

Fiji to Vanuatu

Friday July 23

0900 Into customs to clear out..there's a few folk here clearing in and out – I now realise for sure that we were supposed to clear out of Lautoka before going to the Yasawas and then clear back in when we returned before clearing out again to go to Vanuatu...all this clearing in and clearing out is ridiculous – the forms are all the same, the questions inanewhat is your mast made of?, what make and model mobile phone? and all needs to be done in triplicate...at least they have carbon paper this time!

My customs man is looking for something – in every book, under each pile of other folks filled in forms (and there's a lot of piles!) on his desk, in his computer...eventually he asks another customs man something in Fijian – CM#2 says to me: “did you send in a preclearance form before you came to Fiji?” Yes, I say, and I brought it with me when we cleared in...”But its not in the computer” – Oh, isn't it?, I say in all innocence. CM#1 then gets a severe bollocking from CM#2, some of it in English – Why didn't you take his form?, It must be in the computer. This is why the form is so important!...after what seems like 5 minutes (but is probably only 1 or 2), CM#2 turns to me and asks... ”Do you have the form with you?” – No its on the boat – ‘Where is your boat?’...In the harbour...”Can you go and get it?”...sure “Thank you Captain we will complete all the paper work in readiness for your return. I go and get the form and now CM#1 sees it, he starts searching all over again – looking for his copy?...dunno...after 10minutes of fruitless searching, he photocopies my form and gives to a girl to enter into the computer. Meantime, all the clearance papers are done and I'm free to go..OK CJW...lets go before they change their minds!

1030 motoring off to Vuda Point to fill up with diesel. – we tie up and take on 140 litres. While fuelling Crissy goes for a walk to see if she can find Peter Greacen and Peter Pacific Jewel. We find Viveka and have a chat with PG who tells us the other Peter has gone to help an American woman and her child on a yacht in Musket Cove. PG and I agree to try to meet up in Lougainville on the island of Espiritu Santo in 3 weeks or so....goodbyes done we leave Vuda Point.

Motor off to Musket Cove, anchor between Clark Gable and Aninda...T&A are not on CG, there's another couple on her.

Saturday July 24

CG motors over and tells us that T&A have gone back to NZ and they were asked to keep an eye out for us..didn't catch their names or the whole story...but said they were around for a week and would leave CG at Vuda Pt 'till T&A get back...and also that there was a Peter from Brisbane on an American yacht who was looking for ussaid they were off to Castaway and would catch up...we're off to Vanuatu...when...Now!...oh well...good luck ..bye!

We prepare to set to sea and then motor over to the moorings where all the US boats are to see if we can see Peter – no luck

1030 Slowly motor through the anchored yachts – passed a Deerfoot 2-62 “Ariana”, say goodbye to ani and Daniel on Aninda and head for the Malolo Passage

1200 Through the Malolo Passage – there's a 2 knot incoming current...so while our boat speed is 5 we're only making good 3 knots against it. Swell is breaking on the outside of the reefs on either side..and there's a guy surfing on it !!



Out into the ocean and there's not a breath of wind, so motoring on we set the autopilot of 270degT – dead west – towards Port Vila..500+ miles to go...

1230 Cabbage, cheese, tomato, mayo sandwich for lunch – thanks Chrissy - depth sounder is off soundings – we're on our way again.

1300 breeze comes in – beam reaching – main/genoa 6-7 knots – just lovely. During the afternoon / evening, the breeze freshens and the swell starts to build...night time 3 on 3 off watches again..still beam reaching at 6-7 knots



Sunday July 25

Morning sees the seas a little flatter, breeze is still in the high teens low 20s...we lose yet another luer to an uncaught fish !

1200 check the log ... 160 miles run since 1200 yesterday

Evening comes and the wind and the swell have increased..we've got 25 knots SSE now and a 2m swell with wind waves on top.

Monday July 26

Really blowing now – wind steadily in the 30s and swell up to about 3m – reef in the main and headsail furling to about 1/3 (its OK reaching Pete!) Diva is well balanced and Mr Fleming is steering well.

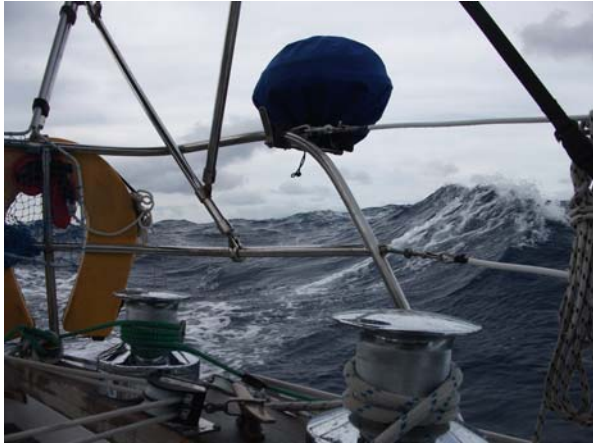
1200 check the log ... 167 miles run since 1200 yesterday

During the night the new vang top block I bought at Vuda Pt breaks with a bang – the loads must be very high in these conditions...too high for that block anyway !

Tuesday July 27

Seas high...occasional 4m swell comes through with a breaking white top – Mr Flemings airfoil snaps – well I suppose 3000 miles for a piece of coreflute isn't bad...oops and it was the light weather one...lesson there !...On with the autopilot.

Later in the morning I climb out the back (with harness on a short tether) and remove the damaged foil. Chrissy has been exhorting me not to replace it as the seas are large...later when she's off watch I replace it... only takes a minute. There are flattish periods when the wind gets down to about 25 knots and the large swell seems to flatten to about 1m before it build again....we try to take photos of it, but the majesty of it all just doesn't penetrate the camera lens.



As we close in on the island of Efate, the sea is building with the wind. In trying to make for the coast across the swell, I misjudge a large wave and we broach, water in the cockpit and Chrissy soaked...sorry ! Wind is in the high 30s and the waves are becoming like small mountains with steep faces and steps up the face to the white caps being blown off the tops

1200 check the log ... 179 miles run since 1200 yesterday...that's a 24hr average of 7.46 knots ! we saw more than 9 knots many times during the day and a few over 10.

Apart from my misjudged broach, the boat feels well under control and flying – its as though she's enjoying herself, like a horse given free rein.

Slowly we edge our way across the swell to get in to Baie de Mele so we can head for the port. It's tricky as the swell is pushing us away and I'm constantly looking for valleys between the swells that we can dart through. I'm steering by autopilot with the rudder gain on max...when the boat starts to turn the wrong way a punch on + or -10 degrees brings her back quickly...that hydraulic ram is much stronger and quicker than I would be on the wheel...as we round Pango Pt, the seas subside...but the wind doesn't...we eventually make it into the head of the Baie but it's still blowing 25 knots.

1730 Motor on, get the sail down and we're pushing into 25 knots on the nose. It's now getting dark and we're looking for the red/green beacons that mark the port entrance. We think we see them and head towards them at 085T – then the water starts to disappear beneath us ... 35m to 10 in 2 boat lengths ! Chrissy sees a flashing red light on out stbd bow – we should leave that to port ? ...we head for it and as we approach it a green light comes into view dead ahead....why couldn't we see these further out ? ...dunno..is it the lights ..or is it us ?

Round the red leaving it to port ...now we can see the fixed red on the hill and the red on the radiomast behind it which lead to the quarantine buoy . Within 10 minutes we're there and see in the dark with the spotlight about ten other yachts anchored here. Finding a spot in here that's less than 30m deep is a bit tricky, but we find 10m and the anchor chain rattles out...whew !...Time for a beer ! – what?...no cold beer ?...sorry, says the crew, with all that was going on, I forgot to put beer in the fridge – oh well, I'll join you in a G&T then.....well....I forgot to put tonic in the fridge too ! Grr what do we pay these people for...of forgot I'm not paying am I !!

Never mind....great passage...561 miles in 78.5 hours = 7.15 knots average.

Wednesday July 28

0730 Call customs on 16 – Yachting world reply – they will send a man in a boat to collect us and take us to customs and immigration and the quarantine officer will come to the boat at 1100. Moses arrives in a sort of whaleboat thing with a huge outboard and takes me, Stuart (Nomad) and Brian (Tillikum) to customs on the other side of the port – usual inane questions on forms with no space for the answers – all done after 20 minutes. Moses takes us to immigration in town ...4000 vatu per boat (~A\$50), passports stamped and the usual clatter about visa extensions, and go here go there, forms to fill etc....

Moses back at the pier with the quarantine officer in the boat...takes us /him to the boats...we are last in the line...hope Brian doesn't talk too much....he takes the longest to do everything as he doesn't remember anything, can't find the appropriate papers and needs to tell everyone his life story....

1115 Quarantine man arrives ...questions are simple, the officer articulate and pleasant..inspects our Fijian yam, gives the boat a look over and takes away our rubbish...brilliantthen the invoice for 3000 vatu ! Can be paid at the post office he says....but too late nowthis place runs on French hours..offices shut at 1130, reopen at 1330 !

Go ashore now and try to find an internet café...there's wireless out here, but the signal strength is very low Need to try to find some larger scale charts of the islands as well...the plotter electronic charts only go down to 1: 300000

That's all for now...Cheers from Vanuatu !