



I used a 200-year-old octant during the Talisker Bounty Voyage. Future ship's masters may not need to know how to use one.

# A LOST ART

Don reveals that there is a plan to removing compulsory sextant training for commercial Ship's Masters — what would Bligh think

In 1591, five ships and 277 men under the command of their captain-general Magellan set off into the unknown on a grand adventure to seek what had never before been imagined. Three years later, the survivors, just one ship and 19 sailors struggled home to become the first ever to sail around the world. This was in a time of virtually no charts, sextants, nor chronometers. Longitude was a treasure, mostly unattainable. Risks were high and ships were lost.

Today GPS is a cool thing, right? And if you're ocean voyaging you

will have your sextant ready in case the satellites are "turned off", won't you?

The captains of commercial ships all know how to celestially determine a position using a sextant and tables. It is part of their compulsory training, as a precaution to the GPS failing for any reason.

Well it used to be compulsory, but not anymore. The plan is to pull this requirement from Ship's Master training in two years' time!

## ASTRAL STEERING

In 1973, when I graduated as a celestial navigator, we were NOT even allowed to use sight reduction tables — that was too easy — instead, we had to solve spherical triangles to determine our position, using logarithms.

When I received my AYF Yachtmaster Ocean Certificate in 1983, I used a calculator to assist my sextant sights tabulations; in the 1990 BOC Challenge solo around-the-world race, I used an

## [WOW! THANKS]

During the past 30 years of my life and adventures, Margie and the water have both been a constant. So too, has the Australian Geographic Society, established by Dick and Pip Smith 25 years ago.

My 1993 expedition to Antarctica with 200 teddy bears got me a silver medal for a Spirit of Adventure award. In 1996, we both received the gold Adventurers of the Year medal, for our year spent together alone, in a box in Antarctica. We then did some crazy things with our ship *Sir Hubert Wilkins*, raced rally cars, made a world-first solo gyrocopter flight around Australia, retraced William Bligh's epic open boat voyage following the Mutiny on the Bounty, are currently treasure hunting and will soon retrace Capt Charles Sturt's voyage down the River Murray.

Last week, I was shocked and humbled to be presented with the gold medal for the Lifetime of Adventure award at a huge gala dinner in Sydney (at 57, I am NOT retiring by the way!). It was inscribed for *A life spent encouraging Adventure and Discovery!*

I could not have done that without "Ted" (Margie), nor all the sponsors and friends over the years, who have helped, been part of or dropped everything to make things happen. Thanks. This is your gong too.

People still ask me, "Why?" Because it is fun! We all know the modern world can sometimes be a confusing place, so if you want to attempt working it out, just dream a little, then get out there and try something with an unknown outcome (my definition of adventure). It will not give you the magic answer, but it will be special and may just help.



My adventure partner and fellow adventurer in her own right for 30 years, Margie plays around, while preparing the Talisker Bounty Boat in 2009. Just another pirate!



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across a 16th century definition of "adventurer", it is: A shareholder in Commercial, Privateering or Pirate expedition. Mmm? That sounds like my new immigration card description for my 'Usual occupation'.

Our path to the lost maritime history of Tonga is taking many twists and turns. Much of it is recorded as oral-history only, so we are encouraging locals to start writing. The many meetings are proving fruitful, adding to the research data we have accumulated over the past few years.

Eua Island, just off the coast from the main Island of Tongatapu, is rich in stories. A passing comment from one of our local friends turned up an amazing yarn that's about to be lost!

Hundreds of years ago, when the locals overran a ship and killed the crew, ate some, then collected the iron etc., they just referred to it as "killing ship", and there were many. Cannons were taken and some have since been lost.

A chap remembered that there used to be one on the wall of the harbour, but sometime in the early '70s it was washed off in a cyclone. I asked what happened to it? "It was heavy and it was just a cannon, so no one cared about it." No one wanted it!

After showing some pictures in books to the chap, it appears that it may be a 17th century Spanish bronze cannon, 2.5m long. We reckon it is probably in about 2m of water and should be within about 6m of the wharf! We have another job to do.

**AN IDEA!**

If you are looking for something to do in your life, on the ocean, or are having trouble dreaming, you



My crazy mate and friend Tom McNally is in "the book" — twice across the Atlantic in a boat less than 5ft long!

need to get hold of this book, titled *A Speck on the Sea: Epic Voyages in the Most Improbable Vessels*, by William H. Longyard.

It is so powerful they had to state the following on the first page: "NOTE: neither the author nor the publisher encourages any unsafe form of sailing, rowing or voyaging. It is recommended that all boaters comply with US Coast Guard regulations and

recommendations concerning boat handling, safety and cruising."

This book is like an index of all the crazy adventurers and amazing boats, canoes, yachts and bathtubs that have done some epic feats, most with very little or no money. It makes you want to get out there and do something. And even if you don't, you will be amazed and maybe even inspired by what has gone before. I dare you! 🚩



Above: The team aboard ICE... there is another cannon down there somewhere! (For more, go to [www.bluetreasure.me](http://www.bluetreasure.me)). Left: Amit is inspired by an adventurer's must-read book, while Kylie smashed her board and gashed her body on a big wave.

early-model military GPS. Now people are starting to use iPads! Hmm... What's next?

They may just stop making sextants someday soon (?), but it is still very sad, when a yacht and experienced crew sail straight into the side of a well charted island in Tonga, on a dark night, with the loss of two lives. It could happen to any of us, especially if we just push buttons.

**BLUE TREASURE**

I am up to my eyeballs at the moment in Spanish galleons, pirates, privateers, castaways and beachcombers. I stumbled