

STRICTLY FOR THE BIRDS ...

welcome in the club. I don't think much progress has been made here and am baffled about what can be done. The response to ladies' only functions is reasonable, but does not warrant more than one per season. It could be that there is no problem - the attendance at our mixed social functions, particularly the last two, has certainly been excellent. Anyway, I would ask those ladies who have been in the club for a few seasons to be aware of new members, and make them welcome when the occasion arises.

My grateful thanks again to those members and their ladies who have so ably assisted the flag officers and their wives in these last two years. I know the incoming officers can depend upon the same support and I hope they enjoy their term as much as I have done.

PAT TEDMANSON

CONTRIBUTIONS

IN THE WAKE OF BLIGH (Part III of the series on Moongara's Pacific cruise)

On our arrival in Tonga, our education in coral navigation commenced.

Spread a chart of coral islands on your table and romantic notions of the 'palm fringed silvery shores' variety are apt to enter your imagination if you are a sailing man; closer scrutiny usually frightens you to hell. Certainly the Admiralty charts of the Vava'u group in northern Tonga showed a veritable Bay of Islands in the tropics, but all the islands appeared to be reef encircled, with very deep water right up to these reefs, and no

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beaches or anchorages. Of course Admiralty charts are not published for the benefit of cruising yachts and we discovered, when we went exploring among these delightful labyrinths, many hundreds of safe, clear, coral sand anchorages within the reef breaks; and we took no time at all to feel easy when sailing in these areas.

The sand is coarse, therefore reasonably heavy anchors are desirable. I used the old Admiralty or fisherman throughout, with no problems; in the coral areas we found the silver line with chain rod (4 fathoms) on the bottom to be better than all chain cable, as at times we were anchored in quite deep water - up to 60 or 80 feet, in fact - and all chain is a bit heavy in such depths. The water is so clear, however, that we could set the anchor by sight even at those soundings, and so keep it and the line clear of coral heads. In Tongan waters, the areas between reefs are deep and well defined, both by colour and surface disturbance; but in other places, such as Fiji, there are extensive areas of much shallower water and much more surface coral, and colour is still the guide.

Most yachts in this part of the world come from the U.S.A. or New Zealand and seem to favour C.Q.R. anchors; light Danforths distort more readily if fouled on coral.

Good sunlight and conning from the mast are essential for safe navigation in extensive coral; you don't try it at night except on passage between island groups where the going is deep and clear.

Stores are readily available at all ports from super-market type stores, although variety of goods is limited in most of the Tongan group and fresh meat is a little difficult to come by there. Tongan waters have been heavily fished over the generations and it was not until

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we got to Fiji, and had discovered the correct trolling gear, that the big ones started to flop into the cockpit: mainly the fine Walu or Spanish mackerel, with a few big trevally and barracuda. Some species of coral fish are dangerous to eat but all the pelagic varieties are safe.

The big mackerel were a welcome addition and variation to our diet. Since there were only two of us to feed from New Zealand onwards, catering was fairly simple. We had refrigeration but no deep freeze; and were still able to hold fresh meat for 18 days, bread for 10, and fruit and vegetables for adequate periods. On very few occasions did we have to resort to hard tack.

There must be more Seagull outboards per acre in Tongan waters than anywhere else in the world everything that floats is propelled by one. They are, as one local man explained, Tongan-proof. The locals were always highly amused to see us paddling our minute dinghy from ship to shore, as we had left our own Seagull at home to avoid carrying petrol and to conserve space.

We sailed right through the Tongan islands from south to north, stopping over midway at the beautiful island of Nomuka, the anchorage HMS Bounty left the day before the famous mutiny of 28th April, 1789. The mutiny itself took place between this island and Tofua some 30 miles northwest; we sailed across the very spot where Lt. Bligh and his eighteen men were cast adrift in the 23 foot open launch. Our imaginations were taken back all those years as we recollected this piece of maritime history, and we were glad indeed for our 31 feet and full deck with well-stocked ice box beneath it.

We were to follow and cross Bligh's track several times during the next few weeks and we never ceased to admire the superb seamanship and effort which kept that tiny

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craft afloat and going, right across to Timor; a voyage through waters, some still unsurveyed today, which would keep a well-found yacht's crew alert even now.

None of these islanders knew much about Bligh, but many spoke of Cook, who was there a decade before Bligh. The knowledge of these first European ventures into the area obviously is forming a part of the islands' spoken history.

From the low-lying islands of the south, the northern islands of the Vava'u group of Tonga provide quite a contrast; they are much higher, obviously the result of volcanic upthrust, and densely overgrown. The rich soil provides splendid plantations of coconut, tapioca, taro, and all the usual produce of the islands.

Most yachts here were American, down from Hawaii or California via Samoa, doing the Trade Wind circuit. After speaking to some of them - all very elaborately fitted of course - I doubt whether many had reefed sail. And many found anchoring a bit of a chore. Certainly on one occasion when we drifted quitely to anchor under sail we received offers of assistance from those at anchor who thought we must have been in trouble!

This was at the usual yacht anchorage at Neiafu, and was just off the famous Port of Refuge Hotel, a large and elaborate holiday resort with a staff of several dozen and four guests.

It would be a lovely place for a quiet holiday, but nobody seems to go there. Quiet it certainly was: they didn't have any money in the till for change when we bought a drink.

The only yacht club in Tonga was at Nuku'alofa - there were no yachts, and the clubhouse was a shed with a bar

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and billiard tables, and everybody on the island seemed to be a member. A Squadron pennant was displayed among the small collection on the wall, so at least one other of our club boats must have visited there at some time; perhaps it was Rufus L, of Port Lincoln, but nobody there knew, or cared either.

A few New Zealanders and one or two Australians were in the area but we saw little of them as (like us) they were generally off cruising among the outer islands, enjoying the peace and magnificent diving over the best natural aquarium you could ever see. With the water at 82°F we almost dissolved in it.

The Tongans, like most islanders, are very friendly people. They are well-mannered, however, and will wait for an invitation before coming aboard. Once having extended that invitation, though, you find all the friends and relatives taking advantage of it also; that usually means half the village - and there are no small Tongans. So at times an uninhabited anchorage becomes very desirable.

A large portion of their income is derived from the sale of handcraft items - shells and such - to tourists and passengers from cruise ships; and an interesting aspect from the yachtsman's angle is that you are not pestered a great deal to purchase anything once they know that you are from a yacht. As one Tongan explained: "You are poor like us, you come in small boat instead of big cruise ship like rich people; your boat is small like our house." We didn't take up the argument!

We did purchase a few items at Nuku'alofa, however, from the Sergeant-Major of the palace guard. He carefully removed his sash and other insignia from his uniform

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before conducting the sale, explaining that the king would be very angry if he saw him doing business in front of the palace in his uniform.

It was here also that we spent a few hours with one William Fa, who was one of the survivors of the Tongan yacht Tuaikeapau, which was wrecked on Minerva Reef some years ago while on a voyage from Tonga to New Zealand; Olaf Ruhen wrote a book about the incident.

From here we were to enjoy a free sheet sail with the Trade wind on our port quarter through the Lau or Eastern Fiji group towards Levuka. Again we converged onto Bligh's track, and entered the Lau group through Bounty Boat Passage. Trade winds were blowing hard now and we sought an uninhabited cluster of islands enclosed in a very large lagoon and 'lazed off' for a couple of days. As it was inadvisable to call at the villages until we had entered ship officially, we didn't stop again; and another couple of days running before brought us through the narrow pass in the fringe reef of Ovalau Island and into the anchorage at Levuka. The leads through this pass are interesting: they are two fixed green lights in line and the front one is in the form of an illuminated cross on the tower of the Catholic Church on the waterfront - a guiding light indeed!

PEP

CARTOGRAPHIC COMMENT

Most of us have grown up in a British historical tradition, with only a vague idea of the contributions of explorers from other countries. In the eighteenth century, however, geography, like science today, was mostly an open and international discipline. Even in times of war it was