

PITCAIRN NEWS

DEM TULL

Volume 7 No 4 April 2013



The "Prairial" helicopter whirring above town

Kari orn Pitcairn tull: Another hot weather month, but it is cooling down. It's been quiet, too, after the bustle of Claymore's comings and goings, but people were busy preparing for the last cruise ship of the season. The bug which started working its way through town before Christmas, still seems to keep some people coughing.

Our thanks to Melva, Mike, Daphne, Luther, Mitch, Erik, Brian and Kari for photos in this issue.

ANZAC DAY



ANZAC DAY – the traditional dawn ceremony on 25th April celebrated at the Square in honour of servicemen who lost their lives in war.

A DOG!!!! The visitors on the yacht “My Muse” brought ashore their dog, who got a lot of attention. Billie, Heather and Kerry’s dog, is the only one on the island these days, generations of dogs through the last decades left no issue, so the kids especially are “dog-starved



The “Marina”, cruise ship expected on the 26th April, announced the day before that she could not stop after all – they had an accident onboard, and must hurry on to Easter Island with the patient. The disappointment was huge on the island, most of us had already packed baskets and boxes full of carvings and other curio accumulated from months of hard work in workshops and elsewhere. Oh well, the last cruise ship of the season went straight east, and all we can do, is wait for the first ship of the next season to arrive in November.

Right – A PICTURE FROM THE PAST

The Hill of Difficulty – before the concrete and the advent of the tractors and cranes and before the flying fox stretched over land from the edge to the landing. This was how drums of 44 gallon oils were transported from Bounty Bay to Adamstown. And the good old Pitcairn wheelbarrow was used. It looked harder wheeling it on the wheelbarrow than actually rolling the drum UPHILL . In those days our men had muscles to die for.



HELICOPTERS

The men above could have used the help of helicopters in carting the drums of oil from the landing. In years gone by we have had visits from the US Navy and in recent times the French Navy – see article on Prairial where they have landed their helicopters ashore. In reminiscing there was the time when the US Navy surprised us and when Len looked out of his window on hearing the loud noise he saw that one had landed in his nearby watermelon patch. On another occasion most of the islanders were gathered at the Mission House where a planned US Helicopter from the Icebreaker “Atka” in April 1966 had landed and on takeoff the rotors on the helicopter hit the fronds on a nearby coconut tree and caused damage to the helicopter. Except for the extreme skills of the pilot who managed to pull the helicopter out of the out of control dive of the helicopter just a few feet from the rocks there would have been a disaster we would not have forgotten in a hurry.



MEMORIES

Hi Julie and Kari, You must be wondering what I am on about so I will begin explaining by sharing some memories.

When Margaret, our three pre school aged children and I arrived at Pitcairn there was a storm raging and the ship's captain said we might have to go on to Panama. Ben who had travelled with us said there was no way he was going to stay on board and he would take his chances swimming. However the men managed to get a boat alongside. They lowered the kids and one dog over the side in haversacks and we spent the night at Ted Side. Our rooster let us know that it was dawn and we went around to Bounty Bay and braved the surf into the landing.

Christie and Mimie arrived at Pulau with some wonderful hot food shortly after we got there. That's when the people of Pitcairn began looking after us and they continued to do so for the three years that we were there.

During the voyage over we got to know Ben and get an idea what our future home would be like. He told us that his son Dennis would be having a birthday soon after he got back and he had brought back a special treat. Two bags of potatoes.

When the boats were unloaded we found that our main supply of stores had been left on the wharf at Auckland.

Word got around and help began arriving. One of the first to visit was Ben. With a bag of potatoes!!! I also remember Pussy riding up with a bag of flour on the back of her bike.

During our stay, there was a period of time when no store ship arrived for seven months. Except for a couple of cans of corned beef we ran out of food but we weren't about to go hungry. Almost every day someone would arrive with fish and we were kept supplied with fruit and vegetables.

Towards the end of that time a cargo ship made a brief stop. Trading wasn't good. The only one who had any success was Len and he managed to trade for a piece of beef. After the ship had departed and the boats had been hoisted up and stowed in the sheds there was a knock on our door. It was Len with a piece of beef. Margaret told him that he had kids too but he insisted that she take it saying that Pitcairners could manage better than we could.

Why wouldn't we be very fond of the people of Pitcairn and be prepared to help out if ever there was a chance?

Regards Russell

Note: Russell Henry was the school teacher from 1969 - 1971

RINGING THE BELL: A tradition that goes back at least a hundred years, is being discontinued. In the days before satellite phones when everyone can ring each other locally free of charge and before the VHF radio which every household has for communication and general announcement, we only had the ringing of the bell to tell us what was happening. Most of these uses were gone some time ago, the five bells to announce you have to hurry to catch the longboat going out to the ship, was the last to go. There were some of us who literally missed the boat, being too used to listen for the bell and not the rush of motorbikes running down to the Landing.

Repeated single strokes of the bell - announcing 30 minutes before Sabbath School

Repeated double strokes of the bell – announcing 10 minutes before Sabbath School

Repeated three strokes of the bell – announcing public work

Repeated four strokes of the bell - announcing public share out (whether food or dunnage from ships)

Repeated five strokes of the bell - announcing there is a ship coming and hurry to the Landing

Repeated and continuous ringing of the bells are for emergencies – a fire, an accident whatever. And then of course we have the counting of single bells for funerals, indicating the age of the deceased. Plus the ringing of the bells for pure fun and frivolous purposes at Christmastime and New Year, the only times one is allowed to ring the bell at one's own initiative and inclination.

The bell on the right of the picture is engraved MHS Dainty 1953



ARCHEOLOGY ON PITCAIRN – Kari Tull

The **NORWEGIAN ARCHEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION** to Easter Island in 1955/56 included a visit to Pitcairn as well as Henderson. Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl with five comrades had sailed across the southern Pacific on a raft, the Kon Tiki, (which was the title of a major movie production in 2012) in 1947 to prove that the Polynesian islands were settled from South America rather than from Asia mainland. His Kon Tiki expeditions opened up the possibilities for this migration route, though the theory have mainly been abandoned by science today. But Heyerdahl's Oscar award in 1951 for his documentary on the trip, inspired him to further adventures. In 1955 he chartered Greenland trawler M/S "Bjelland" and went to Easter Island with a team of 23, including five archeologists, to excavate stone platforms, stone statues and other artifacts. After five months on Easter, the ship came here to Pitcairn. They did not do any excavating, but examined the local stone statues (connecting them to the Easter culture), and confirmed the fact that obsidian were to be found only three places in Polynesia – in New Zealand, on Easter and on Pitcairn (Down Rope). Heyerdahl mentions in his book *Aku Aku* how impressed they were when the Pitcairn longboat came up to meet them, six pair of oars working as efficient as a diesel engine. They wanted to take food ashore for their stay, but the islanders would not hear of it – they had food enough for visitors, too. In return for hospitality, the "Bjelland" took the men and their boats to Henderson Island to cut miro wood, and also for the archeologists to do scientific research. The "Bjelland" went on to Mangareva, Fatu Hiva, Ravaivae, Rapa Iti and Hiva Oa.



Postcard sent from Pitcairn the day the expedition arrived, 12th April 1956, by chief archeologist Arne Skjoelsvold to his colleagues in Oslo, Norway. The card was recently given to my brother Erik by Martin Blindheim, the addressee's son, an old friend of Erik's. The postage stamp had been removed some time during the last sixty years. - It's a small world.



Thor Heyerdahl, wife Yvonne and daughter Annette with Floyd and Violet McCoy (courtesy of Daphne)



There were two previous archeological expeditions, both of them coming to Pitcairn after excavations on Easter Island - the Routledge one in 1915 and the Belgian in 1935 with Henri Lavachery, who studied the rock carvings and also commented on the obsidian deposits Down Rope. Both reported on the remains of three maraes on Pitcairn, Routledge describing one at Ship Landing Point, a rectangular 4 m high mound covered with large beach pebbles, comparable with the shape of Easter Island platforms. According to the Pitcairners at the time, four stone statues had originally stood on the platform, but a group of enterprising young men in the 19th Century eager to show their muscles managed to topple the statues and push them over the cliff and down in Bounty Bay. Benjamin Young admitted he was one of those young men. Under Norris Young's house, Lavachery found a statue of a headless fragment of 79 cm in height and 30 cm in diameter of porous stone, which Norris used as support for his floor, retrieved from Bounty Bay. The human torso ended below the navel, similar to the MOAI of Easter Island. The two oversized hands covered the abdomen, also this is a parallel to the statues of Easter Island.

Several islanders contributed to the Routledge Museum collection of stone tools, (the names Gerard, William, Lancy and Mimie Christian, Alice Butler and Roberta Warren are mentioned). When the expedition ship "Mama" left, brothers Edwin and Charles Young travelled with them to England, where they as representatives from the farthest outpost of the Empire were presented to the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace in June 1916. Both the Young brothers returned to Pitcairn.

(sources: H. Ford's "Port of Call", T. Heyerdahl's "Aku-Aku", J N Hall's "Tale of a Shipwreck", various online archeological records)



VISIT OF FRENCH NAVY SHIP “PRAIRIAL”

The “Prairial” – a “monitoring frigate” - had announced its arrival for 7.30 am on Saturday 27th, when their helicopter would do a couple of swings over the island, while the ship itself found its anchorage in Tedside and settled down prior to the longboat coming out to pick up some of the crew. Islanders loaded their cameras and found strategical positions in the hills to get the best photos. 22 of the crew had been invited to stay the night with locals. Because of rough seas all around the island, those of the crew still ashore on Sunday, were picked up at Taro

Ground by the helicopter Sunday afternoon – another big show for our cameras. Pitcairners put on a public dinner at the Square Saturday night for all the crew ashore, and on Sunday the gallant Gauls arranged a barbecue lunch at the Square for the islanders, courtesy of President Hollande – not personally, but from his government budget, which was greatly appreciated by us all. A very popular token on this our special day, and enhanced by their presence, as 28th April is the date of the Bounty mutiny exactly 223 years ago.

Except for the colonial ties to England, Pitcairn has been closer to French Polynesia, both geographically and historically. Ever since 1849 there have been unofficial feelers from the French to join them under the Tricolor, but the Pitcairners have politely declined. During the late 1800s the trend was definitely American, with the mission ship “Pitcairn” providing contact with the States and travelling possibilities, the young people going to school and getting married there. Thursday October was chastised by a visiting English captain for flying the American Stars and Stripes in the longboat instead of the Union Jack.

More recently, world headlines were “Islanders flirt with France” in 2000, after reporter Simon Winchester wrote about islanders angry and worried about British subsidies being lifted, and quoted from islanders “There’s some talk that if the British don’t want us, maybe the French will”. And Governor Williams at the time responded to the media that “they can become French if they want”. But here we are, still British – in fact the only remaining reason for the British to be involved in Pacific

matters.

L - With cameras at Ship Landing Point,

R - Picking up crew at Taro Ground



Public dinner at The Square



IN MEMORY OF MITCH BUNKIN



We got the sad message from Sue early in April that our good friend Mitch had passed away after two years fighting cancer, only 72 years old. His interest in Pitcairn started when he was a teenager, corresponding with the teacher here at the time, and he was still in touch with the Wotherspoons. In 1993 Mitch and Sue spent some time here on Pitcairn, staying with Steve and Olive. They kept in touch with several islanders, also visiting them in New Zealand. Mitch was director-at-large of Pitcairn Island Study Group 1999-2011, and he was a constant and unafraid supporter through Pitcairn's hard times.

Since 1968 Mitch has been professor at the Social Science faculty at Bucks County Community College, devoted to history, justice, family and his Model A Ford, and active in local land conservation and his local rural community north of Philadelphia, PA. Their more than 200 year old house by the Delaware River is a gem, built by stone and timber to last at least another 200 years.

All his emails carried this message: ***Most people ONLY want to know what they already believe and nothing more.*** How true that is. There will never be another one like you, Mitch – we will miss you here on Pitcairn. Our deepest sympathy goes to Sue and the family.



With wife Sue, sons Kevin and Keith, daughter in law and three grandchildren on a recent holiday in Florida

I first met Mitch Bunkin when he visited Pitcairn in the early 90's. He came across as a fun, witty and intelligent character and that is exactly what he was. Through the years I have had many discussions and conversations with him and felt enlightened by his insight and open-mindedness. With the advent of internet and especially Skype it became almost like I was visiting his house (though I have never been to his house physically), and knew his pets off by heart, such as the foul-mouthed parrot "Kermit," as well as the three cats "Romulus," "Remus," and "Politcat" (I hope I got the last one spelled right). He had a keen interest in Pitcairn Island history, and many years ago provided me with a wealth of firsthand accounts from the 1800's. When I spoke to him a couple of weeks before he passed away I would never have guessed that it would be the last time. The conversation ranged from perceptions of politics to Politcats antics to the preservation of the S.S. United States and U.S.S. Olympia, which are both in the area. As always, a memorable conversation.

Goodbye Mitch, and know that you will always be remembered by me and my pile.

Sincerely

Tim "The Tourguide from Hell" Young

OUR TOURISM SIGNS GOING UP

Pitcairn's Tourism Coordinator Heather with some of her team put up the big signs that arrived on the last supply ship – designed to point out and enhance the tourists' experience of Pitcairn. It is not enough anymore just to "be" descendants of the mutineers, tourism has become sophisticated, we have to be aware of tourists' needs and provide more than the rustic duncan and simple lifestyle. We got a history, but not much to show for it, with Thursday October Christian's (second generation Pitcairner 1819-1911) house demolished in 2004 because there was no money for maintaining it, and a lot of our Bounty artifacts recently exported wholesale to private buyers in The States.



Left - Jay and Roger at Thursday October's house site in Adamstown, Garnet's Ridge with Christian's Cave in the background, making sure the sign is level before they pour cement in the hole.



Right - Heather, Kerry and Jay putting up the sign at Arliehow, overlooking Tautama, which once upon a time was the "tool factory" of the Pacific, and where you can still find Neolithic tools.



Left - Roger, Jay getting the cement to secure the legs of the sign, Heather and Carol at the old radio station at Taro Ground, which was given to the Ham Club long ago. Since there is no ham club anymore, there is confusion about who is in charge of the building, which is quite dilapidated, but is still housing weather observation tools.

Right - Carol and Heather at Tom Block, overlooking the rocks and beach Down Rope with the petroglyphs, plus St Paul's.

The other signs to follow in next issue – for the last wooden longboat and the remains of the Bounty down the Landing,



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Last month we wrote about our disappearing artifacts. Here are a couple of comments from our readers:

To the people behind Dem Tull

I have not been reading this newsletter for long, having only been recently introduced to it by a contact. It has made for interesting reading. However, on reading the March 2013 issue I felt I should write my feelings regarding the topic of artifacts. As a person who works in antiquities (my field happens to be Chinese antiquities) have seen all sorts of questionable acts regarding the taking of relics, which was fortunately dealt with. Until I read this article I had assumed that Pitcairn Island and its inhabitants were proud of their heritage. I shared this articles with some associates and their reactions were similar to mine. Has Pitcairn Island no pride? I would hope this matter is resolved and these items returned to the island, but is that just wishful thinking? To those Pitcairn Islanders who have sold your birthright, 'shame on you!' (name and email withheld by request)

Dear Editor:

Thank you for writing about the robbery of Pitcairn's historical treasures, it is a matter that needs to be aired long and loud. I see no reason why appropriate authority shouldn't immediately start proceedings against those who have illegally sold these treasures for a few pieces of shiny coin, or for simply giving items away while knowing the law full-well. If government doesn't screw up its courage and initiate such action, the Pitcairn people can expect to one day soon have little or nothing of its rich heritage of the past left on the island.

The Pitcairn Islands Study Center here in California holds a few historical items from the island. All are gifts to the Center from others, rather than having been taken from Pitcairn by Center personnel. A careful examination has shown that each of these items have an exact companion there in the Pitcairn Museum or elsewhere on the island, so a return of them would simply be that there are two or more of the same item on Pitcairn, rather than a return of something not now on the island. We believe these "duplicate" items being on display to the ever-growing number of visitors, academics and others who come to the Study Center, are of greater value to Pitcairn displayed here (valuable to the growth of tourism and other Pitcairn contact) than if they were on the island simply as a duplicate of what is already on display or otherwise kept on the island. However, we are on record that if all the Pitcairn people feel differently – that for whatever reason these items will better serve the interests of the Pitcairn people by being on the island rather than on display in the Study Center – a letter from the Island Council will immediately bring whatever we have back to Pitcairn.

Thanks *Dem Tull* for telling it like it really is! Herbert Ford, Director, Pitcairn Islands Study Center, Pacific Union College
Angwin, California USA, Pitcairnstudycenter.org

We asked our historical writer Tim Young if he would like to write a piece on the Bounty/Pitcairn artefacts situation. Unfortunately we are unable to print his response as his response regarding the incident was laced with profanity. We apologise for this. Tim doesn't.

In 2006 our then Commissioner who is now a private resident of Pitcairn, gave a speech at the Auckland Museum where he outlined many of the things he proposed to implement on Pitcairn to move us forward. The breakwater at Bounty Bay, Windmills, a new store, etc formed a good part of his speech. Another part of his speech was focused on our ignorance in safeguarding our artifacts and he was going to make it his mission to put systems and laws in place to do just that. He gave an example of a Pitcairner trading a Vise from the Bounty for goods from a passing ship. Kari and I were both present at the evening and so were a number of other Pitcairners and Norfolk Islanders. It wasn't appreciated that mention wasn't made that the vise was sold so long ago that at that time, there would have been little appreciation of the value (not in dollar terms) of what the Bounty artifacts would come to mean to us. While it may not have been the intent, we felt the speech was delivered in a way to make the audience think the vise was sold in 'recent times' and something must be done to stop us. Nobody disagreed with his aim to protect our artifacts. We applauded him. So what happened? Whatever system was put in place obviously did not go far enough.

Also in various Council Minutes, there is mention of certain Councillors making requests to other museums for the return of our artifacts to the Pitcairn museum with some success. I hope those councillors are not amongst the sellers of some of our artifacts and that the current members of council make it their priority to ensure there are safeguards in place to protect all of our artifacts and that the law is worded in a way to capture it all. Currently I believe our law in this matter is an ass. I understand it protects pieces of the Bounty e.g. a nail but not things that were on the Bounty e.g. a cannon. Maybe that law is as old as the Bounty - a relic.

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