

S/V Soggy Paws: Papua New Guinea-Kavieng to Rabaul

Boat Type: 2005 St Francis 44 MKII Catamaran

Draft: 3.5'

Homeport: Melbourne, FL USA

SSCA Members since January 1992

4-6 March 2019

Authors Notes: 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 southeast from Kavieng at the northern tip of New Ireland Island to Rabaul at the eastern tip of New Britain. We were still a group of four boats, including the 48' catamaran *Ocelot*, the 41' catamaran *Indigo*, the monohull *Berzerker* and us, all travelling together for most of the trip down from Indonesia.

Dear SSCA,

Commercial charting is mostly useless for passage and finding good anchorages among SE Asian and Western Pacific islands, as the charts 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.

Terry Sargant of *Valhalla*, the SE Asia custodian of cruiser waypoints, provided way points 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 WWII sites.

Sherry's PNG Compendium, available under the Destinations menu on the SSCA website or on our own website, 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. 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.



Red track is route down SE, yellow is return route to NW

We pulled out of the Kavieng town anchorage on the afternoon of March 4th, after spending the morning provisioning and getting ready to move again. On the way we stopped to make a short dive on a B-25 bomber that had ditched during the war in shallow water southwest of Kavieng. It was in a muddy location, just off a mangrove island, and still had some of the guns aboard. Photography was difficult in the low visibility, but it was still interesting to inspect a relic of WWII. Its history is on pacificwrecks.com.

Late that afternoon we anchored at Albatross Channel, after motoring about another hour in a winding passage. This positioned us to go out the south entrance of the Kavieng area the next morning. There was another boat anchored in the spot we'd selected to anchor (looking at the satellite pic). It was dodgy getting all four of us anchored and comfortable in the area. But it was OK for an overnight.

The next morning we got underway around 0645, headed south and east toward Rabaul, with a planned stop at the Duke of York islands, just off Rabaul.

There wasn't a breath of wind...



Glassy calm most of the way to Rabaul

The other boats motored straight for the Duke of Yorks, about 130 miles SE. But since it was so calm, Dave and I wanted to explore the north coast of Djaul Island, which was almost directly on the route. So we made a beeline for Bendeman Harbor (also known as Missionary Cove), on the north coast of Djaul. Our intent was to have a look in the harbor without going in. So I plotted our route to dog-leg down the coast just outside the harbor. As we approached, however, Dave wanted to take a few minutes to go in and check on anchoring depths.



On this CM93 chart you can see why we use satellite charting for close-in navigation

Our charts are not that accurate in this area, so I went below to look at the satellite charts, and plot a route to download to the Garmin, so that we could safely go in the harbor. Dave was on the helm and I thought he understood not to go further in, then where I had previously plotted the turn in the route.

As I walked back out into the cockpit with the Garmin chip in my hand, I found that Dave had proceeded on course past the waypoint. Then BANG! BUMP! CRUNCH! GRIND! We had driven right into the reef guarding the entrance to the harbor! Dave didn't see the reef at all because it was glassy calm and a little overcast, so the reef wasn't visible.

Fortunately there was no wind, and no seas (and no one to witness our calamity). We quickly dropped the mainsail, and Dave got in the water to assess the damage and see the best way to get ourselves off. We were relieved to find that (as designed), our saildrives were protected by the keels, and the keels had stopped us before the rudders hit anything substantial. One keel was scraped but not damaged severely. After making sure we could run the engines in gear, Dave pushed from the bow, and I motored in reverse. We slid gently off the reef. Thank God!!

By then, a few villagers had gathered around in canoes, but we just smiled and waved, and motored into the harbor.



One of the locals who came to look at the strange boat

It was a long narrow harbor and would provide good protection in all but a howling north wind. And the reef we had run into provides some protection in NE.



Satellite view of the harbor, our track in red.
Note the accuracy and shoreline definition.

There is a substantial concrete pier on the west side, and all the kids in the village were standing on the pier waving at us. We felt bad about leaving without stopping to socialize, but we were on a mission...



All the kids in the village waving at us

The bottom was smooth at 85 ft deep off the pier, and it slowly shallowed to about 60 ft about 2/3 the way in. So it would be an anchorable spot at 02°54.63' S / 150°52.76' E.

Continuing on, while carefully avoiding the protruding reefs, we hugged the north coast of Djaul, looking for other possible anchorages. We found a couple that were possibilities. The whole island looks pretty interesting on the satellite picture. If we weren't on a mission to get all the way to Vanuatu by May, it would be fun to stop and explore this island for a week. There may be some great diving here too, but we know no cruisers that have ever been here.

By early afternoon, we had cleared the island and set a direct course to the west side of the Duke of York islands. The wind came up enough to give us a small boost in speed, but not enough to sail without using an engine, unless we wanted to make it a 2 night passage. So we pattered along on one engine at 4-5 knots, and eventually made it in by 1530 the next day.

During the night, we saw a bright light about 15 degrees to starboard. It never changed course, it wasn't flashing, there was nothing on radar, and nothing on AIS. We never did figure out what it was. (Our buddy boats were too far ahead of us by then for it to be them). We speculated it might have been a light from Rabaul--maybe the volcano center (high on a hill)--as we were then about 80-90 miles from Rabaul. It may also have been a well-lit fishing boat.



A Filipino fishing boat, very far from home

We normally take the fishing line(s) in at dusk, and put them out once Dave has had breakfast (can't catch a fish on an empty stomach!). On coming on to the bank where the Duke of York Islands are, we hooked a 6' Black Marlin!! It was a good fight, with multiple jumps, for an hour or so. We brought it in to take a picture (and get the hook

out), and then released it. We were using 40# line on a Penn 4/0 rod and reel and a plastic squid.



The exhausted black marlin, after an hour of fighting



Dave gently makes sure the marlin is rested before releasing it

We had barely dropped anchor in Mioko Harbor in the southern Duke of York Islands when a canoe approached us asking for an anchoring fee. A young man without much English paddled up to us and handed us an “invoice”, stamped and signed by a local woman. We refused to pay the fee without seeing paperwork proving that the fee and the person collecting it was legitimate, and knowing what it was going toward. But our buddy boats all just went ahead and handed over money. One of our boats was actually first asked for a 500 Kina (\$143USD) anchoring fee!! Apparently the local council has decided that passing yachts are a good source of income.

Later a guy in a canoe who said he was a teacher at the school, warned us not to pay (or donate) any fee that was supposedly going to the school, without seeing the ledger book that the school keeps. Apparently some unscrupulous people have solicited a donation for the school that never found its way to the school.

Just at sunset, the head of the council, who was aboard one of our buddy boats having a chat, suggested that two of us who had anchored further out in the bay, should move in closer to the village. He was concerned about boardings and theft during the night, and said his people would keep an eye on us.

The anchor spot where we first anchored was 04°13.68 S / 152°27.13 E, in 42 ft, scattered coral heads. We moved to 04°13.88 S / 152°27.12 E.

We left for Rabaul the next morning, but our buddy boats stayed another night. Apparently there is an opportunity to swim with dugongs (guided by a villager). They stayed to do so, but only saw one dugong from the surface. We just did not like the vibe there, and were anxious to get to Rabaul.

Commodores Dave & Sherry McCampbell

