

sv Soggy Paws: Papua New Guinea- Rabaul to English Cove, New Ireland

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Boat Make: St .Francis MK II Sailing-Catamaran

Draft: 3.5'

HomePort: Melbourne, FL USA

SSCA Members since January 1992



Sailing Papua New Guinea 14-15 March 2019

Auditor's Note: The below cruising information is extracted from the blog of *sv Soggy Paws* with some modifications. It covers an early portion of our 11 month, 7000 nm round trip in 2019 from the Philippines southeast through eastern Indonesia, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands and return. This article covers our trip from Rabaul to English Cove at the southern end of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea. We were traveling in a group of four boats, including the 48' American catamaran *Ocelot*, the 41' Australian catamaran *Indigo II*, the Kiwi monohull, *Berzerker*, and us.

Commercial and CM93 charting are mostly useless for anchoring and close passage among SE Asian and Western Pacific islands, as they lack accuracy and shoreline and reef detail. So we prepared satellite imagery of the area in advance and used that with OpenCPN to provide the accuracy and detail we needed for close in navigation. Terry Sargent of *Valhalla*, the custodian of SE Asian and Indian Ocean cruiser waypoints, provided information for anchorages used by the few cruisers that had been in the area before us. Sherry had also done her usual vacuuming of cruising information from internet sources, and we had spent time with a couple of cruisers that had been in the area earlier. From our cruising library and the internet I found several sources for information on diving and WW2 sites. Sherry's PNG Compendium, available under the Destinations menu (<https://www.scca.org/destinations>) on the SSCA website, or on our own website. <http://www.svsoggypaws.com/> now has waypoints and information for most of the possible stops along the northern New Guinea coast and outlying islands. There is also additional information on *Ocelot's* website [at http://www.hackingfamily.com/](http://www.hackingfamily.com/).

(Editors note; These three websites provide a tremendous amount of detailed information for cruisers)

On this trip we mostly cruised among the eastern islands of New Guinea, offshore of the New Guinea

coast which has a reputation for piracy and theft. We checked out of PNG with the Rabaul Customs officer with next port listed as Gizo, Solomons. While in town, we all hit the stores and the market for one more round of provisioning. We bought some very expensive marine 2-part epoxy in one hardware store that had some marine supplies. We did this so we could pay back the epoxy we had borrowed to make our rudder repairs (done in Kavieng), and have a small supply on hand in case we need it again. We left Rabaul in the early morning, headed SSE to a pair of coves on the SW end of New Ireland, named Irish Cove and English Cove. As we motored out in the glassy conditions, we motored right past the smoking volcano that we had hiked a couple of days before.

Once the wind came up, we were able to sail most of the way with the NW wind mostly behind us. However, as we approached the coast of New Ireland at Lamassa Island, the wind switched 180 degrees and came strong on our nose (some weird land breeze).



Sailing Coast of New Ireland.

Photo credit: SSCA Lifetime Commodore Sue Hacking on *sv Ocelot*

One of our buddy boats captured a great picture of us cruising off the coast of New Ireland. The map shows the south end of New Ireland, where we anchored in English Cove (Lawanai Cove). Our tracks are in red. Dave wanted to see an anchorage at Cape Waum that Rod Pearce (famed WWII diver and wreck hunter from Rabaul) had said we could anchor in, and from which we could scramble up on a ridge and find a downed WW2 Japanese dive bomber he had found years ago. So we let the other boats go on to the anchorage in Irish/English Cove and we explored around a bit.

We found that there was indeed a very attractive anchorage where Rod had pointed out, at 04 43.56 S / 152 48.08 E, in about 20-30 feet of sand/mud a couple miles NW of English Cove. See our track above. On our way back in late August, we and *Ocelot* spent several nights in this anchorage—it was very nice with lots of birds and greenery.

There was a big thunderstorm building offshore and we still had at least an hour to go to get to the other anchorage, so we didn't get a chance to explore ashore, but we did get a chance to return on our way back north a couple months later.

sv Indigo II anchored in spectacular English Cove.

Being last in a 4 boat fleet into a tiny anchorage



meant we got the outside spot. But fortunately our buddy boats had left enough room for us. We were wedged into tiny English Cove two-by-two, with *Ocelot* behind us hanging in 12 ft and we dropped in about 40 ft at

04°46.29' S / 152°51.41' E.

English Cove.

Our four boats squeezed into tiny English Cove on a rainy day with wind and swell outside. It seemed like the cove was exposed to the prevailing westerly winds, but the outside reefs blocked the swell and we were fine. We had earlier checked out Irish Cove and found it much deeper with step-to edges. So we could probably not have fit all four boats in there.



Sue on sv Ocelot surrounded by friendly canoes looking to trade or for handouts.

By the time we came in and anchored, our friends were surrounded by local canoes. These were friendly curious people, and it turned out that most of them were from Lambom Island nearby. We could see a fairly large village there on the satellite charts. Lambom does not have a water supply, so the villagers come daily to English Cove in their canoes to get water from the fresh water river that empties into the bay. English Cove was the site of a failed French colony in the 1870-80s. A wealthy Frenchman, Marquis de Reys, landed 4 expeditions at this location where hundreds died of various causes.

Only a few families currently live in this bay, so eventually the Lamborn canoes departed as the sun started to set. A little later we met Passie (pronounced Posse, like the American west group that forms to hunt down the bad guys) and Joel, two of the men who actually live in English Cove. Both spoke really good English, and neither chewed beetlenut (a mild drug from a local plant that leaves the chewers with red stained and broken teeth). So we had a nice chat with them.

Passie told us we could come in to their river to get water or take a swim in their swimming hole. He also told us there was a waterfall a little ways upriver that he could guide us to if we wanted.



Passie's comfortable home on English Cove and the small river.

We had planned to depart for Buka the next morning, but after a happy hour conference, our group decided we'd stay for the next day.

The next morning Passie guided us up the river to the small waterfall. It was more like small rapids than an actual waterfall, but it was nice to get out and walk some. Part of it was walking up the rocky river bank, and those with flip-flops struggled a bit. On the way back, we took a shortcut through some of the village's gardens. And the birders in our group were happily spotting birds.

Back at the swimming hole, we had a nice time splashing around in the surprisingly cold clear water. The next morning we did an exhaustive look at the weather.



The next morning we did an exhaustive look at the weather which didn't look good for a long overnight passage to Buka, on the northern end of Bougainville. But it didn't look great the next day either, so we collectively decided to go ahead and leave. The forecast showed either light wind directly behind us, or light wind on the nose. We would be motoring most of the passage.

It was already March and if we were going to make the passage to Vanuatu before mid-May we had to keep moving. Had we more time this would be an interesting area to explore and see if there was anything left of the settlements.

**Commodores Dave and Sherry McCampbell,
sv *Soggypaws***