

## ROUNDING CAPE HORN IN A WINDJAMMER

This article was published in National Geographic Magazine, in the February 1931 issue and it describes the voyage of a great sailship from Australia to England by way of Cape Horn.

It has 36 black and white photos which I will scan and add with time (12 done so far). You can already see some of them in the following pages and you can click on them to see a larger view. The text is complete (although I am sure a few errors have crept into the transcription). I am considering adding some footnotes of my own with explanations for those not familiar with nautical terms. I have divided the text into three pages or sections which are best read in order but which can be read independently.

Part 1 is mainly an introduction which gives some background into the situation of sailing cargo ships those days and explains why they had almost disappeared in favor of steam. It mentions several ships, one of which is the Peking which was made famous by Irving Johnson who, in 1929, about the same time of this article, also shipped as a sailor and took some splendid still and movie pictures of a voyage around Cape Horn, from Germany to Chile. The movie footage was made into a documentary narrated by Irving Johnson himself which can now be purchased on video tape from a number of sources, including Mystic Seaport. The ship Peking was made into a floating museum and can now be visited in New York's South Street Seaport Museum.

Part 2 tells us how the author shipped as a sailor with the intention of taking some photos and what life aboard was like. This is, possibly, the most interesting part.

Part 3 relates some very unfortunate accidents that happened on that voyage and illustrates how hard life onboard was for the crew in the age of sail. And this was in 1930; 50 or 100 years earlier life was much, much worse.

The author, Alan Villiers became well known as an author of nautical books and articles. I hope you all enjoy it.

## ROUNDING CAPE HORN IN A WINDJAMMER

By ALAN J. VILLIERS

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THE number of ships that round Cape Horn now is few and becoming steadily fewer. Steamers have no need to go that way. If they are coming from Australia to Europe, Suez and Good Hope are shorter and kinder routes. If they are bound from or to New Zealand, there is Panama. If they are outward or homeward bound in the West Coast trade, Panama Canal, too, is much more convenient, even for the far southern port of Valparaiso. In the unusual event of a steamer passing to the south of the American Continent--say, on passage from Buenos Aires to Talcahuano--nine times out of ten she will use the Magellan passage or, failing that (for visibility is often bad there and currents treacherous), she will pass between Tierra del Fuego and the small island the southern tip of which is the dreaded Horn.

Even sailing ships avoid Cape Horn now, when they can. It is a regular thing for the guano barks, coming up from Guañape, Lobos, and Santa Rosa for Jacksonville, Wilmington, or Falmouth for orders, to pass through the Canal instead of using the old highway to the south

and doubling the Horn. Indeed, in the grain race of 1930 one sailer from Australia, the Swedish four-masted bark C. B. Pedersen, actually made her way into the Atlantic by way of Panama instead of the Horn--an entirely unprecedented experience that would make a thousand old shellbacks turn in their graves.

### NITRATE BARKS STILL ROUND THE HORN

But there still remains a small coterie of wind ships regularly using the Cape Horn road. There are the German nitrate-carriers, the big four-masters of the Hamburg Laeisz Line--*Padua*, *Passat*, *Parma*, *Priwall*, *Pamir*, and *Peking*--all splendid, upstanding, four-masted barks powerful, clean-lined, speedy, and economical. They remain in commission to carry nitrate from German mines in Chile to German factories on the Elbe. They are manned largely by boys who must see service in deep-water, square-rigged ships before their country will allow them to sit for examination as officers. They are well found and make good voyages; some of them are comparatively new ships. Two have been built since the World War; one of them, the *Padua*, as late as 1925. They carry no auxiliary engines of any kind. One of them, the full-rigged ship *Pinnas*, was lost in 1929.

These Germans with the sailers of the Finnish fleet and one or two Swedes, just about comprise the whole of the world's seagoing, square-rigged ships. America still has one or two; but, except for the four-masted *Monongahela*, which I saw in Port Adelaide in January, 1928, when she was discharging a cargo of lumber there and the full-rigged ship *Tusitala*, which is a more or less regular user of the Panama Canal, I don't think any are still in commission.

### THE SAILING SHIP'S LAST HAPPY HUNTING GROUND

The majority of the square-riggers still rounding the Horn are in the grain trade from Australia. This is the last happy hunting ground of the big sailing ship, which has been steadily ousted from every other trade it ever enjoyed, even the carrying of Peruvian guano. When Australian wheat harvests are heavy and steamers are inclined to ask high freights because of the difficulty of getting outward cargoes, the sailer still has a chance of sneaking an odd cargo here and there.

She is prepared to accept a much lower rate of freight than the steamer. She will go to any outlandish port and register no objections to spending six weeks or more over loading. She will discharge her own ballast at her own expense. She does not mind sailing halfway round the world in ballast if only there is the chance of a cargo at the end of it, and she carries her wheat well and delivers it in good condition.

She has the added advantage, some times, of bringing something of a gamble to her charterers. She may load on a falling market and set out with her wheat worth shillings below a payable price. She takes months on her voyage, providing good free warehousing on the way, and sometimes has the luck to arrive in time to take advantage of an upward trend of which there was no sign when she left.

For this reason, shippers still like to take an odd gamble with a sailing ship, particularly in recent seasons, when wheat prices have been so dull that the grower's main hope lies in some unforeseen upward trend when "bottom has been touched."

The Swedish four-masted bark *Beatrice* in 1930 was chartered to bring home wool from

Melbourne to London--a trade which throughout this century had been religiously the exclusive right of the steamer-- simply because she provided long warehousing by the duration of her voyage, and there was a chance that prices would rise while she was on her way.

She was 110 days on the passage, and her charterers had the satisfaction of clearing better prices for the wool they sent in her than they obtained for any they had sent in steamers. The steamers had discharged their wool on a falling market months earlier; the *Beatrice* arrived to find stocks lower and prices slightly higher. As her freight rate was lower than the steamer's, her chartering was profitable to the wool owners.

But against the lower freight rate has to be offset the tendency on the part of underwriters--natural, perhaps--to charge a higher premium for the insurance of sailing ships' cargoes.

### NO CLIPPER-SHIP RACES TO-DAY

Since the World War, a few sailing ships have been able annually to obtain wheat charters from Australia to the English Channel for orders. Since they all leave about the same time, and since their scarcity brings them to the notice of the press of the public, their sailings have come to be known as "races," though they are not really anything of the kind. Some of those ships are in no fit condition to race; some of them never were. They are not proud clipper ships, built to run fleetly before the gale and to carry steerageway through doldrum calms. They are great cargo-carrying steel wagons, wall-sided and heavy lined, with bluff bows and heavy sterns, oversparred and undermanned. They make rare visits to dry docks, since dry-docking costs money and must be a luxury to them. They run upon the borderline, with crews of inexperienced boys; their gear is old; sometimes their plates leak a little, here and there, and they are badly off for sails.

Their masters cannot hold to their sail when strong wind comes, because they know that if they do not shorten down in time, the chances are that they will not be able to shorten down at all. A few lost sails mean a spoilt voyage. Canvas is expensive in these expensive times. The loss of a No. I storm canvas topsail in a big four-masted bark cannot be written off at less than \$1,500. Food is expensive, especially in Australia; port charges send sea captains to an early grave. Wharf laborers are refractory; tugboats grossly overcharge poor sailing ships, which are helpless in their hands. The boy crews, though they may be cheap, are apt to melt away in attractive ports and are difficult to replace. Real sailors are scarce; in any case, they will not go in sailing ships.

### VAGABOND SHIPS OF SAIL

There are still a few ships which are able to give good accounts of themselves, and generally do--the Finnish four-masted bark *Herzogin Cecilie*, which was formerly a Norddeutscher Lloyd training ship; the Swedish four-masted bark *Beatrice*, formerly the Clydesider *Routenburn*; the ex-Englishman *Archibald Russell*, and the old Dundee-built *Lawhill*--but the bulk of the ships progress slowly over great waters and are content if they come to port at all, without racing.

They are more concerned with the safe delivery of their cargoes and the return to their homes of all those who set out to sea in them than with spectacular and thrilling holding on of sail in heavy gales and forcing the ship in short tacks against head winds. They sail

leisurely, and would not run more than nine knots if a gale blew right behind them on a sea of perfect calm, if such a thing were possible. They steer badly and their great back-breaking sails and yards are extremely difficult to handle in anything of a breeze.

They accept their wheat gratefully and are glad of any cargoes. They spend months, and even years, sailing round the seven seas in ballast, hunting for charters they rarely get. If ever they chance upon a charter, they are not fools enough to throw away good money on blown-out sails. Let newspapers rave about the "race" and fools ashore lay bets; they wander placidly and slowly on.

### FINNS AND SWEDES SHARE AUSTRALIA'S GRAIN TRADE

There are, perhaps, about 20 big sailing ships eligible for the grain trade. Thirteen are owned by one man, Capt. Gustaf Erikson, of the sleepy little Ahvenanmaa (Åland) port of Maarianhamina--a strange place to be the last home of the deep-water sailer. Captain Erikson has largely built up his fleet since the World War, and now he owns the four-masted barks *Herzogin Cecilie*, *Archibald Russell*, *Hougomont*, *Pommern*, *Ponape*, *Viking*, *Olivebank*, *Lawhill*, and *Melbourne*; the barks *Killoran*, *Penang*, and *Winterhude*, and the full-rigged ship *Grace Harwar*-- nine four-masted barks, three barks, and a full-rigged ship! Outside of Finland, few people know such a sailing-ship fleet still exists.

It would not exist if it were not for the Australian grain trade. Ninety per cent of the ships chartered are from the Erikson fleet. There are only three others to be considered--the Swedish training barks *C. B. Pedersen* and *Beatrice* and the little Finnish schoolship *Favell*. Denmark had the big five-master *Kobenhavn*, but she is lost; England had (in Canada's name) the four-masted bark *Garthpool*, *Lawhill*'s full sister, but now she is gone, and the race is left to the Finns and the Swedes.

### A REAL RACE FOR ONCE

I sailed in the grain race of 1928 and again in 1929. In 1928 I sailed from the little South Australian port of Port Lincoln on the same day as the Swede *Beatrice*. For once, there was a real race.

The *Beatrice*'s people were sure they would win. We knew they had a chance, but did not think much of it.

We made for the Horn before the great west winds, passing to the far south of Tasmania and New Zealand. We were lucky and rounded the Horn after 33 days, despite the fact that we were 16 days out before clearing Campbell Island, off the south of New Zealand. From there we ran round the Horn in 17 days, which was famous sailing.

### AUTHOR AND COMPANION STAKE THEIR ALL FOR A PICTURE RECORD OF THE SEA

We crossed the Line on the 68th day, having seen nothing of the *Beatrice*. We were off the Azores on the 90th day, and came ramping into Falmouth Bay six days later. Had anything been seen of the *Beatrice*? we demanded of the pilot before the anchor was down, fearful of his answer. "No," he said. We had won!

Poor *Beatrice* did not come in until nearly three weeks later. She had gone the Good Hope way, making across the Indian Ocean in the tail of the southeast trades and round the cape in the Agulhas Current, thinking that she might make a quicker passage that way. But she failed. Really, the chances of a faster passage Good Hope way than the Horn were about even, but luck was on the *Herzogin Cecilie*'s side that voyage and she won. Beatrice was delayed for weeks in light Atlantic trades, where only a few days before we had had strong wind.

I left the *Herzogin Cecilie* and remained in England a while. Then I went back to Australia and, together with a young reporter-photographer friend, conceived the idea of once more rounding the Horn to get a cinema record of it while the chance remained. It was a stirring opportunity which no film-producing corporation seemed inclined to tackle. We kept our ideas to ourselves, thinking that if we sought to interest some great film concern they would be more inclined to charter a ship and send some expert cameramen and a gang of scene-shifters and whatnot out to sea for a week or two, rather than to commission us to go after the real thing in our own way.

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