



EXPEDITION DIARY Honduras 2006

By Katherine Wilden

6 March

It was 8 am on Saturday morning when the boat set off from Lagoon Marina, La Ceiba, to take us to the island that is to be our expedition base for the next few weeks. It had rained overnight, something that has become a pattern over the last few days, but the clouds were clearing away as we headed out to sea. The journey took around 40 minutes in the open-topped motorboat – warm and windy – and on landing at the jetty we were met by two very enthusiastic dogs and the epitome of a paradise island.

If you're wondering who I am, I'm Kathy Wilden, and I'm lucky enough to be your expedition leader for this diving expedition. Today is Monday and I've done some settling in. I've been working with Italo, who is leading the scientific work here (and is a diving instructor) and Matthias who is also from Biosphere. We have been finalising the training schedule and the daily routines as well as acclimatising to being on a beautiful desert island. I'm sure I don't have to remind you to bring your diving kits (mask, snorkel, fins, dive computer or watch and wetsuits essential, everything else can be hired here) and diving paperwork (certification/referral, medical statement, logbooks), but I did want to stress the need for long-sleeve tops and trousers, along with insect repellent, as the sandflies can be quite annoying here – the itching doesn't seem to last long but there can be quite a few of them!

I'll be travelling back to La Ceiba on Saturday morning to do some shopping and last minute paperwork and I'll be around on Saturday evening if anyone from the first slot would like to meet up for supper. I'll come to the Banana Republic Guesthouse at around 7pm and hang around for half an hour or so hoping for a date, so if you fancy joining me just turn up – I'll be somewhere around the reception. For our official meeting I'll back at the Banana Republic Guesthouse at about 6.40 am on Sunday morning - our 7 am meeting time is the earliest start on the whole expedition, but it is essential that you are there on time as the boat has to leave early enough to beat the developing waves that cause a nasty choppy sea later in the morning. If anyone needs to contact me then please use my local mobile, Tel: (please note that this number is for emergency communication only and will only work intermittently once we are on the island). Looking forward to meeting everyone.

Regards

Kathy.

8 March

This is a quick update on things over here and an apology for not including my mobile number in the last email. My mobile number (only for problems and emergencies) is a Honduran number Tel: +504 xxx [number withheld on web] (where 504 is the code for Honduras).

I'm settling into the island routine now and looking forward to the diving. Even just swimming off the beach here there are fish coming into the shallow waters and the visibility here, at least, is excellent. Arrangements are virtually finalised with all the survey sites now agreed and our timetable organised. When people arrive on the Sunday we'll spend some time on briefings and orientation, and then the next two days will be training for the survey work. After that we will settle into a daily routine with one survey dive in the morning and one in the afternoon. I'm attaching the plan for you all to have a look at, but remember to stay flexible as nothing is as constant as the change on plan on expedition ;->

Looking forward to seeing you all on your arrival.

15 March

First, apologies for the gap in communications – the internet has been down for a few days so I haven't been able to email. All part of the fun of island living. Everyone arrived safely at the meeting point on Sunday and we set off in good time for the boat ride over here. Even though we left early, a few of us got a bit damp (think of someone throwing buckets of water at us) on the way over as the wind picked up and the seas got a bit boisterous. We were travelling in a large boat called "Baracuda" (one 'r' in Spanish) that is going to be our dive boat for the next two weeks. She is an excellent boat for choppy seas, originally being a drugs-running boat that was seized by the police from some Columbian smugglers and donated to the research station here! On arrival everyone settled in and we spent the rest of the day with introductions and briefings about the work that goes on here and what the team will be doing. We ended the afternoon with an entertaining snorkel run-through of the survey technique that we will be using underwater. It involves laying a 100 m tape measure down on the bottom (our transect line) and then pairs of divers swimming at suitable intervals down the line looking for different aspects of the underwater environment. The first team identifies and counts certain families of fish, the second looks on the bottom for invertebrates and coral damage & disease, and the final team concentrates on what the bottom is made of (soft coral, hard coral, rock, sand, etc.). There is a lot to look out for, but the survey is designed so that each team has a manageable task.

Over the next two days we worked in the dry lab on our fish, invertebrate and substrate identification skills and then put them into practice with two dives, the second one also testing out the survey procedures. Although a few of us were a bit nervous about the first 'proper' survey, I am writing this at the end of the first day and we have had two very successful dives. Everybody was organized and efficient in getting into their buddy pairs and going down to the beginning of the transect, and then followed each other down the line like true professionals. The scientists here have been really impressed by everyone's abilities and dedication. We have also devised some interesting new hand signals underwater – when surveying, each diver has to carry several things with them, one team only has to carry a large slate to write down their observations but the fish team need a 2.5 m PVC tube (to demarcate the edges of their transect), a slate to write on and a couple of identification slates, so when they are asked how much air they've got left, the signals which say 'how am I supposed to pick up my gauge now?' can be quite direct! We are also working on some one-handed signals for the different types of fish. Snappers were quite easy (chomping action with hand) but we haven't really agreed on one for the parrotfish yet (my idea of putting your hand up as if it is sitting on your shoulder was rudely rejected). I'll let you know how things progress.

In other aspects of life here, the weather has been great with a good strong wind keeping things at a pleasant temperature and, more importantly for some of us, keeping the sandflies away. The island's wildlife has kept us entertained, with iguanas watching us as we walk up through the wood to the dining room for each meal, only occasionally falling out of the trees as we go past. There are a lot of crabs that live in holes in the sand on the seashore and run for cover as anyone approaches. As the slightly limited diet (refried beans with – almost – every meal) starts to make people crave alternative food types, it is lucky for the crabs that they are not quite big enough to be worth catching. I have just radioed an SOS to La Ceiba with an order for chocolate so I'm hoping that its arrival on Saturday will prevent mutiny!!

20 March

Work has been progressing at a steady pace here. Since I last wrote we have had three more survey days and a well earned day off. Baracuda leaves the jetty at 8.30am and 2pm everyday, everyone sitting in their buddy pairs with all their equipment, often doing some last minute work on identification and swapping tips on distinguishing grunts from snappers (the most difficult groups to separate as they are closely related, but more on this later). Underwater signals are run through, but not the normal ones that you will see on tourist dive boats. On Baracuda the array of signals can look very strange. The fish team's signs range from the parrotfish sign (they adopted mine in the end – hand sitting on shoulder!) to grunts (fist held sideways on head in manner of stupid person saluting - used because of the use of the word 'grunt' to describe a lowly private in the army) and the substrate team practicing the difference between sand and silt (fingers pointing downwards and wagging versus fingers pointing up and wagging), and soft coral (open fist) and hard coral (closed fist). To the uninitiated we must look like a rather eccentric bunch.

Back to fish identification (ID) problems. I thought that over the weeks I'd give you a few tips on our main indicator species so that next time you are in the water, diving or snorkeling, or watching the latest underwater programme, you can bore your friends and family with annoyingly knowledgeable details. The groups that we have the most difficulty distinguishing between are the grunts and the snappers. Both are medium to large fish with very similar body shapes. The text books can be a bit tricky to tie down on the differences. They say that snappers are 'usually' longer than grunts, 'usually' less colourful than grunts and their body shape is 'usually' fatter than grunts. So we've had to use close observation and the best advice from our local scientists to come up with a guaranteed way of telling them apart.

The grunts feed on inverts on the bottom whilst snappers feed on crustaceans and fish, and this has caused their feeding parts to evolve differently. So, if you are observing a fish one day, and you can't tell whether it's a grunt or a snapper, all you need to do is ask them to smile at you. As soon as they smile, take a look at their teeth and see if they've got any at the front – a nice big toothy grin means you've got a snapper on your hands, no canines, and you've got a grunt!

One type of fish that we haven't had any difficulty in identifying is the barracuda. At several of the sites that we've been diving we have been observed, and sometimes followed, by these magnificent animals. The biggest one was found hiding in a small ravine. It looked like a large dark fish hiding between the rocks but we couldn't see what it was. Its large and very pointed teeth seemed to shine out from the shadows. Then it suddenly decided it had had enough of us and darted out into the light. As it swiftly and elegantly glided off we could see its silver colour shining in the sun and estimated a length of around 2 metres. Definitely the largest fish so far.

As well as the magic of the underwater world we've been having some land-based experiences too. As we were suiting up one day at the end of the jetty Christoph very calmly called me over. 'Katherine, Katherine, could you come here? It's stung me twice'. I wandered over to where Christoph was standing with his wetsuit, thinking that maybe some stinging cells had been stuck in his suit, but when I looked down I saw a small brown scorpion sitting on the back of his hand. I made some rather pathetic efforts at getting it off (scorpions can really stick to things when they want to) until Christoph finally got it off very gently himself. There then followed a bit of a debate with our dive leader, who has a phobia of scorpions, over what we should do with it – this took the form of our leader holding a large shoe and waving it threateningly, and Christoph & I trying to protect the little scorpion. In the end the scorpion made its own decision on its future and ran off under the jetty, hopefully not to be seen again. Christoph went out for the morning dive and when he got back there wasn't even a mark on his hand where he had been stung.

Other incidences have included: minor foot surgery – splinter removal with three people taking turns to play surgeon (unsuccessful); sarong rescue from the jetty – after much debate our dive leader eventually jumped in (successful); and a Bay Watch moment when an empty fuel drum blew off the jetty - Louise spotted it and sprinted to the dry lab, in what proved to be rather unsuitable clothing for running, to get help and the help appeared in the form of a young man who ran onto the sand, stripping as he went, and diving into the sea to save the day (successful on so many levels for so many different people!).

With Sunday as our day off, Saturday night became party night for the researchers of Cayo Menor. Four year old Nicaraguan rum appeared (the favourite local tippie here), Carribean music played on the stereo and we chatted the night away in our open-air dining room set up in the hill. When it started to get late and some people headed for bed, the rest of us went in search of phosphorescence with a paddle on the beach and ended the evening sitting on the jetty watching the sea and the stars. For our "day off" the next day everyone chose different things to do. In the morning some chose to relax around the bungalows whilst the others took a wonderful walk across the island from our base on the south up to the northern beaches. Every year in June the north beaches become a site for nesting turtles, so from now until June the rubbish (plastic bottles washed up on shore) has to be removed from the beaches and large logs that block the turtles' path up the beach have to be cleared away. The walk across the island took us along a ridge through oak woods, past pirate treasure caves (according to local legend), snake spotting and learning about the pink boas that are protected here on the island. We also passed the tall antenna that has been set up amongst the trees on the highest peak here – it has taken many experts many months to get it set up properly but the result is that this island and those around can access the internet for the first time (before you get too excited, internet access is restricted to administrative staff in the office). The beach itself was spectacular and it was easy to imagine a large pirate galleon anchored out in the bay, but it was difficult to believe that so much rubbish had been washed up here. We filled our bags but realised that this was merely the start of this crucial work. On our return to base, and after a good lunch, the boat left to take half of our group for a fun dive and the other half to a hotel on the neighboring island for some rest and relaxation. After diving, the dive group joined the others at the hotel for a sundowner before we returned to base and supper. An early night was had by all in preparation for the resumption of our work in the morning.

23 March

The hot debate for our last 3 days of survey work was, as you might expect, something simple – who has seen the biggest fish? Lou has made claim to the biggest find, the 2 meter barracuda that I reported on in the last diary, but there have been some serious contenders and some ill feeling amongst the team! The substrate team often doesn't see anything except the tape measure and the bottom (signals for hard coral, soft coral, rocks etc flying between the buddy team) and the invertebrate team are busy looking in holes and crevices for illusive creatures (as well as counting the plant-like gorgonian soft corals), so I think they feel slightly at a disadvantage in the 'biggest fish you have seen' game at the end of each dive.

Having said that, the substrate and invert teams are often those that come back with stories of lobster, flamingo tongues, squid (which sometimes hide in the sponges) and other tricky to spot species. Another fish-bone of contention happened just as the dive boat had moored on its buoy for the last survey dive of this slot. Just as the divers were about to kit-up and get in the water a voice rang out - 'Shark, shark!!' There was a lot of excited scrabbling in the boat as everyone went to look. A few people saw a dark shape in the water but whether it was a shark or not was fiercely contested – unfortunately we didn't have an underwater sighting to confirm the theory.

Yesterday was the last survey dive and all the data have been put into the computer spreadsheets. After a final check from the scientists our first submission to the central 'Reef Check' database has been made. The scientists have been very impressed with the team's professionalism and dedication to the work and were pleased to be able to submit all of the surveys in the knowledge that the data were accurate and complete. The Honduran Coral Reef Foundation office in La Ceiba have just emailed to say that the data looks very interesting and will help with the decision making about future conservation strategies for the area. The submission to Reef Check will also ensure that the data from the reefs here are analysed along with hundreds of other reefs around the world to give a good picture of the health of the world's coral reefs and will help to inform global strategies on conservation.

As I write this it is the morning of the first team's last day here on the island. Some are just heading off for a fun dive whilst Christoph is doing an inventory of the survey kit to make sure that everything is in order for the next team. Caroline and Stephanie are also working hard, preparing a Happy Birthday banner for our lead scientist/dive leader using, for their creative inspiration, a mixture of fish identification cards, reef species books, and children's crayons! It should be interesting.

This afternoon is free time for everyone to sort their stuff out and pack up, followed by a final round-up at 4pm. We will depart at 7a.m. tomorrow morning, hoping for some quiet seas to give us a nice dry crossing! For those of you receiving this who will be coming on the next slot, I will be staying at the Banana Republic and on Saturday evening will be very pleased to meet up with anyone wanting to come for supper. I'll be in the reception area at 7pm if anyone would like to join me. If you need to get in touch with me, I can be reached either through a message at reception or on my new mobile which is Tel: +504 9842810. If I don't see you then, I'll see you (no later than) 7am on Sunday morning in the same location.

26 March

I know that somewhere in the dossier it says, 'stay flexible, things can change'? Unfortunately, it has been the weather that has changed and this has caused us a few problems. The first team left very successfully as planned on Friday at 7am, in what turned out to be the last good weather of the weekend. It was dead calm all that day, with not even a puff of wind on the island (wicked sandfly weather), and then the rain began overnight. At least it does 'rain' properly here – the serious torrential stuff that gets you wet when you look out of the window at it. Quite nice as a change but there's not much to do on a tropical island on a wet Saturday afternoon. There was some worrying news that a boat coming from La Ceiba had sunk and the staff here went out on a search and rescue mission. Two hours later word came that the people had been found swimming towards the mainland – they had had engine trouble, no bilge pump and no life jackets so as the boat started to sink they decided to swim for it. Luckily the patrol team from here reached them in time.

I'm glad to report that our boat coming with the new team this morning did, eventually, arrive here without any such mishap. They were slightly delayed by the weather but eventually decided that there was enough of a gap in the rain clouds to get over late this morning – and they even arrived dry! The rest of today was settling in and introductions and briefings on survey techniques. After an early night we should all awaken refreshed and ready for diving tomorrow.

28 March

It's been a packed couple of days training. The team have covered everything from snapper and grunt identification (something you know all about) to what the different 'nutrient indicator algae' look like (not a mean feat – maybe that should be your next training?). They also know exactly how slow they need to swim down the transect line, how to do all the hand signals, what the different sorts of sea urchins look like and much, much more. Formal training and practises have finished for today but the team are being very impressive and studying quietly in the dry lab together. Everyone has their nose in a book and the few sounds you here are mutterings about stripes, fin shapes and teeth. Yesterday we had a weight-check and orientation dive from the jetty here in the morning and then the team went out for a boat dive in the afternoon.

Everyone came back with stories of sightings and questions on identification, plus a few lucky people saw a Nassau grouper (this is the only fish that we need to count at species level). I think I was the most excited about it as it was the first one that I've seen since I've been here.

This morning we did a practice survey, splitting the team into two so that two different transects could be completed at the same time. One group had quite a good time with a relatively straightforward transect to follow whereas the other team had an interesting time trying to work on a wall that went from 6 m down to 12 m – not the easiest starting point when you are trying to count lots of things that you've rarely seen before, keep your buoyancy and not accidentally wack your buddy in the face with a 2.5 metre long PVC pipe (the fish team have to carry these). I have to say that they did amazingly well, especially given the added fun of a buffeting current, and still managed to surface with smiles on their faces.

You'll be pleased to hear that despite a rather slow start on the food this week (two suppers involving beans, tortillas and eggs) our lunch today was a triumph of chicken, rice and salad. I was thinking about bringing out the emergency chocolate early (this was very kindly provided by Carol and Glynn who arrived with enough to keep the whole team happy for a long time) but now that we've had chicken and I'm told that Italo's birthday cake has arrived, I think I'll hold it back for a few more days....

1 April

We have had three and a half days of survey work with good solid data coming in. The first two days we had an interesting mix of walls and shallow reefs to work on, swimming past a sunken plane at one site and around the side of a bowl-shaped reef on another. Everyone swapped roles and managed to master their positions really well. The only non-programmed activity involved a slight problem with the transect tape. The tapes that we use are 100 m tapes that are wound onto a plastic holder. Unfortunately the end of one of the tapes came off as it was being laid, so the people who were supposed to wind it in ended up having to do the best they could with a sort of gathering effort. We've got a lovely pictures of Sabine draped in tape underwater on the ImageStation site, laughing very hard.

The third day saw a wonderful dive at 'Dickie C', which is just off the neighbouring island, with big towers of coral reef to swim over and between. We didn't necessarily see the most in terms of indicator species, but it really was a great dive. Yesterday afternoon saw our most 'interesting' dive so far. As we moored up to a buoy at Cayo Timon, the sea was beginning to build a little as the wind got up, which made the boat a little uncomfortable to be on as we kitted up. The two teams that were going to lay the transect then left the boat and after a swim of about 200 m signalled and descended to lay the lines out for everyone else to follow. The rest of the team then entered the water and split into two to follow the two different transect lines (one deep and one shallow). The shallow team had a good survey, but one buddy pair had to surface at the end as one member became temporarily blinded after a mask flooding incident. Of the deep team, only the fish survey was completed as two team members didn't manage to find the start of the transect. They and the cover divers spent an interesting half an hour looking for each other underwater with regular surfacing to ask the boat for directions to each other. Just as the transect line was being reeled in everyone met at the start – just in time to head home to the boat! When we all surfaced the seas had really got up and it was hard work getting back on the boat. One buddy pair from the shallow dive had to surface quite a way from the boat after one of them became entangled in the transect tape and after 10 minutes watching them attempt to swim to the boat we saw a signal for help and took the boat to them. Although several of our team had had some quite anxious moments during, and at the end of, their dives, everyone was calm and level-headed. We all came away with nothing more than a good story and an amazement that so many unrelated things can happen to one small dive team!

After yesterday's excitement we chose a very sheltered site for this morning's dive. A gentle sea lapped the sides of the boat as everyone went in for a completely incident-free and successful survey. I think that one team member, Greg, is even warming to the role of substrate team recorder, something that he, at least, didn't think would ever happen.

As I write, we are about to go to lunch but are just hatching something for the team when they come back for the afternoon dive. Although it is 1 April, we managed to hold back on setting up a joke survey dive this morning, wanting people to have a relaxed dive following the excitement of yesterday – so this afternoon is a delayed April Fool's session. Our briefing board shows this afternoon's dive site as 'Lado del Tonto' ('The Fool's Place' in Spanish) and the team will be asked to look for two important site specific indicator species – *Diadema rosetta* (pink sea urchins) and the rare but wonderful 'horned butterflyfish'. I just hope that Italo, our dive leader, will be able to hold a straight face when he's going through the briefing!!

4 April

The April Fool's joke went quite well considering that there are a few Spanish speakers amongst the team and they're all quite clever people. There was some discussion about the meaning of the word 'tonto' (fool) and a couple of people knew exactly what it meant. Carol was good enough to accept the explanations of our field scientists and started to discuss exactly what a horned butterflyfish looked like – apparently a few people had tried to look it up in the reference books and couldn't find it. Michele, on the other hand, had a very wide and sceptical smile on her face the whole way through! Anyway, it made the organisers giggle and everyone smiled and laughed good-naturedly when the truth was admitted.

The afternoon dive that day was great, with only the lack of Greg on the team to spoil things. When we were about to jump in he noticed a hole in the high-pressure hose that goes to his gauges and Sabine located two, so unfortunately he couldn't dive (despite us trying to fit an alternate regulator which didn't fit and a rather sad and desperate attempt by me with duck tape – I know, the term 'high-pressure hose' should have given me a bit more of a clue about how useful a bit of tape was going to be, but I wanted my buddy in the water). The shallow dive team were unaffected and the deep dive team managed to muddle through as our transect was mercifully relatively shallow and there was lots of sand (Greg was due to work on the substrate team that has to take a reading every half metre of the make-up of the bottom i.e. sand, hard coral, rock etc etc – something that can take a long time except when you've got lots of sand readings).

Saturday night became Salsa night. After farewells to Matthias the team opened a drop of the local brew (rum) and turned to swapping stories of diving, love and dance! It turned out that both Detlef and Hellen were excellent salsa dancers and they took to the floor for a couple of demonstration dances. Everything fell apart shortly after that when some of the rest of us decided to have a go – but lots of fun was had by dancers and spectators alike. The evening ended with a now traditional (well, we've done it twice!) walk to the end of the jetty and a final drink looking out to sea and up at the stars.

Sunday was our "day off" and followed the same pattern as for the previous slot, so half the team stayed at base for a rest in the morning whilst the others trekked across to the north beach to do some beach cleaning. Arriving at the beach this time was much better as the results of our efforts the previous time were very apparent. We still managed to fill more than 10 rubbish sacks in about 45 minutes, so you will understand that there is still plenty of work to be done there. We considered setting up a market stall in La Ceiba with some of the debris – an amazing number of shoes and some interesting children's toys. The afternoon was spent with a mixture of fun diving and sitting at the hotel on the next door island, drinking pina coladas or sipping rum. Ecson, our boat captain, very kindly slowed the boat at appropriate moments on the boat ride home so that we could all get our cameras out to snap sundown over our very own island.

Monday dawned with some bad news of two of our members who were unable to dive (one tummy problem and one ear problem) so despite having the extra assistance of Ecsson, who is a qualified divemaster, we still didn't have enough people to run two transect groups. We organized ourselves into one group, which allowed us to experiment with some extra support for the invertebrate team in the form of an additional person who is dedicated to counting the soft corals called gorgonians. The invertebrate team is always stretched by the number of gorgonians that have to be counted (often 800 plus on a transect) as well as having to hover upside down in the water peering into cracks and crevices looking for the likes of lobster and shrimp. The gorgonian person proved to be a popular improvement to the team and even Detlef, who volunteered to do the job, was quite pleased with the results. Ecson has also proved to be a popular addition to the team and has been voted the coolest diver so far. To start with we weren't sure whether he'd forgotten his wetsuit (we all wear 3 mm or 5 mm suits) as he started to kit up on the boat in his shorts and T-shirt, but no, it seems that he doesn't need a wetsuit. He also doesn't seem to need much in the way of weights to get him down – in his previous diving he had been happy without any weights but Italo insisted that he carried one, just to show that he had thought about it!

This morning we all awoke to a change in the weather. Not even a breath of wind disturbed the island as we sat in our hill-top dining room for breakfast and several people left early to avoid being eaten alive by the return of the sandflies. By lunchtime there were threatening clouds as well and as we changed for the afternoon dive the rain began in what was generally regarded as an English drizzle. We arrived back from the dive as the sky opened and gave us a proper Honduran version, everyone eager to get dry and warm up (yes, here we are sitting on our island in the Caribbean and I'm moaning about the cold and the rain). We hope for a return to sunshine before we all leave the island on Friday.

4 April (interlude from L.A.)



Sorry for butting in everyone, this is Matthias, but I thought you'd all like to hear this story. Today I went to the Reef Check HQ in L.A. and guess who the first person I see? Our very own "outstanding" film star Craig from Reef Check, the movie! Within a split second I was transformed into a groupie, begging him for an autograph and a picture. Poor Craig I think did not quite know what to make of it all and like a true star kept us waiting for a while before gracing us with his attention and an autograph. Before you think I am serving you a bullshit story, I have taken the precaution of taking a photograph of the event, complete with the man himself and his autograph. The trip to California's been worth it just for this! Oh, and by the way, the meeting was very good too. They like our work and we are making plans for the future.....

P.S. I have copied Craig into this (see top) in case you want to send him some fan mail ;->

9 April

After a little bit of bad weather, followed by sandfly-heaven conditions, the island finally returned to our favourite weather state of hot and windy for the last day. The team continued working right up to lunchtime on the last day as we had to complete a final transect on what should have been a 'fun dive' at the end. I think that Matthias' meeting with the Reef Check video star, Craig, had boosted our motivation and we were all keen to impress. Craig has now said that he might 'drop-in' on an expedition with us soon - so you'd better all join up for next year now!!

It was with sadness that I spent Thursday packing up and clearing away all of our equipment. It has been a wonderful experience, living at the research base and sharing the lives of the people there. All of the team members have been great with a really strong commitment and wonderful team spirit. We left on 'our' boat, Baracuda, on Friday morning and said our final farewells at the Banana Republic. I didn't manage to see everyone before I had to go to a meeting at the Foundation's office so I'd like to say a warm goodbye to everyone that I didn't catch up with - I hope to see you all again. Since then I have been travelling and nearly 48 hours later have arrived back in the Biosphere UK office and completed the paperwork for the expedition.

It has been an amazingly successful expedition - a really good set of data for the Honduran Coral Reef Foundation to base their decision-making on over the next months and years (they have asked us to come back with teams for at least the next five years), the Reef Check organisation that takes in all the data worldwide from these types of surveys is impressed with some of the procedures that the teams have developed and have asked if they can collaborate with us in other areas, and we at Biosphere are happy that the project has gone so well and that everyone has contributed so much. All that is left for me to say is thank you to all those involved and I hope to be back out at Cayos Cochinos next year. Maybe see some of you there?