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After I had been retired from IGS (or BGS as it has mercifully now become) for around a year, and we were feeling semi- settled at Whirlow in Ottery St Mary's West Hill, I was surprised to receive an invitation to take a two-year post-retirement contract in Fiji. The job was with the Mineral Resources Department of the Government of Fiji, and the invitation was initiated by Richard Holmes.

Richard Holmes had joined my Continental Shelf Unit in Edinburgh in the 1970's after completing post-graduate marine studies at Imperial College London. He was a serious and upright young man, one-time member of the Territorial Army, who wrote papers and letters in convoluted prose and near-unintelligible handwriting. In Edinburgh we had produced a joint paper on a difficult aspect of North Sea geology.

Although still on the staff of IGS, Richard had been seconded to the 'geophysical branch' of MRD, as part of a UK technical aid programme designed to build up its offshore geological survey capability. Once there, he had discovered the existence of a vacancy for another geophysicist/marine geologist, and had suggested I be approached, although the actual letter came - I believe- from Abdul Rahman, Deputy Director of MRD.

We - Lucette and I - did not immediately accept, partly because the salary offered was minimal, funded by a voluntary organisation. I pointed out that we would be out of pocket at the rates proposed, and the reply came that MRD would seek proper funding for the post from CFTC (the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation). On this basis we accepted. So; we knew we would probably be going to Fiji, but we did not know exactly when.

We started making preparations on this basis. Most importantly we found a residential home for Grandpa (my father – JAI Eden) where he was comfortable - Gittisham Hill House – a former country house set on its own in nice gardens, woodland, and pleasant autumn sunshine above Honiton. He had been with us at Whirlow for nearly a year, but agreed to move to Gittisham when I explained my work was taking us away for a while. Because of uncertainty about the date, he actually moved there several months before we left, and this provided a useful settling-in period. I visited him most days, and before we departed thought it safe to bring him back for tea at Whirlow, which he did not remember but found familiar in some way he could not precisely pin down. Sad. But he was well fed and comfortable – he enjoyed having the young nursing attendants fussing around him. He had the benefit of females fussing around him most of his life, lucky man.

We eventually departed on 24th February 1982. Bill and Margaret Singleton, next door neighbours, were to keep an eye on Whirlow and pay the gardener. They took us to Exeter St Davids Station in their car. We travelled via Freeport, Grand Bahamas, where we stopped off for a long weekend with AR and Vina plus Ewan (Lise had yet to put in an appearance). Then, with changes of plane but out more stop-offs, to Miami, LA, Honolulu, Nadi and Suva. The only memorable thing about the trip (other than Honolulu airport in the middle of the night) was on the last leg. From a small and not very stable plane travelling from Nadi International Airport to the

capital, Suva, we watched towering thunderclouds rising into a blue sky above the green jungle of mountainous central Viti Levu. An impressive start.

And our stay continued to be impressive, right to the end. See my essay 'Fiji – A Not So Fatal Impact in the South Pacific'. Our two years there were to be amongst our best. Most of the expatriates knew each other, and we made many friends, both amongst expats and locals. Now, in year 2001, we are still in touch with quite a few.

On arrival at Suva we were met at the airport by Abdul Rahmen and conveyed to a hotel with a view of a brick wall, from whence we fairly smartly transferred ourselves to the Grand Pacific Hotel, where we were to stay for a month. It was a white colonnaded building dating from colonial times, probably early colonial times, with wide balconies, palm trees, spacious lawns and a good swimming pool, alongside Lami Bay. Lucette became a lady of leisure, whose job was to sit reading graciously on the balconies and await the return of her hard-working husband for meals in the restaurant.

An early need was to acquire a car, and we had decided in the UK that it was to be a 2000cc Subaru 4WD estate. Taxes, and therefore prices, were lower in Fiji than in the UK, but there was to be a three month delay whilst the vehicle was shipped from Japan. The garage offered to loan us a little white clapped out Subaru van (BF 395) for free to cover this period, so we were immediately able to get around and have a check on the immediate environs of Suva. The tyres of our van were totally bald.

Lucette soon showed signs of tiring of being a lady of leisure, so searching for a house or flat became a priority; my CFTC contract included provision for payment of reasonable accommodation costs. There were a number of somewhat dated government houses – Richard Holmes and his young family had one – we quite liked them but they were in short supply. We discovered that Indian traders on their way up were apt to build their dream houses with a loan, then rent them out whilst saving up enough money to eventually live in them.

We looked at several such houses, and in the end we did end up with an Indian landlord, Dr Ali Asgar, but not one who fell into this category. He was an Australian-trained optometrist, with a self contained flat in the bottom part of a large house high up in the city outskirts. We noticed an advert he had put up on a notice board in the city centre and soon clinched the deal. We never had any regrets about this decision and Ali plus his family soon became firm friends, with whom, in year 2001, we are still in regular touch.

The flat had a magnificent view across the entrance to Suva Harbour, the reef beyond and rolling forested hills to the west. It had – very necessary – steel security bars on all windows, and – also very necessary – it was mosquito proof. There were pawpaws growing by our front door, which we were free to pick as we wished, and there was a passion fruit bush in the garden which produced around a thousand fruits in season. The pawpaws seemed to be always in season. We were allocated a small sector of garden, which I attempted to cultivate, but found the soil to be about two inches thick on solid rock.

The staff of the Mineral Resources Department was, I suppose, around 50 or 60, of whom a dozen were qualified professional geologists. The Director was a Welshman, Howard Plummer. There were groups dealing with geology, minerals, hydrogeology and 'geophysics', which latter comprised offshore geology plus seismology. I was nominally head of the geophysics group, my title being Principal Geophysicist Offshore and Seismology - PGOS. (Or PGOS could be translated as Principal Geologist Offshore and Seismology - it seemed a matter of personal preference of the holder of the post.) Richard Holmes led the offshore geology work and Ian Everingham – a seconded Australian geophysicist – the seismology. The seismology was largely funded by Australia as part of its South Pacific network, and despite my title I never thought it appropriate to take more than a friendly interest in what the seismologists were up to, nor was I called upon to do so. We had a separate new two storey building a hundred yards from the main MRD block, joined by a stairway which my claim to fame is having arranged to be constructed.

The seismologists had around seven automatic seismological stations on the tops of hills on Viti Levu and some of the islands. They periodically visited these stations by being winched down from a helicopter, to service them and spray weed killer, with the object of preventing the jungle encroaching on each small cleared area. I once joined them on one of these visitations, making approving noises.

The operations of the offshore section centred on (but were not confined to) a small research ship, specially built for MRD but for logistic reasons handed over to the Fiji navy just before our arrival. The navy provided a crew of eight, notably including the captain, an engineer and a cook. For six months of the year MRD was expected to direct operations, supplying a scientist plus geophysical equipment (sparker, echosounder and several trisponders for positioning). (See my essay 'Mbegga Lagoon'). For the other six months the ship was used on hydrographic survey work by the Fiji navy.

Suva is on the wet side of Viti Levu, and can receive a good deal of rain (see 'Wet Sunday in Suva'), but my recollection is also of a lot of pleasant sunny spells – not excessively hot due to the island location. When it was warm and sunny the best place to be was on or in the sea. Inside the reef the water was always calm and swimmable, although in the Suva vicinity the beaches would have much preferred to have been mangrove swamps. We soon realised that our scope to find beaches would be greatly improved if we had a small boat, and were lucky to acquire the 'Red Baron' a 17-ft sailing boat with an auxiliary outboard engine and a very useful extremely long mooring rope. This boat was our pride and joy for much of our time in Fiji, permitting many trips along the inside of the reef for quite considerable distances to both east and west. There were several sandy islands to visit, and much snorkelling to be done.

Red Baron could comfortably take a crew of four, and we were often accompanied by two Australians, June and Ian Everingham, the seismologist and his Mrs. Good company, and instructive, because Ian was an experienced small boat sailor from whom I learnt how to get the sails up and generally handle the boat. We frequently picnicked, swam and entered races run by the RSYC (Royal Suva Yacht Club), which we often won, not by coming first but by dint of having the benefit of a large handicap. Once we came last but still won.

June was sweet and very artistic, with a heart condition which did not seem to seriously inconvenience her; Ian was somewhat of a lad, kind hearted but a believer in speaking his mind, whatever. He also liked his beer, for which he had an inexhaustible capacity.

We were introduced to two other Australians by Ian and June. These were Jack and Poppy Pinkstone. We had frequent gets-together with the two couples. Jack was an editor of the Fiji Times and Poppy, like June, was artistic – painting-type artistic in her case. In 1983 she painted ‘The Legend of the Tagimaucia Flower’ for Amy, to celebrate her birth.

Apart from the RSYC – the clubhouse was our regular rendezvous for Sunday barbecues - we belonged to two other basically expatriate societies which held regular meetings. These were the Rucksack Club and the Shell Club. Both arranged group visits to parts rarely visited by non-locals, often using chartered boats. I became a committee member of the Shell Club, most members of which had, I fear, a non-ecological approach involving collecting shells - largely cowries - from the extensive coral reefs. The Rucksack Club often went quite far afield, members being treated to special local banquets and afterwards welcomed into the houses of villagers as honoured guests.

An early official engagement, not long after we arrived, was to the renaming of the MRD survey vessel on its becoming part of the Fiji navy. It had been called the ‘Bulikula’, but was re-named ‘HMFS Latui’, meaning ‘Hawk’. Grand ceremonial occasion with gleaming uniforms, military band, blessing by the naval chaplain, everything more than shipshape. The renaming was done by the wife of the Chief of Staff, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau.

Not long after, in Easter 1982, we went with the Rucksack Club to visit the village of Draveuni on the island of Kandavu – probably one of our most memorable island visits, even if only because it was our first. On the way back to Suva I wrote as follows (T 17)

“13-04-82 Time? – 1.30 pm. Place? – South Pacific, part way from Draveuni to Suva. Weather? – very hot. Blue sky with the odd woolly cloud, but a few hours ago there was a thunderstorm hanging over the main island of Kandavu to the south, partly obscuring it. There is a steady throbbing allied to a gentle rolling with a period of about five seconds, bringing the low swell of the open ocean into view through the cabin windows – first the oily scaly sea, then the bright sky with those little clouds strewn at random. If I stretch up I can see the island of Mbenga faint on the horizon to port.

“Impressions of these four days? – Many, but being an unnatural animal my first thought is for those six unhappy turtles, lying on their backs in the stern, some of them tightly but unsymmetrically tied up with red plastic twine. The tall Polynesian cook explained that one prepares them for eating by cutting off the front flippers, thus draining the blood, then removing the underneath scales to get at the innards. He found it of note that ‘like men’ they remain alive with most of their innards removed. Well, perhaps it was partly to shock his audience, but that’s what he said; and there is plenty to show that the nearer a

man gets to nature in the raw the more his instincts are those of a natural animal – which translates into No 1 (plus his comrades) first, and the rest to the pot if they are edible.

“My second impression is that the amenities of western-type civilisation are not to be dismissed all that lightly. My fifth layer of sunburn is smarting slightly, in patches, my mosquito bites itch a little, my hair and the rest of me is a bit clogged with a four-day accumulation of hygroscopic salt – I can get at it by licking my lips. Also it is distinctly hot.

“Let us now look at the positive side of our F\$60 per head Easter excursion. There was of course the blue blue, clear clear, warm warm sea. That is what it was really all about, and it did not disappoint. The hugely varied exotic fish dutifully went about their darting procedures around the hugely varied forms of the coral heads. The coral shallows and steep drop-offs all obligingly waited to be examined. The sea allowed itself to be heated to comfortably warm bath temperature, so that one got out not because one was cold but because one felt a need for a spell of the human way of life as a variant from its fishy version.

“On the white beaches the water was a little milky near the wave-break zone, but seawards it soon cleared to reveal long loose ripples with dead white shells in the troughs and the occasional giant clam and conch-like shell, patches of scanty eel grass, and straight trunks of coconut palms lying on the sea bed trying to look like fat prone telegraph poles. Many must have had their counterparts in the headless palms left by a hurricane eighteen months earlier. New houses and a new church were other testaments to the effects of this hurricane.

“Fringing the beaches, the dead black volcanic rock of the coast plunged seaward into seething life, built, as some poet said, on a graveyard. Bulging and overlapping colonies of massive corals hanging over hollows filled with the chewed up remains of their ancestors. In deeper water the sea floor gradually faded downwards away from view until one could see only the occasional steep-sided pinnacle of coral pushing upwards towards the surface. – on our last snorkel around Solo Lighthouse that was.

“Our boat was the ‘Viking Ahoy’, our numbers about 34, our trip organised by the Suva Rucksack Club, represented on this occasion by Mike White. Departure from Suva about 9.30am and four and a half hours of seeking shade around the deck as the Viking Ahoy plugged on to Vanuakula island, about a mile on the Suva side of Draveuni. This was to be our first landing. It took four overloaded trips of the ship’s boat to get us onto a coral sand beach with good shade from coconut palms, apparently naturally rooted along the shore. Vanuakula Island was the place where the shore vegetation was too dense to penetrate inland, where Lucette quickly picked up dozens of cowry shells, and where the coral offshore looked very much as if it might have been blasted in fishing operations.

“Then we moved on to Draveuni village, said to comprise four extended families, total population about 60, but this may be an underestimate. We were landed surrounded by piles of baggage on the beach, whilst the villagers, apparently by protocol, studiously ignored us. In fact we could see them seated in conclave in a circle in the Long House. Once we had all been ushered ashore it was announced that the ‘wacka’ would now be presented’ and the ‘sevu sevu’ would occur, in the Long House, a tall open-sided shelter thatched with palm fronds.

“The ‘wacka’ turned out to be an untidy bundle of roots wrapped loosely in a half newspaper, but mostly protruding from it. This bundle was placed on the ground in front of Mike White who made a brief but flowery speech. The village chief replied in Fijian, translated by an elderly Fijian who was a retired schoolteacher, now living with his wife on a neighbouring island. We were courteously welcomed and it was explained that we had been allocated six ‘bures’, amongst which we should divide ourselves according to our condition and status in life, thereafter returning for food which the village ladies had prepared.

“We ended up in a bure which turned out later to be the home of Vilimaina Toga and her husband. We shared with a Mr and Mrs Wainright, son and daughter, also John Hailey and his wife Caroline. The toilet was a corrugated iron box over an earth hole, but with a plastic seat, water trap, and a tin can and plastic water ladle. OK. The bathroom was an oil drum outside the back door, part filled and with a small plastic bowl floating in it. All water was hand carried from the village rain-water tank, so one douched sparingly and as far as possible over the flower bed rather than over the sand/dust in front of the drum. Vilimaina and her husband slept in their kitchen, which was a corrugated iron shack alongside. The bure was newly built – breeze block and concrete rendering, with corrugated iron roof. Vilimaina, like all the villagers, was demonstrated by her wall pictures as concentrating her interests on family and religion. The bure was clean, well prepared with new rush mats on clean sand, and a small table with flowers in the middle. We were to sleep on the floor.

“The dinner was laid out on an enormous table at one end of the Long House. Many sorts of fish and poultry in small plates were surrounded by several rows of plates containing carbohydrate-type slices. Breadfruit and ‘dalo’ (‘songe’ to Lucette, also called ‘taro’) I now recognise, and there were several others, but the strain of simultaneously learning Fijian, English and French names for all these things proved a bit much in the heat, especially as they all look and taste similar. There were paper plates and spoons to help, but fingers played a major part in coping with the meal. Eating was done sitting on the rush mats at the other end of the Long House. Drink was orange juice, the island being dry (on account of strong Methodist views); there were also beakers of a spicy milky liquid to pour over the food. After the guests had finished they were asked to leave the table end of the Long House so that the hosts could eat what remained.

“After a decent interval the ‘yangona’ ceremony took place. Yangona is made by pounding up the roots of the plant presented at the *sevu sevu*, then putting the powder in a porous bag to be hand kneaded in water in a large wooden bowl. The resultant drink looks like weak tea and tastes like cold washing-up water. It leaves a slightly numbing taste, and is called ‘grog’, but is non-alcoholic. It is served with reverence in a half-coconut shell, and must be drunk in one gulp preceded and followed by a hand clap. If one wishes to demonstrate one’s local knowledge one says ‘inaga’ or ‘naga’ to the bearer: this means ‘thanks’. The bearer does his best to serve in accord with his ideas of the pecking order - the village chiefs first, then visiting males, visiting females, and local males; local females don’t get any.

“3.30pm. I shall be quite glad of a cold shower. Mbenga has moved much farther round on the port side now, and I can see the misty mountains of Viti Levu with billowing white thunderclouds.

“So far so good; but the first night would probably best be passed over in silence. It turned out to be true that there were mosquitoes there. One had the choice of being eaten alive or cooked alive by covering oneself with a sheet. As John Hailey said, ‘A distinctly unsuccessful night’. Lucette, in particular, seems to be most attractive to mosquitoes. In the morning there were resolutions that we would never again leave home without a mosquito net, also reflections that there were only two more nights to go.

“As it turned out, the fears for the other two nights were groundless, as Mrs Wainright produced a packet of mosquito coils she had brought but accidentally left in the boat. They smoulder all night and produce a sort of incense which seems to be anathema to mosquitoes. Somebody wrote in the *Fiji Times*, ‘Can anybody tell me what place mosquitoes have in the scheme of things?’ This is not a question I would ask, but I observe that even the kindest-hearted of humans is normally converted into a natural animal when confronted by a mosquito in the night.

“On Day 2, Saturday, we transhipped to another island, believed to be Bulia, close to the coast of Kandavu, and apparently – like Vanuakula – uninhabited. Beautiful white sand bay with palms and other trees, plenty of shade, and rocks at either end. Varied coral offshore. Lunch was barbecued sausages, local scones, some fish – prepared by a couple of Draveuni village ladies with much assistance from Mike Smith.

“On the evening of Day 2, after dinner and yangona, was a display of local dances presented by the village ladies. From acting as cooks and waving large fronds to keep the flies off the food, they dressed up in their finery – notably garlands of leaves - and performed a series of ‘rhythmic sway’ dances. General dancing followed, with the village band playing tunes which seemed basically to be a continuous repetition. It soon became apparent that the local prerogative, of both males and females, was to ask for a dance. At the start of each dance they swept along from their end of the Long House to grab the partner who had caught their eye. Frank from ‘Liverpool’ (Blackburn in fact) also gave an extremely professional turn with his guitar. Lucette said he

reminded her of Fernandel. The dancing ended sharp on midnight, it then becoming Sunday.

“On Day 3 we first visited another local island for about an hour and a half. It was shaped rather like an hourglass, with a narrow sandy spit joining two rocky areas. Coral growth was good on the far side, but people complained of being stung in the water on the near side. Shade was rather limited; shell collecting good.

“Then across to yet another island, where the retired school teacher of our first day has his home. A long sand beach but somewhat mucky with floating bits and pieces, and brown algae, apparently one of those stringers of algal bloom which one sees from time to time. However, by following a track through tall grasses below coconut palms, one could arrive at the other side of the island, passing two tethered cows en route. This was much better – calm calm water, then a coral flat and a coral drop off. I managed to coax Lucette into two feet of water before she panicked and revolted.

“After dinner it was announced that there would be a yangona ceremony at 10.30pm, followed by dancing which would start at midnight, the Sabbath then being over. Lucette and I, however, went for a walk on the beach and then to bed. The beach at night was quite special. There was a waxing gibbous moon, brightly illuminating the palms and fringing clouds. Before the moon rose the Milky Way was of startling clarity, including the blank patch to which Mr Perry used to draw attention in Diego Suarez days. The Southern Cross clear in the Milky Way.

“At 6.30am next day the village band was still at it when we got up, but apparently most of our party had gone by about 4am.

“Day 4 was notable for the warmth of the farewell. Three cheers all round from beach and boat, and all the villagers there to wave; also the band. Many of the party swam out to the boat having dispatched their luggage in the tender. Then, whilst we waited, there was a session of jumping into the water and climbing out again.

“About an hour out from Draveuni we turned into Solo Atoll - some three miles across - and anchored by the lighthouse. More blue blue, clear clear water, but also a bit choppy. However, thirteen snorkellers landed on the lighthouse rock, examined two minute chicks which seemed to manage without a nest, also one egg on a ledge; admired swooping tern-like birds, some black with white top to head, others white with black top to head. We concluded with more jumping into the water from the boat.

“Ah, well.

“I suspect that when I eventually get round to seeing myself in a mirror again my face will be distinctly red from this Draveuni episode; but what about those six turtles, for whom our \$60 per head has resulted in a disaster as bad for them as any nuclear war or meteor impact? “

From 15th to 22nd April I sailed with HMFS Latui along the south coast of Viti Levu - the Coral Coast - to establish suitable locations for trisponder stations for survey purposes. These were pre-Global Positioning System days. In UK waters at this time there was no problem in obtaining a reasonably accurate position fix for a survey ship by using information from one of the navigation chains, notably the Decca chain, much used by fishermen amongst others. However, in Fiji the location of a survey vessel was only really practically found by the use of the ship's radar, ranging on to one or more of such precise fixed points as provided echoes.

Along the Coral Coast there are a number of triangulation points, lighthouses etc of which the position has been precisely fixed, and my job was to locate these, place a trisponder (simply a box of electronics which receives, amplifies, and re-transmits radar signals, thus producing a bright spot at its plan position on a radar screen) at each and check that it provided a usable reference point. This exercise involved me in landing by inflatable at about ten exotic locations to seek out the selected fixed points.

The first survey reference point was an old unmanned lighthouse tower on top of a cliff on Vatulele Island, well to the south of the Viti Levu coast and commanding huge views of uninterrupted green jungle and blue sea. It was necessary to land about half a mile from the building, and trek through tangled woodland with my Fiji naval escort. A feature was the large number of fat land crabs scuttling across the narrow pathway; some had the misfortune to find themselves collected into the bags with which the troops had thoughtfully armed themselves. The lighthouse was a spectacular grey stone tower protruding upwards from the encroaching jungle, its lower part heavily encrusted with indecipherable scrawled and painted graffiti. It was entered through a massive steel door for which one of the troops had been provided with a key. We located the transponder on a balcony at the top.

The second survey point was on high ground at Nambouwalu radio mast, around 35 miles West of Suva. A small platform about 100ft above the ground and accessed by a vertical metal ladder looked like a promising location for our transponder, but the scary experience of trying to climb this ladder with our gear soon convinced me that a ground level location would be quite adequate.

Other locations were Tavarua Island - a low forested sand cay, Novo Island - volcanic with a fringing reef, Navula Reef Lighthouse, and a number of trig points marked by distinctive red metal pyramids about eight feet high. Navula Reef Lighthouse is another unmanned light, comprising a white hexagonal structure on long metal stilts emplaced on an isolated reef which does not break surface. The trisponder and its tripod were hoisted from Latui's inflatable up to a platform alongside the light.

On 30th May, with Ian and June Everingham, together with John and Poppy Pinkstone, we made our first visit to Colo-e-Suva Forest Park in the hill country behind Suva. All but ourselves were Australians, and this was a very Australian event - a barbeque. Unfortunately it rained continuously, although not heavily. Our Australian friends had a way of dealing with this minor inconvenience - the barbequeing was conducted under a sun umbrella and the beer consumption was independent of any rain. Later, with Christopher, we were able to visit the Forest Park in better weather, and found it to contain deep natural pools where swimming and jumping in from a height were de rigeur..

The location of our flat close to Suva harbour gave us a grandstand view of shipping movements into and out of the port through a gap in the reef just below and opposite to our location. Apart from the cruise ship Oriana, arrivals in mid 1982 included a large oil drilling barge towed in from Singapore, which I was later to visit on site, and the New Zealand Oceanographic Research Vessel Tangaroa.

The crew of the Tangaroa included marine scientists, kindred spirits. We had a meal with some in The Star of India, a local restaurant, and were invited aboard. It was a large vessel, larger than Whitethorn, scrubbed clean and with just a few survey instruments lost in acres of empty space. Very different to my British experience, where the difficulty was always (a) to persuade the crew to clean up their rubbish, and (b) to find space for all the scientific equipment. It has to be admitted, though, that the Tangaroa had to face the South Pacific in all weathers, rather different to working in UK waters, where we always had the option of running for cover. Anyhow, I envied the New Zealanders their ship.

Special social events of one sort or another were frequent. In June/July, for example, there were four in the space of four weeks – a ‘lovo’ (stand-up meal plus presentation) at MRD to mark the departure of an expatriate, a gala evening for Fiji crippled children, a mime display sponsored by Air Pacific, and cocktails plus dinner with Richter Drilling Pty Ltd.

The gala evening was on Tuesday 15th June, it lasted until after midnight (too late for a weekday), and was hosted by the Australian High Commissioner amongst others. The evening included cheese and wine to refusal, together with the showing of a couple of Australian films, one of which I was persuaded must have been made at a time when its Director was drunk. Part way though the evening the High Commissioner interrupted proceedings to announce that victory had just been conceded by Argentine in the Falklands War. This announcement was followed by a spontaneous outburst of clapping and cheering, sufficiently enthusiastic that for a few brief minutes the spirit of the monolithic British Empire lived again. These people were really genuinely pleased.

Dress at the Richter Drilling evening was designated as ‘semi-formal’ I was designated as ‘Principal Mining Engineer’ My brief note on the evening was – ‘Quite enjoyable. Must have been expensive.’ So.

In the midst of all these exertions a break was called for, and in June we spent a weekend, the first of several, at the Man Friday Hotel on the Coral Coast. This was a resort I had discovered during my trisponder locating with Latui, when we had landed there by inflatable and installed one of our trisponder stations close to its radio mast.

Man Friday Hotel is typical of a type of Fiji tourist resort. It consists of a central building with restaurant, and adjacent guest accommodation in thatched chalets referred to as bures, looking out on manicured lawn and palmy gardens with the beach beyond. Bure is the name given to a Fijian village house, but these are constructed to western standards. If one wishes to see real bures they are to be found grouped round the central green of Namanggumangua, an adjoining village. The working staff of Man Friday Hotel is provided by the inhabitants of this village on whose land it must be situated and, indeed, the hotel is stated to be a joint venture between the villagers

and a developer. No doubt arising from this arrangement, Namanggumangua looks prosperous - most of its real bures are new and, like those of Kandavu, with corrugated iron roofs. The central green of Fijian villages seems to be mainly used for playing football.

Apart from tourism, most of the coastal villages of Fiji outside the sugar cane area have little by way of natural resources. They have the reef, with scanty shellfish, but the giant clams of the Great Barrier Reef are missing. Presumably they have been fished out. Fishing generally is poor in mid-ocean locations such as Fiji. On land are coconut palms, from which copra, roasted coconut flesh, was formerly the only cash crop. In 1982 copra was still being produced in Namanggumangua, but return on effort was small.

The oil companies with the most interest in exploration in the Fiji area in 1982 were Pacific Energy and Minerals, and Worldwide Energy Corporation. These were American concerns represented locally by Ward Austin, a stout, colourful and thrusting elderly geologist, together with his equally colourful – and not unattractive - wife Gaytime. Gaytime was fascinated by orchids, and had a considerable collection in their Suva home.

Ward Austin spent much effort communicating to PEM investors his enthusiastic belief in the oilfield potential of Fiji. He believed in buttering up MRD as part of the Fiji government, the licencing authority, and MRD believed in humouring him as a channel for funds for oilfield exploration. Five exploratory wells for oil were drilled in and around Fiji by various concerns up to 1984; of these, two were located off the south-east coast of Viti Levu. Starting in mid 1982, one of these - Verata Point site - was under active investigation by Ward Austin's group.

On 31 July 1982 we had dinner with George Hay, of Edinburgh, at Regent Hotel, Nadi, on his way through, and at 3.45 am the next day we met Christopher at Nadi Airport, fresh from the UK. After a brief acclimatisation at Sea Shell Cove Hotel, we spent a night at Man Friday Hotel on our way back to Suva. The next day we had Christopher sailing Red Baron out to the small sand island known as 'Sandbank'.

We had an eventful few weeks during Christopher's visit. We went aboard a large luxury boat – 'Scotch Mist' – in passage, had dinner aboard 'Ocean Girl', visited Colo-i-Suva – where we swam and Christopher played his bagpipes - , and from 12 to 15th August we all went on a 'Blue Lagoon' cruise to the Yasawas Islands.

“Thursday 12th August. We joined the MV Marie Anda at about 6pm and were allocated a three berth cabin (No 20) on the port side lower deck. Not at all bad, but I agree that the upper deck cabins (\$10 extra) are better – they have doors and windows opening onto a companionway running both sides of the ship. We sailed at about 7pm, and after only 20 minutes anchored at Saweni. There followed a pleasant dinner (All meals were pleasant) and the Captain's introductory talk. Dressed in a spotless white uniform, he resembles Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara.

“Friday 13th August. Sailed soon after 6 am. We passed an island reputedly visited by Prince Charles, then another with a rocky cliff said to resemble a head. In

due course we arrived at Nanuabelava. There was a sandy beach with a few small thatched bures, apparently inhabited by shell sellers. Two or three of them were sitting on the sand with little displays for sale. Offshore were several small coral bommies. Excellent visibility. I swam ashore and also back to the boat – the shell sellers sadly watched us depart.

“In the afternoon we proceeded to Nacula, and started off by running a long gauntlet of shell sellers. There must have been 50 or 60 of them, seated on the ground and surrounded by their wares. Lucette and Christopher bought necklaces; I bought two nautiloids. We then walked two by two to see a local rigger match, apparently played twice a week – quite vigorously. We went through the village, with quite a few new thatched bures, no doubt to keep the local traditional building format alive. There is a large Methodist church and a smaller RC one, but the latter was locked.

“Whilst awaiting the boat I swam in a shallow sandy bay with extensive sea grass meadows. We had tea/coffee on the boat, then returned to Nacula again in the dark. Strong wind. The beach was lit by kerosene flares (2 inches of kerosene in a thick metal jar on a stake). Dinner was a lovo. Then the members of the local choir approached in the darkness, singing as they walked. We were presented with garlands all round, mostly of frangipani, with some bourgainvillia. There followed a concert and demonstration of local dancing, then general dancing. We returned to the Marie Anda about 11pm. The village was well organised and the show was smoothly staged. The people are obviously well geared to the tourist trade, but seem to enjoy doing their thing.

“Saturday 14th August. We left Nacula about 7am and proceeded to Cololevu island, where there is no village. Wide sandy beach with blown sand behind, then a fringe of coconuts, casuarinas, sea grapes etc, rising to grass-covered hills – fairly typical of the west side of the Yasawas, except that the beaches are not continuous. There were many shells scattered on the sand and being eroded out by the wind. I found a small nautiloid and later lost it.

“I snorkelled round volcanic rocks in the centre of the beach – not much life – too shallow and sandy. I then tried off a beach rock area at the north end of the beach. Found a drop-off increasing to about 25ft to the north. Many corals and good visibility. There is a wide modern wave-cut platform on the headland at the north end. Christopher started playing his bagpipes here.

“The Marie Anda then sailed to the Sawa-i-Lau Caves. These are in a large limestone hill showing prominent vertical jointing when viewed from the sea. One goes up steps to a gate, normally locked, leading into a flooded cave lit by the sun on the seaward side. The water is in contact with the sea and about 25ft deep - the upper part of the cave reaching to possibly 100ft above sea level with vertical sides. One can swim under a rock barrier about a foot deep into an inner cave lit by filtered light from the outer. The procedure then is to swim in a dog-leg along the inner cave to a vertical shaft leading up to the surface at the far end. Small lice

attached themselves to the swimmers and bit. They were no doubt enjoying their regular meal of tourist blood. Outside of the cave was a small but pleasant beach.

“There followed a three hour sail to Drawaqa, where we arrived in the dark at about 6.30pm. After dinner was a fancy dress party at which Christopher played his bagpipes and was much applauded. I went as a ‘South Pacific Business Man Prepared for All Eventualities’ wearing a sulu, life jacket, sun hat, and carrying an umbrella. Warm starry starry night.

“Sunday 15th August. The boat moved in closer to the beach at Drawaqa and we landed on the north side of a strait. Good coral sand and gravel beach with waterlain rocks at the right hand side (from sea). It is shallow with coral gravel close in, then a fairly wide shallow coral platform. On the seaward side was sand with spectacular coral bommies which quickly sloped away into deeper blue water.

“We departed from Drawaqa at about 11am and returned to Lautoka in a blue blue flat calm.”

On 23rd August was the 15th birthday party of Shaheen, son of Ali and Nisha Asgar. Also present were Nasha, Reena and others, and Christopher. The three of us were the only non-Asians present, a situation which was not unusual in our Fiji experiences. . Christopher was persuaded to play his bagpipes to the usual acclaim.

Another Christopher achievement in Suva was to attend a commercial SCUBA diving course during which he got in some reef diving. His stay was due to end on 29th August though, so on 28th we returned to Sea Shell Cove Hotel, where a meke was held in the evening. Next day Christopher left from Nadi Airport at 4.30pm, per CP Air.

The following day, 1st September, I visited the drilling barge from which the Thakau Sanggata Borehole had just been completed by PEM. My object was to collect chipping samples from the borehole, to be examined by Robert Smith, a young Australian geologist of the Offshore Group. We travelled by helicopter, and I managed to take a number of photographs, of not too good a quality on account of it being a distinctly damp misty ‘winter’ day. We flew over Tamavua Heights and I photographed 18 Wairua Road, then over the nearby large radio dish operated by the Fiji telecommunications authority.

From here we flew in the rain over another oil exploration site being prepared in shallow water near Verata Point off SE Viti Levu.. Although final authority was awaited, the intention was that the drilling barge would probably be moved to this site from Thakau Sanggata. To accommodate the barge it was necessary to excavate a channel, and this had been in hand for some time by a couple of waterproofed bulldozers working from a pontoon.

At Thakau Sanggata Reef we landed on a pad at one end of the barge, which was of an impressive size, with a crane, generator trucks and rows of container huts lining two ‘streets’ running along its length. A support ship stationed in deeper water a mile or two away provided accommodation and meals for the operatives, movement between the

two being by tender. I and an Australian 'environmental scientist' were taken to this support vessel for lunch, and it turned out to be a Blue Lagoon cruise ship on hire to PEM.

The job of the environmental scientist was to prepare an Environmental Impact Report on the effect of the drilling on the nearby reef, and to do this he was equipped to SCUBA dive with an underwater camera and double flash mounted on two arms. I took the opportunity to snorkel with him for part of the time. The reef surface was flat and somewhat uninteresting, but what most impressed me was the huge number of hermit crabs – they were in fact by far the dominant element of the fauna. I concluded that they were making a good living off the bits of food etc dumped overboard..

The barge had ceased drilling a week or two before our visit, and at the time was waiting instructions as to its next move. This left the British boremaster at a loose end, and he confided to me that he was totally fed up. He had tried fishing, but the only fish to be seen were squid, which displayed no interest whatever in his bait. He sadly showed me a school of squid swimming past the barge in crystal clear water - he had given up trying to catch them

In his office this boremaster had, on his desk, a photograph of an oriental looking lady and two children. He informed me that the lady was Thai and was his wife back home in Bangkok. European women, he explained with incontrovertible conviction, are 'rubbish' these days. He would have nothing to do with any of them. Anyone who wishes to be looked after needs to get himself an oriental wife.

On 19th September Lucette and I visited Rattail East Reef near Suva with the Shell Club. This reef still shows the effects of a major tsunami which hit Suva in 1953. It was caused by a large underwater landslide in the deep water muds outside the reef. The slide pulled the overlying water down behind it, causing Suva harbour to completely drain, then a large backwards surge occurred into the void. The surge had a punch big enough to severely crack the reef, rip many angular blocks of coral limestone from the reef front and dump them farther landwards on the reef flat. Nearly thirty years later the blocks were still there, varying in size up to the volume of a double decker bus.

On 1st October 1982 Nicole arrived in Fiji, and was followed on 10th October by Philip. In each case we met them as we had done Christopher, staying at Sea Shell Cove Resort and taking them there for their first acclimatisation in a hammock slung between two coconut palms. We showed them the local sights, but the main event of the visit of Nicole and Philip was a 7-day cruise in Bligh Water and the Koro Sea in a boat called the Tui Tau. This was a sail-assisted motor cruiser, that is to say it could both motor and sail, mostly the former – the sails took quite a bit of getting up and were somewhat of a decorative gimmick. It had four masts, each with sails.

"Thursday 14th October, 7.45am. Steaming at around 10 knots up the west coast of Viti Levu about 3 km offshore. We passed Lautoka at around 6.15 and an hour later traversed quite a narrow passage between the fringing reef and an offshore reef patch to the west. From here the coast looks very much like the west coast of Scotland. Lowish brown mountains with irregular patches of dark green forest along the ridges and spilling down the shallow valleys. Patchy emerald green and brown cultivated areas

along the more gentle slopes just behind the coast, and an occasional white-looking house. The distant mountains grey-blue and misty.

“There is a lot of cloud, at least nine-tenths cloud looking to the west, but I suspect less the other way, and the sun is peeping out from time to time. Curious clouds – grey, silver, white, ragged low down and round the hills, stratified higher up. The sea is, well, grey, perhaps slightly greenish, scaly. The warm blast of wind I am experiencing comes from the ship’s progress mostly, although earlier – off Beachcomber Island – it must have been blowing at about force 5, with quite a few largish white horses. I think the wind is probably SE, which makes it almost offshore, hence we benefit from the shelter of land.

“8am and we are said to be 20 miles north of Levuka, ‘having left Beachcomber at about 4.30’. Passing a wide low spread of dark green mangroves, with a wide cloud filled valley behind – not very Scotland-like, this.

“9am. Passing a jetty with a single tank of what we were told was molasses but I later discovered was oil. Molasses sounds more exotic. The mangrove area must have been the River Ba estuary, but I did not see the river itself although we were less than a kilometre offshore. I can see pronounced dark coloured strata dipping east.

“We joined Tui Tai about 4.30pm yesterday, after leaving the bags of Nicole and Philip at Sea Shell Cove Hotel and the car with George Powell of Burns Philp. At about 6.30pm we sailed to Beachcomber Island, arriving at 8pm after a trip with quite a lot of ship movement – interesting to dance to a Fiji guitar group with the deck moving around under us as well. At Beachcomber we were taken off by two covered launches in the dark – well managed. On the island there was barbeque and meke-type entertainment followed by dancing on a sand floor. Back to Tui Tai about 10.15pm. We have a block of four bunks on the upper deck. Lucette and I are on top bunks – quite comfortable, but we didn’t sleep too well. Lucette has flu including a temperature and was unwell during the night. There was, though, a magnificent scenic view from our beds when it became light this morning.

“9.20am. Passing a prominent headland with a great wide misty bay beyond – it must be Vatia Point. The Walkpeople are mostly now sunbathing in warm misty sun with occasional hot bursts.

“12.05pm. Ellington Wharf. Two tanks of ‘molasses’, with the manager’s house – an old colonial mansion - on a hill close behind. Sugar cane fields on the coastal flat and climbing up the foothills, then giving way upwards to steep craggy forested hills with their tops in the clouds. The sun is virtually overhead and shining a good deal of the time – at least on us about 2 km offshore. The sea varies from flat calm to slightly scaly, coloured various shades of blue and green. So far we have travelled all the time inside the reef, which shows as a brown band to seaward. The coast has generally been pretty rugged but with no coastal cliffs.

“2pm to 3pm. We stopped for a snorkel at Vatu-I-Ra. This is a small island of two basalt masses joined by sand with large-leaved trees and a considerable colony of birds nesting in them – large flightless chicks peered anxiously down at us. Hot blue sky, very few clouds and little wind.

“By 3.30pm Ovalau was misty in the distance, and there was a large high anvil shaped cloud over the direction of Suva. Closer in, Ovalau had a curious ‘hat’ of cloud in an otherwise blue sky – its coast was sunny, then this fluffy white cloud, and above the cloud hill-tops peering though here and there.

“We berthed at Levuka Wharf at about 6.30pm and had time for a walk down the main street before dusk – simple wooden buildings with a sheltered walkway along the front. We all decided to give a miss to a boozy evening at the Ovalau Club after dinner.

“Lucette also missed out on the swim at Vatu-I-Ra on account of a high temperature believed acquired from Polly. By the evening two pills from the nurse seemed to have fixed this, but I was beginning to be the invalid by then. Included feeling very stiff about the knee joints, presumably on account of energetic snorkelling. I am also distinctly sunburnt.

“Friday 15th October 1982. We ‘did’ Levuka this morning in a fine rain. There was a one-hour guided bus tour including a half-hour stop at the museum, which was previously Morris Hedstrom’s store. Much old colonial architecture – wooden buildings and a number of churches. Many well kept gardens and lots of flowers. It is easy to see why the European Fijians have an affection for the place. It was founded in the 1850’s because Ratu Levuka made friends with the early European settlers, and it thus became the chief pre-colonial town.

“I, personally, then retired to bed for the rest of the day. However, there was a swim stop at Wakaya for 45 minutes under grey skies, when Lucette and the Allison’s took a walk. It was a largish island with a jetty, boats and European houses. Also a mock church, looking very real from the sea, recently erected for filming of ‘Savage Island’. At 3pm we arrived at Koro, where a party landed at Nathamaki village for turtle calling, shell purchases, mangit’I (feast) and meke. I remain in my bed feeling better after two pills from the nurse and having felt lousy all day. Have just had sandwich and coffee supplied by stewardess. The crew is singing and playing guitars in an empty ship – the captain sitting and playing cards with an old lady in the saloon. Weather still overcast, but said to have been 28 degrees C this morning – by an unreliable source.

“The turtles were reported not to have appeared. Nicole, however, brought me a turtle shaped nut from the tree where the calling is done.

“Saturday 16th October 1982. We sailed from Koro to Namenalala and anchored in a deep-water patch close to the shore, with one rope tied to a tree and the bow anchor down. Drizzle early on gave way to a lot of warm misty sun. We all spent most of the day ashore. Philip and I walked round the island, which turned out to be larger than it might have been, so it took us a couple of hours – at admittedly a slow rate of progress.. The island is made mostly of basalt and agglomerate, with ? calcareous ash at the south end. Our base beach was at the SW corner. Three-quarters of the coast elsewhere is rock and boulders, but with several sandy beaches on the east side. The snorkelling looked good, but none of us went in. Lucette and I are still only 70%.

“In the evening there was a barbeque and the ship’s band on the beach. A few people slept ashore. An awning and groundsheet were installed just in case, but in the event there was no rain.

“Sunday 17th October 1982. We departed Namenalala at about 6am for a 5 hour sail to Yandua. In the morning Lucette and I still had temperatures of 37.3 and 37.6 degrees respectively.

“9am. Just passing the western end of Vanua Levu, and a good view of it from my bunk. Grey sky again and the hills capped in cloud. The ship rolling a bit as we run along just outside the reef, but the rollers don't seem as big as the Suva ones. Vanua Levu here is quite hilly with steep slopes down to the shore. The coast with patches of mangroves and coconut palms. We have just belted past Nambouwalu, with a number of European style houses and a wharf. It is said to be a government station. There is quite a lot of woodland at this end of Vanua Levu, with patches of grassland here and there on the lower ground. A few small bouldery patches on the reef near Nambouwalu.

“10.10am. Passing Mbua Bay inside a substantial reef. There are no boulders on the reef, but a large mangrove covered spit on the south side of the bay. This bay is reputed to be the start of the Fiji sandalwood trade. Sun appearing from time to time. The hills here are lower than farther south, and more brown, although still with wooded patches.

“10.30am. We proceeded under unassisted sail for about half an hour. The wind was about force 5 and speed about 5 knots. Much blue sky appearing.

“11.45am. Off Yandua in bright sunlight and a stiff breeze. The soil here is said to be poor and thin, and it looks it – brownish straggly bush vegetation for the most part, with dark cliffs. The one village is located on what seems to be a largish island, and depends on fishing.

“5.15pm. Back aboard after a day on the beach in a deep bay on the NW end of Yandua. There is a long sandy beach, a fairly wide reef flat, then a drop off. The ship anchored in front of the reef flat, not too securely in this wind. Fortunately the beach was reasonably sheltered from the wind. There was a 50% cover of rapidly moving cloud, but quite pleasant. Small cassava and coconut plantation behind the beach. Snorkelling along the front of the reef flat would probably have been good.

“The bay is called Lighthouse Bay and, sure enough, a flashing light was visible on the hill top behind. I wonder how often it gets obscured by low cloud.

“Later there was a barbeque and half-hearted string band session on the beach, followed by a musical bar session until 3.30am. Fortunately we are reasonably remote in our berths.

“Monday 18th October 1982. There was a swim and shell sale session before we departed from Yandua, but I am flat on my back again with a temperature. Fortunately Lucette seems to be much better and so far the Allison's are OK.. Anyhow I have an excellent view from my berth. The Walkpeople must view me with some apprehension. The Purser, Kenny MacDonald, has the same affliction and has lapsed into uncharacteristic silence.

“11.55am. Passing on our starboard side a bare rocky island which started by looking for all the world like Ailsa Craig, but is now getting much flatter. There is three quarter

cloud cover and a force 5 wind behind us, with the ship rolling quite a lot. I believe we are travelling with sails and motor, although at 8am we started on sail alone.

“Later great goings-on took place anchored off Yasawa-i-Ra-Ra – swimming, visit to village, meke, lovo cooked ashore and eaten aboard, fancy dress party. I remained in my bunk.

“Tuesday 19th October 1982. Passed Turtle Island, location of ‘Blue Lagoon’ movie. Mostly blue sky as we progress down the Yasawas chain of islands towards Vomo. We seem to have crossed from the west to the east side of the chain at Turtle Island. The to a swim stop at a place (Nanuabelava) we visited before, with Christopher, the place where two Blue Lagoon ships patronised opposite shores of a passage between two islands and where a solitary group of shell people sadly watched us depart. Philip and Nicole swam ashore. Blue blue sky and sea.

“We reached Vomo at about 2pm. More swimming ashore (Philip) and back (Philip and Nicole). Robert went ashore at both Nanuabelava and Vomo, but disgraced himself by a fit of coughing at the latter. Took a photograph of Lucette at Vomo expressing her opinion of Beachcomber Cruises and her future intentions in respect of them.

“At 6.30 we are about to go ashore again for dinner. Vomo is the place where Messrs Beachcomber have dragged their ancient first cruise ship high and dry amongst palm trees on the beach. It is said to have sunk in Levuka harbour and been salvaged for sentimental reasons.

“Wednesday 20th October 1982. Nicole and Philip slept ashore, Lucette and myself out on the deck in front of the bridge. A blanket was needed, but it was good to wake up and see the stars dancing above the masts. And, for the first time recently, my temperature today reads 37 degrees. Mostly sunny all day.

“We went ashore at Vomo at 7.40am for breakfast, and spent most of the day ashore. I managed a good snorkel out to the edge of the fringing reef flat and the drop off. Vomo is good, with its wide sand beach and an interesting drop off fairly close in.

“We departed from Vomo at 2pm and passed by Beachcomber and Treasure Islands en route – dreadful places in the sun. Tui Tai is to take 500 day trippers to Beachcomber tomorrow in two lifts.

“We arrived back at Lautoka at 5pm to be met by Mr George Powell (BP Export Manager) + driver + a cleaned Ratusirkammasesemara – very good that, and all for free.”

Well, how did we assess this Tui Tai trip? To start with, I was distinctly ill for most of the time, Lucette rather less so. It was very odd – just a high temperature. I suspect it may have been dengue fever. We were not the only ones afflicted – there was the Purser amongst others. The wife of one of the Beachcomber Directors, who started on the trip, was airlifted off by seaplane part way through without giving any of the other sufferers a chance to consider a similar option. Not a great deal of sympathy from the administration at any time in fact, not much more than pills when requested.

Another problem was that Messrs Beachcomber are populist tour operators seemingly aiming at people (mainly Australians) perhaps one socio-economic group down from the clientele of Messrs Blue Lagoon. Not that this bothered us. There were more passengers than beds, and this was dealt with by appealing to the romance of sleeping on deck. Gimmicky. The sails were gimmicky too, and ungainly. Also the boat ventured towards an area of the Fiji group where the weather is less reliable. However, we slept OK, the swimming was good for those who could swim, and we got to places we had not visited before, some of them for the last time – Levuka, for example, I would not have liked to miss. The Yasawas, though, are the islands to dream about.

On 30th October the Royal Yacht Britannia came into Suva Harbour bedecked with a vast number of flags. It had been escorted by an Australian warship, HMAS Tottens, but in Fiji waters escort duties were handed over to the Fiji navy, one of the destroyers of which promptly collided with the Australian vessel. This incident, however, did not affect the ceremonies inside the reef, where around 20 boats of the RSYC provided a line-astern escort, motoring in two broad circles on each side of the stern.. Red Baron, crewed by ourselves plus Ian and June, took part in this exercise.

The next day, Sunday, an inter-faith service attended by the Queen et al was held in the National Stadium. The plebs were seated in brilliant sunshine on the grass in front of the hoi poloy in the stadium, the better organised of the plebs having armed themselves with raffia mats and sun umbrellas. During the Royal visit, a number of local dignitaries, including Ali Asgar and Nisha, were invited to a formal dinner aboard Britannia, but it was not considered cost-effective to extend invitations to mere UK expatriates. So?

In November we had visits from Peter and Paule (second cousin of Lucette) Antonelli, and also Bob McQuillin (BGS geophysicist) at more or less the same time. The weather was good, and we had them all out together on Red Baron and along the Coral Coast. All were invited to dinner on 'Ocean Girl'.

We also visited the Singatoka sand dunes together. These are magnificent wind-blown and rippled dunes in the middle of the south coast of Viti Levu where, owing to a broad gap in the reef, rollers coming up from the Southern Ocean are able to pound the beach with a force they elsewhere dissipate on the outer reef. The SE Trades then pick up clouds of sand and push the dunes landwards, ripping all bark from vegetation and all flesh from bones, leaving the resultant jumbled skeletons to bleach white in a merciless sun. There are a number of massive blow-outs where storm winds have torn through the dune crests. Spectacular, and creepy.

These sands are an (at present) sub-economic magnetite deposit, the magnetite appearing as black streaks in the ripple troughs. Richard Holmes actually carried out a sparker survey of the offshore part of the sands using a small barge operating from HMFS Latui whilst I was in Fiji. Sooner him than me. The trick was to sail the barge in as close as possible before there was too great a risk of being swamped by the breakers, then turn round and repeat the exercise a short distance farther along the beach.

Visits to Ocean Girl, tied up at a mooring at the Trade Winds Hotel, were not uncommon during our first year in Suva. I have detailed the story of our doings with this 46-ft yacht and her colourful owners, which was a key element of our Fiji days, in 'South Pacific

Journey'. Suffice it here to say that the boat was the property of Don and Carolyn Tiffin, a couple seriously in love with the boat and equally seriously at odds with each other. At this period we, however, enjoyed the privileged position of being allowed to be friendly with both of them. Don was a Canadian geologist working with CCOP SOPAC, a United Nations South Pacific survey team with its offices in the same compound as the Mineral Resources Dept. Carolyn had a minor lecturership in sociology with the University of the South Pacific.

It was Don who gave me substantial early help with sailing Red Baron, which he handled with consummate ease, sailing her straight from her moorings without use of the engine. He also took me well outside the reef, where it was possible to look back through the transparency of the rollers breaking themselves onto the reef edge. This was the sole occasion on which I went outside the reef in Red Baron. She was a boat not designed for the open sea, and it was not exactly good practice to take her there. In the event the little excursion was safe enough, but I later realised I had been introduced to Don's totally fearless, but fortunately skilful, practice of pushing on whatever.

Christmas 1982 involved a series of parties, starting with one at the MRD office on 17th December, laid on for staff and families by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources. Then there was the 21st Birthday party of Naazli, eldest daughter of our host.

The Christmas Day party itself took place at the house of Jack and Poppy Pinkstone. There were three couples, the third being Ian and June Everingham, plus one single male, Stanley Boyle. The four men were each presented with a blue fisherman's hat by Poppy – mine is still a cherished souvenir. We were photographed sitting in a row, each wearing his hat.

Finally, on 28th January 1983 was the Burns supper, a formal evening dress affair, although the heat resulted in a good deal of the formal dress being discarded before the dancing was through. Marysia Holmes played a prominent role in this well attended expat event. A thoroughly Scottish lass with two Polish parents, she recited a Burns poem to great acclaim.

It was over the Christmas period that we started making preparations for the trip in Ocean Girl which I have described in 'South Pacific Journey'. Ocean Girl herself departed for New Zealand on 12th December 1982, and we followed by air on 27th February 1983. From Auckland we were to make a tour of North Island in a hire car before moving aboard the boat on 7th March and setting sail for Tonga with Don and Carolyn Tiffin plus their daughters Gwyn and Kathleen..

We first travelled south to Taupo on the shore of the lake of the same name, then south east to Napier on Hawke Bay, and west to Taihape. In Napier we finally caught up with a couple of kiwis in the Napier Nocturnal Wildlife Centre. – small undistinguished flightless birds just visible in the darkness and most unimpressive. In Napier, too, Lucette acquires a couple of large and precious sheepskin rugs at a shop called Classic Décor.

The leg between Napier and Taihape involved following a rough track crossing the Ruahine Range, for some reason called the Gentle Annie Road. For around 20 miles we saw no other human being than one hunter, a New Zealand townie who had taken to the

the mountains for a week with a backpack and a gun. His week was up, and he had come down from his mountain to hitch a lift to the nearest frequented road. He was laden with large chunks of bloody deer meat, one of which he offered to present to us for the lift – we gave him the lift but declined the deer meat. From Taihape we continued westwards to the vicinity of Tongariro National Park, which we visited (Ohakure Mountain Road) – a natural wildwood of large forest trees and tree ferns - then north east back to Taupo.

We spent several days in the geothermal area centred on Rotorua in the Lake Taupo area, visiting geysers, boiling mud pools, tufa terraces, sulphur deposits and extremely hot springs. The geysers included the Pohutu Geyser near Whaka and the Lady Knox Geyser, Waiotapu, which latter had to be fed with a large packet of soap powder to persuade it to do its thing. Whaka is regarded as ‘the jewel in the geothermal crown’. We passed the Wairakei Geothermal. Power Station near Taupo, spurting steam in all directions from a new series of boreholes

The houses in the geothermal area had plumbed-in hot water or steam derived from boreholes, and motels were provided with swimming pools and spa pools fed from the same sources. All very impressive and very pleasant, particularly as there were few other noticeable tourists around – we almost had the motels and their pools to ourselves – central North Island is, after all, rather a long way from most places.

All in all we found North Island to be a quiet civilized land with pleasantly obliging inhabitants, noticeably thin on the ground, and showing every indication that they were doing very nicely in a well endowed environment. What we saw of New Zealand reminded me strongly of the bourgeois semi-rural England with which I had been familiar in the years between the wars. The volcanic area is situated on a geofracture. It had its last major explosive eruption in 1886 – I wonder when the next one is due.

I have described elsewhere our distinctly eventful passage to Tonga in Ocean Girl. Not an experience I would like to have missed, or to repeat. We arrived more or less in one piece at Nuku’alofa, on the island of Tongatapu, on 23rd March after 16 days aboard, and promptly moved from our berths in Ocean Girl to the Dateline Hotel.

Once we were installed, my first action in Nuku’alofa was to acquire a hire car, which necessitated applying for a Tongan driving licence at the counter of the central police station. When I had found the place the licence was, on the strength of my UK licence, issued willingly enough for 2\$ Tongan.

We were, of course, preceded in Tonga by Captain Cook - he seems to have landed everywhere in the South Pacific. His Tongan landing place is marked by a small monument on a low hill behind the beach at Mu’a, the inscription on which records the event to have taken place in 1777. Tonga, though, never became a colony, although at one stage the Germans had a good deal of influence. Because it retained its autonomy Tonga was not subject to the invasions by non-indigenous peoples which have had such a massive impact on Fiji, Tahiti, and more especially Hawaii. Here we have an illustration of how indigenous people can handle contacts with the West more or less on their own, or at least without being unduly ordered around.

Tonga would almost have been a suitable place for Gulliver, though, to have visited in the course of his travels. In 1983 it still had a semi-feudal society organised round a monarchy, a passionate attachment to Victorian-type Christianity and women – including the urbanites - who were thoroughly covered up and wore belts with varying degrees of elaboration to denote their status. Equally strange – it was possible to park one's car by the roadside in the centre of the capital, Nuku'alofa. In the lagoons fishermen were still using dug-out canoes with primitive outriggers. Pigs and piglets roamed everywhere in the streets, rooting amongst the houses and crossing the roads at will.

We stayed in Tonga for around ten days, after which we flew back to Suva per Air Pacific. We moved from the Dateline Hotel to the more modest Captain Cook Apartments soon after our arrival in Nuku'alofa, and used them as a base for having a good look around the island of Tongatapu, mostly accompanied by the two Tiffin girls..

We particularly admired the sacred flying foxes (fruit bats) roosting in thousands in cassuarina trees at Kolovai. They must have needed a lot of fruit to keep going, but fortunately it was taboo to do anything about controlling their numbers. Despite this presumably pre-Christian attitude, the Tongans had been converted en mass to Christianity in mid-Victorian times, since when they have been stuck in a religious time warp. It was, in fact, not difficult to secure the conversion, all that was needed in South Pacific islands was to convert the chiefs, after which his subjects followed obediently, apparently leaving no single acolyte of the old beliefs.

On Sunday we went to St Anthony's Roman Catholic Church in Nuku'alofa. This is a large round building, recently constructed and with a striking pagoda-like roof rising to a point in the middle. We arrived a little late, and the church was jam-packed, so we went round to one of the side doors where we were ushered into a couple of chairs made available to us. The ferocity of the singing was almost alarming. No namby pamby mumbling of the hymns here, but full throated near-bellowing from every member of the assembled throng. There was positively no room for any inclinations to agnosticism – the singing was quite enough to blast any non-believer into instant belief. Such conviction by so many could denote nothing less than well-founded truth. We later discovered we had been sitting in the choir.

As appropriate to well behaved descendents of Victorian Christians, anything which could be regarded as non-decorous was formally forbidden on Sundays, and all beach activities, including swimming, came into this category. In Tongan temperatures this could have been a real hardship for the idle, but fortunately Kolovai Beach, isolated at the end of a peninsula, was conveniently not policed on Sundays. By convention the godless amongst the visitors were thus able to besport themselves on their own in this one location. We did so.

Tonga has megalithic monuments, some being large rectangular stone tombs of late mediaeval age, others older and of doubtful origins and purpose. One is a shaped archway at Ha'amonga-'a-Maui, looking like an errant bit of Stonehenge, but said to have been built about 1200AD and aligned to the rising midwinter sun. The megaliths are of coral rock, and as in western Europe there is a problem about how the peoples could have managed to handle such weighty blocks.

It so happened that whilst we were in Tonga a small marine geological team from CCOP SOPAC, Suva, was operating from Nuku'alofa, namely Garry Gauss and a US geophysics technician called Ed Sophore. It also so happened that Garry Gauss had his 40th birthday whilst we were there. There had to be a party - with Australian champagne - and it was held in our room at Captain Cook Apartments, attendees including the Tiffin girls. The last we saw of Garry in Tonga was his lonely figure wading out across the shallow lagoon opposite the Apartments, blue flippers slung over his shoulders, with the object of snorkelling on his own outside the fringing reef.

Back in Suva, the next event of note was the going-away party of Howard Plummer, the Welsh Director of the Mineral Resources Department. With expatriates staying for only a couple of years or so, going away parties were frequent opportunities for taking it easy in company time. They happened in the office itself, cooking being largely done at home by indigenous staff members, except for the meat – that was pig, purchased, slain and cooked in a lovo by a select group of indigenous males. A lovo is a feast prepared by digging a hole in the ground, inserting stones, building a fire on top. When the stones are hot and the fire has died down, the unfortunate pig (purchased alive in the market in the early morning, transported in a departmental vehicle and I fear slain) is placed on top wrapped in banana leaves, then covered with soil and left for several hours to cook.

Indigenous Fijians used to be serious cannibals, and this is how they cooked their captured enemies. A lovo with 'long pig' is a cannibal feast. However, for Howard Plummer's party on 29th April 1983 there was an ordinary pig, a sit-down meal with wine, speeches, and a group photograph of staff members ranging from very dark to very pale, including Indian women in traditional dress and indigenous Fijian women in traditional dress. Despite the varying traditional elements they all seemed to relate entirely harmoniously. Howard Plummer was being replaced by the Deputy Director, a painfully shy local Indian called Abdul Rahmen. His replacement by a local was part of a continuing policy of localisation of senior posts.

One of the Fijian female staff members was a Technical Assistant who acted as my secretary, Tulia Tamani, a round-faced fuzzy wuzzy, probably in her early twenties. She was always very smartly dressed, but I could not help an occasional nagging feeling that she would have been more at home with a couple of small children round her neck as she stirred the soup in the village cooking pot.

Not long after the departure of Howard Plummer we were invited, on 14 May 1983, to the wedding of another of the MRD secretaries. This was of Arunesh, known to us as Lata, and was a Hindu event. Lata, normally attired in western dress, was richly gowned in a red floral robe and headscarf, set off by a good deal of gold jewellery. There was a lot of fire and graceful circling round fire throughout the long ceremony – very impressive even if Lata did look a little bemused by the transformation which she had undergone.

The wedding itself was followed by a cooked Indian meal, served with the guests seated at long trestle tables. No knives, forks or spoons were provided, just plates and glasses containing water, so all the food, including rice and curried meat, had to be attacked in a somewhat basic fashion with nothing more advanced than fingers and teeth. Fortunately attendants were to hand, hovering behind the guests and bearing bowls of water plus towels. When the attendants noticed that a guest was becoming

unduly gummed up, they proffered the bowl in which fingers could be washed, followed by the loan of the towel with which to dry them.

May 1983 also saw the commissioning of a smallish flat-bottomed aluminium barge, paid for from international aid funds and in the design of which I had a large hand. It was intended to permit sparker and pinger surveys of the sea bed in places too shallow for HMFS Latui, which acted as its mother ship.

The first task of this barge was to survey a site for a proposed oil exploration well in Ba Roads, on the north side of Viti Levu. One critical requirement was to know where the barge was at any given moment, and for this we relied mainly on the radar of Latui and a transponder on the barge. Another requirement was to keep the quite bulky electronic gear dry – cables and consoles filling every available bench space. To this end we had designed a sort of square canvas tent slung over our heads. One problem was that this tent did its best to act as a sail which, on a shallow-draft barge, made it quite difficult to maintain a planned survey course. We also had to keep the electronics, including a generator, working and producing viable results. In this we had the assistance of Hans, a short tempered and colourful Dutch technician loaned by CCOP SOPAC. We persisted and managed to produce a usable report (of sorts) on the site.

Latui herself had a properly fitted-out geophysical laboratory, the only drawback of which was that its roof beams were so low that even quite short people were obliged to stoop awkwardly when operating the various machines. Taller operators had a distinct problem.

In mid-June 1983 we visited Rattail West Reef with the Shell Club. Like Rattail East this reef was massively affected by the 1953 tsunami, probably even more so. There are many large boulders still scattered on the reef surface, and numerous very visible cracks caused when the tsunami wave slammed into the reef front. The farther west we went the more exotic became the coral growth on the reefs. Around and east of Suva, coral growth has been stunted by town effluent. Plus, more particularly, mud spewed out by the Rewa River as a result of cultivation of what in pre-settlement days had been mangrove swamp and wet forest.

The Asgars possessed three large dogs, which were intended to be guard dogs, not pets, and therefore lived outside the house, in the garage alongside our flat. One of the dogs was a lunatic who specialised in attacking the tyres, and especially the mud flaps, of any vehicle - friend or foe - arriving or departing from 18 Wairua Road. Simultaneously it uttered the fiercest barks/growls it could manage whilst its teeth were so fully occupied.

In mid-1983 another of the dogs, an alsatian look-alike called Gena, produced a litter of seven puppies, which for the first part of their growing-up became a charge of Lucette's. One she wanted to adopt, but wiser thoughts prevailed and eventually all departed, sold off as alsatians. One of them, sold to the local Chinese shopkeeper, grew up with a distinctly un-alsation appearance, which did not exactly please the shopkeeper. He demanded his money back from Nisha Asgar, but without much luck. Washing the dogs with the garden hose was one of Lucette's standing jobs, assisted at times by the Asgar children – Shaheen, Rana and Naasli.

On the weekend of 18-19th June 1983 we visited Rukua Village on Beqa Island with the Rucksack Club, travelling there by motor launch from Navua. We were billeted with Vasemaca and Jone Ratulevu, a smart couple who made us very welcome and remained our friends. Jone later visited us at our Suva flat, wearing his best suit.

Fijian villagers have a number of characteristic behaviour conventions. One is that visitors always leave their shoes outside the door. Another is that if a visitor is sufficiently ill advised as to admire one of their possessions they promptly give it to him. We became aware of this latter convention at Rukua, when we admired a large gastropod Jone and Vasemaca had mounted in pride of place in their sitting room. It proved quite impossible to refuse the gift without causing offence, and the gastropod now adorns our own sitting room at Whirlow.

The 'sitting room' of a Fijian house is not a place where one sits on a chair, but where one sits cross-legged on woven rush floor mats. The table is also on the floor, or rather it is a table cloth on the floor. A meal is thus eaten sitting cross legged – for as long as one can manage the feat - around this table cloth.

The reason why we went to Beqa Island, and more particularly Rukua, was purely touristic. The local people there had a tribal tradition presumably dating from pre-Christian times, of demonstrating their powers, their influence with the gods I believe, by walking barefooted on fire. They had re-jigged the fire-walking ceremony into a colourful spectacle much in demand at tourist centres on the Coral Coast of Viti Levu. The Beqa team of firewalkers crossed periodically to the Coral Coast, performed their act, and returned enriched. This is the reason why Rukua was a relatively wealthy village, with mostly new bures (huts) despite being situated on a precipitous volcanic island with few natural resources other than rather poor fishing and some coconut palms. They had a growing problem, though, which was that some of the local people on Viti Levu had discovered how to fire walk and were out-competing them.

The procedure for fire walking is to build a large wood fire on top of a bed of stones. After a while the burning logs are pulled off with lassoes and the red hot stones levelled with long poles. The walkers then walk steadily, one by one, across the spread of stones. The key secret is not to hesitate, so that at each pace the feet remain only briefly, and at regular intervals, in contact with the stones. No doubt, also, it is important to choose a time when the stones have begun to cool a little, and to harden the soles of the feet in advance – normally bare-footed tribes-folk have a clear advantage. All the actions involved are carried out as ceremonies, the dozen or so participants wearing colourful grass skirts with necklaces and other ornaments.

Interesting, but once is enough.

On the way back to the mainland we visited Storm Island, one of several sand cays on the Beqa reef, in this case well vegetated. Another was Bird Island, with just a few leaning coconut palms, but each one of these small uninhabited islands is a haven for birds. In all I visited Beqa and its lagoon three times – firstly by helicopter with the seismologists, then this visit with the Rucksack Club, and later for a survey of the lagoon with HMFS Latui, my last marine survey before leaving Fiji ('Mbegga Lagoon, Fiji' – Mbegga and Beqa, by the way, are alternative spellings. The pronunciation is Mbegga).

In July 1983 Richard Holmes set up an innovative scheme for drilling a row of shallow boreholes through the modern reef deposits at Namatakula on the Coral Coast, with the object of establishing the geological structure of the reef margin. The drilling was done from a raft created by lashing 38 oil barrels together and to a wooden framework. This raft, which was painted a smart dark red colour, had a wooden deck, a generator, a hut for shelter, and a drilling rig. Our aluminium barge was used to pull and push it into position in the shallow waters of the back-reef lagoon. There was a need to supplement the engine power of the barge with a good deal of human pulling and pushing, for which we had a team of around twelve – one of them was me.

As the drilling proceeded, the principal method of getting out to the raft to check on drilling results was to wade there in chest-deep water. This was July, the depths of the Fiji winter if it may be called such, but after having been in the water for a few hours the temperature did at times feel distinctly not very tropical - even when wearing my wet suit top. We also drilled some small diameter boreholes on the reef crest with a hand held, power operated drill, at places to which we could not get the raft. The whole scheme was somewhat ramshackle, but we ended with a quite credible cross section of part of the reef. It was all very hard work, even if chilly at times.

In September 1983 I was delegated to represent Fiji at a meeting organised by UNESCO in Townsville, Queensland. The conference name was WESTPAC 3 – this meant it was the third meeting of government marine research organisations of the West Pacific area. This area includes Australia, Japan, New Zealand plus a fair number of island states, and the objective of the meeting was to agree the direction of joint research projects. There were 42 delegates. Being as how this was meant to be serious business, the wives of delegates were unfortunately not invited, so this was one trip which Lucette missed. It gave me, though, an opportunity for brief visits to New Caledonia on the way out, and the Solomon Isles plus the New Hebrides on the way back. It also completed my circumnavigation of the globe, the bit westwards from Queensland having been covered in 1976.

The outward trip was on 14th September. I recorded only some impressions of Noumea in New Caledonia: “The town itself is located on a large eastwards projecting peninsula. To its east - and some kilometres offshore - lies the New Caledonia Barrier Reef. This resembles the Australian Barrier reef, but seemed straighter, stretching north – south to infinity in both directions, in a very blue sea. There are several blue gaps in the reef and I noted lots of white foam.”

The conference itself was unexceptional. I sat at a shiny table behind the Fiji flag, and whenever it was my turn to speak I prefaced my remarks with, “The view of Fiji is” We had a dinner invitation from Gerry Jones, the Senator for Queensland, at the Townsville International Hotel, but more to the point the Australian government invited the delegates to visit the Great Barrier Reef aboard MV Reef Link.

MV Reef Link was one of the first of the high speed catamarans, and I believe this was her first trip with paying visitors aboard (not that it was we who paid). The reef front at Townsville is some 40 miles out across a broad lagoon, and as Reef Link travelled at around 40mph the journey took an hour – just about time for a sumptuous

sea-food meal. Close behind the reef front the operators had anchored a large pontoon with visitor facilities. An unusual feature was that the pontoon was mounted on floodable tanks, so that if a cyclone was on its way it could be sunk to the safety of the sea bed until the weather improved. Visitors could snorkel or dive from the pontoon, or be taken by a small boat to nearby bommies to do so. At the time there seemed to be no facilities to actually get out across the reef front, so the available scenery was a great deal less impressive than that which we were able to see on our 1976 visit to the reef. Just rather unimpressive bommies in perhaps ten metres of water, lapped round by a lot of sand. However, the sea-food meals were good.

I recorded the return trip (per Air Pacific) to Fiji on 22nd September in more detail than the outward journey:

8.30 Queensland coast – much blown sand showing white wind-blows. I think I saw an island of white vegetated sand on the way in on the 14th, but missed it this time. Pale green sinuous sand waves well seen through shallow water several miles offshore. Long wavelength and oriented NW-SE.

Great Sandy Island very clear, with Hervey Bay beyond.

9.30 Passed over three close spaced reefs making a triangle shape, with a sand cay (no vegetation) on one of them.

12.10 Approach to Honiara (Solomon Islands). Smallish muddy river entering at the end of a long beach similar to Singatoka – heavy surf on beach. Sediment plume from river, streaming north. Only occasional small segments of fringing reef, maybe 100-200m wide at most, and not continuous. Rain forest vegetation behind coast. The plane then did a wide sweep to the left across a broad bay towards a flat coastal area. Again just patches of small fringing reef, perhaps 50m wide. Jungle behind, but much cleared. Manioc, copra plantations, much grass.

12.20 Inland we crossed over some sharp ridges before landing at Honiara Airport in a sticky heat. More or less 99% cloud cover and it has just been raining. Time 1 hour ahead of Queensland, and therefore 1 hour after Fiji.

Fairly nondescript transit lounge with dispirited looking Melanesian female sitting by a stall of quite nice carvings in dark wood inlaid with mother of pearl. No purchasers. Prices \$3 to \$200+. \$5 for small cane coaster. \$12 for small wood bowl. On the walls, a few black and white photos, framed, labelled 'British Solomon Islands Tourist Authority', the 'British' bit crudely excised on all but one of the photographs. One of them is a picture of a large gun, presumably a war relic. Marley tile floor, sloping white roof, louvred windows, grey painted walls need repainting, most passengers local Europeans dressed N Australia fashion.

13.20 Departed from Honiara. Now only 60% overcast. Mist patches around low wooded irregular mountains. Suggestions of a possible patchy barrier reef away to north as we departed. The interior of the country is empty, cf east end of Viti Levu. Large geometrical plantation (?coconuts) near airport. There was much very irregular white cumulus over the land, but after 10 minutes sharp, it gave way to patchy striatus over the sea, then more patches of very high irregular cumulus with the blue sea far below. Occasional glimpses of bits of island coast with little apparent reef.

- 15.05 Vila, New Hebrides. Pale cliffs with horizontal bedding. Well developed fringing reef with spur and groove structure dropping obliquely into deep blue water. Dryish looking woodland. Well laid out coconut plantations with some intercropping. Blue sky and fluffy clouds.
Much less oppressive than Honiara, but otherwise similar. Flat ground with wooded backdrop. The terminal more up to date. Clean and colourful. Signs in French and English. I bought a tea towel for 225 vatu, 80 vatu being exchanged for \$A1. Quite a reasonable little shop in transit lounge but unintelligible announcements.
Curious looking Melanesian ?police with chequered Scottish-type hats and pale blue shorts. Tarmac at Vila much smoother than at Honiara, where both landing and take off were pretty rough. We are in one of the 'aging' BAC 1-11s which Air Pacific tried, but failed, to sell. There are small orange and white aeroplanes labelled Air Melanesia on the tarmac.
Judging by the postcard the inhabitants of the New Hebrides are more or less similar to the Fijians.
- 16.55 Departed across rain-forest covered mountains, the lower slopes semi-cleared, with grass amongst scattered trees.
- 17.00 Crossing coast. No signs of reef but a good deal of surf. Volcano-shaped island away to the left. Is it the active volcano shown in local photographs?

We had a visit of Sir Edmund Hillary, climber of Everest, to the Suva Yacht Club on 27th August 1983. Much appreciated by the sports loving Australians with whom we consorted. We had Red Baron out in the sun with a party of six for the great event of his arrival at the Club. Large, fit-looking and relaxed, Hillary stepped ashore to be welcomed by the contestants for the title of Miss Hibiscus, a local beauty competition. One of Hillary's achievements, years before, was to have climbed Joske's Thumb, a near-vertical volcanic plug visible from our flat. His visit was a quasi-regal event.

By late October 1983 the moment had arrived for another holiday, and this time we chose to go to Namale Plantation on the neighbouring island of Vanua Levu. Vanua Levu is not much smaller than Viti Levu, but less compact, less populated and less developed. We flew from Suva to Savu Savu, the nearest airport, per Fiji Air. Namale Plantation contains a hotel consisting of a restaurant block and bures scattered amongst the surrounding tropical bush. We were allocated a bure called 'Susanna' – a really exotic location with flowers (notably hibiscus, frangipani and heliconia), a high wooden deck amongst trees, and a view of the beach below with the sea beyond. A feature of the area was the abundance of very jungly-looking trees which put down roots from their branches, like mangroves, but bigger and not in swampy ground. In places they created an impenetrable colonnade of roots.

I have written elsewhere about the all-dominant reef in this area ('Namale Plantation, Vanua Levu, Fiji'). We did not stray beyond the immediate vicinity, so that was about it, except to mention the white-rumped swiftlets nesting in a cave cut into a coral cliff not far along the coast. In some places these birds have their nests confiscated to make bird's nest soup, but here they were just happily getting on with the job of rearing their offspring. Their nests were open cup-shaped structures stuck to the cave walls, with eggs and hatchlings clearly visible.

Savu Savu town itself was nothing more than a scatter of shacks, but it had undeveloped hot springs, on one of which we saw locals cooking a meal with a sack thrown over it to keep in the heat.

On the way back to Suva we flew over Namenalala Island, and I was able to identify the beach on which I landed with Nicole and Philip in the course of our Tui Tai cruise a year earlier.

We had a crowded social calendar in late 1983. The first event was a reception by CCOP SOPAC at the Trade Winds Hotel before our Namale Plantation excursion. Attendees included an IGS geologist who had been working in Vanuatu, in jungle conditions.

About this time, Lucette with Nisha Asgar joined a group of indigenous Fiji ladies engaged in ceremonial 'dressing of the chief' This involved sewing the appropriate clothes and fitting them to the chief. Lucette established a lasting friendship with a lady called Vinyaka, in which presenting and wearing of flower garlands played a significant part. This contact led on to tapu-making classes. Tapu is a local indigenous product made by beating wood into a pulp and flattening it out into a sort of paper, on which black or brown designs are printed. Lucette ended by becoming impressively proficient.

Then there was a Shell Club social aboard a boat called 'The Coral Sea' on 25th November. Participation included engaging in unrestrained singing. Some of the attendees were from the Cable Ship Reclaim, stationed in Suva Harbour at the time. In the lead was the Shell Club chairman, John Gibbons, a pleasant lad and zoology lecturer at the University of the South Pacific, together with his oriental wife Lily. These two, together with their two small children, had the misfortune to be drowned some time after our departure from Fiji, when their small boat capsized outside the reef.

There was a Fijian gala weekend in Suva, with public dancing by competing teams of brightly dressed women from a number of tribes – colourful, but not exactly exotic in the western sense. Westerners like their female dancers a little less plump than seems to be the norm in Fiji, and the layers of clothes makes them appear plumper still.

On 26th November was the gala presentation of trophies by the RSYC., with a good deal of Australian champagne, followed by more champagne and a good deal of Australian beer at the house of June and Ian Everingham. We needed to celebrate - Red Baron won two cups, which I took back with us, first to the Everingham house, then to our flat. I also got a certificate confirming that we had won the Agnew Cup and the Carreras Cup. Later I discovered that the cups, although presented, were supposed to remain in the trophy cabinet at the Club.

In December 1993 I was asked to be Father Christmas for a large party of expat children on Nukulau Island. The idea was, suitably attired, to arrive in Red Baron and wade ashore with a large red bag full of presents to distribute to the waiting throng. The date scheduled was 4th December, and on that day I was all ready and dressed in a very fetching outfit, but on account of the weather it was necessary to put the event back to 11th. On the 11th the weather was excellent, and I was received with great

acclaim as I strode purposefully from the sea wearing a long snow-white beard almost meeting a large snow-white moustache.

All the presents were labelled and names were called out. I had not exactly expected not only to be obliged to take about a hundred children individually on my knee, but to make a Father Christmas type conversation with each one of them – hardly my cup of tea, but the incognito helped and I performed as manfully as possible. Eventually I departed back down the beach amid cheers and hand clapping to the waiting Red Baron, which disappeared round a corner with me waving from the deck.

When I next saw this same crowd of kids – on their way back to Suva - I was dressed in shorts and my Australian bush hat. They all totally ignored me, I who had become used to my popular status. Thus do the mighty fall.

Anyhow, we were soon back on Nukulau again, although no Father Christmas this time. The MRD office party was held there on 17th December, but on that occasion a local boat transported the group.

On the evening of the same day, 17th December 1983, was the going-away party of three CCOP SOPAC geologists, including Gary Gauss. The names of the three were Burns, Gauss and Rigbys, the initial letters of which read BGR, interpreted on the invitation card as ‘Bloody Good Riddance’ I never cease to marvel at the inventiveness of the human spirit, just as I never cease to marvel at quite a few more negative aspects.

We had arrived at Christmas 1983, and another holiday seemed somehow appropriate. We had enjoyed our Blue Lagoon cruise with Christopher in the previous year, so at short notice we got together with June and Ian Everingham and booked another cruise over the Christmas period with the same company. This time we travelled on the MV Mathew Flinders, a somewhat larger boat than the Marie Anda, and taking about 50 passengers. Several were expats we knew in Suva, and others were semi-locals, so it was a cosy group. The trip lasted a little more than three days, from 11am on 24th to 8pm on 27th.

The Yasawas are a narrow string of islands, 5 to 10 km wide and about 120 km long. The group includes hundreds of island of which the largest is about 20km long and the smallest are little more than rocks. The Group as a whole is probably the pleasantest part of Fiji, with a good climate, no large mud-laden rivers, plenty of coral reefs and beaches and no industry. Small cruise ships visit, and the economic life of the islands where they call mostly revolves around these, but the visits are well spaced out.

This was our third visit to the Yasawas. Each itinerary was different, and in fact on this trip the Mathew Flinders called at only one of the places we had previously visited – the Sawa-I-Lau caves, to which we had been with the Marie Anda and which constitute the highlight of any cruise in the area. This time we visited the following places:

Waya. We anchored off the sand spit joining Waya and Wayasewa islands. Water deepens off both sides of the spit, but snorkelling is best off the NE side. In the

evening we had a smoothly organised meke (concert with indigenous dancing) at the village of Yalomba.

Tavewa. No village here, but we set up camp for Christmas Day amongst coconut palms behind a good sand beach. Offshore the water deepens gradually. A lot of soft coral and dead staghorn coral straight out from the beach. This was the much-mentioned occasion on which I was able to go swimming six times on Christmas Day, including one swim after dark. Apart from swimming, our Christmas day occupations consisted of barbeques amongst the trees. I also engaged in a little writing, having evolved a technique for doing so whilst seated in the water. I mention this here, because it was on Tavewa beach that one of the party photographed me doing engaged in this activity.

On the evening of Christmas day we had a very energetic dance back aboard the Matthew Flinders. Ian Everingham, in particular, distinguished himself by dancing vigorously with an Australian body-building girl.

Next day we visited the Sawa-i-Lau cave complex, which has a locked gate to which only the Blue Lagoon company seems to have the key, providing it with a monopoly attraction. The cave is eroded into a large mass of limestone of uncertain provenance forming a substantial hill. On this trip I photographed this hill and later used the photograph on the glossy cover of a booklet we produced on the oilfield potential of Fiji.

From Sawa-i-Lau we were taken to a shell market at Soso on Naviti island. Shells collected by the local islanders were laid out on the ground on straw mats – a tourist activity not to be encouraged. Then on to Vomo island, where we had a final evening barbeque alongside the dried out and bleaching hulk of the first small cruise ship operated by the Blue Lagoon people. When this boat was decommissioned, they had hauled it up on the beach as a keepsake.

Vomo has a good sand beach with a steep drop-off running south to north and almost impinging on the beach near the cruise ship hulk. Northwards from the hulk is a wide reef flat with little sign of life.

Back at the grind, we were on New Year's Day invited to visit the family of Nisha Asgar at Vunindawa, where her sister runs a store somewhere in the interior north of Suva. This was very much a day with an Indian extended family, with plenty of indigenous country folk thrown in for good measure. It was noticeable that whilst the Indians were smartly dressed and well covered, the local Fijians wore a minimum of not-too-salubrious clothing. Despite the apparent class differences they all seemed relaxed together. The trip involved crossing the Wainimala River in a long thin passenger carrying canoe propelled like a punt by means of a long pole, the pole wielded by one of the half dressed Fijians. Not too stable-looking a combination, but the passage was successfully accomplished.

This was not our only Indian social event in Fiji. The other was more serious. We were invited to a Moslem wedding, where we found ourselves to be the token Europeans. It was all very solemn, in particular the men and the ladies were separated for much of the ceremony. I found myself in grave contemplation and worship with a

number of sombrely dressed elderly Moslem gentlemen. No nonsense here about performing around lights and candles as at the wedding of Lata..

On 11th January 1984 we were invited to luncheon aboard SS Canberra, which was making one of her regular cruise calls at Suva. Our hosts were Michael and Muriel Barnett, Australian expats we had met in the Yacht Club and who were moving back to Australia at the end of their Fiji service. Instead of flying they had opted to make a holiday of their return trip by joining the Canberra. Everything about the meal was lavish, starting with a magnificent printed menu in a glossy cover, listing the numerous dishes for the day.

The fly in the ointment was the attitude of the British waiters, who made it very clear that not only were they crude individuals supremely confident of being in charge, but that they held their clients in contempt. In early 1984 we were in the days when the UK Trade Unions had yet to be adequately cut down to size, and the attitude of the Canberra waiters was a clear demonstration of the need for something to be done in this respect. Anyhow, it was a lavish meal.

The 1994 Burns Night, 27th January, was at the Suva President Hotel. Well attended, and again Marysia Holmes played a prominent role in the 'songs and prose' section of the evening. She eloquently recited some McGonnegal poems amongst other things. I myself wore my new Red Sea rig for the first and only time. Pity. It consisted of a short sleeved white shirt, red bow tie, black dress trousers and a broad red sash round the middle. It was a lot more red than the Red Sea, which – in my memories at least – was a surprisingly and monotonously grey neighbourhood. When the Scottish dancing started these Burns Night events got extremely warm, and decorum was apt to become minimal.

By early 1984 things were beginning to unravel. Nan Dingle, the mainstay of Lucette's bazique club, departed – Lucette went to her farewell lunch at the Lifeboat Restaurant. Then Poppy and Jack Pinkstone departed back to Australia and retirement. Their departure was preceded, on 14th January, by a party at our flat, at which a painting made by Poppy for Amy was unveiled. Attendees included the Everinghams, Loma Livingston, an Antipodal artist friend of Poppy, and June Smith, the rather plump mother of Robert Smith, my Australian understudy at MRD – who held Fijian nationality.

The actual farewell for the Pinkstones was at Suva airport, with ourselves, the Everinghams and Vijandre Kumar, the Indian editor of the Fiji Times. We drank champagne hidden round the corner from the terminal building, since consumption of alcohol in a public place was forbidden by law.

Loma Livingston was making her living from producing and exhibiting ink drawings, together with black and white photographs of the drawings, showing traditional Fijian villages both as they are now and as they used to be in the first days of European contact.. The early views included old Bure Calou (house of the God) and ring forts with hutments inside, the latter reminiscent of British Neolithic forts.

I had discovered a good museum in Suva, where I obtained a number of publications concerning the history of Fiji, which is in fact somewhat sketchy since there are no

pre-European written records. However, what was clear was that in the early and mid 19th Century there was a great deal of inter-tribal conflict. This included a massacre at Da Nang of many of the inhabitants of the Suva area. The massacre involved treachery (safe passage had been negotiated) and was carried out by a tribe based at the town of Rewa in the estuary of the Rewa River, not all that far from Suva. A few years later the Suva people took their revenge by occupying Rewa and razing it to the ground. This was another massacre, of the entire tribe this time.

I was keen to see the site of Rewa, which involved a boat trip across one of the Rewa River distributaries, there being no bridge. One weekend Lucette and I succeeded in getting there by boat and taxi, however, and started by admiring the great swamp taros, growing profusely in the drainage ditches. These are lilies with large leaves and large edible roots, which were the staple food of the historic Rewans when they could not get their teeth into some human being. I identified the sites of the ring forts of Rewa as a spread of irregular ground in the broad swathe of cleared land between drainage ditches.

When we met up with some of the modern locals – friendly smiling youngsters – I asked them what they knew of Rewa. They had never heard of it.

Not long before we departed from Fiji I undertook another trip into the interior north of Suva, with Robert Smith and Vili (a local counterpart) in this case. The visit was under the aegis of MRD in connection with the booklet I was compiling on the petroleum prospects of the area. An assessment of local limestone occurrences was necessary, since limestone is often a reservoir rock for oil, and a number of isolated limestone outcrops were known. These were well away from roads and normal European visitation, so what we were mounting became a mini-expedition.

We passed isolated straw hutments where forest dwellers were able to communicate with the outside world only along jungle tracks. They had their chickens and pigs and were always welcoming. One offered us bananas and cups of tea. In places we waded along streams, and we went through a couple of caves.

As in the case of Sawa-i-Lau, the limestone outcrops in this area always formed abrupt hills, much eroded by tropical weathering, which produced alarmingly insecure-looking hanging buttresses as well as the caves.

On our final excursion in Fiji we discovered one of our best holiday locations.

Around

26 February we went to Naigani Island off the east coast of Viti Levu, opposite Ovalau. , Martin Jones was visiting at the time, so we took him with us. Naigani is a small island, but it has a village and a resort set in palm trees behind an empty beach of white coral sand. Accommodation is in bures like those of Namale Plantation, but my recollection is that we were more or less the only visitors at the time.

We drove to a nearby point on the mainland, where we left our car and were picked up by the resort's boat for a short sea crossing. Being slightly offshore the island does not collect as much rainfall as the mainland, and in fact during our stay we were treated to continuous sunshine. Apart from eating, our principal occupation was

swimming and snorkelling. There proved to be an excellent slowly-deepening reef just off the beach., with huge flourishing coral colonies in the deeper water.

Our going away ceremonies from Fiji, immediately after this visit, comprised three main parts, but before these we had a farewell visit from Jone, our Beqa Island host, who called at 18 Wairua Road whilst Martin was still there.

Firstly there was my lovo at the MRD office. This was a fairly standard event to which Lucette also was invited. I received a good-wishes card signed by about 50 MRD and CCOP SOPAC staff, plus the presentation of a genuine Fiji war club. There had been a collection and I had asked for this rather than one of the Fiji 'cuckoo clocks' which were apt to be dished out on these occasions. There were speeches, and I had to respond, which I did – unusually for me – without notes. I quite enjoyed making that speech.

Next there was the presentation of leis on 28 February 1984, the morning of our departure, at the home of Vinyaka, Lucette's tapa-making friend. The leis were large and colourful garlands of tropical flowers, which were placed round our necks where they had to remain. We wore them to the airport and on to the plane. At the airport we were seen off by June and Ian Everingham, and Richard and Marysia Holmes. As in the case of the Pinkstone departure, champagne drinking took place round the corner from the airport terminal..

Before we had departed from 18 Wairua Road Ali Asgar had presented us with one of the Fiji cuckoo clocks which I was so keen not to possess. It was, of course, accepted as gracefully as I could manage and as I write this it is still, sixteen years later, ticking away happily in our sitting room – but only thanks to me having repaired it twice - so far.

We had departed from Suva in good order. Our car, a Subaru Estate called Ratusirkammasesemara, had been despatched by sea in a container, together with a large case of possessions. Other luggage had gone by air freight. Most importantly my booklet 'Fiji as a Petroleum Prospect' had been completed to the point that Robert Smith was able to see it through the press, and it was duly published a few months later.

Apart from a few minor blemishes I thought the booklet looked good, and I was quite pleased with myself for having produced a summary of a complex and difficult bit of geology in little more than a few months, during which period I was not without other distractions. I have to admit that to keep up the interest of US exploration firms I saw it as a duty to my hosts to put as hopeful a gloss on the petroleum prospects as seemed reasonable. It is the case that the prospects deserved testing – there were a number of positive indications - but the mid-ocean location and the absence of proven source rocks were significant negative aspects. Fortunately not every island paradise can convert itself into an oilfield just because it wishes to be in the money.

We left Suva at 3pm on 28 February 1984 to start a leisurely return to the UK, with stop-offs in Western Samoa, Tahiti, Los Angeles, and the Caymen Islands.

The first leg was per Air Pacific to Apia in Western Samoa, crossing the Date Line and arriving in Apia on 27 February. We stayed in the Tuisitala Hotel, stated to be the most modern hotel in ‘much of the Pacific’. Tuisitala means ‘teller of tales’ and was the name applied by Samoans to Robert Louis Stevenson, who lived in Samoa for five years in the late 19th Century.

Western Samoa is another basically Polynesian island state like Fiji, but with a much lower proportion of non-indigenous people. It became a German colony in 1900, and one of the sights is a plinth recording ‘Hier wurde am 1 Maerz 1900 die deutsche Flagge geheisst’. It was later a protectorate and is now independent, in line with which is another of the sights – the new and old parliament buildings, side by side in a field. Both are large beehive-shaped structures with thatched roofs and covered walkways round their perimeters. To aid air circulation the old building is completely open, without walls or internal dividers, like many Samoan houses.

One of our main interests in Samoa was to see Vailima, the home of RLS. It is a large white sprawling house, very much in the colonial mode, set in parkland not far from Apia. RLS died in 1894, aged 46, and is buried at the top of a wooded hill, Mount Vaea, overlooking the house. There is stated to be a track ‘of sorts’ up the hill, but we resisted the temptation to climb it. At the top is a monument with the carved words

*Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.*

The house is well maintained but was empty at the time. I believe it became the Governor’s residence, but is now used only for special state occasions.

The only other matter of remark about Western Samoa is the number of pigs and piglets roaming in the streets and amongst the houses, very much at home and superficially on an equal footing with the wandering dogs.

We stayed only two days in Apia, then flew per Polynesian Airlines to Papeete in Tahiti. The plane touched down in the Cook Islands and we were allowed to roam for a couple of hours – there seemed to be no immigration or passport control. We had a drink in a thatched restaurant complex near the airport. Because of the time limitation we could not go farther afield, but this brief stop-off constitutes the basis of our claim to include the Cook Islands in our list of countries visited. It seemed to be another friendly Polynesian set up.

On to Tahiti, where we stayed three nights in the Royal Papeete Hotel. Tahiti is not a colony, but a department of metropolitan France, and many of the buildings look like it. We hired a car and travelled all the way round the coastal road. Tahiti has much in common with Reunion, politically, geographically and geologically. Both are the tips of oceanic volcanoes – in the case of Tahiti two volcanoes, just joined together at modern sea level. The interior has no roads and in part is occupied by precipitous forested slopes. Many of the coconut palms had been beheaded by several hurricanes during the previous few months.

Gauguin lived in Tahiti for two periods around the turn of the 20th Century. He had several local wives and children, but is now represented by the Gauguin Museum, well

worth a visit. Other local interest is provided by pre-Christian temple remains and carved figures. We had a swim at Venus Point, where Captain Cook landed and built a fort in 1769. We were treated to a show by local dancing girls at the hotel – they attempted to focus better on the predilections of westerners than their equivalents in Fiji, but gave the impression of going through rather a tired tourist routine. Also several were not quite up to it physically.

I was somewhat disappointed by Tahiti, which left me the impression of being an uncomfortable mixture of untidy French and dispirited locals, which is probably not an unfair summary of its history. Venus point, for example, was entered by a stream which was not much better than an open sewer, and the famous beach had a great deal of blown rubbish. To cap the human awkwardness, the sands were black volcanic rather than white coral.

On 3 March 1984 we left Tahiti per UTA French Airlines and flew to Los Angeles. At LA we had been booked by our travel agent to stay for two nights at a place called LAX Motel, which we were totally unable to locate, so we just gave up and stayed at the first motel we came across. It was OK, but we found that at least this part of LA seemed to have an air of brooding menace. Shadowy raincoat-clad males mooched around the streets and we had no desire to venture out after dark.

We were in LA to satisfy Lucette's desire to go to Disneyland, which we did. There was an impressively large staff cavorting around in a variety of disguises and uniforms. We stood to attention and placed our hands on our hearts to sing the US national anthem. We had time to visit only a small sector of the park layout.

From LA we flew Eastern Airlines to Miami, then straight on to Grand Cayman per Republic Airlines to visit AR and his family for a few days, they having moved from Grand Bahamas to Grand Cayman after a stay in the UK during our absence.

In 1984 AR was one of the seniors at the Royal Palms Hotel. His family included Ewan aged 4 and Lise Anne, aged 18 months – both charmingly un-selfconscious. Ewan was into large hamburgers plus large squeezings of tomato ketchup; He was also very interested in some local nut-like seeds which came in a prickly case rather like a cross between a pea and a sweet chestnut. He called them beast eggs. I thought he showed signs of being a potential biologist. Lise Anne was preoccupied with sleeping on the sand, white coral sand in this case.

Events in Grand Cayman included a barbeque with the neighbours and a visit to a turtle farm. We finally got back to the UK, with two years of suntan to our credit, on Saturday 10 March 1984. We greatly enjoyed our Fiji stay, but it was time to return home. For all its plus points, Fiji is a long way away from the action and we were beginning to feel isolated from our families. The families had grown in our absence – Amy had appeared, and Lise Anne had also appeared. The families had diminished significantly as well, though. Raymond Leclert, husband of Suzanne, had departed and Grandpa also departed (peacefully, in his sleep) not long before our return. We had hoped to have seen him again. We had had a pressing offer to prolong our stay by another couple of years, but had declined.