

1983



*Facing choppy seas, half the people of tiny Pitcairn Island – most of them*

# Pitcairn and

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THE SAGA OF *BOUNTY'S*

By ED HOWARD

Photographs by DAVID HISER

Three unmarried young ladies chosen for their loveliness are brought out by the elders to serve as judges. Kneeling modestly, they conceal with the left hand their scrutinizing glances. In order to hold their attention, the finalists resort to every facial expression and bodily movement they can muster.

After a period of observation the women rise and, advancing slowly toward the dancers, indicate their favorites with a graceful swinging of the arm. In this way the most beautiful are chosen. The winners reap only intangible rewards: increased pride in themselves, the admiration of other men, and the ardor of women.

The week-long Geerewol ends at sunrise after a full night of spirited dancing. As a final gesture of generosity and goodwill, the host lineage presents the roasted meat of a bull to the departing guests. Then, like the chameleon whose dried, powdered skin is worn as a ceremonial cosmetic, celebrators fade into their surroundings and disappear from view.

"Why," I asked Mowa's brother Jumou, "do the Wodaabe place such emphasis on male beauty?"

"Because it makes women want us. We are born beautiful. But we also have the power of *maagani*—the knowledge of secret potions—to enhance that beauty."

The gift of *maagani* makes the Wodaabe feared by some, sought by others. For the formulas they concoct from roots, seeds, leaves, and bark are capable, many believe, of having both magical and curative powers. Thus, leaves of the *eedi* tree (*Sclerocarya birrea*) are applied as a poultice on scorpion bites. The seeds of the *roogo* plant, or cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), are used to keep away the evil spirits that induce madness. These and many more, widely used by the Wodaabe, find a ready market as far away as Senegal and the Ivory Coast.

Since the devastating drought of the early 1970s that decimated herds on which their self-sufficiency depends, the Wodaabe have been forced to yield increasingly to the currency economy of more settled peoples. Some Wodaabe travel into the towns and cities to sell traditional *maagani* remedies. On occasional visits to local weekly markets—often only a spot on the landscape where vendors meet—they may sell a goat or

sheep to purchase such necessities as millet, salt, waterskins, sugar, tea, spices, blankets, and cloth. But only under the direst of circumstances will they part with one of their zebu cattle. And under no circumstances will they accept the more sedentary life where these items are readily available.

**L**IKE FELLOW tribesmen, Mokao wears many *maagani* powders in leather pouches around his neck. Some protect him from snakes, scorpions, sorcery, fear, evil words, and injury; others increase his charm and virility. For he still wants a wife who can bear the children that Mowa, ten years his senior, has never been able to give him.

But Mowa, who loves him dearly, has made it clear that should he bring another wife into their *suudu*, she would return to her own people as she had done some years before when an earlier husband married again. And she would take her daughter, Nebi, wed to Mokao's brother Bango with her, thus breaking up two families.

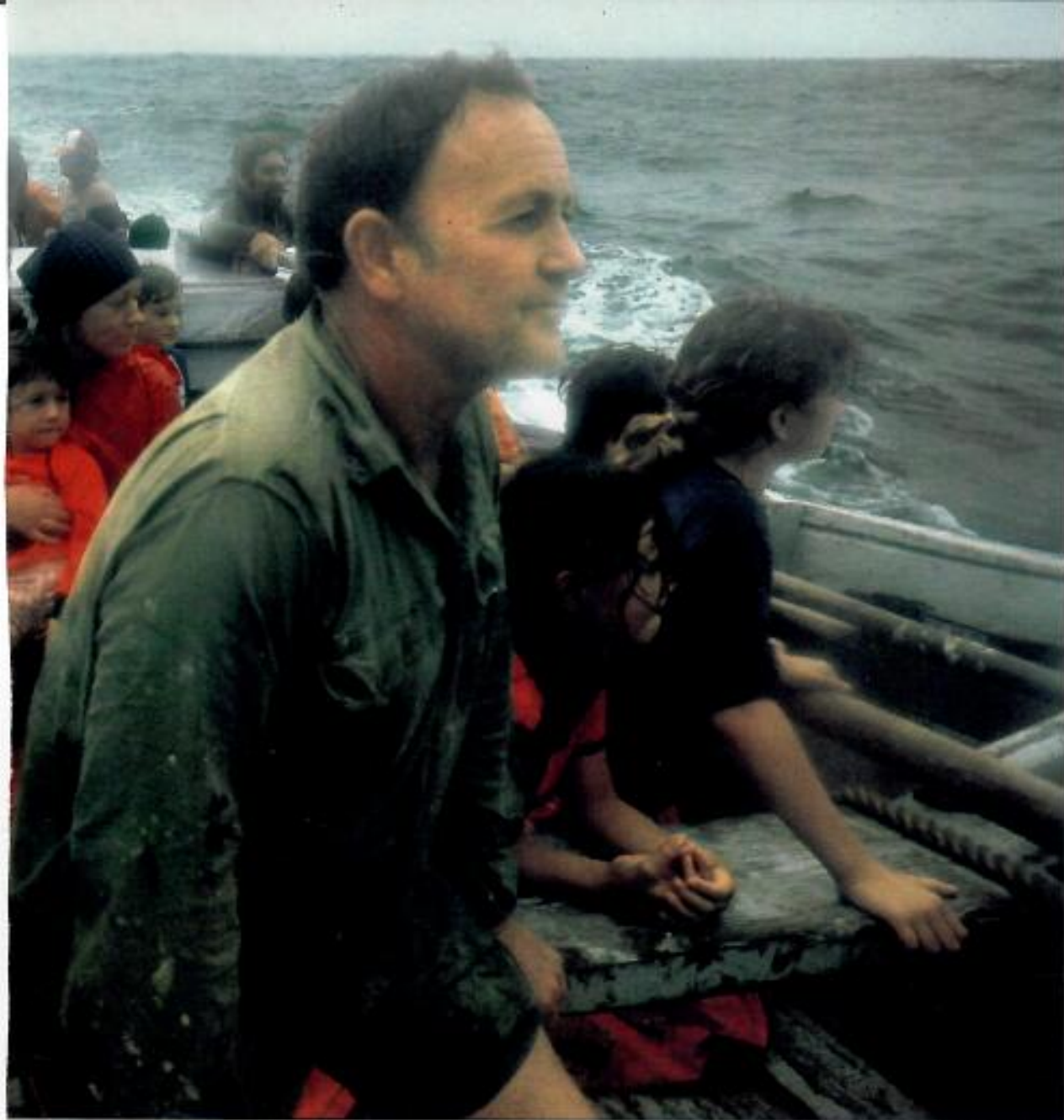
Although Mokao, when pressing his courtship with me, claimed that Mowa would never be jealous of an *anasara* wife—one with white skin—I knew Mowa felt differently, and I respected her feelings.

As important as fatherhood is to all Wodaabe men, Mokao has no desire to lose Mowa, who outshines the average wife in her devotion, loyalty, modesty, and grace.

When the time came for me to leave the Wodaabe, Mokao asked me to share with him the traditional three glasses of tea: The first "strong like life," the second "sweet like love," the third "subtle like friendship."

As we sipped, he talked. "Friends the Wodaabe make remain so forever. We mount our camels and find our friends even if much time and distance lie between us. But when the *anasaras* make friends and go away, they never return; they forget us. This I have observed. Friendship is not the same for the *anasaras* as for the Wodaabe."

But Mokao sensed our friendship would be more lasting. On the day of my departure he scooped some sand from one of my footprints to wear—along with 14 other *maagani*—as a talisman. "In this way I know you will return. For you are leaving your footprints on my heart." □



*descendants of Bounty mutineers – return in a single boat from an outing.*

MELINDA BERGE

# Norfolk

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CHILDREN

and MELINDA BERGE

# Pitcairn Island

Nearly two centuries after young Fletcher Christian seized H.M.S. *Bounty* from its hard-driving captain, Lt. William Bligh, the colony founded by nine mutineers and 19 Polynesians still survives on this remote Pacific island. A Bible from *Bounty* today rests in the Seventh-day Adventist church, while a carved model of the ship sits in the workshop of Steve Christian, one of many residents who carry on the famous name.



BOTH BY DAVID HISSER



"POINT OF ORDER, Mr. President!" The eight other members of one of the smallest parliaments in the Commonwealth swivel their heads toward the man who has objected. His voice is angry, his weathered face defiant. The hand he has raised for attention is callused from years of hard farming and fishing. The little finger is missing, torn off in an accident years ago.

His name is Greg Quintal. He is a descendant of both Matthew Quintal and Fletcher Christian, two of the most famous mutineers in history. A fellow member of parliament has just criticized the seizure of His Majesty's Ship *Bounty* nearly two centuries ago.

"He's accusing us of stealing! We did not steal the *Bounty*!"

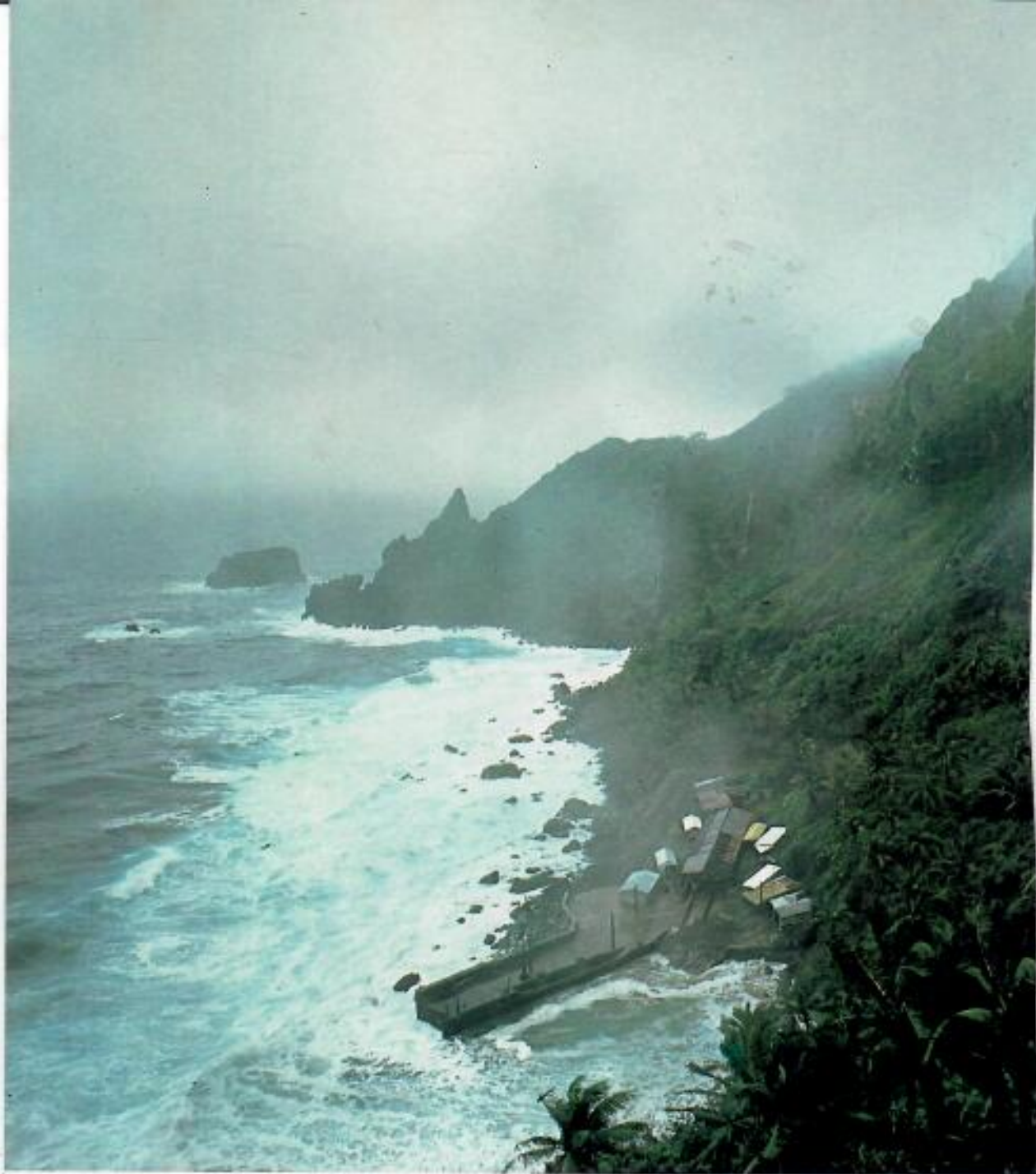
He waits for the effect of his words, and then suddenly the crinkles on his face shift into a gleeful grin.

"We just took-et," he says with delight.

And the members, clerks, and gallery spectators in the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly break up in laughter.

But they are dead serious about the *Bounty*. Five of the nine assembly members are descendants of the British sailors who "just took" the ship from Lt. William Bligh in 1789. They are Pitcairners, a small, distinct stock of people in the South Pacific with a colorful and even illustrious history, whose future is under threat.

In the vastness of the Pacific a sprinkling of islands forms the Polynesian triangle, some 15 million square miles in area. Hawaii is at the apex, Easter Island down at the lower right-hand vertex, New Zealand at

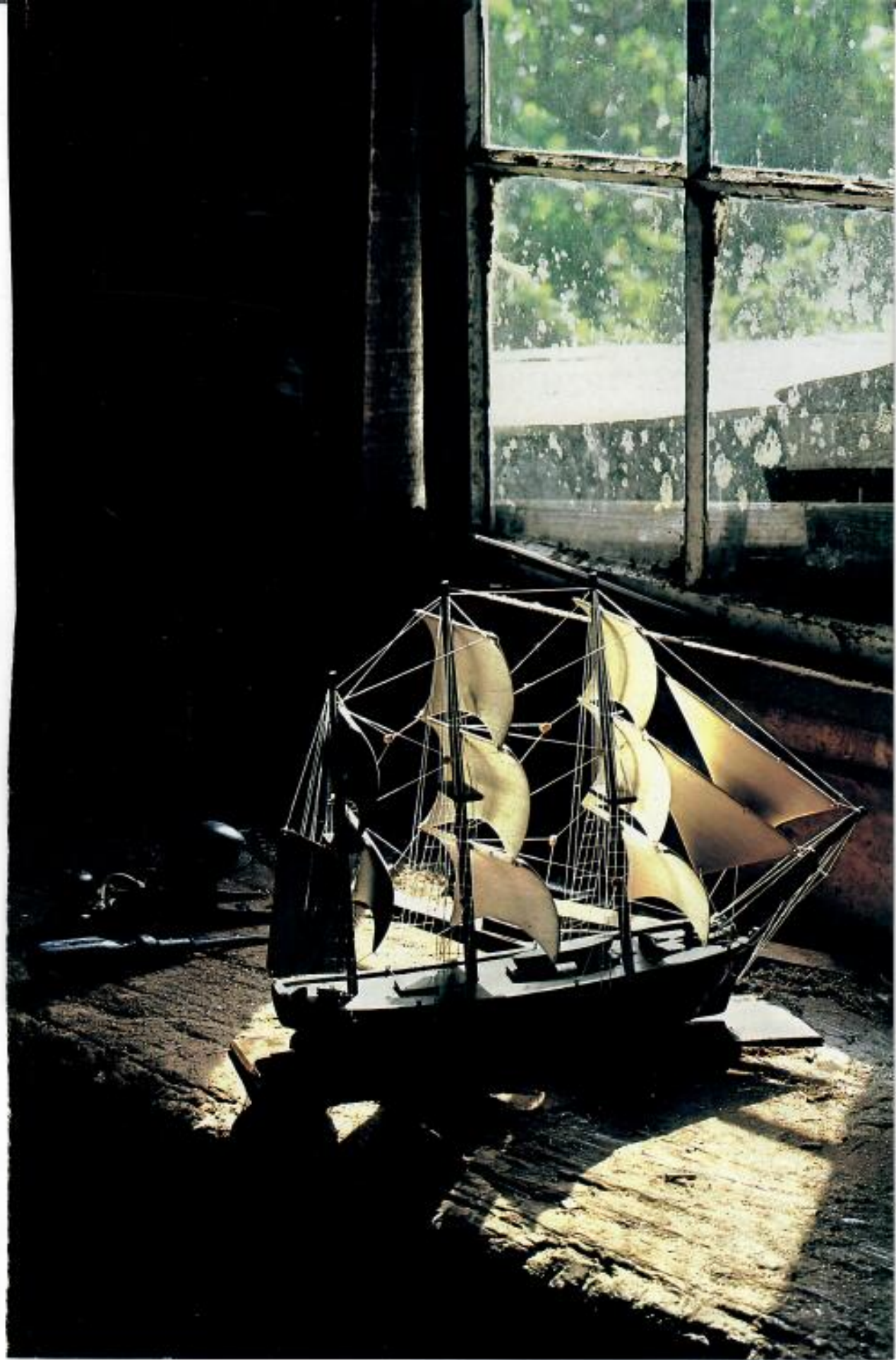


the lower left. The Pitcairners today inhabit two widely separated islands near the eastern and western tips of the triangle.

By far their most populous home is Norfolk Island, far to the west: a three-by-five-mile green dot in the Pacific blue. Thirty-seven hundred miles east, flung out off the end of French Polynesia's Tuamotu Archipelago, lies Pitcairn itself. It is a

craggy, forbidding place, a fairy-tale refuge for 18th-century mutineers and the entrancing Tahitian women they brought with them. If Norfolk Island is remote, Pitcairn is almost lost from the world.

Queen Victoria gave the Pitcairners Norfolk Island as a new and slightly more spacious home back in 1856. They had seemed likely to overpopulate tiny Pitcairn, and



over the side into one of the Pitcairn long-boats, which the islanders had motored to us from Bounty Bay at first light.

"We didn't think you guys'd really get here," said Steve Christian, the boat's smiling young coxswain. "When council got your letter, everybody just laughed—'no way those guys gone get here that quick!'"

You have to apply for permission to visit Pitcairn Island through the British consular office in Auckland, New Zealand. "A licence to land and reside in any of the Islands may be granted by the Governor," the official form says. "It is usual to consult with the Pitcairn Island Council before issuing a licence. On the rare occasions when a licence is issued it is normally for a period not exceeding six months. . . ."

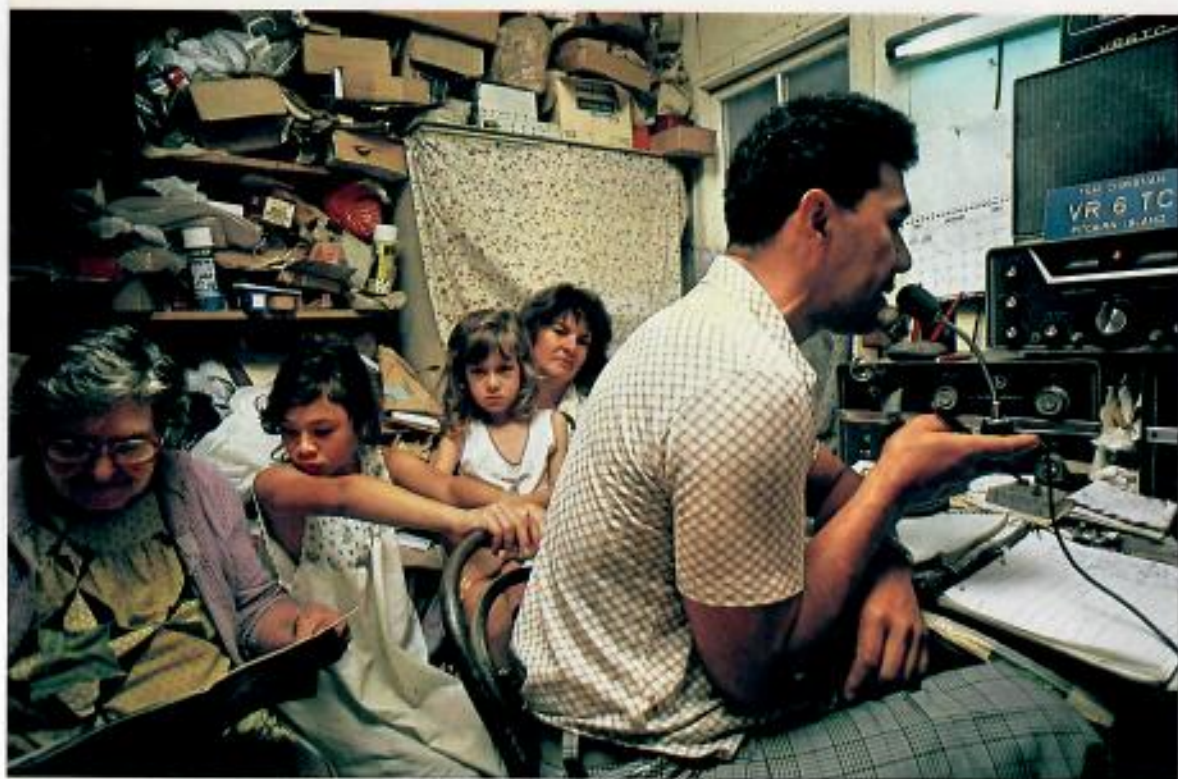
My application, with the required medical certificate and letters of reference, had been lodged only four months before our planned arrival time. It is almost unheard of for anyone to get to Pitcairn on such short

notice. "Get here in four months?" Steve said. "Crazy!"

The longboat poised outside the surf off Bounty Bay, waiting to power in on the back of the right wave. The moment came, the diesel engine roared, and in we charged, wallowing down to a gentle halt alongside a concrete jetty built by Royal Navy engineers in the mid-1970s.

A well-worn bulldozer was part of the engineers' equipment. Until then, six or seven generations of Pitcairners had struggled with the Hill of Difficulty—a steep, rough footpath from the landing place up the cliff face to the shelf of land where their homes are, 300 feet above. I had braced myself for the hard climb with our gear, but found that the legendary ordeal was just that—only a legend now. The bulldozer had long since cut a wide dirt road at a quite reasonable slant across the cliff and up to The Edge at Adamstown.

We didn't even have to walk it. We and



*Making contact with the rest of the world, Tom Christian broadcasts on an amateur radio as his mother-in-law, Millie, left, daughters Raelene and Darlene, and wife, Betty, listen in. Tom also runs Pitcairn's telegraph station, which sends cables through Fiji and communicates with ships that pass near the island.*



To hide from punishment, the mutineers in 1790 burned their ship in Bounty Bay (left), where a small rocky cove still serves as the island's harbor. Their fate was unknown until 1808, when an American vessel discovered their would-be paradise. By then, every man but one, John Adams, had perished by violence or disease, leaving a settlement of women and children. The remains of the *Bounty* were found in 1957 by NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC writer Luis Marden. One of her anchors sits in the public square (below), to the amusement of two boys.



BOTH BY MELINDA BENSE

Norfolk, with a similar latitude and climate, had just become surplus to the empire's needs. All 193 Pitcairners packed their belongings and sailed five weeks to get there, taking over a recently abandoned penal colony that had become a black mark on Britain's reputation. After several years six families moved back to Pitcairn. This splinter group kept Pitcairn alive.

*Pitcairn and Norfolk*

I JOURNEYED TO PITCAIRN as part of a Film Australia documentary crew, sailing the last leg of *Bounty's* final voyage on *Kebir*, a 56-foot ketch we had chartered out of Tahiti.

Pitcairn loomed up like a tattered gray ruin of a fortress. There is no safe harbor, even for a yacht like *Kebir*, so we handed bags and cases of equipment and provisions





our baggage were loaded into the bucket of a big International Harvester tractor and chauffeured in style up the hill.

Bulldozed roads have replaced many of the paths that the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC's Luis Marden followed when he visited Pitcairn in 1957. \* Motorbikes, sometimes towing a two-wheeled box trailer full of kids and vegetables, are commonly used for any journey longer than a five-minute walk. There is a dusk-to-11:00 p.m. electricity service, and even a telephone system.

The phone system is an old wartime one, a party line, donated by New Zealand. Each phone is cranked by hand, in a Morse code series of jerks, to call anyone on the island. Turning the crank causes all the phones to ring: dah-dit-dah-dit-dah for Ben and Irma Christian, dit-dit-dit for the school building, dah-dit-dit-dah for Len and Thelma Brown, and so on.

The New Zealand instructions said no

\*See the December 1957 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.

more than 12 phones could be hooked into one network, so the Pitcairners strung up two networks. Government and island officeholders were put together on one network and everybody else on the other. This quickly became known as the "bosses and dogs" system.

Then Steve Christian said he thought the New Zealand installation instructions were full of baloney, and he rewired everyone into a single network. It works fine. And I found there was a surprise bonus in having personal Morse "phone numbers": One day at Tom Christian's house the phone rang with a dah-dit-dit-dit. I was puzzled when Brian Young, without a word, walked to the phone and began talking. It had been Brian's "number" ringing, not Tom's.

When a few of the families rejected Norfolk and resettled Pitcairn about 1860, they numbered only 43 people. In a few generations, by the 1930s, they had multiplied to 200. Then their number began dwindling.



BOTH BY DAVID HIGER

*Small piece of the empire, Pitcairn remains the last British colony in the South Pacific. Administered through a commissioner in Wellington, New Zealand, more than 3,000 miles away, 1.75-square-mile Pitcairn and three uninhabited islands—Henderson, Ducie, and Oeno—are governed by an island council.*

The greatest decline came in the 1960s, as world shipping patterns changed. Transoceanic jets ended the era of regular passenger ships, and cargo ships rapidly became containerized, computer-managed vessels with little time for out-of-the-way islands. The Pitcairners saw the handwriting on the wall. The steady flow of ships passing Pitcairn, which had given them a market for their carvings and crafts, delivered the supplies they needed from the world, and provided transportation when they needed medical care or education, was doomed.

In the first three years of the decade 40 percent of the people packed their possessions, closed their houses, and moved away. By 1963 the Pitcairner population had fallen to 86. As 1983 began, it was down to 45—almost the same number that had returned from Norfolk some 120 years earlier.

If only a few more leave Pitcairn, it may not be possible to man the longboats and make contact with the few passing ships.

Andrew Young, a patriarch of the island, says, "I think Pitcairn is on her last leg. The manpower now is getting down so low—what are they going to do about it? They may come right to the point they can't manage. What they'll do—whether they'll send people here or move the people—I don't know."

If anything can hold a place together, I thought, people like Andrew Young can. He's a fifth-generation descendant of Edward Young, the *Bounty* midshipman who probably persuaded Fletcher Christian to lead the mutiny. He's soft-spoken, wise, amused by mankind, and for a man well into his 80s, strong as a horse. He can't take his place in the longboats any more, but he has a steely pride in fending for himself. When a neighbor hinted that he was getting old and frail, Andrew stalked angrily down to Bounty Bay, taking the pastor along with him as an indisputably honest timekeeper, and powerfully paddled his one-man boat completely around Pitcairn's circumference in just over an hour. Old and frail? Hah!

**T**HE CENTER of Adamstown is a concrete-paved area called The Square. In U-shape around three sides of it are one-story, veranda-shaded buildings. A Seventh-day Adventist church. A dispensary where the pastor's

wife, always a nurse, provides the best medical care the island can give, and where mechanic Steve Christian delicately wields an old-fashioned dentist's drill when teeth need repair. The library. The post office, where you mail letters through a slot knowing they will lie there until the next ship calls at the island, perhaps weeks or months later. The courthouse—more often used as Pitcairn's public hall. The Island Secretary's office, a paper-crammed cubicle that is the seat of local government.

In front of the courthouse stands one of *Bounty's* anchors, brought up from the ocean floor just off the island by Irving Johnson of the yacht *Yankee* in 1957. For a time the islanders kept it doused with fish oil to prevent its rusting away. They say the aromatic effect on The Square could only be described as stunning. Nowadays the protective coating is plain black enamel.

The buildings are painted and orderly. They give the neat impression of a small colonial outpost. But down an eight-foot bank, on the open side of the U of buildings, Adamstown's main road winds past. Walk its dusty track in either direction, and the tidy, colonial impression of The Square ends abruptly: Pitcairn is dying.

When the population declines steadily, houses have no value except to their occupants. When a family moves away, they close the door and leave the house to deteriorate. There is no new family to buy and move in. Termites have their way with untreated wood. The house gradually collapses.

The Pitcairners are people with a proud heritage. The first generations after the mutineers and their women were taller, stronger, handsomer than their parents. Their constitution, written in 1838, was probably the first in the English-speaking world (perhaps the first in all history) to give women the vote equally with men. The Pitcairners were among the first to write compulsory education into the lawbook.

They took the plain tenets of Christianity from the Bible that Fletcher Christian brought ashore from the *Bounty* and put them into daily practice: Honor thy father and thy mother. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Speak gently and with dignity. They became admirable people, a blend of good-natured Tahitian easiness

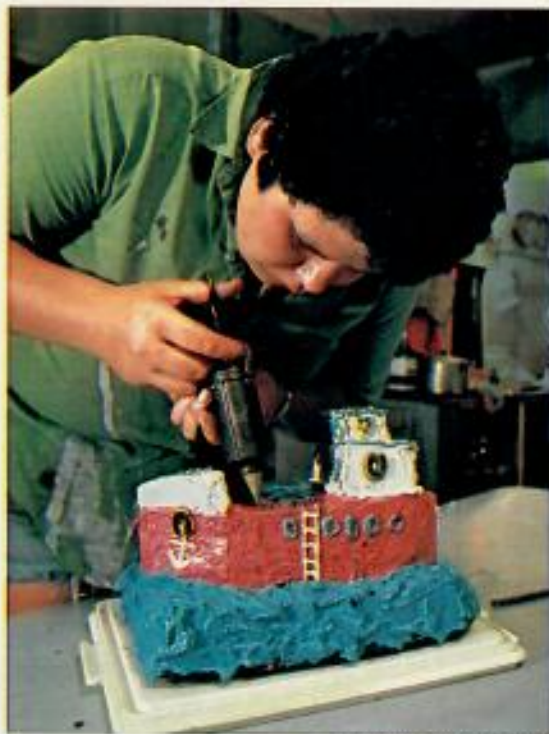


DAVID HISSER (ABOVE AND LEFT)

**Barefoot farmers** John Christian, 87, and his wife, Bernice, 83 (above), carry sweet-potato cuttings for planting in their garden. On the main road in Adamstown, Pitcairn's sole settlement, avocados are distributed at a share-out (left), a method once used by British seamen. As one person points to a pile, another, back turned, names the family to receive it. A map (right) drawn by 11-year-old Dean Warren-Christian depicts such places as Lookout Point and Goat's Land, where no one ventures but the island's feral goats.



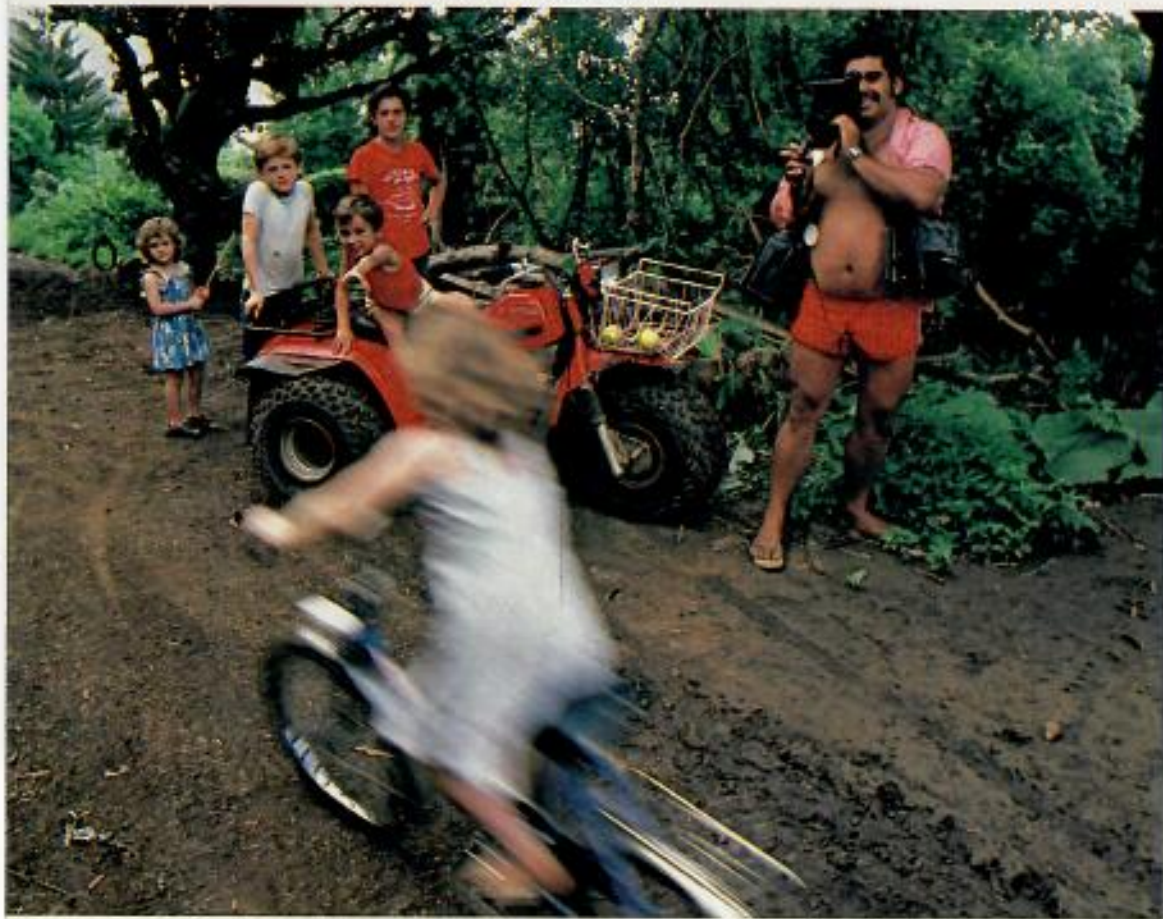
MELINDA BERSC



DAVID HIRSH (ABOVE AND RIGHT)

**Best excuse for a party,** a birthday brings together nearly everyone on the island. This dinner at Pastor Thurman Petty's house (right) is a triple celebration: for six-year-old Darralyn Warren, 13-year-old Ron Christian, and the pastor himself. Each family brings a generous portion of such Pitcairn dishes as pilhi (breadlike pudding), pota (cooked greens), and humpus bumpus (fried banana burgers). These names hint at the unique flavor of the island's home-grown language, a jaunty concoction of 18th-century English, Tahitian, and nautical lingo. Master cake maker Meralda Warren (left) puts the final touches on a treat for another party, a sweet creation shaped like one of the freighters so important to the island's life.

One recent ship delivered a new video camera to an eager Brian Young (below), who captures Darralyn on her bike. Travel on island paths was revolutionized by all-terrain vehicles like the one beside Brian, along with dune buggies, tractors, and several dozen motorcycles.



MELINDA BERGE

**Hopes soaring like their homemade kites, Shawn, Trent, and Randy Christian sail plastic bags at The Edge, overlooking Bounty Bay. Children stay in the island school till 15, after which some continue studies in New Zealand.**

getting firewood, mending something, carving curios, weaving baskets and hats, washing, ironing, sweeping, repairing a motorbike, weeding the little cemetery, planting, preserving, replacing a termite-riddled plank, painting the boats, fishing, baking bread, tidying up the kids, patching a roof—every day but their Saturday Sabbath an endless strand of chores, and more waiting tomorrow. I have awakened at 5:30 in the morning and found Dobrey Christian, in whose home I was privileged to stay, already well into her morning basket weaving.

But once in a while—once a year? twice a year?—some one of the men suddenly takes it into his head to make a kite for one of his children. Then kite fever sweeps through the families, and within a few days six or ten kites are flying in the tropic wind high over the island, left there to fly and buzz as long as they will.

Brian Young has made his from five slender sticks of wood, plastic wrapping saved from some past shipment of supplies, fishing line, and plastic tape. It is six-sided, about five feet from top to bottom, and carries a double plastic tail 20 or 30 feet long. On a taut line at the top of the kite he has pasted a strip of tissue paper cut from a dress pattern. That's what makes the buzzing noise—or a roaring, humming, or singing, depending on how any specific bit of tissue wants to sound.

Why put a voice on a kite? Steve Christian gives a teasing Pitcairn explanation: "If you had a big kite up there, and it couldn't say anything, that'd be some dumb kite, wouldn't it?"

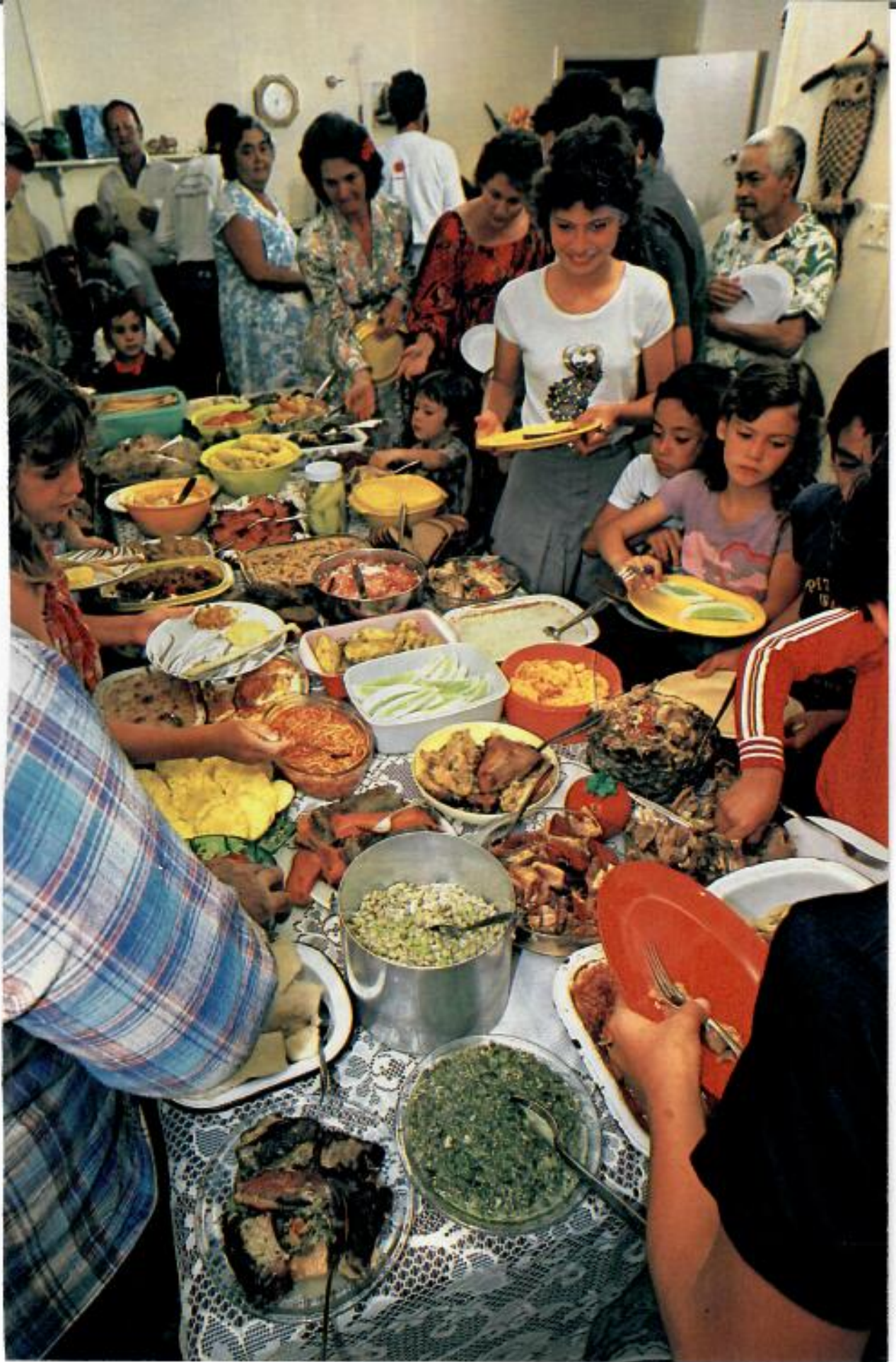
I see a full-size Norwegian flag hundreds of feet above Adamstown, streaming in the endless Pacific sky. It takes me a few seconds to puzzle out that it is flying halfway up Brian's kite string. He has made the kite for his son, Timmy. The flag belongs to his wife, Kari, one of the few outsiders who have become part of the Pitcairn community.

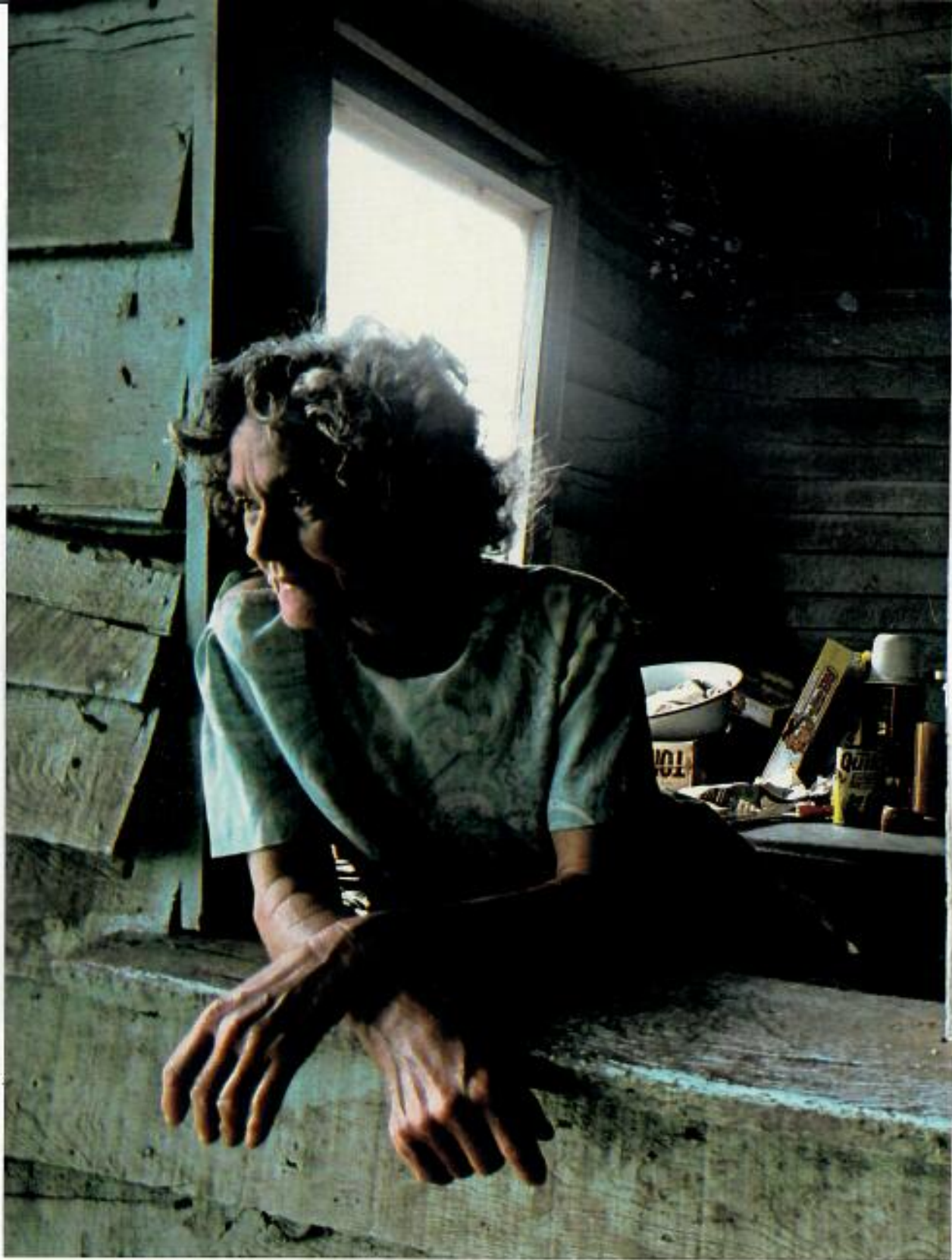


As a girl in Norway, Kari studied to be a ship's radio operator and went to sea. She got to Pitcairn by sheer persistence.

"I read *Mutiny on the Bounty* when I was 12 or 13 years old," she told me. "The story fascinated me. It was so far away from Norway and from the school drag. We always identified William Bligh with our teacher at school. All the girls in my class had a great time playing 'mutiny on the *Bounty*.' We all wanted to be Fletcher Christian."

She determined to see Pitcairn and began





*Taking a break from an endless string of chores, Charlotte and Charles Christian relax in their kitchen. Pitcairn houses are built with dunnage lumber*





DAVID HISSER

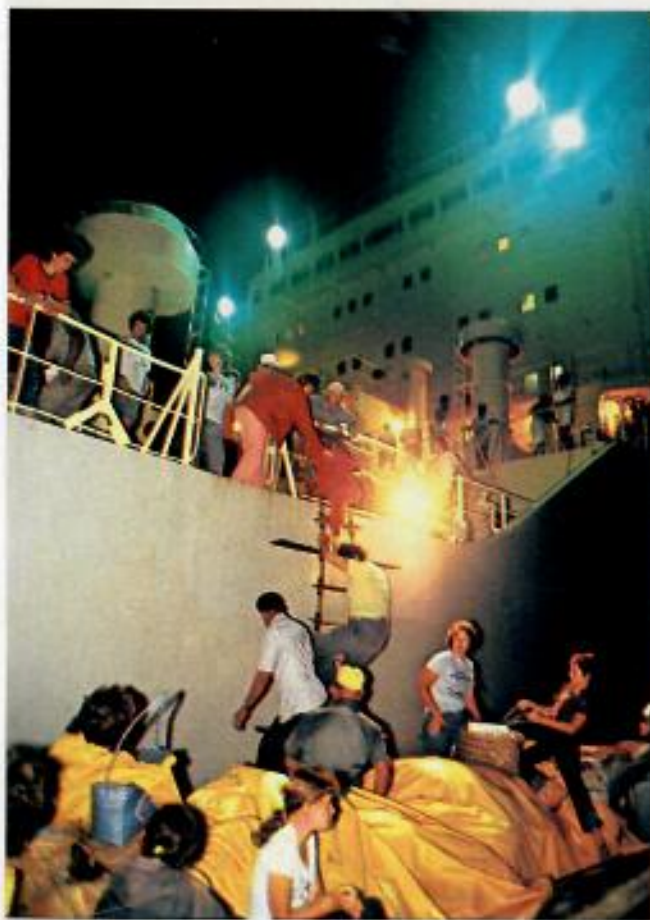
applying for permission. It took three years to get it. "The Island Council granted me a permission right away," she said, "but the governor of Pitcairn wouldn't. He was in Fiji in those days. He thought I was a romantic Eskimo and was doubtful about my reasons for coming here. I just stated that I had fallen in love with Clark Gable when I was 12 years old, because he was Fletcher Christian in the first *Bounty* film. He didn't like that."

Kari was eloquent about the Pitcairners.

"As a group of people they are quite marvelous, something special," she told me. "They have developed a special kind of communication—being together and laughing and joking and helping each other—that has been necessary for them to be able to survive through the centuries. They have still kept it, even in our days, though modern conveniences have come in, and though they are getting more from the outside world, more information and things that destroy the Pitcairn spirit bit by bit."

She had never been a religious person, but the islanders changed her. "God seems to be with them, everywhere," she explained. "I've heard them talk to God, and about God, as if He were next to them in their gardens, or in the boats, or sitting beside them on the sofa."

I had long talks with Oliver Stimpson, the pastor sent by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in America for a two-year stint on the island. Seventh-day Adventism has been Pitcairn's only established religion



*Day or night, when a ship like the Essi Gina stops (above), Pitcairners head out in longboats to pick up or send packages and barter with the crew. Twice a year or so authorities in Auckland send basic supplies such as fuel oil and heavy equipment. For anything else, islanders rely on freighters that stop less and less often. Lookouts in a Norfolk Island pine (right) search for a ship due soon.*

since a missionary effort converted the whole community back in 1887. Church services and activities are one of the cornerstones of life for most of the islanders, and the pastor and his wife—providing philosophical and spiritual continuity as well as medical care—are interwoven with the Pitcairners every day of the year. Oliver was gentle, rather than evangelical, in his ministry to the islanders.

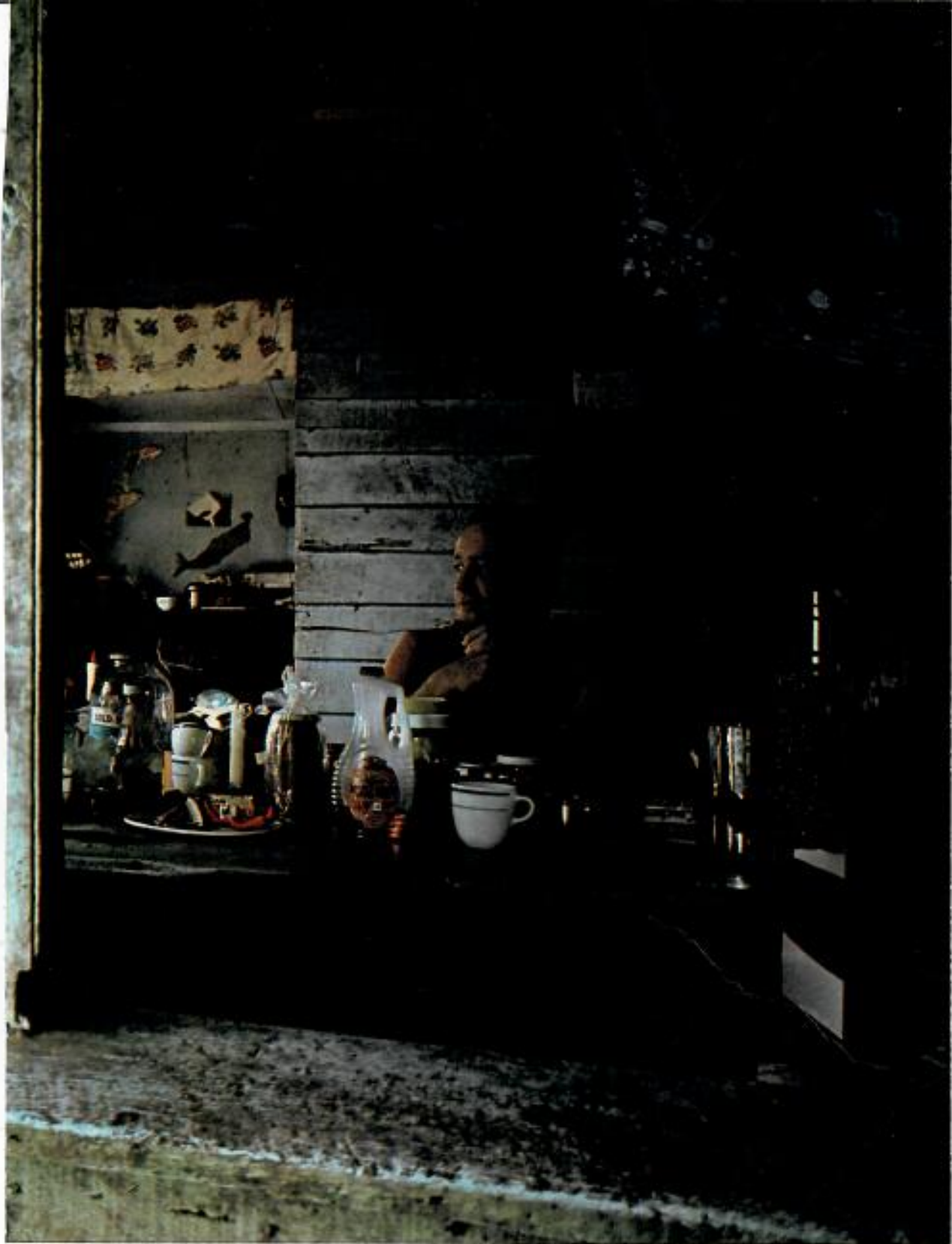
**W**ILL the Pitcairners survive as a people? Their original island, Pitcairn, could no longer sustain a community were it to lose even two or three of its able-bodied younger men.

There has been talk of building a short airstrip on a flatland at Aute Valley, at the top of the island. In theory it would allow some departed Pitcairners to return, knowing that they could count on transport back off the island when it was necessary. It could make possible a miniature tourist industry—a dozen or so visitors at a time, living with island families.

But hard financial facts make the idea most unlikely. Governments don't build million-dollar airfields and establish new subsidized airlines on islands with populations of only a few dozen people. A regular shipping service could help revitalize the island, but the problem of numbers is the same. It's a 2,300-nautical-mile round trip from the nearest commercial port, Papeete on the island of Tahiti.

Richard Goodman, a tour operator in Oakland, California, is trying out a Voyage to Pitcairn Island package, taking groups of 15 travelers from Los Angeles to Tahiti by air and then sailing to Pitcairn aboard a 112-foot cargo schooner that could carry a useful load of supplies for the people of the island. The tourists pay \$5,000 for the journey, including two weeks of living on Pitcairn. If the venture is sustainable, it could mean some regular service, and some new income, for the Pitcairners.

If Pitcairn can't be kept going, the people will have to abandon it once again. Their most practical alternative home would probably be New Zealand, where so many of their relatives have moved. Or, perhaps, the island their forebears tried and rejected once before: Norfolk.



MELINDA BERGE

*thrown overboard by passing ships, acquiring a roomy but ramshackle appearance. Runoff from metal roofs provides all drinking water.*

*Pitcairn and Norfolk*

527

# Norfolk Island

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*Second home to descendants of the Bounty mutineers, Norfolk Island shares their legacy. The entire population of Pitcairn was moved here in 1856 when that island became overcrowded. A few families returned, but most stayed on to settle this 13-square-mile Australian territory. Today an airstrip links Norfolk to faster paced Australian society, but life remains slow enough for cattle to turn up in the main shopping area.*



BOTH BY DAVID HISEN

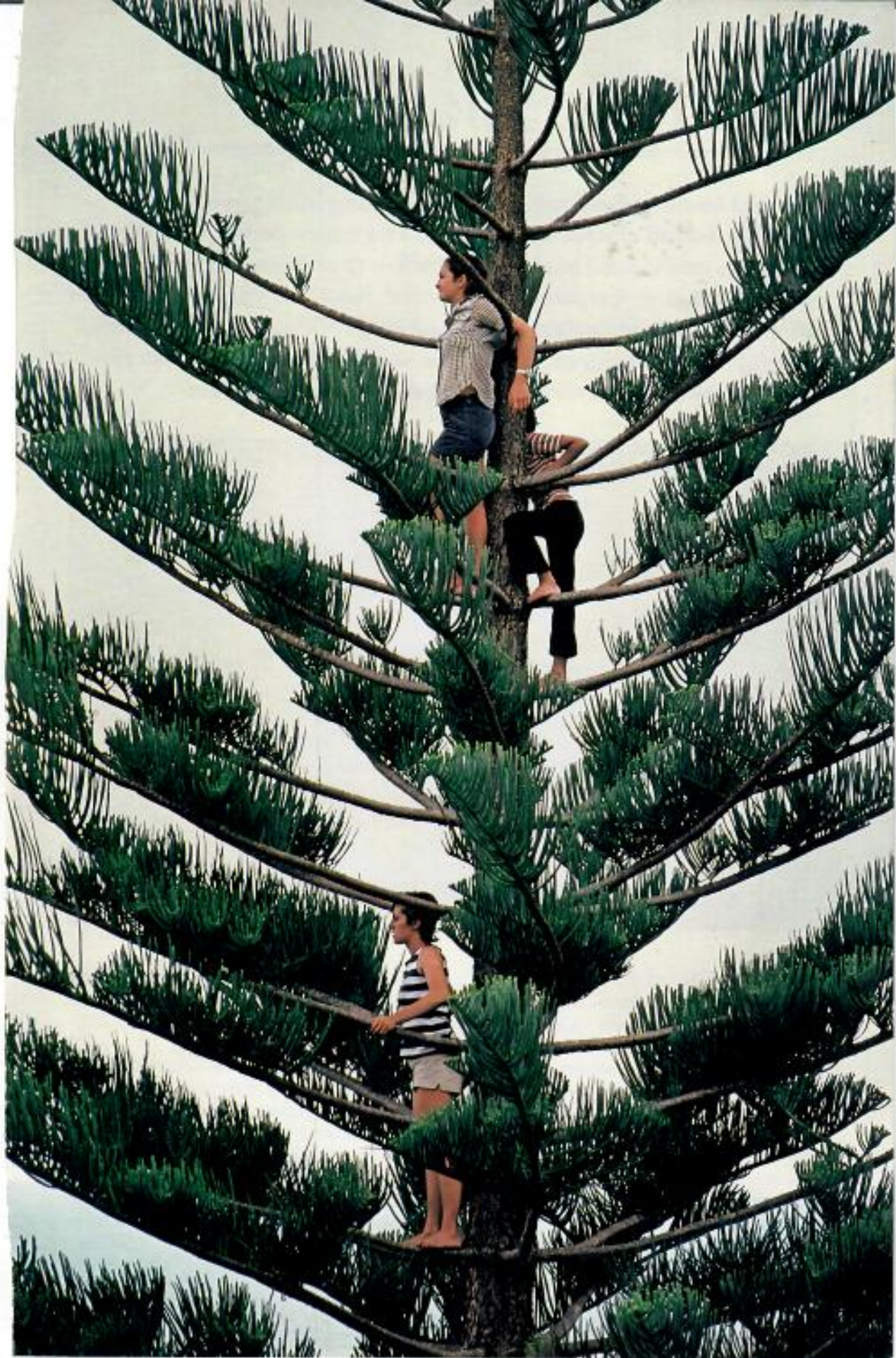
**S**INCE ARRIVING on Norfolk in 1856, the Pitcairners have grown in number and have admitted a trickle of new settlers to share their fertile, rolling hills and valleys, their benign climate, and their coral-reefed beaches.

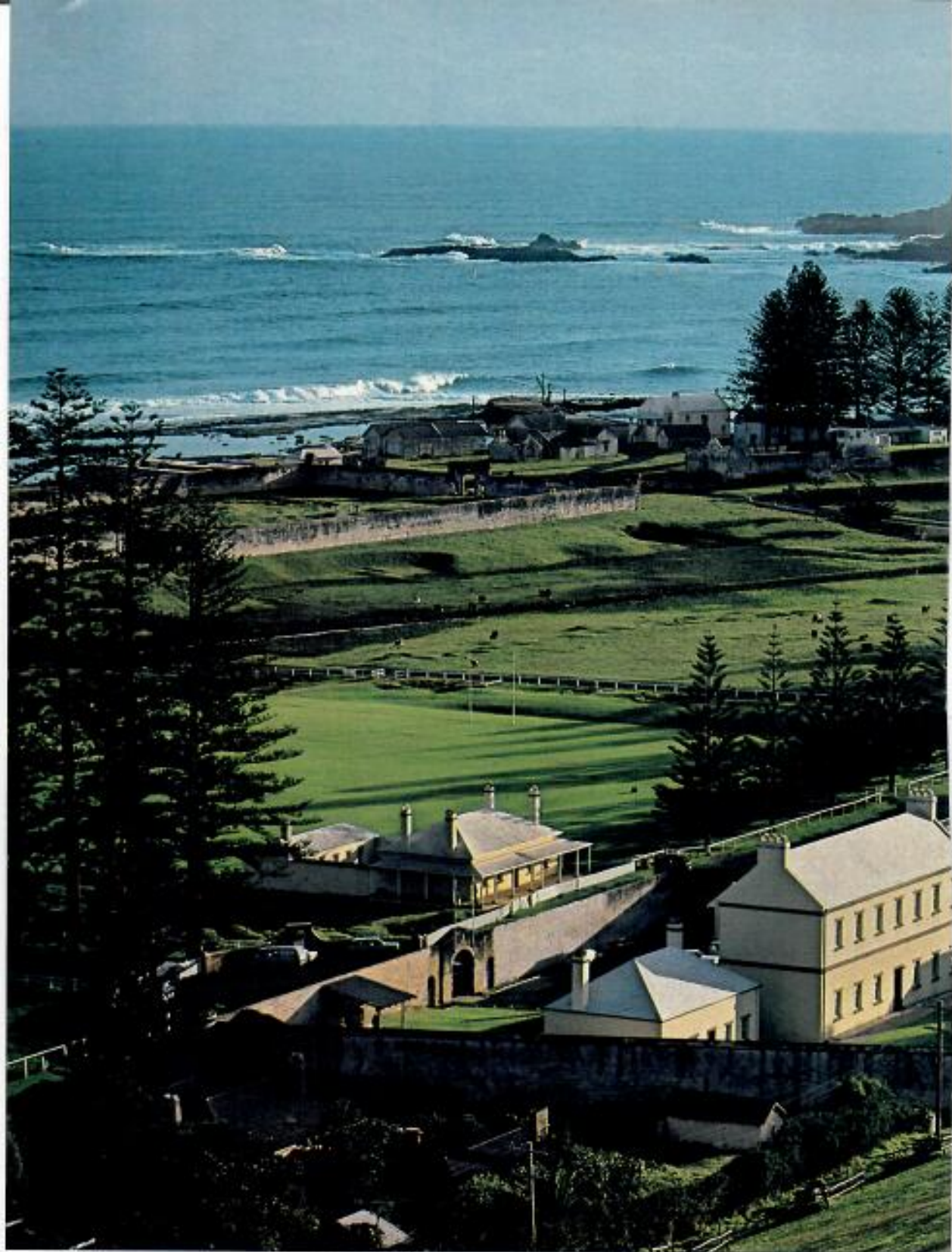
Those first Pitcairners on Norfolk landed less than 100 years after their family tree had taken root following the mutiny on the *Bounty*. A hundred-foot, three-masted merchantman, *Bounty* had been sent from England by King George III in 1787 to barter for breadfruit trees in Tahiti and take them

for replanting in the West Indies. They were intended to become a permanent, almost cost-free source of food for slaves in the British colonies there.

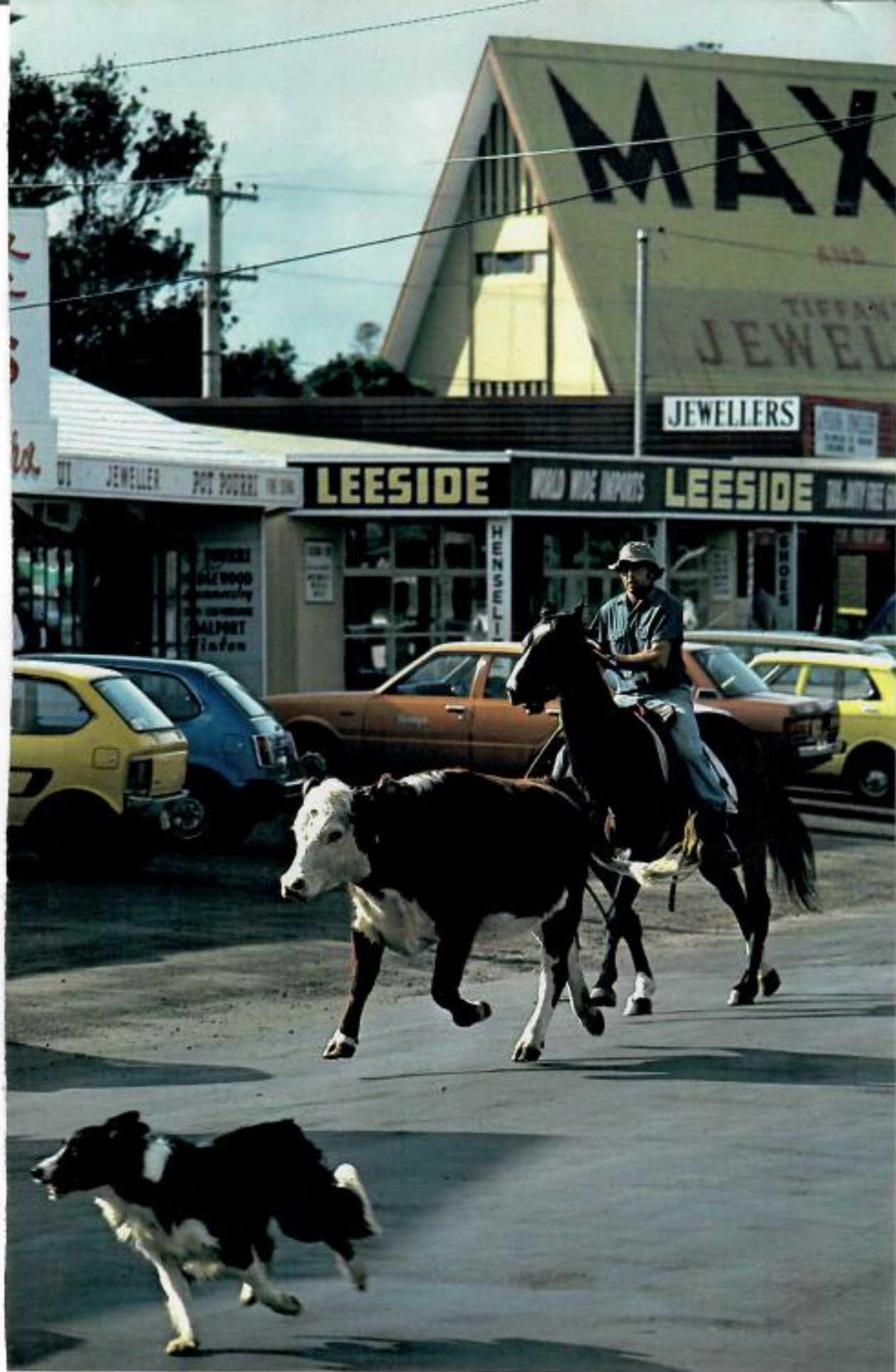
The mutiny on the *Bounty* is the most famous of all mutinies at sea, and it was probably the most gentle—although three of the mutineers were eventually hanged from the yardarm of a Royal Navy ship in Portsmouth Harbour.

Bligh wasn't a monster, though he was an authoritarian captain with a quick temper and a woundingly sharp tongue. As *Bounty*





*Stately as a colonial plantation, these buildings along Quality Row in Kingston served as military barracks in Norfolk's dreaded penal colony until 1856, when the*



left Tahiti in April 1789 with its cargo of breadfruit plants, he shrieked at his crew—"damned thieving rascals!"—and vowed to drive them mercilessly on the hard voyage ahead. On the 27th of April, three weeks out, he hounded and humiliated his 24-year-old acting lieutenant, Fletcher Christian, calling him a scoundrel and a liar.

Other crew members whispered to Christian that if he would take the lead in a mutiny, most would follow him. He agreed.

No drop of blood was spilled. There were cries of revenge and anger, threats and gestures, but the worst bodily harm was that Bligh's wrists were pinched by a rope.

They put Bligh and 18 loyal crewmen into a boat, with enough equipment and provisions to give them a chance—including Fletcher Christian's own sextant, a good one. Bligh thereupon made one of the historic open-boat voyages of all time, sailing 3,600 nautical miles through an unpredictable Pacific to Kupang, on the island of Timor, in what is now Indonesia.

Under Bligh's extraordinary skill and willpower the boat, equipment, and provisions saw them through, with 11 days' rations remaining when they landed.

Why the mutiny? Certainly the Tahitian women, climate, and life-style were dizzyingly attractive. But something else was probably at work too, something in the air, something in the times.

In 1789, a spirit of rebellion against the old order was alight in many eyes. Within weeks of the *Bounty* mutiny Americans were inaugurating George Washington as their first President, and the French were storming the Bastille and singing "The day of glory has arrived." In a way the same day had dawned for Christian and his mates off the island of Tofua in the South Pacific.

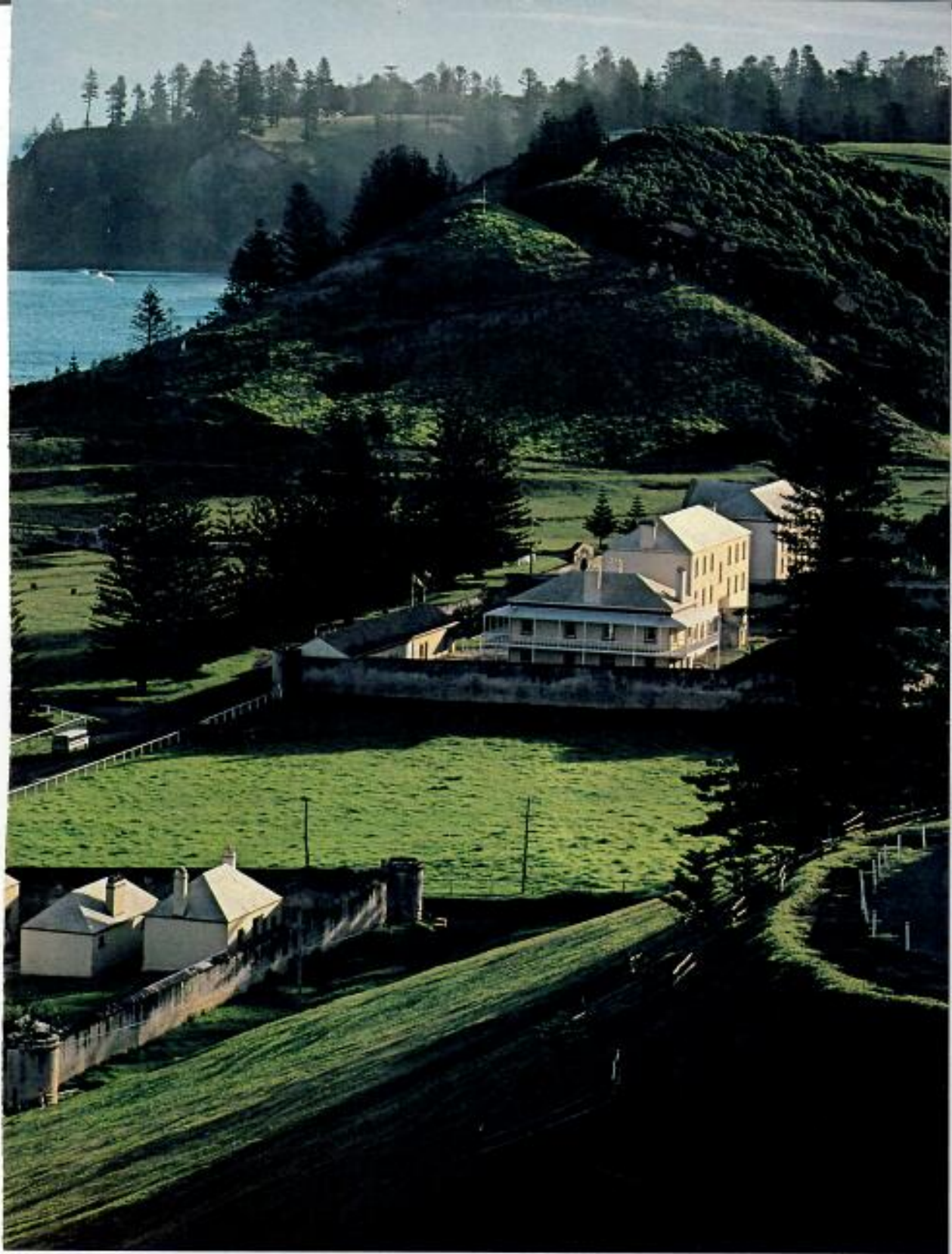
The mutineers jettisoned the breadfruit cuttings and returned to Tahiti. Christian and eight others, together with a handful of Polynesians, finally sailed on to an uninhabited, mischarted island—Pitcairn. They burned *Bounty* and stayed. Their children, half English and half Tahitian, were the first Pitcairners.

**T**ODAY THE PITCAIRNERS number 1,500 worldwide. Only 3 percent of them—45 people—still live on Pitcairn Island. About 160 reside in New Zealand, most of them families who left

HELENA BERGE





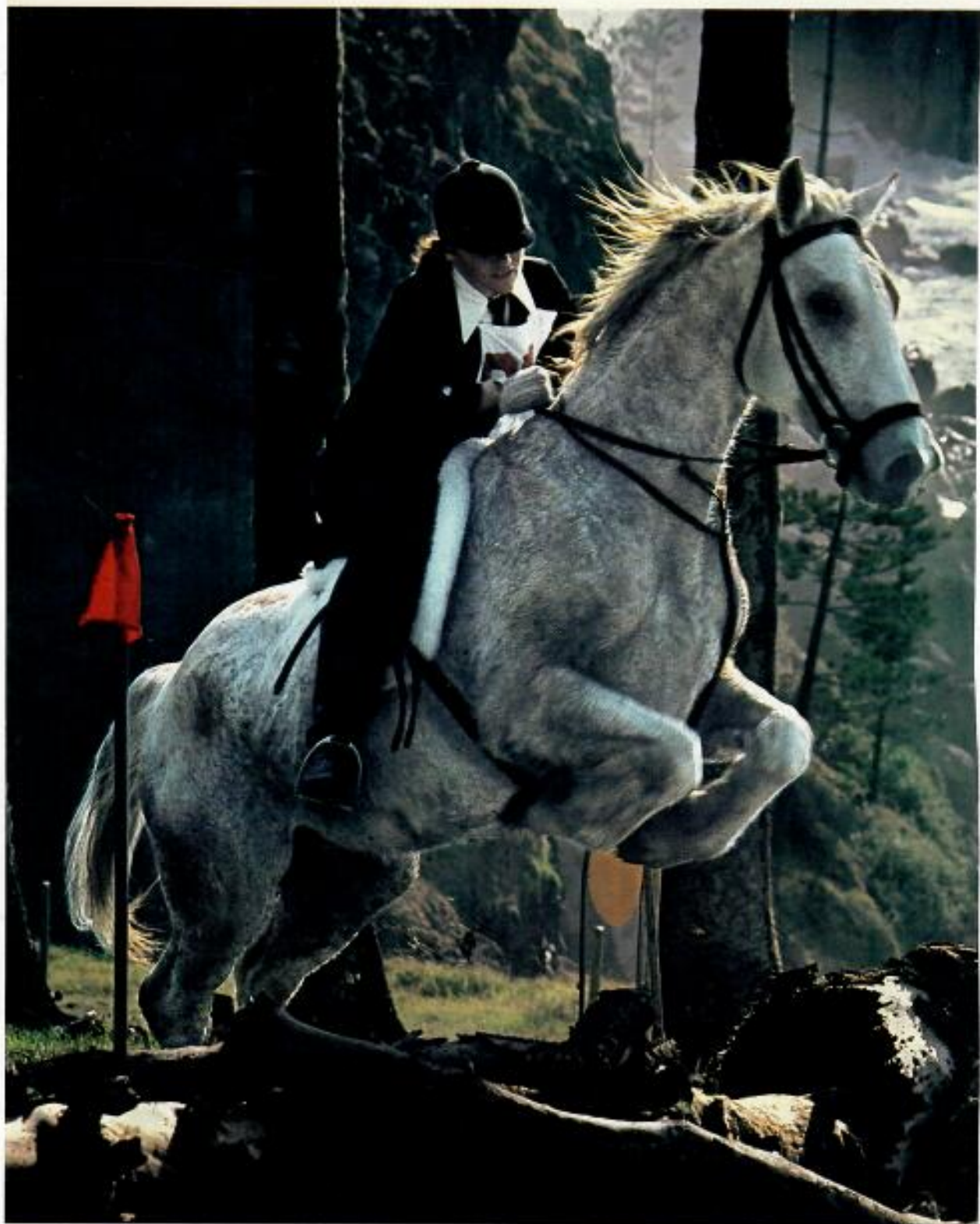


DAVID HIGER

*island was turned over to the Pitcairners. Designed for dangerous criminals, the colony was "a place of the extremest punishment, short of death."*

*Pitcairn and Norfolk*

533



*Near the edge of a rocky coastline cliff, a graceful rider guides her horse over a jump during a day of equestrian trials. Island festivals, historical tours, low-duty*

Pitcairn during the exodus of the 1960s. About 400 live in Australia, mostly people from Norfolk Island who left for better education and jobs in Sydney or Melbourne. (Many harbor a belief that they will return one day to Norfolk. Sometimes, when they die without returning, their ashes are ceremoniously sent for interment in Norfolk's small cemetery by the sea.)

Perhaps 150 or more Pitcairners live on Tahiti and other islands of French Polynesia. There are a few scattered elsewhere on islands in the Pacific and even in countries farther away.

The rest, nearly half of the Pitcairners, live today on Norfolk Island. It was almost exclusively theirs until World War II, when a small airstrip was built by the Allied forces in the Pacific. With air service, after the war, tourism began to boom in a small way. Newcomers moved in, attracted by reports of job and business opportunities in paradise. Islanders fretted about a "rush to big-city ways" when Norfolk's first—and still only—streetlight was placed at Middlegate intersection.

The airport has been upgraded to handle medium-size jets, and regular flights bring

in some 20,000 visitors a year from Sydney and Brisbane, Australia, and Auckland, New Zealand.

"Financially, people are far better off than in the early days," says Greg Quintal. "But life was more free and easy then. The islanders did not have very much, but they were much happier people. Now everyone is chasing the dollar."

Fortunately for Norfolk, most of the dollars stay on the island. Most accommodations are owned by residents, and the Legislative Assembly is trying to keep it that way rather than attract foreign investment.

Among the islands of the Pacific, Norfolk has been something of a miniature economic miracle in recent years, usually balancing its budget and having money in the bank rather than a national debt. It is governed under the authority of Australia, but receives no foreign-aid grants. The secret has been income from vacationing Australians and New Zealanders, worldwide sales of Norfolk's postage stamps, and frugal management. When the world recession of 1982 and 1983 reduced the island's revenues, necessary government spending was kept up by using some of the rainy-day money saved

*Weaving a bond from one generation to another, Beattie Bigg (left) teaches her grandsons, Matthew and Simon, how to plait palm leaves for a Pitcairn-style basket. About a third of Norfolk's 1,800 people are Pitcairn descendants. Smaller numbers of Pitcairners live in New Zealand, Australia, Tahiti, and on several other Pacific islands.*

*At an administrative office in Kingston, Dolores Davies (right) puts together first-day covers of a new stamp series portraying great shipwrecks in the island's history. Philatelists around the world collect Pitcairn and Norfolk stamps, giving both islands a major source of public income. In 1982 Norfolk stamp sales brought in 750,000 Australian dollars, or 28 percent of the island's total income.*



baked in banana leaves, succulent roast pig, the buttery sweet potatoes called kumara, tangy pastries baked full of periwinkles, which the Pitcairners call *hi-hi*.

Mavis Hitch, a woman with striking Tahitian features, is seriously concerned about the islanders' folk traditions. "I am a descendant of the *Bounty* mutineers—and the Tahitian women," she emphasizes. "Their heritage is worth saving."

At the moment she is weaving a hat from *mu-u*, a strawlike plant Pitcairners have worked for many generations. Later in the day she'll be coaching island girls to dance the hip-swinging Tahitian *tamoure*, which was doubtless a factor in the mutiny. "I don't think any Norfolk Island girl has been to Tahiti," she explains to me, "but whenever they hear the music, they get lost in it. When I'm teaching a pupil for the first time, you turn the music on and it does something to them. It's there in them."

In the late 1970s something else got turned on: television. Norfolk has no TV station yet, but nearly half the families have videotape sets. Shows recorded and mailed by friends overseas come in continually, and gradually make the rounds through island homes. There is talk of a broadcast satellite to be put up by Australia, which would be receivable on Norfolk. Can hat weaving and the *tamoure* compete with reruns of "Hawaii Five-0" and "Perry Mason" on the TV set day and night? The question remains in the Pitcairners' future.

**A** FUNERAL IS COMING to an end at the little cemetery at Kingston on Norfolk. At the seaward edge, where the white Pacific combers roll in, are the headstones of officers and convicts from the island's prison era. Then those of the settlers from Pitcairn Island, and then their children, interspersed with those of "mainlanders" who have ended their days here.

The grave has been dug by volunteer workers. The simple, cloth-covered coffin has been made without charge by the Norfolk government.

"And so another person has joined this growing little community down here at Kingston," says the Catholic priest, Father Des Scanlon.

The band of mourners sings the Pitcairn

*To remember the day in 1856 when their forebears came ashore to take possession of the island, Norfolk residents each June 8 hold a gala celebration known as Bounty Day. All dressed up in the style of the first Pitcairn settlers, Peter and Juliette Yager (right) join a march from the Kingston jetty to the restored buildings of the former penal colony. Amid the ruins of the old jail walls, groups of families get together for a quiet picnic or an elaborate feast (below) of roast suckling pig and other Polynesian and Norfolk delicacies. There may also be a rugby match, a historical speech or two by government officials, and hymn singing in the cemetery.*





HELENA BERGE

shopping, and peace and quiet help make Norfolk popular with vacationers.

*Pitcairn and Norfolk*

over the years, and the some 140 government employees—mostly Pitcairn descendants—helped by volunteering to do their work in 10 percent fewer hours, for 10 percent less pay.

The island's beauty and peace and its old-fashioned absence of taxes on either land or income have attracted several hundred families of settlers from New Zealand and Australia. Strict immigration and land subdivision control laws were enacted 15 years ago to keep Norfolk's small-farm countryside from becoming a new suburbia. But newcomers now somewhat outnumber Pitcairners on the island.

**T**HE PITCAIRNERS' own language has been a powerful force in retaining their culture and keeping Norfolk their island. Jean Mitchell, an islander whose guesthouse, Aunt Em's, is known for its Polynesian feasts, tells her grandchildren they can't be real Norfolk Islanders if they speak only English.

"When we start talking 'Norfolk,' few outsiders can understand it," she tells me. "When somebody strange comes in, we speak slowly, and a little more English goes into it so they get some idea what we're talking about. This is in our upbringing, not to make outsiders feel strangers."

She tugs her grandson Gregory by the ear. "You know what 'eeyulla' means? Well, it's somebody that thinks he's grown up when he's not." Gregory whoops with pleasure and races out of Aunt Em's kitchen. Jeannie almost dissolves in laughter. "He can't get home fast enough to call his brother that," she beams.

The language was patched together between the *Bounty* mutineers and their Tahitian wives. It's a rollicking, seagoing, farmer's lingo. Jean Mitchell says, "It has a definite wit. A few words in Norfolk take quite a bit of explaining in English."

I have lived on Norfolk since the late 1960s, and was editor of the *Norfolk Island News* for a number of years. When islanders rip into a cross fire of their own jokes and gossip, I'm as mystified as a visitor just off the plane, but bits of it are easy. *Whattaway* is "how are you?" and *morla el do* is "tomorrow will be soon enough" and *weckle* is prepared foods: heavy, breadlike puddings

baked in banana leaves, succulent roast pig, the buttery sweet potatoes called kumara, tangy pastries baked full of periwinkles, which the Pitcairners call *hi-hi*.

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anthem, in three-part harmony. The words come from the Gospel of Matthew: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And hence the single-word motto on Norfolk Island's coat of arms, bestowed by Britain: Inasmuch.

When I journeyed to Pitcairn, I carried a letter from Norfolk's Society of Descendants of the Pitcairn Settlers. Island Secretary Ben Christian read it to a public meeting in the courthouse in Adamstown: "We would like to take this opportunity of making it known, that should at some future stage any members of your Island community feel that they would like to resettle on Norfolk, it would be our privilege to help you in any way possible."

Andrew Young had visited Norfolk and liked it. "If I *had* to move away, I would move to Norfolk," he admitted to me. "Why I say I like Norfolk is because people there make you feel at home, while in other places you go, such as New Zealand, you feel you are in a strange place. You just don't know how to move."

Leaving the Pitcairners, waving farewell as they sang "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" from their longboat, I had to force back tears. Perhaps, I thought, they can hang on, loving the place because of and in spite of its hardships and isolation. If they can't, I hope at least some of them will give Norfolk a try.

For the Pitcairners on Norfolk Island the challenge is much less pressing but is more insidious. If the ways of the outside world continue to homogenize them, they will one day be as little different from their mainland neighbors as the descendants of "the original settlers" are in almost any place. But I think their chances are good. I think they will go on speaking their pungent language, marching at Bounty Day every June 8, and singing the Pitcairn anthem for a very long time. □

*No handicap to seasoned island golfers, a herd of cattle grazes peacefully on the links. More modern in many ways than isolated Pitcairn, Norfolk still retains a bucolic tempo as it strives to preserve the Bounty legacy.* MELINDA BERKE

