

# FATHOMS

**AUGUST—SEPTEMBER 2010**

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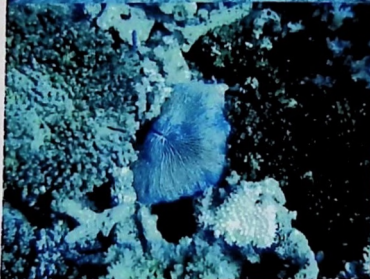
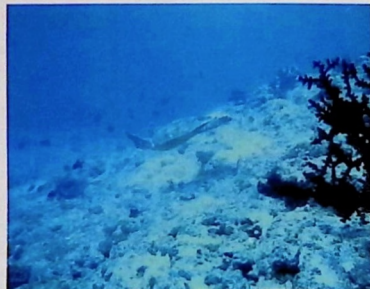
Postal Address:

VSAG

145 Johnston St

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# FATHOMS



*Official Journal of the Victorian Sub-Aqua Group*

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**VSAG General Meetings**  
3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday in the month

Bell's Hotel  
157 Moray Street (cnr Coventry Street)  
South Melbourne, 8.00 pm

**Editorial Submissions to:**

Alan Storen  
15 Regal Court Vermont South Vic 3133



# EDITORIAL

Welcome to the "BULA" edition. No, not the 'full of bull' edition although some might say that after all the reports on Fiji. BULA is the traditional 'Welcome, Hello, Greetings, G'Day mate , etc' in Fijian. Bula represents more than just 'hello', however. It also means happiness and health.

I managed to get 10 lines (+) out of most members of VSAG that ventured to Fiji on the 19 to 30<sup>th</sup> June. What a great time was had by all and please read the comments to appreciate the wonderful time we had on the trip. Many photos are included and these were contributed by David, Benita, Andy & Gail, Christine,

Alan, Jude, Jackie and Patricia.

We also had some local diving during June/July – Queen's Birthday long weekend at Boarfish Lodge, Queenscliff, and JL braving the cold with Alex Ivanov – read the reports to find out the details.

JL also arranged several social events and reports are included on the visits to Heritage Victoria and the Mentone Bakery Museum. The Xmas in July report has been held over to the next edition due to space problems.

The Blues Train in November (SAT 13th) is fully booked out – we have 36 starters I think. If you wish to go on a 'Reserve List' please contact JL in case someone pulls out.

The SDFV BBQ at the Prom over the Melbourne Cup Long weekend is on again and bookings need to be made soon – contact me if you intend going so that a club booking can be made.

The Xmas trip to Beachport ( staying in the Caravan Park) is booked but there is room for a couple more starters – if you are interested please contact Alan Storen asap – details 26 Dec to 1 Jan, powered sites, \$175. Current starters are Mick Jeacle, Greg Richards, Benita McDonough, Alan Storen, John Mills, Trevor Williams (plus partners).

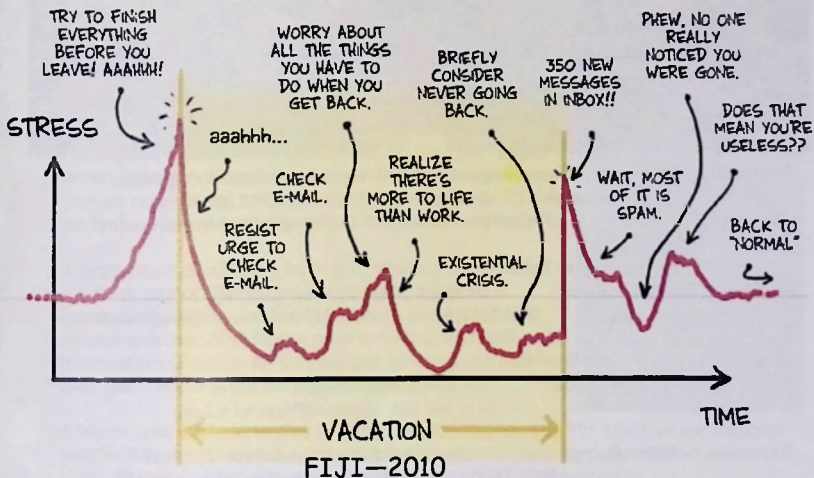
**A reminder about the AGM – September 16. Please come along and join in the celebration. Nominations for the next 'directors'/committee are due to David by 1 Sept. Usual awards: Club Member of the Year, Literary Award, Fathoms Award together with the President's and Treasurer's reports.**

Enjoy,

Alan

**"So much Water, So Little Bottom Time!"**

# VACATION RELAXATION?

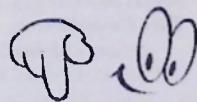


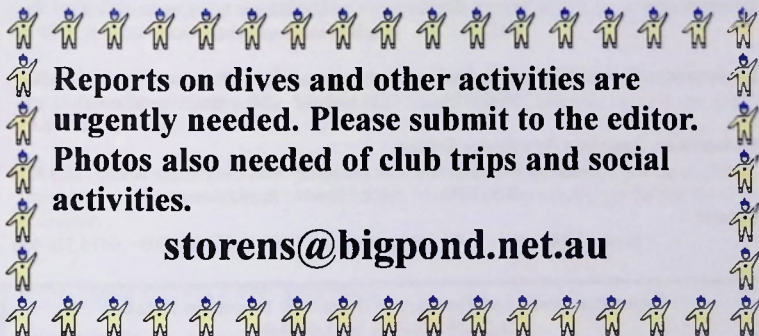
COMING SOON

**AGM 16 September @ Bells**

SDFV BBQ at the Prom—Alan Storen

Blues Train—13 November—JL



**Reports on dives and other activities are urgently needed. Please submit to the editor. Photos also needed of club trips and social activities.**

**storens@bigpond.net.au**

# Committee 2009 - 2010



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Committee meets 2nd Thursday of the month (except in January)

ALL MEMBERS WELCOME

Leighoah Hotel 1555 Dandenong Rd Oakleigh.

# president's page

Well we are over half way through winter and although water temps are down the diving just keeps on coming!

Recently we have had several good days out mainly diving the Bay for scallops and exploring the wrecks and reefs off Rosebud, Williamstown & Queenscliff. In the near future, we are planning a few easy shallow dives in the upper Bay area on rarely dived places, such as, The Uralba and the old tyre reefs and generally taking things relatively easy.

A large group of VSAGers have just returned from diving the Beqa Lagoon Shark dive in Fiji. By all accounts a fabulous trip with great diving and even better food and accommodation. Alan Storen gave a riveting and well-received presentation on it at our last meeting and didn't even get a bottle of Red for his troubles.



A trip to New Zealand to dive the Poor Knights Islands and The wreck of the Rainbow warrior is being planned for Feb- March next year. If your interested please let me know ASAP as we have to make firm bookings soon (with deposits!)

We recently had nearly 20 of us enjoy our annual feast at the VSAG Xmas in July Party. and our November social event at the Blues Train is booked out already. The recent Life Members Dinner was well attended and it was good to see the guys who made this club what it is today still getting together and having a ball.

The club has planned a diver recovery day for early October. The plan is to practice recovering an unconscious diver into our various small boats. This has been planned for some time and we hope to see all boat owners supporting us on the day. There will be a dive on offer as well after the serious stuff -as well as the usual after dive debrief at a local watering hole.

Wilson's Prom Cup weekend is fast approaching and anyone wanting a campsite with the club has to advise the Dive Captain Alan Storen ASAP. Cash with order is the only way to book a site!

For the Melbourne based divers over the Melbourne Cup Weekend we will be running dives as we have several boat owners saying here and John Lawler will be the Co-ordinator.

Brrrrr... gotta love this winter don't ya!!

Greg Richards.

## The Heritage Victoria Visit.

JL has been working hard on filling the calendar with social events and the visit to the Heritage Vic site in Fitzroy was great. It was the Marine Heritage section but also had some artefacts from Pentridge Goal that they were restoring. Many fascinating objects were being restored to viewable condition including the table and 'plumbed toilet' from the 'City of Launceston'.

After the visit we (JL) found an nearby pub that served a fantastic meal – all went home satisfied on both counts.

Alan Storen



Emergency Evacuations  
can cost as much as  
US\$100,000



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### VSAG CLUB DECALS

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from Peter Briggs



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## Diver Profile: Gail Mastrowicz

**Year joined VSAG:** Approximately November 1981 was the first time we met and camped with VSAG on one of their holidays away to Port Campbell.

**How long have you been diving?:** I did my Scuba Diving course in 1975 at Melbourne City Baths and Rye. Having had 2 children, as well as numerous renovations on our house, I have been diving on and off since then (with long gaps in between). Before children we used to dive all weekend, every weekend over the warmer months, always out of Queenscliff.

**First diving experience:** The first time that Andy took me diving was off Queenscliff where we descended to approx 30 feet. As soon as we hit the bottom something caught Andy's eye and he motioned for me to stay put while he popped over a rock to investigate. Andy was only gone for a minute or two when I took a breath of air and there was nothing there!! A quick look around for Andy and then a quick decision to make for the surface. Once safely on the surface and gulping that wonderful air, Andy came up and was not happy that I was not where he left me and then could not quite understand that I had been unable to breathe. Once safely back on the boat, we checked the cylinder only to find that they had only filled the reserve (yes it was a J valve at the time) – they had not filled the actual tank!

Anyway after Andy's heart had come back to normal levels he vowed that if I wanted to continue diving I would have to go and do a Diving Course before he would let me in the water again! So that is how I met the wonderful Mr Fred Tidman (I am sure many of the older divers know of this teacher) and learnt to dive, and have not looked back. Those were also the days that we had never heard of a BC and just kicked our way up to the surface after a dive!!!

**Favorite diving location in Melbourne:** I love doing a Channel Drift – the freedom and excitement of racing along with the current is a great feeling. Other than that I love all areas that we dive in and around the Heads and the Bay. I think we have some of the best diving in the World – although I would love it if the water was a bit warmer though!

**Most memorable diving experience:** Diving the President Coolidge in Vanuatu, as well as the old Wrecks.

**Most unusual or amusing diving experience:** In Fiji in 1983 - we were having a relatively enjoyable dive in and around the waters of Taveuni when one of our VSAG divers found a shark under some rocks and thought it would be a great photo if they could get the shark to come out of the rocks towards them. As there was a hole at one end of the rocks all the divers positioned



themselves around this entry and got ready to take photos. The idea being that one of the more adventurous divers would go to the back of the rocks and poke around until the shark decided to come out, and then the shark would swim out towards the photographers and they would get some great photos! Well, that was the theory. As I do not have a fondness for sharks I did not want to be involved in this (and I didn't have a camera at the time), so I positioned myself as far back at the rear of the rocks as I could. Well, you guessed it, as the poor shark was being prodded it turned itself around and found a rear exit (so much for checking all avenues) and came out of the rocks very fast and straight for where I was positioned. Oh my God, I am not really sure which one of us got the most surprise – the shark or me - as both of us froze for that instant in time, before it then darted off in another direction. Needless to say, if I had have had a camera it would have been an absolutely fantastic photo – full frontal face and (big) teeth very close up!! I must admit that I did not hang around the area, and was the first one out of the water and into the relatively safety of the boat. I don't think any of the divers on that dive ever poked a shark minding its own business under a rock again.

**Most valued piece of diving equipment:** My dive buddy Andy, and also my regs.

**Do you have a dive boat?:** Yes, we have a Yamaha SouthWind SF20.

**If you could dive anywhere in the world, where would you most like to dive?:** I would love to dive the Maldives, as well as the Red Sea.

**Any diving words of wisdom:** Always keep your dive gear in good working order, and check it regularly. Also, always be nice to your dive buddy!!

**Any other comments:** Over the years VSAG has been a fabulous club with lots of amazing and interesting people that we have met - some have come and gone, and others are still here. We have had many wonderful and memorable dive trips away, as well as many social occasions and we have made many great friends and have had lots and lots of fun and laughs over the years. Great people make a great club.

**GAIL MASTROWICZ**



# Nudibranchs

Nudibranchs are marine snails that have no shell (or in which the shell is significantly reduced). The largest species of nudibranchs grow to 40 cm, the smallest are easily able to move through grains of sand. Most are smaller than 10 cm.

'Nudibranch' means 'naked gills' because their gills are on the rear of the back of some species or along the side. The gills are covered by a protective flap, on species that tend to bury into the sand or mud.

## Nudibranch physiology

In all nudibranchs the shell is only present in the larval stage. As adults, the mantle replaces the shell and the operculum. Many nudibranchs have colourful mantles making them easy to see. Around the mantle margin are sometimes found small poison glands, used as a deterrent to inquisitive fish and other predators.

Some nudibranchs have spicules in the mantle also to deter predators. In others the mantle is reduced to a ridge down the side of the body with tentacles protruding.

Chemical sensors on their head are used to 'smell/taste' chemicals in the water that leads them to food or other members of their species. When observed closely, these sensors look like antennae used by us to receive electromagnetic wave signals (radio, television, etc.)

Most nudibranchs have a file-like organ (radula) which is only found in molluscs and is used to scrape off their food. This organ is covered on top with rows of teeth.

## Reproduction

Each nudibranch is both male and female producing sperm and eggs. To mate, two nudibranchs come together side by side and pass sperm sacs through a tube in their 'neck' to each other. Both then go their own way and lay egg masses that may contain millions of eggs.

## Feeding

All nudibranchs are flesh eaters (carnivores). They feed on other invertebrates such as sponges, soft corals, anemones, sea pens, Portuguese man-of-wars and hydroids. Certain species are specific about their diet and feed only on a single or small selection of hosts, others are generalised browsers.

Certain species eat the eggs of other nudibranchs. These tend to be pale in colour so that they can go unnoticed on the egg masses.

## Defence

Nudibranchs have an amazing array of defences. Colour is believed to be an important defence in many species. Others ingest and utilise the stinging cells from soft corals.

Colour can come from external sources (zooxanthellae or pigments from consumed sponges) or can be produced by the nudibranchs themselves.



## QUEENS BIRTHDAY LONG WEEKEND BOARFISH LODGE..QUEENSCLIFF

By: John Lawler DC

A VSAG tradition that has been enjoyed over many years past is the QBLWE hosted by Alan and Mary Beckhurst at their Boarfish Lodge just out of historic and beautiful Queenscliff. Friday night saw VSAG'ers roll up and settle down in front of the fire and working on the choices of take away dinners to be ordered...that done and collected a laid back viewing of dive videos and good banter saw the night out.

Those prayers to the weather gods for Saturday diving were not good enough to satisfy as 30 knot winds were up so it was a disappointing start to the weekend. However, Alan Beckhurst planned a tour around historic Point Lonsdale, a visit to the Department of Primary Industries complex, Dive Victoria's brand new very professional harbor shop and a climb up the stairs to the top on the 30 mtr viewing tower was the next very best fill in. The best pies in Victoria from the "Rollin Pin" were picked up and enjoyed overlooking the comings and goings at the Queenscliff harbor marina.

The day was finished with dinner at the great Victoria Tavern, more dive videos provided by Lloyd Borrett and the prospect of diving Sunday as the howling wind was steadily dropping.

Sunday diving was on...6 divers on FreeDiver and Adam Borge and I headed off to Portsea to collect Ken and Takae and then headed out to the J1 submarine site. Transit through the rip was good with little swell but this changed as we headed south... swells increased to around 2-3 mtrs.. With the site shot the first divers from Freediver dropped in and two from my boat also dropped in..they surfaced some 10 minutes later under SMD's as they could not find the sub....Alan and Lloyd also surfaced under SMB's as they too could not find the sub... Seems the big swells had lifted the shot line...Neil and Jeurgen did however locate the sub and had a "swell" dive but were pushed from one side to the other when one roller came through! Viz on the site was very poor. Those who were had not dived the sub decided on a drift dive and, although the current was running at around 7knots the drifts were fast and testy but a lot of fun The viz was not good and we were almost into the reefs before we saw them... just in time to ascend safely over the top. All divers back on board it was boats out and home for the wash down and gear dry out head of a BBQ dinner at the lodge....again more videos in front of a welcome fire.

Due to the poor viz experienced the day before, and no suitable slack waters, Monday was declared a no dive day and some touristy stuff was done and some headed off back to Melbourne.. David Geekie had his boat available and family members arrived and a trip to Popes Eye and the seals was their Monday plan

The Humpback whale migration was due so we went up to the Barwon Bluf with binoculars. The ocean was flat and had the whales been around it would have been easy to spot them..but they arrived the next day!!

QBLWE 2010 was a fine experience although it lacked the good diving we hope for...next year will be better! Thanks to Alan and Mary for their organization and hospitality again this year...

Divers: Alan Beckhurst/Tony Tipping/Lloyd Borrett/David Geekie/Adam Borge/Ken Methven/Takae Yokoyama/Neil Richardson/Jeurgen/John Lawler..non divers..Cheryl Lees/Mary Malloy.

## **Fiji 2010 – Coordinator's Report**

**or**

### **How I lost control of my holiday.**

Let me start by stating I like being in control. I have to work where I have lots of autonomy, I prefer to drive my own car and even bought another boat so I could control my own diving within the club. I expect to be in control of my holidays.

The article below details how I lost control of this holiday....

#### **Background.**

In 2008 I worked out that if you take off the week before the Melbourne cup and then have a day off in lieu for the Monday you can have a 10 day holiday for only 5 A/L days. So Pam and I ignored the freezing water and chancy weather offered at the Prom and headed to Manila, then on to Puerto Galera where we dived from the Atlantis resort – recommended by a keen diver patient of Pam's. The accommodation and food was excellent, the people lovely and the diving very similar to Bali. It looked a great place to take a dive group from VSAG, similar types of diving as Bali, with better accommodation, food and more local activities for non diving partners. I felt comfortable to lead (control) a group to this location given this previous trip and the contacts I had made.

#### **More important background.**

Pam loves Fiji and the Fijians, she has taken her children there 5 or 6 times for holidays. I feel Fiji is OK, not exciting and I have only had limited exposure so don't feel comfortable with the destination for the club. So when I suggest Philippines she comments Fiji would also be good.

#### **Sabotaged.**

So we go to the club meeting to discuss the 2010 winter dive trip and I have all the data for the Atlantis resort. Someone(?) suggests Fiji as an alternative and I casually ask for those interested in Fiji rather than Philippines. EVERYONE wants to go to FIJI – I have been rolled and the coup is complete. (Kevin Rudd now knows how I felt). But I cannot fade away – I am still left with the role of coordinating the trip to a destination I don't know and don't feel positive about. Things are moving out of control....

Alan Storen suggests Beqa may be interesting with the shark diving and research with others suggests this as a viable destination.

#### **Further Complications and less control.**

Pam suggests that since we will be in Fiji for diving why shouldn't she bring her children over for a family holiday after the dive component? Well, that's just 5 direct offspring, 4 grandchildren and one fiancé. A quiet family holiday after the dive trip, just 12 of us....

#### **MASSIVE COMPLICATIONS, TOTAL LOSS OF CONTROL**

Well if your son is engaged, they always wanted a beach wedding, all your children are there, why not have the wedding in Fiji? You only have to add:

The other 6 'parents' - divorce and re-partnering makes current day weddings interesting, particularly on a small island resort. (*Probably not a good sign for one actual parent when the ex wife and current wife spend too much time together comparing notes*).

Some friends of bride and groom, currently scattered all over the world. Two brothers of the fiancé. Some of the 'parents' need some extra friends so add a few extra bodies

So much for a quiet family holiday, all 35 of us....

### **We were talking about a dive trip.....**

The response from the club members was better than expected, particularly since Pat just casually mentioned to me he would be going and I forgot. However his inclusion rounded out the available accommodation perfectly so it all worked out. Sally found it frustrating dealing with the resort as they had their sales office in Las Vegas and mainly target the US so responses sometimes took days.

I was very nervous regarding the trip given I had not dived the area or been to the resort previously. My concerns and the outcomes were:



1. *Transfers not working* – they all did, though domestic transfers on the way home were tight.
2. *The accommodation would be poor* – it was fantastic, we had the best available in the resort, most if not all even having a private plunge pool. We were reminded by the management that these were viewable from the beach and not to do anything that would alarm the local village children.
3. *The dive program was only 2 dives per day and would not be enough* – this worked out superbly with Jude actually seeing Alan during the holiday. It made the whole experience a holiday rather than a frantic dive trip.
4. *Having the afternoon off would leave people bored.* This worked out well as far as I can tell. The spa treatments were much appreciated and the group looked well rested by departure time. The activities for each afternoon were varied and well supported.
5. *The diving would be boring.* Except for shark dives the fish life was limited, but we did see the occasional shark and turtle. The soft corals were brilliant, the wrecks interesting and we mixed up the lagoon diving with some outside wall dives. It was interesting that the group varied widely in what they considered to be great dives. The shark dive was great, but we mostly agreed we were content to only do this once.
6. *The food would be poor quality and insufficient.* The food was the best I have had at a diving resort such as this, their process of focusing on a narrow range daily and repeating this weekly results in superbly presented meals that were very tasty.

### **Conclusion**

It was fantastic being with the VSAG group, thanks to all for coming.

I will be interested in whether everyone else is as positive regarding the half day of diving per day as Pam and I are. We found it very relaxing and it allowed time to mix with the others in the group. The group was fun to be with and even the staff enjoyed the interaction with us – mostly thanks to Pat, Jackie and AJ!

PS: The family holiday was also fantastic, the wedding was amazing. I would tell you where we went but too many people go there now!

See you all next dive trip....

**David**



# BULA FIJI

## Alan Storen

The trip 'started' last year when David Geekie proposed that the 2010 VSAG trip should be to Puerto Galera in the Philippines, only to find that everyone else wanted to go to Fiji. Only needed eight starters to be a goer he said.

We'll end up with 16 and I must add there were more females than males – Is this a first for VSAG?

The tour list included (in alpha order)

AJ Storen; Alan Storen; Alan Dickerson; Andy Mastrowicz; Benita McDonough; Carol Briggs; Christine Reynolds; David Geekie; Gail Mastrowicz; Jackie Storen; Jude Storen; Kathy Pedlow; Pam Dagley; Patrick Reynolds; Patricia Dickerson; Peter Briggs.

The trip officially started at the Melbourne Airport at some early hour with many up before the Sun to catch the early flight – fortunately it was direct so we could relax in the plane for the 4 hour 45 minute flight. We were about one hour into the flight when an announcement came over the pa – Is there a Doctor on the flight? Pam responded and was briefed on the situation but fortunately there was another doctor closer to the patient and the drama was soon over when the sick lady was given many minutes on oxygen and she appeared to fully recover. Fortunately we were not diverted to Sydney which was an option at one stage.

We arrived in Fiji at about 4 pm (their time- 2 hour time difference) and transferred to the Mercure Hotel for the overnight stop. AJ had been to the area before and directed us to the 'best restaurant in town', 'great ribs', just across the road from the hotel. Some were arriving on a different flights (read Frequent flyer points) and Andy and Gail arrived about 9pm and Peter and Carol the next day.

After the overnight we were picked up, before breakfast!! and transferred by road to Pacific Harbour. We had a stop at Sigatoka Souvenir Shop for some coffee – the best coffee in Fiji, and some early bargaining. A costly exercise for me as Jude fancied a set of Black Pearl Earrings. Some others also gave the credit card a workout!

At Pacific Harbour we boarded a boat for transfer to Beqa Lagoon Resort and, after a 45 minute trip, we were greeted with music and singing by the staff and manager of the resort.



First activity was a free 10 minute foot massage!

Dropped the bags in the room, some lunch (brunch!) and off to the first dive. This was a checkout dive to see that the gear had all been packed, check the number of weights needed, and all gear was operating as it should. The site was called 'House Reef' – what else would you call a reef outside the main reception! It was a good spot for a checkout dive but the viz was not great, the coral a bit patchy and the fish and marine life whilst colourful was not fantastic. Hopefully it would get better! Let the adventure begin!



The first 'resort' day started with a 6.30am wakeup call, 7am breakfast and jump on the 'tinny' out to the dive boat.

# Beqa Lagoon Resort, Fiji



## Fiji Islands

- Fantasea
- John's Tunnel
- Golden Arches
- Rusi's Pinnacle
- Three Sisters

9 Shark Dive

7 Seven Sister

4 Joe's Best

5 Soft Coral Plateau

2 Carpet Cove

6 Shining Glory

- Gee's Rock
- Pearl Rock
- Sea Fan Coral
- Three Thieves
- Cutter Wall

Beqa Lagoon Resort

8 Blue Wall

10 Frigate Wall

Green Area is Land; Blue is reef

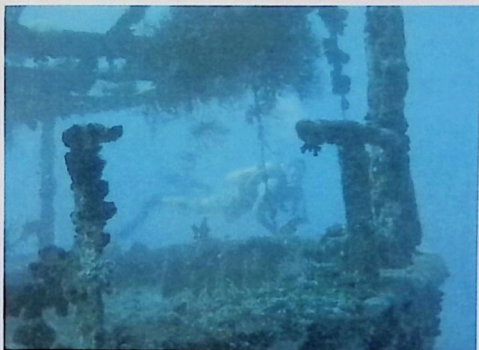


All the divers made it – was this another first for VSAG?, and the non-divers enjoying an early morning sleep-in.

### The Diving

The first boat dive was on a site called John's Tunnel. This was out near another Island called Yunuca Is. We dropped onto a bommie at 6m then over to a wreck of a fishing boat about 25m long, I think it was the Tasu 2, depth about 28m, then around 4 bommies and through John's tunnel. This tunnel was about 12m long and full of soft corals. 57 minutes later we were doing our safety stop on very good coral with many reef fish. A great dive.

The second boat dive was back near the resort island on a site called The Ridge. We had come back closer to the resort as the divemaster (Delana) thought that the water was getting rough with some current. Compared to the bay it was a millpond! There were several ridges with hard corals but I was not impressed compared with the first dive of the day. My log records depth 18.2m, 62 minutes, good fish life and plate corals, a bit patchy, yellow trumpet fish, good reef fish, nudibranches, clams, hydroids, and ...good for a night dive maybe!



After this dive David and I approached the DM and indicated that we wanted the best diving not necessarily the best conditions.

Next day we dived Rusi's Pinnacle (started on a wreck then over to a spectacular pinnacle) and then Fantasea (a pinnacle). Both of these were amongst my selection for 'best of the trip'.

For me, a night dive on The Ridge. Many parrot fish 'asleep', very active seastars, reef sharks, octopus, a small cray...a good dive. Buddied up with an American who spent lots of time photographing so it was a slow leisurely dive. The next day was spent at sites inside the Lagoon – Carpet



Cove and Seven Sisters. Reef sharks, turtles, many nudibranches, mega reef fish, good coral (soft and hard) and some larger pelagics.

Similar area the next day – Gee's Rock and Pearl Rock. David found a huge Nudi – the largest I have ever seen- about 70cm long and still trying to find it in the books! Sharks, blue ribbon eels, morays, fire clam, yellow puffer fish, etc  
Back to the same area again next day – Sea Fan Coral and Soft Coral Plateau. At this stage we broke into two groups (affectionately know and the 'A' team and the 'B' team). Before this we had a DM at the front and a DM at the back with all in between – worked but was crowded when the DM wanted to point out some small creature and all 12 VSAGers swam in to take a look. Turtles, sharks (18 seen in close proximity by the 'A' team), ribbon eels, nudis, garden eels, great soft and hard corals, reef fish, etc.

Next day(Sat) we did the double shark dive with



Aquatrek. Mega sharks – too many to count, bulls, reef, lemon, etc. Did not see the famous Tiger but a very good couple of dives and the best way to describe is 'Watch the video'.

Sunday we went outside the lagoon and dived on Cutter Wall. Dropped into a cave at about 20m and penetrated about 6-8m to find painted crays looking down from above. Fortunately I was in the A team as by the time the B team arrived the cave had become very silted. (where were the buoyancy police??). After the cave we swam along the wall and it was just great – 50m+ viz, depth 38m, shark, soft and hard corals, fans, great deco spot on a coral head. Second dive of the day was inside the lagoon on a site called Three Thieves. Excellent dive but the viz had dropped to about 30m!!

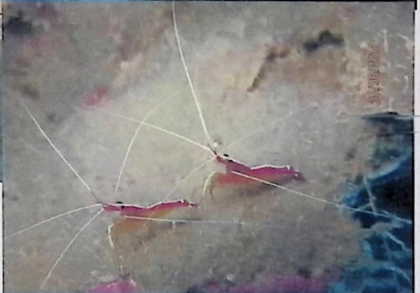


Monday saw us just back near Yanuca Island and we dived Three Sisters and Golden Arches. Excellent dives, good soft and hard corals, large rock cod and trevally, blue striped snapper – very colourful. Golden Arches gets its name from the tunnel/swimthru where the roof is covered in many soft yellow corals. Nothing to do with McDonalds advertising! Very spectacular.



Last dive day (Tues) saw the group drop to 5 (Alan, Jackie, David, Pam and Christine) and we did Blue Wall and Joe's Best. The wall saw viz of 40m+ and again sharks, blue ribbon eels, schools of jacks, snapper, great coal and reef fish. Joe's best was a huge coral head (30m x 12m) which we circled many times. Huge swim through near one end. Sharks, turtle, many nudis, great corals and excellent fish life. Great dive to end the trip with.

The only down side of the diving was the problem Pat had with his shoulder which prevented him from joining us on all but two of the dives. Apart from the night dive and one other day we had the boat to ourselves which was great and



although not the most modern boat in the fleet was more than adequate for our diving. We even had a couple of the non divers come out for a snorkel one day.



### The Food and Wine

## BEQA LAGOON RESORT



Each morning we were presented with a card to 'order' your food for lunch and dinner. Three choices – meat, fish or vegetarian. Lunch was 'pick one of the choices' and dinner was soup, one of the choices and dessert. A Menu explained the choices – every day was different but repeated every week. Most ordered all three at dinner and Jude was fortunate as I do not eat dessert and she had two most times. Breakfast was a choice of fresh fruit, juice, cereal, eggs to order, French toast or pancakes. All meals were superb and very little went back to the kitchen. Happy hour was at 5pm and most days we met

to try out the Fiji beer or the 20 or so cocktails. Over the week Jude managed to drink her way through the list! Many others did likewise. The wine list was not extensive but we managed to find a NZ and an Aussie white that were good and some good Aussie reds. A bit expensive but very drinkable after a hard days diving. Pam had her 9x French Champagne, bought duty free at Nadi and rationed each night to 'last the distance'. Each night we were entertained by a local group on their guitars.

Name	
Bure	
Date	Monday
Please indicate choice with an "X" in the appropriate box	
Breakfast	
Burlet	
Lunch	Fish Taco Beef Skewer Vegetarian
Dinner	Soup Mahi Mahi Chicken Vegetarian Dessert



### The Accommodation



The resort has 12 beachfront bures and this is where the VSAG group spent their sleeping hours – at night or the very often 'nanna-naps'. David and Pam had the honeymoon suite (it was their wedding anniversary) and it had an 'under the stars' outside shower. All the others were well appointed with fridge, ensuite, king size beds, plenty of room, balcony overlooking the water, plunge pool – it's a hard life!



### **The Surface Interval Activities**

Every day activities were listed on the notice board to do or not do as the mood dictated. Many did some, some did many! These ranged from 1001 uses of a coconut, kava drinking, local school visit, village visits, waterfall visit, choir, fire walking, massages, swimming in the pool, kayaking, reef walking and snorkelling.

The highlight for me was the kava tasting as I was appointed 'honorary chief' and this meant I got the most kava and also the others were not allowed to make any noise while I drank my kava. Sounded good at the time anyway – not sure the 'respect' was shown as intended! All good fun.

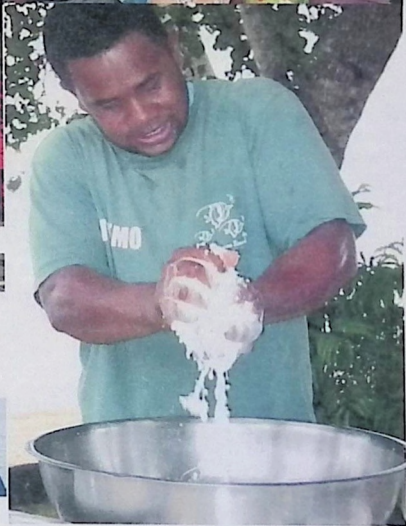


For many the highlight was the massage. Many fronted for a massage, some many times. The stories and the noises were such that many said "I'll have what she's having". I think the 'Hot Rocks' was the most popular followed closely by the 'Signature'. No happy ending for this writer!



### The Staff

And then there's Fiji's most precious asset - smiling, generous, relaxed Fijians who greet you and everyone they meet with the famous and welcoming 'Bula'. The cooks, waitresses, servers, office staff, the dive team( boat captains, crew and divemasters) , grounds staff, security and management did an excellent job of making us feel part of the culture and very welcome.

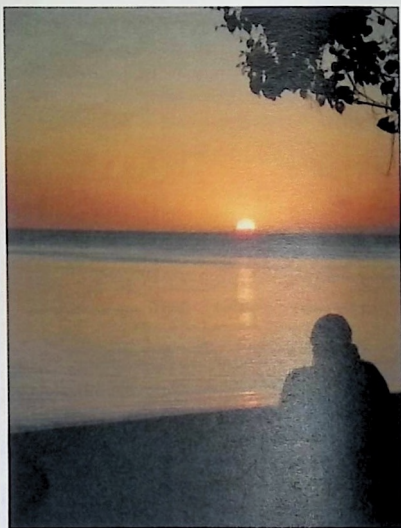


The Storens and Pat got invited back to one of the villages for a special kava tasting and we were made very welcome – actually all were invited the above went. Special mention needs to be made of 'Tu Emo' the activities coordinator. His infectious laugh/ giggle was unique and put everyone instantly at ease. He arranged most of the above events and was in everything. Singing, music, kava, coconut demo, visits, etc – the only thing he did not do was the fire walking!



### The End

All too quickly the party came to an end on the Wednesday. Andy and Gail, Peter and Carol had already left on the Tuesday to return to AUS and David and Pam had another 9 days to spend on another part of the Island (Pam's son was getting married – some excuse!). The rest caught the boat to Pacific Harbour, Bus back to Nadi (via the shops of course) and boarded a plane to Brisbane, custom cleared/quarantine checked, and a flight back to Melbourne. A bit of drama when we almost missed the connecting flight. They called out our names on the pa – “Last Call for (insert names of VSAG group)” as we ran from the check-in area to the boarding gate. One hour 30 minutes is not enough when you need to be custom cleared and get from the International to domestic terminal and go through all the check-in process/security – bring on direct flights!!



Well it is not really the end as many have indicated they would like to 'do it again, soon'. How soon will be up to the committee but I am sure there will be many takers.

Alan







## The Coconut Tree

On the second day of our visit we had the opportunity to attend a talk and demonstration about the "Coconut Tree". This was presented by the jovial and effervescent Tu Emu. In traditional Fijian life, there are uses for all parts of the coconut tree.

The roots are used as rope like bindings for lashing together poles in buildings and other structures.

The trunk provides a strong timber for buildings, furniture, etc.

The fronds are used whole for roofing etc. They are also woven to make baskets, wall panels, ceiling panels, fans and many types of decorations.

Green nuts (recently cut from trees) are used for juice and copra. Brown nuts (that have dried on the tree and fallen naturally to the ground) provide a slightly different flavoured juice, copra, a fibrous husk (used as "fire-wood"), and a shell halves that can be used as cups. The fibres in the husk are also spun together to make strings and ropes.

Tu Emo quickly made a woven basket from a single palm frond. He also opened both green and brown nuts and provided us with sips of both versions of juice. Freshly extracted copra was also enjoyed by all.

The coconut tree is so useful and significant in traditional Fijian life that parents and other elders urge children to "be good, and as useful as the coconut tree".

**Alan Dickerson**

[Ed: Actually many found the best use: Tie a hammock between the trunks and practice your zzzzzzzzzzzzz's]



28/06/2010

## Hot Rocks.

I Started It.

I was the first who tried it at Beqa Lagoon Resort and said how fantastic it was and got everyone onto it (so I say). So I am laying claim as the instigator.

For those VSAG'ers who were not fortunate enough to join the Fiji Adventure and don't know what I am talking about: I am talking about Filo and her Hot Rocks.

You could only have Filo, so we all said, for the best Hot Rocks Massage ever!

As soon as Jackie and I arrived and bolted to get our free foot massage, we both agreed we needed another massage fix. Jackie got the Signature Special Massage and asked for Filo but I bumped her off Filo as I went for the Hot Rocks massage. Filo explained she was the one to do the Hot Rocks Massage. I had seen enough pictures of all the "Beautiful People" in their spa retreats lying face down with lovely rounded rocks strategically spaced down their back looking wonderfully relaxed, to know that was what I wanted.

The truth of the actual experience was better than the pictures. Now I am a bit of chicken when it comes to pain (no Deep Tissue Massage for me) but Filo explained you could have the Hot Rocks Massage as hard or soft as you like. So I had medium. It was blissful. You start on your back on the massage table with little rocks between your toes. There are other larger, smoother rocks placed up either side of your back, not on your spine. Rocks are placed underneath your hands and just below your ribs. Then the massage begins. It is a combination of hot rocks and hands over tired muscles from diving, stiff muscles from carting baggage and just muscles that want some TLC. Once Filo has finished arms & legs on top then she gives you a wonderful facial massage. The combination is blissful. Then you flip over and with rocks once again correctly placed underneath you, Filo continues the massage with rocks and hands on your legs, arms, back and neck.

I walked away floating.

At dinner that night, there was a lot of questions about the Hot Rocks and I praised it as the best massage I have ever had and most of those that tried it over the next week or so agreed. I think that accounted for most of the VSAG group.

So if you ever make it (or return) to Beqa Lagoon Resort in Fiji, make sure you ask for Filo and her Hot Rocks massage.

**Kathy Pedlow**



## DECOMPRESSION FROM A DREAM VACATION

Jackie Storen

1/7/10 - Day One back at work - My boss asked me why I came back. Not because he didn't miss me, obviously after my gushy explanation of hi-vis warm diving, firewalking, fine dinners, sunset gazing happy hours, barefoot tropical saunters, kava ceremonies, lovely local Fijians looking after every whim and Filo's uber-relaxation hot rock treatments.

For shoe wearing folks it takes about 4 days to get to the mode of 'FIJI time', for non-shoe wearers about 2 days. That is where the distance between path rocks suits the slow pace of your 'walk like a snake' back to your private thatched 'bure' (hut) overlooking spa, green lawn, octopus combed tide flats and aqua marine waters of Beqa (pronounced 'Benga') Lagoon.



Fiji is arguably the best diving in the Pacific and with a smile on our faces when declared 'the pool was open', we dived the best FIJI has to offer on this trip. It's hard to argue when you see blue ribbon eels, black and white banded sea snake, cute nemo fish, moray eels, clown trigger fish, pipe fish, angelfish, bat fish, leafy fish, sharks, turtles, dolphins, abundant small fish life, all variety of colours and types of nudis, and large cowrie shells you can only dream of taking as momentos though living creatures hide peacefully inside. However, not prone to argue differences of dream vacations, Palau rates higher for me in

the diving stakes. The diving boat left a lot to be desired but the Fijian boat captains, dive instructors and crew looked after us well and left the female divers hot in our wetsuits and brother AJ flexing his muscles (refer Fathoms centrefold pictures).

The Resort claims the main attraction is diving – however after devouring visually appealing fresh ingredient breakies, morning teas, lunches, and three course dinners that are so tasty, all inhaled to the soul soothing background tunes of Fijian guitar and ukulele, I have come away thinking the diving is really just a fragment of the Fiji bliss we experienced. Beqa Lagoon is a no-brainer. We were informed later that chefs from around the globe have been invited to teach the female resort chefs all they know. I declare, they have learnt well.

FIJI weather in June is a mixed bag. We had cloudy mornings, sunny arvos, intermittent rain, some windy moments all of which did not affect activities, diving visibility, great sun tanning or the constant temperature of approx. 27-29 degrees. The Fijians have the life!

It was clear from the start, we divers were after the best odds of shark spotting. As soon as anyone from the 'A' dive team saw the fin signal on the top of the instructors head, it was with great fin kicking delight that we sped over to get a closer encounter. I have never seen my Dad fin so fast on one dive where 18 reasonable size sharks were spotted. For underwater air consumption king – I'd like to think that would have used up some air, surely!!

The scheduled 'Big Fish Encounter' dive was on Saturday later in our trip. It was impressive to be eye ball distance from the feeding frenzy and pet a shark. To see Bull Sharks, White

tipped Reef sharks and Lemon Sharks larger than you in girth and length left me feeling part fear, part rapture. As we safety stopped, it was hard not to look down in awe and think that you would not like to see these big fellas in any water other than this highly structured, highly unnatural setting. I think I breathed enough for 2 days on the first dive...unable to catch my breath. I particularly marvelled at the fish on the fringe of this frickard, quietly sitting lower in the water, watching this whole shooting match go down, unfazed, clearly well feed.

For non divers, including my Mum, Carol and Patricia, they got 'island-ised' very well and enjoyed honourable morning teas catered by locals, shopped at a local stall, kayaked, did the island tours to schools and church and Mum to my astonishment, even organised a late night Kava party ! Clearly, pushing the envelope that her husband was crowned and skirt wrapped 'Chief' of our group. Biggest laughs were Carol and Peter's romantic secluded (not so private) island experience after 25 grotty yachties joined them after half an hour and Peter's mistaken 'bure' incident. Pants down – takes Gail's birthday cake!

So if the dictionary definition of Bliss is 'perfect happiness, serene joy, absence of depression, elated rapture, seventh heaven' – we lived it for 12 days in FIJI. I hope my hibiscus flower thrown out of our departing boat hits the shores of Beqa Lagoon real soon. Decompression back into shoe wearing cold Melbourne life has been a tough gig after the most delightful and relaxing holiday ever.



## FIJI 2010 HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS: THE TEN LINES THAT THE OTHERS WONT WRITE ABOUT (probably)

### AJ Storen

1. Nanna Naps: Yes they are a luxury for some, but on this trip i think they were commonplace for all. Most people somewhere in between lunch & the activity for the day or before dinner would squeeze in a cheeky one or two hours. I know i missed them today (1st day back at work)



2. "Pool is Open". There were a few lines that would consistently get some token laughs, including the aussie "Oi Oi Oi" chant that seemed to work up the Fijian's, on the flip side the "pool is open" call after each dive brief would always get a chuckle out of me at least.



3. Blatant use of L.O.T.E. Yep the Fijian's were blatant at languages other than English behind our backs. Not that i wouldn't do the same if i could, however their use was out of control. Not only that it almost impossible to decipher the 'vibe' or subject of what they were talking about. A particularly memorable explanation (after an enquiry) was that the female dive master on the shark dive was getting a bit 'cuddly' as she was pregnant by one of us tourists...not very believable.

4. Double Hawaiian. Most people wouldn't find this fascinating but i did. A family who i avoiding making contact with out of fear, all took the fashion statement of double denim to new levels that i hadn't experienced. Not only did all four rock out in head to toe double-un-matching hawaiian gear, secondly one of the kids wore seven hats at a time...and thirdly, possibly the most amazing thing was they weren't Americans but Aussies.

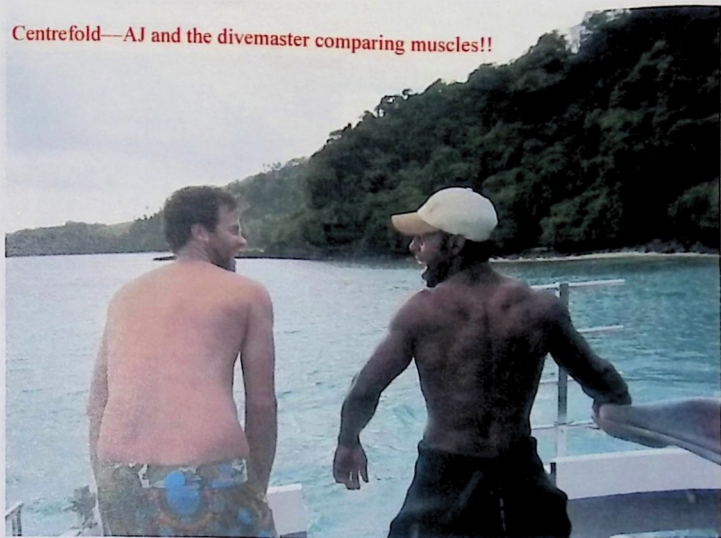


5. Rare talent. Who would've know i could swing a croquet stick

6. Canasta. Gail, we would've won that round easy had Mum & Jac had the courage to go through with the rest of the game! ha



**Centrefold—AJ and the divemaster comparing muscles!!**



7. Not thinking about food. I'm sure that this will be written about, but having a chef for a girlfriend means that you start to think about food a bit more than you used to. Can't say i'd ever thought about food underwater before, but i did find myself on a few of the 2nd dives thinking about what box i'd ticked for lunch.

8. Double Yellow Arches. Who would've know you could change a dive sites name after diving it once. i don't need to go into details but Jac changed the name of Yellow Arches...thanks heaps sis, considering i was following you.

9. Crab chairs. Just cause probably no one else will write about them, and considering i'm a furniture designer i found the crab chairs in the main hut pretty amazing. Not only was the carving pretty awesome, but if anyone tried to move them they'll understand the impressive weight & therefore the skill that would've be needed to work with them. Hopefully someone got a shot



10. Biggest stress. Coming up with these lines... we had a bit of time on the way back.

## FIJI 2010

Freezing in Melbourne makes our trip to Fiji all that more memorable. Basking in 29 degree temperature (despite all the rain) and enjoying all that comforts that the resort had to offer, my thanks go to our wonderful hosts at the Beqa Lagoon resort where nothing was too much trouble for them (especially those wonderful meals and live entertainment), they made my stay very comfortable and entertaining. Thanks also to David Geekie for pulling it all together for us and showing us a wonderful slice of paradise with exciting shark dives and amazingly spectacular wall dives. Definitely not to be missed!



### Christine Reynolds





## Fiji—Beqa Lagoon

*Patricia Dickerson*

This was my first visit to Fiji and also my first trip away with the VSAG group as one of the three non-diver wives who went. The location on Beqa Island was great and the local Fijians such very friendly people, not forgetting the wonderfully presented and enjoyable meals.

Jude and I had a delightful experience on our last day on Beqa of being invited to the home of one of the locals. It was situated in the bush away from the village on the next bay around and 1 ¼ hours walk each way for us. The trek along the way had a few obstacles like getting across ditches on fallen logs and edging around slippery rocks and watery parts of the very muddy track, but it was all worth it to have the privilege of spending time in the home of and talking with Cika and her little grandson Joe. She made us feel so welcome and we learnt a few things about their life and the way they live etc. The walk back was a lot easier as the tide was on the way out and we were able to enjoy a beach walk on our return.



Thank you to everyone for your great company, it was such a pleasure to be with you all.



## FIJI TRIP – June 2010

*By Gail Mastrowicz*

As an article I thought I would give an overview of our holiday in Fiji –

Andy and I arrived in Nadi at 7.00pm local time after a great flight from Sydney. However once on the island it was all “island time” from then on – we had to wait for around 1 hour before the bus left to take us to the Mercure 10 minutes away. Once we checked in we then had to wait another hour or so before a serious looking guy came over and said “we have a problem” – apparently the air conditioning in our room had broken down and we were not allowed to go in until it had been fixed. Finally got to our room around 10.00pm local time. Anyway the next morning saw us all pile into a bus for the journey lasting a couple of hours to get to the pick up point for the boat that was to take us on our 1 hour journey over to Beqa Island.

Upon arrival at Beqa we were treated to a welcoming song and music with a traditional Fijian welcome of shell necklaces and welcome drink and then a talk by the resident Manager. We were also treated to a 10 minute Fijian Foot Massage, which was absolute heaven and had most of us girls booking in for various types of massages over the next 10 days – I can definitely recommend the Hot Stones Massage!!

The food at Beqa Lagoon Resort has to be seen to be believed – every day we had a 3-course gourmet dinner as well as a cooked lunch when we arrived back from each days diving. Not sure about the others, but I know that I put on weight over our time there.

Our bures were facing the beachfront and each one had its own plunge pool and double hammock in the garden and they were quite spacious inside.

We quickly settled into a routine of getting up around 6.25am (4.25am Melbourne time), going to breakfast and then loading onto our dive boats at 7.45am (5.45am Melbourne time) and then motoring out to the various dive sites. Gearing up and listening to our dive profile for each dive was then followed by the Fijian Dive Master announcing “*The Pool is open*”. Then one by one we each entered the lovely tropical water and descended for our dive, usually surfacing around 60 minutes later and then partaking in banana bread, biscuits and Orange Juice handed around by the Dive Crew.

The diving highlight for me was the Shark Dive which saw Lemon Sharks, Bulls Sharks, Nurse Sharks and Reef Sharks as well as lots of Ramoras, Giant Trevally and lots of different types of fish – all darting in and out getting fed from a



22/05/2010

big wheely-bin full of fish-heads, etc. We also saw a Sea Snake. I was lucky enough to be called out to the arena and went with the guide and patted a Grey Nurse Shark, which was a huge buzz!! On our 2<sup>nd</sup> dive to the Shark Feeding area we settled on a rock which was home to a huge Moray Eel (about 1½ metres long) who was quite happy to come a fair way out from under his rock in order to grab some of the food that was being offered.

Usually we were back at the Resort between 1.00pm and 1.30pm and then sat down to a tasty cooked lunch with iced tea, then either a swim or back to the bure for a quick snooze, and then at 2.45pm there were activities planned, such as a Village School Tour, a local Village Visit, Fijian Cooking demonstration, Coconut demonstration, Karva Ceremony, a Fire-Walking Display as well as Fijian Dancing, etc. All in all we were kept quite busy and the days just seemed to merge into one another.

Happy Hour and Cocktails were the order of the day at 5.00pm to 6.00pm and then a wonderful gourmet dinner commencing at 7.00pm. One of the highlights during Happy Hour was Andy singing and entertaining us with his rendition of "You are my Sunshine" with the resident band.



A highlight for me was that I got to spend my birthday on Beqa Lagoon Resort and had a wonderful day consisting of great diving, drinks at our bure before dinner, and then after our main course the Fijians came out singing Happy Birthday and with a huge chocolate birthday cake! I got to wear THE special birthday hat (which was very hot) and eat lots of cake!!! All in all a great day – somehow I think I will have to arrange to have my birthday overseas every year!!



The day finally came when Andy and I, as well as Carol and Peter, had to depart the island and that was also not without incident as there had been a death in the family of the people who were to transport us from Beqa Island over to the mainland, and consequently they had cancelled all their activities. The Manager of Beqa advised us that as all their boats would be out with the divers that they would try and 'commission' a small boat that had both fuel problems as well as steering problems – this did not sound too well at all. Anyway after a couple of hours things were not looking too good with the repairs and the Manager then offered us a 'canoe' to take myself and Andy as well as Carol and Peter and all our luggage as well as the boat driver – taking one look at the horror on both my face and Carols, the Manager then offered us to stay for lunch and wait till one of the dive boats returned and that would then transport us across the ocean. I need to note at this stage that both Andy and Peter could not understand why Carol and I would not agree to go in the canoe!!!! We responded to this question appropriately, and even suggested that both Andy and Peter should go in the canoe and we would meet them on the mainland – an option that they did not take up!!

We finally managed to reach the mainland and it was with some relief that the bus was waiting for us to take us down to Nadi. Our resort had also arranged that we could stop and shop for some souvenirs on the way to Nadi as we were concerned that everything would be closed by the time we arrived as we were about 5 hours later than we had planned. Anyway 2 stops later we all had our souvenirs and, much to Peter's relief, we continued on our way down to Nadi and then finally into our hotel.

We all went out to dinner that night and I can definitely vouch for the "ribs" that A.J. had recommended at the beginning of our trip – they were amazing!!! Then off to bed ready for our 6.20am pick up to take us to the airport and our flight back to Melbourne via Sydney



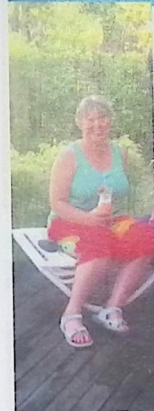
We had a great time and would love to thank David and Pam for all their organisation of the trip and also thank all our fellow VSAG'ers for making our holiday a memorable experience and one that I really look forward to repeating again.

Bula !!!!!

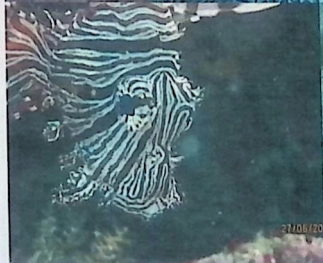
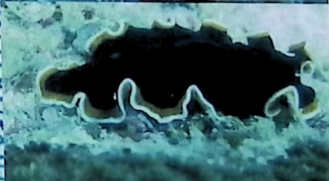


# “The Pool is open”

Benita McDonough



My favorite saying on the trip was “the pool is open”, and one of the funniest things, apart from Peter of course, was Jackie being told after bombing the dive guide that he was heating the pool.



## FIJI - BULA

### **Carol Briggs**

As a non diver, this was my second overseas VSAG trip. Once again, not really knowing what to expect I went away with an open mind and ready to soak up some sun and have a good holiday.

We have been to Fiji before about 13 years ago, staying only on the mainland and I remembered mostly how friendly and helpful the Fijian people were and this holiday was no different.

To get to the Beqa Island Resort was a bit of a trek, 3 ½ hours by car from Nadi to Pacific Harbour and then a 1 hr r trip to the island.

The resort itself was what you imagined a tropical island to be like, with lush rainforests and many varieties of beautiful plants, flowers, coconut trees, palms and butterflies.





Our accommodation was excellent with an ocean front bure and king size bed and comfy pillows. All our meals were of a very high standard, with different varieties of meals served every day, to suit even the fussiest of eater.



As the divers were back by lunch each day it left the afternoon free to explore the local villages and school, along with a display of how every part of the coconut is used by the Fijian people, from the roots to the leaves at the top of the tree. We also had a Fijian cooking display, along with the local men showing us their fire walking ritual.





We were entertained every night by the local band and over the week had a visit from local choirs and dancers.

On our last full day on the island, Peter decided not to go diving and had organised for just the two of us to be dropped off on a tiny uninhabited island, which was about a 20 minute boat trip away for a "private picnic" lunch. This day proved to be quite eventful and funny.....

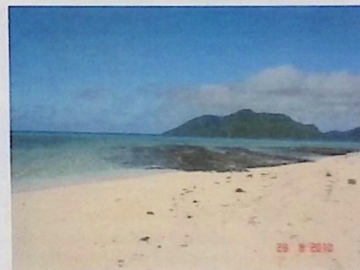
The day started by Peter leaping out of bed around 6.30am to go and inform the crew at the dive shop that he wouldn't be diving that particular day. He quickly put on his board shorts for the short walk to the shop. He returned about 10 minutes later in fits of laughter and explained to me he had just walked into the wrong bure next door by accident and proceeded to undress to get back into bed, but was disturbed by a boy aged about 9 or 10 being woken from his sleep.....Peter then realized, OOOOOPS!!!! I am in the wrong bure!!!!

He later apologized to the parents, who were completely unaware of the STREAKER!!! in their room and we all had a good laugh about it for many hours after.

The day continued to get even more interesting after we were dropped off on our deserted island with our picnic lunch. It was very hot and we immediately went for a swim and snorkel for 20 minutes or so.







I came out of the water before Peter and noticed in the distance a large ship, which I thought looked like an old pirate ship. Five or ten minutes later a dingy was dropped from the ship and was coming directly towards us. As the dingy got closer, I realised there were five very dark skinned looking men on board and I couldn't believe my eyes when I realised they were carrying spears, yes spears!! I thought sh##!!!! that's it!!!! this is how I am going to die!!!! (I would have taken a picture of them, but I was shaking too much to hold the camera). Peter was still in the water at this stage and I thought they will get him first, while he is not looking and then come and get me. They pulled up directly in front of where I was sitting on the sand and hopped out of their boat and said BULA. BULA. They then proceeded around to the other side of island with their spear guns obviously to catch some fish, what a relief!!!!!!



(These photos were taken after I realised they were harmless!!)

The dingy they were on then set off back to the large ship and after about 10 minutes two dingys returned with about 25 people on board in total and were dropped off on "OUR ISLAND" to do some snorkeling and swimming for next couple of hours!! How dare they!!

So here we were sitting eating our picnic lunch on this supposedly deserted island chatting away to people walking past who were from America, New Zealand and the UK, unbelievable!! Oh you have to laugh!! It was funny!! Busy....but funny!!



All in all, it was a great holiday and I think enjoyed by all. Thanks to David Geekie for organising the trip and thanks to Judy Storen, Patricia Dickenson and Patrick to help fill in the hours while the divers were out.



## FIJI

### Peter Briggs

Upon our arrival at Beqa Lagoon Resort, I knew we were in for a great holiday. We were met on the beach with singing and a genuine warm greeting and onto our bure right on the beach with a view you never tire of.



The next day all the VSAG crew were on the water at 8.00am and off to another good dive site which was our pattern every day, to return around 1pm with our lunch on the table. All the Fijian people were so friendly and we spent time in their villages and school and also watching a local rugby match. They entertained us most days, with their warmth and friendly nature which was my holiday highlight.





The diving was always good with great vis and a beautiful 26 degree temperature enabling us to dive without a wet suit if you wanted. We saw many sharks along with beautiful coral and tropical marine life.

The food at our resort was fantastic and I know Carol enjoyed not having to prepare meals or clean up. We had a fantastic holiday and I never stopped laughing, thoroughly enjoying the company of the VSAG crew on another great holiday.



# COWRIE SHELLS

Cowrie shells belong to the largest subclass of gastropods - the *Prosobranchia*, a group that includes periwinkles, limpets, whelks, conchs, abalones and other familiar shells.

## Habitat and feeding

Cowries are common in tropical waters and may be found under boulders and in crevices among the coral where they feed primarily on sponges.

## Physiology

Usually oval in shape with a flattened base and narrow opening, the spiral nature of the cowrie shell is obscured by the outer whorl.

The cowries are most attractive as live animals when the lobes of their mantle are extended over the shell, protecting the glossy surface, and often adding a striking contrast to colour.

The tiger cowrie (*Cypraea tigris*), stands out by its size and dark, spotted pattern, while the smaller tan and white cowrie (*C. cribaria*), has a brilliant orange mantle with a striking tan and white shell.

## Threats

The shells of Cowries are popular collectors items because of their 'high gloss' finish. The golden cowrie from the Fiji and Solomon Islands is a symbol of power and rank for chieftains. Unfortunately, people's love of the cowrie shell has pushed some species toward extinction. Instead of collecting them, it would be far better to admire them where they are or look at pictures of Cowrie shells. The popular Tiger cowrie (*Cypraea tigris*) and the Gold-ringed cowrie (*Cypraea annulus*) are just two now on the endangered species list. Due to over-collecting these beautiful animals may not be enjoyed by future generations. Even shells that look empty are best left at the beach. It is considered by environmentalists and divers to be in extremely poor taste to take live Cowrie from the reef.

Ed: Jackie and I saw 4 large shells on the Fiji reef but as they had a live occupant they were left in-situ.



# Hot Stones vs Firewalking

Pam Dagley

After two relaxing and enjoyable morning dives there were optional afternoon activities.

The highlight for me was an unforgettable 2 hour hot stones massage by the sea with the internationally renown spa manageress Filo. Those of us fortunate enough to have her skilled and caring treatments tried unsuccessfully to persuade her to leave Paradise to work in Melbourne.



A close second was the sacred Firewalking Ceremony. The Sawau tribe of Beqa is the only Fijian tribe to possess this skill.

Preparation for this involves four days where the men abstain from sex and eating coconut. Early in the day a large bonfire is built underneath a pile of river stones.

When the fire is low and the stones glowing red the Sawau warriors appear in ceremonial dress and walk in single file across the scalding stones. As we watched in awe some even stopped for several seconds, as the crowd applauded.



After the ceremony we had the chance to be photographed with the firewalkers. David definitely has competition. This guy is seriously HOT. >>>>>>





Pat and his girls

21/06/2010



Pat was 'forced' to entertain the girls during most days as he was 'out of action for diving' with a sore shoulder. The management even awarded him a prize for his efforts!



Pat would not disclose what his 'duties' were!!



21/06/2010



# Jude's Fiji

## Jude Storen

I was one of three non divers in a group of 16 on a 12 day holiday staying at Beqa Lagoon Resort, Fiji. A most memorable relaxing, quiet time enjoying warm weather and all the resort had to offer – swimming, snorkelling, village and school tours, church service, rugby match, Fijian band playing, choir singing, fire walking, coconut and cooking demos, kayaking, croquet, ½ canasta card game (winners Jackie and I). After my free 10 minute introduction foot massage on arrival I had my one and only Filo's 90 minute heavenly massage—worth the \$\$\$. The waterfall hike was great but I needed to exert myself on the return trip as it was raining, we arrived drenched and I loved it. Plus how could I forget the daily 'arvo naps' - enjoyed by all I think. Must have been something in the drinking water! Early to bed and early to rise for divers anyway. Breakfast ladies just waiting for your arrival and order, followed by tick the boxes for lunch and dinner preferences. Food was great including two desserts as I had to eat Alan's most nights. That's why I am fat. Cocktails were real good—I managed to try them all. Alan said there were 20 but there wasn't that many on the list. He checked the drink bill!! Oh how I miss being spoiled, no chores for 12 days, makes it hard to get back to the norm.

There were some funnies – My wakeful nights or early morning hours listening to island sounds in our 4 poster very comfy kingsize bed. Lost Alan in it! Lovely seeing the flickering candle light of our fish at night in our room! No four minute water restrictions at Beqa Resort. Our big shower for two was a joke there was not enough water coming out of the showerhead for one to wash away soap let alone out of your hair. Didn't use our personal hammock nor plunge pool due to danger of falling coconuts! I did not read a chapter of either of my 2 books, would fall asleep—it would not have mattered if I had a better bed light and forget about Sudoku too. I need to pack better next trip, Alan had said take out 1/3<sup>rd</sup>. He was right, again!

Thanks heaps to the other two non divers - Carol and Patricia plus Pat (who couldn't dive due to a bad shoulder), for their company whilst the divers were away each morning exploring the depths. One day after snorkelling Patricia and I met a retired Fijian man who now grows vegetables for the resort. He invited us to have a cup of tea at his home approx 1 hour walk away (he took ½ hour) - his wife would make us a cuppa he said. "You will definitely come?" he asked! I asked how we will know which house, apparently it was the only one in that area and it was across the bay from another village. I checked with the resort





office lady about our visit. She said it is a long, hard walk and to have insect spray on. Off we set all prepared with umbrellas, shoulders and knees covered because we went thru a village, water, sunscreen etc. We made it, it was difficult in spots, thank god there were no snakes. We were later than expected but eventually arrived calling out Bula, Bula (hello) from the beach. The man's wife and her grandson Joe were there and made us very welcome. Yes we had the cuppa and homemade rotti with peanut butter and a fresh mandarin. Great view from her balcony and we had a long chat. The grandson wanted to leave with us. The return trip of 1 ¼ hrs back was much easier and a delight as we fossicked for shells along the way. What a very special wonderful experience/adventure we had that day. The lady wanted to keep contact with us and sent their address with hubby to the resort the next day. I have written an ozzie postcard, hope it arrives there.



Another very special occasion was an additional invite to one of the nearby villages for a kava night. There were about 8 Fijians at the grandma's home, 4 Storens and Pat sitting on the floor chatting for ages, well past our normal bedtime which was about 9pm. Fijian staff and ozzie Resort Managers were very friendly and helpful. We received a warm beach singing welcome and the same on our departure. They showed Pat their appreciation for his 'services' rendered to guests (ladies) with a T-shirt gift. Pat was our news reporter he knew what the gossip was. If you needed any info see Pat. Hope his shoulder is back in action after visiting his physio back home. Must not forget thoughtful Peter and his bad day! Firstly he accidentally scared two youngies in the early hours, literally caught with his pants down. It is hard to see Bure (unit) nos. in the dark and they all look alike! Secondly Romantic Peter took his lovely wife Carol to a deserted island for a very special lunch, under a beach umbrella on white sands, warm day, crystal clear waters and blue skies, just the two of them! Unfortunately they were caught out! Skinny dipping was cut short, - he paid top \$s for a busy Burke Street setting. We thought about gate crashing also. Wonder what his 3<sup>rd</sup> hiccup was? Speak to Carol. Our ozzie thankyou and photo shoot to Fijian Chefs/Waitresses/Band etc was well accepted with lots of laughs, music and it turned out to be a dancing party. Surprised to see my Alan up on the dance floor I thought he was allergic to dancing. A young lady must have asked him.

Vinaka (thanks) David for your great organisation everyone seemed to have a fabulous time. I was very envious of you and Pamela with nine more days in Paradise with your families enjoying a wedding celebration also.



## **" WINTER WARRIORS" - DIVE REPORT**

Despite a lot effort to find a crew for the club dive on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July our members were seemingly "tied up" or dived out as many VSAG'ers had just returned from Fiji. Family birthdays, medical restrictions, weddings and football and no doubt the cold 12 dgs winter water all contributed to a lack of available divers....but there was hope!

Alex Ivanov was keen to dive so he teamed up with me for the day's diving. We hatched a plan. Deciding to dive both the Blairgowrie and Rye Piers and then do a scallop dive we agreed to meet at Rye at the sensible winter time of 9.30am. Loading up and launching was quick and then a quick 5 minute run down to the Blairgowrie Marina. We tied up at the visitors berth in dead calm conditions, into the dry suits and splashed in half way along the pier into very good viz for the long slow journey around this spectacular dive site. Interestingly the fish life was almost non existent...was it winter or had the great white shark that was seen around the area scare them off...well he wasn't there to greet us! We did meet up with a few more divers all keen to enjoy the color

Back onto the boat for some hot soup and then back to Rye. Anchored on the east side just a few safe metres for the centre of Rye Pier, we dropped in again to great vis and moved to very end of the pier whilst dodging the many fishing lines and calamari jigs.

I found an almost new small fishing rod which had been dropped so you can imagine the look of surprise on one fisher person up to on the pier when his line was given a big tug and up came not a fish but a rod which I had attached to a jig....



The fish life around the Rye Pier was even less than Blairgowrie..to a point of even being almost barren...not being familiar with this dive site I'm not sure what the norm is there but it was not the dive I would be keen to return to if this was the case...our experts could throw some light on this for sure.

The wind from the west was still well down and Alex completed the day's diving with a scallop dive off White Cliffs in 12 mtrs of water...a nice catch of very good sized shell fish.

Both " winter warriors" packed up and headed for tank fills at the Doc's and for me a good run to the Beaumaris Yacht Squadron for a boat wash down ,then home for a gear wash down and a fine meal and a red in front of the fire...life is good!

JL

Photos: Alex Ivanov

