

# GOOD OLD BOAT

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# Trekka Round

## A young man's circumnavigation in a small boat

John Guzzwell built *Trekka*, his 20-foot yawl, from plans by Laurent Giles. Then he sailed single-handed around the world. He was in his early 20s when he began this project and was not yet 30 by the time he completed his circumnavigation. *Trekka Round the World*, his classic tale of this adventure, inspired many of today's sailors. It has been republished by Fine Edge Productions. This wonderful tale by a talented, yet unassuming, young man is quite possibly the best book written about circumnavigating in the 1950s. John has just narrated this tale 50 years later with the assistance of Good Old Boat, making this audiobook a must-have release for all who now follow in his wake and those who dream of doing so.

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In this first segment, John Guzzwell wrote of learning to understand *Trekka's* sailing habits and of their first storm soon after starting the voyage.

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**W**e were now out in the open sea and bouncing along in grand style. The wind was slowly increasing, but *Trekka* was putting the miles away steadily. As if for a final farewell, a big fishboat appeared from the south and headed over toward us. She came close alongside and a voice with a Norwegian accent hailed across the water, "Vere de hell you tink you are going in dat ploody little pisspot?"



I sang out, laughing, "Honolulu!" and the voice roared back, "Vell you're ploody crazee, put goot luck!" I caught a glimpse of her stern as she rolled away and read her home port, Victoria, B.C.

With the wind freshening all the while, I had to roll a reef in the mainsail, but soon there was too much wind for even the reduced sail area and I had to take in what sail was set and wait for the weather to moderate. The sea was starting to build up, and I realized that I was about to have my first gale. The barometer was tumbling down and ragged clouds were driving low across the sky from the southeast. I now had to learn how *Trekka* would lie most comfortably in a gale, so I started to experiment with the sea anchor out over the bow and the little mizzen-sail set. The idea was to make the boat lie head to the seas, but this she would not do. She lay about 75 degrees off the wind and had a most violent motion.

This was obviously not the answer, for *Trekka* was complaining bitterly about this treatment. Finally she decided to do something about it and broke away from the sea anchor. We immediately lay beam-on to the seas and, though it may sound dangerous, she was far more comfortable. I went on deck and lowered the little mizzen-sail, then pulled the anchor warp aboard and saw that the shacklepinned at the end had come unscrewed.

With the helm lashed down to leeward and everything on deck secure, I went below out of the weather. It was not so much the motion as the sounds I noticed below.

The halyards were beating a tattoo against the mast and the wind was accompanied by moaning through the rigging. Somewhere in a locker a can was rolling backward and forward monotonously. I listened to the hiss of a big sea as it approached. There was a bang as it hit the hull and water cascaded over the deck, but *Trekka* was so light and buoyant that it was only the top of the seas that were hitting her. It is when you are riding out your first gale in a boat you have built yourself that you wonder about some of the doubtful workmanship that went into her. I thought about some of the bent nails I had knocked in and remembered one of the splices in the

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In the warm Barbados waters, scraping weeds off *Trekka's* hull was a pleasure.

# the World

by John Guzzwell

rigging that was not as good as it could have been. But even gales end eventually, and a few hours later the wind had veered to the southwest and dropped enough for us to get moving again southward. The gale had done me some good, though. I now had confidence in my boat and a little more in myself, too.

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In this segment, John has joined Miles and Beryl Smeeton on *Tzu Hang* on their memorable passage from New Zealand to Argentina during which their boat was dismantled. This tale is also told in Miles' book, *Once is Enough*.

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I was awakened by Miles tapping on the side of the cockpit, which was the usual way B. called me on watch to take over from her. I was reluctant to leave the warmth of the bunk and wondered if he wanted a hot drink of cocoa or something. I slid the hatch back and saw that it was light outside.

"What do you want, Miles?" I asked rather sleepily, hoping it would be something easy, so that I could go back to sleep again.

"You should see some of these seas now, John. They are really quite impressive and the biggest I have seen so far. How about filming some with your movie camera?"

I thought of getting back into wet oilskins and going out into the cold, and part of me rebelled. "No, man, the sea never comes out and besides the light is not very good," I said hopefully.

But then Miles was looking aft, and he turned to me and said, "Look at this one coming along now. You've never seen a sea like that before. Get the camera; you may never have a chance to get a shot like that again."

When I looked at the scene I saw what he meant. The sea looked different from the weather we'd had the last 50 days. There was a feeling of suppressed power about it, almost as though it were awakening after a long sleep. I saw another sea a quarter of a mile away roll up astern, higher and higher; then *Tzu Hang* began to climb the slope until the crest passed beneath her and she sank into the trough behind. Miles was right: I had never seen the sea look like this before.

"Wait a bit," I said, now more awake, "I'll have to get dressed and see if I can rig the camera up."

A few minutes later with the camera inside a plastic bag to prevent it from getting wet, and only the lens exposed, I got some shots of a worried-looking Miles, steer-



Goodbye to San Francisco.

ing before that dangerous-looking scene. Abreast of us the wind was blowing the crests off the big seas, flinging the spray to leeward.

"I'll shoot more later on, Miles, when B. is on watch; the light will be better then, and I'd like to have some shots of her steering."

The exposed film I put in a plastic bag and, as the tins I had been using were full, I put the bag in Clio's [the Smeeton's daughter] locker. I was pleased later that I had done so.

B. tumbled out of her bunk at seven o'clock and started making breakfast. I ate mine and then went on deck to take the helm while Miles had his breakfast. He was soon back again at the helm and said to me, "Before I called you up to film the sea, two quite large seas broke over the stern and washed me right up to the doghouse. You can see how they burst the canvas dodger."

I thought that he could not have been dead before the sea because during the few minutes I was steering, while Miles had his breakfast, I had been quite impressed at the ease with which the boat steered and rode those enormous seas.

"Goodness, just look at those seas!" exclaimed B. when she came on watch at nine o'clock. "You should be happy now, John, surely. You've been asking for big seas ever since we started, for your film. I hope you're satisfied with these."

“Yes, they ought to look good on the screen, even though the sea always looks flat on film,” I replied. I went below to get the camera and noticed that Miles was in his bunk reading. Pwe was sitting on his chest purring. I went on deck again and shot more film and finished the roll with a scene of B. steering.

“I must just go and put another film in the camera B.,” I said and slid the hatch back to go below.

I got a roll of film out of the locker and went aft to my bunk to load the camera. I sat on the seat by my bunk and opened the camera. The exposed film I laid on the bunk, then I started to thread the new film into the spool.

*Tzu Hang* gave a violent lurch to port, and I put my hand out to grab the fuel tank opposite. I had a sudden feeling that something terrible was happening. Then everything was blackness and solid water hit me. I was conscious of a roaring sound and that we were already very deep.

“She’s been hit by an enormous sea and is full of water. She is already sinking; I must get out.” These were the thoughts that flashed through my mind. I knew I had to go forward, then up out of the doghouse hatch, and I started to fight my way against solid water. Suddenly I was looking at a large blue square. “What on

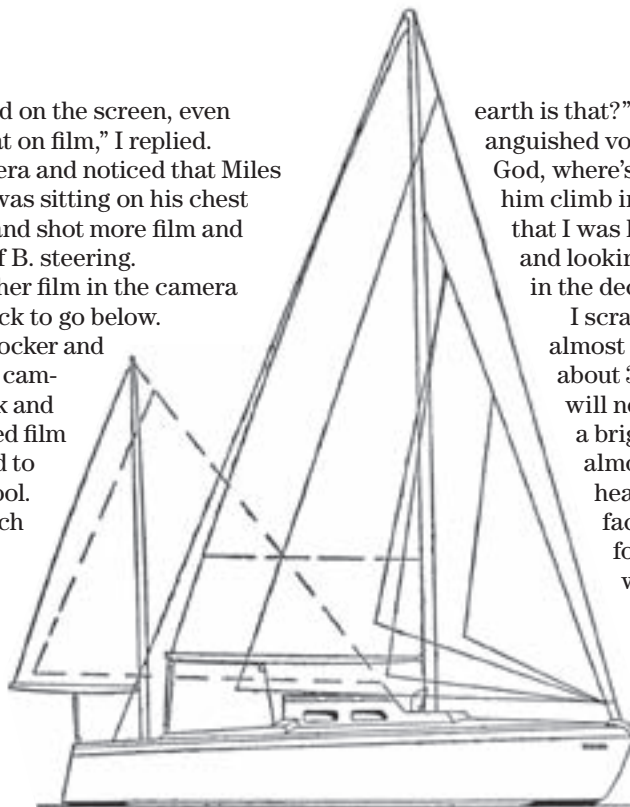


Diagram of *Trekka*.

earth is that?” I wondered. Then I heard Miles’ anguished voice, “Where’s B.? Where’s B.? Oh God, where’s B.?” and still dazed I watched him climb into the blue square. I realized that I was lying on my back in the galley and looking at the sky through the opening in the deck where the doghouse had been.

I scrambled out onto the deck and almost immediately saw B. in the water about 30 yards away. It is a picture I will never forget. She was wearing a bright yellow oilskin, the sea was almost white with spume, and overhead the sky was a hard blue. B’s face was covered with blood and for a crazy moment I thought, “Oh, what a shot for color film!”

B. raised her hand and shouted, “I’m all right, I’m all right.” While she started to swim toward us, I looked about me and saw that both masts were in the water and all smashed into short lengths as though they had exploded apart. The doghouse had been wiped off at deck level and I noticed that both dinghies had gone. The side skylights were both smashed and the lids were gone too. I looked up and saw another monster of a sea approaching and I thought, “What a bloody shame! No one will ever know what happened to us.”



All was not storms for John, *Trekka*, or the Smeeton. In this final excerpted segment John has returned to *Trekka* and is a solo sailor once again. He is amused to present the authorities at the Panama Canal with the smallest “ship” they have yet to see.

**W**ith *Trekka* back in the water, I wanted to get through the canal and back into the Pacific again as soon as possible. I learned that if I could find someone with a launch-operator’s license, I need not take a pilot, but it was necessary to have two other men on board as line handlers for going through the locks.

I had read various accounts of other ocean voyagers who had taken their yachts through

Leaving Cocos for Rodrigues Island, at left. Facing page, next stop Hawaii.

**“But even gales end eventually ... The gale had done me some good, though. I now had confidence in my boat and a little more in myself too.”**



the canal and some of them sounded a little scary to me. The general opinion was that it was best not to transit the locks against the side of the lock walls and many yachts opt for center lockage. To do this, though, you need four good lines, each at least 100 feet long, and a man to handle each line. This was asking a bit much of *Trekka*, so an alternative was to lock through alongside one of the banana boats, motor launches that make frequent use of the canal.

Jim Gloss, a young man whom I met at the yacht club, had a license and he kindly offered to come with me through to Balboa. One of the young men off *Sundowner* also said he'd come. Jim told me that there was a tug locking through the following morning and we could go alongside her.

I went along to the harbormaster and told him that I wanted to go through the following morning, and I was taken upstairs and introduced to a Mr. Peterson as Captain Guzzwell of the *Trekka*. Mr. Peterson was talking to the captain of a freighter, and I heard enough of the conversation to know that the dues for that particular vessel ran into a few thousand dollars. A few moments later I was being taken care of.

“Well, Captain Guzzwell, so you want to make the transit tomorrow, do you? I'm sure that will be all right. Has your vessel been measured?”

“Yes, she was measured when we arrived here but I do not know what the tonnage is,” I replied.

“Oh, if she's been measured I can soon find that out. Will your agents here be paying the dues or will you?” he asked.

“No, I would like to pay myself, now,” I said. “I have no agents here.”

“Very well, just a moment, I'll phone and get the figure of the measured tonnage so that I can work out the dues.”

I watched him pick up the phone and heard the following one-sided conversation.

“Hello? Oh, I've got Captain Guzzwell of the *Trekka* in the office here. The *Trekka* is making the transit of the canal tomorrow and I need the measured tonnage figure so that I can work out the dues ... Yes, *Trekka* ... What's that? ... Three? ... Three what? ... Three thousand or three hundred? ... Just three!” He turned to me with a puzzled

expression on his face and said, “They say three tons ... is that right?”

I nodded, “Yes, that's about right.”


“But three tons at 72 cents a ton ... Why that's only two dollars and 16 cents!” he said unbelievably.

I did not argue about it but paid up quickly. It was good value instead of going round Cape Horn.

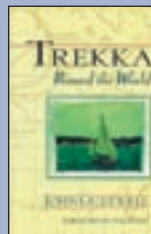
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**In his afterword, written many years later, John summarizes the impact of this adventure and others like it on sailors everywhere.**

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**S**o, beware, dear reader. The sea has an enchantment that may captivate you and make you a bit of a misfit on land. It is perhaps the last place on the planet which remains unspoiled, with its moods and behaviors unchanged since time began. Like the moth to the flame, the sea has an attraction that defies explanation, and those of us who come under its spell are forever changed. 

### For further reading ...



Read *Trekka Round the World*, or let author John Guzzwell read it to you. *Good Old Boat* has produced this book in unabridged audio format. It can be downloaded as an MP3 file or ordered on CD in two formats: MP3 or audio CD. Go to <http://www.goodoldboat.com/audio.html> or call 701-952-9433. The book itself is available from the Good Old Bookshelf <http://www.goodoldboat.com/bookshelf.html> or by calling 701-952-9433.

