

November 3-30, 1997

Leaving New Caledonia was difficult for us. Noumea is one of my favorites in this world. This was going to be a passage of ten days - a long one. We joined a New Zealand radio service for the passage to Australia. The service is called Russell Radio as it is located in Russell, New Zealand. Each evening we would report our position to a very old man named Des and he would tell us what our weather outlook was going to be over the next 24 hour period. While listening to Des, we could hear the clink of ice cubes in a glass and frequent glug glug glug type sounds. Des would become more incoherent as he moved down the roll call. Since we were new to the service, we were near last on the list. By the time *Oso Bueno* was called, Des would be confusing not only names of vessels but even large bodies of water like the Coral & Tasman seas. Des did very well with New Zealand weather but not so well with events in the Coral Sea. We have weather fax on board and at three days out we noted a depression forming off the Queensland coast. This depression and a series of strong storms in the Tasman Sea produced the largest swell we've ever been in. When conditions developed the seas came in on our beam and really left us unable to sail as they reached 5-7 meters. Water has swept *Oso Bueno* before. I can remember two or three times we took a wave into the cockpit. This time it happened frequently and I finally went below and stood watch on radar. It was the first time we stood no deck watch. The depression passed over us clocking the winds from all directions over a two day time period. The westerly gale stopped us and we hove to for 12 hours under a backwinded staysail with a tiny bit of main. The stern quarter was well balanced into the swell while the wind pushed against our beam. We slept as we made leeway up toward the Great Barrier Reef. I really didn't have alot of room to give up but we really needed sleep. Sleep deprivation is the worst problem on a long passage during stormy conditions and after a few days, one begins hearing voices. This time Bobbi heard the same voices I did. Eight days after leaving Noumea we rounded Sandy Cape at the north end of Hervey Bay. We did not yet know of the damage *Oso Bueno* had received. We did know we had reached Australia and we were mighty pleased to sail up to the public wharf at the head of the Burnett river - a tiny crabbing community called Burnett Heads.

Our first impression of Australia was that it seemed like the midwestern U.S.A. 30-40 years ago. The people are very nice and are likely to talk your ear off. Their accent sounds like alot of grunting, "eh" and words made with

lips stiff and only slightly open. We rented a car and drove to the town of Gladstone, 180 miles up the coast. We were looking for a nice marina for *Oso Bueno*. We counted a dozen dead kangaroos along the road as we drove through countryside somewhat like eastern Washington, Oregon, & California. There's tremendous open spaces with flat lands covered with shrubby eucalyptus. Gladstone turned out to have a very nice marina surrounded by coal loading facilities and other similar looking industrial eyesores like smelters. It would be fine but we were hoping for more aesthetic surroundings. We drove back to Burnett Heads having decided to sail south to the Brisbane area - our original goal when we left Noumea.

The closest town to us is Bundaberg, located about 10 miles up the Burnett River. "Bundy" has a population of around 40,000 with an economy based on sugar cane and rum. They call it rum city. We hit all of the sights: the zoo, the botanical garden, the lookout and the museum. We also saw our first Aussie pub. An Australian pub usually occupies an entire city block and includes something for everyone. A typical pub has an area to simply drink, an area to eat while you drink, an area to gamble while you drink, an area to watch horse racing while you drink, an area to play games while you drink, a brothel, sleeping rooms, and drive through liquor-beer store (two lanes). There are no age limits. You see people from 4 days old to 110 years old. Horse racing results are reported on the front page of Australian newspapers, world news is two to three sections back and occupies about 1/2 of a page.

We wanted to round Sandy Cape around daybreak, wind and seas are usually a bit quieter at that time. Departure was mid-afternoon to make the rounding at the appropriate time. I noticed a large freighter anchored in the roadstead off the river as we left and made a mental note to watch her close for movement. Darkness fell, the conditions were easy as we sailed off toward Sandy Cape. The radar was on and we tracked many small fishing and crabbing vessels around us. Most were stationary and to our starboard near the shore. Around midnight I noticed a radar return coming up on my stern that could only have been the freighter I'd spotted off the Burnett River. I radioed the vessel and asked if they had me on radar by giving my range and bearing. I also reported that I had altered course ten degrees to port to allow them to pass me with lots of room. The helmsman thanked me, told me they had me on radar and said he would alter course ten degrees to starboard. Within minutes the freighter was on us and I do mean on us. I shouted Bobbi on deck to jump ship - no time for anything - while I tried to raise the freighter on the radio. Nothing heard so I headed topside and

watched the vessel miss us by less than 50 yards! They passed us like a freight train. Another sailing vessel several miles ahead of us radioed to ask if all was well and to plot our position and at that time the captain of the freighter came onto the same frequency and apologized. His helmsman had altered course to port rather than starboard - I couldn't believe his acknowledgment. We reclaimed our course and sailed on badly shaken. Towards dawn we began to approach Sandy Cape and I detected the odor of radiator cooling water. Sure enough, we were overheating. The problem would not go away and after several attempts to find an easy solution I realized we had a serious engine problem. We elected to sail back to Burnett Heads since it was closest and we were familiar with the entry into the river. We approached the river under sail and checked our tides. It was late afternoon and we would not be able to attempt entry until morning. We dropped a light anchor with forty feet of chain and 5/8" nylon line. I could not use our heavy anchor and chain without the motor to help me get it back up again. Morning finally came after a very rolly night. The anchorage I selected was not really an anchorage but rather a roadstead with fifty mile of fetch between us and Frazier Island. We were a mile off shore in four fathoms of water. We took a backbreaking hour to wench up the anchor by hand and sailed off, jilling back and forth at the river mouth waiting for the tide. Our entry was pretty dramatic. We sailed up the river with a slight flood and sliced through the narrow entry into the tiny harbor. A crabbing boat then came along side and muscled us into a slip. It was horrible. The next week was spent kedging and warping *Oso Bueno* back and forth to the public wharf to remove and replace the engine. Each time was unbelievably stressful. She went hard aground during the final trip back and we had to wait two hours for the tide to refloat her. We discovered that all of our motor mounts had become deformed during our recent passage from Noumea, in fact one of them had sheared. Every bolt was bent. I quietly realized how close Bobbi and I had been to having a long swim. The mechanic picked up a variety of small problems with the engine. A failed head gasket was the cause of the overheating. We went into our waiting-for-repairs-to-be-done mode.

*Oso Bueno* was the only yacht in a working marina made up of fishing and crabbing boats. The crabbing boat people were an interesting group of men. They left the harbor about three in the morning and returned with their limits in crab by noon. Bobbi and I worked hard to get onto good terms with them and within a few days we were having unlimited crab for dinner each evening. One night we ate over 25 crabs. All good things must end. We

began to brake in our rebuilt engine and wrap up a few odd mechanical details, getting *Oso Bueno* ready to go somewhere. We decided to drive to Mooloolaba, Brisbane and Manly and to reconnoiter the marinas down south before leaving Burnett Heads.

The area north of Brisbane on up the coast about 30 miles is continuous beach with occasional river estuaries. The area is fashionable for summer homes and teenagers in heat. Mooloolaba turned out to be a world class teenage rooting ground. The Australians call them "schoolies". Beach boardwalks, cotton candy, hot dogs, etc., just like Santa Cruz, California, 25 years ago. We checked out the marinas and drove on down to Brisbane. Our visit to Brisbane lasted almost four hours. It is a very big city without freeways. This means you drive through many stoplights, stopsigns and traffic control devices to get to your destination. You are also required to drive on the left hand side of the street and if you fail to do this, everyone gets very upset. I had the added disadvantage of being required to shift with my left hand. We found the American Express office, got money and got out of town as quickly as we could. We'll revisit by train.

We stopped many times on our trip back to Burnett Heads. We saw our first live and wild kangaroo in a small coastal town called Tin Can Bay. She had a "Joey" in her pouch and we were able to get within 15 feet for some good photos. Initially the baby's hind feet were sticking out of the pouch and we didn't know what it was. Suddenly the feet disappeared and a very cute head appeared, looking at us.

The towns along the way were small and oddly named: Gympie, Jack Ass Creek, Gin Gin, Kin Kin etc. The people were quite relaxed about things. The habit of nose picking during conversation seemed to come up frequently. Bobbi saw one lady doing it with a car key. The people we met were all very nice despite some informalities. We'll adjust. Every time I touch my nose, Bobbi offers to loan me her boat key.

We decided to sail to Sandy Cape and on to Mooloolaba if the wind was out of the North and to Gladstone if the wind was from the South. We sailed with a prediction of northeast winds and of course, they developed as a southeaster. We set our course for Gladstone with an overnight stop at a little river estuary formed by Pancake Creek. Entry to Pancake Creek involved sailing over a bar at high tide. We entered without any problems and enjoyed a quiet anchorage with a half dozen other boats. The engine ran nicely but I was a worried man. During the voyage to Gladstone I checked and rechecked the engine almost continuously. We sailed hard on the wind up the channel between Gladstone and Curtis Island against the current.

Speed over ground was 4-5 knots while we moved 7-8 knots through the water. It seemed like running on a treadmill. We slipped into Auckland Creek a little after noon and into the Gladstone Marina minutes later. Nice. This is where we'll be stationed for four months. A great cyclone hole for *Oso Bueno* while we get serious about land touring the east coast of the mainland and Tasmania. Bobbi and I plan to purchase a railway pass that allows fairly unlimited travel over a three month time period. We'll rent a car at each destination or rely on local bus service. We'll be sleeping in beds and having hot showers! Television! McDonald's!

We can be reached as follows:

David & Bobbi Hayertz

Fax: 61-07-49-72-7094

S/V *Oso Bueno*

(61 is Australia's country code)

C/O Gladstone Marina

PO Box 1565

Gladstone, Queensland 4680

Australia