

Just Jane Comes Home

Jo Capel

Vanuatu was a fascinating place, and we felt that we could have stayed for a lot longer, but it was now the end of October and the cyclone season was already with us. The Customs officer flew down from Port Vila and went from yacht to yacht, helped by Tim in the dinghy and cleared us all. The next day, with the other yachts we left Port Resolution and set sail for Noumea, New Caledonia, 260 nm away.

For the first 24 hours there was absolutely no wind. The seas were flat and it was easy motoring and comfortable living, but Arnold and I both waited in anticipation as we knew that usually behind no wind, something unpleasant eventuates. The forecast was for a SE and possibly a front coming through but we estimated that we should be in New Caledonia by then.

The sea was glassy and the sky eerily misty. That evening we saw the green flash as the sun went down. This green flash is the result of refraction that sends a thin band of green light to an observer as the sun either rises or sets. There have also been reports of 'blue flashes' caused by extremely rare conditions of refraction.

We motored on until about 0200, when the SE came in at about 30 knots. This wasn't too bad as we were heading in a SSW direction, so we were easily able to hold the course.

Our GPS was playing up and giving us the same reading all the time, until finally it gave up completely and nothing came on the screen. We

The Capel family, home again.



then used the Garmin hand-held GPS until as we were closer to New Caledonia and its off lying islands, where I resorted to the hand-bearing compass and finding our position by taking fixes.

We entered through Havannah Passage, which we had heard could get extremely nasty with strong winds against the tide. In our *Cruising Guide to New Caledonia* book it mentioned 'four-knot current and overfalls which are, at times, very dangerous.' However, we had an easy sail through the Passage and tied up to the visitors' berth in Port Moselle after a passage of 47 hours.

The Morgans docked *Shearwater II* in the same berth. [See *Squadron Quarterly* December 1998.]

At Port Moselle you are ushered into a berth at an ultra modern marina to await the arrival of Customs. This is right in the centre of town, within easy walking distance to everything. We had organised our visas for New Caledonia in Fiji, enabling us to clear Customs fairly quickly. The Australians who did not have a visa stamped in the passport experienced some difficulty in the clearance procedure. All communication was to a large extent carried out in French, but when the officials could see that I was struggling with the language they resorted back to speaking English.

The marina was filled with kids — American, French, Mexican. Tim had a great time mixing with the kids from other yachts and the skateboard and soccer balls came very quickly into action.

Now for a new challenge. How was I going to explain over a phone in French that our GPS needed fixing? I couldn't get by using my hands to describe the problem and my school-girl French certainly didn't cover any nautical terminology. Using the public phone itself was tricky, as somehow and somewhere we had to get a card for it. Another yachting had told us that Jean Luc was the guy to talk to. We located

him by phone, and eventually met a tea-cosied, dread-locked reggae guy, who looked remarkably like Bob Marley. Four days later our GPS came back to us with a new lithium battery and it worked perfectly. All for the price of 9,000 francs (roughly the equivalent of \$90 Aust)

We also had to replace our Profurl joiner, as a section had sheared off again. That wasn't too hard, as it just meant locating a big catamaran called *Nirvana* and another guy called Jean Luc, who happened to be cruising around the islands. Word got around that we were looking for *Nirvana* and by the time we had finished cruising around New Caledonia the part that we needed for the Profurl joiner was at the marina at Port Moselle waiting for us on someone else's boat.

There were many Americans tied up to the marina, all trying to figure out what to do. It was now early December and the cyclone season was upon us. Should they stay put, get across to Australia or NZ or keep on going? They were reluctant to get out of the trade-wind belt as to them it was much safer than the stronger winds down South. For us it was simple. We knew we had to get back to SA, as Tim was going to start High School. The other yachts with teenage kids were all heading back to their home countries for the same reason.

Noumea was a fantastic and relaxing place to be before heading back to Adelaide. Tim and the other yachting kids frequented McDonalds and quickly learnt to order in French. On Halloween day they all trick-and-treated around the marina from yacht to yacht and took themselves off on the local buses to visit aquariums and the museum. They enjoyed life to the full whilst they could and before they lost their freedom totally when back in the real world and facing the demands of school.

Before leaving New Caledonia, we in the company of a few other yachts (with kids) sailed down to the Iles de Pins. There we did some kite flying, and around the reefs we scuba dived, snorkelled and enjoyed our last few weeks of freedom before heading back to Adelaide and work.

Every evening around sunset an American voice drawled over the VHF saying just two words, 'Green Flash!' This announcement resulted in a

rush on all yachts for everyone to get outside and observe the sunset in anticipation of seeing the now very famous (amongst Americans) Green Flash phenomenon. Arnold, Tim and I would dutifully join the crowd of observers but always failed to see this spectacle again. As the sun set the Americans would yell out and scream in delight, 'Did you see that now? Wow! Wasn't that green flash great!' This went on night after night. The three of us became totally confused. We certainly saw it on our way to New Caledonia, but it is a rare occurrence and the conditions have to be perfect for it to happen. But maybe this is not so for the American contingent. Night after night the Americans saw it. Arnold, Tim and I never saw it, even when the Americans told us that to see it effectively you had to use the binoculars. We never did find out what the Americans were seeing but it definitely wasn't the green flash. (We just put it down to the effect some of the anti-malaria drugs were having on them!)

Anyway, time came to leave and we headed back to the marina at Port Moselle to wait for favourable weather. Finally a weather fax came through which looked reasonable, and with sad hearts we set off. We were tied up next to an American Yacht called *Briar Patch* from Peachtree. As we backed out of the berth I could have sworn we were talking to Granny from the Beverly Hillbillies, as Becky called in a very southern accent, 'Hey there, you awl come back now!'

And that ended our fantastic cruise through the Pacific.

We now had 1014 nm to go to Sydney. Depending on the weather we had several options. If we couldn't lay the course through to Sydney we would go to Lord Howe Island. If we were a couple of days out of Sydney and the



Tim Capel kite flying at Isle de Pins, New Caledonia.

weather turned nasty, giving us head on winds, we could then lay the tack to Coffs Harbour.

The wind was ESE and we were heading in a SW direction. By the end of the first day a cyclone warning had been issued. We just kept on heading S as fast as we could, as did an American yacht which was heading towards Coffs Harbour. Bob a single-hander on another American yacht decided to heave to for a while to see which way the cyclone was tracking. He was heading to Bundaberg and the cyclone was supposed to cross his path. When hove to the most wind he experienced was about 40 knots, but we just had a great clear run with winds between 15 to 25 knots.

Our passage to Sydney was one that one reads about and hopes to have. Blue skies, the wind in the right direction giving us mainly a reach. We were all up during the day relaxing in the cockpit, and only did our watches at night. The green flash was still on our minds and we dutifully watched the sunset every day with eagle eyes, until on the fourth night we were rewarded with a definite green flash as the sun went down.

By the end of day 7 the wind dropped and a front was forecast. Luckily we were just off Sydney Heads, and on day 8 we entered Sydney Harbour ahead of the front. Sailing into Sydney Harbour is a magical experience for us. The last time we had sailed in this area was on our H28, a 29 ft fibreglass ketch which we had sailed up the east coast in our younger days.

We tied up next to the Customs wharf and waited for the officials. We knew that Aussie Customs were tough and would take any fresh food, tins of ham and pork and butter or margarine that was not Australian. As we had very little of any of this left it wasn't a major worry for us.

The Quarantine inspection came first with two very large girls in very impressive khaki shorts and with very big official nametags on their billowing blouses. They both carried large black torches. Tim and I tried hard not to grin and laugh at the way these big girls tried to clamber down on to the boat. They decided that it was essential for them to use their big torches and inspect all lockers, at the same time muttering things about guns and drugs. (Tim wondered if he should produce his water pistol, just to get into the swing of things.)

The big khaki girls thought that the best place to start was the forward area in the bow. This, of course, was Tim's cabin and the door was kept closed for reasons that every parent who has a 12 year-old would know about.

Tim did advise them that it was a huge mistake to open his door, but this only encouraged them more and they attacked the cabin with great gusto with their impressive torches. After opening the second locker and discovering revolting things like stale socks and wettish comics, they admitted defeat and retired to the main cabin area and gave a half hearted attempt at searching those lockers.

The girls asked to see our logbook and obviously didn't have a clue what they were reading. When they had both finished their very poor attempt of searching every locker, they stated that we would have to pay \$114 for the Quarantine inspection.

As the khaki girls left another couple climbed down the ladder on to *Just Jane* and this time Tim whispered to me, 'Scully and Mulder!' These two characters definitely looked like the two out of the X files program on TV. Tim immediately started talking in a very American accent and as he had read many X file books during our long passages, turned the whole experience of filling out forms and answering questions into good fun.

After the Customs inspection was completed we headed to Rushcutters Bay and the Cruising Yacht Club to tie up for a while and get some Christmas shopping done. The CYC was full, and more yachts were coming in ready for the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. Anywhere else was very expensive — around \$50 a night at the other marinas. We were lucky enough to raft up to one yacht at the end of the berths at the CYC, and in front of us was *Team Jaguar*. We stayed there for a few nights, then anchored in Elizabeth Bay for the remainder of our stay there.

Finally, with great weather we hopped down the coast — Sydney to Jervis Bay, to Ulladulla then into Eden, where we sat for two weeks waiting for some reasonable weather to cross Bass Strait.

We decided to visit Deal Island in the Kent Group of islands and left Eden with a forecast that we hoped would just cover us for a distance of 205

nm. Of course it didn't and a nasty front came through, so we had a fairly wet and uncomfortable sail to the Deal and Erith Islands. The anchorages there, although pretty well protected, had fairly poor holding ground. When anchored we were experiencing bullets of about 70 knots, so the day before Christmas we decided to make a run for Refuge Cove at Wilsons Promontory. With a 30 to 40 knot WNW we sailed the 45 miles to Wilsons Promontory, where with the other yachts we had a fantastic Christmas day.

We were now trying to move fairly fast, as we wanted to be back in Adelaide before School started. Instead of staying in each place for several days we called in and left as soon as the wind was in the right direction. In this way we jumped from Wilsons Promontory to Apollo Bay, to Portland and then to Rocky Point, Kangaroo Island. We were able to pick up great weather forecasts from Melbourne Radio, which stretched from the West Coast of South Australia right through Bass Strait to Eden.

We stayed at Rocky Point for a couple of days, because we couldn't quite face getting back into Adelaide, work and the other commitments which for a short time we had managed to escape. Tim was very excited about getting home and catching up with old friends, but he hadn't quite realised that going to High School would be vastly different to the meagre piece of schoolwork that he did on *Just Jane*.

Anyway, back into the Squadron pool we sailed. Our wonderful experience was over. We had stopped the merry go round for a while and had managed to step out of the rat race and into a world of excitement and wonder. It was very

much like the saying, 'Stop the world I want to get off !' We did get off for awhile and ventured into a different lifestyle.

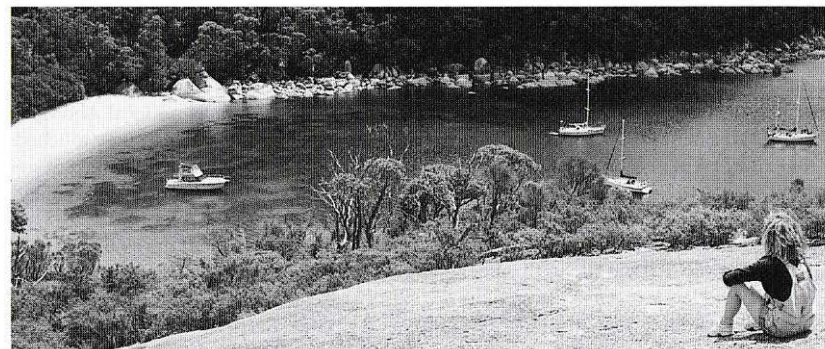
Many people have asked us how much it cost, and how we financed the trip. Our costs averaged about \$1,000 a month. This covered our weekly food and stocking up on canned and dried foods. It also covered diesel, marina costs, hire of cars, travel inland and any maintenance or repairs that the boat needed, together with general kids' things like going to the Pictures or McDonalds etc. We lived off the rent from our property, long service leave payments and money saved. We made sure that we had enough money set aside to cover the costs of a new rig if needed and flights home.

The second week back in Adelaide Arnold was able (much to his horror) to return to his work and I returned to teaching. Tim fitted into school life reasonably well, considering the life style we had led. Like all of us, some of the petty rules and regulations got to him, and one of his teachers made the comment that he seemed far more worldly than the other students. He soon learnt that when the school buzzer blasts it actually means that one has to be at a set place on time and straight away — not like in Tonga a few hours later or the next day. Tim soon learnt to 'play the game' and adapted to school life.

Cruising around the Fiordlands in New Zealand and sailing through the Pacific were experiences that the three of us will never forget. We learnt to cross oceans and adapt to different lifestyles and cultures. We met the most interesting people and visited unusual places.

As many sailors say, 'the hardest part was actually to leave.'

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The peace and beauty of Refuge Cove.