

Ahoy Pacific Puddle Jumpers,

First, my apologies for the delay in sending out this second Fleet Letter to you, but the 'PPJ Communicator in Chief' — me — has been experiencing some unplanned offshore challenges. There are lessons to be learned from these mishaps, of course, so we'll share a brief recap with you.

IT'S WHAT YOU DON'T SEE

My wife and I were double handing our Cross 42 trimaran *Little Wing* from Fakarava, in the Tuamotus, to Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas — a mostly upwind trip. The day after Christmas we lost the use of our engine, then at 4 a.m. the next morning the forestay deck attachment (chainplate) failed, which sent the rolled-out genoa and ProFurl gear lashing around like an angry bull on a short tether. We eventually 'hog-tied' it and set up our removable Solent stay, held the rig up and allowed us to keep sailing with an old hank-on genoa and mizzen. (No main due to pressure on rig.) Tacking upwind at very broad angles, it was very slow going, making only 1.5 to 2 kts/hr for 9 days before finally making landfall here at Nuku Hiva's Taiohae Bay.

Here's the lesson learned: We'd replaced all our rigging less than a year ago, and had inspected every element of our standing and running rigging several times since — that is, with the exception of the forestay chain plate, as it is in a virtually uninspectable area of our forepeak. You wouldn't think a 1/4-inch-thick plate of stainless steel that's 4 inches wide and 10 inches long could ever be the "weakest link" in a rigging configuration, but in this case it certainly was. So we pose the question to you: Are there any "uninspectable" places on your boat that could lead to trouble?

More on forestays: Talking with cruisers this week about our rigging issue we've heard lots of stories about rigging failures, with forestay issues being the most common. One cotter pin slipping out of place can bring your whole rig down.

Our engine issue? The jury is still out, but the engine shutdown and water subsequently found in the oil pan seems to have been caused by a faulty exhaust mixing elbow, which probably should have been replaced years ago. Another lesson learned (for us anyway).

TAHITI'S GROWING PAINS

There have been many posts lately on cruising forums about the tightening of rule enforcement in Tahitian waters, and new restrictions that affect both short-term and long-term cruisers in French Polynesia. Having made annual visits here for the past 18 years, I'll offer my take on the situation: As longtime residents of Tahiti will tell you, for many years there were very few rules and regulations relating to anchorages, but there were far fewer boats.

Then in recent years some of the old regulations loosened up. Years ago, North Americans could only stay three months within a calendar year and their boats could only stay for 12-18 months. Today, North Americans arriving (without a pre-arranged Long Stay Visa) can stay 90 days within a half year. During the recession, when the arrival of high-end honeymooners slowed — a longtime focus of tourism marketing — cruisers kept trickling in as always, and government officials seemed to recognize that they are a small, yet important, segment of French Polynesia's overall tourism picture. That awareness led to the current regulation that foreign boats can stay for up to three years without being officially imported.

This rule change was great news for those of us who want to thoroughly explore the archipelagos, but the change also led to the few existing marinas being clogged with boats that are simply being stored, rather than actively cruised. It's a problem that's not easily fixed. There has also been a lot of grumbling about the new no-anchoring rules in Bora Bora, meaning cruisers must pay for overnight moorings. While this is an unpopular change, we can understand why it was instituted, and consider it to be yet another "growing pain" of the territory. As demonstrated over the past 30 years in the Virgin Islands, if properly installed and frequently checked, moorings can have a huge positive impact on the health of seafloor ecosystems, which would otherwise take a beating from anchors, year after year.

Perhaps the larger point to keep in mind is that there are said to be 118 islands in French Polynesia and most cruisers find that their visits to sparsely populated Tuamotu atolls and Marquesas Islands are the most memorable. Papeete is a fun place to visit for a short stint, as is Bora Bora, but the less-traveled corners of this French Overseas Territory tend to stand out as the most special.

PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP SENDOFF EVENTS

We hope to meet many Puddle Jumpers in person at our three upcoming PPJ Sendoff events in Mexico and Panama which will all be co-hosted by the South Pacific Sailing Network.

Representatives from Tahiti, Tonga, Fiji and New Zealand will fly in to make special presentations and give you detailed info on cruising highlights, customs and immigration issues, repair and refit facilities, cyclone season options and more. (Refreshments and snacks will be served.)

Our presentation team spends lots of time and money to put on these fun and highly informative events, so we hope you will make a special effort to attend.

Feb 28 -- South Pacific Bon Voyage at Pacific side, Panama

10am-2pm Radisson Hotel, Amador (Balboa). Co-hosted by the Balboa YC, the Pacific Puddle Jump and the SPSN

Mar 1 -- South Pacific Bon Voyage at Caribbean side, Panama

10am-2pm at Shelter Bay Marina. Co-hosted by Shelter Bay, the Pacific Puddle Jump and the SPSN

Mar 4 -- South Pacific Bon Voyage & Pacific Puddle Jump Sendoff, Nuevo Vallarta, Mexico

2-6 pm at the Vallarta YC, Nuevo Vallarta. Co-hosted by the Vallarta YC, Paradise Village Marina, the Pacific Puddle Jump and the SPSN

Email andyturpinatlarge@gmail.com for additional info.

OFFICIAL BURGEE

We have an official Pacific Puddle Jump burgee for every registered boat. But it's a real challenge to distribute them to fleet members who are not able to attend our parties. Here are a few ways to get yours:

- Pickup at a Panama sendoff event
- Pickup at a Nuevo Vallarta sendoff event
- Email events@latitude38.com and ask to have your mailed to a friend or family member anywhere in the US and Canada
- Pickup in Papeete, Marina Taina, at the office of Tahiti Crew
- Look for the trimaran *Little Wing* while cruising the anchorages you visit and get one from Andy and Julie

NEXT FLEET LETTER

Look for another Fleet Letter very soon with details on our fleet tracking setup with PredictWind and our fleet's "satellite social net" at FollowingSea.net.

Finally, we want to make sure you are connected with our event partner, Latitude 38 Magazine. If you have photos or stories, email Latitude 38 at editorial@latitude38.com so they can help share your story with those who want to follow in your wake. Visit www.latitude38.com to see where your stories would appear in their online newsletter or monthly magazine.

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— Andy

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