

Subject/ Area: New Caledonia

We took advantage of some unusual West winds (due to a depression passing under New Caledonia) to make a fast 200 nm passage down from Efate to Lifou, the capital of the Loyalty Islands, north of the big island of New Caledonia. The 20-30kts winds (with gusts to 40 during numerous squalls) splashed plenty of seawater on decks and we didn't read much during this lively passage (The predicted NW winds would have been better!).

The ultimate cruising guide for New Caledonia is the Rocket Guide (www.cruising-newcaledonia.com). With charts, aerial photos and sailing directions to most anchorages. We also used "Croisiere en Nouvelle Caledonie – guide des mouillages" by Noumea Yacht Charters and the New Caledonia Lonely Planet. CM 93 electronic charts are slightly off so do not rely blindly on them! In an effort to write more concise letters, some of the details of our visit will only be posted on www.noonsite.com, so download the Lifou pages if you want the full details.

Lifou:

Formalities:

A partial port of entry, this island makes a perfect stop on the way to Noumea. Be aware that you can only stop here if you have NOTHING to Declare for Customs. If you have animals onboard, guns, merchandise that will be imported in NC, you cannot stop at any other secondary port of entry until you have cleared completely in Noumea first! If you have nothing to declare, you can stop here provided that within 7 days you clear Immigration in Noumea! You could fly to Noumea to clear in or pay for the official to fly to Lifou to clear you in (you can share the expenses between cruisers). As we were an unusual case, in that we planned to return to Vanuatu in a few weeks w/o continuing to Noumea, officials were understanding enough to make an exception, after an initial aye-yai-yai and discomfiture over something not "by the book" and a lot of faxing and mailing of paperwork. After faxing all documents for the dogs, they were allowed to remain on board w/o quarantine as long as it was less than 2 months.

WE (pronounced "way") (give correct way point to find the entrance)

Well-protected marina once you have negotiated the zigzag entrance channel into the marina proper. Be aware there is no place to anchor outside, as the channel is used by ferries and local freighters that use the public wharf inside the jetty. The main town of We is very spread out. Hitchhiking is easy, and there are "buses" (look for the word "Navette" on mini-vans and buses (100cfp~\$1US) in the We area. A friend of cruisers can be found in Edouard Katrawa who has lived 18 yrs in France and traveled overseas. He speaks English and Japanese as well, and knows just about everyone and can help get you oriented. <e-mail address> Jean-Marc, the manager of Korail Alimentation (one of the 2 mini-supermarkets) was most nice and helpful in delivering our goods to the marina and in extending us wholesale prices on case lots. Korail generally had better prices than the other large supermarket. Check out the low prices for wine, even with the duty! We can recommend Aero Locations as a good car rental. All vehicles are new and delivered to the marina too. For less expensive, slightly less perfect, but clean and reliable rental cars, Loca LM rental agency is only a few 100 meters from the Marina gate at the Total Gas Station. They also allow drop-off at another location w/o charge. Public phone-card phones are found in many locations, and there's post office, hospital, pharmacy and 2 banks in town, as well as basic hardware and goods.

We decided to leave the confines of the marina to explore other anchorages around the island. With the trade winds, it is more pleasant to round the island via the North side. Easy 26 nm to get to the protected bay of Doking. (Jokin).

Doking (Jokin):

Anchor in 30-50 ft of white sand with tall isolated coral patches in front of the bungalows hanging on the cliff (just right of big cave in the cliff). DO NOT pick up the mooring buoy that a local may tell you is good. Many years ago the province put in moorings for yachts in several bays, but never maintained them, ever. The natives have since taken many balls for their small craft moorings. We snorkeled on one mooring still in deeper water and found that the chain to the concrete block was totally rusted away, and only a thin line tied the buoy!! There is a small concrete landing and path that lead you up the cliffs to Doking village. You'll need a stern anchor for the dinghy. Nice snorkeling all around this coast. Good departure point for either Noumea or Port Vila. Many of the cliff caves are sites of ancestral burial places. It's quite impressive to see the caves from the sea as you approach, and as the setting sunlight illuminates the deeper chambers and formations.

Baie du Santal:

We decided to anchor off the second largest town of Lifou, Xepenehe. (Chepenehe). We had to tack the whole length of the bay to enter as the 25-30 kt trade winds made it impossible to go straight in. Good anchorage in 15ft sand with isolated coral patches (most are not dangerous, but snorkel around to verify) behind the protection of the cliffs (20d47'251S-167d09'057E). Good for easterly sector, but when it goes south of east, the swell wraps around and gets a little roly. Small natural harbor for dinghies ashore just below the local bakery. Look for the distinctive small arched walkway. Fresh bread nearby and also a mini-supermarket up the hill behind the gas station. Post office, medical clinic nearby, and a pharmacy at the end of town as you head for WE. Don't be surprised to see a cruise ship (same Australian ones you saw in Port Vila) anchoring just north, at Easo for a day. Take the opportunity to see local dancing and music or shop for handicrafts at the Cruise Ship welcome area. The dance group, from Wetr, the day we were there (different communities take turns being the host) was an internationally known group that has danced in France, NZ, Australia, etc. They were very good, and the songs and dance are different again from previous S Pac islands we've visited.

Activities around the island:

The roads are all in excellent condition so this is the place to travel by car or bicycle to take in the sights and get nice photos. You can make a sightseeing tour of the island in a day. The town of WE is in the middle. We saw several nice beaches and coastal areas, but missed some of the caves because they can only be visited with a local guide. Many activities have to be arranged ahead of time because the small number of tourists to the island doesn't give them enough business to survive by tourist activities alone, or to justify a regular schedule. Like Fiji and Vanuatu, the Chiefly system requires that you go with guides who have permission from the tribe. There is a tradition of "doing the Custom", somewhat like the saivu saivu ceremony with Chiefs in Fiji, but in Lifou it is often not required if you are doing an activity with a guide from the tribe. If you approach without introduction, the custom is to give a length of cloth, about 2 meters, and in it wrap some "gifts" as a show of respect. There are a number of worthwhile activities and some unique natural features worth visiting in Lifou.

The CEMAID office has some beautifully made brochures in French and English. The booklet "Walks of Loyalty Islands" is excellent and gives you all the info you need, including elevation gains and difficulty. Be sure to ask for it. If you have difficulty contacting the guides directly, ask the CEMAID folks, as they know all the family members who can track them down! All the following activities are in the brochures, and we give the local phone and/or e-mail if they are not.

Northern Lifou: If you like hiking, contact Bessie, a minor chief of Hunete, who runs Lifou Nature. He organizes hikes of up to 2 days (sleeping near the beach or under cave ledges- traditional meals) with

botanical & historical commentaries. We went an afternoon with him to a beach where turtles nest and sharks have a nursery, and had a great time. Bicycles are also available. Contact him 48h before so he can organize logistics. theophile@lagoon.nc

The Lifou Fun Dive center had just changed owners so we didn't have a chance to dive with them. But we went with them take a look at the Luengoni Caves (in the southeast), that might be later developed as a dive site.

We rode our mopeds from here to Kirinata to visit their beautiful inland cavern. Marella, the daughter of the Petit Chef (minor Chief) took us on a 30-min hike to photograph and swim in the majestic cavern with huge columns, stalactites and mites, above and underwater. Fresh water, clear, and incredible blue colors. We were glad we took our mask and an UW light!

Another interesting hiking tour is with Antoine Geihaze, of Medehu Nature, Xepenehe tribe. You get to visit a small but interesting cave (of historical significance), see hunting techniques, coconut crabs and traps, and get botanical information. He also guides snorkeling tours (you could take him with your dinghy or just snorkel from the shore). On the first spot we went to, we saw more than 20 turtles, some times 3-4 at once sitting on small flat coral formations or swimming away... fair sizes too as he had promised! Apparently there are always tons of turtles of all sizes year round. On the second site: a nice bommie coming from 50ft to the surface offered a photographer's delight: beautiful orange gorgonians, even a small red soft coral and nice overhangs! On the way there we saw a few small sharks and a fair size green moray eel. medehutours@yahoo.fr

Vanilla Plantation of Felix Bole: Community of Mucaweng. Felix speaks French and English. His plantation is also his experimental botanical garden where he's planted many interesting tropical species to see if they can be developed in Lifou. He's a personable, smiley fellow and entry is free. He hopes you'll want some of his fine vanilla to take with you.

Chez Fabrice Bole: Fabrice and his family have a vanilla plantation, accommodations in traditional tribal huts, and what is called Tribal Welcome (Accueil de Tribu), which is really hospitality in the tradition of their tribes. Even if you don't stay with them, you can arrange to have a meal made with local ingredients and prepared traditionally in the Melanesian "oven", or local style. We visited his interesting gardens, but did not get to try the food, though we were told they do it well.

WE and Central Lifou (East Coast):

Local Meals: One advantage of French colonization has been the passing on to the islanders their reverence for, and presentation of, food. The "bougna" a leaf-wrapped package of yams, sweet potatoes, bananas, and other local ingredients, which is cooked traditionally over a hot rock "oven" is a native meal normally made on special days (like Sunday dinner). Two places we went called "chez l'habitant" in French, are like the old boarding house idea, where you are welcomed to their home and meals are prepared home style. But here, we were surprised at the quality of preparation and presentation of these meals. As nice as any formal restaurant! The following two were recommended to us especially. The welcome we received was genuinely warm. They can prepare bougna, coconut crab, lobster, flying fox (fruit bat), wild pig and goat, given enough advance notice. They can also put on feasts for groups if a bunch of yachties get together.

Chez Jeanette Ihage: Luecila community. Unlike many S Pac Islands nowadays, Lifou still has a thriving number of Coconut Crabs living in the underground matrix of caves throughout the island, so this is the place to regale your palate with the tasty beast without guilt of decimating the numbers! We called ahead a day or so to give Jeanette time to catch and prepare a sumptuous platter beautifully presented with garnishes of flowers and leaves. She also made us Noumea prawns

cooked in coconut milk with sweet potatoes and bananas. It was wonderful! Jeanette's is across the bay from the marina in We.

Chez Noelly: Between Jozip and Luengoni. Noelly Kausuo is noted by the locals as a fisher woman and cook extraordinaire. Only recently has she opened to tourists her talents as hostess and cook. She and her husband are building a few local bungalows to welcome guests. They have a beautiful setting on the windy coast, and on good days, dining is outdoors with the wild blue ocean as backdrop. The table had fresh flowers, wine glasses, tablecloth and napkins! The bougna was excellent, and a real treat was her appetizer of local cucumber stuffed with tuna that she caught, and handmade garlic mayonnaise! Noelly is not listed in the brochures yet. Phone: (687) 451270. She can also set up transportation.

Central to South Central Lifou:

Vanilla Plantation and bush walk to cave with water hole: Weniko Wejieme, Jozip. Described in the Walks brochure as Grandpa Weniko, a grumpy, but mischievous old guy with plenty of stories, he is also reputed to have some of the finest quality vanilla in Lifou, and be the Johnny Appleseed of the endemic Lifou Palm tree, which is found in the interior of the island, but which he has planted throughout his gardens. The waterhole cave is not as stunning as others we visited, but his plantation is just near the road and worth a visit and some beans to take with you. Next to the Protestant Temple in Jozip.

Jewels of Luengoni hike and cave visit: Noel and Fernand Pea, Luengoni area. The several natural features visited on this excursion were very photogenic and fascinating; although we felt that the walking could have been condensed and still take in the most striking attractions. Would have liked more natural history and local lore and less political discussion. The cave with the beautiful formations underwater is only 5 mins walk from the road, and can be visited w/o taking the long hike to see the other sink holes etc. Take mask and snorkel and good underwater lights to really enjoy the cavern. No way to get lost or stuck.

Transportation: Joseph Forrest runs a bus service for the tribe with regular runs from Luengoni area to We. On weekends and days off, he can be hired for an Island Tour or transport to different activity sites.

South East Lifou:

The Monument area at Mu and the Cliffs of Xodre offer beautiful sea views on a clear day. You can see several neighboring islands in the distance. We rented a car and Edouard, who we mentioned earlier, was guide and told us legends and history of the area. It's much more interesting to hear stories about an island, as well as looking at the scenery.

Inagoj, Subterranean Lake: Stephane Hutihni, Xodre community. We would have missed this fantastic excursion if we had not met Lilas Niypi from the Provincial office of Tourism (she works behind the scenes, not at the CEMAID office, which did not have the newest brochures when we arrived.) She told us about Inagoj, and Stephane, who is newly listed. He does these tours on Saturday mornings, as he has a regular job in We, but he can do tours on other mornings with advanced notice to arrange his work schedule. If you're fascinated by caves, especially those that have water-filled chambers with crystal clear water of purest blue that you can explore by mask, snorkel, and UW light to see the most beautiful formations, above, below, and all around you, you cannot miss this tour. 30-40 mins walk thru the woods, gets you to the cave entrance, then you walk in the cave about 1 km with flashlights, as Stephane enthusiastically tells you the significance of this cave to his tribe, and shows you exquisite cave formations that are so young, the calcite is still pure

white and sparkling with crystals, then you arrive at 2 “lakes”, and go exploring the huge chamber with mask and snorkel. Incredible

Feb 07

Two years ago, we only visited Lifou in the Loyalties but this time, we gave ourselves 4 months to visit more of New Caledonia as well as completing some boat projects we could not do in Vanuatu. As we wrote in our previous letters about Vanuatu, the ultimate cruising guide here is also a Rocket Guide (the second and only other country they cover). Richard and Freddy on s/v Moira, creators of these interactive CD's, are based in New Cal and you might get lucky to meet them in person and get the latest edition of their guide. But the best is to get their CD before arriving here so you can access that mine of information for your advance planning (www.cruising-newcaledonia.com). With charts, aerial photos and sailing directions to most anchorages, you will have no problem making landings. There's even a function to transfer the waypoints from the guide directly to your GPS! The guide's waypoints are true GPS waypoints. The CM 93 electronic charts are slightly off in some areas so do not rely blindly on them! Nor even on Cruising Guides or our waypoints. Always re-verify waypoints yourself.

If you like cool wx (20Celsius), you will appreciate the freshness in the winter (cruising season). In May/June, we had to sleep under a thick blanket (I was even wearing socks!) That cold alas cooled us to do much snorkeling or water activities ... we like the warmth further north – our rule of sailing only between the tropics was validated here if we had had any doubts ☺

NO CLEARANCE IN LIFOU! The biggest news this year is that Lifou is no longer a port of entry until further notice. Always only a partial port of entry, Lifou is now removed as a place to clear in. The marina manager at We was accepted by customs as an unofficial official, but he has passed away, and there is no one the customs trusts to replace him. The “official” reason for closing this port of entry is that there is no quarantine facility, and with the swine flu “epidemic”, foreigners cannot be accepted. Everyone must go to Noumea.

NOUMEA approach and formalities: It is true that the current can be quite strong in Havannah pass and that winds against current can create quite turbulent seas at the entrance. We arrived when the current was flowing out of the lagoon and we had to crab our way along the counter-current on the north side of the channel to sneak in to Goro bay anchorage via the pass of Goro (rounding the lighthouse). Make sure you have your quarantine flag up and do not go ashore to not get on the wrong side of the authorities! At the next rising tide (with plenty of daylight), we continued our approach to Noumea. Do not underestimate the current in Canal Woodin either as it can also be quite strong! The rest of the approach is quite straight forward as seen on charts. To clear in, you are not forced to dock at Port Moselle anymore since the first day in the marina is no longer free of charge! You can anchor just outside Port Moselle marina and go ashore to clear in yourself at the different offices (Quarantine, Customs and Immigration – ask directions at Port Moselle marina office, they will give you a plan ... the 3 offices are located very close together at walking distance (about 30min walk). Europeans can stay here as long as they like, no visas required. Most everyone else will only get 1 month unless you obtained a 3-month visa before arriving. Great thing about entrance/exit formalities is that there are no check-in or checking-out fees (nice thing about many French islands!). When you check out, you go see Customs and Immigration before you go see the Port Captain office

(top of the hill further than the other offices). In exchange of the papers you just received from Customs & Immigration, they will give you the clearance out (that you will need to check in the next country you go to). We asked if we could stop at Isle des Pins on our way back to Vanuatu and we received 3 days from the time we left Noumea. When you check out, you can ask Customs for duty-free fuel AND gasoline. Make sure to ask for more than you think you might need as the gas station can only sell you duty-free the quantity indicated on your custom exemption form. You can take your fuel chez Michel, the friendly guy that runs the CNC gas station (close to Bay de l'Orphelinat), or at the Port Moselle fuel dock.

ANIMALS: If you stay less than 2 months, your pet can stay on board (not allowed to go ashore). If you stay longer, or want your pet to have shore rights, it's quite reasonable: Zenne spent 5 working days at the well-maintained Q facilities (the quarantine people transport you and the pet) and we paid about \$150 US. Much easier and cheaper than the 1month and \$2000 AUS to get into Australia. The French love animals and are more sensible about well-cared-for pets entering. They have had much more problems with animals and livestock imported FROM New Zealand and Australia carrying diseases into New Cal!!

NOUMEA: We first anchored on the west side of the bay of Port Moselle, south of Nouvelle Plaisance between moored boats because the anchorage just outside of Port Moselle (East side of that bay) was too crowded with moored boats. Being on the west side of the bay affords the only protection during a westerly. Otherwise we liked Baie de l'Orphelinat better. You will still have to anchor quite far from the seafront as the anchorage is packed with local moored boats. In over 15 years of cruising, we never saw a town where so many local sailors go out sailing all the time! First you have the weekly after-work Wed regatta where over 30 sailboats (15-60ft range) sail in the 2 bays hoisting all of their sails as they make a big loop from/to the CNC. Then every WE and public holidays (and the French have so many! ☺) over 50 sailboats of all makes and sizes sail out for a few days to the numerous islets around Noumea or to Isle of Pines or Baie du Prony. The regattas are a delight to see, even if it makes you a little nervous to see two 50ft boats charging at you trying to overtake one another, but apparently they rarely bump into anchored boats!

If you take a dinghy contract at Port Moselle, you can dock it at the marina and you are right in the center of town (you also get the use of showers, water fills, garbage and mail pickup). It's NOT cheap, but apparently it's not safe to leave your dinghy next to the sea wall anywhere outside of a marina. As far as Internet options you can get Wi-Fi on your boat in Baie de l'Orphelinat (buy a 8-hour or monthly card at CNC petrol station (Chez Michel, next to where the military ships dock), or you can use free Wi-Fi at Mc Donald, or you can become member of the Berheim Public library (1200 cfp/3months) and you can use their terminals (30min/1hour periods). Since we love music, we also borrowed (FOC) loads of music CD from the mediatheque inside the library (2nd floor).

Most everything can be found in Noumea ... for a price! Take advantage of European products as the French like their fine foods! Watch out for your cruising kitty, especially if you like to eat out! Good place also to provision on canned goods. Check Leader Price in Ducos, Champion and Casino stores (several locations). If you like fresh produce, you will be surprised at the high prices at the market (unlike Port Vila). As far as marine services, you can pretty much find any professional you might need. The industrial area of Ducos has plenty of workshops from automotive, to metal construction, hardware stores, wood and PVC carpenters, ... To travel around, we took the Karuia buses. It cost 200 cfp/ride if paying the bus driver but only 170 if you buy tickets in machines or at the counter at

Place des Cocotiers. Taxis are expensive but you can rent a car starting at 1,500 cfp/day + 25 cfp/km. (The cfp is always at the rate of 119cfp to 1 euro)

HAUL OUT AND DRY STORAGE: For a huge city with numerous marinas and so many large sail and powerboats, Noumea has very limited haul out possibilities. The newest at Nouville Plaisance was expensive and their travel lift could not take more than 7m beam. (We are 8). Note that you need to have 3rd party liability insurance to be hauled out). There are a number of small yards with limited room (CNC). Or large yards for huge commercial boats and huge prices. Outside of the main harbor of Noumea, there is an area called Numbo which is located on the end of the peninsula of the Ducos industrial area. It is a small bay with a number of small yards lining the perimeter. We found one there with a slipway that could take our big beam or even wider, called "CarenOcean", which had just recently been purchased by 4 partners, one of whom has a catamaran that we met in Santo, and later, Noumea. It was bare-boned basic, essentially, they pull you out on the slipway and that's it. They did let us use a power-wash machine of one of the owners. You do all the rest and bring all the tools and materials yourself, Contact Raoul, the mgr for details (ph 99 27 99). We hired Kai (ph 81 50 99), a shipwright to repair some rot around our rudder, and found him to be excellent, quick, sensible and practical, and most of all of excellent integrity. He is a German guy, who was raised on a yacht and has his own wooden yacht. (We, in fact, met his parents on their boat in the Caribbean). He and other friends in the marine business are trying to start a group of marine service people that are known for their integrity and quality of service. He is building his reputation for workmanship and honesty. He does all areas of wood craft, interior finishing, exterior wood (bowsprits etc), and shipwright repair, and has been formally trained in this trade. We highly recommend him. Another person who was very knowledgeable, helpful, and honest was Philippe owner of "Noumea Voile", they do canvas work, sail repair, and rigging, very nice people. There is almost no place to store your boat on the dry for the cyclone season. And none at all for a large multihull. Real estate is at such a premium, that there is very little land that can be devoted to such a low income business as yacht storage. According to residents, yards want you in and out in a minimum of time.

ISLAND CIRCUMNAVIGATION: We had originally intended to do it but we ran out of time as boat projects had priority. To take advantage of favorable wx, you probably should allow 2-4 months according to several friends. So we decided to explore the best parts only, like most cruisers do (except several French and European boats who elected to stay a few years in New Cal).

BAIE DU PRONY: A good hurricane hole if you ever need one but mostly a big selection of anchorages from which to make hikes. The landscape is quite unique: much denuded by old woodcutting and mining operations but also because the high mineral content of its soil. Natives never really lived there, as the soil is too poor for agriculture. It offers a different type of fauna and flora. Our favorite anchorage was Bay du Carenage, as besides being the best protected all around, you can easily hike to several rivers with small cascades and nice pools. The hot pools were barely luke warm, and only one is developed as a sitting pool. Best time here would probably be during the hot summer. See the usual guides for details.

ILE DES PINS: If you like white sand beaches, this is the closest place to Noumea. Too bad it was so cold in June! If you have a bicycle on board, the roads are in excellent condition (as on all French islands!) and you can easily tour the whole island in a day. Don't miss the caves! You can even

snorkel in the fresh water around stalagmites in la Grotte de la 3eme (that we did ☺) . Car rentals are quite expensive at over 8000 cfp/day and a bicycle was 3,000 cfp!

SOUTH-EAST COAST GRANDE TERRE: Ile Nou: do NOT attempt entering this area w/o good light or the waypoints from the rocket guide. We went in at dusk, and could not see the hidden reefs, but the waypoints got us in w/o problem. One can dinghy ashore at a local landing near the main road and walk about 2 miles on good road to get to the Goro waterfalls (would be nice ride if you have bikes)(otherwise easily accessed from baie de Goro). Little pool and cascades with a nice view on the lagoon.

Ouinne: We made an after dark arrival with no problem, as the bay is free of any danger. Amazing on how we could see the big mooring ball on our newly repaired radar! This is a mining town with more desolate landscape. You can dinghy inside the interior river lagoon to check how to get in with your boat should you seek shelter from a storm.

Baie de Pain: We anchored first in the NW anchorage, protected by the reef until the wind got too strong from the E. We then moved to **Anse Lavaissiere**, but with over 30kts of East wind, we got bullet wind gusts over us and a big chop of currents against wind from that small pass. We gave up after lunch and sailed w/ partial genoa, mostly inside the reef, to **Baie de Canala**. We anchored at

Port Mackau: A difference of day and night compared with the previous gusty anchorage!

Sometimes we are reminded to appreciate calm and secure anchorages! Plenty of nooks and crannies to explore by dinghy in the area!

In June, when we cruised the SE and East coast, we had our best fishing in the 17-year history of our cruising! 14 fish in 7 days with a daily best of 6 in 1 day! (4 walu, a bonito, and a mahi mahi) We were very lucky trolling w/ 3 lines at different distances... caught plenty of big walu, 5-6 kg ea (tazzard). Some of these made excellent gifts to the locals. As in Vanuatu and many other South Pacific islands, it is expected that any newcomer first present his respects to the chief of the local community. More than the gift you offer, it is your attitude of respect and implicit acknowledgment of their property that counts. French residents often complain about having to pay money to each chief they cross but if they were offering respect and a symbolic present like food or even a DVD with some wholesome entertainment, they would be as welcome.

OUVEA (in the LOYALTIES): If like us you enjoy the beautiful blue/turquoise colors in clear lagoons with miles of white sands beaches, do not miss this beautiful island reminiscent of the beautiful Tuamotus! About 4 degrees warmer than the big island of N.Cal. too! We had a glorious sail from Mouli to St Joseph with 30kts of wind coming over the low-lying island in a fairly smooth lagoon. We did make 8.9kts despite being quite loaded up ☺ We decided to hitch-hike to visit the main attractions of the island and had no problem getting rides everywhere. People are very hospitable (it helps if you speak French, naturally). In St Joseph, we made 'coutume' with the chief who gave us permission to anchor later in the outer islets of Jehuten/Angeu (also called wrongly Deguala in cruising guides). You can get bread and other groceries at his store in town. Just after de Col du Casse-Cou (where the road goes briefly along the East coast, you can see Hanawa blue hole. We wanted to jump in and swim but were not sure we could have climbed back along the rope! In Wadrilla, you can access a bank if you need one (BCI). Right at the end of the runway a little farther, you can visit Kong-Houtoup grotto. Bring some good light if you like to walk between all the ancient stalagmites. You have to ask the owners (in the houses nearby) to guide you in (a small gift was welcome). The nicest view is definitely the one you have from the Lekiny bridge and lucky for us it was truly like on the postcards when we were there! You can also get there from Mouli anchorage. Keep a careful eye on the wx as

all the anchorages along the main island are completely exposed to Westerlies. The fetch in the shallow lagoon is quite important and a few boats ended up wrecked on the beach over the years. The best place to be in case of westerlies is the tiny well-protected 'Deguala' anchorage in the Northern Pleiades group. Thanks to whoever placed a good mooring in it. After first anchoring and checking the area for depths, we picked up the mooring as located in the best spot. Otherwise, this is the kind of place where you should put 2 anchors to keep you from swinging too far. Nice snorkeling/scuba in the area and small motus to explore! It is alas quite difficult to cruise Ouvea (or Mare) as you have to be fully cleared in Noumea first and are not supposed to stop here after you clear out! Either you go back to Noumea to clear out afterwards or they let you clear in temporarily in Lifou first and you stop here shortly during the 7-day they give you to clear in formally in Noumea.

June 09

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche