



Brigantine ROMANCE

Special Double Issue - Logs # 9 & 10 (Sept. 1980) (Continued).

Palmerston has a luminous beauty, with none of the harshness of the Tuamotus; pretty little islets encircling a turquoise lagoon. Neat white homes stand on soft beach sand under cool, towering palms. Originally, there were eight motus (islets) on Palmerston's reef, but two were washed away in the 1935 hurricane. The atoll has been inundated repeatedly, the entire population taking refuge on the 'mountain', a 20' mound in the middle of the taro patch. Only Wm. Marsters' old homestead, built from 18" timbers salvaged from a wreck, has withstood the big blows. In 1926, the historic old church was carried 200 yards inshore. Since its roof supplied water to the only cistern, it had to be moved back on coconut rollers, using an old ship's capstan. The hurricanes destroy everything, including the coconuts, and palms do not bear again for 18 months. The people survive on lagoon fish. Once, no ship called for 3 years following a hurricane. The people suffered most from lack of clothing, making do with old canvas from wrecks, of which there are many -- the low atoll is treacherous. Romance stood off and on, while we enjoyed a hospitality akin to Pitcairn.

The Tokelau Islands north of Samoa remain a Polynesian Eden, loveliest of all the isles we know. Neat villages of thatch roofed fale open to the cool sea breezes, sailing outriggers and handsome, friendly people. We were paying an unprecedented third visit, a fact which impressed Chief Amusia of Atafu. "The Captain is a man of his word! He said he would come back and he did!" Nothing could prevent him from ordering the most astounding feast in our 20 years of cruising. It represented, he said, everything the atoll had to offer. Lobsters and huge coconut crabs (delicious!), crisp little lagoon fish, tuna 3 ways, raw Tahitian style, baked and smoked, fried chicken, breadfruit, cooked and ripe bananas, creamy coconut soup served warm in the shell, a "spinach" green called "Lou," to name a few. Then 4 bronzed young men marched in bearing a princely golden roast pig in its bed of banana leaves. He was ceremoniously carved open, and hot rocks removed from his belly. The meat was smoky and flavored with its banana leaf wrap, the very essence of Polynesia. We sat crosslegged on soft mats, while young women fanned us. When we had eaten our fill, and the second (local) team as well, we sat back to enjoy the best of Tokelau entertainment. The hands-down favorite, a lively dance-chart depicting the arrival of the white man. "See . . . see . . . see, Pa-pa-longi, Pa-pa-longi!" Not a derisive term as we feared, it translates: 'Longi' = sky; 'Pa' is 'fell from.' Literally, those who fell from the sky. 'Papa' is the plural.

6. In Fiji, several former shipmates rejoined to earn their circumnavigation. We were especially glad to welcome back Millie Heptinstall, our marvelous English cook. Never has any ship eaten so well! Yorkshire puddings, fluffy cheese fondus, quiche, pizza, coconut cream pie—even the most common seafare soaring to heavenly heights and served up like a page out of a gourmet cookbook. Romance herself caught the spirit, racing to Vila with the finest winds of the voyage—and hasn't stopped yet! On July 30th, the New Hebrides were to become the independent state of Vanua Tu, after long years of dual British and French rule. Remote tribes in Santo and Tanna were in revolt, attacking government forces with spears and arrows! But Malekula was quiet. We worked a little white man's magic around the village fire. The bushmen were puzzled when we asked for a big iron pot to cook a little handful of seeds. Then the pot seemed to explode, bang! bang! bang! The children fled in terror. And even the adults were amazed when Jamie lifted the lid -- the little seeds were gone, and the pot full to the top with strange fluffy white stuff. Popcorn! The bushmen were afraid to try it at first—but the real magic was how fast the next batches disappeared!

On Ambrym, the volcano Benbow, treated us to a spectacular all night show. And Millie and I were ambushed by an apparition which darted out of the trees—an animated haystack with a grotesque mask and bobbing head-dress, carrying a knobbed stick. We dove for our cameras, only to be told pictures were tabu. This, however was easily waived with tobacco, and the apparition posed for us. We couldn't find out the meaning of this, except that it was "custom." However, we suspect it was all in fun, for our benefit!

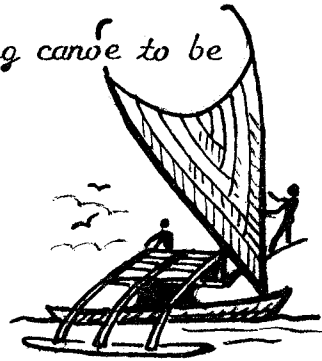
Santa Maria in the Banks Islands, where a freshwater spring boils up through black volcanic sand right in the surf. We traded for bows & arrows, some with poison tips, and others with flat knobs for knocking down fruit bats, a delicacy. On Ticopia, we were again treated as honored guests. Our faces and upper arms were first painted a dripping, indelible bright yellow, a mixture of sweet coconut oil and powdered tumeric (the spice.) We were presented with the traditional 'custom' tortoise shell fish hook worn as a talisman by every Ticopian, and paraded through the village, in and out of low huts, crawling on our hands and knees. The Ticopians believe a man's spirit is in his head, and one must not violate the air space, especially of a chief. It was a treat to have Australian anthropologist Judy Macdonald interpret customs for us. Hopefully, we did all the right things, as honored guests at three feasts in one day, about all any palongi can stand of the greasy grey glue of root starches baked in banana leaves!

On Hawkins Bank, SE of Disappointment Island in the Reef Group, we encountered "Shark Wars." We should have known what was coming when we caught just the head of a big yellowfin tuna. Immediately, we had a 35 pound shark, and then another. Number 3 broke the gaff and got away. We tried to slip a noose over the tail of #4, a really big one, but he

thrashed wildly, and snapped the 150 lb. test line, which whipped back and caught me in the face, raising a big welt. Numbers 5, 6, 8 and 9 got away for lack of any way to land them, but somehow, we whipped #7 aboard. We had now lost our best lures, and decided on one last try. Instantly, a huge white tip took the bait and snapped the line, cutting one of the boys across the cheek. We quit! Score: 3 sharks landed, 7 sharks, a gaff and assorted lines lost, 2-cut faces. Another day in the Solomons, we landed a 50 lb. wahoo, and had a bigger tuna alongside for 5 minutes before the hook broke. The big fellow was so tired, he just laid there, and we felt like jumping in and grabbing him!

Apparently no one visits Nibanga, in the Reef Islands. They clamored to trade handsome bowls, baskets and sleeping mats, for anything that wasn't made of palm! We were glad we stopped on our way to the Solomons. In Langa Langa Lagoon, we saw a very fine 70' cargo vessel being built--literally--with shell money! When the builders ran out of funds, they simply sat down in the shade of the hull and made more! For shell money--strings of tiny, polished disks, is still legal tender throughout the Solomons and much of New Guinea. Can our paper money be worth more???

In Honiara, we saw the first Reef Island voyaging canoe to be built in decades, on its way to the festival in New Guinea. This distinctive craft features a raised deck, and thatch shelter atop a central dugout hull, a graceful crab-claw sail of finely woven matting; all bound together with fibre lashings. They--and we--sailed out into a black and howling night, and we thought of them out there somewhere near, as we enjoyed Millie's good hot meals, and the comfort of a well-found brigantine.



We were bound for Gawa, Marshall Bennets, and Kitava in the Trobriands, where 100 mile voyages are still routinely made in big ornately carved and decorated canoes with pandanus mat sails. Navigational aids consist of witchcraft and magic among islands still bound by the Kula System of ceremonial trading. These very primitive people have been prime subjects for anthropologists for 50 years, and Nancy Munn did her best to answer a barrage of questions.

Papua New Guinea. The Madang festival--twelve tribes stomping and chanting to 500 lizard skin drums. Bare breasts, bare bottoms, oiled bodies dusted charcoal black, tumeric yellow, betelnut red; nose-plugs, beads, shells, rattles, masks, pig tusks, ass-grass, leaves, bows, arrows and Bird of Paradise head-dresses half again as tall as the warriors. A whirling, throbbing Sing-Sing attended by 7,000 people. Bam, a perfect volcanic cone, ornately carved canoes with elaborate figureheads, and puk-puk (crocodile) shaped outriggers. We traded for spear launchers, masks and prize ancestral figures black from generations of charcoal fires. Wewak, and the famous Haus

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Tamboran at Angorum on the Sepik River. Half way! We celebrated with turkey and all the trimmings, and a cake decorated with a chart of the world. Romance flew down the New Guinea coast in good winds and strong currents, crossing the Equator twice in one day, and sailing through a very large pod of sperm whales. The Dampier Straits, green islands in a mirror sea, gateway to Indonesia and the Orient, and a fleet of butterfly trimarans trolling off Ambon.

Romance in Magic Dragon Land! Komodo--volcanic cones and dry brown hills rising into 5,000 ft. razorback ridges, a fantasy landscape in which to roam, very like the Galapagos. There are deer in great numbers, wild boar, buffalo, cobras and crocodiles, and eagles soaring; wide beaches to comb for red coral, cuttlefish bone and nautilus shells. And of course, the dragons. Reaching nearly 10 feet and 300 lbs. Our guides staked a freshly killed goat in a dry river bed. We watched breathless, as a 7 foot Komodo appeared, flicking his long forked yellow tongue. He hesitated only a moment, then ripped into the bloody carcass. Soon there were 4 to 6 big dragons feeding at once. One 8 footer swallowed the forelegs whole, and then had difficulty turning his neck! From time to time, a big, black boar charged the bait, scattering the Komodos, until the guides drove him off with rocks. There was little left of the goat, but the head and stripped carcass, when a monster 9 footer, the biggest of the day, appeared. No matter! He rushed in and swallowed the head, fully as big as his own. The horns stuck in his throat, and since he could neither rip the head off, or expell it, he effectively tethered himself to the stake! He set his powerful hind legs and pulled and tugged and pulled and tugged until he fell exhausted. He lay spread-eagled on his belly, and we were sure he had strangled himself, and was dying! He lay inert for several moments, then gathered his strength for a final effort. He "stood up" and gave one mighty heave, and the goat's backbone snapped below the ribs. Mr. Big waddled off triumphantly with the whole ribcage jamming his mouth wide open -- thinking perhaps, "I can't believe I ate the whole thing."

The special magic of Bali and the Orient will have to wait for Log #11, while Romance sets out on her 6,000 mile journey across the Indian Ocean. Time to wish you all, the

Peace and Joy of Christmas!



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