Crossing the Line

Sailing beyond the end of the road...

By Tor Johnson

Equatorial lunacy

In the final installment chronicling his two-year sailing voyage – which began in Sweden and took in England, Wales, Portugal, Madeira and the Caribbean – Tor Johnson finds shallow reef passes, heavy rights and friendly locals in French Polynesia, then crosses the Equator, bound for H a w a i i .

All uncredited photos: Tor Johnson

Polynesian power lines. Ross Williams, Tahiti. Photo: Jeff Divine

Thierry Dominic. Photo: Steve Ryan

Locals in Poti Marara, mahi boat.

Taputapuatea Marea(temple)Tahiti

"So Tor..does this dinghy...um.... float when it's like this?" Tim Yates asked, making a futile attempt to sound casual. We stood looking down at the limp, impotent mass of what had until very recently been our rigid, reassuringly buoyant Zodiac inflatable boat. We had just pulled it aboard our 48ft sailboat, and were stowing it for the long sail across thousands of deep and remote miles of blue sea from the Marquesas up to Hawaii. It was Yates' first ocean crossing, and he was understandably nervous. I had already sailed Heron, with various crews, from Sweden where she was built, across the Atlantic and finally to the wave-rich zone of French Polynesia. Yates, my girlfriend Annabel and another friend from Hawaii, Tom Mabie, had joined me for this the final crossing to our home in Hawaii. I knew Yates felt the need for an escape plan, but I had no intention of abandoning Heron for the Zodiac.

"Yates, if we need to get into this dinghy a thousand miles out to sea, you'd better be very flexible. Might want to work on that yoga."

"Why?" Yates now looked puzzled, in addition to being worried.

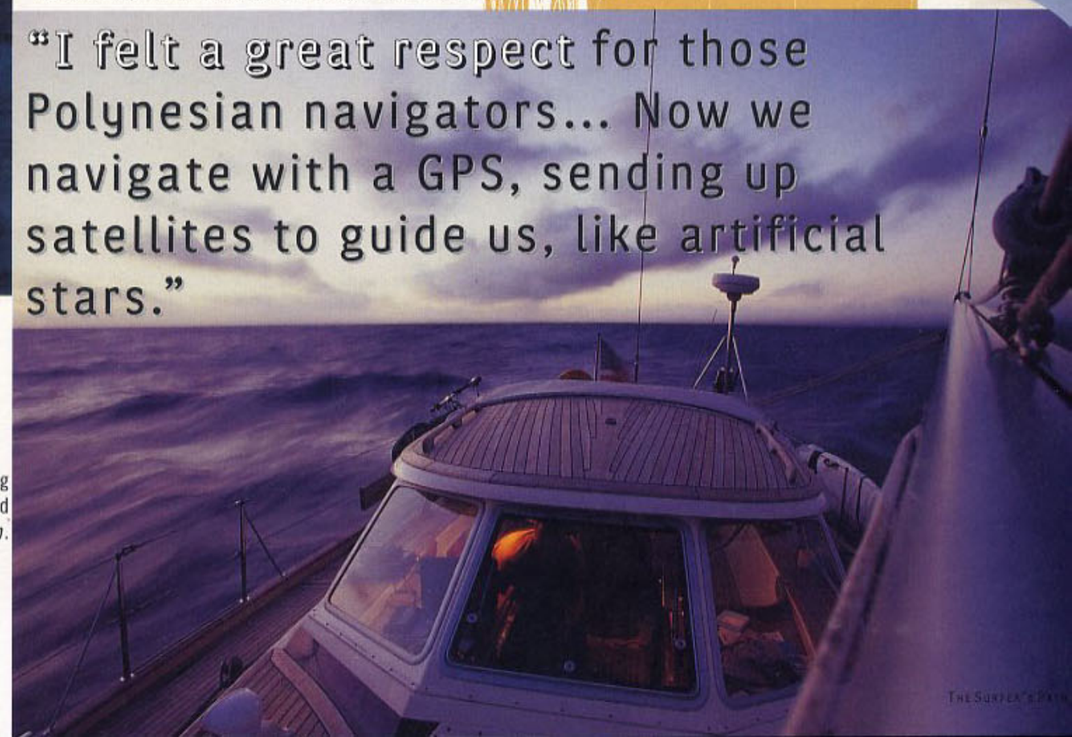
"Because you'll have to kiss your ass goodbye," I replied.

Maeva Tahiti *(Translation: "Mind the Reef")*

I'd had use for my own yoga stretches two months previously in Tahiti when only Annabel and I were aboard. It was my first day in the water and Taapuna was big: my Tahitian "trial by fire". True, it wasn't Teahupoo, but still, it had real power. The lefts

Tor, early morning at sea, aboard *Heron*.

"I felt a great respect for those Polynesian navigators... Now we navigate with a GPS, sending up satellites to guide us, like artificial stars."



Manoa Drollet. Photo: Steve Ryan

were doubling up and heaving on a shallow live-coral ledge, and the bigger waves had a nasty tendency to close out. While I was paddling out, a local pointed out the second section, pantomiming how, if you got caught inside, the second section would trap you under mounds of roiling whitewater in knee-deep water, and then sweep you across the jagged reef.

I watched the locals take it apart for a while. The trick was to get in early with a hard paddle, before the wave hit the shallow ledge. That way they'd get down the face with plenty of time to set up for the inevitable tube once the wave began to suck dry on the inside. A newcomer, and admittedly a kook on heavy backside barrels, I sat watching a succession of locals grab the best walls from deep, and became even more reluctant to take waves from guys who could obviously ride them better than I could.

One of the smoothest surfers scratched down the wave of the day, slid sideways down the face, then pulled his fins back underneath him and rode past me standing tall in the barrel. As he paddled back out, he suddenly fixed me with a fierce, warlike Polynesian stare.

"Eh!!" he said loudly, paddling straight up to me.

'Here it comes... show no fear, maybe you won't get beat', I told myself.

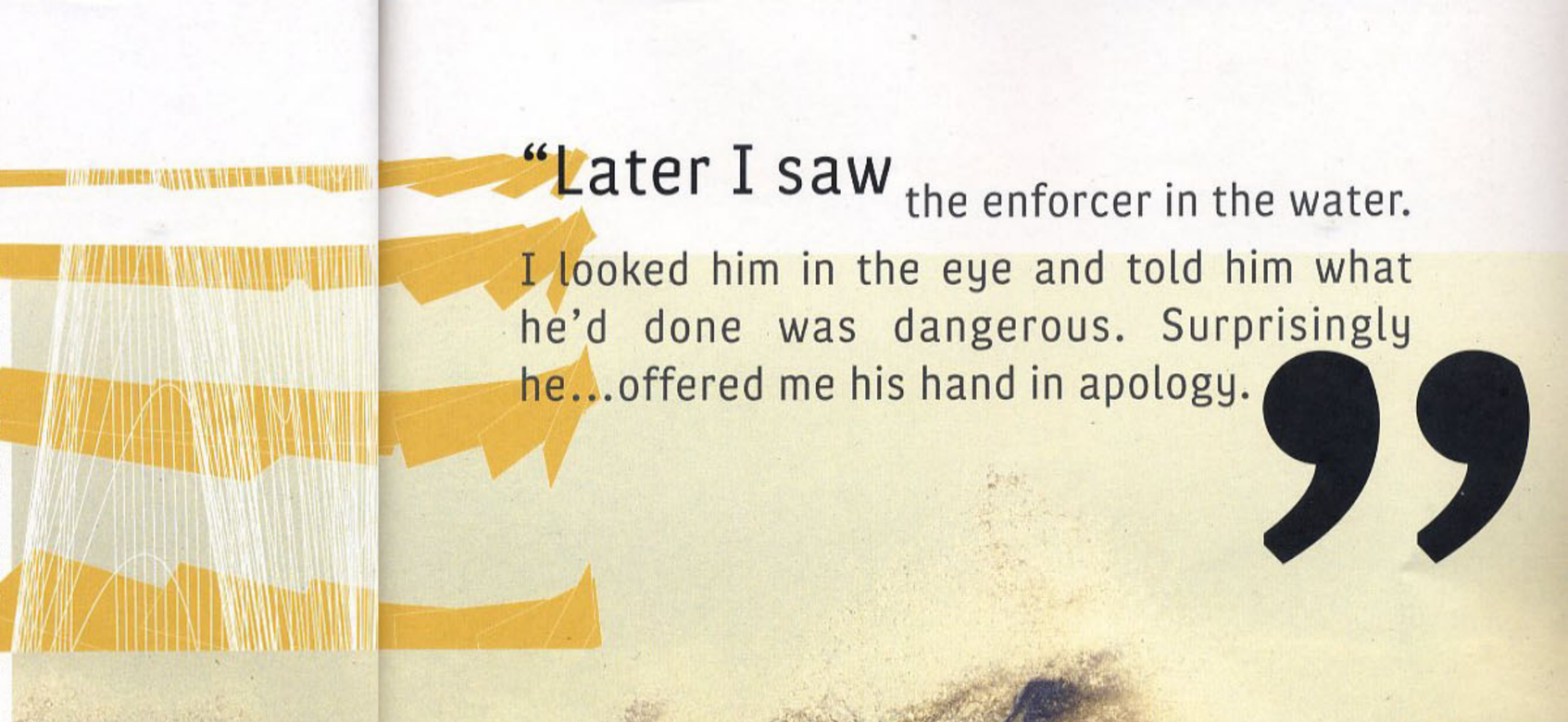
"You no need wait here. You surf deep. With us," he said, offering me a place in the line-up,

'Never heard that in Hawaii', I thought. Nevertheless, I waited on the shoulder, picking off a few wide ones, barely taking my turn. Finally, as the sun sank low, a light onshore wind began to blow and the crowd thinned. Now was my chance to paddle back to the line-up and grab one of those bombs.

I chose the wrong wave. I couldn't get in early enough. Halfway down the face I went airborne, grabbed a rail, and ended up stopped at the bottom with nowhere to go. The entire wall threw out over me and closed out on the shelf. I was pulled backwards over the falls, slowly, sickeningly. Knowing from the pull of the wave that I was going to hit the reef head first, I twisted around to protect my face with my hands. When I hit bottom, I was dragged along so fast that the reef seemed to be racing by me. My rash guard was shredded, my watch was ripped off and I collected some nice long 'Tahitian tattoos' that looked like I'd been attacked with a cheese grater.

The next day I was happy to see that the swell had gone down to less than life threatening, so I paddled out and salvaged a little pride on some smaller lefts. Still, somehow I managed to pull into a hopeless section that closed out in a perfect barrel 20ft past me down the line. I landed squarely on the same section of reef. **Just before falling, I looked out of the tube at several huge smiles from the shoulder.** The locals loved it. This time my shorts were ripped nearly off, leaving just barely enough cloth to be decent. Later I managed to get a few waves and felt a bit better, though far from the backhand 'Occy charg-

"Later I saw the enforcer in the water. I looked him in the eye and told him what he'd done was dangerous. Surprisingly he...offered me his hand in apology."



Local in good trim, Teahupoo, Tahiti.

Chunk slice, Teahupoo, Tahiti. Photo: Scott Aichner

er' league, and with nowhere near the confidence for our next port of call: Teahupoo.

Life on the Sea

Sailing is a unique way to travel. The beauty of searching for surf by sailboat is that you can go places that no other traveler can. In much of Polynesia, with its protecting barrier reefs, you can drop the anchor just inside the line-up of a world-class wave, totally independent of hotels, restaurants, buses, rent-a-cars and taxis and the rest of the nervous jangle that confronts the land traveler. You're on your own schedule. If you don't like a place, you pick up your anchor and go. Of course there's a trade off – with that freedom comes much responsibility.

The romantic image of a sailing life of leisure, like some endless Indonesian boat charter, is actually far from the reality. Heron is the type of boat that can go anywhere – heavy and ready for almost anything the trip throws at her – sort of a Land-Rover of the ocean. But even on a boat like this, and even at anchor, you worry about safety. Will the anchor hold? Will the wind change? Etc..etc.... Then there's the bewildering array of systems to maintain. Imagine a self-sufficient house with its own water, electrical and sewage systems, not to mention all the gear needed to get you there, like sails, motors and electronics. With navigation, maintenance, and the general stuff of daily life like cooking and cleaning, you're always busy, and if you're not, chances are you should be.

Teahupoo

Teahupoo lies at the end of the road – a small, well-kept, peaceful little village full of gardens, with an absolute freak of a wave out front. The pass at Teahupoo is surprisingly easy to enter, a wide, deep channel that wraps and focuses the swell's power straight into the left, forcing it to dredge water up off the reef. Standing at the wheel, I stared straight down into the pit as a tight pack of pros honed their skills on freakish bowls breaking below sea level. **A 4ft swell would strangely morph, throwing out as a 6ft tube. It felt surreal to be safe, dry, and stable, that close to a life-threatening arena.** Like watching a lion feeding in your living room.

Once we had entered the pass, Heron was swallowed by a labyrinth of reef that wound into the most perfectly calm anchorage I have ever seen, right in view of one of the world's most powerful waves. That night I went on deck to check the anchor. As I gazed at the water from beneath the awning, the entire sea appeared strangely full of brilliant pinpoints of light. Guessing this must be some sort of rare bioluminescence, I emerged from beneath the awning to find that it was actually the perfect reflection of a myriad of stars, staring bright from a perfectly cloudless, still sky. We were a ship suspended motionless between two opposite universes.

Next morning I drove the Zodiac fast over the shallow green water covering the reef, watching multi-hued coral and tiny fish flitting by in the sky-clear water. I was staring at the reef when the dinghy skipped out over a reef cliff into the bottomless deep blue of the lagoon. The reef dropped away so suddenly that I felt vertigo as it flew straight off the edge. Suddenly we were suspended over the precipice like a cartoon character stopping in mid-air, looking around before falling.

Although Teahupoo is also known in the surf world as 'the end of the road', it is possible to go further, so not fancying another scrape with a shallow lefthander, particularly one full of hungry pro surfers, I passed Teahupoo by and went on to the real end of the road. My chart gave the name of the small settlement there as 'Paofai', and here we found Pension Bonjouir, an Eden of fruit trees and wide lawns backed by towering peaks so impossibly dramatic they could have been the set for some Broadway musical. The owner introduced himself as Moana, and he told us the area carries his wife Annick's family name, Paofai, because they've lived on the land for many generations.

The Paofai land had lain unused, but not forgotten, for a long time before Moana and his wife built their pension. Annick described how her grandfather had told them to be careful of the rains, to build up high for the floods that inundate the valley in certain years. They took his advice and were glad of it when the river jumped its banks and flowed right underneath their pension.

Pension Bonjouir (spelled with an "i"- a play on the French for "good day" and "good play" or in some meanings, "good orgasm") is one of the few places for visiting surfers to stay when they come to surf Teahupoo. One of Moana's sons or their friends takes guests to surf the reef passes in an outrigger canoe. There were fruit trees everywhere, more passion fruit, bananas and coconuts than you could ever eat, and the grounds were kept in perfectly serene lawns. No Eden would be complete without something evil, and here the evil appeared toward dusk, in the form of tiny voracious gnats which made life outside unbearable.

The Line Between Land and Sea

Moana described an important marae (temple) on his land just inland of the pension. The temple was connected to the reef pass outside by a series of stones, and there is actually another marae that was purposely located underwater in the pass. Stone sentinels were placed like stepping stones in the lagoon to link the pass to the land, to guard against invasion and alert the people if anyone came in through the pass unbidden.

I surfed the pass alone. It was a shifty, shallow wave, with

Shane Dorian. Photo by Steve Ryan

Yoshi sailing *Heron*.

Dinghy, bananas, board. Hiva Oa, Marquesas.

Kieron Perrow. Photo by Steve

Tor+Yoshi

Locals at a dance, Marquesa

eight of the ocean. Photo by Steve Ryan

Loca 'gansta groms', Hiva Oa, Marquesas

strong currents and a tendency to close out. I'm not superstitious, but still, I had an eerie feeling ducking waves in translucent water over the top of a sacred temple that was believed to communicate my presence to the land.

I began to wonder if perhaps for the Tahitians, the sea is just a continuum between land, reef and ocean. The Polynesians who spend their lives in, on, next to the lagoon, fishing, planting, diving and surfing, have many words for the ocean, like the Innuit have many words for snow. The shallow water near shore, the green water over the lagoon, the purple-blue deep open ocean are all different. I imagined that Polynesians couldn't comprehend the shore as a line, the solid barrier between the land and the sea perceived by we Westerners, who come from colder climates with cold, dark and forbidding seas.

Later, I decided to sail Heron into the pass leading to Paofai. It was a dicey channel, but the swell was small, and having surfed the pass, I felt I knew where the deep water was.

I was wrong.

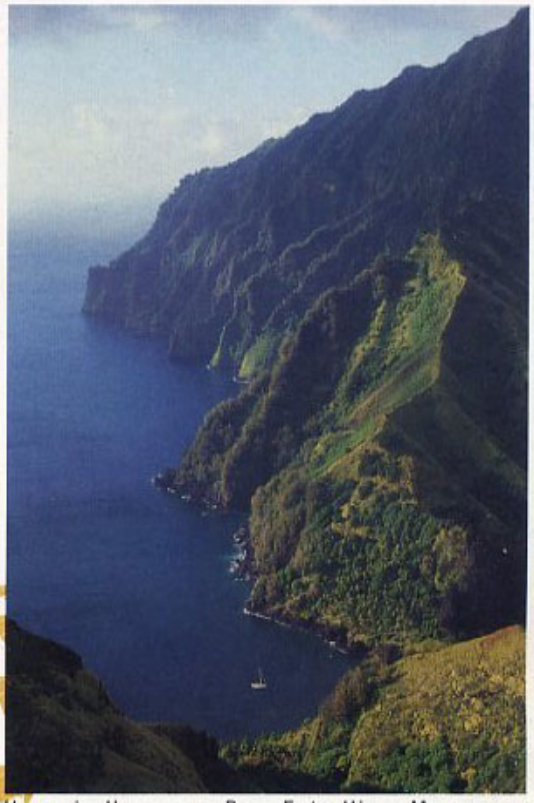
Despite the declining swell, there was still an outgoing current angling across the reef. I had set the GPS (Global Positioning System) digital chart to show me where the deepest water lay. The water shallowed more and more, and Annabel, standing on the bow watching for coral patches, began to look back anxiously as she sighted coral heads getting closer and closer in the gin-clear water.

I couldn't find the channel. The deep water seemed to have disappeared. I looked at the electronic chart. It had gone mysteriously blank. Maybe the guardians of the pass would not let us through. Had we somehow failed to show proper respect?

A swell lifted Heron's stern, and she rode in farther. No way back now. I braced for a grinding crash. Suddenly we were inside the pass. The water turned blue as the coral receded into the deep, placid lagoon, Heron rocking easily in the swell refracting from the shallows. I heaved a huge sigh of relief. Maybe the sentinels had only been warning me not to get too cocky...

The Polynesian way

Although crowds are still rare on the outer Society Islands, localism is far from non-existent. Americans we'd met who now live in Tahiti warned us not to expose the spots to others. Fair enough. Unfortunately our American friends also told the locals that I write for magazines like this one, and some got the impression that we were out to exploit their waves. I told some locals that I never mention spots by name, that I'd rather leave the discovery to the next guy who finds the place. Still, a few of them seemed unhappy. One guy in particular was aggressive, threatening us with fists in the air whenever he saw us. We called him "the enforcer". Being on a boat anchored next to a break may be convenient, but it makes you a fairly obvious presence, and the 'enforcer' seemed increasingly to resent us.



Heron in Hanavave Bay, Fatu Hiva, Marquesas

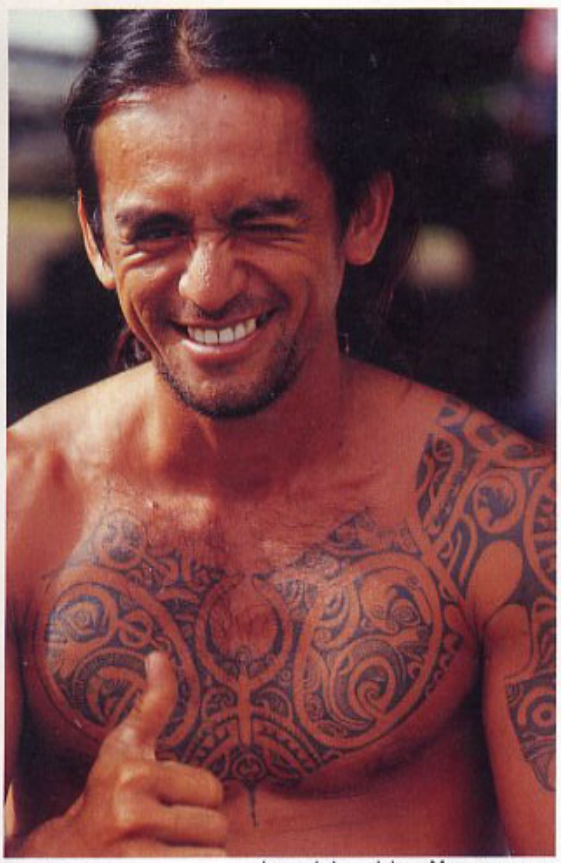
Things came to a head one day as we were sailing between passes. Just for the challenge I decided to sail into one of the narrow passes, beating into the wind under full sail. This meant that we had to tack between the jagged coral edges of the pass with feet to spare, sort of the sailing equivalent of 'shooting the pier'. The waves on both sides of the pass were flawless: 6ft and ridiculously hollow in the stiff offshore breeze.

We sailed right up to the inside bowl, holding our course as long as possible toward the reef, sails full, Heron heeled far over, rail in the water. Just then a speedboat approached from the bow, with a burly surfer standing in it, waving us off and shaking his fist. It was our local enforcer. I had no choice; I had to tack the boat or hit the reef, but the speedboat was in the way. I swung the boat straight at them. They took one look at Heron's imposing bow, capped with a massive stainless steel bow roller and anchor, and swerved away in a curtain of spray.

Later I saw the enforcer in the water. I'd had enough. I looked him in the eye and told him what he'd done was dangerous. Besides, I wasn't going to lead anyone to the spot. Surprisingly he agreed, and offered me his hand in apology. Later that day he and his buddies showed up with a gift of local produce for us, and we all sat around and partied for a while.

It seems it's not uncommon for Polynesians to 'test' someone when they first meet. Many of the Polynesians I met throughout the region looked at me with a fierce, challenging stare and no hint of a smile. Some were

Poto on an unfriendly one. Photo by Steve Ryan



Local bradda, Marquesas

huge, dark, malevolent-looking tattooed locals who looked like they'd as soon break you in half as say hello. They often turned out to be the sweetest guys ever.

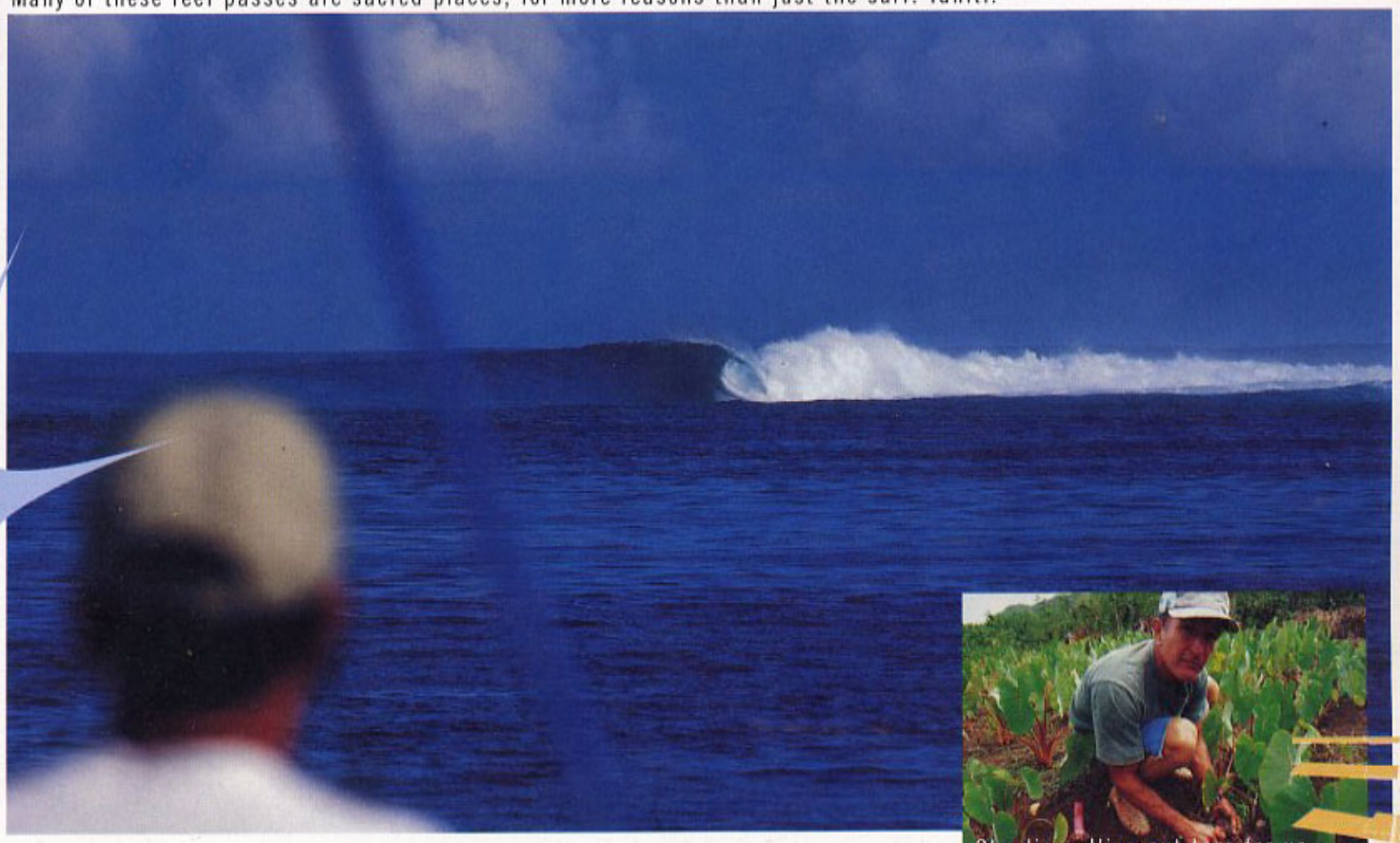
A friend from the Marquesas explained it this way: "It is not the Marquesan way to smile when they first meet you. They look first. Then they decide if they like what they see. They do not know you, so why should they smile? It would seem false".

Another friend who works at the Hawaiian Studies department at the University of Hawaii drew parallels with the neighboring Polynesian Moari culture, where the traditional dance of greeting always involves a direct challenge. Even today, Maoris greet respected guests with ritualized physical challenges, grimaces and taunts. Polynesian cultures value courage highly, and they expect you to stand up to them.

Tahitian Chargers

Tahitians appear fearless in the water. They ride hollow, shallow waves every day, and naturally, they ride them well. **Even beginners who just learned to stand up will get to their feet in stages with a 'knee up', then pull boldly into the tube.** There's no other choice anyway. But the ultimate Tahitian charger showed himself at a certain very hollow right. I was lucky enough to catch this wave breaking about as well as it breaks, wrapping down a reef point close to shore at 6ft, warping and bowling again and again over a sharp, shallow reef. Some guys were getting three or even four barrels on one wave. While several of the locals stood out for their guts and wave judgment, the real charger was a local kid who pulled into a hopeless tube and came up with his board snapped cleanly in two

Many of these reef passes are sacred places, for more reasons than just the surf. Tahiti.



Charlie pulling out taro for us

pieces. He stayed out for over an hour, riding deep 5ft barrels, standing on just the tail of his board.

Tahitian Hanai

On a hot Sunday afternoon, we found ourselves in a remote area of an outer island of the Societies, searching for fresh vegetables. Everyone was at church and our only hope was to ask if the local farmers could sell us some produce from their fields. A truck full of Tahitian women in their Sunday finest stopped and asked us what we were looking for. While we struggled with halting French, a weathered white face peered from the back of the pick-up. It was Charley, a Santa Cruz local, excited to see people from his hometown while so far away. Charley decided to miss church just to pick vegetables from his fields for us. While loading an entire pick-up with several varieties of taro, bananas, oranges and green beans, Charlie told us his story.

On a solo surf trip to Tahiti twenty-six years ago, the local women had asked Charlie,

"Where is your family? Where are your parents?"

They couldn't imagine anyone living alone without the family that is so important to them.

A typically displaced American son, Charley replied, "Well... they're far, far away".

"Then we will be your family", they told him.

So Charley met a Tahitian woman with a sparkle in her eye, moved to a valley to grow vanilla, and now lived a simple life. The valley had clear water and was a paradise for someone who worked hard, content with only what the land provided. Now Charlie is a grandfather. We met his sons – strong, gentle Tahitians any father would be proud of. Charlie's wife loaded us with vanilla and insisted we take more and more fruit, climbing nimbly into the grapefruit trees and tossing down bucketfuls of fruit, laughing and leaping from limb to limb, looking more like a forest creature than a grandmother.

Charlie's farmland lies near one of the most famous and sacred marae of all Polynesia. The reef pass leading to the marae was very important, and could only be used only by a privileged few. Scholars believe that the temple was largely dedicated to voyaging and that many of the great voyages of discovery made by Polynesian navigators may have begun there. As a strong trade wind blew us through the pass, I thought about those fearless ancient navigators who sailed out into the vast Pacific in their frail craft from this same pass. I felt a great respect for them – people who used only their knowledge of the stars, swell, wind and sea life to find their way in a vast, impassive sea. Now we navigate with a GPS, sending up satellites to guide us, like artificial stars.

Marquesas

The surf in the Marquesas, an island chain about 700 miles northeast of Tahiti, is wild and remote, and the locals are dying for someone to surf with. I sailed there with almost no idea where to find surf, and cruised around several of the islands in a futile search before realizing that they are too steep and too devoid of barrier reef to have good surf. Finally, I heard about one island that does have waves. Aboard alone, I was waiting for the end of the hurricane season and fresh crew to cross up to Hawaii. Bored, and desperate for surf, I pulled up anchor and sailed single-handed to Fatu Hiva, a magnificent island too precipitous even for an airfield.

Tia, one of the few surfers on the island, graciously showed me his spot, a powerful peak heaving out of the South Pacific onto ominous, jumbled black rocks that had fallen from a 1200-ft vertical cliff. The cliffs loom so steeply overhead that in the unlikely event a goat lost its footing, it would land on your head as you sat in the line-up.

I explored the village and met the people of the most intact Polynesian society I'd ever seen. I helped out at the local school, teaching English to the joyful kids. Since there is no airfield, and boats across the rough channels are sporadic at best, Fatu Hiva is very isolated. There is very little cash economy. Fishermen give part of their catch away as a matter of course, and the owner of the only store in town didn't want the money I offered for gas for my dinghy engine. After filling my tank, he asked me if I had any extra line on the boat. "To tie my goats", he explained. A storeowner refusing money seemed strange at first, but I realized that when there's no ship, there's nothing to buy, so money has little value. After all, you can't eat money.

This was a barter economy, or more accurately, a gift economy since nothing is really traded in "this for that" fashion. The system seemed to keep people in touch as a community, since every time they gave or received something, they'd see each other. Today you might give your neighbor some fish you caught and say "ka'oha" (aloha). Tomorrow he'll remember, and stop by with a gift of breadfruit for you.

After a week of living in Fatu Hiva, the thought of shopping in Wal-Mart or Costco seemed incomprehensible to me. In our society it's entirely possible to carry out our lives without really speaking to anyone. We can drive to the gas station, swipe the card, fill up, drive to the mega-store and barely make eye contact with the cashier. Our entire system of striving for personal gain, hoarding to get ahead and accumulating wealth, began to seem, in comparison, a bit pointless, sad and lonely.

Why they call it "French" Polynesia

The French continue to pay hugely for the privilege of having used some of the atolls for nuclear testing as recently as 1996. They've built roads, telephones and Internet connections, even in impossibly remote places. I would hike for miles through jungle, and suddenly come upon a perfectly-working shiny glass phone booth with "France Telecom" on it, enabling me to take a break from my bushwacking and call my Mom in Hawaii.

Many of the Polynesians I met seemed angry at what they consider a wasteful and paternalistic government. "The government and police are like chickens", a local who picked me up hitchhiking, ranted, "The French throw grain at us, then the chickens eat it all." He complained about the strict controls over guns and ammunition in the Marquesas, where many people hunt goats and wild pig for food. It seemed like everyone wanted to know, "Vous avez fusile?" (Do you have any ammunition?)

One storeowner insisted on showing me his guns. It was an impressive arsenal.

"Why do you need all these?" I asked him.

"Because the officials don't allow them", he replied.

The Crossing

The short weather window between hurricane seasons in the northern and southern hemispheres meant that we had to make the 2000-mile sail across the Equator to Hawaii in the late fall. By that time water temperatures are too cool for hurricane formation north of the Equator. The crossing was rough and wet, with strong trade winds creating waves that threw Heron over on her side often, sometimes even submerging the surfboards lashed tight to the rails.

Although I had done a few ocean crossings, it was the first time for the rest of my crew and, as mentioned at the start of this story, they were fairly nervous about spending two or three weeks on the open ocean out of sight of any land. I made them even more nervous by warning them to keep a good watch for large ships, since collision is the greatest danger in the open ocean. I also announced that if anyone fell over the side, they'd be a "needle in a haystack" – there'd be no chance of rescue. Open ocean seas are nearly always higher than the tiny head of a swimmer, which makes them impossible to keep in sight.

Despite Yates' apparent lack of confidence, we made it to the Equator safely. Since none of my crew had crossed the Equator before, they were what sailors call 'pollywogs'. Longstanding tradition from the days of sail dictates that King Neptune must test the pollywogs to see if they are worthy of crossing the Equator ('the line'), thus becoming 'shellbacks'. Initiation consists of hazing, which can be fairly brutal. As captain, and the only shellback aboard, it was my duty to initiate the crew. Dressed in a rude semblance of Neptune, with a trident made out of an oar and an old sheepskin tied to my head, I bellowed for the crew to assemble.

Each person was forced to confront their worst fears. Since Annabel had been avoiding going below, where the disorientation and the stench of diesel and toilet in the stuffy cabin made her feel seasick, she was made to go below and "crawl across the line", from one end of the boat to the other, and out the forward hatch. After she emerged, noticeably paler, from the forward head,

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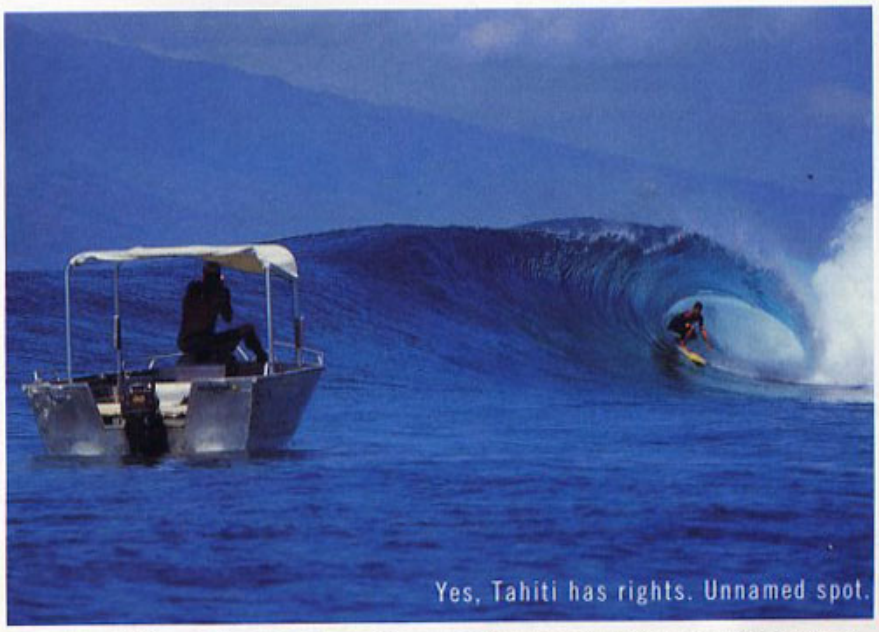
Yes, Tahiti has rights. Unnamed spot.

which had been closed and festering for a week, we sent Tom Mabie, the most seasoned sailor among them, around the deck on his hands and knees while Annabel doused him with buckets of water. By this time everyone was in hysterics, and the tension of the first part of the voyage was gone. Next I ordered Tim Yates to jump over the side. The laughter ceased. I felt that as a kite boarder, he should "drag himself across the line", holding onto the swim ladder on the stern. He was incredulous, since I'd drummed it into his head that if anyone fell into the water, they would die. In fact, it was fairly safe, because Yates kept both arms locked in a death grip fully around the swim ladder as he was yanked through the water at 7 knots.

Just to the north of the Equator is a band of unstable weather where the northern and southern trade winds converge in a huge low-pressure area called the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone. Although known for calms and rain, the ITCZ was very rough when we crossed it at about 5°N latitude. Our crew dubbed it the Incredibly Tortuous Convergence Zone. Towering squalls bore down on us with powerful winds. One squall blasted across the deck at over 50 knots. It felt like a solid force, trying to pluck me from the wheel as I ran the boat downwind to lessen the impact. Yates had his eyes glued to the wind speed readout as it climbed to 30, then 40 knots. When it neared 50, he suddenly turned to me with an intense look, eyes literally bulging from their sockets:

"Now I'm REALLY scared!!" he said.

The weather was hot and muggy, but we were forced to keep all of the portholes closed because of waves that regularly slapped the hull and blasted over the boat. We were either down below, hot and miserable, or up on deck, soaking wet. One night Yates and Tom were on watch, and I was below grabbing some much needed sleep with Annabel. A squall came on suddenly, and the boat began to heel over on its side. The notoriously fickle autopilot switched off, throwing the boat into a jibe. As the boat went over on its side, Yates became frantic and let out a bloodcurdling scream: "TOOOOOOOORRRRRR!!!"

With no time to dress, I ran on deck buck-naked, took the wheel, and let the sails out, leveling the boat. At this point I realized I was naked and started to laugh. Yates admitted later to Annabel that he'd "never been so happy to see a naked man in his life".

The sea remained rough, and we blasted along toward Hawaii relentlessly. Seasickness plagued the crew even after the Equator, and at dinner one night Yates insisted:

"Throwing up is definitely not off the menu!"

Annabel muttered something about "...never, never doing this again..."

After the convergence zone, things began to calm down and Yates admitted that he felt our chances of survival had increased to "...about 80%". We all decided he was incredibly brave to go on a trip with a 20% chance of dying.

Despite the grim outlook, we did survive. A few hundred miles out of Hilo, we encountered the biggest swell of the year as it passed Hawaii and swept on to the south. The wind was light, and the powerful gale that had created the swell was thousands of miles to the north. **It was a true Waimea-sized swell. We were lifted to the tops of immense mountains of water rolling southward, then fell down long, sloping valleys.** We left a tiny white path up and down each swell. I counted 25 seconds between the crests.

The crew began to cheer as explosions of whitewater on the jetties welcomed us into Hilo Harbor. Friends and relatives were jumping up and down and waving on the pier, with leis and a cooler full of cold beer. Annabel and Yates kissed the ground. It wasn't until I stood on the dock with a beer in hand and looked back at Heron tied to the pier that I realized that I'd finally made it home.

For me, it was the end of a long voyage across two oceans over several years. It was an adventure that included every type of wave, from Polynesian perfection to windblown Portuguese slop.

Annabel's best friend asked her if the trip was "fun". She replied:

"Well, you've given birth to a baby, right?"

"Yes"

"Was that 'fun'"

"No"

"Was it worth it?"

"Yes"

"Well, there you have it", she replied.

BIO

As well as traveling the world more than most of us ever will in our lifetimes, Tor Johnson lives on the North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii where he surfs, writes award-winning travel stories and translates Japanese for a living.