

I dedicate this book

**SHEILA IN THE WIND**

to all those of varied colour, creed, social status  
and occupation—some of them I still write to,  
but I never even knew the names of most—who  
without thought of reward helped me on my way.

‘It is nothing,’ they said, but without that ‘nothing’  
my own efforts would not have been enough.

### *Author's Note*

*Sheila II* is a 32ft gaff-rigged yawl, designed by Albert Strange and built by Dickie in 1911. She carried me alone from England to my home in New Zealand via the Mediterranean and Red Sea, past India and Ceylon, east across the Indian Ocean to Malaya, south through the Indonesian Islands to West Australia, and finally with the Roaring Forties to Tasmania and across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. I looked after her to the best of my ability, and she looked after me when at times it was beyond my own ability to do so.

# Sheila in the Wind

---

*A story of a Lone Voyage*

ADRIAN HAYTER



First published 1959 by  
Hodder and Stoughton Ltd

This edition published 2020 by  
Lodestar Books  
71 Boveney Road, London, SE23 3NL, United Kingdom

[lodestarbooks.com](http://lodestarbooks.com)

Copyright © The estate of Adrian Hayter 1959

All rights reserved

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-907206-52-8

Typeset by Lodestar Books in Adobe Jenson Pro

Printed in Wales by Gomer Press Ltd

All papers used by Lodestar Books  
are sourced responsibly

Republished with kind permission of Adrian Hayter's daughters: Gael Falk, Sarah van Meygaarden and Rebecca Hayter, who state: As a faithful reissue of *Sheila in the Wind* 1959, this book contains references and terms which are no longer considered suitable to a contemporary readership. Some attitudes expressed are also outdated by today's standards.

# CONTENTS

	Author's Note	2
	Introduction by Rebecca Hayter	9
	Preface	15
	<i>Sheila II's</i> route from England to New Zealand	16
1	Departure from England—the first gale— navigational difficulties—exhaustion	19
2	A valuable experience—entering my first port—Gibraltar	30
3	Time in port—visitors—the Gibraltarians— a Bull Fight—departure from Gibraltar	34
4	A strong hand—a shy shark—an escort of whales— a lucky sparrow—arrive Algiers	41
5	Arab independence—a cabaret party—uneasy departure	51
6	Thoughts in the wind—arrive Bône	57
7	'Monsieur, dormez-vous?'—'Have a drink?'— Le Café du Bateau Plaisir—departure from Bône	62
8	A navigational error—arrive Malta—censorship—departure	68
9	An escapist—stormy weather—a floppy mast—arrive Derna	73
10	A New Year's Eve Ball— <i>Sheila's</i> danger—Tobruk— on to Egypt	82
11	Arrive Port Said—Mr. MacGregor— departure from Port Said	88
12	The Suez Canal—French women—arrive Suez— a veiled proposal—clearance-out	93
13	The Gulf of Suez—planning for the Red Sea— doldrum weather—asleep among the reefs— arrive Perim Island	99

14	Another single-hander—Mike—a visit to Assab— Djibuti — arrive Aden	113
15	A hard decision—I love the Army—departure	120
16	Nearly wrecked—the need of a writer— nearly wrecked—Mukalla—departure	124
17	The south-west monsoon—exhaustion—a friend— dangerous landfall—arrive Bombay	133
18	Interlude ashore—an appendix operation—refitting— social engagements—red tape—happy departure	142
19	Two passengers—Malabar Coast—Goa— monasteries and temples—international concord	153
20	Arrive Cannanore—the lost anchor—departure	163
21	Arrive Cochin—depart Cochin— the biggest whale—arrive Colombo	169
22	The Yacht Club—the yacht California— another hard decision—departure	174
23	The rat—the doldrums—a dream— the Monsoon breaks at sea— Siamese interlude—arrive Penang	178
24	The Gurkha Officers' Club—the Home Guard— the cost of living—the Malay girl	190
25	Malacca Strait—night entry into Singapore— social engagements—departure	197
26	Planning problems—a sea of islands—the danger of rum— under armed arrest—mine-field—arrive Surabaya— the Coronation Ball	203
27	Dutch hospitality—a spoilt child— political thoughts—departure	215
28	Bali	220

29	The south-east trades— <i>Sheila</i> springs a leak— emergency rationing—a dirty bottom— communism—a hard decision	226
30	Belief—help from Kwan Yin—the condensing plant— the problem of fire—ships passed—the last sunset— underwater landing	234
31	Illegal entry—‘You’re in Australia now’— move to Geraldton—the use of Christian names	249
32	In the slaughter-house—the fencing contract— the shearing shed—on the wharf— social life—a harbour bar	257
33	Departure for Fremantle—the return— builder’s labourer in the North-west— a 400,000 acre sheep station—hospital	271
34	Crayfishing—wrecked—out of a job	278
35	The <i>Trimmerwheel</i> —a girl—an offer for <i>Sheila</i> — departure from Geraldton	282
36	Arrive Fremantle—the Yacht Club— more crayfishing—an unlucky ship	289
37	Perth—the payment of bills—the clean handkerchief	294
38	Departure Fremantle—Planning—the Roaring Forties— a ship passed—Bass Strait—Refuge Cove	298
39	Dismal weather—the drake—meditation—departure	306
40	Adverse winds—emergency ration scale— the cyclone—land-fall—the handkerchief— the Westport Bar—home	310
	Technical Glossary	324
	<i>Sheila II</i> design drawings by Albert Strange	326
	Index	328

## PLATES

- 1 Adrian around thirty years of age
- 2 *Sheila* in the yacht basin at Algiers
- 3 Anti-fouling *Sheila* as she lay against the Red House,  
Singapore
- 4 South-west Monsoon
- 5 I lived on Dorado whenever catchable
- 6 The beach where I landed in Australia and tied the  
dinghy to a bush
- 7 ...a corrugated iron affair with a falling tin chimney
- 8 Adrian after landing at Geraldton
- 9 The morning after arrival in Fremantle from Geraldton
- 10 Adrian on arrival at Westport, NZ
- 11 Sketch of Adrian by Maureen Connell for the first edition
- 12 *Sheila II* at her official welcome at Aurora Sailing Club,  
Nelson, 1956
- 13 Adrian sailing *Sheila* in Auckland, 1970
- 14 Adrian Hayter in 1970

## INTRODUCTION

When Adrian Hayter set out single-handed from Lymington, England on his thirty-two-foot Albert Strange-designed yawl *Sheila II*, local betting was seven to one that he would get no further than the English Channel.

His destination was New Zealand, and the odds were definitely against him. In 1949 perhaps only eight people had sailed solo around the world, and single-handed long-distance sailing voyages were rare. Adrian, then thirty-four, was a soldier, not a sailor.

In the previous decade he had been a close observer of the Partition of India and fought as a soldier in the Second World War and the Malayan Emergency. The latter, Britain's brutal reaction to the Communist uprising of 1948, had driven his decision to sail halfway around the world, single-handed.

More than sixty years later, and in the thirtieth anniversary year of Adrian's death, Lodestar Books is republishing the story of that voyage, *Sheila in the Wind*, first published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1959. As a sailor, Adrian recounts his foray into celestial navigation, a back-street appendix operation in India, armed escort by Indonesian authorities at sea, and eating barnacles off the hull to avoid starvation. As a writer he is trying to make sense of the humanitarian disasters that brought him to this voyage. *Sheila in the Wind* is more than a report of a 13,000-mile adventure; it's a story of the human spirit.

Adrian was born to a second-generation farmer in Timaru, New Zealand in December 1914. He and his two brothers grew up farming on D'Urville Island in the outer reaches of Marlborough Sounds. Even today, D'Urville Island remains isolated and unbroken. Adrian spoke of

mustering the cattle which had roamed wild all winter on horses that had also roamed wild. In bad weather, medical help could be days away so a moment's carelessness could have swift, decisive consequences. And so D'Urville Island helped to shape the man that Adrian would become.

As a boarder at Nelson College, Adrian excelled at diving, gymnastics and boxing, but his independence was at odds with team sports. He left school to work on the family farm as the Great Depression hit hard. His prospects were modest until his mother's younger sister, Adrian's godmother, made an offer: to pay all costs for Adrian, then aged seventeen, to attend Sandhurst Military College in England.

It was a long way in every sense from a D'Urville Island farm to a military career on the other side of the world, but his godmother's offer reflected family tradition. Adrian's mother and her siblings had grown up in India under British rule. For the rest of her life she recounted memories of her childhood and tales of her family's military glory. When Adrian graduated from Sandhurst three years later, she told him to join a Gurkha regiment because they are always loyal. And so, he did.

In India, Adrian continued his training as an officer in a Gurkha regiment of the British Army and was posted to the North-West Frontier. On 26 June 1940, he married Margaret Waight, known as Tigger. She had grown up in India and encouraged Adrian's growing interest in its religions. The introspective soul who had developed in the solitude of D'Urville Island began a spiritual and philosophical awakening.

When war was declared, Adrian was desperate to be in the fight and in 1942 was finally posted to Burma and the Japanese invasion. On 8 September 1944 Adrian led sixty men to take a Japanese stronghold. Although wounded, he mustered a second, crucial attack. Wounded again, he repelled a counter-attack. His persistence earned him the Military Cross; it was then Britain's second-level military honour for officers.

As Adrian wrote in his second book, *The Second Step* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), there was a moment in the battle when he had believed he was about to die. He had a clear vision: the perfect self that he could be and the imperfect self that he was: '... with the terrible knowl-

edge (then too late to amend) that my discord was to go to eternity with me. And this, not death, is fear.'

That experience stayed with him through the long months of recovery, and heightened his keen awareness of cause and effect: that it is impossible to take any action, or accept any action forced upon you, without eventually facing the consequences. Ignorance is no excuse, he said, because it doesn't change the effect.

A commanding officer and life-long friend would later describe Adrian as a fine soldier with a high level of physical fitness but: 'He was difficult to lead for, as a free-ranging New Zealander, he queried most orders and disregarded others.'

Britain granted India its independence in 1947 in a rushed process that became known as the Partition. It created India and Pakistan (East and West) as two separate countries, but failed to accommodate India's complex social systems and the traditional territories of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Hundreds of thousands died in a bloody civil war and fourteen million people were displaced. As Adrian wrote, 'A great terror spread over India.'

As a trained soldier in wartime, Adrian had generally supported Britain's methods; in the Partition, he didn't. He grappled with the enormity of the tragedy. In *The Second Step*, he asks: 'It became compassion, or fellow-feeling, and I could no longer view the daily reports of massacres as mere numbers but felt them as disasters happening to myself or to those I loved. Does it in fact make the slightest difference if a child is mutilated whether it is your own or another's? The tragedy of it becomes an existing fact just the same, and the desecration demands retribution from us all.'

He and Tigger had two children, a daughter Gael, born in 1943, and a son Bruce, born in 1948. The same year, Adrian's regiment was posted to Malaya after the Malayan Communist Party attempted to overthrow the colonial administration to gain independence from Britain. It ignited what the British called the Malayan Emergency.

As Adrian relates in *The Second Step*, this evolved into guerrilla warfare. The Communist bandits hid out in the mountains and depended

on raiding the villages in the lowlands for food. Britain's tactics included destroying the bandits' food supply by destroying the villages' rice paddies and livestock. Villagers who resisted were shot.

Adrian was Chief of Jungle Warfare, training officers and non-commissioned officers. He didn't support Communism, but neither did he support the atrocities to fight it. He petitioned his superiors to collect rice from the villagers on a credit system and then re-supply as they needed it, to prevent it benefitting the bandits, but his efforts were futile.

He was also disillusioned with his own country. Post-war New Zealand had adopted the Welfare State. What many acclaimed as a great advance in democracy, Adrian saw as a betrayal of what he had fought to protect in war: freedom. He believed the Welfare State made people dependent on the government, and if you are dependent, he said, you are not free.

Although Adrian was made a Member of the British Empire for his work in Malaya, the Emergency continued what the Partition had started: it manifested in Adrian what would now be called depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. Perhaps it was that fierce self-reliance that drove Adrian to his own solution: to resign from the army and sail from England to New Zealand.

As he wrote in *The Second Step*: '... having experienced so much discord among people over the preceding ten years, it seemed sensible to seek harmony away from people because all the discord I had seen had been man-made.' Adrian left his wife, daughter Gael, and son Bruce in Malaya to begin his voyage from England. About six months later Bruce died suddenly of natural causes, at eighteen months old.

In England, Adrian briefly owned the forty-foot Aldous gaff-cutter *Aysha*, but she was unsuitable for long voyages. He bought *Sheila II* and made the six-year voyage recounted in these pages. In 1953, Tigger petitioned him for divorce.

In 1959 Adrian married Dr Tamsin Lee. He promised her that his solo sailing voyages were over, but when my elder sister Sarah was a year old, the open sea called again. Adrian returned to England by ship

and bought *Valkyr*, a Norwegian Folkboat, nineteen feet on the waterline. He sailed her via the Canary Islands to the Caribbean, through the North Atlantic and West Indies hurricane season, and through the Panama Canal to the Pacific Ocean and on to New Zealand.

*Valkyr* arrived at Nelson, New Zealand in darkness but the harbour was lit with the headlights of hundreds of cars, horns sounding, to welcome her home. Royal Akarana Yacht Club awarded its Blue Water Medal for only the second time to recognise the achievement. Adrian's third book, *Business in Great Waters*, relates this second voyage.

Nearing the age of fifty, Adrian became seamanship instructor at the Cobham Outward Bound School at Anakiwa in the Marlborough Sounds. I was born in 1963 and the following year Adrian led the wintering-over party at Scott Base, Antarctica, described in his book *The Year of the Quiet Sun*. He was awarded the Polar Medal in 1970.

Through the late sixties and early seventies he taught English in Takaka and later worked his own boat as a commercial fisherman. In 1975, increasingly dissatisfied with New Zealand's apathy against a numbing of individual freedom, he stood as independent candidate for the Tasman electorate. He stood again in 1984 for the New Zealand Party, but was not elected in either case.

Adrian would live to the age of seventy-five; his six-year voyage in *Sheila II* straddled the mid-point of his life but it didn't resolve his inner conflict. At sea he had lived as a spiritual soul and readily accepted what he called The Law: the balance of cause and effect. On land, he felt he betrayed that experience. His second marriage lasted seventeen years, but it never recovered from the hurt of him leaving for the voyage on *Valkyr*.

Through the mid-1970s to mid-80s, Adrian wrote three books: *A Man Called Peters*, *The Missing Piece* and *The Dolphin's Message*, all increasingly philosophical and challenging for most readers. He was desperate for people to understand—but defining that understanding eluded him.

Throughout the eighties he battled the issue of Accident Compensation, refusing to pay his levy because he believed it compensated people

for carelessness. Every five years, he faced charges for not signing the Census, which is compulsory and therefore to Adrian undemocratic. He went into the bush for six weeks to avoid being sent to jail.

As he neared seventy, the years under tropical suns and heavy smoking manifested what I describe as Adrian's last great adventure: cancer. It paralysed and disfigured one side of his face. He resisted conventional medicine, unable to believe in its healing beyond a physical level, and lived alone in his caravan at the Wairoa Gorge, near Nelson, always writing.

'The success or failure of fighting cancer,' he wrote, 'is not necessarily determined by death.'

People often describe Adrian as an eccentric. For others, he was a mentor, an inspiration. A week before he died at home on 14 June 1990, he said: 'I feel an overwhelming gratitude to life itself, and to share its beauty with another is now my awareness of God.'

He had finally found peace.

Rebecca Hayter  
*Golden Bay, New Zealand*  
*May 2020*

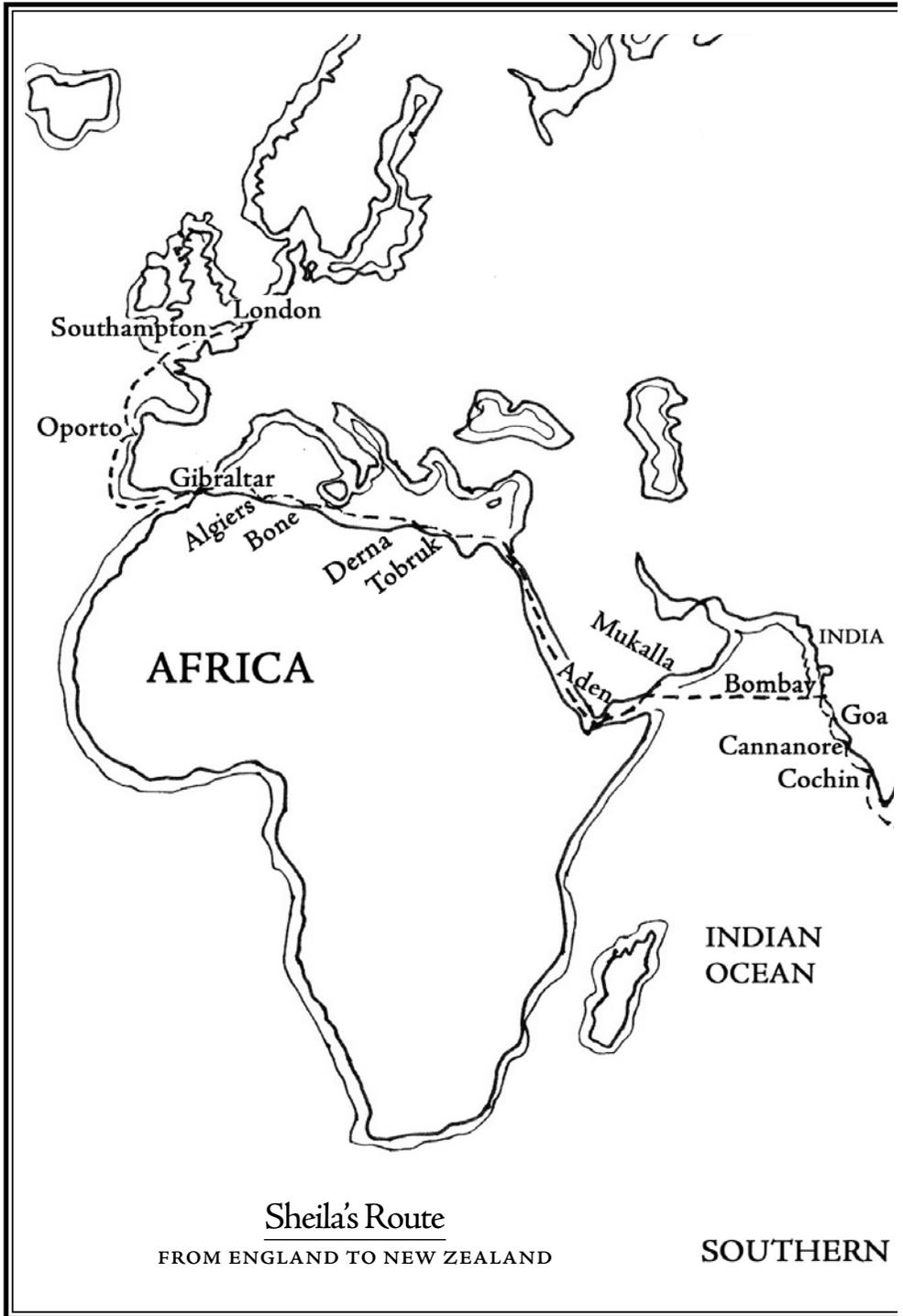
## PREFACE

The greatest difficulty in writing a book such as this is to reconcile the two widely conflicting aspects of it, aspects which in truth cannot be separated. This story of sailing a small ship over thousands of miles of open ocean could be written purely as an adventure story, except that the ship and the sea were only a means to an end. I used these in my search for something greater than either of them, and those thousands of miles have given me a clearer idea of what it is I seek and why it eludes me.

So perhaps this story should be written more as a philosophy but after much thought I know that the two aspects should be welded into one, as indeed they were in fact. Each had its effect for better or for worse upon the other, and neither would have been the same if left to stand alone; nor is it possible in a true story that either should do so.

But can such a story be written? The reader seeking adventure is not interested in the author's amateur ramblings into philosophy, while the thinker seeking to solve the basic problem which confronts us all, whether we are conscious of it or not, is not interested in handling a ship or messing about in boats. It is possible that literary technique could soften the impact of these two aspects, harmonise them into a smoothly readable book, but that would be the falsest tale of all. For this impact in actuality is often harsh, and our reactions to it affect what we see around us and what we ourselves become.

And so this book is merely a true story of the physical adventure, a truth that is incomplete, although it does contain some thoughts that will make strange reading from an armchair; but I am not reporting thoughts from an armchair. And some day perhaps I shall write the rest of the story, the other aspect of it, and so complete its truth and fulfil what I deeply feel to be an obligation, because a half-truth may do more damage than a lie.

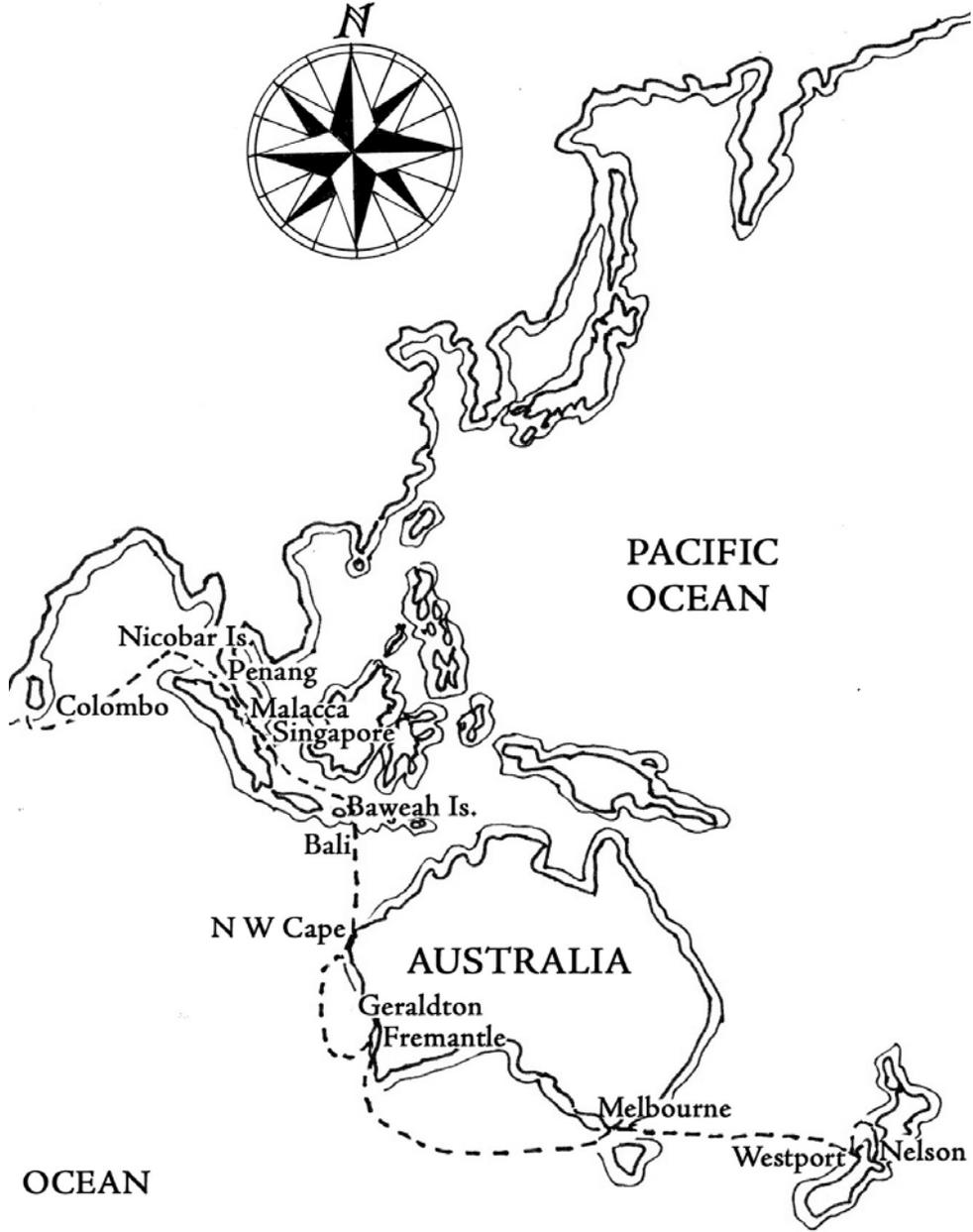


CLAUDIA MYATT

### Sheila's Route

FROM ENGLAND TO NEW ZEALAND

SOUTHERN





# I



## *Departure from England—the first gale— navigational difficulties—exhaustion*

Some London papers printed the news that I was about to sail, and this was followed over the next week by a flood of more than a hundred letters from people who wanted to come with me. Few had any experience of the sea, and fewer still had any money to offer towards expenses.

Extracts from some of those letters will give a general impression of their variety, and how difficult all were to answer. One read: 'I am twenty-five years old, physically strong and pretty clued up—already I've made and lost three fortunes in different parts of the world, so you can see I'm the adventurous kind and am just the companion for you. At present I have no money but what's money anyway—all I ask is my keep and together we'll sail the world, overcoming all difficulties.' At the other extreme was, 'I'm now fifty but still fit and willing to work. Your venture is something I've always wanted to do, but have been prevented by obligations which could not be neglected. I don't mind if I die on this trip so won't be afraid, but will you please give me this last opportunity to do something I've wanted all my life? If you can't take me, know that my prayers will be for you. P.S. I have a little money and it is all yours.'

There were about ten letters from women and girls, some included photographs, three bore no address or signature. One was very confident: 'I am an adventurous person, more like a boy than a girl, and love to do crazy things. I'm never afraid and will do everything you tell me to (love, honour and obey!). Take me.' An anonymous letter said simply, 'I have just seen your photo and would love to come with you. You look so lonely—I too am lonely. I will pray for you and hope to meet you some-

day.' The dreams people have, the escapes they seek, and the dreadful loneliness some feel: I knew them all.

All those letters (except the anonymous ones) requested early replies. Many I wanted to answer, not only to say 'no' as gently as possible, but to thank them also. At this time last-minute arrangements demanded full attention, and so I drafted a reply which would do for them all, and had copies typed and addressed to the writers. That letter must have seemed very unappreciative, even callous, to some; should any of them read this I hope they will understand and forgive.

The last night I went along to the Ship Inn. The Ship, only yards from my mooring in the river, had been a second home to me over the past year. Paddy and Peggy (mine host and his wife) had been very kind to me, from introducing me to other guests so I would not become too much of a recluse, to putting me to bed and looking after me when I was ill.

This was the night—all worries were over and payments were made and I was free to sail, my drinks were on the house, many friends were present; the stage was set for a hilarious celebration. I hardly said a word the whole evening. Terrified! It is strange how you can plan, work and sacrifice towards a thing for months, and yet only when it is within your grasp do you fully realise the enormity of what you're doing. I suddenly realised I was about to emulate what people read of with awe—Slocum for instance. Taking another whisky I asked myself who the hell was I to emulate Slocum? A telegram handed to me during the evening did not help. It read, 'Adrian don't do it.' Then someone else told me that the local betting was seven to one against my ever clearing the English Channel. Thank God he told me. I left the party and went to bed, miserable!

Next morning, Saturday, 12 August, 1950, I slipped quietly away from the Berthon Boat Company, motored past the Royal Lympington Yacht Club unnoticed, much to my relief, turned off the engine and put on sail with two reefs down. The first thrill of this venture came as *Sheila* lifted to the swell and heeled to the first gust by Jack-in-the-Basket at the mouth of the river. The 1400 miles to Gibraltar seemed like a trip to the moon.

All that night I beat down Channel against a gusty sou'-wester. It rained a lot, and I was twice nearly run down by steamers coming up from astern. It was so unusual sitting alone in the darkness of the exposed cockpit, huddled against the cold and wet and partly bemused by the one tiny compass light, that I felt I was a mere solitary atom in a great empty void and forgot about shipping. The noise of their engines made me turn around to see the red and green lights, with the mast-head lights in line.

I slept for an hour the next day but stayed at the helm all that night; there was too much shipping about to sleep safely, apart from the fact that it takes time to get used to sleeping alone at sea, leaving the ship to look after herself. That night the mizzen cross-trees broke in a squall and next morning, being very tired, I decided to go into Teignmouth where there were friends.

Being somewhat unfavourably impressed with my first taste of single-handed seafaring, after an agony of thought I wired a friend that a berth was his if he still wanted to come. The agony of thought—it is amazing how difficult it is to know your own mind, and amazing too how you can argue yourself into anything. All the arguments I had rejected for taking someone with me I now enlisted as being obvious common sense. However deeply honest I tried to be with myself, I just did not know whether I was giving in or being sensible. So I sent that wire, leaving the decision to some power knowing better than I. Next day a wire arrived saying he could not come, and the day after a letter in fuller explanation. All the arguments I had used over the last six months for not taking him and which he had rejected, he now quoted as reasons for not being able to come. 'But,' he added, 'if you're stuck and feel you can't go on alone, I'll sell out and come with you.' That was a generous remark, so I wrote back and said of course I could go on alone—and only then felt that I really would.

On the 19th the Met. Office told me the weather was uncertain until the outcome was decided between a depression over Iceland and an anti-cyclone over Central Europe. The issue had still not been decided on the 20th or even the 21st, and so I sailed that morning. An extract from

my diary written after sailing tells of that better than my memory now:

It is a strange feeling starting off on a trip like this—God knows how or where it will end. I can still see the white houses and hotels along the front, the red cliffs, the steep forehead of the Ness, and behind are the green hills of Devon. It is a beautiful day, a light southerly breeze and a warm sun. As I was getting the dinghy on board before slipping the mooring a young chap rowed alongside and asked to come with me. A launch caught me up going down the Teign, a photographer on board, and two reporters (one a woman) sat below while the photographer did his stuff. Later they remarked on my books—Charles Morgan, Huxley, Plato, Shaw, Tagore, and so on. The man asked, ‘Are you in search of a new philosophy?’ and the woman, ‘Is there a girl at the other end?’ They were nice.

Now the launches and speed boats have gone, I’ve had lunch, cleaned up, and am enjoying the sun, looking back on the England I’ve grown to love so much and wondering if I’ll ever see it again.

During the first two days out of Teignmouth, the wind was erratic and I was continually changing jibs, reefing and unreefing, and snatching odd hours of sleep during daylight because of the fear of being run down at night. The glass dropped slowly and steadily, assuring me by the evening of the 23rd that I was shortly going to experience my first gale.

The gale developed next morning so I hove to and for the first time changed to storm canvas. I had practised this in port, but it was a very different matter at sea. Before beginning I read it up again in the text book, and the only thing that this forgot to mention was the most difficult part of the whole procedure—how to stay on board while doing it. In such jobs, when both hands are used, you hang on with your legs, the crook of an arm, the point of your shoulder, and often use your teeth as an extra hand.

I had fervently hoped that I would not meet a gale until I had gained

some experience of the sea, but running straight into one was the best thing that could have happened. I sat for hours in the open cockpit as *Sheila* lay hove to under storm canvas, because being down below under closed hatches frightened me out of my wits. Whenever a breaker crashed on board it sounded as if the masts had gone, planking and timbers smashed to pieces and immediate sinking was inevitable. I'd rush to the hatch, tear it open expecting to see chaos, to view *Sheila* as if nothing had happened; and nor had it. Later, common sense told me that if a breaker did smash in the decks I would know about it without the need to look above.

Also when below there was a feeling of neglecting the ship, of not being ready for emergency at the time it was most likely to happen. For the next forty-eight hours of that storm I hardly left the cockpit, and during that time I did nothing for the simple reason there was nothing to do. The sails were set hove to, reduced to their smallest size, the helm was lashed, and I could do no more but leave it to the gods. I was wearing myself out quite unnecessarily and very stupidly.

This gale also gave me the essential confidence that *Sheila* could look after herself in big seas. Time and again a huge steep sea, a veritable wall of water, seemed to fill the sky above and I'd think, 'She can't get over this one,' and *Sheila* rose gracefully, somehow slipped around the jagged crest, and sank easily into the next trough.

I had no idea whether or not *Sheila* would sail in that weather under storm canvas, and there was only one way to find out; it was something I had to know for the safety of future navigation, when storms might catch me in congested waters or close in to a lee shore. That sail proved to be one of those thrilling, fantastic experiences you never forget—like your first solo loop in an aeroplane, your first fast run on skis, anything in which temerity and doubt are banished to leave a whole new field of adventure open to you. And adventure in this light is freedom.

I had splashed through rough seas in a motor launch around the coast of New Zealand, but here in the Channel there were noticeable periods as we climbed the hills. From the top was a view to all horizons, of the long lines of rolling white-topped seas and the deep watery val-

leys between them. Sometimes *Sheila* slid swiftly down the steep slope into these, at others her bow hovered before we fell headlong down a watery cliff to the valley floor below, only to land, it seemed, on rubber cushions. *Sheila* said, 'You look after me, my boy, and I'll look after you.' And that was fair enough; it was like being back with Gurkha troops.

Over the next two days I got very tired. I only slept by day in hour snatches and this robs sleep of much value, delaying fatigue enough to carry on for a few more hours but building up no reserve of energy. The long night hours in the exposed cockpit were bitterly cold; there was much spray, at times breakers smothered the ship, and heavy belts of rain added to the misery.

In these days too I overworked myself through sheer inexperience. I'd think the wind had eased, and change from storm canvas to the closely reefed mainsail only to overburden *Sheila* unmercifully, and have the weary process of changing back again. I had little knowledge of what stresses and strains *Sheila*, the rigging and the sails could take, which also led to much anxiety and needless worry.

(Prior to this voyage I had never been out of sight of land in a small boat. Since arriving in England a year before, I had sailed mainly around the Solent, putting the theory of the text books into practice; before that I had only once before stepped on board a yacht when a Christmas party had called at my home on D'Urville Island, New Zealand. We youngsters had gone on board to 'see inside'—beyond this and brief outings in sailing dinghies my yachting experience was nil.)

I wrote, 'I have to stay awake all night in case of shipping. It's bitterly cold and I'm not really enjoying this very much. There are several ports on both the French and English coasts within easy reach, but I know if I go into a port without beating this ruddy gale I'll never leave land again.'

Then came the first Sunday, and a blessed day indeed, a beautiful sunny day with a gentle wind, and the seas died to let *Sheila* sail herself happily towards Ushant. I brought out the soaking mass of clothing from below to dry on deck, and cooked myself a curry lunch. When stripped to change into dry clothes I was amazed to find that my body was black and blue from head to foot, and in the most unexpected plac-

es, from being knocked around during the rough weather.

That night I put lights in the rigging and slept dead to the world until eight o'clock next morning, and it was a beautiful morning. This was the first real sleep I'd had since leaving, and there was something wonderful and strangely exciting in waking to such a lovely day out of sight of land, of ships, of people. And that new world was me.

With dusk a strong westerly came in from the Atlantic, driving *Sheila* hard across the increasing seas to fly past the winking light of Ushant—spray flying, flashes of blue lightning and giant rolls of thunder, and sometimes the moon shone briefly between the towering white columns of the thunder-clouds to show the upward curve of the white sails, the wildness of the tossing seas and their racing black shadows. Ushant died astern and home waters were behind me.

The westerly continued all next day carrying huge seas before it, but lacking the viciousness of those in the Channel. I hove to for a couple of hours' sleep during the day, and sailed all through that night into the next dawn. I wanted to get out of the notorious Bay as soon as I could, and there were another 300 miles to go. I slept for an hour after dawn but by noon was steering so badly, half-dazed with fatigue, that I feared that if anything went wrong I'd be in no fit state to put it right. And once my head nodded forward as a sharp sea lifted *Sheila's* quarter (the corner of the stern) catapulting me right out of the cockpit to land impaled on the lee stanchion. That was another lesson, and thereafter when tired in rough weather I always tied myself in with a lashing round the waist. I hove to and slept again.

Two hours later I shot out of my bunk and through the hatch with the realisation that a loud hooting in my dreams was real. A big tanker (the *Shelldrake*) was rolling heavily beside me, the skipper peering over the end of the bridge right into my hatchway, and I heard his laugh as I appeared frowsy and alarmed. They must have had a discussion before leaving their course to investigate this lone yacht apparently unattended. I regretted the intrusion, but was grateful to a ship which troubled to ascertain that help was not needed.

The weather looked black to the south-west, and as the day grew old

wind came. I tore the mainsail badly getting it up, so changed to storm canvas and let *Sheila* sail herself away from the shipping lane so I could get more sleep during the night. I was too tired to mend the sail then.

Next day was fine with a gentle breeze, so I mended the tear and let *Sheila* sail herself to the south while I did all those things I ought to have done the day before. It is very damaging to morale to leave those things undone that you know ought to be done—‘and there is no health in us’. How exactly that describes the feeling, of apprehension, of ‘butterflies in the tummy’. It is also (I have found) the basic cause of bad temper, even when alone. The solution is obvious.

I ran the engine to charge the batteries, filled respective containers with meths., kerosene and petrol from the bulk stocks, cleaned the navigation lights and trimmed the wicks, tightened the port shrouds, cut out some chafe in the starboard runner (an extra back-stay for the main mast) and put in a long splice (copied from the book!). I gargled with antiseptic as I’d had a sore throat for a couple of days, washed up the dirty dishes and put them away, scrubbed out the galley, burnished the draining-board and de-greased the sink. Clothes and blankets were aired and re-stowed, spare sails neatly rolled and stowed, cabin tidied, ropes above deck coiled neatly, and the bilges pumped dry. In fact *Sheila* was as shipshape as the day she left, and after a shave I felt even better than I myself had on that momentous day.

Cape Finisterre was somewhere about 120 miles to the south, and as I’d now been four days out of sight of land I took a sun sight, the first ever. Before sailing from England I had started a correspondence course on celestial navigation, and gone to retired Master Mariners for instruction, but all these went far too much into detail for me. I can only understand theory when I put it into practice, and so having bought the necessary nautical tables and almanac I threw the papers on board for further study when the time came. The risk of such a system I offset by planning to keep about 100 miles offshore after sighting Spain, to allow for errors while under instruction. It would be impossible to miss Gibraltar, wedged in between two great continents.

The position line obtained from this sight ran near my dead reckon-

ing (DR) position, and as clouds were coming up to obscure the sun I headed south-east to the shipping lane, which runs near enough in a straight line from Finisterre to Ushant. This line I crossed with the position line, and from the intersection laid a course for Finisterre. This showed up two days later.

The next four days and nights were spent mostly encased in a thick fog. There was a big lazy swell and little wind—conditions which give a sailor a glimpse of hell. If you leave up sail the rolling of the ship slams the sails and spars from side to side, jerking the blocks, wearing the sails, and chafing the gear; if you take sail down you understand the meaning of the term 'rolling her guts out'. The almost continual hooting of fog-horns on that busy shipping lane did not help to ease the strain. My fog-horn had made a raucous blare in harbour, but in that great white loneliness it sounded like a toy flute. Sometimes ships passed so close, but invisible, that their breaking wash smothered the side-decks.

As each day and night passed with little change in conditions I reached a stage of frustration which nearly drove me mad, and the engine was not much help because I wanted to save at least ten gallons of fuel in case of need in the confines of Gibraltar Strait. The noise or movement made sleep uncertain, and any breath of wind I used to the full, at whatever hour of the day or night it came.

Then I began to feel really ill, and searched desperately for the cause. A few days previously the tea jar had been broken, and rather than throw the tea away I'd sifted the tiny splinters of glass from each lot before use; perhaps some had been missed. Or perhaps some tinned food had been faulty, or perhaps the remains of some dread tropical fever still lurked in my blood. It felt like all of these—a splitting headache, extreme lassitude and depression, and a wracked tummy which in five minutes miraculously converted all solids into liquid. So I took no food and increased my weakness further.

Yet the ship had to be worked and I must have made progress which my diary is too vague to show. My log tells me that I took sights two days later, putting me forty miles off the Spanish Coast, which was safe enough.

Before going below to make a cup of cocoa at dusk I took a routine glance around the horizon, and to my horror saw a mass looming out of the fading light broad on the starboard bow. Compass bearings and the Pilot Book told me that I was inside a crescent shaped chain of islands composed of Berlenga and the Farilhoes, about forty miles north of Lisbon. There was no need to panic but that is exactly what I did.

I clawed down the sails and started the engine, turned northwest and tried to motor out against a steep sea and freshening wind. This was a useless waste of my limited energy and the engine's fuel, because *Sheila* can deal with such conditions far more efficiently under sail than under power. So I stopped the engine, hauled up sail, put in two reefs, and went on to the port tack. Sometime during the blackness of that night we passed the outer-most rock, when and by how much I don't know. Short tacks would have eliminated all risk; I had effected only two and then left *Sheila* to sail herself, taking a chance on the wind not changing, and going below to the dimly-lit cabin too tired and ill to do more.

The next day brought the crisis. I was standing in the cockpit leaning against the coaming when my knees buckled. My mind was strangely clear and detached as it watched my body crumple and sink into a huddle on the cockpit floor.

I came to some time later, noted that there was wind and that for some reason the mainsail was down. I dragged myself forward to the halyards, not daring to stand upright for fear of falling overboard, but I had not the strength to pull the sail more than halfway up.

It is hard to describe that humiliation now and so I quote from my diary (written up later that evening):

How I wept today—I vaguely remember sliding on to the floor of the cockpit, my head falling on to my doubled-up knees and sobbing my heart out; I tried to stop and just couldn't. All my stupidities seemed too big and yet unended, just as people who knew more of the sea, more of the Army, more of life, had predicted. My navigation is all to hell, I know nothing of handling a

ship and have killed myself trying, my capital's gone, my career's gone—oh brother, are you a failure?

I was laid completely bare and the whole world seemed to be in the watery sun looking down at me, so I went below as a wounded animal goes to hide in a cave, flinging myself on the berth as I thought to die. Then fatigue mercifully overcame the pain all through my body and I lost consciousness.



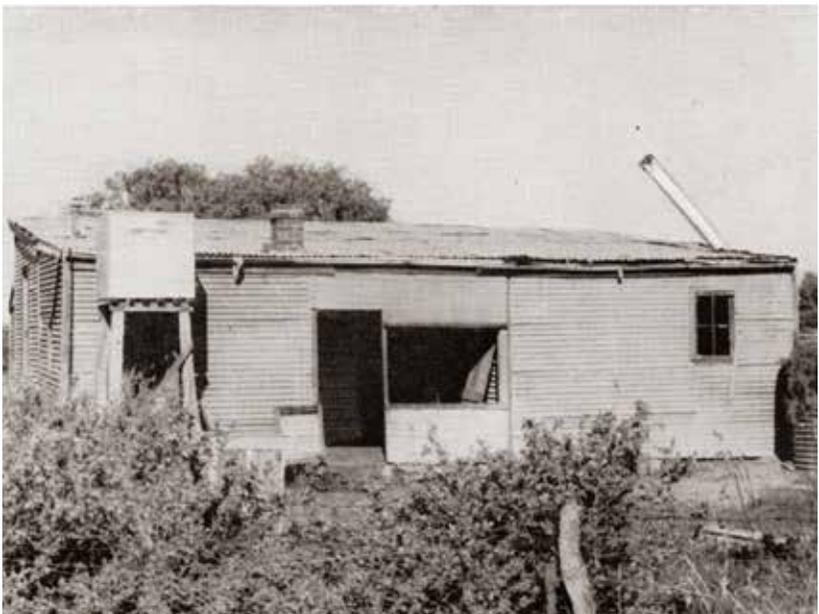
Anti-fouling *Sheila* as she lay against the Red House, Singapore



South-west Monsoon



The beach where I landed in Australia  
and tied the dinghy to a bush



...a corrugated iron affair with a falling tin chimney



*Sheila II* at her official welcome at Aurora Sailing Club, Nelson, NZ, 1956