

OceansWatch's First Project to Vanuatu a Success

The *Magic Roundabout*, OceansWatch's project lead boat for Vanuatu left New Zealand in late May and had a fast trip up to Port Vila on Efate Island. On board was Chris Bone, project leader / skipper, team scientist James Pitman, Melinda Taylor dive master and 15 year old Australian, Jessica Watson, who sets off in 2009 on her quest to be the youngest person to sail round the world unassisted (www.youngestround.com)



OceansWatch's primary goal for 2008 in Vanuatu was to build solid relationships with coastal communities to learn about their needs and how the organisation could then best help meet them. Prior to their arrival OceansWatch had already established that they would assist Vanuatu Fisheries Dept with Reef Check surveys (www.reefcheck.org) and to this end, some of the team had attended the 1st OceansWatch Reef Check training in Tonga in April. By staying for a week at a time in five different communities, the OceansWatch team was able to introduce interested locals to the Reef Check system of monitoring the health of their reef and to assess their enthusiasm for training in the future.

The first village visited by the team was Mangaliliu, on Efate Island, and had been selected by Katie Thompson, a Peace Corps Worker living in the village and working with the Fisheries Dept. The community were keen to work with OceansWatch and are in the process of setting up a Marine Protected Area. A Reef Check survey was conducted on the reef in front of the village as well as another one off Lelapa on a nearby island. (Together, the two villages have a combined population of about 700 and their very own unique language!) The significance of a Chief's burial site on neighbouring Hat Island, has led to its nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage Site which has been extended to include the reef areas in front of Mangaliliu and Lelapa. This means that the data collected by OceansWatch will help the World heritage listing process.



OceansWatch member Neila Swaze and her family on their yacht *S/Y Caledonia* had great fun helping with the surveying and it's very much the intention of OceansWatch, that members boats join the project lead boats and get involved as much as possible with projects.



Whilst in Mangaliliu, the OceansWatch team was able to give a presentation to the Vanuatu conservation organisation, Vanuati, who were there for a conference. The organisation is made up of conservation leaders from throughout Vanuatu so it was a great opportunity to network with them and introduce them to OceansWatch.

Next stop for the team was Asanvari village on Maewo Island, an overnight sail from Efate. Asanvari proved to be a stunning location, not only did the village boast an excellent anchorage and a beautiful white sand beach but also a delightful waterfall 100m from the village.



A week was spent in Asanvari where the community was enthusiastic to help and learn what we were doing.

Asanvari had a small school and a visit soon highlighted their most basic of needs - plywood for desk tops – as flat table tops do not grow on trees! Some families are too poor to send their kids to school so over the coming months OceansWatch will be working hard on its business development ideas and school support programs.





After Asanvari *Magic Roundabout* headed to Pentecost Island – the home of bungie jumping! – where the team was thrilled to see a dugong as they entered the first anchorage. During their time on Pentecost they were very lucky to have Katie Thomson with them as she has been working in Vanuatu for many years and is a fluent Bislama speaker. With Katie's help they did some Reef Check surveying and were thrilled to be invited to a "Thank you" feast in the village nakamal or meeting house.

James and Chris were introduced to the delights of Kava, which they were taught how to make and after the feast Katie gave a Power Point presentation about OceansWatch and the surveys they did.

In Louganville, on Espiritu Santo, Mel took over as skipper and OceansWatch member Brian Perdon flew out from Brisbane to give the team a hand. Although this part of the trip was hampered by bad weather, the team was still able to undertake a detailed survey at Banam Bay where OceansWatch partner, Project MARC, is doing some great humanitarian work, bringing teams of doctors into the community.

During this time a new crew took over the *Magic Roundabout* as the old one had to go home to earn some money! The new crew consisted of temporary skipper Jegs Nuttall, dive master Leila Cara, scientist Irene Llabres and film maker Rachel Patching. Their first project was to train some of the locals at Nguna Pele marine reserve to SCUBA dive. Vanuatu Fisheries are running many projects including breeding and replenishing local stocks of Giant Clam, Green Sail and Trochus, so having their staff able to use SCUBA equipment will be a big help to them. A diver from Nguna Pele Marine Reserve was also trained so that he could assist with deeper water surveys.

Whilst Leila taught diving, the rest of the crew enjoyed time with the villagers and did some Reef Check training with James in preparation for their work in Papua New Guinea.



After the training sessions at Nguna Pele, *Magic Roundabout* made her way back to Efate and then sailed for Papua New Guinea - a first open water passage for the women on board and they all really enjoyed it.

They arrived off the coast of New Britain, in the shadow of Rabaul's active volcano at 4am in late August. Dawn brought the realisation that "Yes," the volcano was active and that the clouds coming from it were volcanic dust and "Oh dear" the boat was covered!!

www.oceanswatch.org

In close co-operation with the world's yachting and diving communities, OceansWatch undertakes marine conservation projects and offers humanitarian aid to coastal communities in developing countries.