

# Hall of Fame - Annie Hill

by Graham Cox

Annie Hill. 1955 -

There are a number of people who are well known within the junk rig community, people who have made significant voyages, written articles and books, or contributed to the growing body of knowledge about the rig. Only a handful, though, would be recognised by the wider sailing community - one thinks immediately of Blondie Hasler, Mike Richey and Bill King - people whose exploits won them international acclaim. Annie Hill is another.

Annie is perhaps best known as the author of that classic text, *Voyaging on a Small Income*. It is one of those seminal books that one finds, well-thumbed, on the shelves of many cruising boats, as well as in the homes of innumerable armchair sailors. Books rarely take on a life of their own like this, but Annie tapped into the ocean voyaging zeitgeist and created an international best-seller. The text is not only evocative - if you can read Chapter 24, *Landfall*, without longing to cast off the docklines, or haul up the

anchor, you have no romance in your soul - but it is also a nuts and bolts pragmatic book, offering detailed advice, culled from a staggering depth of ocean voyaging experience, on how to voyage far, safely, comfortably, elegantly and cheaply, and it showcases junk rig brilliantly.

The book also showcases inadvertently, as a tantalizing back-story, the voyages Annie embarked on with her partner, Pete Hill, first aboard *Stormalong*, a 28 foot Wharram catamaran, making a double crossing of the North Atlantic in 1975/76, and then in *Badger*, a Jay Benford plywood dory with a junk rig designed by Pete Hill, with other modifications drawn from Blondie Hasler's ideas among others. Later, Annie wrote a second book,



Annie Hill

*Brazil and Beyond*, a more traditional travelogue, with a wonderful photo of *Badger* sailing wing and wing on the cover.

Setting off in 1983 aboard *Badger*, Annie and Pete sailed more than 110,000 nautical miles around the North and South Atlantic Oceans, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, visiting Iceland, Greenland, the USA, the Baltic, the West Indies, South America, the Falklands, South Georgia and South Africa. *Badger* was sold in South Africa and Annie later joined Trevor Robertson aboard the gaff cutter, *Iron Bark*, a Wylo 35 design, sailing another 50,000 miles, including a winter in Greenland, before crossing the Pacific to New Zealand, where she fell in love with that country.

After one more cruise to Australia and around the South Island of New Zealand aboard *Iron Bark*, Annie decided the time had come to settle down. She'd been voyaging almost non-stop for 35 years and felt the need to call somewhere home, to stop farewelling friends and striking out for the unknown. At the age of 54, she also felt it was time to get a boat of her own, so that she could do what she wanted, in her own way, although it also meant she would have to develop the skills of



*Badger dwarfed by icebergs*



*The Blue Water medal awarded to Annie and Trevor for a lifetime of cruising*

a singlehanded sailor for the first time. She had no intention of living ashore, so she put her considerable experience to use in finding and adapting a boat to suit her needs. The results of this quest are an eloquent testimonial to her unique talents.

Annie's first decision was to keep the boat small. She had fond memories Of *Missee Lee*, a 20ft Westcoaster that she and Pete converted to junk rig in 1989, while *Badger* was laid up in Falmouth for a couple of years. They cruised Brittany in her, exploring places *Badger* could never have visited. Most importantly, her rig and gear were small and light, making her easy and fun to sail.

Although Annie would have preferred a cold-moulded boat of about 28 feet, she settled for a 26 foot, fibreglass, Raven class sloop. It was the best boat she could find that would fit into the available live-aboard berth on offer in Nelson, where she based herself initially. The boat did, however, have a charming timber interior, and a small but excellent galley, most important, since Annie loves to cook, with a glass of wine for inspiration – the accounts of some people's cruises can make your

eyes water, but Annie's tales tend to make your mouth water!

Annie's approach to choosing and fitting out her new boat clearly illustrates her hard-earned wisdom. She noted that there were two basic approaches one could take, to adopt technology to assist in handling the boat, or adopt a boat and cruising style to suit one's physical and financial realities. Many people adopt technology. Even if you can afford it, this leaves you both dependant and vulnerable to potential breakdowns. Annie couldn't afford it, and she didn't want it either. What she was seeking was a simple, self-sufficient, elegant cruising life.

The first plank in Annie's project was to convert the boat to junk rig. This rig is an integral part of the overall design philosophy, to save strength for a weaker crew and avoid over-exertion. After sailing the boat 90 miles from Picton to Nelson with the bermudian rig, alone in the dead of winter, she was even more convinced that it was the only choice for her.

*Joshua*, as her Raven was called, was renamed *Fantail*, and Annie set about converting her to junk rig. David Tyler designed the rig which, appropriately, he named the fantail rig. Versions of it were later fitted to *Tystie* and *Footprints* and a generic, scalable drawing is now available for others to use.

Annie made the sail from Odyssey III material, a UV resistant cloth that would allow her to forget about sail-covers. Not only does this make the rig cheaper and simpler to handle, but it can be considered a safety issue in open roadsteads, where the uncovered sail can be partially hoisted in a flash, and *Fantail* sailed off her anchor, should the need arise.

She built the new mast step and partners with timber and epoxy, and then stepped the hybrid mast, which uses an aluminium section for the lower spar, extended with a timber topmast. The mast has a 6 degree forward rake so that its heel does not intrude on her lovely forward bunk. She worked carefully and efficiently but still confessed to being greatly relieved when it all lined up.

One reason for choosing such a small boat was the weight of her gear. A small, light boat only needs small, light anchors that can



*The all-important galley aboard Fantail*





Annie sailing *Fantail*

be handled without an expensive, complex, electric anchor winch. Even a manual anchor winch is not cheap, and Annie chose to use a combination of rope and chain that she can haul up by hand, despite using over-sized ground tackle to give her peace of mind on windy nights. This is particularly important as *Fantail* spends most of her time at anchor. A chain pawl on the bow roller securely holds the links as she snugs the chain in, once again using a simple, foolproof system to reduce physical exertion.

Another critical component in avoiding over-exertion was fitting a wind-vane self-steering gear, once again designed by David Tyler. Not only does the vane steer the boat while Annie is resting, cooking, eating, navigating and sleeping, she uses it as an elegant tool while sailing off the anchor. She sets the vane for the desired tack out of the anchorage, then sails the anchor out. If the boat should break out on the wrong tack, as it can do, *Fantail* simply tacks back, allowing Annie to clean up the foredeck and stroll aft. The boat is also fitted with an electronic autopilot, but this is something of a luxury for motoring in calms - if it breaks down it doesn't matter much.

Another challenge was finding a suitable dinghy. Inflatables are light but they are almost impossible to row, relying on expensive and potentially unreliable outboard motors. On the other hand, solid dinghies can be difficult to stow aboard. Annie solved the problem initially by building a folding dinghy, later replacing it with a charming, 5ft 1in, lightweight plywood pram designed by John Welsford. It can hold two adults, and a dog, if they don't sneeze perhaps. It certainly holds Annie, and what is more, by dropping the lifelines, she can haul it aboard alone and lash it down. It is just about the smallest dinghy practicable but, once again, a compromise was made to give her the freedom and independence she desired.

*Fantail's* final evolution from a ubiquitous white, fibreglass sloop came with a new colour scheme, a gorgeous two-tone job in black and aqua, the timber topmast also being painted in aqua. Then Annie settled down to the serious job of getting to know her new voyaging home, and exploring local waters. She found, to her delight, that *Fantail's* cambered sail would drive her to windward without shame in company with the local fleet of bermudan rigged boats, noting with amusement how often they

chose to turn on their engines, while she was content to tack back and forth without the need to haul in jib sheets.

In the summer of 2012, a rally was being organised on the North Island of New Zealand, so Annie decided to sail there on *Fantail*. It is only a short voyage by world cruising standards, but the success of a voyage should be measured by the way the crew meets their objectives, not by its length or degree of difficulty.

It takes courage, and some confidence, to head offshore on your first solo voyage, and on an untested boat, but Annie made the seamanlike choice to take the west coast route, around the top of the North Island, instead of passing through Cook Strait and trying to coastal hop up the east coast, where the obstacles and shipping are more numerous.

Initially, Annie felt a little lonely, missing her friends ashore at Motueka, and a little anxious, hoping the mast wouldn't break, the sail tear, or something else go amiss. She busied herself with small tasks, despite the seas being boisterous, with the wind at the point where reefing might become necessary. She turned her thoughts to all the interesting people and cruising she was going to do on the North Island, and this cheered her.

Later she discovered her wristwatch missing, which must have slipped off her hand without being noticed, as unlikely as this seemed. She never did find it. It is just this sort of minor mishap that can unsettle one and make one turn the bows back to port, but Annie is made of sterner stuff. Anyway, the wind was due to ease later, so, after rounding Farewell Spit well offshore, and noting that all was well, she had a glass of wine. She soon decided to have another glass and realised she was feeling hugely relaxed and content at last. So she cooked a dinner of garlic, onions, red peppers, fresh broad beans and



*Huge sand dunes seen on the voyage north*

pasta, had another glass of wine and went to bed.

She didn't feel concerned about keeping watch since she'd seen no other vessels since heading offshore, adopting the practice of having a look around whenever she awoke. The wind and motion had eased, and she passed a peaceful night sleeping in her real bed up forward, instead of camping in a quarterberth. The next morning, *Fantail* was just ambling along at 2 knots and Annie made herself breakfast with ease, feeling very much at home, looking with pleasure at the open horizon around the boat, and at the familiar, offshore cloudscape of fair-weather small cumulus.

The winds were light that day and so Annie reluctantly motored at times. She was anxious to get around Cape Reinga and North Cape, onto the east coast, before any bad weather came up, a sensible approach since the west coast of NZ has a fierce reputation and no suitable shelter. Dinner this night was salad, with slightly cooked courgette, mushrooms, green pepper, tiny plum tomatoes, runner beans and boiled potatoes, dressed with walnuts and a handful of leaves, washed down with the usual quantity of wine,

followed by another night in the bunk. It's tough, this cruising life!

Light winds continued, with no indication of imminent bad weather when Annie could get a land forecast on her AM radio. She did not run the engine at night when she was sleeping, being concerned she might not notice if it malfunctioned. One night she had to gybe in the middle of the night and blessed the ease of doing so with junk rig. (It may be more exciting in stronger winds, but is still more straightforward than gybing a Bermudan rig with poled out headsails, or spinnaker.)

When the wind came back it was northerly. *Fantail* beat slowly on towards Cape Reinga. Once, when on the inshore tack, Annie found she had phone reception, so texted a friend and got a 7 day forecast. The winds were expected to remain northerly but light for two days, before freshening. *Fantail*, at this stage, was 50 miles from the Cape, so the next morning Annie motorsailed all day. There are fierce currents and overfalls here and it is no place to find oneself in a blow. Even though *Fantail* passed the Cape 10 miles offshore, the sea still had an unpleasant jobble.

That evening disaster brushed by, in the form of a set of fishing floats. Annie just managed to put the motor in neutral before they wrapped around the prop. They hung up briefly on the self-steering paddle before thankfully sliding off. Annie was grateful that the prop exited from the back of the keel, rather than being suspended under the hull by a P bracket. At 2230, the wind backed enough to allow the motor to be thankfully shut down, North Cape came abeam soon after, and at midnight, *Fantail* finally altered course to the south.

While still on passage, they were now in east coast waters and Annie would have liked to share this astonishing information with someone, but it was the middle of the night and, anyway, she didn't have phone reception. So she opened a quarter bottle of bubbly and drank toasts to *Fantail* and absent friends, especially those who'd helped them get there.

The next morning sea and sky showed distinct signs that the weather was going to stiffen, and later a VHF radio forecast confirmed it. *Fantail* was boiling along and a huge school of Dusky Dolphins came leaping and bounding across the bows, making Annie laugh at their *joie de vivre*.

Annie had hardly slept the night before, due to excitement and increased shipping traffic. Having seen no vessels on the west coast until reaching Cape Reinga, she was pleased now that she'd taken the west coast route. *Fantail* was headed for Whangaroa Harbour in increasingly grey and murky conditions. Being tired and lacking detailed charts, she felt a bit anxious, having some initial difficulty in orienting herself to the entrance, but eventually sorted it out and headed in.

The entrance to Whangaroa is narrow and the wind was funnelling through, giving Annie a few anxious, over-canvassed moments, then they were in, sailing





*Fantail and Annie cruising alongside Dolphin of Leith at the Russell Tall Ships Regatta*

the delightfully smooth waters of the harbour. One has to have made an ocean passage to know how sweet this moment is. Annie chose her spot, put down the hook and sat on deck drinking it all in. They had arrived, the next chapter of their adventures was about to begin.

Since arriving, *Fantail* has regularly sailed between the Bay of Islands and the Hauraki Gulf, visiting friends, attending rallies, or junkets as the JRA now call them, cooking up a storm, drinking a few glasses of something special here and there and generally revelling in the freedom and independence Annie has achieved with such high distinction.

In January 2014 Annie delivered *Passepatu*, a junk-ketch rigged

Wylo 32, from Bluff to Whangarei, with a friend, Marcus, as her crew. The boat had not been used for the previous 5 years and its rig was set up in a less than optimal way, the water tanks proved to be unserviceable and the weather for much of the passage was abominable. Nonetheless, *Passepatu* made the passage successfully, non-stop in 14 days, a credit to Annie's seamanship and determination.

Annie was delighted to return to her snug little *Fantail*, aboard which everything is so easy and effective. She says the lesson is to never sail south of Mercury Island and that she'd be quite happy not to do so again.

And why should she? Not only has she sailed more miles and

visited more ports than most sailors, well and truly earning her stripes, but she has now fashioned for herself a life that perfectly suits her means and her inclinations. In a famous essay, Virginia Woolf once stated that every woman needs a room of her own. In this post-feminist age, one might say that it is what every *person* needs, a space where you can be yourself, free from the pressures and expectations of others.

Annie is an example and inspiration to us all, and the most exciting aspect of her achievement, perhaps, is that *Fantail's* rig is the central precept on which it all hinges, something which she has made very clear in her writings. She is probably the most eminent spokesperson for junk rig afloat today.



Annie - happy to be where she is most at home

Annie is a founder member of the JRA, formed at the Southampton Boat Show in 1979. She has made significant contributions to the Association over the years, recently serving as the Sailing Secretary and now as chairman as well as assisting with editorial work on the magazine. During her years as 1<sup>st</sup> mate on *Badger*, the ship received numerous awards. *Badger's* skipper, Pete Hill, was the official

recipient of those awards, but in 2009 Annie won the prestigious Blue Water Medal of the Cruising Club of America, alongside Trevor Robertson, in recognition of her many years of adventurous cruising, an award that was richly deserved.



## NOTICE OF JUNKET - BREST - SECOND WEEK OF JUNE 2015

Bonjour,

A few UK-based junks are planning to meet up in or around Marina du Château, Brest, Brittany during the second week of June, to enjoy sailing in this beautiful location and to discuss and compare a variety of junk-rigged boats; and of course, to meet and enjoy being with like-minded people.

**Rules :** There won't be any.

**Cost:** None, only what you decide to spend aboard your own vessel.

**Liability:** None.

The JRA is an association of people with an interest in junk-rigged sailing vessels who like to meet, discuss and share ideas and recent developments and to sail these amazing boats.

The decisions of where/when to sail and what to do, remains the decision of each skipper, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of his/her own boat and crew, and the prevailing weather and sea conditions.

**Objective:** To spread the word and cultivate interest in the advantages of this rig, amongst sailors young and old.

**Invitation:** Is open to any member of the JRA who would like to attend, together with friends, family, pets, retired (or serving) admirals and unpaid deck hands, in other words anyone who would like to enjoy a few days of social sailing.

**What to do next:** Let us know of your interest so that we can share information of 'WHERE, WHEN and HOW' .

If you are interested please post in the forum.

Brian and Maddy Kerslake will be aboard 'Paradox' on location from the end of May and can be contacted by mobile 0044 7456 884 855

I am the new Sailing Secretary and whilst not planning to attend the Junket will be very happy to assist from afar. My JRA email is not fully up and running yet so I can be contacted by the email below, and of course I will be watching and can reply on the forum.

Ash Woods, Sailing Secretary JRA.

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