

Across the Pacific with the Leda

14/11/53

The long slog ends—at the Marquesas

WE are lying peacefully at anchor in Resolution Bay, Tahuata Island, alongside Hiva Oa in the French Marquesas Islands, at the end of our marathon slog of 2800 miles against the Trade Winds from Fiji.

The coral islands are behind us and the surge in the bay is breaking against sand and boulders.

In the dense bush of the surrounding 3000-foot cliffs cuckoos whistle and wild chickens cackle.

Every now and then I am interrupted by the arrival of yet another native piroque bringing presents of bananas, oranges, breadfruit, pawpaws or coconuts in return for a look over the boat.

We had a dreary time getting here from Moorea but, once again, it has been well worth it. And the next leg of the voyage, 1800 miles north-west to Honolulu, we hope will provide better sailing with the doldrums north of the equator the only major obstacle between us and a straight course with the wind abeam.

It is only 240 miles from Moorea to the Tuamotus and another 540 from there to Hiva Oa, but the Trades, evidently realizing it was their last chance in this hemisphere, really did their best to make it tough for us. Five days it took us to reach the Tuamotus and another 10 to get here! We had counted on doing it all in seven days.

But our sailing technique has changed a lot since we left Tauranga last April. These days we are barely outside the harbour entrance before the tiller is lashed and all four of us down below, reading, doing crossword puzzles or playing cards.

We rate it a considerable hardship to spend more than half-an-hour on the tiller and the thought of a night watch is too awful to be contemplated.

Petered

IT took the Trades some time to realize this, and all they could do for the first five days was to blow lighter and lighter from dead ahead until they eventually petered out altogether and we had to motor.

We arrived at the entrance to Fakarava in the Tuamotus at two in the afternoon—our best timing to date—and were just able to use the last of the seven-knot flooding tide to sweep us into the gigantic 1200 square-mile lagoon.

Just inside we caught a whacking great barracoutta, one of the most deadly-looking fish I have ever seen, and he would have had his revenge on us that night had not the natives warned us that such a fish, caught inside the lagoon is poisonous.

The Tuamotus are an isolated group and we thought we had picked a comparatively unrequented island (the majority of yachts visit Takaroa) but we found that our predecessors included Dick Tober's *Orrust*, which is no doubt still in Auckland; Stortebecker, also well-known in Auckland, which called there with Auckland, Ron Lamb, as one of her crew; the South African ketch *Cariad*, and the big English ketch *Arthur Rogers*.

Locals

WE had a good time at this island, and did not begrudge the fact that the

locals cut out practically all our remaining supply of grog. Stories about the poor benighted natives not being able to drink and hold their liquor are a lot of hocus—but the Tuamotans were very good to us. When it came time to leave, however, we found that the Trades had woken up to the opportunity that was slipping through their fingers.

Our course to the Marquesas was north-east so the south-east Trades blew true and 30 m.p.h. straight from the north-east. We confounded them by waiting a day, even though it meant having yet another party.

Confident

THE following day it blew from the south-west and we shot out the lagoon entrance on the ebb-tide

SANDY WILSON

takes you on the next leg of the Leda's Pacific cruise to San Francisco. The Tauranga yacht should now be nearing California.

like a cork out of a bottle. I have seen some good rips in the Tauranga entrance, but nothing to compare with Fakarava—and it was a fine day.



Erica Wilson with Marquesas Island girls at Tahuata.

We spent a day and two nights, with no moon, clearing the dreaded Tuamotus—graveyard of a thousand ships. The wind had drawn ahead again after 12 hours and was light, but we experienced no trouble, in spite of the warnings we had received.

After three days of light head winds and a big sea, which knocked a lot of way off the boat, we had only 200 miles to go. Deep in the throes of a monumental bridge contest we chatted confidently of reaching our destination in another two days.

Four days later we still had 200 miles to go!

Wallowing

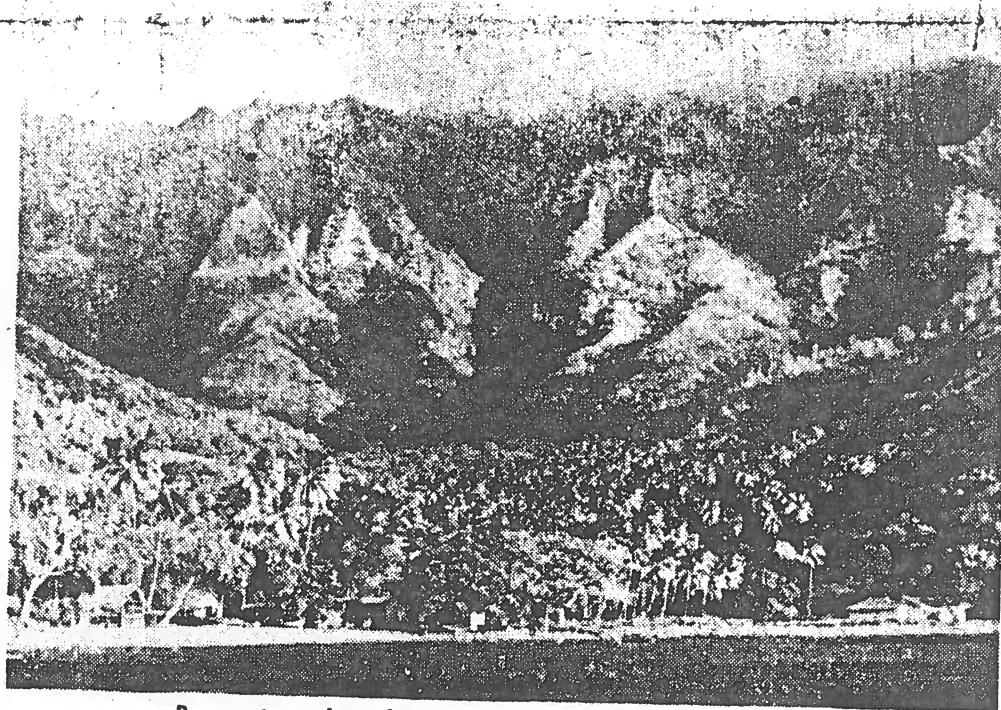
THAT was how the Trades finally hit back at us, by dropping altogether. Ten, twenty, thirty times we must have hoisted the sails to a promising breeze (always from dead ahead) only to drop them again 10 minutes later to

stop the frightful slatting and banging when the wind dropped again.

We continued to play bridge, but our peace of mind was gone. Books no longer held any appeal, crosswords were anathema. We slowly rolled and wallowed our way westward, reading the gloomy prognostications in the pilot books.

Their meteorology notes are like medical manuals. After reading them you see a hurricane or at least a tropical storm in every cloud and swell and lurid sunset. But all we got was a renewal of the Trades. Rain squalls (dead ahead) followed by fresh Trade winds.

We sighted Tahuata dead ahead on the morning of the tenth day and, after weathering some fierce squalls reminiscent of Bream Head, Whangarei—and which we later learnt had dismantled a Dutch yacht there a few weeks earlier—we motored quietly into the bay.



Ranges tower into the mist at lush Resolution Bay, Tahuata.