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News from Legs Eleven

Anthony and Alison Gates

Gatesy and Ali continue to keep us closely informed on their movements. Their electronic journal follows them from South Australia to Tasmania, then New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, Wallis, Futuna, Fiji, Vanuatu, and most recently New Caledonia. We strongly recommend the excellent web site at www.users.on.net/dcastle/visitor.

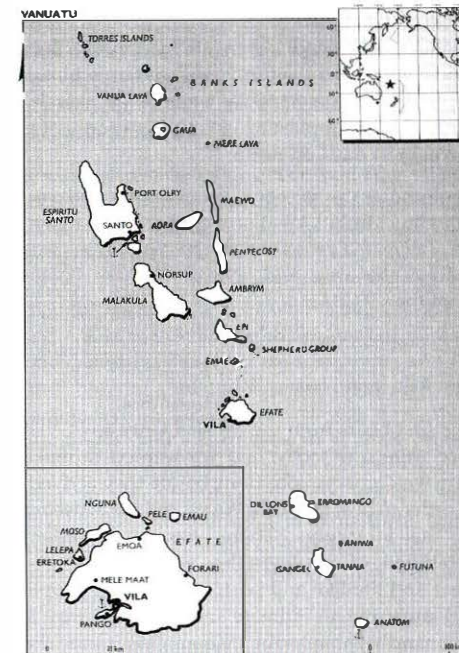
There follows an extract from their most recent reports, which has been edited fairly extensively. Spelling of islands follows that of *Pacific Islands Yearbook*, 16th Edition. Additional material has been gleaned from sundry sources.

13 September 2003

Port Vila, Efate Island, Vanuatu

S 17° 44.85' E° 168 18.55'

Vanuatu is a double chain of some 80 islands in the shape of the letter Y varying from low and heavily wooded islands in the south to the more mountainous volcanic islands in the north. Settled by the Melanesians in around 3,000 BC on their way east into the Pacific, the islands stayed hidden from European exploration until 1606, when the Portuguese navigator Pedro Ferdinand de Quiros first recorded their position. Over a century later it could lay claim to have been visited by most of the great explorers of the time, including Bougainville (1768), Cook (1774), Lapérouse (1778), D'Entrecasteaux (1779), and Bligh on his return to Timor in the longboat after the mutiny aboard HMS *Bounty* (1789). The dark history of blackbirding for Australian and Fijian cotton plantations along with bloody skirmishes with unscrupulous sandalwood traders followed, and with no respect for the native inhabitants England and France squabbled over ownership of what was then called New Hebrides. This led to a treaty in 1886 and a unique condominium, with a joint but uneasy Anglo-French administration in 1906. In 1980 the islanders finally gained independence, elected their first president and declared the new country of Vanuatu (meaning Our Land). With 115 indigenous languages in addition to English and French, the government created its own



language called Bislama, which is a refinement of pidgin English spoken by most of the islanders who have had contact with Europeans.

We found the people of Port Vila the capital, friendly but shy in contrast to the unreserved Fijians. The men were relatively tall and muscular, with longer heads and more facial hair than their larger counterparts the Polynesians. The women also had more athletic builds with finer facial bone structure, resembling more the people of Papua New Guinea than the other Pacific Islands we have visited. The town, however, like most towns, was busy with cars, minivans and trucks, all driving on the wrong side of the road trying to skittle Ali and myself as we made our way down the non-existent foot paths from Yachting World to the market. The local bus service was novel in that you hailed over any mini van with a 'B' on the numberplate, and for 100 vatu (Aus \$1.20) you could get door to door service in order from who got on first. This however

seemed to be the cheapest service offered in Pt Vila, as I was later charged a minimum service fee of Aus \$24 for a spot weld of a sail slug. The supermarkets had a good range, with most products a bit more expensive than in Fiji. Beer prices were over the top, being sold only by the can at nearly Aus \$2.50 for a can of VB, thereby limiting our supplies to 14 cans between us for the next 14 days up north.

On Sunday the streets were deserted, and you can't buy alcohol. We discovered that Bob Keavy on *Twilight Express* from the Squadron was around the area, and so was Graham Footer from the CYCSA.

15 September 2003

Port Vila, Efate Island, Vanuatu

The first boats from the Musket Cove to Pt Vila race were due today, and we wanted to make sure we'd got our jobs done before they arrived, in order to beat the rush. We visited the Museum in the afternoon. There was an excellent exhibition of photographs, which were very clear and life-like and portrayed the real people of Vanuatu in an intimate and insightful way. It was worth going to the museum just to see the photographs, which has inspired us to get out of town and see more.

16 September 2003

Sena Bay, Havannah Harbour Efate Island, Vanuatu

S 17° 33.12' E 168° 16.87'

Rose early and headed into the market to grab some fresh fruit and vegetables before dropping the mooring and heading off for 26 nm to the NW corner of Efate Island. The water was beautifully blue, and due to the good motoring conditions we stuck close to the shore to admire the white sandy pocket beaches which broke the rocky shore. These were backed with coconut palms before the land rose steeply to form a cliff, with a plateau above.

As we entered Havannah Harbour, the wind dropped and the sea became like glass. Small villages and huts lined the shore in the shade of palm trees, which gave way to mangroves as we progressed further into the harbour. By 1530 we'd anchored and had a quick swim, before

sitting in the cockpit to watch the locals paddle their outrigger canoes back from their gardens on the mainland to their village on Moso Island. They paddled to the mainland early every day to tend their gardens in the fertile river soil, before returning late in the afternoon to their villages. As each canoe passed, we were greeted with a hello and a huge white smile. One man, Philip, whose brother David was the chief of the village on Moso, joined us aboard for a chat and some popcorn. His other brother, Paul, was the headmaster of the local primary school.

As we watched the sun slowly set behind the island, more outrigger canoes made their way across the pink and golden coloured glass, which the sea had now become, making great silhouettes against the water. We could hear them singing and laughing as they cheerfully paddled their way home. A canoe with three young women paddled close by the boat, and we could see their smiles glowing in the fading light against their black faces. You can't help but beam back at smiling faces, which are full of happiness and contentment. We could hear them chatting and laughing together long after they'd passed us.

17 September 2003

Sena Bay, Havannah Harbour, Efate Island, Vanuatu

S 17° 33.12' E 168° 16.87'

We took the dinghy across to the village on Moso and met Philip on the beach. He led us to the new kindergarten, where his sister, Margaret was working. As we approached, the children caught sight of us and ran over laughing and staring. They were aged between three and five and were adorable. They had been playing with a log filled with water and detergent, and were blowing bubbles through bamboo straws. Some of the kids came up spluttering though, and we think they must have been sucking instead of blowing. The kindergarten had a sheltered sandpit and a small hut, with a jungle gym and swings built from timber. It had only just been finished, and we met the man who had built it, who worked for the government and went around to remote villages to set up kindergartens. His wife was also there helping to teach with Margaret for a week, and to pass

on ideas and activities to do with the children. The children were all very happy and healthy, and all wanted to have their photo taken. We knelt down to their level and were instantly surrounded, with each child trying to get close enough to touch us.

Margaret led us along the coast to the primary school. As we arrived the children were at morning break. The boys were running around playing soccer, and the girls were sitting reading aloud from their reader. We met Paul, the headmaster, and Willy, his only other teacher, who showed us the two classrooms they used. There were 55 students at the school, split into two classes, and they were studying up to year six. Once the students reached sixth grade they sat a national examination to get into high school. If they didn't pass the exam they had to stay back in primary school and sit the exam the following year. Primary education was free for the villagers, but once they reached high school they had to pay. Many parents couldn't afford to send their children to high school, so even though they may pass the exam, they have to

stay back in primary school, as school is compulsory to the age of 15. After this they would most likely work in the family garden or plantation, as other jobs were limited without a high school education. Those children who were able to start high school had to go over to the mainland of Efate to school by boat or outrigger each morning.

It was interesting talking to David (the village chief) about his views of life. He had no desire to move to the mainland, where there were too many bad people, and he said it was much safer and a better place to live on their little island. He thought living on a boat would be very good, and easier than working in the garden all day. David and his family were Christians, and he said his daughter had a beautiful gift for remembering songs and music and then teaching it to the other teenagers at youth group. They had an organ and a guitar, which played in their church on Sundays, and they loved to hear new music. We promised to send them some tapes of Christian music so that they could learn new songs to sing at church. David was such a

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beautiful person and left wishing us a safe journey by saying, 'God bless you as you sail east, north south and west.' We both felt uplifted after speaking with him, and he left us with a feeling of happiness within.

18 September 2003 Revolieu Bay, Epi Island, Vanuatu

S 16° 43.69' E 168° 08.65'

Rose at 0530 hrs to cover 60 nm from Efate to Epi Island, and as Efate Island disappeared in our wake, to the E stood the two perfectly shaped volcanic peaks of Emae Island. By 0930 it was blowing 20 knots from the E and as we tied in the second reef the sun was hidden from our view by clouds that formed an overcast sky, with the possibility of rain reducing our visibility to around five miles.

Ali called me on deck to see *Twilight Express* pass to leeward heading S, making an easy passage under staysail with two reefs in the main. By 1330 Revolieu Bay, Epi Island could be seen off the starboard bow, but from the distance it didn't look like much of a bay, but more like an indentation with minimum protection from the wind and swell which wrapped around the island. The small reef stretching out from the southern bank did, however, give us some protection as we anchored in 8 meters over black sand.

19 September 2003, Ui Bay, Maskelyne Islands, Vanuatu

S 16° 31.99 E 167° 46.19'

After a slightly rolly night we set off after breakfast for the Maskelyne Islands S of Malekoula Island. We reached the SW channel through to Ui bay by 1315. Ui Bay is a lovely little anchorage between Ui Island and Malekoula Island, with a drying reef reaching across the S end. There were already five other yachts anchored here when we arrived, but we managed to find a nice spot to anchor in 14m over sand. The anchor had only been down for about five minutes before the first outrigger approached us, and a man named Morris asked if we wanted any bananas or coconuts or other fruits or vegetables. We said we'd have some bananas, as we'd eaten our last ones for breakfast, and also some drinking coconuts. Morris paddled off to his plantation to get our

bananas and coconuts, and just as he left, two boys in another outrigger paddled up and asked if we wanted bananas. We swapped an old T-shirt for three eggs and some bananas. When Morris returned we swapped a tin of meat for four coconuts and a hand of bananas.

The bay was swarming with outriggers, either fishing on the reef or coming back from their plantations, or trying to sell or trade with the yachts. The people were very friendly, and weren't assertive or badgering, and happily paddled away after a chat if we didn't want anything. They were also the poorest people we'd come across, dressed only in threadbare rags, which were just holding together. We had recently put some old T-shirts aside as rags, but decided to pull them out and use them to trade, as they were in better condition than any of the clothing we'd seen these people wearing.

Later in the afternoon we met Mal and Meka, a Tasmanian couple off *Moonwatcher*, a Kaufman 48. They had also cleared into Bluff from Hobart, one year earlier, so we reminisced about our Bluff encounters. It turned out that they were good friends of Don McIntyre, and Meka had done a trip on *Sir Hubert Wilkins* to Commonwealth Bay, and shared watches on the bridge with 'Scotty' — Scott Frankham — small world!

20 September 2003 Ui Bay, Maskelyne Islands, Vanuatu

S 16° 31.99' E° 167 46.19'

Today the anchorage was a hive of activity, with children piled into outriggers paddling around. Being a Saturday there was no school. Four young girls approached us in three outriggers, although they were very shy and giggly. Ali handed out some sweets and we sat talking to them for a while. Gatesy decided to take some photos with the new digital camera and then show the girls their pictures. They couldn't believe it when they saw each other in the camera, and squealed in delight. We invited them to come on board to have a look, and they gasped in shock and their eyes lit up in excitement. The girls were amazed by everything they saw. Things we take for granted they have probably never seen. They tapped the perspex windows in wonder and oohed and ached as their eyes wandered around the boat.

One girl saw the picture of Ali's family on the shelf and they were all fascinated by it, staring at the people in the picture. When they recognised us in the photograph they laughed and giggled. Even the cups and plates on the shelf fascinated them. Once the girls left we had a constant stream of children in outriggers paddle by, and we handed out sweets to each of them. One large canoe paddled by with an entire family in it — Dad, Mum and five children, including a small baby strapped to the mother's back. We gave them some tinned meat and sweets for the children in return for a grapefruit.

In the afternoon we went across to Ui Island, and walked around the other side where there was a family settlement. Many of the children we'd seen during the day lived there, and two girls showed us around the huts, introducing us to their father who was busy doing the laundry — scrubbing clothes with a brush and salt water. There was copra drying in piles on the ground or on racks in drying sheds, which was the main source of income for the people in the settlement. Bananas, papaws and pineapples

grew around the huts, but most of their plantations were on the mainland.

We both love Vanuatu and are sad that we won't see more of it, as we have found the people to be some of the happiest and friendliest we've met. We definitely plan to come back in the future.

21 September 2003 Ui Bay, Maskelyne Islands, Vanuatu

S 16° 31.99' E° 167 46.19'

It's Sunday and the Sabbath. Ui Bay has become deserted. At 0600 hrs the little ketch *Fearless* left, followed by *Djaka*, then Mal & Meka aboard *Moonwatch* upped anchor and headed S leaving, only us and another yacht. The outriggers full of locals that moved over the bay yesterday like mosquitoes on the top of a pond are nowhere to be seen, and apart from three visiting kids there has been no sign of life; it was almost eerie.

We took advantage of the low tide to walk round the S point of Malekoula Island to a beach we spotted on the way in. Landing in the dinghy

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where the now dry reef joined the two islands which form the bay, we made our way along the mangrove coast towards the rocky and steep South Point. The rusty remains of a wreck marked on the chart were visible on the outer part of the fringing reef as we skirted the cliff face towards the long coral beach, hoping that the incoming tide wouldn't strand us on the wrong side of the point. The beach was definitely worth the walk; bordered by South Point at our end it reached out in a large semicircle to the far spur of Mt Maskelyne, which rose covered in jungle to form the backdrop. With the ocean waves to the S breaking upon the fringing reef and the jungle to the N, the beach formed a thin line between these two diverse ecosystems. With only our footsteps in the rough coral sand we found several nice shells, including a large cowrie, several spider shells and a large fine unidentified brown shell. Midway along the beach we also found a carved fern statue facing out to sea. Was it to ward off evil spirits or to

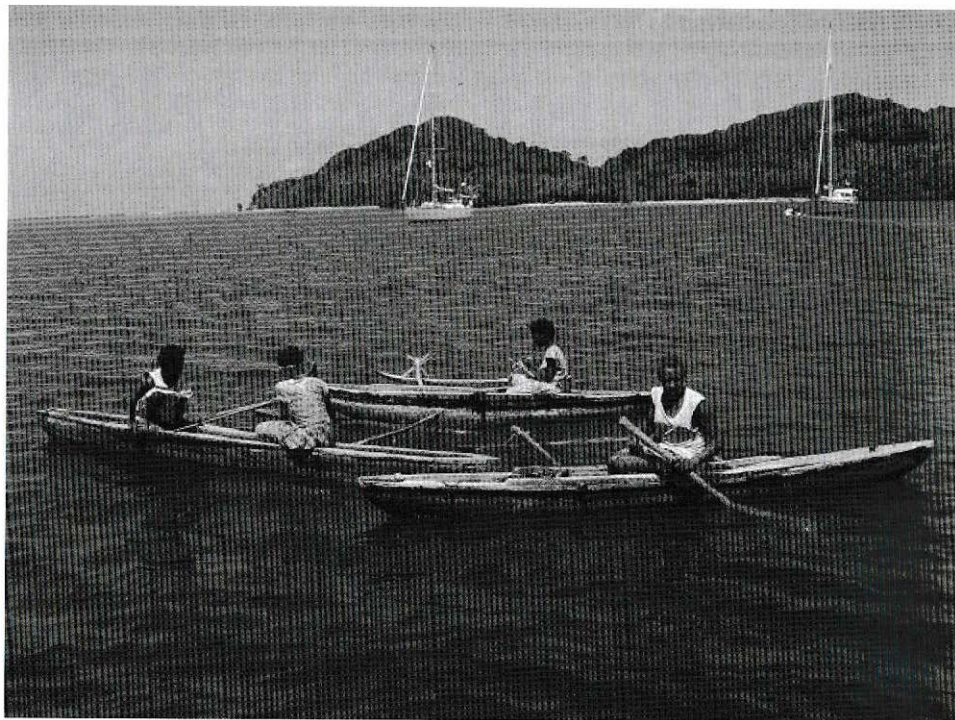
mark a taboo? Maybe in the jungle backing the beach not far from here there was a dark rock cave full of white skulls from the days of cannibalism. Or was my imagination racing as thoughts of *Lord of the Flies* entered my mind?

22 September 2003

Ui Bay, Maskelyne Islands
Vanuatu

S 16° 31.99' E° 167 46.19'

Whilst doing the morning dishes the first sailing outrigger was noticed in the distance to leeward making its way towards the mangroves. Another emerged from behind Ui Island and passed us on its route to South Point. The lugger sail of perhaps four square metres was made from bags similar to our wool bags and stretched out between spars made from mangrove branches, all tied together with a combination of electrical wire and small lengths of twine. The strong variable wind made for difficult sailing conditions as the gusts overpowered the outrigger, driving



it to windward, much to the helmsman's dismay as he worked hard with a paddle as a rudder to bring the craft back on course. Back on course the gust would pass leaving him without wind and with no option but to paddle until the next puff as he made his way to windward, but I believe on a broad reach it would fly. Another larger canoe (maybe 25 ft) then rounded the point of Ui carrying three people which made better headway as the lady in the middle worked the mainsheet, until the twine snapped in a gust. Hailing them with a coil of rope they made their way to the shore where they lowered the sail before swapping seats and paddling the outrigger backwards to us to receive a much needed new mainsheet.

24 September 2003 En route to Pt Vila

Ali's birthday! We departed Ui Bay at 0730 for Pt Vila. The wind was on the nose, and the sea was short and sharp—bang, bang bang! Not a very pleasant way to spend a birthday! We managed to make Devil's Point near the entrance to Pt Vila in one tack. The overfalls here were quite strong and the wind had increased to 35 knots as we bashed our way towards the calmer water of Pt Vila. To make life more interesting, we could see the lights of a vessel on our port beam, but couldn't work out what it was. It didn't respond to our radio calls and it wasn't showing the correct lights; and as the night was so dark we couldn't make out how big it was or how close we were to it. At one point we thought it might be towing something, so we decided to tack away from it for a while just to be safe. When we tacked back we found the vessel had kept pace, so that we ended up meeting again. Eventually we passed the mysterious vessel and dropped the sails to motor in on the leads in the now flat water. We arrived at the fuel berth at 0030 hrs on the 25th (didn't quite make it for the last of Ali's B'day), tied up and fell into bed exhausted.

After a few days in Port Vila and frustrated by strong head winds, *Legs Eleven* set out for New Caledonia.

30 September–2 October 2003

Dillon Bay to Noumea

We upped anchor from Dillon Bay on Erromango Island, Vanuatu at 0815 and set off for a new country and our most pleasant passage yet! We average just over 6.5 knots,

which was faster than we anticipated, and we arrived at the entrance of Havannah Passage in the dark at 1950 hrs on 1 October. The pass proved to be well lit and the leads were easy to find, with all the other lights on the chart lit and in the right place. We arrived at Port Mosselle in Noumea at 0315 hrs on 2 October.

2 October 2003

Port Mosselle Noumea N.C.

S 22° 16.62' E 166° 26.41'

Lapita pottery dating back to about 2,000 BC proves that New Caledonia was already inhabited at that time. It is thought that the first people may have come from Polynesia or New Guinea via the Loyalty Islands.

When Bougainville sailed south from the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) in 1768 he noted nearby land, but explored no further. New Caledonia was discovered by Captain Cook on 5 September 1774, when he landed at Balade on the northeast coast, but he could not get outside the encircling reef on the W coast. He named the island New Caledonia, as the pineclad ridges resembled Scotland. He discovered Ile des Pins (Isle of Pines) to the S on 20 September 1774.

After Cook, Bruny d'Entrecasteaux and Huon de Kermadec, searching for Lapérouse, landed on the Isle of Pines on 7 June 1772. For the next fifty years, navigators, explorers and those in search of sandalwood visited New Caledonia. An English businessman, James Paddon, set up business at Ile Nou, where the harbour of Noumea is now. 'Teachers' from the London Missionary Society arrived in 1840. Catholic Missionaries arrived in New Caledonia on 20 December 1843. Admiral Febvier Despointes took possession of New Caledonia for France by raising the French Flag on 24 September 1853 at Balade, and next day at the Isle of Pines. From 1853 to 1884 New Caledonia was administered by a military government.

In 1854, Capt. Tardy de Montravail chose the site of Noumea to build the capital city and port. The city was called 'Port-de-France' until 1866. From 1864 New Caledonia was used as a penal colony. Some 40,000 deported prisoners were sent there, often under harsh conditions. They included some celebrated participants in the

failed revolution after the defeat of France by Prussia in 1870 (the original Commune). One was the redoubtable Louise Michel, the inspiration of Rosa Luxemburg in the failed Bolshevik insurrection in Berlin in 1918. Prisons were established on the islands of Nou, Ducos and Isle of Pines. Deportation of prisoners ceased in 1897.

Economic development in New Caledonia was boosted by Jules Garnier's discovery of nickel in 1863. The 'Nickel Rush' was on, beginning in 1870.

During both world wars New Caledonians fought for France in Europe and North Africa. The War in the Pacific reached the Territory in March 1942, and New Caledonia became an important American military base in the fight against the Japanese. Four large air bases were built for superfortresses.

[Cruising Guide to New Caledonia Marc, Rambeau & Blackman, 2001; with Editor's additions from *Pacific Islands Yearbook*, 16th Edition and other sources.]

We awoke to a tapping on the hull and a 'Bon Jour' from a security guard. Yes, we were back in France (or at least a colony thereof) — the land of floating marinas and helpful service attendants, but more importantly the land of croissants, pain au chocolat and baguettes.

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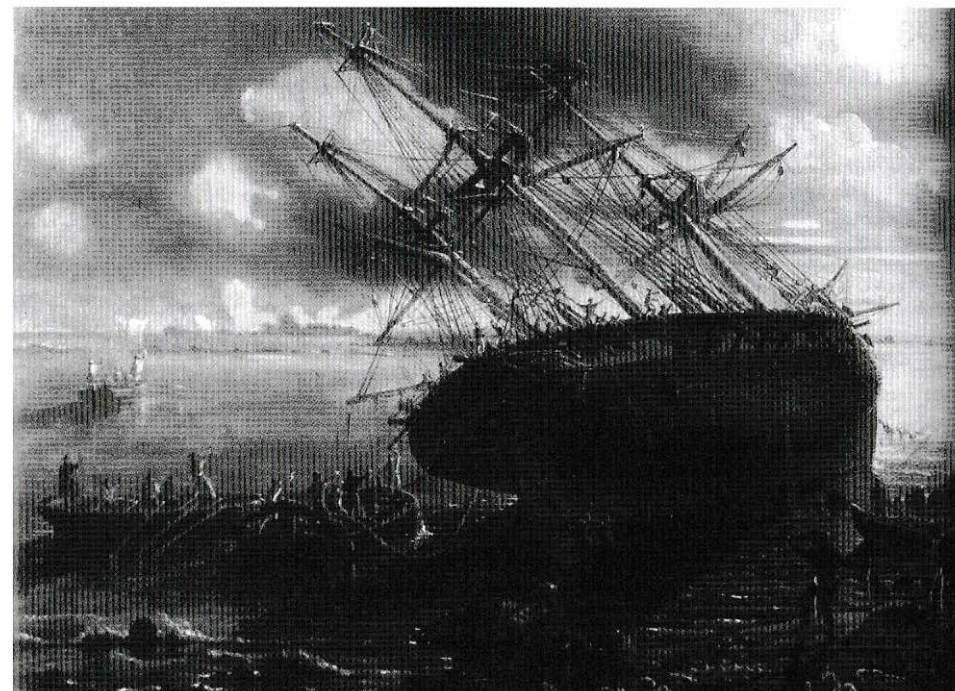
Several hours later, after lots of form filling in and disappointment at again losing all our fresh fruit and vegetables, we were allowed to disembark and greet a new country (our seventh this trip) and my Mum.

Nestled at the base of the red scrub-covered hill of Mont Montravel (167m), Noumea reaches out on a peninsula indented with bays of aqua blue water from the lagoon. It has a beautiful town square with shady trees, a rotunda and stalls with alfresco dinning. The buildings range from new to classic white colonial and French provincial with red terracotta tiled roofs. Shop windows displayed a full range of products we haven't seen since home — but at almost double the price window shopping didn't quite excite. Under the Cathedral on the hill, however, we found a little café facing the street and after deciphering the 'Plat du Jour' and converting the price from Pacific francs to Aussie dollars we joined the French patrons for a delicious and reasonably priced meal.

3 October 2003 Port Mosselle Noumea N.C.

S 22° 16.62' E 166° 26.41'

At Aus \$120 deposit for the toilet key and over Aus \$30 per night for the marina berth, we were not planning on staying in Port Mosselle for long. We started early with our shopping so that we could head off to explore the southern part



In 1838 Dumont Duville's corvette *Astrolabe* went aground in Torres Strait, allowing an unexpected (and unwelcome) opportunity to undertake quick carenage (careening).

of the island, only waiting until our final crew member arrived.

4 October 2003

East Anchorage, Baie Du Carenage, Baie du Prony, New Caledonia

S 22° 18.23' E 166° 51.27'

Do we go or do we stay now? Do we go or do we stay now? I can't remember who sings the song, but these were again the thoughts in my mind. During the night the skies had opened with a huge downpour and a front was meant to be approaching with forecasted winds of 35 knots from the N apparently predicted for today. All the forecasts are in French, which I can sort of make some sense of when written down, but have no idea what's happening when announced over the radio.

The wind direction was great for heading S, either to the Isle de Pines 60 (miles) or 30 miles

to Baie du Prony, but was 35 knots a bit windy for Mum's first sail? As Ali says, 'Make hay while the sun shines.' What that has to do with sailing I'm not sure, so off we headed to Baie du Prony. Later with 27 knots apparent wind and after some heavy gybes we tied in the second reef and surfed steep waves doing 8 kts against 4 kts of tide through Canal Woodin. As Ali buried the bow up to the forward hatch in the tide race, Mum seemed fine, but I was concerned that we had come through this little gap in the dark only a couple of nights ago. As the wind continued to increase, we rounded up behind Ile Ouen, and with only the number three jib hauled in tight we headed into the flat water of the bay with the toe rail under in the gusts, quickly catching the yachts also running for cover under motor. At the head of the bay we found the W anchorage already full, so dropped anchor at 1415 over red mud in the E anchorage, surrounded by red eroded mountains reminding me of the Flinders Ranges.

To be continued