

CRUISER CONVERGENCE —

If there's one thing we've learned after years of interviewing South Pacific cruisers, it's that you really can't sail across thousands of miles of open ocean, then navigate through volcano-formed

at the wheel for days at a time with no sleep. Eventually, they both became so exhausted that boat and sea noises sounded like voices. In fact, at one point they were both convinced that someone was yelling for help in the waters nearby, so the bleary-eyed couple rushed to assist them. After that scare, recalls Bill, "I knew we just had to get some sleep. We dropped our sails, went to bed and just drifted under bare poles."

We also caught up with a pair of New Zealanders — sorry, we didn't catch their names — whose story was unique within the fleet, as they'd done what you might call a backward Puddle Jump. A couple of years ago they jumped off from the West

Coast and cruised all the way home to New Zealand. But not long after settling in, they began yearning for another dose of tropical Tahiti. So they layered up and charged east between latitudes 30° and 40°S for close to 2,000 miles, then clawed north another 900, finally making landfall in the French Polynesian archipelago called the Gambiers. "We are very glad to be back here," they said, "but we would never do that trip again!"

With a number of Rendezvous boats berthed at the downtown Papeete

Right after the start the big Swedish sloop 'Breeze' started walking away from the fleet, but the Kiwi Gunboat 'Kiapa' surfed past her to win.



Bill and Belinda were probably happier to make landfall than most others, having hand-steered their 33-footer for 39 days — a fleet record.

anchorage and vast coral atolls without having a few riveting stories to tell. So it was no surprise that we heard plenty of salty tales at the eighth annual Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous, June 28-30.

Bill and Belinda Tackett of San Diego explained that it took them 39 days to complete their Pacific Puddle Jump from Mexico to the Marquesas, partly because they were forced to hand-steer their Morgan Out Island 33 *Orca Suite* nearly the whole way, after their autopilot failed early in the trip. When conditions got rough, Bill — who, Belinda says, actually did almost all the driving — stayed

In a heartfelt ceremony, skippers received a local chieftain's blessing, and a fragrant flower lei from one of the dancers.



Illustrating just how different the cruising experiences can be on a given patch of water on different days, New Zealanders Lionel and Irene Bass said the 200-mile crossing from the Tuamotus to Papeete aboard their M&M Gunboat 52 cat *Kiapa*, was the roughest sailing they'd experienced since leaving the Mexican coast April 1.

But Maria Gates of the San Diego-based *Tayana 46 Peregrine* reported that just a week or so later, she and Bill Chapman expe-



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yacht quay, activities got underway Friday afternoon just a stone's throw away at the waterfront offices of Tahiti Tourisme, which is a major event partner,

"The full moon rose, reflecting on the surface like a mirror."

along with Air Tahiti Nui, *Latitude 38* and others. Our longtime Tahitian friend Stephanie Betz (of the firm Archipelagos) — who dreamed up the Rendezvous game plan eight years ago — was on site with several bright young assistants who checked in participants, gave them swag bags and event shirts, and explained the activities that lay ahead. Several New Zealand partners were also on hand to share info about North Island services and activities.

Due to the vastness of French Poly-

nesia, and the fact that Puddle Jumpers head west from various ports each year any time between February and June, it's always impossible to pick a date when all Puddle Jumpers will be in or near Papeete. More than 200 boats registered this year, and at the end of June they were spread out across the Marquesas, Tuamotus and Society Islands. Nevertheless, this year's event drew 40 boats from at least 10 countries, and some had rushed or delayed in order to attend.

For example, Swedes Per Eliasson and Sabrina Fischer (whom we'd met at our Mexico Send-off Party) had just arrived at Tahiti's Point Venus the night before

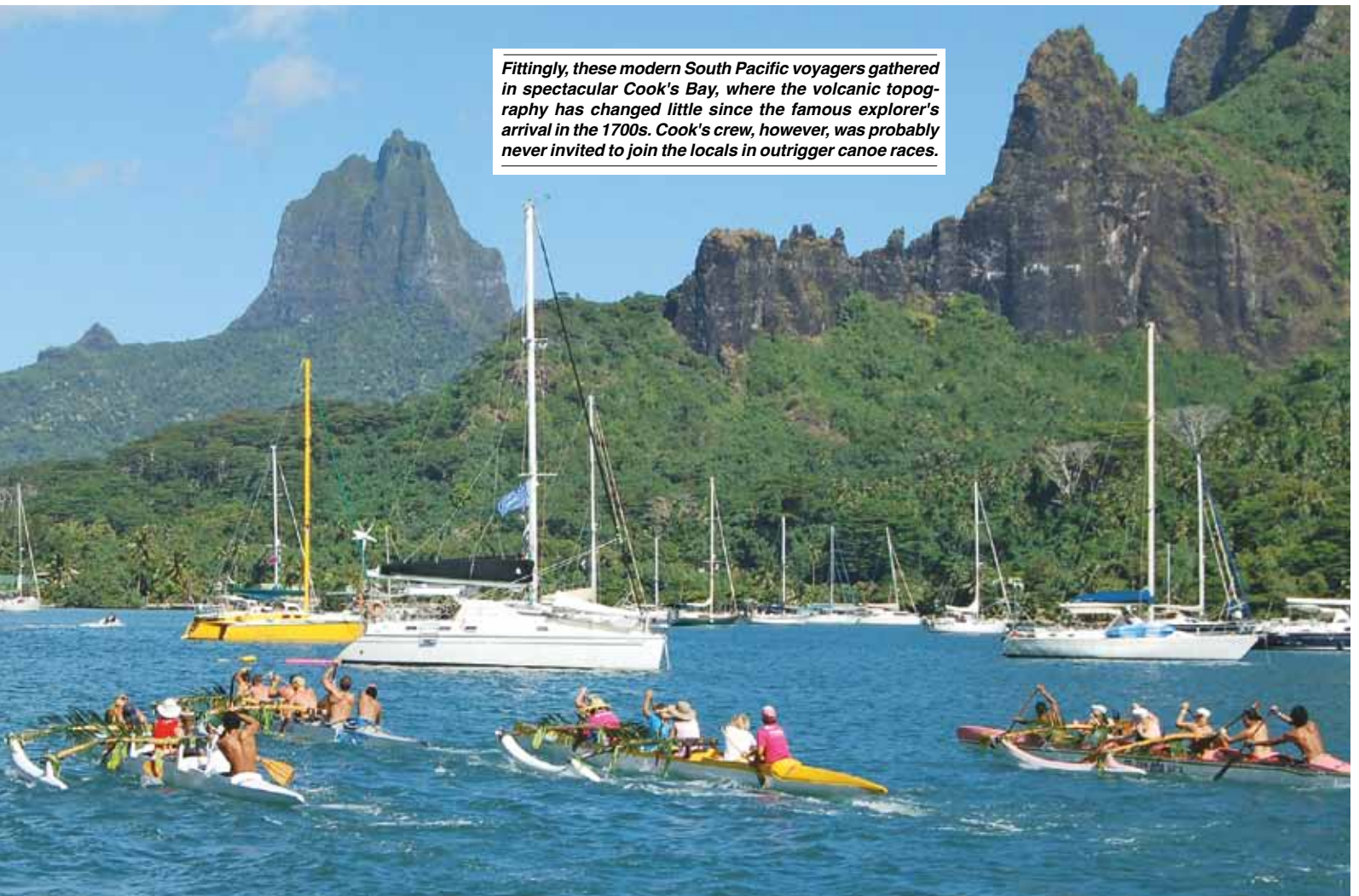


Adorned with a flower headress, this lovely Moorean dancer's reverence for age-old Polynesian traditions is obvious by her beautiful smile.

who plays Q on *Star Trek*. He and some friends had sailed out from L.A. aboard his Hans Christian 43 *Nepenthe*.

After a stint of reconnecting, swapping tales, and an inter-island cruising briefing, fleet members were treated to a rum punch made with local fruit juices

Fittingly, these modern South Pacific voyagers gathered in spectacular Cook's Bay, where the volcanic topography has changed little since the famous explorer's arrival in the 1700s. Cook's crew, however, was probably never invited to join the locals in outrigger canoe races.



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and the skippers were called together to receive a traditional blessing by a local chieftain. Afterward, with drummers keeping tempo on carved hardwood drums, and ukes and guitars laying down sweet melodies, a troupe of lavishly costumed dancers gave many Rendezvousers their first look at the sensual, generations-old dances that are still highly revered throughout Polynesia.

With a promise to meet outside Papete Harbor the next morning at 10 a.m. for the start of the rally/race to Moorea, fleet members dispersed to the waterfront plaza, where food-sellers offered

everything from crêpes to fresh seafood from their mobile *roulettes*. Compared to many cruising destinations, Tahiti has a reputation for being very expensive. But it's affordable when you eat where the locals eat.

Because most cruisers have little or no racing experience, the starting line

action for the 15-mile cruise to Moorea is always comically chaotic, but eventually they all get headed in the right direction. This year, winds had piped up into the mid-20s by the time Thierry Hars of the Tahiti YC sounded the starting gun, and the fleet took off on a screaming reach toward majestic Cook's Bay.

Although *Breeze* took an early lead, *Kiapa* apparently out-surfed her on the

Clockwise from upper left: Big Mako coaches the tug-of-war; yes, real men dance; Iloa sounds the horn as the fast Aussie tri 'Macha' places third; the French cat 'Spirit of Pontapreta' glides down a swell; Iris of 'Andromeda' husks a coconut; Liz of 'Set Me Free' lifts; dancers move in splendid synchrony; drummers keep the beat; fruit-carrier Ken of 'Dancing Walrus' sprints to the finish.



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6-ft swells, taking line honors. That afternoon all crews came ashore to the Club Bali Hai Hotel, where they were introduced to the lovely Miss Moorea, and given just-made flower leis. After a complimentary cocktail, virtually everyone stuck around for that evening's International Ukulele Festival, which was staged on the hotel's grounds. At least a half dozen groups showcased a broad range of uke stylings that ranged from strictly traditional to modern, pop-influenced approaches. It was a feast for both the ears and eyes.

Sunday was dedicated to traditional Polynesian beach games, including a

Cruisers joined forces with battle-tested Tahitian paddlers.

series of six-person outrigger canoe races where cruisers joined forces with battle-tested Tahitian paddlers. (Canoe racing is the national sport.)

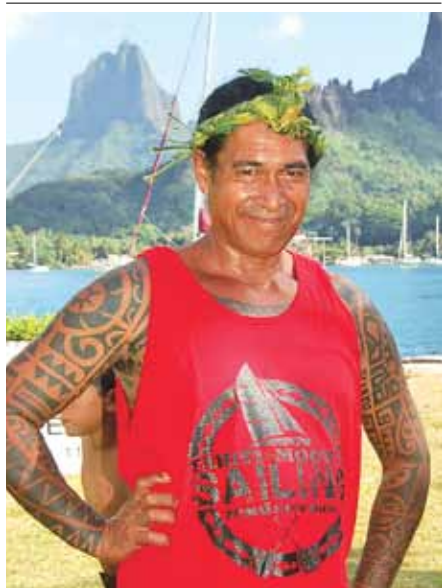
This year, rather than a single, straight-line sprint, the broad-shouldered organizers set out a two-leg course through the lagoon with a mark-rounding that complicated strategy and logistics dramatically. Although very fast, these boats don't exactly spin on a dime, so taking the inside track doesn't always pay off — there was at least one capsized.

After a series of five round-robin races, each with five canoes, the victors distilled down further through a semi-final to two remaining teams. The first was a group of fit young Australian and Eu-



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ropean guys off Simon Davis' Marshall Islands-based Privilege 39 cat *Skimpy*, whose team name was We're Not Wearing any Underwear. The second was Q's team, appropriately named Make It So. Although decades older than their competition, he and his crew, which included Elaine Bryson off *Mazu* and single-hander Michael Bowe off *Patanjali*, gave it their best shot. Naturally, the youngsters showed no mercy on their elders, and took home a hand-carved hardwood paddle as a trophy.



Tattooed from head to toe, Mako Roometua carries out the traditions of his ancestors. But we think he looks awesome in his TMSR tank top.

laid out for those who wanted to sample traditional Polynesian dishes such as poi, taro, roast pork, and *poisson cru* (fish marinated in coconut milk).

Afterwards, several ornately tattooed islanders demonstrated other traditional sports, including a stone lifting contest and the ancient fruit carriers race — a relay where racers carry a pole laden with stalks of bananas and coconuts.

Later, a big, affable Tahitian named Mako, who wore a handwoven palm-frond hat, gave a comical yet instructive demonstration of several traditional ways to wear colorful *pareos*. These origami-like techniques are a minor Polynesian art form.

By their nature, Polynesians are a warm and welcoming people, and one of the manifestations of their hospitality is that they love to invite foreign visitors to learn their traditional dance steps — no matter how pathetically the newcomers interpret the centuries-old movements.

So before the Moorean experts put on their eye-popping afternoon show for us, they did their best to guide the international sailors: foot-stomping and rapid, knee-knocking moves for the men, and fluid hip-gyrating for the women. Fun as it was to try, no fleet members will be turning pro any time soon.

Afterward, with drummers pounding out a time-honored cadence, a troupe of bronze-skinned men and women reminded us all of how it's supposed to be done. The most remarkable aspect of Tahitian dance, of course, is how the women get their hips to flutter side-to-side and up-and-down in such a rapid-fire motion that it seems humanly impossible. No doubt they start practicing as soon as they can walk, if not before.

In any case, it was a fitting finale to a

An optional Ma'a luncheon was

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wonderful weekend, that left everyone smiling. At the brief awards ceremony, every boat received a polished mother-of-pearl shell, etched with the Rendezvous' distinctive logo.

Stephanie thanked all who'd participated and in return received a hearty round of applause for a job well done.

As we wished the fleet safe travels, we reminded them that the payoff for all of *Latitude*'s efforts with the Rendezvous and the Pacific Puddle Jump rally comes when cruisers like them send us stories and photos from the far-flung places they explore. Firsthand accounts from 'out there' are, after all, a big part of what makes *Latitude 38* magazine unique.

Hopefully you'll be hearing about these sailors' adventures in the coming

months. It may not be your turn yet to start living the cruising lifestyle, but experiencing it vicariously may help keep the dream alive.

— **latitude/andy**

Look for our recap article on the 2013 Pacific Puddle Jump in September. And

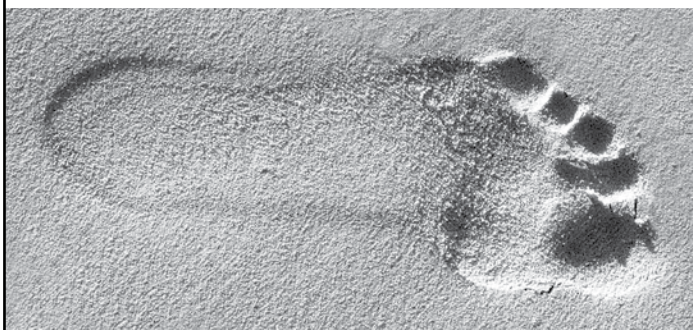
Having just completed the crossing from Moorea in booming winds, the Rendezvousers were in high spirits.

if you're thinking about sailing west next winter, PPJ registration will begin in December at www.pacificpuddlejumps.com. The 2014 Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous will take place July 4-6.



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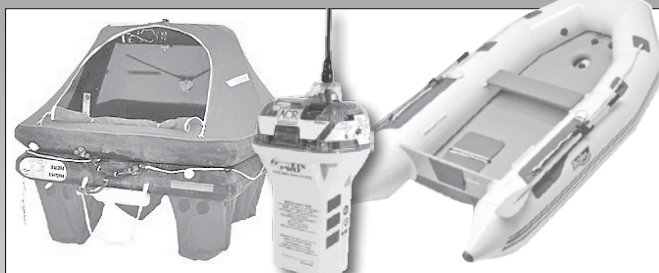
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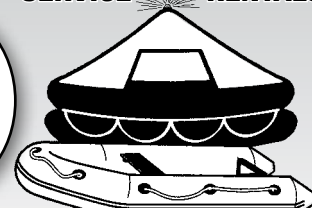
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