H. W. Tilman

The Collected Edition

I first heard of Bill Tilman whilst at the same school in Hertfordshire, Berkhamsted Boys School, which he had attended forty years earlier. He was a famous Old Boy who was still mountaineering at the time. To me his attractions were the adventures he made in far off places, which distracted me as I studied and dreamed in the same buildings in which he had been educated. Sadly we never met, one of my great regrets, so I know him only through his writing. But his writing is so amusing and comfortable and its subject is the real classic adventure that is not readily available to us today.

– Sir Robin Knox-Johnston

Soldier, Climber

Lodestar Books and Vertebrate Publishing present their Collected Edition of the books of H.W. Tilman – Britain's most accomplished independent explorer by both land and sea. Tilman's seven mountaineering books, his eight sailing books, plus the biography *High Mountains and Cold Seas* by J. R. L. Anderson, make sixteen volumes in all.

Each book contains all of the text, photographs and maps of its first edition, and each has a new foreword, and some an afterword, by a present-day writer well-qualified to offer an appreciation of Tilman and the activities, be they climbing or sailing, he himself relates with characteristic modesty and dry humour.

Sir Chris Bonington has contributed the foreword to *Snow on the Equator,* and Sir Robin Knox-Johnston that for *Mischief in Patagonia*. Both are avowed Tilman fans – indeed they sailed and climbed together in the early 1990s in eastern Greenland, getting there aboard Sir Robin's world-girdling yacht *Suhaili*.

…one has to think long and hard to find someone who surpasses his record, not only as an author, but also as a mountaineer. I urge all young adventurers to read a little of Tilman before setting off on their own endeavours, as we did, if only to keep one's self-importance and ego firmly buried in the bottom of the rucksack. His boldness, organisation, and sheer sense of adventure make him one of the greatest mountaineers and explorers Britain has ever known. His list of first ascents around the world, many of which he tackled simply to see what lay beyond the summit, are still not fully appreciated. It is therefore a great pleasure, and not before time, that we see his fifteen wonderfully written books now being republished as new editions.

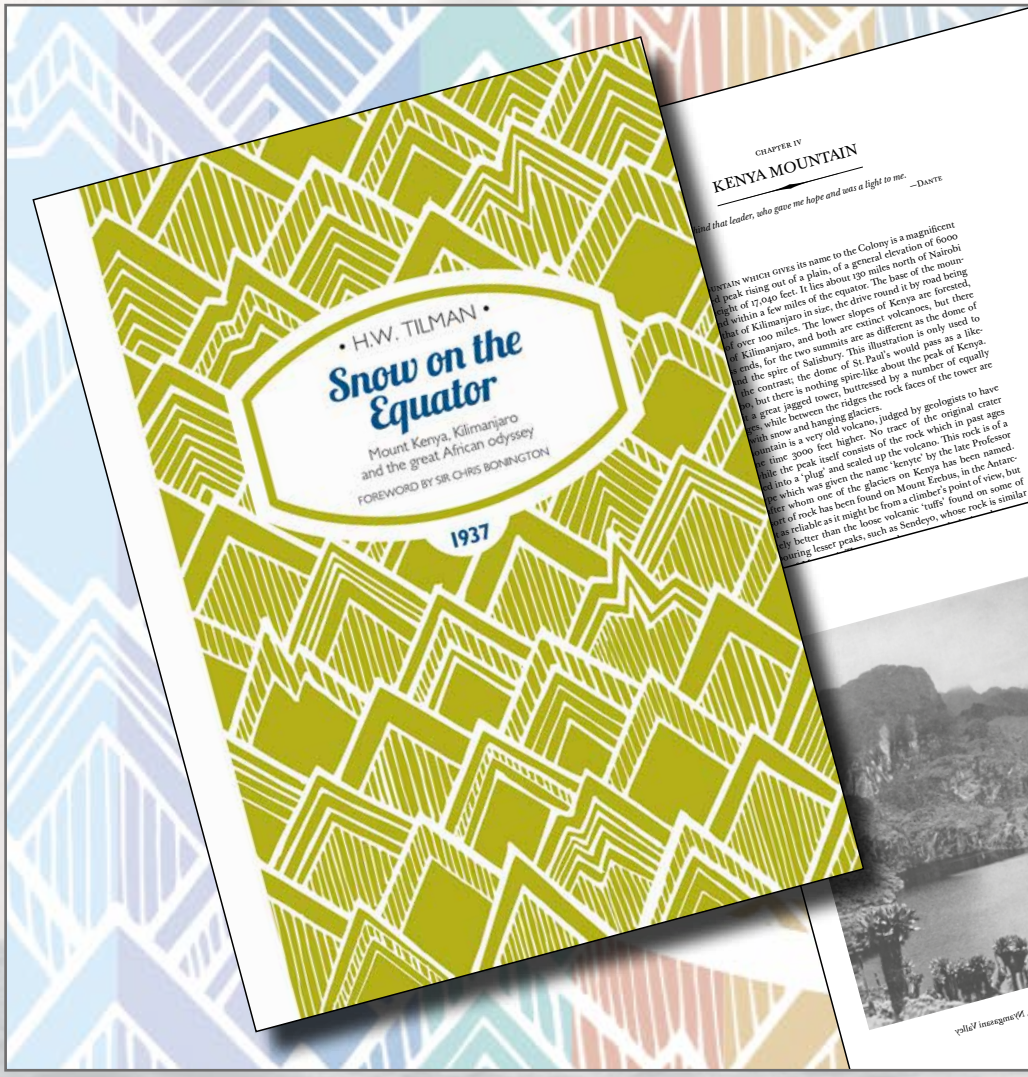
– Sir Chris Bonington

Sailor, Writer

Series researcher Bob Comlay is a veteran of two Tilman voyages to Greenland in the early 1970s, and has contributed to the series. Further contributors include: Doug Scott, Tom Cunliffe, John Porter, Roger Taylor, Gerda Pauler, Ed Douglas, Simon Yates, Libby Purves, Bob Shepton, Skip Novak and Colin Putt.

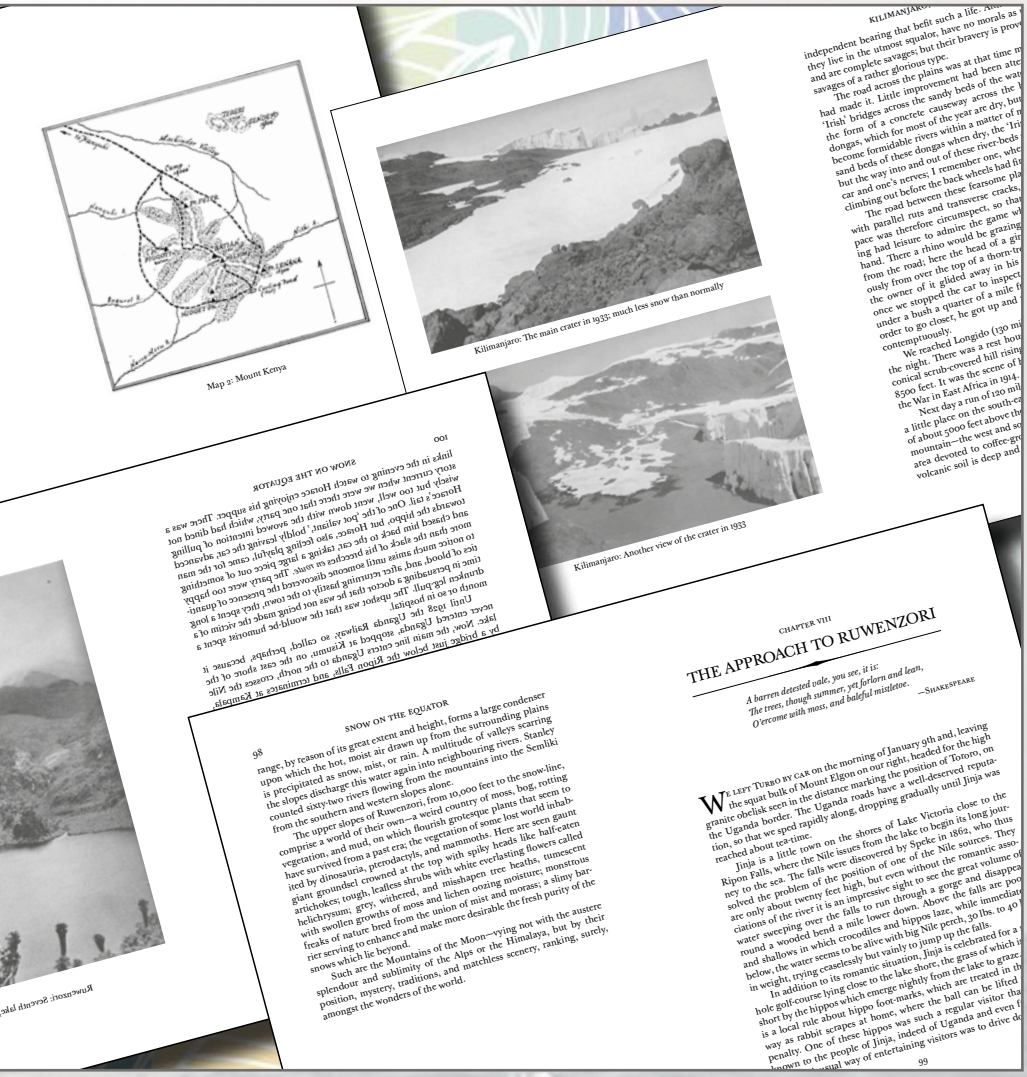
This project has been a true collaborative effort: The books have been edited, and typeset in timeless style, by Dick Wynne of Lodestar Books; the distinctive cover designs were created by Jane Beagley of Vertebrate Publishing; physical production features a robust sewn soft binding, with matt laminated, flapped covers.

In this new, attractive and complete format the books of H. W. Tilman merit a place in every library of travel and exploration literature.



Tilman was one of the greatest of adventurers, a pioneering climber and sailor who held exploration above all else. He made first ascents throughout the Himalaya, attempted Mount Everest, and sailed into the Arctic Circle. For Tilman, the goal was always to explore, to see new places, to discover rather than conquer.

Snow on the Equator chronicles Tilman's early adventures; his transition from East African coffee planter to famed mountaineer. After World War I, Tilman left for Africa, where he grew coffee, prospected for gold and met Eric Ship-



Map 2: Mount Kenya

Kilimanjaro: The main crater in 1933; much less snow than normally

Kilimanjaro: Another view of the crater in 1933

CHAPTER VIII

THE APPROACH TO RUWENZORI

A barren detested vale, you see, it is:
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
O'ercome with moss, and baleful mistletoe. —SHAKESPEARE

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range, by reason of its great extent and height, forms a large condenser upon which the hot, moist air drawn up from the surrounding plains is precipitated as snow, mist, or rain. A multitude of valleys scarring the slopes discharge this water again into neighbouring rivers. Stanley counted sixty-two rivers flowing from the mountains into the Semliki from the southern and western slopes alone.

The upper slopes of Ruwenzori, from 10,000 feet to the snow-line, comprise a world of their own—a weird country of moss, bog, rotting vegetation, and mud, on which flourish grotesque plants that seem to have survived from a past era; the vegetation of some lost world inhabited by dinosauria, pterodactyls, and mammoths. Here are seen gaunt giant groundsel crowned at the top with spiky leaves called artichokes; tough, leafless shrubs with white everlasting flowers called helichrysum; grey, withered, and misshapen tree heaths, tumescent with swollen growths of moss and lichen oozing moisture; monstrous freaks of nature bred from the union of mist and morass; a slimy barrier serving to enhance and make more desirable the fresh purity of the snows which lie beyond.

Such are the Mountains of the Moon—vying not with the austere splendour and sublimity of the Alps or the Himalaya, but by their position, mystery, traditions, and matchless scenery, ranking, surely, amongst the wonders of the world.

W[illegible] left Turbo by car on the morning of January 9th and, leaving the squat bulk of Mount Elgon on our right, headed for the high granite obelisk seen in the distance marking the position of Totoro, on the Uganda border. The Uganda roads have a well-deserved reputation, so that we sped rapidly along, dropping gradually until Jinja was reached about tea-time.

Jinja is a little town on the shores of Lake Victoria close to the Ripon Falls, where the Nile issues from the lake to begin its long journey to the sea. The falls were discovered by Speke in 1862, who thus solved the problem of the position of one of the Nile sources. They are only about twenty feet high, but even without the romantic associations of the river it is an impressive sight to see the great volume of water sweeping over the falls to run through a gorge and disappear round a wooded bend a mile lower down. Above the falls are pools and shallows in which crocodiles and hippos laze, while immediately below, the water seems to be alive with big Nile perch, 50 lbs. to 40 lbs. in weight, trying ceaselessly but vainly to jump up the falls.

In addition to its romantic situation, Jinja is celebrated for a hole golf-course lying close to the lake shore, the grass of which is short by the hippos which emerge nightly from the lake to graze. It is a local rule about hippo foot-marks, which are treated in the way as rabbit scrapes at home, where the ball can be lifted without penalty. One of these hippos was such a regular visitor that [illegible] to the people of Jinja, indeed of Uganda and even [illegible] way of entertaining visitors was to drive de

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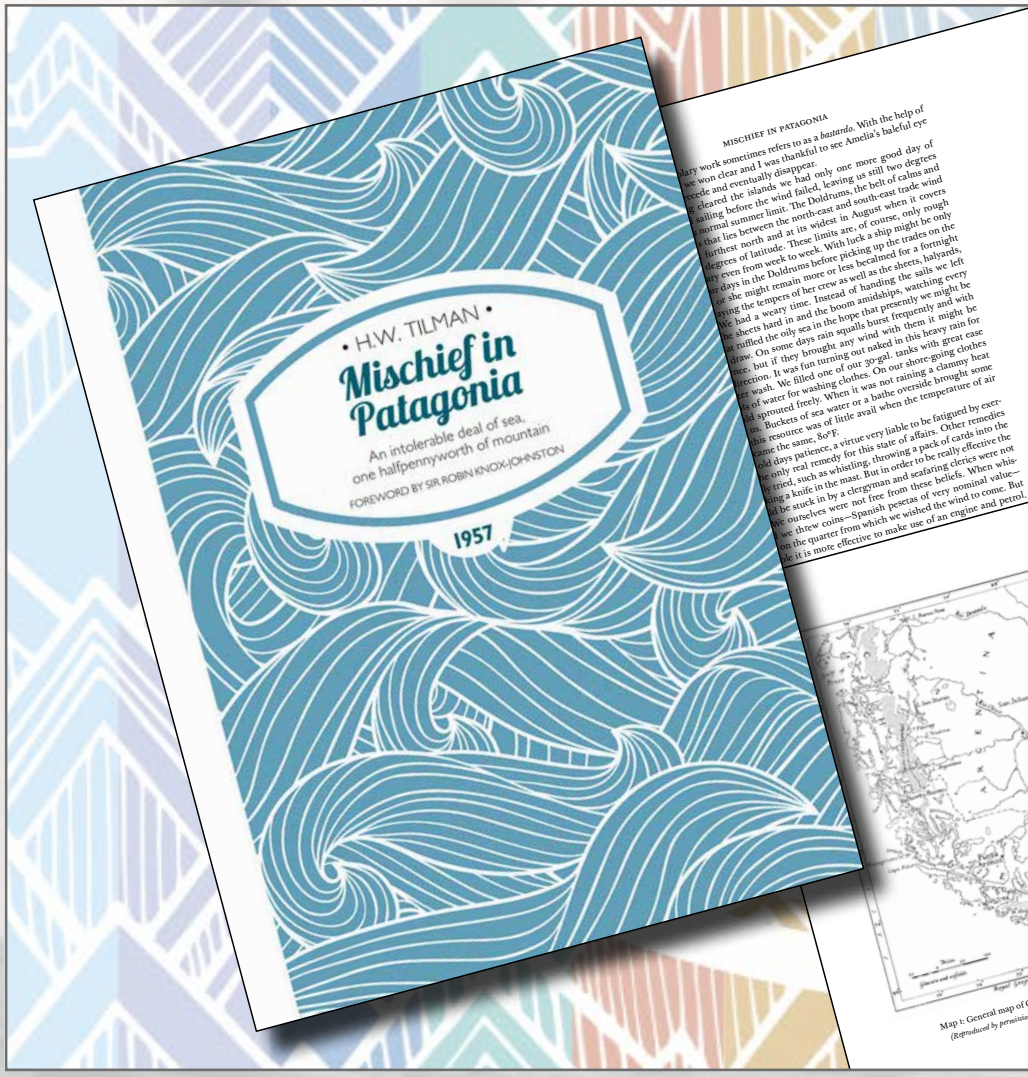
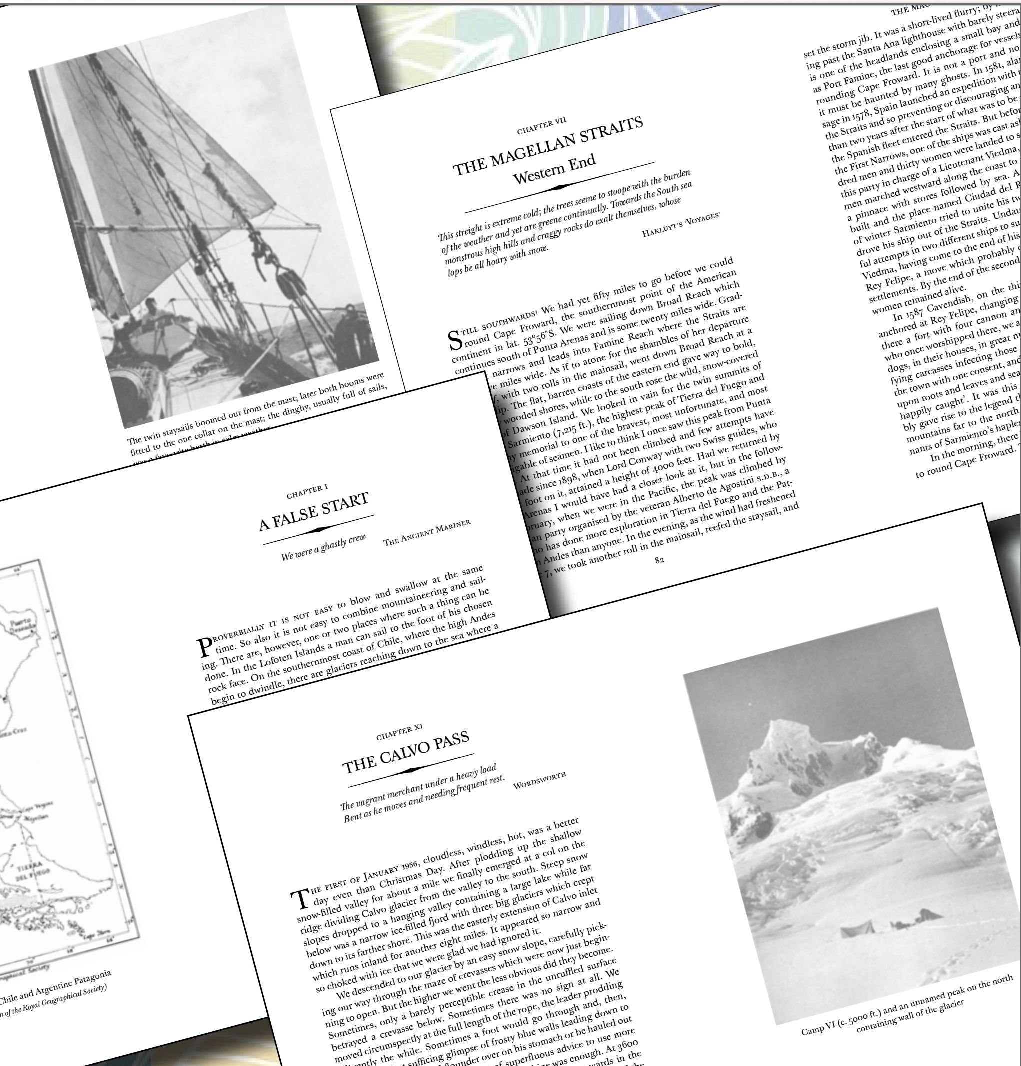
ton, the two beginning their celebrated climbing partnership, traversing Mount Kenya and climbing Kilimanjaro and Ruwenzori. Tilman eventually left Africa in typically adventurous style via a 3,000-mile solo bicycle ride across the continent – all recounted here in splendidly funny style.

Bill Tilman was one of the greatest of all travel writers. His books are well-informed and keenly observed, concerned with places and people as much as summits and achievements. They are full of humour and anecdotes and frequently hilarious. There is nobody else quite like him.



In later life Tilman came to realise that the Himalaya were too high for a mountaineer now well into his fifties. He would trade extremes of altitude for the romance of the sea with, at his journey's end, mountains and glaciers at a smaller scale; and the less explored they were, the better he would like it.

Within a couple of years he had progressed from sailing a fourteen-foot dinghy to his own forty-five-foot pilot cutter *Mischief*, readied her for deep-sea voyaging, and recruited a crew for this most ambitious of private expeditions.

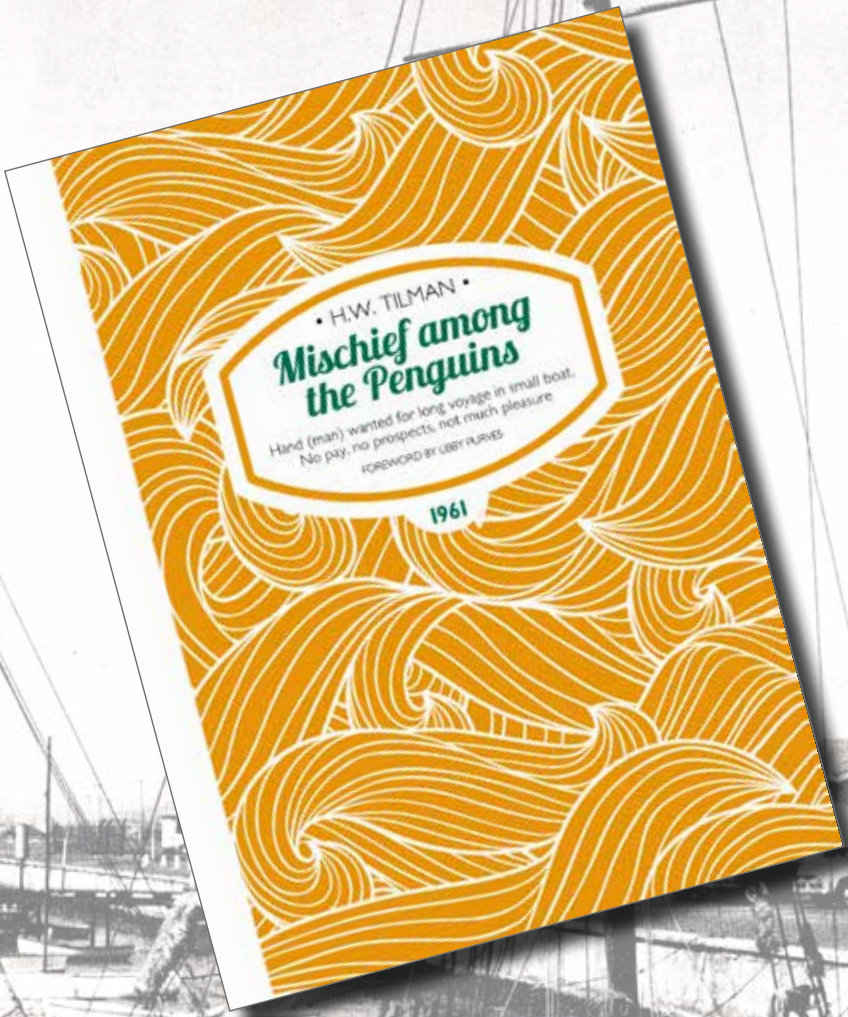


Well past her prime, *Mischief* sailed the length of the North and South Atlantic oceans, and through the notoriously difficult Magellan Strait, against strong prevailing winds, to an icy landfall in the far south of Chile. The shore party spent six weeks crossing the Patagonian ice cap, in both directions.

Mischief finally made it home to Lymington for a total of 20,000 nautical miles sailed, in addition to a major exploration 'first' – all here related with the Skipper's characteristic modesty and bone-dry humour, and many photographs.

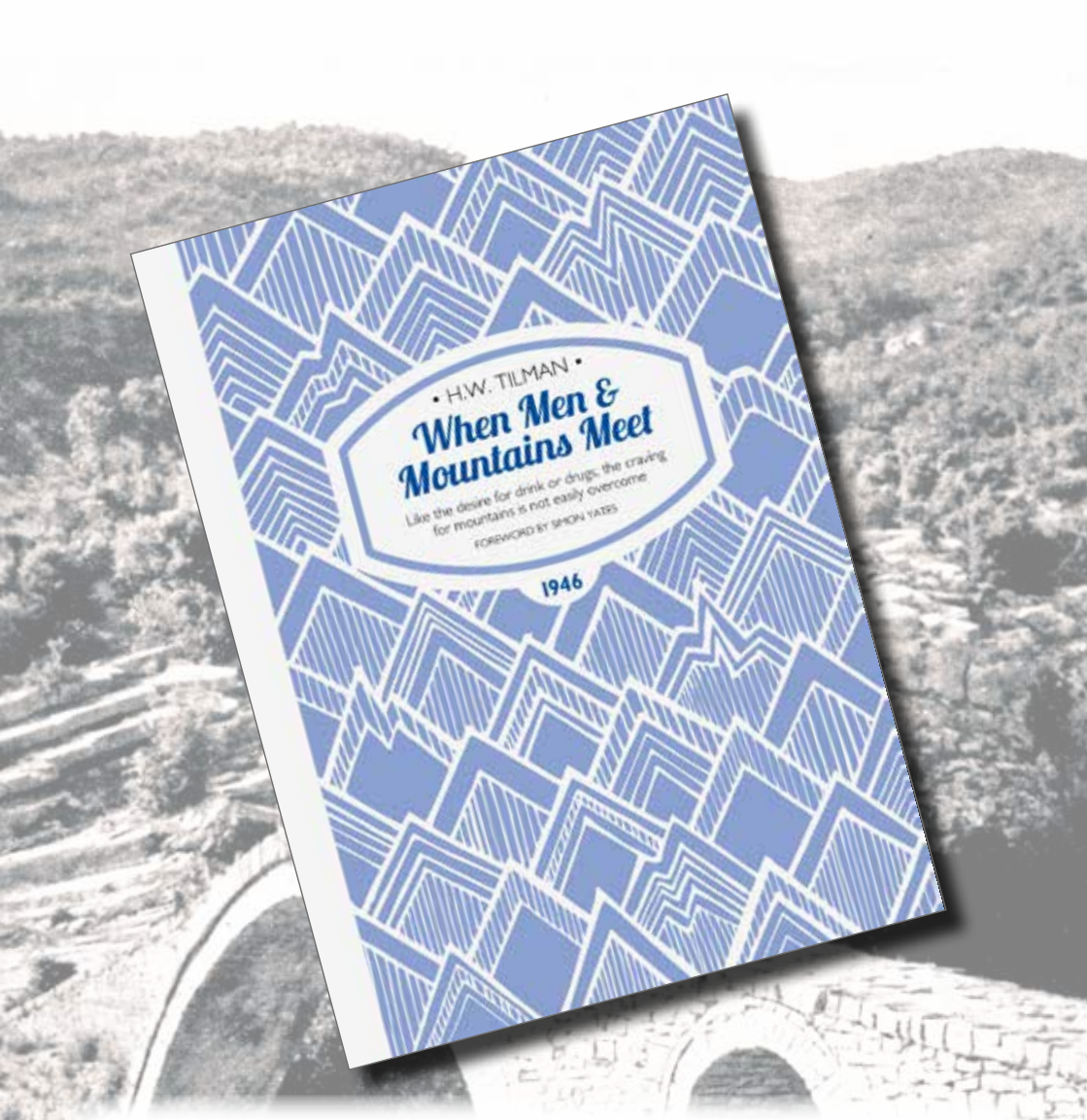
In 1934, after fifty years of trying, mountaineers finally gained access to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in the Garhwal Himalaya. Two years later an expedition led by H.W. Tilman reached the summit of Nanda Devi. At over 25,000 feet, it was the highest mountain to be climbed until 1950.

Tilman's account of the climb, has been widely hailed as a classic. Keenly observed, well informed and at times hilariously funny, it is as close to a 'conventional' mountaineering account as Tilman could manage.



With unclimbed ice-capped peaks and challenging anchorages the Southern Ocean island groups of Crozet and Kerguelen provided obvious destinations for Tilman and *Mischief*. His previous attempt at the Crozet Islands had been abandoned when the ship's dinghy was carried away by a storm.

Tilman's account of landfalls on these tiny, remote volcanic islands bears testament to his ocean navigation skills and seamanship. His accounts of the island anchorages, their snow-covered heights, geology, and in particular the flora and fauna, pay tribute to the varied interests and ingenuity of *Mischief*'s crew.

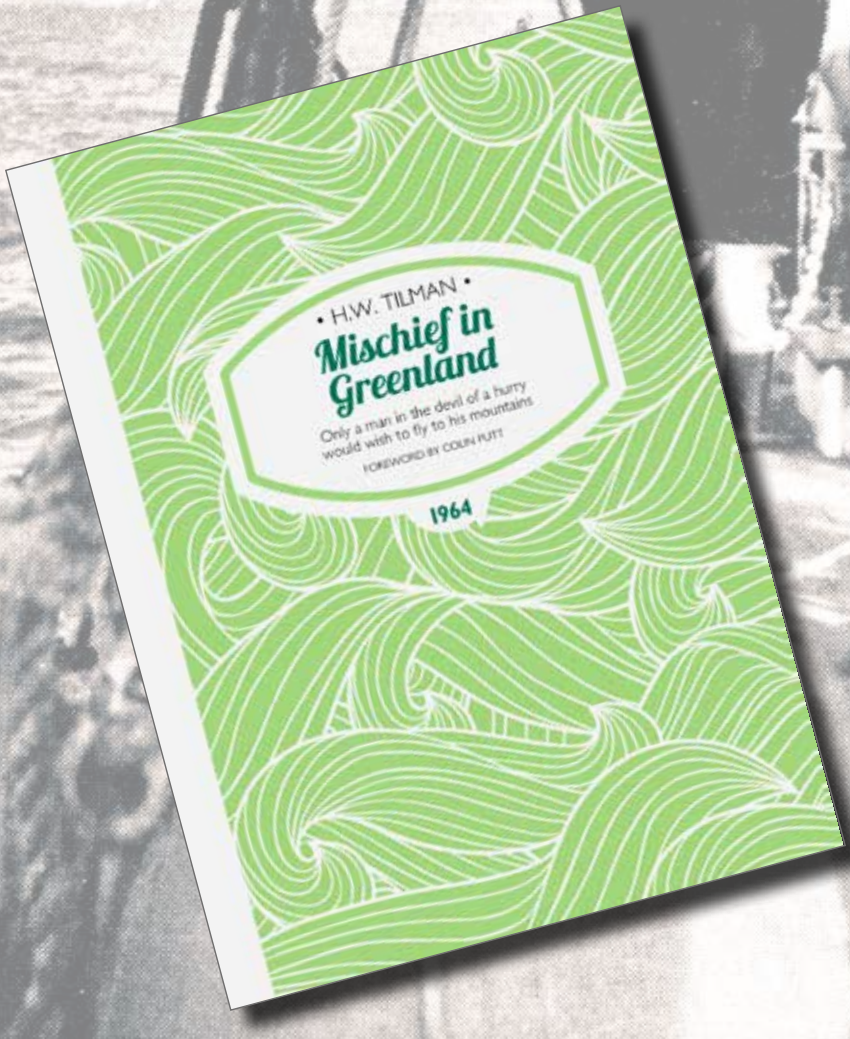


In the thirties, Assam was largely unknown and unexplored, and mosquitos and disease made it challenging. Sikkim proved altogether more successful. Tilman enjoys some exploratory ice climbing and discovers Abominable Snowman tracks, particularly remarkable as the creature appeared to be wearing boots – 'there is no reason why he should not have picked up a discarded pair at the German Base Camp and put them to their obvious use.'

And then Tilman's remarkable Second World War; he was dropped by parachute behind enemy lines to fight alongside Albanian and Italian partisans, and was recognised with the Distinguished Service Order.

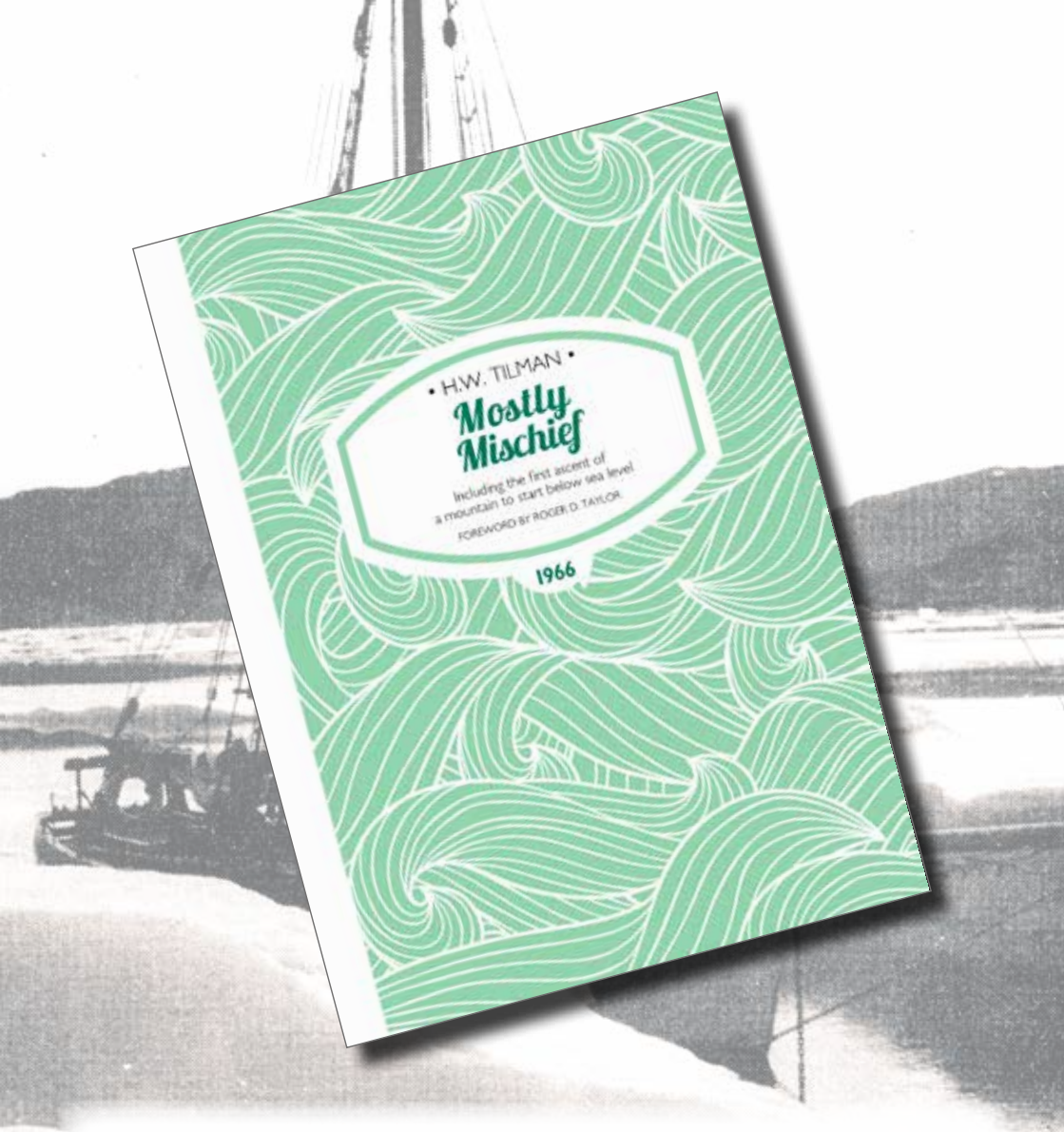
First published fifty years before political correctness became an accepted rule, *Mischief in Greenland* is a treasure trove of Tilman's observational wit. In this account of his first two West Greenland voyages, he pulls no punches with regard to the occasional failings, leaving the reader to seek out and discover their numerous achievements.

The highlight of the second voyage was the identification, surveying and successful first ascent of Mount Raleigh, first observed on the eastern coast of Baffin Island by the Elizabethan explorer John Davis in 1585.



Tilman leads a small team of some of the greatest British mountaineers, including Eric Shipton, Frank Smythe and Noel Odell, and favours the lightweight approach. He carries oxygen but doesn't trust it or think it ethical to use it himself, and refuses to take luxuries, although he does regret leaving a case of champagne behind.

On the mountain, the team is cold, the weather wintery. It amazing that they establish a Camp VI at all, thanks in part to a Sherpa by the name of Tenzing. Tilman carries to the high camp, but exhausted he retreats, leaving Smythe and Shipton to settle in for the night. He records in his diary, 'Frank and Eric going well – think they may do it.' But the monsoon is fast approaching…



Between June 1964 and September 1965 Tilman is at sea almost without a break. Two eventful voyages to East Greenland in *Mischief* provide the entertaining bookends to his account of the five-month voyage in the Southern Ocean as skipper of the schooner *Patanela*.

Tilman had been hand-picked by the expedition leader as the navigator best able to land a team of Australian and New Zealand climbers and scientists on Heard Island, a tiny volcanic speck in the Furious Fifties devoid of safe anchorages and capped by an unclimbed glaciated peak.

Tilman as others see him

Bob Comlay

Photo: Iain Burns

I first met Bill Tilman when I was seventeen; he was seventy-one, old enough to be my grandfather. By the time I was half way through my nineteenth year, I'd made two voyages north, sailing more than 10,000 miles and spending just over eight months at sea with him, 'taking the rough with the smooth', to quote his own stated requirement of me.

Over the course of his sailing career, Tilman took on over one hundred different crew members. Those with a background of mountaineering or the army were taken on trust – their loyalty under pressure and respect for his leadership never in doubt, even if their fitness for small boat voyages at times left something to be desired. The remainder of the crews were selected through advertisements placed in suitable journals, typically in the personal column of *The Times*. These notices were often deliberately worded along the lines of *Hands wanted for long voyage in small boat. No pay, no prospects, not much pleasure* – in order to weed out the chaff. The mixed bunch of applicants that resulted included a number of young people like myself, the kind that we would probably now loosely term 'gap year' candidates.

The destinations were remote, the ocean passages followed little-travelled courses and we sailed without lifejackets, safety lines or life rafts. GPS locator beacons had yet to be invented and would, in any event, have been of little or no use; for much of the voyage, Tilman's boats were hundreds of miles beyond the normal range of rescue teams. While this might now appear foolhardy, his attitude to safety was proactive, wherever possible taking sensible measures to avoid getting into danger rather than taking uncalculated risks with either boat or crew. Those calculations owed more to mountaineering, where the consequence of risk is obvious, than sailing.

Thirty years later I loaded a few of my old Kodachrome images onto a simple website along with a few pages of text and a contact form, and a regular

trickle of incoming emails demonstrated the remarkable global reach of the Tilman story. In 2008, one contact from the organisers of the Three Peaks Yacht Race invited me to give an illustrated talk at a Tilman Festival in Barmouth. It was a couple of years after that event that a member of its audience, Dick Wynne, traditional east coast sailor and the enthusiastic workaholic behind Lodestar Books, contacted me with a proposal to 'republish Tilman'. Key to getting the project off the ground was gaining the approval of the copyright holder, something that I was happy to be able to facilitate. Another couple of years passed by before our occasional conversations led to a joint venture being formed between Lodestar and Vertebrate Publishing, the specialist climbing publisher based in Sheffield which owned the Tilman publishing rights. The publication schedule was set for sixteen volumes in a new edition – seven mountaineering books, eight sailing books and a reprint of J.R.L. Anderson's biography – to appear quarterly in pairs between 2015 and 2017.

The new editions contain new forewords, and in many cases afterwords, from travellers and writers who either knew Tilman or who are well qualified to comment. Sir Robin Knox-Johnston and his erstwhile Greenland sailing and climbing partner Sir Chris Bonington were the first to sign up to the project, and a terrific selection of contributors have followed suit.

Sir Robin set the standard with six pages on his fellow 'old boy' from Berkhamsted School:

> *I have never been sure whether Tilman was particularly hard on his crews or he just chose them badly. Such comments about a crew member as 'felt that a man with the unseamanlike habit of wearing gloves at night in summer in the Atlantic would not prosper on a voyage of this kind' indicate a rather unsympathetic attitude toward his crew's comfort, even if one might share his surprise.*

Roger (*Ming Ming*) Taylor makes some sharp observations on Tilman's qualities:

> *Tilman's books are the nearest I get to having a permanent bedside companion. They're never far away. Sometimes I read them cover to cover, other times I browse and dip. Tilman is endlessly fascinating and infuriating too. His adventures serve as both inspiration and warning. He is a guiding light and a hero, yet riddled with flaws and contradictions.*
>
> *The more I read Tilman, the more I am convinced that his attitude to the proximity of land was not as well-honed or cautious as it should have been. His boats were neither the quickest nor the most close-winded, nor were their engines particularly reliable, yet time and again he stands in close, often, it seems, just for the hell of it.*

Fellow high latitude sailor Skip Novak echoes Roger's sentiments:

> *The Tilman stories are re-read 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.*

It should be little surprise that some of the respondents to Tilman's cryptic crew notices included young women to whom polite letters of refusal had to be written. Much ill-informed nonsense has been written about Tilman's attitude to women and it was appropriate that the new edition offered a right to reply.

Janet Verasanso, the 'Grace Darling' of *Mischief in Patagonia,* and probably the only woman ever to sail with Tilman, has broken her silence after sixty years to give her own forthright perspective on the encounter. Her contribution offers a unique first-hand perspective which is surprisingly gracious in its conclusion:

> *In retrospect it seems almost incredible that Tilman, who was so inept in the yard and on the voyage to Gibraltar, had within a matter of months become a true sailor, fearlessly mastering the intricacies of traditional ocean navigation and deep-sea sailing. He remains a colossus among the many heroes of the twentieth century, whose laconic sense of humour and wit lay deeply buried in his day-to-day life, but was brought out most amusingly in excellent and frequently very frank books, which once started are difficult to put down.*

Annie Hill, whose *Voyaging on a Small Income* remains an inspiration to many, is an enthusiastic fan:

> *For anyone who has read about H. W. Tilman, he might seem an unlikely inspiration for a young feminist and pacifist. Admittedly, I was given* Mischief in Patagonia *to read by someone who admired him without reservation, but I have read other books, equally recommended, without acquiring a life-long hero.*

Elsewhere in her piece Annie offers her own experience in defence of some of Tilman's perceived failings:

Greenland charts are generally devoid of soundings and details and one mountain looks very much like another. Interpreting charts is a skill that can't be learnt in a few weeks, and often there was no-one on board to help Tilman work out what he was looking at. Try doing this sort of pilotage yourself, before muttering that Tilman wasn't all he could have been. That he made mistakes was only to be expected.

The new editions also contain previously unpublished views of those who actually sailed before the mast under Tilman's leadership. Colin Putt, a veteran of the remarkable Heard Island voyage of 1964–65, who also sailed with me to West Greenland in 1970, knew Tilman better than most:

Sometimes he failed to notice uncomfortable conditions which others saw as hardships, but in congenial company he could be the life and soul of the party and he was always concerned and caring to his friends, although a little shy with strangers. He did have a horror of commercialisation of adventure, any attempt to involve him in such would turn him away, so would any suggestion that his volunteer crews should be paid or that he should install a two-way radio with which to cry for help and rescue. People who had tried to open these ideas with him may well have left with an impression of a laconic recluse, for he was too polite to enter into argument with them.

Tilman not only learned to sail, navigate and command late in life, but he was also largely self-taught. When he did get himself into trouble at sea he was remarkably good at fighting his way out of it and, like Shackleton, never lost a crew member through any fault of his own.

Contributions from the mountaineering community to the new Tilman edition reflect on the impact and importance of his climbing past. Steve Bell, just one example, pays eloquent tribute to an early pioneer of Himalayan climbing:

It is perhaps a kindness that the taciturn and ascetic Bill Tilman is no longer here to see the circus that Everest has become; his angels might weep indeed. But we must remember that whatever the future holds for the world's highest mountain, it will never diminish the mighty endeavours of its earliest explorers.

I have long felt privileged to have had the opportunity to 'take the rough with the smooth'. With hindsight, knowing that we sailed at the very end of an era about to be extinguished by technological advances only serves to underline that privilege.

Sir Robin sums that point up in his foreword to *Mischief in Patagonia*:

The arrival of GPS has closed forever the heroic era of expedition travel, whether on land or at sea. It has deprived the modern sailor of the satisfac-

tion of making a good landfall by use of the sextant or dead reckoning, and of the hours spent nervously watching out for a landfall in thick fog with just a lead line to indicate a possible position. So it is perhaps hard for the sailors of today to imagine the extra care and doubt that were a part of the navigator's lot until the 1980s. Tilman's voyages have to be seen in the light of small elderly boats, reaching out to Polar areas infrequently visited and not accurately charted, and with crews of varied experience, and without any of the modern aids that are now taken for granted.

It is a part of his restless character that Tilman actively sought the unfrequented areas of the world. He relished the opportunity to explore, and the dangers that are inevitable to the pathfinder just brought added spice to his life. That Tilman completed so many of his voyages successfully is a credit to his determination and his seamanship.

Roger Taylor comes close to capturing my own recollection of the character of the Skipper:

In a sense his achievements are all the greater for his persistence in the face of constant set-backs: broken spars, blown-out sails, sprung planks, deserting crew and so on. He was no youngster either, when coping with all of this. Perhaps that's one of my favourite aspects of his tales: his indomitable, bloody-minded refusal to give up. But more than that, I come back again and again for the pure quality of his writing – witty, erudite, understated, self-deprecating. There was a lot more to him than the allegedly misogynistic old curmudgeon of popular portrayal. He was a complex man and a deep thinker. Even in the moments of greatest despair, as everything goes wrong for him, one senses that he is looking at it all with a twinkle in his eye.

And leaving the last word to Annie Hill:

Bill Tilman inspired me, not so much because of what he chose to do, but because of the way in which he did it: quietly, without fanfare, understated, but with a profound sense of joy in his ventures and with a deep appreciation of the sublime beauty of remote places. The fact that he came home and wrote about them to share with others is the greatest of gifts. His books are classics that should be in print as long as men and women climb mountains and sail the seas.

Dick Wynne's original intention had a commendable aim – to keep Tilman in print. In reality, it's gone far beyond that. Now the series is complete, we have added much to the record through the worthy contributions of a number of significant voices, all of whom have been influenced directly or indirectly by Tilman himself.

The Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter

Tom Cunliffe

Photo: Ros Cunliffe

For fifty glorious years until the Great War nailed down the coffin lid on commercial sail, the Bristol Channel was a free-for-all for competitive piloting. This great funnel of tide-swept water stood wide open for the men of Bristol and Cardiff, as well as hard-sailing pilots from Barry, Newport and the rest, to thrash their way westwards to Land's End and beyond, winter and summer, to be first to offer their services to any ship which came along.

Because of their numbers, availability, suitable size, handy performance and first-class sea-keeping abilities, Bristol Channel pilot cutters were sought-after by cruising yachtsmen when they were pensioned off following the war. At that time, changes in the upstairs/downstairs structure of society at large were militating against the ubiquitous paid hands of the Edwardian and Victorian periods. Corinthian cruising was on the up and the pilot cutter fitted the bill perfectly. A lot were disposed of for popular prices not dissimilar to those the pilots had paid for them in the first place: £250 to £350 ready for sea in all respects, complete with sails and crockery, was not unusual.

The life of many a pilot cutter began afresh when she made the long beat down-Channel for the last time with yachtsmen as crew. Typically, after sale, a boat would be 'tarted up'. A few of the changes wrought by enthusiastic amateurs were real improvements, others were imaginary and would never have been countenanced by the pilots, even if bank-rolled by somebody else. Fortunately, one or two boats survived without major alteration to show how they were in their heyday.

No rules were ever drawn up as to what sort of boat the pilots were to sail, yet the type developed universally into flush-decked gaff cutters in the order of fifty feet long that could be sailed in all weathers by a crew of two. This was often a man and an apprentice in addition to the pilot, some of whom rarely sullied their hands on a rope.

The cutters had done great service to shipping and had been world-famous among commercial seamen, yet it was the yachtsmen who brought them to a wider public eye. The greatest of these by a long sea-mile was H.W. Tilman, and it was he who inspired me to own one.

I acquired the 1911 Barry pilot cutter *Hirta* in 1981 and stayed with her for fifteen years. I sailed her from Europe to North America, Greenland, Soviet Russia, the Caribbean and all sorts of holes in between. She was 51ft on deck and displaced 35 tons. In the early years of my tenancy she carried a flax gaff mainsail on a solid 30ft boom which two young men could barely lift. Her working rig was completed with a pair of headsails and a gaff topsail set from a 15ft solid pine yard. Rigged in 1911 for all weathers by Pilot George Morrice (Channel Licence number 25), she was so little changed when I bought her that she still had no electric lighting. Any alterations I did make brought her closer to the pilot's intentions and each one made her even easier to sail.

Hirta was gentle and predictable. Even when I asked her to do something she didn't like the look of, she would never behave erratically. In truth, she was the best-mannered boat I ever sailed in forty-five years of professional yachting, but she had to be treated with respect. Given the power and weight involved, there was only going to be one winner if I got into a fight with her, and that wouldn't be me.

In their day, pilot cutters kept the sea in every variety of calm and storm. Reefing and heaving to were so routine that the hull shape and sail plan evolved to meet these needs as well as serving the over-riding demand for tolerably good performance. This means that, unlike a modern yacht, a pilot cutter will stop as well as she will go. Like all sailing craft of the pre-auxiliary engine era, however, there had to be sufficient sail area for light winds.

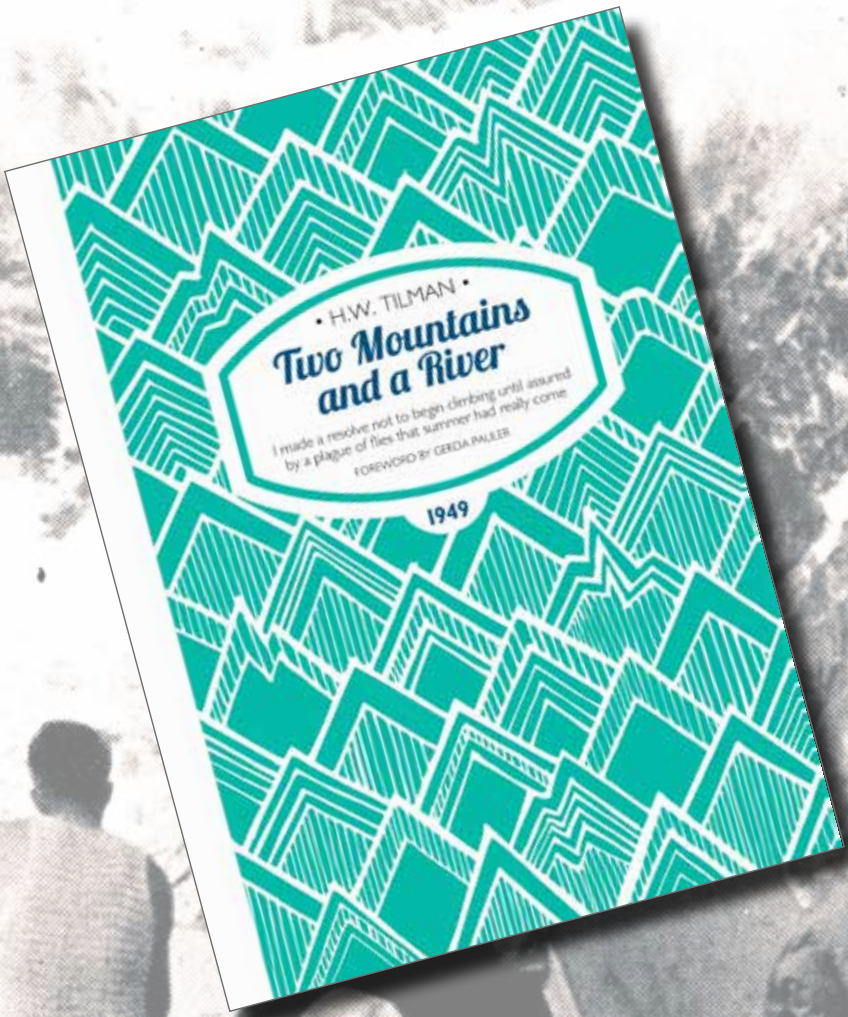
Today, things are different, and in my time even *Hirta* had an engine. She also had a feathering propeller and I used to get a huge kick out of sailing her as she was born to be sailed, sometimes beating to my mooring far up the narrow, busy Beaulieu River and picking it up under sail. Such boat handling has to be seen as a sort of mutually agreed-to situation wherein the boat does what the skipper asks, but always in her own sweet time. In all those years we shared, *Hirta* never let me down.

The pilot cutter suited Bill Tilman's character to a tee. Although far from young, she was tough, reliable, didn't suffer fools and kept going no matter what

misfortune befell. His early voyages in her were built on a scant sailing background, but *Mischief* looked after him famously. Although she was unrestored and probably in many ways 'no better than she should have been', he admired her steadiness in bad weather and, thanks in no little part to the sterling remedial work carried out on her by Berthon in Lymington, her stout construction and heavy scantlings always gave her a second chance when put to the ice. Having had no hands-on dealings with modern yachts, it probably never occurred to him that her lack of manoeuvrability under power was any sort of a drawback.

So satisfied was Tilman with *Mischief* that when she was finally lost he went out and bought a second of her type, after a decent period of mourning. After *Sea Breeze* was lost in the ice, his third boat, *Baroque*, continued the establishment of the Bristol Channel pilot cutter as the vessel of choice for high-latitude adventurers. It was years more before sailors like David and Judy Lomax in their standard 35ft Bénéteau *Cloud Walker* showed that there could be a different way.

Three pilot boats made Tilman as a sailor. It can also be said that, through the medium of his wonderful books, his work confirmed the Bristol Channel cutter's reputation among the great sea-boats of all time.



Two Mountains and a River picks up where *Mount Everest 1938* left off. Tilman and two Swiss mountaineers set off for the Gilgit region of the Himalaya with the formidable objective of an attempt on the giant Rakaposhi (25,550 feet).

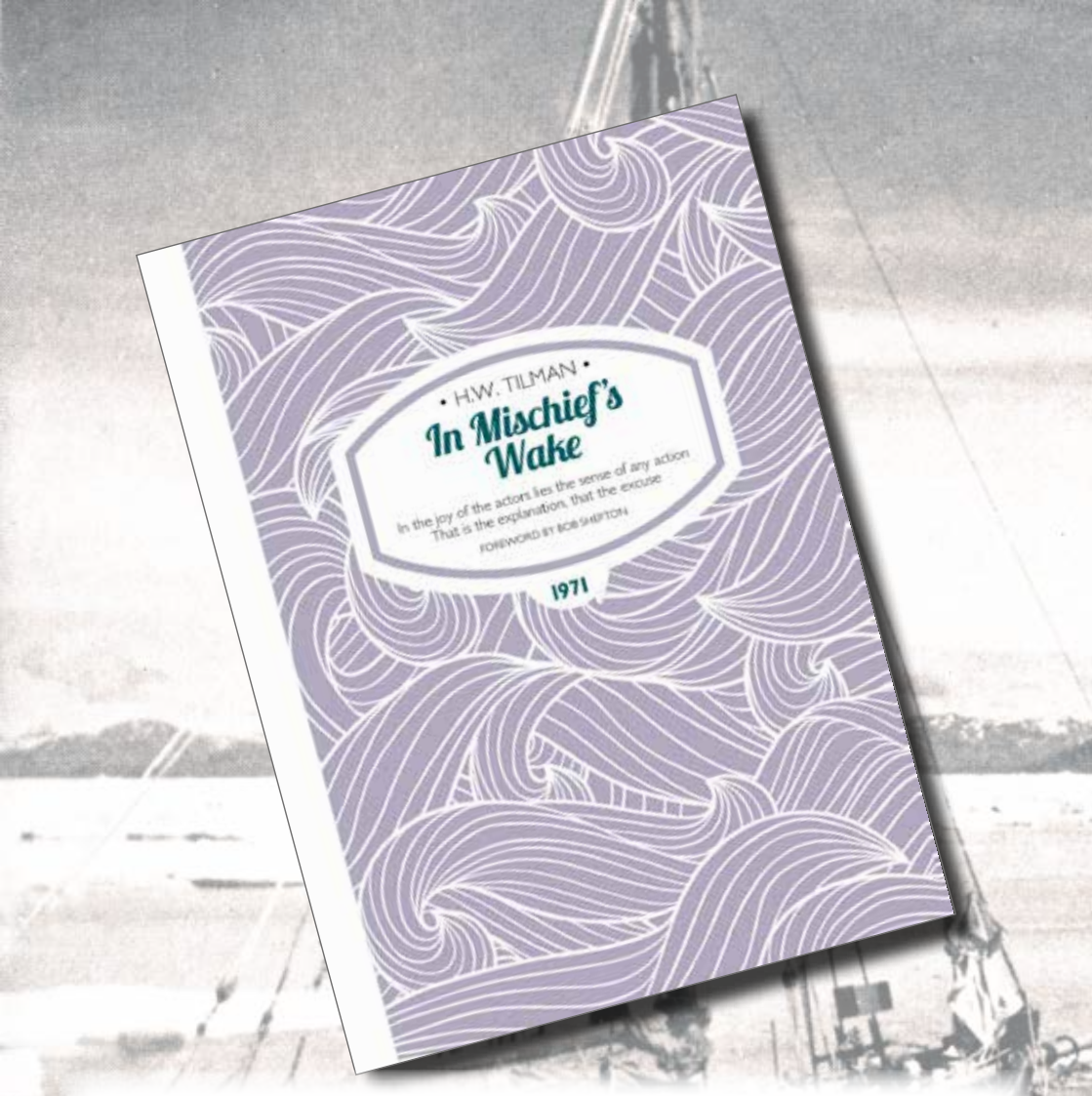
However, this project was not to be fulfilled. Not one to be dispirited, Tilman and his various accomplices – including pioneering mountaineer and regular partner Eric Shipton – continue to trek and climb in locations across China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other areas of Asia, including the Kukuay Glacier, Muztagh Ata – the source of the Oxus river – and Ishkashim, where the author was arrested on suspicion of being a spy…

Tilman and his pilot cutter *Mischief* head south again, this time with the Antarctic Peninsula, Smith Island and the unclimbed Mount Foster in their sights. He describes a voyage marred by tragedy and dogged by crew trouble from the start. Tilman gives ample insight into difficulties with crew selection and supervision and, as he wryly notes, 'to have four misfits in a crew of five is too many'.

The second part of this volume recounts a much earlier gruelling voyage south, left unpublished for ten years for lack of time and energy. Originally intended as an expedition to the remote Crozet Islands in the southern Indian Ocean, this 1957 voyage evolved into a circumnavigation of Africa, the unplanned consequence of a momentary lapse in attention by an inexperienced helmsman.

In 1951 there still persisted a legend that a vast mountain, higher than Everest, existed in central Asia, a good enough reason, it seems, for Tilman to traverse the land. Widely regarded as some of his finest travel writing, *China to Chitral* is full of understatement and laconic humour, with descriptions of disastrous attempts on unclimbed mountains with Shipton.

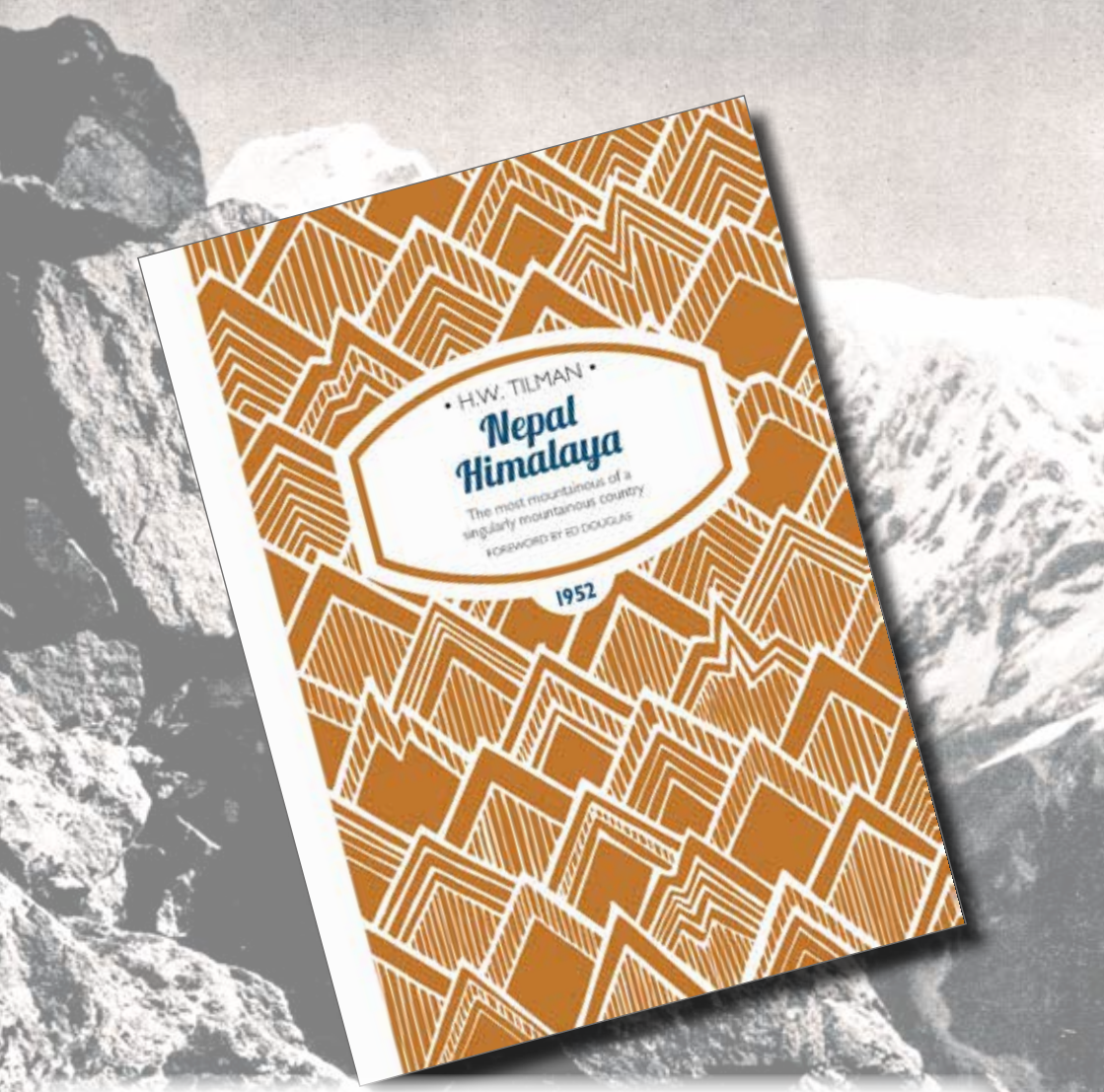
Tilman's command of the Chinese language – five words, all referring to food – proves less than helpful in his quest to find a decent meal: 'fortunately, in China there are no ridiculous hygienic regulations on the sale of food'. He also has several unnerving encounters with less-than-friendly tribesmen.



Tilman records the final voyage and loss of *Mischief*. Refusing to accept defeat and defying a survey report, he takes ownership of *Sea Breeze*, built in 1899; 'a bit long in the tooth, but no more so, in fact a year less, than her prospective owner'.

Sea Breeze called at Iceland before heading north for Greenland in good shape and well stocked. A mere forty miles from his objective Scoresby Sound, 'a polite mutiny' forced Tilman to abandon the voyage.

The following year, with a crew game for all challenges, adventures on the west coast of Greenland gave Tilman a voyage he considered 'certainly the happiest', in a boat which was proving to be a worthy successor to his beloved *Mischief*.



Explorations of the Ganesh Himal and the Jugal Himal and the following season Annapurna and Everest. Manaslu was their first objective, but left to 'better men', and Annapurna IV very nearly climbed instead but for bad weather which dogged the whole expedition. Tilman was leading some very lightweight expeditions into some seriously heavyweight mountains. Approaching Everest from Namche Bazaar, the party made progress to gaze as best they could into the Western Cwm, and at the South Col and South-East Ridge approach to the summit. 'One cannot write off the south side as impossible until the approach from the head of the West Cwm to this remarkably airy col has been seen.' But then of the West Cwm: 'A trench overhung by these two tremendous walls might easily become a grave for any party which pitched its camp there.'

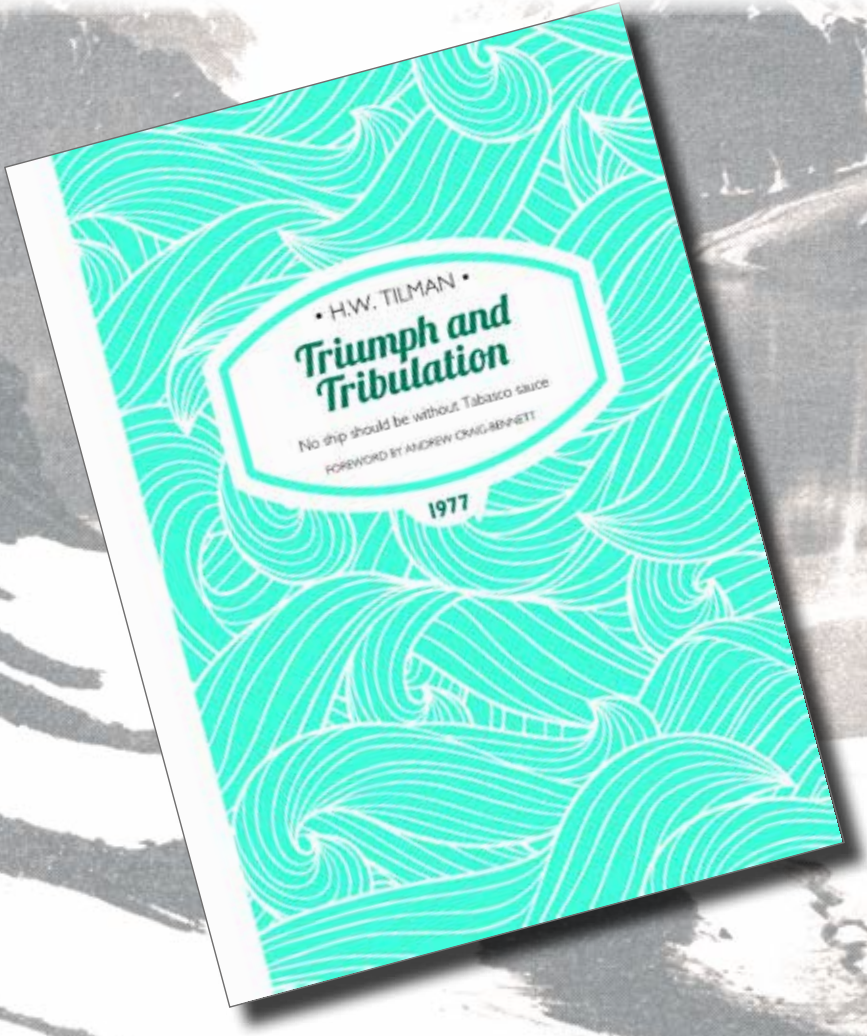
In 1971 Tilman attempts to reach East Greenland's remote and mountainous Scoresby Sound. His first attempt had already cost him *Mischief*, in 1968. The following year, a 'polite mutiny' aboard *Sea Breeze* had forced him to turn back within sight of the entrance. With a good crew aboard in 1971, it is frustrating to find the boat blocked once more, this time by ice. In 1972's attempt, after a series of unfortunate events, *Sea Breeze* ends up between a rock and an ice floe with a failed engine and a disastrous outcome.

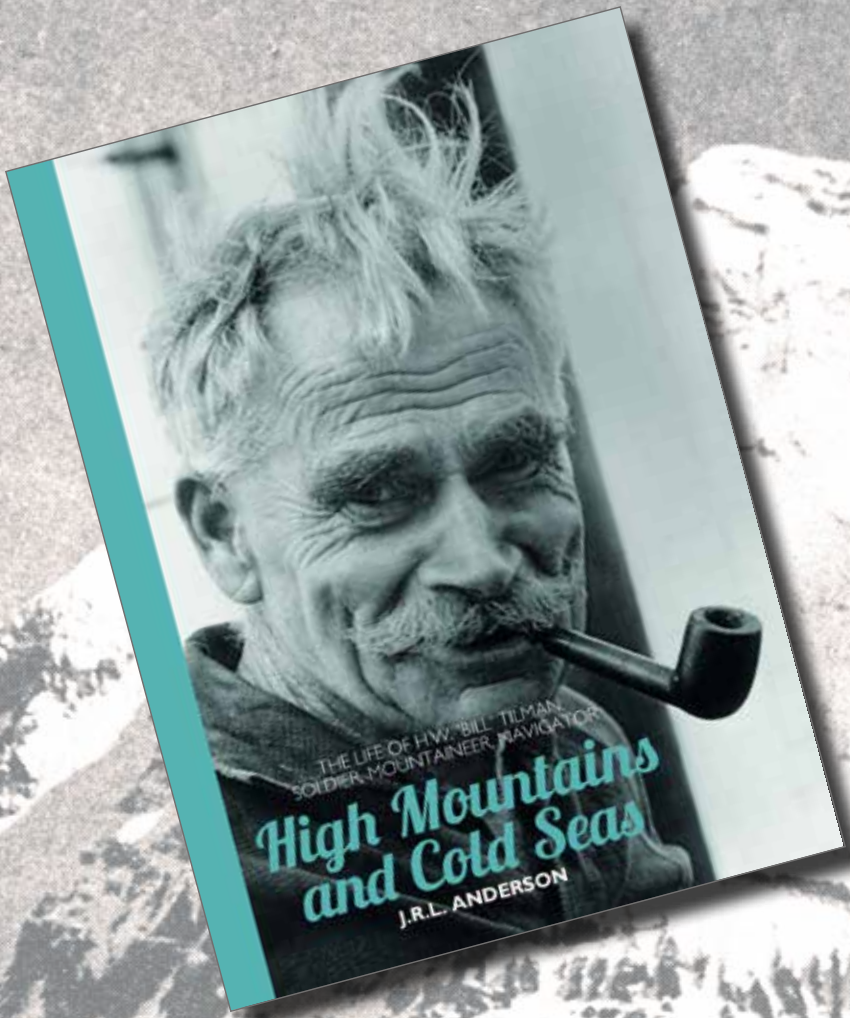
The inevitable search for a new boat begins. The 1902 pilot cutter *Baroque*, after not inconsiderable expense, proves equal to the challenge after Tilman's first troublesome voyage in her to West Greenland in 1973.

The circumnavigation of Spitzbergen in 1974 takes Tilman and *Baroque* to his farthest from the equator. The account makes compelling reading, the crew pulling together to avert potential disaster from a navigational misjudgement.

A younger, less experienced crew join him in 1975, heading north along Greenland's west coast until a break in the boom necessitates an early return. '…failure is at least an excuse for making another voyage.'

The following year sees Tilman's last voyage in his own boat, and he reflects, in artillery parlance: 'As I begin to describe this voyage, the discrepancy between the target and the fall of shot provokes a wry smile.'





Harold William 'Bill' Tilman (1898-1977) was among the greatest adventurers of his time, a pioneering mountaineer and navigator who held exploration above all else.

J.R.L. Anderson's biography draws on a wealth of personal correspondence between Tilman, a compulsive letter writer, and his immediate family and close friends, crafting the first detailed account of the extraordinary life of this remarkable, but very private individual.

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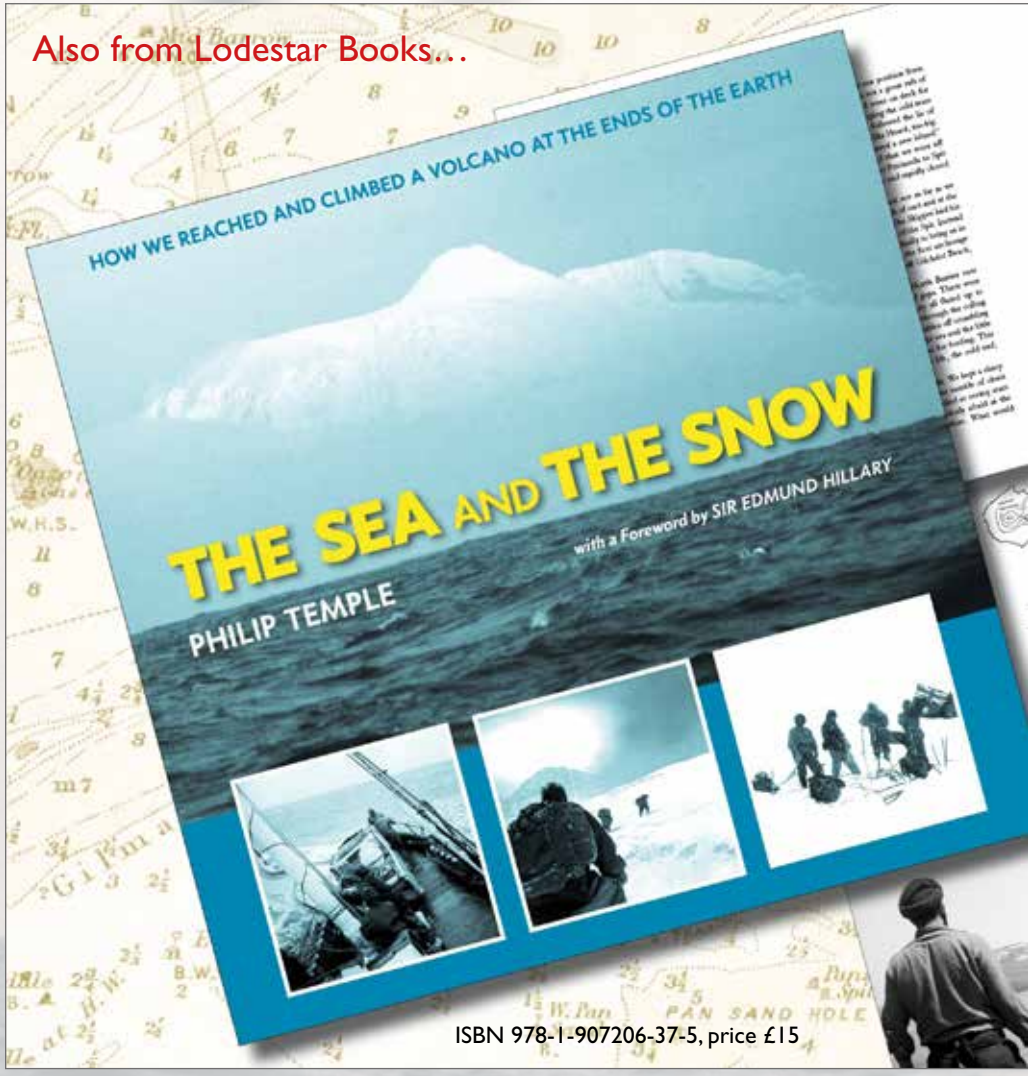

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