

But I wondered if ocean voyaging on a small yacht was feasible without good connections and sponsorship and the ensuing demands and expectations? Ex market gardener and not well-connected grocer Alec Rose showed just a year later that it was possible. He completed an around the world voyage that was the antithesis of Chichester's. With no sponsorship and a simple traditional cruising yacht, Rose departed from Southsea on the English south coast and sailed non-stop to Melbourne, Australia, with no fanfare. He completed the circumnavigation in 318 days, showing just what could be done quietly.⁴ I was inspired. Clearly, it could be done without a considerable budget and high-profile sponsors. In fact, it looked preferable not to have sponsors if that could somehow be managed.

More stories about crossing oceans in small boats gripped me. They kept coming up in the newspapers, such as in the late summer of 1966 when John Ridgway and Chay Blyth landed on the west coast of Ireland having rowed across the Atlantic in 92 days, the first time it had been rowed in the 20th century.⁵

By 1968 there seemed to be just one remaining ocean sailing challenge, to sail non-stop around the world singlehanded, via Cape of Good Hope, Cape Leeuwin (Australia) and Cape Horn. It was rumoured that several attempts at this were being organized that summer. The British newspaper The Sunday Times took the initiative of offering a prize to the first to complete it. Suddenly it was a race, and again short-handed ocean sailing filled the newspapers.

With all this distracting me, it's not surprising that school and academic study held little attraction.

But that was all far ahead of me when I was seven, and my parents sent me to King's College Choir School in Cambridge. This private preparatory school for boys was famous for its choir, whose Christmas carol service has come to be broadcast internationally on Christmas Eve.⁶ But even if you listen most carefully to recordings of the choir back in those days, you won't hear my voice. With some of my generation's most outstanding musical talent from all over Britain as my classmates, I quickly perceived myself as having no musical talent whatsoever. I wasn't much better in the classroom with Latin or French, nor out on the playing field where my complete lack of eye and hand coordination saw me having to compete for a place even on the 3rd 11 soccer team. However, there was much less competition in some other areas. In my final year, with a growing sense of independence and adventure, I was awarded a school travel scholarship to cycle and camp around Devon and Cornwall with my great friend of the time Tim Ewer. A challenging and exciting adventure for two 12-year olds.

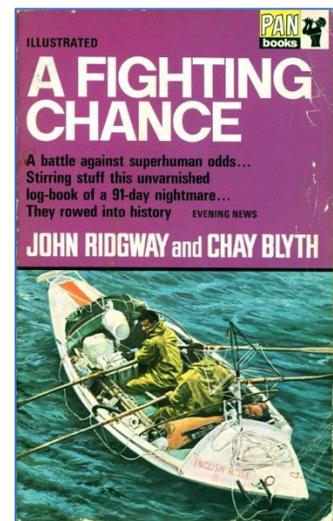


Figure 2 Ridgway & Blyth rowed across the Atlantic in 1966, the first to do so in the 20th century