

Passages

s/y Nine of Cups

A Holiday Newsletter from Sea

Volume 11
South Pacific Holiday 2011 Edition



Letter from the crew....

We left Opuia and the Bay of Islands on New Year's Day 2011 and this time we allowed ourselves plenty of time for a total circumnavigation of New Zealand. We sailed to Fiordland on the South Island's west coast, unspoiled Stewart Island for a sight of our first kiwi bird in the wild and off the beaten path to the isolated Chatham Islands, 500 nm off the NZ's east coast.

Returning to Opuia in late April, we hauled and completed annual maintenance on Cups and prepared her for a season in the tropics. We were off to Fiji and then Vanuatu and finally to Australia for the cyclone season.



David & Marcie enjoying a cuppa on Cups
Photo: Peter McIntosh – *Otago Daily Times*, Dunedin, NZ

We've seen so much and done so much this past year, it seems like a dream sometime. How much longer can this go on, you ask? Initially, we said we'd do this for ten years. Now in our twelfth year, it's hard to imagine another way of life. So...we'll continue cruising until "it ain't fun anymore". And right now ... it's still fun.

As always, our wish to family and friends in 2012 is health, wealth, love and the time to enjoy them all. We really love hearing from you, so please keep in touch.

Keep in Touch...It's Easy

Email us: nineofcups1@yahoo.com
Visit our website: www.nineofcups.com
See our daily blog for comments and position updates at: www.sailblogs.com/member/nineofcups

Highlights of 2011:

- ★ *Circumnavigation of NZ Complete*
- ★ *Off the Beaten Path: Chatham Islands*
- ★ *Fantastic Fiji!*
- ★ *Volcanoes and Crew stew in Vanuatu!*
- ★ *Chesterfield Reef...Coral Sea Paradise*
- ★ *Welcome to Oz*

Detailed stories follow

Back to the Warm

After a whole season in the cold, windy Roaring Forties latitudes, we were happy to head back to the tropics (so we could complain about the heat and humidity instead of the cold and wind). The 1,200 nm trip to Fiji had us shedding layers of clothing as we headed to the lower latitudes and the warm temps.



We arrived in Savusavu, our entry port, at dawn and were welcomed by a magnificent sunrise over the island of Vanua Levu. The tiny town of Savusavu is just what you'd expect a South Pacific town to be: laid-back, friendly and pleasant to visit. Moored in the middle of a creek off Savusavu Bay, we met long-time email friends who run the Waitui Marina, we took trips to the city of Labasa on the bus and worked on the boat a bit.

A vacation from work projects had us circumnavigating the island of Vanua Levu inside the Great Sea Reef. Visiting small villages along the way gave us a feel for the real Fiji. We made sevusevu with local chiefs, a traditional custom of giving kava root upon arrival in order to secure the chief's protection and hospitality while visiting. We found Fiji to be warm, wonderful and fun. Visiting its capital city of Suva, gave us a more cosmopolitan view of the same country.

Circumnavigating New Zealand

In 2010, we had planned to circumnavigate New Zealand, but ran out of summer. In 2011, we planned better and completed the passage between January and April ...over 3,000 nautical miles.

The trip was divided into three distinct areas. First we traveled "over the top" of the North Island around Cape Reinga and down the long west coast to Fiordland...home of fantastic, glacially carved fiords, local lobster, big winds, heavy rains and zillions of nasty, biting sandflies.

Rounding the South and Southwest Capes, we arrived in Port Pegasus, Stewart Island and absolutely loved the area. Rich in birdlife, marine life and flora, we spent every day hiking and discovering what an unspoiled island could be like. We visited Ulva Island in Paterson Inlet, a predator-free bird sanctuary and marveled at the abundance of birds. We ate like kings as oysters, clams, scallops, cockles and mussels were there for the harvesting and blue cod nearly jumped in the boat before we got our fishing lines in the water.

After nearly two months without provisions or socializing, it was a pleasure to arrive in Dunedin, the South Island's second largest city. A university town, the city is rich in culture, Victorian architecture and had plenty to see and do. Two weeks at the Otago Yacht Club with a side trip to visit friends living in Oamaru was just what the doctor ordered and then we were off again.

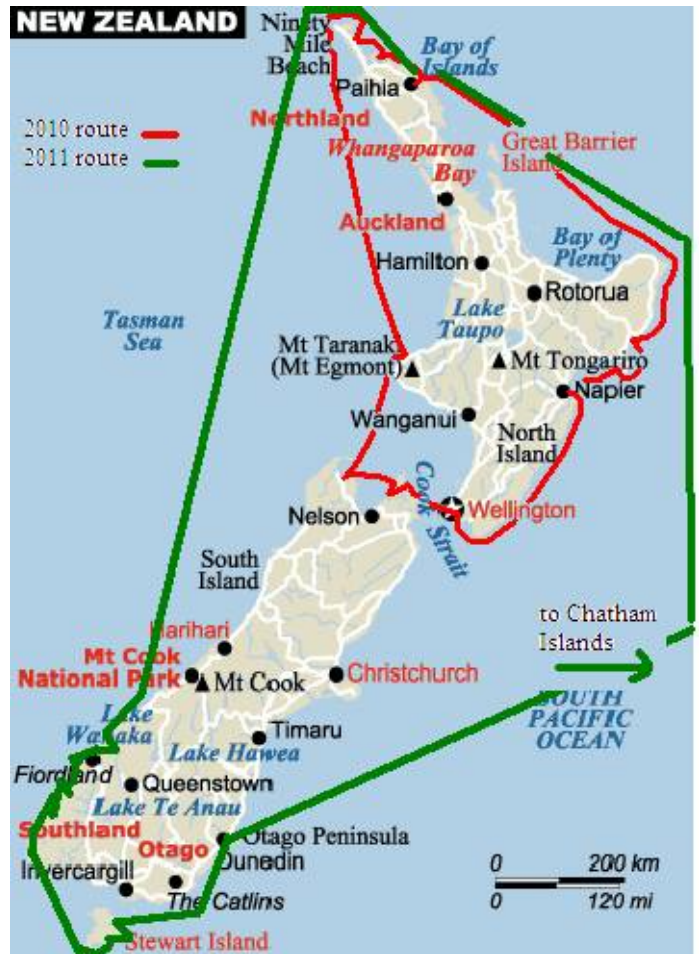
Chatham Island was like visiting another place in time. Isolated some 500 nm off NZ's east coast in the middle of the South Pacific, it sits nearly on the international dateline and is almost equidistant between the Equator and the South Pole. Like other isolated islands we've visited, Chatham had a relaxed, uniqueness and an allure all its own. Hard to describe and wonderful to experience.

From the Chathams, we could delay no further and made for the Bay of Islands once again. This passage was right up there with the most challenging we've experienced aboard Cups in all of our 12 years aboard. In Opuia, we hauled Cups for a well-deserved rest ashore where we gave her some new bottom paint and performed annual maintenance to get her ready for a season in the warm. Fiji, here we come!

World's last living dinosaur



Meet Henry, the NZ tuatara, closest living relative of the dinosaur.



Our 2010 and 2011 routes around New Zealand

Shark's Teeth and First Day Covers

One of the unique aspects of the Chatham Islands was Te Whaka Lagoon where people sift the sand for 30 million year old shark's teeth. We met Pat Smith, a most gracious fellow, who gave us a tour of his farm which borders the lagoon. He gave us some shark's teeth as a gift and also Millennium First Day Covers because the Chatham Islands were the first populated place in the world to welcome the new day, the new year and the new millennium.



30 Million year old shark's teeth

Fleeting time in Fantastic Fiji



Outriggers are used by the Fijian fishermen to ply the local waters.

We didn't explore as much of Fiji as we had originally intended. As always, we linger in a place we like and then find ourselves short on time for visiting more of the country. Though we spent two months in Fiji and did meet and spend time with many villagers, we definitely wished our time could have been extended. We were frequently the recipients of generous gifts of fruit and fish and thoroughly enjoyed the warmth of Fijian hospitality.

New Critter Encounters



A mudskipper sits on a coconut shell at Palmlea Lodge

New critters, like the mudskipper above, are always surprising and interesting to the crew. We thought we were pretty knowledgeable about different animals, but we're constantly encountering new animals that we never knew existed.

Pulitzer Prize Not in Jeopardy

The crew has had some modicum of success at writing articles for publication this year. Both David and Marcie have had several articles published in sailing/boating magazines including *Cruising World*, *Ocean Navigator* and *Good Old Boat*. They'll work to expand their library of articles in 2012.

David Sets New Fashion Trend



David models his sulu before heading to the local village.

Traditionally, Fijian men do not wear slacks or shorts, they wear sulus, a wrap-around kind of skirt, complete with pockets. Since many of the villages we visited were traditional, David donned a sulu. Admittedly, his first time in a skirt, he was amazed at how airy they were. For Marcie, the fashion trend was not quite as drastic. She wore a more colorful sulu, but had to cover knees, thighs and upper arms. When in Rome...

Eek...Iguanas!



Marcie poses with a rare banded iguana

If you took bets on whether Marcie would allow a reptile to crawl on her arm, you'd probably lose except at the Kula Eco Park in Sigatoka, Fiji. The rare green and banded iguanas are docile and they seemed harmless enough. That said, as soon as one started crawling up her arm, all bets were off...and so was the iguana!



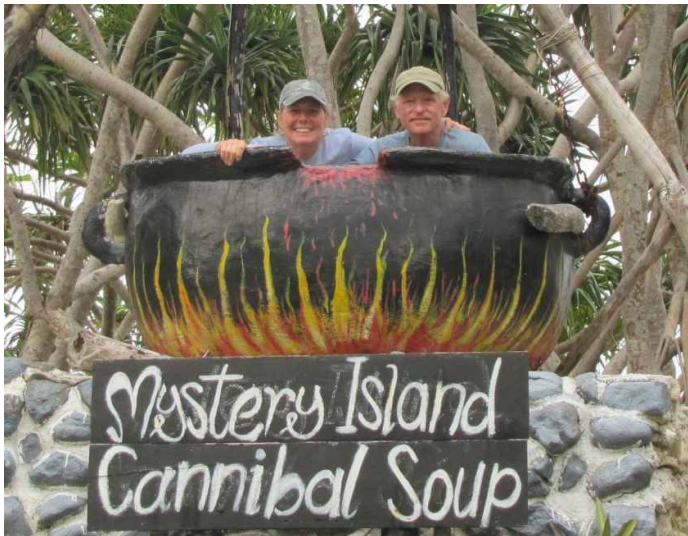
Standing on the Edge



Marcie & David standing on the rim of Mount Yasur

The ground shook. The air was thick with sulfur until we could barely breathe. The heat was intense at times and then the cold and mist took over and made us shiver. We could see the shock waves before we heard the thunderous roar of the volcano. The pyrotechnic display was beyond description. We sailed into Port Resolution, anchored and made arrangements for a truck ride to the base of the volcano. We hiked the short distance to the rim and stood in awe with 10-20 other people as the volcano roared and belched and spewed rocks and molten lava into the air above us. This was a once in a lifetime experience standing on the rim of a very active volcano known as Mount Yasur on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu.

Crew Stew??



Crew stew in Aneityum, Vanuatu

Vanuatu is probably the most culturally diverse and rich country we've ever visited. Things have remained much the same for hundreds of years here. People still live in grass huts and modern conveniences are minimal. The last incidence of cannibalism was in the 1960's, however many locals think it still persists on some islands.

It's OK...we won't eat you this time...really!



Native NiVan warriors dressed for a re-enactment

About 200 years ago, a group of Samoan missionaries came to spread the word of God to the island of Aneityum. They were promptly eaten on arrival. While we were visiting, another contingent of Samoans visited the same island as part of a Reconciliation Ceremony. The islanders were seeking forgiveness for the sins of their forefathers and the Samoans were there to forgive. There were re-enactments of warriors attacking, much singing, dancing and feasting. It was a touching, emotional week-long ceremony and we were honored to have been invited to observe.

Hooked on the South Pacific



David mounted his hook collection in a shadow box

David began collecting fish hooks from the different countries we visited in the Pacific. In each place, the fishermen used local material to carve fish hooks and now local carvers have stylized them as a craft. We were amazed at how many styles and materials we found and how very different each culture's hooks could look. He mounted his collection in a shadow box which now hangs on the salon wall with room for additions as we continue into the Western Pacific.



Toting up the Miles

Taking advantage of two cruising seasons this year, we did pretty well in the mileage department.

Total Nautical Miles Sailed 2011: **7,088 nm**
(thru 1 December 2011)

Total Nautical Miles since 2000: **68, 247 nm**

Australia is for the birds



Colorful pink and grey galahs forage for seeds in a cane field

If we thought birdwatching was great in New Zealand, we're overwhelmed in Australia. In just our first two weeks in Bundaberg, we managed to rack up 43 different species. Imagine what the rest of the country will be like. We're looking forward to photographing and identifying many more over the next year or two. Take a look at the Birds of Australia page on our website at http://www.nineofcups.com/Birds_of_Australia.htm

Coral Sea Paradise

The 1,000 nm trip across the Coral Sea from Vanuatu to Australia can sometimes be challenging. We were blessed, however, with good winds, reasonable seas and a unique opportunity to stop at Chesterfield Reef.



A baby booby waits in its nest for mom.

Truly in the middle of nowhere and only accessible by boat, we found ourselves anchored in the midst of an unspoiled paradise teeming with huge sea turtles mating and laying eggs, dolphins, whales and literally thousands of birds. Walking on the tiny, sandy islets allowed us a close-up view of boobies, terns, noddies and frigate birds...nine species in all...that were apparently non-plussed by our arrival. We spent an entire week there marveling at nature at its finest.

Beachcombing and Shelling Tops at Chesterfield Reef



Chesterfield Reef shell collection...there goes the waterline!

Shell collecting at Chesterfield Reef was fantastic. We walked along the sandy shores, avoiding stepping on birds and collected to our hearts' content. Chambered nautilus, spider conch and a terrific assortment of olives, cones and cowries lay waiting for us on the beach every morning.

Christmas Downunder

This will be our first holiday season in Australia. For folks Downunder, Christmas is a summer holiday and signals the time for summer vacations, BBQs on the beach and hot weather. Being from the colder climes, we sometime have a problem getting into the spirit of the season...there's no snow! We've learned, however, to appreciate and enjoy the local traditions and customs.



Here in Australia, instead of eight reindeer, Santa's sleigh is pulled by a team of six white kangaroos called boomers.

Our friends, Doug & Fay Grimm, arrive from the States on 28 December just in time to celebrate New Year's Eve for the world-famous celebration in Sydney Harbour.

Repairs Are Us!

Nine of Cups is beginning to show her age...just like the rest of us! We made quite a few repairs and replacements this year to ease the aging process. Emergency repairs in the Chatham Islands included replacing a blown engine oil cooler and working on the watermaker. A knockdown off NZ's treacherous East Cape blew out our mainsail, left the bimini in tatters and knocked out a stanchion. We had a new custom mainsail made in Opuia. Marcie fabricated a new bimini and David repaired and rebbed the stanchion. Additionally, all the hatches which had slowly been deteriorating and leaking for the past year or so were replaced, all interior lights were replaced with LEDs and all exterior brightwork was stripped and varnished. We hauled Cups and painted her bottom, repainted her boostripes and her hailing port on the transom.



Masking the deck required tedious precision.

The biggest project undertaken, however, was repairing, repainting and replacing the non-skid on the decks. David began the project in New Zealand, spent 3 weeks on it on Fiji between exploring forays and another 4 weeks on it in Vanuatu and then another solid week here in Bundaberg. The good news...the projects are done. The bad news...there are always many, many more to do.



The age old question...Where to next?

Contrary to popular belief, it really isn't a small world after all. In fact, when you're cruising in a sailboat, the world seems too big and we're convinced there's too much to see and do in just one lifetime. Knowing we won't be able to ask for seconds on this life, we're trying to cram in as much as humanly possible.

As we write this newsletter from Bundaberg in Queensland on Australia's north central coast, we're set to head south to Brisbane soon, then Sydney for the holidays and finally to Tasmania...home of the Tasmanian devil, made famous by "Taz", the Looney Tunes cartoon character...for the Australian summer season. We'll travel to the USA for a few months in 2012 and after that? The crew hasn't decided exactly where they'll go yet. There are lots of options: back north along the east coast of Australia and inside the Great Barrier Reef? Back to NZ? or maybe across the Great Australian Bight and up Australia's rugged, remote west coast? Next year's newsletter will tell the tale.

*Merry Christmas and
Happy 2012 from Downunder!*

Marcie and David

