

LOG OF HAKU II – VANUATU and NEW CALEDONIA 2006

16/5: Ship's Cove and Cape Reinga

We're on our way! Left Lyttelton just after 1pm on 14/5 and sailed 16 hours from berth to rounding Cape Campbell, instead of usual 24. Averaged 8+ kn with a top speed set by speedy gonzales at 15.5 kn! I 'only' got 13.2 knots. Forecast was SW 25-35 but started to get 40+ knot gusts north of Kaiakoura and for last 6+ hours before Campbell had solid upper 40's gusting 50+. Seas ran well, breaking foam rather than green so, though we rounded up several times + a couple of chinese gybes, had some incredible and very safe surfing ... something it's good to have done but wouldn't choose to repeat. Dawny, #3 watch, managed brilliantly.

Once round corner headed for Port Underwood since Cook forecast was S 40 kn but found a balmy, sunny day with E 15-20 knots and tide behind us, so headed for Ship's Cove via a rolly Tory Channel entrance. Bailed out gallons of water, ate and slept! Only damage is one batten when main caught in a running backstay while putting in a downwind reef.

Left after 24 hrs with forecast Stephens = GaleW + SW 35 ..to find flat calm so motored in W3 kn! At least Met's 'average' was right! Mt Egmont magnificent with half snow + blue skies. Christened new reel with an albacore = sushimi!

Rounded Cape Reinga at HW so v calm and spent a lovely quiet night in Spirit's Bay where we toasted 'all those spirits that have departed these shores'. Made an early start Sat am making for Whangaparoa but light winds slowed passage. Met an inky black squall of 25 kn and running on empty so flew into Doubtless Bay and anchored in Hihi Bay at dusk under sail. We called in for diesel and checked out the local pub for the first beers we have had for a week. Today is a 'rain day'.

22/5: Whangaroa 35 02 S, 173 45.5E

Just sailed 20 miles down the coast to Whangaroa, a glorious harbour like Port Fitzroy with about 20 lovely anchorages. Its small entrance opens out into a surprisingly large harbour with bays on either side as you sail through it. Unusual rock formations all around are quite scenic. Our first stop at Pohoi Bay proved to be a little shallow and we rested on the bottom for half an hour or so but not dramatic at all. Moved around to the main bay this morning and will move again around noon once we have had a stooge around. The forecasted gale has still not arrived, though we've had several squalls and the sea is very lumpy. A couple more concerns on the boat mean we will probably aim to arrive Opuia on Thursday and haulout Friday instead of Monday. We're a bit down because it messes up Dawnie's holiday and our time with him but probably better to use the time getting the boat as right as possible. It's been a 3-bears so far: first we had too much wind, then too little & then just right.

5/6: Flying North

The weather turned south and we left Opuia at 1030 this am with three extra crew, including Ken's 14 year-old niece. Winds SW 18-25 and easing, from just abaft the beam mean we're trucking along at 7 knots, birds all round us and currently about 50 nm ESE North Cape. Everyone a bit queasy but all doing very well. A perfect start.

6/6: Great Sailing at 31 13 S, 173 12 E

Currently making 7 knots in SE 15 on a lovely starry night - Trevor is in raptures and all happy. We seem to be way ahead of the fleet by just keeping west. But plenty of time for positions to change. Everyone feels fine and ate well this evening - a magic lasagne - thanks to Jacqui. Grib files look good ahead.

7/6: 29 13.2 S, 172 42.2 E

We're cruising along at 6.5 - 7 kn in perfect conditions - clear sky, moon, wind SE 18 with one reef in the main for the night. Saw our first flying fish and hooked a tiny tuna .. that jumped off a few metres from the boat! We're still grinning. We're almost E of Norfolk Is, Opuia is 370 nm SSE, Anatom Is is about 560 nm NNW & Tana 47 nm further and it's getting warmer daily. Soon be t-shirt time.

8/6: 27 39.7 S, 172 31.6 E

Shorts & T-shirts at last during the day. This is perfect sailing weather at the front of a Big Fat High. We can expect a bit more wind but from SE or E which is good for us. Everyone in great form. Ken cooked stir fry last night (hidden talents) & Soph tackled long division to work out our fuel range - we've used very little. Today's treasures were a young wandering albatross and a young southern giant petrel, both in dark juvenile plumage & huge among the smaller petrels. Smoked salmon (from Keith) & avocado (from J&E) sandwiches tasted luxurious making up for 'showers' using baby wipes! We sat in the sun, discussed John Key's talents & marvelled at the hugeness of the ocean. What could be better?

9/6: 25 07 S, 171 39 E

Sunny, warm and lots of birds. Had a bit of drama when the headsail halyard shackle broke and the roller furling got stuck. We dropped the main and continued on headsail alone until morning then turned into the wind, dropped it, fixed the problems and were back on our way in an hour - very smooth with everyone helping out. Weather is good - winds E 18-25 with one squall at 30 but all from abaft the beam so fairly easy if a bit boisterous at times. We are continuing on headsail alone as it's easier to adjust and gives us a more comfortable ride. 308 nm to our first waypoint at Anatom, then 50 nm to Port Resolution. Looking forward to the rest of Ewen's terrific curry this evening.

10/6: 21 59.9 S, 170 55.2 E

All well here. We just spotted our first island at dusk this evening, 15 nm away. It was so exciting we opened a bottle of wine and even managed to drink it before it was thrown out of our glasses. Dinner was steak & onions with vegs - the meat was cut into small pieces like a child's meal so we could eat out of bowls - plates would have been worthy of Pinewood Studios. The seas are much reduced with only the odd curly wave to knock us about. A lovely night with passing clouds. Full moon tomorrow. There are small birds calling in the darkness and a tiny petrel stayed with us for nearly an hour once he got over his shock of flying into the turbulence off our sail. We're flying the headsail alone until the wind goes ahead of the beam. We're very pleased with our progress and should be in Monday or Tuesday am.

11/6: 20 27.8 S, 170 06.1 E Anatioum

The eastern slope of Anatioum has just appeared out of the mist. We should reach our waypoint late afternoon then turn slightly further downwind for the last 50 miles. We'll need to slow down slightly overnight to arrive in good light. Lovely sailing - and warm enough to melt the butter!

12/6: Port Resolution, Tanna

Vanuatu welcomed us with a handsome yellowfin tuna as we passed Anetium, with its cloud-capped cone. The seas bunched up a bit as they met shallower water and seemed to split into 'keep going' waves rolling on westward and 'wait around' waves which headed for land. After dark we reduced sail & hove to for a while so we could arrive in daylight, keeping deck watch. We started to get concerned when a fishing vessel's lights appeared over the horizon and headed straight for us. We tried to 'escape' but the boat changed course to head straight for us. We put on speed & it chased us. It turned out to be a huge, new Aussie cat with 'unusual' lights (including red at the masthead above white and red/green!) who sounded relieved to see anyone. They had lost one engine, the second was dodgy and the guy sounded knackered and dubious about entering Pt Resolution open to the NE with no weather forecast. He seemed glad to follow our plan. Once we had light we headed gingerly for the entrance to find that the outer waypoint would have put us in a cliff. The Aussie cat bravely went ahead while we used features from the charts, sailing directions, a bow look-out and a slightly different line to feel our way in. All now very well. The bay is primeval with hot springs, red cliffs and lush vegetation. A lovely ni-Vanuatu arrived in a dugout, outrigger canoe and introduced himself as Stanley, the Vice Commodore of the Yacht Club. We are now 'welcome' even though not yet cleared by customs who may arrive 'tomorrow'. If we recover from a huge pancake breakfast, swims, tidying up and lying around we might manage a trip ashore this afternoon. We're officially on 'island time'!

18/6: Guinea Pigs

Salut amigos. We're pigging out on local food and also swimming daily. Today we were guinea pigs for a village offering a new 'cultural experience'. On what was billed as a jungle walk to a custom village a group of bark clad warriors sprang out at us wearing bark clothing and attempted to terrify us then eat us. It was extraordinarily authentic. Another warrior dressed in palm leaves danced as a jungle fowl, we tried authentic food, saw a

traditional refuge inside a banyan tree, met a pan piper swinging down a liana, saw fire making by rubbing sticks together, heard warnings on triton shells and, finally, singing in harmony. Stunning.

The 1st week was fun filled with ICA fleet parties etc (not complaining), visiting firewalkers and trying local archery. We climbed Yasur volcano and got the full works there too - great explosions of molten rock like giant fireworks. We stood on the crater rim with a howling wind trying to blow us over the edge and wondered what OSH would say. We've been welcomed by the village, played petanque with the chief and the local urchins yet still feel somewhat protected from 'real' village life. There are few mod cons but Tanna (Vanuatu) is fascinating. Fruit bats are flying over our anchorage.

20/6: Our crew have flown

Our crew have flown, we're on our own
the boat seems very quiet.
But no more cooking meals for five,
- it's time to start a diet.

21/6: Aneytioum 20 14.35 S, 169 45.76 E

After 8 days with the fleet in Port Resolution, our crew dispersed and the weatherfax yesterday showed an easterly so we made an early 0530 start and sailed 100 km SE to the southernmost island, Aneytioum. It started well with E 10-15 but after 3 hours moved to a squally SE 5-20 which was hard work being dead on the nose. We pinched and motor sailed to avoid being detoured via New Caledonia and reached the lay line around 1430, worked our way in between the reefs and dropped anchor around 1600. We've just scoffed baked beans on toast having felt queasy at lunch and have now slumped due to the early start, hard sailing into the wind and rain squalls. Few people sail to this island (we can understand why) so we hope it's interesting and at least the anchorage is good. A few cruise ships visit nearby Mystery island every 6 weeks or so to see the petroglyphs and snorkel the reefs but the locals believe it to be haunted so won't live there. We'll go ashore tomorrow morning to pay our respects and hand over a couple of boxes of school books donated by NZ schools as an intro. The island has been inhabited for over 2000 years, is renowned for its turtles and its unique flora apparently includes over 50 species of orchid. Sounds interesting.

26/6: Port Patrick 20 08.03 S, 169 49.66 E

Today we exchanged gifts & said goodbye to our village hosts, then sailed to a village with a turtle sanctuary at the north of Aneytioum. We took a local girl as passenger/reef guide & tried a shortcut but reached a dead end & had to backtrack and go outside the reef - a bit fraught & could have been nasty with falling tide & 1m rollers but she helped us safely through the reefs at her home village so 'earned' her passage. Anelcauhat in the south seemed to be pretty well endowed - a primary school with kids running around armed with wicked looking machete's half their height, and a nicely sloping soccer pitch with penalty sand traps dotted around. The pitch didn't seem to slow the boys on a 3-day Presbyterian 'Yoof' Camp, kicking hell out of a ball, bare feet and all.

Here at Port Patrick things are more sparse - the village seems quite run-down and few adults are around, but the cows look good. We went to pay our respects to the chief but all the brass are away. We hope to see turtles, rock carvings and old caves when they return, meanwhile the anchorage is clear, protected from the trade winds & warmer - we were getting quite chilly in 20 degrees!

In an odd irony, although the whole island is about 2.5 miles east of where it is shown on the charts, GPS positions seem to be pretty much spot on (i.e. the GPS and computer charts show us as anchored where we actually are, rather than the usual 'dry land anchorage!')

6/7: Back in Tanna

We loved Aneytioum & spent 2 wks there. The south is prosperous from 6-wkly tour ship visits to Mystery Is, with DVDs in most houses, and has ancient kauri trees in the montane forest. The north has nothing but untouched reef & abundant gardens. We got to know two main northern families who took us snorkelling for lobsters & walking up to see the ancient stone carvings (petroglyphs) from >1000 yrs ago. Sue got speared in the leg by a cut fern & it poured blood (hit a vein) so is still hobbling but coming right. Saw only one turtle (apparently the tabu has been lifted so they're fair game again). Ken mended the village generator & outboard motor & we were given, bought & traded for lush veg. & fruit (peppercorns, chillis, ginger, spring onions, yams, taro, watercress, island

cabbage (like silverbeet), huge grapefruit, mandarins & oranges & lots of papaya). When another kiwi boat arrived with 2 huge tuna we all pigged out, including the whole village. We lost our entire line & lure when something big just kept heading south. At 80 lb breaking strain we probably didn't want it on board anyway.

We're now back in Tanna en route to islands N. Had a mean cross sea on the way back & got broached by a mushrooming wave - knocked over to 65-70 deg but felt like 90. Stuff everywhere & the pc thrown from the nav station right across & forward to the port saloon bunk. Water poured through the gap between the weatherboard & companionway cover from the breaking wave & surged in via the dorade from leeward so the galley got well washed. Ken felt queasy but just managed to clear up without throwing up!

We're between highs so the weather was muggy yesterday. We walked a couple of hrs to a nearby idyllic cove with a tiny french/native resort - stunning breakers, azure sea & waving palms, just like the brochures. Saw heaps of new birds including a grey & white goshawk, palm lorikeets, an emerald dove, cardinal myzomela & a fat robin thing with a red head & shoulders. We even found 6 tomatoes & 6 eggs in the tiny market so had french toast for breakfast this am. Yum. We needed something after sharing a brew of local kava last night with another kiwi boat heading to Valencia (via Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu & New Cal). It's remarkably strong for muddy water. I gave up after a tiny taste but the 3 lads managed 3/4 of the brew before retiring to good old Fiji bitter.

14/7: Last night in Port Vila

We left Port Resolution with regret and sailed gently up the east coast of Tanna, trolling for fish and admiring the view when we spotted a whale spouting just 300 m away. He spouted twice, big vertical blows, then dived without fluking. It may have been a humpback as the blow shape was right & it's the right time to see them heading north to calve. Joe Bennett may, rightly, say that every species has an equal right to respect but we always feel more privileged to see whales than wetas.

The north coast of Tanna gave us great sailing: flat water with 15-20 knots of wind under craggy volcanic cliffs topped with lush green forest and green (grazed?) sward on the hilltops. We tried to reach a new mooring that had been installed by a small resort on the east coast but, though we could see the buoys, we spent an hour trying to find a way in through the coral to reach them. Finally the light started to fade and soon after 4 pm we pulled the pin and sailed north towards Dillon's Bay on Erromango but decided that, since we were by then committed to an overnight sail, we might as well head straight up to Port Vila on Efate. We had an easy sail, caught a lovely tuna on the way in and have a secluded mooring backing on to a small island.

The first morning we were woken by bird song and spent a wonderful, relaxed day catching up with old friends who have recently settled and taken over a boat repair business here, and investigating the patisserie, coffee shops, post office and a couple of handy waterside bars.

The locals are fanatic soccer fans so, when the Italians won the World Cup, Port Vila just went off at 0740. As the game finished a huge roar erupted across the town and the following hour was a continuous procession of cars with horns blaring, carrying huge Italian flags and overloaded with hooting, hollering locals. Apparently the French here had set up a huge victory celebration, which was abruptly cancelled as soon as the result came across. Not much work was done that day because not many people actually turned up to work. Having said that, the locals seem to be pretty motivated and the construction site right behind us seems to be fairly typical with lots of sound of industry, but also lots of banter and hoots of laughter all day long. The place seems to be pretty business-friendly, with a fairly light tax regime, although some of the prices of stuff in the supermarkets are breathtaking, so I'd guess the cost of living would be unusually high for the Pacific.

While the game was in progress, the first boat of the Melbourne-Vila Race (the former dJuice around-the-world boat) snuck through the finish line about 6 hours ahead of schedule and were a bit peeved to find no-one on the finish line to record their time - a new race record. We had a quick look on board and it's a real stripped-out race machine - kevlar everything and not a scrap of excess anywhere. Oh, except for the fishing line - they caught a mahimahi during a 'slow patch', when they were doing just 11-12 knots. At the other end of the scale, another boat in the harbour here is Tiny Bubbles - a 24 foot double ender with no engine, fridge or other things we'd consider essential to life as we know it. The young couple on board have spent the last 2 years sailing it out from Hawaii at an average of 2 knots and make the rest of us look like a pack of unresourceful squeamish wimps.

On Monday night we ran with the PV Hash House Harriers - a short, dull run but interesting people. Lots of expats who have been here for >20 years or born here (including a plumber who said he makes better money in the 6 months of the year he's here, than in the rest of the time he spends in UK where his ni-Van wife & 3 kids live).

Since then we've met up with other boats from the rally, indulged in french coffee & patisserie every day, spent millions at le bon marche, and visited the excellent museum where we spent a fascinating couple of hours with a guide. It turned out he was from Pentecost and was, himself, enjoying learning about the cultural differences on all the other islands. We extended our cruising permit & even managed to meet the State Financial Controller & First Secretary of Finance. We'd promised the Tourism officer at Aneytioum that we'd lobby for ratification of their status as an official Port of Entry - they may ignore our request but they sounded interested during our 3rd visit, especially as we had copies of the relevant acts and showed the value for Vanuatu to support our case.

We're now at one of the outer anchorages ready to leave. It's the Vila Cup (horse racing) tomorrow, the Big Social Event of the year, but we'll slip away towards Havanna Harbour, 18 miles round the corner.

19/7: Emae 17 03.11 S, 168 22.25 E

We had a cracking sail from Efate to Emae yesterday with wind 15 - 20 just ahead of the beam so made 30 nm in just over 4 hours to arrive in good light around 3.30 pm. As we sat in the cockpit after dinner we were treated to a firework display by Lopevi 32 nm away. Explosions from the top shed glowing molten lava down the side. It seems eerie to be so close, even after looking into the crater at Tanna. The wind is turning on the back of the last high so today we have 10 kn NNE giving us a bit of a lee shore but we're sheltered by a reef and the anchor is well dug in and wrapped round a couple of bommies for good measure. The snorkelling here is great, the best we've had yet. Ken surprised an eagle ray & we saw a large wrasse, a small mahi mahi & several good coral trout. Another boat told us that they rated it better than nearby Cook Reef so we stayed put & gave the reef a miss.

A couple of likely lads dropped by in a battered canoe this morning and asked if we wanted fruit. That opening gambit scored enough brownie points (compared with the usual opening request for cigarettes) to agree to trade fruit for fishing line. Good trade for all: we met the chief who approved our visit, got a tour of the village, saw a slit drum carved like a man & some interesting birds & received papayas, bananas, pamplemousse (grapefruit) & nuts while he got 2 fishing lines, hooks, swivels, a reel & a Geographic mag. TradeMe training is working well. The kids are charmers (as usual). Two had come from Tanna when their mum married a man from Emae so were interested that we'd been there. Ken gave them a ride in Toad to great excitement. Everyone seems disappointed that we only have sheep, goats & chickens ... no pigs (local currency!) & no kids. We tell them we tried but couldn't (downcast looks) but we're still trying (much laughter & giggles from the kids). Some humour is universal. A Brazilian friend's father has a pig farm with 600 pigs so he's seen as a billionaire.

28/7: Lamén Bay, Epi, 16 35.76 S, 168 09.81 S

Greetings from the famous Lamén Bay dugong sanctuary. We left Emae and decided to try something completely new. The charts show only 4 depth readings along the 7 km west coast of Tongoa but we'd heard that no-one goes there and they have lots of birds, including megapodes, so gave it a try. Luckily the weather was settled because we couldn't see the bottom even in 7 m so we dropped a hook, donned a snorkel and went to look. No wonder we couldn't see anything - the bottom was black sand, totally devoid of features - but great holding. Fortunately our anchoring went smoothly because on shore there was a big crowd of all ages, with piles of pigs, mats and chickens, all watching with keen interest. Once ashore, we were directed to a Council member - an astute and extraordinarily hospitable man who took us up to the Nakamal (meeting place) where everyone is welcome (not just where the men drink kava as in Tanna) and showed us round. It's a paradise but with absolutely no amenities at all. The people on the beach were camped out waiting for the cargo boat to Vila. They'd been there just under a week and seemed quite relaxed about it! Soon we had met lots of local people including the local chief who has access to the northern cliffs through a marriage relationship (having said that, we've met an extraordinary number of 'chiefs' sometimes overlapping, so the reaction now is "Oh, good - are we OK to anchor here/snorkel there?"). The walk there the next day was a bit dull but at the cliff edge, we looked down on a perfect, hidden anchorage about 100m below. Two trees were full of dangling fruit bats that took off en masse as we approached, and a narrow path descended down the near-vertical face. It was too daunting for Sue but Ken followed down and, sure enough, a megapode took off from the path in front of them. What a thrill. They are pukeko size and shape, black with conical red heads and lay their eggs in warm volcanic sand - fair game except that they're protected worldwide! Fortunately the local chief agrees.

Great entertainment that evening when the cargo boat finally arrived - the fires on the beach were stoked right up and there was hooting, hollering, whistling and shouting throughout the several hours of ferrying assorted people, produce and livestock back and forth in their grossly overloaded wee dinghy. Their outboard wouldn't start so it was a slow paddle each way, until the ship itself was grossly overloaded, and it waddled away. The wind shifted around and it got a bit rolly there, and when we pulled the anchor up to nip around to the northern bay we could understand the lack of life on the bottom .. the anchor was warm! But no pre-cooked lobsters. We would have

loved to stay longer but the weather followed us round to the northern bay so we left early the next day for Revolieu Bay, halfway up the west coast of Epi. Again the wind whipped round the bottom of the island so we had a brisk sail in 25 knots but the bay gave us great shelter all round once we had negotiated the reef entrance. Unfortunately our refrigeration, that has had a major overhaul by three different companies, again packed up. This time it was electrical and we spent the next four days exchanging emails with a very helpful man in Opuia who suggested a temporary fix - and then a Spanish boat arrived and announced that he was a refrigeration engineer and probably had a spare (transpired that it was for a different model), so that threw a Spaniard in the works for a while. It rained on and off every day and, apart from a couple of walks and snorkels, we did very little except maintenance, cleaning and baking - our pact is that when Ken does more than his fair share of maintenance Sue cooks goodies! But we now have the clutch bolted to the compressor so it's always engaged until a friend arrives in 3 weeks time, hopefully bearing a new clutch coil. It's a good thing we don't do a lot of motoring!

We moved on from the Epi-centre and at last the world changed colour from grey overcast to clear skies. Lamén Bay in northern Epi is lovely. When we anchored, Ken jumped in with mask and snorkel to check the anchor and immediately called Sue in too - there was a huge turtle almost underneath the boat and, when we looked round we found four more of them grazing around and generally oblivious of us. We sat in the cockpit for lunch and small round heads popped up every few minutes to check us out. What a joy. We went ashore and met the Chairman of the local school board. A major project is underway with Aussie aid to extend it - an impressive and very worthwhile project in which every person in the village donates a day's work in return for the funding. Since we arrived the sun has been shining, we had people from another two boats in the bay over for sundowners and a skinny moon added a romantic touch. Today was even better. We were ashore by 7am to collect bread and thought we'd meander back looking for turtles since the dugong was apparently 'away'. Then we saw a back break the surface and rushed back to get our snorkeling gear, went back very quietly and found the dugong feeding just 70m from the boat and totally unconcerned at our presence 5m away (and 5m down) until we gave an inadvertent splash and he languidly undulated away. Our cup runneth over.

Tonight we have a stern anchor to combat the slight roll and, when the wind drops, we can hear the deep cannon-shots of Lopevi erupting now only 10 nm away, and can see the glow of it over the hills of Epi. Life is good again!

A surprising number of people we've met have worked in The Big City (Port Vila), or have been to Aus/NZ, and are very happy back in their villages, where money isn't a big deal. It takes about 2 weeks to build a house, and a week to 2 weeks to build a canoe (with outrigger) both of which last about 5 years, and when your meals pretty much fall off trees (with a bit of digging in the garden and fishing from time to time) you can understand why they don't have much interest in the towns. They share whatever they have (family first, then the village), and as long as you don't have any ambition, it's a pretty idyllic life. It's only when you want to watch DVD's, or to run a fridge or outboard, or build a concrete house that the money demon rears its ugly head, otherwise you sell a bit of copra or a pig every now and then to get some flour and sugar and stuff.

We'll probably stay in Lamén Bay for the Independence Day festivities on Monday, then head on up to the Maskelyn Islands. (Maskelyn was the Astronomer Royal that tried to do John Harrison out of his just rewards for inventing the portable chronometer, and thus calculate longitude reasonably accurately).

10/8: Sand in our eyes: Sakau, 16 29.9 S, 167 48.4 E

Sleep. The gift of the Sandman. Even parrot fish weave themselves a cocoon of jelly and hang inside, to sleep at night. The Maskelyne islands are a group of beautiful coral fringed islands off the SE coast of Malekula, seductive and treacherous. The people are smart, friendly and welcoming. The last cannibalism in Vanuatu occurred here in 1969. We've had an, er, interesting time here.

Our passage from Epi was a dream in sunny weather, a gentle tail wind and the conical peak of Lopevi holding its plume of smoke north of us. Nearing the reef entrance we hooked our first ever mahi mahi, the best eating fish in the sea, only to lose it and our last lure after playing it to within a few metres of the boat. We negotiated an easy channel into the archipelago and were just rounding the tip of Sakau island to our chosen anchorage when we spotted a dugong about 20 m from the boat - a great welcome. At the anchorage we met up with Aspect of Arran, sailing friends since 2004, for a happy reunion and saw the great work they are doing as doctors on the MARC (Medicinal Assistance for Remote Communities) project. As part of a wider programme they have set up a clinic here to offer free medical advice and medical training. Another couple are working with the Selkanu (Sail Canoe) School - a local initiative to keep the culture and knowledge of canoe building and sailing alive and well so that they can be used to transport patients to the clinic. The Maskelynes area has 60-80 sailing canoes, the largest number left in Vanuatu, and their patched sails of assorted shapes and colours skim around between the small

islands. The school also has a Hobie Cat and two working catamarans for transporting patients - conveniently, they are also ideally suited to trolling for trevally and barracuda which the village sells to the fishing boat from Vila. Ken mentioned that Sue had represented GB in the Hobie worlds a couple of times, which led to a day of Sue teaching the boys how to rig and sail a thoroughbred, while Ken did a few repairs on it before a practical session.

The anchorage isn't great, either very deep or dotted with coral heads and swept by 3 knot tidal currents but we found a good spot and settled in. The second day a medical mooring came available and, once we'd dived to 22 m to untangle our anchor chain, we had two very comfortable nights. Another boat had similar difficulties so we dived again to free their anchor chain, leaving us low on air. As more MARC boats arrived we had to relinquish our mooring but we checked out a perfect spot where we could clear the bommies and set anchor again. Within two more nights the anchor chain was well entwined in coral and we weren't going anywhere.

Then all hell broke loose. The French call it a 'coup de ouest' an unexpected squall from the 'wrong' direction with high westerly winds that charge through in about 4-5 hours. This one lasted two days and set us on a lee shore with a two mile fetch. We were congratulating ourselves on our cat's cradle anchor line when the tide turned and a 30 knot front over a 3 knot current kicked up a 600mm chop that set all the boats hobby-horsing and hunting on their anchors. Our fast entwined line, previously our safety net, became a noose as we snatched again and again until, finally around midnight, the snubber (used to cushion the anchor chain snatch) snapped with an almighty BANG. We thought the chain had gone and shot into our retreat plan but the chain held. Only the motion deteriorated as the snatching chain jerked the boat like a fish and we started hitting the bommie we had cleared by half a metre. We let out a bit more chain, but that just backed us onto a shallower bommie. Between them the rudder and keel took a few hits until we brought the chain back in again, and we motored gently against the wind to take the pressure off the anchor line and reduce the snatching. After a few hours the wind eased a bit and the tide turned so we could shut the engine down, but had to keep anchor watch all night. Sleep was impossible.

Three other boats in the 'anchorage' had dragged through the night, so after a short lie-in we got together with some strapping lads from the school on their workboat and finished rebuilding and installing a couple of moorings. We moved onto the one with a big steel drum in deep water, while another boat moved onto the other, in shallower water. That night we went to bed comfortable in the knowledge we were on a solid mooring with no chain snatch but were rudely awakened when the tide turned, putting us against the wind, and pressed us down on the steel drum, which immediately went about pounding the paint off our hull. It was 11 pm. It took an hour or two to rig up a stern line to a coconut tree which pulled us off that sodding drum, and we finally got a few hours sleep. It turned out the boat on the other mooring had scythed an arc through a patch of staghorn coral and had also had to tie back to a tree. In two nights in one anchorage we've sustained more damage to Haku than in 6 years of anchorages in all sorts of places, thankfully nothing really serious. Still, we can't complain about sand in our eyes if we choose to play in the sandpit.

On a brighter note we arranged with one of the villages to show us some kastom dancing, but on the appointed day the weather was filthy - gusts of wind and non-stop rain (filled our water tanks, though), and with no sign of the dancers we assumed they'd taken the smart option and cancelled out. Then there was a radio call from a boat at the other end of the island to say "Where are you all?" The dancers weren't to be dissuaded by us or the weather since the income was for their school so they volunteered to put on the show in an impromptu clearing at our end of the island. We realised they were serious about the kastom tabu, when we saw a palm frond screen and a security guy with a machete chasing off onlookers from the local village. It was the real deal, with small nambas, lots of body paint and masks, and they did some great dances, with their chief explaining them all and fielding our questions. After the performance, Sue suggested our boys might like to try, and with a few shoves in the back they were 'volunteered'. The small namba is a bit of soft coconut tree matting wrapped around the willie, lifted up and tied off to a vine belt, with the rest out in the wind, and all that is worn on the rest of the body is whatever paint you wish to apply, usually wet ash or mud of different colours. The boys did an impromptu dance and concluded with a haka, which seemed to go down pretty well with the real dancers and the remaining spectators. There are photos, but they will be closely guarded...

Today we bid our farewells, dropped that bloody steel drum mooring and motor sailed up to Port Sandwich, where it's mirror-calm with not a breath of wind. Time to catch up on some lost sleep.

From Cate's log

15/8/06 – Uri Island

Yes it is pretty amazing, I think its Tuesday afternoon, we are anchored out from Uri village (east coast Malekula) and this morning went snorkeling in the marine sanctuary, on top of the coral reef, saw lots of beautiful fish, big

clams, a turtle and sea snake. There is only one village on Uri. Chief Willie invited us for dinner last night, we sat in their meeting house and had laplap (choice of banana, yam and manioc – a bit like stodgy pancake, not sweet) with chicken, a little pork and fish. It's prepared by the women and, while we were sitting, they made coconut cream by squeezing grated coconut and hot water, then poured it over the platter. Had kava (relaxing drink made from pepper tree root) beforehand - I like. Tonight we are going in to hear the boys play some music - should be good. Tomorrow we are sailing north and stopping in at other islands - Atchin, Wala then finally up to Santo where I can get a plane from Luganville back to Vila. The people have very little, they grow and catch all their food (banana, yam, mandarin, cabbage, breadfruit, pawpaw, fish, coconut, pig), they took us on a tour yesterday through their village and up into their gardens, the nearest school is on the next island, and most don't go to high school.

17/8/06 - Wala Island

NZ seems so far away, - weather is comparatively warm mostly overcast with breeze on the water although when the sun shines through it is good to have shade, too hot. We left Uri yesterday, I took the wheel for a bit until we neared the reefs by Rano and Wala, Sue then took over. Felt sad to leave Uri, the villagers were very kind and on the last night we went in to hear the boys playing in their string band, meeting hall lit by 1 kero lantern, we could dance without feeling too self conscious, although difficult to see who you were talking to! We are now moored just off Wala, usual visits from the villagers in their dugouts, bringing fruit, bananas this morning, we paid with Adventure magazine, the best gifts seem to be biscuits, canned meat. Had a look around their village 200 people, actually 5 villages on the island but this one is the biggest, took us to a special clearing in the bush, so peaceful, they perform their kustom dances here and also grade taking - this is where a man may, by killing a lot of pigs and then distributing to the village, elevate his family's standing in the community. There were many pig stones that were brought over from the mainland by the ancestors. There was also a tabu place which, like on Uri, we were not allowed to go, in this case because women were not permitted, we believe these tabu places are where they used to kill humans. The villages and degrees of modernity vary throughout the islands, most though are self sufficient and trade/need very little, wants are another matter, Ken was asked to have a look at a generator yesterday - being used to run 1 light, TV and video player. All wear European clothing and use plastic/metals cooking and eating containers, of course coconut shells, banana leaves as well. Quite a few cocoa trees in the village, fetch better prices than copra. We set sail tomorrow for Vau will probably miss Atchin as the anchorage there is poor plus we hear stories of lawlessness - usually the result of a weak chief, as most people are kind and honest, Christianity plays a big part in this. Saw an octopus yesterday while snorkeling along the coral and a sea snake this morning. Hope the blossom is starting to appear

19/8/06 - Tutuba Island

Paradise, clear warm aqua sea, golden sand, the island of Tutuba - across from Santo, can see the lights of Luganville. Took off from Wala yesterday intending to stop at Vau, wind was up, anchorage not good at either Atchin or Vau, so decided to head across Bougainville Strait, six hours later found paradise. The passage was choppy rolling, flying fish like little droids, averaged 6 knots, 30 knot wind, did start to feel a little queasy by the end of it, Sue was magnificent, in her element - Brunhilda at the helm. So we are anchored in a quiet wee bay, the island has 12 villages, about 500 people, 1 school, 4 teachers, and a friendly cowfish and her baby - yes dugongs! Swam into shore this morning (I been assured no sharks, still a bit scary) and had a chat with some locals on the beach, they were very proud of their American well that the boys put in for them at the end of the war, skipped some stones with the kids and then the dugongs were back, so donned snorkel and mask, and Sue and I went to have a look, they were grazing at the bottom and swam underneath me, very cool, apparently she had twins but the other calf was caught in a fishing net and died, very sad. This afternoon we went for a walk across the island (7 x 2.5 km) a tour through the gardens, usual yams, island cabbage, coconut, banana, taro etc with some struggling capsicum and cucumber, and ended up at the big sea. There are 2 vehicles on the island, cattle and some magnificent mango trees, pity it isn't the season, they don't grow kava as the island is too hot, so the men motor across to Abokissa where an Australian has built a resort and there is a kava bar. They don't appear to have a clinic on the island, which is not good, talked to a father this morning on the beach with his young daughter, terrible boils on the side of her head, and 2 of our guides today - Jennifer lost her 5 year old daughter, and Davina (12) her mother in May, not sure what from. As per most of the villages we have visited - a new church being build from concrete blocks and bells made from gas canisters, very smart. We have been invited to church tomorrow morning at 8, Sue is lending me a dress, then hopefully a couple of hours of snorkelling the coral.

2/9: Banks Islands, remote and beautiful at 13 49.7 S, 167 22.9 E

We are anchored in calm green waters sheltered by 100 m cliffs festooned with vines falling straight to a narrow white sand beach and black volcanic rocks. Reefs protect us both north and south and the pandanus and palm mat houses of three families add a friendly dab of bleached tan. To the south a powerful waterfall cascades 30m

into a natural jacuzzi, refreshingly cold to wash the salt from our hair and skin. The silhouette of Ureparapara, a volcanic crater island open to the sea, lies tantalizingly 16 nm NNW of us; a displaced Lyttelton Harbour replica reminding us that it's time to turn south. If all cruising was like this apex of our journey we'd just keep going.

Three weeks ago Port Sandwich was a welcome haven after our rough time in the Maskelynes. Like most of Malekula the local schools teach in French instead of English and spread a subtle influence of respect for fine food (no wine unfortunately!). The morning after we arrived the village killed a cow but we were just too late to buy a prime leg, complete with skin and hoof, at Vt125 (NZ\$1.85)/kg. Over half of all Malekula and Santo beef is exported by Japanese agents to Tokyo where it commands Kobe beef prices. The agents must make a fortune as even in Luganville, the seedy seat of government for the northern province, beef steak is Vt550/kg (NZ\$8.25) and Vt 1000 for luscious eye filet (and certified organic - not much question really - the country can't afford to import fertiliser, feed, or any funny stuff).

From Port Sandwich we worked our way up the eastern coast of Malekula, not swimming due to shark attacks in the area, except to bathe from the stern and once to clear a fishing line wrapped around the propeller - and then it was a 'no look around, get the job done ASAP' mission. At Norsup we had arranged to meet Cate but, for the first time in Vanuatu, we had the disturbing experience of theft from the beached dinghy. The young lads working on a nearby boat clearly knew who had taken it ("ah yes, long red rope") and a kindly man took it upon himself to retrieve the line so we would 'not need to visit the police and let other yachts know to avoid Norsup'. We moved to a quieter bay nearby and met a smiling Cate at the grass air strip the following day. We knew she'd fit right in when she stepped out of the twin engine Otter, hefting a single bag and looking like a cool colleague of David Attenborough. She made friends with everyone and won an expression of undying love (in somewhat graphic terms) from a smitten young man at nearby Uri island. A local village was celebrating the opening of a new Community Centre (breeze block and corrugated iron) by the deputy Prime Minister while nearby Uri island was celebrating the completion of a new church (pandanus, palm and hibiscus wood) so our social calendar became very full. Our first evening at Uri island we were invited by Chief Willy to laplap, the national dish made with pounded starch (manioc, taro or cooking bananas) sprinkled with coconut cream and filled with a small pocket of vegetables and pork, chicken or fish. All three varieties were delicious, unlike the tasteless, heavy, glutinous slab usually on offer. The next day three charming lads took us snorkeling to their giant clam sanctuary reef where we saw gorgeous clams and fish, sharks, napoleon wrasse, a large sleeping turtle and, amazingly, a dugong. That evening the village string band put on a special concert for us and were highly amused when we danced with the kids and local ladies. One song, 'Uri island, we love you so...dum de dum...Malekula', stayed with us all the way up the coast.

Heading north we spent a couple of days at Wala island where fast sail canoes from nearby Rano island charge to windward across the deep blue tidal passage separating it from the mainland. These are lighter than canoes further south and each can be carried by one man. We were shown round a natsaro, a clearing in tall forest surrounded by stones on which pigs were ceremonially killed as part of grade taking ceremonies. Our unofficial guide pointed out his family stone and told us, "It's good we have Christian church. Now people visit from other islands and we not eat them, share ideas and help each other, all one people. Some old customs very bad. Sometimes we have to kill our first born son for custom. But some old ways were good and we lose them too. Now everyone make decisions. Old custom times the chief say do this and everyone do it, not like now". Sound familiar?

We set off from Wala intending to stop at Vao, another island with a megalith culture about 7nm north but, after two attempts to anchor in the fierce wind gusts and much shouted (and conflicting) 'advice' from locals who rushed out in canoes to welcome us, we regretfully pulled the pin and continued up the coast to a safer spot. The 30+ knot afternoon breeze heaped the seas up north of Malekula and we surfed down a few rollers approaching the shallower seas south of the next islands: Malo, Aore and Espiritu Santo. It made for some exciting sailing and demanded concentration to keep heading north while the seas tried to sweep us west. The surf ruled out the next two possible anchorages so we picked our way round shallow patches and in the late afternoon shot through a deep channel between two islands into the comparative calm NE of some small islands. Spotting a glorious sand spit at the end of one island we made a quick u-turn and dropped anchor in a tiny but perfect bay in 6 m of turquoise water - only to look up and find a dugong and calf sharing our spot. They were totally unafraid and we snorkeled over to them and they even swam right under Cate - a wonderful experience. The local families were delighted to see us and showed us all round their village and over to the 'big sea' side of the island. We stayed three days, seeing the dugongs every day except Sunday when they 'went to church'. So did we - a warm-hearted happy-clappy service in an airy palm-built hall decorated with bright flowers and yellow leaves. The service was in Bislama, the pidgin english that allows people with 160 languages to communicate and which we now understand enough to get the gist of most discussions.

Finally reaching Luganville we got the last available mooring thanks to the good word of friends on another ICA yacht. We had no trouble filling our days with refueling diesel, water and petrol, picking our way through the many Chinese shops to replenish stores and revelling in butter, fresh meat and the wide range of fresh vegetables not available in the small offshore islands. The local resort served delicious food and it was great to meet up with several sailing friends. Ken dived the world famous President Coolidge (22-76m), gliding down the foredeck and into the promenade deck, gently pushing aside the huge grouper which came to investigate visitors to its domain, while Cate and Sue snorkeled Million Dollar Point where the departing American forces just dumped millions of dollars worth of vehicles, spare parts and machines after the war in the Pacific ended. Both are a testimony to the phenomenal waste that results from warfare, and you'd think that after tens of thousands of years of killing each other, mankind would have learnt something.

We joined a full day excursion to a local cave where, like Cave Stream in Canterbury, a river has forced an underground passage through rock, although here the temperature is warmer, the caves are full of swallows and bats and the outlet is a 2km run through a deep gorge which we swam except where it was blocked with fallen boulders bridged by tiny, slippery bamboo ladders - quite an adventure. In the jungle part we were painted to ward off the evil spirits in the cave and were shown medicinal plants: a bark smelling of wintergreen used to relieve muscle injury, green leaves used to stop bleeding and nutmeg, not used as a spice but as medication for scabies.

Sadly we said goodbye to Cate but happily met Judy & Ewen who flew in to join us. By then we were pressed to come up here (Vanua Lava) for the 5-day Kastom Dancing and Arts Festival so we spend a tranquil day at our secret beach then made an easy 100 nm night & day passage up to Vanua Lava, motoring for much of it as the wind died and swung through 360 degrees as it often does at the end of a high pressure system. We arrived in good afternoon light and met up with 8 other yachts including Eddie and Jen on Te Wai Pounamu, also from Lyttelton, whom we haven't seen since Fiji in 2004. They had heard us on Rag of the Air and emailed us so we were able to bring them supplies from Luganville - a happy reunion.

The festival was simply astounding. With only eight visiting boats it was very much a local affair with us as honoured guests. We were drawn into festival life completely, sharing their enjoyment of dances, magic and string bands, watching and sometimes trying basket weaving, food preparation, catching fresh-water prawns and making 'water music' multi-toned booming sounds by cupping hands in different ways to beat the water. Some of the men were real comedians so we would watch a kastom dance or comedy performance (eg. dancing together to the string band, one in dark glasses playing cool with another in a ladies Mother Hubbard dress) then find when we chatted to them that they are the local headmaster and a council member or pastor!

The locals built temporary bures on the beach to accommodate visitors from other villages and the district governor and political parties have sent representatives ... and donations. The costumes are amazing. For one dance they have to destroy the head dresses immediately after the dance to stop the spirits of the creatures they represent taking over first the mask and then the dancer himself. Some of the head dresses had lifelike models of giant fish and sea urchins - uncomfortable spirits to possess you! 'Devosun' each morning and evening caters for the soul and, for the inner man, they sell freshly cooked lobster, fresh water prawns and coconut crabs each day. Even the string bands are in tune! We feel very privileged to be here. Some of them are real comics. One of the biggest and most masculine men donned a Mother Hubbard and danced with another man wearing dark glasses (mimicking whities?). Then Ken brought much laughter when, as part of a communal dance, he followed the same guys, now in full dance costume, and waved tiny sprigs of flowers to mimic their actions. Luckily no nambas. The older women dance bare topped but the younger women cover their breasts to dance. 'Security' wait on the beach to grab our dinghies from the slight surf and drag them up the black sand beach.

Sue's just returned from a dawn bird foray - up at 5, ashore by 20 past and heard the calls start up, be returned, swelled by later starters and finally becoming almost piercing as the lorikeets joined in, gradually changing to 'daily chatter' as each bird went about his or her business. Each day is a joy but the nights were hell as fierce williwaws up to 40kn blasted down from the hills and across the bay and the swell rolled round the corner. A peaceful nights sleep in Waterfall Bay last night has restored us all to sanity, and with a steady boat, enabled a bit of mechanical troubleshooting to be done today - lends new meaning to Enabling Technologies. We'll be sad to head south and say goodbye to Judy and Ewen but are looking forward to more guests joining us in a couple of weeks time.

2/10: Ranvetlam, Ambae 16 09.07 S, 168 06.52 E

We're in the fork of Vanuatu's Y-shaped chain at Ranvetlam, north Ambrym, anchored in black sand off a small river mouth. A slight breeze is blowing smoke from the volcano well west of us and the land smells richly fertile. A

family of four goats is fossicking on the beach and a young man is tenderly carrying a pig and a machete, followed by five attentive dogs.

We loved our two weeks in the Banks islands and dropped Judy and Ewen, after much too short a visit, at Gaua. The anchorage was very sheltered and a local chief was seeking re-election so we were made very welcome with gifts of fruit and veggies which we reciprocated with sugar, coffee, rope and tools for the community - thereby boosting his chances of re-election. Gaua has a large crater lake and gently smoking cone so five of us set off with a local guide to find it. The track was very like any south island bush track, complete with pungas, hills and dripping rain but the kea calls were replaced by lorikeet cries and skinny beech by huge banyan trees. At one point the path snaked through a 35 metre tunnel of banyan roots while the giant tree towered overhead like some creature from the Lord of the Rings. Ken missed out, recuperating from a high fever, brought on by an infected sea urchin wound.

From Gaua we made a night passage to windward to reach Asenvari in Maewo, probably the most famous and favourite anchorage in Vanuatu. The village has a welcoming yacht club, a plentiful supply of fruit and veggies, a daily bread delivery from the baker 'Christopher Columbus' who knocks on the hull at 6.45 most mornings, and a lovely fresh waterfall for bathing. Life became seductively easy and we stayed a week, checking out local spots in side trips. We had arranged to meet our next guests, Jane and Clare, at a tiny airfield in north Pentecost and spent a nasty, roly night before their arrival in a bay at the foot of a nearby cliff. We thought it was a bit windy but when we reached the airstrip straddling vertical mountains the wind was howling and an Air Vanuatu 'ofisel' told us the flight had been cancelled. This means passengers get bumped to available spaces over the next couple of weeks - not really useful for friends with only 10 days' holiday. Luckily the flight was also landing at Ambae, another island about 12 miles away, so the ofisel kindly radio'd Santo, where our guests had already disembarked, and they were able to reboard the plane at the last minute to Ambae instead. Some three hours and a 40 knot downwind passage later, Haku rounded the headland where our guests were waiting. They were delighted to recognise a familiar yacht but their hopes were dashed when she sailed right past their bay. Half an hour later we were all slightly stunned to find that the pieces had slotted smoothly into place as we ferried everyone back to Haku safely anchored in the next bay.

The strong winds continued for the following week but we were still able to get back to Asenvari, anchoring under sail as our newly reconditioned engine wouldn't start. We later found out that the turbo had ingested the air filter - not very good for either item. We visited some stunning limestone caves and petroglyphs, and enjoyed kastom dancing, kava and coconut crab. On their last day we heard of a one day festival further north and were able to spend a surreal day watching a hilarious parody of a snake dance and magic as the (paying) guests of a portly Chief Jonah who was delighted to see us. His festival was only in its second year and the tourism ministry had arranged for a Thai film crew to record the event - an odd intrusion into this remote island. We were very sad to say goodbye to Jane and Clare and were feeling very flat until Kaitorete sailed round the corner and blasted an airhorn at 5.30 am. It was great to catch up with Mike, Annabel and the kids in person after many emails and we've had a great time with them too. We returned to Asenvari with them (our third visit), then headed south to Pentecost where the land diving ceremonies occur in May but found little activity, drizzle and 20 kn bullets howling through the anchorages so we've been wondering where our tropical paradise has gone. At least the swell was in line with the wind and boat! One lovely anchorage had clear white sand, no bommies and lots of turtles. Gusts from the steep land behind the bay were moving our chain right to the anchor so we put out a second anchor on 5m rope ahead of the first and slept well.

We headed south down Pentecost in winds that nearly blew our socks off - more gusts and nights of bomb blasts from above - until we came to the crossing to Ambrym. That was a saga. By then we had caught up with Te Wai Pounamu too so, early in the morning to escape the worst of the wind, we set three reefs and headed out. Everything went fine as we picked up the anchor but then the exhaust stopped emitting water. We cut engine immediately and set sail round the point into 25 knots of headwind and big seas, then discovered that the engine had blown a water fitting and pumped 25 litres/min of salt water into the boat. Luckily we had noticed it almost immediately so most of the water was still in the engine compartment but trying to keep the boat horizontal and bail out in those conditions wasn't fun. Te Wai and Kaitorete thought we were heading round the east of Ambrym instead of heading for Ranvetlam. Eventually we followed them but went from frying pan to fire as the wind dropped completely in the lee of Ambrym. No engine and no wind! We caught the odd zephyr and got within about 1.5 miles then said stuff it, launched Toad, and towed Haku towards the anchorage until Eddie arrived and generously added his 25 hp to the equation.

Ken found the problem (a botch job where someone had welded a new fitting onto an old one) and three enthusiastic 'fixers' put their heads and spare parts together to devise a solution. Ken is thoroughly fed up with

fixing things that were fully overhauled in Lyttelton (freezer, hot water cylinder and engine). Now all is well again and we have spent a wonderful two days meeting the carvers of north Ambrym, seeing their huge tamtam drums and other work in progress, meeting their families, supplying bits and pieces and being made thoroughly welcome. Three Lyttelton boats together was an excuse to party so we had a barbecue on the beach one evening and a big celebration aboard Te Wai. Tomorrow we go our separate ways again, leaving Kaitorete to linger longer and Te Wai to jump ahead to Vila while we head south more slowly. From Vila we hope to make a short visit to New Caledonia before heading regretfully back to New Zealand.

18/10: New Caledonia, 20 55.45 S, 167 05.08 E

We are sitting at anchor off a pristine white sand beach on the west coast of Lifou, the centre island in the Loyalty Group, waiting for better weather to cross to Havannah Passage, the route through the barrier reef of New Caledonia's main island to its capital, Noumea. We are under quarantine flag so are not supposed to stop but the howling wind gives us a very real reason and the local gendarme confirmed that we are well advised to come ashore and make our formal request to stay to the local chief since his word is law and the authorities have no power over him. The local chief's wife kindly accepted our small gifts in his absence and welcomed us to stay.

On our way back from visiting the chief a car stopped and a man, who turned out to be Felix, the high chief's brother, invited us to his house to 'drink coca cola'. Like most families here he has two houses: a cement bungalow in western style for cooking and washing and a round thatched 'maetro' hut (like a rondavel) in which the family talk and sleep. This traditional house is simply beautiful, having a white-sand filled fire pit in the centre surrounded by white paving tiles (almost Japanese looking) with a smoked wooden scaffold about 6' above it with hooks and a lattice shelf for smoking fish. Round the tiled area the floor is completely covered with layers of soft, woven pandanus mats and a square mattress covered in white cloth on one side so that the master of the house and the rest of his family and guests, up to 14 people, can all sleep round the central fire place. The smoke keeps the insects out and the thick mat walls and roof keep the interior cool in summer and warm in winter. We were entranced - I wouldn't mind building one at home.

Felix's son came to greet us, aged about ten, and very formally, hands clasped behind his back, put his cheek against ours on each side in formal greeting, like a cross between a French braise and a hongi. We must seem philistines to people who have such innate dignity. As we got talking Felix was funny describing the powers of the local chief. He said 'They are really a king (royaume). The French administrators refer to them as Big Chiefs but big means large in size and they are not that at all. We described the New Zealand concept of 'mana', meaning dignity, honour, personality etc. 'Ah yes', our host replied, 'The French don't have a word for this concept, they are a republic so what do you expect?' The conversation was all in French.

We hope the wind will abate somewhat by the weekend so we can move on and reach the mainland but, if we have to be holed up somewhere, we couldn't have found a lovelier place.

7/11: Ile Amadee 22 28 S, 166 28 E and away

After leaving Vila in Vanuatu we found ourselves waiting in Lifou, the middle of the Loyalty Islands, for 5 days while the wind howled overhead. A local dignitary, Felix, took us (with Eddie and Jen of Te Wai Pounamu) for a tour in his wee car to We on the eastern side. The delightful town has a tiny, beautiful marina, a hotel, provincial government offices and a few shops - including good French food but not enough to induce retail mania. Eventually the wind shifted to the east and abated slightly, giving us our cue to leave before the next blow, so we had an early dinner, sailed clear of the reefs before dark and had a bouncy ride down to Havannah Passage, the main route to Noumea, just in time for the tide to carry us in the following morning.

Noumea customs, immigration and quarantine formalities were quick and easy and suddenly we were in France! Patisseries, chocolates, real coffee, foie gras, Bordeaux - all the essentials for life as it should be! From our marina berth it gladdened Ken's heart to hear the sound of Ducatis being thrashed and tyres being smoked from the traffic lights in the 'big city'. Staying in Noumea comes at a price though, and with 10 days before crew arrived we got out before the credit cards insisted, and headed to Baie du Prony - a huge bay on the south side of the mainland, where iron mining companies destroyed the hill tops and where whales hang out to calve in July and August. There we finally caught up with old friends from Fiji on Spindrift for a very social day or so, wallowed in the fresh water cascades at the head of the bay, and wandered up to the lighthouse that overlooks the whole of New Caledonia's southern lagoon, including the reef where a visiting boat struck their rudder - simply by not paying attention with engine and autopilot on. They made it to Noumea and the haulout without any further trouble and were back in the water 10 days later, wiser, poorer and with their rudder and housing repaired and reinforced.

Mining is huge throughout New Caledonia and a vast new nickel processing plant is being built in Baie du Prony. Their Environment Officer says it will wipe out all life in the bay but, apparently, the powers that be are so dazzled by the income it will bring, that there are no demands for environmental redress, which is sad for the local Kanaks who may, eventually, inherit the mess when the ores run out.

In Pilot Bay, Canal Woodin with Te Wai Pounamu we heard that the cyclone has fizzled thank goodness (orders to set cyclone lines in the marina were on hold) and Kaitorete left Vila yesterday for Opuia. It was drizzly and foul but today is cooler, the bad weather seems to have cleared and we have a bright sunny day, 15 knots ESE, turtles and there were four ospreys fishing in the bay this morning. We saw one get lucky on his fifth sortie. They dive in head first then fly out of the water and, after gaining height, shake themselves like a dog until all their feathers stand out in a furry ball in a cloud of water droplets. How do they stay in the air? Then they head for a tree, shuffle around disconsolately until they've recovered, then launch off for another go. Two looked replete, one caught his breakfast in front of us and the other shuffled around postponing the plunge until another chased him off his perch towards the water just like any other parent with a recalcitrant teenager!

Later: We returned to Noumea to pick up Justin and Grant, who will help us sail home, and bid farewell to Eddie and Jen, with whom we've cruised pretty much constantly for the last 6 weeks. After the usual discussion over weather maps, grib files and chickens entrails, we checked out on yesterday and picked up a mooring under the huge lighthouse at Ile Amedee, and tied back to avoid a somewhat rolly night and a threatening bommie, while the faint throb of the resort's disco rolled out over the water until the wee hours. The snorkelling was, however, fantastic as the reef's nature reserve status means that huge fish are so tame they came over to inspect us.

It's now Tuesday morning, there's absolutely no wind and we're motoring our way towards Norfolk Island, 3 days away to avoid tacking into the southerlies on the front of the next high. Hopefully some wind will fill in and we can refuel at Norfolk Island, because we only carry enough fuel for three days.

The end of the trip has been looming for the past couple of weeks and now we're finally on passage for home, with very mixed feelings. We've had a fabulous time, been to wonderful places and met lots of great people, both on shore and cruising, locals and foreigners, and it's sad to leave it all that behind. However, we're looking forward to getting home and to life on shore again, tinged with the usual trepidation about the passage.

9/11: 27 27 S, 167 39 E

It's crash, bang, wallop here as we tack into the southerly from 100 m N of Norfolk Is. We're hoping to hole up in Norfolk Is for a few days until the crap dies down but there seems to be a steady stream on 25 - 30 kn westerlies on its way after this high, which is too small to carry us all the way. Not great choices. It's been fantastic so far with 10-17 kn beam reaches or fetching on slight seas but that all changed as we went through the southerly front around 3 pm this afternoon. We thought it was going to hail it was so cold so it's not only Canterbury that's shivering. At least everyone has their sea legs by now and Justin and Grant are terrific.

11/11: Weather

Hm grib says 30 -35 kn in 5 days (ie gusts of 50) so we are regretfully heading for Opuia instead of Nelson. With light tail winds here we can only make 4.5 kn so would be stuck in it and maybe even the turn to SW 25 so have chickened out. We loved Norfolk Is and its v friendly people.

Our smart new blue ensign is fluttering happily behind us as we make 7+ kn on course - motor sailing! We don't care. The sky and sea are blue, we had visits from dolphins and whales yesterday and we are all well rested and determined to finish anything those b... customs people might feel like confiscating! 300 nm to Cavalli Is then on to Opuia. If we can reach Tauranga before the weather turns bad again we will but will keep you posted.

All well here. Grant made his famous chicken in soy and honey sauce last night and we are all replete and rested.

13/11: 32 02.15 S, 170 58.8 E, 230 m to Cavalli's + 30 to Opuia

We had a great stop at Norfolk Is: arrived at midnight but leading lights now defunct so hove to until dawn. Got fuel and were taken ashore by the lighter tug as they were unloading a cargo ship so were winched off its deck on a pallet of beer kegs in a cargo net! OSH would have a fit. Had to reset our anchor after a cold snorkel to check it out - it was hooked under an old cable that the locals said dates from whaling days (1800's or more recent?).

Finally left about 2.30 am when the wind went to the north and made the anchorage too roly for comfort so thought we might as well roll underway. Found a good beam breeze and next to no sea. When it died we motored for 2 days, confident in our replenished fuel stocks, and have just turned the long suffering donk off as the NW'er gathers. It'll probably go to 25 kn before we get in but we are now heading for Opuia instead of Nelson as the extra 300 miles would have exposed us to 2 days of 30-35 kn NW'ers (=+5 and more in gusts) with a risk of any delay exposing us to 30-40 kn SW'ers that follow. Glad we changed course as the low is coming in even faster and meaner than forecast. Thank goodness for Norfolk Is!

We are skeding with Taupo Maritime at 1915NZ Daylight savings time on 6215, moving to 6224, and we have heard Mawingo once on 4417 at 7pm 2 nights ago and Spindrift last night at 7.15pm on 6516. We miss all the friendly voices and your company.

Grant says he's seen Moreton Bay get in a terrible state (he lived there) so maybe you got off lightly - but it's not what you want/expect, especially at the end of a passage.

I guess we're thinking homebound thoughts so cruising memories come though a slight mist. Our only compensation is that the last two days of motoring have been warmer than the first 3 weeks in New Cal!

14/11: Almost there

Only 20 nm to go to Opuia and a truly shite forecast for the west coast so we're glad we changed our plans from Nelson to here. Had 32 kn as the front went through last night but a small price to pay for good tail winds. Roll on those expressos

16/11: Arrived in Opuia

Early morning on 7th the weather was fair and the forecast was as good as it gets - just at the top of a high. We had one last snorkel in clear waters off Isle Amadee then headed out through the pass, rounded a reef and set course for Norfolk Island, only 4 degrees off course to Nelson. We motored or sailed in light winds for a couple of days, picked up speed as the breeze filled to 15 kn from the west then southwest on the back of the high and made good progress straight down the lay line. Around 35 S we started to pick up big southern swells from the low passing below us and lost half a day tacking into light southerlies but arrived off Norfolk island at midnight on the 10th in calm conditions. It couldn't have been easier.

Cascade Bay on the northern coast has a wave battered jetty with a small derrick but no landing place. The leading lights have been replaced by day beacons so we hove to until dawn then motored in to anchor in 8 m over white sand, rock, coral and the detritus of whaling days. Luckily a small cargo ship was also standing off to complete unloading, so Customs arrived immediately and we were offered a lift ashore by a local boatman on a lighter tug. The lighters are beautifully crafted clinker-built craft with a single long sweep and, with their tattooed crew, could have stepped straight out of the 18th century. A handful of tourists watching the action were as thrilled as us when a crane landed us on the wharf in a cargo net on a pallet of beer kegs! We could picture OSH frothing at the mouth over that.

A local lad gave us a lift on his ute to a petrol station where we filled 3 jerrycans with diesel, then found a friendly coffee shop for real coffee - from a Kiwi born in Ashburton. Unfortunately the weather was too uncertain to stay longer so only Justin got an impromptu tour of the island (courtesy of another friendly local family) but it has a fascinating Pitcairn Island and convict history, wonderful people and will be well worth a revisit, and we think the trees there might be, er, Norfolk pines. Back at the boat we reset our anchor after a cold snorkel showed it was hooked under an old whaling cable and our friendly tug boat skipper returned later in the day with his kids to give us a container of 'whale bird' eggs (sooty tern we think) which were delicious - sweet and tasting faintly of prawns. (Pre-flavoured eggs - may be something the GM guys can start working on...)

Unfortunately, the new forecast showed yet another low following fast on the back of the big one we had just avoided so we decided to head for Opuia instead of Nelson and left about 2.30 am on 12th when the wind went to the north and made the anchorage too roly for comfort. Underway again we found a good beam breeze and next to no sea, giving us perfect sailing and a dawn visit by five common dolphins who played under the bow for nearly an hour. Grant and Justin were woken by Sue singing and whistling to them and we had a magic time telling them how beautiful they were and how glad we were to see them. They rolled over and grinned, played, waggled their flippers, played snakes and gave small tail slaps in response. Lovely creatures.

When the wind died we motored for 2 days, confident in our extra fuel stocks and, and finally turned the long suffering donk off as the nor'westers gathered and drove us swiftly down to Opuia under reefed jib alone on the leading edge of the new low. We were glad we'd changed course as it came in even faster and meaner than forecast and the extra 300 miles would have exposed us to 2 days of 30-35 kn NW'ers (more in gusts) with any delay putting us into the 30-40 kn SW'ers to follow. Thank goodness for Norfolk Island, weatherfax and grib files!

As we entered Bay of Islands we downed a huge steak, eggs and fried potato breakfast to finish up the last of our fresh provisions before MAF confiscated the lot. Customs got a bit shirty because we'd changed course, even though Taupo Maritime Radio had notified them, because the latest procedure requires returning yachts to notify Customs 48 hours in advance with full passenger information etc, and Customs hadn't given us a workable email address. How do smaller boats without sailmail cope? I guess we're thinking homebound thoughts now so our cruising memories come though a slight mist but it has been a wonderful adventure. Opuia is drizzly and windy but we don't care. We're safely back, our crew had a good time and Norfolk Island was an unexpected bonus - and was warmer than the first 3 weeks in New Cal!

This is Haku II signing off until our next adventure.