

A Visit to Hiva

Emily Ross Mulloy

According to legend, a place called Hiva was the original homeland of Hotu Matu'a, the traditional founding father of Rapa Nui. Although the true location of Hiva is unknown, the name forms part of the names of three islands in the Marquesas group in French Polynesia: Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa, and Fatu Hiva. Archaeological evidence also suggests that this group of islands may have been the first in Eastern Polynesia to be inhabited. From this dispersal point, not only Rapa Nui but also Hawai'i, Mangareva, the Society, Cook and Austral groups, and New Zealand may have been first discovered by Polynesian voyagers.

Last April my daughter Brigid and I had the opportunity to visit the Marquesas Islands aboard the passenger-carrying freighter *Aranui*. Fifteen times yearly, this ship makes the rounds of the six inhabited Marquesas Islands, delivering supplies and picking up produce, mainly copra (dried coconut), at some twenty ports.

In contrast to the freighter trips described by many early travelers and ships I had experienced elsewhere in the Pacific, this was quite luxurious. Accommodations ranged from private cabins to group dormitories, and included excellent meals (even wine was included!). The ship has a small salt water pool with a sun deck, a lounge, library, boutique and bar. Two multi-lingual hostesses gave daily briefings on and acted as guides and interpreters on shore.

Shore excursions, including some 18 ports on six islands in the Marquesas and two atolls in the Tuamotus, were included in the trip, and these often featured a meal ashore; sometimes a traditional Polynesian feast prepared especially for our group, or a picnic at some point of interest. Horseback and helicopter rides were extra.

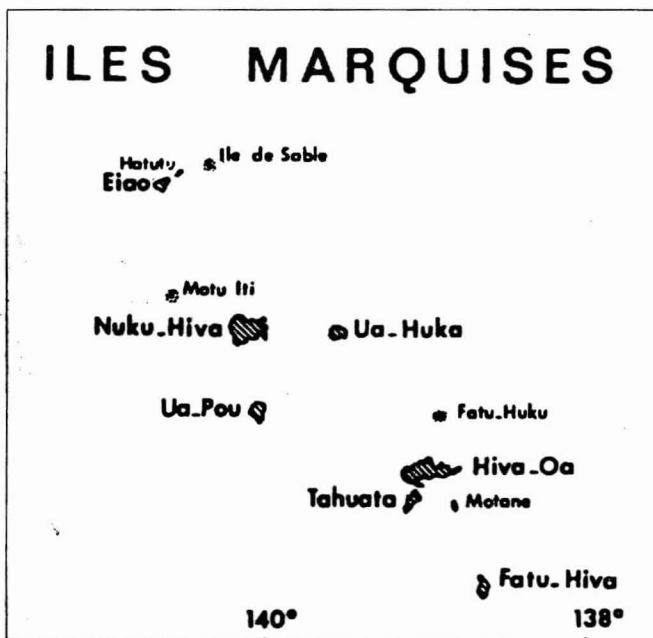
Among the numerous passengers of several nationalities were a number of persons of renown. Among these were Dr Yoshihiko Sinoto, former chairman of the Department of Anthropology at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, who has done archaeological work in the Marquesas since 1963; and Tricia Allen, University of Hawai'i, student and practitioner of Polynesian tattoo. Each lead a group of travelers interested in their respective specialties. A number of writers, photographers, and cinematographers—amateurs and professionals—also were bound for the Marquesas.

Ever since Gauguin lived here, the Marquesas have been a lure to artists, not only for the stunning landscapes but also for the artistic abilities and physical beauty of the islanders

themselves. The creativity of the early craftspersons who worked in wood and stone, mother-of-pearl, ivory and turtle shell is demonstrated in museum collections worldwide. Many of these arts, including that of tattoo, are being revived today.

Although this was my first visit to the Marquesas Islands, I was not the first member of my family to go there. In 1956, my husband, William Mulloy, spent a short time in Taipivai, Nuku Hiva, as a member of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition. This was the Expedition's last stop in Polynesia and they stayed only a short time. My daughter Brigid had lived in Atuona, Hiva Oa, with her young son, Phineas, in 1979. And just days before our arrival in the Marquesas, my grandson, Father Francisco (Pancho) Nahoe, had performed Easter Mass in his namesake village, Nahoe, on Hiva Oa. We met him briefly in Tahiti before he returned

to California as we prepared to board the *Aranui* for the Marquesas.



TAKAPOTO

Our first stop after leaving Pape'ete was Takapoto atoll in the Tuamotus. [Takapoto is where one of Jacob Roggeveen's ships was lost in 1722. After leaving Easter Island, the Dutch ships sailed west amongst the Tuamotu Islands, but the *Africaansche Galej* fell victim to Takapoto's dangerous reef. Unable to save the *Galey*, its Captain and most of its crew were taken aboard the two remaining Dutch ships. One sailor drowned, however, and five others deserted—preferring to remain

on the island. Two of the cannons of the *Africaansche Galej* were recovered in recent years, and remains of the wreck are said to be visible in calm weather. See *Rapa Nui Journal* 8(3) and 8(4) 1994 for more about the wreck.]

Because the island lacks a passage into its lagoon, we had to anchor outside the reef and go in via whaleboat. A low island, Takapoto is very hot and the white sand glares in the sun. We walked across to the lagoon side, passing a church, school, other buildings, and gardens. Pearl farming is carried out in the lagoon at Kakarua, some eight km from Takapoto. Some of the passengers were transported by boat to see the pearl operation.

This was our first chance to swim. We had a picnic under a canopy of palms and then were given the opportunity to purchase black pearls. Several of our passengers created a stir among the islanders as they were from California but belonged to a Tahitian dance group.

UA POU

The first view of the islands of the Marquesas was the spectacular island of Ua Pou, 40 km south of Nuku Hiva. The mountains resemble the peaks in and around Kweilin (Guilin), China, although their origin is entirely different; the Chinese mountains are eroded limestone while these are volcanic. The finger-like spires are covered with heavy vegetation and often disappear momentarily into the clouds that hang over the island's interior.

Our first village visited was Hakahetau, and we went ashore in whaleboats after the freight had been unloaded. At each stop, the cargo takes precedence and is unloaded first. Cargo varies from drums of fuel to concrete blocks, appliances, furniture, liquor, soft drinks, French bread, cases of toilet paper, Pampers, and motor vehicles. Once ashore, passengers are allowed explore while outgoing cargo from the island is loaded. The major item being exported from the island is copra, plus fruits such as limes and bananas.



Figure 1. An ancient house foundation at Hakahau, Ua Pou. There are many more of these in the islands than there are houses in use today.

Hakahetau is small, but has a paved road, electricity, and even a phone booth where—with the use of a prepaid phone card—overseas calls can be made. Colorful tropical shrubs and flowers lined the road and filled the gardens of homes and public buildings. Many islanders had stands set up to sell handicrafts such as baskets, hats, bags made from pandanus leaves, scented oil, quilted or appliquéd bedcovers and hangings. We soon embarked for the 'big city', Hakahau, which has one of the few ports where the *Aranui* can tie up directly to the pier.

We were driven through Hakahau (Figure 1) and stopped at a church built around the stump of a huge tree carved (by local sculptors) to form a pulpit. One window on the side of the sanctuary was left unadorned in order to frame the island's spectacular scenery.

We enjoyed a welcoming ceremony on the terrace



Figure 2. The welcoming ceremony at Hakahau. The mayor is in the background.

(Figure 2) and heard a speech by the mayor, translated into English, French, and German by one of the *Aranui's* multilingual hostesses. An exhibition of drumming and dancing was performed by the young people of the village. We watched the preparation of the local variety of *poi*, (*popoi* in Marquesan) made from breadfruit rather than taro. They still use *poi* pounders of smoothed stone that resemble those found in archaeological sites. The *popoi* is made in a large oval-shaped wood bowl. Mashed bananas, grated coconut and/or coconut milk are added which makes it more palatable to Western tastes than Hawaiian *poi*. *Popoi* was the major staple food in the Marquesas in prehistoric times. It was stored in stone pits lined with leaves and could be kept for years, in case of famine.

The first of many traditional Marquesan feasts took place in a local restaurant and included many specialties of Polynesian origin as well as exotic items such as French bread and wine, and barbecued and curried goat. Goats, a European introduction, seem to have gone native in a big way: the mountains afford them a perfect habitat with no natural predators. On most islands we could see small specks moving around on many of the precipitous peaks, and these proved to be herds of browsing goats. Goat hides are used in some craft items such as hats, purses, drum heads, and the like. Their



Figure 3. The site of Paeke, Taipivai, as it looks today.



Figure 4. Paeke site, Taipivai, Nuku Hiva in 1956. Bill Mulloy is 2nd from left; next to him is Ed Ferdon. Note statue head visible to left of Mulloy's legs.

meat did prove to be a delicious addition to supplement pork, chicken, and fish, which the original Polynesian diet featured. (According to Melville and others, the Marquesans also went in for cannibalism until fairly recently. This custom does not seem to have been revived along with other culture traits formerly banned by the missionaries).

NUKU HIVA

The next morning found us in Nuku Hiva, the island where Herman Melville jumped ship in 1842, and later wrote about in his book *Typee* (now more correctly spelled Taipi). It is believed that many of the ethnological details he described were copied from other writers rather than entirely from his own experiences. Nevertheless, his book does present a realistic picture of an island lifestyle just at the point where it was about to be altered by outsiders.

Nuku Hiva is the largest and most populated of the Marquesas. The *Aranui* made a number of stops, the first at a point named Terre Deserte to unload freight. One of the stops, at Haka Ui, was not even a village, merely the starting point for a trail leading up into the valley to 350 meter Vaipo waterfall, the highest in the territory. Some of the more intrepid travelers set out for the hike. The name *haka*, which occurs in many place names on these islands (*hana* in the Southern Marquesas) is a variation on the Rapanui name *hanga*, Samoan *faga*, Maori *whanga* and means bay or harbor).

Some islanders had been camping at Haka Ui and were carving wood and stone *tiki* (statues). This area is noted for its biting sand flies known as *nonos* ("no see-ums" in North America), and for which the Marquesas are infamous. These pests infest the beach; biting ants hold sway further inland; and mosquitoes abound in the swampy areas or stagnant pools. But as we came well-supplied with insect repellent, the bugs proved less noxious than we anticipated.

The next stop was at Taipivai where Melville stayed with his dark-eyed sweetheart Fayaway in 1842. The whaleboats were able to take us quite far up the river and into the Taipi valley. Some of the group hiked to an archaeological site called Paeke (Figure 3), which had been partly cleared and where carbon samples were collected in 1959 by members of the Norwegian expedition, including William Mulloy and Edwin Ferdon (Figure 4).

Eventually we all regrouped at Taipi village, where we were loaded into trucks (the local name of these vehicles sounds like "cat-cat"! It seems this actually should be spelled *quatre-quatre* or French for 4x4!). They must be tough to survive the road we took over the central ridge and down into the next bay, Taiohae. When Melville took the same trip 150 years ago he vividly describes holding onto tree roots and sliding down precipices. In fact, there were virtually no internal roads for motor vehicles on any of the Marquesas Islands as recently as the 1960s. Communication between one village and another on the same island was either around the coast by boat, or overland by horse or foot.

Our "cat-cat" climbed up a rough winding road that afforded fantastic views through varying types of vegetation. Toward the highest elevations, the jungle gave way to scrub and grasses and we stopped for a picnic near the top. After the meal we went even higher—to the base of a peak where the radio transmitters are located. Unfortunately the summit was shrouded in fog. It was quite cool, a welcome change from the usual heat and humidity of these islands.

The main village of Taiohae is the capital of the Marquesas and has the best harbor, a beautiful horseshoe-shaped bay where the *Aranui* awaited. Another welcome ceremony was

held near the waterfront with a display of handicrafts.

We arrived the next day in the southern group of islands: Tahuata, Hiva Oa, and Fatu Hiva.

TAHUATA

Tahuata is the most secluded and smallest of the six inhabited islands, only 61 sq km. The anchorage at Hana Moe Noa, just north of main village Vaitahu, is where Mendaña first anchored in 1595, followed by Captain Cook in 1774.

Vaitahu has a number of monuments to commemorate the French and other Europeans who were killed in clashes with islanders. There is no mention, however, of the larger numbers of Marquesans massacred by Europeans, starting with some 200 who were shot "for sport" by Mendaña's troops.



Figure 5. Omoa, Fatu Hiva. Sinoto (2nd from right) and associates were greeted by a descendent of the first Hawaiian missionary to the Marquesas (2nd from left).

After a short visit, the *Aranui* sailed for Atuona on the island of Hiva Oa. Some passengers stayed behind on Tahuata in order to visit a smaller isolated village, Hapatoni, noted for its bone and ivory carvings.

HIVA OA

The *Aranui* moored at a pier and we walked ashore on the second largest island of the Marquesas. A priest, Pere Joseph, the first Marquesan to be ordained, greeted me at dockside along with another priest from my grandson's friary in California, but we had little time to visit; they were enroute to the airport. Our plans included another Marquesan feast, a visit to the graves of both Gauguin and singer Jacques Brel, a museum stop, and a replica of Gauguin's house (Maison du Jouir—House of Pleasure), now a center where artists can display their works. Ironically, during his lifetime the people of the community had little use for either Gauguin or his art. Now he is a major tourist attraction. Gauguin died of syphilis at age 55 despite the attentions of his 14-year old mistress. Brel, a famous Belgian singer, died of lung cancer here in 1987.

Almost everywhere in these islands are remains of stone platforms and structures, giving evidence of a much larger population in prehistoric times. Dr Sinoto led some of the group to one such site above Atuona. This archaeological site

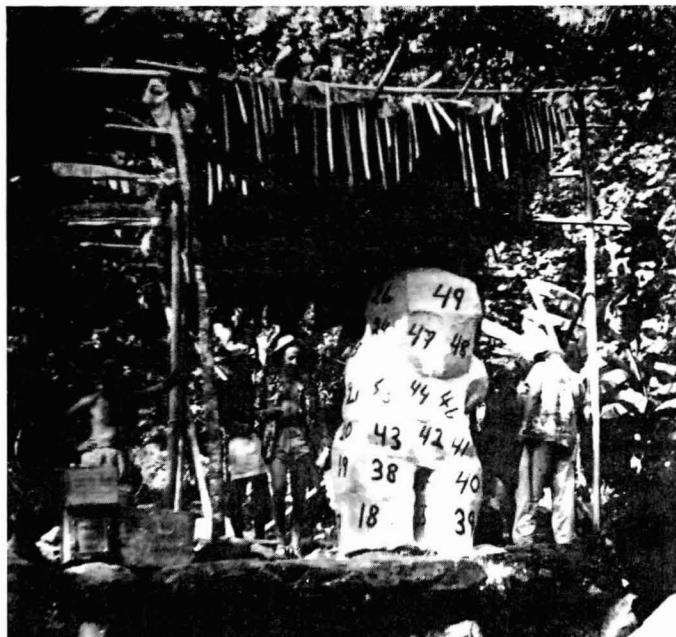


Figure 6. Members of the Norwegian expedition preparing a cast of Puamau's largest *tiki*, 1956. The casting is now in the Kon Tiki Museum in Oslo.



Figure 7. Emily Mulloy with the same *tiki* as seen in Figure 6. It is approximately three meters tall.

is almost overgrown and surrounded by large trees so that it was difficult to see, and nearly impossible to photograph. It was also a prime spot for mosquitoes.

FATU HIVA

The next morning we approached Fatu Hiva, the island where Thor Heyerdahl and his wife lived for a year in the 1930s and where he developed some of his theories of Polyne-

sian origins. The infamous Mendaña stopped here in 1595. Only 80 sq km, Fatu Hiva is far wetter than the northern islands and has lush vegetation. There are only two villages on the island.

Even before passengers went ashore, village women came on board to sell *tapa* cloth. This is the only island where *tapa* is still being made. Today's pieces are stiff and suitable only for table mats or wall hangings. Formerly *tapa* was made from paper mulberry bark and either uncolored or dyed yellow or orange. Today they make it from breadfruit or banyan bark and add inked or painted figures.

We visited the village of Omoa, and Dr. Sinoto (Figure 5) was welcomed by a woman who is a descendant of the first Hawaiian missionary to come to these islands.

Fatu Hiva is as spectacular as the first island we viewed. Some passengers left to hike ten miles to the next village Hanavave, but most of us went via ship which had to make some delicate maneuvers to safely enter the "Bay of Virgins". This is one of the most beautiful scenic vistas in all Polynesia, with its lush vegetation and overlooking pinnacles that appear to be watching over the village. The *tiki*-shaped cliffs almost look carved by humans rather than formed by natural forces.

HIVA OA REVISITED

The next day we returned to Hiva Oa, stopping at two villages on the opposite side of the island from Atuona. We passed by the village of Nahoe. Just beyond that is Puamau, famed for its large statue or *tiki*, the largest in Polynesia, with the exception of the *moai* on Rapa Nui. If you haven't seen those on Rapa Nui, it is rather impressive (Figures 6 and 7). The site is called Ipona or Oipona and has many other statues.

UA HUKA

Our next stop was the last of the six inhabited islands, Ua Huka, with three villages, all on the same side of the island: Vaipae, Hane, and Hokatu. A dune site excavated by Sinoto gave the earliest date yet confirmed from East Polynesia: AD 300. Several pieces of pottery were found here, but Sinoto believes that pottery may have been brought from Fiji, rather than made locally.

Ua Huka has an excellent small museum with some original and replica artifacts as well as a diorama showing the interior of a prehistoric house. A former plantation, now a botanical garden, also contains an aviary with some rare and endangered birds. A drive through more arid landscape resembling that of Rapa Nui took us to a maritime museum, and the port where our ship awaited. Just as we prepared to reboard *Aranui*, the four-masted sailing ship *Wind Song* arrived. Here we crossed paths with an old Rapa Nui hand, Edmundo Edwards, who had been acting as a guide on *Wind Song*.

At sunset our ship dropped anchor near the bird island just offshore from Ua Huka. The migratory sea birds which nest here are terns, the local name *kaveka*, similar to the sooty terns that used to nest on Motu Nui, off the coast of Rapa Nui. Sinoto believes that migratory birds may have inspired the Polynesians to sail off along the path of the birds, reasoning that they must have come from some far distant land.



Figure 8. A dance group at Nuku Hiva in 1956. Note the use of cloth wrap-around skirts and the bras on the women. Today the dancers use leaves and other vegetal materials for a more authentic look.

NUKU HIVA REVISITED

We were back on Nuku Hiva the next morning, this time to a village on the north shore, Hatiheu. This was one of the most delightful stops of the trip. Hatiheu is a beautiful little village strung out along the shores of a black sand beach, with attractive landscaping of colorful foliage and flowers and shade trees. There are old house platforms of stone, and an ancient church with red ice cream cone-shaped towers. A



Figure 9. The *Aranui* at beautiful Hakahau bay, Ua Pou.

wide lawn also serves as the helicopter landing field.

We gathered to see a performance of dancers ; they were garbed in costumes made of leaves. This is in contrast to what dancers wore here in 1956 (Figure 8). After, we were driven up into the hills to see a restored *tohua*, or ceremonial center where islanders put on a traditional Marquesan Pig Dance. Returning to the village, a helicopter began taking small groups on a whirlwind tour of the island. I was overwhelmed by what we saw: all the places we had visited on the ground, plus the waterfall inland from Hakauai, the high points that earlier were hidden in fog, beautiful bays, peaks, and valleys.

A traditional Marquesan feast back in the village was

one of the best, featuring shrimp, lobster, and raw fish in lime juice and coconut milk. Then came the opening of the *umu* with roast pork, goat, and chicken. Entertainment was provided by a musical group playing many of the old songs we heard on Rapa Nui in 1960; they seem to have learned from the same Tahitian records that came to Rapa Nui about that time.

We returned to Taiohae the next morning to attend church at the cathedral. This impressive stone building contains many beautiful Marquesan wood carvings. Back on the *Aranui*, we were treated to an exhibit of bamboo tubes with etched tattoo designs; these were some of the most beautiful items we saw in the Marquesas.

UA POU REVISITED

Back on the island first visited, Ua Pou, we were met by the local schoolmaster who took us on another jeep trip through the residential part of town. Our ship sailed in mid afternoon, after having seen 18 ports on six islands in nine days (Figure 9).

RANGIROA

After another day at sea, we arrived at Rangiroa, 200 km northeast of Pape'ete. This is the second largest atoll in the world: the entire island of Tahiti would fit inside its 1,020 square km lagoon. Unlike Takapoto where the ship could not enter the lagoon, we easily sailed through into the aquamarine waters. The major attraction here is underwater: fish are so tame they come right up and look you in the eye. We went for a ride on the glass bottom boat to see more fish, including sharks, and snorkeled until time to reboard our ship.

The next morning we found ourselves at the dock in Pape'ete, exposed to all the hustle and bustle, noise and air pollution of this port city which contains ten times the population of the entire Marquesan archipelago.

The haunting beauty and peaceful lifestyle of magical Hiva was only a memory.

[The *Aranui* has 15 scheduled trips for 1998. The June voyage (June 2-17) will be headed by two noted Polynesian scholars, Steven R. Fischer and Robert Suggs. There are five classes of passengers, priced from \$1980 to \$3995 pp. The tour is called "Aranui-Freighter to Paradise" and all inquiries should be directed to: CPTM, 2028 El Camino Real So., Suite B, San Mateo, CA 94403. Tel (650) 574-2575 or (800) 972-7268; Fax (650) 574-6881; e-mail <cptm@aranui.com>.

For international inquiries: CPTM, PO Box 220, Papeete, Tahiti. Tel 42.62.40 and 43.76.60; Telex 360 FP Aranui. Fax 43.48.89]