

FIJI TIMES

Diary of a Volunteer

Taniela Laione

To Vuadomo

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INTRODUCTION

I am a 20-year-old architecture student from the UK, who took a trip to Fiji. In the summer of 2024, I volunteered with Caukin Studio to build sustainable tourism facilities for the waterfall in Vuadomo village. The team built three buildings, a reception with a kiosk, changing rooms, and a massage/treatment room. The villagers can work in these facilities and provide a stable income for the village.

This text is a direct copy of the diary that I kept during my trip, which I wrote in every day. Each paragraph represents one session of writing, so some days have more paragraphs than others depending on how frequently I wrote.

Taniela Laione is my Fijian nickname and pseudonym.

TUESDAY 9TH JULY

I'm sat in the Curator pub at Heathrow terminal 3 waiting for my gate information to be released. Both baggage and security went very smoothly for the busiest airport on Earth. I've brought a couple of books to read on the way: Thich Nhat Hanh's 'The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching', and J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Hobbit'. While I'm excited to read these, my flights offer a plethora of films and TV shows, as well as Wi-Fi! I'll soon be boarding an Airbus A380 – the largest commercial aircraft available, with two storeys of seating. My first flight will be a seven-hour trip to Dubai, where I'm expecting to endure some intense heat.

WEDNESDAY 10TH JULY

The flight to Dubai went flawlessly. On board the aircraft I was very well looked after, with a complementary blanket and cushion. I also got to enjoy an enormous catalogue of films, TV, and music; I watched two films: "Poolman" and "Perfect Days". Perfect Days is now a personal favourite of mine. Currently, Joe and I are sat near our gate

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waiting for the second flight of our trip, to Singapore. I definitely don't mind another long-haul flight with Emirates as the experience was phenomenal! I'll probably watch some more films and start reading *The Hobbit*. In Singapore, I'm awaiting a lengthy stop-over of 16 hours!

THURSDAY 11TH JULY

It's the early hours of the morning here in Singapore. After another relatively simple Emirates flight, Joe and I are now sat at the top of the Jewel of Changi Airport, a huge glass dome with a waterfall pouring down the centre. While most shops are closed and lights are off, the Jewel still blows me away. The interior is packed full of tropical gardens full of trees and orchids, so that the warm air is fragrant and humid. After dawn, we plan to take the sky train, through the Jewel to take the sky train, through the Jewel, to terminal three in search of street food for breakfast.

The time is now 4 o'clock in the morning, but still no sign of light outside. After a thorough exploration of the Jewel's other floors, we've settled in the main atrium, so that we can

appreciate the views and enjoy the music. This is definitely a perfect time to read *The Hobbit*.

FRIDAY 12TH JULY

It appears that the pressure of an aircraft cabin disagrees with my pens and their ink. I'm currently flying just west of Fiji, with about an hour to go until I reach Nadi. In Singapore, we met up with four other volunteers on our trip! They are Roxana, Tash, Isabel, and Jamie. After Nadi, Joe and I are taking a flight to Suva, the capital, then to Labasa, where we've arranged to meet Roxana and share a taxi onwards.

Roxana, Jamie, Joe, and myself are now safely through to Nadi domestic terminal. Our next stop is Labasa, on the island of Vanua Levu. The staff even transferred us onto a more convenient direct flight! The only issue is that my bag has remained in Singapore. It should be delivered to the village in due course, but until then I'll have to manage with my hand luggage.

We're enjoying some food before our last flight, and we get quite a good view of the

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domestic runway. It looks like our plane will be very small; four seats in an aisle, and propellers!

It turned out the plane was even smaller than I thought! There were only seven rows, with at most three seats, and you even have to duck when stood up! After landing in Labasa, a helpful Fijian gave us directions to Savusavu, which ended up being an incredibly stressful ordeal, as well as a stressful bus trip down. Eventually we were united with the Caukin team, and since then have been chatting to the other volunteers. Everyone is so friendly and we're getting on very well, going *sulu* shopping, and joking about Oisín's enormous pizza. Soon, we should be heading to Vuadomo village, and possibly welcomed with a kava ceremony.

Entry to the village was a great success! We sat in the back of a truck to the village. It was definitely very surreal to experience first-hand but was a great introduction to the village. Then we met our host family and were shown around the home. I'm staying in Marianne's house with Joe, Enrico, and Oisín.

We all indulged in more kava and chatting with the elders before going home to have some dinner. Now I am delighted to say that I may go to sleep in a real bed for the first time in far too long. *Moce!*

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SATURDAY 13TH JULY

Yadra! I slept like a log last night and now I'm feeling much better. Soon I'll go for a nice cold shower before having some breakfast. The missing paper at the top of this page is where I specified my vegan diet for Marianne. Last night I ate some rice and some relative of the banana, and it was delicious! Though I may have had too much kava because I struggled

to eat much of it. Now it's time to get up and say 'Yadra!' (good morning) to the family, and then explore the village in the daylight.

We're all sitting outside of our house, having just enjoyed some taro leaves for lunch, which tasted incredible! Earlier, we took a walk with Saki to the neighbouring village, pointing out edible and medicinal plants on the way. We also took a short but very steep hike up the mountain and back down to Vuadomo waterfall, where we had a gorgeous swim. The Fijian kids were climbing up the rocks and jumping in! It was extremely refreshing – just what I needed. Later on, Saki plans to take us fishing! He said we can go out on a bamboo raft, and we may use a spear or a net. I don't think I'll take part, but I'll definitely come along for the boat ride.

There was no boating today, but we put out a big net on the beach, where Saki caught an eel-looking fish. Before that, we all enjoyed some fresh coconut water (*wainiu* in Fijian), which Saki got down with a large pole and opened with a knife. Afterwards, Charlotte, Joe, and I played duck duck goose with the kids in the village, which was much more tiring than I expected. Saki invited us four

(myself, Joe, Oisín, Enrico) into the family with a kava ceremony, with some slightly different ‘marine kava’. Then Epeli led a brief talk on Muanivatu Trails and eco-tourism, briefing us on the project goals. Dinner consisted of cassava, fried beans, and taro leaves, very tasty as usual! To end the night, we sat up at the hall to have some kava, although most had already gone to bed, so it was myself, Joe, Oisín, Enrico, Roxana, Jamie, Brychan, and Freddie. Here I’ll list the Fijian words learnt so far:

bula – hello – *bula re* (local dialect)

vinaka – thank you

vinaka na kana – thanks for the food

wai – water

niu – coconut

wainiu – coconut water (Saki’s last name)

taubale – walk

koro – village

savu – waterfall

dalo – taro

yaqona – kava

suki – cigarette

moro – tree that has paper leaves for suki

vesi – hardwood tree, totem of Muanivatu

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dua, rua, tolu, wa, lima – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

bilo – cup

levu – big

lailai - small

Something I learned in Epeli's talk was Muanivatu's land totems, the *vesi* and lizard, symbolising strength and regeneration. The ocean totem is the shark, so they don't eat shark in Vuadomo. Now it's time for bed, and tomorrow it's time to rest.

SUNDAY 14TH JULY

Today we enjoyed some pie and biscuits for breakfast, then went to church. The service was good fun but quite tiring as we were sat for two hours. I particularly enjoyed singing hymns in Fijian. After that, everyone ate together in the community hall, and there was so much food! I had taro leaves, taro root, cassava, and *vudi*. The kids were also teaching me and Charlotte some more Fijian:

lako mai – come here

toa – chicken

dabe – sit down

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We're off to have a swim with Saki now. I can't wait as it's a hot sunny day!

The swim was great, nice warm sea, we swam out to the bamboo raft and jumped off with Isaac, Saki's son. Later on, we all met in the hall with Epeli where we discussed his grant proposal for the project. He spoke about Muanivatu Trails' focus on sustainable, community-led tourism that can help provide the villagers with a stable income. Then things began to wind down for the evening, and we were visited by the Muanivatu Male Voice Choir, who come to each village in Muanivatu on Sundays. Saki and Lomaloma sing bass and invited me to sing with them! The Fijian was a little challenging as I had no lyrics to follow, but I still followed pretty well! The men from the other villages were pleased to welcome me to Fiji's best choir. Finally, kava to finish the day, as well as taro leaves for dinner. Looking forward to resting before our first workday tomorrow, although the presence of a large spider hiding in our room is quite uncomfortable.

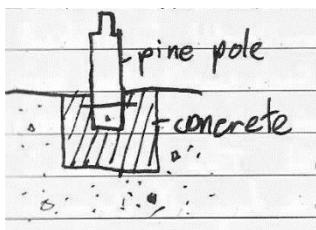
loloma bei Jisu – love for Jesus

MONDAY 15TH JULY

Breakfast today was my favourite *babakau*, and after that we rushed to the hall to watch the Euros finals. A sad result for England but still good fun. On site in the morning, we had a tool induction for the circular saw, drills, angle grinder, and hammer. At lunch I ate a little curry and dhal, as Oisín and I hurried to Savusavu airport to collect his bag. I had hoped to receive mine too but no joy. When we got back, we made the mistake of mishearing the driver say fifteen and gave him fifty dollars instead.

TUESDAY 16TH JULY

Apologies for the brief entry yesterday, I had to cut it short because I'm currently low on iron and felt very sleepy. Today I'll try to eat a lot more and drink more water. Back to yesterday afternoon, we were all hard at work



clearing site of all rocks and debris. We ended up extremely muddy! Afterwards, we very carefully marked out where we'll dig using

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bamboo sticks. They indicate where we will pour concrete for foundations later. Pine poles will stick out of these holes, held with rebar for extra support. Columns and floor beams will later sit on these poles. This construction allows for the tops of the poles to be level, while the concrete may be set at uneven ground. It was incredible to see how much site changed in one afternoon! After work, we had a swim in the waterfall, and we climbed up the rockface to jump in. I went to bed right after dinner, so no kava last night.

koa ni caqeta – don't kick!

koa – no! (for telling off Api)

koli – dog

tuki – hammer

Today I expect more hard work, possibly building timber frames. I just received an email saying that my bag should be on flight FJ103 to Savusavu this morning, so I might be going back to town if I'm lucky. Hopefully I will be reunited with my bag, I really need some clean clothes now!

Great news, my bag arrived! I picked it up this morning in Savusavu, but now I've paid \$75FJD all told on unnecessary taxis (the

price was in fact \$50). The job on site today was digging! We dug all day, so it was extremely tiring, but a great atmosphere on site, with music and taking turns on different jobs. We also spent this time learning more Fijian!

katakata – hot

cakacaka – work

vinaka na cakacaka – thanks for the work

buno – sweaty

au ni buno kito – I am sweaty

masu – pray

sigi – day

vakasigalevu – lunch

gunuti – breakfast

loloma – love

maca – finished (kava)

bu – green coconut

kaivalagi – white person (foreigner)

kaiviti – Fijian person

viti – Fiji

kai Igiladi – English person

Taniela – Daniel

sota tale – see you later

au via – I want

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Back in bed now, I can just hear the bell of the pole hitting the kava, so that it can be put in a strainer to make the drink. I can also hear the insects happily chirping away, and the lapping waves of the sea. I left the kava a little early tonight as I'm very tired again. Still feeling a little rough too, mostly just a headache, so a long sleep will do me good.

WEDNESDAY 17TH JULY

Breakfast was roti with *lolo*, like crêpes with coconut filling, it was my favourite breakfast yet! This morning, I elected to be on the digging team (with Joe, Nedji, Freddie, Jamie, Epeli, Esmeli, and Adriano). Although we got to enjoy the shade, I wish I had picked the timber team. At one point, I went to fill up my water bottle when I slipped, and the bottle flew up into the air and splashed into the river. I chased it as it rushed away, and it approached a rock where I thought it may get stuck. Instead, the water dragged it down below! Even after waiting for it to come out down the river, it was nowhere to be seen! So, I removed my shoes and gloves and waded in, searching between the boulders where the

water flowed. Looking between the spiders and the rock, I caught sight of the bottle floating, and managed to reach in and retrieve it. Jamie was team leader today, and he led our stretches, and told us we can head back to site whenever (Fiji time).

The afternoon shift was equally tough, but we've finished all digging now and we're starting to fill the holes with pebbles for drainage. At the end of the day, I sat with Adriano on the pebbles resting, and he taught me some Fijian:

oca – tired

(au) sa oca – I'm tired

wawale – tired

dagadaga – tired (Wailevu dialect)

mua – point

vatu – rock

moli – lemon (all citrus)

lailai – small

vudi – plantain relative

tapioka – cassava

Tonight, Epeli is going to get us all some beers and we'll have a bonfire on the beach! Now I'm going to head to the beach for some data before dinner.

THURSDAY 18TH JULY

We had some lovely roly polys with coconut *lolo* that we ground last night. Saki was grinding the brown coconut when we got back yesterday, and he let me and Joe have a go! The bonfire last night was lovely too, although I wasn't a huge fan of the Fiji Gold. We were all feeling fragile this morning, especially on site, where the sun was beating down extremely hot from the clear sky. It was particularly tough for Oisín, who came down with some heatstroke by lunch and had to skip the afternoon. On site I was constructing timber frames to sit on the pine poles. Lots of hammering, a bit of sawing and drilling too. While it was probably the hardest morning so far, the whole day was pretty fun and productive. The main problem now is that I ache all over, especially my forearms and left knee.

We've just had a lovely dinner of rice and *maqi*, now we're chilling in the sitting room for a bit. I may head to the hall for a bit of kava, or maybe just go to bed. There's also rumour

of a movie night in Epeli's house, so we'll check that out too.

au via kana – I'm hungry, I want food

au via kana niu – I want coconut

au via gunu – I'm thirsty, I want to drink

au via gunu wai – I want water

au sa oti – I'm finished

mai ti – come have tea/coffee

mai kana – come and eat

kana vinaka – tasty (good food)

lolo – coconut flesh

I've heard the word *kaivalagi* (foreigner) much more in the last few days, especially from Albert, who says “*Bula kaivalagi!*” and I reply with “*Bula kaiviti!*” (Hello foreigner; Hello Fijian). It's a funny game we play when we see each other. The kids tend to call us *kaivalagi* if they don't know our names, but Semi (in our house) tends to call me Dan now.

FRIDAY 19TH JULY

Last night we went to Epeli's house for a movie night, where we watched Moana! It was very interesting to watch as it's in a Pacific island setting, with coconuts and taro and

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villages. This morning I've sent a text to Vesi, Saki's sister, who's coming to the village today. I was asking if she could print off a document for my baggage compensation claim.

For breakfast we had *lolo* buns with jam and lemon leaf tea. The buns were like bread rolls with a coconut frosting – *kana vinaka*! While I was writing, Saki came and gave me a full body massage with his coconut oil. I feel so much better already, I only ache a little now. He's just finishing a massage for Oisín, then we'll head to site.

This morning's work was possibly the hardest yet. We were carrying pine poles to site for the foundations. Although we used two or three people per pole, they are still extremely heavy. Not to mention that the path to site is not that short and contains many small hills. My body was not at all up for it, and by lunchtime it was a struggle getting up and down. Despite being in Fiji for a week now, it's still tough dealing with new food, new living conditions, new culture, new hot weather, and new manual labour. While these things are certainly enjoyable and fascinating, it's a shock to have so much change at once. At

lunch, Vesi was home, and we introduced ourselves. As it's a Friday, seafood was on the menu! There was fried mackerel that we caught the other day, and a whole crab, shell and all! Of course, I stuck to the taro, which was particularly nice as it was crispy. This afternoon I decided to take off work. Although lunch had rejuvenated my spirits, I thought it best not to push my body too hard.

Each morning before work we have a leader of the day, who leads stretches and asks a question of the day. First was Jamie on Wednesday asking everyone's go-to drink. Next Freddie asked if we could have dinner with any two people, alive or dead, who would it be? Today Roxana asked if you were a dessert which would it be? The team leader also gives a Fijian word of the day:

Jamie's: *kasō* – drunk (on kava)

Roxana's: *bibi* – heavy

kerea nai tuki – give me the hammer

wai na moli – lemon juice

au via cegu – I need rest

After afternoon work, we went to the beach for another sunset swim, although I stayed ashore today. For dinner I had taro leaves,

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rice, fried beans, and tamarind chutney, which was delicious. Later, we went to the hall for some kava. There're plans for beers on the beach again tonight, and while it was good fun last time – especially when Saki appeared from the water with a crab and a fish – I'd rather sleep or read. I'm back now having a lie down and Joe's going to get me when they head to the beach.

SATURDAY 20TH JULY

I ended up just sleeping in last night, it was definitely the right move! This morning, we had some *babakau* and headed to the Urata lookout café. The café is a previous Caukin project, the same team we are a part of here in Vuadomo. We all enjoyed some nice drinks and the stunning view of Urata village, Savusavu bay, and Savusavu town. Next, we stopped in Savusavu quickly, where I picked up a razor. Then the truck carried on down the peninsula to Split Rock where we went snorkelling! There was an enormous rock about eight metres tall, with a huge crack running through it, and the whole thing was covered in coral! I'd never seen so many

colourful and tropical fish swimming all around me!

SUNDAY 21ST JULY

I had to cut my writing short last night because it was extremely eventful, so let me recount yesterday. After the incredible snorkelling, where I even saw some pro freedivers swimming through the split in Split Rock, we headed back to Savusavu. In Copra Shed, we caught the last twenty minutes of Fiji vs. the All Blacks and grabbed a bit of food. Then we all came back to Vuadomo, including the four volunteers in Naweni, another Caukin project running at the same time as ours. I think next weekend we'll visit Naweni and their project. When we got back to Vuadomo, Joe was feeling really unwell. He went directly to the toilet and stayed there all night. During dinner, he serenaded us with all sorts of bodily sounds. Probably a combination of too much beer, hard work, new food, and food poisoning. Since Oisín, myself, and now Joe had all experienced some sickness, we were joking that Enrico must be next. Then Enrico slipped on a big rock by the water tap and cut his knee really badly and very deep. After Heemi did some

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first aid he went straight to the doctor in Savusavu.

Straight after this, Oisín and I hopped in the truck and headed to Savusavu for some Fijian clubbing. The sudden drama of Joe and Enrico seemed like a bad omen, as well as the full moon! Fortunately, it ended up being quite a good night. First, we went to a new club called House of Yes, which was very quiet and looked a bit like an office. Luckily Jamie rounded us up and took us to a second club called Rebels, which was busier. We all had a good dance with the Fijians, including Epeli, Joseph, and even Saki!

Finally, we took the truck back to Vuadomo, but not before dropping off a random Fijian guy in his village. I also met a Swiss-Fijian guy and a Norwegian couple who sailed to Fiji, and they were all friendly and chatty. The truck dropped us at the car park where we've been building timber frames. Epeli was off to get more beer and keep drinking in the hut! I'd had plenty however and just went to bed.

After a short but restful sleep, I had some roti this morning and got ready for church. Today church was in Vatulele, the next village over,

and the largest in Muanivatu. To get there, Saki and I walked along the shoreline as the tide was out. The walk turned out to be quite an adventure! We climbed through rocks, waded through reefs, and voyaged through mangroves. I was the first *kaivalagi* from Vuadomo to get to Vatulele, as walking is faster than the truck. The church in Vatulele was larger and more decorated than Vuadomo's, and Saki got me the lyrics for all the hymns. We even sang at the front of the church, with me in the centre! Saki also gave me a nice *bula* shirt to wear to church, and he just told me that it's mine to keep! Then we had lunch in the hall at Vatulele, where I sat opposite the chief of Muanivatu tribe, whom I met earlier at church. I only had some taro root and leaves, but it was quite nice, but busy too! After lunch, we walked back to Vuadomo, had some coconut in the river, and went for a swim at the beach. Now we're chilling back home waiting for dinner. What a weekend!

na toba – the bay

osania – ocean

waitui – sea

tui – king

vadua – stop

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vava – shoes

kofi – coffee

nuku – sand

dogo – mangrove

yalewa – girl

tagane – boy

pusi – cat

lako i vei? – where are you going?

vula – moon

ono, vitu, walu, ciwa, tini – 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

kerekere – please

TUESDAY 23RD JULY

No entry yesterday as I spent all day resting, as Sunday night after kava at Loloma's, I was very sick. Oisín and I spent all night getting up to be sick and going back to lie down. Then it turned to diarrhoea, then stopped all together.

tomate – sick

saki – service

Today we felt much better, though the bug seems to have spread to Bella in the blue house opposite ours. On the plus side, Enrico seems immune, possibly as he's on antibiotics for his knee. The doctors told him

that it's slightly infected, so no stiches until Friday! Jamie, Freddie, and Brychan are also out today with the same sickness. On site we had a ceremony with the Muanivatu chief, who blessed the first pouring of the concrete. Then they all went to drink kava, while we mixed and poured concrete for the rest of the day. It was tough work moving around all the sand, aggregate, and cement, but not as hard as digging. Tomorrow we should get some proper mixers, so we won't have to use shovels and wheelbarrows anymore. We were also meant to get wood delivered today, but it's been delayed. We're off for a nice sunset swim at the beach soon; time to relax.

vuasa levu – very cheeky

siu siu – what you say to a cheeky boy

There're also some kids playing rugby on the yard in the front of our house, and they can be pretty brutal! Also, this morning we awoke to a Bluetooth speaker blasting music! Not to mention Semi watching videos on the phone as usual, although that's better than his occasional scream/cries.

WEDNESDAY 24TH JULY

Some roti for breakfast, now we're ready for more frames or concrete mixing. Some youths from the area are coming to help today, but apparently on Monday they came, moved a few sacks, and had a smoke!

kata – run

gane – small boy

vuaka – pig

ika – fish

qio – shark

moko – lizard

In Wailevu dialect: k → h occasionally

kana → hana

vakalevu → vahalevu

kata → hata

What an eventful day! In the morning, we were back on concrete, although we were running low on materials, so I just lifted sacks of sand to site. It was pretty tough! Only Isabel, Joe, and I were lifting so we were soon tired, and switched to cutting the final pine poles. I had a go on the circular saw and the hand saw on the pine pole and did pretty well. Then came the even harder lift of the pine pole

to site. Joe and I could only manage one! Fortunately, the Fijians helped out in their flip-flops. A woman visited the waterfall today and stopped by site to offer us a stay at her resort in Labasa! Apparently, she owns the resort and can accommodate twenty of us for the weekend! If the arrangements come together that would be a fabulous weekend. Then came lunch, which today was a great picnic at the car park, with curry, rice, coleslaw, papaya, and even sandwiches! I'm delighted to report that my appetite did recover, and I managed to have a sizeable portion. After lunch we were completely out of sand and aggregate, so we had to wait for a truck to take us to the beach to collect the filled sacks. Fortunately, the truck was operating on Fiji time, so it didn't arrive until three o'clock! We all enjoyed a nice long break chatting under the bamboo tree.

Eventually we took the truck to the beach, loaded the sacks, and drove back to the car park, with Fijians jumping on the back on the way. The rest of the afternoon was spent mixing and pouring yet more concrete, and now there is only one hole left on the treatment room. However, there's still

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concrete required for the changing room and reception. If we're lucky we aim to finish by the end of the week. On the other hand, materials and tools breaking are slowing us down. After work we all went to Epeli's house and sang happy birthday to Freddie! He even got a cake from Urata which looked spectacular. We also saw today's sick lot, one of the girls' houses. Roxana, Nedji, Bella, and Tash were all out today, and they seem to have the bug worse than us, bar Nedji. Tash actually had to go to hospital in Savusavu and is staying the night on a drip to rehydrate her. Enrico's also still recovering, with stitches due on Friday, although he's mostly bored sitting around with no work. We took a nice short swim before dinner, then had some rice, beans, and stew. Now we're about to head to the hall to celebrate Freddie's birthday!

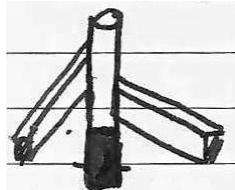
Quite a nice short evening at the hall, a bit of music and even some dancing! Now I'm more than ready for a good rest.

THURSDAY 25TH JULY

I woke up after a vivid dream where I received a watch for Christmas, (I think I forgot that

Christmas is 25th December, not July) and we had buns for breakfast. They were lovely with peanut butter and raspberry jam, but quite heavy. Oisín got up extra early to watch the Olympic rugby at Epeli's house, where Fiji beat the US, then Ireland beat Japan. At the hospital, the doctors say we've had gastroenteritis, and prescribed antibiotics for anyone who's had it. However, we're not bothering in our house, as they tend to give antibiotics too freely, and it may not even be a bacterial infection. Tash is still in hospital, and due to stay a second night, as she had some acute kidney failure, but luckily, she's feeling fine. Enrico also took the school bus to town and checked on her during his daily check-up. On site this morning it was yet again more concrete and carrying 8×2 timber to site. The carrying was the most tough, and then we saw a Fijian (Api's dad) carry one alone on his shoulder! We struggle when three of us try one! Lunch was at home today, and I had a lovely bit of rice and curry, followed by a good powernap. This afternoon began with squaring the pine poles for the reception. I was down a hole hugging pole R15 upright while others hammer 8×2s along the poles. This is so that the poles are definitely

level, and in the right place, as the prefabricated timber frames will sit on the poles. The next step is to fill with concrete once the poles are all squared. However, my afternoon was cut short as Jamie put in the



final pine pole. Instead of lifting it gently, he hoisted it onto his back and dropped it in upside down, with rebar sticking out at the top! I was beside the hole holding up the adjacent pole, so when Jamie's pole fell, it pushed me right over an 8×2 and into a pile of mud! Now I've got a nasty-looking scrape down my right shin, so I actually was very lucky. The rebar could have hit my head; I could have fallen into a hole rather than over; scraped a nail rather than timber; or hit my leg worse and broken it! Jess took me down to the stream to wash away the mud and provide first-aid. Isabel came over with a prescribed orange, then Jamie came with water and was extremely apologetic for his foolish carrying. Now I'm back at home resting, and the rain's just begun, so I got off just in time!

ose – horse

qelegele – brown

drokadroka – green
dravudravu – grey
karakarawa – blue
loaloa – black
damudamu – red
piqi – pink
dromodromo – yellow
koula – golden yellow
lokaloka – orange
vulavula – white
siliva – silver
iloilo – clear
senikavika – purple

Saki got back from work and decided to teach me the colours, and the word horse, because this morning before stretches, a horse galloped right up the road! Luckily Ape was there to wrangle the cheeky horse and take it back home.

FRIDAY 26TH JULY

Last night we had Freddie, Brychan, Roxana, Nedji, Isabel, and Bella at our house to plan the upcoming weekend. Our consensus was to ask Josh for help, as he's been around the area many times and knows how to book

these things. This morning Enrico, Oisín, and I are up early waiting for breakfast, and Semi's playing football with a pair of my socks.

lawaki – don't cheat me!

Saki tells Semi the *tapioka* is *katakata*,
Semi says, “*lawaki!*”

Breakfast was all cassava, fried and boiled. The fried cassava was delicious, just like a hash brown, but I wasn't a fan of the boiled cassava as it had a strange texture and was bright blue! Now we're waiting until eight o'clock for the rugby to start, as Fiji are playing Ireland in the Olympics.

I thought I may have the day off today, but when Jess came by this morning, she said that with a covered dressing, I'd be fine to carry sandbags to site.

gerekere – gravel

coka – diarrhoea (word of the day is back!)

uca – rain

colacola – lifting

vakamalua – slowly

So, this morning I did nothing but carry bags onto site to supply materials for yet more

concrete. Only twelve of the total twenty were fit to work, as well as some Fijians, so work is slower than usual. In total, I supplied 15 bags to site in the pouring rain, mostly sand, and some gravel and cement. They must be around 20-30kgs each, but the cement is 40! Fortunately, seven of them I carried only from the other side of the big hill, rather than all the way from the car park like the rest. Now we're just resting after eating plenty of rice and curry, which was delicious today.

This afternoon was equally heavy, just more lifting until all the materials were gone. In total, I brought 21 bags today. Afterwards, we all had a swim at the beach, where I won a race to the buoys! The sea water will work wonders for my leg. Then, we all laid in the sun with some music on, gazing up at the coconut trees. Seeing the sunlight peering over the mountains and the verdant leaves swaying in the blue sky definitely makes up for all the heavy lifting in the mud and rain. Upon returning to the village, we were told that everyone's going to the hall for kava before dinner. It's to be expected on a Friday night, but we would all rather have something to eat after all that swimming.

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I've just had a quick shower, and Loloma is in the kitchen preparing some vegetables with the Bluetooth speaker on. His favourite thing is to call one of our names as we pass by, often "Taniela!" or "Daniel!", to which I reply: "Loloma!". Saki even sings a song that goes:

loloma, loloma, loloma, loloma,
cecere, cecere, cecere, cecere

Although I'm not sure what *cecere* means.

For dinner Marianne made sausages, fried eggs, and potato chips! A bit of a Friday treat, I enjoyed the potato chips and had some veggie noodles too. After dinner we headed to the beach to stargaze. It was such a clear night; I had never seen so many stars before! Brychan says that you can see more stars in the Southern Hemisphere, because you're angled toward the centre of the galaxy. It was so bright that I could see the Southern Cross, and the Milky Way. We headed back to the village, aiming for the hall, but stopped at the pink house and discussed loose plans for the weekend. Finally, we played a few rounds of werewolf in a circle, and I managed to deceive the villagers when I was a werewolf. Now we're back home and ready for a late-night

snooze, although we may be up early yet for the Olympic opening ceremony.

SATURDAY 27TH JULY

This morning began with a lovely breakfast of bread and baked beans! The beans were lovely and tasted like rich tomatoes and were excellent on bread. I had plenty of margarine, jam, and peanut butter on the rest of the bread. Now Saki's just told us to come and groom a cow, while we were trying to watch the Olympic opening ceremony.

We went over to Saki's farm and saw a nice pig and stroked a beautiful young bull with round black eyes. Then we planted some vudi trees that were sprouting from a mother tree. Saki says that this time next year, they will bear fruit. We also planted some cassava after Joe cut down a small tree with the big knife. Finally, we had a couple of fresh coconuts, which Saki says us guys can only have in the morning (coconuts in the afternoon is only for the ladies).

gunu bu – drink a coconut

tei tapioka – plant the cassava

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Now we're in a restaurant in Savusavu, I've just ordered some vegetarian black beans and rice from the friendly Indians. Semesa (Jamie's Fijian brother) says this place is much cheaper and nicer than Copra Shed. We just had a quick wander around town, getting some clothes and souvenirs from Jack's as they have a crazy sale! Then we stopped in a supermarket for some snacks, and it was the busiest place I'd been to, always saying "tilou!". I picked up some Tang, Oreos, and Fanta pineapple, which was so refreshing on this hot sunny day.

That was absolutely delicious! For only \$10FJD that's a great deal, and I poured some Bombay mix on top for some crunch. The plan now is to gather in this restaurant, then get a taxi to Daku resort to meet the girls that got a taxi there earlier. They also visited the hospital, and got Tash, who was finally discharged now that she's feeling better. At the resort, we may try to hire kayaks, or just relax at the pool. It's also on the seafront, on the way to Split Rock, so we might go for a swim.

The whole group is sat around the pool at Daku resort chatting and swimming. It's a

lovely, picturesque area of little *bure* huts and a central reception where we're getting Fiji Bitters. We were just chatting to some Kiwi and an Australian girl, who are staying at the resort for a yoga retreat, and they actually came to visit Vuadomo waterfall!

sere – song

maqavuka – plane

totoka – beautiful

Up on the hill we just visited the resort's yoga platform. It was absolutely beautiful, huge open walls with a view of all of Savusavu Bay! We can even see Vuadomo from here. Now we're going to hire some kayaks, but it's just started raining, so we're going to hire some kayaks, but it's just started raining, so we're moving to take cover.

Kayaking was amazing! Absolutely beautiful scenery of the bay and great rolling clouds. The clouds did briefly turn to rain as we were heading back, which was very atmospheric if a bit spooky. I had a little swim out with the vessels, but they proved much faster, so I took a ride back on Serena's paddleboard. We watched the sunset from the balcony and enjoyed some (pricey) resort drinks. For dinner we went back to Copra Shed where I

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struggled to finish a portion of large chips. After a nice Fiji Bitter (in my Fiji Bitter shirt) we looked for a taxi back to Vuadomo. The one we took was the most dodgy taxi ride of my life! The driver was swerving around potholes, chatting on the phone, and blasting some Cantonese music, which Enrico actually recognised. Now we're more than ready for a good rest after that busy, but relaxing day.

SUNDAY 28TH JULY

Pie was for breakfast this morning, then Oisín and I visited Loloma's to see his *lovo*, a Fijian barbecue. So far it looks like a good fire with lots of hot stones on top and hitting it with banana leaves. Soon we're getting taxis to Savusavu, where we're renting three cars. The plan is to do a road trip either north towards Labasa, or east towards Naweni, and find things to do on the way.

vualiku – north

sauca – south

vuara – west

tokelau – east

In Savusavu now with our three cars, which are pretty big! I'm in a pickup truck which Serena is driving carefully, but it's a bumpy ride! We're on the road to Naweni now, due to stop at a lagoon! I also stopped in Jack's and got a Drua bucket hat which I thought was \$40, but in the "Krazy Sale" it was just \$35!

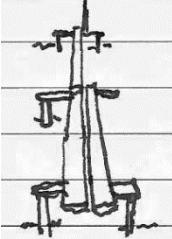
cecere – great, high, almighty

We're now sat in Copra Shed dancing with a random hippie lady and drinking Fiji Gold. Everyone is famished after today so we're ordering lots of food!

I've had a great large portion of chips, and others have enjoyed the Sunday barbecue, particularly the raw chicken drumsticks. Now I'll recount the busy day we've had. After Savusavu we headed east towards Naweni and stopped by a picturesque lagoon and took lots of pictures. We also tried our luck at Koro Sun resort, but they asked us to leave, although we still got some nice pictures.

Brychan was an incredible drive, singing and dancing behind the wheel and dodging potholes. Then we arrived in Naweni District School to see the kindergarten (a previous Caukin project), and the current prototype

house project. The village was next, where we saw the famous (or infamous) Naweni Bridge, which was in fact just some wooden boards, only one or two wide, suspended on some sketchy supports. It was so frightening over the wide shallow river, I had to crawl! Once we reached the trees at the other side, the bridge continued for a good distance through the mangroves. Despite the risk of falling at any moment, it was a pretty walk over the mud and mangrove roots. When we returned to the village, we were invited inside for some Tang and scones. They were very welcomed, as we had had no lunch, and actually ended up being the last thing we ate before Copra Shed. The custard scones were particularly nice, as they ran out of milk and used orange Tang instead!



Back in Vuadomo now and it's great to be home! I was almost falling asleep in the taxi home, except when the driver stopped at a shop for some beer. He told us how he was in bed when we called, so he needs the beer for when he goes back home to relax. I'll finish off the Naweni story tomorrow, as I'm very tired and need to rest for work!

MONDAY 29TH JULY

The final stretch of our Naweni adventures was our trip to see the red prawns. After Tang and scones, we set off with a Naweni villager named Dan, and Saki as our guides. I was under the impression that it was only a short walk, and a wade through the mangroves, so I set off in bare feet! In fact, it turned out to be an hour-long trek through the jungle following a slightly lost tour guide, who luckily lent me his boots. Throughout the journey, scrambling over razor-sharp rocks, and swinging on vines, we all became slightly more convinced that we might not leave the jungle. However eventually we arrived at a steep rocky crevice that was meant to lead to the beach.

Dan had us climb onto his shoulders so that he could lower each of us down one by one. He called it the Fiji Elevator. The crevice led to a large gap in the rock facing the sea, where we all sat and had a rest, glad to be out of the jungle.

taga – sack

au cola nuku – I'm lifting sand

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Around the corner we got to the correct beach and ventured back into the trees in search of the elusive prawns. This time we waded through thick mangrove growth via a central path through water and stepping stones. Soon the route opened up to a secluded clearing, where we finally reached the pool, after wading through murky and very unpleasant water. The water was crawling with baby prawns swimming about, but there was no sign of the red prawns.

Then Dan started to sing:

Keitou na turaga mai Vuna,
Keitou via mai sarava na Ura buta,
Tuba tuba tuba e,
Tuba tuba tuba e,
Tuba tuba tuba e!

The translation reads: “We are the gentlemen from Vuna; We are here to watch the red prawns; Out out out hey!” This relates to the legend of the prawns, as it is said the people of Naweni originated from Vuna, on Taveuni island. The legend goes that a man from Vatulele island was in love with a lady from Vuna, so he went to visit her in a canoe. As the red prawns originate from Vatulele, he took

some with him to Vuna. On the way, he stopped by Naweni for a rest, where two twin ladies invited him for lunch. These twins, Domodomoca and Domodomovinaka, were the owners of that creek we saw in Naweni. Once the man left Naweni and reached Vuna, he realised that he had forgotten the prawns! So, they both returned to that creek in Naweni and offered a song to the prawns. This is the origin of that song, and once we sang it, we saw the same thing as the legendary couple. Huge red prawns emerged within the deep clear pool and began dancing at the surface! They swam back and forth and even performed summersaults as we sang. I thought their show was quite spectacular, but some were rather underwhelmed at the result of the treacherous hike! The red prawns can still only be found in two places in Fiji, that creek in Naweni, and Vatulele island.

Fortunately, we didn't go back the jungle way, as it was getting dark by then. Instead, we followed the coast around to a beach where they filmed some of the TV show "Survivor". From there we took a short walk through the trees, on a real path, until we found the road to Naweni village. Back in the village, we said

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our goodbyes and drove back down the Hibiscus Highway, packed in the boot with Saki and Charlotte. Then dinner was in Copra Shed, the rest you know.

Today was another concrete day, but surprisingly quick! The changing room foundations are now finished, and a good start has been made on the reception too. The supporting 8×2s were removed from the treatment room, as well as the nails and plastic wrap. I didn't personally mix any concrete today, just more carrying of sandbags. Although the work was tough, my spirits were high as I pass people on the path, especially Adriano, who always has a smile on his face. Lunch was in the hall today, and I enjoyed an enormous plate of rice and dhal. For the rest of the afternoon, I felt well-fed and energised! After work I met the Caukin team in the pink house for a briefing, as I will be team leader tomorrow. Then everyone met to discuss plans for next weekend. Our resort offer at Nukubati unfortunately fell through, so instead we're going to Taveuni, Fiji's third largest island east of Vanua Levu. Tomorrow, Joe and I will go to Savusavu to enquire about the ferry to Taveuni, as well as trying to

change flights. We're also thinking to bring Enrico, who needs his stitches re-done; and Tash, who wants to pick things up in town. She was doing better and was discharged on Saturday but took a bad turn Sunday night and went back to hospital. Fortunately, she's back in the village and feeling better again now. It sounds like it'll be a busy day, hopefully not too stressful, so now I'll be off to bed to rest for the day ahead.

TUESDAY 30TH JULY

This morning, I was the team leader on site, and though I was up in the night nervous about my new responsibilities, I did a grand job. My question for everyone was where they would live if they could travel to any period of history. There were many varied answers, such as 1920s for the jazz and fashion, and the 1960s also. Then I led the team in some qigong movements, which were very well-received. My word of the day was “vuasa levu” (very cheeky), which Charlotte has already made good use of on Api. Once everyone was briefed, I headed to town with Joe, Enrico, and Tash. Joe and I succeeded in changing our domestic flights from Labasa to

Savusavu, as well as getting a direct flight instead of a layover in Suva.

Our primary goal in town was to book us all a ferry to Taveuni this weekend. Everyone gave me \$25 each before we left, but we found out that we couldn't book in advance, but actually pay there in the morning. Also, it wasn't \$25 for the return, but each way! All in all, the trip wasn't very successful, but very informative, and great for me and Joe to change flights so easily. Then we returned to the village, and I headed to site as team leader to oversee the work. Concrete pouring has had to stop, as materials have completely run out, so most people are working on frames in the car park. On site, a small team are cutting the pine poles to size and outlining the cuts for the joints. Once this is done, the prefab frames can simply slot into place in situ.

Lunch was a lovely feast in the hall, where I had plenty of crispy taro leaves and rice. Work this afternoon was mostly frames, as we were extremely low on cement, so there was little concrete to pour. Some still needed to mix concrete though, to finish off the cement, so as team leader I elected myself, and took Joe, who lost rock-paper-scissors

against Oisín. Jamie also nominated himself to carry sand, so we all mixed away with a hearty team of Fijians. That afternoon passed by quickly, and we filled all but three holes, and completely exhausted our remaining cement. By the end it was only Joe and myself supplying Fijians who would say “Thank you dear!” with each bag, or “Don’t worry dear!” when Joe dropped a bag into the mix. I found it very funny, and the Fijians didn’t seem to stop laughing, but Joe was very unimpressed. With the final pour, we tidied and joined the rest in the car park. Although it was quarter to five, we kept at it for another half hour, as we’re aiming to finish the remaining six frames by the end of the week. After lots of hammering, and a good few dodgy nails, Jamie, Bella, Enrico, and I called “Tools down!” As my morning qigong warmup was so popular, I led an afternoon cool-down as well. Everyone enjoyed it, especially Jamie, who was rather upset to have missed the morning qigong, as he was waiting for Semesa to have a shower. Joe even told me that he overheard Josh saying that I was the best leader yet!

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For dinner we had some cassava, dhal, and instant noodles. We're considering a bit of kava at the hall tonight, as we haven't been in ages, but we're also very tired! Bella's just popped a message in the group chat offering a game of werewolves, so we'll almost definitely join for that!

WEDNESDAY 31ST JULY

vakelulu – Wednesday

Charlotte kicked off the day as team leader, and I enjoyed some simple stretches, having ad *babakau* with peanut butter and banana to power me. On site I started assembling the second large frame, which is now almost complete. Once we received a new cut list, Joe, Enrico, and I cut new 6×2s for the treatment room's large frame. About halfway through the morning, the concrete pouring was finally finished, to little fanfare. After that, we had an entourage of Fijians to help, so Joe and I moved to a new cut list for the treatment room's small frame. That saw us through to lunch, though we are nearly out of 6×2s, so we'll probably spend the afternoon assembling. Lunch was in the hall again and I

had a good bit of curry and rice. Enrico and I were chatting to Tash, who says she plans to come to site tomorrow, for the first time since the first week. She's also hoping to stay a bit longer, as she's missed so much time being ill.

The afternoon was long, hot, and tough. Joe and I finished our cuts and are due to assemble the penultimate frame. Instead, we spent the rest of the afternoon helping Freddie, Serena, and Roxana finish a small frame. After work I headed to the waterfall on my own for a swim, as it's waterfall Wednesday. It was extremely relaxing and peaceful there alone, as the water was quite chilly and thundered down onto my head like hailstones. I joined everyone else down at the beach for a dip too but made it brief as it was growing dark. I'm hoping that the seawater will do some good on my hands, which suffered from flying sawdust and intense hammering today.

Tonight, we had what may have been my favourite dinner yet, stuffed taro leaves with beans and cassava. I'd not tried the stuffed leaves yet, as they are typically stuffed with corned beef, but Mariannie made me a special one! Despite the wonderful taste, we all

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reported some throat irritation afterwards, which Joe blamed on the taro leaves. After dinner, Roxana, Issy, Bella, Tash, Freddie, and Brychan came over to play some more werewolves. Again, it was great fun, and much more comfortable in our sitting room than the pink house's porch. Once we'd had a good few games, we ventured up to the hall for the first time in a long while and had some kava. The kava was good fun; we were chatting with Saki and Nedji having a lovely time. So now Enrico and I are back at the house and feeling very ready for bed.

au lako gunu yaqona – I'm going to drink kava

au naku i moce – I'm going to sleep

THURSDAY 1ST AUGUST

My plans to rest last night were disrupted when Joe snuck in and whispered, “Dan! There’s wine on the beach.” Though I had only just lay down, I started back up and put my trousers on. On the beach were plenty of *kaiviti*, and myself, Joe, Oisín, Jamie, Freddie, Brychan, Roxana, and Nedji. There wasn’t much wine but there was lots of dancing; it

was actually great fun! By midnight Jamie was planning a taxi to town for more drinks, (black market drinks as shops were closed) but we all decided it was rather too late, as we have work this morning. Still, he went to town with Semesa while we headed to bed, so who knows if he'll be punctual on site this morning. For breakfast, roti with raspberry jam and peanut butter, now I'm ready for another hot, sunny day.

This morning was absolutely brilliant! The work on site is completely finished thanks to the expertise of the chainsaw king. On the frames, Oisín and I took the treatment room's small frame almost to completion. Now there are just two frames to go, with everyone ready to work. This morning there was talk of taking tomorrow afternoon off, if we work enough today, but then at lunch it was suggested that we could possibly take the whole day off! I'm certain we'll finish the frames today, as mine and Oisín's is just getting the final layer put on. Although, we are also finishing slightly early today, because we're cooking for the village! Nedji has allocated a dish from home for each house to cook, and then bring to the hall for us and the villagers to enjoy. Our

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house is on chilli con carne, as well as a veggie version, and rice. Others are doing egg fried rice, garlic bread, and Bulgarian moussaka. As for lunch today, we were treated with baked bean sandwiches! They went down a treat with everyone, and were nicely accompanied by dhal, rice, and cucumber. The cucumbers are also particularly nice, as they are larger and saltier than back home. Just before lunch, Oisín and I were having a banana/suki break with the Fijians, when we were told to go to site for headshots. We each took a turn smiling with the Caukin hardhat on, and I got to see the chainsaw king in action cutting joints into the pine poles. Now it's time to head back to site and smash these last two frames.

This afternoon was another great success. Although there was a point where the batteries ran out and Saki couldn't drill, we still managed to finish all the frames. There was also a musical interlude where I played the spanner and water bottle as percussion. As we finished this week's tasks, we're taking tomorrow off as a long weekend! Immediately after work, Bella, who has been the best leader yet (though hasn't topped my

warmup), led a debrief, and we went to the pink house. There, Nedji distributed our ingredients, and cooking began. I started by peeling potatoes for the moussaka, then headed home to lead the veggie chilli. We beautifully cooked five kilograms of rice for us, and the rice pudding team, just over the fire with banana leaves to cover it. Then I prepared the onion, garlic, and lentils, which are now simmering away nicely. Initially the cooking was a bit hectic and disorganised, with Joe running between houses, and Nedji worrying about feeding everyone. However, it's now nice and relaxed at ours, just sitting and waiting for the lentils.

The chilli is all mixed and simmering away now. We even managed to get some nice cumin seeds, chilli powder, and curry powder, so it seems like a promising dish! There was talk of some Fiji Gold on the beach tonight to celebrate a great week, but it's raining a bit now, so it could be an indoors evening.

Just gave the chilli a little taste and it's really good! It's got a lovely kick but isn't too spicy, so we're just letting it simmer some more before we take it all to the hall. I reckon the

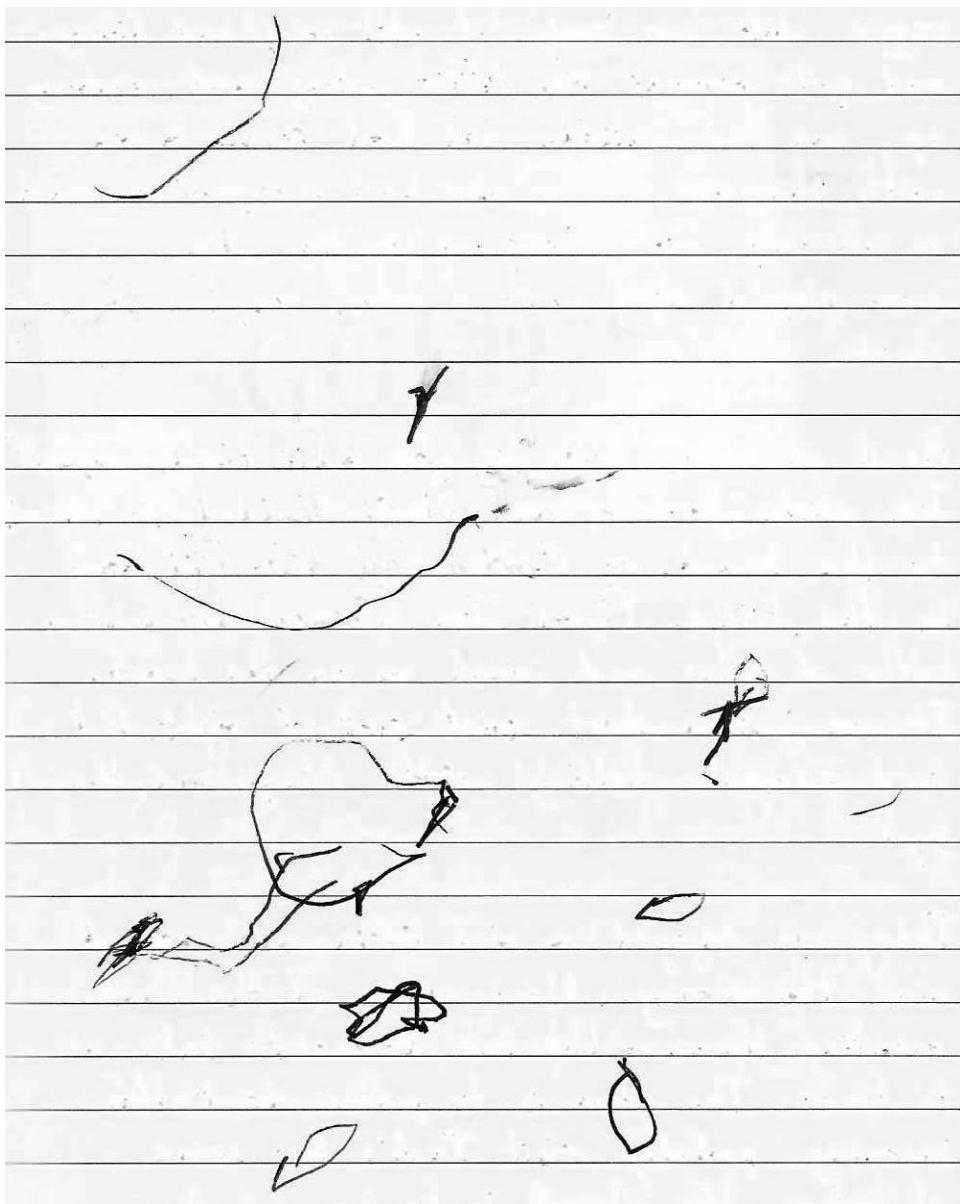
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Fijians will like ours, as they like some spice, and chilli is not dissimilar to some Fijian food.

FRIDAY 2ND AUGUST

Overleaf you'll find an original Semi artwork. I was lucky enough to have him draw it before we went to the hall. Last night at the hall it was very professional, as we plated up and lay out all of our dishes while the children patiently waited. Nedji then led a *sevusevu* for the special dinner with the chief, and she gave an excellent speech expressing our gratitude for the wonderful hospitality we have received. Although we intended for the women and children to eat first, they insisted that we sit with them. The veggie chilli was lovely, if a bit spicy and filling, and quite popular too. After eating and washing up, we sat outside and had some kava with the men. They also had two guitars and an ukulele, with everyone singing along. I even played along with a song, copying Kesa's chords.

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As it got later, and we got a bit tired, myself, Joe, Enrico, and Nedji decided to sneak to the beach, as Enrico had two Fiji Golds in the fridge. Fijian Joe (Joseva) brought a bottle of wine and joined us on the beach. It was just a short, quiet sort of night, but very pleasant chatting with Nedji and the guys.

Today we enjoyed a nice lie-in until around nine this morning. Now we're at the hall awaiting Hamman the taxi driver to take us to town. The plan is to potter about this morning, probably visit Jack's for some shopping, then lunch in town.

batabata – cold

papajou – junior (for little Semi)

liliwa – cold

rairai vinaka – beautiful

In Savusavu Wok Chinese restaurant now, waiting for my Mongolian tofu. We stopped by Jack's but sadly the "Krazy Sale" is no more. Still, I got a Fiji Gold T-shirt and a Fijian Drua bottle opener ring. Joe and I also managed to find the ferry company we were looking for and got a ticket for twenty of us to go to Taveuni tomorrow.



I've just devoured some Mongolian tofu, and it was exquisite, with lots of rice and a Fiji Gold. Now we're waiting for some more beers before we meet with everyone else and head down the peninsula. We're planning to visit a chocolate factory near Daku resort, called Kokomana.

Kokomana unfortunately didn't have any tours, as we got there around three o'clock, but they did lead chocolate tasting for us. They explained the process from cacao pod to roasted nib, which is one of the main ingredients, as well as Fijian sugar. We tasted 85% cacao plain, 70\$ plain, 70% with sea salt, 70% with chilli, and 70% with chai masala. All of the ingredients are locally sourced in Fiji, with chilli from Viti Levu, salt from Natewa

Bay, and chai from Labasa. The chai was definitely my favourite, not too strong or bitter. After the tasting, the guide took us on a short walk around the farm, because she felt bad about us missing the tour. As well as cacao trees, they grow taro, kava, and medicinal plants on the farm. Then we took a short walk through the forest and met some of the girls at Daku resort. Now we're hanging out around the pool with some Fiji Bitters.

nuku – beach

qalo – swim

Dinner is back at Savusavu Wok, after a nice rum cocktail at Daku. Freddie and Jamie had a quick water-based skirmish, fuelled by Charlotte's water guns. It was a great way to spend a Friday afternoon, rather than working away on frames! Here, I've ordered some satay tofu, and vegetable stir fry, because I'm very hungry!

My food took the longest to arrive but was much more than I bargained for! I did manage to get through it, and lots of Fiji Gold too, but I was stuffed by the end. We took the carrier back to the village, and now I'm packing for the weekend away in Taveuni. I just need a

quick shower, then ready to sleep until just before 4 o'clock in the morning! Then the bus will take us all the way to the ferry to Taveuni. It's only around ten o'clock now, so it should be a sleepy morning.

Just as I was finishing my shower, I was taken aback by the sound of someone saying "meow... meow..." The voice didn't sound like Semi or Leniana, and when I looked through the gaps in the wall, I saw no-one. But I knew who it was once I heard "Meow Taniela!" It was Loloma! All I could do was Laugh.

SATURDAY 3RD AUGUST

Just as I was sleeping away peacefully, I'm awoken by Joe whispering my name. It's time to get up for Taveuni, and we've got to leave the house in five minutes. As I finished brushing my teeth, Saki appeared, fully dressed, and said, "Fiji times, ah?"

After a steep trek out of the village, we're now sat at the bus stand waiting for the bus. The walk was actually quite tough, even sweaty in the early morning cool. Saki's also tagged along, but we're not sure if he's coming all the way to Taveuni or not. The stars look magical

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in the darkness; you can see Orion the archer as clear as day.

After almost boarding the wrong bus, we took a strange ride to the ferry. In Savusavu, the bus stopped, and a man walked through the aisle selling curry for just \$2. I didn't try one' although my Fijian bus mate offered some of his. En route to Naweni, the sun began to rise, and shone a deep crimson through the windscreen. Then we picked up the Naweni group and continued to the Vatuyalewa jetty in Loa.

The ferry was actually quite a nice ride; we sat at the top deck and watched Kioa island sail past until we reached Taveuni. At the ferry dock, our pick-up trucks were waiting, so we set off to the hostel. Arriving at the hostel we met a friendly staff member whom we had a nice chat with about our stay in Fiji. The hostel is very fancy, as it used to be a resort. It features a nice bar, a pool, and even hot showers! After signing in and dropping off our bags we walked down to the beach café for some lunch. I've ordered a veggie stir-fry (again) which I'm waiting for now. There was also a strange mix-up, as Jamie didn't come with us from the ferry, but instead he went to

a village for a *sevusevu*. At the resort, Emily (from the Naweni team) couldn't get a bed, because we'd already booked it all out. Fortunately, as things do in Fiji, it all worked out in the end. Jamie just appeared here at the café and told us that he's staying the nights in the village, so Emily can take his bed.

After a lovely stir-fry, we got in the trucks and drove to Tavolo waterfall, in Bouma natural heritage park. The view on the drive was the most beautiful view I had seen yet. On one side there were verdant valleys dense with greenery, that looked fit for dinosaurs to roam. On the other, white sandy beaches fit for a postcard, and turquoise reefs blending into deep blue sea. I didn't even take any photos on the way, as I was too mesmerised on the journey. I travelled in Serena's car, who was a pretty good driver, and supplied a lovely soundtrack too. Once at Tavolo, we paid a discounted price of \$25 and set off into the jungle. After a flowery 20-minute stroll we arrived at what may be the tallest waterfall in Fiji. Joe reckons it's about 50m high. Before we went in, we walked up another 20 minutes to a second waterfall. On the way, there was a

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lookout point; the view of the jungle and the ocean was incredible!

We took the river crossing route to waterfall two, which was nicely isolated and peaceful. Joe, Oisín, and Issy were already getting in, so I promptly joined. The area was more spacious and open than Vuadomo waterfall, so I could swim around a good deal and climb on a log. Although it was cold, it was nicely refreshing, especially under the waterfall. Next, we hiked back down to waterfall one, which was definitely my favourite. Behind the water there was a grand chasm that I climbed into, as well as three smaller, deeper caves. The most incredible and awesome thing was the power of the water. Swimming anywhere near it, you were pushed away, and underneath, it's difficult to stay afloat as you're pushed down, and the water spray filled the air.

SUNDAY 4TH AUGUST

After the incredible waterfall swimming, I saw a sea snake, and drove the pick-up back towards the hostel for a bit. It's great fun speeding down the gravel track. Then Joe and

I swapped seats, and I taught him how to drive a manual car. After a shaky start, he actually drove quite well, considering he doesn't have a license, and only stalled two or three times.

Back at the hostel, we quickly got ready and then went to reception to meet everyone for dinner. Being the boys, we were first to arrive, so we sat down for some kava! They have a Fijian mat and *tanoa* and guitars, just like the village! We chatted with the friendly Fijians who replied "*Bula si'a!*" when I said, "*Bula re!*" I even got to play along with them on a pink ukulele. I think Freddie put it best when he said, "You can take the boy out of the village, but you can't take the village out of the boy." Once we'd had two *bilos*, everyone was ready, and we went to the restaurant. There, we met Jamie and the other Naweni lot for dinner, which was already being served as we arrived. I had a lovely veggie curry, and although it was cold by the time I got it, it was really tasty and filling. As we were finishing, a speaker started to play "Girls just want to have fun", and up I went to dance with Enrico and some others. Once the next song began, "Dancing Queen", everyone was up! For the

next few hours we danced, ordered Fiji Gold (by pointing at my Fiji Gold top), and danced some more.

danisi – dance

Eventually we left, but not without grabbing a kava *bilo* on the way out, and all squeezed into one pick-up with about ten of us in the back, and Joe hanging off the back. Then we headed to the beach with red wine and a speaker. Outside the room, Freddie, Enrico, Joe, and I planned to be as quiet as possible getting our wine – as per “hostel culture”. When we entered, we found that none of our roommates were there, and we snuck in quietly for nothing! On the beach we sat and had a good chat, and Nedji and Freddie started a bonfire with dried palm leaves and logs. It turned out we were actually sat on a private beach of a lodge, and the café that we ate at earlier. When a woman appeared to tell us off, she only asked us to move along, and didn’t mind our fire on their property. So, we headed down to the public beach, which was just past Tramonto, where we had dinner and dancing earlier! So naturally we went in for another *bilo* of kava with the Fijians en route. For the rest of the night, we just sat, chatted,

and played a game with Bella's phone. Finally, we all got up and walked back to the hostel, where I fell asleep in my clothes with sand everywhere.

This morning, I was up around half past eight o'clock, and I felt fine. I was delighted to have the luxury of a hot shower, with a locking door instead of a curtain. Then, I relaxed by the pool with a coffee, for which I said "*Vinaka na kofii!*" and the manager was very impressed and asked if I spoke Fijian. There, I recounted last night in the diary and watched as others made their way down from their beds. In the hostel, there's a convenient sign of Fijian words, but they are also slightly different to what I know, as it's Taveuni dialect.

na yacaqu ko... – my name is...

o cei na yacamu tu? – what's your name

yadra vina'a – good morning

tucake – stand

va cava tiko? – how are you?

vina'a – thank you

(as opposed to *Wailevu vinaka*)

au domoni iko – I love you

With some others awake, I had some beans on toast for breakfast, which was actually a

lovely way to start the day. Then, I hopped into the back of a pick-up with Roxana, and Brychan drove us (quite bumpily) to Waitavala Natural Waterslide. I was expecting a small slippery rock, but what I saw was an incredible valley of smooth rock, with a fresh stream rushing through. Beyond the slides were more great waterfalls, which Oisín and I climbed up to the top of, to find a friendly gang of Fijians drinking Fiji Bitter. One of them I was chatting to told me that his cousin is Semi Radradra, a rugby player from Somosomo, Taveuni, who played for the Bristol Bears! Also at the waterfall was my bunkmate from the hostel, who was riding the slide stood up like a surfer! The slides were so fun, all kinds of fast ones and bumpy, all along the smooth valley rock. I must have gone down it about five times; we even went in tandem on the fast bits. There was also a big group of Fijian teens who went down in a massive group and challenging each other to jump into the not-very-deep pool. After plenty of swimming, we headed up the road to see the international date line at 180° longitude. While it was quite an underwhelming sign, I

found it fascinating to be able to jump over the line a move a day in time.

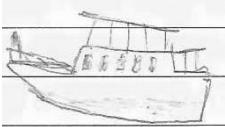
For lunch we stopped at a restaurant called Kai Time, where my Algerian bunkmate appeared again on his quad bike, wearing steampunk sunglass goggles. I was astonished to see that the restaurant had a veggie menu, so I got a falafel salad and tried a Vonu beer. The restaurant was very quiet when we arrived, and they weren't expecting our big group of 18, so the food took a long while to come. Despite our great first impression – beautiful view and reasonable price – the food was very disappointing. People ordered smoothies that came as milkshakes – milk with a bit of flavouring. The beef burgers looked like they were Spam! Fortunately, my salad was actually not bad for the price, and it featured pineapple and olives, although it did also appear underwhelming.

Next, we took a detour in Nedji's car to another resort, where she picked up a book for a PADI open water SCUBA course. Enrico, Emily, and I were sat in the truck for a good while watching the overweight dogs and underweight cat run around, while Nedji

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chatted away with the resort lady. Eventually we managed to leave and go back to the hostel, meeting the others on the beach for a chat over some Twinings English breakfast tea. Right now, I'm in bed feeling very sleepy, and my pen is running out, so I'll finish this story tomorrow.

MONDAY 5TH AUGUST

I'm sat on the ferry to Vatuyalewa jetty early this morning, although it's a much smaller beat than the one we took to Taveuni. It's rocking about terribly at the jetty, about to set sail now. Last night after tea, we had some dinner back at the hostel. I chose a delicious pumpkin and ginger soup, with garlic bread and salad too. They even let us eat beside the pool, as the few tables were occupied. Sat relaxed by the water; I enjoyed my soup with some red wine. We stayed there for a while, and Joe even fell asleep on a sun lounger. Before heading to bed, I fancied some kava, so I sat with the Fijian guitar player and my Algerian bunkmate on the mat. My bunkmate brought his travel "guitalele", a very small

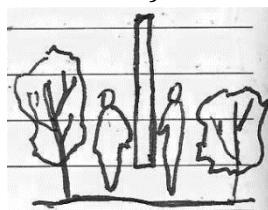
Yamaha guitar, which the Fijian had a try on, singing, “Knock, knock, knocking on heaven’s door,” and sometimes replacing “heaven’s door” with “kava bowl”. After a few *bilos*, I went to pack my bag, and get in bed. As for this morning, I got up just before six o’clock, grabbed my bag, and set off on the jetty. We very nearly missed the ferry, as Nedji drove straight past the turning for about ten minutes. However, this meant that we could see the Catholic church in Wairiki, which Adriano was telling me about on site before we left. It was definitely the most impressive church exterior I’ve seen in Fiji, and I would have liked to explore inside. Then, we turned back and got to the jetty just in time.

The ferry was followed by a sleepy bus ride from Loa to Savusavu. It was quite a nice ride, with good space for our bags. The Chinese woman from our hostel room even joined us on the bus to Savusavu. Getting off in Savusavu, Enrico and I were greeted by Saki, who I didn’t recognise thanks to a headscarf and beard. We have no idea how he knew when and where we’d be, but it was delightful to see him again. There was a light sort of drizzly rain, so we took shelter at Copra Shed,

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and I ordered some hash browns and a coffee. Next, Joe, Oisín, Enrico, Brychan, Roxana, and myself went to a hardware store for some machete shopping. I also picked up some souvenirs from Jack's to give as gifts. Back in the village, we were greeted happily by Epeli, Tima, and Semesa. Sat on the porch again we watched Api's dad, Mone, who is the most muscular guy in the village, playing with bubbles that Charlotte gave him. Now we're heading to site to help prepare for tomorrow.

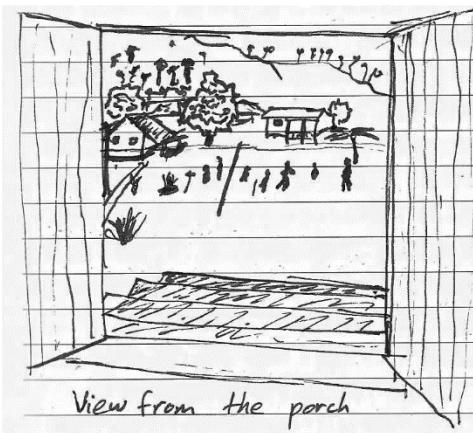
On site we moved the 8×2s out of the way, as well as all the metal drums and tools. Then we used our fresh machetes to clear the path a bit wider so that a frame and two people can fit. It was a very satisfying job slicing through the shrubs and replanting the cuttings. Wielding a machete in the jungle rain certainly was a unique experience. As I came back home and dropped off the knife, some of the village kids came by with Joe's rugby ball for some touch rugby. I was joined by Oisín and Joe and Jamie, who were all pretty good! Then I took a shower, and as I left, Saki



offered me some papaya. Now Enrico and I are relaxing on the porch watching the rugby.

na isele – the knife (machete)

Saki took the lead to kava nice and early, so I went along to find all the girls sat in the hall



learning to weave Fijian fans. Brychan and I had a quick kava *bilo* and sat down to weave. I first had a chat with one of the children, Rozie, who taught me

some Fijian, and looked at some family photos of mine. Rozie's grandmother, Salote, showed me how to weave my own fan, I just need to let it dry in the sun, and make a nice handle for it. Once the fan was complete, Joe and I came to join Oisín and Enrico back at Saki's. We had some lovely curry with cassava. It's a lovely welcome to be eating Marianne's cooking again, as well as seeing all the Vuadomo residents, who greeted us with a "*Bula!*".

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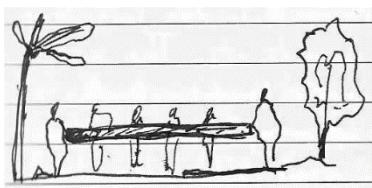
In fact, we're all rather sad to be leaving, even though we'd like to go home too. Fiji truly is a home away from home, as Fijians often say to you, "Welcome home." I was considering kava tonight, as I can now hear the guitar trio playing wonderfully, but I'm just tired and ready for my Vuadomo bed.

TUESDAY 6TH AUGUST

I slept really deeply last night; it was a bit of a struggle to get up this morning. Luckily Marianne decided to play some Fijian music on the speaker which woke us up. Today is due to be the hardest day on site, because we're going to try lifting the frames to site. When the Naweni team put up their frames, they needed to put it down to rest every few seconds. However, their frames were only five metres away from the foundations, on a nice open site. In contrast, our frames are about five hundred metres down a muddy, hilly, slippery, and quite narrow path. Not to mention that we have nine of them to take! The Fijians should be in charge of the heavy lifting itself, (though I worry some of the *kaivalagi* boys might be asked to help) with us

volunteers doing all the support, like clearing and bracing. So now it's time for a hearty breakfast to power us through the day.

The breakfast was a lovely sort of banana bread with peanut butter. I began on site with more bush whacking with Ape, ready for the frames to come down. When the first frame began to move, they ended up carrying it flat with people all around and inside the frame to lift. This means that most of the lifting was over the few bits of flat land adjacent to the path, so many of my carefully pruned bushes actually had to be removed. This also made the route extremely uneven, with banana tree stumps and boulders to navigate over with the frames. The process of carrying is both exciting and frightening, with about thirty men all coordinating through shouts of "Up!",



"Mamalua!", and "Cegu!". When the frame reaches to big hill just before site, the first frame

(treatment room reception – large) was hauled up with rope, but the second (reception – small) we just carried to the top ourselves. Then it is carefully lowered down

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the side of the hill with the ropes until it reaches ground below. It was hard to watch for the first time; the frame sliding down with people scrambling down the side to dislodge the frame whenever it catches some obstacle. Still, despite all the guesswork and uncertainty, all three morning frames went to site very smoothly. The last two only took a half hour each! It's going much better than I'd anticipated, but there's still the matter of getting them upright on the poles.

mamalua – slowly/easy/carefully

donu – okay?

dabu – stop playing/doing that

cava o iko? – how are you?

The afternoon passed quickly with little problems as well. First, we lifted another large frame down the path, for the reception, and hoisted it down to site. The next job was lifting the frame upright to slot onto the pine poles. Once it towered up among the trees, then came the really challenging job of lifting the whole frame up about 400mm, all while keeping it level by bracing with 4×2 timber and ropes. I watched on nervously from the path as the Fijians desperately tried to lift it

again and again. Eventually, after much trial and error, we all managed to get it in the right slot. Everyone cried, “*Vinaka!*” and we all stood by the frame for a celebratory photo. We even did some more photos of the *kaiviti* team and the *kaivalagi* team, then called tools down. In the village we were welcomed by tea in the hall, which was a local lemon tea, accompanied by breakfast crackers, and bread and butter. As I enjoyed the tea, I watched the Fijian men playing touch rugby, and chatted with some of the kids, Rozie and Tavita. Oisín, Joe, Matt, Josh, and Jamie all joined the rugby game, and I filmed as Jamie scored an excellent try. Then we enjoyed the sunset in the sea as we played with a frisbee, being sure to splash anyone who dares entering the middle of the circle.

sa dina – that’s right/true/honest

For dinner we just had a lovely veggie curry with rice, and now I’m sat back on the porch with Saki’s gang (me, Joe, Enrico, although Oisín isn’t actually here right now). We can’t believe that we’ll only have two more of Marianne’s dinners, and that we’ll have to say goodbye to the village, and the other volunteers too. Tomorrow morning, we’re on

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site extra early at eight o'clock, so we may go to the hall for some kava in order to get an early night around nine o'clock tonight. I can hear the guitars going now too, so it should be a lovely night.

The boys all came to the hall, and the girls went to Ite's house to learn some Fijian dancing. It was lovely at the hall because all of the guys that helped us out on site were there. I had a good chat with Adriano and listened to the guitars, and Scorpi's distinctive singing voice. I'm the first one to come back home now at half past nine, because I'm very tired. I had abandoned the idea of reading *The Hobbit* tonight because of my sleepiness, but now Marianne is back on the Bluetooth speaker, so it could be difficult to drift off.

WEDNESDAY 7TH AUGUST

Last night there was another small beach party involving red wine and a papaya pipe, but I'm glad to have missed it because I was fast asleep. *Babakau* was for breakfast, with plenty of peanut butter. Serena was team leader this morning and led a great dance-based warmup. Although we were on site

ready around eight o'clock, we had no option but to sit and wait for an hour and a half until the Fijians arrived. Then we could lift the final frame for the reception, the medium frame, which was actually not too tough.

Lunch today was a lovely spread of curries and soups in the hall, as well as baked bean sandwiches as a treat. After lunch we had planned to surprise Adriano with coffee at his house. Usually, Adriano doesn't drink kava because it doesn't agree with him, but as we're here, he goes every night in the hopes to see us. He's also one of the friendliest and most smiley villagers, who's always happy to talk to us. However, we found that all of the Fijian workers were asleep in his house! So instead, we took ourselves to the hall for tea and coffee. Nedji even came and surprised us with Turkish coffee, which she makes every day. With the coffee grounds, she also told people's fortunes.

After the tea party, we went back to work again. During the afternoon, we all managed to get two of the changing room's frames up, to make a total of five frames on site and in pine poles. Most are also bolted into the pine poles, with floor joists marked too. Now there

are only four more to erect, which we could finish tomorrow. After work there was some rugby and tea again, followed by a brief swim. On the way out of the water, Saki seemed very energised and excited. Now we're waiting at home for a big dinner tonight at the hall. Tomorrow is our last day, so there'll be a big ceremony and party with wine then. Tonight, Josh and Bella are leaving, so I think tonight is a small ceremony. Matt just came round to get us to sign a rugby ball that we'll offer to the village. Saki's now chatting happily away about the dinner ahead, and my vegetarian pot: "Pure vegetarian!" We've all got our *bula* shirts on ready for a lovely evening.

vakayakavi – dinner

Dinner at the hall was really lovely, with Epeli doing a nice speech for us, and Marianne giving me a special veggie dish. Afterwards, we sat and had grog for a good while on the porch, with some guitar playing and Fijian singing. Once we were feeling tired, Enrico, Joe, Oisín, and I said goodbye to Bella and set off home. On the way, Fijian Joe joined us, thinking we were going to the beach. We pieced together that Jamie and Semesa must be up to something, so we went down to

investigate. At the beach we were given whiskey and Fiji Gold upon arrival, then chatted with Mone, the most muscular guy in the village. He asked if we were leaving on Friday and said that they would all miss us dearly, because we are now like family. After some more Fiji Gold and some dancing, Enrico and I set off to bed. I'm extremely tired now, and certainly not looking forward to work tomorrow.

THURSDAY 8TH AUGUST

Breakfast this morning was some fried cassava, then Enrico, Joe, and I went to the pink house. As today is the last day, Joe, Enrico, and Brychan were all joint team leader. They led a lovely warm-up and asked everyone their favourite Fijian word.

na boto – the frog

The work was still very tough, but now the changing room's frames are finished, with just one light frame to carry to site this afternoon. Carrying the frames over uneven terrain with all that manpower is still quite an experience. At one point, I was coming up a rock, and the frame happened to land on my

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right foot as they set it down! I called out: “Up, up, up, up!” Thank goodness for my steel toe!

roqo – handle (the frame)

totolo – fast

lave - ? (Saki fell asleep as he told me this translation)

After the penultimate frame went down, I spent the rest of my morning carrying 2x2 timber down the path to site. It's not dissimilar to sandbag carrying, but much more awkward and uncomfortable, but lighter too. Then we enjoyed our final communal lunch in the hall. There was dhal, soup, breadfruit, and boundless cassava for everyone. Brychan, who had to go to town for his swollen toe, brought back fizzy drinks for us all to share with the lunch too. Now we're just resting with Saki asleep on the floor, not looking forward to the afternoon's work. Although, it hasn't been the toughest day, and it's nice to cherish our final day or volunteering.

In the afternoon, I focused on site work like cutting and nailing secondary beams. By the end of the day, all nine frames are up! I can't believe they were all moved from the car park

and set up in just three days! Once all the work was done, Enrico and Joe called tools down together for the last time. We all took a ceremonial dip in Vuadomo waterfall again, the very reason we are in Fiji. We had a competition to see who could stay in the longest, as it was particularly cold today. By the end it was a head-to-head between me and Roxana, but she decided to get out first and let me win. It was probably my favourite swim, floating and reflecting on the trip. On the way to the village, we were told to turn around as there's more work to be done! In actuality, Epeli (old Epeli) had some coconuts for us to plant. Joe and Serena each planted one and we said a few words of thanks. Back home we exchanged gifts; I gave Saki my family photos, which he said he'll frame and hang! Marianne gave each of us boys a pearl bracelet, with Savusavu pearls. Now we're frantically packing before seven o'clock, when we go to the hall for the final communal dinner. Then there will be a big ceremony and a party with some Fiji Gold! I'm anticipating an emotional but enjoyable night, as we have to say goodbye to the village. I don't know if any of us are quite ready to go yet. As Epeli

said, we're not saying "*moce*", but just "*sota tale*".

I've just finished packing now and looking forward to a big lovo dinner. I also gave Marianne a sarong from my mum, and to Loloma a pair of my site shorts. My bag's absolutely full to the brim, full of Fiji souvenirs! Now it's time to head to the hall, as Saki has already taken the lead.

At the hall we started on the grog until our food was ready. Inside, we had a goodbye *sevusevu* for the group leaving, and we all said a few words of thanks. Brychan spoke particularly well, with some heartfelt Welsh as well. Then the boys on the porch played us a farewell song before we ate. It was all quite an emotional ceremony, and a good few tears were shed as I looked around at all the Fijians who treated us so well, like their own family. The food itself was actually now ideal for me, lots of meaty stews, though I managed to get enough good food, nonetheless. After dinner came more kava, and inside the hall, the girls, who all had wonderful matching dresses and *sulus*, performed the Fijian dance that Ite taught them. It was certainly impressive to watch, all well done and in time. They also got

us boys up so that we could all do the chicken dance, which the Fijians found hilarious. Then back to the grog, and Oisín offered our signed rugby ball to the chief very well. Eventually we transitioned to the hut in the car park for a wash-down. Although there was plenty of Fiji Gold and dancing to be done, Enrico and I feel absolutely shattered. So, after a while of chatting and drinking, we went around to have a goodbye hug from everyone. Some people may be up to see us off from our eight o'clock taxi, but I reckon most will lie in. It really hasn't sunk in that I may not see them again, at least until the Caukin Christmas social. The whole group has been so much fun, and everyone gets on with everyone else; I've been so lucky to have them with me. Now it really is time for the final sleep at Saki's house.

sava – wash-down (drinks after kava)

FRIDAY 9TH AUGUST

Early this morning we were up and packed and had some birthday cake for breakfast! Oisín's turning twenty-four on Sunday, so Marianne made him a lovely cake which read "Happy Birthday Ocean". Of course, we sang happy birthday with Saki, Loloma, Marianne,

and her mum, not forgetting the extra verses, “Happy long life to you”, and “May God bless you”. We met our taxi outside the hall, finding Matt, Jess, Brychan, Epeli, Epeli, Ape, Tima, Salote, Mone, and Emori were there to see us off. I gave them each a warm handshake of hug and said “*Sota tale!*” and “*Vinaka.*” Of course, we said goodbye to Marianne, Loloma, and Saki, who gave quite an underwhelming cool wave goodbye. We also thanked them dearly for their outstanding hospitality. Throughout my trip I’ve felt grateful that even on the other side of the planet on a remote island, boundless love and friendship is easily found. The taxi took us to Savusavu airport, where I boarded the plane to Nadi that I’m in now. The next flight isn’t until tomorrow morning, so we should have a lovely day to relax and explore Nadi.

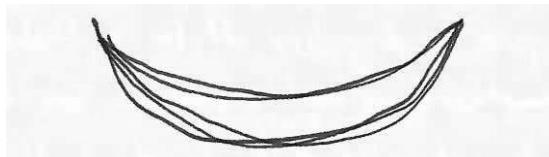
I’m now lounging on a sun lounger with Joe outside our accommodation in Nadi. It’s a friendly but slightly dirty kind of place, but ideal for one night before we head off. We just had some lunch with Enrico, Oisín, and Isabel at the beach bar opposite. I enjoyed a veggie burger, which was literally grilled vegetables in a bun, but still lovely. We also got some

refreshing mojitos to enjoy as they were on offer for \$10. Now we're having a short rest before we take a taxi into Nadi to visit the Sri Siva Subramaniya Swami Hindu Temple. It appears to have some impressive Dravidian architecture and Indian painting; it's actually the largest Hindu temple in the Southern hemisphere. But for now, I'm delighted to read *The Hobbit* underneath a coconut tree.

On the sun loungers, Joe and I did more sleeping than reading, until Issy called us for a taxi. First, we all went to the airport to drop her off for a flight to Sydney. With another hug and a goodbye, Joe, Enrico, Oisín, and I continued to the Hindu temple in Nadi. The architecture was astonishing, especially the vibrant colours and ornate statues. The ceilings were adorned with paintings depicting stories of Hindu legend and Shiva's life. Shrines to Ganesha, Lakshmi, and Shiva at the centre, were full of offerings of banana, coconut, and incense. It was a wonderful and peaceful experience, even though we were told off for ringing the bell too much. There was even a Buddha figure sat beneath what I believe to have been a *Ficus*, where I took some mindful breaths to appreciate this

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experience. Next, we popped to Nadi town to explore a bit and get some snacks. It was such a novelty to see multi-story buildings, and even a shopping centre with escalators! Back at our hostel, we picked up some drinks and sat together on the beach watching an excellent sunset. A friendly Fijian appeared asking where we were from, but he in fact only wanted to sell us cannabis, so he moved on. Then once the sun had disappeared something magical happened. Warm colours of orange blended to crisp yellows, greens, pinks, and a deep Fijian blue. We looked on in awe as the colours danced and shifted about the sky, while beams of deep orange emanated from the horizon in distinct rays.



At the crest of the sky sat the brilliant moon with her smile gracing us below. I said that I believe Fiji wanted to give us a special show tonight to see us off on our final night. On a later flight to Nadi today was Charlotte, who then joined us on the beach, and then for dinner. We ate at a Mexican-Korean place

above the shop, which was great if a bit spicy, as well as my lovely cassava chips, although Joe's food took an age to arrive (it seems always one is late). After dinner we said "*sota tale*" to Charlotte, who I'm sure Joe and I will see soon back in Cardiff. To finish off our spectacular night, us gang went to Sailor's bar and played pool over some Fiji Gold, and rum and coke. I reckon it's the only time that Saki's gang have all enjoyed some drinks together. I had a good few shots at pool, and Joe had some shocking ones! I couldn't have asked for a better send off for my favourite boys. With a heavy heart we said "*sota tale*" to Enrico, who is on an early flight before us tomorrow. We should still see Oisín in the morning before we go though. Now Joe and I are in our twin room fighting to stay awake as his torch dies. It's midnight now and we're due up at seven o'clock, so now again I say goodnight.

bia – beer

SATURDAY 10TH AUGUST

In Fijian fashion, I awoke with the sun and birds this morning, just before my alarm went. I got ready with a weak but warm

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shower and now I'm just waiting for Joe to have one. I've got my Fiji Gold shirt and my nice *sulu* on, ready to fly. When Joe gets back, we'll start to think of breakfast and a taxi to the airport. Now I'd like to recount a story that Saki told me of Dakuwaqa, a shark god of Fijian myth. He said that one day, Dakuwaqa came to Vuadomo, many generations ago. He transformed into a man and walked right onto the shore. In the village there stood a small *bure* (a traditional Fijian hut) near Ape's house, where the villagers invited the disguised Dakuwaqa for kava. Once somebody tasted the kava, it was salty like sea water. That's how they knew that Dakuwaqa had come to visit.

At the beach bar, Joe and I had some coffee and chatted with Rosa the waitress about our lovely time in Fiji. “*Bula!*” I heard over my shoulder; Oisín was there to say his goodbyes to us. As Joe and I got in our taxi, that was the end of Saki's boys, for now, but I'm sure we'll be reunited soon enough. Hopefully Freddie or Jamie, who are staying in Vuadomo for longer, will arrange a video call for us to see some of the new volunteers, villagers, and of course Saki! At the airport we had a smooth

check-in and met up with Bella, Emily, Elina, and said goodbye to Josh, who's staying in Viti Levu for some business, then back to the project in Vuadomo. We're in the tiny departure lounge now and it's time to go to our gate, although it's about a two-minute walk away.

I'm on the plane just west of Viti Levu now, with Captain Jason Johnson. Luckily, I managed to swap seats and sit beside Joe, as well as a helpful boy and his mum. It's lovely to just sit back and relax, although it's sad to see Fiji disappear below us. I'm listening to Bob Dylan's "Stuck inside a Mobile"; Miles Davis' "Blue in Green"; and off course, "The Very Best of Hall & Oates". A hot lunch should be arriving soon enough, which Joe and I will gladly welcome as we skipped breakfast!

The flight is long but pleasant enough; we're enjoying our last Fiji Golds while watching various films and television shows. The food was also pretty good but I'm still peckish! We should land in Singapore around six o'clock, so perfect for dinner time!

Joe and I are back on our same bench in Singapore Changi airport, that we slept soundly on a month ago. In the food republic

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we picked up some dinner, veggie aglio olio and seaweed fries for me. Then we visited a mad Japanese supermarket called Dondondonki, where constantly they played a song about the supermarket. I bought a Japanese equivalent to Pringles in seaweed salt flavour, which I'm gladly tucking into now. Joe and I also bumped into our coursemates Emma and Abbie, who are now on a flight to Fiji themselves to complete the last four weeks of the project in Vuadomo. It'll be great to see them meeting the villager, and Saki, as well as reminiscing together when we're all back in Cardiff in September. Now we're just going to relax here for the next couple of hours until we head to the terminal.

SUNDAY 11TH AUGUST

The flight from Singapore to Dubai was overall mundane – pleasant enough but sleepy. I suppose that the experience is a lot less exciting when your destination is so familiar. Sadly, *The Hobbit* films were not available on the flight, only *The Lord of the Rings*, so I hope I may be more lucky on the last flight to London. In Dubai airport, Joe and I just had a nice Middle Eastern meal in a restaurant, where I ate the same falafel wrap

as last time, but with some lovely hummus and salad too. Now I'm sat on the airport floor, as there's never adequate seating for some reason, and there's 90 minutes until we depart for the last flight.

MONDAY 12TH AUGUST

The final flight was probably my favourite, sat near the window between other friendly passengers. I relaxed with some music and films, finishing off with another viewing of "Perfect Days". In Gatwick all went smoothly, so we got our bags and went home, stopping by a Wetherspoons for a British meal and a cider. Already I feel culture shock back here; everything is very quiet, and people are far more reserved. Joe and I even keep saying "*bula*" and "*vinaka*" to people without realising!

Now I'm back home, I had marmite and peanut butter on toast for breakfast, and a nice French press coffee. I'm sat at my desk, about to begin typing up this very diary for friends and family. As nice as it is to be back, I already dearly miss Fiji and my precious time there. I sincerely hope that I will one day

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travel back to Vuadomo and enjoy the finished facilities that I helped to create! Thank you for reading my diary and thank you to everyone on my trip that made it so special.

To Fiji, *vinaka vakalevu, sota tale.*

EPILOGUE

Since being back in the UK, my time in Fiji feels like a distant dream. I've only been back for just over a week, and now I'm completely settled back in, and it feels as though I never left. I can still see the volunteers in my group who stayed in Vuadomo on social media, and it's hard to believe that they're still there eating coconuts and drinking kava. It's as if I had an entirely different life there which now I've left behind. While it's sad for the project to be over for me, it's still exciting to see the project progress in my absence. I also feel that I've learnt a great deal from my time there, which I'm trying to preserve now that I'm back. For example, waking up nice and early makes the day feel fresh and exciting every morning. The concept of Fiji Time encourages me to be more relaxed and take things as they come without rushing about, confident that everything will work out. Sharing my experiences with my friends has also been delightful, and I can't wait to see the volunteers again in Cardiff, and at the Caukin Christmas social!

