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FIJI NOTES - Lau Group

David Mitchell

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The RCC Pilotage Foundation is grateful to David Mitchell for allowing us to publish his notes, arising from his cruise to the Lau Group in August - September 2010.

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FIJI NOTES

Area covered: Lau Group

Yacht: *Shandon*

Crew: David Mitchell

Date: August – September 2010.

Introduction:

There are 53 islands within the group that includes the Moala Group's three islands. The need for a permit is to protect the culture of the islands. Personally, except for the *sevusevu* that is taken seriously i.e. do not land and walk about before doing it.

Sevusevu

Wear a *sulu*, if you have one, and a long sleeved shirt. A tie will earn bonus points. You will have a spokesman who will greet you when you arrive, often coming out in a boat, and will organise the ceremony. This may entail waiting for the chief who may be fishing. Give your representative your *kava* when approaching the Chief's *burre* (house) and mention any special wishes you may have – collect empty shells, burn rubbish at low water... The ceremony may be in a special hall. The rep. always seems to sit on my left. Facing you, to your left, will be the Chief's Spokesman; this is a hereditary post, like the Chief. Facing you will be the Chief.

Your rep, addresses the Spokesman. Whilst the talking is going on, keep your eyes down. Your spokesman will explain who you are and where you have come from. He will ask permission for you to walk the village, the beach, the plantations and whatever else you might want. At the end, he slides the *kava* to the Spokesman. He replies opening up the walks asked for. Your rep will be muttering '*vanaka*' (thank you) at each opening. ***

Cruising Permit

Confusion reigns. In June, Kandra, manager Waitui Marina, Savusavu, was able to obtain permits direct from the Lau Provincial Government in Suva for \$15FJ plus \$10 per day per head. The latter was waived if post-cyclone-Thomas supplies were taken in lieu. However, the contact in the Council was reportedly sacked for corruption and in the ensuing brouhaha, Kandra decided enough was enough. The Copra Shed Marina in Savusavu may be able to help but the cost for one yacht was \$408FJ. Best advice is to contact both before you arrive to save time. *****email address for Waitui and Copra Shed*** The official line is that you have to go to the Lau Provincial Office in Suva***** where you will be given a talk about how to behave.

On Costs

I have first hand experience of some villages asking for additional tariffs either per head or per boat. It appears to me to be limited to Vanua Balavu. I paid once at Daliconi, as I appreciated that it was the 'cost' of a private invitation by-passing Suva. When asked for an outrageous sum by the recently elected (2008) village Headman at Susui I laughed and walked away. Villagers seemed embarrassed and said that it was a joke. In 2010, I saw a 'letter' given to a yacht visiting Daliconi asking for \$25 per head in return for handling rubbish, allowing the yacht to anchor... I do not believe there is any legal status in such a request and it is up to each yacht to deal with such request as you see fit. Villages need financial help buying fuel and repairs for the generator, grass cutters and perhaps a village boat, repairing the church, helping with the water supply.... So either pay up, offer a different amount or, as a last resort, say 'in that case we shall leave.' Taking medical supplies or school books obviates any problem.

Charts:

Fiji charts are excellent, cheap and available in most yachting centres.

F53 North Lau

F54 South Lau excluding Fulaga and Ogea Levu (not available on Fiji charts)

F100 Totoya and Motuku

UK441 Fiji Islands – Eastern Group (southern portion) printed in 1995 includes Fulaga and Ogea.

UK 1247 Motuku printed 1982

UK1248 Totoya printed in 1985

UK1252 Moala printed 1982

Tidal information:

Standard Port – Suva

Welagilala Island	HW – 0015	LW	0000
Vanua Balavu	-0030		-0030
Lakeba, Wainiyabia	+0005		+0005
Totoya, Herald Sound	+0100		+0055
Moala, Naroi	+0005		0000
Matuku, Matuku Harbour	+0035		+0020

Range: spring about 1.5m and neaps about 1m.

Supplies:

Expect no supplies on the islands. Most islands will have a very basic store or two . There may be fuel for outboard engines (mixed and unmixed) but invariably supplies run out before the monthly supply boat arrives. Diesel may be available on Vanua Balavu and Lakeba, but the same rule applies. It may be possible to trade/buy vegetables and fruit.

Gifts:

Giving gifts is a friendly gesture and the appreciation is far greater than the cost.

I have bought school text and exercise books in Nadi, which go down well. Blackboard paint and brushes are welcomed at every school. Library books are pretty useless, judging by the pile of books in most schools.

Containers in any shape or form – glass and plastic.

The islanders work on reciprocity so I carried tea bags in small packages to give when offered a cup of tea. Loose tea leaves are more common, as cheaper so next time I shall carry them. Also tinned corned beef (Pacific style) and a bag of rice to give to the person providing a meal.

Medicines are wanted. The problem is knowing what is wanted. In Vanua Balavu, the hospital in Lomaloma is the main source for treatment. Most villages appear to have a nurse for first aid so items such as: elastoplasts, steri strips, gauze, lint, adhesive tape, antiseptic cream, cough medicine.

In South Lau, the 12-bed hospital is in Tubou. On every occupied island there is a nursing centre. Moala, Matuku and Totoya have a Health Centre with, in theory, a doctor but none was around when I was there as well as nursing centres. All units are more independent than in North Lau and deliver children and inject patients but are unlikely to give IV, because of a lack of knowledge on the medicines; they want more than first aid supplies. They can order supplies direct from Suva every three months. Just because they ask does not mean they get as the items may be 'out of stock' in Suva.

Medical Aid Abroad (www.maa.org.co.nz, amaanz@xtra.co.nz) a charity based, in Auckland, has supplies and can contact some clinics for information on what is needed. In any case, they would love anyone to deliver what they have. Unless qualified, you will not be asked to carry drugs. Primary contact is Dr Tony Wansborough (stores Manager) ncw@clear.net.co.nz. Husband, Dr Tony Wansborough, is Chairman.

Islands:

Every reef and cay belongs to someone. Visiting an unoccupied island without a representative or permission from the owner-island is theoretically tabu. Apparently this follows an incident when a yacht allegedly left cocaine in dive bottles. This rule seems less important and I was always told 'just go'.

Islands with good anchorages:

Welagilalu

Cakaugalu

Vanua Balavu – Daliconi (owns Bay of Islands and Sosoi Bay, so ask during *sevusevu* and do this before visiting)

Lomolomo

Avea Island not very good as susceptible to popple from the north

Susui Island

Lakeba

Oneata

Moce

Komo

Namuka-I-Lau

Fulaga

Ogea Levu

Totoya

Moala

Matuku

Communication:

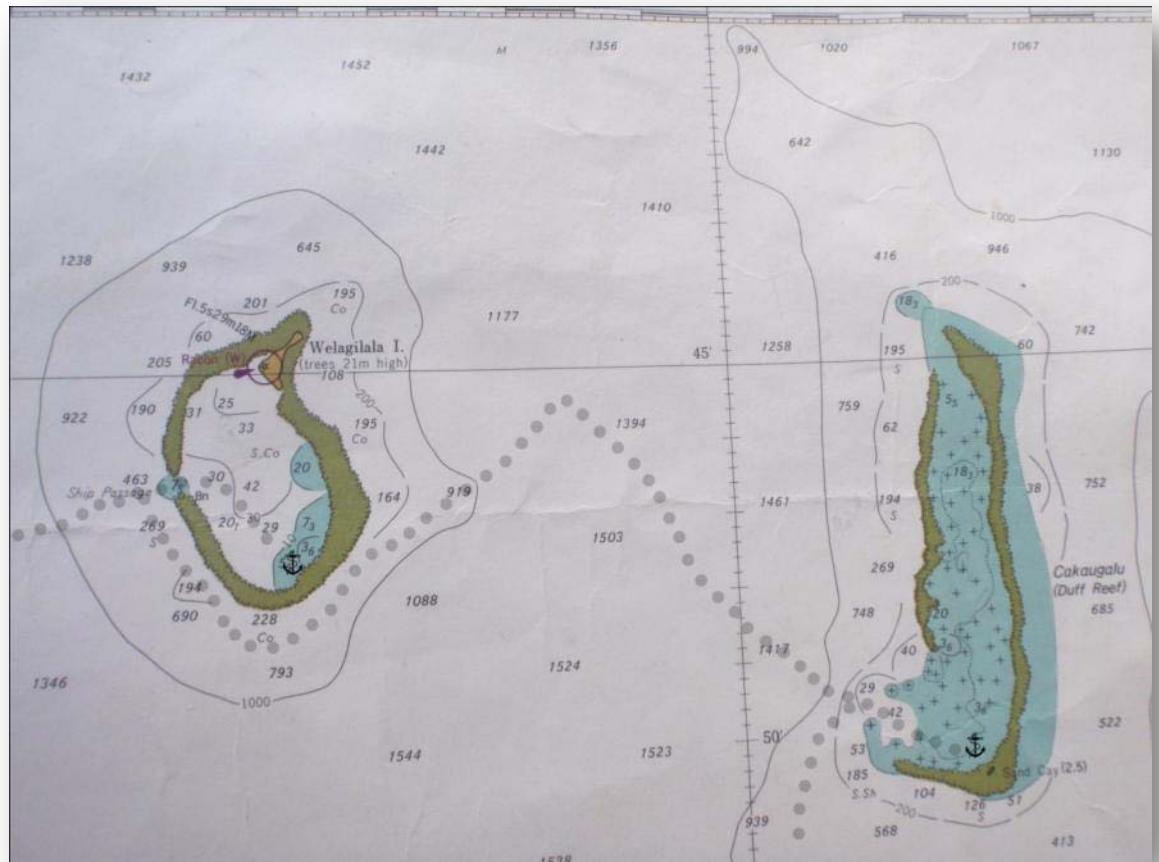
All islands have telephone connections. 6030... means a radio landline; in most cases, this will be a public telephone (v), rather than a direct line (dl). The call may be answered by the nearest person who will then have to search for the recipient. Best to give the contact name and say you ring back in ten minutes. Vodaphone, Digicel and TFL (Telecom) are the three companies in Fiji. See island for possible connection.

Primary contacts:

It is prudent and polite to make contact with the island you are about to visit giving an ETA. For this you will need a TFL Prepay card. They come in \$3, \$5 and \$10. Your contact in one village will make the call for you, using your card. \$3-cards are useful if you have to leave before the call can get through. Cards should be available in post offices but sometimes they run out so best to buy some before you head off. When you arrive at the next island, the chances are that your contact will be there to guide you in. Don't forget to reimburse for the fuel (\$15FJ per gallon).

ISLAND	VILLAGE	PERSON	CONTACT
Fulaga	Mauana-I-Cake	Setareki Dawai	6030424
Komo		Mosese Veilana Post master	6030405 (dl)
Lakeba	Tubou	Mr Bole – chief's spokesman	8220029
Moala	Naroi	Bill Kamikanuca Policeman for yachts	6030307
Moce	Nasu	Mr Joae Bese – post master & mayor	6030407
Motuku	Aroi	Roko Bale – chief. Varanisesse Gade – Island Representative 2012	6030362 (v) 6030366 (dl)
Namuka-I-Lau		Metuisela Tukai	6030411 (dl) 6030412 (v)
Ogea Levu		Epeli Galui Headman – 2012	6030417
Oneata	Dakuiloa	Apakuki Tukana – chief's son Mesake Taufu	850377 & 6030 492 360 6715
Totoya	Tovu Ketei	Rev Sekonaia Chief of chief's number 2 Rupeni Masibabavu – Island Representative until 2011 Mr Tui post master.	6030343(v) 6030346 6030342
Vanua Belavu	Daliconi	Joeli Vuetanavanua President Tourism Committee	9435748

Welagilala Island



The approach is straight forward. I took a waypoint of $16^{\circ}46.30S$ $179^{\circ}07.70W$ off the chart and it worked. The post on the south side of the entrance is clearly visible. Width of pass approx 100m.7m in the pass then drops fast to 30m. Once inside the water is deep and bommie free. I was lucky to find a young humpback whale that breached about three boat lengths away. A dive boat was anchored inside the pass and reported good drift dives in the pass.

The island was deserted although there is a house on the south shore The light did not appear to be working.

The only place to anchor is on the sand shelf on the south side of the lagoon. I dropped the anchor in 4m and fell back to 9m.



Cakaugalu

See chart on previous page. Note: the cay is on the inner edge of the reef.



The sand cay is very visible and appears as a static white slash, as opposed to waves breaking on the reef. I came in from the west with a waypoint on the deepest area ; this avoids shallows (less than 10m) to the south. Steered 110°M on the centre of the cay. Side stepped a couple of bommies – easily avoided. Coral patches in sand 10-5m. Below 5m there is a wide area in which to anchor, on glorious white sand, avoiding obvious coral patch (see photograph). The sand slopes gradually. I anchored in 4m.

The reef is shallow so there is quite a popple at high water.

Over 30 men were camping on the cay and diving for *beche de mer*.

I came out on 280° rather than 290°, which was a mistake as I ended up amongst the bommies on the south side of the entrance.

I might stop here for lunch but will not bother to stay over night.

Vanua Balavu



There are many passes into the lagoon. The easiest is on the NW tip. The leading marks are clear white posts in white oil drums on white rocks.

Many of the posts have lost their top marks. Leave white with triangle facing up to seaward and black facing down on the land side.

Dalconi village

owns the Bay of Islands so do *sevusevu* before visiting. The Bay is deep and you have to keep to the edge if you want to anchor in <10m. There are some fun and challenging spots in which you can anchor off and tie back. Posts mark many of the internal reefs but care is needed on the east side. Susui has a good anchorage. Off Lomolomo is all right. Avea is all right in calm conditions as it offers no shelter except from E – SE. Quite a popple comes in from the north.

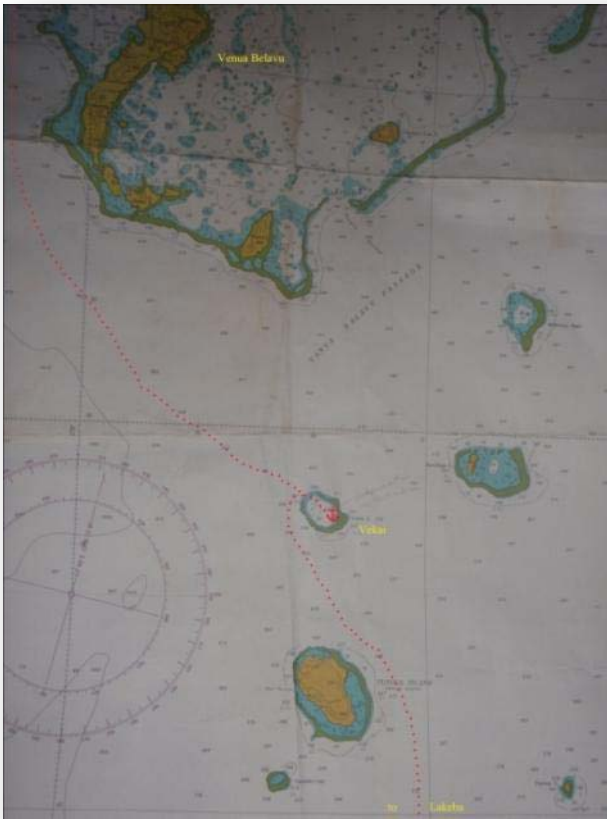


Showing the white leading marks



At anchor off Daliconi village. Note the relationship with the large building on the left (the church) – the left gable is just open. This is the best spot – I was told later. The **airfield** is just out of shot to the right.

Vekai Island

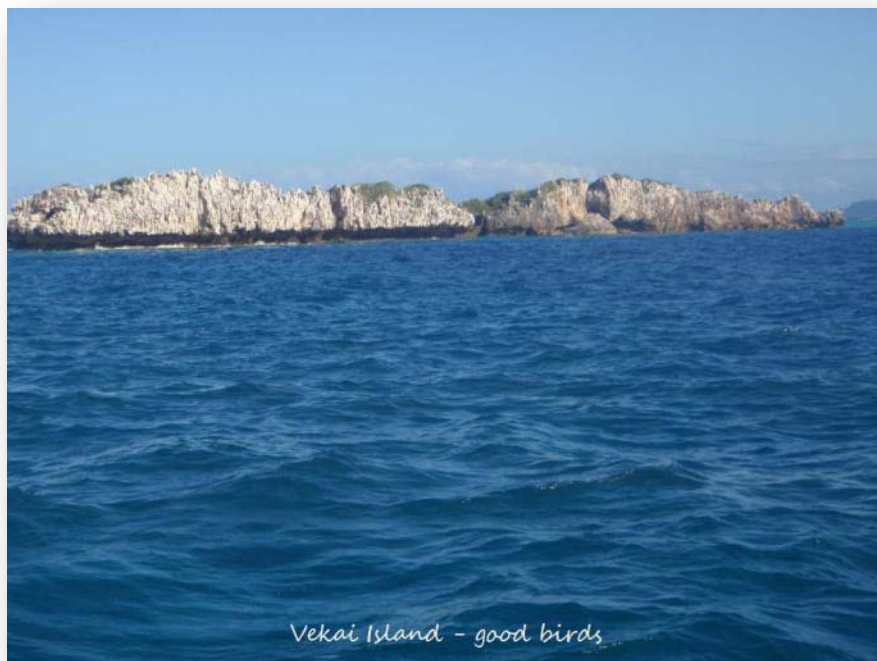


The only reason for stopping here was because of the birds: light and dark phase red legged boobies, brown boobies, brown noddies, sooty and common terns.

The guano covered rock is clearly visible. The approach is straight forward from the NW ($17^{\circ}32.7'S$ $178^{\circ}50.2'W$). I had a minimum of 3.5m and came in on a bearing of $110^{\circ}M$ on the north end of the rock.

I anchored on the north side of the rocky cay in 3.5m. With 25m of chain I fell back to 7.2m. Very popply at high water. Best used in settled weather or for lunch.

There is a small beach and vegetation on the SE side.



Lakeba



Approaching NW coast Lakeba Island

The anchorage at Wainiyabia, $18^{\circ}12.5S$ $178^{\circ}50.6W$, on the west coast, can be approached without sun as it is clean. It is off the last (southern) beach in the bay before the point. Behind it, on the shore, is a thatched 'boat' house. On the cliff above is a blue roofed house (looked grey to me), a traditional looking house in front (in fact an outdoor room and balcony; adjacent to the

north is a 'single-storey 'yellow' building. If Richard (Ric) & Lia Wallace are staying, Ric's white fishing boat will be in the water and a white 'banana' boat may be on the beach. The boats were the first thing I noticed. From the anchorage the blue roof is $101^{\circ}M$ and the boat house $102^{\circ}M$

Anchor in 10m off the cut in the reef marked, possibly, by four branches. The beacons shown on the chart have gone.



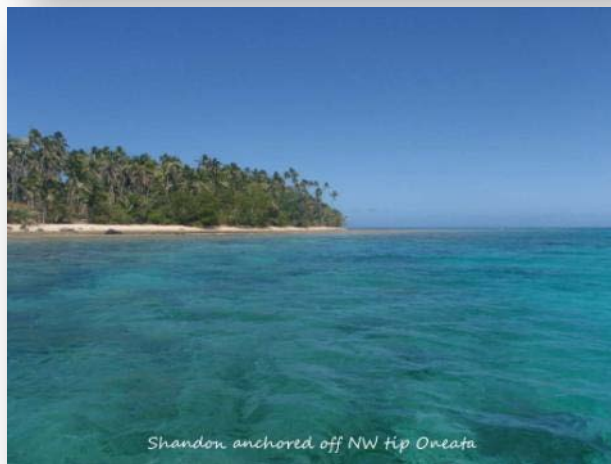
Most of the reef either dries or is awash at LW. Tie to Ric's mooring buoys or run up the beach.

MUD MAP**



Photo shows *Shandon* in the top left corner and the dinghy approach through the shore shelf.

Oneata



Shandon anchored off NW tip Oneata

I aimed for Middle Passage, $18^{\circ}25.7S$ $178^{\circ}28.3W$, and came in on approx $150^{\circ}M$ pointing at the west end of the island. I came through some large bommies (min 10m). I could see Middle Passage to the east. I may have come in through the Middle Passage and went between the bommies shown on the chart. Clean all the way to where I

anchored in 10m. The glorious sand slopes gently and I could have gone closer.

The new house belongs to Mesake Taufa (see contact sheet). From there there is a path to Dakuiloa village where the chief lives.



The wind was coming down the coast making the anchorage rolly, so I moved up the coast to my 'Islets Bay'.



At the northern end of the beach near the angled palm (see photo below), a footpath leads to the other village, Waigori, where there is another chief. The path continues to Dakuilola with a pleasant 20 minute walk.



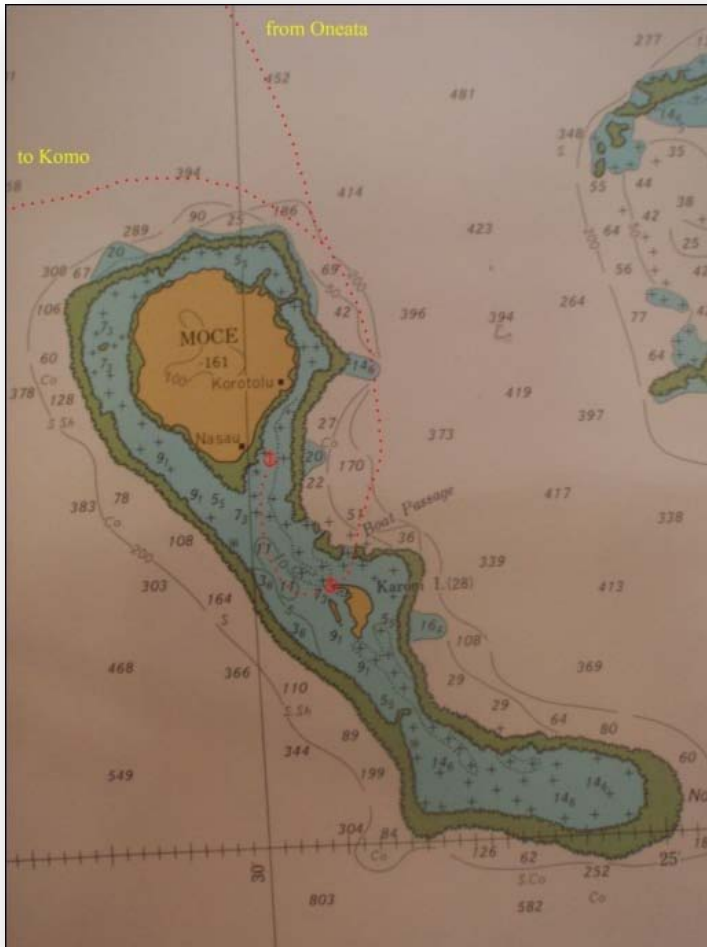
With the wind in the east, I sailed round and anchored off Dakuilola in sand, with patches of black grass, in 3m.

Moce

The Boat Passage into the lagoon is a challenge, which may explain why so few yachts visit the island. I was the first in 2010. A waypoint of $18^{\circ}41.3'S$ $178^{\circ}31.9'W$ took me to a 7m-deep gap that was about 15m wide. It was about LW+1.5hrs and the water was gushing out at about 1 knot. Once inside, the depth comes up to about 4m. Steer between the two shallow patches (see photo) and make for the NW tip of Karoni Island (see second photo).

The next gap is hardly 10m wide and passes within about 10m of the NW tip of

Komo I. (see photo).



Once through steer 250° towards the west reef, then curve slowly around leaving Moce to port. Look for a reddish float buoy marking the outer edge of a reef that nearly dries. The least depth is 4m. I anchored in 4m at $18^{\circ}40.35'S$ $178^{\circ}29.73'W$. The beach and reef come out a long way and dry at low water. The two villages shown on the chart are, to all intents, one separated by a drain. The only chief is in Nasau

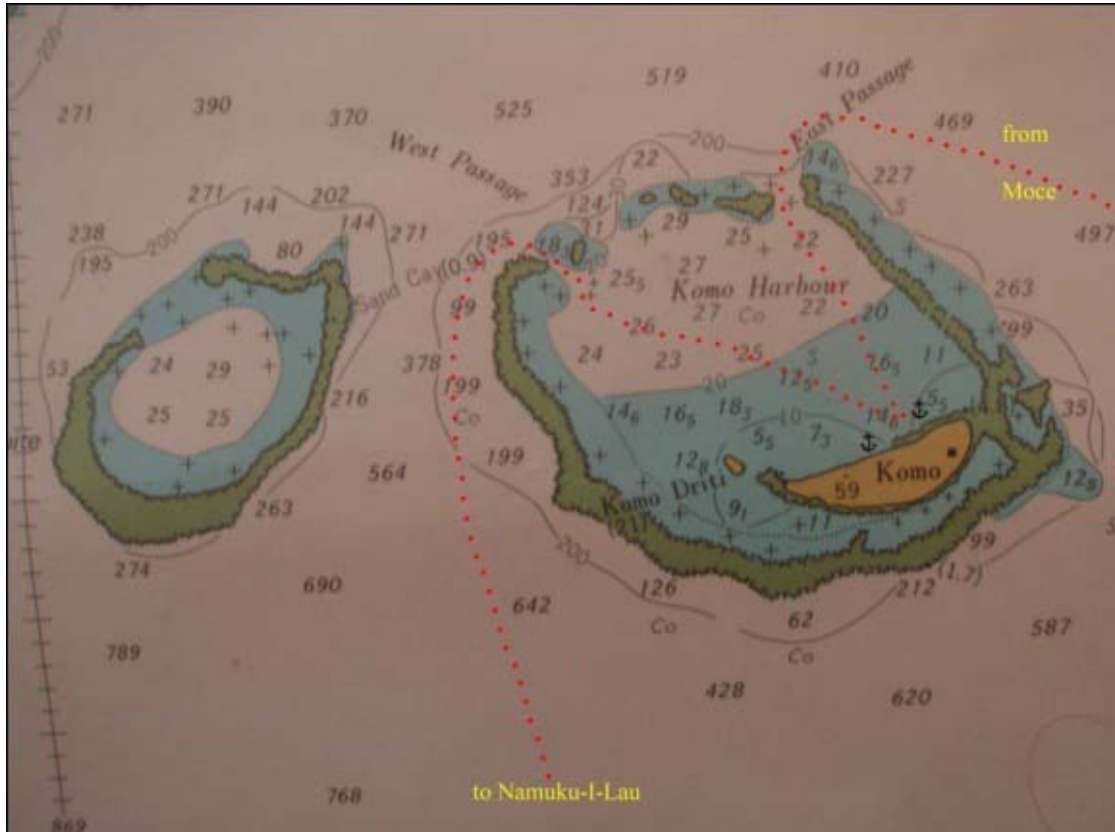
Second Photo. The dinghy is showing the path through the second gap off the NW tip of Karoni Island. Depth 3m.



Third photo.

Passing close to the NW tip of Karoni. Little islets opening up.

Once through, steer 250°M towards the outer reef to gain deeper water, then steer gently to starboard towards the south tip of Moce.



Komo East Passage is W-ID-E! The outer approach is $18^{\circ}38.70S$ $178^{\circ}38.40W$. The bommie shown on the chart is there and clear to see. I came in on $165^{\circ}M$ and cleared it. **Note:** there are a number of bommies and shallow patches ($>10m$) outside the reef. The large rock, shown on the north reef above the 9 of 29 is a good beacon. Once inside I missed the second bommie and had a lovely tack up to the shore. I anchored in the east position in 7m. The west position may be better as easier to land and possibly less popple. Walked up to the ridge and picked up a path by a garden that led down to the village via the Primary School.



Shandon anchored in the east position. Left via West Passage $18^{\circ}19.23S$ $178^{\circ}40.34W$. Cluster of bommies just before the pass. Ample room & depth between large north bommie and remainder.



Photo 2. Passing through the narrow gap between N-I-L (right) and the off-lying island; note 1 knot current. *Shandon* anchored in 3m, sand. The bar almost dries at low water.

Yasaga Cluster

I would not call here again except in very calm conditions. The islands are unoccupied. The approach is wide. The west side is protected from SE swell so the reef is difficult to pick up until close to.

I had been told of the anchorage on Navutuiloma – shown with the red anchor. The approach is possible but a mine field of vertical rocks and mushrooms with <7m between them. However, the anchorage looked shallow and exposed to the W20k blowing at the time.

I ended up on the north side – black anchor – tucked in behind a steep bluff with a hole in it at water level – see photo. The bottom is rough and smooth coral. There are two small sand patches just inside the bluff. I aimed for the inner one but over shot. I dived on the anchor (Rocna) and set it behind a coral ledge. The chain sank into the sand so I doubt if it has any holding power. The anchorage offered good enough protection although the popple came in at high water. Pity, because it is an attractive spot.



Photo 1 – left – before I reanchored towards the beach and closer to the bluff.

Photo 2 –right –showing the approach and the hole-in-the-wall.

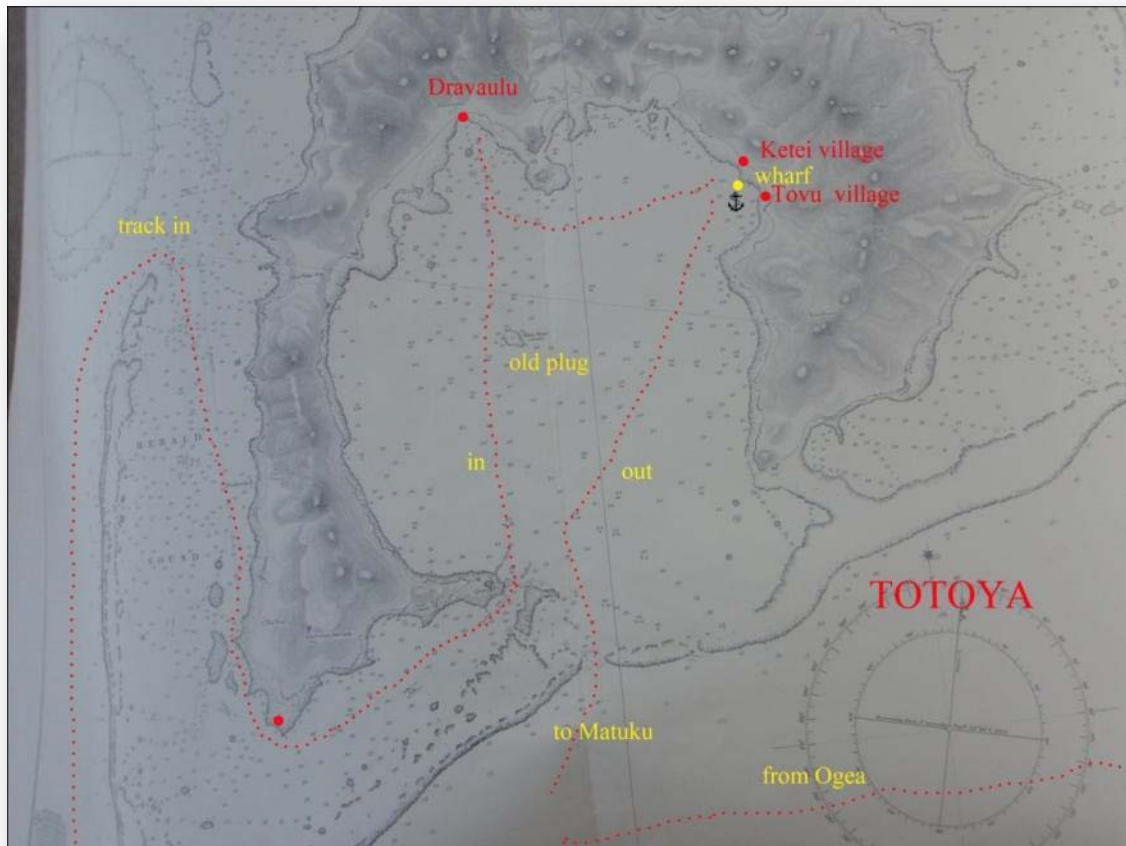
WP of anchorage: 18°57.7S 178°29.3W.



Photo 2 – final approach to the village above far beach. Walking from here at low water!



Totoya



I approached from the east and south of the island. $19^{\circ}01.5'S$ $179^{\circ}51.5'W$ is about 200m of the SW tip of the reef, course $275^{\circ}M$. I came through the reef at $18^{\circ}57.6'S$ $179^{\circ}54.3'W$ steering $070^{\circ}M$ for the obvious gap in the island (Nai Vaka Gap on the chart). This was a mistake as I had to wiggle and ended up on $100^{\circ}M$. Next time I shall continue up the reef to the enormous gap in the reef. Once inside, the lagoon is deep except for obvious reefs off the SW tip of the island. There is deep water inside the reefs of the village below the light house (not working), helped by four posts – all left to seaward.

There is a post on the west side of the Gullet.

Inside the crater, the old plug, I suspect, is not marked but waves should be breaking. I looked at anchoring off Dravaulu village (north of crater) but it looked very uncomfortable in the E15-20k. I sailed out and anchored in 4m on sand off Tovv on the east side, south of the concrete wharf (conspic). **Warning:** the hills act as a vortex and the easterly wind can blast in from all angles spinning a yacht around and pushing it onto the shallow shelf. Next time I will use two anchors and a Bahamian moor.

There are five villages, four on the water; each has a chief. Tovv is the head chief and it was not necessary to *sevusevu* with the others. The island spokesman until 2012 lives in the village north of the wharf, Ketei – see contact information – he may come out to your boat and will organise *sevusevu* and anything else you might want.

I found nowhere to anchor on the west side from the Gap to the SW tip. The water is too deep and where it is shallow it looks full of coral.



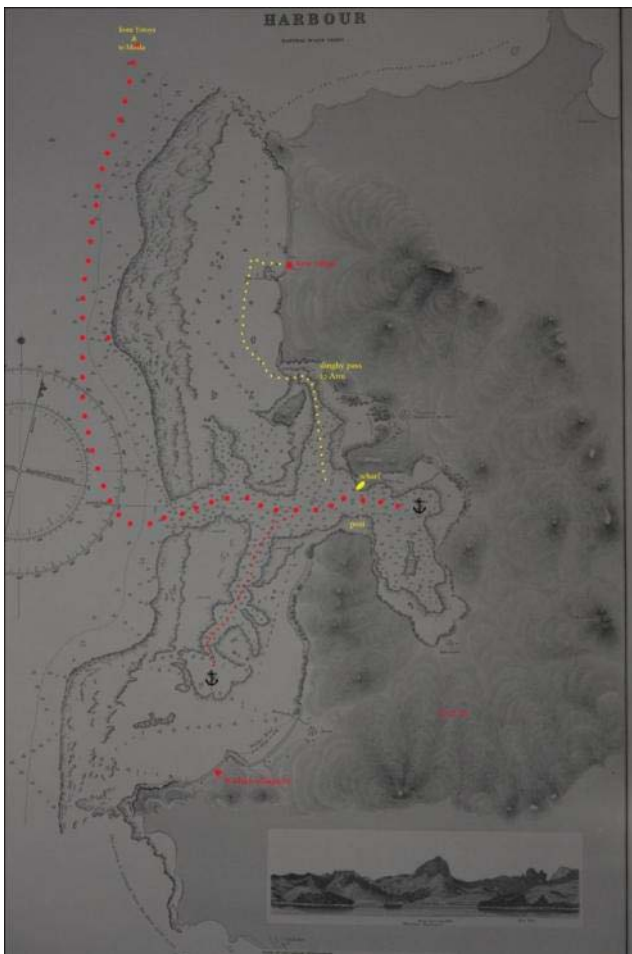
Came out via shallow pass near the Gullet $19^{\circ} 00.1S$ $179^{\circ} 50.7W$ WP outside the reef. Course in $302^{\circ}M$. Bearing on Yanutha I (82 ft) $333^{\circ}M$. 1m waves humped but not breaking. Would attempt only in calm conditions. Suspect about 5m but heart stuck between eyes and brain as looking at log rather than depth and very relaxed at 8.5m (log showing double speed)!



Matuku

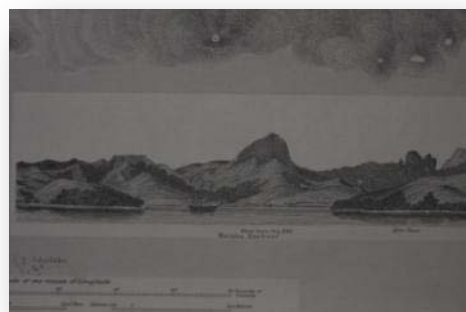


Matuku Island has a dramatic, ragged back-bone more reminiscent of Polynesia (photo approaching NW corner from east). The harbour is well sheltered, deep but mud. I anchored at the east end in 5m, rather smugly but landed in some coral that had the chain grumbling all night. In the morning, I re-anchored in 15m and had a peaceful night. There is a cut north and south, which is fun to explore in the right conditions. The anchorages suffer from popple and I used a Bahamian moor to stop the anchor chain snagging on the small lumps of coral. The only other boat to visit in 2010 (Australian with 3-male crew) had to use local help to get off an inner reef.



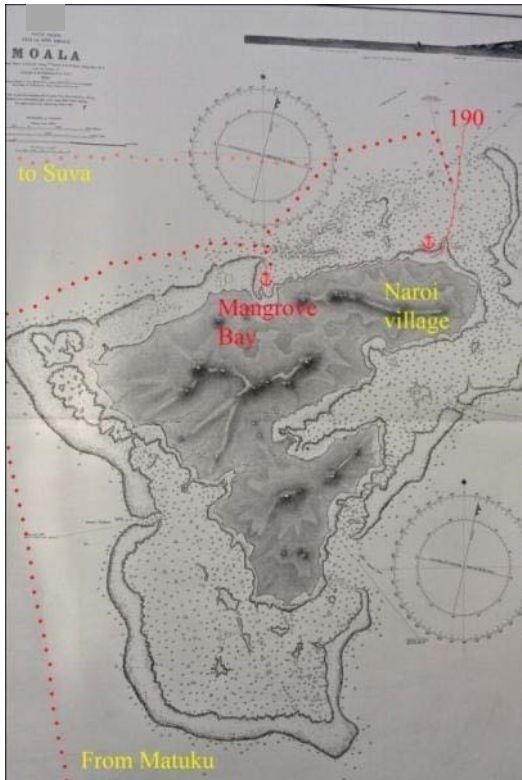
I approached the harbour round the north end of the island. Closing the island on 260°M , $19^\circ06.3\text{S}$ $179^\circ45.2\text{E}$ is about 100m off the end of the reef, which **was not breaking**. The centre of the harbour entrance is $19^\circ09.2\text{S}$ $179^\circ43.7\text{E}$. This is slightly south of the leading line shown on the chart and requires a dog leg to avoid the back of the outer reef. A post marks the northern limit of the south-side inner reef – opposite the wharf. The chief –of-chiefs lives in Aroi. The Island Representative lives in Makadvu.

Church on Sunday in Makadvu requires a tie and be ready to give a reply to a welcome speech.



Moala

This is the largest island in the Moala Group with a population over 1,000 in nine villages. It has an **airfield** with weekly flights to Suva.



18°31.7S 179°56.3E will get you into the wide pass. The reef to the west is not a traditional, surf-breaking line, but largely a collection of bommies with virtually no surf. I came in on 150°M on East Cape although the GPS said COG was 160°. This leaves a cluster of small bommies

about 30m to starboard. From there I came in on the leading marks. There are leading marks in the school – a large collection of buildings climbing up the hill at the east end of the village. The bottom mark is above the largest rectangle building (blue walls, green roof). The back marker is below the highest building with the corrugated-iron roof. Both markers look pale green rather than white. Course 177°M (190°T). This will take you to the Observatory Rocks. I anchored in their lee in 15m. It does not pay to go too close to the coral shelf off the beach as there are offlying bommies and the bottom is horrible loose and jagged coral. In 2008, I had to dive on the chain to release it. This year it came up without a snag.



I anchored in Mangrove Bay as light fading.
Rather more bommies than indicated on chart.
Surprisingly sheltered. Would use again.



The shelf at low water. Observatory rocks
in background. Landing & exiting by
dinghy can involve much tugging, but there
will be endless helpers if the school is out.

