



VANUATU APPEAL

The Cruising Association is asking all our members to support the aid effort in Vanuatu

Cyclone Pam, a massive category 5 cyclone, has torn a path of destruction through the small Pacific island nation. More than 200,000 people may be affected, with 3,300 people displaced in evacuation centres.

Reports from Vanuatu's hard hit outer islands indicate more than 80% of housing has been damaged. There is very little food on some islands, and thousands of people are in desperate need of safe, clean drinking water.

The islanders have been known for decades for the warm welcome they give to cruising yachts, many CA members amongst them, some of whose stories, which range from 1979 to 2013, are told below.

The link here takes you to the Oxfam appeal site. Oxfam is leading the coordination of the Vanuatu Humanitarian Team, a network of non-government humanitarian agencies and supporting the response effort, alongside the Vanuatu Government. Please give generously.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/cyclone_pam

If you wish to avoid mail from Oxfam, untick the box at the end of the donation form or write that you are paying for another organisation and enter the CA's name.



Des Scott announces appeal at the annual Hanson lecture

From Jimmy Cornell

The first time I visited Vanuatu in 1979 it was still called New Hebrides, an Anglo-French condominium occasionally referred to as a pandemonium to better describe the weird cocktail of those two bureaucracies. Since then I have returned with every Aventura, and Aventura IV will be no exception as later this year we shall be there as part of the Blue Planet Odyssey round the world rally.

I was once asked to name my favourite ten cruising destinations and Antarctica topped the list, but with Vanuatu a close second, primarily for its wonderfully welcoming people.



An unforgettable memory is my visit to Erromango, one of the islands devastated by Cyclone Pam. Shortly after landing at a small village, we were befriended by Joe Mete, the son of the island's chief. One day Joe told me that he wanted me to meet his ancestors. He came on board Aventura and we sailed along the coast to Suvu, a small bay fronted by a sandy beach overshadowed by tall coconut trees. He explained that the beach was taboo and no one was allowed to land there because in a nearby cave were the remains of his family members going back several generations.

We landed on the beach and made our way up a steep path, slipping on the moist soil. We stopped in front of a wide crack in the cliff face that led into the sacred cave. Before going in, Joe called into the cave, warning his ancestors that he had come to visit them with a friend, and asking their permission to enter the cave. Down in the damp and gloomy cave were piles of bones and about two dozen skulls. He rearranged some with utmost tenderness, and I could tell from the expression in his face that he was truly communicating with his forebears.

As we were leaving, Joe explained that until not so long ago, when an older person felt that the end was near, he or she would ask to be taken to the cave and be left to die alone. The family would leave them food and water, and return regularly to visit them until they had peacefully died.

Who will look now after the poor people of Erromango?

From Shirley Billings

The French do appear to have acquired the most beautiful Pacific islands. Wallis radiated a greenness that sparkled from the varnished fronds of palm trees down to the tangle of bush. Flowering vines spread out onto the sand.

On Vanuatu, I was invited to help make the communal meal of lap lap, and sat on a mat with the women grating green bananas with the edge of a serrated cockle shell. We mixed the brown pulp with tapioca and coconut milk on wide banana leaves, then patted it all into a four-foot wide flat pancake. Pieces of raw Octopus and fish were carefully placed on top, then more banana leaves to cover the mixture. Flat stones heated by a fire of coconut husks, were lifted between split bamboo rods and carefully placed to receive the flat cake. They had no metal pots.

We sat on the earth floor around the slab of lap lap in semi darkness.

"Is this a meal for a special occasion or do you have it every day?" I asked.

"Every day" was the cheerful reply.

From Amanda and Patrick Marshall

Our destination was Port Resolution, a small inlet rather awkwardly located beyond a small headland a little way up the east coast. It is poorly charted and the entrance is invisible until almost in line with it, so the approach was rather nerve-wracking. The waves diminished rapidly as we closed the coast, and we anchored in almost complete calm.

Early next morning, a man with dreadlocks and a beaming smile paddled over with a young child to say hello, saying that his daughter wanted to see the yachts close up. I asked him about his dug-out canoe, and he said all the boys had to make one whilst they were at school. We bought a papaya from him, and said we'd bring over a print of a photo we took of them. We later went for a stroll through the village, and were enchanted by the way the population of about 300 souls live. A large banyan tree, with its mysterious hanging roots and hollow space inside, marked the centre, around which were seats, a water pump and open-sided meeting houses. One group of dwellings is neatly aligned around a square, with others spaced either side of tracks radiating out from the centre. The thoroughfares are of smooth, compacted earth, which, apparent from the brush marks, are regularly swept clean of rubbish, twigs and leaves.

Women were busy doing the laundry or laying out woven pandanus leaf mats to dry; the men invariably carried a machete, perhaps returning from their plantation with bunches of taro roots or bananas. They were very friendly, and when asked for directions would often lead us half the way.

