

## **ALDEBARAN** **28<sup>th</sup> Report** **Society Islands, French Polynesia**

**Every long distance cruising sailor dreams about this group of islands when the South Pacific is mentioned. The main islands in the Society group are Huahine, Raiatea, Tahaa and the three more famous ones of Bora Bora, Tahiti and Moorea. As reported at the end of our last report we made landfall in Tahiti the most easterly of the group with Papeete the capital.**

**Tahiti** has, at least for me, lost a lot of its charm due to its very successful tourist industry. After months cruising remote areas it was very hard to adjust to the hustle and bustle of city life, albeit not at the same level as much larger cities. Our free anchorage at Maeva Beach was a 20-minute cheap bus ride to the city centre. The buses are converted trucks with wooden seats and are a feature of Papeete, however we did hear that the “powers to be” are planning on replacing them with modern buses, **and what a pity.**

### **Bastille Day celebrations:**

During our two weeks in Tahiti we enjoyed the Bastille Day celebrations including attending the opening night of the traditional dancing competition. On Sat 8<sup>th</sup> July we watched the start of the canoe race from Papeete harbour to around Moorea a distance of 30 miles. This is the biggest sporting event of the year attracting over 100 six-person canoes with outriggers. Most of which have some form of sponsorship. It was a fantastic sight; even before reaching the harbour mouth the favourites were clear ahead. Each team operates with two sets of crew, changing after about 40 minutes. For the change over the relieving crew position themselves in the water and spaced correctly for boarding the fast approaching canoe. When the canoe approaches the old crew dive into the water from the starboard side while the new crew scramble aboard on the port side. For months beforehand we had witnessed the teams practise at the various islands we stopped at.

### **A good tour:**

A fellow yachting, Luc, who was anchored beside us, worked as a tour guide for one of the bigger Tahiti tour operators and arranged a “special yachting” day tour at a much reduced price. One of the places of interest was Venus Point where in 1769 Capt Cook built a fort to observe the transit of Venus, thus giving the point its name. South east of the main island of Tahiti and joined by a narrow isthmus is Tahiti Iti. From its highest point of 4341ft there is a magnificent panorama of the south and east coasts of Tahiti. Other places of interest included a large fresh water pool in a cave, a brewery which also produced chocolate liqueurs of which we were given our fill of samples and finally and most memorable were the variety of samples we were given at a liqueur distillery.

### **A re-union:**

An arranged meeting with Ken and Gina Coleman who had crossed the Atlantic with us in their boat FOG CITY, they have since sold the boat, and were holidaying in Tahiti provided us with what we called a luxurious afternoon at their hotel. We lazed by the pool and before going downtown for a meal at one of the famous Tahitian food vans, **Olivia had a BATH.** It had been 14 months since she had such luxury, I am not a lover of baths.

### **Moorea:**

After two weeks in Tahiti we sailed 20 miles to Moorea. Muna who left ahead of us reported problems with their gear change. However they anchored safely inside the reef at the entrance to COOK BAY, while we continued further into the bay and anchored off the fuel dock next to the Club Bali Hai Hotel, (position 17-30S / 149-49W). In fact we anchored too close and during the night when the wind changed we swung onto the reef, but managed by taking in some chain to pull clear. We only sustained cosmetic damage, another lucky escape. Needless to say we re-anchored further out. We again met Ken & Gina Coleman and together with other yachties attended an excellent bar-b-cue hosted by Bruce, a retired blue water sailor, who Ken and Gina met when visiting here during their circumnavigation.

The following day we hired a scooter and toured the island. It is very tourist orientated.

### **HUAHINE:**

On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> July after purchasing last minutes provisions and together with MUNA we set sail at 1710hrs for Huahine Island, 100 miles to the northwest. We encountered more traffic on this short passage than on the whole Pacific to date. It was a lovely night sail and at 0540hrs on Friday morning we saw and observed on the radar a ship on a collision course with us. They eventually answered our vhf calls and acknowledged our position agreeing to alter course.

At 1000hours we entered the Avamoia Pass beside Fare village and motored south to a beautiful anchorage off the Mahana Hotel. This was without doubt one of the nicest anchorages we visited. A small beach restaurant and bar provided an exquisite setting to watch a setting Pacific sun while enjoying cool beers. During the week there we hitch hiked round the island visiting the village of Fare and Eden Place an organic garden with local and exotic fruits. A 40-minute strenuous walk to a viewing area resulted in breathtaking views of the surrounding bays. Fare has a good size supermarket and market.

### **A BAD NIGHT:**

On Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July we motored back north and anchored off the village of Fare (16-42.8S / 151-02.3W). In easterly trade winds this is a reasonable sheltered anchorage, however during the night the wind increased and backed to the North West resulting in a large swell entering the pass. With bad holding, increased winds and the swell a number of boats dragged their anchor, two of which collided. It was the worst night of rolling we had experienced to date. Conditions were so bad that we got very little sleep and were much relieved when dawn arrived. Everything appears much worse in the dark.

**We would summarise the island of Huahine as being, underdeveloped from a tourist point of view, beautiful with great anchorages and well worth a visit**

### **Raiatea:**

After a second roly night we sailed, again in company with MUNA, to the island of Raiatea 25 miles west. It was a lovely sail with the wind off the starboard quarter. On approaching Teavamoia Pass, MUNA reported their GPS was not working and so we waited and guided them through. Their GPS began working again as they entered the pass, we could not find any reason for the malfunction.

### **Snagged anchor;**

The guidebook claims that Baie Hotopua inside the pass is a good anchorage in mud. However, not being happy with our first anchor position we endeavoured to raise the anchor to re-position ourselves. There was no way we could raise it, it was truly snagged. MUNA at this stage was hovering near us and ran aground on a large coral head. The first indication we had of their predicament was when we saw Malcolm and Laura in the water up to their waists. With them pushing and Helen driving the boat in reverse they managed to free themselves.

### **Scuba gear to the rescue:**

Being unable to free our anchor there was no alternative but to don my scuba gear and for Laura to use Olivia's. For safety reasons where possible we dive in pairs. On descending 20 metres to the bottom we followed the chain and soon were ascending a large coral head rising to about 8 metres from the surface. On reaching the opposite side of the coral head we saw the anchor truly wedged in a crevasse, it would never have come free. Once freed there was no problem raising it. After our 3 minute safety stop at 5 metres from the surface we got back aboard and decided that we had seen enough of Baie Hotopua and so sailed north to Baie Faarooa, still on Raiatea.

**Baie Faarooa** is where the Stardust Charter Company has a base with about twenty mooring buoys (16-49S / 151-24W). They gave us permission to use the buoys and so at 1715hrs our day's adventures were ended. The following day, Sunday, it rained all day with winds over 30 knots, we were glad to be on the buoys. It was too dangerous to use the dinghy between boats. The following morning, with the rain and wind gone, we walked about 2 miles north to the nearest shop, it was reasonable well stocked. In the afternoon with Malcolm and Laura, I took our dinghy up the Aoppomau River to the rapids. The hour it took to drift back with the current was very peaceful and relaxing while admiring the magnificent vegetation and isolated dwellings. An interesting trip and worth the effort.

**Uturoa** the only town on Raiatea was our destination the following day, Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> July. It was a lovely headsail sail of 7 miles. We anchored on a shelf in 6 metres, inside the red navigation buoy off the marina just north of the town (posn. 16-43.4S / 151-26.7W). It was only a short dinghy ride to the superb "smallish" harbour in the centre of town. We found the town to have good shopping, a nice atmosphere and a lovely café, that I fell in love with, overlooking the harbour. There was also an e-mail café from where we sent our 27<sup>th</sup> report. Next morning, Wednesday, together with Malcolm and Helen we treated ourselves to coffee and *fresh cream cakes* at "my café" while watching this new world go by. A large cruise ship the "R Three" was in dock and we spoke with a number of the passengers and crew. When we mention the distance and time we had been sailing they are all amazed. Malcolm and Helen left us and continued to the next island Tahaa, while we strolled round town and relaxed. Later that evening we went back for another stroll. We really liked this town. A full moon and total calm treated us to an exquisite nights anchorage, we were the only boat there. Clearly visible were the islands of Huahine 20 miles away, Tahaa 14 miles and for the first time a view of Bora Bora 15 miles away.

Next morning we exchanged our empty rusty camping gaz cylinders for full and better looking ones and also collected our dive tank that I had left in for a refill.

### **Another re-union:**

As we returned to the boat we noticed a somewhat familiar looking yacht heading towards us. It was "RAGTIME" with Martin whom we had not seen since he sailed from Tobago to Trinidad in company with MUNA to help us celebrate Olivia's birthday on 23<sup>rd</sup> October last year. Such re-unions necessitate a celebration and so in company we left Uturoa and sailed the epic 6 miles to Tahaa to join MUNA and commence the celebrations.

"Late" next morning we had a great snorkel through Toahotu Pass and in the evening, with an additional 3 boats, we continued celebrating with a beach bar-b-cue on a small motu. The full moon made for an excellent setting.

After another "epic" lovely downwind 11-mile sail on Sat 4<sup>th</sup> August we picked up a mooring buoy in Hurepiti Bay belonging to Vanilla Tours for our last night in Tahaa.

### **Bora Bora:**

At 0830 hours on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> we cast off the mooring buoy and duly got caught in it. However after a quick snorkel I freed us and we set sail, in company with MUNA of course, for magical Bora Bora 25 miles away. The spectacular volcanic peaks surrounded by an extensive lagoon of various hues of blue makes this one of the world's most beautiful islands. We spent 10 enjoyable days here visiting four anchorages.

### **Giant Manta Rays:**

Swimming with Giant Manta Rays in position 16-29.5S / 151-42.65W was without doubt the highlight of the 10 days. To see these magnificent graceful creatures swimming just feet below you was truly an awesome and memorable sight.

### **Moving on:**

**After more than 3 months in French Polynesia we set sail from the Bora Bora Yacht Club for Aitutaki in the Cook Islands 500 miles to the west. Our next report will cover our approach to Aitutaki, our visit to famous Palmerston Atoll, our four days at Beveridge Reef, and Niue the world's largest coral island and perhaps one of the world's smallest independent states.**

**Keep up your e-mails to, we love to get even the smallest bit of news or better still "gossip".**

**Pat and Olivia  
Yacht ALDEBARAN  
South Pacific**