



Report-34-NZ to Australia

This is the first time we'd ever had crew. Corey Ogden, Louise-Ann's brother came all the way from Canada to make the crossing with us, and along the way see something of New Zealand and Australia. Our second crew member was Jan Elliott, a Kiwi lady that came highly recommended by Paul of the Gulf Harbour staff.

We day-hopped up the coast to Opuia, stopping first at Mansion House Bay on Kawau Island. In-season this is a very popular spot and boats are anchored cheek-by-jowl; we had the place nearly to ourselves. We went ashore for a long hike and saw a wallaby in the bush. We were welcomed at our next anchorage by a pod of dolphins; so far Corey was batting 1000 in his first major seagoing experience. The weather held nicely and we stopped for a good nights sleep at Tutu Kaka Harbour, Whangaruru and Waipiropi Bay. Corey and Jan took our little sailing dinghy out for a spin around the bay. Then the weather turned on us and we arrived in Opuia, crashing through rough seas. Interestingly, though, the marina basin was calm as could be, making docking a breeze. The bad weather stayed with us for a while and by the time we left we were getting a bit tired of Opuia! Every day we would listen to the weather forecasts and look up others on the Internet, in a vain attempt to find some good conditions.

Eventually, we gave up simply sitting and waiting. So we rented a car and the four of us took a road trip around the northern part of North Island, guided by Jan, who seemed to have been everywhere and done everything before...very handy. The scenery was great and at one spot we had the best fish and chips we'd ever tasted. That evening we pulled into a motel and were surprised to note that the proprietor had no trace of an accent. That could only mean one thing, he was a Canadian. Sure enough, he and his Malaysian wife had settled in "paradise" years earlier. Well, our idea of paradise would not include managing a motel...to each his own!

Everyone told us that crossing the Tasman Sea would be an ordeal. The weather is severe and the distance long enough that one is venturing into the unknown after half the journey, too far out to turn back. We reckoned that the best strategy would be to wait for a low pressure cell to go by and watch for an approaching high pressure cell that wasn't too high. That would give us high winds for the first few days, but we would be in the lee of North Island. After that we should have light but fair winds. Day after day they never came and the wind howled. Corey was beginning to wonder whether he should abandon ship and head off on his own. Eventually, the right system came along and we, along with a throng of others fled the marina. Most were going north to the islands; only a few were going to Oz.

We left Opuia on 16 May, a lovely sunny day, albeit a little windy; but we expected that. Two dolphins immediately started swimming with us, as if to say goodbye. Our plan to head out in the wind, with the promise of good weather once we rounded the top of North Island was not achieved. Alas, the weather systems stalled and once we cleared Cape Ranga, we nearly got blown off the map! With 2-meter waves atop 3-meter swells just forward of the port side, we battled our way westward. The Naiad roll stopping system worked like a champ, but eventually the belt that runs it started slipping and we had no option but to turn the bow into the weather and shut down the main engine. We hate to shut down the main on a passage. We no sooner got that fixed when the pump for the starboard head quit. Fixing these

things in crashing seas made Maurice seasick, so he joined Corey who was fertilizing the ocean already. Jan and Louise-Ann stoically held on, but were rather subdued and decidedly green in complexion.

After two days of this bashing, our fourth day since leaving Opuia, the wind dropped out and we saw an albatross, supposedly a good omen. Sure enough, the good weather held, we saw another albatross and had two gorgeous days. Other than the birds, we saw nothing, just gorgeous days and beautiful sunsets until the last day. As we neared Oz we saw two whales, our first of many in the coming months. Neptune must have had a bad hair day though, as we had to bash into short choppy seas from the tip of Fraser Island into Bundaberg. Corey had the opportunity to film heavy spray going right over AKAMA, until we slowed down to a more sedate speed. We arrived at Bundaberg 24 May.

As far as passages go, this one was neither our best nor our worst. It was, marginally, the longest so far. Having crew made it very easy. Whereas the two of us eventually get into a rhythm aboard, keeping watch, napping and so on, with two crew and proper watches we each had the opportunity to have a good forty winks, except Maurice that is. Being a light sleeper, and as captain of the ship he got up at least once during each person's watch to see how things were going.

Once we arrived at Bundaberg we were quarantined until the customs, immigration and agriculture officials processed us. This was by far the most officious lot of people, although friendly, we had ever encountered. In addition to piles of paperwork and questions, AKAMA was searched top to bottom and stem to stern for contraband. They even put two dogs aboard to aid in the search. Actually, this whole thing worried us a lot. Never before had AKAMA been so thoroughly searched. Who knows what the previous owners might have stowed away and forgotten! In the end, we passed with flying colours and were given one year, which matched our visa time.

About a week after arrival in Bundaberg we noticed a little sailboat coming into the harbour. Once it got close enough we realised that it was GRACIE; aboard were two brothers, Richard and Gary, who had left Opuia about the same time as we did. Their plan, being a sail boat, was to run north to take advantage of the prevailing winds and blow into Bundaberg. We, on the other hand, being a power boat, merely sailed the rhumb line. As it turned out, just north of us where they went there was no wind. Moreover, since they had only a small engine and little diesel fuel, they simply drifted around for days on end. One day they made only 20-miles...in the wrong direction! Had we each sailed the other's route we would both have had suitable weather.

A few days after clearing customs and immigration we said goodbye to Jan, bought a little car and toured the area around Bundaberg with Corey. The highlight was probably the Australia zoo, where we saw Harriett the tortoise who was well over 100-years old; not long afterwards she died. After Corey left we sold the car and headed north on our Whitsunday's cruise.