

**Darramy on tour No 22: French Polynesia to Fiji
July 2013 - November 2013**

Bula

(Hello in Fijian),

Well, we eventually rejoined Darramy, in July, we flew to Tahiti, then a local island plane to Raateaa. A few days work saw her re launched after being out of the water for over 8 months. As ever, there was plenty to do to re commission our floating home, but we were soon underway. We were in the western part of the Society Islands. Bora Bora, being the last island group that is well known. For us it was too touristy, but still fairly spectacular especially for those people who had never been to the Society Islands before. The sea was a lovely colour, and we caught up with many old cruising friends.



Bora Bora evening sky from Tahaa

We again had problems with our water maker so had to wait for some parts from the US,(won't bore you with all the usual difficulties of having stuff flown in from abroad only to say the French style bureaucracy has not made life easy in Polynesia)!



Blue blue water of Bora Bora

We eventually sailed west to Maupiti a small beautiful atoll, entering in through a gap in the outer reef, the lagoon area was lovely, the people relaxed and friendly. After climbing the local mountain and watching Hump Back Whales outside the reef, we decided to do our own whale watching.

So we headed outside the reef in the dinghy during very calm conditions, and found some Hump Backs playing about. Well, to get into the water with these massive mammals was amazing, if you put your head under the surface you could hear them calling to each other. I know you can see this on



Entrance to Maupiti

TV, but to be out there with them was absolutely overwhelming.

We eventually left Maupiti and headed the 100 miles west to Maupihaa (pronounced Mapelia). This atoll had the reputation of having the most difficult entrance in Polynesia. Well, it was certainly on par with a few of the atolls we had entered last year in the Tuamotos, and if you got this one wrong it would probably put an end to any future cruising. Fortunately, we got it right, and entered an amazing lagoon.

Only 10 people lived on the moto's (islands) surviving by harvesting the Copra and catching fish.

We visited different moto's, we went Cray fishing at night, saw baby Boobies on one island, Frigate birds on another, and so it went on. The local inhabitants were very welcoming, and one lady (Hina) we made friends with held a party every so often for the few cruisers who had the courage to enter this lagoon. She was also extremely competitive in our evening games of Boule on the beach outside her property.



Sunset in Maupihaa

We and others helped her harvest the coconuts, transport them to the drying area in the communal dumper truck. Then the hard work began, splitting the coconuts to get out the Copra and arranging it on the drying racks. 3000 coconuts needed to be split, this would normally take Hina about 4 weeks, well, with our assistance this was reduced to about 1 week.



Gathering the Coconuts

There is not a lot for the locals to do but Hina had the only proper hut/house on the atoll, Here, she brewed her own potent alcohol, she let it brew for a week and then started drinking it. We thought she may have been better selling it to NASA!



Splitting coconuts. Only 2999 to go!



Sue on the drying rack!

I had been carrying my snow ski's on Darramy for a few years, and decided that it was time for them to be left in a special place. So I presented them to Hina and started off the Ski Club Hina in Mauphia. (Well, there is a yacht club in Zermatt!). We had a weather window to head further west so it was a fitting present to leave our mark at this wonderful magical place.



Ski Club Hena, Maupihaa

We headed to the Northern part of the Cooke Islands. The Island of Suvarrow to be precise. This is a special reserve to protect wild life. It is staffed by two wardens during the cruising season. Many fellow cruisers have been here and told us how lovely it was. Well for us we had been really spoilt with our previous two atolls, and did not rate Suvarrow quite so highly. There were many restrictions, you were only allowed to stay at the main moto, and not allowed to explore on your own. The wardens were friendly and enjoyed our evening games of Boule.



The colourful warden office Suvarrow

We headed off to Samoa, giving American Somoa the cold shoulder we headed straight for what was once called Western Somoa, now it is just Somoa. We had a lovely welcome from the locals. You felt immediately at home, they were so friendly. We hired a car to explore this island, and as ever, one of the joys in our travelling is meeting the locals, especially the children, their lovely smiles and innocence, together with their natural inquisitiveness made a special place in our hearts for them. Being able to speak English again was a real treat, and made everything so much simpler. (Any one want to buy a phrase book)!



Happy Somoan Children

This was the first country where we felt quite a change in culture. Most houses had a Faia (Solid Gazebo) in the garden which they spent their days in. We have seen these Faia's on TV etc but just thought it was a village thing, like a meeting hut, but no,

every house had one, and sadly the less prosperous even lived in them. No windows or doors, just a couple of beds stuck in a corner and maybe a table and chair. The one place of splendour in each village was the church. The villages seemed to compete to have the grandest church in the area, whilst it looked as though a lot of the people lived way below the poverty level, maybe because they gave a majority of their earning to the local church. Strong religion was certainly a major part of their culture.



Small Village, Big Church



Mother in laws tomb!

Another odd thing to us, but seemingly the way they do stuff is that in front of the house or even a small Faia was a grave site, some extremely grand and ornate, right by the front door. As they all live in families of different generations under one roof. Can you imagine having a real dragon of a Mother in Law living with you, and when she dies burying here in your front garden and building a tomb like structure to meet you every time you come home! (I think not).

We went to a great cultural show in the capital Apia, here we were shown many of the local customs, from making fire, climbing coconut trees, and Tattooing (a major part of the culture). After all these demonstrations we had a local lunch made in the fire pit, but first we had to make our own plates out of palm leaf. Here, Sue came into her own. I thought she was going to make a whole dinner service! Oh, and the food was delicious!



Plate making palm style

Any way time was pressing as we had promised to enter the Vava'u Regatta in Tonga in early October so we set sail for Tonga, we were sad to leave Samoa, but we had a good forecast and it was time to go. Well the passage to Tonga was horrible! The forecast was up the Swanney. We had the worst weather conditions we had

encountered for years, but eventually we made it to Tonga and felt better once we entered Vavau's sheltered waters. (It was that bad. We called it boat for sale trip)!

The Vava'u region is in the northern part of the Tongan group of islands, lovely sailing water with flat seas.



Always good to see vessels behind!

To race on flat water with steady wind is what we love and Darramy has always shown her pedigree in those conditions.

We celebrated our birthdays yet again and got Darramy in racing mode. We procured Loic a young man from Switzerland, whom we met as a ten year old when we were in Columbia years ago. He has now grown into a strong young man, and was keen to grind our winches and pull every rope in sight to make the boat go faster. It worked. We had some good tactical racing and gained a first, a third and a fifth place out of 34 boats.



Darramy showing her pedigree



Sue ready for pole dancing!

The shore side of the regatta was tremendous. From a Fancy dress pub crawl to a nearly full moon party on an idyllic island, and finally a typical sailing regatta prize giving followed by dancing on tables until someone called security! But they were very understanding, and suggested we used the stage area instead!

We enjoyed visiting many of the pretty anchorages in the Vava'u group.. We booked on an organised whale watching trip whilst there with 3 other fellow cruisers, sadly, we did not spot a single whale, so the day turned into a very expensive motor boat ride! Soon, it was time to leave so we checked out and before heaving up the anchor did one last check on the rigging, and discovered a damaged shroud terminal. Phew! that was fortunate as this is the bit that holds up the mast. We signed back in and had to get some rigging from New Zealand so we could continue to Fiji. Anyway we got it sorted, and headed to Fiji. We had a fabulous sail to Vudu Point in Vitu Levu (Western Fijian island). We had planned to leave Darramy there for the cyclone season, as Vudu Point Marina is an approved cyclone marina. But



Stripped for cyclone season

first we had to get the remainder of the rigging sorted, so after ordering more bits from Australia and New Zealand, and having made many climbs to the top of the mast together with the help of a local rigger we replaced all the rigging so are now in good shape to enjoy another season in the South Pacific next year.



Boats in holes

We have secured Darramy with chain and ropes and hope she survives what ever weather is thrown at us during the cyclone season. Some boats are stored in a hole in the ground, but we felt happy with what the marina offered so are staying afloat this time. We have not made definite plans for next year as yet, but are thinking of just staying around Fiji for another year, but we will see what happens. At present we are once again enjoying New Zealand for the festive season, then, we head off to Australia where we have hired a camper van for a while.

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

Best Wishes *Kindest Regards* *Love and Hugs* *Cheers*

Brian and Sue

*You can view this number 22 and all our previous travelogues of the last eight years on our **new OCC site**.*

Yes, I know last time it did not work through no fault of yours truly. So try this link you will see travelogues 1-20, keep scrolling down and see No 21 and now hopefully this one No 22. Click on the blue print and hey presto: (Fingers crossed)!

<http://www.oceancruisingclub.org/index.php/forum/links-to-members-blog-sites/882-brian-wallace-publishes-his-accounts-of-darramy-on>