

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Friends,

Well here we are in New Guinea. After all the plans and the setbacks, we have last met our objective and it has been worthwhile.

The passage across from Australia was to say the least, very boisterous. We cleared Customs at midday on 1st August 85 and this had been a change of plans as we had intended to sail up the coast to Cooktown and depart from Lizard Island. However, once you clear you can no more touch Australia, so the Customs Officer cleared us and cast off our lines telling us we could shelter but not come ashore.

We stopped at Green Island for the night and left the Barrier Reef at 2 pm the next day with the wind 25 to 30, a Strong Wind Warning and a big beam sea. The wind freshened as we got further out so we ended up with 10 rolls in the main and the small jib. We averaged 6.9 for the 72 hour crossing of the Coral Sea. Thanks to the trusty Sat Nav we picked up Badila Bedda Bedda Bonarua Island right on course, and so entered China Strait and up to the diminutive Island of Samarai where we cleared customs with only a half an hour of form filling.

Samarai supports a population of 1000 and although now only used as a fish factory (shipping no longer calling here) there is still a supermarket and a few other stores. We walked around the 53 acres of the island and met a number of very friendly people. We also mended a broken inner forestay with a galv. one, Pep doing the hand splices for me. The old one snapped like a carrot at the swage where it was rigidly attached to the tang on the mast.

We motored to Dagadagabonalua Island in the China Strait where we anchored off the fringing reef in

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a landlocked bay. Within clear sight of us was the Sidudu school with little girls in grass skirts and coconut thatched school huts. A little boy came out in an outrigger canoe selling fresh beans at 20 toea a bunch. As darkness fell, children canoed past singing native songs, all very beautiful and very natural.

We have explored around a number of islands in this area, through Sawa Sawaga Passage where Torres in 1606 made his first landfall (history notes thanks to Peter Last's gift). Our most delightful experience came when we visited Tubatuba Village on Slade Island. Their very attractive village is situated in the lee of the trade wind, with a white sandy beach, thatched huts, and outrigger canoes drawn up on the beach. We were anchored in 30 ft within swimming distance of the beach. Four young Papuan boys adopted us here, their ages ranging from 9 to 13½. Speaking beautiful English, they showed us round their island, told us of their customs, showed us through their thatched school hut and church, sang us native songs in beautiful harmony and generally gave us a wonderful stay. They have absolutely nothing, just the shorts they wear. They live entirely off the land, fish, yams, coconuts etc and the occasional pig.

We fitted them out in T shirts and gave them lollies etc, however they certainly did not need our help to be happy.

MARGARET AND ION ULLETT

