

# Morgan's Enchanted Journey

Fremantle to Phuket

Warren Batt with Trish Meyer

## *Awarded the Royal Cork Yacht Club Vase*

Morgan arrived at Phuket a year older than when he left New Zealand in November 2014, by now well adapted to life aboard *Mustang Sally*. A year during which he joined the ranks of the shellbacks and was the focal point of many of our interactions with local people as we sailed through the Indonesian archipelago. A blond, curly-haired, blue-eyed boy can't help but attract attention no matter where we went and the name Morgan often preceded us as we made our way through the small fishing villages of Sumbawa and Flores. The women of the villages mobbed him to fondle his hair and take selfies - yes, even in the poorest village the cell phone is ubiquitous. Morgan often found it overwhelming and stood stoic on the verge of tears behind his sunglasses, but with the children of the village it was another matter, as they thronged around us at anchor in their canoes. Then he was in his element, paddling, skylarking, swimming and crabbing, anything to escape schoolwork. After a three week break back in New Zealand we take up the story from where we left off in Fremantle in April 2015 in 'Morgan's Rite of Passage'(Roving Commissions 2015).

## **Fremantle to Bali**

We crossed the start line on the gun in the Rally Division of the Fremantle Sailing Club's (FSC) 'Wonderful Indonesia' Fremantle to Bali Race/Rally on the 18 May after two days of postponement due to heavy weather. Our crew included my son Tom and FSC sailing friends, Robbie, Mark and Matt, in addition to



Winners are Grinners, Bali

Trish, Morgan and myself. Morgan, five years-old, was by far the youngest participant in the event. We enjoyed a fast passage up the inhospitable coast of Western Australia running before a SE5-6 and took a deep bite

Warren Batt with Trish Meyer

westwards after crossing the Tropic of Capricorn to avoid a developing trough on the rhumb line. The gamble paid off and we crossed the finish line off the entrance of Bena Harbour 10 days 45 minutes and 1,580 miles after departing Fremantle, to be the sixth yacht to cross the line and win the Rally Division.

The sea over which we sailed appeared lifeless apart from one intense tuna boil and a pod of small leaping dolphins that joined us early one morning. Flying fish were sparse and not long out of kindergarten and there were no birds. The distant loom of lights at night was testament to the depletion of the seas by over-fishing. However, the ultimate obscenity was the vast



Morgan, Warren and Trish

area 400 miles off Java polluted by a never-ending jellyfish-like shoal of shredded plastic rubbish in the deep blue ocean. Our national and international laws governing disposal of plastic at sea seem a joke - all that plastic garbage we carefully bagged and stored on board for disposal on arrival at Bali will probably end up returned to the sea via run-off from poorly controlled rubbish dumps. The blame can't be laid just on Bali or Indonesia or other poorer nations of the world, assailed as they are by rampant marketing and consumerism spawned in the West, but without the resources for effective garbage management. Maybe targeted aid based on a plastic tax in wealthy

nations would help to alleviate what is becoming a global problem.

After a week in Bali we finally received our entry documentation from the agent - a long and frustrating process which involved daily traipses from our hotel in Sanur to Bali Marina despite the 'Wonderful Indonesia' event being sponsored by the Bali provincial government. Sadly, Bali Marina is rather run down, isolated and not an attractive place to stay. Our Indonesian adventure was about to begin, the crew having returned to Perth.

## Bali to Wudong

Over the next three months we slowly worked our way 600 miles east along the northern coasts of Lombok, Sumbawa and Flores. Ambitious plans to sail as far as the Alors before doubling back west through the Moluccas and Sulawesi were abandoned as we lingered longer and longer in successive anchorages. Except for a period of strong ENE winds in early July, the winds inshore were generally less than 12 knots backing each day from light E-SEly, strengthening to a NEly sea breeze in the afternoons.

We arrived at Medana Bay on the NW corner of Lombok after crossing the current-swept Lombok Strait to find peace and quiet after the tourist traps of Lebongan and Gili Air. The need for constant vigilance in these reef-strewn waters was reinforced by an evening of high drama at Gili Air during which we helped re-float two yachts aground on the enclosing reefs and guided two more into safety using our track and AIS. Published electronic charts are totally inadequate for coastal cruising except



Fishing on the Dock, Medana Bay

for some major ports, and the only reliable navigation tools are a sharp look-out and cautious approach helped by Google Earth if good imagery is available.

Medana became our home for the next five weeks while I returned to NZ before rendezvousing with Trish and Morgan in Singapore to apply for our new visas. Shortly after my departure the boat was invaded by rats;

squeaking rats falling through hatches and chewing their way into lockers. Trish handled it all remarkably well until they ran over her in bed; it was



a rather desperate call I received at 0330 back in NZ. Fortunately, most of them abandoned ship after a couple of days while Trish caught the two stayers with glue pads and moved *Mustang Sally* from the marina to a mooring for the rest of our sojourn. The scend into the bay increased as the trades strengthened and we spent an increasing number of rolling nights regaled by the almost non-stop day and night call to prayer from the three nearby mosques during the month of Ramadan. It was time to go despite the warm welcome.

Closing on Moyo after an overnight beat to windward, we passed several substantial *rumpons* (Fish Aggregating Devices, FADs) anchored in 300-400m of water. Each was composed of two 44 gallon drums lashed together in a bamboo frame with a deck and motor bike fenders. They are a good reason for not making passages inshore at night. We



Mobbed both on and off the water

anchored in a large open bay on a narrow shelf of sand off a small village hidden in the trees, half a mile south of the luxurious Amanwana tent resort. The resort does not welcome cruisers. We could have had lunch for US\$75 per head but decided to take a rain check. Strong NEly winds were playing havoc with charter boats further east at Komodo and we waited

three days for the wind to abate.

We crossed Teluk Sanggar in the late afternoon with massive Tambora etched against the setting sun, to make Jaya after dark, feeling our way in using Google Earth and radar. Tambora last erupted 200 years ago when it blew off its top 1,200m and caused widespread death, destruction and the year of no summer, the ash encircling the globe. It's hard to imagine the impact such an eruption would have on Indonesia and the world today. Dawn found us 100 metres off the beach, fishermen dragging their nets inside us. Before long we were besieged by children clamouring for books, pencils, *topis* (hats) and shirts, making a big dent in our stocks. This



School Time

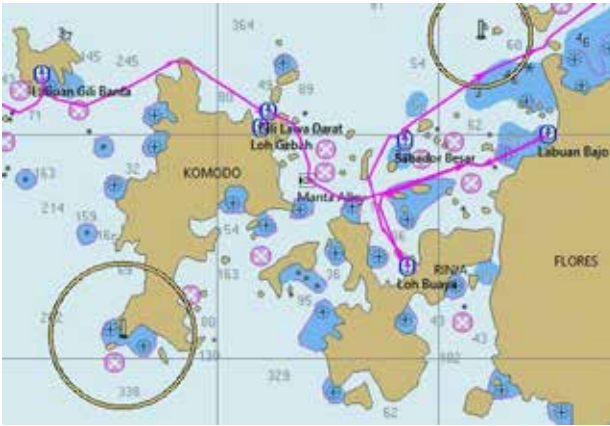
became the pattern of days to come, *Mustang Sally* being one of the first yachts of the season to visit.

We arrived at Wera Bay the day after Ramadan ended to find a large crowd thronging the jetty that gave a splendid view of the sunset with the new crescent

moon, Venus and Jupiter descending bright in the western sky. The bay is open to the north with the NE swell rolling us almost gunwale to gunwale, but the village itself is very interesting. Traditional boat builders line the foreshore with craft in various stages of construction under open, thatched roofed sheds. The boats are 20-30 metres long, constructed by eye from timber shipped from Flores and cut to size by chainsaw, the planks fastened by wooden dowels, hand-held electric drills and planers being the only other concessions to modernity. A local teacher keen to advance his English accompanied us on our walk (*jalan jalan*) through the village with a horde of children in attendance. A hand-woven silk and cotton sarong straight off a traditional loom cost a paltry sum of US\$20 to cover Trish's knees, as she had received a few critical appraisals walking the streets in her shorts. Still there were more than enough friendly people to compensate and the children weren't at all critical. Muslim fundamentalism appears to be on revival in eastern Indonesia, based on the number of new mosques we saw under construction since Lombok. We returned to the boat at dusk accompanied by our new friend and the local port captain. A request for 'port dues' was satisfied with a packet of Gudang Garam (local cigarettes which we carried for gifts) and a cold Bintang (beer).

Twelve miles from Komodo and tourists, a million miles from anywhere, Labuan Gili Banta is a deeply indented bay on the south side of uninhabited Banta Island. We languished for three days entirely alone on the smooth dark waters flanked by steep volcanic slopes rising to the crest of the breached caldera.

We traversed the strait between Banta and Komodo, a swirling mass of eddies, the flood tide against the 'Indonesian through flow'. *Phinisis* and day boats appeared everywhere as we approached the narrow pass between Komodo and Gili Lawa Darat. Having picked up a deep water mooring in the northern bay of Komodo, local hawkers from Komodo



village descended on us to sell carved komodo dragons, wooden lacquered and mosaic abalone bowls, masks and other trinkets now manufactured in the village. Morgan is now proud possessor of a 'dragon

tooth'. What was a very poor fishing village when I was last here has abandoned its colourful fishing *prahus* and developed a whole new industry servicing the tourist market.

The next morning, we grabbed the only mooring in the renowned bay of Gili Lawa Darat. The snorkelling was excellent with the greatest biodiversity and fish numbers we had seen so far. In a late afternoon drift along the edge of the drop-off we joined green turtles, while two sea eagles soared overhead. We left reluctantly the next day bound for Loh Liang and the dragons on Komodo. Fortuitously we passed en route through 'manta alley' off Makassar Reef right on slack water. We stooed around until the tourist boats thinned, before dropping Trish and Morgan off in 12 metres of water to snorkel with two large manta rays feeding on the bottom.

A phone call diverted us to Labuan Bajo. LBJ is full of dive and charter operators, travellers coming and going on their cruises to Komodo and surrounds, and half a dozen Italian restaurants. The changes since last dropping anchor here in 2002 were enormous, from sleepy fishing village to bustling commercialised tourist port, apparently doubling in size every two years. We anchored half a mile from the town wharves and the

anchorage outside us was full of large, two and three-masted *phinisis*, many bristling with satellite domes and modern electronics, and apparently luxuriously appointed. In the high season, they all descend on LBJ for a piece of the action. For six days, we enjoyed the hospitality of a cousin and proprietor of the Bayview Gardens Hotel perched high above LBJ with stunning views west over the Komodo Conservation Area.

Dragons proved elusive on our visit to Rinja Island although we passed one large male on our early morning walk from the dock to the park office. Rino, our well-spoken and informative guide, said they were just



Rush Hour Loh Buaya, Rinja Island

coming out of their breeding season which peaks in July, and they could be very hard to find. Still we saw wild horses, buffalo and deer, and there were enough smaller dragons attracted by breakfast smells at the camp to satisfy Morgan's interest.

The crystal clear, azure waters enveloping the myriad of islands and reefs that form the 400-square mile Komodo World Heritage area could be cruised forever; it's just a pity about the trash. However, environmental awareness is quite high amongst the 30 dive shop operators in LBJ, with several eco-warriors fighting for the cause. No doubt commercial interests are enhanced by being able to provide pristine dive environments, but whatever the motive the results are positive. Beach clean-ups have been organised employing local school children, raising environmental awareness as well as addressing the problem; the last drive collected over five tonnes of plastic rubbish off the beaches. There is can and bottle recycling on shore, and rubbish is collected and disposed of by local authorities although not necessarily effectively or efficiently, with funding always a problem.

Flores felt less conservative than Lombok and Sumbawa. Christians make up eighty percent of the population, although the small, poor fishing villages we anchored off on our eastward coasting were generally Muslim. We liked these little villages and the interaction with the children, mostly smiling boys, who descend on us in motley fleets of canoes to chat and ask for 'books'. Morgan had a great time on shore with them catching crabs, starfish and worms or skylarking in canoes and the kayak off the back of the boat. The caring nature of the older children towards both Morgan

and their smaller siblings, generally seated in between, was touching.

In Lingeh, one of the poorest villages of all, we visited the family of Juand, a young man who had visited us on anchor. He worked and studied in Makassar returning home periodically to visit his young wife and their first-born who stay with his sister, grandmother and family. There were few home comforts other than four faded pink embossed plastic chairs about a low, roughly hewn, yellow-painted table sharing a room with a bed, but they offered what little they had, giving us a bunch of green coconuts. On return we scoured the boat and returned the next day with whatever we could spare and a contribution to Juand's future studies. However, it's difficult to assuage the feeling of privilege.

Pancakes and maple syrup proved popular, and name bracelets made from plastic alphabet beads proved a great source of delight for the children that crowded into the cockpit; unfortunately we rapidly ran out of 'A's', with nearly every girl's name having at least two. Although they tried us on persistently for almost everything and anything, honesty and politeness generally prevailed, and when it all got too overwhelming we would retire below for 'schoolwork'.

A constant watch is required for rumpson and nets. We had one close encounter off Lingeh where a poorly marked net extended much



Tarsier on Belting

further from the fishing boat than expected. The nets have grown longer with the advent of motorised fishing boats, compared to my last visit, when the fishing boats generally sailed out to the fishing grounds on the early morning land breeze and back later in the day on the gathering sea breeze, and the nets were half the length.

Late afternoons reverberated with the 'put-puts' of slow revving, unmuffled, one cylinder Chinese diesel engines as boats of all sizes make their way home from their fishing grounds. On the low evening tides a fairy land of lights materialised on the reefs after dark as locals scavenged for small fish trapped in the pools, slapping the water loudly to scare the fish into traps. There is a rhythm to life here governed by the phases of the moon, tide, fish migrations and seasons, in stark contrast to the helter skelter of our hectic western life and its synthetic rhythms of commuting, gym and Saturday football.



At Riung we began to meet the vanguard of rally boats making the seasonal trek west from Darwin and Cairns. Morgan paddled over to welcome seven-year-old Sophia on *Kailana*. Everything was going splendidly until evening when Sophia became upset with Morgan for catching and killing crabs, a skill he had developed with the Bari Bay boys, and a standoff ensued between two tired children after a long day. After an exchange of notes, one apologising for such cruel behaviour and the other forgiving, they spent another happy afternoon kayaking and snorkelling on nearby Pulau Rutong.

Batu Boga is a delightful sheltered bay, with comfortable room for four yachts. Morgan made friends with the local fishermen, his yellow plastic kayak tied alongside their traditional, wooden-hulled boats while he fished with his little rod and reel while we enjoyed the company of old friends who unexpectedly dropped anchor nearby. Each day the fishermen would return to the bay from mid-morning onwards to raft up, becoming increasing vocal over cards towards nightfall. We swapped *cumi cumi* (squid) for *rokok* (cigarettes) and coke, although the cumi were bait for their nightly forays.

We enjoyed peace and solitude for one night anchored at Wudong under Mount Egon, its cusp shaped volcanic summit silhouetted pale dark against a cloudless paler sky. A stream of westbound rally yachts joined us over the remainder of our stay while we negotiated the tortuous, bureaucratic process of renewing our visas and temporary import permit for *Mustang Sally*. We were overwhelmed by the courtesy of Customs, but hit a brick wall when we were advised that we needed a letter of application for an extension of our visas from our sponsors. Ace Robin, our sponsor from Medana Bay Marina, came to the rescue, but it took seven days to muddle through the issue with numerous trips 30 kilometres into Maumere, capital of Flores, and many expensive phone calls and emails. Another spate of emails was required before Bali Customs would delegate authority to Maumere Customs to renew our import permit.

The Wudong anchorage lies 600m west of Ankermi Dive Resort owned and managed by Kermi, a very hospitable Javan who welcomes cruisers warmly. For 12 days, the resort became our retreat while we completed the paperwork and visited the chameleon volcanic crater lakes of Kelimutu. Trish managed several dives which were on a par with those she had at LBJ. When not socialising with fellow sailors we spent the evenings in the company of adventurous European travellers who had come to dive and relax on the shores of Maumere Bay, once regarded as one of the world's prime dive areas until the advent of dynamite and cyanide fishing and the massive earthquake and tsunami of 1992. Fortunately, it is now recovering and attracting divers and travellers again.

Morgan spent his days after schoolwork swimming, kayaking and

## Warren Batt with Trish Meyer

helping fishermen on the beach haul their nets, and his nights making friends amongst the guests, mainly the attractive young Swiss and German women, with the odd Catalan girl and of course Nick, the young dive instructor from Guernsey with whom he hit it off very well. We left with an expanded repertoire of handshakes and high-five-type greetings.

Flores is a beautiful tortured landscape, mystical and brooding under its 14 volcanoes. After another beautiful night - the moon high in the sky and almost full, the ridge line and mountain peaks to the west rimmed by slivers of white cloud bright in the moonlight, glowing like snow fields in the pale dark – it was time to turn west once more. It was the end of August and we had commitments in Semarang 800 miles away. At least we would have fair wind.



## Maumere to Semarang

Taking advantage of the full moon we sailed the 450 miles directly to Kangean. The seas were flat with little breeze along the Flores coast, in no-man's land between the east-west shipping lanes and inshore rumpons (FAD's), but the wind increased off Sumbawa.

The crew of *Lazaroti*, a small trading boat from Timor, welcomed us to Kangean, braving the F4-5 chop to swim across to us, followed by a cheeky group of locals the next day. The latter hailed from a nearby island inhabited by 1,500 Madurese whose main income was fish farming for the local market. That information plus an invitation to visit cost five cokes, two packets of cigarettes and two T-shirts. Declined requests included two litres of diesel, Morgan's towel and rash shirt, the binoculars, Trish's sunglasses and beer.

We were now sailing crowded waters as we ran parallel to the major shipping lane from Singapore and the South China Sea to Australia, crossed by very busy routes from Surabaya to Makassar and Kalimantan. The AIS gave great confidence but there were a few rogue ships and tugs that didn't turn up on AIS and for which we relied on eyes and radar.



Semarang Welcoming Committee

The tugs with their long tows were especially bad with many not lit in accordance with International Rules for avoiding collision at sea. Tugs and their tows became more common and appeared to be a law unto themselves. To our dismay, much of the bay at Bawean was taken by three large barges and their tugs, and two large seiners rafted up inshore. The largest barge was empty and hung off the back of its tug which itself was hanging off a very long rode in shallow water. The combined swing of the two in the gusty wind swept a large area and we moved three times before we had a secure anchorage well clear of danger.

Overnight between Bawean and Semarang we sailed through great fleets of squid boats, the loom of their lights stretching around the



Indonesian Wedding

horizon before bursting free as fierce orbs of liquid light. There was no need for a moon to guide our way, the cockpit lit by their glare as we passed close by. The first blush of dawn, ochre red above a dark pall of cloud and smog, rose through muted orange into washed out green-blues before giving way to the darkness of the night sky above. It was not the sweet waft of spice and verdant green on the breeze off the shore that greeted us 40 miles out of Semarang, rather damp ash and coal dust that enveloped us as we moved closer to the industrial powerhouses of Indonesia.

## Warren Batt with Trish Meyer

Dodging colourful traditional fishing boats and large fixed fishing platforms further inshore, we made our way towards the featureless coastline of Semarang to be welcomed by a police escort and our friend Fendi inside the large port just before midday. The drama began as we ran aground approaching our allotted berth inside the police basin. After several hours of checking other



Bentulu, Home of the Raja Puti Besar

possibilities we ploughed through the soft mud on top of the tide to raft alongside an army patrol boat in deeper water. Recreational boating facilities are absent in Semarang apart from an incomplete, shallow, power-boat marina a little along the coast.

Semarang is Indonesia's third largest city and off the cruisers' track. The busy industrial port is shrouded in dust and haze from arrays of silos. Traditional Bugis trading boats and the vestiges of a once great Dutch trading empire provide the only exotic relief. Largely built on reclaimed land extending seawards, the port is steadily sinking with constant works to build up docks and roads and provide high tide barriers. It is hardly the Venice of the east, but facing the same problems whether due to global warming, tectonic subsidence or natural land settlement on the fringe of the flat, featureless coastal plain.

*Bentulu*, the Indonesian home of my good NZ friends Kim and Ratna and Ratna's extended family, 45 minutes out of Semarang, was our home for the next four weeks. Trish and Morgan were welcomed with open arms while I dashed back to NZ. Kim and Ratna joined us from NZ to celebrate the wedding of Ratna's niece, a colourful and noisy affair over three days. Time passed idyllically looking up the mountain over the fish ponds and golden padi fields, as we immersed ourselves in Indonesian small town life, a unique blend of western modernity and traditional values. 'Can we stay here until I die', said Morgan, after a wonderful sixth birthday - so spoilt and loved by everyone! Visas were renewed once more with a bit of cut and paste assistance from Fendi before sad farewells.

## Semarang to Batam

After a day of refuelling and scrubbing off the four weeks of accumulated

grime, we finally departed on the 8 October with smiles all round, after paying off the army a handsome sum 'for security' and a present for the crew. Kim and six of our new friends joined us for a jaunt to Karimunjawa, 65 miles off the coast to the north of Semarang. We ploughed back through the mud from the police basin into the main harbour and immediately encountered problems, unable to reach cruising speed and the engine overheating. We made our way slowly down the channel with an overtaking Indonesian warship blasting warnings to stay clear, before clearing it and motor sailing to Pulau Pandang. That night we scraped a thick accumulation of barnacles off the prop and cleared the plastic bag from the water strainer, resolving the problems. Prayers on the foredeck completed, we weighed anchor for a fast reach to Karimunjawa, but the passage was not so pleasant for our Indonesian guests. We anchored well clear of the large rally fleet occupying the main anchorage. Terra firma was a more attractive option for them over the remaining couple of days.

The SE trades held for 24 hours after leaving Karimunjawa before a weak NW change brought the acrid smell of fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan, where forest was being illegally cleared by burning to make way for palm



Crossing the Line

oil plantations. Our eyes became scratchy and noses blocked – our love of Indonesia was being tested. Fortunately, the SElies filled in again as we approached Belitung; five hours short of our destination the engine gave up the ghost, the filter bowls and filters clogged by dirty Semarang fuel local officials insisted we take. After two hours of dripping perspiration cleaning and replacing filters, the engine was running sweetly again. By mid-afternoon we were anchored in a strong sea breeze off the north-west corner of Belitung on a lee shore of magnificent white sandy beaches and granite sculpted by wind and waves.

We moved into a marginally better anchorage where the evenings brought the hour-long parade of spider boats heading to their nearby fishing grounds. Inland, Belitung is not very enticing: a deeply weathered rolling plain with low hills, the forests replaced by scrubby regrowth and palm oil plantations with the odd pepper garden. The scars of tin mining are everywhere, the residual

## Warren Batt with Trish Meyer

colluvial/alluvial tin deposits sluiced from the pallid soils, tin and tourism bringing comparative wealth to the island.

We crossed the Equator on route Nongsa Point, Batam. With great ceremony, Morgan was doused with saltwater before being smeared in a sticky concoction of tomato sauce, jam, peanut butter and baby powder to become a fully-fledged shellback, no longer a pollywog!

The friendly Nongsa Point Marina staff took our lines and for the next three days we enjoyed the resort-like pleasures of the marina while we lodged paper work to obtain clearance. We had finished our five-month cruise through Indonesia's enchanted isles enhanced by Morgan's company who quickly broke down barriers to provide us with a different perspective on life in Indonesia. Yet, with



Melaka Sight Seeing

17,500 islands stretched over 4,000 miles, we have barely scratched the surface and look forward to returning one day.

## Batam to Phuket

We departed Nongsa on 25 October to sail the 500 miles to Phuket in a series of overnight passages up the Straits of Malacca to Port Dickson, Pangkor and Langkawi where we stopped for three weeks in Rebak marina, before island hopping the final 130 miles via Tarutao, Rok Nok and Phi Phi Don to clear into Phuket at Ao Chalong on 3 December. Our passages were uneventful but for the intimidating electrical storms and heavy rain common to the transition between the SW and NE monsoons.

We finished the year as we started from Fremantle, racing. This time in the Cruising IRC3 Division of the King's Cup regatta with many of *Mustang Sally's* old Fremantle crew. Morgan raced with us every day to become adept at serving the beers back on the anchor. We raced in full cruising trim to finish second overall by one point, pipped by friends sailing a Beneteau First 44.7 in racing trim, after leading into the last day. It was frustrating, but a fun way to finish seven months and 4,500 miles of adventure.