

DOWN TO THE SEAS AGAIN

SAMPLE PAGES



*Coles was told by an old-timer that Cohoe was 'unfit to go outside the Solent'
and was just a 'toy yacht'.*

DOWN TO THE SEAS AGAIN

The post-war renaissance of voyaging under sail

RICHARD CROCKATT

Illustrated by
CLAUDIA MYATT



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Chapter I

ADVENTURERS ON THE QUIET

Eric and Susan Hiscock: *Wanderer I-V*

One morning in early May 1938 Eric Hiscock was in the Irish Sea on passage to Douglas, Isle of Man, when a gale blew up from the direction of the harbour. He was only a mile off but it was touch and go whether he would make it. He double-reefed the mainsail, bringing the gaff jaws only a few feet above the boom, but with such a short luff it was impossible to stay her round. He could make to windward only by wearing round at the end of each tack (bearing away, gybing and bringing her up on the wind on the other tack). It took him three hours to beat the one mile into the harbour. He learned later that the lifeboat lookout had been watching his progress, ready to come to his aid if necessary.

Hiscock had spent the previous winter planning a cruise to Scotland. Inspired by the adventures of John Buchan's Richard Hannay, Hiscock planned to sail from his home port of Yarmouth, Isle of Wight to the wild and remote Loch Scavaig in Skye, location of key scenes in *Mr Standfast*. He was thirty years old, single, already an experienced cruising sailor, an established contributor to the yachting press, and author of a cruising guide to the south west of Ireland. His boat was the twenty-four-foot engineless gaff-rigged cutter *Wanderer II*, designed in 1937 by Laurent Giles with lines very similar to those of the slightly bigger *Vertue* whose first incarnation, *Andrillot*, was already under construction. Hiscock could not afford the bigger boat, so Giles drew a smaller version to suit his pocket. He had four months' cruising time ahead of him. He could just as well work on the book he was writing on board as ashore. Thus began a pattern as cruising sailor and author which carried him through till the end of his life in 1986.

This scene presents a sharp contrast with the usual image of Eric Hiscock. Firstly, on this 1938 voyage he was single-handed, while in all his best-known cruises he was accompanied by Susan whom he married in 1941. They had met in the early 1930s when she was only

seventeen and already a keen sailor. Characteristically Hiscock did not dwell on personal matters, so there is little detail about their route from first meeting to marriage. However, he did note in passing in an account of a cruise to Brittany in 1939 that he had put in to La Trinité near the Gulf of Morbihan 'to pick up a friend who had come out to join me for a day or two'. A footnote reveals that the friend was 'Susan Slater, and we got married two years later'. They evidently made a perfect team – both highly independent individuals who cooperated effortlessly. Hiscock made a point throughout his writings of praising her skills and fortitude, but the key to their success lay surely in their total compatibility. They never had children, were perfectly fulfilled in the life they had chosen, and if they argued or disagreed, managed to keep discord firmly in its place. Meanwhile, however, on this Scottish venture in 1938 he was evidently as comfortable sailing solo as he was later with Susan. Whether from choice or necessity he could be totally self-sufficient, and on this cruise to Scotland such a temperament was certainly required.

Secondly, the idea of the voyage being inspired by a scene in a John Buchan novel, with its intimation of romance and adventure, seems out of keeping with the sober, undemonstrative character Hiscock projects in most of his writings. We do not generally associate the Hiscocks' voyages with struggle or adversity. They seem models of planning and execution. In fact, he insisted somewhat primly that 'a successful voyage is a planned voyage' rather than a matter of wandering about 'wherever the winds chanced to blow us, which is contrary to our principles'. In his account of their first circumnavigation (1952-5), Hiscock reported an interview with an Australian journalist:

With shorthand pads at the ready and pencils poised, they started shooting questions at us. 'What was your most desperate situation?' We said we were sorry but there really had not been any.... 'But surely you must have had some excitements? A leak. A fire?' Again we shook our heads. 'Didn't any of your sails split?' We tried to explain that such things do not usually happen during properly conducted cruises or aboard well-found sailing yachts. But the reporters were losing interest in us rapidly by then and soon took themselves ashore.

Eric Hiscock was not without a sense of irony and fun. He knew what he was doing, which was deflecting attention away from what he felt were inessentials and above all recoiling from sensationalism and publicity. But the pose was not entirely manufactured. The Hiscocks were indeed meticulously organised individuals who seemed successfully to have ironed out any wrinkles which life, weather, and mischance might present. Adlard Coles said of Eric that 'his achievements... are due to his perfectionism, a characteristic he shares with Susan over anything they undertake.' This applies as much to maintenance as to boat-handling, navigation, victualling and the rest. While *Wanderer II* was in build Hiscock noted that 'because I like to know that beneath its parcelling and serving every splice has at least four tucks, I undertook the rigging myself. I believe there were 90 splices all told.' It was this approach and these skills which made his instructional books *Cruising under Sail* and *Voyaging under Sail* so popular, a status which they continue to enjoy.

Yet the picture of Hiscock's solo struggle to reach Douglas harbour also contains a vital truth about his life and character. While he declared on more than one occasion that he dreaded bad weather and even that he was 'timid by nature', neither he nor Susan ever shied away from a challenge which might test them to the full. They voyaged in the spirit of Arthur Ransome's words carved in *Wanderer III's* companionway: 'Grab a chance and you won't be sorry for a might-have-been.' It is time to look behind the managerial image of the Hiscocks and bring out the adventuring side of their sailing lives.

* * *

Hiscock was born in 1908 and brought up in Southampton.* Sailing was the dominant theme of his life from an early age. He sailed dinghies at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight where the family spent every summer. At boarding school in Bromsgrove near Birmingham he was unable to take part in ball games because of poor eyesight and put his energies into sailing and rowing. In his teens he was already subscribing to yachting magazines. At University College, Southampton

* Thanks are due to Eric Hiscock's niece Janice Aslin for information about his early life.

he coached the rowing eight. The desire to own his own boat was a wholly natural progression from these early steps.

Hiscock records the seemingly odd fact that he was able to buy his first boat as a result of the bankruptcy of a company called Waste Products Ltd in which his father had invested some of Eric's money. With the onset of the depression his father refunded Eric the money which enabled him to go sailing. He never looked back. In the 1930s he laid the foundation of his subsequent career as the doyen of British cruising yachtsmen, sailing whenever and wherever he could, writing regularly for the yachting press, editing magazines and annuals, besides producing numerous books which were indeed his livelihood. While he was listed as sole author of his numerous publications, from the time he and Susan were married he never failed to acknowledge her contribution to the production of his books and articles or indeed to their lifetime of cruising. Theirs was a joint enterprise. Uniquely among the sailors covered in this book, Eric and Susan Hiscock received MBEs for services to yachting, which recognised their special place among the postwar voyagers. It is worth noting that his books were published by Oxford University Press rather than a specialist yachting publisher, which ensured that his writings reached a wider public than those of most other cruising sailors.

Hiscock's first boat, bought in his twenties, was, he conceded, 'a poor thing, as yachts go' but he did not know that when he bought her for the sum of fifty pounds. She was an eighteen-foot sloop 'too fine forward to balance her very heavy quarters, and to make matters worse her mast was too near the bow', giving her a monstrous amount of weather helm. However, with all her faults, she was the test bed for his sailing life. He named her *Wanderer*, thinking this was an original choice, till a painter he had hired to scribe the name on her transom pointed to a neighbouring motor-boat in bad repair and said 'What, another of 'em?' Hiscock later discovered a dozen *Wanderers* listed in Lloyds Register. Unabashed he stuck with *Wanderer* for this and all his subsequent boats so that the name *Wanderer* is irrevocably associated with Eric Hiscock. He gave her a long bowsprit and turned her into a cutter which solved the steering problem. He rebuilt the interior and transformed her into a proper cruising vessel. Basing himself in the Beaulieu River he ranged in *Wanderer* along the south coast as far as

Cornwall, making many mistakes but generally reaching his goals and laying the foundations of his career as cruising sailor and author.

While mostly solo in his own boat, Hiscock showed a gift for friendship with other sailors, who evidently appreciated his skills and welcomed him as crew. Notable among these was Roger Pinckney, later Commodore of the Royal Cruising Club, in whose Bristol Channel pilot cutter, *Dyarchy*, Hiscock cruised all over northern Europe during the 1930s, as he did later in her successor, also named *Dyarchy*, which Pinckney had built to a Laurent Giles design in 1938. Another regular berth was in *Tern II*, a gaff-rigged yawl formerly owned by Claud Worth, prominent yachtsman of the late Victorian and Edwardian era, which boasted the unusual addition of a square sail. Hiscock's accounts of passages with its skipper Clive Wright are among the liveliest of his pre-war writings, not least his description of the ripping of the mainsail to shreds in a Channel gale, which throws an interesting light on his reply to the Australian journalist many years later, referred to earlier, about whether any such disasters had happened on their circumnavigation. Hiscock's sang-froid came not from having been able to evade difficulties either by luck or design, but from having met such challenges and overcome them.

Meanwhile, by the end of the 1930s Hiscock's own *Wanderer II* already had several substantial cruises under her belt, notably to the Channel Islands and the southwest of Ireland, to be followed by the Scottish cruise already referred to. Hiscock still lived ashore but he was totally committed to the cruising life. His account of these early cruises in *Wandering Under Sail* (1939 and later editions) contains his most sparkling writing and offers a glimpse of the boyish adventurer lurking within the super-competent sailor. On his maiden cruise to the Channel Islands in *Wanderer II* in 1937 he relates that in order to get properly awake after an interrupted night at sea he 'stripped off the layers of clothing which had accumulated during the night and went over the stern to tow along on the end of the mainsheet'.

Never one to take the easy path, Hiscock opted to dispense with an engine, which meant that he was often reliant on a twelve-foot 'sweep' to get him out of trouble. On one occasion on this same cruise he sculled for five hours to reach St Peter Port in Guernsey. Acknowledging that an engine would have made things simpler entering and

leaving ports, he believed that it would have led to the 'ruination of such seamanship as I may have acquired.' 'Besides,' he added, the technique of engineless cruising under sail 'is very different from, and much more interesting' than power-assisted cruising. (Having said that, when it came to building the thirty-foot *Wanderer III* in the early 1950s the Hiscocks chose to install an engine, albeit a 4hp Stuart Turner two-stroke unit with no reverse gear which at best gave 3 knots in flat water. Hiscock could still hardly bring himself to turn his back on the purity of sail).

Then came the war. His progress was curious in two respects: firstly, this apostle of engineless sailing served in the RNVR for two years as an engineer, a job he fell into, he reports, on the strength of once having owned a motor-bike; secondly, after two years' active service he was told after a routine medical examination that his poor eyesight rendered him unfit for service. Hiscock protested to the surgeon-commander that the navy had hitherto acknowledged the need for people with particular skills even if they fell short of perfect physical requirements, that he was currently serving as chief engineer in a submarine chaser, besides which prior to the war he had cruised over 20,000 miles in small vessels, was a competent navigator, knew the coasts on both sides of the Channel intimately, and had written books of sailing directions about them. 'I don't believe a word of it...' said the surgeon, adding that 'I consider you are a danger in the service, and I shall do all I can to have you discharged.' Appeals and protests by Hiscock were in vain. Surgeon-commanders apparently had the last word.

There followed an interlude during which he worked in a pulp-board mill close to the farm where Susan, now his wife, worked. In a short but vivid book about his wartime experiences, *I Left the Navy* (1945), Hiscock recounts his experiences of factory work on the night shift, rebuilding an old cottage in which he and Susan would spend their early married life, then moving on to farm work. During this period he acquired an astonishing range of skills, including plastering, concrete-laying, carpentry, bee-keeping, and operating a combine-harvester and other machines, in addition to growing vegetables and flowers. He showed the same resourcefulness and attention to detail in these land activities as he did in sailing. At the same time he

accepted an offer of the editorship of a yachting magazine, which he did not name but was in fact *The Yachtsman*.

Then at last he was back in naval service. Susan had noticed his restlessness and knew he was pining for the sea. Sensing his mood, she quoted Masfield to him 'A wind's in the heart of me, a fire's in my heels,/ I am tired of brick and stone and rumbling wagon-wheels...' – but ever the practical individual she also pointed to a headline in the *Daily Telegraph*: 'Can you man a boat?' An organization called the Admiralty Ferry Service was looking for personnel to move small craft from port to port around the coast. It was composed mainly of yachtsmen who were considered for one reason or another unfit for service in the regular navy. He applied and was accepted. Hiscock thus found himself in the same job as Humphrey Barton, the redoubtable small boat voyager and surveyor at Laurent Giles, and with whom he was well acquainted. The last chapter of Hiscock's wartime memoir contains a stirring account of a passage from Lowestoft to Plymouth in a ninety-foot MFV in which he was chief engineer, including a vivid description of a spell he took at the wheel as they struggled through mountainous waves in the teeth of a Channel gale. 'This is the life,' he reflected, 'which I have been missing for so long'. He was not the only postwar voyager whose wartime service gave him a depth of maritime experience far beyond that of the average yachtsman.

* * *

In 1950, with several years of cruising in British and French waters behind them, the Hiscocks planned an 'experimental ocean voyage' in *Wanderer II* 'with the idea in our minds that one day we might go voyaging far afield to see something of the world'. They chose the Azores which at 1200 miles WSW of the Lizard would constitute a good test of their abilities and those of their vessel. And so it proved to be. An early gale on the outward passage blowing from the direction of their intended course forced them to divert to the Scilly Isles. After two hundred and six miles sailing since they had left Falmouth they had made good just sixty-two towards their destination. They experienced two further bouts of heavy weather on the voyage out during which they went through all methods of coping: running before the wind under only staysail, running under bare poles, heaving

to, lying to. Just as striking as their management of heavy weather was the challenge posed by absence of wind. At crucial moments they had to resort to the sweep. Just short of La Coruña in northern Spain the wind died and they were forced to scull for a couple of hours. Sheer weariness induced them to anchor outside the harbour but within a short time a sea breeze set, in putting them on a lee shore. They made the harbour under sail but were faced with another hour's sculling in the sheltered waters before they reached an anchorage.

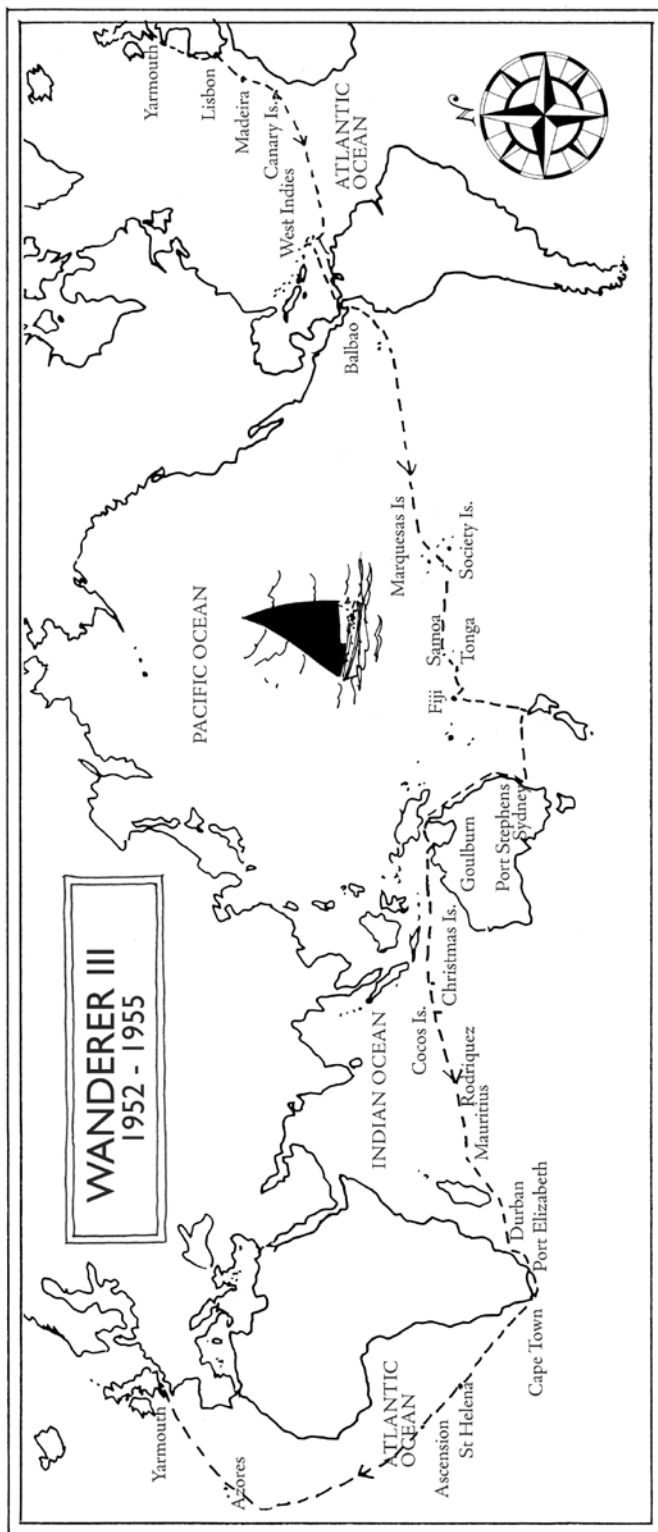
It is a feature of Hiscock's writing about sailing that he moved seamlessly between telling a story and showing how it's done, an approach which he applied as much to dietary and culinary matters as to nautical skills. On the return from the Azores their supply of bananas was ripening so rapidly that 'we had to eat fourteen a day to keep pace with them.' When they ran out of salad dressing 'Susan made some with the olive oil from the tinned sardines, the vinegar from the pickled onions, and sugar, mustard and pepper.' On their first circumnavigation Susan experimented with baking bread, recording an initial disaster in which a sudden gust of wind through the main hatch picked up the bag of flour and deposited it all over the cabin. Nothing daunted, Susan cleaned up and produced a hot, crusty ring loaf. Thereafter on longer passages she baked two or three times a week.

When, in the wake of the Azores voyage in *Wanderer II*, they decided to have a larger boat built and embark on a circumnavigation, they had already developed to a high level the mentality of liveaboards. The thirty-foot *Wanderer III*, another Laurent Giles design, carried, in addition to all the necessities of life, equipment for developing and printing the photographs to illustrate the articles which would pay for the venture. Hiscock was already an accomplished photographer, as is evident from the many journal articles, books, and annuals he had published in the years before setting off in *Wanderer III*. On their second circumnavigation (1959-1962) they added filming to their repertoire with film stock and camera, plus some training, provided by the BBC, who commissioned a visual record of the voyage. The resulting documentary, first broadcast in 1963, offers wonderful footage of their lives at sea and on shore, and brings out even more starkly than the books the distance in accents and attitudes between their time and ours.

The Hiscocks' first circumnavigation, which took place between 1952 and 1955, made their name as bluewater sailors. Hiscock set out their goals with characteristic modesty: 'For a long time Susan and I, who are both well used to the handling of small sailing craft, had wanted to make a long voyage. This was chiefly for the satisfaction of achieving something by our own unaided efforts and by the practice of such skill as we might have acquired; but we also wished to see a little of the world, which we could not afford to do in any other way, and to gather copy and photographs for the books and articles which are our livelihood.'

This voyage, described in *Around the World in Wanderer III* (1956), took them across the Atlantic via the Canary Islands to Barbados, from where they island-hopped through the Windward and Leeward Islands before taking the Panama Canal into the Pacific and on to New Zealand via the Marquesas Islands, Tahiti, Samoa, and Fiji. Restrained in temperament and highly organized as he was, Hiscock's account conveys a vivid sense of freedom and openness to experience both at sea and ashore. In the Caribbean they revelled in a thrash to windward during which 'we drove *Wanderer* as hard as we could and she responded gamely, forcing her way steadily out to windward and never letting the steep seas stop her, but she hammered them hard so that fountains of spray shot out of each side of her rounded buoyant bows every time she smashed into one'. Whenever they were inclined to grumble about the heat or a gale or any other discomfort, they would remind themselves that they were free of the fate of 'thousands of pale-faced office workers who were at that moment fighting to get back to their homes in the suburbs'. On the 4000-mile, forty-day passage across the Pacific from Panama to the Marquesas islands Hiscock celebrated the ocean as 'a vast, colourful desert, something so great and indifferent that our tiny vessel, with straining sails and hissing wake which was obliterated after she had passed, seemed indeed a puny thing, allowed to continue safely on her way on sufferance'.

On the more strictly nautical front, Hiscock offered an unusually clear and detailed description of the process of taking a sun sight with a sextant, while marvelling at the magic of being able to find one's position on the surface of a featureless ocean by taking observation



of distant objects in the universe. Coupled with his account of the routines of the day on passage, their watch system, sail changes, and all the business of keeping the boat moving towards its destination, Hiscock vividly communicates a sense of what life aboard a small vessel is like on a long passage.

Encounters ashore, especially with Americans, produced notes of humour arising from cultural differences which also feature in many other accounts by British voyagers, not least Peter and Anne Pye whom the Hiscocks encountered several times in the Atlantic phase of this voyage. An American official in the Canal zone, taking details of boat and crew, asked Eric his age, to which he replied forty-four. 'And Mrs Hiscock's thirty-nine,' said the official. 'However did you know?' asked Eric. 'Without looking up from his writing the official replied: "no dame is ever more than thirty-nine."' At the other end of the canal they were invited to a 'brawl' at the American Legion Club which turned out to be a fancy dress party. Having no costumes to hand, the Hiscocks made do with draping two tattered blue ensigns round their waists, only to be greeted with stony silence when they entered the room. A 'tough looking customer in ragged shorts' approached them and explained the problem: "'See here you folks. I'd have you know there's a British yacht in port and", pointing to the blue ensign on which we were sitting, "that's no way to treat their flag.'" Explanations were duly forthcoming and they enjoyed the party and got aboard late.

Behind the surface of the Hiscocks' seemingly strait-laced manners lay an openness to experience without which indeed the life they had chosen would have been impossible. Eric showed a particular susceptibility to sensual experience which he was not shy about expressing. In Tahiti he was intrigued by the permissive sexual mores of the Tahitians, who, he said, had not yet been persuaded by missionary teachers that indiscriminate sexual intercourse and bearing children out of wedlock was sinful. He was no less impressed by the freedom with which the Tahitians danced, in contrast to the Europeans who, once they had had plenty to drink, generally looked 'dissipated and ill at ease.' On the Pacific island of Bora Bora the Hiscocks attended a party organized by the crew of a visiting British yacht. Among the party-goers were some islanders who had participated in an inter-is-

land dancing competition. Eric was entranced by the hula dance of a young woman in the moonlight which he described with almost poetic intensity: '...as she performed the swift but graceful movements of the dance in ever-increasing tempo, the firelight shone in rippling waves on her skirt.'

From the Pacific Islands their voyage took them to the North Island of New Zealand, on to Sydney and then north along the length of the eastern coast of Australia, following Cook's log of the same passage made nearly 200 years before. On passage across the Indian Ocean towards the Cape of Good Hope they met with a fifteen-day gale between the Cocos islands and Mauritius, during which their tiny seventy-five square-foot trysail was set the entire time. Off the southern coast of Madagascar they experienced a squall which Eric estimated at eighty knots. He bore away, not attempting to hand the trysail which he knew would be ripped to shreds if allowed to flap. He recalled that 'Wanderer tore through the black night faster than I have ever known before... Dimly I could see the bow-wave rising high each side of her as from a speed-boat.'

The rest of the circumnavigation was completed in seamanlike fashion without great dramas for which, Eric concluded, 'we were grateful to Providence for bringing us safely home'. He considered *Wanderer's* most hazardous journey to have been her subsequent trip through the streets of London on a ten-ton trailer to the second National Boat Show at Olympia where she was to be displayed as an example of British workmanship. This too she survived in good order, leaving many onlookers, Eric believed, judging from the far-away look in their eyes, 'dreaming of wide oceans... and imagining themselves far away in boats of their own'. Meanwhile, the Hiscocks held to Arthur Ransome's injunction to 'grab a chance and you won't be sorry for a might-have-been' – words which were carved in *Wanderer's* companionway. A second circumnavigation was in the offing.

In the interlude between the two circumnavigations Hiscock reflected in the *Yachting World* Annual for 1957 on his ideal boat in the light of their experience in *Wanderer III*. Greater beam to give her increased initial stability and easier motion was high on the list. That would mean higher Thames tonnage and hence greater cost, which was what had dictated the her dimensions. But would greater beam



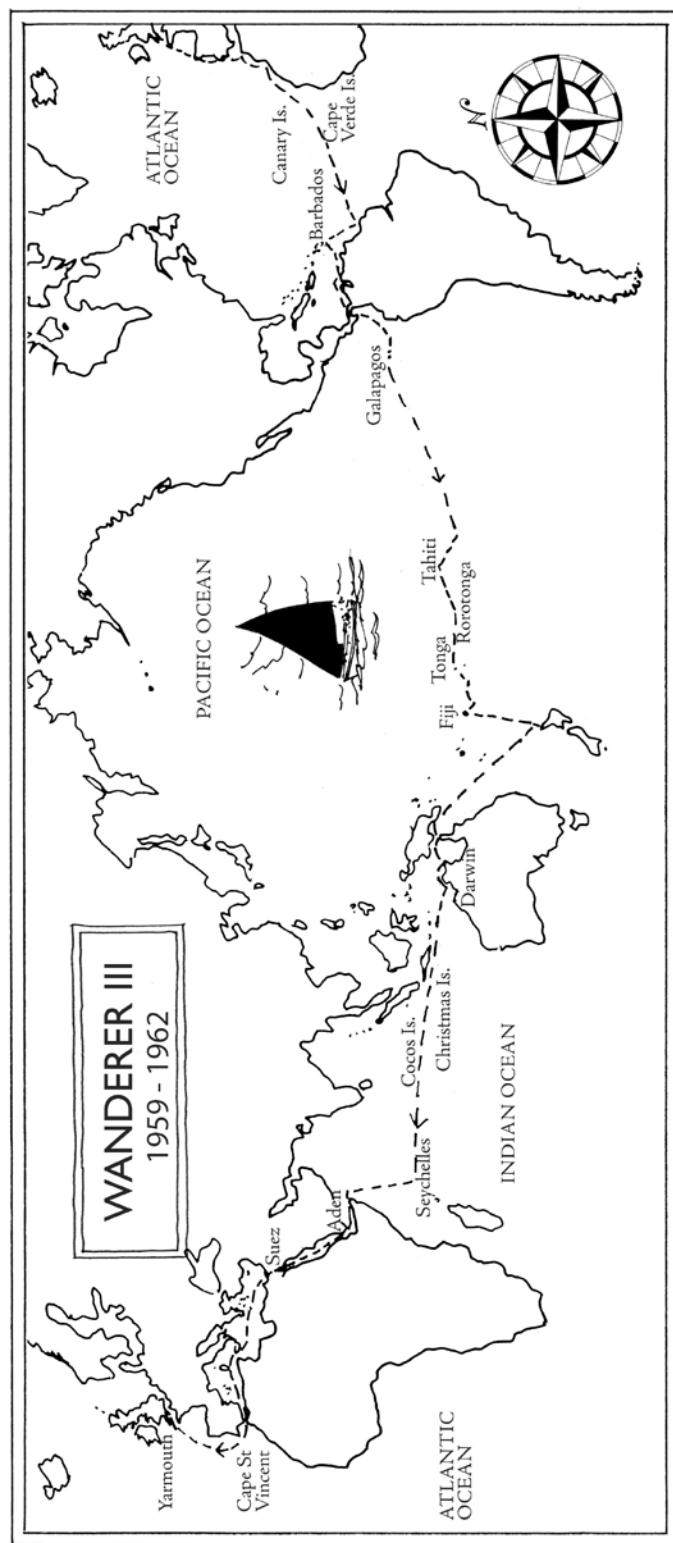
Hiscock celebrated the ocean as 'a vast, colourful desert'.

mean a sacrifice in performance, especially to windward? Hiscock noted that the Pyes' twenty-nine foot *Moonraker* was a foot wider in the beam than *Wanderer* and carried a gaff cutter rig but achieved the same average daily runs as *Wanderer* over long distances. Hiscock therefore opted for the gaff rig for his ideal boat, downwind ability compensating for any limitations to windward. Perhaps most striking was his admission that he had been wrong to choose an engine of a mere four horsepower for *Wanderer III* – it proved useless on the very occasions when it was most needed, such as entering a channel which was too narrow to beat through, or making good distance in anything but a flat calm. His ideal boat would have a diesel engine of generous capacity.

In the event, the Hiscocks stuck with *Wanderer III* for their second circumnavigation largely because they could not afford to commission a new boat. When ten years later the opportunity arose to build new, their choice bore only a distant relation to the ideal boat sketched out in 1957 except that the commitment to a substantial engine remained. Meanwhile he reflected that, given her size, *Wanderer III* satisfied their current needs, besides which 'to us she is a personality and we understand her'.

The second voyage initially took a similar route as the first (to the Pacific via the Panama Canal and to the North Island of New Zealand) and was conducted with the same skill and aplomb. This time, however, after leaving New Zealand they headed for Papua New Guinea and the Torres Strait, with only a brief but, as we shall see, incident-filled stop on the northern tip of Australia. The big difference in the second voyage was the decision to come home via the Suez Canal rather than via the Cape of Good Hope.

Comparison of the written account of the second circumnavigation with the film (both entitled *Beyond the West Horizon*) shows interesting omissions in the latter. The book devotes a whole chapter to the stranding of *Wanderer III* on Coker Island off the coast of northern Australia which almost brought their voyage to an end. After resigning themselves to losing the boat, they made it ashore and encountered a carpenter who mustered a band of locals, including a whole school class of Aborigines and their teachers, who helped the Hiscocks recover their floating home, enabling them to continue the



voyage. It is a dramatic and touching sequence of events, nothing of which appears in their film of the voyage. Also omitted from the film was mention of Eric's broken rib in a severe gale on passage to Fiji and a boil on Susan's hand which went septic and required daily hospital treatment when they eventually reached Fiji. Both Hiscocks were allergic to anything that smacked of sensationalism, with the result that the full story of their achievements rarely reached beyond the yachting world.

* * *

In the late 1960s the Hiscocks commissioned a new yacht, the steel-hulled fifty-foot bermudan ketch *Wanderer IV*. She displaced twenty tons compared to *Wanderer III*'s eight and had a sixty horsepower engine. Except for the commitment to a sizeable engine she bore little relation to the ideal boat Hiscock had sketched out ten years earlier, confirming the experience of many boat owners that 'the ideal boat' is a changeable and elusive concept. Nevertheless, over a period of twelve years the Hiscocks cruised 77,000 miles in her, completing a third circumnavigation in 1976.

With the purchase of *Wanderer IV*, they finally sold their house in Yarmouth, Isle of Wight and opted to base themselves in Whangarei in New Zealand's North Island. Hiscock's accounts of these voyages have many of the same qualities as his earlier ones but the bigger, more sophisticated boat brought with it bigger and more complex problems. In the grumpy first chapter of *Sou'West in Wanderer IV* which describes the building of their new craft, Hiscock recounts a succession of glitches in the electrical systems, problems with the rudder, and many other design problems connected with the accommodation, to say nothing of poor relations with the builder. He even doubted that he had chosen the right rig for the boat. It is a sad falling off from their experience with *Wanderer III*.

Nevertheless, the Hiscocks stuck to their task. They made their peace with the boat's foibles and undertook some of their most adventurous cruises, including a year in California and a circumnavigation of the South Island of New Zealand where they spent several weeks in the remote and demanding waters of Fjordland. Hiscock's susceptibility to attractive young women makes an intriguing re-appearance

here. He describes an encounter on a Pacific Island with an all but naked young woman who climbs aboard their boat in the middle of the night with a flimsy story about escaping from her cruel father. Hiscock eventually drops her ashore but reflects that other options could have been open to him such as offering her clothes and a cup of coffee or a berth for the night or accepting 'her final suggestion'. 'As we neared the shore,' he recalled, 'she leant towards me, smelling nicely of frangipani, and putting a hand on my knee said in best Mae West style: "You come with me?"

Well what would you have done?'

* * *

It is no surprise that with their advancing age, rising demands of maintenance, and persistent problems with the steel hull, the Hiscocks should think about a new boat. They moved on to a wooden 40-foot cutter, constructed of triple-skinned diagonal strips of the tropical hardwood kauri. *Wanderer V* was launched at Whangarei in 1981. Her maiden voyage round the Western Pacific took them once again to Fiji, New Caledonia, Sydney and back to New Zealand. Now in his mid-70s, in the final chapter of what was to be his last book, *Two Yachts, Two Voyages* (1984), Hiscock reflected ruefully on the changed cruising scene, characterised, in his view, by excessive reliance on technology, over-crowded anchorages, and a loss of traditional skills. He tried hard not to come over as mere curmudgeon but there is no disguising his alienation from the world of mass cruising. His is the perhaps predictable lament of one who learned his skills the hard way at a time when deep-water cruising was a minority undertaking. It speaks volumes about the Hiscocks' uncompromising mode of cruising that they never owned a radio transmitter. Independence for the Hiscocks really did mean self-reliance, not some airy idea of freedom from the constraints of the shore.

Eric died in 1986 at Whangarei. Three years later Susan moved back to Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, where she resumed sailing the West Wight Scow class she had learned in some sixty years before. Wanting to attend a meeting of the Royal Cruising Club across the Solent in Beaulieu, she decided to sail over in her Scow *Shrimp*, a solo adventure which perfectly displays the casual offbeat courage of this septu-

agenarian voyager. In a fresh southwesterly breeze she found herself on a dead run off the entrance to the Beaulieu River where she 'gybed and brought the wind on to the beam to tear into the river'. After the meeting she opted not to stay for the evening party so as to ensure a daylight passage back to Yarmouth. Leaving Beaulieu she fetched across the Solent to Gurnard Bay, but with contrary wind and tide she could make no way towards Yarmouth and was forced to anchor and wait for the ebb. She got out her sandwiches and 'watched with some irritation the effortless way a couple of sailboards swooped around, oblivious of the tide'. The sun set at eight and it was fully dark by the time by the time the tide turned in her favour. A bright moon helped illuminate the last few miles to Yarmouth. Rounding the pier, she recalled, 'the harbour's FULL notice was up and I needed an oar to help me through the crowd of yachts'. She finally stepped ashore at midnight. 'It has been a good day,' she observed, 'with the night passage a spicy bonus.'

A few years later, with the help of a legacy from Susan's will, the Yarmouth RNLI station launched a new lifeboat, the *Eric and Susan Hiscock (Wanderer)*. One can be sure that, for all the modesty they characteristically displayed about their achievements, this was a tribute they both would have been glad to accept.