

The Woodinville Weekly

The Northlake News & The Valley View

woodinville.com
Our Advertisers

[Main](#)
[Staff](#)
[Rates](#)
[Links](#)
[Contact](#)

Community News Since 1976

Main Menu

- [Local News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [School](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Crime Watch](#)

[Browse The Archives](#)
[Search The Archives](#)



Community

- [Home & Garden](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Wine Events](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Events](#)

Commentary

- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Submit A Letter](#)

About Us

13342 NE 175th St.
P.O. Box 587
Woodinville, WA
98072
Ph: 425-483-0606
Fax: 425-486-7593

Hours: Mon-Fri
8:00am-5:00pm

Submit Community News

If you have some Local

Edition Date: August 6, 2007

A trip that becomes a bit more than 'interesting'

by Judith Lee



Photos courtesy of Jeff Brooks
Jeff and Leigh Brooks on the beach at Fiji.

As if cycling from Seattle to Duvall to work isn't enough

Imagine that you'd like to go lie on a beach, soak up the sun, listen to the surf. Your significant other suggests Fiji, a nation of 322 picture-perfect islands in the South Pacific.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Now imagine trading your beach idyll for arduous hiking and hacking through a tropical rainforest, humidity you could cut with your machete, and the company of native Fijians who know not a word of English and hunt feral pigs and spearfish three-foot-long eels.

That's the reality of at least a part of a three-week trip to Fiji taken this summer by Jeff Brooks, optician and office manager at Duvall Advanced Family Eye Care, and his wife, Leigh.

Experienced world travelers, Jeff and Leigh have had many adventures thanks to Jeff's penchant for making things "interesting."

Like ... flying into the Yukon on a bush plane and spending a week hiking and tent-camping in grizzly country.

Or ... hiking in Oregon's Hell's Canyon in conditions so difficult your dog's feet are shredded, and both man and beast need to be rescued out of there.

"My wife asked that we go somewhere with sunny beaches she can lie on, without having to do something crazy," notes Jeff, an athletic "forty-something" who bicycles the 48-mile roundtrip from their home in Seattle to Duvall about twice a week.

Guides roast cassava root in the jungle.

Fiji came to mind, as that many islands have to have some nice beaches. Besides, Jeff enjoyed hearing stories about the South Pacific from his employers, Drs. Brad and Suzan Grimm, who lived in Samoa for several years (well before settling in Duvall and opening the eye care center about five years ago).

Jeff and Leigh noticed a "red flag" late last year while they were arranging their trip. The Fijian government was overtaken by a military coup, about which a reliable travel Web site (www.lonelyplanet.com) still says: The situation



News that you would like to share with the community, please submit your short story, article, announcement or review [here](#).

is calm and generally safe but it could deteriorate. Travellers are advised to exercise caution.

"Fiji has had five coups in the last 20 years, so this isn't as shocking as it sounds," says Jeff. "Actually, it worked in our favor, because the airfare and prices for tourists plummeted."



While in Suva, the capital, the couple did observe armed guards around the government buildings, and a running debate in the daily newspapers about whether the country will go toward a democracy. Jeff describes the dispute as a "private matter" between native Fijians and Indo-Fijians, who immigrated there to work.

"The tourists are not being targeted in any way. We didn't feel fearful," Jeff says.

In fact they were comfortable enough to try to arrange a hiking guide in the jungle, just before they were to relax on the beach. Befriended by a taxi driver who spoke English, he took them to meet his relatives in the mountainous interior.

There they met people who were friendly, but spoke no English at all. Jeff and Leigh were led into the jungle by native Fijians who were farmers and hunters, not professional hiking guides. After one false start, Jeff and Leigh realized they would not be able to make their guides understand their intent. The couple decided to tag along on a hunting and fishing trip.

"These were barefoot guys hunting feral pigs with dogs and machetes. We had about eight hours of hiking each day. At night, they went spearfishing for 3-foot-long eels and prawns. These people live off the land in a way that is beyond our comprehension, until you see it done," says Jeff.

Through skill and hard work, the hunters provided their guests with root vegetables, feral pig, eel, and prawns to eat, and coconut milk to drink. Although Jeff and Leigh brought a tent for shelter, it was pitched each night on solid rock, as the jungle floor was too wet.

"The best part was sitting around the fire at night, as our hosts cooked up meals they had caught for us. They were as tired as we were. There was no conversation, but all five of us sat together as far away from civilization as you can be," Jeff says.

After three days, the hunters led the couple back to the village, where the entire village threw a feast in their honor by roasting a pig in the traditional "lovu" style. A pastor who ministers to the village held a religious service.

"These people made us feel like family," remembers Jeff gratefully.

The taxi driver who had brought them there returned to take them back to Suva. Not 100 yards from the village, he had a mishap that stranded the vehicle off the road. The entire village came down and lifted the taxi back on the road.

Once back in Suva, Jeff and Leigh arranged for a catamaran to take them out to a tiny island, where a "backpacker resort" hosted 20 to 30 guests. Although the cuisine was simple (white rice and fish), and the living conditions Spartan (they had electricity about three hours a day), the beach and ocean made it all worth it.

"The beach and water was everything you dream about for South Pacific islands. The surf was coming in from a 270° radius, with a sweep of ocean that was wider than your peripheral vision," says Jeff. "With the trade winds blowing on the island, the climate was perfect. We stayed there for nine days. Yes, my wife got her beach.