

BOOK REVIEWS

REACH FOR PARADISE – Andrew Rayner. Published in both hard and soft covers by Companionway Press [www.reachforparadise.com] at £29.50 and £18.50 respectively. 376 178mm x 254mm pages, with hundreds of photographs, sketch plans and original paintings. ISBN 978-1-4456-4633-6

Reach for Paradise, A Journey among Pacific Islands, is just that – and is extremely comprehensive, too. When I first dipped into it I had a feeling of déjà-vu – lots of *Flying Fish* articles on the South Pacific, all in one volume. But this book is much more – *Flying Fish* contributors usually write in the past tense and are limited in the length of their pieces. Andrew Rayner uses the present tense and has the luxury of no word-count or other restrictions. He has an entertaining style, and the level of detail and historical research is impressive.

Andrew Rayner bought a Dutch-built Nordia steel ketch, renamed her *Nereus*, and followed the milk run to Panama via Barbados and Trinidad. *Nereus*' Pacific crossing – with a frequently changing crew of friends, relatives and a few pier-jumpers – at first followed a fairly conventional route, with some unusual and intrepid detours from the usual track which make the most interesting reading. These include visits to Makemo, Tahanae, and Fakarava in the Tuamotus; Muapiti in the Society Islands; Palmerston Atoll in the Cook Islands, and Niue. Later in the book Andrew recounts *Nereus*' visits to Popao, Euakafa and Foeta in the Vava'u group of the Tonga Islands, and the Astrolabe Reef south of Fiji.

The first part of *Reach for Paradise* is illustrated by many photos – interesting, but mostly fairly small and some of only average quality. But after his new crew Robin (later his wife) joins him and *Nereus* the book is enhanced by Robin's paintings, mostly acrylic on canvas. She captures the Polynesian life and culture perfectly in this medium, with brilliant colours used to great effect.

After a year-long stay in New Zealand, and less than halfway through this long book, Andrew and Robin sail north for Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, continuing to visit villages in remote bays. Unlike many cruising yachts, *Nereus* seems unconstrained by either time or money, so the visits are extended, the locals become good friends, and Andrew describes it all in great detail with much fascinating historical background. Having cruised through the Solomon Islands in 1989 I was particularly interested in the chapter on this area, where civil unrest and 'The Tension' in recent years has caused major changes for the worse. Corruption is rife and there is serious misuse of island resources. Timber and fish products make up 75% of exports, very little from sustainable stock in either case, and tourism is right down. Andrew and Robin were relieved to move on from Honiara without having been attacked or robbed.

At Marovo lagoon, famous for its exquisite carvings, *Nereus* was the first yacht to visit for ten months and was bombarded by locals in canoes, trying to sell their wares. Back in '89, with a steady stream of visiting yachts, the pressure was less intense and we chose a few beautiful souvenirs. Luckily *Nereus* had some Solomon Island dollars and lots of items to trade for carvings. Visiting the Louisiade archipelago next, and having been unable to get the necessary visas for Papua New Guinea, Andrew used his negotiating skills to obtain a five day permit, which came at a high price with the usual 'overtime' ruse. Plenty of cigarettes were required as an additional 'gift' – some things never change...

Nereus sailed south to Australia for the hurricane season and then up to Papua New Guinea, where she cruised alone for several months. The last part of the book covers the islands of the Bismark Sea – New Britain and New Ireland, rarely visited by yachts. Again, Andrew's insights and historical details make it particularly interesting reading. Not put off by warnings of trouble, this couple were intrepid travellers and *Reach for Paradise* continues to be 'un-put-downable' to the end – a fascinating and thought provoking read, especially interesting for

OCC members who have crossed the Pacific but may have missed some of the more challenging areas. For those heading that way, this book will encourage cruisers to get off the beaten track, although, as the author warns, it is definitely not a pilot book. What it will provide is a huge amount of extra information to enhance your travels.

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