

**A L D E B A R A N' S**  
**Sailing Circumnavigation**  
**36<sup>th</sup> Report**  
**Fiji (part one)**

**(Exchange rate; one Euro = 2.1 Fijian dollars)**

**After 18 days at sea** since departing New Zealand, see our 35<sup>th</sup> report for the full details, we finally secured to a mooring buoy at the Copra Shed Marina at Savusavu on Fiji's second biggest island Vanua Levu (position 16 degrees 47 minutes South and 179 degrees 29 minutes East). Within two hours of arriving, following visits from, firstly the Department of Health followed by Custom and finally Immigration, we were cleared into the country. The Department of Agricultural never turned up. During their visits the various officials cleaned us out of coke and biscuits. The only cost was \$33 (about 16 euros) for the Health Officer.

**“Welcome to Fiji” was the welcome we got from each one of them**

**Fiji** is made up of more than 200 uninhabited and about 100 inhabited islands spread across some 200,000 square miles lying between 15 and 22 degrees south and 177 degrees east and 178 degrees west thus straddling the 180<sup>th</sup> meridian. Suva the nations capital is situated on the largest island Viti Levu. The almost 730,000 population comprises two major ethnic groups, the largest group being the native Fijians at about 49% followed closely by Fijians of Indian descent with about 46%. However land ownership does not break down in the same proportion, the native Fijians hold 80%, the British Crown about 12% with the rest being freehold.

The land owned by the Fijians is not however owned by individuals but rather held under customary tenure in the name of small tribal units, the most important of which is the mataqali. The whole question of “native lands “ is a very complex subject. It is for this reason that when we anchor in a new area we immediately seek out the local chief , make a presentation to him and ask his permission to walk and swim etc in his territory. The presentation ceremony is very special and is described in detail below.

Many of the islands including the four biggest are volcanic in origin. The summits of many of the mountains have distinct craters, their activity long since ceased. The eastern part of Fiji is by far the wettest compared with the much drier western part. Savusavu where we made landfall and Suva the capital are in the wetter half. There is a distinct difference in the vegetation between the two half's with the wetter eastern part being much greener. Fruit and vegetables are grown in abundance although sometimes scarce in the drier sector.

**History:**

Archaeological research has shown that the Fiji Islands were populated at least 3,000 years ago, although there are some researchers who claim that original settlement was made as far back as 8,000 years. Most authorities agree that people came into the Pacific from south-east Asia by way of the Indonesian archipelago. Later, voyagers from Polynesia mixed freely with the Melanesians to create a highly developed society long before the arrival of Europeans.

Abel Tasman was the first European to discover the islands in 1643 and in 1774 Captain Cook visited the area. Captain Bligh having been cast adrift in a open boat with 17 loyal sailors by the mutineers of the HMS Bounty sailed through the area in 1789 and recorded the area in more detail. Bligh did not set foot on the islands for fear of cannibals especially having been chased by two war canoes in the western Yasawa group of islands.

The Fijian way of life – savage by any standards – turned into an era of even bloodier warfare after the arrival of the first European. Although treachery, killing, and cannibalism was normal the early Europeans which consisted mainly of shipwreck sailors or runaway convicts from Australian penal settlements added a new dimension by lending their talents to the various warring chiefs.

To day, I am glad to report first hand, with the exception of the odd coup, such warring especially cannibalism is history and a more friendly people you would find hard to come upon.

**The twelve days** we stayed in Savusavu afforded us a good introduction into Fiji culture and tradition. A visit to a local village was the first time we experienced the offering of gifts to 'turaga ni koro', the chief or other local official. About half a kilo of the root of yagona, better known as kava, is the most generally acceptable gift. The giving of the gift is a very formal ceremonial presentation and known locally as 'sevusevu' with both parties seated in a circle in the Chief's house. The Chief starts with a litany of prayers and words of welcome, spoken in their native Fijian tongue. In the center of the circle is the 'gift' and it is only when the Chief reaches out and takes it that you know that 'your gift' is acceptable. The acceptance of the 'gift' ends the formal part of the gathering and from then on things are very informal and we now have permission to, walk the village and beach and swim etc in the tribal territory. After the ceremony you are often invited to partake in the drinking of 'kava'. By the time we departed Fiji we had become very adapt at 'sevusevu' and especially in the drinking of 'kava'.

The mooring at the Copra Shed Marina cost us \$55 per week (26 euros), diesel was \$1.05 litre (0.50 euros), a large pitcher of draft beer cost \$10.40 (4.95 euros).

### **Kava:**

What is kava? most people ask. Well kava to Fijians is like beer to Europeans only instead of being alcoholic it is kind of drug. The root of the plant, a member of the pepper family, is crushed by various means including, a coral stone or wooden stake and in the more advanced villages a meat mincer. It is 'reported' that in the Kandavu area the women chew the root and spit the juice into a container. What a thought!!! The juice is then put into a fine mesh cloth e.g. a sock, a scarf, or piece of old cloth and then dunked into a receptacle container the appropriate amount of water depending on the strength of drink required.

The finished product is the most disgusting colour you ever saw, like very dirty dish water. And for the taste, well if you never tried it you could not possible imagine how revolting it is, well at least for the great majority of non-natives. This non-native, your scribe, took a liking to it and partook in many good kava drinking sessions throughout Fiji, as I also did back in Tonga in 2001. It is served in half a coconut shell, without the meat of course, and one measures the quantity drunk by the number of shells drunk. So instead of saying, you had so many pints, as in beer, you say I had so many shells.

After two or three shells, of the good quality kava, you feel your lips and tongue tingling and after a few more shells you enter into a much relaxed state. The following morning, unlike the aftermath of a heavy alcoholic session, you seem to continue in that same relaxed demeanor for most of the day. At least that was my experience and I think Olivia will confirm it.

### **A sad farewell:**

On leaving Savusavu 7<sup>th</sup> June we sadly said farewell to our very good English friends Malcolm & Helen Shaft on their 33ft steel Ebbtide called MUNA. We first met them back in September 1999 at Bayona, Spain and have been cruising with them on and off ever since. On leaving England their only plans were to sail to New Zealand and they had no plans thereafter and so they are sailing back from Fiji to New Zealand for at least another cyclone season. They would like to settle there if at all possible. We have spent the last four St Patrick's Days with them. In 2000 we were on the volcanic island of Monserrat in the Caribbean, in 2001 in the Galapagos, in 2002 Tauranga, New Zealand and in 2003 Auckland, New Zealand. As the 17<sup>th</sup> March is also Malcolm's birthday it gives us an excuse for a little extra celebrating. We wish them well on whatever course they travel and thank them very much for sharing so many wonderful experiences with us. Hopefully we will meet again at some time in some place.

### **Koro:**

On leaving Savusavu we intended sailing west about 30 miles to the island of Taveuni, however the wind was 'on the nose' and so we altered course to starboard and set a course for the island of Koro about 30 miles south. About half ways there we caught a 1.3 metre Dolphin fish that fed us for the next few days. After

negotiating the reefs we anchored in position 17 degrees 14.9 minutes south and 179 degrees 22.8 minutes east off the village of Nabuna and on going ashore presented our sevusevu to the chief. We had heard of a lovely waterfall about an hours walk from the village and so with two natives Pate and Celeo we began the trek. It took us almost two hours in exhausting heat to reach the falls and then we were only at the top of them. Our two guides climbed down the 100metre descent and had a 'nudi' swim while Olivia and I were happy to loll about in the pools atop the falls. The return, being downhill, took a little less and on re-entering to the village we were invited to join a group of men seated in a circle drinking kava. While I accepted the offer, not wanting to be rude, Olivia excused herself, as before we left for the falls we had been invited to a house for tea and she decided to take up the tea offer in preference to the kava. Some of the natives spoke English and so it was not too difficult to converse with them. I consumed four shells before Olivia's return whereupon she had a shell.

### **Olivia's tea party (described by Olivia):**

"Guided by a group of village children I approached Sekovi's house and was met by his wife Melinda. We sat outside the house on a woven mat. Tea was produced in a big flask, it seemed to be more like warm water, also brown sugar was offered to me. They are such lovely people, so friendly, all the children were sitting beside me, there was plenty of laughter as usual, one little girl had her arms around Melinda and then she proceeded to search through her hair, Melinda looked at me and said lice, it seemed like a sociable thing to do and no remark was passed on it. I was a little careful after that not to get too close to anyone."

To conclude a memorable day, at 1800 hours as arranged I dinghied ashore collected Pate and Celeo our guides and Sekovi in whose house Olivia had the tea. Sekovi brought with him some kava powder complete with the wooden ornate kava bowl and so while seated in Aldebaran's cockpit we made copious amounts of kava. Pate for religious reasons did not drink kava or alcohol and so it was left to Celeo, Sekovi and I to do the drinking. By 2200 hours, and after about ten shells, the kava 'binge' concluded when I left them ashore. Another 24 hours in a relaxed state followed.

### **MAKOGAI:**

From Koro we sailed 35 miles west to the island of Makogai and entered the anchorage through the less treacherous north west Daveta Yawa-Levu pass. Our reason for visiting here was to see the Marine Research Station, a former leper colony, and the giant clams they were cultivating. Shortly after anchoring we were visited by two of the Station's employees bearing a beautifully decorated basket of fruit. By this stage in our travels we knew that the receiving of such gifts was a prelude to a request for something in lieu. It transpired that most of the workers at the station lived on the main island of Viti Levu traveling to and fro at the weekends but due to bad weather they had been unable to go home for the past two weeks and so had exhausted their supply of kava and cigarettes. Having bought a good supply of kava roots and some already crushed roots in Savasavu and duty free cigarettes in New Zealand we were able to satisfy their needs. This of course got us off to a good start with them and we were thereafter treated like royalty.

The giant clams were located just offshore in a depth of about three metres in crystal clear water. The bigger ones measured almost two metres across while the majority were about a metre across. There were about a total of 30 clams in the area, all seemingly with various combinations of the most exquisite of colours. The hour we spent snorkeling over the clams will remain as one of the many highlights of our Fijian experience.

### **LEVUKA:**

Our next stop was Levuka on the eastern coast of the main island of Viti Levu. Cruising Fiji necessitates checking in and out of the major cities or towns of which there are four, Savusavu, Levuka, Suva and Latoka. Levuka is the least popular mainly due to its bad anchorage. We anchored in the recommended spot on front of the Church which is directly opposite the entrance through the reef in 13 metres. The prevailing winds also blow straight through the pass which means you are on a lee shore. Not the formula for a relaxing night's sleep. However, we survived the night, albeit with little sleep, and next morning at 0630 hours began the 54 mile passage to Suva the Fijian capital.

## **SUVA:**

With the exception of being nearly run down by the same inter island ship that almost ran us down during our last night at sea prior to reaching Savusavu the 54 miles to Suva was uneventful. Approaching the anchorage off the Royal Suva Yacht Club we were called on the vhf radio by friends Karen & Wes on their yacht Caprice whom we had not seen since leaving Tauranga, New Zealand. The Suva anchorage is not the prettiest, what with the city dump upwind and fleets of rusting Japanese fishing boats midst the anchored yachts I can think of nicer places to be.

Besides having to check into Suva our main reason was to await the arrival of our new found friends Keith and Gay from New Zealand who were due to arrive in five days time on 24<sup>th</sup> June.

## **Our next report, our 37<sup>th</sup>**

The second and final part of our Fiji experience will be detailed in our next report. This will include our three weeks cruising with Keith and Gay along Fiji's south coast and up its west coast to the famous Yasawa group of islands. It will also cover our visits to the yachting Mecca of Musket Cove, swimming with giant manta rays, diving on a World War 2 plane and much more.

## **IMPORTANT:**

Notifying everybody via our hotmail address can takes days as they only allow you send to fifty address per day. Subsequently some of you may get notification via our boat e-mail. It is a great system but unfortunately we can only send and receive short messages. If you get such notification (via [ei5359@sailmail.com](mailto:ei5359@sailmail.com)) and wish to reply PLEASE DO NOT re-send the original message with all the addresses and PLEASE no attachments, photos or jokes.

**Please keep your e-mails coming, we love to get your comments and news.**

**Pat and Olivia Murphy, s/y ALDEBARAN in the South Pacific**