



DIRECTION FINDER

Newsletter date: November 2, 2009

Special Edition

SPECIAL EDITION “NATARAJA” PANGAIMOTU, TONGATAPU TONGA

**Date: Monday, ‘November 2, 2009, 6:04 PM
Position: 21° 07’ 72” S/ 175° 09’ 58” W**

We finally got a break in the wind and a favorable shift to make a run for the Ha'api Group. We weighed anchor and cleared the reef at Blue Lagoon at a little after 0600 on the morning of 10 Oct. The wind turned out to be not so great, it was a light NE that slowly shifted NW. Not enough to make 5 knots which we needed to do in order to arrive in the daylight. We motored sailed pretty much the whole way. We did catch two fish at least. As we made our approach, we were treated to a dolphin escort. These looked like bottle nose dolphins, but they had a white band around their noses. Hadn't seen that before. After they left us, a mother humpback and calf surfaced near us. That was something! We made good time and had the anchor down at Ofolanga Is at about 1630. The next morning, we splashed the dinghy and headed to shore to explore the island. It was uninhabited although we did find some old woven huts and a dugout canoe. The island

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The information contained in this publication is subject to

has a lovely white sand beach that rings it. We found some "palangi" (short coconut trees for white people who can't climb to fetch drinking nuts) trees much to my delight. As a habit, we always have our machete with us, so Eric opened a nut for me to enjoy while we walked. Later we found another palangi tree and collected a few nuts to take back to the boat with us. Later in the afternoon, the wind shifted rather suddenly from NW to south. This put us on a lee shore with miles and miles of fetch. The wind was only about 10 knots and it wasn't too bad. There wasn't a south wind anchorage anywhere near us so at about 1845, we decided to weigh anchor and head out to sea and hove to for the night. Figured we would sleep better out there than butt to the reef in a building wind.

At around 0400, the wind shifted east and Eric got us under sail before waking me up to take over the watch. It took us all morning and a good part of the afternoon to beat our way into the anchorage on Lifuka Is. Visibility was terrible because of overcast skies and choppy water. It was spooky making our way thru the reefy areas. I had taken the Lat/Long off the chart for several areas we needed to avoid and put the coordinates into the GPS. I gave us plenty of leeway on them because the chart is from 1898 and the positions of the reefs, etc. were very likely off a bit. And, they were. We proceeded very slowly as we tried to pick them out. We came really close to one and passed over another. There was plenty of water but it sure made for some tense moments. But, once we made it into the anchorage of Koulo Village and set the anchor, all was well with the world.

We ventured ashore the next morning and walked down the road to the village of Pangai to find the Customs office and clear in. The road to the village was flanked by plantations. There were rows and rows of taro, tapioca, banana, and sweet potato. As we got nearer to town, we passed several cemeteries. One was the European Cemetery with a monument to Shirley Baker. He was a missionary who became a confidant and political advisor to King Taufa'ahau.

There really isn't much to Pangai. It was a bit like a ghost town with a number of old wooden European style buildings. Some looked like they belonged on the set of an old Western movie. Shopping was actually pretty good and Eric hit pay dirt when he found BarS smoked bacon. He came walking out of the store with a smile from ear to ear. Oh the simple pleasures in life. Now all we had to do was find the store that sold eggs!

This area has some amazing history. Captain Cook visited Lifuka Is in 1773, 1774 and 1777. The infamous Mutiny on the Bounty took place in April 1789 between the islands of Lifuka and Tofua. After Capt. Bligh and his 18 companions were set adrift, they managed to row to Tofua Island where they

were attacked by the locals. Bligh and company headed off to sea and spent the next 42 days. They ended up in Timor, 5800 km away.

In 1806, the British privateer PORT AU PRINCE was captured by a group of warring locals. Sixteen year-old William Mariner was one of the few survivors. High Chief Finau took a liking to young Will and ended up adopting him. Will lived for four years with Tongans and played a major role in advising warring techniques that helped Chief Finau conquer Tongatapu. Will even had a plantation on Vava'u.

From the boat, we could see Tofua Is and its neighbor, Kao. Tofua is a volcano but has blown its top and now it looks like a big donut with a lake in the middle. Kao looks like a giant Hershey's kiss. The sunsets over the two were stellar!

Tofua still steams and we could actually see it. That was pretty cool. One afternoon, we headed ashore for a walk and worked away along the island in the opposite direction of Pangai. We came to the airport or rather the runway. The runway crosses the road and if a plane is landing or taking off, the security guards on either side lower the crossing guards. I am thinking Homeland Security would not approve of that! We looked both ways, just in case, before crossing the runway and proceeding down island where we came across a sign that read "Port Au Prince Memorial Beach". So we headed down the path and found a memorial to the ill-fated ship and took a walk along the beach. On our return trip, we met a pilot stretching his legs on the runway and stopped to chat.

Fun stuff!

We weighed anchor and had a lovely sail under jib alone up to the island of Ha'ano. Along the way we saw four humpback whales breach one after the other not too far off the bow.

Amazing! We anchored off the reef and after some lunch headed ashore to see what we could find. The island has four villages and the anchorage is about in the middle. We found a path to the dirt road and turned left one day and right the next. The road here was lined with plantations and giant mango trees. As we approached the first village, we noticed it was fenced off. We opened the gate and passed thru. They do this to keep the pigs and goats in the village and to prevent them from free ranging throughout the island and destroying the crops. Each home has a fence around it to keep the pigs and goats out of the yards. These folks live a subsistence lifestyle. They grow and catch all their food. They even use horse drawn carts to bring the crops in from the outlying plantations. It was a amazing to see the simple but hard life that these people lead. They are all so friendly and everyone waved and said hello to us as we walked by. We saw a lot of fruit bats on this island. Many more than on any of the others. There was one spot along the shore where the trees were full of them.

While looking at the bats, I almost grabbed a large blue and black banded sea snake when I grabbed a rock to hold the dinghy in place. We were rather surprised to the see the snake up in the rocks like it was. All sea snakes are terribly poisonous so it is a good thing I saw it before I actually grabbed it. We saw a couple more while walking the reef but none as large as that one had been.

The next island we visited was Nukunamo. We had to pick our way thru some reefy patches to get to a nice sandy spot where we anchored. Ashore we found a trail that led inland and took us to a rock platform. According to the cruising guide, it was an old pigeon hunting platform used by the king many, many moons ago.

We took advantage of the islands excellent beach to play some bocce ball. We also built a fire and roasted hot dogs. Great fun!

After a few nights out we decided to head back into Pangai and clear out so we could make our way South. Lots of boats were suddenly in the area and we figured we'd try to stay ahead of them. As it turned out, the wind picked up and we decided to stay at Pangai for a couple of days and wait for

better winds. Once we got a nice day, we sailed off to Ha'afeva Is.

While wandering around here, we met Melanie and Erik. They are Peace Corp folks

from Fargo of all places. They are in Tonga teaching English. We invited them out to the boat one night for dinner and had a great time.

Our next stop was Nomuka Iki Is. The winds still had a lot of South to them so it was a hard beat to get there. We did land a nice mahi mahi so that made it worth while. We were quite surprised when we arrived to find 13 boats already anchored. But, by the next morning, there were only three left. We spent the day exploring the island and found the remains of an old penal colony - a cistern and a toilet. We also found some palangi trees and I got some drinking nuts.

The next morning, the wind was way down and the water was flat so we took the dinghy across to Nomuka Is to do some exploring. This island actually has some elevation. We asked around and found out how to get to the telephone antennae on top of one of the hills. When we got up there, we found a

guy sitting on a rock with his phone. A real house phone, not a cell phone. He was plugged in at the antennae and said he was there to make a call. That totally explained why the trail up was littered with phone cards. He directed us to another trail to take down and we found ourselves in a maze of dirt tracks that wound around thru the houses. After several wrong turns, we finally found our way back to the main dirt road then picked up the road that crossed the island. There is a huge brackish lake on the island and we wanted to check it out. Apparently the islanders don't think much of the lake, Ava Ana, because we only caught a minor little peak of it. Oh well. We did come across one of the smaller ones though. We followed the road until it ran out and turned into a single track. We followed that till it ran out and then we followed the horse poop. Good thing we did cuz we popped out of the jungle and found ourselves at the other side of the island with the most spectacular views. We were atop a cliff of about 15'. The dirt was red and there were chunks of volcanic rock scattered amongst the grass.

Below us the surf rolled and crashed. Eric got me a drinking nut (more palangi trees!) and we sat down and took in the view. We could see several islands and many reefs. Of course we didn't take our horse poop track back. We are not ones to double back when there is a potential "short cut". Instead

we walked along the cliff and actually found another horse poop trail and since the other one paid off so beautifully, we figured we'd follow it. Well, it petered out but we kept on bashing. It wasn't looking good and several times we thought we'd have to turn back, but persistence paid off and we found a faint trail that headed inland. It paid off and we found ourselves at a small lake. Eric asked "isn't this the one you took a picture of?" I wasn't sure, it looked different. We continued on and came to a fork and I said "this is where I took the picture". We were back on the main road so we doubled back and picked up another trail that started out really nice than petered out and we hacked our way thru and popped out on a cliff overlooking the big lake.

We found it! It was pretty impressive but couldn't find any way to get down to it. We picked up a trail that led to a barbed wire fence at a plantation. But, the wire was stretched where people had passed thru so we followed suit.

Next thing ya know, we hear a puppy barking and then we see a tent and a guy taking a nap on the ground. He lifted his head and greeted us and pointed to show us which way

to go.

We apologized for interrupting his nap and continued on. This trail took us back to the main road and we figured we might as well stick to it this time. When we got back to the boat, we got an invite to a bonfire that was to be held that evening on the beach. There were only three boats, including us, and we all met on shore for a sunset bonfire. The next day was spent cleaning the bottom and that evening, we set sail for Tongatapu.

The winds were lighter than we had hoped and ghosted along until about 0330, Eric couldn't stand it any more and turned the engine on to give us a push. We arrived off Tongatapu at sunrise and anchored off Pangaimotu with 39 other boats!

Crap! Unbeknownst to us, a yacht club was started on this island and said yacht club, Big Mama's, was celebrating its 7th birthday. And, all boats were welcome for a free buffet dinner. Drinks were not included but hey, free food! The buffet was an amazing spread that included a whole pig, turkey, fish and lots of local foods. It was a fun night and we met lots of new people. The next day, half the boats left for New Zealand and a bunch more the day after that. But, boats are still trickling in and we have 13 boats now. We met up with ZEPHYRA, Russ & Deb, from Tahoe/Brickyard Cove and members of Lake Tahoe Windjammers YC!

We went into Nuku'alofa with them on Saturday and they pointed us in the direction of the markets and bakery and gave us the nickel tour of the rather large city. This afternoon we headed over to the full dock to take on water and diesel. Eric was rather surprised when the fuel tanker truck pulled up and for a moment we thought maybe they thought we wanted 100 gallons instead of 100 litres! The truck usually only comes for the mega yachts. As it turns out, this is the only way the boats can fuel. The pumps at the dock are not used.

We are now back at anchor at Pangaimotu and it's raining. It's gonna be a lazy day.

Right now, we are watching the weather faxes and waiting for the wind. There is a huge high sitting between Tonga and New Zealand so it's not a good time to go. All the boats that piled out of here over the weekend are motoring. There is no wind and when it fills it's gonna be from the south.

We can wait.

Until next time, this is e&E aboard

NATARAJA, the little yellow boat from Nevada, waiting for a good weather window to sail to New Zealand in the company of Zephyra.

PANGAIMOTU

