

JULY 10, 1936

# TIN CAN ISLAND

TIN CAN MAIL

was thrown overboard in the "S. S. Mariposa" off the coast of "Tin Can Island" in the Tonga Islands—Lat. 10° 33' South, Long. 175° 39' West.

Wm. R. Meyer, Commander.



Mr. J. N. Alderman,  
National Geographic Society,  
1624 M Street, N. W.  
Washington, D. C.  
U. S. A.

## Stamp Collectors Prize "Tin Can Island" Mail.

Approved by National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.—WNU Service.

ALTHOUGH the south Sea Island of Niuafo is the top of an active volcano that erupted in 1929 and destroyed a village, it remains the happy home of some 100 of those superb Polynesians, the Tongans.

Dwelling for untold generations in this remote crater in the sea, they have learned to act quickly and shrewdly in volcanic emergencies, and in recent years there has been little loss of life.

How they behave was dramatically illustrated at 4 a. m. on July 25, 1935. A hundred or more villagers, the entire population of Futu, on the northwest coast, were awakened by a rumbling and saw fire breaking out in the hillside less than two miles to the southeast.

No time was lost. The alarm was spread in the village, and the babes in arms, the sick and the aged were hurriedly carried off along a good road that led to the northern village of Angaha. All realized that safety lay in reaching here or the high ground of the island's circular ridge.

From three vents on a fracture that opened northward, the molten rock descended upon Futu. By eight o'clock in the morning most of the abandoned buildings were consumed by fire and buried under mounds of heavy basaltic lava. Pouring into the ocean, the hot flows killed fish, sent up clouds of steam, and heaped enormous quantities of black sand along the water front. Fringing the shore were patches of cultivated land that remained unscathed among the lava streams. In one of these the returning villagers found a few of their horses, pigs and chickens still alive. Thanks to the prompt exodus, every one of the human inhabitants escaped.

### How It Became "Tin Can Island"

Niuafo reminds one of a hat with a hole in the crown. At the bottom of the hole is an islet-dotted lake of fresh water, with its bed some 200 feet below sea level, its surface only 20 feet above. The wide "brim" has been formed by lava flows.

So nearly perfect is the ring which Niuafo forms about its lake-enclosing crater that at first sight it appears to be a coral atoll. The island's highest point is about 800 feet above the waves, but the volcanic cone it crowns thrusts itself up some 6,000 feet from the ocean floor.

This detached bit of the Tongan archipelago is a straggler from the line made by those islands north of New Zealand. It lies near the center of the ocean triangle formed by Samoa, Tonga and Fiji.

Lacking harbors, the island is utterly isolated. Precarious was the regular carrying of mail to and from the island until recent years. The monthly mail steamer, unable to anchor, stopped about a mile off the northern landing at Angaha. Natives, fortified with log floats, swam out to it, regardless of sharks, holding above the water brown paper-wrapped packages of outgoing letters tied to the tops of sticks.

The sailors on the steamer lowered a bucket and collected these parcels. In exchange they dropped into the water the more bulky mail from the outside world, soldered in

large biscuit tins. The athletic villagers towed these tins ashore and thus completed delivery of the mail.

An unfortunate encounter between a swimmer and a shark finally caused a suspension of the swimming mail service, and native canoes now collect tin cans. It is easy to understand why Niuafo, called "Good Hope Island" on some charts has become known also as "Tin Can Island."

On the west side of Niuafo is a desert of new lava flows, but on the east is a tropical glory of coconuts, ironwoods, mangoes and pandanus, yams, taros, papayas, sweet potatoes, pineapples, bananas, melons, and manioc.

Although the island lies some 15½ degrees south of the equator, the trade winds give it a delightful climate, much like that of Hawaii.

### Explosive Eruption of 1886

Explosive volcanic eruptions around the lake have occurred about 72 years apart, and lava outbreaks in the western deserts have come at intervals of approximately 16 years.

The last steam-blast eruption, which occurred in 1886, was a major event in the history of Niuafo. There was no loss of life, for the trade wind forced the huge cauliflower clouds of sand and dust westward, away from the settlements. The site of this eruption was near the northeast corner of the big lake, where large blocks of cliff rock were engulfed, and heaps of sand were piled 200 to 400 feet high. Ponds were left where the explosive craterlets had formed. About three feet of ash fell on the settlements.

The story goes that an earthquake shook the island with a gentle swaying motion at 7 p. m. on August 31, 1886, and smaller shocks continued till midnight, causing alarm. Then came a detonation, a "rocket" ascended 3,000 feet above the lake, and quaking ceased. Violent thunderstorms developed, and lightning struck in many places.

A blizzard of black dust and sand weighted down the vegetation during a night of inky darkness. On the leeward side of the island, broken fragments of rock and pumice, along with sand and fine dust, piled 20 feet deep. The eruption continued in spasms, geyserlike, for 18 days, with recurrences of terrifying clouds of dust that shut off the light of day.

Only two months before, Tarawera volcano had erupted disastrously in New Zealand, indicating volcanic sympathy between two craters hundreds of miles apart on the same general rift in the earth's crust; and Funuafo (Falcon island), nearer to Niuafo, had begun eruption in October, 1885.

### Legend of Ahau's Destruction.

Destruction of property by hurricanes and eruptions on the northern and western sides of the island have been lamentable during the last century. The story of the village of Ahau in the southwest is reminiscent of that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Ahau, legend says, was founded by men and women who, refusing to conform to the laws governing legal marriage, rebelled against the strict high chief at Angaha.

They founded their village purposely on the side of the island most

remote from Angaha, and their headman denounced with impassioned oratory the taxes imposed upon them by the high chief. He called upon the gods to send a sign from heaven to destroy all his people rather than permit them to submit to such oppression.

Whatever the truth of these stories, certain it is that on June 24, 1853, the ground rifted and lava spouted up directly under the village headman's house. Such destruction of human life by a sudden lava flow is unusual in volcano annals, for lava is usually so slow-moving that people have time to flee from it.

An aged woman recalls the frenzied flight of those inhabitants who escaped and the gossip about the village. She will tell you that two-thirds of the population, possibly 60 or 70 people, were killed.

When a volcanologist visited the site of this village recently, he found the lava flows covered with a moderate growth of ironwood, somewhat resembling a pine forest with its small cones and long needles. Not a trace remains of the village green or native huts.

There is a 50-foot double spatter cone of black lava at the place where the headman's house is said to have stood. From this hill all lava gives place abruptly to a luxuriant growth of coconuts and fertile plantation lands on the slope of the circular ridge.

### Outbreaks Can Be Predicted.

A study of the eruptions and the dates when they have occurred provides some basis for predicting, roughly, when future outbreaks may occur.

It may be said that Niuafo is continuously erupting, and that these lava flows and explosive engulfments are merely punctuation marks in a continuing process.

After an explosive eruption in 1814, the intervals were 26, 13, 14, and 19 years. From the 1886 explosive eruption to the present time the intervals were 26 and 17 years. Considering the average lava interval of 16 years, we have reason to expect another lava eruption about 1945. Adding the average explosion interval of 72 years to 1886, it may be estimated that the next explosive eruption will occur about 1958.

These expectations are not accurate forecasts, but merely suggestive experiments in volcanologic reasoning. It is probable that the explosive eruption about 1958 will break down the very high cliffs to the southeast of the lake, and that opposite this the lava flow, about 1945, will extend the crack of 1929 along the northwest shore of the island, in the direction of the village of Esia, near Angaha.

### Llama, Beast of Burden, Used by American Indian

The llama has the distinction of being the only beast of burden that the American Indians were in possession of when America was discovered, observes a writer in the Rural New-Yorker. The peculiar conformation of its feet enables it to tread with security over rough and steep slopes where other animals would find it difficult walking. And then, camel-like, it is capable of making long journeys without water.

The llama is not a fast traveler, for the average distance is from a dozen to 15 miles a day when transporting merchandise, as it is distinctly a beast of burden, yet it supplies the Indian of South America his supply of wool for clothing, fresh meat, though coarse, leather, bone and his fuel, as the manure when dry is burned.

Here is one very peculiar trait of the llama: He carries a burden of from 100 to 125 pounds. If he is overloaded, he simply resents the imposition by walking out to the side of the road, lies down, and there is no persuasion and no punishment that can be administered to him that will induce him to change his obstinate decision!

When you look at a llama, you are beholding one of the most interesting animals of history, for when the great Inca Empire flourished from the Maule River in Chile and the Oasis of Mendoza to the Northern Andes of Ecuador, the llama was their beast of burden.

# Through A WOMAN'S EYES

by JEAN NEWTON

## THE GARDEN YIELDS BEAUTY AND PEACE

"I HAVE my little house and I have my garden. The garden keeps me occupied, even busy, and I am quite content."

That from a woman just turned sixty, healthy and active, who had always lived a most cosmopolitan life. The little house to which she referred is one on the estate which had been her summer home during the lifetime of her brother and sister who had passed away. She is a single woman of wealth, trained to no work, her life always having been a social one. She has had her consciousness of service in a great generosity to good causes, by maintaining which, she says, she feels less guilty in enjoying her retreat!

Always the mistress of a large household, a patron of the theater and the opera and all the advantages and entertainments of a large city, spending only summers in the country, this woman now lives there all the year in a "little house"—and is content, because "I have my garden."

A woman who had known my friend when she was active socially in the large city, expressed pity

when I told her. But then, "On second thought," said she, "why is her garden less important than anything else she might be doing? Perhaps Miss— has the right idea!"

And there is wisdom in that second thought. My friend of sixty is content because she is no longer able to pursue her former activities, but because a lifetime of them has taught her their true insignificance. After all, what of all the things she might be doing in the social life of the "great world," is of more real importance, or more lasting value in the scheme of things, of more benefit to others or more satisfaction to herself—than her garden?

What except growing children offer a more satisfying return than the flowers growing in a garden? What greater yield of pleasure and joy than with one's own hands to make possible the beauty that is a garden in the spring? Social success, varied recreation, excitement, prominence? What does it all mean in the end? Indeed how fortunate is the woman for whom a garden can apply sufficient interest and zest for life. For there are few pursuits that can equal its yield of beauty and of peace.

# Bedtime Story

By Thornton W. Burgess



## BILLY MINK AND BOBBY COON WARN THEIR FRIENDS

BOBBY COON had been so frightened when he had sprung that trap there by the Laughing Brook that probably he would have run clear back to his home in the Green Forest had he not found Billy Mink waiting for him at the old log where they had met earlier in the evening. Billy was grinning.

"What are you running for?" he demanded. "I thought you were not afraid."

Bobby Coon stopped. "It—tried to catch me!" he panted. "It—jumped right at me!"

Billy Mink chuckled. "But I see it didn't catch you," said he. "Didn't

ing Brook to the old Smiling Pool."

The idea of going down to the Smiling Pool was too much for Bobby Coon to resist. So he followed Billy Mink down the bank of the Laughing Brook. When they reached the trap which Bobby had sprung, Billy Mink kicked it aside as he passed. It was plain to see that Billy Mink had known what he was talking about when he said that now that trap was perfectly harmless. Then, without hesitating, Billy slipped through the little opening in that fence the trapper had built. That proved there was nothing to fear there now, so Bobby followed. He had to make the opening big enough to get through, but he did this by pulling up a couple of the sticks.

When they reached the Smiling Pool they saw Little Joe Otter sitting on the Big Rock. Jerry Muskrat was swimming over toward his house.

Little Joe Otter dived into the Smiling Pool and he and Jerry Muskrat had a race over to the place where Billy Mink and Bobby Coon were waiting. "What is it you have to tell us?" demanded Little Joe. "I don't believe it's anything important."

"That depends on how you look at it," retorted Billy Mink. "Somebody has been setting traps along the Laughing Brook. I've found three of them, Bobby Coon and I have sprung two of them. We thought we'd just come down here and give you fellows warning." Then Bobby and Billy told Little Joe and Jerry all about those traps.

© T. W. Burgess.—WNU Service.



"Hi, You Fellows!" Called Billy Mink. "Come Over Here!"

I tell you it wouldn't hurt you if you put your paw under it? That kind of a trap is perfectly harmless as long as you do not step in it. I'm glad you sprung it. I sprung the one on the other side of the Laughing Brook the same way. Now, both of those traps are perfectly harmless. They will be until the trapper sets them again.

"We can go up and down the Laughing Brook through the openings in those little fences with nothing to fear as long as those traps are in plain sight. That trapper will probably come around tomorrow, but for the remainder of tonight there is nothing for us to worry about. Let's go down the Laugh-

## Man's Pants Catch Fire; Money Burns

Madison, Ind. — Earl Smetley, North Madison, suffered burns on his legs and lost a roll of paper money when his trousers were partly burned after a car he was driving burst into flames. A leaking gasoline line was given as the cause. Smetley jumped from the car and was forced to remove part of his clothing to save himself from further injury.