



It's off the beaten path so to speak, so Pitcairn Island residents, mostly descendants of the mutineers of the H.M.S. Bounty, treat their visitors like royalty. Despite being on remote island, the residents do have some modern conveniences — VCRs to watch tapes of "I Love Lucy" and "Gilligan's Island."

PAUL MARTI

Pitcairn proves to be 'bounty-ful' stop

Islanders welcome is 'royal'

Editor's Note: Street Scene has been publishing Paul Marti's journal entries as he attempts to sail around the world. However, Street Scene received word that the circumnavigation would not be completed. Within a few weeks of receiving his letter from Pitcairn Island, we learned that our voyager was on his way home; his boat, Keema, was lost on a reef off Fiji. Not wanting to leave our readers hanging, we are publishing Marti's stories about his journey to Pitcairn Island and French Polynesia and then a final chapter, an account of the wreck of the Keema.

Eleven hundred miles west of Rapa Nui lies the isolated British possession of Pitcairn Island.

Measuring only two miles long by a mile wide, Pitcairn is one of the smallest inhabited islands of the South Pacific. As any lover of sea lore knows, what makes Pitcairn Island special is its unique history.

My head was filled with tales of H.M.S. Bounty as I weighed anchor and departed Easter Island on Feb. 22.

With any luck Pitcairn Island could be reached in 10 days. After my fast and successful passage to Easter Island, I was quite optimistic as I sailed Keema out of the waters of Hanga Roa Bay.

Good fortune was not to be mine on this leg.

In an area of the Pacific where 80 percent of the winds come from the east, I encountered seven straight days of westerlies and calms. Most non-sailors assume that storms are the most difficult aspect of blue water cruising.

However, I think most cruisers would agree that calms or light winds are much more frustrating. During the first week of the passage I could just cover 350 miles. Every night I was becalmed. I dropped all sails and let Keema peacefully drift on a mirror-like sea. The highlight of the first week occurred on the second night out. About an hour before dusk Keema was encircled by a school of dolphins. Frequently pairs of dolphins came to investigate Keema; usually they disappeared after a few minutes.

THIS TIME, however, the school numbering several hundred decided to stay and play. For the next four hours the dolphins escorted Keema, jumping, doing acrobatic stunts and thoroughly entertaining me while they stayed within arms reach.

I took several pictures in the fading light hoping to share the feeling with friends back home.

After a full week of light air, my fortunes shifted with the wind. The trades returned and Keema's sails stretched taut as we heeled slightly and returned to a proper pace.

During the next six days the winds continued strong and several storms kept me changing sails. Keema handled it all quite well and we covered the remaining 800 miles in excellent time.

On March 5, just after midday, an irregular shape appeared on the horizon. It was my first sighting of Pitcairn Island, 38 miles to the west. Shortly after, the wind died and I elected to use some of my precious fuel. It took six hours of motoring before Keema arrived in Bounty Bay.

Before I ever set foot on land I received a hint of the warm welcome that awaited me. It was early evening as I approached Bounty Bay and I noticed several lights were flashing. I went below and flicked my mast light off and on several times. Sure enough all the lights ashore started blinking hellos to me.

Like Easter Island, Pitcairn is lacking a protected anchorage. That night I dropped anchor in 50 feet of calm water and went to sleep, greatly excited about getting ashore the next day.

UNFORTUNATELY, the winds shifted during the night and quite suddenly things turned ugly. At 4 a.m. I decided it was time to move to a better anchorage or

go on shore to wait out the weather.

As I was preparing to go on deck I felt Keema rise on a large wave and heard a loud crack forward. Once on deck, I realized that the wave had picked Keema's bow up quite high and the force on the anchor chain split the bow roller and was tipping my bowsprit in two.

It took two hours of the hardest work of my sailing career to free the anchor and extricate Keema from a lethal situation. Had we remained much longer we would have ended our voyage on the rocky shores of Pitcairn Island.

Just after first light, as I was struggling to complete my work forward, two islanders came out in their long boat and gave me directions to a safer anchorage. They also told me that when the seas calmed a bit they would come out to Keema and bring me ashore. Two hours later, totally exhausted, I was reanchored at Tedside and collapsed in my booth.

The islanders didn't come for me that day. I later learned that they had tried frequently to call me by VHF radio. It was then that I realized that my radio was inoperable.

At seven the next morning as I sat in the cabin reading, I heard a distinctly British accent calling out to the crew of the Keema. Brian Young and Dave Brown in the community boat were wondering if I would like to "come have a look about?"

I HAD already packed a day bag and quickly closed Keema up and joined them. Thus began the finest two days of my adventure.

Brian and Dave welcomed me to Pitcairn in a very casual way, as if I had just stepped next door to a friend's home.

I immediately felt comfortable with both of them. The ride to shore was an adventure in itself. Tedside anchorage is almost two miles from the landing place. Pitcairn is the peak of an underwater mountain and has no protective reef. With no beaches or natural landing places and sheer cliffs using up hundreds of feet from the surf the island is quite intimidating.

In order to reach the one accessible landing area we had to first pass through the surf line. The long boat we rode in is a modern 20-foot inflatable with a outboard. My knuckles were white as I held onto the safety lines while Brian and Dave seemed to enjoy the wild ride through the giant swells.

Once ashore, their boat was hoisted safely out of the water. While we were securing the boat, I noticed no signs of habitation near the shore line. With the work completed, Brian motioned for me to hop on the back of his three wheeled Honda (the workhorse of island transportation, each family having one). We started up the dirt track towards Adamstown.

There are no paved roads nor automobiles on Pitcairn. The island lacks any flat terrain and is all densely covered with tropical vegetation.

BRIAN DROVE me directly to his home where his wife, Kere, and two children, Timothy and Annetta, were just starting their day.

At this point, unlike other countries, I had gone through no formal procedures. I was not asked for my passport, boat papers or Zarpes (clearance from previous port). Everything was quite casual.

The first question I was asked was whether I preferred coffee, tea or chocolate with my breakfast. I took chocolate. As if I were one of the family I sat down to a feast of bacon, eggs, potatoes, toast and that Brian was the elected island magistrate.

It wasn't until later that day that he casually said "oh, you'd probably like to have your passport

stamped, wouldn't you?" It took a while to find the stamp; the kids had been playing with it. After breakfast Brian took me on a three-wheeled tour of the island.

Today there are 54 people living on Pitcairn Island. All but a couple of them are direct descendants of the mutineers.

The mutiny on H.M.S. Bounty took place in 1789 and the mutineers landed at Pitcairn in 1790. Since then, except during two brief interruptions, the island has been continuously inhabited by the Bounty descendants.

Virtually everyone I met was either a Brown, Christian, Young or Warren. During my brief visit, I met all but two of the islanders. Those two were quite ill and sent their regards. As Brian showed me around everyone was most anxious to say hello.

MINE WAS the first yacht to call in several months and I was treated like visiting royalty. People were most anxious to hear of my travels and future plans. I, on the other hand, was full of questions about life in Pitcairn. Everyone I met invited me to stay and talk, and of course share a bite to eat. I ate more in my two days ashore than in the previous week of sailing.

All the people insisted on giving me a gift of food for my next passage. When I left Pitcairn my store of gifts included two huge stalks of bananas, six squash, six mammoth cucumbers, two watermelons, two dozen potatoes, one dozen apples (from New Zealand, obviously a cherished item), three onions, one dozen carrots, one dozen peppers and one monster zucchini. Eventually I had to refuse more for lack of refrigeration. I knew it would go to waste. I have never seen such spontaneous generosity.

Both evenings ashore I was treated to meals that were truly feasts. The only favor I could do in return was to deliver some mail and a few packages to my next stop, Mangareva.

The encounter that epitomizes the islanders' warmth occurred when Warren Christian, the elder Christian on the island brought me a gift.

The day before he had asked if I would deliver a letter and a small package. When he brought the items he also gave me a commemorative envelope with a rare Pitcairn Island stamp on it. It signed his name and asked "Would you please accept this as a gift from me for your kind favor?"

ALL THE people are extremely proud of their heritage. They pointed out to me that they are the only British territory that receives no subsidies from the mother country. They will be celebrating 200 years of independence in 1990 and see no need for outside help now.

Outside contact is minimal, with supply ships calling twice a year. Other than supply ships the odd yacht like myself and very infrequently a cruise ship, no ships make it a regular port of call.

They do have radio/telephone communications via New Zealand and Brian Young is a ham radio operator and keeps touch with other hams around the world.

Evidence of outside influence was apparent while I was having lunch at Brian's home. As we ate Timothy (age 10) turned on the VCR, they have no television stations but most islanders have recently acquired VCRs. They receive tapes from friends around the world. During lunch we watched "I Love Lucy" and "Gilligan's Island." American culture has reached this remote outpost of civilization.

Having been raised in and around Detroit and growing up with the diversity of life in America, I was quite curious about how the people lived on this lonely island.

It was quite apparent that the Pitcairners live as one large extended family. Although they have laws to govern themselves, mutual respect keeps the island running smoothly.

There is an island court that convenes, if necessary. The last time court was held was in 1967. The economic system is based on bartering, and community work is divided up among the families.

THE PEOPLE do acquire foreign currency through world wide sales of the island's postage stamps plus sale of hand crafted items to visitors. The currency is used to purchase manufactured goods from New Zealand. The people are always looking to purchase needed items from anyone visiting. I sold Dave Brown some SCUBA gear he was in need of and was paid in U.S. currency.

The children have their own school where students attend until the age of 14. I spent a few hours talking with the 12 students in their one room school house.

Their teacher is a New Zealander who contracted for two years and also doubles as New Zealand representative to the island. All the students seemed pleased to have a visitor and I told them about Rochester High School with its 1,800 students. They couldn't quite imagine a school that large.

I asked the students if they would be interested in writing letters to some Rochester students and possibly developing pen-pals.

They all responded with positive enthusiasm. The following letter is somewhat typical of the 12 I received for exchange:

Sheri Christian
12 years old
P.O. Box 1
Pitcairn Island
South Pacific Ocean
Dear Friend,

We have just had a visit from Paul who has asked us to write. On Pitcairn there are around 50 people, there are only 13 children, 12 at school. The youngest is 1 years old and the oldest will be 90 next year. I live here on this small island and was born here too. I like swimming and other sports. I have three sisters. Their names are Jackie, Radlene and Darlene. Jackie is at New Zealand for college. I am in grade seven.

For transport we walk and use three wheel, four wheel and two wheel Honda motor bikes. We also have two tractors and one bulldozer.

Your friend,
Sheri Christian

AFTER THE fourth form (9th grade) mandatory education is finished and students who would like to continue their education must go to New Zealand for further studies.

Sheri Christian's mother, Betty, told me that as a parent it was the most difficult decision on the island. Since most students do not return, to encourage further education almost certainly means permanent separation.

Today the island population is quite stable and has been since the early '70s.

None of the people I met voiced any discontent with island life. The impression I received was that they felt blessed with the richness of their island and the sense of community they have developed. I couldn't help but feel I was visiting a nearly utopian society.

The decision to leave Pitcairn was a difficult one. I would have preferred to spend more time but the weather was deteriorating and presence suggested it was time to depart.

Shortly after dawn on March 9 I stowed my anchor and set sail for French Polynesia.

Visiting Pitcairn is a unique experience and I feel privileged with these special people. As Pitcairn Island slowly faded into the horizon I called Keema west with a bounty of fond memories.