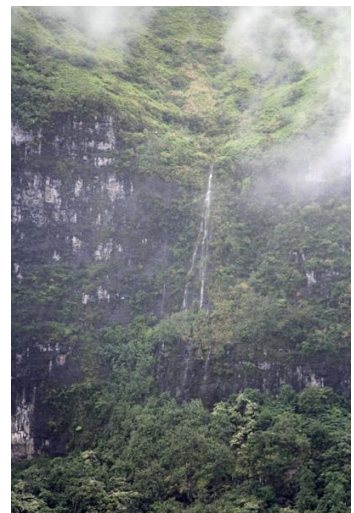


March 14, 2012: Bora Bora by Land



Rain dashed heavily upon the thatched roof through the night and we arose to close the sliding doors to the back patio to prevent rain from entering. Air still flowed freely through the openings between walls and roof of our naturally ventilated abode. While we had been a bit warm in the humid, non air-conditioned room at first, through the night it cooled considerably and the light blanket was just enough to keep us warm. We had fallen asleep early in the evening, so awoke before daylight. The rain continued in the dark as we arose to slowly start the day.

Obviously the lagoon tour was out of the question; a little rain would be tolerated, but not the torrents of that morning. Nir, our host came up later to chat and help with plans for the afternoon. He pointed out the ephemeral waterfalls on the cliffs of Pahia across the bay. They only appeared during times of heavy rain. Drifting clouds parted now and then to reveal their full extent, then closed again to veil them from view. Gradually the rain diminished and blue sky appeared here and there through the clouds.



We finalized plans for a four wheel drive tour around the island, and the driver, “Si,” arrived promptly on time. He helped us load into his Land Rover and we bounced down the lane to the road. It was but a light warm up for what was to come. He stopped at another pension where we picked up a young Taiwanese couple who were on their honeymoon. Such a strange combination of people we were, different cultures and different life stages, all loaded into the back of the yellow Land Rover on two bench seats that faced each other under a canvas canopy. Yet we all blended together well, chatting at times, marveling at the sights, and sharing chagrin at some of the steep passages we made.



Si warmed up the group quickly with wit, wisdom and friendly demeanor. He had been born on Huahine, but had moved to Bora Bora due to family connections. He knew the island well and was eager to share his knowledge. At the barest opening of the upland woods he turned to travel up a steep, eroded two-track path. With the low gears whining and passengers holding on tightly, the Land Rover jolted us up the rugged road. Then the trees parted and we came to rest on the crest of a knoll with a lovely view of the mountain and the lagoon. We stopped to take photos, then continued along our bouncing journey.

Through narrow trail and water-filled ruts we ground on until a very steep ridge about 10 feet high appeared. “Welcome to our theme park ride!” Si teased and then motored up just to the

crest. Then he took it out of gear and we rolled backwards back down the hump. When we had caught our breaths and stopped giggling, he ran up the hump again, cleared the crest, and then traveled a short distance over more temperate terrain to the emplacement of two World War II cannons.



We stopped to take pictures of the weapons of war standing over serene lagoons that stood in silent memorial of the terror that had tormented paradise in the Pacific so many decades ago. Si discussed the effects of the war and the American presence during the time. He displayed a wide knowledge of history, particularly as it affected the Polynesian people. We were delightfully surprised when he stated that they appreciated what the Americans had done to provide reliable water, roads, and schools that benefited the native peoples long after the soldiers had left. Perhaps that was why the cannons were maintained regularly by locals to preserve their appearance for posterity.

We reversed the journey down the rugged path as the vehicle lurched and swayed, but bore its burden without complaint. Back on the road other vehicles and numerous bicycles passed by with nonchalance on the narrow paved highway. Past church, village, and marae the journey continued with Si stopping now and then to discuss the historical significance. Then again we turned up a steep rutted road, jostling through flowering woodlands, with passengers wondering what could possibly be the attraction to such a venture. Part way up the road groves of bananas,



papayas and other fruit bearing trees appeared, with pineapple growing just beyond. It was the source of fruit for several local resorts, seemingly manicured from the surrounding jungle.

Farther up the road a level clearing appeared, and the most beautiful, serene scene rewarded the rugged ascent. An open building with brown roof and bright white interior lay at the foot of cliffs below

Otemanu and Pahia. Cascades of water poured over the cliffs with sweet rushing sounds, ephemeral waterfalls due to recent heavy rains that poured forth from the greenery above. Beautifully maintained grounds around the building held flowering plants and trees on terraces that stepped downward beyond the ocean side of the building.



Inside the Paarara Mountain Artist building brightly painted pareos by the artist, E. Masson, were on display. He was at work on another masterpiece, putting the final touches on the hull of the Hokulea that he was painting. We dined on grapefruit and ramboutan graciously offered by our hosts, then made our selection from the beautiful work.

From there the tour returned to the road, and we cruised past less interesting scenes such as stilted luxury resorts over the water and homes of celebrities that had seemed to have lost their significance amongst surrounding tropical treasures. Farther down the road we stopped at a local store to buy some bread, cheese and water for future meals, then continued to the startling climax of the trip.

Oh my! The last turn off of the highway led to the steepest hill climb yet with ruts that could swallow a small child—on a horse! Perhaps I exaggerate, but we definitely did not want our wheels sinking into one those voids. I comforted the fainthearted by noting aloud the stoutness of the” roll bars” that supported our canopy. On the first cautious attempt up the grade the wheels spun and we had to back down. Si had to try again at higher speed and slightly different

track to make the first part of the grade. Coins jostled out of the pockets of our Taiwanese companions and landed on the floor of the vehicle with a metallic clank. It was too rough to bend over to pick them up. For a moment it seemed that strips of two track pavement that appeared above would be our salvation as the ride smoothed for a time.

Si turned left onto a flat area just below a very steep knoll that supported a large antenna. We prepared to exit, but no, he was just positioning to back up the last terrifying grade. “Oh good, it is dry.” He commented, then added that in the morning it had been too wet to climb. As the Land Rover revved its way backwards up the hill, the nose pitched sharply downward and scattered coins rattled towards the driver. “See,” said the driver, “This is a robbery!” The Taiwanese gentleman replied, “You do not need to do this. Just say it, I give you!” We all laughed till we nearly cried as we somehow bounced up over the last hump without pitching over and came to rest on a tiny patch of level ground.



By the tower at the top of the hill, Bora Bora lay in full splendor. Bight breakers accented the line between deep ocean blue and lagoon turquoise. In the distance Tahaa and Raiatea bore scattered scarves of clouds. Dark coral heads contrasted with the color of the lagoon. The uplands of Bora Bora gave tantalizing glimpses through misty veils, ever changing, revealing the whole, but never all at once. The best had truly been saved for last.

With grit and determination, and at least one set of closed eyes we bounced back down the trail to level ground. After a stop at the Pearl Farm to see how pearls were grown and processed, we were again deposited at Rohotu Fare. Its grade seemed gentle and meek compared to what we had just been over, and we felt like we were returning home. We thanked Si again for this marvelous adventure, and felt a little sad as he departed down the hill. Yet another friend we may never meet again, but will never forget.



We showered the soil and sweat from our bodies, but could not remove the excitement from the day's adventure. We discussed the various sights we had seen and reviewed photos to deepen the memories while the sun gently lowered towards the horizon. Finally it was time to wander down the hill to catch our bus ride to Bloody Mary's.

We arrived by the highway quite early and chatted while waiting our ride and watching twilight fade to night. Venus and Jupiter ruled the western sky while brighter stars appeared here and there. Familiar stars were located in strange positions and northern constellations seemed turned on their heads. To the south stars such as Canopus rose high above the horizon, trailed by stars that we had never seen before. Fairy, Wanda, and Royal visited while I followed the starry gaps that trailed slowly moving clouds in search of the Southern Cross and the star clouds of Carina.



A large bus rumbled to a stop by our lane and we boarded immediately. Minutes later we were at the thatched building with bright lights and archway that contained the names of dozens of famous people who had dined there before. Through the arch and up a sandy path we wandered to the main lobby to deposit our shoes on a rack and then continue barefoot to the venue where a

smiling vahine in a bright, beautiful pareo, displayed our meal choices from cuts of fish, meat, kabobs, and appetizers. After making our selection, a hostess led us to our table near the bar and we settled into our surroundings.

Wooden beams supported thatched roofs and walls, while beneath; soft white sand formed the floor. Though conversation abounded through the restaurant, there was little of the noise so common in other busy restaurants and we could converse easily at our own table. The table and seats were made of beautiful dark wood and the seats arose from the ground like toadstools and were quite fun to occupy.

Bread and salads arrived as we sipped our Bloody Mary drinks, then our fish arrived. Fairy and Wanda had the teriyaki Wahoo and I had the mahi-mahi. Gasps of amazement arose from our table as each tasted their meal for the first time. None of us could recall having had a better meal, and we dined in delight until the very last bite. We followed with dessert, then chatted and observed for a while before departing.

Royal had noticed two young French ladies sitting a couple of tables away. He had seen them at the Hotel Kaveka and wondered where we might run into them next, so he walked to their table to chat briefly. Yes, they had been at the hotel Kaveka, had gone on the dolphin tour and were going to the Marquesas, but not on the Aranui. They seemed a bit surprised, but pleasant as we departed the restaurant.

After dining we gazed at the names on the visitor's board by the entrance for a while, then boarded a van back to our drive. Above the Southern Cross and Carina star clouds were in full view. Orion stood on his head, peering between thin clouds, while Jupiter and Venus hovered low over the horizon. I gazed through binoculars for a time on the deck of our lodge before retiring to our teak-root framed canopy bed to dream of stars over a magical island.



More Images:



From our deck after the rains.



View from our deck.



Church from land tour viewpoint.



Views from entrance to Paarara Mountain Artist.



Cloud-veiled Mount Otemanu



Dueling Land Crabs



Ocean scenes from the tour's final viewpoint.

