



Passages

s/v Nine of Cups

A Holiday Newsletter from Sea



Volume 9
Holiday 2009 Edition

Letter from the crew...

2009...a good year for Nine of Cups and crew. At last, we crossed the Pacific and at this writing, we're safely sitting in New Zealand getting ready for a Kiwi Christmas.

We sailed exceptional passage miles this year and did a tremendous amount of exploring new countries and new cultures. We've loved the South Pacific so much, we're seriously considering returning next season to give it another go!

This, our 9th annual newsletter, allows us to share with you some of our better moments in 2009. We now use our website and Sailblogs as our primary way to document our voyages and Marcie continues to love photographing everything and anything. Finishing up our ninth year aboard, we can only say we wish we had done it sooner and we think we've still got another ten years to go!



We enjoyed a royal welcome at Niue
Photo by Keith Vial

2010...hard to believe we're starting a new decade already. We're happy, healthy and older...a little sea-sworn, but still in love. As always, our wish to family and friends in 2010 is health, wealth, love and happiness and the time to enjoy them all. Remember, we love hearing from you, so keep in touch at nineofcups1@yahoo.com or check out our website at www.nineofcups.com. We also have a new daily blog with position updates using GoogleEarth and crew comments from sea. Visit www.sailblogs.com/member/nineofcups.

Bounteous Pitcairn Island

Stopping at remote Pitcairn Island seemed almost an historical event. As we dropped anchor in Bounty Bay, we couldn't help think about how the mutineers must have felt when they first sighted this bleak looking island jutting up from the sea.



Bren Christian on Pitcairn Island

We had made previous contact with Brenda Christian, great, great, great, great-granddaughter of Fletcher Christian and it was Brenda who met us at the wharf. She was a bundle of energy and good will as we climbed aboard her quad (ATV) and shot up the hill for a tour of the island. Brenda and her husband, Mike, were quickly "old friends" as we sat in their living room, eating fresh bread and Pitcairn honey and chatted away for hours. This is surely the stuff that keeps us cruising the world.

First Mate Claims Score Due to Luck, Not Expertise

Yup, we're still playing a game of Gin Rummy first thing every morning while we sip our coffee and tea. Marcie is convinced it's all luck.. David's opinion differs slightly.
Cumulative scores as of Nov 2009:
David: 1715
Marcie: 1682

Highlights of 2009:

- ★ *A Pacific crossing...at last*
 - ★ *Bounteous Pitcairn*
 - ★ *Mainsail Blow-out!*
 - ★ *Niue, the Rock*
 - ★ *A Kiwi Christmas*
 - ★ *Tonga's Friendly Islands*
- Detailed stories follow*

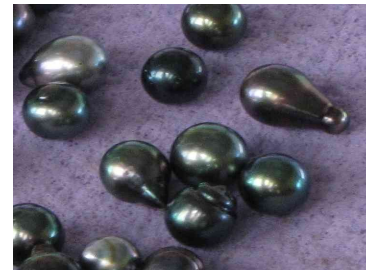
Polynesia's Black Pearls

One of the stories we'd heard about French Polynesia concerned the black pearls we'd be able to buy or trade once we got there. We were hoping they were true, but actually our experiences went way beyond buying and trading. We actually got to harvest and graft pearls.



Marcie harvests a black pearl

When we arrived in the Gambier, our entry port to French Polynesia, we happened to meet a pearl farmer named Dada, who promptly invited us to his farm for the day. We certainly collected our share of black pearls on our passage through French Polynesia, but nothing equaled the thrill of harvesting our own.





Chile

Pitcairn Island

France

Cook Islands

Niue

Tonga

New Zealand



1. Puerto Montt, Chile
2. Juan Fernandez Is.
3. Easter Island
4. Pitcairn Island
5. Gambier Islands
6. Tuomoto Islands
7. Tahiti/Moorea
8. Bora Bora & Leeward Islands
9. Penrhyn Atoll
10. Manihiki Atoll
11. Suvarrow Atoll
12. Niue
13. Vava'u, Tonga
14. Ha'apai, Tonga
15. Nuka'alofa, Tonga
16. Opuia, NZ

Pacific Crossing at last!

Well, it took long enough, but we finally left South America and made it across the Pacific...all in one season. Though it seemed we really rushed, it's hard to believe we left Chile way back last February and have had nearly 10 months getting to New Zealand. The itinerary took us from Chile to Robinson Crusoe Island, Easter Island (for the third time), Pitcairn Island, French Polynesia's Gambier, Tuamotu and Society Islands which included the exotic ports of Pape'ete, Tahiti, Moorea and Bora Bora. We visited the atolls of Penrhyn, Manihiki and Suvarrow in the Cook Islands and then sailed to Niue, "the Rock of Polynesia" Next on the itinerary came the northern Vava'u islands of Tonga, the Hapa'ai group and finally Tongatapu, Tonga where we waited for a weather window to make the last 1,100 mile passage to New Zealand for the austral summer season and away from the cyclone belt.

Next season? Oh why talk about it? We always change our minds, so you'll just have to wait until the 2010 newsletter to find out where we're at!



Racking up the Miles

We definitely put some miles under the keel this year. Here's the reckoning to date:

Nautical miles in 2009: 9,103
 Nautical miles since 2000: 59,336
 Total countries visited: 28

More Diversions...

Coachwhipping is a traditional sailor's art involving intricate knots and wraps, in this case around our teak wheel. Its need for endless varnish led David to try his hand at an intricate 18-strand round sennit with a core design. The results were fabulous AND no more varnish.



First Impressions...All Good

Our first impressions of New Zealand...all good. From the Bio-Security folks who brought us gifts when clearing us in (!!) to the friendly Opuia Cruising Club, to the gorgeous scenery all around us, this is going to be a wonderful place to explore. We'll be updating the website regularly.

Cups in New Zealand Land of the Long White Cloud

Well, it wasn't the easiest of passages. We started out with a permanently triple-reefed mainsail due to heavy repairs in Suvarrow. We had an engine oil leak en route. Then no wind, then too much wind and in the wrong direction, BUT we're here in Opuia, New Zealand...safe and sound and already making repairs so we can head down the New Zealand coast for the austral summer season. The passage was 1205nm and we sighed in relief as we arrived at the Quarantine dock in Opuia knowing that we'd completed over 9000 nm miles this season and it was time for a break.



Cups at the Q Dock in Opuia

Don't forget to visit our website: www.nineofcups.com or check our daily blog at www.sailblogs.com/member/nineofcups

Sharks, rays & eels... oh, my!



This was quite the year for learning to swim with critters we weren't used to sharing water with. We swam and snorkeled in several places with sharks, rays and sea snakes and even got quite used to it. None were as aggressive as the sacred blue-eyed eel going after the mackerel David is holding out for him.

Fruit Relay...No Way



We participated in the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous in Pape'ete and Moorea. It was a great meeting of sailboats in mid-June who had crossed the Pacific to get there. Sponsored by the Tahiti Bureau of Tourism, this 3-day free affair was well done and loads of fun. It included several traditional Polynesian competitive events including outrigger canoe racing, stone lifting (NOT!), coconut husking and the big fruit relay.



It was a good year for birding. Above, the male firecrown hummingbird endemic to Juan Fernandez.

Mainsail Blowout!

We were hove-to on a particularly boisterous passage between Manihiki and Suwarrow Atoll in the northern Cook Islands when we heard a sickening rrrrrrip and then a loud poof, followed by the fluttering of sail shreds in the wind. We had blown out our mainsail. We managed to lash the tattered mainsail in place and limped into Suwarrow Atoll motor-sailing with the storm trysail.



John & Veronica, the Suwarrow caretakers, allowed us to use a sleeping hut on the beach as a sail loft. It took us nearly a week of work, but we managed to repair the 20' vertical tear and replace the three panels that had completely blown out.



Clare (Manaroa 3) & Marcie making the sail repair

Crew's Best Picks of 2009

The crew choices for its best picks for reading in 2009 include:

Saving Fish from Drowning-Amy Tan
Captain James Cook – Richard Hough
A Million Little Pieces – James Frey
Rule of the Bone – Russell Banks
Five Quarters of the Orange – J Harris
Bridge of Sighs – Richard Russo
 We also really enjoyed among others a rather quirky film, ***Station Agent***.



A fairy tern chick waits for Mom.

Suwarrow Atoll is the Cook Islands' only national park and it's nearly beyond description. Entered through a pass in the reef which encircles it, the lagoon is huge and teems with fish and birdlife. We had the opportunity (midst boat and sail repairs) to explore several of the tiny islets within the lagoon with the expert guidance of the resident park wardens. Fairy terns, frigates, red-tailed tropic birds, brown noddies and red footed boobies all call Suwarrow home when it comes time to breed, nest and raise their young. It was incredible.

Diversions

Besides boat repair and maintenance (which seem like a full time job sometimes), we keep busy with lots of projects and hobbies aboard. David currently has an interest in jewelry-making and since Marcie has always had an interest in wearing jewelry, this works out well. Many of the materials used are shells and things we've collected along the way.



Mother of pearl pendant with a real starfish and tiny natural pearl from the Cook Islands.

Moai'a Still Amaze



We visited Easter Island this year for the third time. Fortunately, we were invited to pick up a mooring buoy just off the Port Captain's office which saved us from having to anchor in the deep, sometimes foul, waters of Hanga Roa Bay. We also rented a car this time which allowed us to explore parts of the island we hadn't been able to see on foot. Those Moai are still amazing!

Repairs in Matamaka



Like most cruisers, we like to contribute to community whenever and wherever we can. This year when we stopped at Matamaka Island in Tonga's northern Vava'u Group, David was able to put his electrical engineering skills to work. He fixed innumerable solar panels, TVs, generators, DVD players, VCR recorders and even a weed whacker. He was so busy, we enlisted the help of Rob on "Yohelah" and John on "Gannet". It was one happy village when we left.

Where in the world is NOC?
Visit our website:
www.nineofcups.com and click
on "Where are we?" for a map
showing our current location.

David Joins Kava Circle Really Enjoys Numb Lips

While visiting Matamaka Island in northern Tonga, David was invited to join the men's kava party. "What did it taste like?", I asked. "Like weak, bitter tea", he replied, "except it numbs your lips and tongue". I was more interested in the possible hallucinogenic results



of sipping kava, but David didn't experience any. Many of the men, however, looked like they were in la-la land as we women watched, but could not participate. David reminded me that he joined at 1pm and some had started at 9am which may have accounted for the difference. The worst part of the circle...sitting cross-legged for 3 hours.

Tarot on Board



After a fun day in the Matamaka village, the crews of *Gannet* and *Yohelah* joined us on *Nine of Cups* for cocktails and tarot readings. Everyone had more repairs in their future!



Caves, caverns and chasms seem to aptly describe Niue, tiniest nation in the world, affectionately known as the "Rock of Polynesia". Above, Talava Chasm



Bottom Job in Tahiti Boat, not crew

Because we had the time and the price was surprisingly reasonable, we decided to haul *Cups* and paint her bottom. We had "kissed" a coral head in the Tuamotus and repaired that minor damage as well. Most importantly, we found a problem with the cutlass bearing and shaft coupler which was addressed before it became a problem. Above, Marcie dressed as a Bedouin, applies the bottom paint.

Go Fish!

We stopped in Penrhyn, the northern-most of the Cook Islands and were surprised at the amount of trading the locals did. Man, they were great at it. "Do you have any bungee cord?" "No...Go fish. "Do you have any extra towels or bedding?" No...Go fish. "Do you have any fishing gear?" No...go fish. "How about snorkeling masks, Dremel tools, rice, swim fins?" It went on and on like a kid's card game of Go Fish and we'd have been stripped clean if we traded all they wanted. In exchange? We're not quite sure what we got, but the boat was significantly lighter when we left.

Merry Christmas and
Happy 2010!
(yikes...a new decade!)
Marcie and David

