

Foul BOTTOMS

with John Quirk*



The Voyage of the Aegre

Quirky continues with his literary experiences at the Australian Wooden Boat Festival.

So there I was, giving the spiel about how the book *Quirky History* came about at the 'meet the authors' gathering in Hobart when I was approached by Nick Grainger. He said he had a book about to come out, and could I supply a couple of drawings for it? It is about to go to print but they could shuffle a couple of the pages to accommodate drawings of events for which he did not have photographs. Sure, what's the book about?

In the seventies, he and his girlfriend, who he had to marry, (no, not that, will explain later) bought a 21'6" Shetland double-ender. They then sailed to the Pacific where they were rolled, lost just about everything, including their navigation equipment and managed to grope their way to Samoa.

We later met in Geelong when Nick handed over a preliminary copy of the book. This has to be one of the greatest sailing stories I have ever read. Nick met

Julie when they were both very young; she was 15 and they enjoyed adventurous and excruciatingly uncomfortable holidays together.

Nick thought that being trained as an optician was not for him so he tried for a job with Captain John Ridgeway, who had rowed the Atlantic with Chay Blyth. Ridgeway had set up a sort of Outward Bound School for corporados in the wilds of Scotland. He was accepted, and revelled in all that over-exertion in the discomfort of the dreich weather of northern Scotland.

Nick particularly enjoyed the qualities of the local Shetland sailing boat which formed part of the course. This became a full-time job and Julie gave up her university studies to join him. She and Nick were offered accommodation in a tiny primitive hut, but on one condition. Ridgeway was not having his instructors 'living in sin' (this was 50 years ago) so they were married.

Outward bound

Julie was also captivated by the same little boats and mainly from cash gifts as wedding presents, they bought the 21'6" *Aegre*.

They had Tom Edwards of Yell in the Shetlands add a deeply cambered deck and wee two-foot square cockpit and access hatch. Nick packed the ends with polystyrene slabs cut to shape and made his own rigging using cable clamps. Lead ballast was securely fixed in the bilges. All these decisions would later save their lives.

The rig was a gaff sloop with an optional bowsprit to extend the sail plan. They had special heavy-duty flax storm sails made. The flat-headed gaff storm mainsail was almost a rectangle and was rigged upside-down to act as a square sail.

As most of the interior was taken up with buoyancy and stores, there was only room for one bunk, athwartships, just big enough to sleep 'one in comfort or two in ecstasy' as an old girlfriend used to say. (But I never got the chance to find out what she meant.) I doubt they did either because although a self-steering vane was fitted, they seemed to spend most of the voyage watch-on-watch in the tiny cockpit.

The first step was a massive stride to Madeira, which showed up precisely where expected. A brief rest then it was blue water Trade Wind sailing across the Atlantic for which the storm sail / square sail was a perfect rig.

In the West Indies they received further funds from Nick's dad and splurged on an Avon inflatable and in a Panama duty free, a proper watch.