

ANOTHER REPORT FROM ALPHA CENTAURI

Here we are on 20th May 86 almost back in Australian waters, and exactly a year since we left Sydney. How time flies.

Brioney and Brendan joined us in Honiara, and we made our way along the coast of Guadalcanal down to Marau Sound. Marau Sound is a deep commodious harbour formed by a cluster of islands, islets, reefs and shoals off the eastern tip of Guadalcanal Island. We spent 2 days moored off Tavanipupu Island, which must be the most beautiful anchorage in the Solomons. Charles and Myfanwy Humphries, who spent some 20 years in British Government service in Honiara and have now retired to Tavanipupu Island, entertained us and made our stay a most memorable one.

From Marau Sound across to Malaita Island, on motoring up the Maramasike Passage between Malaita Island and Maramasike Island, a dozen or so canoes full of children paddled out to escort us into their village. The people of Matanagasi Village made us extremely welcome; on Easter Sunday we attended the 7 am church service, and on the way back to CENTAURI, one of the women presented us with a hot yam and coconut cake baked in banana leaves; it was Ion's birthday, and the first yam birthday cake he has had.

During the afternoon we took 30 children on a 3 hour trip up the Maramasike Passage. One of the adults, a ship's captain, came with them and guided us safely through the passage. Many of the children hadn't been more than 10 miles from the village, and they were very excited.

Malaita Island is a mountainous jungle covered island. Along the western side there are 2 lagoons formed by small islands and reefs half a mile off Malaita Island, each lagoon being about 20 miles in length. Ari Ari Lagoon is very lovely with villages scattered on all the islands within the lagoon. The islanders

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were all very friendly and thoroughly enjoyed a game of football on the village green with Brendan, who being a league footballer had to keep fit while with us.

Between Ari Ari Lagoon and Langa Langa Lagoon we decided to spend a night in Waisisi Harbour. The good book had described it as a totally virginal beach offering seclusion and peace where you could rest before being entertained by the islanders in Langa Langa Lagoon. Within half an hour we had 20 school children from the village 2 miles across the bay descend upon us. We sent them home after 3 hours of fun; I dished up dinner, and halfway through Brendan's birthday dinner, out of the darkness appeared a dozen of the children, all about 10 to 12 years old, who decided to entertain us with songs. They belonged to the South Sea Evangelical church, and sang hot gospel songs with much foot stamping and hand clapping; one of the funniest nights we have spent. Brendan will never forget his birthday dinner.

We found Langa Langa Lagoon extremely interesting with its famous artificial islands with walled foreshores which consist of coral rocks filled with earth and then the villages built on them. They were built about 17 generations ago to protect the inhabitants from the mountain tribes.

Malaita is famous for its shell money necklaces, which even today are used for bride money and trading with other islands. Business was very brisk, having up to 40 islanders at a time on board or beside us, trading necklaces, and nautilus shells, for T shirts, shorts and food. We visited the villages to see the shell money being made and found they are still building timber boats of up to 80 feet in length and superbly built.

Two traumatic events have occurred to the Malaitous since their contact with white man. Firstly

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Blackbirders who kidnapped all the young men and took them to the Fijian and Australian cane fields to work. Secondly during Word War 2 many Malaitans were chosen or volunteered to work for the allies as scouts on Guadalcanal. Today the majority of politicians are Malaitous, as are the prisoners in Honiara jail.

From Malaita we sailed across to the very lovely islands of the Florida Group for a second time. Tulaghi, the capital of the Solomons until 1942 when taken over by the Japanese, is today the centre for boat building and repairs, and a fish cannery operated by the Japanese Taiys Company, who have a large fleet of catcher boats in the Solomons.

Tulaghi and nearby Ghauutu Harbour and Tokoys Bay are full of wrecked ships, barges and planes partly above water, some American and some Japanese. Ghauutu was an American Catalina Base, after being taken over from the Japanese.

In Mbili Passage between the 2 main islands of the Floridas we filled our tanks with crystal clear water. The Americans piped the water down the mountain-side, over a reef, into the deep water and onto a pontoon during the war and the spring has run ever since.

We visited the different villages and received our usual supply of fruit, vegetables and shells from the islanders, swam off white sandy beaches in crystal clear water, before heading back to the Santa Crug Yacht Club in Honiara.

Brioney and Brendan left us early in the morning and Mary and Alan Smith arrived late the same afternoon.

We spent a day stocking up on food and grog from the supermarket, and the native market, before heading

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back to the Floridas and across to Santa Isabel Island.

Santa Isabel boasts some fine mountains and dense jungle and along the coastline, coconut plantations and mangroves. Beautiful Thousand Ships Bay, a deep harbour formed between Sau Jarage Island and Santa Isabel was named by Mendara during his voyage of discovery in 1567. It narrows into Ortega Channel with quite shallow water for miles, and mangrove fringed; several villages along the banks, and native drop net towers, completely different scenery.

We returned to the New Georgia Group, spending a couple of days with our friends at Telina Village in Marous Lagoon. We all came away with beautiful shell inlay wood carvings, and black coral carried. This time we traded our excess shell money necklaces and Nautilus shells from Malaita, plus some cash.

Off once again we sailed through Marous Lagoon to Segi where the famous coast watcher Kennedy was stationed during the war. Across the Hele bar out to the open sea, down to Munda, through Vona Vona Lagoon across to Kolambangara Island, Kennedy Island and back to Gizo. We replenished our stores, cleared customs and immigration, and departed the Solomons; but couldn't resist another stop over at Simbo Islands.

Once again the chief's son took us under his wing, and showed the Smiths around the island. We came back to CENTAURI with our arms full of snake beans, paw paw, pomilo, lemons, shells and bananas. Alan estimated that we have been getting 1,000 bananas a month.

We left Simbo Island at 6 am for the 180 miles across to the Laughlan Islands in PNG, with 25-30 knots of breeze and a peculiar sea. Later in the day we heard on the radio that we had been in the start of a cyclone which then passed across Australia at Cooktown.

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We arrived at the Laughlan Islands in a flat calm, and surrounded by flying fish, dolphin and schools of tuna, entered the lagoon through a break in the reef and on into the horseshoe of little islands. Crystal clear water, white sandy beaches, and attractive villages with large sailing canoes pulled up onto the beach. We had dozens of villagers out wanting to trade lemons and carvings for tobacco. It is a very remote area with a supply ship calling only 4 times a year and they were all out of tobacco. Luckily we had a good supply of tobacco and ended up with dozens of lemons, shells and carvings including the carved bow section for a canoe.

Woodlark Island was next. A mountainous jungle covered island, but mostly mangrove swamps instead of sandy beaches - definitely crocodile country.

Across to Egum Stall, an absolute paradise, the most beautiful place in the whole of our trip. The stall is about 15 miles long and 10 miles across, with Yanaba Island at one end, and the Egum Isletis, a group of about 6 tiny islands in the centre of the stall. Only one of the islands is inhabited, with a population of about 100. One end of the island is about 150 feet high with huge rocks like monuments on the top, the rest of the island is flat with just large boulders set amongst the huts, and tropical flowering trees, shrubs and plants, like a landscaped garden. Crystal clear turquoise water, and white sandy beaches, with huge sailing canoes pulled up on the beach.

Wadat, a Papuan missionary for the United Church, looked after us for the 2 days we spent with them. He and the boys dived for crayfish, and brought out a dozen for us which were absolutely delicious. Once again they wanted tobacco as well as some of our lemons.

We hated leaving Egum Stall but time was running out. We motored across to Debu Island where we had

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spent Independence Day last September, then retraced our steps to Observation Point, Serva Bay, both on beautiful Normanby Island, to Boia Boia Island off the tip of East Cape, the Killertou Islands where 6 Papuans dived and cleaned off the bottom of the boat for us before motoring up Milne Bay into Motau, through customs and officially entered PNG waters once again.

After collecting mail, food and fuel we motored across Milne Bay to Kana Kopi where the Australian and American forces were stationed during the war. Across China Straits to Sariba Island through Sawa Sawaga Passage to Sideia Island, and then to Basilaki Island on our way to Slade Island, to revisit our little friends from Tuketuke Village.

We spent 2 wonderful days at Tuketuka Village, and after school on our last day, Izehial, a born organiser at 10 years of age, brought 20 of the school children out to sing for us. Once again we recorded it.

Back to Samarai Island, then along the South Coast of PNG to Moresby, with 4 night stops on the way. The coast here is very mountainous and covered with jungle. The nearer we got to Pt Moresby the mountains were lower and drier and looked more like West Coast around Rapid Bay. The very lovely Papuan houses we had seen up until now being replaced by fibre houses, with an iron roof, mostly built on stilts in the sea because they can't afford to buy the land. They are more like our aboriginal shanty towns.

Have had 4 very interesting days in Pt Moresby, had several meals at the Royal Papuan Yacht Club, and have found the people all most friendly and hospitable. The hills around the bay rise steep from the water's edge, with large houses and apartments all the way up. It just looks like fairyland at night.

We leave here on 21st May 86 and head back to Australia, the end of a wonderful holiday.

ION AND MARGARET ULLETT