

The lure of the tropics began to tug at us as the weather deteriorated with the approaching winter. The wonderful cruising in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf was losing its edge as low pressure systems brought more and more rain and squally conditions.

We cleared Customs and then spent 24 hours sheltering from a gale behind Rangitoto Island, before making our departure. After a front went through, the wind backed to the south, and we headed off NNE on the starboard tack; 10 days later we arrived in Fiji without having tacked! The wind from the tail end of the low pressure system had driven us north into the SE trade winds before it could box the compass. Apart from the remarkable consistency of the wind direction, the trip itself was fairly uneventful; a breeze compared to our Tasman crossing.

It took us one whole day to get through the rigmarole of entering port at Suva, but then we set about enjoying our first taste of the tropics. We went duty free shopping for a zoom lens camera to see if we could improve our photography, and a digital watch to make time keeping easier for navigation. An Indian lad showed us around, and although we felt a few misgivings putting our trust in him, he provided us with much information about Fiji and the lifestyle of the Indian population there. We visited his family home, and learned to eat curry!

From Suva we coast hopped along the south coast, and had our first taste of sailing through a narrow reef passage on Mbengga Island. The calm conditions and clear sky enabled us to see the coral reef very easily, with colour changes from dark blue for deep water, through light blue, greens, yellow and finally brown. The bottom was clearly visible and we could barely believe the depth meter showing 20 metres. A native, Taniela, invited us ashore for the first

of our many kava ceremonies, and we felt ill prepared in not having a small gift of kava powder to respond with; a fault we rectified as soon as we could. He presented us with some wonderful shells and we signed his Visitors' Book. It was 9 months since the previous yacht had visited the island, and yet we were only a day's sail from Suva which would see about 500 yachts passing through each year!

In Lautoka we met up with fellow Australians on MAID OF MARTHA and sailed in company out to the Yassawa Islands which were very rewarding. Young children would grasp our hands to walk with us and smiling faces abounded. One felt somewhat like Dr Livingstone! The trolling and diving were excellent, and we began to feel that we were really getting into the true cruising environment.

From Fiji, we have a 4 days passage to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu). Again, it was an uneventful trip with consistent trade winds. We crept into Vila Harbour on a pitch black night, with misty rain, and at 3 am, anchored amongst other yachts in 20 metres of water. Many anchorages are quite deep, as the reefs pop up very suddenly with no shelving. It took us an hour to dislodge our anchor from the coral bottom next morning and we resolved to always set a trip line if the water was deep or dirty.

The highlight of our time in the Hebrides was to visit a grading ceremony for the senior Chief on Aoba Island. The 'status' of the Chief is raised by giving a big feast and killing more pigs to eat than the previous Chief. The ceremony was quite a mixture of old and new with some people in European clothes and others in traditional dress. There was a lot of speechmaking and exchanging of gifts, and finally the 100 pigs were killed by a blow to the back of the head and cooked by heated rocks in an

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earth pit. We felt very privileged to have witnessed this event.

Hot springs on the beaches and the climbing of an active volcano on Tana Island were other highlights of our time in this area. The 'cargo cult' were much in evidence, having formed a 'religion' out of the abundance of goods and wealth that came their way during war years.

We had an overnight sail from Tana to Maré in the Loyalty Islands, and made good 168 miles in 24 hours, which we felt very pleased with. Maré was rather quiet at the time, with the 4 gendarmes locked up by the locals who were all meeting at the maison commune to discuss their next step in the search for independence.

Another short sail and we were in New Caledonia - mountainous and green with clear coralline waters. We had been told not to bother with New Caledonia; it's dirty, expensive, and the French don't like you. I can only say that one should never generalise about places. We had a good time there, found the people friendly and helpful, and if one bought food from the native markets, it was not too expensive. While here, we had the pleasure of meeting up with Mike and Di Gardiner off TRALFAMADORE who had left Adelaide a year before us.

From Noumea to Brisbane was straight forward, apart from headwinds on the last day of the trip. We saw numerous jelly fish (vela vela) - about one every square metre of the entire trip. Our trolling line gave us a nice tuna and we saw another huge tuna jump out of the water when we were having some practice shots from our rifle.

In Brisbane we slipped EXPEDITUS for antifouling

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and organised a shorter booming out pole for use on smaller headsails in the Southern Ocean. We also had a 4th set of reef points put in the mainsail and a set in the storm jib. Following our work, we went sailing with some local friends on a 23 ft yacht in Moreton Bay. It was refreshing to sail on another boat, and enjoy oysters, crabbing, and general island hopping.

Our desire to get to England by the next (northern) summer would mean some long ocean passages and few land falls, and by the time we had crossed from Brisbane to New Zealand again, we felt ready to tackle the Southern Ocean. The Tasman had been a good ocean in which to cut our teeth, and we thought that we could always "turn left" to Tahiti if the Southern Ocean was too much for us.

We had another enjoyable time in New Zealand, sailing with a visitor from Adelaide, and after topping EXPEDITUS up with 9 months supply of food, a final check of all equipment, we were heading off to the Southern Ocean and Cape Horn.

This passage started with head winds from the NE, so we angled down to the SE, and eventually picked up true westerlies at about 47°S. The beauty and remoteness of the Southern Ocean has to be experienced, and apart from some apprehension during the 3 severe gales we encountered, we enjoyed the passage. There was always a changing seascape and a visiting albatross could generally be relied upon to break the monotony of the grey seas and sky. The weather gave us a significant amount of force 5, 6 and 7 winds, but with these astern, no reefs, and insignificant shipping, the sailing itself was easy. In gales we would run on the quarter, maintaining our course as much as possible, and reefing down to keep our speed to 5-6 knots. If we went too fast we would surf

down the waves in a jet of spray and get very concerned about pitchpoling. Once a front had gone through, and waves began building up (on the beam) from the SW, we would run away from whichever set of waves was worst - the 'old' waves from the NW or 'new' waves from the SW. On occasions we would have breakers from port starboard and astern to contend with! In the entire 51 days from New Zealand to Cape Horn, we were down to bare poles on 3 occasions, with EXPEDITUS still doing 6-7 knots, but these conditions only lasted for perhaps 6 to 8 hours at the very peak of the gales. In general, we got pretty well what we expected having consulted the Pilot Charts and numerous other books on the area.

Eventually Cape Horn was sighted, and we passed close offshore before turning into the islands and anchoring behind Herschell Island, opposite a small Chilean 'casa'. The small hut housed 5 Chilean Marines who were posted there to look out for Argentine shipping, and without a word of Spanish between us, Gay and I ventured ashore with wobbly legs to see what our reception would be.

I will continue our story in future editions of the magazine. The following are some more comments on the more commonly asked questions about our trip.

RIFLES

Yes we did carry them. In general most Pacific countries required them to be handed in on arrival and picked up on departure. This created additional trouble, particularly if departure was from a different port to arrival. We were allowed to keep rifles aboard in most Caribbean countries. Although we never had to use the rifles, we know people who have had to shoot (and motor) their way out of an attack situation.

LIFE OF SAILS

Our sails have done 51,000 miles and most of them have a fair amount of life left in them, particularly the storm jib and trysail etc. The mainsail however is worn out.

CRUISING COSTS

It depends on where you are, the lifestyle you lead, condition of your boat etc. We live on about US\$3,000 per annum, doing all our own maintenance, and spending judiciously on souvenirs. Marinas, restaurants, and dropping cameras in the water would add significantly to this figure.

MIKE LEWIS

