

Nine of Cups – Liberty 458 Cutter – 7' draft
Subject Area: Pitcairn Island Group – April 2009

After eleven days at Easter Island, we headed for the Pitcairn Island Group. Prior to studying the charts, we were unaware that there were actually four islands in the group: Ducie Atoll, Henderson Island, Pitcairn and Oeno. Only Pitcairn is inhabited. Ducie and Henderson were on the way, so we decided to stop if we could. *Lonely Planet South Pacific* does a pretty good job of describing them. We had read that we needed permission to visit them and emailed in advance to Pitcairn. We were told we could stop, but there was a \$10/pp landing fee for each island, payable when we arrived at Pitcairn.

Ducie Atoll is a classic atoll, a small coral island and islets with a lagoon protected by a coral reef. It is so low lying that we couldn't see it until we were within two miles. It's easy to imagine how the ship "Acadia" was lost here in 1881. If you didn't know it was there and didn't hear the breakers crashing, it would be easy to hit the reef. The charts and chart plotter were off by about .5 miles to the southeast versus the true GPS location. We anchored on the north side in rock and coral (waypoint 24S40.32/ 124W47.50 in 43 feet). There is dinghy access through the reef on the southwest side, but large southwest swells prevented us from landing on the island. We buoyed the anchor and were quite glad we did since the chain had wrapped around the coral a bit and would have been difficult to raise otherwise. The water was clear and aquamarine and the bottom was visible 80' feet below.

Henderson Island, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is the largest of the Pitcairn group. It is higher and a bit easier to spot. Its large rectangular shape with square-cut corners reminded me of a huge sheet cake. The landing place and anchorage is on the north, but the wind had backed making both a landing and an anchorage untenable. We circumnavigated the island and hove-to for a day hoping the wind would abate, but no luck so we continued on to Pitcairn.

We had been in touch by e-mail with Brenda Christian (great-great-great-great granddaughter of Fletcher Christian) since we departed Chile in February. E-conversations with Brenda along with earlier research had given us some good background about Pitkern (the way the locals pronounce it) and we were anxious to land and learn more. We arrived late afternoon in Bounty Bay, found a sandy spot to anchor in 50' and planned on landing the following day.

Bren hailed on the VHF first thing in the morning. The weather was settled and we were able to take our own dinghy ashore, saving us the \$50 fee for use of the government launch (roundtrip). We actually found the landing here less daunting than skirting the rollers in Hanga Roa harbor at Easter Island. Bounty Bay's tiny harbor is fairly well protected by a manmade breakwater which is currently being extended and improved. We dragged the dinghy up the slipway and completed initial formalities in the boathouse.

We climbed aboard Bren's quad (ATV), which is the usual mode of transportation on the island, and up, up, up we went along the steep, switch-backed road to Bren's house for

coffee, fresh bread with Pitcairn honey and formal stamping of our passports. Bren is the Immigration Officer as well as Chief of Police.

Formalities complete, we chatted amiably with Bren and her husband, Mike, and then they invited us for a tour of the island. It might be a small island, but there was so much to see. Vista after vista enthralled us, interwoven with the history of the Bounty mutineers and information about local flora and fauna. Place names like Oh Dear, Down Rope, Bitey Bitey and Where Dan Fall all had associated stories.

We managed three night's anchorage at Bounty Bay before we had to move to Ted's Side (Western Harbour) to avoid the east winds and swells that had developed. Bren came aboard for coffee one morning and we met Bren & Mike at the little natural harbor at Ted's Side to say goodbye on our last day. They were loaded with fruits and gifts for our departure and we were overwhelmed with their generosity.

Bounty Bay Port information:

- **Arrival/Check-in/Check-out**
 - Contact "Pitcairn Radio" Channel 16 for anchorage information and coming ashore; every household on Pitcairn has a VHF, so someone will always answer.
 - Bounty Bay Anchorage: 25S03.98/ 130W05.70; ~40-50', sand, good holding
 - Restrictions: no trash, food or honey is to be brought ashore
 - Health forms and passport stamping done on shore; \$US30/pp landing fee. You're allowed 14 days with your initial stamp.
 - Check-out stamps are usually given at check-in since the weather is so unpredictable.
 - Government launch can pick you up (\$50/roundtrip) or in settled weather, you can take your own dinghy to the harbor. Ask for advice.
- **Time:** UTC -8
- **Currency:** NZ\$, but US \$ readily accepted
- **Dinghy dock:** The entrance looks daunting with big breaking rollers all around, but there is a clear path to get in. Keep to the right of the end of the breakwater, then take a hard left into the little harbor area. Haul your dinghy out on the slipway and tie up to the boat house. Tidal change is ~1M
- **Services:** There are few services available on Pitcairn and those are usually available on request.
 - Banks: None/ no ATM
 - Internet/Call center: There is island internet and international calling is available; check with a resident for availability
 - Post office: At the Public Square; open on request
 - Car rentals – Quads or ATVs are the primary mode of transportation on the island; you can arrange a tour or transportation from the dock via VHF
 - Fuel (gas/diesel): Available on as "as need" basis only, but in very limited quantities and requires jerry juggling.

- Propane: available, but limited; check with a resident for fill procedures
 - Medical Clinic: reasonable facilities for basic treatment with a doctor in residence
 - Restaurants: ask residents
 - Fresh water: available from a tap near the boathouse; ask before using
 - Provisioning/supermarkets: Pitcairn Island General Store for basic supplies; open on request. The island has abundant fruit trees. Residents are happy to trade for fruit and vegetables that are available. Always ask before picking.
 - Laundry: some residents have washing machines; ask for pricing
 - Trash: you are NOT allowed to bring any trash to the island.
- **Things to See and Do:**
 - Tour of the island: fabulous views, John Adams' grave, Eco-Tour, several marked hikes
 - Diving: the Bounty is scuttled 50M from the dock in Bounty Bay harbor; not much remains, but it can be seen; crystal clear water
 - Crafts: There are no shops per se, but many Pitkerners sell souvenirs out of their homes. Miro wood (rosewood) carvings, especially dolphins and HMS Bounty replicas, pandanus palm baskets, t-shirts, Pitcairn memorabilia; ask someone and they'll direct you
 - Museum: small, but good overview of the island and its history. Open on request. Admission by donation.

Note that there is no all-weather anchorage at Pitcairn Island. Depending on the winds, you must be able to move rather quickly to a more protected spot. The Pitkerners are keen weather prognosticators and can usually tell you a change is in the wind and where the best protection will be.

Ted's Side anchorage (Western Harbour) – 25S03.69/ 130W07.17 – sand, good holding; 50'; a small natural cove serves as the landing place and there's a steep path leading to town.

Nine of Cups was the fourteenth sailboat to call at Pitcairn in 2009. The islanders are hospitable, welcoming and overwhelmingly generous. We left laden with fresh fruit and well wishes. We'd consider it a "must-see" place if you're in the neighborhood. If you go, consider e-mailing ahead to let them know you're coming and to see if there's anything you might bring for them (keeping in mind the ramifications of such a promise if you can't stop). Also consider bringing gifts such as rum, wine, DVDs and CDs. Country-western music is popular there.

For more photos and information about Pitcairn Island, visit our website at www.nineofcups.com.

Commodores Marcie (AA1ZM) and David Lynn (AA1ZL)