

March 25, 2012 Tahuata, Charming Children and Snorting Bulls



The low rumble of the moving ship gently awakened us in the early dawn. Clouds hovered over the inland peaks, while sunlight reached for the valleys and beaches and awakened the colors in the brilliant blue waters of the bay. Fairy and friends left with the 7:30 AM barge to Vaitahu so they could listen to the church music that Sunday morning. I stayed behind to attend to journaling and photos, and then caught the 8:30 barge to join them.

The barge dropped us at a cement wharf on the left side of the bay. The road paralleled the beach, and palm trees rose here and there between. Outrigger boats with motors were perched along the beach and chickens and pigs roamed the region to their hearts content. Half way across the head of the bay merchants were hawking their wares, while the melodious



sound of singing came from the church behind. I walked up to the lovely Catholic church in a clearing and Fairy and the gang were nearby. I took some video to record the beautifully harmonized voices of the congregation that sounded like a polished choir. No musical instruments accompanied them, and none could have made the song sweeter.



We eventually wandered over the market area, perhaps 150 feet from the church and checked the wares. Tom purchased a miro (rosewood) walking stick with a polished cow's horn for a handle. Tiki faces adorned the portions of the gorgeous red wood. Fairy and I purchased a necklace for her and ones for both Sara and for my nurse, Diane. The vendor

kindly posed as I took her photo, and thanked us for the business.

We slowly strolled back to the dock and then rode back to the Aranui 3 in relatively calm waters. Before long it weighed anchor and then motored a few miles farther down the island to the bay at Hapatoni. The barge landing was the first that was fully protected by rocky breakwaters, which made it much easier to debark. Young girls waved and shouted “mave mai”; or welcome to our island and performed a ritual dance greeting, overseen by adult family members. Boys sat in the background and watched, and another wandered the rocky breakwater.

A short hike took us past brightly colored outriggers lying on the grass. Beyond waters with brilliant shades of blue cradled the Aranui III in the bay between two ridges that sloped downward towards open sea. Breakers lapped ashore on sand and black rocks as we made our way through the small settlement towards the gathering area. Vendors



casually displayed their wares on the beach side of the road, willing to smile and show their wares with no pressure to buy.



Under an open air pavilion, foods such as coconut, plantain, fruits, bread fruit and more lay free for the taking, and ladies poured water or lemonade for the visitors. Beyond the pavilion rocky platforms of another tohua and paepae stood next to the cemetery and church grounds. The cemetery gleamed white with crosses and memorials. In the beautifully manicured clearing

nearby, the local church stood in simple elegance against the rising greenery and mountains beyond.

Before lunch, the four young girls who had greeted us so warmly at the dock danced while family played drums, guitar and ukulele accompaniment. The young boys in the meantime seated themselves behind the performers, on the edge of the floor of the pavilion and sang, clapped and goofed off as any normal kids would. They provided no end of entertainment and competed with the dancers at times for our attention. One



particular young lad, perhaps five or six, exuded particular energy, clapping, singing, dancing at times and teasing the other kids. He seemed like a “Spanky” from our gang and sported short brown hair with light colored tips and a grin beaming with a loveable sort of mischief.



After the performance we enjoyed a buffet-style lunch with usual tropical fare. As usual there was way too much to eat and we could not begin to try it all. We found seats on rough wooden benches and chowed down as skinny dogs eyed us pleadingly. Of course we obliged them with a few tossed morsels, but one female dog sniffed a piece of Wahoo that I tossed then turned up her nose and awaited the pork handouts which she gulped right down. Bitch!

After dinner a guide announced a tour up to the cross that overlooked the bay. We headed across the church yard to a path that led to a road leading to the overlook. At the top of the path a bull tethered to a tree looked at us laconically and the guide said something in French then turned around. Tom, who has a farm and is used animals said: Let's see what he's got to offer. He approached the bull, and then waved his arms to see what would happen. The bull stood his ground, shook his head and snorted. Tom immediately turned around and remarked that when a bull shakes his horns and blows snot at you it is time to leave. And that's no bull.



We followed the guide back down the hill, found another route around the brute and hiked on up towards the overlook. Tom and I, two of the oldest people on the hike arrived first and managed photos before the gawking gaggle arrived to clutter up the landscape. A five-foot high shrine housed the Virgin Mary and behind a footing had a large square hole where the cross had once, but no longer stood. Below varying shades of blue water battled an azure sky, polka dotted with fluffy clouds for attention, while rising green ridges separated the two.

We walked back down as the rest of the crowd was just getting situated and continued on without the guide. Gentle waves lapped against the rocky shore as we walked past the church, pavilion and merchants. Shaded grassy areas between the road and sea felt cool in the gentle breeze and several, including Wanda and Royal had settled into the serene scene. We stopped to chat with them briefly, and then walked on to the dock. Our ladies were sitting in the shady area

that young boys had occupied on our arrival. The young boys and several girls were in the water or in moored dinghies by the dock, laughing and splashing about with great glee.

We made our way back to the Aranui 3 for a leisurely and restful afternoon. We went to the bar, ordered mai tais, and settled down for a while to watch this peaceful part of the world. Then we



went back to the room, napped for a while, before getting up to watch the boat move from Hapatoni to an adjacent bay to anchor near some sailing yachts.

As day faded to dusk, the moon appeared next to Jupiter and Venus in the western sky, and I took some photos of the spectacular display. Later we attended the next day's orientation lecture and geared our minds for the duty that we

had to get the tikis from Joseph Vaatete onto the Aranui 3 for our friend Nir. Fairy discussed this with Steven, who agreed to help us with our mission. After another wonderful dinner, we wandered to the upper deck to take another look at the stars and Milky Way. The Southern Cross appeared above the eastern horizon, streaming a trail of stars to Orion and beyond. Low and to the right of the cross the faint glimmer of another galaxy, the Greater Magellanic Cloud, drew our attention momentarily, but we were quickly drawn back to the great, glowing Milky Way. This was our universe, and we felt quite at home, afloat in the South Pacific amongst the islands and stars.



Tahuata Photo Gallery



Vaitahu Bay



Vaitahu Dock



Vaitahu Bay



Vaitahu Bay and Aranui 3



Vaitahu Church



Vaitahu Center



Vaitahu Tahuata



Vaitahu Bay



Hapatoni Tahuata



Mave Mai at Hapatoni Tahuata



Jetty at Hapatoni Tahuata



Hapatoni Tahuata



Petroglyph at Hapatoni



Tohua at Hapatoni



Church Hapatoni



Church Hapatoni



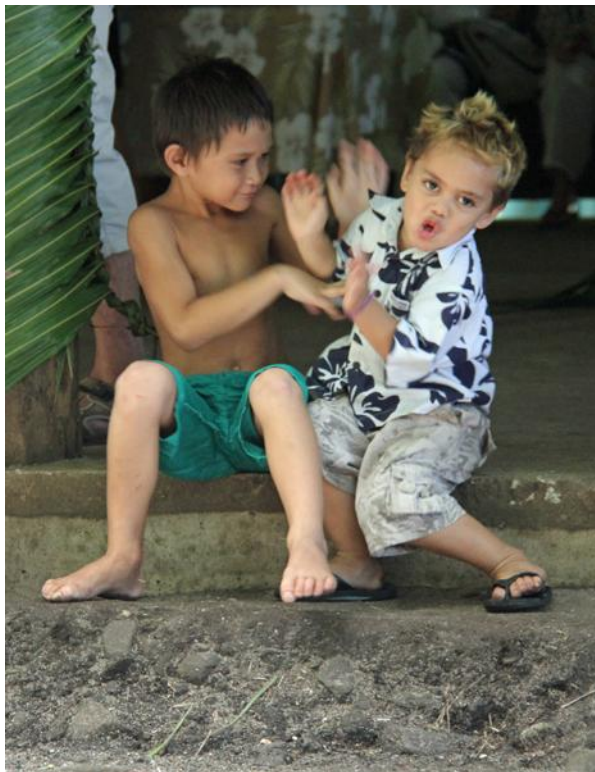
Aranui 3 at anchor at Hapatoni



Dock side of Hapatoni Bay



Kids at play Hapatoni



Kids being kids at Hapatoni



The photogenic and the photographers



Shutterbugs



Hapatoni Overlook



Hapatoni Bay from the overlook



Peaceful Anchorage at Tahuata



Day's end at land's end by Tahuata