

Without instruments  
they challenge the great cape and win

# Surmounting Cape Horn

by Marvin Creamer

*In December 1983, Marvin Creamer departed Cape May, New Jersey, aboard his Goderich 35 Globe Star to attempt a circumnavigation without the aid of even the most basic navigational instruments. His remarkable journey took him south through the Atlantic to Cape Town, South Africa, then on across the Southern Indian Ocean to Hobart, Tasmania. (The accounts of the first two legs of the voyage appeared in the May and September 1984 issues of Cruising World.)*

*After a layover in Hobart, Creamer set off to keep his appointment with Cape Horn, a test that would challenge his novel navigational techniques to their limit.*

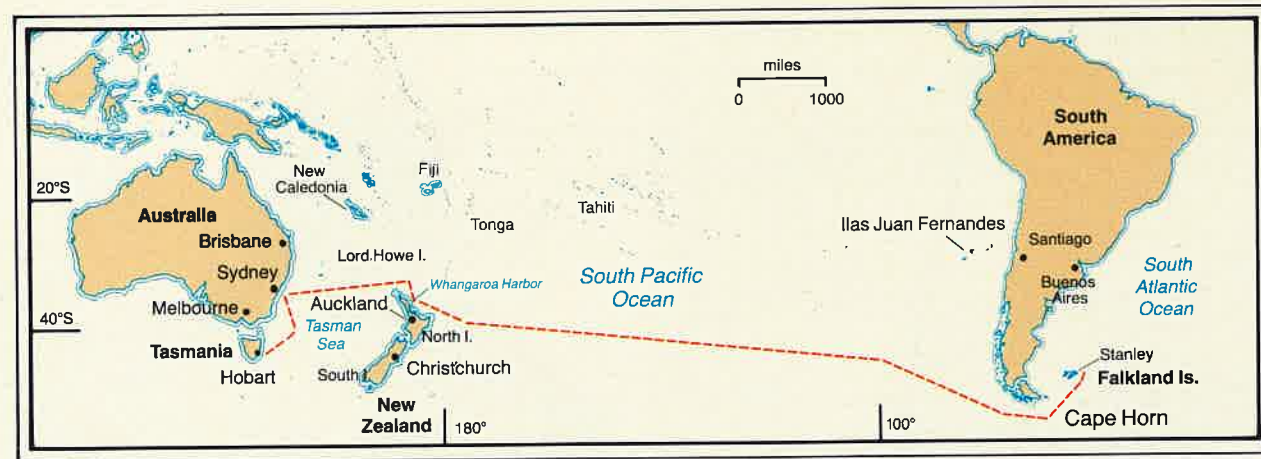
When Jesse Edwards, Nick Gill and I eased *Globe Star* out of the womblike shelter of Hobart's Constitution Dock on the first day of the Southern Hemisphere's 1983 spring, our plan was to graze the northern tip of New Zealand and head for Valparaiso, Chile. Within 24 hours *Globe Star* had capsized, my shoulder had been dislocated, Jesse had decided to withdraw and our next port had been switched from Valparaiso to Sydney, Australia.

We did not know as we hummed downwind at seven knots past the Iron Pot from the Derwent River toward the Tasman Sea that the 20-knot breeze behind us would turn into a "Storm Bay Howler" that produced 55-knot gales in Hobart and 75-knot winds across the Tasman in Wellington, New Zealand. Local cray-boat skippers had alerted us to the equinoctial gales that plague the area at that time of year but the urgency of being in Drake Passage south of Cape Horn during the last two weeks of December pushed us into leaving Hobart as soon as we could get away.

Jesse had flown from Rock Hall, Maryland, to join me and Nick for the Pacific leg of *Globe Star's* no-instrument circumnavigation. Jesse was experienced in boat maintenance and offshore sailing; Nick, who lived near Hobart, had just finished welding his own 30-foot steel hull. He wanted to get some blue-water experience before setting out in his own boat. The rolling motion sent both Nick and Jesse to the rail within an hour of departure. By the

**As we head deeper into the Furious Fifties, we begin to encounter the gales that are legion in the Southern Ocean.**





time we reached the open sea Nick was ghostly white and Jesse had a serious problem; the gastritis which he had thought was a memory was reactivated by the gales and building seas.

When Nick came on watch next morning, I went forward to strike the storm jib, which was taking a beating in hurricane-force winds. As I hauled downward on the leech with my left hand, a wild gust hit the loose sail and carried my hand and arm past my ear to a dislocation at the shoulder. My arm refused to obey directional commands but my fingers closed with near-normal grip. By twisting my body I found that I could swing my arm toward the sail and then grasp it with my fingers. I managed to get the jib down where I could hold it with my feet. Nick came forward and gave my arm a stiff yank. My arm hung — limp. The second, much harder pull, did the trick. It was three days before I could raise my arm without wincing and even now, over a year later, I find that I can predict the onset of a storm.

Two hours later Nick sat in the cockpit watching our newly installed vane gear working to keep *Globe Star* on a broad reach with the top corner of our "bulletproof" main held out to starboard by a four-part vang preventer. The sound of the crashing wave that banged us on the port quarter was that of a locomotive slamming into a truck. Nick was catapulted to lee by the breaker that engulfed him. His safety harness kept him from being washed overboard. In the cabin, cartons of apples and oranges flew to starboard, hit the lee cloth suspension lines of the settee berth and jerked the supporting hand-rail screws from their hidden backup blocks. Only Jesse's face was visible above the fruity deluge.

In the starboard quarter berth, I was intent on dragging my bunk cushion aft to get it out of the salty Niagara Falls that poured through the partly open hatch. I don't remember any pain from my just-dislocated shoulder but I do remember being pleased with my decision to have all bunk cushions made of closed-cell foam. The extra firmness had taken some getting used to but I was able to strip off the covering and as soon as I dried off the exterior moisture with paper towels I had a dry bunk. We were able to estimate the degree of roll when two days later we found a patch of broken glass cemented to the headliner by milk that was in the jar that flew from the galley sink and broke against the stainless steel hand-rails overhead. The angle indicated a 135-degree roll — *Globe Star's* mast had rotated 45 degrees below the wa-

ter's surface.

Our rig had passed the acid test; the stick came up undamaged. Because of the leakage problem around a keel-stepped mast, I had resisted advice and left the mast stepped on the cabin top according to the original design. I felt that crew morale would suffer in a wet cabin and that crew morale represented a significant factor in the successful completion of our no-instrument voyage. To decrease the chances of losing the mast in a knockdown or rollover, I had used what I considered the best wire available — Universal Wire Company's Super Stainless. Also, I increased wire size from quarter-inch to 5/16-inch all around, installed double headstays and backstays, used STA-LOK fittings on all wire ends and shortened the mast by 10½ inches to accommodate a one-piece extrusion. I'd had builder Bob Patterson weld a strong compression post between the keel and cabin top and cap it with a very heavy, welded internal plug for the mast step.

What we had just experienced turned out to be the most severe conditions of our 17-month voyage. However, not knowing what lay ahead, Jesse could not afford to gamble with his stomach and asked to be dropped off in New Zealand. Not wanting to risk sailing down on a lee shore to ensure a certain landfall, I elected to make a non-scheduled stop in Sydney. We turned northward and closed the Australian mainland at Gabo Island, where *Gipsy Moth V* foundered on the rocks in the 1982 BOC Singlehanded Around The World Race.

Jesse's departure meant that we were not bound to a Chilean landfall. In conference, Nick and I decided that unless a replacement "fell into our laps" we would double-hand the next leg.

#### New Zealand Pit Stop

Two weeks, two storms and two latitude star sightings after leaving Sydney's beautiful harbor, Nick and I sighted Tauroa Point light 40 miles south of New Zealand's northern tip. The following day, in drizzle and one-quarter to one-mile visibility, we found our way into Whangaroa Harbor on the opposite side of North Island to complete our 1,200-mile, doublehanded crossing of the tempestuous Tasman Sea. We had not planned to stop but were drawn landward by the green-clad slopes. In spite of the gales, cloud cover and paucity of latitude sightings, our DR latitude at the time of landfall was less than 15 miles off. If only we could do that well at Cape Horn.

Bob Rout, an irrigation engineer in his late 20s out for



After our 135-degree knockdown in the Tasman Sea, we duck into Sydney to dry out. This is Jesse's (left) last port with *Globe Star*, while Nick will continue on.

a Sunday ride, saw our American flag and stopped by to chat. Within an hour he invited us to his home for dinner and showers. In deference to our hosts, we decided to accept the invitation in the reverse order. As we relaxed in an atmosphere of good music, good food and good company, Bob and his friend, Val Roberts, listened to our stories and plans. Nothing was said about a third hand then or during the 45-minute ride back to the harbor, but early next morning Bob appeared and politely offered to join us if we wanted a third crewmember. Nick and I exchanged glances and shook Bob's hand. Without advertising or formal interview we had recruited the outstanding sailor of the entire 17-month odyssey. Jesse's replacement had "fallen into our laps." A week later, on October 30, when Bob's affairs were in order, we accepted a gift of freshly dug scallops from a native Maori and headed east to keep our date with the Horn.

#### To The Southern Pacific

It was time for inventory and prospect. There was little doubt that *Globe Star* was a survivor. She had weathered North Atlantic storms, ghosted through Saharan dust, kept her equilibrium across the Agulhas Bank and in the pooping waves of the wintry gale-ridden Indian Ocean, and held on to her spars in two Tasmanian knockdowns. I had a good feeling about our chances of getting through Drake Passage safely. The sun was speeding into the Southern Hemisphere bringing warmer days but, more importantly, a shortening of the night period. Barring a major catastrophe, it seemed likely that we would be able

to sail the 5,000 miles to Cape Horn while the sun was taking 53 days to reach the Tropic of Capricorn. True, we would be spending a lot of time in the Roaring Forties, had yet to sample the Furious Fifties and expected mountainous seas where the current runs strong over the sill between Antarctica and South America. But we would sail it one day at a time and handle problems as they came up just as we had for the past 10 months. In our favor was an able and motivated crew. Living close to the Pacific, both Bob and Nick had dreamed of crossing it and rounding the fabled Horn.

In a way, our problem at the Horn was less acute than the one we faced approaching Tasmania. There we needed to close the land in order to reposition and at the same time had to avoid being blown on as our vulnerability increased with decreasing sea room. Clearing the Horn was a necessity but although seeing it was highly desirable, if we were to pass it unseen, we could continue downwind long enough to ensure clearing and then work our way back to South Africa, a landfall we had made previously. Shag Rocks, east of South Georgia Island, might present a problem, but in late December and early January we would have long hours of daylight to scan the horizon. Even though our main aim was to clear them, we hoped that we could pick up some kind of longitudinal clue — steepening waves, bird or sea life, or water color — that would enable us to find the Falklands or make our way safely around Shag Rocks.

Our "float plan" as we worked our way around Stephenson Island into the open sea was to sail east until we had

passed Cape Runaway and East Cape and then angle southeastward into the Roaring Forties to pick up steady winds for the Pacific crossing. We would ease up on our southward dip if we ran into severe weather. As we neared the Horn we would move smartly southward and level off to straight east for the run through Drake Passage.

At the turning point we could find the required latitude by noting the intensity of twilight at the time of the December solstice. If we were far enough south to clear the Cape, the sun would set, twilight would occur and the sun would rise. There would be no period of complete darkness. My homework for the leg at hand was to take the last watch each night and study the filling in of the shadows at the depths of wave and wavelet troughs as the sun neared the horizon each morning. My purpose was to develop keys to use in judging the quality of twilight for both clear and cloudy conditions.

In spite of a broken tiller and a badly damaged steering vane, the ensuing sail became a "jolly romp" on the ocean. Life on board was a blending of rhythms paced by the rolling motion of downwind sailing. Light air and gales passed over us with predictable regularity and

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routines of cooking, eating, sleeping, watch keeping and sail handling patterned our daily lives. We felt sorry for all the people on Earth who would never know the sheer joy of a small-boat ocean crossing.

Tuna were easy to catch during the first half of the voyage and provided a welcome addition to our rations. We ate it fried, baked and in chowder, salad, casserole and pizza. Invariably, if chowder was leftover from our evening meal, Nick would ask for it for breakfast next morning. We canned 16 pints of tuna and, taking Ron Ware's suggestion, tried drying some. However, before we ate any quantity of dried strips, Bob threw all of them overboard. Nothing was said but I suspect the reason was that he did not want to eat raw fish that glowed in the dark.

We came to call the Pacific run "the apple pie leg" — not necessarily because of the smooth going, however. We were well stocked with Granny Smith apples and pie was the favorite dessert. A piece of plastic pipe rolled the dough for 18 pies — 12 apple and six "pumpkin" made from butternut squash. Two nights out of three we enjoyed our All-American dessert. Ironically, crashing seas ruled out pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving. Apple seemed the sensible choice as we rolled wildly downwind. Under the circumstances, we were lucky to have had that to top off scotch broth and boiled potatoes. But the meager meal contrasted sharply with my family's traditional feast and I couldn't help wondering how things were going at home.

Two days earlier we had made the decision to work our way toward the latitude needed to clear Cape Horn. The necessity of running before gales during the preceding week had set the stage. We could not risk getting close to the lee shore of South America where we might not be able to stand up to the heavy seas to starboard.

On November 30 I wrote ". . . all night we had gales behind us in building seas that sent us surfing and careening into troughs. The banging and swaying inside the cabin was horrendous. Even though nights are getting pretty short, last night seemed long because of overcast skies and, at times, a driving rain. It cleared just before daybreak but not quite in time for the meridian transits of Canopus and tau Puppis — stars we want to see for latitude."

We were not overly concerned about our latitude but wanted to keep tabs on it via stars to back up our "twilight method" for getting through Drake Passage. Our hunch was that we were not as far south as our DR latitude indicated. Two nights later we got a good look at the sky and obtained verification not of our DR latitude but our hunch!

### Surmounting Cape Horn

On Pearl Harbor Day the thought occurred that we were in the Pacific, albeit a different part, where many of the great battles of World War II had been fought. I reflected on it and the changes in the world since that time — Russian and American penetration of space, Japanese penetration of world markets including our own, the emergence of Third World countries, the development of antibiotics, the advance of electronics for use in calculators, computers and countless other devices we now take for granted. A playful albatross circled and landed in the airstream of our genoa only to repeat it time and time again as we pulled away from its landing site. For a brief moment we shared the joy of living together in harmony and I wondered whether nations would ever live in harmony.

Our long slant to the southeast ended just after midnight on December 9. We confirmed our DR latitude of 56°13'S with a look at Canopus and decided we were far enough south to clear the Horn (55°59'S). Horn fever was running high and it helped somewhat to know we were headed east — directly toward it. At the time of our decision, we learned when we got home, the ARGOS system placed us at 56°06'S — just seven minutes (miles) north of our DR position. And after covering 3,874 miles from New Zealand our DR longitude, reckoned only by our estimates of speed and direction, was off by only 3°18', 110 miles at that latitude — a one-day sail and less than a three-percent error.

A cold rainsquall drove us into green water on December 12. Land couldn't be far away. The next day in heavy mist, Nick caught a glimpse of what he thought was a naval vessel. A short time later a north wind chilled the cabin so that we could see our breath. Cold air from that direction could only have come from mountainous land. During the day, the water color changed from green to blue to green. We knew we were in Drake Passage and thought we might have passed Cape Horn.

Next day Bob spotted a noise-making, orange-billed bird different from any we had seen. The sea changed from dark green to light green and back to dark green. Next morning we sighted a group of rocky islands against a rocky backdrop. The islands were dead ahead. We shifted to a windward rig and left them to port as we passed by on the starboard tack. We were relieved to clear but were puzzled by what we had seen. Our charts



Before departing New Zealand, a local fisherman stops by and donates a bucket of fresh scallops to *Globe Star's* cause.

lacked the detail required for positive identification. Our best guess was that we had seen either the Islas Diego Ramirez or the eastern end of Staten Island. In truth we had seen neither. Positions furnished by the ARGOS system at the end of the voyage show that the rocks were those of the Islas Iledefonso about 50 miles west of Cape Horn and that we passed within 30 miles of the famed landmark during the early morning hours of the following day, December 16.

The remnants of the rocks were barely out of sight when the wind cranked to a steady 40 knots with sustained bursts to 50 and 60 knots. Because of the low temperature and flying water, we crawled into our Helly-Hansen survival suits. That night we went to a two-man watch system in order to keep a better lookout in the twilight of 56°S — the twilight we were counting on for judging the latitude. Because changing clothes took so much time with our two hours on and one off schedule we wore our "space suits" 24 hours a day, which made sleeping uncomfortable. I wound up with a crick in the neck. The insulated suits with boots attached did a good job of keeping us dry although one comb smashed me in the face with hydraulic force and drove water past the neck gasket and down to my nether regions. Nothing short of a pressurized diving suit would have kept that kind of water out.

During the two-day blow we flew straight downwind slightly north of east. We wondered if we would be able to work our way northward far enough to clear Shag Rocks. And then the shrieking wind began to subside.

We could hear each other without shouting. I asked Bob what he thought about spending Christmas — eight days away — in the Falklands. He was overjoyed at the thought. Nick woke up smiling from what he had heard so we turned hard to port to see if we could find the windswept islands.

There was some risk involved. Gales could be "hazardous to our health" as we approached, especially if we ran into bad visibility. It seemed worth the try. We had seen enough of South America's southern tip to make sure we had rounded the Horn and were, by this time, well clear of any danger there. If we were going to fetch the Falklands, we would have to sail the 200 odd miles north before gales from the west drove us irretrievably downwind. We endured a day of calms, got buzzed by the RAF, and strained for clues beyond the dark green water that suggested nearness to the island group we were trying to find.

Thousands of diving petrels crossing our bow got our attention, but the clincher was a long row of cumulus clouds that formed in some very dry, cold air an hour or so after it had passed over us moving toward the northeast. We changed to a poled-out, double-head rig and within three hours had the mountains along the south coast of West Falkland Island in view. We would, indeed, spend the holidays in the Falklands.

Marvin Creamer, 69, of Pitman, New Jersey, is a retired geography professor. His unprecedented no-instrument circumnavigation in *Globe Star* took 18 months to complete. Since returning from the voyage he has spent his time writing and giving lectures across the country.