

# Log of the *HILDE M<sup>2</sup>*



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HALFWAY TO THE MARQUESAS! As of Monday evening, March 9, Karl and the *Hilde M<sup>2</sup>* are at 117 degrees West, 5 degrees South. They left Galapagos on Thursday, February 26, and were making 150 mpd until the last day or two before that call but still making about 100. ETA about March 23.

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MY TRIP is now scheduled for April 3 - 26, and I am busy collecting a vast array of goods to pack somehow. Thanks to those who offered suggestions for some of my specialized problems; last call for any additional mail to go with me. K plans to send another disk with story of voyage from Panama to Galapagos, and then Galapagos to Marquesas, but most likely won't arrive in time for me to get out another Log before I leave. Sorry for the "gap-osis", but will get an issue out soon as possible after return.

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ADVENTURES IN PANAMA! The disk takes a long time arriving from Galapagos. On a phone call K explained to me that he was having a good visit, that the Galapagos is really an interesting and different sort of place, and that he had written me a letter, plus he had the disk ready, but he couldn't mail them, because they were out of stamps....

The sixth Letter from the Captain is dated February 21, written on board the HM<sup>2</sup>, Puerto Ayoro, Santa Cruz, Islas Galapagos, Equador, and begins:

"Hello everybody, from the southern hemisphere! Yes, the water does run around the potty in the opposite direction! Other than that it is remarkably like the northern hemisphere, but then we're just a few miles over the line: 0 45'S; 90 19'W to be exact.

"I'm in good health, having had only a touch of la turista or something like it a couple days ago. I found a good balance scale about a week ago and checked my weight at 72.5 kilos. Jezebel, the computer, says that equals just under 160 pounds and it's the least I've weighed since college days!" (Ed. Boy I wish he hadn't said that, I am jealous)

"I've been busy, busy for the last month, having had first cousin Jim Wall aboard in Panama and then Willem Langedyk as crew through the canal and down here. Sorry I've gotten behind on the letter writing, but the time just seems to fly with company on the HM2. A lot of water has gone under her keel. We've had some good experiences and some interesting experiences; very few bad moments. Let me pick up the story in Porvenir where Jim flew in to meet me on January 20 . . .



The Airstrip on Porvenir, San Blas' portal to the world

"Dr. Jim Wall is Barb's first cousin, actually. He's currently finishing a year as a visiting professor of history through a Fulbright grant in Costa Rica and working at least as hard on research as he is in teaching. He returns to Northern Virginia next spring to resume his regular duties at NOVA. Following some individual touring in Venezuela, Colombia and Panama he took a 'commuter flight' on a small twin engine aircraft from Panama City and arrived about 6 AM. I was watching the activity on the airstrip from the boat with binoculars but didn't pick him out in the group. It was he who spotted HM<sup>2</sup> and got a ride out in a dugout canoe. As he approached a bit uncertainly I finally recognized him and waved and hollered, which must have made him feel a bit more welcome. I plead extenuating circumstances since with his slim figure, dark hair and deep tan he seemed more Latin than WASP.

"After a couple hours of catching up on family conversation we pulled up the anchor and motored a short distance to Isla Nalunega where we visited the most picturesque Cuna village I ever saw in the San Blas area. It could have been a movie set for a south seas village. Everything was neat and clean, with a large central open area for meetings (and displaying and selling molas to occasional hoards of tourists from visiting cruise ships). In the local general store we ordered some pan, tiny loaves of delicious wood oven baked bread.

"Nearby a small native style hotel had a half dozen gringo guests and we chatted while they waited for lunch to be served. The 'bush pilot' who had flown some of them down is a middle aged Zonie who grew up in the Chesapeake Bay area and later worked for the Canal Company for some years. I gathered that he wasn't particularly happy with the way things have gone since the beginning of the changeover to Panamanian control.

"We had our own lunch back on the HM<sup>2</sup> and later did some snorkeling while we waited for the bread to be baked. There were only a few starfish to be found on the otherwise unremarkable bottom of sand and broken coral. Finally with our supply of pan, including some we promised to get for the crew of *COLUMBINE*, we motor sailed against a 16 knot wind and a strong northerly swell to pass through the reef at Chichime Cay just before sunset. We found *GODSPEED*, *COLUMBINE*, and two French boats

whose names we couldn't see, in the lagoon. The wind and current were so strong that after rowing the bread to *COLUMBINE* I found it tough work to row back. Rod kindly gave me a tow with his speedy Zodiac tender.

"Wednesday the 21st we got our anchor up with some difficulty in the moderately strong wind and still-strong current through the lagoon due to the heavy surf on the reef. In the process we wrapped the new 3/8" floating polypropylene dinghy painter on the prop and snapped it in two. I had thought to avoid just this kind of thing when I had installed the new line a few days earlier but was obviously wrong on that one. In the meanwhile some Indians in a dugout canoe went after the rapidly departing dink, snagged it, and brought it back just as we got the anchor off and began to power out the pass. We appreciated their spontaneous help very much.

"With only the genny up we headed SW on a broad reach at 5.5 K to see the *SS BRITANIS* anchored off Nalunega, then S on the other tack to the Corti island group, center of the Indian culture in the San Blas. We had to eyeball our way through a maze of reefs to the anchorage between the islands. Going ashore on Carti Tupele we were a bit disappointed with the rather crowded village and the number and quality of molas to view.



A typical island village in San Blas

"We did have an interesting conversation with an elderly man who invited us into his compound to show his living and cooking houses and demonstrate some of his fishing spears. Along the way through the village we were invited into several family compounds. Sleeping is generally done in hammocks, although a few bedsteads were seen. Most belongings were hung in bags on poles in the rafters so the floor area is usually swept clear. Cooking is done in a separate house with a star fire (just like in the Scouts) and pots sitting right in the coals. There is no chimney or smoke hole, but the smoke (which doesn't smell as bad as most wood smoke but still can make the eyes smart) finds its way out through the cracks.

"Many compounds have one or more mango, breadfruit, or calabash trees in addition to coconut palms. Most of the family coconuts, though, apparently come from owned trees on other islands where caretakers look after them. Every coconut tree in the San Blas belongs to a family and it's a no-no to pick up a coconut anywhere. The Indians will sometimes sell them or trade them for food items from visiting boats.

"The children are appealing, as always, and the Indians obviously treat them with love. The adults are attractive, courteous and friendly, clean and neat; a little bit curious about the visiting strangers, but rather dignified. They aren't very aggressive about selling their handicraft but are anxious for you to look at their goods and willing to bargain a bit, but only up to a point. Very few speak English and many don't speak Spanish, using only their Cuna Tule.

"I was most impressed by their sense of color and design and by the fine workmanship on their dugout canoes which are not just utilitarian but almost works of art. They can be bought for 3 or 4 hundred dollars. The molas go for anywhere from 5 to 50 dollars depending on the intricacy of the cut work and number of layers of cloth overlaid. Jim bought a beautiful blouse for \$40 and I got a couple of small molas for \$12 and another more modern parrot design for J&J for \$5.



Karl's been shopping in the village

"One man attached himself to us and showed us around the island. His English was poor but infinitely better than our Cuna Tule. He came aboard and we motored the short distance around to the S side of Carti Sutupu where we went ashore again. This was the main island and the densest community we had seen yet (or saw anywhere). With about 800 people on the island, the lanes between compounds were usually less than 3' wide. Coconut trees here had long since disappeared. This is one of the few electrified islands, a generator providing light during the early part of the evening.

"Not many molas were in sight and not much seemed to be happening but we did see a half dozen men working with cut sugar cane, preparing it for brewing of a 'coffee wine' to be used for a big celebration in a couple weeks time. I couldn't help shivering at the thought of what could happen if a fire ever got

loose on the island. There would be great loss of property and life in the incredibly crowded conditions since little or nothing could be done to stop it.

"Back at the HM<sup>2</sup> several boatloads of women and children came by to show us molas and shells. One canoe had a group of better dressed kids: Alexander and Les Rodriguez-Esmit (sp?) were about 15-17 years old, sons of a postal worker, and came to practice their English, bringing 3 small nieces and nephews along for the ride. The boys have studied in Panama City. Their English was more than fair and their Spanish, according to Jim, was excellent. Some day they will probably be running things in the islands, and they couldn't have been nicer. We learned quite a bit from them and passed out sour balls to the little ones to their apparent delight.

"For supper Jim cooked up some yucca in the pressure cooker. The root vegetable looks like Iris tubers and is a fine potato substitute, used all around Central America. Its taste is subtle and good, and Jim says it can be boiled, fried, mashed, baked, etc. just like a potato. We had it with canned chicken meat and gravy and some spinach and made a top-notch meal.

"Thursday morning we had some more visitors around the HM<sup>2</sup>, trying to sell molas. We weren't really in the market for them and it seemed to me that all the best ones had been taken N to the outer islands for sale to the hundreds of tourists on the cruise ships. Jim struck up a conversation with one girl who speaks Spanish and managed to learn a few words in the Indian language: nuede means "thank you" but the other words were not as easy to pronounce or as generally useful. She lost interest when she saw that she wouldn't make a sale.

"An old man named Jimmy Harris came by. He was born in Florida, he says, and came to the Panama as a child. His English is pretty good but if he wasn't an Indian he is one now, gone native, because he sure looks and acts the part. His job is to paddle a dugout several miles to the mainland and up a stream to a source of drinking water. His dugout was loaded to the gunnels with plastic water jugs to be filled. The job must be backbreaking and it's no wonder he looks as though he's 70 years old, though probably only 50. He wanted some coffee but we had only the bare minimum to sustain Jim so I gave him some sour balls instead. He said he'd bring back some drinking coconuts but we had to leave long before he returned from the mainland.

"By 10:30 our anchor was up and we were threading our way between reefs, headed NE to the Hollandes Cays. Along the way we passed Gunboat Island and the los Grullas groups and wondered how they got their names. Many off-lying shoals kept us alert with one eye on the color of the water and the other on the depth indicator. About 1 pm we dropped the hook and 18 fathoms of chain in 30' of clear water very near two large coral heads S of the gap between the first two cays of the Hollandes group.

"The diving there, which we proceeded to immediately, was great: lots of different kinds of coral, many small fish, and a large spotted ray. A visit to the first island, apparently uninhabited, was interesting. It looked as though it had taken a beating in a recent storm - much shore erosion, some snapped-off palms, etc. Apparently a family lives on the second island, caretakers for the coconut trees on both islands and divers for fish, langosta (lobsters) and conch around the off-lying reefs.

"During the afternoon a change in the weather was apparent. The wind shifted more to the NW and the air became drier. The visibility became much better and both Jim and I nearly got sunburns before we realized it, the first time I had worried about that in about 6 weeks.

"Friday the 25th was a lazy pleasant day. We sat and talked for hours. I showed Jim how to use a sextant and tried to explain how celestial navigation works. The main feature of the afternoon was a snorkeling trip beyond the reef on the Caribbean side of the cays. Since the reef is continuous at this point we swam out to it and walked across it to the outer edge. Fortunately the surf was down and the waves were fairly gentle. The edge drops off sharply to 15 - 20' with many caves and overhangs. There were all kinds of coral, mostly elk-horn, but a much greater variety than I'd seen before.

"We were disappointed in the number, size, and variety of fish. There were some yellow jacks, parrot fish, a few groupers, an occasional small barracuda and a couple of 4 - 7' nurse sharks. A few small conch were seen on the inside of the reef. After about 20 minutes I lost track of Jim although I'd been trying to keep him in sight. The visibility was limited to about 15 - 20'. Suddenly he was nowhere in sight either below or above water. I decided to stay where I was, retreating only about 10' to the edge of the reef and climbing up to look for him. After about 15 minutes I spotted him on the shore of the island and joined him there much relieved.

"Later in the afternoon Rod and Jane sailed in on *COLUMBINE* to join us in the anchorage. They took their Zodiac around the end of the cays to dive and do some spear fishing, promising us some good dinner. Their report on return was about the same as ours and we had no fish for supper. A dugout came out in the early evening with a man, two women, and three small children. The kids got some sour balls and I got an old but (to me) a remarkably nice pair of molas on a much worn blouse for \$20. Jane said it would have gotten top dollar if new." (Ed.: I think it's really great, it's a bat design with very fine needlework.)

"Jim and I planned to push on to the W toward the Canal in the morning. We had heard stories that transits are now limited to Tuesdays and Thursdays with most of them taking two days, and I was concerned that we might not get a date to go through before Jim had to leave at the end of the month. Saturday dawned windy (from the N) and rainy - not good for the trip along the coast with poor visibility and a lee shore.

"So the morning was spent with a lazy breakfast, lounging, and talking until noon when we decided that conditions had moderated enough for the 10-12 mile run west to Chichime Cay, subtracting at least that distance from the 65 mile trip to Portobello. Rod and Jane had apparently disappeared from their boat. We thought we saw them walking on the shore, so without being able to say goodbye we headed W, motor sailing with the genny partly out in 12K N wind and 4-6' swells. It was quite rolly outside the reefs but we made good time toward our destination, passing wide around the reefs on the N and W sides of Chichime.

"At one point the boat heeled sharply on a larger-than-usual swell and Jim (who was on the starboard side) came hurtling across the cockpit and fetched up against me (who was facing forward on the port side) smashing me against the coaming and badly bruising (or perhaps cracking) my L rib cage. The pain was intense for several minutes and then eased, but it hurt badly to take a deep breath and any effort like pulling a line or cranking a winch nearly made my hair stand on end. Fortunately Jim was only shaken up and was able to continue steering for awhile.

"We arrived back at Chichime, our favorite anchorage and the most beautiful we had seen, about 2:15 PM. Later in the afternoon we swam (I could by then do a L side stroke but not a R) the 200 yds to the small N island and walked around the park-like 4-5 acre cay. It was just like my imaginings of a S Pacific islet, lacking only grass skirted vahines with ukeleles. The water was gorgeous. We spent some time watching a heron (smaller than the blue herons of the Chesapeake) who obviously owned the place as he/she did an expert job of fishing in one favored spot.

"About the time we got back to the HM<sup>2</sup> and I groaned myself aboard two boats came in from the SW. *FRISA*, which we had seen before on this anchorage; and *GALADRIEL* (sp?), a trimaran with Wayne Hendricks and a party of 5-6 aboard. Wayne had transited the Canal after visiting the coast of Costa Rica from S. California and had spent a month or more on the Caribbean side of Panama, but had decided that he didn't like the stories he'd heard about the Caribbean enough to make the uphill trip to the Antilles. Now he was getting ready to head back through the Canal and on to Baja California which he felt is the greatest. As for me, I headed for bed with aspirin for my sore side.

"We were up early on Saturday the 25th and were following *GALADRIEL* out the pass about 7:15 AM. Sailing was good in the 10 - 12K N wind but we motor sailed with low RPM and all canvas up to move at maximum speed in an effort to arrive at Portobello before dark. We sped along at 6.2K through the water all day, making good a little more than that due to a bit of favorable current. Even so we fell far behind Wayne who just shot ahead in the tri.

"We stayed well out from the coast and its offlying reefs, rounding Pta. Mazanillo about 2 PM and Isla Grande shortly later. From there the beam reach became a dead run wing & wing down past the lovely Duarte Cays to Portobello. We arrived in that picturesque anchorage under the guns of Fuerte Santiago de la Gloria and the crumbling batteries W and E of the old town about 5:30 PM. Securing as quickly as possible, we rowed into town and hunted up a phone to call B. It was great to hear her. She was weathering out a big winter storm at home and didn't expect to be able to go to work on Monday. Jim asked her to call his mother, Neta, in Cookeville, TN, and let her know he was fine.



Checking out some of the ruins at Portobello

"The call made, we walked around the town where old colonial ruins and more modern Panamanian dwellings stand side-by-side. It seemed to us that the old Spanish construction was a good sight better than today's. I'll bet there'll be hardly a trace of today's new stuff left in a couple hundred years, and the old stone walls will still protect the memories of the millions in gold bullion that passed between them. We looked for a place to eat, but none being open, we retreated to the boat for a late supper.

"After a gourmet onion omelette for breakfast we returned to the town to walk around the fortifications, the lower batteries right at water level E of town and the others higher up to the W. A massive structure along the waterfront W of town is crumbling. Apparently the dressed face stone was mined away during construction of the Gatun Locks, exposing the original rubble fill. The large roofless aduena building has walls in remarkable good condition and is gradually being stabilized by the government. It was here that the wealth was stored to wait for the galleon fleets from Spain, and it was through here that all of the European goods for the W coast of S America passed.

"Jim tried to figure out where the old Camino las Cruces (sp?) passed through and out of the town on its way to the Pacific side. Everything both E and W bound was carried across the isthmus on that road for a couple hundred years, Jim says. I suggested that a day spent in a small plane would almost certainly show most of that track. It appeared to us that it must have passed along the landward S side of the the aduena and departed town to the SE up the shallow valley. Remains of a ruined structure could be seen about 400 yd across some farm plots and might have been the first of a series of way-stations.

"It's a shame that that there is no popular historical information available for tourists in Panama. There certainly was none here, and Jim says there was little to be found in Panama City. It's as though the Panamanians have no interest in their past and no concept of what that kind of information might do for tourism. It was pretty much as though we were the first to have stumbled on this place, and we had to draw our own conclusions from what we saw. Of course much work HAD been done, clearing away underbrush and revealing the outlines of the old constructions, so it's not as bad as I made it sound.

"After some searching and asking through the town we did locate the local representative of IPAT, the Instituto Panamaniano de Turismo in a small unmarked out-of-the-way office and there we saw some artifacts found on the sites and an interesting sketch plan of proposed restoration in the area that made things clearer to us. Obviously Jim was interested professionally, but I was excited by the raw unprocessed history here, too.

"In wandering around town we met Manfred and Marie, a German couple on *MARIMA*, also headed for the Marquesas. At midday we left our somewhat rolly anchorage and motored across the harbor to the foot of the fort on the N side where we went ashore briefly to climb up and see the HM<sup>2</sup> over the sights of Spanish cannons from the 16th century. Jim opined that the fort was on the militarily correct spot and since he's an Army Reserve Colonel I hastily agreed. I never doubted those Spaniards knew what they were doing but it still puzzled me that Morgan, the pirate, could come in over land with a few hundred men and sack the town. The garrison could blow a fleet out of the water in the approach to the harbor but was helpless in this case.

"We departed about quarter til one for Cristobal, Caribbean terminus of the Panama Canal. once outside the harbor it was a nominal 240 degree course on a broad reach with no offshore dangers to speak of.

Along the way I discovered to my horror that I lacked the detailed chart of the Limon Bay approach to the canal. Everything in Limon Bay was white on the chart I had and a little note referred to a detail chart I never heard of. Good planning, Carlos!

"We were fortunate enough to be following *JAMBO*, a German yacht that had left Portobello after we did but moved faster, being larger. We just followed her in to the flats, making just a short detour past the Panama Canal Yacht Club to look it over. The flats are an open roly anchorage in about 30' of water, and it takes a long wet dinghy trip in the usually present popple across to and around a long fuel pier to get to the YC. We had to try anchoring twice to get our CQR to hold in the soft gooey bottom in the brisk NW wind. The process was made harder by my sore side and by the coating of viscous mud that clung to the chain when it came up after the first try. I felt and looked like a mud wrestler after that effort. Jim did a super job of holding HM<sup>2</sup>'s bow to the wind during my tribulations. Everything was secure by 5:30 PM.

"An hour later just as we were about to leave for the PCYC for a shore dinner the battleship *IOWA* hove into the harbor accompanied like a dowager queen by 4 tugboats storming around and whistling at each other. The process of tucking her into the pier took more than a hour and a half. God knows what it cost the taxpayers of the US, but it effectively stopped any small dinghy from getting to the Yacht club from the anchorage during the prime evening hours. I was in a snit and pouted. Jim sat on deck and watched the spectacle murmuring something like "God, she's big" from time to time.



Sharing the harbor with the battleship USS Iowa

"About the time the *IOWA* got settled, a missile frigate came steaming in all by herself, carrying probably many times the striking force of the huge leviathan with ever-so-many fewer hands from admirals on down. What a contrast between waste and efficiency!

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