

Passage Log- Kavieng, Papua New Guinea to Koro, Palau

December, 2016

NOTES: The GPS on our plotter failed several months ago and we are navigating with a handheld GPS. Our running lights failed shortly before we departed and we have no replacements.

Most of the entries were written on my 2200-0200 watch.

Dec.8, Day 1: We woke to a glassy morning and made final preparations to depart on the tide. Both of us sweat through a shirt before we even hauled up anchor at 1000. We motored out of the pass under sunny skies and made water on the way, topping up the tanks. The Island kids were out enjoying the surf as we pulled out of the pass and into the waiting long, ocean swell. I was busy with the plotter/handheld GPS/SPOT/phone and quickly felt poorly. We found enough wind to raise the sails and get going, although just barely. Our course was N & E as we found westerly winds. All forecasts predicted east winds, WTF. Squalls and good winds during the afternoon and we happily made our way north towards the equator. At dusk we decided to tuck a reef in the main “just in case”, squalls marching across the horizon looked rather dark. We had chicken stir fry and rice for dinner and I was happy to hit the bunk, feeling better. Although we had a bright, clear sky at sunset it clouded over by 1900. Boat speed between 4-6 kts. Midnight watch was uneventful.

Dec.9, Day 2: This morning all scents were curiously annoying and my earl grey tea was too soapy tasting to drink. Oatmeal and honey were a palatable breakfast. Odd symptoms of seasickness? We shook out the reef and I sat high on the combing in the breeze and read for most of the morning, I took it as a sign that my weak bout of seasickness was over. By the time I was off watch at 1000 I wasn't feeling quite right, but ignored it. We had leftover pizza for lunch and I lay back down for my last hour off. The whole afternoon was a struggle – I could barely open my mouth to speak I felt so ill. I went below for a pee and barely made it up on deck before I threw up lunch. We tucked in a reef again at sunset, the evening sky looking menacing again. Plain rice for dinner. It was a cloudy night with a 1/4 moon only visible now and then through the haze. Our progress is looking good to pass over the equator before dawn. The winds have started to back slightly south so we are now steering more north than

east, thankfully. Not making our “waypoints” as predicted by the weather router, an east setting current is slowing us up and pushing us away from our destination.

Dec.10, Day 3: The wind eased last night at 0300 and progress toward the equator all but halted. At 0500 Steve woke me for the festivities; a photo, a shot of rum and a toast to Neptune. At 0521 we officially crossed back into the northern hemisphere after 6 years “Down Under.” I could only have a small sip of rum as my throat was still raw from vomiting, so I tipped the rest of the good stuff into the sea, not taking any risks this time. The rest of the day was quite as we struggled to make miles north in very light winds. An incredible sunset and clear skies tonight. Steve and I sat on the couch house and shared a beer watching the skies transform long past the change of watch. The winds died after dark, Steve doused the sails and we rolled around in the gentle but annoying swell for most of the night. Winds filled in on my midnight watch and I was able to get us sailing in the right direction again. A bright waxing moon set at 0300, motion of the boat is comfy. I am feeling much better, tidied the cabin this afternoon and cooked dinner. We are at least 100NM/24 hours “behind” schedule.

Dec.11, Day 4: Any suggestion of wind disappeared early this morning and by 0700 I finally pulled down the main so Steve could get a little sleep. A beautiful day but desperately windless. We turned on the engine at 0930 and motored all day. Lots of cats paws on the water but nothing came of it, greasy looking between the ripples. Lots of tuna jumping and groups of blue bottle jelly fish floated by this morning. We lost 3 NM (nautical miles) drifting on my morning watch and another 2.5NM when we drifted this evening. That east setting current just won't let us go. Lunch was delish Asian noodle salad using up the leftover spaghetti and lobster in the fridge. Neither of us very hungry at dinner time so we had popcorn and sundowners, another stunning red sky. After I managed a few hours sleep we turned the engine back on at 2200. Wind teased all night long, just enough to hold 80% of the headsail as we motor sailed, giving us half a knot. Weather router texted to say we may not find wind until 3-5°N...how will we ever get there to find out? Trying to stay positive, still 2 weeks until Christmas.

Dec 12, Day 5: Now above 1°N! A long night and morning listening to the engine. Finally turned it off at 1000...12 hours! I think that is a new record. Calm and quiet

while drifting this morning and I caught up on some sleep before noon but had weird dreams about making stew out of the cockpit cushions. Am I worried about running out of food? We lost a little ground during the afternoon drift but the current has changed direction so at least we are kind of getting pushed towards our destination and not directly away from it. Steve did an engine check and discovered the raw water pump was leaking badly. Decided to remove it and replace the seals. Thankfully it was glassy and all the squalls seem to skirt us. He had it back in place at 1700 as we caught the edge of a rain squall, a chance to clean the cockpit and have a fresh shower under a drip off the bimini, a nice way to cool off. No dinner again, not even snacks. Woke up ravenous at 2200, tea and oatmeal. I barely got any sleep during my off time and struggled all through my wake to stay awake. Although the seas are calm a gentle swell is broadsiding us just enough to make the bunk uncomfortable and little things in the cupboard rolling around. I think we should cancel Xmas.

Dec 13, Day 6: At change of watch 0200 a BIG black squall hung on the horizon. I was happy to let Steve deal with it as there was no doubt there would be serious winds. An hour later he was shortening sail as rain pelleted the cabin top. We only had the headsail up and saw 25-30 kts winds so no big deal. Rain stayed until 0700. Hot breakie and tea all round. Another squall approached on my morning watch but I managed to skirt around it and ride the push of wind at the edge, shortening sail and chugging along at 6-7 kts. All in the right direction! Wind died altogether at noon. We motored for a couple hours but were both exhausted by the noise. Light winds for my afternoon watch and I had to douse sails and drift. A dirty swell kept us rolling. Seas smoothed by dinner and we spent the whole night adrift- we just can't motor anymore. 20NM to 2°N. Suffering mild headaches and heartburn. Averaging 5-6 hours of sleep per day but I don't think I have logged more than 1.5 hours at a time, just can't seem to find a rhythm. Full moon tonight, bright enough to write by! Dolphins swam by as we were drifting at 0100.

Dec 14, Day 7: Just after 0400 we were rolling so badly I couldn't stay in bed. Told Steve I would rather listen to the engine than fall out of bed. Put in some earplugs and got two solid hours of sleep, magic! Motored all morning in glassy seas. Woke for lunch feeling much better, no headache. All that was undone when we came to a sputtering halt at 1330. Out of fuel. Steve unearthed the lazarette and transferred 55

litres of diesel into the tank. Then he had to bleed the fuel system, so the cabin smelt of diesel. So much for my headache free day. So that's officially it for motoring. And thank fuck! We've done 40hours, never before have we run the engine this much on passage. I feel like a cheat. Light winds forecast for the next two days, no way we can pull off 900NM in a week to make it to Palau for Xmas at this rate. Missing family today. I am being such a grumpy Gus, no patience with this fickle wind. Our last fan broke today...that's ok we are just drifting near the equator, what do we need a fan for?

Dec 15, Day 8: We managed to sail all night, but the winds lightened up after midnight and things got wet before day break. Morning watch was a boisterous ride. Grey all day, just impenetrable walls of grey. Winds NW-NE 10-30kts. We have been able to sail a more westerly course between 275-300°. Close hauled all morning, of course, but making 6-7kts. The winds were fickle for Steve, abruptly changing direction and turning off as if someone flicked a switch. I made a hot lunch of "Steve Famous Gumbo" from cans and leftovers in the fridge. Rains increased during the afternoon and I sat my watch reefing and furling, seeing the boat speed eek to 8kts. Soaked to the bone and cold by 1800 we were both happy to be putting some miles under the keel. Winds continued through Steve's evening watch and the rains finally stopped, brighter skies and moon light for me! Cold still, foulies and fleece on tonight despite being at 3°N. Hoping we have made enough ground north to find the NE trades and progress to Palau can be made in earnest. Dahl for dinner. Port window leaking onto the bunk. Everything feeling clammy after a week of hot bunking. No shower today. Fresh veggies finished.

Dec 16, Day 9: Not a great day. I took advantage of the relative calm and warmer temps this morning and had a leisurely bath in the cockpit while Steve snored below getting some much needed rest. Feeling inspired by my new cleanliness I tidied the boat, dried the foulies and towels outside and changed the sheets. Things were even quiet enough that I cooked a bannock as there had been comments from the crew about our lack of bread. But by the time I laid down for a few hours rest at 1100 the hatches were dogged and the air had a warm, fetid feeling to it again. The ride was not comfortable. Struggled all day with squalls that stole our wind and left large, confused seas. After dinner thing settled and boat speed went up to 5kts, although now on a course of 330°T, much more north than we'd like. 800NM to go.

Dec 17, Day 10: This morning wasn't quite as nice with NW winds for the last few days and 180° tacks due to current, not to mention squalls and lack of sleep we had a little shout out. This afternoon the skies lifted and there was a hint of sun and blue skies. The winds finally settled and clocked, putting us and the boat on a better track. We both a little rest. Now YEHAHAW! After a small squall blew through I thought the wind failed. Still making way at 1.6kts it wasn't a total loss. Then I heard a ruffle and suddenly we had 15kts and were chugging along at 7-8kts! I usually shorten sail, especially at night, but with stars overhead and a resolve to be braver at the helm I let her go. A few tweaks and she felt good, fast and happy, the decks bare wet. Best of all we were sailing directly for Palau!! I had the brilliant idea to put out wee little tree up today using one of the suction fan mounts. It worked brilliantly, and made the cabin look sparklie and festive. Which put me in a much better frame of mind for the "blessed" day, even if we have to hove-to and cook Xmas dinner. Raided ditch bag for PB.

Dec 18, Day 11: One of those days that reminds you what being a sailor is really about. Conditions deteriorated after 0200 change of watch. I managed to get a couple hours sleep before being woken by bangs and crashes, the swell had built with the increasing winds. Then a sudden wind shift and we were running with the wind and swell at 6-7kts and then some. Tucked in a reef at 0930 and calmed the boat a little. During Steve's morning watch the skies started looking nasty. With the boom paid out and increasing winds and seas the boat was feeling very uneven the boom being pinned to leeward on the roll. With the winds aft of beam we decided to drop the main. Winds 30-35kts so we hove-to on the headsail to make the job easier. The motion finally settled but the winds stayed strong. Things seemed to ease a bit on my afternoon watch but the skies still low and grey and angry looking. Had to semi unearth the vee berth as the sewing machine as banging around inside its box. I got an hour or so of sleep after dinner but very rolly.

Dec 19, Day 12: Urgh...I camped out on the floor last night. You can't fall off the floor. I got at least 1/5 hours before the roll, clang, Bang, POP! Violently awoke me when the wind died and the messy swell kept the boat at anything but a standstill. Rained most of the morning and both are wet through again. Finally decided to pole out the headsail to keep it from popping and make the boat liveable again. After a hot lunch I spent a few more hours in the drizzle. I had a much needed shower wedged

against the mast, my hair was so salty and sticky and gross. On Steve's morning watch the centre seam of the bimini blew so we have no protection from the weather. Wind died at 1600 and we decided to motor just for a few hours to charge batts and make water, haven't seen enough sun to keep batteries charged. At 1730 we killed the engine, raised the main and doused the pole, now able to carry course, a gentler swell made it quite comfortable. Veggie Chilli and toast points for dinner. Sleep tonight was good but having lots of dreams of home- starting to feel really home sick for the holidays – nothing will please me. Everything is starting to ache; the bunk is like a rock. Maybe we can just postpone Xmas a few days until we get into port?

Dec 19, Day 12: A few more squalls between 0100-0600 but short lived. Been making fantastic time, finally. Then a worrisome message from the weather router about an "intensifying system to the SE of us". All day we wait for the offices to open, finally at 2200 we get a call. The system is now E/NE of us and fast moving to the NW. 50kts squalls or more in the system. We divert due west until things clear. The next 24-48 we will be cautious as it is predicted to deepen into a typhoon. A straining to see through the darkness, looking for a hint on the horizon, a smudge, a dark patch. Every gust puts me in edge, I am checking and rechecking our position, speed, course and radar every 15mins. I doubt my senses and my good sense. The new course is a sail smacker and we've had quite enough of that on this trip! The horizon has been heavy for days, purplish and dark like I've never seen before, no doubt we've been skirting this system for the last 3 days, hence the squalls. Serious salt blisters in on bum, possibly infected.

Dec 20, Day 13: No change in situation for most of the day. We were able to hold a decent westerly course for most of the morning but by afternoon the winds seemed to back and we were close hauled and heading 220°T. We decided to tack @1700 not wanting to be pushed too far south. Our reciprocal course was due north but we had 40Nm between us and the system. Somehow we were bashing into 1.5M seas so Steve decided to put up the staysail, which eased the motion of the boat somewhat and upped our speed. But still that northern horizon had a horrible inky, steely, cold grey hue to it. It was just angry looking and I wasn't sure I wanted to be pointing right at it. So we tacked south again, doused the headsail to reduce boat speed and inched along at 2kts. No point in making our way too far south when we will have to sail right back north to get to Palau. Winds backing after 0000. Lightning on the

northern horizon but skies above clear with stars. This new development definitely squashes all hopes of making Palau for Xmas now- still 375NM to go. The whole day was rather taxing and I was not a great mood this afternoon. Steve reminded me that there isn't any room on board for misery, so I slept it off and decided to be better humoured about things, Xmas and sea and cyclones included.

Dec 22, Day 15: I woke to a bright dawn, clear blue skies and fluffy clouds lining the horizon. The foreboding, violent gray to the north has finally lifted after nearly a week. Our decision to shorten sail and head south paid off. Within one watch we gained all the ground back and encouragingly made 4kts or so, hampered still by contrary current. We expected lighter winds after the low passed so we are happy to meander along. We had the predictable lunchtime lull but under sunny skies. A tanker sat off our starboard side all morning and most of the afternoon, apparently unmoving. A quiet afternoon but on course, watching heavy clouds on the northern horizon. Roughly sewed the bimini back together so at least we have a little shade and rain protection. Dinner was mashed potatoes, sauerkraut and hot dogs. I feel like hot dogs are the featured meat product of this trip. I brought some garland out and strung it up under the dodger. Xmas tunes and fruitcake rum for sundowners. Lots of plastic floating by today, lots of boils of fish and Steve spotted whales at sunset, standing on the combing and declaring "There she blows!" I was treated to a midnight dolphin show as we sailed downwind at 6kts. Bright phosphorescence and a late moon rise- what a spectacular night!!

Dec 23, Day 16: An OK day, and looking very hopefully for an Xmas morning arrival in Palau. Winds good all afternoon, sailing on course and making good time. As we were enjoying a glass of hooch at 1700 Steve decided that the clouds and darkness in the SW sky look menacing. We tucked in a reef before dinner and dark. Hove-to again in fairly big seas and I moved forward to do the familiar task of reefing at the mast. As I put the last crank on the winch there was a SNAP! The cheek block for the reef line broke. We had to reroute the line through the bale on the boom and start again. Problem solved but none too soon as that grey horizon was now moving toward us. Furled the headsail, put away diner and suited up. We got 30-35kts with Steve on the wheel running downwind at 8kts. It was short lived and within 30mins the rains set in and the winds eased. Steve has yet to have a night watch without rain. He fought shift conditions and crappy seas all night, taking and gybing several times

to keep us moving. Not much sleep for me as every course change was a bunk change and I lay listening to winches grind and Steve swear. Winds all but died at day break, killing any hopes of making port for Xmas and all holiday spirit on board.

Dec 24, Day 17: What a miserable day. At 0600 with only 193NM to port someone flicked a switch. Overcast skies, no winds and a confused sea. We are both exhausted. All sails down and drifting. Boat rolling 15-30° each way, clanging and banging everywhere. No one slept during the day as it was prone on your back trying not to roll off the bunk. I feel into slump in the afternoon while trying to keep the boat at a favourable angle to the swell. I am worn down. Missing home. Dinner was eaten in silence. Couldn't be bothered to shower this afternoon and went to sleep on the floor at 1800 to try and get a little sleep. All I wanted was to sleep and forget that we are stuck at sea on Xmas. Steve found a bit of wind and raised the mainsail but it failed to raise my spirits. I have been miserable and sullen all day. I just want this trip to be over. I want to eat with two utensils off a plate not out of a plastic box. I want it all to stop.

Dec 25, Day 18: Happy Xmas! I don't think it could have been a better day. Woke to blue skies and lite winds on the beam with the boat quietly making way towards Palau. Although I woke in the same black funk that I went to bed in I didn't last long, Steve wouldn't let it. He surprised me with presents on the tree, small cards with hand drawn/written notes about all my gifts I will get when ashore; a haircut, a spa day, a manicure, beer & hamburger date, and the best one "ALL MY LOVE, always". I was in tears, he is such a thoughtful, good man and he loves me. Breakfast was hot polenta with the last few pieces of bacon. After he went down to sleep I slipped a little fruitcake rum into my morning tea and had a hot bath in the cockpit, put on a dress and earrings. I made a cinnamon & fruit bannock for morning tea. We have a lovely lunch of nibbles in the sunshine, listening to Xmas music as we sailed along under clear skies. We toasted with the last two beers that we kept for the special day. Steve called home in the afternoon and I enjoyed a few quiet hours while he slept. We had the Chicken Curry Cassoulet for dinner, as well as an olive and sundried tomatoes and herb bread. DELISH! Even if it was eaten out of a plastic box. We enjoyed a rum at sunset together. It was a cloudless, starry night – perhaps the finest of the whole trip. I saw the big dipper for the first time in years.

Dec 26, Day 19: Another Beautiful day. Steve has a theory about our passages; he figures that no matter how crappy they are things always sun and winds co-operate on the last day or two so a shitty passage ends on a positive note. I swear this is why we always go back to sea. Because we were becalm for 12 hours on the 24th we are now 12 hours behind and will arrive at the reef pass in the dark. We decided to heave-to, not a totally successful manoeuvre, and one that I would prefer not to do again. It is supposed to ease the motion of the boat, but it was a horribly rolly night. We made 2kts with the current and both sat watches, looking as we neared land and gybing when necessary. Savouring the last few hours at sea, alone if not all that quiet. Squalls though the night, Steve is wet again.

Dec 27, Day 20: We were about 11NM from our approach waypoint when we tacked back onto our course at sunrise this morning. Steve, having not slept much at all, took advantage of the quiet for a few hours and I took advantage of the settled weather and prospect of landfall and made a celebratory pot of coffee! My first in almost a month! It was a beautiful, sunny morning in the cockpit with a bit of sea running but good winds. I tuned into the local radio station and watched the fearless tropic birds dive bomb schools of fish. Around 0900 a pod of dolphins bounded out of the waves before us and escorted us in. They stayed for almost half an hour, happily playing in the surf. We easily navigated the fringe reef and the shoals and were able to sail directly up to the channel in the reef, quite obvious and full of dive boats heading out on morning tours. Motored into town and easily made our way to the dock and tied up alongside, careful to avoid some nasty oysters. Clearance was quick and painless; we will find the offices in the morning and settle the bills. Got settled on a mooring and decided to go ashore for happy hour beers. It's a busy spot, we were happy to go home to Kate and relax, together.