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Tahiti, "Finest Island in the World"

*Today's jet travelers echo Captain Bligh's superlative
when they behold the South Pacific isle
that embodies every man's vision of delight*

Article and photographs by LUIS MARDEN

National Geographic Senior Editorial Staff

"AT 3 P.M. WE SAW the Land bearing W. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., it appeared to be a great high mountain covered with clouds on the top. . . This made us all rejoice and fill us with the greatest hopes Imaginable, we now lookt upon our selves as relived from all our distresses as we was almost Certain of finding all sorts of refreshments on this great Body of Land. . ."

George Robertson, master of the British *Dolphin* frigate under Capt. Samuel Wallis, wrote this in his journal on the 19th of June, 1767. They had discovered Tahiti, and sailormen have been finding "all sorts of refreshments" on that lovely island ever since.

Hard on the heels of Wallis came other navigators: Frenchmen, Spaniards, and more Englishmen. Not far behind were the mis-

The Author: Luis Marden, who has sailed many tropic seas, endorses Captain Bligh's description of Tahiti (see title). For an account of the author's voyage to the island aboard a modern-day *Bounty*, see "Huzza for Otaheite!" in the April, 1962, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.

sionaries, and later there began the long pilgrimage of litterateurs, painters, and escapists to whom Tahiti was the earthly paradise, the Great Good Place, the home of the Noble Savage. Tahiti thrust her green breast up through the mists of the Great South Sea and discoverers, men of God, poets, and adventurers all came to drink, and in drinking, breathed nepenthe. No matter if one never set out for Tahiti, the Isle of Illusion was always there, somewhere beyond the horizon, far away and approachable only by sea, the golden dream of everyman.

Air Age Brings Change to Eden

The dream lasted exactly 193 years, three months, and 27 days. It came to an end the 16th of October, 1960, when a four-engined passenger aircraft turned into the wind and touched its wheels down on Tahiti's new two-mile-long runway.

Tahiti is still there. The sea still breaks in growling thunder on the encircling reef; the white-plumed waterfalls continue to course

down the verdant mountainsides; the brown girls smile as invitingly and laugh as happily as ever. But it is not quite the same. The reason is simple: Tahiti is no longer remote, a misty isle of legend, a place untouched by the niggling realities of the outside world. Now it is as near as your airport.

Let me make myself clear: I do not say that Tahiti is "finished"; far from it. On the contrary, a new era is beginning for the island. I say only that the state of mind that was Tahiti, that drew Melville, Loti, Stevenson, and Gauguin to the island, has vanished, merely because the place is no longer far away, and no writer, painter, or plain escapist can any longer "get away from it all" there.

I witnessed the metamorphosis of Tahiti. I was there when the first jet arrived and the green island of dreams took on the sharply etched outlines of a spectacular vacation island. I had come to Tahiti by sea, as third mate of the new *Bounty*, a copy of the original mutiny ship, which had been built by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for a filming of Nordhoff and Hall's book *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

We had sighted the lighthouse on Point Venus at night. At first light we worked into Matavai Bay, and instantly we were surrounded by a fleet of outrigger canoes. For me the scene had a dreamlike quality. We were anchored in the exact spot where Wallis, Cook, and Bligh had dropped their hooks, and I had become so steeped in the old accounts and had seen so many engravings of the scene, that the feeling of having been through it all before was overpowering.

World's First Tattooed Sailors

No longer, however, did the Tahitians shout *taio! taio!* (friend! friend!); the word, as well as the custom of blood brotherhood, has passed out of the language and life of the island. But the brown-skinned laughing girls clambered aboard as of old, and hung garlands of *tiare Tahiti*, the sweet-scented single gardenia, around our necks. They did not rub noses; instead, they cried "*Ia ora na!*" (Health to you!) and kissed us on both cheeks.

I watched a girl in a red-and-white *pareu*—a brightly printed cotton cloth wrapped round the body from breast to knees—trace

with her finger the tattooed blue anchor on the sunburned arm of one of our seamen. The cycle was complete: When the first Europeans came to Tahiti, they found both men and women decorated with indelible designs. "Tattoo as it is called in their language," wrote Captain Cook. It was done by pricking the skin with a sharpened bone dipped in soot and coconut oil.

Sydney Parkinson, artist on Cook's ship lying in Matavai Bay in 1769, recorded: "Mr. Stainsby, myself, and some others of our company, underwent the operation, and had our arms marked." Doubtless these were the first seamen in history to wear what later became the traditional badge of the sailor.

We lay in the lee of the long finger of Point Venus, northernmost point of Tahiti (page 4). Beneath coconut palms and feathery casuarinas, a steep black beach trembled under the hammer blows of green combers that broke in hissing foam on the lava sand.

Crewmen Lured by Island Charms

On this spit of land Capt. James Cook set up his telescopes to observe the transit of Venus, and Tahitians have been observing the transients of Venus ever since. For these are the Amorous Isles, sailor's dream of Elysium.

Near me at the port gangway a small girl in a blue-and-white *pareu*, with a mane of glistening hair like a dark cloud, hooked arms with an able seaman and smiled up at him.

"You like Tahiti? You stay?" she asked.

With a dazed look my shipmate swallowed and nodded vigorously. Forgotten were the words of Tahitian earnestly practiced in the watches of the night. "Yes," he managed to croak. "Me like, me stay."

The first navigators to touch these enchanted shores faced a problem that has become classic: how to keep their crews from deserting, or, at least, how to keep the men's minds on their work. Bougainville, the French circumnavigator who reached Tahiti only a few months after Wallis, wrote plaintively:

"I ask, how is one to keep at their work, in the midst of such a spectacle, four hundred young Frenchmen, sailors who for six months had not laid eyes on a single woman? Despite all our precautions, a young girl climbed on

"They are in generall handsom and engaging, their Eyes full and sparkling"

JAMES MORRISON, BOUNTY MUTINEER

Hibiscus thrust into the dark cloud of her hair, Tati with liquid eyes and coconut-frond fan embodies the dream of a South Seas paradise. Until recently her island home, Tahiti, stood isolated beyond Pacific swells, a lodestone to writers, painters, and escapists. Airplanes now give fast access to its legendary allure.

KODACHROME BY LUIS MARDEN, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STAFF © N.G.S.





board and went to stand on the grating over the capstan. . . She had a heavenly figure. The sailors and marines rushed to reach the gratings, and never was a capstan turned with such celerity."

Inland from Matavai the mountains rise steeply, fold upon fold, the hills near at hand a fecund yellow-green, the singularly shaped mountains beyond smoke blue. In plane after receding plane, they rise to the highest peak

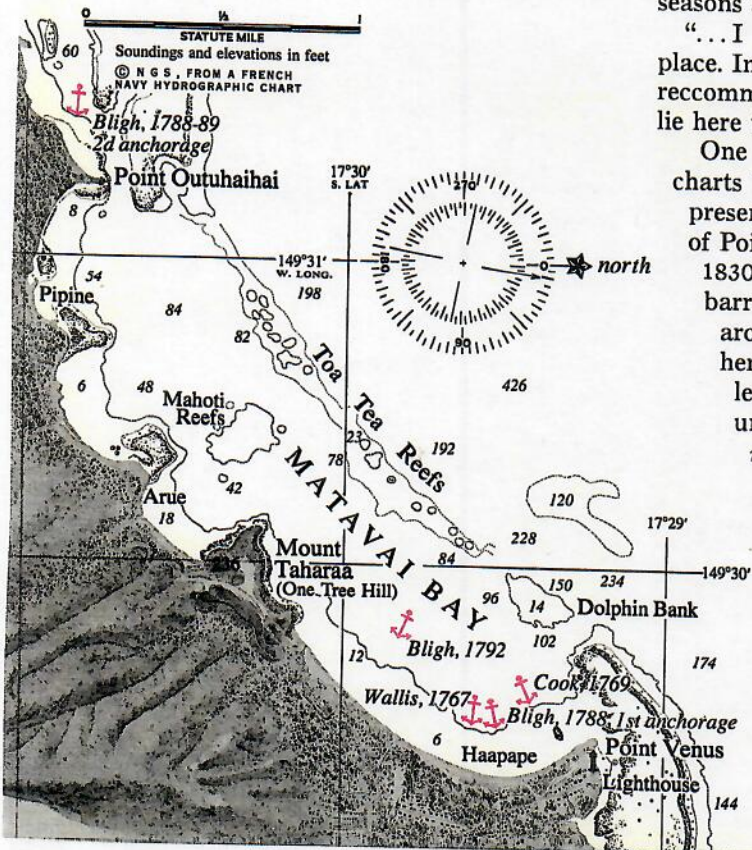
"There is a magic about these islands that is time-defying" JAMES NORMAN HALL

In 1767, "with the greatest hopes imaginable," British Capt. Samuel Wallis sailed his frigate *Dolphin* into this "fine smooth bay," Matavai, and discovered Tahiti and Moorea (background). Papeete lies within the sheltering reefs at upper left. Beyond, rock dumped into the sea made a runway for modern voyagers in the ocean of air. Point Venus extends to the right in the foreground and on the map below.

KODACHROME (OPPOSITE) © N.G.S.

Anchorage of the discoverers can be plotted accurately from ships' logs (map).

After seizing the *Bounty* from Captain Bligh in 1789, Fletcher Christian and the mutineers returned to Tahiti and anchored in Matavai Bay before fleeing to Pitcairn.



of all—"shaped like a cocked hat"—Orohena, 7,352 feet high (page 42).

Such a cloud of legend, illusion, and history surrounds Tahiti that it seems bigger than it is, but actually the island is only 37 miles long. It was born when two volcanoes emerged from the abyss of the Pacific, touched at their periphery, and then cooled in a figure 8, with one large and one small lobe. Most Tahitians live, as they always have, on the narrow strip of flat land—nowhere more than a mile and a half wide—that runs round most of the island.

Like her namesake, our *Bounty* stayed several months at "the finest island in the world," as Bligh called it. I went ashore to live in a small thatch-roofed house behind a gardenia hedge three winding miles east of Papeete in the District of Pirae.

Matavai's Calm Ends Abruptly

The first navigators came upon Tahiti in the winter months, when the southeasterly trades blew almost constantly. Then Matavai, its waters sheltered by the steep backbone of Tahiti itself, is a safe haven. But during the summer months the wind sometimes blows from the northwest, and then a dangerous swell sets into the bay.

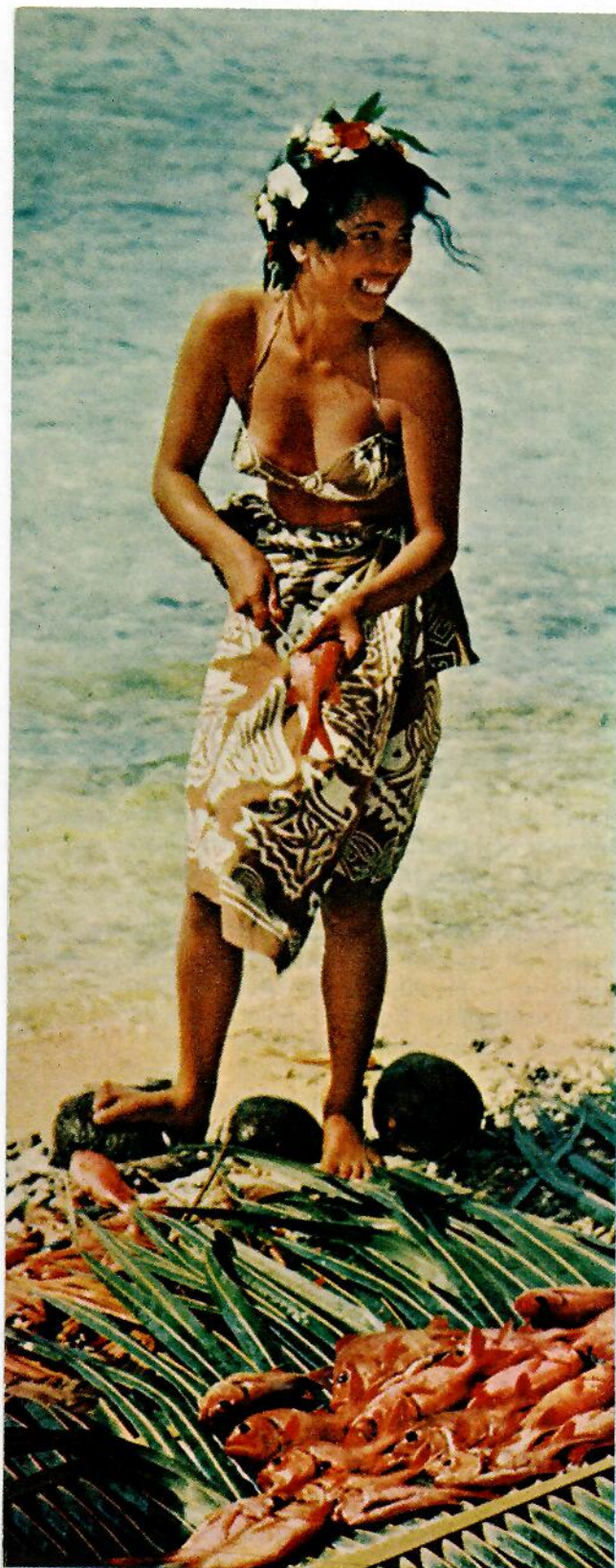
Captain Bligh, who came here to load breadfruit trees for the West Indies in 1788, had to move his ship in early December (Tahiti is south of the Equator, and of course the seasons are reversed). In his log he wrote:

"...I had considered Matavai a secure place. In this I am very much mistaken, and recommend it to future Navigators not to lie here towards the Southern Solstice."

One of the safer anchorages marked on charts by Cook and others was the site of present-day Papeete, five miles southwest of Point Venus, but it was not until about 1830 that the port was established. The barrier reef that runs nearly continuously around Tahiti has an opening, or pass, here. Vessels coming in make a sharp left turn and then moor or tie up safely under the lee of the reef and a small *motu*, or islet.

When the discoverers came to Tahiti, there was not a single village on the island. Houses were scattered in charming disarray along the coast. This remains true, and Papeete—pronounced Papayay-tay—is still Tahiti's only town.

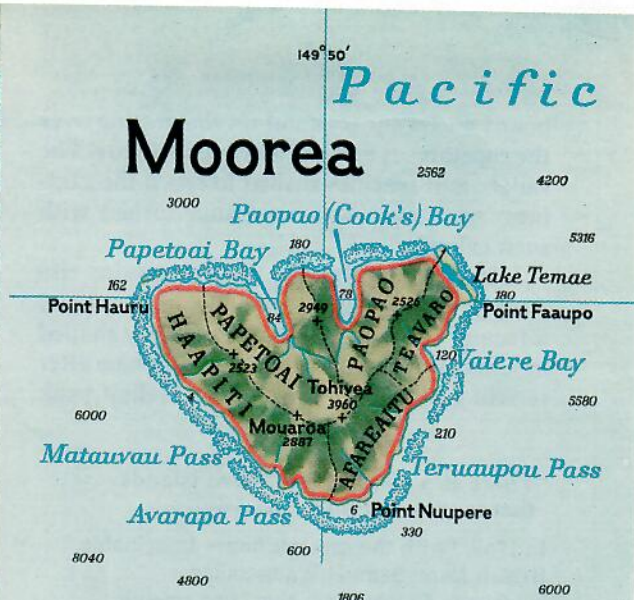
The little port is the capital of French Polynesia, four major



KODACHROME © NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

"The Weomen are finely Shaped" MORRISON

Artists in the enjoyment of living, Tahitians find pleasure in everything they do. This gardenia-crowned girl laughs even while cleaning squirrelfish for a feast.



groups of islands scattered over a vast area of the South Pacific. Half of their entire population is concentrated on Tahiti, a French territory, and nearly half of Tahiti's people live in Papeete, a town of about 18,000.

Yachts Tie Up to Old Cannon

Peaked red-roofed wooden buildings line the principal street, the *quais* along the waterfront (page 8). Here the yachts that started out to circle the world tie up stern first and swing their gangplanks ashore. Along the stone coping of the seawall, old cannon sunk into the ground serve as mooring bits.

Our lines had been made fast to one of these guns when I first came to Tahiti in the brigantine *Yankee* three and a half years before.* Across the street from our old berth stands the town's principal cafe, the Vaima. The name means Pure Water, though doubtless that is the drink least called for there, as Tahiti is an island of beer drinkers.

Most of Papeete's inhabitants are government-employed Frenchmen and their families, but you will see few of them at the Vaima. This is the hangout of Papeete's fixtures: The travelers who came for a week and stayed for a year, the round-the-world sailors whose cruise ended here, the journalists and film makers who have come to put Tahiti down on paper or film, and even the serious, bespectacled Frenchman, who at eight in the morning sits sipping coffee and reading a paper-bound book, *The Murderer in Room 21*.

Whenever I entered Vaima, someone would shout, "*E Rui e! Haere mai e inu tatou!*"—"Hey, Louie! Come and drink with us!" The Tahitian language knows no L, so they called

*See "I Found the Bones of the *Bounty*," by Luis Marden, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, December, 1957.



me Rui. Nor does it have a B, and William Bligh was called Pry.

Tahitians are as volatile as the mists of morning. Bougainville, the perceptive Frenchman, sensed this at once. He wrote: "Everything strikes them, but nothing bothers them . . . we never succeeded in fixing the attention of any of them for two minutes on end. It appears that the slightest reflection becomes an unbearable task to them, and they flee even more the exhaustions of the spirit than those of the body."

When it comes to pleasure, Tahitians are all business. No one is more relentless in pursuit of a good time. To sing, to dance, to play the guitar, to love—these are life's aims, and no one works harder at them than the Tahitian. If you are a gay companion, you are accepted without reserve. Your social standing or the size of your pocketbook comes into it not at all. Not for the Tahitians the long face and the gloomy brow, the soul searching and the continual worrying about the

psyche—these are *papaa* (European) things.

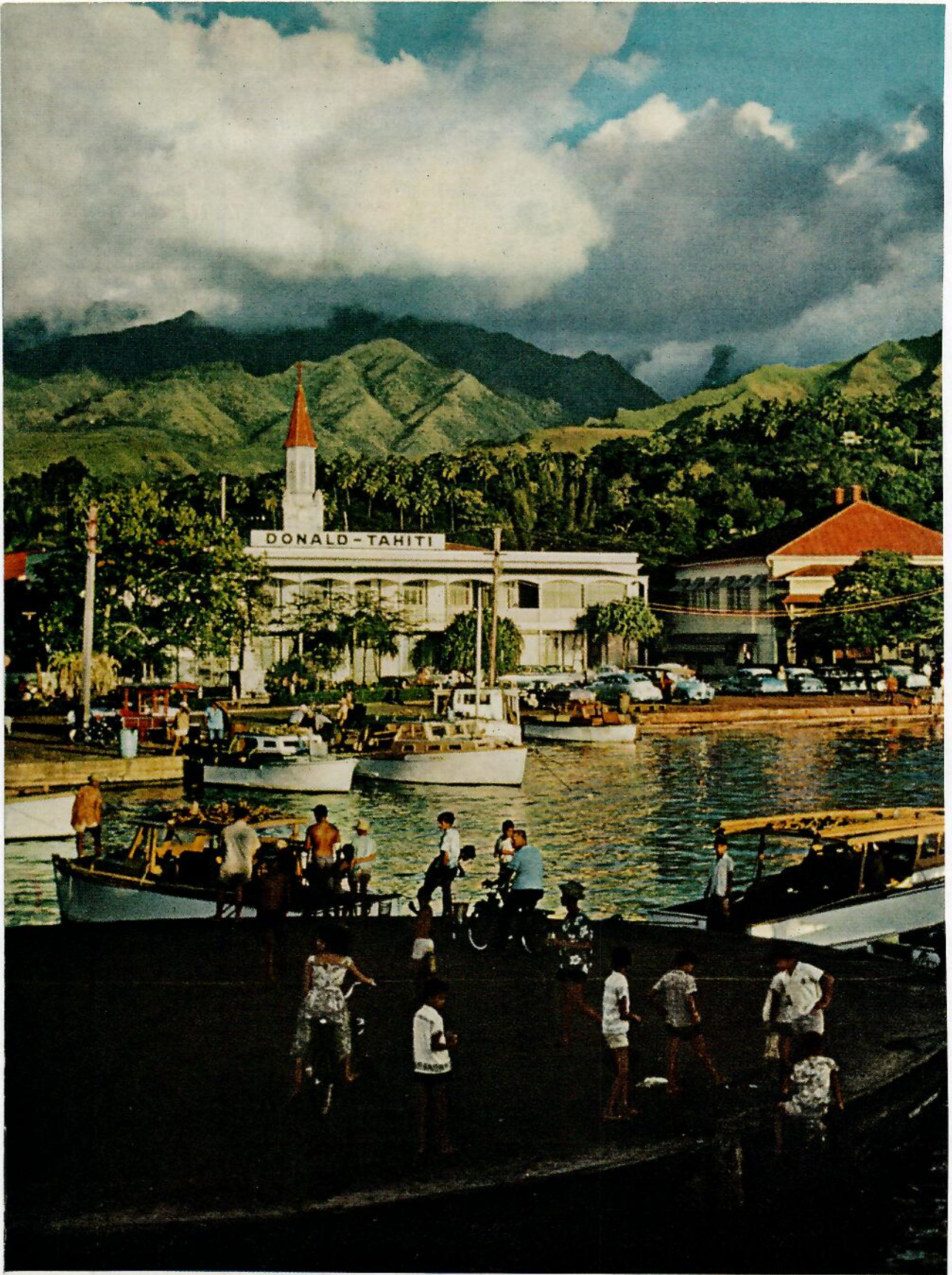
Everything is fun, an excuse for laughter. The girls who played in the *Bounty* film as extras, when on board the ship in rough weather, would be seasick almost to a girl. When they could no longer hold out, they would dash to the rail, then run back to continue the *tamure*, the wild hip-swinging dance of Tahiti, laughing like mad all the while. It was all fun, even being seasick.

Bamboo Teaches Lesson on Life

I discussed the Tahitian attitude toward life with Eddie Lund, an American who has made Tahitian music known round the world.

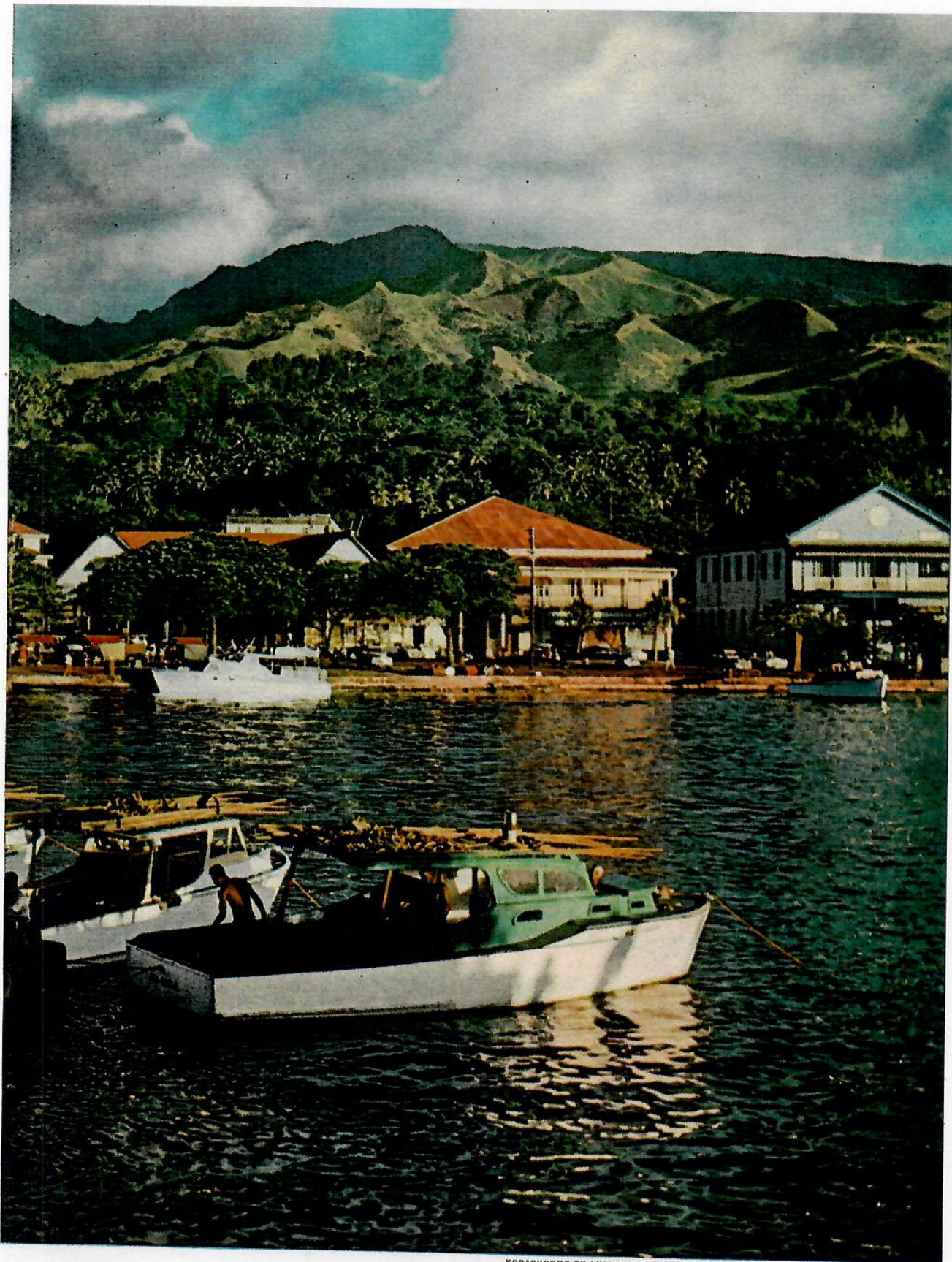
"Here I can learn more about life from a three-year-old child than I can from a forty-year-old back on the mainland. Tahitians lean with the wind, like bamboo," he said. "Life grows more beautiful the older I get. I learned it from the Tahitians, I guess."

Lund calls himself "a frustrated composer of popular music," and says, "If I have been



“the village of Papeete struck us all
very pleasantly” HERMAN MELVILLE

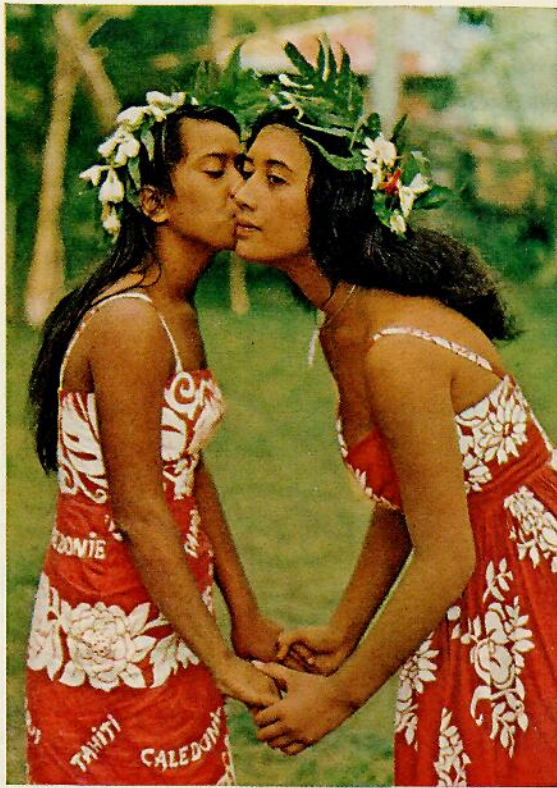
Built here about 1830 to escape dangerous summer winds in Matavai Bay, Papeete still preserves the charm of another era. Red roofs cap wooden



KODACHROME BY LUIS MARDEN, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STAFF © N.G.S.

buildings from the turn of the century. Yachts, steamers, and trading schooners tie up to the main thoroughfare. In front of the spire of Papeete

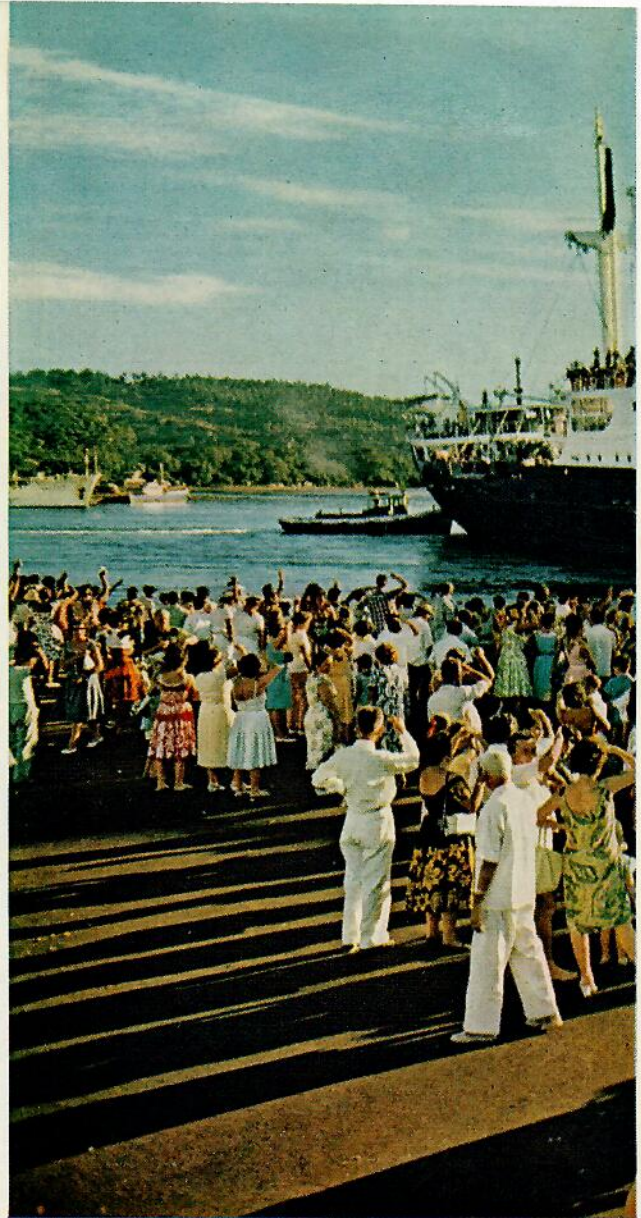
Cathedral, the sign "Donald-Tahiti" marks a long-established trading firm. Clouds wreath the island's mountainous, uninhabited heart.



“instead of kissing . . . they Join Noses,” wrote Morrison in 1789. But customs change; today Tahitians kiss one another on both cheeks when meeting or parting.

“the crowd that throngs the wharf . . . is gay and debonair” SOMERSET MAUGHAM

All Papeete waves farewell as the *Tahitien*, a French liner, sets sail for Marseille. Passengers drop flower crowns into the sea to assure a return to Tahiti.



successful in Tahiti, it was because I had no competition.”

But he does himself an injustice. So steeped is he in the language and music of the island that the Tahitians accept him as one of themselves, and his music as an authentic expression of their way of life.

It is not easy to remain here for many years, as Lund has done, if one is not a Frenchman. Long ago the administration found it must either impose rigid curbs on entry permits and the length of time visitors might stay, or have all the world's dreamers and beach-combers on their hands.

One must have a round-trip ticket to get a visa, which is good for three months. One may not engage in any gainful employment on the island. But even in the most stringent of regulations, there is always a little stretch,

and if one has been around for a while and is *sympathique*—perhaps a way can be found.

As recently as 1954 only 500 tourists came to Tahiti in the entire year. In 1960, the Year of the Airplane, more than 6,000 came. And that was before jets began nonstop service from the United States, from which come more than 70 percent of the island's visitors.

Until recently, the government was reluctant to do anything that would bring too many tourists. Then the *Métropole* (central government) decided something would have to be done about the economy of the island, which had only copra and a little coffee and vanilla to export. Hence the airstrip and the encouragement of tourism.

Language is the mirror of a people. The Polynesian dialects have always fallen sweetly on my ear, and Tahitian, which suppresses



KODACHROMES © NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

most of the hard consonants, is the most musical. James Morrison, one of the *Bounty* mutineers who remained on Tahiti and left the best account of the daily life of the pre-European Tahitians, wrote: "Their Language is Soft and Melodious, abounding in vowels; they have only seventeen [actually 13] letters, yet they can express any thing with ease, tho for want of the others which Compose our Alphabet they never could pronounce any English word which Contains them."

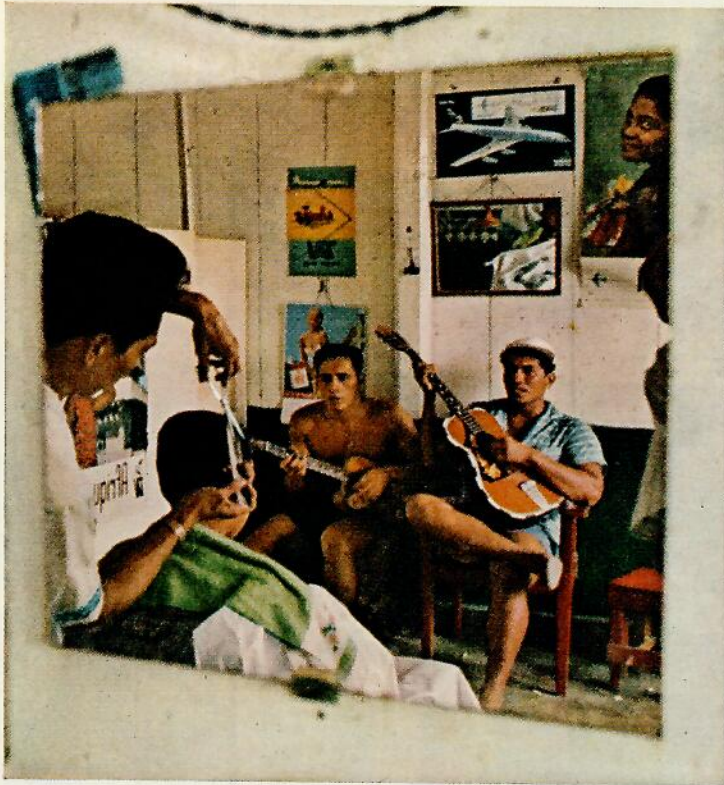
Twenty Words for Coconut

Because they live for the moment, and had no written language (even today there is almost nothing in print in Tahitian, save the Bible and other religious works), Tahitians have a tongue rich in tactual, sensuous, and material words, but poor in abstractions. The

common fish the jack is called by seven distinct names, according to size, yet they are all the same fish. Tahitians have more than 20 words for the coconut in all its phases, and at least 30 words to describe the eyes, the face, and its expressions.

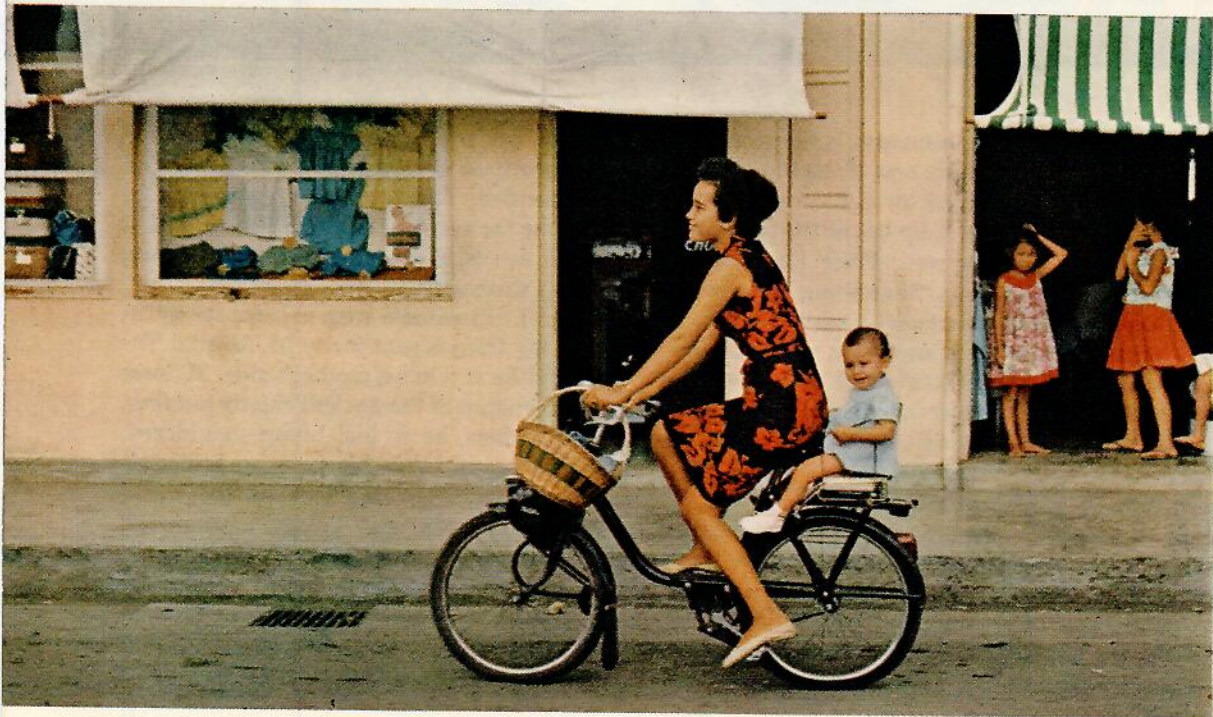
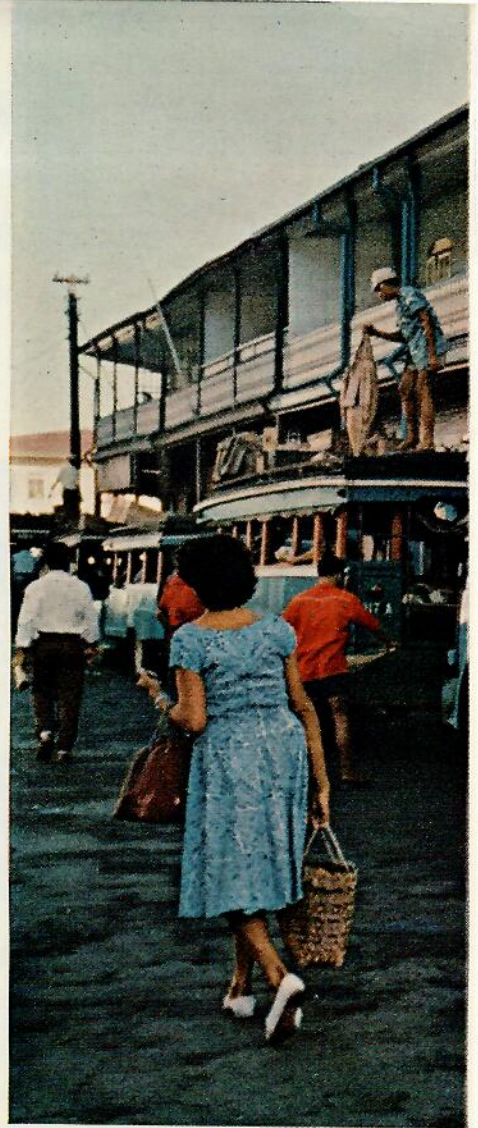
When I expressed a wish to learn some Tahitian, my friends sent me to M. Martial Tuterapuni Iorss. On his mother's side, M. Iorss is a descendant of the ancient chiefly families, and like them he is big, broad-shouldered, and handsome. From his German father he inherited gray eyes that look on the world with appreciation and kindly amusement. During my stay on the island, I recorded on tape an entire Tahitian grammar, spoken by M. Iorss in the sonorous accents of the Tahitian orator.

M. Iorss bears a Tahitian as well as a



"To sing, to dance, to play the guitar, to love—these are life's aims," says author Marden of the Tahitian philosophy. This barbershop provides customers with guitars rather than magazines; they play while waiting.

Baby rides a bike behind a young mother. To Tahitians, children always come as a blessing, and all are welcome. Youngsters often grow up with relatives or friends so that they may have two or three "mothers."



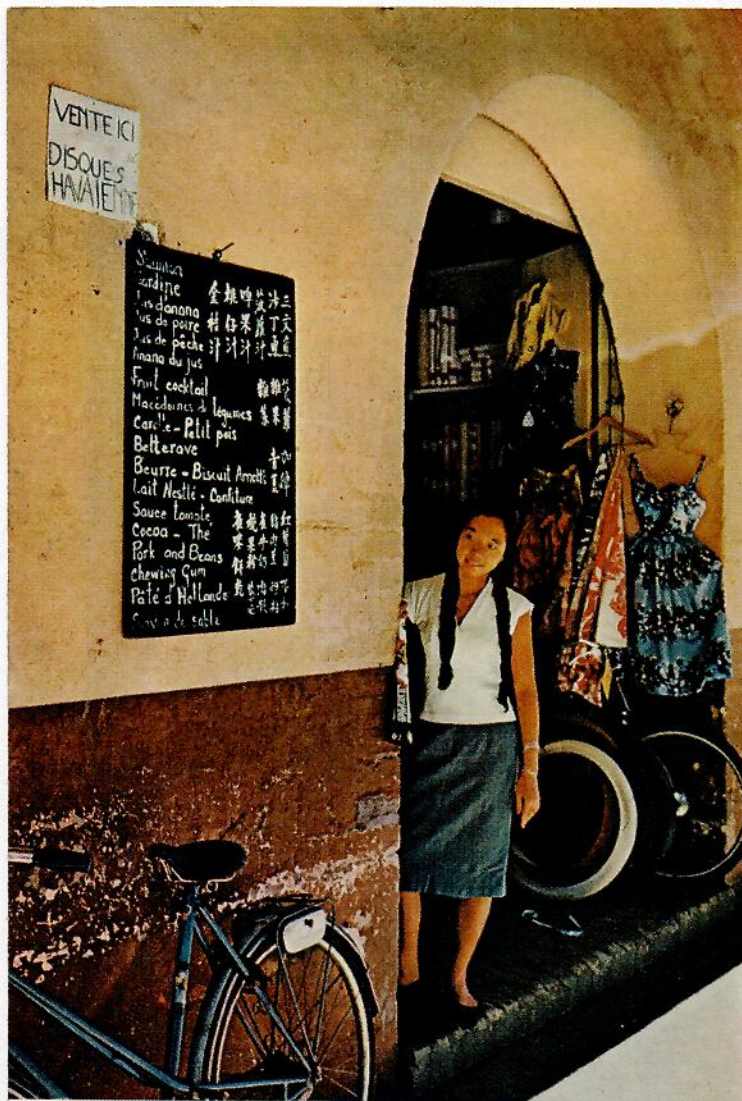


Le truck bustles with passengers. Cargo rides the roof and fish hang from the back. Bearing names such as Tickle! Tickle! and Wink-the-Eye Flower, the jitneys load in Papeete's central market and fan out to points all around the island. In town they compete with hundreds of bicycles and motorcycles.

Tahitian Christmas tree, a feathery-branched *aito*, or ironwood, once furnished wood for war clubs. Europeans introduced the Christmas tree to the island in recent years.



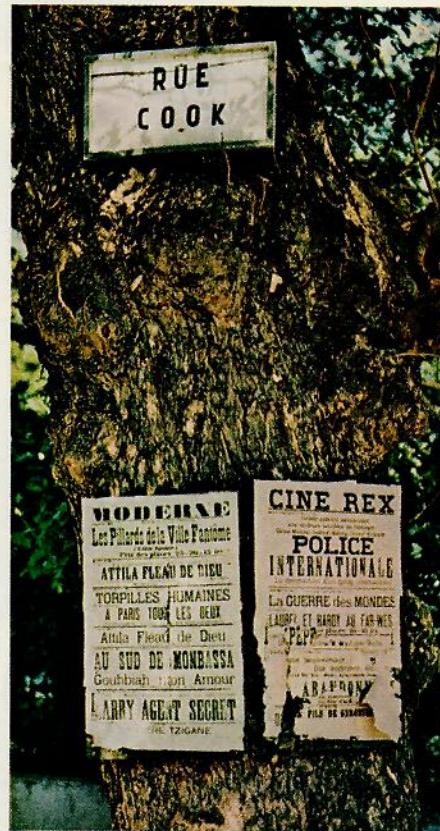
KODACHROME (ABOVE) AND HS EKTACHROMES © N.G.S.



KODACHROMES © NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Trilingual blackboard on a Papeete shop advertises canned foods in French, English, and Chinese. Most Tahiti merchants are Chinese who sell a wide variety of goods. This shop, like many others, specializes in tailoring.

Cook Street honors the navigator, who called here on three voyages. Cinema bills in French list films of spies, science fiction, human torpedoes, and a Laurel and Hardy comedy.



"When they move, they flow," says Marden of the Tahitian girls. Lolo arrives in town carrying her crown of flowers and a bundle of clothes.

Christian name. He was born on Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas, where Herman Melville jumped ship in 1842. His parents named him Teikipahatoua i Nuku Hiva—The King of Nuku Hiva Who Fears Not War. Why, then, I asked, was he now called Tuteraiipuni?

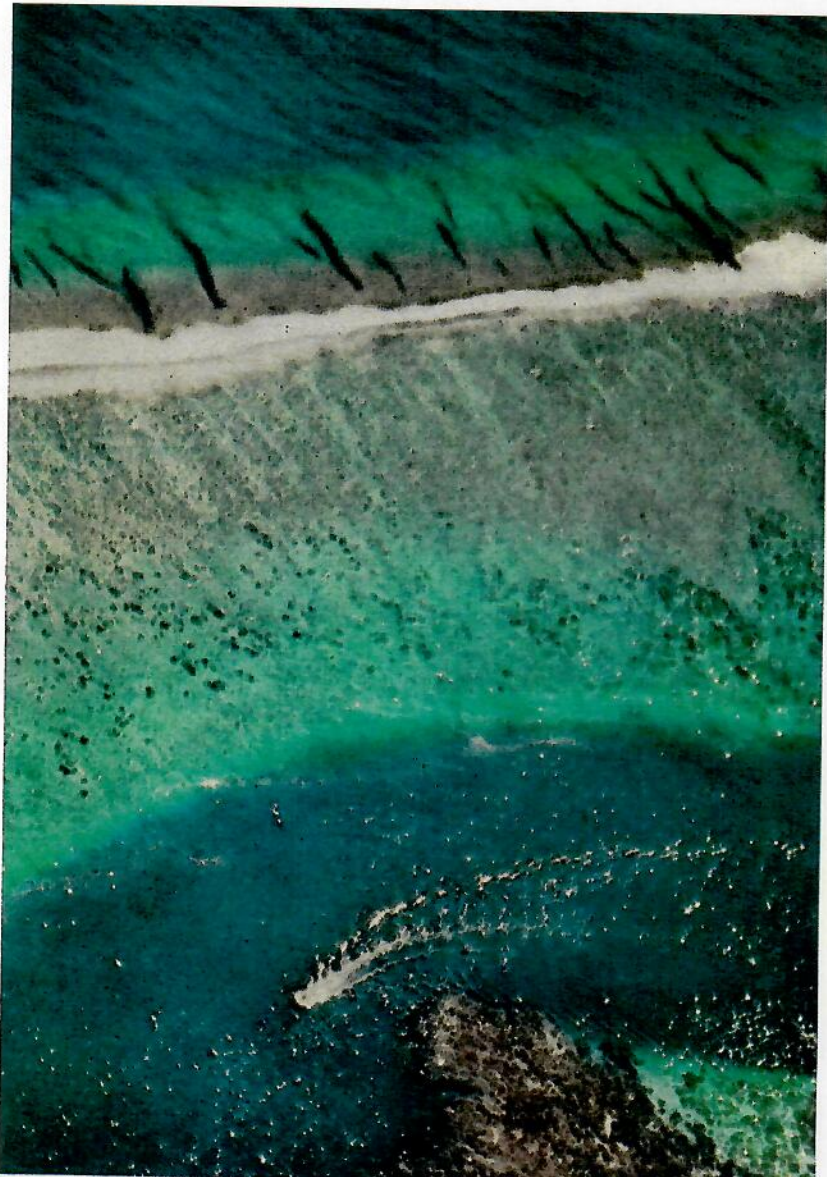
"That is my wedding name," said M. Iorss, and proceeded to explain something that had baffled Cook and Bligh. A chief they had known by one name on one voyage would be called something else by the time they returned, and if they came back a third time, the chief might have still a different name.

"When I was married," said M. Iorss, "I was given the name Tuteraiipuni, He Who Stands Upright in the Overcast Sky. A name was always chosen for a child before birth. At adolescence, the child exchanged names

with a close friend. When the men who went out to the ships of Wallis and Cook cried 'taio!' they wished to become blood brothers of the seamen. If accepted, they took the sailor's name and gave theirs in return, and they exchanged gifts—tapa cloth, breadfruit, pigs, and coconuts on the Tahitian's part, and beads, shirts, and iron nails on the part of the pale strangers whom they called *papaa*, meaning 'sunburned shoulder blades.' Iron was prized by the Tahitians, who lived literally in an Age of Stone.

"When a man married—ah, here it grows complicated. All the relations chose a name for the bridegroom; then his parents gave him still another, while the bride's mother and father bestowed a third. When someone in the immediate family died, on his death-





White-fringed wall of coral protects most of the island from the ceaseless blows of Pacific rollers. Small boats and canoes ply the smooth waters of the lagoon between reef and shore (foreground). Inner edge of the reef slopes gently to moderate depths. Fissured outer face tilts sharply into the cobalt of the deep sea.

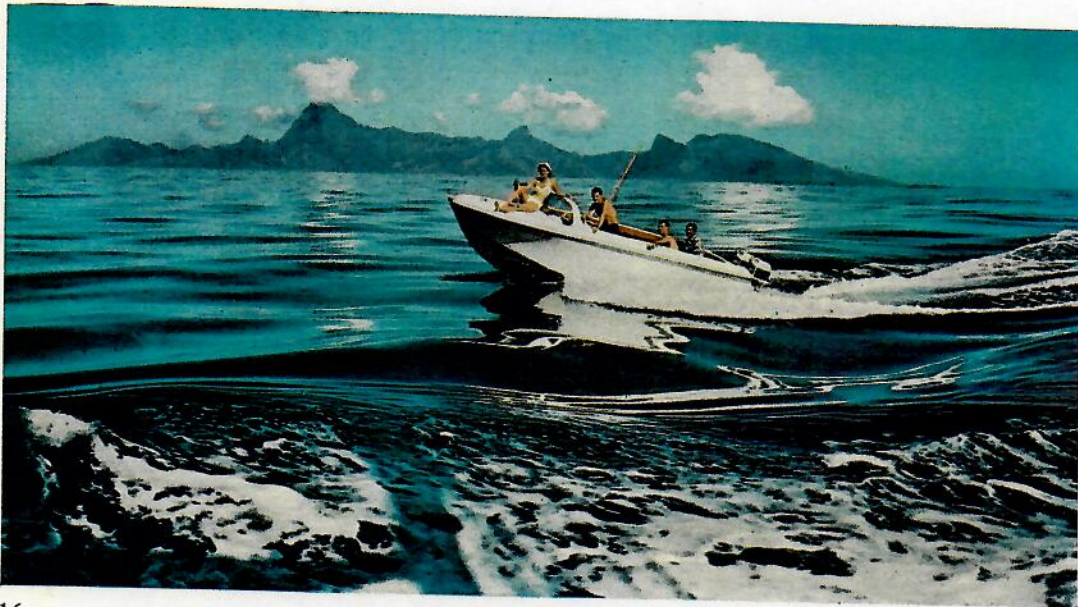
“Sky and sea immoderately blue, and the great breakers ... on a barrier-reef”

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Stevenson’s “roaring coast, where the ring of the reef is broke and the trades run riot the most.” Gaps in reef give access to the lagoon.

Planing over an oily sea off Moorea, a motor launch takes Nancy and Nicholas Rutgers, Jr., to fishing grounds off Tahiti’s northwestern shores. Sawtooth profile of Moorea pierces the horizon.

KODACHROMES © NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY





HS EKTACHROME (ABC)

bed he bequeathed his name to the new husband. And when *he* finally died, his survivors referred to him by yet another name.”

This custom made a shambles of Tahitian genealogy as recorded in early accounts.

Language Shows English Legacy

Tahitian friends, who knew I was studying their language, in their innocence said, “You should have no trouble; a lot of our words are very much like English.” That is true; for example, *moni* for money, *faraoa* for flour, *pata* for butter. The truth is, of course, that these words *are* English, modified according to the Tahitian alphabet.

Englishmen were the first to stay and make their influence felt in the islands. It was from

England that the missionaries came to translate the Bible into Tahitian. And so, with few exceptions, the names of things that did not exist before the coming of the European are all of English origin.

When the Tahitians do coin their own name for a new thing, it is invariably poetic, as when they call the airplane *manureva*—the Bird of Heaven.

“*Cher ami*,” lamented M. Iorss, “today the rich and harmonious tongue of my ancestors has fallen upon hard times. The Chinese merchants, who speak a kind of pidgin Tahitian, are much to blame, but I should tell you also that it is not taught in our schools. All classes are held in French, and the child hears Tahitian spoken only at home and in the streets.”





AND KODACHROME BY LUIS MARDEN, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STAFF © N.G.S.

"They Eat Fish of all kinds"

MORRISON

School of skipjack tuna hangs on racks in Papeete's central market. Leaving port before dawn, fishing launches troll for tuna and dolphin. The catch comes to market in late afternoon and disappears from the stands in less than an hour.

"Fish... is the principal food of the Women..."

WILLIAM BLIGH

In ancient Tahiti, flesh was forbidden to women. These girls ride a motor bicycle home from market with two fish.

The Chinese, mostly Hakkas from Hong Kong, run most of the shops and businesses of Tahiti. They are tailors, grocers, wine merchants, copra dealers, pearl shell middlemen, restaurateurs, and barbers.

The wave of hotel building has washed up entrepreneurs with startling ideas on the shores of Tahiti. People who live among coconut palms do not dwell in their shade, or tarry long there—it is too dangerous, because at any moment a heavy nut may come crashing down with skull-cracking momentum. But nothing so trivial as a fact of nature will stop the hotel man who wants to set his thatched bungalows under the palms. One told me with much pride, "I am bringing in a special hormone from Hawaii; I'll spray all the palm trees on my place, and they will bear no coconuts!"

Faintly in the background, I seemed to hear the lament of the last High Priest of Tahiti, who exclaimed to the trader Jacques Antoine Moerenhout



in 1831: "O my friend! To what estate has my country fallen! O Tahiti! *Aue! aue! aue!*"

There is really only one road on Tahiti. It encircles the main part of the island and extends arms like clasping pincers part way round both sides of the smaller peninsula. It runs for 75 miles, a leisurely half-day drive, around Tahiti Nui, Big Tahiti. It is best to start west—counterclockwise—from Papeete in the morning, in order not to have the sun in your eyes going or returning (map, page 7).

Whole Island Takes to Wheels

I drove a French-made station wagon, but most of the traffic was two-wheeled. There were girls on bicycles, girls on Solexes—bicycles with small one-cylinder motors attached to the front wheel—girls on Vespas. Bikes, motorcars, pedestrians, and trucks tangle in the square before the cathedral.

Nowadays nearly everyone in Papeete seems to be motorized, as the French put it. Motorbicycles and motor scooters snarl up and down the waterfront, and there are even parking problems. By the time I left Tahiti, there were 3,000 cars circulating in the streets of Papeete and on the single circumferential road, and more than 14,000 bicycles and motor-driven two-wheeled vehicles. This on an is-

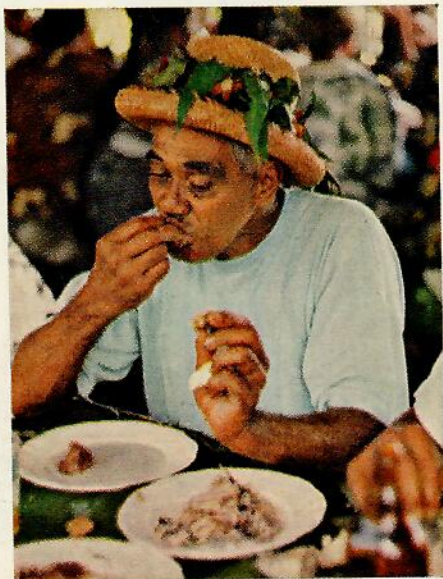
land with 100 miles of road. All Papeete closes shop from 11:30 until 2 in the afternoon, and at noon the homeward-bound traffic comes to a boil.

The great British racing driver Stirling Moss visited Tahiti during my stay. A reporter for the island's little lithographed news sheet asked him, "What do you consider your greatest achievement, the one that has given you most emotion, of your career as an Ace of the Steering Wheel?" Replied Moss, "To have traversed Papeete on a Vespa at the stroke of noon at six miles an hour."

As you drive west, you have the sea on your right hand. Beyond the smoking reef the outline of Moorea rises, blue in the soft morning light, gray and unsubstantial in the heat of the day, and outlined in fiery gold against the caldron of the setting sun.

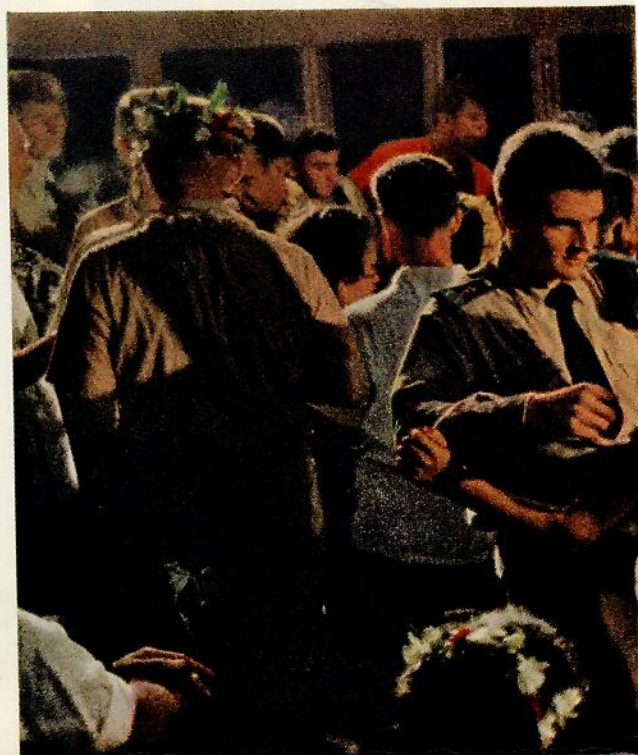
Only about one-eighth the size of Tahiti, the island has almost no roads, and only a half dozen Jeeps and trucks. Its somnolent, tranquil life of fishing and copra and vanilla growing is like the Tahiti of 30 years ago (pages 37 and 47).

As I drove, I passed jitneys jammed to the gunwales with laughing men and women, pigs, pandanus thatch, strings of fish, bales, bunches of breadfruit, coconuts, bananas,



"Sucking the . . . fish & repeatedly dipping it in the sause," wrote a *Bounty* mutineer of a Tahitian diner. In like manner, this man at a wedding feast eats raw fish marinated in lime juice and coconut milk.

Saturday night at the Bar Lafayette:



sacks of live crabs, brightly colored *otaa*—bundles wrapped in pareu cloth—and, always, a guitar. Clinging to a step at the back rode the two *matelots*—sailors—who pass bundles up to the roof and help passengers disembark. No one ever is in a hurry; the driver stops wherever he sees a freshly cut green coconut frond placed across the road.

The jitneys have blue-and-orange wooden bodies, and bear wonderful names: Tickle! Tickle!, The Thing Which Passes, Wink-the-Eye Flower, and The Shadow (page 13).

Modern Chiefs Chosen at Polls

Back from the sea toward the mountains run the valleys, deep-fissured, umbrageous, separated one from the other by ridges like the buttresses of a giant fig tree (page 43).

Down the valleys rush clear, cold rivers, fed by plumed waterfalls that hang on the blue-green flanks of the mountains like single brush strokes of white mist. The high ridges usually mark the limit of a district, of which there are fourteen on Tahiti Nui and six on Tairapu Peninsula, with a total population of about 45,000. A chief still governs each district, no longer by inheritance but—*liberté, égalité, fraternité*—by election.

Tahiti has few beaches, and most of these

are of black lava sand. Between shore and reef the lagoon affords a smooth-water passage to outrigger canoes and small boats.

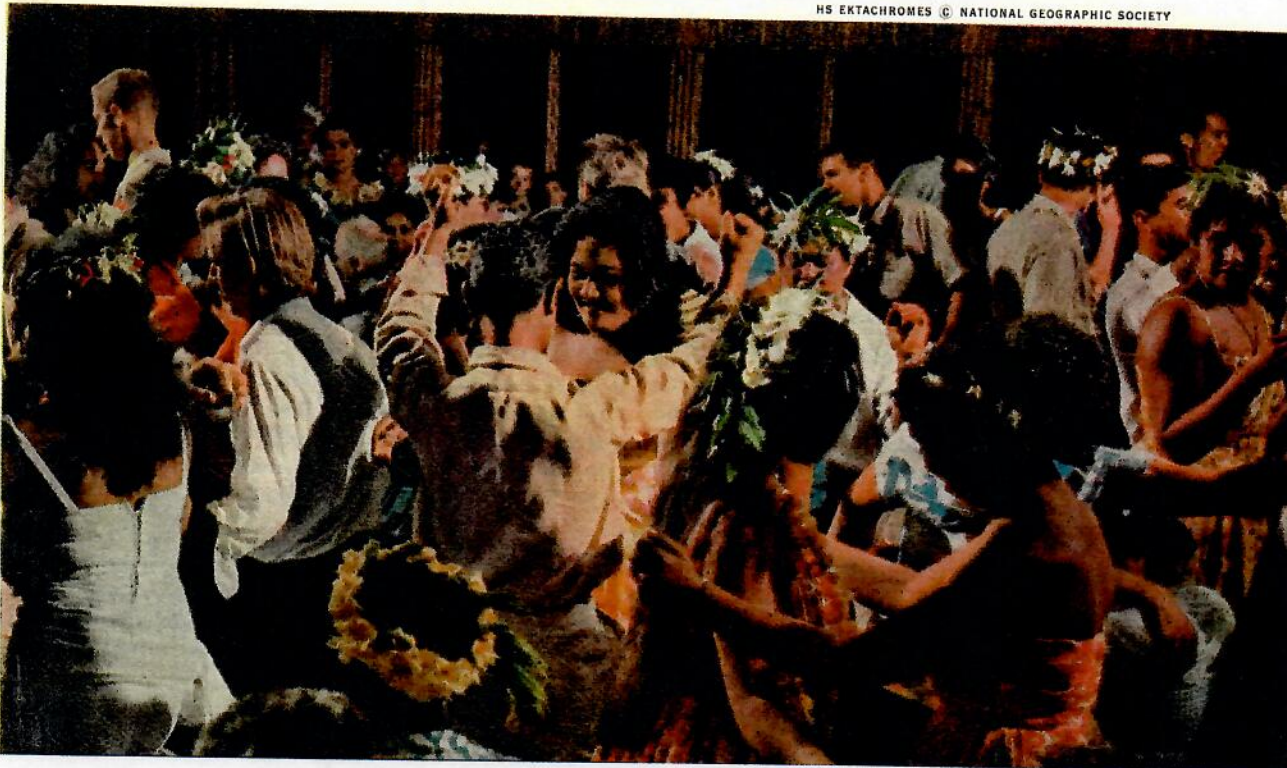
All along the coast I saw dugout canoes drawn up on shore or perched high and dry on two forked branches. The pirogues are hewn from a single log of wood, preferably breadfruit because this reddish wood resists better than any other the rotting action of sea water (page 24). An outrigger log of hibiscus wood is connected to the canoe by two arms, a rigid shaft near the bow for support and an upcurving, flexible branch near the stern to absorb shock of waves and swell.

The thing that most impressed the early Tahitians about the discoverers' ships was not their great size or tall masts, but the fact that they stayed upright without a balancing pole. They called these ships the "Canoes Without Outriggers," and marveled.

So many wonders did the strangers bring—sticks that belched fire and killed at a distance, tubes that made far objects seem close, something called iron that cut better than stone—that the Tahitian became blasé, and ever after remained unimpressed by the most intricate and wonderful devices of the European. After experiencing the first shock, he came to expect anything from these

Tahitians, French marines, and Canadian seamen dance the fast, hip-shaking *tamure*

HS EKTACHROMES © NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY



people, to whom everything was possible.

One thing about the white man that Tahitians could not understand (they still do not) was his exaggerated—to them—sense of property. The Polynesian shares willingly anything he has. He gives freely and generously, and cannot understand therefore why something he admires should not be given to him in return. So he considers Europeans *rima puu*—tightfisted. He has little sense of ownership—except that of land. The latter is a very real source of pride, and ignorance of this basic fact led to trouble for Fletcher Christian and his fellow-mutineers when they divided the scant land of Pitcairn among themselves and left nothing for the Tahitians.

The language reflects the nature of its people. Says Morrison: "They never return thanks, but by deed, having no Word in their language expressive of it..." Today, influenced by Europeans, Tahitians say for "thanks" *mauruuru*; literally, "I am in a transport," or "I am carried away."

Jet Roar Gives Way to Silence

Three miles southwest of Papeete the new airstrip draws a straight black line two miles long on the blue-gray waters of the lagoon. Using rock and gravel from the Punaruu River valley, the builders filled in the lagoon near an islet. Now the isle's coconut palms rise forlornly from black macadam.

Five times a week the Tahitians pause on a promontory above the airstrip to watch the Bird of Heaven arrive and depart. Minutes after the great noise has sent white terns exploding into the air to circle in bewilderment, the envelope of silence heals again over Tahiti. Then the mutter of the reef, the voice of the island, seems subdued against the susurrus of the trade wind among the feathery branches of the ironwood trees that grow along the shore.

The road curves round the island so gradually that I was not aware of the change of direction until Moorea was no longer visible, and the mountains moved so far away at one or two places that they were hazy with distance. The flat fields are planted to taro, the tuber that grows with its feet in mud and

water, like rice, or to coconuts that stand erect and gray-boled in orderly rows, each tree wearing a circlet of shining tin to frustrate the rats and crabs that like to climb the trees and eat the tender nuts.

Party Hunts for Eared Eels

In Mataiea, 30 miles from Papeete, I was told of a curious lake, high in the mountains of the district. A hunter of wild pigs described a strange creature, a big eel with *ears*, which he said lived in the lake. I had heard of these improbable creatures on my previous visit to Tahiti.

One morning at dawn, I accompanied some of my *Bounty* shipmates on an excursion up the Vaihiria River valley to the lake. I wanted to dive in Lake Vaihiria, to see, and possibly to photograph, the eels. We had a guide and three porters, who insisted they could carry eighty pounds, so I took along my Aqua-Lung tanks and heavy underwater camera.

We struck across a field toward the river's embrasure in the hills, splashing ankle deep through mud and water. It was still the rainy season, from October through April, and the sodden trees dripped ceaselessly.

The guide told us that the trail would cross the river innumerable times (page 32). He was right. One of my shipmates cut a notch in his walking stick every time we forded the river, and when we got to the top, we found we had waded it 67 times.

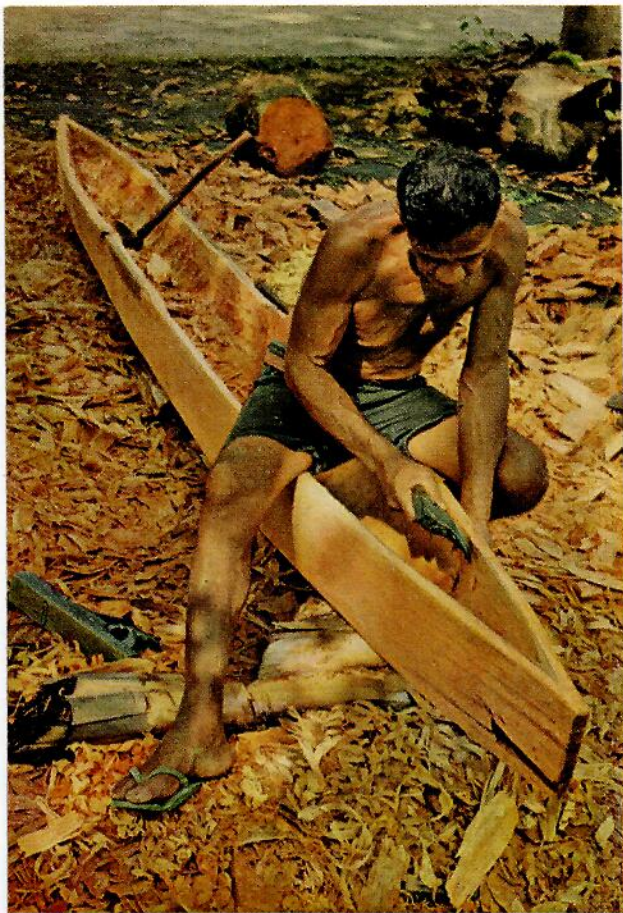
I have the fisherman's habit; before disturbing the water, I always peered into the clear green depths. I could usually see the dark mottled shadows of small fish that hung over the golden gravel. They were *nato*, a kind of perch that lives in nearly every Tahitian river (page 35). Occasionally a darting black crayfish flipped itself under a stone.

As we climbed higher, the trees grew thicker and bigger. Giant *mape*, the Tahitian chestnut, leaned over the foaming river and sent their gnarled buttress roots down to the water's edge. The fallen fruits are gathered by women and girls, who boil them and then string them on the midrib of a coconut frond to sell. Eaten cold they are excellent, tasting much like our boiled chestnuts.

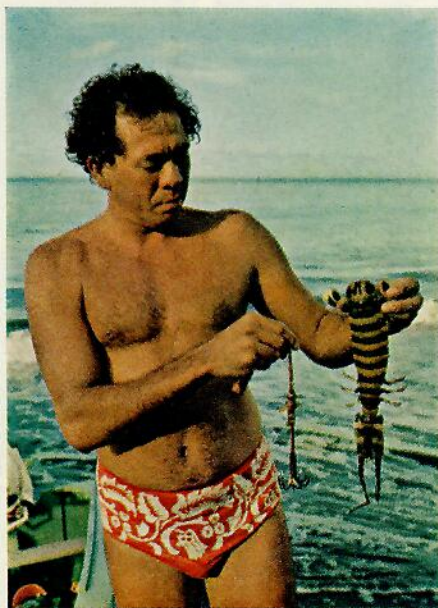
"I thought I was transported to the Garden of Eden" LOUIS ANTOINE BOUGAINVILLE

In a fern-shrouded glen, a girl bathes beneath a waterfall. Glossy elephant-ear fern and wild chestnut flourish in the damp, shady grove. Countless waterfalls cascade in misty plumes and broken curtains down every mountainside. Tahitians like to bathe in fresh water two and three times a day.

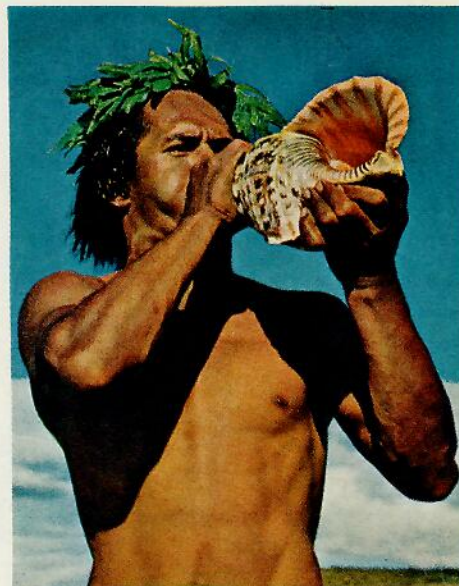




"Their Canoes . . . are built all of them very narrow," reported Captain Cook. With an adz, a master builder hollows out a log of breadfruit.



"They have Shell Fish with which the reefs abound," wrote Morrison. Mantis shrimp inhabit holes in a sandy bottom.



Triton shell trumpet sounds a two-toned blast to call fishermen from the sea. Tahitians once used the horns in war.

Seine made from coconut fronds, which Cook



We wore wreaths of fern to keep the sweat from running down into our eyes. As we went higher, the ferns grew bigger and became literally trees, with tightly curled fronds at their tips like the scroll on a violin.

Vengeful Skipper Introduced Mosquitoes

I have seldom encountered rougher going than the trail to Lake Vaihiria. At every step we sank into black muck, sometimes nearly knee deep. Fallen trees lay across the track, and lantana tore at our bare legs and arms.

Mosquitoes in clouds hung over the stream and sank their lances into our necks and legs. As I slapped and muttered, I thought of Herman Melville's account of how the mosquito, which did not exist in Tahiti before the coming of the white man, was introduced. In *Omoo*, the book based on his stay in Tahiti in 1842, he wrote:

"Some years previous, a whaling captain,

touching at an adjoining bay, got into difficulty with its inhabitants . . . deeming himself aggrieved, he resolved upon taking signal revenge. One night, he towed a rotten old water-cask ashore, and left it in a neglected *Taro* patch, where the ground was warm and moist. Hence the mosquitoes.

"I tried my best to learn the name of this man: and hereby do what I can to hand it down to posterity. It was Coleman—Nathan Coleman. The ship belonged to Nantucket.

"When tormented by the mosquitoes, I found much relief in coupling the word 'Coleman' with another of one syllable, and pronouncing them together energetically."

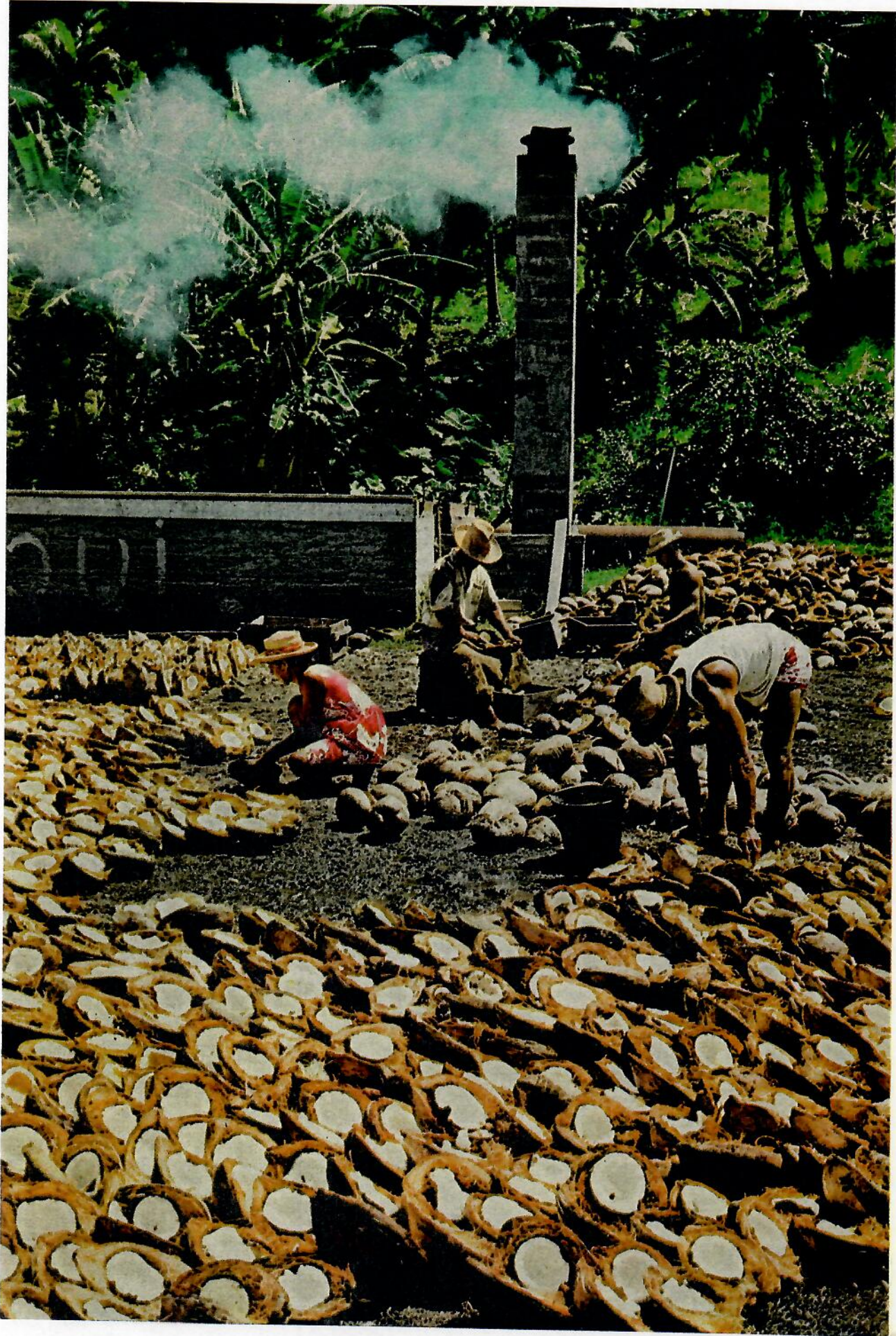
I must say I found satisfaction in doing the same thing, but little actual relief.

I stopped frequently to take pictures, and as the day wore on, the guide and my shipmates drew farther ahead, until they were out of sight. The heavily laden porters fell

mistook for "coarse broad grass," dredges small fish from shallow water

KODACHROMES BY LUIS MARDEN, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STAFF © N.G.S.





**The "Cocoa Nut is . . .
a Very Serviceable
tree"** MORRISON

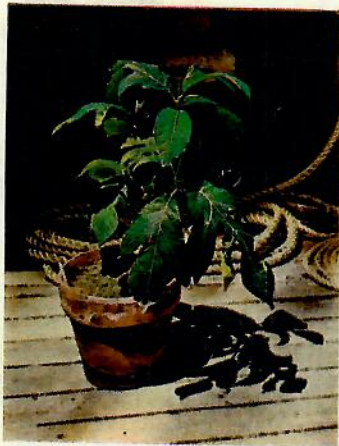
Split ripe coconuts dry in the sun to make copra, chief export of Tahiti. After sunning, the white meat is cut out of the shell and spread on a metal rack (background) to dry more thoroughly over a coconut-husk fire. Oil extracted from copra goes into soaps, cosmetics, and glycerine for explosives.

The word *Oui*—yes—chalked on the drying rack refers to a French referendum on the question of Algerian independence.

**"I have taken some
small breadfruit trees"**
BLIGH

When author Marden sailed to Tahiti, he took with him a young breadfruit (lower), grown from the rootstock of a tree transported to Jamaica by Captain Bligh.

Planted in Arue, the district from which it came 168 years before, the tree grew to seven feet within a year (right). Nancy Hall Rutgers, daughter of James Norman Hall, co-author of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, stands beside it.



behind, and at twilight I found myself alone at a deep and swift ford. Leaning on my ironwood stick, I breasted the waist-deep cold current, but on the other side I could not pick up the trail again. I made casts to right and left, like a dog seeking the scent, but thick underbrush and the tangle of wild banana and lantana showed untrodden green everywhere.

Chilly Nap Athwart Mountain Trail

There is little twilight in the tropics; swiftly it was dark. I doubled back on my tracks to an open grassy slope and lay down across the trail, so that anyone coming up or down would have to step over—or on—me. I had nothing in my pack but cameras; waterproofs, blankets, food, and wine were all in the porters' loads somewhere behind me.

The night wind, the *hupe*, whistled down the pass. I lay on my back and watched Orion wheel slowly—all too slowly—across the narrow strip of sky until he disappeared behind a high shoulder of mountain. Clouds obscured the stars and a cold rain began to fall. In my wet shorts and short-sleeved shirt I shivered and dozed fitfully.

Around midnight a brilliant light shone in my face. In the glare of gasoline pressure lamps two crayfish fishermen stared at me. They knew where the porters had made camp, and in the circle of white light thrown by their lanterns we recrossed my hard-won fords and walked half a mile downstream.

EKTACHROME (BELOW) BY N. G. RUTGERS, JR., AND KODACHROMES BY LUIS MARDEN © N.G.S.

