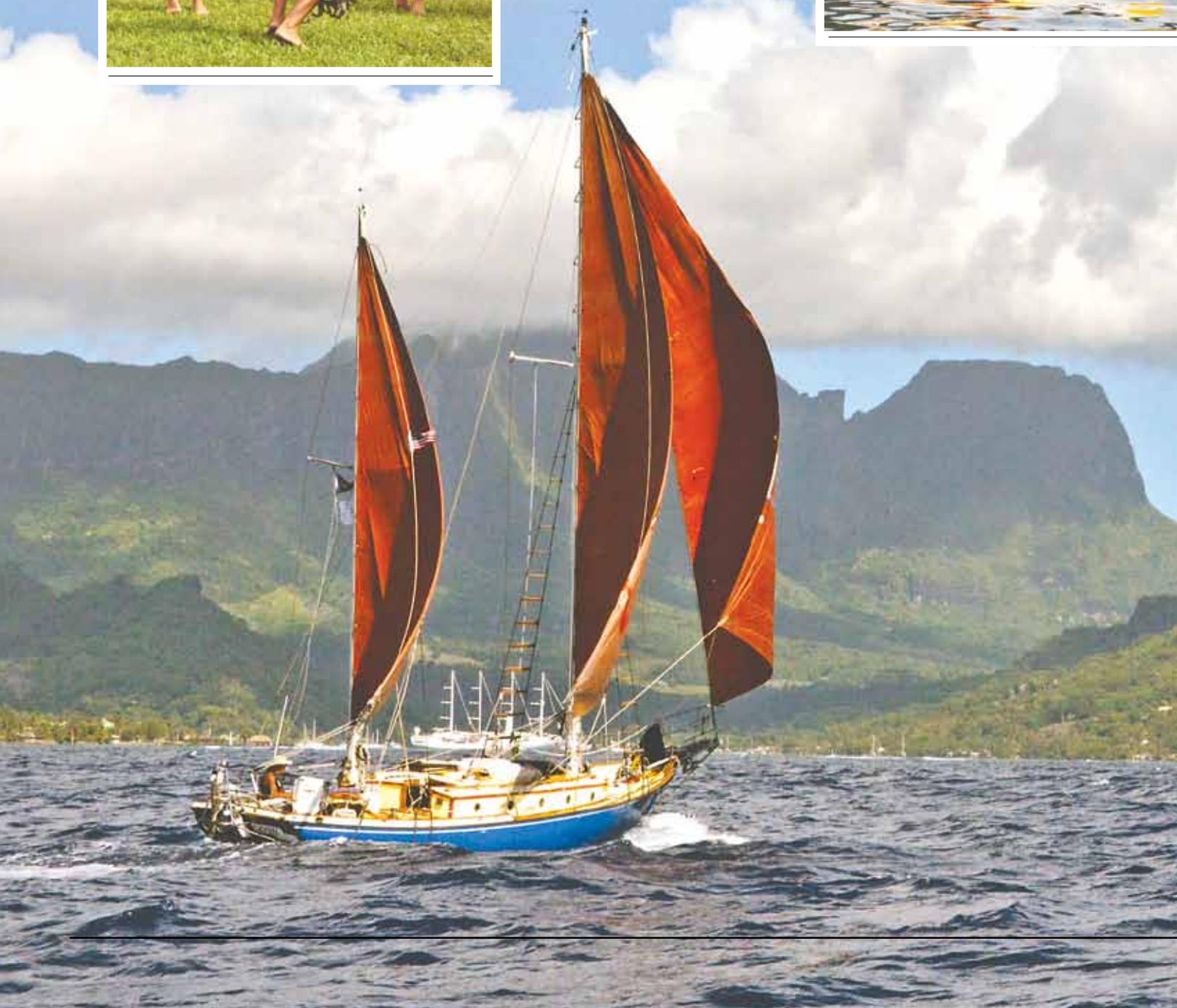
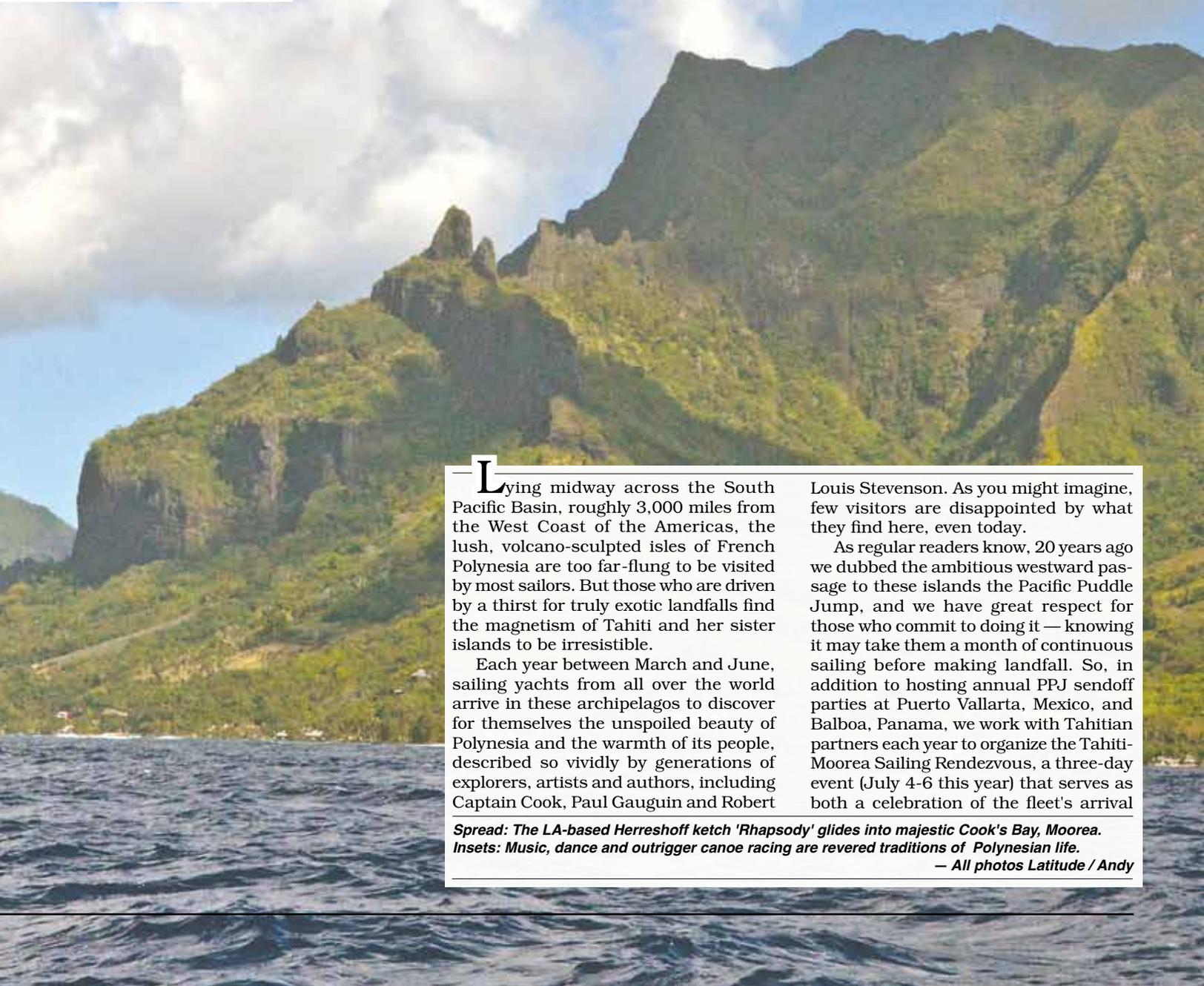


TAHITI-MOOREA SAILING RENDEZVOUS —



LIVIN' THE DREAM



Lying midway across the South Pacific Basin, roughly 3,000 miles from the West Coast of the Americas, the lush, volcano-sculpted isles of French Polynesia are too far-flung to be visited by most sailors. But those who are driven by a thirst for truly exotic landfalls find the magnetism of Tahiti and her sister islands to be irresistible.

Each year between March and June, sailing yachts from all over the world arrive in these archipelagos to discover for themselves the unspoiled beauty of Polynesia and the warmth of its people, described so vividly by generations of explorers, artists and authors, including Captain Cook, Paul Gauguin and Robert

Louis Stevenson. As you might imagine, few visitors are disappointed by what they find here, even today.

As regular readers know, 20 years ago we dubbed the ambitious westward passage to these islands the Pacific Puddle Jump, and we have great respect for those who commit to doing it — knowing it may take them a month of continuous sailing before making landfall. So, in addition to hosting annual PPJ sendoff parties at Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and Balboa, Panama, we work with Tahitian partners each year to organize the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous, a three-day event (July 4-6 this year) that serves as both a celebration of the fleet's arrival

Spread: The LA-based Herreshoff ketch 'Rhapsody' glides into majestic Cook's Bay, Moorea. Insets: Music, dance and outrigger canoe racing are revered traditions of Polynesian life.

— All photos Latitude / Andy

TAHITI-MOOREA SAILING RENDEZVOUS —

and a mini-festival of Polynesian culture.

This year's Rendezvous began Friday afternoon, July 4, with a meet-and-greet in downtown Papeete, Tahiti, at the waterfront plaza of Tahiti Tourisme, a longtime supporter of the event.

After registering (\$32 per adult) and picking up 'swag bags' that contained Rendezvous-logo tank tops and other goodies, fleet members who'd met in Mexico or Central America got reacquainted by swapping crossing tales. Some crews, who'd exchanged weather tips and anecdotes via SSB nets during the crossing, met in the flesh here for the first time. Representatives from Whangarei and Opua, New Zealand, had flown in to showcase their marine services, as had the manager of Fiji's popular Vuda Point Marina.

We'll save the passage-making stats and stories for next month's PPJ Recap article. But suffice it to say that this year seemed to be windier than is typical — at least for a lot of boats. That said, it's almost impossible to generalize, as no two boats ever have precisely the same experience. For example, the L.A.-based Herreshoff 36 *Rhapsody* and the Sausalito-based Mason 53 *Sequoia* both left Puerto Vallarta during April. But Alan and Laura on *Rhapsody* didn't see a lot of wind in the early stretches of their crossing, while Carl and Janice on *Sequoia* experienced winds in the 30s not long after departing.

One thing that's pretty much universal year after year, though, is that when

we reconnect with cruisers in Tahiti after they've completed the jump and spent a couple of months exploring the Marquesas and Tuamotus, they always seem to radiate an upbeat sense of self-assuredness and inner peace that we hadn't seen in them back on the mainland. No doubt that's a result of having met the challenges of open-ocean sailing, and achieved the realization that they are finally living their dreams of South Pacific cruising after years of anticipation.

In addition to acquiring deep tans during the previous months, some proudly displayed freshly inked tattoos, and some of the guys had traded the clean-shaven look for bushy beards.

Clockwise from upper left: 'Code Blue' chases the fleet to Cook's Bay; 'Elena's happy crew'; Stephanie briefs the skippers on Moorea's charms; Cassity scrapes a coconut; her dad, Courage, learns to make a clean break; outrigger canoe races in a dreamy setting; yes, real men can dance; serenading the games; the ancient fruit-carriers' race; a blessing of the fleet.



ALL PHOTOS LATITUDE / ANDY EXCEPT AS NOTED

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LIVIN' THE DREAM

That afternoon, our longtime Tahitian partner Stephanie Betz of Archipelagos gave a detailed chart briefing for Saturday's crossing to Moorea and later cruising in the Leewards (*Les Iles Sous le Vent*). As a troupe of ornately costumed dancers and musicians assembled, fleet members toasted each other with wine from France and the Tuamotus. The salty sailors were impressed when the mayor of Papeete, the director of the Tahiti YC and a representative from Tahiti Tourisme all turned up to offer a genuine welcome to their islands.

All captains were then called to the front to receive a traditional Tahitian blessing, then the dancers took over —

the guys stomping their feet and knocking their knees, while the girls swiveled their hips in a lightning-fast motion that only Polynesians can accomplish.

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At 10 a.m. Saturday morning, the fleet assembled outside the reef that defines the perimeter of Papeete Harbor. As promised, the breeze had piped up to between 15 and 18 knots from the east; ideal conditions for the 15-mile broad reach to

Cook's Bay.

It was obvious by their semi-chaotic pre-start maneuvers that few of these cruisers were experienced racers. But that was just fine, as the crossing was

officially billed as a "rally," not a race.

Still, the British sloop *Elena* managed a near-perfect start, despite the fact that her mom-and-dad crew were double-handing while looking after three young kids. Close behind were Adam Sutton's *J/130 Ananda II*, which had sailed down from Hawaii, and Mike Poll's Hunter 450 *Beluga Free* from Hong Kong, which was about two-thirds of the way through a circumnavigation.

Two hours later, the first to cross the finish line at the Cook's Bay channel markers was the one-off aluminum sloop *Argonaut* from the Netherlands. Having crossed the Atlantic aboard her, then spent two seasons in the Caribbean, owners Frits and Marian seem to have their techniques for doublehanding this sleek 54-footer down to a science.

Second was *Ananda*, with the boys from Hawaii, who'd been having so much



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LATITUDE / ANDY

The lovely Neherika Matoi, aka Miss Moorea, greeted fleet members with tiare flowers Saturday, then whipped them in canoe races Sunday.

fun spinnaker-reaching off the coast that they overshot the entrance. The Privilege 51 *Havachat* was third, and the first of the multihulls. The Australian Maslen family had bought her last May (in the Caribbean, we suspect) and were happily sailing her home, as so many other Aussies and Kiwis have done in recent years.

The arrival at Cook's Bay is always an eye-popper. The jagged, tooth-like pinnacles and sharply ascending ridgelines that surround the oblong anchorage are clearly the remnants of an ancient volcanic crater. About twenty boats made the crossing, while another dozen had crossed a day or two before, and now had a front row seat for the Rendezvous' weekend festivities.

That evening, fleet members came ashore to the Club Bali Hai hotel, which lies in an idyllic spot right at the water's edge. The lovely Miss Moorea, whose name is Neherika, was there to greet all

Don't you wish you were in this group photo? Put the Puddle Jump on your 'bucket list' and perhaps you'll get to join the fun someday.

100 sailors with sweet smiles and fragrant *tiare* flowers to tuck behind their ears in the traditional Polynesian style.

After a complimentary round of rum punch, dinner was served, and soon a huge dance troupe arrived to put on a stunning show. With numerous costume changes and impressive athletics, the spectacle extended from twilight until darkness, when several acrobatic fire-dancers provided the finale.

Sunday's schedule was focused on traditional Tahitian sports, with the obvious highlight being a series of six-person outrigger canoe races staged on the flat waters of the anchorage, right in front of the Bali Hai.

With seasoned Tahitian paddlers in the bow and stern seats, four cruisers provided fresh muscle-power from the mid-hull seats. It's impossible to travel through Polynesian lagoons without ob-

One crew had subbed-in a fresh paddler in the bow position: Miss Moorea.

serving both male and female paddlers practicing their national pastime every afternoon. So it's a big thrill to actually have a chance to try it yourself.

Through a series of elimination heats, the 'championship' came down to a final two-canoe race with mixed teams from several boats. But one crew had subbed-in a fresh paddler in the bow position: Miss Moorea, whose paddling prowess is as impressive as her beauty.

During a midday break many Rendezvousers opted to have a traditional Ma'a

luncheon, with at least a dozen classic dishes including roast pork, taro, yams and delicious *poisson cru* — fresh fish marinated in coconut milk.

Other activities that afternoon included a fruit-carriers' relay race — where runners must shoulder a heavy staff with



LATITUDE / ANDY

It's in the nature of Polynesians to share their cultural traditions with visitors — including age-old dance steps.

coconuts lashed to the ends — a stone-lifting competition, a coconut-husking contest and a tug-of-war. Meanwhile, local handicrafts artists demonstrated batik-making, *pareo*-wrapping, and techniques for weaving fresh, island-grown flowers into headdresses and leis.

It's probably safe to say that by the time a final dazzling dance show had concluded, all who attended felt that participating in the Rendezvous had been time well spent. And all had gained a much clearer understanding of how much French Polynesians revere their cultural traditions. Without a doubt, it had been a splendid welcome to these friendly, unspoiled isles.

— latitude / andy

If you plan to head west next year, we hope you'll make a special effort to attend the 2015 Rendezvous, which will probably take place in mid-June.

Look for updates at www.pacificpuddlejumps.com and at the Rendezvous' own site: <http://tahiti-moorea-sailing-rdv.com/english/> (where you can see lots more photos).



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