

STRICTLY FOR THE BIRDS ...

Visitors to our Squadron, too, tell me the view from our lounge verandah is truly magnificent, and, of course, this is always with us - a part of our scene.

So you see, ladies, we have lots to offer you and we do extend to you all, the warmest invitation to come along and enjoy the pleasures your clubhouse offers.

One special social event we must mention is the Annual Dinner Dance, which this year will be held on Friday, 1st September at the Colonial, Glen Osmond. This is always a happy night, and as the bookings are often competitive, it might be as well to get your tickets early. Details will be put on the notice board in the foyer.

We will talk about our exciting Opening Day, which is 4th November later on.

Dorothy and Molly join me in sending best wishes for Happy Sailing, for the 1978-1979 season.

CLARE HARNIMAN

CONTRIBUTIONS

CRUISING THE FIJIS (Part IV of the series on Moongara's Pacific cruise)

The run across from Tonga to Fiji, about 450 miles, is usually an easy one, with the trade wind on the port quarter and moderate seas of regular frequency. 'Fanny', our windvane steering gear, was in charge of compass courses, we had at last shaken off the rain which had dogged us throughout a good deal of our time in the Tongas,

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and the passages between the large islands of the Lau group were well defined so that navigation presented few problems. When sailing among the islands, however, careful checking of currents is always essential; they change direction and rate quite suddenly at times, as the stream flows through and around various island groups.

We duly made fast to the Quarantine buoy in Levuka harbour to await pratique, but after some time were beckoned to the wharf, where the formalities eventually took place - the Port Health launch had broken down. This saved us the expense of the launch, which is charged against yachts at this port, but they recouped their losses by charging us full fees for berthing and light dues. I can see the day fast approaching when yachts will be used as yet another source of revenue in many places, especially as the volume of yachts is increasing everywhere all the time.

We circumnavigated the attractive island of Ovalau as a prelude to a wonderful six weeks in these superb cruising waters; and we were always on the alert now for coral heads and uncharted sections of reef, as large areas here are still unsurveyed.

Numerous wrecks of small inter-island cargo ships and foreign fishing trawlers of up to about 500 tons, lying high and dry on reefs, and providing splendid marks, were ample evidence of the necessity for care; that is, if we wanted any reminding. Indeed, at about the time of our passage through these island groups, two yachts were lost to the N.E. of Veti Levu; the stern section of a ferro-cement yacht was left shored up on the beach of a resort island S.W. of Lautoka, as though awaiting the arrival of a new forward section; a round-the-world single-handed ketch grounded on the reef near Plantation village, badly damaging her skeg-hung rudder; and two more yachts, one a large ferro ketch, were wrecked north of New Caledonia - all these

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within a couple of months.

Veti Levu is surrounded, as coral islands and groups usually are, by a fringe or barrier reef, with passes (navigable and otherwise) at intervals; and we sailed from Levuka down to Suva within and outside this reef as interest and safety dictated. The weather deteriorated, approaching Suva, with rain and a cold trade wind which blew at times to more than 30 knots. The 'trade' is not always a balmy wafter.

Suva, the principle port of Fiji, is probably more attractive from the sea than from a base on shore, but then this is very often the case - the peace and privacy of a yacht make an excellent retreat. We used the anchorage off the Royal Suva Yacht Club, where there is a quarter-mile row to the club premises. There are few yachts in the club - most boats are powerful fast motor-boats for gaining rapid access to the outer reefs for fishing - but the atmosphere was pleasant and friendly. We made our official introductions, were made honorary members for a fee, enjoyed our stay, and provided some minor entertainment by grounding right in the basin in front of the clubhouse while retiring to the anchorage from the fuelling berth. By the time a line had been run ashore and we had commenced cranking the tide had receded three inches, and there we stayed for six hours - the penalty we paid for listening to somebody else instead of taking our own soundings. Fortunately darkness relieved our embarrassment.

From here to Lautoka on the western side we enjoyed an interesting interlude of reef, lagoon, and resort hopping. The best anchorages along the South and S.W. coast of Vetu Levu - the so called Coral Coast - are taken by large holiday resorts. These are usually designed to blend in with the natural surroundings and are sometimes

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barely discernible from three or four miles to seaward. Yachts may anchor off any of them; and indeed we were made very welcome at some, and invited to use all their facilities. This offered a change of routine, where we could dine ashore in an informal atmosphere and meet a few people if we so desired.

By now the fishing was assured and we were seldom without a good supply of Walu, the magnificent Spanish mackerel, which is as fine a cabin-table fish as any when baked with coconut oil, fresh scraped coconut, tomatoes, taro, onion, peppers, and sundry spices. So good, in fact, that our primary concern became the depleted stocks of Australian white wines rather than a shortage of fish.

Late one afternoon I sorted out a likely anchorage for the night from the chart of Nandi waters, and on approaching to within a couple of miles we discovered yet another large hotel resort. The anchorage was good, so it was dinghy over the side, row ashore, across the beach, over the spacious patio, past the swimming pool complete with swimmers' bar and cash register at water-level (what next!) into the reception area; where my bearded crew asked the astonished receptionist, 'Where are we, my dear?' She answered incredulously, 'You are, Sir, in the Regent of Fiji Hotel.' Most guests come in the other way, it seems. We bought a drink on the strength of that.

The top sail schooner Sea Spray came to anchor while we were there, and disgorged her passengers after an outer-island excursion; I paid her a visit and was happily received aboard. She has been a magnificent yacht in her day, and featured recently in a television series, but now her two topsail yards lie untidily askew and she seldom sets much sail. I asked her happy-go-lucky mate why, and he took me below to point out the heel of the mainmast, which appeared to be gradually subsiding into the keelson. She was

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equipped with a Heath Robinson style auto-pilot, which the mate explained to me enthusiastically was very good when you wanted a little sleep!

When it was time for a return visit to Moongara the huge cigar-puffing Fijian skipper asked if our cabin hatch was specially designed for pigmies. Their thirsts were bigger than their physiques.

We sailed next up the coast to Lautoka, where once more we had to undertake the formalities of entering ship before we could visit the outer islands. This proved the most pleasant part of the cruise in Fiji. The weather on this lee side of the main island is fine and sunny, as all the rain has been precipitated over Suva and the South coast.

Here the cruising crew has the choice of several kinds of activities. There are the resort anchorages mentioned above, the village anchorages on the outer islands, or, if you seek solitude, there are many secluded anchorages inside fringe reefs off uninhabited islands which afford fine beaches and superb swimming over coral. Some of these last have plantations that are worked occasionally by neighboring islanders, and you are at liberty to take a few coconuts for your own use.

We headed for the Yasawas, a chain of islands with extensive reefs North West of Vetu Levu. They have only recently been 'discovered' by visitors and are as yet quite unspoiled. There are no resorts, although three very well-run, small, passenger motor-vessels make regular three-day cruises to the group from Lautoka.

It is customary here when landing at a village to ask for the chief and present him with a small token parcel of yongona

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root (kava), whereupon he conducts a minor ceremony and grants you freedom of the village. Offers to attend a kava party often follow. These gatherings, attended by males only, are usually pretty boring; as is the concoction itself, which tastes to me like mildly aniseed flavoured wash-up water.

You must be particularly careful regarding clothing out here - the pleasure of nude swimming and of getting around on deck similarly undressed is taboo within sight of any village, as the inhabitants are easily offended by the practice.

We had by now covered a lot of ground and explored countless anchorages, but time was running on; and on the 7th August we made our very reluctant farewell to these beautiful cruising waters, sailed out through the outer reefs for the last time, picked up a light S.S.E. trade wind, and set course for New Caledonia, another 650 miles west southwestwards.

PEP
