

Long Distance Cruising . . .

likes and needs. I have friends who like to cruise to places where the restaurants and bars are of high quality. So do I, but I can't afford it. For places with good anchorages, exciting scenery, clear water and space to yourself, try South Australia. Most yachties I have met would be ecstatic at Thistle Island or Snug Cove. One of the places which is even better is Tasmania. The wild and beautiful West Coast is really something, and then you have the quiet beauty of the East Coast, in particular the D'Entrecasteaux Channel.

Further afield, the West Coast of Palawan in the Philippines is beautiful and unspoiled. Malampaya Sound is much larger than Sydney Harbor and the weather is warm. The West Coasts of Malaysia and Thailand are good, but overloaded with yachts from everywhere. The water is dirty. The islands of SE New Guinea are also delightful and unspoiled. This is such a big subject I should leave it for another time.

Money. Most full-time cruisers are on a tight budget. I have seen yachts moored way up rivers where the fresh water will kill and finally remove the growth from the bottom of the boat. Cheaper than slipping, which mostly is very expensive. In my experience, the costs are always higher than my budget—an indication perhaps that I am an optimist.

I have used Visa and Mastercard to get money. Visa is by far the best in Asia and Micronesia. Virtually every large town has an automatic teller which will take Visa. Not so with Mastercard, where you must go (and plead) with a bank. The little 'hole in the wall' money changers invariably give better exchange rates than banks, and also don't go through lots of lengthy paperwork.

Port Clearances, Immigration, Customs and Quarantine. One of the tedious parts of international cruising is coping with the various authorities when you arrive and leave a country (or in Malaysia a port). The procedures vary greatly from country to country and from port to port. The officials representing the various places are probably bored having to handle a yacht and not the *Queen Elizabeth*. You, the sailor, must adjust to their needs and tempos. Remember the saying, "There is no reason, it's our policy." Allow a day to check in and another to check out. In many countries, like the Philippines, you must also pay corruption money. ('Squeeze' is the usual term.) Don't worry, they will tell you how much they want. After a life of freedom afloat, it takes a certain amount of control to cope with the situations arising when meeting the bureaucrats. But do keep cool, or you might end up in the slammer!

Communications. Mail to the countries I have visited is cheap and fast. Poste Restante at the various ports is excellent. However, redirected mail often doesn't arrive. Most countries have International Direct Dial public telephones, using either your Visa or Mastercard or a locally bought telephone card. Reverse charge (collect) calls are often impossible. Radphone (HF) via OTC is quite good. I have often made contact with Perth Radio from Malaysia and Thailand, and had good quality calls. The time of day is important, which for me is at dawn. HF radio is an excellent facility, both for weather, and also for making contact on the various yachtie networks. OTC's Seaphone VHF service is excellent when you are within range of one of its coast stations around Australia. Be careful, though, or you will spend a fortune. SQ

Arcoorie from Vanuatu to Port Moresby

Ken White continues his story from July, 1991.

In Vila I was able to relax for the first time, and spent a month of sunny days, gentle afternoon breezes and balmy tropical evenings. This part of the harbor is protected by Iriki Island, now a resort and once the residence of the British Governor. I took part in the Sunday races, and acquired as crew Cedric, a large British bureaucrat. An experimental wave recorder buoy worth \$60,000 was adrift 60 miles south of Efate Island, and Cedric enlisted *Arcoorie* to find it.

I put Cedric on the helm to follow a course while I worked out a drift pattern and search strategy. To my horror my sat nav was not giving fixes. When I took sextant sights and calculated my position it was 900 miles out! Several days later I found that I had set a new watch to GMT + one hour by mistake. Meanwhile I was in a state of panic. I could not reveal to Cedric that the equipment was not working, nor that I could not calculate our position. I kept a good DR, and used the landforms to take compass bearings. By late afternoon we reached the search site, an area 15 miles by 10 miles. We called off the search at 2030 the first night, and resumed at first light. By 1500 I told Cedric that I would give up if it were not found in the next hour, as I calculated that it could not be more than five miles north of our present position. Half a mile away over the grey swell I made out a bronze object. We were ecstatic! Cedric thought I was brilliant, but I knew it was 90% luck. It took three men to hoist aboard the 500 kg sphere with 100 metres of rubber and stainless steel umbilical cord, using a spinnaker pole and main halyard.

A few nights later I was invited to a very

colonial formal dinner party to celebrate Cedric's recent award of the OBE. A British doctor called John asked me to take him 30 miles to Havana Harbor, where he had to attend some village aid posts. This is an almost enclosed waterway the size of Sydney Harbor, which was home to the American fleet during the Second World War. We anchored near one of the few reefs, and were approached by canoes with family groups. They recognised Dr John, and had an animated conversation in Bislama Pidgin English. Having lived in New Guinea, I could pick up the gist of the news of various villagers in hospital with tuberculosis, malaria and other diseases. Later I asked John the meaning of "House belong picaninny." That is pidgin for uterus.

My wife Kate arrived in Vila from New York, where she collected an award for one of her documentary films. We had a delightful trade wind sail north to Espiritu Santo. Here there are many signs of war. *President Coolidge* struck a mine, and was run ashore to save the crew before slipping back to sink in 120 metres of water. Divers come from all over the world to explore this protected wreck. Close by is Million Dollar Point. At the end of the war the Americans offered to sell to the Government of New Hebrides a multitude of equipment, jeeps, tanks and supplies. When negotiations failed it was all dumped into the sea. Embedded in the soft stone I found Coca Cola bottles, brass belt buckles, bullets, diesel engines and fragments of crockery.

Kate had to return to Australia, and I set out alone 1,200 miles to Port Moresby. It was a somewhat daunting prospect, but I thought of Captain Bligh successfully making a similar journey [in May-June 1789]. In his account Bligh complained bitterly of the

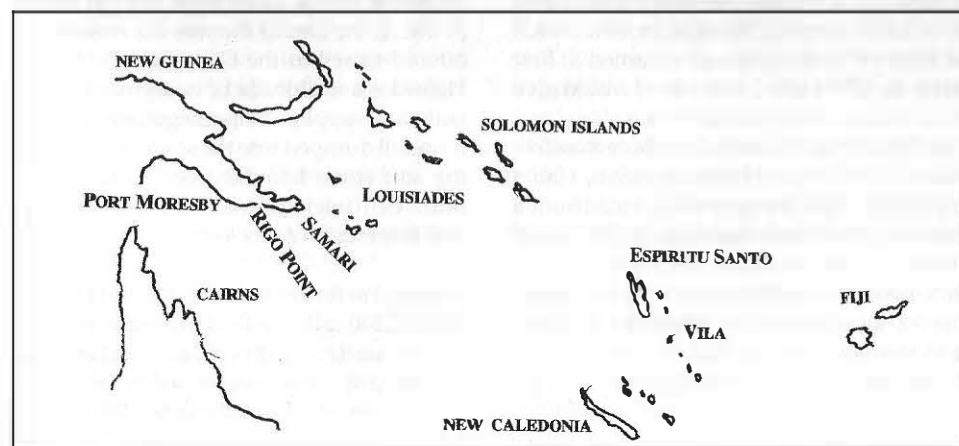
Arcoorie from Vanuatu to Port Moresby ...

cold, especially at night. -Ed.] If he could do it, so could I. I fell into a routine, in which I used the auto-pilot to allow me to sleep from 2300 to 0500, and steered by hand in the afternoons. In the late afternoon of the second day the wind was about 20 knots, and I was surfing down the faces of unusually large waves. I thought I was hallucinating when I heard a sound like a steam train, which to my horror came from a huge approaching wave. I straightened up to 90° to the wave. The rushing water pinned me to the wheel as I watched the speedo wind beyond 9, 10 and 11 knots to the maximum position. It was a thrill as *Arcoorie* rocked from side to side with white water at deck level. This was fun, but what would happen when I was obliged to turn on the auto-pilot? After watching the wave sequence, I swung hard to starboard, almost due east, with madly flapping sails, and dashed below. There was a lurch as we came on course and began to zig-zag across the ocean. I sat below with a scotch to relax.

Crossing a shipping lane I stayed on watch most of the night, and saw a Japanese freighter with a cargo of timber pass about

500 metres ahead. Next day I woke to clear sky and a steady 15 knot breeze from the south-east, with quieter waves of two metres. This was exactly how I imagined trade wind sailing to be. For the next five days these conditions prevailed as I read, did odd jobs, and thought of Captain Bligh.

The wind began rising as I approached the Louisiade Archipelago off the eastern tip of New Guinea, and I would have to find my way through a maze of unlit islands to reach Samari about midnight. I found I did not have an important chart showing this area, and had only an inaccurate land map. *Arcoorie* carried on through stronger winds and more frequent rain squalls. The auto-pilot was not working and I had to steer by hand. I was 50 miles offshore, closing on Rigo Point, when half asleep I allowed a gybe. With a CRACK! the mainsail split down the centre seam. I had to continue under No 1 jib and mizzen. As day broke I could clearly see Rigo reef, and was encouraged to see a ship, which I thought was coming out. Closer up it was a wreck, with waves breaking over it. All that day I sailed outside the reef, until at last I entered



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Basilisk Passage and the tranquil waters of Port Moresby. I had not been there for 15 years. My memories of 1971 were of a colonial outpost moving rapidly towards independence. The old characters at the bar with their stories of patrols into the jungle were long gone. Now I found barbed wire, protective barriers, police sirens, a fortified yacht club, expatriates carrying guns, and a curfew at 2100. This then is development? Battles occur daily between the haves and the have-nots. Urban expatriates are hardened by the daily struggle for survival.

I was glad to get supplies and leave, feeling physically sick to see such decay in so short a time. One pleasure was a chance meeting with Freda, our house servant of 1977. I had taught her brother Michael, and took him to his village 50 miles west of Port Moresby on my way to Thursday Island. From there to Darwin is another story. [SQ]

[As at September, 1992 Ken White can be contacted at Boyden International, Jalan Yusuf Adiwinata no 60, Menteng Jakarta, Indonesia.]



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