

Divided Sky - Australia

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"I shall return." No, not General Macarthur's saying, but rather the

Harrison's quote-du-jour. For the fourth time Australian landfall from a foreign port was made at delightful Coffs Harbour Jetty. Fresh fish, hot showers, and friendly natives awaited our arrival.

What about the 860 mile passage from Noumea? It certainly reminded us that we were now in the variables, not the tropics. Each night progressively cooled, as the long sleeved shirts and jumpers were retrieved from storage lockers. Each day presented a different wind direction, speed and sky colour. From motoring in flat seas to getting hammered by 50 knots of wind as two cold fronts roared through, we saw it all.

In Australia, you would have heard about the terrible bush fires in Homebush and Port Stephens. We also heard about these on ABC radio news, knowing that we were in the path of these violent northerlies as the system moved eastward. We hove-to for 8 hours to let the seas settle before continuing our westward journey after the first front churned up spewing waves from all directions and the wind clocked to the southwest. We hove-to for three hours during the second blast. Both of course occurred at night, but at least we had decided to sail with the bright full moon.

In the early hours of morning the second cold front pushed through. Due to heavy rainfall, we did not see land until it was less than three miles directly ahead of us, but earlier we smelled the bush fires. For a while the rain was an ash colour. Earlier I had thought that Colin was making toast for breakfast as I came on 6:00 a.m. watch. Wrong. We ate well in spite of the sea state. That was because we had to devour everything which was going to be taken by quarantine in Australia. One night all hands were required to hold the pan on the stove whilst preparing the ingredients for a one-pot leftover veggie and beef stew. We braced butt to butt in the galley as the stove gimballed full tilt front-to-back. The very next day we were motoring in flat seas with no wind on the gauge at all and the last two pork chops cooking on the gently swaying stove.

Quarantine took our rubbish and a few surprise items - tinned fruit was okay, but apparently not commercially prepared fruit in jars or plastic. Their \$340 user fee for removing rubbish seemed a bit on the high side, especially when relegated to the two Customs officials servicing our clearance. Generally, the customs men were friendly, helpful and courteous, which meant a great deal to us after a gruelling passage with little sleep the previous night.

How good was it to finally say "Land-Ho"? Inexplicable! With over 22,000 miles over the water and seventeen foreign countries visited since 1 June 2012, we were certainly ready to step upon Australian soil, into a hot shower, and over to the fish co-op for dinner.

