



# Suvarov — Isle Of Dreams

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photography Albert Fletcher



Have you ever dreamed of going to a deserted, sun-drenched Pacific atoll with its tiny coral islets, surf-surfing reefs and calm blue inner lagoons? Well, there are a few of them left and one such is Suvarov, formerly known as Suvarrow, of the Cook Is. group.

As we approached the pass, sans chart, we were totally enthralled as well as slightly apprehensive. The passes to the Pacific atolls can be very dangerous as they are often filled with patches of coral. Also, except for the time of slack water, the current moves at great speed both in and out.

Suvarov was the one time home of the hermit, Tom Neal, who had moved there after the Coast Watchers of W.W.II had left. Refining their huts, he had lived alone on the atoll for many years. One could easily see why - such paradise and not a fly or mosquito to mar the peace.

As we rounded up Anchorage Island, lo and behold, a boat. We were a little disappointed that our deserted island was not deserted after all, and were soon to find out it had become one of "the stops" on the cruising yacht circuit. We also found out the yachties were doing a good thing.

Tom Neal had been taken from the island quite ill but planning to return. He had left a note asking any boats

calling to leave messages with dates and names. They have done more than that. One yacht started a log book and did a lot of work cleaning up the place. Since then most every yacht has done its' share in the task of keeping Tom's little place in order.

As it turned out, Tom was fated not to see his island again, as he died of cancer shortly afterwards. The yachties' work is a fine memorial to a brave and different sort of man. We had read This book "An Island to Oneself", and almost felt we knew him.

### **Ashore**

When we anchored there seemed no one aboard the other yacht. We dinghied ashore anxious to see if the descriptions of Tom's place in the book were still recognizable. We landed by his ruined stone dock and yes, there was the crushed coral path through the palm trees toward the centre of the island. As we progressed on we saw the hours of effort spent in making the trails lined with coral rocks, planting flowers and landscaping. A difficult task in a tropical climate where the undergrowth takes over so rapidly.

Then we saw a lazy spiral of smoke climbing into the air and the odour of fresh baked bread wafted through the undergrowth. Sure enough, it was coming from

Tom's old cook-house. The folks from the other yacht were making good use of the place, so we introduced ourselves. The crew of Duen at the time was myself, husband Albert, our 13 year-old son Toby, our daughter and son-in-law, Vicki and Jim Camp, and their 11 year old son James.

Everything looked like Tom had just stepped out the door minutes before. Yachties had kept the place swept, left the tools and utensils in place, even painted some of the buildings. There was the main hut with old blanket still on the bed, the cook-house, the shower-house, tool-shed, wood-shed, fenced gardens with a few plants left and even a couple of chickens running around. The only real deterioration we could see was the overpopulation of mice and rats since Tom's old cats had disappeared.

### **Exploring**

We explored the island and walked the reefs which were quite shark infested. We dived and hunted for shells and fished. Two days of pure enjoyment later we saw sails on the horizon and following one of the many sudden squalls, two yachts arrived. They were acquaintances we had made in Bora Bora so that night, Tom's old place rang with laughter amidst a pot luck dinner, guitar music and songs. Crab racing was the big event of the evening.



***Above left:** A final touch of perfection as we leave Suvarov; two beautiful mahi mahi held by Toby.  
**Above right:** Duen heads to sea with full compliment of sails.  
**Below:** A boy's dream – a ready built house in the trees to camp in.*



own crab (not too difficult!) and then from a starting line urge them on, hopefully in the right direction to the finishing line.

Not even the Melbourne Cup Race could generate more excitement and laughter than those little crabs provided. I wonder if Tom would have approved, since he certainly must have valued his quiet and privacy. But never mind - for joy certainly reigned on that tiny, lonely Pacific atoll.

The next night the little islet blazed with light as a

generator and lights went ashore and all for the purpose of running the ice cream machine! Now if you have never sat on a lonely little atoll in the middle of an ocean eating homemade ice cream - well - you've missed an experience.

Suvarov even had a wrecked Korean fishing boat on the far reef. We sailed over and explored it with the men spending one whole day trying to see if there was any fuel left. One fellow had a narrow escape as a huge steel hatch cover he was

hanging onto broke loose and they both plummeted down to the reef. Luckily the cover missed him he missed some jagged pieces of iron and coral when he landed flat on his back in six inches of water. Undaunted they searched on, but all tanks had been drained by previous visitors so all they got was sore, tired but satisfied with their dangerous search.

We anchored at Bird Island, a natural bird sanctuary, and totally fascinating. A stroll on that island was a cacophony of sound and as the disturbed birds took to the air. One had to be very careful walking not o step on eggs or nesting birds.

The boys had a marvelous time exploring and

swimming and diving for shells. Since there was nothing more harmful than the large coconut crabs on the island they could explore to their hearts' content with no fears. Coconut crabs, by the way, make a delicious dinner.

Duen's contribution to Tom Neal's place was the clearing of the paths the length and breadth of the island, quite a task with machetes flashing an entire day.

One by one the yachties started talking of leaving. It was hard for us to leave, it seemed so perfect. We have no time to schedule except the one nature provides all yachties with, a very important one. The first and foremost safety feature on a

boat is being in the right place at the right time.

Three of the yachts left together and I'm afraid Albert's ego grew a bit as his traditional old rig put a bone in her teeth and pulled away from our friends. But we all figured to meet again, some time – some place.

As we sailed away from Suvarov I wondered if I would be able to live alone or even with my family on such an island. For all its beauty, I'm afraid it would be too lonely for me. So now it was off to find big city and bright lights, but the vision of Suvarov with its' bending palms, white coral beaches, blue, blue lagoon and breaking surf will linger long in our memories.

