

Witchcraft goes to West Africa

Ed Wheeler



Part 1: Ireland to the Gambia

My sister Diana and I delivered *Witchcraft* from Donaghadee to Porto Santo in August 2007 and I laid her up ashore there until late October when I was joined in Quinta do Lorde, Madeira, by John Clementson (ICC) and Eric Degerland. John brought numerous gadgets, including a patent wind scoop (which we called the Wedding Dress, on account of its elegant appearance), a solar shower, a fan, miner's headlamps and a 40,000 volt mosquito-bite zapping machine.

We left for the Canary Islands on Wednesday 7th November and called at the Islas Selvagens (Portuguese). They are a nature reserve and a permit is required to land. Wind and swell were blowing straight into the anchorage at Enseada dos Carragos on Selvagem Grande, so we didn't go ashore.

Arriving in San Sebastian, La Gomera, at dusk on Friday, we found it busy with boats waiting to do the ARC and we squeezed into a berth beside a large catamaran. After shipping some more stores, we left San Sebastian on Saturday 10th November at 16.30, bound for Dakar in Senegal.

After three days of light winds, mainly between northwest and northeast, the trade wind filled in late on Tuesday 13th November, in 21°35'N, 018°11'W. The windvane steering was working well and was nicknamed 'Arry Aries. We passed through miles of yellow-streaked algal bloom and scooped some of it into a jar, regretting that we had no microscope. After dark it lit up like a torch, when shaken. At night, the phosphorescent tracks of dolphins were like a firework display. On Saturday 17th November, we gave a good berth to Cap Vert and Cap Manuel, came in past Dakar, West Africa's largest port and felt our way cautiously into the anchorage at Hann, a wide shallow bay northeast of Dakar, sheltered to north and west but open to the east. (14°43'.2N, 017°25'.2W).

Senegal is an ex-French possession which retains a strong French flavour and influence. The country is bordered by Mauritania in the north and Guinea-Bissau in the south. It is nearly bisected by The Gambia, a former British colony which lies along the River Gambia and is 30 miles wide at the sea, tapering down to less than 20 in the east. It was an early centre of the Atlantic slave trade. Senegal has a somewhat democratic regime, while The Gambia is ruled by President Jammeh, who seized power in a coup in 1994. He claims to be able to cure HIV with herbs and the power of prayer. Dissent is discouraged.

The masts of a sunken schooner loomed out of the gloom as we approached the moorings. We anchored in 3.5 metres at 03.45 and turned in. We woke to the sounds and smells of Africa. Hann has an odour deriving from rotting seaweed and fish, drains and some unspecific spicy smell. The "plage" runs for miles and is home to a thriving fish market and many colourful pirogues drawn up on the sand. Shanties extend as far as one can see behind the beach. Much-amplified calls to prayer from various minarets wafted out on the light breeze. We came ashore in a launch from the Cercle de Voile de Dakar (CVD), one of the two yacht clubs. Facilities include water and

wash tubs, showers, a bar and restaurant. For a modest daily charge the CVD, including the ferry service, is open to visiting yachts. Of the large, mainly French, fleet of yachts anchored and moored there, many look abandoned, sad endings to dream-world voyages. We met some people from *Voiles sans Frontières*, a group which sails to remote villages to provide medical services (<http://www.voilessansfrontieres.org/>). Later, we went into Dakar and ended up in a clothing sweat-shop on a back street, whence Eric emerged bedecked in colourful pantaloons and robes, looking rather like a minor prophet.

On Sunday we left Hann at lunchtime and sailed over to Isle Gorée. It is now a tourist island and is like an African version of a French "bastide" village. It has many restaurants. We lay alongside the stone jetty, rather uneasily, as there was only one bollard within reach. We shared the jetty with a pirogue and numerous small boys. I would not use this as an overnight stop, as it is open from northeast to southeast. This was the only place in Africa where we came alongside. We left again at 16.00 bound for Banjul. It being "le weekend", all the official offices were closed, so we did not trouble the authorities with our arrival at or departure from Dakar.

Banjul

Eric had a plane to catch in Banjul, so we sailed there overnight. However, a sharp lookout is required, for there were many unlit fishing pirogues. Some carry a strobe, which they turn on if they think you are getting close. Their idea of close is very close. The approaches to Banjul are straightforward. For clearance, we had to anchor off a disused shipyard southeast of the main port at an area called Half-Die (so named because half the population died in a cholera outbreak). The place is littered with wrecks. To get to the port offices, one must either negotiate a busy container depot or walk through a shanty town. Assorted loungers are on hand offering their services. I had decided that we didn't need guides but Eric, being a soft touch, had acquired two and they marched us up and down Wellington Street looking for the various offices. It was hot and dusty and nobody really knew where they were going. Eventually, we found the immigration office and got our passports stamped. The customs man was more difficult and insisted on visiting the boat. After a cursory inspection, he produced a declaration form, which for some reason I had to copy out in longhand. I thought the ship's official stamp would impress him, but the ink had liquified in the heat and splodged all over the paper, compounded by the perspiration dripping off my brow. Eventually a limp and smudged document was completed. The customs officer demanded a life-jacket for the hazardous voyage ashore in our rubber dinghy and was disinclined to give it up on arrival. He then said that, while of course there was no question of bribery, it was customary to wish him a "Happy weekend" with a small token gift. Hard cash was preferred.

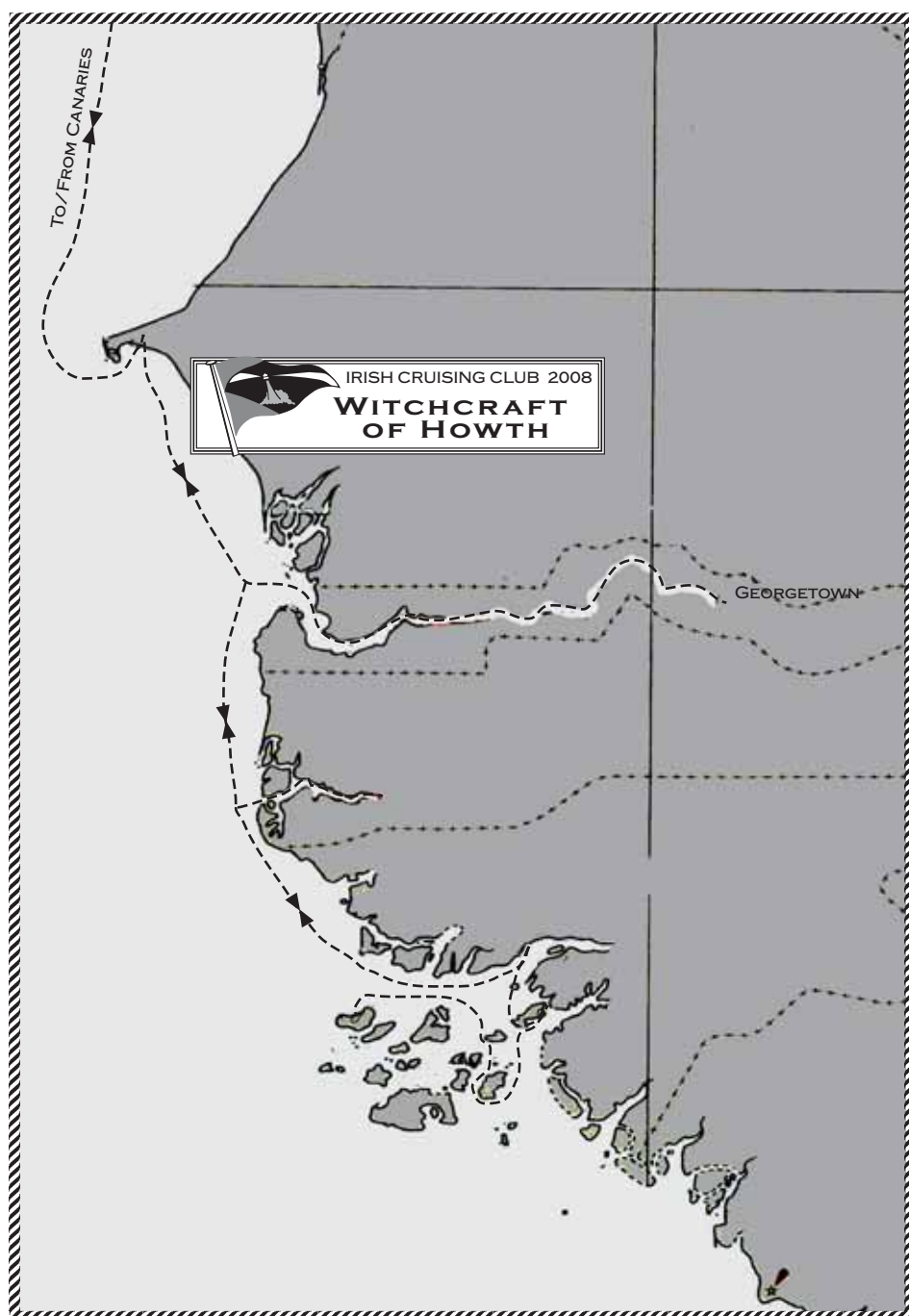
Eric had to collect his air ticket from an agent some distance away. Our minders found us a local taxi. This was an ancient Japanese hatchback held together with duct tape and driven by

Cherno, an irrepressible character with a baseball cap worn sideways. He found ice for us at a place down a sandy track, where we were stopped by a wash-out. We had to push the taxi to turn round, as its reverse gear was out of action.

John was pleased to see the sack of ice and the arrival drinks were the more appreciated. We weighed anchor from Half-Die to go up the network of creeks to Lamin Creek. Nearly there, we cut a corner and gently took the ground, spending the night peacefully embedded in the mud. Next day, Tuesday 20th November, we had the hook down just opposite Lamin Lodge by 11.00. (13°24'.2N, 016°37'.5W). Lamin Lodge is a bizarre erection of sticks and thatch, belonging to a German who arrived there thirty-five years ago in an old gaffer which later succumbed to teredo and fire. It is a restaurant and excursion centre which caters mainly for parties from the tourist hotels and gives them a "river experience". They use pirogues, with fake ketch or schooner rig, powered by a large outboard in a well. The sole safety feature is a few cork lifebelts. The Lodge serves decent meals and cold beer. Old hands keep their plates covered when eating, otherwise the local green velvet monkeys will swoop on the choicest morsels. A little community has grown up around Lamin Lodge, including a craftsman in wood and raffia calling himself Mr. Cheap. I vainly suggested to Mr. Cheap that he might move upmarket a bit by rebranding himself as Mr. Inexpensive or even Mr. Quality. Another local industry is oyster gathering and processing. The women go out in dugouts at low water and collect the oysters growing on the mangrove roots in the surrounding creeks. Nothing is wasted and the oyster shells are either used to pave tracks or heated in kilns and made into a sort of cement. After Eric left, John and I spent a couple of days doing small jobs and getting stores (including local "Gin" at about £1.50 a litre).

Part 2: Exploring the river Gambia

We were aground for an hour either side of low water, so it was 16.30 before we got away on Friday 23rd November. We made our way cautiously past the wrecks at Half-Die and anchored off the bank on the south side of the river in 3 metres over mud, near some more wrecks. Darkness falls at about 19.00; sunsets are very beautiful, the afterlight providing a complete palette of colours changing rapidly with the onset of night. We weighed anchor in the pre-dawn at 07.00 and motored up river, guided by Peter Jones's Cruising Guide to West Africa which, although over ten years old, still contains much useful information and sketch plans. The Admiralty chart of the River Gambia is still reasonably accurate, although all navigation aids are now missing. GPS positions become



unreliable as one ascends until, by Georgetown some 155 miles upriver, they are over one mile adrift. This, together with ubiquitous fishing nets, makes navigation in darkness rather imprudent. The wind, although contrary, was quite light and we carried a 2 or 3 knot flood tide, past the village of Jufureh. This was supposed to be the birthplace of Alex Hailey's great grandfather in his book "Roots" and is now very much on the tourist itinerary. The next landmark of note is James Island, a small fortified islet dating from Portuguese times. Jones suggests anchoring and visiting the fort, but the anchorage is completely exposed to the prevailing wind and strong tide and we didn't like the look of it.

We carried the tide up as far as Jurunka Creek, one of the numerous creeks or "Bolons" which form tributaries of the main river but are not detailed on the chart. We felt our way in, greeted by a flock of pelicans, anchored inside the bar to await the next rising tide, then crept cautiously up the creek for a couple of miles until we ran gently aground in the centre of a large lagoon. When the tide lifted us, we anchored nearby in 2.5 metres, enjoying our sundowners in utter peace and tranquility.

The blood feud between John and the ground tackle was now in deadly earnest. I always knew that the anchor had reached the stemhead by the howls of pain and rage emanating from the foredeck as the anchor and chain fought back against John's attempts to persuade the shackle through the fairlead. Anyway, after this ritual was completed, we headed on upstream. The wind blew consistently down river, so we had to motor. However, this was mitigated by the favourable current we carried: as we were travelling with the direction of tidal flow, the duration of each tide was considerably greater than that at any given point. We broke the day's passage at Madina, the ferry crossing on the main highway from Dakar to Ziginchoir, where the captain of the spare ferry allowed us to lie alongside for a couple of hours while we took a taxi the 4km to Farafenni. The whole place is very busy and colourful, with queues of bush buses and "camions" waiting to cross. The highway had been asphalted in the past but the surface has fallen into deep potholes; as a result, the lorries and buses hurtle along either verge, choosing the best surface regardless of left or right, while the pedestrians and animals walk along the paved surface in the middle. We bought some provisions at Farafenni, then carried on upstream and anchored in the main river for the night.

As we got farther upstream, the water turned fresh, so we could wash ourselves and our clothes properly. The river gets narrower and the channel is broken up by islands. We anchored at midday off the village of Kudang Tenda, where we were welcomed ashore by Ibrahim, the headman's son, and by hordes of children. It is a picturesque place, with round houses built of mud and thatch and brightly coloured dugout canoes pulled up on the beach. We gave away the first of our footballs,



Half Die, Banjul, The Gambia

Photo: John Clementson

carried at the advice of Peter Haden (ICC and OCC), who had cruised to West Africa ten years before. Peter was very helpful, lending me charts and his OCC log. He had found that footballs and pumps were highly appreciated gifts in remote villages. We were entertained in Ibrahim's house to lunch, a meal of rice and a spicy groundnut sauce, while he showed us his most treasured possessions, charts of Trinidad and Venezuela left by a previous voyager. As we left, the children swam out to where we were anchored off the old wharf and swarmed over the dinghy. That night we anchored in the lee of Bird Island just off the main channel.

Passing the Baboon Islands, a nature reserve where landing and anchoring are prohibited, we saw hippotamuses in the stream. Passing the Kai-Ai islands, we encountered unexpectedly shallow water just inside the eastern entrance to the north channel. An hour later we arrived at Georgetown, aka Janjanbureh, where an incident in which we might have

measured the height of a new HT cable across the river with our mast was avoided by shouts of warning from the ferry, which happened to be crossing at the time. The nominal height of the cable is 6 metres, but locals say it has sagged. A man from the ferry was recruited by John to pilot us under the cable close to the north bank, where the clearance is greater. As we approached the critical point, he decided that there wasn't enough height, so we retired hastily. John was outraged at this performance. We anchored near the ferry landing on McArthur Island and became the immediate focus of much attention. John had been fretting about not having any local currency, and had arranged to have money transferred by wire to the Western Union office, the only bank with a branch at Georgetown, where it is located in an old



Lamin Lodge, River Gambia

Photo: Brian Black



Witchcraft, Kudang Tenda

colonial-style building. He collected an impressive wad of dirty, tattered banknotes which he placed in a shopping-bag, where it joined forces with sundry vegetables, fruit and fish in an interesting multi-coloured display, attracting the customary crowd of spectators, one of whom produced a parrot, which sat becomingly on John's shoulder.

We spent a couple of days there. Armed with John's new-found wealth, we took the dinghy across the river to a tourist camp on the north bank for an indifferent buffet. Consequences ensued the next day, when John came down with a bad attack of D&V. For some reason, I escaped this, although we had eaten the same meal. We had intended to go another 20 miles upriver to the Mungo Park memorial, commemorating the Scottish explorer's two expeditions in 1795 and (fatally) in 1801 across the watershed in search of the river Niger. (The late Mungo Park (ICC) from Howth was a direct descendant of the explorer. On a recent visit to Dublin, the Gambian High Commissioner held a reception to mark the expedition's 200th anniversary to which Mungo was invited, and apologised publicly for his great great grandfather having eaten Mungo's great great grandfather). Unfortunately, the HT cable prevented us taking *Witchcraft* any farther upriver and John's indisposition made an excursion by taxi or bus rather unwise. Before departing Georgetown, we were able to get diesel and water and I bought a body part from a goat, which turned out to be inedibly tough. We found that vegetables and fruit were poor in both quality and variety everywhere in The Gambia, despite the favourable climate. There doesn't seem to be much entrepreneurial spirit among the agricultural community.

On Friday 30th November, we headed downstream. We had

another brush with the shallows entering the Kai-Ai north channel, this time bumping over some obstruction on the river bottom. At the Baboon Islands we saw hippos, chimps clambering in the trees, and a young baboon which the park warden brought aboard when he came alongside. It had been orphaned, its mother probably having been killed for bushmeat, and he was rearing it himself. The baboon and John took to each other immediately. We passed the old port of Kuntaur, where the wharves are derelict, with wrecks and debris scattered around. There are some impressive dilapidated colonial buildings, evocative of a time when the area must have been quite prosperous. East of Bird Island, we came to the Red Hill of Kassang, past the masts of the passenger steamer *Lady Denham*, wrecked in 1948 (one wonders,

how?). There is a clay/sand beach and we anchored off that but found the holding poor, so ducked round the corner into the muddy channel east of Bird Island. Next morning, we climbed the hill, which is one of the few places with enough elevation to give good views over the river country. Later, passing Kudang Tenda, we met our old friend Ibrahim fishing in a leaky dugout. We gave him a copy of the ICC Journal from 2003, which has a picture of *Witchcraft* in the frontispiece. We anchored that night in the river just off Sarmi Creek.

Next day, Sunday, we woke to find a brisk northeasterly breeze blowing and sailed off our anchor, the first good sail since coming upriver, although the wind died later. We anchored east of Devil's Point but the wind piped up from the east and we had rather an uncomfortable night. At least we could sail the 18 miles passage to Mandori Creek, which had depth of 2.5 metres on the bar. This is an attractive bolon, with plenty of bird life. On Tuesday, we had planned to visit the



Buying fish, Georgetown

Kemoto Point Hotel, located on the south bank by a prominent bend in the river, and we anchored off the point. Cold beers, showers and a meal ashore beckoned. We found a man who said the hotel was closed but came with us to show us around it. It had been an ambitious project, with swimming pool, large bar and well-built accommodation, but was now abandoned, with doors banging in the wind. The hotel opened in 1992 and the village had prospered while it was there; now the people are having to get used to hard times again. Kemoto being a lee shore, we weighed, went over to the north side and up a creek called Tabirere, which is very peaceful and quite wide, enabling us to anchor clear of unwelcome winged visitors (except hornets, which find you wherever you are). We stayed there two nights.

On Thursday 6th December, we sailed out of Tabirere Creek, down river and then up the large tributary of Bintang Bolon, on the south side of the Gambia river. We tacked up the creek about 3 miles to Bintang camp and anchored on the opposite side of the creek, as the holding was poor off the camp. This place was open and served cold beers which we absorbed gratefully, but not before exploring the village, with its obligatory sacred crocodile pool. Bathing with crocodiles is reputed to cure barrenness in women but just how this process takes place is thankfully not made explicit. The next day we completed our exploration of the river, carrying a good sailing breeze down Bintang Bolon, as far as Half-Die, then motored up to Lamin Creek. Here, I made arrangements with a young chap to look after *Witchcraft* while I flew home for Christmas. Llanda is the unofficial harbourmaster of Lamin and has taken over, by adverse possession, a string of four moorings, one of which I took. Since it is completely sheltered and shelves gently to soft mud, I could leave her with a (relatively) easy mind. While I was home, he sent me text messages assuring me that all was well and his mother did my dhobi. John left at Lamin and I was sorry to see him go, for he is an excellent seaman and good company.

Part 3: South to the Bijagos

I rejoined ship on 11th January and Brian Black (ICC) arrived on the 15th. We got our visas for Guinea-Bissau at the embassy in Bakau, left Lamin on Thursday 17th January and by 17.00 were clear of the port under full sail. The wind fell light overnight but we were in no hurry, as we wanted our arrival at the Casamance bar to coincide with the start of the flood. Brian is an environmentalist and TV journalist. He is very 'green' and would not allow even teabags to be thrown overboard. Luckily, I prefer leaf tea.

The Rivi re Casamance is the marine gateway to southern Senegal and is low-lying, with many creeks and tributaries. A ferry plies between Dakar and the regional capital, Ziginchoir. There is an active regional separatist movement, which erupts in violence from time to time. The rebels are supported from across the border in Guinea Bissau, which has caused sporadic warfare along the frontier region.

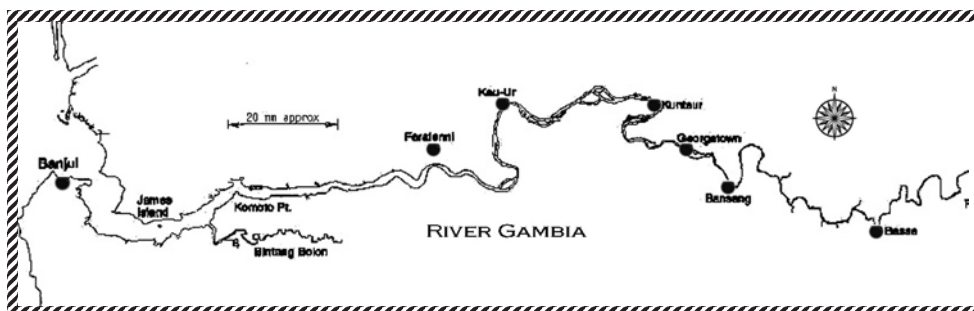
We found the Casamance No.1 buoy a mile to the south of

the charted position, and followed the marked channel from there through the Passe M diane. There was plenty of water over the bar, although depths fell away inside until we realised that we were a little to the west of the leading line. We followed the buoys upriver for about 20 miles, carrying the flood as far as Marigot Ariandaboul (Marigot is the local name for a creek). There was 2 metres on the bar and 4 metres inside. We were followed all the way by bottlenosed dolphins. It was a short leg next morning to Ziginchoir, which is about 30 miles from the mouth of the river system. The navigable channel after Marigot Djagobel curves close to the north bank round the Isles des Oiseaux and their extensive mudbanks, where we saw our first flamingoes and many other species. Ziginchoir has a long waterfront, with pirogues drawn up on the shore and on moorings. There were 10 other yachts anchored off, all French, apart from one German. We found a space in 9 metres and went ashore at the new hotel, which has a dinghy pontoon and a water tap. Ziginchoir (locals call it Zig) is a colourful place, with a many bars and restaurants. Le Perroquet, beside the hotel, serves good meals and excellent house wine. The only downside to Zig was the smell from the fish landing places along the waterfront. Fruit and vegetables from the large market are fresh and good. It being "Le Weekend" again, no arrival or departure formalities were possible.

We dropped down the river from Zig on Sunday in flat calm conditions, pacing ourselves against a large pirogue heading for the sea. On the north bank just inside the entrance and just to the east of Pte de Djogue is a creek called Boulabab ne. It should have had at least 2 metres in the entrance at that state of the tide but we bounced off a couple of times and couldn't get in. We didn't fancy anchoring off the beach at Djogue as it reeked of rotting fish, so we went into the Bolon Kachiouane, west of Isle Karabane. This has a long sandbar off it, and one has to go downstream of it and then turn back up to enter the creek, holding very close to Pte de Nikine to keep enough water, after which it deepens inside. We turned in too soon and found ourselves in shallow water. Next morning, we crossed the bar via the Passe M diane without incident. The night before, we had seen the Dakar ferry using the Passe du Nord but this is unmarked and local knowledge would be required. A breeze filled in from the west and we had a quiet passage overnight, heading south for Bissau.

Guinea-Bissau is the former colony of Portuguese Guinea. It became independent in 1974, ten years later than other countries in the region, after a long liberation war. It has had a lot of unrest and is very poor. There was a civil war nine years ago and there is an ongoing conflict on the Cacheu/Casamance border. As if this were not enough, the outer islands of the Bijagos archipelago have become a cocaine smuggling centre for the African continent. Drugs are landed from ships in remote areas of the Bijagos and then ferried to the mainland by launch or light plane, whence they are split up for shipment to Europe or back to the Americas. This situation seems to be tolerated by senior Government ministers and officials. The currency is the CFA, the same as Senegal. The official language

is Criolo, a subset of Portuguese and very little English is spoken. We heard of no other yachts during our visit to this country. The main reason for a yacht to come here is the beautiful and unspoilt Bijagos archipelago, west Africa's largest island group. It is not for the faint-hearted, as the tidal range is over 5 metres, there are strong currents through all the channels and it is strewn with rocks and shallows. All



navigation aids are now missing and the group is only partly covered by large scale Admiralty charts.

There are extensive offlying shallows along this coast and we also wanted to keep a good offing from the River Cacheu. Bissau lies on the Canal do Geba, a turbulent channel. We had been (wrongly) told that this was now the only port of entry. It is not a prepossessing place. The harbour is clogged with wrecks and the anchorage is exposed, with 4 knot tides. As soon as we anchored, a Policia Maritima launch with a huge outboard charged alongside, doing my topsides no good at all. They indicated that I was to come with them, bringing the ship's papers and passports. The outboard roared and I nearly went over the stern (only two speeds were in use: full ahead and stop). First, we pulled into a ramshackle slip, crowded with picturesque characters, among whom were two immigration officials. They came aboard and we all shot off into the docks. I was ready for them this time and held on tight. I was taken to the harbour office, where more officials crammed into a tiny room. I was told that my papers weren't in order, and we should have had some kind of pre-arranged permit to enter the country. The immigration people levied quite substantial per-diem fees for the crew, and the Policia Maritima followed suit for the ship. They said that these permits would cover our stay in the country and no more payments or permits would be needed. This proved not to be the case.

Extraordinary Bolama

We left Bissau immediately, down the Canal do Geba and through the Canal de Pedro Alvares, between the Ilha de Galinhas and round the (missing) buoy which used to mark the shoals and shallows off the southeast tip of Ilha de Bolama. We carried our tide almost all the way up to Bolama town, anchoring north of the stone jetty in the dusk (11°35'N, 015°28'.2W). Bolama is an extraordinary place. It was the capital of Portuguese Guinea until 1941, when the administration moved to Bissau. The first thing to catch the eye on stepping ashore is a large concrete sculpture, a present from Mussolini to Bolama in recognition of assistance given to an Italian flying boat which crashed there in 1931. There are many large colonial-style colonnaded buildings, a military barracks and a fine, once-irrigated central garden square, dominated by the vast town hall and dotted with termite mounds. All are derelict and crumbling, with goats and chickens wandering in and out. The main village is outside the old town. There are a few bars where one can get a beer, Portuguese wine or a plastic beaker of 'Cana', a local anaesthetic. Brian befriended a schoolmaster who taught English and he showed us around. He had not been paid for the past four months. We were collared by officials who collected dues, saying that the permits issued in Bissau were no good for the islands. One man ingeniously demanded money for pirogue hire in order that he might inspect the boat. After collecting, he said that he had decided that he didn't need to inspect us after all; he kept the money, though. We were able to get good water near the beach, diesel and a few basic supplies.



Next stop was a delightful anchorage between the two Ilheus dos Porcos, just northeast of Ilha Roxa. This is a palm-fringed idyll, with good shelter, no habitation in sight and deserted white sand beaches (11°19'.5N, 015°39'.3W). We saw animist symbols, and care is needed hereabouts lest one disturb the spirits. In the morning, we were joined on the beach by a couple of chaps fishing in a dugout. They generously shared with us their lunch of fish in sauce, eaten with the fingers and accompanied by groundnuts. We could communicate, for one of them was Senegalese, married to the daughter of the police chief in Bubaque. He was a Moslem and refused beer. His assistant had been raised as an animist but had, so to speak, taken the soup, in order to attend a Protestant missionary school. They needed a torch for night fishing and we had a spare. We towed them with difficulty back to *Witchcraft* behind the dinghy and tiny outboard and gave them a torch and batteries. Ibrahim asked if he could have the outboard too, but we regretfully had to refuse. I asked about the fishing and he said it was badly affected by the foreign trawlers sweeping up everything offshore. He had had a good night recently, when he caught a large shark, so big it couldn't be got into the dugout, so they lashed it alongside and paddled it home, like Hemingway's 'Old Man And The Sea'. We towed them some way towards their village before parting.

We carried the ebb south past the west side of Roxa and turned north through the Canal do Bubaque with the first of the flood. It is difficult to see the entrance (11°13'.65N, 015°49'.9W) to the Rio de Bruce, a mangrove-lined creek on the Ilha de Bubaque. There was perfect shelter inside, no tsetses (contrary to Steve Jones's experience) and a beautiful sunset, with attendant sea eagles. At this point, it would have been nice to have had either detailed charts of the south and west of the Bijagos Archipelago or local knowledge, plus shallow draft or a lifting keel. Without these, for reasons of



Rivière Casamance

prudence we had to forego visiting the channels around the islands of Orango, Meneque and Oragozinho, where are reputed to be found salt water hippos. Peter Haden had explored this area ten years ago in his bilge keel Westerly Seahawk *Papageno* and had indeed found the hippos. He found the ability to “park” on mud flats useful. The text of his log of this cruise may be found on the Ocean Cruising Club website at www.oceancruisingclub.org/content/view/387/82/

It was a short sail up to the main island settlement of Bubaque, where we anchored just off the beach ($11^{\circ}18'N$, $015^{\circ}49'.8W$), west of the ferry jetty, on Sat 26th January. It is deep and strongly tidal, with suspect holding. We put out a kedge into deep water, to prevent the boat swinging onto the beach at change of tide. Bubaque has basic provisions, plus fish, diesel and some fresh vegetables and fruit. We celebrated Brian’s birthday here. There is a couple of decent restaurants. It is a pretty place, with more crumbling old colonial buildings. The town is built along a bluff and the stalls and bars near the harbour are lively. Bubaque is the only place in Guinea-Bissau where we saw any kind of tourism. This is based on camps here and across the straits on Rubane. Tourists are brought out from Bissau in fast launches. The main activities are wildlife watching and angling. We spent a couple of days here, relaxing. We made the mistake of making the dinghy fast to the platform under the ferry jetty. As the tide rose, the current strengthened, and the dinghy disappeared underneath. The tide was flowing at about 4 knots. A large crowd immediately gathered (why does this always happen?) and much good-natured but unintelligible advice was proffered. Eventually, we got the dinghy ashore on the rocks, boarded it and set off. The outboard could barely stem the flow and we got back to *Witchcraft* on the last few drops of fuel. On the Sunday, we were boarded by officials in a launch in which most of the space was taken up by an enormous plastic septic tank. Communications weren’t good enough to ask why they were carrying it in the Policia Maritima boat, so the mind was able to boggle freely. They were however able to communicate the requirement for monetary tribute, and also raided our medicine chest. They went away with our ship’s papers and would have taken the passports too, except that Brian resolutely refused to part with his. Next day, we had to visit the Policia Maritima office to retrieve the papers and more cash changed hands. More serious on leaving was the loss of

our kedge, which was inextricably fouled.

Our next anchorage was Ilha Caravela, the northwest island in the Bijagos group. We would have liked to approach it westwards through the channel separating Bubaque from Rubane and thence via Ilha Formosa but again our draft and lack of charts made this unwise, so we left Rubane to port and came up through the Canal de Galinhas and into the Canal do Geba. The distance is over 70 miles and the winds were light, so it was 23.00 when we rounded the west end of the long breaking bank which provides some shelter from the north. We could just see the glimmer of the breakers in the dark and felt our way in until we had about 4 metres water and anchored. Next morning, we moved to where there seemed to be least surf on the beach. This was in $11^{\circ}33'.7N$,

$016^{\circ}19'.5W$. In fresh northerlies, this could be uncomfortable, but while we were there, the weather was settled, although there was some roll. There was no sign of life ashore at first but we met some wild cattle on the beach, then found an inlet, not marked on the chart, which we earmarked for later dinghy exploration. There were flamingoes and there were lots of sea birds, waders and raptors. The second day, we found a track inland and followed it for a couple of miles. We came upon the village quite suddenly, through a stand of magnificent trees. It was primitive, with thatched mud houses and women were pounding grain and groundnuts in large wooden mortars. There was a schoolteacher there who spoke some French. I presented a football and pump, which were well received. They asked for another for a nearby village, so we returned to get them, accompanied by a noisy troop of urchins.

Next day, we anchored off the unmarked creek and set off in the dinghy to explore. We crossed the bar near high water in about one metre and entered a sandy lagoon with quite deep water. This would provide perfect shelter for a catamaran or lifting-keel yacht. Upstream, the water shallowed, then deepened again, gradually changing character until we were in a deep, mangrove-fringed creek. This wound inland for at least a mile and a half. We saw lots of bird life, including enormous Goliath Herons, which flapped away in front of us like pterodactyls, and a crocodile. There is supposed to be a solitary hippo living in this area and this would be an ideal environment for him, but he kept out of sight. Coming over the bar into the sea again, I was escorted by a pair of large barracuda. Caravela is a delightful island and Brian got many good photos and video footage.

We left Caravela on Friday 1st February. Since we were in good time for Brian’s flight, I decided to visit the Northern Isles, which lie at the entrance to the Canal do Geba. We headed eastward, intending to pass through the Canal de Catarina, which separates the Ilha de Jeta and Ilha de Pecixe. The Admiralty chart shows reasonable water in this passage but we couldn’t find any navigable channel, so we turned back. Just after we did so, a military launch appeared and came alongside. We were boarded by five men, one soldier forward and one aft, each holding a Kalashnikov. Just in case we were inclined to argue, they also had an RPG7 in the launch. One of them took a close interest in our GPS, especially the waypoint which I had

labelled “Cacheu”. We were questioned closely about our movements. They did not demand cash but they did make off with a chart, a water breaker and a shopping trolley. After this, I abandoned the idea of the Northern Isles and headed out to sea, to make the passage back to the Gambia, well offshore. With our good offing, there were not many pirogues but we sailed through a big fleet of foreign fishing vessels, lit up like football stadia. By Sunday morning, we were hove-to in fresh winds waiting for daylight to enter Banjul.

We anchored at Half-Die to clear customs, etc, but most offices were closed. I bought the largest tiger prawns I have ever seen, about ½ lb each in weight, from a pirogue. They ate very well. When the flood began, we negotiated the maze of channels to Oyster Creek, where we anchored in mid stream, near a submerged wreck. Oyster Creek has a couple of wooden jetties and some ramshackle bars. It is crossed by the main road from Banjul to Serekunda over a low-level bridge. This has enough headroom for pirogues and angling boats to reach the sea. There is a police post at the bridge, with a water standpipe. At the bridge, bush buses or taxis ply to Banjul or Serekunda and Fajara. I fell into the water at the jetty, giving much pleasure to the onlookers and ruining my mobile phone. Brian left from Banjul and my son James joined for the passage back to the Canaries.

We left Oyster Creek on Thursday 7th February and threaded our way back past Banjul, missing a turning and coming close to being neaped in a blind creek. The wind came in north-northwest fresh to strong after a while and we had a wet thrash to windward with three reefs in the main, eventually making Hann anchorage at Dakar on Friday just after dark. We left on Monday 11th February. As expected, it was a long and tedious beat to windward for most of the 800 miles back to Gomera. We had our first rain for months, with thunder and lightning. I had borrowed a satphone and told Jan that I would contact her every couple of days. Unfortunately, it didn't work, so I tried to contact a passing ship to relay a message, so she wouldn't be concerned. I called three vessels on Ch 16 before



Witchcraft sailing at Caravela

Photo: Brian Black

one answered, and kindly sent our message. In accordance with the new regulations, they do not monitor Ch 16 any longer. The passage took 8½ days and we arrived in La Gomera late on Tuesday 20th February.

I rejoined the boat on 2nd June to get to Ponta Delgada by 19th June to meet my incoming crew, David Whitehead (RCC, ICC). I was single-handed for the passage to the Azores. David is co-organiser of the 2009 Azores Meet. I sailed the 55 miles to Pta de la Restinga on El Hierro on Wednesday 4th June in northerly winds which whistled up very fresh as I approached Hierro. The marina at La Restinga is only for local boats and visitors have to lie alongside the breakwater, which has rubber coated piles, so a plank would be useful. There is surge a lot of the time and it always seems to be blowing a near gale outside. I set off from there on Saturday, bound for Santa Maria. I could also help David by doing a recce of that island, which is rarely visited by UK-based yachts.

It is about 650 miles from El Hierro to Santa Maria and in a region subject to fluky and variable winds. Sailing alone does not particularly bother me, but *Witchcraft* is not ideal for single-handed sailing, as she has a large foretriangle, heavy, fully-battened mainsail and reefing has to be done on deck. On the plus side, catering is easier and I can sing without people



Seagoing pirogue, Rivière Casamance

complaining. I am nervous about being run down, even in a little-frequented part of the ocean, as merchant ships do not always seem to detect yachts. I believe that a Class B AIS transponder would provide a lot more security.

It was calm along the south coast of El Hierro but I ran into strong northerlies again on rounding Pta de Orchilla, the southwest corner of the island, and by the end of the day had three reefs in the main and well-rolled genoa. On Sunday, I saw turtles and there were still some flying fish in 29°N. We were on the wind until Tuesday night when it freed me, then fell light and I motored for a day. On Thursday morning, a breeze filled in from the southeast and gradually freshened, veering round to south-southwest until by Friday morning it was blowing very hard with a falling glass. There was a big sea over a heavy swell and I was unsure of the status of Vila do Porto, where there was supposed to be a marina under construction. It was a dead-lee shore, so I aborted the approach and coasted round to the east side of the island to a rather beautiful bay called Sao Lourenco, where I anchored for a couple of days to let the weather settle. Apart from a bit of a roll, this was well-sheltered. It rained very heavily. There are Peixe Porco, aka Grey Trigger Fish, which are easily caught and good to eat. Tip: don't try to fillet or skin them before cooking. Vila do Porto does now have a well-sheltered marina, with lots of empty space at the moment. There aren't any facilities yet (June 2008) but these will be in place shortly. Portuguese officialdom is at its most bureaucratic here, with four different departments involved. All are very friendly and helpful. You have to go up to the Capitania at the top of the hill to fill in the forms for light dues. This process takes about half an hour and the dues are about £2. Vila do Porto is an elongated town, rising steeply from the initial climb from the harbour. There are numerous bars and restaurants. The island is gentle and undulating, with rich farmland in small fields. It has attractive vernacular houses, with distinctive bread-ovens/chimneys built onto one side.

I sailed to Ponta Delgada on 17th June in light winds. The old marina was still in use but a new one for visitors will be opened by 2009. David Whitehead arrived and we spent a couple of days going around Sao Miguel. I went aloft to replace the masthead flag halyards and we departed on Sunday 22nd June, homeward bound. Unfortunately, the heavy swell off Pta Dos Mousteiros caused the flag halyards to chafe through and I lost my burgee and staff. We had a fairly good passage home with generally favourable winds and no bad weather. Dave took over the galley, which was great. It took 8½ days for the 1,150 miles leg, with one day of calm and a total of 29 engine hours. For the final three days, we were nicely squeezed between high pressure over Biscay and shallow depressions to the north, providing good downwind sailing. We picked up a bad forecast approaching the Fastnet and scuttled into Baltimore Harbour just ahead of a southerly gale, which caused an uncom-

fortable scend alongside the pontoon at Sherkin Island, parting one of our lines. From there, we went up to Courtmacsherry, where we were royally entertained by ICC Sailing Directions Editor Norman Kean and Geraldine. We called at Helvick, then Howth, arriving there early on 4th July. Michael McKee (ICC) and James Nixon (RCC and ICC) joined me in Howth for the sail north. We returned via Greencastle, where the holding is poor, then Portaferry, completing the voyage by picking up James's mooring at Ballydorn on Wed 9th July. The total distance covered since leaving Donaghadee was 7,226 miles.

Witchcraft of Howth is a Contessa 35 designed by Doug Peterson and built by Jeremy Rogers in 1976. She draws 6'.

<i>Witchcraft</i> 2007/8, table of times & distances				
Passage	Dep date	Duration	Dist. miles	Eng. hrs
Donaghadee - Porto Santo	06/08/07	12d 7.5h	1,485	45
Madeira - La Gomera	07/11/07	2d 12h	305	28
La Gomera - Dakar (Hann)	10/11/07	6d 11.25h	830	33
Hann - Banjul	18/11/07	0d 17h	96	1
Up River Gambia to Georgetown & back (numerous anchorages)	23/11/07	13d 9.5h	310	50
Lamin - Ariandaboul (R Casamance)	17/01/08	1d 3h	112	6
R Casamance, Ziginchoir,				
Kachiouane	19/01/08	2d	45	11
Casamance - Bissau	21/01/08	1d 2h	103	16
Bissau - Bolama	22/01/08	0d 6h	41	6
Bolama - Isleus dos Porcos	24/01/08	0d 5h	22	5
Isleus dos Porcos - Rio de Bruce	26/01/08	0d 5.5h	20	5.5
Rio de Bruce - Bubaque	26/01/08	0d 2h	6	2
Bubaque - Caravela	28/01/08	0d 12.5h	78	12.5
Caravela - Banjul (Oyster Creek)	01/02/08	3d 3.5h	184	15.5
Oyster Creek - Hann (Dakar)	07/02/08	1d 11.5h	100	7
Dakar - La Gomera	11/02/08	8d 11.75h	957	77.5
La Gomera - el Hierro	04/06/08	0d 10h	53	5
el Hierro - Sta Maria (Azores)	07/06/08	6d 1h	757	31
Sta Maria - Pta Delgada	17/06/08	0d 11.25h	55	7.5
Pta Delgada - Baltimore	22/06/08	8d 8h	1123	29.25
Baltimore - Courtmacsherry	01/07/08	0d 5.75h	35	0.5
Courtmacsherry - Helvick	02/07/08	0d 10.25h	57	2
Helvick - Howth	03/07/08	1d 0.75h	128	12.5
Howth - Greencastle	07/07/08	0d 8.75h	42	7
Greencastle - Portaferry				
(Strangford Lough)	08/07/08	0d 6.75h	36	1
Totals:		71d 14.5h	6,980	417
<i>Note: total distance logged was 7,226.</i>				

Update notes for yachts visiting Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea Bissau

Note: See pilotage notes for updated information on navigation and facilities. They can also be read at www.rccpf.org.uk/

Introduction

Steve Jones's excellent "Cruising Guide to West Africa" was written over 10 years ago and now requires updating. It is still a very good guide to the three countries covered but some things have changed. The following notes were compiled from information gathered during a cruise in the area in November/December 2007 and January/February 2008. I have only commented on topics or areas covered in the book where changes have taken place or errors have been discovered and which I have actually visited.

General information and planning

GUIDE BOOKS:

The Lonely Planet guide to Senegal and The Gambia has up-to-date information on the main towns and cities and on things to see and do. There is also a good local bird recognition book which is worth carrying. It is A Field Guide to the Birds of The Gambia and Senegal, by Clive Barlow and Tim Wachter, from www.longitudebooks.com or good book-shops. It is useful to reconnoitre before leaving home using Google Earth, which shows a surprising amount of detail.

WEATHER:

The weather was as predicted for the dry season, rather hot and humid in November and early December, less humid and generally more pleasant in late December/January and February. Temperatures hovered around 30°-35° by mid afternoon, dropping to 20°-25° at night. Visibility varied from moderate to hazy. We did not experience any severe Harmattan conditions. Winds early in the season were generally less than we expected, becoming lighter the farther south we went. However, fresh to strong winds between northwest and northeast were experienced on several days on the Gambia River in early December. In late January, northerly winds became well-established from the Guinea Bissau border to about 19°N., after which they became lighter and more variable. No rain fell until just north of Cap Vert on the return passage in February, when some thunderstorms occurred.

CHARTS:

Admiralty charts as listed in the book are still available, but have not been significantly updated. We were unable to source Portuguese charts for Guinea Bissau. These would have been very useful. Once inside the river bars, the charts of Senegal and The Gambia were dimensionally accurate and in most cases the depth information is still reasonably valid. However, detail is lacking. There were older charts of the River Gambia which contain much greater detail but these are no longer available, unless one is prepared to rip them off the walls of bars where they are sometimes displayed. Using electronic charting from Seemap on a laptop, we found that the locational accuracy decreased markedly the farther upriver one progressed, until by Georgetown, approximately 155 miles upriver in the Gambia, the locational error was greater than one mile. One has to assume that the chartwork was not

geodetically corrected and that the charts are not referenced to WGS84. Once out of the rivers, the locational accuracy was satisfactory. However, great caution has to be exercised navigating with GPS in the rivers. This would tend to preclude night passages, which are inadvisable in any case owing to the abundance of unmarked fishing nets.

TIDAL RANGES AND DIFFERENCES:

There no longer seem to be detailed tide tables available for the River Gambia. As Steve says, tidal prediction up the rivers is something of a dark art. It is worth carrying the Volume 2 of the Admiralty Tide Tables, which include enough secondary ports on the West African coast and rivers to be highly useful.

HAZARDS:

The unlit pirogues off the coast are still a problem for night passages. They are encountered surprisingly far out to sea. The strategy of keeping farther offshore to avoid them brings one into the presence of massive fleets of foreign trawlers sweeping up everything in their path. Off the Guinea Bissau coast, there was a solid phalanx of these vessels. They seem to operate without any supervision, presumably under government licences, the revenues from which disappear into some African black hole. We heard many complaints from pirogue fishermen about the effect on their catches from these activities.

BOAT PREPARATION AND EQUIPMENT:

There is still virtually nothing available, except in Dakar, where there is some kind of chandler at or near Mole 10 in the main harbour. It is possible to haul out at the Cercle de Voile de Dakar (CVD) for essential repairs, where a couple of yachts were lying on beach trailers. Limited tidal ranges in Senegal and The Gambia, together with muddy banks and dangerous or non-existent wharves, make drying out difficult. The greater tidal range in the Bijagos Archipelago and harder surfaces make careening a feasible option for cleaning, antifouling or anode replacement. If contemplating much time in the fresh water parts of the Gambia river, you might consider the use of temporary magnesium anodes. I found that a surprising amount of galvanic action had occurred in the 3 months *Witchcraft* was in these waters and speculated that fresh water might have had something to do with it.

Spares and Provisions: Do not assume that you can easily buy antifouling paint. Diesel, petrol and lubricating oil are widely available, as is Butane gas. However, I did not see anybody selling Camping Gaz, so it is worth carrying ordinary Calor Gas bottles and regulator. There is nowhere on the coast where you can safely go alongside, except at Ziginchoir. Hence, all water has to be brought aboard by dinghy. You therefore need a supply of gerricans. The same applies to diesel. Water should be treated with sterilising tablets. An online filter for the drinking water tap is also useful. With these precautions, we had no stomach problems from drinking the water. You will always find when you go ashore with gerricans someone who will arrange to fill them and bring them back. Often this involves travelling some distance by donkey cart or



Heavy construction traffic, Ziguinchor.

taxi and may take some time. Do not grudge the payment of a few dalasis or CFAs for this.

Costs of diesel and other provisions are now much the same in all three countries. Guinea Bissau now uses the CFA as its currency. Typically, diesel cost during my trip was about £0.75 per litre. Dakar and the greater Banjul area have supermarkets, where a reasonable variety of European-type foods are available, except for durable loaves of bread, which we could not find anywhere. Towns and villages have shops which stock staples such as rice, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, cooking oil, etc. Most towns have a market selling local produce. Local fruit and vegetables are good and abundant in Senegal, much less so in The Gambia and Guinea Bissau. Meat is chancy generally, with an almost equal weight of meat and flies on the scales. Ditto fish, which is best bought fresh from dugouts or pirogues. Alcohol is widely available in Senegal and Guinea Bissau. Do not expect the wine to be Grand Cru Classé. A local gin is available in Banjul for the adventurous, which costs the princely sum of £1.50 for a litre bottle. For the suicidal, a spirit known as Cana can be found in the Bijagos. Both Banjul and Dakar have breweries, although beer can be difficult to find in The Gambia upriver, the country being largely Moslem.

HEALTH:

Malaria is the principal problem. It is widespread and Chloroquine resistant, which means taking either Malarone, Doxycycline or Mafloquine Hydrochloride (Lariam). Malarone is expensive and has to be taken daily. Side effects are mild, but it is not recommended for prolonged use, i.e. for a protracted stay. Lariam can have very severe side effects, including but not limited to severe depression, anxiety, paranoia, nightmares, insomnia and seizures. It is recommended that people try it out before travelling, to ensure that they are not subject to these side effects. As it happens, I was able to take it without ill-effects but I have known others who have suffered very badly, including permanent irreversible mental damage. I was never asked for proof of vaccination while in Africa. It is advisable to be vaccinated against Yellow Fever, as there have been recent cases in West Africa. This disease is believed to be carried by apes and monkeys, which are widespread in the cruising area covered. Vaccination against Typhoid, Hepatitis A and B, Rabies, Polio and Tetanus should all be considered. From my observations, it would not be advisable to fall ill in this area of the world. Yachts should also carry antibiotic courses and topical cream, anti-diarrhoea tablets and rehydration salts. A case or two of Delhi belly is quite likely, especially if sampling local street fare, which can be very tempting.

BUGS:

To Steve's impressive list, I would add poisonous spiders, which can inflict necrotising wounds which take a long time to heal and may require surgery. My boat minder in Lamin Creek was bitten by one of these, concealed in a tee-shirt, and had to be hospitalised. I found out about this when I asked him about a large spider, which had spun a web in the rigging of a nearby yacht. He said that all their spiders are poisonous, which you can take with a pinch of salt or not, as you choose. A frequent and unwelcome visitor was the African hornet, a large hovering beast which can give a severe sting. They are not aggressive but like to build nests. I found vestigial nests behind the switch panel below and in the cockpit. Regard all flies as potential biters. Even small house-type flies bite.

Other wildlife is as covered in Steve's book, except that crocodiles are now rare in The Gambia and we only saw one in the Bijagos. Comments about hippos apply to these animals cause more fatalities in Africa than any other. We didn't see any snakes, probably because they saw or heard us first.

OFFICIALS:

I did not meet any officials in Senegal. We entered that country three times, but on each occasion it was a weekend and Senegalese officials apparently don't work weekends. Entering The Gambia, one has to run the gauntlet of immigration, customs and harbour authority. This can be time consuming, hot and frustrating. The only official there to expect a bribe was the customs officer, who insisted on coming aboard in our tiny dinghy and demanded a present. Bars of chocolate and a few tins of soft drink did not satisfy him and he virtually held us to ransom until I paid him 100D, about £2.50. However, when we entered the country a second time, a different customs official signed us off without asking for anything. Guinea Bissau is a different matter. Visas can be obtained from their embassy in Bacau, a suburb of Banjul, without any trouble. However, once in the country, things have changed since Steve Jones's time. We made the mistake of going to Bissau town to clear in. Officials descended on us armed and mob-handed. In spite of having valid visas, I was told that our papers were not in order, we should have had some kind of permit for the boat before entry, etc. This was a prelude to the levying of "Charges" for each person of CFA1,000 per day and CFA5,000 per day for the boat. For a ten day stay, this amounted to about £90 and we were told there would be no more formalities or charges anywhere in the country. Transactions were in cash and receipts were not issued. On top of this, the only official who spoke any English demanded another CFA7,000 for a facilitation fee. However, when we reached Bolama and Bubaque in the Bijagos, each set of officials claimed that we had arrived in a different administrative zone and demanded more "Fees" at similar daily rates. The total added up to around the equivalent of £5 per day for the boat and £2 per day per crew member. As well as cash, demands were for made for "Kind", especially from the medicine chest.

NON-OFFICIALS:

People are generally extremely friendly in all three countries we visited. However, there is a "Bumster" element in the more tourist-frequented areas around Banjul and in Dakar city, who are very persistent and difficult to dislodge. I came across no instances of crime or stealing. It is now much more common for ordinary people to greet one and strike up a conversation than it was when the first edition of this book was published and this is no longer regarded as impolite. However, his comments on dress are still valid and men and women in Senegal and The Gambia do not wear revealing clothing. Shorts

are rarely worn by locals. It is best to observe this convention, although nobody will say anything if you do not.

We were advised to carry a supply of footballs and pumps and these were much appreciated in remote village communities. It is also a good idea to carry plenty of boiled sweets to give to children (although this may not be recommended by dentists).

LANGUAGE:

Previous comments on language are still valid. To add to this, we found that virtually nobody in Guinea Bissau speaks English. Because of the presence of Senegalese fishermen, one can often get by with French, at least at a basic level. We did not speak Portuguese, so cannot comment on the quality of the Criolo, the local Portuguese dialect.

COMMUNICATIONS:

The mobile phone is now widespread in West Africa and the service covers all but the most remote areas. European mobiles work in Senegal and The Gambia but not in Guinea Bissau. In any of these countries, you can purchase a SIM card and credit for a very modest sum. Make sure your mobile phone is not "Locked" if using these. Internet coverage is unreliable. There are internet cafés in Banjul and Dakar but speeds are very slow. The postal service is not to be relied on in any of these countries.

DAKAR

The currency is the CFA, which exchanges at around CFA 950 = £1.00. The only cards which work there are Visa and, to a lesser extent, MasterCard. Bank cards do not work in ATMs here or in The Gambia or Guinea Bissau. Euros are readily exchangeable and are the best currency to carry.

I am told that there is some kind of chandlery, which also sells charts, inside the harbour complex at Mole 2 or Mole 10 (check with CVD).

PORTS AND CUSTOMS:

As we did not clear in or out of Senegal, this information is hearsay; however, at the CVD (Cercle de Voile de Dakar), we were informed that one has to visit Mole 2 and Mole 10 in the harbour area in Dakar itself. The yacht can be left at the CVD.

HANN:

(14°43'.2N, 017°25'.2W). If approaching the anchorage at night, watch out for a sunken schooner just east of the outermost yachts. It has just masts and the top of the deckhouse showing.

The CVD now seems to be the more active club and runs a ferry service. The cost of using the club, including the ferry service, was CFA 4,500 per day, for 2 crew. I think it has a basic charge of CFA 2,500 for the yacht plus 1,000 for each crew member. They are rather casual about this charge, at least at weekends, when the office is closed.

There is a large number of yachts off Hann beach, mainly French. Some are on moorings and look as if they have been there rather a long time. Holding seems to be quite good, in sand. It is advisable to buoy the anchor. Depth is around 3 metres all over the anchorage. When the northeast trade is blowing, there is a very fresh wind across the anchorage, up to force 6 or 7 at times. Good ground tackle and plenty of chain are advisable. You will get wet in the ferry on the way out.

Water containers can be filled at the CVD. It is usual to have a boy do this and take them out to the yacht in the ferry for you. Standard charge for this is CFA 2,000. You may have to pay a deposit of CFA 5,000 for a filter, which is returnable. Diesel



Flying fish for breakfast.

and petrol can also be obtained in the same way at the CVD, for a similar charge plus, of course, the cost of the fuel. There are (tepid) showers at the CVD and you can also wash clothes or get one of the women at the club to do it for you. The club serves basic meals and has a bar. It is rather an agreeable place.

Hann beach is a swarming hive of activity, colour and smells. The pirogue fleet lands its catch there and this is all very colourful. The market is just along the beach from the CVD and is worth a visit, although the smell of rotting fish is quite strong. There are various small restaurants in the vicinity and fresh fruit and vegetables can be bought from stalls nearby.

GORÉE

You can use the north pier there. However, most of the bollards are missing and there is usually one or two pirogues alongside. In a fresh northerly, it is untenable. I have seen yachts moored outside the harbour but this would require very settled conditions. If visiting by ferry, note that it costs a surprising CFA 10,000 return for non-residents. The island is worth visiting, for the museums, restaurants and the general ambiance, which is that of a small southern French hill village, plus goats.

DAKAR TO BANJUL

The route is quite straightforward, the only caution being the ubiquitous unlit pirogues. Going straight to Banjul requires a night passage.

THE GAMBIA

Currency is the Dalasi. The exchange rate is around D 40 = £1.00. Note that the only card which works in this country is Visa. Nothing else works, at all. However, it is easy to exchange pounds, euros or dollars during working hours. Outside working hours or at weekends, there is usually somebody who will do it from a market stall.

APPROACH AND CLEARANCE:

The approaches to Banjul have not changed. The main shipping channel is still buoyed.

The yard at Half Die is now closed. Anchor in about 4m near the moored boats off the disused yard. Do not be tempted to anchor too close, as there is a proliferation of wrecks. The Harbour Office is a blue 4-storey block right in the southeast corner of the harbour complex. Leave your dinghy on the beach near the drawn-up pirogues. You can get out of the yard through the container depot during working hours but this is dirty and hazardous. Alternatively, you have a long, dusty walk through

the shanties west of the yard and round by the road. Immigration is inside the harbour estate, past the Harbour Office and they will stamp passports there. Not all the crew need attend. Before going into the Harbour Authority, you must clear customs, which is at the next gate to the north of the harbour complex, about 200m from the blue building. They may wish to inspect the boat. Patience is required for this and they will expect a present. In exchange for this, you will receive a customs clearance paper. It is useful and impresses the officials to have a ship's stamp for these papers. Take the paper to the harbour officials, who can be found right at the top of the blue building. They will issue you with a permit for the vessel, which costs about D 700 for a month.

Having cleared officialdom, you will probably wish to remain in the area for a few days. Banjul and the surrounding towns are busy and colourful. You have the choice of Oyster Creek or Lamin Creek as anchorages and each has advantages. Oyster Creek is right on the coastal highway at Denton Bridge and it is easy to get bush taxis or minibuses from there to Banjul, Serekunda, etc. However, it is a busy anchorage with a lot of pirogue movements daily. Lamin Creek is farther from towns and shops but is well sheltered and less busy, with excellent holding. A yacht can be left there in safety.

BANJUL TO OYSTER CREEK:

Take particular care when entering Chitabong Bolon, as it is very shallow until you enter the Bolon. Hold very close to the east point. Thereafter, follow the directions carefully. Half tide rising would be best for all but shallow-draught yachts. Going towards Oyster Creek, it is reasonably easy to avoid the large false creek to starboard but coming back it is much more difficult to pick out the correct line at this point. These creeks are not shown in any detail on current Admiralty charts, so follow the pilotage instructions in the book very carefully. You will emerge into Oyster Creek quite suddenly from the winding Turnbull Bolon. Anchor south of the moorings and watch out for a nearly-covered wreck in the fairway. You will be tide-ride and holding does not seem to be particularly good. After a few days there, my anchor was bunched up with chain. There is a wooden jetty and a jumble of shacks dispensing beer or coffee and catering for the charter angling businesses which operate out of Oyster Creek. There is no problem leaving your dinghy ashore. Water is available from the back of the police post on the seaward side of Denton Bridge. You can take your dinghy right down to the beach below the standpipe but courtesy demands that you call into the police station and ask permission. The tap is very slow. Diesel, petrol and lubricating oil are available from a nearby garage. Boys at the shacks will arrange for your containers to be filled for a modest fee, plus the cost of a taxi to fetch them.

LAMIN CREEK:

This is just about accessible at any state of the tide but it is best to make the passage on half flood. A moment's carelessness or disorientation can lead to a grounding but the bottom is soft. There are many spots on the way to Lamin where one could anchor in seclusion. It is all well sheltered once under the lee of Chitabong Island. Lamin Creek is dominated by Lamin Lodge, an idiosyncratic structure on the west bank of the creek which provides cold beer and meals and caters for the river tourist and birdwatching trade. It lies down four kilometres of rough dirt road from the village of Lamin, which is on the main road to Banjul airport. Follow the directions carefully and you should have little difficulty until you approach the anchorage. Keep centre stream until about 1/2 cable downstream of the Lodge, then hold over to the east bank, leaving all the moored boats to

starboard. There is a line of two or three yachts on moorings close to the east bank. Leave these close to starboard and anchor in 3m in line with but past the end of this line. Holding is good. There is an unofficial "Harbour master" there who looks after some of the moored yachts. His name is Llanda and he is reliable. If you wish to leave a boat there, he will look after it for a very modest sum. His mother also does washing and he or other boys at the Lodge can get diesel and water for you. This has to come by donkey cart from the standpipe in the village, so may take some time. Lamin Lodge is owned by a German called Peter Loess, who has been there since the seventies, having sailed there in his own wooden gaffer, now sadly defunct. He is consequently yacht-friendly.

The River Gambia

PLANNING:

The buoyage upstream of Banjul is now completely missing, except for two buoys marking a cable crossing at Farafenni. There seems to be no fee for navigating the river, apart from the boat residence permit mentioned above. In addition to nets, there are fixed fishing installations, often built from a number of dugouts lashed together with poles. These are for prawns and shrimps and do not have any outlying nets or dangers.

The river appears to teem with fish, although we did not have much luck angling for them. You can buy fish from dugout fishermen. D 50 per kilo seems to be the going rate.

There are some concrete or timber wharves and jetties on the river, built for the groundnut trade. None of these is really suitable for a yacht to lie alongside. Many are in disrepair. Also, to repeat the earlier caveat, GPS positions are not reliable up-river. For this reason, no latitudes or longitudes are quoted.

BANJUL TO BINTANG BOLON:

The No. 6 buoy at Dog Island is no longer in place.

James Island does not really offer anything in the way of an anchorage, except in flat calm conditions. The anchorage mentioned upstream of the island is exposed to the prevailing wind and the tidal streams are strong.

BINTANG BOLON:

The entrance to Bintang Bolon is about 25m upstream from Banjul and would make a good first stop on a passage up the river.

Bintang village now has a tourist camp where one can get a meal and a cold beer. However, holding is not good off the camp and it is better to anchor on the opposite side of the creek.

BINTANG BOLON TO FARAFENNI:

The Kemoto Point Hotel is now closed, although the hotel and village are worth a visit. It was quite an ambitious project and gave employment to many local villagers, who are now sadly much reduced financially.

There is no sign of the tourist camp at Tendaba, although we did not go ashore there.

Jurunka Creek is accessible and has 2 metres in the entrance at low water. It winds up past a primitive village and into a large lagoon, with shallow water in the middle. Anchor anywhere convenient. Lots of bird life.

Tabirere Creek, a short distance upstream from Jurunka Creek, is even easier to access, with deep water inside and 3m over the bar. Again, plenty of bird activity and this creek is wider, allowing one to anchor well clear of the banks to reduce unwelcome nocturnal visitations by mosquitos. Approach all of these creeks with care, remembering that banks form naturally on the inside of bends and downstream of points.

Mandori Creek is still as described and is recommended.

The ferry crossing at Madina Creek carries the trans Gambia Highway between Dakar and Ziginchoir. You may be able to lie alongside the spare ferry at Madina Creek. The crew were very helpful. It is 4 km to Farafenni, where basic stores may be purchased and there is a market. It is something of a white-knuckle taxi journey, as the asphalt highway has deteriorated into gaping potholes; consequently, the paved surface in the middle is only used by pedestrians and animals, while the traffic, mainly lorries, thunders along the verges on either side, choosing the side with the best surface, regardless of left or right.

FARAFENNI TO KUDANG TENDA:

You can pass either side of the Elephant Island. We did not encounter many tsetse flies, although Steve Jones mentions them as a nuisance in the fresh water sections of the river.

Kudang Tenda is a traditional fishing village with friendly people. You can anchor off the concrete wharf. The son of the headman will give a guided tour of the village. His house looks out over the wharf. Among his most treasured possessions are Admiralty charts of central America, Brazil and the Caribbean (and now a copy of the Irish Cruising Club Annual for 2003).

KUDANG TENDA TO KUNTAUR:

The channel at either end of Bird Island makes a good anchorage, out of the main stream. Holding is poor off the beach below the Red Hill of Kassang. The hill is worth climbing, as it is one of the very few places where one can get a good view over the river country.

KUNTAUR TO GEORGETOWN:

You should see hippos and chimps as you pass the Baboon Islands. You may not go ashore there and the area is patrolled by wardens. It is possible to visit the islands via the tourist camp nearby on a supervised tour; however, we were unable to contact them on the telephone number given.

Pass the Kai-ai Islands using the north channel. The west (downstream) entrance to the channel is narrow but has plenty of water; however, the channel at the east end of the islands has much less depth than that shown. We slid over some kind of obstruction in the channel just abeam of the northeast end of the largest island.

Georgetown is now also called Jan Jan Buleh. There is an overhead power-line immediately upstream of the ferry crossing. This is supposed to have 16m clearance but locals say it has sagged considerably. This effectively bars the river upstream of Georgetown for other than the smallest sailing yachts.

Georgetown has declined further since the first edition. Power goes off every day from 12.00 to 18.00. There are few facilities. Water and diesel are available. Anchor downstream of the ferry jetty, leaving enough room for the ferry to turn. The Talamanca Bar and Restaurant is run by an enterprising local and is the best local bar to use.

LEAVING THE GAMBIA:

You really should clear out of the country officially; we did not, owing to the time being inconvenient and the hassle of anchoring at Half Die. There were no adverse consequences on our return.

Senegal: The River Casamance

PLANNING:

In settled weather, the entrance is not difficult, although there is usually some breaking water near the bar. An overnight passage is required to reach the bar in daylight from Banjul. It is best to cross the bar on a flood tide. Early flood is optimal, to carry the tide as far up the river as possible. Previous remarks about unlit pirogues apply.

Although the political situation is still unstable, and there was a border war in 2006 involving Guinea Bissau and the Casamance separatist movement, this does not seem to cause problems for visitors and we saw no overt military presence.

Unlike the River Gambia, the buoyage on the River Casamance is mostly still in place and maintained.

The port of entry is Ziginchoir.

Wildlife, especially birds, is prolific on the Casamance. There are bottle-nose dolphins in the river all the way to Ziginchoir.

RIVER CASAMANCE ENTRANCE:

There are three possible passages across the bar, the Passe du Nord, the Passe Mediane and the Passe du Sud. Only the Passe Mediane is buoyed. The large Dakar ferry uses the Passe du Nord, so it must have plenty of water. On the approach, the Safe Water Buoy shown on the Admiralty chart is missing. The No. 1 channel buoy is 1 mile south of the position shown. Its position in Jan 2008 was 12° 32' .5N, 016° 50' W. There is then a buoyed channel leading across the bar, with 4 pairs of pillar and can buoys. The final buoy to starboard is a red can with 2 balls, which may mark a wreck shown on the chart, no longer visible above water. From this, follow a course of 050° magnetic until you pick up the old No. 8 red pillar buoy. This used to mark the inshore end of the buoyed channel and care should be taken not to shape a course for this buoy until inside the bar. Leave the old No.8 a cable or so to port and you should shortly sight a starboard hand lateral buoy, which marks a wreck and also a 3.5m bank.

DJOGUE TO ZIGINCHOIR:

Immediately past Pointe de Nikine, which lies in the mouth of the river south of Pointe de Djogue, is the entrance to Bolon Kachiouane, the channel to the west of Isle Karabane. Since the port of entry is Ziginchoir, you may be entering this on the way back down the river. If so, take great care, as the bank extending north and west from the northwest tip of Isle Karabane is now shallower and more extensive than shown. If entering from upstream, go right past the entrance in midstream until Pte de Nikine bears approximately 145°m before turning in to the point, which should be held close aboard until inside the channel and depths have increased. Bolon Kachiouane has 8-12m inside the bar.

Jones mentions a possible anchorage in Boulababene, the creek just upstream from Pte de Djogue; however, we found depths too shallow to enter this creek at half flood.

The wreck buoy off Karabane is missing. Follow the marked channel up the river as directed.

Marigot Ariandaboul provides a convenient anchorage on the way upriver, with no particular difficulty at the entrance. The bar has about 2m on it. Note that the No. 16 is missing and the No.16b has been moved a little upstream to the edge of the bank south of Pte Djougoute. The odd numbered (starboard hand) buoys have in some cases been moved to reflect changes in the channel but it is generally well marked.

We did not enter Marigot Diagoubel but were told that Elora



Welcoming committee at Kudang Tenda

Creek, the narrow west-tending channel inside, has a village off which yachts can be left at anchor safely.

ZIGINCHOIR:

There were 10 other yachts anchored off the town, nearly all French. The water is quite deep and you will need to anchor in 8-10m, wherever you find a space. The Perroquet restaurant is still there and serves good meals and quite excellent house wine; however, the modern tourist hotel beside it has a jetty with a small pontoon and deep water alongside and a fresh water tap. They don't seem to mind people leaving dinghies there. A visiting yacht came alongside there to take water, the only place in West Africa we saw where this seems to be feasible. It would be courteous to massage the hotel management a little for the use of their facilities, although no charge was sought by them while we were there.

Ziginchoir has a good market and plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, not something easily found in The Gambia.

I don't know anything about clearance formalities at Ziginchoir, as we arrived at a weekend and did not find any officials on duty.

Guinea Bissau

Guinea-Bissau has been in a state of economic meltdown since the first edition of this book. It had a major civil war 9 years ago and there is a sporadic low-intensity conflict on the Cacheu/Casamance border. As if this were not enough, the country, and in particular the outlying islands of the Bijagos archipelago, has become the cocaine smuggling centre for the African continent. Drugs are brought ashore in remote areas of the Bijagos and then ferried to the mainland by fast launch or light plane, whence they are split up for onward shipment to Europe or back to the Americas. This situation appears to be tolerated or even encouraged by Government ministers and senior officials, who are presumably receiving payoffs.

Another activity which is badly affecting the economy and welfare of the people is the rape of the sea fisheries. We came up against a continuous wall of trawlers fishing off the coast, mostly Korean. These trawlers come into Bissau port for R&R and fuel. What their licencing arrangements are is unclear but one has to assume that revenues from licences do not find their

way into the general economy. There appears to be no regulation of their activities and the local pirogue fishermen say that fish stocks are being badly reduced.

Officials, of whom there are many, may not be regularly paid. This is certainly the case with a schoolteacher we met in Bolama, who had not been paid for 4 months. Consequently, officials have to seek a living wherever they can get it, which leads inevitably to sidelines, bribery and corruption. All officials we met in Guinea Bissau, without exception, demanded money and/or goods and materials in kind.

These officials, on first meeting, were rather unfriendly and intimidating. As soon as money had changed hands, however, attitudes changed completely and broad smiles broke out.

We were only boarded once by a military patrol, off the Canal de Santa Caterina, and this was quite alarming, as two Kalashnikovs and an RPG 7 were trained on us. One official, who knew his way around our GPS, asked very hard questions about why we had a waypoint named Cacheu. (It was well off the mouth of the Cacheu river). For this reason, I do not recommend visiting the Cacheu area.

Apart from officials, the people are friendly and helpful. Language is of course a problem, as virtually no English is spoken. Knowledge of Portuguese would be highly useful. Religion is mainly animist or Christian, hence one encounters plenty of pigs and alcohol is generally available and enthusiastically consumed.

PLANNING:

It not necessary, nor recommended, to go to Bissau Town for clearance. The anchorage is exposed and tide-rod, the harbour is choked with traffic and wrecks and there is nowhere to leave a dinghy safely. Officials are predatory. We were charged CFA 90,000 for a 10 day stay, which we were told would cover us for the whole country, including the Bijagos islands; however, both at Bolama and at Bubaque, we were then charged again by immigration and the Policia Maritima, on the grounds that these were different administrative areas.

I did not stay in Bissau long enough to comment on availability of goods and services.

Clearance can be obtained in Bubaque and Bolama.

Virtually no buoys are still in place in Guinea Bissau. There appear to be no functioning lighthouses. The only navigational aids still visible are old stone perches and light towers, all unlit. However, the Admiralty charts of the Canal do Geba and of the Bijagos are still mostly accurate where available in large enough scale (except, as noted below, in the approaches to the Canal de Santa Catarina). Unfortunately, the Bijagos are only partly covered by detailed Admiralty charts.

A visa is necessary before entering the country. The easiest place to get this is in Bakau, a suburb of Banjul, where the Guinea Bissau embassy is located on Atlantic Road. Visas can be purchased over the counter.

The currency of Guinea Bissau is now the CFA, the same as Senegal. These can be obtained in exchange for hard currency, preferably euros. ATMs and banks do not appear to be present in the islands

THE NORTHERN ISLES:

We attempted to enter the Canal de Jeta through the Canal de Catarina. The Canal bore no resemblance to the chart and banks seem to have extended right across the entrance. We did not find it possible to enter.

BIJAGOS ISLANDS:

A deep-keeled yacht is not ideal for exploring these islands with their 6m tidal range, strong currents and lack of detailed

charts. Shallow draft with the ability to take the ground, bilge keels or a lifting keel would extend the cruising area considerably. A comprehensive spares and tools inventory, together with a good medical chest are important. It is probably not possible to have any work done on engines or other equipment.

That said, they are still a wonderful cruising ground and one quite unlike any other in the author's experience. Paradoxically, the difficulties mentioned above have meant that tourism has not yet touched the islands in any quantity. There is some tourism, especially on Bubaque, but it is as yet unthreatening and mainly involves angling and bird and wildlife watching.

BOLAMA:

The buoy marking the south end of the Restinga da Areia Branca is missing but the old steamer wreck shown on the chart 1.7 miles to its northeast is still there and makes a good waypoint (leave it well to port).

Anchor in about 6m to the north of the stone jetty, at about 11°35'N, 015°28'.2W. Holding appears to be reasonable. Tidal streams are not too strong here.

Bolama is an atmospheric place. It gives the impression of having been deserted by the Portuguese administration, which it was in 1941, but the grand colonial buildings are still there, with the old military barracks, all decaying gently. There is an enormous square with diagonal pathways and dry irrigation channels in front of the old administrative building. The main local village is outside the old town. Diesel and basic stores are available from the shops. There are very basic restaurants and bars, not for the faint-hearted. Mussolini's grand and bizarre concrete monument still dominates the sea-front, donated to the town after the crash nearby of an Italian transatlantic flying boat in 1931. Good water is available from a stand-pipe just off the beach, behind some buildings.

BOLAMA TO BUBAQUE:

This area is covered by detailed Admiralty charts and presents no difficulties.

An anchorage recommended by Jones and which we found delightful is at Ilheus dos Porcos. Approach is simple if you follow the directions in the book and the anchorage is well-sheltered, with slackish tides (11°19'.5N, 015°39'.3W). The larger island, which you anchor near, has an excellent beach and is visited only by occasional fishermen, a couple of whom we met and who shared their lunch of fish and groundnuts with us. There are various animist symbols ashore and one has to be careful not to offend the spirits by disturbing any of these. There is more water in the approach than shown previously and it should be accessible at any state of the tide, although, as always in these islands, arriving on a rising tide is to be recommended.

Rio de Bruce makes a useful passage anchorage if heading to Bubaque, as it is difficult to work round Ilha Roxa and back up to Bubaque on one tide. Approaching the entrance to Rio de Bruce, watch the GPS, as the gap in the coast is hard to spot until you are very close. Once sighted, follow the directions in the book. It provides a tranquil creek anchorage with lots of bird life. The entrance is in 11°13'.65N, 015°49'.9W.

Bubaque is not a good anchorage. Tides run through it at up to 4 knot and the water is deep. You have to anchor very close to the beach in 7 or 8 metres (11°18'.0N, 015°49'.8W). It can be difficult to get the anchor to bite and even more difficult to recover it. Because of the strong tides, a tripping line is likely to turn into a terrible bird's nest. Laying a kedge out into the deeper water to hold the boat clear of the beach at the turn of the tide is a possible option, although we lost ours when we left.



Dinghy towing dugout, Ilheus dos Porcos.

Anchor between the ferry pier and the old concrete jetty to the north. The officials' office is at the head of the concrete ferry pier and you must clear in there on arrival. Take great care with dinghy work because of the strong tides. It is advisable to land on the beach, not at the ferry pier. There is a profusion of small shops and businesses in shacks above the pier. Diesel and other basic provisions are available from these.

Bubaque has a several bars and restaurants.

BUBAQUE TO CARAVELA:

Because of the lack of detailed charts, the safest option for a deek-keeled yacht is to leave Bubaque via the Canal de Bubaque, going between Ilheu de Anagaru and Ilha do Galo and following the old buoyed channel through the Canal das Galinhas (buoys now missing), then back out into the Canal de Geba through the Canal de Pedro Alvares. It is a straightforward passage to the anchorage at Caravela, which it is feasible to enter at night by watching the GPS carefully (the passage from Bubaque cannot be completed in daylight).

Otherwise, for the more adventurous or for shallow draft yachts, the directions for Formosa above can be followed as per Plans 75 and 76.

Caravela is a highlight of any cruise to the Bijagos. It is a most attractive island, with a couple of very primitive villages on it. Anchor as shown on the chartlet, in sand, about 3.5m, at 11°33'.7N, 016°19'.5W. Holding is good. The village of Bichau is about 2 miles from the beach, ending in a wood of enormous kapok and elephant trees, from which one emerges into a village unchanged in millenia, except for the football shirts worn by the boys. The footballs and pumps we carried made a big hit here. There are no provisions to be had on Caravela.

Caravela repays dinghy exploration. There is a long (at least 2 miles) creek leading from a sand spit on the beach, with about 1 or 1.5 metres water at high water, then deepening and broadening inside. At first sandy and lagoon-like, the creek narrows and deepens as you go up, palms giving way to mangroves. It has the most prolific bird life we saw anywhere and at least one crocodile.

Caravela is an indifferent anchorage as regards swell, as it is protected from the prevailing wind only by a long sandbank, which covers at high water. Although somewhat rolly, it seems safe enough.