

Darramy on tour No 20: Northern Marquese Isles, Tuamotu's Atolls, and The Society Islands. July – October 2012

La Orana
(Hi in Tahitan),

As you can see we are still living!

We left you last time in the Marquese. Well, we made it to Nika Hiva, which is the busiest of the Marquese Island in the northern group, here there were lots more signs of the ancient culture for which these islands are famous. The main anchorage Taihae was quite crowded with other cruisers, and a rolly anchorage to boot, so we stocked



Anaho, N Nuka Hiva

up and moved to the north of the island. What a contrast, beautiful calm anchorages, extremely picturesque, and best of all, we had these wonderful bays to ourselves. We visited three different spots, all pretty good in their own way, one place called “Pua”, was described as a friendly hamlet in a valley. So, intrepid as ever we went ashore and walked through a lemon grove, where we saw a house with the usual large collection of dogs around it. We called out in our now rapidly improving French, and a bloke came out, well he looked like an old warrior. His face was covered in tattoos, which was quite a scary sight. We also noticed a large cooking pot bubbling away on a fire. Now bear in mind these islands are renown for cannibalism, and we were on our own, even the toughest of you would be having apprehensive thoughts. (We didn't dare to take a photo of him either!).

Well we had a chat, then, wandered up the valley for a nose about. We returned to see Tattoo Man, and he started to pick loads of fresh fruit for us from his trees, as we were about to say our “au revours”, he called us into his house, Uh! Uh! We thought, but no problem he reached into his fridge and pulled out a leg of pork from a recently slaughtered pig, and gave it to us. What a lovely fellow, so we left armed with fresh fruit and a leg of pork. It just shows you never know what to expect. A few days later we headed off to Oa Poa, our last island in the



Ancient Tiki



Sue getting to know the locals, Ua Poa

Marquese group. The scenery was again quite spectacular; this place is well known

for it's phallic shaped rock formations. Whilst there, the local cruise cum supply ship called in, so we were able to enjoy some of the local cultural events which are put on for the handful of tourists.

We eventually hauled up the anchor and headed off to the Tuamotu's 500 miles away, now this group of islands are a complete contrast, known by the ancient mariners as



Raiora

The southern ones, were where the naughty French did all their nuclear testing a few years ago. Some of the lagoons within the atolls could be as big as 30 miles across, so a fair stretch of water, which is usually uncharted, and coral heads can appear right in front of you so we had to pay attention with the old navigation. But I get ahead of myself again. To enter the atolls there is a

shallow pass which has a few markers to indicate a possible channel in and out. However you have to realise that the tides do not ebb and flow like they do on most of the channels we



Skipper off to collect Coconuts

Our first atoll in Raiora took us over one hour to get through the pass, and it was less than a mile in distance! So we had to aim for the markers, watching our depth, try to avoid the worst of the overfalls that are created by the strong currents and an uneven sea bed, and eventually express a sigh of relief at making it into the lagoon. Then it was finding our way through the lagoon by using our eyes looking for the colour of

the dangerous archipelago, they consist of atolls, which means low lying coral islands known as Motu's which have risen out of the sea, sometimes to form a ring of small islands which usually have a lagoon in the middle of the surrounding atolls. Many of these atolls are uninhabited, but a few have a sparse population. There are a few atolls in the northern part of the Tuamotu's which are more populated and do a bit of tourism, but we were heading to the central group.



Full Moon Rising in the East

were used to, and since there are no tide tables with any degree of accuracy to refer to, you have to know what the phase the moon is in (is it waning or waxing)?, what the sea state is like and what you had for tea 3 days ago!. So still without much idea, you head in and hope the tidal flow is not too strong against you. Don't forget to add to the fun there are loads of uncharted reefs around the outside of the atolls as well.

the water changing to indicate shallow patches. We rigged up some ratting lines on the shrouds so yours truly could climb up the mast quickly and shout down directional



Slim, a local Pearl farmer

buoyed, so another extra hazard to be aware of as well. Eventually we would find what looked like a good anchorage, and spend a fair bit of time anchoring and trying to set the chain so as not to get it twisted around coral heads which would be another hazard to deal with when the boat moved about around its anchor. We usually managed to get a bit of shelter from the trade winds behind a low motu with a few palm trees which swayed permanently in the winds..

So having tried to give you some idea of what the atolls are about, you may say, why bother, it all seems a bit risky. We can assure you it was well well worth it to be able to spend time in some remarkable anchorages This was made easier partly due to the modern navigation aids in a part of the world which historically had been avoided by most mariners.

instructions to Sue who became chief helmsman for these tricky and sometimes a bit too exciting lagoon crossings! We needed good light to do this and the sunshine behind us, so as to give maximum assistance in finding our way safely to where we chose to anchor. Oh, I forgot to mention the few local people now are developing pearl farms, so they use the lagoon waters to grow the pearls. There are hundreds of ropes just under the surface with their crop of pearl shells attached, similar to a mussel farm but more wide spread, and not always



Slims work place; Katiu



Beautiful Taou

We went snorkelling, and swam with some amazing fish, the colours of some of the coral and the surrounding shells like clams (which were pretty tasty once you discovered how to dislodge them from the rocks) and the size of some of the fishes was stunning. You would regularly sight sharks looking for a snack, but the friendly locals we met taught us not to be to afraid of them, being wary and respectful is ok, but work with them, and enjoy the experiences.

We visited a pearl farm where they showed us how they remove the pearl then re seed the shell so as to reuse the shell to produce more pearls. We bought some pearls from a farm at Katiu, an atoll with an extremely tricky entrance and seldom visited by

cruisers. The difficult entrance meant if we got it wrong our cruising may have come to a sudden halt, but skill and fine judgment prevailed and we were able to enjoy another magical atoll.



The well marked entrance into Katiu !

We headed slowly towards the northern atolls, calling to Tahanea which was a marine reserve, i.e. no development of any kind. This was a beautiful spot, we navigated our way across the lagoon and anchored in the south eastern area. Again our own little islands 50 metres from the boat. A couple of large super motor yachts came and anchored nearby. These were the first non local vessels we had seen for a few weeks, and on chatting to the French crew on the beach, we understood that their fishing had been far more successful than our own in this part of the world. Since we were getting low on fresh meat, their offer of fish was welcome, the next morning there was a knock on the hull, and they brought us fresh bacon, croissants and bread made by their chef together with two good sized fish. These were soon cut up and put in the freezer. That night we dined on the fish... mmmm! About 4 hours later all sorts of bodily hell broke out, we were both feeling pretty ill. It turned out that the fish had a poison called Ciguatera. This has the effect of completely debilitating the body in so many ways that only crudity could describe. We had some medical books on board, but there is no real antidote to this, and we were aware that it could stay in our bodies for a long time. To cut another long tale short, we suffered badly for a week, and gradually recovered some normality so as to be able to move the boat to another anchorage for the change in weather that was expected. Don't forget we were hundreds of miles from any medical help or assistance so we were on our own. Not a scary moment but one that certainly focused our minds on our situation. After a couple more weeks we were able to function reasonably well so as to resume a near to normal way of life; not so ...mmmm after all! (Anyone sadistic enough to want to know more about this poisoning can look it up on Google – Scary). Also no pictures either!



Sharky

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Now that we felt a bit stronger we headed to the next atoll, Fakarava, the southern end of the lagoon was renowned for some remarkable diving. I had heard about a dive called "Wall of Sharks", so I really wanted to investigate this. Basically you go out when the current has stopped ebbing and jump in at the entrance to the pass, and the new flood tide takes you along the bottom past hundreds of sharks

which seem to be stacked up (just like a shoal of fish, but much much bigger

obviously) At 30 metres depth, there is a cave you can sit in and watch the sharks,



More Sharky's

because the air bubbles from the dive tank stay in the cave, they do not disturb old sharky, so he feels quite happy to get right up to you, once again not for the feint hearted, but such a wonderful experience. In fact I did that dive twice, it was so amazing. When we went to the north of Fakarava we found 2 shops, the first we had seen for over 6 weeks, there was not a great selection, but a bit of meat came in handy. We visited a couple more atolls ending up in

Rangiroa, which had an interesting entrance. By this time I had a fair idea of

the tide times, so planned our arrival for about 2 hours after low water to take the flood tide through the pass. We arrived a 7.00am after a good overnight passage, at the entrance the waves seemed quite rough, so we proceeded very slowly and carefully. There were large standing waves in the channel, and we had to go through them. All hatches being closed before hand. I rechecked my tidal calculations, no, I was correct, the current should be with us. There were dolphins jumping out of the water all around us making a wonderful sight in all this rough water, but once again there was no camera on hand. Eventually we made it through to calmer and slacker water. This was certainly the strangest pass we had been in. We learnt later that the lagoon had been ebbing for 3 days continuously due to the large amount of water coming over the south end of the atoll from the ocean.

The reason to visit Rangiroa was to dive with the Dolphins and Manta Rays this was a memorable experience, as although swimming with dolphins was not new, playing with them 20 metres below the surface was amazing. We eventually left the atoll in very smooth seas, but the current was still ebbing!



Kon Tiki Memorial. Raiora

We headed towards Tahiti in the Society Islands which was to be a two night passage, however, we made very good time and our arrival was going to be in the middle of the night. Well, after all the passes we had negotiated in the daylight recently, we decided to enter Tahiti in the dark, as it was a major port, a night entrance looked reasonably easy. So after a good fast sail we started to pick out the lights of Papatee, as we neared the entrance into the lagoon, perhaps I should mention that Tahiti is a proper island, no more of these motu /atoll thingies for us, but all the safe water for anchoring is behind reefs, so again you have to follow navigation marks to find the safe passage through the reef. We had read that you must call the port control before entering the pass and harbour area as the end of the airport runway crossed the entrance. So we duly called in and were told it was safe to proceed. Well as we made our way in we

heard a tremendous roar, and an airliner's lights were seen approaching us very quickly. I can assure you it was full astern with the engine, this bloody great airliner



Moorea

Cercamon) a Swiss couple we had met a few years previously, accompanied by a new crew member for them. Baby Dann was now 6 month old. It is always good to meet up with old friends, to catch up, but also to pick their brains on what is good and bad, and where to locate everything without being ripped off. So having new knowledge of the area, we went to find a shop and start restocking. We found the Carrefour supermarket (big deal you may say), but don't forget we had not seen a large supermarket since January in Panama, and it was now October, so although I certainly hate shopping, it was a real adventure. We were like two children who had been let loose in Santa's grotto, so many things we had not seen for ages, such a vast selection of stuff, we did not know where to start. We just ended up with some of our favourite luxury items, returned to Darramy and pigged out!

crossed overhead, at a height that seemed to be just above our mast. Phew!

Welcome to Tahiti! (Sometimes we are asked on our travels if we have had any scary moments. Well yes, that was one!)

We proceeded through a marked and well lit channel for about 4 miles, where we were able to find a mooring buoy to tie to amongst other cruisers for that night.

The next morning, a knock on the hull, and it was Regis and Doris, (s/v



in

Quiet anchorage Moorea

We soon found that Tahiti was almost a first world country, so we were able to partake in many things we had not been able to do for ages. You may have heard that French Polynesia is expensive, we



More Moorea

can confirm it is. It appears that if you worked for a government department in France, and had a transfer to Tahiti to do the same job there was usually a times 1.9 uplift in the pay. So we bit the bullet saying to ourselves we had lived cheaply for the past four years, so let's enjoy it. (what is this children's inheritance thing anyway)? We soon adapted and then it was time for our Birthdays again, but this time I was entering a new decade, many of you I know are there already, but to celebrate this milestone event, Sue

wanted to treat me so we arranged to go to a restaurant nearby. Well on the due day (Oct 8th make a note for the future), after opening all the cards Sue had brought back from home. we looked ashore and the selected restaurant had burnt down during the night. Not only that, the one next to it had closed for safety reasons, (I didn't realise Sue would be so cunning to save money), so the option was McD's, but then I found another posh one in a resort not too far away, so we ended up having a pukka meal in a beautiful setting. Very memorable.

So as life was now passing by so quickly we headed for Moorea, one of the well know and lovely islands near Tahiti, This is where they filmed some of "South Pacific". It was quite pretty, but felt it was a bit oversold, but we have had the privilege to visit many beautiful places so maybe we are getting a bit picky. We spent a couple of weeks enjoying some lovely views, and hired a car to see the island proper. It is not a large island so we were able to get around in one day, so much so we found we had a bit of time remaining, and unusually for me I had put too much fuel in the car, so as to get full value from our hire package we had a race around the island against the clock, this second circuit was none stop and it took 56 minutes, thus using the surplus fuel, and a fun drive!



A Tahitian wedding ceremony we gate crashed

We headed back to Tahiti as we had a new Duo Gen (water/wind generator arriving, after 9 years we had worn the old one out), unusually the new one came through customs without any problem and installation was an easy retro fit. So we restocked



Huahine Yacht Club

(Carrefour havng lost its initial appeal but was still a great place), and went back to Moorea and from there to another lovely island Huahine (pronounced Whinny), this was more our sort of place, oh, and they were just getting ready for a festival, as they say timing is everything! We hope to go back there again as there is a lot more exploring to do. From there we headed to Raitea, the next island, and where we had arranged to leave Darramy for the cyclone season. We prepared Darramy for storage, and on the due day we found

that there was not enough water in the dock to float Darramy onto the special cradle they provide at the CNI yard. So we ended up leaving her in the water, and left the yard to put her into storage ashore without my supervision! We have since had photos of the boat in storage so hope all will be well when we return in 2013.

So, after nearly 6000 miles sailing since Panama, It was now time for some different travelling. We boarded a plane bound for Auckland, New Zealand and hopefully more adventures.

So as usual it's TTFN
(Delete as applicable)

Best Wishes *Kindest Regards* *Love and Hugs* *Cheers* *nana* (goodbye Tahitan)

Brian and Sue

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