

A L D E B A R A N' S

Sailing Circumnavigation

Report 42

Australia to New Caledonia

November 2003 to June 2004

Having arrived into Australia at Bundaberg, an official check-in port, with the Port-2-Port rally from Vanuatu we then sailed south inside Fraser Island and through the Sandy Straits to Tin Can Bay. The Sandy Straits are shallow narrow passages between Fraser Island and the Australian mainland. There are a number of very nice anchorages along the 90 n/mile route including the Kingfisher Resort and Gary's Anchorage. On arrival at Tin Can Bay at 1625 hours on Friday 14th November there were about 25 yachts at anchor awaiting calmer conditions to cross the bar to the open sea and continue south, you have to exit the straits here. A number of yachts, over the past few days, were unsuccessful in their attempts to cross. By 0600hrs the next morning there were only three boats left, Aldebaran, Rascal Too and one other. At 1130 hours, 90 minutes prior to high water, in company with the Australian yacht "Rascal Too", we weighed anchor and by 1250 hours had covered the 6.2 miles to clear the bar and set a course for Raby Bay, 30k south east of Brisbane, (in a later report we will describe how we re-crossed the bar, from seaward, under totally different conditions with Aldebaran surfing at 13.8 knots).

Luck of the Irish:

Together with Rascal Too we sailed overnight across the great Moreton Bay to Raby Bay where Rascal Too were going into the marina and we were heading for the private berth at the rear of Andrew & Nickie Knights house on the canal system.

How were we so lucky you are entitled to ask? Well read on. Shortly after arriving in New Zealand I was in a Marine Chandlers, unfortunately for me on the "paying" side of the counter, when I met Tom Redmond who left Dublin in the fifties, he still had his unmistakable Dublin accent. Well we became friendly with Tom and his wife Allison and at some stage we mentioned that we were going to Australia. They told us their daughter Nickie was married and living in Raby Bay, Cleveland and that they had a dock they were sure we could stay at. So almost two years later we tied up at their magnificent dock and met Andrew & Nickie and their two boys Christopher and Stephen for the first time. We had the use of their swimming pool and a separate toilet and shower unit, and to crown it off we had the use of a car.

We were apprehensive about imposing ourselves on strangers but from the outset they made us very welcome and thus began a friendship which will hopefully last for many years to come. We were delighted to be able to transport the two boys to and from school when both parents were working. Andrew keeps his 30ft racing yacht "War Canoe" at the Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron in Manly about a 20 minute drive from Raby Bay.

2003 Summary:

From departing Tauranga in New Zealand on 8th March 2003 until arriving in Raby Bay, Australia on 16th November we sailed 4,621 nautical miles (5,314 miles or 8,502 kilometres) having being at sea for 881 hours (36.7 days).

Australia, (a quick summary):

In December 2003 we bought a Ford Transit Camper Van with a high roof, similar to a Toyota Hiace with a high roof. Our first expedition in the van was to Melbourne where we spent Christmas with my brother Jim and his family. From Melbourne we toured the Australian south coast to Port Fairy where we celebrated the New Year. On our way back north to Raby Bay we visited the many scenic and

historic sites on route. At the end of January I sailed with Andrew in the "Surf to City Race". The day prior to the race, taking the inshore route, he and I sailed War Canoe, from Brisbane to Southport on the Gold Coast where the other three crew members joined us. Next morning, Saturday, the race started at 0900 hours and at 0400 hours on the Sunday morning we crossed the finishing line in Brisbane in a very respectable position.

From then until sailing to New Caledonia on 9th June we continued to explore the Australian Continent including Canberra and Sydney. Sadly our attempts at prospecting for opals at Lightning Ridge and at the other opal fields we visited proved un-productive. Since leaving Ireland we visited so many museums that I promised myself that I would not visit any more, however, while in Canberra, I was persuaded to visit the War Museum and I can honestly say it was the most interesting museum I have ever visited and I highly recommend it. Sydney of course is a must and we were not disappointed with its attractions especially the Opera House and it's almost land locked magnificent harbour.

At the end of May we lifted Aldebaran at the East Coast Marina in Manly and in addition to anti-fouling we completed other preventive maintenance tasks in preparation for the forthcoming 2004 sailing season.

Australia to New Caledonia, what a terrible passage!!!:

Having sold our camper van to Andrew & Nickie, we departed Raby Bay at 1115 hours on Friday 9th June and at 1600 hours after 23 n/miles we anchored inside the wrecks at Tangaloma, 5 n/miles from Moreton Bay's north east channel. Here we linked up with Matt and his partner Robyn on Palefire, their 40ft steel yacht.

Early next morning, with a course set for Noumea in New Caledonia, we both weighed anchor and thus began Aldebaran's worst passage since departing Ireland in July 1999. It was Matt & Robyn's first ocean passage, in fact it was to be Robyn's first ever time to leave Australia. On exiting the north east channel we were joined by Martin and Katherine with their 10 year old son William on their 45ft steel ketch Suleika. They had spent the off season in Mooloolaba, we had first met them in Trinidad in 2000.

The course to Noumea was east north east and with the prevailing winds mainly from east south east we experienced adverse winds for most of the 803 mile passage necessitated us sailing 1008 miles, an extra 205. It took us 199 hours (8days and 7 hours) or an average of 5 knots over the 1,008 miles or 4 knots over the rum line of 803 miles.

The first 24 hours saw us reduce our distance to go by 113 miles and on day two we reduced it by a further 107 miles. Day two, in addition to very uncomfortable sea conditions, had us reefing in rain squalls of over 35 knots and with the south going current off the Australian coast we ended up some 56 miles south of our rhumb line.

On day three our engine overheated and I could not find the cause despite many hours of investigating, and of course the sea conditions continued to be uncomfortable. As if things could not get worse day four saw the generator stop and with winds of 25 knots on the nose conditions were anything but suitable to sort the problem. However, despite the conditions I worked on the engine and ascertained the problem to be the raw water strainer. Prior to leaving Australia I had taken it off and had the outlet pipe re-welded. A piece of the new welding inside the casing prevented the inner strainer from seating correctly and subsequently preventing the screw on top seating correctly. This allowed air in and reduced the intake of cooling water. Under the uncomfortable sea conditions the easiest solution was to remove the strainer and hope that no foreign matter would enter the system and cause a bigger problem. At least this allowed us run the engine.

By the end of day four we had reduced our distance to go to 336 miles and by the end of day five by a further 87 miles. During day six we recorded being 105 miles north of our rhumb line from being 61 miles south of it on day 3. The 24 hours of day six only produced a reduction of 60 miles towards Noumea. Day seven allowed us reduce the distance by a further 88 miles leaving 101 miles to go.

Oh how the weather can change!!! On a flat sea with 10/12 knots of favourable wind the first half of day eight had us sailing in ideal conditions. During this time I removed the complete outer casing of the raw water strainer and using an array of files managed to file down the offending piece of welding and reseal the strainer and screw top correctly. Lunch on this day was taken in the cockpit and with the engine and generator both working, yes I sorted that problem too, we foolishly believed the worst was over.

Up to this time we had sailed 22,500 miles since leaving home and the worst weather we experienced was on the passage from Tonga to New Zealand when it blew 35/40 knots for some hours. That time we were pre-warned, knew how long it would last and were ready for it.

Not so on this occasion. At 1300 hours we observed a rain squall approaching and reefed the mainsail and headsail. The weather forecast was for 20/25 knots from the south. By 1530 the wind reached 25/30 knots and by 1600 hours had risen 30/35 knots. An hour later it was 40/45 knots at which time we hove to. Being only about 25 miles from the many reefs surrounding New Caledonia we had to hove to on a course that would take out further out to sea. Olivia was in contact with Noumea on the VHF and they continued repeating 20/25 knots despite the fact that she told them we were experiencing 40/45 knots. Over the next four hours the wind reached 50/55 knots and we had no idea if and when it would abate. Despite being hove to, conditions on the boat were very uncomfortable and to add to our troubles the headsail split on a seam. With lifejackets and safety harnesses on we rehearsed our emergency systems including the possibility of having to abandon the boat. However there was no time at which we thought this course of action would be necessary as we had great confidence in the construction of Aldebaran. Such conditions during daylight are one thing but during darkness the same conditions seem much worse. Luckily by midnight the winds began to moderate and by 0400 hours the following morning we were motoring in very light winds.

At 0700 hours we successfully negotiated the Dumbea Pass through the reefs and at 0945 hours we were secure in the Port Moselle Marina in Noumea. We were lucky to have been able to re-install the sea water cooling strainer as the water in Port Moselle was covered with all sorts of rubbish and could have blocked the cooling system and overheated the engine.

Palefire and Suleika who were just over 100 miles behind us had a beautiful night's sailing and did not experience winds higher than 15 knots. However we soon learned that boats on the southern end of New Caledonia experienced similar conditions to us and a number of them were blown ashore or damaged.

So ended our memorable passage from Australia to Noumea in New Caledonia.

PREVIEW:

In our next report, our 43rd read about our cruising and views on New Caledonia, our return to Vanuatu where we had to make a 115 mile overnight passage in bad weather to the nearest hospital with Olivia when she developed malaria symptoms.

Pat and Olivia Murphy, s/y ALDEBARAN

Please keep your emails coming to the boat at ei5359@sailmail.com, or to patandolivia1999@yahoo.com, we really appreciate receiving them and your comments, but please no jokes or attachments.