

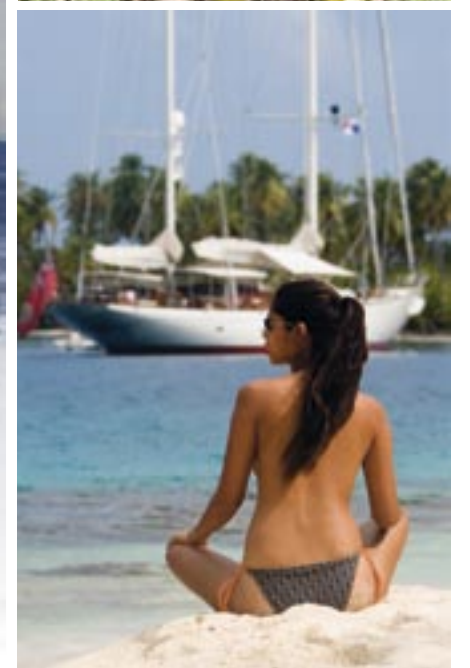
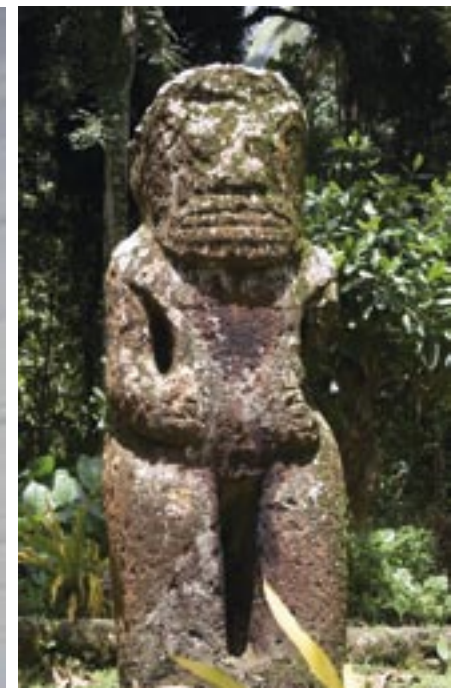
# FRENCH POLYNESIA

## *in style*

After her launch in Holland in 2005 and a maiden cruise to the fjords of Norway, the 180ft ketch *Adèle* spent last summer in the Pacific. Here her owner Jan-Eric Österlund and photographer Rick Tomlinson paint a stunning picture of the remote island groups of French Polynesia



*Adèle* in glorious sailing conditions off Bora Bora. Right (from top): Takaii, the largest tiki, or stone statue, in Polynesia; Jennifer on the beach; a church in Tahaa



There is superb cruising within the barrier reefs in relatively shallow water with excellent anchorages and an abundance of marine life



Sailing outside the reef off Bora Bora. You can easily see how important eyeball navigation is here. Right: approaching Ua Pou

The sheer size of the Pacific is sometimes difficult to comprehend for those who have not experienced this vast ocean. The absorption of some simple facts might help – it's larger than the Atlantic and Indian Ocean combined, larger than Europe and Asia put together and covers virtually half the globe.

And Pacific it was when *Adèle* made her crossing to French Polynesia in April 2006. The rhumb line distance from Galapagos to Marquesas is around 3,000 miles, 20 per cent longer than the distance from the Canaries to Barbados. We managed it in 13 days but we sailed 3,500 miles at an average of 11.2 knots, which, for *Adèle*, is not particularly fast. We sailed a good deal of the way, sometimes with everything up including the mizzen staysail (but not the spinnaker – too much work with a limited crew) but we motor-sailed very effectively, consuming about 65lt an hour at 1,500rpm which gives us 10 knots.

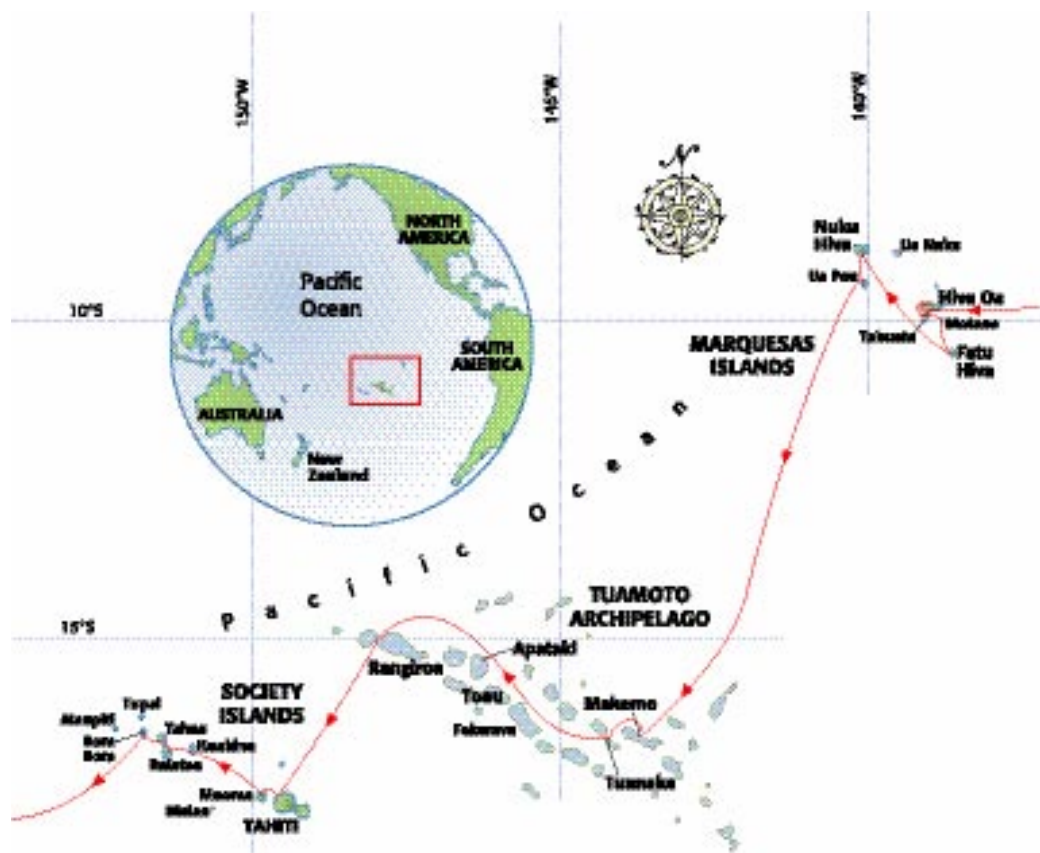
Apart from my wife Jennifer and myself we were a crew of eight, including our captain Andre Engblom, and in the Marquesas we were to be met by two more guests, John and Lise Keil. We met only two yachts en route to the Marquesas, both of them barely moving – we worked out that, at three knots, they would have taken 40 days to reach the island group! Neither answered our VHF calls and one yacht looked so deserted that we decided to go up to her. The yacht was sailing with two poled-out headsails and no main – she was rolling heavily and covered in barnacles. When we got close a dog emerged wagging his tail and barking, followed by a young lady who crawled from under a tarpaulin. They were on their way to Nuku Hiva. We exchanged greetings and bade them farewell.

We caught one tuna on the approach to the Marquesas, which provided us with nice sushi, but otherwise the sea seemed empty. Crew and guests spent a considerable amount of time communicating with friends and businesses via e-mail.

### Towering mountain spires

The spectacular island group of the Marquesas is volcanic and geologically young, the rich soil and warm climate encouraging extraordinarily lush foliage, which blankets the land. Anchorages are abundant, but we often found the swell creeping into





what looked like a sheltered spot so the kedge was laid to keep us bows-to the swell. It also made landing tricky on beaches which were often swept by breaking waves.

We arrived in Tahauku Bay on the south side of Hiva Oa on 29 April and three of us walked to the main village of Atuona in search of the Gendarmerie. We found the gendarme cutting his front lawn and he asked us to return after the weekend!

Atuona is where Gauguin is buried. He built a house here, calling it the House of Pleasure, probably to provoke the local clergy. He lived there with a 14-year-old local girl before dying on the island two years later. There's a small museum in his honour.

We were keen to visit Iipona where *pae pae*s, or meeting platforms, have been excavated in one of the best archaeological sites in the islands. The Polynesians mounted *tikis*, or stone statues, on these platforms and one of the largest – 2.7m high – can be seen here. With their large heads and enormous round eyes, the statues represent a chief or a warrior and were worshipped.

After visiting Tahuata where Alvaro de Mendana anchored in 1595 to make the first European discovery of the islands, we headed for Motonea and then continued to Fatu Hiva.

## Heyerdahl's haunt

I was intrigued with Fatu Hiva because Thor Heyerdahl of *Kon-Tiki* fame spent a year here honeymooning with his first wife. He wrote

an interesting book about the difficulties young people faced on the island (just prior to World War II). I had read the book as a young boy and brought a copy with me to find a couple of places he described.

Being the most south-easterly island, Fatu Hiva receives more rain than anywhere else. The upside is that it is also the lushest. A walk to a waterfall was hard going in the high humidity but we crawled over boulders to reach the fall and the lovely pool below it.

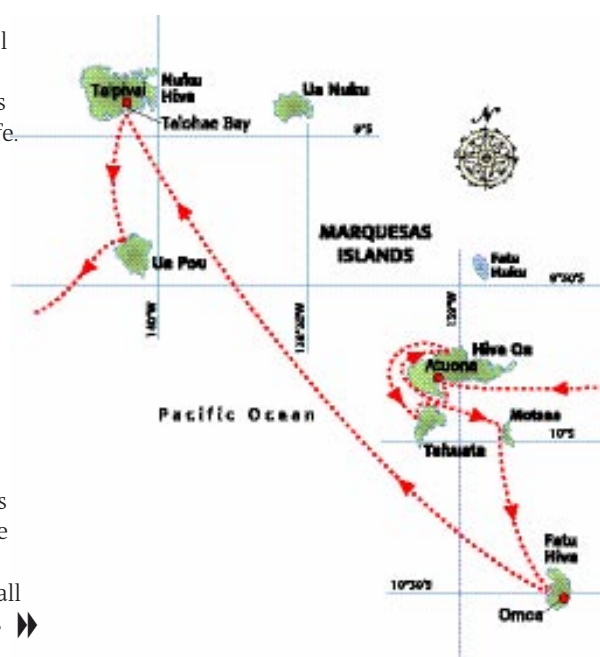
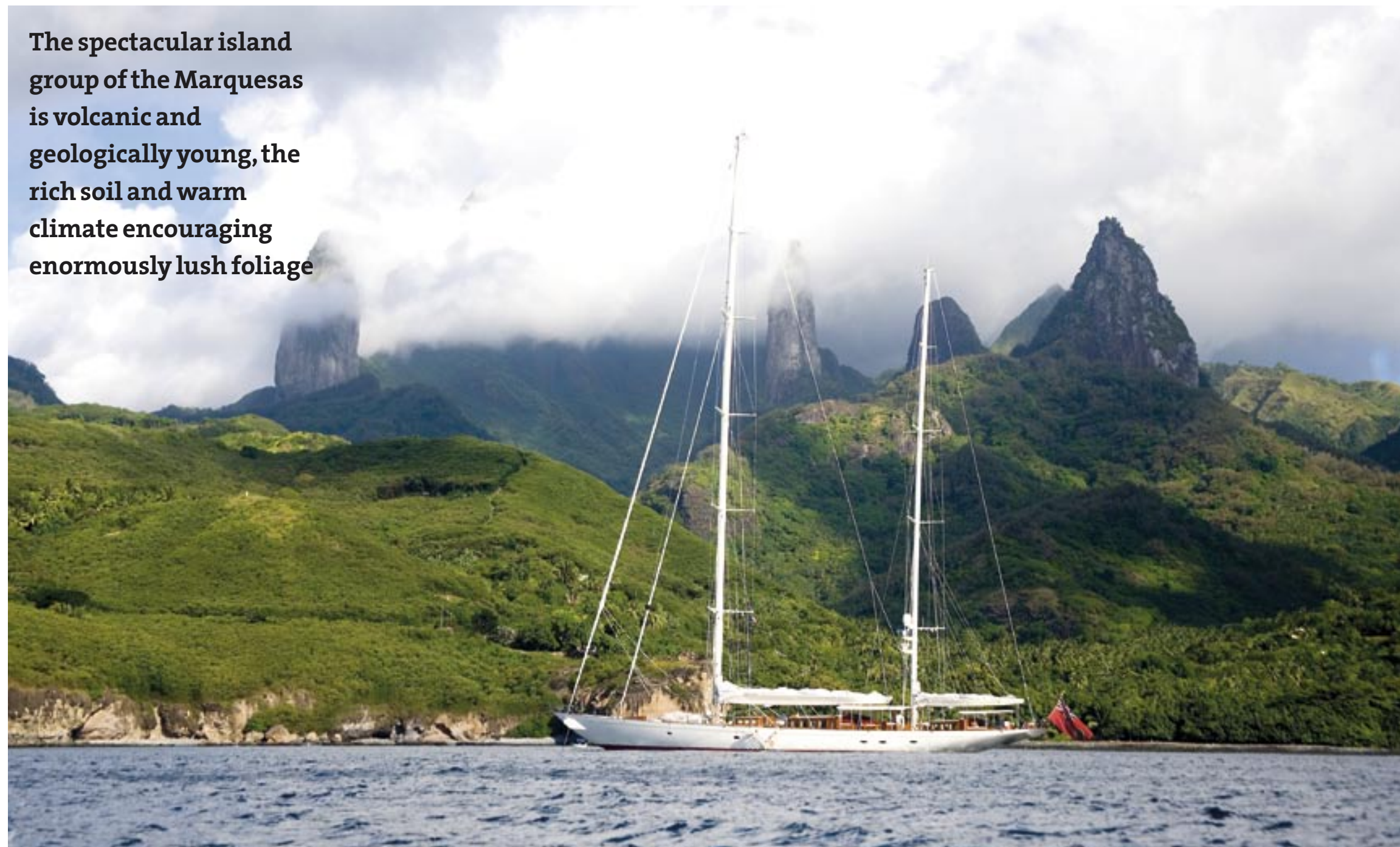
We'd met Lorena, a local, at the start of the walk and we were invited to dine with her husband and father. Breadfruit, bananas, curried chicken and vegetables were typical local fare, but the highlight was the conversation with Lorena's deeply religious father, who proffered his views on island life.

## 1,150ft waterfall

There is enormous scope for hiking on the islands. It took us five hours to cover the 17km from our anchorage in the Bay of Virgins on Fatu Hiva to Omoa, the island's main village further south. We had to negotiate the ascent to a ridge before our descent to Omoa, taking us into the clouds and on the way we were able to pick wild peppers, guava, pomelo and mango. Boarding *Ika*, our large tender, in Omoa was tricky with a big swell, which required some skilful boat handling by first mate Mark.

We also managed to reach Waipo waterfall which at 1,150ft (350m) is one of the world's

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Top: Adèle at anchor off Hakahetau Valley, Ua Pou, in the Marquesas Islands. Left: church in Fatu Hiva. Above: the author Jan-Eric Osterlund and his wife Jennifer



Left: at 1,150ft, the Waipo waterfall in Fatu Hiva is one of the world's tallest and can only be seen in its entirety from the air. Above: the tender, Ika, in big swell off Fatu Hiva

### The low-lying islands

Although the Tuamotu archipelago lies only 500 miles from the Marquesas, the islands are completely different in form despite also being the remnants of volcanic activity. They are all low-lying, formed of coral reefs, or atolls, which have grown on one-time volcanic islands. Much older than the Marquesas or indeed the Society Islands further west, the Tuamotus have slowly sunk beneath the surface, leaving the coral to do its magnificent work.

What this offers is superb cruising within the barrier reefs in relatively shallow water between 10m and 40m deep, with excellent anchorages and an abundance of marine life.

It took us two days to reach Makemo and we enjoyed some glorious sailing in up to 20 knots. It was important to arrive at slack water to navigate the passage through the reef safely, so during the last night we took a reef in the main to slow us down.

In Puheva village there were no supplies to buy, but Clare, our chef, had stocked well in Nuku Hiva. But we could buy an ice cream on our walks and enjoy a beer and a pastisse at the local bar!

Motoring inside the 25-mile lagoon required a good lookout for *bommies* or coral heads. We couldn't sail after 1500 because of the angle of the sun and the need to 'eyeball' navigate through the coral. We sent the tender ahead, so her soundings could be sent back to the yacht but, although electronics may be good, there is no substitute for a human lookout 40m up in the crow's nest.

We decided on an evening barbecue on one of the *motus*. Clare had prepared duck, tuna fish and spicy sausage and Anne prepared a rum punch. An almost full moon cast its light across the party. A night swim, the moon above us, 29°C air temperature and only the surf on the reef breaking the silence – this must be close to Paradise! ▶▶

tallest – so tall, in fact, that we couldn't see it in its entirety. It was only in the afternoon, when we flew by helicopter over the site (for a photo shoot) that we were really able to appreciate the beauty and scale of the fall.

### No ordinary ordination

We were lucky to be on Nuku Hiva when a local priest was due to be ordained, only the second ordination of a Marquesan. More than 1,000 people congregated from other islands, along with two bishops and a representative of the Pope in attendance. After the ordination in Taiohae's beautiful cathedral, a feast of local delicacies baked in banana leaves ensued and the celebrations continued the following day in another village.

We anchored off Taipivai to watch more groups perform and were aware that this was where Herman Melville (author of *Moby Dick*) stayed in 1842, having jumped ship from the

whaler *Achushnet* aged just 23. With Tobias Greene, he lived for a month with the Taipivai tribe and described his experiences in his book *Typee*. This was not only an adventure story of desertion and living with cannibals, but gave one of the first descriptions of life in a Marquesan village.

Melville criticised the church, missionaries and French colonial power (the French annexed the Marquesas in 1842) for destroying much of the original culture. But criticism of the church wasn't so easily accepted by the American public and Melville was forced to rewrite part of his book and tone down his views on missionaries.

Our final island in the group was Ua Pou, one of the most impressive, with its mountain spires towering to almost 4,000ft (1,200m). It seemed an appropriate last port of call in the Marquesas before we set sail for the Tuamotus.



In the morning the entire Makemo lagoon was mirror-calm and with the morning haze, one could barely distinguish between the sky and the water

In the morning the entire Makemo lagoon was mirror-calm and with the morning haze one could barely distinguish between the sky and the surface of the water.

As we headed for the western pass of the lagoon, pilotage was made even more difficult as cloud was reflected in the calm water. We crawled forward at four knots with one tender in front checking for *bommies*. Again the tender came in very useful to check the passage through the pass, her sounder sending back information to *Adèle's* helm station and navigation centre.

One of our guests, Claes, was flying out of Fakarava, an atoll 100 miles away, on 14 May but we couldn't make the passage in a day. We needed to arrive in daylight, so we stopped at Tuanake. There was no more than a small boat pass on this atoll, so an expeditionary party boarded *Kina*, our other tender, and set out for the lagoon.

Negotiating the pass was difficult – we had to pick a wave which would carry us through. Once inside we had to slow down quickly because the depth was barely a metre. But the coral formations were wonderful, with a lot of colourful fish, and we enjoyed fabulous snorkelling in the shallow water. Moray eels, huge clams, lots of fish we were unable to identify and coral of every type was thriving on the nutrients being brought through the pass.

We rejoined *Adèle* with some difficulty as the swell rose and fell along her topsides and we then motored slowly north to Fakarava. We spent a couple of days here. We saw only one car! Claes caught his plane home and the rest of us headed for Rangiroa to the north-west, sailing under a cloud-covered sky and in breeze which at times reached 18 knots in the squalls.

We sailed along the atolls of Toau and Apataki before tacking to lay Rangiroa. Although the Tuamotus are known as the 'dangerous islands', satellite navigation kept us safe and we could use the protection of the reefs to enjoy fast, calm night sailing.

Rangiroa was the first place to resemble

civilisation since leaving Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas and we anchored off a beautiful hotel. We also enjoyed some great diving here, where one of the crew filmed a manta ray underwater and we later enjoyed a drift dive through the pass. The clarity of the water was extraordinary, allowing us 55m deep visibility. We got down to 35m, where there were plenty of shark, manta ray, Napoleon fish and barracuda.

We left the Tuamotus through the Tiputa pass. Lise, one of guests, had commented on the absence of dolphins, but as we began our passage Andre shouted "dolphins!" and they were soon playing in our bow wave. We cleared the lagoon at the western extremity and set sail for Tahiti, which we expected to reach the following day.

## The islands of love

*Adèle* approached the Society Islands from the east but it was, of course, from the west that the original explorers, settlers and culture originated. Although Tahiti was visited by the first Europeans in 1767 – Samuel Wallis reached the island aboard the *Dolphin*, followed in 1769 by Captain James Cook – long before they arrived the Polynesians had completed a remarkable feat of exploration and discovery in the South Pacific.

The Melanesians had populated New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu and finally Fiji between 30,000 and 5,000 years ago, but they had never reached further east. Then less than 4,000 years ago a new people and culture, the Polynesians, started an emigration wave from present day Indonesia and possibly the Philippines and the east Asia mainland.

In less than 100 years they had moved 3,000 miles, their superior boatbuilding skills key to this evolution. Their sailing canoes had developed from designs with two outriggers, still commonly used in the Philippines today, to a single outrigger more adept at handling large waves, to a vessel with two similarly sized hulls – thus the catamaran was born!

And with the catamaran they took the next big leap from Tonga and Samoa to what is now French Polynesia, a journey taking them across 2,000 miles of open ocean. Interestingly, they settled the Marquesas first and then backtracked to Tahiti, the Society Islands, Hawaii in about 500AD and then New Zealand in about 900AD.

After weeks of sunshine, our arrival in Tahiti was met with



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thunder and lightning as if the Viking God Thor himself was up there causing a commotion. *Adèle's* size meant we had to embark a pilot, a charming and cheerful man who offered his wealth of knowledge of Tahiti, French food, other yachts and whatever else we asked him.

His light touch on the joystick brought *Adèle* inside the reef and safely to Marina Taina where we would remain for ten days. Because of the height of our masts (203ft/62m) we also had to gain permission to pass either end of the airport runway but this was granted with little fuss.

Papeete was the first decent-sized town we had been in since leaving Quito in South America more than six weeks ago. One pleasure was being able to buy 'real' >>>



Main picture: approaching Opunoho Bay, Moorea, in the Society Islands. With its stunning peaks and two bays in the north, this is one of the most beautiful of these islands. Above: on passage to Tahaa. Right: Polynesian dancers on board





newspapers. Aboard *Adèle* we are able to download news and print out our own papers, but it isn't quite the same as reading the real thing.

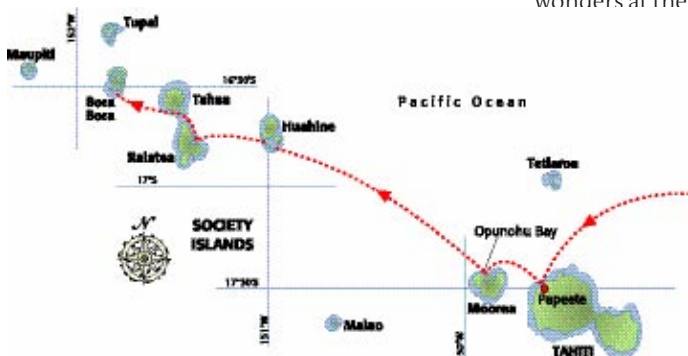
Everyone took time off in Tahiti. Jen and I went to see my daughter in California and we had new guests. Sandford and Geraldine Henry, Philip and Florence Hands and Annika and Rick Tomlinson, the photographer, were aboard. Katarina Kiss was also with us, although unfortunately her husband was stuck in Kazakhstan and couldn't join us.

A surprise start to our adventure was the arrival of a dance troupe, who performed traditional Polynesian dances on top of our deckhouse much to our delight and to that of the crews of surrounding yachts.

## Stunning peaks

Shortly afterwards we set sail for Moorea which, with its stunning peaks and two bays in the north, is one of the most beautiful islands in the Societies. From Opunohu Bay we visited the temples at Belvedere and the meeting platforms or *maraes* similar to the *pae pae* seen in the Marquesas. We also saw ancient archery platforms from which male nobility used to have competitions, firing their arrows into a cleared range. The Polynesians never used the bow and arrow in anger – instead they used spears and clubs to kill and maim their enemies, who would then be sacrificed on the *maraes*.

The 90-mile passage to Huahine was



**Above: a pearl farm in the Society Islands. Left: *Adèle* at anchor in calm waters as the sun goes down**

undertaken under power and as we entered the pass that led to the lagoon there were great views of rays and turtles in the shallows to starboard from our vantage point in *Adèle's* crow's nest. Spinner dolphin could be observed in the deeper water.

On Raiatea we used the tenders extensively to explore shallower parts of the island and took them both to visit Marae Taputapuatea, the most important *marae* in all French Polynesia. It was the focal point of religious ceremonies, where the main shrine was dedicated to Oro, the god of war.

Many human sacrifices were performed in honour of Oro and excavation has revealed more than 5,000 skulls on the temple site. Despite these rather gruesome facts, one wonders at the wisdom of the work of

those who sought to convert the population to Christianity. The missionaries may have stopped cannibalism but at the same time destroyed a culture, parts of which were very attractive.

Authors like Herman Melville and Robert Louis Stevenson drew attention to

this in the 19th Century and criticised the missionaries for their zealousness and lack of understanding of the culture.

We left Raiatea, returned to Tahaa and then headed for Bora Bora where we prepared for a special date: 06/06/06. Would the

numbers have a symbolic effect, we wondered? But for the Swedes aboard it was also our National Day and an important one to celebrate. Dinner started with salmon roe and Swedish schnapps which got everyone going!

Walking, visiting a local school and spectacular dives kept us busy in Bora Bora although a diving encounter with a number of black tip reef sharks and a couple of 3m long bull sharks was interesting. They were probably well fed on the reef but we learned later that they can be quite aggressive and are responsible for a lot of attacks on humans. We were lucky!

This part of our Pacific adventure was now drawing to a close, Jen and I returned to Europe and our guests departed. We were to return just two weeks later to sail in Samoa, Wallis and Futuna, Fiji and Vanuatu for the rest of the northern summer.

*Following her Pacific cruise, Adèle headed for New Zealand for a refit before sailing for Cape Horn and Antarctica. As you read this, Yachting World's deputy editor David Glenn will be joining Adèle in the Falkland Islands and sailing to South Georgia and Rio de Janeiro. Check out his regular blog on [www.yachtingworld.com](http://www.yachtingworld.com)*