

Best Explorer's  
Logbook 2016  
From Tahiti to  
Australia



*Figure 1: Best Explorer's track from Tahiti to Australia*

## **From Wednesday 6 to Friday 26 April 2016– Tahiti**

I left Tahiti last year on August 24th with a frantic rush, riding the only bus that could get me from Port Phaeton to the airport.

I had chosen a long route via Easter Island (I would finally glimpse it at least), Santiago de Chile, Madrid, and finally Italy, after seven months of absence. I did not and do not appreciate the transit through the USA and subjecting myself to preventive treatment as a criminal.

A long journey, but interesting and smooth., including the view of the fierce Aconcagua practically flying at its own level.

Last winter, while preparing for the upcoming voyages, I seized the fortunate opportunity, so I thought then, to meet a new crew member eager to come with me all the way to the Fiji Islands and, as a guest, to help me in Tahiti during the foreseen month of preparing the boat.



*Figure 2: Best Explorer moored in the tiny bay of Port Phaeton, Tahiti*

We set off together and arrive at Port Phaeton mid-morning with beautiful weather, but laden with humidity.

The boat is a real disaster: the flexible solar panels are burned, terrible quality, the outboard motors have been stolen, the deck is stained by infinite rust spots left by leftovers from some nearby work, and inside, life became impossible due to the mould and some exploded canned food cans.

My arms fall off: there will be much more work to do. And I haven't seen everything yet.

The severe humidity has jammed all possible gears (the boat is made of steel). From the stern lockers that we must force open, to the steering mechanism whose chain is now rusty, to the generator which is an aluminium oxide flower pot.

Fortunately, electricity is available, but the water is not drinkable. The shipyard bathroom is a dark cave where one can barely perform the most essential functions.

The inside of the boat is infested with cockroaches and other insects. Outside, where we laid out two small mattresses to sleep, mosquitoes celebrated with our blood. And there has been an epidemic of dengue here!

In the morning, we gather our courage and decide to let our beards grow, after all, there's no alternative. We then begin making a work plan. First, internal and external cleaning, then purchasing materials and pest control, identifying a water source to have something to drink—a tap two kilometres away—reporting the theft to the police, arrangements with the mechanic to fix what's necessary, and gathering supplies.

This is how the almost daily trips to Papeete begin, the only place where it will be possible to buy technical equipment, find

someone who can overhaul the life rafts, and look for a shipyard that can haul the boat ashore because here it is not possible.



*Figure 3: You can understand what is the meaning of "raining cats and dogs"*

A week has passed since our arrival and it's beginning to rain cats and dogs, as it should in the Amazon. I didn't think the rule applied here too. We still can work on deck thanks to the waterproof tarps.

My companion is good company, but not very helpful. He prefers to watch the rainwater fall from the sky and smoke his pipe.

After almost two weeks, we managed to bring our suitcases below deck!

We rebuilt a whole series of parts and had others remade. The mechanic fixed many things, but for the generator, there is nothing to be done until the spare parts arrive in several months, which we don't have. I disembark it and bid it farewell. A fortunate

coincidence: there is someone here who can cast the protective anodes that I need!

I keep the details of the different jobs to myself because when I read the pages listing them in the logbook, I feel sick!

After almost twenty days, we will finally return to Papeete on Monday the 25th, and tomorrow we will transport the boat to the Papeete shipyard where we were luckily accepted. Just a few miles outside the port, we emerge from the cloud that has obsessed us all these days.

My companion turns livid as soon as we get on the calm open sea. Wide open spaces are not for him.

On Tuesday the 26th, we exited from Papeete marina with the necessary authorization from air traffic control (remember that to exit, you must pass under the ground controlled approach of the airport). We approach the shipyard through the eastern entrance as we skirt the coast from the outside. The boat is quickly hauled ashore, and at night we rest safely and dry on a clean and orderly platform.

## From Wednesday, April 27th to Tuesday, May 17 2016 – Papeete - Moorea



*Figure 4: The shipyard's service area in Papeete*

This morning saw the start of an intensive period of work to fine-tune the boat. At the end of the rainy season, we now have reliable suppliers and people who know their trade after many years of poor weather, incompetent workers, and distant locations.

There are still some issues that need to be resolved. There are pending issues with customs on the stolen outboards to certify and reaffirm the rights to tax exemption, to find the right materials, and track down suppliers of the most unusual parts, but we are confident.

I decided to strip the hull bare and repaint it: in short, not only the workers, but we too become black as chimney sweeps and

thus the drains of the convenient showers are burdened with an overload.

In the evening, drum rhythms can be quite disturbing. There is a club and disco nearby, and we think it's their fault. One evening, having stayed out late and tired of cooking, we decided to treat ourselves to a dinner out. We must walk a few *kilometres*, and our steps take us near the source of the noise. It's strange, it's coming from a container depot.

As we look inside, we discover that several young men and women are preparing for *tamouré*, a splendid traditional dance. We kindly request permission to watch, which is granted to us. Their skills, dedication, agility, and even the plumper ones, make them fascinating. We won't be complaining anymore about the noise, which always ends at reasonable hours.

The chores and odd jobs are multiplying: so many things have broken or jammed due to the humidity since winter. Unbelievable. The wallet is beginning to complain.

Gianfranco and Franca arrive before we manage to launch the boat. I send them off on a tourist tour. A delightful couple of my own age, they lovingly bicker non-stop and have an excellent spirit when I impose inconveniences on them.

On Friday, July 13th, the hull will be launched, and the new livery will make it sparkle! I don't waste any time and head straight to Moorea, causing Franca to feel seasick because the sea is not very favorable today. Franca is regretting her decision to come.

The anchor chain has been replaced and no longer leaves a stain on the deck.

We have been lingering on this spectacular island for a few days, swimming and taking dinghy trips. The group's spirits are so

uplifted that tomorrow I will risk leaving for Raiatea. It will be like sailing alone, as I won't have much help, but the autopilot will provide me with assistance in calm seas as per the forecast.



*Figure 5: Relax at the Moorea Resort*

## **From Wednesday the 18th to Saturday 21st May 2016 – Moorea–Raiatea - Tahaa**

Between Moorea and Raiatea, there are only one hundred and ten miles, which involves a night of navigation, so guests can lie down in their bunks and better withstand any potential seasickness.

Spending a little more time in these wonderful surroundings is worth it (if you've not figured it out yet, I'm completely in love with Moorea!). After a swim and a little tour in the deep bay of Oponoo, followed by lunch at anchor and some minor repairs (otherwise I wouldn't have had fun...) we set sail for our next destination.

The weather has been favorable for us, only disturbed by a squall, which is almost a habitual occurrence. Since we arrive at the entrance to the reef still in the morning and the nearby \*motu\* (small coral island covered with palm trees) offers a good, calm shelter, I anchor in just a few meters of water over a very beautiful seabed. Moorea must have been swept by a cyclone, because its reef was quite ruined, while here everything seems alive and vital.

Refreshed by the break, we go to moor at Uturoa, the capital city I already know at the same position of last year.

In a few days Simona and Nicoletta will arrive, spaced out, so while waiting for them we dedicate ourselves to a bit of tourism, both by boat and on land. The choice of destinations at a short distance is limited: I try to identify the most promising places from the map and find, a few miles away, a bay on the island of Tahaa, immediately north of Raiatea and a little island that suits us.

With the help of my friend who brings swimming a rope with chain fixing them on a "potato", that is, a coral head just at the water level, and with the anchor dropped on a thirty-meter bottom, I tried a "Polynesian" mooring, which holds. But the weather is calm; I don't

know if I'd repeat it the same under different conditions.

Back at the fuel station dock, the next day we join a guided tour of the island.

Raiatea appears to have been the hub of propagation for these indefatigable expert Polynesian navigators who colonized from here the other islands, to the Marquesas, Hawaii, the Tuamotu, Easter Island and finally even New Zealand.

Religious and ritual traditions have left imposing traces, which we had already seen in this form at Huaine last year. Large platforms with long protective walls and burials that still show human bones, remnants of sacrifices that here, unlike in the Marquesas, seem to have involved the (younger?) sons of the chiefs.

There is a veiled sun and a steady breeze, few people, silence. We wander slowly through the vast area of the Marae of Taputapuatea with an indefinable sense of the sacred, no matter how nonbelievers we are. But we do not speak of it among ourselves, each one gathering the experience within.

## **From Sunday 22 to Thursday 26 May 2016 – Raiatea - Tahaa**

Here's Simona. We give her the time to settle on board, then we prepare to set sail and go swimming right in front.

The wind has picked up, coming from the east, pushing us against the dock to which I am moored on the starboard side. It is the worst position to depart from: Best Explorer under power is prone to veering to starboard, especially in reverse. If I were moored on the port side, I would manage quite easily by pushing against the dock in forward gear with a line holding fast the bow with appropriate fenders. Then using full rudder to port, once well clear, I would change rudder to starboard and pull in reverse. The propeller would help pull me away even against the wind, but from this position it is practically impossible.

I regret not having thought of it yesterday: it would have been enough to drop the anchor well upwind and haul the boat on the chain. It would have served the purpose admirably that is, to move the bow away from the dock. Now it is too late to regret.

My first partner is delegated to the simplest, yet most important task: uncleat on command the stern line, which is positioned to keep the boat away from the dock, while I will try to pull the boat on a long rope fastened on the opposite pier. All that's needed is timing: when it's time, he just must remove a single loop from the stern cleat. He fails miserably. Jamming the rope and risking serious damage, which I narrowly avoided with a sprint and a shout at the last moment. Naturally, the maneuver fails.

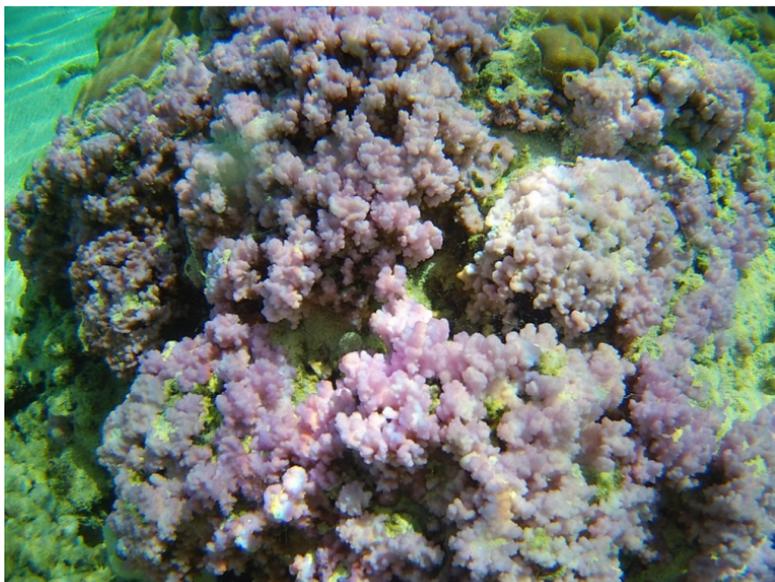
He got offended and went downstairs after telling me: 'manage on your own'. This is the most intelligent attitude, given that we are literally on the same boat.

Fortunately, Gianfranco, though inexperienced, applies himself intelligently in his role and correctly supports me while I redo the maneuver. I'm starting to fear that I'll have to make the journey from the Cook Islands to Fiji alone. Sailing with that guy on board would be worse than not having him, as I would be burdened with not only the maneuvers, but also the duty of supervising a misfit. And to think that he is quite likeable on land.

The man segregates himself. We still enjoy a nice swim and then go to moor ourselves at Apooiti Marina, on the opposite side of the island from Uturoa. This is a modern marina with various services that offers, for a fee, a more comfortable rest place than the other mooring, which is exposed to the trade winds.

On land, in front of a peace offering beer that he offered me along with the proposal to disembark, I declined the proposal. I suggest that he should carefully consider his options before giving up on such a unique experience. I hope to improve the training and turn the discussion to a technical level, trying to explain the meaning of the morning's maneuver, but with little success. The matter has yet to be resolved. To comfort himself, he focuses on Simona, who has no appreciation for him.

The next day it rains heavily. We still move towards some "motu" of Tahaa and facing Bora Bora, passing inside the barrier with an interesting view of the coast. The weather is so depressing that we don't even take a swim, returning to our mooring with our low ears.



*Figure 6: Corals at the Tahaa motu*

To be ready for any possibility, as time is passing quickly and taking the opportunity of port's internet connections, I send an urgent crew request for the trip from Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, our next stop, until Fiji.

The next day, to my relief, Nicoletta arrives: I will no longer be alone in facing the problems. Besides her experience, a filter is always advisable between the commander and the crew. It allows time and space for any necessary corrections. and unpleasant possible measures are less abrupt and definitive.

Awaiting Nicoletta the time is passed, so it remains only as much as needed for a short dinghy trip, after having delivered some sails to the sailmaker to be repaired.

The next day the weather is fine again and we return to the "motu" where we have been the day before yesterday, where we drop anchor. The place, Motu Tautau, it is known as "the coral garden." The shallow seabed between the islets is truly very rich and varied, and the trip is quite satisfying. Franca and Gianfranco, Simona and Nicoletta form a truly pleasant company: they got along well and the atmosphere on board has greatly improved, even though Simona's distancing maneuvers are noticeable ...

Tomorrow we will move to Bora Bora.

## **From Friday, May 27th until Wednesday, June 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 – Tahaa– Bora Bora**

This morning there is a strong, steady wind from the south-east, about twenty knots. As we approach the Pass, it blows in gusts, often foul, while we approach the Paipai pass, the nearest exit from the lagoon. Then it's a beautiful sail ride against a residual sea that is not too bothersome, managing to maintain a decent speed. The fishing line in the sea disappoints us once more.

Last year, the island's internal anchorages hadn't satisfied me much, so I'll try to slip into one between the leeward barrier and the long island of Toopua. The shallows form a bend with a depth of 5 or 6 meters just past the access channel, which seems tailor-made for us. The colors of the water are marvelous.

We stop at this beautiful place for three days, with dinghy trips and snorkeling around here. Motu Tapu, really tiny just at the main entrance to the lagoon offers us a relaxing exploratory walk



*Figure 7: Anchored at Povai Bay near Raititi Point*

among palms, tamarisks (or some similar shrub), shells, and remains of pic nics. It is so close to the main settlement, Aitape, that must be a favorite destination for short trips.

The sunsets are all to be admired, but one must not miss them because, as everywhere in the equatorial belt, they last but the time of a few breaths.

On Monday we wish to change the scenery and we move just a little far near the Raititi point, a little further south, from which one can access, only by dinghy, a vast expanse of shallow water facing a long, bright white beach. The beach hosts, on the south, a few huts/bars and a few umbrellas, frequented by those who do not have the money enough to shut themselves away in the luxury resorts of the eastern part of the island.

However, it is a lovely location. With only a mile or so, the barrier closes the horizon with a frame of white foam, and rays and remoras can swim undisturbed in the shallow water.

We took advantage of the facilities and had lunch, exceptionally, at the restaurant in the shade, refreshed by the breeze and with a view of the breakers.

The return trip by boat was almost dark due to the darkness. We have an excellent mood and sing choral songs (perhaps a little off-key) during the evening.

I notice that the movable keel has lowered, causing oil to be lost. I thought I had solved the serious problem that occurred in Galapagos by replacing the oil tubes, but it is now clear that the leak is in the piston. We will not be able to change it before we reach Australia. No more stops in shallow waters from now on.

The shallow waters of the eastern lagoon, although difficult to navigate, are not a problem: the loss is modest and the keel takes a few minutes to lower by itself. Our goal is to anchor as far south as possible to get as close to the barrier's edge, with a lookout at the



*Figure 8: At the south-east edge of the Bora Bora lagoon you can see Tahaa and in the mist on the right Raiatea*

bow to guide us.

The great motu that protects us and the barrier and roaring limit of the breakers are both worthy of exploration. Every step we take uncovers ancient fossil corals beneath our feet. The pleasant weather is in our favor.

With eyes still not sated, the time to leave these wonders approaches: tomorrow we return to Raiatea.

## **From Thursday 2nd to Wednesday 8 June 2016 – Bora Bora – Raiatea**

The sky is overcast, as is somewhat our mood. We easily weave through the shallows of this eastern lagoon, which we now know well enough, and head out to ocean from the main pass to the northwest. It will be an uneventful sail, entirely under engine.

Arriving at Tahaa in the early afternoon, I decide to moor at a buoy in Apu bay, near the southern tip of the island to delude myself into thinking I am still traveling and not immediately finishing this part of the cruise, so mixed with satisfactions and setbacks.

The next day, early, we depart and go docking alongside the entrance quay of the sea from Apooiti, where they measure us accurately refusing to tax us for the boat's official measurements. It's raining and a nasty wind is blowing: good to be in port.



*Figure 9: Essay on Polynesian dances from a school*

I stay on the boat with Franca while the others get soaked from above and below to visit some Raiatea waterfalls. The search for a travel companion from Rarotonga to Fiji is becoming frantic. I continue to contemplate with apprehension the solo navigation for all the approximately fifteen hundred miles.

In the evening, we go to watch a display of Polynesian dances by children, not very interesting in itself, but very much so for the atmosphere that surrounds them.

On Saturday, Simona leaves us to our regret to return home. We console ourselves by going in a dinghy to bathe at a nearby "motu," very beautiful, an outing we repeat the next day. Relations with my initial companion seem more relaxed.

The Monday we are moving to Uturoa for the diesel supply, gasoline, water and gas (it's strange the speed at which it is being consumed) and then return to Apooiti under a heavy downpour. We begin to think that when we dock we become a haunted boat because on that occasion it almost always pours, stopping only as soon as we finish.

Franca and Gianfranco are leaving us as well. After a day dedicated to shopping, odd jobs, and receiving the repaired sails, my companion, without further notice, disembarks. I won't hide that I feel an intense relief. Despite the difficult prospects, I feel freed from a heavy responsibility.

In the evening, as a compensation a message arrives from a certain Riccardo, confirming that he will join me in Rarotonga, after few others declined.

The thoughts that had crowded my mind when Salvatore had decided to come with me for the entire Northwest Passage came back to me.

What will he be like? Will we get along? Will he be a good sailor? And several other questions.

Once more, I decide to temporarily file them away under the label: brave!- He is risking more than me...

Tomorrow, the series of formalities to leave French Polynesia must be completed. Tonight, alone, we relax in the comfort of seventeen years of sailing life together: the absence of our friends is felt, but also the responsibility for their well-being.

## **From Thursday the 9th to Sunday 12 June 2016 –Rai-atea– Rarotonga**

The French authorities sometimes are truly bothersome. We were forced to move the boat to the outer dock with a difficult maneuver due to the strong wind, and we ourselves are rather inflexible, but when they tell us that the exit documents must be completed on the day of departure only, which is tomorrow, we struggle not to openly show our impatience. We will have to walk back to Uturoa just for that.

By now, we have undergone many controls from different countries: without surpassing the peaks of dislike from U.S. officers (with the notable and happy exception of those in Alaska, at the opposite end), the French ones, with their air of superiority toward us poor relatives, firmly maintain the second place, even after having completed the world tour and passed through thirteen or more other countries.

Having arranged everything very well on board, including the installation of a new chart plotter, jubilantly replacing the old one worn out by the humidity of Tahiti, we prepare ourselves to sail. There's an awful weather with heavy rain and twenty-five knots of wind. Back home we'd probably stay in port, but it's a following wind and the next downwind coast that would pose a danger ahead of us is Australia.

Outside the lee of the island, the waves are four meters high. I have doubts about the autopilot's ability to hold, which I decided to use since there are only two of us, with following seas. This is the most critical point of sail for it, but it really seems to be managing. We have only hoisted the two forward sails.

At night, it clears up.

At sunrise, the wind rises to thirty knots with gusts to thirty-five, and the sea builds further to up to five meters. We must take the wheel. When around noon we pass near the atoll of Maupihaa surrounded by majestic breakers, rather large, we feel quite tired enough to wish to stop.

Will there be calm downwind and will we find a way to enter the lagoon?

Let us try.



*Figura 10: Maupihaa's anchorage next to the passe*

Just after rounding the southern tip, the sea subsides and then calms completely, still with a strong wind. But the pass, not wider than fifteen meters and about five hundred long, it's a raging torrent. Even at seven knots, the boat barely advances. Two attempts and then I give up: too risky.

Let's try our luck: just south of the channel, directed south-east - northwest, there is a short ledge about ten meters deep. We try to drop anchor a couple of times and the anchor holds. Well, if it were to drag..., which will happen around ten o'clock and then takes hold again, we have the entire ocean behind us: I don't believe this wind can change direction and smash us against the barrier.



*Figure 11: The current coming out of the passe continues out to sea*

The water that comes out from the pass is a rushing stream about thirty meters from us, and the side current it's dragging along keeps us at a bit of an angle.

The fine weather that favoured us while we anchored turns into persistent rain.



*Figure 12: The spectacular sunset in complete solitude*

The wind in the night dies down only to pick up again in the morning. The scene is impressive and magnificent. Sea birds crowd above the barrier a short distance from us.

In the afternoon we go swimming while tied to the boat with a rope: the side current around us is strong. The water is crystalline and the bottom immediately behind us plummets into the dark blue abyss. Remoras with the striped jersey swim around us trying to attach to our skins. A giant manta ray enters in the pass without effort: how enviable! Gorgeous coral in bright colors carpets the seabed and a large, abandoned ship chain recalls of a past shipwreck. The sun sets, igniting the edge of the still threatening clouds. What a wonder with the only company of nature!

## **From Monday the 13th to Sunday the 19 June 2016 – Raiatea – Rarotonga**

This morning the wind has markedly died down, and the weather has turned beautiful again. As a catamaran enters in the pass with difficulty, we dedicate ourselves to sorting out a few contacts of the instruments that have shown signs of malfunction. The Chinese wind generator, installed in Tahiti and which never worked after countless tests, turned out to be 12V instead of 24V, naturally met with dismissive refusals from the manufacturer upon requesting a refund. At the first opportunity, it will be uninstalled.

We set sail cautiously for fear of damaging the coral and manage to avoid it. The wind allows us a good speed and the autopilot, with a little less swell, steers effortlessly. The next day the swell does not exceed two meters. Before nightfall we reef the jib, since we're going fast enough anyway and so we avoid complicating any manoeuvre. In fact, during the night the wind exceeds 25 knots and our speed eight. It's worth taking down the mainsail, with some damage to one of the sliders. The sea is quite rough and exceeds 4.5 meters, but in the morning, it settles down.

We passed the first two Cook Islands by sailing between them: Atiu and Takutea. The first one has a small shelter truly too small and risky for us and the second is almost inaccessible.

On Thursday morning we arrive at Rarotonga, after having glimpsed the tall island from afar. The harbor is poorly protected and the tourist basin to the left of the entrance seems a bit too narrow for us. We call via VHF and the manager comes to guide us.

We anchor (a notable exception nowadays), and we approach in reverse with some difficulty due to the unusual maneuver and the wind which chose this moment to pick up. We toss the lines ashore and we labor for a long time to arrange the mooring. The dock



*Figure 13: We see Rarotonga in the morning*

is high and the surge is significant.

We position several spring lines, even from the bow to maintain alignment, and lower the dinghy as a floating gangway. When moving away from the boat or at night we will have to properly slacken the stern lines to avoid collisions with the dock.

We are completing the various procedures: agriculture (health), immigration, and customs. Kindness, cleanliness, and order warmly envelop us. Long live British fair play (the islands are administered by New Zealand)!

We dedicate ourselves to communications with home,

where problems are not lacking, but nothing can be done about it. This is also why I can't convince my wife to join me, poor thing.



*Figure 14: Anchored in the poorly protected port of Rarotonga*

Let's take advantage of the stop to stroll around, to diving and to attend a very beautiful Polynesian dance show at a quite pleasant restaurant-museum.

Finally, Nicoletta leaves me waiting for Riccardo, who arrives in the dead of night.

What a pleasant surprise! We hit it off right away and he's also a good sailor, he claims it and I will personally verify it in the days to come. Truly a great stroke of luck.

## From Monday 20th to Friday 24 June 2016 – Rarotonga – Palmerston

Riccardo comes up with the excellent idea of renting a scooter to look around a little. He will drive it; I wouldn't be too confident. We'd like to visit Palmerston atoll, which is not a "port of entry"—that is, one of those places where you can complete the entry and exit formalities for a country. No one knows anything, neither at the central police and customs office nor at the airport. After numerous trips back and forth (the scooter is perfect) we convince the central office to do the paperwork. They aren't at all convinced it's necessary and would simply let us set sail; a similar lack of bureaucracy I've only seen in Alaska. However, I know very well that when we arrive somewhere else, they will certainly want our papers!



*Figure 15: Farewell, Rarotonga*

We also take some time to look around. With Nicoletta, we

only went as far as it was reachable on foot. Here there is an incredible peace and serenity: a paradise. It's a pity that the barrier is so close to the coast, leaving no room for a lagoon navigable by boat.

Wednesday we set off for Palmerston, 270 miles away, with a steady following wind and a decent four-meter sea: the forward sails are enough. Slowly, the wind and sea become more manageable until we arrive downwind of the atoll. Riccardo spots a cetacean from the deck, which I barely glimpse, but not enough to understand what species it was.



*Figure 16: At the buoy in Palmerston*

At four p.m. on Friday we approach a buoy, following the instructions of the locals we called on the VHF. The seabed is deep, at least thirty meters. They urge us to drop the anchor and a good bit of chain, to ensure we don't end up on the reef if the wind changes direction. To convince us, right opposite us on the beach lies the sad wreck of a boat that did not follow that advice.



*Figure 17: The unhappy remains of an unwise boat*

We will stay here until Monday, guests of the family that allowed us to moor.

This community has a curious history. The atoll was uninhabited and in 1863 a carpenter, William Masters, landed here with three Polynesian wives (!), to each of whom he assigned one of the main "motu." Their descendants still live here, having survived various cyclones that flooded the atoll except for the base of a large mahogany tree where they took refuge.



*Figure 18: Happy guests of the family that has us under its responsibility*

The community follows rules that maintain a relative serenity. They gather on Sundays, all in a church, where we also have been, but one perceives a certain rivalry.

The few sailors who arrive are hosted by the family that owns the mooring buoy.

It falls to us and another just-arrived boat to take Edward's.

## From Saturday 25 to Wednesday 29 June 2016 – Palmerston – Beveridge Reef

The boat rocks gently, feeling the caress of the oceanic swell that fades in the lee of the atoll.

Once, you could enter the lagoon with the boat, but now it is no longer allowed. The family hosting us takes care of transporting us with a launch to shore and bringing us back to the boat. At first, the passage over the reef is heart-stopping: we weave at high speed among the coral heads in a channel that doesn't seem more than a



*Figure 19: Best Explorer moored near the reef*

meter deep, later we will get used to it, but always with excitement.

The other boat next to us is of a French couple from New Caledonia who are heading to Tahiti: quite brave to do the whole journey against the wind! On top of that, their starter motor is burnt out, and I don't know how they will manage to get a replacement

here, lost in the middle of nowhere.



*Figure 20: Walking the deserted beach*

For now, they try to enjoy the hospitality as we do. In exchange for a modest yet well-deserved contribution, we are guests for lunch under the shade of palm trees with tasty Polynesian foods. watered by inexhaustible coconuts filled with their own water, the best and sweetest we have tasted in the Pacific.

We feel truly on vacation: we are led around the island to see the communications center (there is a satellite link for internet and radio reserved for the community), we encounter chickens, piglets and children, and then we are free to wander along the beaches.

The next day, Sunday, we are invited to participate in the Protestant, non-Anglican religious service, attended by all the inhabitants. Women and men sit separately, the men on the left. The women sing with a shrill voice while the men's voices are loud and their

tones are deep. A mixture of ecclesiastical and Polynesian.

Another enjoyable family lunch, then a fruitful feeding session for the fish, which eat our bacon. We really would have liked to eat them ourselves, but such is life...

Here they try to make use of every old piece of machinery, as is customary in many remote places, so we happily give them, and they are pleased to receive them, two rusty emergency pumps we wouldn't have known how to fix and the 12 V wind generator; perhaps some part will be useful to them.

The next day, before leaving, we make a round of goodbyes. So, we see again Arthur, the government envoy who had told us that he could have arranged the exit permits; Bill, who offers us an ice cream; Edward, our caretaker, along with his family who receives the gift of the Cook Islands flag signed with our names.

The wind has shifted and the boat is no longer over the deep blue ocean, but now it rocks over the atoll's platform: that's the reason for anchoring. We take one more swim and then set sail for Niue.

Indeed, our intermediate destination is Beveridge Reef, a submerged atoll in the middle of the ocean, two days' sail away. We are very curious.

Problem: we know that its official position is off by several miles. (Now, almost ten years later, it has been corrected), will we manage to find it? If the sea were calm, the barrier might be visible only from a few hundred meters away. We will have to be particularly cautious.

The wind is steady and the weather is fine. We proceed downwind with all sail aloft.

I held a course that kept us sufficiently upwind, but not too

much. At eight o'clock on Wednesday morning, we tacked to head toward the Reef. The wind and sea had calmed. We sharpen our eyes.

To the left of the bow, there seems to be a kind of mist, perhaps produced by the breakers. Half an hour later, we are certain of it; the white foam is visible.



*Figure 21: Beveridge Reef can only be seen from very close: and it is not in the marked position!*

## Wednesday, June 29 2016 – Beveridge Reef

The last minutes we spent as lookouts hanging from the rigging and scanning the leeward horizon. Now that we have come close enough to see the color change in the sea indicating the submerged edge of the reef we return to the cockpit to skirt it and search for the entrance to the inner lagoon.

Today, images of the atoll taken from the satellite can also be found on Wikipedia where you can clearly see its almost bean-like shape and the entrance at the center of the concave area to the west. The information we then had, however, was minimal. The only way to find it was to go around the barrier until we saw it with our own eyes.

We move cautiously along the windward side, always careful to remain steadily in the deep blue. The submerged barrier to the northwest forms a right angle, turning straight south south west. Suddenly, having "rounded the corner," the remaining ocean swells cease and we sail on a smooth surface, rippled only by the wind which has dropped to a light breeze. We drop down the sails and we start the engine. I reduce the speed because we need to be even more careful: there are no more breakers to mark the limit of the corals.

But how long is it? Without reference points, the log alone gives me no feeling of the distance traveled.

Almost suddenly we find the reef in front of us and simultaneously see the opening we were looking for appear to our left. There's hardly any current. Excellent.

We have a fleeting glimpse of a ten-meter depth of marvelous clarity, then, now inside, the lagoon, a stretch of luminous and extremely clear, incredibly transparent waters draws us to the left: it is the white sandy bottom, almost uniformly about four meters deep.



*Figure 22: The ocean is all around with no land in between*

We are heading slowly northward, avoiding large black blocks scattered about, which up close gain color and reveal themselves to be coral heads (potatoes) isolated in the sand. We advance until we spot the line of breakers on the windward side, then we drop anchor.

What a feeling to be surrounded by water, with no land in sight! It is now two in the afternoon, and we are taking a break for lunch.

We dive near the boat and up to the coral head here alongside. There are fish, but fewer than I would have expected; perhaps these heads are a bit too isolated.

With the coming of the high tide, the waves begin to enter the lagoon and cause Best Explorer to pitch. It certainly does not qualify as a potential refuge in case of cyclones...



*Figure 23: A coral head next to the boat*

A spectacular evening, under a sky as dark as can be imagined, so far from any source of light. The Milky Way rising from the south is a spectacular band of light, accompanied by some of the brightest stars: Rigel Kent and Arcturus above all, and then tonight we also have Jupiter, which almost casts shadows, Mars and Saturn, and no Moon to blind us, what a spectacle!

## From Thursday, June 30 to Friday, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 – Beveridge Reef



*Figure 24: On the reef, the lagoon behind us*

Today, a dinghy trip to the windward reef.

We choose the period of low tide, and with the ocean calming down, the breakers are much less spectacular. In return, you can walk over the reef, barely splashing in the shallow water.

We are very careful to place our shoes, necessary to avoid injury, on stretches where the madrepores' corals appear more compact. We are not entirely sure we are not causing permanent damage.

In our minds, the internal debate on the sustainability of human impact (ours, in particular) on the environment grows deeper every day.

Every living being, by its very presence, has some impact on the environment. This is, or should be, in dynamic equilibrium. Over time, the equilibrium undergoes disturbances from causes we define as natural, but we ourselves are part of nature just like other living beings. Well then: how about that? It seems to us that everything depends on the scale of the phenomenon. Apparently, there is a range of variation within which the system oscillates in a somewhat stable way. The fear, and a very well-founded one, is that maybe even the smallest effect of each of us multiplied by about eight billion is forcing the oscillation beyond the limits of stability.

To return to our stroll, we console ourselves by thinking that our possible damages, however minimal, would only be multiplied here by a few units each year. At least, we hope!

Small electric-blue-lipped giant clams are settled, carving niches with their acids and enlivening the ochre-yellow surface. Everything seems very uniform, but if we stoop down, we can see many tiny animals populating every slightest crevice.

We do not want to cause any further damage, and we move towards the semi-submerged wreck of a small fishing boat lying on the sandy bottom. It is an oasis of life. All around there are numerous cones, the dangerous tropical shells that can even kill a man with their lethal dart if handled. We limit ourselves to looking at them. Here the giant clams are in excellent shape.

In the afternoon, at the next low tide, we move downwind where, at its minimum, a strip of sand exceptionally emerges: we can say with good reason that we are the first humans to set foot upon this land: shall we take possession of it in the name of Italy? What do

you say? Or is it no longer done?



*Figure 25: At low tide a strip of sand emerges downwind*

We barely resist the desire to dive into the sea among the low breakers, through whose waters parrotfish can be seen swimming. We are held back by the fear of possible hidden currents. There are only two of us, and if one of us encountered problems, the other would be in serious difficulty to do anything. Each of us wanders about on our own but always keeping an eye on the other.

The sensation of walking alone on this strip of sand just a few meters wide in the middle of the ocean, with only the boat barely visible upwind, is disturbing, hilarious, thrilling, exciting, unique,... How many other adjectives crowd my spirit, so many that they tangle in my throat and keep me from expressing them all.

The water is rising: we need to get back on the dinghy and return to the boat. In the evening we return to the spot, but the high tide has submerged the sand and we merely pass by the reef.

In fifteen days, Riccardo must depart from Fiji, we cannot stay longer: we still have to travel about eight hundred miles.

This morning, just after getting up, what a coincidence! I see the fenders drifting away from the boat. They are still very close, they just untied themselves. So without a second thought I jump onto the dinghy to go and retrieve them. I load them on board and only now do I find myself with just one paddle, and the wind has already carried me thirty or forty meters away.

Recklessness lurks even for safety maniacs like me. I lie down at the bow and paddle frantically, gaining ten and losing seven with every stroke, but little by little I progress and, exhausted, I cling to the stern platform. Fool! Fool! Fool!

Time to catch our breath, I wake up Riccardo, and set sail. Next stop Niue.

As we go out from the passe in the now practically calm sea, we observe one of the most beautiful sea beds we had ever seen. We regret not having walked here yesterday: it was the place where to dive safely setting out and arriving within the lagoon. Now it's late and unfortunately there will not be a next time!

Course 290° and with the engine and the mainsail hoisted just for stability.

## From Saturday the 2nd to Sunday 3 July 2016 – Beveridge Reef-Niue

For the first time from Tahiti, we are forced to travel this entire leg motoring: there is almost no wind, a highly unusual situation for these latitudes.

When next morning we come within sight of Niue we are surprised by its appearance. Without having carefully read the pilot book, we expected something similar to one of the Cook Islands, but instead we find ourselves circling a kind of cake with sheer walls few tens of meters high and almost flat at the top, all green with trees. It has a strange origin, as a coral block that rose above a volcano that then lifted it. It is also rich in unusual minerals, perhaps drawn from hydrothermal activity.



*Figure 26: With other boats at the buoy in Niue*

It is dark grey and does not offer any shelter, however minimal. They say you have to moor to a buoy. Out at sea off the

island there are a couple of boats with a single person each on board who doesn't seem busy fishing.

We wait a little longer and indeed we reach some buoys. We easily moor to one of them and then prepare to go to the shore with the dinghy for completing the entry procedures. Yes, because Niue is a State, the smallest island State in the world.



*Figure 27: The Niue landing stage with the crane to hoist the dinghies*

Here the seabed is deep, beneath us there are about thirty meters of blue.

A boat is approaching the short wide pier, which is the only usable landing place. Behind it there are some constructions with containers on top and on the left a couple of metal silos stand out. We use the binoculars and observe how they do it. The undertow is quite noticeable and the boat rises and then falls on the waves. One of the occupants jumps ashore onto the last step of a concrete staircase and lowers a hook from a small electrical crane while the

other grabs it and attaches it to the boat, then he gets off as well.

From above the dock they lift the boat and set it down on land.

We will have to do the same. Let's prepare the dinghy's attachment points, which are the same ones we use to place it on our deck. Then we jump aboard with the documents.

The maneuver, this first time, is a bit complicated because we are not used to the movement of the sea along the pier and the necessary balance, but we manage just fine.

A ramp brings us to the level of the upper part of the island, where there is a coastal road that we follow: to our right, a border of flowers and plants before the sea cliff, and to our left lush nature with a few properties.



Figure 28: The Niué Yacht Club

Along the road, an art gallery, an exhibition organized by color of colored plastics found on the beach, informational panels

about the island and its nature and not very far away there is a small multifunctional building on two floors between the street and the sea that hosts the yacht club, where the paperwork is also done. Nobody around.

The small environment is welcoming. There is even a small exchange library.

Everything is quickly done in exchange for a modest mooring fee.

We walk up and down. Some tombs recall someone more illustrious, surrounded by well-kept meadows, cicada, pandans and flowers.

A large sign advertises a water management project also funded by the European Union, imagine it down here. Others indicate the evacuation route in case of a tsunami. The last ones I had seen were in Alaska.

A plaque commemorates the landing site of Cook in 1774, who was met with fierce hostility. An easy staircase leads to the sea, now used for the more peaceful activity of canoeing. The sea here is not very friendly, and if one wishes to deal with it, some experience is needed.

The Protestant religion pervades the island and dictates the rules. In fact tomorrow, Sunday, no activities are permitted, except for walking. Bathing especially is strictly forbidden, even from the boat.

A boat with a Japanese couple spins like crazy around the buoy. We watch her for a while, ready to help; receiving a signal is all it would take. But then they manage, we don't understand what problem they had.

The boats offshore stand guard awaiting the arrival of the

whales, expected in these days, to prevent any disturbance to the animals.

We bought some fresh supplies at the supermarket, but we practically didn't manage to have any contact with the locals. We remain somewhat disappointed.

## From Monday the 4th to Wednesday 6 – Thursday 7 July 2016 – Niue– Tonga

To leave in the morning, in the evening, or at night when there are hundreds and hundreds of miles to grind away does not make any difference, so we take advantage of the free day to take a walk to the left, instead of towards the right. There aren't many alternatives.

On this side there's also a supermarket where we do some shopping, before heading back to the Yacht Club and completing the departure formalities.

The day is windy, so when we cast off from the buoy we can hoist only the yankee, which allows us a quiet night. In the morning we also hoist the staysail: the sea has risen to just under four meters



*Figure 29: Approaching Tonga*

with the wind a bit more manageable. The autopilot relieves us of

much of the effort. In the evening we even manage to jibe, imagine that, after twenty-four hours on the same tack. It's not the first time. Now the wind has shifted 90 degrees and is blowing from ESE.

The next day we pass over the Tonga Trench again at night, more than 9,000 meters beneath the keel, but we notice no difference, with secret disappointment. There is a lot of rolling and pitching. In the northern sky before dawn, the constellations of Orion and the Pleiades reappear for the first time.

At 1:30 PM we allow ourselves another change of course and shortly after we sight the cliff just over two hundred meters high of Vava'u, the northernmost of the Tonga islands, with rocky and steep coasts covered in lush vegetation.



*Figure 30: Neiafu*

Entering the leeward labyrinth of the island is interesting: a nature different from those encountered so far and an inhabited coast. We moor at the customs wharf of Neiafu and we change the time and date, having passed another fifteen degrees of longitude

and the date change line! We crossed the other great circle, but this one, unlike the equator, is conventional and does not imply, as far as I know, any passage ritual.

## From Friday 8th to Thursday 14 July 2016 – Tonga – Vanua Levu, Fiji

We waited until the morning after our arrival to go and complete the arrival formalities in this new nation. The building is on the harbor pier, so once finished, we walk around a bit to get a feel for the country.

Near the port there is also the covered market and, outside, fish sellers who display inside metal tubs or on simple black plastic bags a very colorful variety of reef fish and crustaceans.



*Figure 31: Fish on display at the open market*

I recognize some of them: porcupine fish, squirrelfish, lobsters, crabs, and very colorful parrotfish, all scattered somewhat haphazardly, though perhaps many have already been sold. We are surprised by this selection, which in Polynesia was much more limited, especially for parrotfish, which were almost certainly carriers of the dangerous "Ciguatera", that intoxication caused by a toxin carried

by bacteria living in the coral environment and which leads to serious neurological dysfunctions.



*Figure 32: The vegetable market*

The population has a completely different appearance from the Polynesians., they seem shorter and bulkier and they have features closer to Asians. They wear skirts, even the men, and many have a plant-fiber overskirt made of light-colored woven fibers, which they will tell us is a sign that there has been a death in the (extended) family in the preceding months.

It's raining and we don't feel like going out, so when we find ourselves stopping at the restaurant "Bellavista" (sic), with a truly beautiful view of the harbor inlet, we enter and have the mild surprise of being greeted in Italian by a Toganian lady. She is the wife of the likable Mario, whom we will visit again, and who tells us a few anecdotes about Tonga and about his life.

We will also meet another Italian and we will come to the

realization that both, for different reasons, have found here a refuge from justice. We will, in fact, be informed, among other things, of how to bring suitcases of prohibited shells into Italy... which we will be careful not to do

But the food there is excellent, and Mario confirms to us that there is no danger of ciguatera: It's the only place where we allowed ourselves to eat parrotfish: exquisite!



*Figure 33: A killer whale drawn on a Tapa*

We also go to refill the gas cylinders which empty with alarming speed. There must be a leak, but I haven't located it yet.

In the two following days, with good weather finally returned, we go nearby to swim. We find a small island with shallow seabed where anchoring is easy (among the islands the bottom is almost uniformly between sixty and seventy meters deep).

The coral here is not spectacular, but to make up for it, we

witness the arrival of several humpback whales. We see terns and seagulls diving onto schools of fish that we try unsuccessfully to attract with our fishing lines. Once back on land, we do a bit of shopping. The intriguing drawings (I bought the one of an orca) on the curious "tapa", a type of paper obtained by beating the bark of the paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) with a laborious procedure.

We have about three hundred miles to go before we reach the island Savusavu in Fiji and since we don't have time to head south to visit the rest of the vast Tonga archipelago, we set sail westward with little wind and calm seas.

The next day the wind arrives and gradually strengthens. We pay close attention to the course because we must cross the Lau group, the easternmost islands of the vast Fiji archipelago, which could also be very interesting, but it is unclear whether they are closed to foreign visitors or not.

Fiji has rather particular customs, I will tell you about them further on.

The entrance to Savusavu on Vanua Levu, the second largest island of the archipelago, is easy, but it is not clear how we should behave until via radio we understand that one must anchor outside of the inner harbour basin which we think we are doing correctly.

There, we are met by the health control boat, and they immediately are overreacting: you have exceeded the quarantine limit, I must fine you two thousand dollars (Fijian, about €900)!

Miiiiii....!

In these cases, I, without great effort, present myself as the mildest of men, also because I was morally innocent.

The official proceeds with the inspection of the boat anyway and, not having found any mosquitoes, which were his main concern

for an epidemic of zika in force, he shows himself conciliatory and gives us permission to dock, canceling the fine!!!

## From Thursday 14th to Monday 25 July 2016 – Vanua Levu, Fiji

The health official has departed. We leave from the uncomfortable position they had imposed on us and go to moor at one of the wooden piers of Copra Shed Marina.



*Figure 34: Moored at Copra Shed Marina*

We are on the eastern side of the bay of Savusavu in a channel of a bend protected by a pair of islets and with shallows all around. The marina offered a bathroom, laundry, and everything else we'd been missing since we left Raiatea.



*Figure 36: One of the trees felled by the cyclone*



*Figure 35: Coconut palms abraded by the wind*

We can relax: Riccardo will depart from here in a couple of

days. So tomorrow we will complete the entry procedures and those required for navigating in the island waters, a peculiarity of Fiji, and with Riccardo's help we fix, with uncertain success, a few appliances on the mast and some lights on deck.

Then we rent some scooters and dedicate ourselves to wandering around here.

There are signs of the recent tropical cyclone that devastated many parts of the islands. In this area it did less damage, but there are some enormous uprooted trees and areas where the coconut palms have abrasions on their trunks from the windup arriving to showing the orange-colored bark.



*Figure 37: A sensitive*

We slip onto a dirt road that leads into the damp and lush interior, with herds of cows, areas where the forest has been cut and now the meadows host plots with sheet metal shacks with laundry hung out to dry, edged by banana trees and vibrantly colorful ornamental plants.

We head back towards the coast, observing up close tidal areas with mangroves, which we hadn't seen since Baja California, and along the edges of the road I point out to Riccardo the sensitive plants, with leaves like those of mimosa that close at the slightest touch.

The people we meet are very polite and friendly. We are satisfied to have respected all roadmap with this little head start that allowed us

a nice trip. The next day Riccardo must leave and it would have been a shame not to have seen together the surroundings.

I will stay here a week more before leaving for Viti Levu. It



*Figure 38: The poor abandoned Melinda*

will be my first solo experience because I can't find anyone here who can accompany me. I'm damned worried of my ability to manage, not so much for navigation, as for the emergence of problems like the one that occupied me last year at the entrance to Port Phaeton.

I have made several friends and their company helps pass the time that remains after fighting, especially against the winches which are increasingly stubborn. One never finishes fixing problems: to reduce them significantly, the boat would now require a complete overhaul of the systems, which is currently unfeasible.

I console myself by looking at Melinda, a ketch that has been here for who knows how long and now lies in a pitiful state.



*Figure 39: A marvelous sunset from the Marina*

I draw the possible route with daily legs. When I leave the weather is beautiful. There is a narrow passage through the reefs at midday, but the visibility is good and I pass through it well despite the contrary current of one and a half knots.

I am enjoying myself with this new experience: it is exciting and relaxing at the same time.

In mid-afternoon, I choose to drop anchor between two arms of a reef that form a kind of bay at Coconut Point. The anchorage is a bit exposed at high tide. As a precaution, I set up a trip line, and despite rocking a bit, I feel well settled for the night.

## **From Tuesday 26 to Thursday 28 July 2016 – From Vanua Levu to Viti Levu, Fiji**

I get up early and go out on deck to check the situation: the wind has picked up and is at about twenty knots. From east-southeast with a splendid sun. I start the engine and prepare to set sail with great caution, taking care that the anchor does not break ground unexpectedly: the aft space is not much and I would drift in an instant onto the barrier. The boat displaces around 28 tonnes and her inertia is considerable.

The damned windlass jams when there are still twenty meters of chain left (the depth is thirteen meters). I have no other solution but to use the jib winches (by hand) using the long lines that we keep on the stern rollers knotting them on the chain with rolling hitches. First, I pull out about ten meters of chain from the well to allow it to glide towards the stern, then I begin to haul the lines by hand, using forward gear now and then to keep my distance from the barrier.

Particularly dangerous is the time I lose once I have recovered five to seven meters of chain to knot the second line and position it on the winch on the other side. Then I put it under tension and release the first one, bring part of the recovered chain to the bow. I repeat the maneuver on the other side, always with several stops while using the motor to advance a bit.

The effort is making itself felt and I am panting heavily. In the end I am also using the trip line and finally the anchor is put on deck and the boat is not gone on the rocks.

I leave the shelter/trap and dedicate myself for a while to tidying up on deck the chain and the lines. Then I hoist the mainsail and yankee and I set course for one of the outer barrier passages.

The Fiji archipelago has two main islands surrounded by the reef: Viti Levu southwest and Venua Levu to the northeast. Between the two lies a very deep, elliptical body of water about sixty miles wide: Bligh Water. I must exit the reef of Viti Levu, sail for thirty-five miles in deep waters and then enter the coastal channel of Viti Levu where I will anchor for the night.



*Figure 40: Strong wind over Bligh Water*

The navigation quickly becomes exciting: I stripped completely and enjoy the sun and the wind in complete freedom, sailing at eight knots.

Midway between the two islands, the barrier stops protecting me from the rising sea, but by now I have left the reef, which always risks showing some surprises and I become intoxicated by the navigation, very careful not to risk ending up in the water because I did not want to wear the safety belt as an extraordinary exception to my own rules.

A pod of dolphins comes to greet me and I exceptionally capture a fish as well, which, however, breaks free due to the excessive speed, which I have no intention of reducing.

I am running along the leeward barrier at Viti Levu until the passe which opens to the north of a good anchorage where I can enter under sail without difficulty.



*Figure 41: Viti Levu from my anchoring point*

I take the following day off to search for the origin of the (electrical) failure in the winch and to repair it by replacing the command relay and thoroughly cleaning all the contacts: I think they were causing an increase in resistance with a resulting rise in amperage and thermal overload.

Reappears on board a Gecko I thought had only made a temporary visit. They are fantastic hunters of cockroaches, in the case there had been some on board. We experienced it many years ago right here on Franco Malingri's boat. Now it has to limit to catch mosquitoes. I notice Vuda Marina of my arrival.

The next day I leave early and, with the engine running in the coastal channel, I head towards my goal. The journey is a bit boring, brightened only by the encounter with a humpback whale.

The mountainous island is covered in yellowish grasslands, completely different, perhaps due to the different exposure, from the wooded Vanua Levu.



*Figure 42: The entrance to Nadi Marina*

Arrived to the marina I find an easy docking spot at the end of the entrance canal. Sailing solo was much better than I had feared, but I prefer to be in company.

A couple comes to help me and I have the pleasant surprise to meet again after ten years Lizzi Eordegh and Carlo Auriemma, whom we had met during our previous visit, a pity that they must leave the next day for one of their trips among the islands.

The meeting is significant: their previous boat was substantially the same hull as Best Explorer's one rigged a little differently

and it was precisely here at that moment that we decided to buy a steel boat, thus starting our navigation.

## **From Friday 29th July to Sunday, August 7 2016 – Viti Levu, Fiji**

The marina hasn't changed much since we were here ten years ago, I found myself home. They make me change moorings further inside, it's more comfortable. There's always some little maintenance to do while I wait for Nicoletta, Elisabetta, and Claudio to arrive. With them, we'll go back to visit the islands we visited years ago: they are very beautiful places, and having already been there, we know the anchorages.

Unlike other nations, here the waters around the islands are owned by the facing villages, and one must offer their chief a sample of kava, a slightly euphoric root, to obtain permission to anchor. This is because you are under his protection and responsibility, and he is free to accept it or not. The tradition in the more frequented places is fading, but in anticipation of anchoring in front of at least one of them, I buy a bundle of roots at the market, which resemble dry twigs.

Nicoletta brought a quantity of spare parts with her from Italy, and while Elisabetta and Claudio are settling in, we use a number of them.



*Figure 43: Best Explorer at anchor in Mana Lagoon*

The day after we leave for Malolo, a mooring that had gifted us a wonderful underwater spectacle. Unfortunately, it's all destroyed by the last cyclone. We move right after that to Mana, where there is a spectacular lagoon with a complicated entrance and a protected mooring in front of a long white beach.

It is so beautiful that we stay there for two nights, strolling along the beach and swimming in the lagoon and along the almost exposed reef.

We begin to see some flying foxes again, enormous fruit-eating bats that hang from the branches of trees inland and become active mainly at night.

Elisabetta has already been with us, but for Claudio it's his first time and he's struggling a bit to adapt, especially because during high tide, as it is normal, the waves overcome more easily the barrier and the boat moves a little more.

We then move to Navandra and along the way we have the chance to see two humpback whales and some dolphins. Then at Waya Island. A fisherman sells us a magnificent trevally which, under Nicoletta's expert cooking, finally restores the smile to Claudio's face.

At each stop, we enjoy exploring the surroundings by dinghy and snorkeling. The seabeds are all severely damaged, especially in the first eight to ten meters, whereas below that, the coral seems to have held up better. The waves, fresh rainwater, and sediments torn from the ground have been deadly.

Finally, we reach the Blue Lagoon, in the group of the Yasawa. Faithful to the teachings of Fausto Maligri, with whom we explored these areas, we secure the anchors with a trip line, but by now I have great confidence in the holding power of our anchor.

The weather turns rainy and we stay in the boat after presenting the kava to the chief. The one we knew is dead and now it is his son who receives it: he suggests we perform the ceremony on our boat instead of in his hut.

Last time, we were also hosted for a Fijian lunch with food cooked in an underground oven wrapped in freshly woven palm mats, with various cockroaches scurrying over the food. Very exotic, but perhaps on Best Explorer it will be better.

## From Monday 8 to Sunday 14 August 2016 – Viti Levu, Fiji

For the Kava ceremony the root should be crushed in a mortar until it is reduced to powder, then it is placed inside a cloth (the old chief had put it in a sock, we do not know if he had cleaned it first...) which is wrung out into a basin of water until it becomes cloudy. The ceremony leader takes a bowl made from a coconut shell, collects a bit of the liquid, offers it ceremonially to each of the attendees one by one, who say "bulaaa", then he drinks and pass on the bowl. The ceremony is repeated for each participant in turn. And people chat.



*Figure 44: Mangroves near Blue Lagoon*

That day it is gray and raining and we stayed on the boat. When the chief arrives with a friend, I go ashore with him and we go to pound the root at the house of someone from the village who has the appropriate mortar and we gift him half of the powder.



*Figure 45: Anchored near Blue Lagoon*

It is fun to take part in a small slice of local life. Sitting in the boat around the octagon (that's what we call our table), we stay for a long time. Chatting pleasantly. Kava is not a drug: it only makes you slightly euphoric. Like after a good glass of wine, nothing more no matter how much one drinks. They tell me that in other places, like Vanuatu, the root is much stronger, but we won't have the chance to check it.

The next day it rains again, but tired of staying on the boat and given the warm weather, we go around in the dinghy, skimming the mangroves and then going for a walk along the beach.

Ten years ago, the walk in good weather had been much more interesting. The beach teemed with shells and various other marine life, but now we only see a few crabs and a few hermit crabs. Our friends are a little disappointed, and rightly so.

Then again walking and a bit of swimming, but it only drizzles and it's grey.



*Figure 46: A very worried crab*

I do not think it wise to venture further, although Lau, an island a little beyond, is a very interesting destination, with its karst rock hill, a cave with a tunnel joining it to the sea and the flying foxes that settle on the trees clinging to the rocks.

But we would lose too much time, so let's go back to Somosomo Bay, the weather finally improves.

The bay is a wide, solitary crescent of white sand with a border of palm trees. The spectacle otherwise soothing is absolutely distressing: after the cyclone passed, only the trunks of the palm trees remain. All the crowns of leaves have been carried away. Even the rocks that here and there darken the clear water have been milled. We stop only one night and this time do not go to pay homage to the village chief who remains hidden behind the southwestern tip.

No one comes to disturb us.

Last time instead we had brought some medicine ashore for a child who was ill, since the doctor wasn't expected there for weeks.

The weather has definitively turned good again and before we return to the marina we have time to do a bit of snorkeling in front of the reef of Vomo, the last little island before arrival.

The walls drop vertically for about ten meters and one notices more than elsewhere strong signs of coral recovery, difficult to understand why.

Coral colonies grow very rapidly and navigating the immense lagoon we had learned to carefully observe the colors of the water to spot them, it is the only way: the nautical charts cannot be updated quickly enough. I would say that after two years in the Pacific, we have now developed an eye for it.

Moored to the marina we are preparing for the departure of Elisabetta and Claudio who, aided by the good weather of recent days, leave us rather happy.

We prepare the boat for the arrival of the next guest, whom we have only met via email, and who will be with us until Vanuatu.

## From Monday the 15th to Friday 19 August 2016 – Viti Levu - Tanna, Fiji – Vanuatu

Yesterday I went to welcome our new Guest, it seems less flexible than I had expected. We'll set our course anyway in the afternoon, heading out from the western pass while there is still light: the tide is ebbing and the current is outgoing. There is a noticeable overfall. The ocean isn't very rough, though. I expected worse given that it blows twenty knots from the south southwest.

During the night, the wind dies down, and so, after a few attempts and breakages, we hoist the MPS, a light sail almost never used, which stays up only briefly because the wind strengthens again.

To our great surprise, we catch a fine *skipjack* tuna weighing a full five kilos! Nicoletta, always sensitive to the killing of animals, is not happy, but she cooks it quite well for us.

The pace is easy and it's time to let our guest experience the thrill of the helm. He holds it for less than a minute (poorly) and then gives it back to us: "I didn't come on a boat to work, you know!". No comment!

At dinner, with the autopilot engaged, we try to relax him with a bit of conversation. He tells of his mishaps and fractures. To show solidarity, I also mention I suffered fractures myself. "Ah, but mine are much worse!". We did not attempt socializing any more.

The next day the sky becomes overcast and there is a light rain. The wind steadily strengthens from the same general direction and the sea consequently rises to four meters, so much so that we must let the autopilot rest. We take watches, the two of us alternating. We are having a bit of a hard time. The rain cover effectively protects us from the downpours.

The following day remains overcast, but during the daytime

the sea becomes more regular while a booby accompanies us for hours, staying downwind. As night falls, we sight the island of West Futuna to the south, the easternmost of Vanuatu. We are headed to Port Resolution, at Tanna, where we requested and obtained special arrival permission, it not being a "Port of Entry."

At dawn, right at the bow, it seems to us we glimpse from time to time a red light switching on and off. However it is easily concealed by the yankee. It takes a while, then we realize that it's not a boat nor a lighthouse, but it is the occasional reflection of the volcanic explosions from Mount Yasur! Fantastic and thrilling.



*Figure 47: Port Resolution from the beach*

Port Resolution, the first local stop of Captain Cook, is a sheltered bay right under the volcano. We enter cautiously because the charts are approximate, but it is not difficult then to find a suitable spot to drop anchor in just five meters of white sandy bottom. It is early morning and we wait to understand how to complete the entry formalities. The matter is very unusual.

## Friday 19 August 2016 – Tanna, Vanuatu

So, here we are at the Port Resolution. After a few days of rough seas, the bay seems a paradise of serenity. Following a tricky entrance due to lack of detail on the charts, keeping the reef to our left and the breakers against the rocks beneath the volcanic slopes to our right, with an eye on the depth sounder we anchored on the bright white sand. All around us the lush forest, above us plumes of black smoke billowing from the mouth of the volcano accompanied by its deep rumbling. The sun is already beating down and it's only eight-thirty.



*Figure 48: A visitor from prehistory*

In the bay there are two canoes with a fisherman each, dark. I take the binoculars and what I see fills me with wonder: they are monoxyle pirogues, that is, dug out of a single tree trunk with an outrigger beside them. We have suddenly been thrown back thousands of years in time! Aside from the rumble of the volcano, there is

not the slightest sound around.

We don't know what to do or who to call: no one is responding on the radio.

The tip of the bay designs a small rocky hook inward, and there appears a well dark guy that waves us. He launches a canoe, also a dugout, into the sea and paddles toward us.

He comes close and introduces himself: his name is Stanley and he is the local factotum. He tells us we must wait for the customs officer, whom he will now notify. We wonder how he will do it.

With the utmost naturalness, standing on the canoe from thousands of years ago, he pulls from the pocket of his shorts (thank goodness the clothing, though minimal, is appropriate for our time) a iphone and he calls the customs office. We almost fall into the water from amazement: modernity and prehistory side by side!

In time, the officer we are going to meet arrives on the shore. He loads us onto his pickup truck and we set off on the road toward Lenakel, the capital city.

The road, first unpaved then asphalted, winds through the forest. The official is very cordial and shows us the basketball courts: he is also the promoter of the diffusion of sports among the local youth, even with organized championships.

In half an hour we arrive at the foot of the Yasur volcano, where there is an organized visitor center. Immediately beyond, the road passes next to the volcanic cone, only three hundred meters high, covered with the ash that every few minutes is emitted from the crater hidden behind the summit.



*Figure 49: Yasur smokes and grumbles*

The road continues ascending a ridge from which you can see almost the entire island as the vegetation becomes lower and more bushy. The pickup truck is uncomfortable, but since we are settled in the cargo bed, the view is unobstructed in all directions.



*Figure 50: Lenakel Market*

At Lenakel it feels like being in Africa: the same gigantic trees sprouting from the reddish earth with vendors offering their wares spread out on colorful cloths on the bare earth. The same basic single-story houses, a small building housing the police, where we stamp our passports (the rest of the paperwork will be done when we reach the capital Port Vila, on the island of Efate), no possibility to change currency except at a resort, where they do us that courtesy and where we eat something.

On the way back, they make us get on with several residents on another pick-up, even more uncomfortable, serving as a bus. We go back along the same road, which has signs indicating that it is a gift (!) from the Chinese.

We look more closely at the forest, and now we notice that many trees are not palms, but tree ferns with the elegant pattern left on the trunk by the fallen branches.

Arriving at the bay, we spot a shed with a nice lawn around it

on the flat area above the point: tomorrow we will come to see the place.

This island is the wildest I have visited so far. We agree with Stanley to go tomorrow to the volcano center visit, we are excited at the mere thought.

## Saturday, 16 August 2016 – Tanna, Vanuatu

Our guest is so obsessed with planning that he speaks at length of the future university career he plans for his daughters, who are only ten! The poor girls! He would like to decide immediately what to do next, I wouldn't say every minute, but certainly every day of his intended stay, without knowing what even the next step holds in store for us, even less the weather.



*Figure 51: One of the fumaroles of Yasur*

This island is so different from the others we visited that we, instead, are full of curiosity and we expect multiple surprises at every step. Among these the visit to the volcano is scheduled (this one yes) for the afternoon, so in the morning we pass the time exploring the shore of the bay, giving a glance from the dinghy at the intriguing puffs of steam blowing from the rocks on the north side. They are hot springs that come directly from the slopes of Yasur.

It's not a good idea to dive here into the water though: we'd

get burned or worse!

Then we go to meet some indigenous people who are cooking food: they use the hot springs that gush from the base of the rocks gurgling along the beach! They burn!



*Figure 52: A geothermal steamed banana*

We stay with them for a while, enjoying some tastings, warmly welcomed. They have a very different look from Polynesians, more like what I imagine is typical of Australians or Papuans: dark, curly hair, broad noses, pleasant. The children are very cute. Here too, as in all the isolated communities we have encountered since the far north, the children are calm and serene. It makes one reflect on how we are—"advanced"...

We walk along the beach examining the details of a couple of monoxyle pirogues pulled ashore and we'll look at the area behind the bushes along the beach: it is the village of scattered huts where the indigenous people we saw earlier live, clean and full of flowers.



*Figure 53: The interior of the Port Resolution Yacht Club*

Then we go to visit the “Yacht Club” on the tip. The esplanade on which it stands is a meadow among palm trees, banana plants, and other tropical vegetation on which some huts stand likely intended for tourists.

The main building, aside from a few sparsely furnished rooms, consists of a large shed that shelters several big tables and a worn-out sofa on which a calm old dog rests. Beneath the tin roof hang many flags, both national and from various regatta-cruises that have made a stop here. There is no one around.

We too will add our pennant when we return here.

While waiting for the trip to the volcano we invite Stanley to have lunch with us on board, we are also told some local anecdotes, especially about the many cults that flourish vibrantly here.

Figure54 Since the text you provided appears to be a com-

puter-generated filename (`vlcsnap-2025-03-13-17h40m38s234.png`), it does not contain translatable language content. It is a name for a file, likely a screenshot from the VLC media player, capturing a moment at 17:40:38.234 on March 13, 2025. Following your instruction to "return the original text as is" if it cannot be translated, the response is: vlcsnap-2025-03-13-17h40m38s234.png One of the fumaroles of Yasur

## **From Saturday 20 to Monday 22 August 2016 – Tanna– Port Vila, Vanuatu**

The time for the visit to the volcano has come, without us yet fully understanding what it means.

Stanley carries us into the pickup truck and drives us along the road we already know to the entrance of the organized tour, where we receive our first instructions.

Shortly afterwards, we are welcomed by the local tribe, who perform a propitiatory dance to ingratiate themselves with the god of Yasur (the volcano).



*Figure 55: Dancers at Yasur Volcano*

What an incredible difference from the colorful and complex choreographed Polynesian dances! Here, the ritual transports us back tens of thousands of years: from the attire made of palm leaf skirts, to the rhythms marked by a drum, to the simple procession of people rotating and beating time with their feet, and finally to the foreign

aspect of the physiognomies.

It does not seem that the repetition of the dance, which undoubtedly occurs every day, makes the participants in the dance less involved. We gradually become so as well.

Then, having boarded a shuttle from the Visitor Center, we climb up the roadway that leads below the summit, and here the trip takes us even further back into the past.



*Figure 56: The fern forest at the foot of the volcano*

Having emerged from the steepest part, where tree ferns thrive nonetheless, we come out into a small valley where they form a veritable forest. In an instant, one expects seeing a roaring Tyrannosaurus to burst forth from it, in the presence of the ash cone that now towers smoking beside us.

The last stretch is done on foot, climbing with the aid of wooden steps to the rim of the crater. And here, the interest reaches its peak.

From the sandy edge, after a first leap, opens the active, reddish and smoking chasm, next to another one further away, less active.

The roaring explosions follow one another with launches of sprays of glowing red lava and stones and lapilli that fortunately fall back within the first slope.



*Figure 57: One of the spectacular lava fountains*

We sit atop the ridge waiting for the sun to set, half-hidden by the haze, so we can watch the nighttime spectacle.

Beneath our seats, the ground trembles with each spectacular explosion.

Our guest is quite pale: we would have thought him much braver! He struggles not to jump up and run away. We, on the other hand, are excited and calm and perceive no danger, nor do the guides accompanying us show any signs of nervousness. The volcano generally does not erupt lava, but confines itself to these displays.

Some larger stones come close to the edge, and the lava fountains become more evident as the light diminishes, while the air cools.

Look at a video of our visit to Tanna:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkO4gFdpOh4>

In the darkness, not yet satisfied, we must return. Our guest remains silent for the rest of the time while we do not stop reminiscing about the spectacle: I realize we must have been obnoxious.

The next day, after a morning of rain had passed and after saying goodbye to Stanley and meeting a young fisherman with a bow and arrows (!) we set sail for Port Vila and soon encounter a rough sea and wind up to thirty knots, which then during the night subsides, though leaving us with an annoying swell.



*Figure 58: The Fisherman with Bow and Arrow*

The entrance to the bay is interesting because of the seabed,

which varies irregularly. We anchor outside the quarantine docks.

Under a torrential rain we go by dinghy to the appropriate office. I must assert myself over our guest who is getting nervous about the (not even excessive) slowness of the officer, bypassing me and attacking him with foul words that he, fortunately, does not understand. The guy is increasingly likable! Having regained control and obtained the permit, we proceed towards the yacht club (a real one, this time) where we moor properly.

Right next to our stern, in the water among the rocks, a sea snake with a black and white striped livery is resting, the first one we've seen.

## **From Tuesday, August 23 to Friday, August 26, 2016 – Port Vila-, Vanuatu**

Our guest gets often nervous because we don't plan our trip more precisely, but, just as an example, no one warned us that there would be a torrential rain this morning. So much so that he himself didn't seem now too eager to set sail.

In the early afternoon, we set sail anyway to head to the north of the island where it seems to us there is a sheltered inlet. Our long journey is in fact all an exploration: we go to places that are not described by any accessible publication and try to imagine what the anchorages will be like from the scant information that can be inferred by looking at nautical charts.

Port Havannah –Matapu Bay is protected by a long island covered, as everywhere here, by dense greenery and frequented by a fisherman in his now customary dugout canoe with children on board. Countless fish leap out of the water.

We go by dinghy to snoop around a very large sailboat that has run badly aground on the shore of the island that protects us. It's been abandoned there since long due to a series of bureaucratic and customs problems. I would say that many large boats are often property of people with questionable reputations!

That night is deeply quiet, and we are enjoying a magnificent starry sky.

We could convince our guest, who would like to go to the far island of Ambrym to see the volcano's lava lake, to go there on his own from Port Vila. Ambrym is far enough to occupy almost all the time we have left in hurried crossings. So we will only go as far as the island of Epi, a little further north: it is the most reasonable destination.



*Figure 59: Lamén Bay*

So we arrive early in the morning under downpours of rain that prevent us from seeing the island, which seems very wild. The bay, Lamén Bay, has a smooth seabed and we anchor near a pier that will be convenient for going ashore. The bay is supposed to harbor some sea cows, which we hope to spot.

We go ashore and walk along the only dirt road by the bay that leads to some huts, but we do not make any contact there.

Coming back, we dedicate ourselves to wandering around the bay by dinghy and doing a bit of snorkeling. We have no luck and no sea cow appears, only a large turtle that lets us approach.

Time is tight and after dinner we set sail, since it's only Nicoletta and I sailing: our guest who is not interested in sailing can rest anyway, whether it's day or night. In fact, if we cross by night he can enjoy the daylight hours near the coast.



*Figure 60: The Lamien Bay turtle*

Before arriving in Port Vila while the sky is always overcast, I caught a beautiful mahi-mahi (dorade or dolphin) very much fighting which I estimate weighs at least ten kilograms. Not having a grappling hook unfortunately I lose it when it was already almost on the boat and the line terminal broke. Fishing is not my thing!

Back at the mooring at the Yacht Club, our guest prepares to go catch his flight, and we breathe a sigh of relief: if you haven't figured it out yet, we didn't like him at all.

## **From Saturday 27 august to Sunday, September 4 - Port Vila - Tanna, Vanuatu-Pine Island, New Caledonia**

Today the weather is nice and there is movement: Antonio, Enzo, and Roberto are coming, three excellent sailors, we'll have fun!

The supplies are done and the minor maintenance is finished. Nicoletta has left, we are preparing to set sail again with destination Port Resolution. I believe our friends will be curious to take a look at the volcano and its surroundings.

I can relax a little: now we can do four three-hour watches with a nice rest period for everyone. This last part of this year's navigation promises to be good: the weather is fine and shortly after departure we even catch a fine skipjack tuna weighing a couple of kilograms. Every catch is an event, they are so rare!



*Figure 61: The Port Relolution steaming vent*

The good weather does not last. The next day the sky is

overcast. As we approach Tanna, the wind carries the volcano's smoke above us and the boat becomes covered in dark ash. Upon arrival in the now-familiar bay, we anchor in the rain.

I plan to stay here for three days and on the first day I'll take my friends to visit the hot springs on the beach and the steam vent in the middle of the forest that we hadn't visited yet.



*Figure 62: One of the giant ficus trees in the forest*

We enjoy the profusion of plants and flowers along the walk, while the steam emission is in a moment of relative calm, less spectacular than our expectations.

On the beach we find Sarah again, the Melanesian woman who had already welcomed us last time.

The next day we go to Lenakel to have the passports stamped for departure. It's a pity we didn't think of it in Port Vila, where we might perhaps have completed the exit early.



*Figure 63: Our friends with Sarah*

We spend a lot of time, but wandering around the small settlement and observing its life is not at all a wasted time.

The next day we renew our visit to the volcano. I'm sorry for my friends, but this time we are not lucky: the wind is from an unfavourable direction. We must move to the opposite side of the ridge compared to the previous time, but we are almost immediately enveloped by the suffocating cloud of fumes from the crater, which makes us cough and flee hastily to avoid choking.

During our final visit to the Yacht Club, we leave our burgee as we had promised ourselves.

The next day we set sail early, heading towards New Caledonia, skirting the island from the south and encountering a very unpleasant cross sea with over twenty knots and waves that wash over the deck, seeping in from below as well, a circumstance for us completely exceptional.



*Figure 64: Our pennant in the Port Resolution Yacht Club*

At night we even must reduce the surface of the yankee, the only sail left, but in the end I decide to take shelter behind the north bay of Mare island because the three-meter waves have worn us out, making this the least pleasant leg of the entire journey during this year.

The choice of anchorage is unfortunate: protected from the open sea it is but open to the swell. This time we also hoist the mainsail and with a good close-hauled tack we anchor again just north of the town of Tadine later to be driven out by a warden: it is a protected area, but it is not marked on the map! We finally find rest south of the town pier. We are heartened by the visit of a humpback whale with her calf.

We rest a little, but then we set sail after nightfall to arrive at daybreak at the barrier that joins Grande Terre of New Caledonia to the Isle of Pines, our destination. The passage is coral and it is best to cross it with good visibility.



*Figure 65: The Kuto Bay at Isle of Pines*

Everything goes smoothly and we go to anchor in the center of Kuto Bay in six meters of water, along with several other boats. We are surrounded by a white beach lined with the famous pines, that is, the araucarias typical of this island.

The water is not clear and we do not trust swimming after seeing a beautiful sea snake appear under the bow. They say they are shy and do not bite, but being extremely venomous and not being able to see them...

## From Monday 5 to Tuesday 6 September 2016 – Isle of Pines – Nouméa, New Caledonia

Today we devote ourselves to the visit of the Isle of Pines, of which they speak wonders.

We will not be disappointed. Our first stop is at the "piscine", a series of small coves lined with araucaria trees and dotted with stony corals. The walk to get there is already full of wonders: we pass through a narrow stretch of sea now left dry by the tide, on whose bottom hundreds of colorful fiddler crabs have emerged from their burrows while they display their large claw to signal their prowess.



*Figure 66: The monument to the Sacred Heart with the crown of totems*

We walk beneath the towering araucarias, the "pines," which rise slender, dense, and dark, creating an incongruous mountain effect at the latitude of the tropics.



*Figure 67: Some of the totems*



*Figure 68: The outrigger canoe*

We happily bathe in one of the pools, resisting the tempta-

tion to go further for snorkeling, because a panoramic reconnaissance tour still awaits us.

Further ahead we stop at Vao, with its curious white church adorned with colorful decorative lines and the monument to the Sacred Heart surrounded by a circular palisade of carved wooden totems.

Beside us on the beach, a sailing outrigger canoe is pulled ashore, which we stop to examine in detail just as another glides past us, light upon the shallow, transparent water: an image from another time.



*Figure 69: A fiddler crab*

We are not going back on the boat without a stop at a scenic spot to take a souvenir photo.

I cannot help but feel at least a little regret for the choice to undertake long sea voyages, a choice that deprives me of the pleasure of exploring more deeply the places I visit. Here in the Pacific, one

should spend an entire lifetime and perhaps even that would not be enough.

Tonight an unexpected downpour refreshes the air and wakes us, but when we set sail at five the sky is clear.

We are headed to the capital of New Caledonia, Nouméa, and first we must reach Grande Terre by skirting the barrier that connects it to the Isle of Pines, then pass through the Woodin Channel, which can be traversed by moderate currents, which we engage at 11:30.

These are new surroundings with significant tides, and as always in these conditions, one must be much more careful than usual. It is better if in the end the precautions turn out to be excessive.



*Figure 70: Ouen Island degradation*

The channel, between Grande Terre to the north and the Isle of Ouen to the south, is sad: the shores are stripped bare and marked

by great scars of red earth that we imagine are due to mining activity: the quantity of articles about the island's mineral wealth that can be found on the internet fuel our suspicions from back then.

As we approach Nouméa, we see for the first time since we've been crossing the Pacific an activity and constructions of a Mediterranean type. The city appears to us almost as a copy of Cannes, and the sailboats gliding around us justify the similarity.

We are proceeding in the marina Port Moselle, equally of an enchanting Mediterranean feeling, and we dock at 16:00. Tomorrow we will take care of the paperwork (here it's quite easy going., contrary to Papeete). This evening at the restaurant we are treating ourselves to a thoroughly French dinner!

## From Wednesday 7 to Friday 9 September 2016 – Nouméa, New Caledonia



*Figure 71: Near Nouméa*

Not at all easy! Well, yes, a bit they are such. Because the documents from Vanuatu are lacking and they let us through anyway, but the biosecurity is strict and confiscates our vegetables, bacon, sausages, and popcorn and also the honey (still Mexican but sealed!), who knows why.

Not too bad in the end.

Let's go for a little walk.

The night the smoke alarm sounds, rightly so because the living room is full of it, but there is no fire and we cannot figure out where it might be coming from. Everything seems to be in order: it will remain a mystery.

We spend the following day adjusting and making small repairs in anticipation of the crossing to Australia.

On the last day of our stay, besides the usual—and this time quick—completion of the exit paperwork, we make some purchases, which results in our credit card being blocked: evidently, one of the shops was less reliable than it should have been.

The city is truly similar to Cannes in its houses, streets, and traffic. The only oddity is the checks we often see the police conducting on various canaca people. (the original inhabitants of New Caledonia) poorly dressed. The island is a cauldron of resentments and is under strict metropolitan control due to its strategic importance. It is the only island in the Pacific where we have seen significant industrial facilities so far.

The next destination is Australia. The Americans we met previously have all warned us about the strict entry controls, even concerning the hull's anti-fouling paint: "They'll keep you anchored outside for days! They'll seize everything!" they almost went so far as to warn us of the danger of being roasted!

Nicoletta, after a chance meeting with the organizer, signed us up for the "Down-under Rally" and with this secured us a berth at the port of Bundaberg, the southernmost still at the edges of the Great Barrier Reef and outside the area normally hit by tropical cyclones. Therefore, at least some potential problems are averted.

So we are sparing with supplies. But it seems to me that the directions for the entrance they gave us from Australia are simple and clear. We shall see.

We do a bit of calculations to determine the most suitable departure time according to the tidal flows and to identify how far we will stay from the dangers of the Coral Sea. Which is indeed dotted with reefs, but our route, approximately 800-900 nautical miles, if

there are no surprises with the weather, It will pass further south of all of them.

## **From Saturday 10 to Tuesday 27 September 2016 from Nouméa, New Caledonia to Bundaberg, Queensland - Australia**

After the routine checks of the alternator belt levels and tension, we set sail to the pass at Dumbéa, the closest one. The wind is steady, twenty knots from the southeast, on a broad reach which allows us to hoist the mainsail with a single reef, the yankee slightly furled and the staysail, which we keep hoisted until nightfall, when we lower the mainsail for peace of mind.

My companions are expert sailors and I have no concerns, other than allowing them the time to become familiar with the boat's reactions.

In the following days, with wind and sea gradually subsiding and occasionally shifting direction, we perform some maneuvers, on average once a day, changing the composition and position of the sails. My friends, who are excellent racers and with their classic boat are always at the top of the rankings, are eager to squeeze a few extra tenths of a knot from the boat. Who knows, maybe I'll learn something new too!

One evening we can joyfully celebrate, with a clearer sky, the crossing of the Tropic of Capricorn toward south.

With these speeds, this wind and this sea and above all this happy company, the crossing has become a real pleasant holiday.

On Thursday, with the light wind, everyone takes advantage to climb one after the other onto our crow's nest and have a look from above. I remember we mounted a proper crow's nest from the very beginning up to a third of the mast's height, a very useful vantage point for spotting both cetaceans and ice or other dangers.

We spot a couple of ships, a fortunately rare encounter in

the ocean, where the lookouts (theirs) are even less accurate than usual.

The proximity of the land is also felt by the encounter with storm petrels and gannets.

We are approaching the coast, which influences the weather. At one in the morning, a low, dark cloud appears ahead of us. I prepare to lower the jibs, but a violent squall with rain immediately hits us. We are just passing over the shallows that extend north of Fraser Island. It is an unpleasant spot also because there is a current and the danger of drifting onto the banks is high.

We get soaked like chicks in the rush to reduce the sail area while the boat spins around, but everything goes smoothly and we do not hit any rocks. We proceed under engine because we are now close to the port, where we arrive early in the morning, entering the river within which it the marina is situated.



*Figure 72: Bundaberg Marina*

We call via radio and they immediately send us to dock at

the marina, where an biosecurity officer awaits us with a customs one. The procedure is quick, simple, and courteous, even though the boat it's not entirely in order: it's Friday, and the officer will return on Monday to check that the additional required cleaning has been done.

Much simpler and quicker than what the Americans had led us to fear. We also discover that we were the first in the "Down under Rally" to arrive and therefore we have won the prize (it won't be anything special: some pennants and t-shirts!).

My friends go to visit the Great Barrier in the gulf while I devote myself to preparing the boat for wintering and to finding someone who can check it for me.

On Sunday my friends they depart.

It still takes me a full week to get everything sorted out and to set up the main tasks for the coming spring, the most important of which is booking the travel-lift and the dry dock space. I also take a bit of free time to familiarize myself with the surroundings.

Even discovering that in the late 1920s a pilot and aviation pioneer from Bundaberg by the name of Bert Hinkler, after completing a record flight to London, on the return flight died crashing in Tuscany.



*Figure 73: The tribute to Bert Hinkler*

His coffin received military honors and burial by order of Mussolini. There is a museum dedicated to him and it is striking to see the ceremony faithfully reenacted with mannequins in fascist uniforms.

On the very last day, while I'm enjoying the view of the river, a pink dolphin comes to visit me for a moment next to the boat! I have no way to photograph it and I'm left wondering what kind of species it was!

In the end, I too am leaving, carrying with me an excellent memory of Australian courtesy and helpfulness, in absolute contrast with the attitude of U.S. officials (except for Alaska).