

We were hot, cross, and impatient to leave. We looked at each other, shaking our heads. Exasperated, I turned to Julie;

*'I've had it for today. Let's just go back to The Aegre. In fact, let's just sail this afternoon anyway.'*

Would they send a gunboat out after us? I doubted it. Would it be a problem arriving in Rarotonga with no clearance papers since the Marquesas? Well, it wasn't French, so probably not. We stood in the busy, noisy street, looking at each other.

*'Yes, let's just go',* agreed Julie.

Back aboard The Aegre, we excitedly readied the boat for sea. Setting the mainsail on our new mast, the familiar routine coming back, I started to haul in the anchor warp, *'All ok Julie?'* I called back to her in the cockpit in the familiar way. Then the anchor was clear of the bottom, and once more, The Aegre was starting to heel to the light breeze. With the jib set, we picked up speed and were quickly joined by Bob and Sharon from the yacht Marluva, out in their dinghy to see us off. Out past Varua now, heading for the narrow Punaauia pass through the reef.



Figure 19 Departing Punaauia, Tahiti

No French gunboats appeared as we swept out through the narrow pass. I was back on the helm of The Aegre and smiling, feeling the wind in the sails, the boat picking up speed. Bob and Sharon gave a final wave and blast on their air horn and then turned back. A solitary Hobie cat followed The Aegre in the building sea and wind, then it too turned for home as we emerged from the lee of Tahiti. We were alone again, heading out. I loved this moment of leaving, off on another adventure. Where would this one take us? What lay ahead, beyond the empty horizon?

Everywhere I looked, The Aegre around me was improved. She was the best she'd ever been. It was a bit like leaving Scotland, and I wanted to sing:



Figure 20 The Aegre heads off for the Punaauia pass in the reef