

## Trip on the Manamo River, Venezuela

### Introduction

This is a diary about a trip on the Manamo River in August 2011 by the yachts Alba, Blackthorn Lady and Pogeyan.

We have also drawn a map of the area with various Cruising Notes which is in a separate document.

A copy of these documents can be downloaded from our website:

<http://www.thehowarths.net/downloads.html>

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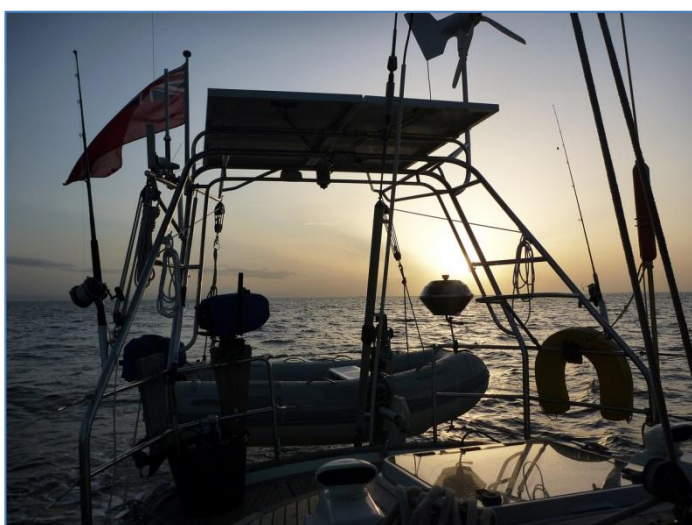
### 19 August 2011 Chagaramus to Five Islands, Trinidad

I woke up excited that we're finally going to leave Power Boats marina and go off on a mini adventure.

I spent the morning running about buying last minute things and finishing off a few essential jobs. In preparation for the River Manamo, I bought a Fortress anchor which is supposed to hold well in soft mud. My credit card was red hot by lunchtime.

Glenys went to West Mall to pick up some more malaria tablets, but got stuck in a traffic jam for 1½ hours which was caused by a land slide – she wasn't happy when she finally arrived back at the boat.

After lunch, we tidied up and went to check out. It took over two hours because "Blackthorn Lady" & "Pogeyan" were both clearing out at the same time and the customs guy was a complete idiot. We arrived back at the boat at quarter past four loaded with the last minute food shopping and enough duty free booze to kill a small elephant. The next stop was to fill up with fuel and we only just had time to motor around to Five Islands before the sun went down. We had a few beers with Steve & Rixzene from "Pogeyan" and Ian & Jackie from "Blackthorn Lady" to discuss the trip. The group decided to leave at three o'clock in the morning.



*En-route to the Manamo River*

### 20 August 2011 Five Islands to Rio Manamo, Venezuela

I must admit to groaning when the alarm went off at half past two. There wasn't a breath of wind, so we hoisted the main sail and motored south west. We both had a one hour kip before breakfast.

The wind didn't pick up at all, so we motored for nearly ten hours. It was so calm (and boring) that Glenys retired below to finish sewing the mosquito net for the cockpit. I sat and read a set of cruising notes about the River Manamo that have been prepared by other cruisers who have visited the area. An extract from the Cruising Notes:

*The Manamo River is one small finger in the vast delta that empties the Orinoco River into the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Pariah. The Orinoco River,*

*the eighth largest in the world, is 2,140 km long and its watershed encompasses seventy percent of the national territory of Venezuela. Two thousand rivers are tributaries and feed more than one quadrillion cubic meters of water annually into the Atlantic Ocean.*

*The Orinoco has formed one of the largest deltas in the world. The 40,000 sq km delta is known as the Delta Amacuro and is a region of wild forests, damp jungles and mangrove swamps which are woven with the rivers and channels that empty the waters of the Orinoco through more than 70 major mouths. In this labyrinth, the waters are constantly forming channels (canos) and islands where the moriche palms thrive.*



**Approach to the Manamo River**

haven't officially entered the country, but they don't seem to care.

Pedernales is a very sleepy little town and there wasn't much going on. We were unable to get anyone to change our US dollars into Bolivars, so we couldn't buy anything. The only interesting thing was seeing Scarlet Ibis wandering about the edge of the river – they are a brilliant red colour and unconcerned with the locals (who also ignore these beautiful birds.)



**Guardia Nacional Dock, Pedernales**

The approach to the river mouth starts about seven miles out and is along a wide channel which is around 4 metres deep, going around very shallow patches. We used the GPS coordinates provided by the cruising notes and they are bang on - thank goodness for GPS because it would have been very tricky using transits and other older navigation methods.

We anchored off the small town of Pedernales at one o'clock and went to see the Guardia Nacional to clear in. We speak very little Spanish and they spoke no English, but we managed to let them know that we want to be here for a couple of weeks. They wrote our details down in a ledger and that was it. We

In the evening, "Pogeyan" and we had to move because we were both anchored where there are cables running across the river bed to a small village – we were told to anchor to the north of the Guardia Nacional dock. We invited "Pogeyan" and "Blackthorn Lady" for drinks. They were suitably impressed by our cockpit mosquito net, although it wasn't necessary because there was a stiff breeze.

#### **21 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

The others had gone by time we surfaced. After breakfast, we pulled up our anchor which was a mission

because the chain kept getting snagged on some obstruction on the sea bed. We headed off around the point from Pedernales into the Manamo River. The delta mouth is about a mile wide at this point and there is a shallow bar that sticks out half way across the river. We nearly went aground a couple of times. When coming into the start of the river, the charts show a shoal area to the west and we went too far towards the shore - I



had to slam into reverse when the depth gauge dropped down to 2.2 metres – we draw 2.0 metres. It was a pretty tense hour of watching the depth gauge, trying to get into the river and working out which way to turn when it was getting shallow. Fortunately, once we were in the river, the depth varied between 6 and 10 metres deep.



**Warao Indians**

*canos and to access fields cleared in the island forests. The dugouts range in size from a few meters for small children, to craft ten meters or more holding 40 to 50 people. Giant sassafras and ceiba trees are preferred for construction of the larger craft as the durability of the wood gives a useful life of up to 10 years.*

The main river is about a quarter of a mile across - much wider than I expected. The jungle is very thick on both sides and the water stays deep to within 20 metres of the tree line. There are plenty of Scarlet Ibis which fly overhead, so we soon gave up pointing them out to each other. We took it nice and slow and enjoyed a gentle two hour trip up the river to Ibis Island.

Once we had anchored near to "Pogeyan" and "Blackthorn Lady", we had several groups of Warao Indians visit us. The cruising notes say the following about these indigenous natives:

*The Warao (15,000 est. in 1987) rely on dugout canoes to fish for morocotos in the*



**Moriche palm**

*Palafitos, rectangular pile dwellings supported on the trunks of the moriche palm are the typical dwellings in the bajo delta. Walkways, also supported on piles often connect various dwellings. The platform of the dwelling is made of two layers of split palm trunks, covered with a layer of clay. Two central forked posts support the ridgepole. The roof is thatched with fronds of the termiche palm. The ends and sides are open although the roof slopes nearly to the level of the floor. Most of the villages are concentrated near the Atlantic and the Warao often travel to Tucupita or Barrancas to trade.*

*The moriche palm is the Warao's tree of life. From it they extract flour, called yuruma for bread, fat grubs, which they eat fried, boiled or raw, a wine called guarapo de moriche and a drink called mojibo. The moriche seeds are also eaten. The top of the palm sprout is beaten, split and twisted into strands used to make sails and twisted into heavier cords and ropes. The Warao also make wax candles for lighting, extract oil from the castor bean and sassafras for medicinal uses and sejo, palm tree oil which is used for medicinal purposes and for frying food. The Warao also weave moriche baskets, which they dye with extracts from the moriche and other nuts and seeds and the barks of various trees. Baskets are also made*

*from small cane (itirite). Also woodcarvings are made from the soft wood of the buttress roots of the sangrito (Dragon's Blood Tree).*

The first Warao to arrive were children from the nearby village. The boys came in a pirogue with a powerful 40hp engine, while three girls arrived in a dugout canoe. They didn't have anything to trade and have obviously come to expect hand-outs. We gave them sweets and the odd little trinket.

We had another family that came for hand outs. It's very odd. They come alongside, speak no Spanish or English and just stand there patiently waiting and smiling expectantly. Glenys gave the children a couple of sweets and eventually they left. They came back later with some small items to trade. Glenys traded a towel, some soap and a t-shirt for some beads and a small woven basket.



*Glenys welcomes a boat load of Warao Indians*

slowly at first and then lift off in a spectacular flock with a great rush of noise. Unfortunately most of them seemed to have found somewhere else to roost. Even so, it was nice and peaceful drifting slowly in the dinghy and we heard a troop of Howler Monkeys in the distance.

We pottered about in the morning doing a few jobs and then left about two hours after the others. The river is a maze of waterways and it's a bit scary being alone because the channels all look the same and it would be easy to become disorientated. The Navionics electronic charts that we have on our portable chart plotter are surprisingly accurate. The general shape of the canos and islands is correct but the GPS position is a quarter of a mile out at times. The hand drawn map with the cruising notes is very useful and is our main guide to getting south.



*Trading with Warao Indians*

After lunch, we did a few little jobs and went for a quick explore down a small cano in the dinghy. There wasn't much to see, so we spent the rest of the afternoon mooching about.

We all congregated on "Pogeyan" for a pot luck barbeque dinner to watch the Ibis arrive to roost for the night. In past years, there have been thousands of them, but there didn't seem to be very many this evening. There was a spectacular thunderstorm and heavy rain as night fell.

## **22 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

The alarm clock went off just before six o'clock and we climbed into the dinghy to go and see the Scarlet Ibis leaving their roost. We have been told that they leave

We passed three Warao villages on the way. The first village had already visited us for hand outs yesterday, but repeated the process as we passed their village. The second settlement was much larger and we were literally mobbed by about 10 large pirogues full of children. Again they had nothing to trade – just expecting hand-outs. We didn't see anyone from the third village and found out later that there is a huge swath of water hyacinths at the water's edge and they can't get through.

"Pogeyan" and "Blackthorn Lady" were anchored ½ mile from another large Warao village. As soon as we dropped anchor, we spotted a small group of River Dolphins swimming around the anchorage. They are strange, mottled pink creatures with long snouts. I went up the spreaders to try to get a good photograph of them, but the best I could get was a blob in the water. We also heard a group of Howler Monkeys to the east of us.

The Warao Indians arrived in droves, but at least they all came with something to trade. I was starting to get despondent about the previous villagers begging. Glenys had a fun time bartering for baskets and



bracelets. She now has an established process where she first chooses one or two items from the many being offered. Glenys will then get a small selection of items that she is willing to trade and lays them out on the deck, indicating how many items she is willing to trade. It's all small items like toothpaste, pencils, colouring books, small towels, clothing, soap, dress material, etc. Interestingly, it seems to be only the ladies and older girls who make the final selection. The fun part is watching the ladies touch the various objects trying to decide which one they want. They are torn between the practical items like soap and the more frivolous items like pencils for the children. Most times they end up with a choice between two items and go for the practical object, at which point, Glenys cracks up and hands them both items. We're worried that we're going to run out of things to trade – we should have brought more sweets and cheap clothes (especially ladies tops.)



*Traditional Warao Dwelling*

After trading with about ten boats, there was a short lull, so we jumped into the dinghy and went for a ride up a small cano – more jungle and mangroves, but there was one little stream through beds of water hyacinth which was a welcome relief from jungle. We didn't see any wild-life, so we went over to have a look at the Warao village.

The dwellings are more traditional here than downstream – the roofs are made from palm leaves rather than corrugated iron sheeting and there are intricate wooden walkways between the buildings. They also seem to be a lot more organised than the previous villages, with some evidence of traditional activities, I saw one guy handling big branches of palm leaves – I assume that it was Moriche Palm. There is however,

evidence of modernisation with electricity cables strung on poles, some more solid looking buildings (with government notices) and 75hp Yamaha outboards everywhere you look.

We had drinks and nibbles on "Blackthorn Lady". The mosquitos and horse flies haven't been a problem – we were expecting to be continually fighting the little beasts. I didn't put on any mosquito repellent this evening and wasn't bitten at all. This is the first time in a month, after constantly battling the little blighters in Power Boats.



*Bora of Water Hyacinth float by*

## **23 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

We were actually cold last night, even when covered by a sheet. It was a cool, over cast morning and the current was against us, so we waited for an hour until the tide turned and headed south.

There was a big bora (raft) of Water Hyacinths lodged against our anchor chain, so I lashed a machete to a mooring hook and cut it away – the plants are surprisingly tough and I had to cut down for two feet before breaking it apart. Rixzene told me later that the best way to get the hyacinths off is to motor forwards then to reverse back leaving the bora separated from the chain. Whilst in the dinghy, I noticed that the boat is sitting 2 inches lower in the

water because we are now floating in fresh water. I hope that the barnacles that we picked up in Chagaramus are dying and falling off our hull.



**Warao Indian Children**

Once on our way, we had to dodge bora of water hyacinths which are floating by on the current. These apparently have small eco systems of their own with frogs and even snakes living on the larger ones. We were stopped by a few Warao Indians whilst motoring past their dwellings and traded for some more small things.

We stopped at a side cano and went for a short tour in Pogeyan's dinghy with Steve and Rixzene. We saw a couple of locals fishing with a line – possibly for piranha? I was quite excited to see a couple of Toucans fly overhead. We heard howler monkeys, but didn't see any.

Our anchorage for the evening was at the south end of Isla Monos (Monkey Island) just off an small "Eco-resort" called Boca Tigre Lodge. They can take 30 guests who come out to see the jungle and the Warao Indians. We all went to the bar to see if we could organise a trip into the jungle or something, but no one could tell us if it was possible or how much it would be.

We invited the others for dinner and we didn't bother to put the mosquito netting up in the cockpit – a BIG mistake. Just as the sun went down, I felt a mosquito bite my leg. About 30 seconds later, we were invaded

by hundreds and hundreds of big, black mosquitos. I got out the cockpit mosquito net, but with six people trying to help, we got into a tangle with it and it took five minutes to sort it out. By this time, the inside of the mosquito netting and the boat were swarming with the little black buggers.

I produced the tennis racquet zapper and we started to kill them, but there were too many. We retreated down below while I sprayed the cockpit area with insect killer (called BOP). I then started to BOP the inside of the boat and we all fled back into the cockpit. Ten minutes later, all of the surfaces of the inside of the boat (carpet, upholstery, table, etc) were speckled with hundreds of dead black bodies. Glenys had to stop making dinner and Hoover the carpet while the rest of us were still trying to kill the insects that had survived in the cockpit. It was an hour and a half of chaos, before we settled down to eating dinner. I later found 25 dead mosquitos on my chart table in a small 2 square foot area.

## **24 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**



**Pogeyan and Blackthorn Lady**

I didn't sleep very well, worrying about mosquitos and things that bite in the night. We also didn't bother to put up our hatch cover so, when it rained, Glenys had to shut the hatch. It then became very hot in the cabin, so I had to get up at four o'clock and put up the hatch cover.

Rixzene organised a tour guide in the morning. Our first stop was up a small cano where we donned wellies and walked through the muddy jungle while the guide pointed out various trees which the Warao Indians use. It was hard to understand the fine detail because it was all in Spanish, but he pointed out a moriche palm and extracted a big fat grub which he offered





*Glenys showing off her Piranha*

around to be eaten. When there were no takers he ate it himself – nice.

We then went fishing for Piranha for an hour or so. The Piranha live in small canos and not in the main river. We used simple fishing poles with a small ½” long hook and small chunks of uncooked chicken for bait. The secret is to attract the Piranha by splashing the water with the end of the fishing pole to simulate an animal that has fallen in the water. Glenys and I caught one each, which we cooked later and shared with everyone else as a starter for dinner.

The guide then took us to a Warao Indian habitat. I was very uncomfortable at the way that we walked into their home and stared at their meagre possessions. The building is very, very basic consisting of a rough wooden floor suspended about six feet above the muddy shore on poles with a roof thatched with palm leaves. There appeared to be about 30 people including children living in the one that we visited and I guess that they all sleep in hammocks or on the floor. Clothes are either hanging from the roof on string or in small piles. They were weaving a traditional hammock on a simple loom. It’s incredibly basic living, but they have electricity, a TV and there was a 40hp Yamaha engine being repaired

on the floor.

We went back to our luxury yachts and spent the afternoon lounging about in the heat – not a breath of wind. I’ve started an audio Spanish course – a bit late but I need to learn the language. I find it very frustrating not being able to communicate with people. The guide came back after five o’clock and took us down the river where we saw three troops of howler monkeys in trees right on the edge of the river.



*Warao Indian Dwelling*

“Pogeyan” is a large catamaran with a big lounge, glass doors and air conditioning. Following the “Night of the Mosquitos” yesterday, we were concerned about being attacked again by insects, so Rixzene and Steve invited us to their boat where Jackie cooked a meal.

#### **25 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

I felt a bit dull this morning – too much duty free red wine last night. The current was against us first thing in the morning, so we did some small jobs until eleven o’clock.

The river is 30 metres deep here. We decided to hug the outside of each bend in the river and were able to motor along about 25 metres from the shore and look at

the jungle – we managed to get a reasonable photo of a wild curassow, which are the size of chickens and roost in the riverside bushes.

There were a few small dwellings at first and we were met by the inevitable children in their canoes. Some came to trade and others for hand-outs. We then hit a stretch where there were several villages and we were

inundated by happy smiling faces – it gets a bit wearing having to slow down all the time. Glenys did quite a bit of trading and handed out some cookies that she made yesterday.



**More Trading**

One of the tips that we picked up from the cruising notes was to put all traded items into a plastic bag and BOP them with insect killer. This is definitely a good idea - Glenys had a weevil thing squirm out of one basket onto her hand as it was passed to her. She flicked it over the side.

The Orinoco Delta Lodge is ½ mile up a small cano which branches right off the main river. The entrance is very shallow in the north-western part of the river, so we favoured the southern side. We were too far to the south and nearly went aground just off the small village on the shore. We eventually made it to the Orinoco Delta Lodge at four o'clock. As soon as we had anchored, we had a small

pod of River Dolphins swimming around the boat – I still didn't manage to get a decent photograph of them.

We had a quiet night alone. It's great cruising in company, but the constant partying is getting too much for my liver. We put up the cockpit mosquito netting and watched hundreds of big black mosquitos trying to get in as darkness fell. At the height of it, there were 20 mosquitos per square foot on the netting. Hundreds of tiny flies were still getting through the mesh of the netting, but they didn't seem to bite and were just attracted by the cockpit light. I rigged up a holder for the insect zapper next to the light, stuck the button to "on" and watched one insect per second get zapped for the next three hours.

## **26 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

It was a hot night and I woke up at three o'clock having been bitten. I switched on the light and used the zapper to clear the room.



**More happy smiling faces**

The first job in the morning was to remove the mosquito netting and hang it up on the front deck to shake out the insect bodies. Then I swept up the hundreds of small fly bodies from the cockpit.

Rixzene, Jackie and Glenys went for a dinghy ride back to the main river to visit a small settlement, where some small boys had given some of us necklaces as gifts. Rixzene wanted to go and give them some more things in return. As they went alongside a dugout canoe by the shore, the children came down and gifts were exchanged. One little girl had a Toucan on her hand and one of the ladies was holding a small monkey.

Glenys and I went for dinghy ride for a mile up the river and down a small cano. I tried fishing for Piranha using my spinning rod and some dried salted fish for bait. I had a few nibbles but caught nothing. We saw little else apart from a Toucan high up in a tree.

Back at the boat, there was a little bit of excitement when a blue and gold macaw flew onto Pogeayan and then onto our boat. It was obviously a parrot from the Lodge (saying "Ola" all of the time), but was a fun photo opportunity.



We all went for dinner at the Lodge. They only have a few guests staying and we had to give them advanced notice that we wanted to eat dinner. There was only a set menu with no choice, but for \$20US per person, the food was good. We gleaned some more information from the staff about the electric cable strung across the river at Boca de Uracoa and the fact that we can buy diesel there. A guide from a small group of Germans was able to exchange some US dollars for bolivars at an exchange rate of 7 bolivars to a dollar. We all had \$20 worth which will be enough to buy a few things in Boca de Uracoa tomorrow.



*Blackthorn Lady in the morning mist*

further off the shore.

There were lots of Water Hyacinth boras to negotiate in the main river and the mist soon lifted to give us another nice sunny day. The scenery has now changed quite dramatically. The thick jungle is giving way to farmed land and plantations, while the housing is much sturdier, with walls, roofs, doors and windows. These seem to be villages that have been set up by the government, as the houses are very similar in construction. I even spotted a basketball court and children on bicycles. The locals still have dugout canoes, but not many came out to see us. Those that did just came to stare and not to trade.



*Grocery shop in Boca de Uracoa*

only a couple of shops and food stalls. The main grocery shop doesn't have any sign, but can be found by the crowd of people hanging about outside the small frontage. There are red iron gratings stopping anyone going into the shop and you have to ask the shop keeper for the items that you require - shop lifting is obviously a problem around here. Glenys bought a bag of twenty four bread rolls for 18 bolivars which she shared with the other boats.

## **27 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

It was a hot, still evening, so Glenys slept in the cockpit last night. She said that it was very pleasant listening to the jungle noises rather than the whirr of a fan in the cabin, but our cockpit seats are a bit narrow to sleep comfortably. I had a mosquito free night, if a little hot. It's Saturday, so we took our weekly malaria pill today.

It was a beautiful, misty morning. We all left at seven o'clock because we wanted to get over the shallow entrance at high water. The lowest depth of water that we recorded was 2.8 metres about 30 metres from the south east shore right next to the village. Again, I think that we should have been

We had the current with us for most of the trip and, after a couple of hours, we took the right hand branch in the river towards Boca de Uracoa. It took us 4½ hours to reach the electrical cable strung across the river, where we anchored on the east side in seven metres of water. The holding was once again surprisingly good - I expected more soft mud in the river, but our 60lb CQR seems to dig in well. Perhaps the bottom is hard sand due to the fast flowing current.

Glenys and I went into town to have a look around and hopefully buy lunch. Boca de Uracoa is a real one horse town. There are very impressive, gaily painted concrete water taxi stands on the river front, but beyond that there is one main street with

We bought a couple of pasties from one of the food stalls, which contained a shredded beef concoction - tasty if a little greasy. Having exhausted the possibilities of the town, we climbed back into the dinghy and motored around the corner into a small cove where we found "Pogeyan" and "Blackthorn Lady" at the fuel station filling up jerry cans with diesel. They bought 150 litres of diesel for 7.5 bolivars which is approximately \$1 US – that makes diesel only three US cents per gallon. Being the only fuel dock between here and Pedernales, it's a very busy place with hordes of local boats filling up a staggering variety of containers with fuel.



**Fuel Dock, Boca de Uracoa**

There's a small bar next to the fuel dock, where we managed to get US dollars changed at a rate of 8 bolivars to one US dollar. We bought a case of beer for \$15 US which makes beer \$2.15 US per litre which is 71 times more expensive than diesel.

I'd estimated that we'd used over 100 litres of fuel with all the motoring that we have done in the past week, so we borrowed some of Pogeyan's jerry cans to fill up our tanks as well. I had a bit of a minor disaster when our tank overflowed after putting in only 75 litres of fuel. We had nasty, smelly diesel running down our beautiful teak decks. However, a bit of washing up liquid soon sorted that out. I just hope that the

diesel tank vent pipe is higher than the filler pipe, otherwise we'll have smelly diesel in the bilges.

We invited the others over for dinner and the mosquitos weren't as overwhelming as previous nights – perhaps it is a little bit windier here? A few of the devils managed to get past our defences though and the zapper was deployed at various times. The Polar Lite beer that we bought today is tasteless. What's with Lite Beer anyway – surely that's an oxymoron?

## **28 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

We had a chilled out morning waiting for the current to turn, to start taking us back downstream. Glenys worked on a big sun shade to cover the main boom while I mooched about, editing photographs and writing this diary.



**Thunderstorm**

We ran the water maker and the output is amazing. It normally produces 45 gallons per hour but because we're in fresh water, I reckon that it's outputting at least twice as much – about 100 gallons per hour. We only had to run it for 15 minutes and we filled two big jerry cans with water for "Blackthorn Lady".

We decided to go back to the Orinoco Lodge and try to arrange a fast pirogue to take us on a day trip to Tucupita tomorrow. We had a little bit of wind as we left Boca de Uracoa and put up our sails, but soon ground to a halt in the fluky winds. The trip back to the Lodge was uneventful, but we had to pick our way through areas of quite dense water hyacinth once we were back on the main river.





**More Trading**

major hazard when it gets windy, but it will keep the boat considerably cooler while we are sitting in a calm anchorage. I decided that I'd draw a map of the Manamo River with notes about the various things that we have discovered. It can then be added to the cruising notes that are being shared by cruisers



**Trading is serious business**

into swimming shorts to continue to steer down river. Glenys retreated below and cooked a roti for lunch.

It was around low water when we entered the cano for the Orinoco Lodge and we recorded a depth of 2.3 metres at a few points. Our nervousness was made worse by the approach of a huge thunderstorm which was giving us gusts of 20 knots as we edged our way over the shallows. We had lashing rain and 30 knot gusts as we approached the anchorage, so I just dumped the anchor using the windlass control in the cockpit and we sat and waited for the storm to pass.

We tried to get a trip down to Tucupita, but they wanted \$180US and we would have to leave at five o'clock in the morning because they are taking some other guests to Boca de Uracoa first. We decided that they were trying to overcharge us so we declined. We had dinner on "Pogeyan" – no problems with the mosquitos behind the patio doors in their saloon.

### **29 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

We had another morning of waiting for the tide to turn. Glenys finished off the white sun shade for the main boom. It's massive and will probably be a

We set off at eleven o'clock and negotiated the shallows at the entrance to the cano. The trip down the river was quiet with only two groups of Warao Indians coming out to see us. The first were in two boats – a small dugout with three young boys and a larger boat being rowed by eight children. We started to slow down, but we were still going at two knots when a small boy at the front of the dugout grabbed a fender. Glenys told him to let go, but before he could, he tipped the whole canoe over. The dugout turned upside down and immediately filled with water. The children in the other boat thought that this was hilarious and, as we drifted off, they were helping the boys on board their boat and bailing out the canoe.

We stopped to trade with another boat from a village and Glenys finally managed to get four plate mats. Hopefully that is all that we need now. The elderly lady who was in charge of the boat was good at negotiating and fleeced us for a lady's blouse, a belt, a baseball cap AND a bar of soap. Her serious face was a joy to watch as Glenys communicated in sign language and poor Spanish.

Just after noon, the clouds started to build as a big thunderstorm approached. We were hammered by very heavy rain and 20 knot winds. I had to change

We anchored next to the Boca Tigre Lodge. Ian and I went to see if we could get a trip to Maturin, which is a big town further to the west. The only guy that we could find wasn't very helpful - this lodge always seems to be shut down. Looking at a map, we would have to go to another small town and get a bus, so we decided that it wasn't worth the effort.



*Night time visitor*

We had a boat come over to us when we had anchored. It was driven by a teenage Warao Indian, but had a load of small children in it. They simply said hello and then hung onto the fenders waiting for a hand out. I have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand it's great to give the kids a treat in their otherwise hard lives, but should we encourage this begging? It is much better when they come to trade and we give the children a present at the end of the bartering.

Glenys and I had a quiet night by ourselves in an attempt to rejuvenate our livers. After dinner, I spotted a movement outside the mosquito netting and said "We've got a rat". Glenys leapt up but couldn't see anything. After a few minutes exploring the

deck, I spotted it on top of the mosquito net. It was a small nocturnal mouse and was fascinated by the light. We assumed that it arrived on a bora of hyacinth, so I took a photograph of it and tossed it overboard from whence it came.

### **30 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

I woke up this morning with a burning desire to go exploring up the river to the west of the anchorage. All of the electronic charts stop about half a mile west, so I thought that it would be interesting to map it out and see if it leads to San Jose de Buja which has a road going to Maturin. I jumped in the dinghy and went to talk to "Pogeyan and "Blackthorn Lady", but they weren't interested in doing battle with the large number of water hyacinth bora that have passed us going up this river.

Glenys and I set off at eight o'clock by ourselves. We had to do a considerable amount of manoeuvring to avoid the water hyacinths, but it slackened off after a mile. We passed a fairly large Warao Indian village and continued up the wide, deep river. We had a few stops to look and listen to the wildlife – howler monkeys, parrots, weaver birds, toucans, etc.



*Floating barrier to stop water hyacinths*

After an hour, we came across a junction in the river, where there is a floating barrier across the branch which heads south west. This consists of 56 gallon oil drums, strung together with chain and logs. The purpose appears to be stopping the Water Hyacinth going up this part of the river – and it looks to be effective. We watched a local pirogue slide across by pulling up their outboard, but there didn't seem to be any way that we would be able to cross it with our 2 metre deep keel.

We continued up the other branch, continually doing battle with the ever thickening bora of hyacinths. When we were eight miles from the anchorage, we came across another junction in the river.



By this time, the sky was darkening with ominous thunder clouds and both river branches seemed to be getting thicker with hyacinths, so we decided to call it a day. As we turned around, a group of ten scarlet macaws took off from a nearby tree and flew away squawking their protests at being disturbed.

We managed to get into the clearer water before the first heavy rain hit us. Once the rain had stopped, we anchored for lunch and chilled out until Glenys spotted a huge raft of hyacinth heading straight for us. We leapt into action and just got the anchor clear of the water and out of the way before the raft arrived.

Back at the anchorage, we chilled out for the rest of the afternoon – I finished off my map of the Manamo River including the new bits that we had explored. We had a lamb curry on “Pogeyan” cooked by Jackie.

### **31 August 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

Another late start today, waiting for the tide. Glenys is making dinner for everyone tonight, so she went and scrounged some onions and potatoes from the other boats. We’re starting to run out of fresh food now.

We left before the others and motored down the river. Meanwhile “Pogeyan” were having a few problems. They had a huge raft of water hyacinths lodged in the front and between the two hulls of their catamaran. Using one of their engines, they tried to motor forwards and then back off, which has been working pretty well up to now. Unfortunately they weren’t able to move the hyacinths and, in the process, their starboard engine overheated and they had to shut it down. “Blackthorn Lady” and some of the local pirogues came to their assistance and the locals used grappling hook type anchors to pull chunks of the raft away. Fortunately, “Pogeyan” have two engines and were able to start the port one and motor down the river. Glenys and I heard the saga on the VHF radio and anchored a few miles away to have lunch and wait for them to catch up.

We all carried on down the river until we came to a smaller cano which heads east. The Cruising Notes say that this cano links the Manamo River to the Pedernales River, but that the river becomes very narrow and the trees overhang the river. Some cruisers have made it through and I would like to try it. Glenys and I went down the cano to have a look, while the others carried on and anchored a mile further down river.



***Traditional Warao Indian Settlement***

We motored for 40 minutes, passing a small Warao settlement and the cano didn’t narrow at all. The depth varies between 6 to 15 metres and it seems pleasant enough. We turned around and headed back to anchor next to the others. We had dinner on Alba – salt fish stew.

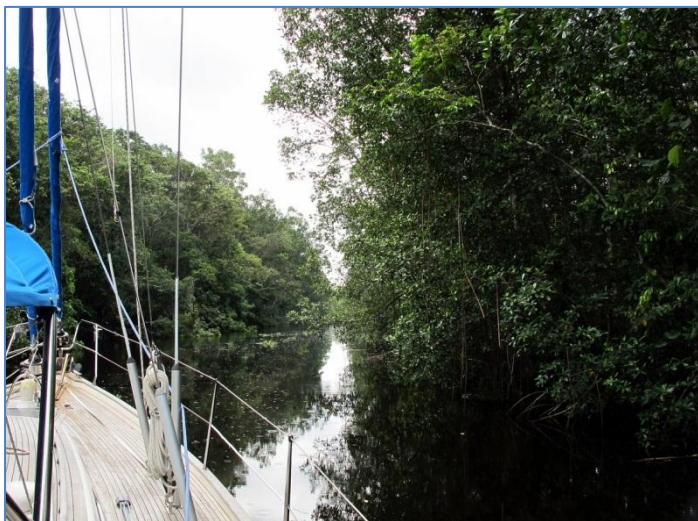
### **1 September 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

No one else wanted to attempt to go down the small cano to the Pedernales River, so we upped anchor at eight o’clock and motored off by ourselves. We passed two large villages on the main river, but didn’t stop to trade with anyone when they came out to us - we were on a mission.

The first half of the cano has depths between 6 and 15 metres and is initially over 50 metres wide. After an hour of motoring at 5 knots, the cano started to narrow and trees began to encroach on the water. An hour later, we came to a junction where there is a Warao Indian village. They had very traditional dwellings with palm leaf roofs and most of the kids were naked. There were many happy, smiling children waving at this strange apparition passing very close to their homes.

We took the right hand fork and the river narrowed to 30 metres with lots of the trees hanging over the water. From this point onwards, Glenys was stood on the back deck, watching the trees and making sure that we didn’t hit branches with our 50 foot mast and rigging. I focussed on slowly steering us through this maze and watching out for water hyacinth and sodden floating logs. We hit two big logs with a thump, but both times I

had the engine in neutral gear and no damage was done. The depth hardly ever dropped below 5 metres, which was a great relief, as we had enough to worry about with zigzagging between the trees. The narrowest point in the river was 20 metres wide and there were no places where we touched the trees.



*Zigzagging around trees in a cano going to Pedernales River*

It took us an hour of intense concentration to weave our way through to the Pedernales River and what a welcome sight it was. In retrospect, the route is not difficult at all, but it is stressful because we didn't know whether there was a way through. At some parts, where the trees are thickest, there is little room to turn a 42 foot yacht around, so we were pretty committed to keeping on going. Once we got through, both of us thought that it was good fun.

We slowly motored north down the wide river. It's quite shallow compared to the Manamo River being between 5 to 10 metres deep. The vegetation on the shore is more regular with less palm

trees as we go towards the sea. We passed a couple of big Warao villages – these had more “modern” buildings with corrugated iron roofs. Many dwellings still don't have walls, but most of them have satellite TV dishes. No one bothered to come out to see us, but the children waved and smiled from the shore. I don't think that they see many yachts down this way.

There's a lot of boat traffic up and down the river. Most of them slowed down to stare when they saw us. At two o'clock, we anchored off an island at 09 45.21N 62 10.29W in 7 metres of water. There's a very shallow bar extending south from the island and our depth gauge dropped below 2 metres while we were looking

around for a place to anchor. We probably went aground in the soft mud, but I soon reversed us off into deeper water.



*Children wave and stare on Pedernales River (Satellite TV dishes)*

The horse flies are a damn nuisance here, so we put up the mosquito netting to keep them at bay. Glenys relaxed in the cockpit in the afternoon and I updated my map with the route of the small cano that we have just done. I made sure that I collected a good number of GPS waypoints on the trip through the cano, so the map should be pretty accurate.

The anchorage is a lovely peaceful place with two smaller canos that go off to the west. The cruising notes say that one of them goes back to the Manamo River, but I don't think we'll bother to try. Our plan is

to go to Pedernales tomorrow and meet up with the others, who are staying at Ibis Island tonight, before heading back to Trinidad on Saturday.

In the evening, the horse flies were going mad trying to get through the mosquito net – I'm really pleased with the way that it's worked on this trip. We had an early night – a stressful, but enjoyable day.

## **2 September 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

I slept like a log until three o'clock, when I woke suddenly with the feeling that I'd heard voices outside. Glenys was awake, so I asked her if she had heard anything, but she hadn't. I had to get up and have a look



around outside, but all was very peaceful. The only noise was the occasional splash of water against the hull caused by the strong current.

Back in bed, I found it difficult to sleep because I was constantly listening for the sound of someone on deck. I had time to ponder the balance between anchoring in an isolated place and the need for security. Most of the time, we are anchoring in crowded places with other cruisers, but it is nicer to be anchored alone. On the other hand, we are more likely to be a victim of armed robbery if anchored by ourselves. I finally fell into a fitful sleep without reaching a conclusion.



**Warao Indians catching crabs**

I was up at quarter past six, when the first boats came whizzing by us. One of the problems that we will face when going back to Trinidad is that we won't have any documentation to show that we have been in Venezuela for two weeks. Some cruisers have had a very hard time from the Trinidad Customs officers when they arrive with no papers. To make matters worse, we've heard that a "State of Emergency" has been declared in Trinidad because of some civil unrest a week ago. I'm not sure whether this will make it harder to get cleared in without proper documentation. I prepared a home-made departure document which I

filled in, hoping that the Guardia Nacional will date stamp it for me in Pedernales.

The trip down river turned out to be fairly boring. The river Pedernales is very wide and only 5-10 metres deep. We passed a small settlement of Warao Indians and two dugout canoes came across to see us. They didn't come to trade, just to stare. We called them over and Glenys gave them a few small things and some pancakes that she had made. One of the dugouts had a couple of young boys who had a woven basket containing crabs, which I guess they have collected in the mangroves – we later saw many boats and people going into the mangroves on the shore line.



**Downtown Pedernales**

We stuck our nose into a large river which heads east a mile before Pedernales, but it was only 4 metres deep and didn't seem to be going anywhere. We turned around and carried on to Pedernales where we anchored beside "Blackthorn Lady" and "Pogeyan".

There was a wicked two knot current in the anchorage, so we waited until it had slackened and then went in to see the Guardia Nacional with the others. I had written down what I was going to say in Spanish, "Es posible para usted meter una marca en mi zarpe?" He seemed to understand and immediately stamped my homemade exit papers and wrote

down our passport details in his ledger. When the officer had done the same with the others' papers, we all went for a walk around the town.

It was a little busier than when we arrived two weeks ago and we bought some bread and beer. There was a traditional ice machine on the street. This is a hand cranked press, which grinds a big block of ice into small pieces. The vendor puts the ice into a cup and adds syrup to make a "slush puppy." Glenys bought one to try it and it was nice.



*Traditional Ice Machine, Pedernales*

There were quite a few Warao Indians hanging about outside the shop where we bought beer. They were sitting about with loads of kids and it appeared sad that they were in this town with nothing to do but beg. We were pestered by a few children asking for money and Glenys' slush puppy. We walked back to the boat a little despondent at the obvious poverty in the town.

We had dinner on Pogeyan which was a barbeque using up any fresh meat that we had left. Glenys and I have decided that we'll not bother stopping in Trinidad, but will carry on to Grenada overnight. We swapped photographs with the others and exchanged contact details. It has been a fun two weeks and we have become good friends.

### **3 September 2011 Rio Manamo, Venezuela**

We climbed out of bed at five o'clock in the morning and left at half past five just behind the others. Once again we had big problems getting the anchor up because the chain was wrapped around something – there must be big rocks or other obstructions down there. It took us five minutes of motoring backwards and forwards to get the chain free.

We motored down the river entrance and the horse flies made a last desperate attempt to get us. It was a very unpleasant hour swatting the little buggers as they zoomed about the cockpit. I've decided that horse flies are a major navigation hazard because when trying to swat them, we were definitely not looking where we were going and veering about wildly.

The trip out of the shallows was uneventful and we settled down to motor sailing in the fluky 5-10 knot wind. We had practically no wind and had to use the engine all the way past Scotland Bay, until we were five miles past Trinidad heading towards Grenada. The wind then picked up to 12 knots and we had a lovely sail until midnight when the wind dropped again. Before it went dark, we had ten minutes of watching bottlenose dolphins play in our bow wave and I caught a tuna, which was particularly satisfying because I'd lost a big fish in the afternoon when it bit through the line. We had a sighting of the elusive green flash as the sun went down to end a very nice day. We arrived in Prickly Bay, Grenada at dawn. I didn't have any problem clearing into Grenada with my homemade zarpe.

Neville & Glenys Howarth  
Yacht Alba  
<http://thehowarths.net>



## Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela

ZARPARA DEL PUERTO:	
FECHA DE ENTRADA:	
SITIO DE ENTRA:	
FECHA DE PARTIDA:	
DESTINO:	

NOMBRE DEL BARCO:	
PUERTO REGISTRO:	
PAIS REGISTRO:	
NUMERO REGISTRO:	
TONELAJE REGISTRO:	
ESLORA:	

### TRIPULANTS:

<i>NOMBRE Y APELLIDOS</i>	<i>NACIONALIDAD</i>	<i>NUMERO DEL PASSPORT</i>	<i>FECHA DE NACIMIENTO</i>	<i>CARGO A BORDO</i>

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de Capitan

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Oficial

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha & Marca