

# THE CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF S/V KAMAL

A journey by Greg and Lauren Henry aboard their Pearson 365

*Excerpted from e-mail correspondence between Randy Powers and Lauren Henry in December, 2003. It is presented on this website with the permission of Greg and Lauren Henry.*

## **PART III**

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**Tahiti • Niue • Tonga • Fiji • New • Caledonia**

### **Tahiti 7/01**

(Written by Gregs 16 yr. Old sister Elizabeth)

Dear all,

I never expected to go to Tahiti nor did I ever really want to. It was a place I had heard about in vacation commercials but I had no idea where it was or how long it would take to get there. I found out - it took 15 hours to fly and over 20 hours of traveling from our home in New Jersey. While we (my mom, dad and I together with Lauren and Greg) were there, we managed to see four out of the six main islands of French Polynesia. Tahiti, Moorea and Bora Bora are the most visited islands as shown by the comings and goings of the cruise ships. Huahine is more remote and was my favorite as well as my moms and Laurens.

All of the islands in the area are atolls surrounded by reefs hundreds of yards off shore. All the reefs, however, have natural openings that allow boats to come and go and also create great snorkeling areas. Tahiti has many waterfalls. The day after arriving we were able to see a beautiful example after only a five-minute walk. Later in the day as we drove around the island, we noticed at least half a dozen more from the road looking back at cliffs in the area. Another amazing sight (for Greg and Lauren) was the huge supermarket (think Cosco or Wal-Mart) in Papeete. This was a treat for Lauren because she had not seen such a supermarch in quite a while. Compared to the other islands we visited, Papeete was obviously more industrialized and city-like. In Tahiti, we met some of Greg and Laurens boating friends who are very enjoyable. Jeanette and Don, off of White Rose, seem to have the most experience and are heading home to Australia to their kids and grandchildren. Gandalf from Gloucester, MA with Jay and Carol, is following the same basic route as Kamal (I am assuming if all goes well, they will be together for most of the trip). The last of the yachties are Lisa and Mike in Jemanna. They are Greg and Laurens age and are sailing to their home port in New Zealand. The group seems to enjoy the others company, have interesting stories and experiences to tell and look out for one

another while they are at sea. They also share one similarity: making fun of how Greg sails.

Moorea, the second stop of our trip is about four hours from Tahiti. We were able to sail part of the way and I managed to sleep, eat and read the whole way. The trees and vegetation on Moorea are more lush than on Tahiti. Greg also managed to have a little bit of fun when going through the reef in Moorea. He climbed the mast and sat there for the first time during the trip checking out the deep and shallow water locations. Once on land, we realized the island is much smaller because the so-called town couldn't be found until we realized we had already passed it. Unlike Tahiti there are smaller food stores, less cars and more of a deserted feeling. Greg and I did try snorkeling off the reef once. I earned the privilege of snorkeling in the lagoon by scrubbing one side of the boat. Greg and I were in water 15 to 20 feet deep. We saw many fish but it was very hard to snorkel for long because the current and the depth made us very tired! Also once we were in the water, we found the reef suddenly drops off like a cliff to hundreds of feet deep.

We sailed for about 15 hours overnight to Huahine, the third island we visited. Greg, Lauren and I anchored just off the over-water bungalow where my dad, mom and myself would be staying. It was very nice to look out at the horizon from the deck of the bungalow and see Kamal. Huahine seemed much more remote because there were no more than five hotels on the island, and we had to take a boat to get to our hotel. It was very serene and peaceful. One day Greg, my parents and I went for a boat (dinghy) ride to find a place to snorkel and we found a small island in a bay. There was no one living on the island so we pulled the dinghy ashore and snorkeled. It was beautiful to see all the different fish with their vibrant colors. We also were able to snorkel another day at a different hotel after riding a car ride around the island. The coral was amazing as was the variety of fish. Both these areas had relatively shallow snorkeling which was nice because you were so close to the fish.

Our last experience with fish was on the island of Bora Bora. It is the exact opposite of Huahine with more than a dozen hotels and many restaurants where we actually HAD to make reservations to get a meal! We did a tourist snorkeling boat ride on our only full day in Bora Bora. By arrangement, we were able to see fish, sharks and rays being fed in the ocean. Later on we swam with sharks, fish and different kinds of rays in a safe enclosed area. They had different tanks which contained different sea life which was fun to see. The last day we left Greg and Lauren on a dock after a teary departure as we rode a ferry to the airport. Overall the trip was great, especially the location and of course the chance to be with Greg and Lauren.

## Niue 8/01

Dear all,

I'm writing from Niue, a small island just east of Tonga. Niue is like a coral shelf lifted out of the water leaving dramatic cliffs split by rugged chasms and caves. The coastline is so unforgiving dinghies can't land ashore but must be hoisted onto a jetty by crane! The surrounding waters are incredibly clear, though, because rainwater is filtered through the coral; we're moored in 109 feet of water and can see the bottom. The only drawback is that the anchorage is completely exposed to the west, so if the normal SE trades swing around from that direction boats are forced to leave or suffer the bumpy consequences. I want to thank Elizabeth for her wonderful letter. It was great to see the visit from her point of view and she has some interesting observations. One thing needs to be clarified, however: our friends don't make fun of Greg's sailing abilities per se, they poke fun because we tend to run the motor when they (purists) will still be bobbing along at 3 knots. We don't like to sit around sailing for sailing's sake. We like to get places. And fair's fair, Elizabeth - I notice you didn't mention how they made fun of you for falling asleep on your watch! (If you dish it out, be prepared to take it too!) Since Elizabeth thoughtfully covered the Society Islands, I'd like to answer some of those pressing questions you have, or at least the ones which seem to keep cropping up. So, a little Q&A:

*Where do you get enough books to read?*

Before we left Greg graciously set aside one locker (after intense negotiations!) to house my books. This was augmented later by a shelf, and then a bag stuffed in the forward berth. But those only last so long. Luckily there are plenty of other boats out here in the same predicament so book swaps are arranged, either onshore so they are available to everyone in the anchorage, or between individual yachts. I have to admit, though, it's getting more and more difficult to find good stuff to read and my literary diet includes an inordinate number of mysteries. I'll know it's gotten truly desperate the first time I reach for one of the Danielle Steele novels which are invariably in the mix

*What do you do all day?*

For us, time is divided into segments - "at sea" and "at anchor". I won't bother talking about passages; there's only so much one can do out there. "At anchor" begins once we've dropped the hook. It generally takes us until the end of the next day to get the boat cleaned up and for us to recover (i.e. get a good night's sleep). Sails have to be folded and put away, lines coiled, instruments and boat washed, etc. You have to check in with the

authorities which can take anywhere from a few minutes to a whole day. (Rule of thumb: the smaller the country the greater the bureaucracy). There's customs, port captain, immigration, quarantine officer, agriculture in some places you have to surrender your fresh fruit and veggies (I NEVER give up my tomatoes, eating them right then if I have to!) and once in a while you'll get boarded for inspection. By now a day or two has come and gone and we're ready to head ashore to replenish the food locker. Not so fast! First the dinghy has to be pulled out and inflated. Then you have to find a place to land that is devoid of sharp, pointy things and wayward children. (I'm not kidding - a group of them unintentionally destroyed our friend's outboard by running it while it sat on the beach). Not all places have nice docks to tie up to, so getting ashore can be an adventure in itself. Once there you need to; 1. Find the nearest/cheapest/best-stocked store, and 2. Figure out how to get there and back with all your stuff. Cruisers walk a lot. Shopping can take a whole day, but luckily there's a steep learning curve so the longer you stay in a place the savvier you get (which also makes it harder to pry yourself away). A part of every day is taken up by some task on the boat, be it laundry (two bucket and a plunger!), baking bread, doing an oil change or something else off the seemingly endless "to do" list. Someone, obviously a cruiser, once observed that cruising is just working on your boat in exotic places. But we try to reward ourselves in the afternoons with snorkeling, biking, hiking or sightseeing. Otherwise, what would be the point? I'm trying to convey that cruising is much different from living ashore or even living in a boat in a permanent slip. Everything takes an inordinate amount of time, effort, planning and above all, patience. It can often be frustrating, but the rewards help you forget the tough parts.

### *Who steers?*

Actually, either Clyde or Ursula; they are the autopilot and wind vane, respectively. Greg and I rarely ever steer by hand, unless neither of them can cope with the conditions or if we're entering or leaving port. It is tiring and tedious and can make life miserable. So every day we're out there, we make sure to tell them what a great job they're doing and hope they keep on doing it.

### *How do the Pacific islands differ from one another?*

If you asked Don and Jeannette on White Rose, who are itching to get home to Australia, they'd tell you one island is just like another, which is why they stop at only half the number of places we do. Although I don't agree, they're not completely wrong. The islands we have visited could be grouped as "Eastern Polynesia" and share both history and ancestors. Although the different groups had different customs (for example, cannibalism was a practice isolated to the Marquises and Tuomotus) their societies

were remarkably similar. They developed rigid class systems with complicated taboos regulating everyday life, but what carried over to modern times are communal traditions that bound them together. For example, in the Pacific wealth is based on how much you give away rather than how much you accumulate. Gifts must be reciprocated (hence the absence of tipping) and hospitality must never be denied to someone in need. We've been the recipients of many acts of kindness by locals that seem extraordinary to us, but are simply a part of their culture. Some of the major differences you'll see today result from the occupation of these areas by western powers. This is most evident in the French territories, where Gallic culture has infiltrated local daily life to a great degree. In schools, the curriculum is based on the French system; until recently teaching local history and language was prohibited. Ironically, as a result of this and the earlier repression of local culture at the hands of foreign missionaries, there has been a renewed interest in resurrecting ancient traditions. Everywhere you go you can see troupes performing traditional dancing and singing, and in the Societies people are once again adorning themselves with elaborate tattoos whose designs go back centuries.

Of course, there are other differences, from geography (some islands are volcanic with towering spires rising into the sky, others are low-lying coral atolls with more to see underwater than above) to climate to language. In the Marqueses women wear necklaces made out of colorful seeds and nuts, in the Tuomotus visitors are given necklaces strung with small shells, while in the western reaches both women and men wear flower leis. Many of the unique aspects of each island are derived from their natural resources. The islands of the eastern Pacific do have a cultural cohesiveness but after spending some time here, you do develop a sense of their differences.

And finally, for those of you keep asking for information about the performance of the Pearson 365, we've done some calculations. In a little over 10,000 miles sailed we've averaged 136 miles per day, or 5.6 knots, including motoring through calms. (To conserve fuel we motor at 4.5 knots.) So far our best day made 182 nm en route to the Marqueses.

Next stop: Tonga!

## **Tonga/Fiji 9/01**

Dear all,

We sent our last update from Niue, probably before we'd actually had a chance to see very much. We loved it there. We explored deep chasms, rocky inlets and the forest on foot; Greg dove to 90

feet to explore underwater caves, and a mother humpback whale and her days-old calf visited almost every day and cavorted just 15 feet off the side of the boat. We sampled taro, breadfruit, unga (coconut crabs) and fruit bats. (yuck). Most of the cruisers who stopped agreed Niue was worth going out of the way for. Many who planned to stay for just a few days were still there two weeks later, some fighting fierce weather out of the north-west in order to prolong their stay.

Our next stop was the Vavau group in Tonga due west of Niue. It reminded us of the coast of Maine, or how Maine might look if transplanted to the tropics. Its a great place to charter, because the maze of islands provides calm water and plenty of safe, protected anchorages. The Moorings charter company issues a guide to the area and everyone refers to the various anchorages by their Moorings-designated number, including the locals! Its a good place to get away from it all, but once you've seen what there is walk around Neiafu, the only town, which is run-down and disheveled-looking, visit Mariners Cave, where a deep breath and dive under a shelf of rock brings you to a cave where the surge going in and out makes fog suddenly appear and disappear while simultaneously causing your ears to pop, row into Swallows Cave where hitting the wall with an oar creates a bell-like gong, look for shells on #28 and snorkel along the reef at #16 there's not much left. We attended a few yachtie bbqs and walked along the beaches. While visiting one of the villages we met Naida, a local woman who hosts a weekly traditional Tongan feast. We decided to attend the next one and became friendly with her and her husband Tali. Later that week Greg, along with the village minister, went octopus-hunting with Tali, and we were invited to the upcoming feast as their guests. That day I spent the afternoon in their house helping prepare the meal. I mashed ground cassava and water with my hands and cut fruit. I also trimmed stems off banana leaves which were then used to create small packages for food (tied closed with the removed stems) then placed in an umu, an underground oven, to cook. Naida, concerned I might starve before dinner, kept trying to feed me banana, clam, octopus. I told her I had to save my appetite but shed just laugh and put more food in front of me.

We left after two weeks and a farewell meal with Jemmana, who we won't see again until our visit to New Zealand. Ahead of us was a four day passage to Fiji. We passed through a windy, rainy weather front one hour out of Tonga but otherwise everything was looking good until we tried to engage Clyde, the autopilot. He only wanted to steer to starboard, effectively turning in circles. I think I jinxed us by boasting about how reliable he is. So instead, we had to use the windvane and manually correct our course by hand every minute or so because we didn't have enough wind for the vane to work effectively. It was tedious, but not as bad as if we'd been forced to steer completely by hand.

We were relieved to arrive in Fiji but spent all day tied up to the commercial wharf getting cleared in. It was raining, which it does at least once a day here. We couldn't believe how wet the rainy season is until we discovered that the rainy season doesn't start until November. On the wharf, we were positioned behind three commercial tuna fishing boats out of Taiwan and the crew invited us aboard for dinner that night. We anchored and got the dinghy ready in record time with a few minutes to spare for quick showers. The boats spend five months at a time at sea and one week in port unloading and tending to repairs so it was quite the party atmosphere on board. Communication was difficult but didn't make much of a difference. We had a wonderful meal and a great time.

Suva itself is everything we've been missing supermarkets, shops, restaurants, museums and movie theatres. There are practically no tourists, (air prices have been slashed and 12,000 tourists are expected to arrive in the next month) so there are incredible deals all around town. But the flip side are the hungry pickpocket and scam artists who are working overtime. The most common trap is giving your name to a friendly man you've met on the street who promptly carves it into a wooden sword and demands payment for your "memento". Our South African friends fell prey to that one. Cruisers are particularly vulnerable because they've been isolated for so long and have let their guard down. But urban-bred instincts return naturally and help you appreciate the city for what it is without falling victim to its dangers.

In the aftermath of the recent coup, an interim government was established backed by the military. All the members of the new government are indigenous-Fijians with no representation for the Fiji Indians who make up just under half the population. (They used to be a majority, but many fled after the last coup in 1987) Everyday life continues with little outward appearance of strife. Occasionally you'll see a soldier, or roadblock, and a 10:00pm curfew remains in effect. However an undercurrent of fear and tension remains as many Indian businesses were looted and destroyed, and the peace is a tenuous one. Everyone we speak with acknowledges that the problems are complex and will not be solved by refusing to allow Indo-Fijians in positions of power.

After absorbing as much city life as we can, we'll work our way to Lautoka, on the western coast of Viti Levu. We've ordered a tiller pilot to replace Clyde and once that arrives we'll head for New Caledonia.

We'd like to thank everyone once again for leaving messages on the guest book. It makes us feel connected to all of you back home and gives us something to look forward to. Our only request is that you fill in the date when you're writing otherwise we have

no sense of perspective. And, for those of you who want to keep in touch the old-fashioned way, we finally have an address where mail can be sent while were in Australia, from now until April-ish 2001:

Greg and Lauren Henry  
S/Y Kamal  
Mooloolaba Yacht Club Ltd.  
P.O. Box 90  
Mooloolaba, Queensland 4557  
Australia

### **Fiji/New Caledonia 10/01**

Dear all,

We ended up staying over one month in Fiji, much longer than we thought we would. Unfortunately not much of that time was spent traveling, since we were waiting for our replacement autopilot. (In order to actually take possession it was necessary to be on hand to negotiate the bureaucratic maze typical of small island nations). The package eventually arrived three weeks after placing the order. In the meantime we visited several spots on the main island of Viti Levu and a secluded resort called Musket Cove located on one of the outer islands. The resort is owned by a former cruiser, so all the boats were treated like regular guests. It felt like we were the ones on vacation!

Back on the mainland we made a last-minute decision to haul and paint the boat. Not only was the cost right, but they have tin-based paint which is unavailable in most places and is lethal to all creepy, crawly, slimy things that like to accumulate on the bottom of the boat. (We've spent a lot of time diving under the hull scraping off the sea life). We sailed about 1 kt faster with our new shiny bottom! In the end it was worth it, but we suffered those five days on the hard; the mosquitoes were particularly vicious, and despite the heat we found ourselves forced to close every opening in the boat in an effort to keep them out. It was a relief to get back in the water.

Bad weather kept us in Fiji several days after we'd planned on leaving but we were rewarded with an uneventful five day trip to New Caledonia. The local authorities want boats going directly to Noumea, New Caledonia's capital, to check in, so we were unable to stop at the fringing Loyalty Islands. Noumea is a small city but has a more cosmopolitan feel than the other Pacific cities we've visited. New Caledonia is occupied by the French, and their influence is unmistakable. Indigenous Kanaks live in the city and



outlying areas, but residents of Noumea are predominantly mainland French or their descendants. When we arrived the harbor was full to overflowing with more than 300 boats there to enjoy the 8th annual Pacific Arts Festival. The festival is held every four years in a different country, and the timing and location of this year's choice coincided serendipitously with the cruiser's migration to Australia. Groups have arrived from all across the Pacific to participate and we've particularly enjoyed seeing performances by those islands we missed along the way.

The festival is a wonderful opportunity for different nations to come together and display their traditional culture through crafts, theater, dance and singing, but unfortunately this year's festival has not risen to the occasion. Hundreds of people expended a lot of time, effort, and money to attend, but apparently four years was not long enough for this year's sponsors to prepare because the festival has proven to be an organizational nightmare. Schedules change constantly, events are cancelled, venues change, all without warning or notice. The whole thing is an adventure, but the performers have managed to remain enthusiastic despite the difficulties and they're the reason we're all here anyway.

Once again we're being detained by bad weather. While we wait all the boats headed to Australia or New Zealand are going through their stores looking for foods which are prohibited from entry. As a result of their geographic isolation both countries have remained free from many of the pests and diseases (rabies, for example) which plague other countries. And they want it to stay that way. Because of this there are strict guidelines regulating what can and cannot be brought in. The list is long and somewhat ambiguous, and there's a frenzy of swapping and donating among the boats in the anchorage.

With the extra time, and to avoid a long and difficult beat back to visit the islands we missed on the way in, we took a high speed ferry to the Isle of Pines just off the southern coast of New Caledonia. It's a small island with jutting pine trees, clear blue water and beaches of white sand so fine it feels like talc. We picked a beautiful day to explore the prison ruins, eat lunch at a local hotel and laze on the beach.

November first marks the one year anniversary of our departure. It seems incredible that we've come so far in that space of time. We're looking forward to the next chapter of our journey, closing our time in the South Pacific and beginning with our arrival in Oz.