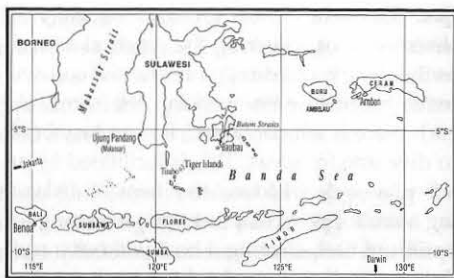


We've Been to Bali Too

Ion and Margaret Ullett

The Moluccas are those fabulous "Isles of Spices", where Javanese, Chinese, Indian and Arab traders handled the spices long before the first Europeans appeared on the scene, trading cloth, rice and metal tools for cloves, nutmeg and mace. They were prized above the value of gold in medieval Europe, where inability to store meat and fish required spices to hide the rank flavours which resulted. It was all running smoothly until 1521, when the Portugese decided to take over the trade. The Protestant Dutch ousted the Catholic Portugese in 1605. British and Dutch administrations alternated until 1814, when the Dutch were left in control. Ambon became the centre of Dutch control of the spice trade by the JOC or Dutch East India Company.

In July 1991 we arrived with the Darwin-Ambon Yacht Race invasion. The fleet of 61 yachts, a third of which were from overseas, had a great welcome from the Ambonese, with national dancing and the music of Gamelan gongs. Ambon is a real mixture, with people who are mostly Christian (Dutch Reformed Church) in a strongly Islamic republic. The locals are called Black Dutch. It was here that the last resistance to the Indonesian Independence revolution occurred. There is no doubt that the annual yacht race is loved by the locals. We were given a great reception, with free bus tours, luncheons and friendliness from all. There is not much remaining of historic buildings in Ambon, due to the bombing of the Second World War. The countryside is beautiful, of course, and a part of every tour is the Australian War Memorial Cemetery, where so many young Australian soldiers rest. [The Japanese landed on Ambon on 29 January, 1942. The tiny Australian and Dutch forces were overwhelmed, and surrendered on 2 February, thirteen days before the fall of Singapore. Only 15 men were killed, but 309 officers and men were executed by the Japanese as a reprisal for the sinking of a Japanese minesweeper. Many of the prisoners-of-war also died. For nearly half a century survivors of Gull Force and their families (including many from those whose menfolk died) have supported the people of



Ambon with education and with medical facilities.—Ed.]

From Ambon we sailed due west to participate in the Makassar Regatta, first stopping a night at the small island of Ambelau. This had been a prison area for political internees, and it has only recently been opened up to yachting. Within minutes of anchoring straight out from the little town with its mosque on the shore, dozens of canoes loaded with kids came out to see us. During the night (about 0200), unbeknown to us, the ferry calls. It stopped twenty feet away, and announced its arrival with flood lights and Indonesian rock music played full bore from loud hailers mounted on the bridge. That soon brings one to life!

A perfect 20 knot south-east broad reach for 250 miles brought us to Buton Straits on the Island of Sulawesi (Celebes). This is an area filled with history and beauty. The Straits are 75 miles long and offered us an inland waterway for five days. We motored in glassy calm conditions past rain forest and villages, each with its prominent mosque. Most nights we anchored at small sandy uninhabited cays and bays. On one occasion there were 21 yachts at anchor. At the southern end of the Straits, passing through the tide rips of "The Narrows" we anchored at the ancient town of Baubau. This was overlooked from the heights by an old Dutch fort built in the sixteenth century, reasonably well preserved and still with its cannons pointing from the battlements to protect the Straits. Our next stop 100 miles out in the Banda Sea was the Tiger Islands. They are a large collection of atolls, reef lagoons, sand cays and coral. We were accompanied by

We've Been to Bali Too

our three American friends, *Abracadabra* (53 feet), *Molly Brown* (49 feet) and *Northern Lights* (54 feet). They were loaded with GPS, radar and Loran, but they all came in behind *Fine Romance* with no tricky gear: only good old Cap'n Pep on the wheel and myself in the cross trees to con us through the myriad of reefs. We anchored for two days off a beautiful sand island called Tinabo. "Anchored" is the right word. Our bow was nearly on the beach, and we relied on the south-east trade wind not to change direction, for the anchor was in eighty feet on the edge of the drop-off of the reef. A small community of fishermen lived on the island, drying and salting their catch for the market in Makassar.



From the Tiger Islands we sailed north to the coast of Sulawesi. We had been told not to miss the town of Tanaberu. As we sailed into the bay we saw why. Along the entire beach, for about two miles, were timber prahus being built. They ranged from twenty feet to cargo seagoing vessels of 150 feet. It was done with traditional methods, using adze and wooden nails. We watched planks being sawn with large cross-cut knives, one man on a platform and the other in the pit below. We joined the crew of another American yacht, *Cannibal* (55 feet), together with our own flotilla of *Molly Brown* and *Abracadabra* for a dinner at the one eating house. Sixteen of us enjoyed a big slap up feed and beer for \$6 per head. Half the local population craned through the windows to see how much the bill came to. I'll digress to tell you about the yankee yachts.

They were all superbly prepared for their round-the-world adventure. *Cannibal* even had a 250 hp Kawasaki motor cycle covered and neatly stowed at the mast. With the exception of *Abra* they were crewed only by husband and wife (or similar). *Abracadabra* had four paid hands. *Molly Brown's* skipper Dicky had two artificial hips and walked with sticks. There was only his little wife to help. They had not been on the wind since leaving the States.

Our next stop was Makassar, which is now called Ujung Pandang (the Pandanus Palm Cape). The bustling city of 700,000 was called Makassar by the Dutch after they conquered the Kingdom of Goa. The old fort was built by the Goanese in 1545, and the Dutch added their traditional architecture. It has been restored, and the ceremonies of the Makassar Regatta were held there. The local population includes the seafaring Bugis. They are a mongoloid people dating back to Kubla Khan. It is generally accepted that the Bugis settled this coastal area a thousand years or more ago. They are now a colourful ethnic group. Makassar is still a major seaport. As part of the regatta there was a re-enactment of the rice trade. Sixteen cargo prahus, ranging from eighty to 120 feet, were freshly painted and loaded with rice. They set off under full sail and with throbbing diesels in a race to Jakarta (Batavia). The yachts of the regatta fleet sailed alongside them as far as we could, calling out, "Salamat Balaya! - Safe Sailing!" The Makassar Regatta itself was a bit of a disaster. There were supposed to be two races. The first was abandoned, due to the prize money provided by the Darwin Sailing Club "disappearing." The bureaucracy "lost" it somewhere. The main race on the second day was won by the official entry of the Darwin Sailing Club. I think that may have been to prevent a diplomatic incident. A number of boats were pretty unhappy. They do the "pot hunting" circuit of Asian races, and the prize money was substantial. We filled up with fuel from the naval tender which came alongside each yacht. Fuel in Indonesia is twenty cents a litre, so you don't mind using the engine.

[To be continued in the next issue—Ed.]

