



This is the cat with eight lives left, setting off for another day, fortunately with no damage after dragging an anchor up against the seawall of Nuku'alofa Harbour. A few weeks before, an uninsured \$15 million 33m motorsailer was abandoned by its crew, when it started taking water just off Tonga. Boats and adventure often go together! Insert right: The seawall in Tonga is a handy spot when conditions are good and is only about \$25 a month – but make sure your anchor is set well!



CHALLENGES IN TONGA

One person's picnic can be another's adventure

Tying the stern to a wall with an anchor off the bow can create challenges, especially when it blows hard across your beam. *ICE* generates plenty of windage, so I set my anchor way out when I'm in Tonga. If it lets go, you are on the wall.

We had a big cat anchor up beside us recently and he held firm for two days in strong 25kt trades, but just when you least expect it, while all their crew were ashore, its anchor dragged. The rudders were now on

the mud and the transom less than a metre from the rocks. The wind was now gusting to 30kts on our beam.

I went onboard the cat, quickly setting up a spring from *ICE* to her stern and a line from its bow to ours. I winched her off, then watched closely to make sure we didn't drag with the increased load, hoping their crew returned ASAP – the cat's anchor line was now slack!

We held her for about 90 minutes; then *ICE* started dragging! I started our motor to push us off the wall, just managing to hold the cat, but a

situation was developing.

With just Jane and me onboard and my crew in town, we had a problem. If I let the cat go, she was going to get smashed, and that decision would surely come soon. It was not a good feeling. There was no one around and I couldn't now get off *ICE* to do anything on the other boat.

I rang my crew and told them to rush back to *ICE*. If they arrived in time my plan was to get them onto the cat, drop its stern lines and hope it drifted out into the harbour (with

not too much crunching), in-line with her anchor. Then I would get on the cat and let more chain out, hoping it would hold until they returned.

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

While waiting for my crew, the surprised skipper returned. He started his engines to hold off. It was a close call. We dropped our lines to the cat and got onshore to drop the stern lines for him. Relieved, he escaped without damage.

It was a strange feeling, like having a climber at the end of a rope, then having to save yourself by cutting him free! I'm glad we didn't have to make that decision and hope that one day someone would do the same thing for me. When you mess around in boats things happen.

One person's picnic can be another's adventure. It all comes down to what happens on the day, good or bad. The outcome may not be what was expected, may not be fun while it is happening and you ask yourself who's idea was it anyway, or what did I do to deserve this! The next stage for me when it gets really bad is to laugh at myself, the situation at hand and life in general and appreciate how lucky I am to be able to put myself in those situations, which is exactly what I do.

CREW QUIZ

When I sign on new crew to *ICE* at some point I will pose the question: "If someone ties up the dingy and it later disappears from the back of the boat, who pays?"

I mean it is a \$9000 package, right. I don't expect an answer but they sure are focused in future when securing the dingy with two independent lines for the night.

BASE BLUES

For the past 10 days we have been anchored off Nomuka Iki, a beautiful, uninhabited tropical island in Tonga. During that time we have established our Blue Base ashore to accommodate up to eight divers, all part of our **bluetreasure.me** treasure hunting expedition.

Blue Base has been seven months in the planning and a logistical nightmare: shifting 20m³ and four-tonne of cargo from China and Australia to Nuku'alofa, the capital of Tonga, and then on *ICE* the last 65 miles here. With 10 people onboard and every available space on deck and below crammed with



Aboard *ICE* are 22 dive cylinders, 70 dive weights, four dive compressors, three inflatables, 12 fuel tanks, eight anchors, six outboards, two generators, one desalination plant, nine tents, a field kitchen etc. Add 10 people and three month's food and it makes for a "rolly" heavy boat, with every space loaded!



Part of my nine crew on *ICE* that didn't move for the one-hour "super rolly" trip to paradise and Blue Base on Nomuka Iki.

gear, it was impossible to set sails or flopper stoppers for that last leg of the journey. We rolled heavily in the two- to three-metre beam sea and 25kts wind. Most were seasick and questioning why?

Approaching Nomuka Iki's blue lagoon 11 hours later, all was forgotten as the anticipation and smiles grew rapidly, gazing over to where we believe there may be some intriguing wrecks.

The offload was hampered by an unreliable outboard and the "Iki Airforce" – swarms of mozzies only just held back by the first two tents erected before dusk.

Next day was a glamour; tropical blue sea and sky with plenty of sun,

white sand and a gentle breeze. More like the dream we all imagine. We worked 10 hours straight that day.

The site was overgrown and had to be cleared but by the end of the day each of us had a home and our systems were starting up. Next day it rained and blew.

After three days, Blue Base looked impressive and plans were being made to prepare more boats, desalination plant and diving systems etc. Then the weather shut down, as did two outboards.

It was blowing 25 to 30kts from the NE straight into the camp... and over the next few days it would blow up to 40kts. *ICE* was now on a



Two days after arriving and Blue Base is taking shape – we even have party lights!



After all my dramas with PVC boats falling apart in the past, I never thought I would own more, but these new custom heavy-duty 4.7m dive boats from China should go the distance. Blue sea and sky, with white beach and palms at Nomuka Iki... bring on the diving!



Day three and we had a dunny to put over the hole. Paradise found!



The only thing remaining of my beautiful three-season-old 5m Hyperlon inflatable after it was "discovered", washed-up "abandoned" by local fisherman and chopped up for the rope ringing it! All we could do was laugh at the events that led to this and buy a new boat.

lee shore. The Base took a battering with some damage and the slightly depressed crew watching much of their hard work getting smashed. Then the radio call came through: "Had anyone seen the 5m Avon dingy?"

DINGHY DEATH

Two days before, I last gave instructions to the Blue Base team to fix a small floor seam on the Avon, so it was deflated high up the beach for the job... and apparently tied to a tree.

During the night the high tide and swell swept it away and no one

noticed for two days. I saw it was gone the next day but assumed they fixed it and rolled it up to store for later when the weather improved. Now, two days later I was stuck on ICE but suggested an immediate search along the beach. The call came shortly after; they had found the dingy... in pieces.

The day before some local fishermen arrived and were met by the Blue Base crew on the beach before heading off to set a net in the

lee of the island. Unbeknown to us they found the now abandoned and swamped Avon in the sand, looked at all the rope onboard – obviously all theirs – chopped it up to salvage the bits and mark the end of a perfectly good \$5000 boat! At least it was not fitted with an outboard.

It was a few hours before I could laugh about it but I did. What are the chances of that happening?

Our brand-new 25hp Yamaha four-stroke died after just 30 minutes

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and the 15hp Tohatsu's waterpump spat it too, not to mention all the fuel issues and intermittent running. The Tongan fuel is very low octane and is creating havoc, lots of swearing and lack of trust for the reliability of boat operations. The next stop is Australia if you get swept away, so we were being very cautious in the strong winds and isolated geography. I have another 8 and a 15hp Yamaha and an 18hp Titan two-stroke from China, so hopefully one will work.

FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

It is a funny thing but throughout my entire boating career I have never had to change an outboard waterpump impeller. I didn't even know where the pump was but assumed it must be a case of removing the entire lower leg and somewhere in there would be the pump. I had no manual for the job but couldn't see any cooling water coming from the pilot hole, so I knew my pump was shot.

I had a Kiwi visitor onboard the next day from another yacht and mentioned this to him. He had only recently changed his first impeller

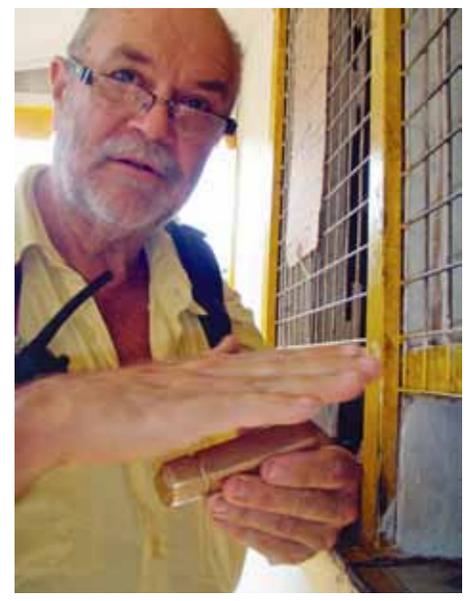
after 35 years in boats and after the job was done there was still no water coming from his pilot hole? So he stuck a kebab stick up the hole and cleared the salt and wow... water! And he didn't have to change his impeller after all! So I got a stick and did the same and wow... water was pouring out! A tip to remember everyone.

Eventually, after three unsuccessful attempts on the Yamaha over three days and in total frustration, I pulled and jiggled every electrical connection and wow... it just started and is still going strong! I used to love my Seagull outboards.

WHALE WORLD

We have just steamed to Pangai, 42 miles away, to dump emails – including this column – for the first time in two weeks. We only have mobile phone access on our tropical island paradise and that is fine by all of us.

In the first hour of this short voyage, two big humpbacks swam down the side of ICE (now drifting in idle) just 3m away and then turned 180 degrees to approach our transom. The crew slipped into the



When visiting a neighboring island I was asked to give an opinion on a recently "discovered" bar of gold. I had been hearing about this rumour for months. This one turned out to be bronze, but where there is smoke... Stay tuned.

water and hugged the hull to watch the show. They were blown away!

We passed whales all day and they are around in force. This is a great place in the world to be. Tomorrow, we pick up another dingy – we need three to be safe while diving, with one always on standby. That will mean that finally, at last, maybe, if all goes well, touch wood, we will get to go diving in a few happy days! 🍀