

March 24, 2012 North Hiva Oa, Tikis Meae Laundry and Leaping Fish



The night brought restful slumber, interrupted only briefly now and then by an aching muscle. An awakening, we felt refreshed, though we could feel the effects of the work out the day before. When it came time to try the stairs, the legs seemed lighter than they had before the hike; at least the first time up and down the stairs.

It was time to do the laundry, and it was on B Deck the lowest level of the boat and we were on Star Deck, the highest, with six flights of stairs between. We carried the rancid load down the stairs to the laundry, found two washers free and immediately started the wash, but forgot one detail. Up the stairs we went to await the finish. But there were other concerns, so we went back down again, then I had to return to the room to get something or another. Then there was one thing more, so up and down the flights I went again.

Finally the wash was done. But wait, one batch was not clean; we had forgotten to add the soap! Oh no, we needed another detergent pad which was up in our room, so there was another trip up and down the stairs. Oh, oh. We found another dirty piece that needed washing, but the first second load had already started, so we could not put it in with the others. We needed to do a second “second load.” That meant another trip up and down the stairs, followed by more to fetch I don’t remember what. My muscles began to complain about déjà vu all over again as I huffed up and down the stairs thinking that perhaps we had metabolized part of our brains during the long hike the day before.

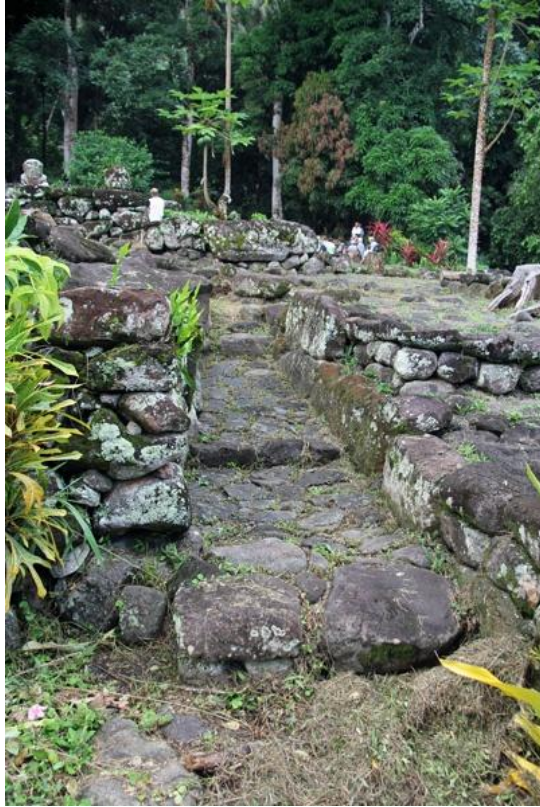
Our next dilemma was to find more Euros for the machine, the second “second load” had nearly depleted our supply, and we were not sure how we were to get the clothes dry. About the time we were beginning to panic, Steven, our friendly helper walked in and on hearing our dilemma produced two more Euros. We thanked him profusely, but he would take none of our money for them.

Finally, we got the laundry done, though we did have to find more Euros later to finish the drying. We got extra and later that evening I found Stephen and gave him back the two Euros. At first he declined, but I insisted, and then he thanked me; not just a shallow thank you, but with a look and tone, that left me feeling that I had gained a true friend.



After breakfast, we got ready to debark for Puamau, Hiva Oa to visit Meae Iipona which has the largest stone tiki in Polynesia outside of Easter Island. The large tiki held a special interest for us. In preparation for the trip we purchased a used copy of *The Marquesas Islands Mave Mai*, and page 50 shows a photo of a lovely young lady named Vai standing by the large tiki. She had autographed the photo for the previous owner of the book several years before. We had been drawn to the photo since it seemed to connect us with the former owner, the tiki, and the lady in the picture. Aboard the Aranui, Fairy had immediately recognized a friendly face at the reception desk and had asked her name. Of course, it was Vai and she graciously autographed the photo in the book again, this time for us, and remained a kind and courteous host through the whole trip. With that in mind, we were eager to see the site





The first two shore barges carried the hikers, and I joined Royal and Tom in the “hikers” line so we could walk to the archeological site of Meae Iipona before the rest of the group departed. Fairy planned to take a later barge after finishing the laundry. We had hoped that with our early start we would arrive before the bulk of the crowd to photograph the. Fairy and the other ladies were to join us when they could.

We three made it to shore on the second barge, but noted a number of people on it who were obviously not going to hike. We trudged over the road to the head of the bay and then turned up the street towards the meae. Several cars passed us along the way, including a car carrying Fairy and one carrying Wanda and Kathy. So much for the manly men arriving early to make way for the ladies. As we stomped our final steps up the steep slope, it was apparent that we were among the last, not the first to

arrive, and tourists were clustered around nearly every desirable photo op.

Oral history holds that Meae Iipona was begun by the Naiki tribe during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries to commemorate defeat of a neighboring village that had killed one of the Naiki chiefs. Further terraces were added as late as the early 1800’s. It was given to a Hawaiian missionary Kekela in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by the last chieftess of Puamau. It was excavated and restored with the help of the people of Puamau for the 1991 Third Marquesas Islands. Several stone tikis stood over the upper portion of the meae. The largest is known as Takaii and was named for a great warrior and chief. It stands atop a stone platform at the head of the clearing, with two other large tikis. Their features are muted by weathering and lichen growth, and will eventually wear away, and we were asked not to touch them to avoid hastening their decay.

Several other terraces stepped downward from the great stone tikis. On a lower level, an



unusual horizontal tiki lay horizontally on a pedestal with its face looking straight ahead. Various interpretations have given to explain its horizontal position, but to me it looks like a person swimming. I managed several photos between shifting bodies, and Fairy had gotten video when it was less crowded. We listened to a presentation by Michael Koch, the anthropologist that had joined the cruise, and tried to comprehend as much of the meaning and significance of the site as possible in the limited time we had at this magnificent place. After the discussion, we wandered the grounds a little longer, and then boarded an auto for a ride back to the landing dock.

We arrived well before the barges could board passengers, and watched the distribution of cargo at the dock. Locals were loading 55 gallon drums of gasoline delivered by the Aranui into a large yellow truck. A backhoe had chains attached to its bucket, and they attached the chains to the drums, two at a time, using hooks that grasp the rims at both ends of the barrels. Workers were in flip-flops or sandals, and no hard hats were to be seen. Two or three assisted in attaching the hooks to the barrels while another steadied them as they were lowered and stacked in place on the truck. They had obviously done this many times in the past since the operation went smoothly and all the barrels just filled the bed of the truck. It was fascinating to watch the work as they used their own ingenuity to accomplish the task in their own way, with little or no government oversight.



By the dock, surge splashed over tide pools teeming with crabs and fish. We watched some of the crabs darting here and there, but other strange creatures hopping and flopping over the black rock caught our attention. On closer inspection, they proved to be fish! The small, dark creatures, only a couple of inches long, appeared to walk and hop using their pectoral

and tail fins across the rock, occasionally returning to pockets of water in the rocks, presumably to “breathe.” They kept us entertained as they darted about, with mouths moving and gills flapping as they went.





After the usual leap of faith between sea swells to board and later exit the passenger barge, we settled in for the rest of the day aboard ship. Hanaiaapa was the next port of call in the afternoon, but we were tired, and I had journaling to do. It serenely lay in a tranquil bay at the foot of steep mountains covered with foliage. Some who went ashore stated there were no organized

tourist activities, but that a few had enjoyed resting by the beach or swimming and bodysurfing in the waves.

I made my way to the lounge to work with the computer so I would not interrupt Fairy's nap. The French contingent was already there and was practicing a song for Polynesian night on board. I went into the side computer room which was quieter and typed away while the group sang enthusiastically around the corner. After completing the section I had been working on, I returned to the room. Fairy was still sleeping, and I felt tired, so lay down as well, and drifted off to sleep.

We awakened in the late afternoon with sun spotlighting various portions of the island mountains and valleys. I completed all my journaling and we watched the sun set from the window in the room as the Aranui sailed slowly towards Tahuata. At the briefing for the next day, we learned that the deck lights would be turned off for five minutes for stargazing, starting at 10 PM, and we made plans to join others there for the celestial show.

From the briefing we went to dinner where we were invited as guests to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of fellow travelers, John and Donna. We were joined by Alexander and Katherine from Canada, Mike and Eileen from Tasmania, Wanda and Royal, and Kathy and Tom. After the usual dinner chatter, John had each couple tell how they first met. Each had an interesting story to tell. Kathy turned hers into a multiple choice quiz with four options, and had us guessing until she revealed the not one, but two correct answers. John then gave a touching tribute to his wife, using all but one of the letters of the alphabet.

The dining crew darkened the lights as was customary for birthdays and holidays, and serenaded us as they brought another mango pie for the celebration. Their voices blended beautifully through the songs, cheering not only us, but the whole dining room with the melodies.

After dinner I caught up in my journal on all the activities of the prior day, while Fairy went to the bar area on Sea Deck to listen to music while awaiting the dark sky event. I joined her a bit later and gazed at the Milky Way, planets and star clusters from a darker portion of the deck. Chief engineer George came on deck and announced lights out. We gathered together in anticipation.

People gazed in wonder at the bright Milky Way stretching from Orion through the Carina, Southern Cross and to Centarus. Alpha and Beta Centauri angled upwards from the eastern horizon to point towards the Southern Cross. Beneath the cross, the southern Coal Sack appeared where a dark molecular cloud, which might someday condense into stars, blocked light from the background Milky Way. Below the Southern Cross between a sloping ridge and a dark fluffy cloud, the Greater Magellanic Cloud, a sister galaxy to the Milky Way, filled a region of sky with a faint seductive glow.

Nearly overhead, the ruddy Mars glowered down, adjacent to the head of Leo. Farther to the east Saturn rose over Spica and Virgo. Finally, to the north, the whole of the big dipper portion of Ursa Major, lay completely visible, upside-down over the crest of the island. When the lights came on many of the stars faded from view, but it had been a glorious five minutes.

During the stargazing, some had noticed fish swimming in water, illuminated by soft lights on the lower deck the boats. Then someone gasp: Is that a shark? Indeed, distinctly illuminated in the murky green water, a familiar form swam deliberately about, at least eight feet in length. It turned round a couple of times in the vicinity of where the other fish had been, its dorsal fin occasionally rising above and riling the waves. Snorkeling, anyone?

Charmed by the songs and stars, we retired to the room, tired, happy and ready for sleep. After another pleasant day with friends, sights, and events we could not otherwise have imagined, what a wonderful sleep it was.





**Photo Gallery:**



Puamau, Hiva Oa



Puamau, Hiva Oa





Puamau Dock



Puamau Dock





Aranui in Puamau Bay



Beyond the Bay





At Meae Iipona



Giant Tikis at Meae Iipona





Horizontal Tiki at Meae Iipona



Horizontal Tiki at Meae Iipona





Paepae at the Meae Ipona



Paepae at the Meae





Most unforgettable Mahalo



Scenes from Hanaiapa Hiva Oa





Scenes from Hanaiapa Hiva Oa





Scenes from Hanaiapa Hiva Oa