



SAILING

THE LEGENDARY SAILORS AND GREAT RACES

SOLO

NIC COMPTON

FOREWORD BY ELLEN MACARTHUR

# SAILING **solo**

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**Foreword by  
Ellen MacArthur**



International Marine/McGraw-Hill  
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While all reasonable care has been taken during the preparation of this edition, neither the publisher, editors, nor the authors can accept responsibility for any consequences arising from the use thereof or from the information contained therein.

To my brother Simon  
lost at sea off the Canaries  
17 March 1980

Page 2: Florence Arthaud on *Pierre 1er* in the 1990 Route du Rhum.

Page 5: Raphaël Dinelli on *Sodebo-Savourons la Vie* in the 1998 Route du Rhum.

"Of his bones are coral made:  
Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange."  
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

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## **SAILING SOLO**

by Nic Compton

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# FOREWORD

**W**hen I was first asked to write this foreword I hesitated, not sure if I should be the one to do this in light of the far greater sailors that are included in this book. But when I read Nic Compton's book I felt a great empathy with my fellow sailors – past and present – and felt in some small way I could show my appreciation to those who have risked so much to achieve their dreams.

I have had a passion for the sea from the age of four – it consumed me. But I never consciously dreamt of being a solo sailor, I just wanted to be on the water to live my next adventure. It was only at the age of 18 when I sailed *Iduna* round Britain that I began to believe that I could have a career in sailing. Perhaps I had an inkling of my future solo career when I re-fitted *Iduna* with only one bunk – it was a conscious decision about going solo, it just felt the right thing to do!

But looking back I see I was always drawn to the stories of the solo pioneers. When I was a young girl at school in Derbyshire I would go into the library to read the only book it had on solo sailing, Francis Chichester's *Gypsy Moth Circles The World*. When I returned to my school recently, I searched for that book and it was still there – only one other kid had read it since I left eight years ago! Maybe that doesn't say a lot for kids' interest in solo sailing but, without doubt, the adventures of solo sailors have always captured the imagination regardless of one's age.

Even now, I am still completely amazed by the early pioneers of solo sailing. Imagine setting sail on a tiny boat with only the most basic of safety equipment, foul weather gear, and navigational aids. This is what Slocum, Chichester, Rose, Hasler and, to some extent, Sir Robin Knox-Johnston did. Even when Robin set the non-stop round the world record on *Suhaili*, he did so with few of the sophisticated aids and modern comforts we have now. Robin set his record of 313 days in 1968–69, seven years before I was born. Now, the monohull record stands at 93 days – a lot has been achieved in 26 years!

Today, solo sailors are racing across the oceans in the latest high-tech carbon racing machines costing millions. They have all the latest technology to help them – satellite communications, sophisticated auto-pilots, canting keels and masts, EPIRBs, gortex sailing gear, freeze-dried food, water desalinators – the list is endless! And this is demonstrated in the amazing records that are now being set by the modern day solo racer. But one thing will never change no matter what you have onboard – the ocean remains all powerful.

Nic effortlessly recounts many of the greatest solo stories demonstrating his understanding of the sea and the sailors who are prepared to sacrifice everything to compete on the world's oceans. These tales of great human endeavour leave you feeling in awe of the men and women who have attempted these incredible voyages.

One thing is for sure, there will be many, many more stories to tell as the sport of solo sailing continues to evolve. But the achievements of all those that have gone before will continue to live in the memories of those who follow.

*Ellen MacArthur, Skipper, Team Kingfisher*  
[www.ellenmacathur.com](http://www.ellenmacathur.com)



# INTRODUCTION

**D**eep in the Southern Ocean, hundreds of miles away from human habitation, a small fleet of yachts is tearing its way across a bleak desert of sea in what seems like reckless haste. With triple-reefed mains and storm jibs set, they surf down 12m (40ft) waves at speeds of 20 knots and more, their wakes quickly erased by the screeching wind. Aboard, their radars scan the water ahead for icebergs, a satellite link to the race headquarters keeps them informed of their rivals' progress, and routing programmes help them decide the best route to take. These are efficient, state-of-the-art racers, costing up to £1million apiece. Their skippers are skilled professionals trained in the art of navigation, meteorology, nutrition and, above all, sleep management. They eat reconstituted food and sleep in 20 minutes naps. Each of them is embarked on what is one of the ultimate challenges known to man: to sail around the world singlehanded.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, another group of solo sailors is setting out on another yacht race in a very different setting. The TBS Grand Prix, Hungary's most hotly-contested singlehanded race, takes place in the foothills of the Alps, 160 miles from the sea, in an area more commonly associated with wine-making than sailing. Although just 77km (47.8 miles) long and 14km (8.7 miles) wide, Lake Balaton provides a sharp test of the competitors' skill and endurance, and every year about 20 skippers on an assortment of boats gather for this unique event. It takes all their stamina to race non-stop for most of the day, making the most of every wind shift and ensuring the boat is sailing at its optimum in order to steal a few valuable feet from their rivals. For, while the skippers strut their stuff in the Southern Ocean, these landlocked sailors are pursuing their own non-stop solo circumnavigation – around Lake Balaton.

Although literally a world away from each other, these two events are linked by a common passion: the desire to harness the elements of wind and water, alone, and without recourse to outside assistance. Whether it is in the wilds of the Southern Ocean or amid the vineyards of some Hungarian valley, it is a challenge that sailors the world over have responded to ever since man hoisted a sail on some rudimentary craft and set out to sea. Some do it of their own prompting and according to their own rules, including many of the great ocean navigators, from the “original” solo circumnavigator Joshua Slocum to the romantic individualists of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Alain Gerbault, and the latterday eccentrics such as Jon Sanders – the only man to have sailed three times around the world singlehanded and non-stop!

But an increasing number choose to pit their skills against other like-minded sailors, and combine the thrill of sailing alone with the rush of adrenalin that is a part of any race. The late 1970s were the high water mark of singlehanded racing, with up to 125 competitors taking part in the Observer's transatlantic race, while the advent of the Mini-Transat and Route du Rhum gave birth to a new generation of solo sailors in Europe. Likewise, across the Atlantic, the Newport to Bermuda One-Two and the Singlehanded TransPac generated new interest in the sport.

With the advent of the BOC Challenge and the Vendée Globe in the 1980s, the sport moved to a new, more professional level which has gradually become the norm across most of the sport. Singlehanded racing is now big money, with the top Around Alone campaigns costing around £2million. And it has, arguably, never been more popular. Depending on who you believe, between 50,000 and 200,000 people lined the entrance to Les Sables d'Olonne to welcome Ellen MacArthur back in 2000, while the year



before the Figaro race had the largest number of entries in its long history. Meanwhile, solo races are taking place from Hong Kong to Seattle to the Balearics and Lake Ontario, as well as on both sides of the Pacific.

It is this upsurge of interest in the sport that signalled the need for a publication that would provide a context for the many races that now make up the busy singlehanded calendar. Appropriately enough, thanks to the flexibility of

modern technology in the form of a laptop and a mobile phone, most of this book was written alone and on a boat — albeit up a muddy creek on the South Coast rather than on the ocean wave. I hope some salt has nevertheless crept through the keyboard and onto this page to convey the thrill of this most exhilarating of sports.

*Nic Compton, Newhaven*

**above** Singlehanded racing has come a long way since Francis Chichester won the first OSTAR in 1960 in 40 days. Lightweight catamarans such as *Fujicolor II* now sprint across the Atlantic in less than 10 days.



# THE routes

## THE MAJOR RACES

Since the pioneering exploits of Joshua Slocum and Sir Francis Chichester, singlehanded sailing has grown in popularity, spawning a variety of races. Some are epic round-the-world contests, others more low key, but each has its own character and offers challenges for the singlehanded sailor.

— **OSTAR**

— **Figaro 2002 route**

— **Mini-Transat '01 course**

— **Route du Rhum '98 winning route**

— **Around Alone 02-03 route**

— **Vendee Globe**

**Other Solo Races**

— **TransTaz**

— **TransPac**

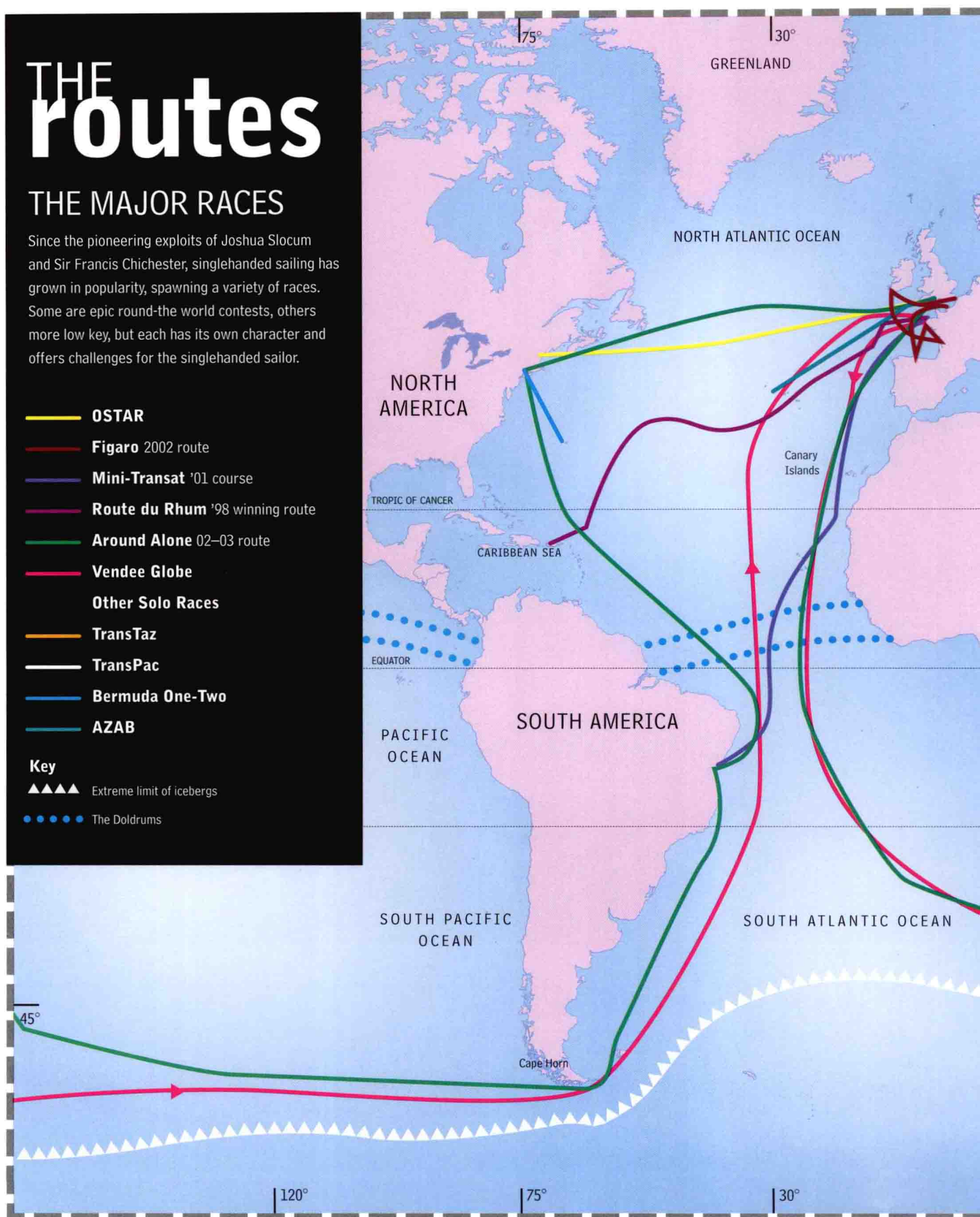
— **Bermuda One-Two**

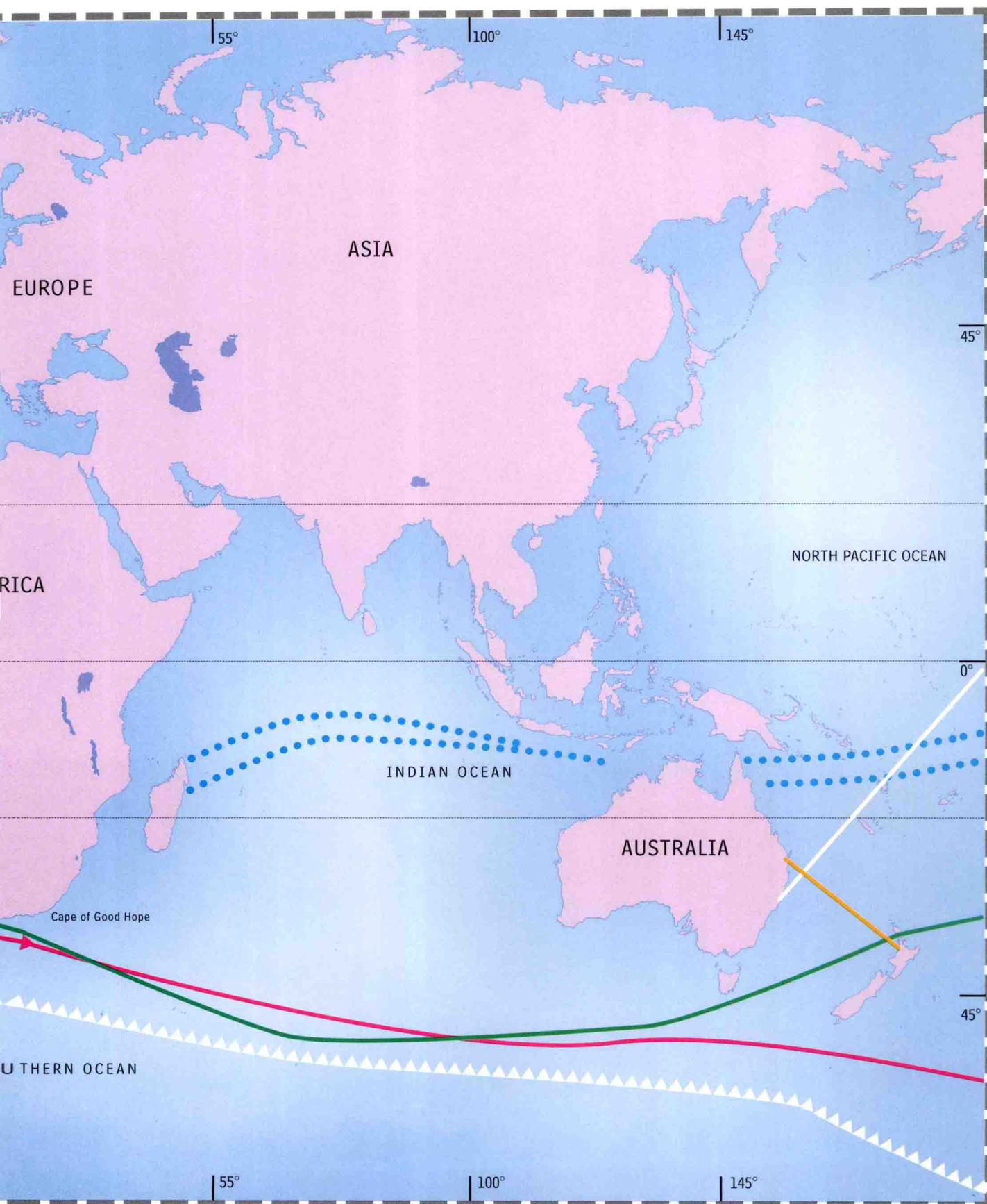
— **AZAB**

**Key**

▲▲▲▲ Extreme limit of icebergs

●●●● The Doldrums









# THE background



**left** Robin Knox-Johnston's *Suhaili*, in which he completed the first ever solo round-the-world race in 1968–9.



# THE routes

## PIONEERING SOLO CIRCUMNAVIGATIONS

What used to be an exceptional achievement accomplished by only a small handful of individuals has, since the advent of round-the-world races in the 1980s, become an increasingly common occurrence. There are, however, a few notable sailors who forged the way for all those to come.

### Joshua Slocum

First solo circumnavigation on *Spray*, 24 April 1895–27 June 1898

### Francis Chichester

First fast solo circumnavigation on *Gipsy Moth IV*, 28 August 1966–28 May 1967

### Robin Knox-Johnston

First non-stop solo circumnavigation on *Suhail*, 14 June 1968–22 April 1969

### Chay Blyth

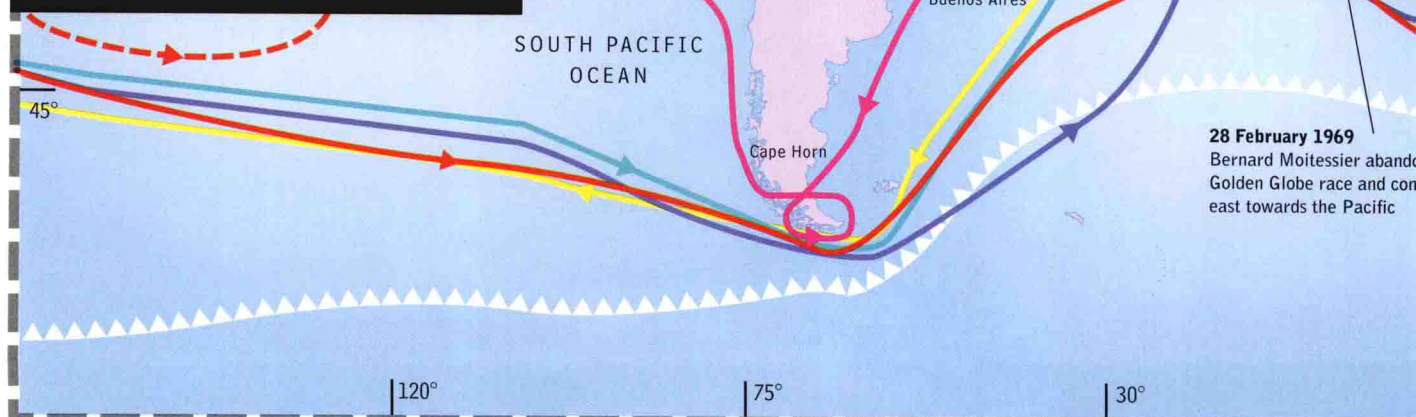
The "impossible route". First non-stop solo circumnavigation the "wrong way" round on *British Steel*, 18 October 1970–6 August 1971

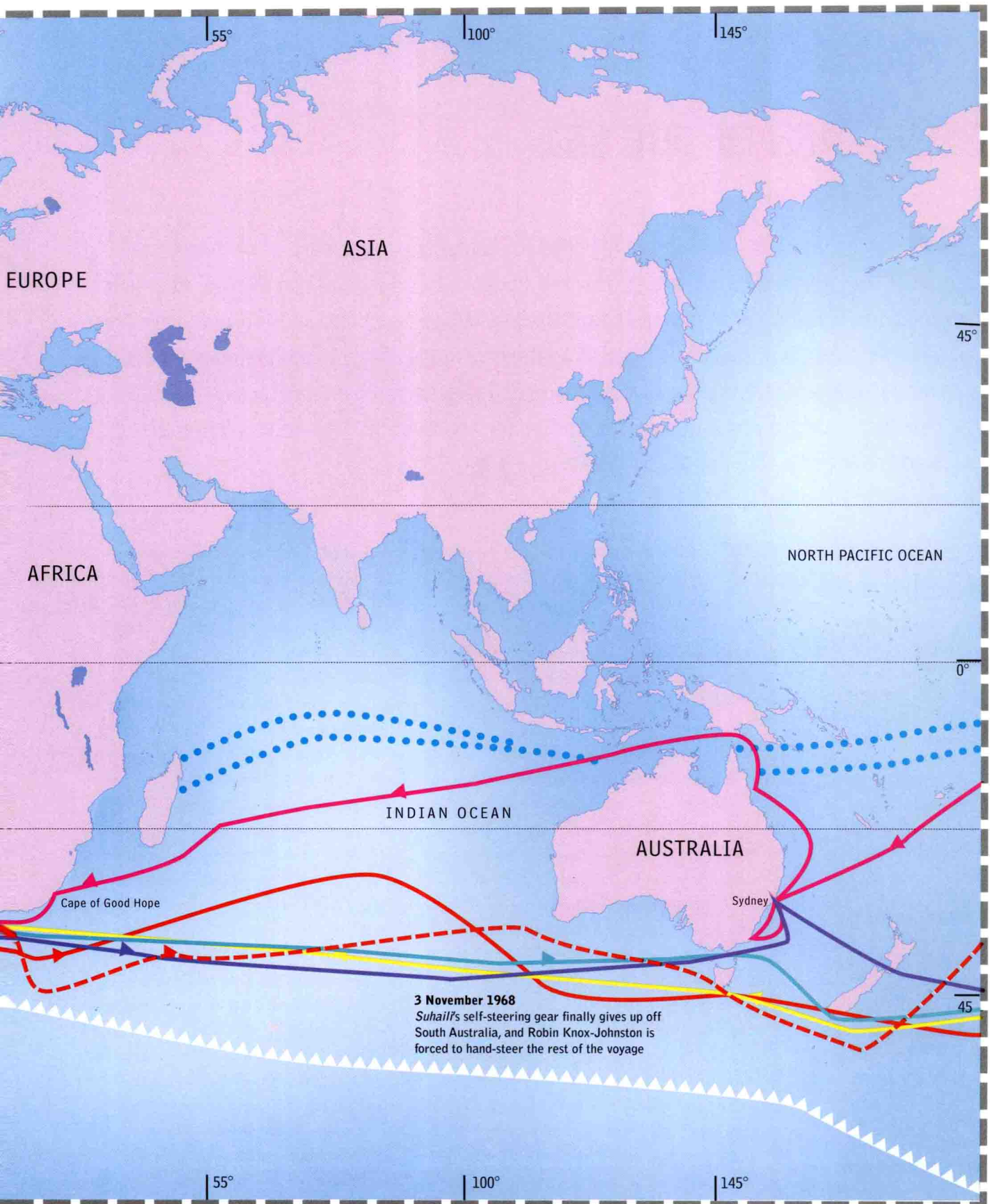
### Bernard Moitessier

The "long way" solo circumnavigation, on *Joshua*, 22 August 1968–21 June 1969.

#### Key

- ▲▲▲▲ Extreme limit of icebergs
- The Doldrums







## GREAT MEN OF THE SEA

“After four gales my hands are worn and cut about badly and I am aware of my fingers on account of the pain from skin tears and broken fingernails. I have bruises all over from being thrown about. My skin itches from constant chafing with wet clothes, and I forget when I last had a proper wash, so I feel dirty. I feel altogether mentally and physically exhausted and I’ve been in the Southern Ocean only a week. It seems years since I gybed to turn east and yet it was only last Tuesday night, not six days, and I have another 150 days of it ... I feel that I have had enough of sailing for the time being...”

*A World of my Own*, Robin Knox-Johnston

### THE GOLDEN GLOBE CONTENDERS

Robin Knox-Johnston  
*Suhaili* (UK) finishes in  
313 days

Bernard Moitessier  
*Joshua* (Fr) sails on to Tahiti

Chay Blyth  
*Dytiscus* (UK) retires at  
Port Elizabeth, South Africa

John Ridgeway  
*English Rose IV* (UK)  
retires at Recife, Brazil

Bill King  
*Galway Blazer* (UK)  
retires at Capetown

Nigel Tetley  
*Victress* (UK)  
boat breaks up off Azores

Donald Crowhurst  
*Teignmouth Electron* (UK)  
lost at sea, possible suicide

Loïck Fougeron  
*Captain Brown* (Fr) reaches  
St Helena under jury rig

Alex Carozzo  
*Gancia Americano* (It)  
retires off Lisbon

The date is 9 September 1968, and Robin Knox-Johnston is 87 days out of Falmouth, England on his way back to Falmouth, via New Zealand. His purpose: to be the first man to sail singlehanded, non-stop around the world. He has already suffered one serious knockdown which almost forced him to retire: his self-steering system is badly damaged and will eventually break irreparably off Australia, forcing him to make do with rope lashings or steer the boat himself; his yacht’s cabin has been bodily shifted by the force of the breaking seas and will leak for the rest of the voyage. Despite these setbacks, and many more to come, he continues the journey and, although not sailing the fastest boat, is the only person to complete the course. He arrives back in Falmouth 313 days after he left, having sailed a distance of over 48,000km (30,000 miles). He has not only won a race but he has earned himself a place in history.

In many ways the race for the Golden Globe trophy was the greatest challenge of them all. It came after Englishmen Francis Chichester’s and Alec Rose’s epic circumnavigations, and Frenchman Eric Tabarly’s triumphant victory in the second OSTAR; suddenly singlehanded voyages were in the news, and the sailing world

was looking for old records to break and new records to set. Chichester’s journey had proven that a lengthy non-stop voyage was possible (he put in only in Sydney, Australia to modify his keel and fix his self-steering, but although exhausted was otherwise in a fit state to continue) and the general sentiment, most notably expressed by the father of the Golden Globe’s eventual winner, Robin Knox-Johnston, was: “There’s only one more thing left to do...”

Chaired by Francis Chichester and sponsored by the *The Sunday Times*, the rules of the Golden Globe were simple: to sail alone and unassisted around the world via the three capes: Cape of Good Hope, Cape Leeuwin, and Cape Horn. The start time was any time between 1 June and 31 October 1968, leaving from any English port and returning to the same place. A Golden Globe trophy was to be presented to the first finisher and a prize of £5000 to the fastest.

In the end nine boats set off: five never made it past the Cape of Good Hope; one boat broke up in mid-ocean; one skipper probably committed suicide; only one completed the course.

One finisher out of nine is not a very auspicious record, but it proves how close to the edge of the contemporary technology and