



Log of S/V *High Drama*

No.9-TheSociety Islands Part I: Tahiti, Moorea, Raiatea, and Tahaa

French Polynesia

July 2001

High Drama tugs gently on her anchor as the wind pushes her and tidal current shifts underneath. We sit in the cockpit sipping a glass of Cote d’Rhone watching the sun drift beneath the horizon. Although we sit in silence, we share a common thought: how fortunate are we to be able to live this dream. In this Log of *S/V High Drama* please join us in the Society Islands in French Polynesia: Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine, Raiatea, and Tahaa. We start with Captain James Cook and the history of his voyages here. Next we show some pictures of the Heiva celebration and the Autonome Day Parade. We comment on the influence of the missionaries, and provide some thoughts about Tahitian dance. We conclude with a collage of photos and prediction about where we will go next.

We always welcome hearing from you. Please write to us at:

_____ or _____

The Society Islands and Captain James Cook

No reasonable discussion can be held about French Polynesia without first discussing Captain James Cook, the famous British explorer. He named the Society Islands, among others, and charted most of the major islands the South Pacific. Cook began his Navy career as an enlisted man, which was quite remarkable since in the 1750s most sailors were involuntarily conscripted. Moreover, he joined at the age of 26, whereas many young men who hoped to make a career of the Navy began as cabin boys at the age of 12. Cook quickly rose in rank to master, the senior enlisted man on a ship, responsible for navigation. One of Cook’s early assignments included charting the St. Lawrence River and later the coast of Newfoundland. The accuracy of his charts, which he made using land-surveying methods, caught the attention of the British Admiralty.

In 1767, the British Royal Society, a group of scientists and academicians, hoped to measure the path of Venus as it passed in front of the sun. If the measurement were taken from

different places on earth, they would be able to determine the size of the solar system for the first time. This in turn would allow more accurate navigation. Tahiti, which had been “discovered” by Samuel Wallis one year before, was selected as an observation point. Of course, the British Admiralty recognized that certain military, political, and economic benefits would follow from increased activity in the Pacific. At the time, Spain claimed most of the Pacific (without realizing the breadth of the area) by virtue of their trade routes from Mexico to the Philippines. France had an interest and sent Bougainville on a scientific voyage at about the same time. Britain controlled much of the Atlantic, but their grip on the Colonies had slipped because of their confounded Revolution. Most of the Pacific at that time was a great unknown.

The Royal Society the Admiralty for support. Of course, if the Admiralty were to supply the ship, they would also surely supply the captain. Cook’s map-making skills made him an excellent choice to lead the expedition. He was promoted to Lieutenant and the Royal Society also selected him as one of the astronomers to make the observation of the Venus transit.

Cook’s scientific zeal transcended astronomy. Along with Joseph Banks, the naturalist on the *Endeavor*, Cook sought to learn about the culture of the indigenous people. Cook succeeded in befriending the natives on Tahiti, albeit with an occasional show of force, and was able to trade for supplies including water, hogs, and fruit. Cook realized that the visits by Europeans would forever alter Tahitian culture.

Unlike most sea captains of the day, Cook was extremely protective of his crew. On Cook’s first voyage, he experimented with diets to prevent scurvy. Sauerkraut was one of his favorite dishes to ward off scurvy. Although Cook was very successful preserving the health of his crew, apparently sauerkraut had little to do with it. Rather, Cook’s insistence that his crew eat fresh meat and local produce reduced scurvy more dramatically than on any ship of the time.

But most of all, Cook was a sailor and a navigator. We puny yachtsmen sail in and out of well charted well marked reef passes using satellite technology that pinpoints our position within 10 meters. Cook depended on a sextant for determining latitude and the lunar method (a lengthy time consuming series of calculations) for determining longitude. He sent long boats in to find passes in the reefs. The finest chart maker of the day, he continually grumbled that the explorers of earlier times did not take time to carefully chart their discoveries. Cook was one of the greatest navigators of all times whereas we only follow the dots. But still, we thrive on following his footsteps. The Tahiti we have discovered differs from the Tahiti Cook found.

Papeete, Tahiti



Waterfront of the bustling City of Papeete



Downtown Papeete, Tahiti came alive with the “Heiva,” the Tahitian term for celebration. This month long celebration in all of French Polynesia takes place from June 22 to July 22, but climaxes around French Independence Day, Bastille Day, July 14. The Heiva involves dance

competition, canoe races, and a fruit carrying race, arts and crafts demonstrations, a javelin-throwing contest and numerous other celebrations of Tahitian culture. The competition in Papeete includes representatives from groups from all islands in French Polynesia. However, each island has its own celebration also. In the photograph above, you see the start of the 6 man canoe races in Papeete. Views of different races follow.



One-man canoe races.



After race.



Right of way challenge.



12 women per canoe.

The Javelin Contest



There were 4-6 throwers to a team; each man threw 10 spears in 10 minutes. There were 10 rounds.



The technique required an underhand throw.



Men of diverse ages participated.



Only the top most spear got a point. Some early spears got knocked out later in the round.

The Tahitian Independence Day Parade

The Islands of French Polynesia have been a protectorate of France since 1842. However, over time, France has given the islands a broad area of self-government. On June 29 we attended a parade that celebrated Autonomie Day. Below are scenes from the parade.





Local Union, I think.



Kids



Queens



Flag wavers.



Beer drinkers.



Parades make you thirsty. Relaxing at Le Retro.

Fred & Renee from *Aldebaran*. Suza from *Voyager*. Ann. Paul from *Adelie*, Paul and Natalie from *Renegade*.

The Missionaries Arrived After Cook



Octagonal Protestant Church Moorea

In 1792 a group from the London Missionary Society landed in Moorea and established a church where the octagonal church pictured above stands. In 1812 they converted Pomare II, the reigning leader of Tahiti, to Christianity. Shortly thereafter, Pati, the lead priest of Oro, the god of fertility and war, publicly accepted Christianity and burned all of the idols in the area. The whole population followed Pomare's example. They let the *maraes* where they had previously worshipped and where chiefs met to determine policy, go to seed thereafter. The islanders had no written language, but rather passed on rituals, myths, customs, taboos, navigation techniques,

and virtually everything important orally. The culture was passed down through a host of oral means including story telling and dance. Now much about the old ways has been lost.



Eglise de la Sainte Famille

Catholic missionaries competed with Protestant missionaries and some islands were divided on religious grounds. The church pictured above was the home of the Catholic mission on Moorea; the church was built in 1891.

Dance and Sport

Joseph Banks, the scientist aboard *Endeavor*, Cook's first ship, theorized that the Tahitians devoted much time to play because they required very little time to gather food. The Tahitians devoted comparatively few hours to raising food because so much fruit grew naturally and fish were always abundant. The sea attracted the Tahitians above all. They surfed, swam, and raced canoes. On land they participated in archery contests, for distance, not accuracy. Tahitians never used the bow and arrow for war. They wrestled, played ball, and had javelin-throwing contests. But they loved to dance and early European visitors marveled at how they danced almost every day for any reason, but of course, always in celebration.

Dancing took place at the *maraes* to celebrate harvests, fishing, and voyaging. Most community activities involved dancing or dance competition. Children took part in dancing at a very early age. Dances involved re-enactments of battles or preparation for battle. Dances depicted religious myths and the stories of the gods. And of course, some dances celebrated life and procreation.

The Missionary Position on Tahitian Dance

After achieving success converting the Tahitian population to Christianity, the missionaries began exerting influence in the political sphere. They provided drafts of “codes” and chiefs among the Society Islands promulgated them. King Pomare II of Tahiti, published the Pomare Code in 1819. These codes sought to abolish old Pagan bad habits: the time-honored practices of tattooing and dancing were outlawed. According to P. O’Reilly, dancing went underground for twenty to thirty years. When the French assumed control over government, dancing was legalized for a short time, and then outlawed. In 1849, Article I of the Government Council of the Protectorate provided: “The dance know as the *upaupa* is prohibited in all islands of the protectorate.” So much for protection.

The Europeans seemed most offended by a dance called the *Timorodee*, which appeared to simulate copulation. Although my research does not clearly answer the question, this dance seems to have died in the early rounds of regulation. Another dance, however, the *upaupa* lasted for quite awhile. In the mid 1800s visitors from Europe wrote, “Even if they begin in decency, they invariably end with gestures of an abusive sensuality...” A German woman, Ida Pfeiffer, who stopped in Tahiti in 1847, described these dances as “the most indecent that I have ever seen!”

Gradually around 1900, dancing made a comeback in Tahiti. Missionaries authorized people to travel to Papeete for the Heiva that accompanied Bastille Day. Early dancers were required to wear long white mission robes, apparently under the theory that no one could have fun in one of those. But slowly, traditional costumes returned. Dance competition among island groups took place. By 1956, Madeline Moua set up a dance group. Finally a woman from an honorable family supported dance. Tourism also aided the revival. Tourists loved the traditional Tahitian dances as they are now performed and resorts found it necessary to make arrangements with local dance groups for performances. At long last, two hundred twenty five years of deleterious missionary zeal has been overcome.

Tahitian Dance Today

Today Tahitian dance is alive and well. Sensuous they are; scandalous they are not. Seeing traditional dance is one of the most joyous aspects of our visit here! We first sampled the *tamure* at a luxury resort. These dancers are highly skilled and their routines well choreographed. Their movements were timed precisely.

As we moved through the Society Islands, however, we enjoyed dance competition at the village level. In Huahine we attended a competition where each of 10 districts on this small island entered a dance team comprised of about 50 young men and women between the ages of 13 to 25. The competition was held in an outdoor gym with the floor pulled up and bleachers installed. The event sold out every night to local people. For reasons I can’t fathom, very few tourists came to the local island competitions. We also saw local competition on the island of Tahaa. The participants looked like they had the time of their lives. The young women (ages 13-15) were especially fun to watch as they practiced swinging their hips while delivering a coquettish smile. All of the dances re-enacted a local myth. Below are two pictures of the professional dancers followed by some shots of the Heiva in Tahaa, and an American group we met in a remote spot on the Island of Huahine.



Two wonderful dancers at the Beachcomber Hotel.
Below, the village competition held at Tahaa.



Part of the band.



Aerial act.



Choral backup for the dancers.





Each of the 6 villages on the island entered a dance group composed of about 50 young people.





Each village also entered a large chorus for singing competition.

The Sacramento group



Above is the Sacramento, California Tahitian dance club performing for their Huahine hosts out in the country. Check out their website: <http://tepoe.tripod.com> Apparently San Jose, California has one of the biggest annual Tahitian dance competitions outside of Tahiti.



These kids spent 10 days learning from their Tahitian host families.



The parents of the California group provided musical accompaniment.



Smiling missionary attempting to convert two pagans.

Marae Taputapuatea on the Island of Raiatea

This *marae* in Raiatea is the most important in French Polynesia. The site, with the crude rebuilt representation of Oro, god of war and fertility, looks out the Te Ava Moa pass to the sea. Large fire pits open toward the sea. From this point on Raiatea Polynesian navigators sailed large double voyaging canoes to colonize New Zealand (2200 miles away) and Hawaii (2300 miles away). They made multiple round trips. They had no sextants, compasses, or charts. They navigated by using the stars, the ocean swells, the wind, and signs of land, such as birds, or floating plants. While Cook was a great navigator, one has to marvel at the sailing skill of the Polynesians who made these trips in frail open canoes.



The posts next to Oro line up with the pass through the reef.



Ann looks at an altar.



Banyan trees were usually found at sacred places. Here Ann rests.

Collage of Photos



Farming black pearls.



Sandra and Gabby, guests aboard *High Drama* one evening.



Voyager inside reef at Tahiti. Moorea in the background.



Ann's herb garden on the back of *High Drama*. Some people think it is "paka", the Tahitian name for grass.



Impromptu music in municipal common area in Fare, Huahine. Weaver sings, too.



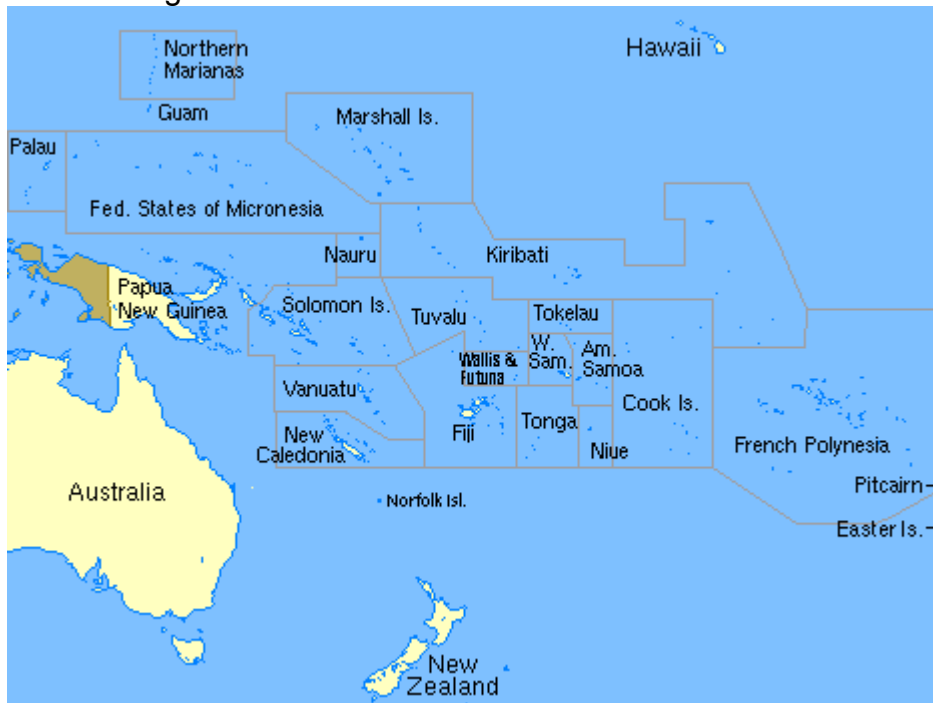
The pot of gold went to the guy who already had it in **Rover**, a very classy powerboat.



Departing Opunohu Bay, Moorea, one of Cook's anchorages.



Looking over what the Tahitians call “The Sea of Moons.”



Conclusion

We have one more island to visit in the Society Islands, the crown jewel Bora Bora. Pudge Ingebritson, another Albert Lea, Minnesota native will join us there. Pudge will be with us for the offshore sailing leg to the Cook Islands. We look forward to seeing him next week and the parts he brings!

Thanks for your visit!
Jeff & Ann Brooke
S/V High Drama

Test Question:

For those who have demonstrated the perseverance to scroll this far, here is the test question: What is the Tahitian name for marijuana? All persons submitting the correct answer will be entitled to a free Hinano, (Tahitian beer) payable at Bloody Mary's in Bora Bora. Rush your answer to _____