

Matuku

September the 13th 2020



Reef entrance 19° 9.22' S 179° 43.938 E

Finally the weather we had been waiting for. After a long wait in Kadavu with really strong trade winds our weather report looked good for continuing our voyage east to The Lau Group.

Not that we had suffered greatly in Kadavu as we loved the place and the people and would miss the graceful manta rays at Vurolevu but alas we are nautical nomads and it is time for us to move on.

Our friends William and Delphine on the sloop Atoll left their anchorage at 8am and we watched as they disappeared over the horizon confident we would catch them through the night.

At 5PM we cleared Solo channel at the north end of Astrolabe reef and through large swell left over from the strong winds of the previous days we headed out into the Pacific ocean.

As you quickly learn sailing in the Pacific weather reports can sometimes vary quite differently from the truth and instead of our predicted broad reach straight down to Matuku we found ourselves hard on the wind and still pointing way north of our desired destination. With dagger boards down and sails sheeted hard in we continued through the night with light winds.

A little after midnight the breeze did change slightly in our favor so that at daylight we had managed to claw our way to a position just north of Matuku, to port we could see Moala and Totoya islands.

Dawns early light also revealed a white speck way of on the horizon well south of us. It was our friends on the sloop Atol and they had made good southerly early in the previous day and were in great position for their approach to the reef entrance, we on the other hand were north of where we needed to be so we put S/V O2 through a starboard tack and after an hour we started the engine for a final approach to the cut.



The inner anchorage at Matuku

The reef entrance is wide and uncomplicated and moving into the bay at Kadavu you are at once surrounded by large hills covered with more shades of green than you knew existed.

The approach to the village at the head of the bay is complicated by a reef smack in the middle but can be quite easily seen with good light and passed on either side.

We skirted the reef and came into the inner anchorage which after examination appeared to be a little tight for us and S/V Atoll together so we returned to the deeper water anchorage a little north.

Climbing Korovava



Korovava from our deck

Who's idea was this anyway I thought as we made our way out of the village of Lomati passing the pig farm on the right and following an ever disappearing path on our way up to Korovava, It looked to me to be the highest peak in Matuku.

Jessy was our guide and armed with a very sharp machete and an engaging smile he led us into the ever thickening and steepening forrest.



We passed the pig farm on the way out of the village

At first the climb was not too bad but as we proceeded into the jungle it became more apparent that this was not going to be “no walk in the park”.

A far more sinister punishment was in store for those who dare to challenge the mountain.

There were 5 of us, Jessy the guide, Delphine and William from sloop Atoll, Ofelia and myself from S/VO2.



The intrepid voyagers entering the jungle



Ofelia with her new walking stick



Delphine and Jessy discussing nature

Ofelia started this walk with a bad knee and I asked Jessy to cut her a walking stick to help her along the way. After choosing the appropriate branch he soon had it whittled down to the perfect aid for her to continue.



On a rest stop Jessy explaining where he had buried previous cruisers who foolishly attempted to climb the mountain

After about 20 minutes we stopped for a rest and it was very apparent that Ofelia's knee was not going to hold up for much longer so we gave her the option to sit this one. We promised to find her on the way back. Jessy quickly cut her a bed of palm throngs where she could rest.



Delphine clings to a tree as she looks down on William struggling to navigate the hand holds on the vertical climb.

And so the rest of us slugged on as the path metamorphasized into a scene from “Raiders of the lost Ark” and we found ourselves pulling our tiring bodies vertically with tree roots and clinging vines.

My old heart was pounding like Polynesian war drums and I was forced to rest after every 50 meters of vertical progress.

Jessy kept offering to carry my camera bag but I am if nothing else very stubborn and refused to let this little rock shame me into submission.



At one point the jungle opened up allowing us a glimpse of the future destination still way the hell up there.

Well as it turns out the last 300 meters was clawing your way up a razor back ridge with steep drop offs on either side.

One mistake here and we would become a statistic for sure and me with my giant sombrero threatening to drag me to my doom because of the strong wind that was now adding another element to our adventure.

Hugging the rocks as tight as possible I could now see the other side of the island and its surrounding reefs but there was no time to revel in the view, I was in survival mode and so I scraped and crawled to the summit and finally emerged onto a small area where one could sit up and take in the spectacular views .



Jessy at the summit



Fearless Delphine ready to launch their drone from the summit



Yours truly feeling quite accomplished at the top of the mountain. There's life in this old sea dog yet!



The reward.

After ½ an hour admiring the view we began the long journey back down to oxygen rich air.

The first problem was the razor back ridge where we had to descend backwards making it even more complicated but Jessy was there to guide us and prevent miss steps so that we all made it off the mountain top alive.

Then for me at least the rest was easy and I swung from branch to branch like a monkey all the way down the mountain.

We arrived back to where Ofelia was resting on the path. Jessy decided we deserved some fresh coconut water. He quickly scampered up a palm tree and started hurling coconuts to the ground with me trying to dodge the missiles as I attempted to get a perfect photo.

What a marvelous gift of nature is a coconut. The water is cool and refreshing and nothing would have served to quench our thirst better. Not even a cold beer.



Ofelia enjoying her fresh coconut



William and Delphine resting on the way down

Another 20 minutes and we were back in the village and Jessy true to his promise early in the day presented us a basket full of cabbages. He knows that every cruisers problem is fresh veggie's. I have said it before, Fijians are the most giving people you are ever likely to find.



Beautiful fresh cabbages given to us by Jessy

Note: We offered to pay Jessy for this fantastic adventure tour and he refused to take any money. These people have been decimated by cyclones and lack of tourism. They are continually rebuilding. There is very little income for the basic needs yet they want to continually give. We finally convinced him to take the money for his children and he reluctantly did so. We hope if you have a chance to visit here you will find a way to be generous to these wonderful people.

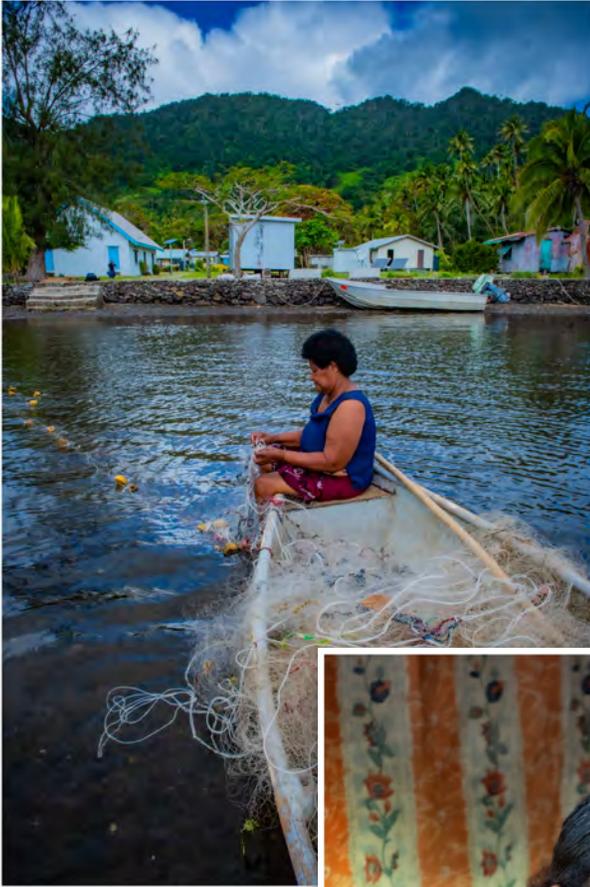


Jessy with a lot of cabbage for our two boats

Unfortunately our friends on sloop Atoll “Delphine and Willian” had to leave for their return journey to New Caledonia as soon as we returned from our climb. I on the other hand had a shower and collapsed exhausted into my bed.

Lomati Village

Fish net repair



Taka



Mareca



Jessy's son Paul



Moape and his daughter Titilia

Weaving a bridal mat

Luvu



Luvu and Tokasa



Ledua



Lomati front door



I just love the colors in this old tin hut and the cross that was sculptured to adorn its roof





Liku



Lala



Oni

Most of the children of Lomati are at boarding school in Makadru during the week and return on weekends to be with family.

The trek to Makadru

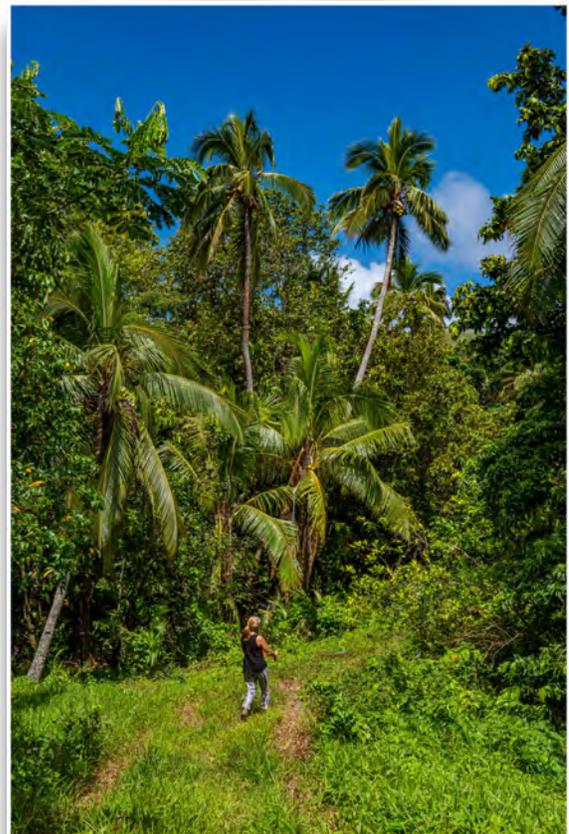
September the 16th 2020

It was way too windy to dive today so we decided to amuse ourselves with a little stroll, Haha! over to the next village Makadru. Apparently it was a reasonably easy 40 minute walk, one just needed to pass through the village of Lomati and pick up the main track where we would “we were told” soon see another path veering off to the right.

Well I guess the track no longer gets much use as we completely missed it and it didn't take me long to figure out we were walking in the wrong direction on a track that would take us to a far more distant village, we doubled back and with the help of a villager were finally headed the right way.



Passing the pig farm
Ofelia found a little friend.



Ofelia now moving in the
right direction.

The first part of the track was flat through very lush jungle but it quickly turned up hill. After my mountain climb of 2 days ago I was wondering if I'd regret this walk. Well it wasn't quite so bad but we did have a big hill to cross.



Flowers and vines along the way



Looking back, a reminder of our first hike. "Korovava"



Matuku Harbour from half way up the hill



After about 40 minutes we reached the summit and started our descent into the village of Raviravi.



As you enter a village everyone comes out to meet you
Isei and Mereani



Lesi



Waqa



The church at Raviravi





Waqá climbing a coconut palm



Waqá opening our coconut

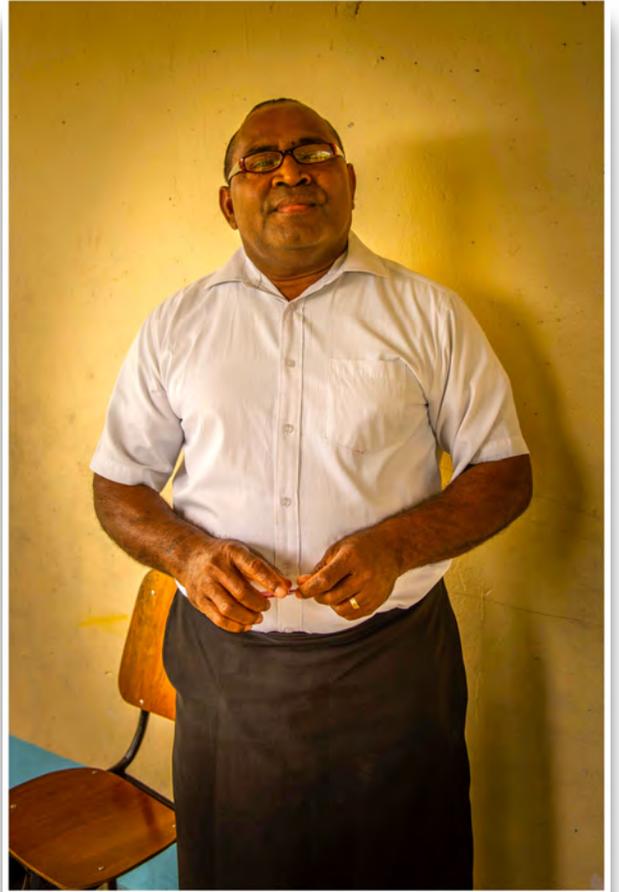


Absolutely full to the brim with coconut water

Thirsty on your long hike,
No Problem!
One of the locals will shimmy
right up a coconut palm and
bring you the most delicious
thirst quenching drink ever.



The school sign



The school director : Eroni



The school has 28 students and 4 teachers



John



12 resounding bongs,
announces Lunch time.



Students



Students



Mere :Teacher



Beni : School teacher



Gift of coconuts



Pasemaca : Teacher

The parents take turns off one week in length to go over to the boarding school to prepare the food and care for the children so depending on the number of children in a given family your turn may come up every 15 or 20 weeks.



Makadro Village view



Lave : 95 and still smiling



Dam : The village store keeper Makadro

Dinner in Jessy's and Mere's house was an amazing treat and we met the whole family. It was Friday so the kids were back from boarding school in Makadro.



Ofelia
and
Mere



Margaret



John

Friday afternoon Kava session with the village gents



Inia



Tadu



Sese



Cama
The Turanga Nikoro
He represents the
village to the
government.



Lui



Jessy James and family visit the boat

Flowers only last for a few days when they are taken away from the tree and our time here, soon will come to an end but the memories we have together will always treasured deeply in our hearts .
You will always welcome in our family all the time or any time.
Thanks very much for having us today.

FROM THE
James Family.

A touching letter from James family

Saturday September 20th 2020

At 4pm Kenny went into the village in our tender and picked up the James family for a visit to our boat. Ofelia had worked hard all day preparing cakes, cookies and dips for them to try, in a small way to repay for the amazing spread that they set up for us the night before.

Now we can't even get close to matching the amazing bounty of food that was prepared for us the night before as the island Matuku and Jessy are great providers.

Everything grows here and with an abundance of fish, well its hard to compete from vessels stores but luckily Ofelia is a very talented cook and came up with an amazing pineapple cake that I was sorry to see disappear.

The favorite however was her tuna dip and crackers that the kids seemed to prefer over the sweet cakes and cookies.

We played cards, talked and laughed for hours, looked at photo's and videos I had made, Jessy explained island politics and about his dreams for his family and village and the time flew by so fast.

Alas it was getting late. Out on deck it was pitch black and the wind was gusting to 25 knots as we loaded our guests back into our tender for the trip to shore.

Another incredible day has come to an end here in Matuku.

If you ever go to Matuku be sure to ask specifically for Jessy



A small bouquet of flowers gifted by our new friends

Monday September 21st and we are departing for Totoya. Kenny and I picked up our second anchor early and then Ofelia and I went into the village to say our goodbyes.

Back on the boat we lifter anchor and proceeded out of the harbour.

We hadn't gone ½ mile when we saw a panga set out from shore and head out to us at top speed. Its Jessy says Ofelia. we had missed him in the village as he was out on his garden. Sure enough it was Jessy and the kids and he had made the effort to catch up to us to give us more vegetables. Now how amazing is that ? We will miss them here on Matuku. Very much.



Jessy and the kids chased us just to give us more vegetables. Now how cool is that?



Delphine approaches a nice anemone

Due to bad weather we never did to do much diving in Matuku but we did do a few immersions outside the reef entrance in beautiful clear water. Lots of great swim throughs and moving out from the reef a drop off into the dark depths.



William over brain coral



Ofelia swims past a large cave



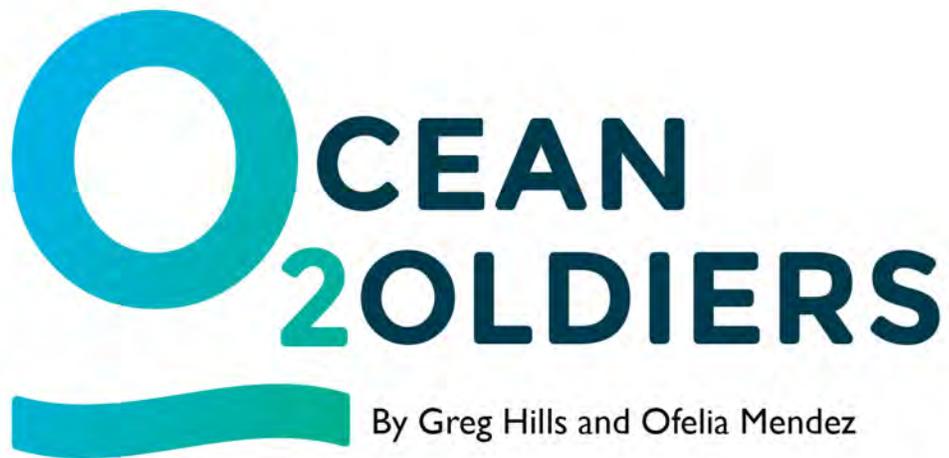
Looking up at Delphine and William on the wall in Matuku.



Delphine
entering a cave on
Matuku outer reef.



Finally a photo of me. Thanks Delphine.



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