

Divided Sky - New Caledonia

Posted: October 18, 2013

DIVIDED SKY – TO NEW CALEDONIA

WE HAVE SAFELY ARRIVED IN NOUMEA, NEW CALEDONIA AFTER A VERY TRYING AND EXHAUSTING PASSAGE. THE FIRST THREE DAYS OUT OF LIFUKA, TONGA WERE BOISTEROUS. IT SEEMED LIKE WE WERE SAILING THE NORTH ATLANTIC AGAIN, NOT THE SOUTH PACIFIC. WE WERE ROLLED AND BRUISED BUT AS DI MONCRIEFF LIKES TO SAY, "PERSERVERANCE" WON OUT. HAVING JUST MET A DELIGHTFUL MAN, NAMED IAN MAJOR, IN TONGA WHOSE SYDNEY BOAT IS CALLED "MAJOR PERSERVERANCE," THIS BECAME THE JOURNEY'S THEME. AFTER THE NEXT FEW DAYS OF GREAT

SAILING, THE WIND DROPPED OUT, AND WE STRUGGLED TO KEEP 2.5 KNOTS ON THE GAUGE.

HAVING SEEN ONLY ONE FISHING BOAT ON THIS PASSAGE, IT WAS A STARTLING SURPRISE TO HAVE A RAPIDLY MOVING TUG EMERGE FROM THE SETTING SUN, TOWING 2 BARGES OVER 500 METRES IN TOTAL LENGTH. HIS DESTINATION WAS A MYSTERY, AS HIS COURSE WAS RECIPROCAL TO OURS AND WE WERE 120 MILES OUT OF NEW CALEDONIA.

ANOTHER STARTLING SURPRISE OCCURRED ON COL'S EARLY MORNING WATCH. AS DAWN WAS BREAKING, COL HAD HIS EYES ON THE EASTERN SKY TO CATCH A SPECTACULAR GREEN FLASH JUST BEFORE THE SUN BROKE THE HORIZON. THE REEF AROUND NEW CALEDONIA CAN BE TRICKY, SO WE DID NOT WANT TO ENTER THE PASS AT NIGHT. THIS MEANT A ROLLY (OF COURSE THE WIND CAME UP TOO LATE TO MAKE IT TO THE PASS), SLOW, DARK NIGHT HOVE-TO ABOUT 20 MILES FROM THE PASS BEFORE WE HEADED INTO THE LAGOON IN THE MORNING. WE NEEDED A GOOD NIGHT OF REST AFTER THE TEN DAY PASSAGE FROM TONGA, SO WE HEADED FOR AN ANCHORAGE IN BAIE DE PRONY. AFTER THREE FRUSTRATINGLY UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO SET THE ANCHOR IN A LOVELY BAY WE GAVE UP AND HEADED INTO THE NEXT BAY. WHAT A TERRIFIC SURPRISE TO FIND GOOD, FREE MOORINGS AND AN ADELAIDE BASED YACHT CALLED "RETOUR," WITH JAN AND BEVAN PURVIS IN A LOVELY SETTING WITH DOZENS OF CHIRPING BIRDS AND FLAT CALM WATER. "RETOUR" HAD PARTICIPATED IN THE 2008 PORT VILA-TO-PORT BUNDABERG RALLY AS WE ALSO HAD. IT WAS NOT AN EARLY NIGHT TO BED FOR US HOWEVER. JAN MENTIONED THAT QUARANTINE IN NOUMEA MIGHT TAKE ALL OF OUR FRESH PRODUCE - - THE FIRST

TIME THIS WAS THE CASE ACROSS THE ENTIRE SOUTH PACIFIC. WE EXPECTED THIS TO HAPPEN IN AUSTRALIA, BUT WERE UNPREPARED FOR FOOD QUARANTINE HERE. SO THE STOVE RAN HOT AS WE BOTH COOKED UP A STORM: MASHED PUMPKIN FOR SOUP;

CABBAGE AND CORNED BEEF USING THE LAST OF THE BACON, ONIONS, GARLIC, CAPSICUM, NUTMEG, AND CABBAGE; SPAGHETTI SAUCE WITH THE LAST OF THE

TOMATOES; DICED CARROTS; AND HARD BOILED EGGS. LUNCH THE FOLLOWING DAY INCLUDED THE EGGS PLUS BLT SANDWICHES AS WE FOLLOWED THE MARKERS AROUND

REEFS TO PORT MOSELLE MARINA, NOUMEA. FOR THE FIRST NIGHT SINCE 22 MARCH (MORE THAN 6 1/2 MONTHS) WE WERE BERTHED IN A MARINA. IT WAS A CULTURE SHOCK

TO SEE THE CITY LIGHTS AND HEAR THE TRAFFIC NOISE FROM THE COCKPIT OF DIVIDED SKY. NEARLY EVERY NIGHT HAS BEEN A SOCIAL OCCASION, AS WE'VE BEEN CATCHING UP WITH OTHER CRUISERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

JUST TO BACKTRACK A BIT, BEFORE WE CLEARED OUT OF TONGA WE STOPPED IN LIFUKA, HA'APAI ON A GENEALOGY SEARCH FOR INFORMATION ABOUT A LONDON

MISSIONARY SOCIETY MINISTER NAMED JOHN THOMAS. OUR SEARCH WAS MOST INTERESTING, AS WE LEARNED THAT JOHN THOMAS WAS A RESPECTED FRIEND OF THE

FIRST MODERN TONGAN KING IN THE 1830'S, AND WAS EVEN GIVEN MENTION IN A LIFUKA HISTORICAL PAMPHLET. OUR ENQUIRY LED US TO A TONGAN TOURISM

MINISTER WHO HAD 3 BROTHERS PLAYING RUGBY IN EUROPE. WHAT AN UNEXPECTED, BUT DELIGHTFUL DIVERSION! WE ALSO RAN INTO DON MACINTYRE (OF SOLO ROUND-THE-WORLD RACING PLUS ANTARCTIC WINTERING FAME) ON HIS YACHT "ICE" WHICH WAS WORKING ON THE PRESERVATION OF WRECK DIVE SITES IN THE HA'APAI AREA. HAVING CLOCKED UP OVER 20,000 MILES SINCE OUR LAUNCH IN JUNE 2012, IT IS

ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE THAT THE GPS NOW SHOWS ONLY 860 NM TO COFFS HARBOUR. WE SHOULD BE HEADED THAT WAY IN A COUPLE OF WEEKS.

COLIN AND JEANNE HARRISON

YACHT "DIVIDED SKY"

