

Fiji Chronicles, August 2008

On Tuesday, July 15, Lynn and I departed Atlanta beginning our trip to Fiji. This trip was to celebrate Lynn's birthday number 10 in the *sexagesimal* system. If you are an ancient Mayan you will immediately know what that means. We stayed over night in Los Angeles to make the trip easier, and spent Tuesday afternoon at Manhattan Beach and Wednesday afternoon with my cousin Sharon Wahl.



We had lots of fun with her and looked through old photo albums with baby pictures of my father and of me and of many other relatives. The old black and whites are still in good condition but newer colored photos have already faded. Especially interesting were many pictures of “grandpa uncle” Morris (see my autobiography at www.fefox.com for more details). Sharon was rather clear that it is most probably “Uncle” Morris, and I think the pictures support that.

Late Wednesday night, July 16, we took Air Pacific to Nadi, Fiji, non-stop business class. It was about 10 (*decimal* system) hours in the air and very comfortable. I slept most of the way and Lynn watched movies. (Nadi is pronounced “Nandi” in Fijian, an example of a sounded but invisible letter.) Going west made the trip one of perpetual nighttime and we arrived at 5:15 am

Friday, July 18 ! The international date line was crossed as was the equator. Fiji is between 17 and 20 south latitude and between 177 and 181 east (179 west) longitude, a bit east of Australia and north of New Zealand. The real date line goes straight through Taveuni but for practical reasons the date line has been moved east of all of Fiji so the country can maintain a daily coherence. Our bags were first off the plane and by 5:45 we were through customs and on our way east along the south coastal road of Viti Levu to Hideaway Resort where we would acclimate for a few days. The terrain is more like Jamaica than Hawaii. There are many sugar cane fields, New Zealand pine forests and relatively less natural habitat. Fiji is volcanic like Hawaii but older. Viti levu is the biggest island, literally “big Fiji”, and the source of our bottled drinking water at home, *Fiji Water*. The Tongans mispronounced Viti and the Europeans added to this error coming up with *Feejee*, and we now say Fiji rather than Viti. The next biggest island is Vanua Levu, literally “big land.”

Hideaway Resort is on the Coral Coast of Viti Levu. A vast coral reef skirts the south coastline for many kilometers. Fiji’s reef system is second to only the Great Barrier reef in size. By afternoon, Lynn was basking by the pool and I was wandering down the beach to investigate the tide pools at low tide.



The tide went out several hundred meters, leaving shallow wading among pools and channels. In these there were numerous juvenile fish, bright bluish purple starfish, brittle stars, crabs (one a cousin of the Sally Lightfoots of the Galapagos), dozens of banded sea cucumbers (these are very thin and long and at first appear to be sea snakes) and many types of coral. The surf breaks out at the rim of the reef where the depth increases suddenly and dramatically. At high tide the waves break on shore with the reef several feet under water. At low tide it is too shallow to snorkel except in the channels and pools. By mid-afternoon Lynn and I began naps to adjust to the change in time zone (8 hours different from Atlanta if you ignore the date line). These “naps” ended about 5 am the next morning.

July 19: Our Bure (a spacious private accommodation on the Beach) had an outdoor light that I tried to turn off at about 4 am but couldn't. However, it did attract lots of geckos that I liked, and one even sold me an auto insurance policy. At 8 am we were informed that our previously arranged day trip up a river to a native village was cancelled since a minimum of 4 persons was required. Instead we went to Kula Eco Park. This is a preservation and rescue park. There is much natural foliage in a riverine setting. The feel is that of a tropical jungle. There were threatened iguanas (including the rare crested iguana) birds, snakes (boas), and fruit bats (flying foxes) of great size. I enjoyed this visit and got personal with lizards and the boa while Lynn took pictures.





She fears snakes, lizards, birds and bats. She wasn't as happy with this excursion as was I ! Flying Foxes have been around for 35 million years. They do not use echolocation and are much larger than "true" bats. The natives like to eat them. Lynn is now basking by the pool as I write this on the front porch of our bure, surrounded by coconut palms and a fruiting pandanus tree. Just in front of me, roughly 50 meters out, a young native boy is trying to spear fish in a tide pool. He is now about 0 for 100 tries, persistent if not adept. Lynn and I tried the nap thing again in late afternoon and awoke the next morning. It was a good thing that our meal plan included breakfasts only. What food we did eat was very good but very expensive.

July 20: Today we elected to take a day trip to Robison Crusoe Island. About an hour's van ride away, we arrived at a boat dock on a mangrove lined river. The boat went down the river for awhile and out to sea a short distance landing on Robinson Crusoe Island. This uninhabited island is a playground for visitors where one can snorkel, kayak or go for a hike in the jungle to learn about medicinal plants. It was sort of a Fiji version of Coney Island. At lunch time they served a *lovo* lunch. This is prepared by digging a pit and burning logs long enough to heat up many rocks. When the embers are gone the hot rocks are covered with bundles of fish, chicken and native vegetables, which are then covered with elephant ear leaves (from really big

caladiums) and left to cook for some time. The meal produced in this way is moist and flavorful. As we learned later, the technique was only slightly altered for cooking one's enemies during the cannibalism days not so long ago. The main difference was that the captive's head was above the cooking media and he was cooked "alive." To entertain us, they performed native dances.

