



Log of *S/V High Drama* No.14 New Zealand to Fiji

July 2002

Bula! Bula!

Greetings in Fijian from the sailing vessel ***High Drama***! This log takes us from Gulf Harbour Marina north of Auckland to Whangarei, New Zealand, then on an off shore passage 1200 sea miles to Fiji. Sorry that there are not more pictures taken at sea, but we were pretty busy!

We had a snag in our email at Winlink about the time we left Gulf Harbour. We believe that we successfully retrieved all of our email, but it was a month later. If you sent us an email to which we did not respond, please accept our apologies! But don't stop!

As always, we enjoy hearing from you. Please write to us at WCX7992@sailmail.com which has the best reception now, but we still can access KD7GHW@winlink.org. We receive email by radio, even at sea.

PLEASE DO NOT write to us at HighDrama@xtra.co.nz! We no longer have that email address!

Departure from Gulf Harbour Marina

While *High Drama's* galley was torn up undergoing rebuilding, two women at The Café at Gulf Harbour adopted us. Kathy and Barbara greeted us many mornings with a cup of coffee and in the evenings with delightful meals. Their hospitality went well beyond that for which Kiwis are famous!



Kathy and Barbara, The Café at Gulf Harbour upon receipt of honorary High Drama T shirts

Nothing goes quite as planned on a boat, and *High Drama* is no exception. After undergoing a 5-month re-fit that included new paint and rigging, items that we forgot about or that showed up on our shake down cruise to Great Barrier Island off Auckland required attention. And then there was the onset of New Zealand winter. The weather near Auckland got cool for two Arizonans. Comparable to San Francisco, the temperatures dropped to the high 40s and 50s and the rains came, and came, frequently with winds too high for sailing. Most cruisers had long since departed by June 18, our 36th wedding anniversary when we finally got away from Gulf Harbour.



Sentinel cormorants executed a smart about face and saluted as we left.

A Stop in Whangarei

Although we set out for Opua in Northern New Zealand before sailing for Fiji, the weather was lousy with no good forecast until the weekend. Moreover, we developed a hydraulic fluid leak in the steering wheel that was quite discouraging. The steering pump was about the only part that we didn't have rebuilt during the re-fit!

We turned into Whangarei, a port of entry halfway to Opua but 12 miles up a river. Of course, we knew that our friends since Panama Peter & Gina on *Talisman*, Bob and Robin on *Misty Dawn*, Alvah and Diana on *Roger Henry*, and Mark and Dorothy aboard *Dirty Dottie* were all in the marina here, and that helped the decision! We hosted a potluck dinner with all of those folks. We even got some wine stains on the new cushions to break them in properly. We noticed that Mike and Stacy were the only 2001 Pacific voyagers in our small cadre not present so at 3:00 am their time we called them collect!

The next morning a young hydraulic mechanic fixed the hydraulic leak and because he read the manual about the steering system, he solved some steering mysteries we have experienced since our first cruise to the Channel Islands in 1999. A full-blown storm blowing driving rain with gusts up to 60 knots kept us hunkered down in Whangarei for a few more potlucks.



Alvah & Diana Simon, and Mark from *Dirty Dottie*



Halifax, crew aboard *Roger Henry*

The Passage to Fiji-Some Drama

On Monday June 24, 2002 as the tide swept out of the Whangarei River, *High Drama* left New Zealand bound for Fiji. Gentle rain, favorable winds, good byes to good friends, and later a full moon treated us. Alvah & Diana and Peter & Gina rose at 6:30 am to send us off and handle our lines. In the style of the Polynesians who sent off their navigators for South Pacific islands centuries before us, Alvah blew the conk shell as we slipped down the river. Tears came to my eyes but several days passed before I could identify why.

We first met *Talisman, Roger Henry, and Misty Dawn* in Panama. We delivered a couple of out board motors to *Talisman* and *Roger Henry* in Ecuador after theirs were involuntarily donated to the local economy. We sailed the 3,000 miles from Ecuador to the Marquesas with them, that is, within 500 miles, making radio contact daily. Our routes and lives intertwined for a year during which we faced a common sailing goal. Each of the four boats now had different plans. Alvah and Diana are looking to establish a base in New Zealand; Peter and Gina think heading for Indonesia for experience with more diverse cultures sounds good. Bob headed back to the United States to replenish the cruising kitty while Robin stays in New Zealand to work on their boat. While the bond of these friendships will remain, it seems unlikely that the four boat crews will be in the same spot at the same time again. Alvah's blast on the conk shell as we sailed away made me realize that a beautiful chapter had just closed.

Ann and I have not made a long passage without additional crew. Mike and Stacy sailed with us from Panama to the Tuamotus and Pudge Ingebritson sailed with us from Bora Bora to Tonga. Bob from Misty Dawn made the run down to New Zealand from Tonga. We made an effort to find crew, but for a host of reasons, we did not find an experienced sailor to come with us. I thought that we were up to the challenge, but Ann had serious misgivings. If all goes well, two people can handle sailing and watches, but Ann was concerned that if either of us had a health problem or if we hit bad weather, we would quickly become exhausted. Of course, she was right.

Heavy Weather

As we sailed, the weather appeared as forecast for several days, but the wind speeds climbed higher than forecast. On Thursday night, June 27, 2002 with the knot meter registering sustained 30 knot winds, gusts to 40, we decided stop sailing, be conservative, and to "heave to". This maneuver was used by sailing ships in days past and is a storm tactic still used today for sailing yachts. Although the winds were not forecast to be higher than 30 knots, we thought that "parking" was a good strategy for a tired and short-handed crew.

That night the wind climbed to sustained 50 knot+ winds. This was a whole new ball game for us. Big breaking seas also followed. Every 20 minutes or so one of the 25-30 foot rolling waves broke near the boat and cascaded green water all over the deck. Each wave felt like getting hit by a water balloon the size of a VW Beetle. Neptune, perhaps, attempted to dynamite our dinghy, life raft, and dodger from their fittings on the decks of the boat. The screaming sound of 50 knots of wind is also a little unnerving at night. Our deeply reefed mainsail whipped so badly that we had to go out on deck and further secure it to avoid having the wind rip it up. I must say Annie is quite a trooper in heavy weather. Perhaps she used up all of her anxiety before we left because if she had any concerns, she did not voice them.

The next morning the wind dropped down to 25-35 knots but the seas were still pretty high for San Diego sailors. Actually, we were glad that we had not seen how high the waves were the previous night! **High Drama** climbed each oncoming wave and then scooted down the backside. By evening the wind and seas subsided.

Dog tired, we were obliged to "Gene", our autopilot, which did most of the steering, and "Oedipus," our radar that scanned for traffic.

We are wiser sailors now after a short course on heavy weather.

Fiji Landfall in Suva

Early explorers avoided the 300 islands that comprise Fiji because of their reputation for housing fierce warriors who were quite intent upon eating their enemies. Cook made only one stop. Captain Bligh, after being mutinously set adrift from the **Bounty** in Tonga sailed between the two major islands in what is now called Bligh Waters.

We made landfall at Suva, the capital of Fiji. Suva provided our first introduction to Fijian culture. The early settlers of Fiji were Melanesian rather than the Polynesians who settled other islands that we have visited. They are more African in appearance, but they share the friendliness common to all of the islanders whom we have encountered. Fiji was a British colony from 1874 to 1970. The early Governor sought to avoid further exploitation of the indigenous Fiji population so he made the decision to bring in indentured laborers for Fiji's sugar plantations from India. Over 60 years low caste Indians came to Fiji. After 5 years the term of the indenture terminated, but in order to return home, another five years of labor was required. Most Indians stayed.

The first post-colonial government institutionalized divisions along racial and cultural lines. As a result, there is not a strong Fijian identity, but rather Fijian (native about 45% of the population), Fijian Indian (45%) or Fijian European (5%). Now 4th generation Fijian Indians are strong in the trades, and as merchants and as farmers. But, 83% of the land is still held by Fijian natives, individually, or more likely communally by village in rural areas. Although English is the

national language, locals speak Fijian or Hindi. Similarly, the population is divided among Christians (the Methodists really scored here), Moslems, and Hindus. The cultural diversity makes for great restaurants and challenging politics.

Fiji has the most vibrant economy of any of the tropical islands we have visited. Tourism, sugar, and pine provide cash in that order. They are avid rugby players and currently are hosting the ACP Conference, an organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific developing nations.



Cane sugar on a light rail system bound for Lautoka, the Sugar City



Sugar cane trucks take the middle lane.



South Pacific Distillery, makers of rum, vodka, and whisky.



Sidewalk vendors outside of the New World Supermarket



Royal Suva Yacht Club

Aldebaran of Milwaukee cruised into Suva right behind us. That evening we joined the Royal Suva Yacht Club where we anchored while we did the considerable paperwork necessary to travel in Fiji. The “Royal” in the name of the yacht club typifies the relationship that Fiji has had with Great Britain. When the club was formed the office of the Queen gave permission to use the term “royal” in the name. Then, after the military coup in 1987 Fiji was expelled from the Commonwealth. Now, I think they have been re-admitted, but I have not been able to establish that fact definitively.



Don, Fred & Renee enjoying a Fiji Bitters at Royal Suva Yacht Club happy hour.

We also re-met **Project Mayhem**, a couple of fearless sailors whose knack at finding bad weather seems unparalleled. Mike, whose degree college degree is in astrophysics, describes his career path as “college to retirement.” He is the quiet shy member of the team. Brett, a semi-retired professional surfer is somewhat more outgoing.



The Blues Brothers!
Mike & Brett from *Project Mayhem*
"We're gonna get the Band together!"

David on *Beacon* is one of few lawyers or rather barristers out sailing. He left a practice in England to sail on a very fast boat. Generally he has crew, some of whom have been fascinating folks. He must be a very good interviewer. Although we threaten to have a good talk about the law, so far sailing has been our most frequent subject of conversation.



David from *Beacon*, Ann, and Mike

Musket Cove

One of the few freeholds in Fiji, Musket Cove was first sold in 1860 for one musket. In 1962 an American cruiser named Dick Smith acquired the island, Malolo lailai for “many muskets” and developed a resort and marina. The anchorage is nestled within several coral patches and is well protected. Musket Cove is very friendly to yachties and hosts a week of races in September. See www.musketcovefiji.com

The Musket Cove Yacht Club boasts 3,000 members. The only way to qualify for membership is to sail here from a foreign port. A Life Membership is \$1 for the captain and \$5 for each crewmember. Eat your heart out, San Diego Yacht Club!



Boats tied to pier at Musket Cove Resort & Marina



Plantation Island, adjacent to Musket Cove is a family place.



The “bure” (building) is the \$3 Bar which hosts a BBQ every night.



A lesson in reading reefs is required when sailing in the Fijian Islands. Deep blue is good; green, yellow, brown and white are progressively more serious.

Training to sail on *High Drama*

People who join us for a sail sometimes send us information about their sailing experience. Not many have gone as far as Lee Carr who will join us for a couple of weeks in early August. Lee sent the below photo stating that he had been sailing most of his life!



Lee Carr (left) and friend training to sail on ***High Drama***

Conclusion

As I write, Ann is back in Zumbro Falls, Minnesota seeing friends from high school who decided to have an old fashion slumber party for the Women in the Class of 1960 (Albert Lea High School) Who Turn 60 This Year. ***High Drama*** is moored at Musket Cove where I am puttering doing boat projects and having a swim, and going to the \$3 Bar for an occasional happy hour.



A Sunset for Dave Auther, who reminded us before we left that we could not take too many pictures of sunsets.

Thanks for your visit to our website! Be sure and send us an email!

Jeff & Ann Brooke
S/V High Drama
WCX7992@sailmail.com or
KD7GWH@winlink.org

