

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2007

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PERTH PERKS

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**10TH WESTERN CIRCUIT
SAILING REGATTA**



FIJI BOUND!

by Orla Doherty and Abigail Alling



Mark Van Thillo filming with the Immersive Media camera.



Namena coral reef.



Mark Van Thillo, Kitty Currier and Carol Milner with the Immersive Media camera.

Our voyage from Papua New Guinea to Fiji was a challenging one, as we headed into the steady blow of the south east trades. For the first few days, we all struggled with the strange angles caused by *Infinity's* motion against wind and current, but eventually our life settled into the rhythm of a glorious one month voyage, with a weekend stop in Port Vila, Vanuatu to assess the standing rigging and enjoy the delights of a heavily French-influenced city.

Our time in Fiji was action packed. We met with many scientists affiliated with the University of the South Pacific and were delighted to form a long-term agreement with the Faculty of Islands and Oceans in marine conservation. This collaboration was initiated by Dr. Joeli Veitayaki, Head of the School of Marine Science and Dr. Epeli Hau'ofa, Head of the Oceania Centre—a perfect companion programme to the one we have with Raffles Marina.

During the month of June, we were joined by friends who arrived laden with luggage filled with new film equipment! Our onboard *Studio of the Sea* is now going high definition with a new camera, underwater housing and lighting system! Moreover, our science and education programmes are taking on an entirely experimental project with Immersive Media, to use their 11-lens immersive camera to film coral reefs and island cultures. Weeks were filled with technical discussions and familiarisation sessions with the new equipment, plus a little woodworking to ship shape it all securely. By July, we were logging gorgeous high-definition film of reefs and immersive 360 degree images of coral reefs, sailing, and highlights in Suva City!

The reefs of Gau Island were a mixture of abundance and loss. In the staggering Nigali Pass, grey reef sharks circle around schools of barracuda and walls of big eye trevally; yet the barrier reef, on the other hand, appears to have taken a huge beating through the years with much of the reef gone. Inside the lagoon, sedimentation, disease and increased water temperatures, have decreased the vibrance of a diverse and pretty fringing reef. Our study at Gau will

focus on the barrier reef on the north side of the island, to try and understand what happened to these reefs. The study site will include both an area in the recently declared Marina Park, where fishing has been banned, and another just outside that area, in order to create a baseline data set which will assist in the future monitoring of the Marine Park. Dr. Veitayaki's student, Rachel Nunn, joined us onboard during the study in order to jointly analyse and publish the research.

Come the end of August, *Infinity* and crew will return to Suva for two events with Dr. Joeli Veitayaki and Dr. Epeli Hau'ofa. When all is completed, we will relish sailing with the magnificent trade winds behind us, bringing us almost effortlessly back to Vanuatu.

Members of Raffles Marina are again invited to join us on *Infinity*, for any appropriate segment, or project, to participate in our ongoing marine conservation initiatives. Visit our Planetary Coral Reef Foundation website at www.pcrf.org.