

'A wonderful true tale of adventure.'

SIR RANULPH FIENNES

ADDICTED TO ADVENTURE

BETWEEN ROCKS AND COLD PLACES



BOB SHEPTON

BLOOMSBURY

**ADDICTED TO
ADVENTURE**

You are going to enjoy this: a life of adventure – surviving the war years on the far side of the world, sailing, climbing, ski mountaineering, in many different parts of the world. It is inspiring that a Reverend should stick his neck out in this way – battling Atlantic storms, losing a mast in Antarctica, sailing continually in the Arctic, making the first ascents of mountains, skiing across remote regions, climbing with world class climbers, and sailing through the North West Passage. As a Commando, Bob is clearly made of the right stuff!

BEAR GRYLLE

ADDICTED TO ADVENTURE

BETWEEN ROCKS AND COLD PLACES

BOB SHEPTON



ADLARD COLES NAUTICAL

B L O O M S B U R Y

LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

*For our youngest daughter Rachel, who has faced real challenges in life
and is winning*

Published by Adlard Coles Nautical
an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP
www.adlardcoles.com

Bloomsbury is a trademark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Copyright © Bob Shepton 2014
Maps © John Plumer

First published by Adlard Coles Nautical in 2014

ISBN 978-1-4729-0586-4
ePDF 978-1-4729-0588-8
ePub 978-1-4729-0589-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage and retrieval systems – without the prior permission in writing of the publishers.

The right of the author to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Note: while all reasonable care has been taken in the publication of this book, the publisher takes no responsibility for the use of the methods or products described in the book.

Quote on page 95 originally used in *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* by W. H. Murray, published by The Orion Publishing Group. All attempts at tracing the copyright holder of this publication were unsuccessful. Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holders of the other quotes used in this book. For any queries relating to copyright in this content, please contact us.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Foreword by Sir Ranulph Fiennes	vii
Foreword by Sir Chris Bonington	ix
Maps	x
Prologue: Fire down below!	xv
Timeline	xviii
Chronology of voyages	xix
01 ORIGINS	1
An interesting life?	1
Challenge is the name of the game	14
02 MIDDLE EARTH	23
Azores or bust	24
Azores – last visit	30
03 ATLANTIC VARIANTS	43
‘The First School Across the Atlantic, and Back’	44
In the wake of the Vikings	50
04 DEEP SOUTH; FAR NORTH	65
Antarctica and broke	66
Angels to the rescue	83

05	MOUNTAINS AND MEN (AND WOMEN)	95
	The Arctic, like Tilman? Why not?	96
	Arctic again and the Tilman Traverse	105
06	VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE	122
	Mutiny on the <i>Palandra</i>	122
	A Pacific venture	131
	<i>Billy Budd</i>	140
07	ARCTIC ANTICS	151
	Paradise regained – or at least revisited	151
	The <i>Impossible Wall</i>	164
08	A GRAND FINALE	180
	The Northwest Passage	180
	Glossary	199
	Acknowledgements	203
	Photo Section	205

FOREWORD

BY SIR RANULPH FIENNES

This is the uniquely interesting and colourful life of an Anglican clergyman turned adventurer. It all started way back in pursuit of his ministry as part of the pastoral outreach and care with young people, especially when he was chaplain at two specialist schools. Bob never retired and his adventures covered the world.

So were they just the ordinary type of adventurous trip here and there? No not really, when you consider they encompass sailing to the Azores as a first ocean passage with school boys – not necessarily too taxing, although all navigation was done by sextant in those days – and then to Antarctica (losing the mast in the process), round Cape Horn, to the Arctic (including losing a boat to fire when wintering alone in the ice), to Alaska, and crossing the Atlantic fourteen times (so far) and never by the easy route, Canaries to the Caribbean. And finally there is the Northwest Passage in a comparatively small fibreglass boat.

So is it all sailing? By no means! There were those undiscovered and unclimbed cliffs and new rock routes in the 1960s and 1970s at Lulworth and Portland, which he set about developing with members of his church youth group – rumour has it that sometimes he had his climbing gear on ready under his clergy robes. Then new routes on the Ormes at Llandudno with boys from St David's College where he was chaplain, not without some amusing near disasters. And the first ascents of mountains and new rock climbs in Arctic Greenland and



Canada from the boat (sometimes literally stepping off the boat to start the climb), including climbing a new extreme route with ‘world-class climbers’ in Greenland in 2010 when ‘of a certain age’, for which expedition the whole group were each awarded a Piolet d’Or, perhaps the most prestigious award in the mountaineering world.

And skiing and ski mountaineering? Lots of that too, including ski instructing in Scotland and on the Continent, which included teaching British army groups in Bavaria for several years, downhill and touring, to earn money for the next expedition, sometimes living in extreme conditions to avoid the huge fees for accommodation in Switzerland for instance. Ski mountaineering in the Arctic yielded more first ascents of mountains, and included a repeat of the north-south traverse across Bylot Island in Arctic Canada by that well-known, enigmatic mountaineer and sailor of yesteryear, Bill Tilman.

Parachuting? Yes, but only to take boys from Kingham Hill School when he was chaplain there – ‘probably the most scary thing I have done, but then I did start rather late in life for that sort of thing’. The formative years of his youth, especially his service with the Royal Marines, coupled with a resolute Christian life fitted him well for leadership and daring. This is a wonderful true tale of adventure with a wide variety of people of all ages, in different parts of the world and over many years. A long, full and varied life, stretching from the days of the British Empire to the present day. A truly interesting book which I definitely recommend.

FOREWORD

BY SIR CHRIS BONINGTON

Bob has climbed for most of his long life. Originally trained as a Cliff Leader in the Royal Marines, he was responsible for discovering and developing the limestone cliffs of Lulworth and Portland and bringing them to the attention of climbers. He made a number of first ascents of climbs on the Great and Little Ormes at Llandudno, with schoolboys, again in the early days of development.

In recent years he has led several private expeditions sailing to and climbing in Greenland and Arctic Canada, and his expeditions there have made over sixty first ascents of mountains and rock faces, not all of them technically hard, but a number also in the Extreme category, and all previously unclimbed. The members of his 'Greenland Big Wall Climbing Expedition' were awarded the Piolet d'Or in 2011, including Bob, and he has been called 'the modern Tilman'. All this as well as being, and often in conjunction with being, a Reverend.

It's an interesting and varied life; I commend it to you.



Falkland Islands
(U.K.)

Mar
Argentina

ARGENTINA

Rio Gallegos

Isla Grande
de

Tierra del Fuego

Rio Grande

Ushuaia

Cape Horn

Islas de los Estados

55°

50°

A T L A N T I C
O C E A N

Beauchene
Island

SOUTH
AMERICA

Antarctic
Peninsula

ANTARCTICA

P a s s a g e

Drake

Scotia Sea

Weddell Sea

PACIFIC
OCEAN



200 nm



ARCTIC OCEAN

Axel
Heiberg
Island

Ellesmere Island

Lincoln
Sea

Nares Strait

Littleton I.
Kap Alexander

Etah

Grise
Fjord

Northumberland I.
Herbert I.

Qaanaaq

Bethune
Inlet

Baffin
Bay

Devil's
Thumb

Kullorsuaq

Clyde River

Upernavik

Asiaat

Sismiut

Kangerdluarssuaq

Nuuk

Paamiut

Qaqortoq

Nanortalik

Prins Christiansund

Cape Farewell

Labrador
Sea

Greenland
Sea

GREENLAND

Denmark Strait

ICELAND

Arctic Circle

500nm

ATLANTIC OCEAN



ALASKA
(U.S.A.)

R U S S I A

Chukchi
Sea

Wrangel I.

Nome

Point
Hope

Point Barrow

Mackenzie
Bay

Beaufort
Sea

Tuktoyaktuk

Bank
Island

Victoria
Island

Cambridge
Bay

Victoria
Strait

King William I.

Bothnia
Peninsula

Bellot Strait

Prince of
Wales I.

Resolute
Bay

Cornwallis I.

Beechey I.

Devon I.

Dundas
Harbour

Ellesmere
Island

Somerset I.

Tay Bay

Navy Board
Inlet

Pond Inlet

Bylot I.

Sortehul
Fjord

GREENLAND

Davis Strait

Upernavik

Aasiaat

Labrador
Sea

Irkens
Havn

Nuuk

Fiskenaesset

Paamiut

Cape Desolation

Nanortalik

Cape Farewell

Greenland
Sea

Norwegian
Sea

Arctic Circle

ICELAND

ATLANTIC
OCEAN

Barcaldine

N O R W A Y

North
Pole

500nm

This page intentionally left blank

PROLOGUE

FIRE DOWN BELOW!

By Red Flower Bagheera meant fire, only no creature in the jungle will call fire by its proper name. Every beast lives in deadly fear of it...

THE JUNGLE BOOK, RUDYARD KIPLING

It was during the winter of 2004/5 while alone, ice-bound in Greenland, that I made the simple mistake that destroyed my 33-foot Westerly sailing yacht *Dodo's Delight* and might well have cost me my life.

But sailing up a fjord in Greenland one month and skiing down the same fjord on the winter ice a month later had already been such an enjoyable, novel and intriguing experience.

The autumn had been brutal. A gale drove me out of my first anchorage. I had to haul in 40 metres of chain, hand over hand, as *Dodo* was blown fast across the fjord towards the rocky shore. My next anchorage, in a cove within a cove, was certainly better protected from southerly gales, but by a curious freak of tidal currents, when the winds were constantly in the north, ice floes would sneak around the corner from the nearby Upernavik Isfjord. A massive, borrowed warp I stretched across the entrance worked to keep fresh floes out, but it also entrapped the ice already inside the cove. When gales broke up the still-forming winter pack ice, huge sheets of it, scraped along *Dodo's* sides. The noise was alarming, but at least at that early stage the ice was still soft and thin and did no real harm.



Eventually, once we were properly iced in, life became so much better. We were secure, protected by the ice sheet (pack ice); growlers and bergy bits or wind-driven floes could no longer reach us. The weather improved and my quality of life improved with it. Now I was able to get out on the ice and walk around, and I could ski over to the nearby settlement at Upernavik for fuel and stores.

Bringing fresh water aboard was much easier too, although it did remain a challenge. Simply getting from the tidal ice to the fast ice (sea ice 'locked' to the land) could be tricky and once, picking my way back to the boat, I stepped on to what I hoped was a solid shard between the fast and the tidal ice only for it to capsize and plunge me into freezing water. It was a struggle to lever myself out, but I managed it, shivering with cold, and was relieved to get back aboard to defrost and change my sodden clothes.

On land, snow shoes were essential footwear when dragging my sled with the water containers to and from the small fresh-water pool I had found, where a stream came down to near the water's edge. Knowing how radically the landscape would change as winter progressed and the heavy snows set in, I had thrust a ski into the ground to mark my precious water supply.

Even at first, in early winter, drawing water involved a good deal of digging, cutting out the snow in blocks in order to reach down and break the thin layer of ice covering the pool. After filling my containers I would stack all the cut blocks back in place then plug every crack with loose snow to stop the pool from freezing solid. Snow is a good insulator; on the boat, for example, I had deliberately let earlier falls pile up on the decks.

Skiing across the fjords one day I passed my first anchorage. I could see folds and fissures in the ice where *Dodo* had been; it was perhaps as well that I had been driven out by the gale.

The Arctic winter's constant darkness had begun to ease a little, although by the time I returned to the boat daylight was fading. After a cup of coffee and a bite to eat I took the portable generator up to the



cockpit to charge the batteries. ‘Must fill the diesel heater’, I thought. I took the fuel container and a funnel along the deck, opened up the hole I had made in the deckhead, inserted the funnel and started to pour the diesel – it was a routine job that I had been doing for months.

Almost instantly red flames erupted from below. I had forgotten to put the other funnel under the deckhead. Instead of filling the header tank, diesel was spilling on to the stove’s naked flame. The speed of it all was terrifying. I rushed to the main hatch, pushed it open and started down to fight the blaze. One breath and I knew instinctively that it would be fatal. The smoke and fumes were already too noxious.

After that it all became ridiculous. In a frantic attempt to extinguish the inferno I began scraping snow into a bucket and throwing it on the flames. It was pointless: snow contains comparatively little water, yet I fought on when I should have been throwing flammable gear such as gas cylinders off the boat. Had I not been so fixated on dousing the fire I could have saved more. Eventually, driven off the boat, I could do nothing but stand and watch while the conflagration consumed *Dodo* and all my possessions.

Alerted by someone who had seen the plume of black smoke from the airport on the hill above Upernavik, the local ‘fire service’ arrived on skidoos, but by then it was far too late to fight the blaze and their chief concern was to get me away from danger. I was put on the back of a skidoo and taken to Upernavik. Next day, all that was visible of my boat was a third of her mast sticking up out of the ice and, strewn around, a few forlorn fenders and gas bottles. Maybe I could have ducked under the smoke, perhaps wrapped a towel around my head. Maybe. Maybe I would have choked to death. I will never know.

Now, I had only the clothes I was standing up in – no money, no credit cards, no passport. The authorities came to my rescue. The police wrote a letter in Danish and English explaining the loss of my passport, and my wife Kate transferred funds to pay my airfare home from Greenland.

Would this be the end to adventuring? Well, we had best go right back to how it all began...



TIMELINE

1935	Born Batu Gajah, Malaya
1941	Sent to Australia with my sister Rosamond
1943	Back to Great Britain, mother, sister and myself. Pacific, Atlantic, U boats
1948	Bradfield College, Berkshire
1953–1955	Royal Marines, 45 and 42 Commando RM, Cliff Leader Course
1955–1958	Jesus College, Cambridge
1958–1959	Mayflower Family Centre, Canning Town, London
1959–1961	Oak Hill Theological College, Southgate, London
1961–1963	Curate, St John's Church, Weymouth
1963–1966	Boys' Club Leader, Cambridge University Mission, Bermondsey, London
1966–1969	Warden, Oxford Kilburn Club, Kilburn, London
1969–1977	Chaplain and Outdoor Pursuits Master, St David's College, Llandudno
1977–1980	Chief Instructor, Carnoch Outdoor Centre, Glencoe
1980–1992	Chaplain, Kingham Hill School, Kingham
1992	Retired

CHRONOLOGY OF VOYAGES

- 1984 Falmouth – Ponta Delgada – Horta and back (Azores or bust, page 24)
- 1986 Portland UK – Portland USA (Maine) ('The First School Across the Atlantic, and Back', page 44)
- 1988 UK – Faroes – Iceland – Greenland – Newfoundland – Atlantic return (In the wake of the Vikings, page 50)
- 1993–1995 Round the World, including Falklands – Antarctica – Falklands – Antarctic – Cape Horn – Easter Island (Antarctica and broke, page 66)
- 1998 Scotland – Nuuk – Akuliarusinguaq – Scotland (Challenge is the name of the game, page 14)
- 2000 Scotland – *Sandersons Hope*, Upernavik – Aasiaat (The Arctic, like Tilman? Why not? page 96)
- 2001 Aasiaat – Akuliarusinguaq – Bylot Island – Atlantic (Arctic again and the Tilman Traverse, page 105)
- 2002 Cape Canaveral – New York – Halifax – St John's – Atlantic ('Mutiny' on the *Palandra*, page 122)
- 2004 Scotland – Akuliarusinguaq – Qaanaq – Siorapaluk – Smith Sound – Herbert Island – Upernavik (Angels to the rescue, page 83)
- 2004/5 Wintering near Upernavik (Prologue: Fire down below! page xv)
- 2006 Golfito – Hawaii – Alaska (A Pacific venture, page 131), Aasiaat – Disko Island – Devil's Thumb – Devon Island – Pond Inlet (*Billy Budd*, page 140)



- 2008 Scotland – Horta – Ponta Delgado – Scotland (Azores – last visit, page 30)
 Delivery Flensburg – Antwerp – Curaçao – Panama – Peru
- 2009 Scotland – Paamiut – Akuliarusinguaq – Northumberland Island – Smith Sound – Aasiaat (Paradise regained, or at least revisited, page 151)
 Delivery UK – Las Palmas
- 2010 Aasiaat – Sortehul, Upernavik – Cape Farewell area – Prinz Christian Sund – Atlantic (*Impossible Wall*, Greenland: World-class climbers, page 164)
- 2012 Scotland – Paamiut – Upernavik – Pond Inlet – Resolute – Cambridge Bay – Tuktoyaktuk – Point Barrow – Bering Strait – Nome (The Northwest Passage, page 180)

01

ORIGINS

*We ourselves feel that what we are doing is a drop in the ocean.
But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.*

MOTHER TERESA

AN INTERESTING LIFE?

I was born in 1935 in Batu Gajah, Malaya – now Malaysia, although then a British colony – where my father managed a rubber plantation some twenty miles from Kuantan on the east coast. Memories of my early childhood remain vivid to this day: sitting on my father's shoulders one evening, surveying the perimeter of the estate; 'coolies' rushing from the factory shed to stop me from poking a stick at a cobra coiled on the road; diagonal grooves cut in the rubber trees, dripping latex sap into a cup set low on their trunks. And I have flashbacks of our house, inside and out, and of my dear Amah, a sort of Chinese nanny, who looked after me.



I was only six when, together with my twelve-year-old sister Rosamond, I was sent by plane to stay with cousins in Australia, as our education was not going well in Malaya. It was 1941, and in those days of piston-engine aircraft it took us three days to fly from Singapore to Adelaide. There were stops in Indonesia and then Darwin, where we overslept and nearly missed the connection because no one thought to wake us. My father was not best pleased when he discovered that the Prince and Princess of Siam (now Thailand) had been boarded at the last minute, which meant that I had to sit on Rosamond's knee throughout the long flight; nor, as she told me recently, was my sister.

Later, my mother came to Australia, intending to return with us to Malaya. While she was there, however, the Japanese invaded Malaya. To everyone's surprise the invasion had started in the far north of the country, avoiding the guns of Singapore pointing south out to sea. In their lightning sweep down the Malay Peninsular the Japanese had chanced upon my father who had returned, loyally, from Kuantan to pay his workers. He and the Forestry Commission officer were sitting outside the small factory when the Japanese encountered them, and having no use for prisoners the invaders marched the men into the trees, shot them, and moved on.

My father was believed dead and the Japanese were in control of Malaya but my mother, sister and I had already moved from Adelaide to Perth. We had crossed the country by train and I remember buying boomerangs from a group of Aborigines along the way, although I never learned to throw them properly. In Perth, a family took pity on us and invited us to stay at their farm up country. There I shared a room with the four sons of the house and they, tough nuts all, taught me how to aim and fire a rifle, and also how not to aim, as I tried at first with the gun on my nose.

My mother was desperate to get us all back to England, yet with little money and very few other resources it seemed we might be stranded in Australia. In the end we returned to Adelaide in 1942, boarded a cargo vessel, and sailed via the Panama Canal and so up to

New York where we joined a convoy to cross the Atlantic. During the passage two of the convoy's ships were sunk by U-boats. This must have put the remaining ships' passengers on edge but, oblivious to the fears of others, myself and another boy used to march around the decks imitating the wail that the siren sounded to warn of attack. I also recall eating as much butter as possible; we knew that there was rationing in Britain long before we made landfall in Bristol in early 1943.

Back in England we stayed with aunts (my mother's sisters). Money remained very tight until my mother was able to sell an orchard, which my father had bought in Essex before the war, and buy a small house in Chislehurst, south of London. There, when the doodlebugs (V1 rockets) came over, we used to shelter in the cupboard under the stairs. We would hear their engine noise, then came that ominous silence, and then the explosion. I am not sure whether the later V2 rockets were better or worse: there was no engine noise so you only knew one had arrived when you heard the detonation.

Prep school and beyond

I was sent as a boarder to Carn Brae, a prep school in Bromley where every morning we formed a queue, stated whether or not our bowels had opened, and were then given a spoonful of malt. After Carn Brae, aged thirteen, I went to Bradfield College near Reading; I had won a classics exhibition and this helped a little towards the fees. Bradfield was typical of most public schools of the era. Fagging and caning, which we considered perfectly acceptable but both of which are generally frowned upon today, were part of school life. The headmaster had been highly decorated in the First World War and partly because of that an unspoken, subconscious ethos of toughness and challenge underpinned life at Bradfield.

The day started with a cold shower (when I was a prefect I would try and stay in longer than anyone else as an example), and there was cross-country running and boxing, for which I was in the team. I became deputy head boy and captain of football. I loved it all.



After school came National Service in the Royal Marines from 1953–1955. The commando course took place on bleak Dartmoor and then it was out to Egypt, guarding the Canal zone. Next we were off to Malta on a destroyer with our commanding officer, Colonel Tailyour, who later became Commandant General, Royal Marines. He had us raid a deserted North African fishing village, manned for the exercise by a Guards battalion. The Navy landed us short of the beach, as usual, so we had to wade ashore, carrying our rifles high. A machine gun opened up, but in a raid speed is of the essence so we ignored it and ran swiftly on into the village. We crossed a beach ‘under fire’, moved quickly down the mole and ‘blew up’ the lighthouse at the far end. On the way back we ignored a signpost which looked as if it had been turned around, an old trick, and met up with the returning landing craft.

Towards the end of my time in Malta we were offered the choice between taking a parachute course or a cliff leader’s course when we returned to the UK. I chose rock climbing and was trained in Cornwall and North Wales by the Royal Marines, first in Tricouni nailed boots to learn good climbing technique, and then in boots with grippy, Vibram rubber soles. No protecting running belays, just long run-outs of the climbing rope: those were the days, and I have never looked back. Climbing had become my hobby and a challenge, for life.

In the 1950s, officers in the Royal Marines (it was different in the army) could only sign on for either two or twenty-two years. During my schooldays at Bradfield I had become a committed Christian, and the feeling that I was probably ‘meant’ to be ordained was the main reason behind me not signing on for life in the Royal Marines.

After National Service I went to Cambridge. I read history and then archaeology and anthropology, I played football for Jesus College and was an active member of the college and university Christian Unions. Immediately before I began my final year I became certain of my vocation: I received what I felt was a definite call to be ordained as a ‘pastor and teacher’ within the Church of England when a passage I