

Medical Mission 1 (May 2009) – A Summary

The Voyage

Our first objective of, "arriving safely in Vanuatu", was achieved on Wednesday 13th May, 11 days out of Sydney, with the dropping of Chimere's considerable anchor in Lenakel Harbour, on the west coast of Tanna Island, at the southern end of the Vanuatu island chain.

The 2,400km passage had been largely uneventful, with favourable winds and following seas making for a comfortable ride much of the way.



The crew ready for action,
(l-r) Martin, Bob, Rob, Kathy & Will
Chimere leaving Sydney, 2 May 2009

Medical Team Arrives

Customs, immigration and quarantine formalities were dealt with over the course of the first few days and then on Friday 15th May the medical team arrived. These were the people we'd be transporting to remote villages over the course of the next two weeks and included:

- The local director of the Vanuatu Prevention of Blindness Project, Richard Tatwin,
- The Vanuatu Government eyecare worker for the region, Morrison
- Four Australian volunteers:
 - Carla Dinardo (Optometrist)
 - Hugo Huygens (Doctor/surgeon)
 - Kat Owens (Optometrist)
 - Margie Lee (Casualty nurse)
- Plus the Australian coordinators and founders of the program, Don and Meg MacRaild

In addition to having transported the many boxes of glasses and medical equipment for use in the clinics, our role was to offer transport and logistics and to be available in the event of patient evacuation, should it be required.

Along with the medical team came an additional crewmember and 50% owner of the boat, Andrew Latimer, who would assist with work aboard over the next two weeks.



Medical Team 1, (l-r) Kat, Carla, Margie,
Meg, Don, Morrison, Richard & Hugo

Working On Land

For the first few days the medical team worked in the coastal regions of Tanna and despite the large amounts of rain, were still able to make their way from village to village along bush tracks by means of a locally hired 4wd.

The standard vehicle-of-choice in this region is the 4wd ute, which have an amazing capacity for carrying "gear", including people, goods, animals and equipment - mostly all at the same time. They just keep going, which is fortunate because the roads are generally poor and after rain, (of which there is quite a lot) either very poor or impassable.

After five days anchored at the confined, rocky and quite treacherous Lenakel, we moved around to Port Resolution on the south east coast of Tanna. By contrast, this was a wonderfully smooth anchorage and it was here that we finally took aboard the medical team on Sunday 24th May, after they had concluded their final clinic in the region and after the compulsory climb to the nearby active volcano, Mt Yasur.

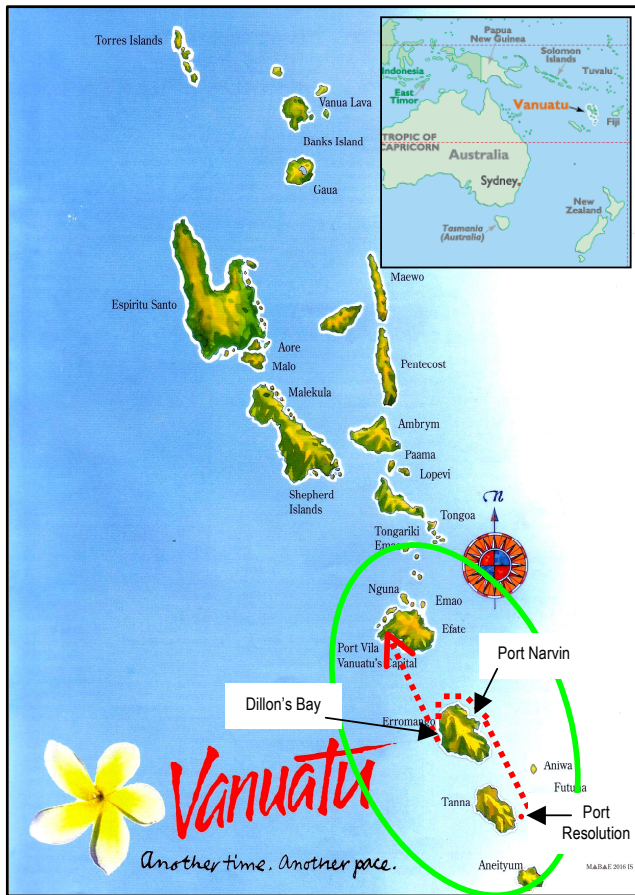
First Medical Transport

It was officially on this day that we finally began to do what we'd come all this way to do – that is, transport medical volunteers.



Medical clinic waiting list (queue) Tanna.

The task involved relocating the medical team of eight, 100km north to Port Narvin on the east coast of Erromango Island, where a clinic was to be conducted the next day.



I'd like to say that this first "nautical journey of the medicos" was a sunny, bright, smooth affair, but unfortunately that was not the case. It might have started that way, but after an hour at sea, the wind was on the nose, the rain began to fall and the waves made everything very, very uncomfortable. Basically, it was cold and wet with the sun disappearing along with the initial high spirits and excitement.

Late afternoon, however, was a different matter. The sun came out, the passengers emerged on deck and there was even a hint of frivolity in the air as we closed in on our final destination.

Upon arrival at Port Narvin, accommodation was found for the medical team ashore and the crew of Chimere set about transporting them ashore along with their gear.

The next day dawned sunny and calm and it's amazing what a difference a good night's sleep can do to the mood – along with a brilliant sunrise.

The clinic went well and after a fast trip by local motorboat around to the nearby village of Ipota, in Cooks Bay, the next day, it was back on board for a leisurely

sail around the top of Erromango to Dillon's Bay on the west coast.

This was a magic ride, made all the more memorable by the presence of dolphins at the bow and a wonderful sunset.

The medical team slept aboard upon arrival at Dillon's Bay, with the next day's clinic starting early after all the required boxes had been ferried ashore.

Overnight Sail To Port Vila

By mid afternoon the last of the medical boxes had been loaded back aboard the boat and it was time to weigh the anchor again, this time for the 145km overnight sail north to Port Vila on the island of Efate.

Once again, the seasonal weather returned with a steady southeast trade wind driving us forward at a steady pace, enabling us to enter the Port Vila harbour in time for breakfast. The calm conditions enabled the medical team to get a good night's sleep (in their own bunk) as the crew took it in turns to keep watch throughout the night.

There was a two hour delay upon arrival in Pt Vila as we waited to clear customs (something we were not able to achieve down at Tanna) then it was straight to a marina berth at the Yachting World sea wall. It was Thursday 28th May and this effectively marked the end of our transport role with the first medical team.

Port Vila was a time for some crew to leave and for new crew to arrive for the sail north to meet up with the second medical team, which would be arriving on June 18th. It was also the off-loading point for much of the gear transported from Sydney, including two donated "edging machines", (used in the shaping of glass lenses) each of which weighed more than 40kg.

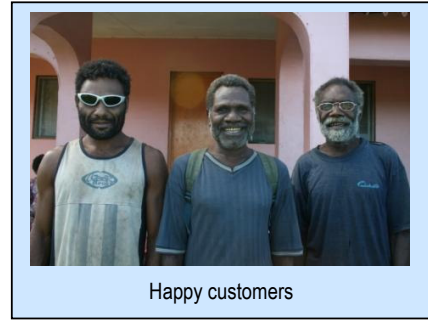


Transporting boxes for a clinic, Dillon's Bay Erromango

Facts & Figures

In talking with Don MacRaid, who fulfils a multitude of roles including “record keeper”, the medical statistics for the 10 days of in-the-field work are as follows:

Locations worked on Tanna and Erromango	13
Patients seen	1027
Prescription glasses provided	430
Sunglasses provided,	415
Referrals for eye surgery	50
Fares paid for transport to Tanna	10
Further medical treatment diagnosed	210
(Conditions diagnosed included Yaws, ear infections, Diabetes, high and low blood pressure, tropical ulcers, lipomas, heart problems of varying types.	



One child has been organized for heart surgery in Brisbane in August another child is to be brought to Vila when the next heart team visits for proper diagnosis and fares for this have been organized. If surgery is required for this child we will try to get him into the ROMAC program in Australia. (Rotary Club)
A 10 month old baby with an occipital lipoma was found and she will be brought to Vila for surgery. Funds have been provided for this.

In reflecting on the past month, the voyage from Sydney, the time spent at Tanna and then the work involved in actually transporting the medical team north through Erromango to Efate I can really only describe it as incredibly rewarding. The medical volunteers were highly motivated and inspiring and the local people, in the villages where we worked, were not only appreciative but were incredibly welcoming, generous and open.

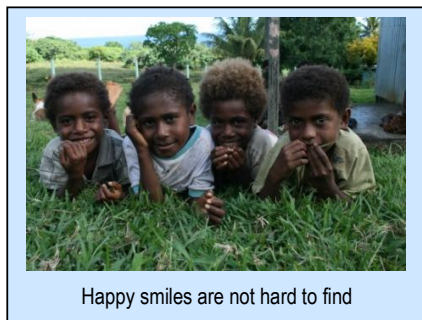
We look forward to assisting the next medical team as they work in the Central Vanuatu region in June and then two further medical teams in the northern region throughout July.

Robert Latimer

www.msm.org.au

PS Don't forget the Pt Vila “Holiday Package”, Aug 6-13. Details on the following page.

Be quick before it's all booked out.



Vanuatu ISLANDS

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on a twin share
basis.

Including

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- Return airport transfers
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- The Round Island Safari Tour
- Free day-sail aboard Chimere

Cost from
Sydney \$1,305.



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Background

This holiday package has been prepared for friends and supporters of **Medical Sailing Ministries (MSM)** by **Signature Travel** in North Ringwood, VIC. Prices and availability are subject to change and bookings should be made soon, direct with Signature Travel on (03) 9876 4166. Variations to the package can be arranged. This holiday package is not connected with the volunteer transport work of MSM.

For more information contact Robert Latimer on 0428 370579