



Volunteer Updates from Fiji

Greenforce Fiji
Marine Conservation
Phase 16

Start Date: 21 January 2009

Week 1 – 21st to 28th Jan *By Harriet & Lily*

19 volunteers arrived at Nadi Bay Hotel all very tired, sweaty & pasty, but very excited!

On arrival everyone jumped into the pool and enjoyed a nice shower. After a night of very little sleep we were put on a bus piled high with everyone's luggage and headed off for Lautoka. From there we bought our rations & Bula shirts for the lads & Bula dresses for the girls; all beautifully colourful & flowery! The next evening we boarded the 12hr night ferry from Lautoka to Savusavu. This provided chance to bond. A few brave volunteers even experimented with the local drink of choice; KAVA!!!

From Savusavu we got on 2 trucks and had a journey of a lifetime controlling flying mattresses and getting a bruised everything while taking in the amazing views offered by Venua Levu.

The final leg of our journey was a short but sweet boat journey to camp. The dawn of realisation occurred as we approached a small but unique Island, and this would be our home for the next 10 weeks. After setting up our beds and spending hours putting up our mosquito nets we settled down to our first meal on camp. Luckily this was made by staff members and was thus edible and enjoyable, a rarity.....!

Saturday evening is where we let our hair down! Our first will be hard to beat but I'm sure we'll give it a go! After around 3 hours of playing 'I have never' and drinking copious amounts of the local Bounty Rum, I feel it would be safe to say that everyone felt that they knew one another a little or in some cases A LOT better! Yes James we know everything!!

Sunday involved chilling out on the beach, with little activity from us volunteers for the rest of the day.

The following day was our first visit to the village of Navatu where we met our adopted families and had our welcoming Sevusevu ceremony aka. Grog time! This was a great way to meet the Fijians and get to know more about the Fijian way of life.

Tuesday was spent by the non-divers reading huge PADI books, and a lot of sunbathing for the already qualified divers. Fortunately everybody passed their theory and diving will commence on Wednesday.



Week 2 - 28th Jan to 4th Feb

By Rachel

Beginning of week 2 on camp and all the non divers have completed their Theory. Big thanks to Paul & Jade!

So for this week it's mainly completing the Open water dives, sunbathing & digging trenches. This week saw the arrival of Steve back at camp, our Assistant Scientist, as Debs heads off to Nadi for a week.

Steve was welcomed home on Saturday night with a themed night giving the lads a chance to cross dress (to which they felt waaaaay too comfortable doing!) A good night was had by everyone. The normal gossip proceeded the next morning as more couples have formed!

Sunday was the first Church of the month, which brought about 2 other villages to Navatu (Namalata & Raviravi). Unfortunately the heat proved too much for one of the volunteers, Lily, as she had to escape, running past the reverend & village chiefs, looking for 'some fresh air'!! Luckily, 5 minutes prior, Steve had apologised to the congregation for any mistakes we may make over the next 10 weeks. Good timing really!

The weather so far has been awesome. We have all managed to complete our Open Water dives and are starting to do our PADI Advanced Knowledge reviews. Good times!



Week 3 - 4th to 11th Feb

By Imy

The first part of week three was spent focusing on getting the PADI Advance Open Water course completed which meant that whilst everyone was busy attempting to complete their knowledge reviews, the four already qualified divers had plenty of free time to top up their tans. Once the relevant knowledge reviews had been completed, the trainee divers had to complete five dives in order to qualify as Advanced. These were: Deep, Navigation, Boat, Drift & Night. Despite a few problems on the navigation, everyone managed to successfully complete the course meaning that everyone on camp is now Advanced and is able to dive to 30m!

Friday saw the first Ladies night of the phase and was our chance to give something back to our 'Fijian mums' who look after us sooo well in the village and ask for nothing in return. We spent the evening playing games with the ladies such as pass the parcel & bingo, as well as showing them some 'traditional' British dancing in the form of the YMCA! Of course it wouldn't have been ladies night without cake, but luckily the ladies came prepared so we spent the first half an hour eating cake & drinking tea.

The next morning everyone got up at 6AM to say goodbye to Steve who had to go home earlier than expected. We all sat on the beach and took a group photo before the boat left camp.

That evening, Debs our Chief Scientist returned from Nadi. Steve sent some pizzas back which was such a nice change from camp food, even if Jon did manage to drop one of the Pizza's, to which we still ate. The letters from home put everyone into a reflective mood, so our Saturday night was quieter than usual. Only a few games of 'Ring of Fire' and little gossip the following morning.

On Sunday, we went to a new village called Kiobo, where we met the Chief of Kubulau. Once again we were amazed by the warm welcome and wonderful standard of Fijian hospitality that we received. Church was outside this week, which was a nice change before having an amazing lunch and our much needed afternoon sleep. After waking, we drank Kava with the villagers and then left later that day to return home to camp, just before the rain.

Monday saw the start of our Science training. We've spent the past 3 days learning the difference between fish and how to identify them underwater.

Today (Wednesday) the sea was so still that Paul decided to reward us with all our hard work during the dive training by taking us to dive over at Namena, a protected site that plays host to a huge variety of fish and rated amongst one of the best reef sites in the world!

The dives at Namena were awesome, and we saw such an large array of marine life such as Big Sharks & Turtles of which has given us all the determination to learn our fish ASAP, and so we are going into week 4 frantically trying to learn fish using fish cards and points to help us. We hope that all this information stays!!



Week 4 - 11th to 18th Feb By James and Chris

The start of this week saw our first Namena trip. Namena is the marine protected area around 40 minutes away by boat. Our dive site is known as Grand Central Station, rated one of the best sites in the world.

This enabled us to put our recent fish identification training to the test. It was amazing!!! We dropped down on a wall of coral and almost immediately spotted a white tip reef shark. Sighting of the day had to be the elusive green jobfish! Wow!

We got a surprise on Wednesday night when the staff disappeared for an hour or so and then Steve (Assistant Scientist) and Jon (trainee) reappeared after having their heads shaved! It was a bet that went a bit wrong, both were rather distraught when they realised what fools they had been.

As usual Thursday night was quiz night, and as always the competition got very heated! Somehow the team made up of the 3 male members of staff managed to win!

The end of the working week saw the end of the fish lectures, now we just need to pass our identification tests.....

Saturday saw the second trip of the week to Namena, the staff gave up their dive so that we could make the most of the calm weather. The highlight of the dive occurred whilst still on the boat, as a pod of around 20 pilot whales were seen logging only metres from the boat. It was awesome! When we reached the dive sight the views as always were amazing but there was quite a current, making it a challenging dive for all. Chris and Ali had somewhat more trouble with the elements as they lost their SMB and ended up towing just a piece of string. This didn't matter too much as Chris managed to use all his air in 15 minutes due to his underwater operatic skills! A couple of the divers were very excited to report seeing two 5ft adult Humphead Wrasse, a fish which is on the CITES list of endangered animals! Debs was so excited she had managed to spot them!

In the evening a few of the male villagers came round for an evening of drinking kava. As Steve proved some people hold their kava better than others (or not as the case may be!)

On Sunday we went to church in Navatu, as always we were greeted with open arms and shown their usual generosity. Having spent the day eating good food, sleeping through the afternoon before being spoiled with tea and cake we got back to camp and everyone was ready for bed.

Monday and Tuesday we were studying hard for our fish test and trying to learn all 170 species (eek!) We also started doing our size estimation dives, which were far more difficult than expected. Monday was also a great day because it was the first ration run. I've never seen so many people so excited to be receiving Nutella and peanut butter, oh what luxuries!!!

As always Donnie (aka Jon the trainee) lived up to his wild but unreliable namesake (Donnie from the Wild Thornberries) and dropped 40kg of flour and his mobile phone into the sea whilst trying to rescue his \$3 flip flops, oops!

Week 5 – 19th to 25th Feb By Nicola

Imagine a tiny patch of sandy beach surrounded by crystal blue water, a mini paradise that can only be reached when the tide is low. The sandspit is about a 30 minute walk around the island from camp. Its great for a girly sunbathe or a little game of football with the crystal clear water providing the chance to cool down with an all important snorkel although be wary of the tide as at high tide the sandspit disappears.

Shh....he's coming....quickly, light the sparklers, aim the party poppers.....HAPPY BIRTHDAY PAUL!!!! Saturday saw Paul's surprise party, he was oblivious to the planning, we had real chicken for dinner dipped in garlic butter! Yum! Chocolate cake and Mars bar doughnuts. It was sooooo good! The staff also had a little surprise for all of us.....Ice!....They made ice, they are gods! You have no idea how much you miss a cold drink, it was amazing! Then we partied the night away under the stars!

The past few days have been the best kind, lazy days involving lying out on the deck getting lost in a book or taking the raft out to the deep blue where you can dive off without fear of hitting your head with your mask and snorkel and see what's under the sea. Church on Sunday was chilled out as usual, we got fed fresh fish and noodles then spent the afternoon with the villagers. It was an all round good day.

We had the inverts test this week, all about sea urchins, lobsters and anemones. With an afternoon of revision we all passed the test! On a sad note Wednesday was Harriet and Chris' last night, they were only here for 6 weeks, so we made them kava bowls out of coconuts as a farewell gift, which were signed by all. It's a great group here and we've all bonded well so it was sad to see them go but no doubt we will all meet up again!



Week 6 - 26th Feb to 4th March By Steve

Thursday: Chris & Harriet (our 6 weekers) say their farewell (and ours to them). It's so weird saying goodbye to people when you have spent this amount of time together. On this Island, you *live* together. You bond on levels that back home would take years. It isn't nice to say goodbye to people. So we won't. We just wish them all the best in their travels and can't wait to see them again in the UK.

Friday: Back to diving. The vols are taken on a fun dive. The site is named Playgrounds and every time a diver surfaces from this site, you remember why. It may only be a

shallow dive but the corals are beautiful. The sun proves the perfect mixing ground as the crystal clear water laps up against some of the most vibrant corals. The reef here is some of the healthiest in the region as the currents that pass bring with it all the nutrients needed to harvest such a site. The site is also jammed with swim-through after swim-through. It is a dive that neither time nor air is ever on your side. Both go quicker than we would like.

Saturday: The day of camp cleaning, good food and partying. This was no different. We were given real chickens to cook with today. Now most people think, huh, chicken, it's alright. Spend a few weeks here and you'll all be making shrines, praying for real chicken!

So with a belly full of good food, and a day of spring cleaning under our belts, a beer (or two) is the perfect end. Of course, we're all sensible, and getting drunk isn't cool, but hey, we all have to let our hair down sometime!

Sunday: Church. The perfect cure for any hangover! Especially when it lasts 2 ½ hours! This week we visit Namalata. A village well known for its amazing hospitality. As the first Sunday of the month, Namalata also plays host to 3 other villages. So with a packed church, a table overflowing with food and hundreds of new faces, we take the time to recover from the hangovers and appreciate why we are here; members of the Kubulau community.

Monday: Usually a day of volunteers spending the morning in the village running the playschool. Unfortunately, the village was busy hosting a workshop for WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society). This workshop is a follow on from last weeks. The aims were to train community members in conducting their biological monitoring and teaching them how to report their findings back to their respective villages. With this taking priority, and the unfortunate situation of replacing the broken compressor, we were unable to dive, therefore the day was everyone's own to do as they wished. Most took a few hours out and took to a snorkel trip to our outer reef. A 20 minute swim from our beach, but well worth the trek, for the corals and fish are amazing.

Tuesday: The morning is spent diving. The great thing about where we are is that nobody else dives these sites, and they're on *our doorstep*. There's a World class dive site off one of the near by Islands, but other than that, the reefs here are un-dived, unless Greenforce decide to rock up and, well, dive it. Today we did. We found a new reef that we haven't been to before and it proved to be a winner. All divers came up with that familiar smile. The topography of the reef has numerous passages & swim throughs. This site has to be named. Do we call it Labrynth, or The Maze?? Who knows? But that's the cool thing about this place. We are the first people to have EVER dived on some of these reefs. There aren't many divers who can say that about a dive!

Wednesday & Thursday: With plenty of diving under our belt, we take a wee trip across to the next bay where a river mouth opens into the sea. This river is called Saitabu River. Over the 2 days, we split into two groups. One group stays at camp and has a chilled out day, while the other goes on the River trip. The River is spectacular in its scenery. The banks are formed by a long stretch of mangrove. The mountainous Jungle in the background brings it back home how far from civilisation we are. The water has that murky brown colour, the Mangroves & trees cast vibrant greens & the skies are perfectly clear, not a cloud in sight. It's a perfect place, it's a perfect day! We spend the first part of the day travelling up stream, taking in the views; we then stop off to dig into our packed lunch and then take a swim in the fresh water. Its cold, its fresh.....it's perfect! We try climbing a few of the trees and vines to jump in from a height, we go hunting for fruit from the trees, we have belly & back flopping competitions off the boat (of which the videos were hilarious. The sound of everyone laughing/sighing out loud together is just infectious to listen to). We then have a spin from the back of the boat as we were dragged behind at speed. Trying to hold on as long as possible to a buoy. Everybody wants a go, and of course, that becomes a competition as well (who can last

the longest?). Eventually the tides force us to leave this paradise and return to the Sea. Not ready to return to camp, we stop off at a reef and have a snorkel for several hours. Music on the boat, Tea in flask, Cameras flashing every few minutes; this has been an awesome 2 days.



**Week 7 - 5th to 11th March
By Will**

On Friday we were invited to an inland village, Nakorovou, of which Greenforce have only visited once since they have been in Kubulau. After the 40 minute truck ride we were met by some of the villagers who greeted us in almost perfect English, they took us to the community hall to conduct the Sevusevu. Here we met the village elders and chiefs of Nakorovou and its six settlements. We were then invited on a tour of the village, showing us what our fundraising donation will be put towards such as improving the water supply and renovating the community hall.

We then spent a few hours playing sports, tug of war, touch rugby and volleyball. Defeated by the heat (I lie, the Fijians, the heats just an excuse) we escaped to awesome food. We had crab, prawns, fried fish, fresh veg... the food was such a change from the coastal villages and the difference in diet was evident. The afternoon was then spent bathing in the river, jumping off trees and swinging from vines and of course the obligatory kava. We returned home knackered and not at all hungry.

On Saturday the morning was spent preparing for a very competitive raft race. We had to build rafts using bamboo and vines, each bure had their own team. The actual race lasted around 20 minutes and was won by the boys bure team! The celebrations began later in the night and left a few volunteers a little worse for wear on Sunday morning. Sunday morning saw our first trip to a small settlement, usually we visit Methodist churches but this one was termed by the Fijians as happy clappy. It was voiced mainly in English which was a change from the usual Fijian assemblies but maybe it should have been in Fijian as we felt really ashamed of our partying the night before. After the service we were rewarded with a lovo (earth oven) lunch with cold juice.

Monday was a great day, it saw the arrival of our new compressor! Woo! We went out on a night dive that night, making the most of being back in the water. Then on Tuesday we got to go on a fun dive on the outer reef, where we saw a Napoleon Wrasse, turtles and a shark. This was our last day before we started on our survey dives.

Week 8 - 11th to 18th March By Ali

Wednesday: The last of the Coral points today. Not the easiest of the 3 subjects to learn but it's made easier by Debs' enthusiasm. The afternoon is spent watching the staff act out a survey so that we are able to see who does what and where each diver must be positioned.

Thursday : It's here! Our first survey, and there's a lot more required to do a survey dive than first thought but everyone came out very enthusiastic and excited about doing more survey dives.

In the afternoon a few of us swam out to the outer reef and were lucky enough to see 3 White Tip Reef Sharks & 2 Green Turtles.

On an equally important note, one lucky lady won a cracker eating competition which meant that she no longer had to complete her camp jobs the next day!!

Friday: (FRIDAY 13th) It's early diving at 7:30AM. Survey diving has become more intense now there are more boats away to fit all the diving in before the end of phase. Everyone seems to be enjoying the extra diving. It's good to be busy.

The guys on lunch went a little crazy and decided to make 'blue' soup by adding food colouring to the Tomato soup! Surprisingly tasty! Everyone passed out in the afternoon, knackered from all the mornings diving to wake to Roast Chicken for Dinner! A good shout, poor old Donny needs the protein for his 'poppin' biceps!

Saturday: Fun dives have been swapped for more survey dives; a unanimous decision by the group. As a result of having a few surveys under our belts, we're put into one the more challenging sites (NP2) but the current was too strong and the dive was abandoned so we set off for a different site. One volunteer got very excited at the new site when they saw a cartoon starfish!!!

This Saturday night was a little quiet. Everyone's too tired from all the diving, that and there was a Kava circle going on. However, where most were taking it easy, James & Ross proved otherwise by getting completely battered! Come on Sunday morning hangovers!!

Sunday: Everyone went to Navatu, our local village in which we had breakfast, went to church & had lunch with our respective families. Some of the villagers will be leaving in a few days for a wedding in the capital and as such, some of us have to say our farewells.

Monday: Another day blitzing the surveys. Boat away after boat away. A few of us found a small waterfall on the next beach where the dry pit is. Due to the heavy rain we've been receiving this week, it was running fast and was so refreshing.

Tuesday: Yep, you've guessed it, more surveys. Each survey site has to be surveyed at 12 & 6meters. In between dives, we hug a warm cup of tea. It's cold today! An energy filled soup was provided at lunch, some may say too sugary! But I believe it was required to keep our energy levels up!

The afternoon involved the normal snorkel to the outer reef where this time we saw a Loggerhead Turtle, a 5ft Napoleon Wrasse & a White Tip Reef Shark. Very exciting!

Wednesday: A much needed later breakfast at 8:30, but still managed to get 2 survey dives for everyone before lunch. We must have got at least 12 dives each in the last week. We're all extremely tired but equally grateful for the diving and the effort put in by the staff.