

Vila to Santo

Tuesday August 3

Into town to Lands dept...sorry printer still isn't working...oh well, nothing to be done..at least most of the places north have detailed charts on the cockpit plotter.

Nambawan for coffee and internet then back to the boat to get ready to go.

1000 Motoring out of Port Vila – no wind...freighter Scarlett Lucy is leaving at the same time. Cut to Pointe du Diable and breeze comes in from SE – lovely sail for a short while



1300 breeze dies, motor on...1330 breeze is back but NE F3..so now we're beating and tacking. Looking at the chart, my intended anchorage, Nawora Matua Bay on Nguna Is is exposed to the N and W ...North winds generally herald a SW change so I chuck it in and head for Lelepa is where I can anchor in the lee of the point. Entering the bay is tricky...no chart !...there's coral shelves everywhere but once inside consistent 6 m depth...anchored in sand and broken coral 1500.



There's a French Amel Super Maramu2000 here...middle aged bald Frenchman with a Polynesian woman saw them in Vila), a French catamaran and a Canadian cat Cop Out. The Frenchmen have gone ashore and are playing boule (petanque) with a local on the beach. The women are now heading to the beach with picnic baskets sprouting baguettes.

The Canadians drop by on their way to the beach to ask if I'd like to come for a walk as I don't have my dink in the water...thanks, but I've got a radio sched in 5 minutes and I want to get down early for an early departure...Ok no probs...

The weather is warm and the water calm..and warm..I scrubbed the ever present grass from the water line..had a look underneath...nothing growing just a bit slimy..good !

Called Russell radio on 6megs and wonder of wonders they heard me ! Had a chat with Bev about the weather, she told me they were having 50 knots and rain in Bols ! Well, that's the first time I've been able to get through directly in 4 months !

Wednesday August 4

0700 up and at em, on the way to Rivolieu Bay...the Amel is leaving too...I go the wrong way and hit some coral going very slow <1 knot...just a bump....back off and follow Mr Amel...at least if there's anything there he'll hit it first ! he has eyes at the bow that I don't have.

Sails up and we're off...the French cat is out too and roaring up the coast line. About 3 hours later I see the French Cat, Amel and the Canadian cat Cop Out going north but it looks like they're headed for the south side of Epi Is rather than the west.

I'm having a lovely sail...its 10-12 knots E-ENE and we're humming. About lunchtime it seems that the other three are getting closer – they've changed course and now are clearly heading the same way as me. The French cat crosses in front of me and is still going faster – Amel is behind me followed by Cop Out. The French cat sails into a windless hole and we're all catching up with him. I get right up beside him and fall in the hole...Amel is charging from behind. Breeze picks up ...its NE. Diva picks up her skirts and we're off pointing high, hard on the wind doing 6 knots in 11 true. The cat is stalled, he can't point at all.... Amel and Cop Out pass him. The French cat readjusts his sails, bears off a little and gets going. It is quite clear that Diva can point higher than Amel and sail faster in these conditions. Both cats are a good 15degrees lower than us and slower. We all end up in Baie Rivolieu following the waypoints in the cruising guide – perfect anchorage in 9m over a mud bottom.



Amel Charging from behind



At anchor

these islands are different again from what we've seen....lush, green and almost jungle like. Beaches alternate between bright white sand and black ...they say one shouldn't swim where the sand is black because of sharks.



Talking of fish...yup, you guessed it, While I was below making a sandwich, the reel went ZING! And by the time I got to it the line was gone ! luer, trace, 75m of 70lb line gone in seconds !

Thursday August 5

0900 leaving Baie Rivolieu for Port Sandwich. Motoring for an hour then the breeze arrives and we're away reaching- take us all the way to the entrance of Port Sandwich. Got a bit behind as we approached..and a bit stronger ..25 knots dead behind...carried the main all the way into the anchorage. What a delightful spot...totally protected anchorage in 13m...only thing is no swimming...apparently this place is alive with sharks.

The Independence celebration festivities continue. From the village music is blaring out..reggae..its the thing here. Seven boats in the bay..Swedish, Swiss, Brit, French, NZ +1 EU flagged and 1 unknown..



Discovered when hauling down the main that two of the batten pocket tapes that hold the batten pockets to the mast slides are nearly completely undone..the tapes are OK but the threads holding it all together are gone. Quick repair with the needle and strong waxed thread.

A rough looking little freighter pulls in and ties up at Ballande wharf...its got 44 gal drums, gas cylinders, cardboard boxes and sacks aboard. On the wharf there's 2 utes and about a dozen people waiting its arrival.....must be supplies from the big smoke !

The boat ties up and in the usual way of things , everyone is just sitting around – seems compulsory in the islands to do nothing for quite a while before engaging in whatever needs to be done! After about half an hour they start unloading the boat – chain gang from the boat to the ute..cartons and sacks..can't tell what it is...meanwhile the reggae plays on.....





Will's anchor light –still working after all these years...thanks mate



Mars is starting to show – brightest light in the evening sky (BUT I CAN'T KEEP THE CAMERA STILL!)and will get bigger and brighter...according to info received from PRG, it will be the closest to earth in our lifetimes towards the end of August.... thanks mate

Friday August 6

0800 Planning the next leg to Port Stanley..~30 miles NW towards the north end of Malekula Is. Out of Port sandwich then 336T to pass Bangon Pt & Bongnaun Pt, then 305T to Uri Is.

Rained in the night and morning is damp and o'cast..but there's patches of blue (sailors pants) coming in from the SW so hopefully it will clear.

0900 On the way out of Port Sandwich. Once out on the sea, the wind is dead behind ...sail with main only, spread right out. Mr Fleming doing OK as long as the apparent is > 8 knots...less than that he wanders too much and risks an accidental gybe. About 1400 the wind dies and its on with the motor .. motor sail all the way to Port Stanley.

On the way I caught a fish ! well, almost... the remaining line went ZING!...I got to the reel in time to activate the brake, see the rod bend and a beautiful blue and white walu jump 4 ft out of the water – he was about 4ft long, exquisitely coloured, but when I tried to reel him in, he jumped again and the force on the line overcame the brake on the reel and he took the line away...another jump in the air and he was gone! So now I have, no line, no luers ...again ! Anyway he was a BIG fish...I doubt I could have landed him.

Arriving in Port Stanley, the cruising guide gives waypoints for an anchorage over 5-8m sand – couldn't find it, neither could the other two yachts that entered at the same time – we all end up on the south side of Suare Is – difficult anchoring in a coral bottom....16deg06.81'S, 176deg27.57'E



Two locals paddle up in a dugout outrigger canoe – they've been fishing but no luck – they try to sell me paw paw and shells...not today thanks. They try other boats...Kiwi boat Bali Blue gives them fishing line...Hey, I could do with some of that !!

Saturday August 7

Up at 0800, beautiful morning..local couple paddling around in a dugout...he's going spearfishing, she's paddling the canoe...he gets a nice size octopus and chucks it in the canoe, she stabs it with a stake and proceeds to club it to death, then de-entrails it with a big knife...all very efficient.



Decide to have a go at making yoghurt a la Chrissy – got it organised in a bucket on the east side of the boat.

Slow sail 15 miles to Vao Island in NE F4. Picked up a weather fax that shows a low over NZ – that's why its NE here – when the low moves east, the breeze should go SW then back to ESE again.

1345 Anchored in the bay on the west side of Vao Is (15deg54.13'S, 167deg18.14'E) – beautiful spot. Within minutes dugouts are paddling towards the boat – nice young woman Lucy asks if I'd like to come to the village – yes please, I'm doing washing at the moment, after that ?..3.30? ...OK...The conversation is conducted in French, seems few of the locals in the north speak English.



An enterprising young man, Joe, paddles up - he wants to give me mandarins – no thanks – but he won't take non for an answer... I GIVE them to you...then he asks to come aboard...Joe unloads his cargo of mandarins and climbs aboard...he's soaking wet !....very interested in all the gadgets on the boat asks me for a rope for his bullock....maybe , what size?...5 to 6 metres 10-12mm he replies precisely. I give him an old sheet – he's very happy with that, until he spies the cap collection...You have a lot of hats, I don't have a hat...so I give him one of the Barilla caps (thanks Bill & Wendy) – now he's really happy. Anyway, I say I have a rendezvous dans le village a tres heures trente et le lavage ne fait pas encore !

Bon, on y va he says and scoots off..the other 10 or so lads that are hanging around in dugouts are not so keen to go...Allez !!..and they're gone

Into the village to find Lucy...not so easy...this is a BIG village..but eventually she's found, nursing a 4 week old baby, hers. She has another child of 3 yrs who is in NZ with her grandmother – there's a discussion with another woman who has two children under 5 that I don't really fully understand, but the gist of it was about parents separating and leaving children everywhere...

Lucy sends me off with another woman to see the preparation of kava. The root has been chopped up into thumbnail sized pieces and left to dry in the sun all day. It's gathered up in a bowl and taken to the kava preparation place where two fit young men feed the kava lumps previously soaked in water into a manual meat mincer which produces a dirty grey/brown sludge – it's clearly hard work as they take it in turns to turn the handle on the mincer. This sludge is then pressed to get the liquid out of it and the liquid filtered to produce drinkable(?) kava.

OK, that's over, back to Lucy's place. After a short while, Lucy's cousin Juliette turns up with a bag of little baskets (for soap I think). She asks me when I'm leaving and where I'm going – eyes light up when I mention Noumea. She has friend Gizelle in Noumea that sells her baskets for her and could I take un petit pannier with me if she gives me Gizelle's phone # and adresse. Sure as long as the package is not too big...no no just a shopping bag full...OK

So we go to Juliette's house – she has a gate ! – a swept sand pathway!, keys for the doors ! (first time I've seen that – a warning perhaps?) She organises the pannier of 100 little baskets plus “deux pour ta

femme” and insists I take even more mandarins, 2 papaya and 2 pamplemousse. OK, now we go and take kava !

The kava bar is a lean to of corrugated iron and stakes with a bench supporting the plastic bowl of kava, the drinking bowls and the money box. Its 50 vatu a bowl,,, Juliette forks out and I’m presented with a small bowl of about 150ml of milky liquid that has more in common with dirty used dishwater than something you’d want to drink !...OK here goes...gulp....holy moly...it tastes like recycled dirt ! I don’t think I can drink this...yes you can insists Juliette who knocks back her bowl in one shot ... Ok, I do the same and within minutes, my mouth feels numb and I feel quite silly – the locals are having a laugh at my expense ! Its not like an alcohol sensation, its quite different...anyway I’ve had enough – Juliette tells me that Lucy will have 2 or 3 in an evening and men often have 5 or 6 !

Off to say goodbye to Lucy – she’s feeding the baby again. Lucy’s father is there-quite refined looking gent and well dressed by local standards – introduces himself – obviously very proud of his daughter. Lucy’s mother is there too, speaks very good English...just back from NZ, Tauranga where Lucy’s brother lives, married to a kiwi – blanc comme toi, Juliette informs me....Good bye and thanks for everything ! – I may well be back in 2 weeks – great place !

Back on the boat taking in the washing before dark and the kava seems to have gone to my legs, I’m tripping over things and still feel a bit stupid !

Retrieve the yoghurt container from the bucket – it worked ! another tub of fresh yoghurt – thanks Chrissy !

Sunday August 8

Up early kneading dough to make bread...still having trouble with the oven going out – the thermocouple is in the wrong place I’m sure, problem is I don’t know what is the right place !

0930 Bread done, up anchor and off to Luganville on the island of Espiritu Santo – breeze is light so we’re motoring with the genoa out to catch the puffs. Leaving Malekula Is behind we cross the Bougainville Strait – what famous names...Bougainville, de Quiros, Cook..I know a lot about Cook but not much about these other guys, must do some research into it..especially the Spaniards that discovered Santa Cruz and Espiritu Santo by mistake...In the days when the Spaniards and Portugese were vying for the East Indies, the ships sailed on latitudes as they had little idea what their longitude was. So they’d round cape Horn from the Atlantic and sail north until they hit the latitude of their destination and then turn left ! Santa Cruz and Santo were discovered due to poor navigation !



Uneventful passage for us into Second Channel – there are some impressive haciendas on the north shore coming in



And some idyllic spots on the north side of Aore is. ...here's a better map....



1530 Anchored in Luganville Bay 15deg31.4'S, 167deg09.8'E - a bit blowy but close to Point Clemenceau and the river that leads to the secure dinghy wharf – seems there may be a theft issue here according to the cruising guide, but maybe its just the editors paranoia...he seems pretty fearful of most things – water, fish, fruit, insects....we'll see.

Tomorrow Judith arrives at Luganville airport 4.30pm on a flight from Vila for a 10 day visit cruising Santo! I have to find customs and check in, find an internet café, supermarket etc and find out how one gets to the airport.....

So, hopefully, this latest collection of meandering thoughts and experiences will reach you tomorrow !

Gourmet dinner of pre-boiled yam pieces fried in olive oil and garlic spread on the top of a plate of baked beans !!plus a cold beer and Flora Purim on the stereo - wonderful combination!

This anchorage is really rollywouldn't recommend it..... Apparently across the bay at the resort its much better, but it's moorings that one pays for...looking at the chart its 45m deep over there !

All the best

Alan

SY DIVA