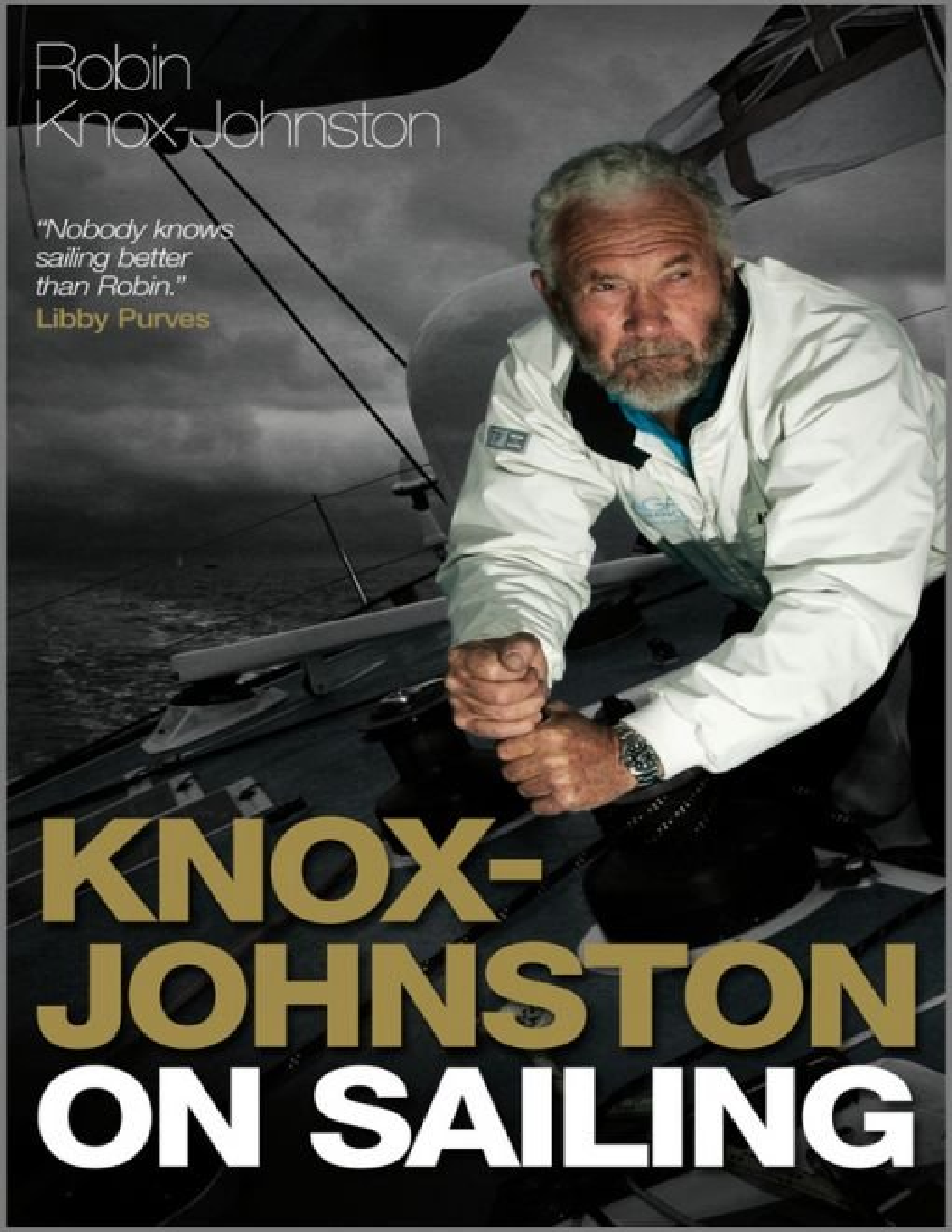
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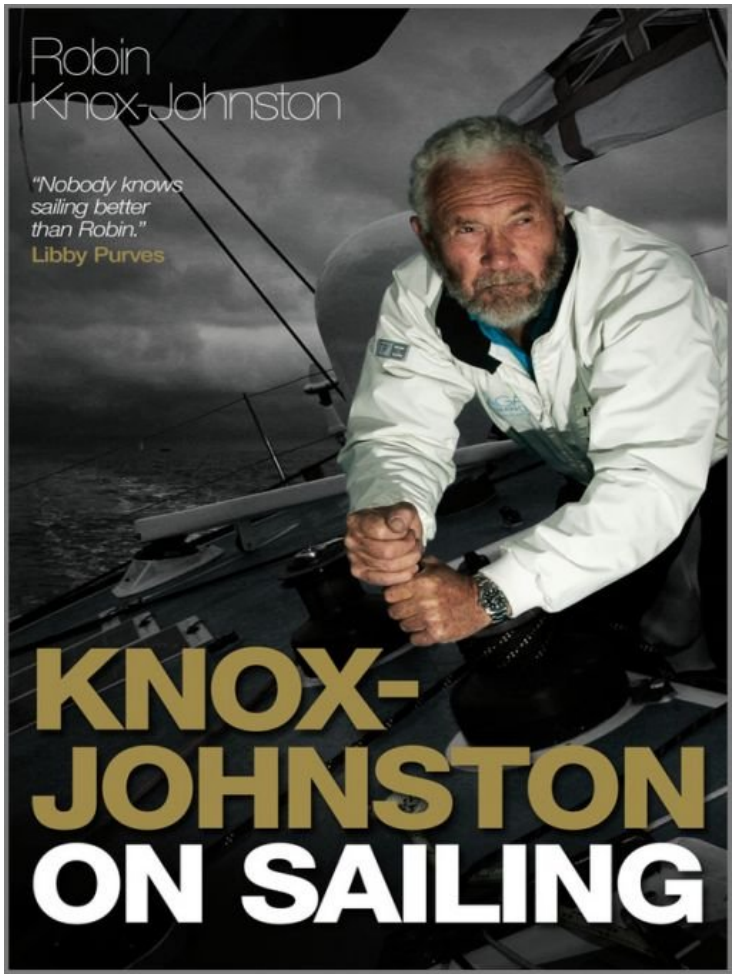
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FOREWORD

Although, in theory, a magazine editor has a free hand over the content of their magazine, in practice major changes to the editorial mix are very difficult, though not impossible, to implement. In practice the only time the editor is free to perform major surgery is when they first take over. Such was my situation when I took over a faltering *Yachting World* in late 1992 and in I waded with a sharp axe. In fact so sharp was that axe that by the time I planned out my first issue as Editor there were only two out of several regular features left in the mix. One of those was Robin Knox-Johnston's regular column which continues today some 18 years later. In this Robin brings an uncommon dash of seamanship and common sense that keeps *Yachting World* bolted firmly to the floor as a foil to the hi-tech world of racing, the America's Cup and the latest technical wizardry.

Don't get me wrong. Robin, or Sir Robin as he is now, is far from being a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist. His knowledge and writing spans everything from current ideas to the traditional as is well illustrated by the fact that he still sails his decidedly low-tech gaff ketch *Suhaili* despite racing the ultra high-tech Open 60 *Grey Power* in the last Velux 5 Oceans round the world solo race. What his column recognises and promotes is that there are many aspects of sailing and seagoing that are every bit as relevant today as they would have been a century ago. The way we go to sea might change but the sea, and wind, remain the same.

What makes Robin so different from many other yachtsmen who have achieved great things is that having, in 1969, become the first person to sail solo, non-stop round the world, he continued to be very active in the sport with

other circumnavigations and notable passages to his credit all without self-aggrandisement. Not only that, he remains even today, Britain's best-known sailor and promoter of sailing in its broadest sense. Which is why, in 1992, that sharp axe passed over his column. And let's hope he stays on as a *Yachting World* columnist for many years to come.

Andrew Bray
June 2010

PREFACE

The world of yachting has changed massively since I set sail on *Suhaili*, my 32ft ketch, to sail around the world. That was in 1968 and the voyage took 312 days at an average speed of just over four knots. As I write, the current solo record stands at just 57 days. I have been lucky enough to be involved with this transformation from tortoise to hare, competing on giant multihulls, round the buoys in the Admiral's Cup and on Open 60 monohulls – though *Suhaili* has stayed with me throughout.

Technology has transformed sailing. Composite materials, weather routing, self-steering systems and satellites – which have given us instant communications, weather information and global positioning – have allowed yachtsmen to sail faster and faster and the records will continue to fall. There is, however, more to sailing than battling the oceans and the record books. The thrill of exploration, whether of Greenland's frozen shores or of a quiet local creek, is something that every sailor feels, and it continues to draw me to the sea and provide a wide range of subjects for my *Yachting World* column.

Over the past 18 years writing for *Yachting World* each month has been a huge pleasure, and one I still enjoy, although sometimes the deadlines have crept up on me! I have been given a free rein, allowing me to change my focus from the latest race or rescue to more general reflections on sailing and seamanship. This selection reflects that diversity. I hope there is something here for everyone to enjoy.

Robin Knox-Johnston

June 2010

PART ONE

Going Places

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

Every sailor thinks his own part of the world has the nastiest stretch of water. Robin thinks the Thames Estuary takes a lot of beating *. . .*

Have you noticed that wherever you sail in the world, with very few exceptions, the local yachtsmen will always tell you that they have the most dangerous sailing conditions anywhere on Earth?

My first introduction to this peculiarity came when sailing back from India a few decades ago. Before we left Bombay, we were warned about the dangers of the Indian Ocean. We miraculously survived the crossing to Muscat, to be told there that the coastline down to Aden was far more difficult. In Mombasa, the treacherous crossing of all these dangers was as nothing compared with the East African coast, and so on.

Wherever we arrived, people dismissed what we had been through, except, of course, the last day or two as we approached their area – where we had obviously been lucky.

We actually did believe them in East London when they told us about the Cape of Good Hope, but the Capetonians were much more in awe of the Skeleton Coast.

The people of Brest will tell you about the Chenal du Four, Australians about the Tasman, Hong Kong sailors about the China Sea.

Personally, I have always felt that the Thames Estuary takes some beating. An easterly gale on an ebb tide from

Sea Reach onwards creates conditions which no one in their right mind would wish to experience in a small yacht.

However, I assumed that this was just my own prejudice until French sailor, Titouan Lamazou, told me that he was concerned at the possibility of bringing his 140ft sloop, drawing 6.5m, to London in 1993. He, like many other Frenchmen, found the estuary alarming, not because of the wind and waves, but on account of the banks and tides.

I am sympathetic. The Thames is not easy and the unwary can swiftly find themselves aground some distance from their DR position – especially now the number of navigation marks has been reduced. Even in moderate visibility I consider the Thames to be the complete justification for investing in GPS.

TOGETHER ACROSS THE POND

Crossing the Atlantic is still a major achievement, no matter how many others have already done it. The Atlantic Rally for Cruisers is a good way for amateur sailors to cross in company.

If John of Gaunt's grandsons had been interchanged so that King Henry V of England had been Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal and vice versa, then it is just possible that England might have started exploring by sea earlier: any one of the Canary Islands, Madeira or the Azores might have been English, not Spanish or Portuguese.

Of course, we would not have had Agincourt, but as compensation there would have been a nice warm Atlantic island in the Northern Hemisphere, selling beer instead of wine. Whether this is a great loss is a moot point; a major attraction of the islands, in addition to the mild maritime climates, of course, is their Iberian charm.

Of the three, the Canary Islands might be said to have staked an early claim as the jumping off point for an Atlantic crossing, since Columbus sailed from Gomera, one of the group.

There was practical logic in this. The Azores are on the edge of the westerlies, usually in their grip during winter when they can reach storm force (I experienced 98 knots in December 1989 while moored in Praia da Vitoria), so a voyage west was likely to be against the wind in the winter and beset by calms in the summer.

In the days before proper salting of meat and no means of keeping water sweet, voyages were severely restricted to the length of time the available stores lasted.

Madeira is in the middle of the Horse Latitudes, between the westerlies and north-east trades, so lack of wind is more likely to be a problem for an Atlantic crossing from there. The Canary Islands are at the northern edge of the trade winds where a westerly passage can find variables in winter, but usually steady winds in summer.

This made the Canaries the perfect place of departure for the square-rigged vessels that dominated oceanic transport until just over 100 years ago. Latitude, and these following winds, provide another benefit from this route, sometimes called the southern route, which is an easy, warm voyage across to the West Indies – provided the hurricane season is avoided, of course.

Those factors are just as applicable today and make the Canary Islands an ideal starting point for the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers, now known as the ARC.

Ocean cruising can trace its roots back more than 140 years, but even as recently as 1960 a transatlantic voyage was rare and seen as something special. Since then, yachting has had a huge increase in popularity. Inevitably, as people have become more experienced and adventurous and have had more leisure time, they have wanted to explore further.

There are no figures for the number of yachts crossing the Atlantic, but it must be into the thousands each year. Not all skippers are highly experienced – indeed, some are making the voyage just in order to gain experience and this is where the ARC concept is so beneficial.

The sea is never going to be a safe place, but a number of yachts sailing together does provide some security. This is

the ultimate secret of the event, because it helps allay the fears of most amateur crews.

Radio allows the boats instant contact, so although they might not sight another entrant after the start, there is no need to feel alone. Each boat knows that another must be only a few hours away, to offer assistance in an emergency. There are advantages, too, in such groups sailing, as *Notices to Mariners* can be issued advising commercial vessels to be more watchful.

The ARC is the antithesis of such events as the America's Cup and the Whitbread Round the World Race since it is an event for the amateur. Although there is a mild competitive element, the prime reason for entering is, I suspect, the company. The number of entries indicates the popularity of the concept.

In 1986, when the first ARC was organised, a total of 204 yachts took part, still a record for a transoceanic race and a clear indication that it fulfilled a need. The lowest entry was 97 in 1993, but by 2009 they had more than 200.

SCOTLAND THE MAGNIFICENT

A safe anchorage surrounded by empty mountains is Robin's idea of satisfying cruising. He found it in the Arctic, but you don't have to go so far to find clear night skies, sparsely populated anchorages and the grandeur of a mountain backdrop.

Next to racing, I think the most satisfying aspect of sailing must come from approaching a new coastline. There are the heightened senses as you navigate into a previously unknown area and the anticipation of a fresh port or anchorage to explore.

If the area is uninhabited, so much the better, as it then provides those increasingly rare commodities – privacy and freedom from social constraints.

Moored in a safe anchorage, surrounded by clean, untouched and empty mountains or hills brings a contentment that is hard to equal. There are not many places left in Europe where this is possible, which is why the Arctic is so attractive.

A recent excuse to go to the north-west of Scotland showed me that it is not necessary to travel so far to find the same grandeur! True, there are more boats about and the chances of being sole occupant of a loch are less, but the coast has been heavily indented over the centuries and there is a wide choice of lochs.

Usually there is no need to anchor within miles of another yacht. The mountains are higher in Greenland, of course,

and glaciers are not to be found in Scotland, but the land has that greater ruggedness that comes from less weathering.

The head of a loch is likely to be inhabited by sheep on bright green grass rather than the barren gravel and occasional scrub at the head of a fjord, but this is only due to a few degrees' difference in temperature and the effect of time.

From the sailor's point of view, when searching for a good anchorage, the water close to the head of a loch is likely to shoal more gradually, not abruptly as is common further north. This has the drawback that the anchor will probably have to be laid further out, but there is less risk of dragging into deeper water or swinging into the steep edge of recently deposited silt, so often the case in Arctic fjords.

Anyone listening to the weather forecasts could be excused from gaining the impression that Scotland was the subject of continual high winds and constant heavy rainfall. Both occur, but generally less in summer when the Atlantic depressions track further north.

There is a benefit in being closer to the depression's paths, though, as the weather changes more quickly so that if it is unpleasant today, one can be confident that it will be better tomorrow. In most cases, if not tucked into one of the small coves that are to be found from careful examination of the charts, the worst of the bad weather can be avoided by shifting a few miles to a new lee as the wind changes.

It is said that in the British Isles we have weather, not a climate, but this is what gives us the wonderful variety and changes in colour and this is a particularly attractive feature of Scotland's west coast.

May is often a very good month in Scotland as the weather has improved and the midges have not yet

expanded their numbers to the point that they make Dracula seem like an amateur at drawing blood.

Head nets and shirts that cover all exposed flesh are advisable, but these won’t keep out all of them and an insect-repelling cream is an essential part of the yacht’s stores. Smoke will drive some away, coils are effective. Closing all the hatches works to a point, but the sight of midges collected round the hatch, yearning for access to your skin, can be unnerving.

The best measure is to anchor at least 200 metres from the nearest land if this is possible. Even there the odd marathon midge will reach you.

If this all sounds as if paradise has nettles – well, that’s no bad thing. The west coast of Scotland is one of the cruising yachtsman’s best-kept secrets and we don’t want it becoming overcrowded!