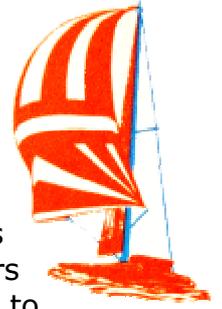


Prologue by Heide Wilts



Heavy snowfall, gusty winds, Deception Island ahead! True to its name, Deception appears before us as an optical illusion, a Fata Morgana. And yet the picture of this snow-covered, iceberg enclosed island is unmistakable for us: We first landed here on Antarctic ground, 16 years ago, in January 1982. At the time, her flooded interior crater had seemed to us to be an ideally protected natural harbor. Nine years later we trusted this deceptively misleading shelter with the dreams and determination of unsuspecting hopefuls.

Back on May 24th, 1991, in the crater lake of the collapsed cone, Erich and I had been stranded with the FREYDIS in a winter blizzard, and our dream of sailing around Antarctica seemed out of reach before it even began. Overcome with anxiety, I look at the small world where we spent a long antarctic winter, which had been full of many terrible as well as unforgettably wonderful experiences! Everything seems so familiar. A feeling of joy overcomes me, emotional chaos gives way to pure happiness of seeing it all again, as if there only fond memories remained. I felt like widely embracing all the penguins and seals along the black beaches, all skuas, Dominican gulls, sea swallows (sp) and storm birds (sp) and yelling „Remember us?“ How often had we visited these bays, climbed these hills and mountains, looking down from icy craters out to the numb frozen sea, longing for spring. I feel as if I had spent y-e-a-r-s here! But aren't these the feelings that measure time?

For many years, our main goal was circling the antarctic continent and visiting as many of its peripheral antarctic and sub-antarctic islands. However only during the brief southern summers, from early December to early March, can we sail the polar sea. As soon as the southern winter approaches, bringing pack ice, ship-freezing, storms and darkness, we must yield to warmer northern waters.

Five years have gone by, three quarters of circling the Antarctic lie behind us: We've crossed the South Atlantic and the South Indian Ocean, visited the west and southern coast of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand with its sub antarctic islands and sailed to the Ross Sea. Now we want to complete the circle around Antarctica. But in the subpolar westerly wind belt, between New Zealand and South America, lies a huge water desert with no worthwhile destination islands. There are two ways to cross it: Either we go the direct route on the westwind drift, between 40 and 50 degrees southern latitude, which is 4800 nautical miles, a stretch for which we would need a maximum of six weeks. Or we sail the Kermadecs, Cooks, Society Islands, Tuamotus, Gambiers, Pitcairn, Easter Island, Sala y Gomez, Juan Fernandez, to Valdivia on the Chilean coast. We decided against the fast trip through landless southern latitudes and for the route that crosses the subtropical and tropical island world of Polynesia – despite predictable poor sailing conditions.

But for this kind of „island-hopping“ we find ourselves at the wrong place at the wrong time. Normally, you sail the South Pacific from east to west, with the southeast trade winds and the current behind you,, and ofcourse during the cool season from May to October. But we are running „against the grain“, against wind and current, in hot humid months. But only this way can we figure with lighter winds and longer calms, with the prospect of at least not having to tack the entire South Pacific against tight winds.

So why are we doing this to ourselves? What is so special about the South Pacific compared to other tropical and subtropical areas in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean? We are attracted to the sheer endless distance of the South Pacific which spans half of this ocean planet with its thousands of islands.. In the South Pacific Ocean alone, from the northern tropic to the 50th southern latitude, there are over 7500 scattered atolls, volcano and reef islands – „Oceania.“ Most islands don't have a landing strip, so a sailing vessel is the ideal means for transport. A sailor's life would not be enough to explore all the land protrusions.

Many of these islands are inhabited, mostly with people of Polynesian descent, closely related to the Maori, whom we met in New Zealand. They are the descendants of experienced mariners, who possessed stone age know how and a natural sense of navigation, and who discovered and inhabited the entire Polynesian island realm between New Zealand in the southwest, Easter Island in the southeast and Hawaii in the north - and most probably even reached South America.

We would always favor the South Sea ahead of any other tropical territory. She fulfils our longing for relaxation, gaiety, easy living, our yearning for warmth, sun, palm beaches, shimmering lagoons and friendly people. But our most heartfelt region is not the South Pacific. It is still Antarctica and the sub-antarctic and antarctic islands. It repeatedly attracts us with a passion for which we are willing to suffer. Sailing in upper latitudes, so much is granted, is highly associated with heavy predicaments, hardships and toil, but it fulfills us with an intense feeling for life, new energy and deep satisfaction.

Only on the still relatively white spots on earth, do we find what we are really searching for: untamed nature, rich in wildlife and pristine landscapes. Only in this wild drama of primitive iceberg, volcano and glacier scenarios, do we feel like the day of creation in a world before the Fall of man. Where else can man and animal meet in such unity of paradise?

That is why, after the South Pacific, we will sail again, through Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego to the cold south, to visit many to us unknown but also known places – especially the volcanic island of Deception. Only here, on May 24, 1991, where everything seemed to end for us, and like Phoenix rising from the ashes, everything began.. Only here will we close the circle of our rounding the Antarctic after 44,000 nautical miles and seven years. Wasn't seven always the magical number, back in seafaring days?

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