YACHTING MATTERS

INCLUDING THE INDUSTRY FILE

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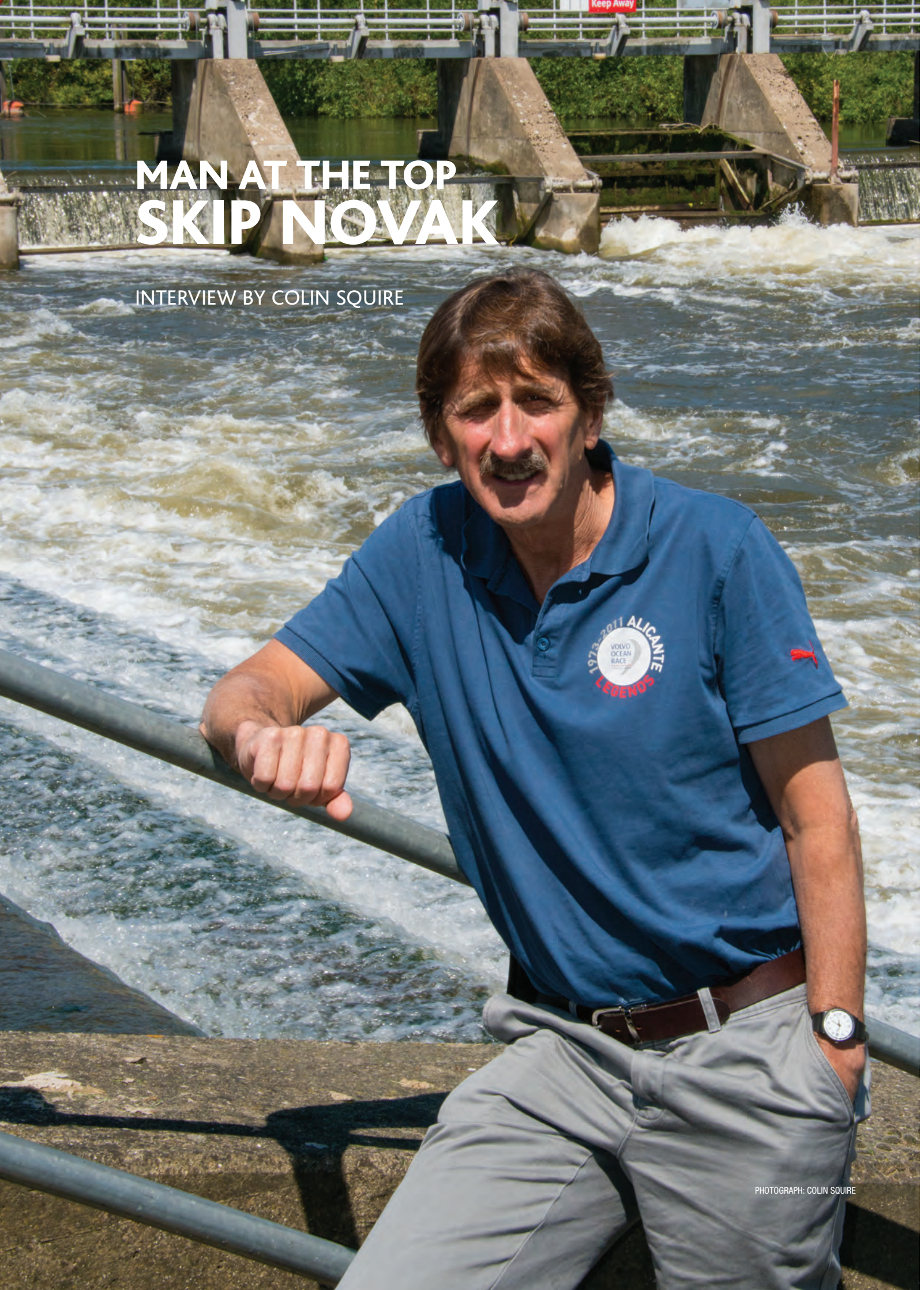
27

A Colin Squire Publication

MAN AT THE TOP
SKIP NOVAK

INTERVIEW BY COLIN SQUIRE



PHOTOGRAPH: COLIN SQUIRE

SKIP AND I MET IN A BEAUTIFUL HOTEL ON THE BANKS of the Thames. A lucky opportunity brought Skip via London as he headed back to Cape Town after an 'International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators' (IAATO) meeting in the USA. Because of Skip's interests and love of Antarctica he has over the years played a key role in the development of tourism in the region and advised on the protection of its fragile environment. We talk about Skip's early life and how he grew up to become a highly competitive sail yacht Captain that enabled him to compete in many of the world's most rigorous around the world races. We also discuss the protocol involved to enable a yacht to visit the Antarctic today and what it was like during his early years of cruising there. Experiencing and coping with the unexpected and succeeding where others would have failed are all a part of Skip's quite amazing life story.

CS: *Skip, where does your family originate from?*

SN: Novak is a classic Czech name, it's like Smith in the UK. My dad was Czech, my mother's side was German. Their parents, my Grandparents, came over from the'old' countries in their teens at around the turn of the last century. I can remember them speaking with broken accents when I was a very young child. My parents were absolutely American, Mid-Western from Chicago. My dad was an architect and my mother was a classic 1950's housewife. She should have gone to university. She was extremely bright but my dad was making good money when they got married and she was relegated to the classic situation of being in charge of the household and of course looking after me.

What about your schooling?

My very early days were spent on the south west side of Chicago in the immediate suburbs where I attended a small Grade School before going onto high school. Then I went down state to the Western Illinois University in the cornfields of middle America. I later wound up in Florida, eventually finishing university at the University of South Florida in Tampa. I was a 'B' student – better than average, but not 'A' grade, I was never top. The only classes I remember getting top marks in were Geometry and Trigonometry. When I got to Calculus I failed miserably, mainly because they never told me what Calculus actually did. I can remember the teacher on the first day droning on about equations, he never explained their use and I was too shy to ask and I eventually failed. That was basically the end of my mathematical career.

How did your sailing career begin?

It was when I was very young, my dad was a member of the Chicago Yacht Club, he had a 22m² Clare Udell designed yacht, unique to Scandinavia and the Great Lakes. They were very narrow day sailing boats with a high aspect mainsail. When I was around nine or 10, in the early 60's, he bought a Bounty 40, it was one of the first production line GRP family cruiser racers. We sailed that as a family up and down Lake Michigan and took part in the Mackinac Race. I enjoyed that for several years until my dad went bankrupt and the boat was re-possessed. I was 14, it was a very dark moment when these two guys in suits arrived at the boat yard and took the boat away. I called home to be told that we had a bit of an issue. It meant humiliation and a personal disaster for me.

After the loss of our boat I started crewing in earnest for other yacht club members. I was also a member of the yacht club junior programme, learning to sail in Lehman 10 dinghies and Blue Jays which were mini Lightnings. These were formative years and I became part of a gang. We called ourselves 'The Harbor Rats'. We all had similar stories, sons of club members, some had boats, some didn't, we were a small group of half a dozen kids aged between 13 and 17. We were quite infamous in Belmont Harbor as we got up to quite a bit of mischief, but we did a lot of good too. There were times when we saved boats that had broken their moorings. We would get paid to do jobs all around the harbour for people, I guess we actually began real work very early in life. We each had a stable of four or five 35 to 45ft boats that we would clean up after a weekend's sailing and before the next weekend we would wash the deck, scrub the topsides and get them ready. In Chicago, before the Clean Air Act, you had grit and

BELOW:
SCHOOLDAYS 1961–62
SKIP, LOWER RIGHT

RIGHT:
SKIP FISHING AT A CANADIAN LAKE IN 1959

BELOW:
BLUEJAY FLEET SAILING SCHOOL IN THE 60S

soot coming from the factories that would waft over the lake front which was obviously good for our business!

We were very entrepreneurial at a very early age and the amazing thing is, you couldn't envisage allowing your own kids to do this now. At the beginning of the summer we would establish ourselves at the yacht Club, living on boats, and we would not leave until September when school started. We would stay there for three months and be totally left to our own devices by our parents and it is still not clear to me now what they were thinking. We would see them occasionally if they came sailing on weekends. We were just having one hell of a time. We would often be out all night just riding our bikes up and down the lake front and getting up to all sorts of shenanigans. We all had dinghies with outboards, we would race around out on the lake in the middle of the night and in the later stages we would actually take our parent's sail boats out as well, unknown to them. We would pick up girls and take them out for parties which included a fair bit of boozing. It was one hell of an adventure. Nothing ever happened to us, nobody ever had an accident, nobody drowned, we never wore life jackets, safety never came into it. We all had an amazing sense of self confidence from a very early age, a confidence that would stand us in good stead later in life.

One of the worst things we did at the Club one night was to have a fire extinguisher fight. We ended up letting all the extinguishers off and of course we realised that it was a pretty stupid thing to have done the next day when we got into trouble with Frank. Frank had become like a mentor to us, he was ex Navy and had a son Johnny who was one of the Harbor Rats. Frank was hired as the Marine Manager of the club and was an ex Pearl Harbour veteran when a Chief Petty Officer in the American Navy. He taught us how to splice rope, fix outboards and repair all kinds of stuff. We were his unpaid helpers and when he had to go

RIGHT:
1972 CLEARWATER FLORIDA – SKIP WORKING AS A RIGGER AT ROSS YACHT SERVICES

out in one of the crash boats from the club we would go with him. We would always be leaping from the dock and on board of something that floated to help Frank with whatever. When we pulled the fire extinguisher stunt it was a dark moment – Frank was really angry and disappointed in us. We felt pretty bad about it and had to redouble our efforts to regain his confidence. Art Gates was another mentor – he was actually the dad of Harbor Rat Chuck, and he was sort of as crazy as we were, in an adult way. Looking back he was in the background watching over us all.

That routine went on throughout my early teens and when you are 16 in America you are allowed to drive a car. We were still living at the Club but now had a few cars between us that added a whole new dimension to our lives. We would go downtown in the middle of the night and roam around. It was a pretty loose arrangement.

When I was 18 I went to University in down state Illinois which was also the first year I tasted salt water. I was invited along by one of the club members who had a 40 footer on the Lake. He took his boat down to Florida for the winter and we did the Miami to Montego Bay Race which was a classic ocean race that ran every three years. It was my first experience truly offshore. In my second year at University I took the winter term off from mid December to Easter to go sailing in the SORC – The Southern Ocean Racing Conference. SORC was a collection of races that took place around the west and east coasts of south Florida and then over to the Bahamas, they still exist but in a much less elaborate form. The professional crews were mainly migrant Aussies, Kiwis, Jarpes (South Africans) and Brits who would gather in St Petersburg in January to prepare the boats before the first event. The fleet was comprised of Corinthian sailed yachts and private owners with amateur crews, but usually with one or two professionals onboard – a boat 'captain,' and maybe a nipper, to make it all happen. For an American from the Midwest they were a colourful bunch of exotic characters who were extremely capable and raconteurs and jesters to boot. They sang and told elaborate jokes. They didn't have names like John, Colin or James – but rather we had The Fat Rabbit, The Wharf Rat, The Abbo, The Canadian Whale, The Flying Nun, Jocko, Blue, Nut, Empty Head – many of whom wound up with the owners daughter and in some spectacular cases the owners wife! I was enamored with the genre.

The next year I decided to take the Winter and Spring terms off. I did the SORC again and more racing in the Caribbean and along the East Coast. I spent the whole of the summer on the East Coast doing classics like the Annapolis to Newport, the Halifax Race and minor events on Long Island Sound. I finally realised that if I was ever going to finish university I would have to move to Florida. I simply didn't want to be in the middle of Illinois looking over a sea of corn any longer. I was still well connected to the Great Lakes though and wound up sailing there on a boat called Bay Bea owned by Pat Haggerty, who was the President of Texas Instruments in the late sixties and seventies. We did the SORC on Bay Bea followed by the Mackinac and Trans Superior Race that summer. There was a South African boat captain on board called Craig Middleton and I was the nipper. I would go up to the top of the mast and sort that problem out, or jump over the side and put the rubber band on the folding propeller at the ten minute gun before the start; I was the bowman; I was the gymnast on board and I loved that.

The boats in those days raced in the IOR (International Offshore Rule) which was a complex handicapping system. Pat Haggerty was a very technical owner and the boat was designed in large part with his input. It was a Sparkman & Stephens–German Frers collaboration, and Haggerty was continually changing the boat to optimize the rating. He would put a new stern on, put tumblehome in the boat along with ping pong balls and micro balloon to make the boat wider with maximum beam at, and above, the water line; things that nobody had done, continually tweaking things to play the rating game. He also owned the Palmer Johnson shipyard which helped.

It was really exciting being on that project and eventually when he did sell the boat after a three year campaign he asked me to deliver it from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico via the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, an incredibly exciting trip. I was

21 at the time and had been given this major task of getting a boat down through the canals and river boat systems, including the south branch of the Chicago River – a sewage canal that linked to the Illinois River. We put the mast, which was on horses, through a barge window on day two and left before we were found out. There followed 35 locks down the Illinois to the Mississippi just north of St Louis where we were flushed out into 'Mark Twain' country – going down the Mississippi and stopping at little towns on the way. After a few nights grounded on sand bars, and many nights 'in bars' we eventually made it to New Orleans, moored in Lake Pontchartrain and there followed a few boozy nights in strip joints. Finally we motored out through the delta and sailed across the Gulf of Mexico to Clearwater and booked into the yacht yard. There I refitted the boat, painted the decks with new non skid and then re-rigged the whole shabang for the new owner who was a friend of Pat Haggerty. It had been a big responsibility at an early age – I was in charge of everything. I did eventually finish University in Florida, in large part thanks to Courtney Ross of Ross Yacht Service in Clearwater. Another mentor, he gave me a flexible job as a rigger and fitter that allowed me to stay in school over a three year period. One of my jobs was to sea trial and deliver yachts to owners. I had the pleasure, or pain, of delivering the 6th Out Island 41 to the Moorings in Tortola, circa early 70s – there was not much left of the boat, which was a floating trailer really, after thrashing our way against the trades to the Virgin Islands.

My swan song of sailing in the States was the last year when I crewed for Wally Stenhouse on Aura, another S&S 49 footer from Chicago and on Bay Bea one of the first stripped out racers with very little interior. We finished her multi year worldwide campaign by winning the World Ocean Racing Championship in 1975.

What did you study at University?

Geography, I got a Bachelor of Arts. The degree included courses in geology, weather, hydrology; all the things I was interested in. I did not finish university until, I guess, I was 24, it was all that sailing and bumming around that delayed me. I didn't know what I was going to do with my BA. I went travelling for the next 35 years so I guess it was a fine choice.

BELOW: 1977 CREW OF KINGS LEGEND IN PORTSMOUTH BEFORE THE START OF THE WHITBREAD RACE

After I finished I spent a year in the States sailing the east coast. I eventually did the Onion Patch Series in America, which is similar to the Admirals Cup with the same type of IOR boats. It consisted of teams of three boats. I was sailing for the German team on Pinta as boat captain. We did the Newport to Bermuda race within that series and then the owner asked me to take the boat to Europe. It was 1976. I put an ad hoc team of young people together and did my first transatlantic delivery as a Skipper. Earlier, during 1972 I had made my first transatlantic race on a fine S&S sloop called Dora IV from Chicago. We raced from Bermuda to Bayona Spain, enough time offshore to learn to navigate with a sextant, more or less. That was my first big transatlantic race. Getting back to 1976, I delivered the boat to France and the German owner turned up and when I handed the boat over to him he asked me what I would be doing during the winter. I had nothing planned and he then invited me to stay in his ski house in Austria with the promise of a job in the local ski village which I thought was a great idea. Again, a bit of a wandering lost soul.

Meanwhile, that summer I went to Cowes. It was the summer of the big drought. I was invited to sail during Cowes Week on Bumble Bee 3, a Frers 53 from Australia which was a well known boat on the international circuit. The crew consisted of well known Aussie yachties of the day: Frizzle, Muno, Gardo, Beanhead, Have a Chat and The Boy. We did Cowes week and then took the boat over to Sweden to do the Skagerrak Race and Marstrand Week which was great fun. My mate Lennie Burke (Have a Chat) acquired shipmate Roger Nilson's keys to his apartment in Stockholm. Along with his 'little black book' we had an interesting Swedish mid summer holiday!

My initiation to the UK began in that Summer of 76 and I fell in love with it. I loved the Dickensian feel of Cowes at that time. This was the 70s and Britain was in a terrible state of decay, pre-Thatcher. Everything was a bit ropey and run down, but I felt quite comfortable coming from Florida which suffered from an over-kill of commercialism. I was never that content in places like Miami and Fort Lauderdale – it just wasn't me – too much concrete, too many restaurants, too many gas stations. I was absolutely charmed by old England, I felt completely at ease, warm beer, Marmite on toast and lousy shower arrangements not withstanding.

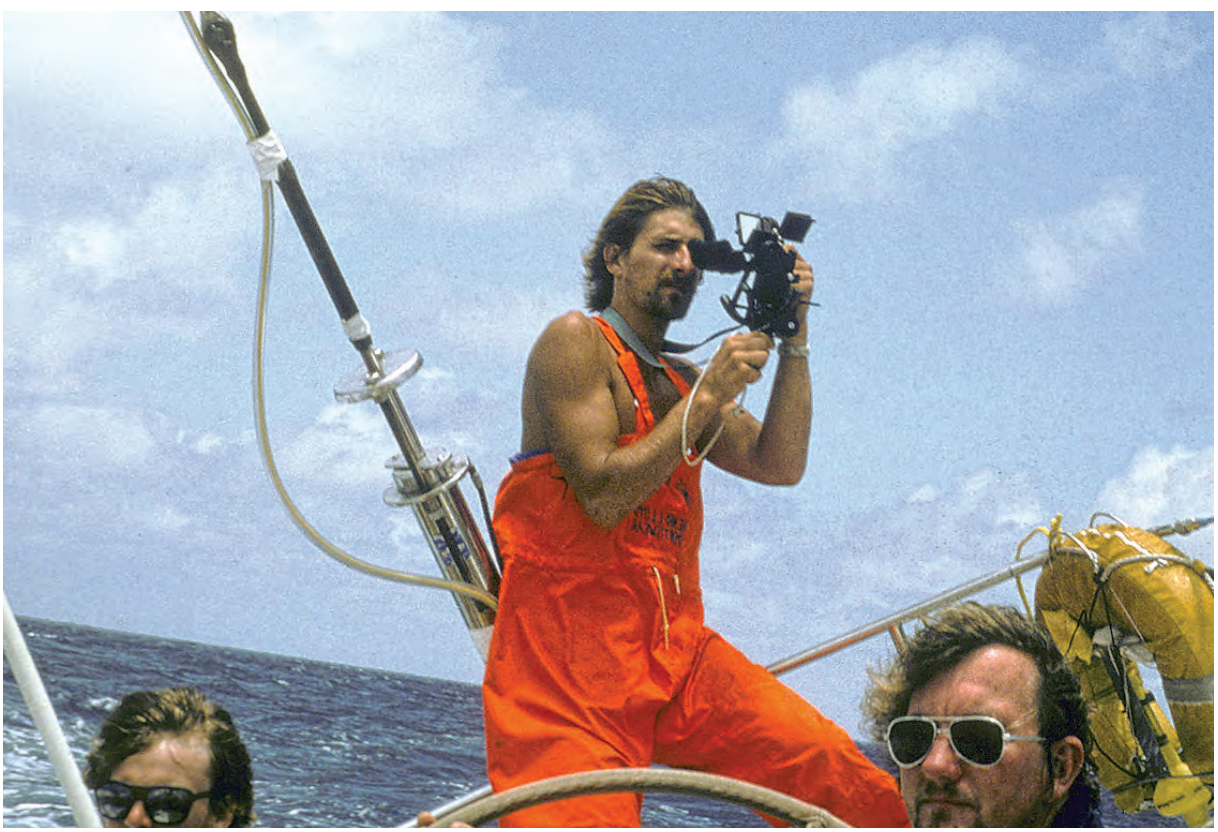
During that summer just before I went skiing, I met Hans Savimaki in the bar of the Fountain Hotel in Cowes. An Aussie of Finnish decent with the gift of the gab, I christened him 'Blowy'

BELOW:
1978 – SKIP THE NAVIGATOR ON KINGS LEGEND

for short. His proper nom de guerre is left to your imagination. He was the Captain of a Swan 65 sloop called Kings Legend and they were entered in the 1977 Whitbread Around The World Race. I had a few pints of ale with Hans. He asked me if I could navigate and then arranged for me to have a chat with the boat's owner Nick Ratcliffe the following weekend. That was how it was done in those days, nothing like the Volvo Race of today, no psychological vetting, no physical tests or medical examinations – it was all done in a bar over a pint. I had landed an incredible job as the navigator onboard Kings Legend. I then managed to bring in my American friends to the team, a few Brits and a young French guy, an international team good enough to race Kings Legend around the world.

I did the ski season in Austria at Lech with my German boat owner friend Willi Illbruck who was a significant supporter of German yacht racing in those days having campaigned his Pinta's in several Admirals Cups. I had a great time at the ski station, but eventually ran out of cash and defaulted back to Cowes at the end of February. I moved straight onto Kings Legend with Blowy in the Groves and Guttridge Marina, now called The Yacht Haven. The crew started to arrive throughout the Summer as we prepared the boat and then in September 1977 we started the second Whitbread Around the World Race which was my first really big sailing adventure on a truly a global scale. We finished a good second and had the potential to win it, coming very close to beating Conny van Rietschoten on Flyer.

Conny upped the game for global ocean racing. He was Dutch, wealthy, extremely well-organised and brought together a great crew. We sailed with him practically head to head all the way on the first leg and eventually crossed tacks with him just 400 miles out of Cape Town. It was incredible, there had never been anything so close in offshore fleet racing over that distance, and we were rated exactly the same, it was a boat for boat race. He beat us into Cape Town by around an hour and a half and then we beat him into New Zealand by an hour or so, we were literally tied half way around the world. At the same time though, we were running out of money and fast. The owner hadn't come with us on the second leg as he had to go back to the UK to find more cash to keep us going. We were living on board, we didn't have hotels like they do today (or like Flyer had at the time); we had to do all the work ourselves, there were no shore teams, you had to repair the sails, fix this, fix that, make new running rigging; most things like rigging, blocks, and even booms and spinnaker poles used to routinely fail. It was a lot of work, five weeks in Cape Town preparing and then five weeks in New Zealand getting ready again. We had no bucks and we became slightly demoralised. During the third leg I made a fundamental error by being 60 miles south of where they went, although in those days you didn't really know where anyone was. A low came through and we ended up with 48 hours of head winds while Flyer was running around the Horn up to Rio. We got into Rio two days after him – the only consolation was that the Samba school was in full swing before



the Carnival. In the last leg we beat him in as well. In cumulative time he beat us by days, but in the system they use now, which is points weighted to distance, we might have won or at least drawn that race.

Did you have any close shaves on the boat?

On the second leg we had a leak on the rudderpost, we were taking on water, you could see the whole skeg was panting and it was coming in through the laminate, we were concerned as we were in the middle of the Southern Ocean and the radio had gone down. It had been flooded when the toilet had overflowed and soaked the SSB, we had no communication, but we were not that worried about it, we were watching the rudder though. It was all part of the great adventure, being in the middle of nowhere. I remember I finished that first around the world race with just £200 to my name, it was a very Conradian experience, sailing up the Western approaches with our boat ahead of Flyer, roaring up through the Solent, down-wind with a poled out yankee, all the crew in beat up old foul weather gear. We arrived back at the dock in Portsmouth and it was just like the old sailing days, everybody signed off and then exploded. Nobody was talking to the owner at that point as we felt he had screwed us a bit by not supporting us financially, whether he had the money or not, the whole thing went slightly sour. We then had to leave immediately due to a tax problem with the boat which we took to Belgium just to get it out of the UK. Within two days the boat had left Portsmouth, we weren't even allowed to enjoy the aftermath of the race, all the other boats were still finishing and there were many parties that we missed.

How long was the race?

About nine months, we all went our separate ways after that and I immediately got sucked in with Swan and I was asked to go to Finland to deliver a Swan 65 to the Med for a German Owner. I did a whole bunch of those deliveries over the next year or two. I became very close to Nautor in those days. Delivering boats in the Spring to the UK and the Mediterranean, sometimes sailing with the owners extensively showing them how to handle the vessel. Always freelance, I was definitely afraid of having a permanent Captain's job. This was significant, I was absolutely terrified of getting pinned down on a boat and sitting in the Med doing charter or something like that. I was enthusiastic and obviously capable; I was always running around fixing things, organizing, making lists, so owners would say 'I think you should come to work at my company'. For a lot of people this would have been the gift of a lifetime. It was an opportunity because they liked you and I would say, 'thank you but no thank you'. Offended (these people are not used to refusals) they would go off you a bit because you turned down what they believed was an amazing opportunity.

I was very secure knowing that I wanted to stay completely freelance, but insecure in that I did not know what I wanted to do in life. I had done one around the world race and thought this is what I liked doing – ocean global sailing. This was me. For cash I kept doing deliveries and then in late '78 I received a message that there was this guy from Australia, Peter Wright, wanting me to go to the UK to skipper another Swan. I was stuck on a boat in Manila at the time, it was hot and sweaty between the monsoons with far too many mosquitoes, we were living onboard and suffering as the boat couldn't be moved for legal reasons. The rain flushed out the city sewers into the harbour and the Yacht Club was in front of the sewer outlets. There were dead animals, rubbish and excrement, and probably bodies as well, it was like a living hell – I never really liked hot weather very much and this place was dreadful. It is one thing being in the tropics where you can jump over the side into clear water to cool down, another is being in a dirty port. I will never forget the feeling at Heathrow when the door of the plane opened and cool fresh air of a UK spring blew in, I felt like I had come back to life. It was 1978 and I was heading for another job, the Parmelia Race, it was a one off race down to Western Australia – one stop, Plymouth UK to Cape Town, Cape Town to Freemantle and it was to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Swan River Colony.

Who was Peter Wright?

He was a miner, of a certain type. He had prospected the Pilbara iron ore fields in North Western Australia with his partner Lang Hancock. They found the deposits by flying around in their own planes and landing in the middle of the bush. They managed to finance the extraction, first by attempting to do it with Australian government federal money. The Feds wouldn't play ball and so he went to Japan, managed to get capital and eventually developed the port and all else dedicated to the Iron Ore industry in the Pilbara fields. They made fortunes of course. Wright was particularly upset that the Government had not given him help and he started promoting the idea of Western Australia succeeding from the Federal Government. In the middle of all this politicking he bought a Swan 65 named Independent Endeavour, for this event. I was put in charge as the skipper and had to find the crew. It was a young mob. I was 26, one guy was two years older than me but the rest were kids. We managed to win the race against the local favourite, Rolly Tasker on his maxi Siska. It was a huge defeat for the home favourites but a huge victory for Peter Wright and it culminated in his arch enemy the Australian Premier having to personally award Peter, as the Owner of the boat, first prize at the awards ceremony... it was great. Everyone was lampooned in the press, on both sides.

After this I went mountaineering in the Southern Alps of New Zealand for the entire summer season. I then came back to

RIGHT:
2010 – SKIP TAKES A BREAK DURING A CLIMB IN ANTARCTICA

Perth to rejoin Independent Endeavour. Peter needed to get the boat out of Oz for tax reasons and asked me if I had any ideas. I suggested taking her to the Mediterranean to do a charter season. He agreed and left me to organise it. I got in touch with Nautor and we managed to get some charters booked up and we then sailed the boat from Freemantle, via the Seychelles, and Peter, now 73 years old, came with us and I taught him celestial on the way. He was a fascinating man, incredibly wealthy but extremely frugal. It was revealed to me one dark and starry night in the Indian Ocean that another reason he had the boat was that it gave an escape mechanism for his extended family and himself in case the Chinese invaded Australia. In those days there was a perceived 'threat' from the North, there was a feeling amongst many Australians that an Asian juggernaut would come down and overrun the country like locusts. Crazy then in 1979, maybe not so now.

He sailed with us to the Seychelles, then he flew back and we spent two weeks there. There wasn't a marina In Mahe, the port was only a little harbour with a slip way with an old wooden ship on it being refited by a sunbaked crew of chancers. It is a privilege to be able to remember the Seychelles as they were in those days, pre Eden Island. We continued on up the Red Sea into the Med and I based myself in Port De Fontvielle, next to Monaco. Fontvielle was just being developed then, there was not much to it. We did our charter season which included the Sardinia Cup and general cruising around the western Med.

Talking of the Sardinia Cup, in 1976 I sailed on a Swan 48 called Princess Shareen, it was owned by an Iranian and flew an Iranian flag. This was not long before the revolution in Iran in 1978. The owner was an interesting chap called Pascal Mavi. He was American educated and his sister was the Princess and they came from an aristocratic Iranian Persian family. His father was the Shah's right hand man and I found out later that he was instrumental in developing Iran's fledgling nuclear power industry, dealing with the Americans at the time. I met the father and French mother, who were seperated but both living near Monaco, and became a friend of the family. I am still in touch with Pascal, who went on to own several superyachts.

Fast forward to 1980. Then another bazaar thing happened, I was contacted by an Austrian gentleman called Urwin Tautner, I guess because I now had a Whitbread under my belt and had won the Parmelia Race. He was looking for a skipper because he wanted his boat, already under contstruction at Palmer Johnson, to do the next Whitbread. It was like a dream, being given a state of the art maxi boat, a 78 footer, and being told Carte Blanche to sort it out and get the crew together. I went out to Vienna to meet Mr. Tautner. Subsequently I had two or three meetings with him, always in Vienna but he never came to the shipyard. He had a son that he wanted to become involved in the race, but we had no contact. I spent most of my time at Palmer Johnson back in the Great Lakes managing the preparation of the campaign for the 81/82 race. We were at the stage of bolting on winches, ordering sails, getting all the guys together ready for launch in the Spring and to start the race in September 1981. Then suddenly, and out of the blue, one stage payment didn't come in and alarm

BELOW: FAMOUS CREW MEMBER – SIMON LE BON

bells started to ring in the yard. A couple of weeks went by, they couldn't contact anyone in Austria and they had to stop construction. This guy had literally disappeared off of the face of the earth. It turns out that he was an embezzler and had absconded with capital from the Austrian Government, the Swiss Government and his own manufacturing company to the tune of millions of Deutsche Marks. He just went AWOL and Interpol was searching for him. In the meantime I was left holding the bag. I had to cancel the sail order, cancel the crew. Eventually some character turned up from Austria claiming ownership and wanting to finish the boat and sell it. It was too late to do the race now and he paid me off. That is the boat that became World Navigator skippered by Phil Wade. I actually gave the boat the name World Navigator as I figured that would have been a good name for a Whitbread Race entry– remember these were the days before real sponsorship. Phil ran it for about a year and half and that is how he made his connection to Palmer Johnson, which then of course led to his Timoneer career. Nine months later Mr.Tautner would eventually be arrested in Spain.

That left my Whitbread hopes in tatters. The next race was coming up and I had no boat. About the same time a Californian based project had bought the Flyer, which had won the race in 77/78, and brought it back to Walter Huismans yard in Holland. They put a new stern and keel on, changed it from a Ketch to a Sloop and basically tried to optimise it within the IOR rule, re-christening her the Alaska Eagle. Because I was one of the few Americans who had done the race, I was invited to sail on the boat as watch Captain. It was owned by a guy called Neil Bergt who owned Alaskan Airways, and he was going to skipper the boat. He wasn't very experienced but that was his plan. We got the boat ready, we did the final preparation in Lymington and started the race from Gosport. After about a week we realised the boat was a complete dog, with all the modifications something had gone horribly wrong and the boat, for its rating, was slower than it was as a ketch originally. It was a complete disaster. I think we were about 10th around world at the end of the day. The owner walked off the boat in Cape Town after realising the mess up, not wanting to be associated with it and asked me to Skipper her, I guess because I was the most capable or ambitious. He left me in a most ridiculous situation with his project manager, where we just locked horns and disagreed on almost everything. We struggled around the world, it was not a pleasant experience for me, it was the least satisfying race out of the four I did.

During the early 80's on the shoulders of that Whitbread I did more racing in Europe and the Mediterranean, mainly on Jim Kilroys Maxi yachts, Kialoa III and Kialoa IV with superb crews and meticulously well prepared campaigns. I also bought my house in the UK in 1982 in the Hamble, sort of on the proceeds of Alaska Eagle.

1983 was significant. I signed with War Baby, quite a famous race boat in her days, which in fact had been the original Dora IV that I had sailed on in that 1972 Transatlantic. It had sold

to Ted Turner and became Tenacious; he owned it for about five years and raced it very successfully and then Warren Brown from Bermuda bought it and named her War Baby. Warren invited me to be the skipper to prepare it for an Arctic summer cruise, which really became a logical focus. I had read all of Bill Tillman's books about his sailing adventures in the far south and Arctic, it was an amazing opportunity to actually sail in his wake, more or less. The plan was to visit the Scillies, west coast of Scotland including the Outer Hebrides, the coast of Norway, Bear Island and finally Spitsbergen, then returning via the Faroes and the east coast of Ireland. We did all of that whirlwind tour in the Summer of 83 during a 2½ month cruise, with his friends and family joining us at various stages. It was a great trip, which opened my eyes to a different type of sailing, it was a bit unsatisfying though as we never spent more than a day or two in any one place. Warren was the type of guy that would pull into a place and suddenly say 'we are leaving now!' My interest was the land, but I was allowed only one nights camping in Spitsbergen with a rushed ascent of a peak Tilman had climbed. It was a great eye opener, but frustrating because of the rushed schedule. I had to find a way to go back.

Then the Drum Project started, with Nautor once again being the link. Their Hamble based agent John Irving was contacted out of the blue by the managers of the rock group Duran Duran, Mike and Paul Berrow, who announced that Simon Le Bon wanted to race around the world on a Swan. We flew over to Paris to meet Simon, Mike and Paul and had this amazing evening of hysterical rock star behaviour as the whole group were in Paris at the time. We spent the night having a dinner and at the end of the dinner we had managed to convince Simon to do the race, but not on a Swan, much to John Irving's initial unease. With Simon's profile, we had to have a Maxi, Class B was unacceptable.

Looking back I think Simon needed a break from the rock scene. He had chartered boats before but he wasn't a racer, he just thought it would be a cool thing to do. I was designated as the Skipper, we then had to find a Maxi boat, and it was now the middle of January. We eventually decided on a Ron Holland hull

BELOW:
DRUM FROM MASTHEAD

that had been commissioned for Rob James – the famous around the world sailor who tragically drowned in a trimaran accident. The construction had stopped as a mere shell of carbon and Kevlar in a shed in Devon. The hull was trucked down to Moody's yard on the Hamble River, launched and then towed to Cowes to finish the hull and composite structure at Vision Yachts.

Rick Tomlinson was working for Vision at the time as a boat builder. He also had a camera. I signed him on as crew and the rest is history! Over a period of two months Vision finished the structure, then the boat was towed back to Moodys for the fit out which took us into the summer racing season on the Solent. The

RIGHT:
THE RESCUE FROM A STRICKEN DRUM

BELOW:
REPAIRS ARE UNDERWAY

crew I assembled were top notch yachtsmen of the day. Phil Wade was first mate, the celebrated Magnus Olson joined us along with Roger Nilson who had been with me on Alaska Eagle as navigator. We did the Fastnet Race in 1985 as a serious warm-up and that is when the keel came off, which is told in my book, 'One Watch At a Time'.

Tell me about the interesting bits?

The boat flipped upside down and some of us got out and sat on top of the hull and within about a half hour we were lifted off by helicopter. There were six guys down below, including Simon, who eventually swam out with a diver. We had to pay a dive boat £10,000 because they had put a tow line out to claim salvage while we were all off the boat that first night in a hotel in Falmouth. We went back out the next day, the mast had grounded and snagged on a reef and broke and the yacht was stuck. We talked to the owner of the dive boat and offered him £10,000 to release it and he was happy to do so. We had already organised a fishing boat to tow Drum into Falmouth. We towed it into the outer harbour, anchored it and then had a dive company come out and drop the rig on the bottom so that we could tow the hull in. Can you imagine, we had to get insurance to get into the port with this wreck. There was a lot of behind the scenes work involved. A couple of days after the accident we managed to get the boat alongside a jetty and flip it over with cranes. We had two cranes and I was by this time doing the diving as we had to fire

RIGHT AND BELOW:
DRUM BATTLES
THE ELEMENTS

the diver for time wasting. I hooked up the straps ready for the crane operation; we flipped it upright expecting it to sink, just in case we had slings everywhere. We emptied it out and inside was like a washing machine with sails, kit, clothes, rigging, fuel, kit bags etc. We ballasted it with sandbags and towed it back to Moody's overnight. By this time we had negotiated with Simon and the brothers as to what we were going to do, it was a disaster for Simon and the newspapers were having a field day. Simon and the brothers were insistant 'we must fix the boat'. There were five weeks to go before the start. We had to make a new keel and rig. We acquired Xargo III's old mast, re-wired the boat, fitted all new electronics, new sails, serviced the engine and winches and after a lot of effort and help we managed to put it all back together and make the start.

There were six Maxis on the start line. The late Peter Blake was there, he also had a Ron Holland design called Lion New Zealand. Pierre Fehlman was on UBS Switzerland. The six of us sailed head to head down the Atlantic and into Cape Town against the south east trades, a real ball buster. Out of the six maxis, four had structural failures including two dismastings. Only Lion and UBS Switzerland arrived in one piece, the rest of us were in tatters.

What happened to your boat?

As we were heading to Cape Town we noticed that the keel was starting to move again. It was subsequently found that it wasn't the keel but the structure of the carbon ring frames that were failing – the whole thing was not strong enough to carry the keel load and support it. We were 600 miles offshore and thinking that

BELOW:
PELAGIC, 1989

the keel was going to fall off again.... not a nice situation. We also had some de-lamination in the bow as well which was not so serious after shoring it up from the inside. Eventually we got to Cape Town, pulled the boat out, took everything to pieces again, took the interior out and then had a big pow wow. We decided on a radical approach to the repair because we had the confidence of the crew hanging in the balance. One guy had already left, the rest of us hung together, but we had to come up with an absolute fix because once you leave Cape Town, on day two, you are out in the Southern Ocean, it is not like being in the Atlantic where the water temperatures are survivable. The situation was not to be underestimated. We ended up having to build in situ in the boat a steel sub-structure that was laminated onto the skin and the frames. It was a massive overkill. In effect we had mild steel floors and longitudinal beams running across and through the bilges. We had to get longer keel bolts which had to be flown in. The keel was re-attached through the steel so that the load on this steel sub-structure was spread out over a wider area. In the middle of lowering the boat onto the new keel after this mega repair the aft sling of the crane broke dropping the stern and smashing the rudder which we had to re-build, yet another tragedy. We eventually managed to put everything back together and made the start. From that point on we were fine and had no more problems with the boat. Overall we did very well indeed. UBS Switzerland was first, Peter was second and we were third.

The main point is that the core of the crew stayed together, we all hung in there until the end, it was a very satisfying event, but with a very difficult start. Rick launched his photographic career on the back of that voyage documenting our adventure with on board photography that was truly innovative.

But what to do next? We were on the last leg heading to the UK, and I can remember sitting on the weather rail with Phil somewhere near the Azores and it was suggested that we should build our own boat. The idea was that we could put a bit of money in and build a boat really cheaply, just use paint from the hardware store kind of attitude. We agreed to do it and we brought in Chuck Gates as an investor, he had been on leg three with us and was one of the original Harbor Rats. Yacht designer Patrick Banfield, now of Custom Tender fame, who was also sailing on the Drum crew offered to do the design for free, he was already sketching the basics of this boat coming into the western approaches. He hadn't done a boat this big before so was up for it. We put equal thirds in and started building the boat in the summer of 86.

You built the boat?

Yes, in the start it was myself, one welder and one boat builder. We lofted the boat in the traditional way, full scale on a full lofting floor, we started by cutting the metal out for frames and plates, grinding and burning, doing everything by hand.

We built the boat in Southampton, we were offered a shed rent free by the developers of a marina. It had water, electricity and was a big space. I just had to pay rates and utilities and that was it. We started building the boat and a year later we sort of finished it and the idea was that I would have the first year on the

back on the construction. I had the year of building the boat, but it was not that much pleasure, it was quite a difficult year for me, as I was at the same time involved in another sponsorship campaign for a maxi project for the Whitbread – which failed, and the half finished boat later became The Card, sailing from Sweden. My time was horribly compromised (a lesson learned) and I was getting ready to go down on my first Antarctic trip on a half finished Pelagic, aided by my ex Whitbread buddies who were helping me to fit her out with the idea of participating in the first Antarctic Expedition in January/February 1988. I had Italian, French, Belgium and British friends involved. We managed to get Italian sponsorship; in those days it was easy to get sponsorship to go climbing in Antarctica. It was a big deal, nowadays they laugh at you as it has been done so many times. We scored a lot of equipment; free dinghies, outboards, diving gear, cooking equipment, climbing gear and all the clothing – all through one contact in Italy, who was very good at procurement. You name it he got it, we were fully equipped but the boat wasn't really quite ready to sail away. It sailed though, but without me, due to the Whitbread campaign still in its death throws. When that finally collapsed, I flew down to Punta Arenas in Chile. Off we went, late in the season due to various snafus, but we successfully made our first Antarctic expedition with a sailing/mountaineering team who were filming for Italian television. It was a great trip, a true adventure and we had a marvellous time. A great friend of mine, David Barker, a celebrated New Zealand artist, came and did a beautiful series of paintings that were exhibited all over the world. He published his illustrated 'logbook' of sketches and words; we made the film and took heaps of images that were published worldwide in sailing, climbing and feature magazines. It was leading edge, pioneering 'sail to climb' expedition philosophy.

I carried on after that including a six week stopover in South Georgia in early winter and arrived in Cape Town in June 1988. We now had five months to finish the construction! Phil Wade was due and you do want to keep a man like him waiting! We had to fully blast the exterior and hot metal spray it, drop off the overheads to re-insulate the deck head and sides, amongst everything else. After the handover to Phil I was free of Pelagic for at least two years and I went climbing in East Africa with one of the Italian guys from the trip. We climbed a new route on Mount Kenya and then went fooling around on the beaches of Madagascar.

I was never one to be hanging from loose ends for long. I returned to the UK in March and received a fax from Moscow from out of the blue. 'We have a boat, we are doing the Whitbread Around the World Race' – this was Vladislav Murnikov the designer of Fazisi. ' We know all about you and we want you to come and help train the crew and advise us, we have a crew, the boat is almost finished, it is being built in Poti in Georgia on the Black Sea.' I said, 'Great send me an airticket and I will fly out' and he said, 'We have no hard currency.' I flew out as I thought it would be a great opportunity no matter what transpired. I had the initial meeting in Moscow with Vladislav and Mr Tichov, who was like the mafia boss of this so called joint venture and a German partner. I immediately felt this was possibly some sort of money

BELOW:
1989 – LAUNCH PARTY OF FAZISI IN POTI GEORGIA WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNIST PARTY CHIEF

laundering scheme, but what the heck? They were building this boat and it was going to be sponsored somehow and it was going to be a watershed event for a sporting team coming out of the Soviet Union without government support, hindrance or anything else, a real first.

This was still the full blown Soviet Union. For this first meeting I was out in Moscow for four days, but they wouldn't take me to see the boat. So they said 'When you go back to England this is what you must do to help us, please get hold of the mast maker Sparcraft, the sail makers and the keel maker in Germany.' I started contacting these suppliers, they had none of this equipment in the Soviet Union of course.They had a boat and engine, but that was all. The idea was that all this gear was going to be bought, somehow, but exactly how was left to be determined. I insisted that I needed to see the boat and they arranged some air tickets for the next visit. We took a train to Kiev and flew from Kiev to Poti. I expected to see a boat that was ready to go, the idea was that they were going to launch it, put it on a barge and take it through the Med and up to Northern Europe. The boat was still being welded up! They were dreaming about the schedule, they really thought they could make it, and I started to lose faith in the project and told them so. A day later they said they had come up with a solution: to fly the boat to London, and somehow they managed to organise it. The boat was still a bare aluminium hull, that was it, they had a full launch celebration in Poti with the local Communist party chief and an attractive woman who was a chess champion. They put the boat in the water and then took it out immediately and put it on a barge, they then barged the boat down to Sukhumi which is down the coast, lifted it off and onto a truck, drove it to the airport where an Antonov 124 was waiting with the nose open; they rolled it inside, along with a 20ft sea freight container holding all the other stuff they were sending over; tools, spare parts, clothing, jars and tins of food, vegetables, sausages etc. We flew the boat from Sukhumi to Kiev, then to Moscow where we had to wait for the passports for the 18 crew. We sat in dreadful humid heat for five hours, with everyone completely exhausted and nervous as to whether the passports would be issued, all of a sudden a guy burst in with them, we literally grabbed the passports and ran out of the airport, it was like an evacuation – the kind you see on movies – it was very tense. We eventually took off. We were all on the upper deck with everyone just roaming around, there were simply plastic chairs lining the side of the cabin and mattresses to sleep on. We arrived in London late in the day on the tarmac at Heathrow.

In Heathrow?

Yes, the boat was decorated with Pepsi banners at the time, because we were negotiating with Pepsi in the UK about the sponsorship, we took a punt with the banners. The boat rolled out, we took pictures of this amazing scene with the plane's nose up. She was craned on to a flatbed lorry and off we went.

We took her down to Hamble Yacht Services for the fit out. The crew were staying at the Seaman's Mission in Southampton.

BELOW: VLADISLAV MURNIKOV, – THE DESIGNER OF FAZISI, ALEX GRISHENKO, – THE CAPTAIN WHO COMMITTED SUICIDE AND SKIP

BELOW:
1989 – SKIP AND THE FAZISI CREW MEET THE DUCHESS OF YORK IN URUGUAY

OPPOSTE:
A STUNNING IMAGE FROM A 1992 ANTARCTICA VOYAGE

We finished the boat at the 11th hour. I remember cash arriving in a big briefcase a few days before the start before any loans would kick in. We paid everybody off, and we seemed to have paid everybody who up to that point had been contributing with some risk on good faith. We then managed to get ourselves around the world, sadly losing one guy who hung himself in Uruguay. You have to read my book 'Fazisi – The Joint Venture' to appreciate the background to how that happened.

But no money?

Yes, it was very stressful. We were never sure if we would get over the next hurdle at the leg stopovers. With every stop came the challenge of appealing to people's sense of charity as this was such a special thing, being Soviets. Whilst we were sailing around the world everything started to crumble in the Soviet Union; the Berlin Wall came down; the Romanian Dictator, Nicolai Ceacsescu was killed; Perestroika, Glasnost! All that happened during the Whitbread. By the time we got back to Europe there was a new regime in Russia and the Soviet Union had exploded into republics. It was extraordinary to be on the fringes of it all. We had three Communist Party members onboard as crew. I can only imagine the confusion in their minds.

Did the crew go home?

Most had families and kids and almost all bailed on them. The wives actually visited them in Uruguay during the last stage. Most of these guys, when they had been in Uruguay for the first time, had found girlfriends immediately because they were good looking, fit men and they were a novelty. Then we went to Freemantle and Auckland and back to Uruguay so you can imagine the lives they were living, being celebrated with attractive followers everywhere they went. When we arrived in Uruguay for the second time, the 'politburo' in Moscow managed to find some money, somehow, to fly their wives to visit them for that stopover. Of course by that point the last people the Soviets (now Russians, Ukrainians, Modovians, Latvians, Georgians) wanted to see were their wives, coming from what was still winter in the crumbling Soviet Union. I will never forget that vignette; the wives wearing clothes that looked like velvety curtains, silk stockings with the seam up the back, heavily made up, walking up the streets with their husbands who were looking very unhappy.

Tell us about the guy that committed suicide?

He was Ukrainian and the designated skipper, they decided early on to make me the co-skipper as I knew what was what. They didn't know anything about racing big boats for sure. I always managed to get another European on each leg to help me out though. I couldn't handle it myself, only a few of them spoke English. During the summer in England we decided that having an American co-skipper and a Soviet co-skipper would be very interesting for the Press and it was. Many of the photos from that summer are Alexei and I standing together with the American flag and the Soviet flag promoting the concept of 'joint venture'.

It was a great idea to have Pepsi as a sponsor as they were visible in the Soviet Union, having beaten Coke to market. But it never really panned out for one reason or another. Pepsi in America got cold feet as we were still 'Soviets' and in cold war terms, the enemy. We never received any more money from Pepsi beyond the British summer sponsorship package which wasn't even enough to get us out of the UK. Alexei obviously, in

hindsight, had a nervous breakdown. He seemed OK generally, other than acting a little strange at times, but we were all acting in strange ways during that project, you tend not to focus on one guy. We actually had a psychologist, a Russian woman, who had been involved in this project and she hadn't noticed anything, obviously not doing her job, and Alexei just eventually lost the plot in Uruguay. His wife had a baby just before we left on the race, which he hadn't seen. It was a tragedy, his death took so much energy out of me that I felt that this was it as far as around the world racing was concerned, I needed to get away from it all. After the race was over, I took a long break and went to Australia with a girlfriend and wrote the book on Fazisi, a sort of catharsis about the whole experience.

That was the end of my racing career for the time being and I headed back to Pelagic as my second year of the partnership was coming up. I started to plan another Antarctic, South Georgia expedition with the same multinational mob, pretty much the same team again with a mountaineering theme. We did a feature film for Italian television and a few adverts for Sector Watches. We went to South Georgia, then I got back to Cape Town and it had already been decided that Phil and Chuck didn't want to roll over the partnership as they had other things to do. I wanted to keep the boat to pursue this lifestyle of mountaineering, sailing and expeditions but didn't know how I was going to pay for it until it suddenly dawned on me that I could try to charter. I decided to keep my share and we formed this new business plan for me to pay them out. I started chartering with groups of friends from Chicago and New Zealand. I had to prove it was possible to charter in the Beagle Channel, take people around Cape Horn and possibly make charters to Antarctica. I was one of the first to attempt this, there was myself and a few French boats that started during that same two year period 90/91.

RIGHT:
1999 – TRANSPAC
RECORD WITH ELENA

Were there many cruise ships then?
They existed but they were small vessels, maybe 50 to 100 passengers, there were maybe 1000 cruise ship visitors in 1990.

How many visitors are there now?
37,000 visitors in the 2013/14 season and expected to rise.

How did you meet your wife, Elena?
I met her in 1989 during the Whitbread Race when I was on Fazisi. She was a journalist and her brother Paolo was on Gatorade. She was given the job by Berlusconi's Chanel 5 in Italy to interview the skippers prior to the race. I do not remember her then, I was doing at lot of interviews and being bombarded by problems here and there. She went to the other ports as well, I had her business card though and several years later after the 2nd Pelagic trip when I was visiting the Italians, I called Elena and asked if I could visit her in Milan. I went over and had dinner. Every time I passed through Milan, for the next couple of years, I would stay with her and go out to lunch or dinner, which in Italy is always a pleasure! She was going out with Franco, her camera man at that stage. They had already been to Tierra Del Fuego filming. She had done a trip there in the early 90's and so we had common ground to talk about. I didn't start going out with her until 95, when my previous relationship ended. Soon after I invited Elena, just on a punt, to sail down with me from Buenos Aires to Tierra Del Fuego at the beginning of the season with a bunch of like-minded friends. We did this marvellous trip down the coast, stopping along the way - at little anchorages and that was when we started having an affair, consummated in the lower starboard bunk. She ended her relationship and then we became an item from that point on.

You have two children now?
Yes Lara, she turned 12 yesterday, she was born in Milan and Luca is 10. We went to South Africa when Lara was one month old to build the Pelagic Australis in 2002/3. Luca was born in Cape Town a year and a half later – he is a true South African. His passion is surfing.

Elena is still working?
Yes she does a bit of journalism, but mainly news production for the European Broadcasting Union, it is a non profit organisation formed soon after World War II to amalgamate the broadcasters of Europe, which is now worldwide. She sets up news ops, summits, elections, things that are pre-planned, sets up the transmissions, the stand up positions for the presenters so that they can do a live via satellite set up, she books the Satellite time and gets government permits and so on... a bureaucratic can of worms. Or if there is a flash point anywhere in sub Saharan Africa she could be deployed there immediately. If a big story happens, she has to get on a plane always travelling, even in Cape Town with a passport and a rucksack and a couple of spare sets of clothes, she can just up and go at a minutes notice. She is an African expert having 'done' Rwanda, Somalia and many other conflicts, which seem to be unending.

It's a strange lifestyle, do you get to spend much time back with the kids?
Yes, being freelance she gets a lot of time where she is not doing anything or just admin from home, or pre-planning things that are coming up, like the World Cup. Nigeria was planned, but then it got extended by 10 days because of the girls' kidnapping, events that you can never predict it. For example she has been tracking

RIGHT:
1993 – PELAGIC SUPPORTS GREENPEACE IN THEIR ANTARCTICA CAMPAIGN

BELOW:
1993 – SKIP AND BRUNO PEYRON TRANSPAC RECORD

Mandela for seven years. He tried to die three times and they saved him, always in the middle of our family holidays or just before, we haven't done anything in the past year, we just did ad-hoc holidays around Cape Town as she was on continuous standby which was pretty stressful. For me, I have big blocks of time home when I am 100% on the case with the kids. We go sailing, surfing, rock climbing and mountain walking.

You became an established charter business?

Yes, that continued right through the 90's. Ticking over nicely, but never making a fortune. It was a life style choice. After I started my relationship with Elena in 1995 I was spending more time with her back in Europe and getting various veterans of Pelagic to skipper in my absence, I would only come down for the expedition charters that involved mountaineering or film making.

In the late 90's my short career on Maxi multi hulls began. In 1997 I was invited by Bruno Peyron, who is the famous French multi hull sailor, an entrepreneur and veteran of the Drum capsize, to sail to Hawaii on his Explorer, for the Transbac race as navigator with a great crew. Florence Arthaud, a famous French female sailor, Cam Lewis, an American sailor and friend and a French crew of young guys. Back in 93 Bruno had broken the Jules Verne record, as the first person to sail around the world, non-stop, in less than 80 days. (79 days 6 hours 15 minutes 56 seconds & now Banque Populaire V in 45 days 13 hours 42 minutes 53 seconds)

Bruno's dream in the wake of that Jules Verne success was a race in the Millennium year to be called 'The Race'. We did theTransPac race to Hawaii, we broke the sailing record taking five

days. Elena flew out and we then sailed the boat down to Tahiti and spent three weeks cruising around Bora Bora. We left the boat in Raiatea for the storm season, then Bruno came back the following year and took the boat to Australia to publicise his Millennium idea and try to get an Australian entry. I flew out at the end of that same season, he flew home and I sailed the boat from Lindeman Island on the Great Barrier Reef, to Yokahama, dodging tropical storms with a young pick up crew. We spent a month in Japan in the filthy port of Yokohama. Elena flew out to join us whilst we prepared the boat to attempt the North Pacific record from Yokohama to San Francisco. It was great second summer – having fun, getting paid very little, but sailing with Elena on another adventure. We sailed across the North Pacific and into San Francisco, put the boat into a shipyard and had them fit Volvo engines and a sail drive in each hull, as we had been sailing around all this time with no engines (also no plumbing, heads, etc.) which made it quite interesting getting in and out of the ports.

BELOW:
2001 – INNOVATION EXPLORER ON THE RACE

I went back and did parts of the Pelagic season for the southern summer, and came back for my third northern summer to get the boat ready in San Francisco and back in the water, rigged and ready to go. We sailed close inshore down the central American coast, through the Panama Canal, through the Gulf of Mexico to Miami. Elena and I took a break and drove the support van to New York while Bruno and Cam Lewis broke the Miami New York record. This was easy to break, as we pretty much invented it. We then attempted the transatlantic record, but did not feature due to the weather and our schedule. We got the boat back to France after this three year odyssey and by that stage I had clocked up about 40,000 miles on Maxi catamarans, I was by now reasonably competent on what were not sailing yachts but sailing machines.

Now that The Race was looming large, I got involved with Bruno on the event side. He had sponsorship from France Telecom, Disney Paris and the port of Barcelona for the start, and the port of Marseille for the finish. But we struggled to get the entries. Pete Goss was building what would be the the radical wave piercing cat, Phillips Innovator. The wealthy adventurer Steve Fawcett built Play Station, also a Maxi cat, the definition being about 100 feet. There were two 80 footers from the last generation which included Explorer which we campaigned in the Pacific and sold to a Polish syndicate and Tony Bullimore's Legato.

Bruno kick-started the whole thing and saved the event by taking some of the French Telecom money, I am not quite sure how, and commissioned the build of three similar 110 foot catamarans. Bruno was a player and he had his neck stuck way out on this one. Grant Dalton, the famous Kiwi sailor who is now in charge of Team Emirates New Zealand ended up being skipper of the first boat out of the mould, sponsored by and called Club Med. Cam Lewis got the second boat, called Team Adventure, paid for by private money. With no other sponsor forthcoming, Bruno's brother Loick, the French super star skipper inherited the third boat which we named Innovation Explorer and I was nominal co-skipper, mainly for publicity reasons. We put together a 2nd tier crew as we couldn't afford to pay the going rate for the real pros. We left Barcelona in January 2001 and raced 64 days non-stop around the world back to Marseille. Elena was onboard as the media person, sending back reports and running the satellite transmission system for the feeds.

In the end Club Med, who certainly had out-spent us, won, and we were 2nd a day and half behind, but we were the only two boats to go non-stop as all the other boats had issues – Team Adventure delaminated and had to go into Cape Town and again into Wellington; the two little boats were miles behind; Play Station dropped out off Brazil because they had problems with their mainsail. Philips Innovator split in half on the way to the start and they lost the boat completely. It hadn't been sea trialled properly and was very much an experimental design and structure by Adrian Thompson, the same guy that did the structure on Drum back in 1984/5. We were down to the three sister ships and

the two smaller 80 footers so in the end there were only five boats that finished The Race. It happened and was a success, but not as big a fleet as Bruno had hoped. Sailing flat out at 25 to 30 knots as we did sure had its attractions though.

I stayed on Innovation Explorer the following season in the Med doing promo for Bruno and some minor race events and then the boat was laid up. I decided at this point to get my life together, realising that there was an opportunity to make a real business with Southern Ocean charters – that was my break point where I had to stop racing completely. I decided to try to find the money to build a bigger charter boat which I eventually did with financial help from a friend from the Chicago Yacht Club. We began building it in Durban in 2002, finished in 2003 and started chartering in the 2003/4 season down South and have never looked back.

You must have had some incredible experiences there?

Every year, in addition to the normal tours, I do one flagship cruise, either sponsored or paid for by a group of friends wanting to do something out of the ordinary. Mountaineering, cold water diving, kayak expedition support and logistic support for film makers are my main interests. Over and above the boat's crew, I now come on board as the 'Expedition Leader' which includes having done all the planning, permitting, logistics and then on site lead the team ashore. After all, I have done enough sea miles! I really enjoy these special projects, they pay well and most importantly keep me fresh. I have not lost enthusiasm for high latitude sailing after 25 years of doing it. Yep, I'm livin the dream!

I let the crew do the milk runs because they are young, fresh and enthusiastic in getting the charter clients involved. Our philosophy is a 'voyage of participation', which means when the guests come on board they are immediately part of the crew. I was once accused of running a 'boot camp' but that is certainly an exaggeration! It is a single team experience and we have found this formula works incredibly well. The goal is for people to finish the trip reasonably exhausted, but knowing full well they have made a positive contribution to the sailing expedition.

What's the season in the Antarctic?

We operate from the end of September through to June, If you look at the website (www.pelagic.co.uk) we have a schedule which is set two years in advance for the season: South Georgia in Oct/Nov, Antarctic Peninsula Dec/Jan/Feb, then Tierra Del Fuego and two week Cape Horn Trips in March, April and into May. Then we do the last trip of the season that brings us back to South Africa. It is based in part around an RYA Yacht Master Offshore Course in Puerto Williams, the Beagle Channel; I fly an instructor down for that and we will have five or six students. They take the five day, 40 hour course and then they go out and practice this stuff cruising the Beagle Channel and going around Cape Horn with the instructor on board. Then after reaching Stanley the instructor normally goes home and the crew and the students then sail the boat across to Cape Town, stopping, hopefully, in Tristan da Cunha. We have our own Pelagic syllabus that takes into account all the other aspects of an ocean crossing

BELOW:
2003 – ELENA (PREGNANT WITH LUCA) AND LARA AT LAUNCH OF PELAGIC AUSTRALIS

RIGHT:
2008 – TOP DOGS BBC FILM WITH ROBIN KNOX-JOHNSTON, JOHN SIMPSON AND RANULPH FIENNES

where the RYA part stops – things like provisioning, port clearances, on going maintenance, marlinspike seamanship and more. They work their way across the ocean, in the spirit of Phil Wade – and pay for the privelege.

That brings us to mid June and the crew go home and I do a refit in Cape Town with my local guys. Ullman, our sail maker is based there, Southern Spars, our mast maker is based there. I have a very good machine shop, a painting team and a dock space down at the waterfront and I get to work with an old mate of mine, Manuel Mendez, who runs a small shipyard right in the main basin, 15 minutes from home. Couldn't be more ideal.

Do you have the same crew every year?

I get a team for three years and I do not let them go beyond three years. I did it once with one team and it didn't end well, three years is all you can expect, the nipper may come and go, but the foundation of the crew is normally a couple. If they haven't much experience of the area, then either the previous skipper or myself have to go with them for the first couple of trips.You can't send a green crew down to those places with clients. The boat is easy to get your mind around, it is a very simple boat, but how to handle yourself in Antarctica in the ice, with volatile weather and much else is not. I have a whole raft of people to call on if necessary and ex skippers that are happy to do one off trips if need be, they are all very keen to come back.

Have you been involved in setting up the rules and regulations that are in place down there?

Yes in the early days there were no permitting requirements, we just went roaming around, barely any other vessels in the area. It was like this for the first five or six years, then things started to really come together after 1991 when the Antarctic Treaty rules were formalised with the Madrid Protocol. Then each country had to ratify that within the Treaty and then apply the rules and regulations into their legislation. These rules had to fit in to the British System somehow, if I, as a British vessel, broke those rules I could be prosecuted by the Brits, that's the theory, but that took 23 years to implement, culminating in the Antarctic Act 2013 for the UK. The Anglo countries, USA, Germany and Scandinavia were quite quick to sort things out but the Latin countries were very slow. It's a whole sliding scale of acceptability, the system is a dog's breakfast of different permitting systems and in some Treaty countries there is no permit system in place as yet. If you are an Italian vessel there is some sort of a system, but the joke goes that the application form is the size of a postcard.

This applies to anybody heading that way?

For everybody there are pollution and wildlife rules – there is a field operation manual about eight inches thick that has all of the guidelines formulated over the years by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), which started

RIGHT:
EMPEROR PENGUINS

in 1991 with six ship companies as founding members. I joined in 97 as the first yacht and I was then instrumental in bringing in other yachts that regularly visited the region. We went down there in the first place to get away from regulations. Frontier and wild wilderness was what we were looking for. A few of us were fortunate to have lived that pioneering golden period, but for obvious reasons that has come to an end. IAATO now has 15 yachts out of a total of 46 or so members. We represent almost 30% of the membership now, which has its own problems because everybody has one vote. The yachts do not contribute that much financially to the organization as it is based on a simple passenger tax. There are issues of who is paying for the Association and who gets what out of it. But it does function extremely well and is respected by the Antarctic Treaty system, who are the final arbiters of what happens next.

Are there noticeable problems with the climate and over fishing?
Climate Change is significant. Whether you agree with Global Warming or not, the Peninsula is basically one of the fastest warming areas of the planet. The West Coast of the Peninsula specifically. It has risen about three degrees in the last 50 years, there are a lot of changes because the temperatures are hovering around zero. If you are always just above, rather than just below the melt is dramatic. I have noticed a lot of feature changes, glaciers receding or showing more shore line where there were once ice cliffs hanging over the sea. There is plenty of evidence if you compare photographs over the 25 years I have been there. Due to climate change the penguin colonies have changed. Some do better because of global warming. The Gentoos, a sub Antarctic species that is a mixed feeder, are moving further South and increasing in numbers. The Adelies and Chinstraps which rely exclusively on krill for their diet are faring worse. The ecology of the area is changing and that determines the krill population – the less sea ice, the less krill as the krill feed off micro organisms that breed under the sea ice itself. Krill need sea ice.

And how about the tourist pressure?
Tourist numbers have increased steadily since the early 90's and the proliferation of ice capable vessels that drove this increase of availability was a direct result of Perestroika – when Russian Academy of Science vessels lost their budget overnight, and in turn were chartered at knock down prices by clever westerners, inclusive of officers and hotel staff. There were 37,000 tour ship visitors last season, a number that will probably rise again in 2014/15. This necessitated the drafting and implementing of 'site guidelines' for each of the wildlife and historic sites where ships and yachts visit. It is all now regulated – how many ships per day, how many people on shore at any one time, how close you can get to the animals of each species, staff to passenger ratios, site rest periods, and these rules are becoming continually more site specific depending on local sensitivities.

There is more and more knowledge being added to the database of what exists in Antarctica and how things should be treated by the ever increasing number of tourists. That is the biggest change I have seen in recent years. Cruise ships are well organised through IAATO, which is a self-regulatory organization. There have been many unworkable proposals over the years put forward from the Antarctic Treaty administrators. These are largely bureacrats

RIGHT:
2010 – PELAGIC AUSTRALIS ANTARCTICA

FAR RIGHT:
2013 – SKIP AND CLIMBING TEAM IN ANTARCTICA

BELOW:
2014 – LARA AND DAD, ANTARCTICA CRUISE

who are not necessarily experts on what happens in the Antarctic. In order not to be regulated, top down, with draconian policies that would eventually either limit, or put us out of business, we try to create our own rules, regulations and measures that are more practical and better for the environment. Governments now respect that and we work together with a lot of the prime movers from each country involved in the Antarctic Treaty. Some countries are very anti-tourism full stop, the Brits are very pragmatic. Luckily, the UK is where I do most of my permitting. There are now many large yachts flying Red Ensigns, hence the British are playing a very big role in the permitting for non governmental expeditions.

How do you see the future for visiting Superyachts?

That is an interesting subject as we have new legislation about to unfold for SOLAS vessels in the 2016/17 season. The Polar Code is an IMO invention; principally in the wake of the 2007 sinking of the Explorer, which was the original tour ship built by the famous Lars Lindblad. It was built in the 60's, and in 2007 was being operated by Gap Adventures from Canada. I read the survey report of this ship as part of the post incident review process, and it had just squeaked through its last survey a few months before the accident. The scantlings were getting pretty minimal in some areas, it was probably going to be its last year. The Captain on the

ship was a Baltic Ice Pilot with only one seasons experience as a first mate in the Antarctic. He ended up barrelling in through what he thought was first year sea ice, which is quite soft and sponge like, it is full of air and you can cut through it quite easily with a reasonably strong vessel. Unfortunately he found multi-year hard ice which hardens, rafts up and gets more dense. He cut a big gash in the ship along its water line. It started to flood and also flooded quickly across compartments and in to the engine room. There were other ships in the area, it was a calm night and they managed to get everybody off with no loss of life. That and other minor incidents over the years prompted the IMO to attempt to tighten the whole regime up in both the Arctic and Antarctic and they have developed the Polar Code, a painstaking affair, over the last four years. All of the flag states have participated in this via the IMO, each lobbying for various interests. Some flag states have been very aggressive saying that they want no ship sailing south of 60 degrees if it is not of a certain Ice Class. They were advocating double skinned hulls, then double skinned hulls in the way of fuel tanks and black and grey water tanks. They wanted fully enclosed lifeboats for everybody on board which most ships would not be able to convert to. The original permutation of the Polar Code would have probably put 70 or 80% of the present Antarctic cruise ships out of business overnight. The IAATO members got involved in these discussions as we knew exactly what the Arctic and Antarctic was like at different times of the year in specific geographical areas. They have tweaked this whole system over the years to make it more palatable and the final result is going to be announced in November by the IMO. Then we will see exactly what this thing looks like, but it is a lot less draconian now than when they first thought of it four years ago.

RIGHT:
A FANTASTIC VIEW OF AN ICE CAVE

Do you think it will impact Superyachts?
Possibly yes. It will depend where you want to go. If you are a SOLAS vessel, then you will fall into the first wave of the Polar Code and you may not be able to go as far South or to certain areas. There will be safety equipment enhancers that may not exist on your Superyacht. You may have to get a different life boat, get a multitude of different cold water safety equipment and communication devices.

How do you get on with Insurance?
We are insured with Pantaenius. They seem to be aware and realistic about high latitudes and are not afraid by the prospect. They seem to have the experience and consequently do insure many of the yachts who go far south and far north. Everyone must have medical evacuation insurance either via the vessel's Crew Accident Policy or on an individual basis for the owner and his guests. The vessel also needs to carry a minimum 3rd party liability cover related to gross tonnage in case of any environmental damage that might occur.

Your company offers its expertise and guides to yachts planning a trip?
Yes, this work needs to start with plenty of time up front for planning. Pelagic Expeditions offers a consultancy to first of all assess the vessels suitability, and then we work with the captain to get through the Antarctic permit application process which accounts for two basic concerns – safety and environmental awareness. This is where our membership of IAATO kicks in because we can use the same suite of protocols, guidelines and resources for these voyages. The IAATO Field Operations Manual, which is our resource base, now weighs in at about 10 kg. On the practical side we work out itineraries, advise on equipment, clothing, tender operations, stranding equipment and guidance on any special activities. Then, of course we put a pilot/guide on board to work with the captain to advise on where to go and why, which is critical to save time on what typically are whistle stop tours. Knowing what is possible and what is not possible with respect to ice conditions can make or break a cruise. The landings are also under the supervision of the guide who in Antarctic tourism lingo is the 'Expedition Leader,' being responsible for all conduct ashore – ever more critical with the pitfalls of instant social networking. We've seen some horrendously funny and also tragic consequences of mistakes made, which have quickly gone 'viral.'

What equipment should these visiting yachts carry?
It depends on the size of the yacht, if it a small yacht, say 70/80ft or less, you can do things like tie to the shore, because you can get into smaller anchorages. It would be good to have floating shorelines and wire strops to go around the rocks, Scandinavian style. If your yacht is bigger than that you are pretty much consigned to using a single anchor in deep water where deep drafted drift ice becomes an issue. Then there is the consideration of which type of tenders are best – inflatable as opposed to hard bodied tenders. There now has to be a boot washing station on deck so that after every landing boots, ski poles, the bottom of your trousers etc. are flushed with a biocide to make sure you are not transferring pathogens from one site to another. You have to keep all of your food waste in sealable barrels for dumping north of the Polar front in the Drake Passage. The Antarctic is, to a great

extent, a sealed eco-system. The Southern Ocean extends unimpeded around the Antarctic and the biomass is isolated from any eco-system further North.

It is important to note that during the mid 90's when 'permits' to visit the Antarctic were more or less invented, the rules that were laid down in the Madrid Protocol of 1991 were not legally binding, at least in the British context, until last year when the rules were legislated via the Antarctic Act of 2013. Since many large yachts fly a red ensign they would deal with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Polar Region's department for permitting. But if the flag state is a non treaty party member there are several ways of bringing a vessel into the British stable if any other British connection can be found; for example the nationality of the owner, captain or ownership company and this extends to addresses and domicility in British Overseas Territories.

What about Owner's toys?

Sailing Superyachts are relatively simple in this regard because they cannot carry the big toys. They just don't fit into their layout. But activities could include extended zodiac cruising, guided kayaking, guided ski-mountaineering, rather than just vessel cruising and passive walks ashore at wildlife and historic sites. Diving with a cold water dive master is another possibility, but the guests or owner must have previous ice diving experience. Most things are possible dependent on the level of experience of

guests and what they want to do. I find that owners of sail boats and big yachts in general are fairly risk averse and the captains follow suit. As an Expedition Leader, I suggest and encourage activities like kayaking in stable inflatable kayaks with loose Zodiac cover, just to give the guests some sense of adventure. It is counter intuitive, but if these voyages become too passive (like cruise ships), with no sense of a perceived risk somewhere, the experience is less, not more.

Power Superyachts are a totally different dynamic and the really large ones can carry helicopters, submersibles, ROVs and fleets of jet skis and now UAV's (drones) have made an appearance.

What about helicopters?

You won't, or at least shouldn't, get a permit for a single helicopter operation that involves flying over large expanses of land. This is for the obvious reason of search and rescue. You would need two helicopters, two pilots, with one on standby in case something happens to the first one. You can however be permitted for a single helicopter if you plan only to fly along the coast where you could do a rescue with the vessel or a tender if it ditched. You have to also consider the wildlife. There are flying regulations for distance and height near colonies. It is very clear you need a whole different level of expertise from people that have experience with handling these 'toys' in Antarctica, and if the owner wants to use all of his 'toys' a vessel can end up with another four or five dedicated staff onboard. That's where EYOS Expeditions come in who are colleagues in IAATO. They are specialists of the expedition Superyacht genre. Every one of these activities has to be planned and permitted and it can be a mine field. From day one of the planning stages everybody's expectations must be managed to avoid ending up in an awkward situation where the owner wants to do something that has not been thought through properly. We all know how that can go!

'Adventure Tourism' – and Superyachts fall squarely into that category – has become a big topic of conversation at the Antarctic Treaty meetings and how to manage this growing phenomenon going forward. When you consider a large expedition motor yacht and what that implies in view of things possible, a permitting document can end up being hundreds of pages long, it is an immense amount of work to exercise due diligence for the vessel and the duty of care for the individuals taking part.

You are a small operator though, so how are you different?

My business model is quite different to a normal charter situation that we are familiar with in the Med or Caribbean. When my guests come on board, they come on board as a team and immediately bond with the crew. We are small, we have eight or 10 guests plus the crew and we all eat together, guests help to do

PREVIOUS SPREAD:
2014 – ALOFT ON LORD NELSON, ANTARCTICA

RIGHT:
2014 – FAMILY CRUISE TO ANTARCTICA WITH THE BBC

BELOW:
2011 – TENT BOUND SOUTH GEORGIA

the dishes and cook (if they can boil an egg). They help sail the boat, it is what I would call a 'voyage of participation'. When they come back a month later, they can honestly say, 'Yes I have been on a sailing expedition'. We have a clear niche. The skipper is in charge, he sets the tone and gets everybody involved, even non sailors can help sail the boat under supervision. What we also sell as a positive is 'uncertainty', where almost nothing is guaranteed. We have a sample itinerary, but we won't necessarily stick to it, guests have to accept that and realise that because we are going to a remote and perceived hostile environment, that is part of the buzz where the level of risk is managed.

Skip, where do you see your future?

Designing and building expedition yachts for others. Tony Castro and I have started a new company Pelagic Yachts. I have several clients interested in building a range of boats. We have three concept designs, one that exists as my present boat that can be modified; an 82 concept and a 55 family boat. We are pretty well known for operating on a continuous schedule with a platform that is robust, simple to maintain and cost effective – arguably more capable than the range of what is on offer in the cruising boat market.

Your boats are built to be practical!

That is the beauty of it, they are very robust with simple systems that can be repaired on the go, we never need to call in experts from Holland or Northern Europe to fix a thing that is fundamental. I have seen boats in the Antarctic where the whole

sail control system has gone down, they need an expert to fly in to sort out the computerised system that runs the hydraulic system that runs the foiling system. This, in my mind, is totally the wrong way to go if you want to go remote cruising, the voyage is the goal as opposed to the object, which is the yacht. This is not an easy philosophy to peddle, but I am working on it! >II

Skip I wish you well it has been brilliant talking with you.

We would like to thank Skip's friends and family, particularly Rick Tomlinson, for allowing us the use of the photographs in this article.

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