

One of our escorts: a friendly fairy tern



Ensign Bob Cosby has hands full with shark hooked from cutter's longboat



Above anchored cutter, masked booby stands on cornerstone of ancient Polynesian temple

## Adventure off Hawaii

# VOYAGE OF THE BUTTONWOOD

By ERWIN A. BAUER

**Our cruise to a little-known refuge teeming with wildlife brings us a bonus—wild fishing**

**F**OR MORE THAN A MILE the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Buttonwood cruised at half speed on a cautious approach to Lisianski Island. As I watched from the bridge beside Capt. Dave Smith and Gene Kridler, I could see white foam breaking over an irregular barrier reef. Beyond it and barely visible was a thin sand beach—Lisianski—topped with low green vegetation. Clouds of seabirds circled above the small Pacific island.

"There's our landing spot," Gene said, pointing to a lagoon beyond the reef, "if we can find a way through the coral."

A moment later, in water 12 fathoms deep, the Buttonwood's engines were briefly reversed and the anchor was dropped, and that seemed to be the signal for plenty of activity. Orders crackled over the public-address system. One crew of seamen made ready to lower a longboat in preparation for landing. On the buoy deck up forward, other Coast Guardsmen were inflating a rubber raft.

But the excitement that most interested me took place at the



Crewmen measure, weigh uluas, which abound in Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge





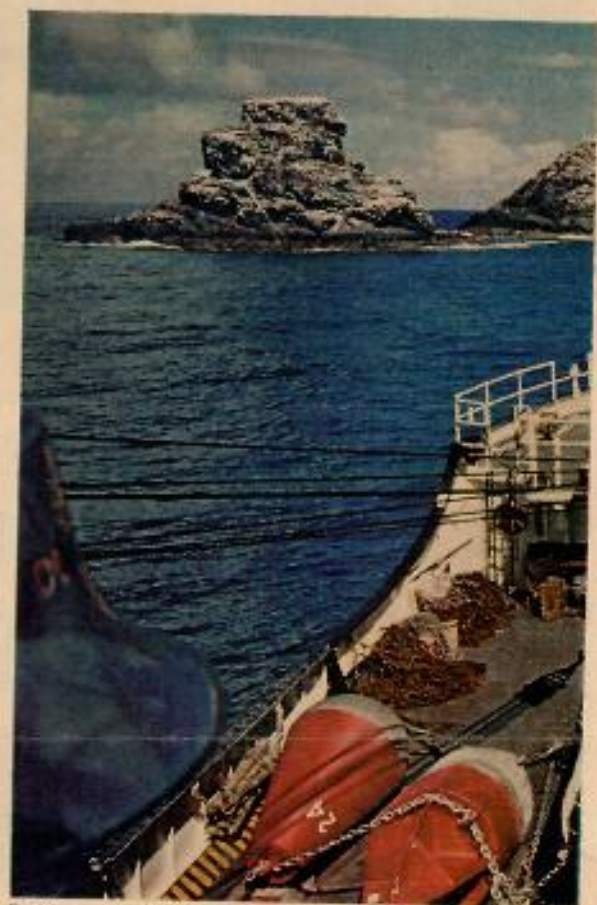
Divers leave ship at reef, Gardner Pinnacles



Trolling from longboat invariably produced hard-fighting uluas up to 50 pounds



Above, a scene at beautiful but forbidding Necker Island, treacherous to land on. Bird at right, Laysan teal, may be the rarest duck on earth; it exists only on Laysan Island. Below, a young great frigate bird on nest a few yards from our tents on Laysan



Buttwood's bow is dead on to Gardner . . .



Aerial view of barrier reef around Kure Island, another of outer Hawaiians



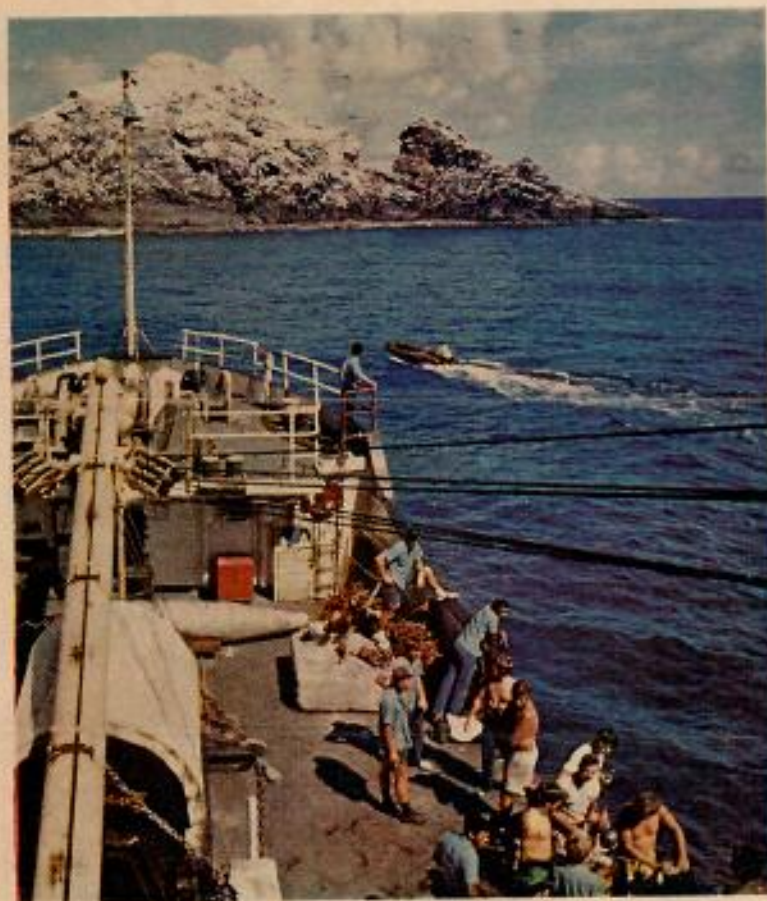




This 80-pound whitetip fought tough but was minnow next to other sharks we saw



John Sincock, left, Gene Kridler tag monk seal



... Pinnacles, upjutting volcanic cliffs almost never visited  
Crewman Charlie Schlinke with trip's top ulua, a 73-pounder



## VOYAGE OF THE BUTTONWOOD

*continued*

boat's fantail. There, almost every crew member who was not on watch duty or a work detail had broken out fishing tackle, and an astounding variety of baits and lures was being tossed overboard.

Somebody soon had a strike, and so did the man casting next to him. Then it was pure bedlam. With line evaporating from their reels, both men needed elbow-room, but many other lines were in the water, and the result was a snarl unlike any I had ever seen before. There was shouting and swearing, and, to confuse matters further, a third fish was hooked in the melee. The tumultuous scene looked like something out of an old-time slapstick movie.

"Get the gaff," somebody shouted.

"I think my fish is tangled in the prop," someone else moaned.

From a porthole just below the fishermen and all the action, a seaman appeared and reached far out with a gaff hook mounted on a 10-foot pole. He missed on his first two or three passes with the gaff, but finally he connected and heaved, and the fish—an ulua (pronounced "oo-LOO-a") of about 40 pounds—was hand-over-handed aboard. There it began to fight all over again, bouncing across the deck and scattering fishermen. Somebody caught it by the tail and conked it with a belaying pin, and in almost the same instant another angler was shouting "Strike!"

At that point I decided to set up my own tackle, but it was too late. Both the longboat and the rubber raft were in the water, and the ship's public-address system was calling for the landing party. That included me. I swapped the tackle for cameras in a waterproof rucksack and headed for the Jacob's ladder hanging from the buoy deck. My first taste of central-Pacific fishing would have to wait.

Through the years some of my greatest outdoor adventures have been those that were largely unplanned or at least unexpected, and this one may head the list. It wasn't supposed to be a fishing trip at all. I was a member of a government-sponsored scientific expedition to inspect one of America's (*continued on page 118*)



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## VOYAGE OF BUTTONWOOD

(continued from page 59)

least-known (but perhaps our most magnificent and valuable) wildlife sanctuaries—the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, which protects one of the most remarkable wildlife spectacles left on earth.

The refuge is really a necklace of lonely, tiny, uninhabited islands extending for 1,500 miles, from the Hawaii that is familiar to tourists to Midway Islands, the site of a midocean naval base and an important sea battle during World War II.

The leader of this annual expedition to the "wildlife islands"—also called "bird islands"—was Gene Kridler, a veteran biologist and manager of the refuge. Also in the party were John Sincock, a government biologist who was mostly concerned with Hawaii's endangered birds; Ken Norris, an authority on ocean mammals; Eric Schlemmer, probably the only living person who was born on any of the refuge islands (he was born on Laysan Island in 1904); and I.

My own mission was to photograph the wildlife, some of it very rare and occurring nowhere else, for a book on great wildlife islands of the world. I did carry along a fishing outfit—just because I always do, whatever my destination or assignment. But I had no thoughts of fishing, because Gene had written that it was not permitted in refuge waters or inside the 10-fathom (deep) line close to shore.

Because of the isolated nature of the islands, which are far from busy travel and shipping routes, access is possible only by small boat when the seas are calm enough to permit it. At times, landing is either impossible or highly hazardous, and on a number of earlier occasions Gene and John had nearly lost their lives trying to get ashore. Two of the islands, Necker and Gardner Pinnacles (which are really volcanic cliffs poking above the ocean's surface), are very treacherous. The Pinnacles, in fact, has known very few visitors in all history.

We were therefore totally dependent on the U.S. Coast Guard and the crew of the Buttonwood, a buoy tender stationed in Honolulu, to take us within small-craft-beachhead distance of each island.

Last September the other expedition members and I boarded the Buttonwood at Midway after a military flight from Honolulu, and we were immediately identified by the crew as the "bird people." One seaman got me aside and asked whether I had any spare line or large hooks in my luggage. I did, and shared what I had with him, but later I had second thoughts about the generosity.

The plan was to cruise from Midway back to Honolulu in stages, stopping at as many refuge islands as possible on the way. Gene and John had to census the rare birds and to count and tag as many monk seals and green sea turtles as possible. These outer, leeward Hawaiian Islands are the only home of this seal species and in fact are the only

place where any seals still survive in tropical waters. The islands also are the major remaining breeding area of the green sea turtle under U.S. jurisdiction and possibly the only such area anywhere in the world.

Our first landing, on Lisianski, was rather easy. This sand island of only 382 acres is nowhere more than 40 feet above sea level. We made a complete circuit of the beautiful soft-sand beach, counting 248 seals and tagging many turtles on the flippers. The tagging is grueling work, but tag returns can tell the biologists much about the animal's growth, travels, and survival. We were constantly followed by clouds of fairy, sooty, and noddy terns, which nest by the millions here. The whole Lisianski scene is one of absolute wildness and escape.

Back on the Buttonwood that evening, my first priority was to rig up my four-piece plugcasting outfit, which fits into a duffelbag. But before I could fix a metal jig onto a short metal leader, an ulua of about 48 pounds was hauled aboard still full of fight, and suddenly my gear looked inadequate.

The ulua is a mid-Pacific species of the jack family (Caranx) and is similar to the Atlantic amberjack in size and shape. Like all its cousins, it is a very strong battler on any kind of gear.

Since the first hour or so of superfast action in the morning, the ulua fishing had become sporadic, mostly because many sharks had been attracted to the vicinity. On about my 10th cast I had a soft strike. But after I set the hook, line vanished from my casting reel so fast that I thought all of it would go. Somehow I stopped the run. Suddenly I was soaked with sweat.

For a while I thought I had a chance with the fish. Fifteen minutes passed, and I regained some line.

Chief Boatswain's Mate Charles Schlinke of Nixon, Texas, who was among the most serious of the anglers aboard, stood next to me against the rail. Earlier in the day he had boated a pair of large uluas.

"Just keep a steady pressure," he counseled, "and keep the line away from the hull."

I couldn't follow that last suggestion. Suddenly a big shark appeared at the surface, and the ulua made a strong surge down and under the ship. I could feel my line rubbing metal. Then it snapped. I'll never know if the ulua alone broke my line or if the shark had him when it happened. Anyhow, that was the last of the day's fishing action. Soon we were under way toward our next destination, Laysan Island.

After we'd anchored off Laysan the next morning, lines were again put over the fantail. Besides the uluas, which averaged much smaller here than at Lisianski, wrasses and other colorful fish came flopping aboard, most of them going unidentified.

Somebody hooked a small whitetip shark, and it was saved for bait. Later in the day it was used whole to tempt a large tiger shark that was seen cruising nearby. The tiger struck and was



sidered among the gamest of sharks, but this one came clear out of the water in a wild leap as soon as it tasted the hook. Then it fought savagely near the surface before two crew members gaffed and swung it aboard, being very careful to stay clear of the toothy jaws. It weighed 80 pounds—barely a minnow compared to what we saw next morning at French Frigate Shoals.

**F**rench Frigate is an atoll composed of several islands surrounded by an elaborate reef system. One island, Tern, is the site of a U.S.C.G. Loran (Long Range Aid to Navigation) Station that houses 18 men. It is the only inhabited place in the Hawaiian Refuge.

Just before our arrival, one of the Loran men, L. J. Bergeron of Baton Rouge, had landed a 12½-foot tiger shark. No scales were available, but the shark probably weighed half a ton, and it was only one foot 4½ inches shorter than the world record for that species.

Necker Island was the next stop on our eastward trip, and except for Gardner it is the most treacherous on which to land. Luckily the seas were fairly cooperative again, and a drenching was the worst that happened. Necker not only has a staggering amount of wildlife but is also the site of several temples built and abandoned by Polynesians many centuries ago. The builders must have reached this remote spot by outrigger canoe alone, and that remains a miraculous feat of navigation and survival.

"I wonder," one seaman mused out loud, "if they also discovered the fishing here."

There seemed to be more and bigger uluas around Necker than anywhere else we dropped anchor. We tied into them while casting or jigging from the boat and also by trolling from the Buttonwood's longboat when it was not needed for landing operations. It was the sort of bonanza that a fisherman encounters far too seldom, no matter how far he travels.

Radioman Bob Stockton of San Antonio, Texas, kicked off the action with a 64-pounder. Then several men were hooked up at the same time.

I missed a couple of strikes before connecting solidly with an ulua. I spent the next 20 minutes trying to wear out the strong fish before my light line failed.

The trip-record ulua was boated shortly thereafter. That 73-pounder, hooked by Charlie Schlinke while trolling from the longboat, remains the all-time record (as far as I now know) for the Buttonwood. But it was only two pounds heavier than the 71-pounder Bob Cosby hooked soon thereafter.

Again the sharks arrived, and again the uluas seemed to go elsewhere, but the action merely increased. One big tiger of 10 feet or so attacked a whole three-foot whitetip that was offered as bait and to which a large plastic float had been attached to absorb the shock of a hard strike on a taut line. The float was last seen disappearing toward Tokyo.

The great fishing around Necker

proved also to be a sort of disaster, but not because of a fish shortage. Fewer fishermen were up to bat, mainly because much tackle had been smashed, many lures lost, and lines used up. I myself had to quit fishing because all I had left was a rod (fortunately intact) and a plugcasting reel with a sorely tested drag. Metal leaders and lures were completely gone when we upped anchor and cruised away from Necker.

One more island stop remained—Nihoa, another old volcanic peak and the home of countless seabirds. En route there many crewmen used off-duty time to try to repair tackle. I saw one man fixing a broken rod by using a section of aluminum tubing as a sleeve. A thorough search was made of every remote corner of the Buttonwood in trying to locate line, lures, and anything else that could be used. Not much was uncovered. But Bob Cosby and Charlie Schlinke worked all night to fashion large shark hooks out of scrap pieces of brass rod.

I have encountered crazy fishermen in the past, but few matched these Coast Guardsmen.

This story would have a happier ending if I could report bonanzas fishing around Nihoa, but it didn't work out that way, probably because the tackle was too depleted. Only three uluas larger than 50 pounds came aboard; most of the action was supplied by sharks. One of the home-made hooks accounted for a 75-pound whitetip, which was lost to a bigger fish.

Then the anchor was raised for the final time, and on an extremely calm, beautiful sea we headed toward Honolulu and the end of our expedition to the wildlife islands.

"What do you think of our cutter and crew?" Capt. Dave Smith asked me on the way home.

"Great," I answered, "just great." Then I had an afterthought.

"If your Coast Guard recruiters would mention this Hawaiian Islands duty and especially the fishing," I added, "you'd have more volunteers than the service could handle."

"I think you're right," the young skipper said. "I'm getting excited about it myself." THE END

## BAKING ON THE TRAIL

(continued from page 82)

and one of cooking oil, a teaspoon of salt, and just enough water to form a sticky dough. The dough should just be able to settle level in the pot, but if it's a little thinner, it won't matter.

The dough is spooned into a well-greased 1½-quart pot and placed on a thick bed of coals. More embers are heaped up around the sides. We cover the pot with our extra aluminum plate, which we fill with coals so that the bread will bake on top. Cooking takes from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the heat. After the first 10 minutes, it is a good idea to check the bread frequently to prevent burning. When a straw comes

out clean or the bread is firm and springy on top, it's done. The pack weight for the ingredients is slightly over eight ounces.

Often we bake a pot of bannock in the breakfast coals while we are cleaning up camp and packing. When we're ready to leave, we take the bread out of the pot to cool, then replace it and slip pot and all into our pack. At noon, we eat the bread with peanut butter and honey or brew up a cheese sauce from a packet of powdered cheddar mix and pour it over the crumbled bread for a wilderness Welsh rabbit (rarebit).

But if you really want to impress your camping partners, try a fruit pie or a yeast-raised pastry. There is something downright luxurious about a wilderness meal that ends with a slab of home-style pie or fresh-baked cinnamon rolls.

**F**or such baking you need a reflector oven, but there is no need for a heavy commercial type. You can rig a reflector out of heavy-duty foil and wire, or you can make a sturdier model with a pair of throw-away aluminum cookie pans.

We use two of the 9 x 12-inch pans, hinging them together on the long side with two twists of wire. The hinge is set along the rear edge of our 4 x 13-inch backpacker's grill, which is supported by rocks. The top pan is angled over the grill and propped up by two wires attached to the front of the grill; the bottom pan is slanted under the grill. The open sides are closed with aluminum foil to increase heating efficiency. (See photos, page 83). The pans, wire, and foil, plus two throw-away baking dishes, weigh about four ounces.

To make a pie, you need two cups of prepared pie-crust mix and a two-serving packet of freeze-dried fruit. The total weight of these ingredients is under 12 ounces.

In the field, the flour is mixed with one-fourth cup of cold water to form a dry dough. Save out a tablespoon or so of the flour. Then, on smooth ground, spread out the foil that will later be used on the oven and sprinkle it with the extra flour. Put half the dough on the foil and roll it out with a plastic or aluminum bottle. When the dough is reasonably thin, flop it over into a well-greased eight-inch aluminum pie plate. With your fingers, thin it out and form it up to cover the rim.

If you don't have a bottle to roll the dough with, just make a thin pancake of the dough and place it in the plate. Then, starting in the center, press the dough, flattening it toward the edge. Keep at it until you have a thin crust covering the entire pan.

Meantime you can be boiling the package of freeze-dried fruit in the amount of water specified by the directions. When the fruit is thoroughly tender, remove it from the fire and add not more than one tablespoon of the remaining flour for thickening. The filling should be soupy, since the slow baking in low heat will tend to dry it out. Sweeten it to taste and add a little cinnamon if you like. Then pour it into the bottom crust.

Form the rest of the dough for the



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hooked, but it easily snapped a line testing 100 pounds.

I had no chance to fish on our arrival at Laysan, because of the more-complicated landing preparations. On this two-square-mile island the wildlife group would camp for a week, at the end of which the Buttonwood would return to retrieve us. Everything for our stay, including enough water for any emergency, had to be carried ashore since we would have no communications of any kind with the rest of the world we had left behind.

No previous week of my life compared with that one on Laysan, and I'd never before lived so close to such an astronomical amount of wildlife. An estimated 11-million birds use the little island as a nesting site each year. At places the birds actually live in tiers: shearwaters and Christmas and Bonin Island petrels nest in burrows underground; noddies, sooty terns, and red-tail tropic birds lay eggs on the bare surface; great frigate birds with seven-foot wingspans and boobies roost in the low brittle bushes.

We pitched two tents on the only sand dune that was as much as 50 feet above sea level. Boobies roosted on our ridgepoles, and shearwaters burrowed underneath our cots after dark. The din of shearwaters and petrels each night was a constant moan.

On Laysan I saw and photographed the world's rarest duck, the Laysan teal, which lives only here. It is small and chocolate-colored, and it is believed that at one time only seven survived on earth. But after our census Gene and John estimated today's total population at about 150. At night we circled a small lagoon in the center of the island that is three times as salty as the ocean. The teal, which feed on brine flies, concentrated there, and we captured several teal in butterfly nets for tagging.

Also on Laysan I saw and filmed the very tame Laysan finch, another species of animal that is found nowhere else on earth.

The week at Laysan passed too quickly, probably because we were always busy. We found an abandoned, rusting Japanese longline fishing boat that had wrecked against the barrier coral, but we did not try to board it.

I snorkeled every day and was amazed at the abundance and variety of fish, even on the reefs closest to shore. Some that I could identify were butterflyfish, bandit fish, scads, wrasses, damselfish, school uluas, goatfish, and tangs. One or two monk seals and a turtle were curious enough to swim nearby. Late one afternoon I headed promptly for the beach when a shark appeared on the opposite side of a coral ridge. The fishing would have been great around Laysan, but these waters are within the restricted 10-fathom limit.

Our next destination was Gardner Pinnacles, a few acres of rock spires with a maximum height of 280 feet. Lisianski and Laysan, by contrast, are atolls surrounded by reefs and are comparatively easy of access. En route to Gardner all hands doubted whether we

would be able to get ashore, but fortunately the sea grew very calm as we approached. Still it was not easy to scramble, at the precise crest of a swell, from a rubber raft onto a sharp, slippery cliff. Boatswain's Mate Tom Smotherman of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, did an expert job of holding the raft against the cliff.

Later in the day, back on the Buttonwood, Tom tied into a couple of uluas that he would never forget. The first simply broke off before he could get it turned around. The second gave him a long, tense workout before it was gaffed. Cargo scales on deck weighed the ulua in at 58 pounds, the top fish of the trip till then.

But less than an hour later the trip record was broken by Len Bobrowski of Philadelphia, a warrant officer, with a 59½-pounder. Then Charlie Schlinke topped them all with a 63-pounder. All those fish are worth bragging about.

As we had noticed before when the ulua fishing was fast, many sharks



Ensign L. J. Bergeron landed this 12½-foot tiger shark from Tern Island beach

eventually appeared and ulua action fell off. The sharks, easy to spot in the clear water from the Buttonwood's decks, always drew plenty of spectators, and the fishermen tried for them with baits ranging from kitchen scraps to ulua tails and entrails.

The sharks were even more willing to strike than the uluas—so willing that they busted up far too much tackle.

After we'd come back on board after the Gardner landing, I had a ringside seat on the fantail as a pair of large whitetip sharks cruised past. Ensign Bob Cosby of Jacksonville, Florida, using a medium boat rod with 80-pound-test line on his reel, tossed a large chunk of meat into the sharks' path. Immediately the nearest one rolled and tore away a chunk of the meat but was not hooked. The second shark, though, nearly tore the rod out of Cosby's hands.

The whitetip is not generally con-