



AKAMA REPORT 21

12 April 2004

After a few days in Lae we went only 20 miles south to Salamaua. Salamaua is on a tiny peninsula that creates a harbour. Rugged mountains rise inland and there are small ones on the peninsula. Salamaua fell to the Japanese in March 1942. Allied forces led by General Douglas MacArthur recaptured it in September 1943. We climbed a small mountain to see WW-II guns left behind by the Japanese, who defended this area vigorously. We also visited an old cemetery that seems to be all but forgotten, it is so overgrown and remote. One of the stones bears the inscription, "...died of wounds from a native arrow", yet the date of death was 1936, underscoring the fact that hostile behaviour continued well into this century. Indeed, only last week the local media reported that someone in the hills had taken a human head as an act of retribution. We snorkelled on a small wreck in the bay and saw a lion fish, puffer fish, several feeding sea cucumbers, a school of large bat fish and numerous colourful reef fishes. The wreck is a coastal freighter, not much larger than AKAMA, and it apparently sank only two years ago, while at anchor as a refrigerator ship. Once the coral grows a bit more this will become an excellent shallow dive spot.

The next day we went to Brunswick Harbour (7-30 South by 147-16 East), a deep bay with a west and south arm. The scenery on the way was spectacular, as we entered Royle Channel, composed of mountains and fjords on the mainland side and small islands seaward. We anchored in the end of the south arm in 15-metres of water, totally protected. All around us tropical birds flew and screeched. We recognized only the cockatoos and hornbills among at least a dozen different species we heard and saw. Only one family lives in this bay, an old man and his five boys. They informed us that they were from a neighbouring village and were establishing a vanilla plantation. It seems nearly every village in PNG is starting vanilla plantations, which makes us wonder whether there will be a glut on the market in time. We hope not for their sake, as it is not easy work slashing a plantation out of the jungle.

An easy day's run further southeast took us to Morobe (7-47 S by 147-35 E), yet another fantastic anchorage. This one has a small opening at the end of the south arm of the bay. This opening leads to a lagoon, thence to a river and another, bigger, lagoon. We entered with the dinghy against about a six knot current, and explored both lagoons; the area is beautiful. If this were in Canada this would be prime cottage country. But since it is in PNG, the land is nearly worthless. We were told that one could lease a waterfront lot for a sizeable cottage for about twenty dollars a year, on a 99-year lease.

We limped toward Bau Island on the wing engine, as the alternator failed taking out the v-belt and disabling the main engine. Bau is about 12-miles SE of Morobe. We anchored between the village of Bau and Bau Island. Fortunately, not long ago, we added an identical alternator to our wing engine, to use as a DC charger. So, that alternator was put on the main engine. Maurice and Phil (from SELKIE) took the old alternator apart; the bearings and brushes were shot. It had gone well over 2000 hours, which on a land vehicle would be the equivalent of over 100 thousand miles, so we probably should have anticipated this and stocked spares. At Bau Island, one of the boats travelling with us was threatened by a drunken local. After we arrived, Maurice went down in the engine room to do some repairs, and a man entered our boat. Thinking this was the drunk, Maurice demanded that he get off the

boat. He was about to be bodily evicted, when the man stated that he was the local ward councillor (head man). Apologies and handshakes restored everyone's pride. The councillor explained that we could stay and that they would protect us from the drunk, who was apparently a fisherman from another village.

It was an easy day to Cape Ward Hunt (8-04.5 S 148-07 E) where we anchored at Douglas Harbour. There is a large village in this area and it seemed like everyone came out to meet us and gawk. A few of them traded for fruit and vegetables. This was to be a two-day stop, only to rest up for our first overnighter on the way to the Solomon Islands, the first of two. None of the cruising guides say much about Douglas Harbour, except that it is plagued by swells (we fixed that by deploying our roll stoppers and setting out a stern anchor). It turns out that it is a nice place. A scenic river runs back from the end of the bay, through a small village and then into uninhabited country; we ran up it until it got too shallow to navigate. There is a nice reef on the south side of the bay, which had to date the best coral garden we've seen for ages; we spent hours snorkelling there. The stop was marred only by the head man in the Douglas Harbour village, who complained that we should not have travelled up and down "his" river in our dinghies. When we arrived, he was rather belligerent, saying this was "his" bay and was setting us up for a big anchorage fee or some such, until we dropped the name of the ward councillor for the area, who just by chance Gary (of MUSCAT) had met in the previous bay where we had attempted to anchor.

After an overnight run we anchored near Kwalvaluma Island (8-20.7 S x 150-35.4 E), a tiny, uninhabited speck on a big reef. We carefully picked our way through the reef on the west side, only to find that we could have easily entered from the east. Since the area is uncharted we did not feel too dumb. This is a beautiful spot with crystal clear water; we watched our anchor go to the bottom in over 15 metres. Some local banana boats (open fibreglass boats with outboards) came by and gave us advice on where to go from here. One was a dive boat for collecting sea cucumbers, a big business in this country. Another was a bunch of traders who were seeking respite on the island from the noonday sun (hmmm; was that a 6-pack on ice?). Alas, this was not quite the paradise it seemed. There are lots of flies here, which spoiled our plans for a beach BBQ. Also, there were stingers in the water, which spoiled our plans to do some snorkelling. After we left we discovered that we'd received hundreds of sand fly bites while ashore and we had to bathe the bites in calamine lotion and take antihistamine tablets to reduce the severe itching and swelling. We are told that one develops immunity to sand fly bites, but so far we suffer for a week whenever we are attacked. This time was by far the worse.

Upon arrival at Kiriwina Island (8-23 S x 151-04 E), we were besieged by canoes of people wanting to trade; we took the opportunity to stock up on beans, coconut and a few other things. Some thought that we were one of the local charter boats and had dozens of carvings ready to sell to our guests. The carvings here are reputedly the best in PNG; however we did not buy any, as we have no room on the boat for anything more than we already have. One carver paddled over from four islands away when he heard that yachts had arrived. Two kids paddled over in the evening asking for lollies (candies). We knew that if we gave them some that all the kids would be over looking for handouts, so we got them to sing a song and paid them for that in lollies. The people here are obviously used to tourists, although we saw none. We went ashore for yet another traditional cultural show, for which we were expected to make a donation. This time it was the young ladies who danced. It was quite amateurish, although their costumes were striking, and not just because they were bare breasted. As usual, the village was neat and clean. Surprisingly there were few flies. The drought that struck the southern hemisphere last year affected the crops here; we noted that the yam cribs (similar to our corn cribs) were empty. They told us that they have started eating this year's crop a month early.

Twenty miles farther southeast, at Kitava (8-38 S by 151-18.5 E), we anchored between the main island and an islet to the east. It is nicely sheltered on three sides, and it was a good thing, as the wind whipped up, causing us to stay an extra two days. It was a good place to be stranded, as it has nice people, very clear water and lots of coral. The usual bunch of canoes came out to greet us and get some handouts. Among other things, they like to receive old newspapers, which they use to roll cigarettes. As usual, we handed out balloons to the kids and let some go on the wind; the kids swim and paddle after them, having a great time. We spent a lot of time talking to the locals, a dozen or so would stand on our swim platform at a time. The United Church boat called M/V Bromilow, which they use for their Outreach Program, was there when we arrived. It is smaller than AKAMA and we watched while they loaded at least 60 persons and a huge quantity of goods, including a large pig. The heavily overloaded boat set out for Kiriwina; people were sitting on the roof, the gunwales and all the decks. There are some little birds here, about the size of sparrows, which have a most interesting habit. They "swarm" the few hundred metres from one island to the other each morning and evening. First a few start flying around the island; they are joined by more and more. Then suddenly millions of them fly upwards in a black column, and then suddenly it subsides, only to be replaced with bigger and bigger columns. Eventually, they decide to make the dash across the little strait, but often one near the rear of the swarm will chicken out and turn back. The instant this happens the birds ahead of it also turn back and they peel away in layers. However, if the lead birds are more than half way across, they continue and are followed by those behind them; this often splits the flock in two. It's almost like the flock was an amorphous blob which is being pulled at both ends and then somehow breaks in the middle, each half then regrouping to form a separate blob. This process is repeated several times with bigger and bigger swarms, until all the birds are across.

We are now sending position reports to a position report server on ham radio when we send/receive our emails. So, if you go to the web site <http://winlink.org>, choose the position report module and enter ve0mn, which is our call sign (the middle character is a zero, not oh), you will be able to see where we are on a map. We also have a link to this server on our web site (www.nunas.com). Way cool!

That's all the news for now. Hugs and kisses to everyone and happy Easter.