



RCC PILOTAGE FOUNDATION



CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY

Tom Partridge



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Visit www.rccpf.org.uk for any mid-season updates or annual supplements, for cruising logs for this area, or if you notice any errors or omissions and would like to let us know.

Contact us at info@rccpf.org.uk

Positions and Waypoints

All positions and waypoints are to datum WGS 84. They are included to help in locating places, features and transits. Do not rely on them alone for safe navigation.

Bearings and Lights

Any bearings are given as °T and from seaward. The characteristics of lights may be changed during the lifetime of this book. They should be checked against the latest edition of the UK Admiralty List of Lights.

Photos

All photos are courtesy of Tom Partridge unless stated otherwise in the photo caption.

Navionics Chartlets

We recommend cross-reference with more inter-active electronic chart apps or to the free chart viewer at <https://webapp.navionics.com/>

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Whilst the RCC Pilotage Foundation, the author and the publishers have used reasonable endeavours to ensure the accuracy of the content of this publication, it contains selected information and thus is not definitive. It does not contain all known information on the subject in hand and should not be relied on alone for navigational use: it should only be used in conjunction with official hydrographical data. This is particularly relevant to the plans, which should not be used for navigation. The RCC Pilotage Foundation, the authors and the publishers believe that the information which they have included is a useful aid to prudent navigation, but the safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgment of the skipper, who should assess all information, published or unpublished. The information provided in this publication may be out of date and may be changed or updated without notice. The RCC Pilotage Foundation cannot accept any liability for any error, omission or failure to update such information. To the extent permitted by law, the RCC Pilotage Foundation, the author and the publishers do not accept liability for any loss and/or damage howsoever caused that may arise from reliance on information contained in these pages.

THE RCC PILOTAGE FOUNDATION

The RCC Pilotage Foundation was formed as an independent charity in 1976 supported by a gift and permanent endowment made to the Royal Cruising Club by Dr Fred Ellis. The Foundation's charitable objective is "to advance the education of the public in the science and practice of navigation". The Foundation is privileged to have been given the copyrights to books written by a number of distinguished authors and yachtsmen. These are kept as up to date as possible. New publications are also produced by the Foundation to cover a range of cruising areas. This is only made possible through the dedicated work of our authors and editors, all of whom are experienced sailors, who depend on a valuable supply of information from around the world by generous-minded yachtsmen and women. Most of the management of the Foundation is done on a voluntary basis. In line with its charitable status, the Foundation distributes no profits. Any surpluses are used to finance new publications and to subsidise publications which cover some of the more remote areas of the world. The Foundation works in close collaboration with three publishers – Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson, Bloomsbury (Adlard Coles Nautical) and On Board Publications. The Foundation also itself publishes guides and pilots, including web downloads, for areas where limited demand does not justify large print runs. Several books have been translated into French, Spanish, Italian and German and some books are now available in e-versions. For further details about the RCC Pilotage Foundation and its publications visit: www.rccpf.org.uk.

FOREWORD

Access to information on the Chagos Archipelago (BIOT) has been difficult for cruising yachtsmen and women in recent years and confusions have arisen. The RCC Pilotage Foundation is extremely grateful to Tom Partridge and his fiancée, Susie Plume, for creating this guide. Tom and Susie are on the final leg of a circumnavigation and cruised the Indian Ocean in 2016. Their knowledge is first hand and is supported by their further research and reference to the experiences of other cruising yachtsmen and women.

Thanks also to Ros Hogbin for her help with the final production of the guide.

Jane Russell
Editor-in-Chief
RCC Pilotage Foundation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the cruisers who visited the Chagos Archipelago in 2016 with us, not just for some wonderful memories but who, after some struggles to secure permits to visit, inspired me to write this guide. A big thank you as always to my fiancée Susie Plume who tirelessly sorts my scattered writings into a structured order, proof checks everything and without whom I could not do any of this.

To those yachts who do receive a treasured permit to visit BIOT, we ask that you please respect this unique and fragile environment. We were saddened to find that previous cruisers had left behind rubbish like jerry cans, boat parts etc. Please do not do the same; if we can ask just one favour in return for this free guide it's that you please take some of that rubbish left by other cruisers away with you. Endeavour to leave the islands in a better state than when you arrived so those behind you can continue to enjoy them. Thank you.

Tom Partridge
Yacht *Adina*
January 2017

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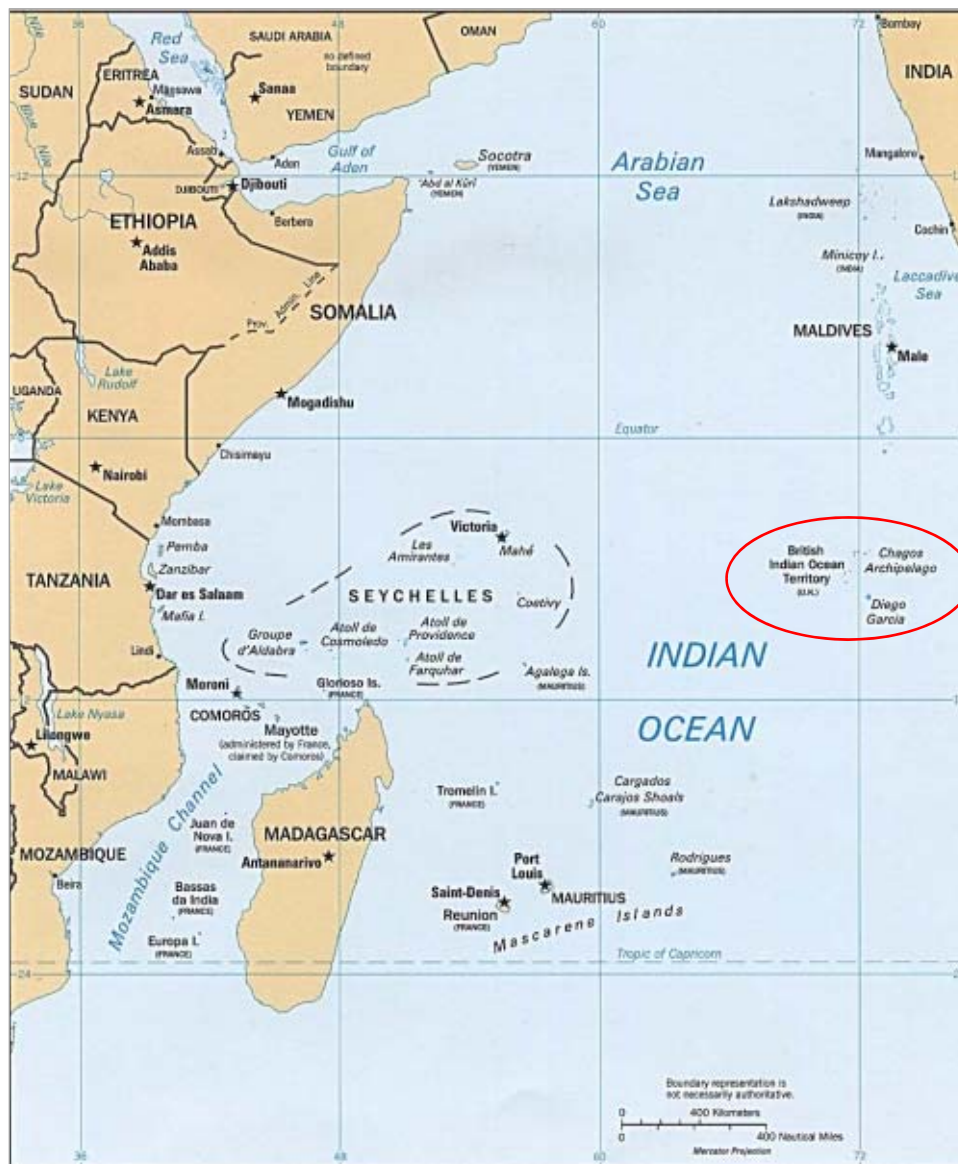
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Chagos Archipelago, British Indian Ocean Territory

INTRODUCTION

The Chagos Archipelago or, as it is formally known, British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), has long been used as a transit point for sailors crossing the Indian Ocean, utilising it as a safe stop during the transition season between the northern and southern hemisphere cyclone seasons. Cruisers must obtain a permit to use it as a transit stop and stays are limited to a maximum of four weeks, which gives time to explore these fabled islands whilst waiting for the seasons to change. The archipelago is an area of marine conservation and strictly regulated; cruisers are fortunate to have the opportunity to enjoy some of the most unspoilt and best protected marine territory on the planet today.

These notes are intended to help cruisers obtain a permit and prepare for a safe and enjoyable visit, with the focus being on timing your transit.



Location of BIOT (source: <http://www.surftrip.com/image/maps/chagos-archipelago-map.jpg>)



*Yachts by Boddam Island in the Saloman Atoll
(Source: Airtask Group)*



Endless beaches line the islands in BIOT

BACKGROUND

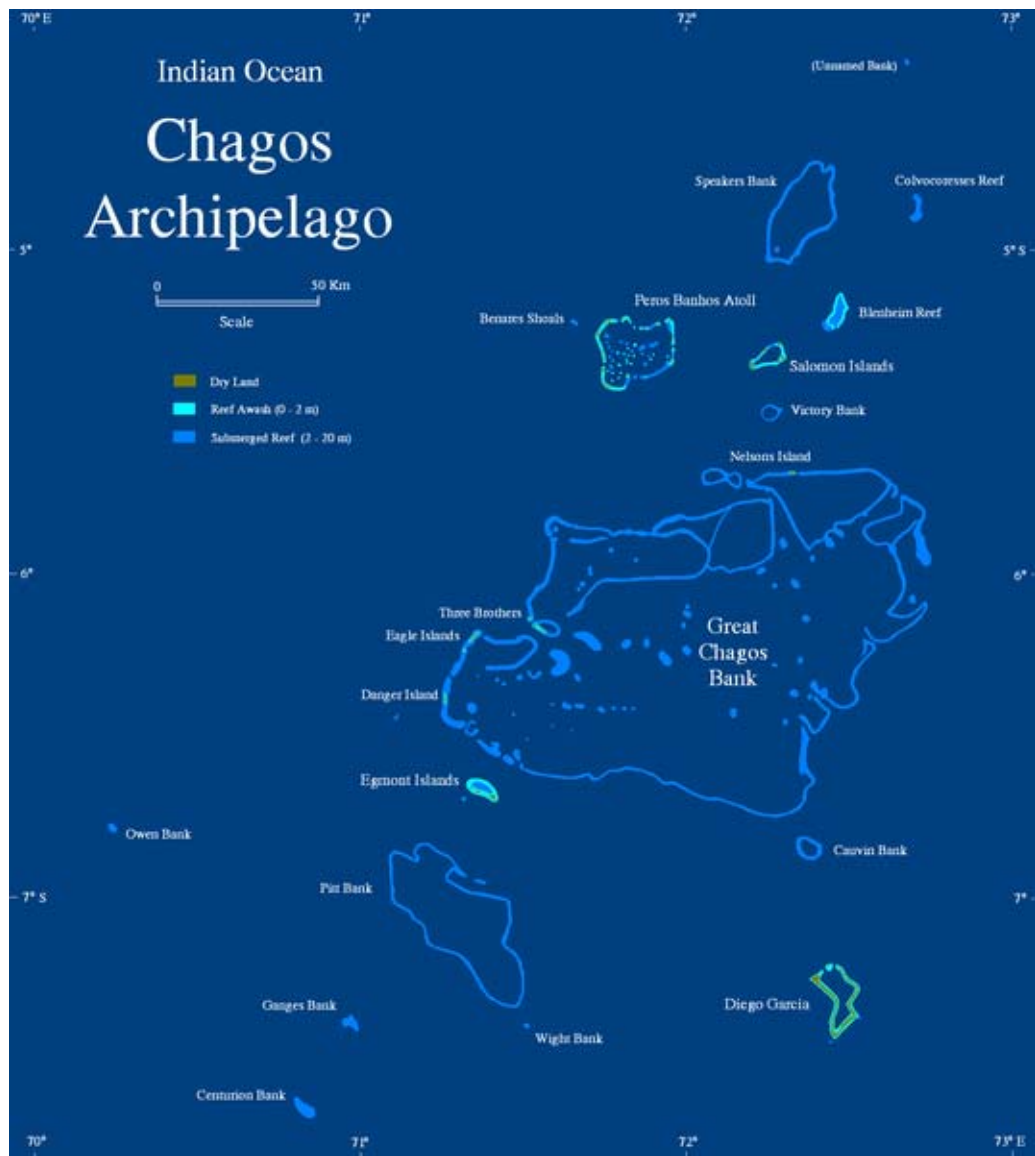
The 55 islands that make up the Chagos Archipelago (BIOT), cover an area of approximately 640,000km² and sit isolated just south of the equator in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Their closest neighbours are the Maldives, 280M to the north, the Seychelles 1000M west and Indonesia, 1700M to the east.

The islands were ceded to Britain by the French in the Paris Treaty of 1814. In November 1965 they were established as the British Indian Ocean Territory which at the time also included the Seychelles islands of Aldabra, Farquhar and Desroches, but these were later returned to the Seychelles on their independence in 1976.

In 1966 the British signed an agreement with the US, culminating in a military base being built on the island of Diego Garcia in the south of the archipelago which is still in use today. This arrangement was for an initial period of fifty years but can remain in force legally for a further twenty years. In 1967 the BIOT Administration acquired the land and the commercial interests of the company operating the copra plantations. Controversially, the Chagossians were forcibly removed and to this day are still fighting a campaign to return. Chagossians and their descendants now live in Mauritius, Seychelles and there is a small community in England.

The BIOT website states *“The British Indian Ocean Territory is not a tourist destination. Access is restricted and a permit is required in advance of travel. There are no commercial flights and permits are only issued to allow safe passage for yachts through the Indian Ocean. You may apply for a permit to moor in the Outer Islands of BIOT only where it [is] essential for your safe passage across the Indian Ocean, which we must be convinced of before granting you a permit.”*

BIOT is administered from London with the key positions in the administration being the Commissioner, Dr Peter Hayes; Deputy Commissioner, Mr Alex Cameron; Administrator, Nicola Carnie (names correct as of October 2016). There is also an Assistant Administrator who handles requests for permits; the person in this position has changed frequently over previous years.



The Chagos Archipelago (Source: www.wikipedia.com)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Time Zone

BIOT is technically in UTC +5, however the military base at Diego Garcia and the Pacific Marlin patrol boat maintain a time of UTC +6.

Courtesy Flag



This is an image of the BIOT flag. Officials have not been known to require one to be flown but for those who collect courtesy flags, it certainly ranks as one of the rarer ones.

Supplies/provisioning

You need to ensure you are fully provisioned for your passage to BIOT, your time in BIOT, any required extension and your onward passage. There are no supplies whatsoever except for fish caught for personal consumption.

Think carefully about your fuel requirements, including motoring, use of generator and using your dinghy outboard to explore or fish whilst in BIOT. Cruisers often underestimate fuel requirements and if winds are light and you have to leave, you want to ensure you have as much fuel as possible. If you end up out at sea with little fuel, no wind and having to drift, it is an uncomfortable experience as the ocean swell still reaches up from the south.

There are some water wells ashore on Boddam but you would need to boil and filter the water for drinking. The water wells are good for showering and washing clothes.

Ashore

There are many islands to explore in and around the Peros Banhos and Salomon Atolls. The islands are untouched and you can see the likes of red-footed boobies, sooty terns and white fairy terns close up, seemingly unbothered by humans. Hermit crabs and coconut crabs (especially on Boddam Island) can be seen in great numbers.

While scuba diving is prohibited, you can snorkel the pristine reef and many cruisers comment on the size of reef fish. Black tip reef sharks are common and are often seen patrolling the Boddam Island moorings. Pods of dolphin are known to enter the atolls.

Boddam Island itself was once a coconut plantation and there was a small community here. Many ruins remain scattered ready for exploration – you can see the old railway lines, a hospital, church and a graveyard. Cruisers have turned the remains of one old ruin into the 'Chagos Yacht Club' and many have left mementoes of their stay. You can find a visitors' book inside the club. In the evening cruisers often gather here for a fire or barbecue.

A visit to the Chagos Archipelago is without doubt a highlight for many cruisers. Please respect the rules - do not burn or leave litter, do not kill coconut crabs, try and remove some of the rubbish, especially boat parts left by others.



Top Left: Hermit crabs which grow to be Coconut Crabs

Left: The graveyard on Boddam Island, one of the many ruins to explore

Right: Red-footed boobies can be seen nesting in May/June



WEATHER

The weather in the Chagos Archipelago is generally hot and humid, being cooled by trade winds when they blow. December to March is the rainy season with light WNW winds and higher temperatures. June to September is the dry season with moderate SE winds, slightly lower temperatures and less rainfall.

For those sailors intending to sail between Asia and South Africa or vice versa it is important to have a good grasp of the weather and seasons in the North Indian and South Indian Ocean to optimise favourable sailing windows.

North Indian Ocean

The NE monsoon in the North Indian Ocean lasts from December to March, making sailing with the wind behind you on a typical route west ideal for exploring countries like Thailand, Northern Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. In the opposite season, the SW monsoon lasts from June to September and if on a typical circumnavigation westabout via South Africa you will need to be located south of the equator.

South Indian Ocean

The SE monsoon season in the South Indian Ocean lasts from June to September bringing good sailing conditions of around 10-20kt making this the favoured time to head west towards South Africa. The NW monsoon season lasts from November to March with much lighter winds. This is also the cyclone season and cyclones are most prominent around December to April. It is extremely rare for cyclones to occur in BIOT.

Transition Seasons

The transition seasons are April/May and October/November. It is at these times of the year that the action of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) which separates the air masses of the northern

and southern hemispheres is dominant. The ITCZ can bring strong squalls but generally winds are very light and there can be no wind for days on end.

Weather considerations for your safe passage through BIOT

The restriction of being allowed to stay in BIOT a maximum of four weeks puts pressure on the timing of your trip.

Most yachts sailing from the Maldives are looking to leave there before the onset of the North Indian Ocean monsoon season which brings strong S to SW winds. These can start any time from late April.

More importantly, yachts need wind for an onward journey from BIOT to Rodrigues (east of Mauritius) or the Seychelles. Looking at a pilot atlas, you will notice the SE trade winds tend to start to reach Chagos around mid-May at the earliest. The chances of these winds setting in and strengthening only really improve in June, hence timing your visit the later the better is desirable. This is more of a challenge for those setting sail west for the Seychelles, who need the trade winds to come up from the south, whilst those travelling to Rodrigues may motor south to find wind.

Many yachts have been caught out by arriving in BIOT in early May and having to leave for the Seychelles four weeks later before the trade-winds have set in. Their passages to the Seychelles have taken up to two weeks, often in uncomfortable swell, whilst a passage in trade winds can typically be achieved in one week. Equally, yachts leaving the Maldives later, when the S to SW winds have started, have had to endure unpleasant passages to BIOT.

There is no easy solution to this problem, but a recommended tactic for yachts sailing from the Maldives and on to the Seychelles is to head to Gan (the southernmost island in the Maldives) and wait for a break in the S to SW winds in the second half of May before heading south to BIOT. This enables you to leave BIOT later in June with a greater chance of a trade wind sail to the Seychelles. It can be better initially to sail south to find wind and then come back up north further west as the trade winds are usually stronger closer to the Seychelles. Be warned, weather forecasting with the ITCZ is notoriously difficult and what may look like a favourable forecast a week out will often not materialise.

For those heading on to Rodrigues, the departure date from BIOT is less of an issue as you can motor south to find the trade winds. The challenge here is that once you find the SE trade winds, these can be strong and present a challenge in themselves if sailing direct to Rodrigues. Many sailors prefer to head directly south to start so that they can bear away to Rodrigues as the trade winds strengthen.

CURRENTS

Adding to the challenge of fickle weather are strong currents. During the transition season, the equatorial counter current is found from approximately 2°N to 4°S; it flows from west to east and is usually at its strongest in April/May. Once you reach 4°S, the impact of the counter current wears off quickly.

The counter current impacts sailing from Gan, Maldives, down to BIOT and must be factored into your passage planning. Those who have ignored it have found themselves setting east and missing Chagos. It is often better to get some westing in very early in your trip especially if winds are forecast to be lighter further south. This should reduce the risk of motoring into the current later, wasting valuable fuel.

A more favourable equatorial current can be found south of the equator once you get south of 5°S but its impact during the transition period is not as strong as the equatorial counter current.

Those sailing to the Seychelles in the transition season are likely to encounter both favourable and adverse currents on their journey, as the currents tend to flow in big broad circles at this time of year.

The use of electronic Real-Time Ocean Forecast System (RTOFS) current files is recommended to help analyse where the currents are flowing and at what rate.

FORMALITIES

Obtaining a permit

To visit BIOT you will need a permit, which can be obtained through formal application to the BIOT administration team in London; you will be required to fulfil strict criteria in your application. The final decision as to whether or not you will be granted a permit is at the discretion of this team. Any person who enters BIOT without a valid permit is liable to imprisonment for three years and/or a fine of £3,000.

Here is a step-by-step guide to the process for obtaining a BIOT permit.

Step 1. Complete the 'VISIT PERMIT REQUEST – YACHTS' document

- This six page document can be found at <http://biot.gov.io/wp-content/uploads/BIOT-Visit-Permit-Request-Yachts.doc>
- It is critical that where the form requests 'Purpose of Visit' you write 'Transit'. The BIOT administration team state '*BIOT is not a tourist destination*' and that '*Permits are only issued to allow safe passage for yachts through the Indian Ocean*'. In 2016 several yachts were denied permits on the basis that they had given their purpose of visit as 'Tourism', 'Pleasure' or 'Private Visit.' See further notes in the next section regarding 'Definitions of safe passage.'
- A maximum stay of 28 days is permitted. The form asks for 'Date of intended arrival' as well as 'Date of intended departure'. Once you are granted a permit you can change these dates with relative ease and it is recommended you do change them to start your permit a few days before you anticipate arriving. In the past yachts arriving before the start date of their permit have been told to leave.
- Where the form requests 'Permitted Mooring site(s) to be Visited' include 'Peros Banhos' and 'Salomon islands'. This will allow you to visit the five designated mooring areas for yachts across these two atolls. Yachts are not allowed to anchor or moor anywhere else in the archipelago, except in an emergency, so do not write anything else or you risk your permit being declined.
- Complete the 'Declaration for Yachts in BIOT Waters'. This is a legal part of the application in which you agree that if '*I am unable to sail my said yacht and its passengers out of the Territory, I shall within 7 days of demand pay the Commissioner of the British Indian Ocean Territory the cost of transporting my passengers and me from the Territory together with all such costs as may be incurred for the clean up and removal of my yacht from BIOT*'.

Step 2. Provide proof of appropriate insurance

- Insurance requirements are strict and specific. '*Given the remoteness of the islands and the lack of medical facilities in BIOT, before issuing a permit we will ask you to provide proof of insurance for minimum \$100,000 US for each person on board to cover the cost of a medevac as well as insurance that covers the cost of wreck recovery, clean up and removal.*'

- You will need to send your entire insurance documents (by e-mail or fax) for both yacht and medical cover to the BIOT administration team. It is highly recommended you also create a page/pages to accompany the documents highlighting the sections of cover that relate to the specific insurance requirements so they can be reviewed easily by the BIOT Administrator. Copy, paste and highlight the relevant sections as appropriate.
- It is a good idea to contact your insurer(s) and ask for British Indian Ocean Territory to be specifically referred to in your insurance schedule, along with reference to medevac cover and wreck removal – ensure your schedule highlights that medevac and wreck removal is included for BIOT.
- Some cruisers have annual insurance, some cruisers obtain insurance cover just for the period of their stay in BIOT.

Step 3. Submit your application to the BIOT Administration team

- You can either e-mail your application or send it in via fax to the Assistant Administrator, British Indian Ocean Territory Administration; e-mail: BIOTadmin@fco.gov.uk; fax: + 44 (0) 20 7008 1589.
- Note that the BIOT team ask *'Please ensure your e-mails are no larger than 5MB, otherwise we will not receive them nor will we receive notification of them, and that your e-mails have the name of your yacht in the subject field'*. This can be a constraint especially for sending your insurance documents so you may need to send several e-mails. Using pdfs instead of sending word documents can help to keep the file sizes smaller.
- It is recommended you ask for acknowledgement of your application. Historically the BIOT administrative team in London has had a poor reputation for communication when dealing with yacht permits.
- Although the BIOT website advises it can take up to six weeks to grant a permit, you should look to submit your application at least eight weeks in advance of your anticipated arrival into BIOT, earlier if you can. You may will need to chase the team to ensure your application is processed in time.
- It is advisable to refer to the Chagos Archipelago as BIOT and not Chagos.
- The BIOT team insist you use BIOTadmin@fco.gov.uk for all correspondence and are reluctant to give out any other details. You should endeavour to comply with this but should you be struggling or need to escalate, the Administrator's contact details are: Nicola Carnie, Administrator; Address: British Indian Ocean Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory Administration, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH; e-mail: nicola.carnie@fco.gov.uk; phone: +44 20 7008 7959.
- Keep copies of all the documents and e-mails you submit.
- Do not pay any monies until your permit has been approved.
- Note that your passport should be valid for a minimum period of six months from the date of entry into the British Indian Ocean Territory. No visa is required.

Step 4. Following permit approval, pay the required fees

- Once your application has been approved you will need to pay for your permit by transferring money into the BIOT Administration's UK bank account. The details are provided in the 'VISIT PERMIT REQUEST – YACHTS' form detailed in Step 1.
- Charges are £50 per week, charges are per full week, you cannot pay on a per day basis and payment has to be made in pounds sterling.
- If you are paying from an international bank account you will also be charged £1 for transfers of £100 and under, or £7 for transfers over £100.

- Remember to include the name of your boat in the payment reference field to avoid issues when the BIOT administration team look for your payment. You will need to supply proof of the payment to them; ensure you take a screen shot of the payment at the time you make it or ask your financial institution for proof of payment. This can be cumbersome when making an international payment so ensure you record all details of the payment.
- As a general rule, your permit should be sent by e-mail shortly after your payment has been received. However there can be delays – so politely chase if needed.

Step 5. Save and print your permit and related forms

When your permit has been approved you should receive the following documents:

Document 1. 'Mooring Permit'

- This will state:
 1. The permit number, which is usually the number of the permit granted for your year of travel – for example 001/17 or 002/17 and so on
 2. The date issued
 3. Boat details
 4. Crew details
- Check that all details are correct.

Document 2. 'Guidance for Visitors'

- This document contains the rules and regulations pertaining to visiting BIOT, including penalties that can be imposed if not followed. It is important that you and your crew read this document to understand what you are/are not allowed to do. Cruisers in the past have been guilty of not obeying these rules.
- Remember this is a fragile environment and it is a privilege to be allowed to spend time in it. Please do not leave any rubbish onshore and if you can, take some of the waste that has been left by other cruisers with you. Continual abuse of the rules risk BIOT stopping future cruisers using this as a safe passage stop. Aim to leave the islands in a better state than when you arrived.
- The document also details the five permitted mooring areas. It is recommended you map these out on your charts to help understand where you can anchor/moor your boat. See the section on 'Navigation/Moorings' in this document for more information.



Coconut Crabs are protected inhabitants of BIOT

Document 3. 'Visitors and Visiting Vessels Ordinance 2006'

- This is a more detailed legal document pertaining to rules surrounding visiting vessels and penalties that can be imposed. Again, ensure you and your crew read the document and understand the rules and regulations pertaining to your visit.
- Note this document states '*No vessel shall enter the territorial sea of Diego Garcia*'. This means you must stay clear by at least 3M.

Document 4. 'Fishing Returns Form: Yachts'

- The purpose of this document is to help BIOT fishing officers monitor fish stocks, the nature of species and their sizes.
- Fishing by hand line is the only form of fishing allowed and it must be only for personal consumption within three days.
- You should record any fish you have caught as you catch them as this may be requested for inspection by a Fisheries Protection Officer. At the end of your trip your completed form must be sent to the BIOT team.
- Note, scuba diving and spear fishing are strictly prohibited.

Step 6, if required. Change your arrival/departure dates

- You can request an amendment to the arrival/departure dates on your permit before you actually arrive in BIOT.
- Simply e-mail the BIOT administration team on BIOTadmin@fco.gov.uk with your new dates. They will issue you with an amended permit.
- It is advisable to do this at least 72 hours before you depart for BIOT; these requests are usually turned around quickly but better to be safe than sorry.
- If you arrive before your permit starts and the BIOT patrol vessel or spotter plane finds you there you risk being fined and told to leave with immediate effect.

Step 7, if required. Apply for a permit extension

- The BIOT team will issue extensions to permits in exceptional circumstances. The most common request is due to unfavourable weather for an onward passage, typically no wind.
- Extensions are issued for seven days, payable at a fee of £50. Seven days is usually the maximum permitted extension but if you have a strong case for not being able to leave, you might be able to stay longer.
- There are no set rules stated but it is understood that the BIOT administration team will need strong arguments for an extension.
- It is important you request any extensions before your permit expires (using boat comms, there are no facilities ashore). Keep proof of any requests for extensions or extensions granted, as you will need this should the patrol vessel arrive. Stay on the right side of the law; not to do so may mean you will be fined or made to leave with immediate effect.

Definitions of Safe Passage

BIOT states '*You may apply for a permit to moor in the Outer Islands of BIOT only where it is essential for your safe passage across the Indian Ocean, which we must be convinced of before granting you a permit.*' In recent years there has been a decline in the number of permits issued for those wishing to stop in BIOT and the BIOT administration team have been challenging yachts about their reasons for stopping. There are clear justifications as to why the Chagos Archipelago represents a safe passage stop for yacht crossing the Indian Ocean and some yachts have communicated these to the BIOT team. However, like anywhere else, BIOT personnel come and go so you may find yourself having to provide justification for your safe stop.

The following may help you in your justification, depending on your chosen route across the Indian Ocean. It covers points relevant to the most popular routing from the Maldives to BIOT and then on to the Seychelles or Rodrigues as part of an anticlockwise route.

Timing

Yachts typically sail to BIOT in April/May to ensure they are south of the equator before the onset of the SW cyclone season in the northern hemisphere. Yachts have traditionally used BIOT as a safe stop to wait for the onset of the southern hemisphere's SE trade winds in late May/June when they can then sail on to the Seychelles or Rodrigues.

Weather

April/May is a transitional season in this area bringing three risks which are hard to avoid over a long period at sea:

1. Experiencing strong SW headwinds in the northern hemisphere which start to dominate at this time of year.
2. A high likelihood of being caught in the doldrums – a lack of wind in the belt around the equator where no wind for days on end is common. Given the considerable length of the journeys to the Seychelles or Rodrigues, sailing yachts are unable to carry enough fuel to motor the entire journey.
3. Encountering cyclones north of the equator – while rare, due to the distances involved, a potential cyclone is unlikely to be forecast before departure.

To quote Jimmy Cornell, a leading expert on circumnavigation, from his book 'World Voyage Planner', *'BIOT would make a convenient landfall during the transitional period as the archipelago is very rarely affected by Cyclones.'*

Currents

Sailing south from the Maldives to BIOT enables yachts to make it quickly across the strong equatorial counter current which flows from west to east. This minimises the negative impact the current has on their journey and any risks involved. Conversely, the direct route from Maldives to Seychelles for example, is a recipe for disaster, as it combines the risks of no wind and adverse currents, and yachts attempting this in the past have had to request assistance. Yachts first sailing south to BIOT are able to use the favourable west to east currents south of the equator when sailing onwards from BIOT to the Seychelles or Rodrigues.

Piracy

By being allowed to stay in BIOT, yachts are able to stay out of the BMP4 high risk piracy area until the onset of the SE trade winds, which arrive at the end of May/early June. At this time pirates are known to avoid the rougher sea state.

Dealing with emergencies

If you have an emergency that you consider life threatening whilst in BIOT, you should declare it as a maritime emergency in accordance with International Maritime Regulations. The BIOT authorities in Diego Garcia can be contacted on HF SSB channel 2182 or VHF channel 16 if within range. You can also try to contact the BIOT patrol vessel *Pacific Marlin* on HF SSB channel 4057, satellite phone 00 870 356 301 550 or e-mail pacific.marlin@swireships.com.

BIOT Patrols

BIOT makes use of a patrol boat, *MV Pacific Marlin*, and a spotter plane to monitor territorial waters. Typically they are patrolling for illegal fishing boats but they will also check on yachts.

To visit yachts, *Pacific Marlin* will typically anchor and then deploy a 20ft RIB with around 6 men including a Customs official and a Visit Vessel Control Officer (VVCO). They will visit each yacht in turn and ask to see your permit and passports for all on board. Should you have extended your permit you will need to show e-mail proof of an extension. You can expect both your passport(s) and permit to be stamped. Yachts report officials to be friendly and courteous. An inspection of the Visitors' Log Book kept in the Chagos Yacht Club will reveal they have signed it too.



Delta Four flying over yachts in BIOT

In 2016 a marine aircraft *Delta Four* was used to check in on the yachts. Should you see the aircraft, turn on your VHF radio to channel 16. The plane will ask for the names of all yachts moored. The crew are friendly and polite and in 2016 would regularly fly-by and greet the yachts as they flew over.

Should you see any fishing boats in the vicinity of either the Salomon or Peros Banhos atolls or pick anything suspicious up on AIS or radar, you should try to make contact with *Pacific Marlin* either on

HF SSB channel 4057, satellite phone 00 870 356 301 550 or e-mail pacific.marlin@swireships.com. These may be illegal fishing boats and you will be helping the officials.

Clearing Out

There are no clearing out requirements; countries ahead understand this and will ask for documentation from your previous port of call before BIOT.

NAVIGATION/MOORINGS

Charts

The following British Admiralty charts are available for navigation in and around the Chagos Archipelago:

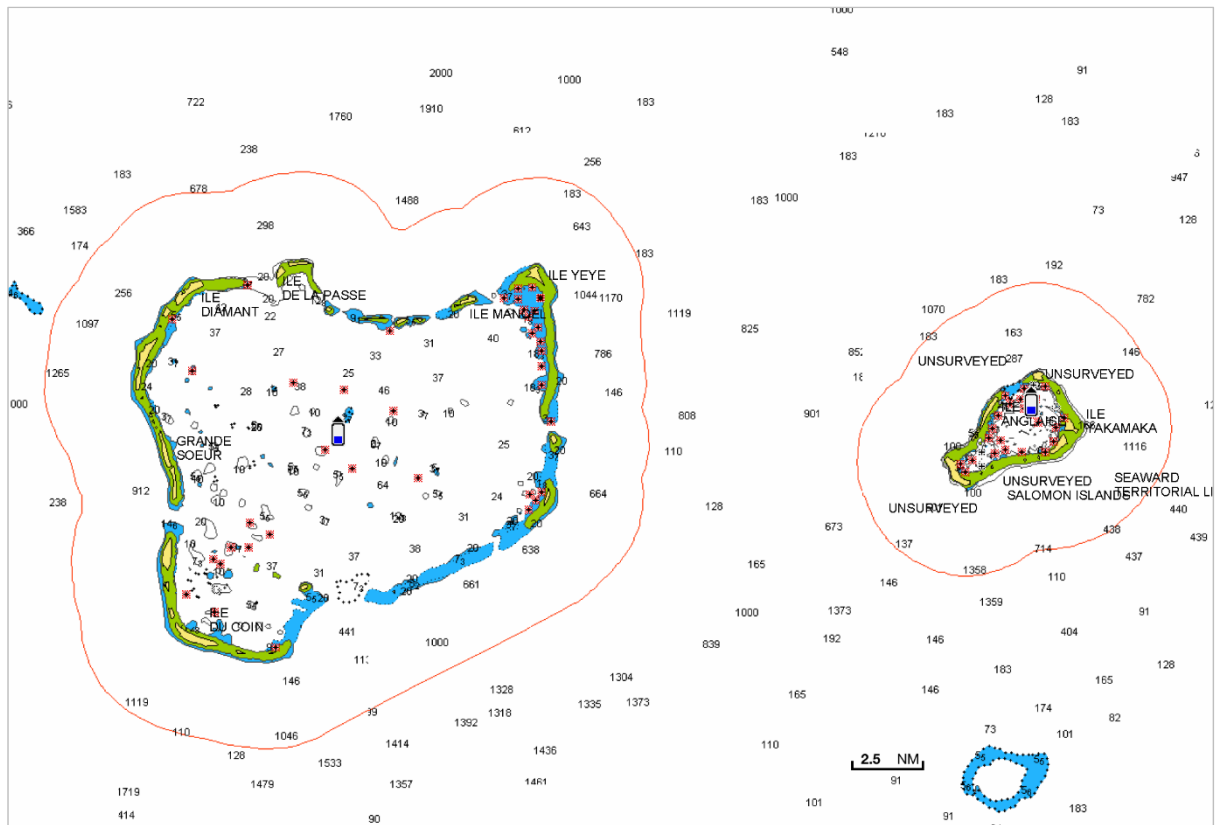
- BA3 – Chagos Archipelago
- BA725 – Plans in Chagos Archipelago
- BA726 – Chagos Archipelago: Egmont islands to Three Brothers
- BA727 – Peros Banhos to Blenheim Reef including Nelson's Island
- BA 920 – Diego Garcia
- BA4702 – Chagos Archipelago to Madagascar

Mooring Areas

BIOT designate five permitted mooring areas – you may not anchor or moor anywhere outside these areas unless in an emergency. There are three mooring areas inside the atoll of Peros Banhos and two in the Salomon Atoll.

All co-ordinates used in this section are in ddd mm.mm and all are °S, °E. BIOT provide co-ordinates that mark the ends of lines drawn along or roughly parallel to islands, and the zones permitted for mooring/anchoring lie between each line and its adjacent Island.

Satellite photographs are used below to show these in more detail and to show anchorage positions of yachts that have previously visited – this does not indicate any recommendation by the author on the anchorage positions chosen.

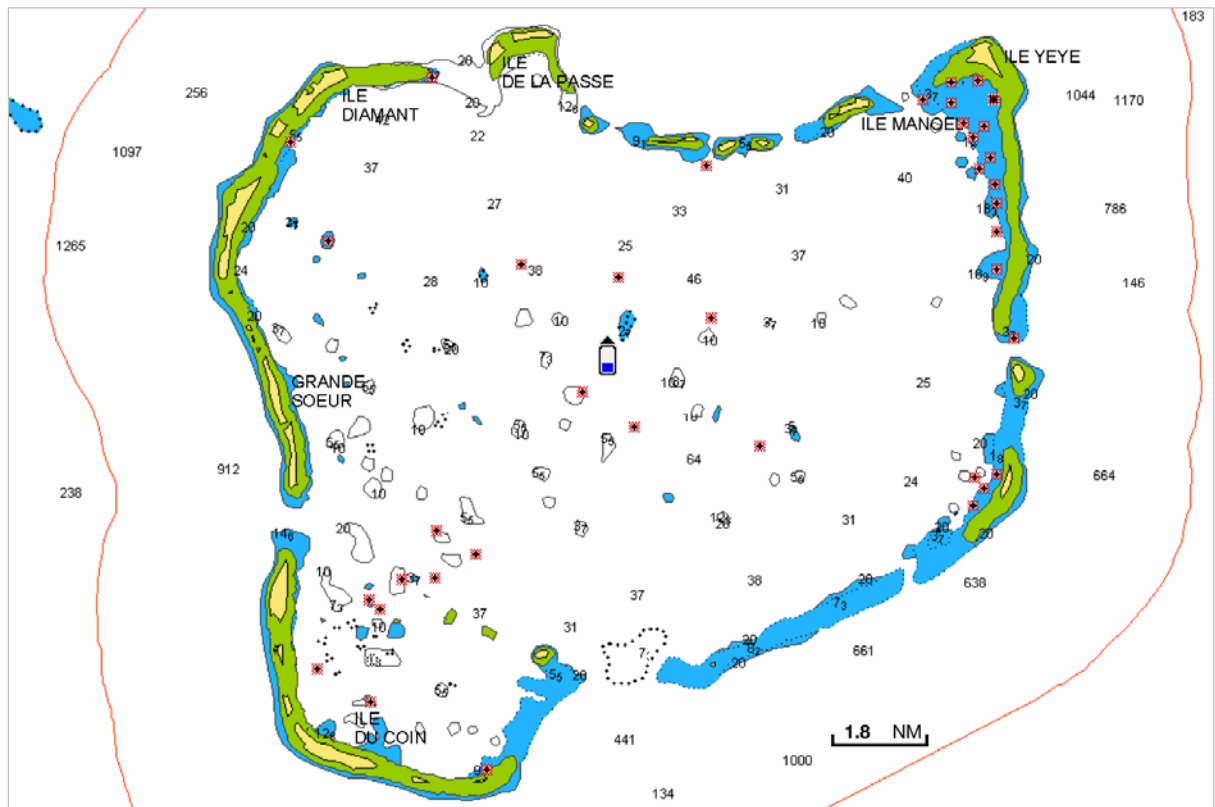


Peros Banhos and Salomon atolls



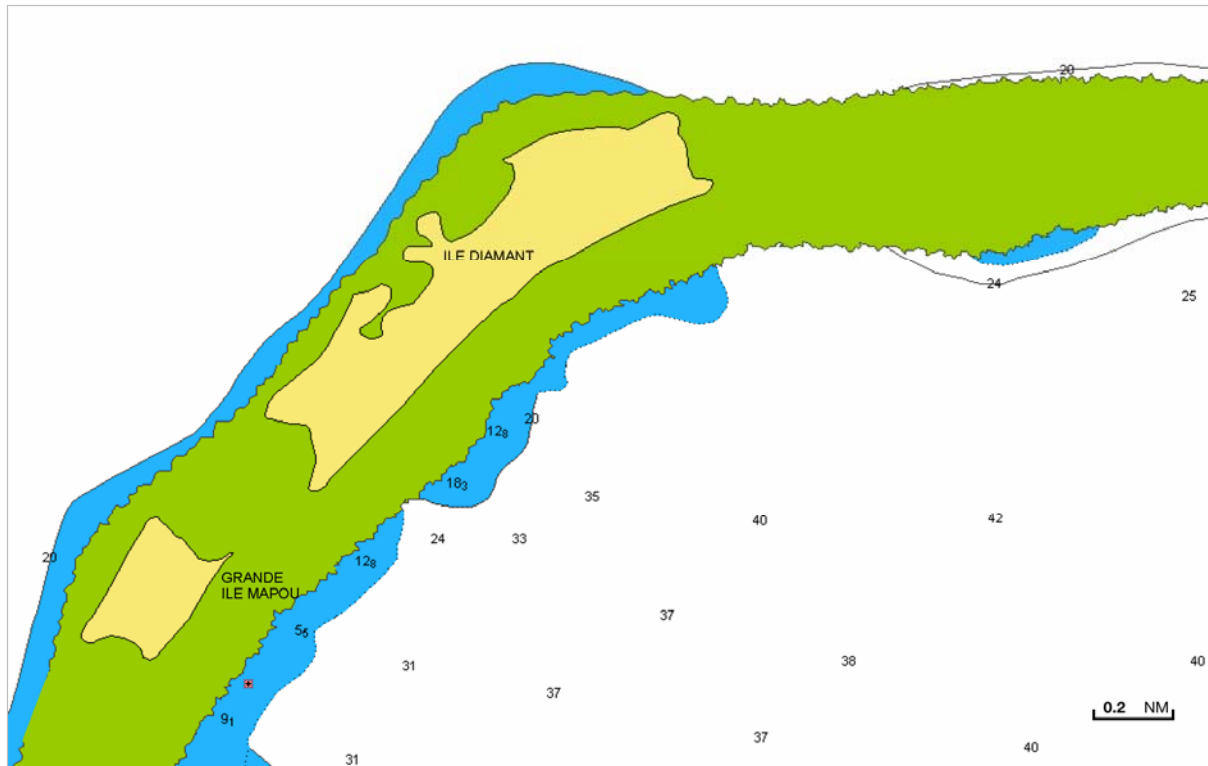
Peros Banhos

Sailors visiting this atoll should do so outside of the SE trade wind season as once the chances of SE winds start, it is safer to be based in the Salomon Atoll where better protection can be achieved.



Peros Banhos atoll details

1. Ile Diamante



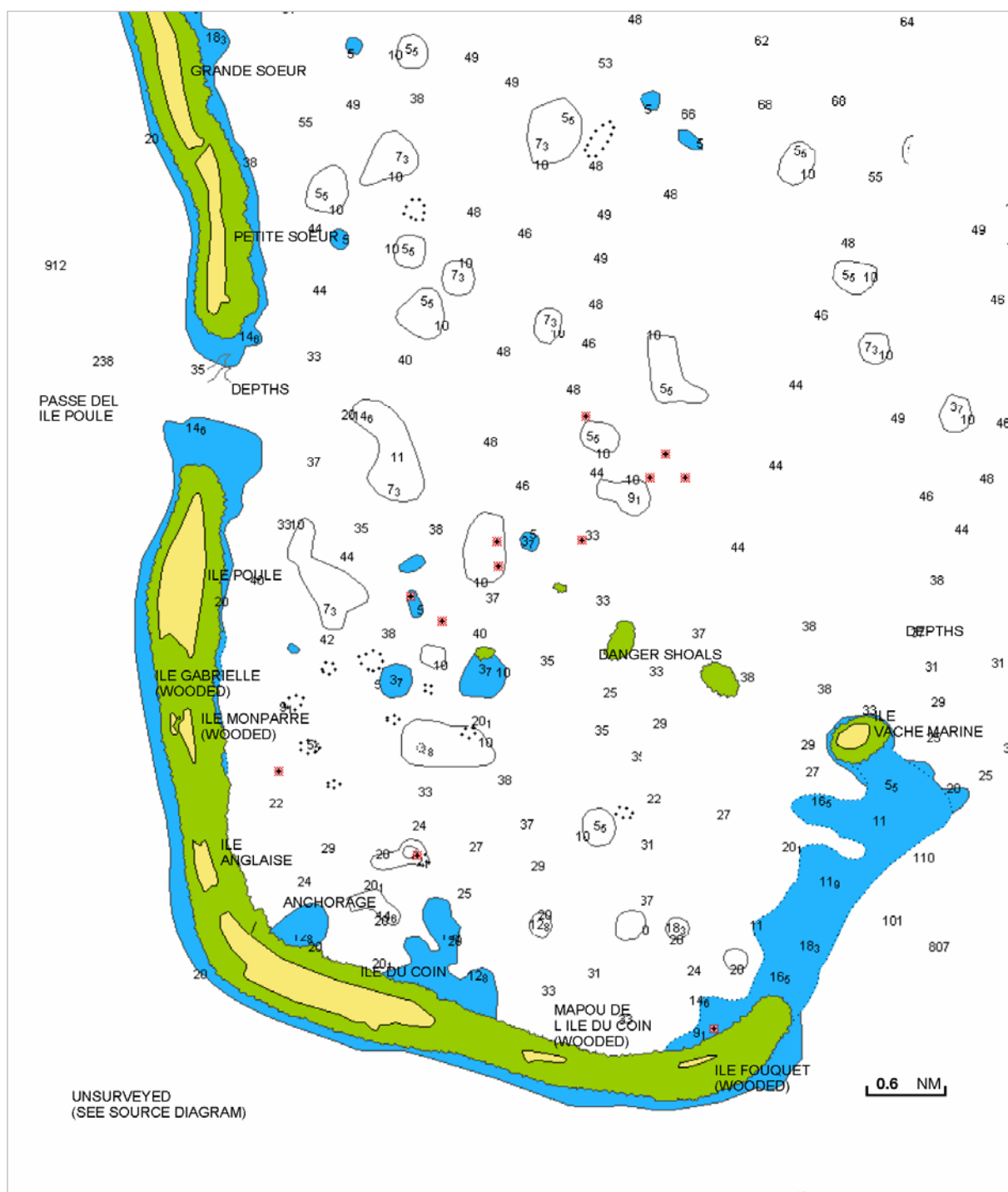
Mooring area 1 – Ile Diamante



- NW of a line stretching roughly the full length of Diamante:
 - North: 5°15'.17S 71°46'.63E
 - South: 5°15'.94S 71°45'.56E

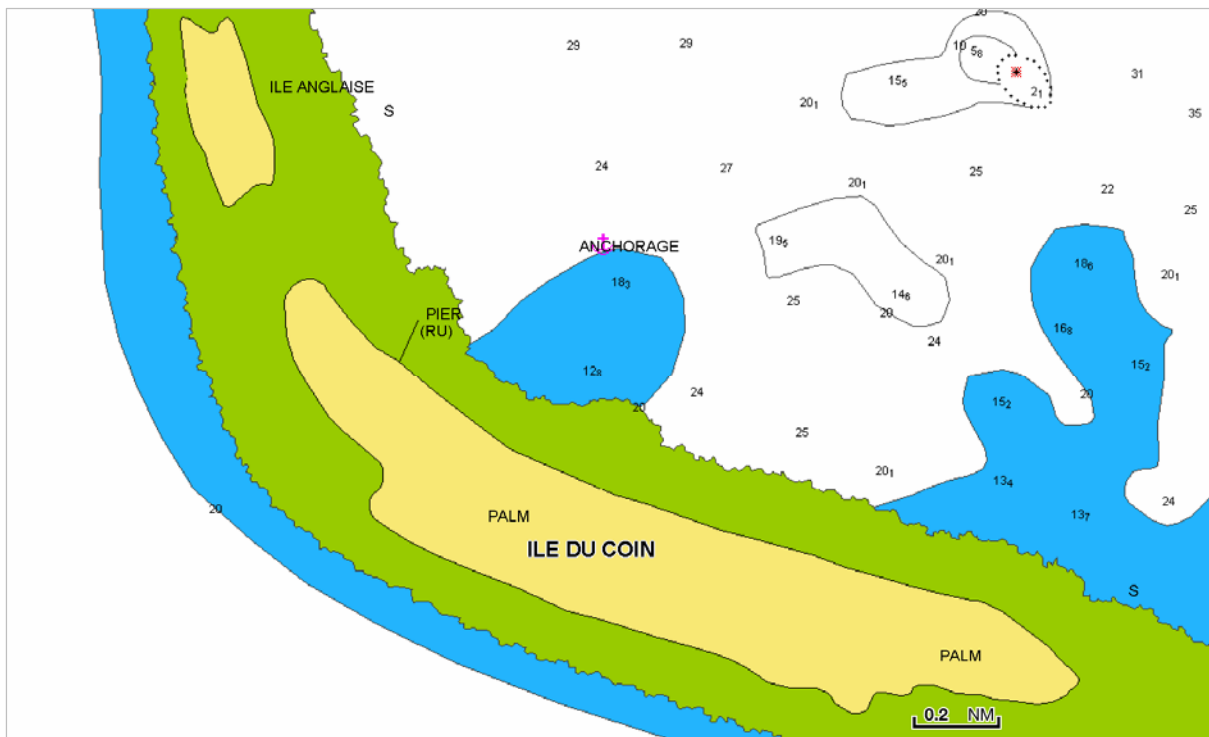


Ile Diamante mooring area and anchorage positions used by yachts who have visited previously



Mooring areas 2 and 3, Ile du Coin and Fouquet

2. Ile du Coin



Mooring area 2, Ile du Coin

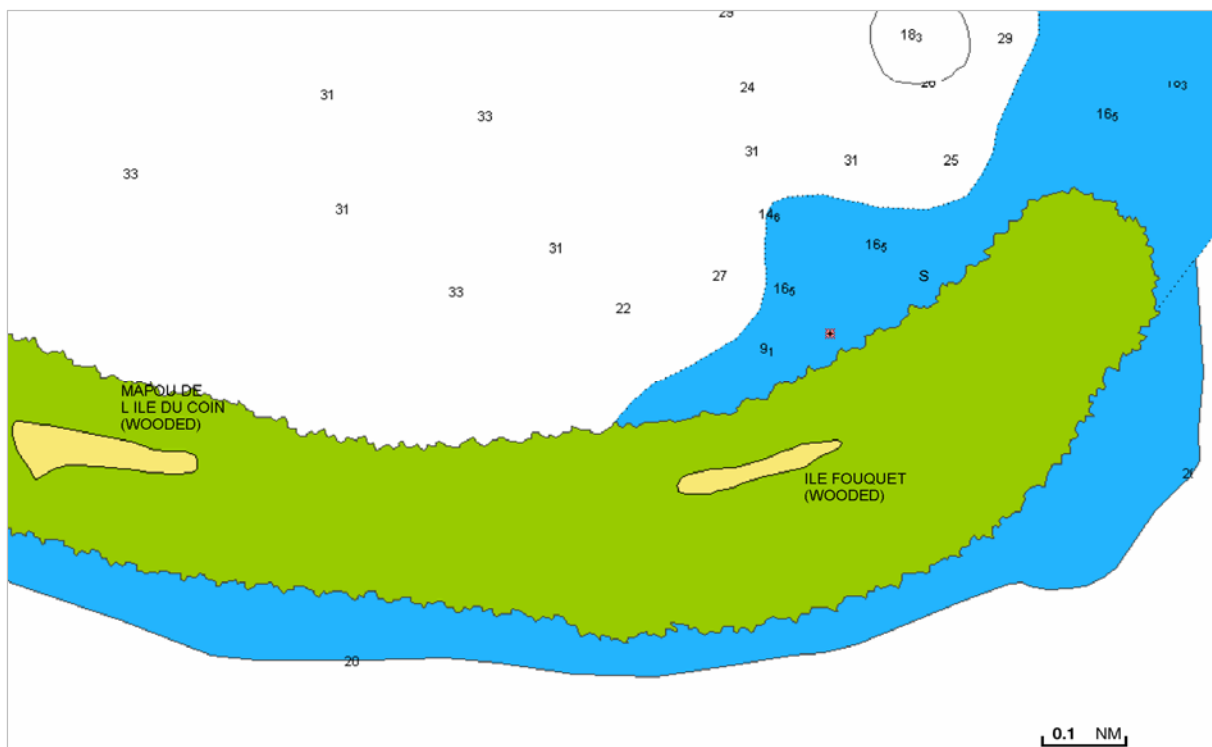


- SW of a line from mid Anglais to two-thirds down Ile du Coin:
 - North (Anglais): 5°26'.30S 71°45'.52E
 - Mid (Ile du Coin): 5°26'.67S 71°45'.76E
 - South (Ile du Coin): 5°26'.87S 71°46'.46E



Ile du Coin mooring area and anchorage positions used by yachts who have visited previously

3. Fouquet



Mooring area 3, Fouquet



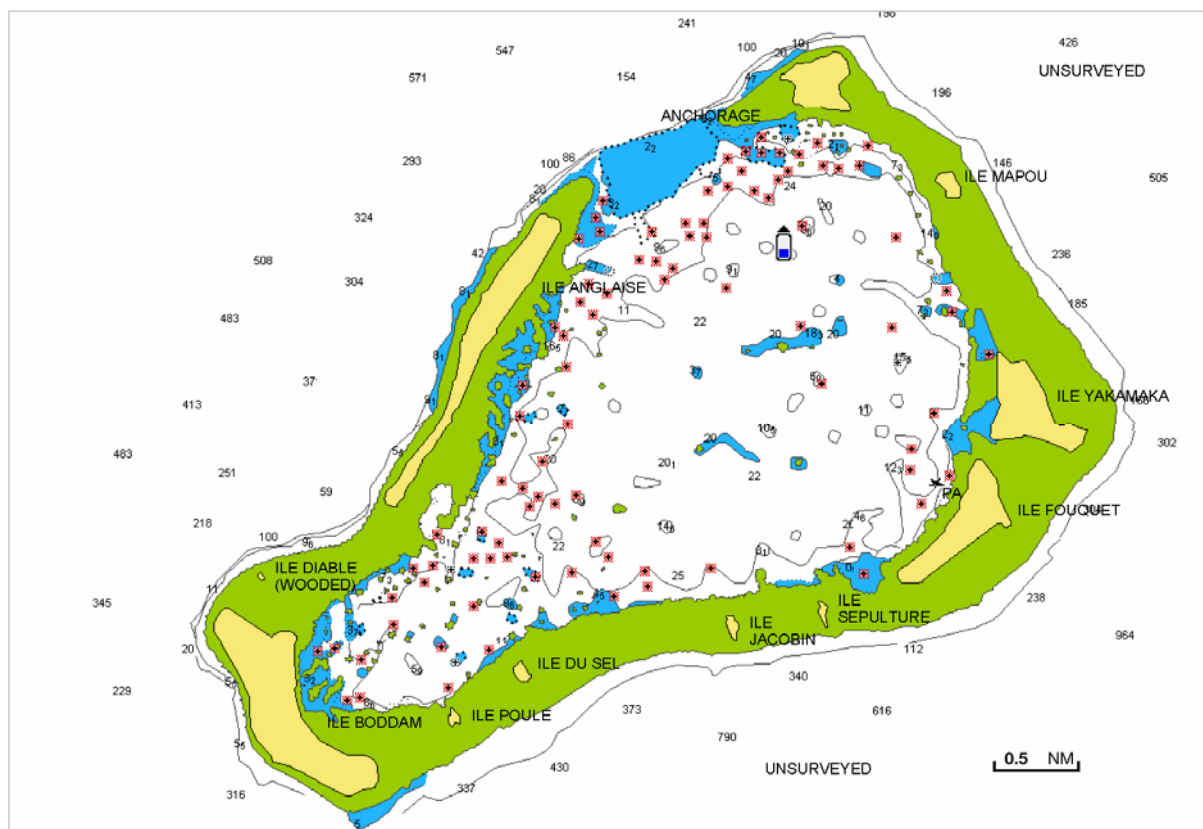
- South of a line from mid Mapou du Coin to East end of Fouquet:
 - West: 5°27'.60S 71°47'.79E
 - East: 5°27'.40S 71°48'.75E



Fouquet mooring area and anchorage positions used by yachts who have visited previously

Salomon Atoll

This is the more popular of the two atolls, particularly Boddam Island, due to the presence of moorings laid by yachts who have visited previously.



Salomon atoll

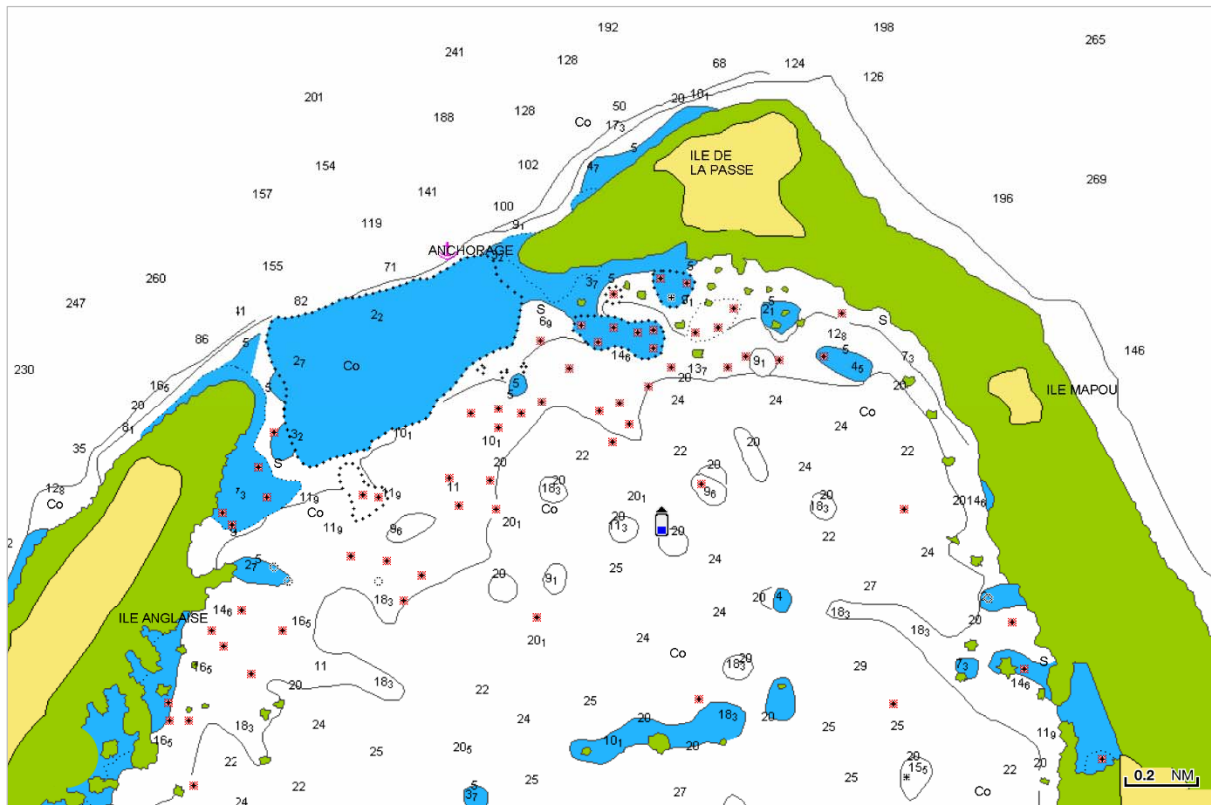


Entry to the Salomon Atoll

The wide entrance to the north is shallow and has coral heads in places so should only be attempted with good light above or behind you, and with a good lookout. Expect minimum depths of 4 to 6m. Once inside the atoll, there are numerous large coral heads and at a low spring tide some can be seen just above the water. A night time arrival is not recommended, it is better to time your arrival to have the sun behind you or above you. The use of satellite images to help you plot a route to either of the mooring areas inside the Atoll is very helpful, do not rely on paper or electronic charts alone.

The following waypoints have been used by cruisers in the past to enter the lagoon:

- Salomon Atoll Entrance 1: 5°18'.22S 72°14'.40E
- Salomon Atoll Entrance 2: 5°18'.32S 72°14'.44E
- Salomon Atoll Entrance 3: 5°18'.49S 72°14'.51E
- Salomon Atoll Entrance 4: 5°18'.61S 72°14'.59E
- Salomon Atoll Entrance 5: 5°18'.85S 72°14'.77E



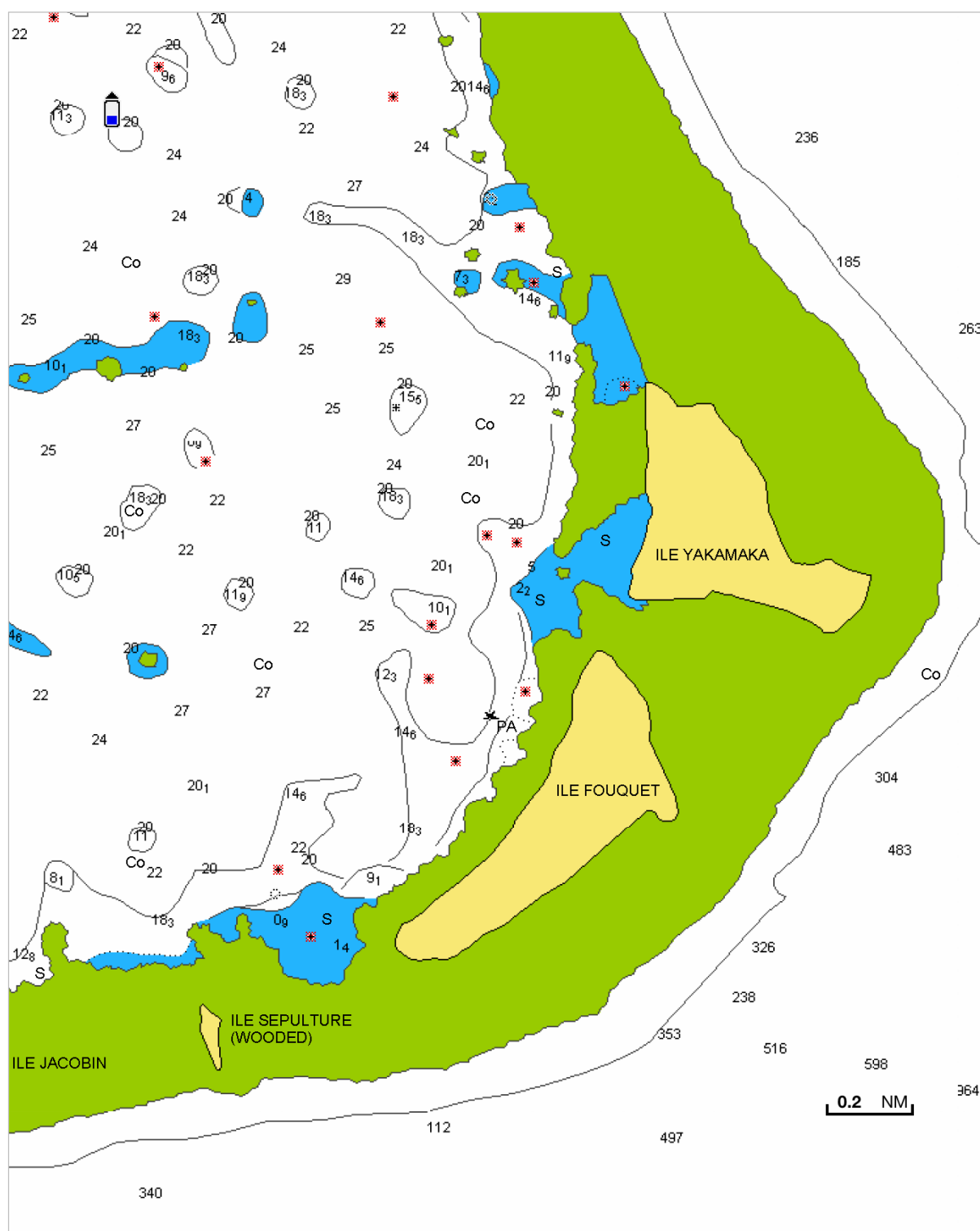
Entrance to Salomon atoll

NAVIONICS
NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION



Entrance to Saloman Atoll

4. Ile Fouquet/Takamaka



Mooring 4, Ile Fouquet

- SE of a line from mid Takamaka to the SE tip of Fouquet
 - North (Takamaka): 5°19'.73S 72°15'.94E
 - South (Fouquet): 5°20'.64S 72°15'.40E



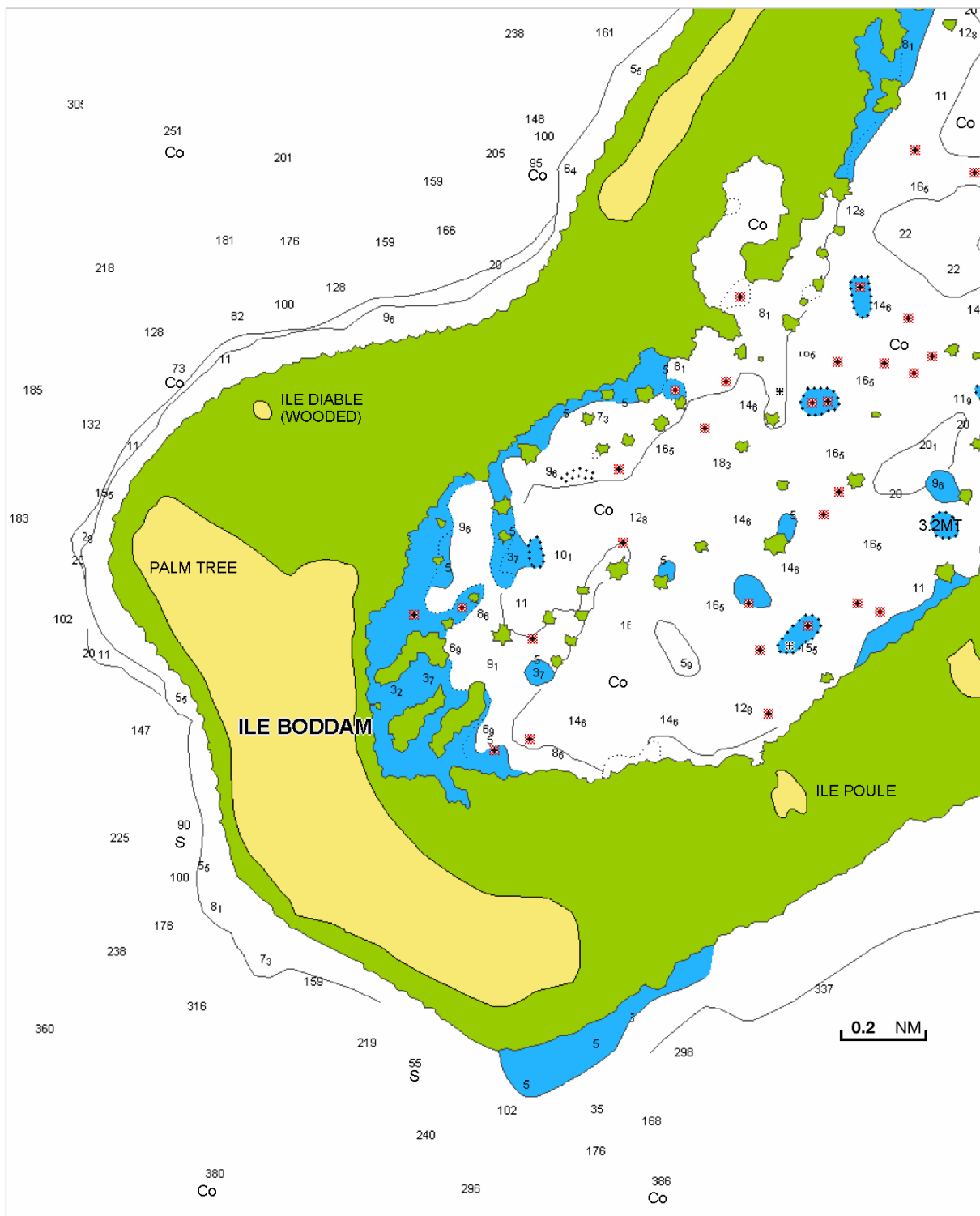
Ile Fouquet/Takamaka mooring area and anchorage positions used by yachts who have visited previously

- This is the favoured mooring area for when SE winds are experienced. Cruisers use the sand bank located here to anchor, however this does have its disadvantages in that it shelves quickly and should a squall come from the north it puts boats in a dangerous position on a lee shore, particularly due to the shelf and potential impact of waves. On shore are the remains of a catamaran wreck. There is a channel between the islands here and water flowing through this channel can cause boats to swing in various unexpected directions.



The wreck of a catamaran on Ile Fouquet is a reminder of the need for safe anchoring and constant vigilance

5. Ile Boddam



Mooring 5, Ile Boddam

NAVIONICS
NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

- SW of a line between Iles Diable and Poule
 - West (Diable): 5°21'.05S 72°12'.51E
 - East (Poule): 5°21'.45S 72° 13'.17E
- This is by far the most popular mooring area for yachts.
- Anchoring is **NOT** recommended as the bottom is hard coral. There are several coral outcrops (bommies) which have moorings on them, set up by yachts based here in previous years. Should all of these moorings be used, you will need to find a suitable bommie and make up your own mooring using chain and rope.
- It's a good idea to try to remain in contact with yachts ahead to ascertain how many yachts are moored at Boddam and if there are any moorings available. Friendly yachts might try and scout around for a bommie if no moorings are free.
- This area more than any other has several coral outcrops, many of which can be seen at low tide, spring tide. A good look out is essential when moving around, even in a dinghy!
- The location of the moorings are provided in the table below and cross referenced on the satellite image. Note: the positions given were taken from yachts on the moorings in 2016 so the position of the mooring itself is not spot on but will be very close by.



*Boddam Island mooring area and locations of moorings used by yachts who have visited previously
(as detailed in the table below)*

Mooring	Position	Comments
1	05°21'.16S 072°12'.5E	Several chains around bommie with two chains leading to surface with old floating buoys. Added shackle to each chain leading from bommies and led own lines to these from the boat. Depth 6m.
2	05°21'.16S 072°12'.57E	12mm Chain around bommie and leading up to a rope float. Chain worn on lead up to boat so as a back-up, shackled a piece of 8mm chain to the part that is worn. Two shackles added and led own lines to these from the boat.
3	05°21'.19S 072°12'.47E	12-15mm chain around bommie. Loop of 9mm chain as a lead attached to that. Two separate ropes added to lead in 2016 - one is 19mm samson braid and one is 16mm 3 strand. One other chain lead but links have worn and should not be used.
4	05°21'.23S 072°12.49E	Three different bommies with chains around each. The first yacht here in 2016 used one chain on an existing bommie and laid a new 10mm chain around another bommie. They shackled these two chains together and buoyed the chain. Shackles were attached and two different lines, one from each chain, were led back to the boat. The ropes were left behind but had chafed so the second yacht here in 2016 separated the chains and using a shackle on each chain added new mooring ropes and led them back to the boat. The downside is the lines had to be checked each day as with the wind swinging they would twist around each other. Depth 6m.
5	05°21'.34S 072°12'.50E	Mooring is around a bommie in 5m water but swings to 3.5m. Yacht added a shackle to an existing 10mm chain 1m beyond the worn end. Also tied to an existing rope on a buoy - not to be trusted. Looped new 8mm chain around 2 existing wraps of chain on the bommie. Intention is to attach new chain onto a float for a snorkelling pickup. There is a shackle on the end of this chain which will take a 13mm rope.
6	05°21'.32S 072°12'.63E	Existing chain around bommie plus rope to an attached submerged float. Yacht here in 2016 used this and then added own chain which they kept when they left. Used 2 lines up to 2 pick up buoys.
Bommie	05°21'.25S 072°12'.64E	Large bommie but no chain. Yacht here in 2016 dropped anchor to the side of the bommie and with two people in the water guiding the way, steered the boat to wrap the chain around the bommie twice and then shackled the chain back onto the chain leading to the anchor. A snubber was added. You would need at least 25m of chain to make your own mooring on the bommie. Total of 60m was used to go around twice. Depth 12m.

General advice on BIOT moorings

- On arrival, tie your boat to any existing rope or chain as a temporary measure, keeping watch while you work to ensure the mooring is secure. At worst, drop your anchor. Winds are generally light enough that some chain on the bottom will hold you but try not to do this as you will potentially damage fragile coral.
- Dive to check the mooring. Note the moorings are generally shallow enough to free dive but if yours is a deeper one you will need scuba gear – strictly speaking the use of scuba kit is prohibited but you would hope BIOT officials would understand the need to safely secure your boat.
- More often than not, the chains around the bommies are in good condition. However, the chain leading from the bommie towards the surface (i.e. the buoyed chain or lead) is often in **POOR** condition. You need to look for any chain that has corroded or has worn away and is thin. Most yachts attach new chain they have brought with them on points where the existing chain is still good and lead this up. If the chain has thinned in parts you can use new chain and shackles to make loops of chain to bypass the weak sections or even use shackles to effectively loop out any suspicious chain.
- Any existing rope should be treated with the greatest degree of scepticism. It is highly recommended you add your own lines. You will need shackles to attach your lines to the chain and many people simply leave these behind on departure by slipping their lines. Ideally use your own shackles to be sure of their strength.
- Try to ensure you are secured to a second chain wrapped around a bommie as a back-up. Many yachts use their own spare chain for this – usually 10 to 15m will do the trick, ideally use at least 10mm chain. Attach a large shackle to one end of the chain and lead the other end of the chain around the bommie and back through the shackle forming a loop. Attach another shackle to the free end of the chain for buoying the chain using a float and one towards the end of the chain for a line led to the boat to be attached to. You can then lead a line through this shackle and back to a secure place on board. Ensure there is enough chain leading up to clear the bommie or your line will chafe against the coral. There are plenty of fishing buoys in the ‘yacht club’ ashore which you can use to help float the chain.
- **EACH DAY** check your rope/chain. Independent lines will tangle when the wind shifts. You will be surprised how easily your lines can chafe!
- You may see black tip reef sharks but they won’t bother you (hopefully).
- When you leave, tidy your mooring, aim to leave it in good condition for the next visitor.



SY Solstice moored by Boddam Island

FURTHER READING

Useful links

- British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) - <http://biot.gov.io/>
- UK Foreign Office Travel Advice for BIOT - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/british-indian-ocean-territory>
- Chagos Conservation Trust - <http://www.chagos-trust.org/>
- UK Chagos Support Association - <http://www.chagossupport.org.uk/>
- Chagos Refugees Group - <http://chagosrefugeesgroup.org/>
- Chagos Archipelago on Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chagos_Archipelago

Books and articles

- *Shipwreck or Shangri-la* by Peter Lickfold
- *Eviction from the Chagos Islands by Displacement and Struggle for Identity Against Two World Powers* by Sandra J.T.M. Evers and Marry Kooy
- *Outposts: Journeys to the Surviving Relics of the British Empire* by Simon Winchester
- *The Stolen Islands of Chagos* by Diane Selkirk - https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/the-stolen-islands-of-chagos