SERENDIPITY IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Funafuti, Tuvalu. I'm not sure if what I've discovered here in one of the world's smallest and unknown independent countries is a case of serendipity: finding something where you least expect it - or barendipity: not finding something where you most expect it.

Whichever, it's fascinating, revelatory, and absolutely hilarious. Get ready to have a really fun learning experience.

It wasn't, however, fun for the folks here to get their country started.

"Tuvalu" (*too-vah-loo*) means "eight standing together," eight atolls with a Polynesian people speaking the same language and having a common culture. The Brits colonized them in the 1890s along with another group of islands inhabited by Micronesian people with a different language and culture. Naming Tuvalu after a Brit shipping merchant named Ellice, and the other group after a Brit sea captain named Gilbert, combined it was the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Crown Colony (GEIC).

After World War II, the Brits designated Tarawa in the Gilberts as the capital. With four times as many Gilbertese than Tuvaluans, the latter were reduced to minority status. By the late 1960s, Tuvaluans couldn't handle the discrimination any longer and began demanding a divorce. The Brits responded with threats and extortion.

The GEIC was paid for by a Crown Agent Account and the Brits said they would cut Tuvalu out of it completely, leaving them destitute. They would be left with one single trading and transport ship out of the GEIC fleet, and every island in the entire GEIC except the "Tuvalu 8" (many Tuvaluans lived on others) would be given to the Gilberts (they ended up with one more). On and on went the threats. The Tuvaluans told the Brits to shove them up their colonial noses.

They voted to separate from the Gilberts in 1974 and declared full sovereign independence in 1978. It took them 22 years to have their sovereignty recognized by the UN, becoming a UN Member State in 2000. One of the tiniest countries on the planet with a total population of barely more than 11,000 and a total land area of less than 10 square miles, it wasn't given much of a chance of survival.

Over half the country, some 6,000, live here on skinny Funafuti, a strip of sand and coral between the ocean and lagoon (the remaining 5,000 are spread among the other smaller atolls):

I came here to understand why and how this place exists. I knew that Tuvalu was given the Internet Country Domain of .tv, and parlayed that into a $50 million deal with Verisign, which expired in 2010. Other than that, what's going on here?

Even though the Brits spitefully gave most of the entire GEIC ocean territory to the Gilberts, Tuvalu still has an Exclusive Economic Zone of some 400,000 square miles which contains very rich fishing grounds. It sells fishing rights to a number of countries including South Korea, Taiwan, and the US. Their boats are very well-monitored, and as they pay a lot of money, they eagerly report any outlaws, which they consider "fish-rustlers."

Tuvaluans have an excellent reputation world-wide as skilled sailors and seamen. The Tuvalu Maritime Training Institute rigorously teaches the skills necessary for employment in global merchant shipping. Over 15% of all Tuvaluan adult men are so employed now, maintaining their families and relatives with remittances.

As you may know, the Chicoms of China vie with Taiwan over getting small countries like Tuvalu to diplomatically recognize them. Tuvalu chose Taiwan, brushing aside the PRC - "they're Communists!" is the explanation I kept hearing. As a result, Taiwan provides aid for a number of projects.

Tuvaluans have parlayed all this into their sovereign wealth fund called the Tuvalu Trust Fund, which is thoroughly monitored by Australia and New Zealand. Twice a year, a representative from each, trained IMF/World Bank economists, come here to scrupulously examine the Trust Fund accounts and books, with transparent access to all spending.

They are here now, and over a few VB's (Victoria Bitter from Australia is the beer of choice in Tuvalu), they explained to me how well the fund is doing. It's now over $140 million - that's for a country of 11,000 people - and growing, as the government can spend only the interest above inflation.

So the place is making a go of it. This is certainly no failed state. But now for the fun part.

Tuvalu is a poster child for the Global Warming Climate Alarmist movement. Google "Tuvalu sinking" and you'll get over a quarter million hits. "Tuvalu global warming" will get 1,200,000 hits. There are lots of do-gooder trust fund babies and professional international envirocrats here intent on saving Tuvalu from being "washed away due to the effects of climate change."

There are signs all over Funafuti proclaiming the existence of envirocrat groups and their efforts:

The founder of Lonely Planet guidebooks, Tony Wheeler (no relation!) wrote a weepy book, Time and Tide (beautiful pictures, though) about Tuvalu, a country that's "on the climate change front line," and will "soon be lost to global warming."

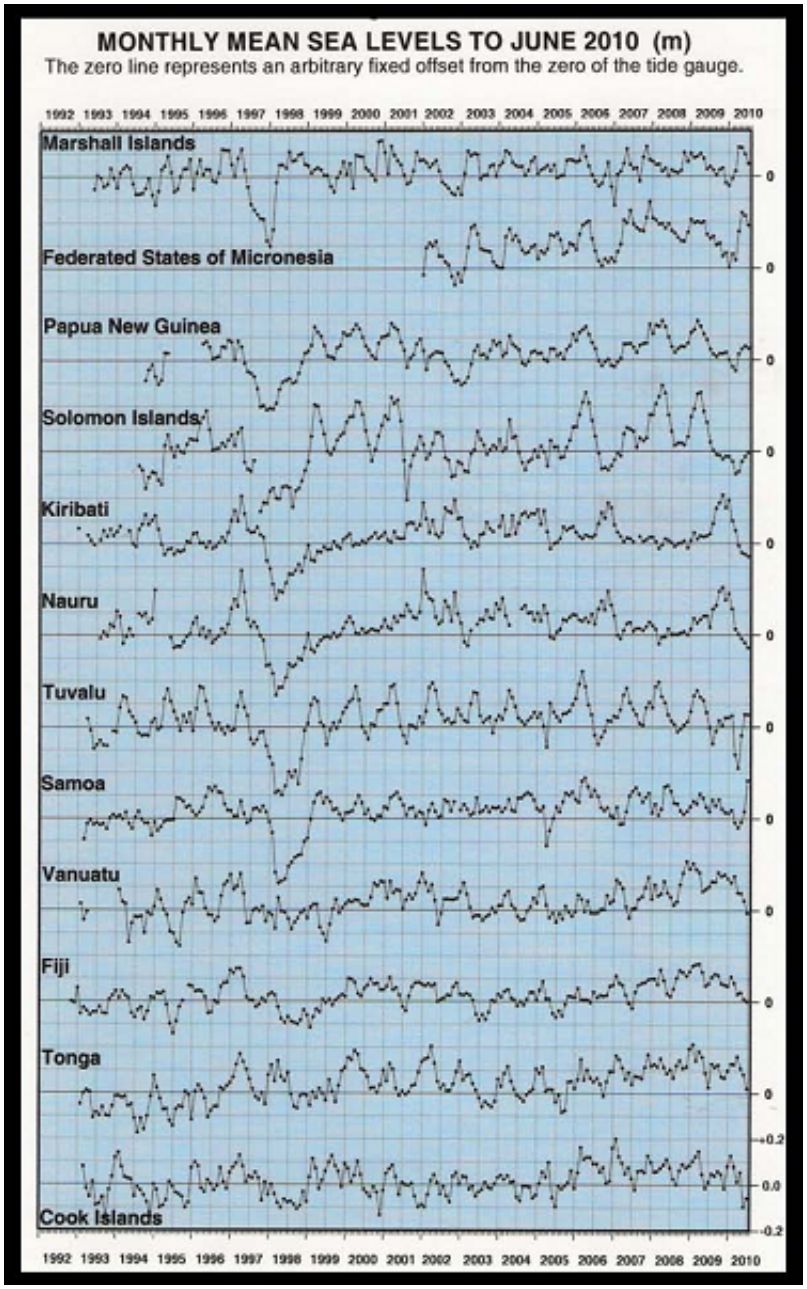
The highest point on any atoll in Tuvalu is 15 feet above sea level, and the average about 6. And the oceans are rising! Antarctica and Greenland are melting and the oceans are rising and innocent helpless countries like Tuvalu are going to drown because evil selfish greedy White Western countries won't stop Global Warming! It's too funny for words.

It's too funny because of this:

I took this picture yesterday. It's the rusted remains of an American bulldozer used to build the Funafuti airstrip in 1942. It's been here at this spot on the edge of the ocean shoreline (not the lagoon side) for over 70 years. Obviously there's been no sea rise for the last seven decades.

On the contrary, an analysis by New Zealand scientists at the University of Auckland comparing historical WWII photographs and current satellite photos of all Tuvalu atolls plus 18 others shows that most (86%) are the *same size or larger today*. Big storms, you see, deposit a net gain of coral rubble from the surrounding reef on the shoreline, building the atoll up.

The most comprehensive study of sea levels is the SEAFRAME sensoring by Geosciences Australia of 12 Pacific Island nations since 1993. The chart for Tuvalu, as it is for all 10 in the South Pacific, is flat. (The Marshalls and the Carolines of Micronesia are in the North Pacific and are slightly elevated.)



The funniest aspect to this is that most Tuvaluans know there's been no sea level rise, but are happy to stroke the do-gooders just the same.

David is 16, a bright high school student. He and a friend took me out in an outboard motor boat to a small reef island, a post card paradise called Tepuka. If you're going to be marooned on a Robinson Crusoe island, this will do:

They showed me an observation bunker built there by Americans during WWII to watch for Japanese ships. It's still intact with coconut palms and pandanus trees growing on the roof. Far from being washed away, the tiny islet is stable and flourishing:

When I pointed this out and asked David, "How is this still here after 70 years with global warming and the sea level rising?" - he laughed. "Every Tuvaluan knows the ocean isn't rising. My grandfather, who is even older than you (thanks, David...) says it is crazy talk."

"It really upsets my grandmother," he added. "The graves of our families are very important to us. Many of them are next to the sea."

Yes, I told him that I had seen many:

"My grandmother gets angry and says, ‘Do you think we would bury our loved ones next to the ocean if we thought the sea was rising and would wash them away?' She feels insulted by these foreigners who come here and seem to say that."

Kids will usually tell you just what they think if you'll let them. Adults are more cautious. But if you buy them enough VB's, they open up. I assured them that I wasn't with any government or non-governmental (NGO) aid agency, I was just a visitor here to learn about Tuvalu.

"So you want to know what's really going on here, eh, Jack?" said one oldtimer. "Look, we live here, we've lived here for who knows how many generations. The ocean is our home. It's either just a few feet away when we're on our islands, or we're on it and in it, fishing. We know storms and king tides and cyclones, and we'd know if something was making the ocean higher. It's the same, Jack, the ocean is not getting higher. It hasn't for all our lives and our parents' and grandparents' lives.

"But... if white people want to come here and give us money because of some bulls**t theory of theirs, who are we to say no?"

We all belly-laughed so hard we almost cried. I of course ordered another round of VB's. Another elder spoke up:

"So we all nod and agree when the foreigners spout their theories and tell us it's their fault the ocean is going to wash us away and they must give us lots of money to make up for it. The only Tuvaluans who believe this are the politicians who have to spout it back to keep the money coming. Even if you know something is BS, if you say you believe it often enough, you end up thinking the BS is real. But we don't care about politicians much in Tuvalu."

A third fellow confided:

"One politician who has it figured out is Tony Abbott (Oz's new Prime Minister). All the people from Australia who come here hate his guts because he says global warming is 'absolute crap.' We never tell these people that we think so too!"

They were happy to confide in me as almost no one ever comes here just as a visitor or tourist. Tuvalu gets a few dozen tourists a year. Other than the occasional businessman (mostly from Taiwan, Korea, or Japan), and yachties sailing through, everyone else is with some government or quasi-government. As best as I could determine, right now I'm the only tourist in the entire country right now.

It's easy to see why. There are only two places to stay, a small motel and another even smaller; neither have hot water. There's no scuba diving or tourist facilities of any kind. You can rent a motorbike and traverse Funafuti's only road - 8 miles from one end of the island to the other - in an hour. Credit cards don't work here; you have to pay for everything with cash (Australian dollars) you brought with you. You can fly here only from Suva, Fiji, two flights a week, often canceled. You can't fly to any of the other islands; they can only be reached by cargo boat once a month.

Yet Tuvalu has captivating charms. Tuvaluans are incredibly friendly, maybe the friendliest people I've ever met on the planet. Everyone of all ages has a smile for you, open, welcoming, generous, genuinely Christian nice.

Tuvaluans believe in freedom, in live and let live. Religious freedom is abundant. While most belong to the Congregationalist Church of Tuvalu, there are also Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baha'i.

They love to sing and dance, from their own traditional music to rock and roll. Last night I went to a great rock party, the band and singers were really tight, performing Credence (Bad Moon Rising) to Maná (Mariposa Traicionera) to Tuvaluan traditional, with everyone so happy and dancing and laughing having so much fun.

There are no bars, other than at the two tiny motels, and a cramped Chinese restaurant called 3T's. No one uses cell phones, you go and find whomever you want to talk to on your motorbike. There's one small internet café, some satellite dishes for Pacific Sky television, but most families don't have a TV. They'd rather spend time with each other and friends, swim and fish in the

lagoon, play volleyball at the end of the day, sing and dance at night. Tuvaluans are a very self-entertaining people.

They got kicked in the teeth by the spiteful Brits and rose above it. They cherish their freedom and sovereignty. They are happy, and happy to be who they are. How serendipitous to find such a people and place lost in the South Pacific.

What's barendipitous is to discover the people who live in the poster child country for Climate Alarmism have the smarts to know it's a total con.

"We are a seafaring people," I was informed. "We know how amazingly vast and enormous the ocean is. Human beings make just the thinnest skin on the planet. To think that us humans can change the level of the whole ocean is crazy in the head. What we don't understand is why anyone would want to believe that."

If only the do-gooder trust-fund babies and envirocrats, with their desperate faith in the Religion of Warmism, knew how these friendly folks in Tuvalu were laughing at them while having no problem accepting all the money being shoved into their hands.

And now, here's a quick look at Tuvalu and its people. If you ever come here, you'll be made welcome.

Three friendly ladies:

Three friendly kids:

Smiles from young and old:

The favorite sport:

Dad bringing home dinner from his outrigger canoe in the lagoon:

You can grow most anything in your front yard (like lots of papayas):

You can also have your front yard be the family grave site:

You can simply relax and enjoy the beauty of the lagoon:

And of course, sunsets that take your breath away: