



Mangarwa in French Polynesia's Gambler Islands is part of the Tuamotus, a cluster of five volcanic islands surrounded by a barrier reef.

photos by PAUL MARTI

Paul Marti's dreams of circumnavigating the world came to an abrupt end in the South Pacific this summer. Despite the loss, Street Scene has decided to continue to publish reports of the journey Marti sent when he was able. This was his last installment before the unfortunate demise of the Keema.

Stately coconut palms swaying to the trades, sparkling white beaches and beautiful "Vahines" frolicking in the crystal clear waters.

Since the 16th century sailors have been lured by these visions as they set course for Tahiti, the pearl of the Pacific. Today, Tahiti and its capital, Papeete, is the administrative center of French Polynesia and continues to draw sailors from distant ports.

France's overseas possession is composed of 109 islands, covering more than 1 1/4 million square miles of the South Pacific. Four major island groups make up French Polynesia — the Society Islands, of which Tahiti is a member, the Tuamotus or Dangerous Islands, the Marquesas to the northeast and the seldom visited Australes to the south.

The vast majority of French Polynesia is undeveloped and rarely seen by airborne visitors. Tahiti, Moorea and Bora Bora attract more than 90 percent of the tourists.

Following a rather slow and uneventful passage from Papeete Island, I entered French Polynesia at its south eastern extremity. My landfall was at Mangarwa in the Gambler Islands, part of the Tuamotus, a cluster of five volcanic islands surrounded by a barrier reef.

The main village, Rikitea, is nestled at the base of a protective mountain ridge and I was able to anchor just a few yards offshore in a perfectly calm lagoon.

It may seem insignificant to those of you with solid foundations under your feet, but after two months of non-stop motion, to have Keema quietly lying to anchor was a true pleasure. I indulged myself in a hot

'Adventures in Paradise' Marti's style

shower and enjoyed a relaxing dinner on a level table with food that remained a stationary target.

MANGARWA was a popular port during the whaling days and was also a R & R port during the 1970s for French sailors assigned to the nuclear testing station 250 miles to the northwest. However, with the end of whaling and the reduction in nuclear testing, Mangarwa has returned to peaceful isolation.

About 500 people currently live on the island. Pearls are the main source of income and, along with French government assistance, the islanders enjoy a reasonably affluent standard of living.

It was at Mangarwa that I first came in contact with Polynesian prices. For some reason, which no one has adequately explained to me, goods cost two and three times as much in French Polynesia as in the rest of the Pacific.

Although I was forwarned and had provisioned heavily in Panama, it was still a shock to see a box of cereal for \$7 and a case of beer for \$48. I ate local fruit for breakfast and drank water.

During my visit, I enjoyed the warm hospitality of both Polynesian and French islanders. After delivering a package from the Browns of Pitcairn to Mito, a Polynesian, he insisted I stay for dinner. It was Sunday and I turned out to be the equivalent of a U.S. backyard barbecue.

Mito's entire family was present.

There was a pig roasting in an open pit and a variety of exotic dishes were laid out for the feast. A giant cooler had been packed with cold Heineken and sodas for the kids. The adults sat under the palms and laughed away the hours while the kids swam in the lagoon.

TWO FRENCH families also adopted me. Dominic the meteorologist and his Polynesian wife Marie, and Claire, the local nurse, and her husband Laurent both had me over for dinner several times. Claire gave me the use of her shower and washing machine and helped to make my stay most enjoyable.

I also met up with my friend Claude and we explored the island together. One feature is readily apparent, the number of churches. For a population of 500, there are seven churches and the remains of a monastery.

During the 1800s, a somewhat overzealous priest, Pere Laval, arrived, and after converting the locals, put them to work building numerous stone and coral monuments to their new religion. Most are deteriorating through lack of use. One, the main cathedral, is still functioning and Pere Laval is buried inside it.

A more modern monument is the 100-meter long cinder block fallout shelter, built to protect the islanders from nuclear radiation. Several people told me about the entire community gathering in the shelter, complete with gas masks for "extra" protection. Today the building's tin roof is in need of repair and it is used mostly for storage.

Mangarwa is really very quiet, with social activities centered around family life. There are no restaurants, one pub, a few small grocery shops and a bi-weekly bakery (great French bread) and each evening at 10 p.m., it's lights out as the islands' electrical generating plant shuts down for the night.

I HAD planned to leave Mangarwa on March 18, but high winds and rough seas kept me safely anchored in the protected lagoon. Finally, on March 19, I said "au revoir" to Claude and my new friends and embarked on the final leg of my passage to Tahiti, 950 miles to the northwest.

Betsy was awaiting my call to join me in Tahiti and I was anxious to complete this segment of my journey. Unfortunately, the passage to Tahiti, although fast (8 days, 8 hours), was the worst of my travels to date.

A few hours out of Mangarwa I encountered the start of my first true gale. For 24 days, Keema was pounded with 40-knot winds and 20-foot seas. Occasional lulls brought torrential down pours. It was a miserable period.

To compound my difficulties, I felt ill for the first time since leaving home. During one squall, I was totally drenched and hours later started having chills. I spent the next three days incapacitated with fever, chills and tremendous headaches. Keema sailed herself as I kept bundled up in my birth.

Even after the storm passed, I felt violently ill and was unable to keep food down. When I got to Tahiti, I was still feeling terrible. I never found out what I had, but it took six weeks to fully recover.

PAPEETE, the capital of French Polynesia, is a modern city with more than 60,000 inhabitants. Arriving just before midnight I anchored in the main harbor close to the city center. The next morning I was awakened by the sounds of traffic, construction and the voices of city life.

I had expected Papeete to be a village, with life at a leisurely pace, perhaps islanders canoeing out bearing gifts of fruit, beckoning me to come ashore. No so. Keema was one of many cruising boats sharing the harbor with commercial ships.

I found my way to customs, reported in and then called home. Betsy had been worried. There had been some confusion and she had expected a call the previous week. Three days later she flew into meet me, and Keema once again became a family boat.

Betsy and I spent a couple days



Betsy Marti adjusted quickly to the seagooing life and outside showers near Keema's anchorage.

exploring Papeete while she readjusted to life afloat, then sailed over to Moorea 20 miles away. We anchored Keema in Cooks Bay and instantly fell in love with Moorea. No canoes came to greet us, but the palms were swaying, the water was crystal clear, and people were very friendly.

What started out to be a week or two in Moorea turned out to be two months. The days were perfect, snorkeling the reef, hiking around the small villages and laying in the sun, everything that I imagined life in the islands to be. We could have stayed a year . . . or two.

Our time in Moorea passed quickly and we learned a great deal about island life and even adjusted to the outrageous prices. We knew we'd been in Polynesia too long when \$8 for a sandwich didn't seem to bad. We never did adjust to laundry costing \$10 a load, so we did ours by hand at an outside shower near our anchorage.

Bora Bora was our final stop in French Polynesia. After a brisk 30-hour sail from Moorea we anchored

outside the friendly OA OA Hotel.

After being spoiled by the beauty and cleanliness of Moorea, Bora Bora was a bit of a let down. However, the Hotel Bora Bora, where we dined for Betsy's birthday was exquisite. Some would say that at \$400 per night, it should be.

We only spent a week at Bora Bora. Our two-year schedule was closing in on us and we were forced to move on.

Since leaving Panama in late January more than 5,500 nautical miles have passed under Keema's keel, a total of almost 11,000 from Lake St. Clair. I no longer feel like a neophyte. And as the first year of the adventure comes to a close I am much more realistic about life afloat, its rewards and sacrifices.

An understanding of the people of the Pacific has replaced myth and tourist brochure idealism. So far the voyage has been the learning experience of a lifetime.

Our next passage takes us to Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, 600 miles to the south west . . . one more leg in the long circle home.

Calm waters in protective lagoons provide plenty of space for a relaxing afternoon aboard a floating bar.