

RCC Pilotage Foundation Cruising Guide to West Africa

Notes and Updates

Robert Fox

December 2016 - April 2017

Introduction

I visited Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau in the dry season of 2016-17. I arrived in Dakar, Senegal in December of 2016 and cruised southwards, leaving towards Brazil from Bubaque in the Bijagos islands in April 2017.

I used the second edition of Steve Jones "Cruising Guide to West Africa" throughout my visit. These notes are my comments and updates to that book based on what I found. Section headings, page numbers and plan numbers refer to the book.

General Information and Planning

Throughout the book, bearings are given as Magnetic. When the book was first published in 1997 magnetic variation was 10° W.

I found United States Pub. 143 "Sailing Directions (Enroute) - West Coast of Europe and Northwest Africa" useful in Guinea-Bissau. United States Sailing Directions can be downloaded free from the official website at msi.nga.mil.

Landfall

Page 3: Ziguinchor is apparently no longer a port of entry for Senegal. (See The Casamance: Planning.)

Communications

In The Gambia I bought an Africell SIM and had coverage almost everywhere on the river although the signal was often poor and away from Banjul / Lamin only 2G data was available. QCell appeared to have comparable coverage and may have better data speeds away from the capital.

West African mobile phone networks do not automatically configure your phone for data. The access point details must be entered manually. For Gambian networks, on Android phones, go to Settings - All - Wireless & networks - Mobile Networks - Access Point Names. Enter the “three vertical dots” menu (bottom right of screen) and select “New APN.” Under Name, enter the network operator’s name, e.g. africell, and under APN enter the network operator’s name followed by net, all as one word, e.g. africellnet. Leave everything else as it is and save the changes. Alternatively, ask for it to be done when you buy the SIM card or go to any mobile phone shop.

Page 19: European phones still do not work in Guinea-Bissau. There are two local networks, MTN and Orange. I bought an MTN SIM card from the MTN office on the main road in Cacheu, where they registered it. They also configured the Access Point (as described for Gambian networks above) but it worked better after I removed the Proxy, Port, Username and Password the agent entered to leave only the Name, mtn, and the APN, internet.mtn-bissau.com. Your passport is required to register the SIM. The network lived up to its slogan “Everywhere you go” and I had remarkably good coverage throughout the Bijagos, including 3G data fast enough for video calls when I was in Bubaque.

Dakar

Approach

Page 21: most of the lights charted as occulting on Admiralty Chart 1000 are actually flashing.

Page 22: there are several dangerous wrecks in the anchorage off CVD. There are known wrecks in the following positions:

- Wreck 1: 14° 42'.731 N 17° 25'.324 W
- Wreck 2: 14° 42'.778 N 17° 25'.615 W
- Wreck 3: 14° 42'.754 N 17° 25'.717 W

One of these is just outside the moored yachts roughly in line with the main leg of the CVD jetty. When I visited it was marked by a small soft drink bottle attached to the wreck by a length of fishing line, an almost invisible marker even in a flat calm. Although it is always submerged I could touch the wreck easily with my dinghy oars at low tide.

There is lots of information about CVD including wreck positions and other arrival information on the CVD website <http://cvdakar.e-monsite.com/> (in French).

The former ADP jetty is now derelict.

The CVD ferry runs daily at 0830, 1030, 1200, 1400, 1600, 1800 and 1930 and is free to club members (see under Hann.)

Ports and customs

Refer to figure 1.

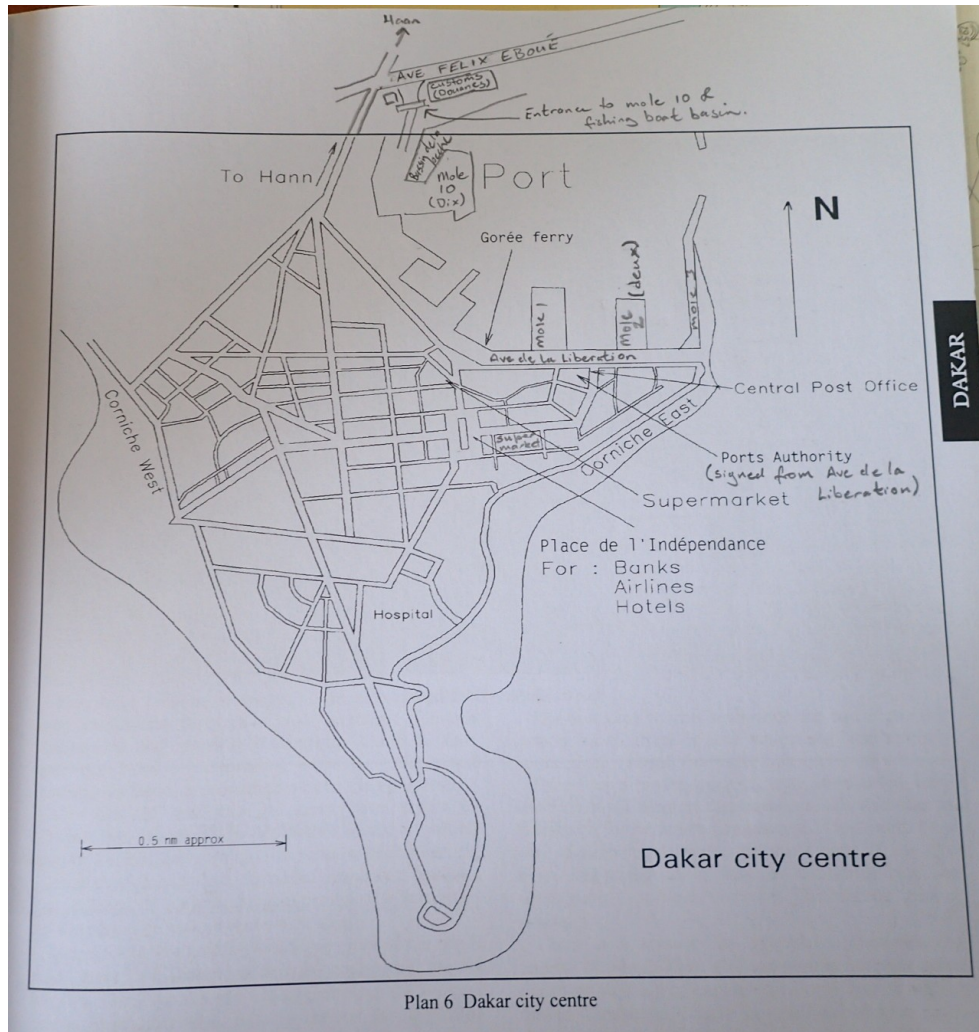


Figure 1: Plan 6

Page 22: if you visit the CVD office before going anywhere else they will give you an information sheet and guide you through the clearing in procedure.

The CVD office arranged a taxi to take me to each office and wait for me. The round trip cost 10,000 CFA.

Page 23: for taxis, the address of the Commissariat Special du Port can be given as "Mole 2" and the Customs at Avenue Felix Eboue as "Mole 10."

Do not try to clear customs in the tempting looking "Douanes" building near the Commissariat Special du Port at Mole 2, go to Mole 10.

The Customs office at Avenue Felix Eboue (Mole 10) is not obvious but it is the building on the left side of the gateway to Mole 10.

My papers were photocopied at both offices but not retained.

The customs fee is still CFA 5,000 for which you will receive a receipt. I was not asked for a “present” at any of the offices.

Plan 5: see figure 2. The Super Market shown on Plan 5 no longer exists but there is a vegetable market and a fish market as well as shops where indicated near the north of the plan. I found (in December/January) that the prevailing wind usually had a larger onshore component than would be expected from the plan.

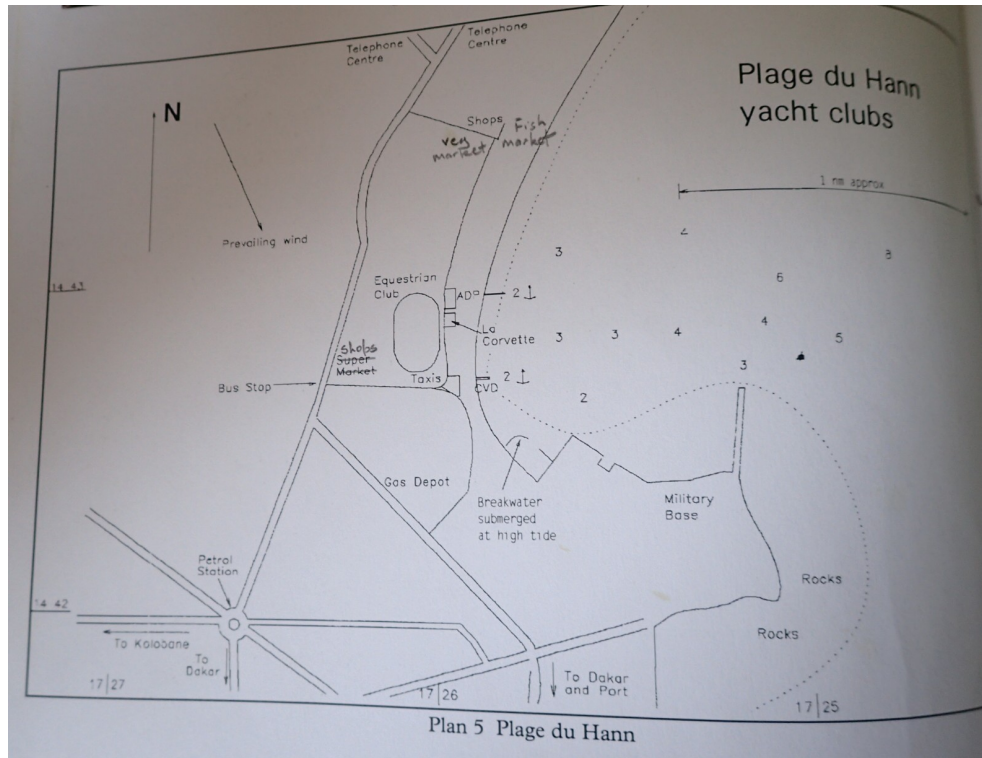


Figure 2: Plan 5

Hann

Page 24: I found Anse Hann was frequently quite choppy with a fresh onshore breeze. Even with a snubber I had to lay a lot of anchor chain to avoid snatching. The chop was sometimes enough to make using the dinghy awkward so the CVD ferry was a welcome service.

Amicable du Pleancier (ADP) has closed.

In January 2017 temporary membership of the CVD was 3,000 CFA per day for a yacht and one crew plus 2,000 for each additional crew. A week was 20,000 CFA for a yacht and one crew plus 7,500 for each additional crew. Rates for longer stays were available.

It is possible to fill your own water containers at the tap as an alternative to having cans

brought to the boat by a boy. Keep track of how much you take as you may be asked to pay for it.

If planning to use the beaching trolleys inspect the trolley carefully before committing to it. One recently collapsed with a yacht on it.

There is now a chandlery opposite the entrance to the CVD.

Dakar to Banjul

Dakar to Saloum

Page 33: new editions of Admiralty chart 607 do show the new entrance to the Saloum including the buoyed channel. In January 2017 all the entrance buoys except No. 11 were present. No. 13 is very small. The buoys are not lit. I did not venture beyond Djifere.

The water tower at Djifere is obscured by trees from many angles but the adjacent radio mast is conspicuous.

The Gambia

Arrival in Banjul

Page 44 & Plan 20: I anchored off the former boatyard at Half Die as shown on the original Plan 20. I was boarded almost immediately by the Navy and asked to move to the other side of the pier where their power boats are moored, probably the location described by Bob and Liz Cooper. There are a lot of unmarked and dangerous wrecks in this area.

I remained anchored at Half Die overnight as I arrived too late to clear in and was visited again in the middle of the night by the Navy checking up on me. This was in the period after President Yahya Jammeh had refused to step down (having lost the last election) and before he did actually leave office so the Navy were probably more on edge than normally.

There is a convenient pontoon on the side of the Navy pier where one can land by dinghy. The correct order for clearing in is Immigration - Customs - Port Authority - Immigration again. The offices are hard to find in the port complex. One of the security guards from the pier guided me round them (and to an ATM first for cash) for a small present. It took about 3½ hours in total but would have been a lot longer without his help.

Customs still do not have a photocopier so you need to bring your own copies of your documents.

Port Authority charged a fixed rate of €22 for a cruising permit for however long you specify up to one year. The fee can be paid in Dalasi. The permit is renewable.

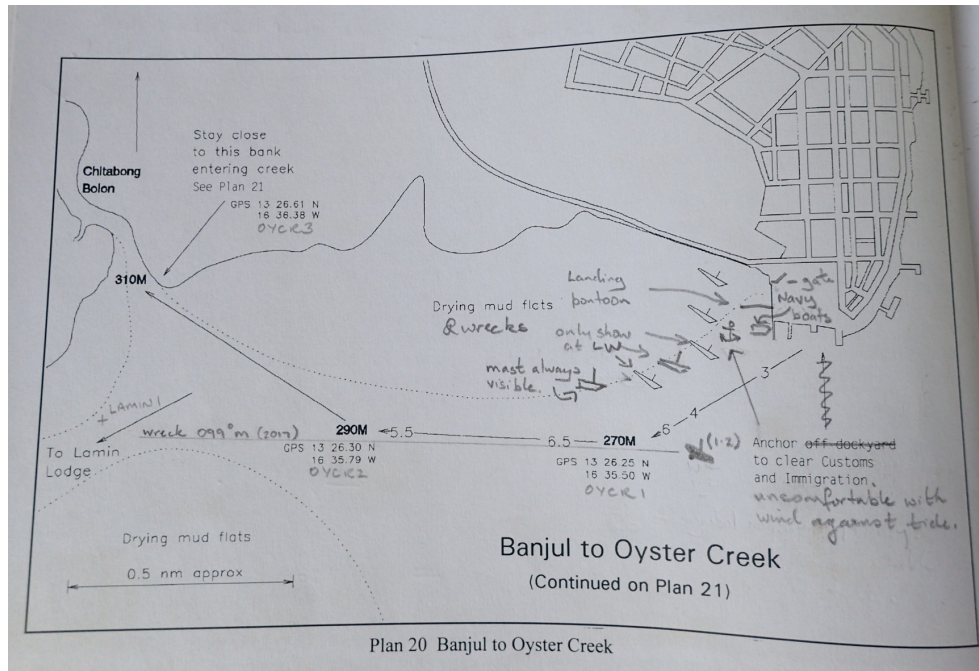


Figure 3: Plan 20

Tide tables are now 350 Dalasi. The times given are the same as in Admiralty Tide Tables NP208.

I was asked for a “present” by both Immigration and Customs but not by the Port Authority. None visited the boat although Immigration did come down to the pier and inspect her from there.

On departure it is only necessary to visit Immigration who will put an exit stamp in your passport.

Banjul to Oyster Creek

Page 47 and Plan 20: I found pilotage in the area of Plan 20 difficult. There are a lot of wrecks and not many landmarks.

I could not identify the “two wrecks almost in line on a bearing of 270°M” described on page 47 and they may have broken up.

The 1.2 m wreck shown south of the channel on Admiralty Chart 608 is always visible and a useful landmark. The mast of another wreck on the north side of the channel is also visible at high water but there are other dangerous wrecks close to this one that are usually submerged. I have sketched some extra details on Plan 20 (see figure 3) but stress that these are very approximate and navigation in this area must be undertaken with great care.

I failed to find the entrance to Chitabong Bolon either by traditional pilotage or by using the GPS waypoints given in Plan 20. I ran aground several times trying (i.e. depth less than 1.8 metres), fortunately all in soft mud. This was an hour or two after low water. Whether my pilotage was at fault or the entrance has moved or shoaled I don't know. In the end I gave up and went to Lamin Lodge instead. Unfortunately I never got round to going back and surveying the area by dinghy. I did note several yachts and some large fishing boats in Oyster Creek when passing on the bus but they may have been there for some time.

I did find the GPS waypoints given in Plan 20 very useful for staying in the main channel.

Bakau and Fajara

Plan 24: see updated sketch in figure 4. Pipeline Road is now called Kairaba Avenue. Some of the supermarkets have moved or changed.

Minibuses from Lamin go to either Serekunda or to Westfield Junction. Change at Westfield for Banjul.

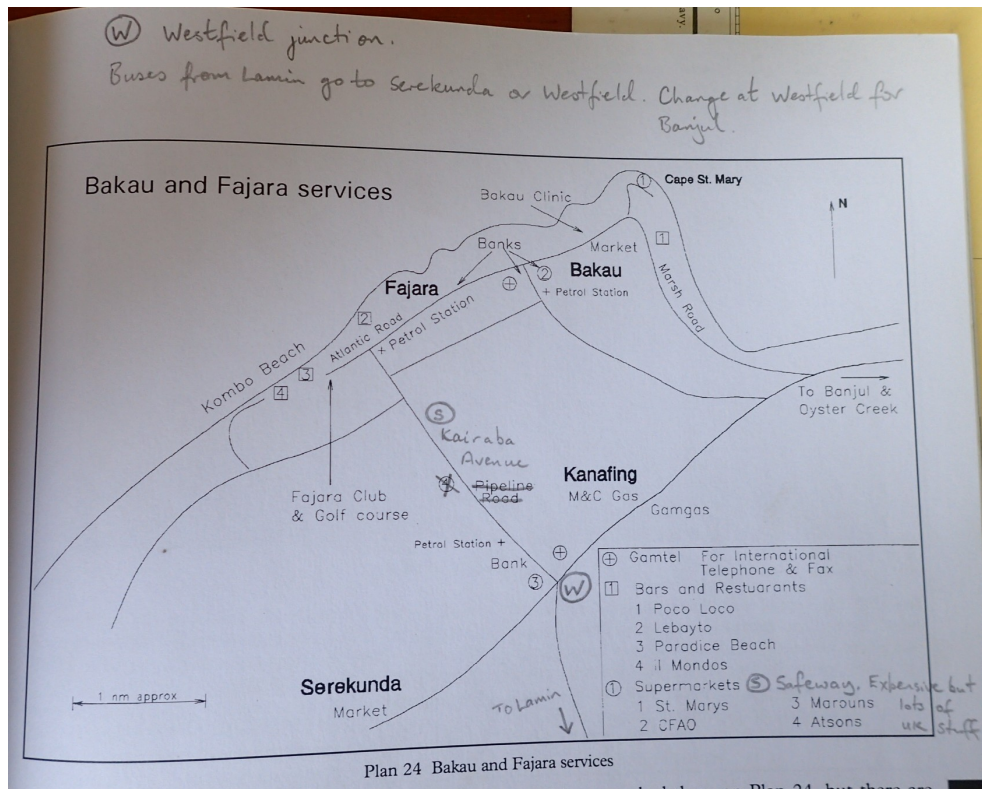


Figure 4: Plan 24

Lamin Lodge

Page 53 and Plan 25: the shallows in the area where Daranka Bolon joins Lamin Creek are very extensive. A pavilion on the tip of the mainland just south of Lamin Island makes a useful landmark. The deepest track I could find was to stay quite close to the west bank right up to the north west point of the entrance to Daranka Bolon and then head straight across to the point of land just north of the pavilion. I could just follow this track at low water (depth about 2 m) but the shallows are very close to starboard. See figure 5.

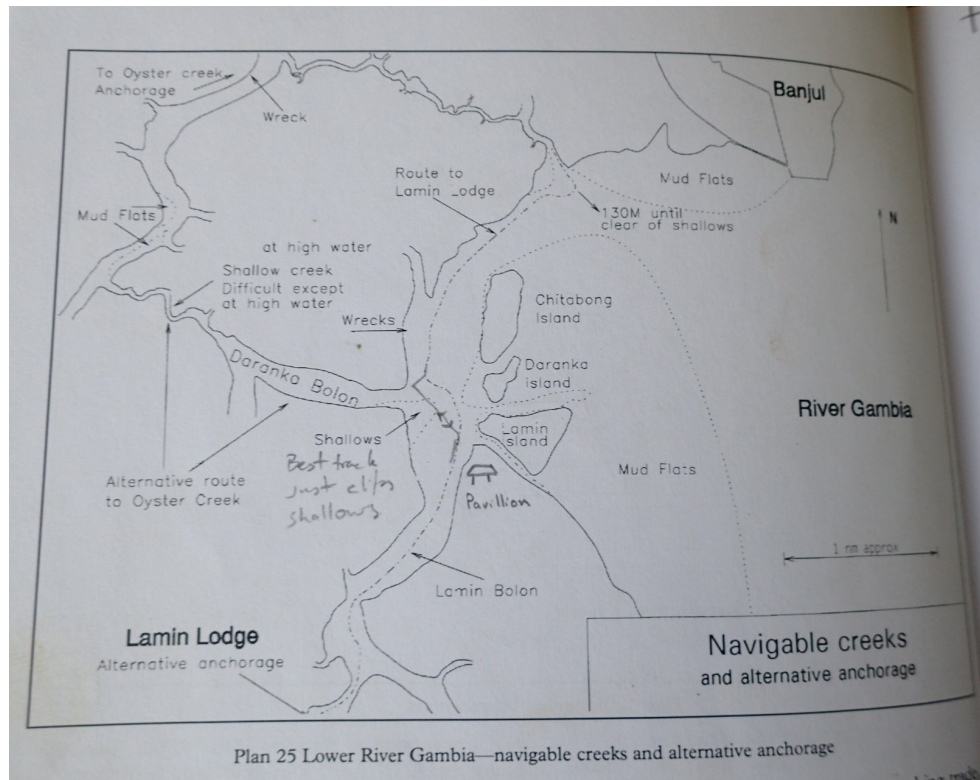


Figure 5: Plan 25

The area around the final turn into the creek leading to the lodge also has extensive shallows.

As you approach the lodge, hold close to the west (starboard) bank. Shallows extend to at least mid channel from the east bank but the west side is deep right up to the trees. I anchored on this side about 100 m before the lodge. If continuing upstream, cross to the east bank at the bend at the lodge.

Lamin itself is about 2 km of dirt road from the lodge and has a wide range of shops and numerous fresh produce stalls although no large supermarket. The GTBank ATM accepts foreign cards.

Boys at the lodge can arrange most supplies and services including water, diesel and gas cylinder refills as well as for taxis to come and pick you up.

Kerosene is available in Lamin from shops selling engine oil and such like. Some petrol stations have a kerosene pump.

There is a sand bank beyond the lodge where the adventurous can careen their vessels for underwater maintenance. The boys at the lodge look after some of the moored boats and may be able to help with bottom scrubbing, painting etc. Gibril, telephone +220 365 3765, is recommended and may well meet you when you arrive.

Yundum police station, on the main highway about 2 km from Lamin in the direction of the airport and Brikama, has an immigration office where visa extensions can be obtained.

The River Gambia

Page 55: When I visited all the buoyage shown on Admiralty Chart 608 was in position as far as James Island although the lighthouse on the island has clearly not worked for a long time. Beyond James Island the only buoyage is at the ferry crossing at Yalitenda / Farafenni, see Tendeba (Yalitenda and Farafenni) below.

Plan 26: Plan 26 gives the times of high and low water relative to Banjul but I found that the current generally did not reverse until a long time after high or low water. At James Island the delay was about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours, decreasing to about 30 minutes by Kuntaur and then increasing to $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours again by Georgetown. I have noted these times in figure 6 but they are very approximate.

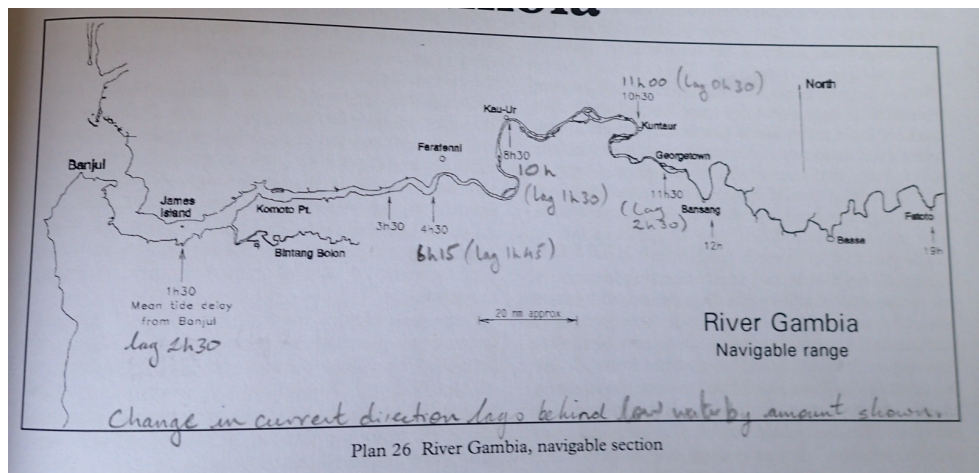


Figure 6: Plan 26

Bintang Bolon

Page 57: “(see detail in Plan 29)” should read “(see detail in Plan 28).” I did not visit this creek.

Kemoto Point

Page 60: Tabirere creek has deeper water towards the northeast bank both at the entrance and inside. There are sizeable shoals off both points at the entrance.

I did see one fishing canoe in Mandori Creek but the birds are still there.

Tendeba (Yalitenda and Farafenni)

Page 61: there are now three ferries at the Yalitenda ferry crossing and two were operating simultaneously at the time of my visit.

A bridge is presently (2017) under construction to replace the ferries. When I visited large piles were being driven into the river from construction barges. In addition to a pair of buoys marking the channel there were numerous buoys, moorings and vessels associated with the bridge construction as well as a number of fish traps.

The construction crew told me the finished bridge would have a vertical clearance of 18 metres. Completion is reportedly scheduled for 2020.

Water can be obtained in Farafenni.

There is a bank with an ATM in Farafenni, the last on the river until Basse.

Visa extensions can be obtained at Farafenni police station.

Kuntaur to Georgetown

Refer to figure 7.

Plan 32: there is an additional small island in the channel north of the largest Baboon Island, this is shown on Admiralty Chart 609 but not on the original Plan 32.

Part of the shoal shown south of the largest island on Admiralty Chart 609 is now a new island.

Page 66 and Plan 32: as reported by the Coopers, the depths in the channel north of the small island before Baboon Island are much less than charted, *to the extent that many yachts will not be able to use this channel at low water*. I slid over a shoal in this channel at half tide and calculated that there would be less than 1 m at chart datum. This was close to the position where plan 32 shows a depth of 7 m. The depths in the south channel were more or less as charted.

Trees have grown up around the mosque tower at Barajali and it is no longer prominent.

Page 67: the dumb ferry in the south channel at MacCarthy Island has now been replaced by a bridge, even lower than the telegraph wires. Nothing much larger than a canoe could use this channel.

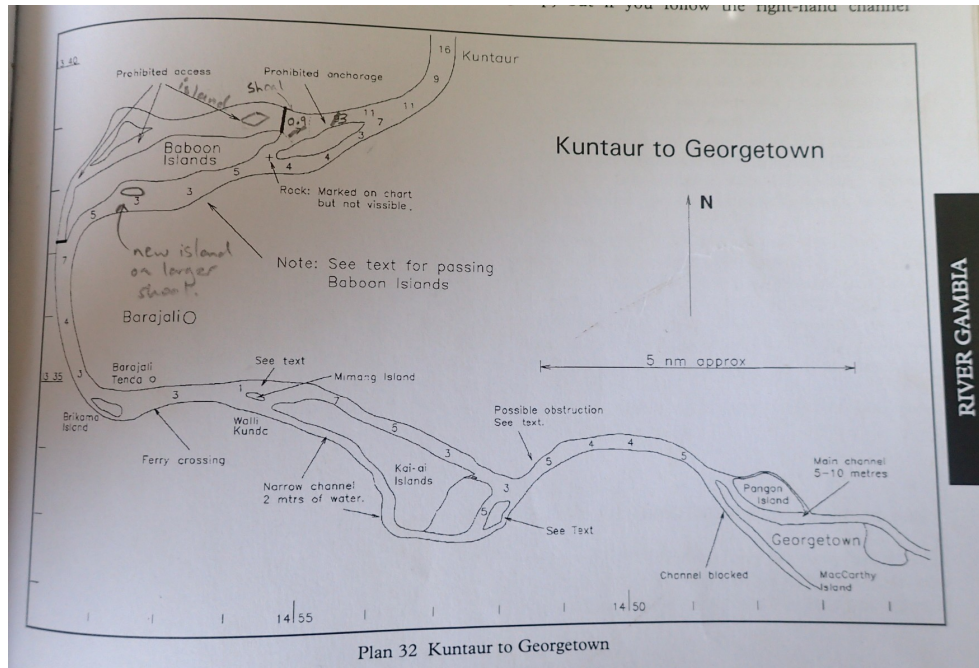


Figure 7: Plan 32

As reported by Ed Wheeler the north bank channel is obstructed by power lines immediately upstream of the ferry crossing at Georgetown. Locals say yachts can pass under the cables by staying close to the north bank where there is a pylon and they are not so low. This looked plausible but I did not try it.

Georgetown

Page 67: Georgetown is these days a thriving place (whereas I found Kuntaur very quiet) and has a well stocked market and a good range of shops as well as a large school, museum, police station, bars, restaurants and the like. There is no bank but there is a bureau de change where foreign currency can be exchanged for Dalasis.

Regular busses run from Georgetown back to Brikama and Banjul as well as upriver to Bansang and beyond.

I did not go beyond Georgetown.

The Casamance

I did not visit the Casamance because of the changes to the clearing in rules described below. The following is all based on second hand information which I have not verified.

Planning

Page 72: according to the CVD office in Dakar it is no longer possible to clear in in Ziguinchor. Clearing in to Senegal can only be done in Dakar. It is therefore not permitted to sail from The Gambia to the Casamance, one must first return to Dakar to clear back into Senegal. It is however still possible to clear *out* of Senegal in Ziguinchor by going to the airport.

Banjul to the Casamance

Page 73: a report at the CVD dated 23/12/12 gave the position of the approach (buoy?) as 12° 35'.548 N 16° 54'.081 W and the entrance as 12° 32'.484 N 16° 50'.336 W.

A friend who visited the Casamance in 2017 reported that the buoyed channel was in place.

Djogue to Ziguinchor

Page 77: a copy of the Port Authority rules for Ziguinchor on the notice board at CVD states that in order to keep the channel clear yachts must anchor less than 100 m from the shore and in less than 4 m depth at chart datum.

Ziguinchor

Page 78: the same notice states that you must report to the Harbour Master (Port Authority) within 12 hours of arrival and again less than 12 hours before departure, even if you are coming from or going to another port in Senegal.

South of Elinkine

Page 85: a friend who visited the Casamance in 2014 advised me not to go off tracks in the vicinity of Ehidj as there may be land mines.

Guinea-Bissau

Planning

Page 95: the Guinea-Bissau Embassy in Banjul has moved. It is now in the suburb of Kotu, at the Palma-Rima junction, up a side street on the south side of the Bertil Harding highway. There is a sign for it at the highway and the Guinea-Bissau flag flies from the building itself. Opening hours are 9 - 16 Monday - Thursday.

River Casamance to River Cacheu

Page 99: I used the anchorage in the lee of Cabo Roxo and found it an adequate passage anchorage in settled conditions.

I entered the Cacheu using the Rio de Bolor channel as described. There are no navigational markers and I relied heavily on GPS, motor, depth sounder, and the chart.

I left the Cacheu by the south channel by using GPS to follow the line over the banks where the chart showed the buoys used to be. I found isolated shoal patches of up to 1 m less than the charted depth on this line.

I would not like to use either entrance to the Cacheu in anything other than settled conditions.

River Cacheu to Cacheu

Page 100: I cleared in to Guinea - Bissau in Cacheu. I arrived in the evening and cleared in the following morning. I paid a non negotiable 25,000 CFA for a cruising permit, for which I received a receipt. Two officials came to inspect the boat and they asked for "presents" of a further 5000 CFA each plus a couple of items they selected from the ship's equipment. The officials were friendly and helpful and the whole process low key and nonthreatening.

The anchorage at Cacheu is not always as placid as in Steve Jones experience, particularly when the wind is against the tide.

Page 101: the standpipe near the jetty only works between (approximately) 7 and 9 in the morning.

Cacheu has a reasonably well stocked vegetable market. There is a larger weekly market every Thursday.

Bijagos Islands

Bolama to Roxa

Page 117: neither the marker on the Baixo do Pargo nor the buoy marking the shallows were present when I visited.

If entering the Ilheus dos Porcos anchorage at high water, note that the beach dries out a long way and then shelves very rapidly. This is obvious at low water.

Roxa to Bubaque

Page 121: I did not enjoy dealing with the officials in Bubaque. I arrived in the evening, and having already cleared in to Guinea - Bissau in Cacheu I did not immediately go ashore. I was boarded the following morning by 4 threatening officials (plus 2 more to man their launch) demanding to know why I hadn't cleared in etc. Despite my papers

from Cacheu, I was charged 30,000 CFA for departure clearance (for which I did receive a receipt), a further 40,000 CFA for “inspection charges,” plus 2000 CFA for passport stamping, a total of 72,000 CFA. I was told that the port captain’s office is manned 24 hours a day and that I should have reported there as soon as I arrived regardless of the time.

I used a Bahamian Moor to solve the problem of getting into water shallow enough to anchor without ending up on the beach at the turn of the tide.

The market had a good range of vegetables but the only fruit available was mangoes and lemons. Most other basic supplies can be obtained in the village, which is very pleasant after the problems of anchoring and clearing in are overcome. There is no bank but some of the shops will exchange Euros for CFA.

The “European style” ferry to Bissau had not operated for several months when I was there although a replacement vessel was supposed to be on her way from Spain. A local *canoua* ferry was operating a service about twice a week, a 5 - 6 hour journey which even some locals were reluctant to brave. Dakar based airline Arc en Ciel operates flights from Bissau to Bubaque on request, using a light aircraft which can carry up to three passengers.

Canal de Orango

Steve Jones does not describe the Canal de Orango but it is described in the United States Pub. 143 “Sailing Directions (Enroute) - West Coast of Europe and Northwest Africa.” (See General Information and Planning.) I used this route back out to the Atlantic after leaving Bubaque and found it straightforward.