

# Fulaga

September 30<sup>th</sup>

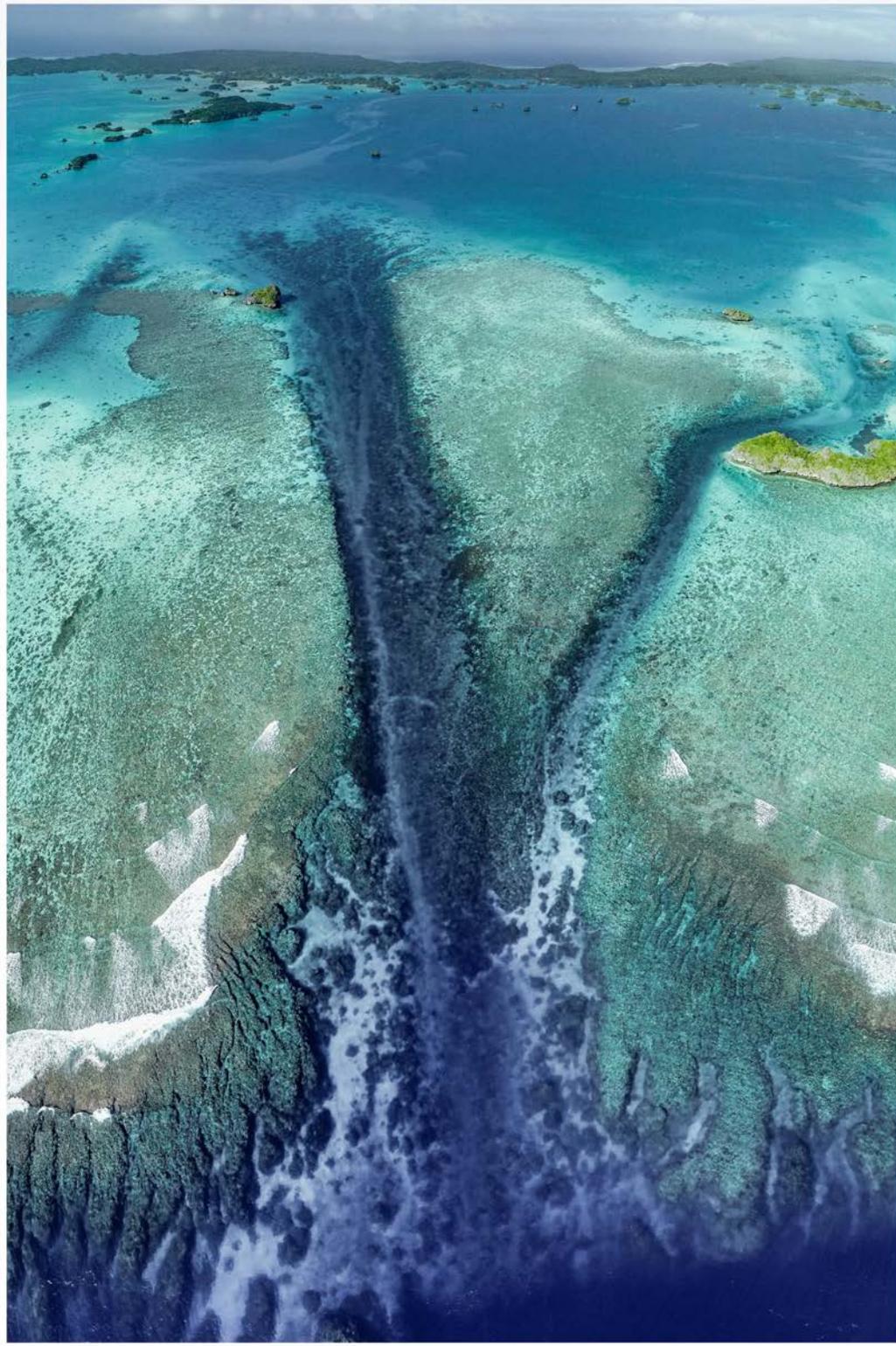
We were on our way at last, at 0830 am we cleared the passage at Moala Island where we had done so many memorable dives, turned the bow of the S/V O2 south and headed with favorable winds towards Fulaga. With a bit of luck we will soon see what all the fuss is about.



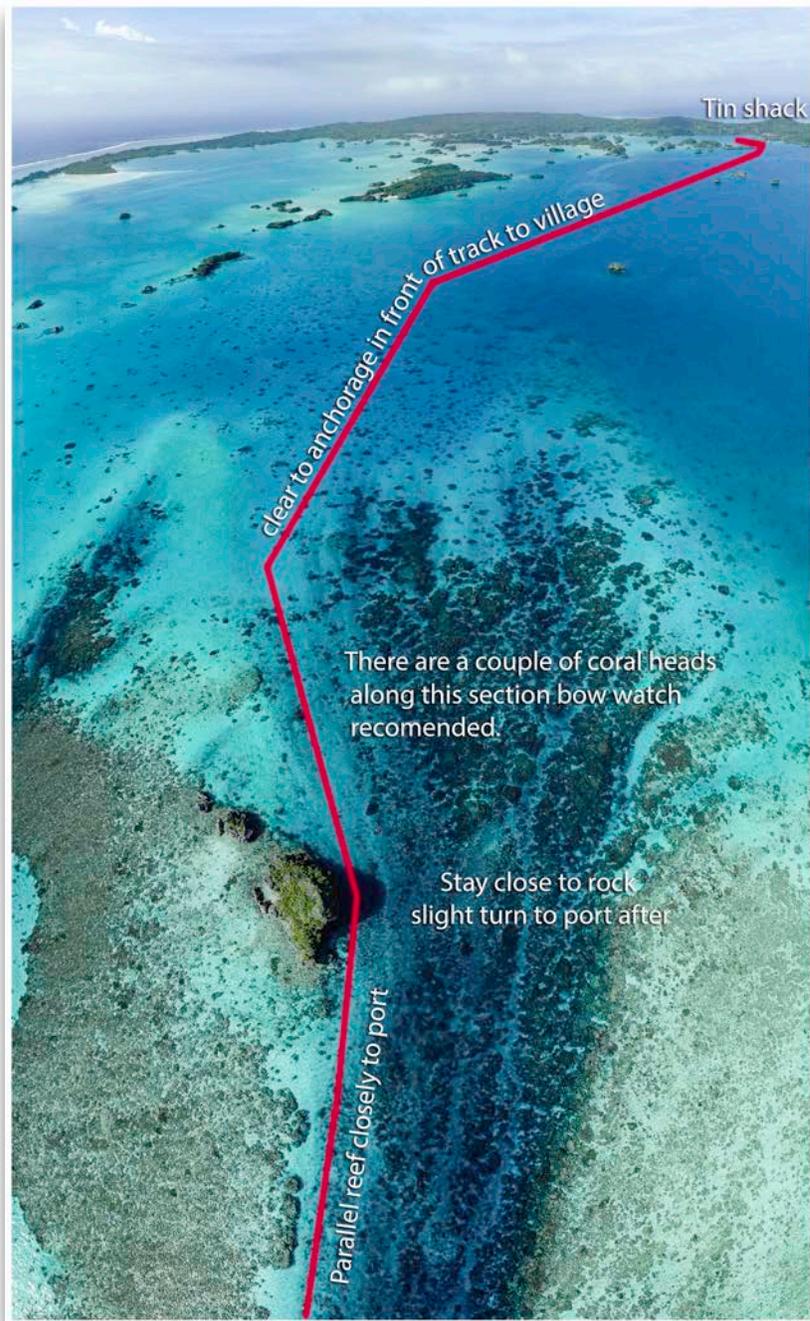
Our first anchorage in Fulaga  
19° 8.945' S. 178° 33.740' W.

The northerly winds blew all night and we made very good speed, too good in fact as we only had 94 miles to travel and would arrive at the pass in Fulaga way before midnight.

When we got to within a few miles of Fulaga we hove too and drifted aimlessly about on a moon lit flat calm sea waiting for daylight.



Passage into the lagoon 19° 7.207' S 178° 32.224' W



The seaward entrance to the cut is quite easy but there is a reef that extends out on the starboard side. Stay to port of that. Then follow the visible reef line to Port quite closely, when you reach a rock on your port side you should be very close. We passed this vegetation covered rock with about 8 feet of clearance and 15 feet of water under the keel.

You now enter a fowl ground with a few coral heads so keep a good watch. By this time the water should be quite flat and clear so they are easily seen. Just go slow and with a good lookout on the bow or preferably your dingy leading the way.

The edge of this area is quite visible about 100 meters distant and you will soon be over sand. Congratulations you're in the lagoon where eyeball navigation is essential but easy.

Please keep in mind, we arrived with perfect conditions and it was a breeze but it is not always the case.

I didn't give GPS positions or course lines here as eyeball navigation is best also every vessels instruments can vary.

GPS positions for anchorages are given under the photo's.

## Fulaga Village

The next morning at 0830 Ofelia and I set off along the path to Fulaga Village “pronounced Fulanga” a quick 25 minute walk along a very pleasant track.

We were covered with large quantities of mosquito repellent. “It helps to read other cruisers blogs as this was a very good tip” So smelling like the dirty laundry basket from a chemical plant we strolled amidst forest and palms enjoying the sound of birds and waves crashing on the far off windward reef.



A beautiful Kingfisher landed on a tree beside the path. How I wish I had my 600mm lens but the best I could do was my 70-200mm which I quickly attached and popped off a couple of shots before he disappeared.



Ofelia trail blazing



The chief's house

**T**he Mayor “The Turaga Ni Koro” met us as we entered the village and immediately introduced us to Seta who is to be our sponsor here.



Seta

Each vessel gets adopted by a family for the duration of their stay and they are there to tend to all your needs. What a beautiful tradition.

We then all marched off to the Chiefs house for the Sevusevu ceremony.



Simon "The Chief"

Seta our elected host



Soki the Turaga Ni koro

It was the longest ceremony of this kind that we had experienced so far in Fiji and the 3 men spoke in Fijian for 15 minutes in a formal presentation of our gift of Kava.

When they finished we were asked to sign a guest book and present our donation.

We presented them with FJ\$50 which is nothing for the privilege of being in this amazing place.

A pleasant conversation ensued after which we were free to wonder the village and did so with Seta leading the way.



### Ofelia and Seta

I felt completely at home in this village as we wondered aimlessly down the path between rustic corrugated Iron homes as the smell of cooking fires accompanied us on our tour.



Fantastic colors and shapes everywhere.



Most of the homes are corrugated iron. Oval shaped to withstand better the occasional Hurricane.



Seta shows us some copra "dried coconut"



Even here you have yard work



One of the few wooden homes in the village, right on the beach. You can't put a price on that.



One of the youngest residents we met in Fulaga  
“Semi”



In the front door of their home,  
Unib holding little Semi

heard some loud chanting over on the beach and wondered over to see what all the fuss was about. Fijians are usually very quiet people.



Salote dancing with her gift for the new boat



It turns out that when the village gets a new boat all the women welcome it with gifts.

Its quite a momentous occasion and we just happened to be lucky enough to witness this new Arrival.

The ladies walked down to the shore and as soon as the bow of the boat touched sand they waded into the water and started heaping gifts on its bow.



Welcoming the new boat with a gift of voivoi.



The gifts ranged from home made brooms, woven floor mats, voivoi to weave mats and colorful cloth.



The new boat being welcomed



The poor little boat would have sunk under the weight of all the gifts had it not been already hard aground.

It would seem getting a new boat in the village is a very big deal and we had fantastic luck to witness this arrival.



Reluctant to let the celebration fade too soon the women gather on a typical Fijian canoe and pose for this strange looking Aussie bloke that won't stop taking photo's.

Leaving the beach behind Seta lead us to his home to meet his wife Pupenina who was weaving a small fan from a palm leaf.

No need for department stores here,  
You make what you need from the materials at hand.  
Seta then gave us a big fat bag of fruit, Bananas and Papaya. How cool was that?

It's time however to head back down the track to the S/V O2 and we said our goodbyes with a promise to return Sunday for church and a big meal.



Seta with a gift of fruit.



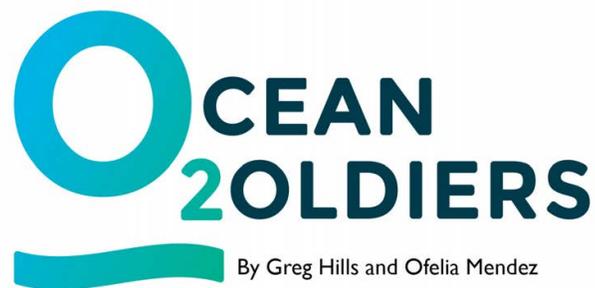
Pupenina



Who needs Walmart when stuff just grows on tree's.



Ofelia found a friend to carry our fruit on the way  
back to the boat



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October 3rd Well this sucks. We woke up to 25 knot winds blowing horizontal rain across our deck and the weather report for the coming week looks very bad. We can't even go for a run around in the tender it's raining so hard. Maybe tomorrow.

October 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday and I was committed to go to church in the village which I was not at all happy about but at least it might be interesting to see the village residents all dolled up in their Sunday best.

At 0930 Kenny dropped Ofelia and I off at the track to the village where we ran into Humberto also on his way to church. A quick stroll across the island and we heard the drums beating, Oops we're going to be late "says I", so we upped the pace arriving just in time.



Church in Fulaga

**A**nd a rousing sermon it was, “at least I think so”  
It was all in Fijian so if I could hear it “which I couldn’t”  
I wouldn’t understand it anyway but most of the villages  
left looking sufficiently chastised for the sins of the past and  
ready to confront the temptations of the future.



Seta “our host” in his going to church outfit.

**A**fter church we were invited to lunch so we wondered over to where the women were preparing the food over a stove converted from electricity to wood burning. “Cooking over wood tastes so much better and fuel is free”.



Talei preparing curried land crab in coconut milk.



**W**e sat cross legged on the ground under the shade and had a feast fit for kings.

Sea grapes with Lolo “coconut milk” and fish meat.

Finely chopped cabbage with onions and Lolo,

Tapioca bread with Lolo roasted underground inside a coconut shell.

Fresh fish cooked in Lolo

Land crab with curry and Lolo

By now you have figured out that just about everything is cooked with Lolo “Coconut milk” and everything we ate was provided by nature. It just doesn't get any cooler than that.



The banquet with the Seravatu clan



Seru, who lives in Suva was visiting the island of his parents birthplace for the first time.



Joe sporting a pretty mean mustache

**A**fter lunch I left Ofelia swapping recipe's with the ladies and went for a stroll. I first made for the beach which I could see through a beautiful coconut grove then I turned onto a path which led me down towards the western end of the village.



Palm grove on Fulaga water front



Looking out over the reef to the south west



Fijian wooden catamaran on the beach



Sunday afternoons are a sleepy affair in Fulaga Village.





Playing peek a boo with Kalob



Ofelia had to try out the hammock

As it's time to return to the boat so we said our thanks "Vinaka" and headed on down the track which parallels the shore line for about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile.

Ofelia just couldn't continue without trying out the hammock conveniently positioned along the way

**B**ack on board the O2 now free from village obligations we lifted anchor and followed Humberto on the catamaran “Holandes Errante” between fantastic mushroom shaped rocks out to another beach in our quest for the perfect anchorage.



Our new anchorage  
19° 8.228' S 178°32.124' W

**O**ctober 5<sup>th</sup>  
Today we moved anchorage again just a little to the east of our last spot. We're are now surrounded by many rocks each undercut by the sea over millennia and each sporting a few small palms and other vegetation that had managed to find a foothold on the porous lava structures.



The rocks were surrounded by shallow turquoise water and I can't wait for a nice sunny day to photograph here.

We were anchored behind a chain of these islands "The ancient rim of the volcano" which occasionally had gaps between them allowing the clear ocean water to pour through creating small pools perfect for a dip.



Ofelia posing in front of a fantastic little island



Gaps in the barrier islands create great pools for swimming



Dotted along the barrier islands were tiny palm lined beaches with the softest sand.



October 6<sup>th</sup>

We woke to a beautiful day quite contrary to the weather report. 15 knots of wind and lots of blue sky so I sent my drone aloft again for some more photo's.



View to the NW over our anchorage



View to the SE from the anchorage



S/V O2 and The Holandes Errante anchored in paradise



A sculptured rock near the anchorage

**T**hese islands are very remote and it requires a lot of effort to get here.

Few boats even make it and you need to come prepared with good provisioning and spares. There are no stores, no internet, no medical services and no good charts. In fact You are on your own.



A beautiful swimming hole.

**H**umberto, who heard us on the radio and came out in his dingy to help us navigate the pass is a great source of information and has become a good companion for our stay here “except he is eating all of my cookies”

His boat is “The Holandes Errante” and he has been coming here for years so knows his way around. You should be so lucky to have him here when you arrive.

Humberto



Humberto and Kenny set up a net today in the hopes of catching some fish through the night.



Kenny, our crew member on S/Y O2

A bit of traffic on the VHF indicates the arrival of more yachts. During the day 3 more boats came into the anchorage.

There is now a total of 6 vessels here. This place is getting crowded.

Two of the arriving vessels we knew so it was reunion time in Fulaga.

Two of the boats that are here have plans to leave quite soon and peace will settle once more upon paradise but for now lots of company in our anchorage



October 7<sup>th</sup> Early in the morning we went out in the dingy to photograph the reef pass with the drone.

Then Ofelia and I had a great day swimming and exploring the surrounding area and we discovered some really great swimming holes.

This place really is unique. The day finished with a rainy afternoon a game of cards and sleep Z Z Z Z Z Z Z Z



A sand bar in evening light



This rock has a rust colored stain that I assume is iron



Looking straight down over the barrier islands. Reef side left, Lagoon side right.



After the rainy afternoon the sky cleared for sunset



Kenny Ofelia and Humberto leaving to set the fish net

**O**ctober 8<sup>th</sup>  
The fishing crew went out early to check the net and found they had caught a small tuna a barracuda and a mullet. I guess there will be food on the table today.



Humberto retrieving a barracuda



Retrieving the net

**A**fter breakfast we picked up anchor and moved back up to where we were the night before.

Today we snuck in a wee bit closer as there were no other boats here now and it had turned into a glorious flat calm day. First order of business was to send the drone out for a few shots.



19° 8.238' S. 178° 32.114' W



### The S/V O2 with all the toys in the water

All around us were nature's sculptures, beautiful lava rocks capped with a vegetation.

The anchorages are over soft closely packed sand and provide excellent holding. I'm having to break the anchor free using the boat's momentum instead of the windless, the anchor digs in so deep.

This combined with very flat protected water makes for good peaceful nights of sleep, a very rare thing.

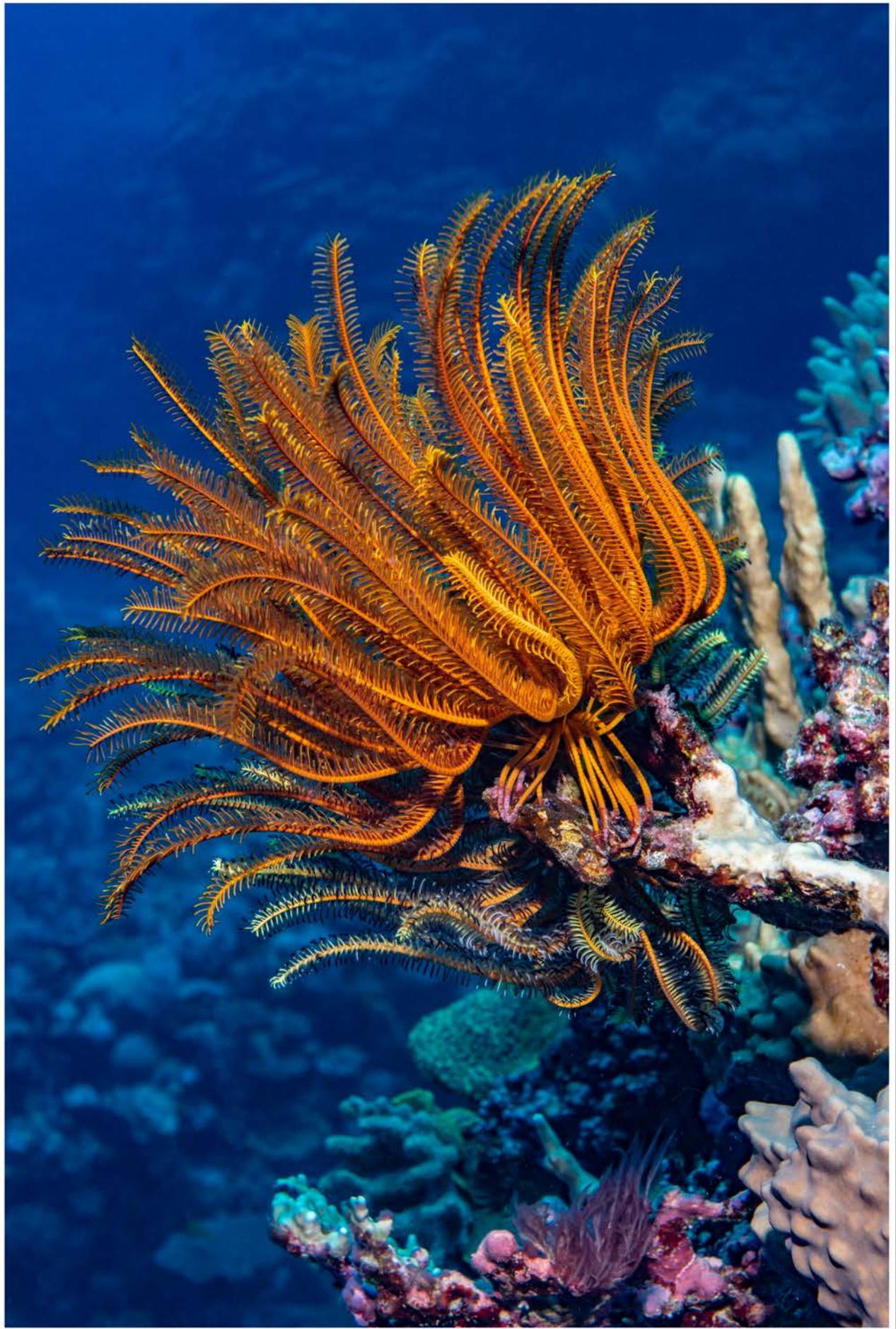


With beautiful weather like this Ofelia and I decided its a good day to go for a dive outside the reef so we took off for the pass and once through into open ocean turned right.

Heading south east for about an 8<sup>th</sup> of a mile we saw a spot not to close to the large breaking surf and dropped the anchor.



Our first dive  
sight in Fulaga's  
outer reef



Orange Crinoid



Octopus



Moray Eel

**A** riot of corals covered deep passes into the reef. Caves with foreboding dark entrances where everywhere and lots of fish to enjoy.

Out from the reef we could see the drop of descending into dark blue. An octopus crawls out from under a ledge and a moray eel peeps out from his little hole.

Small colorful fish covered the reef and a school of large parrot fish swam past. It was a beautiful hour long trip into another world.

What day would be complete without a nice cold beer sitting in a bean bag on the bow, fanned by a cool Pacific breeze as the sun goes down. Aaaaaah life is good. Z Z Z Z

**O**ctober 9<sup>th</sup> It's another lovely day here in Fulaga. I woke up at 0530 to a cloudless sky and a gentle SE breeze.

The boat is so still we could be embedded into cement. At 0730 I decided conditions were perfect for my attempted Fulaga panoramic shot with the drone so Kenny and I sped off out the main pass to sea for about a mile.

Up goes the drone, 100 meters....200 meters .... then at 300 meters we hit wind. Up at 300 meters it was blowing over 25 knots and down here calm as could be. Go figure.



A 12 shot panorama of Fulaga from 300 meters

Every time I fly my drone I wonder if it's the last time I will ever see it as I've lost several over the years and had a lot of close calls.

I quickly shot 3 panoramas each one consisting of about 12 photo's and hope that I had aligned the shots ok.

Not an easy thing to do in a bouncing dingy with a towel draped over my head to shade my screen.

I then brought the drone home steering towards the dingy I could see on the iPad as a tiny spot on a dark blue ocean.

When it was within reach Kenny reached up and grabbed it.

Phew!!!! another successful mission.

I would have liked to fly much higher for the shot but the wind was way too strong up there and it was risky enough as it was.

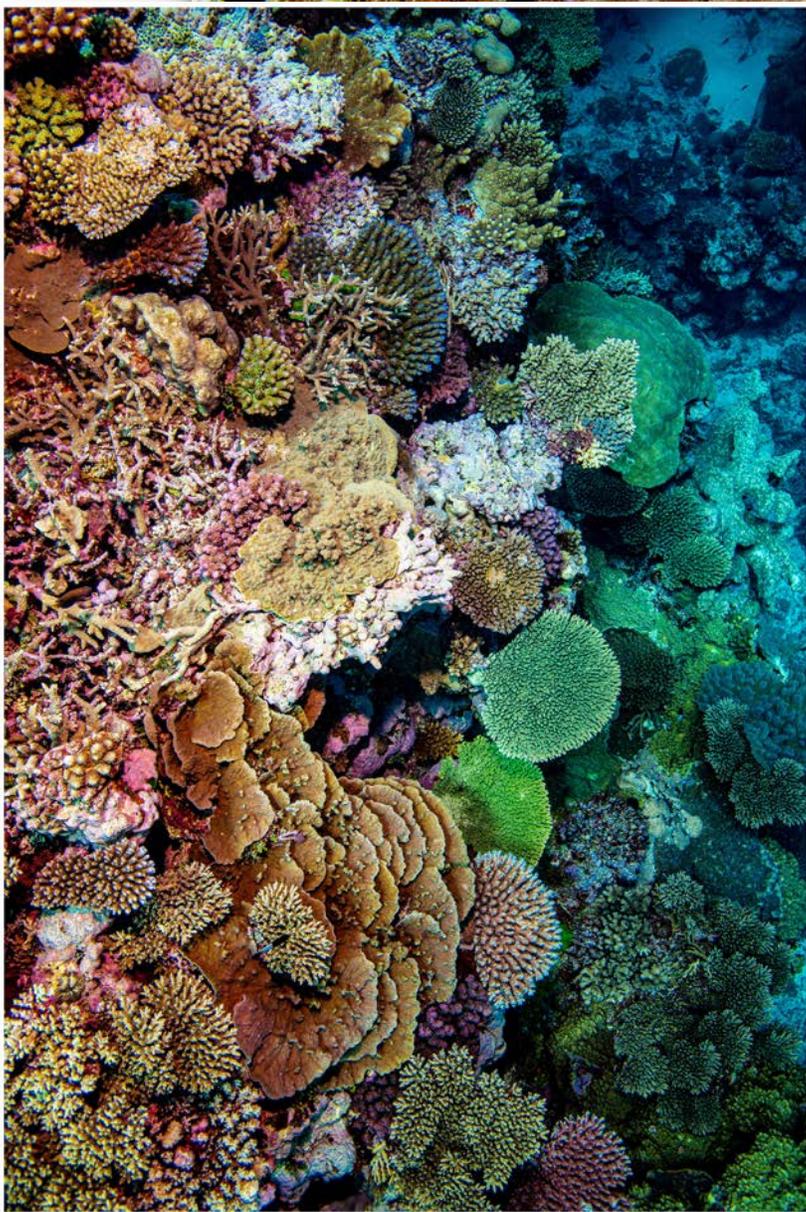
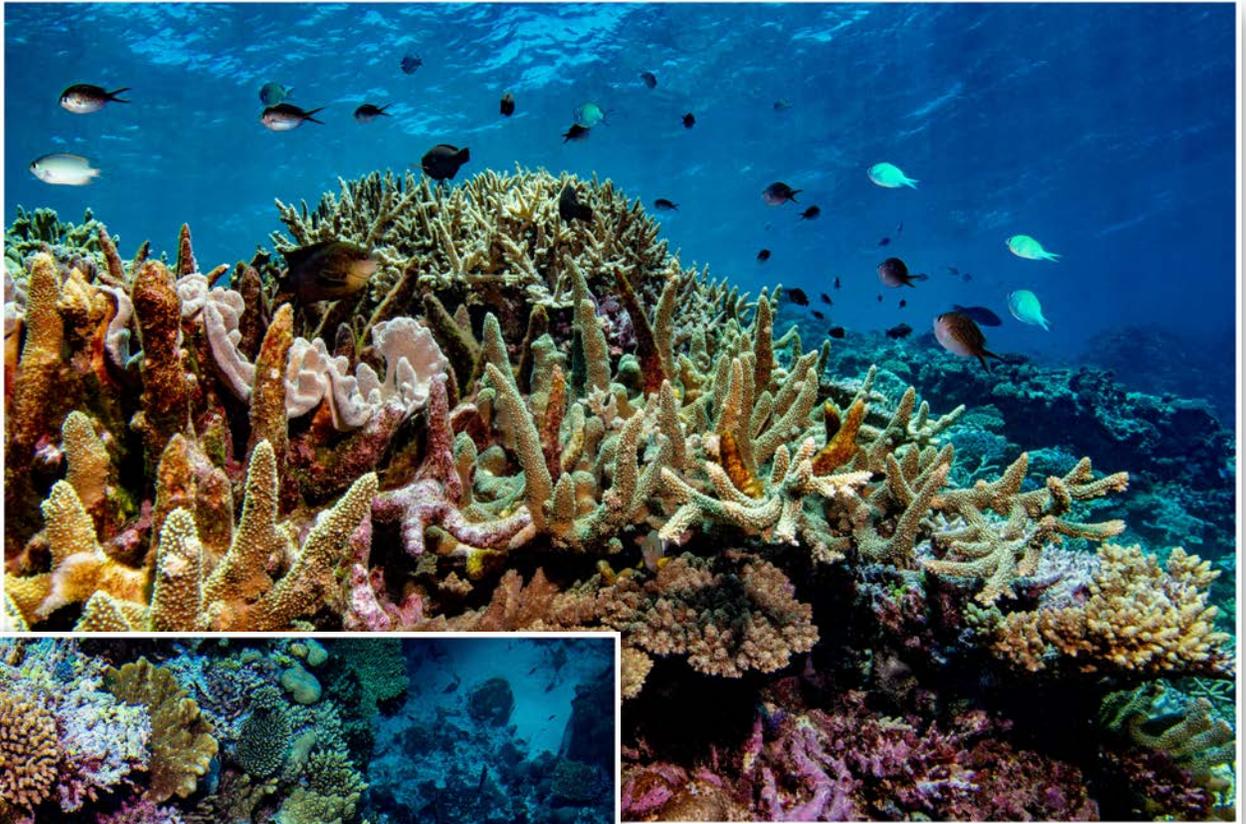
**A**t 1130 we cranked up the O2 and motored up the lagoon easily avoiding coral heads and rocks in the clear shallow waters. We anchored in a position just north of the reef passage and set off in the dingy for another dive.



We dove in a position close to yesterdays dive with big coral canyons and caves.



A bright orange anemone  
adorns a coral head as Ofelia  
swims along one of the  
countless canyons



Layer upon layer of coral is what forms a coral reef.

Over millions of years coral reefs can grow to be massive, in fact the Great Barrier Reef is the only living thing visible from outer space.

Here in Fulaga the variety of hard corals is amazing as you can see on the photograph to the left looking straight down a wall.

**W**hat better way to finish off the day than with a beach barbecue with all the other yachties. Everyone has a fantastic story to tell, adventures they have had and things they have seen. Yachties are definitely not boring people. They come from every country in the world and the one common denominator is love of the sea and all it's magnificent creatures.



19° 8.228' S 178°32.124' W



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October 12<sup>th</sup>

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday Ofelia. Happy birthday to you.



Well the long awaited day is here and I made Ofelia some crepes this morning for her birthday. This may seem like no big deal to most but to say that I am less than useless in the galley is an understatement so this in fact is a really big thing also as its her birthday we picked up anchor and motored back up to her favorite anchorage. A day of swimming and fishing ended with a small get together on the O2 with Humberto and the family from catamaran Olena

October the 13<sup>th</sup>  
At 6am Humberto arrived at the stern of the O2 with some fresh fish he had netted during the night. We then “over a nice cuppa tea” made plans to sail down to an anchorage that he considers the nicest in Fulaga so really looking forward to that as where we are is spectacular.



One of the many islands within the lagoon  
19° 7.949' S. 178° 34.297' W.

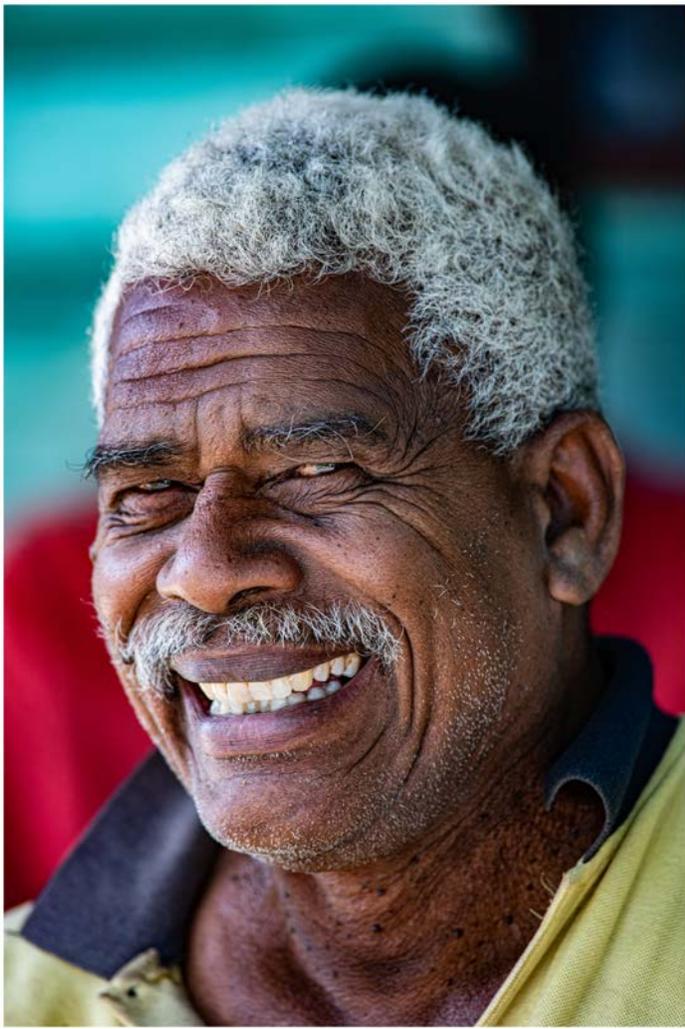
Every Island you anchor behind and every beach you enjoy here you feel like you're the very first person to visit. The truth is quite the opposite of course but the place still feels like virgin territory it is so unspoiled.

**A** brisk sail 22 knots of wind with full genoa drove us down to Humberto's favorite anchorage at 8 knots. In 45 minutes we were re-anchored behind a small lava island surrounded by many others of similar size. The water under the keel read 8 feet over sand. Humberto was right, this place is magnificent.



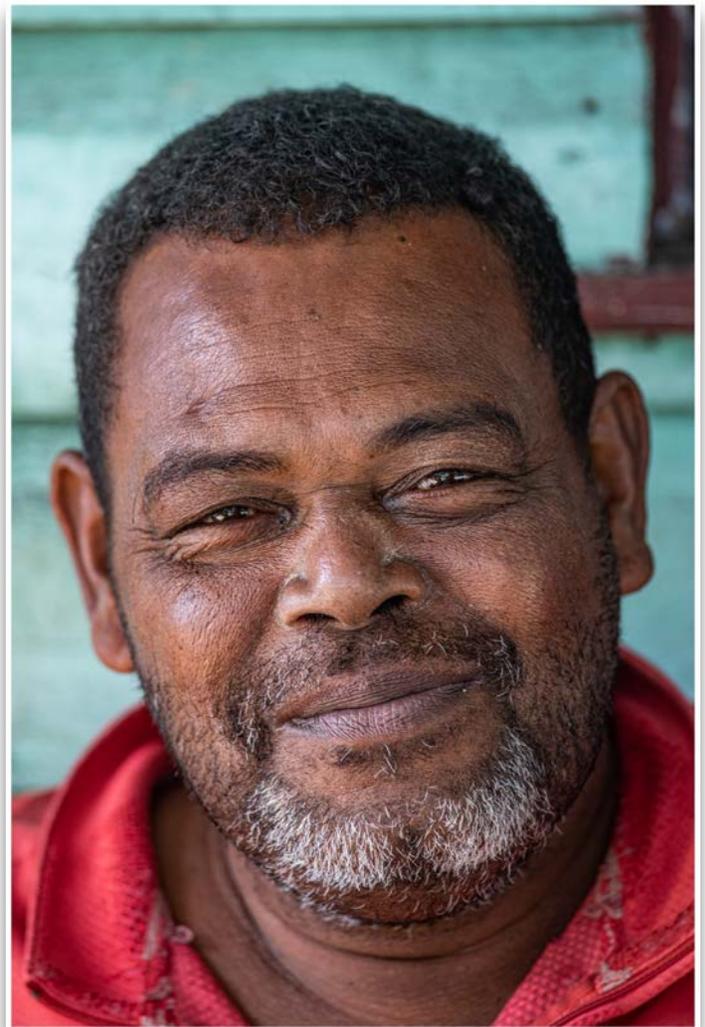
Picture perfect this island stands in shallow turquoise water.

October 14<sup>th</sup>  
Ready for another adventure today I had Kenny drop me off on the beach that is the access point for another path to the village. I was on a hunt for the blue kingfisher I had several day ago and now armed with my 300mm lens I set of through the forrest. I saw no kingfisher along the way and emerged into the village right next to where all the men were building an extension to one of the homes.



Joe

Building a new room on one of the huts the entire village helps



Pate

A quick chat about what I was doing with such a big camera and one of the men Tae said “come with me, I’ll show where you can see lots of the birds” so I followed him down the path to his house. Unfortunately we never saw any kingfisher but we did see the small parrots feeding on the palm seeds.



Small parrots feed on palm seeds.

After trying for an hour to get close to the birds Tae asked me what else I would like to see. I said “well anything you think might be interesting” so he then lead me to the back of the village and up a jungle covered lava cliff where a cave appeared in the wall. (In there) he said (are the bones of our ancestors) I climbed up to the opening and looked inside.

There were about 14 skulls in an unruly pile in the center of the tomb. A few luckier skulls “if you could call them lucky” were placed on rock shelves on the dark interior walls. Perhaps relatives returned later to give their deceased family member a better view.



A skull looking towards the tombs entrance



Tae in front of the tomb



They were not sure where the bones had come from and the oldest man in the village “who had recently died” was 100 years old when he passed away and he had no idea to whom the bones belonged. All assume they are from the village and not some defeated enemy.

I was later told that if I had gone a little further up the cliff I would have found the remains of an old village where in olden times they would defend against Tongans who came with bad intentions by hurling rocks down the cliff. I think that might have been a pretty good deterrent.

**A**s I stared into the black voids of the empty eye sockets of one skull I found myself wondering who this person was? Was it a man or a woman? What was life like here on this very remote Pacific island so long ago? What was the cause of death? and the biggest question of all, how long before I look like this? “Let’s hope I can delay that for a while” I thought as I climbed out gasping for breath into the open clean air of the forrest.

Most of the answers I will never know and I intended to delay knowing the answer to the last question for a good while yet. Tae and I scrambled back down the cliff and back in the village



**3** days earlier Tae had burned his right foot between the toes on a hot coal from his cooking fire. He had no shoes but on the injured foot he had a sock and an old sandal that was split and threatening to fall apart at any moment. Never the less he picked me a huge pumpkin and some papaya and insisted on carrying the heavy bag full of goodies the 30 minutes across a rough track back to the boat.

When we were at the boat we washed his foot and gave him some burn cream and bandages and I pulled out an old pair of sandals that fitted him perfectly. We then had a nice cupa and piece of Ofelia's chocolate cake after which he set off across island again back to his home. This is Fiji where people will walk with an injured foot 1 hour to make sure you have something to eat. Fijians are amazing.



Our anchorage at  $19^{\circ} 8.379' S.$   $178^{\circ} 34.531' W$



Fantastic small lava islands surround us

The path to the village leaves from a little beach to the right of the anchorage. Its not as comfortable of a walk as the other path but neither is it too difficult. Good shoes would probably help but there are locals that do it bare footed over lava rock which can be quite sharp.

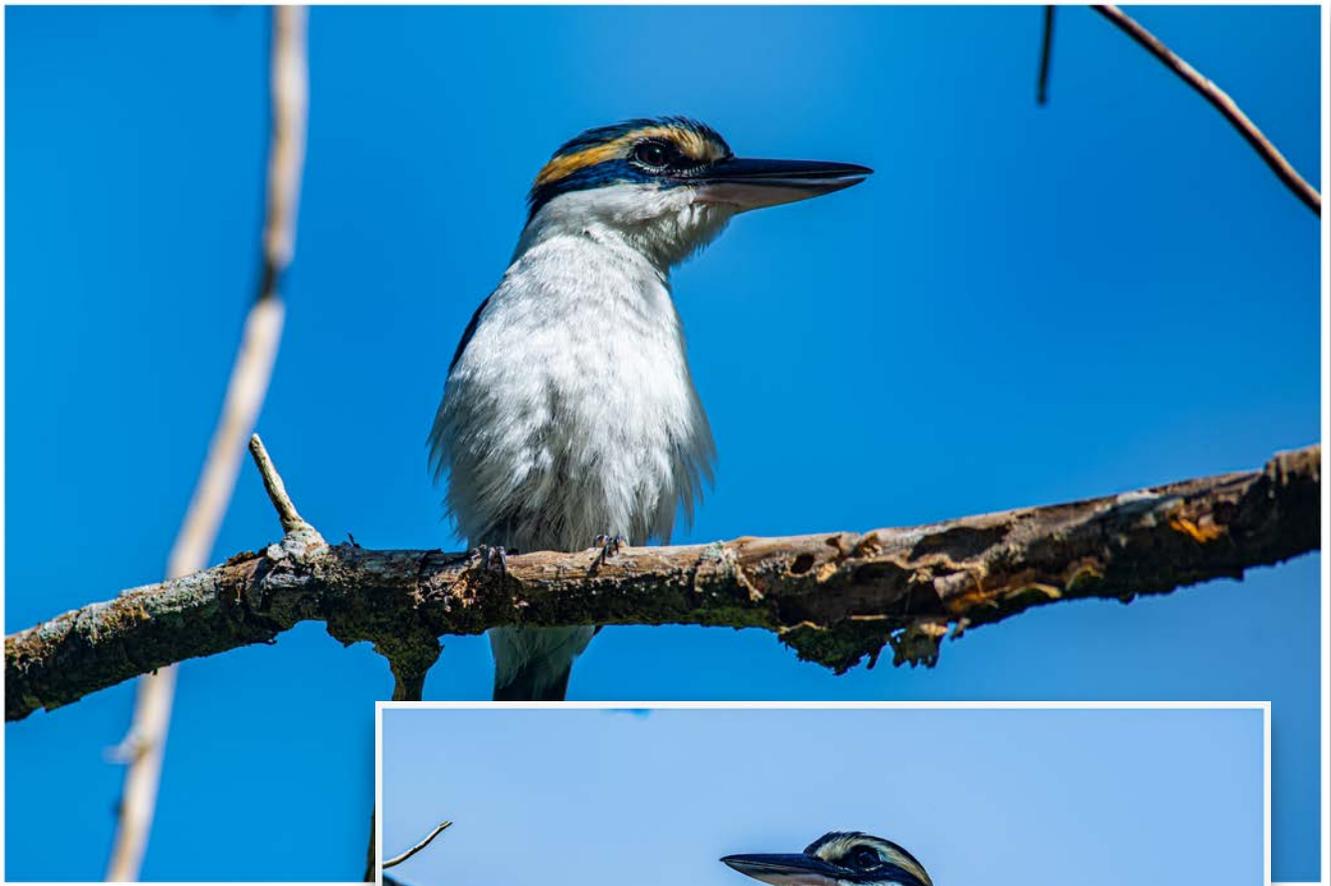
October 14<sup>th</sup>  
Ofelia Humberto and myself set out along the path to the village very early as Humberto wanted to try to communicate with Europe from the school where internet is again working. I was on a mission to photograph the blue kingfisher and parrots I'd seen the previous day so 30 minutes later we entered the little community and I went off on my own while Ofelia and Humberto went to the school.



I quickly found some parrots as I now know where all the seed pods are but the Kingfisher is another story.



Parrots feeding on palm seeds



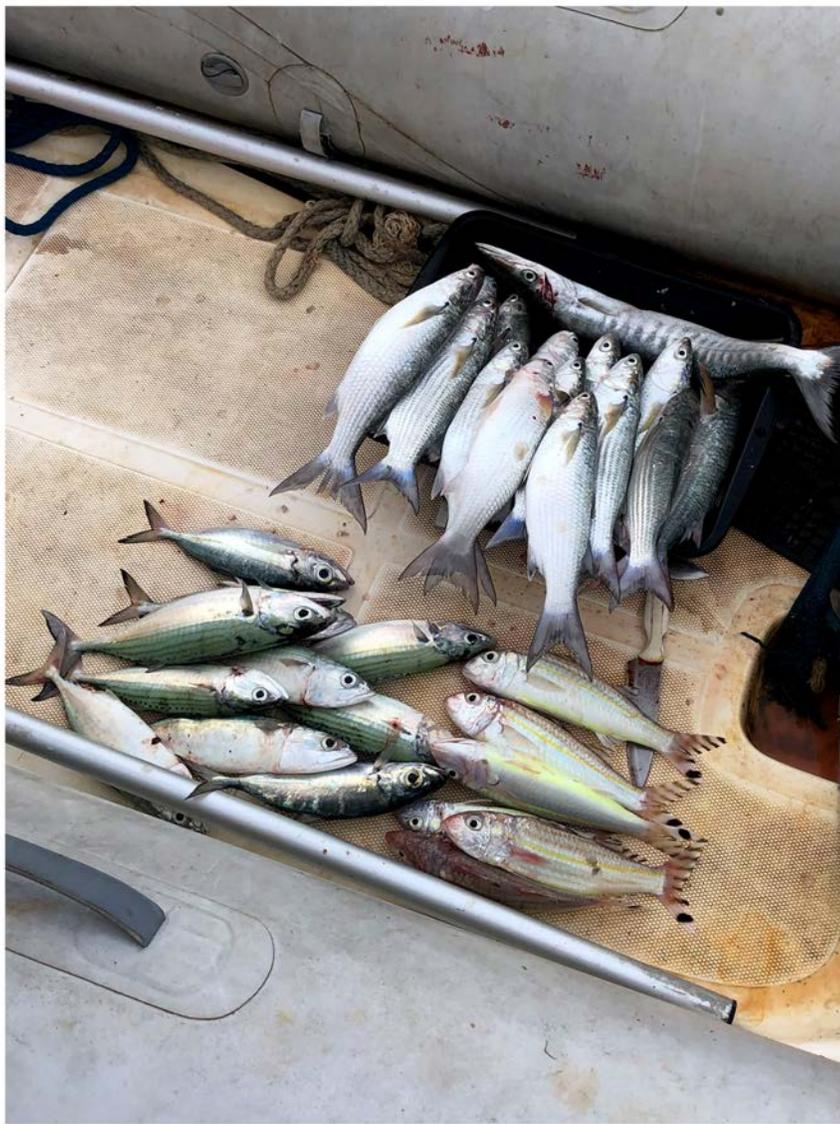
These little guys take patience and luck but Tae described to me the sound they make. After that I did managed to track one down.

The rest of the afternoon was spent trying to leave which might seem like a simple task but not here. Everyone wants to invite you for tea and Tae refused to let us leave without trying a very sweet desert the women had made. It was delicious.

October 15<sup>th</sup>

Well the weather looks good and its time to move on to the next destination. You could spend months here in Fulaga but there is so much more to do. There are so many islands between us and Vuda Marina and we need to be a bit selective as we have a date to be back in Nadi for visa extensions and a long over due haul out of the O2.

For now though we will enjoy this beautiful place for a few more hours and exit on the afternoon tide.



6 am Humberto checked his net this morning and found he had caught lots of fish. 31 to be exact. He dropped off a few for us and will deliver the rest to the village this morning. No wonder they love him here.

Humberto's catch



9 am Kenny, Ofelia and Humberto left for the village, Humberto with fish and Ofelia and Kenny carrying lots of canned goods. The village will be very happy today.

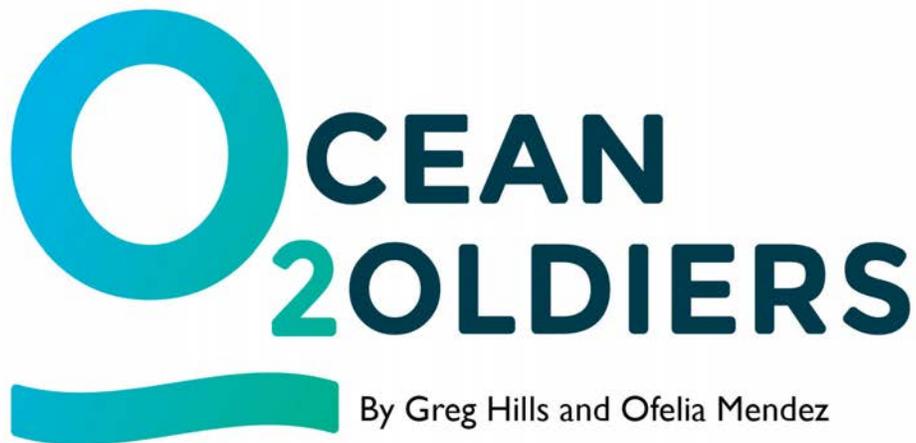
Change of plans. we have decided to stay in Fulaga another day and tomorrow head over to visit Ogea which is just 7 miles entrance to entrance. Its supposed to be another very special place.

The path to the village starts from this beach.



Lat 19° 8.379' S. Long 178° 34.531' W.

October 16<sup>th</sup>  
Unfortunately time is running out on us and if we wish to visit more islands we really must be leaving Fulaga. At about 8 am we picked up anchor and following “The Holandes Errante” we motored out of the pass at Fulaga and set course for Ogea just 7 miles away to the SE passage. The adventure continues.



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