



Log of *S/V High Drama*

No.11-Nuie-Tonga-New Zealand

November 2001

This Log of *High Drama* stretches from the tiny island nation of Nuie through the Vava'u Island Group in Northern Tonga and ends in New Zealand. This log will be heavier on pictures and lighter on commentary and history. We currently are in New Zealand. We extend to you all our heartiest Holiday Greetings and Best Wishes. Welcome aboard again!

As always, we are delighted to receive your emails. Please write to us at:

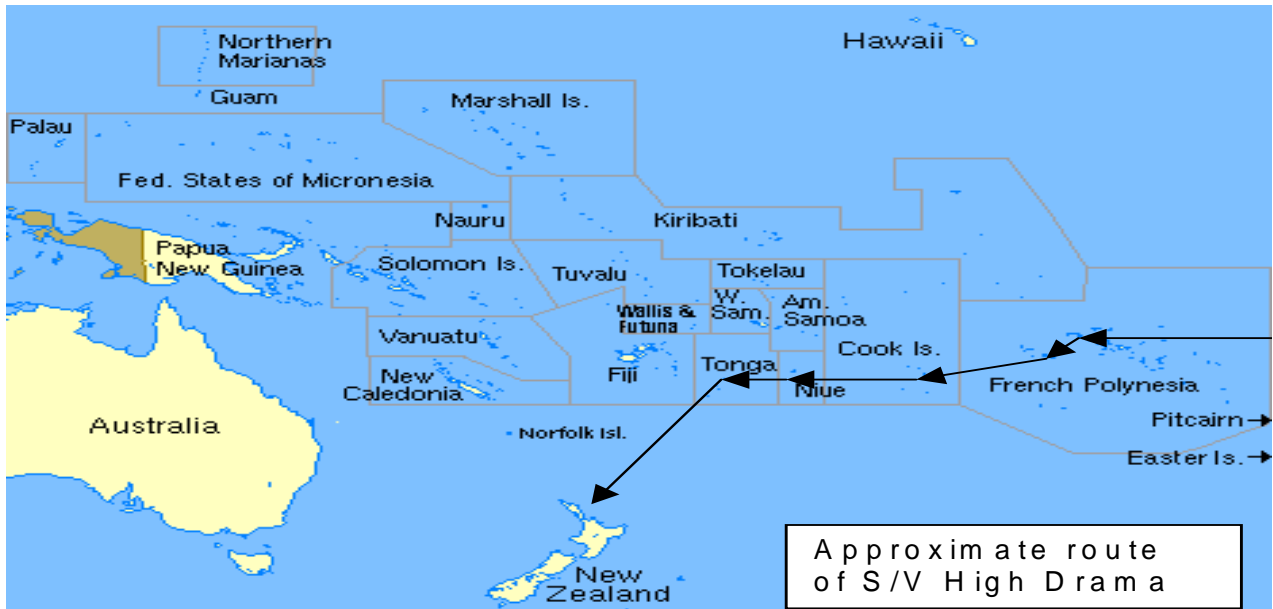
KD7GWH@winlink.org or WCX7992@sailmail.com

Review

To really appreciate the size of the Pacific Ocean, you have to look at a globe. Oceans occupy 70 percent of the earth's surface. The Pacific's share of that total is 50 per cent. In the last two years we have sailed 13,500 sea miles. Fortunately, we have never experienced sustained heavy weather, by which we mean winds above 40 knots with commensurate seas. Similarly, we have not even sailed through a gale, which by definition produces winds in excess of 34 knots. We have experienced a few squalls lasting for a few hours with gusts up to 40 knots, but never anything serious. Some cruisers sail for years without hitting sustained heavy weather. Others manage to find gales with regularity. While we try to wait for a so-called "weather window" before weighing anchor, gale and storm avoidance involves a considerable amount of luck. We have certainly been lucky so far.

The map below shows the approximate route of *High Drama* since April 2001. We traveled along a trade wind route, so named because the winds were regular and predictable enough in the days of sailing ships that they could make scheduled long passages for trade. Many sailors take the route we have sailed. It is colloquially known as "The Coconut Milk Run" because the route passes through some of the most beautiful coconut strewn islands in the

tropical South Seas. We recently turned south from Tonga to avoid the onset of tropical cyclones as hurricanes are referred to in this hemisphere. The route of our last leg, the 1200 miles from Tonga to New Zealand usually produces at least one gale in the spring weather of the Southern Hemisphere. We missed our gale, but that may well mean we will hit two next time.



Nuie

After leaving Rarotonga in the Cook Islands we sailed to Nuie, an island nation with only 1700 residents. An independent nation, Nuie formerly was a territory of New Zealand, which still represents Nuie in foreign affairs and matters of defense. Although the government is Nuie's largest employer, it fits nicely into one building. There may be a lesson here.



Nuie is affectionately called “The Rock”. It boasts many good hikes, such as the hike to sacred Togo Beach.



Ann & Pudge hiking to Togo.



The descent to Togo.



The cavern at Togo, formerly a sacred place for the Maoris.



A cyclone took many homes a decade ago. New houses were then constructed using cement blocks and steel roofs. Nuie has been unable to support her population, however, and the occupancy in the villages is about 40 per cent, leaving many of these structures vacant. Nuieans are quite a friendly lot, however and we met quite a wonderful local people.

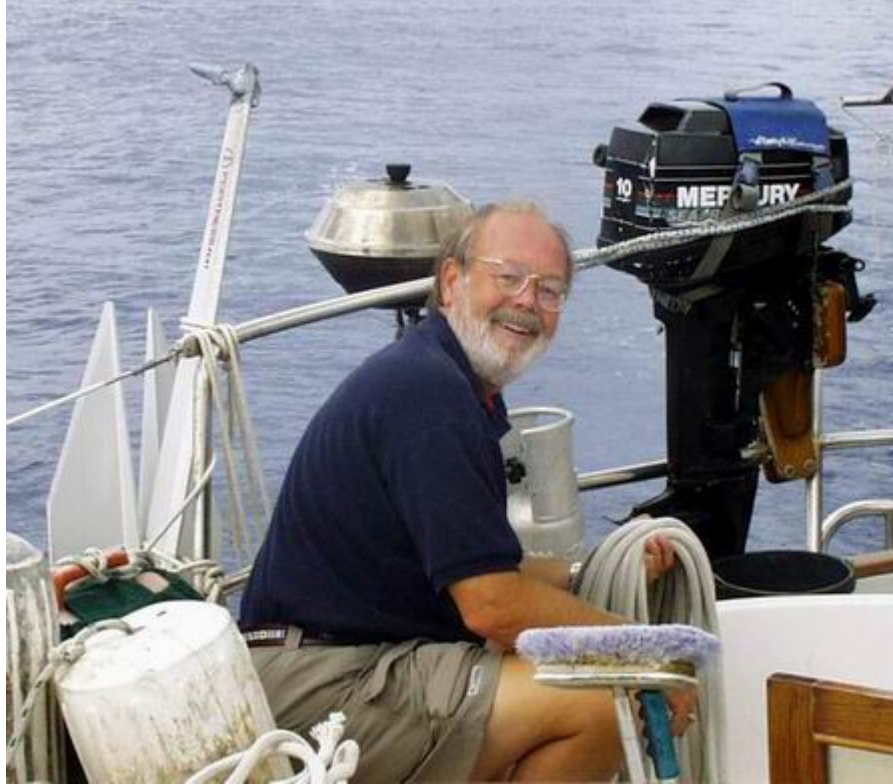


Ann dancing with the mother of the members of the band.



Conveniently located next to the Nuie Immigration office is the Bond Store where one purchases ships' stores such as a bottle of gin upon checking out of the country. The customs officer will even haul your gin to your boat!

On to Tonga



As with all of our crew, we forced Pudge to do all of the dirty work. He has just finished swabbing the deck, polishing the stainless, and is coiling a line. He claimed that his only regret was that there weren't enough projects for him.

The Kingdom of Tonga

We sailed in the Vava'u Islands in the north of the Kingdom of Tonga. Neiafu, the largest town in the north supports two charter sailing operations. We highly recommend the area for chartering. The winds are good, the islands well protected and the islands are largely undeveloped. Named the "Friendly Islands" by Captain Cook, the local people still take the concept quite seriously.



Neiafu Harbor, Vava'u, Tonga

Tonga never exercised the opportunity to become colonized by a European nation. The country is ruled by a King. Since he makes and interprets all of the rules, there is theoretically no need for lawyers. Unbelievable! There is, however, a court system.



Court Room



The King and his family seem to have an interest in every profitable business. But, there were no beer sales on Sunday morning when this photo was taken.



The town market.



Selling taro root, bananas, kiwi fruit, and Coke (in the cooler).



High Drama in the lagoon at Hunga Island.

An entrepreneur named Vaha gave us a tour of Hunga Island. The village was surrounded by a fence to keep the pigs in. Each of the 70 families had several pigs that roamed the village by night. Each villager seemed to know who owned each pig. Dogs also roamed the village. They didn't bother the pigs, but were quite useful when a pig made an escape. Each family was permitted to rent a plot of land from a nobleman for \$0.80 per acre per year. Vaha proudly referred to his several acres as a "plantation". His wife and children helped farm taro, kava, breadfruit, papaya and a few other plants on weekends. Vaha also fished three mornings a week. For cash Vaha's wife wove mats and he made carvings that he sold to tourists. When I asked him about what he thought about the Royal Family's involvement in many businesses he replied, "The King, he got the money, but the 'down people' they got none." But Vaha was not bitter about the situation as far as we could tell.



Vaha at work in his plantation.

The Tongan Feast

Our good friends Alvah and Diana Simon aboard the ***Roger Henry*** are first-rate sailors. Alvah has made a living by writing about their adventures. (See ***North to the Night.***) In August The Travel Channel aired a 3-hour long program about his adventure in the Darien jungle in Panama. Although Alvah constantly challenges himself, he takes the responsibility of sailing offshore very seriously. That's why we couldn't resist roasting him when given the opportunity.



Alvah and Diana sailed the **Roger Henry** to Ecuador while **High Drama** was still in Panama. Unfortunately, the tender to the **Roger Henry** was stolen and, after the intervention of the Navy of Ecuador, when the tender was recovered the outboard motor was conspicuously absent. **High Drama** readily volunteered to bring a new outboard to Roger Henry when we came from Panama to Ecuador.

As luck would have it, **Roger Henry** lost her tender a second time, this time in Nuie. When a serious weather front moved through, the wind shifted in the anchorage and **Roger Henry** and several other boats were forced to leave the area without following normal check out procedures. **Roger Henry's** dinghy with outboard once again parted company from the mother ship. **High Drama** visited Nuie a week later and paid the departure fees for these boats and located **Roger Henry's** dinghy and outboard, which had been recovered after the storm. Since **Roger Henry** was just a week ahead of us in Tonga, we readily agree to bring the dinghy and outboard.

All of the arrangements were made over the single side band radio, also know as the cruisers' party line. Cruisers all over the South Pacific heard how **Roger Henry** lost a dinghy and outboard a second time, and that **High Drama** was once again lending a hand. Needless to say, Alvah the adventurer got a modest ribbing over the airwaves.

When we arrived in Tonga, Alvah and Diana hosted a wonderful Tongan feast for us by way of saying thank you. At the feast, we presented Alvah and Diana with a notebook containing interviews and photos of all of the folks in Nuie, from the police chief to the mayor, who had anything to do with the rescue of their dinghy. In the process of describing the recovery of their dinghy, we gave Alvah quite a roast and a bill for salvage costs in the amount of \$3,000.

Alvah arranged the Tongan feast with Fred, a taxi driver in Vava'u. Fred's young sons roasted two pigs, Fred's wife prepared enormous quantities of local food, and Fred's daughters reluctantly danced.



The pigs on skewer.



Alvah and Fred in Fred's house.



Alvah reading notebook containing salvage claim.



In Tonga, the dancers spread oil on their skin and the audience shows appreciation by pasting dollar bills to them.



The bills don't always stick, so the yellow pan was used. Hannah, the toehead thought the money was for her and took it out.
Notice that Fred's family likes Elvis as much as I do.



In the end, the palangis (Tongan word for white foreigner) danced too. Note the young Tongan girl looking on.

Swimming with Humpbacks





The Vava'u group of islands host Antarctic whales that each year swim north to warm waters to mate and give birth. Our guide, Aunofo, a Tongan woman with a smile that stretches into next week, knows the whales' habits. The humpbacks swim in the deep but protected water among the islands. When she spotted a young calf, Aunofo slowly positioned our small boat nearby. After advising us not to make any noise entering the water and to keep our fins

below the surface when we swam, she gave us the signal to slip into the water. In the past, especially off the California coast, we had seen the dorsal fin on many whales as they slowly exposed their blowhole to take a breath and then return to the deep for a meal of tiny microorganisms. We had been in museums where we stood next to models of whales to get an idea of their size. But no experience had prepared us for seeing them close by underwater.

Aunofu estimated that the calf was only a few days old because of the frequency of its trips to the surface. When we ducked below the surface of the water, we saw the huge mother humpback about 100 feet below us. In the deep blue we could only see her outline and the white of her underbody when she rolled slightly to allow her calf to nurse. One of her enormous pectoral fins stretched about 30 feet straight out from her body. The calf then started a slow ascent, swimming toward us, and close enough for Fred from **Aldebaran** to make contact. Aunofu told us that the baby humpback was curious about us puny human creatures. When the calf swam by, I estimated its length as about 3 times Fred's. Fred put his hand out, making momentary contact as the baby slowly turned away. Next mom swam up slowly toward us. She turned at a distance of about 20 yards and slowly moved away, breaking the surface she took a breath and then she swam silently back down, where her baby joined her. We watched the process several more times before they swam beyond our range.

When you see the whale blow as it surfaces to breathe, you really only see about five percent of its mass. When you swim next to them in the water, their size and majesty is awesome. They move slowly, silently and apparently without effort. An adult humpback measures about 85 feet long and weighs 50 tons. The mother whale's milk is 9 times richer than that supplied by humans, and the calves grow a meter a day right after birth. We swam two times with this nursing pair. Usually a male stays nearby a nursing mother. The sentinel bull hangs silently, upside down, guarding. In our group, only Pudge saw the sentinel bull.

After our second swim, I wanted to stop. We had the experience and more would not be better. I was concerned that one of these whales might remember what our relatives had done to their relatives. I recently read In *The Heart of The Sea* by Philbrick, an account of a sperm whale that charged and sunk a whale ship in 1821. Better to stop before the whales interpreted our visit as harassment. Sorry, but Pudge has the pictures that we snapped with an underwater camera.



Aunofu watches the whales.



Renee gets ready to swim with the whales.



Pudge going ashore for lunch, a beer, and a nap.



After some persuasion, Pudge got into the cruising lifestyle.

Pudge's Departure

Reluctantly we put Pudge Ingebritson on a plane. While sailing with us during a six week period he logged 1500 miles of blue water sailing from Bora Bora to Rarotonga to Nuie and then Tonga, all of it through gorgeous weather. However, the poor guy missed sweet corn and homegrown tomato season in Minnesota. He was a real trooper aboard *High Drama*. He settled into our routine without a hitch and contributed mightily. Pudge was a Naval officer in his younger days, and he gave us lessons on swabbing decks and polishing stainless that will be invaluable in the future. Pudge made friends with other cruisers and locals faster than anyone we have ever seen. Other yachts hosted several long lasting going away parties in his honor. After he left, Ann and I sailed quietly out to a remote Vava'u anchorage to dry out. We will miss him and we hope he will consider a return to *High Drama* for another tour.



Justine, the lovely Kiwi manager of a waterfront pub in Neiafu called the “Mermaid” developed a real fondness for Pudge. They are shown here at one of Pudge’s going away parties.

Racing in Vava’u

The Moorings Yacht Charter Company hosted friendly yacht races on Friday nights. After each race a party was held at the pub operated by the Moorings. Every boat in the race received a prize. These races and parties proved to be quite popular among locals and cruisers alike. **High Drama** raced twice fishing as high as fifth. The finish does not do justice to how good we looked on the course, however.



The crew of **Aurora** developed a surprise racing tactic that proved distracting to other boats.



The sails looked good in the first race. Peter (**Talisman**) and Fred (**Aldebaran**) advised Jeff.



High Drama's 15 seconds of fame in the second race: we took the lead to the first mark. Some naysayers suggested that *High Drama* may have been over the starting line. The Race Committee still has the issue under advisement.



High Drama held off a last leg challenge for 5th place.

Diana Simon and Halifax, her cat, visited ***High Drama*** for a sail to the anchorages in Tonga while Alvah journeyed to the United States to speak at the Annapolis Boat Show, among other places.



Diana at the helm.



Halifax made herself at home in the galley. The white tips on her ears evidence the frostbite she received when she spent a winter in the Arctic with Alvah aboard the ***Roger Henry***.



Ann & Diana heading in to shore.

Later, back in Neiafu, cruisers planned a surprise 50th birthday party for Diana.



The women at the party.

There were a number of places in Tonga for entertainment.



Tapana Resort hosted a blues band, not visible here. The people who own the restaurant, originally from the Basque area of Spain, passed out rhythm instruments and even the palangis got rhythm.

We also did some diving in Tonga.



Ann in diving gear.



Fred from *Aldebaran*.



Ann in the "Aquarium".

The Passage: Tonga to New Zealand

High Drama set sail for New Zealand from Neiafu, Vava'u, Tonga on the morning of November 1, 2001.



After three days of sailing, we anchored in Minerva Reef. There are no sandy beaches with palm trees, no resorts, nor is there anything above the water level. The circular reef is submerged just below the surface except for a couple of hours around low tide. It is a large parking lot about 400 miles from Tonga and 800 miles from New Zealand. When we left, there were 24 boats parked there waiting for a weather window for the rest of the passage to New Zealand.



Boats anchored in Minerva Reef. Note surf breaking in the background.

Life at sea



Ann plotting our position on the chart.



Ann made chocolate chip cookies.



Ann taking a shower in the aft cockpit.



Ann catching a nap off watch.

Bob Trahan, a fellow cruiser from ***Misty Dawn*** sailed with us as crew. Not only is Bob a highly skilled sailor and diver, he is an excellent chef.



Bob, listening to CDs on headphones while cooking. Then, the presentation of the apple pie.



Ann & Bob on deck. Note the transition from T-shirts to long sleeves.

It took us 5 days out of Minerva Reef to catch Gail and Dave on **Blue Yonder**. Then we traded photos.



High Drama north of New Zealand.



The view toward New Zealand.

Landfall New Zealand

On the drizzly evening of November 13, 2001, we arrived safely in Opuia, New Zealand on the North Island. The Kiwi officials who greeted us extended every courtesy, including waiving the duty on *High Drama's* liquor stores. As the northernmost port of entry, Opuia is yet another reunion point for boats that have been sailing together across the South Pacific and beyond. Cruisers from a dozen nations gathered at the Opuia Boat Club for a Thanksgiving dinner last night. Although there was no formal ceremony, before dinner the assembled group of one hundred fifty people observed a moment of silence out of respect for the human tragedy of September 11. While we are physically remote from the attacks and the current military campaign, these events are not far from our consciousness.

Thanks for stopping by. Let us hear from you.

Jeff & Ann Brooke
S/V *High Drama*
Opuia, New Zealand

BULLETIN: For those of you who have once again persevered all the way to the end of this page there is another chance to win a prize! (Some of you have quite a string of correct answers going.) Test question: What is the name of the famous Artic cat belonging to Alvah and Diane Simon? All winning entries will receive a Steinlager Lager* payable at the Opuia Boat Club! Rush your answer to:

KD7GWH@winlink.org

*You need not be present to be recognized, but your prize may be consumed in your absence.