



AKAMA REPORT 24
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Near Lola Island we visited Kundu Island (a.k.a. Skull Island) by dinghy. This island was used as burial site for the chiefs and fierce warriors, from the days of headhunting. Incidentally, this was not that long ago; we were told that the last headhunting raid in the Solomon Islands occurred in 1936. Generally, only the skulls are interred there, enshrined in primitive coral altars. The bodies were apparently buried on the main island, although on Kundu there are some complete graves, including a few Christian ones. Among the skulls we saw shell amulets and other carved shell pieces that were used as money.

It was a short run on Saturday, 8 May to Munda (8-19S x 157-15E), made famous by the Japanese in WW-II. They built an airstrip undetected by the allied forces, in an ingenious fashion. First, they made a network of aerial wires between all the coconut palms in the vicinity of the site, and then they cut away all the trunks in the area of the strip, leaving the canopy relatively undisturbed. Then they built the airstrip under the false canopy. They would have succeeded, however the locals snitched them out to the Americans. We noticed a sign that said "Mother's Day Dinner and Dance - Saturday Night. We stayed for it and had a wonderful time. There was a buffet meal, disk jockey and floor show of traditional dancing (much like Hawaiian hula), all for about \$5 a head Canadian!

Next, we went to Rendova Island, entering west of the main harbour at Kenelo Point (8-27S x 157-16E), the site of a timber yard. We had an awful time finding the way into the harbour, but once in, it was worth the effort. We nosed around the harbour a bit, and then started exploring the backwaters. The only guide book we had said that there might be a way from here to the main Rendova harbour, and indeed there was. It was a delightful motor through an uninhabited and winding passage. Although we did not anchor, we spotted many ideal spots. The main harbour was a bit of a disappointment; it is big, too deep to anchor in most places, and rather empty. Divers might like it though, as there is a Dauntless Bomber in about 12-metres of water. This is the place where J.F. Kennedy was based with PT-109, so at least we can say we were there. We went just around the corner into Balira harbour, where we saw our first salt water crocodile. A local man we met, Edward, said that he was not particularly large. Well, we don't want to mess with a big one then! The guide book says that there is good snorkelling towards the entrance; yah right, that's not far from where we saw the crock! We just spent the night, for which it is an ideal anchorage, good depth and bottom and no villages nearby.

After a peaceful night we went east, just around the next corner, to Egholo, where we stopped to buy some carvings. The carvers here are truly expert and the prices were reasonable; we bought several nice pieces. They also showed us work in progress and some of the palaces where they work. An unexpected bonus was a walk in the jungle, guided by Mr. Sesa and Pattson Ngana, to see the wreckage of a U.S. bomber that crashed in 1942, killing the 4 crew. It apparently got hung up in the trees and then its bombs exploded, scattering pieces over a large area. We also went up river to swim in a clear, cool stream. The people in the village below have built a small dam and have piped drinking water to the village, rather unusual in these parts and quite progressive we thought. The people here were very nice, even though there are two religious groups resident (SDA and United). Part of the reason is Mr. Bozi Ngana, the village chief; he seems a reasonable and active chief. We did not stay the night, and

anchored at Mburuku Harbour (8-26S x 157-24E), after initially passing it by and trying two other anchorages further south that were recommended. We chose well, as we had a good anchorage at the head of the bay, and we had a ball trading with the children, lollies, balloons and pencils for various fruits and vegetables. We merely mentioned that we needed a few things to one of the villagers and that evening during some hard rain we were also deluged with kids bearing goodies. We even scored a crayfish.

Our next anchorage, Husuzo Harbour (8-33S x 157-21.5E), is known for its wood carvers, the main reason we stopped there. There are about 300 of them in this one village. We were unlucky, as a few days before they had bundled up most of their work and shipped it to dealers in Honiara. Nevertheless, we bought a few pieces, including a bowl made from coconut wood, and a mask made from ebony with nautilus shell inlays. At first glance this seems a tenuous anchorage, as it is deep. But, there is a 10 to 20 metre bar that runs right across the middle of the bay; so one just drops the hook on that and backs off.

Tetepare Island (about 10 miles to the southeast) was to be our next stop, just for the night; but since we had itchy feet and we got an early start we ended up in Marovo Lagoon at Votana Point (8-39S x 157-52E), which was our next planned stop. Marovo lagoon was made famous by James Michener, the American author. He figured that it should be one of the wonders of the world. It certainly is beautiful, a huge lagoon (some argue the world's largest, others argue that it is really three abutting one another) dominated by a massive central island, which is surrounded by reefs and islets nearly too numerous to mention. Our problem was not finding neat places to go; it was deciding where to go among the many.

After Votana we anchored at Bureh (a.k.a. Mbareho) (8-34S x 157-49E), mostly because people just don't go there. In a good year they get only two or three yachts and they get no tour boats. It is only three or four miles off the beaten path; but the only description we've seen says that the path is riddled with reefs, which must keep people away (there are reefs but we had absolutely no problem manoeuvring around them). So, these folks are not spoiled by excessive tourism. It was worth the visit, as we were welcomed by children bearing orchids; we gave them lollies (candies) in return. SELKIE and MUSCAT were again with us and we had a communal dinner that just could not be beat, as SELKIE had caught several wahoo on the way in. That night we met John Davis, a local guide, who offered to take us to see crocodiles and coconut crabs (we declined as we were still partying). The next day we visited both islands that make up this community. There are good wood carvers, some of whom have original works that we had not seen before. On the smaller island we met Aldio Pita, a local carver and artist. He does lovely wood block prints on handmade banana fibre paper; we bought several. He is also an expert carver and showed us a fantastic mud crab shaped bowl that was not yet finished. We also noted that the prices here were excellent; a carved walking stick that they wanted 300 SI dollars (fixed price) for in Ghizo went for 100 here (asking price was 125).

From Bureh it was only a short trip nearly due east to Seghe (8-34S x 157-52.5E), the site of a government station for the province and an airstrip. We anchored in about 5 metres of water over sand and coral. The airstrip was built by the US Seabees in just a bit more than 10 days; at the police station they have an old plaque that proclaims this to be a world record. We snorkelled on a P-38-Lightning fighter aircraft, which crashed in about six metres of water just off the end of the runway. It is amazingly intact and has very little coral growing on it.

Only a couple of miles NNE from Seghe we intended to stop for lunch at the Vanua Rapita Resort on Michi Island; it was lauded in a cruising guide for its good food and reasonable prices. When we got there we found yet another casualty of the misinformation in the world press about the hostilities in the

Solomon Islands. It was deserted and parts of it were falling down. We motored farther north to Uepi Island (8-25 S x 157-57 E), which is the site of another resort in the Solomon Islands. Thankfully, it is still operating and we had a wonderful time (see www.uepi.com for their web site). This is a multipurpose resort, featuring fishing, diving and ocean canoeing; it would also be a great place to just veg-out away from the world. The snorkelling was great right off their jetty; at the same spot there is a nice wall dive. One of the owner's sons, Wesley, hand-fed some sharks, which was most entertaining. We had been snorkelling among them only minutes earlier. He assured us that they have never bitten anyone.

We stopped to look at wood carvings at Marovo Island, but moved on as the day was still young and because this was where a yacht had been boarded and robbed a few months ago. The carvings were very nice, but there was nothing that we wanted. The lack of tourists over the past few years has hit this community hard; as we were leaving an old man was literally begging us to buy his carvings. We anchored for the night at Telina Island (8-30.5S x 158-04E), where we were immediately canoed by many carvers and a few children. We stayed here two nights, and met some fascinating locals, including a fellow by the name of John Wayne, who has an art studio and tourist lodge. We bought a lovely carved bowl made of kerosene wood, with inlays of jackfruit, king ebony and nautilus shell. The bowl was not quite finished, as it did not yet have the "kustom putty", meaning traditional putty made from a local tree fruit; so we were able to see this fruit and see how the putty is put on.

By this time, we had had our fill of carvers and sought out a typical tropical desert isle, we passed by several, settling on a beautiful spot just inside Tongoro Passage (8-33S x 159-10E). MUSCAT came with us, and SELKIE, who had gone its own way in search of more carvings, again caught up with us. Dianne, from SELKIE was surprised when we all got together aboard AKAMA and had a birthday party for her. It was so nice that we stayed two nights. This was our last anchorage in Marovo Lagoon, and the next day we moved to an anchorage at Peava to await good weather for the crossing to Guadalcanal.

So, until next time, we wish you all the very best.