

# **The Tonga Compendium**

## **including Minerva Reef**

**A Compilation of Guidebook References and Cruising Reports**



**Rev B.4 – May 20, 2012**

**We welcome updates to this guide!  
(especially for places we have no cruiser information on)**

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**The current home of the official copy of this document is  
<http://svsgogypaws.com/files/>**

**If you found it posted elsewhere, there might be an updated copy there.**

## Revision Log

Many thanks to all who have contributed over the years!!

<b>Rev</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
A	21-Oct-2011	Initial version, extracted from the Cooks and Samoa's Compendium, still very rough at this point!!
A.1	24-Oct-2011	Added Minerva Reef
A.2	21-Nov-2011	Added Grommit's account of Neiafo'oo Island
A.3	15-Jan-2012	Chesapeake's Inputs for Vavau and Ha'apai
B.1	24-Jan-2012	Added Nine of Cups (2009) and s/v Passage inputs
B.2	01-Feb-2012	Added Ocelot's (the Hacking Family) dive sites + a little Ha'apai diving info
B.3	20-Feb-2012	Added Tongan Phrases, Added Cyclone Season Weather section
B.4	20-May-2012	Added Ha'apai Info and some final updates to Vavau info

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## **1 Introduction**

This guide originally started out as a way for s/v Soggy Paws and a few friends to organize notes and various internet sources on Tahiti and the Society Islands, prior to our cruise there in Spring of 2011. Later, it became a way for us to pass on what we've learned while cruising the area in 2011. Now it's migrated from the Tuamotus, to the Marquesas, to the Societies, the Cooks and Samoas, and now Tonga. If you haven't found our other 'Compendiums', they're available online at <http://svsoggypaws.com/files/>

It is not intended to replace the guidebooks or charts, but to supplement out-of-date guides with recent cruiser first-hand reports, and fill in places that the guides don't cover.

### **1.1 Organization of the Guide**

This guide is loosely organized in the order that cruisers coming from French Poly and the Cook Islands normally transit... north to south.

### **1.2 Overview of Tonga**

#### **1.3 Time Zone**

Note that you cross the international dateline when arriving in Tonga from the Cook Islands or Samoa.

Tonga is GMT +13. Example: If it's Tuesday 09:00 in Tahiti, it's Wednesday at 08:00 Tonga time.

In the Sept/Oct timeframe, Tonga is on the same time zone as NZ (I don't know about the rest of the year).

### **1.4 Weather In Tonga**

#### **1.4.1 General Weather Conditions September-November**

The Vavau area is considerably cooler than the Samoas in October. Similar to French Polynesia in June-August, it is warm during the day but cools down nicely at night.

By October it is starting to warm up some. There are still lows and cold fronts going through the area in October, bringing alternately rainy and squally weather, and then fine clear weather.

There is also the possibility of the South Pacific Convergence Zone dropping into the area from the west, bringing very wet weather.

I have heard more complaints in Tonga about the inaccuracy of the GRIB files than in our whole run west from French Polynesia (no doubt because of the fronts and SPCZ).

#### **1.4.2 Weather Sources – With Onboard Email/SSB**

##### **Whoosh – September 2010**

Here are additional weather products beyond those useful for French Polynesia

Saildocs: send nadi.cooks

Saildocs: send nadi.nuie

Saildocs: send nadi.fiji

[http://www.met.gov.to/index\\_files/routine\\_forecast.txt](http://www.met.gov.to/index_files/routine_forecast.txt)

(the Tongan waters f'cast, done by Nadi and tweaked at Nukalofa airport). Not very detailed and not forecast very far in the future.

### **Soggy Paws - 2011:**

In our transit through this area, what we used most of the time for watching the weather were 3 files:

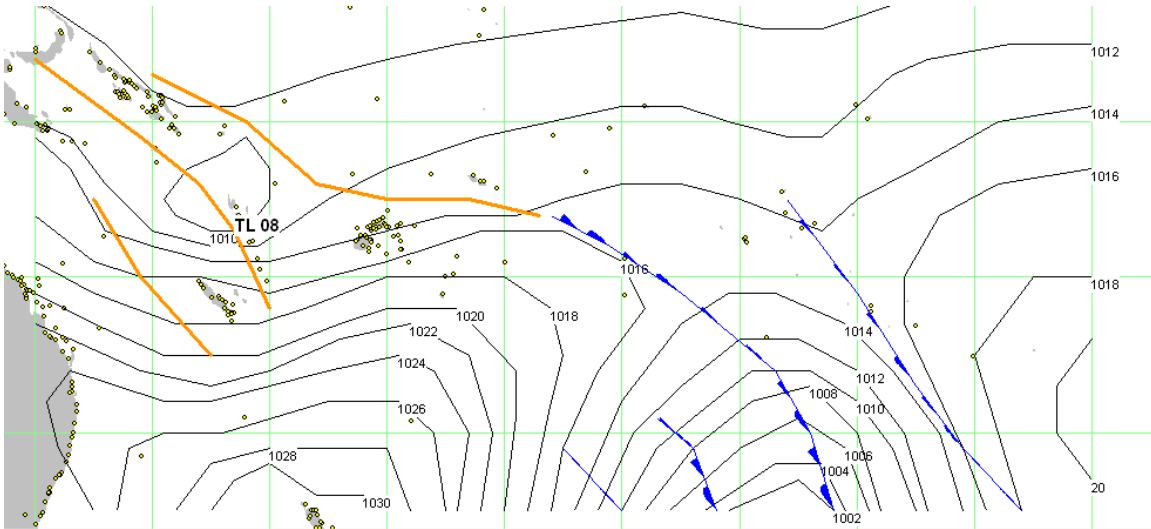
1. A spot forecast for the location we were in—every 6 hours for 10 days
2. A 'local' GRIB file that gave a fairly detailed forecast for a reasonably small area for about 5 days
3. A 'wide range' GRIB that watched conditions approaching well to the west and south of us. The area we requested while in Tonga was 05S-40S, 160E-165W, for the next 10 days. This was about a 40K GRIB file (we had to use Winlink, and our Iridium to receive one that big). This provided a good long range forecast.
4. The Tonga 'Routine Forecast' file listed above.
5. During times of tropical activity, we also found these two sources useful for additional perspective
  - a. [http://weather.gmdss.org/navimail/GMDSS\\_METAREA14-TROPICS\\_INMARSAT](http://weather.gmdss.org/navimail/GMDSS_METAREA14-TROPICS_INMARSAT) (this is Met14.trop on Saildocs)
  - b. <http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/data/raw/fz/fzps40.phfo.hsf.sp.txt> (this is FZPS40.PHFO (S Pacific 0-25S, 120W-160E) on Saildocs)

We also got the Nadi Fleet codes daily, but rarely looked at them unless we were puzzled by the current wx.

We found 6 possible sources of weather useful while away from internet in this area

1. **The Fiji Met office** produces 2 products that cover the area, one is the 'Fleet Code'—a coded text file that can be pasted into a software program that will decode the codes into a surface analysis chart that covers from New Zealand east to about 120W. Download the Fleet Code program on the Pangolin website [www.pangolin.co.nz](http://www.pangolin.co.nz) before you get out of internet range. The saildocs request is `send fleet.nadi.`

The second product is a text version that is not coded. The saildocs request is `send nadi.sopac.`



**The Nadi Fleet Forecast as Decoded by PhysPlot**

2. **GRIB files.** GRIB files seem to be generally accurate except when stalled cold fronts from NZ run into troughs or convergence zones which lurk sometimes over Tonga. Then, no one, including the Tongans, Fiji, or NZ weather offices do a very good job of predicting what the wind will do exactly in any given location.

**3. New Zealand Weather Faxes**

They only have one transmitter in NZ, so each product is broadcast on a different frequency every 15 minutes starting at xx00 (5Mhz), xx15 (9Mhz), xx30 (13Mhz), xx45 (16Mhz daytime, 3Mhz nighttime). All times are Cook Island Local times. (-10UTC)

PRODUCT	TRANSMISSION TIMES (Local) & Freqs				
	3247.4	5807	9459	13550.5	16340.1
1200 SW PACIFIC MSL ANAL	0645	0600	0615	0630	
1800 SW PACIFIC MSL ANAL		1200	1215	1230	1245
TRANSMISSION SCHEDULE		1300	1315	1330	1345
0000 SW PACIFIC MSL PROG H+ 30		1400	1415	1430	1445
0000 SW PACIFIC MSL PROG H+ 48		1500	1515	1530	1545
0000 SW PACIFIC MSL PROG H+ 72		1600	1615	1630	1645
0000 SW PACIFIC MSL ANAL		1800	1815	1830	1845
0600 SW PACIFIC MSL ANAL	0045	0000	0015	0030	
TRANSMISSION SCHEDULE	0145	0100	0115	0130	
1200 SW PACIFIC MSL PROG H+ 30	0245	0200	0215	0230	
1200 SW PACIFIC MSL PROG H+ 48	0345	0300	0315	0330	
1200 SW PACIFIC MSL PROG H+ 72	0445	0400	0415	0430	

(subtract 1.9 to get dial frequency)

**4. Hawaii Weather Faxes**

UTC	Local	Product	Coverage Area
1724	0724	SIGNIFICANT CLOUD FEATURES	30S - 50N, 110W - 160E
1755	0755	STREAMLINE ANALYSIS	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E

1849	0849	SW PACIFIC GOES IR SAT PIC	40S - 05N, 130W - 165E
1940	0940	WIND/WAVE ANALYSIS	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
1953	0953	24HR WIND/WAVE FORECAST	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
2302	1302	48HR WIND/WAVE FORECAST	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
2315	1315	72HR WIND/WAVE FORECAST	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
2341	1341	24HR WIND/WAVE FORECAST	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
2354	1354	STREAMLINE ANALYSIS	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
0524	1924	SIGNIFICANT CLOUD FEATURES	30S - 50N, 110W - 160E
0555	1955	STREAMLINE ANALYSIS	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
0649	2049	SW PACIFIC GOES IR SAT PIC	40S - 05N, 130W - 165E
0740	2140	WIND/WAVE ANALYSIS	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
0753	2153	24HR WIND/WAVE FORECAST	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
1102	0102	48HR WIND/WAVE FORECAST	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
1115	0115	72HR WIND/WAVE FORECAST	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
1141	0141	24HR WIND/WAVE FORECASTS	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E
1154	0154	STREAMLINE ANALYSIS	30S - 30N, 110W - 130E

On the Web

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The full Hawaii schedule is available as a text email via Saildocs or online at <http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/fax/hfhi.txt>

The Streamline is available at this URL:

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/graphics/stream.gif>

And the Significant Cloud Features here:

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/graphics/neph.gif>

The Sat Photo is here:

[http://aviationweather.gov/data/obs/sat/intl/ir\\_ICAO-F\\_bw.jpg](http://aviationweather.gov/data/obs/sat/intl/ir_ICAO-F_bw.jpg)

### **Getting the Hawaii Faxes via Email from Winlink or Iridium email**

From s/v Whoosh: Here are the files I've been sampling using NOAA's FTP file server because I don't find these in the Winlink catalog and Sailmail won't offer graphics files/attachments.

This just boils down to sending an email to winlink with some special commands in the body of the email. They require opening up your file size limit (to 40K in some cases) but one or two are practical with a good connection, without using up all one's time. These are the same products available via wxfax IF propagation supports getting them in a viewable, usable form, and IF the timing fits the crews' other plans. So the FTP option is just another arrow to have in the quiver.

PJFB10.TIF - Pacific Wind/Wave Analysis 30S-30N, 110W-130E (Most Current)

PWFE11.TIF - 24HR Pacific Wind/Wave Forecast 30S-30N, 110W-130E (Most Current)

PJFI10.TIF - 48HR Pacific Wind/Wave Forecast 30S-30N, 110W-130E (Most Current)

PWFA11.TIF - Pacific Streamline Analysis 30S-30N, 110W-130E (Most Current)

QYFA99.TIF - Tropical Surface Analysis 40S-40N, 100W-120E (Most Current)

PBFA11.TIF - Significant Cloud Features 30S-50N, 110W-160E (Most Current)

PYFE11.TIF - 24HR Pacific Surface Forecast 30S-50N 110W-130E (Most Current)

PYFI11.TIF - 48HR Pacific Surface Forecast 30S-50N 110W-130E (Most Current)

To get any of these, you address an email to:

[ftpmail@ftpmail.nws.noaa.gov](mailto:ftpmail@ftpmail.nws.noaa.gov)

No subject; use the following format with one or more files listed:

```
open
cd fax
get PJFI10.TIF
quit
```

I'm finding that connecting to the Winlink Hawaii station must be done the evening before I do a morning weather report (in order to connect) - do either of you pull down winlink files in the early a.m.? For me, this means using some stale f'cast products (e.g. that streamline analysis) but doing so seems better than not having it altogether.

Note: To get any of these via internet directly, prefix the product above with

<http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/fax/>

If you have trouble viewing or downloading as TIF file, try changing the .TIF to .GIF

For an printable listing of current Pacific "Fax" products

<http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/fax/rfaxpac.txt>

### **1.4.3 Weather Sources – Voice**

The best source of voice weather for Tonga is the Rag of the Air net, which comes on 8173 USB at 0800 local (1900z). Jim, the net control, with handle Also Island, is located in NE Fiji. He does a full run-down of the area weather from Vanuatu to Tonga, from various sources.

### **1.4.4 Weather Sources – Internet**

Soggy Paws has compiled a bunch of specific South Pacific weather links on their website. These are mainly for French Polynesia, westward to NZ, and northward to Hawaii. These are all the government office forecast products that I have found to be useful. (and a few non-govt sites)

#### **New Zealand Met**

Current surface analysis:

<http://www.metservice.com/national/maps-rain-radar/maps/sw-pacific-recent-latest>

Surface Forecast Series (30, 48, 72H)

<http://www.metservice.com/national/maps-rain-radar/maps/sw-pacific-future-series>

These are great maps in small (PNG) format--about 16K per map. But not easily downloadable via email (appears to be no fixed product name for the graphics, unlike other offices' websites).

### **Australia Met**

And here's for Australia. There may be a more user-friendly page, but I found this that seems to list all the products:

[http://www.bom.gov.au/inside/itb/dm/idcodes/tables/current/difacs\\_products.shtml](http://www.bom.gov.au/inside/itb/dm/idcodes/tables/current/difacs_products.shtml)

### **NOAA Charts in Color from Hawaii**

Though these are highlighted in color (much easier reading), they are small files, only about 30K each.

Current Streamline and Streamline Loop:

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/graphics/stream.gif>

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/graphics/streamloop.gif>

24, 48, 72 Hr SFC Prog for Entire Pacific

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/graphics/24hrsfcp prog.gif>

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/graphics/48hrsfcp prog.gif>

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/graphics/72hrsfcp prog.gif>

Full List of Hawaii Marine Weather Products:

<http://www.prh.noaa.gov/hnl/pages/marine.php>

### **Satellite Pictures**

This is likely available on a marine weather site somewhere, for slow connections here's the link I use for a small B/W Pacific Satellite:

[http://aviationweather.gov/data/obs/sat/intl/ir\\_ICAO-F\\_bw.jpg](http://aviationweather.gov/data/obs/sat/intl/ir_ICAO-F_bw.jpg)

This picture is updated about every 15 minutes, and if you download and save successive files, you can get a fairly nice moving satellite picture.

For a really nice animated color Sat picture of the SW Pacific, use this link. It requires Flash (didn't seem to work on my IE installation, but works well on Chrome).

[http://www.prh.noaa.gov/samoa/satellite/index\\_flash.php?image=IR](http://www.prh.noaa.gov/samoa/satellite/index_flash.php?image=IR)

### **FIJI Met Office**

Fiji Met Office Maps and Satellite page

<http://www.met.gov.fj/sat-map.html>

They have some very good products, but some of them only start coverage west of 155 degrees West.

### **Bob McDavitt's Weekly Weathergram**

<http://weathergram.blogspot.com>

### **Met VUW**

Note this is from the University of Victoria at Wellington (NZ), and is the weather source that the Kiwi's swear by. But it looks kind of like 'repackaged GRIB files'.

<http://metvuw.com/forecast/forecast.php?type=rain&region=spacific>

### **Passage Weather**

Note this is mostly 'repackaged GRIB' files

<http://www.passageweather.com>

#### **1.4.5 Tropical Weather (Jan-Mar)**

**Soggy Paws 2012:** We have only experienced one tropical season in Tonga. So we don't really know enough to know whether our experience is typical or not. But here's what we got.

The official tropical season runs 1 Dec - 30 Apr. But the height of the activity seems to be 15-Jan through 15-March.

From about Jan 15, the SPCZ descended on us, and lay right along a line from the Solomans down to Tonga. The wind in Neiafu area was NW and cloudy/rainy for weeks on end. And a new tropical low spawned in the NW and came towards Tonga about once a week. Some of lows have been just squally, one or two turned into 'Named Storms' and got pretty violent. At least one popped up out of a blob of rain over Fiji and built into a cyclone between midnight and 6am, and was on top of Neiafu by 7am--with no warning whatsoever. This was right as an MJO peak was passing over us. So when Bob McDavitt starts talking about MJO's, pay attention.

Check this link for more info on the current state of the MJO:

<http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/precip/CWlink/MJO/mjo.shtml>

The main cyclone forecasting in our area is handled by Fiji. Fiji is not like the US National Weather Service. The frequency of bulletins is not very good, and they don't forecast much more than about 24 hours in the future. Tonga's text forecast is not much better.

If the tropical system drops below 25S, Fiji stops reporting on it, and Wellington, NZ, picks it up (but lackadaisically). We had one system that walked along 25S, and it seemed neither weather center wanted to take responsibility for it.

The US Joint Typhoon Warning Center is not supposed to be forecasting cyclones in our area, however, they do. If there is an active system, they have a graphic and text forecast out for 120 hours.

<http://www.usno.navy.mil/JTWC/>

I could not find a weather product in Airmail for the text forecast, but once you request it via internet, you can then request the text file directly via Saildocs. For example, clicking on the link on the above page 'TC Warning Text', brings up the following file:

<http://www.usno.navy.mil/NOOC/nmfc-ph/RSS/jtwc/warnings/sh1012web.txt>

You can then request this from Saildocs by requesting:

```
send http://www.usno.navy.mil/NOOC/nmfc-ph/RSS/jtwc/warnings/sh1012web.txt
```

This works. Though if the link gets too long, you might have trouble with the 72-character limit on Sailmail

The Fiji Tropical Weather information can be gotten on Sailmail by requesting

```
Met.14trop
```

This is the URL in that Sailmail weather product:

```
http://weather.gmdss.org/navimail/GMDSS_METAREA14-TROPICS_INMARSAT
```

This is a conglomeration of tropical and high seas warnings, and sometimes runs so long when there are active warnings that Sailmail truncates it. Sometimes, the report is not there, and we get nothing..

There are two satellite photo links that I have been using to monitor squally weather and tropical storms. These are big, animated, infrared satellite photos, but if you have internet, they are the best source of what's happening right now:

[http://www.prh.noaa.gov/samoa/satellite/index\\_flash.php?image=IR](http://www.prh.noaa.gov/samoa/satellite/index_flash.php?image=IR)

This is from American Samoa, and includes only Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. You can zoom in a little to better see what's happening in Tonga.

For a bigger picture, all the way out to the eastern edge of Australia, this link is better:

<http://www.goes.noaa.gov/sohemi/sohemiloops/shirgmscol.html>

Finally, if you don't have all this internet stuff, a long range, wide-area GRIB file is much better than nothing. We request this one to be sent daily:

```
GFS:05S,40S,160E,165W|3,3|0,12..240|PRMSL,WIND,RAIN
```

It is about 40KB, so you might have to request something smaller if you don't have Winlink (to get around Sailmail's size limitations).

#### **1.4.6 Understanding the South Pacific Weather Patterns**

Several really good sources of instructional material on South Pacific weather exist.

1. Bob McDavitt's "Mariner's Met Pack for the Southwest Pacific" ISBN 1-877197-08-04 published by Captain Teach Press, Auckland, NZ. Though Bob is located in NZ and his weather focus is mainly the western portion of the South Pacific, his instruction manual covers a lot of useful information for the South Pacific in

general. Purchase online: [Waypoint Books](#) [Bluewater Books](#)  
If you can't find it, email Bob at [mcdavitt@metsservice.com](mailto:mcdavitt@metsservice.com)

2. Jim Corenmans "Letters from the South Pacific" originally published in the late 1990's in Latitude 38 Magazine. Copies of this series of articles are floating around among boaters, and might be found on Latitude 38's website. Jim had a great article on understanding South Pacific weather that is still really helpful to newbies entering French Polynesia.

Download from here: <http://svsoggypaws.com/files/index.htm>

3. David Sapiane's Weather for the Yachtsman. I downloaded this document from the Pangolin site:

[http://www.pangolin.co.nz/jetsam/view\\_article.php?idx=19](http://www.pangolin.co.nz/jetsam/view_article.php?idx=19)

It is an 11-page Word document dated June 2008, with a bunch of good information on terminology and understanding weather for the South Pacific.

4. Some practical tips on planning a passage can be found here:  
<http://www.pacificyachtdeliveries.co.nz/weather.htm>
5. The Hacking Family has a great circumnavigation website, and their South Pacific weather page is here:  
[http://hackingfamily.com/Cruise\\_Info/Pacific/SPacific\\_Weather.htm](http://hackingfamily.com/Cruise_Info/Pacific/SPacific_Weather.htm)
6. Check the Pacific Puddle Jump 'Files' section on Weather, there are usually some good, updated documents there.  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pacificpuddlejump/>

#### **1.4.7 Professional Weather Routing**

Generally, the Marquesas – Tuamotus – Tahiti - Societies runs are not too difficult, but just to add some info for those of you who worry about weather for the Pacific crossing.

One of the most-mentioned names in the South Pacific when talking about the weather is **Bob McDavitt**. Professional forecasts can be obtained from Bob McDavitt. Email him for detail at mcdavitt – at - metsservice.com

Soggy Paws used a USA-based weather router named **Ken McKinley at Locus Weather** for the Easter Island to Pitcairn and Gambiers legs of their trip. Ken did a good job for them. Email Ken at locuswx – at - midcoast.com.

Another weather person in the area is **David Sapiane on s/v Chameleon**. They have cruised all over the SW Pacific, and just this year, have opted to stay home in Gulf Harbor, NZ for the winter. He has been lately doing weather synopses on the Rag of the Air net (8173 at 1900z), and he offers his email address: [chameleon4844@yahoo.com](mailto:chameleon4844@yahoo.com) . I don't know if he's doing 'professional weather routing' at this point, but it would be worth contacting him. He'd be worth paying for weather routing service by email or radio, if he's offering it.

## **1.5 Yachtsmen's Services - Overview**

### **1.5.1 Money**

The currency in Tonga is the Tongan Pa'anga (TOP), however, when locals quote prices, they say "dollar" even though (usually) they mean Pa'anga. As of October 2011, the 1 Pa'anga equals approx \$.60 USD. In this guide, I will try to indicate Tongan Pa'anga (TOP) or US dollars (USD).

In Niuatoputapu, there is NO ATM. However, there is a bank that will exchange USD, Euros, and maybe Aus and NZ dollars, at whatever the current rate plus a 10 TOP service charge.

In Neiafu, there are several banks with ATM's, including an ANZ Bank and Westpac Bank, both within easy walking distance of the dinghy docks.

In Pangai (Lifuka), Haapai, there are also no ATM's, but you can go inside the Westpac bank to get cash with a credit card.

### **1.5.2 Diesel and Gasoline**

Fuel is available in Neiafu and Nukualofa (and maybe other places, TBD). If you are clearing out, you can arrange for duty free fuel in either Neiafu or Tongatapu but must purchase a minimum quantity. See the respective sections for more details.

However, here is one report in 2007 that summarizes trying to get duty free fuel in Nukualofa. Similar reports received in 2011 that indicated it was still like this:

*We and 4 other boats were trying to check out of Tonga in Nukualofa and obtain the permit for duty-free fuel (which runs \$4 instead of \$7 per gallon). This turned into a parade from office to office in the hot sun. We had clear instructions from another boat, who had run the gamut Friday. We went back and forth between customs (2 offices), the Port Captain, and BP Oil, each office telling us we needed a form the previous office said we did not need. Took all morning.*

We did see gas pumps near the dock at Lifuka (Ha'apai), but not needing any fuel, did not acquire as to availability, type, or price.

### **1.5.3 Propane (Cooking Gas)**

Propane is available in Neiafu (maybe other places but no positive reports yet). We got a fill with a U.S. tank with no problems. Take your tank to the Gas place (just south of town on the main road), and fill up. We paid TOP 41.50 for 9 kilos of Butane.

The receipt we got indicates there is a similar place in Nuku'alofa, so cooking gas is available there too.

Rumour has it that there is no access by dinghy anymore. Best is to get with another cruiser or two and share a taxi.

#### **1.5.4 Groceries**

There are several small grocery stores in Neiafu, and a nice open air market. There is also a place quite far out side of Neiafu, called Tina Burke's (aka The American Store), that carries more American goods, but at a hefty price. It's about a 10 minute walk out of town, up the street next to the WestPac Bank, and jog right. No markings on the outside of the store, but it's a solid-looking building on the left.

Better supplies and a bigger market can also be found in Nukualofa, but cruiser reports indicate that maybe that the downtown Nukualofa harbor is best avoided (see reports in the Nukualofa section).

#### **1.5.5 Water**

There is a dock in Neiafu where you can tie up for a fee and take on water.

### **1.6 Getting Visitors In and Out**

Flights into Neiafu all originate from Nukualofa. Here are some airline links that may help you get travel sorted out:

<http://www.chathamspacific.com/> - Local airline in Tonga

<http://www.airpacific.com/> - Fiji airline that flies Tonga-Fiji-LAX

<http://airnewzealand.com.au/> - Air New Zealand also flies Tonga-USA via NZ

Also checkout <http://www.whaleswim.com> , they had a good page with advice on getting to Vava'u from various locations (making the connections efficiently).

**WARNING:** As of October 2011, if you are flying in on a one-way ticket, or leaving your boat in Tonga and flying out and back in on a round trip ticket (ie one-way back in, as far as the Tongans are concerned), there is a 240 Pa'anga fee per person.

This fee is either paid ad-hoc at the airport in Nukualofa as a 'penalty' when you arrive at the airport with no onward ticket, or, if you want to get a piece of paper from Immigration before you leave, to say you are returning to your boat. Either way, apparently, it costs the same.

A cheaper option is to buy a full-fare 'onward ticket' from Nukualofa to NZ (on Air New Zealand), that can be canceled with little or no fee, to get around this payment.

**After action report from Soggy Paws, Shango, & Sea Flyer, January 2012:** When we (Soggy Paws+Shango) returned from the U.S. on the second half of a round-trip ticket from Tonga-U.S.-Tonga, we purchased a full-fare refundable ticket online from Air New Zealand one-way from Tongatapu to New Zealand. It cost about \$350 USD per person.

This Air New Zealand full-fare ticket was cancelled online, after arrival in Tonga, with no penalty, and a full refund promptly issued to the credit card it was booked on.

Soggy Paws, flying via Air Pacific, was asked at the check-in counter in LA for paperwork to prove we had a way out of Tonga. We were also asked, but did not have to show the paper, by the Immigration official on arrival in Tongatapu.

Sea Flyer's crew, checking in on the same flight from LA to Fiji and Tonga, was not asked on check-in and also not asked on arrival. She had booked her one-way on Air Pacific from Tongatapu to Australia, and incurred a \$75 cancellation fee when she cancelled the flight. Plus it took nearly 2 months and lots of bugging to get the refund on her credit card. So, if you're going to use the 'onward ticket' route, do it with Air NZ.

## **1.7 Communications**

### **1.7.1 VHF**

**General VHF Advice that applies to all areas:** Be aware that on high power, a good VHF will transmit 25 miles line of sight. So if you are only doing within-anchorage communications, switch to low power. On the flip side, if you are trying to call across island, or to the next island, use high power, and turn your squelch down. Make sure you are aware which channels are automatic low power (ie 17, 67 on some radios), and stay away from the low-power channels for long distance conversations.

Though widely spaced in channel number, channels 16, 68, and 18 are very close to each other in frequency. Most VHF antennas are 'tuned' for channel 16, so long distance communications will work best on 16, 18 or 68. Conversely, in a crowded anchorage, transmission on high power on channel 18 or 68 may 'bleed' over to channel 16 (and almost any other channel, if you're close enough). You don't need high power to talk to the boat next to you, so turn your radio to Low Power!!

Also be aware that some channels that Americans use frequently are 'duplex' channels in International mode. So, for example, you may have trouble communicating with a European boat, or an American boat whose radio is in International mode, on Channel 18. (see any VHF guide for the full list of international and US channels and frequencies, but any US channel designated 'a', like 18a, 22a, etc will cause trouble with VHF's in international mode).

Make sure you ask in each port what the local channels are--both so you know how to reach someone ashore and so you know not to use those channels for your off-channel conversations.

In **Neiafu**, there are a number of channels in use by local businesses. Channel 26 is a repeater channel, which can be used by boats (and locals) trying to communicate in places where normal VHF won't work. Most boats cruising the outer areas, and most of the resorts and islanders stand by on 26 instead of 16. The **Neiafu VHF net** runs on VHF 26 at 0830 Tonga Time.

Here is the current list of who's listening where (from Tropicana Café)

06 Backup repeater channel, if 26 is down

08 Tropo (reserved)

09 Beluga Diving and Whalewatch

- 10 The Ark Gallery and Tapanā anchorages
- 11 Ta Pana Resort and anchorages
- 26 Marine and Ports repeater channel – keep conversation short
- 69 Dive Vava'u/Ikapuna/Alatini
- 71 Sport Fishing Vessels & Ika Lahi lodge (Hunga)
- 72 Moorings Calling
- 73 Moorings Working
- 77 Mounu Island

Channel 26 is owned by Marine and Ports and is a repeater channel so has a better range than channel 16 - please keep your conversations short on this channel.

### **1.7.2 SSB Radio Nets**

The primary net for the SW Pacific is the **Rag of the Air Net**, operating out of NE Fiji is on 8173 at 0800 Tonga time(1900z). This net covers boats on passage to/from Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Minerva Reef, and NZ. The primary net controller, Jim on Also Island in Fiji, can be a little light and hard to hear. But there is usually extensive weather info given daily on the net.

In 2011, the **transient cruiser's nets** were on 8131 (0800 in the morning) and 6224 (1630 in the evening). As the boats started arriving in Pago Pago and Tonga, they had trouble continuing to check in (due to short skip, topography, busy ashore). After more boats were in Tonga and Pago Pago, the nets were shifted an hour later. 8Mhz worked much better with the distances, but needed relays to fill in for the closer boats. 6Mhz was a little stretched for these distances, later in the day or earlier in the morning would have worked better for 6Mhz. The nets nearly died when all the cruisers arrived in Tonga, and then picked back up for the trip south to NZ.

The bottom line is to ask around as you meet other cruisers, because the nets tend to fade out and re-form at the major crossroads, especially if there is a time zone change.

If you can't find a net that suits you, start one. Be prepared for it to fall apart as boats reach Tonga/Samoa, as Neiafu, Apia, and Pago Pago are HF 'black holes' where it is hard to hear anything, both because of local noise and terrain.

If you're a ham, for longer passages, we always checked in with the **Pacific Seafarer's Net**. This is also a good frequency to have saved in case of emergency—the Hams on the PacSea net will move heaven and earth to help any boat with a true emergency—ham operator or not. Even when there is no net going on this frequency, there are often hams monitoring the frequency for emergency traffic.

The Pacsea net operates on 14,300 Khz USB at 0300 UTC. They start with a 'warmup session' at 0300, where you can call in and chat, and maybe hook up with someone who will make a phone call to the US for you. They start calling boats on the roll call at 0330, and when they finish (30-60 minutes later), they call for boats getting ready to go on passage to get on the list for tomorrow's net.

### **1.7.3 Telephones & Cell Phones**

There are two cell providers in Tonga (that I know of), TCC and Digicell.

My quad-band GSM cell phone with a US ATT plan picked up Digicell in Neiafu no problem (ie on roaming), so for very short visits, this might be the best solution (or if your phone is not unlocked).

If you have a quad-band GSM “unlocked” cell phone, you can buy a local sim card for 5 TOP and then use “top up” cards to add minutes to it, at the Digicell store just to the west of the Market in Neiafu, in downtown Tongatapu, and maybe in Pangai in the Ha’apai.

**Digicell** is running some special promotions for calls to U.S., Australia, and NZ, so ask. The current (Jan 2012) promotion for US calls is \$.70 TOP per minute, but only the first 3 minutes are charged, the next 30 minutes are free. So you can call to the U.S. for 33 minutes for about \$1.25 USD.

**Soggy Paws: May 2012:** I didn’t even know that **TCC** (Tonga Communications Corporation), the fixed phone operator, supplied cell phone service until another cruiser told me after we’d been in Tonga for several months. But apparently they do. I do not know about the coverage differences between Digicell and TCC. The only spot we did NOT have coverage in Vavau was in Hunga, and they’ve been promised a tower ‘soon’.

So far in the Ha’apai, we had coverage from Ha’ano down to Lifuka. We haven’t been south of Lifuka yet.

To dial the U.S. from a Tongan cell phone, dial 001-XXX-XXX-XXXX. To have friends and family dial a Tongan cell phone from the U.S., dial 011-676-number. Some Tongan phone numbers (fixed numbers, I think) are 6 digits, and some (newer, and cell numbers) are 7 digits.

Unlike the U.S., calling cell phone to cell phone with the same operator is cheaper than cell phone to land phone, which is cheaper to cell-to-cell with different operators. If you’re unsure what it costs, ask.

### **1.7.4 Internet Access**

There is internet access available in Neiafu, it’s a little slow and somewhat pricey.

There are several sources of wifi in the harbor in Neiafu, if you have a decent wifi receiver and antenna. Vavaunet has the widest coverage around Vavau (but NOT extensive), and can be bought online after hooking up to one of their access points. But they are the most expensive.

Diginet, which is currently only available in Neiafu Harbor, is much cheaper (8 hours on Diginet can be purchased for \$30 TOP, which comes out to about \$2.25 USD/hour). Diginet can only be bought in the Digicell store. To log out of the Diginet signal, you MUST MUST MUST have pop-ups enabled on your browser. If the pop-up that lets you log out doesn’t come up when you log in, you can’t log out and your time will just expire.

It costs more if you only buy by the hour.

The Tropicana Café is rumoured to have the fastest internet, but charges \$6-8 TOP/hr. At Tropicana, they have both wifi and PC's you can use.

Aquarium Café has free internet while you're in their café, but it can be very slow during the season (too many people using it). Aquarium also has 1 PC that can be used.

Mango Café also has free wifi while you're eating or drinking there.

### **1.7.5 News**

Here are some sources of news that we used to keep abreast of what was happening in the world:

#### **English Language Voice News**

As the internet proliferates, English-language voice broadcasts on SSB seem to be dwindling. Many of the broadcasts you can find these days by dialing around are either religious-oriented, or anti-American oriented (so listen carefully!).

I did a lot of research on the internet before we left Central America, but I found that what worked best was to dial around on the 9Mhz band at the time of day I wanted to listen to news (morning and evening are the best times for propagation).

We found the BBC on 9695 am at 1600-1700 UTC (mornings) and 12095 usb at 0100UTC (afternoons).

And Radio Australia on 9580 at 1700 UTC.

#### **News via Email**

I don't know of any news service that formulates a customizable daily news email for yachts at sea (if you do, please email me, see email address at front of this guide).

But we had success, using Sailmail, in subscribing to a 'daily news email' from Reuters. We set it up so it went to a shore email address, and then we used Sailmail's Shadowmail feature to retrieve the daily emails when we felt we needed news, and had good enough propagation, to retrieve the email, stripped of all the graphics and stuff.

The daily 'US News', coming in through Sailmail, was only 7Kb. It contains the 'top 10' headlines, with a one sentence summary of each. Check out what Reuters offers at <http://links.reuters.com>

I am sure there are many other similar sources of a daily news email, but try them out on your internet email before you subscribe via your Winlink/Sailmail account!!

### **1.8 Diving**

Most of the diving information we have at this point is for diving in Vavau. See individual sections.

### **1.9 Haulout, Storage, and Repair Facilities**

There is a single-boat slipway in Neiafu, near the Moorings dock. Moorings boats are hauled on this slipway.

## **1.10 Tsunami Information**

The entire Pacific Basin is subject to tsunamis. Since we have been in the Pacific (3 years), there have been 3 significant tsunamis which have affected cruising locations (American Samoa and Tonga in 2009, So America, Galapagos & Panama in 2010, Hawaii & Mexico in 2011). The tsunamis originate in various locations, but the worst origination locations were Japan and Chile, however, many 'tremors' happen in these locations that do not cause widespread tsunamis.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center website is located here:

<http://ptwc.weather.gov/>

If you have onboard email, it is a good idea to subscribe to tsunami warning emails while you are in the Pacific, which you can do on this website. It might be useful to first subscribe from your internet email for a little while, to understand what messages might be coming your way, and how often, before you chance clogging up your onboard email.

## **1.11 Cruising Information Sources**

We are indebted to the people and organizations below for documenting their experiences and sharing them with us. We hope they don't mind that we've gathered their comments into this document to share with other cruisers who don't have internet

A few details about the boats are included, where we know them, so you can assess what 'a foot under the keel' means, for example.

Where it's important, we've annotated the contributions. But every section is a mix of several sources.

### **1.11.1 Tongan Websites**

I haven't yet checked the Haapai and Tongatapu sites, but the Vavau site has a wealth of cruising and visitor information.

<http://vavau.to/> - Vavau Cruiser's website

<http://www.haapai.to/> - Haapai Cruiser's Website

<http://www.tongatapu.to/> - Tongatapu Cruiser's Website

### **1.11.2 Cruiser Reports**

For most of the earlier sources, we have gleaned the information off the internet (cruiser's websites, blogs, and online forum postings) or out of an SSCA bulletin. For the sources reported below as 2009-2012, much of the info has come directly from our cruising friends, helping to round out the information in our various Compendiums.

**Heart of Gold (late 1990's)** - We are indebted to Jim and Sue Corenman for their Letters from South Pacific, originally published in Latitude 38 in the late 1990's, referenced in our Weather section, but also which contain a bunch of still-relevant information about cruising in the South Pacific.

**Sloepmouche (Nov 2004)** - Sloepmouche is a 46' Cross Trimaran with a 5' draft, with Luc Callebaut & Jackie Lee aboard. They have a website, but I have lost the link. Google them!

**Passage (2005)** - These notes came from the [Vavau Cruiser's Guide](#), which attributes s/v Passage <http://svpassage.com>

**Ocelot (The Hacking Family) (2004)** - This is a family traveling around the world on a catamaran. They have done a great job documenting where they've been and what they've learned. They were in Tonga from May - October 2004.

<http://hackingfamily.com>

**Tackless II (2005-2006)** - T2 is a 44' CSY center cockpit cruiser (5.5' draft). They were in Tonga in 2005, and stayed over for cyclone season into August 2006.

<http://www.thetwocaptains.com/logbook/southpacific.htm>

**Baraka (2008)** - Baraka was in Tonga in September and October 2008, on their way through to NZ.

<http://svbaraka.com/tongalog.htm>

**Mata'irea (2007)** - <http://matairea.blogspot.com>

They transited through Tonga in 2007

**Migration (2009-2010)** - Migration is a trimaran with a beam of 25' and 4'9" draft. Most of their comments in this booklet come from Bruce's website. Bruce has also contributed a few comments via the PPJ Yahoo Group.

<http://brucebalan.com/migrations>

Bruce has been from Tonga to NZ and back again twice so far, so seeing where they went could be very useful going both ways.

Bruce also wrote a very good article for Latitude 38 on South Pacific weather, which can be found on our website, here: <http://www.svsoggyaws.com/files/>

**Mr John VI (2009)** - These comments came from a PDF file floating around on the web called **Mr John's Kingdom of Tonga** or Mr John's blog. It seems to be a compendium of his own experience in 1987 and revisiting again in 2008/9, and shared experiences from other yachts. Useful guide and it includes some sketch charts which are not included here, so Google for it and download a copy for yourself.

[www.clubcruceros.org/polynesiaguide/The\\_Dangerous\\_Middle.pdf](http://www.clubcruceros.org/polynesiaguide/The_Dangerous_Middle.pdf) (the original 2008 guide). In 2009 he put out a separate, more complete, Kingdom of Tonga guide.

Mr. John IV is a Bristol 35.5 with a fairly shallow draft (for a monohull). He has a tendency to want to anchor in shallow water, so if you have boat with a draft over about 5 feet, take care!

Mr. John also has a blog, where they elaborate more on their experiences at each place.  
<http://yachtmrjohn.blogspot.com>

**Nine of Cups (2009)** - Nine of Cups is a deep draft 44' cruiser.

<http://www.nineofcups.com> . They passed through Tonga in 2005.

**Visions of Johanna (2010)** - Visions' blog is here: <http://vofj.blogspot.com>

Visions is a 62' custom racer/cruiser with a 8 knot average cruising speed and a 6'8" draft.

**Soggy Paws (2011 & 2012)** - Soggy Paws arrived in Tonga in October 2011, and is stayed over for the 2011/2012 cyclone season. They were in Neiafu most of the time, but spent a month in the Haapai in May and June 2012.

Soggy Paws is a CSY 44, a 44 foot monohull with a 5.5' draft. Soggy Paws' blog is here:

<http://svsoggypaws.blogspot.com>

**Whoosh (2010)** - Whoosh 's major contribution is the weather sources information.(see Weather section)

You can find Whoosh's log at:

<http://www.svsarah.com/Whoosh/WhooshUpdateLog.html>

**Slipaway (2011)** - Jan and Rich on Slipaway came through this area in Fall 2011

Slipaway's website is <http://slipaway.net/>

**Mahina Tiare III (2010/2011)** - John and Amanda Neal run a custom Offshore Sailing Experience business call Mahina Expeditions. They have criss-crossed the Pacific and shared their experiences on their website and on noonsite.com.

<http://www.mahina.com/>

**Sete Mares (2011)** - Sete Mares is a 60' catamaran. John and Marie-Andrea cruised through the area Sep 2011.

<http://www.sailblogs.com/member/andreatsea/>

**YOLO (2011)** - "YOLO" (You Only Live Once) is a 42 foot PDQ catamaran owned by Karen and Jason Trautz. They spent about a month in Neiafu, before making their way south towards New Zealand.

<http://yolotrautz.blogspot.com>

**Chesapeake (2011)** - Chesapeake is an Outbound 46 owned by Jim \_\_\_\_\_. He and his companion, Linda, spent about a month in Neiafu, before making their way south through the Haapai Group towards New Zealand.

### **1.11.3 Pacific Puddle Jump Yahoo Group**

This is a 'group' on Yahoo where the people gathering in South and Central America meet to share information about crossing the big puddle. Fortunately, many previous years' jumpers come back and share their information with the newbies. A good source of information, but not very organized, and full of bloat from people who ask the same questions over and over again, without doing any research of their own.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pacificpuddlejump/>

You must be a member to read or post anything on this site, but if you are getting ready for a Pacific crossing, it is well worth a few minutes to sign up for Yahoo and then sign up for this group. Be sure to explore the Files and Links pages, there is lots more information there.

### **1.11.4 Noonsite**

Originally started by Jimmy Cornell, this site is a great repository of information for all those out-of-the-way places. Made possible by YOUR contributions.

<http://www.noonsite.com>

### **1.11.5 Seven Seas Cruising Association**

The SSCA is a world-wide organization for cruisers whose primary function is to exchange information about cruising destinations. They have a monthly publication that is mostly letters from cruisers about the areas they are cruising. They also have a good website and a well-attended bulletin board. Membership is reasonable, and the monthly publication is available electronically every month. Indexed back issues are also available electronically.

<http://www.ssc.org>

## **1.12 Printed Sources**

We are consciously NOT duplicating any printed, copyrighted information here. It takes a lot of effort AND money to publish a cruising guide, and we firmly believe that if it is still in print, you should BUY it, not steal it (in electronic form).

There are two excellent, but slightly out of date, guides to Tonga. For cruisers who really want to get the most out of Tonga, I would buy both.

### **1.12.1 Sailingbird's Guide to The Kingdom of Tonga**

Sailingbird's Guide was published in 2004 with a downloadable update as of 2007. This one IS available in Neiafu. Find it on Amazon.com [here](#) or at other cruising bookstores. Sailingbird was interested in diving and snorkeling, and so their chartlets indicate good places to snorkel and dive.

### **1.12.2 Ken's Comprehensive Guide to the Kingdom of Tonga**

2005. Has nice waypoints for all of Tonga. We emailed the address in the book to ask if it was available locally, and never received a response. We finally bought our copy on

Amazon.com [here](#). It is still available from cruising book sources in the U.S, and probably in NZ. I could not find a copy in Neiafu. If you google Ken's Guide to Tonga, and his name, you will find Ken's current website.

### **1.12.3 South Pacific Anchorages – Warwick Clay**

South Pacific Anchorages, Warwick Clay, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2001, pages 22-33

#### **Reported by s/v YOLO in July 2011: South Pacific Anchorages GPS Locations:**

We noted that the anchorage locations stated in South Pacific Anchorages by Warwick Clay did not match up with our C-Map NT+ plotter locations, or our backup GPS units. In general, Clay's locations were slightly east of the actual locations and usually on land.

### **1.12.4 The Pacific Crossing Guide – RCC Pilotage Foundation**

The Pacific Crossing Guide, published by the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation in association with the Ocean Cruising Club. Originally edited by Michael Pocock, and Revised by Ros Hogbin. We have the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition published in 2003.

### **1.12.5 Landfalls of Paradise – Earl Hinz**

Landfalls of Paradise, Earl Hinz, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1999, University of Hawaii Press.

## **2 Passage Reports**

### **2.1 Niue to Tonga**

#### **2.1.1 Mr John VI - September 2008**

Niue slipped astern soon after we slipped the mooring and departed under sail, the first hour was good, a spanking breeze and a smooth sea; then we started to pick up the swells that were hooking around each end of the island, the sea built on top causing a 'washing machine' motion that had us rolling gunwale to gunwale at times. This motion seemed to continue well after Niue vanished below the horizon, the wind remained at almost twenty knots whilst we rolled on into a very dark night under double reefed mainsail and a little Genoa poled out to starboard; it was uncomfortable but we were covering distance quickly.

We were expecting the wind to swing around to the north slowly and allowed ourselves to get well north of track so that when this happened we'd come back down slowly without having to adjust sails; that strategy worked so well, it was afternoon on the following day when the pole had to come down and we went up on a beam reach. The wind shifting into the north was a good indication that we were being approached by a front line; this we had been expecting and we assumed from what we'd seen in the forecasts that we'd have a little motoring to do when it went through. We were also expecting heavy rain cells and some squalls along with the passage of the front; thus as afternoon gave way to evening, we furled away the Genoa and moved onto the small inner headsail.

At about 2000hrs Paula called below that there was a little rain coming so I struggled

into a rain jacket and went on deck, in that short space of time the squall line hit us and the wind went from ten to forty knots in a matter of seconds; I rushed up forward and dropped the jib to the deck as the rain sluiced over us, driven horizontally by the wind. It was like standing in front of a fire hose, the force of water and wind was enough to knock you over and my rain jacket was having zero effect. Returning to the cockpit we pointed her up into the wind with the Vane Gear and heaved the mainsail in tight so that the boat was fore-reaching at minimal speed; there was time now to hide from the rain and watch the wind speed indicator as it hovered around the forty-five knot mark and seemed fixed there, not wanting to come down at all.

We remained like that for the best part of an hour; me, huddled under the spray-dodger, ready to attend any problems whilst Paula plied me with coffee and chocolate biscuits. A short time later we were down to twenty-five knots and the wind had worked its way around to the south so we freed off the main; resuming our westerly course.

Just twelve hours after our little blow, we were forced to start the motor as the wind died to nothing and we could see, on the horizon, the north-eastern headland of the Vava'u Group; we had, at last, arrived in the Kingdom of Tonga and as far as I was concerned, completed our crossing of the Pacific. Motoring into Neiafu Harbour we found well over one hundred boats, many of which we had already met or heard on the radio during our voyage, they had all gathered here to prepare for the final leg; the passage to New Zealand.

## **2.2 *The Samoas to Tonga***

### **2.2.1 *Vesper - October 2003***

**The Sail:** Our three day sail to Tonga was pleasant until we got within 20 miles. We'd been watching the weather faxes and a front was predicted to cross our path. We thought we might get to Vava'u before its arrival. The sky began to darken and we saw the characteristic line of black clouds ahead. As the front came through we felt the rush of cold air hit us, the wind shifted 180 degrees, and immediately we had heavy rain and howling wind. In a flash we went from lovely sunny and warm conditions to virtually no visibility and 25 knots on our nose. Our hopes of arriving before dark were dashed. We made very slow progress motoring into the building seas. Vesper's bow occasionally crashed hard as it came down off a wave top. Nothing we could do but endure. At least we were close.

We rarely enter a harbor at night. It's just not worth the risk. But this time, we were assured by our friends already in Neiafu, the main town in the Vava'u group, that the harbor entrance was well marked and the range markers and buoys were lit. They even went out into the channel to check on the lights to make sure they were working. They relayed to us the GPS positions of the major marks. With that information, good charts, and our trusty radar, we decided to enter the harbor. Our friends were waiting for us inside the protected waters and guided us to a nearby mooring where we tied up for the night.

**Fishing:** We had good luck fishing and caught four wonderful yellowfin tuna. They make excellent sashimi and we ate nothing but raw fish for days. We trail several lines behind Vesper with home-made lures that skip along the surface. Often the Boobie birds mistake the lures for fish and dive on them. Usually they realize their error and don't actually grab the lure. However, they aren't smart enough to remember this, so they come right back at it again and again. But on this trip a bird did get himself hooked. As Vesper sailed along smoothly at 7 knots our new friend was being pulled sharply through the water. We watched horrified, but we must admit a little amused, as he sailed up into the air firmly tethered a few hundred feet off our stern. He parasailed up and down without flapping his wings at all. The boat provided the necessary speed to lift him and allow him to glide. Eventually he crash landed and ended up water skiing along the surface before finally flipping upside down and submarining. Hoping we could free him from our hook we pulled the line in as fast as we could. But as each minute went by with our friend under water we felt for sure he would arrive dead. When we got him within 10' of the stern, he popped up out of the water smartly and sure enough was very much alive! As Deirdre held his beak so he couldn't bite, Jeff was able to extract the hook from where it had lodged in his neck and we set him free. He stumbled for a moment and then flew away. Quite the lucky fellow.

## **2.3 *Niutoputapu to Neiafu***

### **2.3.1 *Soggy Paws - October 2011***

We stopped in Niutoputapu on our way south from Samoa. Though technically within Tonga, Niutoputapu to Neiafu is a ~170 nm trip, and when we did it in October 2011, the trip crossed a frontal boundary or the SPCZ. The weather forecast LOOKED like it was going to be a nice close reach, and it was for about 18 hours, but when we reached the disturbed weather, we got squally weather that varied from 0 knots to 35 knots, and variable direction, some of it right on the nose. It was very helpful having a good engine to keep moving in the lulls between squalls. This is because we chose to plan the trip as a '1 overnight', which would have been easy had the wind been consistent, but was not easy in the variable winds.

Nearly everyone who crossed this space during the week we did, had the same crappy weather. Even the '2 overnight' people. And one boat (Chesapeake) said they had the worst weather on this leg that they had experienced on their whole Pacific crossing. Again, this was because the SPCZ or a trough was laying directly across the route between Niutoputapu and Neiafu.

So, pay attention to where the SPCZ is when you reach Tonga, it makes a difference!! (and it's nearly always somewhere nearby.).

## **2.4 *Vavau to Haapai (and back)***

### **2.4.1 *Tackless II - July 2006***

Our passage down – once we got going – went smoothly. We departed from Vava'u's Port Maurelle anchorage at about four in the afternoon, with a course set west around Hunga before turning south. Although the distance between the island groups is one that

many boats could manage in a daysail, we were not keen on possibly arriving in the unfamiliar anchorages of the Ha'apai after dark. (This proved to be wise after we saw firsthand the anchorages we might have counted on.) We had a good sail south, close-hauled in an east wind of about 15 knots, with a full-moon. Arriving early about four miles out, we hove-to to await good light, enjoying the spectacular dawn produced by heaping masses of clouds to the East.

Our first quasi stop was the anchorage at Ha'ano Island. Billed as a good rest stop, we picked our way in toward the mushroom-rock landmark. There were reefs to the right, reefs to the left, and reefs in the middle, plus deep water until there wasn't, and, coupled with the chop from the southeasterly wind, there was little inviting about the place for our size boat. We turned and departed. I'd be lying if this first disappointing anchorage didn't make us anxious about what else we'd find in the Ha'apai.

#### **2.4.2 Cheseapeake - Nov 2011**

We left from Port Maurelle (#7) and motored in light winds for 2 hours to Maninita Island, spent the night, and then left early the next morning and sailed in good winds on a beam reach the rest of the way, to Ofolanga Island. The distance from Maninita to Ofolanga is 52 miles, SSW, so doable pretty easily by most boats in a day.

#### **2.4.3 Soggy Paws - May 2012**

We had a quiet night at Fonua One One (southern Vavau), where we anchored the night before--a little roly but decent protection. Certainly a LOT better than trying to get into Maninita under dicey conditions. We had one small Tongan fishing boat, with barely a cabin on it, anchored next to us for the night.

We got up at the crack of dawn and left the anchorage about 7:15am, with one reef in the main. The forecast indicated we'd have SE winds about 12-15 kts. Our course being about 195 degrees, this seemed like perfect sailing conditions.

We'd gotten a fish strike the day before, approaching Maninita from the west, which had broken our 'sport' fishing line. So I made sure we had our strong hand-line rigged to put out as soon as we got going. I have been hungry for Mahi Mahi all summer, and you can't find them for sale at the market.

By about 7:30 we had all our sails up and were headed SSW for our northern tip waypoint at Ha'ano, about 53 miles away. We turned the engine off and, for the first time in 6 months, were actually sailing again. Ahhh!! We had sunny skies and perfect wind for our first passage in months. We did have a little swell on our nose from a storm down off NZ, but it wasn't affecting us too much.

Our perfect sailing conditions lasted only a couple of hours before the wind went to 10 knots on our beam--at those wind speeds, with any wave action, we just wallow along at 3 knots. And with an unknown anchorage, a long way to go, and sunset at 6:08pm, we couldn't afford to go 3 knots. We an hour playing with sails trying to get us going again but we ended up having to the engine back on to keep our speed up.

Around noon, we boated a very nice 3-foot Mahi Mahi--our first fish since somewhere in French Polynesia.

We ended up motorsailing the rest of the day. When the wind strengthened again late in the afternoon, it had gone back to SSE--too close for us to make our waypoint of the NW corner of Ha'ano without a little assistance from the engine. By the time we were approaching the northern tip of Ha'ano, our conditions had changed considerably. The wind was now 20 knots and we had 100% overcast and rain threatening.

We arrived at our reefy 'open roadstead' anchorage just at sunset, with 100% cloud cover, and barely enough light to see. Fortunately we had our Google Earth Charts, and 2 other boats' tracks, to help us in safely. The regular C-MAP charts are not very accurate here--they show us anchored on the land. But the GE charts are fantastically accurate (most of the time) (and our Garmin chart was pretty good too). Dave could see enough looking straight down that we were able to drop the anchor in a sand spot in 35', and it held well. We are out of the wind and the wind-waves and safe for the night.

It was a good passage, and we are glad to be in the Ha'apai.

Anyone who plans this leg from Neiafu should look carefully at Fonua One One (see previous post) as a jumping off point for the Ha'apai. This is a MUCH easier anchorage to get into and get out of than Maninita, and protected from ESE to SW, with an obvious shelf with good deep sand. It only costs you a couple of miles and a couple of degrees for the long leg, over starting from Maninita.

#### ***2.4.4 Tackless II - August 2006 - Back to Neiafu from Ha'apai***

The weather forecast called for the east winds to continue and strengthen. Although the direction was ideal for the trip to Vava'u, the force was a little more than we like. Plus since the return trip should be faster, I wanted to get up early and make the trip during the day, while Don still preferred the less-pressured night passage option. In a compromise move, we moved north to **Ha'ano**, the anchorage the guidebook touts for departures and arrivals, thinking to get a partial night's sleep and then follow our track out into clear water for an early start.

Well, that was the plan. Shortly after sunset, the wind that was supposed to be well east, veered back into the southeast, just far enough that it wrapped around into the anchorage and set us a bobbing. As the tide came up it got worse and worse, with seas building to several feet, and Tackless II was pitching and rolling violently. Then, just to add interest, we started getting squalls with winds up to 25 knots. It was not a nice night. Don let out extra chain, and we used the chartplotter's anchor watch for the first time. Neither of us slept.

Come daylight, it was clearly a bad idea to set sail. Instead we tucked our tail between our legs and struggled back south through squall after squall to Pangai's protected harbor. So much for weather reports! We slept through the day, and when we woke, the wind was still up and squalls still rolled through. The next morning, I woke early, but Don could not be persuaded to try the daytime run, especially with the extra eight miles between Pangai and Haano tacked on. We waited through the day, diverting ourselves

with computers and books, and finally raised the anchor to get around Muikuku Point in daylight.

The sky was definitely more benign than it had been for the previous days, but the wind was still smoking. We'd expected this from our GRIB files, but the forecast was for even more, so we were determined not to turn back again. Instead we took the third reef in the main, set the staysail, and pulled out maybe 2' of genoa. As we left Ha'ano behind and got the wind full bore, T2 was making 7+ knots in a fairly steady 30 knots of wind. The seas were plenty big, but after the sun went down fast we only saw the crests breaking in moonlight! Out of sight, out of mind? Well not exactly.

It was a very fast trip. By 3AM we were hove to in the lee of Hunga Island. Any fantasy we had of going on in into familiar territory was doused with the setting of our quarter moon. Dark is really dark at sea, even with radar! We took turns sleeping until we estimated that we and sunrise would meet, and then motor sailed the rest of the way into town.

## **2.5 Haapai to Tongatapu**

### **2.5.1 Chesapeake - Nov 2011**

We left Tofanga at 2pm a couple days before a big Northwesterly was due. We had 3kts current against us at the Ava Mata Mata Veka pass, dancing waters, 20k winds and ugly confused seas that extended out about 5 miles. Not such a good sail toward Nuku'alofa.

### **2.5.2 Baraka - Oct 2008**

Dave turned on the radio net, and heard that Met weather guru Bob McDavitt is advising boats we know to jump for New Zealand in the next couple days. That lit a fire under us.

Though Ha'afeva looked inviting, we decided to move along and get in position at Nuku Alofa if we opt to take this weather window. So we pulled up the hook and motored out between the reefs. We noticed that the missing red north entrance buoy had drug, and was hooked on the south entrance reef next to the green marker. Hmmm. So much for navigational aids in the Ha'apai!

A few minutes later I spotted a breaking rock where the charts showed deep waters. The rock turned into the back of a large humpback whale. Then we saw its baby exuberantly jump completely out of the water a half dozen times! We hate to hurry through these lovely islands. Maybe we will return...

We motored all day under sunny skies, pulling into beautiful Kelelesia mid-afternoon. We entered between areas marked on the charts as "blind rollers" which are actually breaking reefs, Jan on the bow watching for shoals.

We anchored in sand, but the chain of our scope brushes a large coral "bommie" covered with delicate corals. Makes us feel bad, like we parked our Humvee in someone's rose garden.

We explored the island and snorkeled for rumored lobsters. No luck, but what a spectacular place! The island has striated limestone cliffs topped with coconut palms, ringed by white coral sand beach, and sits in a turquoise lagoon.

Tomorrow we rise early for the all-day run south to Nuku Alofa. There we will top off fuel and prep the boat for the 10-day NZ passage.

Got an early start from Kelelesia, and motored in dead calm all the way into Nuku'alofa where we anchored in the middle of the fleet at a small island across the bay from the main town. We are next to Destiny, Warm Rain, Charisma, New Page, Elusive, The Dorothy Marie, Blue Plains Drifter... the list goes on. It will be fun to catch up with everyone and strategize for the NZ passage.

## **2.6 *Vavau to Fiji***

Tbd - send us your report!

### 3 Niuas Group

#### 3.1 Niuatoputapu

Most cruisers refer to this place as 'New Potatoes', but though the spelling is daunting, the correct pronunciation is not that difficult... New-ya Tow-poo Tah-poo. Be the first of your friends to learn how to say it correctly!

Note that you cross the international dateline when arriving in Tonga from the Cook Islands or Samoa.

Tonga is GMT +13. Example: If it's Tuesday 09:00 in Tahiti, it's Wednesday at 08:00 Tonga time.

##### 3.1.1 Soggy Paws - October 2011

**Approach:** Warning-Our Garmin GPSMap with 2008 charts, in the overview view, had the island, Tafahi, that is nearly in a direct line between the western end of Upolu, Samoa and the entry to Niuatoputapu, located 3 miles east of where it really is. The 'zoomed in' view had it more or less in the correct place, and the CMap charts showed it more or less correctly. It's easily seen 25 miles away in daylight, but if you're hove-to drifting around at night, be sure you know where it is.

**Entry:** The 2010 CMAP computer charts, and our Garmin MapSource charts are offset slightly for Niuatoputapu. Our actual track plotted just south of the pass on the chart (a similar offset to the few spots in French Polynesia that plotted off). The waypoints given in the Ken's Guide (the first two provided here) were perfect:

Approach: S15°55.247' W173°45.590'

#1 S15°55.507' W173°45.590'

#2 S15°55.656' W173°45.621'

#3 S15°55.771' W173°45.614'

#4 S15°55.833' W173°45.618'

This will get you in the pass, and give you an idea of the offset on your chart system. Buy Ken's Guide for the rest. In normal light, navigation is easy. There didn't seem to be any current in the pass when we came in.

There are a pair of rusty pilings at about Wpt #1, and some other channel mark pilings on the way in. Only two had faded red and green boards on them.

**Anchorage:** The anchorage is off the concrete pier in 25-40' of water. Holding seemed good, and protection is good. Even when the wind was low, we had a decent breeze (so nice after windless Apia). When the wind is howling out of the SE, this is a nice anchorage to be in.

**Dinghy Dock:** There is a low concrete step area on the lee side of the concrete pier. There are a few exposed re-bar that provide a place to tie up. Try not to let the cruiser dinghies block the whole dock, as the entire island uses this low step area to come and go.

**Clearing In:** If you are arriving from outside of Tonga, you should put your Q flag up as you enter the harbor (we didn't until after the officials had arrived at the dock, and the Customs official remarked on it).

Several reports we had heard talked about 4 officials (in previous years) coming to the boat, others talked about going in to clear.

When we arrived, Sia, ashore, who has a VHF, had already arranged to have the officials come to the dock, and then cruisers with dinghies ferried them around to the 3 boats. Only 2 officials came... Customs and Immigration. Both actually looked a little queasy when they arrived on Soggy Paws, and rolled their eyes and grimaced when we told them more boats were expected the next day.

We did the paperwork for these officials, and then they explained where else we needed to go to finish clearing in... to the bank to change money, and then to the Customs office and the Health office.

If you arrived on your own, and didn't have any cruisers already there to give advice and help with logistics, it would probably be OK for you to go ashore on your own and find the Customs and Immigration office on your own. I would NOT bother tying up to the 'dock'--it's very rough. Conveniently, the bank and the 'government officials' are located next to each other out by the high school, just short of the village of Hihifo, about 3Km west of the anchorage.

Don't forget the final stop at Health to pay your Health fee. This is currently located in the town by the anchorage, at the elementary school.

Fees, in Pa'anga, as of Oct 2011:

\$25 - Quarantine

\$12-15 - Customs (depends on Gross Tonnage)

\$100 - Health

When you leave Niuatoputupu for Neiafu, you need to clear out with Customs. Since we were only planning on staying 5 days, and planning on leaving on the weekend, we got the nice lady to clear us out (with a departure date of Saturday) at the same time as we cleared in, so we didn't have to make the journey back to the other end of the island a second time.

### **3.1.2 From Infini - Sep 2011**

We've lost a day! Here in Tonga it's one day later than the USA. Yesterday, we were cleared in by two officials; cost was \$25 for Customs, \$15 for Quarantine, and \$100 for Health...all in pa'anga dollars (conversion was .6436/USD yesterday).

About 170 boats a year visit here; 70 yachts clear in from Apia or other ports, and 100 yachts come up from Vava'u.

We had started walking to the 'bank' to obtain Tongan currency when a new pick-up stopped to give us a ride; turns out he was one of the senior Customs officials, so knew we were going to the bank and his office was adjacent next door.

There's a new temporary 'bank' (one room area for exchanging money; cash only, no ATM's; \$10 pa'anga fee for any currency exchange), Customs office (another one room area), and high school, as well as an entire new village being built nearby for residents evacuated to higher ground.

This is a very poor economy; small one room temporary houses abound; land is fenced off by cut off trees and a length of barbed wire and corrugated roofing; there are no bars or restaurants (that we know of) and one small store with limited items for the locals; the supply ship arrives every one or two months. There are many horses, pigs, dogs and chickens running around, and since it's Spring here, they've all just had their babies...too cute! And of course, many smiling, waving children as well.

We took a walk to the end of a small village nearby; according to the local Nurse Practitioner, there are less than 900 people on the island. During our walk we were met by Fehia, a local woman who has a very good command of English, and a picnic lunch had been arranged for the yachties.

There are (including us), six boats here in the anchorage, all of them German except ourselves. Twelve of us were picked up by diesel flat bed truck and taken out to the airport (grass landing strip) located just by the beach on the NE side of the island. Fehia's family had prepared a feast: three kinds of fish dishes (fried, sweet and sour and poisson cru), potatoes, taro, cooked papaya, pig, fruits, and mango juice. (Cost was \$10 pa'anga/person.)

After lunch we toured the island a bit, and suffice it to say this is a small island offering quite a contrast to our last port of call, Apia. The main commercial activity here is preparing pandanus for weaving, and we didn't see any commercial stores at all.

### **3.1.3 Distant Shores - August 2011**

Source: PPJ Yahoo group:

Nice yet isolated volcanic island in the Niuaus. There are 3 villages on this island Falehau, Vaipoa and the capital Hihifo. All three were virtually destroyed in the 2009 tsunami. Many of the residents were evacuated to other islands, some relocated to higher grounds and the remaining attempted to rebuild all with the assistance of NZ, Australia, Tonga, Red Cross etc.

The harbor is at Falehau and is well sheltered, in fact we are securely anchored in 37 feet sand bottom with 20-25 knots of wind blowing across the island. No fetch and great holding. The reef provides protection from the north, east and west.

The entrance to the harbor is narrow. There are two steel markers guarding the entrance at approximately 15d55.49mS / 173d45.62mW. Before going through the entrance line

up the two poles with white triangles on top then stay on that course all the way in. We had a depth of 30 feet most of the way in with one hiccup of 24 feet. There are worn down red (square) and green (triangle) channel markers to guide you the rest of the way in. There is only one VHF radio on the island and as we understand is rarely monitored

Procedures for clearing into Tonga are fly the yellow quarantine flag and meet the customs/quarantine/immigration officers at the wharf.

Note: you are suppose to call the port authority on VHF16 then tie up at the wharf until customs/quarantine/immigration & health arrive. If you don't, then there is an additional fee by Health. However, since there isn't a radio it is hard to manage this. We tied off at the wharf then left a 1/2 hour later since no one showed and the wind/surge was rolling our boat dangerously against the concrete wharf barely large enough to hold one boat.

We anchored out and dinghied in to complete the paperwork. The customs official then drove us to the Health Clinic to meet the Nurse Practitioner (Paea) to do more paperwork. From the health clinic in Falehau we were driven to the government buildings just east of Hihifo to exchange money at the bank.

Note: there is NO ATM on the island and they do NOT accept any credit cards. They will exchange cash only to their Pa'anga.

The fees were \$25 Pa'anga for quarantine, varying fees for customs depending on gross tonnage (29 ton was \$16.68 Pa'anga). The health fee is \$100 Pa'ange (used to support the health clinic - note that we were handed a paper that says it is suppose to be \$200 if you don't tie up at wharf, but we were only charged \$100). No fees for clearing out but immigration requires you to clear with them to obtain paperwork for next Tongan port.

We saw no stores on the island, however, we do understand there is one somewhere. A supply ship comes in once a month. The 837 residents subsist on the sea, breadfruit, tara, papaya, bananas and whatever they grow in their gardens.

We have become friendly with Mafi Hoa who is secretary for the women's guild here and she has agreed to provide her email address (hoamlutui@...). (*Ed note: sorry, this was obliterated by the PPJ bulletin board*)

If any yacht is interested in coming to Niuatoputapu please send her an email to verify procedures and, if you are able and want to provide assistance, inquire what if anything the community may need i.e. baby supplies, batteries, school supplies, etc.

They have no electricity, no wifi for yachts, and no landline telephones. There is cell phone service.

There are some on the island that latch on to yachties in an attempt to obtain as much wealth and goods as possible for their own personal gain.

The hotel listed in the Moon Guide was destroyed in the tsunami and has not been rebuilt. With the loss of the hotel was also the loss of the only restaurant.

There is hiking on the ridge line and lots of great swimming and snorkeling.

### 3.1.4 Welcome Letter for Yachts in Niuatoputapu

This was handed to us (Soggy Paws, Oct 2011) on paper by the health official, on a 'many copied' piece of paper, it is obviously several years old, since there is a crossed-out reference to the hotel that was destroyed in the tsunami of 2009. But just in case it is no longer around when you arrive, I have transcribed it here, and added the Google Earth view.



Welcome to Niuatoputapu, Tonga's loveliest island. Here, far from the hustle and bustle of Vava'u and Tongatapu, you will enjoy a true taste of the South Pacific as it used to be. Niuatoputapu has much to offer, and the following are but a few of the highlights:

1. A walk along the island's ridge (approx 2 hours up and down), beginning through the local's plantations and taking in the truly spectacular panorama of the island and its lagoon, spread out below you from on high. And why not refresh yourself afterwards with a tip in Niutoua, Hihifo's lovely freshwater spring?
2. A trip across to Tafahi, the extinct volcano, and a hike to the top (approx 5 hours up and down).
3. An exploration of the waterways behind Hihifo--amongst the South Pacific's loveliest scenery, with vast stretches of white sand at low tide, and numerous little islets to swim or paddle around, depending on the tide.

4. A walk around Hunganga, the island just offshore from Hihifo, with its surprisingly diverse scenery, lovely beaches and spectacular views of Tafahi. Here too are pools in the reef connected by underwater caves which can be swum through

**Shopping:** There are a number of 'fale keloas' (bush shops)...The best stocked of these are in Hihifo.

Depending on how long it has been since the supply ship has come, these shops will usually have in stock most basic supplies such as flour, sugar, fish, canned fruit, biscuits, etc. For a short time after the arrival of the supply ship, fresh meat and dairy products may also be available. These will usually be in a freezer at the back of the shop, so you will need to ask. Fresh groceries such as fruit and vegetables are only occasionally available in the fale keloas so it is best to ask local villagers if they are able to supply you some of these things.

There is only one bakery on the island but unfortunately they only bake on Sunday (if they haven't run out of flour). The bakery is in Vaipoa, the middle village. As you enter the village coming from Falehao, take the first turning to the left and it is the second house on the left. There is no sign so just go up to the door and knock. Be sure to check out the home made oven! Bread costs 2 pa'anga a loaf and is available from about 11:00 in the morning until perhaps 5:00 depending on when the last batch sells out.

**Outings:** Tafahi, the extinct volcano, may be reached by local fishing boat. The owner will also be able to arrange a guide to take you to the top. The cost will be 150 pa'anga for the boat trip (for up to 10 people), and 30 pa'anga for the guide. You may take your own food or arrange for with your skipper for some to be provided. Your guide will provide you with fresh coconuts to drink for refreshment, so it is unnecessary to carry a large amount of water with you. Please be advised that safety standards on local boats are not high, and it would be worthwhile to bring with you a mobile VHF if you have one, and perhaps life jackets. These trips are naturally taken at your own risk.

Locals who can arrange for this excursion for you are Nico and Sia, who can usually be contacted on VHF channel 16.

Nuiatoputapu's central ridge offers an excellent hike, with lovely panoramic views from the top. A guide is essential as the path winds its way through plantations initially and is often overgrown. Ask one of the locals. A fair price for a guide would be 15-20 pa'anga. Ask to begin in the middle village Viapea, and to descend afterwards to Hihifo where you can also cool off if you like in the freshwater spring.

**Transport:** You will often be offered a ride on the island by a passing motorist, and don't be afraid to flag a vehicle down if you're really exhausted and they don't seem about to stop! There are no official taxi's on the island, but rides can be pre-arranged between Falehau and Hihifo for a cost of between 8-15 pa'anga, depending on the size of the car or van.

**Changing Money:** Cash and traveler's checks may be changed at the Tongan Development Bank in Hihifo, but there is a 10 pa'anga charge, whatever the amount. Unfortunately, there are no facilities for credit or debit card transactions in Niuatoputapu.

**Rubbish disposal:** Yachties should dispose of their rubbish in the pit signposted on the left hand side of the road at the end of the wharf.

**Further Information:** If you have any further questions or need advice on any aspect of your stay here, please feel free to drop into the high school (between Vaipoa and Hihifo), the hospital (the first building on the right as you Hihifo coming from Falehau), or otherwise the main government office.

### **3.2 Niuafou'ou**

Niuafou'ou is about 150 miles west of Niuatoputapu.

The following is copied from the MOON HANDBOOKS: South Pacific, travel guide:

Niuafou'ou is Tonga's northernmost island. Despite the airstrip that opened in 1983, Niuafou'ou remains one of the most remote islands in the world. The supply ship calls about once a month, but there's no wharf on the island. Landings take place at Futu on the west side of the island (this is where we are presently anchored). For many years, Niuafou'ou received its mail in kerosene tins wrapped in oilcloth thrown overboard from a passing freighter to waiting swimmers or canoeists, giving 'Tin Can Island' its other name. In bad weather, rockets were used to shoot the mail from ship to shore. Early trader, Walter George Quensell, doubled as postmaster and brought fame to Niuafou'ou by stamping the mail with colourful postmarks.

Niuafou'ou (50 square km) is a collapsed volcanic cone once 1,300 metres high. Today, the north rim of the caldera reaches 210 metres. The centre of the island is occupied by a crater lake, Vai Lahi, nearly five km wide and 84 metres deep. It is 21 metres above sea level. From this lake rise small islands with crater lakes of their own -- lakes within islands within a lake with an island. Presently, the volcano is dormant, but the southern and western sides of the island are covered by bare black lava fields from the many eruptions earlier this century.

Apart from the lava fields, the island is well forested. Incubator or megapode birds (malau in Tongan) lay eggs one-fifth the size of a grown bird, in burrows two meters deep in the warm sands of the hot springs by the lake. Natural heating from magma close to the surface incubates the eggs, and after 50 days, the megapode chicks emerge fully feathered and ready to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, the malau eggs that aren't collected by the islanders for food, are dug up by free-ranging pigs and the birds are facing extinction.

#### **3.2.1 Grommit - Nov 2011**

The weather forecast was showing 3 more days of light winds, so we decided to make a 2-3 day stop at one Tonga's most northerly island called Niuafou'ou. We hadn't planned on stopping anywhere in Tonga, even though it is en route to Fiji, because we are running late in the season. We need to be in the Solomon Islands at the beginning of

December and they are still quite a distance away. I'm happy though to be stopping at Niuafu'ou, so that we will be able to see a tiny bit of Tonga.

We had a great 3 day sail to Niuafu'ou. To stop here was not in the plan. We had thought, because of our time constraints, that we wouldn't have time to stop in Tonga, but the weather decided for us! The winds were lighter than expected upon leaving Pago Pago, so we were not able to make the distances that we'd hoped, so we knew we would not make it to Fiji on a weekday to check in.

We arrived yesterday around 4:30 pm and spent over an hour anchoring. The sun was pretty low in the sky already, so it was hard to see what kind of bottom we were dealing with in terms of having our anchor set. Our chart shows an area of shallow water, shallow being a relative term around here, so we did about 4 exploratory circles around the 'shallow' area and tentatively decided on a spot. I was not satisfied with not knowing what our anchor would land on so I put my mask and snorkel on and went down our swim ladder at the back of the boat. Michael was at the wheel slowly driving around while I hung on to the ladder, face in the water, looking at the bottom. Black, it was all black. Black sand and black lava.

Niuafu'ou is a volcanic island but is presently dormant. In 1853 and 1929, lava flow emanated from fissures on the outer slopes of the caldera and destroyed the villages of 'Ahau and Futu. In 1946, which really isn't so long ago, the main town of Angaha disappeared under lava, so the government evacuated the 1,300 inhabitants to a neighbouring island. This explained why I was seeing only black. It wasn't a huge surprise, because the whole shoreline is black volcanic rock. With my mask, I was hoping to find an area of sand, which I did. So, Maia got on the wheel, Michael was up at the anchor, Liam was on the back deck and I was in the water hanging onto the swim ladder. When I saw a patch of sand, I yelled to Liam, my relay guy, to tell Maia to put the engine into neutral. Then I yelled to Liam to tell Maia, who was wearing a head set to tell Dad, who was wearing the other head-set, to drop the anchor. By this time, we had already overshot the patch of sand, so Liam had to yell to dad to stop the anchor, which had not yet reached the ground and then yell to Maia to reverse Gromit. She did and when we were over the sandy patch once more, I had Liam relay that message via Maia who relayed it on to dad and down went the anchor. It was too late in the day to go and check the anchor to see if it did in fact land in the sandy patch, so we'll do that today. Michael tied a buoy to the anchor, so that if it gets caught on coral hopefully we'll be able to free it.

Today, we plan to get the dingy in the water and get to shore to check in and explore a little. We hope to be able to see the crater in the middle of the island, that I described in my last post. Also, I want to go to the post office, if there is one, and see if there are stamps. I'm not sure if an island of roughly 700 people will have a post office.

**Two Days Later...** Two days ago, Friday, Michael asked me if I'd ever imagined that I'd be kayaking around a crater lake on an island in the Kingdom of Tonga. I had to admit that, no, I'd never imagined this. When we checked in here in Niuafu'ou, a couple of days ago, we asked about the lake and the police officer who was taking our info said he

could get us a ride to the lake that very day. The kids and I jumped into the back of the shortbed truck that pulled up a little later and Michael sat inside with the driver and the police officer. The main roads are quite rough here on the island.

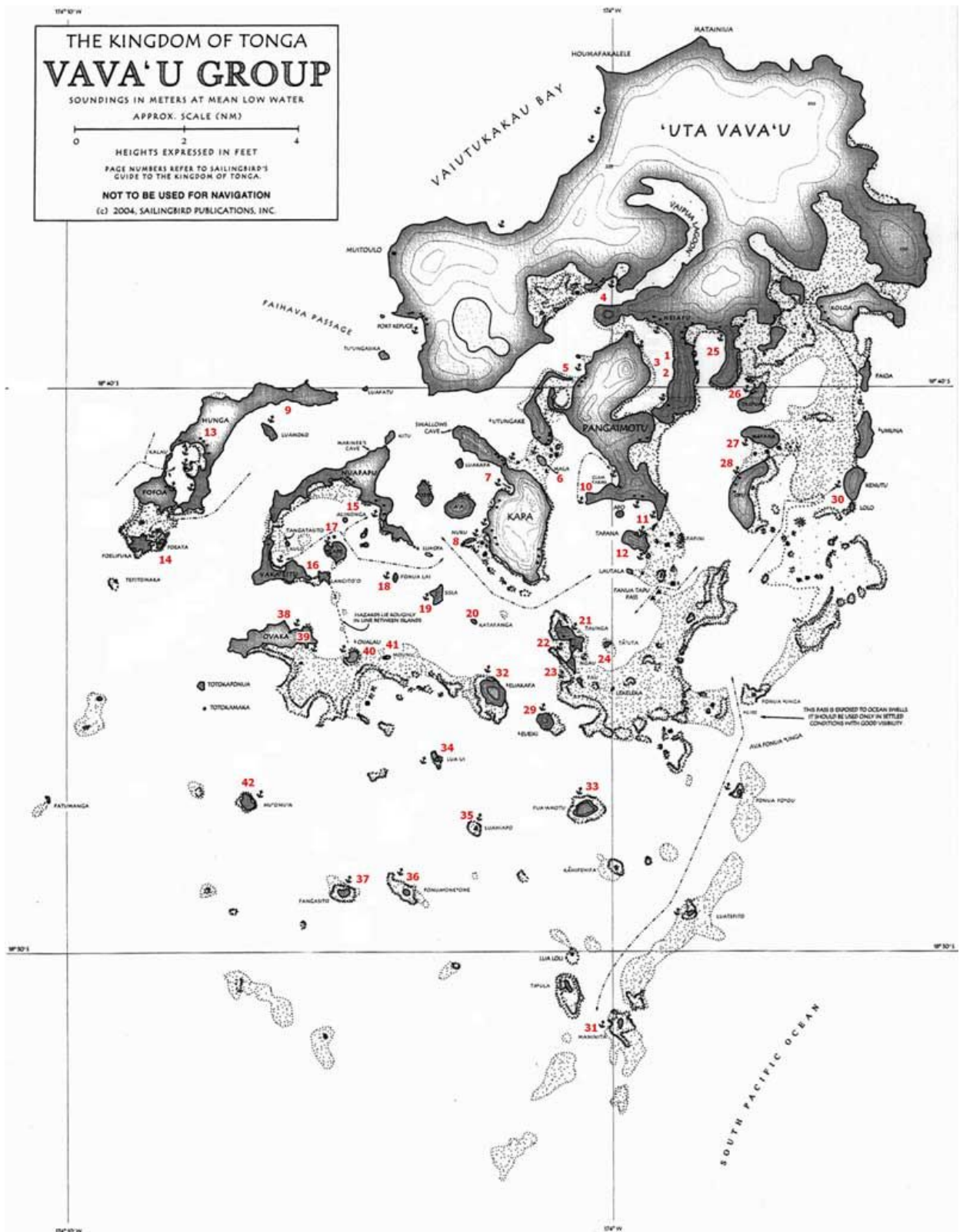
When the driver turned off the main road to head towards the lake, I had serious doubts as to whether this old truck with completely bald front tires could manage the rough, rocky, coconut strewn road, but it did. We were dropped off around 10am and set a pick up time for around 3pm. It was a fantastic day of relaxing and kayaking. The weather was warm and sunny and we had picnic lunch overlooking the crater lake on a sort of land bridge that cut the lake into two parts. The sand was pure black and hot!

On our way back through the main village, the policeman gave us a basket full of mangoes as a thanks for the flour, sugar, pasta and diesel fuel we had given some of the villagers. The monthly supply boat has not come to Niuafu'oa in over 3 months and the people are very low on many supplies.

It is whale season in this part of the Pacific. They come from Antarctica to calf because the water is too cold for the babies to survive there. We had not yet seen anything other than a flipper sticking out of the water or bit of water spraying up. But, yesterday while we were eating lunch in the cockpit, Michael said that it would be nice to see a whale and guess what, within 2 minutes about 200 feet from Gromit along came a whale. It stayed at the surface for a couple of breaths and then it dove down. It did this 3 times very near the boat, so we all grabbed our snorkeling gear and floated around behind the boat. The current was causing us to drift away so we thought we'd better swim back. Everyone was facing Gromit swimming when I took a look behind and down low in the water and saw a whale coming up towards us. I can't describe my excitement. I started yelling to Michael and the kids to look down because the whale was coming to check us out!!!! It was as interested in us as we were in it. He swam by and then came back for a second pass. We guessed him/her to be about 30 feet long and we have yet to check our book to see if we can identify him/her. This was so exciting. Not only did we see a whale, but we swam with one!

## 4 Vava'u Group

### 4.1 Vavau Overview & Map with Anchorage Numbers



## **4.2 Neiafu**

There is a fairly up-to-date website for cruisers in Vava'u, with a downloadable PDF 'cruising guide', here: <http://www.vavau.to> . You should read this guide completely before asking any questions on the VHF net, as it answers almost all the questions people normally ask.

### **4.2.1 From 2010 PPJers - Sep 2010**

#### Entrance

1. The entrance is straight forward and there is lots of water.
2. Do not depend on electronic charts. C-map is about ½ mile off and will take you over land. Google Earth is spot on.
3. There are range markers in the mountains but they are not necessary for daylight entries.
4. Entrance route to the harbor is like a 45 minute river cruise; you will forget that you're in the Pacific Ocean.
5. Upon entering Neiafu, the entrance narrows, so pay attention. There is a red and green entrance buoy and a green buoy afterward. Keep the green buoys starboard; the starboard shoreline extends outward. All are clearly marked & easy to read on a sunny day, so no big deal. The entrance is about 30' deep.

#### Customs Clearance

1. After clearing the yellow bucket, approach the buildings on the left. These are the two main docks. There's a tall dock on the right with big, black dock guards for supply ships and a lower dock to the left. The tall dock is the public dock and free of charge and the low dock to the left is the fishing dock and you must pay a nominal fee. I recommend using the lower dock. Depending on the tide, the high dock is difficult and at low tide I know of two boats that went under the dock and sustained damage. With your Q flag up and tied to the dock, the officials will come to your boat. Their work day starts at 9 am. The Harbor Master can be reached on Ch. 26, if desired. No advance notification to Tonga Customs is required.
2. There are 4 Tonga officials to pass inspection. Customs & Immigration are free of charge. There is also an Environmental Health Inspector for \$100 local money and an Agriculture Inspector for \$25 local. The fishing dock fee is \$12 local so the total is \$137 local or about \$75 US dollars.
3. Payment is made only in local currency. While waiting for the officials you can send a crew member to an ATM which is about 4 blocks away, just past the local vegetable market. I found the ATM at the ANZ Bank the best.
4. There is no hassle with your produce, meat or alcohol stores. They bypass the issue by asking you not to take anything ashore.
5. The immigration visa is normally for 31 days and you must renew your visa before it expires for a fee. Ask the immigration official for details.
6. Duty free alcohol for purchase is available within 24 hours of your arrival.

7. Customs & Immigration is closed on Sundays. I would recommend anchoring along the way or take a mooring in the harbor with your Q flag and approach the dock on Monday morning.
8. Sometimes there are delays clearing immigration; the same immigration officials also do the airport which has priority.

#### Currency Exchange

1. The official currency is called the Pa'anga but everyone calls it a dollar. So when something is \$10 dollars it is \$10 local dollars.
2. The exchange rate is \$1USD = \$1.84 local dollars. \$10 local dollars = ~\$5.50 US dollars.
3. Unlike French Polynesia, prices are generally reasonable or inexpensive. Tonga is a very poor country with their only subsidies remittances sent from New Zealand, US, etc.

#### Anchorage:

1. Most cruisers pick up a mooring ball for \$13-15 local/night rather than anchor in 100-120 feet. Generally there are plenty of moorings. Try to avoid the mooring balls in front of the Moorings Charter base since they sometimes will need their moorings for their own fleet at the end of the day. Collecting the mooring fees is lax unlike the Caribbean.
2. There are two internet providers for the harbor: neither is cheap but both are adequate. Vava'U Net can be purchased on-line, Digi Net must be purchased ashore. There are also several internet shops in town.
3. There are several dinghy docks. There is a public dock for small boats in front of the produce market and several others along the waterfront. There is rubbish disposal at the Aquarium Restaurant for a small fee.
4. There is a daily, very informative Cruisers Net at 08:30 on VHF Ch. 26. The morning net will keep you informed of all local non commercial and commercial activities and services.
5. The anchorage at Neiafu is protected and very quiet. Some boats spend hurricane season here because it is so sheltered. The anchorages outside of Neiafu are quite spectacular, plentiful and some have internet. There anchorages with mooring balls sponsored by the Tourism Dept to protect the coral. Please pay the local \$10 fee when at Neiafu.

#### Communications:

1. Channel 26 on your VHF radio has repeaters throughout Vava'U so you can use this channel to communicate along with channel 16.

#### Fuel:

1. Cooking gas bottles and jerry cans of diesel and gasoline can be dropped off at The Giggling Whale Restaurant (*closed in 2011*). You only pay for the cost of the

- fuel, there is no additional fee. This is one of the best restaurants in town so buy a meal from them in exchange.
2. Cooking gas is cheap and fuel is expensive. Diesel is US\$5.20/gallon; gasoline is US\$5.10/gallon. Duty free diesel is available but only after you clear out. Duty free diesel is US\$2.60/gallon & duty free gasoline is \$1.80/gallon.

#### Laundry:

1. There are several restaurants that provide the service but the best is in town below the radio station.

#### Services:

1. Limited hardware and very little nautical supplies. Ask on the Net for any needs you might have. There are a few welders and mechanics that are resourceful.

#### What To Do in Neiafu?

1. There is a plethora of cool restaurants and bars during the cruising season. There are also some shopping for provisions and tourist stuff. The Giggling Whale has a local band and children dancing on Wednesday evenings that is highly recommended.
2. There is a sailing regatta in late September. Activities for children, yacht race, a Full Moon party, etc., etc.
3. Most cruisers check in at Neiafu, enjoy the bars, restaurants and internet and then go to the outside anchorages. They later return to Neiafu for more of the same.
4. Whale Watching: This is controversial since conservationists are very critical of the local guide services because they harass the whales and the guides routinely violate the Tonga whale watching regulations. It's also fairly expensive and there are no guarantees of whale sightings.

#### People of Tonga:

1. Tonga is known as "The Friendly Island" but I find them a little shy and reserved. They all speak English but in general they lack confidence.
2. The Catholic Church probably has the most impressive singing of all the South Pacific. The congregation's a cappella singing is spectacular.

#### **4.2.2 Soggy Paws - October 2011**

**Weekend Arrival:** Though Nine of Cups (below) talks about overtime fees, when we were in Tonga during the offseason of Jan-Apr 2012, boats arriving on a weekend were told by local expats to anchor or take a mooring, don't go ashore, and check in on Monday. This may change during 'high yachtie season', but in general, EVERYTHING in Tonga is closed on Sunday.

**Taxis:** For trips out of Neiafu, there are a number of taxi drivers hanging about. Prices are reasonable. One taxi driver is on the VHF net (CH 16 or 26), and goes by the name of 'Primrose'. He is reliable, drives carefully, and speaks pretty good English. He can also be reached by cell at 888-1184 or 755-6160.

Another taxi driver (recommended by several people as very reliable and honest) is Tesamoni. We used him for several trips between Anchorage #11 and town. He has a van and can be reached at 886-4586. He charges 20 pa'anga, one way, between Ano Beach (in the Anchorage 11 area) and Neiafu.

**Stainless Steel Welding:** There is an American guy named James who has a machine/welding shop on the Fisheries Wharf. He can be contacted on his cell at 879-6683. He did a bunch of work for us after our cyclone damage. He's a creative 'field welder'--not super elegant, but gets the job done with the tools and supplies at hand.

**Engine, Generator, Refrigeration Work:** Ian, who share's James' work space, is the 'go to' guy for repairs on engines, outboards, generators, and some brands of refrigerators.

**Inexpensive Overnight Accommodations:** We were looking for a place to stay overnight for an early morning flight out of Neiafu. Backpackers, next to Tropicana Café, has both private rooms (with shared bath), and bunk rooms. They quoted 99 TOP for a double with shared bath, or 30 TOP per person in male or female dorm rooms. KS (next door to Balcony Restaurant, near Aquarium). Quoted us 50 TOP for private double with private bath and cold water (no A/C or TV). Add \$20 for the upstairs room with hot water. Kitchen privileges. Reservations at KS 887-9528 (Ian) or 888-7707 (Mele)

If you want something fancier, there are many resorts and B&B's here, see the <http://vavau.to> website.

**Restaurants:** We have eaten at Marina Wine Bar/Rooster Bistro and Aquarium Café for lunch. Both are pretty good. We have had several very nice dinners at Ovava, which is a little out of town on the main road that runs along the water to the west. You can go to Ovava by dinghy by docking at the dock underneath the big hotel, walking through the hotel (not operating right now), and across the road to Ovava. If you're going after dark, a daylight scouting expedition (and a flashlight) would be advisable. It's worth the effort. Lawrence, the owner is often listening on the morning VHF net, if you have questions or want to make reservations.

**Internet:** Internet in Neiafu is somewhat slow and relatively expensive. Aquarium Café has free wifi (and a few 110v outlets), but it can be pretty slow. Tropicana Café has the fastest internet, but it costs \$6 (\$8?) TOP per hour. They have wifi, or you can use their PC's.

There are two for-pay wifi signals which can be picked up in the harbor--Vavaunet and Dignet. You can sign up online for Vavaunet, but Dignet you must buy a card at the Dignet store next to the market. Cost for an hour of either is in the range of \$4-5 TOP, and the price gets better as you buy more. However, neither seemed to have an automatic log-out, so use care (and make sure you enable pop-ups on your browser to enable the log-out pop-up) when logging on with an account with a lot of time on it.

With a good wifi antenna, Vavaunet is also available (usually) in the following anchorages:

Off Tongan Beach Resort

Mala Anchorage

In the anchorage off Ben & Lisa's new island 'resort'

We always kept minutes on both Vavaunet and Diginet, because you never know when one would become unusable (or slow as heck).

If you're staying put in the Neiafu area for cyclone season, it is possible to contract with the phone company on a monthly service plan for a point-to-point internet connection. They only have annual contracts, but they have assured us that we can cancel ours in April when we leave. We had it installed on our buddy boat, who already had a wifi hotspot aboard, and we split the cost of the contract, so we were getting 3GB/mo for about \$50USD. (You can get more per month for more money). The phone company is TCC, located behind the Post Office. In order for this to work in the more remote anchorages, you need to use a beam antenna, and this requires you to maintain your boat position.

**Good Bread:** Though plain white bread is readily available in the grocery stores, and in several of the local café's, we found the best tasting bread to be found at the grocery store up from and across from Sunset Café. Ask for their Italian loaf--it's a big odd-shaped loaf, but very tasty. We also liked their 'panini' bread for sandwiches and for making 'French Bread Pizzas'. Marina Wine Bar makes western-style designer bread to order a couple of times a week. Listen for their 'ad' on the VHF net.

**Banking:** Though Zephyr (below) says ANZ bank would only let them have 200 TOP, we were able to get 900 TOP from the ANZ ATM in mid-October and again in January. That limitation probably had something to do with how many cruisers were arriving in town and drawing out money in September. We have heard several complaints in 2011 and 2012 about Westpac Bank ATM debiting accounts and not dispensing money. We never got cash at Westpac, so can't comment, but we never had a problem at the ANZ bank.

**Prices:** Some prices of food in Neiafu and other items Jan-Apr 2012, just for reference:

<u>Item</u>	<u>TOP</u>	<u>USD (.65 exch)</u>
Local Beer (Bar)	5-6	\$3-4
Beer (Steilager Bottles, Case)	72	\$46
Lunch (Café)	10-15	\$6.50-10
1 Pkg Crackers	3.50	\$2.30
1Kg Lamb Flap (Sipi)	9.50	\$6.50/kilo (\$3/lb)
1Kg Chicken Leg Qtrs (Moa)	3.44	\$2.25/kilo (\$1/lb)
1L box fruit juice (fm conc)	3	\$2
1 Papaya	2-3	\$2
8-10 Papayas in Basket	5	\$3
Pile of small tomatoes	3	\$2
~6 Cucumbers	3	\$2

2 Large imported carrots	3	\$2
Ginger-Handful of small pcs	3	\$2
500g Fresh Garlic	6.50	\$4.25
1 Doz Eggs	6	\$4
1Kg Mozzarella Cheese	18	\$12

Note that the price of fresh veggies varies a lot with what's in season and what the demand is. In Nov 2011, we bought 5-6 cucumbers for 3 TOP, but in April, we were only getting 2-3 cucumbers for that price. The ladies in the market seem to aggregate stuff in \$3 piles

Prices above include the 15% tax.

**Liquor, Beer and Wine:** We had fortunately provisioned heavily in Tahiti and in American Samoa, but we started running out after staying in Tonga for 6 months.

Within 24 hours off arrival in Neiafu, you can go to the duty free store on the main drag and get an allowance of liquor or beer duty free. Also on checking out of Neiafu (they want to see the stamp in your passport). The duty free beer is ONLY Heineken, which, duty free is 50 TOP for 330 ml bottles and \$65 TOP for 500 ml cans. I did not ask for duty free prices for liquor. It is all 'name brand' stuff.

We bought beer non-duty free at the Chinese store on the street that runs inshore from the market. Their quoted price was \$72 TOP for a case of Steinlager bottles. We got together with another boat and negotiated the price to \$68 TOP for 6 cases. (And then paid a taxi from the stand next door \$10 to deliver us to the dinghy dock).

From the same Chinese store, we also bought local Tongan rum. There are several brands and they do taste different. If you're picky, get together with your friends and buy a couple of flavors and do a taste test. We liked Marlin brand, a dark rum. Cost for the local rum is \$25 TOP per liter bottle.

We hear the beer in Fiji is CHEAPER and liquor in Fiji is more expensive.

**Coffee:** I don't recall seeing any non-instant coffee for sale in Neiafu except at Tropicana Café. They have both beans and ground, supposedly grown in Tonga. If you're stopping in American Samoa, it's probably cheaper there.

**U.S. Name-Brand Goods:** The first rule of shopping in Tonga is to go to EVERY store. Sometimes it is useful to ask for what you are looking for, because sometimes it's not in sight or not in the most logical place. Second, if you are looking for specific US-branded items, try the "Tina Burke Store" (also called the American Store). Start from next to the Westpac bank, walk up the street away from the water until you hit a major crossroad (about a 5 minute walk, past an auto repair yard). Turn right at the major road, and follow it around a curve for about another 5 minutes. There is a big concrete building with no markings, across from a school playing field, that is the Tina Burke store. (Taxi drivers know where it is, but it really is only about a 10-20 minute walk from town). They have a lot of name-brand sauces and mixes and things that yachties are looking for that aren't found anywhere else. Like whole wheat spaghetti noodles, dried beans, etc etc.

The second rule of shopping in Tonga is, if you see it, and you need/want it, buy it then. It may not be there when you go back. All of the goods (except the locally-grown veggies) come in by ship on a monthly basis. It is not uncommon for shortages, ESPECIALLY when 200 cruisers are passing through in September/October.

#### **4.2.3 Zephyr - September 2011**

As you approach the island (as far out as 25 miles) you can normally reach the harbor in Neiafu on channel 26 as there are repeaters all over the island. You might get through on 16 but 26 is much easier and someone is always listening.

**Clearance:** As you enter the harbor, the customs dock is on the left side of the harbor. There is one area inside a fenced area as well as a commercial dock with big built in fenders that you can also tie up at if the other dock is full.

Mondays is the worst day to check in as they are closed over the weekend. Don't be surprised if you are asked by another boat if they can raft up to you at the dock. The commercial dock is a bit of a jump from your boat but doable. Be sure to fly the quarantine flag when you tie up.

**Beware of the tall guy with a bicycle:** As you walk towards Customs from the dock, or walk around town, you may be approached by an older man on a bike (or maybe no bike) wanting to sell you flags, homemade bread (not really homemade) as well as jewelry and laundry services. He is persistent so beware. His prices are VERY high because he wants to get to you before you scope out the town and find out what things really cost. We wish we had said no but we didn't. By the way, if you buy anything from him, barter him down as everything is negotiable. But I'd just say no and walk on

Once tied up, proceed to the Customs shed. It's just behind where they store containers on the dock and doesn't have a sign any where on it that says "Customs". It is just past the Quarantine Office. He will want your exit papers from your last port as well as passports and a crew list with everyone's names and nationalities and passport numbers on it. Now he may take you then or he may send you straight to the Immigrations Office (you will visit him upon your return if that happens).

Immigration is located in the middle of town on the second floor of the "Tonga Development Bank". It's also about the only two story building in town. He will want more information as well as a look at your passports again and he will fill in the immigration forms for you. You will not fill out the forms.

Immigration will give you a free 30 day Visa that can be renewed for more time but you must submit an application one week before the existing Visa expires. There is a charge for the extended Visa upon renewal.

During your walk around town, stop in at either ANZ Bank (right side of the street as you walk toward the office or Westpac Bank (building has two dark brown roofs and is on the left side of the street).

With that done, return to the docks and visit the Quarantine Office (next to Customs). She will ask you a few questions and fill out a form for you. If you have pets(I know you

do not) they will want to see all the paperwork(all shot records) and will require copies of their records. She will charge you a small fee(\$23 Pa'angs) for her services.

Your next visit is the Health Inspector. He's in the same "building" as the Quarantine Office. He may or may not be in. He was gone when we arrived and we had to wait till after lunch (12:30 to 13:30). He was still absent after lunch so we continued our tour of the town.

We were approached by a man as we wandered the streets asking if the boat tied up to the dock was ours. (It turned out that he was the Health Inspector off running another errand but would be back in an hour or so). When we finally arrived back at the Health Department, we sat and chatted with him and another inspector. While they may come onboard your boat, ours did not. We were tied up to the commercial docks (hard to get on and off). If he does come on board, he will normally sit in the cockpit and chat with you about where you have been and where you are going. From what I have found, he doesn't go below decks to actually inspect. He has a fee of \$100 Pa'angas that goes to support the local hospital.

All during this check in procedure, we only received copies of any kind of forms from the Quarantine Office and the Health Department. Nothing from either Customs nor Immigrations. Once the Health Inspector is done, you are officially checked into the country.

When you leave Neiafu and head out to either another country or just off to visit another of the groups of the Tonga Islands, you must advise Immigrations where you are going and when you think you might get there.

Please keep in mind that this was our experience at Customs and Immigrations. Others have had different experiences (order of visiting the offices) but from what we have seen, all have had a good experience getting checked in here.

**Banking:** ANZ will only let you take out \$200 Pa'angas while Westpac has a limit of up to \$1000 Pa'angas. Be sure to save your receipts as my account was debited twice for one transaction. I'm still working with the bank to get my \$300 Pa'angas back. Now I go to a teller inside (requires photo ID as well as ATM card).

**Mooring and Anchoring:** Mooring buoys are available all over the harbor. All the companies (Aquarium Cafe, Beluga Divers and Sunsail) that rent out boats monitor channel 16. Beluga Divers is available on channel 09. Cost is normally \$13 Pa'angas per day. We have heard that the price might be had lower if you want long term usage. You can tie up to an available mooring after you clear Immigration and then radio the company that owns the mooring. Some will come out in a dinghy and take you to their mooring.

There are also moorings on the west side of the harbor if you want to get away from all the crowd off the town. It just means a longer dinghy ride to town but it is much quieter over there. Anchoring is available between the Customs dock and the mooring field as well as south of the mooring field and north of the buoys on the west side of the harbor

**Visitors Information:** Midway through town on the left side (past Westpac Bank) is the Visitor's Center. They sell a map of the island and the town showing all the businesses and where they are located. At a cost of \$1.00 Pa'anga, it's worth it.

**Internet:** Internet here is quite slow. Even at the Tropicana Café (wifi at \$8.00 Pa'anga per hour) it is still slow especially during the breakfast and lunch crowd. Someone will use Skype or try and upload photos and it really slows everything down.

At the Aquarium Café (opposite end of town) they have free wifi but it is also slow but doable if you are patient. You can purchase wifi for \$79.95 for 24 hours of service (other amounts are also available) from Vavaunet. We can get it here in the harbor but not down at Ano Beach where the Regatta had a get together (even with our super wifi antenna). From what we have found, wifi is only available in the general area of Nieafu. If you plan to stay in Neiafu for cyclone season, ask about longer term plans, it may save you some money..

**Groceries:** Stock up with as much meat and U.S. goods as you can in American Samoa as food stuffs here are limited in what is available, and expensive. All meat is frozen, and the selection gets very thin when all the cruisers are in town restocking after French Poly and the Cook Islands.

A reasonable selection of fresh fruits and veggies are available at an open air market located near the Customs Dock. The market seems to be open all day every day (except maybe Sunday). The Saturday market, early, is supposed to have the best selection.

**Liquor:** You can get Duty Free liquor at the local liquor store located near the Tropicana Cafe in town only during the FIRST 24 hours you are in town. Duty Free liquor doesn't include beer or wine, only hard liquor. At least that was what we were told when we stopped in with some friends. We were not told that when we checked in during our first 24 hours but since they were out of beer, we didn't have the opportunity to get any. They did tell us to come back the next day though we didn't as we still have plenty of beer from Tahiti still on board.

**Bakery:** If you are in need of a bakery, go up the street where the Police Department is located and turn left at the next street. Walk about 3 or four blocks and there is a good small bakery on the left with great cinnamon rolls as well as loaves of raisin bread and brown bread (has dried fruit in it). Bread is available through out the town in all the grocery stores but if you are looking for a special treat, their rolls are great but only available early in the morning as they sell out.

**Trash Disposal:** As for trash, you can get rid of it at the Aquarium Cafe (small bag=\$2.00 Pa'anga, medium bag=\$3.00 Pa'anga and a large bag is \$5.00 Pa'angas). It's done on an honor system as no one is normally watching the garbage bins. You can get rid of trash for free at the Balcony Cafe (right side of the street) a short walk into town from the Aquarium Cafe. The Quarantine Department will take your trash for free when you check in to the country.

**VHF Cruiser's Net:** Monday through Saturday, there is a cruisers net on channel 26 at 0830 with local info as well as the normal things found on all morning nets. Restaurants broadcast specials and information at the end of the net.

**Duty Free Fuel** - If you are leaving Tonga and checking out of Vava'u, you can get duty free fuel delivered to your boat at the customs dock. The procedure is simple; you phone the fuel depot, which is 5Km outside of town, order a quantity of fuel (I needed 360ltr), the fuel truck turns up an hour or so later and pumps it straight into your boat, you pay the driver, the customs man has seen that the fuel went into the boat, signs the delivery man's papers and everyone goes away happy. (Aquarium Cafe and Tropicana Café will phone them for you for a small fee).

Note that during the week or two that most cruisers are heading for NZ, this process gets significantly more complicated (we overheard on the VHF, boats rafted 2-3 deep waiting for the fuel truck, which was running a couple of hours late).

If you are NOT leaving Tonga, the procedure to get fuel is the same, but Customs is not involved, and it costs more.

#### **4.2.4 *Nine of Cups - 2009***

**Guides:** Moorings Cruising Guide to Vava'u Tonga and its associated numbered chart; A Yachtsman's Guide to the Hapa'ai Group, Kingdom of Tonga by Phil Creegen; a new guide, Sailingbird's Guide to the Kingdom of Tonga, but felt we had enough with what we had. Making Sense of Tonga by Mary McCoy and Drew Havea is an excellent introduction to Tongan culture and etiquette; as always, Lonely Planet South Pacific.

**Charts:** Navionics electronic charts were off by nearly a half mile in some locations as were the paper charts we had. We recommend no navigation at night while in the island groups and a good watch while navigating during the day.

**Currency:** Tongan pa'anga (TOP) though the Tongans refer to them as dollars

**Time:** GMT +13; the first country in the world to greet each new day.

**Check-in/check-out** – Both Neiafu (Vava'u) and Nuku'alofa (Tongatapu) are international ports of entry. In both ports, you must tie up to the Quarantine Dock, and officials will board your boat for inspection and completion of inbound paperwork.

In Neiafu, we were visited by Customs/Immigration, Health and Quarantine and paid \$123 TOP (Tongan pa'anga) for entrance fees including a free 30-day visitor's visa. They take all of your trash with them. Note that your visa can be extended at the Immigration office for up to a total of six months at \$40 TOP/passport/month.

Overtime charges apply for weekends, holidays and after hours. Best to "arrive" between 9-4 Mon.-Fri.

Movement within the country is regulated by the Port Captain and Immigration. Visit Immigration first and then the Port Captain's office where a fee is due. If you wish to visit Ha'apai, you must obtain a separate permit to go there, and then check in and out again with the Port Captain in Pangai to obtain a permit to go to Nuku'alofa.

Note: In theory, a 24-hour notice must be given to Customs prior to arrival, but no one there seemed to know any contact information for the pre-arrival notice, and no mention was made of it on arrival. Check before going.

**Port Guide** - In Neiafu, pick up a current, free Vava'u Marine Guide by Baker Hardin as soon as you arrive in Neiafu from Tropical Tease or Tropicana. This guide contains all the information you'll need for getting around Neiafu and finding needed supplies and services including fuel, propane and laundry.

**FIG 89.3 FM** – the local “ex-pat” radio station with easy-listening music (*down in May 2012, awaiting a mast for the antenna*)

**Cruiser's Morning Info Net** – 0830 daily on Channel 26; weather/tides, general information, local happenings

**Fakatonga** – An important expression to learn. It means “the Tongan way,” and for better or worse, it's how things are done in Tonga.

#### **4.2.5 Shipping Parts to Vava'u**

**Big stuff:** Karen at Dive Vava'u told us that it was possible to ship bigger items (like batteries and dive tanks) to Tonga by freighter from California. The cost is approximately \$7 per cubic foot (not by weight). The company she uses as a freight consolidator is S.F. Enterprises in Oakland, California. You can find them at <http://www.sfenterprises.net>

Someone else told us that you can get 'chandlery' type parts shipped from NZ through Cater Marine. [sales@catermarine.co.nz](mailto:sales@catermarine.co.nz). The contact there is Bob Fazio.

**Packages:** Aquarium Café or Tropicana Café seem to be the addresss of choice. They did a good job of informing cruisers when their stuff came in.

### **4.3 Anchorages Close to Neiafu (#4-8)**

#### **4.3.1 Port Maurelle (#7), Swallows and Mariner's Cave - Beaujolais - August 2010**

We went to anchorage #7, also called Port Maurelle as it was named after the Spanish sailor who first anchored there. It was really lovely with a sandy beach and crystal clear deep blue water. However, 3 attempts to anchor with the CQR failed so I changed to the Danforth which held first time. This is often the case when the bottom is a thin layer or sandy coral or had coral or limestone. The islands are either raised limestone which provide lots of caves, chasms etc. to explore or the archetypal and idyllic white sand, South Seas Island beaches with coconut palms.

That night there was a Tongan Feats being held at the nearby Barnacle Beach. At 5:30pm we went around the headland of the bay in the dinghy, along with the crews of as few other boats that were also anchored in the same bay.

The next day, I went snorkeling around the island of Ava and it was great. I saw reef fish that I have not seen before, humungous sponge corals, blue and pink starfish, and a 2-3m black tipped reef shark that quietly glided passed me about 10m away. I do confess

that I swam much closer to the limestone and coral walls and turned my head several times to check on him before resuming relaxed swimming mode.

**Swallow's Cave** is accessible by dinghy from Anchorage #7. It is a large high entrance that immediately opens out into a huge cavern with water some 5 metres or more deep.

Best visited around 3pm to 4pm, the afternoon sun pours in and lights up the water with the most intense shades indigo trailing off towards lighter turquoise at the edges.

Magnificent! It is possible to tie up the dinghy, swim about 2 meters and climb up further into the cave. It then comes to a large flat area were historically, feasts were held. Very high above is a hole in the roof through which food and drink would be lowered on the equivalent of a Polynesian dumb waiter. With a torch (flashlight), you could walk still deeper into the cave to a third but smaller cavern. All along the way, the ceiling is full of birds and the air of birdsong. Apparently, they are starlings, not swallows.

**Mariner's Cave:** We fired up the Yamaha outboard and went planning along to a neighboring island to seek and find Mariner's Cave. Now, for those of you who are still persevering with all of this, this next part really IS interesting, honest.

Someone gave us a waypoint of 18-41.45 S / 174-04.48 W, and we were able to find it easily using that waypoint.

Mariner's Cave is accessible only from underwater and to find it you have to go along very slowly looking for the underwater opening! To get in, there is no other way but to scuba or snorkel. The lower entrance is at about ten meters, the upper at two. There is nowhere to anchor outside; ten meters from the cliff face the bottom drops off instantly from about 20m to 60/80m. So you go along in your dingy or with your big boat and while someone stays on board, you dive in and "do" the cave.

Darryl took dinghy duty and I dived in and not without a wee touch of apprehension, duck dived down the necessary 3m and swam the 4 or 5 metres until I saw the water above separate from the rock and then surfaced into this cave some 25m in diameter. WOW! That was exciting despite the fact that I dive deeper and for much longer all the time, there was something about there being only rock and no air above that added an extra dimension to the experience.

The only light in the cave comes through the submerged entrance.

Once inside, the air pressure increased and decreased as every swell from outside forced more water into the cave. With the increase in pressure, the air condensed into a fine mist that instantly disappeared a few seconds later when the swell receded.

Swimming out, I did not time the swell quite as well as I did on the way in so had to swim that little bit harder but it really was ok.

For people new to snorkelling, Mariner's Cave could be quite an intimidating experience but one that would never be forgotten. This is a MUST DO if ever you visit Vava'u.

Luckily, I was finished and already back out when a dive boat arrived with a dozen or so people who then spent their time with the instructors doing what I had just done. I am so

glad that we got there before them as doing it with a crowd would have taken away a lot of the pleasure.

#### **4.3.2 Kapa/Port Maurelle (#7) - Passages**

Just out of Neiafu is the lovely island of Kapa with its Swallows Cave, similar to the Blue Grotto in Capri, and a spectacular sight. Kapa Island is only about 4 miles from Neiafu, but it is a world apart.

Fangakima is on the western shore of Kapa Island, and it is well protected in all conditions except NW (we had southeasterlies). Fangakima is usually called by its English name – Port Maurelle - named after the Spanish navigator who was the first European to visit Vava'u. Our first stop was Swallows Cave on the NW tip of the island. Swallows Cave is a multi-chamber cave accessible only from the water. However, the water just off the cave is 250' deep, so one must anchor elsewhere and go by dinghy.

We were fortunate to be there in the late afternoon when the sinking sun lights up the multi-colored stalactites and the beautiful deep water and coral formations inside. There is also a dry cave accessible in one back corner, but we did not have shoes with us, so we could not explore. Although parts of the overhead contain the mud nests of the birds that live there, parts of the overhead are covered only by brush. At the turn of the 20th century, this cave was used to entertain important visitors, and entire feasts were lowered down in to the cave through the openings that are now brush-covered.

Also adjacent to Nuku and Port Maurelle, Ava provides some amazing snorkelling and diving, particularly along the western shoreline. The mid afternoon sun highlights the natural colours of the coral and fish life, the depth dropping away to around 200 feet.

#### **4.3.3 Nuku (#8) - Passages**

A tiny island with a cozy anchorage alongside an idyllic sands pit, Nuku is possibly the most photographed island in the Kingdom of Tonga. A perfect day stop for safe wimming and snorkelling for those beginners to gain their confidence. Nuku becomes a favourite with all who visit Vava'u.

### **4.4 Tapana Area (#10-12)**

#### **4.4.1 Tapana (#11) - Hacking Family**

Tapana (#11) is a small island south of an island south of Vava'u proper (very descriptive, eh?). There's a wonderful Spanish couple living there, running a paella restaurant. YUM. But also way too much food for ME to eat. The nice thing about anchoring at Tapana is that there's actually road access from there to Neiafu, so if necessary you can ask Maria to call you a taxi, and ride into town for shopping or what-have-you. The downside of Tapana is that it's a long way up-wind to get there. But that was easily solved once we were shown the short-cut past Mala (6), which effectively cut a 12-mile sail down to about 7. The snorkeling was nice - a friend said she saw seahorses there, but we never did - and Mom, Dad, and Chris did a dive on a bommie just south of there.

## **4.5 Hunga & Blue Lagoon (#13-14)**

### **4.5.1 Hunga (#13) - Nine of Cups (2009)**

Hunga – 18°41.56S, 174°07.75W – 70' (good holding in sand)

There's a small village here. Check in with them as a courtesy if you plan to stay.

The narrow entrance to Hunga is daunting—the proverbial “between a rock and a hard place.”

We'd suggest checking out the Moorings guide or getting local knowledge before entering.

Pretty little beaches here and lovely scenery.

### **4.5.2 Blue Lagoon (#14) - Nine of Cups (2009)**

Blue Lagoon – 18°42.72S, 174°08.38W

Gorgeous anchorage; entrance through the reef can be tricky, but it's pretty straightforward with good visibility.

No services. We used it as a jump-off point for heading to Hapa'ai.

### **4.5.3 Blue Lagoon (#14) - Hacking Family**

(Jon) Blue Lagoon has a reputation as a beautiful anchorage (which it is) with a fairly dangerous entrance and little protection from the prevailing easterly winds (ditto). It's almost completely surrounded by coral reefs and the white sand bottom give the water a delightful aquamarine glow. However, the entrance is narrow and the reefs are generally underwater, making it difficult to see them when entering (especially in the afternoon, with the sun in your eyes), and making it almost impossible to leave at night if the winds should come up. This was one of the few places we depended heavily on our GPS to get us lined up correctly at the entrance. The low reefs also allow waves to slop over their tops unimpeded at high tide.

Blue Lagoon (#14) sounds like it should be absolutely gorgeous with crystal-clear water and white-sand beaches. WRONG! But it wasn't too bad, anyways. There's a bit of a dodgy entrance to the lagoon, past a few big bommies that come within about a foot of the surface at low tide, to a rather small anchorage. Oh, yes, and visibility in the water is maybe five feet. Okay, a bit more. But I couldn't see the bottom in 25 feet. Let's just say, not a place I'd want to arrive at or leave with bad lighting or visibility. While we were in Tonga, a boat (steel-hulled, thank goodness) actually managed to get themselves stuck up on the reef for about an hour. Luckily the tide was rising and no real damage done... except to the coral.

The advantage of Blue Lagoon, though, is that it's got pretty much 360-degree protection. Okay, so a lot of that protection is just reef, which water comes over at high tide, but it's about the best you can hope for in Vava'u. We stayed there two nights, one of which we went to bed facing NE, woke up facing SW, and by lunchtime were pointing east again. It got a bit choppy at high-tide, but other than that it was fine!

## **4.6 Nuapupu & Vaka Eitu Area (#15-16)**

### **4.6.1 Matamaka (#15) - Nine of Cups - 2009**

Anchorage Location: 18°42.46S, 174°07.75W – 45' (good holding in sand)

Services – None; you can probably pick up some fresh lettuce, kumara (sweet potato), coconuts, fish/lobster from the villagers for purchase or trade. There is an old, dilapidated wharf, but it's easier to beach your dinghy ashore.

Fa'aki's house is near the wharf. If she's there, ask her for a village tour. She speaks excellent English.

The reason for staying was not the scenic vistas or the snorkeling or diving—though all were great—it was the people and our ability to interact with them. We met Fa'aki, her husband, Ben, and their six kids and we just bonded. Fa'aki's excellent English allowed us to learn more about the Tongan culture and their way of life.

David's engineering background came in very handy. First, he fixed solar panels for the school teacher, then for the minister. Then there were generators and more solar panels to fix. Folks were coming by horseback from the other side of the island to enlist David's aid. Time to call in the troops! We contacted Yohelah and Gannet, good friends and fellow SSCA members, and invited them to come for a Tongan feast—and, oh, by the way, there are lots of things to repair here.

The feast was held in honor of Roxanne's (Fa'aki's oldest daughter) graduation from elementary school, and it was splendid. The men had been invited to a kava circle earlier in the morning and were definitely mellow when it was time to eat. We contributed some baked goods on request (no ovens other than underground umus on the island) and were treated as honored guests. We were at a loss as to proper etiquette although no one seemed to mind.

The men earned their feast! They spent two subsequent very full days ashore making repairs. The final count: 30 solar panels, four generators, a telephone, a digital camera, two VCRs, three TVs, one DVD player, a weed whacker and who knows what else—we lost count. But it was truly a community affair. People were queued up. Everyone watched intently as "the doctors" diagnosed problems. If it was fixable, a collective sigh went up from the crowd with smiles and thumbs up signs. If not, "oh well," and they moved on to the next repair.

We were paid in bananas, lettuce, coconuts and genuine smiles of thanks.

While the men worked, Fa'aki took the women on a village tour with stops to admire weaving, tapa-making and gardening and to learn more about Tongan culture. It's a very small village, and it was easy to keep track of the men's progress. If we didn't see them, we certainly heard where they were and what project they were currently working on.

## **4.7 Eastern Vavau**

### **4.7.1 Kenutu (#30) - Hacking Family**

Kenutu (#30) is one of the easternmost anchorages in the Vava'u Group. It's a bit dodgy getting there, as one has to cross over or near lots of reefs, but the reefs are pretty to look at and once tucked in, the anchorage is well protected from most winds. The beach itself is OK, and at low tide you can walk to the islands both north and south. But the main attraction for me is the trail that extends from the beach to the high cliffs on east side of the island. Here, the ground is more open, allowing extensive exploring through what looks like a series of pretty campsites. The waves slam against the cliffs, spraying foam high into the air. The vista reminds me of parts of route 1 down the California coast. Magnificent!

### **4.7.2 Kenutu (#30) - Passages**

Kenutu is an idyllic lagoon for an overnight anchorage, with an attractive beach, excellent diving for experienced divers on the reef and a walk on the ocean side to visit the caverns and blowholes.

While you are here, the Berlin Bar is a great stopover. Throughout the cruising area, you will find amazing diving and snorkelling, in crystal clear waters, with brilliantly coloured coral and reef fish.

Navigating to Kenutu Island was a bit more intricate than coming through Fanaa Tapu pass. There are no markers, and there are reefs and isolated coral heads everywhere. So we chose to do this mid-day with the sun high overhead.

We first explored just offshore in the dinghy. We have never seen so many starfish. They are around 10" in diameter, and they are colored red, brown, and black. Near shore there is short grass, and lots of life is moving around within the grass.

Onshore, we hiked down to the pass between Kenutu and Lolo Islands while the tide was low. We found good shelling and great tide pools. There were many sponges and countless sea slugs. There were also lots of sapphire blue starfish of about 6" diameter. We wanted to cross over the island to see the rugged east side. After a few dead ends, we found a foot path that crossed over, and what a view! The shoreline is extremely steep and rugged. Waves explode on the cliffs and spray flies in all directions. We hiked south along the ridge as far as we could, and found thick stands of pandanus and iron wood trees. We hiked through an area where the needles from the iron wood trees are so thick that they appear as a carpet covering its surroundings. A bit eerie but beautiful.

We had read that there is an enormous cave with a fresh water pool on Umuna, and we went looking for it the following morning. Any foot path that might have once existed is gone, and we could not find it.

## **4.8 Southern Vavau (#30-42)**

### **4.8.1 Mounu (#41)**

Sailingbird Guide - Pg 121

**s/v Passages:** A delightful small island surrounded by a sandy beach, Mounu is the South Pacific island of your dreams. A new mini resort has been established on the western end of the island, call ahead on the VHF and make your reservation for a gourmet meal.

#### **4.8.2 Euakafa (Anchorage #32)**

Sailingbird Guide - Pg 122

Ken's Guide - Pg

**Passages:** Euakafa is a high island in the southeastern part of Vava'u. It is not inhabited, but it offers many other attractions. There is a great reef for diving on the east side of the island. There is ample shallow sand nearby in which one can anchor.

There is also a footpath from the beach up to the top of the mountain which provides spectacular views of the surrounding islands.

And it also the site of some interesting Tongan history/legend - the story of Telea and his queen, Talafaiva. The tomb of Talafaiva is found along the trail leading up the island.

Along the beach, there are obvious slabs of coral missing where they were taken for Talafaiva's tomb. The walls of the actual tomb appear about 8" thick. However, there is also a short vertical wall (about 8" high) surrounding the tomb, and that wall is said to enclose an area about the size of a football field. We were not able to explore its perimeter because of the thick brush, but we believe the "football field" estimate is probably accurate. The tomb is open and empty. Some say that Talafaiva was never buried in it. Others say that her body was stolen by Lepuha. Others say that her body was stolen by members of her family. No one knows.

At the other end of the island is the site of Telea's house. Although the house and fence are gone, a few stones remain to mark the site. The fo'ui tree is gone too.

This island has plenty to offer despite it being currently uninhabited

#### **s/v Ocelot (Hacking Family)**

Euakafa (#32) is further south and more exposed from all but east to southeast winds, so it needs settled conditions. The anchoring is often difficult as the holding is bad, but there's a mooring available if you're early. Snorkeling is excellent, especially just south of the anchorage, but reefs extend all around the island and off to the west as well. Since Euakafa is in the center of the whale area, whale-song can often be heard through the hull. There's a beautiful long beach around the north side, with an excellent trail at the easternmost end of it. The trail winds in a big loop from an old fishing/copra camp, offering nice exercise and fleeting vistas as it climbs up the hillside. On top of the hill is an ancient queen's grave, now broken open but surrounded by a large stone-work. Further along the trail ends at a point overlooking a nice cliff, offering a stunning vista to the north and east.

#### **4.8.3 Maninita Island (#31)**

Sailingbird Guide - Pg 138

**Soggy Paws - May 2012:** We thought we had pretty good weather conditions to make a stop overnight at Maninita, on our way from Hunga to Ha'apai. However, when we arrived, the sky was overcast, there was rain nearby, and the wind had picked up to 15 knots. We had the best nav-aids available, Google Earth charts and several sets of waypoints from other cruisers, plus lots of experience with reef navigation, but after sailing back and forth several times near the entrance, we decided against trying to get inside. We backtracked a few miles NW to Fonua One One, where we found a reasonable anchorage that is easy to get in and out. It only makes the trip to the Ha'apai 2 miles longer from Fonua One One (see waypoint below)

**Chesapeake - Nov 2011:** We spent our final couple of nights in Vava'u at Port Maurelle (#7) because we wanted to clean the bottom before we left. From there, we motored 2 hours south and east to Maninita Island, a very small anchorage with a narrow entrance.

Ken's Guide chart lists entrances to the North and to the South around a reef. We tried to go into the North but were unsuccessful in finding the passage but we did find the reef. We backed out and went in the South entrance and had no problems getting in. There was barely room for us (46ft) and Slip Away (41ft). Inside we had easterly winds with waves breaking over the reef and hitting the stern making it a loud, uncomfortable anchorage. Snorkeling was so-so but it was an effortless swim to a beach composed of crushed coral. It was an easy walk around the island with millions of nesting birds. The island interior was a large tree canopy with little underbush, probably from periodic storm surge. Aside from the waves slapping the stern, we were inundated with flies.

**Anchorage Waypoint:** We used Ken's Kingdom of Tonga Guide for the anchor waypoint - 18° 51.400' S - 173° 59.866' W.

**Baraka - Sep/Oct 2008:** We arrived in good light and mild conditions at Mananita, where we heard you can snake your way carefully inside the reef to a tiny anchorage. After waltzing back and forth, we spotted the opening and Dave nosed our bow in. One quick zigzag, and we arrived in a small bathtub lagoon of emerald green - 20' of depth over sand, completely surrounded by reef.

We anchored twice, to get our position just right, as there is no extra swing room. There is barely room here for one boat, and lucky us, we are that one. We rowed to the white coral sand beach and walked around the tiny island. The surf is a gentle roar all around us.

However, our tiny private lagoon turned into the Bathtub from Hell, when unforecast winds kicked up to 25 knots during the night. Dave stood an anxious anchor watch, checking where we lay. Though the surf churned all around us, with the reef only 20 feet off our stern, our well-set anchor never budged. This morning, we waited through a heavy downpour. As soon as we had enough light to see our way out, we escaped Mananita. I stood on the bow and gave Dave signals where to turn. Though the light was poor, we were just able to make out the reef edges. This is nervous work.

#### **4.8.4 Fonua One One (#42)**

Ken's Guide, not covered; Sailingbird Guide Pg 136. Both Sailingbird and Moorings call this a 'day anchorage only'.

**Soggy Paws - May 2012:** Anchorage Position: 18-48.935S / 174-03.918W in the deep sand in 15 feet at the edge of the shelf. We were hanging in about 60' after letting out our anchor scope.

We had originally intended to stop overnight at Maninita, as that is the southernmost anchorage in the Neiafu group. It supposedly makes a good jumping off point for the Ha'apai. The guidebooks say it is a beautiful and protected 'one boat' anchorage. (We know of friends last year that had 2 boats in there, though).

However, when we arrived around 3pm, the conditions--windy, 85% overcast, and swell from the south, it looked very dicey to get in, and very confining--with a narrow pass in the reef, and reef all around, all breaking. The swell was forecast to rise, and we didn't want to get trapped in a crappy anchorage (been there, done that). It is supposedly very beautiful, and I encourage people to visit it (it is also a bird sanctuary, so be kind to the bird life), when conditions are right--light winds, good sun, slight seas. It is close enough to places like Tapanu to be a good day stop. I don't think it makes a very good overnight stop for an early departure for the Ha'apai.

The anchorage we'd recommend for consideration as your jumping off point to the Ha'apai is Fonua One One (I'm pretty sure that One One is pronounced "onay onay"). It is only a few miles north and west of Maninita. I don't think either of the 3 guidebooks we use cover it as an anchorage, and the chart is not very good for it. But on the north side of this island, off the west tip of the island, the reef extends far enough to the west that there is good protection from SSW through E. There is a dip in the middle of this spot that has a 15-foot sand shelf, with DEEP sand, and (just) enough swinging room in case the wind gets backwards. The big advantage over Maninita is that you can escape in any light, and any conditions as it is completely open to the north. As long as you don't mind anchoring off the drop-off, 2-3 boats could share this anchorage area easily.

When departing to the south around the east end, make sure you miss the reef that extends north and east from the island, and also the large, breaking detached reef a couple of miles to the south and east. You can go between Fonua One One and the detached reef. The reef breaks pretty spectacularly, so you can see it easily in most sea conditions.

On our 'wide area' Google Earth chart, Fonua One One doesn't even show up, though the islands to the north and east are there. I did go back in my 'historical' depictions and find one blurry shot (not properly downloaded to my cache, probably) that does include Fonua One One and the detached reef. If you are going there, I would suggest you try to get a good depiction of that area.

There was a strong current running north through the gap in the reef just ahead of us, which seemed to persist no matter what the tide was doing. We believe it was caused by the southerly swell breaking on the reef.

## 4.9 Diving Vavau

While 'rocks don't move', dives do change due to environmental issues (seasonally, cyclones, and warm water events), and dive operations change owners FREQUENTLY in Vavau. So in reading the pages below, take them as possibilities, but make your own assessments before you go diving.

### 4.9.1 Summary of Dive Operations in Vavau

There are currently (2012) 4 commercial dive operations in Vavau. Soggy Paws dove with 2 of them (see our comments below). If you are looking for certification, we would recommend Dive Vavau. Riki's operation was most economical, and most amenable to package deals for small groups. We were able to negotiate some discounted rates with both Dive Vavau and Riki, by getting a group together, and negotiating for a group of 6 divers.

Name	Certification Levels / Affiliation	Min Divers	Max Divers	Gear Rental	Air/ Nitrox Fills
Dive Vavau	PADI - All Levels, SSI	2	2 boats ~10 divers each	Yes	Yes
Dolphin Pacific Diving			2 boats	Yes	Air Only?
Beluga Diving			2-3 boats	Yes	Air Only?
Riki Tiki Tours	PADI	1-2	6	Yes	Air Only

Air fills generally cost around \$10 TOP. Nitrox fills, if available, are likely to be expensive, because the O2 has to be shipped in from outside the country.

**Dolphin Pacific Diving** - <http://www.dolphinpacificdiving.com/> - Claudia and ?? We We did most of our diving during the summer months (low low season), and Dolphin Pacific was pretty much shut down during those times, working on equipment and boats. We did talk with them a number of times, and they seemed to be a good operation, but we have no first-hand experience diving with them.

**Dive Vava'u** - <http://divevavau.com/> Karen (PADI Instructor) and Paul. Recommended by several cruisers in 2011. Nicely set up dive boat, professional operation. Tel: +676 70492 70557 Cell: 7776 616 VHF: 69 [info@divevavau.com](mailto:info@divevavau.com) Air fills, including Nitrox. Our friends on s/v Shango got certified with them, and we went out with them a couple of times. Good instructors, good equipment, nice boat.

**Beluga Diving** - Tel: +676 70327, VHF Ch. 09. We did most of our diving during the summer months (low low season), and Beluga Diving was pretty much shut down during those times. They were also not at all amenable to working out any discount deals, as we were able to do with Dive Vava'u and Riki Tiki.

**Riki Tiki Tours** - Riki is a former Kiwi and a PADI dive instructor. He worked for another dive operation in Neiafu for a long time, but eventually acquired his own dive boat and works for himself. He prefers small groups, and would likely be the most economical operation for 2-4 divers. Riki also reportedly does the dive certifications for Dolphin Pacific. Soggy Paws did a number of dives with Riki in early 2012, and he runs a safe operation, and knows the Neiafu dive sites well.

#### **4.9.2 A Dive Emergency in Vavau (2004)**

*Soggy Paws: This account is from the Hacking Family website, buried in the Private Dives section. I felt it was a useful account and worth elevating its visibility a little.*

It was on the Clan MacWilliam wreck dive (in Neiafu Harbor) that our very experienced diving friend Kelcey, from Lady Starlight, with over 2000 dives, [got bent](#).

Kelcey and her husband Jim had dived the wreck about 9 times before, and were very cautious about not reaching their decompression limits. But, within minutes of surfacing after a dive in February, 2004, she felt a sharp pain in her neck, then weakness in her right side and torso. Although they are classic signs of the bends, none of them could believe it was anything other than her normally cranky neck -- they had been so conservative on the dive times! She used the on-board oxygen for awhile, then took a nap. By the next morning she told Jim they had to call DAN (Diver's Alert Network). The closest chamber, in Fiji, was in use, so she had to go to the big multiple chamber in Auckland, New Zealand.

Although there was a specially equipped Lear jet/ambulance that could pressurize to sea level on alert in Melbourne, Australia, it couldn't get permission to land in Tonga. It was Sunday in Tonga, and NOTHING happens on Sunday. All the officials that could grant permission for a private jet to land in the Vava'u Group were at church, then unavailable. Kelcey waited at the hospital, on oxygen, until after midnight. In the early morning hours of Monday, the jet whisked her off to Auckland, where she spent 9 hours in the chamber, and then again for the next 5 days.

She is not fully recovered (she still has weakness in her leg) but the hardest thing is not being able to dive again for a year (her doctors actually told her "never again").

Although they may never know what happened, and why she got bent when she was within the no-decompression limits, one suggestion was that she was dehydrated, having had a couple fast cups of coffee while running around town before the dive. In her haste, she failed to drink her customary liter of water before the dive. We all take note!

*Soggy Paws: DAN membership, with the extra coverage for dive insurance (about \$130 USD per year for a couple), is a valuable thing to have for cruisers diving in remote locations.*

#### **4.9.3 Soggy Paws - Summary of Dive Sites in Vavau**

We were fortunate to spend the 2011-2012 cyclone season hanging out in Vavau. We were also fortunate to work out a deal with Riki Tiki Tours to take 6 of us from 3 boats

diving once a week for a reasonable price. We took our GPS along to record the 'put in' position on most of those dives. In addition, we got a bunch of the normal dive site waypoints from s/v Two If By Sea, who had done dive charters in the area for a couple of years. We dove a few of the places by ourselves with dinghies.

We have summarized our experiences on our website, here:

<http://svsoggypaws.com/tongadive/>

On that site are dive profiles, our opinion on the best way to dive the site, and pics and descriptions of the dives we did. Plus downloadable copies of the waypoints, suitable for pulling into Google Earth and OpenCPN. I'm not going to duplicate all that info here.

Also, some of these dives are also covered by the Hacking Family (s/v Ocelot), here:

<http://hackingfamily.com/underwater/Diving/>

But, because I know you probably don't have internet access right now, below is the list. The ones with an asterisk (\*) in the first column are those that area easy to dive for a cruising yacht with a dinghy and their own gear.

Most of these are grouped around the western entrance to Neaifu, because they are the favorite dive spots of the dive operations at Neaifu, who want to give you a good dive in the sometimes screaming east winds, without using too much gas. I am sure there are LOTS more dive spots around Vavau, further out, if you're adventurous.

Most of these are also good snorkel spots, especially Swallows Cave and the Coral Gardens at Vaka Eitu, which are both 'Not to Miss' locations in Vavau.



	Site Name	Latitude	Longitude	Description
*	<a href="#">Clan MacWilliam Wreck</a>	18°40.348'S	173°59.351'W	400' Wreck in Neiafu Harbor 80-120 feet. Bouy on bow and stern.
*	<a href="#">Swallows Cave</a>	18°40.945'S	174°02.845'W	Nice cave for diving or snorkeling, near the Kapa/Port Maurelle anchorages
	<a href="#">Mushrooms</a>	18°40.285'S	174°03.403'W	Just across the way from Swallows Cave
	<a href="#">Sea Fans</a>	18°39.664'S	174°04.040'W	East side of Tu'ungasika Island, in the North Shore area
	<a href="#">Split Rock</a>	18°39.488'S	174°04.111'W	NW side of Tu'ungasika Island, in the North Shore area
	<a href="#">China Gardens</a>	18°39.462'S	174°04.234'W	North side of Tu'ungasika Island, in the North Shore area. Beautiful coral structures.
	<a href="#">Fotula Rock</a>	18°38.920'S	174°04.064'W	North Shore area. Deep dive, swim-through
	<a href="#">White Patch</a>	18°38.920'S	174°04.064'W	North Shore area
	<a href="#">North Shore</a>	18°38.329'S	174°03.968'W	North Shore area. Wall dive.
	<a href="#">Rhino</a>	18°40.050'S	174°03.425'W	North Shore area
	<a href="#">Caddy Shack</a>	18°40.263'S	174°05.067'W	North east tip of Hunga Island. Many swim-throughs.
	<a href="#">Shark Tooth</a>	18°40.975'S	174°03.932'W	On the north tip of Kitu Island
	<a href="#">The Gap</a>	18°41.296'S	174°04.170'W	North tip of Nuapupu Island. Pelagic fish, deep dive, swim-throughs
	<a href="#">Mariner's Cave</a>	18°41.462'S	174°04.494'W	Northwest side of Nuapupu Island
*	<a href="#">Coral Gardens</a>	18°42.630'S 18°42.971'S 18°43.396'S	174°06.144'W 174°06.231'W 174°06.336'W	West of Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16). Beautiful reef and wall in 8'-50'. Great snorkeling too.
*	<a href="#">Langito'o Island Reef</a>	18°43.668'S 18°43.835'S	174°05.490'W 174°05.336'W	South East of Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16). Nice reef in 5'-45'
*	<a href="#">The Pagodas</a>	18°43.990'S 18°44.242'S	174°05.044 W 174°04.911 W	South East of Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16). Nice coral structures in 10'-60'
	<a href="#">Ovaka Wall</a>	18°44.668'S	174°06.972'W	(we didn't dive)
	<a href="#">Ovaka's Coral Canyons</a>	18°44.698'S	174°06.626'W	Beach dive at the west end of Ovaka, in a coral area
*	<a href="#">The Nursery</a>	18°45.328'S	174°02.544'W	Near Euakafa, Anchorage 32
*	<a href="#">Blue Coral</a>	18°45.927'S	174°02.337'W	Near Euakafa, Anchorage 32
*	<a href="#">Little Knob</a>	18-43.504'S	174-00.148'W	Near Tapana, Anchorage 11 or 12. Coral mound.
*	Hunga Pass			The south side of the pass into Hunga Lagoon
	? (Downtime)	18-50.33S	174-02.91W	Coral Mound SE of Island
	Fonua One One			S Side of Fonua One One

## 5 Ha'apai Group - North to South

The Ha'apai group is comprised of 62 islands. The islands include barrier reefs, shallow lagoons, coral shoals, and even active volcanoes, but most are small lowlying coral atolls. The size of the smallest island is less than 1 hectare, and even the largest island is less than 18 square miles. The total land mass of the Ha'apai group is less than 43 square miles, and those islands are spread over no less than 4,000 square miles of ocean.

There are east-west passes between islands which somewhat separate islands in to groups. However, the Ha'apai islands are most obviously separated in to an east and west group. The eastern islands are a series of barrier islands running north-south, and the western islands are individual islands. However, the east-west passes between the barrier islands do define the 'soft' boundaries between the four groups of western islands.

From north to south, the western islands are sometimes described as the Northern group, Lulunga group, Nomuka group, and Southern group. Ken's Guide divides them into Lifuka Group, Kotu Group, Nomuka Group, and Kelelesia Group, and that is what is used in this book.

Of the 62 islands in the Ha'apai group, only 17 are inhabited. On those 17 islands, there are approximately 8,000 people settled in 30 villages. As throughout Tonga, all but a few of the population are of Polynesian descent, and almost all are active members of a Christian church.

There is limited infrastructure in this island group. Only the four largest islands have electricity. The other islands are without electricity, running water, or telephones. And even the largest islands with electricity do not have television.

Income for these islanders is from agriculture and/or fishing. However, as in much of Tonga, the largest source of income is remittances from family members living abroad.

Much of the history of the Ha'apai parallels that of all of Tonga, but the Ha'apai also has a remarkable maritime history. The maritime history of the Ha'apai includes the well-known explorers Captains Tasman, Cook, and Bligh. It also includes the lesser known, but equally interesting, William Mariner. Recognition of these mariners is found throughout the Ha'apai group, especially in the administrative center of Pangai.

### 5.1.1 *Yacht Services in Haapai*

**Internet:** We found internet at Mariner's Café in Pangai (Lifuka), at \$6 TOP per hour, and were also amazed to pick up a TPLink signal via our high-powered wifi, out in the harbor.

**Cell Phone Coverage:** We have a Diginet cell sim card we got in Neiafu. We were amazed to find good coverage all the way from Ha'ano to Lifuka (and probably some ways south and west from there, more to follow. Boats currently at Nomuka Iki says there is no coverage there.

**Groceries:** We wandered the streets of Pangai, and found the usual poorly stocked shelves, dominated by junk food, starches, and canned food. A peak in the freezer in one store revealed the same unidentified frozen stuff in bags that we saw in Neiafu-- chicken leg quarters and poor beef cuts, we think. Every store seemed to have onions, garlic, potatoes, eggs. The fresh food market, on a Monday afternoon, only had bananas and watermelon. There was one ugly (bug-eaten) eggplant and one squash also. One of the ferry boats from Tongatapu came here while we were anchored there, but we never got back to the market/stores to see if that changed the offerings at all.

There is a fish market next to the open air market--a nice-looking modern fish market facility (created by Aid money). It was closed when we walked by, but someone told us to come back around 8-8:30am

**Fuel:** We saw gas pumps right near the main dock. We also saw a fisherman carrying a jug toward his boat (implying that the pumps actually work). We filled up with diesel before we left Neiafu, so didn't inquire about diesel availability.

## **5.2 Lifuka Group**

### **5.2.1 Ofolanga Island**

Ken's Guide - Pg 98; Sailingbird Guide - Pg 88

**Chesapeake - Nov 2011:** Our sails were up at 7am (after staying overnight at Mananita l) and we had a very pleasant sail, mostly 7s and 8s with good wind from the East. It took us 7 hours to get to Ofolanga Island.

We anchored in a sandy bottom with good holding and lots of surge. The water was murky but we could see the anchor. There was also plenty of room for other boats to anchor but it was just Slip Away and us. Inside we had an Easterly wind and waves came around the corner on the bow for a comfortable anchorage, no rocking and rolling. Snorkeling was much better the second day, especially over some of the reef. It was a long swim to get island access.

**Anchorage Location:** We used Ken's Kingdom of Tonga Guide for waypoints which were spot on. Anchor waypoint is 19° 36.430' S - 174° 27.430' W.

### **5.2.2 Ha'ano Island**

Ken's Guide - Pg 102; Sailingbird Guide - Pg 86

**Passages (2003?):** Ha'ano Island, about 8 miles north of Lifuka, was our first stop in the Ha'apai group. Although there are a few islands further north, they are also further west than we wanted to be. This was as far north as we could stop within the Ha'apai and stay near our intended course.

After our daysail from Vava'u, we were happy to drop our anchor at Ha'ano before sunset. Ha'ano is inhabited, but we did not visit the village. In fact, we did not go ashore at all.

Technically, we were not supposed to stop at any Ha'apai island before checking in on Lifuka. And even though we have heard that customs in Ha'apai are relatively easy going, we saw no need to test that. We had already somewhat stretched the rule (with our stops in the southern part of Neiafu), so we chose not to stretch it any further.

From the anchorage we could enjoy the beautiful coast and Pukutola Point. From a distance, the point appears uninhabited, but we had read about the fruit bats. We did take the dinghy to the shallows to see them. There are hundreds of bats! They make a squeaking sound somewhat like a mouse - a very big mouse. And, like all bats, they hang upside down. Some of the trees were full of bats, and many more were flying around. Cool.

Some of the coral looked inviting, and we thought about going for a quick dive before heading to Lifuka to check in, but we decided against it. We see no need to push our luck as we are entering a new area. So, by midmorning we had our anchor up and we were off to Lifuka to check in.

**Tackless II - July 2006:** We had a good sail south from Neiafu, close-hauled in an east wind of about 15 knots, with a full-moon. Arriving early about four miles out, we hove-to to await good light, enjoying the spectacular dawn produced by heaping masses of clouds to the East.

Our first quasi stop was the anchorage at Ha'ano Island. Billed as a good rest stop, we picked our way in toward the mushroom-rock landmark. There were reefs to the right, reefs to the left, and reefs in the middle, plus deep water until there wasn't, and, coupled with the chop from the southeasterly wind, there was little inviting about the place for our size boat. We turned and departed. I'd be lying if this first disappointing anchorage didn't make us anxious about what else we'd find in the Ha'apai.

Later, when staging for our return trip to Neiafu, with winds in the east, we moved north to Ha'ano, thinking to get a partial night's sleep and then follow our track out into clear water for an early start.

Well, that was the plan. Shortly after sunset, the wind that was supposed to be well east, veered back into the southeast, just far enough that it wrapped around into the anchorage and set us a bobbing. As the tide came up it got worse and worse, with seas building to several feet, and Tackless II was pitching and rolling violently. Then, just to add interest, we started getting squalls with winds up to 25 knots. It was not a nice night. Don let out extra chain, and we used the chartplotter's anchor watch for the first time. Neither of us slept.

Come daylight, it was clearly a bad idea to set sail. Instead we tucked our tail between our legs and struggled back south through squall after squall to Pangai's protected harbor.

**Rutea - Oct 2011:** Our first stop was at an open roadstead that serves as a pretty decent anchorage off of Ha'ano Island. We had to drop the hook in over 50' of water but we were able to find a good sand bottom with few coral heads. We did some snorkeling that they said was fantastic.

We only plan to stay here for about five days but there's a BFH (Big Fat High pressure area) approaching that's going to reinforce the trade winds into the 30-knot range before the end of the week. That might just force us to sit tight until the BFH breaks down. Since we have about another 100 miles to go until we get to Tongatapu (where we go to officially check out of Tonga and fuel/provision for the run to New Zealand), we'd like to have that passage not be a challenge.

**Infini - Oct 2011:** Position: 19-40.3S / 174-17.4W We had a leisurely overnight sail down to this northern most island in the Ha'apai group, anchoring at 0900.

We've snorkeled the "mushroom rock" here, and passed over some beautiful coral formations and nice fish. We didn't see any big critters, but the boat next to us saw a zebra shark yesterday sleeping in the sand nearby their boat. Tomorrow we'll be going to Ofolanga Is, about 10 nm away to the NW. If weather allows, we're planning on spending about a week in the Ha'apai group before departing for Nuku'Alofa, where we'll stage for passage to NZ. We expect most of our time here will be spent snorkeling and shelling. These islands are quite low, and remind us of the low atolls of the Tuamotus in French Polynesia.

**Chesapeake Nov 2011:** We sailed over to Ha'ano into a tight anchorage, and with the guidance of s/v Yolo we were able to anchor very close off their stern. Snorkeling here is the best so far –it's like floating through an aquarium chock full of huge thriving coral and a vast array of reef fish all in calm water. With the wide choice of reefs to float over this is a hard place to leave. For a change of pace there's beachcombing with plenty of small shells. Ken's Guide describes Ha'ano well and again his waypoints were accurate.

Anchor waypoint is 19° 40.267' S - 174° 17.355' W with an approach route of 72° T from 19° 40.440' S - 174° 17.906' W.

### **5.2.3 Daytrip to Lua Lafalafa Reef for Diving**

**Visions of Johanna 2010:** We dove the Lua Lafalafa site, west of Ha'ano, by taking our big boat and anchoring. There is a relatively shallow (50-60 feet) comma-shaped patch of sand just NW of seamount.

After we anchored, we were lying at 19-40.413S / 174-19.971W.

The actual dive site is at 19-40.498S / 174-19.908W.

### **5.2.4 Daytrip to Lauhoka Island from Ha'ano**

Ken's Guide - Pg 100; Sailingbird Guide - Pg 88

**Chesapeake Nov 2011:** There were three of us at Ha'ano, and our friends on Slip Away volunteered to be the boat to sail us all over to Luahoko Island for the day. This is an open anchorage in the middle of the ocean and because the current went one way, the wind another, snorkeling was not easy. The water was clear and the island was full of birds, but there wasn't much to see underwater.

We didn't see the magnificent coral or abundant fish that Ken's Guide referred to. We headed back to Ha'ano for more snorkeling.

**Anchorage Waypoint:** Ken's anchor waypoint was 19° 40.522' S - 174° 23.843' W.

### 5.2.5 *Nukunamo*

Ken's Guide Pg 104; Sailingbird Guide Pg 84-85

**Soggy Paws - 2012:** This spot, which is covered well in both Ken's Guide and Sailingbird Guide, is a nice little spot only a couple of miles south from Ha'ano. We used the waypoints in the 2 guides and a Google Earth chart closeup to get in here on a fully overcast day. Pretty easy entry. It was high tide, and we expected some swell coming from the gaps north and south of Nukunamo Island, but did there was hardly any swell-- certainly less swell from the S-SW than we had at Ha'ano.

Our anchor spot is 19-42.81S / 174-16.9W.

Though Ken's says this is a "one boat anchorage", there is plenty of room in good sand in 20-25' for 5-10 boats here. The island is pretty, and far enough from the Sandy Beach Resort just south on Foa to feel pretty remote.

We only did a lunch stop here, but it would be a good several day stop in any winds from an easterly quadrant.

**Nine of Cups - 2009:** Nukunamo Island - 19°42.71S, 174°17.01W – (43' good holding, sand)

Services – None; this is just a small, uninhabited island. Good shelling and beachcombing. We learned in Nuku'alofa that there were plans to develop this island into a resort. See it while it's still pristine!

**Sloepmouch - Nov 2003:** Foa & Nukunamo Islands: anchor in good sand in front of the uninhabited Nukunamo or just off the Sandy Beach Resort on the North tip of Foa. Good sand, 20-30 ft, watch out for coral heads.

The resort is not too accommodating to cruisers (dinner 29 US\$). but we did enjoy meeting Herbert Mohr, who ran the Happy Ha'apai Divers. With 30 yrs of experience, he is a real professional! He runs a very good operation: he knows great dive sites, safety is well organized and the equipment is in excellent shape.

### 5.2.6 *Foa*

Sailingbird Guide Pg 84

**Soggy Paws - May 2012:** We were anchored at Nukunamo, which was lovely, but with winds forecast to 30 knots from the SE, we opted to continue a few miles further south to S Foa, which looked more protected.

Using approach waypoints from the Sailingbird Guide (which weren't perfect), and our Google Earth chart (which was), we worked our way in close toward an anchorage waypoint that I had only marked on my chart as 'RCC'. Garnered, no doubt, from forays on the internet or from a data/info swap with another boat, from an account from a boat writing into a Royal Cruising Club newsletter. After doing our own prospecting around the bay surrounding Foa town, we ended up nearly on top of that waypoint. It is protected

from the SW-NE, and though quite a bit of scattered coral is visible on the bottom, we found a big sand spot where we could drop our anchor in the clear. We ended up anchoring in about 25 feet of sand, away from town, off a nice little beach with a landing from which one could walk or hitchhike into Pangai.

We spent 2 days of squally SSE-SE weather anchored snugly here.

Anchorage Position: 19°44.16'S 174°17.33'W

**Chesapeake - Nov 2011:** After a morning of snorkeling at Ha'ano, we motored to Foa Island and anchored in a sandy bottom. It was windy with protection from weather from the East but completely open on the West.

We took the dinghy over to Lifuka and walked to Pangai to check in. There wasn't much to the town with sparse options for provisions. There were no ATMS and the only bank charged \$5 US to get money.

We stayed a short while because it didn't take much time to walk around Pangai, then we motored over to Uoleva.

### **5.2.7 Lifuka and Pangai**

Ken's Guide Pg 106; Sailingbird Guide Pg 50

**Soggy Paws - May 2012:** We were amazed to find **wifi** in the harbor at Pangai. We anchored just south of the 'fairway' leading into the harbor, near Ken's waypoint. There is only one sailboat in the inner harbor, on a mooring, and he's a semi-permanent resident. Mariner's Café is still there as described in other accounts (though Trevor is gone), with wifi, food and drink, and a book swap.

**Passages (Haapai Check-In):** Lifuka is the island on which Pangai, the administrative center of the Ha'apai group, is located. So all boats passing through Ha'apai need to check in and out with Customs in Pangai on Lifuka.

We had been trying to plan an itinerary during which we could 'circumnavigate' the Ha'apai islands so that we could start and stop our travels in Pangai and check out from Pangai before heading south to Tongatapu. However, when we checked in, the Customs agent was willing to give us our check out immediately negating our need to return to Pangai. This greatly simplified our plans, and it is reflective of the friendliness and helpfulness we experienced wherever we went on Lifuka.

The village of Pangai is small with dirt roads and a unique charm. It is neat and clean, and its people are friendly. It has miniature versions of institutions one might expect only in larger villages - a museum, library, bookstore, and hospital. It also has a small grocery market, produce market, and even an ice cream shop. We hit them all except the hospital.

Probably our greatest surprise was to find a DSL internet connection at the Tongan Communications building - this on an island where there are few telephones.

Also on Lifuka is the Mariner's Cafe. This is a small cafe run by Trevor Gregory - an Aussie expat (NOW owned by Craig and Magda from South Africa). The cafe offers

excellent - albeit a bit pricey - food and cold beer. We ate there a few times. It is an oasis.

Lifuka also has a secure harbor in which visiting boats are welcome to anchor without charge. We prefer anchoring out, so we stayed outside of the harbor for a few nights. However, weather conditions began to deteriorate somewhat, so we moved inside. We stayed for a few nights until the weather calmed again, and it was a comfortable and secure place to be during bumpy weather.

**Tackless II - July 2006:** Pangai is a simple town a couple of blocks deep, but well strung out north and south. The interior harbor, defined by a substantial man-made breakwater, is big enough that several cruising boats can actually come inside and anchor. A larger group could med-moor. This becomes an attractive option should one get caught in Pangai with winds going to the West, the one direction there is little protection in this whole part of the Ha'apai. The wharf has two landing stages built to accommodate the changing tide. One (the better one, of course, for the wind conditions) was occupied by a family fishing, so we tied up on the other, setting a stern anchor to keep the dinghy out from under the massive beams.

We found our way a few blocks south of the main wharf to the customs office, a pleasant building under the shade of a huge spreading tree. In a back office we sat and chatted a bit with Sam, by far the friendliest official we have met in Tonga. Even though the Ha'apai is part of Tonga, cruisers are required to check in and out. This requirement is eased to a single stop for boats passing through one way or the other, but because we planned to go back to Vava'u, Sam wanted us to return before we left and held on to our papers. This was slightly inconvenient as, given the shape of the cruising ground, I had thought we might want to be free to sail back north from the western islands, maybe passing by Tofua, the Ha'apai currently active volcano, and perhaps had we felt strongly enough to make the point, Sam might have accommodated us. Indeed, I am fairly sure that some of the few boats we saw in the Ha'apai never checked in at all. How they get away with that at the next port, I have no clue! We prefer to play by the rules.

After our stop, we wandered around the simple but pleasant town. We thought to go find the hospital, which was the one building reported to have suffered major damage in the 7.9 earthquake that actually put Tonga in the headlines for a half day last May. We never found it, but we did find a building identified as the Afa Eli Historical Museum. We poked our noses in to find things in the museum were rather topsy turvy. Our first thought was earthquake damage, but we shortly learned that the woman who put together this little collection – Virginal Watkins – had just died! The funeral, a big affair, was only just over! Virginia's daughter Rose, an American from England, was coping with consolidating huge piles of stuff into one room that she hoped they would be able to afford to keep open. She invited us in to poke around, speaking of our missing her mother as if the dignified woman had just stepped out to another village for the day!

The other highlight of Pangai is the Mariner's Café, the only restaurant in town. The café is a major meeting place. A group of visiting teachers was conferring at a table in back, two med students interning from Fiji were lunching at another, a young Dutch couple on a two-year travel sabbatical waited for a taxi to take them to the airport, and we sat down

to a couple of Mariner burgers, towering sandwiches with a bit too much bread and way too many French fries! We signed the cruising log, and of course, flipped through exclaiming over all the boats we knew who'd passed through before us.

On our way back to Pangai later, we motored north from Uoleva to take in another historical anchorage, **Muikuku Point**. This sandy point projects west from Lifuka Island a mile or so north of Pangai. A large reef continues seaward from the beach making for that first tricky navigation we'd encountered upon our arrival here three weeks before. Captain Cook anchored here on his three visits to the Ha'apai, and this was also the anchorage at which the privateer Port au Prince was attacked and burned in 1806, leading to the wonderful account of Tongan life by William Mariner, a fourteen-year-old clerk who was spared. I just wanted to be able to say I had been there. On our way into Pangai during the gray squally weather it had looked uninviting, but today it seemed almost as idyllic as Uoleva. We anchored *Tackless II* well in in 20' of water and took the dinghy to a clear landing on the golden beach that stretched from the back of some houses in a grand curve out to the point itself. With the sun out, it was a beautiful walk. A few local fishing boats were moored picturesquely, and the even the simple houses looked pretty in their gardens.

Out on the point we discovered that Pangai's airport begins just a few feet inshore when the gooney bird (DC3) of Peau Vava'u Airlines roared to earth over our heads!

**Sloepmouche - Nov 2003:** Anchor in good sand (20ft) outside the harbour entrance, without blocking the access (do not forget your anchor light). Some space at the dock available inside in bad wx ... you should check first with the harbor master.

If you stop anywhere along Foa, Lifuka or Uoleva, you should visit the customs officer here in Pangai, to show him your clearance papers from Vava'u or Nukualofa. He is (rightly) quite upset to see (with his binoculars) boats anchored around that never check with him. It takes 3 minutes and cost nothing, why upset officials?

We were quite surprised to see that Pangai, the main town in the Ha'apai was in fact very small and undeveloped. Do not expect any major provisioning or organized activities. Most tourists, in fact, leave the Ha'apai with almost as much money as they had with them arriving.

Do not miss a visit to the Afa Eli Historical museum (opposite the customs). Virginia ( a mature lady from the US lives here for over 20 years) created & maintains several museums on the island. You will enjoy talking with her!

### **5.2.8 Uoleva**

Ken's Guide Pg 108, Sailingbird Guide Pg 82

**Chesapeake - Nov 2011:** Uoleva's anchorage is a big anchorage with a sand bottom that held really well.

Snorkeling was good but there was a very strong current by the beacon and the pass.

Beachcombing offered plenty of small shells, especially cowrie.

The resorts that Ken mentions in his guide didn't seem to have any visitors and we had the area to ourselves, along with Yolo and Slip Away. Because of the limited snorkeling for us we left on the third day.

**Anchorage Waypoint:** We used Ken's anchor waypoint for the South side, 19° 51.095' S - 174° 25.415' W.

Baraka - Oct 2008: From Pangai, we motored 5 miles around the corner to Uoleva Island, hoping to meet up with Jim Marco, an old cruising friend from our first voyage. We last saw Jim in Mexico in 1989. Lately, he has been anchored off Uoleva helping his friend Patti start up a new resort.

We missed Jim, who sailed to Nuku Alofa just a few days ago. We should be able to catch him there. But we met Patti, her friend Sammy, and her Tongan workers who are sprucing up the resort, hopefully for a December opening. Patti is interesting, ex-cruiser, ex-pat American. She bought the resort buildings, pre-fab, then broken down, from Bali, and shipped here in 5 containers. The buildings are gorgeous, lovely hardwoods, open air pavilions.

Sammy invited us to dinner and a campfire last night, where we heard more of Patti's story. She and her friends have done an amazing amount of work in a short time. Her property is beautiful, 8 acres spanning lovely beaches on both sides of the island.

Beachcombing, Dave and I saw a black and grey striped sea snake climb from sea to woods. Yikes! They are deadly, but with small mouths are really little threat to humans. Today we circumnavigated the island on a long beach hike - great cowries, a whale skull. We are exhausted from the 5-hour walk in soft sand. Can't explain it, but Dave and I often start a trek, without packing foods and fluids, that turns into an all-day ordeal. We never intend to go so far, but the beach was so gorgeous, and the day so fine. Pacific-postcard-perfect.

**Tackless II - July 2006:** After lunch in Pangai, we weighed anchor and moved about six miles south to the next island, Uoleva, putting our hook down in the southern of its two anchorages.

This is surely one of the most beautiful anchorages we have ever been in. It is a wide bight protected to the south and north by reef systems and headed by a long, perfectly-curving beach of golden sand. Huge coral heads loom up from the bottom as you enter the bay, but farther in we found plenty of clear sand about 25' deep.

No other boats were in sight, and the only signs of humans were the two backpacker "resorts" (camps) at the north end, a runabout parked on the edge of the woods, and a tent about one third of the way from the south end.

In the morning we dinghied ashore and, walking the beach, met the campers in the tent. This proved to be an American woman named Patty, her daughter and two grandchildren. Patty, who'd discovered Tonga while crewing on a cruising boat, had recently bought the eight acres on which she camped. Of course in Tonga, buying is

actually leasing, but still, at USD\$58,000, with 500 feet of waterfront on both sides of the island, it seemed like a helluva deal, and she was full of plans of the fale resort she would build here. It sounded idyllic. Of course, if all the resorts (rustic and upscale) we have heard about being in the works actually get built, things will really change in Tonga.

This particular spot is almost practical as the island is still very close to Pangai and its airport. Still, there are absolutely no services in place, construction materials would have to all be shipped in, and the low flat land struck us as very vulnerable to storm surges and tsunamis (earthquakes always on the mind), so it's a big fantasy. Of course Don and I are no strangers to fantasy, and we allowed ourselves to borrow Patty's for the next several days. The thing is, as entrancing as these land chances seem to be, to us it always comes back to the very big negative of being fixed in one place.

The next day we snorkeled the big coral reef on the north side of the anchorage. Don brought along his spear gun but, finding nothing to aim at, was disappointed. My pleasure not being tied to hunting, I enjoyed myself, although the water was pretty darn cool. This set a tone for much of the rest of our time in the Ha'apai, -- that is Don having little interest in snorkeling if there weren't fish to spear --with the result that I went mostly by myself.

**Sloepmouche - Nov 2003:** Anchor in 25-30ft, good sand ... watch out for some coral heads reaching about only 5ft deep!

Great spearfishing in the pass south of the island. Wild orange trees between coconut trees on the south side.

We did not visit the resort(s) which are hidden away from the anchorage. As a reminder to the volcanic activity around the Tongan islands, we found many pumice stones that floated and drifted on to shore from some distant (we hope) eruption

### **5.2.9 Tatafa (Westerly Protection)**

**Tackless II - July 2006:** The weather changed and forced us to backtrack from Tofanga in strengthening nor'easterlies up to Tatafa and the boomerang reef. As winds backed through the north into the west at twenty knots, we hunkered down first in the lee of Tatafa, and then, as the wind backed into the west, we moved to the elbow of the boomerang reef. Don was very skeptical that this submerged sand and reef cay would be enough to knock down the building seas. We felt like were sitting completely out in the open! But, amazingly, the boat sat steady for the duration: a little pitch, but no roll, becoming a little bouncy in about one foot of chop at high tide.

I snorkeled the anchorage and found a near perfect bottom, heavy sand with almost no coral, except on the protecting bank itself. Unfortunately, because that was so shallow, most of the coral was skeletal. We remained behind the boomerang cay for two full days not minding a bit as we always have plenty to occupy us on board.

### **5.2.10 Tofanga, Uonukuhifo and Uonukuhake**

**Chesapeake - Nov 2011:** Tofanga was the first island we had all to ourselves – for one day and night. We anchored in a beautiful sandy bottom, over coral, with good holding. Winds were 15+ and overcast.

Ken's anchor waypoint was 19° 57.518' S - 174° 28.317' W.

Waves and current and slope of the beach made it hard to access the island from the anchorage side. We waited until slack tide to round the South point of the island and go into the lagoon side to get beach access. Some shelling and big whale vertebrae can be seen, along with the resident cows. It was strange having cows approach me on the beach. There wasn't much to see for snorkeling.

On our last day we took the dinghy over to Uonukuhake Island for a very, very long walk to the other end. The island is covered in thick brush with wild pigs and piglets running through and around an abandoned camp.

**Nine of Cups - 2009: Tofanga** – 19°57.45S, 174°28.35W. This is just a small, uninhabited island. Good shelling and beachcombing

**Tackless II - July 2006:** Given the fine weather report, we sailed on by Tatafa down to another set of small islands: Tofanga, Uonukuhifo and Uonukuhake (these names become more manageable if you know that uo means lobster, hahake means east and hihifo means west, i.e. east and west lobster island!!)

We anchored first at **Tofanga**, and enjoyed a near perfect afternoon. Walking ashore we quickly found a spot to cross over to the windward side. Here was a scavenger's heaven of mooring balls and buckets. Don collected a pile to take back to Vava'u for Larry of the Ark. Also, the coconut palms here were low enough that Don could easily reach with his machete to hack down a couple of green drinking nuts. There is nothing to beat a cool coconut water on a hot sunny day!

The beach was fringed on the windward side by very shallow reefs and tiny sand sharks darted around in the four inches of water. A wide apron of sand at the north end was liberally sprinkled with shells, and as we rounded it our first whale of the season spouted and breached a mile or two off.

In the afternoon we moved the boat a mile or two farther down to anchor behind a big sandbar connecting the two Uonuku Islands. Just as we pulled in a pod of dolphins came and went to the sw, the only dolphins we've ever seen in Tonga!

Not willing to waste a moment of this beautiful day, I jumped in for a long snorkel around Uonukuhifo's south reef. Don, worrying about current, followed me for an hour in the dinghy, allowing me to swim all the way through the Ava Mata Mata Veka Pass and halfway along the coral wall on the windward side. Of course, this was the swim he should have brought his gun along. I saw hordes of large parrots in the rocks of the inner point, but although I looked intently I saw no Uo (lobster) anywhere along the dramatic coral wall of the outer reef. I did see my first Napoleon wrasse of the year, and as the afternoon light waned, my first shark.

When we returned 10 days later, we enjoyed being back in this beautiful anchorage. We hiked around Hihifo finding on the windward beach not the lobster carapaces the guidebook predicted, but hordes of snails snuggled up tight behind exposed rocks.

We also did not find the conveniently low coconuts we'd found on Tafanga, but Don still managed to whack up a couple of fallen nuts to munch on.

**Sloepmouche - Nov 2003 - Uonukuhifo:** Postcard scenery looking from our anchorage behind the sand bar! Easy swim ashore and walk around. Drinking coconuts easy to grab to quench your thirst during your short walk around.

Good snorkeling and spearfishing outside the pass on the barrier reef and the numerous small seamounts (watch for currents and do not let the dinghy too close to rollers – keep an eye for blind rollers). The deep drop-offs and walls on the outside corner of the pass made a great drift dive. Be sure to go having someone on the surface in the dinghy and a drift float on the divers for security.

#### **5.2.11 Luhangahu Island**

**Sloepmouche - Nov 2004:** Good west wind anchorage with reefs protecting some from the North and some from the South. Anchor in 15ft of good sand. See Ken's Guide for description of entrance.

#### **5.2.12 Uiha Island**

**Sloepmouche - Nov 2004:** We anchored off the dock in Uiha village in 15ft of good sand but with many coral heads around, so buoy your chain. Convenient to dinghy to that small dock. Check the very ancient cemeteries. Very nice people in the village.

### **5.3 Kotu / Lulunga Group**

The Lulunga Island group has five inhabited islands in several clusters, with lots of little uninhabited ones scattered around, and here the Ha'apai's two volcanoes loom much closer on the horizon.

#### **5.3.1 Ha'afeva**

**Passages:** Ha'afeva was a nice surprise for us. We went there because it provides a relatively secure anchorage in a variety of conditions, so we thought we would explore and dive the surrounding islands with the confidence of knowing we could duck back in to Ha'afeva if conditions deteriorated.

We knew that the island was inhabited (population 252), but we had not specifically planned to explore this island itself.

But we did go ashore, and we are glad we did. We went ashore planning a quick walk-around, and it became a bit more. These are definitely the friendliest Tongans we have met yet! We had not been on the island half an hour when a young woman invited us to her home, and we made plans to return the following day. We stopped to talk with the nurse-midwife at the health center, and she, too, invited us to a feast the following day.

We declined since we had already made plans, but within an hour on the island, our social calendar was full.

The kids were great too. Tongan kids love having their pictures taken like no other children we have seen anywhere. They have seen enough digital cameras that they know to ask to see the shot as soon as it is taken, and they don't ask for prints. But they are great hams. We met one very shy young boy, John, who seemed uncomfortable talking with us, but he didn't want us to leave either. When we said we were leaving, he climbed a coconut tree to get us drinking coconuts and maybe even to show off a bit.

We also met two teenagers with whom we traded some t-shirts for some papaya, mango, yam, and bananas. They gave us so much that we had to return some to them so it would not get wasted.

We did not visit Kayfour's home, and we did not explore/dive the surrounding islands. But at least we did have one great day among these most-friendly islanders.

**Rutea - Oct 2011:** Sarah Jean II and Rutea pulled up our anchors and sailed 17 miles to the west to the island of Ha'afeva. Coral dotted the sandy bottom and it made me anxious as it's very common for an anchor chain to get wrapped around a coral head, preventing the boat from retrieving its anchor - you never really know until you try to leave.

The cool thing about the anchorage at Ha'afeva is that there's a wrecked Korean fishing vessel that met its demise on a reef near by. Since our dinghy is easy to deploy, we picked up Beth and Norm and the five of us snorkeled around the wreck and the reef responsible for sinking the ship. It was very interesting and at the same time a grim reminder of what can happen out there.

**The Two Captains - July 2006:** After lunch we moved to Ha'afeva from Matuku. It always amazes me how quickly the seas quiet down after a wind shift. Now the lee was the lee. We anchored just north of a serious looking pier, and dinghied over to it to try our luck on this island. We found a nice track leading inland from the pier to the village on the other side.

About halfway through, the jungle-y vegetation opened up to criss-crossing tracks and the villagers' garden plots, most of them fenced off with barbed wire. Men were at work, hoeing and burning, but almost all took a moment to wave and call "hello" or "malo e lei lei." At a cross road we were picked up by a pack of small boys who had the usual repertoire of English-isms, "Hello. How are you? My name is \_\_\_\_\_. What's your name?" and "Lolly?"

We expressed interest in seeing their school and the boys lead us into the village holding hands with Don. (In Tonga it is inappropriate for couples to hold hands in public, but entirely acceptable for hand-holding between members of the same sex!)

The village was large and orderly, strung out along a sand track on the island's eastern shore. Most houses had fenced-off yards with flowers planted. There was no sign of the falekoloas (stores) I'd hoped to find, and as popular as we were with the kids (the group was steadily growing), we got little more than a nod from any adult!

However at the school we fared better. Roused from his house on the school grounds, the school principal Vinz seemed pleased to give us a tour. The school, housed in a long cement-block building, held three decent-sized classrooms. Each classroom has one teacher and two grades. Right now the school has 42 kids in six classes. Any kids wishing schooling beyond that go to Lifuka where they board during the week. The walls of the classroom looked like any school, with teaching aids and colorful posters filling every bit of wall space.

One had colors in English and Tongan, another numbers, and so on. It's no wonder everybody's English is tentative when you realize the principal only learned his English in secondary school. In a village this remote, where the only English speakers they meet are the occasional cruiser, what little school English folks learn grows rusty pretty quickly!

From the school we escaped our entourage, which had gotten involved in a game of rugby on the school playing field, and wended our way back to the wharf and the boat. From there we watched as several trucks arrived from town with loads of stuff that was then piled up on the wharf before sunset. After dark there was no light.

We woke at five am to find the wharf all ablaze with light from a pretty large ferry that was docked to it! It always amazes us that these large vessels can sneak in without our hearing them! An hour later we sat up to watch it depart again!

After our morning chores we geared up to go snorkeling. The guidebook had recommended spots all around Ha'afeva. We opted for the one to the north, checking out a tiny islet on the reef edge first. It reminded us of the Galapagos, all coral rock and saltwort, and it looked like there should be sea lions basking on the sand. Instead, the only life was a couple of terns that flew away and a moray eel swimming in a tide pool.

We stopped on the way back to snorkel a large reef that bulged southward between the cay and the pass. We nearly dismissed it for being another of those shallow, skeletal-but-dead reefs, but in fact there proved to be tons of fish. When we reached the end, we moved south to the next bulge of reef north of the anchorage. This reef, too, was dead, although it took a much more intriguing shape that made me think of space cities from sci-fi movies. We swam toward the boat, towing the dinghy, fascinated with the remains of what must have been some kind of pillar coral and the spreading colonies of pink and gray-green leather corals. However, there were very few fish here, although we did see our first turtle in ages.

Although there are tons of snorkeling and diving opportunities marked in the guidebook around Ha'afeva's island group, we found ourselves feeling gun-shy about the brief window of good weather and so decided to motor right on south to Wickham Reef.

### **5.3.2 *Matuku***

**Tackless II - July 2006:** We had planned to anchor at Ha'afeva, but the winds were still too southerly, so we continued on to Matuku whose anchorage -- a narrow sand ledge over a steep drop-off -- was protected to the south. We could see the roofs of the small village tucked behind the trees, and for the first time we found ourselves sharing an

anchorage with another boat, a trim German cutter called Finte, although they were gone before coffee the next morning.

The day was a pretty one, the boat pointing again southeastward as the weather system of the previous four days finally let go its grip. We dinghied ashore to stretch our legs by walking the perimeter of the small island. We hadn't made it one-third the way around when a trio of kids and several dogs caught up with us. The boy, older, ventured some conversation in hesitant English, but the girls mostly giggled. By the time we came back around to the dinghy the boy had negotiated me out of one of my strainers that he said his mother needed. I had hopes we would get some fruit in exchange, but that didn't happen.

### **5.3.3 O'ua Island**

**Sloepmouche - 2003:** Follow the well marked channel to the South anchorage inside the lagoon for easy access to the village and the calmest and one of the roomiest anchorage we found in the Haapai! The reefs all around may give you a comfortable night.

Small typical village with only 1 phone and only one house with TV and VCR! But with the solar panels/battery bank/6 lights/radio they received last year from the EEC/Australia ... technology may arrive fast!

Calm wx made it possible for us to sail approx 3 miles and anchor at Wickham reef for some good scuba on the south side of the long reef. (see Sailing Bird's Guide)

We anchored at 20-04.017S / 174-45.575 in 15ft of good sand in the small bight. At high tide we dinghied across the center of the reef area and passed over the barrier to the deep side. Later that day, we went to the Northern anchorage of O'ua mentioned in the guidebooks. Despite low light and clouds we had no trouble as the entrance is wide and the path straight and easy.

### **5.3.4 Wickham Reef**

Sailingbird Guide Pg 65

**Tackless II - July 2006:** Our friend Sandy, of Impetuous, described Wickham Reef as "the best dive in the Ha'apai."

Wickham Reef is a stand-alone reef structure some three miles long bordering the north side of a five-mile swath of open water dividing the Lulunga island group from the southernmost section of the Ha'apai. It was a beautiful morning with hardly any wind at all, perfect conditions to anchor on a reef system far from any island, and so we motored ten miles south and to look for an anchoring spot on Wickham Reef's north side.

As we were motoring in, we saw a sail on the horizon and, hailing them, discovered it was Ventana, a dark-hulled ketch sailed by two women, Rachel and her vigorous young Norwegian crew Elizabeth. Divers themselves they were glad to stop and share the diving with us, one team down and one up. Don and I loaded up and dinghied around to the SW corner and dropped down on the healthiest bank of coral I have seen in a long time. Beautiful hard corals interspersed by soft corals covered great humps, dimpled

deeply by gorges, that sloped away southward to deep water. Plenty of the usual colorful tropical fish populated the coral and several white tips skirted by us, but, disappointingly, the great expanse of deep did not produce the schools of pelagic fish we hoped to see, nor any whales, nor even any whale song. And by golly, the water was chilly! As good as it was, we found ourselves surfacing long before we had to!

By the time the girls were up from their dive, the wind had begun to freshen and a line of cloud had rolled in from the south, dashing any fantasies we might have entertained about staying there for the night. Both boats sailed north for shelter in an anchorage west of O'ua Island, where we shared a nice evening of snacks and cocktails while we watched the threatening clouds pass us by.

### **5.3.5 *Limu Island***

Ken's Guide Pg 134, Sailingbird Guide Pg 72

## **5.4 *Nomuka Group***

### **5.4.1 *Nomuka Iki***

Ken's Guide Pg 136; Sailingbird Guide Pg 60

**Passages:** Nomuka Iki is a small uninhabited island just off Nomuka Island. The larger Nomuka Island is inhabited, and somewhat like Ha'afeva, the area around the two islands provides safe anchorage in various conditions. So we stopped - planning to stay only one night - on our way south.

Our winds and the seas were from the southeast. The wind held our bow to the southeast, and a reef in front of the anchorage dampened the seas considerably. It was not a bad anchorage, even if a bit bumpy. But we felt secure.

Nomuka Iki has plentiful papaya, coconut, and mango trees on its shore just off where we anchored, but we did not go harvest any. Also on this near shore is the remains of an old prison and the wreck of the Takuo. The Takuo was a fishing vessel that foundered on Hakaufisi reef during a storm, and some of the men on board were lost. The hull later washed ashore on Nomuka Iki where it remains as a reminder of how treacherous these reefs can be.

Because we had planned to stay at Nomuka Iki only one night, we did not launch the dinghy. But we heard on the SSB radio that the anchorage at Kelelesia - our next planned anchorage - was full (that is only three boats in that tiny anchorage), so we stayed another night.

We planned to leave at 5:00 am local time, so we still did not launch the dinghy. All we saw of Nomuka Iki was from our boat, and it was a beautiful island.

Reportedly there is decent diving on the other side of the island, but it was too bumpy to go out there, so we passed by another opportunity.

**Inifini - October 2011:** Position: 20-16.56S / 174-48.28W We're presently anchored on the south side of Nomuka Iki island (we did not go to Ofolanga), between reef systems around us.

We've been motoring the last few mornings to get to our destinations as winds have been light--at least until this morning, when a southerly squall blew in with gusts to 28 knots.

With a trough over the southern parts of Tonga, the mornings here in the mid to lower island groups have started off overcast, and we're going by eyeball navigation along with our charts; but the charts can be, and often are, based on old surveys, and some charts are wildly inaccurate.

We've also found currents here to be strong, and consideration has to be given to time of day and direction of travel.

To add to the navigational delights, there are also what's referred to as "blind rollers," which are just what they suggest - waves that can only be seen from one side, so going over any of them would provide a rude surprise. We've seen lots of whales, and they're certainly cavorting around having a good time.

**Tackless II - July 2006:** The next morning dawned gray, but we pushed on southward another seventeen miles to the small Nomuka Group. Although we feared our weather window might be running out, we didn't want to miss seeing this spot, since it was the last anchorage of the HMS Bounty before the famous mutiny. The Bounty anchored in the mile-wide roadstead between Nomuka and Nomuka Iki and took on water from the fresh springs at the base of a hill near the present day village. Today's cruising boats actually anchor in the more accessible depths of Nomuka Iki, a small island shadowing Nomuka's south west face and wrapped around by some extensive reefs.

Unfortunately, we arrived on Saturday evening, and Sunday is never a good day to visit island villages uninvited. The sky stayed gray, and a huge so'westerly swell rolled past making great ice-blue rollers break on the islands' rocky tips and reefs. Even Nomuka Iki's inviting beach looked dicey for landing the dinghy, so mostly we stayed aboard and enjoyed the view. Then Monday's weather forecast predicted strong easterly trades to fill back on Tuesday which would make it very difficult sail back to Pangai, so we were forced to hightail it out of there without ever getting ashore! Oh, well, we came, we saw and we photographed.

**Sloepmouche 2003:** We arrived in 30+ kts and rough seas and were happy to find shelter from the worse in the reef protected anchorage (20-16.742 / 174-48.035W).

Our new 70 lb Bugle anchor held us well in 15ft of good sand against 30kts and up to 38 kts gusts the next 48 hours! Very rewarding spearfishing all around the island and some wild fruits (papayas, oranges) to be found on this ex-prison island. We had a nice beach BBQ with "Freefall" and "Jingle Bells 2", the last boats of the cruising season that we saw.

#### **5.4.2 Mango Island**

Ken's Guide Pg 138; Sailingbird Guide Pg 59

**SloepMouche - 2003:** Deep anchorage (50-60ft) on the North side of this small island with less than 50 inhabitants. Traded for lobsters & fruits. A short (20min) and easy walk to the summit of a small mountain gave us great photo opportunities.

### **5.4.3 Lalona Island**

Ken's Guide Pg 144

**Sloepmouche - 2003:** We anchored in 15ft of water, good sand at 20-20.449S / 174-31.344W between 2 breakers and the reef. Easy island to walk around. Small temporary fishing camp, otherwise uninhabited

### **5.4.4 Telekivavau Island**

Ken's Guide Pg 142, Sailingbird Guide Pg 70

**Sloepmouche - 2003:** Protected anchorage inside the tiny "lagoon" which could accommodate maybe 4 yachts at once. Anchor in 8 to 10 ft of sand with loose coral rubbles. The holding is not that great and we wouldn't chance it in more than 25 kts! The small, well-kept resort is now owned by an American living in Hawaii. The resort mgr, Steve, has his own trimaran in the lagoon. The 45 nm to the nearest airport is a great difficulty to overcome to get tourists to book!

## **5.5 Kelelesia Group**

### **5.5.1 Kelelesia**

Ken's Guide Pg 146, Sailingbird Guide Pg 56

**Passages:** Kelelesia is the southernmost island in the Ha'apai group, and it is only 35 miles north of Nuku'alofa - the administrative center of the Tongatapu group. It is also a dramatically beautiful island. These combined characteristics make it an ideal stop between the Ha'apai and Tongatapu groups. However, this time of the season, there are many boats making the trek southward, and the tiny anchorage at Kelelesia cannot handle more than three boats - assuming they are good friends - at any one time.

In addition to being very small, this anchorage is also very rolly. It is not the most comfortable anchorage we have found, but it is one of the more beautiful.

Kelelesia is a privately owned island. It was a gift from the king to a Tongan family a few generations back. The owners do not live on the island yearround, but they graciously welcome boaters to anchor here year-round and roam about on shore at will.

The first thing one notices about Kelelesia is its dramatic prominent bluffs. These are different from any others we have seen in Tonga. And the anchorage faces these bluffs - beautiful... Reportedly there is also good diving just outside the anchorage.

We did a brief snorkel around the anchorage, but it was cold, and the visibility was not particularly good, so we didn't gear up to dive. We did, however, see about six large

clown fish in anemones at only about fifteen feet below our keel. But since we were just 'passing through' on our way to Nuku'alofa, that was the extent of our diving here.

Fishing was good between Nomuka Iki and Kelelesia--we caught three tunas on this leg. We kept two and threw one back, so we will eat well for a few more days.

**Rutea - Oct 2011:** This morning we got up at 0-dark-thirty, pulled up the anchor (it came up easy!) and continued to make our way south. Dawn broke to a sky that was heavily overcast but the wind was light so I hoisted the main sail up full. We were motor-sailing along and I was checking in to the Southern Cross Net (8161 KHz at 1830 UTC) when out of the blue twenty knots of wind from the northeast hit us. I scrambled up to the main mast and quickly tucked a reef in. Ruthie and I unfurled the genoa and cut the engine. Our course was close enough to the wind that Rutea was heeled over hard, her new portlights under water most of the time. The seas quickly built and the rain started to fall. Rutea's bow would rise up and over a wave, sending a geyser of water skyward as it landed. Gravity would take control of the geyser of water and with the wind's assistance, deposit it all over the deck and cabin. This went on for most of the morning.

Shortly after noon, we approached our destination of Kelelesia Island, the most southerly of the Ha'apai Group. This island is out in the middle of nowhere. Our two guide books differed on the dangers when approaching the anchorage and the charts mentioned 'Blind Rollers' surrounding the entrance. The wind was still honking and we were even discussing skipping Kelelesia altogether as it was sounding a little dicey but we pressed on. Our collective pulses quickened as we powered into the narrow gap between the reefs on either side where it seemed like waves were breaking all around us.

Once the anchor was down and set we took stock of our surroundings. The palm tree-topped cliffs met a wide, sandy beach which faded into the perfectly clear water. The water gradually changed from clear to pale blue to aquamarine. Before we entered the anchorage, I was skeptical that it would suffer from swells entering as they were breaking so close to the entrance. However, I was pleasantly surprised when I found the motion in the anchorage to be better than tolerable. No other boats were there - just Sarah Jean II and us - no other people were on the island, either. There's a small fish camp on the east side but it was deserted.

It didn't take us long to get into our snorkel gear and check out the reefs that we had just sailed past. Unfortunately, much of the coral was dead and the snorkeling was pretty uninteresting. We did, though, walk ashore where we found many giant clam shells - the ones that are almost two feet across. Since we follow the Sierra Club's rule: 'Take only pictures; leave only footprints', we left all the shells on shore.

All of us were a little troubled that we almost skipped Kelelesia Island as it's a remote gem - just the idyllic, deserted South Pacific island that so many dream of and rarely find. We leave tomorrow morning for Tongatapu, the capital of Tonga.

At 10/15/2011 6:26 AM (utc) Rutea's position was 20°30.13'S 174°44.45'W

**Wonderland 2010:** Wonderland said this was the scariest anchorage they ever went into, because of the narrow channel and the 'blind rollers' reported there.

**Baraka - Oct 2008:** We motored all day under sunny skies, from Ha'afeva, pulling into beautiful Kelelesia mid-afternoon. We entered between areas marked on the charts as "blind rollers" which are actually breaking reefs, Jan on the bow watching for shoals. A big fancy catamaran was in the anchorage, with crew parasailing off the beach while a Tongan fisherman and his 4 dogs watched from his beach fale (house). We anchored in sand, but the chain of our scope brushes a large coral "bommie" covered with delicate corals. Makes us feel bad, like we parked our Humvee in someone's rose garden.

We explored the island and snorkeled for rumored lobsters. No luck, but what a spectacular place! The island has striated limestone cliffs topped with coconut palms, ringed by white coral sand beach, and sits in a turquoise lagoon.

Tomorrow we rise early for the all-day run south to Nuku Alofa.

**SloepMouche - 2003:** very scenic island (rugged limestone cliffs) and nice, albeit small (3-4 boats?) anchorage in 30ft of good sand with isolated coral heads. Good snorkeling right in the protected anchorage (open only to the West). There is an old gentleman with a crippled arm who stays here year round to tend the land and fish camp. He is very discreet, but we made sure to ask him if we could walk the island, and gave him some cake and cookies. This island's geology is so different from the rest, with reddish-layered cliffs..

## **5.6 Diving Ha'apai**

### **5.6.1 Summary of Dive Operations in Ha'apai**

**Fins 'n Flukes** - <http://www.finsnflukes.com/>

Based on Lifuka Island in Ha'apai, we offer [Humpback whale watching/swimming](#) (Jul-Nov), [scuba diving](#), [PADI dive courses](#), [snorkeling](#), [kayaking](#), [island trips](#), [camping](#) and bike hire. In keeping with the local pace of life we operate on laid back Tonga time, permitting total absorption of experiences you'll never forget. With our extensive knowledge of the local marine environment, we endeavor to give you the absolute best from your valuable time here.

We are the only PADI authorized dive resort and whale watching/swimming operator on Lifuka, conveniently located in the centre of Pangai, close to all the [local guesthouses](#), five minutes from the airport and a stones throw from the turquoise blue waters edge.

We offer whale watching from most of the accommodations on Uoleva and Foa Islands including Sandy Beach Resort, Matafonua Lodge, Captain Cooks Resort and Serenity Beaches. We offer SCUBA diving from the Sandy Beach Resort, Matafonua Lodge and Captain Cooks Resort.

Phone: +676 60015  
Mobile: + 676 8870141 or 7313261

Email: [info@finsnflukes.com](mailto:info@finsnflukes.com)

Skype: finsnflukes

### **Happy Ha'apai**

Herbert Mohr, who ran the Happy Ha'apai Divers is no longer there, at the north end of Foa near the Sandy Beach Resort.

**Soggy Paws' note 2012:** There was someone operating out of the Sandy Beach Resort (where Happy Ha'apai is/was) when we anchored for lunch there in May 2012. Bad weather was coming and we wanted to move, so we didn't get chance to talk with the new operator of this dive operation.

#### **5.6.2 Dive Sites from Wannadive.net**

These came straight off the internet from [Wannadive.net](http://Wannadive.net)

### **Akoteu**

Latitude: 19° 49.067' S

Longitude: 174° 31.183' W

Average depth 20 m / 65.6 ft

Max depth 70 m / 229.7 ft

Current Medium ( 1-2 knots)

Visibility Excellent ( > 30 m)

#### **DIVE TYPE**

- Wall
- Deep
- Sharks
- Big fishes

Without doubt the aquarium of Ha'apai. This beautiful seamount has a reef top that sits at 5m and drops to 70m either side. Reef fish gather here in huge numbers with various types of Fusiliers schooling in the thousands.

Large schools of Black snapper, Unicorn fish and Big Tuna also cruise the blue along with Sharks and Barracuda. Trumpet fish, Filefish, Longtoms, Sweetlips, Coral trouts and Large puffer fish all inhabit the reef, along with the numberless others!

The coral gardens here are beautiful with many different species hidden away. You will often find Octopus, Moray eels, Little crabs and Shrimps, making it an ideal spot for spotting little critters as well as larger fish.

### **Lafa Lafa**

Average depth 20 m / 65.6 ft

max depth 25 m / 82 ft  
Current Strong ( > 2 knots)  
Visibility Excellent ( > 30 m)  
Latitude:19° 49.067' S  
Longitude:174° 34.133' W

The Lafa Lafa group comprises a series of four, distinct submerged seamounts. Being offshore and slightly exposed to prevailing currents they attract many of the larger species that divers want to see.

Sharks, Rays and Turtles are not uncommon but may be difficult to sight through the profusion of schooling fish belonging to the Snapper, Parrotfish and Grouper families.

Transient pelagics including Great Barracuda and Dogtooth Tuna scathe the mount facades, ever alert for an unsuspecting meal. Watch the small reef fish dive for cover as the open water predators make their periodic lunges.

The standard of coral health on the Lafa Lafa group, 3 and 4 in particular, is unparalleled in the entire Kingdom of Tonga and these dives deserve real recognition.

In 2008 we had several scuba encounters with Humpbacks here!

Currents can be a little tricky here and the dive is suited to more experienced divers.

### **5.6.3 Dive Info from Visions of Johanna (2010)**

I located those GPS coordinates in the Ha'apai group where we dove the sea mount with Migration.

The name is Lua Lafalkafa sea mount - located 19 40.498S/174 19.908W. I recall a relatively shallow (50-60 feet) comma sized patch of sand just NW of the mount. After we anchored, we were lying at 19 40.413S/174 19.971W.

There is also an area called "the Arch". We did not dive there. it is located 19 37.801S/174 29.002W

## **6 Tongatapu**

Tongatapu is the southernmost island group in Tonga. It is also the name of the island on which Nuku'alofa - the capital of Tonga - is located. So, in an effort to minimize the inevitable confusion this causes, we will refer to the island group as Tongatapu and the island itself as Nuku'alofa. We do this knowing full well that there is much more to the island than just its capital city. However, we visited only the capital on this island, so this seems a workable way to organize our experience.

Tongatapu - meaning "sacred south" - is the government and cultural center of Tonga. The Tongatapu group - approximately 160 square miles - comprises one third of the land mass of the Kingdom. Approximately two thirds of the Tongan population live on these

islands in 60+ villages. Depending on the source, there are between 30 and 46 islands in the group (just how big does a rock have to be to be called an island?). Much of Tonga's early known history occurred in the Tongatapu group. Today, the capital of Tonga remains in Tongatapu.

## **6.1 Nukualofa**

### **6.1.1 Nukualofa - Passages**

Nuku'alofa is the capital and center of Tonga. Here is where one finds government offices, historical landmarks, military installations, tourist attractions, and shopping. However, this is not a big city by western standards. There are cars and paved roads, but there are no stop lights or even stop signs.

We did not go out to any of the tourist attractions, although many of them are reportedly quite interesting. There are blowholes on the south shore, many caves to explore, and tombs of ancient kings. There is also a Tongan National Center which displays artifacts of Tonga's history - including tapa and weavings - but we did not make it there.

There is a small harbor - Fua Harbor - in which cruising boats are welcome to tie up stern-to, but we opted not to. The bottom is soft mud, and we didn't like the idea of caking our ground tackle in mud just before leaving on our week-long passage to New Zealand - stinky! Also, there are rats running around the harbor, and we try to discourage uninvited guests whenever possible.

So we anchored outside the harbor while we checked in - a quick and easy process - then left town for a more remote anchorage. But we made a few trips to town, and we learned a bit about it and enjoyed our time there.

Approximately 20,000 years ago, the Ha'apai volcano of Tofua - about 90 miles to the north - erupted, and it covered Nuku'alofa (as well as many other islands) with a thick layer of ash. This has developed in to a rich and fertile soil in which much grows. Consequently, Nuku'alofa grows a wealth of fruits and vegetables (they, too, have fruit bats here). There is a wonderful produce market with more variety than we have seen in many months, and the prices were remarkably low.

While shopping in Nuku'alofa we found a larger variety of products than we have seen since the Samoas. Shopping in most of the rest of Tonga has been extremely limited. We found excellent food at Friends Cafe, and there are a few ice cream shops (so Bud is a happy camper). Although there are a few bakeries, they produce the same boring bread we have found throughout Tonga. At least we can buy it for only 70 seniti here (the equivalent of about 39 cents in U.S. currency).

We also found **internet access** through which we were able to take care of a few business-related chores.

**Duty-free fuel** is available inside Fua Harbor, but there are two substantial obstacles to clear. First, you must be inside the harbor, and, as already mentioned, we really didn't want to go in. Second, you can purchase it duty-free only after you have checked out,

but you need to order it in advance, so you need to plan at least a few days ahead - sometimes difficult in these rapidly changing weather conditions.

We calculated that we needed 120 liters, and although we would probably save close to \$100 pa'anga by buying duty-free, it just was not worth the hassle. We paid a bit more, but it was delivered to our boat while at anchor. Money well spent.

Then we spent the rest of our time in Tongatapu waiting - waiting for a weather window to head south to New Zealand. Although we have become marginally competent at reading local weather charts, we are quite perplexed by the interactions between northbound polar air masses that mix with tropical and subtropical systems between here and New Zealand. So we ordered a voyage forecast from Bob McDavitt - New Zealand's weather guru. We will use the info we get from Bob to plan our departure.

### **6.1.2 Checking Out & Duty Free Fuel - Don Quixote - Oct 2011**

*(Note: we have heard of much different better from those people who went to Pangiamotu (see above) to clear out)*

Do not under any circumstances go into Nuka'alofa harbor to check out of Tonga.

I can not be any more clear than that. Please everyone cruising TAKE NOTES (and forward to NZ bound friends). Check out of Neiafu. Spend a week or two enjoying Ha'apai. Then go directly to New Zealand. Do not pass Nuka'alofa. Do not collect \$200. Just go.

We spent all day ALL DAY in various offices trying to get checked out of Nuka'alofa. For our pains, we spent a ridiculous \$235 pa'anga to legally leave the country. This is after the \$200 some odd we spent getting into it.

The largest expense was a port fee for using the rat invested, muddy, and smelly mooring available in the harbor. They charged us \$4.36/pa'anga per gross ton -- which unfortunately for us is 31. Most monohulls will pay considerably less because GRT is based on volume rather than weight which is a legacy of the freighting industry. The price is not dependent on the amount of time you spend, however, so I suppose if you parked there for a month, it's a reasonable fee.

The HM Customs guy is almost never in his office, and after three visits, we just parked our stubborn bottoms on their bench until the office workers hunted him down.

To get duty free fuel we went to -- and I am not exaggerating... I know I usually do so let there be no mistake here -- six separate offices to get the right paperwork, approvals, stamps, signatures, and blessings.

The town itself is outside of normal walking distance being at least 2 km to the west along the water front. Town is an unavoidable journey since it is there you will find the Immigration office. You can take a taxi for \$5 each way. There is no Internet available near the boat, and every cafe in town that advertised wireless services was also fronted by a sign that said their wireless was not functional. There is a Dataline Internet store where you can buy incredibly slow access at \$1.50/15 minutes on computers that looked

like they were 20 years old and whose keyboards should be put out of their misery via the expedient of bathing them in acid.

There are restaurants along the water front, most of which are on the pricey end of the scale. On an upnote, there is a daily fish market just across from the Med moor line as well as opportunistic local farmers who line the street to sell their wares. The veg and fruits available on the water front as well as those available at the large market downtown are considerably more diverse, better quality, and lower priced than those found in Neiafu. The market downtown also supports a diverse number of artisan and craft sellers whose prices are highly competitive and with whom you can bargain vigorously for a last few trinkets and souvenirs. You can find a marvelous bakery across the street from the downtown market. There are many hardware and a variety of food stores downtown. So provisioning is a bit of a shlep, it is easy enough to find what you need and bail into a cab for the trip back to the boat.

There are few interesting places to anchor in the Tongatapu group. None of them are really viable in a big wind or swell. We are having no difficulty, of course, because as of two days ago, the wind engine delivered an enormous layer of fat, wet clouds and then turned off to leave them sitting pleasantly and helpfully over the watermelon fields of Nuka'alofa. The watermelon is thriving and delicious. Our boat needs to be picked up by a giant hand and wrung out like squeegee.

### **6.1.3 Pangiamotu & Nuku'alofa - Nine of Cups - 2009**

Pangaimotu- 21°07.51S, 175°09.82W – (75' good holding)

Anchored off Big Mama's. Big Mama's bar and restaurant – everything you'd expect in a South Sea's island bar/restaurant—sand floors, cold beer, friendly people, good food.

You can also tie up Med-moor style at the inner harbor in Nuka'alofa. Fees apply.

There is a ferry several times a day from Big Mama's to Nuku'alofa (\$10 TOP/pp/RT).

If you've already checked into Tonga, you can anchor at Big Mama's and do all of your paperwork on foot in Nuku'alofa. Lalo at Big Mama's can give you all the information you need for check-in.

Note: You can certainly dinghy across the bay and tie-up at the dinghy dock in Nuku'alofa. We found this more convenient and economical than relying on the ferry.

**Duty free diesel** – If you plan to depart Tonga from Nuku'alofa, duty-free diesel at the public dock in Nuku'alofa can be arranged through Big Mama's and requires both a duty-free purchase permit and a bunkering permit through Customs.

International check-out in Nuku'alofa can be done from Big Mama's anchorage.

First, go to Immigration in downtown Nuka'alofa, then to Customs and the Port Captain's office in the port area. Fees are due, but they were minimal.

**Supermarkets/provisioning** - The Talamahu Market is a huge fresh/crafts market; other smaller supermarkets are available with varied offerings. Don't expect much and you won't be disappointed.

**Laundry** – Available through Big Mama’s. We did not see any self-service laundromats.

**Trash** – Big bins available at Big Mama’s at no charge.

**Water** – Jerry jugged in from Nuku’alofa on the ferry. Otherwise, you can take your boat to the wharf in Nuku’alofa to get water. The anchorage is deep and clean enough to make water with your watermaker.

**Propane** – Check with Big Mama’s

**ATMs** – Westpac and ANZ both available on Taufa’ahau

**What to do do/see** - Walking tour of the town; archeological sites; never-ending offerings of cultural shows, feasts and dancing; snorkeling, diving; good collectible stamps here from the post office.

#### **6.1.4 Pangaimotu - Big Mama Yacht Club - SSCA Cruising Station**

From a 2007 SSCA Bulletin writeup:

Malo e lelei! Greetings from the Kingdom of Tonga. A convenient stop along the Coconut Milk Run west across the Pacific, Tonga is a great place to visit while waiting for weather and preparing for the last long run to New Zealand. And now, there’s an official SSCA Cruising Station in Nuku’alofa to give you a warm Tongan welcome when you arrive there.

Unique among the Pacific Nations, the Friendly Islands archipelagos were united into a Polynesian kingdom in 1845 and remain the only monarchy in the Pacific. Despite “outside” intervention, the islands and people maintain much of their indigenous heritage and offer yet another exciting, exotic look at Polynesian culture.

Ana “Big Mama” Emberson, a native Tongan, owns and operates Big Mama Yacht Club, located only a mile by water from the capital city of Nuku’alofa. Ana describes the location as “an idyllic tropical island anchorage with friendly service, smiling girls and boys and the best fish’n’chips and cheeseburgers.” The sandy-bottomed anchorage in clean, clear water is as close as 100 meters from Big Mama’s Pangaimotu Island Resort, and offers cruisers a splendid view of sandy white, coconut-fringed beaches in the lee of the island.

Ana and her husband, Earle, have officially operated Big Mama Yacht Club for five years now, but have been welcoming visitors to their resort since 1996. Pangaimotu Island Resort <[www.pangaimotu.to](http://www.pangaimotu.to)>, welcomes cruisers to their tropical bar/lounge, casual dining and open patio/deck area. The local ferry dock has space for dinghies and allows good access to Resort facilities. Ana can assist with local information from fresh food markets, mechanical repairs and marine parts to LPG fill-ups. Specifics on the Tonga Cruising Station at Pangaimotu, Nuku’alofa are now available on the SSCA website in the Cruising Stations section of the Members’ Area..

### **6.1.5 Pangaimotu - Passages**

In the Tongan language, 'pangai' means royal, and 'motu' means island. So pangaimotu means 'royal island'. It is, indeed. The King of Tonga owns all the land throughout the kingdom other than a few small parcels that have been given away.

However, the Queen is related to one of the principals in Pangaimotu Island Resort, and she has granted them permission to live and run a business on the island even though the King retains ownership of the land itself.

Pangaimotu Island is just over one mile northeast of the harbor in Nuku'alofa, but it feels a world apart. It is a small palm-covered island with a sandy beach completely surrounding it. There is a secure, albeit deep, anchorage on the SW side of the island just in front of the Pangaimotu Island Resort. The 'resort' is a low-key bar and restaurant that also has four fales (beach houses) for rent. Although we did see the bar and restaurant a few times, we did not see inside the fales. The bar and restaurant served tasty fish and chips, and the beer was always cold.

The resort also offers shuttle service to Nuku'alofa a few times each day for \$7 pa'anga round trip, and they will take one's bags of garbage for only \$1 pa'anga each. The couple that runs the resort, Earle and Ana, are very helpful. When Ana saw us shopping in town, she brought our bags back out to the resort with her so that we would not have to carry them with us as we went about town. And Earle arranged our fuel delivery for us for a very small service charge.

They do not charge boats for anchoring off the island, and they welcome cruisers to their bar and restaurant. They cater to the cruisers, and consequently, the cruisers give them some bar and restaurant business. A nice arrangement for all. And this is where we chose to spend our final days in Tonga.

We needed to do a few things to get ready for our passage to New Zealand, and this was a great place in which to work on those things. We needed to fuel the boat and clean the bottom - done. We needed to catch up on our rest and sleep - done.

Then we waited for a weather window. If you have to hang around and wait, this was a great place to do it!

## **6.2 Outside Nukualofa**

### **6.2.1 Malinoa - Passages**

We didn't really plan on stopping at Malinoa. We had planned on sailing from the southernmost Ha'apai island - the beautiful Kelelesia - in to Nuku'alofa. But it was getting late in the day, and we decided to end a great day of sailing in a beautiful and isolated anchorage that we could have to ourselves. Malinoa was just right.

Malinoa is just a dot on the chart about six miles north of the harbor in Nuku'alofa. It is very tiny - probably just a few acres - but what it lacks in size it makes up for in beauty. It is lightly wooded, and a sandy beach surrounds it. There are substantial coral reefs all around it, and there are plans to turn this island in to a protected marine preserve. We think that is a great idea if it will help preserve this island in this 'untouched' state.

It took some effort to navigate our way in, but it was well worth the effort. We had to go in quite close to find a sandy patch in which to drop our anchor, and we ended up dropping in only 18 feet of sand. The crystal clear water revealed spectacular corals all over the bottom, but we did not get in (we were again pushing the envelope on being 'legal').

We were content to look at it through a few feet of clear water. We had a calm quiet night here before heading to the bright lights of the 'big city' (a relative term) of Nuku'alofa.

## **7 Minerva Reef**

### **7.1.1 *Infini - North Minera Reef Waypoints - October 2011***

Here are the waypoints that s/v Infini used in October 2011. They were spot-on.

Approach: 23-36.635 S / 178-56.418 W  
Entry: 23-37.267 S / 178-55.959 W  
Inside: 23-37.390 S / 178-55.749 W  
Anchorage: 23-39.480 S / 178-54.191 W

Infini reported good protection in the anchorage, and plenty of room to anchor.

### **7.1.2 *Cooee Too - Minerva Reef Waypoints - September 2011***

The following waypoints are taken from my previous tracks in and out of both reefs. I will give you 2 waypoints, one just outside the entrance and one inside. I give you these in good faith but cannot accept any responsibility for them. All the entrances are very easy in good light.

The North Minerva ones I have taken in between my most northerly and southerly tracks but will put you in the strongest out flow which can be quite rough at times. It is very easy to go either side of the main current though and the entrance is deep all the way to the reef on either side. The entrance is about 150m wide.

Once inside there aren't any hazards to worry about in the top half of the lagoon and only 1 or 2 in the south. There is a sandy ledge running the whole way around the inside of the reef. This ledge is normally about 5m deep and up to 200m wide but is thin sand on coral and not very good holding. The edge of the ledge drops off quite sharply to 10 to 15m with the odd small coral head on the bottom with really good holding. These coral heads aren't more than a meter or 2 high so not an issue except for anchoring but it is fairly easy to anchor in between them. At low tide the lagoon is very calm but can get a little roly at high tide if there is a big swell running. I have been there in 50kts and 5m+ seas and though unpleasant quite manageable and far better than being outside the reef.

North Minerva

outer waypoint. 23 37.284 S / 178 55.977 W

inner 23 37.390 S / 178 55.749 W

The diving and fishing outside the reef is exceptional but do go a little way from the entrance. This area has been fished quite hard by everyone over the years.

North Minerva is a much better short term stop than South. I spent 6 weeks there this year but only a week in South. South is quite a bit more rolly and North has the advantage of a beach at low tide on the SW reef, not far from the light house, unless the Fijians have blown the new one up again.

Don't believe the story about lobster everywhere, I have seen about 5 and am yet to eat one.

South Minerva isn't as well protected as North as the reef isn't as wide or as high but the fishing is slightly better and the lagoon is smaller. Also the entrance is much wider with a large coral head in the Northern part. This gives 2 entrances. The Northern one is about 100m wide and the Southern 600m. I have only been through each once so will give you my exact track. The Northern one is pretty much in the middle and it is also deep right to the edges.

South Minerva, North entrance

outer 23 55.899S 179 07.875W

inner 23 55.957S 179 07.647W

The Southern pass is much wider at 600m and is also deep. I went quite close to the reef on the South side so my track is for that but don't go any further south. That is to starboard on the way in. I did this so that I could see the reef on my right but I couldn't see the reef on the other as it is so wide. I have no idea if there are any obstructions in the middle to Northern part of this pass. There is a big coral head a fair way inside the entrance on the south side but it is very obvious.

South Minerva, South entrance

outer 23 56.176S 179 08.193W

inner 23 56.279S 179 07.923W

North Minerva is a much better short term stop than South. I spent 6 weeks there this year but only a week in South. South is quite a bit more rolly and North has the advantage of a beach at low tide on the SW reef, not far from the light house, unless the Fijians have blown the new one up again.

If you like diving and fishing do spend some time here as it is a fantastic place when the weather is right. It can be a bit painful if it is blowing a gale though. Good luck and enjoy.

### **7.1.3 Migration - Update on Tonga / Fiji Dispute - July 2011**

Last November we were boarded by the Fijian Navy while at North Minerva Reef. They were very nice and there was no problem. 10 days later they did kick some boats out so they could blow up the navigation light.

This year, in June, 2 Tongan Navy ships were there rebuilding the light. We stopped for our third time on our way from NZ to Fiji. The day we arrived the Tongans had finished construction and were getting ready to leave when a Fijian Naval ship showed up. The Tongan ships chased the Fijians away. For the following three weeks, no naval ships visited (this from friends of ours who were there the entire time).

Though I think it is wise to be aware of the situation, having visited Minerva 3 times - 2 when there were Navy ships there - I would have no problem stopping again. It is true that's it is possible Fiji might be upset if you stopped before checking in to Fiji but the possibility of anyone knowing you are there is very remote - except for the NZ Air Force Orion which flies over quite often. Of course, political situations change and it pays to keep up to date on the current state of affairs.

For planning purposes, and unrelated to the above, it makes sense to visit Minerva when travelling FROM Tonga to NZ as well as FROM NZ to Fiji. Stopping on the reverse of those routes often makes the second leg more difficult because of prevailing winds.

*Note in Fall 2011, a Tongan Customs official in Neiafu assured a boat inquiring about the situation that it had been resolved.*

PPJ - Tonga / Fiji Dispute over Minerva Reef - Feb 2011

This was posted to the PPJ Yahoo group in Feb 2011:

I heard on the news tonight that Fiji is asserting its claim to Minerva Reef and was hassling cruisers who tried to stop there last year. Tonga also lays claim to this popular stopover. It is a handy little pit stop on the way to or from NZ and hopefully this problem is temporary. Here is the link to the story – you may want to check the status if you plan to stop there.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/business/4640775/Minerals-behind-Tonga-Fiji-border-spat>

## 8 Appendix A - Useful Tongan Words and Phrases

The following was originally taken from the website of the Aquarium Café's in Neiafu: <http://www.aquariumcafevavau.com/tonganphrases.html> However, we have added a few words and phrases to the list.

It is not necessary to learn to speak Tongan when you visit the Friendly Islands. English is the second language here and almost all Tongans have some exposure to it. At the Aquarium Café, all of our staff speak English, but it might be helpful to learn a few Tongan phrases. Tongans are always very impressed when a visitor tries to speak to them in their native tongue.

Even just learning to say *mālō e lelei* (hello) and *mālō* (thank you) will be much appreciated.

In Tongan, a consonant almost always indicates a new syllable and the vowels have a slightly different pronunciation than they do in English. For example "a" is pronounced as "ah", "e" is said as "ay", "i" is said as "ee".

### 8.1 *Everyday Greetings*

English	Tongan
Hi. (Informal)	Mālō e lelei.
Hello (Formal)	Mālō 'etau lava.
How are you?	Fēfē hake? (Idiomatic)
Fine, thank you.	Sai pē, mālō.
How about you?	Fēfē koe?
Very Good.	Sai 'aupito.
Are you ok?	Sai pē?

### 8.2 *The Basics*

English	Tongan
Yes	'lo
No	'ikai
Thank you	mālō
Thank you very much	mālō 'aupito
No, thank you	'ikai, mālō pē
Excuse me (said when passing in front of someone)	tulou

Please	kātaki
Sorry	fakamolemole
Please, help me	kātaki, tokoni mai
What is the Tongan word for _____?	Ko e hā e lea faka-Tonga ki he _____?
I am here. (An appropriate response when someone calls your name)	Ko au.
What's that?	Ko e hā ē?
Sorry, what is it? (say it again)	Fakamolemole, ko e hā koā?
Where is the toilet?	Ko fē e falemālōlō?
I have a question.	‘Oku ‘i ai ki’i fehu’i.
I am tired.	‘Oku ou hela’ia.
I am Taua. (name).	Ko Taua au.
Sorry, I don't understand.	Fakamolemole, ‘ikai mahino.
Let's begin.	Tau kamata.
Time to rest.	Taimi mālōlō
Let's pray.	Tau lotu.
Do you know how to speak English?	Ke poto he lea faka-pālangi?
I speak a little Tongan.	‘Oku ou lea faka-Tonga si’isi’i pē.
An expression of grief, excitement or concern	‘Oiauē!
Stop it!	Tuku ia!
Don't.	‘Oua
It's ok/ Never mind.	Sai pē ia.
Just joking	Fakakata pē
Just wandering around	‘Eva pē.
Of course.	Ka ko toe hā.
Oh, how sad!/pitiful	Faka’ofa.
Man!!	Masi’i!
Really?	Mo’oni?

Good-bye - (said to someone who is going, when you are staying, informal)	'Alu ā.
Good-bye - (said to someone who is staying, when you are going, informal)	Nofo ā.
See you later. (informal)	Toki sio.
Bye Rose - (good bye to a person using his/her name).	Lose ē.
Good bye - (said to someone who is going, when you are staying, very formal)	Faka'au ā
Yes, is the common response to all the farewells above.	'Io! but pronounced it like this "loooooo"

### 8.3 Tongan Numbers

Numbers	English	Tongan
0	zero	noa
1	one	taha
2	two	ua
3	three	tolu
4	four	fā
5	five	nima
6	six	ono
7	seven	fitu
8	eight	valu
9	nine	hiva
10	ten	hongofulu
20	twenty	uanoa
30	thirty	tolunoa
40	forty	fānoa
50	fifty	nimanoa
60	sixty	ononoa
70	seventy	fitunoa

80	eighty	valunoa
90	ninety	hivanoa
100	hundred	teau

#### **8.4 Monetary Related Phrases**

<b>English</b>	<b>Tongan</b>
dollar	pa'anga
cent	sēniti
How much is it?	'Oku fiha?
Eight dollars	Pa'anga 'e valu
Ten cents	Sēniti 'e hongofulu
Two dollars and ten cents	Pa'anga 'e ua sēniti 'e hongofulu

#### **8.5 Shopping and Groceries**

<b>English</b>	<b>Tongan</b>
How much is it?	'Oku fiha?
Chicken	Moa
Mutton	Sipi
Beef	Pulu
Fish	ika
Breadfruit	