

March 26, 2012: Ua Huka—Woodcarvers and Whaleboats



Aranui 3 in Hane Bay

We awakened at the earliest light of dawn in anticipation of one of the most hazardous maneuvers of the trip. As the boat approached Ua Huka, a small slit known as Invisible Bay appeared dead ahead. Sunbeams painted towering clouds shades of salmon and pink as they rose above the sloping dark layers of basalt of the cliffs surrounding the bay. Breakers burst on boulders where fire once met the sea as the boat entered the outer reaches of the bay and dropped anchor. Two green and white whaleboats were lowered by the bright yellow crane into the blue-gray waters of the sea. Anchor chain rattled out of the capstan while the gleaming white boat slowly edged forward into the rocky slot that was barely wider than the ship was long. The Aranui 3 came to a stop, then, as the anchor held firm, turned slowly, carefully about its mooring with the guidance of marines in the whaleboats.



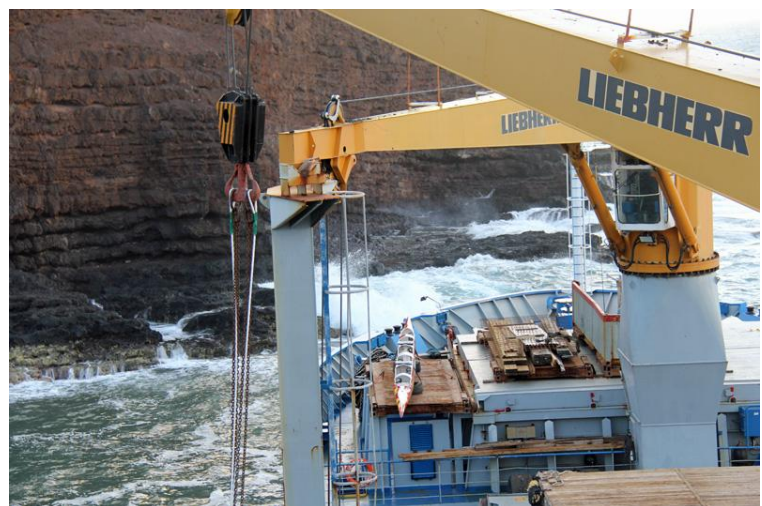


When the 350 foot freighter had turned beam to the seas, only a very narrow margin separated the bow and the stern from disaster on the rocky reefs on either end. Slowly, gently, it continued its turn until it lay bow into the seas and parallel with the canyon walls. Marines in the whalers took the great yellow hawsers to bollards imbedded in the rocks at the foot of the cliffs of Invisible Bay. One cautiously guided the boat, while the other, with a light line in hand, made a carefully timed step from bow of the whaleboat onto the wet rocks by the bollard. With the line he hauled the heavy hawser up the rocks, and then heaved its loop over the stout mooring.

The efforts were repeated on the portside, but rougher seas made it difficult for the marine to make the transition from boat to shore and back again. Several times passengers were gasping as breakers splashed on nearby rocks, showering the sailor as he made the delicate passage and fixed line to mooring. But he

was born of the sea and succeeded in his hazardous mission, where lesser men might have failed. Soon the transition was complete; The Aranui 3 lay steadfast between anchor on the bow and angled lines from the stern to each side of the narrow moorage. Rounds of applause and cheers went up for the captain and crew for their heroic performance.

Later in the morning we loaded onto the barges for shore transport. Swells that rocked the freighter during its tight-quarters maneuver also challenged passengers debarking. The barge rose and fell several feet as we seemed to slam-dance our way into the tender. Powerful arms held us back until just the right moment, then thrust us forward, one-by-one with careful timing so that all safely landed aboard the tender and not in the surging waters. Safely aboard, we marveled at the challenges the crew had to overcome so we could go to shore. Little did we know that a greater adventure was yet to be.



Pickups and SUV's met us at the dock at the head of Invisible Bay by Vaipae'e. We were looking for master carver, Joseph, who we were told would be driving one of the autos for the tours. About half way up the line of waiting cars, we asked a lady who appeared in charge if she knew where we might find him. She pointed behind us, and there, seated on a rock was the master carver himself. With a smile, he shook our hands, but did not understand what we were saying. Shortly our guide, Jorg, served as interpreter, and he agreed that we could see the tikis that he was making for our friend, Nir, and take photos after the tour had ended in Hane, where Joseph lived.



The cars delivered us to the Vaipae'e museum, where beautiful replicas of the highest quality of ancient Marquesan artifacts adorned the walls and displays. Ironically, nearly all of the original Marquesan works had been taken from the island and reside in museums and private collections throughout the world. In the back of the museum a replica burial cave has been reproduced with burial canoe, wooden chests for

bones of the departed, and various artifacts were on display. Master carver Joseph Vaatete, who had carved the artifacts on display, sat quietly behind the desk at the entrance. Had we not known who he was, we would have been clueless to the great things that he had done.





Outside, the familiar sounds of ukulele and Marquesan voices filled the air with song while ladies danced gracefully in a shady clearing. Children joined the adults where they could and seemed as interested in the scene as were the tourists. Crafts were on display beside the museum, and we wandered from craft pavilion to the dance area and back, leisurely enjoying the morning until time to set out for the next part of the trip.

A short ways up the valley our car pulled to the side of the road under a canopy of trees near the entrance to the Arboretum Papua Keikaha. Recent rains had dampened the area, and reddish-brown mud made our steps slippery as we walked past the tan, sculpted stone marker that rested on a small black rock paepae to the left of the main entrance. On the opposite side of the entrance, an obviously not genderless male tiki gazed proudly down upon the visitors as we entered.



We gathered in the abundant shade beside a small visitor's center while Paul temporarily became our guide and gladly shared his broad knowledge of the variety of plants and fruits that surrounded us. Soon Jorg took over as guide for the English-speaking group and beamed with a contagious enthusiasm as he talked about the 300+ species of trees planted on 17 hectares (42 acres) of the arboretum, which included one of the finest collections of citrus in the entire world.



We followed Jorg along the wooded dirt road the whole length of the arboretum, stopping at various points to view trees, fruits, flowers. Occasionally small tan, brown, and black birds, known as the Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, flitted to perches on twigs above us. Were we watching them, or they watching us? Regardless, soon it was time to move on to our next destination, and we did our best to remove the mud from our shoes before re-boarding our ride for the next adventure.

The autos then took us over the hillside past a short runway with a Twin Otter aircraft by the small terminal. Barely 2500 feet of runway angled down-slope towards the sea. Beyond the low cliff at the end of the runway, a small volcanic island rose from the sea with an angular peak to

one side. It was immediately identified as the distinct, angular island seen so often in guides to the area.

Our driver spoke little English, but noted the camera around my neck and would slow at various scenic areas and ask, “Photo?” He knew all the right places. We stopped for a moment above a surging bay a little past the airport, and we took photos and marveled at the scene of surf and sea against the rising rocks. Multicolored flowers sprinkled the slopes below us and several horses grazed in the grass below. As the Aranui 3 left its narrow harbor, the Twin Otter departed using barely half of the short runway before lifting off and soaring upwards towards the clouds.

Around another bend the bay of Hane came into view with a steep mound of an island rising beside its entrance. Swells, breakers and foaming seas swirled through the bay, while in the distance the Aranui 3 motored around the headlands towards this unsettled anchorage.

The next valley past Hane cradled the village of Hokatu at the head of another rocky bay where we stopped to look at

wares at their market. Fairy and I purchased three beautifully caved tikis, two for gifts and one for my office. Our driver pointed out that the lady at the counter was his sister as we paid for the tikis. Before loading back into our auto, we wandered down by the beach to marvel at the rugged setting. Spray gushed from distant rocky headlands while polished rocks rattled about the beach in the breaking surf.



We then returned round the ridge to Hane Bay where the Aranui lay swaying about anchor, seemingly ill at ease and rocking back and forth. Breakers crashed upon rocks by the cliff and rolled across a sandy shore at the head. No dock was present which meant that we would have to breach the breakers to make it back to ship. It was food for thought as we dined in

delight at Chez Celine Fournier's restaurant. Several buffet tables for two rooms full of guests provided ample fare with a variety of meats, fish, vegetables and fruits. A more nutritious, satisfying meal would be hard to find.



After dinner we walked down the paved road back towards the head of the bay in search of Joseph Vaatete and our guide to interpret. Along the way, we noticed a small area under the trees with various red stones with carvings, including a partly finished, large tiki, so I stopped and photographed the area. Fairy commented that she wondered if this was Joseph's workshop. We continued on to the Hane market and maritime

museum and saw Joseph sitting comfortably on the fluke of a large anchor propped an outside wall. He smiled kindly as I took his photo. Since Jorg was with other tourists, we went into the market to admire the wares. Overhead a large outrigger canoe spanned the market and extended into the museum.

A short time later, Jorg, our guide and interpreter came and we visited with Joseph. He led us back to the area I had photographed earlier. As he had told us before, the tikis were much too large to put on the Aranui without a truck and a lift. Around the giant tiki that was partly finished, were several other smaller stone tikis. Joseph pointed out the partly finished tikis that we were looking for, and I photographed them at various angles for Nir.



We then wandered back to the museum and store building as the guide talked with him. Steven then appeared with a cell phone and we called Nir and apprised him of the situation. Nir and Joseph visited for a while and seemed to come to an understanding regarding the tikis.

Afterwards, we had the interpreter ask if Joseph had made any items at the store, and he pointed out the only two items there that were his. One was a beautifully carved wooden bowl, and the other a tiki just exactly the size we were looking for. We immediately bought both, before some other eager shopper could claim them. When we walked out he was holding his young granddaughter. He seemed a little surprised, but then beamed when he saw that we had



purchased not one, but both of the pieces. He smiled and posed with his granddaughter for another, and later brought over a carved miniature war club that he gave to Wanda and Royal as a gift as well. It was a very happy time for all.

After bidding farewell, it was time to return to the Aranui. We headed to the beach where a group of passengers stood on the sandy shore at the water's edge behind one of the whaleboats that was beached stern to shore. One by one, passengers who were able sat on the transom and swung their legs over the gunnels and into the boat, and then were guided to a seat. A few had difficulty, and sailors were prompt to assist them, while keeping a close eye on the waves that rhythmically jostled and shifted the whaleboat. One heavy-set couple was manually lifted, one by one, into the whaleboat by the help. Long before our turn, it was

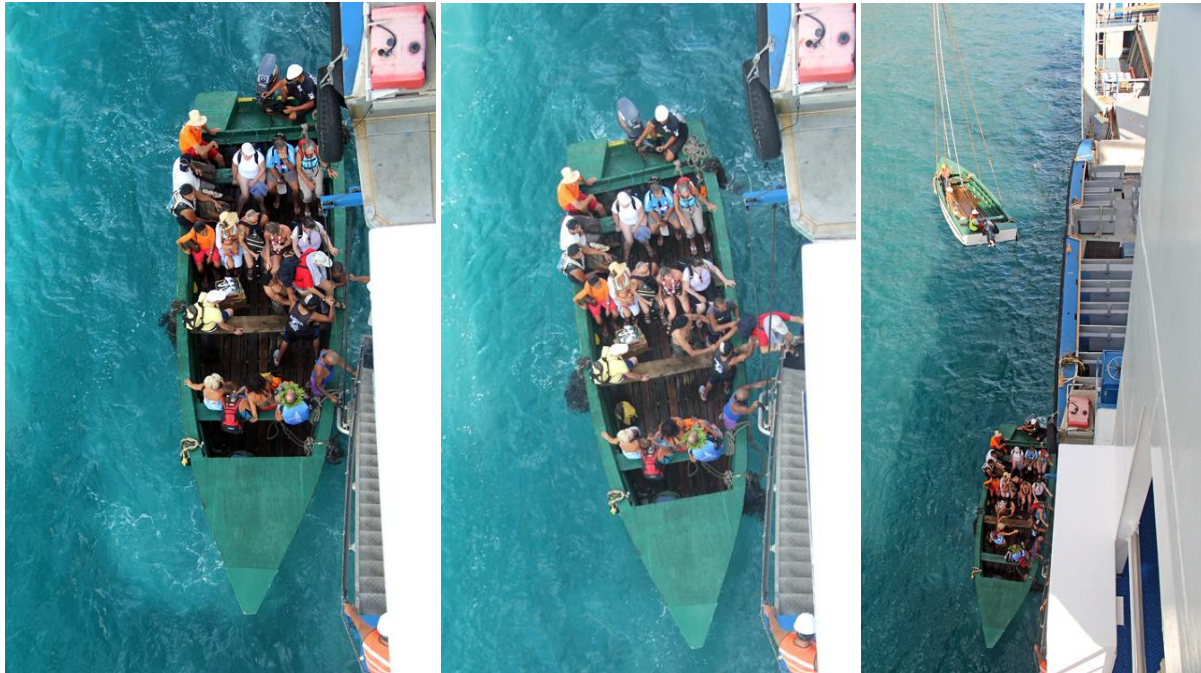
announced that the whaleboat was full; we soon came to realize how lucky we were not to be on it.

A series of large swells had entered the bay and began to break near the bow of the boat. The crew tried to push the boat outward, but another swell pushed back as they tried to start the engine. Some water rolled over the bow soaking the front row. The engine started, but before clearing the swells, another larger one broke over the bow and swept several passengers off their seats and sending two of the sailors into the water. Steven, who had been helping had to duck clear under the wave to avoid being tossed about by it. They rallied, got the passengers settled and after two more smaller waves, managed to start the engine and power beyond the breakers. That boat never did return after offloading its passengers, but could be seen circling the bay as the marines bailed out the water.



A second boat returned for passengers and again many were doused with spray before clearing the breakers, but their exit went much more smoothly. Finally it was our turn. Several people had crowded ahead of us and managed to sit at the very front of the boat. Steven saw us and directed us to the row just forward of amidships looking astern. The remainder boarded and sat in the two in the back half of the boat that faced forward. As they finished loading, someone said, here comes a wave. Fairy and I braced and were splashed with

some water as the boat washed ashore and stopped abruptly as the stern dug into the sand. One lady in the row facing us pitched backwards onto the floor of the boat and struck her head on the seat behind. She came up stoically and stated she was ok.



The next wave pushed back as well, but this time the stern did not dig in and the boat smoothly slowed. In a moment they had the engine started and we pushed through another wave with only a small amount of water splashing the passengers, and finally we were clear of the breakers. It seemed our problems were over until we realized that we had yet to board the Aranui 3. Swells raised and dropped the whaleboat as we came alongside the gangway. Again, with great care from the boat's crew, we were guided, lifted or tossed from boat to platform and made our way up the steps and into the boat. We hosed our feet and shoes to get the sand out as best we could then wandered back to our room to compose ourselves. It had been a full, thrilling and adventurous day, and it was time to celebrate.

The cranes of the Aranui 3 gathered the whaleboats back onto the forward deck, then the anchor raised and secured. We wandered about the boat to take a last look at the island of Ua Huka in the late afternoon light. The Aranui carried us back past the airport headlands, Invisible Bay and then on to the two Bird Islands. Terns flocked about over a low flat island closest to the Ua Huka shore, while spray cast a misty glow around the angular, rocky seaward island.





We gazed silently for a while to allow the sights and memories to cement into our memories, and then joined our friends on the sundeck.

Paul had saved some tables on the back of the boat, and Royal and Wanda, Tom and Kathy, and Fairy and I joined him and Mari to relax, visit, and await the celebration of Polynesian Night on the boat. When the wine bar opened we had glasses of chardonnay as the sun slowly lowered. We chatted through the afternoon and evening, reliving adventures and the unusual sights that we had seen, then were diverted by Wanda who became an unexpected source of entertainment.

A tall, gruff, overexposed German fellow had lurked about the decks seeking more sun for his leathery hide. Bushy hair and eyebrows accentuated gruff facial features, as he insisted others give him wide berth. That evening as events were unfolding on the deck below, Wanda wandered to an open space by the rail next to this gray-frosted cupcake, and he immediately went into a tirade about how that space was taken and she must go elsewhere. She had had enough; the meek, mild lady we had come to know turned tiger and gave the startled stranger a lecture on rudeness and being nice for a change. She returned to our table to relate the exchange to the rest of us as we gasped in shock and awe.

After the discourse, announcements were made by the staff on the deck below, and then they called the names of all who were on the cruise to celebrate birthdays or anniversaries. Fairy and I were surprised when they called our names as well. We went down to the swim deck and were greeted by the staff with flower leis. They sang to our honor and produced a cake for us all to blow out the candles, and then we returned to our seats as they finished preparing the food.

Dinner was buffet style with a variety of too much food for any one person to try all. We settled down to dine, and felt that all was well with the world. Then Fairy announced: I feel rain. A few

drops splattered here and there, but nothing much at first. Then a few more drops, then a lot more drops pelted the open portions of the dining areas. Tom and I were the last diehards sitting at the table, bemoaning only the dilution of our wine by the rain. When I finished my food I moved to shelter leaving the table to Tom and the rain. Though a bit sodden, our spirits were not dampened, and festivities continued, while the rain did not.

Eventually we moved back to our chairs and tables after Tom found a towel and dried the seats. Then the drums and ukuleles began to play, followed with singing. Several members of the Polynesian dance class came out in full costume and performed with the help of several staff. This was followed by songs and dance from various groups. Again Wanda stole the show as she waltzed from the wine bar up the stairs to the sundeck with a whole bottle of wine. With flair and a sashay she plunked the bottle on our table while singing, "Wine, wine, wine, Delilah." We applauded her performance and shared the rewards as the bottle slowly emptied to the delight of all at the table.

As the French group harmonized through their well-practiced songs, Fairy and I reluctantly shuffled to our room, more than just a little tired from the day's excitement. Those who stayed stated that the rest of the entertainment was very good, and by some accounts the party lasted until around 2 AM even though the official entertainment had long ended. For us, however, the party continued only in our dreams as the Aranui seemed to gently rock to the rhythms of ukuleles and Marquesan drums.



Ua Huka Photo Gallery:



Sunrise at Ua Huka



Ua Huka Dawn



Invisible Bay, Ua Huka



Ua Huka Shoreline



Along Invisible Bay



In Invisible Bay



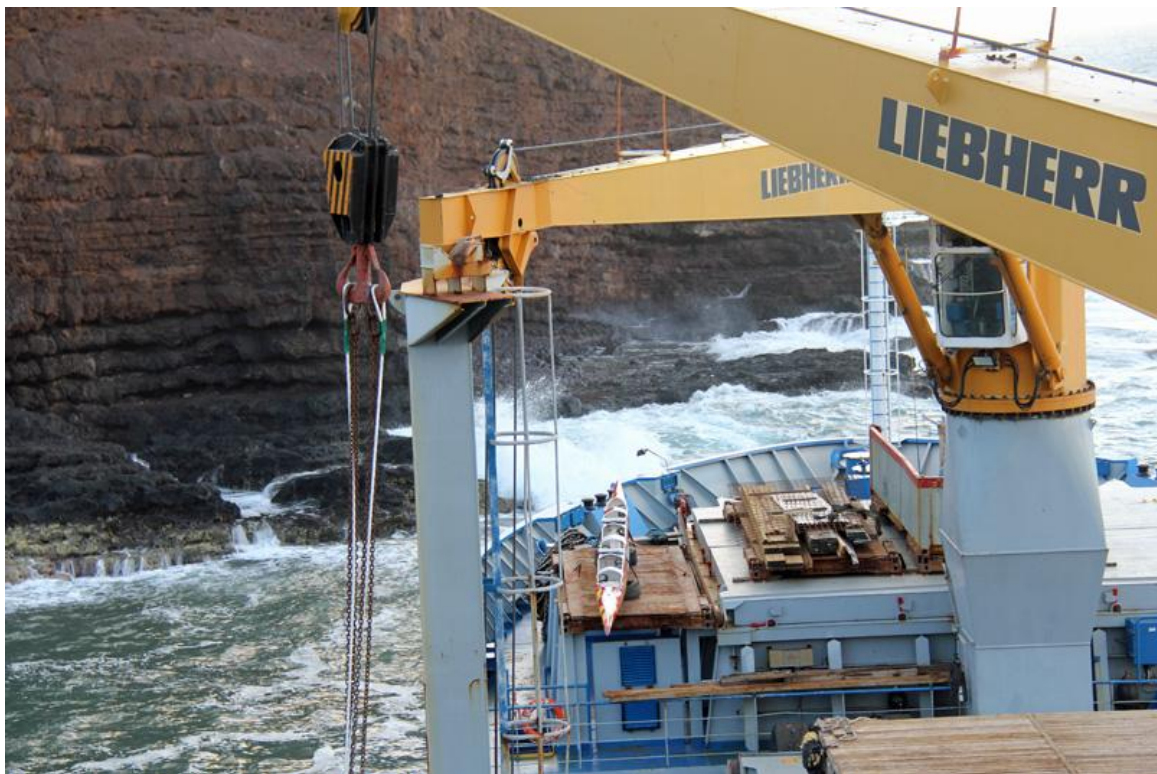
Coming about in Invisible Bay



Cliffs astern



Slim margin in Invisible Bay



Hard rock hazard



Safely about



In Invisible Bay



Making fast the stern lines



Securing second stern line in Invisible Bay



Ashore in Vaipae'e, Ua Huka



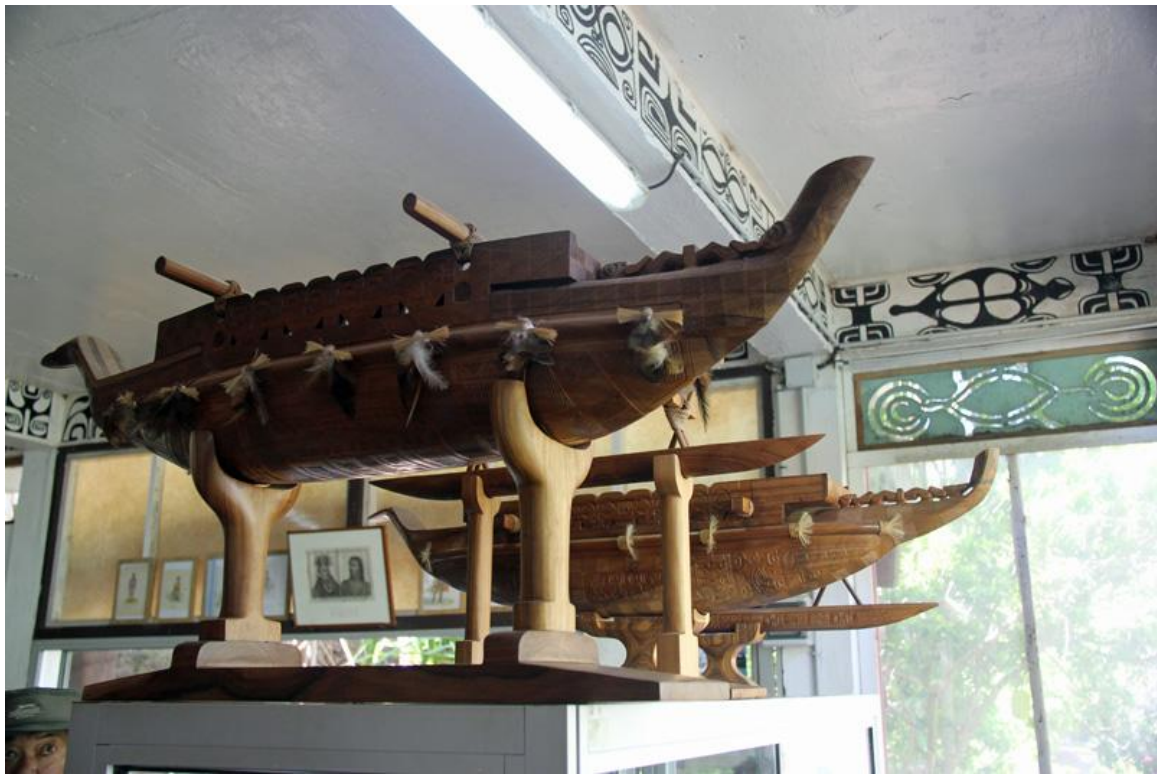
Tourist transportation by “the people of the cars”



Tikis at Musee Communal de Ua Huka



Burial Display at Musee Communal de Ua Huka



In Musee Communal de Ua Huka



At Musee Communal de Ua Huka



At the Arboretum Papua Keikaha



Hibiscus



Hibiscus



Bougainvillea at Arboretum Papua Keikaha



More arboretum scenes



At Arboretum Papua Keikaha



Horses and airstrip at Ua Huka



Ua Huka shore



Aranui departing Invisible Bay



By the headlands



Botanical \Paul outside Chez Celine Fournier's restaurant



Church at Hane, Ua Huka



Whaleboat in Hane Bay



Aranui rolling about in Hane Bay



Hane, Ua Huka



Seaward from Hane



Departure



Ua Huka last look