

1999 New Zealand - final comments

Even the long version doesn't do justice to the adventure.

There are a few things that haven't been said. I remember one day Ivan was up the back of the boat having a leak, when he said that there was something like oil in the water. I went up and had a look and at first I couldn't see anything.

Then after staring down into the water I started to notice these blue fluorescent balls in the water. They all appeared to be about as big as a pea or a small marble and they were at varying depths, from the surface, right down to as far as we could see.

It was a clear sunny day and the water was placid. These things glowed very brightly.

Obviously they were some sort of sea creature, but am still not sure what type.

We also saw lots and lots of blue bottles in the water almost every day.

Another day Ivan took it on himself to throw a bag of rubbish in the water. I made it my mission to make him feel guilty.

His excuse was that it had gotten oil all over the bag and was getting the cockpit dirty. He said he didn't want to put it down the lazarette in such state and couldn't think of anything else. I suggested that he might have put the whole lot inside ANOTHER bag. He seemed stunned at the simplicity of this idea.

On the subject of rubbish, we saw a few bits and pieces most days. I tried to work out the rubbish density of the Pacific Ocean, based on how many bits I saw and our area of possible observation. I might do the numbers if I get a chance later.

Also, at the end of the day, the rubbish might as well have all been dumped in the ocean.

After all, the whole boat was, rubbish and all. I had at least locked the bags down the lazarette, but the hatches were wide open when we stepped off the boat and no doubt a lot of stuff would have floated out on its way to the bottom.

While we were on the ship we had a good time. They showed us around the engine room and let us wander around the bridge pretty much at will. We had the run of the boat basically. On the first night we drank some of the complimentary beers and had some of Charlie's scotch.

One the second night we had some more beers and watched a video in the mess with some of the crew. At one stage the Phillipino crew were watching a video with the sound down and subtitles in Korean. Wacky !!

One day, the 2nd Officer, Tim was telling me that they rescued 20 people floating in the ocean off Bangladesh. Apparently, they were fishing on their boat, when it either broke down or they just drifted into the wrong area. They were shot up and sunk, by a Burmese gun boat and left in the water for dead. They were all clinging to a few drums and had been in the water for 4 days. One of the crew that was on the ship with Tim went out side to eat his dinner, as the air conditioning had broken down. It was pure fluke that he looked into the distance and saw a few arms waving at him.

Ivan and I were sharing a cabin and Charlie had another cabin. That evening we all went back to our cabin. Ivan and I got in our bunks and Charlie sat on the lounge drinking and talking, talking, talking. He got pissed and I fell asleep. Not sure exactly when he wandered off to bed.

On the Saturday, I woke and looked out the window to see, snow capped mountains. It was the eastern coast line of the South Island of NZ. It was very beautiful. My one photo doesn't do it justice. We sat around a bit that day and drank a few more beers. We were due to get into Lyttelton at about 4pm. This was revised down during the day until we were due in about 1:30 pm. Then we heard we were going to stand off for the night. I was both annoyed and happy. I was very comfortable on the ship and having a good time. I also thought that the extra day would give the media a chance to get bored with us.

As soon as the ship dropped its anchor, all the guys were on the back deck fishing. It was a real highlight for them. They must get horribly bored after 9 months at sea.

As the story stated the pilot boat came out to get us, instigated by Sybille.

She chartered it at \$300 per hour. A big move! The NZ government eventually picked up the tab, but just the same, a big move. She even organized to get the NZ customs people to come out specially to stamp us through.

It was really good to see Sandra. It was a fitting end to the ordeal and definitely not expected. They drove us to the hotel, the Airport Plaza in Christchurch. The first thing I did was to phone Josh and Rhys. They seemed very glad to hear my voice, and I was sure glad to hear theirs. Rhys was quick to tell me he had been on TV and Josh told me that he'd had to go around the school and read out the clipping from the paper.

That evening we all got cleaned up, and hit the bar/restaurant. It was an excellent meal and a great evening. Lots of good conversation, many toasts, to old boats and new as well as wives and friends. Then it was back to the room to make up for lost time with Sandra.

The next morning I woke up early and just had to go for a run. Then we all met for a really nice breakfast and discussed our plans.

We were all in half a mind to fly up to Auckland to see the Orion crew. Charlie had wangled a lift up in a few days time on a RNZAF Hercules, so he was drifting out of our group. He took the parachute and radio with him.

The airport was virtually across the road. When we arrived there it all seemed like too much trouble and we decided to just catch a flight straight back to Sydney.

As fate would have it, the girl at the ticket counter offered us a deal where we could fly first to Auckland and then have a few hours lay over and then fly home to Sydney. The kicker was that the flight from Auckland to Sydney was going to be business class. Very nice indeed. We agreed to this as quick as we could and were on the plan within the hour. I didn't see much of the South Island from the plane as there was a thick cloud cover.

Ivan, Sib, Sandra and I caught a quick taxi ride into the Americas Cup Village on the harbour in Auckland. We had a good two hours just walking around, looking and taking some photos. It was all over way to soon and we were on our way back to the airport.

The check in procedure was very quick. We had done all the hard work before going into town. Sandra and I bought some duty free booze and then relaxed in our business class seat. Lovely!!

Sandra and I drank a continuous stream of glasses of Jack Daniels and Coke and we dined on some truly lovely food. I can see why people pay extra for business class seats.

Because of our upgraded tickets the four of us were through immigration and customs very quickly. We got our luggage very fast. The sail was the biggest thing. We kept telling people it was a body and we had to get it back into the ice quickly.

Sib and I had a huge trolley race through the airport. She, because she is such a flip sometimes, and me, because I was smashed and just having a good time.

We threw our stuff in the car and then it was just the drive home. Sandra and I borrowed a car off Ivan and we drove the rest of the way home getting there about 10:30.

Glenn and Bonnie were at the house and we talked into the night.

I got up the next morning and went to work, mainly because I saw no point in being at home. During the morning, Prime TV rang for an interview. It was just to close the adventure for the viewing public. Not that I was really worried what they thought, but it seemed the right thing to do and certainly no skin off me. I had to tell the story fifty times over the coming days. Sandra had to go up to the school to give a little talk to Josh and Rhys's classes about the ordeal and then was asked back to cover all the classes. She took up a life jacket, harness and an Epirb and chart. The whole thing took on a life of its own.

Finally one of the journalists here at work wanted me to write a story about the rescue. I had intended to write it all up anyway, so it was very little extra work and was a bit of fun to see my name next to an article and picture.

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- I received a call from Charlie this afternoon. He was back from New Zealand and had some photographs to show me.

- They were of the boat and of the rescue ship, taken from the Orion.

- They were very good and I have scanned them to disk.

- Charlie didn't end up getting a Hercules flight from Christchurch to Auckland, he caught the train and a ferry and then another train. Sounded like a fun trip.

- When he got to Auckland he went to the air base and saw two of the guys from the Orion.

- He got the photos and also an email address. I will endeavor to get the video that the crew of the plane took.

- Charlie told me, that on the morning of the rescue, the winds at the air base were over 40 knots and the runway was a

flood. They were in doubt, whether they could get the plane off the ground.

- To clear the runway, they ran a Hercules up and down the runway to try and dry it out a bit.

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