

FIJI OCTOBER 2011

Route Group 1: Hawaii--Fiji Route Group 2: Seattle/Arizona—Los Angeles—Fiji

Departure Day

Everything started out smoothly as we were waiting for the Airport shuttle to Seattle when Bob announced his wallet was missing! He was pretty sure he left it at home. Panic sets in, as the shuttle will be arriving in 15 minutes, he calls for the van and races home only to make it back with one minute to spare! Blood pressure is sky high as we hope this is not an indication on how this trip will go. Needless to say we all made it to SeaTac and are on our way to LA. Just a short wait in LA and we are on our flight to Fiji.



Arrival Day in Fiji



Our flight out of LA left about an hour late, so we arrived in Nadi, Fiji at 6:30am. All checked luggage made it and we exited out of customs to our awaiting bus to head to First Landing Resort in Latoka. It is just a short 20-minute ride from the airport and upon arrival Karma & Aaron greet us at the reception desk as they have been here for 3 days already. Today is recovery day as we enjoy our breakfast by the waterfront and wait for our rooms to be ready. Everyone

is a little worse for wear but not feeling too bad. Most of us change into our swimsuits and head to the pool. The sun is shining and we are ready to relax! A few drinks and some lunch and people are starting to disappear into their rooms for a little down time. There is a very big black ugly squall coming and by 4 pm we are in a full deluge of rain. The rooms have great screened in porches and a view of the water. This is such a great place to wind down after a long travel day. Mike & Liz finally arrive from Beqa Lagoon area, where they have spent 3 days and did the shark dive with Aquatrek. Luck was on their side as the Tiger Shark showed up and Liz got several pictures for proof! It's happy hour so off to the bar before dinner. Tonight is the big fire show that the local village comes and puts on for the resort. They demonstrate many different dances from all over the South Pacific, even a Samoan Fire Dance. Times up, everyone is fading fast as we head to our rooms to call it a night.

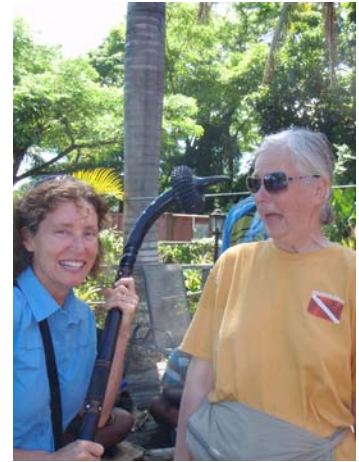


Day 1

Sunshine and blue sky greet us this morning after our first good night of sleep. Today we celebrate



Mary's Birthday, Happy Birthday Mary! With everyone rested and breakfast finished, Karma (aka Julie McCoy) activity coordinator has us off on a woodcarving shopping spree! Since the main woodcarving is done about 2 hrs away, they brought the woodcarving to us. We stopped in at a small backpacker resort where the carvers had setup their wares and were also demonstrating how they accomplish their beautiful work. The group gets busy picking out all their choices and pretty soon there is not much left on the table. First stop was successful and away we go to the main town of Nadi. In Nadi, "Jacks Handicrafts" is probably the biggest chain of retail woodcarvings. Another load of goodies to the



van and its time for a little lunch. Just around the corner is a small local restaurant called "The new Nadi Farmers Club" which had a variety of local food. After lunch we make our way back to the resort before we meet up for our sunset cruise. While in town several people stocked up on the Mango Orange Schweppes soda, so now we have a party on the patio! Like moths to a flame, more and more of our group show up and pretty soon our group is jammed onto two porches with the vodka and rum flowing! Good times, good times.



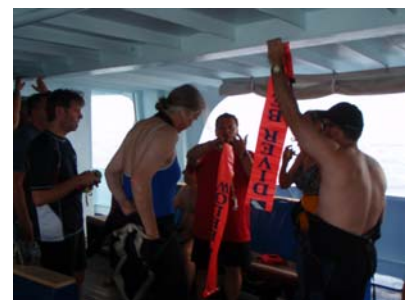
Unfortunately, our sunset cruise is a bust. Shortly after we boarded the boat the rain started coming down. It pretty much continued for the rest of the night. This had to be the craziest cruise ever, as a guy sang songs old country songs on his Casio and the boat did a continuous circle in front of Danaru Island. Hey look there is the Hilton...and there is the Hilton again and again. We did finally get him to sing Happy birthday to Mary. Hey, at least it will be memorable and we all had a good laugh about it. We also had a great view of a spectacular lightening storm on the way back to the harbor. Back to the hotel at record speed so we can get some dinner before calling it a night. We are excited about getting on the Nai'a to start our 10-day diving adventure tomorrow. After dinner the staff sings us the Isa Lei (Fijian goodbye) song and its time to say goodnight.

*On a side note: Hal if you ever rent a motorcycle while traveling, if it doesn't kill you, I will! Thank you for not going renting that motorcycle today!

Day 2

A leisurely morning as we wait for the golden hour of 1:30pm when the bus is scheduled to pick us up for the next leg of our adventure. A little breakfast, pool time and the final pack as we watch the minutes tick away like hours. Everyone is really excited to get on the boat and start diving. Finally, on the bus and it is a quick 15-minute ride to the harbor as we spot our home for the next 10 days, aboard the Nai'a. No time is wasted as we unpack dive gear and get it set up. Boat and dive brief are done

and we are diving by 4:00pm. Unfortunately for me, my first dive is brief due to sinus squeeze from a lingering head cold before we left. This was a great shake down dive for everyone so we could make sure all was working before we hit the big water tomorrow. There was lot's of safety sausage deployment practice after Bob's



class session, so everyone knows what to do. Congratulations to James as he just did enough dives for his Advanced Specialty Rating. Time for a little dinner, maybe a glass of wine and relax for the rest of the evening.



Day 3

After an 8hr steam we are now in the Bligh Waters. The day begins at 6am when the anchor goes down; let me tell you, it is just like an alarm clock that shakes the whole boat! The boat just installed a new espresso machine. Nothing like a double shot of espresso to get the day kick started. A light breakfast and we are off and diving. Welcome to Fiji RAC (rippin' ass current) diving. Our first dive

delivered as everyone put their reef hooks to good use. The soft corals are phenomenal, just as expected, and no one came away disappointed. Everyone does great as we tackle day one of dive, eat, dive, eat and keep diving. The sun is shining and the wind is up a bit but we are back behind the reef and it is pretty calm. After sorting out a few camera and gear issues we can chalk up the first day as a great day of diving. A little sinus squeeze is going to keep me out of the water for the rest of the day, but plenty more diving ahead. So instead of diving we head to the top deck for cocktails at sunset. No ones up for the night dive so we enjoy a spectacular meal before we depart for another 8hr steam for the Gua area. Might be a little bit of a bumpy ride as the wind has picked up since we've been here. Better medicate.....



Day 4

6am the anchor is deployed so it must mean time to get up. A quick breakfast, espresso and time



for diving! The first two dives are macro, the water is a bit cooler here than in the Bligh Waters we discover, as soon as we back roll in. Sea Kraits and a Zebra Shark were spotted on the dives along with Nudi's, Mantis Shrimp, and Gobies etc. Congratulations to Mary has she just accomplished her 600th dive! Way to go Mary. A bit more coffee, a second breakfast and then time for diving. We motor on down

to Nigali Passage to dive with the Gray Reef Sharks. This is a dive where you drift through the channel and hang out on a ledge and wait for the sharks to come by. There are lots of Giant Grouper along the way and a pupping ground for the sharks. We sit and



wait but there just wasn't enough current for them to come in close. We bail out and head for the top of the reef for our safety stop. As Mary deploys her safety sausage we all decide to hitch a ride. All of a sudden we are in a whirlpool that is going straight down. A quick adjustment and we all pop to the surface only to be smacking into each other as we whirl about. Time for sunset cocktail hour as we motor on to our evening anchorage. Some dinner and a little kava time on the back



deck before we call it a day. The kava party got a little wild with 4 buckets of kava put down before anyone knew what happened. Time to disappear before I drink anymore kava.....



Day 5

After a peaceful night on the hook in the calm lagoon almost everyone looks very refreshed. There could be a couple of Kava hangovers this morning, as a few folks look a little weary. We are still in the Gau (pronounced now) area and our plan today is 3 dives and then a village tour. Our last dive

of the day will be Nigali Passage for the final time in hopes of great shark action. These apparently are the only two days good enough to dive this passage, otherwise the current is going the wrong direction. After a good break for lunch we slowly wake up to get ready for the final dive of today. Everyone knows the plan, back roll and head down to the "bleachers" for some shark action. The last dive had the best action of the three. Sam gave the signal for the free for all, so everyone can swim around where ever the sharks are and were lucky enough to get very close to a large grouper. Time to get ready for the village tour, the group learns how to don their sulus.



A quick briefing about how to act while at the village; no head patting, no pointing the feet at the chief, no hats or sunglasses. We arrived at Somosomo Village and broke up in three groups and walked around with a guide explaining village life to us. The entire village is waiting for us in the community house for the Meke. It all started with a blessing, then the Kava. As soon as the last person has their Kava it was time for singing. The little kids started out singing and dancing...so cute! Then it was time for the women's dance and they wanted all the women to get up and participate. We might not look as good but it was a lot of fun. After several Meke songs it was time for us to say good-bye and head back to the boat. We feel lucky and honored that the villagers let us come into their village and experience some of the true Fijian way of life. A short ride back to the boat for dinner and a relaxing evening.



Day 6

2am the anchor goes up as we motor over to Wakaya (privately owned island of David Gilmore).



Another 6am wake up, of course, in sync with the anchor dropping in the bay. Here there is another natural cut in the reef and which is a great place for spotting Mantas. The group is ready at a moments notice with their "spirit fingers" just in case the Manta comes cruising by. Luck is with us today as Mantas and Hammerheads were seen on several dives. Karma, Karma, Karma where is your dive computer?? Chalk up another afternoon of

great diving! It is now a 2hr motor over to Makogai Island, where we will stay for two night dives. We drop in on two small bommies for our late/night dive. Tons of little critters, 2 Octopus were mating, Scorpion Leaf fish, big Crabs and much more. Time for dinner before Hal & James go out for another night dive. Not a single soul awake on deck by the time Hal finally makes it back from the dive.



Day 7

Another 2am anchor hoist as we now are going back to the Bligh Waters. We tie up at 6am at Mt. Mutiny this morning. Mt Mutiny is a spectacular pinnacle where the walls plunge to 3000 ft. The current is not running on the first dive, so the action is a little slow, but the soft corals are brilliant and there are plenty of critters to photograph. This is my 1800th dive and we are doing Mt. Mutiny again. I suppose it is only fitting that I throw myself under the bus as I had back rolled into the water with no mask on! I don't know what it is about Fiji that makes me keep doing this! At least it made for a good laugh. A short move and our next

dive is E6, which has a nice swim thru and beautiful hard coral. I try my hand at some over/under shots with the boat but it is too choppy and proves to be impossible. We move once more to dive UndeNIable 1, but the skiff drivers took us to UndeNIable 2 by mistake. Which was pretty funny since we were all swimming around thinking that the dive didn't really look like the pre-dive brief! However, the dive was beautiful with lots of hard & soft corals. After the dive Karma meets us with a tray of Baileys and coffee! You're the best Karma! We decide to stay anchored out as the weather is supposed to be good tonight. But, we were not so lucky as the wind did pick up and it was a very roly night.



Day 8

No sleep for me last night as it is pretty noisy up in the front cabin. Happy Birthday to Peggy & Russ! The wind is howling today so we attempt a dive at Kats and Kats Meow. Getting back into the dinghy proves to be the most difficult part. One boat had Pilot Whales come by as they were getting picked up so they all jumped back in the water to snorkel with them. The wind is getting worse so we pull anchor and head for shelter. Back over to Mellow Yellow dive site area for the rest of the day and hopefully a little calmer seas. The wind is only supposed to howl for today and we have been pretty lucky with good weather so far on this trip. The wind has picked up significantly all day and we have now moved over behind a reef for the night dive. Peggy & Russ have their party hats on for a little birthday celebration. The rest of us hit the night dive, which was great with plenty of small critters to shoot as we make it back in time for dinner. A little birthday cake with all the crew singing and it is a fitting end to another

great day. At 10pm tonight we will lift anchor and do an 8 hr steam to our next destination of Nemena. The wind is still up so the crew tells us to brace for a very roly ride on the beam most of the way. I'm trying to figure out where I am going to sleep tonight....rough waters at night, one of my most favorite things.



Day 9

Anchor alarm goes down at 6am as we drag our butts out of bed for another day of diving. Now you have to get in line for the espresso machine. The 8 hr cruise was a bit rough but not as bad as first thought. Thank you Captain John for picking the smoothest ride! We are now in the Namena Marine Reserve where the village Chief has declared this a no fishing zone. The first dives are in an area called Save-a-tack Reef, which are a series of bommies. One boat spotted a Manta as they entered on their first dive. We will stay here for two days of diving, and the wind is certainly calmer here compared to yesterday. Now, we just need a bit of sunshine. We hook in on the third dive and watch the shark and tuna action, where we actually saw two tuna mating. The last dive of the day



we moved back to where we started this morning so it was just a nice easy pinnacle dive. The sun is low and the light is fantastic as the sun did finally come back out this afternoon. At the very end, a lone Manta came cruising by circling once and then came back around the second time for those who missed it on the first pass. On the boat ride back, Mike finally said the words I thought I would never hear; he was cold. Of course I think it was the boat ride and not the water, but we had to tease him anyway. Tonight is the big crew kava party, so after dinner we dress back up in our sulu's and get ready to get our party on. Several kava bowls later everyone starts to fade as we

look forward to a 5-dive day tomorrow. We will stay anchored here tonight as we enjoy a peaceful night of sleep.



Day 10

5am anchors away! We just moved a short distance and we are now located over Fantasea dive site. It is a dive similar to N. Save-a-tack Wall, so it is a drift in the blue and then reef hook in to watch the action. The current is not super strong so the action is a little low, but at one end we find about 6 big Bumphead Parrot Fish. We hear a loud bang and we are all looking around to see if someone blew a hose or an o-ring. Several more loud bangs and Bob signals that he thinks it's dynamite fishing going on. As we drift off the wall, the soft coral on the bommies is incredible as we navigate our way around trying to hide from the current. Back on the boat we discover that several people witnessed the Bumphead Parrot Fish smashing heads together and that's what



the loud bang was. This just seems impossible that it would be that loud. Bob is still saying he doesn't believe it.

Congratulations to James as he made his 50th dive this morning. Way to go! Second dive we had a fly by Manta sighting, and with our heads stuck in the reef trying to get our teeth cleaned by a shrimp, we almost missed it. Light current on the 3rd dive so not much action, but we did have a little Turtle named "scratchy" come by who was busy ripping all the soft coral off the pinnacle. Still windy today but a little better than yesterday and the sun is out. The 4th dive today we did the arch and then drift over to



Kansas, but the current had switched on us so it was a heck of a swim against the current and the visibility went really low. The fish action was really good so it was worth all the kicking. Hal & Mary were the only die hards to do the night dive, while the rest of us relaxed and did a little stargazing. The boat will motor again tonight as we start to make our way back towards Lautoka. So sad, tomorrow is our last dive day.



Day 11

Not much sleep last night as it had to be the roughest ride yet and everyone is a little groggy this morning. The funge has started to spread among the group as

stuffy heads and ears are becoming a big problem. It is our final dive day and it is really windy, but we are hiding behind the reef as best as possible. First dive was "Go Mo" which we remember has "Black Magic Mt" and it is beautiful. The soft coral drift around the pinnacle is mind blowing. The hardest



part is the ride out to the site and getting back in the boat at the end of the dive.

Second dive is "Whole Shebang" and we know it as "Purple Haze". The base of the wall is covered in loads of purple soft coral. The current is really moving on this one as we do a quick fly by and round the corner to a beautiful hard coral garden. Third and final dive of the trip we all jump in

on "Coral corner" for one last soft coral drift. We stay at the pinnacle looking into the blue and see many sharks, barracuda and dogtooth tuna hunting. As you come into the point the current picks up speed and whisks you around the corner. Here you hook in and watch the fish action in the RAC (rippin' ass current). Back to



the boat for a gear clean and dry as we motor back to Latoka. Congratulations to Aaron as he hits his 650th dive on the final dive of the trip. Time for a TRUE sunset cocktail cruise on the top deck as we try and finish all the Orange Mango w/vodka. After dinner, we watch Sam's video and a slide show of everyone's photos. We just sprung ahead an hour as daylight savings time occurred in Fiji while we were out on the boat, so one less hour of sleep! Everyone quickly packs and heads for bed. It's been a great time and we're sad it has now come to an end.



Day 12

Up bright and early for final pack, breakfast and settling of the boat tab. Of course even now, our group is done early as we wait for the bus to pick us up and take us to our dayroom at Raffles. This hotel is a great place to hang out before our 10pm flight tonight. We say goodbye to Mike & Liz as they are staying an additional 5 days of relaxation after 10 days of diving. We decide to go to Nadi for some last minute shopping, the cab ride is \$12FJ for the carload. Six of us jump in a cab, this is a few too many, but we made it to town safely. A large war club in hand, we have some lunch and head to the pool until our 6pm departure. There's a great slide at the pool and all of a sudden everyone turns into a kid as they fly down the slide! Bob has discovered the best technique as he tries to "school" everyone, but in the end Bob is the ultimate slider! So fast, he almost flew out of the slide!



In the late afternoon there was some confusion on our departure time for our flight home.



Someone came and told one of our group members that the flight was leaving an hour later than scheduled. Yikes! People are freakin' out, time to do some investigating. I check with the desk, they call Air Pacific, nope, still scheduled on time. Checked on line, still on time. I tell everyone the departure time will remain the same; we are departing the hotel at the scheduled time of 6pm. The other groups at the hotel choose to "believe" the later departure time and left later. Ours was the smart decision as the flight time never changed and when I saw the other group at boarding, they had barely made it. Chalk one up for the Anacortes Group! We had no problems checking in and they did not weigh our carry-ons. They did make me check my war club, but didn't charge me for an extra piece. Marle sweet-talked her war club through TSA, but hers was shaped more like a paddle so I think this is the only reason she was able to do it. Make sure to

buy the second bag before you leave home, as it will cost you huge to pay on the spot.

The flight home was uneventful, we arrived an hour early, but it took us that long to park the plane and commute by bus to the terminal in LAX. Immigration was a breeze but it took almost an hour before our luggage came on the carousel! It took all of the 3 hours for us to make it to our final gate for home as we leave Sam & Kelly in LA for their flight home to Arizona. We land in Seattle, and luck was with us as Dale, Peggy, Mary, Bob and I make the shuttle 2 hours early. Yahoo!

It has been a great trip and we would like to thank everyone for joining us on such an incredible destination. We look forward to traveling with you all again!



Kelley & Bob

To sum up the trip overall, everything ran smoothly with very little equipment or camera issues, which is always a blessing. The Nai'a is definitely a good live aboard to book on, it really is the best way to see THE BEST diving Fiji has to offer. Bob and I still agree that our favorite diving in Fiji is located in the Bligh Waters. The soft corals are tremendous and of all the places we have traveled to, I still have never seen soft coral walls like this. However, it was nice to see new places and the diversity that each area offered. All the diving was done from two zodiac style skiffs which worked fine especially in the rough water. The ladders mounted on both boats were never used, maybe once; I think it was too much trouble to put them in and out. The skiff driver hoisted most everyone into the boat or you kicked yourself on board. I have to give the two skiff drivers props as they did an excellent job picking us up after each dive in big waves! The only negative comment was that this was a dive guide handover tour and there was definitely some lack of knowledge. As the new guides learn the ropes and the experienced guides were to take a back seat, the group felt that the pointing out of critters was sometimes non-existent. All in all, the entire crew did a fantastic job keeping the entire boat running smoothly. The food on board was phenomenal, thank you to all the staff in the kitchen for putting out such wonderful meals each day. I can't imagine that one would ever go hungry on a live aboard dive charter! The rooms on board were all recently remodeled in 2010 and they are beautiful and roomy. Cabin #9 where Bob and I were located is small and all the way up in the bow. But, we never spend much time in the cabin, so this was not an issue except for my seasickness. The mattresses were even comfortable! I would definitely come back and dive in Fiji aboard the Nai'a again in the future. After departing on the last day we booked a day room at Raffles Hotel in Nadi. This hotel is located directly across the street from the airport and is well suited for hanging out waiting for a late night flight. I don't think I would stay more than a night here. We had flown Air Pacific to get to Fiji from LAX and they now have a 1 free bag limit in coach. The Nai'a main office had a deal worked out with Air Pacific that if you bought your second bag before you left it would only be \$50 for a 50lb bag each way. Trust me, buy the second bag! If you don't a second bag could run you almost \$150 one way. We all had printed receipts and had no hassles about our second bag, so it worked great. We were hassled a bit about our carry on bag weight in LAX, but had no problems when we left Fiji.

If you have never been to Fiji, be sure to add it to your bucket list! BULA VINAKA!



FIJI

October 11-25, 2011

Anacortes Adventure Dive Team



Mary, Dale, Peggy, Russ, Sam, Liz, Kathy, Scott, Hal, Mike,
Karma, Marle, Penny, James, Bob, Kelly, Aaron, Kelley