

CACIQUE'S CIRCUMNAVIGATION

If reading of an ordinary woman in extraordinary circumstances appeals you might enjoy reading the letters I wrote 30 years ago while sailing my Vancouver 27, Cacique. If moreover you'd like to see what the cruising world looked like 30 years ago you can find photos through the link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/29592355@N08/albums/72157644653734631>

Sint Maarten, Caribbean June 1990

The danger of having a dream is one day it might come true. Cacique, my newly bought 27 foot Vancouver, had defied my best efforts to break her on a very tough test sail from Southampton to Falmouth, so my day of reckoning was upon me and I was almost shaking with fear. Walking around town anything that offered extra security seemed a good buy but the tide would not wait so limiting purchases to a detailed chart of Madeira I cast off with no onlookers and headed down river.

A light southerly allowed an easy beat to the Lizard followed by a direct course out of the English Channel. Although the wind rose to 35 knots and veered during the night, by the time Cacique was reduced to double reefed main and staysail clearing Ushant was sure. I had no idea it would be 48 days before I saw land again.

By the 14th we'd been forced east of the shipping lanes when the engine ran away with itself at full throttle and the new radio, bought for weather forecasts and direction finding, packed up. Under these circumstances there was no way Cacique should be anywhere near the Spanish and Portuguese coasts with their lee shore and fishing boats so a tactic evolved which endured for 3 weeks: no course east of due south!

Fixing first the engine then the radio I heard there was a high forming over southwest Europe - the weatherman did not mention the series of fronts running up its western side! Beat south, beat west. and very occasionally run southwest was the pattern as the wind varied between 20 and 40 knots constantly changing direction.

The seas became ridiculously confused but the chance of a major low arriving made it inadvisable to delay by heaving-to for a rest. First the home-made spinnaker pole broke then a forward lower shroud but we were progressing, marking off a series of estimated positions ready for the day the overcast cleared enough for a star sight. Cacique tackled the waves like a terrier with a rat, out-performing my best hopes, and somehow between tears and tantrums the skipper hung on.

As the chances of reaching Madeira diminished it became tempting to head for the Azores, Bermuda or even the US coast but with inadequate charts for that, Cacique finally passed the Azores 115 miles to their southeast. Often I'd considered doing one of the big trips single-handed and now the moment had chosen itself. At least with a new destination of Sint Maarten there was no need to head south so quickly and the continuing boisterous weather could be accepted for the speed it offered. It seemed somehow 'not cricket' when for 4 days around 25°N the worst gale of the trip deposited a huge question-mark course on the chart as the highest southwest winds forced a tack to protect the mast with its broken shroud.

At last we crossed 20°S after 30 days at sea but no trade winds arrived. In fact it was more like the doldrums and the ETA got pushed back and back. Thank goodness we hadn't gone south earlier. By the 35th day there was little danger of a gale but the voyage had taken on aspects of an emotional odyssey and this was the nadir. For 5 weeks Cacique had echoed to my outbursts and I thought of little else but family, friends and how pleasant it would be to take up golf. When becalmed watching the dorado and smaller fish I would wonder whether the traditional 40 days in the wilderness offered hope of relief for one moment I would be brimming with confidence but the next cursing my stupidity and begging inanimate objects to stop hitting me.

Fortunately through all of this the crew kept pushing Cacique at her best speed making and mending as necessary, and the cook supplied three meals a day supplemented with enormous quantities of pancakes, for which I had an insatiable appetite. It was the 43rd day when the outbursts stopped, with no major revelations and no stout-hearted resolutions; just a few old ghosts laid to rest and the decision that sometime I must play a few rounds of golf with grass under my feet and trees masking the horizon.

Seven and a half years fighting and dreaming just for that - it was worth it!

The weather takes no account of sailors though, and the seas were often sloppy with the wind from every direction but east. As we approached Barbuda, a low lying island with far-flung reefs which I hoped to bypass by 20 miles; clouds frustrated star sights while the overhead sun offered no reliable latitude for a

sextant. That sextant also often had to be re-aligned being a composite of the two sextants with which I started. When finally a fresh north wind arrived it looked as though we would be forced to head into open ocean for safety but the skies cleared and a seven star fix - which I was too relieved to get to begrudge the paper work - produced a satisfyingly small position circle. We were in the groove and pushing flat out lest the skies close and the wind fail again.

Next morning a ship passed from whose course I took reassurance, unlike the many others I had seen in the open ocean (about 15 off any shipping lanes), which had created a constant fear of collision. Sometime later a military plane spent ½ hour buzzing us, at one stage with one engine stopped. Were we going to have to rescue him?

Despite the good speed it was soon clear that the shortest route to Sint Maarten would put us among many unlit islets in the moonless early part of the night. Thoughts of a long, cold drink had to be put aside and the bow pointed toward St Barthelemy, which came into view 24 miles ahead at 1500 local time on April 28th. It was a long night creeping around the south side of that island then north-east toward St Maarten but finally, as dawn came with 4,000 miles behind us, we sailed the last couple of miles into its harbour of Phillipsburg.

"Good morning" I casually called to a few early risers as we passed among the anchored yachts. Then, after securing and tidying Cacique as she deserved, I made a cup of tea with my last tea bag and last spoonful of sugar. Finally I rowed ashore to find it was Sunday, nobody would accept my English pounds and the banks would not be open until Thursday due to the carnival. I didn't even have a coin to phone my friend Tom's contact address or to take a shower, which I badly needed.

Entering the office of BYS, a local charter company, I was still trying to catch the receptionist's attention when the voice of another waiting girl broke through to me.

"You don't remember me do you, I'm Debbie, we met in the Pacific last year"

For the last time I burst into tears, my facade of casualness shattered by the shock. I'd arrived!

Soon everyone was doing their utmost to help. Debbie lent me \$100 to be posted to the States where she was flying in 2 hours. Linda, the receptionist, and other yachties sent off radio messages to find Tom and there were frequent cries of "48 days- Jesus!"

Since arriving I've done a lot of skippering for BYS and tried to work out the future for 'Cacique' and me. Tom and I are getting along but I'm cagey particularly as he is 21 years older. As it is too soon for us to commit to a life of domestic bliss, in a couple of weeks we will take his 40 footer with radar, satnav, radios, refrigeration and water-maker to Venezuela to store for the hurricane season, then fly back here to go cruising on Cacique with a sextant and foot pump for water. I don't suppose that will surprise the friends who have suggested I might be a little stubborn!

Pago Pago, American Samoa June 1991

At first light we raise more sail apprehensively among the squall clouds remaining from the previous night. After a few rapid sail drops as squalls pass over, the skies clear and the sun burns down. A wisp of cloud on the horizon becomes more concrete and as the sun rises further the cloud begins to boil like an unwatched pan of milk on the stove. Other clouds do the same and we know that by mid-afternoon they will be vicious squalls with lightning dancing in their tops as they accompany us through the night driving us back over the few miles we have progressed during the day.

We are sailing from Penrhyn (lat.9°S, long.158°W) via Suwarrow to Samoa, which lies 850 miles to the southwest. As we left Penrhyn the wind was light from the north and in laying a course southwest I was blithely ignorant that this time the best way to Samoa would have been to start in directly the opposite direction. Now Cacique is like a spider trying to escape from a bath - she could make it if only that sadist would stop turning on the water.

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It's a year since I turned away from the chance of domestic bliss with Tom and, alone again, set sail from St Maarten with the vague idea of spending six months on the U.S. mainland before irrevocably transiting the Panama Canal to the Pacific. On the way I stopped in the Virgin Islands, supposedly for a couple of days, to see friends. Days however became weeks and I did not leave. Boat business here is pure theatre and ill-suited to the English habit/indulgence of understatement.

Paradoxically I was desperately aware that to be a mere bit player on the St Thomas stage put my voyage in danger as I could be seduced by the easy living, yet I could not overcome my reluctance to move

centre-stage and give the customers what they want. Fortunately friends retained more faith in me than I had in myself but only afterwards did I fully appreciate the lesson they had taught me. You don't have to be a phoney or a cynic to be an entertainer and a little razzle-dazzle can make the world a brighter place.

Eventually the seasons turned until I could move into the Pacific without too much danger of cyclones. I was provisioned and watered ready to go when Gene Dutra knocked on Cacique's hull and announced "I want to go with you." He admitted there were a host of organisational problems he would have to overcome, that he was no sailor or cook and that the effects of multiple sclerosis left him short of physical capabilities however he could financially support himself, share Cacique's running costs and, most important to me, I felt anyone who so strongly wanted to come must add to the pleasure of the voyage - Cacique had a crew; or passenger as Gene insisted.

The 1050 nautical mile run to Panama is notoriously boisterous in January and I planned to go fast on the basis that the quicker the passage the less time for the seas to get really bad. It can probably best be described by quoting Gene - "I knew we were moving fast when the waves stopped passing the rooster-tail!" Once as I came back from the foredeck after a sail change I was startled to find that back in the cockpit Gene had broken onto a cold sweat - but he never uttered a word of complaint. Gene was working out fine.

Despite my worries the transit of the Panama Canal went smoothly. My line-handlers were two boys aged 11 and 14 and the pilot took it on himself to keep them amused as Cacique pattered her way through. The engine did quit entering one lock but that just made things interesting.

On the Pacific side of the canal we had a celebratory dinner with an American mathematician about my age who was near the end of a circumnavigation in his own 31 footer. He explained that owing to the vagaries of modern economics when one of his computer programs proved marketable he suddenly found himself with \$6,000,000 and so set sail. It made me feel good to think that despite the vast differences in our finances we had both chosen to do exactly the same thing in similar boats.

With the Pacific in front of us there was no longer quite as much need for haste although I'd have to get Gene to Samoa for May 29th to fly to the States for his annual medical and his parents 50th wedding anniversary. We wuffed our way to the Galapagos (1°S, 91°W) - where seals and penguins live on the equator and iguanas swim in the sea - then plodded our way across the 3,080 miles to the Marquesas (10°S 140°W) dragging a huge quantity of goose barnacles which just loved my new anti-fouling paint.

In the Marquesas things were very expensive and we expected to be limited to a 3-day stop. However we somehow managed 15 days of high living for not too much money and had some glorious inter-island sailing before our schedule forced us on.

Next stop Penrhyn (9°S, 158°W) where we reaped the harvest from sailing off the normal routes. Despite being part of the modern world the people get few visitors and we were never short of invitations to visit their homes join picnics or enjoy local dancing. In the middle of this I came close to losing Cacique when a 50 knot squall found us anchored off a lee shore surrounded by coral. We were in no personal danger but did have the money and papers ready in a watertight bag! Most days were punctuated by offers to trade anything we had for local natural pearls. Of course after many years of world traveling I am immune to such deals but if anyone wants to buy some pearls it seems I have a few to spare..!

We are about 400 miles from Penrhyn and have finally fought our way from the belt of westerly headwinds into 30-35 knot southerlies. Suwarrow is somewhere close by to the northwest but I haven't had a good position fix for 2 days. My chart of the island cost \$19 in Panama and I don't want to miss visiting it if possible. We run down-wind for safety approaching the north coast on a curved course. We can't navigate the pass in this wind! Reluctantly we turn toward Samoa with Suwarrow still unseen (even the later confirmation that the pass was totally unnavigable does not completely ease the disappointment).

Another day and we lose the wind being left rolling in the swell. To cap it off Gene compares my pancakes to tyre patches. We dribble onward until - "No, it's not fair." - a huge cloud front intercepts us and now we have wind from the right direction in ABUNDANCE. For 18 hours I have to slow the boat as the gale combines with swells from three directions to produce a ridiculous sea. "Keep going Rona" I mutter and progress is made and the wind eases until after another 1½ days we sight the islands of Manu'a, 60 miles from Samoa.

Just one more night and we're there but again the wind is rising until at dawn with 40 knots blowing and very poor visibility I realise we are going to need a lot of luck to make the last 10 miles. For a moment the rain clears enough to give us a good position-fix and we are on our way weaving around the off-lying banks and holding our breath as heavy rain blots the land from sight. If the last turn coincides with good visibility we're home. Otherwise we must turn away accepting defeat for we can never beat our way back against the wind for another try.

CLEAR! we triumphantly sail into the harbour and within minutes are safely moored and talking with the first yachts'-people we've seen in 3 months. It has taken us 17 days for an '8 day trip' and the wind is gusting to 50 knots but who cares: we're safe with fresh vegetables, steak, ice-cream and the first letters I've received in 5 months!

Darwin, Australia July 1992

Picture me sitting at the top of a jungle waterfall high in the hills of Western Samoa. All I have to do is push off and I will slide down the weed covered rocks for 30 feet than shoot out into space before plunging into the pool below. No more difficult than casting off to sail around the world.

Western Samoa was my first stop after Pago Pago where I last brought my on-going letter up-to-date. In contrast to the factory hooters of US Samoa in Apia, the capital of Western Samoa, the day starts with the police brass band. This relic of German colonisation was the first sign of the strong community spirit in this most Polynesian of Pacific Islands. Apia contains many old European buildings, including Robert Louis Stevenson's home (he wrote Treasure Island etc) but out in the countryside everyone still lives in wall-less, pandanus roofed houses as in centuries past.

Romantic books and films have tended to show the Polynesians as a beautiful and peaceful race but this is a long way from the truth. The men are very large and violent and the nubile Polynesian maidens soon become 250lb mamas. Both men and women tend to be hairy which can further confuse matters when you notice the 'woman' you are talking with could do with a shave being one of the males raised from birth as girls in order to look after the other children and do the domestic work. Polynesians and Melanesians are also at heart still feudal and you have to make sure you don't confuse a member of the aristocracy with one of the masses who do the physical work of fishing and farming for, as in Europe not so long ago, a local chief might have the full power of life and death with or without central government approval.

My next stop was the Kingdom of Tonga which is the most extreme of monarchistic societies in the Pacific as was demonstrated by Queen Salote at the Coronation of Elizabeth II of England when the 6'6" Queen of Tonga really showed the gathered European royal families what being regal is all about. Fortunately the present King is more interested in making millions of dollars from the communication satellites using His air space than bothering tourists!

Tonga was where we joined 'the fleet of cruising yachts - some based in the west Pacific, some going round the Pacific basin and a few circumnavigating the world, but all drawn together here by the winds. Like it or not all long term cruising people are members of 'the fleet'. Over 50 years it has evolved into a global village and like all villages the people change and renovate their homes, develop complex relationships and above all gossip! Sadly I heard of 10 friends and acquaintances who had made one mistake too many on their voyages but against that there was a new birth and two more expected. As we cruised the idyllic waters of Vava'u in northern Tonga and on to Fiji, which contrasts unchanged island villages with its cosmopolitan capital, Suva, I alternated shoreside experiences with whole-hearted participation in the floating village.

November was drawing to a close and the first cyclone of the season had gone through before we moved on to New Zealand taking 18½ days in perverse but not dangerous winds to travel the route I had last completed in 6½ days with 'Cloud Nine'. This slow progress was partly due to Cacique's engine being out of commission and I felt better for her when I later heard other engineless boats took between 20 and 25 days.

Storms and jungles, piracy and romance are expected of travellers' tales and in New Zealand Gene decided to leave in a way, which I shall classify in the piracy section and say no more.

On arrival in Opuia I was surprised to find one of my old Cloud Nine crew, Sandy Lewis, waiting for me. We patched up the engine and set off on one of those magic periods when everything went right. Christmas we spent with cruising friends, complete with tree, holly, decorations and Christmas pudding. New Year at Tutukaka in local friend Fritz Visser's beautiful cliff-top home, and it was all wrapped up in the best sailing and touring you can imagine. In Sandy's words, "I think I've died and gone to heaven".

For me it was a time which recharged my batteries and increased further my enthusiasm for this beautiful country and its friendly people so by the time Sandy had to return to the US I was all fired up and ready to see more. With only 8 days out of the water I blitzed the boat work and straight afterward sailed the Bay of Islands engineless with friend Ronda who wanted a 'holiday' from her 'captain'. Then I put the rebuilt engine back in Cacique and set off down the east coast, alone once more.

You don't have to sail very far in New Zealand before reaching places that rarely see a foreign yacht and the treatment I received from local people made me feel very much the intrepid explorer. The sailing was far from easy. I was covered in the blow-out from a volcano and took a week and three attempts to sail around East Cape, but even at such times the local fishermen would call me up on the radio offering advice.

encouragement and free crayfish. New Zealand is a country everyone should try to visit to see how good life can be but beware it is oh so difficult to leave.

Eventually I had to return to the Bay of Islands to prepare for my next ocean passage, which brings me to the most difficult part of the year to describe. Which way should I go? I had New Zealand and its people, which I feel so close to; while Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomons and New Caledonia were a short sail away for the winter months and romance in the shape of HJ, who wanted me to sail with him. On the final evening we had a party in one of the boat sheds and I convinced everyone including myself that I was sailing back to Tonga for another year in the west Pacific sailing in tandem with H.J.. Six hours later I cast off and sailed to Australia. Kersplash! Just like shooting down that waterfall!

Now I am sailing up the Barrier Reef making the most of my time. First Caroline and Debbie Morrison joined me for two weeks and we dug sapphires in a place called Rubyvale next to Emerald (got 58 carats). Sailed Cacique over a cattle crossing ploughing our way through the mud and crocodiles (we didn't actually see them but it was dark and the imagination is wonderful). Finally I got to cuddle a koala.

Next, continuing alone, I stopped off at an island bar looking for company - there was just this kangaroo and me so we shared a beer. Finally now I'm visiting an old friend, Jacquelyn, in Cairns where I'm using her typewriter and waiting for another old crew member Carol Pine to join me for a couple of weeks on the way up to Cooktown. (This is as good a time as any to admit to those who don't already know that I plan to make this a circumnavigation which, thanks to the help and encouragement I've received on the way, I can hope to complete in less than one year more).

Often these days I stop for a moment, look around and say out loud 'God I'm lucky to have all this.' but it is human nature to want more and I'm hoping H.J. will fly in to visit on my way and regardless, one day I will return to my magic circle of the west Pacific.

"What about a storm?"

OK, I'll agree that this letter wouldn't be complete without the traditional storm but it is not an experience I ever want to relive. It was on the middle of the Tasman Sea 10 days out of New Zealand when I'd already had a gale and several fronts on what was proving a nasty passage, There were several yachts out there (all at least twice the size of Cacique) going in various directions and feeding information back to the weather station so I knew what to expect. The first indication was a slight saddle on the centre of a 1020mb high, up in the Coral Sea. Nothing to worry about. Then it started to develop as ripping across the Tasman its pressure dropped to 970mb and I heard a forecast I never want to hear repeated. "Winds 55-60knots sustained, gusting higher. Seas PHENOMENAL."

As it hit me the winds became bad but the seas impossible building 20-25 foot waves on top of the previously existing 10 - 12 foot multi-directional swells. Like a machine I did everything I've learnt over many miles to prepare 'Cacique' and myself, but for the first time in 10 years sailing I was not frightened as there was no way we were going to make it through this. The cross-seas were picking Cacique up and surfing her sideways for huge distances. It was a characteristic I had chosen her for but it was unfair to expect her to cope with seas like this. Eventually she must roll. In my mind I visited my family and friends saying my goodbyes.

We survived! Over the following days news filtered through of other yachts which had been through the same storm: two dismasted: two more knocked down heavily; much general damage; one still missing but little 'Cacique' had come through totally unscathed. When you next see me you might just notice a few white hairs, which were not there before, but no other sign remains of what is now just one more sailor's yarn.

"For Chrisake woman!"

I was in Cairns under the ministrations of Australian Jacquelyn van Westenbrugge, who is my self-appointed psychological counsellor, straight out of the Ghengis Kahn School of Nurturing. Draughtswoman, marine contractor, business trouble-shooter, acupuncturist, physical-therapist and banana farmer; Jacq fed me up, stood over me with a whip to get out my last newsletter and re-aligned Cacique's engine with me in time for Carol Pine's passage up to Cooktown.

I'd done a lot of planning for this leg as, although it was short, Carol is a very keen sailor and I wanted to give her plenty of variety. The weather gods said "Uh-Uh!" with the wind blowing 30+ knots day after day, river bars became uncrossable and off-shore anchorages untenable. we took our opportunities though and while other yachts lay in shelter we moved up the coast - sometimes at very high speed - brushing up on Carol's astro-navigation and diesel experience when we couldn't sail. The wind was unrelenting and even when we reached Cooktown a life jacket was advisable for the 50 yard row to shore. With time to spare we

took a short-wheelbase jeep into the bush over very corrugated tracks. "Dddd you think wwe will sssee kangaroos in this area?" asked Carol. WHAM! A kangaroo 'caroomed' off the side of the jeep, trying to get in the back seat.

Jacquelyn arrive from Cairns laden with ginger and acupuncture equipment for sea-sickness. Jacq had never been on a sailboat and suffered from a balance disorder, which meant she could literally get seasick on land yet bravely she had agreed to join 'Cacique' for the next leg. We waved goodbye to Carol - a departure that was delayed by washed-out roads. I've ordered good weather stated Jacq, a firm believer in the power of positive thought. The sun came out and for day after day, week after week we enjoyed the most idyllic sailing I've ever experienced. We snorkelled with giant cod and grouper; climbed Lizard Island's peak to where Captain Cook had stood searching for passage through the reefs: hiked through aboriginal lands to see rock paintings: and sailed, sailed, sailed.

Jacq had brought local fishing gear composed, it seemed to me, of clothesline and fence wire. "Fish on!" she cried, and we battled to pull 4 feet of thrashing mackerel on board while the spinnaker drove Cacique on at high speed. "Dinner's on us tonight!" I called over the VHF to any boat in hearing. By now all the other yachts were under way and I'll never forget how Cacique proudly led a veritable fleet through a narrow, uncharted short cut between offshore islands to anchor. Later that evening, as twelve of us tucked into fish dinner, they confirmed the adrenalin was almost oozing out of the radio as I made that call.

Another day another anchorage. We had stopped to see the hills of Cape Melville, composed entirely of huge smooth boulders heaped hundreds of feet high. Later as we prepared to board the dingy to visit 'Tainui' I saw we had a visitor - six feet of very black, very mean looking snake was trying to set up home in 'Cacique's' exhaust pipe. A blast of the engine discouraged him but he seemed to be remaining between us and Tainui. As we rowed warily across I reflected on my present life compared to the one I was raised to back in England.

Eventually Thursday Island was before us. The 'top' of Australia. Time for Jacq to decide if she would fly back home or face the rougher waters of the north coast. Bouyed with confidence gained on the Barrier Reef she decided to press on. It was a sleigh ride! 30 knots on the stern nearly all the way. For a couple of days Jacq was sick but not badly and she recovered to appreciate 'Cacique' in her element; forging ahead hour after hour at hull speed. When Jacquelyn finally moved ashore at Darwin, heading for the Kakadu rain forest to camp and canoe, I just had to shrug my shoulders. H.L. Dietrich wrote "...our destinies are decided by the vagrant breezes of fortune that blow from the windmills of the gods..... Caroline, Debbie, Carol and Jacq, my cruising companions for the Australian coast- for all my planning they'd had such different experiences they might have been on different planets. Maybe I should read Dietrich's work instead of just remembering that quotation.

Singapore Sept 1992

With Jacquelyn gone the weather turned and I was faced with head-winds for my next off-shore passage to Bali. A delay did not help and eventually I set out to beat. Luckily the winds weren't strong and as I approached the coast of Timor they sometimes dropped to nothing, gentling the seas.

Tack, tack. tack. Along this coast were lots of local sailing craft and I got the most out of the daily wind shifts by following their example, at the same time however playing Nelson in manoeuvring 'Cacique' so they wouldn't be in a position to board me for a bit of amateur piracy. (There are many real pirates on Indonesia but these days they don't seem to bother yachts too often, hitting instead the commercial vessels which are less likely to open up with automatic rifles).

We cut between Timor and Roti, and tacked our way on to arrive after 14 days at Benoa, Bali. This is the place for official piracy with baksheesh necessary to overcome the lack of a cruising permit. 'Business' done I set out to play tourist. What a shock! The entire island is a fairyland of grottoes and temples, with beautifully terraced rice paddies slotted into the valley sides; but oh so many people. For years I've lived in the less-inhabited parts of the world but now I was going to have to regain my street-smarts. I had hoped to find here a painting or statue for Cacique's' saloon but although there were many beautiful things I couldn't find something I could live with. That was a shame as I was offered some good deals if I would just trade the Australian bush hat I wore to keep off the sun.

A week was enough then 'Cacique' and I set off on one at my whims. The standard route from here is up the east coast of Bali through the Lombok Strait but I decided to go west. It worked perfectly. The first day I sailed over to Java and anchored for the night among hundreds of fish traps (I wasn't expecting them to be there and when they first appeared on the radar I took them for a major fleet of small boats). Next morning, with the tide and moon right, we shot north through the Bali Strait, across the open water beyond and through the next strait. By 0740 the next day I'd been on deck for 25 hours avoiding the throngs of small fishing craft, but I was feeling great - I'd been thinking about friends.

The morning was bright and sunny, we'd cleared the hazards of straits and fishermen, the wind was 12 knots astern and the only ship in view was going well clear. I went below to rest, feeling a warm glow.

The windmills of the gods creaked.

Twenty minutes later the hairs on my neck stood up and I shot out of the companionway. Too late! The ship had changed course, probably curious about 'Cacique', misjudged the distance and steamed straight across our bows. Cacique, affronted by the intrusion, rammed the freighter slap in the middle of its starboard side, trying to shunt it out of the way. The crew of the freighter had been gathered on its rail and now they were treated to the sight of a stark naked yachtswoman struggling to sort out the mayhem.

By the time I had checked we weren't sinking and collected in the jib, the freighter was out of name-reading sight. I started the engine and gave chase but it never did slow down or answer the radio. After about 15 minutes of chasing I realised my body was hurting badly and I would have to make repairs to 'Cacique' quickly, before the adrenalin stopped flowing and it stiffened up. I jury-rigged a forestay and lifelines, ignored the anchoring equipment, which would need a workshop, set sail again and went below.

For two days we sailed on and despite sail changing being slow and painful (I was covered in bruises and had some cracked ribs) I found my spirits recovering remarkably quickly. Soon I was making plans as to how I would make good the damage in Singapore. In the meantime I would have to plot a new course and sail non-stop, as the damage meant I could no longer anchor for rest, but we would make it.

On the third evening I felt a shiver as the sun went down. It was rather pleasant to pull a sheet around me after days of tropical heat. I then noticed my legs were shaking in an odd way. It seemed intellectually interesting. Finally I looked at the red light on the radio and saw there were now two of them doing a slow dance. Whoops! One of those tropical bugs living in my body was making whoopee while my resistance was low. I quickly reduced sail and put 'Cacique' on a course as clear of hazards as possible then went to bed.

Judging by the log I was delirious for a good while, after which there were four days when I could not hold down any fluid and three more of soup before I could take solids. My spirits were still good though.

Through all of this 'Cacique' had been making progress and on the fourteenth day Singapore was ahead. Except it wasn't! We'd motored in flat calm through the Singapore Channel the previous night and I'd wondered why I couldn't see the loom of the city lights. Right through the packed ships anchorage we went - still nothing. It wasn't until we were just two miles off the coast that I first spied anything. Now that's what I call smog!

I couldn't pinpoint our position well enough in the gloom to find the East/West quarantine anchorage (later found it was no longer used) so motored another four hours around to Changi. By now it was pouring with rain and the wind had come up right on the nose (what is called locally a Sumatra). Finally we anchored and backed and backed and backed.

The bottom was like custard. Five times I dropped the anchor and five times had to haul it back up again by hand. No winch, no bow roller, no fairlead. Even with the light tackle I'd been forced to choose, my back and ribs were killing me and the tears streamed down my face. The good spirits were put on hold. Enough's enough!

Luckily sailors have notoriously short memories when it comes to tough passages or they would never put to sea. I've been in Singapore for three weeks now, resting, repairing 'Cacique' and feeding myself up (not easy when you don't know the local food and are eating with chopsticks: but I've nearly recovered the 15lbs I lost on that last passage). In a few more days all will be finished and we'll be off up the coast to Malaysia and Thailand before heading for the Red Sea and England.

This is the last newsletter I'll be able to send before England and I've left a lot unsaid - maybe I always do. This time however with Christmas approaching and the last big push just ahead I'd like to add a little more.

The best moment I've ever had was quite recently when I realised I have friends who think about me, value me and care about me - without 'Cacique's' voyage I might never have known how much. That knowledge is the most valuable gift I've ever received. I can be a bit slow about learning some things but by hitting me over the head repeatedly, for mile after mile, year after year, you've made it sink in: so please accept this deepest Christmas wish to my invisible crew - long and far may we travel together

P.S. To my long suffering family who mostly have no interest in sailing, or any idea why I'd sail around the world when it is faster and cheaper by jet, and better still I might stay in England and save the money. I know you care, as I do for you. Remember it's all in the genes.

Happy Christmas

P.P.S Will continue to send cards when I can.

P.P.P.S For sailors only: Confronted by a weather beaten face with sun-bleached hair and eyes seeming set on a distant horizon, St Peter at the Pearly Gate recognises he has a sailor before him. "Pull up a chair" he says with a smile. "What do you fancy to drink? Did you know I used to work the boats? Fisherman I was." The hours passed happily as St Pete and the sailor reminisced about storms boats and shipyards. At last St Peter rises saying "You tell a good story but I suppose we'd better get the business done. Now how was it you made your living on the boats?" he asked opening 'The Great Book'.

"I was a charter skipper" replied the sailor. "Ah" exclaims St Peter. "That explains this entry. 'On fast turn-around. Can't stop.'"

Teignmouth, England July 1993

Indiana Jones move over; Modesty Blaise bow out. Rona's here! Sounds fine doesn't it? I can almost hear the cheers. Being in the hot seat is kind of uncomfortable though!

Cacique's tale was left in Singapore where I was repairing the damage to boat and body from a collision in the Java Sea and a fever in the South China Sea. The work went well but if you ever thought life would be better if people worked harder and were better behaved then Singapore will change your mind. Economy booming, no unemployment, little crime, clean streets and even immaculate subway trains yet it is my idea of hell. I found myself with an inane grin on my face in reaction to the surrounding glum expressions. Even a punk or two would have been welcome to enliven the place. A sign summed it up well - 'No eating dorian on the subway'. It was explained to me that dorian is a fruit which smells bad yet later I found that in other countries dorian is called honeymoon fruit because it smells of

Even here I found people I'll remember fondly but it did mark a change in the people I met ashore. Right through Asia and the Middle East although I got on well with other women the men were a complete blank to me. Food for thought.

Finally ready to move on I consulted my somewhat out of date chart and set sail. I had a little trouble finding the next anchorage but cleared up the confusion later by asking "How long has that island been there? The one with the big trees?" Singapore has changed since 1951.

Entering the Straits of Malacca the pilot chart promised beam winds in dry settled weather but headwinds squalls and the highest ever recorded rainfall for the area were the truth. Hot dangerous and arduous enough that when I reached Kelang I stopped for a week just to eat. While I was there a large number of yachts gathered for a race up to Thailand so I had plenty of company but left a day before them to avoid the 'rush hour'. Such a small decision.

I was 12 miles out with a good breeze on my way to Lumut when I went forward to raise the staysail. The halliard gave! (A knot, which had withstood 20,080 miles and was regularly checked, came undone). Before knowing it I had cleared the windward lifeline and was being towed by the lazy jib sheet I'd somehow grabbed in passing. Using the adrenalin rush I immediately levitated 5 feet out of the water but wasn't strong enough to flip myself back onto the deck. Think! Ahead was a fishing boat, which offered a chance, and I spent half an hour unsuccessfully trying to knit a ladder out of the sheet and other such games as I approached. The fishing boat moved off!

This left a freighter anchored about 6 miles back as my best chance so I let go the rope. Treading water for a moment as Cacique sailed on I thought of a scene repeated in several old films. Uninsured Cacique was everything I owned bar the T-shirt and shorts I was wearing. Perversely I felt proud that I'd let it all go to give myself the best, if small, chance of surviving and considered shedding my clothes to make swimming easier but realised that if I did reach the freighter I wouldn't have the strength left to climb the chain so would need something to lash myself to it. Time to swim.

Twice as I progressed the fishing boat reappeared, crossed my path and stopped - once I was close enough to clearly see the men working - but each time it moved off before I could reach it. After about an hour I found a net and stuffed a couple of floats in my T-shirt but they were too small to help so I released them and swam on. Again a fishing boat stopped, closer this time. Long before I'd come to the conclusion I'd probably drown but I was still ready to give survival my best shot yet these diversions were exhausting me by putting me at a bad angle to the waves. Still he was definitely closer. I diverted. At any moment he might set off damn him. I was practically knocking on the hull before he saw me but eventually I was lying on the deck leg locked in cramp.

The two fishermen were Malay but sign language explained the situation though they did not want to chase Cacique. I offered cash and they agreed but only after net laying was finished which seemed to take for ever. Finally we were off at full speed and my hopes rose as Cacique first appeared then grew on the horizon. As the fishing boat angled in on Cacique's windward side the mate moved forward tying a line to his bows and I realised Cacique was about to be lost to a salvage claim. There was a simultaneous leap - the mate for Cacique's bows and me for her tiller. I still don't know how I cleared that gap and the lifeline but in the same movement I hauled Cacique's tiller to windward as the mate fought to secure his line forward. I won! He gave me a long look then shrugged and we settled down to agree a price.

I've never considered myself a great businesswoman and being very grateful I wanted to be as generous as possible but they wanted more than I had with the alternative of putting in to their village with their police and their judge. This gave me every incentive to haggle and I managed to bring the price in the range of the money on board for which we settled.

Geography doesn't change to suit dramatic purposes and having waved goodbye to the fishermen it took another 28 hours on deck before I could reach safe anchorage. You can believe I slept well then before moving up the river to Lumut where I moored 10 yards away from the best source of good food.

As an aside this in a good time to answer the suggestion that I don't eat well sailing alone. Listening to a recent radio programs I heard that my diet coincides with that of a marathon runner - large quantities of meat, vegetables and fruit plus huge quantities of carbohydrates (bread, potatoes, pasta, rice etc.). I

probably don't eat enough fat but the only serious fault seems to be that too often the food is canned or dried.

This wasn't a good time for me. Of all the things I'd considered which might stop Cacique (most of which amounted to lack of money), I had never thought I'd be beaten by lack of stamina. 8 days rest in Lumut didn't help much; I still had headwinds to contend with and progress was very slow. Again I was forced to stop in Langkawi, which did improve things a little thanks to a forcible suggestion I take mineral supplements, and the (chaste) company of Australian friend Tom on 'Cat-o-nine-tails' - a self confessed adventurer and gigolo.

Thailand at last and the end of the Straits of Malacca. Luckily I'd scheduled plenty of time for the Straits but that was in the expectation of doing lots of exploring. "Put it behind you Rona - Christmas and party time." Cultural studies were put on hold as I got on with shopping, a bit of day sailing and simply getting reacquainted with the floating village. A grand total of 80 boats gathered for the New Years firework display, which ran continuously from dusk to dawn. I set sail again on January 2nd (or was it the 3rd) 1993.

It felt so good to have a fair wind. With the Red Sea ahead the long distance boats were beginning to converge and there was a lot of chatter on the radio. Having no transmitter I could not talk but when I heard a 40-footer just ahead of me boasting of a record speed for his voyage I could not help saying to myself "Don't look now fella but I'm blasting right up your tail-pipe!" as Cacique ran 164 nautical miles in 24 hours (189 land miles). The final approach to Gaille was tricky as not only the yachts but also the ships were converging; however before long I was sitting on the Windsor's famous verandah sipping a cold drink. Don Windsor had died and the two of his sons who'd taken over as agents had not yet developed the style to cover the shark's teeth but the verandah was the same and the other company good.

I spent a week boat fixing, sightseeing locally, visiting Colombo and relaxing until 'Tethys' was sailed in by Nancy, Patti and Sue. We joined forces to explore inland and something strange happened to me. The first sign was when I diverted to the airport to pick up a parcel held by customs. They insisted I needed an agent for the paper work but I insisted they could cope with my own efforts. It took 20 signatures to release that parcel from bureaucrats who didn't know how their own system worked and sometimes they became over-excited, but I remained calm throughout, only just resisting the temptation to wish the chief bureaucrat 'Great Peace of Mind' as I left. I felt wonderful.

That evening I met the others at the house of Innocent Ratwatter in Kandy and immediately felt very much at home. During the day an infection on my ankle had flared which first-aid didn't help so as well as touring the local historic sights, Innocent and Comarie (a neighbour whose husband I'd met in Gaille) arranged a doctor and medicine for me. The ankle didn't respond well but I couldn't resist taking time to join the others for a trip into the tea plantation area high in the hills (a pilgrimage for an ardent tea drinker?). I must have looked very much the intrepid explorer in my silk bound bush-hat and 8-foot walking staff cut from the jungle when we entered the Hill Club for a dinner on this remnant of the British Raj. Stags' heads and paintings of hunting scenes on the walls, a roaring fire, the billiards room and the braying voices of remnants from empire; what did they think they were doing? Their image as upper crust gentry was as shaky as mine as an intrepid explorer proved to be when my ankle seized up and Nancy and Patti had to carry me from the dining room to the taxi.

Nancy and Patti returned to their boat but Sue insisted on waiting in Kandy with me for the surgeon's decision on my foot (if they cut it off would things heal fast enough for me to sail on before the south-east monsoon arrived?). Perversely those days waiting were the most relaxed of the entire trip. Innocent, Comarie and Sue are three of the most impressive people I've ever met yet I felt completely at ease with them. It was as though I'd reached the peak of my personal mountain and found these three friends waiting for me with a pot of tea on Innocent's terrace. Not strange enough for you? Remember, other people have mystic revelations, I have cups of tea!

The news from the surgeon was good (I'd keep my foot) and my moment of nirvana produced an immediate much needed weight gain, but you can't live on top of a mountain so Sue and I headed back to the boats. Our arrival coincided with a party held to celebrate the birthday of a ship's cat (any excuse) and we created a stir by turning up in magnificent saris. Despite having to change the dressings on my ankle every 4 hours the next few days were lot or fun as Cacique received a steady stream of visitors. It's always difficult to set sail. This time I was afraid I would never again be as content as I was right there.

Maybe Sri Lanka was trying to pull me back because I soon met light headwinds and it took 2½ days just to clear the local fishing boats, one of which gave me a shock by waking me as it pulled up alongside. He was no problem but 2 days later I was 200 miles out and in real trouble. A local type craft changed course heading for Cacique. It was loaded with fuel drums, too far out for fishing and judging from its original course almost certainly smuggling between the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Piracy might well be its sideline! I loaded my two flare guns, laying one by each hand (out of sight), and stood in the cockpit passing occasional comments to my husband Hulk, the crew Killer and the dog Fang inside Cacique. For 15 minutes the 'smugglers' ran parallel about 10 yards off, ignoring my polite denials of interest in trading and watching my charade. Finally they left. Had I been in danger? When I first told the story I treated it lightly yet two weeks later another yacht in the same area was boarded and stripped.

Regardless, I was safe and a few days later enjoying an unscheduled stop in the Maldives while awaiting better winds. The fish life was fantastic and I soon gave in to temptation wrapping my ankle in duct-tape to enjoy some of the best diving in the world. "The evenings are pretty good too" I thought as I relaxed with an after dinner drink on a 97 foot mega-yacht I can only describe as seriously decadent. The owner and I had only met that day and an Englishman and his wife Samantha who neither of us had met before joined us. Conversation was meandering gently until I mentioned an old boyfriend from my Turkish days. "That's my father!" exclaimed Samantha.

Sometimes we all do things we're not proud of and I badly let down the feminist cause when it came time to do the clearance papers from the Maldives. I bluffed my way past the inconvenience of not having cleared in properly and proudly produced my de-ratting certificate and other bumph collected from offices around town. "Where is your ***** certificate?" asked the customs man, holding up as explanation a piece of paper covered in indecipherable script. "If you haven't got it you must return tomorrow because that office is now closed." That would mean another 16 mile round trip by boat as, unknown to him, Cacique wasn't even on his island. It was time for heavy-weight tactics. I let my eyes glisten and a tremble come to my bottom lip.

"Alright! Alright!" he gasped, holding out his hands palms outwards as though to ward off the devil. Cacique and I were on our way.

Progress was steady at 100 miles a day and I was relaxing on my bunk, the pirate stronghold of Socotra well clear on Cacique's beam. Crash! "Oh no! Not again!" I rushed on deck to find an 18-foot whale laying beside Cacique pumping out blood. We both dove below - me to go into my abandon ship routine before checking for damage. At the beginning of Cacique's voyage this would have been a major drama but now the scene playing in my mind came from the 'Hitch-hikers' Guide to the Galaxy' - A whale and a bowl of petunias materialise above a planet. They start falling and the last thing that goes through the mind of the bowl of petunias before it hits the ground is "Oh no! Not again". Supposedly if you know the reason you know the answer to 'Life the Universe and Everything'. Maybe the answer is the same as for why we go sailing - one moment you can be relaxed in the security of a well-balanced view of life; the next comparing yourself to a bowl of petunias!

No damage to Cacique and before long we were in Aden for my first experience of the Arabic world. I soon came to the conclusion the reason the women covered themselves completely was nothing to do with Islam but as protection from the arab men. Unfortunately many of the women were also afraid to have any contact with foreigners. Life goes on for them though and you can see one walking black tent call to another walking black tent across the road what can only be the local equivalent of "Hey Edith! Nice to see you. What brings you into town?" How do they recognise each other? Underneath the body armour though they are often dressed quite normally by western standards, cosmetics included. I don't want to give you the impression all arab men are a nuisance - in Aden some were friendly and helpful but the others you have to slap down really hard.

In Aden Cacique was join by 18-year-old Kirsten from the family crew of New Zealand yacht 'Tainui'. Her mother Lynn and I were the same age within a few days but Kirsten said she found it difficult to believe which flattered my ego and helped to make up my mind to take her.

The Red Sea is only a 1,200 mile leg and the southern section can have favourable winds, yet everyone approaches it with trepidation as those fair winds aren't guaranteed; the rest is definitely a boat-breaking windward beat and if you get in trouble the locals often give you the choice of being robbed, jailed or shot. Most yachts these days motor-sail it in the shelter of the fringing reefs but Cacique's was to be an old fashioned voyage straight up the middle; although that would mean a lot of sail changing and ship dodging.

The first gale hit within 24 hours and I soon realised that unlike me Kirsten was totally fearless. Moving on when the wind dropped I saw her haul up sails in a twinkling - she had twice my strength. To cap it off she was a great cook and loved cooking. Sometimes we just get lucky.

Kirsten wanted to learn to sail away from the 'protection' of her father and two brothers and I was happy to teach her although probably too slow in letting her share the foredeck work. It was easier to accept the risk to Cacique's gear those young muscles offered than to accept the risk of her injuring herself or falling overboard as she exuberantly bounced around. We both learned a lot as we slowly moved up the chart. Naturally we didn't see much of the fair winds and were reduced 45 miles a day made good until a short calm gave me the chance to go over the side in open water to scrape off some of the weeds and barnacles. That was spooky but the improvement was enough to encourage us to put in to an isolated creek in Sudan to finish the job. Once there Kirsten was uncharacteristically cautious about swimming ashore thinking of land mines but I couldn't resist stepping into a new country. That was kind of spooky too, standing naked in the middle of nowhere.

Now we could make good 60 miles most days, which doesn't sound much, but listening to the radio we were making much better time than the larger boats behind the reefs. News too of frequent engine failures and expensive bribes being paid to officials for permission to stop for provisions, fuel and repairs encouraged us to stick it out.

Strongish winds would pass through every couple of days but a bump of the barometer gave good warning and after only three weeks we had reached the Gulf of Suez before a humdinger of a blow hit. A fishing boat running for shelter gave me a fright as I had to manoeuvre in 50 knots to get out of his way in the pitch black night so I was more than ready to shelter behind a nearby island.

Two days later the wind dropped to nothing and we took this unusual opportunity to motor the last few miles to Port Suez where I could breath a huge sigh of relief. Not for long though for now it was time to face the Suez Canal pilots - the most inept and corrupt in the world. It was to be an interesting experience but I don't think the pilots enjoyed it. The first day the wind piped up and we had to put the pilot to bed with a Panadol - he seemed to be suffering from shock. The second day he returned but en-route I had to over-rule him to prevent Cacique being smashed and he left muttering about putting in a report to the canal authority.

A new pilot was due at 7am the next day but I'd caught a rotten cold and was not upset when he didn't materialise. Unfortunately a uniformed man arrived at 10am and when I said it was too late to finish transitting the canal before dark he said he was the chief engineer come to test Cacique for speed due to a complaint. His 'test' went on and on through the canal with increasing suggestions I'd have to take a tow at \$200 an hour but I'd become suspicious of his status. Finally he made the suggestion that the tow could be avoided by mooring overnight if I and presumably Kirsten would give him and the men at the next security station "a good time". My opportunity had come! On the VHF I called the boats ahead and behind giving the details and asking them to be ready to relay to our embassies and the authorities if I put out the word. Suddenly our pilot (for that is what he was) became a pussycat and we reached Port Sudan at 11pm where at the first opportunity he abandoned ship under pretext of clearing us through customs. A mile further on another pilot attempted to board but I'd had enough of their games and he never made it. The Mediterranean opened before us and us were free!

It was a 200-mile beat straight to windward to Cyprus but that's nothing after the Red Sea and 3½ days later we were enjoying hot showers and the benefits of civilisation. Maybe Kirsten was no longer under the illusion I was younger than her mother but we'd shared a lot of laughs and she wasn't the only one who'd had an education. It took only a couple of days for her to find a job to tide her over until Tainui arrived and Cacique was then joined by Sandy Lewis, last seen when he came for a holiday with me in New Zealand.

The people of southern Cyprus are Greek but the British holidaymakers dominate the island and Sandy and I wanted to see the Greek islands proper so off we sailed. Was it my fault our first stop was in Turkey where we ducked into a bay to get out of a blow? "You've got great patience" said Sandy as we spent 2½ hours making the last ½ mile to the head of the bay against 50-60knot williwaws off the mountains. Pointing back at the open sea I replied I've got all the patience on the world if the alternative is that!" - the Mediterranean in a blow produces waves that will knock every filling out of your teeth. Luckily that was our only bad weather and although the wind was always adverse we simply chose our next step to be on the best tack. Tourism has boomed since 1984 when I was last in the area but 13 stops on 10 islands allowed us to experience everything from the sublime to the ridiculous and we were well satisfied.

Dropping Sandy off at Pylos on the Greek mainland I sailed the 400 miles over to the Straits of Messina between Italy and Sicily to meet Sandy's sister Caroline Morrison. Many of you know Caroline personally or through my letters and she is a great friend - I just hoped she would still be talking to me when we reached France after a 700 mile beat to windward.

We went through the Straits in ideal conditions but the currents and winds were quite bad enough to make us realise the cautions I'd read were no joke. Next we aimed for the gap between the south of Corsica and Sardinia but ended up calling in at a yuppie island off Rome (fairy lights on a church?) and Bastia in the north of Corsica. Luckily Bastia proved a very pleasant old town and once past the island we had a slight slant from the wind on our way to Sète at the entrance to the French canal system. It was slow and the only reason Caroline had joined me for the leg was mismatched schedules but we made it in time for her to have a week enjoying the canals - in theory.

Bridges always look lower from a boat than they really are, don't they? Wrong! We'd pulled Cacique's mast, resting it on the pulpit, but barely gone a half mile before the first bridge proved too low. It was a swing bridge but not due to open for 8 hours so we completely repositioned the mast by hand and pressed on. That was by no means the last mistake I made. An instant mis-diagnosis of weed round the propeller as blown piston rings (low power and thick black oily smoke from the exhaust?) and managed to get Cacique crosswise in a couple of locks before working out a reasonable technique.

By the time Caroline had to book her train ticket we had done 65 locks and were pretty good at it but she never, ever under any circumstances, wanted to see another lock in her life. Still next morning she said "they're only five more up locks before the top and I've got time before my train - let's get them done". With friends like Caroline you can achieve anything - with friends like me you can get ulcers.

I'm now going to confuse you by saying that for me the canal was one of the highlights of Cacique's trip - after all the problems were small; relatively. Forget the history and culture the main pleasure in France is food and wine. Indeed the French themselves are best seen 'at table' when you can really believe their claim to be the only truly civilised race in the world. Each day you wend your way through the countryside catching glimpses of chateaux through the trees which link their branches overhead. The birds and animals watch you pass in sun-dappled scenes straight out of *Wind in the Willows* and at the end of the day you can moor almost at your pleasure to search out the perfect cafe to watch the world go by over a meal and carafe of local wine. Two weeks of that wasn't hard to bear even on the day I played Katherine Hepburn in '*African Queen*'; ten times diving over the side with a knife to cut Cacique's propeller free of weed.

Eventually Cacique reached the river Gironne for the final descent to the sea and I gulped. The river was in flood and littered with tree trunks being swept by at high speed - maybe this wasn't such a good idea. False alarm again as two days later the flood had eased leaving a helpful current for the run down to Bordeaux where I re-stepped Cacique's mast. The local yacht club was wonderfully hospitable, even wanting me to stop and do a television programme (with my French?), but time was too short and next morning I ran a further 20 miles down the river to Pauillac where I ran out of steam.

Around the world telephones ring as I need to hear the enthusiasm of friends and draw strength from it. That helps a lot but reaching the open sea I am literally bone tired and feel any stop before England will mean at least a week's delay to re-gird my loins. Over the past year I've imagined this final leg many times but I still don't know what to expect. Beating out of the Bay of Biscay is slow so slow at 30 miles a day - ships and fishing boats allow minimal sleep - but eventually Cacique reaches Cap du Raz where I drop anchor and get a proper sleep while waiting for the right tide.

At 6am I'm off at 5 knots. Round the first cape and the speed goes up to 6 knots. The wind and current increase as we run the 20 miles to the next cape and we blast out of the Chenal du Fort into the English Channel at 8 knots. Riding the tides, surfing the waves and sling-shotting off the squalls Cacique sails into the night. Strong wind warnings on the radio as we rocket past a yacht hove-to with no sign of life - they've got to be crazy, this is the busiest shipping lane in the world! Eventually a grey overcast dawn approaches and a break in the cloud shows Start Point with Dartmouth ahead where I first stepped on a yacht 11 years ago; where I made my first stop with Cacique 3 years and 4 months ago; where NOW!!! we cross the line and Cacique's 30,000+ mile circumnavigation is complete.

The wind dies in the lee of the point and I contemplate putting into Dartmouth for a poetic finish but 20 miles up the coast my mother is waiting and now it's her day having followed my course and forwarded my mail all around the world. Eventually I get through to Teignmouth harbour on the VHF and hear nobody is expecting me and I won't be able to cross the bar until high tide that evening so I day sail, tacking in and out of the bays but still reach Teignmouth by 2pm and it looks as though I'll have a long wait. A dredger comes out to dump his load and I call him. "Plenty of water" he says "Follow me in."

Crossing the bar the harbour opens before me and there is my mother waiting on the beach. It takes a few minutes to moor and row ashore but soon we are hugging each other crying with happiness. "You must be tired" she says, "I'll make a nice cup of tea"

Don't waste your sympathy on thoughts of unsung exploits. I know several at you were hoping my arrival in England would be made a media occasion and eventually I had my moment of glory when the town decided there was something worth celebrating. First the local yacht club asked me to give a talk and show my pictures. Not having slides or anything prepared I just sat on a stool and chatted - for 3 hours. It seemed to go down very well and demonstrated one of the changes the trip appears to have made in me - I talk more!

A week later I was given a civic reception at the town hall where the mayor presented me with a frame diploma and a shield of the town's coat of arms. Unfortunately right at the start the official photographer's cynical attitude annoyed me and I came out loaded for bear and the bemused mayor found himself waving the Stars and Stripes for the press. From that you can see I haven't learnt to completely control my temper but at least I've learnt to use it!

That just leaves me to clear up one last detail. I've been writing these 'High Adventure' over-the-top style letters for some time now, accepting I haven't the skill to describe the gentle things that really make my voyages worthwhile. I did try for a magazine with the poem below but readers later blamed the poem for this last year which has been so far 'Over-the-Top' even my letter style has broken down.

LETTERS HOME

Tell a tale of pirates and every ear pricks up.
Slash and cut and buckles swashed are what it's all about.
But tell a tale of balmy nights when stars reach to the ground,
then eyes will close and legs stretch out and stifled yawns will sound.
Tell a tale of cyclones and jaws will drop in awe,
the lightning flash, the breakers crash will raise heroic roars.
But tell a tale of market stalls, of scowls and smiles and banter,
then cakes are passed and sugar spooned and teacups soon will clatter.

Tell a tale of jungles and eyes are all agog.
With just a knife the hero leaps to slay that hungry croc.
But tell a tale of waterfalls, sun-dappled serene pools?
The moments there without delay to bring out chip filled bowls.

Tell a tale of romance and noses twitch with glee
as the desert sheik with eyes like coals exacts his lustful fee.
But tell a tale of friends well met, of mellow sundown chats
then chairs soon creak and hands are drawn to playing with the cat.

So what should I write home about, from these far distant seas?
Intrepid, brave, heroic heart? That surely isn't me.
To jungles, romance, hurricanes I'm not drawn like a salmon.
I never seek out adventures - but still somehow they happen

The truth that remains is that Cacique's circumnavigation has succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. Cacique herself proved perfect for the trip! I've had the most wonderful time and it has renewed my enthusiasm for the future. Most of all it added a richness to my friendships that carried me through the rough times and completely changed my perspective - Cacique has had to go on the market but I've gained more than enough to compensate.

This is going to be the last of my newsletters, at least for a while, and I've so little time I'm going to have to scrimp at the end but hopefully you will reply and we can pick up our correspondence on a one-to-one level. Many of you I can look forward to seeing again soon as Roger Swanson and I have decided it's time to push Cloud Nine through a few more waves together. Until then...

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoy'd the sun,
To have lived the light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought,
to have done?

Departure/Arrival Dates and Mileage

1990 - Hamble to Sint Maarten and the Virgin Isles

02-Mar-90
Depart Moodys' Yard on the Hamble River, March 2nd @ 13:00
03-Mar-90
Arrive Dartmouth March 3rd @14:00.
04-Mar-90
Depart Dartmouth March 5th @ 13:30, Eddystone at first light
05-Mar-90
Arrive Falmouth March 5th @ 20:00.
12-Mar-90
Depart Falmouth March 12th @ 16:00. 24th March Position approx 40N, 20W
31-Mar-90
Position approx 30°N, 30°W
05-Apr-90
Position 26° 30'N, 30°W at dawn
29-Apr-90
Arrive Philipsburg, Sint Maarten April 29th @ 10:00 GMT (06:00 local)
4,000nm
10-Jul-90

Depart Sint Maarten @ 15:00.
11-Jul-90
Arrive Charlotte Amelie, US Virgin Islands @ 13:00
110nm

1991 - Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean

23-Jan-91
Depart St Thomas January 23rd @ 15:10 (19:10 GMT)
31-Jan-91
Arrive Cristobal (Panama) January 31st @ 15:30
1,030nm

05-Feb-91
Cristobal to Lake Gatuan on February 5th
07-Feb-91
Lake Gatuan to Balboa on February 7th
10-Feb-91
Balboa to Isla Tobago on February 10th
7nm

11-Feb-91
Depart Isla Tobago on February 11th @ 07:15 (12:15 GMT)
16-Feb-91
February 16th Becalmed thro' night surrounded by whales.
22-Feb-91
Arrive Bahia Stephens, San Cristobal, Galapagos @ 01:45. Moved to Bahia Bequerizo (Wreck Bay) later in day.
831nm
12nm

25-Feb-91
Depart San Cristobal @17:00
31-Mar-91
Arrive Hiva Oa, Marquesas @ 10:45
2,310nm
07-Apr-91
Depart Hiva Oa @12:20, arrive Tahu Ata (Baie Hana-moa-noa) @ 14:50
8nm

08-Apr-91
Depart Tahu Ata @ 16:28; 9th April arrive Nuku Hiva @ 18:00
105nm

16-Apr-91
Depart Nuku Hiva @ 09:30
28-Apr-91
Arrive Penrhyn @ 14:30
995nm
08-May-91
Depart Penrhyn @ 09:30
25-May-91
Arrive Pago Pago, American Samoa @ 11:30
916nm
21-Jul-91
Depart Pago Pago @ 13:00
22-Jul-91
Arrive Apia, Western Samoa @ 08:30
80nm

13-Aug-91
Depart Apia @ 11:45

17-Aug-91
Arrive Neiafu, 'Uta Vava'u, Tonga @16:00. 18th August on arrival due to date line.
335nm
15-Oct-91
Depart Neiafu @ 08:10
19-Oct-91
Arrive Suva, Fiji @ 14:30
485nm
28-Nov-91
Depart Suva @ 13:25
16-Dec-91
Arrive Opuia, New Zealand @ 14:00
1,348nm

1992 - Opuia to Gisbourne, New Zealand and Return

22-Feb-92
Depart Opuia @ 12:00. 23rd February Arrive Port Fitzroy, Gt Barrier I. @ 18:15.
105nm

25-Feb-92
Depart Port Fitzroy @ 0850, arrive Port Charles, Coromandel Peninsula @16:30
25nm

26-Feb-92
Depart Port Charles @ 14:30, arrive Kennedy Bay @18:30.
14nm

27-Feb-92
Depart Kennedy Bay @ 0900, arrive Tairua Harbour @ 16:00.
30nm

01-Mar-92
Depart Tairua Hbr @ 14:00, arrive Slipper Isle @ 17:00
10nm

02-Mar-92
Depart Slipper Isle @ 0810. 3rd March arrive Hicks Bay @ 11:35
120nm

04-Mar-92
Depart Hicks Bay @ 09:50. 5th March arrive Tolaga Bay @ 12:30
92nm

06-Mar-92
Depart Tolaga Bay @ 08:45, arrive Gisbourne marina @ 16:00
32nm

13-Mar-92
Depart Gisbourne @ 10:00, arrive Tolaga Bay @ 17:00
32nm

14-Mar-92
Depart Tolaga Bay @ 08:30, arrive Waipiro Bay @17:30
27nm

15-Mar-92
Depart Waipiro Bay @ 05:30, arrive 1nm north of Waikori Bluff @ 11:30
22nm

16-Mar-92
Depart Waikori Bluff @ 08:15, arrive Tokomaru Bay @ 17:00
36nm

22-Mar-92
Depart Tokomaru Bay @13:45, arrive ? @ 20:00
27nm

23-Mar-92
Depart ? @ 05:45, arrive south side of Hicks Bay @ 11:30
18nm

24-Mar-92
Depart Hicks Bay @ 05:45, arrive Waikau Bay @ 16:00
32nm

24-Mar-92
Depart Waikau Bay @ 18:30. 25th March Arrive Waikau Bay @ 02:00
22nm

26-Mar-92

Depart Waikua Bay @ 08:30. 27th March Arrive Slipper Island @ 19:15

122nm

28-Mar-92

Depart Slipper Island @ 06:45. 29th March Arrive Gulf Harbour Marina @ 07:00

95nm

01-Apr-92

Depart Gulf Harbour Marina @ 11:00. 2nd April Arrive Tutukaka @ 06:45

74nm

07-Apr-92

Depart Tutukaka @ 08:00, arrive Opuia, Bay of Islands @ 19:15

44nm

1992 - New Zealand to Thailand

16-May-92

Depart Opuia @ 06:30

23-May-92

Position 28° 10'S, 169° 23'E @ 15:22. Storm rising to 60 knots; waves 20-25ft over swell

24-May-92

Position 27° 13'S, 169° 40'E @ 22:46. Reset course for Gladstone.

06-Jun-92

Arrive Gladstone, Australia @ 13:45.

1,390nm

12-Jun-92

Depart Gladstone @ 10:30 through strait, arrive North end @18:30

19nm

13-Jun-92

Depart Curtis Island strait :06:13, arrive Great Keppel :14:30

30nm

14-Jun-92

Depart Gt Keppel @ 0630, arrive Port Clint @ 16:10

43nm

15-Jun-92

Depart Port Clint @ 08:30, arrive Pearl Bay @ 10:15

9nm

16-Jun-92

Depart Pearl Bay @ 12:00, arrive Middle I, Percy Islands @ 06:00

57nm

17-Jun-92

Depart Percy Islands @ 06:45.

18-Jun-92

Arrive Pelican I by Carlisle I @ 07:45

80nm

19-Jun-92

Depart Carlisle Island @10:30, arrive Goldsmith Island @ 13:30

12nm

20-Jun-92

Depart Goldsmith I. @ 06:45, arrive Thomas Is @ 08:50.

10nm

20-Jun-92

Depart Thomas Island @ 14:00, arrive Lindeman Island @ 16:40

12nm

21-Jun-92

Depart Lindeman Island @ 06:30, arrive Hamilton Marina @ 08:45

9nm

22-Jun-92

Depart Hamilton Marina @ 07:45, arrive Molle Island @ 09:40

8nm

Depart Molle Island @13:45, arrive Abel Point Marina (Airlee Beach) @ 15:45

8nm

24-Jun-92

Depart Airlee Beach @ 08:00, arrive Bowen @16:30

35nm

26-Jun-92

Depart Bowen @ 08:30. 27th June Arrive Magnetic Island @ 08:00
103nm
28-Jun-92
Depart Magnetic Island @ 08:15, arrive Casement Bay, Gt Palm I. @ 16:15
30nm

29-Jun-92
Depart Gt Palm I. @ 06:45, arrive SW of Cape Richards @ 16:15
41nm

30-Jun-92
Depart Cape Richard @ 08:00, arrive Dunk Island @ 12:30
18nm

01-Jul-92
Depart Dunk I. @ 09:45, arrive NW side of Fitzroy Island @ 23:00
65nm

02-Jul-92
Depart Fitzroy Island @ 07:30, arrive Cairns Marina @ 10:30
15nm

17-Jul-92
Depart Cairns @ 11:00, arrive Double Island @ 15:10
17nm

18-Jul-92
Depart Double Island @ 08:45, arrive Port Douglas @ 14:20
21nm

19-Jul-92
Depart Port Douglas @ 12:00, arrive Low Islet @ 15:00
9nm

22-Jul-92
Depart Low Islet @ 07:45, arrive N side of Cape Tribulation @ 12:00
20nm

23-Jul-92
Depart Cape Tribulation @ 08:00, arrive Cooktown @ 14:30
40nm

31-Jul-92
Depart Cooktown @ 13:15, arrive Cape Bedford @ 17:00
17nm

01-Aug-92
Depart Cape Bedford @ 09:15, arrive Watson Bay, Lizard Is. @ 16:15
36nm

05-Aug-92
Depart Lizard Island @ 07:30, arrive NW side Howick Island @ 12:45
31nm

06-Aug-92
Depart Howick Island @ 07:45, arrive Cape Melville @ 14:45
37nm

07-Aug-92
Depart Cape Melville @ 09:00, arrive Owen Channel, Flinders Isles @13:30
16nm

09-Aug-92
Depart Owen Channel @ 03:20, arrive Morris Island @ 17:15
66nm

10-Aug-92
Depart Morris Island @ 10:15, arrive NW of Night Island @ 14:15
22nm

11-Aug-92
Depart Night Island @ 07:15, arrive Portland Roads @ 14:35
40nm

12-Aug-92

Depart Portland Roads @ 06:20, arrive Margaret Bay @ 14:20

43nm

13-Aug-92

Depart Margaret Bay @ 04:00, arrive Mount Adolphus Island @ 21:00

88nm

14-Aug-92

Depart Mount Adolphus Is @ 07:45, arrive NW side Horn Island @ 12:00

25nm

17-Aug-92

Depart Horn Island @ 09:50. 22nd August Position 11° 08.7'S, 130° 10.98'E @ 16:22.

23-Aug-92 Arrive Fannie Bay, Darwin @ 16:00

834nm

04-Sep-92

Depart Darwin @ 23:30.

05-Sep-92

Position 11° 25'S, 129° 43'E @ 10:12 (west of Bathurst Island)

12-Sep-92

Position 10° 25'S, 123° 15'E @ 03:00 (between Timor and Roti Island)

14-Sep-92

Position 10° 07'S, 121° 32'E @ 09:24 (north of Pulau Sawu)

15-Sep-92

Position 10° 38'S, 119° 24'E @ 20:40 (south of Sumba)

18-Sep-92

Arrive Benoa, Bali @13:00 (anchored in north creek) – 960nm direct/1250nm sailed

1,250nm

25-Sep-92

Depart Benoa @ 08:00, arrive Pangpang Bay, Java @ 22:30 (08° 29'S, 114° 22'E)

63nm

26-Sep-92

Depart Pangpang Bay @ 07:00.

Position 08° 04'S, 114° 28'E @ 11:08 (through strait)

Position 07° 03'S, 114° 14'E @23:30 (between Gili Jang Island and Sapudi Island)

27-Sep-92

Hit by Freighter @ 07:50 (position 06° 32'S, 113° 59'E)

30-Sep-92

Position 03° 41'S, 109° 54'E @ 09:16. 30th September Position 03° 42'S, 109° 54'E @ 09:16

06-Oct-92

Position 00° 13'S, 105° 53'E @ 18:20. 8th October Position 01° 14'N, 104° 49'E @ 17:34

09-Oct-92

Arrive Changi, Singapore @ 14:00. Anchored approx 01° 23'N, 103° 58'E

940nm

09-Nov-92

Depart Changi @ 08:20, arrive Sentosa Island (?) @ 18:00

28nm

10-Nov-92

Depart Sentosa Island @ 07:00, arrive SW side Pulau Pisang @ 18:00

38nm

12-Nov-92

Depart Pulau Pisang @ 04:30, arrive 01° 51'N, 102° 45'E @ 18:00 (Tanjong Tobor)

40nm

13-Nov-92

Depart Tanjong Tobor @ 05:00, arrive 1nm NE Cape Rachado @ 18:00

63nm

14-Nov-92

Depart Cape Rachado @ 09:15

15-Nov-92

Arrive Kelang @ 04:30

58nm

19-Nov-92

Depart Kelang @ 08:00, Position @ 13:00 03° 15'N, 101° 12'E – Fell overboard

20-Nov-92

Arrive SW side of Pulau Pangkor @ 18:10

92nm

21-Nov-92
 Depart Pulau Pangkor @ 09:10, arrive Lamut Yacht Club @ 11:40
 10nm
 29-Nov-92
 Depart Lamut @ 08:45
 30-Nov-92
 Arrive 05° 14' 44"N, 100° 16' 23"(Saddle I) @ 12:30
 75nm
 01-Dec-92
 Depart Saddle Island @ 13:15, arrive just south of NW tip of Penang @ 21:00
 15nm
 02-Dec-92
 Depart Penang @ 15:00.
 03-Dec-92
 Arrive Kuah Town, Lagkawi @ 09:00
 80nm?
 12-Dec-92
 Depart Kuah @ 11:00, arrive Last Resort (06° 21' 42"S, 99° 40'E) @ 18:00
 15nm

 13-Dec-92
 Depart Last Resort @ 04:00, arrive east side of Pulau Tertua @ 14:00
 19nm
 14-Dec-92
 Depart Pulau Tertua @ 07:30, arrive NE tip of Ko Rok Nok @ 19:30
 46nm

 15-Dec-92
 Depart Ko Rok Nok @ 08:15, arrive Ko Phiphidon (Pee Pee) @ 17:30
 36nm
 16-Dec-92
 Depart Pee Pee @ 06:45, arrive Ao Chalong,
 30nm
 19-Dec-92 to 1-Jan-93
 Gunkholing between Ao Chalong, Nai Harn, Kata and Patong Beaches
 40nm

1993 - Thailand to England via Suez Canal and Mediteranean

02-Jan-93
 Depart Patong Beach @ 08:45
 05-Jan-93
 Position 07° 37'N, 93° 39'E @ 06:30 (between Little Nicobar and Nancowry Islands)
 11-Jan-93
 Arrive Galle, Sri Lanka @ 01:00. Average 5.2knots for 1083nm (max 164nm in 24hrs)
 1,083nm
 14-Feb-93
 Depart Galle @ 08:30
 17-Feb- 93 Possible Pirates
 20-Feb-93 Arrive Malle, Maldives @ 08:00
 450nm
 25-Feb-93
 Depart Maldives @ 09:30
 10-Mar-93
 Position 13° 33'N, 52° 00'E @ 17:45: Hit a whale
 15-Mar-93
 Arrive Aden @ 09:30
 1,810nm
 21-Mar-93
 Depart Aden @ 12:25 with Kirsten from 'Taina'
 03-Apr-93
 Arrive Khor Shin'ab, Sudan @ 09:45
 732nm
 05-Apr-93
 Depart Khor Shin'ab @ 06:05

10-Apr-93

Arrive Jiftun as Saghir, Egypt @ 07:20

388nm

13-Apr-93

Depart Jiftun as Saghir @ 07:30, arrive Endeavour Bay @ 15:35

32nm

14-Apr-93

Depart Bay (27° 34'N, 33° 47'E) @ 06:00, arrive Ras Shukheir @ 17:57

51nm

15-Apr-93

Depart Ras Shukheir @ 06:00.

16-Apr-93

Arrive Suez @ 08:17

113nm

18-Apr-93

Depart Suez @ 04:45, arrive Al Kibrit @ 08:00

19-Apr-93

Depart Al Kibrit @ 08:30, arrive Ismailia @ 15:15

20-Apr-93

Depart Ismailia @ 09:54. Position Port Said @ 21:30 where pilot dropped and replacement declined by me.
Continued without pilot

Total for canal 87nm

21-Apr-93

Position 31° 25'N, 32° 17'E @ 01:30

25-Apr-93

Arrive Limmassol, Cyprus @ 07:00

294nm

11-May-93

Depart Limmassol @ 08:30. 14th May Arrive Kalkan, Turkey @ 14:20

224nm

15-May-93

Depart Kalkan @ 10:00. 16th May Arrive Mandraki, Rhodes, Greece @ 03:00

63nm

19-May-93

Depart Mandraki @ 13:00, arrive Symi @ 18:30

24nm

20-May-93

Depart Symi @ 06:30, arrive Palon, Niseros @ 17:00

35nm

21-May-93

Depart Niseros @ 17:00. 22nd May Arrive Skala, Astypalaia @ 07:00

42nm

23-May-93

Depart Skala @ 08:00. 24th May Arrive Rethimnon, Crete @ 17:15

118nm

24-May-93

Depart Rethimnon @ 00:30, arrive Khania, Crete @ 10:30

32nm

28-May-93

Depart Khania @ 11:20, arrived east of Cape Spade, Crete @ 15:30

15nm

29-May-93

Depart C. Spade @ 06:00, arrived Kapsali Bay, Kithera @ 21:30

47nm

30-May-93

Depart Kapsali @ 07:00, arrive Port Kagio (36° 08'N, 22° 29'E), Greece @ 17:30

31nm

31-May-93

Depart Port Kagio @ 07:30, arrive port Longos, Sapientza @ 22:50

47nm

01-Jun-93

Depart Sapientza @ 08:00, arrive Pylos (36° 55'N, 21° 42'E), Greece @ 11:20

12nm

02-Jun-93
Depart Pylos @ 11:00
06-Jun-93
Arrive Reggio di Calabria, Straits of Messina, Italy @ 23:00
320nm
08-Jun-93
Depart Reggio @ 16:00. 12th June Arrive Pto di Ponza, I. di Ponza @ 07:00
216nm
13-Jun-93
Depart I di Ponza @ 08:45. 17th June Arrive Bastia, Corsica @ 14:30
197nm
18-Jun-93
Depart Bastia @ 14:30. 22nd June Arrive Sete, France @ 08:00
274nm
24-Jun-93
Depart Sete @ 08:00 through Canal du Midi
06-Jul-93
Arrive Castets-en-Dorthe @12:30
450km
08-Jul-93
Depart Castets-en-Dorthe @ 11:30 down River Gironde, arrive Pont d'Aquitaine @17:00
57km
09-Jul-93
Restep mast and Depart @ 09:30 arrive Pauillac @ 15:30
42km
13-Jul-93 Depart Pauillac @ 11:15
15-Jul-93
Position 46° 43'N, 02° 25'W @ 15:04 – boarded and searched by French Customs
17-Jul-93
Arrived Audierne (48° 01'N, 004° 33'W) @ 20:30
241nm
18-Jul-93
Depart Audierne @ 06:15.
19-Jul-93
Position 50° 03'N, 003° 52'W @ 05:30 where outward line of circumnavigation crossed.
Arrive Teignmouth 19th July 1993 @ 14:10
173nm

Trip 1235 days - 3 years 4½ months