

**A L D E B A R A N' S**  
**Sailing Circumnavigation**  
**Report 37**  
**Fiji (part two)**

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

**SUVA:**

We arrived in Suva the Fijian capital on Wednesday June 18<sup>th</sup>, after a 54 mile passage from Levuka, to await our New Zealand friends Keith and Gay who were due to join us on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup>. As mentioned in our previous report the anchorage off the Royal Suva Yacht Club with its adjacent city dump and fleets of rusting Japanese fishing boats amidst the anchored yachts would rate at the bottom of our good anchorage table. However, in compensation the Royal Suva Yacht Club would be among our top listing of friendly and pleasant clubs. It is situated on the waterfront and has a lovely big lawn on front with BBQ facilities and the bar and restaurant are most comfortable serving drinks and good meals, all at reasonable prices. Anchoring off the club and using their facilities cost \$9.12 (4.35 Euros) per day. Travelling to and from the city centre on local buses that pass the club every few minutes cost about \$0.40 (0.19 Euros) each way and taxis were only \$2.00 each way and they carry four people.

**Suva** is a bustling metropolis with a range of shopping to suit all. Their fruit and vegetable markets is massive and well worth a visit if in the area. If you get to the market about 1630 hours just before they start packing up for the night and visit the first floor, where the aroma of spices is heavenly and where they sell the kava root and kava powder, you will see groups of men drinking kava. Talk nice to them and they will let you taste 'their' kava and without fail each group will boast that theirs is the best kava. As you approach a group tell them that the previous group said "ours is the best in the market", they will immediately ask you to try theirs and of course you will say "you are right, yours is much better" and move on to the next group. They really do enjoy a good bit of humour. I have had some great 'craic' (Gaelic for fun) with them. We bought four bundles of kava roots (yaqona), each about half a kilo, for doing sevusevu which is the giving of a gift in a very formal ceremonial presentation to local chiefs in return for permission to visit their lands. Our last report describes the sevusevu in more detail.

Our friends from New Zealand, Keith and Gay arrived as planned on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> June and after provisioning we departed Suva the following morning at 1030 hours. Just over five hours later having sailed 27 miles we anchored in Vaga Bay on the island of Beqa. We did not go ashore as we had heard the people, being so close to Suva, were very materialistic and had a high degree of gift-seeking. In compensation we sat in the our cockpit and enjoyed "sundowners" while watching another scarlet sun set beneath another flawless horizon. We really do experience the most wonderful sunsets.

**A first for the village:**

Next day we had an exhilarating downwind 24 nautical mile sail to Somosomo Bay. After negotiating a very difficult gap through the reefs we anchored off Naboutini village in a depth of 12 meters at position 18 degrees 14.5 minutes south and 177 degrees 49.5 minutes east. On approaching the beach in our dinghy we were welcomed by about fifteen enthusiastic children. Lifting the dinghy ashore with so many helping hands is never a problem. The children led us through the village to their chief who then brought us to the village meeting hall. During our walk through the village we were continually being stopped by locals shaking our hands and welcoming us and enquiring as to where we came from. After a number of village elders and officials gathered in the meeting hall we all sat on the floor in a circle. I placed our gift of kava roots in the center and the chief began his welcoming speech. When he eventually reached out and picked up our gift we were all very relieved. We were told that we were the first yacht to offer 'sevusevu' in the village. The few yachts that do negotiate the difficult passage through the reef, mainly just stay overnight leaving the following morning without coming ashore. They showed their appreciation by inviting us to

join them in a kava drinking session before giving us the freedom of the village. As mentioned earlier I am into drinking kava unlike Olivia, Keith & Gay who are a 'little' apprehensive.

### **Sailing par excellence:**

Next morning at 0830 hours we weighed anchor and after 30 minutes we had successfully, much to every bodies relief, negotiated the passage through the reefs to the open sea. Sailing downwind with a 15 to 20 knot easterly wind had us cover the 34 miles to Natadola Harbour in six hours, during which time we sailed at over seven knots for prolonged periods. It was the ultimate ideal sailing conditions, a nice steady warm breeze blowing from aft moving us through a flattish aqua coloured sea and all under a cloudless blue sky. Just like the Irish Sea, I don't think.

Keith and Gay being avid powerboat enthusiasts, they own a beautiful 40ft motor cruiser called Mykonos back in New Zealand, were certainly enjoying the sailing. Admittedly our speed of 6 or 7 knots does not compare with Mykonos cruising at 20 knots but the absence of engine noise and our steadier motion more than compensates for our slower speed, and of course our cost per mile is only a fraction of Mykonos's. Perhaps there could be a lovely 40ft motor cruiser for sale in New Zealand shortly.

### **Sanasana Village:**

From our anchorage in Natadola Harbour (18-06.5 south / 177-18.9 east) it was a dinghy ride of about 20 minutes up a shallow inlet to the village of Sanasana. Here again we presented our sevusevu to the chief. This village appeared much wealthier than Naboutini village. They have a steady flow of tourists from the adjacent large Fijian Resort passing through the village on route to a nearby popular beach. Because they can extract easy dollars from the "one week" or "two week" tourists they are under the misbelief they can do the same with cruising yachties. However, being so welcoming and hospitable extracting dollars from us was easy. Kalesi (Leslie) Ratuva and her husband invited us into their meagre home for tea. While Kalesi prepared the tea her husband was making pancakes for us on their single gas ring. They have three children and unfortunately had a four month baby die a few months earlier. Another villager we met was 17 year old Neumi Naqura who was finding it difficult to raise the \$3 per day required for the senior school bus. While walking on the beach we saw two ladies tenderizing, using sticks, the tentacles of two reasonable sized octopus that they had just caught (See photo). They looked anything but appetising, but would be sold in the market of Singatoka, a nearby town. We always found octopus to be very tough, requiring a lot of chewing. Later that evening we entertained three villagers on Aldebaran.

### **A Cruising Mecca:**

Next morning we sailed 26 miles to the island of Malola Lailai on which the Cruiser's Mecca of ***Musket Cove*** is located. The area abounds with dangerous reefs and entering the anchorage for the first time is nerve wrecking, while motoring in slowly we made contact with one such reef but luckily it only caused superficial damage. There are two resorts on the island, the Plantation Island Resort and the Musket Cove Resort owned by Dick Smith an Australian. Dick has also established the Musket Cove Yacht Club which now boasts a membership of almost 1,000 blue water sailors. Membership eligibility requires you to have sailed from a foreign port. Olivia and I took out '***life membership***' for the enormous cost of \$1 for me as skipper and \$5 for Olivia as crew. Carved into the wooden ceiling beams of Dick's famous bar are the names of skippers who join the MCYC together with the name of their boat. So if you ever get there look for our name in the 2003 section.

The yacht club provide over 20 mooring buoys at a cost of \$10 per night or you can go on the new pontoons for about \$20 for a 12.5 metre (41ft) boat per night. During the busy yachting season of July/August buoys are at a premium and finding space to anchor, with room to swing, in the deep water surrounded by very dangerous reefs is not easy.

Ashore the facilities are excellent with free use of the dinghy dock, the resort swimming pools and bar-b-cues, showers are available at \$1. However emailing is very slow and very expensive at \$24 per hour. Luckily we have emailing on the boat through our high frequency radio and while the system does not allow us surf the net or receive and send attachments we can use it at any time and from any location even in the middle of oceans and all for a cost of US\$200 (about 170 euros) per year.

The Island Bar, better known as the “\$3 Bar” where all drinks including, soft drinks, beers and spirits cost \$3 (1.45 euros) is extremely popular with yachties.

### **The Yasawa Group:**

After three days at Musket Cove we sailed north to The Yasawa Group. This group of islands lie about 20 miles to the north-west of the main island of Viti Levu and stretch about 50 miles in a north-east/south-west direction. The group is the main cruising ground for most of the commercial and non-commercial vessels in the area, and not surprising as it is a very beautiful area.

With dangerous reefs guarding each of the many islands and indeed not only adjacent to the islands but in open waters they make sailing throughout the group anything but relaxing. However with good charts and guides and careful planning the rewards are well worth it.

Most of the villages in the Yasawas have contact with tourists. Because of this there is a high expectancy that gifts will be forthcoming. We also found that the villages having most contact with tourists were the least tidy. In contrast the more remote villages were a credit to its inhabitants.

There are a small number of good resorts in the group but plenty of backpacking hostels!!!!

The eleven days we spent cruising the area were most enjoyable and highly recommendable. Two of the highlights were, firstly swimming with giant manta ray and secondly, snorkeling on a World War Two plane.

### **Manta Rays:**

Over the radio we heard that giant manta rays frequented the Tokatokaunu Pass between the islands of Naviti and Drawaqa in the approximate position of 17 degrees 10 minutes south and 177 degrees and 11.45 minutes east. Having swam with these majestic creatures back in Bora Bora in French Polynesia we had no hesitation in trying to repeat the experience, especially since it would be a new experience for Keith and Gay. We found a manageable anchoring depth of 18 metres about 300 metres from the pass and next morning dinghied to the pass hoping to see them. “Hoping” being the operative word as many of the would be manta spotting yachties never see them. We were told the best time was on the ebb when the tide was flowing from east to west and that the more spotters you had in the water the better. With us, searching the pass were the crews from four other yachts and a small cruise ship. We spread ourselves across the pass and eventually somebody spotted the first one. Converging on the location we entered the water complete with masks, snorkels and flippers.

About two metres below us was the first of six giant manta rays that we were to see over the next hour. These magnificent plankton eating creatures grow to a wing span of about five metres (16ft) and can weigh up to 950kg (2,000lbs). The ones we saw had wing spans ranging from three to almost five metres. Some of us were able to dive and swim next to them, although with the current getting stronger we found it very hard to keep with them. What a wonderful sight, they were like the old Vulcan bombers. While feeding, their toothless mouths are wide open catching the plankton funnelled in between their protruding curved ‘horns’. While we were working our feet and arms like mad to try and keep up with them, they, while moving effortlessly forward against the strong current, showed hardly any sign of body movement. They are perhaps one of the oceans most graceful creatures. Another memorable experience.

### **World War Two plane:**

The second highlight was when we found the remains of an American plane that crashed into a lagoon off the east coast of Naviti Island. Again we had heard on the radio about the plane and were given it’s approximate location. We anchored in Vunayawa Bay on Naviti’s north coast (17-05.02 south / 177-16.6 east) in 9 metres. After presenting our sevusevu in the village of Somosomo together with Mike and Joyce on Nereid and Brian and Sheryll on the power boat Waverly we walked across the island to it’s east coast. Approaching the coast we passed through a small family settlement. Unlike Somosomo village this was a very neat and tidy place and its inhabitants most hospitable. They pointed us in the general direction of the plane wreck. With our snorkeling gear we walked across the beach until reaching the water where we donned the gear and began swimming towards where we thought the wreck was. It was Olivia, who was to the rear and off to one side, who spotted the plane. It was a single engined fighter, perhaps a Mustang, that

was maybe shot down or ran out of fuel. The more adventurous among us were able to dive down and sit in the cockpit while everybody was able to dive and touch various parts of the wreck. During the war this whole area of the Pacific was alive with action, the Americans/Allies had bases everywhere. Our thoughts went to the pilot of this plane wondering if he survived.

On returning ashore we were given lots of coconuts to drink by members of the small settlement. They were in fact all one big family. On returning back to our boats we all agreed that it was,  
“ANOTHER GREAT DAY IN PARADISE”.

### **30 Knots On The Nose:**

Not such a good day in Paradise would be an understatement in describing our last day's passage of 29 miles back to Musket Cove on Saturday July 12<sup>th</sup>. While the Unionists in Northern Ireland were marching to the beat of the fife and Lambeg drum, to commemorate William of Orange's victory over King James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, we were having our 2003 battle with Mother nature, a battle which we will not be commemorating in the future. The forecast was for 15/20 knots from the southeast which, while not good should not be too bad, especially since a good portion of the passage would be in sheltered waters. We weighed anchor at the uninhabited island of Mamanutaa-I-Ra at 0700 hours for what we thought would be a passage of about six hours. We had to return to Musket Cove as Keith & Gay were due to fly home on Monday 14<sup>th</sup>, and rather than bringing them back to the mainline it was decided, due to the bad weather being forecasted for the next few days, we would sail the shorter distance to Musket Cove from where they could catch a ferry back to the mainline. The ferry docks at Port Denarau which is only a short taxi ride to Nandi International Airport.

After about two hours the wind began to steadily increase until by 1100 hours it was blowing at 30 knots and right on the nose (the bow). Even motoring at high revs. there were times when our speed was down at just over 2 knots per hour.

The passage was made even more hazardous by the multiplicity of surrounding reefs, many of them uncharted or not charted correctly and poor visibility. Sailing in such restricted and dangerous waters is not a good idea, because if you hit a reef with sails full it just continues to push the boat further onto the reef. Trying to stop a yacht under sail takes time and time is not something you have when making contact with a reef. For this reason we motor through such waters and when necessary can quickly put the engine in reverse. Luckily we had the engine maneuverability, because at one point we were only metres from running aground on a reef that seemed to appear from nowhere.

It was a very relieved and tired crew that anchored back in Musket Cove at 1630 hours or 9 hours since weighing anchor that morning having traveled at an average of just 3 knots per hour.

### **A Sad Farewell:**

At 1500 hours on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July, with very sad emotions we said goodbye to Keith and Gay as they boarded the ferry for the 40 minute crossing to the mainland. They originally came for two weeks but extended their stay to three weeks. We enjoyed every minute of their company, especially the 'sundowners', and hopefully they will rejoin us at some stage in the near future.

Olivia and I spent another three weeks cruising between Musket Cove and the mainland, visiting Port Denarau and Vuda Point Marina from where we visited Fiji's second largest city Lautoka. On Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August we visited Customs and Immigration in Lautoka and checked out of Fiji. After provisioning Aldebaran and filling with diesel at \$1.03 (0.49 Euros) per litre we returned to Musket Cove the following day to await a favourable weather forecast for our 470 mile passage to Vanuatu, formally the New Hebrides.

### **The Irish we met in Fiji:**

The Irish "Celtic Tiger" economic boom appears to be allowing more Irish than normal to travel to most corners of the World and Fiji, from the number of Irish we met there appears to be high on the list of preferred destinations. The following are names of some of those we met, Patrick and Lynn from Baldoyle which is just round the corner from us, Liam from Galway and Denise from Sligo, sisters Geraldine

Anderson and Maeve May (nee Ryan) originally from Sutton which is where we live, Ferdia and Mary Kelly from Blanchardstown, Dublin, Nick Healy and partner Maeve, Dervla Mullin again from Sutton and partner Mark Kennedy from Belfast. Dervla's sister Christine is married to one of our son Shane's best friends, while Mark is the son of Hugh Kennedy whom I sailed with back in the 1950s in Whitehead, County Antrim. Most of the above we entertained on ALDEBARAN. There were others we met but unfortunately we failed to record their names, apologies to you all.

### **You Never Know What Lies Ahead:**

With us at one of our last bar-b-cues at Musket Cove before Keith and Gay left was Bob Carvell from Northampton in England. In 2002 Bob bought his boat called "Coker Lady" a beautiful 55ft yacht about two years old in Thailand. He sailed it to Tauranga, New Zealand with his son-in-law and Johnny an Indonesian and Balty a Phillipino, where we met them in December 2002. Little did Bob and crew realise, on that beautiful evening at Musket Cove, what disaster lay ahead of them.

### **Farewell Fiji:**

At 1200 hours on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> August we departed Musket Cove and headed for the gap in the reef that would put us into safer open water from where we could set a course for the island of Tanna in Vanuatu 470 miles to the West. At 1345 hours we cleared the pass only to emerge into a very, very rough sea with winds gusting to 30 knots. Not knowing how long the bad conditions would prevail, after almost an hour we decided to return to Musket Cove. This was the first time in almost 20,000 miles that we were so indecisive about departing anywhere. And so, after re-entering through the pass we again changed our minds and turning round, again exited the pass. This time we stayed on course for Tanna.

### **Our next report, our 38<sup>th</sup>:**

This report will cover our visit to Vanuatu where cannibalism was practised up to 1968 and to where we plan to return. Also included in the report will be details of the tragedy that befell Bob Carvell and his crew aboard their yacht "Coker Lady".

### **IMPORTANT:**

Notifying everybody via our hotmail address can take days as they only allow you to send to fifty addresses 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 shortish (about half A4 page) 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. But please do not let these restrictions stop you from sending us emails, we really do appreciate receiving them.

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