

"I WOULDN'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THE EXTENT TO HOW UNTOUCHED AND AMAZING SO MANY OF THESE ISLANDS REALLY ARE UNTIL A FEW WEEKS LATER WHEN I GOT OFF OUR LAST CONNECTING FLIGHT, TWO DAYS AFTER LEAVING THE EAST COAST."



Keahi and Evan share a flat water session, right off the dock at home base on Beran island

# THERE AND BEYOND

EXPOSURE TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND ALL THE PERFECT LIVES WE'RE NOT LIVING CAN LEAVE US WITH FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY AND JEALOUSY. KITE MAGAZINES CAN BE JUST AS DAMAGING, TORMENTING READERS WITH SHOTS OF PLACES THEY'LL LIKELY NEVER GO. THE MARSHALL ISLANDS IS PROBABLY THE MOST ASPIRED-TO-REACH DESTINATION FOR PRO WAVE RIDERS, AND ALSO THE LOCATION JOE BLOW KITEBOARDER IS LEAST LIKELY TO VISIT. IT'S A TOTAL HASSLE TO GET TO AND IN ALL REALITY YOU NEED SOME CONNECTIONS, BUT IT HAS THOSE PERFECT WAVES, WHERE SEEMINGLY NOBODY ELSE RIDES AND TRIPS TO THESE ISLANDS SEEM TO DELIVER UNFORGETTABLE ADVENTURE, IF WE'RE TO BELIEVE THE VIDEOS AND TALES. SO WHERE ELSE COULD WE FEATURE FOR ISSUE #100? BUT IS IT REALLY AS GOOD AS WE'RE LED TO BELIEVE? EVAN NETSCH REVEALS BOTH SIDES

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Evan attempting to find some shade on a smaller one at Amnesia

Everywhere and nowhere

The Marshall Islands were at the top of my dream location list before I even knew they existed. If I was to close my eyes and envisage the perfect location beyond any reality, the Marshalls were that place.

Coming from the east coast of the US, the Pacific Islands are a place of mystery and beauty to me, combining utter remoteness and historic significance.

Growing up I'd watch surf movies shot there and see glimpses of perfect waves breaking without another soul around. I remember back in the early 2000s Quiksilver sponsored a surf exploration to find the world's best uncrowded or unknown waves. All the locations were so unattainable and I didn't even consider it a remote possibility that I'd visit them in my lifetime.



**I'VE SEEN PLENTY OF CLEAR WATER IN THE CARIBBEAN, HAWAII AND OTHER PLACES AROUND THE WORLD, BUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN IT'S A DIFFERENT VERSION OF CLEAR.**



The tales the Indies Trader could tell!



The one and only house on Biran Island



Leeward side launch at Biran



Reo, Amnesia

In 2011 Cabrinha released a video called 'Drifting' which saw the team visit some tiny island in the Marshalls. There was insanely clear water, pristine reef, empty perfect waves and it seemed like one of the most remote places imaginable. I have never been a city person, so managing to get hundreds or even thousands of miles away from any civilization makes me feel alive, experiencing the raw elements of the world, untouched by humans - just totally alone and exposed.

My first opportunity to visit the Pacific Islands came onboard Discovery, also known as the Cabrinha Quest; a sail boat on a mission to explore some of the most remote locations and discover their kiteboarding and surfing potential. I was lucky enough to go on a 10-day trip to Tonga and the next year again to Micronesia. While we didn't get epic conditions on either one of these trips, sitting out in the middle of the Pacific Islands with only the people on the boat was a peaceful yet exciting feeling. We travelled for multiple days to get there, were cut off without internet or cell service, so all we could do was fully enjoy the present and get a glimpse of the world from long ago (okay, granted we were on an excellent boat with high-tech toys, but still).

Sitting in an empty surf line-up or kiting alone off an island that's only just long enough to lay out your lines without another person or boat for hundreds of miles gives an otherwise impossible sense of freedom in today's world.

I never really knew where the Marshall Islands were until the trip to Micronesia when the island hopping flight made two stops through the Marshalls on the way back from Guam to Honolulu. Linking many Pacific Island nations together, I finally got a clear mental map. I remember stopping in Majuro (the Marshall Islands' capita) and we all got off the flight to take a break and grab some food. We walked off the plane into a single-room airport where a local vendor was selling tuna sandwiches. They were about \$4 and there were enough for about half the people on the flight. He could have sold each sandwich for \$20 anywhere in the US. Fresh as could be, but when they ran out that was it: we boarded

the plane and continued on our way. Looking at the islands from the air all I could see was shallow reef surrounding the atolls and what looked to be endless potential for amazing surf and kite locations. All of which were impossible to get to without some serious exploration and a boat equipped for the challenge.

Ever since peering out the window of that flight over the Marshalls I knew that before I died I had to find my way back there beyond the airport.

I spent a lot of time exploring the area on Google Earth. I learned a lot about the tragic history of many of the Pacific Islands, where physical and economic scars from war and nuclear testing earlier in the 20th century are still clearly evident today. I walked right past the closed Bikini Atoll town hall, an atoll that is still uninhabited after it was evacuated and contaminated with nuclear radiation. Amongst environmental tragedies are some of the most alive waters I have seen in my life. Water so clear that you can see a small reef fish on the bottom, 50 feet down, though a sun glared surface. Reef so alive that if you dare scrape it you'd be fighting infection for weeks. And so many sharks that you're not even phased to see them after the first day.

I had a glimpse of this in Micronesia in 2016. Sunken merchant, war ships and gun turrets littered one of the main islands, Pohnpei. Local supplies were stamped with US Aid as continued attempts to pay repentance for the damage done to the islands. Meanwhile, islands in another atoll just a hundred miles away may not have a single person living on them, making you wonder when the last person set foot on those beaches. Was it last month or last year? On some islands, perhaps never.

When Reo Stevens called me just a couple weeks before his own trip to the Marshall Islands I was prepared to drop whatever was necessary to make it happen. This was my chance to finally get to what I believed to be the most remote and pristine kiting destination on the planet. I wouldn't fully understand the extent to how untouched and amazing so many of these islands really are until a few



**"HOLLOW IN SHAPE AND WITH A PERFECT IDE-OFF WIND, THE WAVE GRINDS RIGHT ALONG THE EDGE OF A REEF PASS THAT SITS JUST A COUPLE OF HUNDRED METRES FROM A SMALL ISLAND. IF YOU WANT TO LEARN TO GET BARRELED ON A KITE, THIS IS YOUR WAVE."**

Reo scoring at Amnesia

weeks later when I got off our last connecting flight, two days after leaving the east coast.

Leaving from Florida I had a standard day of travel to get to Hawaii. From Hawaii there are only a few flights per week that go through Majuro, our first point of contact with the Marshall Islands. A second flight had to be booked from Majuro with Marshall Air, the local inter-island charter company. We would be flying into Ailinglaplap Atoll, a flight that runs just once per week. From what I understand, Marshall Airlines has just two planes, both fairly small island hoppers.

Majuro airport is pretty relaxed. Once the big commercial flights have come and gone, airport security and pretty much all the employees disappear and we were left alone to wait for our little local flight to arrive. By then

we'd been travelling a couple of days and I decided to go for a quick swim while we waited. Walking out of the airport and across the road I was welcomed by water that seemed to match the air temperature, degree to degree. After washing two days of airport travel off I walked back into the open terminal and we boarded our last short flight. A minor mechanical mishap and a quick mid flight U-turn back to Majuro later, take two on the final leg of our journey was complete and we finally touched down in Ailinglaplap Atoll.

It's a short drive through the local village to the other end of the island where a cut in the reef allows a small boat to get into the beach. We loaded supplies onboard and made our way out to the Indies Trader and what would be my home for the next two weeks.

#### A DIFFERENT VERSION OF CLEAR

I've seen plenty of clear water in the Caribbean, Hawaii and other places around the world, but in the middle of the Pacific Ocean it's a different version of clear. The Islands are atolls, which is essentially just the rim of a volcano that barely breaks the ocean's surface. Around the rim are various islands and passes in the reef and in the centre there's a big lagoon. The steep sides of the volcanic rim drop off quickly to thousands of feet deep, maybe not more than a couple hundred metres outside of a surf break. Fresh ocean water is constantly cycling in and out of the islands and with no sizable land mass or development to create run-off, the water is clear and clean. Boarding the boat after multiple days spent travelling we wasted no time pulling a few boards out of bags to get



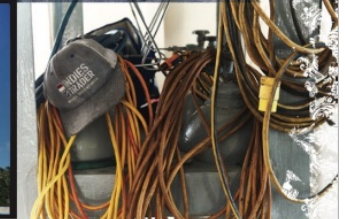
Onboard artillery



Reo



Evan



back in the water after an initial welcoming swim. A world-class surf break sits on the end of the runway, so we were immediately sharing waves with only the friends that joined us on the trip.

We still had an hour to motor to the island where we would base ourselves for the next weeks, so as the sun began to get low we wrapped the session up to make navigation a bit easier in the last light of the day. Entering the reef pass there are many coral heads that jut up to the surface like pyramids in hundreds of feet of water. Without quality charts of much of the area, the best navigation is the captain's own eyes.

Over the next two weeks we would kite, surf and explore this gem of a location discovered by Martin. Daley, Martin is the owner of the

Indies Trader and was captain during the Quiksilver crossing, a five year exploratory trip to find the best untouched waves in the world, an expedition that many of the best surfers of the time and today were part of, from Kelly Slater to Bruce Irons and many more. After a lifetime of exploring in some of the best and most remote locations in the world, Martin finally chose the Marshall Islands to set up camp. It's unspoiled, uncrowded and home to some of the best surf and diving in the world. While kiteboarding was unlikely on his radar at the time, the Marshall Islands have some of the most consistent winds I have ever experienced.

Back in 2011 Cabrinha found this location along with the support of Martin and his crew and it became the stage for the 2012 Cabrinha product shoot. Recognising the potential of the location, Reo Stevens has now teamed up with Martin who has expanded on his Marshall Islands base on Beran Island, offering a full service tour of the area. This is what I was fortunate enough to join, along with Keahi De Abottiz, Brett Sheerin and of course Reo who was hosting a camp in the islands for a few weeks.

There are many reef passes and islands surrounding Beran that scatter the rim of Ailinglaplap Atoll, but some of the best flat water kiteing is right off the dock. If you kite round to the other side at high tide you'll find fun onshore waves breaking down a few miles of reef. On many days we'll launch right off the main dock and ride down this reef, until finally hitting the reef pass where a wave Martin named 'The Bowl' wraps right around the end of this long stretch of reef. It's a low tide wave, which as the name suggests wraps pretty hard around the corner of the pass. On the outside the wind starts side-on where the wave is a bit slower and softer. The further you ride the wave the more side and then side-off the wind becomes, before finally the wave stands up at the end section to be bigger than when you initially dropped in. There's also a nice quick

Reo has coined the camps #Mikiteadventures and during the windy season the Marshalls offers many different weeklong camps. With Beran Island as our hub

barrel to finish off with. The wave is not only close to home, but is exposed and catches a lot of swell, even if there isn't much more than short period wind swell from the consistent trade winds.

This was often our go-to wave as it seemed to just always work. While the swell may have been small on several days, the wind couldn't have been more consistent. Keahi and I shared a three-kite quiver for the entire two weeks. Between the two of us we only rode an eight, nine or ten metre Drifter. I was never underpowered on the ten and never overpowered on the eight. It's safe to say that the wind was simply, well... perfect.

While the Bowl is the closest and maybe most consistent wave, there are many other nearby waves to choose from. Just a couple islands down with a strained eye through the pair of binoculars that live on the deck of the Beran house you can see a wave in the distance. Martin has named it Amnesia and it was responsible for my best session of the trip. Amnesia is a little bit shorter wave, but if you take the bottom section of the Bowl, organise it a little more, put it onto shallower reef and then speed it up, you'd have Amnesia. Hollow in shape and with a perfect side-off wind, the

wave grinds right along the edge of a reef pass that sits just a couple of hundred metres from a small island. If you want to learn to get barrelled on a kite, this is your wave. It is just imperfect enough to create sections to pull under and keep things from becoming so perfectly boring.

If you do not want boring, this next wave is yours. Let's just call it the 'airport wave'. If you search the internet hard enough for John Florence and Ian Walsh you may find a Red

Bull video of them getting shackled together at this spot. With the water dropping off to over a thousand feet right behind the wave, the swell sneaks up on you out of nowhere. It is a thick, heavy wave that from behind may only look thigh high, but from the inside you realise it's often well overhead. This is another hollow right, but faster, thicker and scarier than the other waves. It's also a lot harder to read. The wind is a bit more offshore, which for



Venturing to the next wave in the Marshalls

**"IT'S THE WAVE YOU NEVER WANT TO LEAVE AND IF I WAS TO GUESS THE FINAL SELLING POINT THAT SEALED THE DEAL TO BRING A MAN ON THE MOVE LIKE MARTIN, TO FINALLY PUT DOWN SOME ROOTS IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS, IT WAS THIS."**



Keahi off the top at Amnesia



Keahi pushing his fins out at the airport wave. A small but mean wave that day, breaking onto a very unforgiving reef

kiting is almost necessary to keep up with the speed of the wave, but for surfing it's plain scary because the sets pop up out of nowhere. Coming from such deep water the swell doesn't show until it stands up on the shallow reef. The speed of the wave and the rapid way it suddenly stands up then means your take-off zone is no more than a couple feet. Thankfully, this wave was not more than head high while I was there, which was plenty to give me a good appreciation of what it has to offer.

If the airport wave doesn't sound like your style and you want a spot so good it's boring, there's 'Nirvana'. A flawless, peeling wave with no sections and fades you out into a channel. By no means mushy, soft or slow, it's just the perfect barreling wave with a bit thinner lip and runs flawlessly, time after time. Nirvana is a bit more protected than the other spots, so needs more swell. However, if the other spots are too big, this becomes your saving grace. It's the wave you never want to leave and if I was to guess the final selling point that sealed the deal to bring a man on the move like Martin, to finally put down some roots in the Marshall Islands, it was this. As the name suggests, it is heaven.

For two weeks straight, every day had the same outline, but filled in with different adventures. Wake up to the Indies Trader squeaking against the dock as the first light shone through the porthole, there was then no rush in the morning to beat the wind to the waves as the wind simply blew day and night.

After breakfast on the island we would scout some conditions and hit the water, either right off of Beran, or by taking a larger boat (usually 'The Surveyor', Martin's work horse vessel) to breaks a bit further than is comfortable to ride to from home base. There really is only one way to fully appreciate this sort of adventure, to become part of it yourself.

Spending time on Beran I came to realise the effort that it must have taken to discover and set-up something like Martin has here, so far from any civilisation as we know it. Remote and exposed, he must be self-reliant and prepared for anything. I was looking around the island and thinking, 'how the hell did he get a three-tonne tractor on the island?' In the garage there is a more complete stainless-steel nut and bolt collection than you'd find at your local hardware store. There are three decompression chambers for deep diving, which have allegedly saved many lives each. Everything has a purpose and everything gets used.

After hearing rumors about his diving adventures, I asked Martin one night at dinner how long he had spent in one of his decompression chambers. I only have a basic understanding of how decompression works when diving, but I know if you are down too long or come up too fast, nitrogen gas bubbles form

and it is a pretty serious situation. I figured in a really bad situation you might end up in a chamber decompressing for a few hours, or at most the majority of a day. Martin looked over at me and in his still-thick Australian accent, casually remembered, 'Ah mate, 45 days'.

What? 45 days! He went on to explain the situation and why the industry had been down at 300-foot depths for so long and I realised what a gnarly guy Martin really is. The kind of guy it takes to envisage something this far out. He holds his paradise to the same unreasonable standards and it takes effort to reap the rewards that the Marshall Islands offer.

Find info on Reo's camps at [www.reostevers.com](http://www.reostevers.com)



Keahi's daily commute from the house to the dock, all of about two minutes long