

Island Reach 2011-2013

The origins of IR unfolded in 2011 with the purchase of Research Vessel Lly which was to serve as the base for services with island and coastal communities for the next 8 years. The period of 2011-2013 was an intensive time of learning, service, and passagemaking aboard Llyr.

Our first engagement was as a liveaboard research platform for Reef Check. RC had recently received a 3-year grant from the MacArthur Foundation to fund a Marine Resource Management Project to build conservation capacity in Haiti. Working with executive director Dr. Gregor Hodgson and team, we navigated the south coast of Haiti, and participated in reef surveys. Survey results during the course of the project indicated that Haiti's coral reefs could be classified as among the most overfished in the world. According to RC: "In a classic "fishing down the food chain" scenario, overfishing has also destabilized the entire coral reef ecosystem by removing herbivorous (plant-eating) fish – allowing fast-growing algae to overgrow and kill adult corals while blocking settlement of coral larvae. As a result, while the reef structure is intact, living coral typically occupies less than 10% of most reefs surveyed while algae and sponge occupy over 50%."

With our next base in Panama, we traveled overland to the Pacific coast of Costa Rica to visit and learn from the artisanal fishers cooperative CoopeTárcoles R.L. located in the community of Tárcoles in the Gulf of Nicoya. The community had faced declining fish stocks due to a combination of overharvesting by commercial shrimp boats and unsustainable local fishing practices. At the same time, rapid development of the tourism sector along the coast threatened to restrict access to the shore and to marginalize their work. To respond to these threats, the cooperative was founded in 1985 and since then had developed fishing bylaws emphasizing sustainable practices. In 2007, a few years prior to our visit, they had launched an initiative in partnership with CoopeSolidar R.L., focused on sustainable and community-based ecotourism to provide an alternative source of income for local residents. In 2009, the group was successful in gaining approval of a community-managed marine area. Learn more about this initiative in this article by Vivienne Solis Rivera, who was our host during our visit to Tarcoles.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40152-017-0077-1>

In 2013, we made passage across the Pacific, visiting various conservation nonprofits and research stations, including the Experimental Ecology Station in Moorea, the fieldwork center for studies on Polynesian reefs. It was here we first began to understand the extent

of damage to coral reefs in the Pacific caused by the proliferation of Crown of Thorns starfish.

In Fiji, we met with officers and members of POETCom, the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community, to learn about their efforts to develop tools, education, and support to make organic practices and produce a successful alternative for farmers and consumers in the Pacific region. We gained valuable insights into food sovereignty and market issues in the region.

All of these experiences and more laid a solid groundwork for the alliances we would begin undertaking in Vanuatu in 2014.

Photos from 2011-2013 – Haiti, Panama, Costa Rica, Passagemaking, French Polynesia, Cook Islands, Kingdom of Tonga



