Readying *The Aegre* for sea, the Caribbean and the Pacific, I was excited, challenged and nervous. Back in Scotland, our seemingly ambitious plan had been to do the Atlantic cruise; Madeira, Barbados, north through the West Indies, then probably back across the Atlantic to England via the Azores, over about twelve months. It was a course travelled by many yachts every year, even back in the early 1970s. We'd equipped the boat for this. The most demanding passage had been from Scotland to Madeira, as expected, but since Madeira, I'd felt we were in a relatively benign environment, meeting some of the same yachts in port along the way. The ports themselves had been highly westernised and seemed relatively safe.

Now we were leaving all that behind us. Across the Caribbean we would be sailing far off the coast of Venezuela and Colombia to Panama. Then after the Panama Canal, we'd be heading out into the Pacific. But where in the Pacific? Aboard an engineless yacht the wind calls the tune, but exiting the Canal we'd find little of it in the Gulf of Panama, a near windless zone for much of the year. However, a few hundred miles to the south blows one of the ocean's great winds, the south-east trade. If we could somehow make our way south to it, we could ride it westward for thousands of miles, near all the way across the Pacific. In the south-east trade, the first land we'd come to would be the remote Marquesas Islands, but they were more than 3,600 miles out from Panama, and I could hardly imagine sailing that far. Nor would there be any possibility of help along the way and little support beyond there until Tahiti, a further 1,000 miles.

Once we departed from the West Indies for Panama, there would be no turning back with the strong tailwinds we expected across the Caribbean and then Eastern Pacific. By going on, we were committing ourselves and *The Aegre* to at least sailing across the Pacific to New Zealand or Australia. It was hard to imagine taking her so far. Were we, the boat and the rig really up to it?