

Darramy on tour No 24: Fiji, Fiji and more Fiji

May 2014 – November 2014

Bula, Bula,

Our cruising this year went according to plan. We have had 6 wonderful months cruising Fiji.

Lets start at the beginning: After a couple of good months at home in the UK, catching up with family and friends, the end of April arrived and it was time to return to our nomadic life on the water. So it was back to Darramy which, you may recall we had left afloat at Vuda Point in Fiji. We found all well on board, and we soon tested all the systems and restocked ready to start our exploring.

We were in the West of Viti Levu, the largest of Fiji's 330 Islands. Because the prevailing winds come from the East, our planed trip

entailed heading into the wind. (Not always the most pleasant way to sail)! Added to that, there are loads of uncharted reefs in the area, and many of the charts had not been updated since Captain Cook and his buddies charted the area over 200 years ago! Although we have GPS, and the GPS system is very accurate, whilst Captain Cook's stuff has done well for a long time, it has often found that the charts may be up to 1 mile off in accuracy. So we had to eyeball many of the passages. We did have some waypoints to follow which were available from other cruisers. During a passage we would look at the track we had taken and very often that track showed on the chart that we were crossing the land!



Back to School

We had made two attempts to cross, but due to all this inaccurate charting stuff together with poor visibility and strong winds, we had already turned back twice, we decided on a change of plan, and headed further East along the coast of Viti Levi. Calling in at Makangai, a small island, which had been a former leper colony. Here we did our first "Sevusevu"



Getting on Board

Scary stuff, and one or two boats we heard of did have encounters with the reefs, fortunately no loss of life, but damage to your boat in this part of the world, causes many problems with the lack of repair facilities etc. Best to be avoided!

So we headed up around the Northern coast of Viti Levu, where we waited for better conditions to cross Bligh Waters to

Vanua Levu the second largest Island.

Now Fiji is a mixture of old and new, whilst they have enhanced many of the modern ways of life, they still keep alive their old customs and traditions. “Sevusevu” is, what you must do when you visit a village or island. You find the chief. then you present



Getting to know the locals

him with some roots from the Yacona plant, which looks like a pile of twigs which you wrap in newspaper and fasten with a ribbon. The chief does his mumbo jumbo bit, and then welcomes you to the village and gives you permission to wander and join in with some of the village life. These roots are then bashed, and ground down to a powder put in what looks like an old sock (tea bag style), steeped in water this makes the drink called “Kava”, not really alcoholic, but it has some sedative and anaesthetic effects on you. A communal bowl and shared drinking from a ½ coconut shell. It is an acquired taste, of which we did our best to master! (Best not to loose too much sleep over the hygiene bit either!). We visited a junior school, met the head teacher and chatted to the children who enjoyed talking to us, and we showed them on their world map where we had travelled. Lots of questions, and it turned out the naughtiest boy coincidentally was called Bryani, So he and I had a lot in common! We were invited to watch some traditional dancing where the whole village took part wearing traditional costume, a really entertaining cultural time.



Taveuni Waterfall

We then headed to Savu Savu on Vanua Levu, yes we finally got there! Here we met up with a few boats and old friends we had met in previous years. Now the Eastern part of Fiji is quite a wet area, and we spent a few days waiting for the weather to improve before slogging further East. We stopped at a few pretty anchorages on our way, some of the entrances to these places for us were fortunately, more miss than hit, because of all the hidden reefs we had to ensure we had good light to find our way in and go very, very slow. Phew, we made it



Supping Sue

in and always found a pretty and quiet anchorage for a few nights stay, only to repeat the navigational exercise when we came to depart.

Quite a few of the anchorages gave us a chance to do some water activities. The new paddle board (SUP) was put to good use, sometimes Sue would be sitting on the front whilst I paddled, not quite Venetian gondola style but we had a lot

of fun. The snorkelling and diving was excellent, many live corals and sponges to see as well as a vast array of beautiful coloured tropical fishes. I Scuba'd a world famous dive called the "Great White Wall". There was some beautiful white soft coral covering a wall below 25 meters depth, and this was the only place in the world where this is found, a really spectacular dive site especially as we had to go through a couple of rock tunnels on the decent.

We slowly headed to Taveuni Isle via several small islands which had been settled on, not by Fijians, but by people from some central Pacific Islands which had had to be vacated either by rising sea levels or pollution caused by first world companies exploiting the raw materials on the islands and the population being ripped off with puny compensation pay offs.



I am enjoying it. Honest !

Anchoring in the north of Taveuni, we went on the local bus to the end of a road, where we proceeded to walk up to a series of waterfalls. The track got steep, and slippery, but eventually we got the highest waterfall, it was wonderful and so looked inviting for that lovely fresh water swim in the pool below the fall. Hmm, cold and invigorating is a good description!

A change in the weather forecast moved us on to the Island of Qamea, we had



A Burr under construction

previously met a lady called Sherry on Taveuni, she had invited us to her village on Qamea. Well, on arrival we discovered there were four villages so we had to ask where Sherry lived, we were directed to another village so made our way there, now we, over the years seem to drop lucky quite often, and on entering this village we were directed to the chiefs Burr (Fijian House), We could hear music and singing, and found

the chief amongst some villagers having a Kava party. He came to us and took us to his Burr where we presented our "Savusavu", again more mumbo jumbo stuff, and he then invited us to join him and the villagers, that is, after his daughter had shown us around the small village, in the meeting hut (a two side corrugated unit with a roof) to drink Kava.



Kava & Jamming in Qamea

It turned out that the original inhabitants of the village descended from the Solomon Islands, and today was Solomon Island independency day, so it was party time. I told you we were lucky! I was also getting used to this Kava by now, so we sat on the floor and joined in the festivities. The chief who was also the Minister, was pretty talented, he could play the guitar and mandolin, and had a wonderful singing voice. We just sat talked with everyone and enjoyed our first real village event, not one put



Sherry and family feast

on for the tourists. We felt very much part of the people, but where was Sherry? We were told she was away from the village for the day. The next morning a lady came out towards Darramy paddling a small boat, shouting and waving; it was Sherry, she was excited to see us and pleased that we had come to her village. We discovered later that they did not get many visitors being the smallest village on the island.

We made a fuss of her, and she wanted us to come up to her house in a few days time as she was having a celebration for her daughter Titilia, who had finished her school exams This we duly did. Well, Sherry had been cooking for two days, and conjured up a wonderful spread, all cooked on a wood fire, whilst these folks had very little in material goods and chattels, cloths were spread on the floor and the food laid out. We, we think were the guests of honour, and many members of the large family past through for some food and a look at Sherries new friends! She found a spoon and fork for us to eat with, but the rest of the family ate with their fingers. Sue had made a big pasta dish which was well accepted by everyone. We gave a small gift to Titilia and she was thrilled to receive a present. After the food Sherry



Sherry and gifts

got out the family Kava bowl and we had a few drinks with her before heading back to the boat. Early the next morning Sherry was back again this time with a bag of stuff which she emptied on the table and we thought here we go, it's the hard sell bit now. How wrong can one be. This was a bag of gifts for us from her and the family, beautiful shells, wooden carvings and necklaces. We had already printed out some photographs of the previous day's celebration, which she was delighted with. She eventually left with tears in her eyes, it was a very emotional parting, but left us with some wonderful memories. We left that evening for an overnight passage to the Northern Lau group of Islands which were reputed to be as good or even better.

Although the distance to the Northern Lau group was not that far, we knew we had to arrive with good light behind us for the tricky entrance through the reefs surrounding the Vanua Balavu Islands (Exploring Islands). This we safely navigated. The Lau Group has only been open to visitors for the past two years, previously it was difficult

to get a permit to visit, so the inhabitants lived a very traditional way of life without



A bit of the Bay of Islands

many outside influences. The chief is the boss man. They only get a supply boat once a month, so have to be fairly self-sufficient. But on arrival we were called on the radio by the chief's underling asking us to come ashore at 2.00pm to do our "Sevusevu". This we did and also got a bill for \$30 per head, they called it a donation! This is to help them improve the village services. For a race of people who had had very few visitors in

previous years, they soon had learnt about trying to fleece the visitor!

We sailed around this lovely area, anchoring in the Bay of Islands, a wonderful almost landlocked bay with many small islands, hidden coves and unbelievable rock formations. We went on to "Royal Exploring Islands Yacht Squadron", we already had a letter of introduction to the manager of the coconut plantation, where the squadron was based which enabled us to explore the plantation and the lovely views



The School Bus

of the Bay of Islands from land. We met a couple of the local plantation workers, who had run out of petrol for their small boat. We gave them some petrol. Well by this act, we made some new friends; a few of us cruisers repaired their boat, which they used as the school bus, for fetching supplies from the nearby islands and for fishing.

These same people were caretakers of the club house, they let us use the BBQ, so we had a few evening parties there with the

other cruisers anchored in our bay. We bought a couple of pigs from the plantation owner and the locals cooked them for us in traditional style, one on a spit and one in the ground called a "Lovo". We had a fantastic musical, kava evening, together with their traditional food, in their village. These people just love to party, many of them are very musical and can turn their talents to play many instruments. Yes, Kava is a big incentive, and they don't

need much of an excuse for a Kava session!

I went with them on the "school bus" to the next island to drop the children off for school. The children stay there with extended family Monday to Friday, and return



Petrol Head?

home for the weekend, weather or the boat permitting. We then went to another island to get some petrol, not your usual petrol station, (see photo). We had also met some other cruisers on a boat named “Monkey Fist”. Paul and Francis were from Australia on their way to Japan, but they had been eye testing on remote islands to provide reading glasses to the locals. This initiative was sponsored by the Lions Club of Aus and NZ.



Optician's waiting room

are no longer able to stretch far enough in front of you to focus!) With Paul's guidance we soon got into the way of testing their reading sight. With a magazine for them to read from, trying out various prescriptions, we usually managed to get them glasses that suited their eyes. Blimey was it rewarding to see their faces light up with delight as they realised they had the ability to read again. We found this to be a very satisfying moment. It also gave us more of an insight of the gratification that people who work in the care industry probably get.

They used recycled reading glasses which were checked and cleaned in Aus, they had over 1000 pairs on board of various prescriptions, and when they were in a remote place could test the reading eye sight amongst the local community. Well, Sue and I went with them to an island called Avia, we set up in the meeting house, and just about the whole village came along, some people had not been able to read for years because of failing eye sight, (*Over 40s: you know what I mean when your arms*

We visited another island named Susui, here we went to the local Sunday church service, although conducted in Fijian, we were made welcome by the minister and village elders, and then after the service invited back to the traditional feast which follows the Sunday Service. These folks eat well I can assure you, and their generosity is amazing. In all our time in Fiji, we rarely saw really skinny people!



Mmm! Nearly Sunday roast

We had hoped to head to the Southern Lau group, but we were getting low on supplies after over a month, and decided that we would have to head back to the main islands to resupply and start heading West as time was going by and we had arranged to be in Musket Cove by early September for the annual Regatta.

We had some good sailing retracing our track back to Savu Savu, and also caught some good sized Mahi Mahi so at least fresh fish was on the menu again! We headed South and made it to an Island called Gau, where again we did the usual village greeting stuff, and then a few days later sailed on to Suva the capital of Fiji. Suva came as a bit of a shock as it was just a big town bustling and far removed from what we had experienced for the past few months. Restock, deal with repairs and leave was

the order of the day. We headed to Bengga an island surrounded by yet more reefs, the diving is reputed to be excellent, and it was, seeing my first Bull Shark and a few other new species, but the water was cold, only 25 degrees Brrrrr!

We made our way to Musket Cove in the Mananutha Isles (West Fiji), here we took part in the annual regatta, not just sailing, water based events for everyone, Yes, yacht racing which we entered, but Pirate day, dinghy racing, stuff for children, and a Paddle Board Race, in which yours truly did not let the side down, with a second place in class only being closely beaten by a young chap of a mere 30 years! (life in the old dog yet?). It was a really good well organised event, and we then departed for Vuda Point Marina.



Sandbank party Musket Cove

We had met an Aussie guy in the Lau, and he was a marine upholsterer. Now you may remember I always moan about the damage the tropical heat does to the boat, well the head linings were in a sorry state, He reckoned he could sort the job out, so after some thought we ordered material from Australia had it flown to Fiji, and our new friend, lets call him Jim, set to, well the job had to get worse before it got better, the mess



Headlining Stripped!

was horrible, the boat a tip, don't forget we were still living on board. But eventually after a week of fantastic effort Jim produced a work of art, we now have a relined boat, it was more than a make over, and we are extremely happy with the new interior.



Jim doing his stuff!

After this it was back to Musket Cove for a small dinner with fellow OCC members in the area to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the club.



OCC 60 year celebration

We then sailed up to the Yasawa group of Islands, which were very pretty, however there seems to be a small resort on almost every island, and the locals we found were not so friendly, they were too used to tourists and we felt they had lost the traditional way that still existed in the Eastern part of the country. On our way there we were fishing, and got a bite, the line ran out. Oh no, we had hooked a Marlin, this thing



Marlin, may seem small, but Oh No!

jumped out of the water, Sue got that Jaws feeling again! Anyway I was determined to have a go at landing this monster, after over half an hour, I managed to get it to within a couple of meters of the boat, but it was still fighting, I was knackered, but still the battle went on, at last the Kevlar 40Kg line was also knackered and broke. Probably the best result with hind sight!

We then made our way back to Vuda Point to finish what had been a fantastic time in Fiji. Our final party was Halloween at the Marina. The staff entered into the spirit of it with gusto!



Spooky Sue!

This season we did not clock up large distances, we really enjoyed having time to spend amongst some of the best people we have come across in all our travels. We have had experiences way beyond anything previously, and just love these folks. A special thanks (Vinaka) to all the staff at Vuda Point, who treated us like family.



Halloween

Once again, we prepared to leave Darramy for the cyclone season and had her lifted out of the water to be stored in a cyclone pit. We return in April next year to head further west, maybe to Indonesia.



Nestled in the Cyclone Pit

We are now in North Island New Zealand where we are renting a lovely apartment overlooking the Bay of Islands. We are doing some sailing on local racing boats, and using the SUP. We fly home in February so may see you then. Sue is looking forward to seeing Henry, her new Grandson born in August.



NZ living: Weird all this space & luxury!

So as usual it's TTFN

(Delete as applicable)

Best Wishes *Kindest Regards* *Love and Hugs* *Cheers* *Merry Christmas*

Brian and Sue

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So try this link, you will see travelogues 1-20, keep scrolling down and see No, 21,22,23 and now hopefully this one No 24. Click on the blue print and hey presto: (Boredom unlimited)!

<http://www.oceancruisingclub.org/index.php/forum/links-to-members-blog-sites/882-brian-wallace-publishes-his-accounts-of-darramy-on>