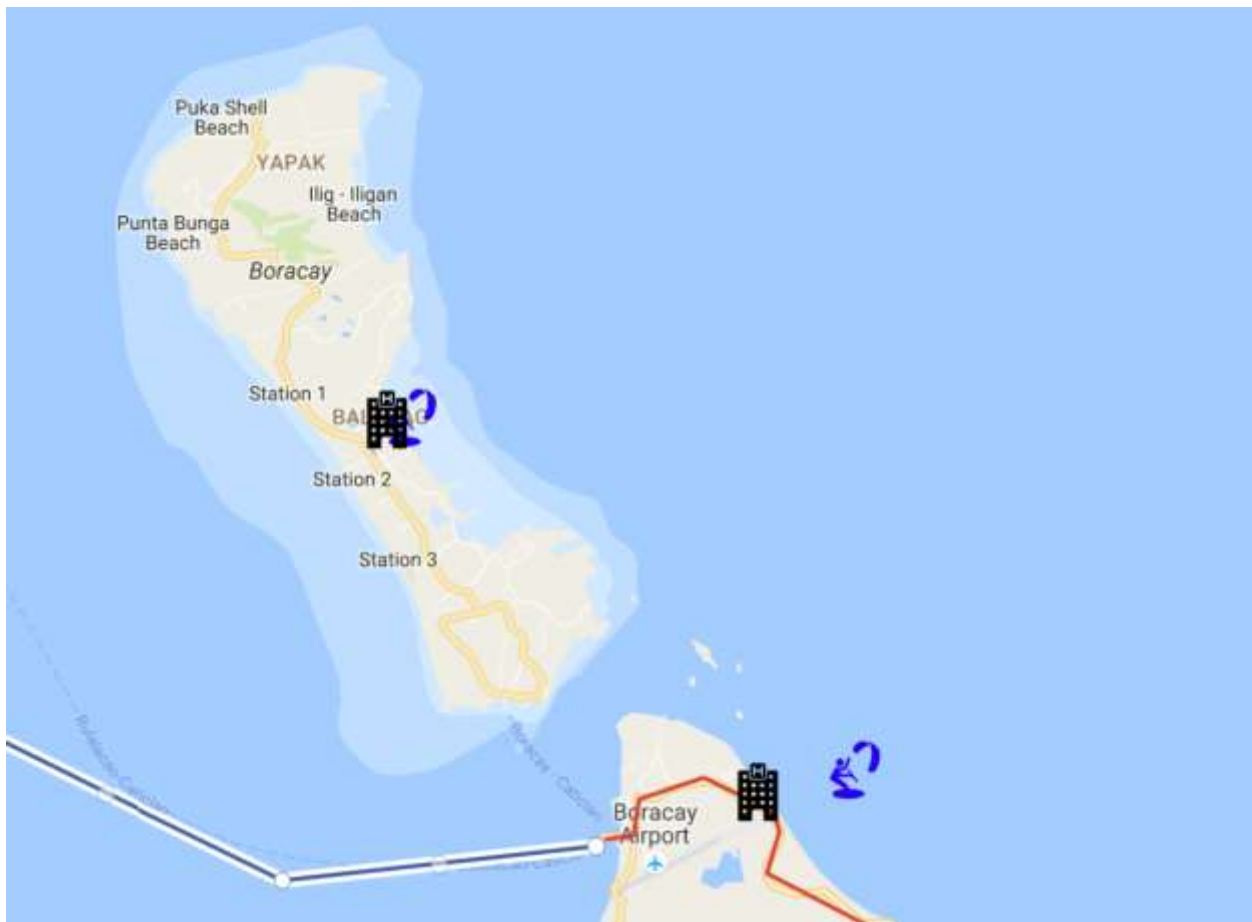
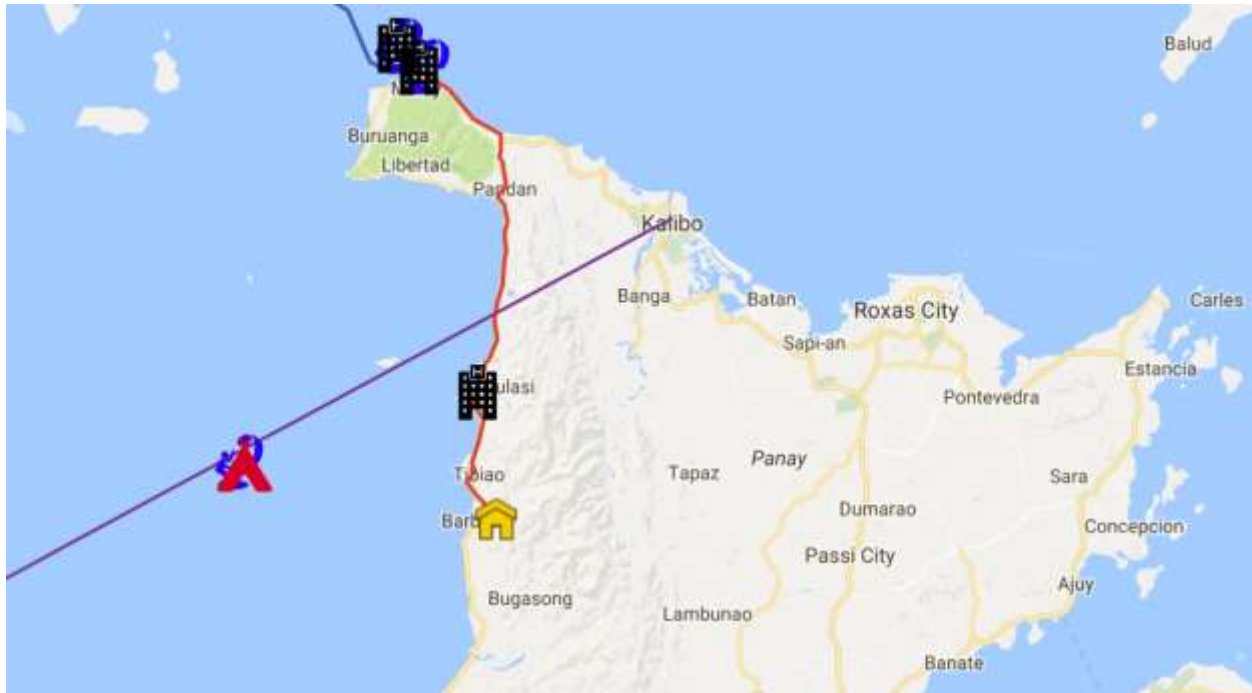


Season 6 – Part 2. Kite Surfing Kite Surfing Kite Surfing!



We 10.2.2016, day 213. Off to Boracay.

We arranged to leave our bikes and most of our baggage at the hotel as we didn't feel like going to all the trouble of packing our bikes and all our stuff onto the small Bancas (small outrigger boats that are used to ferry people between the islands). So we packed all the kite surf stuff and one bag with everything we would need for the next 5 days and took a tricycle to the ferry terminal. Soon we were on one of the Bancas to Boracay.







Th – Su 11-15.2.2016, day 214-217. Boracay.

Boracay was once a paradise island, extending about 6 km north to south and 500 m wide and is a 10-minute boat ride from the mainland of Panay. It has the most superb white beach on the west coast and on the east coast another beach that is more rugged as it faces the prevailing winds that blow hard most of the time. Between the beaches there are some mangrove swamps or rocky outcrops. The rest of the island was once hilly jungle.

What has become of the island is beyond words. There is an ongoing green algae bloom triggered by all the raw sewage that is simply dumped into the sea. This left the white beach covered by a green goo that is raked up every morning to keep up the appearance. A walk along the beach at low water reveals the pipes where the sewage drains. The smell is terrible. Apparently the pipes are shorter than required by law, but if the right bribe is paid to the right person everything is possible.

At night white beach is packed with tourists lounging around on beach chairs in front of the bars that line the whole length of the beach without space between them. Each bar turns the volume of the music up as loud as possible to try and drown the rumble and throb of the adjacent bars.

Every couple of minutes touts come along offering sunglasses, peanuts, plastic toys, dvds, ask if you want to join the island hopping tour, or the parasailing tour, or want to go jet skiing, or whatever and it is really hard to stay polite after saying “no thank you”, “no thank you”, “no thank you” hundreds of times.

If you move inland from the beach things get shabby very quickly and the narrow roads are congested with tricycles, air conditioned white tourist transfer busses, bikes and trucks. Of course there is also a McDonalds and a huge complex called D-mall with back to back souvenir shops, restaurants, beach wear stores.

Incredibly, the resort hotels are still quite well booked in spite of the prices ranging from 500\$ to 1000\$ per night for a beachside room at one of the nicer hotels and also at every corner there is construction going on as all sorts of investors are trying to get their piece of the cake by building new hotels or restaurants or entertainment centres.

The majority of the tourists here are Chinese and Koreans. Funny how they always travel in groups following a guide that is explaining all sorts of things. They even tour the D-mall in groups and then patiently wait in line at some ice cream place until the whole group has the same ice cream. There are also a lot of Russian tourists, while only few western Europeans or Americans. For me this shows how, especially the Chinese, are copying what they think is the western idea of wealth and luxury, while the people in the west, mainly the Europeans are becoming far less attracted to mass tourism and resort complexes.

And I am not at all saying that this is a good thing. While it is clear that Boracay is completely ruined by mass tourism it might still be better to concentrate all the tourists at one place than to do what especially western Europeans are doing, touring the world looking for the very last untouched spots, similar to big game trophy hunters shooting the last remaining Rhinos.

Seeing a place like Boracay also makes me think about the whole concept we have today about wealth, money and consumption. Reading books like “Why Nations Fail” it seems that still today the ideal we

should be striving for is the American concept, which is to give people incentives to become rich. Doing this, some do become rich, some even become stupidly rich, but very many don't make it and get stigmatized as they do not correspond to the ideal driving them into criminality, into drugs or into a burn out. And if you have "made it" and are rich you come to a place like Boracay, to flaunt your wealth, to post pictures of yourself on FB and to destroy the island. Somehow scary to think that there are 1'200'000'000 Chinese striving for the "American Dream".

Coming back to my favourite topic of Permaculture, I think we should really start having a shift in values, away from growth at all cost towards self-sufficiency, sustainability, modesty and sharing instead of owning.

All these musings apart, we had a really good time on Boracay. We stayed in Surfer's Home right on the kite surf beach. We had some great kiting days, Siria took lessons and made a huge jump forwards. She is now able to get up on the board without problem and is able to ride really nicely, even up-wind. Next big step will be turns.

We also met up with Fabian, the brother of Siria's sister's husband. Once again I used him as a mule, he brought my new credit card from Switzerland and I gave him my thick and heavy and now no longer needed wet-suite to bring back home. It was really great seeing him and chatting about friends and family back home.

For us the time on Boracay was really like a holiday from our holidays and after 5 days we almost started to feel a bit guilty from doing nothing all day but eating sleeping and kite surfing. The stay on Boracay was also quite expensive. Prices there are way above anything we have encountered on the Philippines so far.











Mo 15.2.2016, day 218. Caticlan.

After 5 days on Boracay we took the Banca back to the mainland to the Gailtian Resort where we had left our bikes. I was glad to see they were still there, however the salty sea air has caused them to go a bit rusty. Poor bikes! After checking in we packed the kite surf stuff and biked over to the kite spot at Blue Orange Resort. There we met Andrei and Corinna again, two of the kite surfers who had been staying at Gailtian resort in Caticlan when we spent the night there before going over to Boracay.

Unfortunately there was no wind. But the predictions said wind should pick up, so I inflated the kite, just to be ready. Everybody laughed at me and indeed no wind came. So we headed off back to the hotel, miffed.

Tu 16.2.2016, day 219. Kite surfing in Caticlan

The wind predictions said there should be good wind in the morning, so I set my alarm for 6am. Unfortunately it didn't go off and I slept until 8am. I cursed and jumped out of bed and biked off to the kite spot as quickly as possible. When I got there, there was already too little water in the lagoon to kite, so I cursed some more and had a coffee waiting for the tide and hoping that the wind wouldn't die. Soon Siria arrived with lots of goodies from the market in Caticlan and my mood significantly improved. It turned out that the wind blew all day, so we got in some great kite surfing. Siria's riding is improving in leaps and bounds and I started doing some small little jumps. In the evening we went out for dinner with Andrei and Corinna.









We 17.2.2016, day 220. More great kite surfing and a party.

The day was almost an exact copy of the day before. Brilliant sunshine and perfect wind. We headed out to the kite spot, enjoyed the beach lounge at the Blue Orange Resort and kited all day. It was absolutely fantastic! Towards the evening the wind dropped and Andrei brought a bottle of rum and a bottle of coke from the kiosk around the corner. The 35cl bottle of rum was 45 Pesos, less than 1 \$! That bottle was followed by another and then another. We ended up having dinner at the resort, which was a grill up and was great, telling stories of kiting adventures. Apparently Andrei is taking a year (or more?) off from work and is travelling from one kite spot to the next, basically doing nothing much else than enjoying the beaches and kiting, kiting, kiting. He already spent time in Brazil, Venezuela, Dominican Republic and now he's in the Philippines. What a life! It was really great hanging out with the two of them and once again we were sad to say good bye.

We biked back to our hotel and found that there was a Karaoke party going on there, so we joined in (it would anyway have been impossible to sleep as our room was right next to the speakers) and sung a couple of songs. To my surprise and to my great joy, Siria also sang two songs! And did quite a good job as well!



Th 18.2.2016, day 221. On the road again.

We set the alarm quite early as we had quite a long ride ahead of us. We were both feeling quite battered from the celebrations of the night before. I packed my stuff in slow motion and finally got everything ready. Siria had an instant soup for breakfast, I only managed to get down a coffee. We then slowly headed off. After a couple of kilometres, the odometer clicked off the mark of 10'000 km. What

an incredible milestone! And we are still dragging the kite board with us! We shot the obligatory selfie and rode on. It was really hot and we had a small hill to climb. Instantly the sweat started to pour down my body and there was a constant drip off my nose. We took it really really slowly, stopped for quite a tasty lunch of 2 servings of meat and vegetables, 3 servings of rice, 3 delicious fried bananas, water and a lemonade. All this knocked us back 110 Pesos or just over 2\$. We stopped again for some ice cream and arrived in Culasi at about 2pm. It was a really wonderful ride along beaches, through palm and banana tree forests, past hills and over sparkling streams, along rice paddies being worked by farmers with water buffaloes, through small villages where everyone laughed waved and shouted as we passed. Biking is really a fantastic way to discover a country.

Siria had found a hostel on the internet and we headed straight there. It was a really nice place, tucked in away from the road. We booked into the room and took a stroll to the town, the market, had dinner and then sat down on the pier at the beach watching the children play in the sea and the sun slowly set.





















Fr 19.2.2016, day 222. Trip out to the uninhabited kite surf paradise island: Seco Island!

We had booked a kite surf weekend on Seco Island, a tiny island far out in ocean, apparently uninhabited and known to offer perfect kiting conditions. I really felt we were massively overpaying for this trip and I was afraid it was going to be a tourist rip-off. We were to join up with the group at 9am at the marked in Culasi. 9am came and went, we were there with our stuff, but there was no sign of anyone anywhere. After asking around for a bit someone made a call to someone else and very soon Rico, who was going to be the captain of the boat arrived in his ragged tee shirt. Some 30 minutes later a jeepney full of really cool kite surf dudes turned up. Turned out that most of them were instructors from Boracay who joined the trip probably to get away from the beginners and tourists and didn't seem very interested in socializing in anyone outside of their group, but Mike, the guy organizing the trip was great and there were some other regular kitesurfers who were relaxed and approachable.

My main concern on the boat ride out was not to get burnt to a cinder by the blazing sun. I did this by hiding under a blanket, but this quickly got too hot, so I dumped the blanket until I got too worried that I was getting burnt. Suddenly after heading out into the deep blue ocean for about 2.5h a tiny yellow sliver of an island with The ocean turned the most incredible turquoise colour as we approached the coral reef. We were ferried in on a small boat as the water was very shallow inside the reef. The island was really very small indeed. On one side there were some fishermen who seemed to be using the island as a base, we went the other side, where Rico and his crew quickly knocked up a shelter with a couple of bamboo poles and a large tarpaulin.

The next disappointment for us was that Isla Kitesurfing school over whom we had booked the trip forgot to pack kite equipment for Siria. She was really very miffed by this. Also for me the wind was way too strong for my 12m kite. So we both glumly sat there watching everyone else have a good time. Luckily Mike came to our rescue and offered that we could use his gear for a small fee. He is a professional kite surfer and his equipment was correspondingly high performance stuff. I took his 8m kite out for a spin and was stunned by the speed and directness of the kite. I seriously need to consider getting new gear! Later in the afternoon the wind dropped enough for me to use my 12m kite and Siria got to use Mike's 8m. So we finally did get in some great kiting!

We spent the evening sitting on the beach drinking beer, watching everyone show off their skills in front of the setting sun. Especially Mike was incredible to watch. Compared to him the cool Boracay instructor dudes looked like school kids. And Mike's dog Cash went absolutely nuts chasing up and down the beach after him. It was really quite magical! Rico's gang did a great job of cooking a small tuna that they bought from the fishermen at the other side of the island.

Quite soon we crawled off to a quiet little corner of the beach unrolled our mats and lay down to doze off under the moon and stars.











Sa 20.2.2016, day 223. Seco Island.

This day followed pretty much the same pattern as the day before. Quite soon after sunrise it was too hot to lie in the sun forcing us to get up. I went for a quick dip in the ocean to cool off, had a breakfast of about 3 coffees, lots of pineapple and some chocolate bars, after that the only thing we did all day was kite surf! I really having more and more fun. I'm still a beginner, but feeling more and more relaxed and confident, I think starting to carve the turns nicely with good speed and also starting to have fun jumping. Only problem is I can't really estimate how high I'm going to go before the jump. Scariest moment was during the evening session when using Mike's high performance kite, just before sunset, when I decided to try just one last jump. I was going fast, edged up and pulled the kite back quite hard. The kite jerked me out of the water and I shot up into the air. I felt as if I continued to go up for ever and could almost look over the island to the other side. I threw away the board in panic and tried to keep the kite above my head. Coming down again felt almost like the finally approach when landing a paraglider. I crashed into the water. No harm done and the kite still flying peacefully above my head. Good thing I always made a point of only jumping when I was well away from the beach! Then I looked back and tried to spot my board. It was nowhere to be seen. I body dragged backwards and forwards for a while but couldn't see the board anywhere. So I went to the beach, landed the kite and waded out to look for the board. No chance. I had almost given up when Mike cruised past, asked what the problem

was and in a flash he found the board, picked it up, rode back and threw it on the beach, then continued doing his crazy freestyle stuff. I have a long way to go!

Evening meal was a feast. Rico dug a pit, filled it with wood charcoal, speared a couple of chickens on a spit and rotated them above the embers. There was again a grilled tuna, rice, fruit, salad and everything was washed down with ample quantities of beer. Later the rum (or vitamin tea, as Rico called it) came out and everyone gravitated towards the fire. Mike asked for a couple of songs on the guitar and I found the nerve to play. In fact, I was not nervous at all for once and everyone was very appreciative. It was actually a very nice and peaceful atmosphere.







Su 21.2.2016, day 224. Back to Culasi.

After a slow start, we got to set up the kite equipment. Siria was very nervous but after a bit of kicking she finally got set up and out onto the water. It was actually the first time that we were both on the water at the same time. I just rode backwards and forwards a bit, my nerves still a bit on edge after yesterday's huge jump and hard landing.

All too soon kite surfing was over and we were all packed up and back on the boat. The ride back was far more fun. We were heading into the wind, so it was cooler and we were also crashing into the waves meaning that every now and then bucket loads of refreshing sea water came spraying all over us.

In Culasi we said goodbye to everyone, took a tricycle back to Anne Sophie's Hostel, were relieved to find our bikes still there (even if they had been moved due to a wedding that we held during the weekend), had a quick shower and went for a late lunch by the water's edge. We then watched the sun set and started to turn our minds to the next leg of this trip: Steve's Permaculture Air Project. I am really wondering what this will be like!





Mo 22.2.2016, day 225. Into Mablاد...

We had a short ride ahead of us, so we took it easy, got up quite late, had a nice Filipino breakfast in the hostel, rode out of Culasi southwards along the coast. In Tibiao we stopped for something to eat and had a look at the university campus. Just before Barbaza we took the turning up towards Mablاد. The road quickly turned into a dirt road that climbed sharply into the hills. We had no idea where the Permaculture Field School was, but we figured that Mablاد is a tiny place and someone would surely know about it. We were happily riding along, when suddenly Siria's mudguard fell off. We stopped to pick it up and remount it. After putting it back I looked up and saw a sign for a pizzeria up against the fence right next to us. I found it somehow strange that there should be a pizzeria up here in this very poor and rural village. It quickly struck us, that the mudguard had fallen off exactly outside of the Permaculture School. What a coincidence! Or was it the doing of the invisible hand that had been drawing us towards this place ever since we first learnt about permaculture from the Jana, the Bike a Bee beekeeper back in Chicago...



