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How quickly time flies. Already the Southampton Boat Show is fast approaching, after which there is all too little of the season here in the U.K. in which to enjoy sailing to the full. Having said which, there are some splendid days in October, but the evenings are short and the temperature drops rather quickly when the sun goes down. Oh well! We can always look forward to doing all those jobs both on the boat ashore and in the garden. They will be very appreciative of a good start!!

The Committee met last week and were unhappy to have to discuss finances. With the ever-increasing cost of postage and production of the Newsletter, Register etc. it seems that we have held the annual subscription down for too long. If we are to maintain the Newsletter in its current form and frequency, it seems the annual subscription rate must be raised to £25. On the basis of 10 copies per year. The committee feels it would be very sad to cut this to merely once a quarter. Do let me know how you feel and if you can give any suggestions or advice for its improvements.

We should like to be able to include Home Ports or sailing areas in future editions of the Register so that members may contact one another when perhaps arranging an impromptu barbecue or similar. Will you please fill me in on these? To help cover the cost of printing these, it is proposed that we sell advertising space therein. Do you know anyone who might take up advertising space at, say £50 per A5 page or £30 for a half page? We do need your help to keep YOUR Association afloat!

Having written in a rather low mood, I do hope I have not set the tone of your day. I feel sure the second chapter of Echo's homeward journey and a further chapter from Lucien Contesse will cheer things up again. Pinkle Purr is fast coming to the end of her epic journey which has been a great achievement.

"ECHO"

CONTINUES HOMEWARD

By Martin & Bunny MINTER-KEMP

Two months later we returned to find all well and the grape harvest in full swing. After suitable liquid farewells, we set off along the Canal due Rhone a Sete which has been widened and deepened in attempt to lure back commercial traffic – with little apparent success to date. We passed Sete, pausing to watch maritime jousting on boats fitted with cantilevered platforms from which young braves attempt to dislodge their opponents with lance and shield, encouraged by partisan crowds on the quays. Lots of noise and everyone seems to end up in the water. Sete is the beginning of the Etang de Thau, an inland sea complete with flamingos in large numbers. The start of the canal du Midi lies at the western end 17 kms. from Sete and marked by a lighthouse. Entering the Midi the countryside enfolded us and the Mediterranean suddenly seemed totally remote.

Up until now the waterways had been lock-free and our first one on the Midi reminded us of what was to come. It was still early in the season but we shared the locks with two or more yachts or holiday mini-peniches. As we travelled in company towards Agde, a camaraderie evolved between boats with mooring lines being taken for

each other and fenders strategically positioned. Agde was reached at dusk and the locks and their keepers were most definitely not working – it being Saturday night. Sunday morning however produced a keeper for the famous circular lock and we passed through, waving to the numerous British boats, which form a little colony along the canal bank. “Why bother to move when it is so pleasant here” seems to be a very sensible philosophy much in vogue along the canal.

This account has so far made little mention of “*Echo*” and her virtues (and vices). Our previous transit of the French canals with a 13 ton motor-sailer was sheer hard work, especially in the locks. A Catalac at four tons displacement however is a joy both to handle and cope with the locks – especially going uphill. “*Echo*” remained docile and unflustered by the torrents of water thrown at her, while other deeper draught yachts in the lock were straining their warps, and crews, sometimes severely. She could nestle up to canal banks, allowing crew to step ashore with dignity and without a gangplank. On the debit side, entering the hulls tended to cause headaches until one remembered to duck – but did provide a little gentle exercise.

Progress west continued with Carcassonne as our destination where my wife Bunny would fly out to rejoin “*Echo*”. We went up the eight lock ladder at Beziers and through the oldest(?) canal tunnel ever at Malpas. The canal twisted and turned around the hill contours, climbing ever higher with glimpses of the Pyrenees away to the South. Much canal-side planting is being carried out since the Canal du Midi is now a World Heritage Monument with funding to match. We stopped counting after the 1000th!

The ancient city of Carcassonne finally appeared. South of the canal looking as awesome as it did in films like “*The Gun*”. We moored where we could see the floodlit ramparts at night before moving into the Port de Plaisance in front of the convenient but noisy Gare. (French trains, even the goods variety, seem to go at break-neck speed, day and night – but then they are always on time) The next five days were spent spring-cleaning and polishing before Bunny’s arrival. The intricacies of the lavateria were mastered and everything washable was – put through it. All this activity was observed with amusement by bachelor/grass widower skippers along the canal bank with no such deadlines to meet. Finally all was ready and Ryanair deposited Bunny at the airport with no formalities at all. A celebration dinner in the Old City and the crew was once more complete. The temptation to linger in Carcassonne and savour life on the Midi in slow motion was almost overwhelming. However, we knew that the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel with its inevitable equinoctial gales were waiting for us at the Atlantic end of the Gironde and we needed to get a move on. It actually took us seventeen days and although we didn’t hang around we still managed to do a decent run each day and also find time to explore our surroundings in the evenings, even occasionally stopping for a leisurely lunch at some irresistible spot.

Knowing that we might not stop again in a large town with shops and a market handy, we victualled the boat with what we thought were enough stores and fresh fruit and vegetables to last at least a week. To wander around a French open air market sampling fruit, cheeses, cuts of saussicon and smoked meats on a warm sunny autumn morning, is to sample a small slice of Heaven. Even with our rusty French and limited knowledge of the produce on sale we were made to feel that each of our small purchases was of the utmost importance to the stallholder. It is wonderful how goodwill and a handshake cuts through language barriers and makes one feel valued and at home.

Working the uphill locks is totally different from dealing with locks on the downhill stretch. On entering the lock one is faced with a towering metal gate with water pouring and spouting out of every crack, flowing powerfully through the lower sluices. The walls of the lock chamber appear to be impressively high damp cliffs, sometimes almost shutting out the daylight. The Midi locks are oval shaped – built that way for strength – and sometimes makes it tricky to come alongside neatly. With these uphill locks it is necessary to put a crewmember ashore before entering the lock so that there is someone up on the lock to take warps. The poor skipper, if he is left alone onboard, has to be nifty about positioning his vessel and then throwing lines up fore and aft and to his crew, before the incoming waters force the boat backwards. The Midi locks aren’t big and three boats of average size – say 30/40 ft.- are all it can accommodate. The trick is not to go too far forward because when the lock keeper opens the main sluices the water pours in at an alarming rate. A little distance between your boat and the lock gate ahead is vital if you are not to be swamped or battered by the incoming torrent. We managed between 15 and 20 locks most days without any problems and enjoyed the challenge enormously.

The joy of travelling across France in late autumn is that we travelled alone most of the time. We went for days sometimes without seeing another boat and where the locks were automatic, without seeing a person. We would stop when we had had enough and just tie up to a tree or its roots to hold us into the bank. Having such a shallow draft and two hulls meant that we could nudge into the bank easily and still keep one hull in deeper water which helped when we came to push off again. It never felt lonely and we just revelled in the peace of the green tranquillity that had become our world. Some mornings we would get underway before it was fully light. The mists rising from the canal and the moisture dripping from the trees lining the banks, which almost met overhead, created a mysterious, timeless atmosphere. We would chug slowly along in the half-light occasionally disturbing herons that were feeding on the edges of the canal and small fish that skipped and flapped through the water at our approach. Once we annoyed a coypu, which swam across in front of the boat. It looked like a large otter. It turned its head as we passed and glared hard at us for disturbing his patch of water.

Most days by lunchtime the sun overhead was really hot and we would look for a shady tree to shelter under for a lunch break. The lock-keepers, rather like the rest of France, lunched any time from midday till 2.00 pm and we had to fit in with their schedule. We found everyone helpful and friendly. At one lock we asked if by any chance there was a mechanic who was familiar with Renault engines in the little town ahead. No-one around knew but later we found out that a phone call to the lock-keeper down the line asked the question and when we arrived the answer and the engineer were waiting. We had no idea all this was going on. Everyone is just concerned to be of help. Throughout the whole journey through France everyone we met was friendly and if needs be, most helpful. We did wonder if we would have had the same treatment in the UK, if the boat were on the other foot.

Within three days of leaving Carcassone we arrived at the “top” near le Segala. This is the highest point of the watershed between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, 90 metres above sea level. It was here, in the mid 17th century that Paul Ricquet, chief architect of the Midi, set about channelling the waters which flow from the mountains to the north to create what we know today as the Canal du Midi and the Canal Lateral a la Garonne – one flowing east into the Mediterranean and the other west into the Atlantic. At this point we tied “Echo” onto a tree stump by the towpath and walked up to the Ricquet obelisk to pay our respects to the man and his vision. Afterwards we entered our first downhill lock aptly named Ecluse de l’Ocean with a gentle drop of 2.60 m. What a difference – gone were the rushing waters pouring in on us from above. That first lock was a gem of peace and quiet with the shade from trees over 200 years old almost covering it. Before entering the lock we had to slow down and wait on a deep green pool of clear water that cannot have changed much since its creation except that the trees have matured and now cast an even deeper shade over the still waters of the canal. A short while later we turned out of the canal and into the Port de Plaisance at Lauragais. After being on our own for the last few days we found ourselves suddenly surrounded by buildings and boats and lots of people. The port consists of two huge man-made lakes and some impressive buildings cantilevered out over the water which housed restaurants, shops and an interesting museum dedicated to Ricquet and his works. The rest is immaculate parkland mown to perfection with little grassy hummocks, rose beds and banks of flowering shrubs. Apart from not seeing any rabbits, we had the distinct feeling we had arrived in *Teletubby land*. We had managed to foul one of our props on a tree root earlier in the day and needed to fix the problem as we looked around for a suitable place to moor up and be able to get at the stern of the boat easily, we found ourselves taken in hand by a couple of splendid characters – a bargee and a man walking his dog and obviously bored. With lots of instructions in a marvellous mixture of French and English, the offending tree root was removed. The barge owner then insisted that we tied up alongside him so that we shouldn’t get into any further trouble. Little did he know what we were capable of!

The next day we decided to bite the bullet and position ourselves at Port Sud in order to tackle Toulouse the following morning. We reckoned that, as it would be Sunday the water traffic through the city might not be too bad. We had managed 45 locks since Carcassone without a mishap but knew that we were coming up to automatic locks and until we reached them, didn’t know how they worked. The build up was slow. Most of the city seemed asleep till around 8.00 am but then it seemed that every able-bodied man, woman and child was either jogging, roller-blading, running, walking or cycling along the tow paths. To our relief they weren’t on the water. We had a busy morning and once we had worked out the automatic system, made good progress. Before we knew it we were through the city and into the Canal Lateral a la Garonne. Yet again, we had the canal to ourselves and began to feel guilty about the huge amounts of water we were moving in and out, each time we went through a lock. We had left the oval locks of the Midi behind and were now working with the oblong shaped variety, much easier to negotiate. The country around us was some of the loveliest that we had yet seen.

In some parts nothing appeared to have been cut back along the banks in a decade or so. It was wild and beautiful. One of our overnight stops was in the Port de Plaisance at Castelsarrasin where we met a splendid Dane who had built himself a garage on the stern of his boat and, with the help of a small hydraulic lift, could drive his car on and off with ease. One learns not to be surprised by anything on French canals.

Progress is such that the French canals are now official tourist areas which attract European funding. The lock keepers are paid officials; boats need papers and have to pay dues. The picturesque houses with their enchanting cottage gardens are being sold out of the system and becoming holiday homes. For us, the dramatic entrance across the Tarn Aquaduct at Moissac is now far less spectacular since at the far end, the loveliest of all the lock houses has changed. We have fond memories of how, when we passed through ten years ago, the lock house and the garden were smothered in masses of bright flowers and climbers and everything was painted and cared for with great love and pride. The old couple who lived there allowed us to tie up in the lock overnight, so that we could enjoy the amazing view of the river and wander in their garden. Next morning they smothered us with fresh fruit and vegetables and wouldn't take a franc. So what, we wonder, is progress? Moissac is a favourite place of ours and so we allowed ourselves some time there. We revisited the magnificent basilica of St. Peter with its vast intricately carved stone entrance and enormous interior walls, hand painted in ochre, blue and pink. We stopped in the square for a table d'hôte lunch which consisted of three courses of excellent food and a large jug of superb local wine, all for under £5 each. That lunch combined with the warm sunshine, forced us to make a late afternoon start. Still sleepy we set off again. Our first obstacle was a swing bridge. Luckily the Madame in charge saw us weaving our way towards her and opened the bridge for us. Our klaxon, which we were feverishly trying to use, wouldn't work. We found out later that it was completely clogged with a spider's web. That spider must have been there since Turkey, the last time we had to use it.

October 1st found us nearing the end of the Canal Lateral. After a breakfast of fresh croissant and coffee we set off from Buzet aiming for the village of Mas d'Agenais where we planned to visit the local church and see for ourselves the Rembrandt picture we had been told about. The church was large, empty and quiet. In the subdued light, hanging on a plain rough stone wall, we found this beautiful, agonisingly sad painting of the Crucifixion. It is not protected or secured in any way that we could see but to look up into the face of the Christ figure is to know that it is indeed the masterpiece it claims to be. We came out into the bright sunlight in the little town square both awed and humbled by such beauty in so simple a setting.

The Garonne and the canal are, at this point, now beginning to run parallel. Every so often, through gaps in the trees bordering the canal, there were glimpses of a very wide, rather muddy expanse of water flowing ever seawards. We began to think we could smell the Atlantic.

It is important to coincide one's arrival at Castets en Dorthé and the last lock down into the Garonne with the top of the tide. This allows a favourable current all the way to Bordeaux. This was important because there was no way "Echo" could have moved against a foul tide. We also needed daylight for this part of the journey, so had to get it right. In the event, we arrived at the top lock around mid-day and were told to wait for an hour and then enter at 1.00 pm exactly. We did as we were told. This last lock is in two stages and both are very deep. We were one of three boats marshalled by a very efficient lock-keeper who told us exactly what to do and when, even more important, what to expect. Down we went and we were suddenly out in the Garonne – sort of spat out. One minute you are in a quiet canal and the next you are in a fast flowing river heading rather alarmingly for the middle span of a large bridge across the river.

It took us exactly four hours to get to Bordeaux. It is very exciting to arrive in a big city by water. We had had a huge tide under us all the way and at times were doing 7 knots, which up till then was unheard of and undreamed of by us in "Echo". It was an exhilarating run but with good charts and a non-panicking crew picking out the landmarks and shouting warnings about submerged tree-trunks, branches and plastic flotsam, we arrived tired but unscathed. Once in Bordeaux we had to find somewhere to tie up and quickly, before the tide changed and swept us upstream again. Our small engines were no match for the river's awesome strength. We should have realised then that that was to be the pattern from now on – with 350 miles still to go. We found an ancient laid-up iron barge and tied on but had our doubts as to whether it would lift with the tide. By then it was too late change our minds, the tide had turned.

Once again we had good reason to be grateful we were on a Catalac. All the tree trunks, branches and rubbish that had gone down with us earlier, was on its way upstream again and doing its best to ram us. We would rush

on deck whenever we felt a big bump only to see whatever it was hitting us disappearing between the hulls and out again.

In the late afternoon light the water looked a very evil murky brown and the sight of it swirling and racing past made one giddy and determined not to get any closer to it. We were glad to leave next morning and be out once again in the current heading for Pauillac, where we hoped to put up the mast. That trip took another four hours. It was a fascinating journey down the wide and often shallow Gironde – the city of Bordeaux and its outskirts on one side and mile after mile of docks and large industrial works on the other. There was also a lot of shipping on the move and we had to keep a good look out behind, sideways and in front. Yet again we arrived at our destination with no tide to spare. A friend had joined us at Buzet and now in the quiet water of the marina at Pauillac, he and Martin raised “*Echo*’s” mast without any problems. Sadly Simon’s time with us was up and he caught a bus back to Bordeaux the next morning and we were on our own again. Taking advantage of the tide, we set out to motor-sail across and up to Royan, about 45 miles away on the north side of the entrance to the Gironde. The tide beat us this time and we only just made it into Port Bloc on the south-west side of the estuary. It had taken about 7 hours to do only 30 miles. The tide turned against us making the last mile a real slog with the light also fading. We finally crept in to find the port full. There was no room to raft up because it is a busy ferry port with little turning space. Here again being a Catalac and therefore not very wide and not needing much water to float, we found a small slot of space and pushed and squeezed until we fitted in rather snugly. We tied up, closed down our faithful engines, had a tot and relaxed. We were the only people, apart from the Pilot crew, aboard in the whole port. After the day we were very grateful for the peace.

With a forecast of strong north-westerlies there was no way we could get out of the estuary and work our way around Oleron and across to La Rochelle. So we relaxed and enjoyed ourselves in Port Bloc, which turned out to be a delightful place. Gone now was the peace and tranquillity of the canals. We were now back once more in the environment our little boat was designed for. We were keen to know how she would behave in Atlantic waters. From now on we would have to move whenever the tides and winds allowed, to try to work our way north west exactly where the winds always seemed to be blowing from. We had always known it would be a gamble to be wandering around Biscay and the west coast of France in late autumn but there we were and we had no choice. Several times along the way, when it seemed we were going to be weather-bound for a long while, we researched the possibility of leaving “*Echo*” and returning later when the weather improved. When it came to it, we could never bear to leave her again and it became a matter of honour to get her and us home together, to our mooring on the river Fowey. So we sailed on when we were able and ran for shelter when the conditions became too foul to be at sea. The big tides in that part of the world were also a huge factor, without them in our favour we could get nowhere. We moved mostly in daylight hours rather than at night, unless we really had to, due to the very real danger of becoming entangled in one of the hundreds of unlit fishing buoys that seem to litter the French coastal waters. We had a couple of nasty experiences with these floats when Martin had to go over the side with the breadknife at night in rough water to free a snared propeller. We were grateful that “*Echo*’s” propellers are so close to the surface. Having two of them also meant that we could limp into port using only one engine, if we had to – rope cutters are now high on our priority list!

Our average day’s run was only around 30 miles. This meant that we found shelter in all sorts of out of the way wonderful places. Places we should never have dreamt of visiting if we had been able to get a move on. We went from mainland to Atlantic island and then back to the mainland, zigzagging our way up and around the coast of western France. Usually we were the only visitors in port and we were either totally ignored and allowed to please ourselves as to whether we stayed or left, or else we were almost smothered in goodwill and made some wonderful friends, which was very heart-warming. Without doubt every single place we visited we promised to return to one day – but preferably in gentle, warm summer weather.

When we were in Carcassonne planning the last 600 miles of “*Echo*’s” odyssey from Cyprus, we felt as if we were on the home straight. Martin did mutter something about the possibility of there being a “sting in the tail”. How right his prophecy was. As far as his crew was concerned the last 100 miles was a sting and a half. We were sheltering in L’Aber Wrac’h river when the shipping forecast gave us what we hoped was our weather window for a run across to Fowey. We set out in a blustery west wind and a big swell. That was all fine till about half way across. Then the wind increased alarmingly. The expected f 6/7 became 8/9. The big seas were too much for the self-steering and I didn’t have the strength to hold “*Echo*” against some of the huge waves that were pushing us along. Martin had to hand steer having first taken in the jib and then the main. We surfed up and down the seas for hours on end and finally, seventeen hours after leaving France, almost flew into Fowey

harbour entrance at three o'clock in the morning, under bare poles and doing just over 6 knots. It had been a terrifying yet exhilarating passage. Later that morning, with great pride, we introduced "Echo" to our welcoming and relieved family. Throughout "Echo" had behaved like a true ocean sailor and did everything we had asked of her with style and courage. We were all three home again, having shared a great adventure.

The Cyprus to UK statistics may be of interest. Five seas, one channel, one ocean, 25 islands and a lot of locks! Total mileage 285.5 nm by GPS. "Echo" behaved impeccably throughout and my wife fine-tuned on the distaff side as to what makes a boat a home, is definitely converted from mono to multihull. "Echo" is now almost literally parked at the bottom of our garden, taking her ease in a mud berth across the river Fowey, while we pipe-dream all the improvements we hope to make, but that is another story.

NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

By Lucien Contesse

Chapter 37

Sunday 3 September

We are invited to church. The service is held in an open palm-leaf building with a cross on the roof. It did not take long and we were able to go with our hosts to lunch. Heinz and I eat alone. The women encourage us to take more. The kids lie around us on their bellies and watch us as if we are animals in a zoo. Perhaps they are thinking that these foreigners must be crazy; they eat with knife and fork, and take the best pieces; our people eat nearly everything with their hands. The women are fanning the flies away, so that we can eat undisturbed. When Heinz and I are finished, the men have their turn, and after them the women and children. After the meal we, the guest, receive many pillows so we can rest in comfort. When everybody has had a midday nap, we thank our hosts and leave. On our boats, we decide to have another rest.

4 September

At 9.00 am. We sneak out of the inlet. The sky is overcast. The water is brown from the rainfall and the nearby river delta. The reefs are invisible. We let the anchor hang about 3m. below the keel, to detect coral blocks before we sit on them. We get stuck only once, with no damage, before we reach the coral-free channel. Under very light wind conditions, we sail along the reefs and have to use the engine before we arrive at our next destination. After 20 miles we tie up at Vatia Wharf.

5 September

In a light sea breeze we set sail. The next 10 miles we have to navigate by compass and have to make two course changes without markers. By noon the wind has increased in strength and we make good speed. Soon after, we change from the genoa to the smaller jib, as the wind increases further. The wind changes to south-west and we get it right on the nose. Now we have to tack in between the reefs. Everything goes well, until the reefs start to disappear with the tide. Barsoi is still too much sail and we drop the main. The sailing starts to get unpleasant and dangerous. Tacking in such a confined space is nerve-racking. We have no time to spare. Our aim, Vito Bay, is 5 miles away. We drop all sails, as it gets very wet on board. By motor we plough through the waves which sometimes bring the boat to a standstill. They are short and steep and plenty of water comes on board. Finally we make Vito Bay, just as the sun disappears behind the mangroves and paints the sky red.

6/7 September

Today, we have in mind only a small trip of 5 miles to Lautoka, where we arrive at noon, after having passed many mangrove island. The water is brown and muddy. The chart promises sand and no corals. We hope that that information is correct, as we cannot see through the water. We make it safely to the jetty and clear in at Lautoka, a small town of approximately 20,000 inhabitants. After window-shopping and price comparison, we buy meat, bread and vegetables for a nice meal. Here it is somewhat more expensive than in Suva, as the holiday makers' trade is in full swing. Heinz's engine is in need of a small repair, Takes us all morning. After we sunbathe and have a holiday.

8 September

We walk to Lautoka for an ice cream and a cool drink. Many tourists walk about, mainly people from New Zealand. We don't know why people come to such a place, as the sea is not inviting and there is not much entertainment. There are better places in Fiji, really worth a holiday. On our way to the boat, we clear the customs building we have a shower and buy a bottle of duty free alcohol before we retire to the boat and enjoy a lazy afternoon.

9 September

We are on our way to Nandi. The anchorage there may be difficult. With a weak breeze on the beam and later on the stern, we make the 12 miles to the bay of Tomba-Ko, near Nandi, in four hours. We anchor 800 m. from the shoreline, in 6 m. of water. The wind, unfortunately, blows straight into the bay and the build up of choppy waves is rather

uncomfortable. We drop two anchors to avoid any surprises. The runway of Nandi Airport is parallel to the shoreline and we see aircraft land and take off. We stay on the boat for today, waiting to see what the wind does.

10 September

800 m. to row in a rubber dinghy is quite a task, but the sea-bed is too shallow further inshore. We tie our dinghy to a tree and walk to the airport. The distance turns out to be much further than we thought. Nandi Airport seems not to be very important for international traffic, with only 15 take-offs and landings a day. While we wait for the bus to Nandi, a taxi turns up and offers to take us there for 25 cents, which is 10 more than the bus but more convenient. We stop in the middle of the business centre and do some window-shopping. All the shops are laid out to attract duty free customers. As we don't need anything, we decide to have lunch instead and a cool beer. Nandi is a few miles inland and very hot. As it is Sunday we do not see many visitors in town. They are probably resting in their hotels at the swimming pools. We take a bus back, which brings us directly to the place opposite our dinghy. To our astonishment, a strong wind has come up and big waves are crashing against the shoreline. We walk through the first couple of rollers and then mount the dinghy. Our clothes are wet, but we have to get back to the boat, a very difficult and long way home. We have to judge every wave and how we approach it. Very slowly, bobbing up and down over wave after wave, we finally get there, very tired.

11 September

Mommi Bay is our aim today, 18 miles away. It is the last bay before we leave the protecting reef. We motor from Tomba-Ko, till we reach the channel between the mainland and an island. Then we set sail and cross a bay seven miles wide without dangerous obstacles in it. Now, staying about 200 m. from the mainland, we make good speed along the coast. Mommi Bay lies behind a reef with a lighthouse on the edge of the pass which has to be approached with care. We sail through it without any problem and drop our anchor 300 m. inside the bay, on a sandy bottom. The place is empty of any living soul except us, so we go for a swim.

12 September

We start early in the morning, as rain is on its way. The sky is completely overcast and grey-black, not very inviting. We have just finished weighing anchor and setting sails, as the rain comes. We sail for a mile and then turn back to wait for better weather. The rain, however, lasts all day and night. We stay on our boat and have a reading day.

13 September

The sky is less black but still not good. Waves thunder over the reef and a nasty wind blows onshore. We feel secure behind the reef and stay put, glad to be here. We just wait and see.

14 September

The radio promises nice weather and light winds. We start early, to be as soon as possible through the outlet of the reef. After motoring through the Navula Passage, we encounter a heavy swell, which inside was absorbed by the reef. Offshore, the wind is much stronger and the forecast of light winds is an understatement. Soon after, it blows at 20 – 35 knots. The sea is rough and I get a taste of what sailing is like on a keel-boat. I must admit that tacking against the waves is less stressful on the keel-boat and much softer than on my catamaran. As we cross the waves at a different angle from the one that I have been used to, the cork-screwing is tremendous and I really have to hold on to what I can find in the cockpit. Heinz lets me have the helm for a while, just to get the feel on the boat. Even here, where I can hold on to the wheel, I have to spread my legs to find a reasonable stance. I still think I prefer my Bobcat! We have to tack for the next 10 miles, before we have the opportunity to flee behind the next reef. We find that the water is flowing out through the inlet and the wind and waves drive against it, creating tremendous turbulence. We switch to engine power and drop the sails before we enter. Behind the reef things become quieter, but are still turbulent enough. We anchor and watch our bearings carefully, to be sure that we stay put. As evening approaches, the wind subsides and we count on a quiet night. This was probably a local storm which did not affect the main weather pattern.

Why then did we not take my boat? We had several reasons for that. The low draft of Pinkle Purr would have been ideal for those shallow waters but my outboard motor was not reliable enough to cruise in these coral-infested areas. The boat would always be too fast, even with idling motor. My tanks contained petrol for a maximum of 60 miles. Petrol was much dearer than diesel and not readily available everywhere. And, last but not least, Heinz did not want to leave his boat in Suva Harbour for such a long time, unobserved, as it was not insured.

15 September

We have an early start. A 10-knot wind blows over the reef. We motor through the passage and then set sail. We have 14 miles to go to Nandronga Bay or Thuva Bay, as the Fijians call it. With nice cruising speed, we arrive there at 12.30 pm. Nandronga Bay has a beautiful sandy beach that is surrounded by coconut palms. A big hotel in the background diminishes the beauty of the bay. Many holidaymakers are on the beach sunning themselves. We anchor as far away as possible from all these people, so as not to have too many visitors.

16 September

We row ashore and catch a bus to Singatoka, a nearby small town. We buy a few things for our daily living, such as bread, cheese, meat, vegetables and eggs, and a bottle of wine. After that we loaf around and do some window-shopping. On our way home, we each buy an ice-cream. It is very hot. The beach is full of people who are swimming and sunbathing. A strong trade wind has come up but it does not do much to cool our bodies. As soon as we are on board we put our bathing togs on and jump over the side into the refreshing waters.

17 September

After we have filled up our tanks with two jerricans of fresh water, we leave Nandronga Bay. The sea is like oil, absolutely smooth with not a breath of air. We motor out of the bay and hope to catch a breeze further out. It is too weak to set sail and so we motor the whole stretch of 14 miles. Sovi Bay is a small, quiet place, where we drop anchor and stay for the rest of the day, doing nothing!

18 September

With a nice breeze at 10 – 12 knots and waves from 1 – 2 m. we tack for six hours to make a distance of 18 miles. The sun is shining out of a blue sky with heat that is close to unbearable. We sail into a bay and decide to stop there for the day. It is Vanua-nui Bay and is surrounded by palms with a beautiful sandy beach. In the middle of the bay is a small island about 12 m. long by 25 m. wide, covered with very dense vegetation of coconut trees and other tropical bushes. We are too tired from all that tacking to go on an excursion. We will do that to-morrow. Heinz goes for a swim whilst I prepare the evening meal. We have rice, corned beef, and fried onions, green beans and carrots – everything out of tins except the onions. For dessert we open a tin of peaches. Heinz washes the dishes and I retire to my bunk to read. Our kerosene lamp attracts plenty of mosquitoes, so we close the hatch and door until we go to bed.

19 September

After breakfast, we explore the bay. The sand is nearly white and reflects the sun back into our eyes. We walk along the water's edge to one end of the bay but do not see anything of interest. Then we cross the sand and make a tour of the coconut palm belt, where we collect a few green coconuts for drinking and two brown ones for their flesh. Mosquitoes are so numerous, that we run back to the beach and our dinghy. Back on board, we unload the coconuts and go to explore the outside reef. What a disappointment! The reef consists of stones sand and mud, no corals, fish nor shells. On the way home we stop on the island and have a quick look. Getting ashore is not very easy as the growth on the outside is very dense. This is only camouflage. The inside is quite free of undergrowth where about a dozen palms have their home. It is cool here and we stay for a while, as we do not encounter any mosquitoes. Back on the boat we take the rest of the day off.

20 September

Ten hours of combat against the wind for 20 miles of gain. In reality we made about 50 miles. We are inside a ring reef with two islands, Janutha I and Abenga, where we lie at anchor. The ring reef is not completely charted and demands great attention. Many shallow spots and coral heads are not marked. Those promise some surprises, if the helmsman should fall asleep. We are glad that we made it to our anchorage, half an hour before sunset. Very tired, we cook a simple dinner of sauerkraut and frankfurters, and call it a day.

21 September

All night long the breeze is blowing and we have a restless night. The anchor ground is not the best, even though we are sheltered by the island. But with all those corals around us we have to be careful not to drift. After breakfast we wait till 10 o'clock before we weigh anchor. The sun is shining now at an angle, so that we can see clearly what is in front of us. The first seven miles are no problem. We sail in the lee of the island till we approach the reef. On the outlet of the reef we should find markers but we cannot see any. With field glasses I scan the reef and finally see small posts, the only remains of the signals. The rest has rusted away and never been replaced. If it were high tide at the moment, we would even see the posts. We approach with caution and idling engine, ready to stop or reverse in a hurry if necessary. Everything goes well. Outside the reef it is rough, very rough. The wind blows at about 25 knots from the east, the sea is far too steep and choppy for this wind. We sail with the wind on the beam and make good speed. Plenty of water is swamping the deck from the rolling and breaking wave. We are wearing rain gear to stay dry but it is fun. The roller coaster ride of these steep waves is tremendous. At one moment we see only water and at the next we see land. Barsoi is lifted up by a wave and then slides down the other side exposing the windward side of the boat, so that I can see the keel all the way down. It is amazing that we do not topple over. The wind blowing into the sails, however, keeps the boat upright. While the keel hangs in the water like a pendulum, Barsoi copes with everything quite composedly. At 2.00 pm. we arrive at the Namuka entrance and pass through it under engine power. Inside the harbour we are immediately in quiet water. We search for a safe berth and drop anchor. From here we enjoy the sight of Suva only 5 miles distant.

22 September – 11 October

In absolutely calm water and an oily looking seam we leave our anchorage and motor the 5 miles to Suva. Outside the reef there is no wind either, so we have no choice. The sky is black and rain is on its way. We make Suva harbour before the rain starts and are lying at anchor by the yacht club before the first downpour. I was quite happy to be back on my boat.

The nearly six weeks around Viti Levu were fairly interesting but on some days rather boring. But it was worth the trip. Sailing inside the reef was something only very few sailors do. We were presented with beautiful scenery, island and reefs with which only a few other places can compete. The east side of the island was like paradise, the north side dangerous, but not less interesting. The west side was murky, muddy and full of mangroves and brown water from the rain. Now we are back in Suva and we have plenty of rain. I pay visits to boats, exchange goods and get the boat ready for the trip to New Zealand. I also test my newly acquired sewing machine by producing a cover for the outboard motor. I could have done that a long time ago but some things always get pushed aside till the yachtsman's mood is right and he finally does it. Heinz and I will clear out for tomorrow and do the last food shopping and plan to meet again in New Zealand. The weather is too bad, so we stay one more day in Suva.