



RisingTides Newsletter

www.RisingTides.org

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Membership and Donations

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RisingTides Update

2010 has been an exciting year for RisingTides (RT). The 2010 Expedition was launched as planned on February 28, 2010. Brian Basura and I had the momentous goal of crossing the Pacific from Baja California to French Polynesia to perform environmental surveys. The first leg of the journey was a 1,200 nautical mile shakedown sail from Long Beach, California, to La Paz, Mexico, before heading out on a 3,200 nautical mile journey across the Pacific. Our journey then continued to French Polynesia with stops in the Marquesas, the Tuamotus, and the Society Isles. This was the extent of our originally planned survey area. Instead of stopping our journey there, however, Brian and I continued to Suwarrow (Cook Islands), and American Samoa, for provisioning and repairs. Then we traveled to Tonga and finally stopped in Fiji for the cyclone season. All told we covered over 8,200 nautical miles during the 2010 season and anchored in 41 different locations.

2010 was a year of great personal growth for each of us on this expedition. With big organizational goals, we learned that there is only so much two people can achieve on such a journey. First and foremost, we ensured our safety and health. Secondly, the integrity of the sailing vessel had to be maintained. And thirdly, we performed surveys only where prudent.

In Mexico, we unexpectedly found coral growth off of Puerto Ballandra and took that opportunity to performed preliminary coral surveys as a learning experience and to report to the CoralWatch Foundation. We were able to continue our coral surveys in the Tuamotus Archipelagos, where we selected Tahanea Atoll as our main area of survey due to its pristine condition. Any future changes to the coral there will be easily observed and the lack of human interference will strongly suggest the changes are due to climate and sea conditions.

Unfortunately, we observed many detrimental human impacts to the coral in areas we visited in Nuku Hiva (Marquesas), the north end of Fakarava (Tuamotus), and Moorea, and Huahine of the Society Isles. We observed the coral, but we didn't perform any surveys because there was little or no healthy coral to survey. We observed silting and dead coral in many of the areas we visited, as well as possible damage from storms and anchors.

In American Samoa, the water of Pago Pago Harbor was sadly polluted. Large quantities of plastic objects float on top and/or are sunk to the bottom of the harbor.



In contrast, Tahanea, the south end of Fakarava, Toau (Tuamotus), Suwarrow and Tonga (Vava’U Group) had healthy and growing corals. The Crown of Thorns starfish (which thrives on coral) was observed in many of these areas, but so was the presence of the Napoleon Wrasse, a very large fish and predator of the Crown of Thorns.



Due to a lack of funding, we were unable to obtain additional environmental information we originally sought such as water quality information. However, we did what we could with the funding we had available and feel that we were able to provide a baseline coral survey for remote areas of the Tuamotus which had not previously been surveyed. In this way we met our organizational goals.



The good news is that we examined many marine protected areas in Mexico, and the cleanliness of the land and sea areas was unexpected and inspiring. We also met with the “Vigilantes de Bahia Magdalena” or “Magdalena Baykeepers” and discussed their programs to protect and rehabilitate Sea Turtles, our efforts to collect baseline data on coral health, and general techniques to increase environmental awareness.



In the Tuamotus we found a strong environmental awareness with many local champions, and some atolls such as Tahanea have been turned into “Reserve Naturelles” which will hopefully allow them to remain in their current pristine condition.



There are many individual conservation efforts underway such as on Toau where Valentine, one of the approximately half dozen local residents, has provided moorings for the yachts that visit in order to protect the fragile coral. Valentine also collects and raises frigate bird hatchlings to repopulate other islands within the Tuamotus, and is a spokesperson on environmental awareness to islanders finding they are more receptive to one of their own.



We visited Suwarrow, a Cook Island Reserve, which from April through October is managed by a Game Warden and his assistant. These two individuals provide environmental education and awareness as well as a presence to ensure the health of the motus "islands". They also protect the indigenous wildlife, and ensure non-indigenous plants and wildlife are not introduced to the motus.



Through RT, Brian and I maintain a positive presence wherever we travel on s/v Skylight. We also encourage environmental awareness, provide humanitarian services, and encourage cultural interchange during our travels. Following are some of our activities in 2010:

We helped organize and actively participated in cleanup activities on the windward side of Turtle Island. In just one afternoon we removed from the shoreline an entire boatload of trash which has washed up from distant lands and passing ships.



We initiated a rebuild of the historic Suwarrow Tom Neale Pier for islanders and future visitors to see and use. We also performed GPS mapping of the anchorage area to limit impact to fragile areas and we fixed the generator that provides power for refrigeration.



We picked up trash in American Samoa which not only allowed us to do our part for the environment; it also set a good example for passersby who were curious about what we were doing allowing us to spread the “Think Globally but Act Locally” message.



We visited school children at GPS Nuapapu in Tonga, giving them an opportunity to practice their English and to learn about the bigger world outside their small fishing village.



We encouraged RT supporters to participate in a postcard project for the GPS Matamaka school. This project helps broaden the children's understanding of the world around them by plotting the sender's location on world maps then discussing the culture and geography of that location. (Please see www.risingtides.org for more information).



We shared coral survey techniques and CoralWatch materials with a teacher and Peace Corp volunteer (Farfum Ladroma) in a small Vava'u village. This village supports the ecological education of their students and is actively trying to re-grow coral that once surrounded their small bay.



We discovered that the City of Lautoka Public Library was in desperate need of books. With that in mind we collected books from people in the marina and delivered them to a very grateful staff at the library.



We worked with Habitat for Humanity, over a 4-week period, building a two bedroom house for a Fijian family near the town of Lautoka.



In closing, as we come to the end of the first year of our expedition, we are thankful for what we were able to achieve and hope that we can continue to contribute to the well-being of indigenous peoples during our stay in the South Pacific. We realize that although there are limitations, we can and will continue to make a contribution environmentally and socially everywhere we go.

Claudia Richardson

Plans for the Future

Currently, RisingTides s/v Skylight is waiting out the cyclone season in Lautoka, Fiji. With unpredictable weather during this season, s/v Skylight is safely tucked away in the “cyclone-safe” Vuda Point Marina. During this time, we hope to take care of the much needed updating of the RisingTides website and RisingTides on

Facebook.

The new sailing season begins in April 2011 and many repairs to s/v Skylight are already underway. As we learned through many of our adventures in 2010, maintaining and sailing a large vessel is quite challenging and demands much of our time. It has been a learning experience and we found that in order to maintain safety, more time must be given to verifying daily weather and sailing conditions, finding safe anchorages, communicating with other boats, obtaining proper provisioning, and completing official paperwork and procedures. As a necessity, we are now sailors first and researchers second.

Our mission has redefined itself and a big part of what we are doing is being messengers. As we travel, we spread the word to “Think Globally and Act Locally”. As we speak with others who are working to preserve or improve their environment, whether organized or on their own, we are all encouraged to meet individuals and groups with the same mission. Our goal is to continue spreading this message, and to set a good example through the end of the RT expedition and into the future.

Our current plans are to continue with surveys where possible in New Caledonia and Vanuatu before ending the expedition upon arrival in Australia in the fall of 2011.

Getting RisingTides Out There!

RT is still in search of interested youths to communicate with now or when we are underway again in 2011. If you know of any teacher or student of any age interested in our efforts, please pass along our URL www.risingtides.org or email us at info@risingtides.org as we are more than happy to provide any information needed.

Fundraising and Donations

Keep RisingTides afloat! Your donations are appreciated. There are always much needed repairs and provisioning needed to s/v Skylight. You can [donate](#) directly via a secure [PayPal](#) transaction or other methods (please see our website for further information).

Help spread the word! Pass our URL along to those you know who might be interested in supporting RisingTides. www.RisingTides.org

Our sincerest thanks to the following

Ross Overstreet – RisingTides California for your time and energy and taking care of the necessities back on the



home front.

Bruce Basura – Brother and Friend, for your aid in keeping us “afloat and underway” by making sure we obtained a new headsail and other much needed repair supplies.

Lorraine Goodwin – Volunteer coral surveyor and crewmember during our four weeks in the Tuamotus.

Our friends and family, who provide much needed emotional support that keeps us going.

All our past and present supporters without whom we would not be able to achieve our mission.