

LANCE GARCIA – ABOARD Liberty II – Cocos Keeling to Addu Atoll (Maldives)

13/9/2016 Day 1 - Joining Liberty II



After a car trip to Brisbane, a long flight to Perth, a taxi trip to my overnight hotel and back to Perth international airport, a long flight to Christmas Island (with a 2 hour delayed flight from Perth) and then to Cocos Keeling Island, another taxi trip, a ferry to another island (from West Island to Home Island) and finally a dinghy trip (very wet, thanks Dan) to Liberty II, I am finally aboard.

So the plane stopped at Christmas Island and we disembarked and headed to the transit lounge while all those staying on the island went through customs and border control. The transit lounge consisted of exiting the building into the street, mixing with the locals and then entering the building through into the departure lounge to re-embark on the plane. I think we were off the plane for about 15 minutes in total 😊😊😊

Oh, yes and all this while carting my own gear (luggage bag and hand luggage) plus a 16kg awkward, inert piece of rubber for the skipper all the way from Toowoomba. Mind you this piece of rubber is critically important as it forms an integral part of the spare diesel we need to carry. Wouldn't want to run out of fuel in the middle of the ocean, you know!!! Oh yeah, don't forget the Nespresso capsules for the skipper (gotta keep the boss happy) and the generator part. ☺ Well, no generator = no electricity = no fridge = no cold beer.

Wonderfully, Michael was at the airport to meet me. Then a bus trip to the ferry, and across to Home Island where Dan was waiting with the dinghy. After a 30 minute wet trip, we were finally at the boat.

I was welcomed aboard with a cold beer!! Well actually, I had already had one on the dinghy.

14/9/2015 Day 2 - Cocos Keeling Islands



Up bright and early today to catch the ferry at 7.00 to West Island for Michael to organise a diesel fuel top up. Well, what can I say about our 1 mile dinghy trip to the ferry terminal except that it was slow and with the wind and waves, we only just made it time!! Oh, did I mention that it was also a very wet, wet, wet dinghy trip – spray and waves everywhere and we were all soaked. Our wet weather gear did not hold up too well. Dan who was driving said that we just had to open our mouths and we would be able to gargle with sea water. ☺

Dan, Errol and I took the bus into the “town” section – cost of trip = 50 cents each. Spent some time in town and about – nothing much there except the airport, a resort, shop and the information centre and a few “restaurants.” It was pretty hot so we stopped at Maxi’s for a nice cold milkshake.





Later we were joined by Michael who had organised the fuel. We then sat chatting while waiting for the bus to take us back to the ferry. The bus was due to leave at 11am for the ferry departure at 11.15. So we wandered to the bus stop at about 10.50 – in plenty of time to catch the bus. True to island time the bus had departed early despite exhortations by Errol to the bus driver to wait for us!!

So it was a mad scramble to try to find a ride. Well, once again we just made it as the ferry had been told of our predicament and was waiting for us. The ferry still managed its 11.15 departure.



Got back to the boat after another soaking dinghy ride!! Thanks Dan ☺

Later, the afternoon, Michael, Dan and I went to snorkel the famous RIP at the tip of Direction Island. It was an incoming tide and was running around 5+ knots. Michael made it across the current but Dan and I got swept into the lagoon by the current. It was an amazing experience to swim in the current with no way of making headway against it even with flippers!! Talking to Michael after he returned, he never saw any evidence of the rope that you swim to and hold on while snorkelling.

A few minute later a French couple came snorkelling by and told us we had been swimming in the wrong place. Michael and Dan swam across again and found the rope. I had twinged a back muscle earlier so decided to wimp out.

The evening was a convivial time in the company of Sandy, a Scotsman, sailing solo around the world in a 32ft yacht.

15/9/2015 Day 3 Cocos Keeling Islands

Lazy day until we up up-anchored and followed the channel to the West Island ferry terminal to fuel up with diesel and fill the water tanks.



That took some time and then it was a “mad” dash back to the anchorage so that Michael could then jump into the dinghy and hare off to Home Island to clear customs for our departure tomorrow. Of course none of us went with him so he had to fill out our departure cards and sign them for us!!! Apparently the policeman/customs agent was very accommodating.

While he was away, Dan and Errol tackled some minor repair jobs – fixing a loose table in the upper helm station and then replacing a broken mast stay with cable that Michael had sourced on his trip to customs and the shop.

On his return we had some visitors – the fuel guy and his English girlfriend who was backpacking around the world till she got here and is also in training to swim the 9km Home Island to West island stretch.

After they left, we had a lovely swim off the back of the boat until our next guests arrived – a French couple sailing around the world since 2012 with intermittent lay ups and home visits to see their grandkids and family.

After a great dinner, we sat around chatting before retiring to bed for an early rise and 8am departure tomorrow.

16/9/2015 Day 4 - Voyage day 1

Up bright and early today, had breakfast and then Michael dinghied to Direction Island to try to access the Internet to arrange an “agent” to organise everything (clearing in and customs) for our arrival in the Maldives. Apparently, this has to be done before you arrive there.



The Wi-Fi from the island, which you paid for by the hour, is a bit flaky and if it drops out during your paid hour, well that’s too bad, you just lose your time and have to buy more. It’s supposedly more reliable on the island itself.

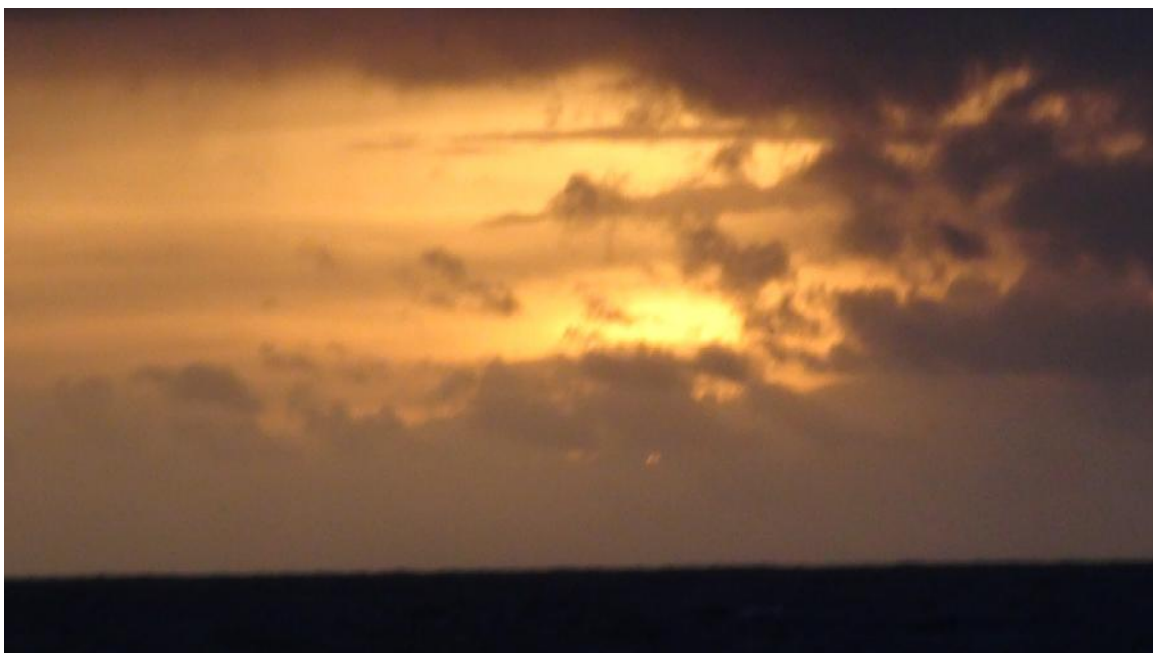
Well, now we're off, the wind is still blowing but the forecast is for reducing winds from today onwards.

17/9/2015 Day 5 - Voyage day 2

Today was a day of doing our watches trying to catch more fish and either reading, watching a movie on one of the many devices on board or just resting/sleeping.



Took a Stugeron and later a Stemetil as I had been feeling a bit queasy for a while and by mid afternoon was much better.



Much excitement today as we caught 3 barracuda which we released and later 2 Mahi Mahi were caught. I only got one of the Barracudas.

So we had fried Mahi Mahi for dinner and it was delicious.

18/9/2015 Day 6 - Voyage day 3



The day passed much the same, I did catch a small Bonito which we released.

Today, had the fishing lines out as usual and we lost 4 or 5 lures to some big fish!! Eventually Michael managed to land a large +/- 5 foot Wahoo 😊 It was so big that he had to fillet it on the cockpit floor and not the filleting table. No doubt we'll enjoy some if it tomorrow night.

The wind is still a steady 15-18 knots from behind us with a 2m following swell. Consequently it's like being on a perpetual roller coaster.

Things continue to go wrong with the boat. The port engine is running hotter than it should and there is white smoke in the exhaust. A couple of lights on the helm station went out and had to be fixed. The aft bilge pump alarm kept ringing – something stuck in the pump. The watermaker is leaking a lot when making water. This necessitates someone having to go into the engine room to keep mopping it up as the water keeps triggering the mid ship bilge pump. Ah well, that's cruising – fixing boats in exotic locations 😊

Dinner was kebabs on mash.

19/9/2015 Day 7 - Voyage day 4

Started my watch at 3 again this morning. The wind has changed direction slightly and this is resulting in a very sloppy sea on top of the swell. Not unpleasant but not particularly comfortable.

It's bright and sunny but not too hot as the wind is nice and cool.

Woohoo, I caught a monster yellow fin Tuna – all of about 45-50kgs today!!! It's the biggest any of the guys have caught except Errol who has fished in competitions. I think the guys thought I was just being a wimp because I took so long to land it! Then they saw its size!!!! I think I'm in the lead to win the "pot" for the biggest fish. I think Michael thought he had it in the bag with his Wahoo yesterday. But, who knows, there are still a few days before we get to the Maldives.



I now have a blister on each thumb – one on the left from trying to spool the line and another on my right from the reel handle trying to wind the fish in. I'm not sure but I think it took at least 30-45 minutes to play and finally land the fish.





Yummy tuna and wahoo pasta for dinner.

Soon after I went to bed, we went through a squall and I felt like I was trying to sleep on a trampoline with 10 people jumping on it!!!!

My back continues to play up!

20/9/2015 Day 8 - Voyage day 5

Just as we were sitting down to a lovely scrambled egg on toast and bacon breakfast whipped up by Michael, one of the reels started screeching! So it was down with the breakfast tools to reel in another fish- this one a Dorado landed by Errol. So we sat down to a hot turned cold breakfast! Priorities 😊

Been having some issues with the port engine – ever since we left Cocos and maybe before. The engine has been running hotter than the starboard engine and there has been white smoke from the port exhaust. This disappears very quickly indicating that it is water vapour which is in keeping with the heating issue. It now seems that the temp has climbed another few degrees, so Michael will be shutting down the engine in order to flush out the heat exchanger in the hope that it is just dirty and blocked which could be the cause of the problem 😞

Well flushing the heat exchanger did not make any difference. The engine was still overheating and the smoke was still present in the exhaust gases 😞 😞

So the next step was to look at the impeller. Again had to stop the motor and allow it to cool sufficiently to work on it. So back in the hot engine room for Michael and Dan!! 30 minutes later they reappeared with a broken impeller. Time to fire up the engine and see.....

Eureka, temperature normal and no smoke – can now resume normal engine speed 😊 😊 😊

Also today, we reached another milestone. We reached the halfway point of our voyage to the Maldives ☺ At the same time we moved all our clocks to Maldives time, thereby gaining an extra 1 ½ hours today.

The sea has been peculiar today, initially it was very calm but later developed a lot of wind chop which is contrary to the weather forecast for this area. Ah well, that's weather forecasting for you!

21/9/2015 Day 9 - Voyage day 6

Pirate scare!!! Just as I was taking over for my watch at 3am, we noticed a ship's lights some way off the starboard side. It also seemed to be shining a very bright spotlight around. The funny thing was that it didn't show up on either the radar or AIS!!! So, what was this unidentified vessel doing in the middle of the ocean shining a spotlight around. Well, in the dead of night ones thoughts obviously turn to PIRATES.

Kept a good watch on her till she disappeared from sight behind us. Mind you, I kept a sharp lookout behind us to ensure that she didn't sneak up on us with her lights turned off. I'm not sure what we would have done anyway!!! Later I learned of Michael's plan to repel boarders!! Won't go into that though.

Another bit of drama around the same time was that the autopilot decided to take us walkabout for some strange reason. Anyway, Errol, who was still on watch brought us back onto our proper course and reset the autopilot. Technology!!!!

MARLIN!!!!!!

Not long after breakfast, there was suddenly the zzzzzzrrrrrr sound of a fish taking the lure and stripping line off the reel. It was Dan's turn so he started the task of playing the fish to bring it in. Suddenly the fish was jumping out of the water and was identified as a Marlin – what excitement on board!! ☺

Well, Dan played him well and eventually got him near the side of the boat at which point the Marlin went under the boat and the line must have got caught on a sharp barnacle and got cut. Said fish lives another day. Great was our disappointment but Dan's adrenalin was still flowing with the thrill of hooking and playing a Marlin ☺ ☺



Catching these big fish sure is exhausting work 😊



The rest of the day passed uneventfully. Relatively benign sea state, intermittent rain showers and generally fairly cool due to the South East Trade winds. There was lunch, reading, sleeping, listening to music, backgammon and relaxing.

Even the fishing rods have been stowed as it is deemed that there is enough fish on board for quite a while thanks to my monster tuna and Michaels Wahoo.

Great dinner by Errol – roast pork, veges, roast potatoes and crackling – all done in very trying circumstances given the rolling around of the boat in the swell!!!

22/9/2015 Day 10 - Voyage day 7

On watch again at 3 am. Little wind and slight roll to the sea swell. Supposed to be a relatively full moon but obscured by the clouds. No rain though and still quite cool in the slight (8 Knot) breeze.

The day has turned into a brilliant day. Started with some rain storms – mild – and then after seeing a beautiful rainbow, we seemed to leave the last of the front behind and the sea is smooth apart from a gentle swell and very little wind. Which means that it is quite hot but the little breeze is quite refreshing.



It has been a day of rest for us all with a couple of chess games thrown in. The fishing rods have also not been deployed. There are about 30 kgs of fish in the freezer.



Sadly the big box freezer is not working properly so all the fish had to be transferred to the standard fridge freezer. More repairs???

Soon it'll be my watch from 3 to 6 pm but it'll be an easy watch. The autopilot does the steering and the watch keeper just has to keep a lookout for other ships and make sure the engine instruments are all reading normal. Much like driving a car without having to steer☺
Of course that presupposes that the autopilot does not decide to go walkabout again!

Then it'll be dinner again. The meals that are being produced by Dan and Errol are of the highest standard. So good in fact that early on Michael and I swapped our evening meal shifts and in return do the dish washing. Suits me 😊

23/9/2015 Day 11 - Voyage day 8

Today was a relatively boring day consisting of sloppy head on seas and travelling into the wind. This resulted in the boat pitching and rolling all over the place. Rolling is when the boat rolls from side to side while pitching is the boat bobbing up and down along the long axis. Rolling and bobbing.



The weather forecasts were for minimal wind and calm seas – ha!!!

The head on seas and headwind have also reduced our average speed from around 8.5 knots to less than 7.5 which will delay our arrival time in the Maldives by a few hours.

Today is our second last day on this leg of Michael's epic journey around the world.

24/9/2015 Day 12 - Voyage day 9

Final day! Sloppy head on seas and head on wind has reduced our speed. Our ETA now in around 5pm – extended from the 1pm which we were hoping on and planning on – and this despite Michael increasing the rpm and our speed since last night.



As I write this we are about 30nm out and hanging out to see land – and to have a cold one after customs clearing. Michael runs a dry boat while underway.

The sky is mostly clear and it's hot but fortunately the wind has a cooling effect so it's very pleasant temperature wise.

Land ho!!! Addu Atoll, Maldives in sight 😊



Soon we were anchored and after clearing in, we were free to go ashore and so we took ourselves off to the resort around the corner where we had a “few” celebratory drinks and then dinner which was very nice. After sitting around for a while we returned to the boat and sat out on the fly bridge having a few more celebrations. Then it was off to sleep in the wee hours of my “watch.” 😊



25/9/2015 Day 13 – Addu Atoll - Maldives

So today we were up for a bacon and egg breakfast and then a meeting with our agent again. He had organised transport to take us to a local restaurant for coffee/milkshakes or orange juice as well as free wifi at the restaurant. Our transport consisted of each of us being a passenger on the back of a scooter!!!! Helmets? Not required on this part of the island!

After that he took us around in his car to have a look at where the grocery, hardware stores, ATM and bank were. We also had a look at a local fishing boat that had just returned and was offloading and selling to locals.

Then it was a return to the boat and some lunch, although this was a bit of a let down as there was not much left in the larder!!

This afternoon we spent lazing around while Michael was out doing some personal business including buying a local SIM card and some data.

Also had a swim off the back of the boat as it was so hot.

This evening we walked into town to a local restaurant that had been pointed out and each had a scrumptious local meal and bottles water, joins, milkshake and Pepsi. The total bill for the 4 of us, including the drinks, came to the princely sum of 36 USD!!!!

After that we stocked up with some basic provisions for the next few days. Now it's bed time. Night night.



26/9/2015 Day 14 – Addu Atoll - Maldives

Today Dan and I took the scooters that we hired and toured the island. My overall impression is one of litter everywhere, incomplete building projects, scooters and unkempt yards. Although I saw a lot of women sweeping or raking the road frontage of their homes.

Goods are mostly very cheap and the people are extremely friendly and English is spoken by most people.

This afternoon, Michael and I took the dinghy and went to one of the sites that was recommended for some snorkelling. It wasn't the best of days with cloud cover, some sea chop and slightly reduced visibility. There was a vast array of different multi-coloured fish as well as some clownfish (Nemo) swimming amongst some soft coral. The coral in this area was badly bleached and most of the finger type coral was broken off and dead – probably due the sweeping action of many boats at anchor over the years.

Then it was a trip to the wharf where the fuel transfer will be effected – a big tanker drives to the wharf and then the bowser will be passed down to the boat. Michael wanted to see what the tie up situation as well as the depth was like.

The few restaurants that I've been to are excellent. Clean good décor and great food. Nowhere did I have anything to eat that was not very tasty and no signs of any side effects – no traveller's diarrhoea!!!

Then it was back to Liberty II for a wash off and get dressed for dinner.

The one restaurant that we went to last night – Tatso - was so good that we returned there for dinner again tonight. Total cost of 4 mains, 4 drinks (soft – no alcohol outside of the resorts) and 4 bottles of water was US\$24.



After returning to the boat, I spent some time packing up my bags before turning in.

2/9/2015 Day 15 – Addu Atoll - Maldives

Up fairly early today for a shower and chat before catching my pre-arranged taxi to the airport for my flight to Male where I am overnighing tonight.

Flight was on time. And so my very tiny part in this adventure has ended.

Now its back to the hum drum life of work, garden upkeep and a 100 little land based things that need to be done.

Thanks Michael, Dan and Errol for a wonderful experience.



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