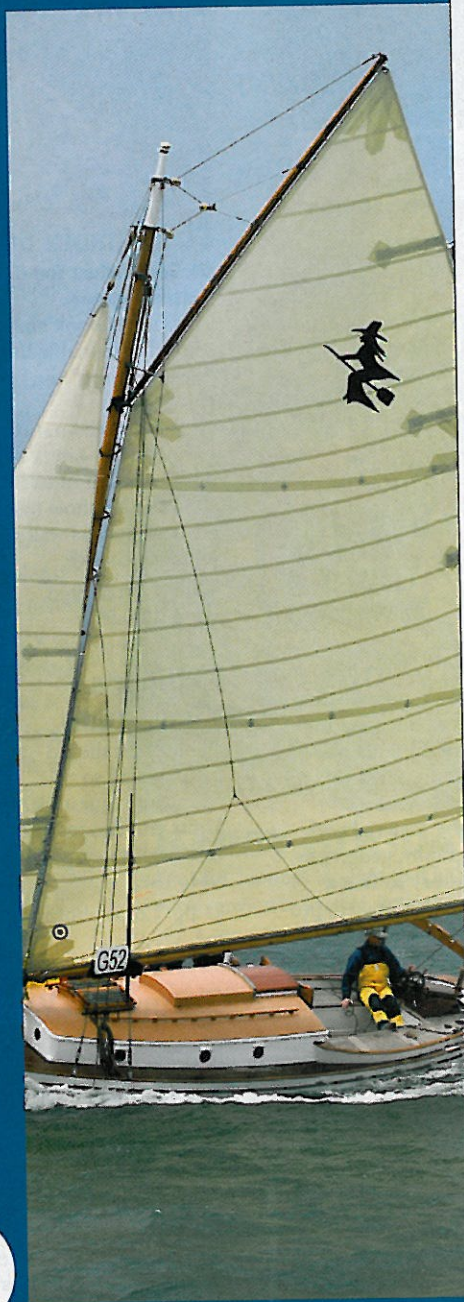


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SHORELINE



CORAL SEA: THE SURREAL WORLD OF CHESTERFIELD REEF

AFTER 500 MILES OF OPEN OCEAN, THE DEPTH SOUNDER OFF soundings the whole way and the chart showing a comfortable reading of about three miles deep, Tiffany suddenly cried out, "Seventy feet!"

"Seventy feet deep?"

It was a shockingly small number. Then I heard "Thirty feet!"

No time to consult the chart. I looked over the edge of *Vixen*, our 34-foot, Atkin-designed sailboat, and saw beautiful coral heads racing beneath the keel—vivid aquas and greens and sandy patches glowing electric blue. But this was supposed to be open ocean! I climbed up the rigging to get a better look. What I saw took my breath away: submerged coral heads stretching to the horizon.

Typically, sailors do everything they can to avoid reefs. It was, therefore, a little counter-intuitive, on our trip from Vanuatu to Australia, for us purposely to visit Chesterfield Reef. The area lies about 500 miles west of Luganville, Vanuatu, in that part of the

South Pacific Ocean known as the Coral Sea.

After we sailed for an hour through this landmine of coral heads, the ocean swell we'd felt since leaving Vanuatu subsided. We seemed to have entered the lee of Chesterfield Reef, although there was still no sight of any land on the horizon. We carefully marked our progress on the chart, and after several hours and a change of heading, a thin sliver of sand appeared ahead. We sailed toward it, the ocean growing increasingly calm, until finally we reached the lee of a sand spit only half a mile long.

Once *Vixen* settled back on her anchor, we could appreciate the surreal nature of this remote reef. The canopy of the bright blue sky of the tropics reached in all directions to meet the clean line of ocean encircling us, with only that patch of sand directly ahead. *Vixen* sat perfectly at rest amid the Pacific Ocean while the trade winds blew a steady 25 knots.

Just a few weeks earlier, our toddler daughter, Solianna, had learned to point at passing birds and cry out "Bird!" Now, in the lee of Chesterfield, the air thick with the aroma of guano, she worked herself into a frenzy, shouting "Bird!" and pointing to



Beautiful, battered shells are scattered through the broken coral sand at Chesterfield.



starboard, then "Bird!" again and running to port. In fact, the sky was black with birds; boobies, terns, and frigates surrounded us. One booby turned with an inquisitive stare while it flew by. "Clang!" It clipped the forestay, wobbled, then recovered and continued on its way.

On the windward side of the island, a tremendous surf threw the flotsam of the ocean high upon the shore. Plastic bottles, flip-flops, and fishing debris were the main offenders, but beautiful shells—battered cowry and nautilus—also were scattered through the broken coral sand.

We spent three days in this timeless anchorage with the sun beating down and the trades blowing. The only sounds were the keening of birds and the dull roar of the surf. At night, the boobies would roost on the boom, and we'd sit on deck as the stars of the Southern Hemisphere came into clear focus.

When we left Chesterfield Reef, we navigated by eye to cross the protected waters of the lagoon and exit through a narrow pass on the leeward side, about 10 miles downwind of our anchorage.

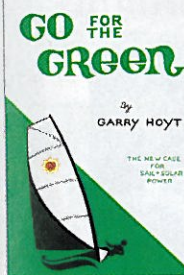
Ahead lay Australia and all the pleasures of civilization. Our landfall in bustling Bundaberg transformed Chesterfield Reef into a seemingly imaginary land, its remote beauty so different from everyday life that it could scarcely be real.

Bruce Halabisky

GOOD BOOKS

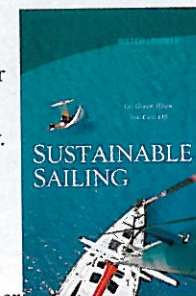
TWO FRESH TITLES WEAVE SAILING AND SOUND ENVIRONMENTAL practices into the compatible topics that we've long known them to be.

Go for the Green: The New Case for Sail and Solar Power by Garry Hoyt (\$14; 2009; iUniverse, www.iuniverse.com). The well-known racer and yacht designer, calling sailing the "original medium of discovery," proclaims the end of the



use of carbon-based fuels in water recreation while heralding a new design-driven alliance between our beloved sport and lifestyle with solar electric power.

Sustainable Sailing: Go Green When You Cast Off by Dieter Loibner (\$25; 2009; Sheridan House, www.sustainable-sailing-book.com). Loibner, a former *CW* editor, argues that if Earth already supports wind generators, eco-houses, electric cars, Earth-friendly back-rubs and potions, organic pretzels, and beer

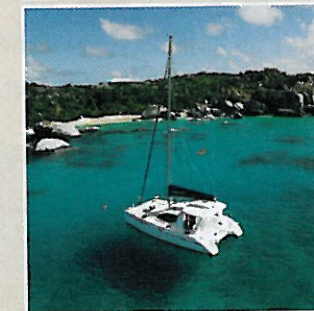


brewed with solar power, it can also certainly support a sustainable sailing movement.

E.L.

BRUCE HALABISKY

COURTESY OF IUNIVERSE AND SHERIDAN HOUSE. MAP BY DAVID NORTON



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