

Kailani Passage – Fiji to New Zealand 2012 – ship's updates
7 days, 7 hours, 41 minutes ... 1,135nm

29 October 2012

18 21 S 176 44 E
223 T 6.5 kts
1024 nm to Opuia

We're back at sea and have had a great first day of sailing. The wind is starting to drop but up until now we have been making between 7 and 8 kts on a 12 kt breeze 45 degrees off the wind although a bit right of our desired course as the wind has a lot of south in it.

We checked out of Fiji at Lautoka yesterday getting into customs just under the wire at 1610 (they close promptly at 1630). The official wanted to charge us overtime as it takes 30-40 minutes to do all the paperwork but then he remembered us from checking in back in September, or I should say he remembered Sophia and the air conditioned boat, and processed us out without a hitch. We anchored up in a shallow bay south of Lautoka for the night, finished our passage preparations and were off the anchor just before 0900 this morning. So far the weather looks to be light winds largely on the nose through the end of the week before the obligatory spanking we'll no doubt get the last two days onto NZ. The crew are all well, the watches have been set and Tom is cooking dinner, no doubt pasta pesto.

30 October 2012

20 52 s 175 51 e
200 T 6 kts
Seas: 8 ft swell/lumpy Wind S 8 kts
869 nm to Opuia

A long day of motoring, most of which has been uphill against a current so we have been barely making a 5 kt vmg. In the last hour the wind, such as it is, has backed more to the SE and we are back close to the rhumb line making 6.5 to 7kts . We are racing a low scheduled to hit NZ Tuesday night. The forecast looks like no wind until the weekend, then light from behind before increasing out of the NW.

The crew are all fine. Bruce is standing his first watch on his own right now and the moon just rose above the clouds. A beautiful night.

1 November 2012 1900 local

23 17 S 174 30 E
200 T 7.1 kts
720 nm to Opuia, NZ

Today has been spent largely motor sailing into this long period 10 ft swell. Yesterday's adverse current finally disappeared last night and we made a steady 8 kts over the ground all day although the wind direction has still kept us east of the rhumbline to Opuia. We finally turned off the engine late this afternoon and are making about 7 kts to the

south southwest, but the wind is dying and we'll be back on the motor before full dark. The weather forecasts we are receiving are all over the place in terms of wind speed and direction over the weekend, a crucial time as we close on New Zealand, so we are just trying to stay close to the rhumbline and hope whatever wind materializes will give us a push.

The days are getting longer as we move south and the nights, while not cold, still have us in hats and sweaters, quite a contrast from the stifling heat of two nights ago in Fiji. The crew is content although Tom has been battling a cold, but seems to be on the mend. He rallied to the call of the galley tonight and prepared a delicious pasta chicken casserole which we promptly and unceremoniously devoured. (Bruce is astounded at the speed with which Tom's and my plates of food disappear.) We are running a 3 on 6 off watch during the day and 2 on 4 off at night. With the exception of mealtimes, one or both of the off watch is asleep and everyone seems rested.

2 November 2012 1845 local

26 10 S 174 27 E

180 T 7.5 Kts

Motorsailing in light winds

Weather is a fickle master. This passage to New Zealand can be a bear as you are pretty much guaranteed to deal with at least one low pressure system spinning up from the Tasman sea. The passage itself from Fiji or Tonga is right at 1,100 nm on the rhumbline which means 7-9 days for the typical cruising boat. While Kailani is a bit faster, we still need to make an educated guess about on route weather for five to seven days out. So we download all the information we can while we have access to broadband internet and then when it looks like we can make it, we go. Once we are committed and are at sea, our weather information is limited to picking up grib files (a readable picture of wind arrows extracted from a sophisticated weather model), weather faxes (usually illegible weather maps which roll on to your computer screen at a maddeningly slow speed and always in the middle of the night when you can get decent reception) and listening to one of the weather nets that come up in the morning. Notwithstanding the fact that the nets are run by accomplished meteorologists, it is still weather forecasting which in this expanse of 750,000 square miles of empty ocean is a crap shoot at best.

We are luckier than most boats in that Jen (when she is not with us on passage) can still get access to and distill all the information available on line and relay a synopsis to us each day. Since she is an experienced passage maker she has a better sense of what we need and can give us specific advice on heading to sail.

This particular trip has been characterized by uncertainty. This kept the fleet in port as everyone wants assurances that things will be OK. Consequently there are more than 20 boats still in Fiji waiting to leave with only Kailani and one other boat actually biting the bullet and departing this week. The next window is Monday the 5th and even that looks iffy so we are happy to be out here even though the wind has been light and we have had to motor more than 300 miles so far. Tomorrow the wind is supposed to fill in from the NW at 20 kts backing around eventually to the SE and bringing with it 3-4 meter seas on the nose for a couple of days. We plan to bash through it and make Opuia sometime late on Monday. But it is the weather and that can change, so we'll see.

4 November 2012 0130 local

29 55 S 174 38 E

170 T 9.3 kts

wind ssw 20 seas 4-6 ft
324 nm to Opuā, NZ

This will be short and sweet as the heel angle is 20 to 25 degrees and nothing, including yours truly, tends to stay where you put it. Best we can say is that we are moving fast, a steady 9 kts with occasional 10s on the gps. The crew is all well and, except for the skipper on watch, snug in their racks hard on their lee cloths. The bread is rising although the first attempt at setting the tray down put the loaf squarely on a leeward cabinet, but there will be toast for breakfast.

This looks like it will be with us for the next twelve hours at which point the wind will go south and we'll have to pick a tack.

4 November 2012

31 01 s 175 27 e
240 true 7 kts motor sailing
265 nm to Opuā

Short update due to poor propagation (ie hard to send/receive emails) still steering into big winds and big seas. Rogue wave today > 30 ft. Tom hand steering got us over the top. Wind should go light but have had poor propagation all day so no wx. Now looking Tues night arrival in Opuā due to low vmg (4-5 kts).

5 November 2012 1945 local

33 07 S 173 56 E
193 T 7.2 kts motorsailing
133 nm to Opuā NZ

There have been times in the last 7 days when I look at the rig and wonder what purpose all that canvas, rod rigging and line serves. We have motored almost 100 hours so far and expect that the only sailing we will get from here on is the last 11 miles into the Bay of Islands to Opuā tomorrow afternoon when the wind is forecast to back to the east. Maybe we'll fly the spinnaker and make a grand entrance.

What a difference a day makes. The sun came up yesterday on a calm sea with light NE wind. By 1100 the wind had backed to the NW and increased to 20 kts and by midafternoon we were seeing wind in the low 30s and 10-12 foot seas both coming dead out of the south, the direction we needed to go. We went down to a double reef on the mainsail and went through the laborious process on a pitching deck to rig the running backstays and finally deploy the staysail. Fifteen minutes later there was a large BANG and the clew blew out of the sail leaving it flapping in the wind with no control lines. We rolled it up and Tom went forward and wrapped the sail with a spare halyard and a bunch of zip ties to stop it from unfurling in the near gale it was blowing. All afternoon the seas grew bigger pushed on by the wind and the strong high pressure system miles to our southwest in the Tasman. We were beating up tack on tack making about 2-3 knots toward Opuā when we crashed off a huge wave and the anchor tore loose from its lashings on the bow roller. Tom and I spent the next twenty minutes tied to the foredeck leaning over the pulpit trying to horse it back into place with the bow, the anchor and us plunging into every third or fourth wave. The anchor weighs 105 lbs and required both of us to heave it aboard as we timed its wild swings, but we eventually got in back and secure. As we wobbled back the length of the rolling and pitching deck to the cockpit, Bruce, who had been at the helm while we wrestled with the anchor, commented that he had been reviewing the man overboard drills in his mind the whole time we were up there

and was ready to pull the pin on the MOB unit. He also confessed that he wasn't entirely sure what to do after that, particularly if we both went in the drink. As superstitious sailors Tom and I both wondered what the third problem would turn out to be, and we did not have long to wait to find out. Tom was on watch and the seas had grown to the size where hand steering to negotiate their faces with assistance from the motor was the safest tactic. Bruce was below in his bunk and I was under the dodger waiting my trick at the wheel when we both saw this unusually large roller with a cresting top headed right for us. Tom deftly negotiated its face, but as we topped it we were confronted by its big brother. We're talking huge given the sea state, and no time to do anything but pick a path and hope we crest it before it breaks over the top of us. At the point where it was not yet clear we were going to make it, Kailani's stern was in the trough, her bow was just below the crest and she seemed pointed to the sky. The wave broke on the bow, rolled down the deck and drenched us and everything in its path, but our momentum carried through and over. That turned out to be the ocean's last hurrah as it began to calm down after that, but the adrenaline coursing through our veins kept us vigilant for another couple of hours.

In the end we chalk it up to yet another sea story. The crew was unhurt, the damage to Kailani (blown out sail, gel coat scratches from the anchor and a little salt water through a dorade in the salon) was minor and our faith in the boat was reaffirmed.

Today has been uneventful Bruce cooked up a wicked fried rice for lunch, we did spaghetti and meatballs in the pressure cooker for dinner and we are endeavoring to eat up all the fresh food before it is confiscated by Customs in New Zealand tomorrow afternoon.

7 November 2012 2200 local

35 18 S 174 07 E

On the dock, Opuia New Zealand

We arrived in Opuia yesterday and tied up on the quarantine dock just before 1600 after a beautiful sail into the Bay of Islands, one of the fabled cruising grounds of New Zealand. In contrast to most of the trip which had been characterized by either no wind or wind on the nose, we had a delightful 12-15 kts on the beam as we reached into the Bay past magnificent rocks and islands.

The Q dock at Opuia is actually a breakwater not connected to the land and Customs/Immigration comes out to you. Unfortunately their inflatable dinghy's engine would not start, and they told us that we would have to stay aboard until morning as they would not get it running before they closed up shop at 1700. I advised them that if I were to inform the crew that they would be forced to spend an extra night eating leftovers with no beer I would in all likelihood have a full blown mutiny on my hands, and I offered to put our small rowing dinghy in the water and row across to fetch them, much like the Rat fetching the Mole in the first chapter of *The Wind in the Willows*. Now you must imagine a very small somewhat unstable craft with me in the middle on the oars, a young lady Immigration officer in the bow clutching a rather large attaché case and a clearly reluctant Customs officer in the stern with his attaché case and several large garbage bags into which would eventually go all the prohibited stores aboard (honey, fruit, vegetables and unfortunately a half pound of bacon, down from three pounds two days earlier). This left the dinghy with about 4 inches of freeboard with the wind getting up toward 20 kts. By the time the officers were below we had gained the moral high ground and the formalities were accomplished in record time.

Bruce was kind enough to lend us a truck for a couple of days which has been a great help in moving the broken gear off the boat. Tom and I found a pizza parlour last night in nearby Pahia where we dined and then returned to the boat in

pouring down rain (through which we had to row). We collapsed into our bunks and slept like rocks until this morning; no watches, no wind, no waves, no worries.

We sailed a total of 1135 nm to get here and spent 7 days, 7 hours and 41 minutes doing it for an average speed of 6.5 kts, not one of our fastest passages. On the other hand considering that we had little or no wind for most of the trip and that when we did get wind it was strong and blowing directly from Opuia, we did alright. What we did get right was going when we did, and whether that was luck or smarts, who can say? What we can say is that there are currently some 25 to 30 boats out there in our wake that waited to leave until the collective wisdom of the fleet and a few weather routers said, "Go". They are now caught up in a wicked low pressure system with wind speeds of 40 plus knots, a sea state that is frightening and no prospect of relief for a few days yet. We listen to their radio net in the morning and feel for them, and we wish them safe passage.