

- 25 

A LONG-DISTANCE VOYAGE IN CONTEMPORARY POLYNESIA ¹

RICHARD FEINBERG *Kent State University*

Common “knowledge” among students of traditional Oceanic voyaging seems to have it that Polynesians long ago abandoned their old wayfinding techniques. Thus, a Bishop Museum film about the *Hōkūle’a* expeditions describes that vessel as the first canoe in centuries to set off on an interisland voyage under the guidance of a Polynesian navigator. ² Thomas (1987:5) comments, “Now, throughout Polynesia . . . the tradition is forgotten, swept aside in the rapid adoption of Western culture.” And, even in the Caroline Islands of Micronesia, where long-distance noninstrument voyaging is an ongoing concern, Thomas (1987) suggests that we soon may witness “the last navigator”.

My book on Anutan voyaging (Feinberg 1988) was intended as something of a corrective to this view of Polynesian seamanship. There, I pointed out that people from Anuta, a Polynesian Outlier in the eastern Solomon Islands, made canoe voyages to Tikopia until the 1960s; and trips to Patutaka, an island about 30 miles away, remain a regular occurrence. The voyages are made entirely without instruments, using only stars, sun, wind and waves for guidance. Still, by ancient standards, these voyages are short and hardly spectacular.

However, on my most recent visit to the Solomons, I was told a remarkable story of a voyage by a young Anutan who, in 1985, sailed from his home island to Santa Ana in Makira Province, some 400 miles away. The sailor’s name is Tom Tope, and what follows is an account of his voyage as reconstructed from a number of lengthy interviews with him as well as with several other Anutans who, in one way or another, played important roles. The largest portion of the narrative comes direct from a taped interview, which I have translated and only lightly edited to reduce redundancy and improve clarity in English. I have intentionally left the account as close as possible to the original, despite a little awkwardness, to retain as much as possible of my informant’s own perception of his voyage.

GETTING STARTED

The first part of the voyage — to Vanikoro Island in the Santa Cruz Group — was completed by two youths, Tom Tope and Ashley Raakei. They made this trip because they had been accused of stealing watermelons. One Sunday, after - 26  the evening service, Pu Akonima told the populace to gather in the churchyard. He then spoke about the watermelons and publicly accused the two youths of the crime. According to Tom, they were innocent, the real culprits being a pair of teenage girls. The youths, however, were preparing for an evening of fishing in a small canoe named *Potuo* and were not present to defend themselves. ³ Still, they were shamed before the community, and Tom suggested to Ashley that they should put out to sea. Ashley agreed, and they began to lay their plans.



Plate 1. Tom Tope. Photographed in Honiara, Solomon Islands, August 1988.

Plate 1. Tom Tope.

Photographed in Honiara, Solomon Islands, August 1988.

This was the period of the Easter holiday; the entire community was eating together as a single unit near the St James Church at the eastern end of the dwelling area, far from the passage (see Figure 1). At about 2 p.m. on Tuesday of that week, Tom and Ashley went to Te Ana, a cave near the passage, to locate a vessel for their voyage. They decided on *Kavaitevai*, a small canoe with three outrigger booms, which had been constructed in early 1984. ⁴

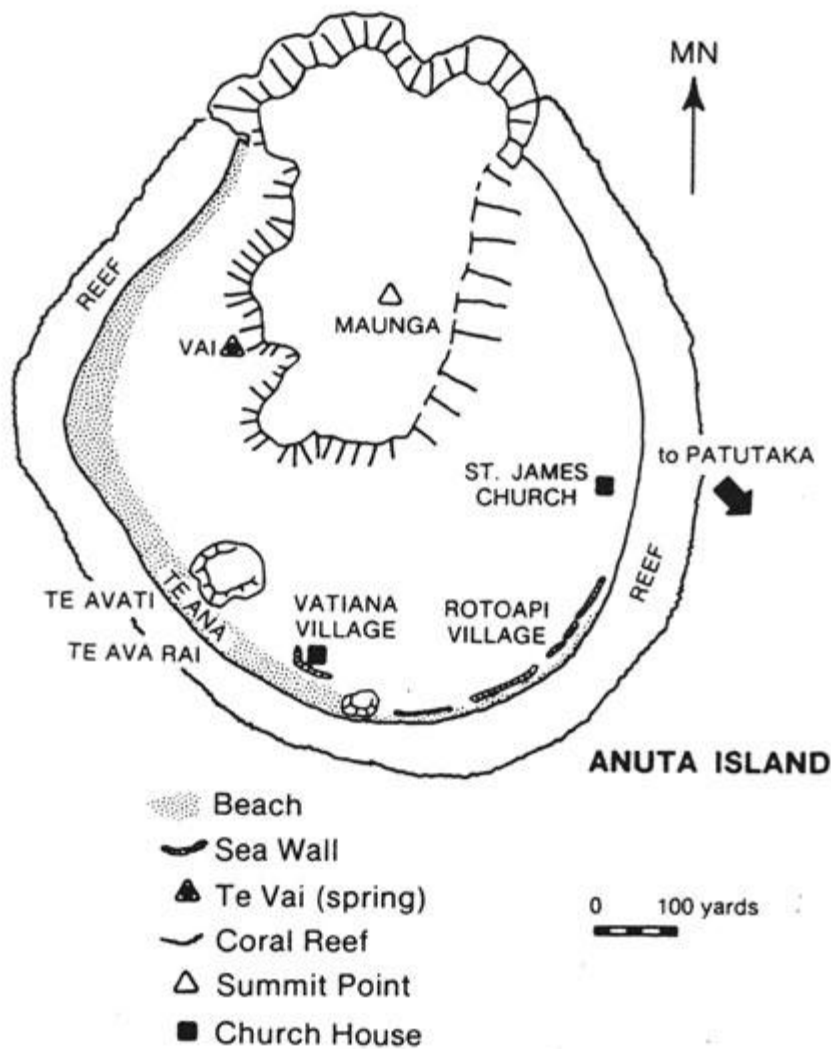


Figure 1. Map of Anuta Island (adapted from Yen and Gordon 1973:27)

Figure 1. Map of Anuta Island

(adapted from Yen and Gordon 1973:27)

- 28

Near the cave, they met a man named Charles — a visitor from Tikopia, the neighbouring island. Charles asked where the two were going; they responded that they were about to go to sea, implying that it was for purposes of fishing. When he asked if they had bait, they lied and told him that they had some pieces of octopus. He indicated his approval, and the youths continued carrying the canoe down to the water.

Their mast and paddles were already stashed inside the vessel; but they had to go back to collect a supply of mature coconuts — their staple on the ocean. Once they had gathered sufficient nuts, they launched their canoe through the Ava Rai 'Large Passage' at the south end of the island, where water from the reef flat is funnelled back out to sea.

As they reached the surf line, they were spotted from the hill by some children who had gone to gather food for the funeral of Nau

Notau, a woman who had recently died. The children quickly realised what was happening, and, fearing for the young men's safety, shouted for them to turn back. The youths just waved their paddles at the children and continued on.

THE SAIL TO VANIKORO

A number of canoes already were out fishing, and they chased the youths. But the latter raised their sail and were not caught. Tom then turned to Ashley saying, “Let's go to Vanikoro.” Ashley agreed and they began their ‘descent’ to the west. ⁵

About 5 o'clock, just before dusk, they looked back and saw two Anutan sailing canoes — *Vakautai* and *Tearavave* — on the beach at Te Ana Rai, being outfitted for a chase. In addition, Pu Penuakimoana went out alone in *Potua'o*. He was the first to come after them. A number of other small canoes also joined the chase. But they failed to catch them. At about 8 o'clock, the pair felt safe enough to try to get some sleep.

Tom and Ashley had decided to set sail for Vanikoro rather than Tikopia despite the latter island being less than half the distance (see Figure 2), because they thought that, if they made landfall at Tikopia, the Tikopians would contact authorities on short-wave radio and have them returned to Anuta by Government ship. They did not wish to return to Anuta because they still felt very much ashamed about the watermelon accusations.

Of the two, Tom was the more accomplished seaman. Ashley is a competent sailor but claims no special skill at navigation. During the day, Tom slept while Ashley took the helm; at night Ashley slept and Tom kept the canoe on course, following the star path. Both sailors told me they were not frightened and were fully confident of reaching Vanikoro; but that really was not the point. When they made the voyage, they were considering suicide and hoping that their actions would make people back home feel remorse for shaming them. When Ashley

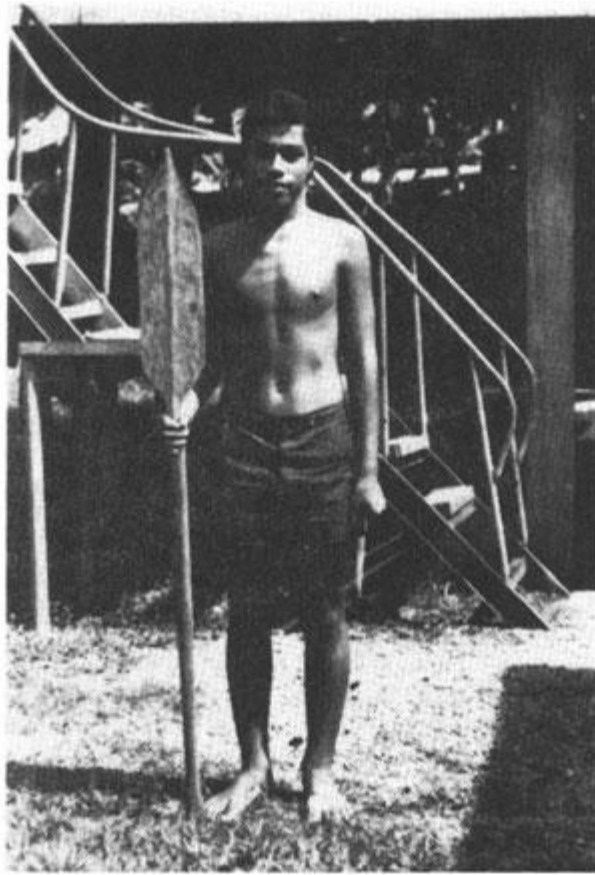


Plate 2. Ashley Raakei. Photographed in Honiara, Solomon Islands, August 1988.

Plate 2. Ashley Raakei.

Photographed in Honiara, Solomon Islands, August 1988.

finally returned home in a Government ship, his parents were elated to see him after having been convinced that he had died at sea; and he felt vindicated.

They set out on Tuesday of the week after Easter in April 1985 and sailed through the following day. Thursday morning their canoe 'sank'. Both were sleeping through the night, Ashley in the bow and Tom astern. In the morning, when they awoke, Tom stood up to raise their sail. Just then a squall struck. Tom called out to Ashley to help raise the sail, and they almost succeeded but finally had to give up their attempt. ⁶

Tom soon went back to sleep as he had not been fully refreshed from the previous night. Then, while he was sleeping, the wind struck and swamped the canoe. Startled, he awoke and saw that Ashley was enveloped by the sea, still clinging to the outrigger boom on which he had been sitting. Tom soon regained

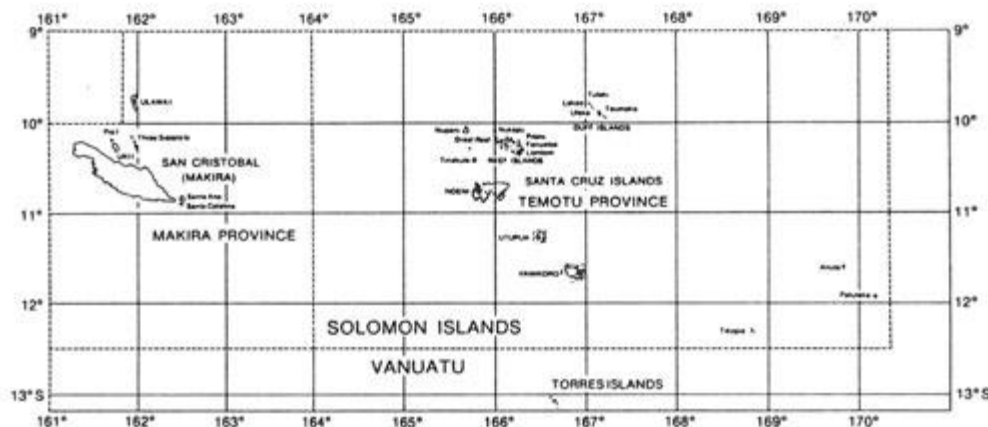


Figure 2. Map of Eastern Solomon Islands, including Torres Islands of Northern Vanuatu.

Figure 2. Map of Eastern

Solomon Islands, including Torres Islands of Northern Vanuatu.

- 31

his composure, took stock of the situation, and told Ashley not to be frightened. The canoe was still intact. They would bail the water from the hull, refloat the vessel, and continue on their way.

Indeed, that is precisely what they did; and not long afterwards — at about 1 o'clock in the afternoon—they spotted Vanikoro. Tom was sitting in the stern and pointed out to Ashley that the island lay straight ahead. Ashley looked and acknowledged that the island was indeed on the horizon. They were elated at the sight.

TOM DEPARTS FOR SANTA ANA

They stayed on Vanikoro for two or three months. When the Government ship *Butai* finally arrived at Vanikoro, the authorities planned to take the two youths into custody and return them to Anuta. At first Ashley suggested that the two of them return, particularly as they were being offered free transport. Tom, however, said that he was not ready to go home. At Tom's suggestion, Ashley agreed to go back home with Ta Ngarumea, an Anutan couple who were travelling aboard the ship. Tom stayed one more week on Vanikoro. Then, on June 12, 1985, he carried his canoe down to the beach to set off once again. He waited until all the people were asleep — then, at midnight, he cast off.

He set off from Murivai, a Tikopian settlement on Vanikoro Island. At about 6 a.m., he arrived at Lale at land's end — the last village on Vanikoro before crossing the many miles of open sea to Utupua.

By about noon he neared Utupua. As he approached the island, he saw several people fishing. They signalled for him to come to them, but he did not as he was still concerned that, if he went ashore, the police would be called and he would be returned to Anuta. So he sailed past Utupua. By about 1 p.m., the island was behind him.

When he left Vanikoro, he had little with him in his canoe. No food, fish, coconut, or even water or fishing-line. Only his paddle, bailer, mast, and sail. In part, he opted against packing food because Cyclone Nina had recently struck Vanikoro, destroying that island's food supply so that there was little for him to take. Anuta also had been struck, but not hard, and its food supply was intact. Vanikoro and Tikopia, on the other hand, were decimated. The Government sent relief supplies to those two islands and, during Tom's stay on Vanikoro, all that people had to eat was Government-supplied rice. No coconut. No sweet potato. No manioc. There had been little rain, and new growth was not yet sprouting.

He passed Utupua at about 3 or 4 p.m.. Utupua then vanished into the ocean. When it was close to midnight, he sighted Ndeni, the main island of the Santa Cruz group. At first, he thought it was a cloud; but it did not look quite right. As the - 32 canoe sped onward, he continued to observe. Finally, he saw a light shining in the distance, and he knew it was an island. As he sailed on, the

wind blew harder. Shortly before daybreak, at about three or four in the morning, the island fell behind him. By six o'clock, he had put a little distance between himself and the island. He was now proceeding direct towards Makira.

ENCOUNTER WITH A FISHING VESSEL ⁷

He sailed on through the day of the 15th. From the outset, the wind had been just south of east, and he ran before a constant tail wind. But about midday on the 15th, it shifted to starboard. By late afternoon, as he watched the clouds drift past the setting sun, he realised that the wind had shifted and that he had been sailing in the wrong direction!

He corrected his course and continued under sail with the wind to starboard. Then, at about five o'clock, just before sunset, the rains came. It rained incredibly hard. Then, through the rain, he heard the moaning of an engine. At first, he thought it was a plane's engine. As he continued under sail, the engine's whine came closer and closer. When he was very close, he was able to see that it was a European-style ship — a fishing boat. A Japanese fishing boat. ⁸

When the rain had eased slightly, he looked to starboard and saw the ship coming straight towards him. When the crew became aware of him, they seemed to take fright and turned about to flee. He sailed onward, and soon he saw the ship again. ⁹

At about two or three the next morning, he was awakened by the sound of the engine approaching once more. He looked up and saw a light shining towards him dead ahead. First he thought it was an island. Then he realised that it was a pair of running lights — red on one side and green on the other — and he knew it was a European ship.

For a while he just sat and looked. His canoe sailed towards the ship. The vessel had not travelled far because it had been at anchor most of the afternoon and evening, fishing for tuna with hook and line. They were still fishing as he approached. ¹⁰

When they saw him, they weighed anchor. As he approached very close to their ship, he furled his sail. For a long time, they just stood on the deck and stared at him. Then the captain began to shout instructions to his crew. Tom could not understand what the captain was saying as he was speaking in Japanese. However, when he saw several sailors run towards the bow and return with a length of heavy line, his first thought was that they planned to kill him.

The captain motioned downwards with his hand to indicate to Tom that he should come aboard; but Tom was fearful. He saw that the ship was backing towards him and paddled frantically to move his canoe out of the way. Suddenly - 33  he heard a thud. They had dropped a grappling-iron on to his canoe and were towing him towards the ship.

He turned to see what had happened and saw the hook which had been lowered from the deck and had become engaged in the hold of his canoe. He was terrified and tried to free his vessel from the hook, but to no avail. When at last he loosened the first hook, he heard a second landing in his bow. At the same time, he looked up and saw them motioning for him to leave the hook. They towed the canoe to the ship's ladder and gestured for him to climb aboard.

When he ascended to the deck, the crew said to go and see the captain in his quarters. There, the captain and another man offered Tom a small can of soda-pop. However, his throat hurt so badly that he could not drink it; so he returned the tin to his hosts. He had been four days at sea, from the 12th to the night of the 16th, without anything to eat or drink. The only thing he could get down was water, so they took him to the kitchen and told him to drink his fill. He replied that he could not drink because his throat hurt too much, so they told him to drink a little bit and not try to take too much. He drank, and his throat soon began to feel much better.

Almost all their conversation took place by means of hand signals. The two Japanese would speak to him in their language and then use gestures to convey their intent. Tom understood very little of what they were trying to communicate. They spoke and gestured, but most of what they wanted to communicate remained unclear.

Eventually one of the men went out and spoke into a loudspeaker, telling the ship's radio operator to come up to the captain's quarters. The radio operator spoke some English, but he was only slightly more proficient than the others.

As they conversed, the radio operator asked Tom where had he come from. Tom replied that he had come from Vanikoro. They did

not believe him, observing that the people of Vanikoro have black skins, not light skins like Tom's. But he explained that he was not a Vanikoro Islander — that he was an Anutan. They said that they were familiar with Anuta; in fact, they had passed near Anuta on their voyage not too long before, and they had done a good deal of fishing in the ocean triangle bounded by Anuta, Patutaka, and Tikopia. They noted that the people of Anuta have skin that is not really white, but more reddish; Vanikoro people, on the other hand, have completely black complexions.

Tom agreed with this characteristic, adding that he had begun his travels on Anuta. He had sailed to Vanikoro and stayed there for some time. He had then put out to sea from Vanikoro, and that is how they had met him. He had departed Vanikoro and had not yet sighted land.

They asked somewhat incredulously how he could be so sure that he would reach an island. He said he did not know when he would make landfall because - 34 his 'carrier' (*kaavenga*) — his guide star — had gone astray. The wind had shifted.

They replied that he had one more day at sea before he would make landfall. He asked how they could know this, to which they responded that they saw the island on the ship's radar. Tom wanted to see the radar. So the captain escorted him to the machine, turned it on, and told Tom to look inside. The captain explained that the objects visible on the screen were islands of Vanuatu. The closest — the Torres Islands — were close by. If he sailed through the night and the next day, the captain said, by evening he would reach the Torres Islands. ¹¹

At that point, Tom did not want to get back into his canoe. The captain offered to return Tom to Vanikoro, and he initially agreed. But after thinking matters over for a while, he suggested that he go with them to Japan. This request, however, they refused, saying that it was against the law. Their action would be construed as kidnapping, and they would be arrested. The "blackbirder" days were long past, and the law was now a force that they could not ignore.

As an alternative, Tom suggested that they take him and his canoe closer to shore and set him down near to an island. Again they refused, saying that they were afraid of the local authorities. Tom tried to reassure them, saying that he would "lie" to the police and give them an "excuse." He would tell the police that they had found him on the ocean and had come ashore only to rescue him from perishing at sea. But they still refused, saying that they were extremely fearful.

Tom and the Japanese then got into an argument. As the argument went on, Tom and the captain grew angry at each other. The captain wanted him to go back down to his canoe so that the ship could go about its business. The ship had been in the same spot for a long time, and the captain wanted to proceed.

While they were arguing, Tom was standing on the deck smoking a cigarette. The man who seemed to have been supervising the crew ordered each sailor to grab his knife. If Tom did not go back down to his canoe, they were to kill him. The captain was at the helm, starting up the engine. The mate went up to the captain to talk to him and pass him his knife. Tom was convinced that they were planning to kill him. But the captain was busy firing up the ship's engine and not paying close attention to what was going on, so Tom managed to intercept the knife and place it in his own belt. They continued to argue, the crew asking if Tom was going back down to his canoe and Tom insisting that they take him ashore. He was not fearful, he asserted, of continuing his voyage; but he was "sick of going on the ocean." His skin had been parched by the sun, and he had shivered through torrential rains, because he had no shelter on his craft.

Eventually, Tom went up behind the captain, who was still standing on the bridge. He struck him in the back and the captain fell forward driving one of the wheel's spokes into his abdomen. He turned and only then realised that Tom had - 35 his small knife. When Tom first approached the captain, the bridge was filled with crew members; but as soon as they saw him attack their leader, they became frightened and ran outside in confusion. The captain also ran off to hide in his cabin. ¹²

Suddenly, Tom found himself alone on the bridge. The ship's key was still in the ignition, so Tom grabbed the throttle and began to play with it. He opened the throttle to full speed, then slow, off, and reverse. He played with the controls for some time, thus expressing his anger at the ship and crew for their refusal to take him ashore. At length, the captain reappeared and spoke to Tom through an open window. This time, having vented his anger, Tom agreed to go back down to his canoe.

Tom began descending to his vessel; but the captain said to wait. He went back to his room and returned with two cases of beer. However, Tom declined the offer, thinking that if he were to get drunk at sea he might do something foolish — like diving into the water and leaving his canoe. So he told the sailors that he did not want the beer. They went back and brought out three cases of something else. He looked at the cases and could not tell what they were. He asked, “What are these?” and they told him they were cigarettes for him to smoke. He replied, “It is good.”

They were still fearful that he would turn around and attack them, so they were anxious for him to get going; but as he was leaving the room, they brought out another parcel — this time a carton of orange pop. He could tell that it was orange because there was a picture of the fruit on the outside of the case.

They went back once more and brought him three lighters, encased in plastic bags. They placed one carton of cigarettes and one lighter in each bag to keep them from being ruined by sea water. They were not concerned about the tins of orange because they would not be damaged by exposure to sea water, but the cigarettes and lighters would be spoiled if they got wet.

Tom said, “It is good,” and assured them that he would look after his goods carefully. Then, at last, he got back into his canoe. This was on the 17th. He had first boarded the ship on the 16th, somewhere between 2 and 4 a.m. — shortly before daybreak. He left the ship on the 17th, at about 1 or 2 p.m. When he got into his canoe, he still had the small knife with him. They asked for it back and he said, “All right.” But he just returned the case, keeping the knife for himself. He threw the case up to the deck and they packed it away, not realising that the knife itself was not inside. Finally, they parted.

LANDFALL AT SANTA ANA

After descending to his canoe, Tom spent a long time on the ocean. For the most part, he remained awake by day. At night, he lashed his steering paddle to - 36  an outrigger boom and slept. His main guide star from Anuta to Vanikoro had been Toki ‘Adze’ (Arcturus); ¹³ his secondary guide was Taro (Antares). From Vanikoro to Santa Ana, he indicated, the setting Taro was slightly off the port bow. Traditionally, Anutans did not sail to Makira and surrounding islands; but the star path had been revealed to him by an elderly Taumako (Duff Island) man. Taumako Islanders, he stated, used to make the passage fairly regularly in their voyaging canoes called *tepuke* (cf. Lewis 1972). Although they had long since given up such journeys, a few people still remembered the directions.

During this phase of the voyage, sun and rain beat down unmercifully. When it rained, he had no protection whatever. When the sun became unbearably hot, he would immerse himself in the ocean behind one of the outrigger booms, in the space between the hull and the outrigger float. Then, when he was cool, he would climb back aboard his canoe. He was on the ocean under these conditions for an extremely long time. Still, he was happy on the sea because of the cigarettes the Japanese had given him. Before his encounter with their ship, his longing for a smoke was sometimes overwhelming; but he had nothing to smoke. Now, his happiness was indescribable.

Several days later (he cannot remember exactly when), he began to feel that he had reached his destination. It was about noon when this feeling came upon him. Soon his premonition was confirmed by a piece of mangrove floating in the ocean. It was a fresh mangrove leaf floating in the current. He could tell from the fresh leaf that the current was flowing swiftly; that the island was now close at hand; and that it lay dead ahead. He was sailing with the wind, and directly against the current.

About 11 or 12 o'clock that night, his paddle hit a piece of wood floating in the sea. He inspected the wood and confirmed that it was debris from an island. He continued on, and at daybreak he sighted the island. It was the large island, Makira.

He continued on, almost to the point where he could see the coastal flat. Then he sighted the peak of a lower mountain ascending from the ocean. This he identified as one of the small islands off Makira's eastern coast. It looked like another day of blazing sun; so Tom set sail direct for the smaller, closer island.

As he approached the island, he saw smoke from a fire drifting out over the ocean, and he knew a village was nearby. He headed for the village. As he approached the village, however, he observed that the passage through the fringing reef was impassable. So

he left this island, which turned out to be Santa Catalina, and headed for its “twin” — Santa Ana.

As Tom approached Santa Ana, just outside the surf line, he saw a man surfcasting from a boulder on the reef flat. The man was Christopher Kites Tom made towards the beach near Kita's house and found that the passage was deep - 37  and clear of obstacles. So he traversed the passage and made landfall.

When Tom landed, Kita approached and asked him where he had come from. Tom replied that he had come from Vanikoro. Kita asked, “Where is Vanikoro?” Tom answered that it was in Temotu Province — Eastern Outer Islands.

Kita replied, “Oh! I have not yet seen Vanikoro!” He was most surprised by Tom's response to his queries and asked how Tom had travelled to his island. Tom answered that he had voyaged by canoe. Upon hearing this, Kita's sympathy for Tom just overflowed. He called for the people to come down and see Tom, the man who had voyaged all the way from Vanikoro.

The populace came running down to see him. They spoke to him, asking him to explain how he had got to their island. He once more replied that he had voyaged. After a short time, Christopher Kita, the man who had been fishing in the surf and thus had first seen Tom, told him to bring his canoe ashore and to set it down in a smooth place. Tom answered, “It is good,” and they all carried the canoe ashore.

There were a great many people gathered together, waiting for Tom in the place to which he was escorted. Christopher Kita then asked what were those objects in the canoe's hold. Tom told him that they were tinned drinks. Kita wanted to know where Tom had got them. Tom said that they were from the Japanese fishermen whom he had met at sea. They had given him the drinks. Kita replied, “Oh! That is good. They had sympathy for you.” Tom agreed, “Yes. It is very good.”

The people then asked Tom for the cigarettes that still were stashed in the hold. He retrieved the cigarettes and distributed them for the people to smoke. He had smoked only five packs while at sea, so two full cartons and most of the third were still available for distribution. As the people smoked, their happiness defied description. Others drank the tinned pop.

Christopher Kita then told Tom to go and sleep because his body must be very sore. He told the people to let Tom sleep; that they should wait until the next day to speak to him. He was very tired and readily agreed.

When Tom awoke the next morning, he found the house and yard were filled with people. Filled with people from the island, eager to pump him with questions. They seemed very happy.

Tom stayed with these people for a rather long time—about four months. He had departed Vanikoro on June 12 and he made landfall on the 21st. On the 16th, he had boarded the Japanese fishing boat, and he had parted company with the ship on the 17th. He sighted Makira on June 21, 1985.

THE AFTERMATH

Since the Protectorate days, the Solomon Islands have had a statute banning - 38  most interisland voyaging by sailing canoe. Thus, when word of Tom's exploits reached Government authorities, he was taken into custody and charged with violating national law. His trial was held before a magistrate in Santa Ana, and the court was packed with supporters. Proceedings were conducted in Pidgin, the Solomons lingua franca, and Tom served as his own lawyer. By Tom's account, the trial revolved around several key arguments.

The prosecutor asked if Tom was unaware that he had violated a Government order. Tom replied by asking, “What is government?” The prosecutor responded that government is the people who look after all the islands and all the people of the Solomons. Tom then asked the prosecutor to list the names of all the men, women, and children of all the islands—which he should be able to do if he really looked after them and protected their interests. When no one in the courtroom could do this, Tom began to list the names of every person living on Anuta.

The prosecutor tried to argue that the law was passed for the people's own welfare. The Government provides shipping service, which is safe and reliable. If one wants to go to a different island, one should travel by Government ship rather than risk one's life

in a traditional canoe.

Tom replied that he saw little difference between Government ships and his canoe. When he got in a Government ship, he had confidence that he would arrive at his destination. But he had equal certainty when he set off by canoe. That was the way that his people had always got around; and he was simply carrying on his ancestors' traditions. The only difference between Government ships and Anutan canoes was size, which, as far as he was concerned, should not be an issue. Besides, he had been living on Anuta, where there was no source of cash income, and he had no money to pay for passage in a ship. Therefore, if he wanted to travel, his only option was canoe.

Public sentiment was clearly on Tom's side, and he told me that, if he had been convicted, the people in the courtroom might have physically attacked the magistrate. In the end, he was given a stern warning and set free. The people were so happy that they hoisted him on their shoulders, carried him outside, and began throwing him in the air in jubilation. The prospect of being dropped, he said, was far more frightening than anything he had encountered on the ocean.

Eventually, he travelled aboard a Government vessel to Honiara, the Solomons capital, leaving his canoe behind in Santa Ana. During a period of several months in Honiara, he hinted that he might take another canoe and sail on to the Russell Islands, where many Anutans work as plantation labourers. However, relatives in Honiara dissuaded him, and he travelled to the Russells by ship. He spent about two years in the Russells before I met him in Honiara in July 1988. He had long since recovered from his shame about the watermelons and was waiting for a ship back home.

- 39 

Reactions to Tom's voyage have been somewhat varied. Some of my informants depicted him as irresponsible, not only about his own well-being, but also about the canoe. *Kavaitevai* was a new canoe which had just been built in 1984. It had taken several men about four months of solid work to make the canoe, and had cost one family a large *Callophyllum* tree — a valuable and scarce commodity. The men who had constructed the canoe and the domestic unit that contributed the tree were certainly not pleased that Tom had taken their vessel and that it was now on Santa Ana, where it would likely never be retrieved.

There was some sentiment that Tom should take responsibility for returning the canoe to Anuta, but he told me that he wants to leave it on Santa Ana as a kind of memorial to himself and his accomplishment. Alternatively, he has suggested that he might build a replacement when he gets back home. Some commentators, however, were sceptical of his abilities as a carpenter.

While Tom has his critics, however, the overwhelming response has been respect and admiration. Immediately after his trial, he became something of a national hero. He was to be interviewed by the Solomon Islands Government newspaper and radio station, but departed for the Russells before the interviews occurred.

Among Anutans, too, his feat has taken on heroic proportions. Several people spoke to me in glowing terms about Tom's seamanship abilities and made such comments as, "He has a strong heart. He is not afraid of anything!" Even several people who had worked to build *Kavaitevai* seemed ready to forgive him. And a former high official in the national police force — a man who typically has placed great value on obedience to law and maintenance of discipline — described the story of Tom's voyage as "a very good one." Anutans seem to take collective pride in Tom's accomplishment as affirmation of their ancient seamanship traditions, and assert with tones of awe that no one from their island — at least in recent memory — has successfully completed such a journey.

DISCUSSION

Tom's voyage is instructive with regard to Polynesian travel because it grew spontaneously out of his cultural and social setting. It was not done as a self-conscious attempt to recreate the voyages of others, nor was it part of a "navigational renaissance" among Anutans. Rather, it was done for the same reasons and in essentially the same manner as countless other voyages through the generations. And many fundamental themes of Polynesian voyaging are summarised in the events.

The immediate motivation for the voyage was 'shame' (*pakamaa*). Two young men were falsely accused of a "crime" against the

common good. Backed into a corner and seeing no way out, they opted for the traditional remedy: suicide. - 40 Both Tom and Ashley explicitly told me that their intention was to kindle among their accusers feelings of remorse and sympathy (*aropa*) by risking death at sea. Yet, as Firth (1967) has pointed out, risk-taking and suicide frequently shade into each other. Life had become unbearable at home so they put out to sea. If the voyage was successful, they would have made their point by demonstrating the depth of their hurt and, at the same time, proving their abilities as wayfinders and sailors. If they died at sea, the community would rue the day that they had forced the youths to sail towards their last sunset.

By the time that they reached Vanikoro, Pu Akonima's anger and their shame had largely dissipated. Tom's decision to push on alone to Santa Ana, then, was for a different reason — unabashed bravado. His motivation, as he put it, was to *taka toku rongo* 'spread my reputation'.

A second set of themes involves the common view of bachelors as reckless adventurers and the community's efforts to control their wanderlust. The issue for Anuta is discussed more generally in Feinberg (1988:128–31). In the present case it may be seen in the need for the youths to sneak away; the attempts to apprehend them when their departure was discovered; and Tom's decision to leave Vanikoro in the middle of the night without even taking food or water, for fear that that might draw attention to his plans.

Similar concerns entered into the decisions as to where to go. For example, Tikopia would have been an easier destination than Vanikoro, but Tom and Ashley were afraid the Tikopians would be anxious to co-operate with Anutan authorities and have the pair shipped home post-haste. Moreover, a voyage of 200 miles is more heroic than one of just over 70.

Common Oceanic wayfinding techniques are also evident. Thus, Tom did not insist on setting out direct for Makira Province. Rather, he employed the strategy of island-hopping (e.g., see Gladwin 1970:162–4; Lewis 1972:Chapter 8) by sailing first to Vanikoro and only later setting off again. Then, on the last leg of his journey, he took careful note of Utupua, Ndeni, Makira, and Santa Catalina before finally making landfall at Santa Ana.

Tom kept his bearings at night by traditional star paths. To maintain his course by daylight was more complicated. Before sunrise, he looked at the stars and calculated wind direction in relation to his course. If the wind was not directly astern, he set off the bow sufficiently to make allowance for leeway drift. Then, he assumed that the wind would remain steady through the day. Come evening, he would take stock of the situation and adjust his course. He found at times that the wind had changed somewhat, but only once was the shift great enough to cause concern. And on that occasion, he diagnosed the problem before any damage had been done.

Since Anutans had not been known to voyage to Makira and surrounding - 41 islands, he could not rely on traditional navigational lore for that particular star path. Rather, he was told the route from Vanikoro to Makira by an elderly Taumako man. He tried it and it worked, demonstrating successful intercommunity exchange of navigational information. Similar exchanges must have taken place through the precontact period.

It is well known that current shifts are among the most difficult problems to diagnose for a noninstrument navigator. On the open sea, it may be impossible for even the most capable navigator to discern current shifts. Tom's account, however, indicates that, once he started to approach Makira, he was able to determine current with some confidence. It also indicates the initial difficulty of distinguishing land from cloud formations. Yet, at his journey's end he sensed he was approaching land before he actually could see it. Floating debris only confirmed what he already "knew."

The resilience of the Polynesian outrigger canoe was demonstrated when *Kavaitevai* sank on the morning Tom and Ashley sighted Vanikoro. By remaining calm, the pair were able to refloat their vessel and continue towards their destination.

The incident with the Japanese fishing boat may be some indication of the surprising amount of traffic on what Westerners tend to think of as the empty vastness of the wide Pacific. And it illustrates the mixture of fear and bravado with which Anutan (and most likely other Polynesian) voyagers face their natural and human challenges.

Tom's description of this encounter shows signs of being at some variance with actual events. Several aspects of this point have been discussed above (notes 7–10). These discrepancies might be explained in part by Tom's reputed flare for embellishing a good

story. In most respects, however, his account is probably an accurate reflection of his perceptions at the time of the incident. Some of his less plausible descriptions of the crew's behaviour probably are based on a misreading of their motivations, illustrating the kind of mutual misunderstanding that easily arises when people speaking very different languages and holding different cultural assumptions meet under such unlikely circumstances. In addition, it is easy to imagine that, after several days alone at sea, without food or drink, one's perceptions might become distorted. ¹⁴ Lilly (1956) found such altered perceptions to be common among persons who have been isolated at sea and in polar regions. Although Gladwin (1958:896) questions the applicability of Lilly's findings to Caroline Islanders, he gives little information on degree of physical deprivation suffered by the people in his sample, so the relevance of his claim for Tom's case is dubious.

Lastly, the entire episode demonstrates the positive symbolic value Anutans impute to the sea, and the sense of confidence with which they face the prospect - 42  of an ocean voyage. This is seen in Tom's willingness to set off twice within three months on 200-mile voyages, and his apparent willingness to contemplate a third from Honiara to the Russells. It is apparent in his argument in court — that canoe travel, even if less comfortable, is as reliable as Government shipping. And it may be seen in the popular acclaim he received not only from Anutans but also from other Solomon Islanders, who also admire skill and courage, and many of whom share the Anutans' fondness for the sea.

This attitude was summarised most poignantly by Tom himself in answer to my query as to whether he might ever make another voyage like the one in 1985. He said he did not know. *Matea, i te vaatia. I te vaatia nei, kau matnata ki te moaner; kairo kau matakū.* 'Maybe sometime. Now, I view the ocean [and] I have no fear.'

- 43 

REFERENCES

- Feinberg, Richard, 1988. *Polynesian Seafaring and Navigation: Ocean Travel in A nutan Culture and Society*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press.
- Firth, Raymond, 1967. *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Gladwin, Thomas, 1958. Canoe Travel in the Truk Area: Technology and Psychological Correlates. *American Anthropologist*, 60:893–9.
- ———1970. *East Is a Big Bird: Navigation and Logic on Puluwat Atoll*.

- 44 

- Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Kyselka, Will, 1987. *An Ocean in Mind*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lewis, David, 1972. *We, the Navigators*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lilly, John C., 1956. Mental Effects of Reduction of Ordinary Levels of Physical Stimuli on Intact, Healthy Persons. *Psychiatric Research Reports*, 5:1–28.
- Thomas, Stephen, 1987. *The Last Navigator*. New York: Holt.

This article is based on research with Anutans in Honiara, the Solomon Islands capital, in 1988. The study was conducted under the auspices of Kent State University's Research Council. I am indebted to Leith Duncan, Ben Finney, and Nancy Grim for helpful comments and encouragement.

Kyselka (1987) makes similar statements about the *Hōkūle'a*.

All canoes on Anuta are named, regardless of their size. This may be in part a function of the island's topography: Anuta has no easy passage through its fringing reef, and, in order to withstand the surf, canoes are carefully constructed over a period of many months. Through their months of labour, craftsmen

develop an attachment to their vessels which is partially reflected in the local naming practices. Anutans living overseas in Honiara and the Russell Islands also build canoes, but they are less well made and seldom named. See Feinberg (1988:32-6) for more detailed discussion of this issue.

Kavaitevai was in the early stages of construction during my brief visit to Anuta towards the end of 1983. I did not see it completed, but it probably was about 20 feet in length, with carved ends (*manu*) and bow and stern covers (*puke*), very much like other Anutan canoes described in Feinberg (1988). The builders were competent craftsmen, although not generally regarded as the island's very best.

Anutans refer to east (the direction from which the sun rises) as *runga* 'up' and west (the direction of the setting sun) as *raro* 'down'. Thus, one 'ascends' (*penake*) to the east and 'descends' (*ipo*) to the west. See Feinberg (1988:92-100) for discussion of Anuta's directional system.

Tom and Ashley both are strong and energetic youths. Tom is a muscular 5'10" or 5'11". Ashley is a little shorter and more slender, but physically fit. In fact, in 1988, he was working for a security guard service in Honiara. The difficulty in raising the sail, then, was undoubtedly a function of the weather rather than the sailors' skill or physical condition. I have no way of gauging precise wind strength at any point during this voyage. I would note from my experience, however, that Anutans are effective sailors even in a nasty squall. Thus, the wind on this occasion must have been considerable.

Leith Duncan (personal communication) has pointed out a number of discrepancies in Tom's story of this episode. Unfortunately, there are no witnesses other than Tom and the unidentified fishermen. Therefore, we should view the following account as Tom's perception of the events he described and reserve judgment on the story's accuracy.

Although Tom seemed certain of the ship's nationality, he did not make clear precisely how he knew that it was from Japan and not Taiwan, Korea, or some other Asian country. He speaks no Asian language, and it is unlikely that he could identify the language by looking at written characters. Perhaps he saw a flag or was told by the radio operator, who spoke some English. On the other hand, his identification could have been in error. It must be said, however, that Anutans have irregular contact with fishing vessels from a number of countries, and my experience suggests that they are usually correct in their identification of the ships' countries of origin.

These, of course, are Tom's interpretations. In his opinion, the ship fled because it was fishing illegally in Solomon Islands waters, and the crew was fearful of potential witnesses. This is also his understanding of why they later refused to take him ashore (see below). There are, however, other possible explanations, e.g., that the ship backed off to avoid the risk of running him down. Nor did Tom explain why he was certain, when he saw a ship a short time later, that it was the same one rather than a second ship, perhaps from the same fishing fleet.

⁰ It seems unlikely that a ship would be at anchor in that part of the ocean; and if it were, it is unclear why it would have had its running lights on. It may have been drifting with its engine running; but we can only speculate.

¹ In fact, if Tom had already passed well west of Ndeni, the Torres Islands would have been over 100 miles *back* towards the south-west (see Figure 2). Evidently, then, either Tom was mistaken as to his location, the fishermen were lying to him, or he misunderstood what they were trying to tell him. Again, we lack sufficient data to decide among these possibilities.

² Duncan (personal communication) suggests that this apparent show of cowardice would be extraordinary behaviour for sailors in view of an attack on their captain and the subsequent threat of damage to their ship (see below). In 1972, I observed a large group of Anutans thoroughly intimidate the crew of a Taiwanese fishing vessel that had stopped at their island; but Tom was alone and his situation was quite different. It seems likely, then, that he misread his hosts' intentions.

³ *Toki* is misidentified in my book (Feinberg 1988) as *Delphinus*. On my 1988 visit to the Solomons, I was able to observe it in the sky and make a definitive identification.

⁴ In this regard, Duncan (personal communication) has noted: "I had a similar encounter with such a vessel off Sydney Heads in the early hours of the morning. . . . Like Tom I'd been at sea solo but just for two or three days. Every time I altered to give the ship clear passage it altered toward me. I thought it was deliberately trying to run me down then realised that maybe it was Customs or such wanting to check me out . . . so held my own course. When I finally closed with it it was a Japanese longliner drifting, presumably awaiting the dawn before entering the harbour. . . . Later as I went up the harbour I was in a weird state of mind, highly suggestive if not actually hallucinating. I saw minarets and pleasure palaces, an 'Oriental' not Western city. . . . Tom's situation was more severe, four days not two, no food not just no proper meals or sleep. The equaliser may have been his much greater sailing and boating experience. This was my first long trip."