

media information



BOB BEGGS

AGAINST THE FLOE

The first east-west
voyage through the
North West Passage
and circumnavigation
of North America
under sail alone
and against the
currents

www.againstthefloe.co.uk

SINCE the earliest days of European maritime trade and navigation, adventurers have sought to find a short way to the Orient and the fabled wealth of its spices and gems.

In the 15th century, the Bristol venturers of England backed brave navigators in early, but unsuccessful searches for a mythical sea route across the top of the world - one which was still seen as flat by the Church, but not by seafaring adventurers of the time like John and Sebastian Cabot and a score of others who followed them over the next five hundred years unsuccessfully probing the frozen northern seas for a way to the west.

The existence of a potential sea passage between the Atlantic and Pacific was proved by the late 19th century, although no explorers or their ships were able to navigate their way through the maze of ice floes, islets, false leads and foul weather.

The twin lures of commercial riches and strategic benefit underwrote many expeditions, and the expenditure of many lives, with harrowing evidence of stranded exploration parties turning to cannibalism in unsuccessful attempts to survive.

But the indefatigable efforts of the adventurers finally overcame the hostility of the Arctic. The North West Passage was changed from a fable to a fact when Norwegian Roald Amundsen completed a three-year epic in 1906 in his 45-ton, 70-foot wooden built, gaff-rigged cutter Gjøa.

She was, however, reliant on propulsion from her 13 horsepower auxiliary engine during the piecemeal voyage through the labyrinth of sounds and islets off northern Canada and took three years to accomplish the feat.

Since the 1940's, commercial vessels, warships, and even motor-driven yachts, have made their way along the route, and in 2007, in a series of short hops from west to east aided by the prevailing currents, by a French sailing boat.

To date, however, no sail-propelled vessel has succeeded in an uninterrupted passage from east to west against the currents - and the flow of the ice floes themselves.

This year, a three-strong team led by top British sailor and adventurer Bob Beggs, from Plymouth - the home of Scott of the Antarctic - will be setting out to achieve just that.

With the latest scientific predictions for year-round ice-free conditions in the seas surrounding the Arctic Ocean within the next five years, (source: NASA, February 2008) this is without doubt the last great sailing adventure left.

It could be not only a first, but a final, goal.

introduction



AGAINST THE FLOE

FOR JUST a few weeks in a 'normal' polar year, the Arctic ice sheet diminishes and increasing stretches of open water between the islands of the frozen continent develop.

In recent years, the pack ice and floes have diminished so that the North West Passage is no longer the domain of special, powerful icebreakers, but is seeing an increasing number of commercial ships from oil tankers to cruise liners negotiate all or part of the available routes.

There are, in fact, several alternatives, and the North West Passage is not a single channel from the North Atlantic into the Pacific.

The test for Against The Floe skipper Bob Beggs to pilot the first boat to transit the passage east to west solely under sail and oar, unaided by auxiliary power, and sustained solely by renewable resources and energy generation began this January, when work on the design and construction of the craft began.

That, in itself, is a major challenge and has been resolved by the adaptation of an existing, highly successful, catamaran design which has been proven in several trans-Atlantic crossings and many more sea miles of tough competition.

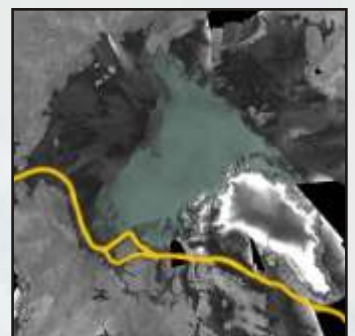
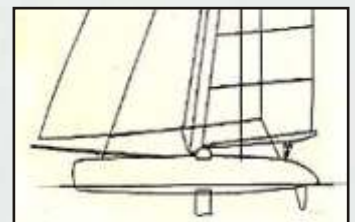
The new Dazcat 28 will be an eco-friendly expedition craft able to maintain high average speeds at sea, withstand the abrasion of ice, and support the crew of three against some of the harshest conditions on Earth. While the team for the Arctic passage has mainly been selected, opportunities exist for other adventurers to join Against the Floe for various intermediate passages.

Work began with the fabrication of the two fibre reinforced plastic hulls in a workshop overlooking Plymouth Sound, with a departure planned for June on the first leg of the voyage - a testing passage itself, eventually following the track of the 11th century Vikings who 1,000 years ago were the first Europeans to cross the Atlantic to North America and Greenland.

This is where the going gets serious, with a six-week window to complete the intricate maze of leads and channels across the roof of the world that make up the North West Passage, skirting Canada and Alaska and emerging in the notoriously dangerous Bering Sea.

Once in the open waters of the Pacific, Bob and his crew will head south, across one of the most turbulent and remote stretches of ocean on the planet to a landfall in Alaska before threading their way through the Aleutian archipelago, and onwards to Galapagos and Panama, transiting the canal to regain the Atlantic, and making the return passage to Plymouth to complete the continental circumnavigation.

the challenge



www.againstthefloe.co.uk

AGAINST THE FLOE

BOB BEGGS has spent his adult life looking for, finding and succeeding in new challenges. The lad from Manchester was drawn to sailing after he joined the Army and became a commando with 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery based in the historic 17th century Citadel overlooking Plymouth Sound.

Among other activities, he qualified as a free-fall paratrooper, ran his first marathon, gained his Royal Yachting Association Day Skipper ticket and in between times saw action abroad.

Bob always took the first opportunity to get back into a boat, and in 1988 made his first Atlantic crossing under sail. Two years later, he successfully completed a voyage from the UK to Belize in Central America in a 26ft catamaran as skipper with one crew.

Soon after qualifying as an RYA Offshore Yachtmaster in 1991, his military duties took him to Iraq in Operation Safe Haven, providing a refuge for Kurds fleeing Saddam's regime.

In 1992, he competed for the first time in the Europe 1 Singlehanded Trans Atlantic Race and finished first in his class. The following year he completed the Teesside Two-Handed Round Britain and Ireland Race - said to be more punishing and exacting on sailing skills and stamina than the Atlantic event.

Having by now gained his RYA Ocean Yachtmaster ticket, and qualified as a Yachtmaster Instructor, he gave up the Service life to become a professional sailor, achieving his next challenge by building a 26ft Dazcat catamaran for the 1994 Two-Handed Trans Atlantic Race from the UK to the United States.

Backed by the UK's biggest footwear company, the boat was renamed Clarks Active Air, and Bob gave his new sponsor a second Atlantic race success, followed up by another in the 1996 Single-Handed from Plymouth to Newport, Rhode Island.

Bob also gained valuable experience in the corporate sailing sphere as skipper of a successful former round the world 60 foot racing yacht before acting in a similar role on joining Sir Chay Blyth's Global Challenge fleet as a skipper.

He established his own successful sailing school in Plymouth and is now principal and chief instructor of Performance Yachting, as well as being a qualified RYA Yachtmaster Ocean examiner.

Arguably, his greatest challenge and success was in moulding 14 novice sailors into a tough, resilient crew for The Times Clipper 2000 round-the-world yacht race, sailed in a fleet of identical 60-footers.

Rather than sailing the yacht carrying his home port's colours, Bob was nominated as skipper for the rival Bristol Clipper.

It mattered not - he still clinched overall victory after 30,000 miles !

the challenger



www.againstthefloe.co.uk

AGAINST THE FLOE

THE ETHOS behind Bob and his team is strongly grounded in the adage 'KISS' - Keep It Simple, Stupid! Against The Floe could not be more simple. Two hulls 28 feet (8.5m) long constructed of fibre reinforced resin connected by two rigid beams and a netting deck, called a trampoline by multihull sailors.

The rig, too, is simple with a mainsail, a single foresail, or jib, and a 'gennaker' - a big lightweight sail for use in gentle winds. The boat can be steered manually from either side of the deck, with twin tillers linked to the rudders by a rod. They can also be controlled by an electronic autopilot.

The only protected accommodation is below decks in the narrow confines of each hull, which serve as sleeping quarters, navigation area and galley - the kitchen - with food prepared on a single-burner camping cooker.

Rations are primarily military-style high energy dehydrated food packs, and water is produced from the surrounding sea by a manual desalinator. It takes many gallons of seawater to produce just a couple of litres of fresh drinking water after an hour or so's laborious pumping.

The criteria for the new boat included:

- Light weight - to enable the craft to be dragged up the beach or ice if needed
- High power to weight ratio enabling sailing in the lightest of breezes
- Shallow draft - to capitalise on ice-free water close inshore and to facilitate beaching in heavy weather for safety
- Proven ocean-going ability
- Fast, for long distance open water passage making

The design of Against The Floe has evolved from the original Dazcat 26 from the drawing board of the highly respected multihull designer Darren Newton, of Millbrook in Cornwall. Despite their diminutive size, these catamarans have competed successfully in several trans-Atlantic races since 1988.

The lines have however been modified with a different bow profile to allow the boat to ride up onto the sea ice, as well as the provision of more shelter for the crew and several other changes specific to the task. Oars and seats will also be fitted to allow the boat to be rowed if becalmed.

Energy requirements for navigational and communications equipment on board will come for the latest wind generators and solar panels. The latter will be challenged by the low levels of convertible radiation in the far north, offering manufacturers a valuable test and development opportunity for new technology and innovation.

the catamaran



AGAINST THE FLOE

A CHALLENGE of this nature is multi-faceted. Besides being a physical and mental test of skipper and crew, it provides scope for many disciplines and wide research opportunities.

- A portal for teaching with regards to climate change and global warming allowing schools and colleges to participate in curriculum related studies.
- A test bed for yacht design, construction and equipment
- A proving ground for navigation aids, communications equipment and sources of alternative energy, such as hydrogen cells which will augment the electrical energy needs of Against The Floe
- Ecological awareness - the team will not be taking any internal combustion engines, therefore relying totally on solar radiation and wind for energy generation
- Medical research into the physical and psychological effects of cold and stress during polar journeys

During the Arctic passage, Bob and the crew aim to monitor wild life, including polar bears, whose habitat is threatened not only by the fast dwindling polar ice, but also by massive new oil exploration schemes being planned for the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean.

Many explorers attempting to negotiate the North West Passage have been caught out by sudden changes in the weather and been beset by ice, in the worst cases having to over-winter and wait for next season's thaw to complete their transit.

In 2007, French sailor Sebastian Roubinet completed the first passage entirely under sail from west to east, aided by the prevailing currents. And while his boat, Babouche, was built for the purpose, it was not an ocean-going craft, being shipped by container to the starting point of the expedition, and on completion of the transit, recovered to its shipping container.

The route from east to west, against the currents, by a craft powered solely by sail and oar has, therefore, yet to be realised. Furthermore, no vessel of any type has ever completed an uninterrupted circumnavigation of the North American continent under sail unaided by engine power.

This year, Bob Beggs hopes that he will be able to achieve just that, leaving Plymouth at the start of June on the anti-clockwise voyage via the North West Passage.

the research



www.againstthefloe.co.uk

AGAINST THE FLOE

our supporters

*PARTNERS and support team
to date include:*

Marlow Ropes

International Yacht Paints

Crusader Sails

Carnegie Research Institute -
Leeds Metropolitan University

29 Commando Regt, RA

Darren Newton Designs

Andy Fox - Ecocats Ltd

Mayflower International Marina

Multimarine Composites Ltd

Nikki Woodroffe -
Kelly College, Tavistock

Simon Osborn
ldat.co.uk

Pip Paterson -
Multihull Centre Services

Pete Goss

Robin Price
Photography & Media

Performance Yachting Chandlery

Ultra Marine Services

Jeremy Greenaway -
Waterlines Words & Design

AGAINST THE FLOE has already achieved a wide range of support to get the project under way, and essential encouragement from some of Britain's most notable ocean voyagers, including Sir Robin Knox Johnston - the first person to sail alone around the world without a stop - and round-the-world race rescue hero Pete Goss, who has this to say:

I couldn't help smiling as Bob revealed his latest project with his usual understated manner for it



belies the depth of experience and drive that underpins it.

This is a challenge of many disciplines and in my view Bob with his military, sailing and boat building background is one of the few around that has both the breadth of knowledge and determination that it calls for.

Only a robust character will pull this off and Bob's unstoppable attitude and resourceful approach to all that is thrown at him will, I am sure, pull him through the many unknowns that will inevitably lie in his path. Fair winds Bob, this one has your name on it and I know you will get there in the end.

For media registration, CONTACT Bob Beggs at

Performance Yachting Ltd
Mayflower Marina
Richmond Walk
Plymouth PL1 4LS

Tel +44 (0)1752 565 023
Mobile 07 721 382 287
Email bob@performanceyachting.co.uk

www.againstthefloe.co.uk