



AKAMA REPORT 1

8 May 2002

Hello,

Greetings from the South China Sea! We are currently circumnavigating Pulau Tioman (Malaysia), just to see what's here. P. Tioman, according to the blurb, is one of the world's ten most beautiful Islands, and it is the island called Bali Hai, in the 1949 movie South Pacific. Here is our first report, to keep you all up to date. If you prefer not to receive these, please let us know.

Friday, 26-04-2002: M/Y AKAMA left Raffles Marina in Singapore, accompanied by S/Y SARI TIMUR (our friends Mark and Pauline), and checked into Malaysia at Seban Cove, an easy 6-hour trip about 3/5 of the way around Singapore from the Southwest corner to the Northeast corner, and then across a small strait into Malaysian waters. The trip wasn't without incident, as the generator set broke down; this means no 240-volt AC supply to charge the batteries, run the air-con and so on. AKAMA is more like a little ship than she is a big boat; so a generator set is much needed and it is run for many hours each day.

Saturday, 27-04-2002: We tanked up AKAMA nearly to her capacity of nearly 4000 litres of diesel and headed out towards Pulau Aur (an island in the South China Sea, off the East Coast of Malaysia). This was an all-night trip, our first. An hour or two out, the hydraulic stabilizers packed in, which means that the boat rolled a lot for the rest of the trip. We intended to go through Lima Channel (just at the south east tip of Malaysia) and started in that direction, but changed our minds at the last minute and went around it. Going around usually takes an extra hour, but is much safer, as the channel is narrow and there are lots of rocks in it. However, we took several extra hours, as we got caught in reef-infested water several times and had to pick our way out.

Sunday, 28-04-2002: Early in the morning, south of P. Aur, we saw emergency flares and were about to deviate course to lend help; Mark had already altered course and had called on the VHF radio to see if anyone needed help. There was no reply, so we kept moving towards Aur, but with a sharp eye open to any distress situation. We had noticed a lot of military ships in the area that night, and were not terribly surprised when the Malaysian Navy started following us in a PT boat. Eventually, however, they flashed flood lights at us (that really screws up one's night vision). We hailed them on the emergency channel and asked their intentions, but they did not reply. Then they started firing flares towards us! Eventually, they came close enough to shout between the two bridges, and hollered at us to "clear the area or they would take action on us" {gulp}! The only thing is, we did not know what "the area" was, and when we asked which way they wanted us to sail they did not reply. Then they went after SARI TIMUR in a similar manner. We also heard them accosting OLIVIA, a sail boat that was travelling east of us, and a coastal freighter. The situation was at times tense. Finally, a British warship came on the radio and explained that they were about to conduct live firing exercises. We explained where we were headed (anchorage at P. Aur) and all was well. LA missed the whole thing, as she was off watch. We arrived at P. Aur just at sunrise, rendezvousing with our friends Graham and Watti on M/Y SATULAGI (Malay for "another one"). We drank beer, went snorkelling and regaled our friends with tales of the

encounter with the Navy. P. Aur has the clearest azure water we had ever seen, and we saw lots of fish, coral and so on.

Monday, 29-04-2002: We climbed the escarpment on P. Dayang (a small island north of P. Aur), with Mark from SARI TIMUR. Both LA and I were beat by the time we reached the top. But it was worth it. The view of the anchorage and the strait between the two islands was spectacular. We spent the next day cooling our heels, both in the water and at the bar. We hosted cocktails and dinner on our boat for SARI TIMUR and OLIVIA (Albert).

Tuesday, 30-04-2002: We left P. Aur for Pulau Tioman in the late morning; SATULAGI had already departed for Singapore early in the morning and SARI TIMUR left for Tioman about a half hour earlier. The mooring buoy was so fouled in the mooring line that MKN had to jump in the water to get things straightened out. That proved difficult, as there was at least a two knot current against which he had to swim to get to the buoy and then he had one chance to grab AKAMA as he drifted past her stern. The trip to P. Tioman was uneventful, the Navy did not fire on us and nothing broke.

Wednesday 1-5-2002 to Tuesday, 7-5-2002: SARI TIMUR returned to Singapore after only a few days at P. Tioman. We spent a week on the west side of P. Tioman doing many things by ourselves. First in line was fixing the broken bits. Both problems (the generator and the stabilizers) were due to broken V-belts, both recently new and improperly installed by the mechanics. We snorkelled (lots of coral, fish and a sea turtle), swam and nearly drowned when we got caught in a strong current whilst getting back to the dinghy, which was moored to a buoy a considerable distance from the reef. LA got about 1/3 the way back and ran out of steam. So she drifted with the current while MKN ploughed ahead. With my last breath I made it. This was very scary! While we could have drifted back to the reef and found shelter on a rock or been picked up by a local dive boat; but if we had missed those, we might have not had the strength left to swim to shore and could have been swept out to sea. The weather turned lousy by Friday, with rain and roly seas. So, we did lots of household chores and maintenance. MKN found a bunch of bad solder joints on the VHF and HF radios and fixed them.

A high point was meeting Warren Blake of FOUR FRIENDS; FOUR FRIENDS is a traditional-looking schooner. He has been exploring the seas and taking 7th grade children out on week-long excursions for about 20-years and has tons of tales to tell. We also met the crew of an associate ship, RISING TIDE, and we all had dinner ashore at a Malay restaurant.

Which takes us back to today. We slept in until past 9 AM, when the Marine Police came by to tell us that we had to leave, as we were anchored in a "submarine area". Strange, as we were well within a National Marine Park boundary and had been anchored there with FOUR FRIENDS AND RISING TIDE for two days. What is it with the authorities here?