

The glamorous

Rosie



Colin and Rosie Swale achieved their ambition to follow the clipper ship route from Sydney to England in their 9.14m catamaran with their two very small children in 1971-1973. On the way Rosie wrote two books, as well as a number of articles, which provided virtually their only resources.

The Swales' Cape Horn adventure raised several important questions at the time, and these continue to be relevant, and not merely in the sailing sphere.

The first is whether such a small and lightly built catamaran is likely to survive the conditions generally to be found deep in the Southern Ocean, especially in the hands of relatively inexperienced sailors. An ancillary question is whether in the 1970s, with radio available, if *Anneliese* had met with a serious accident it could have led to very expensive and even dangerous searches. This question remains relevant in one form or another.

It could be said that the Swales were lucky and the Smeeton's, for example, unlucky. But bad weather can happen to anyone at any time, whether experienced or not. If the catamaran had been capsized or pitched there, she would not have righted herself like the Smeeton's *Tzu Hang*, and the Swales' chances of survival would have been minimal.

Rosie suggested that their boat was safer in these conditions, since she could sail fast enough to keep ahead of the breaking tops of giant waves, but whether this is right or not, a huge risk surely remains.

The second question relates closely to the first, but is even more serious. Was it irresponsible to take two very young children on such a dangerous adventure?

Rosie claimed that the risk was no greater than in flying or crossing a busy road, but this is highly questionable. At least taking their yacht into the Southern Ocean and round Cape Horn, however dangerous, was for Colin and Rosie



The Swales' voyage on *Anneliese* took them through some of the most challenging waters in the world.

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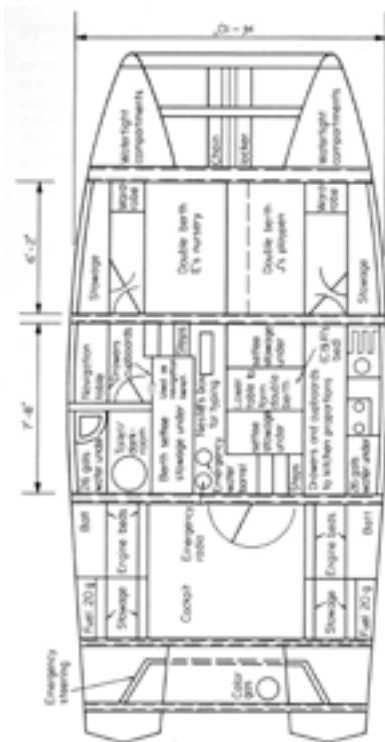
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their own informed decision. It was not for Eve and James, who were only three and two respectively when they set out. They had no way of knowing anything of what their parents were doing, and at their age had no choice but to go.

Of course Rosie and Colin arranged for the children to be as safe and comfortable as possible. Their bunks were turned into complete living spaces, and they soon learned to ensure that their lifelines were attached whenever they were brought into the cockpit. And they soon became adapted to life at sea and its effect on their digestive systems, and on that part of their physiology which dealt with seasickness.

All of these reactions lent weight to Rosie's argument that it was easier to take them across the world at their age than when they were much older. It still leaves out of calculation the dangers that the Southern Ocean – and no doubt any ocean – could bring to children who were unable to make an informed choice about going round Cape Horn.

Readers will have to answer these questions for themselves. But the fact they can be asked at all raises doubts about the whole enterprise. Colin and



Rosie were brave and determined. But is that enough?

Rosie's later life has been just as eventful as the first thirty years. For ten years after the Cape Horn venture

she spent most of her time looking after her children, but in 1983 she fulfilled a long held ambition by sailing the Atlantic alone in a 5.1m yacht, taking 70 days and almost running out of food and water.

Then she gave up sailing adventures, and took to her earlier love, running, and horseback feats. She ran 1600km across Iceland, and rode the length of Chile, using just two horses, as well as more long distance running feats in South Africa and Switzerland. She contested ultra marathons in the Alps, the Sahara Desert, Romania and elsewhere.

After Colin died of cancer in 2002, she decided to give her wholehearted support to the Nepal Trust, a Scottish organisation devoted to helping the people of Nepal. She has now trekked the length of Nepal with a party of Nepalese mountaineers, a feat she says was the most challenging in her life. And at fifty-nine she is still seeking adventure. ↓

Tailpiece: If you have any memories of the Swales' visit to Sydney (or photographs), please share them with our readers.

Next month: The Visit of the Beagle.

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