



AKAMA REPORT 27  
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Honiara to Vanuatu

We started out early on 10 June, east bound from Honiara for Vulelua Island (9-30S x 160-28.5E), our planned anchorage for the night. The GRIB weather files we downloaded at midnight promised an easy ride with 8 to 10-knots on the nose. Little did we know! Before we'd even got half way the wind began to pick up. It built steadily throughout the morning until by noon we had steep choppy seas, big whitecaps and the high wind alarm was going off, signalling gusts to over 30-knots. We were relatively comfortable with this, given that we only had about a half-day's motoring to the anchorage. In any case it was to be worth the bother, as we had read that there was a friendly little eco-resort waiting to serve us an early dinner and drinks. We arrived and found no resort, not even a trace of one; we surmise that being of leaf construction it was simply burnt down during "the tension". We got canoed shortly after arrival, but we were tired and simply ignored them until they went away. Once rested, we dove on the hull to check the running gear and give the prop a scrape. Just before sunset, in a small pang of conscience we let some balloons go to the canoe kids who had reassembled. Everywhere we go we are the centre of attraction.

The next day we left well before daylight, in the hope that the winds would abate in the night as they often do. No dice. We had another rough ride to Port Mary (10-50S x 162-27E), which is on a Santa Ana Island, at the east end of San Cristobal (a.k.a. Makira I.). This was a superb, albeit a little deep, anchorage to wait for the weather to clear. There is an island to the east to protect us from the SE trades, and a fringing reef in nearly all other directions, to protect us from swells and any wind shifts in the night. The people are friendly, though not overly intrusive. We let some balloons go for the kids to race after, traded with the locals for fruit, veggies and crays, and did some minor maintenance. Some kids jumped in the water and helped us clean the beard off the waterline, so we paid them for their efforts in lollies and balloons.

We had to fix the blasted generator (again). This time it was the voltage regulation (again). We believe that Westerbeke, the manufacturer, did not use tinned boat wire in building the thing. So, over the years everywhere there is a terminal crimped on the salt air has introduced corrosion, which makes the joint a bit resistive. We spent hours re-crimping the joints and in some cases replacing terminals, and away she went. This fix is sure not to last, as there are lots of joints we did not re-crimp or replace. This is the second time we have had to do this; last time we also replaced with crimped connections some automotive style plugs that Westerbeke used. The lasting fix, which will come later, is to rip out absolutely all of the wiring, and replace it with proper, tinned boat wire.

We did not leave Santa Ana until Thursday the 17th, due to crummy weather. Late Wednesday afternoon the wind died and we knew we would be good to go in the morning, as the GRIB weather predictions were favourable. The plan was to make a 180-mile, one-night trip east to Nendo Island, rest, and then island-hop to Vanuatu via Utupua I. and Tevai I. As it turned out, Mother Nature played a trick on us, because after we got well out to sea the wind returned with a vengeance. It was not a

comfortable passage and we decided to press on to Utupua, as the angle to the waves would be better. Before long we realized that we still could not make a decent cruising speed so it would still be dark upon reaching Utupua, and the anchorage there is a bit tricky. So, we decided to make a long passage of it and head for Hiou Island, the closest one belonging to Vanuatu, about 150 miles southeast of Nendo.

Upon arrival at Hiou we did not like the look of the anchorage, given the winds, so we decided to push along to Tegua. But, conditions in the anchorage there were not much better. So, we decided to bite the bullet and head for Sola, the capital of the Torres and Banks Islands province, on Vanua Lava (13-52S x 167-33E). We thought we might make it there before nightfall, given the expected favourable currents. Of course they did not materialize and we did not get in until well after dark. Fortunately, this is a fairly safe anchorage, and with the help of the GPS and the RADAR we were able to drop the hook right in a good spot. We had turned a simple overnight passage into a 360-mile marathon that took nearly three days, but in the process we had advanced our position considerably, making up for time lost in previous anchorages waiting for favourable weather windows. We are only about three weeks behind the rough plan that we made over a year ago.

Since we have left the Solomon Islands, a few thoughts about the place would be in order. First, contrary to what the media reports have said, it is mostly very safe. Apart from one minor incident we never felt threatened or even at risk. The "tension" reported in the media is over, and it only existed around Guadalcanal. Not surprisingly then, the people in the SI are all very friendly, with the exception of a few spots near and on Guadalcanal. In contrast to PNG, where we expected only villages but discovered cities, nothing is big in the Solomon Islands. Honiara, the capital, is supposed to have a population of about 40 thousand; but as far as we could see, it is not much more than a big town spread out along a highway. We wonder where all the people are. Gizho, the second-largest centre is barely a town at all, and Noro is not much more than a huge fish canning plant. Clearly, one does not go to the SI for the city life! The country has a population of over 500 thousand; clearly they all live in villages and are predominantly babies. In every village we went to we saw children by the scores. The main exports are supposedly copra, timber, rice and cacao, although we did not see much evidence of production or shipping. An exception would be timber where we saw a few typical deforestation projects, and we did see a small commercial fishing fleet and cannery. In terms of things to see and do, the Solomon Islands ranks very high if your interest is sport fishing, WW-II history and artifacts, snorkelling and diving. There are a few mostly rather rustic resorts and no big hotels. Our favourite resorts are Zipolo Habu on Lola Island (for fishing and simply relaxing) and Uepi in the Marovo Lagoon (for diving). We found the native culture to be more varied in PNG; the S. I. is about 95 percent Melanesian with a smattering of Polynesian. For cruising, the Western province was by far the best in the Solomon Islands.

A few words about trawler yachts might be in order too, as we have now logged a significant number of miles under our keel in areas where few boats tread, let alone power boats. Lots of our correspondents are boaters and many will build or buy a new boat one day. We have observed that we are just as good as a mono-hull sailboat when going to weather (of course at that point of sail they are a power boat too) and about the same as a heavy cruising sailboat or motorsailer. We suspect that if it were to get really, really snotty the sailboat would be the better bet. We've also observed that most of the time we are more comfortable, but only when our stabilizers are working. When we loose stabilization sailboats beat us hands down. We've never been partial to catamarans and have observed that the ones we have been with are not that great going to weather; we usually outrun them in such conditions. But, once the wind turns to that they can sail they leave us in their dust. Overall, so far, we usually come out ahead by a nose though. The biggest difference is in creature comfort. When we host a party or have guests aboard space is no object. We have room that sailboat owners (of any size less than about 70-feet)

could only dream about. One young lady from a buddy boat, a cat, paid AKAMA the nicest compliment. She said she liked visiting us because it was like visiting a posh apartment. The non-boaters we meet, and a few boaters, are often taken aback when they realise that we have no sails. The notion of going around the world in a power boat is still rather alien to most people. So far, at least, to us it is the only way. One of the downsides to power boats is that you have to put diesel fuel in them, sometimes a lot. Up around the equator, where the seas are relatively flat, we routinely ran at about 6 to 7 litres per hour when making about 5 to 6 knots. Now that we are in an area where the seas are rougher, our consumption is greater. On the passage from the Solomon Islands to Vanuatu we used about 10 litres per hour but averaged only about 5.5 knots. Still, for the \$30k or so we did not have to put into sails and rigging we can afford to buy a bunch of diesel!

That's all for now, folks. Stay well!