

MISCHIEF GOES SOUTH

H. W. TILMAN



Mischief close reefed in Drake Passage

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TILMAN

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Contents

	Foreword – <i>Skip Novak</i>	9
	Preface	15
	PART ONE: ISLANDS OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN	
I	The Objective and the Crew	19
II	To the Canaries	33
III	Tragedy at Sea	44
IV	Arrival at Montevideo	55
V	Trouble at Montevideo	65
VI	To Punta Arenas	77
VII	To the South Shetlands	92
VIII	At Deception Island	106
IX	South Georgia	117
X	Montevideo and Homewards	128
	PART TWO: ROUND AFRICA	
XI	The Start	145
XII	Cape Town	156
XIII	Defeated	163
XIV	Comoro and Aldabra Islands	173
XV	The Red Sea and Homewards	181
	Afterword—Tilman’s ‘Grace Darling’ – <i>Janet Verasanso</i>	189

Photographs

<i>Mischief</i> close reefed in Drake Passage	2
Commerson's dolphin underneath bowsprit shrouds	25
North side of Neptune's Bellows	25
Approaching Neptune's Bellows	40
The Chilean base at Pendulum Cove	40
<i>Mischief</i> anchored off the Chilean base, Pendulum Cove	57
Iceberg in Bransfield Strait	70
Sea elephant at Grytviken, South Georgia	70
In Cumberland Sound, South Georgia	87
The whaling station, Grytviken, South Georgia	98
Old try-pots outside the manager's house, Grytviken	98
The Old Harbour, Bahia, Brazil	119
The British station at King Edward Point	134
Albatross in South Atlantic	151
Shark killed by Lovegrove	151
Moroni, Grand Comore Island	166
Giant land tortoise awaiting shipment	183
The lagoon, Aldabra	183

Maps

1	Track chart for Southern Ocean expedition: Lymington—Montevideo	18
2	Track chart for Southern Ocean expedition: Montevideo—Southern Ocean; The South Shetland Islands	94
3	Track chart for Round Africa expedition	144

Mischief

Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter built at Cardiff 1906 by Thos. Baker, East Canal Wharf. Length 45 feet. Beam 13 feet. Draught 7 feet 6 inches. Net tons 13.78. T.M. 29 tons.

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 1906–1919 | Working pilot boat owned by William Morgan or ‘Billy the Mischief’ | |
| 1920 | Sold for £450 to a Mr Unna who sailed her to Takoradi | |
| 1927 | First appears in the Yacht Register and had subsequently in 27 years ten different owners | |
| 1954 | Bought at Malta by Ernle Bradford who sailed her to Palma, Mallorca and sold her to her last owner, H. W. Tilman | |
| 1954 | Palma—Gibraltar—Oporto—Lymington | 2000 m. |
| 1955–56 | Las Palmas—Monte Video—Magellan Straits—Valparaiso—Callao—Panama—Bermuda—Lymington
(<i>Mischief in Patagonia</i> , 1957) | 20,000 m. |
| 1957–58 | Las Palmas—Bahia Blanca—C. Town—Durban—Beira—Comoro Is.—Aldabra—Aden—Port Said—Malta—Gibraltar—Lymington
(<i>Mischief Goes South</i> , 1968) | 21,000 m. |
| 1959–60 | Las Palmas—C. Town—lies Crozet—Kerguelen—C. Town—St Helena—Lymington
(<i>Mischief Among The Penguins</i> , 1961) | 20,000 m. |
| 1961 | West Greenland. Godthaab—Umanak Fjord—Godthaab—Lymington
(<i>Mischief in Greenland</i> , 1964) | 7500 m. |
| 1962 | West Greenland. Godthaab—Evighedsfjord—Holsteinborg—Exeter Sound (Baffin Is.)—Lymington
(<i>Mischief in Greenland</i> , 1964) | 6500 m. |
| 1963 | Baffin Bay. Godthaab—Godhaven—Upernivik—Lancaster Sound—Bylot Is.—Pond Inlet—Godthaab—Lymington
(<i>Mostly Mischief</i> , 1966) | 6500 m. |

Surveyed Dec. 1963 and reported no longer fit for long voyages.

- | | | |
|---------|---|-----------|
| 1964 | East Greenland: Faroe Is.—Reykjavik—
Angmagssalik—Lymington
(<i>Mostly Mischief</i> , 1966) | 3700 m. |
| 1965 | East Greenland: Reykjavik—Angmagssalik—
Skjoldungen—Lymington
(<i>Mostly Mischief</i> , 1966) | 4000 m. |
| 1966–67 | Las Palmas—Montevideo—Punta Arenas—
South Shetland Is.—South Georgia—Montevideo
—Azores—Lymington
(<i>Mischief Goes South</i> , 1968) | 20,400 m. |

Two mountains and a cape have officially been named after her—Mont du Mischief, by the French, on Île de la Possession, Îles Crozet; Cap Mischief, also by the French, on Île de Kerguelen; Mount Mischief, by the Canadian Survey, Exeter Sound, Baffin Is. near to Mt. Raleigh.

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Foreword

Skip Novak

BILL TILMAN. It seems I have been trailing in his wake for the last three decades...

In the summer of 1983 I was invited to ‘boat captain’ the sixty-one-foot sloop *War Baby* for her voyage to Scandinavia and the Arctic. The owner/skipper Warren Brown was a renowned ocean racer and blue water cruiser. In fact, *War Baby* was a famous racing boat that, as a young lad, I had crewed on in the 1972 Transatlantic Race from Bermuda to Bayona, Spain. At the age of 20, and well before satellite navigation, let alone GPS, I made it a point to understudy the navigator and learned the art and science of celestial navigation en route. Before I realised it I was destined to spend more than a fair share of my life at sea girdling the globe on various around-the-world races and other ocean passages, that eventually overlapped with a long career in expedition sailing to high latitudes that continues to this day.

By the time of our cruise north in 1983 I had been based on the south coast of the UK for seven years and had two Whitbread Round the World Races under my belt. I was still footloose and fancy free, leaving a trail of failed relationships astern in my blind ambition for wild places by land and sea—living out of a sea bag ready for any adventure at a moment’s notice.

For *War Baby*’s cruise, we prepped from Lymington. One of my responsibilities, in addition to modifying and equipping a former race boat for her cruise north, was to compile a library of Arctic literature pertinent to our itinerary. This is when I first discovered Bill Tilman’s *Triumph and Tribulation*, realising with regret that back in the mid to late 1970s I had probably passed by him on the dockside in Lymington.

Was it a golden opportunity lost, or a blessing in disguise that I had neither met him nor seen his well-known adverts for crew that

promised “no pay, no prospects and not much pleasure”? I might have been in time to sign on for his ill-fated East Greenland expedition with *Baroque*. In fact, given the time frame, I might have ended up on *En Avant...* along with the young crew including the 79-year old Bill Tilman, never to be seen again after their stop in Rio de Janeiro on the way to the Antarctic in 1977.

You see, in addition to being a professional sailor, I was a keen and frustrated mountaineer. Had I encountered Bill and started a gam, it would have been more than likely I would have been invited on board for his next expedition—and might have enjoyed what he called on one voyage his “fine view of the Isle of Wight through the port side planking,” of his Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter taking leave of the UK for the great unknown.

During my high latitude baptism on *War Baby* in 1983, in the space of four months we had visited the Scilly Isles, made a pub crawl in Howth, Ireland (where I fell in love yet again), sampled the liquid production in the Western Isles, made a whistle stop tour of the Norwegian coast from Bergen to Hammerfest, trekked across Bear Island (stupidly without a bear gun), and cruised the north-west and north coasts of Spitsbergen before returning to the UK via the Faroe Islands.

Contingent on taking the job in hand, I was promised that our objectives were to land people to explore inland, which would include some serious trekking, camping and climbing within the abilities of a mixed group. In spite of making every effort to climb every bit of high ground possible (although not necessarily before breakfast as Tilman might have advocated), the schedule was rushed with the owner’s guests coming and going at various ports along the way. Deadlines prevailed. We did manage to camp on the beach known as Graven-set (sealer’s graves) in Magdalena Fjord and we climbed where we thought Tilman had climbed in 1974, but by and large the voyage was a frustration of too much ocean covered in too short a time and a raft of missed objectives in the hills. Let it be said it was an introduction to the possibilities, and for that I was thankful. Through my obsessions with high ground I was nicknamed ‘Tilman’ by the crew, which suited me just fine.

The result of that foray and the solution to my dilemma was simply to build my own boat. In 1987 I launched my first expedition vessel

Pelagic, specifically to sail to remote areas to climb. Over the next three decades the Tilman stories would serve as inspiration to our travels in Patagonia, Spitsbergen, Antarctica and South Georgia. The shipmates who were with me back then all became, and continue to be, Tilman aficionados able to come up with a Tilman one liner, witticism or some sage advice, *ad lib*. One of our favorites is always “Every herring should hang by his own tail,” of which the meaning is very clear—self-sufficiency is key and don’t expect a bail-out, if you go adventuring. Indeed, on our travels it became a priority to visit as many of the sites, described in the books with typical Tilman style and humour, of several mishaps or near disasters. *Mischief in Patagonia* which describes his first foray afloat to Chile in 1955–56 provides a surfeit of material.

Anyone who has brought a small boat alongside a jetty or left it and made a hash of the job in front of spectators will no doubt relate to how he described the “aquatic sports” of getting *Mischief* off the jetty at Punta Arenas, which included a jib dropped overboard, a grounding, an engine that wouldn’t start and being rammed by a Chilean cruiser trying to help. Tilman, an observer of human nature *par excellence*, summed it up: “It was a Saturday afternoon and one could almost hear the happy sigh of the crowd as they realised how wise they had been to spend it on the jetty.”

In Peel Inlet on the west coast of Chile more trouble ensued at the junction of the Calvo Fjord: “I was steering and elected to pass between two of the biggest [icebergs] which were some fifty yards apart. Although we were watching them pretty intently, for they seemed to be unusually still, it was not until we were up to them that I realised they were aground. A moment later we joined them.” Having also done a lot of exploratory navigation in Chile, rather than being critical of Tilman’s methods, that to a yachtsman would seem irresponsible and cavalier, we on the other hand could empathise. We had our share of groundings, but in the relating afterwards, they were never so cleverly described.

Further on at the north arm of Peel Inlet is Tilman Island, the scene of the infamous grounding when Tilman, Jorge Quinteros and Charles Marriot were crossing the Southern Patagonian Icecap to Lago Argentino. Bill Proctor had been left in charge of *Mischief* with John Van Tromp and Michael Grove aboard, and as Tilman relates it,

“Enough has been said of the extreme north end of Peel Inlet to show that it must be a fascinating place, and apparently Proctor’s curiosity to see it proved irresistible.” Nigh on three and a half tonnes of ballast in pig iron had to be extracted from the bilges and rowed ashore at slack water as they were grounded in a tidal race. After many mishaps and close calls in just staying on station, they managed to float off and then reship the ballast before taking shelter in Sea Lion Bay. We had spent two weeks there in 1993 attempting the unclimbed Mt Aguilera on the Wilcox Peninsula, and in view of the horrendous weather, which is typical, we had time to study and contemplate this debacle in its entirety. It is an accolade that in spite of what could have been the expedition’s undoing, not to mention leaving the three stranded on the beach in the Calvo Fjord, Tilman, instead of making a meal of it, dismissed and forgave Proctor’s folly with that single sentence, perhaps realising his own methods all too well.

In 2004 on *Pelagic Australis* after another visit to Bear Island we managed to circumnavigate Spitsbergen and sailed through the Hinlopen Straits and into Freemansund, a channel between Barents and Edge Islands, a shortcut which has strong tidal currents. With too much ice on the outside of Edge Island Tilman opted for the channel, in his words, “thus setting the scene for another regrettable incident.”

In short, hanging from a stern kedge, they had to jettison all the vessel’s ballast overboard, being too far from shore to row it in. Ditto all the water. All this while being attacked by ice marching to and fro with the tide, risking their rudder and propeller and losing two anchors into the bargain. A spare mainsail weighing about 400 pounds was also thrown over. Tilman: “Normally I get a lot of harmless pleasure from throwing overboard superfluous gear. The mainsail might be included in that category, but certainly not the ballast.”

Having lost all the ballast they had to ship onboard beach stone to retrim. A discussion ensued about how much weight in ballast could be achieved with stone in the space heretofore occupied by the pig iron. Various optimistic estimates were mooted, before crew member Andrew “invoked the aid of Archimedes” and with a spring balance and a bucket of water calculated that the stone would only achieve a quarter of the weight in pig iron. Tilman’s response is one of my many favorites: “Nothing has an uglier look than reason when it is not on

our side, and we hastened to tell Andrew what he could do with Archimedes and his bath water.”

The Tilman stories are reread on a regular basis not only for amusement, but by way of reminding ourselves of our fallibility (mistakes are still made) and for the wisdom of not taking ourselves too seriously. Some ships carry the Bible, we carry Tilman, a continuous source of inspiration and entertainment.

From the perspective of a modern yachtsman who is now dependent on a variety of gadgets, and in view of so many near misses experienced by Tilman and his crews, you can understand how recent generations might discredit his methods at sea, some of which may, with hindsight, have been suspect. As a mountaineer he is easier to sympathise with as the struggles that exist today in the mountaineering world, mainly based around self reliance, are not much different from the ones he experienced. Through the climbing books his toughness is recognised and therefore the mistakes made at sea become irrelevant; from the climber’s perspective, his maritime misadventures would naturally be dismissed as mere bagatelles. And this is where voyaging is so fundamentally different from mountaineering. Why? In Tilman’s own words, “The perils of the sea are less apparent than the perils of climbing and have to be carefully assessed. In climbing the penalty for a mistake is obvious and is sometimes exacted instantaneously, so that on the whole there are far fewer foolish climbers than foolish amateur sailors.”

I have often asked the question ‘how would I have fared with this amateur sailor?’ (by his own admission) while lurching from one mishap to another. In my younger days during Tilman’s final years I might have ended up as many of his crew had done—stranded in a foreign port, considering themselves lucky to be onshore and alive. If we could turn back the clock, but not my age, given the chance I would have been stoic and survived, just for the privilege of being his shipmate.

Skip Novak
Cape Town
February 2016

Preface

WHILE THIS BOOK IS MAINLY a record of *Mischief's* most recent voyage in 1966–67, I have included a hitherto unpublished account of an earlier voyage because there are features common to both. From my point of view both were failures. On the more recent one, though we reached our objective, we achieved nothing, and on the earlier one we did not reach our objective. On both voyages a man fell overboard, in one case with fatal consequences, and on both there was crew trouble. Happily on the earlier voyage this concerned only one man.

Writing about the recent voyage was like turning a knife in the wound. I had to exercise iron control. Instead of cheerfulness continually breaking in, as it should, plaintiveness and spleen were uppermost in my mind. But the latter do not make for either edifying or interesting reading. I have therefore suppressed my feelings and hope that the tone on the whole is moderate and the language of strictest reserve.

An anecdote of Swinburne told by Hugh Kingsmill in his book *Invective and Abuse* is relevant. Swinburne, who thought he had been affronted by Emerson, had written him a letter. 'I hope your language was quite moderate,' says his friend Gosse. 'Perfectly moderate,' replied Swinburne, 'I merely told him, in language of the strictest reserve, that he was a hoary-headed and toothless baboon, who, first lifted into notice on the shoulders of Carlyle, now spits and splutters from a filthier platform of his own finding and fouling. That is all I've said.'

H.W.T.

Barmouth

December 1967

PART ONE

Islands of the Southern Ocean

July 1966–July 1967



Map 1: Track chart for Southern Ocean expedition: Lymington—Montevideo

THE OBJECTIVE AND THE CREW

WHAT ORNITHOLOGISTS, speaking *ex cathedra*, as it were, like to tell us about the habits of birds sometimes takes a lot of swallowing—an inelegant phrase, but apt enough in this context. For instance, one Forbush affirms in his whimsical way that the Arctic tern ‘nests as far north as the most northern Eskimo live, while in winter its tireless pinions beat along the distant shore of unexplored lands of the Antarctic continent.’ I am more willing to concede this because recently *Mischief*’s movements have been equally erratic, though less rapid, sailing off the east coast of Greenland in 1965, and in 1966 beating her tireless pinions far down in the Southern Ocean. With less compelling reasons than the Arctic tern has for its long journey, such behaviour may seem strange, especially after I had decided that from my point of view Greenland waters were the ideal cruising ground and that there was no need to look elsewhere. The point of view is important and since mine is not widely shared the following description of my ideal will be of help:

A region to which the voyage is not too long, where Arctic waters beat upon coasts that are wild and little frequented, and that are studded with unclimbed mountains; where in summer one enjoys almost continuous daylight, the pale skies and soft colours of the north, and above all the romance and excitement of icebergs and pack-ice seen at close quarters from the deck of a small boat. A region where it is easy to imagine oneself in company with John Davis aboard his 50-ton ship *Mooneshine*, or with any of those hardy spirits, the Elizabethan seamen-explorers in search of a North-west passage.

A man must be allowed to change his mind. As Benedick remarked: ‘When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I

were married.' It is a mistake to get into a rut. Fired by the divine spark of discontent or out of cussedness, after five voyages to Greenland waters I felt in need of change. No doubt the most striking change would have been a cruise to the West Indies or the South Sea Islands, regarded as the Islands of the Blessed by most right-minded yachtsmen who, if they live in England, pine, not unreasonably, for sunshine, hula-hula girls, and bananas. Something could be said against such places but my main objection is that they have no mountains, or only mountains that are covered with a lush growth of tropical vegetation, suitable for bushwhackers but not for climbers. Instead my thoughts turned to the far South, to Antarctic islands; and since this would be a longer and more arduous undertaking than a Greenland voyage it was a case of now or never, before *Mischief* and her owner grew any older. Many would say, I suppose, that both should long since have been in a museum.

There, as in northern waters, one would enjoy the blessing of continuous daylight and would lack for nothing in the way of icebergs, glaciers, and mountains. Moreover, the Southern Ocean is richer in life—albatross, giant petrels, penguins, whales, seals, and sea elephants. Nor would romance be quite absent, though the sealers of the nineteenth century are not perhaps such heroic characters as the Elizabethan seamen-explorers. In Antarctic waters, lacking the incentive of an imagined North-west passage, exploration began at a more recent date; yet, even in the days of sail, many adventurous spirits found their way there, in search of a living rather than of fame.

Obviously a southern voyage has one or two drawbacks. The weather for one, which is likely to be ruder and colder, with a marked absence of the prolonged sunshine that is a heartening feature of the Greenland scene. Worse still is the great distance involved, a round journey of some 20,000 miles of twelve months' duration. *Mischief's* earlier voyages had been to the South, to the Magellan Straits and Patagonian channels, and to the sub-antarctic islands of Crozet and Kerguelen. And of these I had said, misquoting Prince Hal: 'An intolerable deal of sea for one half-pennyworth of mountain.' The voyage I had in mind meant going farther south, to the South Shetland Islands, 500 miles south-east of Cape Horn and only some sixty miles from Graham Land, the northernmost tip of the Antarctic continent. This

peninsula, by the way, whose name has long been in dispute between the Americans and ourselves—the Americans calling it Palmer Peninsula—is now known as the Antarctic Peninsula. The South Shetlands comprise eleven islands and in the *Antarctic Pilot* there is the following general description:

These islands were discovered by Mr W. Smith in the brig *Williams* on February 18th, 1819, when on a voyage from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso, and standing far to the southward. Smith again attempted to make the islands in June 1819 but met the pack-ice and had to abandon his project; but he succeeded during a third voyage in October of the same year, landing on King George Island. The commercial exploitation of the islands by numerous British and American sealers followed immediately upon their discovery. The valuable fur seals were taken in such numbers that by 1822 they were almost exterminated, though some sealing continued until 1828. During this period the coasts and harbours became well known and some of the early charts which were produced compare favourably with modern surveys.

The islands, which are largely volcanic, extend about 290 miles in an ENE and WSW direction between the parallels of 61°00' S. and 63°22' S. and the meridians of 53°50' W. and 62°50' W. and are separated by some navigable channels. The northern parts of the coasts of the islands abound with islets, rocks, and breakers, but the southern coasts are almost entirely clear of dangers. In the early part of spring the southern coasts are blocked with ice, which may also extend a considerable distance northwards from the islands during winter, making the islands inaccessible to vessels other than icebreakers.

The interior of the islands consists generally of high mountains, Smith Island (Lat. 63°00' S. Long. 62°31' W.) the highest, being 6900 feet high. The islands are almost entirely ice-covered all the year round, and it is only after midsummer (in January) that a few tracts which are free from snow carry lichens and mosses, in some places supplanted by small patches of grass. The summer may be compared with a mild British winter. Sea birds, principally penguins and petrels, are very plentiful as in the South Orkney Islands. Elephant seals

are found on many of the beaches and their number appears to be increasing. Fur seals were abundant until their practical extermination during the nineteenth century. A few Weddell seals breed on the islands and the crab-eater seal is a rare visitor.

The particular island I had in my sights was naturally Smith Island, the most westerly of the group and the most mountainous. Livingston is the only other island of the group with mountains of interest. Smith Island has on it Mount Foster (6900 feet) and Mount Pisgah (6000 feet). Neither have been climbed. Indeed, so far as I can learn, no one has even landed on the island since James Weddell in 1820, a year after its discovery by William Smith. Many place-names in the Antarctic serve to remind us that sealers such as Smith, Weddell, Biscoe, Kemp, and Balleny were foremost in exploring those waters, prompted equally by a love of exploration and by the wish to find new, untouched sealing grounds. Weddell, a retired Master of the Royal Navy and a sealing captain, is famous for his penetration of the Weddell Sea in 1822 in the 160-ton brig *Jane* and the 65-ton cutter *Beaufroy*. In his *The White Road: A History of Polar Exploration* L. P. Kirwan writes:

Weddell in his devotion to science was typical of these sealing captains of the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Despite the lack of proper instruments and the disgruntlement of his sailors at so apparently profitless an occupation, he did what he could, testing the direction and strength of currents, taking temperatures of the sea until his thermometers were smashed in a gale, puzzling over differences in magnetic variation, scrupulously observing even in moments of danger the nature, form, and movements of the ice. To persevere with such tasks in vessels cruelly exposed to the violence of Antarctic weather required a singular devotion. The experience of Weddell's ships on this lengthy pioneering voyage were not unusual. A whaleboat overboard, a rudder frozen into immobility; bulwarks, decks, and rigging so heavily encrusted with ice that the ship could scarcely rise to the sea—such experiences were common in the brigs and cutters of the Antarctic sealers in the early years of the nineteenth century.

No doubt Conrad had in mind more distant times, but the earlier years of the nineteenth century, at least in the Antarctic, might equally be included when he speaks of 'Days when the sea was great and mysterious, ready to surrender the prize of fame to audacious men.'

From my point of view, therefore, the South Shetlands were highly attractive—remote, inaccessible, mountainous. The fact that they were inhabited was a slight drawback. At least on one of them, Deception Island, there are British, Chilean, and Argentine bases. Smith Island offered a supreme challenge to the sea-going mountaineer, an even sterner challenge than that accepted recently by Warwick Deacock and his party of Australians and New Zealanders when they sailed to Heard Island in the sub-antarctic and climbed its 9000-foot peak Big Ben. For at Smith Island a party would be starting from scratch, without fore-knowledge of a possible landing place—there might well not be any—or of any route up the mountain. But apart from the island and its problems, the voyage alone would be an ambitious undertaking for an old 30-ton cutter with a skipper verging on the Psalmist's age limit. An old boat can, of course, be strengthened. But the man whose strength is diminished by age can only strive to emulate Beowulf's well known exhortation:

Harder should be the spirit, the heart all the bolder,
Courage the greater, as the strength grows less.

Ambitious or not, the voyage was within *Mischief's* powers. Size is no criterion of a boat's seaworthiness. The sealers used to sail small boats in the Antarctic, but these were either carried there on the deck of the larger vessels or built on the spot. They did not try to sail them across Drake Passage, the stretch of water between Cape Horn and the South Shetlands. Edmund Fanning, an American sealer who was active in these waters, describes how he acquired a fleet of three such tenders, or shallows, as he calls them:

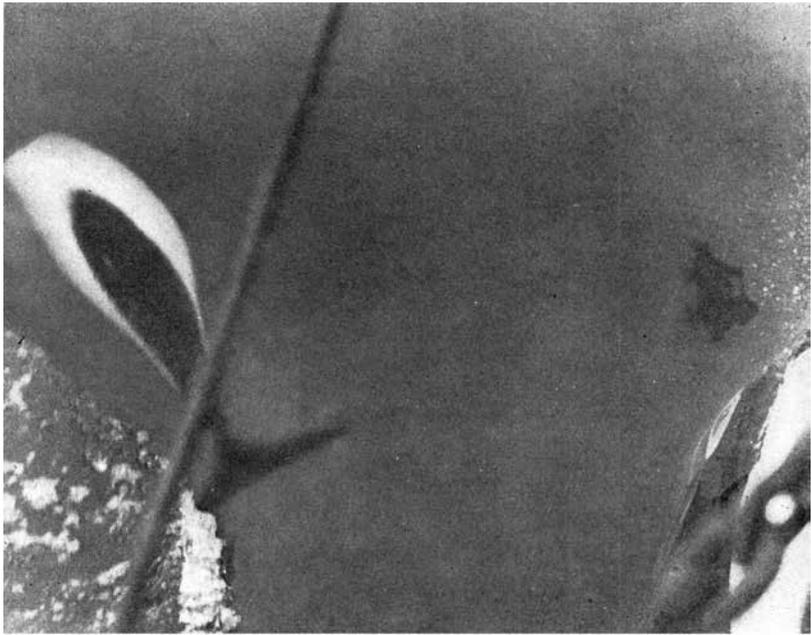
Raising and decking our launch for one; then purchasing another which had in the previous season been built here by the crew of an English sealer; then taking the spare topmast of our vessel *Aspasia* for a keel, and a spare mainyard for a mast, together with some fifty oak knees roughly hewn that we had on board to support our battery

deck; with these materials and a number of 3-inch planks which had been used to floor the ballast over, and sundry articles purchased from the wreck of the *Regulator*, we proceeded to lay the keel of the third shallop on an iceberg, in a valley at the starboard side of the harbour. She was a first-rate seaboat, as well as the fastest sailer among the fleet.

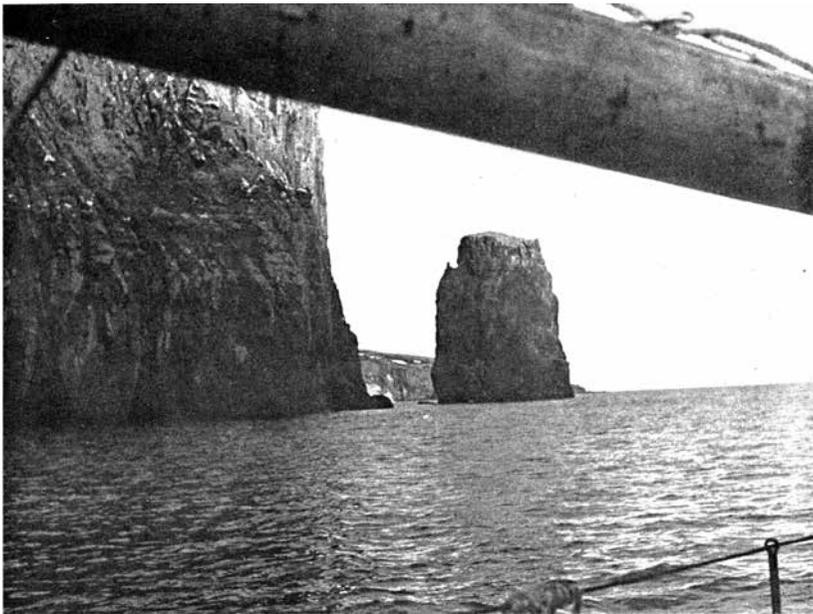
The 'iceberg in a valley' is a puzzle. Does he mean an iceberg aground, or a glacier? And one would like to know why they laid the keel on an 'iceberg'. Was this the only flat ground available? Or was it to facilitate the launching? Or just for the hell of it?

Other than those built on the spot or carried there, no boat comparable to *Mischief* had sailed in Antarctic waters, much less crossed Drake Strait—with one memorable exception. Shackleton's famous do-or-die voyage from the South Shetlands to South Georgia in May, one of the worst weather months, is not likely ever to be forgotten. This voyage in the *James Caird*, a ship's lifeboat, was a rescue operation, a life or death matter, not only for the six men on board but for the other twenty-two men of the *Endurance* marooned on Elephant Island, the easternmost of the South Shetlands. Behind *Mischief's* endeavour there would be no such compelling motive. The interest of the voyage itself and its ultimate aim must suffice to make it, as I thought, a worth-while undertaking. Anywhere at sea there are hazards, otherwise small-boat sailing would have less appeal. No waters are foolproof and Antarctic waters perhaps less so than any. As regards ice dangers, icebergs are visible even at night, and in low visibility one can always heave-to. Pack-ice we would avoid, for in summer the South Shetlands are normally ice-free. At Punta Arenas, through the Chilean navy, one could get reliable information about ice conditions, and if necessary wait there until the islands were reported free from ice. In summer a frigate or a naval tug plies frequently between Punta Arenas and the Chilean Antarctic bases.

The weather might have a more threatening aspect than the ice, but *Mischief*, in spite of her age, is staunch and a good seaboat, well able to stand up to the weather of those latitudes, the so-called Roaring Forties, Furious Fifties, and Shrieking Sixties. That is, of course, in summer conditions, between November and March. Ed Mikeska,



Commerson's dolphin underneath bowsprit shrouds, Magellan Straits;
unidentified marine monster on right



North side of Neptune's Bellows, at the entrance to Port Foster,
Deception Island

a professional seaman, who had sailed with me to Baffin Bay and who had always regarded with apprehension *Mischief's*, vulnerable skylight and too roomy cockpit, wrote to me encouragingly in his own peculiar, semi-seamanlike, staccato vein: 'I see you are to be a flying-fish sailor again, Cape Horning? Going to spit to windward now! Have a couple of good bilge-pumps fitted. Ole *Mischief's* timbers will be a'shivering, and mind yer blooming skylight, not to mention the snug, dry cockpit you have. If you are lucky and hit a gale period in the South you will make the Shetlands under bare poles and baggy-wrinkle.' But much smaller boats than *Mischief* have successfully rounded Cape Horn. One hoped that the weather might not be quite so fearful as has been painted, and one knew that it does not become progressively worse farther south. In winter the weather could no doubt be hell, just as it can be in the North Atlantic.*

To find crews for *Mischief's* first three voyages, which were all of twelve months' duration, had involved me in much effort and trouble. On the whole the results had been highly satisfactory so that none of this effort had been wasted. There must be plenty of men of the right stamp who would come forward if they knew what was afoot or if one could make contact with them, but the publicity that could easily be had and that would solve this problem is not all that welcome. One would like to have the benefit without paying the degrading price, like an American firm that proudly proclaims: 'We eschew publicity but we know how to use it.' However, despite this desire to let things speak for themselves, a policy that in these strident days might almost pass for reticence, *Mischief's* voyages have become better known. For each succeeding voyage the need to shop around for crew or to advertise,

* Note. Here is a specimen of winter Atlantic weather quoted recently in the Meteorological Office publication, *The Marine Observer*. Trawler *St Barr*, Hull to Labrador:

15th	Feb.	1966	18.00	Wind WNW force 12, gusts to 87 knots, vis. 50 yds.
16th	"	"	00.00	Wind NW force 11, snow, seas 35 ft. vis. 50 yds.
16th	"	"	06.00	Wind NW force 11, continuous snow.
16th	"	"	06.10	Wind NW increased and blew off wind-cups.
17th	"	"	00.00	Wind NW force 11, main aerals down.
17th	"	"	12.00	Wind NW force 7-8, snow showers, vis. 2½ miles.

became less. To find crews for her most recent voyages I had really exerted myself very little, merely lurking in my fastness behind the Welsh hills, vetting the letters of hopeful applicants, and sallying forth at intervals, like a spider from his web, to inspect and secure another victim. One had to take them on the principle of first come first served, for it was not reasonable to defer a decision for long. This often had unfortunate results. Sure enough, when the muster roll had been filled, a man with better claims and in every way preferable, had to be turned down.

In spite of this inevitably haphazard method of collecting a crew—for it could not be called picking one—on all the Greenland voyages we had been a reasonably happy ship. On a comparatively short voyage of four to five months it is easy enough to:

Be to their faults a little blind
And to their virtues ever kind.

And this cut both ways, the crew being prepared to tolerate anything I might do or say seeing that they had not to endure or suffer me for all that long. The crew's ability to get on with each other and to work together is more important than what seamanly qualities they may have. In this respect the enormous crew of ten which had sailed with me in *Patanela* to Heard Island (see *Mostly Mischief*, London, 1966) was remarkable for the absence of friction. But those were picked men, known to each other or to mutual friends, men with like interests and with expedition experience.

My system, if system it could be called, had worked well enough so far. Even if it could be arranged, a short preliminary voyage to try out the crew would have little value. They would be on their best behaviour, zealous and willing to an embarrassing degree, and if one did take a dislike to one of them, a replacement would still have to be found at short notice. Always on past voyages the crews had soon shaped up to their jobs, took whatever was going in the way of food, and made themselves as pleasant as they knew how. I hope I did the same, though no man can be expected to make bright, chatty remarks for five months on end, much less for twelve. It is sometimes difficult to say 'Good-morning' and quite impossible to continue the conversation beyond that. Doubts have been expressed as to whether the

Christian virtue of good temper is binding on a man before breakfast. There is a story, quite apocryphal, of a pre-war voyage to India in a P&O liner with a Himalayan climbing party. On reaching the open sea from Tilbury the writer is reputed to have exclaimed, 'H'm, the sea', and on nearing Bombay, after a silence of eighteen days, to have startled his expectant listeners with another profound remark, 'H'm, the land'. But no one goes to sea in a small boat in the hope of leading a social life.

Naturally the finding of a crew for a twelve months' voyage is harder than for one of only five months. Fewer men are able or willing to spare that amount of time. There are therefore fewer from whom to choose. Whether this means that the chances of picking a dud are greater or lesser I am not mathematician enough to say, but the presence of any such will inevitably be that much more difficult to tolerate. For the sort of voyage now in prospect, where conditions would be tough, at times perhaps even daunting, the quality of the crew, their reliability, their devotion to the ship they served and their sense of obligation to finish what they had undertaken to do, became of prime importance. Again, unlike a Greenland voyage, there would be stops in strange, sunny, exciting lands where the temptation to swallow the anchor is strong. Places where:

Slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind, and wave, and oar;
Oh, rest ye brother mariners, we will not wander more.

Besides the attractions of the shore there may be other yachts which, at any rate in port, seem to offer more ease and comfort than hellship *Mischief*, and whose skippers appear to be less of a bastard.

As I say, no special exertions were made to find a crew for this voyage and there was no lack of applicants. Of these many withdrew when they learnt the time involved and our destination, and in the end, as is usually the case, it was touch and go whether we should have a full complement, with no scope left for manoeuvre. In the case of the first few applicants, one is so glad to have any at all that, like the first swallows of summer, they meet with a less critical eye. What unexpected virtues may not lie hidden under that unprepossessing appearance and manner? If this man is turned down, on possibly flimsy grounds, will

any more be forthcoming? These are the questions that arise, and one has nothing to go upon but one's own fallible judgement.

Early in 1966 I roped in the first applicant, young Roger Robinson who approached me in person after a lecture I had given at Lymington. He was then at Southampton Technical College taking a course in yard management, and in the happy position apparently of being able to break off and resume after a year's absence. He had had considerable sailing experience, had seen *Mischief* and knew what he was in for, and seemed uncommonly keen. I thought this quality would compensate for lack of size and weight, for he was diminutive. As Falstaff said: 'Will you tell me, Master Shallow, how to choose a man? Care I for the thews, stature, bulk, and big assemblance of a man? Give me the spirit, Master Shallow.'

Next I had a letter from John Ireland, a stranger, who had heard of me and *Mischief* through a friend of mine in New Zealand. He then came to Wales bringing with him a friend of his, David Shaw. John Ireland hailed from Liverpool (my own home town) and had the Liverpool sound, talking that language so fast that I had always to ask him to repeat what he had said. He had recently done a long trip in a Land Rover, climbing in New Zealand and the Andes on the way, for he was primarily a climber. He had also done some dinghy sailing. The friend, David Shaw, looked the more likely and proved to be just the man I always hope to have with me and so seldom get. I took to him at once; red-haired, sturdy, quiet, and self-reliant. He had been a Conway boy and was then in the Royal Mail Line and had just got his Master's ticket. He had not done much sailing but with his sea background would very soon learn. He would be invaluable to have, both as a competent mate and an experienced navigator, and should we succeed in landing a climbing party on Smith Island he would be able to take charge of *Mischief*. The question was whether he would be granted a year's leave. It would be a bit of a busman's holiday for him but he hankered after a closer familiarity with the sea in its varying moods than can be obtained from a glass-enclosed bridge sixty feet or more above it. Not that there is anything the matter with glass-enclosed bridges. If *Mischief* had to proceed at twenty knots in all weathers one would certainly want to lurk behind glass. On my advice they went down to Lymington to look at *Mischief*, with the result that both wanted to

come. It would be some time before David heard about his leave and it was up to me to keep a place open until he had heard.

The first few days down the steamer-infested English Channel with an inexperienced and probably seasick crew can be very wearying, conducive to nightmares and stomach ulcers. On this account alone the presence of a man who has sailed before in *Mischief* and knows the ropes is more than welcome, besides the comfort to be got from having on board from the start a man whom one knows and in whom one has confidence. Nor is this wish to have on board a second-voyager quite so absurd and improbable as may be thought. Not all past crews think that once is enough. Charles Marriott, for instance, has made one long and two short voyages in *Mischief*, thus deserving my gratitude and a medal, too, if I had one to bestow. Roger Tufft was another who had made one long and one short voyage, a man who liked it the hard way, having previously done three years in the Antarctic, subsequently making a crossing of the Greenland ice-cap manhauling a sledge. Bill Procter, too, had taken part in two long voyages when he was of the utmost value to me, having had far more experience. Later he built his own boat, a little twenty-one-foot sloop, in which he had got more than halfway round the world before—alas—coming to grief. In July 1965 he left Guadalcanal for New Guinea, since when no trace of him or his boat has been found.

Setting considerable store, then, on having on board an old hand, I wrote to Bob Cook who had been present on the first, unlucky trip to East Greenland when *Mischief* had been nipped in the ice. I knew he was neither married nor in a job so promising that it could not lightly be thrown up, for he was a long-distance lorry driver. I was glad when he agreed to come. As well as being a climber he was valuable on deck, a big man whose weight on a rope would be worth about three of my more diminutive crew. There remained one place to fill, the hardest to fill in both senses. It is rare to find a man eager to cook at sea, and this is not strange, for dedicated men are rare. *Mischief's* galley is forward of the mast, the liveliest place in any seaway, and the cooking is done on Primus stoves, primitive, smelly, but safe and reasonably efficient. I have described it elsewhere as 'a role that is exacting and always difficult to fill. A role requiring the balance and agility of a juggler, a strong stomach, and indifference to being alternately sprayed with

cold sea water from the galley hatch and boiling water from the stove; the ability to work in a confined space breathing rather foul air, and the energy, patience, and goodwill shown by a hen cormorant in feeding her mouth-gaping offspring.'

A friend of Roger Robinson's, a Swede, volunteered for the job, but owing to the Easter holidays, and his departure for Sweden before he had received my glad acceptance, he managed to escape. A young lad on a motor bike bound for Snowdonia and dressed for the part, a little shaggy withal, then turned up unannounced at Bodowen. Having heard through John Ireland of what was afoot he was on fire to come in the hope of doing some climbing. He had made one or two voyages as a trawler hand and was now learning the trade of welding, two jobs that in my opinion augured well of a prospective cook, the one hinting at a cast-iron stomach and the other familiarity with great heat. Tom O'Shaughnessy hailed from Birmingham and was, of course, Irish, and quick to take offence. His keenness for the adventure overcame his reluctance to cook. We already had two possible climbers but his willingness to cook made me glad to take him.

We were now complete provided David Shaw got leave and I had to put off several possible recruits while this hung in the balance. In mid-July we were due to sail so it was disturbing for me to learn a month before that Bob Cook had fallen off the top of his loaded lorry on to a concrete floor, chipped the bone in both wrists, and would be unable to come. Those whom I now had to fall back on, having previously refused them, were committed to something else or for some reason unable to come. One had taken an Alpine holiday and spent all his money. Time was running out, but having at last heard that David Shaw could come I became reconciled to sailing with five all told instead of six.

At the end of June, just before I left for Lymington to start fitting out, Bob Cook wrote to say that he might be fit enough to come provided he could take things easy for the first few weeks. This welcome news came a fraction too late. Chance governs all. Before I had replied telling Bob to come I had a telephone call from a Mike Edwards, another of John Ireland's acquaintances. He, too, came from Birmingham. 'I have no great hopes of Birmingham', said Mrs Elton, 'there is something dire about the sound of it.' Be that as it may, I should

have plumped for Bob Cook, chipped wrists notwithstanding, had not Mike Edwards told me that he was a professional photographer and suggested the possibility of making a film. On two earlier voyages we had made a 16 mm film and I had found the exercise expensive and not repaying. But hope springs eternal in even my breast and I arranged to meet Mike Edwards in Ludlow next morning on my way to Lymington. Besides his photographic background he had sailed racing dinghies and had done his national service in the Navy. True, he had served only as a photographer but he should have learnt something of the sea and the need to keep things shipshape below. As later he showed, he had.

We met in the bar of The Feathers. He was tall, very fair, with a handsome beard of the same hue, a relic presumably of the Navy. Answering a question in the Commons about shark repellants, Churchill began his reply by saying, 'H.M. Government is totally opposed to sharks'; and, stupid prejudice though it no doubt is, I feel totally opposed to young men with beards. However, beard or no beard, I had to decide quickly between these two possibilities and I decided on trying to make a film. This gave Mike barely a week to settle his affairs, collect his kit, find, buy, and have tested a suitable second-hand camera with the necessary equipment. That he managed to do all this and join *Mischief* a couple of days before sailing says much for his energy and ability.

So, for better or for worse, I had my crew, and on paper they looked pretty good. On previous voyages I had sailed with crews of less experience and less promise who had turned out well. How many of this lot were men with whom, according to Monty's well known criterion, one would care to go into the jungle, remained to be seen.