WEST AFRICA

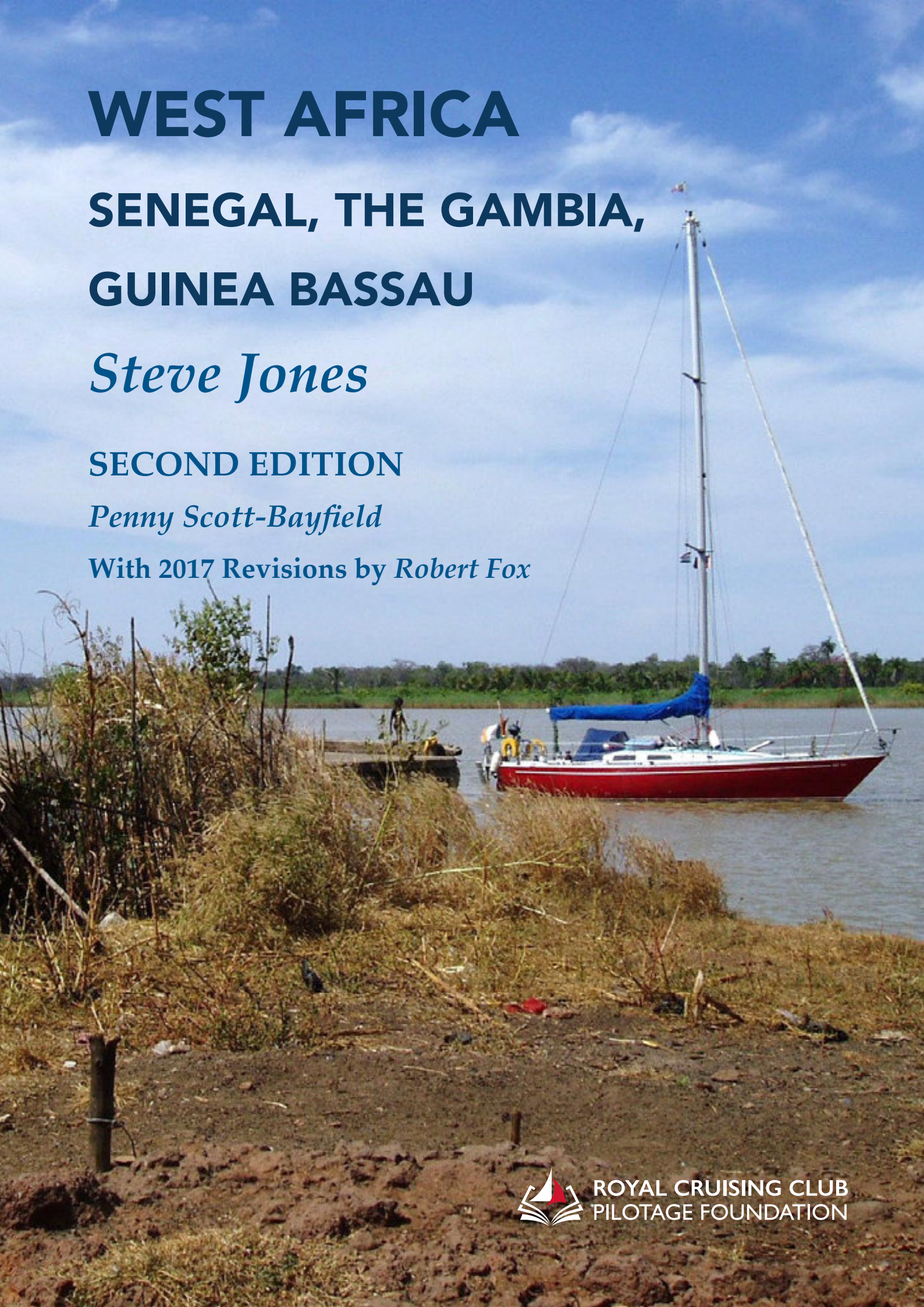
SENEGAL, THE GAMBIA, GUINEA BASSAU

Steve Jones

SECOND EDITION

Penny Scott-Bayfield

With 2017 Revisions by *Robert Fox*



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By Ed Wheeler

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The plans in this guide are not to be used for navigation - they are designed to support the text and should always be used together with navigational charts. It should be borne in mind that the characteristics of lights may be changed during the life of the book, and that in any case notification of such changes is unlikely to be reported immediately.

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Navigating the PDF - hyperlinks

All items on the Contents page and the List of Plans are hyperlinked to their relevant page in the text. On each page in the text, there is a link back to the Contents page.

Revisions

We are grateful to Robert Fox who has supplied some corrections to this book from his cruise to west Africa in 2016-17. These revisions can be found in their entirety after the last page of the book (after p.128). The corrections are also linked at the relevant pages throughout the text, in orange. To navigate between them, please click on the orange hyperlink text. Links on the revision pages will also take you directly to the relevant place in the main text.

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Benefitting from the copyrights donated by RCC members and others and working with its team of dedicated authors and editors, the Pilotage Foundation has developed a portfolio of cruising guides available both in printed format and through its website covering a wide range of cruising areas including some of the more remote areas of the world.

The Foundation's website gives full details of its activities and provides a portal for the sale or download of its publications, as well as Cruising Notes comprising up to date navigational and other reports: **rccpf.org.uk**

We welcome corrections or additional material which will help keep this publication up to date and be incorporated into any subsequent revisions of this work: **info@rccpf.org.uk**

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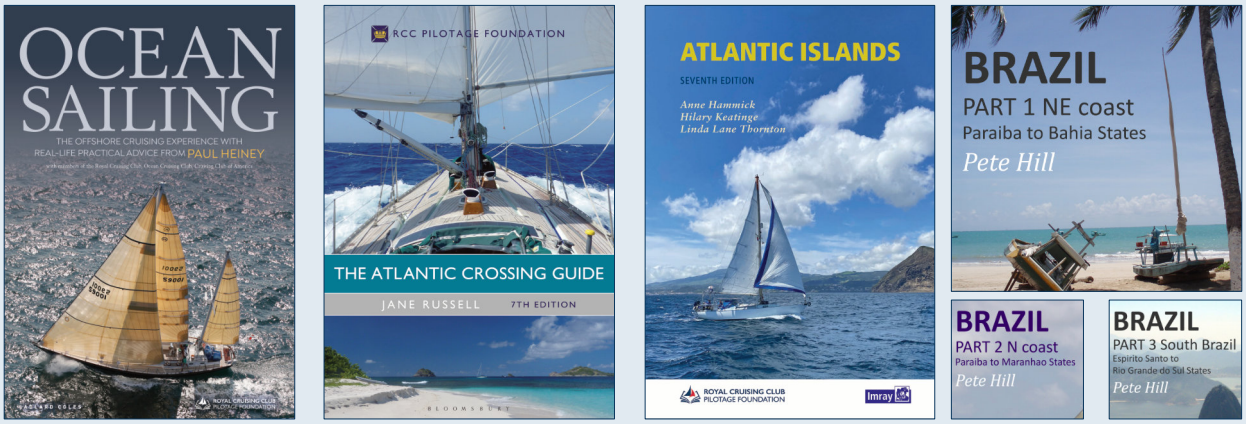


FOREWORD

The original edition of this book was published in 1997 from information collected by Steve Jones whilst he was working for the Medical Research Council in the Gambia. Despite the passage of many years, visiting sailors have found that his advice and observations remain largely valid, and have been periodically revised by Ed Wheeler on *Witchcraft*, Dai Rice on *Miss Claudia* and Bob and Liz Cooper on *Yanina of Bosham* from their cruises in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

The colour photographs are all by Ed Wheeler and we thank him for making his photographic records available to us. We are grateful to Penny Scott-Bayfield, Ros Hogbin and Peter Price for preparing the last edition of the printed publication.

More recently, in 2017, Robert Fox supplied ten pages worth of new information which Jenny Taylor-Jones has neatly incorporated into the electronic version of the book. Clickable links within the main book take the reader to the supplementary information, and vice versa.

Although there may be some who are disappointed not to be able to buy a hard copy, we are pleased that this revised edition is available for anyone to download, free of charge, from the Pilotage Foundation website, hopefully encouraging a new generation of cruisers to this interesting coastline, especially ones who supply us with new pilotage information!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I find acknowledgements in technical books so tame that I suspect they are only read by those people who expect to be mentioned. I have therefore decided to spice these up by adding a few of the people who would rather not have my opinions published. There is a dual purpose to this. The African continent has such a fearful reputation that it might be expected that the rogues gallery would exceed the list of helpful people. This, as you will see, is not the case.

So many people fall into the helpful category that it would be impossible to name them all, a difficulty that is compounded by my failure to keep records of the crews who used early drafts of the northern chapters and offered useful comments. Whether named or not, I am grateful to you all.

Of those mariners that I can name I must start with my own crew, Jeanette and Lim, of whom the former was only happy when becalmed and the latter only content when it was blowing a hooley. Such diverse expectations are one of the pleasures of sailing with one's family.

Of the many crews that helped a few stand out for special mention. Ted and George on *Steeleye* for their initial support, Tony Woodman and John Cox for friendship and technical assistance, and Dave Seed for his knowledge of marine diesels and the French West African yachting community. Of passing crews Jill and Nick Shinas on *Maarmari*, Pierre and Karin Siegenthaler on *Caravellec*, Jacques Roullier on *Likapati*, Rosmarie and Alfred Alecio on *Ironhorse* all made significant contributions which are acknowledged in the text.

Less helpful among boat owners were the speed boat posers of Banjul who were cursed by those who had to share the waterways with them, especially by the local fishermen in their dugouts which were swamped every time they passed. There was also the French Canadian yacht owner who so incensed the local Police that all visiting yachts were banned from filling up with water from their tap. From larger boats I must mention the Korean crew of a trawler who broke my boat from her mooring one night (thank you again, Tony) and the skipper of the *Jola* who likes to chase small boats for fun.

Next I must turn to professional colleagues, starting with Dr Brian Greenwood, the Director of the Medical Research Council labs in the Gambia. I could not have asked for a more sympathetic boss when it came to seeking the sailing time required to make the project viable. Indeed all the MRC staff, too numerous to mention, that I knew and worked with over the nine years I spent in the Gambia require a big 'thank you' for their support. Special mention is due to Peter Langfield, my friend, neighbour and work colleague, who covered for me when I was away and who could always be relied on for help in any difficulty.

I must also name my loyal and long suffering core staff, Mbye Nying, Papa Sanneh, Ebrima Saine, Max Keroma, Mbye Chune, Alkhali Khinta, Lamin Fatty and Edrissa Manneh (who still owes me money!).

So many long-term residents and friends offered support and advice that I can only pick out a few to mention. Brian and Sue Paul were helpful in many ways from serving cold beer and good food on the beach, to the loan of an outboard when I needed one. I must also mention Sue's former husband, Graham Rainy, whose tragic early death removed the most knowledgeable person on the River Gambia. It was one of Graham's sketches that we all used when we first had to find our way out of Oyster Creek. I must also mention Nick Denis, who worked with Graham, and who generously passed on much of his knowledge - as well as

being another useful source of cold beer. Though he has now moved on, Metal Mick, or Mike Hargrieves to be precise, deserves to be included in this group for his help with getting my inboard installed.

Other constant and reliable friends were Mr Cessey who watched my boat and helped in numerous ways in Oyster Creek, and his friend Mamadu Cessey who worked for me as a watchman and Crew. Lamin, my gardener, was better at rubbing down with bald wet and dry than anyone I have ever known.

My contacts with officialdom throughout the region were generally speaking warm and friendly. I should especially mention Captain Bah, the Gambian Ports Captain, who was so helpful over the 'phone and in written communication that we never actually met! Less positively I must say a word about the Senegalese Army Captain who blatantly demanded payment at Dioloulou to let me pass and the Ports Captain in Cacheu (see Guinea-Bissau Planning section).

I am grateful to Ann Fraser for supplying many of the slides from which illustrations have been taken.

Finally, for praise, I come to the Royal Cruising Club from whom I have received every help. In particular my thanks go to Henry (Scrap) Batten who has been a constant mentor throughout the project, to Sandy Watson for being an able and diligent editor, and to Ann Fraser for her comments.

Steve Jones

May 1997

Bissau Port
By Ed Wheeler

General Information and planning

Introduction

These introductory notes are intended to be read as far in advance of a cruise as possible. They will provide the information required at the planning stage as well as a rough idea of what you are letting yourself in for.

Obviously this information has to include the problems that are likely to be encountered, but prospective cruising yachtsmen should not be put off. I am sure many probably plump for the safer option of the Canaries as a staging post for an Atlantic crossing for fear of the sinister reputation of the Dark Continent. They miss a lot. I lived in West Africa for nine years, and only returned to England because my son's education had reached a critical stage. With the aid of this book a visiting yachtsman can explore sunny lands inhabited by friendly people which include some wonderful cruising grounds. The problems of health, crime and officialdom cannot be ignored, but they are not as bad as many people imagine.

The information in the subsequent chapters divides the region into sections from north to south, following the logical progression of using prevailing winds and current.

The region

This cruising guide covers Senegal, the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, which are the three most accessible countries of West Africa. The region stretches from the Sub-Sahara, Sahel in the north to tropical forests in the south, and includes some magnificent cruising grounds. There are rivers that will take you deep into Africa, peaceful creeks which a yachtsman can spend idle days exploring and isolated offshore islands with stone age cultures. By comparison, the classic North Atlantic cruise taking in the Canaries and West Indies looks like an extended tour of theme parks.

North of Senegal lies Mauritania which is dry and inhospitable, lacks facilities and has the type of bureaucracy which takes all the pleasure out of one's first contact with the indigenous population. To the south of Guinea-Bissau is Guinea Conakry which is a notoriously difficult country to get into, though there are some signs of improvement. Beyond lie the war-torn countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as the erratic currents and weather patterns of the Gulf of Guinea.

Plan 1 shows the area covered, and some of the popular destinations which are easily accessible. It is not the purpose of this book to repeat material which has been adequately covered elsewhere. For information on Atlantic cruising and routes to the Canaries and Cape Verde Islands I would refer the reader to the *Atlantic Crossing Guide* by Anne Hammick (Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation, published by Adlard Coles). Jimmy Cornell's *World Cruising Routes* includes information on the South American destinations. The whole of the eastern seaboard of the American continent is accessible from West Africa. From Salvador in Brazil it is possible to travel either north or south, which makes this an increasingly popular destination.

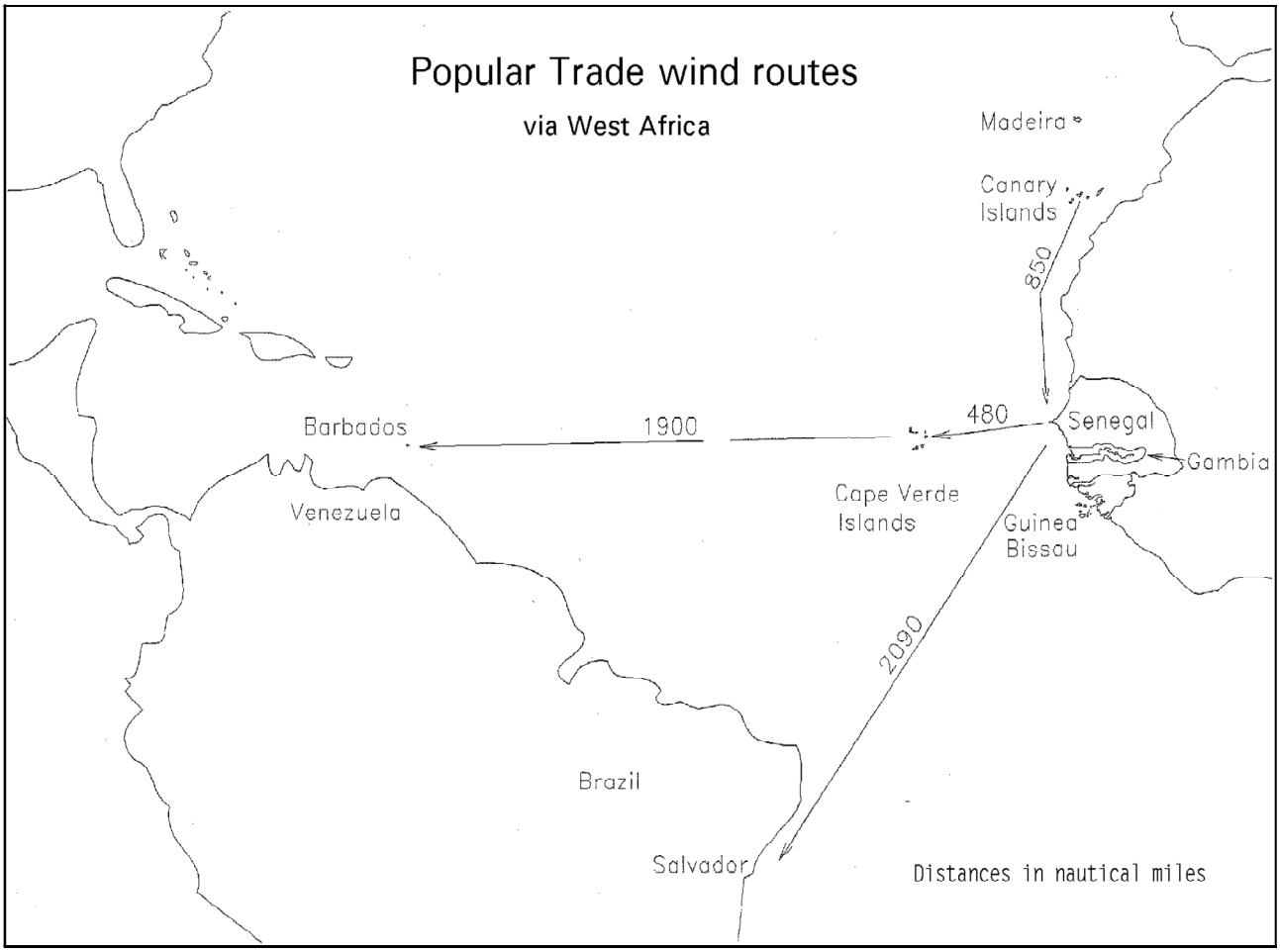
Weather and timing

The traditional cruising season for the region is November to May when the doldrums, which bring the rain, humidity and storms, are further south. During this period the Trade winds carry one easily to the region and the weather is cooler and dry. It is often considered important to leave before the end of May in order to avoid the rains and tropical squalls associated with them. However, those who are heading south and are bold enough to leave their departure to later in the rainy season, when the intertropical convergence zone moves further north, may pick up the SE Trades early.

Most of the time the weather in West Africa is fairly kind to small craft. The main concerns are line squalls, which come in the rains and the Harmattan, which can occur from November to March. When the Trade winds are blowing strongly there is an associated swell which, though uncomfortable, does not create a problem unless you are attempting to enter or leave a difficult anchorage surrounded by shallows.

Line squalls can bring with them very strong winds, but are of short duration and should not cause too many problems to a well-found yacht with sea room. You can normally see them coming in time to reef, but when the front hits they come with such heavy rain that visibility is reduced to almost zero for a while.

See Revisions pg R1



Plan 1 Popular Trade wind routes

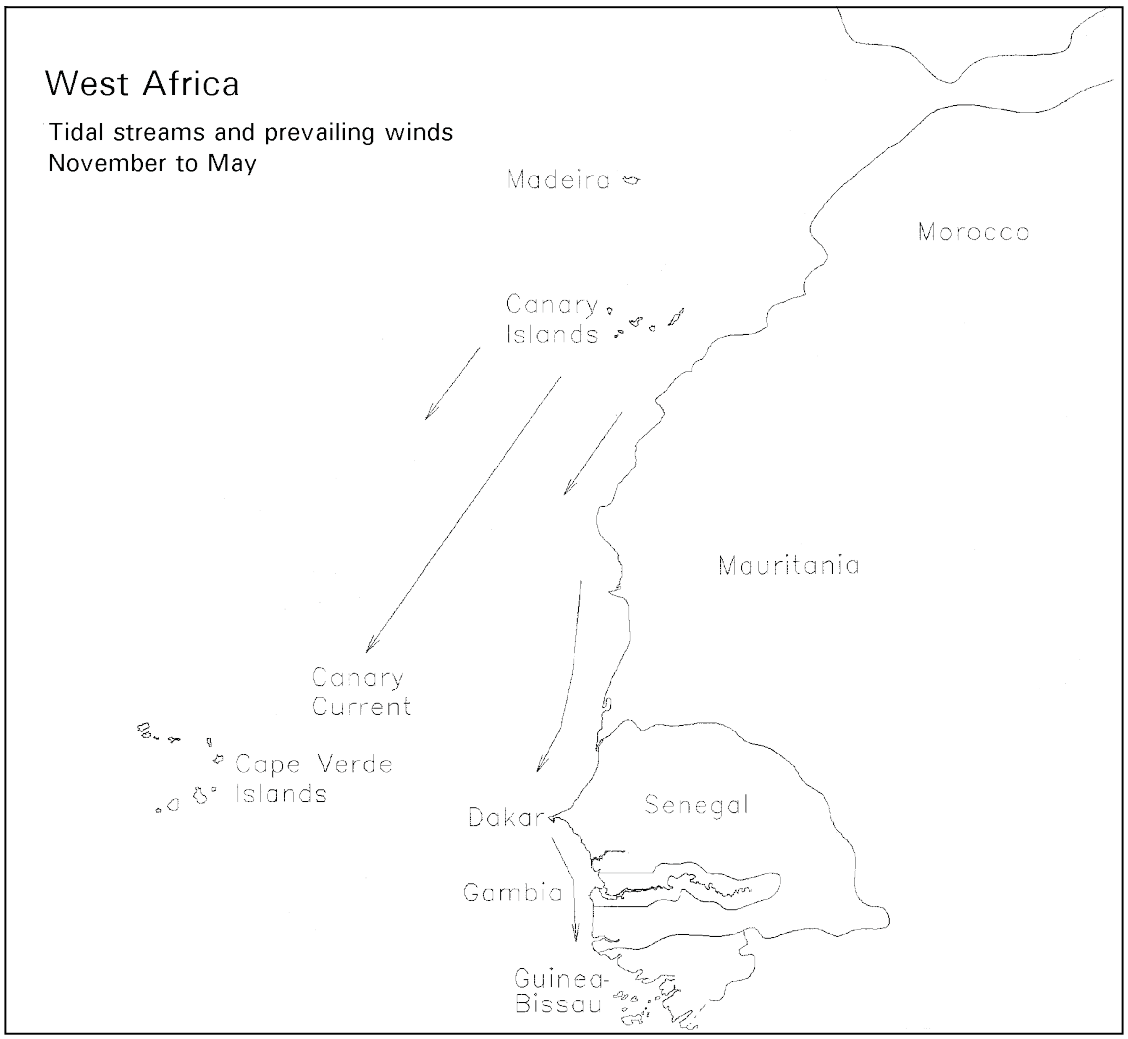
Whilst in one of the many sheltered anchorages that the coast provides, it is possible to watch the weather pattern and choose a period when a storm has passed and a few days of calm weather can be anticipated.

Probably worse than line squalls are the Harmattans, which can reduce visibility to a few metres. They are caused by dust being blown off the desert and settling over the region. They come in varying degrees throughout the dry season, but a really thick one is seen on average only once a year, most probably in February. Though they appear very quickly and without warning, they only last for a few days and visibility normally starts to improve within 24 hours of the onset. In the worst case the dust arrives and the wind drops so that one would not only be reduced to zero visibility but becalmed at the same time. This is in addition to everything being covered in a thick coating of red dust, which is unpleasant to breathe and clogs up winches. If you are unfortunate enough to be at sea when a really heavy Harmattan comes down you would have little choice but to gain sea room and wait for conditions to improve.

For most of the dry season visibility is poor because of dust in the air. This makes traditional navigation difficult in a region where the coastline is low lying and lacking natural features. In contrast the visibility becomes spectacular in the rains, especially after a storm.

My recommendation would, therefore, be to try to arrive in West Africa between November and January. Vessels continuing to the West Indies should leave before the end of April to arrive before the tropical storm season. Those heading south towards Brazil can depart at any time, but the fastest crossings can be achieved in June and July, which goes against the conventional wisdom. Be prepared, however, for the possibility of line squalls up to several hundred miles off shore.

While on the subject of weather, it is perhaps worth mentioning a common phenomenon which may well not occur in advance to the reader contemplating a cruise. This is the bewitching effect that Africa can have on some crews who put off their departure so long that they find themselves spending one, or more, unplanned rainy seasons there. This is no great problem, allowing for the fact that the rains are normally passed in one location. It allows you a much better chance of doing justice to your cruise. Too many visits that I have observed have been spoilt by the pressure of time to move on.



Plan 2 West Africa - tidal streams and currents

Arrival in West Africa from the north

Warning: The charts show St. Louis as an accessible port, but this is no longer the case. Lower rainfall and a barrage on the River Senegal have reduced the flow of water out of the estuary resulting in considerable silting up. The spit of land on the seaward side of the estuary has now extended further south than charted, and the channel is reported to have less than a metre of water in places. Though it is still theoretically possible to call out a pilot on channel 16, the last person that I could find who could confirm using the system did so five years ago, and his advice was to leave well alone.

This part of the coast normally experiences a large surf which creates an area of confused white water at the river mouth, adding a further hazard.

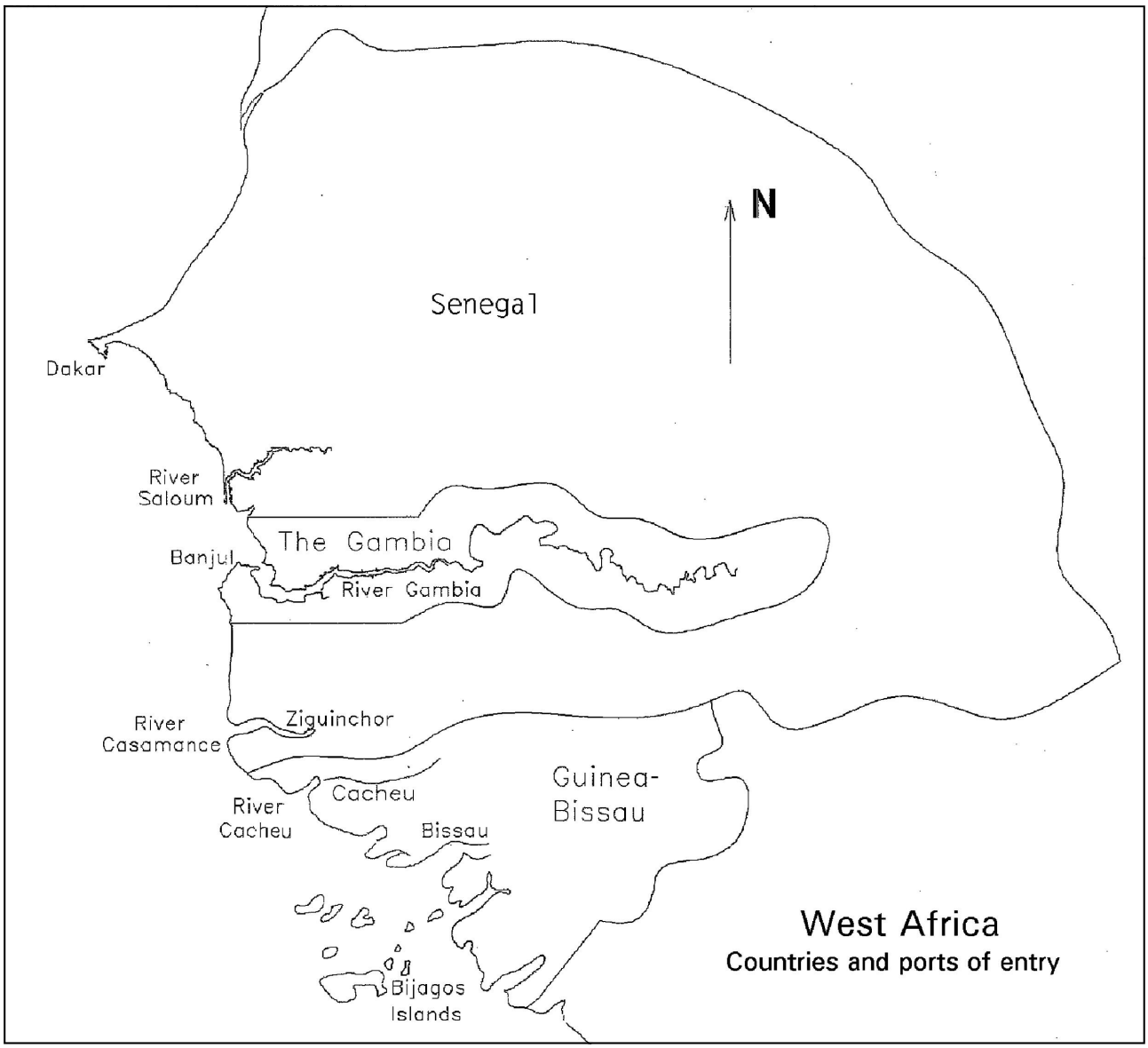
The last account of a yacht entering this river that I have been able to trace was by an 11.5m Beneteau which was nearly lost trying to cross the bar. She was eventually washed up on the shore and suffered damage to her winged keel, which was fortunately repairable. The skipper was washed overboard during the drama and was thought to have drowned, but made it ashore later. For these reasons, St Louis, as a port, has been excluded from this guide. It will be dealt with as an excursion from Dakar.

Landfall

See Revisions pg R1

Dakar is the obvious starting point for a cruise in West Africa, being the first port encountered when arriving from the north. Anyone intending to cruise the whole coast is advised to start here as wind and currents carry one south. However Banjul, Ziguinchor or Bissau are all ports of entry to their respective countries. English-speaking crews intending a short visit to the region may prefer to head straight to Banjul. Approach and official regulations for these ports are covered in the relevant section.

Dakar is about 850 miles from Las Palmas on Gran Canaria in the Canaries, assuming one stands about 80 miles off Cap Blanc in Mauritania. It is about 480 miles from São Vicente in the Cape Verde Islands.



Plan 3 West Africa - Countries and ports of entry

As can be seen in Plan 2, the prevailing wind and currents make Dakar an easy landfall. There is more detailed information on currents in the area in the Admiralty African Pilot volume1. Generally speaking, however, both wind and current will carry you south as far as the Guinea Current (which is beyond the scope of this guide).

Dakar has the added advantage of standing on a rocky promontory, and is therefore the most visible landfall in West Africa. It is also the most westerly port on the continent. The Cap Vert light is 120m above sea level and is visible up to 31 miles in clear conditions.

If heading for a landfall south of Dakar, remember that the tidal effect of the main rivers can continue for up to ten miles from their estuaries.

Plan 3 shows the countries covered by this guide, with their main ports of entry and the main cruising grounds. In theory Bubaque in the Bijagos Islands can also be used as a port of entry to Guinea-Bissau but I have never found the harbour master in his office. Most of these ports have more difficult approaches than Dakar, and most require entering one of the local rivers. The problem with this is that all their estuaries are made up of low mangrove swamp, and can be difficult to pick up in hazy conditions. This is compounded by the fact that you cannot rely on navigational aids, although most of the approach buoys are in place for most of the main ports most of the time. A GPS will overcome this problem, so I have included some useful waypoints in the approach notes for these ports.

Charts

Charts of the region should be purchased before departure, as they will be difficult to pick up later. The common practice of swapping charts does not work too well in West Africa as everyone tends to be going in the same direction.

I find that the British Admiralty charts of the region are generally better than French charts, although the latter often have more detail of the inland waterways. There are some excellent Portuguese charts of Guinea-Bissau if you can get hold of them. It may be possible to obtain copies of these from the harbour master in Bissau.

However, this involves borrowing the chart and taking it elsewhere to make a copy. This process does not necessarily produce a usable result, as I found to my cost.

Also excellent are the old Admiralty charts of the region which, though out of date, give much more detail of the navigable waterways which are not used by commercial shipping. These areas of interest to cruising yachts are being systematically removed from current charts and, frustratingly, it is not possible to obtain copies of the old ones. If you keep a sharp watch, however, you will sometimes pick some up in a chart swap session with a seasoned cruising yacht.

If using GPS it will be found that some corrections are necessary, usually a small shift west. Where I have found this to be a consistent factor over most of the area of a chart, the correction has been added in the notes, though they are not that critical. These corrections are based on my observations using a Garmin hand-held GPS.

The following list of British Admiralty charts, listed in the order required when travelling from north to south through the area will provide adequate cover. It is worth carrying the set as they are not all available in the region. Some charts can be purchased from the Ports Authority office in Banjul, and it is possible to get black and white copies of charts in Dakar. Many crews have fallen for the charms of West Africa after they have arrived and extended their itinerary, regretting that they did not bring more charts.

No 4104 - Lisbon to Freetown, scale 1:3,500,000. This is essential, covering the whole West African seaboard down to Sierra Leone and including the Azores, Madeira, the Canaries and Cape Verde Islands.

No 3135 - Nouakchott to Bissau, scale 1:1,250,000. A useful chart covering most of the area and includes more detail of Cape Verde Islands than the previous chart.

No 1663 - Saint-Louis to Riviere Saloum, scale 1:340,000

No 1664 - Riviere Saloum to Ilheu de Caio, scale 1:342,000

These two charts replace No 559, Cap Vert to Canal do Orango, and cover most of the area of this guide.

No 1000 - Approaches to Dakar Baie de Goree, scale 1:50,000 Essential if calling at Dakar, which may be necessary, even if not planned. Shows the approach and all necessary details.

No 1001 - Rade and Port of Dakar, scale 1:10,000.

No 607 - Rivière Saloum, scale 1:75,000. Necessary if planning a cruise in the River Saloum. Also useful are the French chart No 6174 which shows more of the connecting waterways.

None of these charts show the new entrance to the Saloum.

No 608 - River Gambia Entrance, scale 1:75,000. Essential if calling at Banjul, covers the approach and lower river.

No 609 - River Gambia, scale 1:100,000. Only needed if planning a trip up the River Gambia above James Island.

No 3532 - Rivière Casamance, scale 1:75,000. Necessary for a cruise in the Casamance.

No 611 - Cabo Roxo to Port Kamsar, scale 1:400,000. A very useful chart as it covers the whole of Guinea-Bissau and the Bijagos Islands. However it is strongly recommend that one also carries the next three larger-scale charts of the region as well.

No 1726 - Approaches to Canal Do Geba and Rio Cacheu, scale 1:100,000. Necessary for the approach to Canal do Geba on the approach to Bissau. Also if planning a cruise in the River Cacheu.

No 1724 - Canal do Geba and Bissau, scale 1:100,000. Necessary for entering Bissau, the only port of entry for Guinea-Bissau. Also covers the northern approaches to the Bijagos Islands.

No 1727 - Bolama and Approaches, scale 1:100,000. Necessary for a cruise in the Bijagos Islands.

No 1690 - Plans on the North West Coast of Africa. This could also be useful to carry as it shows the entrance to the ports in Mauritania in case of emergency on the way down. However, the plan of the entrance to St Louis included in the chart is no longer valid.

No 4012 - Passage planning chart. Covers West Africa to West Indies and South America down to Salvador in Brazil.

In addition, the Admiralty African Pilot, volume 1 covers the area. This, however, is of limited value to small craft and much of the information is out of date. It is recommended that additional charts be bought rather than the pilot.

Neither French or Portuguese charts seem to be obtainable from UK distributors and the best method of obtaining them, although not without its difficulties, is probably to contact the national distributors. The addresses are:

Portugal: J.Garrio CA LDA
Avenida 24 de Julho No 2
1° Dto,
1200-478 Lisboa
Tel Portugal 351 21 3473081
e-mail: chartdepartment@jgarraio.pt

France: Librairie Maritime et D' Outre Mer
17, rue Jacob
75007 Paris
Tel France 33 1 43 29 96 77

Ed Wheeler reports that when using C-MAP electronic charts, he found the locational accuracy decreased markedly the further up the River Gambia he progressed, until by Georgetown, approximately 155NM upriver, the locational error was greater than one mile. He assumes that the chartwork was not geodatically corrected and that the charts are not referenced to WSG84. Once out of the rivers, the locational accuracy was satisfactory. However, he advises that great caution should be exercised navigating with GPS in the rivers. This would tend to preclude night passages, which are inadvisable in any case owing to the abundance of unmarked fishing nets.

Charts of the area generally use terminology which refers back to the European language used by the country in question. For example, a river is *riviere* in Senegal and *rio* in Guinea-Bissau. Most are terms are obvious in context, but the following puzzled me at first:

Bolon - a side creek of one of the major rivers. Mainly used in the Gambia.

Marigot - the same as a *bolon* but mainly used in Senegal.

Fleuve - Sometimes used as river in Senegal.

Biaxios - shallows or drying mud flats in Guinea - Bissau.

Guide Books

Ed Wheeler found that The Lonely Planet guide to Senegal and the Gambia had up-to-date information on the main towns and cities and on things to see and do. There is also a good local bird recognition book which is worth carrying, called 'A Field Guide to the Birds of The Gambia and Senegal', by Clive Barlow and Tim Wacher. It is useful to reconnoitre using Google Earth, which shows a surprising amount of detail.

Notes on sailing and navigation

The guide and drawings

A cruise that included only a brief stop in Dakar and Banjul would not require this book; all the information you need is available on the charts. The main purpose of this guide is to introduce visiting crews to the magnificent rivers, uncharted creeks and secluded anchorages of the region.

The main difficulty is that mud banks and shallows change on a seasonal basis. The most dramatic change has been the River Saloum breaking through the spit of land at its estuary to create a new mouth. This new entrance is uncharted and the area is changing rapidly. St. Louis was once considered a deep water port, but in recent years the entrance has been silting up and it is now dangerous to approach.

Recent changes up to the time of writing are recorded in the plans and text of this guide. However some areas, especially the new entrance to the Saloum, are changing rapidly and it is always possible that the information presented here will be out of date by the time you arrive. Consequently, it is clear that when approaching the rivers and creeks of the region great care must be taken as the danger of grounding is ever present.

The plans in this guide are not hydrographic charts, and should not be used as such. They are intended to give additional information and to supplement the text. In many cases they show access to uncharted but accessible channels; they will also show where the charts are out of date.

Where soundings have been included in the diagrams these are in metres and are either confirmation of readings from other charts, where they agree with my findings, or the depths that I have measured crudely reduced to MLWS. In the latter case they will have been rounded down to the nearest metre. I must emphasis, however, that I have no way of knowing accurate tide differences, and a degree of guesswork has had to be used. The soundings are included as a guide and must not be considered as absolute. In most cases they will have been rounded down to the nearest metre, so that you should always have more water than charted. However, in shallow entrances there is little scope for this sort of reduction, so where soundings go down to 2m or less it is probably close to the mark. I do not want to put anyone off using these channels, rather to warn against complacency. Grids and scales are only added as a rough guide.

Unless otherwise stated in the text I have sailed my own boat over all the ground covered in the guide. I can therefore say, without fear of contradiction, that it was possible to get a vessel

drawing 1.35m safely through these waters. In addition, visiting crews have been using the northern sections of these notes for some time to check their accuracy and correct minor errors.

The information was collected over a five-year period and there were, inevitably, changes in approach over that period as I acquired better equipment and improved techniques. Most notably you will find less detail and lower accuracy in the River Gambia section which I cruised before I had any idea that I would be writing this book.

Where comments have been made on sea conditions, and the effect they may have on a yacht under way or at anchor, it is worth remembering that these observations are based on my experiences in a light-displacement 8m sloop.

In the main cruising season visibility in the region is poor. This can make landfalls difficult in an area without prominent landmarks. I have therefore added some useful waypoints for people navigating with GPS. I do not want to offend the purists, but my own experience was that its use revolutionised my ability to find the narrow channels and isolated waterways of the region. It also allowed me to carry out crude surveys of some of these places, information for which is included in the plans.

Finally, I should say something about the difficulty of place names and their spelling. Considerable confusion can arise because people throughout the region use different spellings and sometimes different names for places. In addition, many place names have changed since they were first included on charts by the early hydrographers. I have used, where possible, the names and spelling from the Admiralty charts, on the basis that this will be the common source of reference for people using this guide.

However in some instances these names have disappeared completely from common use. A perfect example of this is Portugal, which was one of the early trading ports on the coast a little to the south of Dakar. This still appears on some old charts under that name but is now universally called Sali (pronounced like the girl's name). It would be misleading to use the obsolete name so I have used the modern one. In most cases these differences should be explained in the text.

Spelling is another matter, and you will find a wide range of spellings for different place names. In cases where there is no reference from the Admiralty chart I have tried to use the spelling in most common use.

Tidal range & differences

The information given here is a rough guide based upon Dai Rice's most recent observations and local tide tables. In the absence of more accurate data, these are included here to help with passage planning.

Generally speaking the tidal range is only about 1.5m throughout Senegal and the Gambia, but increases to 6m in parts of Guinea-Bissau. Tidal streams and times are very difficult to predict among the Bijagos Islands.

The following table lists the time difference in hours from Banjul:

Dakar	-1
Saloum Estuary	-0.5
Banjul No 3 buoy (unlit)	+0.5
Banjul Harbour	0
Casamance No 1 buoy:	
Not clear. SJ estimated	+0.5
Lower Casamance (Djogue)	-1
Ziguinchor	+2
Lower River Cacheu (Bolor)	+0.5
Cacheu	+1
Lower Geba (Ponta de Caió)	+0.5
Bissau	+1.5
Bubaque	0

I would be careful of time corrections suggested for rivers. In the Gambia time differences are printed in the tide tables, and though I am sure they are accurate mean measurements, I have found them to be of limited use for practical applications. There are a number of reasons for this, the most obvious being that the further up river you get the less sinusoidal the tide will be. In addition, I think there must be some stratification of the water where you get salt and fresh water mixing. This, I suspect, can produce an apparent down river flow of fresh water after the tide has started to flood.

A number of people have suggested crude calculations (like allow one hour tide delay for each eight miles up river) as a way of calculating tides in all the West African rivers. This does not allow for the problems stated above or the fact that each bend, island or narrowing of the river will make the relationship more non-linear. In these conditions, and among the islands, the most important factor is how the tidal stream is affecting your boat, and I would suggest you base your calculations on your own observations at the time and place.

Ed Wheeler found that there no longer seem to be detailed tide tables available for the River Gambia. He suggests carrying Volume 2 of the Admiralty Tide Tables, which includes enough secondary ports on the West Africa coast and rivers to be highly useful.

Hazards

Every chart carries the warning that navigational aids cannot be relied upon. Not only are they often missing but, even worse, they are sometimes out of position. This is another strong argument for the use of GPS. Throughout this guide you will find comment on this subject and some indication of what to expect; but the bottom line is not to trust anything.

The other main problem you will encounter in these waters is the primitive procedures being followed by other vessels. As you work your way down the coast and through the rivers your main companions will be the local fishing pirogues. These vessels were probably introduced by the Portuguese and were designed to carry lateen or square rig sails, but in recent years these have been almost universally replaced by the outboard. Used like this they are very efficient into a sea but unstable beam on. Navigation is by landmark and eyeball, the anchor is usually a block of an old engine and they rarely have any auxiliary means of propulsion. Their security is in numbers, so when you enter the fishing grounds there will either be lots around or none.

In calm weather they often stay offshore all night fishing. They do not have lights and have nets and traps scattered about all over the place. Often they carry a torch which they flash at you, or each other, for communication, but this is not guaranteed. If sailing at night, make sure you are well lit and keep a sharp watch. On one occasion the first indication we had that there was another vessel near us was the smell of burning charcoal being used to brew tea. This, as you can imagine, is an unnerving experience. Except for the long haul from the Banjul to the Casamance I tended to travel by daylight in a series of short hops. It is more fun and avoids the hazard of unlit pirogues.

Ed Wheeler found these unlit pirogues surprisingly far out to sea. He warns that the strategy of keeping further offshore to avoid them can bring one into contact with very large fleets of foreign trawlers, especially off the Guinea-Bissau coast.

Your dealings with local fishermen can be affected by their limited understanding of the sea and vessels. Be very careful if receiving directions from them because they really cannot grasp the concept of a keeled yacht, and will insist there is plenty of water on a certain passage if there is enough for them to get through. I once came across an engineless pirogue sitting about five miles offshore just south of the River Casamance which called me over and asked for me to pull them to the beach. They could not understand that I was unable to do this. They could run up on to the beach, so why could I not do the same? I offered to pull them into the Casamance but they did not want that and chose to stay where they were until another pirogue arrived. I left them with bread and water as they had no food or drink whatsoever. They did not even have a paddle on board. If the sea had suddenly got up, as it can do very quickly in this area, they would have been in real trouble. But I could no more explain this to fatalistic Africans than I could make them understand that my keel prevented me from running them to the beach.

These attitudes and limitations should be carefully considered if using a local crew or pilot. I have used a Serer fisherman very successfully as a crew and watchman on my boat, but he had seen her dried out and had more idea of what was involved. He did, however, still tend to put more faith in his Jujus than sound seamanship.

I was also very wary of the trawlers fishing off these coasts. They have mainly Korean crews and will usually be found fishing illegally within the five-mile limit. They have little empathy with other smaller vessels, and I normally gave them a wide berth.

On one occasion two of these trawlers came into my home mooring of Oyster Creek and attempted to unload their catch at midnight with a strong spring tide running. Between the two vessels they had one working engine and one inadequate anchor. When hardly anyone was around they lost control trying to cross the creek at the peak of the flood stream, hit my boat and broke it from its mooring. The crews obviously thought this was a matter of no importance because they continued to wreak havoc on other moored boats and left mine to its own devices. Luckily a friend of mine saw what was happening and got to my boat to drop the anchor. Only luck and the intervention of a few other yachtsmen prevented serious damage to other boats that night. The skipper of the trawlers concerned showed considerable annoyance when asked for compensation, and only the intervention of the local police secured payment to cover the worst of the damage. I received nothing for the loss of my mooring.

Also watch out for river ferries. Where there are crossings they should be shown in a plan or mentioned in the text. These ferries are usually old and poorly maintained, and it is not unusual for them to fail in mid-crossing to be carried off by the tide. I have even known them be so underpowered as to be unable to make their way against tidal streams and strong winds. On one occasion I saw one carried off up river because it ran out of diesel on a crossing. Consider it to be your responsibility to stay well clear.

Boat preparation and equipment

General

West Africa does not have the sort of facilities you will find in cruising grounds closer to home, making it all the more important that your boat and its equipment are in good order. Before setting off, reflect that you will be over eight hundred miles down wind and tide of the nearest general chandlers and give your craft a close inspection with this in mind. In addition, you

will be in a tropical environment where all forms of organic growth and corrosion will be much more of a problem.

Self-sufficiency should be the guiding principle in all your planning. When fitting out and reading up always remember that there will be no one to help you when things go wrong. This may not always be entirely true, but you will be better prepared for the worst if you work from this assumption.

Be very careful when you have technical problems. There will be no shortage of people offering to help and claiming to have all the necessary skills, but I have known Gambian motor mechanics sink a boat by disconnecting the exhausts with the seacocks open. As the exhausts were a little above the waterline they did not appreciate that there was a problem, but when a chop built up water started to spill over into the hull and it sank. This is an extreme example of a common problem; local tradesmen will not consider that there is any difference between a marine diesel inboard and a lorry diesel engine.

If you have broken down you want to be told that someone can solve your problems and the local mechanic will be very willing to give you all the assurances you need. He will also fail to understand why you do not want to go to sea with a jerry-rigged fuel tank on your coach roof to gravity feed your engine when your fuel lift pump has packed up. If the engine runs, they will consider that there is no problem.

Most skippers will not be fooled by such obvious errors, but with more complex faults it can be more difficult. This is where your own knowledge will really pay dividends. If you have to use local tradesmen ask around among as many people as possible before choosing one, and then keep a keen eye on his work. Insist on the highest standards, and if they object to these, pay them off and start again.

The hull

Fouling of the hull is a major problem which needs to be given serious consideration before starting your cruise. With the exception of Dakar, it is difficult to dry a hull for maintenance purposes because of the limited tidal ranges in Senegal and the Gambia, together with muddy banks and dangerous or non-existent wharves. It is therefore best to get your craft cleaned off, inspected and antifouled before you arrive. The greater tidal range in the Bijagos Archipelago and harder surfaces make careening a feasible option for cleaning, antifouling or anode replacement.

Of the legal forms of antifouling, the ablative type appears to be best for these waters, but it is difficult to find. I would advise any visiting yachts to carry sufficient paint to do the hull at least once. If a long stay or extended cruising in the more remote parts of South America are anticipated, it would be advisable to carry sufficient paint to do your hull annually until you can reasonably expect to have access to materials. It is possible to buy antifouling in Dakar, but it does not work. I have also managed to buy forms of antifouling in Banjul which do work, but which you would not be allowed to use on a yacht in Europe or North America.

It is worth remembering that galvanic corrosion is more active in warm highly saline water and that worm is active in many of the creeks of the region and can attack wooden hulls. However, this has not prevented many wooden boats spending long pleasant cruises in the region. Ed Wheeler suggests considering the use of temporary magnesium anodes if spending much time in the fresh water parts of the Gambia River.

Sails and rigging

Bob and Liz Cooper found a sailmaker at the Cercle de la Voile de Dakar (CVD) in Dakar. The main problem of getting repairs done there is the shortage of materials, and one should not bank on obtaining anything locally which will be suitable for your purposes.

The only rope which is readily available in the region is nylon, which can be used to get you out of trouble, but is prone to stretch, is unpleasant to use and quickly deteriorates in UV light.

Engines

Good-quality diesel engine oil and lighter grade oils, including penetrating oil are available, but marine grease is more difficult. I would advise carrying sufficient stern gland grease for your requirements. Remember that exploring the rivers and creeks may involve much heavier use of your engine than normal cruising.

There are agencies for Yamaha and Suzuki outboards in the region, but for some unknown reason they do not always deal with the same engines as are available in Europe.

Electrics

Proper marine deep-discharge cells are not available in West Africa, but you can sometimes pick up deep-discharge cells for use in domestic solar circuits, which are almost as good.

You will not be able to get any electronic instruments repaired in West Africa.

Dinghies

Many cruising yachts will carry a convenient inflatable dinghy, but these can have their drawbacks, especially in tropical waters. In recent years a number of cheap inflatables have come on the market but I have seen some of these fall to pieces within weeks in West Africa. It would appear that the adhesives used on the seams is not adequate for the conditions. For what it is worth, my advice would be to buy a good old Avon.

Accommodation

There are no local laws covering the use of marine toilets, but if you have any form of holding tank system which requires chemicals make sure you carry them.

Butane is readily available throughout West Africa with the same standard thread and regulator as calor gas in the UK. If you are fitted with this system your gas bottles will be interchangeable throughout Senegal and the Gambia. In Dakar other types of bottle can be filled with this gas (see the section on Dakar). Ed Wheeler found no sign of Camping Gaz, so recommends carrying ordinary Calor Gas bottles and regulator.

Kerosene is also readily available throughout the region. If you use this type of fuel, however, it is advisable to carry a good supply of spirit for lighting and cleaning purposes as this is more difficult to come by.

Spares and provisions

Anything that you regularly use is worth carrying. Bring a good selection of stainless fittings, including all the standard-size nuts and bolts, split pins, jubilee clips etc. used on your boat. These things are always in demand even if you don't need them yourself and a healthy bartering system often exists between visiting crews.

Some form of marine-grade sealant like Sikaflex should be carried as it is not available locally (though silicon can sometimes be found). Epoxies of all sorts are a problem. If you are likely to need them carry them, but they are difficult to use in local conditions and quickly go off. The spray type of penetrating oil like WD40 is another useful addition, though this is widely available in Senegal and Gambia.

Most basic provisions that you are likely to need are available somewhere in the region. It is always worth shopping around in West Africa and buying in bulk when you find a cheap item.

It is still difficult to buy basic provisions in Guinea- Bissau and it is best to revictual before going there if you intend to head straight on across the Atlantic.

Ed Wheeler reports that as there is nowhere on the coast you can safely lie alongside, all water and diesel will need to be brought aboard in jerrycans. He always found someone who would arrange to fill and return them, which often involved travelling some distance by donkey cart or taxi and could take some time. He recommends that you do not grudge the payment of a few dalasis or CFAs for this.

In early 2008, the cost of diesel and other provisions was much the same in all three countries, with diesel about £0.75 per litre.

Dakar and the greater Banjul area have supermarkets, where a reasonable variety of European-type foods are available, except for durable loaves of bread, which were impossible to find. Towns and villages have shops which stock staples such as rice, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and cooking oil. Most towns have a market selling produce. Local fruit and vegetables are good and abundant in Senegal, but much less so in The Gambia and Guinea Bissau. Meat may be more risky, so a safer option is to buy fish directly from the dugouts or pirogues.

Alcohol is widely available in Senegal and Guinea Bissau, and a local gin is available in Banjul for the adventurous. For the suicidal, a spirit known as Cana can be found in the Bijagos. Both Banjul and Dakar have breweries, but beer can be difficult to find in the largely Moslem upriver areas of The Gambia River.

Health considerations

General

The measures you should take to limit your risk of contracting illness when in West Africa are mainly common sense.

For example you will find that the Aids epidemic has not reached the biblical proportions predicted in the western Media. However, that does not alter the fact that many prostitutes and some of the enthusiastic semi-professionals you may meet are infected. It is best to keep any intercourse with these people on a firmly social basis.

While not wishing to sensationalise these notes I have deliberately mentioned that subject as it is an example of a common mistake people make when they think of Africa. It is a huge continent and the starving masses and refugees you see on the television, as well as the Aids-ravaged communities reported in the press, are as far from the coast of West Africa as the warring cities of Bosnia are from the Home Counties.

Anyone who follows the precautions listed here should be able to cruise the region safely.

Preparation and vaccination

It is important to make health plans well in advance. No vaccination certificates are required to enter any of the countries in the area. Ed Wheeler was not asked for any certificates in West Africa. However, it is advisable to be vaccinated for Yellow Fever, following recent cases there. As this vaccine lasts for ten years and protects you from a potentially fatal disease I would recommend that you have it before you set off.

It is also worth being vaccinated against typhoid, hepatitis A and B, and rabies. The cholera vaccine is unlikely to be still valid by the time you have sailed down there. The risk of contracting any of these ailments is fairly remote however, especially if you observe the simple health measures laid down in this chapter. Ed Wheeler also recommends having Polio and Tetanus vaccinations.

By far the greatest risk to your health is malaria. Before you set off you should contact a doctor and discuss your intended cruise and make sure that you have sufficient medication to cover you for the periods you are going to be in infected countries. This, of course, does not only apply to West Africa. Make it clear to your doctor that you will require protection for some considerable time and that any long term effects from taking prophylactics should be considered.

Ed Wheeler reports that malaria is widespread and Chloroquine resistant, which means taking either Malarone, Doxycycline or Mafloquine Hydrochloride (Lariam). Malarone is expensive and needs to be taken daily, with mild side effects, but it is not recommended for prolonged use. Lariam can have very severe and permanent side effects and it is recommended that people test it before travelling.

Liz and Bob Cooper found malaria tablets available in pharmacies in Senegal and the Gambia.

When you have been supplied with drugs to prevent malaria make sure you follow the instructions. This will usually include taking them before you arrive in an affected area and continuing for some time after you have left. Do not mess with malaria, it can kill you.

Medical care

The health services available are generally not good and it is advisable to have some form of health insurance that will cover flying you home for treatment if necessary.

As with most things, there are better facilities in Dakar than elsewhere but an operation or prolonged treatment will be expensive. While cruising in the more remote areas you will be lucky to find a health centre with a doctor, let alone medicines. I would therefore recommend that you carry some quinine for treating malaria. Also carry some form of antihistamine in case of a reaction to insect bites.

A general first aid kit should include plenty of sterilised dressings for treating cuts and sores, along with antiseptic and antibiotic cream. Tropical sores and ulcers are common among people living on yachts for some reason, but if treated at the first sign and kept clean they should not be a problem. Bandages for sprains and some means of improvising a splint in case of a broken bone should also be included. Carrying antibiotic courses and topical cream, anti-diarrhoea tablets and rehydration salts may also be a good idea.

General precautions

The simple precaution of boiling and filtering drinking water will greatly reduce your contact with harmful bacteria. This protection will be further enhanced by using a chlorine-based sterilising solution, like Milton or Puritabs. Wash all fresh fruit and vegetables in suitably treated water before consumption. Ed Wheeler found a filter for the drinking water taps useful, and with these precautions, *Witchcraft's* crew avoided to avoid stomach problems from the water.

Be sensible with other foods. The same rules you would apply at home over meat and fish apply to West Africa, with the added proviso that they will go off more quickly in a hot climate. Most proper restaurants are of a reasonable standard and I have used all those mentioned in this guide without problem.

Personally I avoid the communal food bowls which you are often invited to eat at, though many people I know eat like this without apparent harmful effect. I also avoid the street vendors with bowls full of cooked meat and their attendant flies. Having said this any meat or fish you buy in the market will come with its own cloud of flies, and this is something you just have to get used to.

Bugs

Yes, it has to be admitted that there are a lot of insects hanging around, especially in the rains. Some bite, others sting and some carry unpleasant diseases, but most just hang around in an irritating buggy sort of way. They are an important part of the food chain and without them you would not have the abundant bird life which is one of the joys of West Africa.

Mosquitoes, of course, carry malaria and some means of keeping them at bay is necessary. As the light fails I used to drape a conventional mosquito net over the coach roof and hatch. Other people have frames with mosquito mesh to fit over their hatches. The problem with these is that they are a pain to stow, are easily damaged and have to be lifted out if you want to relieve yourself over the side

at night. The draped net just pushes aside and drops into place behind you. Whatever system you use, be ready with it on first arrival.

Having done that do not be smug, there are other flying, biting bugs which are small enough to pass through mosquito netting. The nastiest of these are known locally as no-see-ums, pronounced as a single word and cursed in all the rich vernacular of the local languages. The best protection against these and other insects small enough to get through the netting is to anchor further offshore. It is a simple general rule that the greater distance between you and the bank the less you will be troubled by insects. The bigger the bug the further it can fly.

Another useful deterrent is to use yellow, rather than white light. I have not been able to find yellow tubes or bulbs for marine lighting but this can be achieved by wrapping yellow-coloured tissue around fluorescent tubes (not conventional light bulbs as these get too hot).

There are also some good insect repellents on the market now, and it might be worth carrying an ample supply of these. By anchoring a reasonable way offshore with a few repellent coils going we have spent some pleasant nights dining in our cockpit under the stars.

Mosquitoes and no-see-ums come out as the sun sets, but there are others nasty flying things which are around in the day. The worst of these are the West African killer bees. Don't worry, I have never heard of anyone being killed by them, the name was coined after they had been exported to the Americas for their honey. If you were to stumble into a hive you might be in trouble, but when they invade your boat they are more of a nuisance than a danger. If you see one it is best to kill it before it goes off and finds its mates; keep a can of spray handy for the purpose. The thing which attracts them most seems to be fresh water. I found that we were particularly vulnerable when we anchored for the evening and washed off in fresh water which, in the absence of luxurious facilities, we normally did on the foredeck. If one bee picks up the scent of fresh water you will soon have a swarm. If this happens, go below, batten down and wait for dark, when they will all go away. If you catch the problem early enough simply up anchor and move as quickly as possible. Again the further off shore you are the less likely to have a problem.

The other daytime pest are tsetse flies. They do not carry sleeping sickness here as they do in East Africa, but they still have a nasty bite. Personally I would rather be bitten by a hundred mosquitoes than one tsetse as I have a nasty reaction to them; other people say the opposite. I seem to be troubled more by them in my eight-metre sloop than people on larger boats. The reason for this is that they fly low over the water and can more easily find their way over my low freeboard. Towing a dinghy also helps them find their way on board, so if you are being troubled try pulling your dinghy up. They also seem to be common where you have drying mud flats. I have been up and down some creeks at high water and not seen a single tsetse but been inundated with them in the same place at low water. My entomologist friends tell me that water plays no part in their life cycle but my own observations would seem to contradict this.

Ed Wheeler found African hornets were a frequent and unwelcome visitor. Despite their severe sting, they are not aggressive but like to build nests, including behind *Witchcraft's* switch panel!

The good old cockroach does not bite or sting but is still greeted with almost universal aversion and is difficult to get rid of. Old is a suitable adjective (though good may be stretching it a bit) because they are primitive creatures that have been around far longer than most things we are familiar with. Their success is partly due to the fact that when they are dying they lay eggs, which then hatch and keep the colony going. This is why they are such a pest when they get on your boat. Regular spraying will keep them down, but will not eliminate them. Another method which I am told will help is to put down sugar, yeast and water mixed to a glutinous consistency which they will eat. So primitive a creature is the cockroach that they have no mechanism for getting rid of excess gas in their digestive system and when this mixture ferments inside them they explode. Other cockroaches then come and eat their fallen colleague and the process start over again.

While a regular regime will keep them down, it is best to avoid them getting on board in the first place. If you are only in the region for a brief stop in the dry season this is quite possible. In the rains they fly and can get on board that way, again anchoring well offshore will reduce the risk. A common way of introducing them is by carrying some form of cardboard packaging on board in which they have laid eggs. For some reason the cardboard boxes in which local beer can be bought are particularly prone to this (not that I would expect this to be a problem for most cruising yachtsmen). It is best to remove as much packaging as possible before carrying provisions on board, a process made easier by the wider use of plastic bags recently.

Look out for weevils if stocking up with flour and rice. Though more expensive, these items are better bought from supermarkets where they will be better packaged. If weevils get into your flour they quickly multiply making the whole stock inedible.

In the rainy season the dark green blister beetle comes out. They have an almost metallic look and in most years are not encountered in very great numbers, though occasionally you can get a plague

of them. These can give you a nasty burn but only if you squat on one yourself. If one lands on you brush it aside and it will fly away without harm. They are only active at night and gather around light.

As a general rule it is always best to wear sound shoes which cover the whole of your feet. The reason for this is a nasty beast called a jigger (sand flea). This will lay eggs under your toe nails which are extremely unpleasant when they hatch. The problem is far more prevalent the further south you get, probably because they seem to be associated with pigs which the northern Muslims do not keep. Where they are known to be particularly prevalent, I have mentioned the fact in these notes.

The last nasty to be mentioned in this context is less of a problem to yacht crews than the rest of the population. It is the tumbo maggot, the lava stage of the tumbo fly. These maggots need to feed on animal blood, and one way of achieving this is for the fly to lay its eggs in drying laundry. The eggs are too small to see but when you wear the item of clothing next to your skin they will hatch and eat their way into your flesh until they can feed on your blood. Unpleasant though this may sound, you are not aware of it at first because the maggot is so small, but as it grows you begin to feel its activity.

Do not panic, it is very uncommon and there is a simple measure which will prevent it from happening. All clothing should be ironed before you wear it, which will destroy the eggs. Clothes dried on board are unlikely to be affected anyway, but if you send your laundry off to be done elsewhere make sure that it is thoroughly ironed. Any African doing laundry for you will be well aware of the problem anyway and make sure that it is OK.

If you should be unfortunate enough to pick one up you will have to let it grow until it is large enough to remove. The best way to get them out is to cover the hole in your skin, through which they breathe, with Vaseline. The maggot will then have to come out to breath. When enough of it is exposed to grab with tweezers pull it out. It is important to get this right and remove the whole maggot in one go. If a part of the body is left in the wound it will quickly fester and medical help will be needed.

Ed Wheeler also advises being aware of poisonous spiders, which can inflict necrotising wounds which take a long time to heal and may require surgery. *Witchcraft's* minder in Lamin Creek had suffered from one of these concealed in a T-shirt and had to be hospitalised.

Other hazards

Before we leave the Chamber of Horrors I should make some mention of other things lurking in the undergrowth which might cause concern. Of these probably the most common fear is of snakes.

It is true that there are a great number of snakes in West Africa, but the majority of them are harmless. The likelihood of being bitten by a venomous snake is so remote that you can discount it. If you are prepared to cross the road at home you should certainly not worry about being bitten by a snake in West Africa. Reptiles are more afraid of you than you are of them. When walking in the bush, especially close to fresh water, make as much noise as possible and they will slink off to avoid you. Be more vigilant in heavy rains when they might be forced out of their holes by water. The same is true of scorpions, though in nearly ten years I have never seen a live scorpion. Be specially wary of cobras, easily recognised by the raised head. The spitting cobra is so called because it can spit venom in your eyes which will blind you temporarily.

Watch out for stinging jelly fish and stingrays in the water. Both can be very unpleasant, though are unlikely to be fatal to a fit person. There are sharks off shore but they do not seem to come into the creeks. They become more common the further south you get, and I am told are abundant in the Bijagos Islands. The same is true of crocodiles, which you will find throughout the region, but are far more common in the south.

Of the other wildlife, bush pig can be aggressive if cornered, and a pack of baboons is not to be messed with. In both cases keep your distance. Hippos can be seen in the fresh water section of the Gambia and their salt water cousins in the Bijagos, but do not approach them too closely.

The countries and people of West Africa

A brief history

The history of West Africa is inextricably linked with its geography and ecology. There was a period in recent pre-history when the Sahara was green, supporting farming communities and linking the southern region, which we now call the Sahel, with the Mediterranean world. Some time before 2000BC, however, the Sahara began to lose rainfall, the rivers dried and the desert grew. The Senegambia region became hidden behind natural barriers with the desert to the north, the Atlantic to the west and the rain forests to the south. The only room for the movement of people and ideas was therefore confined to the savannah area running across the continent south of the desert.

In isolation the demographic map of West Africa was altered by the rise and fall of kingdoms and the movement of nomadic people which has resulted in the tribal distribution found today. Some contact

must have remained with the outside, however, because iron smelting appears south of the Sahara by about 500BC, and this was to have a profound impact on the development of the region. Iron tools provided the means of clearing forests and, once the land was cleared, of improved agriculture. The smelting of iron also needed large quantities of wood, which kept the iron workers moving and clearing. Gradually the forests were cleared for farm land, creating the savannah and in these open plains kingdoms rose, distinct from the more primitive tribalism of the forests. A vicious cycle was established with the savannah working its way southward and the desert following.

The coastal regions remained heavily forested until fairly recent times. This left them on the periphery of the succession of empires which rose from the Upper Niger region in modern Mali. Culturally these kingdoms remained backward, but advances came in the eleventh century with the arrival of Islam, bringing written script and limited contact with the outside world. However, by the time of the arrival of the first Europeans most of the coastal area covered by this book was still heavily forested and only sparsely occupied by pagan tribes.

Early in the fifteenth century the Portuguese started to feel their way down the coast of West Africa under the guiding hand of Henry the Navigator. It has been suggested that this exploration, which culminated in Vasco de Gama rounding the Cape, was inspired by the fall of Constantinople and the need for a trade route to the east, but I have a suspicion that natural curiosity and developing technology also played a part.

Their first contact was with the Wolof kingdoms to the north. Cap Vert, the promontory where Dakar now stands, was discovered by Nuno Tristão in 1440 and a trade agreement arranged with the local natives. In 1447 the same explorer travelled further south and discovered the Rio Grande, probably the modern River Cacheu as it is reported to be 90 miles south of Cape St. Mary in the Gambia, though one of the tributaries to the River Geba is today called the Rio Grande.

The River Gambia was not discovered until two special expeditions were sent under Luiz de Cadamosto and Antoniotto Usodimare in 1455. The interest was due to reports from the inhabitants of Cap Vert that the banks of this river were a good source of gold. To this day there is a common tendency among West Africans to tell people what they think they want to hear, and one suspects that these persistent stories of gold in the Gambia are more a result of the European obsession with that metal than any genuine expectation that it would be found. The two expeditions joined forces at Cap Vert and entered the Gambia together, where they were attacked four miles up river. After this their crews lost their nerve and the ships had to turn back.

However the two explorers were not so easily deterred and they returned in 1456 when they succeeded in establishing trading relations with two kings from the north bank of the river. Our knowledge of these early Portuguese explorers and the trade they set up is sparse. They were travelling beyond the limits of the known world in a superstitious age and developing navigational techniques as they progressed. In West Africa they left a trading class of Portuguese immigrants who mixed with the indigenous population and created a new race of middlemen. These people lived a tenuous existence, surviving in a hostile and disease ridden climate, gradually merging with the natives until they disappeared from history altogether.

The early trade in West Africa was disappointing. Gold could be purchased in small quantities, but the supposed gold mountains could not be found. It was the Spanish who were to discover the value of West Africa when they chanced on the American continent. In order to develop its potential they needed labour, and it soon became obvious that the local Indians were not suitable because they had an inconvenient tendency to die when subjected to slavery and hard labour. Then they tried exporting some African slaves who proved both compliant and hardy, and suddenly one of the most profitable and cruel trades the world has ever known was in place.

The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch, French and British in West Africa, but even when the latter began to show a serious interest in the region, after the Restoration, the main objective was still gold. Slaves, ivory and hides were considered suitable items to trade in while bases were set up to explore the hinterland for the supposed wealth that existed there.

Practical considerations changed the emphasis. The climate was too hostile for European settlements, and the land too remote for complex enterprises in the seventeenth century. It was possible, however, with a small set-up to trade in slaves, which the local chiefs were ever willing to provide. It was then simply a matter for trading vessels to make brief stops and continue before the crew were severely affected with malaria.

Take note, because it is a point often overlooked, that slavery was a standard practice in the West African kingdoms and the supply of slaves for the Atlantic trade was carried out by Africans. The image of the white slaver stomping off into the bush to capture his prey is as misleading as it was impractical at the time. I do not say this to absolve us of our guilt but, being an emotive subject, there has been a tendency to distort history which I believe to be counter-productive.

The Dutch were ousted from their stronghold on Gorée Island, off modern Dakar, by the French in 1677 and disappear from the West African history. From this time on the influence of Europeans, on

the coast at least, was established much as it is to this day. There was virtually no penetration into the unknown interior of Africa by white men until the end of the eighteenth century when explorers like Mungo Park travelled into the hinterland beyond the limits of the navigable rivers. Their published travels offered Europeans the first glimpse of what lay beyond the seaboard and rivers of the region.

It was at about this time that the slavery controversy was reaching its peak in Europe. The reforming movement, led by Wilberforce in the British Parliament, achieved its first objective in 1807 with the act which forbade British ships to carry slaves. This was soon followed by attempts to enforce that ban on the rest of the world. For this purpose the River Gambia took on a new importance, as it was seen as a major artery into the continent and a useful place from which to set up a base to police the region.

In the treaty of Paris in May 1814 France agreed to abolish slavery, after a five year lapse to re-stock her colonies. The final settlement in November 1815 saw most of the other European powers fall into line, at least in principle, with the idea. Of these the most important decision was that of the Portuguese who agreed to end the trade after a period of years. This turned out to be 1830, following cash inducements from the British Treasury. These agreements were only with governments, however, and did not stop the illegal trade. Most notable in holding out against the tide of opinion at this stage was the United States.

In 1816 the British established Bathurst at the mouth of the river Gambia to assist in policing the new agreements and, with French assistance from their old slaving base on Gorée, followed a controversial policy of searching ships of other flags for illegal trade. This ironically made matters worse for the poor slaves, for whom there was still a healthy market. They were now shipped by more ruthless men expecting larger profits, and one way of achieving this was to cram even more people into insanitary holds.

In 1833 Britain finally passed an Act of Parliament to abolish slavery in her colonies. This stated that all slaves were to be freed by 1840. Though less than perfect in its execution, it was another step forward, and from this time the trade gradually disappeared from West African waters. Some freed slaves were returned to West Africa and given land.

The nineteenth century ended in the illogical scramble for Africa, when European nations forgot their high ideals and divided the continent among themselves. This undignified grabbing of a poor, underdeveloped continent is difficult to explain. Some honestly thought they were bringing Livingstone's three C's to the natives (commerce, civilisation and Christianity) while others were out for a quick buck. Not perhaps literally, but certainly figuratively, they were still searching for those mountains of gold. Politically the process resembled panic buying.

By this time the British had rather lost interest in the Senegambia region, but the French followed an expansionist policy designed to link their West and North African possessions into a single empire. There was even talk of the British ceding the Gambia to France, but this never came to anything. All this time the Portuguese hung on to Guinea-Bissau, almost in spite of their much declined importance in the world order.

After the slave trade had been brought to an end there was little of value to export from West Africa. The ground nut became the staple crop, shipped mainly to France to make soap. In addition, gum, hides and ivory were exported, the last two items gradually drying up as the wildlife was decimated by hunting and destruction of habitat.

The present political divisions of the African continent were largely settled by the First World War, and by the end of the Second their value was realised to be limited. After these wars, Europeans began to settle down to more peaceful coexistence. Without the old competition, and with no financial attraction to draw her sons, Europe largely abandoned Africa with undignified haste.

The political map

Politically the region is divided into three countries whose boundaries were set by conferences held in Europe. Each country has a distinct culture resulting partly from their colonial and post-colonial experiences. Within this framework is a complex tribal culture which is not so immediately obvious to the visitor, but is equally important for an understanding of the region.

While it has to be admitted that West Africa, like the rest of the continent, remains unstable, remember that the national boundaries which we are dealing with today are less than a hundred years old and it is only just over a quarter of a century since the people of these newly created countries have had to learn to manage them.

Senegal became independent in 1960, while the Gambia gained self-government in 1963 followed by full independence in 1965. Only the old Portuguese regime held out against the new order and the inhabitants of Guinea-Bissau had to fight a bloody revolution before finally shaking off their masters in 1974.

Since independence, Senegal has become the economic giant of the region with its capital, Dakar, the main commercial hub. While there has been some civil unrest, it is among that rare group of emerging African nations which have seen a smooth secession from its original president to the next generation. This process has probably been helped

by the heavy French involvement in the country, an interest which is only now on the wane. Elections in 2000 resulted in another peaceful transfer of power, and in 2001, a new constitution allowing the formation of opposition parties.

There are further long-term pressures caused by tribal diversification. To state the case somewhat simply, Senegal can be divided into a mainly Wolof region to the north of the Gambia and Jola and Mandinka to the south. The Jola are concentrated mainly around the Casamance, and they resent being ruled by the predominantly Wolof government in Dakar. This has resulted in an independence movement which flares into violence from time to time.

The Gambia has suffered two coups since independence. The first of these in 1982 was the more violent but was finally put down with help from the Senegalese and the SAS. The second, in July 1994, overthrew Sir Dawda Jawara who had led the country since independence and created a military government. In 1995 the former military ruler, Major Yahya Jammeh, was elected president and in 2001 and 2006, was voted in for his second and third five year terms.

Guinea-Bissau suffered years of isolation as a Marxist military state, until in 1994, it elected the former military dictator, President Vieira, as the country's first democratically elected head of state. Five years later he was ousted from power. A civil war ensued and new elections were held in 2000. The new government, headed by Kumba Yala, lasted until 2003, and in 2005 Vieira was returned to office. By then the country's economy had been weakened by the years of instability and soon emerged as a major trans-shipment point for international drug trafficking. The scale of the drugs trade is believed to be such that it almost certainly dwarfs the country's legitimate exports.

There is more information on local disputes in the relevant sections.

The people

There is a wide range of tribal groups in the region. Though each group has a traditional homeland, they are now very mixed and it is not easy to distinguish between these peoples without specialist knowledge of their language and customs. The tribe is still a very important factor to Africans, however, and it will help tremendously in your dealings with them if you understand these differences.

Northern Senegal is mainly populated with Wolof while the Gambia is mainly Mandinka and the Casamance predominantly Jola. The Tukulor are found in the upper reaches of the River Senegal while the Serer are to be found mainly in the vicinity of the Saloum. In Guinea-Bissau the land is patchily populated with Mandinka, Manjaks, Serahuli and Fula, while the Bijagos Islands are mainly inhabited by the unique Bijagoes. The Fula are nomadic cattle grazers who can be found spread throughout the region.

With each country being strongly influenced by a different European culture the natural diversity of tribal Africa has been further complicated. Thus you will find English speaking, Gambian Jola in the Gambia and French speaking, Senegalese Jola along the Casamance.

There is another large group of people who have lost their former tribal identities through long contact with Europeans. Many are the descendants of former slaves who were returned to West Africa by the British after they had abolished slavery. In Senegal and Guinea-Bissau they are more likely to be half-caste descendants or former middle class Africans who have developed European ways in colonial times. These people have unique cultures of their own which are an amalgam of African and European ways. Their language is normally a pidgin form of the respective European tongue and they are usually Christian. They are also often the best educated and the group most at ease with Europeans. The English speaking Aku also often have English names.

In Senegal and Guinea-Bissau these people are still to be found among the ruling elite, but they have lost much of their former influence in the Gambia where they are a part of the professional middle classes, and are less common in government.

Religion

Until the last century the vast majority of people living south of the former Muslim Wolof kingdoms were Animists, but strong outside influences have changed this. The arrival of Europeans brought Christian missionaries and returning slaves who had already been converted. At about the same time there was a strong Islamic movement pushing southward which culminated in the Marabout wars in the second half of the century. This may be partially explained by the continuing deforestation of the land which made new areas appear ready for civilising, while the dark forests were still regarded as primitive and threatening. It is certainly true that even today the further south you travel the more forests you encounter, and the people are more likely to be animists.

The Marabout were a peculiarly African invention, with Islamic spiritual leadership combined with belief in powerful magic. Their success in leading local people in a revolutionary movement can be partly explained by their appeal to the minds of unsophisticated people, but also to the corruption of the existing system of kingship. Many of the traditional leaders had succumbed to the vices born of easy money and cheap rum while the Marabouts offered fair rule from clean-living

leaders. It was a classical revolutionary movement against conservative rule in which Islam, by adopting the practical and moral initiative, won.

The result of this is that there is now a significant Christian community in the old colonial centres but a majority of Muslims among the northern tribes. Thus you will find that most Wolof, Mandinka, Fula and Serer are Muslims. While in Bissau, where the Portuguese kept a tighter hold on events, the Manjaks and other minority tribes are still Animists. The second largest religious group in Guinea-Bissau are the Catholics with Muslims only third.

It should be understood, however, that Christianity and Islam have only recently been introduced, and both have had to adapt to local conditions. Most people of the region are extremely superstitious and still believe in the Juju, spirits which can have a strong effect on their lives. All sorts of natural phenomena and many everyday events are put down to the intervention of these spirits, which can be invoked by Marabouts and used against someone. Even devout Muslims and Christians will be found to be wearing talismans against the Juju.

Mixing with Africans

On arrival you will need to have some idea of how to interact with Africans. Whenever two people from the British Isles meet they learn much about each other in the time it takes to be introduced. The accent tells us where the other person comes from, their social status and national roots. Their dress gives clues to their professional class, style of life and probable political views. When we first meet Africans we have none of these insights, and it is far from uncommon for visitors to be either rude to an important official or over-welcoming to a confidence trickster. Either of these extremes can be equally disastrous. The customs official will expect, like his first world counterpart, to be shown the respect his position demands, and you are not likely to clear his formalities easily if you do not recognise this.

Equally there is a group of people who seem as common as mosquitoes when you first arrive, who want to be your friend and help you with any problems, but the moment you start to trust them your difficulties will multiply. If you are lucky it will just prove expensive and long-winded to conduct whatever business they are helping with. More probably you will be lied to, conned and robbed. When you first come to recognise this group of people do not worry about being abrupt with them; though they come in all shades of villainy they are generally regarded with contempt within their own culture. In Senegal and the Gambia, where they are most common, they are normally called bumsters. They are less common in Guinea-Bissau where there has been less outside influence in recent years.

Unfortunately West Africans will seldom tell you that someone is not to be trusted until you have already discovered the fact, then they will sadly shake their heads and agree with your complaints. It is no use becoming cross, the vast body of decent people around you are kept from explaining these things by cultural constraints and the knowledge, gained by experience, that all white men are a little mad. Remember that in the same way that you could recognise an old drunk coming up to you in the streets of Europe as a ne'er-do-well, the local inhabitants can see that one of their own is no good. To them it is amazing the way visitors befriend such people.

There are no hard and fast rules to help you decide who is genuine and who is not; only experience will enable you to spot one from the other. Even then, as with your own kind, you will not always be right. The most important thing to remember is to be on your guard when you first arrive in a country and are at your most vulnerable.

Officials

Do not be tempted to use go-betweens to sort out your arrival formalities, however protracted they may seem. The harbour master, customs officials and immigration officers will have an office and staff (except in the more remote ports in Guinea-Bissau). You should go to them rather than them turning up to see you, and do so as soon as possible. Regard anyone who turns up at your boat claiming to be an official with suspicion. Checks against yachts which have not cleared the port's authority are certainly carried out in Dakar; elsewhere it becomes less likely. If approached you should be polite but firm that you will go to the office of the person concerned. Check with other boats and local people that anyone turning up like this is who he claims to be, and if he turns out to be genuine do not be stinting in your apologies at having failed to recognise him as such. It is always best to explain that you were caught out in one of the other countries by unscrupulous people to explain your caution. It is the genuine person who will recognise this as sensible and the crook who will become angry and make threats.

It is also possible, though not common, to have someone turn up in uniform who is acting outside of his jurisdiction. This is the most difficult situation to deal with, and is best avoided by sorting out your paperwork as soon as possible. It is much easier to front someone out when you know that you are in the right than if you are unsure. It is only when you first arrive in a county that you are vulnerable to this type of action and I have indicated in the guide the places where you have to be careful. Try to make sure that you arrive in a new country on a work day so that you can deal with the authorities as soon as possible. Often you will find

that it is then possible to move on to more comfortable surroundings.

Many of us have an idea of the corrupt and unscrupulous officials in third world countries who will rob and cheat you, but in West Africa you will find that most of those you come in contact with have their dignity. That is not to say that there are not crooks among them. In the introduction to the Guinea-Bissau section of the guide I have included the experiences of friends of mine using Cacheu as a port of entry to Guinea-Bissau. It is included there because it is specific to that country but the general principle could apply to the whole region.

The worst thing you can do when dealing with officialdom is to become frustrated and cross. Allow yourself as much time as it takes. Be prepared for delays, and you will probably be pleasantly surprised. The people you need may be difficult to locate, officialdom can be time consuming. Be calm, polite, but resolute.

You will often be asked for a present. This has unfortunately become something of a standard practice, especially in French-speaking areas. I try to avoid it as much as possible, but it is advisable to have a low-denomination note ready in case it looks as though things may turn ugly. Sometimes a supposed irregularity with documents might appear to prevent the conclusion of the business until the 'present' appears. In my experience this is usually an easy-going process, and by playing dumb or broke I have avoided it more often than not. There have been occasions when I have felt that someone has gone to considerable trouble when I have given them a tip.

Where possible I have tried to give useful contacts in this guide, but there is no guarantee that these people have not moved on, so it will become important for you to develop communication skills.

Non-officials

Apart from the officials you come into contact with on arrival, most of the people you mix with will probably be poor and uneducated. Much of the friction between the indigenous population and visitors is caused by the very great disparity in wealth, and this needs to be borne in mind in your everyday dealings with people. By virtue of arriving in Africa in a boat, with all the necessary equipment to make an ocean passage, you are a wealthy person. You may not consider yourself to be so but in the eyes of the man brought up in a mud hut, with no education and no way out, you are rich indeed.

To some Africans stealing from outsiders, especially white men, is regarded in the same way that we might pick up a biro from work. In this case our assumption is that it is an item of little value that will not be missed, but technically it is still theft. To many Africans we have so much that they can hardly imagine that we will miss a small amount of money or that length of mooring warp left carelessly on the foredeck.

It is far better to avoid temptation. Do not flaunt your wealth and possessions, keep valuables locked up, and do not carry around unnecessarily large sums of money. Also do not lavish money and favours on people who are not used to your lifestyle. If you take someone with you to help in some activity arrange beforehand what is a fair price by local standards for the job and stick to that price. If you then stop for refreshment on the way your helper will be happy with a soft drink. If you overpay or over-favour your helper he may assume that you have more money than sense and consider you fair game for more.

By not following these simple rules many visitors, especially package tourists, have created the class of 'wide boys', referred to as bumsters. They are nothing but a nuisance to both the visitor and the ordinary decent population and are not to be encouraged in any way. By living off easy pickings when they have a mug, they have become disinclined to work and will turn to crime if their needs cannot be met. Most drink alcohol, which the majority of the population refrains from, and many use drugs. Ed Wheeler found this element in the more tourist-frequented areas around Banjul and Dakar city.

They usually approach their prey by trying to involve you in some sort of conversation, and once you find yourself talking to them they become more difficult to remove than oil from your bilges.

Ed Wheeler found that generally people were extremely friendly in all three countries. He came across no instances of crime or stealing. Men and women in Senegal and the Gambia do not wear revealing clothing, and shorts are rarely worn by locals. It is best to observe this convention, although nobody will say anything if you do not.

Ed Wheeler also reports that he was advised to carry a supply of footballs and pumps, and these were much appreciated in the remote village communities. He also recommends carrying plenty of boiled sweets to give to children.

Language

The first thing to remember is that though a large number of the inhabitants of these countries speak either English, French or Portuguese, few of them speak these languages as a European would. In general language is simplified and you will make yourself understood better by using fewer words. Adjectives are particularly confusing, and it is better to emphasise by repetition rather than more colourful language.

When you first hear an old Africa hand do this it sounds shocking to Western ears, as though the

speaker were insulting his audience's intelligence, but most Africans prefer it. It is a closer interpretation to the way they speak among themselves.

Local languages do not differentiate between the sexes, as European languages do, and it is common in translation for people to refer to someone with the wrong gender. It is worth checking that the person you are talking to is referring to a man or a woman.

On the other hand local people do not consider it necessary to be obtuse about colour. They will describe people as either black or white, though a pale Negro or half-caste might be called white. Do not be shy to ask what colour a person is, and if the answer is white, ask if that means white like you or not; no one will be insulted.

You will need reasonable French in Senegal and English in the Gambia. Language becomes more difficult in Guinea-Bissau where Portuguese is the official language, but is only spoken in a very pidgin form by most of the inhabitants of remote regions. Ed Wheeler found that virtually no-one in Guinea-Bissau spoke English, but because of the presence of Senegalse fishermen, it was possible to get by with French. These forms of European languages are spoken throughout the region, but in the Gambia and Senegal the populations are also more likely to be able to use the correct form of the parent language.

These pidgin forms of English, French and Portuguese should not be regarded with disdain. They are very colourful languages in their own right, and it takes some time to tune into them. When you first hear people talking in one you will assume it to be a tribal language, which in some ways they are related to. European tongues must seem very dry to Africans who would not say that someone has died when they can explain that they "gone done truck luck".

Unless planning a long stay in one particular place it is hardly worth the visiting crew struggling with tribal languages. Most places you will find someone who can speak your European tongue. Of the tribal tongues, Wolof is probably the most widely distributed, especially in the north of the region, while Mandinka is more widely spoken throughout West Africa in general.

Time

Another important thing to remember is that most Africans do not have the same concept of time as Westerners. If arranging an appointment, do not expect that they will necessarily turn up at the time and place stated. If you have arranged to meet a friend in a bar one evening do not be surprised if he turns up instead at your boat the following day. Equally, do not assume that an official who has told you to report to his office on a certain day is going to be there.

The region is in the GMT time zone with no confusing alterations between summer and winter. In the Gambia this is usually referred to as Gambian maybe time, a common joke you can share with anyone. Experiencing Africa is all about going with the flow. If you get uptight by delays and confusion it is probably best to move on. If, on the other hand, you can laugh about it with your hosts you will be able to make friends and enjoy a different way of life with totally new values.

Communications

See Revisions pg R1

Ed Wheeler found that the mobile phone is now widespread in West Africa and the service covers all but the most remote areas. European phones work in Senegal and The Gambia but not Guinea-Bissau. In any of these countries, you can purchase a SIM card and credit for a very modest sum, but you will need to make sure your phone is not 'locked' if using these. Internet coverage is unreliable. There are internet cafes in Banjul and Dakar, but the speeds are very slow. The WiFi at the CVD in Dakar was good and fast enough to be able to Skype. The postal service is not to be relied on in any of these countries.

Faces of West Africa

Dakar

Quick reference

Port of entry:	Yes.
Status:	Capital and main port of Senegal.
Official language:	French & Wolof.
Currency:	CFA
Exchange:	1,000 CFA =£1 Bank cards do not work in ATMs in these three countries. Visa and (to a limited extent) Mastercard can be used in some places. Euros are readily exchangeable and are the best currency to carry. Hotels and some restaurants will exchange cash. There are no currency restrictions.
Useful facilities:	Two yacht clubs. Beaching boats. Liferaft checks. Well-stocked supermarkets. Most countries represented with an embassy. Visas for Gambia (not required by UK passport holders), Bissau and Brazil. Limited chandlery
Not available:	Chandlers (though more marine items available than in other West African cities). Easy communication in English.
Main features:	Most sophisticated city in West Africa. Easy access to Northern Senegal.
Expensive:	Real coffee, tea, tinned food, wine, cheese and dairy products.
Cheap:	Fruit and vegetables (in season), meat, fish.

Approach

See Revisions pg R1

Admiralty chart 1001 and 1000.

Note: It is not necessary to enter the ports, which are busy and dirty. On arrival go straight to Hann where there are two yacht clubs and anchor there (Plans 4 and 5).

The promontory on which Dakar stands is the most westerly point of the African mainland. The highest point on this promontory is 39m above sea level, though in the hazy conditions which often prevail this might not be visible more than a few miles to sea, and in a Harmattan not at all. In normal conditions the Cap Vert light (Fl 5s) is visible up to 31M, and the Cap Manuel light (Fl.R 5s) for 19M. As you approach, the light on the dangerous rocks off the Pointe des Almadies should be visible for up to 10M. From my observations, and other reports, these lights appear to be well maintained.

On approach, remember that Dakar is a busy port. There are likely to be quite a number of tankers and freighters anchored in the roads to the East and South East of Goree Island. Navigational aids are more reliable than in the rest of the area covered by this guide. At the time of writing all the major beacons were working, but not all the lights on buoys. Only the main lights for approaching Dakar are shown in Plan 4.

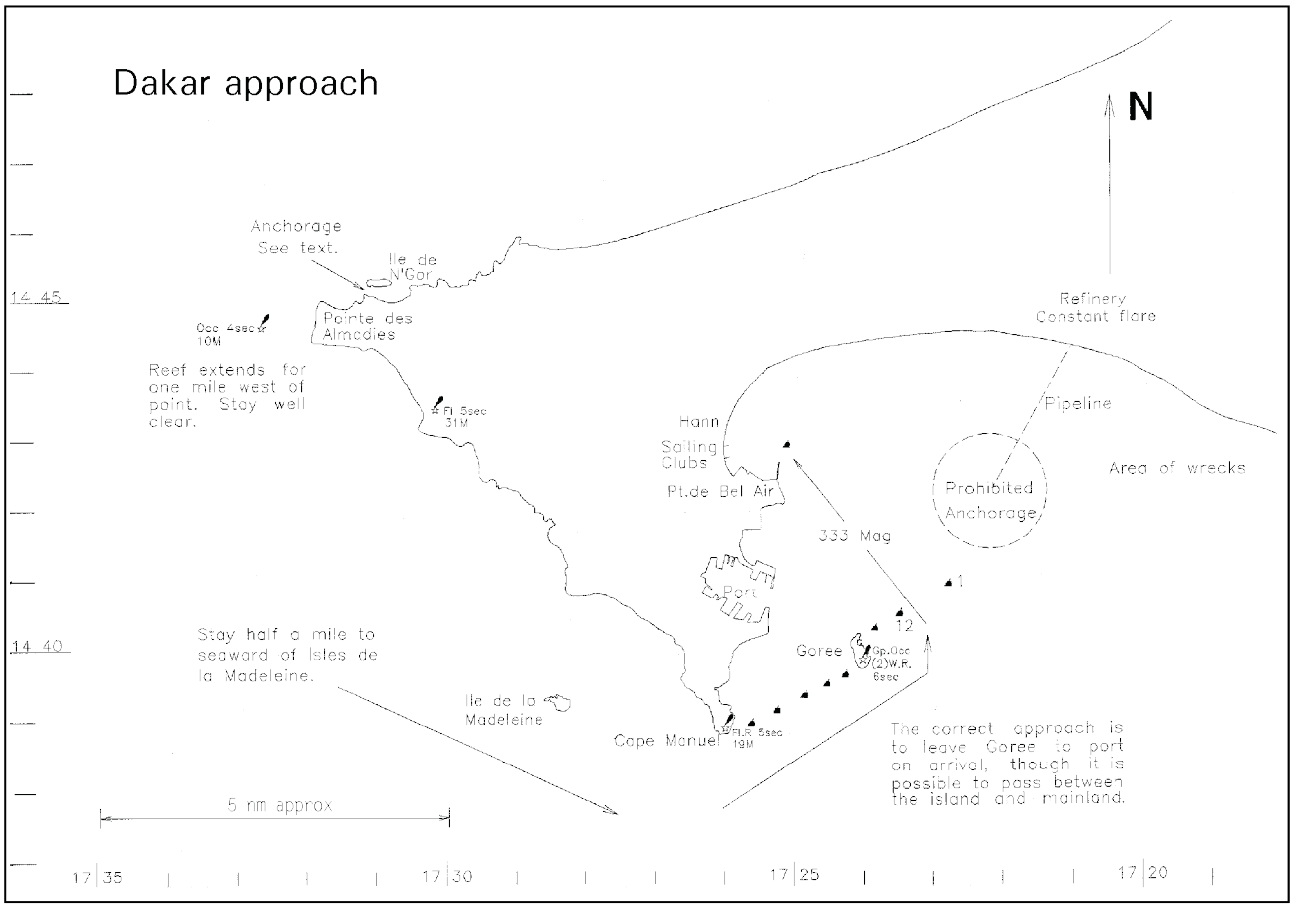
There is an anchorage behind Ile de N'Gor, just over a mile NE of Pointe de Almadies, which could be used as a shelter provided the weather is not too rough. I have not used this anchorage.

On approaching Dakar stand well off the Pointe des Almadies where a reef extends for a mile from the point. The rocks at the western extremity of this reef are submerged. The leading light on a rocky outcrop ¾ mile off the headland was working in 1997 (Occ 4 sec).

When past Pointe des Almadies, head to leave the Ile de la Madeleine at least half a mile to port. The island is a protected national park and craft are not allowed near it.

From the Ile de la Madeleine you can round Cape Manuel. The correct approach from here is to leave No. 2, 4, 6, 8 & 10 buoys to port and pass to the south of the island of Gorée before heading up to leave No. 12 buoy to port. I am told that it is also possible to pass between Gorée and the mainland; the obstruction shown on some charts was a proposed causeway which was never completed. This route takes you past the harbour mouth and I have always preferred to follow the correct course to the south of Gorée.

See Revisions pg R1 and R2



Plan 4 Dakar approach

Do not assume that all large vessels will be heading for the port after they have cleared Gorée; tankers may be going to unload off the single-point mooring buoy at the end of the pipeline. These vessels will head towards No. 1 buoy. The last time I was in Dakar, No. 1 did not have a working light, and was slightly off its charted position at 14° 41.0N 17° 22.6W.

From No. 12 buoy you may be able to see the breakwater from Pointe de Bel Air; if not head on a bearing of 333°M until you can. There was a buoy just off the end of this breakwater which you will probably not see until you are much closer; you can pass either side of this marker. It was not there in January 2009 when Bob and Liz Cooper visited. The area to seaward of the breakwater and the headland before it is shallow. Before you reach Pointe de Bel Air you will see the yachts moored off the two sailing clubs. There are also some yachts moored behind the breakwater off the military base, but this is a restricted anchorage.

Each club has its own wooden jetty from the beach. The two-metre contour is just past the end of these jetties, so most craft can anchor fairly close. There is a service buoy just off the end of the jetties which should only be used by prior arrangement. As there is little tidal current here, the boats always lie to the wind which has resulted in a tighter cluster than you would normally find in a swinging anchorage.

The clubs also have a boatman in the daytime who will run you to and from the jetty if called. The sounding of a fog horn will attract his attention.

Strong winds, up to force 7, can blow across this anchorage, even in the dry season. Lay good ground tackle and watch out for old moorings from which a boat might break loose. I am told this is a common problem.

Ports and customs

When you first arrive people will come up to you to offer help with clearing Ports and Immigration and other problems; politely decline these offers. You have sufficient information here to sort everything out yourself, and you will find that it is not that difficult. Also it will cost you a lot less if you do it yourself. It is advisable to be respectably dressed in all dealings with authority in West Africa. Long trousers, a clean open-neck shirt and beards trimmed will be appreciated. Scruffy old jeans or shorts and unkempt hair will be considered a sign of disrespect and cost you time.

Bob and Liz Cooper found that the CVD (Cercle de la Voile de Dakar) office guided them through the necessary paperwork.

See Revisions pg R2

After arrival you should report to the Commissariat Special du Port at the first available opportunity to be checked into Senegal. They can be difficult to find, and asking directions in Dakar will soon lead you around in circles. They are located in a small street just off the Boulevard de la Liberation, which runs along the city side of the port (Plan 6).

The address is:

Commissariat Special du Port,
The Place Luclec,
Euface de 7062,
Dakar.

You should be able to take a taxi from outside CVD yacht club which can take you to this building. They are open daily from 0800 to 1230 and 1400 to 1700, but are more reliable in the mornings.

The offices themselves are through a small side entrance about half way along the building which leads directly to a dingy stairway; at the top of this you will find a desk. Be polite to the staff and patient with the speed of the process.

They will stamp your passports and hold your ship's documents until you clear with them before departure. There is no way around this, and it is pointless to argue. If you want to make an early start you have to clear the day before. This also means that if you want to go for a cruise in the Saloum before moving on to another country you should go back to Dakar to clear Senegal afterwards (could be 36 hours into the wind). The alternative is to clear beforehand and do the cruise illegally. Most people adopt the latter procedure, and I have not heard of anyone being stopped. The initial visa is valid for 3 months, but this can be renewed if needed.

Some of the officials in the Commissariat Special du Port may ask you for their 'present' after processing your papers. If possible, this is to be avoided; each passing yacht which eases their passage in this way increases the expectation. Dai Rice in early 2008 reported a going rate for this 'present' of CFA 5,000.

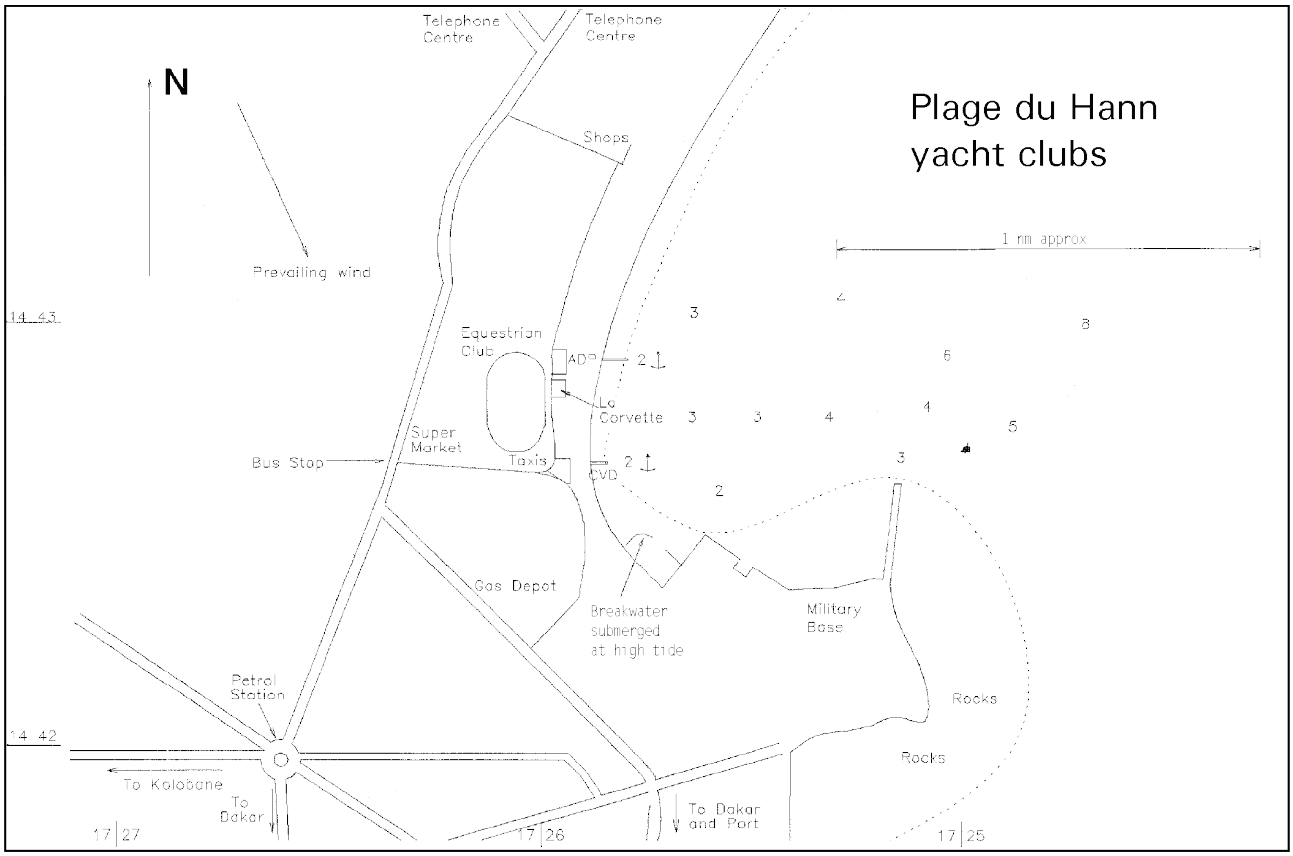
In addition one has to visit the Customs at Avenue Felix Eboue. This costs another CFA 5,000 which is clearly a fixed fee as they issue a receipt. The whole process took about an hour when Dai Rice did it in early 2008.

The Coopers found a taxi driver who took them to each office and to get photocopies from a street stall. They only had to pay CFA 2,000 to the Police in 'presents', and the process took two hours.

To check out of the country one has to visit the Port Police again to get passports stamped. No 'present' is needed on this occasion.

I am told that an official goes to Hann once a month to check that there are no boats there which have not checked in with the Commissariat Special du Port, and he can become very unpleasant if he finds unregistered boats.

Hann from CVD - Ed Wheeler



Plan 5 Plage du Hann

See Revisions pg R3

Hann

Plan 5 shows the general layout and services available in Hann, a pleasant and relaxed spot with a good anchorage. Its main drawback is the smell of decaying weed on the beach. Some days the smell of this seems to pervade your whole boat, though it is less noticeable ashore as there is nearly always an offshore breeze.

Another problem if you are contemplating a long stay is the mess associated with birds perching on mast and spars. Most yachts which spend a lot of time at Hann look as though their masts and cross trees are fraying as bits are added to make them comfortable perches.

Ed Wheeler reports a sunken schooner just east of the outermost yachts, with just the masts and the top of the deckhouse showing and the Coopers report a second sunken yacht in the anchorage with its mast showing.

Good ground tackle and plenty of chain are advisable. Ed Wheeler also recommends buoying the anchor. Depth is around 3m all over the anchorage. When the north east trade is blowing, there is a very fresh wind across the anchorage, up to F6-7 at times.

Both of the sailing clubs offer a warm welcome. Cercle de la Voile de Dakar (CVD) is the one closest to Pointe de Bel Air and is the older of the two. It has larger grounds and more of a family feel to it, with children running around. It also has a squash court. Amicable du Pleancer (ADP), about a hundred metres along the beach, has better facilities for working on boats. Most recent reports from Ed Wheeler, Dai Rice and the Coopers are that the CVD appears to be the most active club and runs a reliable ferry service.

Bob and Liz Cooper suggest keeping to port for the CVD, bearing in mind the whole bay is shallow, and discounting the masts of a very shallow catamaran harbour on the extreme left and heading for the left-hand breakwater when you see it.

Both have showers and toilets, water supply, a bar and can beach boats of up to 16 tonnes. It is worth taking advantage of this facility as it is the only place covered by this guide where a yacht can be dried out. Elsewhere all antifouling etc. has to be done by beaching and working at low tide. The system used is a number of large wheeled cradles which are winched up the beach, a technique which works well. It is also possible to have the boat lifted off the trolley onto supports if more protracted work is required. To use this service you must put your name down on a waiting list. Sand blasting is also available at reasonable prices for steel hulls. The only warning I would give is not to spend too long on the beach, as one friend of mine found to his cost, when the trolley had sunk into the sand and could not be moved.

Dai Rice reports that yachts can also be stored here ashore long term, although it is normal to hire a local security guard to look after the boat when the owner is away.

The cost of using the club's facilities in January 2009 was 3,500 CFA per day for visiting yachts and one crew, plus 2,500 CFA per additional crew member. Or, for the week, 16,000 CFA for the yacht and one crew and 5,500 CFA for each additional person. This entitles you to use of the facilities. However, they can be rather casual about this charge, at least at weekends, when the office is closed. The bars offer competitive prices and snacks are available. To take on water there is a buoy just off the end of the jetty with a hose connected. You should arrange this with the club first.

Laundry can be done cheaply through a local washer woman, which can be arranged by the clubs. Post can be held by the clubs until your arrival.

There is a sailmaker with a workshop (an old squash court) within the grounds. The Coopers also found local people wandering around the courtyards offering their services. The CVD office issues ID cards so you can check if they are bona fide. The price for everything is negotiable and they were grateful for help transporting heavy items in the heat.

Tide tables for Dakar are published monthly in a free magazine called *The Panda*. This is sometimes delivered to the yacht clubs - but not always. However, a copy can easily be picked up in any of the hotels or from newsagents. This journal also contains other useful information such as phone numbers and addresses of the embassies. I have not been able to find out if the ports print annual tide tables, though it would seem a surprising omission if they did not.

Liferafts can be inspected and serviced by:

Sensec
Boulevard Felix Eboue
Bel Air
Tel : 221 859 40 46
www.sensec.com

There is nowhere else in West Africa where you can get this done, so take the opportunity while you are here. I have not used the service myself so cannot comment on its efficiency.

Ed Wheeler reports that water containers can be filled at the CVD. It is usual to have a boy do this and take them out to the yacht in the ferry for you. The standard charge is CFA 2,000. You may also have to pay a deposit of CFA 5,000 for a filter, which is returnable. Diesel and petrol can be obtained the same way.

Fuel can also be purchased at a nearby petrol station. If you require more than 400 litres of diesel it is theoretically possible to arrange it duty free in the port, though I am told that this is rather a palaver. There is no other reason that I can think of for a yacht to enter the port. You may be offered fuel by local traders at Hann, but be very cautious. At least one boat has had to have an engine rebuilt after taking on diesel with added sugar.

Dai Rice reports that there is good Wi-Fi internet access at CVD. There are now numerous ATMs in Dakar, the nearest of which (accepting only Visa) is about 15 minutes walk from the CVD on the main road into town.

There is a nice restaurant "La Corvette" next to ADP yacht club, whose owner, Jeau Rey, is also a vice-president of the club. Jeau speaks fairly good English, and is a useful source of information as well as a friendly host. I am also told that he is a good woodworker. The food is good, and there is an extensive menu which should have something for most tastes. Bob and Liz Cooper were told to approach it by the road as walking along the beach at night is not safe.

In addition, the restaurant has an international phone, which is more expensive than the telephone centres, but is very convenient, especially when you first arrive. This is one facility which the yacht clubs do not possess, their phones being purely for local calls within Senegal. They can, of course, receive international calls.

If you consider the cost of phoning from “La Corvette” too excessive there are two telephone centres a short walk away. One is on the main Rufisque road and the other is on the Route du Front de Terre, just after the railway line (Plan 5).

A little further up this road there is a shop which I am told sells the French equivalent of Ordnance Survey maps. Though they do not have soundings, these are useful for showing the many inland creeks and waterways which are not charted. However, it has to be said that my attempts to find this place have failed, and it is only the fact that I have seen French yachts in possession of these maps that I am prepared to believe that it is possible to buy them.

On the opposite side of the road from the yacht clubs is an equestrian club, which also has tennis courts.

There is a supermarket on the main road close to the yacht clubs, but this is more expensive than those in the centre of Dakar. Bread and other small items can be purchased from a number of small stores in the area, and a woman comes daily to CVD selling fruit and vegetables. The market for fish caught by the pirogue fleet is just along from the beach and worth a visit, with the proviso that the smell of rotting fish is quite strong. There are various small restaurants in the vicinity and fresh fruit and vegetables can be bought from stalls nearby.

There is a taxi rank just outside CVD. Negotiate the price before starting the journey. In January 2009, this was about CFA 2,000 for the trip to Dakar, but make sure you have the correct change.

Ed Wheeler reports that there is a kind of chandlery, which also sells charts, inside the harbour complex at Mole 2 or Mole 10 (check with the CVD).

Mini-buses can be picked up by waving them down on the junction of the main road (Plan 5). The buses passing this junction travelling towards Dakar will either be going into the city centre or to the large open market at Kolobane, so check before you get on.

Kolobane market is worth a visit for both the experience and the chance to pick up cheap items. All manner of goods are sold there including, clothing, fruit and vegetables, fish, meat and poultry.

Dakar

Plan 6 shows the centre of Dakar. Though not typical of West Africa, it is worth a visit for the contrast it presents to the rest of the region.

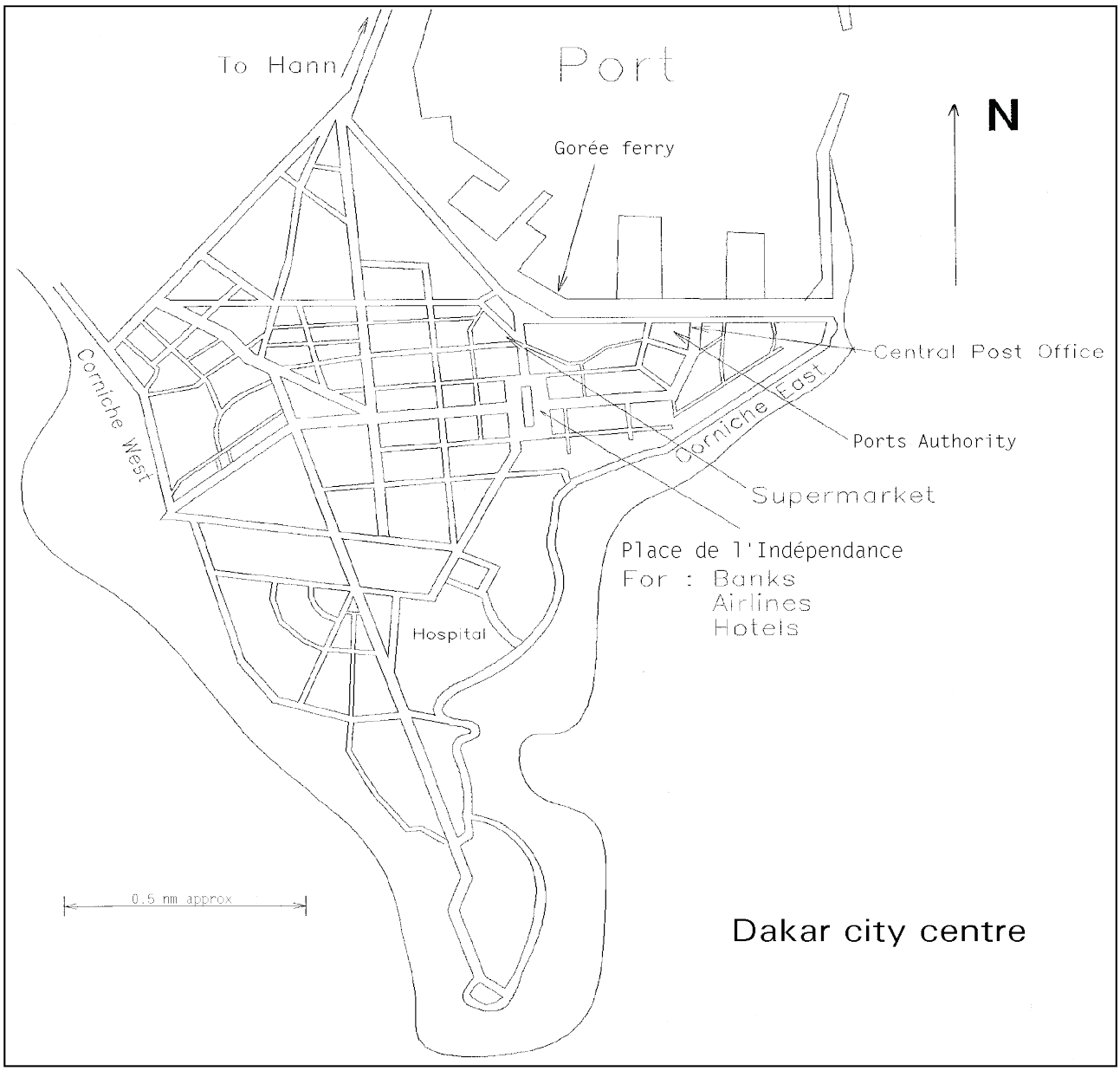
If going into Dakar for official business or shopping, do not forget that this is French West Africa, and that many establishments close down from 1130 to 1430.

In the centre of Dakar you get the impression of a southern French city that has been transported to Africa. Nowhere else will you see such grand buildings and expensively stocked shops. But the contrast between poverty and wealth is more exaggerated, and the streets are full of beggars and pickpockets. Keep a good grip on your valuables, especially in the huge main market, and be wary of those approaching you; they may be a decoy. Also avoid dark alleys and back streets at night where it is not uncommon to be held up at knife point.

Place de l’ Indépendance and its immediate surrounds will provide most things which you would want from the city. The Commissariat Special du Port is not far off (see ports and customs above), the banks are in the square and there is a large supermarket just one block off it (Plan 6).

There are many bars and restaurants of all types and prices in the area.

Worth a visit is the restaurant and bar at the top of the Independence Hotel in Place de L’Independance. This is on the sixteenth floor and offers spectacular views of the city and islands.



Plan 6 Dakar city centre

See Revisions pg R2

Gorée

The island of Gorée lies about one and a half miles off the entrance to Dakar Port, from which they run a regular ferry service (Plans 6 and 7).

The island has a unique feel, unlike anywhere else in West Africa, with its tiny harbour, brightly-painted buildings and fish restaurants. At weekends, as the Dakar ferry arrives, the children will swim out to it, climb on board and dive off again, making as much of a splash as possible.

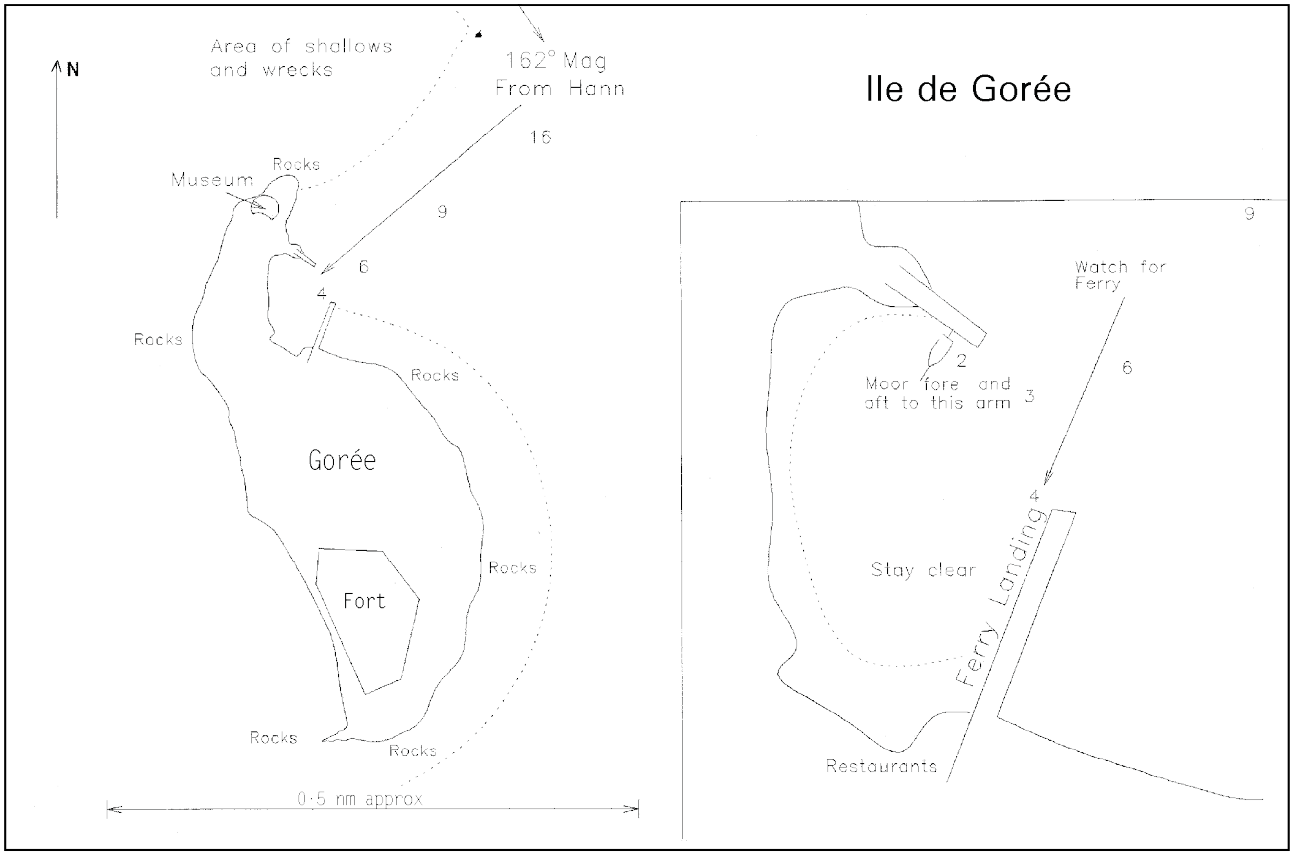
Bob and Liz Cooper found it touristy but a welcome peaceful contrast to the noise and bustle of Dakar.

If using the harbour, anchor fore and aft against the harbour arm to starboard as you enter. Most of the bollards are now missing and there are usually one or two pirogues alongside. Do not go alongside the other arm as this is in constant use

by the ferry. This harbour can quickly become uncomfortable. A north-westerly blowing off the land has enough fetch to pick up a swell which makes the harbour untenable. If you use the harbour be prepared to leave in a hurry, especially in the rainy season. Mooring outside the harbour would require very settled conditions.

However, many people go to Gorée as a day excursion and I have seen yachts anchor just outside the harbour arm and their crews row ashore in calm conditions. Or, if you are feeling lazy, simply use the hourly ferry, which costs CFA 5,000 return for non-residents. The island is not very big, and a few hours will allow you to explore, visit the museum, enjoy the atmosphere (which Ed Wheeler describes

Isle de Gorée - Ed Wheeler



Plan 7 Gorée

as 'like a small French holiday village with goats)' and have a seafood meal on the water front.

The museum is housed in a building which used to hold slaves awaiting transportation to the New World, and is fittingly dedicated to this trade. The displays are only in French, but even if your linguistic skills are poor you will get the gist.

The restaurants clustered around the port are excellent and often crowded at lunchtime. Make sure you have enough time to enjoy a meal in one; this is one of the highlights of Dakar.

Excursions from Dakar

If leaving your boat at Hann, or anywhere else around Dakar, you are advised to hire a recognised guardian. This can be done through the yacht clubs, although I have never had cause to do so.

To visit West Africa by boat is to see it at its best. There are many reasons for this, not least of which is that the only contact you have with officialdom is checking in and out of countries. If you want to visit places which are not accessible by your craft the situation changes. Corruption and crime is at its worst in and around Dakar. Any excursion from the capital will involve road checks, as well as bad roads and possibly chaotic ferry crossings.

For these reasons it might be better to organise any excursions through a tour operator. Though expensive, and possibly frustrating, it will at least put the burden of dealing with the police and making all travel arrangements onto the operator.

Car hire is available at competitive prices in Dakar, but driving there is the sort of activity which could be just be enough to push a highly-strung visitor over the critical threshold towards a nervous breakdown. If your driving experience is restricted to the Shires, I would leave well alone.

Surprisingly the traffic does flow, most of the time, and there are fewer accidents than you would expect. Once you leave Dakar, driving in Senegal becomes much easier, and the farther you get from the capital the fewer road checks you have to put up with. I drove in Dakar but did not enjoy the experience. I also know grizzled old ex-pats who have seen it all but will not drive there. Use the taxis and buses for a while before making a decision to drive yourself. On the other hand a car does make it easy to see the whole of Senegal.

St. Louis, at the mouth of the River Senegal on the border with Mauritania, is the old colonial capital of Senegal. It was once the main trading centre of French West Africa and the staging post for exploration and colonial expansion of the region. Ocean-going vessels called here to load cargo brought from deep within the African continent down the River Senegal. Times have changed, with less rainfall and a barrage across the river, the port is no longer accessible to deep-keeled craft. The swinging bridge, built to allow access to the river, no longer swings and the town has become an elegant crumbling remnant from another age.

St. Louis is about a five-hour drive from Dakar over roads of varying quality. Four-wheel drive is not necessary for the journey, but would be useful to explore the area when you arrive.

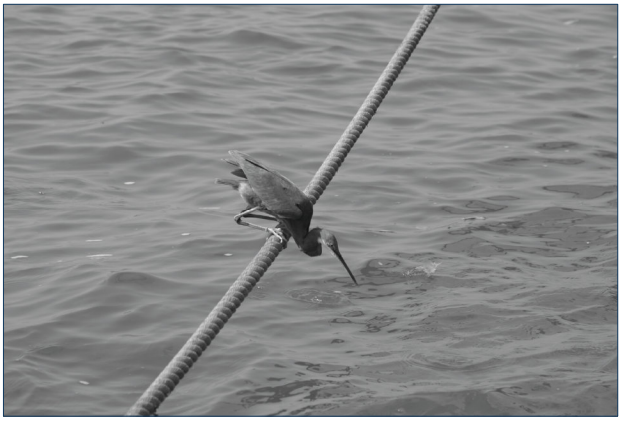
Stay at the Hotel de la Poste if possible. It is well placed by the river just as you come off the bridge and one block off the main square. It is one of those old colonial hotels where you can almost imagine yourself in a former age. I prefer the old photographs of St. Louis in its prime to the animal heads in the bar, but this is all a part of the atmosphere.

Niokolo Koba is the only game reserve in this part of West Africa and, though less spectacular than those in other parts of the continent, it is well worth a visit. It occupies a large area in the east of the country, and is a not easy to get to. Tours are organised from Dakar, though these are expensive and you are farther from the park than in Banjul or Ziguinchor. If you want to visit the park with an organised tour and are short of time, your best bet is to do it from Dakar. If you have more time there were irregular tours being organised from Banjul before the coup which may be running again by now.

The best time to visit is towards the end of the dry season when there is less water and the animals concentrate around the water holes.

There is a twice-weekly, but unreliable, ferry service from Dakar to Ziguinchor which also calls at Karabane in the lower Casamance. This might be a way of visiting this region if time is tight. It has also been suggested as a way of sounding out the unpleasant approach to the Casamance before sailing it.

There is a train twice a week to Bamako, the capital of Mali. This is a convenient starting point for those wishing to explore the upper Niger and the fabled Timbuktu. I have not had the chance to do this journey myself, so cannot comment further.



Gone Fishing

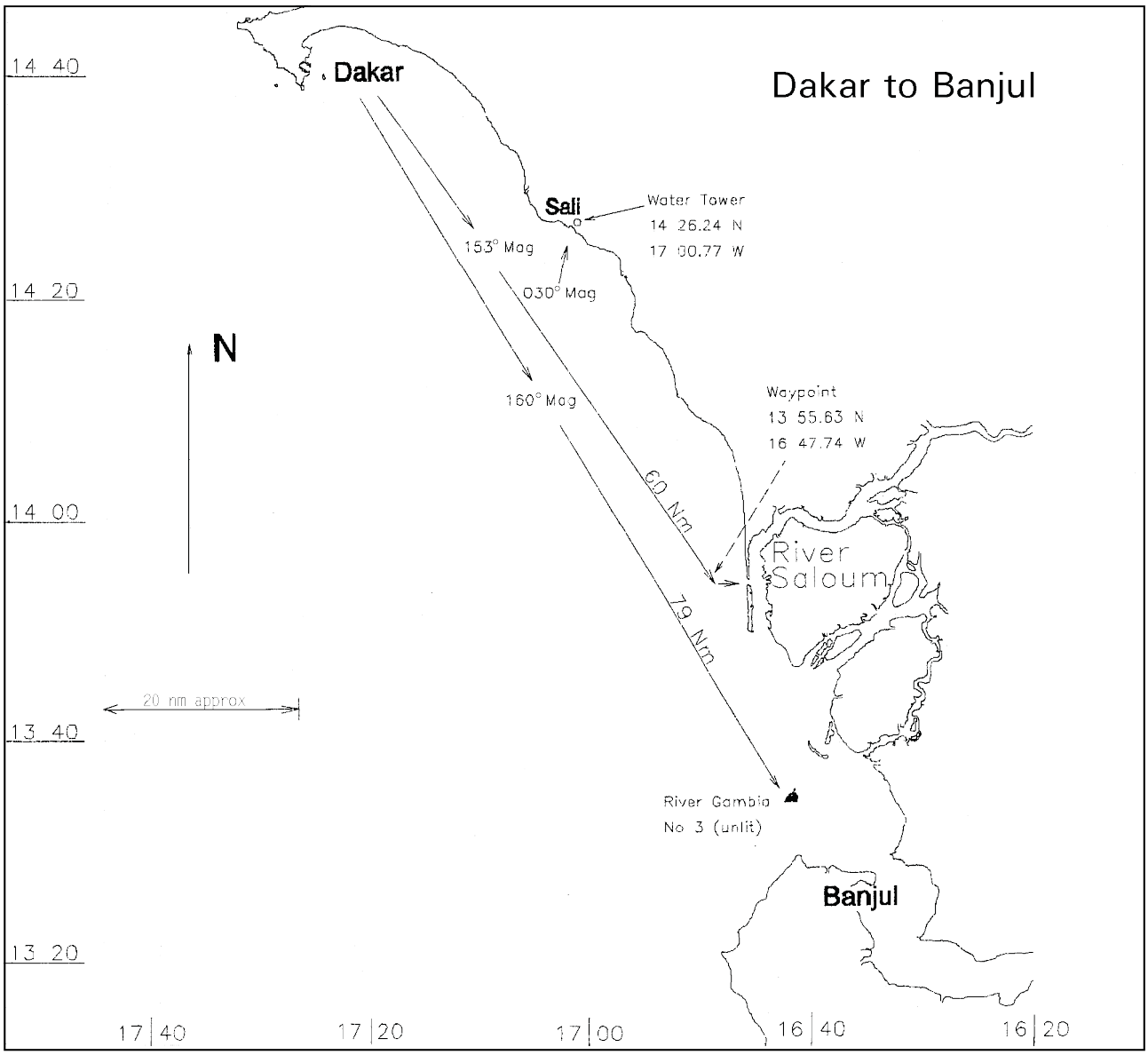
Dakar to Banjul

Direct

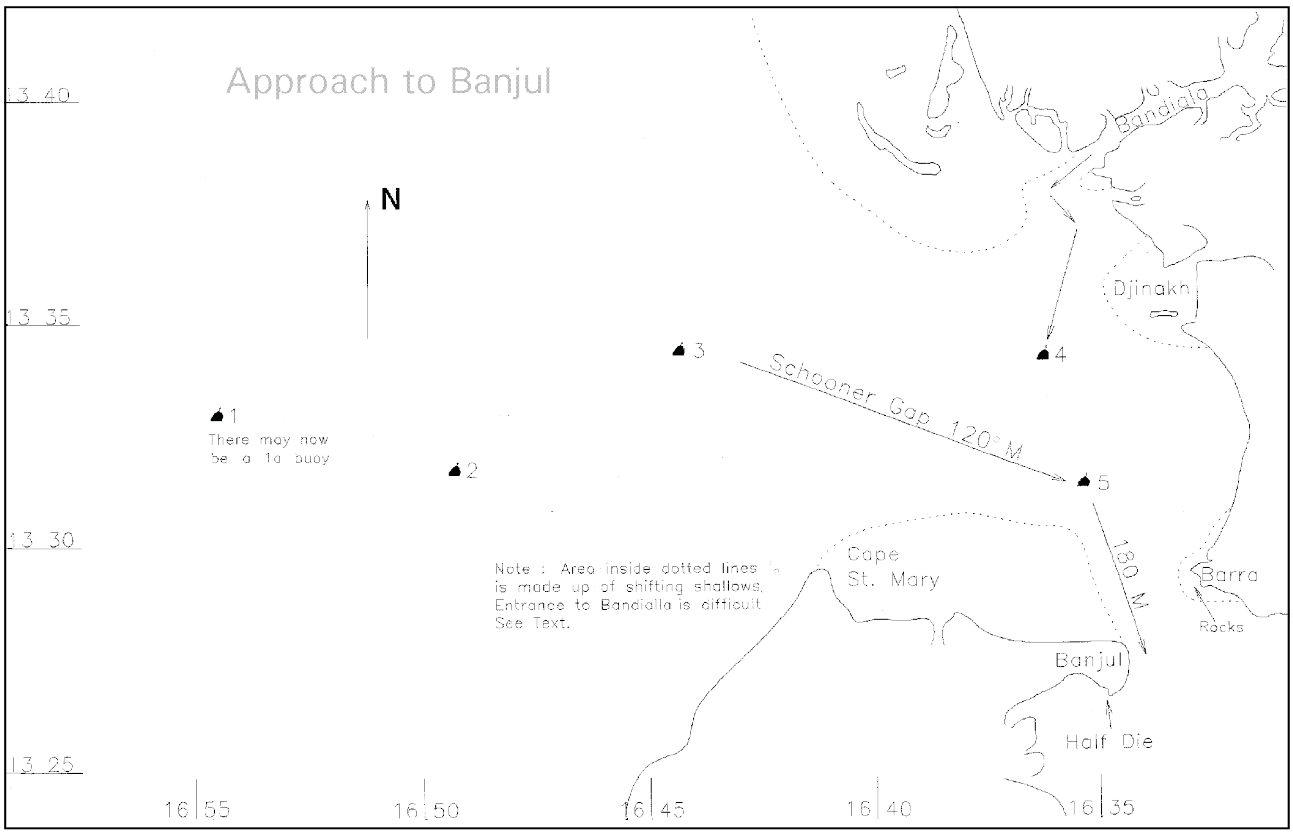
The route is covered by Admiralty charts No. 1663 and 1664 and the approach to Banjul is on chart No. 608.

It is about 95NM from Dakar to Banjul; usually you will have wind and current behind you in the cruising season. A heading of 160°M should allow you to pick up No. 3 buoy on the River Gambia approach and take you well clear of the shallows off the coast. Note that the Admiralty charts show a wreck close to this course in about 14° 08N 17° 03W. Also remember to allow for the effect of drift if a tide is running as you approach the Gambia.

High Water at No. 3 buoy is about 0.5 hour before HW Banjul. These times are only a rough guide since, as far as I can establish, no accurate measurements have been made.



Plan 8 Dakar to Banjul



Plan 9 Approach to Banjul

It has been reported that an extra buoy has been added in the vicinity of No. 1 on the Gambia approach. This may be shown on more recent charts and should assist picking up the channel. Rather than going further out to pick up No. 1 or No. 2 buoy when approaching from Dakar or the Saloum, I tended to head directly for No. 3. However, remember that any of these markers may be out of position (No. 3 recently spent a period relaxing on the beach at Cape St Mary). The lights are also unreliable.

Try to time your approach so that you arrive as the tide begins to flood and with enough daylight to reach the port. The tidal effect of the river is quite strong. From No. 3 buoy most yachts can head straight for No. 5 buoy, through the colourfully named schooner gap and leaving "stop in time" bank to port on a bearing of 120°M (Plan 9).

Unless you have the misfortune to be approaching in a Harmattan you should be able to see Banjul before you reach No. 5 buoy, but do not cut the corner as there are shallows there. Banjul lies 180°M from No.5 buoy.

On arrival in Banjul you must anchor off the dockyard at Half Die (Plan 9) and fly the Q flag until you have cleared ports and customs. See the next chapter for details on formalities on entering the Gambia. It has been reported elsewhere that you can go directly to Oyster Creek and check in from there. This is incorrect, and will create difficulties with the authorities.

Alternative routes

It can be more interesting to do the trip from Dakar to Banjul via the inland waterways made up by the Rivers Saloum, Diomboss and Bandiala (Plan 10).

The coastal area from the Saloum down to the Gambian border is a national park and is therefore relatively unspoilt. This shows in a number of ways, but most noticeably in the abundant wildlife and in the villages where traditional thatching is managing to keep corrugated sheeting at bay.

With an anchorage at Sali (Plan 8) it is possible to cover this section in a number of short hops and not have to be at sea by night. If time permits I would strongly recommend a short detour up the Saloum until you pick up the link with the Diomboss and then into the Bandiala. This comes out only 3nm from No. 4 buoy in the Banjul approach, thus offering a pleasant morning's sail to check into the Gambia.

If you are planning to visit the Saloum estuary you will need Admiralty chart No. 607. In addition there are a whole set of French charts which cover the region. Of these the most useful are 6174 and 6147.

See Revisions pg R4

Remember that the whole coast from here down to Guinea-Bissau is constantly changing from the effects of mangrove growth and river sediment. It is, therefore, always possible to hit mud or sand banks which are not charted. In some places you will find that the river has changed or an island appeared or disappeared. Though this sounds alarming, in practice it presents few problems provided you are careful when entering and leaving estuaries exposed to the sea.

Dakar to Sali

Sali lies about half way between Dakar and Djifere and offers a secure, though often uncomfortable, anchorage in the dry season. Lay a course of 140°M from Dakar. This takes you close to a wreck marked at 14° 37.5N 17° 20.0W on the old Admiralty chart 599, but which does not appear on the other charts of the area. There is a headland just before Sali which has less than 2m of water up to 2 miles offshore. You need to pass this until you can see the water tower in the bay, and then go in on a bearing of 030°M from the water tower (Plan 8). The water tower is on slightly raised ground and is shaped like a martini glass, though the lower part of the structure is obscured by trees. There are rocks to the north and south of this bay, and I would not try to enter in poor visibility.

As you approach you will see two jetties sticking out into a small bay. The best anchorage is inside the rocks to the left of the left-hand jetty. You will probably be able to see the sea breaking on these rocks and can anchor half way between these breakers and the beach. If it is so calm that you cannot see them I would remain anchored off the bay. The bottom is sandy and the holding should be good, but I would advise laying plenty of ground tackle here.

I have never used this anchorage; the only time I considered doing so it was blowing hard. When in the bay you are sheltered from the worst of the prevailing dry season swell, but it can still be quite rough. It is not advisable to use the anchorage in the rains when line squalls can lash across it.

There are a number of hotels and restaurants around the bay offering facilities, but they are expensive and geared to the package tour industry.

To the north of the hotels lies the fishing village (Sali-Niakhniakhale) where there is a small bar and restaurant which is much cheaper. You can also buy bread and basic provisions in the village. There is a bus service into M'Bour where most provisions and fuel are available.

Dakar to Saloum

Warning: The Lower Saloum has changed dramatically since the river broke through the sand spit at Djifere. At the time of writing these changes have not been recorded on the charts. The information included in the first edition was based on my own observations compiled on a number of cruises in the region between 1993-95. However, Mike Yendell reports that it has changed significantly since then and therefore the recommendation is to seek advice from anyone in the Dakar yacht clubs who has been recently.

Use Admiralty chart 607 or French chart 6147 for the lower Saloum, though these do not show the new entrance. I have found that all the charts require a slight correction of 0.15 to the west when using GPS, which suggest they were all compiled from the same data. The advantage of the Admiralty chart is that it covers the whole of the navigable Saloum up to Kaolack. The French chart 6174 shows the route from the Saloum to the Diomboss, but without soundings.

With a fair wind you can just make it from Dakar to the shelter of the Saloum in daylight. It helps if you can plan to be entering the Saloum on a flood tide. The bar had 2m at MLWS, and is constantly changing. Extra caution is required when there is a heavy swell which runs across the bar. There are no approach markers or lights to the main entrance.

From Dakar, head on a bearing of 153°M. As with Sali, watch out for a wreck marked at 14° 37.5N 17° 20.0W on the old Admiralty chart No. 599 but which does not appear on others. Follow this course to the waypoint at 13° 55.63N 16° 47.74W (Plan 8) from where you should be able to see Djifere.

Without a GPS it can be difficult to pick up Djifere from seawards in poor visibility. In clear conditions, when you can see the coast, you will be able to pick out the opening. But when it is hazy the first thing you can see is a large, squarish tree which looks as though it might be the water tower. Djifere has a number of casirina trees (ferns) which in the haze look like an area of raised ground. As you get closer you should be able to pick out the inevitable water tower, which is round and almost white.

If light is fading, which is probable if you have come straight from Dakar, there is an anchorage just past Djifere off the beach of a tourist camp. Continue up river until you are adjacent to the water tower and you will see a beach hut with fern trees behind it. You can anchor about 100m off this beach; watch the echo sounder as you approach as it shoals very suddenly. This spot is nicely sheltered from the prevailing north-easterly wind, but can become uncomfortable if the wind turns and blows down river. The holding is fair.

Saloum and National Park

Plan 10 shows the River Saloum as far as Kaolack and the adjoining rivers of the Diomboss and Bandiala. The coastal area, offshore islands and the southern tract from Missira down to the Gambian border of this region are designated a National Park. In practice most of the rivers and interconnecting creeks south of the Saloum are sparsely populated and unspoilt, making the area a delight to explore.

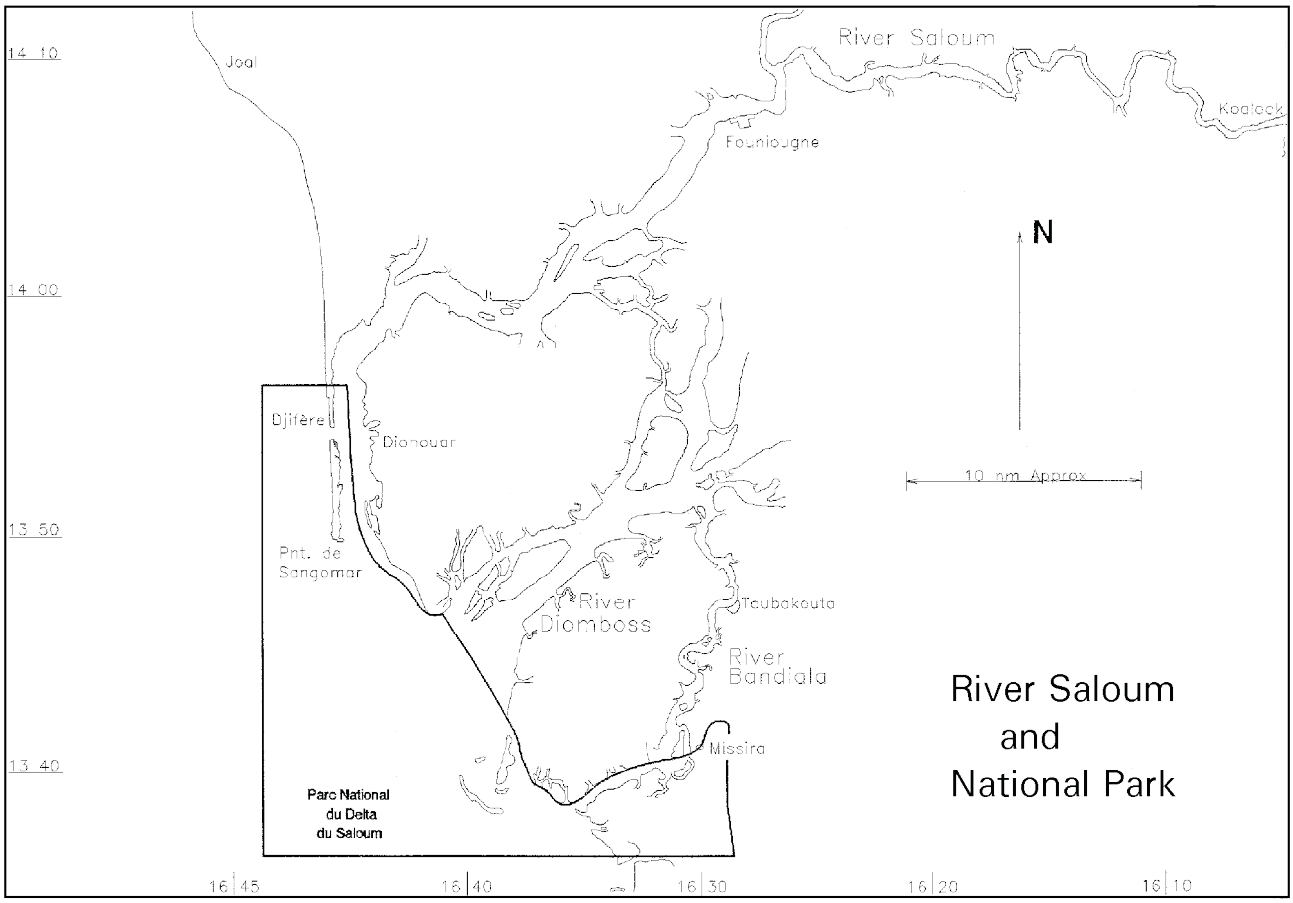
This whole area, along with the coastal region up to Dakar, was heavily wooded when the first Europeans arrived and had become a refuge for the Serer, a tribe who had retreated into the forests to escape Wolof expansion and slave raids. The tribal distribution has since changed with many of the Serer moving south to the Gambia, but the area remains distinct and different from the rest of northern Senegal.

Lower Saloum

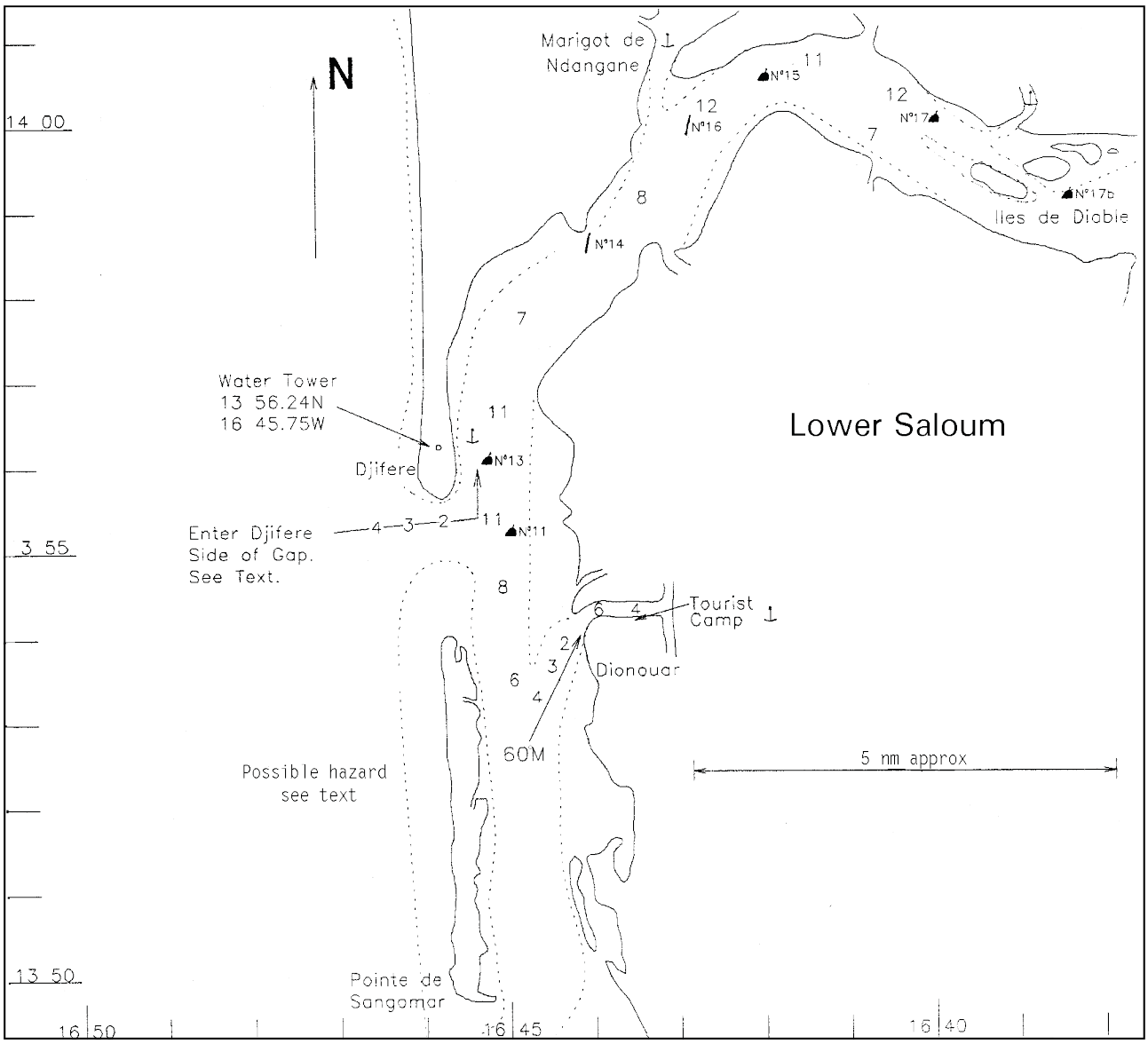
Anchoring off the tourist camp at Djifere was covered at the end of the last section.

Djifere is gradually being eroded away, and most of what is left is the fishing village which can worm its way up river as the land disappears. There was still a concrete jetty and the shell of a fish processing plant near the headland in 1995; a fishing quay near the river is planned.

An alternative and more sheltered anchorage can be found in the Marigot de Gokhor near the village of Dionouar (Plan 11). To enter this creek you must head south after the clearing the river entrance, keeping to the seaward side of the channel until you can enter on a bearing of 060°M. The mud flats form a long bar past the mouth of the creek, and the channel is quite narrow. As you approach the creek you should be 75-100m off the beach where you



Plan 10 River Saloum and National Park



Plan 11 Lower Saloum

will only have 2.5 metres of water at MLWS. Head for the down-river bank and enter within 10m of the bank. As you enter the creek the depth rapidly increases to 6m.

Dionouar is one of the most striking towns in West Africa, standing majestically in a natural setting of silver sand and palm trees. The most prominent feature is the central mosque with its impressive minarets. It is a convenient and friendly place to anchor, and is much more sheltered than the anchorage at Djifere.

Going up river, the Saloum is marked by a system of buoys which may still be maintained, though its declining importance as a commercial waterway may affect this in time. Travelling up river, pass odd numbers to starboard and even to port.

Going up river from Djifere, No. 11, 13 and 14 buoys were not in their charted positions, having been moved because of the changes in the river.

Just before No. 16 buoy, on the north bank, is the entrance to the Marigot de Ndangane which is accessible to most yachts, but is a bit tricky. To enter, you need to start slightly down river from No. 16 buoy. Looking along the west bank of the creek you will see stretches of mangrove with a sandy beach in between. Head in on a bearing of about 185°M towards this beach, watching the echo sounder. Stay close to the west bank until the creek widens, and then head for the other bank past the next headland.

A number of people have spoken warmly of the village of Mar Lodj, about three miles up this creek on the east bank. When I attempted the passage at approaching MLWS I could not find a channel to get there, and can only assume that you would need to approach on a higher tide. The village has built up around the Catholic church, a formula which seems to guarantee a warm welcome in French

West Africa. There is a small bar here which sells cold beer and has a relaxed atmosphere, welcoming to visitors.

Continuing up river from Marigot de Ndangane are the Iles de Diable. You can stay in deep water to the south of these, or pass through the shorter channel between the first and second of the islands. If following the latter option, stay in mid- channel between the two islands, leaving buoy No.17b close to port. This channel is narrow at the up-river end because of the shallow water extending on both sides from the islands, so watch out for large ships which also use it.

The small unnamed creek on the north bank opposite the first of the islands (Plans 11 and 12) is accessible and offers a nice, sheltered anchorage. Enter on a bearing of 040°M from the down-river side, watching the echo sounder. As you approach the creek, head for the up-river bank and follow around the curve of the creek. Though a convenient shelter off the river, this is not a particularly attractive anchorage.

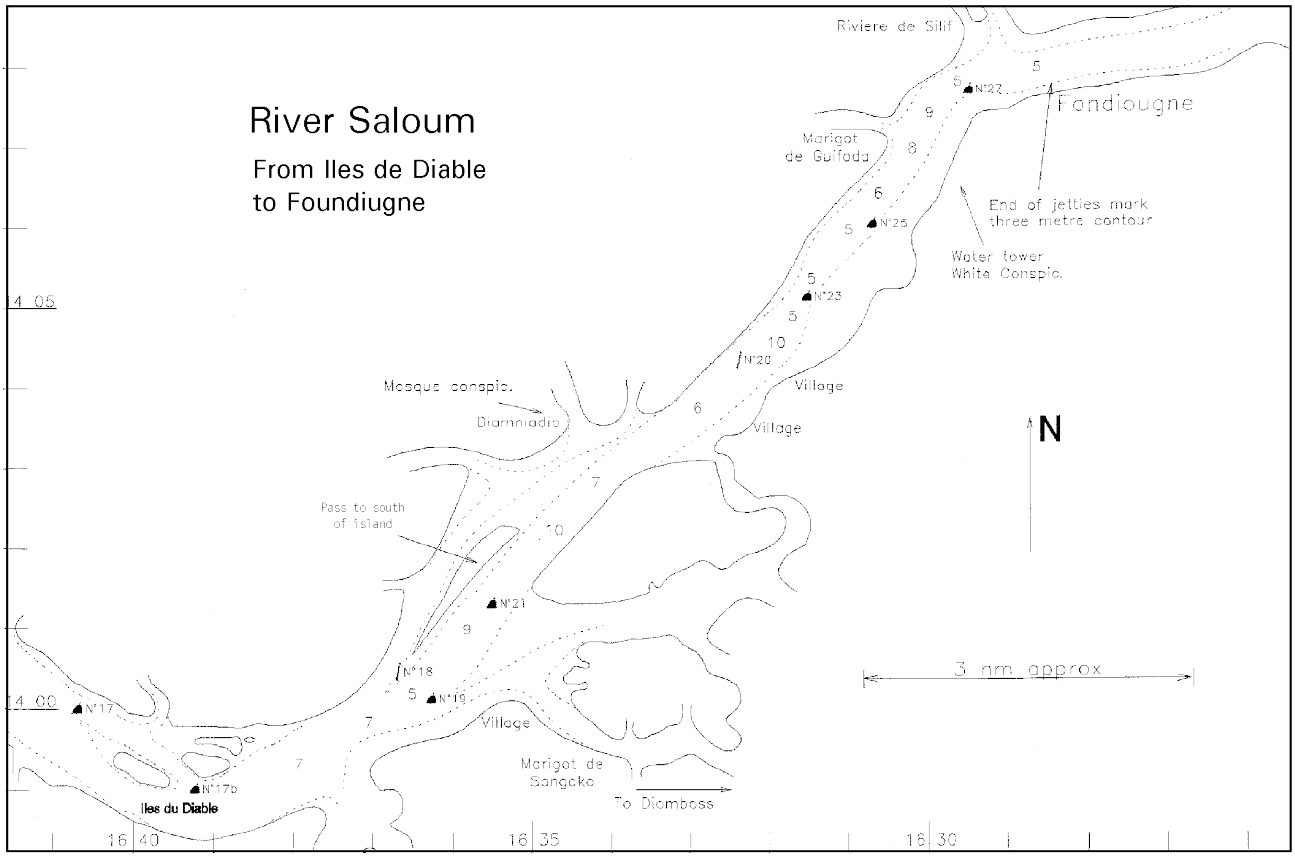
Just past these islands you have a choice between following the Marigot de Sangako down to the River Diomboss or continuing up the Saloum.

Upper Saloum

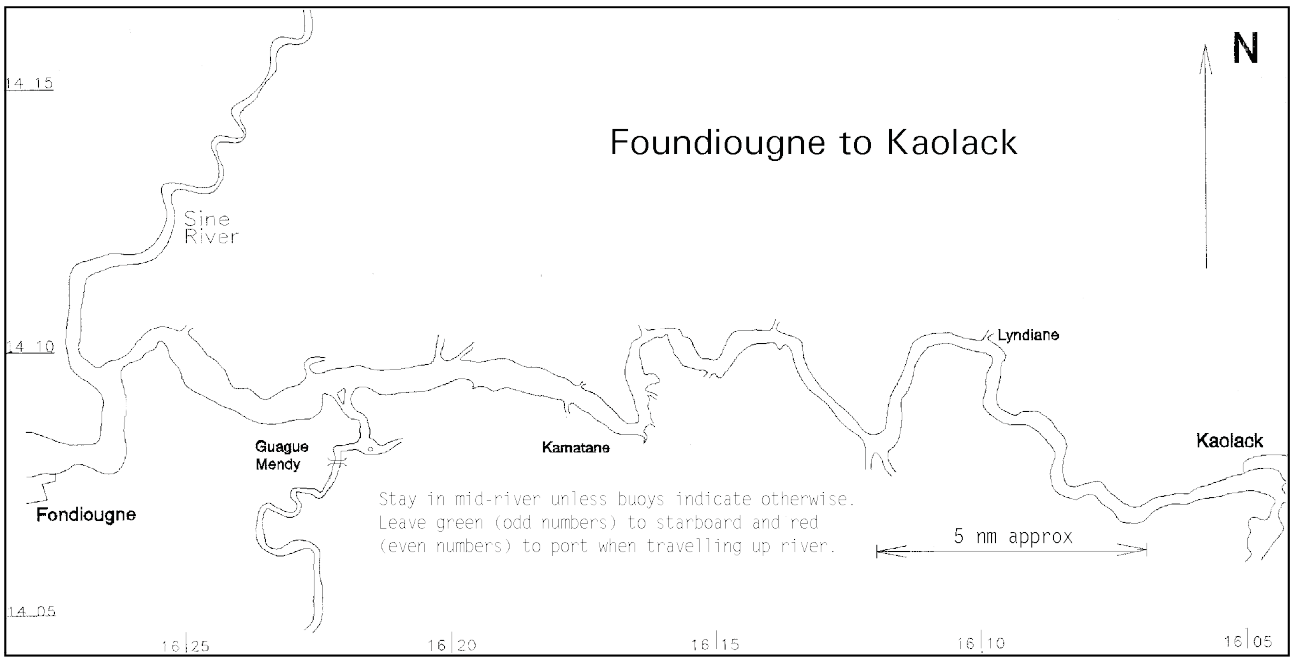
It is best to leave No. 18 buoy well to port, the shallows extending from Ile Ndar are more extensive than shown on the charts and spread more towards the north bank (Plan 12). Hold a course mid-way between No. 21 buoy and the island, then move out to mid-river when well clear of the island. Leave No. 20 buoy to port and then move towards the north bank to leave No. 23 and 25 to starboard. There is an extensive area of shallows on the bend before the town, so make sure you leave No. 27 buoy to starboard. You can then head towards the first of the prominent jetties.

There are five wooden jetties along the waterfront of Foundiougne and the end of these marks, approximately, the 3m contour. However, only two of these are in good repair and, as the beach shoals rapidly, it is best to anchor a little way off the end. I would not go alongside any of these jetties unless by arrangement.

The first jetty leads to a tourist hotel called La Pirogue. The management and staff were friendly and helpful when we stopped here and allowed us to use the showers in one of their rooms, but there were no tourists around at the time. Prices,



Plan 12 River Saloum from Iles de Diable to Foundiougne



Plan 13 From Foundiougne to Kaolack

however, are geared for the tourist market. About 100m down the road towards town from the hotel is Le Baobab bar and restaurant which is cheaper, but often suffers from lack of "current", which means no electricity and, consequently, warm drinks. If you want to eat in Le Baobab it is best to inform them beforehand. They will then ask you what you would like and get it for you.

Foundiougne used to be a busy regional capital, but it has gone into decline. It was a crossroads with the river traffic going to Kaolack and the Dakar-Banjul highway crossing the river by ferry. Now the ships have declined and the bridge at Kaolack has redirected the cars and lorries. However, it is worth walking around the town to sample the crumbling remnants of French colonialism.

Petrol is available in the town, but diesel can only be purchased after a 25km taxi ride. Bread, some fruit and vegetables, and basic provisions are available.

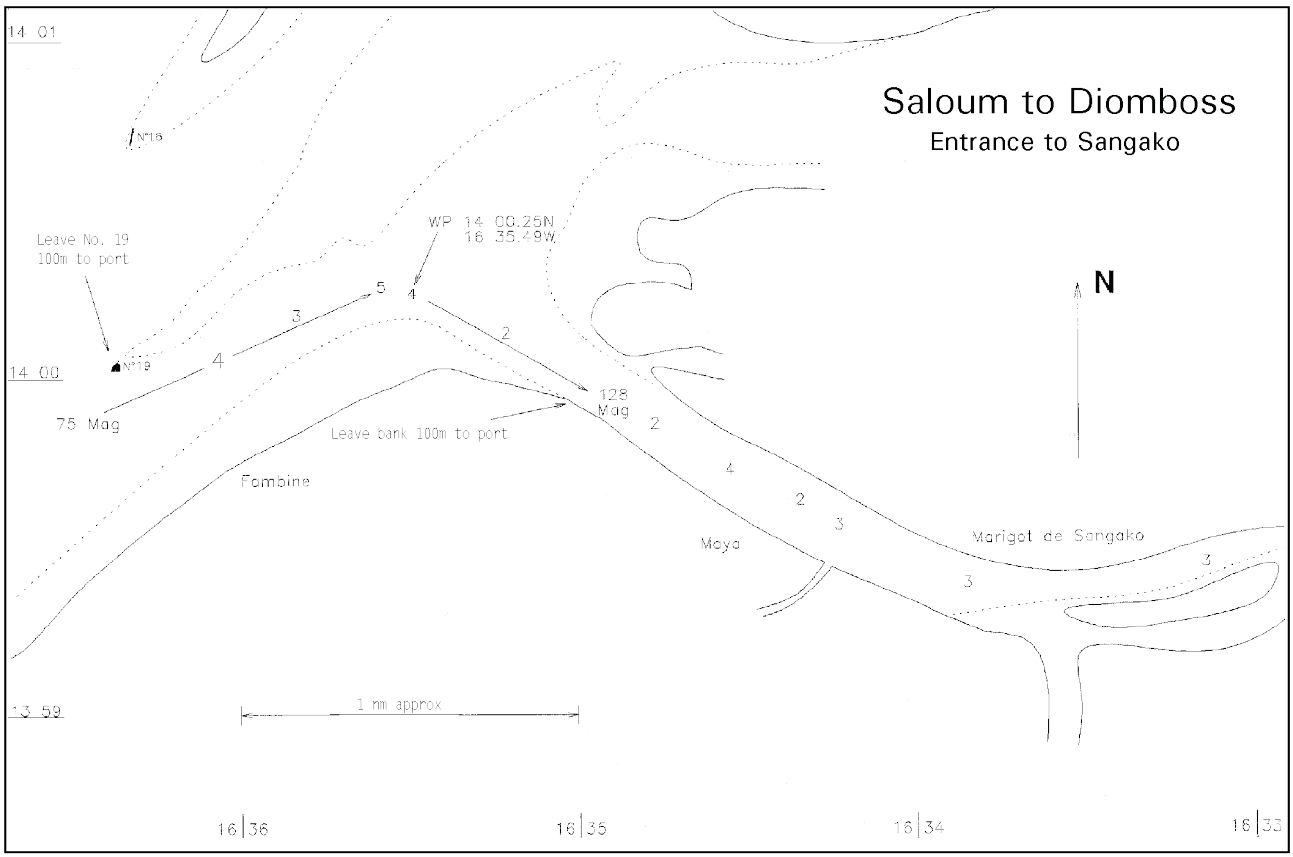
Foundiougne marks the upper limit of most cruises in the Saloum, but the river remains navigable as far as Kaolack. The route is shown in Plan 13. I have not sailed this passage, but much of the course is visible from the road. The land here was once heavily wooded, but deforestation has left a rather desolate landscape. In the dry season the wind whips across the salt flats on either side of the river, making the air dusty and unpleasant. Navigation in these upper reaches should be easy enough as long as you follow the buoyage system which may still be maintained for large vessels.

Kaolack used to be a busy port, but the river trade has dropped in recent years. However, unlike Foundiougne, and being on the main link road from Dakar to the Gambia and the Casamance, it is still a bustling town. Most things are available in town including petrol and diesel, water, fresh vegetables and general stores.

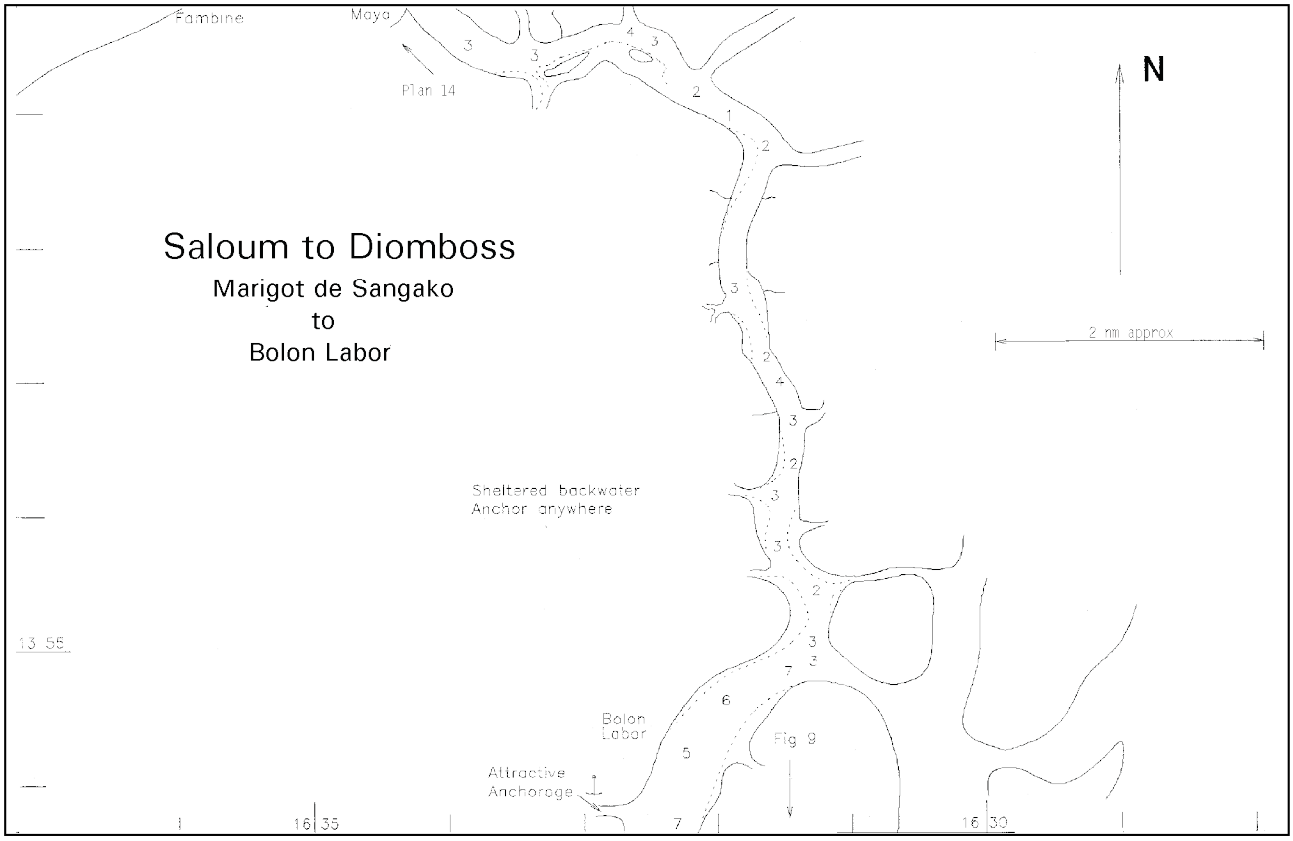
The only account I have come across of a yacht having visited Kaolack was that of Bill, Nancy and Brandon Pabst in *Poco a Poco*. They reported that they were able to tie up on the almost disused commercial wharf, but they were visited by the harbour master who charged them US$13 harbour fees. This is very high by local standards. They confirm that the river is not very attractive above Foundiougne.

Saloum to Bandiala

The route can best be seen in Plan 10. It should be remembered that you will be sailing through back creeks in the mangrove in uncharted waters, and boats drawing more than 2m could have difficulty in some sections. However, the waters are sheltered and there should be no difficulty in waiting for a tide.



Plan 14 Saloum to Diomboss - Entrance to Sangako



Plan 15 Saloum to Diomboss - Marigot de Sangako to Bolon Labor

Plan 14 shows the entrance to the Marigot de Sangako which leads to the Diomboss. This is a difficult passage, and is best carried out on a rising tide with the echo sounder going. The shallows extend almost to No. 19 buoy and are growing. Approach this buoy from down river and leave it about 100m to port. Then continue on a bearing of 075°M. You will have shallows on either side, but there is a channel between them decreasing in depth from 6.5m at the buoy to about 3.5m and then getting slightly deeper again as you come adjacent to the creek. When it gets back up to about 5m, edge around and try to stay the same distance from the bank to starboard until you are facing down the creek on a bearing of 128°M. Then head for mid-stream.

If these directions seem a bit imprecise, you have to accept that this is a feature exploring these secluded creeks. It can be very rewarding, but the down side is that you have to feel your way in and out. Remember that if you ground it is only mud, and as long as you have a rising tide you should get off without any problems.

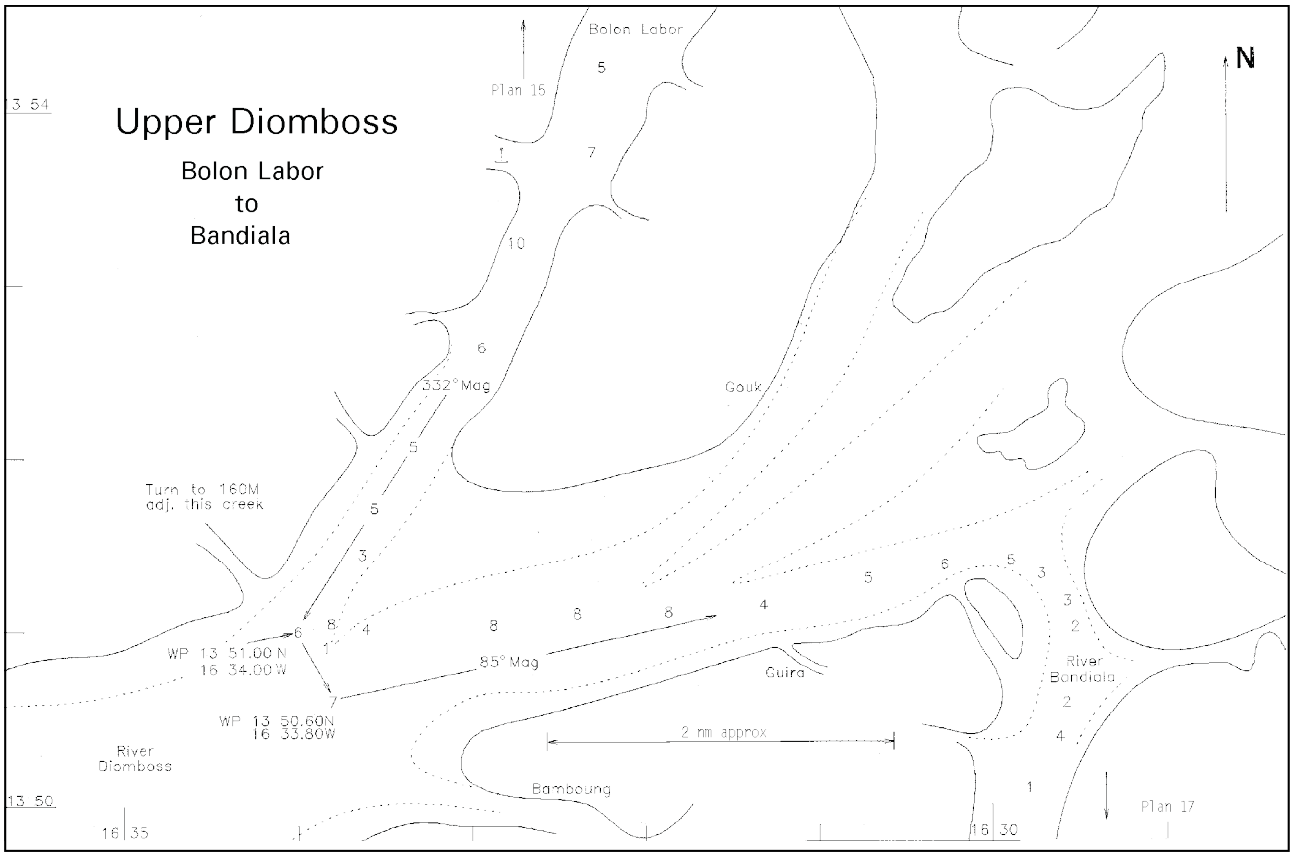
When in the Marigot de Sangako follow the channel shown in Plan 15 towards the Diomboss. There are other routes which may be navigable at some states of the tide, but most yachts should be able to follow the route shown without problems. Stay mid-stream except where shallows show that a different route should be followed.

As you enter the Diomboss, maintain your course until you pass the creek to port after the island, as the shallows extend a long way down river (Plan 16). I have added waypoints to get GPS navigators around the shallows, but the alternative is to take your time and feel your way around. The Diomboss, though a wide river, has always been very placid in my experience. There are more channels through the shallows than shown in Plan 16.

The Diomboss itself is worth exploring, being an isolated area without roads to bring in the 20th century. There are only a few fishing villages around but, with extensive areas of drying mud banks and shallows, most of these are difficult to reach. I have known shallow-draught multihulls head out to sea from the Diomboss, but I would not recommend it and certainly would not attempt it in a keel boat.

The Bandiala

Entering the Bandiala can be tricky. The approach is shown in Plan 16. You have a narrow channel between shallows on either side as you approach the entrance; watch the echo sounder. You should be able to maintain 5m of water until you turn into the river. Stand between 50-100m off the island at the entrance until you reach the 3m contour. Then hold the same distance off the shore until the river begins to deepen.



Plan 16 Upper Diomboss - Bolon Labor to Bandiala

Once in the Bandiala follow the channel shown in Plan 17. Watch out for the spot just before Toubacouta shown as a narrow channel in Plan 17. You have to find your way here from the west to the east bank through the shallows. I would advise having a look at it first, as the channel is narrow with only just over a metre at MLWS.

Toubacouta is on the main Dakar-Banjul road. Basic provisions are available and there are two tourist hotels with jetties. Of these, the Village Hotel, Keur Saloum is the better. It is accessible from the first jetty you come to travelling down river. Try their fixed-menu evening meal which starts with abundant steamed oysters - delicious.

There are customs and immigration officials in Toubacouta, but I have never heard of them approaching a visiting yacht.

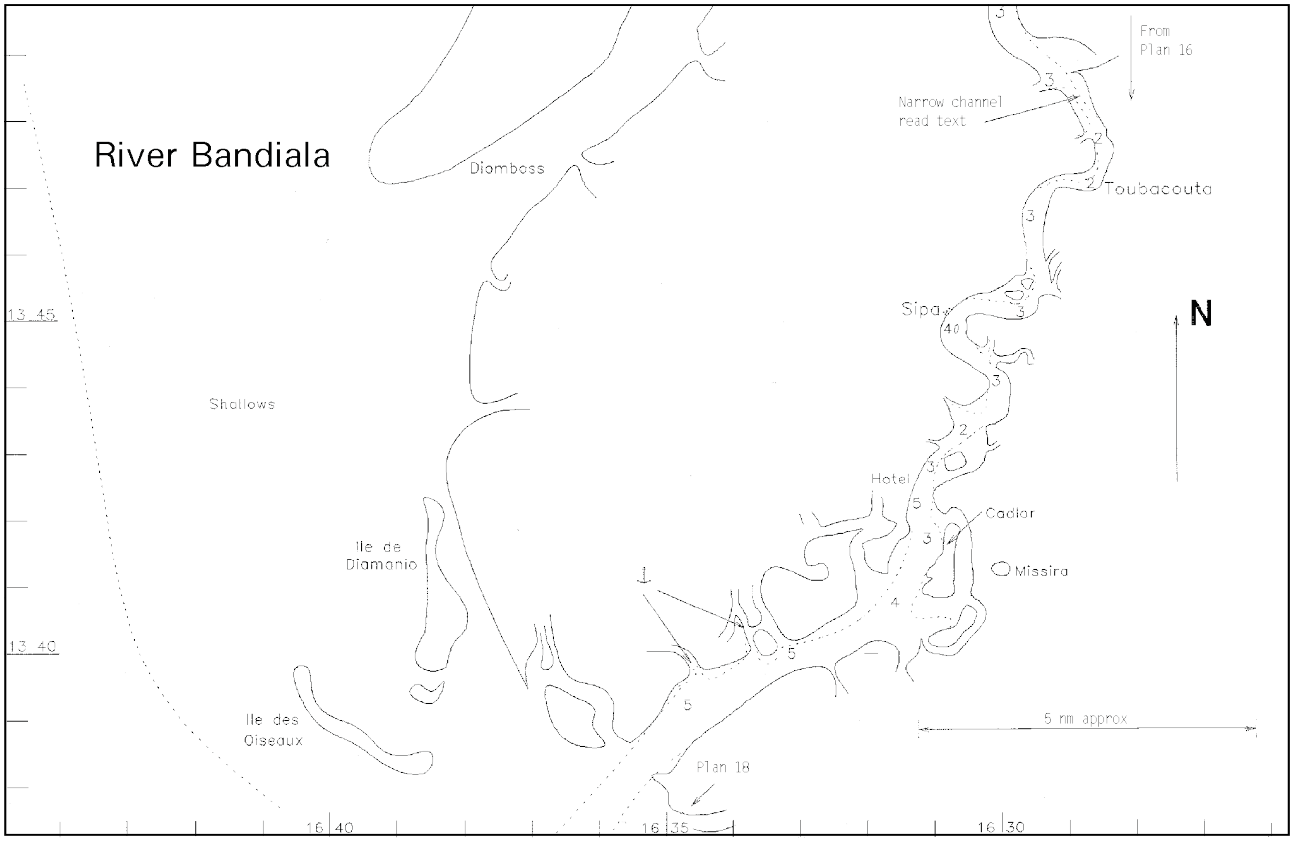
Below Toubacouta you come into remote country again. The village of Sipa is an attractive and friendly place to stop. It is also a good place to sample fresh palm wine. If you do not drink it fresh, it becomes bitter and will have a decidedly negative effect on your seamanship later in the day. You have been warned.

There is a tourist hotel, with a drying jetty, on the north bank just before Chadior. Anchor about 10m off the bank, but not too close to the jetty from which tourists fish. I have had a line cast straight into my cockpit by one such person who felt that I had no right to be there.

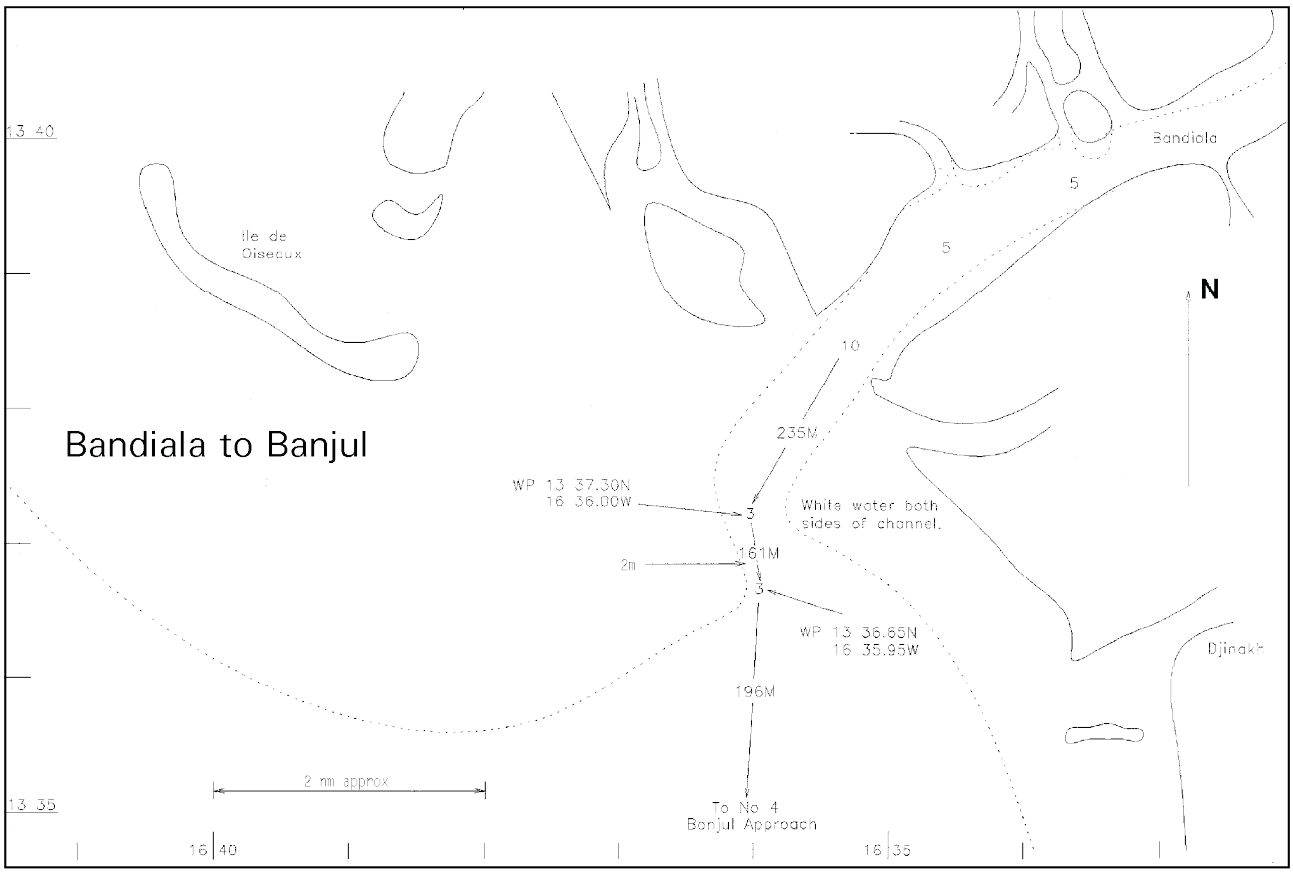
The hotel takes small parties which travel down river by boat. When there are no groups here it is a pleasant sleepy place, but its character changes when the tourist boat arrives. The reason for this is that a large number of the visitors come for shooting excursions, and in the late afternoon groups of French tourists set off dressed in combat gear with bandoleers full of bullets intended for the wildlife. Judging by the flak jackets some of these brave souls wear, I presume the bush pigs must have a tendency to shoot back. The hotel itself is just on the outside of the national park, so presumably this activity is legal. The food is good, with a plentiful supply of fresh meat, and the staff very pleasant.

At anchor off the hotel you are sheltered from the prevailing seas by the headland just down river. Once you pass this headland you may come into choppy water. Stay close to the north bank until you clear it, and then head out towards the largish island which marks the south bank at this point. Stand about 50m off this island until clear of it, and then continue slightly to the south of mid-channel until clear of the next headland. Then continue mid river.

You can find sheltered anchorage in either of the last two creeks on the west bank before the river mouth. Enter both from down-river and head for mid-channel. They offer a handy place to wait for a suitable time to leave.



Plan 17 River Bandiala



Plan 18 Bandiala to Banjul

Bandiala to Banjul

British Admiralty chart No. 608.

Leaving (or entering) the Bandiala looks worse on the chart than it actually is, though the bar is only 2m above chart datum (Plan 18). The breakers shown on the chart mark the shallows either side of the channel and effectively show you the way. If the sea is particularly rough, which can happen when a large Atlantic swell is coming in, it would be prudent to wait for calmer weather.

It is best to leave at low water as the tide is beginning to flood. Not only is the channel easier to pick out in these conditions, but the flood tide will help to carry you into Banjul.

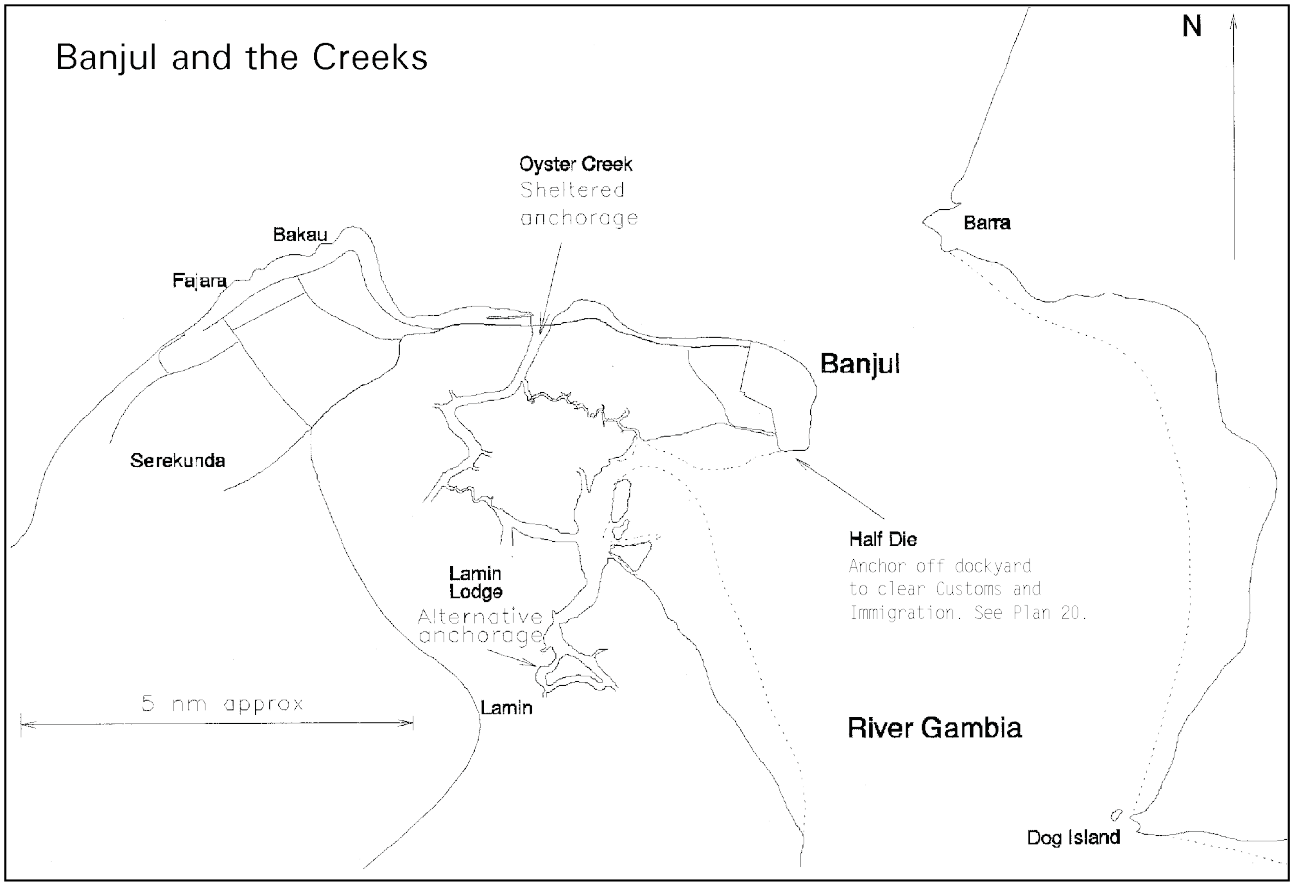
Head straight out of the river on a bearing of 235°M (Plan 18) and hold this course until you reach the waypoint shown, or you can see the channel begin to shoal. Turn to 161°M for 0.8M, which should carry you over the bar. From there head 196°M until you pick up the River Gambia No. 4 buoy.

To reach No. 4 buoy you have to cross the main shipping lane. If it is clear, you will be able to see Banjul; but if not, head 148°M until you pick up No. 5 buoy. From there follow the directions for entering Banjul in the beginning of this chapter.

Lamin (p52)

Kundang Tenda (p62)

The Gambia



Plan 19 Banjul and the Creeks

Quick reference

Ports of Entry: Banjul only.

Capital: Banjul.

Official Language: English.

Main ethnic languages: Mandinka.
Wolof.
Aku (a developed form of pidgin English).

Currency: Dalasi, divided into 100 bututs.

Exchange: £1=40 Dalasi.
Banking facilities are good but they generally only accept Visa cards.
Traveller's cheques can also be changed in the hotels. It is easy to change sterling, euros or dollars during working hours. Outside working hours, there is usually someone who will do it from a stall.
There are no currency restricttions.

Useful facilities: Good communications with UK.
Well-priced fruit and vegetables.
Several well-stocked supermarkets.
All victuals and services cheaper than Senegal.
British, American consuls. Also several other European consuls.

Not Available: Chandlery.
Slipping and reliable shipyard facilities.
Direct fuel supplies.

Main features: The river.
Extensive and isolated beaches.

Half Die - Ed Wheeler

Banjul and the creeks

Note: Much of the information presented here was collected before this book was envisaged, and has consequently had to be written up from memory. The techniques used on the later sections, including detailed navigational notes, GPS fixes, soundings and bearings were not carried out over this period. This does not present a problem as navigation in the River Gambia and associated creeks is very straightforward. Possibly the greatest frustration for readers will be the instances when I state the fact that a creek is navigable, but give no details. This is because I have used the passage but do not have sufficient records to offer precise directions. I can only offer apologies for this.

Where GPS fixes have been included on the up-river section they have been supplied by other competent crews.

There is a further complication caused by the unpredictable political situation, which has been mentioned on page 15. This has affected many aspects of Gambian life, and this should be borne in mind when reading these notes.

Arrival in Banjul

See Revisions pg R4

Banjul is the capital and only port of entry to the Gambia. On arrival, you must anchor off the disused shipyard at Half Die to clear Customs, Immigration and the Port Authority (see Plans 19 and 20). There have been some articles published in yachting magazines which have stated that you can go straight to Oyster Creek and go through the formalities from there. This is not correct, and will bring you into conflict with the authorities. Anchor at Half Die and fly the Q Flag until you have reported to the Port Authority.

As you approach you can leave Banjul within a few hundred metres to starboard, but look out for the Barra ferries and vessels using the two large wharves at the southern end of the city (Plan 20). This approach is usually peaceful enough, but can burst into sudden bouts of unpredictable activity. I usually motor in so that I am prepared to take sudden evasive action. Stand a safe 200-300m off until you have cleared the last large wharf, then bear off to starboard following the coastline around. You will see the rundown dockyard with a couple of slipways and a wooden jetty. Anchor in about 4m near the moored boats off the disused yard. Do not be tempted to anchor too close, as there is a proliferation of wrecks. Bob and Liz Cooper

anchored near the moored 'Navy' powerboats. They suggest plenty of chain if anchoring overnight as there is a chop when the tide comes in. The channel to the south of Banjul is fairly narrow, with deep water on the island side. Stay to the Banjul side of the line of moored boats to the south of this channel.

Half Die is probably the worst possible introduction to the Gambia. It derives its name from a cholera epidemic in 1869, when literally half of the population did die. The mortality rate has improved, but the area is still notorious for its crime level. While anchoring there keep a keen eye on security; some boats have been robbed while their crew were asleep on board. Pull dinghies and outboards onboard and lash them down well overnight. The anchorage can also be uncomfortable with wind against tide.

When you anchor at Half Die you will probably have people offer to act as your 'agent' to clear formalities. These offers should be politely declined.

Clear the formalities yourself as soon as possible in normal working hours. These, in theory, will approximate to government working hours in the United Kingdom, though holidays will be different.

You will not be greeted like a long-lost relative in any of these offices. The process is slow, frustrating, and involves wandering around the worst part of Banjul. Be patient with the authorities and watchful on the streets. As previously stated, dress respectably and do not wear shorts.

Ed Wheeler suggests leaving your dinghy on the beach near the drawn-up pirogues. You can get out of the yard through the container depot during working hours but this is dirty and hazardous. Alternatively, you have a long, dusty walk through the shanties west of the yard and round by the road. Bob and Liz Cooper moored their dinghy alongside the pilot boat in the small harbour at the east end of the yard and walked into the yard from there. The guys on the pilot boat were friendly and looked after the dinghy for a small 'present'.

The Harbour Authority is a blue four- storey block right in the south east corner of the harbour complex.

Ed Wheeler cleared Customs first, then the Harbour Authority and finally Immigration.

Dai Rice cleared Immigration, then Customs and finally the Harbour Authority, which took about four hours.

The Coopers arrived on a Friday and reported to Immigration, the only office open. Having been issued with a five day pass, they followed the same order as Dai Rice on the following Monday. It took them a whole day in total.

They report that in January 2009, a large part of the port of Half Die was being demolished on the orders of the President, and a new dockyard 'to rival Singapore' is to be built by 2020.

As a result, Customs are now in a temporary home by a large blue warehouse without a photocopier, so you need to have your own copies.

Customs are to the north of the harbour complex, about 200m from the Harbour Authority. They may wish to inspect the boat. Patience is required for this and they will expect a present. Dai Rice reports that the Customs official insisted on inspecting the boat but refused to be transported in their dinghy as he 'couldn't swim'. A compromise was reached where Dai brought the boat to within 50m of the quay. "He inspected our yacht with some rigour but didn't ask for a 'present'". After this, you will receive a customs clearance paper. It is useful and impresses the officials to have a ship's stamp for these papers.

The harbour officials are right at the top of the Harbour Authority building. Once you have shown them the customs clearance paper, they will issue you with a Cruising Permit for the vessel, which costs about D 700 for a month). Another permit is required to sail on the River Gambia upstream of James Island but this doesn't cost any more. Good tide tables are also available from this office and cost 175 Dalasis.

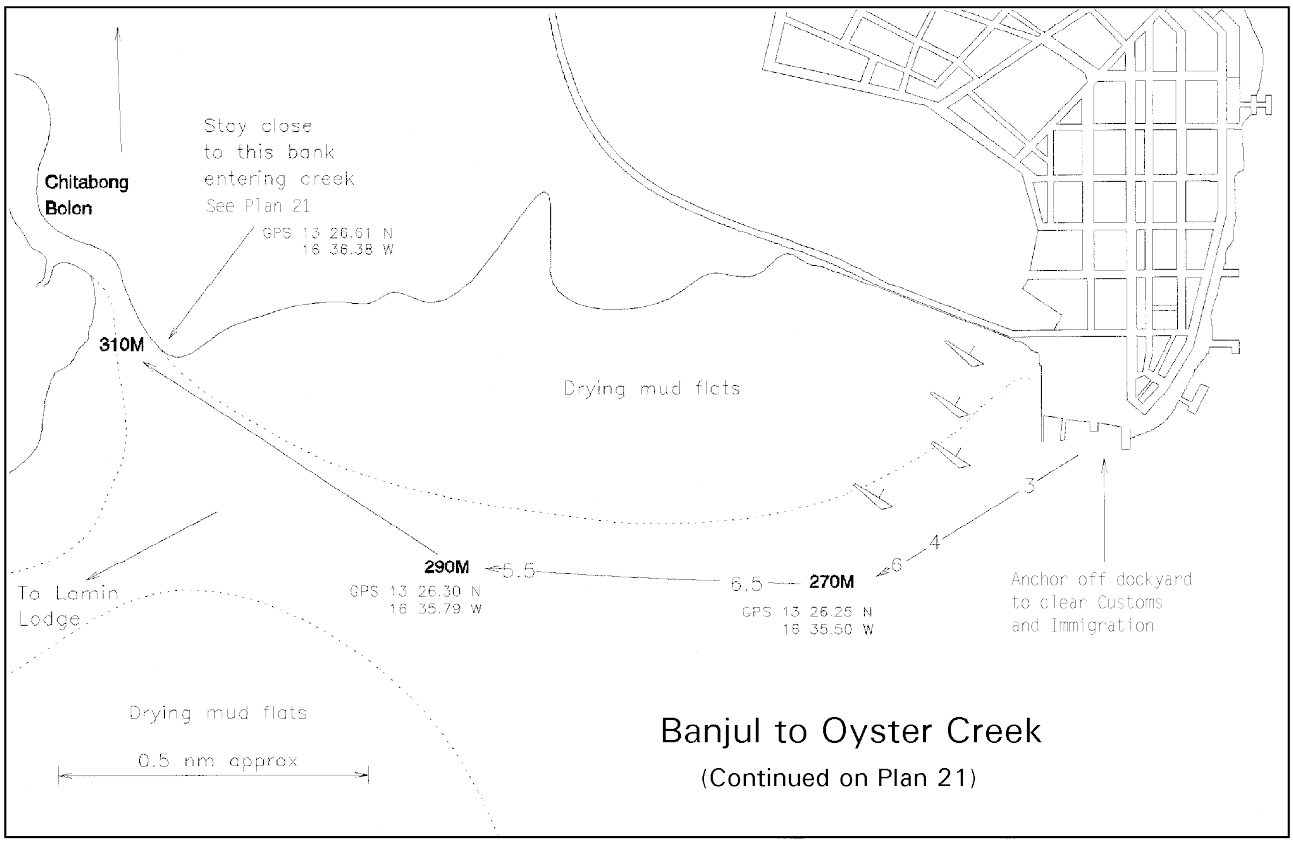
Immigration is also situated inside the harbour complex, past the Harbour Authority, and they will stamp passports there with entry permits (these costs 300 Dalasis in 'presents'). All the crew need not attend. There may also be a requirement for health clearance, though this will vary.

Dai Rice warns that it took him some time to shake off the Immigration officers and dealing with them was not a pleasant experience, in contrast to the rest of their time in the Gambia. He also carried out a 'tortuous' crew change happened in Banjul, with the departing and arriving crew each having to be 'escorted' to and from Banjul airport by the Immigration officers. Naturally this involved an 'escort fee' of 600 Dalasis.

If you are planning to stay in the area for more than a couple of days, it is best to clear formalities as quickly as possible and go to Oyster Creek, where there is a sheltered anchorage and pleasant atmosphere. Ed Wheeler reports that Oyster Creek is right on the coastal highway at Denton Bridge and it is easy to get bush taxis or minibuses from there to Banjul (about a ten minute drive), Serekunda etc. However, it is a busy anchorage with lots of pirogue movements daily.

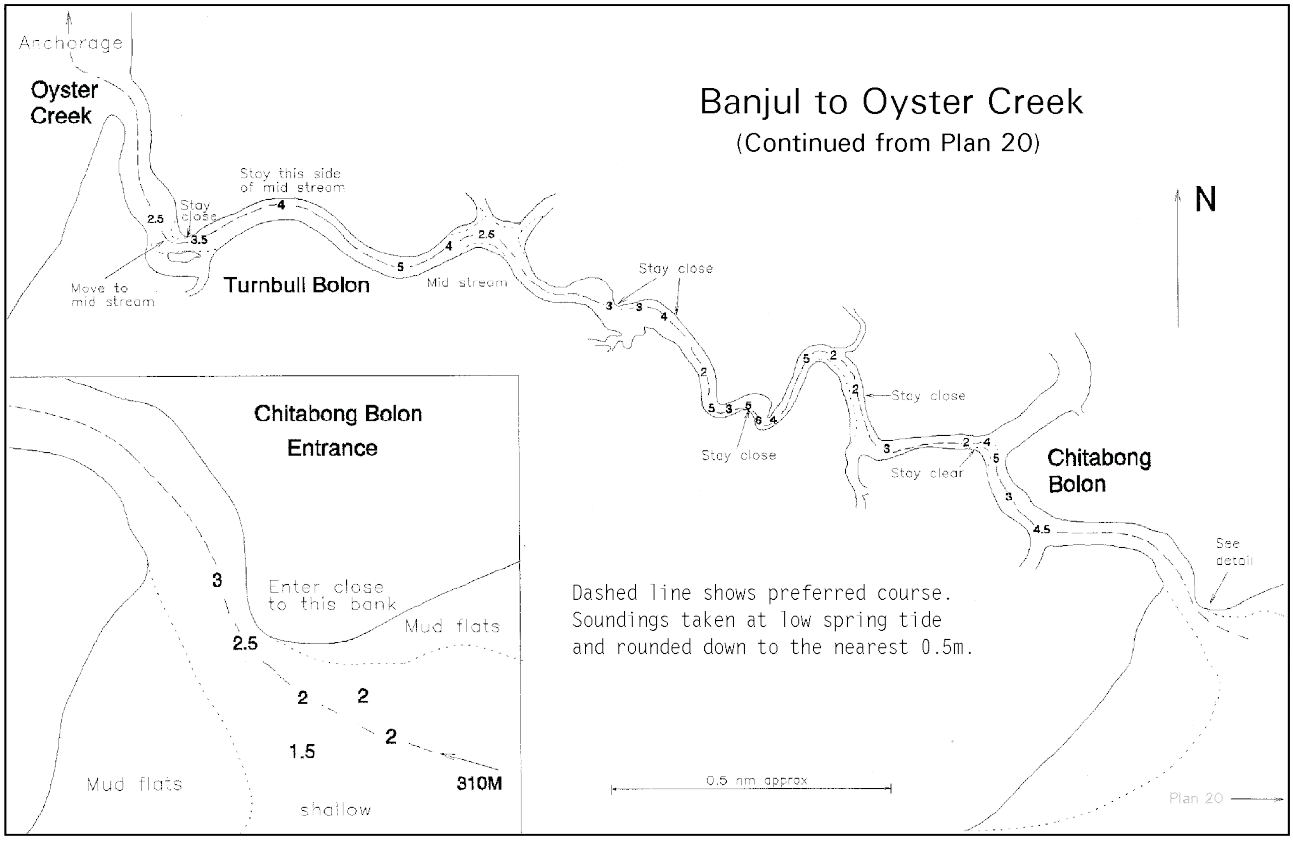
Banjul is covered later in this chapter. As previously stated, it is probably worthwhile re-victualling in the Gambia, rather than anywhere else in West Africa, and I would recommend doing so from Oyster Creek.

Another alternative and increasingly popular anchorage is at Lamin Lodge, which is more convenient than Oyster Creek for the airport if a crew change is planned. Ed Wheeler found it to be



Plan 20 Banjul to Oyster Creek

● See Revisions pg R4 and R5



Plan 21 Banjul to Oyster Creek (cont. from Plan 20)

further from towns and shops but tranquil and safe, with excellent holding. A yacht can be left there in safety. This is covered at the end of this section (see plans 19 and 25).

While you are anchored off Half Die it is worthwhile trying to get tide tables from the Ports Office and a road map from the Surveys Department. These are both close by and will save you coming back to collect them. It is also sometimes possible to get the Admiralty chart of the River Gambia from the harbour master's office. However, it has to be said that there are occasions when none of these things are available.

If you need to do any maintenance, I would advise against trying to use the dockyard. They are expensive and have little experience with working on yachts. Basic maintenance is better carried out by the crew at Oyster Creek.

See Revisions pg R5

Banjul to Oyster Creek

It takes about three quarters of an hour to motor to Oyster Creek. The following instructions are as accurate as possible, but it should be remembered that the mud banks shift on a seasonal and long term basis, so approach with caution. It is best to come in on a rising tide. I have known boats drawing nearly 2.5m use this route with plenty of water to spare on a MHWN, so most cruising yachts should manage without difficulty.

From Half Die you will see two wrecks almost in line on a bearing of 270°M (Plan 20). Head in this direction, leaving them about 30m to starboard, until you are about 30m past the second and then bear off to 290°M. If the weather is clear you can pick up a transit with the second wreck and the radio mast at the point where you bear off. This is a tall, thin mast to the right of the prominent red and white one in Banjul, but is often not visible in the dry season.

If it is a clear day, you should be able to see the entrance to Chitabong Bolon as a slight break in the line of mangrove. If this is the case, continue on a heading of 290°M until you can see this entrance on a bearing of 310°M and then turn in towards the east bank of the creek. If you cannot see this entrance, continue on your heading of 270°M until you pick up the 2-metre contour and follow this around until you can clearly see the opening, and then head for the east bank. Take your time on this passage, grounding is not uncommon, as it is very shallow until you enter the Bolon. Hold very close to the East point. Half tide rising would be best for all but shallow draught yachts.

Enter the creek leaving the bank 20-30m to starboard (Plan 21). At low tide take the bank to be the line of mangrove. This entrance can be tricky at low water and the contours seem to change seasonally, but they are made up of soft mud. Provided you do not get stuck on a falling tide you should have no problems.

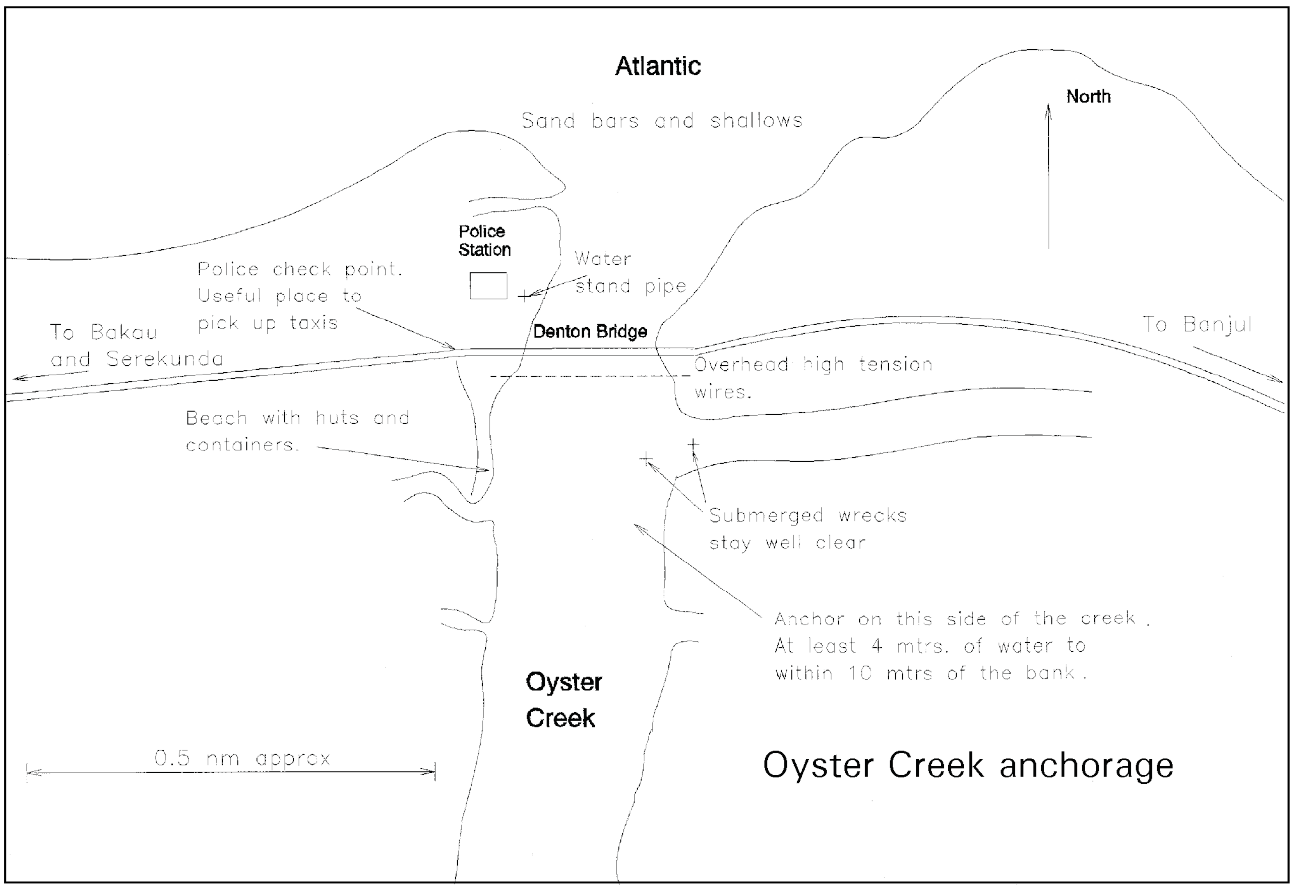
When you are in the creek, head out into mid-stream. You will pass one narrow side creek on the left before coming to a junction where Turnbull Bolon joins Chitabong. Do not take the wider of these options, but follow the narrower creek to port.

From there stay to the right of mid-channel until you come to the three sharp bends. Stay clear of the first of these headlands but cut the second close, and then move back out to mid-stream. When you have passed the third headland, move to the right of mid-channel.

As you round the next bend the creek widens, with a side creek entering from the left. Stay well over to the opposite bank from here and pass close to the next headland. Then move back to mid-channel until you have passed the double creeks entering close together from the right-hand bank. After this, stay slightly to the starboard side of mid-stream until you see the side creek and island approaching on your left. At this point you must stay close to the starboard-hand bank until you are past the headland. Then hold your course until you are back into mid-channel and turn sharp right to stay there. Continue in mid-channel until you enter the much wider Oyster Creek, turning to starboard towards Denton Bridge.

Ed Wheeler reports that going towards Oyster Creek, it is reasonably easy to avoid the large false creek to starboard but coming back it is much more difficult to pick out the turn to starboard. These creeks are not shown in any detail on current Admiralty charts. Steve Jones' pilotage as above should be followed carefully. You will emerge into Oyster Creek quite suddenly from the winding Turnbull Bolon.

As you round the bend into the main creek you will see a number of boats moored and at anchor (Plan 22). You can anchor anywhere in this creek, but stay well clear of the submerged wrecks marked on Plan 22. It is also better to anchor between mid-channel and the starboard bank as you face the bridge because of fishing boats passing at speed along the other side. Ed Wheeler suggests anchoring south of the moorings, while watching out for a nearly covered wreck in the fairway. Several tourist pirogues operate from the new jetty and the local boatmen are keen to rent out their 'visitors' moorings'. However Dai Rice suggests that it is preferable to anchor, as the moorings are of uncertain size.



Plan 22 Oyster Creek anchorage

Oyster Creek Ed Wheeler

Oyster Creek

This area is well sheltered by sand bars which cross the mouth of the creek. You will often see large waves breaking just beyond the bridge, but the anchorage remains comfortable. Holding is reasonable in mud, but tidal streams can run at nearly two knots. After a few days there, Ed Wheeler's anchor was bunched up with chain.

The beach marked on Plan 22 is a convenient landing point, and is close to the police checkpoint on the road where you can pick up a taxi or bus to Banjul or Serekunda. When first landing, ask for Cessey who will look after your dinghy and offer friendly advice. He is there every day except Mondays.

It has been unfortunately somewhat overrun with handicraft shops, tourist touts and bumsters. These men should not be encouraged, but most of the boat boys are friendly and will offer genuine help if Cessey is not around.

Water is available from a (very slow) standpipe at the police station marked on Plan 22. Ed Wheeler reports that you can take your dinghy right down to the beach below the standpipe but courtesy demands that you call into the police station and ask permission. There is no problem leaving your dinghy ashore. Diesel, petrol and lubricating oil are available from a nearby garage. Boys at the shack will arrange for your containers to be filled for a modest fee, plus the cost of a taxi to fetch them.

There is a wooden jetty here and a jumble of shacks dispensing beer or coffee and catering for the charter angling businesses which operate out of Oyster Creek.

Anti-fouling and other work below the waterline can be carried out by most yachts by beaching on spring tides. There are no chandlers in the Gambia, and though it is sometimes possible to buy some items, such as anti-fouling, from the dockyard most materials will have to be brought in.

At Oyster Creek you are about halfway between Banjul and the main tourist centre of Fajara. You are also close to the main residential area, a corrugated sprawl around the market area of Serekunda. There is much of interest in this area, well worth sampling for the pure indulgence of it. Cruising yachts have been known to stay for years, though they always claim to have a good reason.

Unless you carry bicycles, you will either have to go to Denton Bridge and wave down a mini-bus or taxi, or come to some private arrangement with a taxi driver to get around. The vehicles that stop at the bridge will generally be going to either Banjul or Serekunda, and are unlikely to deviate for you.

If you require a private taxi, the easiest place to find one is between the Wadna Beach and Palm Grove hotels, about a fifteen-minute walk from Denton Bridge towards Banjul. Alternatively, you can take a mini-bus going to Banjul and ask to be dropped off there. There is a bar between the two hotels called Jengdula which sells reasonably-priced cold beer and excellent meat pies (though the latter seem to disappear outside of the tourist season). If there are no taxis around it makes an ideal spot to sit and wait for one.

All the places covered in this section are easily accessible by bicycle if you carry one, but make sure you have a padlock and chain for security.

Banjul

Banjul is not the most salubrious of capitals. For much of its history it flooded on a high spring tide, and has only recently had a drainage system installed to cover the whole city. It tends to be hot and dusty, and many people write it off at first glance. However, a little perseverance will offer some rewards. The street plan of Banjul is shown in Plan 23.

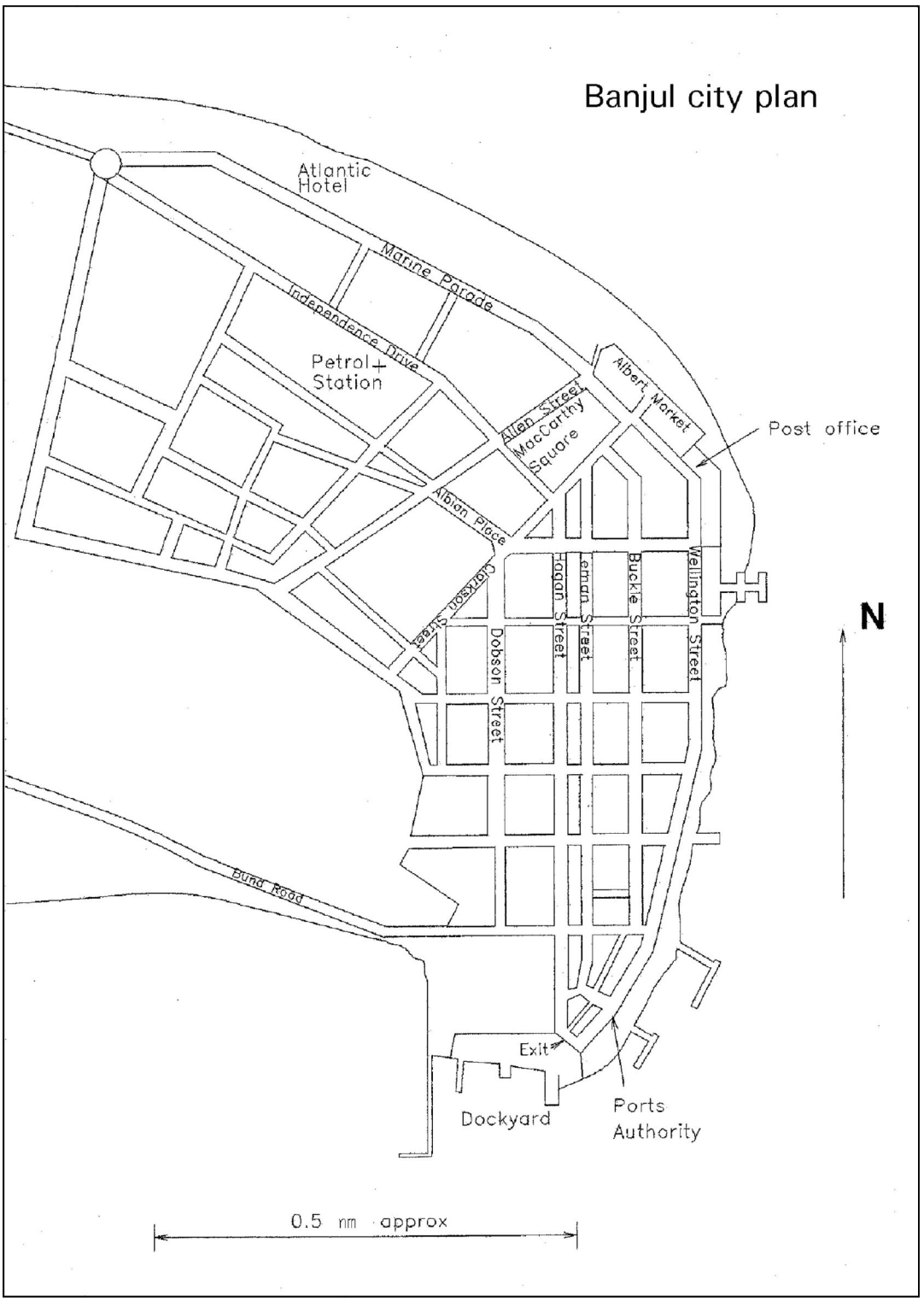
The Prince Albert market is a lively African affair with a wide range of products and larger-than-life characters to match. You enter its labyrinths from Liberation Street (Wellington Street) near the post office, finally coming out onto a beach if you weave your way through to the back. Though more limited in its scope than the more famous markets in Dakar, it is also less intimidating. Remember that it is probably better to buy large quantities of provisions from Serekunda or Bakau markets than from here.

There are several supermarkets in Liberation Street (Wellington Street) but more in the Fajara area, which are better stocked. The same is true of most other services.

The Gambia National museum in July 22nd (Independence) Drive is worth a visit. Though a little ramshackle, the scope is wider than you would expect. Written history does not go back very far in West Africa, and many of the displays are of the area's long pre-history. The most interesting part, in my opinion, is that covering the colonial period where there are some fascinating old photographs.

The Corinthia Atlantic Hotel is a pleasant tourist hotel with a pool, bars and restaurants. It is located on the beach off Marine Parade, which is not shown on the chart but runs parallel to Independence Drive behind the hospital, and is a short walk from the museum. This will take you past the remnants of the old colonial government buildings which still survive. These have a certain tropical Englishness about them. They are still used as government buildings.

There are several banks in Banjul, but Standard Chartered in Ecowas Avenue and IBC in Liberation (Wellington) Street are the most convenient, being close to Albert Market.

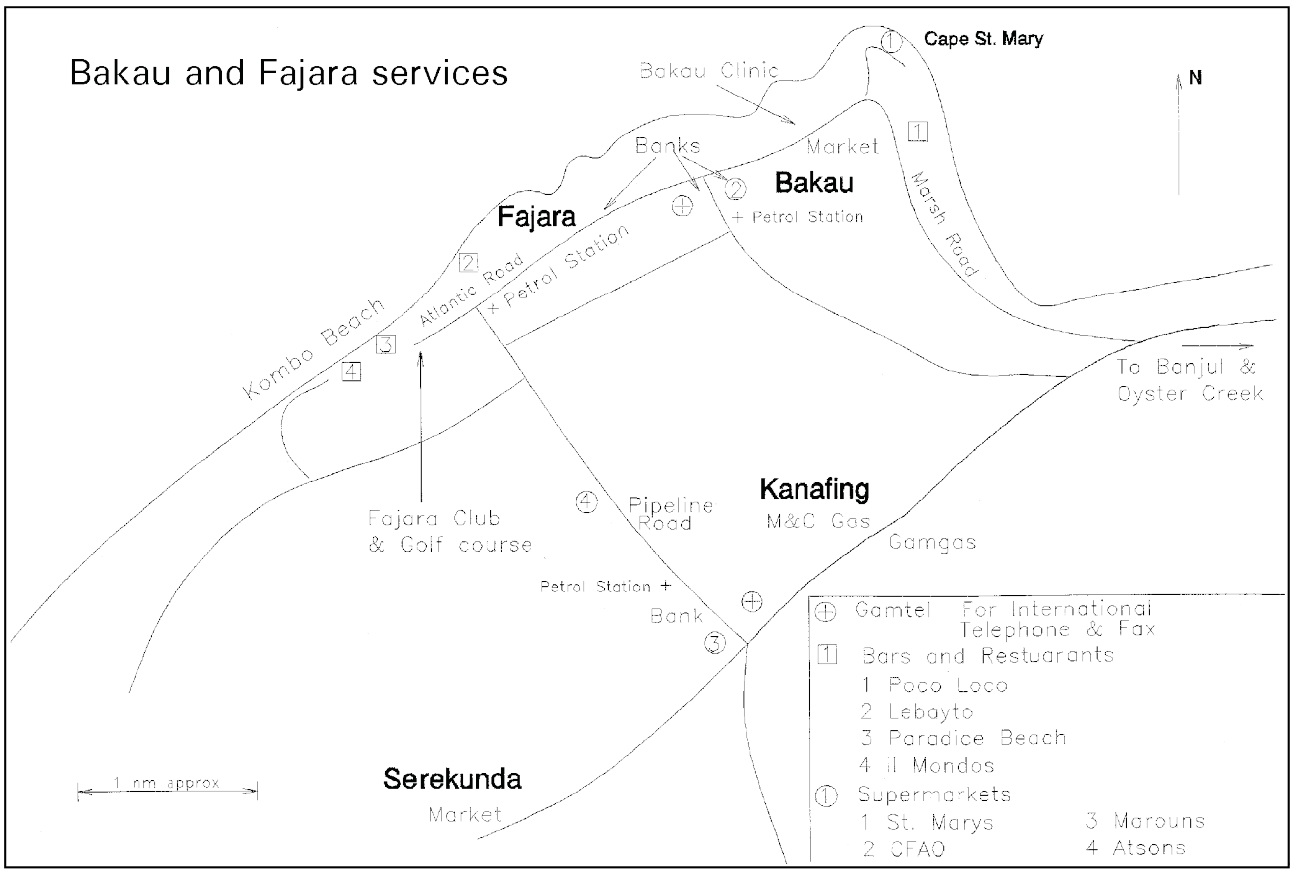


Plan 23 Banjul city plan

International calls, fax and telex can be made from the Gamtel offices, and the central post office is in Russell Street.

Bakau and Fajara

Fajara is the place where wealthy people live and tourists look. It has beaches, hotels and a club with a golf course. Between Fajara and Denton Bridge is the tourist and residential area of Bakau where you will find most of the services you require. Few of the minibuses or bush taxis crossing Denton Bridge will be going to either Fajara or Bakau, so you will need a private taxi or go via Serekunda to get there.



Plan 24 Bakau and Fajara services

See Revisions pg R5

Alternatively, walking is not out of the question if it is not too hot. Plan 24 shows the banks, supermarkets, clinics, telephone exchanges, petrol stations and some of the bars and restaurants in the area. However, it is always possible that some may have closed down by the time you arrive.

I have not shown the hotels, which are numerous and spread along much of the coastline. Generally speaking, their facilities are expensive and if you change money in them you will get a poor rate of exchange.

Bakau market probably has the best displays of fruit and vegetables in the country. You can also buy meat, fish, bread and all other essential foodstuffs. It is also conveniently placed close to several supermarkets, a couple of banks, the petrol station and international telephones. This makes it the best area for a large victualling expedition.

An alternative is to head for Serekunda. A local taxi or mini-bus will drop you off at the top of pipeline road where there is a supermarket, a bank and international telephones. Alternatively, they can take you on to Serekunda market, which is larger but more chaotic than Bakau.

The area has so many bars and restaurants that it is not possible to list them all and so I have only included a few of my favourites.

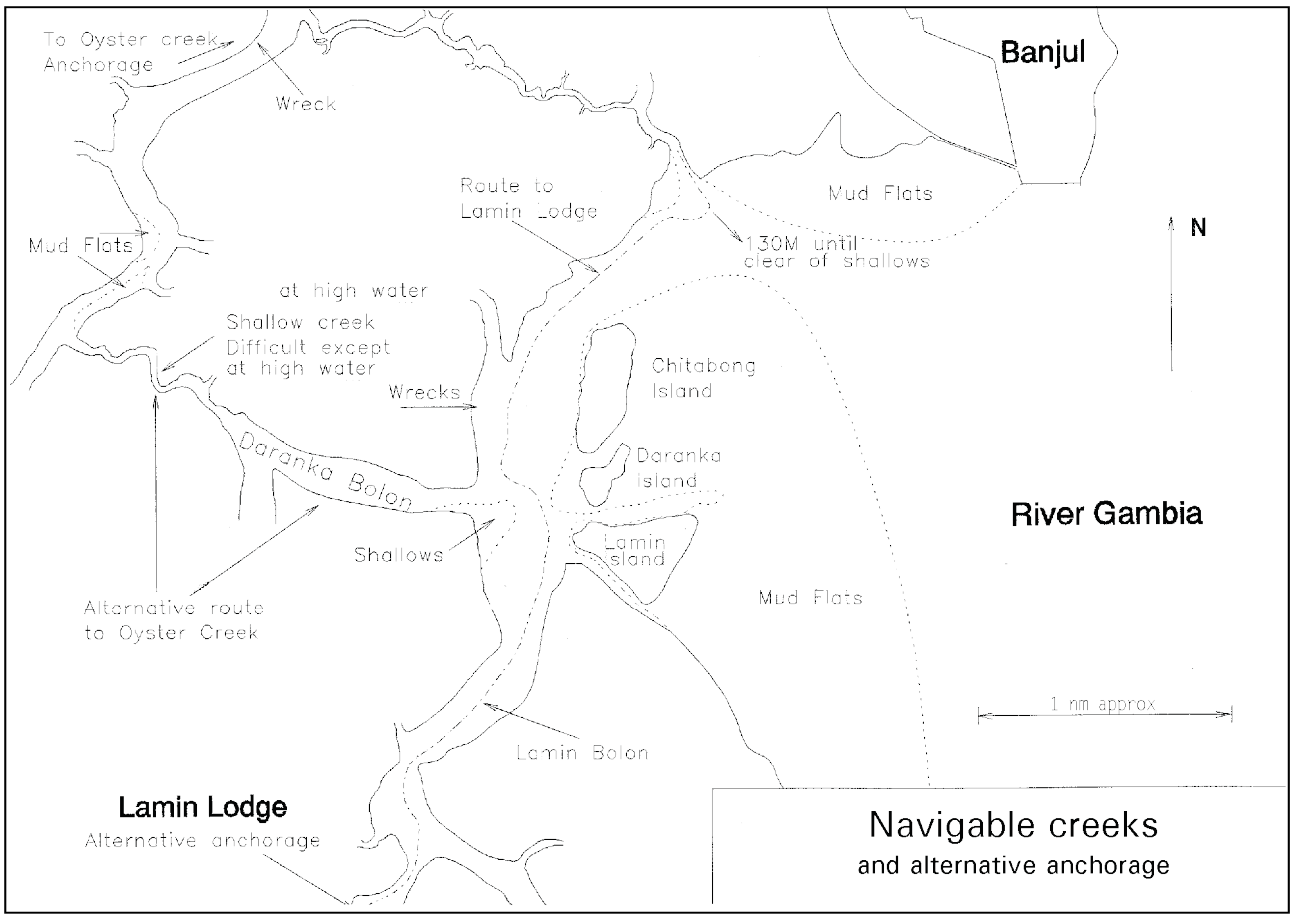
The main thing which the Gambia is known for is its beaches, and there is probably no better way of enjoying them than sitting in the shade of a beach bar. I have marked three on Plan 24, but there are many more. Of those I have shown, Il Mondos is more than just a beach bar and does the most reasonably-priced crayfish in the country and many other fine dishes. Try Sue's bakewell tart for a taste of home.

From there you can walk for miles along golden sand and palm-fringed beaches. But do not get too carried away with the clichés of paradise, you will either need a four-wheel drive vehicle or a bicycle and the fitness of youth to escape the madding crowd. Here you are in the centre of the Gambian tourist industry, and will have a constant stream of young men wanting to be your friend, which means they want you to spend your money on them. Be polite but firm, and avoid starting a conversation.

While on the beach, you might like to try one of the fish bars. There are a lot of them, and the fish, cooked slowly in tin foil with oil and spices, is excellent. Probably the most reliable is Solomons which is on the beach but just off the map in Plan 24; but do not expect to drop in for a quick meal.

The creeks

All the creeks shown in Plan 25, and several others, are navigable to yachts and can be fun to explore. Remember that there are some large sand and mud banks that are easy to get stuck on. The area is rich



Plan 25 Lower River Gambia - navigable creeks and alternative anchorage

See Revisions pg R6

in bird life, and exploring the creeks is an ideal way to see many species. There are several varieties of heron, sea eagles, cormorants, egrets, kingfishers and many more.

Lamin Lodge

A pleasant day trip and alternative anchorage is Lamin Lodge which is marked on Plans 19 and 25. Though it is less convenient than Oyster Creek, for most services it has many advantages. It is a very sheltered anchorage, has good holding, is close to the airport, fuel can be obtained in Lamin village, about four km of rough dirt road away, and they can arrange for fresh water. It can also be used as an alternative base, being close to Lamin village, which is on the main road to Banjul airport.

The lodge was built, and is run by, a German called Peter Losens. He looks a bit like an Old Testament prophet, but is a charming and friendly host. A former yachtsman, Peter sailed down to the Gambia several years ago and stayed on. He has a love of boats and the sea and enjoys having yachts moored off his lodge.

This is a nice place to hang around for a while, a peaceful and serene spot with the idiosyncratic Lodge providing cold beer and meals and catering for a healthy river tourist and bird watching trade, but is occasionally overrun by package tourists. At weekends and holidays you can also get water skiers of the most inconsiderate kind. You can use Lamin Lodge as a landing stage, bar and restaurant. Try the oysters in lime juice; they are mud oysters, but good all the same.

Dai Rice felt that Lamin Lodge would be a fine and safe place to leave a yacht for any length of time. Peter Losens can arrange for a mooring to be laid and for a security guard. He can also arrange for the hull to be cleaned whilst afloat.

Ed Wheeler found a reliable and unofficial 'Harbour master' called Llanda who looks after some of the moored yachts. If you wish to leave a boat there, he will look after it for a very modest sum. Llanda's mother also does washing and he or other boys at the Lodge can get diesel and water for you. This has to come by donkey cart from the standpipe in the village, so may take some time. The Coopers also found an internet cafe on the main road near Lamin village.

As you can see from Plan 25, there are two possible ways to get there, but the easiest is to go back through Turnbull and Chitabong Bolons (as though going back to Banjul) and then turn to starboard and head towards Lamin Creek.

Lamin Creek - Ed Wheeler

See Revisions pg R6

Based on the mudflats the Coopers found, they suggest a third waypoint (on Plan 20): 13°26.42N 16°36.34W to turn to enter Lamin Creek.

Ed Wheeler reports that this is accessible at any state of the tide but it is best to make the passage on half flood, as a moment's carelessness or disorientation can lead to a grounding, but the bottom is soft. There are many spots on the way to Lamin where one could anchor in seclusion. It is all well sheltered once under the lee of Chitabong Island.

Take care coming out of Chitabong Bolon because you have mud banks on both sides. Continue as if you were going to the ports on a heading of 130°M until you are well clear of the creek mouth before turning to starboard. Then follow the track shown as a dotted line in Plan 25 and described below.

Stay close to the bank on your starboard side until you pass a group of wrecks. The Coopers report a new wreck, not visible, just before this group on the west bank. Shortly after this there is the wide opening to Daranka Bolon to starboard and the last of the group of islands opposite. Cross to the other bank just before you reach this point so that you are standing 30m off the western tip of Lamin Island. The mudflats have extended further out on the tip of Lamin Island Continue into Lamin Creek, staying on the same side until you are past the channel between Lamin island and the mainland. Then move to mid-creek until you reach the turning for Lamin Lodge. The Coopers suggest turning into it at 13°23'.94N 16°37'.26W.

Make sure you do not attempt to turn into either of the two small creeks before the one which goes to the lodge, as these are shallow. It is important that you keep a close eye on your position because you cannot see your destination until you turn the final bend. As you approach the lodge, Ed Wheeler suggests one keeps centre stream until about 100m downstream of the Lodge, then hold over to the east bank, leaving all the moored boats close to starboard. Anchor in 3m in line with but past the end of the line of moored boats. It is best to anchor clear of the jetty and row ashore as large tourist pirogues call here regularly.

Further excursions

If you are lucky enough to be able to hire or borrow a four-wheel drive vehicle, the best way to enjoy the Gambian beaches is to drive along them. You can travel south to the Senegalese border, except for a couple of creeks which you have to go inland to get around. The best vehicles for travelling along the beach are Suzuki jeeps, which are so light that they can cross soft sand which other four-wheel drive vehicles tend to get stuck in.

There are several day trips organised from the hotels which visit these more remote beaches, but to turn up with a large party seems to defeat the object to me.

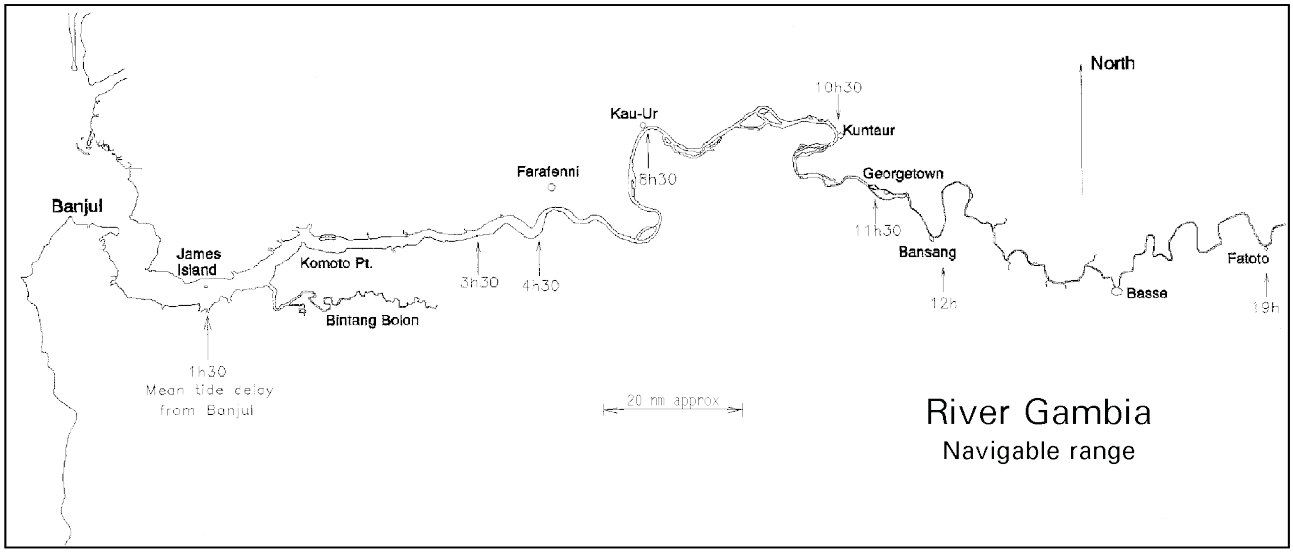
Abuko nature reserve is worth a visit. Go early in the morning, or in the evening, and set yourself up in the hide at the waterhole. You will see a large number of birds, monkeys and crocodiles. It is at its best towards the end of the dry season when there is little water around and most of the creatures have to come to the main pool. The section which is laid out as a zoo is best left to the package tour excursions.

To visit Bara or other destinations on the north bank take the ferry from Banjul. The ferry terminal is in Liberation (Wellington) Street (Plan 23) and the ferry leaves every two hours, but delays are frequent.

Mandori Creek , River Gambia - Ed Wheeler

Internet Café, Gambia - Ed Wheeler

The River Gambia



Plan 26 River Gambia, navigable section

See Revisions pg R7

Planning

The lower part of the river is covered by Admiralty chart No. 608; after James Island you will need No. 609. The latter is somewhat out of date as the section above Kuntaur has not been surveyed since 1826. However the main part of the river was surveyed in 1941, with some sections checked in 1962, and is reliable for navigational purposes as far as Georgetown.

Ed Wheeler reports that the only buoyage upstream of Banjul are the two buoys marking a cable crossing at Farafenni. Bob and Liz Cooper report that chart errors vary as you go up the river, so use GPS with caution.

You should obtain permission to travel up river past Bintang Bolon from the harbour master, for which there may be a small fee. This is normally achieved as a formality when you arrive, but make sure you have the notes on the River Gambia National Park before you set off. In addition to nets, there are fixed fishing installations, often built from a number of dugouts lashed together with poles. These are for prawns and shrimps and do not have any outlying nets or dangers.

The best part of the River Gambia comes with the fresh water above Elephant Island. I would suggest you allow a minimum of a fortnight if you want to see the fresh-water section of the river. It can certainly be done in less, but would not be as rewarding.

Some fresh vegetables and bread will be found in most villages but it is best to stock up before you leave. Not until you get to Bansang or Basse will you find anything like the selection of fruit and vegetables that are available on the coast. Also remember that the further into the dry season it gets, the less there will be available.

Your valuables will probably be less coveted up river than they are on the coast, but this does not mean that you are immune from opportunistic robbery. When beaching the tender up-river look out for the spot where the dugout canoes are pulled up. You will usually find a group of old men sitting nearby who will gladly, and honestly, guarantee the safety of your property. In African society the old men have natural authority and no one will steal something which is being watched by them.

Although there are health centres in many villages, and clinics in the larger towns, you will find medical care is very basic and drugs are unavailable. If you have any health problems it is best to go to one of the clinics at the coast before setting off.

Ed Wheeler reports that the river appears to teem with fish, which you can buy from dugout fishermen for about D50 per kilo.

There are some concrete or timber wharves and jetties on the river, built for the groundnut trade, but now mainly in disrepair. None of these is really suitable for a yacht to lie alongside.

Banjul to Bintang Bolon

Plan 27 shows the first section of the river as far as Bintang Bolon. Most of this stretch is covered by Admiralty chart 608 and after James Island you will need No. 609.

Allow for strong tidal currents in the lower river, reported as up to 3.5 knots on a spring ebb. It is advisable to sail with the tide as far as possible.

There is only a small tidal time difference between Banjul and Dog Island, but James Island is about an hour and twenty minutes behind the port.

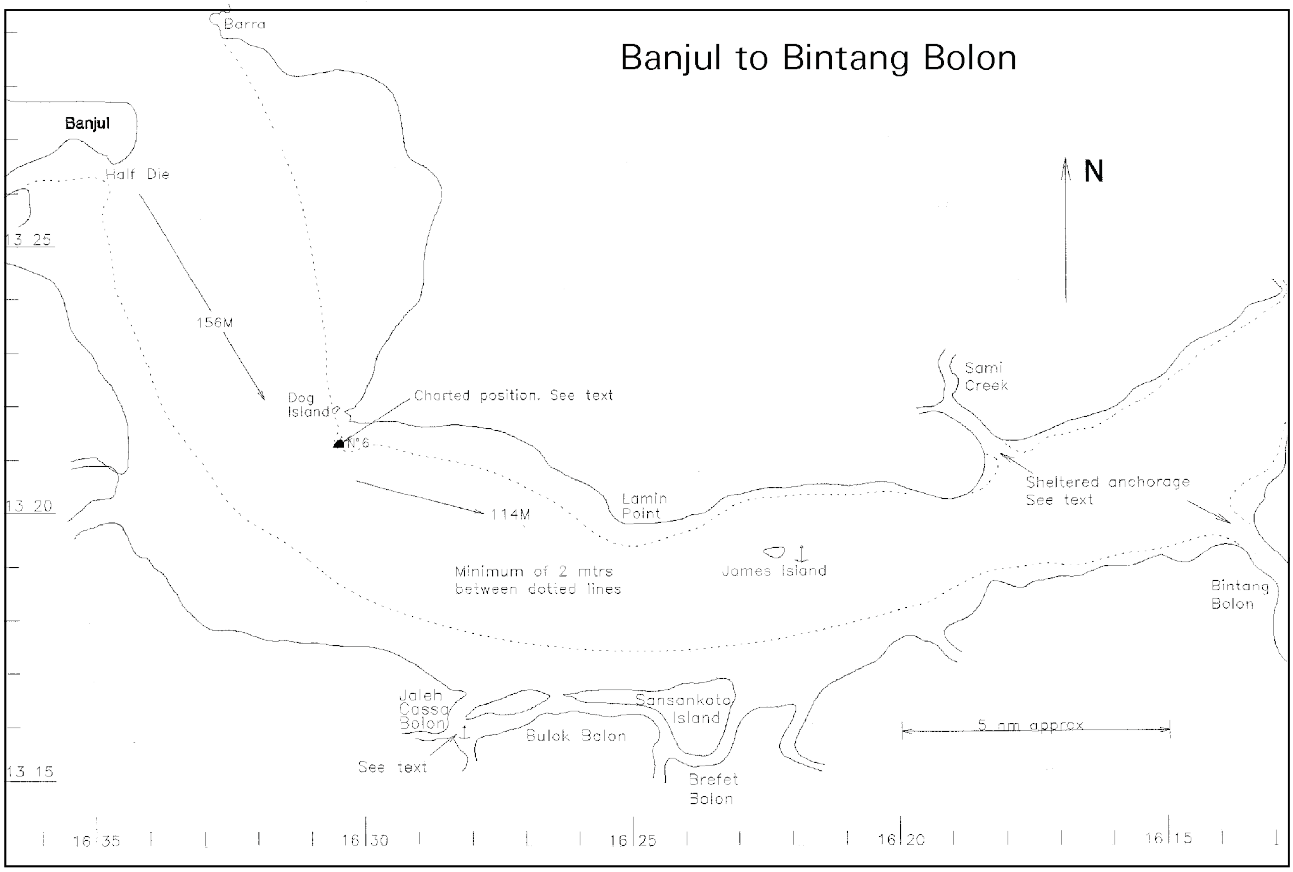
This section of the river is exposed to the prevailing wind, and it is not advisable to use it as an anchorage.

When the weather is clear, Dog Island can be seen from Banjul as a point up river just off the north bank. It looks more like a headland than an island, being only separated by a small stretch of shallow water. Steer well clear of this headland on a bearing of 156°M from Banjul. Stand at least a mile off Dog Island and the bank up river until you are a mile past the headland. When past Dog Island take a heading of 114°M towards James Island.

Jaleh Cassa Bolon and the connecting waterways on the south bank between Dog Island and James Island are accessible with care, but the approach is surrounded by shifting mud flats and shallows. Sansankoto Island used to stretch from Brefet Bolon to Jaleh Cassa Bolon, but the sea has recently broken through at its narrowest point, as shown in Plan 27. This has added to the changing contours and renders the Admiralty chart out of date. The deep-water channel approach shown on the Admiralty chart still exists as shown, though it is not as deep as charted. This is still the best approach, however, especially at low water when the mud flats can be seen. I have been able to pick up this channel at high water using GPS, but keep an eye on the echo sounder. At high water you can also cut across from mid-river on a bearing of about 186°M to the centre of the bolon. There are a number of fish traps moored each side of the channel which can be used to guide you in but, again, keep a good eye on the echo sounder as you approach.

Continuing up river, James Island should come into view by the time you pass Lamin Point, unless visibility is very poor. Stand half a mile off Lamin Point to avoid shallows. As you round it you will also see Albreda on the north bank. Albreda was a French trading centre when James Island was the main British military base in this part of West Africa. Their histories were closely linked until the establishment of Banjul removed their strategic importance.

There is a bizarre twist to the story of Albreda because of its close proximity to the village of Jufureh. This village became famous on publication of Alex Hailey's "Roots", where it was reported to be the birthplace of his great grandfather who was abducted from his natural environment and sent into slavery. On closer inspection the story seems unlikely as Albreda has been a trading centre for hundreds of years and the inhabitants would have been knowledgeable of the ways of Europeans. There are even the remains of a Portuguese church to prove a long continuity of outside influence.



Plan 27 Banjul to Bintang Bolon

Nonetheless, tourist boats stop there as a part of their itinerary and the area suffers from much of the negative effects of this contact. If you want to stop it is best to anchor well off and row to the long jetty, where you will be met by an enthusiastic crowd ready to show you around. Water is available at Albreda.

A nicer place to visit is James Island, where the past is being left to crumble with more dignity. There is a small charge for landing and the ruins are not spectacular, but it is a pleasant mid-river setting. In truth the fort was never very important and was surrendered more often than it was successfully defended. With a history full of rogues, deceit and failure it retains a very West African charm.

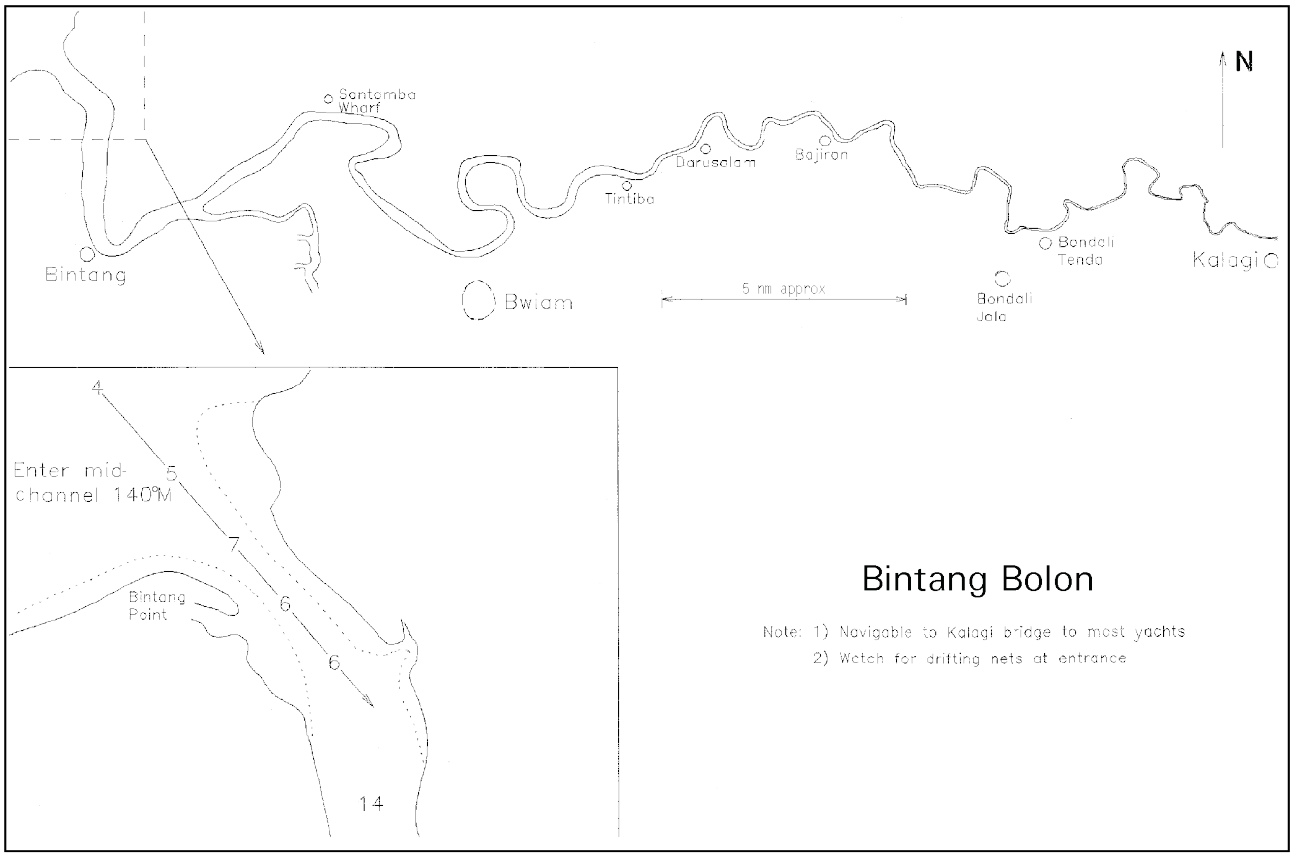
There is fair holding just up river of the island. You can anchor about 30m off at this point in clinging mud. However, it is exposed to the prevailing wind and the tidal streams are strong, so can get a bit uncomfortable. There are more sheltered anchorages further up river. James Island has no facilities.

There are dolphins in the lower Gambia River, but for some reason the place I saw them most often was between James Island and the sheltered anchorage of Sami Creek. This is about four miles up river from James Island, but it is not advisable to enter in poor light as there are numerous fish nets and traps around the entrance. The mud flats off the up-river side of the entrance seem to have extended since I first entered this creek, and the entrance is consequently shallower. The best way of entering would seem to be watching the echo sounder and following the 1.5m contour around the down-river side of the entrance until in the creek. If you do not have a sounder, follow the curve of the entrance around standing about 100 m off the line of mangrove. I would not recommend this on a falling tide. Avoid this except in a flat calm (reported update 2008, EW).

Bintang Bolon

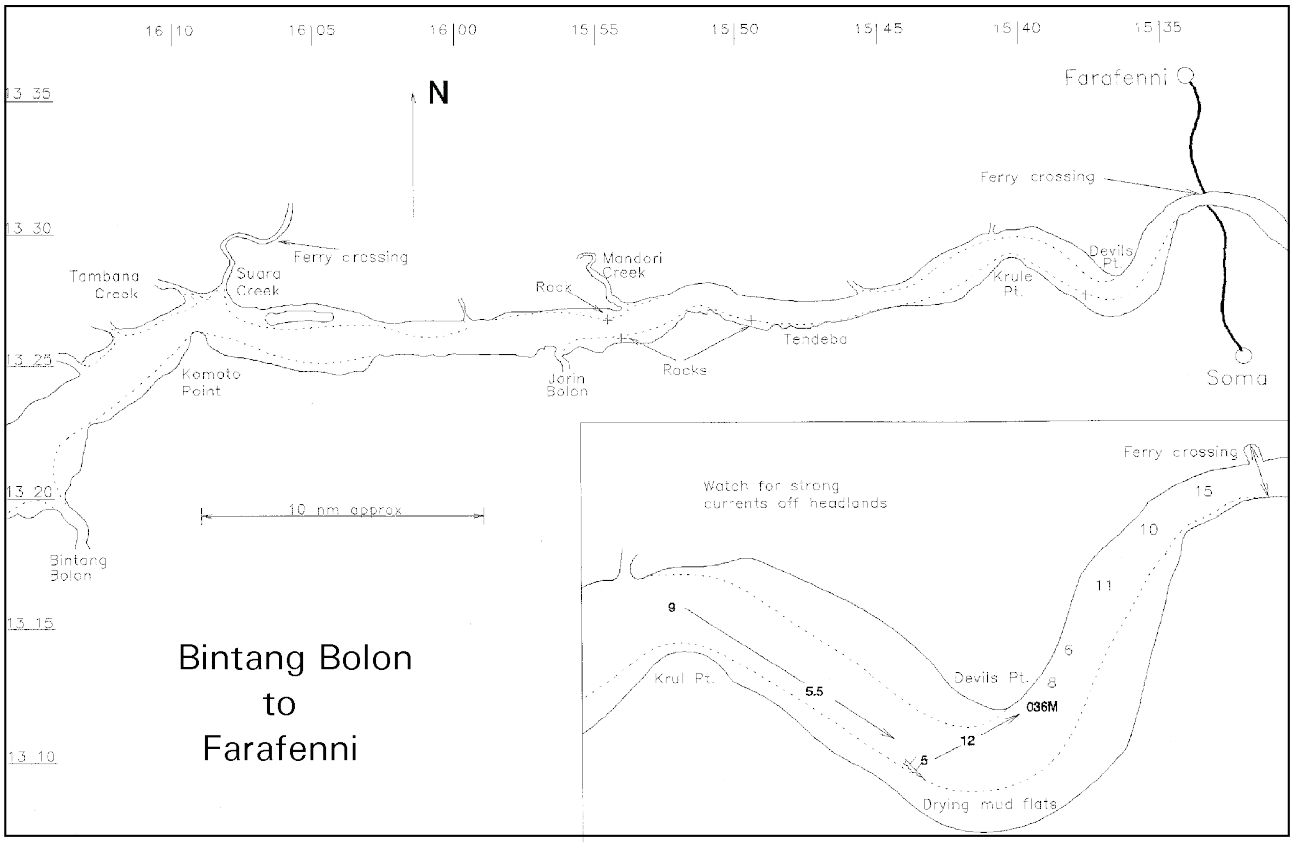
See Revisions pg R7

Shortly after Sami Creek on the south bank is Bintang Bolon, shown in Plan 28. The entrance to Bitang Bolon is about 25m upstream from Banjul. Ed Wheeler suggests that it would make a good first stop on a passage up the river. The chart and Admiralty pilot say that it is navigable as far as Sandeng which is no longer true because a low bridge has been built at Kalagi, a couple of miles before Sandeng. However, it is still a pleasant creek to explore, with deep water until you reach the bridge, and is easily entered on any tide. Stay in mid-channel and enter on a bearing of 140°M to avoid the mud banks either side until you round the first bend (see detail in Plan 29). The Coopers



Plan 28 Bintang Bolon

Bintang Camp Ed Wheeler



Plan 29 Bintang Bolon to Farafenni

report that the mudbanks have changed and suggest a bearing of 133°M instead. Watch for cross currents; there are no transits, but provided you stay mid-channel at the entrance you should have plenty of water. Also watch for drifting nets near the entrance, which may be poorly marked.

The Coopers suggest the following waypoints may be helpful:

Mid-channel:	13°20.72N	16°15.44W
Half way in:	13°20.065N	16°14.348W
Entrance:	13°19.66N	16°13.77W

I have not encountered rocks or mud banks in the lower reaches of Bintang Bolon, even whilst beating to windward along the stretch from Bintang to Santamba. Generally, stay in mid-channel or to the outside of bends. I have not been able to take any accurate fixes on the bolon, but when I stopped at Kalagi Bridge with my GPS I found that I was about a mile away from the creek according to the Admiralty chart. Look out for fishing nets strung across the creek, which sometimes leave very little room to pass.

This creek has had a strong influence on the development of the region until recent times, with the area to the east of it remaining isolated. Kiang West district is still one of the least developed regions of the Gambia, and is a good place to go looking for wildlife.

Bintang itself is the main town on the bolon until you get to Kalagi. Bread and some provisions are available, but not fuel. There is a rough road which links the village to the main road.

Ed Wheeler reports that Bintang Village now has a tourist camp where one can get a meal and a cold beer. However, holding is not good and it is better to anchor on the opposite side of the creek.

There is a ruined wharf and an old trading building at Santamba, which has fallen into disrepair, and a small village. A little further on, however, there is the much larger village of Bwiam (Kansala on the Admiralty chart) which rambles between the bolon and the road. It is about a mile walk from the bolon until you get into the village proper. Bread and some provisions are available in this village.

After this there are a few small villages before the bridge. Kalagi itself is not a very large place, but is useful because it is on the main road. If you are short of fuel or provisions, it is about two hours by bus to Serekunda or an hour in the other direction to Soma. I would advise observing the bus service before you decide to use it; even among intrepid sailors there may be some who will decide that it is not for them.

Cold soft drinks, bread and roadside snacks are all available at Kalagi, about five minutes walk from the bridge.

Bintang Bolon to Farafenni

Plan 29 shows the next section of river from Bintang Bolon to Farafenni. The latter is a major town about three miles from the river on the north bank. Add three and a half hours to Banjul for tide times at Tendaba, and about four and a half hours to Devils Point.

Continuing up river from the entrance to Bintang Bolon there is a tourist hotel just before Kemoto Point (Muta Point on the Admiralty chart). The headland, which is an area of raised ground sticking out into the river, is clearly visible as you approach. If visibility is reasonable you will see some white buildings on the hillside from a few miles and, as you get closer, a jetty.

Do not try to approach this as the river quickly shoals here, but anchor as close as you can. If you do not have an echo sounder stay about 300m off. The holding here is fair, but there is plenty of room for an angry chop to get up if the wind is in the wrong direction, especially against the tide.

Kemoto Point

See Revisions pg R7

The Kemoto Point Hotel has now closed, but Ed Wheeler reports that the building and village are still worth a visit.

There is a small shop in the village which can supply a few provisions and fresh bread.

The old hotel jetty is not a strong structure and I have gone through it pulling a heavy craft in.

For those who prefer a cosier anchorage or wilder surroundings, both Sura and Tambana creeks on the opposite bank are accessible. The mud flats between them, however, come out a long way. I have tried to find an easy method of entry, but there does not seem to be one. The best advice I can offer is to try to imagine the course of the creek you are entering extending from its entrance through the mudflats and follow this. Sura Creek ends in a long slow curve which continues out into the shallows until it meets the current from Tambana creek. It is, therefore, not possible to go in on a bearing.

Sura Creek offers deep water for several miles, but is used by fishermen and is the only place in the Gambia where they have tried to con me into believing that I had fouled a net. It was a very crude attempt, and was soon sorted out, but suggests that the inhabitants of this creek may be less friendly than most. It is also true that the inhabitants of Kerewan, where there is a ferry crossing, have always had a bad reputation. The ferry is motorised and clearly visible as you approach, but I would not anchor in this vicinity. Sura Creek is, I am told, navigable to Jowara near the Senegalese border. It is possibly navigable beyond this.

Back in the main river the north bank is in marked contrast to the south, being mainly uninhabited swamp. Tambana, Tabirere and Jurunka creeks are

Farafenni ferry landing - Ed Wheeler

all accessible with many other navigable creeks coming off them. It is an area where you can get lost and be completely alone. A few fishing boats do come this way, but with so much water available it is easy to have your own private stretch. Flamingos can often be seen on the mudflats at the entrance to the creeks on this section.

Ed Wheeler found Jurunka Creek accessible with 2m in the entrance at LW. It winds up past a primitive village and into a large lagoon, with shallow water in the middle and lots of bird life. Anchor anywhere convenient.

Tabirere Creek, a short distance upstream from Jurunka Creek, is even easier to access, with deep water inside and 3m over the bar. Again, plenty of bird activity and this creek is wider, allowing one to anchor well clear of the banks to reduce unwelcome nocturnal visitations by mosquitos. Approach these creeks with care, remembering that banks form naturally on the inside of bends and downstream of points.

The mudflats come a long way out from the north bank heading up river from Sura Creek, and it is best to stay well off. This next stretch is sparsely populated with only the settlement being at Tankular until you reach Tendaba. There is a very long jetty sticking out into the river at Tankular, but it has fallen into disuse. There are also shallows off the north bank opposite Tankular, so it is best to stay to the south of mid-river until adjacent to Selekini Creek.

Selekini Creek, I am told, is accessible. After a shallow entrance it offers deep water for several miles. However, my own favourite excursion on this stretch of the river is Mandori Creek five miles further up river.

To enter Mandori stay in mid-river until you can clearly see back into the creek to the first bend. This will take you past the charted rocks down-river of the entrance. Like many others, it shallows at the entrance. Watch the echo sounder and go in slightly off-centre towards the west bank. Once inside the creek you have deep water.

Mandori Creek is narrow and lined with tall mangrove; it does not seem to be visited by local fishermen and is alive with birds. As you enter, eagles, herons, pelicans and cormorants circle around you until the boat has passed and they can settle back into their undisturbed retreat. When anchored here, with only the sounds of nature all around, it is possible to feel that you really have got away from it all. After Mandori Creek the river is deep up to the north bank until you are almost off Tubabkollon Point. Then stay in mid-river until you are adjacent to Tendaba.

See Revisions pg R7

Tendaba

I prefer to anchor where I can keep the boat in view. One of the reasons for this is that the holding is not as firm, and the area is sometimes subjected to sudden high winds channelled down-river. In these conditions it is common for yachts to drag their anchors. Another reason is that the villagers have had longer contact with visiting tourists (because of the tourist camp) and are more inclined to be a nuisance. It is one of the few places on the river where I was concerned that someone might try to break into the boat.

If the river is calm, it is possible to tie up to the concrete jetty for loading or unloading at high water, but I would not recommend staying there long as the water can soon become very choppy. There is not a lot worth picking up here anyway, with even fresh water being hard to come by.

The Coopers report that the tourist camp has a small swimming pool, and a restaurant serving bush pig. They found the village and its small school a friendly place.

The area is notable for wild bush pig. A fully-grown male can stand several feet tall, and it is best not to hang around if you upset one. Their meat can be very good, though occasionally tough. The locals will happily kill the animals, but do not eat them because Islam forbids it. However, it should not be eaten unless frozen for at least 48 hours to ensure that the worm which it commonly carries has died.

From Tendaba the river takes a slow sweep out towards the sinister sounding Krule Point and then there is an S-bend to round Devils Point. Regardless of the names and the fact that there is a wreck lying between them, this section should not offer too many problems. Strong currents can run off Devils Point during spring tides and sudden squalls can be channelled through the high ground on either side, making conditions difficult. The wind tends to blow down river off Devils Point, which can make it a difficult beat to windward.

Stay closer to the north bank than the south until you are off Krule Point, and then head towards the south bank as you round it (see detail in Plan 29). Shortly after the headland you should be able to see the two-masted wreck of the *Lady Chilel* sticking out of the water, and this can be used as a marker. You can leave her within 50m of your starboard beam before heading up towards Devils Point. If visibility is poor, lie about half a mile off the south bank and run parallel with it until you see the wreck; then head up on a bearing of about 036°M until you can see Devils Point.

The *Lady Chilel* was a tourist boat donated to the Gambia by the Swedish Government, and was used to run trips to Basse and back. She went down in 1984 after capsizing, and no reason has ever been given for the disaster which cost several lives.

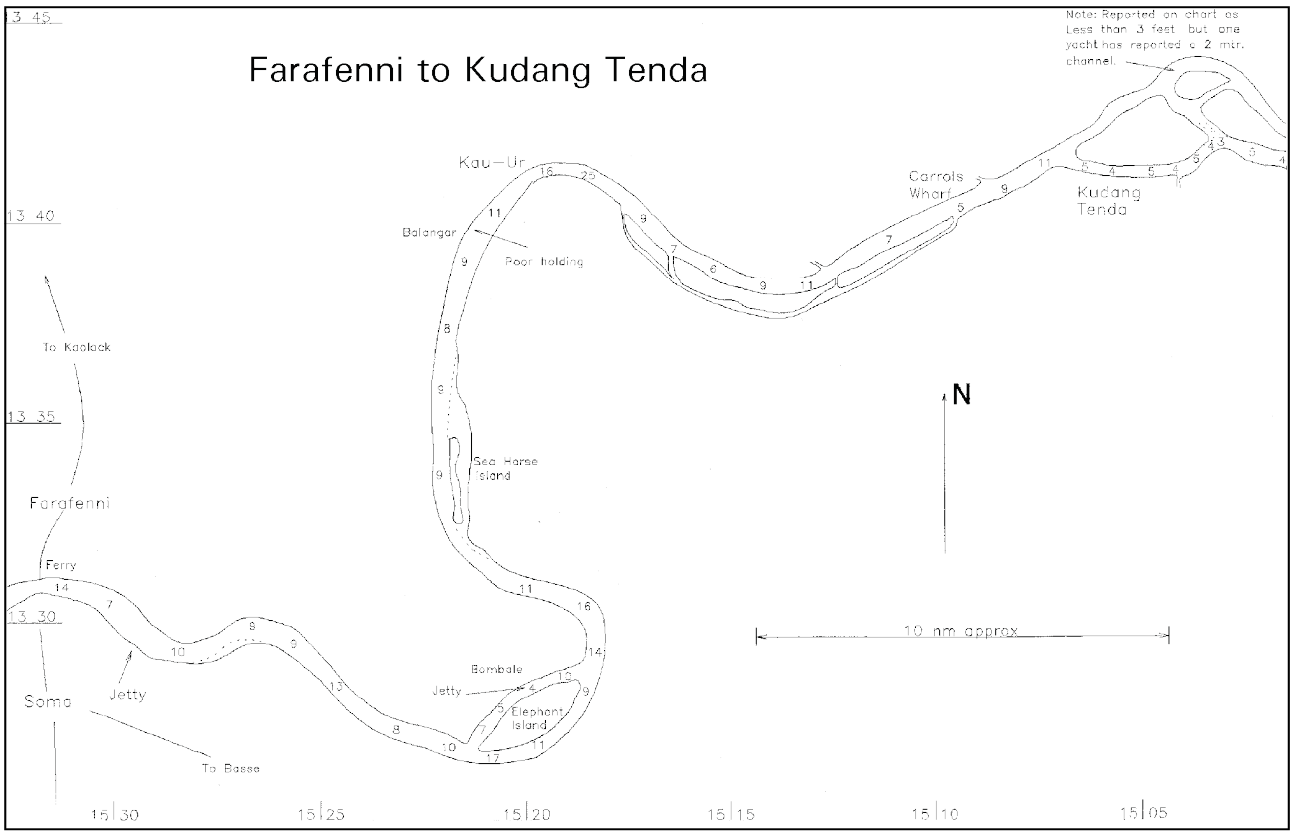
The river narrows dramatically after Devils Point, and there is more traffic until you are well past the ferry crossing at Yalitenda. Stay close to the north bank as you round Devils Point as the mud flats on the other side continue to the next bend. I have no idea what the unexplained obstruction marked on the Admiralty chart up river of Balingo is, but there is plenty of water on the north bank side. Bob and Liz Cooper report that near the ferry crossing after Devil's Point there are red and green buoys marking the channel, outside of which are what appear to be permanent fishing nets.

As you round the next bend you come to the Yalitenda ferry crossing. Take care as you approach as the ferry can be out of view in a dredged channel on the north bank. You can see the slipway on the south bank, and the opening opposite is clearly visible. As the ferry pulls out they normally sound a horn, but it is best not to rely on this. Although there are actually two ferries, I have never known them run them both at the same time, so if you can see one on the river or on the south bank you can proceed. Also watch out for pirogues and other small craft crossing the river with passengers.

This is the point where the main Dakar to Ziguinchor highway crosses the River Gambia linking northern and southern Senegal, which makes it a busy crossing and a useful place to pick up provisions. Ed Wheeler reports that you may be able to lie alongside the spare ferry at Mandina Creek, whose crew were very helpful. A taxi will be required to get to Farafenni to the north or Soma to the south. It is best to negotiate with the taxi driver to do the round trip before you start. Ed found the 4km ride to Farafenni something of a white-knuckle taxi journey, as the asphalt has deteriorated into gaping potholes. Consequently, the paved surface in the middle is only used by pedestrians and animals, while the traffic, mainly lorries, thunders along the verges on either side, choosing the side with the best surface, regardless of left or right.

Both Farafenni and Soma have petrol stations where you can buy petrol and diesel. They also have markets and shops for meat, fresh vegetables, bread and other provisions. In addition, there is a large market every Sunday in Farafenni where you can buy almost everything. This is called a *lumo*, and is worth a visit if you have the time, but watch your valuables as pickpockets are common in the large crowds.

With the possible exception of bread, it is best not to buy things from the vendors at the ferry crossing itself as they are overpriced. Fish is best purchased directly from the fishermen.



Plan 30 Farafenni to Kudang Tenda

Because of the numbers of people travelling across the river, and the many small craft around, I am nervous of anchoring here and prefer to leave someone with the boat if I need to go into one of the towns. However, I have never heard of a visiting yacht being broken into.

Farafenni to KudangTenda

The next section from Farafenni to Kudang Tenda is shown in Plan 30. There is about eight hours delay in the tide between Banjul and Kau-ur and just over ten hours (+4) to Kuntaur.

The river changes from brackish to fresh over this section. Until Balangar it is mainly covered with tall, dense mangrove, interspersed with a few areas of reeds and grass which have soft banks. This makes landing difficult, except where jetties or wharves are provided.

There are several of these old wooden wharves near villages along the way, however, made from virtually indestructible rhun palm logs.

If you want to stay near Farafenni overnight, there is a nice, peaceful wharf which offers a good landfall about four miles up river between Sankuia and Karantaba creeks. It is marked on the chart, but difficult to see until you are almost adjacent to it. The people are friendly, and a few fishing boats sometimes drop their catch off here.

The river is now much narrower, and you soon come to Elephant Island which is the first of the large up-river islands. It is covered by impenetrably dense mangrove which makes it impossible to land. The roots of this very tall mangrove cascade down to the river from branches several metres high, and offer an impression of African jungle which is reminiscent of early illustrations. This is rhizophora mangrove which is a different plant from the low avicenna africana mangrove further down river.

You can pass either side of Elephant Island. The north bank channel has a jetty at Bambale village (spelt Bombale on the Admiralty chart). This part of the river is where you start to be troubled by tsetse flies which are an extreme pest in the fresh water section.

Joining the river on the south bank on the next bend after Elephant Island is Sofaniama Bolon. This is navigable as far as the bridge at Pakali Ba and makes a pleasant excursion, but is very narrow in some sections.

The next island is called Sea Horse Island on the Admiralty chart, and it is said that the name comes from the fact that this was the first place the early Portuguese explorers ever saw hippos, which they called horses of the sea. However, it is now called Dankunku Island on the official road map, and is covered with mangrove. The land behind it is low grass marshland, however, and the water may be fresh in the rainy season.

A little way up river from Sea Horse Island is the abandoned settlement of Balangar with the remains of some well-constructed buildings. The only people now in the area are a few Senegalese fishermen living in mud huts who are friendly, but do not speak any English. The holding off Balangar is not as good as most of the river, and I have received reports of boats dragging when the wind gets up. This can be quite strong with the northerly wind being channelled between the hills of Balangar and Kau-ur.

There are good views of the river from the top of Balangar Hill, but it is a bit of a scramble to get up and down. The red laterite hills along the river have a crumbling surface which does not provide very good grip.

Although there is still mangrove for some way up river my dog would drink the water here and I suspect that the fresh and salt water is stratified. There is also a strange effect with currents which make it look as though the tide is ebbing when the water level is rising; this can make it difficult to judge the tide.

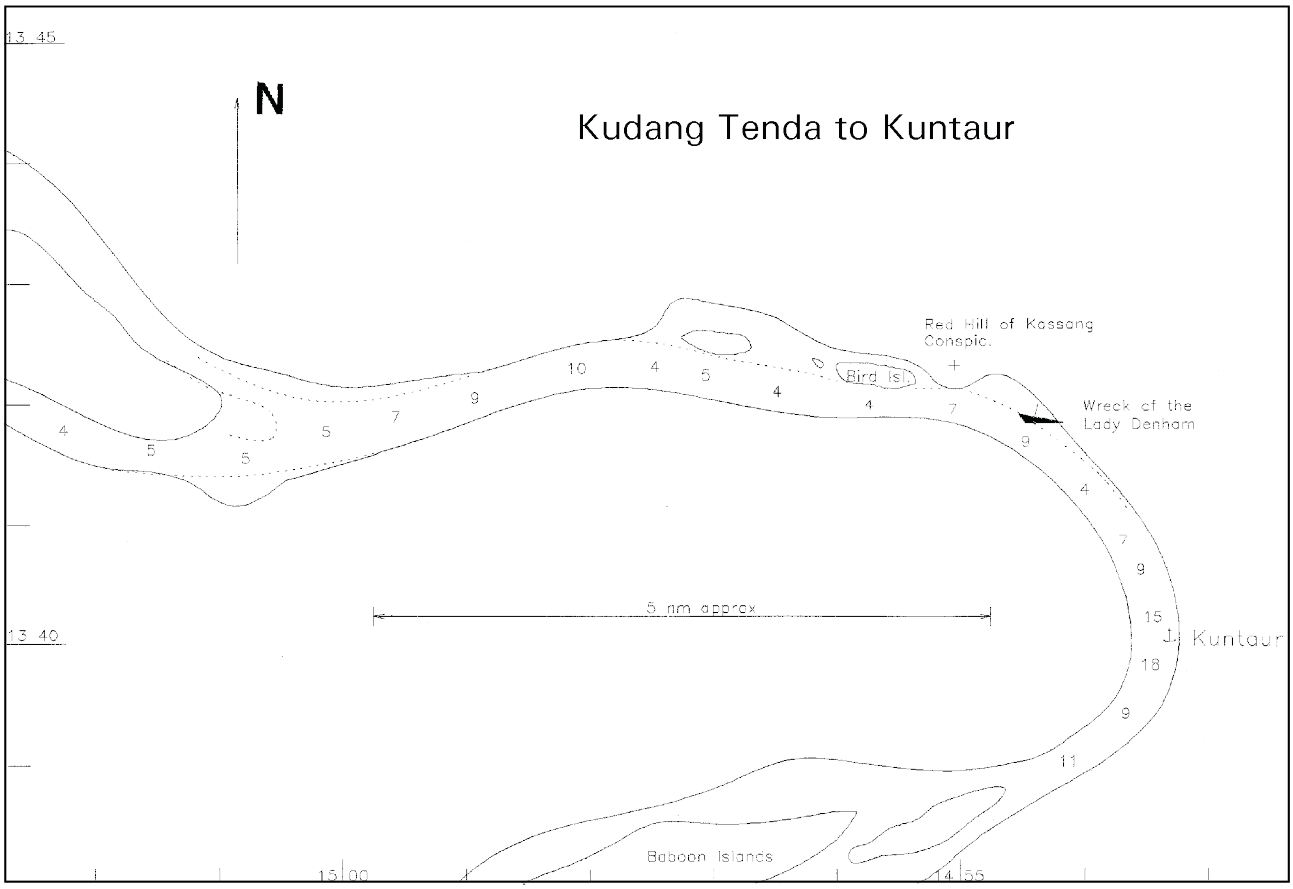
Kau-ur

Kau-ur is only about three and a half miles up river from Balangar, but the holding is much better. Be careful where you anchor because a river ferry calls at the slipway, and groundnut barges use the wharves. It is best to anchor well clear of these facilities because some of these vessels are poorly handled at close quarters.

Kau-ur itself is a place worth stopping at if you need anything. It is close to the north bank road and has a groundnut processing factory. The Coopers report that there is a small concrete slipway suitable to beach a dinghy. Both diesel and petrol can be obtained by sending a 'donkey cart boy' to the petrol station on the road. This can take an hour, but only costs a few dalasi for his services. There are also a few shops with basic provisions.

The people working in the groundnut factory once started their generator to charge a battery for me and let me tie up to their wharf to work on my engine. There are several of these plants along the river and they may all be as helpful, but I have never had cause to stop at another one.

An effect of the fresh water is that there are now a lot more rice fields adjacent to the river, and this seems to have an undesirable effect on the tsetse population. I am also told by reliable sources that you will sometimes see hippos in this section,



Plan 31 Kudang Tenda to Kuntaur

though I have not been fortunate enough to come across them myself.

After Kau-ur the river breaks up into numerous islands and side channels, but the main channel is clearly marked on the chart and is easy to follow. The first stretch as far as Carrols Wharf is fairly quiet, with only a few fishermen in dugouts and the occasional woman in the fields. Those with time to linger might like to anchor and explore some of the small creeks or the shallows behind the islands; the holding is good and it is safe to leave a locked boat. Remember not to approach hippos.

The Coopers suggest keeping an eye out for fishing floats strung most of the way across the river with a canoe at one end and a large float at the other, presumably with nets between them.

Carrols Wharf itself is a colourful spot linked by a rough track to several other villages and, eventually, the north bank road. These settlements are more remote from outside contact than those further down river, and your arrival will create a lot of excitement among the children. If you find this a bit galling, which it can be if you want a quiet walk, remember that your arrival is probably the most stimulating occurrence in their lives since the last visiting yacht passed through.

From Carrols Wharf on look out for the exotic Egyptian plover, or crocodile bird as it is often called because it is depicted in ancient hieroglyphics picking the teeth of crocodiles clean. The Gambia is one of the best places to find them, and ornithologists come to this part of the river especially to see them. I do not, however, know if anyone has seen them cleaning crocodile teeth in recent years as the birds themselves rather outnumber the crocs.

After Carrols Wharf you soon come to the group of islands called Deer Islands on the Admiralty chart, though the first and largest is called Pasari Island on the road map. Only the south channel is navigable according to the chart, though I have received a report from a French boat that claims to have travelled around the back of them with nearly 2m of water all the way. I cannot confirm this.

Kudang Tenda is a large, thriving, traditional village where you can get bread and water. There are also stores in Kudang which is about 2.5M south. Kudang Tenda also has several million children, or so it seems, who will swarm all over you when you arrive. Ed Wheeler reports that the son of the headman will give a guided tour of the village. His house overlooks the wharf. Among his treasured possessions are Admiralty Charts of central America, Brazil and the Caribbean, for some reason. Bob and Liz Cooper anchored off the concrete wharf. Lots of children watched their arrival, even setting off in pirogues to meet them. They suggest if you are giving pens, pencils etc to these children, it might be an idea to ask a villager to distribute them to avoid a minor riot.

There are hippos in the channels behind Deer Islands, and you can sometimes find a local fisherman who will take you to see them from Kudang.

Kudang Tenda to Kuntaur

About 4M up river from the last of the Deer Islands is one of the most attractive sections of the river (Plan 31). Around Bird Island, and the unnamed island just before it, the river widens and beyond these islands there are red hills bordering the area. The most conspicuous of these is the Red Hill of Kassang just after Bird Island. It is well worth stopping here to climb this hill for the view of the river it provides –one of the very few places where one can do this. The water is shallow between the islands making, it an ideal habitat for hippos. Ed Wheeler reports that the channel at either end of Bird Island makes a good anchorage, out of the main stream but found holding poor off the beach below the Red Hill.

Just after Kassang is the wreck of the *Lady Denham* which used to carry passengers up and down the river until she went down in 1948. Around the next bend Kuntaur comes into view.

Kuntaur

Kuntaur was once the second port of the Gambia, being the furthest up river that deep-draught trading vessels could go. Now the old colonial building are slowly crumbling and the warehouses stand unused. It has a rundown and dilapidated charm which is echoed in the small diagram on the Admiralty chart.

The U.A.C. wharves marked on the chart refer to the now defunct United African Trading Company which once dominated British trade in West Africa.

The layout of the waterfront has changed little, but the elegant structures and grand designs have been overrun by Africa.

The people are friendly, but there is less available in the town than you would expect for a place of this size. Petrol can be bought from a shop where they store it in plastic containers (not a place for heavy smokers) and diesel can be obtained if you

give them time. You will need an interpreter to explain what you want to the man in the petrol shop, but the local children will be glad to help.

There is a market that can provide bread and some fruit and vegetables and there are a few shops. There is also good water available from standpipes in the town.

About three and a half kilometres from Kuntaur is Wassu, famous for its prehistoric and enigmatic stone circles. These are mentioned in all the guide books, but few tourists actually make it this far. If

you are feeling energetic it could make a pleasant early morning stroll to see them, or get a ride on a donkey cart. They are fascinating because of the mystery which surrounds them rather than their grandeur.

It is also worth making this trip because of the rapid contrast in the landscape as you leave the river. In the dry season it comes as a surprise to see how quickly the savannah takes over from the lush riverside vegetation and how unforgiving West Africa can be to its inhabitants.

Kuntaur to Georgetown

This is, in many ways, the most interesting section of the river containing the National Park and the now truly fresh-water flora and fauna. The tide at Georgetown is over 11 hours behind Banjul (+5).

Immediately after Kuntaur is the River Gambia National Park, and you will have to refer to the instructions issued by the harbour master to pass it (Plan 32). Do follow these instructions. An incident when three chimpanzees disappeared, resulted in a visiting yacht which had been anchored close to one of the islands coming under suspicion. It is not possible that the boat in question was involved in smuggling these animals out of the country, but they were probably slack in observing the rules, which reflects badly on them and gives yachtsmen in general a bad reputation.

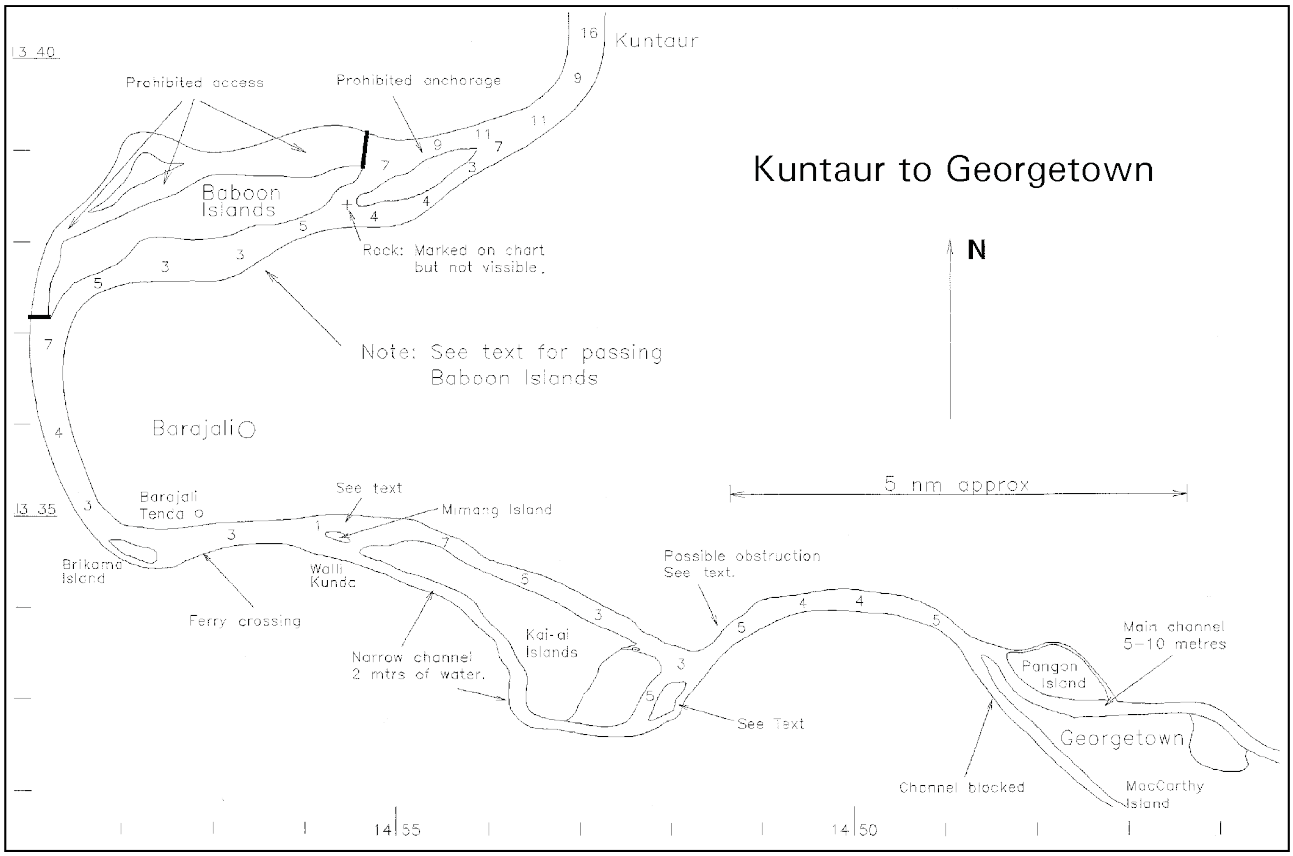
The rules can be summarised as:

1. Stay to the north bank channel when you pass the largest of the Baboon Islands and do not go closer to the island than mid-channel. There are sign posts to indicate the channel, and the restricted area is shown in Plan 32.
2. Do not do anything which might excite or aggravate the animals, and stay well clear of any hippos you might see.
3. Do not go ashore.

The second and third of these points should be obvious to all sensible travellers, but the instructions are strongly worded to emphasise to tour operators to keep a weather eye on their charges. The park was set up for a chimpanzee rehabilitation project but do not count on seeing any chimps, they can be elusive. The area behind the island is also a haven for hippos which are protected there. Ed Wheeler reports that it is theoretically possible to visit the islands via the tourist camp nearby on a supervised tour. Personally I find it enjoyable for the outstanding natural beauty of the area and its rich vegetation. It is also the best spot on the river to observe the West African river eagles which soar overhead as they hunt fish.

You can pass either side of the first island of the group, but if you follow the right-hand channel

See Revisions pg R8



Plan 32 Kuntaur to Georgetown

there are good views behind the island where you may see hippos. Though you can use this channel, you must not anchor in it. There is a rock marked on the Admiralty chart just off the up-river end of this first island but it is not visible, and I have never found it. Stay mid-channel until well past the end of the island and you should have no problems. The Coopers report depths in the channel north of the small island before Baboon Island being much less than charted.

The vegetation is very thick as you pass the main island and it is difficult to see a lot, but when you are past it have another good look behind it for hippos. Bob and Liz Cooper report that the Park Rangers asked for D100 each for tickets to help the chimpanzee project, but were informative and helpful. These rangers told them that low water is the best time to see hippos, which were spotted near the charted rock at the end of Baboon Island. On Sundays the monkeys are fed, and by following the Rangers' boats, they saw chimpanzees, baboons and red monkeys.

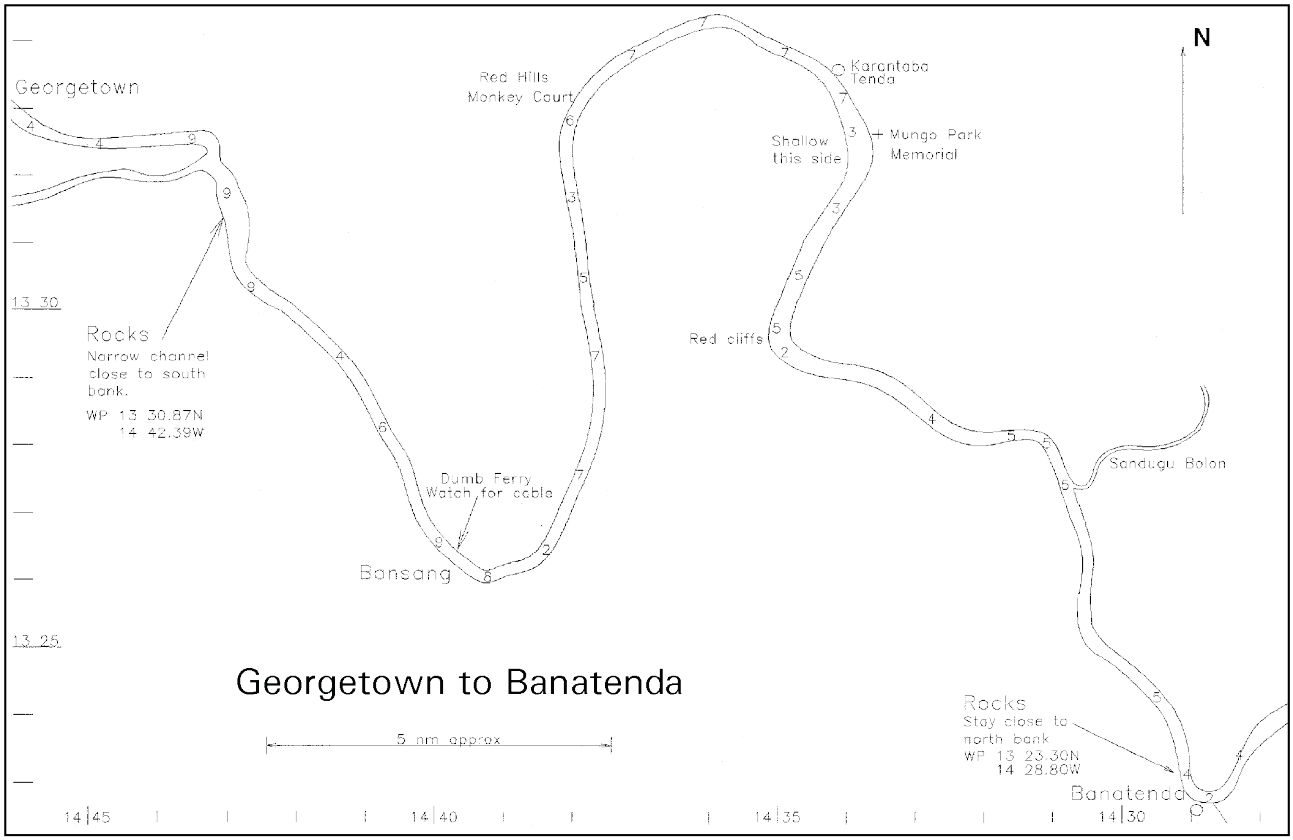
Along the next stretch you will see a prominent mosque tower on the north bank. This is the village of Barajali which was the birthplace of Sir Dawda Jawara, the previous president. Around the next bend just past Brikama Island, which is unnamed on the Admiralty chart, is a ferry crossing linking Barajali to the south bank. This is a good place to stop for a stroll to see the rice-growing project run from Sapu.

The road from the Barajali ferry on the south bank goes through these paddy fields which are fed river water by large pumps. This enables them to get two crops a year, and the sight comes as a pleasant surprise at the end of the dry season when the whole area is lush and green, in contrast to the rest of the country. This used to be known as Jakhaly swamp, and was always a notable place for bird watching; with the constant fresh water supply it has become even more so.

The small island just before Kai-ai Islands which is called Mimang Island on the road map is a favourite nesting site for egrets. It changes colour at dusk from green to white as they come back to roost, reversing the process at dawn. It is worth getting up early to see the spectacle as they take to the air at first light.

It is possible to pass either side of Kai-ai Islands, but the northern channel may be difficult to enter for deep-draught boats. Personally I prefer the north channel for the simple reason that the south channel has the greatest concentration of tsetse flies that I have come across anywhere in the world. I assume that this is because of the extensive rice fields along its bank. You need to decide which route you are going to take before Mimang Island, as it is shallow between the islands. Ed Wheeler also suggests using the north channel. The west (downstream) entrance

See Revisions pg R8



Plan 33 Georgetown to Banatenda

See Revisions pg R8

to the channel is narrow but has plenty of water; however the channel at the east end of the islands has much less depth than shown. He slid over some kind of obstruction in the channel just abeam of the north east end of the largest island.

The Admiralty chart is deceptive at the up-river end of Kai-ai Islands where they break into three separate islands. The first of the three channels shown is narrow and easily missed, so if you are following the south bank channel there appears to be only one small island at the end instead of two. You can pass either side of this island (Plan 32).

I have received several reports of some obstruction in the river just after Kai-ai Islands. No one seems to know what it is, and old river hands who have been travelling through this section for years insist that there was nothing there before. The advice is to stay to the south of mid-river until past the slipway going down to the river from the north bank.

The next island is MacCarthy with the provincial capital of Georgetown (now called Jang Jang Bureh). Though the chart shows that it is possible to pass either side of MacCarthy Island, the south bank route is now blocked both by the cable for a dumb ferry and by low telegraph wires. It is, therefore, necessary to use the north-bank channel passing between Pangon and MacCarthy Islands. A motorised ferry crosses from Georgetown to the north bank, but is clearly visible as you approach. Ed Wheeler reports that there is an overhead power-line immediately upstream of the ferry crossing. This is supposed to have 16m clearance but locals say it has sagged considerably. This effectively bars the river upstream of Georgetown for any other than the smallest sailing yachts.

Georgetown

Nowhere is the commercial decline of the river more obvious than at Georgetown which was an important administrative centre in colonial days, but is now a run-down place. While Kuntaur still seems to teem with life, Georgetown is quiet and its market short of food. Power goes off every day between 12.00 and 18.00, and there are few facilities. Petrol is available from a shop near the market and is stored in plastic containers. In theory it should also be possible to buy diesel from the same place. There is also good-quality water from standpipes in the town, one of which is close to the petrol shop and market.

Opposite the town on the north bank is Jang Jang Bureh Tourist Camp, which is a welcome source of cold beer after many dry miles. This is run by the same management as Lamin Lodge and offers reasonable food and a friendly welcome. It is a nice place to sit in the evening when monkeys come down to the river and climb through the trees. Also recommended by Ed is the Talamanca Bar and Restaurant in the town, run by an enterprising local.

It is possible to use the wharf at Georgetown to take on water, fuel or provisions, but I would advise anchoring off if staying overnight. Ed Wheeler suggests anchoring just off the ferry jetty, leaving enough room for the ferry to turn.

Georgetown to Banatenda

From here on the River Gambia is not for the faint-hearted or for yachts needing clearance of near 16m (see above). There are a number of rocks to be avoided, and you soon find yourself off the end of the Admiralty chart. With sufficient care, however, its navigable and offers the extra reward of going beyond the point where most boats turn back. In addition, the fresh water fauna becomes exciting with turtles and manatee to be seen if you are lucky. The tide is over twelve hours behind Banjul at Bansang.

Plan 33 shows the river from Georgetown to Banatenda. It is fairly easy to navigate bend by bend and, provided you take sufficient care when rocks are approaching, you should have little difficulty.

The first set of rocks are just past MacCarthy Island, and are marked on the Admiralty chart. Take care here because they stretch almost right across the river, leaving only a narrow channel near the south bank. They are not always visible, especially in the rainy season, and the markers shown on the chart are long gone. To make matters worse someone has set rhun palm logs in the river to act as markers, which would be all right if it were not for the fact that they look like rocks themselves and can be mistaken for them.

It is worthwhile anchoring before you get to them and do a reconnaissance in your tender. No written explanation can compare with a first-hand survey using your own eyes and an extended boat hook for soundings.

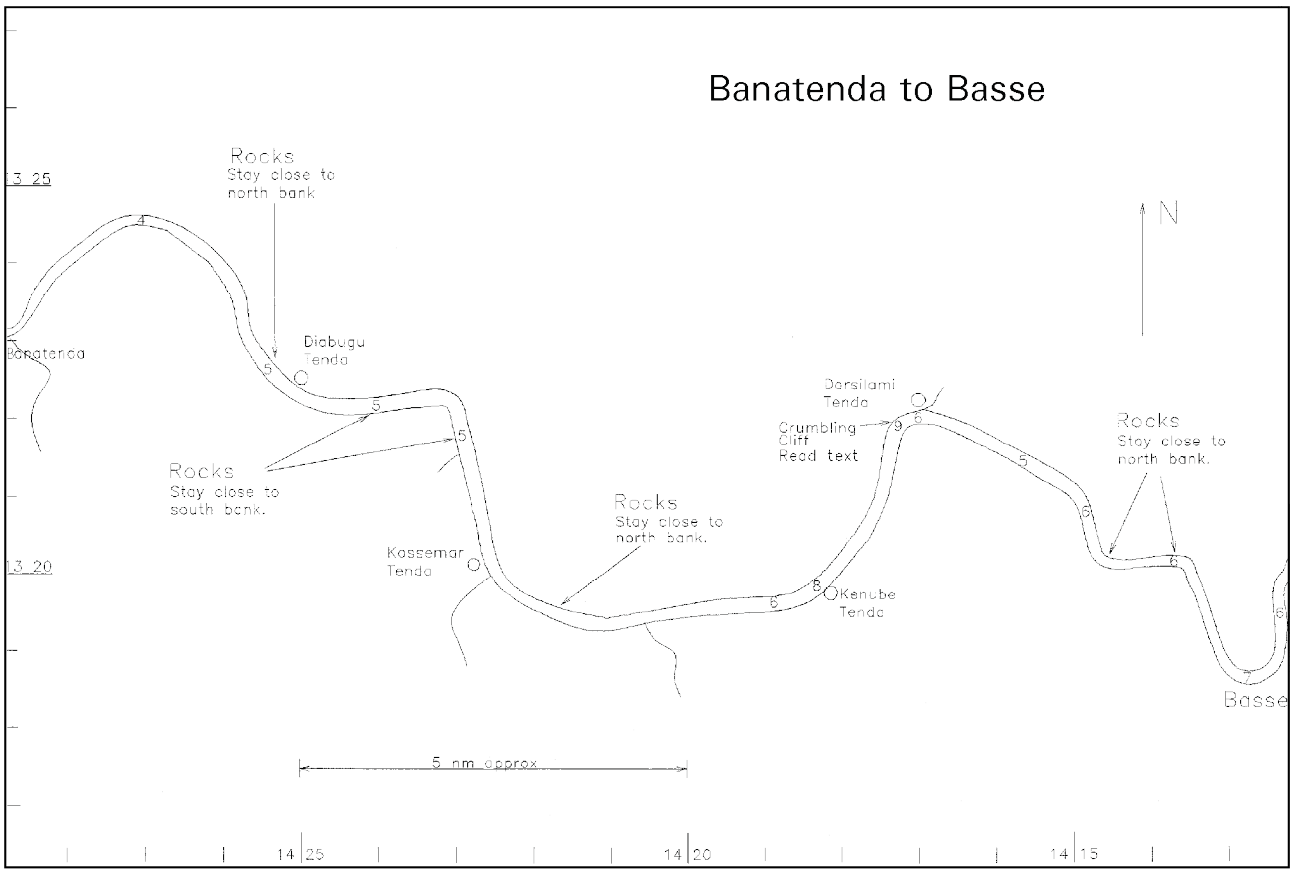
After you leave MacCarthy Island stay close to the south bank and keep a good lookout for the rocks, or currents which indicate that they are just below the surface. Also watch out for birds apparently standing on the water. There is a track coming down to the river almost adjacent to the rocks. At this point you can pass within 10m of the bank and have plenty of water.

Once past these rocks stay mid-river until you reach Bansang.

Bansang

The tide at Bansang is about 12 hours behind Banjul (0).

Keep an eye out for the ferry as you approach. It is another dumb ferry with a cable across the river, but this is not a problem as you can easily pass over it



Plan 34 Banatenda to Basse

when the ferry is on the bank. Only when they are crossing are you likely to foul on it.

Bansang is a thriving commercial centre, being on the road and the river. The town centre and market are near the ferry landing on the south bank. Unfortunately, this seems to be surrounded by a communal rubbish tip which makes it less fragrant that you might wish. There is a road running from the slipway which comes to a T-junction after a two-minute walk. Immediately opposite this junction is the market, and about 50m to the right is the fuel station. This, again, is a shop where the fuel is sold from plastic containers, but they usually have diesel.

Here you will find a far greater supply of fresh fruit and vegetables than anywhere else on the river between Banjul and Basse. Spend a little time wandering around and you will be surprised what you can pick up. There are shops offering a wide range of foods, a couple of bars and you can even get welding jobs done provided you are not expecting too high a standard of workmanship.

There is also a hospital in Bansang which has Chinese and European doctors. Though it may not seem very inspiring when you visit it, this is the best public facility for medical care you will find along the river.

Personally I do not find Bansang a place where I like to linger. There are some pleasant quiet spots just up river where it is preferable to anchor overnight.

The next long bow in the river has no villages before Karantaba Tenda, but is lined with hills, including the evocative sounding Monkey Court. Old hands say that monkeys do hold court on these hills, but I have never seen it, though there are monkeys all around on these quieter stretches of the river. It is still a nice spot to stop below the Monkey Court Hills, however, though the wind can gust strongly down this valley.

There are a lot of nets stretched out across the river on this section and they are usually only marked with small polystyrene floats, so keep a good lookout.

Just past Karantaba Tenda on the north bank is a memorial to Mungo Park. This spot was a trading station, called Pisania in Mungo Park's journal, where he came to learn Mandinka and prepare for his trek into the interior. Apart from the stone obelisk memorial itself there is no other trace of the former station. Curiously, the inscription commemorates his second tragic journey without mentioning the earlier successful one. I like to think

that the explorer would have appreciated this whimsical blending of cultures left in his memory.

The mudflats shown on this stretch on the Admiralty chart seem a little exaggerated. From the Mungo Park memorial stay to the north bank side of mid-stream until you are past Banatenda. Banatenda itself is not easily distinguished except by the sharp bend in the river, but there are rocks running out from the south bank just before it. These do not reach mid-stream and are easily avoided. As you leave the bend make for the south bank side of mid-river.

Banatenda to Basse

The next three sets of rocks are close together (Plan 34). The following notes should get you past them without difficulty, but be prepared to stop and have a good look if you are not certain.

The next rocks are about three miles up river from Banatenda, just before Diabugu Tenda, but before you see the village. Look out for currents in the water as the rocks are not always exposed and stay about 10m from the north bank.

Diabugu Tenda has an old rhun palm jetty which has fallen into disrepair, but is clearly visible and there is a wide track coming down to the river which is handy for landing. It is a short walk to Diabugu, which is an interesting village with potters, weavers and goldsmiths.

After Diabugu Tenda stay close to the south bank side of the river until you have passed the next two sets of rocks. The river turns in a slight northward arc for about two miles before a sharp southward bend. There are rocks mid-river just before this sharp bend, which are often not visible. Stay close to the south bank and you will miss them. The next rocks are just after this bend, but are more prominent; these must also be passed close to the south bank.

From now on stay close to the north bank until you reach Basse. There are more rocks, which are not usually visible, just after the village of Kossemar Tenda, and you will have to stay close to the north bank to pass them. The river bed is rocky just before Darsilami Tenda, where there is a red cliff which is being eroded and falling into the river. It is best to stand a little way off the north bank here, and it is not advisable to anchor.

There are more rocks on the last bend before Basse. Stay close to the north bank from Darsilami Tenda until you are in Basse itself.

Bird Island - Ed Wheeler

Basse

Though a long way from the river, Basse has a proper petrol station, a thriving market, shops, restaurants and bars. Diesel should be available most of the time and good water can be got from the standpipes. It is worth stocking up here for the return journey.

There have been several reliable sightings of manatee in the river near Basse, so keep your eyes peeled for this elusive and endangered creature.

While in Basse do not miss Uncle Peacocks bar. Painted on the outside is the slogan, "A bar with principles - no music." His other principles involve a stubborn refusal to sell you beer if he thinks that it is not cold enough. The place is a tin shack with dirt floor, but there cannot be many like it in the world. Uncle Peacocks is in a back street near the main market, ask anyone for directions.

There is another bar opposite called Basse Bar No 2, which is more lively, but where you are also likely to be pestered by drunks and professional ladies.

The best place to eat in the area is F&B's which is about 2km outside Basse on the Mansajang road. The restaurants in Basse itself are a bit basic, and it is best to eat the local food rather than attempt to order something which they are unlikely to be able to produce.

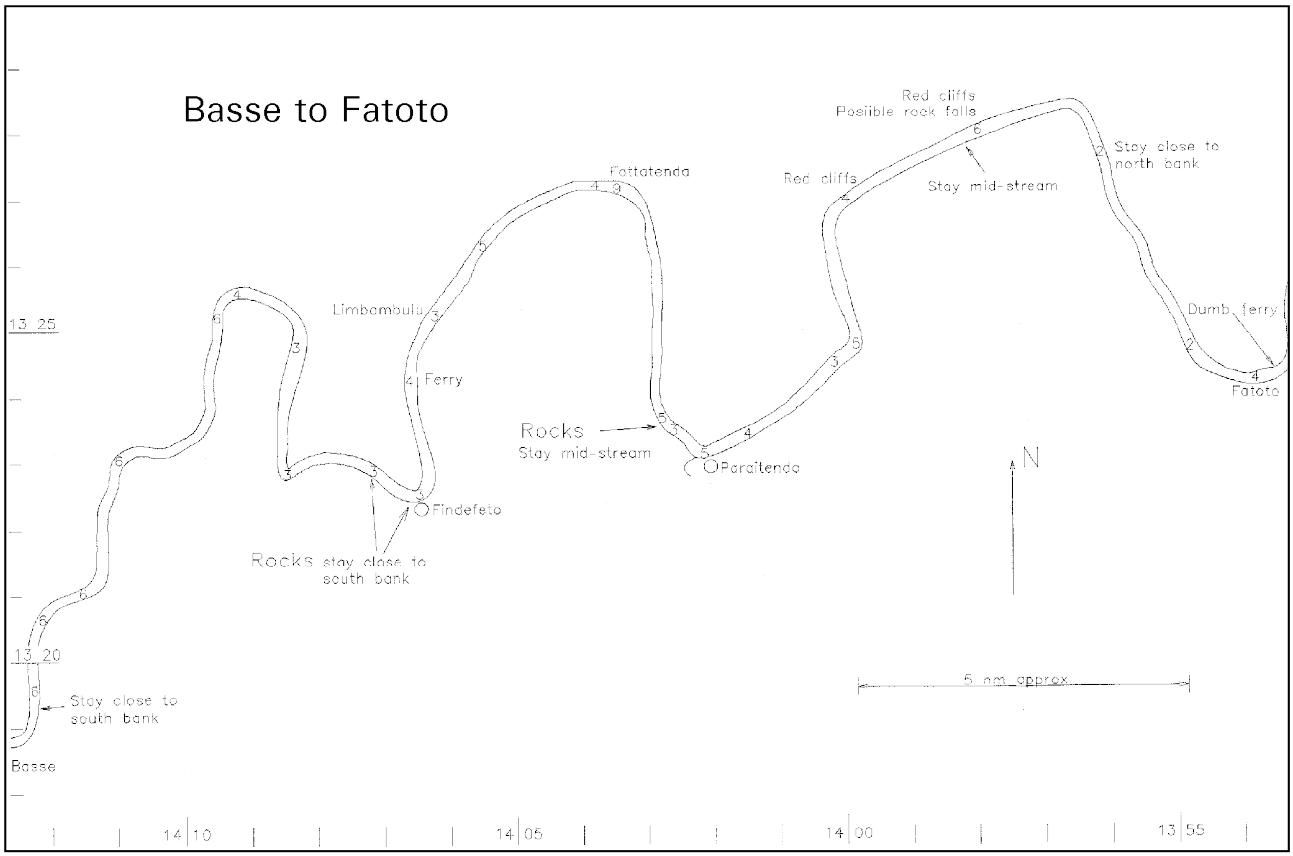
Basse is the closest point most boats get to the wildlife park of Niokolo Koba, which is about half a day's drive across the border into Senegal. Getting there is not easy, however. Try going to the bus station where there are a lot of bush taxis hanging around and negotiate. Be prepared for an expensive trip though.

Basse to Fatoto

Plan 35 shows the river from Basse to Fatoto. This information was obtained originally from a hand-drawn chart of unknown origin which covered from Georgetown to Fatoto. Unfortunately, it contained errors in the lower sections and could not be relied upon. I was not able to check the information above Basse myself, but luckily Rosmarie and Alfred Alecio in *Ironhorse* used my original data and came back with excellent notes including GPS fixes and soundings. I am therefore very grateful to them for their contribution which has been included in Plan 35. At Fatoto the tide is over 18 hours behind Banjul (+6).

Fatoto has a busy market for local produce and by local standards is a thriving place, but it is beyond the metalled road and retains that beyond-the-pale feel.

Few visiting yachts have got this far, though a couple of German catamarans managed to continue past the Barrakunda falls and into Senegal. This may also be possible for shallow-draught monohulls at the right time of year but is, of course, illegal.



Plan 35 Basse to Fatoto

The Casamance

Quick reference

Port of entry:	Ziguinchor (or Elinkine, see text).
Capital:	Ziguinchor.
Languages:	French, Wolof and Jola.
Currency:	CFA
Banks:	Banking facilities in Ziguinchor.
Useful facilities:	Banks, hotels, restaurants etc. in Ziguinchor.
Not Available:	Limited services beyond Ziguinchor. Chandlery.
Main features:	Flora and fauna is more exotic than northern Senegal, making the area popular with French yachts.
Main Problems:	Politically unstable. Unpleasant approach. Large military presence.

Planning

To the French, the Casamance is the most popular and exotic part of their West Africa, but the difficulty of the river entrance has tended to act as a deterrent to other nationalities. In addition, the continued political troubles in the region have severely affected both normal tourism and the number of visiting yachts.

Before planning a cruise in the river it is as well to consider these problems, but Ed Wheeler reports that this did not seem to be causing problems for visitors (in early 2008) and there was no overt military presence.

The first difficulty is the approach, which is the most unpleasant of all rivers covered by this guide. Though there is a buoyed channel, which Ed Wheeler reports is mostly still in place, it runs across the prevailing swell which breaks on shallows to leeward. These lie close to the channel, and a yacht experiencing problems could quickly end up aground and taking a hammering.

The narrow approach channel is also used by all the commercial shipping entering the river. This includes, if running, a twice-weekly Dakar ferry which shows scant regard for small craft and usually passes through the channel and on up river at a minimum of thirteen knots. She also anchors off Karabane each way. If possible avoid her.

When planning your passage, make sure that you will be approaching the Casamance in daylight. The passage from Oyster Creek to an anchorage in the Lower Casamance takes me about 20 hours, assuming a brisk north-westerly. Few cruising yachts would do it in daylight. This fits in neatly if you have a mid-afternoon ebb tide to leave the Gambia so as to catch the flood entering the Casamance the following morning. The main disadvantage of a night passage is that, on the route shown in Plan 36, you will be passing through fishing grounds full of poorly lit pirogues. If you should end up arriving at the entrance at night I would stand off and wait for daylight. I have not attempted it at night, but the markers do not look as though they have maintained lights. Also the swell can obscure No. 8 buoy from your position at No. 6 (Plan 37). This is not a stretch of water where you would want to be in any uncertainty about your position. The charted light at Djogue is clearly visible, however. I have never sailed directly from Dakar to the Casamance, but would plan a 36-hour passage if I did.

Warning: Jacques Roullier reports that the buoyed channel approach to the Casamance was not being maintained in March 1997. This may be a temporary problem or due to a more serious collapse of the Senegalese infrastructure. At the time No. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 4b buoys were all missing but No. 5 and 6 were in place. He reports that it is possible to trace the old channel with GPS or by skirting the visible shallows to pick up No. 5 and 6 buoys. Ed Wheeler reports that, in early 2008, the buoyage on the River Casamance was mostly still in place and being maintained.

However, this is a difficult and unpredictable approach, and can be very unpleasant in a heavy swell. I would advise being prepared to stand off to wait for suitable conditions to cross the bar or

See Revisions pg R9

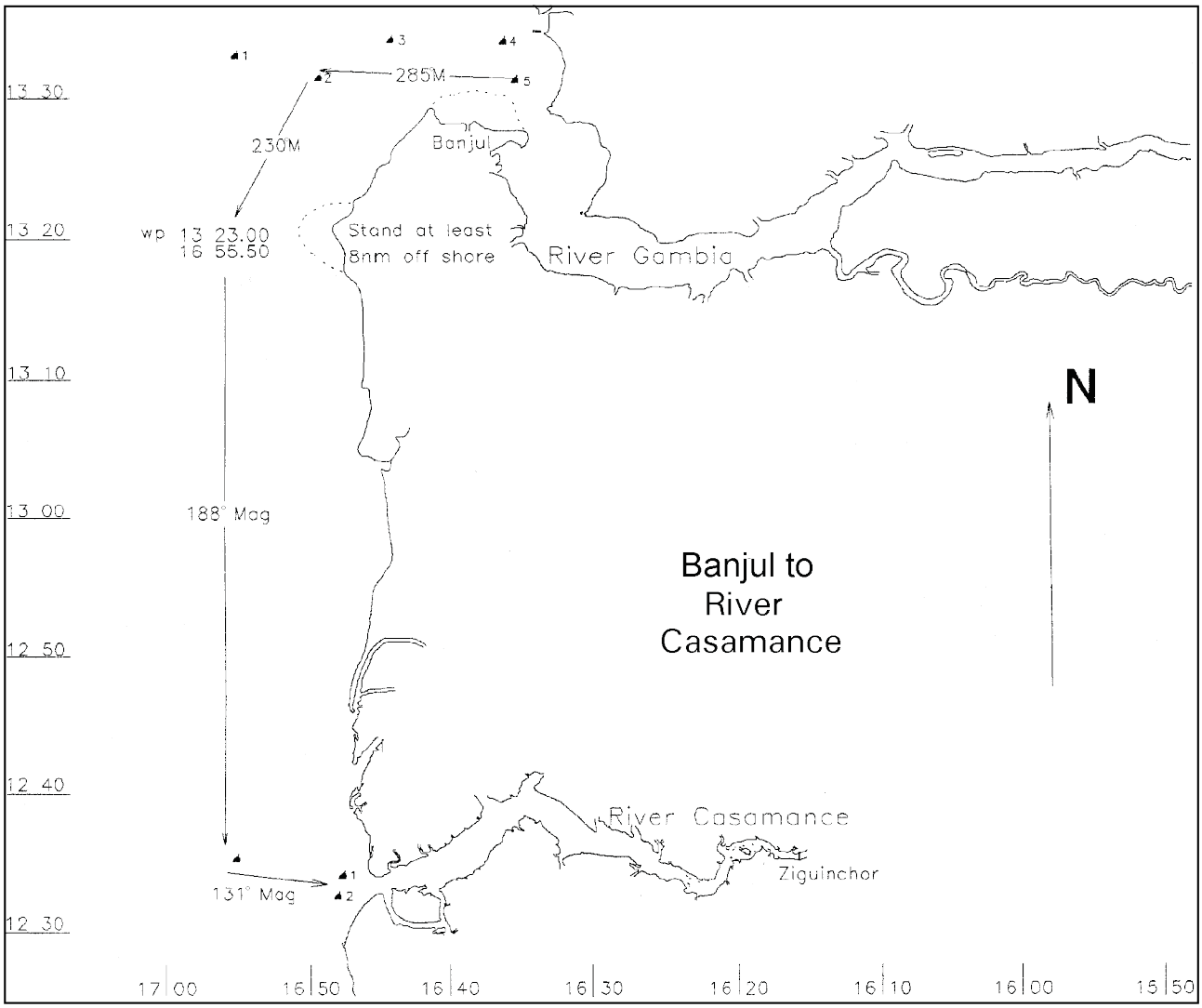
possibly head south for an alternative anchorage if conditions are poor.

Difficulties with the entrance and shipping have not deterred the many yachts that have enjoyably visited the region over the years, but continued political unrest has had a pronounced effect. The Casamance is mainly inhabited by the Jola, a proud race with strong traditions who do not take lightly to being ruled by the predominantly Wolof government in Dakar. This has inevitably led to unrest, and there has been an active separatist movement which has been fighting government forces for some years now.

Since 1995, when four French tourists who had hired a car and driven off into the bush disappeared, with rebel involvement suspected, the ailing tourist industry has been killed off almost completely. Though this can be a blessing in some ways, it does mean that many services have closed down and you may find more difficulty getting provisions than is indicated here.

Moving on to practical considerations, it is best to go to Ziguinchor to check into Senegal before exploring the lower reaches. The reason for this is that, unusually for West Africa, there is a policeman at Elinkine who will come on board and check your papers. If they are not in order you will have to go through the checking-in through Elinkine palaver, which is an option some crews take by choice, but which I have avoided for reasons which will become clear. Official procedures in Ziguinchor are not too onerous by local standards and are laid out in this chapter.

Elinkine, on the other hand, used to have only one policeman, the indomitable Mr Nyang. I had been told that he will board boats in both Elinkine and Karabane to check papers. So I avoided going near either until I was sure that mine were above board. I had returned to Ziguinchor on my way back from Bissau and left the boat there with a Serer guard, who I recruited from the Gambia and knew well. I left him with the ship's papers and impressed on him the importance of keeping them safe.



Plan 36 Banjul to River Casamance

Unfortunately, I did such a good job of this that when I returned to the boat and he went back to Banjul he left with them very securely in his bag. I realised this as we arrived at Elinkine and, expecting Mr Nyang any minute, quickly forged a document by filling some of the ship's details on the tear out warranty section in the back of my Autohelm manual (in my defence I must explain that I had been living in West Africa for nearly ten years by this time). For two days there was no sign of Mr Nyang but, living in a house on the beach, he had been able to observe us and pounced on the third day. I had to row him out to our boat where he gave the contents a professional sleuth's scrutiny until he spied the fridge, and announced his liking for cold beer. Suitably revitalised, he turned to our passports and ships papers, the details of which he carefully wrote down on a piece of paper I provided along with a rather fine pen which I used to write up my log. Crucially, we had the necessary stamps in our passports to say we had gone to immigration in Ziguinchor. After completing the details on my 'ship's papers' he looked me in the eye and clipped my pen neatly into the top of his pocket with the air of a man who knows he's just been given false documents. I leave the reader to draw his own conclusions from this story.

To end this section on a more positive note, it is worth remembering that the Casamance enjoys a rich natural diversity, far more abundant than the northern regions. The savannah has given way to a land with forests where the inhabitants' lives are still regulated by nature and their beliefs are openly animist. This is more the Africa of popular imagination than the sparse savannah of the north. Personally I would always try to visit the Lower Casamance when sailing in West Africa if only because dolphins are more numerous than anywhere else I have ever been. On one occasion when we were forced to motor in very still river conditions we had incredible numbers swimming with us. I think they must get bored when there is no movement in the water, and a small boat offers a distraction. Whatever the reason, we had them with us until we were almost at Ziguinchor and became so familiar with them that we could tell many of them apart.

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Banjul to the Casamance

Before leaving the Gambia you should anchor off Half Die to clear Ports and Immigration.

Plan 36 shows the route from Banjul to the Casamance. Follow the River Gambia buoys to No. 2 buoy, or cut across from No. 5 if draught permits. From No. 2 buoy head on a bearing of about 230°M to stand well off from the Bijol Islands. These are coral, and may be growing. In Plan 36 I have shown a waypoint eight miles off Bald Cape to allow for the fact that the islands are normally in your lee. All bearings south are taken from this waypoint, which has the advantage of being well inside the shipping lanes, but the disadvantage of taking you through the main fishing areas.

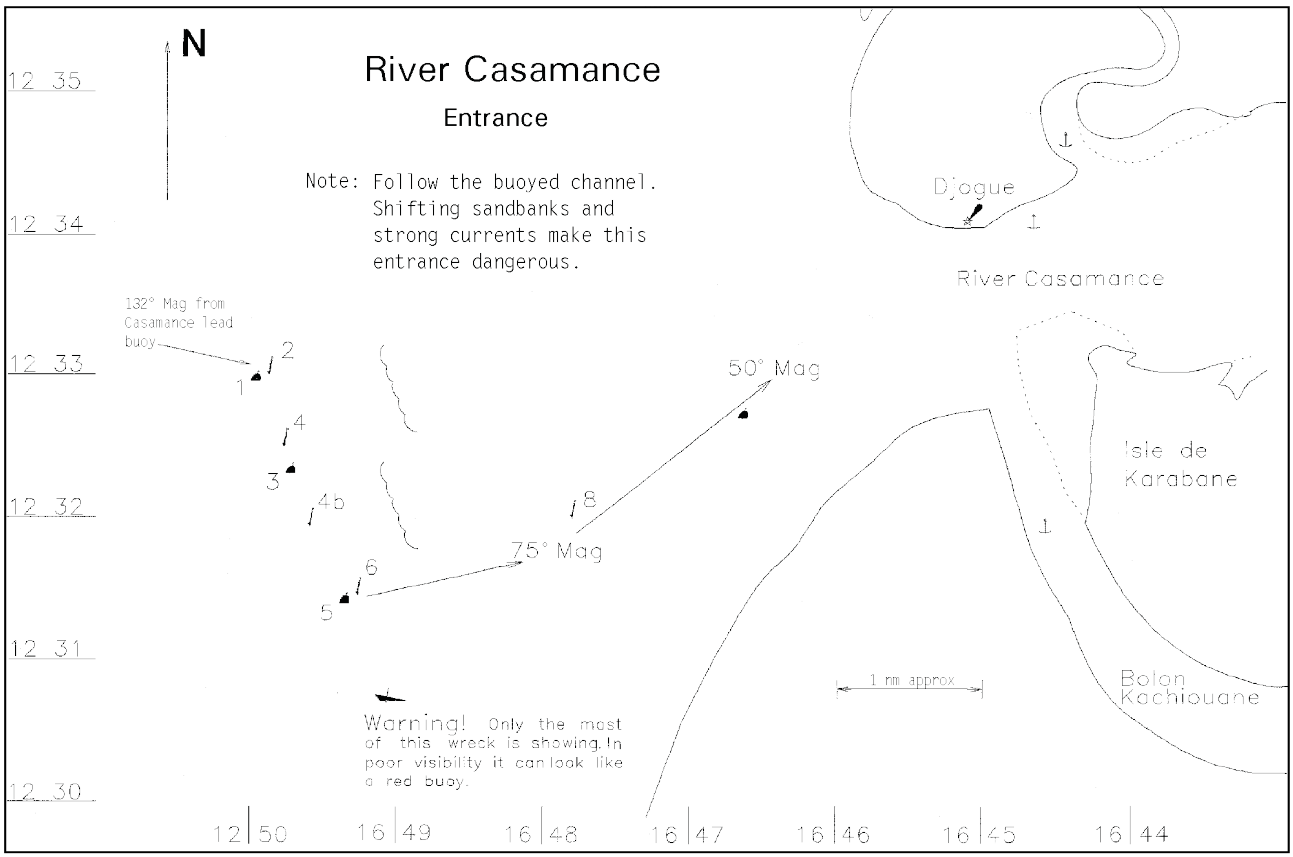
The bearing of 188°M from the waypoint should allow you to pick up the Casamance lead buoy. There are no large rivers on this stretch of coast, so cross-currents do not have a great deal of effect until you approach the Casamance. Personally, navigating on GPS, I head straight for No. 1 & 2 buoys (note change of No.1 buoy's position as below) provided visibility and weather permit, but a brief glimpse at the chart will indicate that some caution will be required. See warning note on page 71.

As stated in the planning section, the Casamance does not have a pleasant approach. Plan 37 shows the channel as it was in 1995 when I used it many times, but remember that the buoyage may not be maintained and as this estuary is constantly changing it could alter.

Ed Wheeler reports that there are three possible passages across the bar: the Passe du Nord, the Passe Mediane and the Passe du Sud. Only the Passe Mediane is buoyed. The large Dakar ferry uses the Passe du Nord, so it must have plenty of water. I used to motor through this channel with an anchor ready to drop at the first sign of trouble. As previously stated, if something were to go wrong you would have very little time to spare before you would be aground to leeward.

Ed Wheeler reports that on the approach, the Safe Water buoy shown on the Admiralty Chart in 16°33'.0N 16°49'.7W is missing. The No 1 channel buoy is 1 mile south of the position shown. Its position in January 2008 was 12°32'.5N 16°50'.0W. There is then a buoyed channel leading across the bar, with four pairs of pillar and can buoys. The final buoy to starboard is a red can with two balls, which may mark a wreck shown on the chart, no longer visible above water. From this, follow a course of 050°M until you pick up the old No.8 red pillar buoy. This is used to mark the inshore end of the buoyed channel and care should be taken not to shape a course for this buoy until inside the bar. Leave the old No.8 200m or so to port and you should shortly sight a starboard hand lateral buoy, which marks a submerged wreck and also a 3.5m bank.

Leave this green buoy to starboard and then you can look for an anchorage and a well-earned rest. Anchoring off the beach at Djogue offers shelter from the prevailing sea, but is infused with the smell of drying fish. The 3m contour is 50-100m off the beach and holding is good in sand. Djogue is covered later in this chapter, but if you go ashore it is worth noting that it is well known for its jiggers (sand fleas) so make sure you wear good shoes.



Plan 37 River Casamance Entrance

It is possible, depending on the state of the tide, to get a very snug anchorage in Boulababéne, the creek just up river from Djogue (Plan 43). Though an improvement, you are not completely free of the negative aspects of Djogue here and Ed Wheeler reports that they found depths too shallow to enter this creek at half flood.

My own preference is the easily accessible Bolon Kachiouane, behind the Ile de Karabane on the south bank. It is accessible at all states of the tide (Plan 44), but strong converging currents and the prevailing swell can make the entrance very choppy. It may also be necessary to get well into the creek in rough weather to get a really snug anchorage. There are depths of 8-12m inside the bar.

Ed Wheeler reports that if you are entering Bolon Kachiouane on the way back down the river, take great care, as the bank extending north and west of the north west tip of the Isle Karabane is now shallower and more extensive than shown. If entering from upstream, go right past the entrance in midstream until Pointe Nikine bears approximately 145M before turning into the point, which should be held close aboard until inside the channel and depths have increased.

The River Casamance

Plan 38 shows the River Casamance and the associated navigable creeks covered in this section. Like the other large rivers along this coast, there are more channels to explore than could possibly be covered by this book.

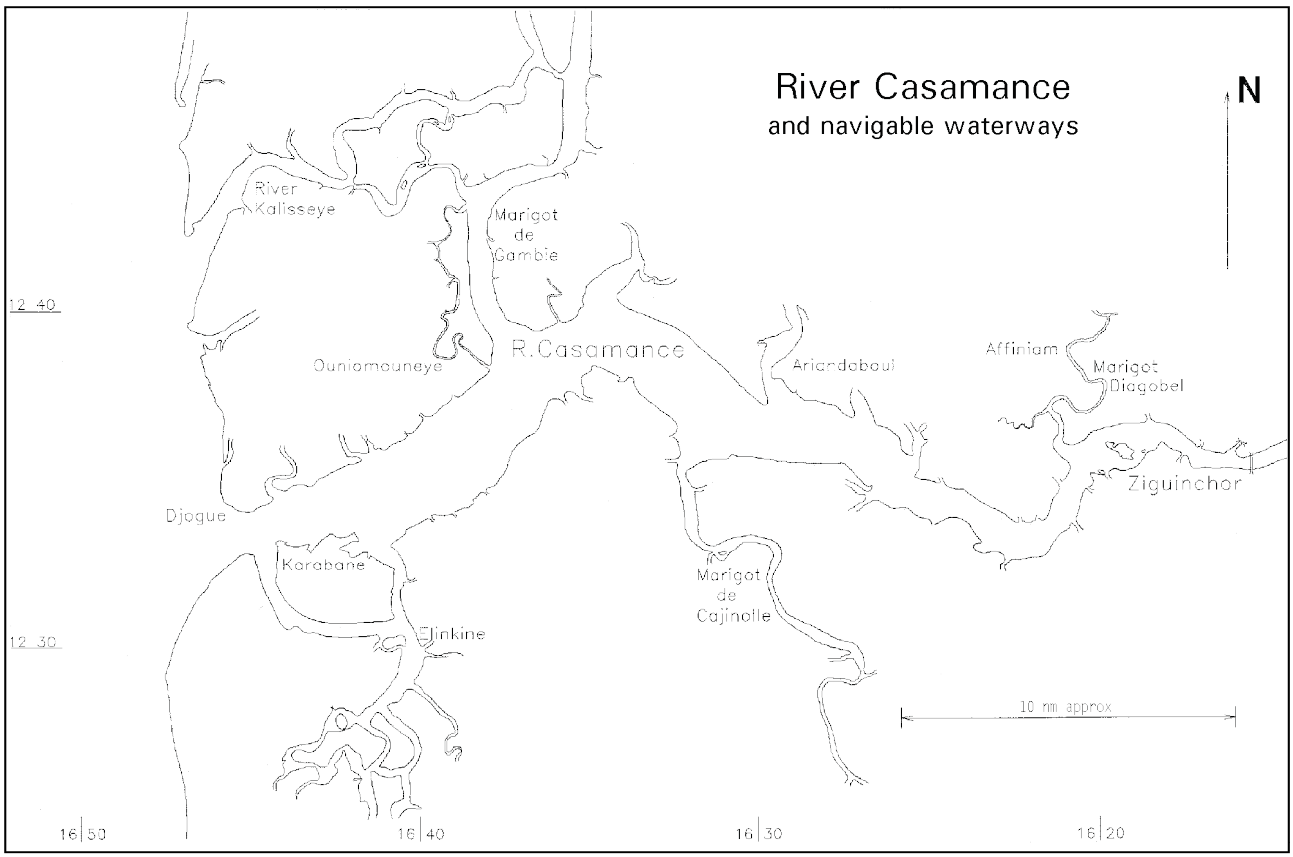
Djogue to Ziguinchor

As you should visit Ziguinchor to clear Ports and Immigration before exploring the river I have covered this first.

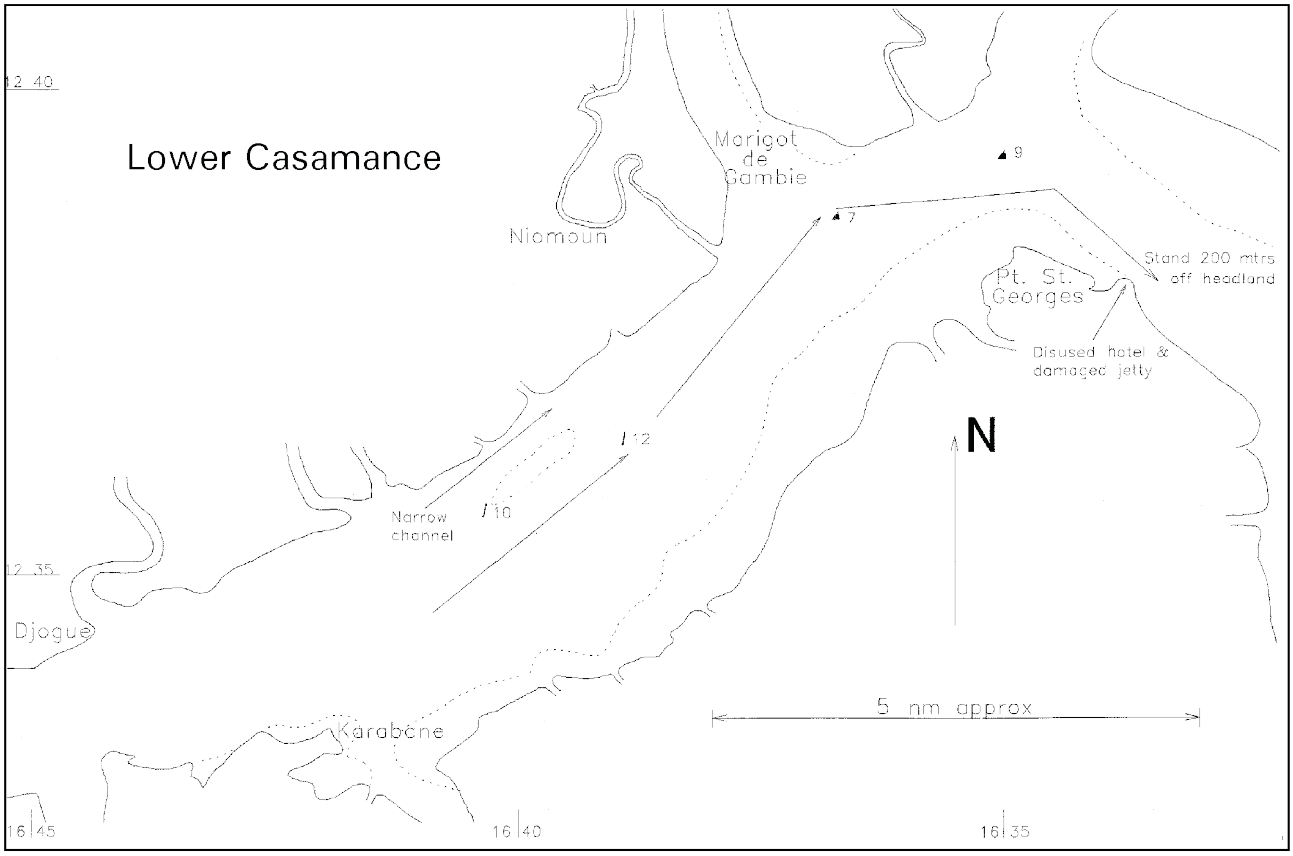
The out-going stream off Djogue can be as much as 2¾ knots and 2 knots off Karabane, so it will be necessary to use the tide. The flood tide is not as strong as the ebb, but even so fast passages can be made over the 35M to Ziguinchor with a spring tide behind you.

Leave red, even-numbered, buoys to port and green, odd-numbered, buoys to starboard travelling up river. Though the lower reaches of the river are wide, and navigation easy, it is necessary to keep a good watch because of commercial shipping (see planning) and local fishermen who present the usual problems of nets and floats in the channel. When travelling up river note the following points:

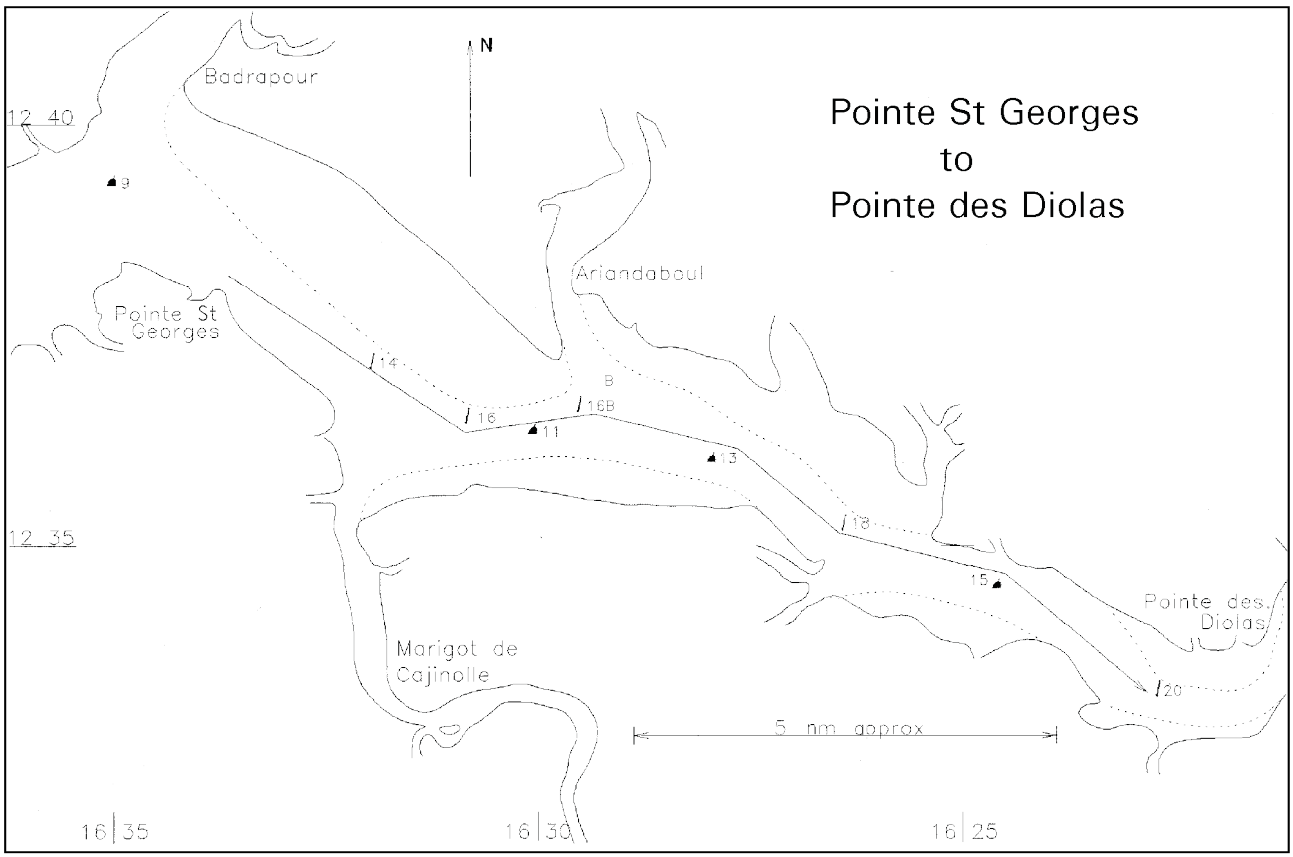
1. Ed Wheeler reports that the odd numbered (starboard hand) buoys have in some cases been



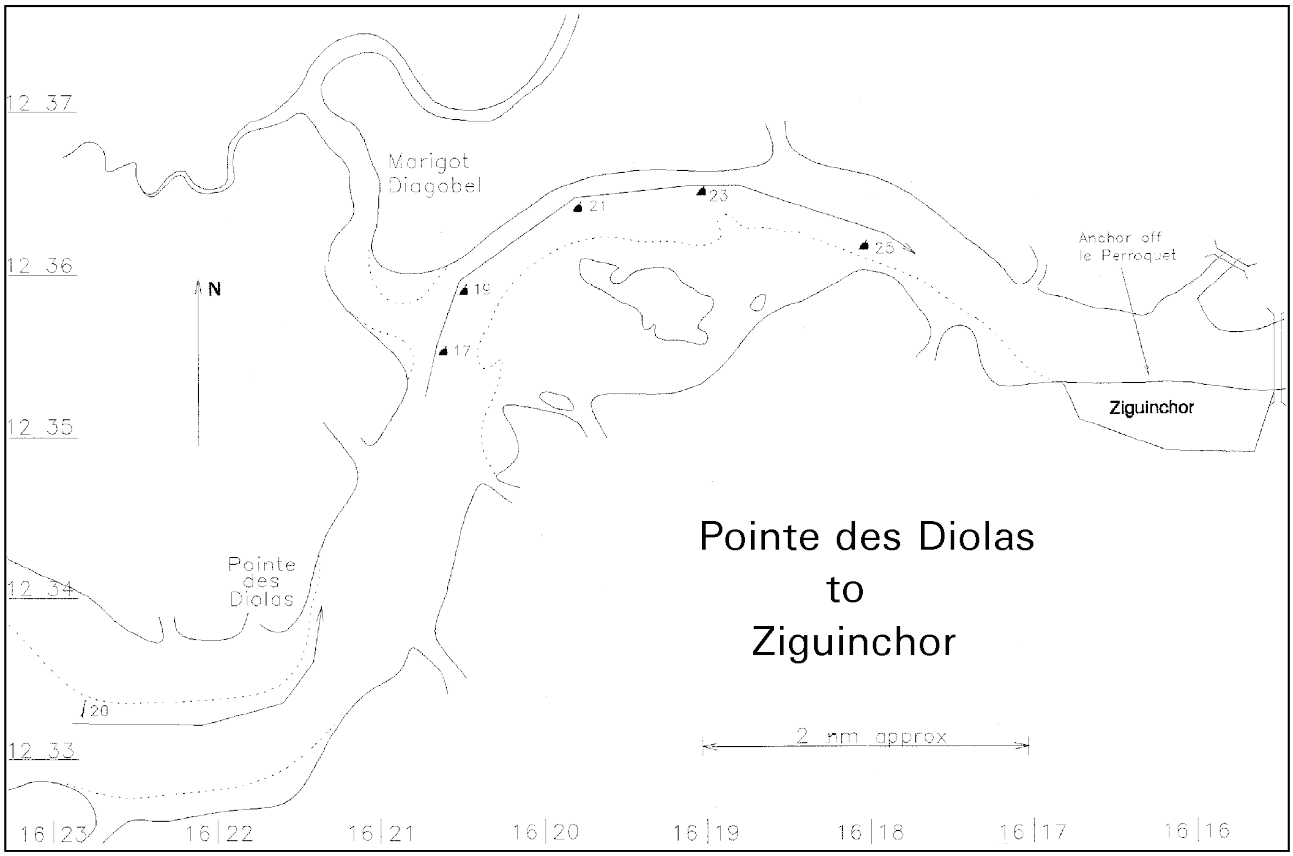
Plan 38 River Casamance and navigable waterways



Plan 39 Lower Casamance



Plan 40 Pointe St Georges to Pointe des Diolas



Plan 41 Pointe des Diolas to Ziguinchor

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moved to reflect changes in the channel but it is generally well marked.

2. The buoy shown on the Admiralty chart marking a wreck off Ile de Karabane is no longer there. I have no idea if the wreck remains.

3. There is a 5m channel close to the north bank inside No. 10 and 12 buoys, but this would be too narrow to sail to windward. With the wind on or aft of the beam or under power, however, it is a useful alternative if the ferry is expected (Plan 39).

4. The wide bend after No. 7 buoy can be cut off by most yachts, but watch the echo sounder. Pointe St Georges is a low mangrove headland which you should leave about half a mile to starboard, but the next headland is clearly distinguishable and you can pass within 200m of this. From a distance you can see tall trees, some buildings and a damaged jetty. (In March 1997 Jacques Roullier reported that No. 9 buoy was lying horizontally and was hardly visible.)

5. Stick to the channel as you pass No. 14 and 16 buoys (Plan 40). Ed Wheeler reports No. 16 buoy was missing in 2008, and No. 16b has been moved a little upstream to the edge of the bank south of Pte Djougoute.

6. There is an uncharted red buoy close to No. 11 buoy. Pass between these two buoys (the extra buoy is useful if entering Ariandaboul, covered later).

7. Take care not to wander momentarily the wrong side of either No. 19 or 20 buoys. When they put these in place to mark the edge of the channel they were not joking.

8. After No. 20 buoy stay the same distance from the north bank until you are well around the bend and can see No. 17 (Plan 41).

9. Between No. 19 and 25 buoys there is some room on the inside of the bend if you should wish to get out of the way of larger vessels. When it shoals, however, it is a steep bank.

10. Ziguinchor should be clearly visible as you come off the bend, and both the town and bridge are well lit at night.

As you approach Ziguinchor look out for Le Perroquet, just before the main port, where other yachts will probably be anchored. The name of this bar is brightly painted on a wall facing the river. Get in as close as you can to allow for large shipping using the channel. There is not a lot of room if there are many boats trying to anchor, and the holding is not that good in soft mud. The result is the French habit of laying a lot of chain to compensate for light anchors, a habit which I have observed results in chaos when a strong wind blows. The water is quite deep and you will need to anchor in 8-10m, wherever you find a space. After you have anchored, watch how the other yachts swing on the turn of tide and look out for an afternoon blow. Be prepared to move if necessary.

There is an alternative anchorage down river off the main fishing beach. However, security is a major problem at Ziguinchor and a crowded anchorage does help.

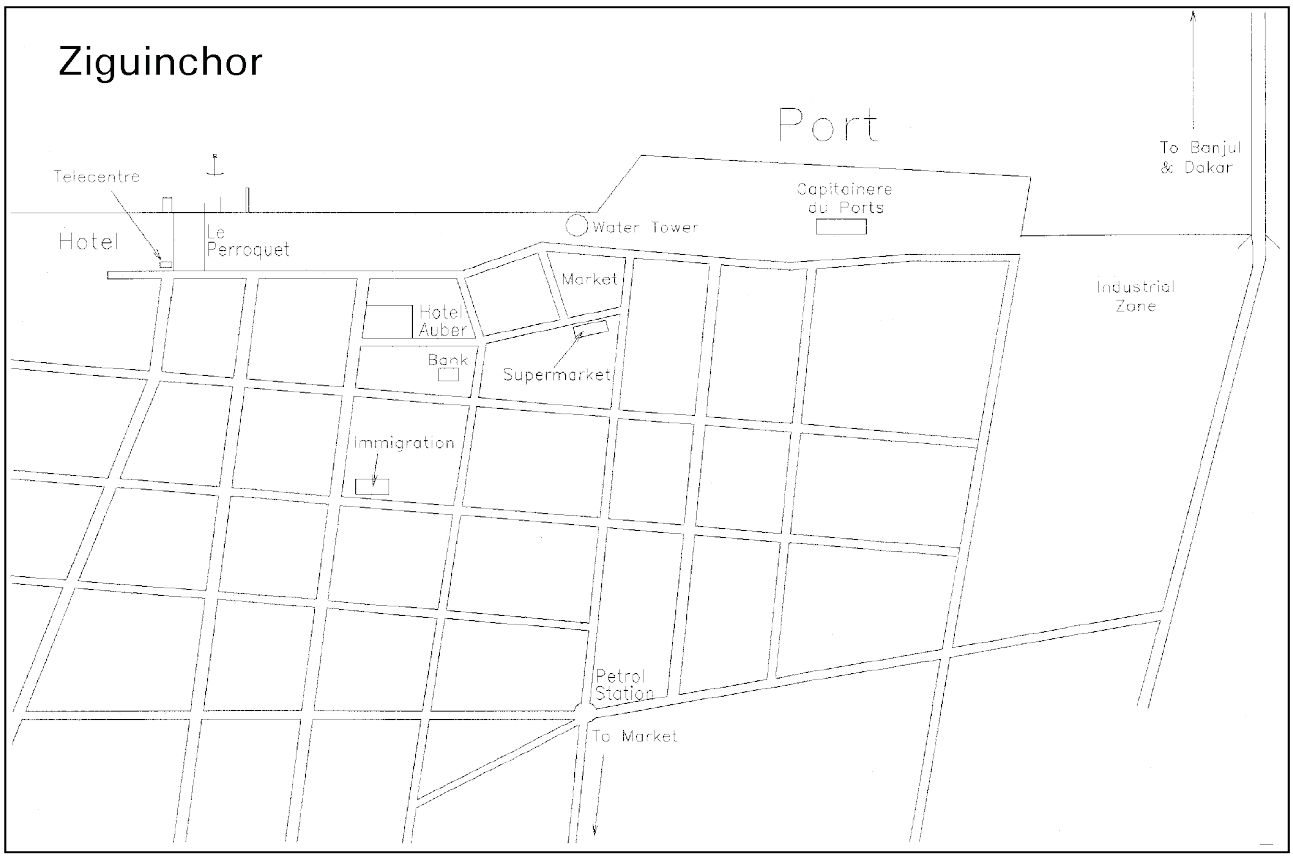
Jacques Roullier and Ed Wheeler report that immediately down river from Le Perroquet there is a hotel which has a jetty with a small pontoon and deep water alongside and a fresh water tap. They don't seem to mind people leaving dinghies there. A visiting yacht came alongside there to take water, the only place in West Africa Ed wheeler saw where this seems to be feasible. It would be courteous to massage the hotel management a little for the use of their facilities, although no charge was sought by them while Ed was there. This may be a more pleasant landing stage than Le Perroquet, especially at low tide.

Ziguinchor

Ziguinchor (Plan 42) is the capital of Southern Senegal as well as being the centre of the Casamance region. It is a major cross-roads and, by African standards, an industrial city. Do not be taken in by the talk in some tourist guides about French colonial architecture and tree-lined avenues. They still exist, but the main impression of the city is not one of elegance.

The first thing to concern yourself about is security. Thefts from yachts are common and, with so many pirogues passing through the cluttered anchorage, constant vigilance is required. Do not leave anything of value lying on the deck. Anchoring as close to Le Perroquet as possible does offer some protection as the place is a popular restaurant and there is usually someone there, but do not imagine that this is enough. At night I bring my dinghy on board and lash it down tightly. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that when I left my boat unguarded for a week I hung a local *Juju* (a magical charm) on the boom which ensured our security.

Le Perroquet itself is one of Ziguinchor's saving graces. It offers a landing stage, good food at reasonable prices and a convenient place where crews can sit around over a cold beer and exchange yarns (I mean useful information). The only drawback is the landing stage. Row up to the restaurant and tie your dinghy up to the railings, then climb up the wall and over the railings. This is normal practice, and has to be conducted with as much nonchalance to the discharging sewer as possible. Tie up to the left of the bar as you approach from the river, as this is the furthest point from the sewer. Also, at low tide, you might find yourself wading through soft mud. In these conditions it is best to tie up to one of the pirogues and walk along it to get to the restaurant. There are easier places to go ashore but when you are tied up to the restaurant your dinghy is secure.



See Revisions pg R9

Plan 42 Ziguinchor

Christian, the patron of Le Perroquet, is happy for you to fill water canisters from his garden tap provided you frequent his restaurant. You can have a shower and rooms are available for crew changes. Christian can arrange for one of his girls to do laundry, and incoming calls and mail can be directed through the bar.

All told the place is almost like a yacht club without mooring fees, though Christian himself will take pains to point out that this is not what he is running. The contact details are:

Le Perroquet, Rue de Commerce ,
Quartier Escale, BP 307
Ziguinchor
Tel: +221 33 991 23 29
www.leperroquet.net

Before discussing formalities and services in Ziguinchor I should explain that the map of the city shown in Plan 42 has been drawn up from an old sketch and my own observations. For some reason there does not seem to be an accurate map of Ziguinchor in existence and all those I have seen have errors. I have produced this map which should enable you to find most of the services required by visiting yachts, but cannot guarantee that there are no inaccuracies.

Formalities in Ziguinchor are not too difficult by local standards, but if you find that you need help speak to Christian or one of the French yachts at Le Perroquet. Because I was leaving the boat at Ziguinchor and returning to the Gambia, my situation was a little more complicated than most. But the crew of a French boat that had spent some time in the Casamance had got to know the immigration official quite well and came with me to sort things out. This was even achieved without the customary exchange of CFA. However, as things have continued to deteriorate in the region this might all have changed.

First you must report to the Ports which is easily found. Leave Le Perroquet and turn left, following the road past the market until you come to a rather run-down two-story building with “Affaires Maritime” and “Capitainerie du Ports” painted on the front in large black letters. Nothing inside this building seemed very organised, and the best advice I can offer is to go in and ask for the Capitainerie, or explain what you want to whoever you can find. This did not take long and only involved a small present for the official.

If your French is not good an interpreter might be a good idea for Immigration. The entrance to the Immigration building shown in Plan 42 is in the road running parallel to the river. On the outside of the building in large letters is:DIRECTION DE LA SÛRETÉ DE L’ETAT. 6 EME BRIGADE MOBILE DE SÛRETÉ. The Immigration official sits in a tiny office at the back of this building with a

secretary outside, who spends her time dealing with a small army of Africans with apparently intractable problems. However, you should not have too much difficulty if you explain clearly who you are and why you are there. Make sure you get your passport stamped.

If you are planning an Atlantic crossing from the Casamance, or even if visiting Bissau first, I would do some revictualling in Ziguinchor. However, you will not find the same choice here as in Banjul or Dakar.

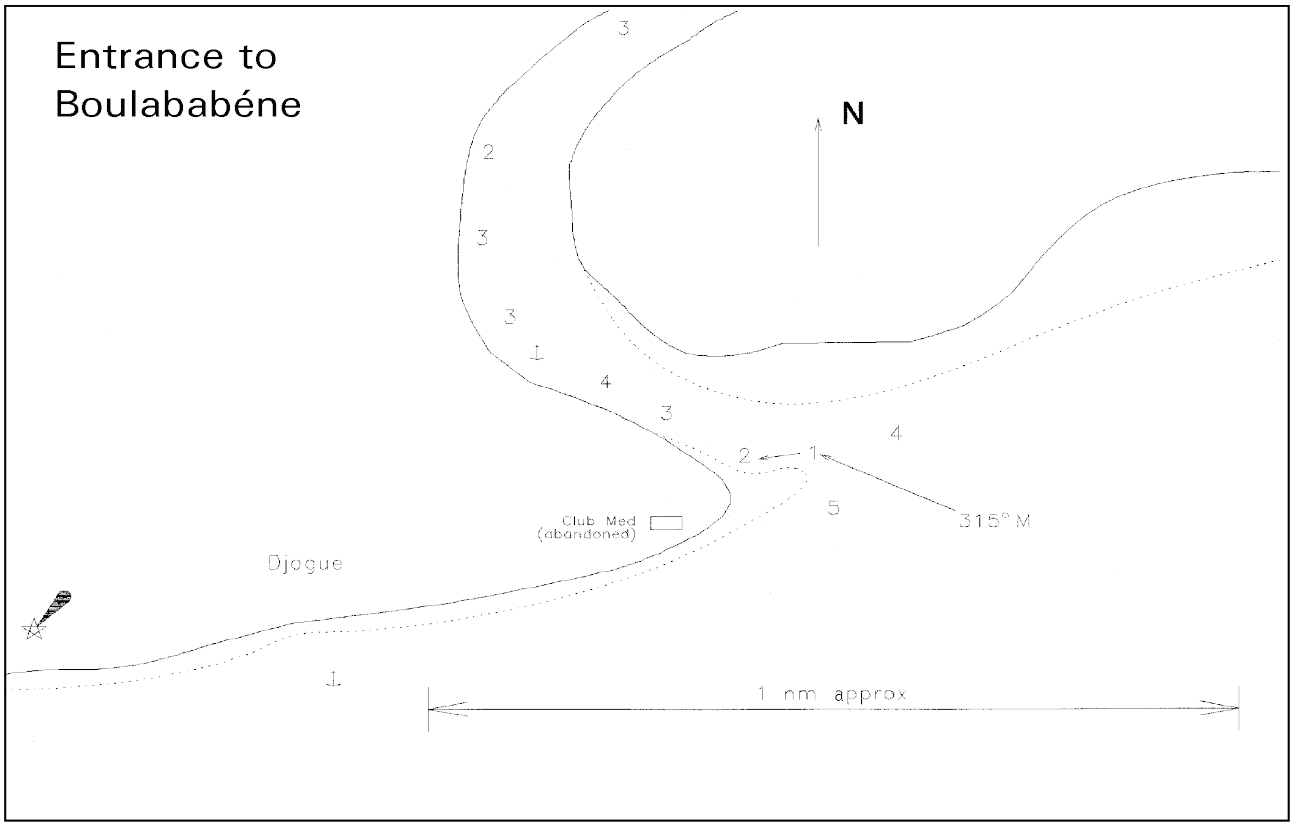
As previously stated, you can fill water tanks at Le Perroquet. Diesel is easily purchased at the garage shown in Plan 42. I find the best way is to walk there with my jerry cans and get a taxi back. There are usually taxis parked by the petrol station. If your fuel requirements are greater than the jerry can standard it is possible to organise a donkey cart boy to take filled oil drums down to the ports and load there. You will have to organise this through the Ports Captain as they will have to find a spot for you alongside the wharf.

There are two markets in Ziguinchor. The one by the ports being a rather poor affair, but the other one is a long way off for carrying large quantities of groceries. However Ed Wheeler found plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables here, not something easily available elsewhere in The Gambia.

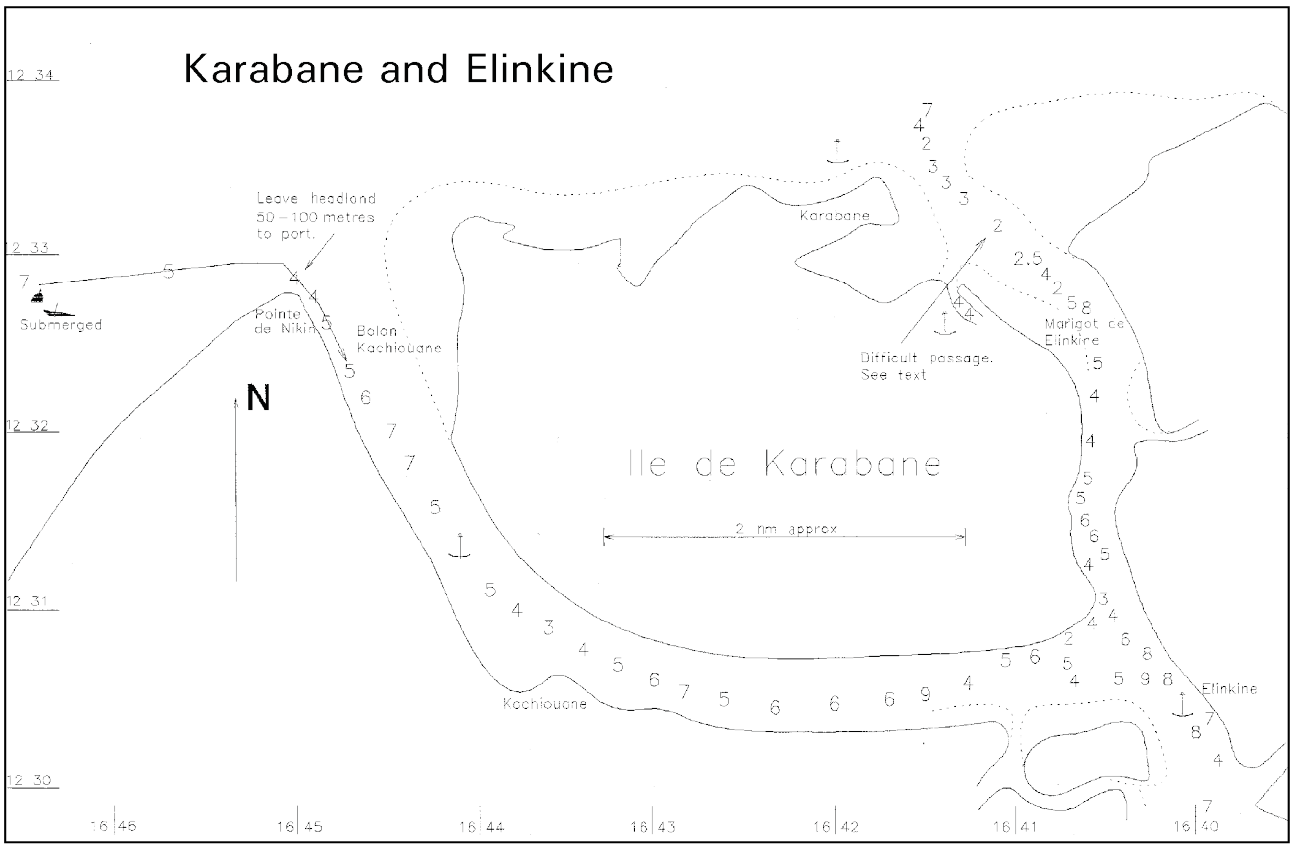
The road opposite the petrol station leads past the Catholic cathedral and on to the large sprawl of a typical West African market. As usual, some caution is to be exercised here, especially if you want to change currency. The only reason for doing so, however, would be if the banks were closed.

If you want to change sterling, euros or dollars do it in the bank. I have shown the most convenient and versatile bank in Plan 42. You can get money on credit cards here as well as by changing currency. The drawback is that it is always busy and a bit chaotic. We have also observed in this bank that the well dressed and polite visitor is dealt with more efficiently than a wild looking crew member who threw his comb away when he left 'civilisation'. There is one other bank in the main shopping street, which goes from the port to the petrol station.

Ziguinchor is famous in the region for its night life with "Bombolong", opposite the supermarket and "Kathmandou" nearby being the main haunts. However, I have met one yachtsman who ended up a few front teeth short after an extravagant night in one of these establishments. I must confess to having never visited either. There are many small restaurants and bars around the town. A popular, though more up-market, pastime is lunch at the Hotel Aubert followed by an afternoon lounging by the pool. I find the food at the Aubert over-rated, but the place has always been popular among the West African expatriate circle.



Plan 43 Entrance to Boulababéne



Plan 44 Karabane and Elinkine

The creeks

The side creeks and navigable waterways that I have explored are covered in the usual order travelling up river. Although it is not advisable to visit Karabane, Elinkine or explore the associated waterways until you have cleared the authorities in Ziguinchor, this area is covered first in order to conform with the rest of this guide.

The Lower Casamance

Djogue

As previously stated, you can anchor off the beach at Djogue (pronounced Jogee) or, depending on your draught and the state of the tide, in Boulababéne, the small creek just up river from the town (Plan 43). If anchoring off the beach I would move as far up river as possible, preferably off the abandoned Club Med resort which the fishermen do not use. The main beach is not only very busy with the coming and going of fishing pirogues at all times, but the charm of the putrefying fish smell wears off after a while.

Though sheltered from the prevailing north-westerlies, the anchorage can become exposed. I have never seen the wind blow from the west or south-west but this is possible, especially in the rains. More likely is a blow coming straight down river which can make life uncomfortable. The easiest shelter to head for if it should blow up is Kachiouane Bolon to the south (Plan 44).

However, Boulababéne is accessible on the tide with care (Plan 43). The spit of sand sticking out from the beach on the Djogue side is the problem. Head in towards mid creek on a bearing of about 315°M and then turn in towards the Djogue side when you are inside the headland. It is one of those channels where you have to watch the echo sounder and feel your way in. Watch out for small dugouts drifting nets across the entrance. Once inside you have 3-4m of water to anchor in. I have only been about half a mile up this creek but it was still wide and attractive then.

Djogue (spelt Diogué by the Senegalese) is a thriving fishing village at the mouth of the Casamance. It is a lively, colourful place with an ethnically mixed and largely itinerant population. Jola and Serer mix easily in the ramshackle cluster of huts which make up a community looking even more transitory than the normal African village. The reason for this is that many of the men come here to work for varying periods and leave their families at home. Though there are resident families and, of course, many women with the inevitable swarms of children, the place maintains the Wild West feel of a town full of listless young men. I am told that after work, sleep and food the most common pastime is smoking locally grown marijuana.

The only time I have ever visited Djogue I went ashore with Mamadu, a Serer crew from the lower Saloum, to look for engine oil. To my surprise, and his, Mamadu was greeted like a long lost brother by a large number of young men whom he did not expect to be there. We also found a supply of good-quality diesel engine oil and left happily. It is not a place I would recommend for its facilities, however. It is also noted for its jiggers as a lot of pigs are kept there, so wear good shoes.

Karabane and Elinkine

The island of Karabane, and the creeks to the south of it, appear like a writhing octopus on the road map. This is a pleasant area to explore and shallow-draught vessels may be able to get all the way to the tourist centre at Cap Skyring. However, it should be remembered that Elinkine is the site of a large military base, which acts as a firm reminder that you are close to the heart of Jola resistance to the Dakar government.

It may also be possible to clear Immigration via Elinkine. I have never done this, and I am told by those that have that it is a bit of a palaver. However, if you wish to avoid Ziguinchor and still want to explore this area it will be necessary, in which event I would go straight to Elinkine and report to the policeman there.

Plan 44 shows the routes to Elinkine. Of these the easiest by far is through Kachiouane Bolon.

Karabane

Karabane is an interesting and popular place to visit, but is an exposed anchorage in a north-westerly. There is shelter behind the island in Kachiouane Bolon, however, so I would visit in the day when an eye can be kept on the weather and find shelter overnight. There is also a narrow creek on the island side of the Marigot de Elinkine with 4m of water to anchor in, if you can get in. I have used this anchorage, which is very attractive, but the entrance defies description.

Approaching Karabane, the NW tip of the island where the village is located, is clearly visible. From a distance you first observe an area of tall trees on this point and, as you approach, buildings become apparent among them. Anchor off the beach to the north of the island (Plan 44). This shoals rapidly and I would not go inside the 3m contour which is about 100-150m off the high water line. The channel to the west of the island, the Marigot de Elinkine, is narrow, busy and regularly used by military patrol vessels, so do not anchor to the west off the headland.

Keep an eye on the weather. If a NW'ly blows up it will quickly become choppy, and it can be difficult to get off the beach in a dinghy.

Karabane was an early trading centre and is often compared with St Louis, but it was never developed to the same extent and has a very different character today. I would describe the place as small and friendly with some interesting crumbling buildings. As in other parts of French West Africa which have a strong Catholic influence, the people go out of their way to be helpful and you can wander around without too much hassle. The village, which is dominated by the church, is sheltered by tall trees and only for the sake of tourism does it spill out onto the beach.

After the church, the most prominent building is the hotel which starts at the beach and is clearly visible when you anchor. It is a former Catholic mission and a friendly place to stop for a cold drink or a meal, if you are patient. Basic rooms and facilities are also available, but I have not tried these. There are cheaper places to eat and drink close by if you walk along the beach from the hotel towards the headland up river. A little further on, also just off the beach, is the Campement le Barracuda; but my experience of this place is that they will not be terribly interested in a small yacht crew if they are expecting a group of package tourists.

This is another thing about Karabane; you can arrive in a quaint isolated and sleepy little town and be enjoying the experience when a tourist boat arrives and everything quickly changes. They do not stay that long, however, and at the time of writing tourism is virtually non-existent in the region so don't be put off.

There are a couple of small stores selling basic provisions like bread eggs and the inevitable tinned sardines. The bread, I am told, is baked elsewhere and shipped in, so is sometimes not as fresh as you might hope.

Karabane to Elinkine

By far the easiest way to get to Elinkine is to enter the Bolon Kachiouane down river and pass behind the Ile de Karabane. This is shown in Plan 44. Enter the bolon from down river and pass close to Pointe de Nikine, within a few metres of the headland. Take care entering from up river as the shallows reach a long way out from the north-western tip of the island. A mixture of strong converging currents and the north-westerly swell can make the entrance to this creek surprisingly choppy. Stay close to the west bank until the creek narrows, and then move to mid-creek. As you enter the Marigot de Elinkine stay closer to the island side until you can see Elinkine and then head towards the northern part of the town, where you can anchor within 20m of the beach.

Entering the Marigot de Elinkine from the River Casamance is much more difficult, and don't be

fooled by the reassuring claims of a buoyed channel still written on most charts. There are still a few buoys around, but I would advise you to ignore them.

Entering the bolon it is best to approach from down river. Leave the headland off the north-west corner of Karabane about 100-150m to starboard and watch the echo sounder; you should be able to stay outside the 3m contour until you are past the headland and the broad bay to starboard opens out after the town. Now head to leave the next headland up creek about 100m to port, but keep an eye on the depth. Until the creek narrows the sea bed is very uneven and, I suspect, constantly changing. It might help to follow one of the many pirogues that pass this way. Stay towards the outside of the bend until you can see past the next headland to starboard and then make towards the other bank so that you are within 50m of the island when you pass it. Then make towards mid-creek until you can see Elinkine. Anchor at the northern end of the town off the campement. You can drop the anchor close to the beach.

Elinkine

Elinkine is one of those places that travellers like to run down. It is true that there is a strong military presence, tourists get ripped off for a short trip to Karabane, and the government-owned campement can show a degree of indifference to its clientele which could only be found in French West Africa. But I still quite like the place. With the exception of the policeman running a one-man campaign to rid the region of illegal yachtsmen (see planning section at the beginning of this chapter), Elinkine follows the rule that it is better to visit in your own boat than overland.

The town stretches along the bank of the bolon. First there is a stretch of clear beach belonging to the campement which offers the best anchorage. Then there is a longer stretch where fishing and tourist pirogues are pulled up and behind which lies the main part of the town. Finally comes the military camp which you must keep clear of.

Mr Nyang, the policeman you will need to report to, lives in the next building down from the campement the other side of a small inlet. His house is the nearest to the beach.

The campement is an ideal anchorage; it is sheltered, has facilities and is relatively hassle-free. Being one of the Campements Villageois which are spread throughout the Casamance, this place is entirely run by locals. When they have people staying there it seems to be quite well organised and, provided you give them forewarning, can include you for one of the tasty evening meals they serve their guests. When they are empty, however, it seems to be too much trouble for them to prepare food. Nevertheless, they normally have cold drinks, and it is a pleasant spot to lie in the sun and keep an eye on your boat a few metres off the beach.

It is reported that the beach off Kachiouane is firm enough for beaching and drying out boats for maintenance purposes. The village also has a basic store and a restaurant called Uncle Bocuse's Cabin which only opens when you make a booking.

The town is what it is because of the unlikely merging of tourism and an active military presence. Elinkine is linked by road to Oussouye, the largest and most important of Jola towns and former seat of their Priest Kings. This is the heartland of Jola culture and an obvious centre for political activity. Elinkine is also the port where tourists transfer from road to boat in order to visit Karabane, a visit which seems to be considered essential for visitors.

The road ends at the beach in the centre of town, and this is where the taxis load and unload. It is also the spot that visitors first see, and it unfortunately smells like a public latrine, mainly because a large baobab tree to one side of the area is used for precisely this function.

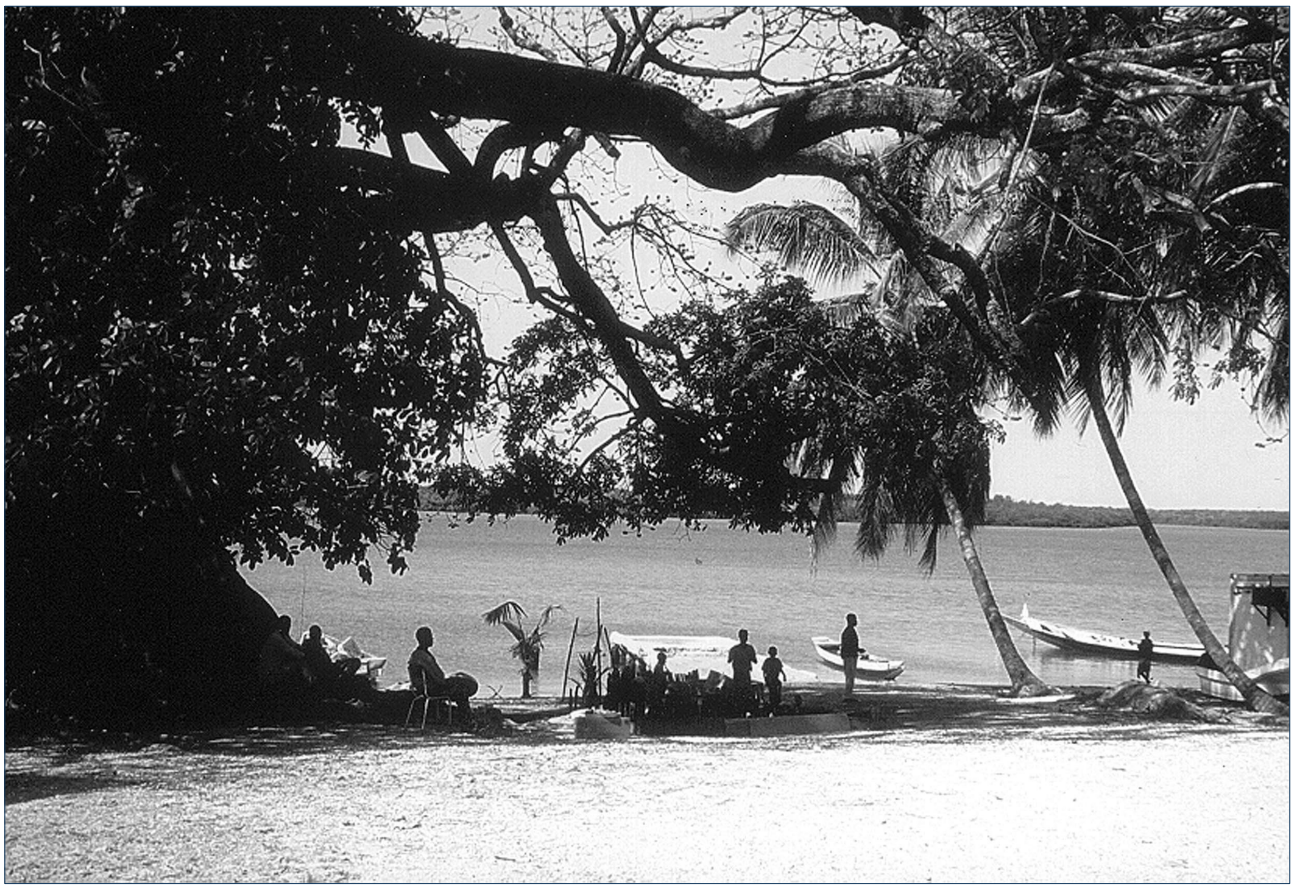
There are a few typically West African shops in this same area with fresh bread and the usual odd collection of tins, unpleasant biscuits and some fresh fruit and vegetables. There is another bar, the cheapest in town, a short walk along the road to Oussouye. Unfortunately this attracts soldiers whom I have seen staggering out in full kit and equipment. The thought of displeasing one of these men in an advanced state of intoxication fully fitted out with the hardware to blow my brains out has tended to discourage my patronage.

On the beach, just by this central hub of the town, they also have pumps for selling the government-subsidised two-stroke petrol to the fishermen. You cannot buy this yourself, but it does not take much ingenuity to get hold of if you need some. I am told that it is mixed 50:1, but the people I have asked seem a little vague on this point. However, the most common local engine requires that ratio and they seem to manage on it.

Probably the biggest advantage of stopping at Elinkine is that it is just about the only place in the lower Casamance from which you can easily travel by road. By 'easily' I do, of course, mean relatively easily. Bush taxis leave from the centre of town for Oussouye, Cap Skyring and Ziguinchor. If you can only get one to Oussouye you can travel onwards from there.

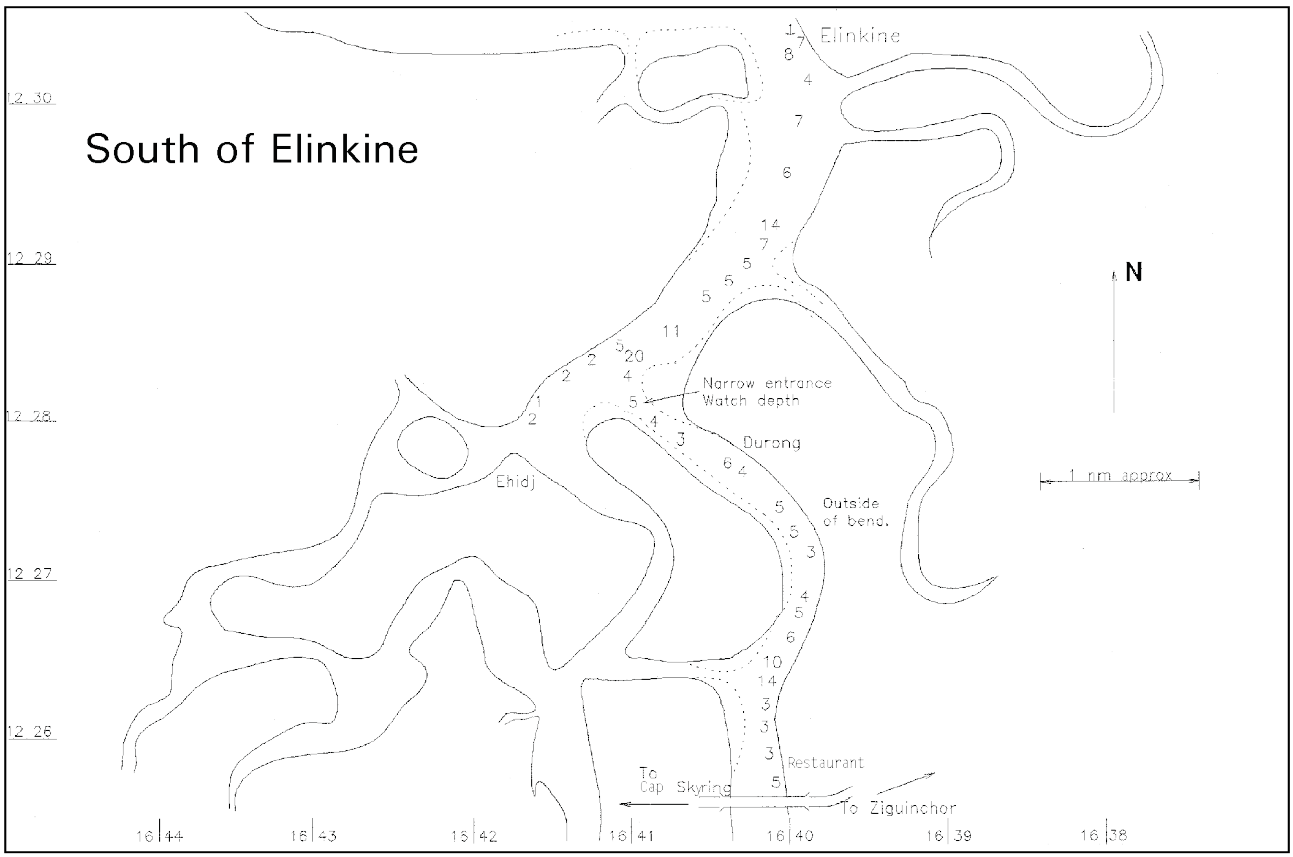
Oussouye

Oussouye (pronounced Ouswee) is a fair-sized West African town with a number of shops. You can purchase far more there than anywhere else on the lower Casamance, including diesel and petrol if you are lucky. Certainly the best supply of fresh fruit

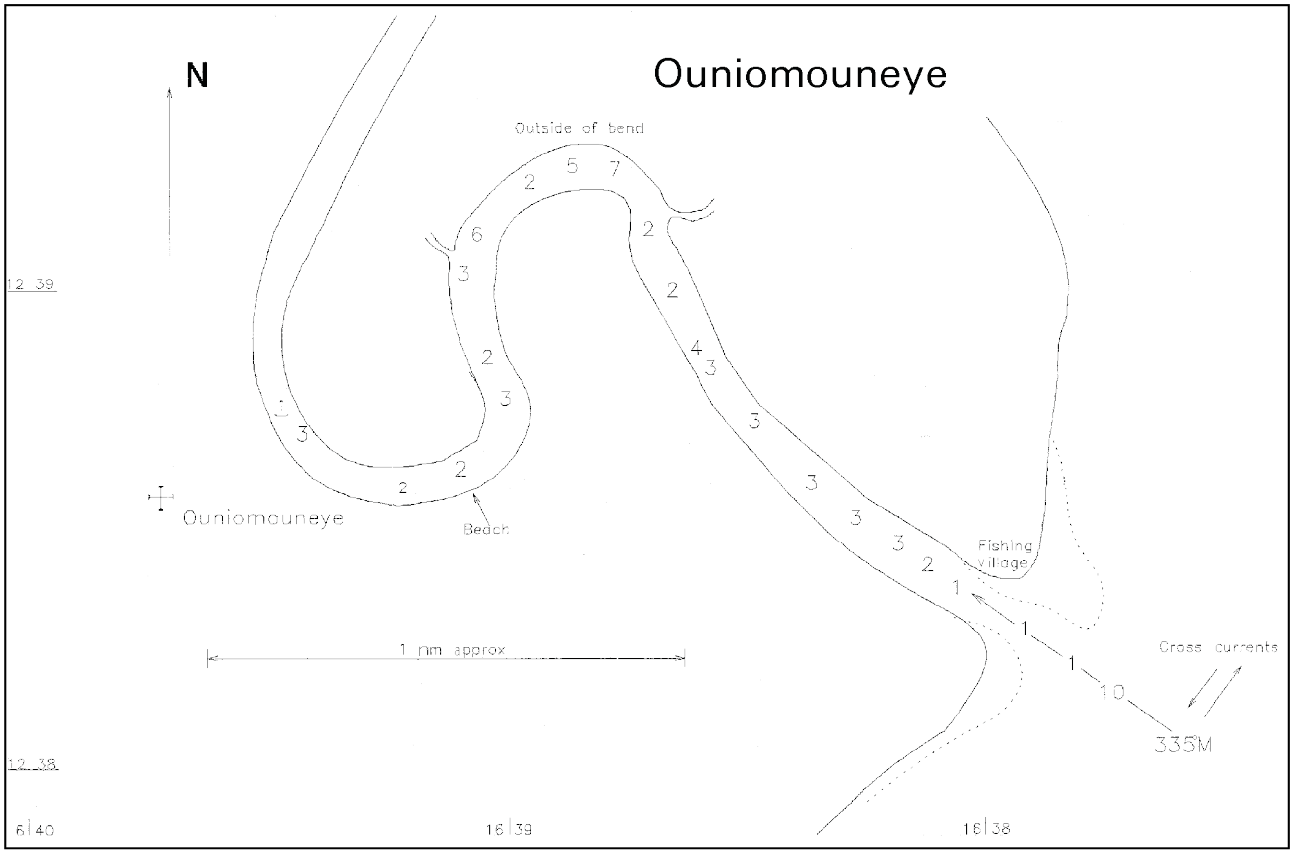


Elinkine - Ann Fraser

Sailing Canoes - Ann Fraser



Plan 45 South of Elinkine



Plan 46 Ouniomouneye

and vegetables until you reach Ziguinchor can be found here.

Travelling to Oussouye by bush taxi is the best way to get close to the indigenous population, possibly a little too literally for most people's taste as you also come into intimate contact with their babies and the sticky sandwiches they chew. Each taxi has a driver and another staff member who covers for conductor, pusher of vehicle when it will not start, promoter and customer relations officer. This is the individual who will approach you and show you your seat when you express an interest in travelling. Now all things are relative, and when he waves an arm at a corner of an impossibly tightly-packed van you might not appreciate that you have in fact been shown a seat, nor will any of the other passengers crammed into the same tight spot make any movement to help you get in. The technique is to force your way to the spot and squeeze yourself between the sweaty bodies in the general vicinity. Having achieved this do not be surprised when several other passengers are added to the total in a way that would challenge the ability of Dr Who's Tardis to distort space and volume. You are in, you are breathing, and you think you are OK. Then the driver turns over the engine, there is a pathetic wheeze, and the next thing you know you are all getting out again to push. Even this is better than when you finally get going, and the irregular motion makes the small child pressed against your shoulder throw up.

The taxi stop in Oussouye is on the road out to Ziguinchor, conveniently next to the petrol station. Fuel here is supplied from containers and diesel is limited. However, if you give them forewarning, you can probably pick up 20-30 litres, which is useful if you plan to go exploring the narrow side creeks of the area.

On the road between Elinkine and Oussouye you might want to stop off at Mlomp to visit the famous two-storied mud houses. But do not expect an explanation, as they are not representative of Jola architecture, and no one knows how they came to be here.

See Revisions pg R9

South of Elinkine

Plan 45 shows some of the creeks which stretch to the south of Elinkine. Shallow-draught yachts might be able to make it all the way to Cap Skyring (called Cap locally) but my 1.4m was too much for it. Also, although I have been assured that this is possible, I have never been able to see how it is to be achieved without passing under a low bridge. So I have not attempted to show a route here.

The passage indicated by soundings in Plan 45 will take you to the site of what I considered the best French restaurant in the whole region. Unfortunately, on my last visit it was closed through lack of custom, a fate which will soon befall most enterprises if the political situation does not change. It should be possible to wave down a taxi to Cap Skyring or Oussouye from here. I am told by some people that diesel is available in Cap Skyring, but others have expressed doubts.

The village of Ehidj stands spectacularly on the top of a sandy hill looking down the creek. It becomes shallow on the approach. The creek to starboard is presumably to route to Cap Skyring, which I might have been able to enter on a rising tide.

Durong, the other village shown in Plan 45, is an attractive place from the creek, with deep water up to a few metres off the beach. The beach is sand, which indicates that the holding should be good in this sheltered little creek. I am told that the beach is firm for drying out.

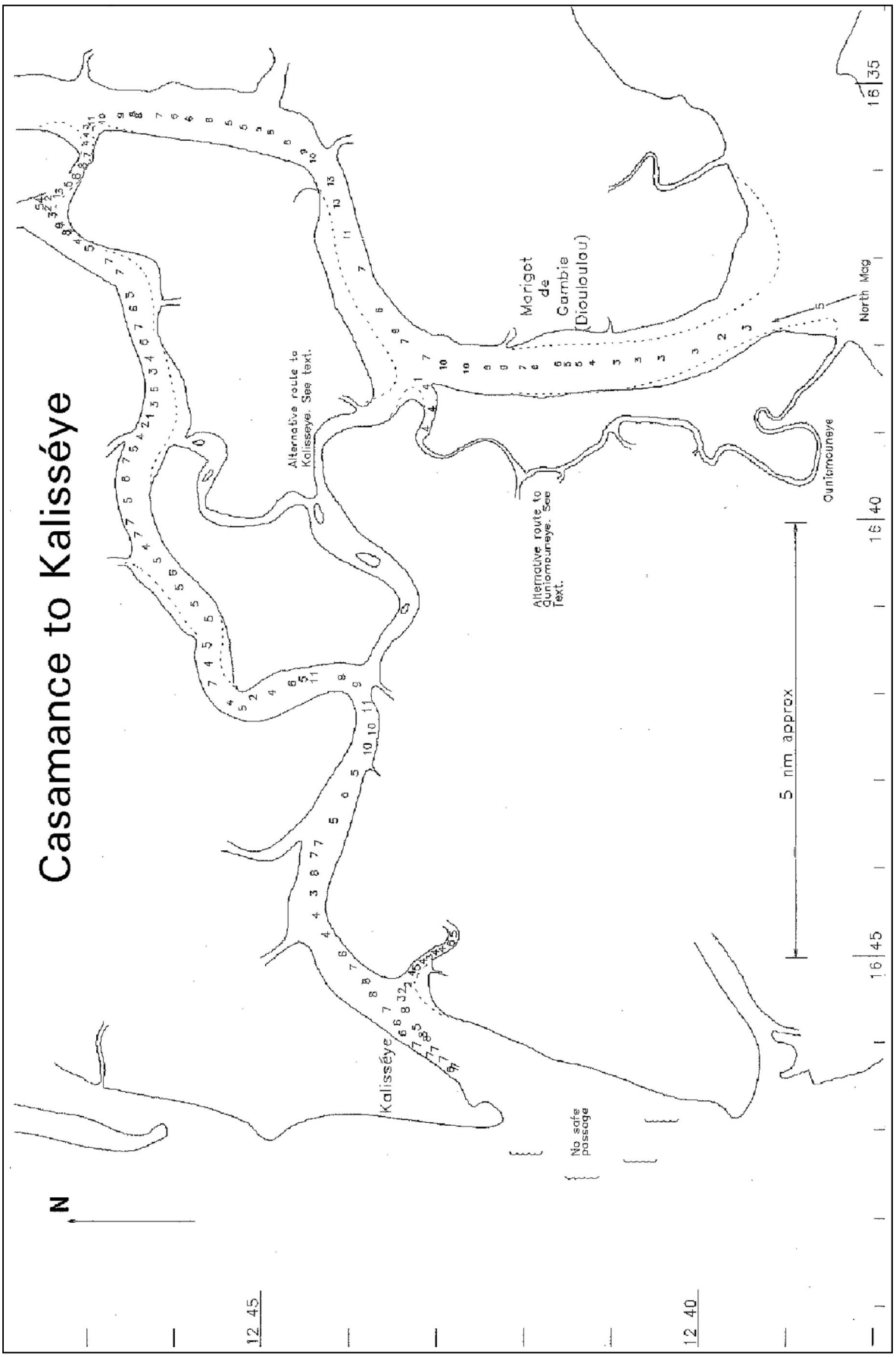
Ouniomouneye

Ouniomouneye (pronounced "new moon") is the most popular anchorage for French yachts in the Casamance. They will tell you how friendly the people are, and how you can leave your boat unlocked and unattended because there is no crime in the village. It is also the only place in West Africa I have ever had a major theft from my boat (my liferaft). It is possible that this item was stolen by the crew of another yacht, but this is one of those thing that I will never know. I would advise, therefore, that it is a pleasant place to visit, but continue to adopt the same precautions you have exercised elsewhere.

The entrance to Ouniomouneye creek is shown in Plan 46 and is fairly straightforward, but look out for strong cross-currents. Most cruising yachts should get in on a mid-tide heading for mid-channel. The fishermen on the point up-river will often call out offering to sell fish.

The creek to Ouniomouneye is straightforward, with deep water tending to be on the outside of the bend, but steer clear of the side creeks as there are mud spits coming out from them. Just before the village the mangrove on the south bank ends at a sandy beach and then you will begin to see cultivated fields and huts. The village is, in fact, three connected settlements stretching over a large area. Continue up the creek until you come to a stretch of beach with a large baobab tree just behind it, where groups of men will probably be sitting (about 12° 38'.6N 16° 39'.1W). There are usually other yachts anchored here.

The reason I have specified this spot is that the village has certain conventions concerning visitors which you are supposed to observe. An old man from the village is responsible for visitors and their well-being, and you will normally meet him on this



Plan 47 Casamance to Kalisséye

beach. The baobab tree behind the beach has special significance as a meeting place for the men. It is where they gather to drink palm wine, but I am told that it also has some spiritual importance. If there are other yachts around they will help you observe the correct formalities, otherwise I would ask.

Follow the path from this beach towards the huts on raised ground about 100m or so behind the beach, and you will find the village shop-cum-bar among them. Being a Christian village, cold beer is available, a factor which may be significant in the French love of the place. You can buy the usual fare, including fresh bread. It also acts as a sort of social point for visiting crews. The shop owner, who is a friendly man, will also be interested in any technical skills you have; I quickly found myself overhauling his solar system.

The villagers here seem to enjoy their status as a haven for cruising sailors, and if you hang around it is common to be invited to peoples' compounds for dinner.

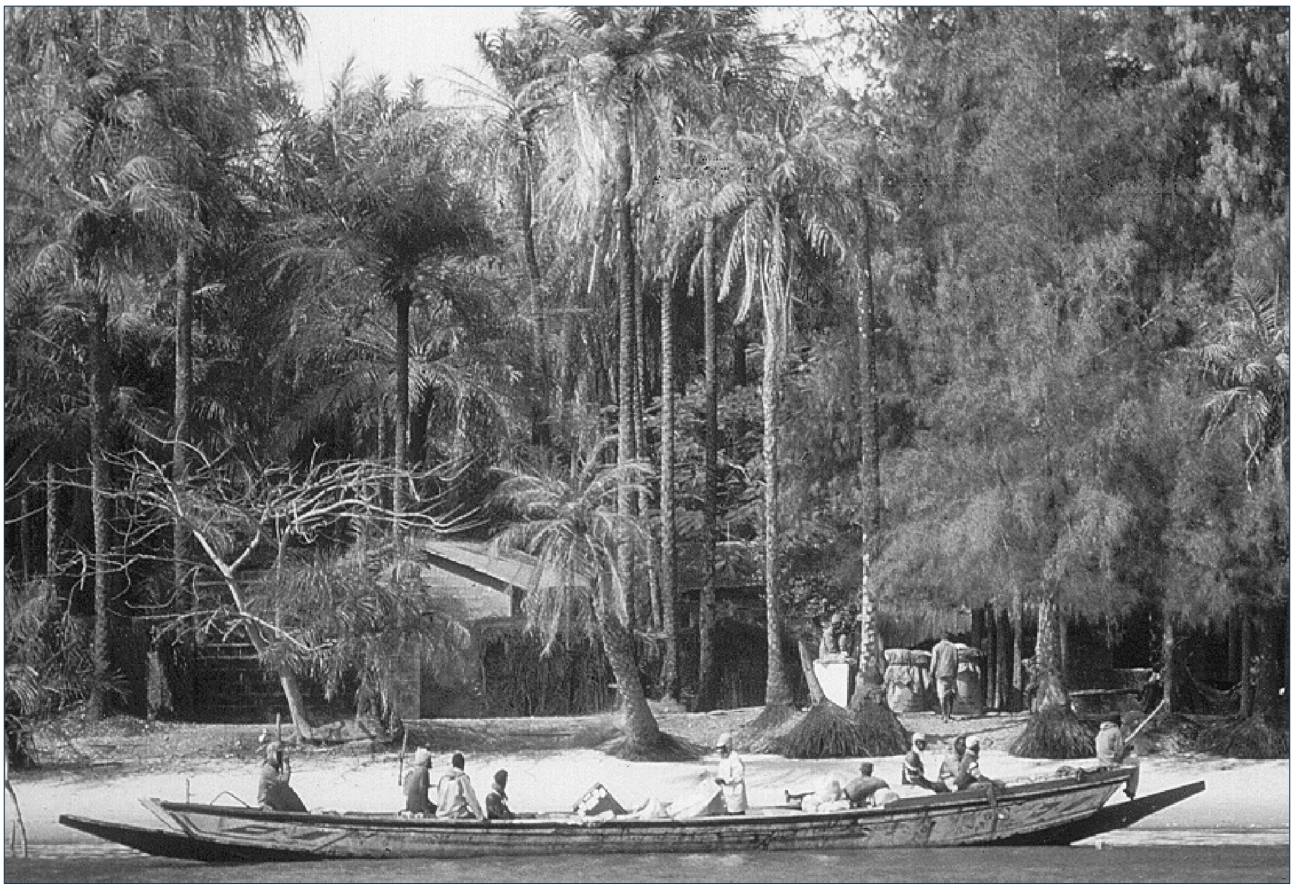
There is an alternative route, shown in Plan 47, in and out of Ouniomouneye which comes out into the Marigot de Gambie on your way to Kalisséye. However, though I have used this route, I experienced so much difficulty that I failed to keep a proper record. If you want to go this way I would advise leaving plenty of time and set off on a rising tide. If you want to go to Kalisséye or any other point to the north I would advise going the long way around.

Marigot de Gambie and Kalisséye

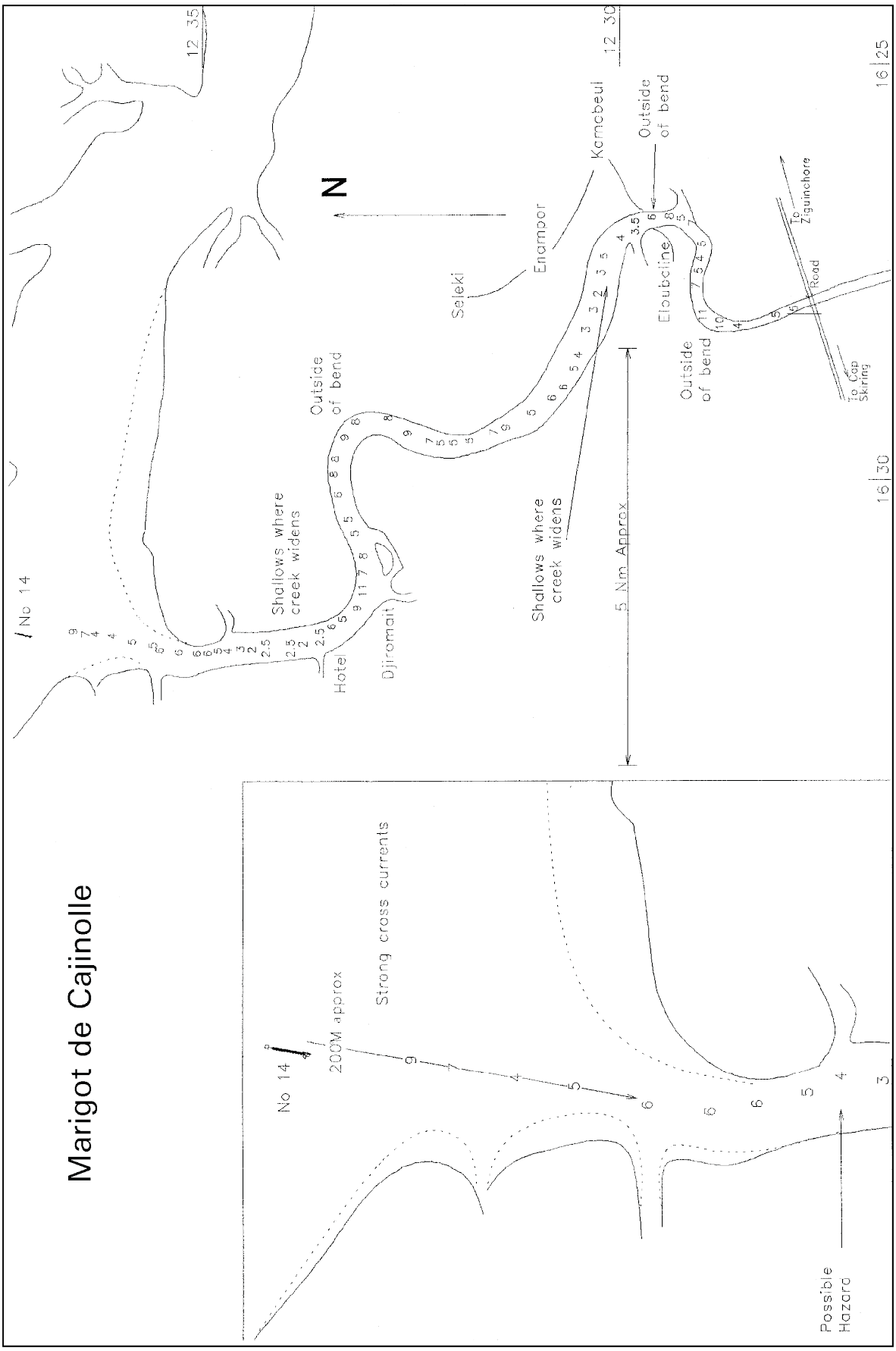
Plan 47 shows the region to the north of the lower Casamance. This is a remote region of mangrove interspersed with occasional raised ground and glorious beaches. There are no roads, and the only other people you will meet will be fellow mariners and fishermen. For my money, Kalisséye is the highlight of the lower Casamance.

Enter the Marigot de Gambie (or Marigot de Diouloulou to the Senegalese) on the down-river side of the creek. You have plenty of room, and most yachts should have sufficient water at any state of the tide. Leave the first headland 200 or 300m to port, and then head gradually out towards mid-creek.

As you can see from Plan 47, there are two possible routes to Kalisséye. I have attempted, as have friends of mine, to use the southern route but had to turn back through lack of water. However, I have met people who have got through this channel in boats drawing up to 1·5 metres using the tide.



Kalisséye - Steve Jones



Plan 48 Marigot de Cajinolle

The main problem comes between the first two islands shown where the creek widens and becomes shallow. I am told that you should pass to the south of the first island and the north of the second.

The other route is relatively easy. There is a mudflat sticking out from the southern headland as you enter the narrow creek leading off the Marigot de Gambie. You need to head up creek from the entrance and then back towards the southern bank in an exaggerated S. As you get inside this creek, and it starts to narrow, you have plenty of water close to the southern bank. As you round the next bend, head towards mid-creek and then towards the north bank as you enter the next larger creek. This is the most difficult part of the passage, and it is very much a case of feeling your way. You need to work your way around the mudflat to the south but end up near the east bank of the wider creek you are entering. Unfortunately, there is not an easily-followed contour but it is not that bad, especially if encountered on a rising tide. You are at least sheltered here if you need to wait.

When in the main creek you should be able to follow the line of the soundings in Plan 47 to Kalisséye. The first stretch involves being closer to mid-stream than is obvious from the plot. Throughout the whole of this passage there is no reason to be too close to the bank.

As you approach Kalisséye the land is very low lying and strong winds often rip across the creek. These winds can be so strong that the water becomes disturbed in a very short stretch. I don't know why this should be but for me, in a small boat, it can certainly be an uncomfortable anchorage. However, the beach shelves steeply so you can anchor very close to it, which should give reasonable shelter from the prevailing north-westerly.

As an alternative I have shown an anchorage in a creek off the south bank of the river, which is very snug in all conditions. Head towards mid-creek until over the bar and then make your way towards the east bank. You should be able to stay in 2m of water at any state of the tide, but it does shoal alarmingly quickly, and the passage is narrow. When you are in, there is plenty of water. Continue around the first bend for shelter and drop anchor.

Kalisséye is a bit like a remote version of Djogue, with the same tribal mixture and wild feel to the place. There is some agriculture in the hinterland, but most people live off fishing. Visiting yachts are popular, and I have not heard of security problems, but I would not take chances. Because of its location, everything has to come in from outside so I would not bank on being able to pick up a lot.

It is, however, a beautiful spot with windswept palms and golden beaches. Find your own stretch of golden sand and forget about the twentieth century.

The Marigot de Gambie is probably navigable as far as Diouloulou close to the Gambian border, where a low bridge impedes further progress. I say this because I have seen deep water pirogues pulled up on the beach there. I would, however, advise against stopping at Diouloulou because there is a particularly unpleasant military checkpoint for road traffic at the bridge, and their attention might be attracted by a visiting yacht. Time permitting, I would like to explore some of the many channels to the north of Kalisséye. The creeks are shown on the road map of the area which is available in Dakar.

Marigot de Cajinolle

Back in the Casamance, heading up river from Marigot de Gambie, you leave two accessible creeks to port. The first one is narrow and unnamed but easily accessible. The second is the wide Badrapour, which must be entered from the down-river side of the creek. I have used both as overnight anchorages.

You then pass Pointe St Georges on the south bank, and just after this is an abandoned hotel. This place once had a reputation for being somewhere that French film stars would go to for seclusion, but now looks sad and derelict. I have never stopped there.

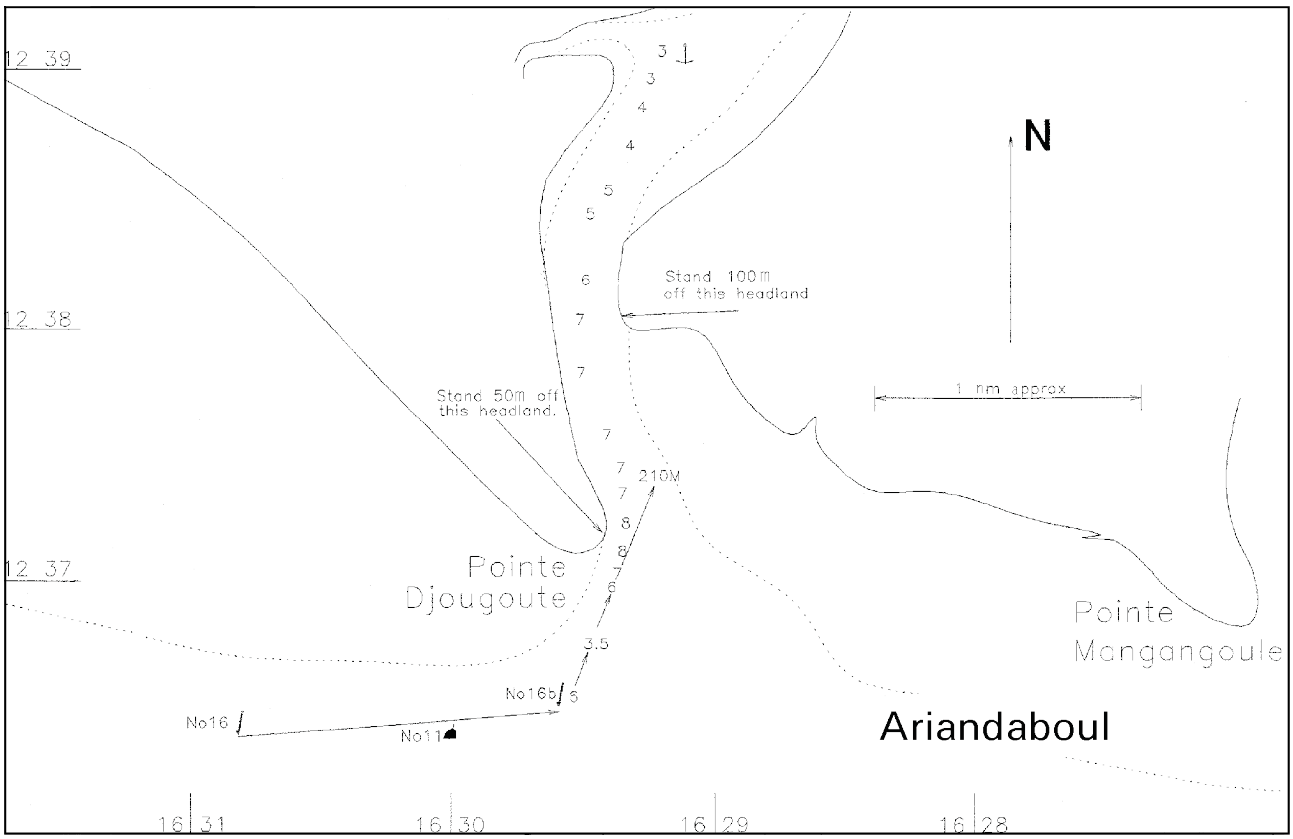
The next creek of interest is the Marigot de Cajinolle up river on the south bank from Pointe St Georges (Plan 48). The entrance is fairly straightforward on a bearing of 200°M from No. 14 buoy, but watch for cross-currents.

I do not know what the hazard shown just inside of the entrance in Plan 48 might be. It was marked near mid-channel on a French sketch of the creek. I normally head close to the creek on the east bank, and have not encountered any problems. Jacques Roullier believes it may be a rock as he has seen rocks off the hotel further up the creek.

The difficulties with this creek come where it widens and becomes shallow, which it does in the first straight section. I have found enough water mid-channel here but deeper-draught vessels may need to use a rising tide.

The first landmark is a grand-looking hotel on the west bank as you go into the first bend. When I was last there this place had not been opened and, considering the unrest close at hand, it is difficult to imagine that it ever will be. Puzzled as to why anyone would invest this sort of money in such a place at this juncture, I started to ask around and was told that it was the project of a local boy made good. Apparently the owner originated from the village of Djiromat and, having made his fortune, wanted to do something for the folks back home, so built a tourist hotel which would provide jobs and income for his people.

Just past the hotel is the pleasant-looking village of Djiromat itself. There seems to be plenty of water in



Plan 49 Ariandaboul

the creek at this point, but I have shown a channel close to the inside of the bend because there are a lot of floats off the village and this is the easiest channel to use. I have seen yachts anchored in the creek just past the village so access must be possible, but I have never used it myself.

You can stay mid-stream on the next stretch until the next bend where the deepest water is on the outside. There is no real difficulty on this section, however, until the creek widens again. Most yachts should not have too much trouble here as it only goes down to 2m at the widest point when you want to be roughly mid-channel heading towards the outside of the next bend.

Then there is a creek to starboard followed by a sort of pirogue-style ferry crossing point. You will see where the track comes to the creek on both banks, and this is a useful spot to stop if you want to visit any of the local villages which are set a little way back from the water's edge.

I am told by Jacques Roullier that the villages of Eloubaline and Kamobeulon which are accessible from this landing stage are notable for huts which have an impluvium for collecting rain water. This is unique, I am told, outside of Guinea.

Shortly after this there is another creek to port. Continue using the outside of bends on the extended S section and you will come out to a straight stretch of creek where you will be able to see the road bridge. I am told that if you were to drop your mast and pass under this bridge the creek continues to Guinea-Bissau where it eventually comes out in the River Cacheu. I am also told that this has been a popular smugglers' route, but a friend of mine who tried to use it the other way was turned back at gun point by a soldier on a bridge near the border.

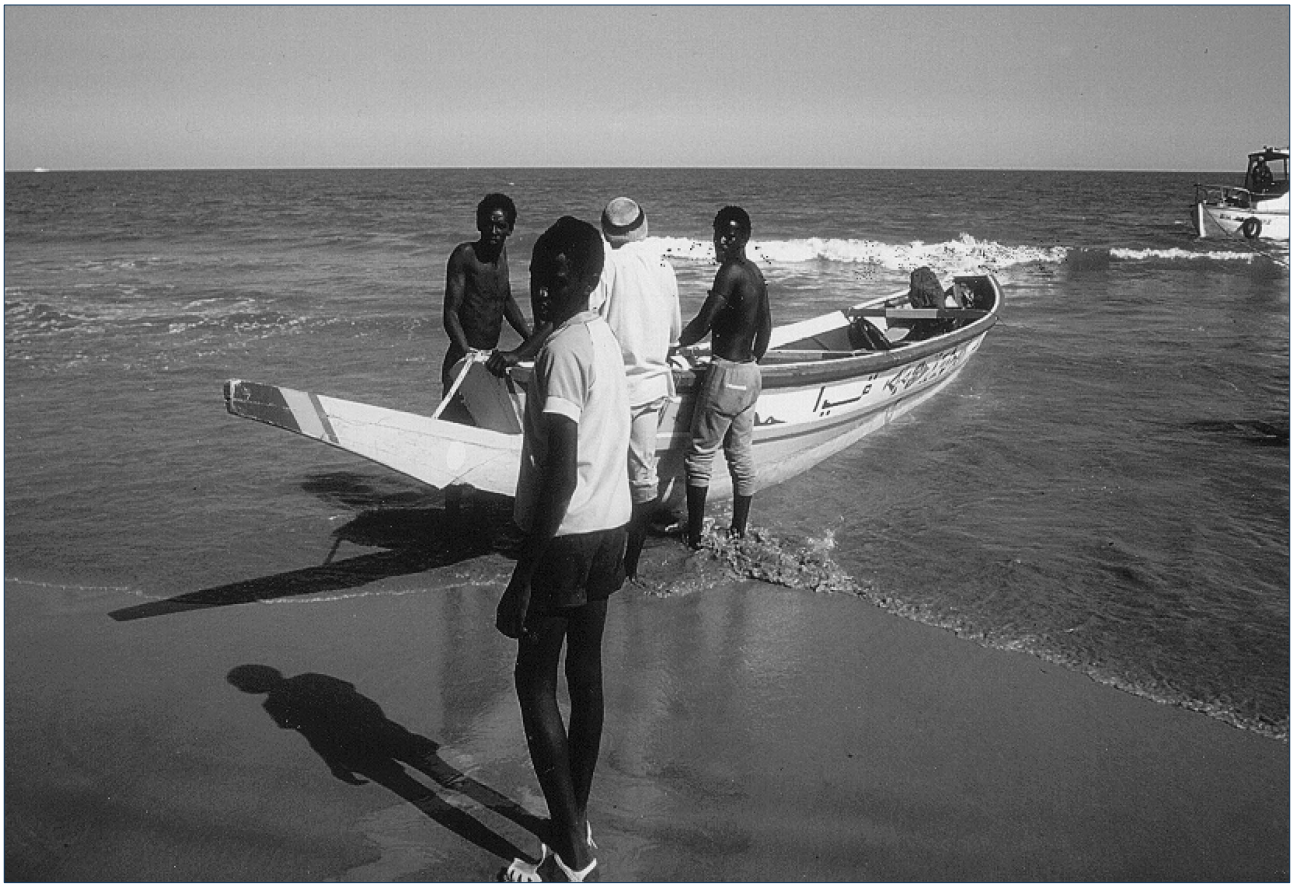
The only reason for hanging around at this spot would be if you wanted to wave down a taxi to Ziguinchor or back to Oussouye.

Ariandaboul

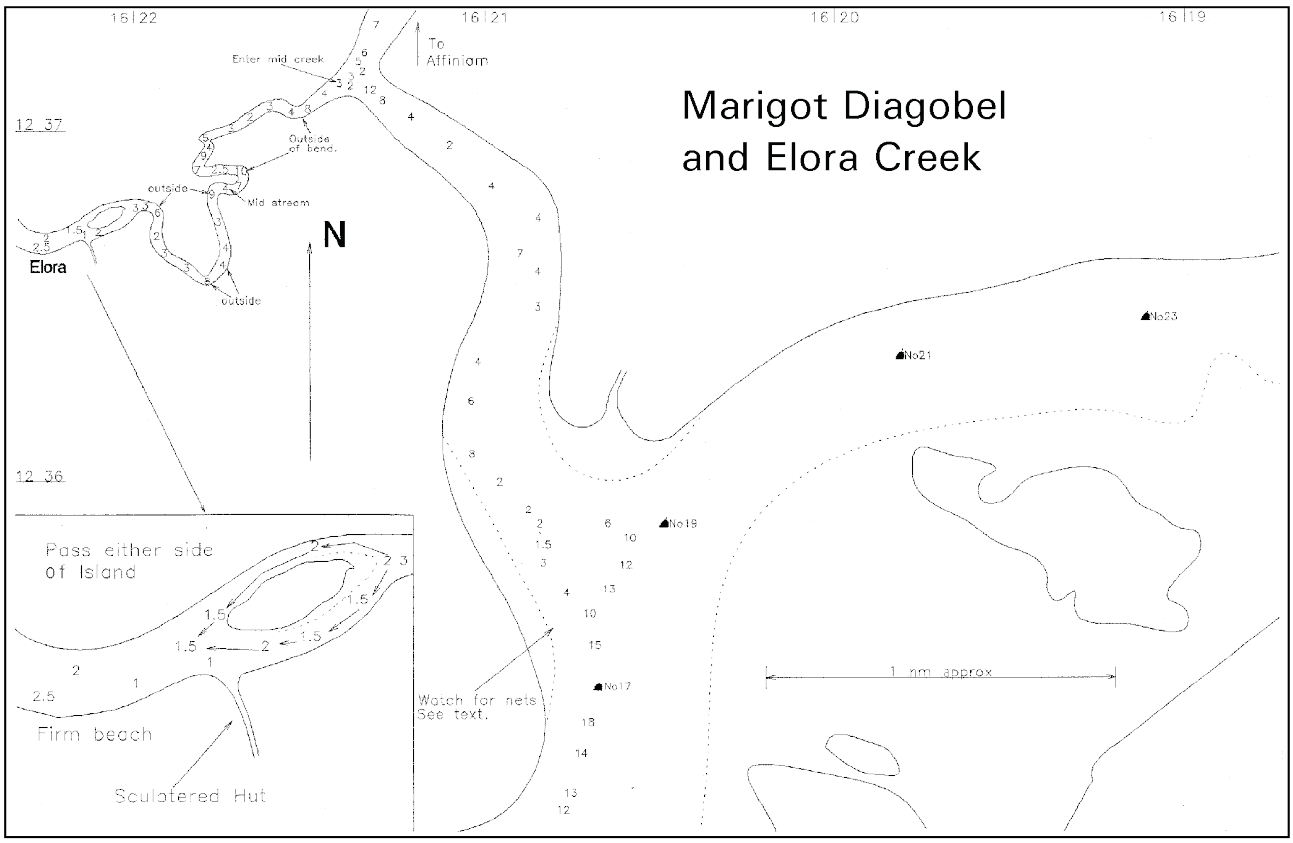
Just up river from Marigot de Cajinolle on the north bank is Ariandaboul (Plan 49). This is easy to enter, and useful because it is the last shelter for a long stretch of the river until you are on the last bend towards Ziguinchor. As it can get quite choppy with wind against tide on this section this is a useful bolt hole. This creek is not named on the Admiralty chart. Ed Wheeler reports about 2m over the bar in early 2008.

After No. 11 buoy is the uncharted No. 16b which Ed reports. This has been moved a little upstream to the edge of the bank south of Pte Dijougoute Leave this to port and then head roughly 210°M to leave Pointe Djougoute about 100m to port. There are a lot of floats in this channel, and you will have to steer a course around them, but as you approach the point there is plenty

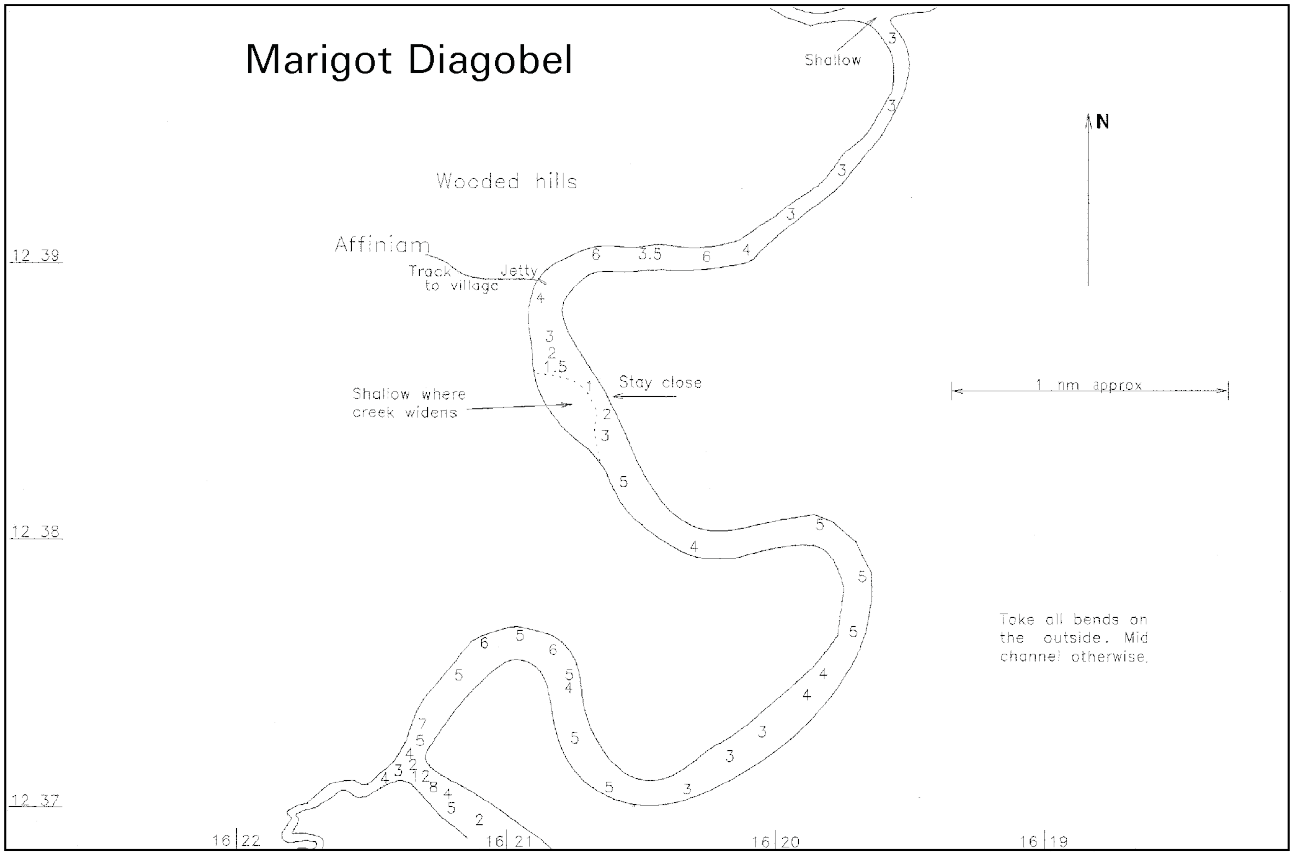
Sailing Pirogue - W.H.Batten



Launching Pirogue - Steve Jones



Plan 50 Marigot Diagobel and Elora Creek



Plan 51 Marigot Diagobel

of water. The mudflats on the up-river bank of the creek are extensive, so follow the west bank around until the creek starts to narrow and then make for mid-creek. When you are past the headland on the west bank you can anchor anywhere that you have enough water.

This creek is fairly quiet, and I find it a pleasant anchorage. I have not been a long way up it, and it does not appear that any settlements are accessible. The fishing, however, is said to be good.

Jacques Roullier reports an extensive area of uncharted but navigable waterways further up this creek which I would like to go back and explore. He describes the area as being like the Everglades without alligators.

Marigot Diagobel

The last navigable creek before Ziguinchor is Marigot Diagobel (or Marigot de Bignona on the road map). This is a pleasant excursion, but the entrance can be a bit tricky, mainly because there are always nets lying across the channel.

Plan 50 shows the entrance, and I have shown the soundings I have been able to get. As can be seen, these are rather erratic because of the courses I have had to steer. I am convinced that there is a deeper channel than shown, and if you hit it when no nets are out you might find it. Otherwise I would use a rising tide and feel your way in. Once inside, stay to the outside of bends until the creek forks, where you have the option of taking the narrow creek to Elora or carry on to Affiniam (shown in Plan 51).

Elora is a small village that has an interesting sculptured house, whose owner is only too happy to show you around. I am not quite sure whether this house is supposed to have any significance or if it has been created on the whim of its owner, but it is undoubtedly a curiosity. In any event the village is quiet and the people friendly. It also has a firm sandy beach which is useful for scraping hulls and yachts are said to be secure if left there, though I have never done this myself Ed Wheeler was told the same thing. I do know of one skipper who leaves his boat there when he goes home to France, however. There are no shops in the village.

The approach is narrow, but there is plenty of water until the creek divides either side of an island just before the village. You can pass either side of this island with care (see the insert in Plan 50). Deeper-draught boats should approach this on a rising tide. Anchor off the sandy beach.

The route to Affiniam is easy enough until you get to the straight section where the creek widens (Plan 51). This is best negotiated on a rising tide, and the only usable channel I have found involves going close to the east bank at the widest point and then heading back towards mid-stream. On the next bend the creek becomes deep again and you will see a jetty and some breeze-block huts.

The village itself is a ten-minute walk away on the wooded hill and the landing spot looks rather desolate if no one is around. Anchor well clear of the jetty as it is used by large pirogues running a ferry service from Ziguinchor.

Affiniam is an attractive village set among the tall woods Jola-fashion. It is one of the most easily accessible examples of a traditional Jola village and is in marked contrast to the Wolof or Mandinka villages to the north, which are in cleared land. One of the first buildings you come to is the traditionally-built campement, but if there are no customers it is likely to be closed. The village also has one of the better-stocked local shops.

The creek remains navigable up to the next fork which I could not pass, though it may be possible with the tide.

I am told that the Casamance gets shallow after the bridge at Ziguinchor, which may be why the city developed at this point. Disappointingly, I have never come across anyone who has been bold enough to explore on up-river, and have not had time myself.

The upper reaches, at least as far as Kolda, are attractive from the road. The advice (at the time of writing) is for travellers not to travel by themselves around the region, but I have continued to do so throughout all the recent troubles.

Village Life

Guinea-Bissau

Quick reference

Currency:	1,000 CFA = £1. The CFA can be obtained in exchange for hard currency, preferably Euros. ATMs and banks do not appear to be present in the islands.
Visas:	Required - obtainable from Dakar, Banjul or Ziguinchor.
Capital:	Bissau.
Ports of entry:	Bissau, Cacheu, Bubaque (see text).
Diesel:	Available in Bissau, but there are often shortages.
Water:	Mains water in Bissau, unusual elsewhere. Water available from wells. Boil and filter all drinking water.
Facilities:	Virtually none outside the capital.
Chandlery:	None.
Embassies:	French.
Consulates:	UK, Netherlands.
Supermarkets:	Only in Bissau, and expensive.
Language:	Portuguese, Creole and Tribal.
Main tribes:	Balante, Mandinka, Fula, Manjago, Bijagoes
Good points:	Superb cruising ground. Isolated islands and channels to explore. Easy-going people. Unique flora and fauna. Undeveloped and unpolluted.
Bad points:	Few services. Strong tides and tidal streams. Difficult navigation. A lot of nasty rocks. Few good anchorages. Politically unstable.

Planning

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When asked the direct question, yachtsmen often say they go cruising to escape the crowds, pollution and regulation of western life. We sail to find space and freedom but too often find that the world has shrunk, and there are few new frontiers other than the sea herself. There are still a few precious places left, however, and Guinea-Bissau is one of them.

Isolated for much of her recent history, you will find a primitive country with most of the population living off the land and sea. There are islands where people still dress in grass skirts and live almost in the stone age. You will find a unique flora and fauna in a land largely unaffected by the pollution of cars and industry. You will also find a country with few facilities, surrounded by waters that can be difficult to navigate, and with limited sheltered anchorages. It is the most rewarding cruising ground I have ever found.

A visa will be necessary before arrival, but these are easily available at the consulates in Banjul and Ziguinchor and, with a little more formality, at the embassy in Dakar. Ed Wheeler found the easiest place to get their visas was in Bakau, a suburb of Banjul, where they can be purchased over the counter at the Guinea-Bissau embassy on Atlantic Road.

Unless you are planning to beat back up the coast to windward I would advise you to revictual for an Atlantic crossing before going to Guinea-Bissau. The availability of fruit and vegetables is likely to be limited, a reasonable selection of tinned food is unknown outside the capital, and even there they can only be purchased at high prices from the foreign-currency shops. Topping up water tanks will have to be done manually from a well in most places, and fuel has to be picked up where you can get it.

The country only became independent from Portugal in 1974 after a bloody revolution, and for many years remained a Marxist military state. Only in the late eighties did it start to open up, but this was followed by years of instability. It had a major civil war nine years ago and there is a sporadic low-intensity conflict on the Cacheu-Casamance border. As if this were not enough, the country, and in particular the outlying islands of the Bijagos archipelago, has become the cocaine smuggling centre for the African continent. Drugs are brought ashore in remote areas of the Bijagos and then ferried to the mainland by fast launch or light plane, whence they are split up for onward shipment to

Europe or back to the Americas. This situation appears to be tolerated or even encouraged by Governments ministers and senior officials.

Ed Wheeler reports that another activity which is badly affecting the economy and welfare of the people is the rape of the sea fisheries. They came up against a continuous wall of trawlers fishing off the coast, mostly Korean. These trawlers come into Bissau port for R&R and fuel. There appears to be no regulation of their activities and the local pirogue fisherman say that fish stocks are being badly reduced.

Dealing with officials contrasts sharply with meeting the normally polite and friendly locals. I cannot give you hard and fast rules on how to handle these situations should they arise. Try to avoid dealing with officials during Ramadan or near festivals and holidays. Whatever you do remain polite, and if asked for large sums of money say that you cannot pay because you do not have it, rather than that you will not pay because you think he is a crook. Stall if you can, even with documents held you have the opportunity to ask around about normal practice and the standing of your protagonist.

Throughout West Africa things are kept deliberately vague, but it seems to me that in Guinea-Bissau there really is no absolute official procedure for visiting yachts. Most visiting yachts have a friendly discourse with officials which usually involves the passing of small sums of money, stamping of passports and everyone parting as friends.

Ed Wheeler reports that officials, of whom there are many, may not be regularly paid. This was certainly the case with a schoolteacher he met in Bolama, who had not been paid for four months. Consequently, officials have to seek a living where they can get it, which leads inevitably to sidelines, bribery and corruption. All officials he met in Guinea-Bissau, without exception, demanded money and/or goods and materials in kind.

These officials, on first meeting, were rather unfriendly and intimidating. As soon as money had changed hands, however, attitudes changed completely and broad smiles broke out.

Witchcraft was only boarded once by a military patrol, off the Canal de Santa Caterina, and this was quite alarming, as two Kalashnikovs and RPG 7 were trained on us. One official, who knew his was round our GPS, asked very hard questions about why we had a waypoint named Cacheu. (It was well off the mouth of the Cacheu river). For this reason, he does not recommend visiting the Cacheu area. Apart from officials, the people are friendly and helpful. Language is of course a problem, as virtually no English is spoken. Knowledge of Portuguese would be highly useful.

The main port of entry is, of course, Bissau but you can use either Cacheu or Bubaque. It has to be said that I have never been approached by anyone who wanted to check my papers when sailing in the country. I have been stopped at police checks on the roads, however.

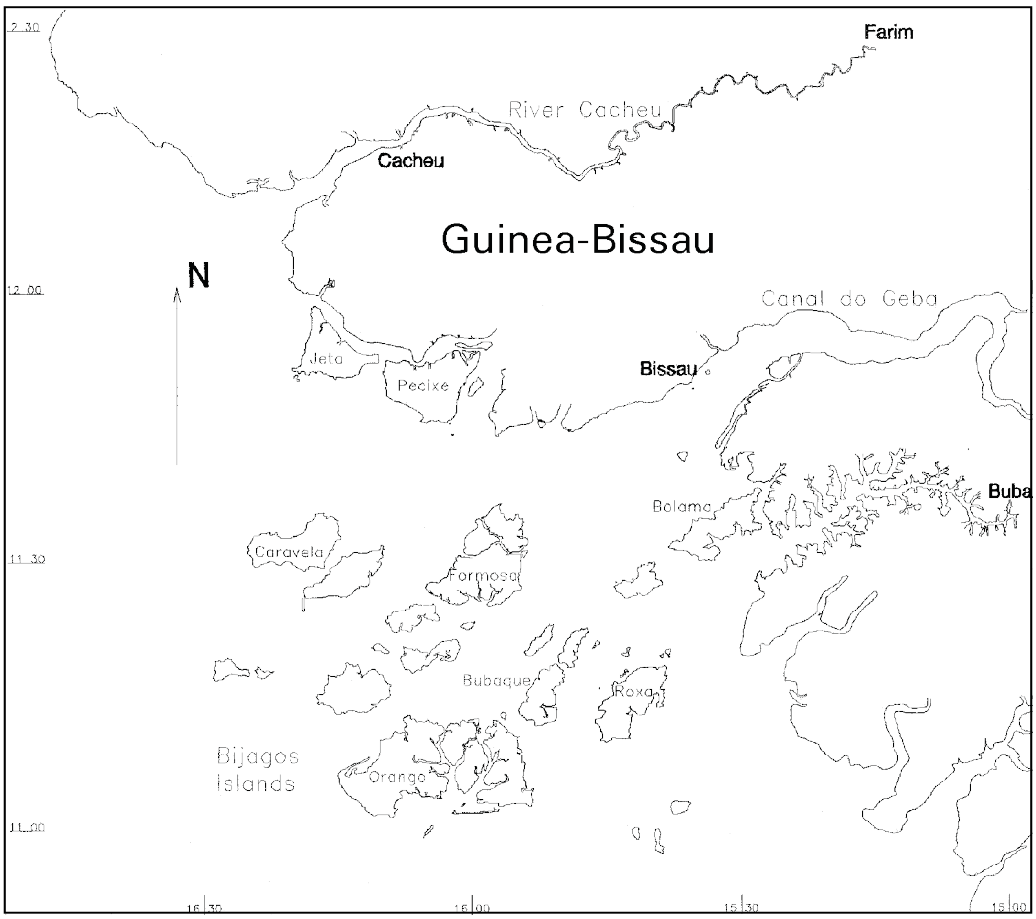
Ed Wheeler reports that going to Bissau Town for clearance is not recommended. The anchorage is exposed and tide-rode, the harbour is choked with traffic and wrecks and there is nowhere to leave a dinghy safely. Officials are predatory: they descended on them armed and mob-handed. In spite of the valid visa, Ed was told that his papers were not in order, he lacked an entry permit for the boat and so on. The resulting "charges" amounted to CFA 1,000 per person, per day and CFA 5,000 per day for the boat, totalling about £90 for their 10 day stay. Transactions were all in cash with no receipts. In addition, the only official who spoke English demanded CFA 7,000 for a 'facilitation fee'. He was charged CFA 90,000 for a ten day stay, which he was told would cover them for the whole country, including the Bijagos Islands; however, both at Bolama and Bubaque, he was then charged similar daily rates again by immigration and the Policia Maritima, on the grounds that these were different administrative areas. The total added up to around £5 per day for the boat and £2 per day per person. Demands were also made for 'kind', especially from the medicine chest.

Landfalls

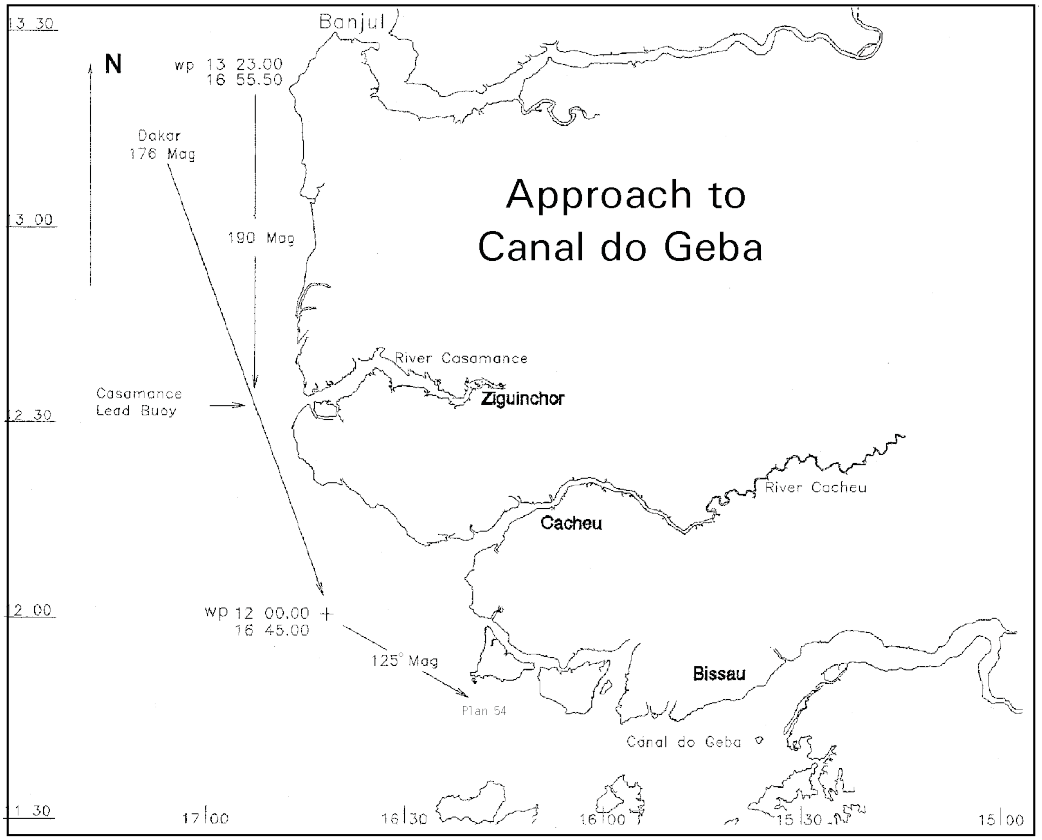
The country and its main navigable waterways are shown in Plan 52. If heading straight for Bissau, be warned that the Canal do Geba is characterised by strong tides, converging currents and sudden strong winds which can quickly produce an unpleasant steep chop. This, for me in an 8m sloop, is an uncomfortable stretch of water and I prefer to take shelter in either the River Cacheu or behind the northern isles of Jeta and Pecixe. This allows me to time my departure to reach Bissau on the flood tide.

If heading directly to Bissau, navigation is straightforward. The routes to the Geba are shown in Plan 53 and the approach to Bissau in Plan 54. Bissau and its anchorages are shown in the section on Bissau later in the chapter.

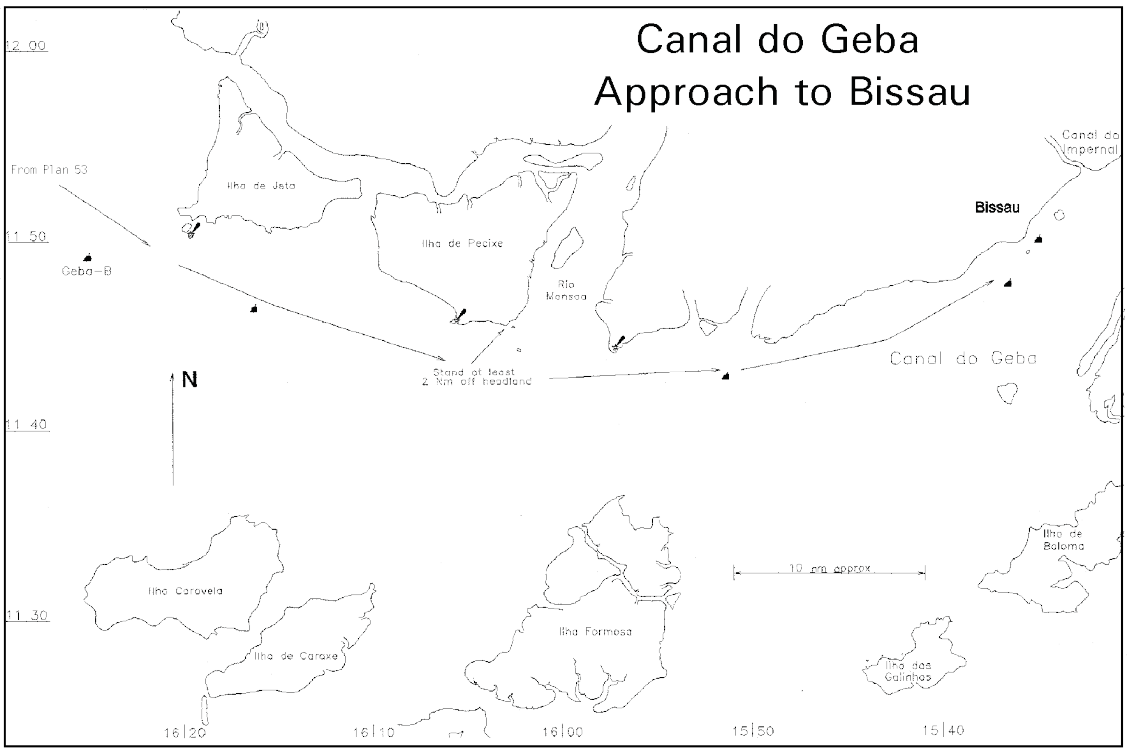
The buoyed channel in the Geba is no longer maintained (reported update 2008, EW), but I have shown those that were present in 1995 in Plan 54. Ed Wheeler reports that the only navigational aids still visible are old stone perches and light towers, all unlit. However, the Admiralty Charts of the Canal do Geba and of the Bijagos are still mostly accurate where available in large enough scale (excepted, as noted below, in the approaches to the Canal de Santa Catarina). Unfortunately, the Bijagos are only partly covered by detailed charts.



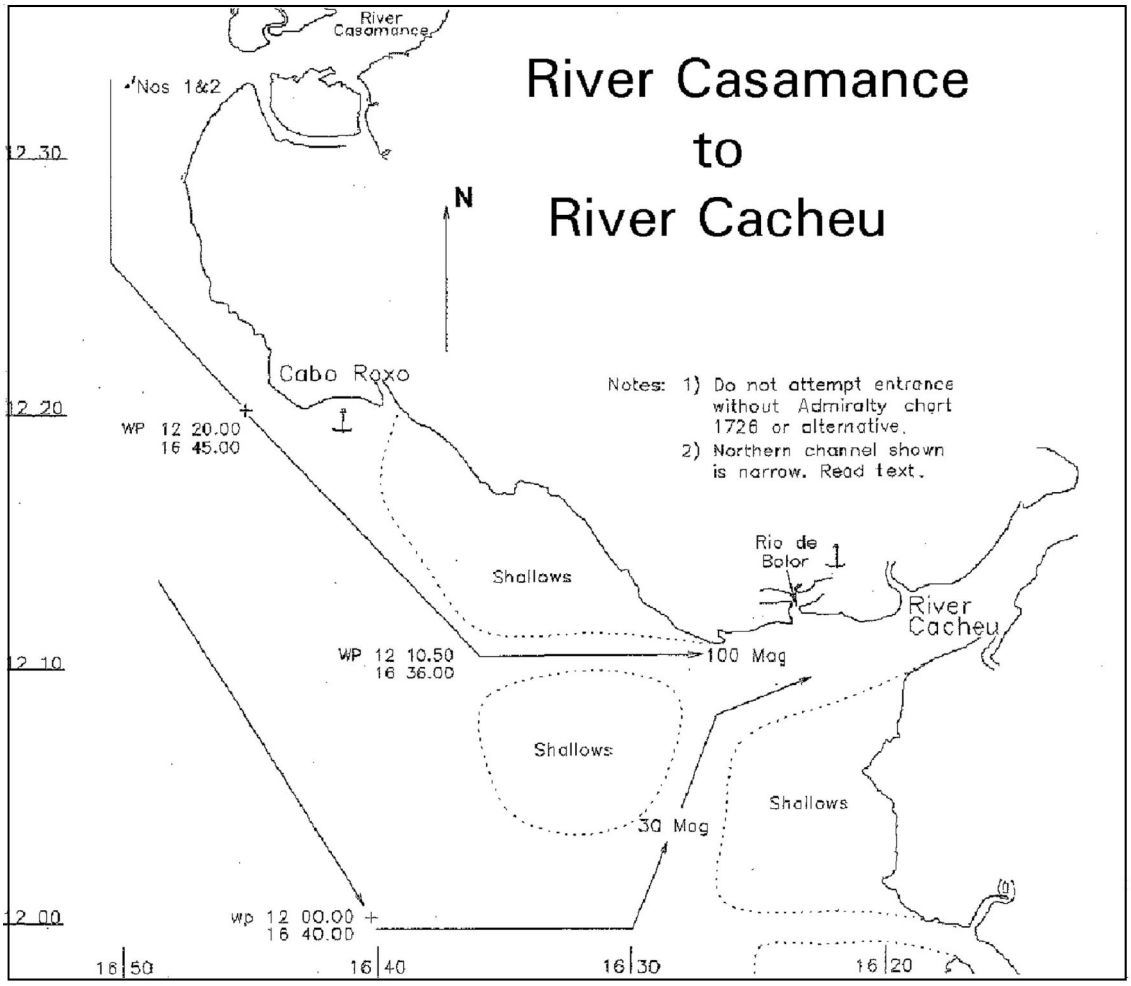
Plan 52 Guinea-Bissau



Plan 53 Approach to Canal do Geba



Plan 54 Canal do Geba - Approach to Bissau



Plan 55 River Casamance to River Cacheu

You can easily stand about a mile off each headland heading up river until you see Bissau except at Pointa Arlete and the eastern tip of the Ilha de Pecixe, where you should stand two miles off.

In my experience there always seems to be a strong blow down river when the tide is flooding, hence wind against tide and a very aggravated stretch of water. I do not know why this is because it goes against the prevailing weather pattern on this coast.

If you have time it is more fun and, I find, more convenient to hop down to the Geba. There are a number of sheltered anchorages and deviations en route. The first of these is the river Cacheu which is a short passage from the Casamance (Plan 55).

If heading straight for the Bijagos turn to the section on these islands in the next chapter.

See Revisions pg R9

River Casamance to River Cacheu

This route can easily be accomplished in a day, especially for smaller-draught vessels which, in reasonable conditions, can cut across the shallows by the northern route shown in (Plan 55). This takes advantage of the deep channel scoured out by the Rio de Bolor, which offers a nice shelter into the bargain. Vessels up to 2m draught can use this route at any stage of the tide, though I would stand further offshore if it is rough or if there is a strong on-shore breeze. All the headlands along this stretch of coast have rocks off them, especially Cabo Roxo where they stretch for a mile and a half off shore.

I have shown an anchorage in the lee of Cabo Roxo which was used by friends of mine, but not by myself. The headland would appear to offer shelter in the dry season with a prevailing north-westerly, but I would watch out for an offshore wind which can blow hard towards the rocks off the headland. I would not consider this anchorage in the rains. Entering the Cacheu takes some care and should not be attempted without the Admiralty chart. As can be seen, there are extensive shallows in the river mouth, but there are a number of factors which make this entrance much kinder than the Casamance. Most important of these is that I have found the chart to be absolutely accurate in the channels I have used. It should be noted that MLWS in Cacheu are half a metre above datum so you will probably have more water than charted. Finally, you do not seem to get the swell here that is common in the Casamance estuary.

As previously stated, I find the easiest approach is using the deep-water channel scoured out by the Rio de Bolor. The disadvantage is that it is very narrow with drying sand banks on both sides, which would make it difficult into the wind. In those conditions I simply motor. The first time I entered late in 1994 there was a wrecked yacht with just its mast and rigging showing on the shallows to port as I entered, which spooked me a bit. It was later suggested, however, that this vessel had been wrecked deliberately. Whatever the truth, if you see signs of her she has been there for a long time.

I have included waypoints to help with the southern channel, but you will need a decent chart as there are shallows all around. Most yachts can enter by this route at any state of the tide but deeper-draught vessels might need to wait for high water. There is no trace of the supposed buoyed channel still shown on the charts. Watch the echo sounder as you approach, you can head up river when you cross the 10m contour. I have shown the channel from mid-river into the Rio de Bolor in Plan 56 but deeper-draught vessels might find it easier to find shelter in the Rio de Elia, which is the next one up river. The chart shows this as a deep and easy entrance, but I have never used it.

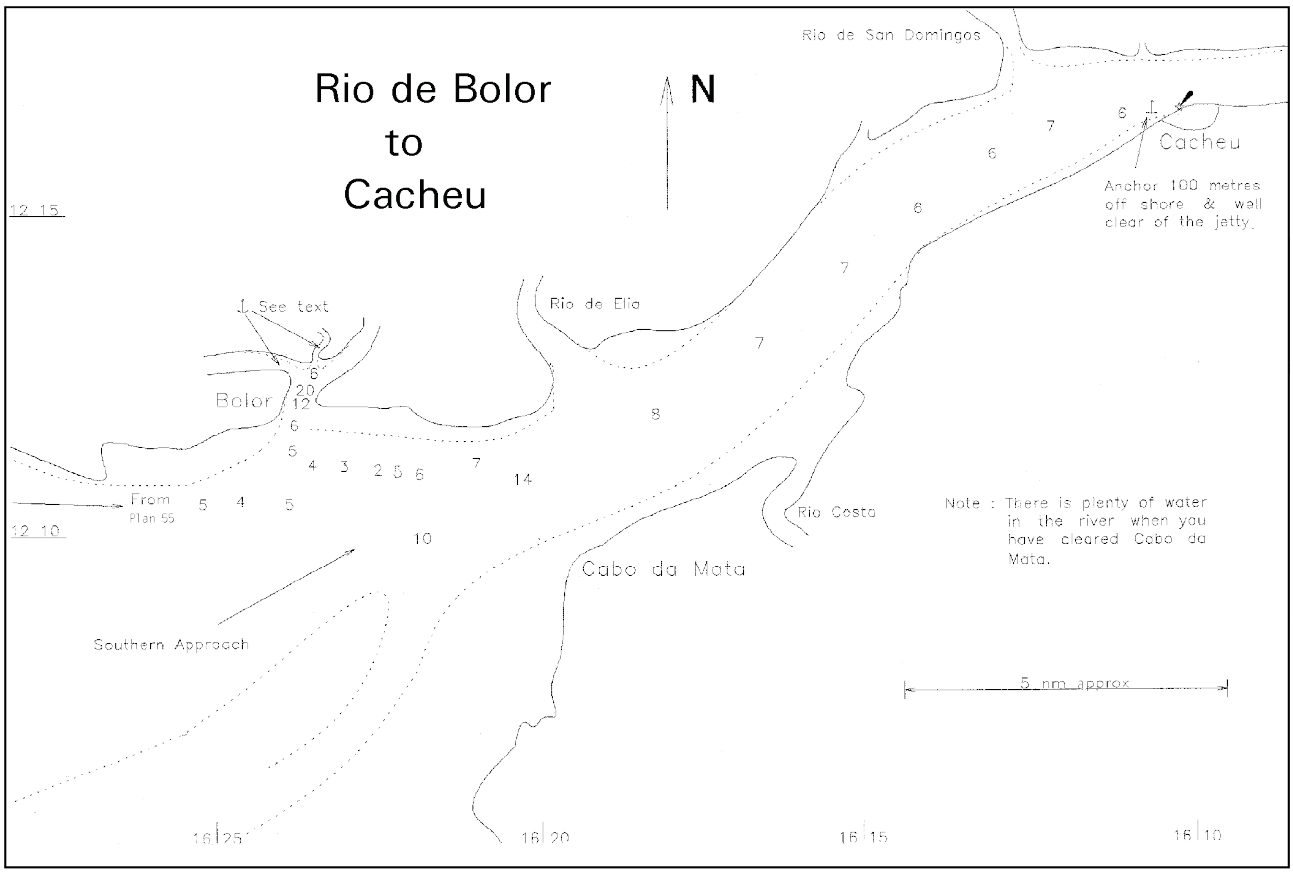
Dai Rice reports that entry into the Rio de Bolor ideally has to be timed to coincide with daylight and a flood tide as there are numerous shallow banks across the entire entrance and running out to seaward. However he did find the Admiralty Chart 1726 to be very accurate apart from the buoyage which is now non-existent. He followed the line over the banks where the buoys should have been and never had less than 3.8m at 2 hours before HW. So with an accurate GPS and depth sounder, and in calm conditions, there should be no problem. He can imagine that a large swell would break heavily across most of the entrance.

River Cacheu

The River Cacheu is an attractive and little used route to the heart of Portuguese West Africa. Farim and Cacheu were both important trading towns and provincial capitals in their time, but are now sleepy backwaters. Cacheu can be used as a port of entry, as will be described in the following text. I have included the information shown in Plans 57 and 58 which has been correlated from road maps and old charts. The main source is the old Admiralty chart No. 3253 which is unfortunately no longer available. Time did not permit me to check this passage above Cacheu.

River Cacheu to Cacheu

Plan 56 shows the lower reaches of the river once you have crossed the bar. As previously stated, this entrance should not be attempted without Admiralty chart 1726 which also shows this passage. Once in the river there is plenty of water across most of its width. The dotted lines in Plan 56 show the shallows.



Plan 56 Rio de Bolor to Cacheu

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The Cacheu seems a remarkably placid river for this part of the world. I have put into the Rio de Bolor anchorage on a number of occasions and sat at anchor for several days off the exposed-looking headland of Cacheu without encountering more than a ripple. I also often used the now defunct São Domingos to Cacheu ferry in similarly calm conditions. Only once when staying in Cacheu during the rains did I see the river get up when a sudden strong wind blew straight down river.

The ebb tide is reported as running up to 2.5 knots mid-stream off Cabo de Mata so you will probably need the tide to help you sail up to Cacheu. The lights at Cabo de Mata and on the jetty at Cacheu were working when I visited over New Year in 1995.

Before Cacheu, Dai Rice anchored for the night in Rio de Elia, which he found to be a deep, safe and tranquil river with no evidence of human habitation whatsoever.

Cacheu stands on a low-lying headland and is clearly visible on approach. Dai Rice reports that once inside the river there is deep water all the way up to Cacheu, and that large trading vessels no longer visit; only trading pirogues now use the port. Do not approach the jetty, but anchor down river as close in as you can get. The bank shoals rapidly 50-100m offshore with the shallows in the shadow of the headland. The tidal range is over 2m here so allow yourself plenty of water on springs. I would not anchor up river from the town, where there is deeper water and you could get closer in, because if the São Domingos Ferry were to start running again it follows the bank along this stretch and the crew are not always sober. However, this might be an option after you have checked the likelihood of such an event.

On arrival, report to the Capitainerie de Porto who has a hut by the main jetty on the up-river side. It is the only building and cannot be mistaken, though you would not think it to be of any importance. The Immigration office is further up the main road, which is straight in front of the port area at 90° to the river bank.

Dai Rice's experience on arrival was as follows: 'We anchored about 200m downstream of the town's jetty and were boarded within minutes by a group of eight men in civilian clothes. They all tried to clamber below until I hauled them out and asked for their ID. In fact they turned out to be the Port Captain, Customs Officer and 'Security Officer' with a group of hangers on. They were not a very friendly bunch and we had to keep a watchful eye on our possessions. After about 30 minutes of drinking our beer they left with our passports, ship's papers and my Yachtmaster Ocean certificate, instructing me to report to the Harbour Office in

See Revisions pg R9

the morning. We were allowed to go ashore but only if 'escorted'.

Considering that shipping movements in and out of Cacheu have now all but ceased its surprising that all these officials are still in place. In fact we were told we were the first sailing yacht to visit for at least five years. The next day brought another unpleasant experience – I was to be fined 3,000 Euros for not giving the Port Captain 72hrs, 48hrs and 24 hrs notice of our arrival, as required of commercial vessels. I told him he was being ridiculous as we were simply tourists. Fortunately a pleasant Immigration lady agreed with me so he backed down and we settled on 80 Euros for a 'Cruising Permit'. This was just a crude attempt to extract money from us and was to be a sadly familiar occurrence throughout our cruise in Guinea-Bissau. Whilst the local population were friendly and kind and the islands and rivers stunning, it was always the greed of the petty officials which discoloured the experience. Perhaps with more visiting yachts around they would be forced to moderate their demands. We haven't seen any other yachts since leaving the Casamance so we are something of a rarity and doubtless seen as easy pickings.'

Dai also carried out a crew change from Cacheu which proved to be surprisingly straightforward. The departing crew took a taxi from Cacheu to Bissau airport (about two hours on a good road) and picked up the new crew.

Cacheu was the first trading centre set up by the Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau and in 1984, to commemorate 400 years of contact, they built a new hotel, a community centre and renovated the old fort. About the same time they also donated a new ferry which ran a daily service to São Domingos on the Senegalese boarder. With a ferry bringing through traffic, a new hotel and a reasonable restaurant looking over the main square and the river, Cacheu was a thriving place by local standards. It was certainly one of my favourite stops in West Africa. The hotel was never really economically viable, however, and when the more important ferry at São Vicente was discontinued the Cacheu ferry went there. Now the hotel and restaurant are closed, and Cacheu is less accommodating to visitors.

Take time to walk around the tiny fort on the river bank. Having been renovated and then neglected it has an almost surreal air. There used to be bronze, larger-than-life statues inside which include Henry the Navigator, Joe Stalin and Lenin. The latter two have their limbs falling off while Henry stands proudly gazing toward far horizons, which may be a fair reflection on their standing in the eyes of history.

Fuel is not available, but there is a petrol station at Canchungo which is about half an hour away by bush taxi. I often used to refill a Land Rover there, but it was not something you could rely on. Dai Rice reports this selling good diesel in early 2008. He also found water available from a standpipe near the jetty. He also found it possible to stock up on basic grocery items, fresh fruit and vegetables and fish.

Cacheu to São Vicente

I have not been able to travel up river from Cacheu because of lack of time, but have included the available information here for any adventurous soul who might wish to do so.

Plan 57 shows the river to São Vicente, which is the main ferry crossing of the river on the Ziguinchor Bissau 'highway'. There is nothing else there and little reason to stop unless you were hoping to pick up a lift to either town, which I would not recommend. Going to Bissau involves another ferry crossing on the Rio Mansoa, and Ziguinchor involves a laborious border crossing.

São Vicente to Farim

Plan 58 shows the remaining navigable stretch of the river up to Farim. The Admiralty pilot states that the river is navigable for vessels with a draught of up to 3.7m to within 4M of Farim. They certainly move a ferry with a significant draught to and from Farim and I suspect that, using the tide, most yachts could get there. As the river narrows it gets quite deep, and the main charted difficulty is on the last few bends before the town.

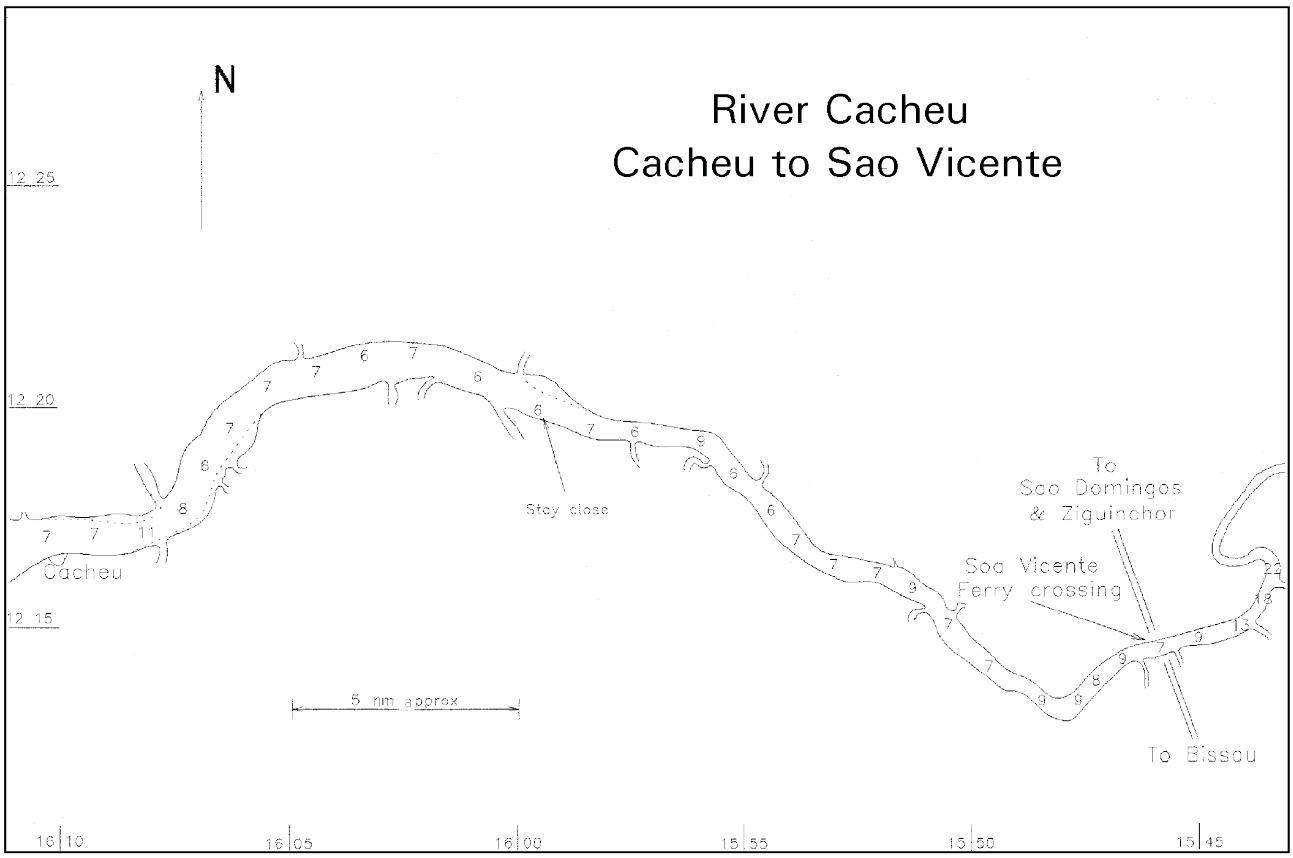
Farim is an old Portuguese trading town complete with the traditional red-tiled roofs and a square on the banks of the river.

I am not aware of any yachts ever having visited the town, so if you make it you will be something of a sensation.

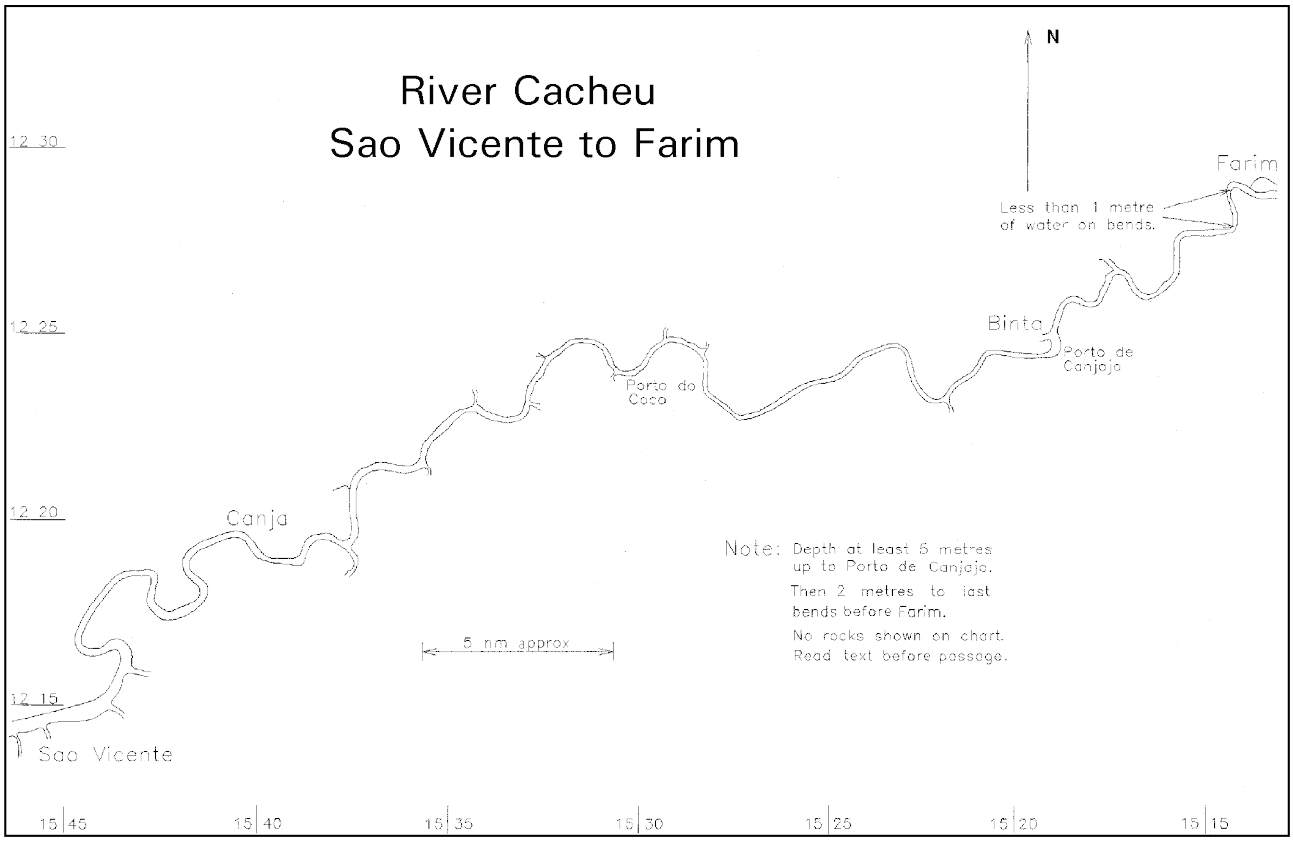
The northern isles

Though less spectacular than the Bijagos to the south, the two northern isles of Jeta and Pecixe shown in Plan 59 are worth a visit if time permits. The channels behind the islands offer shelter and a peaceful route towards Bissau.

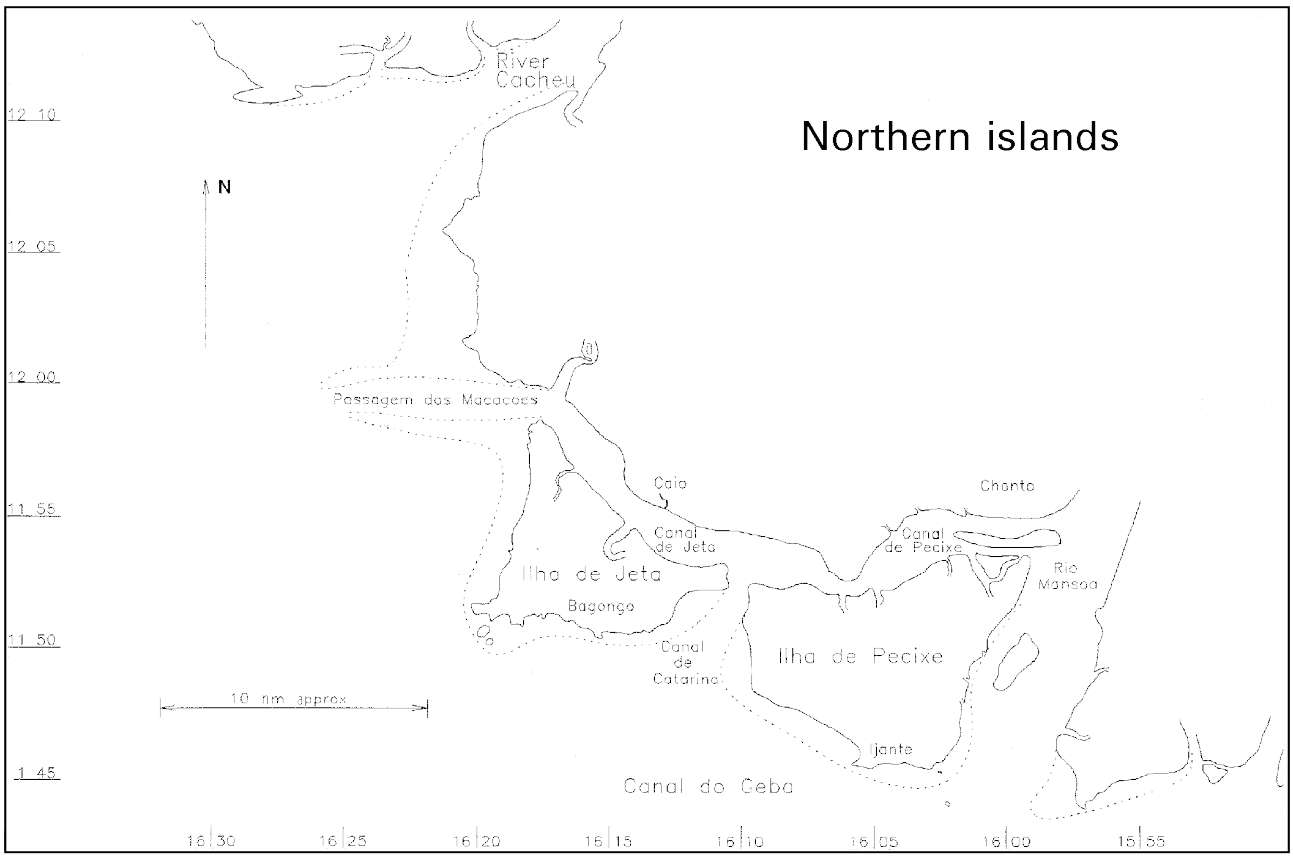
There are difficulties getting in, with the easiest channel being the Rio Mansoa. I have shown the northern entrance into the Canal de Jeta through the Passage dos Macacoes in Plan 60, but do not recommend it. I have used it myself but the charted marker at the entrance is no longer there, and picking up the channel in an area of shifting sand banks and converging currents is not easy. If you do decide to enter, head to the south of the entrance and work your way in. I have given a waypoint in Plan 60, but be prepared for the entrance to have changed.



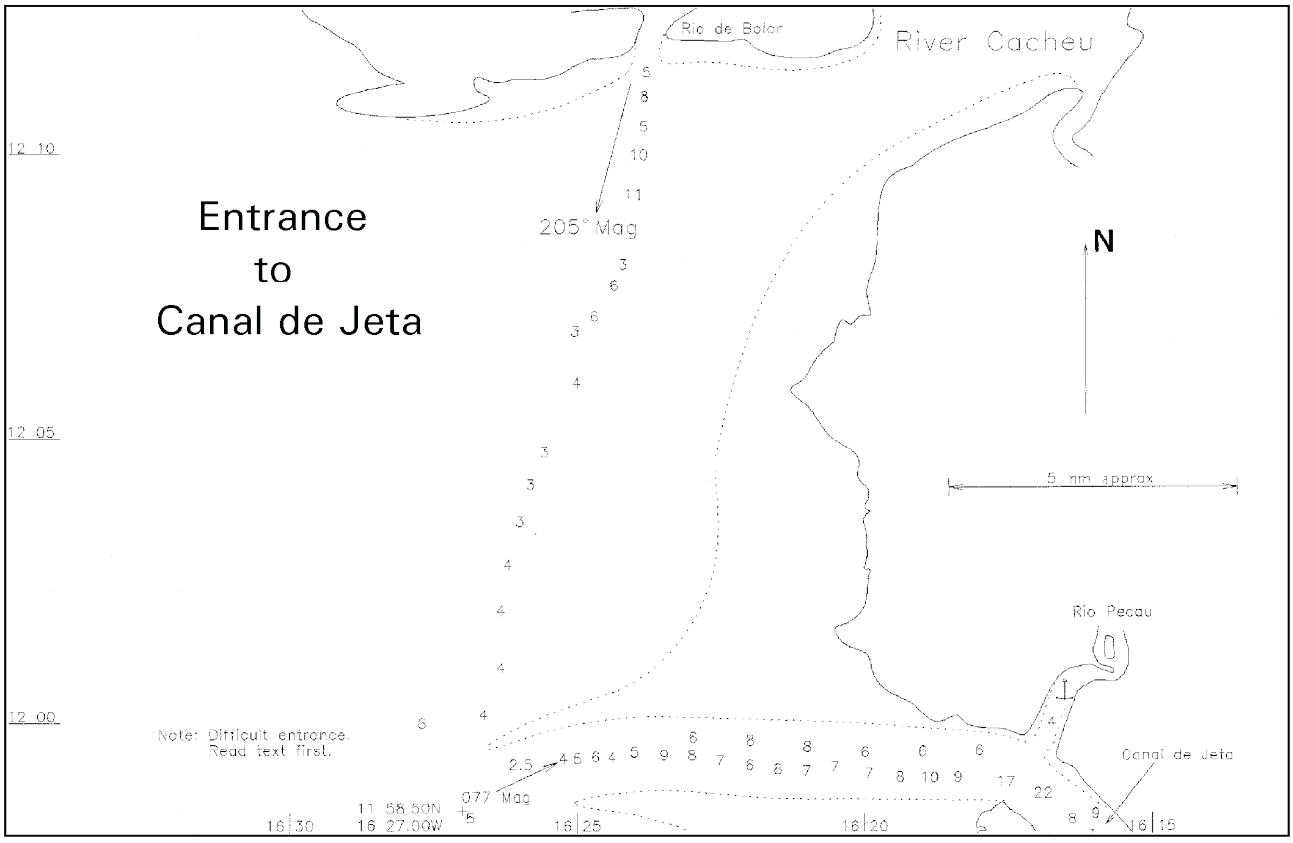
Plan 57 River Cacheu - Cacheu to São Vicente



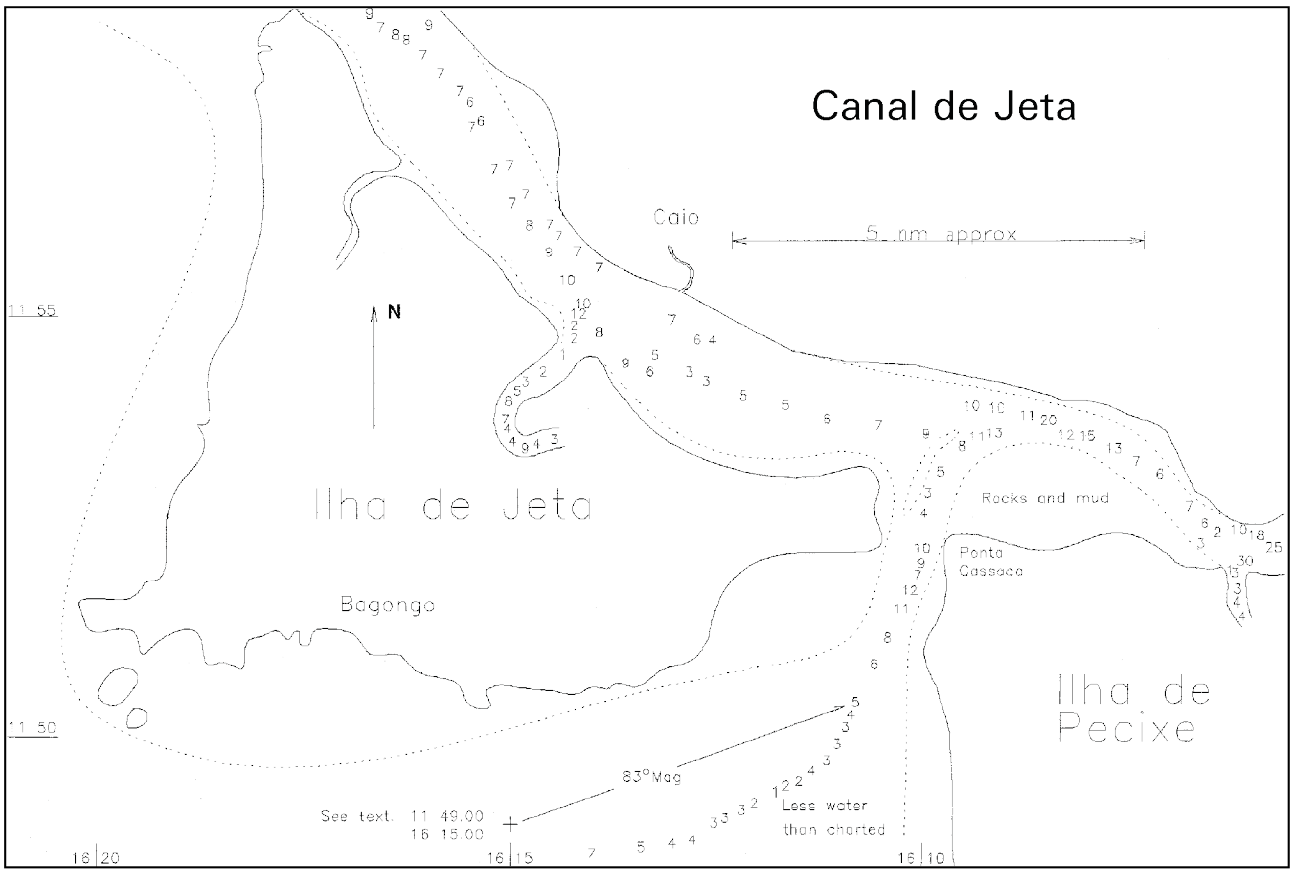
Plan 58 River Cacheu São Vicente to Farim



Plan 59 Northern islands



Plan 60 Entrance to Canal de Jeta



Plan 61 Canal de Jeta

Once you are in the channel, which is about half a mile wide at its narrowest point, there is plenty of water. The banks are sand and steep, but at low tide are clearly visible making navigation easy.

Another way into the Canal de Jeta is through the Canal de Catarina shown in Plan 61, but again some caution is required. I have found that there is less water at the entrance than charted. The line of soundings shown in Plan 61 represents the course I have taken on both occasions that I have used this channel. Ed Wheeler attempted but was unable to enter the Canal de Jeta through the Canal de Catarina; he found the Canal bore no resemblance to the chart and the banks seem to have extended right across the entrance.

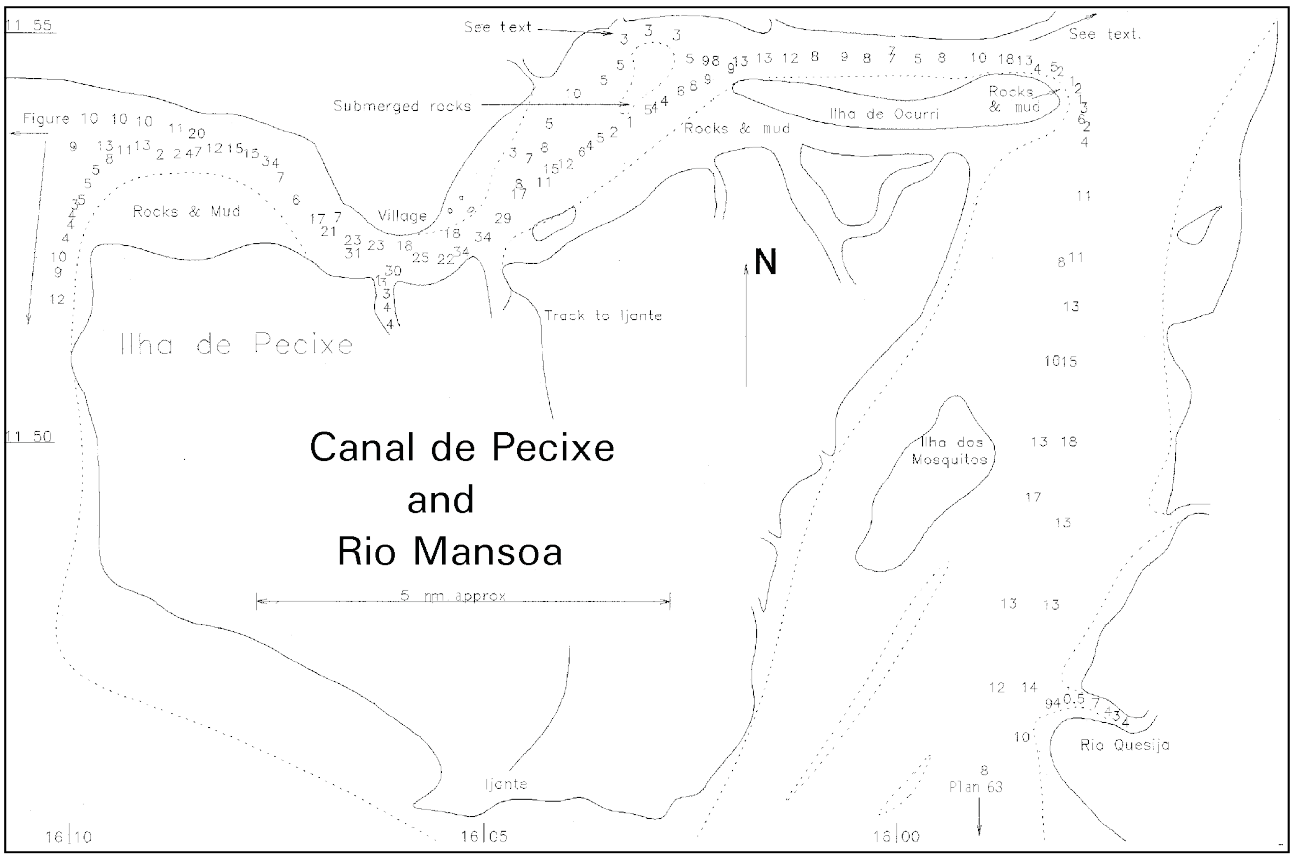
The Canal de Jeta itself is well sheltered with reasonable holding in mud. I have not seen any rocks in this channel, but there are rocks in the Canal de Pecixe which it joins.

The creek going into the Ilha de Jeta about two thirds of the way down the channel is accessible if you can cross the bar. As shown, I have been unable to find access deeper than 1m at the entrance at low tide. Pirogues use this route to go to Bagongo on the other side of the island, but as there are a number of forks in the creek and a lot of tsetses I failed to find it.

On the opposite side of the Canal de Jeta from this creek is another very small creek which gives you access by dinghy to the village of Caió. However, be warned that with a possible tidal range of 3m (I base this on my own observations) this creek will dry at MLWS. I have found myself stuck in Caió waiting for the tide.

The people here are Manjagoes who, like the Jola, are predominantly animist and live closer to nature than the other tribes of West Africa. Caió is a village I know fairly well, as my work used to take me there, and it is a good place to see traditional crafts such as weaving and iron work. There are now a couple of shops with limited provisions in the village, but the bread is made with weevil-infested flour. Water is only available from wells. There is a track through the forest which links Caió with Canchungo, but you might find difficulty getting a lift.

The forest here abounds with wildlife, and Caió is the only place in West Africa I have ever been served gazelle meat for dinner. The people are friendly but have a tendency for heavy drinking, especially when the cashew crop is being harvested. The fruit of this plant is beaten into a pulp and then naturally ferments. Some of it is also distilled to make cashew canna. Treat these beverages with respect.



Plan 62 Canal de Pecixe & Rio Mansoa

There is plenty of water in the Jeta itself, but there are mud banks in the expanse of water between the two channels. If heading on for the Canal de Pecixe, stay towards the outside of the bend as you pass between the islands. If heading out of the Canal de Catarina it is easier to continue towards the Ilha de Pecixe and then head out to leave Ponta Cassaca 200-300m to port. There is another channel closer to Jeta but this can be more difficult to pick up.

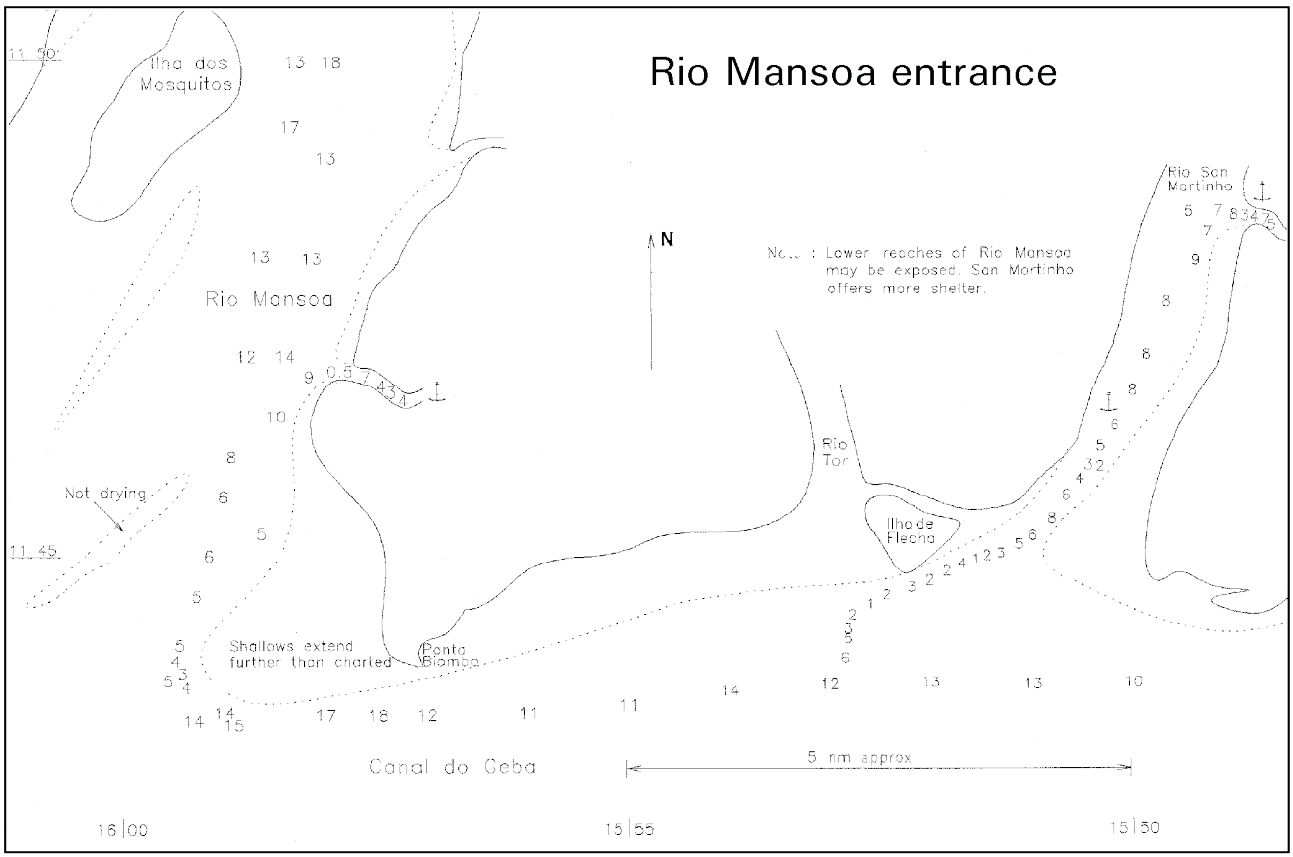
In the Canal de Pecixe stay closer to the north bank until you reach the narrow part of the channel off the prominent headland, where it is very deep. This is a very attractive waterway with a beach on the headland where pirogues are pulled up and a group of tiny islands as the creek widens again. The seabed here is probably rocky, which is why I used the anchorage in a creek opposite to the headland, shown with soundings in Plan 62. I would not particularly recommend this option, however.

After the headland the channel widens and becomes shallower. There is an area of shallows and islets in the shadow behind the headland, which you must work around, but it then appears that the best route is hugging the north bank. I base this on the old Admiralty chart 1722 which I only acquired after sailing this way twice. The line of soundings shows the course I followed on these occasions which, according to the chart, took me either side of an area of rock in mid-channel at the widest point. The 3m soundings shown to the north of this area of rock and shallows are reduced from soundings of over one fathom on the chart, so unless there has been some change you should have enough water.

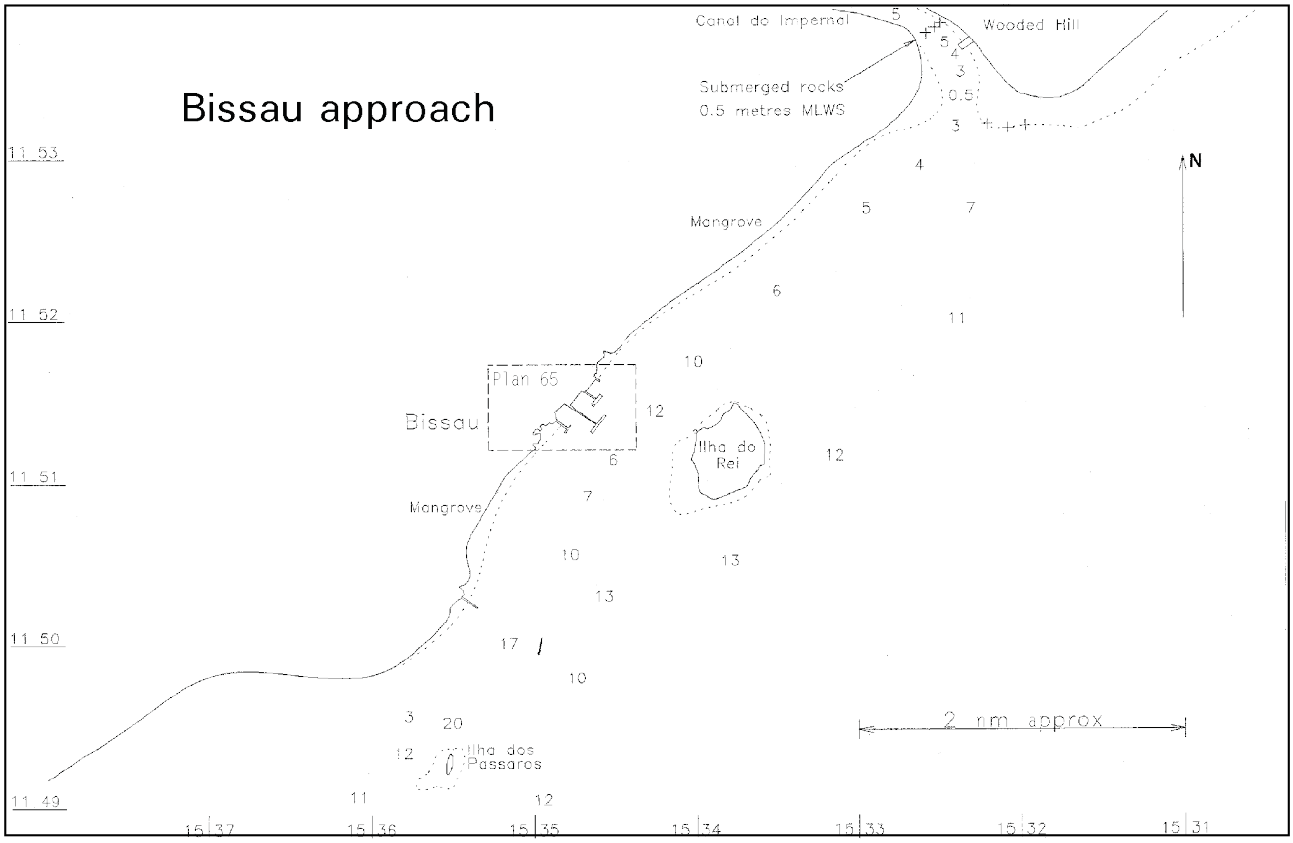
Once in the channel to the north of the Ilha de Ocurri it becomes deeper again, but some care needs to be taken leaving this channel into the Rio Mansoa. The line of soundings shown in Plan 62 is the route I took by following the headland and watching the echo sounder, but when reduced to MLWS these soundings show readings of less than a metre. However, the old Admiralty chart 1722 clearly shows a deep-water channel into the Rio Mansoa standing a couple of hundred metres off the north bank until well into the Mansoa. It also shows submerged rocks off the end of the Ilha de Ocurri, which explain the erratic soundings I was getting.

The Rio Mansoa continues inland to the town of Mansoa, passing the final ferry crossing on the main road to Bissau just north of Safim in the process. I have no idea how navigable this river is, but it used to be possible to move the ferries up river to the crossing.

Going down river there is deep water as far as the Rio Quesija, which can be used as shelter if you can get in. Leave the sinister sounding Ilha dos Mosquitos well to starboard and enter the Quesija by heading towards the north bank and then following the curve of the river. There are broad



Plan 63 Rio Mansoa entrance



Plan 64 Bissau approach

mudflats on each side, and the bar is below a metre at MLWS; but when you are in the river there is over 4m.

Heading out into the Canal do Geba again is easy enough, but the shallows extending from Ponta Biombo are more extensive than charted. Stand at least 3nm off this point. There is plenty of room to get into the river and I have not encountered the charted shallows to the west, but obviously some care must be taken. I have no reason to suppose that there is any problem with either of the other two charted channels between the Rio Mansoa and the Canal do Geba, but have not used them myself.

I have shown the entrance to the Rio San Martinho, but it is not the easiest of channels. The chart shows more water in this channel than I could find, and the possible eastern channel was not there. However, if you get in, the bar offers shelter and the side creek shown up river offers an attractive and snug anchorage.

As previously stated, the Geba is an uncomfortable stretch of water, and in the winter months seems to suffer from strong wind-against-tide syndrome on the flood. From the mouth of the Rio Mansoa stand about a mile off each headland when heading up river (Plan 54).

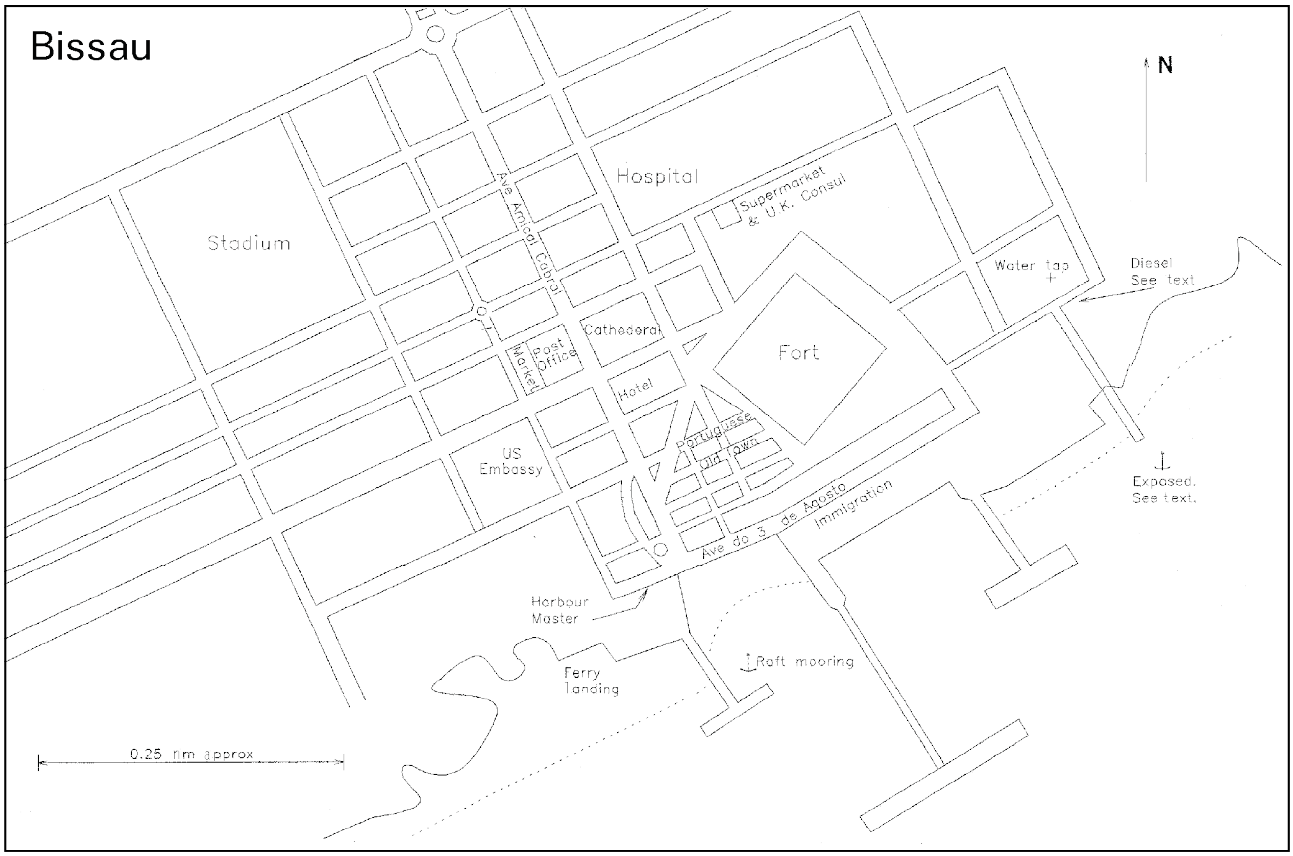
The approach to Bissau is shown in Plan 64. The city and the islands are clearly visible as you approach, and I usually go inside the Ilha dos Passaros as the shortest approach.

Bissau

Bissau is the least friendly West African capital for visiting yachts, not because of the place or the people, but because it is not a natural harbour.

There is no difficulty getting to the port, but there is a serious problem with anchorage when you are there. Depending on the size and state of repair of your yacht one option is to go inside the first pier and raft up to other vessels (Plan 65). These will all be work boats, however, and as heavy seas can pass through the piers make sure you have adequate fenders out. I prefer to anchor in the shelter of the Canal do Impernal shown in Plan 64 and anchor off the jetty up river from the port to conduct business in Bissau (Plan 65).

Technically speaking you should stop in the port to clear Ports and Immigration, but in practice they seem not to mind if you anchor off the jetty. This is convenient for fuel and water as well as a landing point and used only by the local pirogues and dugouts, but it is a bit exposed. I have been anchored off this jetty when an onshore wind has suddenly got up and it was soon too rough to launch my inflatable. We spent a miserable hour, unable to do anything, watching our boat bouncing and pulling at her anchor chain. The local craft



Plan 65 Bissau

Bissau Port - Ed Wheeler

were equally caught out by the conditions and a couple were swamped, resulting in the loss of cargoes. On this occasion we were only gone for about half an hour and the Geba had changed from placid to very angry, so it is worth leaving a competent crew member on board when you go ashore.

On arrival, choose your anchorage and report to Immigration which is in an office in the ports next to the gate near the main jetty. If you have rafted up in the harbour you will naturally pass this office when leaving the ports. If you have anchored outside of the ports you will have to find the gate off the Av. do 3 de Agosto and enter the ports. The office itself has no sign, however, so you will have to ask. Once inside you have the usual West African palaver in which friendly men will look for excuses to ask you for money. One of these will be if they have to walk up to the jetty to inspect your vessel, even though they seem to accept the excuse that your yacht is too small to berth in the ports area. A friend of mine got around the payment problem by inviting the official for a beer on the way, an option usually popular with Bissau officials. He demanded no more payment when he discovered that the yacht involved was a Wayfarer which had been sailed down from Chichester, but that's another story. Your passports will be stamped, and you may be given a document which allows a given number of crew members permission to leave the ports.

Next comes the harbour master's office. Turn left as you leave the port gate and continue until you see a ship's bell at the side of the road about a minute's walk away. The harbour master's office is just past this bell on your left; I really cannot remember if there is a sign. We took several attempts to contact the harbour master himself who always seemed to be out, and finally ran into him in a bar, the way one does. He was friendly and helpful in a West African sort of way, and even spoke a little English. It probably helped that we had been buying him beer. While Immigration seem to be available every day, the harbour master's office works government hours, which means they are not available at weekends and public holidays. The latter are even more unpredictable here than in the rest of the region because they include revolutionary celebrations. If a date appears on the map, like the Av. do 3 de Agosto (August 3rd) there is a good chance it will be a holiday.

The harbour master was able to supply us with tide tables and charts which we were sent to get copied. Unfortunately, the copies proved to be unreadable. On the wall of his office there are the Portuguese charts of the whole area which are very good, and if you have time it is worth studying these. To get the copies he will offer you, for a fee, originals of these charts and give you directions to an office where a friend of his can make UV copies. This is not cheap, and the UV process is intended for making copies from transparencies, so at best you are going to end up with a less-than-perfect copy. Remember that the slower the chart and copy paper go through the UV light, the darker your reproduction will be, and it is worth insisting that this is not done too quickly. If you can get away with it, I would try to agree only to pay for a readable copy.

The only shelter available is three miles up the coast in the Canal do Impernal, shown in Plan 64. This is far from ideal, and would be difficult to enter on MLWS. There is also an uncharted line of rock further up the creek, which I hit. Enter by following the contour of the down-river side of the entrance which seems to be fairly regular. There are rocks charted off the headland up river, but I have never seen them. As you enter, you pass a large jetty which is by a disused boat yard. Anchor just past

this jetty before you get to the line of rocks. There are two wrecks on the river bank adjacent to the rocks, so make sure you anchor well before these and check your swinging radius. Depending on the tide and your draught you can cross the line of rock and anchor further up river, where the bottom again becomes muddy. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that uneven rocky sea beds will bedevil the rest of the areas in this guide.

There is a local dugout running a ferry service across the Canal do Impernal from the jetty, which limits your privacy. This service links the town of Cumere on the hill above you with Bissau, and if you were to walk up there you can see why it is necessary. It is the only town of this size that I have ever visited in West Africa which does not seem to have a single shop. I have not attempted the path through the mangrove and paddy field to Bissau because the landing on the Bissau side is very muddy indeed. I have found it more convenient to make my way to and from Bissau to do my business, and to shelter overnight in the canal.

I have already described Bissau as a difficult place. What limited services there are all close down in the centre from mid-day on Saturday until Monday morning, and if it happens to be one of the many long weekends you can be in for a frustrating time. On one such weekend I was unable to even make a phone call for three days. However, outside the city centre, which becomes a ghost town, the African way of life throbs on. Taxis are cheap so, when the wheels of government suffer paralysis, go exploring.

If you have problems there is a British Consul shown in Plan 65, and the French have an embassy in the Avenue de 14 Novembro. There is also a Dutch Consulate. The British consul is Dutch. He runs the best-stocked supermarket in town, and if you can get to talk to him he is very knowledgeable about the country. To contact him go to his supermarket which is:

Supermercado Mavegro
Rua Eduardo Mondlane
CP 100 Bissau
Tel : +245 20 12 24 or 16
Fax : +245 20 12 65
Email: mavegro@hotmail.com or mavegro@gtelecom.gw

This is a hard-currency shop which is a mixture of supermarket, old-fashioned iron monger and general store. They may be able to exchange currency.

A better deal may had in the central market which is a closed market behind the post office. Whilst less of an ordeal than the Senegalese and Gambian counterparts, keep a good hold on your valuables. Meat, fish, vegetables and a wide range of other products are available.

Around the central market and post office you will be approached by money changers, who offer a slightly better rate than the banks, and are much more convenient to deal with.

One place to phone from is the post office which, though chaotic looking, is easier than you would expect and surprisingly cheap. As you enter the large front doors, turn to the smaller room to the right where there is a counter and a number of booths. The man behind the counter will tell you which booth to use, and you pay him when you have finished. However, international calls were unreliable through their old exchange. Calls can also be made through the 'Posto Publicos'.

If you cannot find something you need in town take a taxi out to the Market Banda a short way from the centre. This is a large, typically African sprawl of a market divided into sections for different types of goods. I went there looking for a fan belt and ended up with an interesting selection of differing sizes, one of which I managed to get to work. Meat, fish, vegetables, nuts and bolts and even English-language books can be found.

The best way to buy fuel is from the jetty anchorage, shown in Plan 65, with jerry cans. At the end of the track leading to the jetty turn right, and a few metres away you will see a container from which fuel can be purchased. They seem to be there most days, and often have diesel when there is none in the town (do not ask me why). This all looks very dubious to a Western eye, but they filter the fuel through a stocking as they fill your jerry can. I always filter it again as I fill my tanks, and have had no problems. There are pumps in the centre of town where the Av. Amilcar Cabral joins the Av. do 3 de Agosto, but they are unreliable.

Fuel is obviously available in the ports for larger vessels, but when I tried making enquiries from the harbour master I could not get a straight answer, and was left with the impression that it was not considered to be for visiting yachts. Also, looking at the wharf where you would have to tie up to use the facility, I was left thinking that I would rather not. By far the easiest and cheapest way to pick up diesel in the country is off the ferries in the islands, but I was never sure if the crew I was buying it from were really the rightful owners.

Water used to be available from an outside tap close to the jetty. Go up the track to your left just before the fuel container and you will see it in some rough ground to your left about 50m further on. There are still periodic outbreaks of cholera in Bissau and, even though this is mains water, I would treat it cautiously. My wife became something of a celebrity when she joined the local women doing their washing at this tap.

All that is hard work, lugging heavy containers backwards and forwards, but help is at hand. The dilapidated-looking buildings at the top end of the jetty road along the track to the right are bars, where you can buy cold beer. The service is

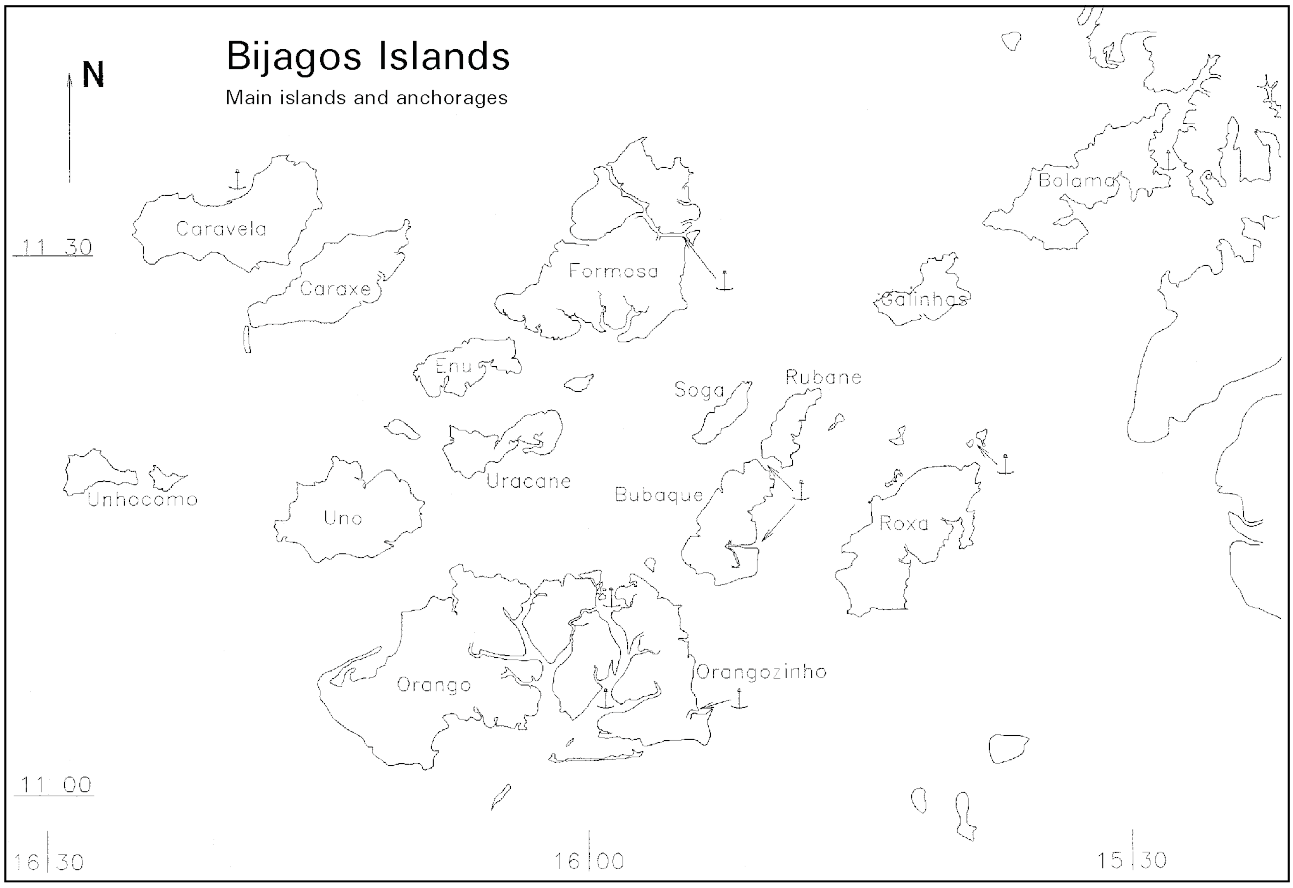
irregular, and you sometimes have to ask around before you find anyone who has some. To say that these places are not very salubrious would be an understatement, and I would not touch anything on offer other than the beer, which is cheap enough.

The Portuguese quarter is an almost triangular area of narrow roads and balconied houses nestling under the protective wall of the fort (Plan 65). It is not very large, and worth wandering around.

I quite like Bissau, but on the two occasions I have visited on my boat I have left with some relief, a relief with a touch of spice, because the obvious way to go from the capital is south to the Bijagos Islands.

Village Life

Bijagos Islands



Plan 66 Bijagos Islands

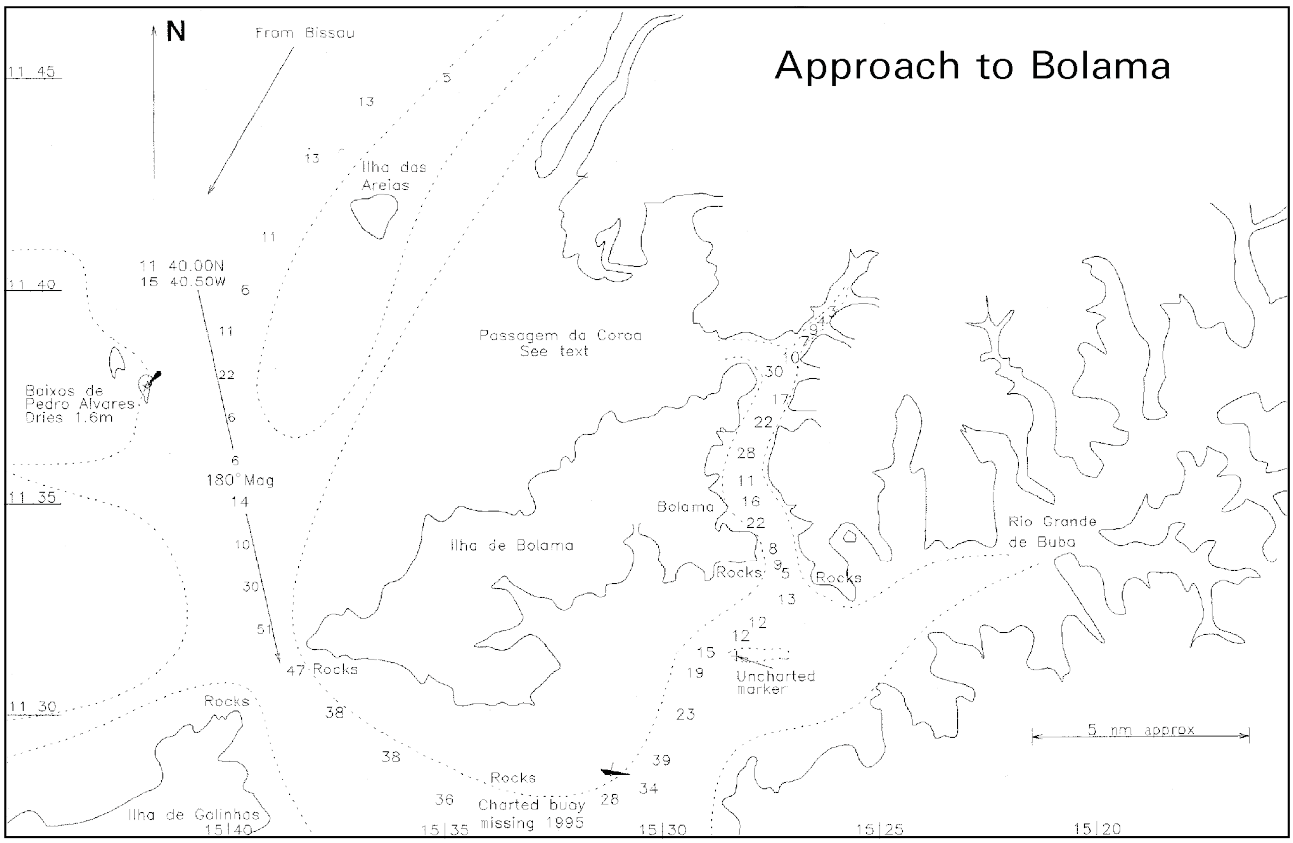
Introduction

The Bijagos Islands are the most beautiful and unspoilt part of West Africa, but lack secure anchorages, are riddled with submerged rocks and are subject to strong tides and winds. These are factors which demand forethought and planning.

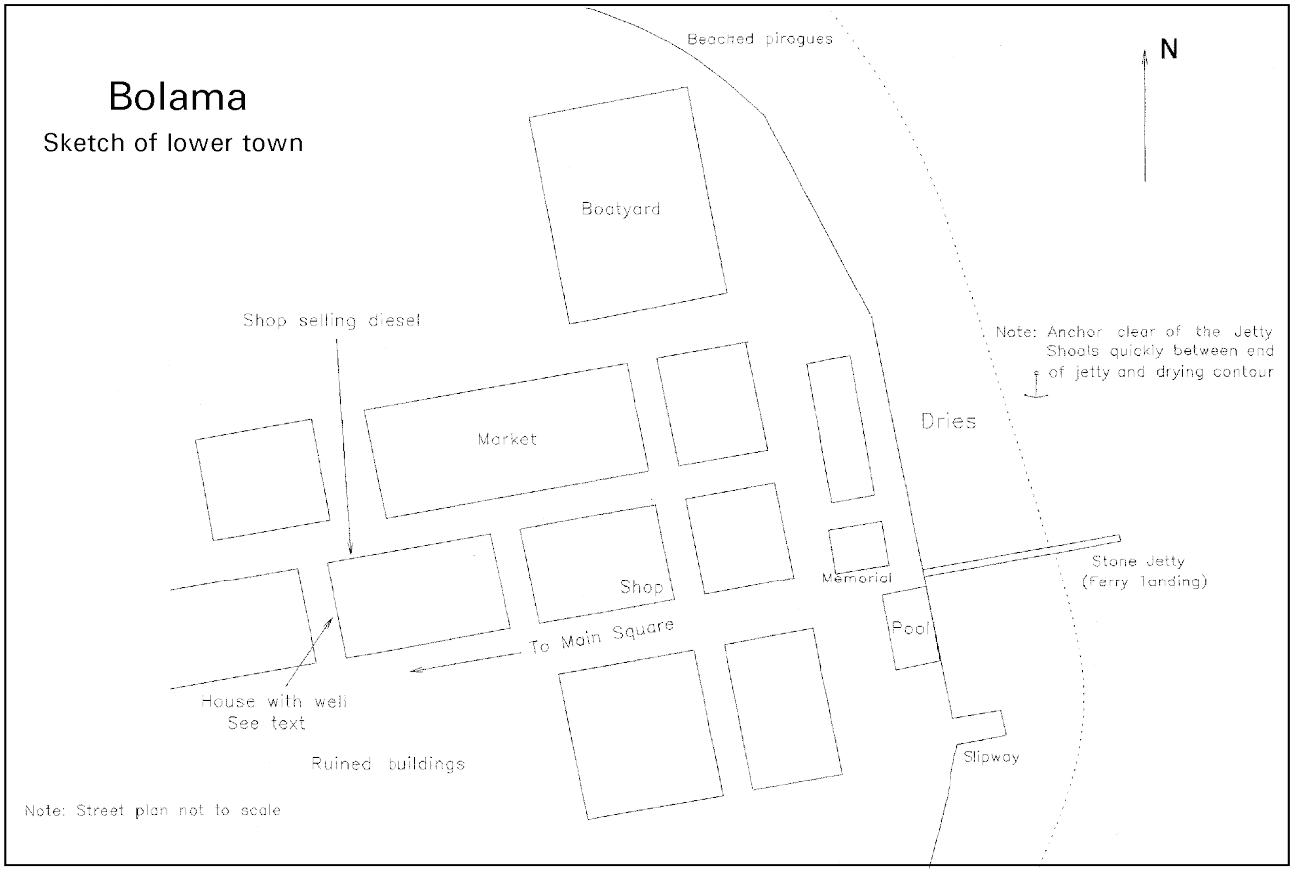
These islands harbour the simplest culture and the most unique fauna I have ever observed, and I would hate to have the balance disturbed by visitors encouraged by this book. In discussions with the few people I know who have cruised there it has often been suggested that helping cruising yachts visit the islands could have a negative impact on the environment. I offer this chapter, confident that those capable of getting to the more remote areas will be responsible enough to appreciate the honour and remain passive observers. Unfortunately, man's unerring ability to corrupt and destroy the paradise he has been given grinds ever onward, and the appearance of tourism and swarms of outboard motors will do the damage far more rapidly than a few conscientious yachtsmen.

Plan 66 shows the main islands and the anchorages that can be used by most cruising yachts. I have covered the islands in the order that I visited them, working out from Bissau. Assuming that yachts use Bissau as a port of entry, this is a logical progression, and it has the advantage of finishing the book with Caravela. There are probably many other anchorages to be found by the adventurous, and I have added some suggestions for further exploration at the end of the chapter.

The use of GPS and Admiralty charts makes navigating the main channels very easy. The charts of the islands are excellent and, though some of the sandbanks might have grown or shifted, the deep-water channels are well charted. Unfortunately, the current trend away from giving detail of the small back channels beloved by yachtsmen, but of little



Plan 67 Approach to Bolama



Plan 68 Bolama

importance to commercial shipping, leaves us a bit restricted. Dai Rice used Admiralty charts 1726, 1727 and 1724. He understood there are Portuguese charts which cover the SW of the archipelago (which is not covered by any Admiralty chart), but couldn't source them. With his 2.2m draught, he felt that a large portion of the SW would have been very tricky for him anyway.

As stated on the charts, navigational aids are unreliable, and it would appear the problem is getting worse. Though some lights are still working, I would advise against trusting them. There should be little problem covering the relatively short distances between anchorages in daylight. Dai Rice agrees as the banks of the Bijagos are numerous and changing and not all rocks are marked on the charts.

Ed Wheeler reports that a deep-keeled yacht is not ideal for exploring these islands with their 6m tidal range, strong currents and lack of detailed charts as mentioned above. Shallow draught with the ability to take the ground, bilge keels or a lifting keel would extend the cruising area considerably. A comprehensive spares and tools inventory, together with a good medical chest, are important. It is probably not possible to have any work done on engines or other equipment. That said, they are still a wonderful cruising ground and quite unlike any other in Ed's experience. Paradoxically, the difficulties mentioned above have meant that tourism has not yet touched the islands in quantity. There is some tourism, especially on Bubaque, but it is as yet unthreatening and mainly involves angling and bird and wildlife watching.

Dai Rice had heard many scare stories about the Bijagos Islands which he can happily dispel: he was not attacked by pirates, the place was not overrun with narcotics traffickers nor was any of his equipment stolen. In fact he would like to go back to the Bijagos and spend more time there in a different boat! His 2.2m draft severely restricted their cruising itinerary and choice of anchorages. Due to the high tidal range of between 4-5m he frequently had to anchor over a mile offshore. This meant that his inflatable had a long trip to get ashore (not always possible in the strong NE winds) and he always had to leave a competent individual on board. In certain places, like Bubaque and Bolama, one can anchor close in but with care as the depths can go from 10m to drying in the space of 10m. He would also recommend a more substantial tender, ideally a RIB.

Bolama

The approach to Bolama is shown in Plan 67. I have shown the route I took in the soundings. This was simple enough, leaving the Ilha das Areias to port, and working around the shallows and sand flats after it by following the contours with echo sounder. I have shown the light on the Baixos de Pedro Alvares because the old Portuguese structure is clearly there as a useful landmark, but I cannot confirm whether the light is functional. If you can pick up this marker, leave it about two miles to starboard. From there you can hold a course to leave the western tip of the Ilha de Bolama about a mile to port.

Ed Wheeler reports that the buoy marking Restinga da Areia Branca to the south of the island was missing. As can be seen from the chart, you have to go almost three miles south of Pta da Areia Branca to clear the rocks and shallows. Once you have rounded this point, look out for the convenient wreck of an old steamer, 1.7 nm NE of where the missing buoy is shown on the chart. This marks the shallows to port. When heading up the Canal de Bolola look out for the uncharted marker which shows the inside channel toward Bolama. This is only a pole, but is useful, standing well above high water, and is clearly visible. Otherwise, follow the contours around and you should be able to stay in more than 10m of water until off Bolama.

I would advise against the northern approach to Bolama, shown on the chart as a marked channel through the Passage da Coroa. I tried to pick up the channel up river from the Ilha das Areias which would lead to the Passage da Coroa, but the marker buoy is not there. With a heavy chop and strong currents, I chickened out as the sounding started to drop and I could see waves breaking on shallows where none ought to have been. The harbour master in Bissau confirmed that not all the markers through the channel are in place, though the route is used by the ferry at high water. This, however, is another cause for concern as I have seen the ferry leave Bolama, after dark, to use this channel when at least some of the crew were drunk. It is possible that they all were, as the vessel and her passengers seemed to be having a party with singing and drums, rather than setting off on a difficult night passage.

On arrival, anchor in about 6m to the north of the stone jetty. Ed Wheeler reports that holding appears to be reasonable and the tidal streams are not too strong here.

The beach dries almost to the end of the jetty, but I found that I could anchor just inside this distance by going a little way up channel. This is useful for keeping clear of the rather erratic ferry. While we were there the town was also visited by a tourist cruise ship, which it is also nice to be well clear of if you do not appreciate the likes of Elton John being played loudly. The channel was very placid, and probably offers a comfortable anchorage throughout the dry season. Should it be required, I have also shown the sheltered anchorage in the Rio de Junqueira about four miles to the north of Bolama.

Plan 68 shows a rough plan of Bolama, which I have reproduced from a rough sketch in my log to

Square at Bokama Ed Wheeler

show where services can be found. This is not an accurate map, and only shows a small part of the town close to the waterfront.

The few guide books that have been written on this part of the world tend not to be very complimentary about Bolama, but I liked the place. It was the capital of the country until the Portuguese moved it to Bissau in 1941, and it has been declining and crumbling ever since. There is something bizarre about the once over-grand colonial buildings and the old military barracks gently collapsing through neglect. That, added to the fact that Mussolini, of all people, donated a grand and bizarre monument on the waterfront, makes the place look like the set for some gothic-nightmare movie, an impression amplified at dusk as the extensive bat population take to the air in clouds. The monument was to thank the people for helping the crew of an Italian flying boat which crashed here. One dreads to think what he might have done had they not helped.

The town offers little by way of services and the main local village is outside the old town. Unfortunately the swimming pool on the map is empty and unused.

There are a few shops with the usual West African fare and, of course, the market where you can buy whatever fresh produce is available at the time. Fish is more common than meat, and only a few vegetables could be seen when we were there. Bread is only available in the morning from the market gate furthest from the waterfront. Get there a little before eight and wait for it to arrive, as it soon sells out.

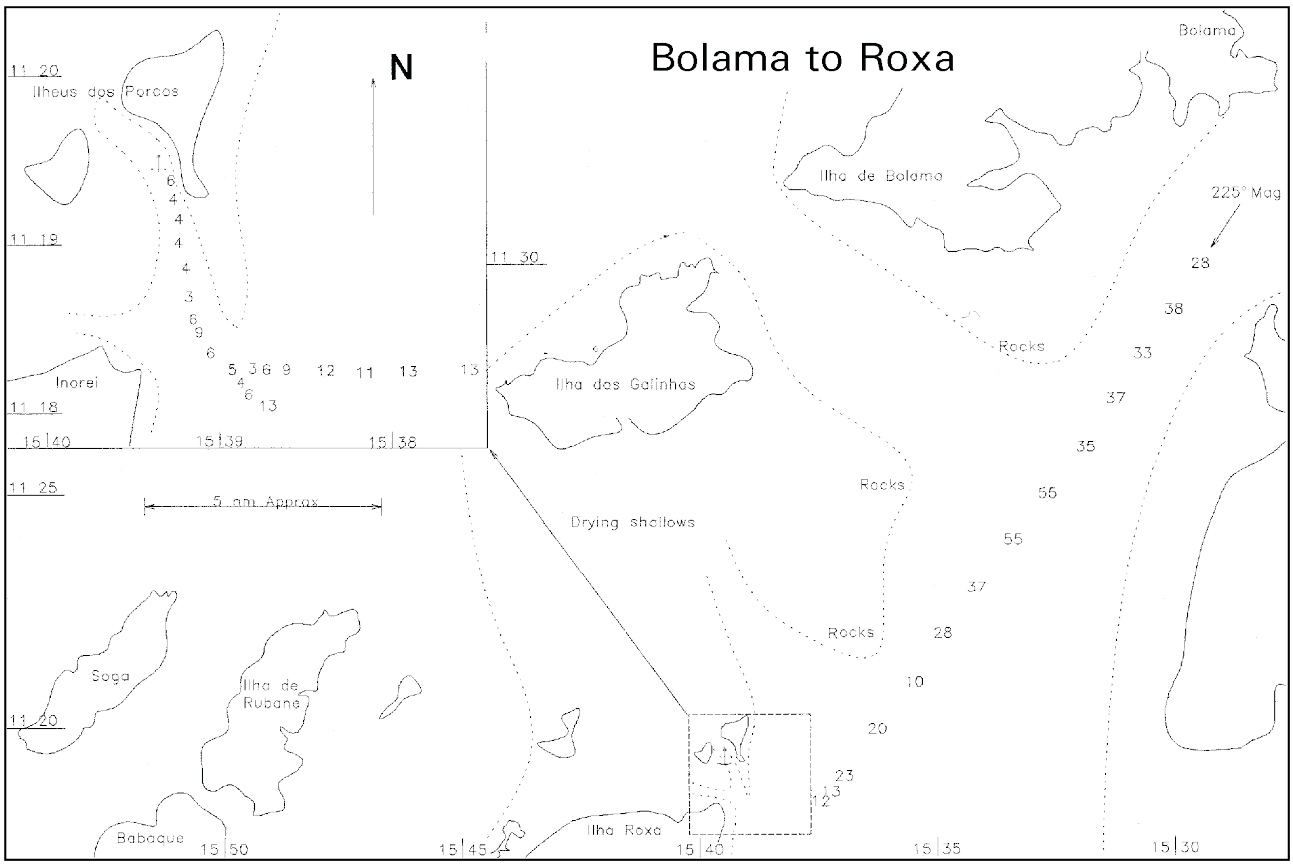
Ed Wheeler reports that diesel and basic stores are available from the shops. There are restaurants and bars, but not for the faint hearted. Good water is available from a stand-pipe just off the beach, behind some buildings.

There used to be a boatyard with a well-fitted workshop on the seafront at the northern edge of the town. This seemed remarkably industrious, and was in complete contrast with everything else about Bolama. The people of Guinea-Bissau are naturally helpful, so if you needed this type of facility I suggest you try there, but you will need an interpreter if you do not speak Portuguese.

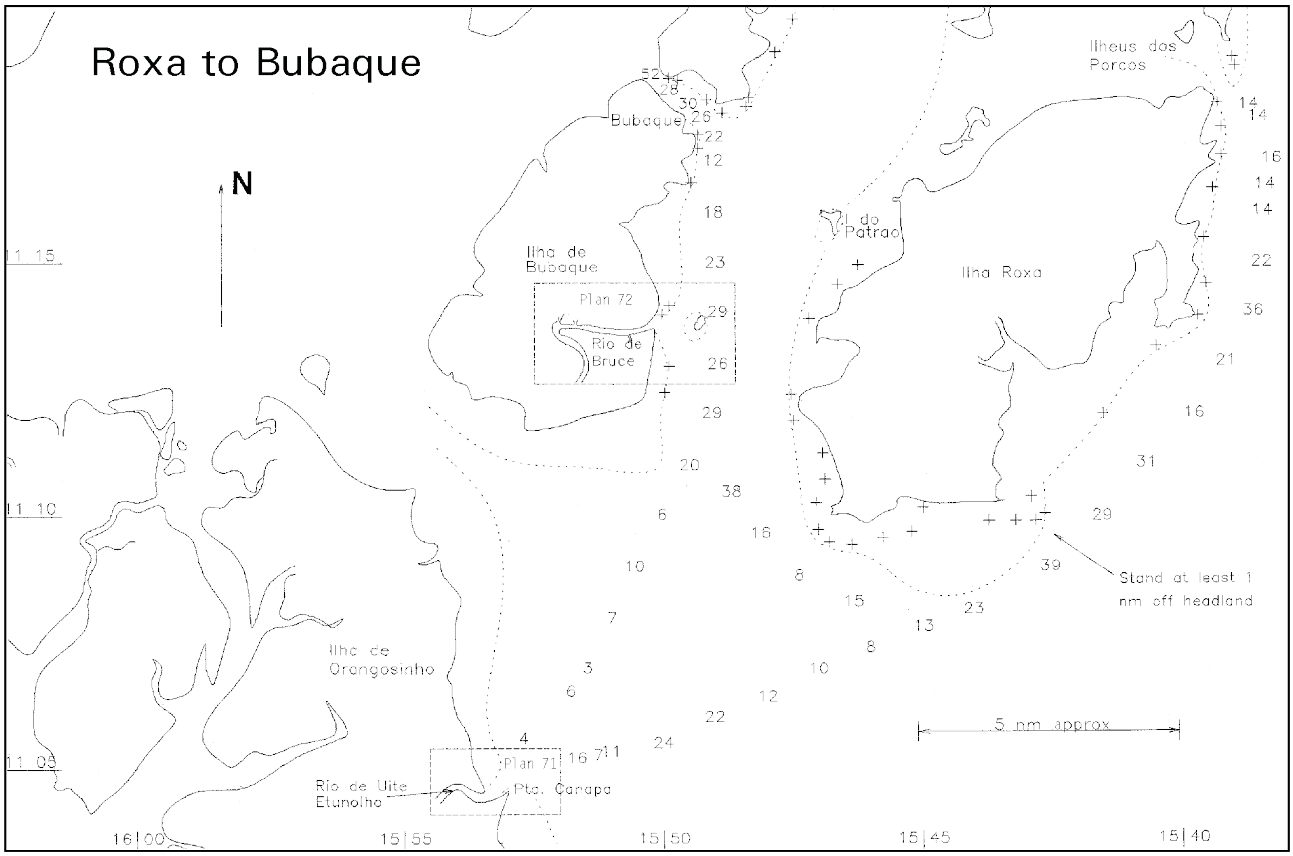
I am grateful to Pierre and Karin Siegenthaler for information on some drying anchorages which they visited in their catamaran *Caravellec*. The warmest welcome they received in the area was at Santa

Bubaque Ed Wheeler

Pirogues near Bubaque - Anne Fraser



Plan 69 Bolama to Roxa



Plan 70 Roxa to Bubaque

Maria on the mainland opposite Bolama, and a couple of miles north. They anchored in the mouth of the Rio de Cacheuzinho and report having a wonderful time imbibing cashew canna with the two families who live in the village. Though I could get into this river at high tide I could not find enough water to anchor in. You could anchor in the main channel and row ashore.

Bolama to Buba

I am grateful to Nick and Jill Schinas in *Maarmari* for the comprehensive notes they sent on their visit to the Bijagos and to Guinea Conakry. They report that the Rio Grande de Buba is navigable as far as Buba. The following is their account:

"The town of Buba lies about 30 miles inland at the head of the Rio Buba. By the look of it this Rio could be more accurately termed a Ria as it appears to have been formed by an incursion of the sea. The main channel is like the spine of a leaf with a number of tendrils branching off from either side. Navigation is entirely straightforward, with no dangers, provided that you can identify which of the two or three channels up ahead is the main one (ticking them off as you go along is one way to sort this out).

"There are no settlements on the waterside on the way up. The forest is dense and reaches the waterside and there is a remarkable variety of trees, in contrast to the Bijagos and much of the mainland forest of Guinea-Bissau. We saw monkeys padding about on the scant foreshore and there was an abundance of bird life. Except for a couple of dugouts up river we saw no traffic. Humpback dolphins were our only companions on the lower reaches. The tranquility of the forest was strangely at variance with the world beneath the surface of the river. Here there seemed to be an almost constant struggle for life and death with barracuda, and even sharks, leaping all around us as they pursued their smaller quarry.

"The wind, such as it is, blows down river in the mornings, breaks for a long lunch and then blows up the river in the afternoon. The wind was never strong enough for us to surmount the current and so we took roughly a day and a half to reach Buba.

"As for the destination, someone once said that to journey is better than to arrive; he could well have been talking about Buba. It is an unremarkable town with its back to the river. Our glossy "come to Guinea-Bissau" guide said that Buba has been developed as a port and suggests that it might become important in the future. The first part of this description is a blatant lie, unless you count the rather crude concrete jetty which dries at low water. As for the second, no ship, large or small, is going to come near Buba unless the last half mile of the river is dredged. Our Admiralty pilot claims that, 'there is always 20 feet of water all the way up to the factories just south of the town'. The factories have disappeared without trace, and the river has largely silted up. We found barely 20 feet at high water springs in the area of the town, and calculated that there would only be 3 feet at low water. In order to remain at Buba at low water we would have needed to anchor about three quarters of a mile from the town.

"Buba itself is a non-event and not worth a visit, but the trip up-river is very pleasant. There can be few places as serene as this."

The only thing I would add is that the channel is not really covered by an Admiralty chart, except the large-scale 611, which gives no soundings and does not show all the tributaries. The Portuguese chart No. 223 of the Canal do Geba does show more detail, but has few soundings.

Bolama to Roxa See Revisions pg R10

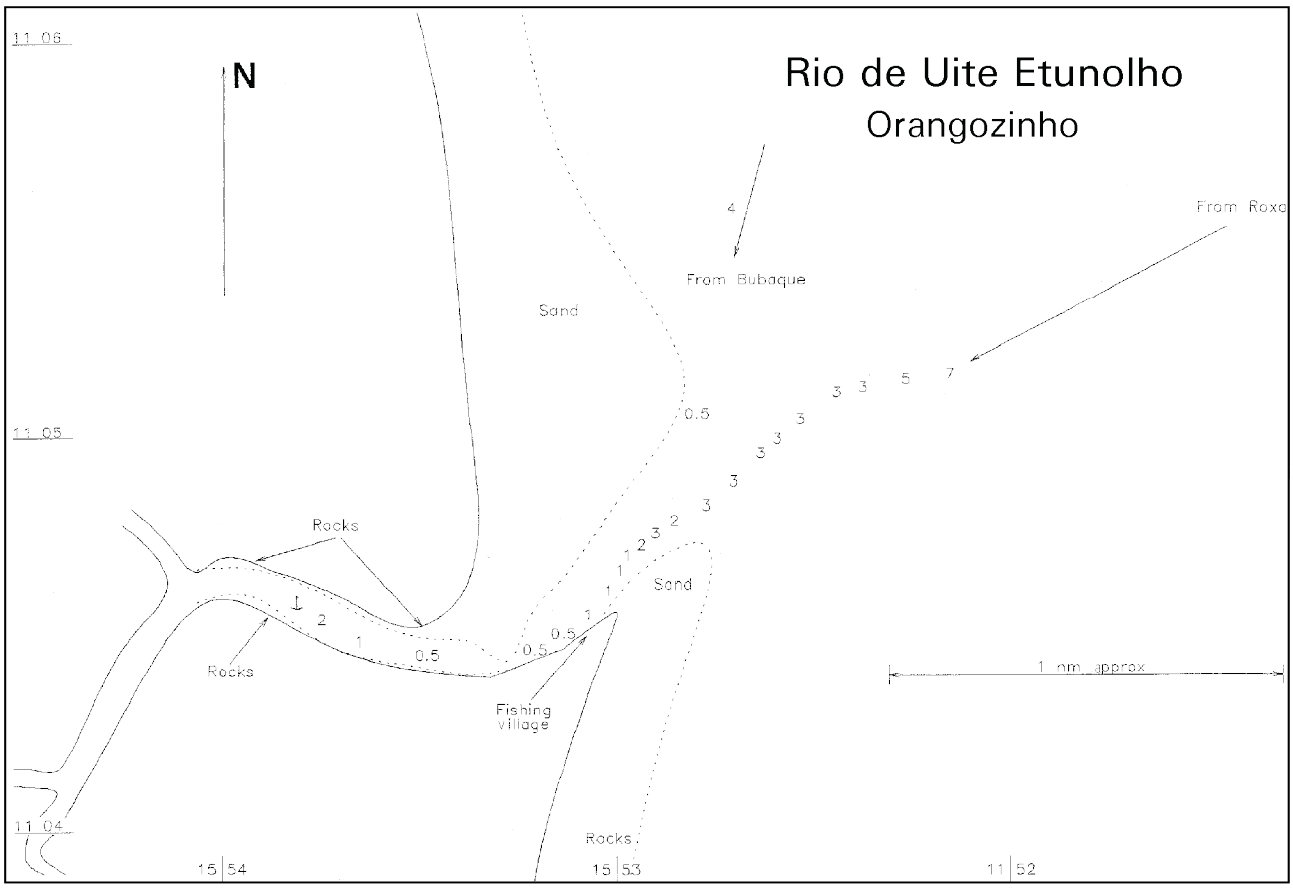
Plan 69 shows the approach to the delightful anchorage between the Ilheus dos Porcos, just north of Inorei on the Ilha Roxa.

En route from Bolama I could not pick up either the marker on the Baixo do Pargo or the buoy marking the shallows but it was a still, hazy day and I may have missed them.

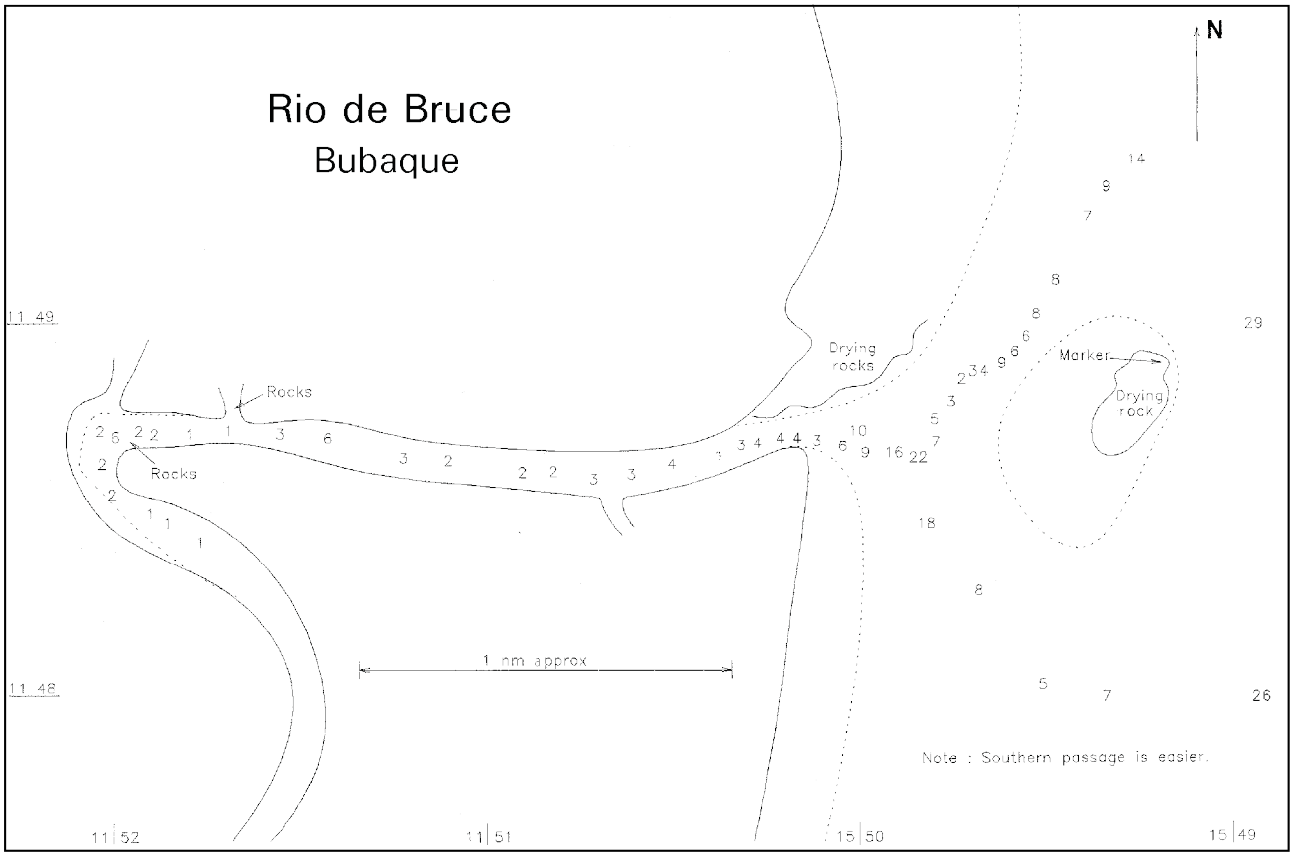
The sandspit to the south of the islands stretches to the limits shown on the chart, but the extensive rocks shown must have been buried in the sand when I was there. The marker at Inorei is small and you need to be close before you can see it. The channel is best picked up coming back up from the south and will be visible at low tide, though deeper-keeled yachts will have to wait for more water to enter. Watch the echo sounder as you go in and make to anchor off the beach of the eastern island. That is all the advice I can offer, except to say that when I did it in calm conditions it was not difficult.

Between the islands you have an isolated anchorage that would be popular with Hollywood producers were it not too remote. Palm-fringed beaches of golden sand with clear water are only visited by a few fishermen and the occasional yacht. To our very great surprise there really did seem to be wild pigs roaming the islands, and for us the sight of the piglets playing close to mum on the beach was the start of the very special magic of the Bijagos.

In January we anchored less than 50m off the beach, gazing up at a clear starlight night, with all the hatches open and were not visited by a single bug. At high water with the shallows covered it looks very exposed, but we had an extremely comfortable night. I think that the shallows to the north are so extensive that no real swell could penetrate. As with most anchorages in this part of the world, I would be more wary in the rains.



Plan 71 Rio de Uite Etunolho, Orangozinho



Plan 72 Rio de Bruce, Bubaque

Ed Wheeler reports that this delightful anchorage is well-sheltered, with slackish tides. The larger island, which you anchor near, has an excellent beach and is visited only by occasional fishermen, a couple of whom we met and who shared their lunch of fish and groundnuts with us. There are various animist symbols ashore and one has to be careful not to offend the spirits by disturbing any of these. There is more water in the approach than shown previously and it should be accessible at any state of the tide, although, as always in these islands, arriving on a rising tide is to be recommended.

To visit Inorei you need to land on the northern most tip of Roxa and pick up the track to the village. The people here are Bijagoes, but I fear they have lost their innocence from too much outside contact. Though I did not meet any here, I suspect that Senegalese fishermen visit the location.

Roxa to Bubaque

The passage from the Ilheus dos Porcos anchorage to Bubaque is straightforward enough with deep water found by skirting Roxa, leaving all headlands a mile to starboard until past Ponta Ambuba, and then heading on a bearing of 355°M for Bubaque. The line of soundings shown in Plan 70 shows the more direct approach I used with the aid of GPS, and includes the detour to take in the Rio de Uite Etunolho on the eastern side of Orangozinho.

This is an interesting but difficult anchorage which you will not find charted. I have shown the approach in Plan 70, but must emphasise that I visited in calm conditions. I anchored there overnight and can confirm that it offers a sheltered anchorage for shallow-draught vessels, but that the approach is difficult and narrow. You have some shelter as soon as you get inside the sandspit to the south of the entrance (Pta. Canapâ), but if entering at low tide you will have to wait to cross the bar before entering the river. There are probably more rocks in the river than I have shown but you are nicely sheltered when you have entered. The light shown on the Portuguese chart to the south of this river on Ponta Camaleão is now only rusting metal.

As with the Ilheus dos Porcos anchorage, we had a comfortable night here with the hatches open and were not troubled by insects. The villagers on the river bank are Senegalese fishing families, and not Bijagoes, though there are presumably islanders around as there are signs of cattle.

It may be possibly to get access by foot/dinghy to the difficult waterways between Orango and Orangozinho, where the salt water hippos are to be found (more of this later). However, I have only used it as an overnight anchorage and cannot comment on access across the island. For more information on this, try asking the French at Cadjoco in Bubaque (see the section on Bubaque).

I have also shown the anchorage in the Rio Bruce on the island of Bubaque (Plan 71). This is a much easier approach, at least from the south, and offers good shelter. I have not stayed there overnight, however, because it suffers from a common problem in the Bijagos which seems to be associated with mudflats. My entomologist friends tell me that there is no connection, but it seems to me that whenever you get exposed mudflats at low tide you will get a lot of tsetses. They were so numerous in the Rio de Bruce that we turned back where the soundings end. This was a shame, because I am told that if you continue you will come out into a sheltered lagoon which is just behind Bubaque's famous sandy beach.

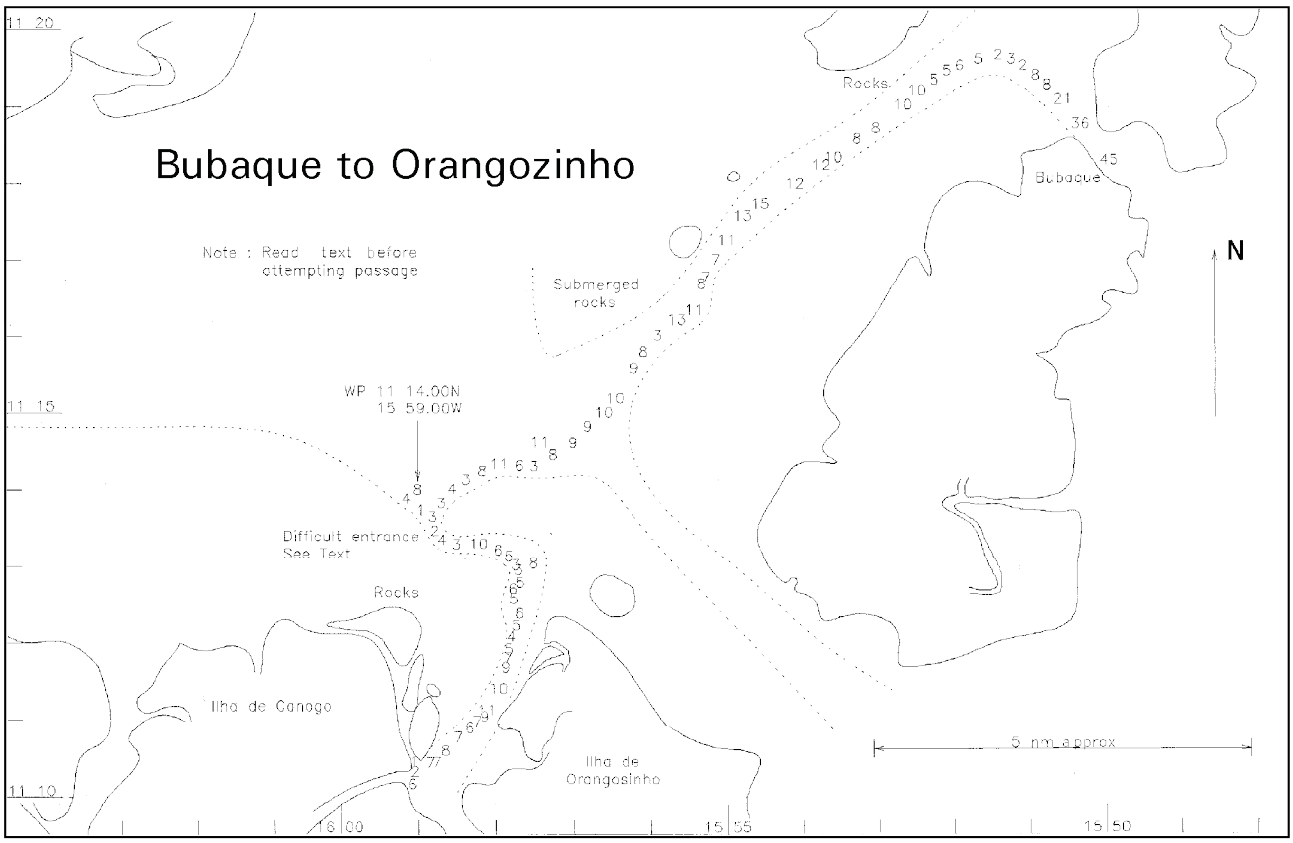
To enter the river, pass to the south of the rocks at the mouth. There is a small stone marker on the northern tip of these rocks which should be visible at all states of the tide. These rocks have extensive shallows around them, but there is a deep channel between them and the beach. Head in on a bearing of about 165°M to the south side of the river mouth, but watch for the deep channel with your echo sounder. Enter the river leaving the south bank about 50m or less to port, where you should have at least 2m of water.

Watch out for rocks in the river, there is a nasty cluster close to the south bank on the sharp bend shown about a mile up-river. We could only see these by the dramatic currents they created.

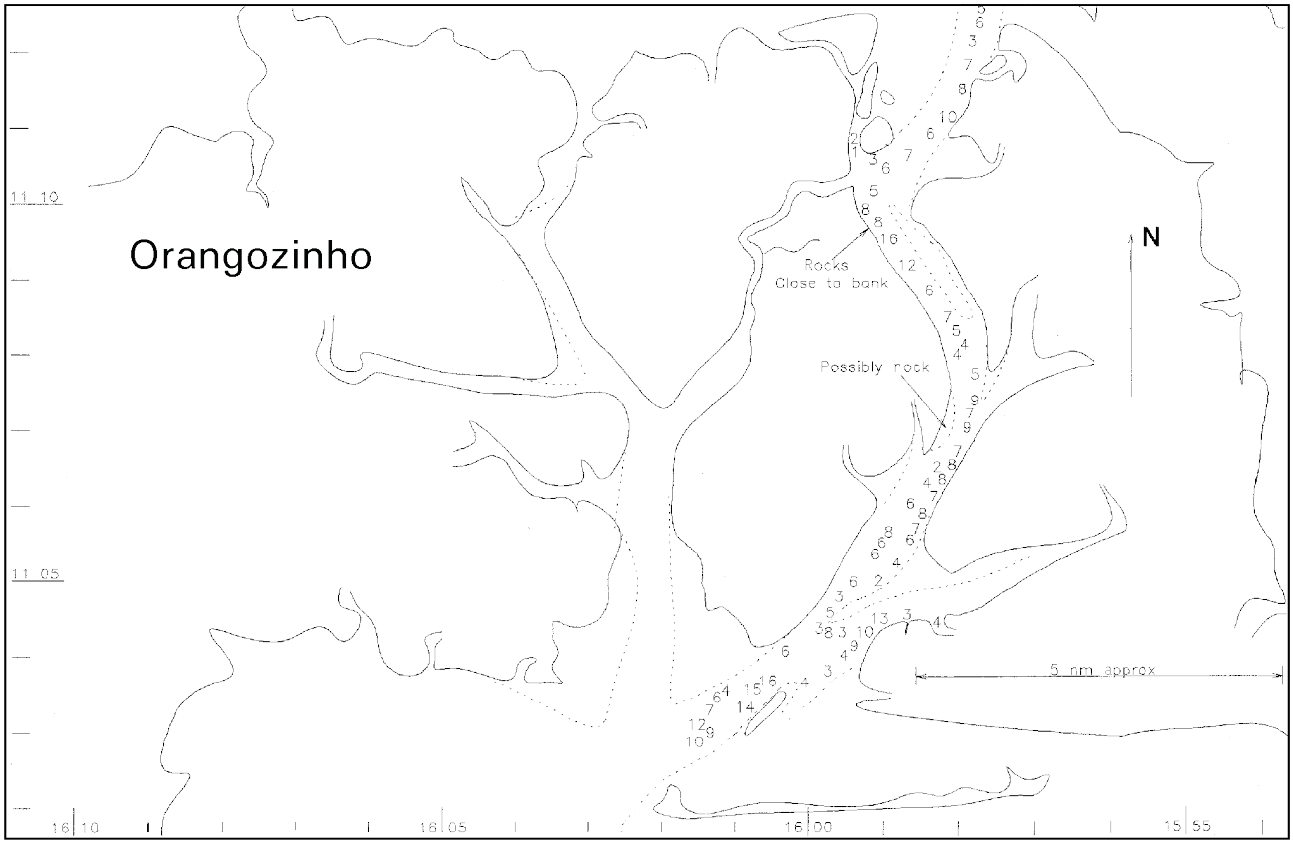
I have shown the northern passage I used to leave, which is useful because it offers the shortest route to Bubaque, but it is not easy and the channel is narrower than the charts suggest. At low tide the rocks are exposed, which makes it a bit easier.

The approach to Bubaque is easily navigable, and the channel between the islands is deeper than charted. However, the current through this channel runs at a considerable rate (I suspect greater than four knots) so be prepared for a slow approach if it is against you. As you enter the deep channel between Bubaque and Rubane you will pass the ferry landing followed by a bay skirted with red cliff and beach. Anchor wherever you can along this stretch, but get in as close as possible because of tidal stream and the depth of the channel. There is a set of steps going up the cliff a couple of hundred metres along the cliff from the ferry landing stage where I anchored. This was a convenient spot, but would soon get crowded if many yachts arrived. The anchorage seemed well sheltered, but I would be nervous in the rainy season. The beach shoals very quickly - and do not forget to allow for a 5m tidal range. Another problem at this anchorage is that the current swirls around in the bay which causes boats to lie at different angles.

Bubaque is not a good anchorage. Tides run through it at up to 4 knots and the water is deep. You have to anchor very close to the beach in 7 or 8 m. It



Plan 73 Bubaque to Orangozinho



Plan 74 Orangozinho

can be difficult to get the anchor to bite and even more difficult to recover it. Because of the strong tides, a tripping line is likely to turn into a terrible bird's nest. Laying out a kedge in the deeper water to hold the boat clear of the beach at the turn of the tide is a possible option, although we lost ours when we left. Anchor between the ferry pier and the old concrete jetty to the North. The officials' office is at the head of the concrete ferry pier and you must clear there on arrival. Take great care with dinghy work because of the strong tides. It is advisable to land on the beach, not the ferry pier. I am told that some yachts have preferred to anchor in the shallower water off Rubane on the northern side of the channel. If you take this option, I would advise approaching at low tide when it is easier to see the extent of the rocks.

Tidal streams are difficult to predict in the channels around these islands. My attempt to collect data on the direction of flow at different stages of the tide disagree with a similar attempt made by the crew of *Maarmari,* so I have left it out.

See Revisions pg R10

Bubaque

Bubaque, with its developing tourist industry, is probably the way the Bijagos are going, and a visit is worthwhile to make you appreciate having arrived in time. I do not wish to sound too negative because it is undoubtedly a beautiful spot and we enjoyed our visit, but it is the only place in the whole country where you will be cut up by a speed boat and ripped off in a restaurant.

The town rambles from the ferry landing outwards and extends along the cliff top to the northern tip of the island. The main market is immediately behind the ferry landing, but apart from this basic geography the haphazard nature of the town defied my attempts to map it.

There is no longer a ferry service or regularly scheduled flights.

If you are going to eat in any of the local restaurants/bars near the market give them some warning of your intent. When they offer you a menu it is on the basis of what is possible, and not what they have at that moment. The best of these places in my opinion was Chez Raoul. Raoul is a distinguished-looking West African with greying hair who originates from Guinea Conakry but lived for many years in Senegal. His English is better than you will find elsewhere on Bubaque, and he is a friendly chap you can sit and chat to over a beer.

Another place worth visiting for good food and information is the French-run Campement Cadjoco. Slightly more expensive than the local run restaurants, it is still cheap enough and more reliable if you are hungry. It is also used as a meeting place for other French expatriates, and it was here that I met the group who run pirogue trips down to the south of Orangozinho to see the salt-water hippos, and who gave me the information which allowed me to find the uncharted channel between the islands (see next section). Cadjoco is about a five-minute walk from the market. Follow the track which heads inland from the market and keep going in the same general direction until you see it down a track on to your right. You may have to ask directions.

Ed Wheeler reports there is a profusion of small shops and businesses in shacks above the pier. Diesel and other basic provisions are available from these.

Water was available from a number of wells around the town, and diesel can be bought from the ferry when it is in town. To do this go to the ferry and ask for the captain. The crew only speak Portuguese, but waving a jerry can will make your meaning clear. As buying diesel in this way was cheaper than buying it in Bissau, I was left wondering how the system worked, but decided it was best not to ask too many questions.

The market and surrounding shops are the most extensive in the Bijagos. Fruit and vegetables, bread and other basic provisions are available. I did not see meat, but fish is sold on the ferry quay.

Bubaque to Orangozinho

Orangozinho, or more correctly the island group which includes Orangozinho, is one of the highlights of a cruise to the Bijagos, but the approach is difficult.

The passage from Bubaque is shown in Plan 73, and is probably best negotiated near MLWS. Though the passage between the Ilha de Bubaque and Ilha de Soga is narrow, I found no difficulty finding my way through with a combination of GPS, motor and echo sounder. The problem is that I did not have a decent chart of the channel. It is shown on the large scale Admiralty chart 611, but with no soundings, and is obscured on 1727.

If you can get hold of a copy of the Portuguese chart No. 223 of the Canal do Geba it is shown, but again without soundings. The soundings shown in Plans 74 and 75 are those recorded by myself on passage.

Picking up the channel that leads into the islands is best done by arriving at MLWN or three quarters springs on a rising tide. This will allow you to see the sand and mud banks and find your way in, and have the reassurance of a rising tide as you enter. There appears to be only a slight tidal time difference between Bubaque and this entrance. The banks either side of this channel are steep and, as you can see from Plan 72, it curves around and almost seems to be heading back out to sea before turning in to the islands. It is difficult to follow at high water, but can be seen from about half tide.

Orangozinho

Once you are in the channel between Orangozinho and Meneque you are sheltered and can anchor anywhere. These islands are predominantly low and mangrove fringed, and are therefore less spectacular than some of the Bijagos, but are worth a visit for the unique fauna.

This is the place to come to find salt-water hippos. I have heard reports of sightings in other parts of the Bijagos but this is the only location that can be confirmed. However, you will need more time than I was able to allow. They live mainly among the shallows to the south of Orangozinho, and I am told that the best way to see them is to anchor in this area and wait. If you stay still they will become curious after a few days and come to have a look at you.

There are also large crocodiles around, and the fishermen tell me the waters abound with shark. As with all the islands, there are a wide variety of birds, and it is the only place I have seen the spectacular saddlebill stork, which is so tall I mistook it for a human at first.

The fishing community on the island to the south is a multiracial mix from various parts of West Africa. It is a very attractive island, and I am told that you can get palm wine there as well as fish.

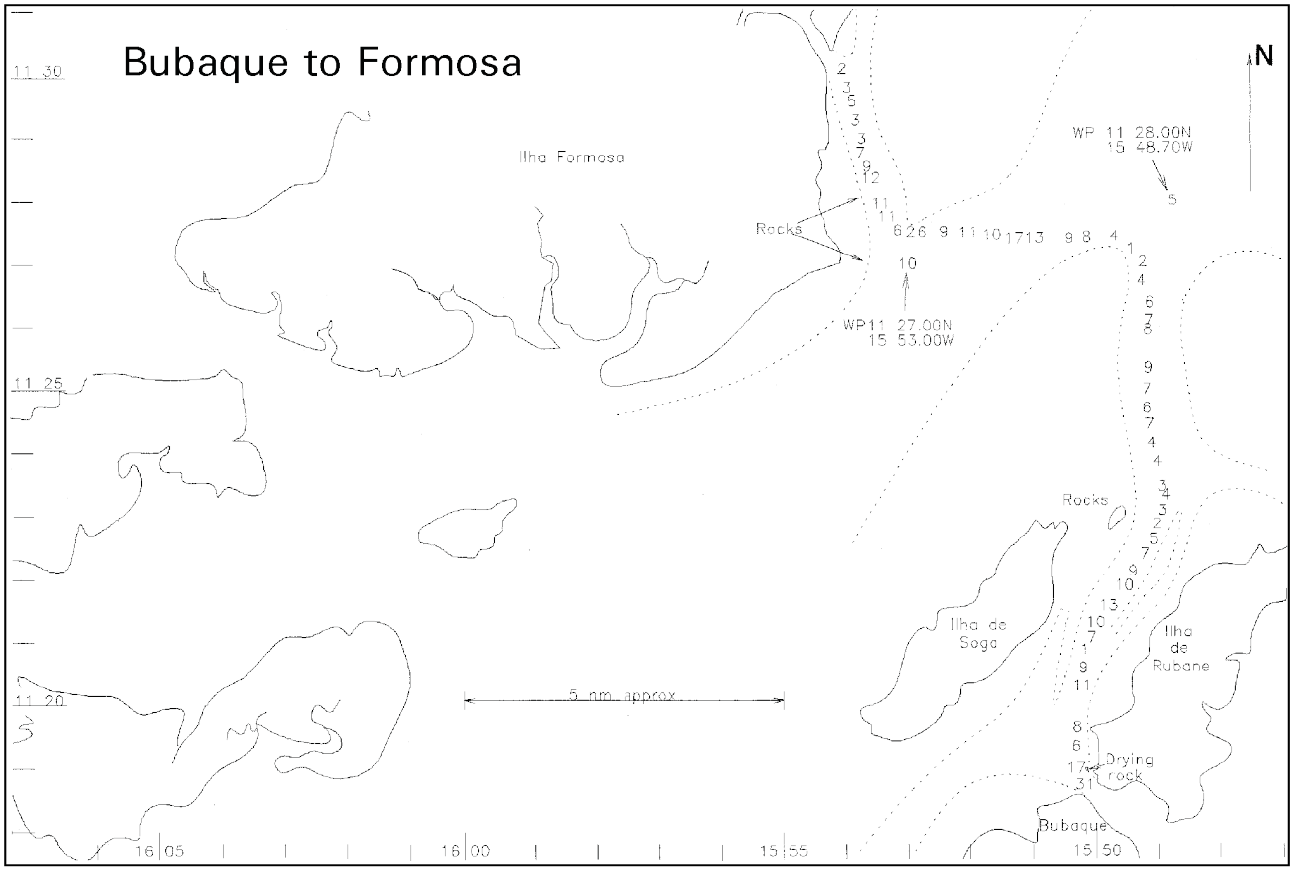
Jill and Nick Shinas took *Maarmari* out of the channel to the south heading towards Conakry using information acquired from local fishermen.

Bubaque to Formosa

Plan 75 shows the route from Bubaque to the snug anchorage in Formosa or, to be more accurate, between Formosa and Maio. This is an anchorage for the lovers of peace and tranquillity, but is also a convenient stopping point on your way out to the Geba and the Atlantic.

This passage is similar to the one heading south from Bubaque in that it involves feeling your way through the shallows. However, it is well charted on Portuguese chart No. 218 which I managed to pick up from the harbour master in Bissau. Heading north between Rubane and Soga was fairly straightforward using this chart and GPS, otherwise I would attempt it near low tide when the hazards can be seen.

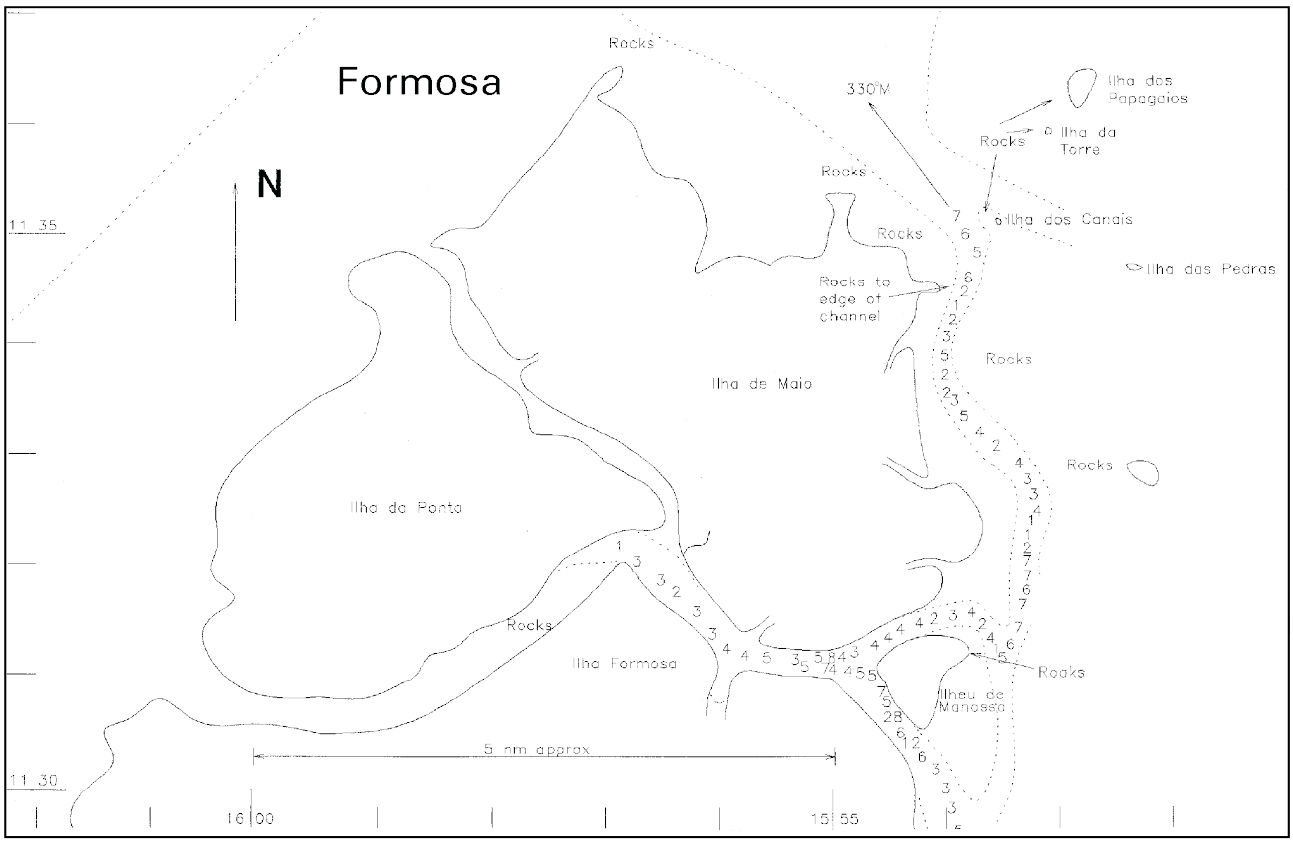
The line of soundings in Plan 75 shows the course I took on this passage, cutting corners and watching the echo sounder. Following the course between the two waypoints should carry you clear of the shallows as you approach Formosa, but the channel between the island and the extensive mudflats to the east is best found near low water. The Portuguese chart shows more water in this channel



Plan 75 Bubaque to Formosa

Bubaque - Ann Fraser

Bubaque - Ann Fraser



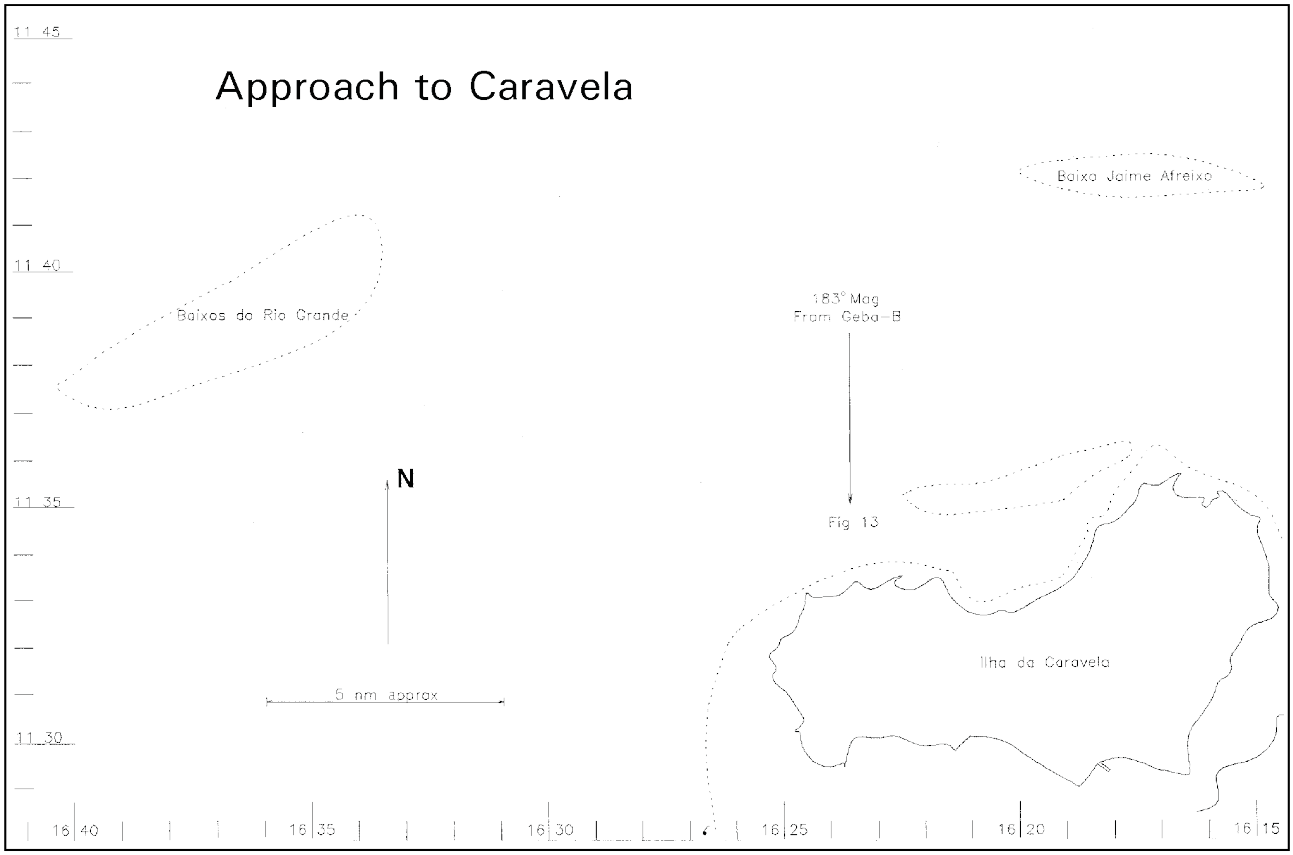
Plan 76 Formosa

than I had, which is probably because I was too close to the island. I found the channel between the Ilha de Manassa and Formosa (Plan 76) fairly easily at high tide by watching the echo sounder, but I imagine this would be simple at low water. The tide rips through this channel, however, so some care is required.

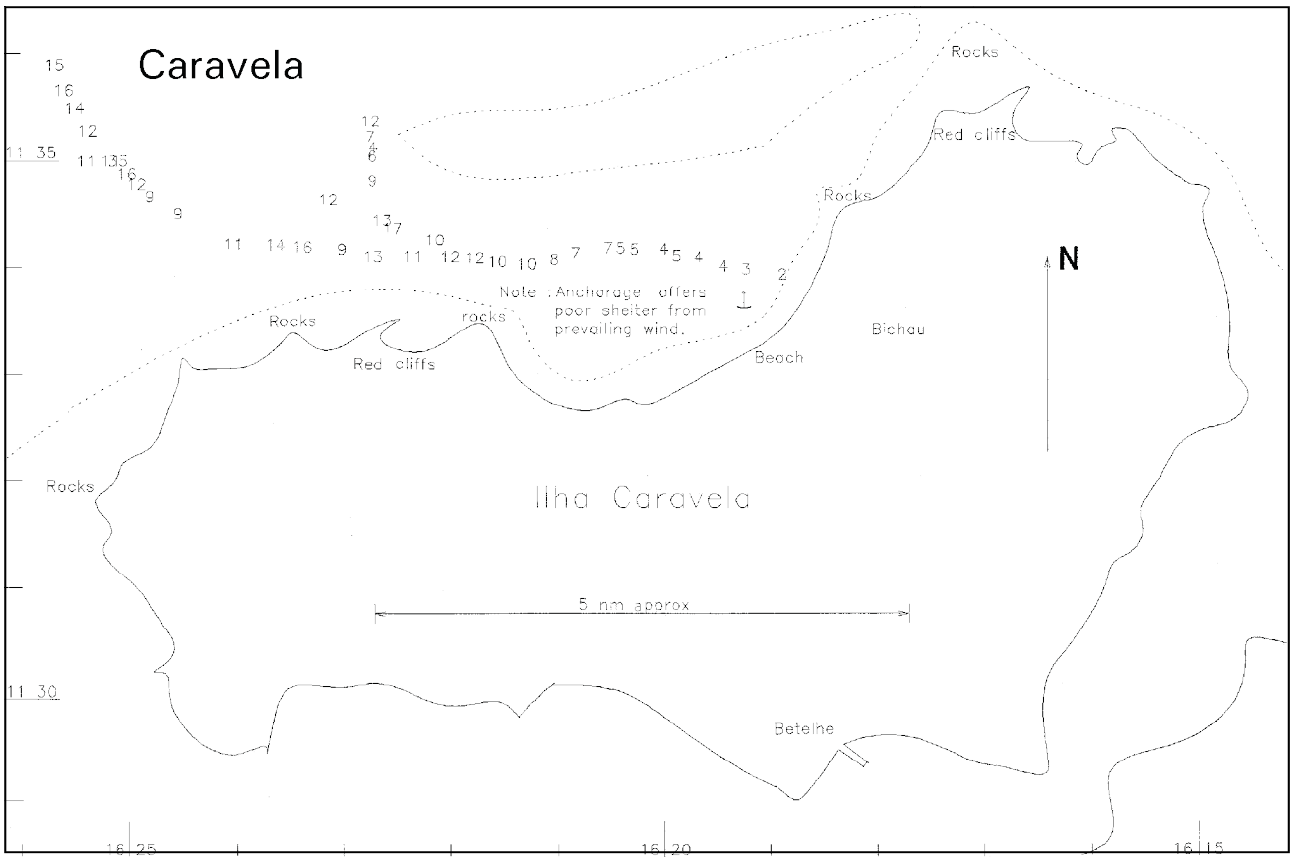
Once in the main channel between Formosa and the Ilha de Maio to the north, the water level gradually gets lower until the bend where it reaches the Ilha da Ponta. After this the channel dries and there are visible rocks, which was where I turned back. I also investigated the channel to the south leading into Formosa, but this too was shallow. Somewhere in that direction is the Bijagos village of Acuno. There are also villages on the two large northern isles but these are also fairly inaccessible.

The channel leading from Formosa back out to the Geba is shown in Plan 76. This again is easy enough to find at low water, which is when I would negotiate it. As you approach the Geba there are a lot of rocks around and you find yourself leaving the shelter of narrow channel into the full unpleasant force of the Geba (river). In these conditions it is good to be able to see where the rocks are.

Caravela Anchorage - Ed Wheeler



Plan 77 Approach to Caravela



Plan 78 Caravela

Caravela

Plan 77 shows the approach to Caravela. This sketch has been included to show the two areas of shallows off the island.

Caravela is the most beautiful and unspoiled of the Bijagos Islands that I have visited, but this may well be due to the fact that it lacks a good anchorage.

The best on offer is the one shown in Plan 77, but the drying shallows to the north offer only limited shelter and a north-westerly swell passes straight through the wide opening. The only good thing to be said is that if it does become uncomfortable you have plenty of room to beat out.

I have not found a passage around to the more sheltered southern coast of the island, and nor have friends of mine who have tried. The chart appears to show a jetty at Betelhe on the south of the island but the Portuguese charts of the area suggest that not only does it dry but that there are rocks off the end of it. There is also supposed to be an air strip there but I do not think that it is in regular use.

There is plenty of sea room to enter the bay sheltered behind the Baixos da Caravela from the west. You pass the red cliffs and isolated inlets on the western end of the islands. This is possibly the most picturesque vista in West Africa, but the coast is extremely rocky until you get to the long sandy beach in the bay.

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Anchor off the beach in the Baia da Escaramuca before the rocky outcrops. Anchor well off the steeply shelving beach, leaving 5-6m clearance to allow for the tidal range and the effects of the swell. Nick and Jill Shinas tried anchoring further up and found that the rocks may be more extensive than charted. Be prepared for a heavy swell and the possibility of rapidly deteriorating weather. Also be aware that the current runs at right angles to the swell, so you will probably find yourself lying beam on to it.

It is one of those beaches which it is difficult to land or launch a dinghy from without a good dunking. I have also heard of sightings of both hippos and crocodiles in the bay. According to the islanders there is one reclusive hippo.

The narrow channel leaving the Baia de Escaramuca to the east is full of breaking water on the flood I am told, which may be due to overfalls.

So why stop here? Well the answer to that is that it is rather special. I will not list these special qualities; rather I will describe my visit to Bichau which may give you some idea.

I went ashore early in the morning and hunted around the beach where I had seen some children the previous evening. Eventually I picked up a track which led inland and, assuming this would lead to the village, followed it. There was not a soul about but the air was full of hunting hawks and eagles as I made my way across open grassland. The path became wooded as it started to rise above the plain, and I soon found myself enveloped in a familiar West African forest of palms and creepers. I was intermittently shaded by a low canopy and then in beams of bright sunlight. The path continued to rise until I suddenly stepped into a different world. The palms gave way to a tall mahogany forest.

I seemed to step from a close-clinging wood into a majestic forest where the high thick canopy kept out the sun and my world became cool and almost totally silent. Only in rare places did a shaft of bright sunlight break through to illuminate the interior. The path now meandered around the thick tree trunks, and it was not clear which way to go. I wandered on for a while, almost aimlessly, until I thought I could hear voices a long way off. Then, as in a dream, I caught sight of the village.

It lay in a hollow in a slight clearing among the trees. As I entered, the first few adults simply looked at me and nodded. I saw one red plastic beaker containing water and a few people wore tee shirts, but every other detail was from a time before Europeans discovered Africa. The huts were all made from mud and thatch, and many of the people were clad in grass skirts. Their tools were from the stone age, and the tranquillity from Eden.

Then the children discovered me and the silence broke like a squall hitting a still mooring. They came out of the huts in a frenzy of excitement, devoured a packet of biscuits I offered as a treat and jumped up and down with excitement as I photographed them. Some of the young women joined in and one young man showed me a python skin which must have been over ten feet long, and which he was obviously proud of killing. The other inhabitants stood back in a dignified silence. I left with some regret, but with the distinct feeling that I should not really be there. It was as though I had stepped through time.

I returned to the boat, got thoroughly soaked getting through the surf, and started the long haul back into the wind and tide to my home mooring in Banjul. The swell was building up as we left the bay and broke with impressive force below the red cliffs. Few will pass this way until twentieth century facilities, like airports and marinas, are developed.

Ed Wheeler reports (Bubaque to Caravela): because of the lack of detailed charts, the safest option for a deep-keeled yacht is to leave Bubaque via the Canal de Bubaque, going between the Ilheu de Anagaru and Ilha do Galo and following the old buoyed channel through the Canal das Galinhas (buoys now missing),

Bichau Caravela - Ed Wheeler

then back out into the Canal de Geba through the Canal de Pedro Alvares. It is a straightforward passage to the anchorage at Caravela, which is feasible to enter at night by watching the GPS carefully (the passage from Bubaque cannot be completed in daylight).

Otherwise, for the more adventurous or for shallow draft yachts, the directions for Formosa above can be followed as per plans 75 and 76.

Caravela is a highlight of any cruise to the Bijagos. It is a most attractive island, with a couple of very primitive villages on it. Anchor as shown on the chartlet, in sand, about 3.5m. Holding is good. The village of Bichau is about 2 miles from the beach, ending in a wood of enormous kapok and elephant trees, from which one emerges into a village unchanged in millennia, except for the football shirts worn by the boys. The footballs and pumps we carried made a big hit here. There are no provisions to be had on Caravela.

Caravela repays dinghy exploration. There is a long (at least 2 miles) creek leading from a sand spit on the beach, with about 1 or 1.5m water at HW, then deepening and broadening inside. At first sandy and lagoon like, the creek narrows and deepens as you go up, palms giving way to mangroves. It has the most prolific bird life we saw anywhere and at least one crocodile.

Caravela is an indifferent anchorage as regards swell, as it is protected from the prevailing wind only by a long sandbank, which covers at HW. Although somewhat rolly, it seems safe enough.

Further anchorages

I have covered above all the anchorages I have been able to visit, but the archipelago probably offers many more, especially to more versatile craft than mine. Drying moorings for multihulls obviously offer a lot of scope, but I am told by Pierre and Karin Siegenthaler that they had difficulty establishing the nature of the seabed beforehand. This problem might be partially alleviated if you have access to the detailed Portuguese charts.

Of the possibly more exposed anchorages that larger yachts than mine would consider I have favourable reports of the bay above Ponta Antinguine at the southern tip of Roxa, and off Cais de Aneanque on the western side of Soga. Both of these were used by Jill and Nick Shinas in *Maarmari*.

The Portuguese charts show channels leading through the mudflats to some of the rivers at the southern tip of Caraxe, but do not give soundings. Also, if you look at the cluster of islands formed in a sweep down from Formosa to Uno the channels may be narrow enough to offer a shelter. This would appear to be the case, for example, at the most westerly tip of Uno where you seem to have channels passing between mud flats and headlands.

The Rio Tobali which, reaches into the mainland to the south of the Rio Grande de Buba, looks accessible and rather isolated. The two other rivers to the south of this look more difficult.

I offer these suggestions to whet the appetite of potential new explorers. Most of the indicators in the previous paragraph have been obtained from Portuguese charts which I did not have before setting out. I would be interested to hear from anyone who visits these other islands.

Caravela uncharted creek Ed Wheeler

REVISIONS TO APRIL 2017 Robert Fox

Introduction

I visited Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau in the dry season of 2016-17. I arrived in Dakar, Senegal in December of 2016 and cruised southwards, leaving towards Brazil from Bubaque in the Bijagos islands in April 2017.

I used the second edition of Steve Jones '*Cruising Guide to West Africa*' throughout my visit. These notes are my comments and updates to that book based on what I found. Section headings, page numbers and plan numbers refer to the book.

General Information and Planning

Page 1: Throughout the book, bearings are given as Magnetic. When the book was first published in 1997 magnetic variation was 10° W.

I found United States Pub. 143 '*Sailing Directions (Enroute) - West Coast of Europe and Northwest Africa*' useful in Guinea-Bissau. United States Sailing Directions can be downloaded free from the official website at **msi.nga.mil**.

Landfall

Page 3: Ziguinchor is apparently no longer a port of entry for Senegal. (See **The Casamance: Planning.**)

Communications

Page 19: In The Gambia I bought an Africell SIM and had coverage almost everywhere on the river although the signal was often poor and away from Banjul / Lamin only 2G data was available. QCell appeared to have comparable coverage and may have better data speeds away from the capital.

West African mobile phone networks do not automatically configure your phone for data. The access point details must be entered manually. For Gambian networks, on Android phones, go to Settings - All - Wireless & networks - Mobile Networks - Access Point Names. Enter the 'three vertical dots' menu (bottom right of screen) and select 'New APN.' Under Name, enter the network operator's name, e.g. africell, and under APN enter the network operator's name followed by net, all as one word, e.g. africellnet. Leave everything else as it is and save the changes. Alternatively, ask for it to be done when you buy the SIM card or go to any mobile phone shop.

European phones still do not work in Guinea-Bissau. There are two local networks, MTN and Orange. I bought an MTN SIM card from the MTN office on the main road in Cacheu, where they registered it. They also configured the Access Point (as described for Gambian networks above) but it worked better after I removed the Proxy, Port, Username and Password the agent entered to leave only the Name, mtn, and the APN, internet.mtn-bissau.com. Your passport is required to register the SIM. The network lived up to its slogan 'Everywhere you go' and I had remarkably good coverage throughout the Bijagos, including 3G data fast enough for video calls when I was in Bubaque.

Dakar

Approach

Page 21: most of the lights charted as occulting on Admiralty Chart 1000 are actually flashing.

Page 22: there are several dangerous wrecks in the anchorage off CVD (Cercle de la Voile de Dakar). There are known wrecks in the following positions:

Wreck 1: 14° 42'.731 N 17° 25'.324 W

Wreck 2: 14° 42'.778 N 17° 25'.615 W

Wreck 3: 14° 42'.754 N 17° 25'.717 W

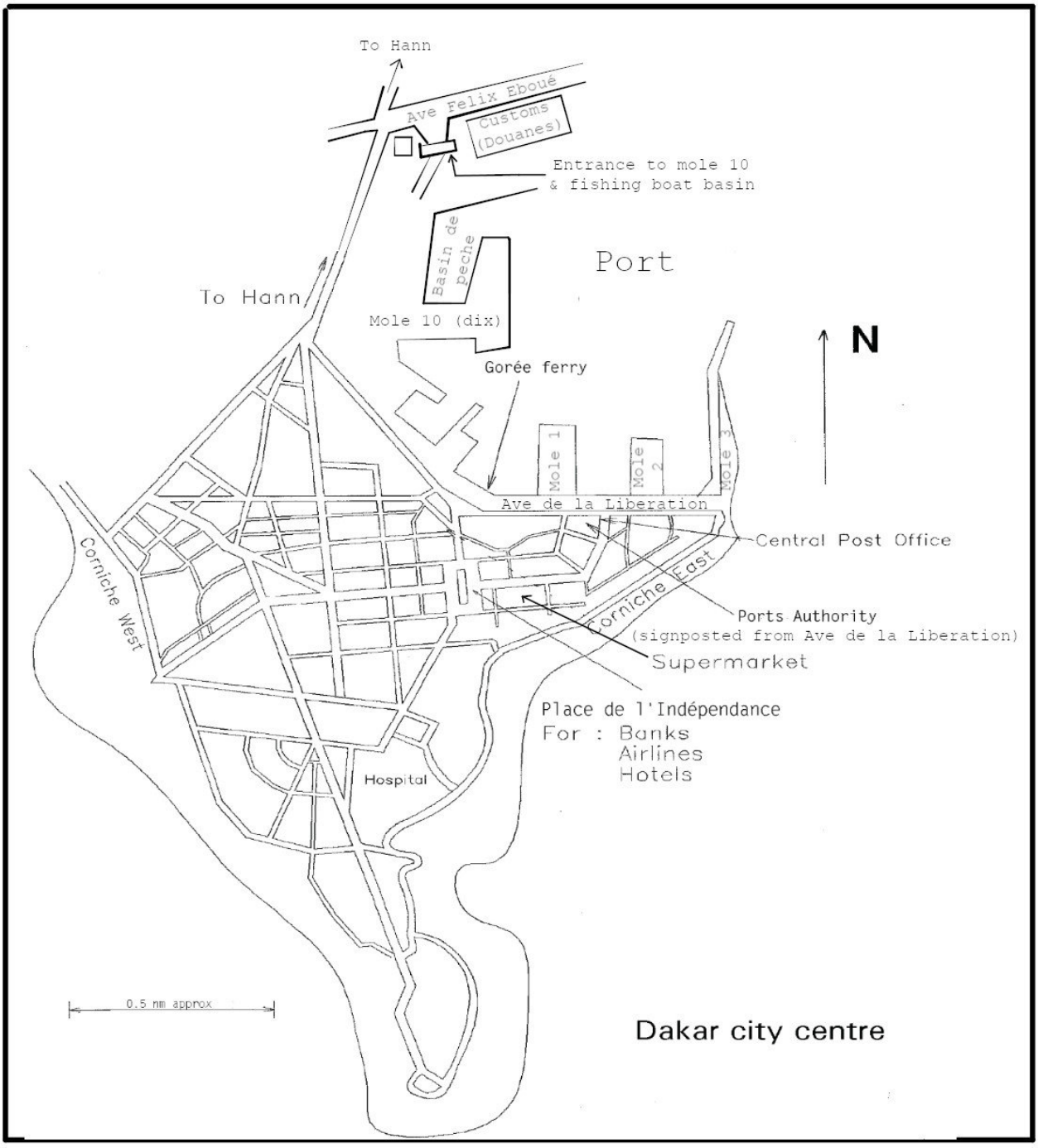
One of these is just outside the moored yachts roughly in line with the main leg of the CVD jetty. When I visited it was marked by a small soft drink bottle attached to the wreck by a length of fishing line, an almost invisible marker even in a flat calm. Although it is always submerged I could touch the wreck easily with my dinghy oars at low tide.

There is lots of information about CVD including wreck positions and other arrival information on the CVD website http://cvdakar.e-monsite.com/ (in French).

The former ADP jetty is now derelict.

The CVD ferry runs daily at 0830, 1030, 1200, 1400, 1600, 1800 and 1930 and is free to club members (see under **Hann**.)

Ports and customs



Plan 6 Dakar city centre

Refer to **Plan 6.**

Page 22: if you visit the CVD office before going anywhere else they will give you an information sheet and guide you through the clearing in procedure.

The CVD office arranged a taxi to take me to each office and wait for me. The round trip cost 10,000 CFA.

Page 23: for taxis, the address of the Commissariat Special du Port can be given as 'Mole 2' and the Customs at Avenue Felix Eboue as 'Mole 10.'

Do not try to clear customs in the tempting looking 'Douanes' building near the Commissariat Special du Port at Mole 2, go to Mole 10.

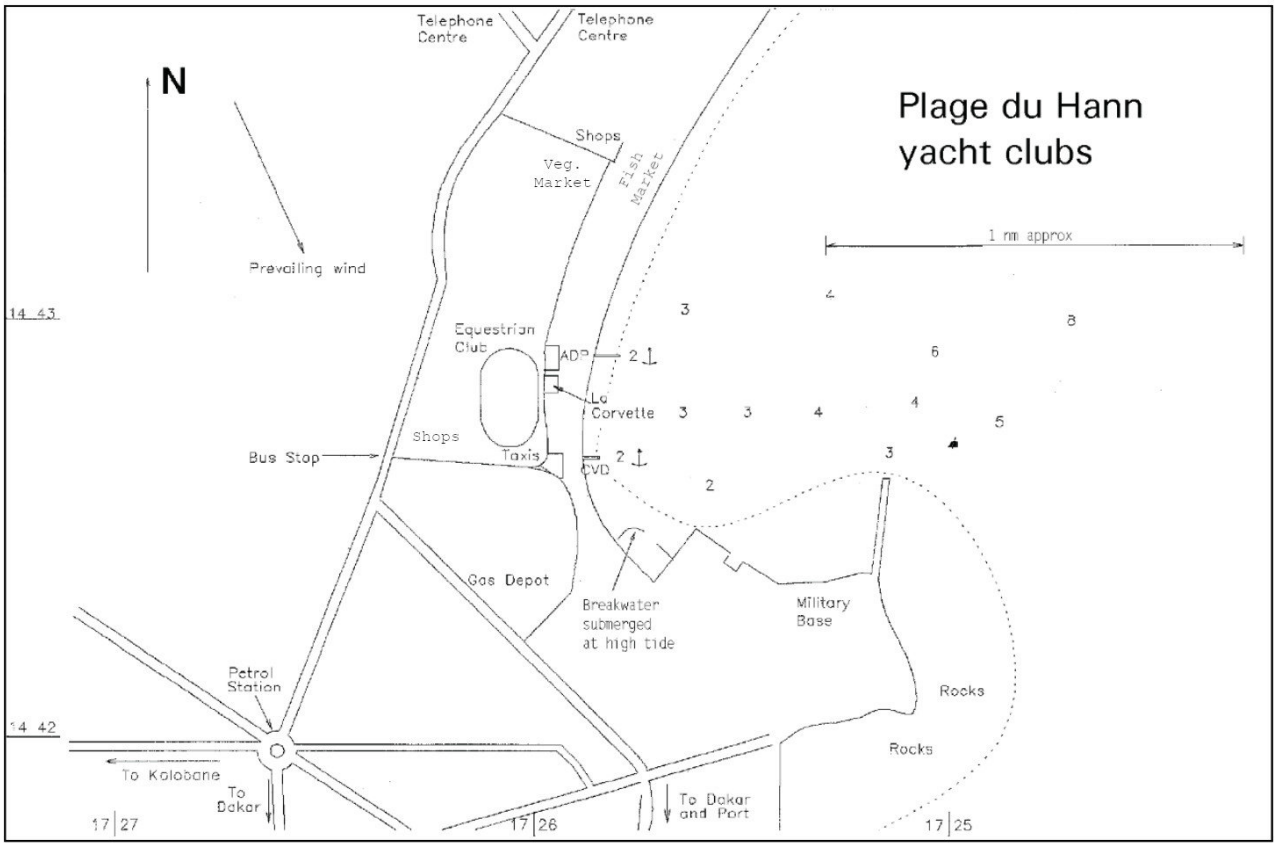
The Customs office at Avenue Felix Eboue (Mole 10) is not obvious but it is the building on the left side of the gateway to Mole 10.

My papers were photocopied at both offices but not retained.

The customs fee is still CFA 5,000 for which you will receive a receipt. I was not asked for a 'present' at any of the offices.

Plan 5.

The Super Market shown on Plan 5 no longer exists but there is a vegetable market and a fish market as well as shops where indicated near the north of the plan. I found (in December/January) that the prevailing wind usually had a larger onshore component than would be expected from the plan.



Plan 5 Plage du Hann

Hann

Page 24/25: I found Anse Hann was frequently quite choppy with a fresh onshore breeze. Even with a snubber I had to lay a lot of anchor chain to avoid snatching. The chop was sometimes enough to make using the dinghy awkward so the CVD ferry was a welcome service.

Amicable du Pleancer (ADP) has closed.

In January 2017 temporary membership of the CVD was 3,000 CFA per day for a yacht and one crew plus 2,000 for each additional crew. A week was 20,000 CFA for a yacht and one crew plus 7,500 for each additional crew. Rates for longer stays were available.

It is possible to fill your own water containers at the tap as an alternative to having cans brought to the boat by a boy. Keep track of how much you take as you may be asked to pay for it.

If planning to use the beaching trolleys inspect the trolley carefully before committing to it. One recently collapsed with a yacht on it.

There is now a chandlery opposite the entrance to the CVD.

Dakar to Banjul

Dakar to Saloum

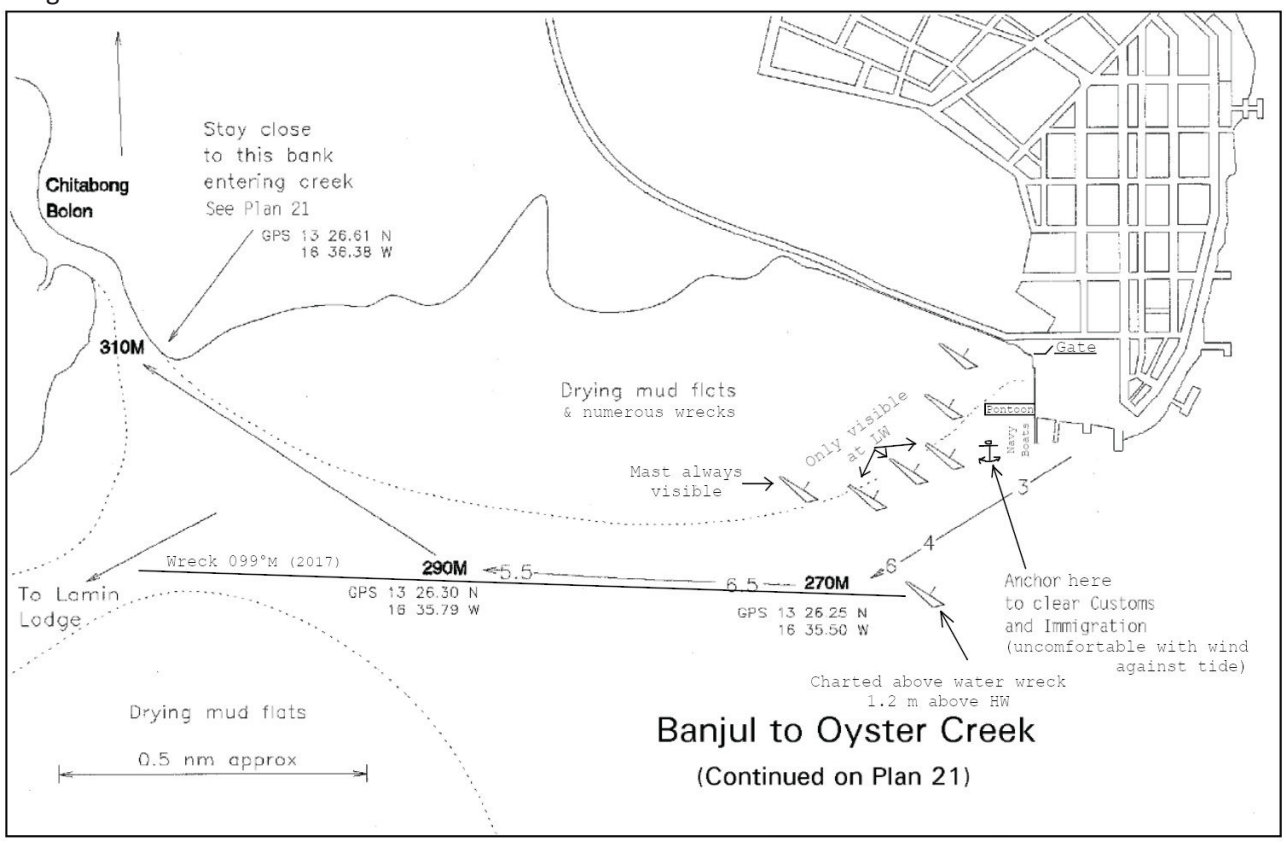
Page 33: new editions of Admiralty chart 607 do show the new entrance to the Saloum including the buoyed channel. In January 2017 all the entrance buoys except No. 11 were present. No. 13 is very small. The buoys are not lit. I did not venture beyond Djifere.

The water tower at Djifere is obscured by trees from many angles but the adjacent radio mast is conspicuous.

The Gambia

Arrival in Banjul

Page 44 & Plan 20: I anchored off the former boatyard at Half Die as shown on the original Plan 20. I was boarded almost immediately by the Navy and asked to move to the other side of the pier where their power boats are moored, probably the location described by Bob and Liz Cooper. There are a lot of unmarked and dangerous wrecks in this area



Plan 20 Banjul to Oyster Creek

I remained anchored at Half Die overnight as I arrived too late to clear in and was visited again in the middle of the night by the Navy checking up on me. This was in the period after President Yayah Jammeh had refused to step down (having lost the last election) and before he did actually leave office so the Navy were probably more on edge than normally.

There is a convenient pontoon on the side of the Navy pier where one can land by dinghy.

The correct order for clearing in is Immigration - Customs - Port Authority - Immigration again. The offices are hard to find in the port complex. One of the security guards from the pier guided me round them (and to an ATM first for cash) for a small present. It took about 3½ hours in total but would have been a lot longer without his help.

Customs still do not have a photocopier so you need to bring your own copies of your documents.

Port Authority charged a fixed rate of €22 for a cruising permit for however long you specify up to one year. The fee can be paid in Dalasi. The permit is renewable.

Tide tables are now 350 Dalasi. The times given are the same as in Admiralty Tide Tables NP208.

I was asked for a 'present' by both Immigration and Customs but not by the Port Authority. None visited the boat although Immigration did come down to the pier and inspect her from there.

On departure it is only necessary to visit Immigration who will put an exit stamp in your passport.

Banjul to Oyster Creek

Page 47 and Plan 20: I found pilotage in the area of Plan 20 difficult. There are a lot of wrecks and not many landmarks.

I could not identify the 'two wrecks almost in line on a bearing of 270°M' described on page 47 and they may have broken up.

The 1.2m wreck shown south of the channel on Admiralty Chart 608 is always visible and a useful landmark. The mast of another wreck on the north side of the channel is also visible at high water but there are other dangerous wrecks close to this one that are usually submerged. I have sketched some extra details on Plan 20 (see Plan 20) but stress that these are very approximate and navigation in this area must be undertaken with great care.

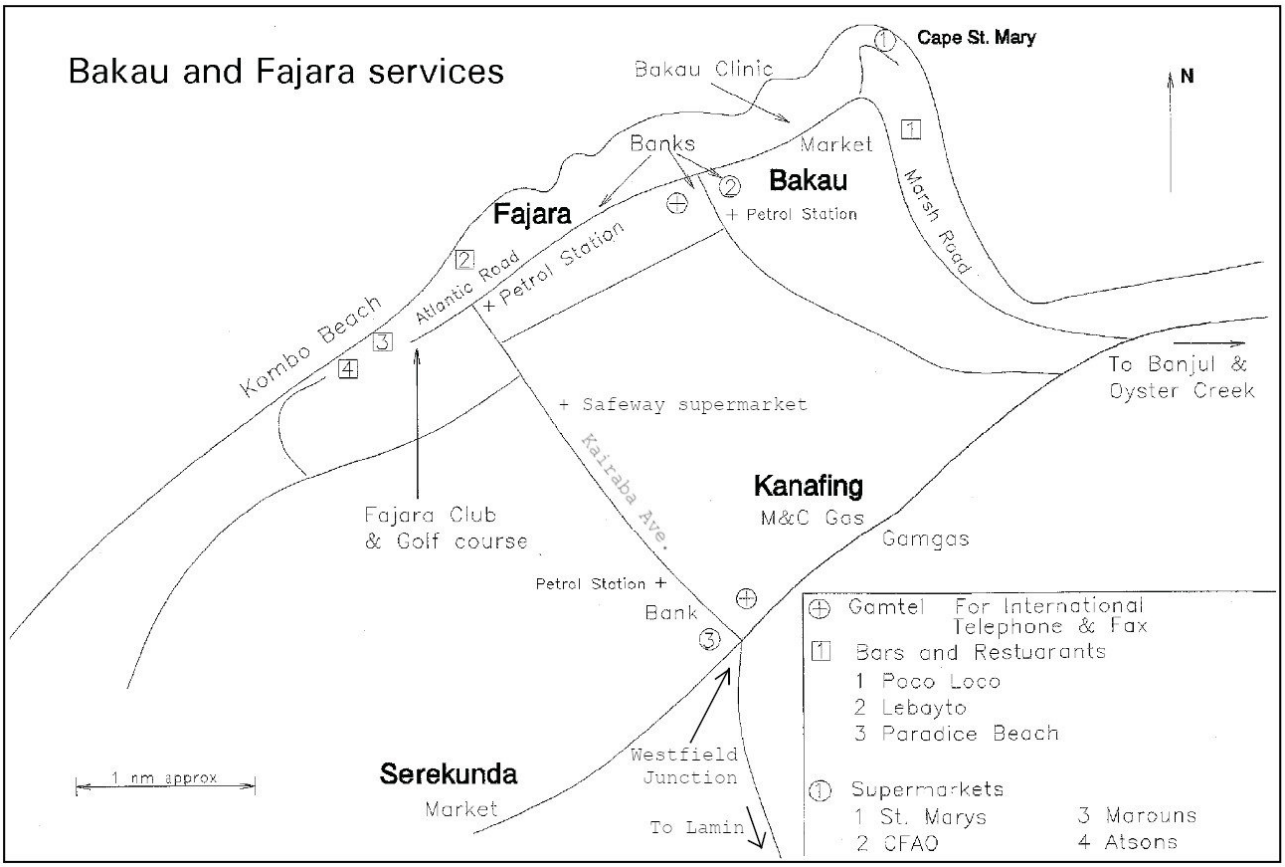
I failed to find the entrance to Chitabong Bolon either by traditional pilotage or by using the GPS waypoints given in Plan 20. I ran aground several times trying (i.e. depth less than 1.8 metres), fortunately all in soft mud. This was an hour or two after low water. Whether my pilotage was at fault or the entrance has moved or shoaled I don't know. In the end I gave up and went to Lamin Lodge instead. Unfortunately I never got round to going back and surveying the area by dinghy. I did note several yachts and some large fishing boats in Oyster Creek when passing on the bus but they may have been there for some time.

I did find the GPS waypoints given in Plan 20 very useful for staying in the main channel.

Bakau and Fajara

Plan 24: see updated sketch Plan 24. Pipeline Road is now called Kairaba Avenue. Some of the supermarkets have moved or changed.

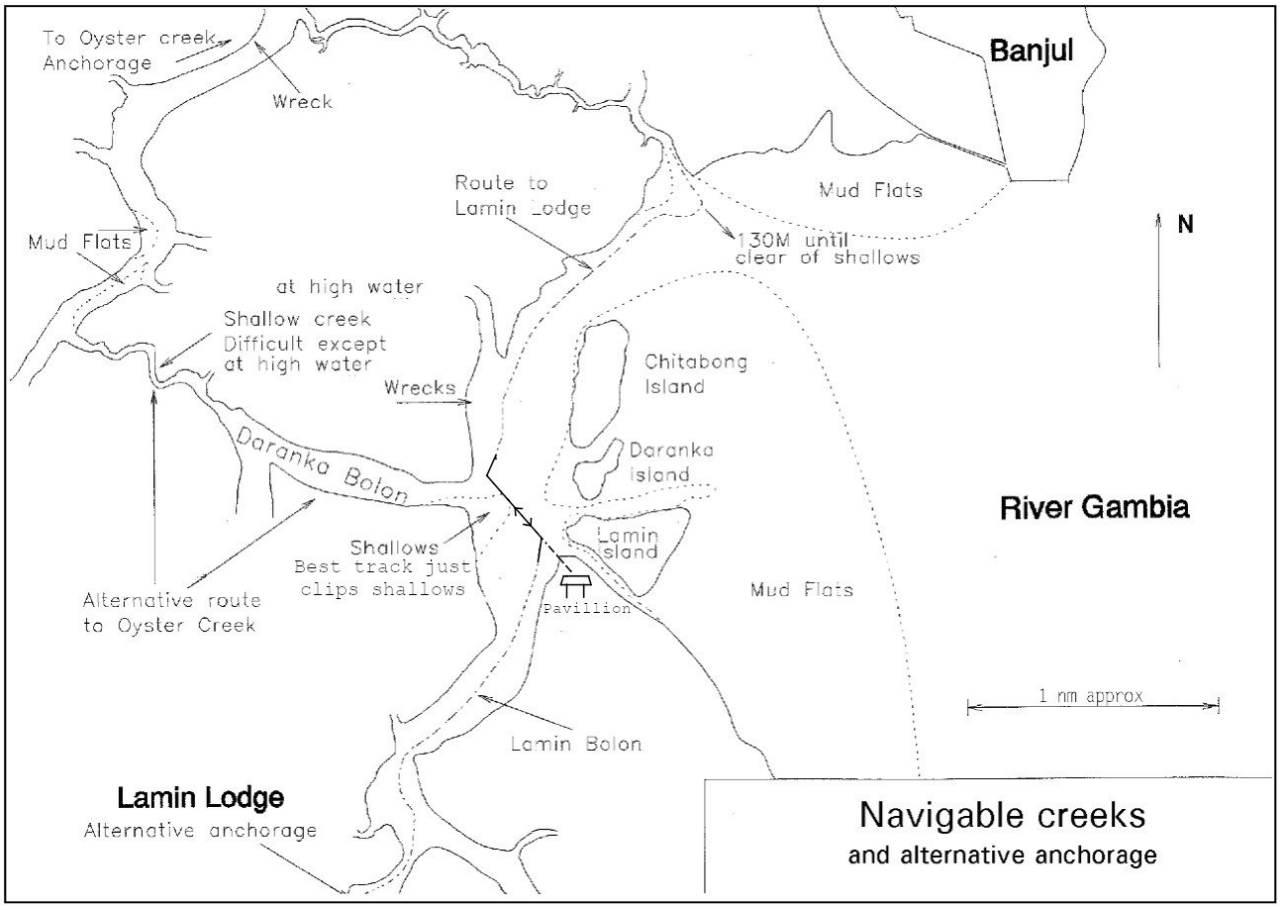
Minibuses from Lamin go to either Serekunda or to Westfield Junction. Change at Westfield for connections to Banjul.



Plan 24 Bakau and Fajara services

Lamin Lodge

Page 53 and Plan 25: the shallows in the area where Daranka Bolon joins Lamin Creek are very extensive. A pavilion on the tip of the mainland just south of Lamin Island makes a useful landmark. The deepest track I could find was to stay quite close to the west bank right up to the north west point of the entrance to Daranka Bolon and then head straight across to the point of land just north of the pavilion. I could just follow this track at low water (depth about 2 m) but the shallows are very close to starboard. See Plan 25.



Plan 25 Lower River Gambia - navigable creeks and alternative anchorage

The area around the final turn into the creek leading to the lodge also has extensive shallows.

As you approach the lodge, hold close to the west (starboard) bank. Shallows extend to at least mid channel from the east bank but the west side is deep right up to the trees. I anchored on this side about 100 m before the lodge. If continuing upstream, cross to the east bank at the bend at the lodge.

Lamin itself is about 2 km of dirt road from the lodge and has a wide range of shops and numerous fresh produce stalls although no large supermarket. The GTBank ATM accepts foreign cards.

Boys at the lodge can arrange most supplies and services including water, diesel and gas cylinder refills as well as for taxis to come and pick you up.

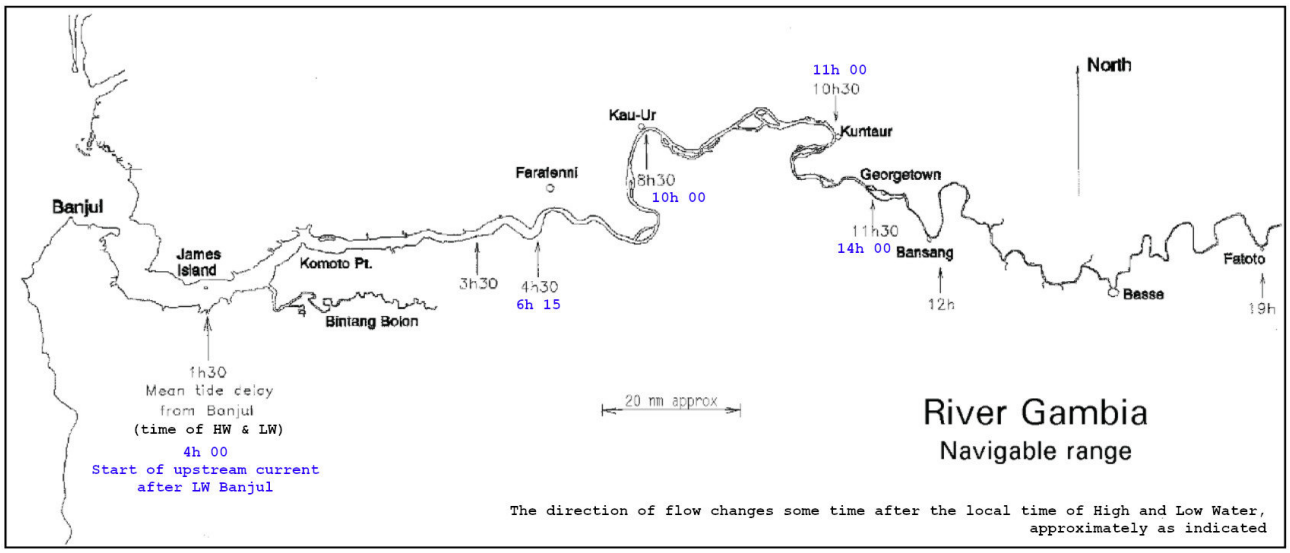
Kerosene is available in Lamin from shops selling engine oil and such like. Some petrol stations have a kerosene pump.

There is a sand bank beyond the lodge where the adventurous can careen their vessels for underwater maintenance. The boys at the lodge look after some of the moored boats and may be able to help with bottom scrubbing, painting etc. Gibril, telephone +220 365 3765, is recommended and may well meet you when you arrive.

Yundum police station, on the main highway about 2 km from Lamin in the direction of the airport and Brikama, has an immigration office where visa extensions can be obtained.

The River Gambia

Page 55: When I visited all the buoyage shown on Admiralty Chart 608 was in position as far as James Island although the lighthouse on the island has clearly not worked for a long time. Beyond James Island the only buoyage is at the ferry crossing at Yalitenda / Farafenni, see **Tendeba (Yalitenda and Farafenni)** below.



Plan 26 River Gambia, navigable section

Plan 26: Plan 26 gives the times of high and low water relative to Banjul but I found that the current generally did not reverse until a long time after high or low water. At James Island the delay was about 2½ hours, decreasing to about 30 minutes by Kuntaur and then increasing to 2½ hours again by Georgetown. I have noted these times in but they are very approximate.

Bintang Bolon

Page 57: '(see detail in Plan 29)' should read '(see detail in Plan 28).' I did not visit this creek.

Kemoto Point

Page 59: Tabirere creek has deeper water towards the northeast bank both at the entrance and inside. There are sizeable shoals off both points at the entrance.

I did see one fishing canoe in Mandori Creek but the birds are still there.

Tendeba (Yalitenda and Farafenni)

Page 61: there are now three ferries at the Yalitenda ferry crossing and two were operating simultaneously at the time of my visit.

A bridge is presently (2017) under construction to replace the ferries. When I visited large piles were being driven into the river from construction barges. In addition to a pair of buoys marking the channel there were numerous buoys, moorings and vessels associated with the bridge construction as well as a number of fish traps.

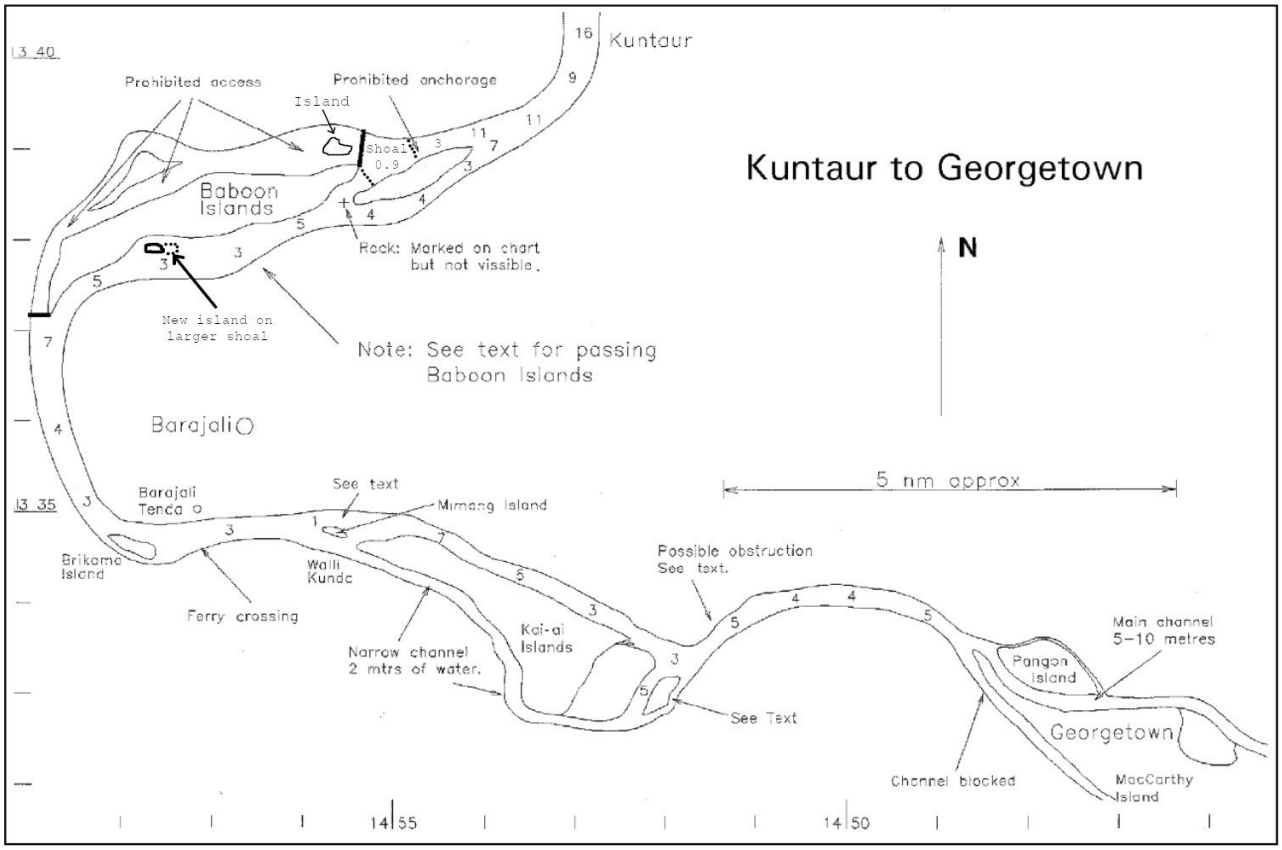
The construction crew told me the finished bridge would have a vertical clearance of 18 metres. Completion is reportedly scheduled for 2020.

Water can be obtained in Farafenni.

There is a bank with an ATM in Farafenni, the last on the river until Basse.

Visa extensions can be obtained at Farafenni police station.

Kuntaur to Georgetown



Plan 32 Kuntaur to Georgetown

Plan 32: there is an additional small island in the channel north of the largest Baboon Island, this is shown on Admiralty Chart 609 but not on the original Plan 32.

Part of the shoal shown south of the largest island on Admiralty Chart 609 is now a new island.

Page 66 and Plan 32: as reported by the Coopers, the depths in the channel north of the small island before Baboon Island are much less than charted, to the extent that many yachts will not be able to use this channel at low water. I slid over a shoal in this channel at half tide and calculated that there would be less than 1 m at chart datum. This was close to the position where plan 32 shows a depth of 7 m. The depths in the south channel were more or less as charted.

Trees have grown up around the mosque tower at Barajali and it is no longer prominent.

Page 67: the dumb ferry in the south channel at MacCarthy Island has now been replaced by a bridge, even lower than the telegraph wires. Nothing much larger than a canoe could use this channel.

As reported by Ed Wheeler the north bank channel is obstructed by power lines immediately upstream of the ferry crossing at Georgetown. Locals say yachts can pass under the cables by staying close to the north bank where there is a pylon and they are not so low. This looked plausible but I did not try it.

Georgetown

Page 67: Georgetown is these days a thriving place (whereas I found Kuntaur very quiet) and has a well stocked market and a good range of shops as well as a large school, museum, police station, bars, restaurants and the like. There is no bank but there is a bureau de change where foreign currency can be exchanged for Dalasis.

Regular busses run from Georgetown back to Brikama and Banjul as well as upriver to Bansang and beyond.

I did not go beyond Georgetown.

The Casamance

I did not visit the Casamance because of the changes to the clearing in rules described below. The following is all based on second hand information which I have not verified.

Planning

Page 72: according to the CVD office in Dakar it is no longer possible to clear in in Ziguinchor. Clearing in to Senegal can only be done in Dakar. It is therefore not permitted to sail from The Gambia to the Casamance, one must first return to Dakar to clear back into Senegal. It is however still possible to clear *out* of Senegal in Ziguinchor by going to the airport.

Banjul to the Casamance

Page 73: a report at the CVD dated 23/12/12 gave the position of the approach (buoy?) as 12° 35'.548 N 16° 54'.081 W and the entrance as 12° 32'.484 N 16° 50'.336 W.

A friend who visited the Casamance in 2017 reported that the buoyed channel was in place.

Djogue to Ziguinchor

Page 77: a copy of the Port Authority rules for Ziguinchor on the notice board at CVD states that in order to keep the channel clear yachts must anchor less than 100 m from the shore and in less than 4 m depth at chart datum.

Ziguinchor

Page 78: the same notice states that you must report to the Harbour Master (Port Authority) within 12 hours of arrival and again less than 12 hours before departure, even if you are coming from or going to another port in Senegal.

South of Elinkine

Page 85: a friend who visited the Casamance in 2014 advised me not to go off tracks in the vicinity of Ehidj as there may be land mines.

Guinea-Bissau

Planning

Page 95: the Guinea-Bissau Embassy in Banjul has moved. It is now in the suburb of Kotu, at the Palma-Rima junction, up a side street on the south side of the Bertil Harding highway. There is a sign for it at the highway and the Guinea-Bissau flag flies from the building itself. Opening hours are 0900 - 1600 Monday - Thursday.

River Casamance to River Cacheu

Page 99: I used the anchorage in the lee of Cabo Roxo and found it an adequate passage anchorage in settled conditions.

I entered the Cacheu using the Rio de Bolor channel as described. There are no navigational markers and I relied heavily on GPS, motor, depth sounder, and the chart.

I left the Cacheu by the south channel by using GPS to follow the line over the banks where the chart showed the buoys used to be. I found isolated shoal patches of up to 1 m less than the charted depth on this line.

I would not like to use either entrance to the Cacheu in anything other than settled conditions.

River Cacheu to Cacheu

Page 99: I cleared in to Guinea - Bissau in Cacheu. I arrived in the evening and cleared in the following morning. I paid a non negotiable 25,000 CFA for a cruising permit, for which I received a receipt. Two officials came to inspect the boat and they asked for 'presents' of a further 5000 CFA each plus a couple of items they selected from the ship's equipment. The officials were friendly and helpful and the whole process low key and non-threatening.

The anchorage at Cacheu is not always as placid as in Steve Jones experience, particularly when the wind is against the tide.

Page 101: the standpipe near the jetty only works between (approximately) 7 and 9 in the morning.

Cacheu has a reasonably well stocked vegetable market. There is a larger weekly market every Thursday.

Bijagos Islands

Bolama to Roxa

Page 117: neither the marker on the Baixo do Pargo nor the buoy marking the shallows were present when I visited.

If entering the Ilheus dos Porcos anchorage at high water, note that the beach dries out a long way and then shelves very rapidly. This is obvious at low water.

Roxa to Bubaque

Page 121: I did not enjoy dealing with the officials in Bubaque. I arrived in the evening, and having already cleared in to Guinea - Bissau in Cacheu I did not immediately go ashore. I was boarded the following morning by 4 threatening officials (plus 2 more to man their launch) demanding to know why I hadn't cleared in etc. Despite my papers from Cacheu, I was charged 30,000 CFA for departure clearance (for which I did receive a receipt), a further 40,000 CFA for 'inspection charges,' plus 2000 CFA for passport stamping, a total of 72,000 CFA. I was told that the port captain's office is manned 24 hours a day and that I should have reported there as soon as I arrived regardless of the time.

I used a Bahamian Moor to solve the problem of getting into water shallow enough to anchor without ending up on the beach at the turn of the tide.

The market had a good range of vegetables but the only fruit available was mangoes and lemons. Most other basic supplies can be obtained in the village, which is very pleasant after the problems of anchoring and clearing in are overcome. There is no bank but some of the shops will exchange Euros for CFA.

The 'European style' ferry to Bissau had not operated for several months when I was there although a replacement vessel was supposed to be on her way from Spain. A local *canoua* ferry was operating a service about twice a week, a 5 - 6 hour journey which even some locals were reluctant to brave. Dakar based airline Arc en Ciel operates flights from Bissau to Bubaque on request, using a light aircraft which can carry up to three passengers.

Canal de Orango

Steve Jones does not describe the Canal de Orango but it is described in the United States Pub. 143 '*Sailing Directions (Enroute) - West Coast of Europe and Northwest Africa.*' (See General Information and Planning.) I used this route back out to the Atlantic after leaving Bubaque and found it straightforward.

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