

A L D E B A R A N' S
Sailing Circumnavigation
34th Report

NEW ZEALAND (part 2)

**Prices quoted in this report are in New Zealand \$ unless otherwise stated.
The approx. rates of exchange are; one NZ\$ = two Euros, two US\$ and three £stg..**

After returning, in August, from our drive round the South Island, the next three weeks were spent house (cat) sitting for our new found Kiwi friends Keith & Gay at their kiwi orchards. They live in Te Puke about 20kms from the Marina at Tauranga where ALDEBARAN is berthed. While Olivia used our \$700 1984 Mitsubishi Sigma I had the use of Keith's land cruiser. During this time I was working and earning money that paid for our marina berth and other expenses.

Back to racing:

Shortly after arriving in New Zealand I was introduced to Ian and Eve Wilson. They have a 37ft wooden yacht called "Weiti" that they race at every opportunity. Ian invited me out for a "trial" and I must have passed the test as I became, other than Eve, his most regular crew. Now in his seventies, Ian took up sailing in his fifties and a more dedicated racing sailor you would be hard to meet. The Tauranga Yacht Club is the major sailing club in the area with the Mount Maunganui Yacht Club next. During the Winter racing is organised alternatively each weekend while in the Summer, November to March, the weekly Wednesday night racing is run by the Tauranga Yacht Club.

During racing I would share the helm with Ian, especially the longer races. On one occasion Ian was not well and just before the start handed me the helm. Immediately the racing "DEMON" in me, that had been lying dormant for over five years, began to take over. By the time we started and reached the first mark he had fully taken over my charactership and the fleet of 12 boats knew it, as did the other six crew members on Weiti. Ian was down below ageing by the minute, worrying about his very precious boat. However on crossing the finishing line, in first place, the "DEMON" immediately retreated to the inner me and the "normal placid" Pat Murphy re-immersed to partake in the celebrations.

Disasters at sea:

During the South Pacific sailing season of 2002 which runs from about March to the end of November we heard of at least five yachts being lost. One was lost while hove-to off Tahiti. He was waiting to assist a friend through the reef who had engine problems. Another ran onto a Tahitian reef.

Approaching New Zealand in November, Alf, a single-handler from Sweden, was run down, even though he had full navigation lights, by a large merchant ship that did not stop. After putting out a MAYDAY on the vhf radio he launched and boarded his liferaft while watching his boat sink. Luckily his MAYDAY was heard by another yacht within the 25 mile range of the vhf and they passed the MAYDAY to the authorities who alerted boats in the area. A Russian ship bound for New Zealand answered the call and rescued Alf after a few hours. When firing a flare to attract the Russian ship he fell in the life raft, badly burning his hand and burning a hole in the raft, so when picked up his liferaft was half submerged. He was landed beside us in Tauranga where we made a collection for him as he had lost everything in the sinking. The authorities identified the rogue ship, it had just left New Zealand bound for the the Far East with a cargo of logs. It was registered in Panama and chances of Alf being compensated is very remote.

Also in November a yacht on passage from Tonga to New Zealand stopped at North Minerva Reef which is about 300 miles south of Tonga and 750 north of New Zealand. On leaving North Minerva they ran into South Minerva that lies about 18 miles south-south-west of North Minerva. They were rescued by fellow yachtsmen but unfortunately the boat was lost.

Finally, a yacht on passage to New Caledonia ran onto the small Ceva-i-ra Reef 300miles southwest of Fiji and was lost.

I am glad to report that none of the above losses resulted in any human fatalities.

Another Christmas & New Year in the heat:

Since leaving home in 1999 this was our 3rd Christmas and New Year celebrated in hot and sunny weather. There is no way the atmosphere in such weather can compare to the atmosphere back home in cold, wet and windy weather with a good blazing fire in the hearth. Christmas cards in the southern hemisphere's Summer with "snow" scenes do not seem right. Olivia, as usual had ALDEBARAN decked out with Christmas decorations including our small Christmas tree with lights.

Just prior to Christmas the Marina put on a great party for the visiting yachties and the live boards on the marina. It was an excellent party with ample quantities of food and drinks for the taking. For some unknown reason the marina was very quiet the following morning.

On Christmas morning Olivia organised drinks and present exchanges for all the sailors. In the afternoon we invited Matt from the yacht Aeventyr to join us for Christmas dinner complete with all the usual trimming.

New Year's Eve had us attend a most enjoyable night at the Mount Maunganui Ocean Sports Club and as members we got free tickets. Surprise, surprise the group playing were "A Touch of Irish" and they were terrific, the best we had heard in New Zealand.

However much we enjoyed the festive season we truly missed our family and friends back home.

White Water Rafting:

Olivia; "Pat, why do we have to start on a grade five, why can't we first try a lower grade?"

Pat; "Olivia at our age we can't afford to waste time working our way up from a lower grade.

Olivia; "But grade five is the highest allowable commercial rafting river.

Pat; "That's way we are doing it, and if we survive it there will be no reason to spend money on the lower grades"

Such was the conversation we had prior to attempting our first ever White Water Rafting. The venue was the Wairoa River near Tauranga with a company called River Rats. Joining us for this adventure were friends Brian and Sue from the yacht Nepenthe. Arriving at WaterRat's Base we were issued with wet suits, life jackets and a "crash helmet". The life jacket and wet suits we expected but not the crash helmets. Together with the raft we were transported by minibus to the start of our descent and the rafts lowered into the river which at this point looked quite mundane. Before boarding the raft, which in fact is a large inflatable, we began getting our safety instructions. We were instructed as to how and when to paddle in various directions as dictated by the different types of rapids and on instructions from our guide. In addition to Brian, Sue, Olivia, our guide Skits and I there were two "tourists". The hydro-electric station open their dam twelve times per year to create this grade five descent. A number of people have drowned on this raft run.

The first few rapids were negotiated with ease and then the excitement started. The gaps between the massive rocks and sheer cliff sides continued to narrow resulting in the usual white water acceleration. Before approaching a rapid, each of which had a "non comforting name" our guide would instruct us as how best to ride it. A very important piece of information we were given was to, in the event of capsizing, keep your feet up and **DO NOT TRY STANDING** because if your foot or leg gets caught between rocks you are likely to break it. Not that we are likely to capsize, we thought!!!!!!

After about forty five minutes when about half way down the run we approached a rapid that was not supposed to cause any difficulty. The gap to go through was narrower than our raft, necessitating the crew to move to one side in order to lift the other side of the raft over a large rock. Whether we moved to quickly or not we will never know, but whatever the cause was, the result was that the raft capsized. All seven of us were unceremoniously disgorged into the very fast flowing white water. Olivia remembers coming up inside the upturned raft face to face with Sue. I was thrown clear and washed down the river bouncing over large boulders on the way, I did remember to keep my feet up, the last thing I wanted was a broken leg or something. I eventually managed to scramble on to a boulder from where I observed the other crew

members sorting themselves out. With everybody being accounted for, in the water, the raft was eventually righted and people began scrambling back aboard. Olivia, Sue and one other had managed to swim to a quiet stretch of backwater from where they were picked up. I re-entered the water and swimming as hard as I could reached the raft and of course was unceremoniously hauled aboard. With everybody recovered, the question we all asked was “what happened?” We still do not know the answer, but it was certainly a memorable capsizing.

Further down the river we were warned that in the event of being thrown from the raft or it capsizing at the forthcoming dangerous rapid we were to swim as fast as possible to the right hand side. The current would be pulling us to the left where there was an underwater ledge that you could be sucked into with little hope of getting out “before they closed the dam gates in a few hours and the water subsided” and “unless you could hold your breath for about five hours you would be in serious trouble”. Anyway, we rode the rapid well and on getting through we pulled into the side to watch another raft, from a different company, come through. As they were negotiating the worse section a man was thrown from the raft. Immediately the two guides and indeed everybody shouted at him to swim to the right, which of course was next to impossible with the very strong current pulling him to the left. He was sucked under the ledge and a frantic rescue effort began with the two rafts paddling as frantically as possible towards the ledge. Luckily, after what seemed like an eternity although it was only about a minute the man popped out from under the ledge and was immediately hauled back aboard his raft. This, we were then told “was where a number of people drowned in the past”. “Thank you for the history lesson” we said.

After the above two experiences the remainder of the run down river was a mundane ride. The exception was when our guide complimented us on our earlier capsizing recovery and asked if we wished to do a planned capsizing. The vote in favor was five to one, Olivia being the objector. At the designated rapid, and for the benefit of a photographer, we had our second swim of the day, and as this was in much quieter water our recovery was much easier.

The trip downriver took about an hour and a half and on return to the base we were given a lunch. For \$60 each it was great value and will remain as another one of our memorable New Zealand experiences.

The Round Alone Race:

Tauranga was the third stopover for this famous single handed round the world race. The first of the remaining ten entrants arrived on 9th January with the last and smallest boat finishing over two weeks later. The 9th of February saw the restart as the boats headed across the Southern Pacific and round Cape Horn to finish the 4th leg in Brazil.

This was the first time Tauranga hosted such a prestigious event and they did a great job of it. A tented village was erected on the grass promenade at the Bridge Marina. Four of the large 60 footers were lifted out in the dock areas and the remainder at the Marina. All day every day people thronged in their hundreds to view the boats and talk to the skippers. The heavily sponsored boats had well organised shore crews to repair damage and ensure all equipment was ready for the restart. The boats less sponsored and operating on a tight budget had no problem in recruiting local help. I worked most days on the rigging and sea trials of the American Tim Kent’s boat “Everest Horizontal”. He had only one regular shore crew who met him at the various stopovers. The morning of the restart I was on the boat finishing splicing work at 6am and completed the work as the boat was leaving the dock at 9.30.

On leaving Everest Horizontal I rushed back to ALDEBARAN and for the first time in fifteen months took her out of the marina to watch the start. In addition to Olivia and I we had ten other people aboard. As expected there were hundreds of assorted craft out to witness the unique event. We positioned ourselves about 500 metres above the starting line and just off the track to the turning mark a few miles down the coast. It meant that we had a great view of the fleet in full flight. Many of the helicopters carrying reporters concentrated, naturally, on Graham Dalton, the local boy. One would be forgiven to think that his fellow competitors allowed him cross the start line first, because he made a perfect start and was well out in front after a few hundred metres. Of course this provided great coverage in the following day’s papers.

We thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere during the whole stopover and being directly involved was the icing on the cake.

Visitors to ALDEBRAN:

During our last three months in Tauranga we had more Irish visitors than during the previous nine. Some of those who visited us were, from Dublin, Gerry & Vera O'Reilly (Donabate), Peter & Bev Killen (Malahide), Pat and Hilary (Howth), Elaine Moran (Newcastle); from Meath; Mary Cullinan (Ashbourne); from Sligo; John & Ann Birch and niece Eleanor; from Castletownbere in Cork; Dave & Julie O'Driscoll with children Ben, Tara and Eimear and Julie's mother Mary O'Driscoll; from Wicklow, Aoife Mulhall (Delgany) and Karen from Newry. Frank Snow who emigrated from Dunlaoire many years ago and who now lives in New Zealand visited us on a number of occasions with his wife Olga.

Soon after arriving in New Zealand we met Tom Redmond formally from Dublin and his wife Allison. They invited us to their home on many occasions and Tom was very helpful in advising me where to get bits and pieces for the boat.

Other notable highlights:

Some of the other memorable highlights of our last few weeks in New Zealand were;

- (a) Our re-union with old friends Ken and Sue Heskin at Pat and Hilary Gibbon's new home in Auckland.
- (b) The time spent at our friends Keith and Gay's bach, (in Ireland we would call it a Summer home) at Whitianga on the Coromandel Peninsula.
- (c) Our land tour of the North Island
- (d) Our meeting with Jeryl Hutchins and Graham Bell who entertained us so wonderfully.

Final farewells:

Little did we think on arriving in Tauranga, New Zealand on 17th November 2001 that sixteen months later we would be bidding farewells to so many friends. In addition to the many individual farewells we held two big parties on the boat. The first was for the crew and family of Weiti the boat I had been sailing on for a year. It was a very good evening with all the 22 who partook contributing food. Our major farewell party was for our fellow cruisers, the marina and boatyard staff and others who were so helpful to us during our stay. To accommodate the large numbers, we combined with our friends Henry and Gale on the boat Maritime Express for this party. Maritime Express was moored next to us, and as they were planning on leaving about the same time as us this arrangement worked very well.

With the farewells completed we prepared to set sail.

Last Minute Hitch:

A few days prior to our planned departure I found that our 230V generator was not working properly. We require the 230V to run our refrigeration. While in the marina we were connected directly to the mains and never had to run the generator. Thinking I knew this troublesome piece of machinery, after three days of trying to fix it I had to call in the "experts" who diagnosed a problem with the windings. Out it had to come, not an easy job, and delivered to a winding shop. Three days later we had it back and with the help of Henry (Maritime Express) re-installed it. So far, after a few months, it is still working well.

Work, work, work:

The amount of jobs including maintenance work required on a cruising boat amounts to a lot of man hours. I have listed all the jobs and work completed on ALDEBARAN but will keep the list for a book, if I every get time to write it.

Departure Day:

Saturday 8th March at 1200 hrs saw us, in company with Henry and Gale on Maritime Express, sever our lines at the Tauranga Bridge Marina and thus begin our homeward journey after sixteen very enjoyable months there.

The first leg:

Believe it or not our first homeward leg was all of 2.5 miles, yes 2.5 miles to Pilot Bay at Mount Maunganui where we anchored for five nights awaiting an easing of the winds.

Finally:

There were very many more friends than named in this report who made our stay in New Zealand so pleasurable. Please forgive us for not naming you all. However I must mention Alan and Robin Kilgour from Rotorua. Alan has very kindly provided this web site and we thank him very much.

Our next report the 35th will take us from Pilot Bay north along the East coast of New Zealand to the beautiful Bay of Islands via Auckland and our passage to Fiji. This 1,100 mile notorious stretch of water that would normally take about ten days took, due to severe weather, 18 days. It will be worth reading.

Please keep your e-mails coming, we love to get your comments and news.

Pat and Olivia Murphy, s/y ALDEBARAN in the South Pacific