

Voyage 1

Cargo handling in the Cooks.

It took us a few days to empty the Moana Nui for all kinds of spares and junk which we had taken with us from Norway.

It was great to see an open and empty garage again for a few hours.

On Wednesday the 16th we started to load cargo.

A family was moving to Atiu (one of the islands in the South group) from Perth in Australia.

All their earthly belongings was shipping in 2 containers to Rarotonga. But from February to now not possible to ship them over to the island of Atiu.

All this time they had to pay port storage for the two containers waiting in Rarotonga port..

They waited and waited for a landing barge to arrive the Cook Islands which has the possibility to transport the containers.

This landing craft barge arrived only a few days before us. A delivery from Brazil..

However, the barge company asked 16.000 nzd for the transport from Rarotonga to Atiu.

The freight price from Aussi to Raro was 4.000 nzd.

Taio Shipping gave them a fair offer of nearly half the barge price, but the containers had to be devanned (emptied) and the goods transported on pallets or in transport bins. The empty containers could follow when space on one of their ships.

Of course the container owner accepted the Taio offer and this was how our first cargo was settled.

Bin after bin, pallet after pallets arrived as fast as they could empty the containers.

In addition some building materials to the same islands (steel mesh and cement) + two 4 tons tractors from a China Aid fund to the Cook Islands.

The message came from the harbour master on Thursday morning that the domestic wharf had to be cleared on Friday before 10:00 as a long international container vessel arrived at 11:00. This ship was 120 m long and needed the wharf length.

We left what we had onboard at 09:25 Friday morning. Still space for more cargo but no time to top up.

As crew on this voyage we are mate and me, a new cook and cleaner, engineer and assistant + one young feller as deck hand. In addition the owner of the container as a passenger.

First stop, the island of Mangaia. To deliver one of the tractors.

The weather was not very good. 20-30 knots wind from ENE. Into our port bow. Speed 6 knots.

Rain showers during the night. We arrived Mangaia early in the morning.

Already at 07:30 the small island aluminium barge was coming out to us. Big swell and strong wind. However, a bit sheltered waters where we met them. It was just the weather limit of acceptance for a heavy lift.

Set the ship position with the wind and swell. Up in the air came the tractor. Over the ship's side and on to the barge. Firstly the tractor was set on the edge. Lifted it up and men pulling in guiding ropes to have it placed in the middle of the barge. Lots of shouting from the participants. up- up.

Now down-down. Hands in the air waiving like propellers.

Long way for them to steam back to the port with it.

There should have been a swing mooring anchorage closer to their port where we could attach the ship and concentrate of the cargo loading. Safer for the cargo ship and closer steaming for the islanders.

During the years so many ships have ended up on the islands' reef.

In Mangaia 3 ships, Mauke one, Atiu 2, Rarotonga 5, Nassau 1. This is just what I know, but the might be many more.

At sea I know of only one that have gone down during the last 40 years.

The reef is the biggest danger for the cargo vessels. Many accidents could have been avoided if there were a safe anchorage swing mooring for the cargo ship.

The Mangaian island people with it mayor gave us a huge box full with sweet and juicy pineapples as a token of thankfulness to bring them the long time needed tractor.

We set course for the next island – Mauke. 110 nm, NNE and into the wind again. All during the night we struggled with 5 knots. She was rolling and pitching in the heavy swell from the East. At 6:00 in the morning we arrived in the lee side of the island. But it is a Sunday. Church day. Not possible to unload before Monday.. The London Missionary Society did a good job for many years ago. No work is permitted on a Sunday.

Well, here we are and have to wait for 24 hours before action.

This island was discovered of the Europeans by reverend John Williams in the hired Endeavour in July 1823.

The statistics says that in 2010 it was 393 people living here.

All the population lives in a village called Areora. The story tells that it was the missionaries who made the people live in on village. Before they were scattered all over the island.

However, as often is the fact in a local community they were not all in good terms with each other. So it became two villages in one, with a sharp border between them.

The church as built on the border. Two different buildings into one church. 2 separate doors and inside the borderline went straight through it. Through the pulpit and even today there are is painted a blue line in the middle of it. The priest had to have one foot on each side. He had to look equally to each side during the sermon.

They say it's still like that to-day. But I've never been to this church on a Sunday.

Still very strong wind from the NE. 20 knots and more in the gusts. But we are well sheltered close to the island reef. It would have been ideal to have a safe swing mooring to attach to, whilst waiting for the working day.

Listen to the weather prognosis from Rarotonga Radio at 20:15 on 2207 kHz.

But the operator reads so fast we have no chance to get it.

We tried to get in touch with him on the radio but he switched it off so quickly, that he didn't hear us calling him.. I guess he does this every day and knows it so well that he leaves no time to listen if anybody else is around on the radio net.

Well, we had a good radio connection with Queensland ham operator. He gave us our local weather forecast and they received well our position.

Nice to feel that we have a reliable back up in the international ham radio community.

When we are back in Raro during this week, we'll contact the Rarotonga Radio and ask them to come on-board and check our radio equipment.

Now it's pitch dark outside. Low clouds covers the bright moon. Well, hover around for the night waiting for daily light and the barge from shore to be able to unload the 2 fuel tanks we have for this island.

Next day came. Quite in the morning. The barge came out. Got the two jet fuel tanks and some smaller items. 5 passenger and two goats.

All this was done in 90 min !

Left Mauke at 08:30. Full ahead for Atiu. Another island in the sun – in the South Cook Islands.. This island was firstly discovered by capt J Cook in the vessel Resolution on the 31st of March 1777.

The population in 2010 was 572. Several small villages, clustered together in the middle of the island. The island is volcanic and thickly wooded. An eldorado for wild pigs. They are huge with all the food they find during the island life. Just heard our passenger tells that they rounded up 32 pigs wild pigs in a glen with their dogs. Here they killed them all. Nice food they say. The pigs are a nuisance for the farmers. They break down the fences and eat the crop when it's ripe for harvest. The highest point of the island is 120m over sea level. The island has a small hospital and an airstrip.

We arrived the island at 14:10. The barge team was ready and we started to unload right away. Very strong wind put us out to sea. Between each barge we had to approach the green sea where it broke to the reef. Vary dangerous position. Then when unloading we were swept to sea and ended up long way from the little harbour entrance.. The passengers helped us to move the cargo pallettes in the cargo room since we have no fork lift truck yet.

!8:00 finished. Hatches closed and we're on-the way back to Rarotonga. Steaming all through the night and at 09:15 well alongside the wharf. Stb side to..

As soon as we arrived, work to fit new passenger accomodation started. Our first long trip will be to the North of the Cooks, leaving Monday the 28th of November. A 15 days voyage. But that'll be the next chapter.

Thank you for your fidelity reading this blog..