



Polar Bound is David Cowper's (above) ultimate aluminium explorer yacht. The 45-footer is ice strengthened, able to withstand 62 tonnes of pressure on the hull, has 25mm armour plate glass windows, is fully self-righting and derives power from a 150hp Gardner diesel. He has taken this boat to the ends of the earth three times.



MY MAN

Don reveals the influence English boating adventurer David Scott Cowper has had on his life

Have you ever noticed how young the police are these days? Hate to tell you this, but it is just another optical illusion. They are graduating at the same age, yet as we get older so they “appear” younger – another indicator of life rushing by reminding us to get out there and do things before it is too late.

Recently, I took a deep breath when my longtime adventure mate David Scott Cowper was written-up in *Yachting World* magazine as our

“greatest living explorer” at 70 years of age! You have got to be kidding me? 70? He’s my mate and I am now on my way to 59, yet see the world through the eyes of a 28-year-old. Wow! I had better get out and do something, hey! In 12 years I will be 70, what the...

David and I started knocking around together in 1979 when I helped him on his first solo circumnavigation of the world to beat Sir Francis Chichester’s record. Over the years since then, we have supported each other on

various occasions and caught-up adventuring in different parts of the world. I cannot think of him as 70.

Having completed five transits of the Northwest Passage, six solo circumnavigations (three via the poles, with more to come), many by powerboat and holding all the “records” you may ask why you have never heard of him. Well he just likes doing it, has no website, privately funds his trips, doesn’t look for publicity and is the quintessential British explorer of old. I was 24 when I first met David.

I had just set off on a three-year Pacific cruise on my 29ft yacht *Skye*. I did not know it then but he was to have a profound influence on my future. He made me realise the world is waiting and that the Polar regions are exciting places and importantly, that life is a very special opportunity that does not last long.

VALUE JUDGEMENT

When you are adventuring, risk management and risk minimisation are major issues and value judgments follow soon after. So what is cost-effective safety? Is your first aid training and equipment matching your risk profile?

I stumbled across a Bondi Surf Life Saving Club rescue clip on YouTube showing the graphic benefits of using an Automatic Emergency Defibrillator (AED). They saved a life just like that! I immediately decided I now had to get one. I first thought about it around 10 years ago but back then they were expensive. Now the price is down to about \$1500 if you are clever. I hope it is more wasted money but watching our awesome Aussie surf lifesavers in action saving a life made me think how helpless I may feel without an AED. I did not buy it for me.

Insurances are another tricky value judgment, especially for global voyagers. If you are in cyclone-prone areas it can be extra complicated. Premiums are not cheap, especially if you have a \$900,000 boat crewed by two in the Pacific. If you are solo forget it. My insurance had lapsed on *ICE* and I was looking at options in December last year.

The boat was in a “cyclone hole” out of the water at Vuda Point Marina, Fiji, and a report came through about a cyclone due to hit in 10 days. Oops... I was onto the job! I submitted proposals and cyclone plans etc. through a NZ broker, who submitted a proposal to Sun Alliance in the UK. Just five days later on December 17 Cyclone Evan was on the horizon and winds rising to through 30kts. My boat was still uninsured. I resigned myself to the outcome.

I was headed for Antarctica but friends on the marina kept me updated. Winds were expected to go over 100kts in the next eight hours – then the broker called. The insurance company and he were both aware of the cyclone’s imminent impact, but said: “Pay your premium now and you are



Last year, 70-year-old David Scott Cowper (second from right) and Jane Maufe (at right) became the first to navigate through Canada’s M’Clure Strait on the original Northwest Passage by powerboat. Icebreakers of 46,000hp had tried and failed but David’s trusty *Polar Bound* got through. David asked me if I wanted to go with him but I was too busy in Tonga at the time. The above photo shows David meeting with Australian adventurers Chris Bray (at left) and Jessica Taunton (second from left) doing the traditional Northwest Passage during that voyage.



About to lift *ICE* from her cyclone hole at Fiji’s Vuda Point Marina, preparing to head for Tonga. Super Cyclone Evan went straight overhead in December with 140-knot winds. We suffered not even a scratch on the paintwork. It is a great place to leave your boat.



cost of hardstand cyclone holes just went up 53 per cent – otherwise known as supply and demand. They will now be very popular. As for Sun Alliance, thanks for being a “real” insurance company and 40 per cent less than my last policy.

TREASURE HUNTING?

My bluetreasure.me expedition in Tonga is all about treasure for sure, but for me the driving force behind it is the “blue” treasure – the deep blue ocean, the clear blue skies and the pristine places of the Pacific. I am not just thinking gold-type treasure, even though there may very well be some along the way. Sure I like pirates and galleons and the fun of treasure hunting. I mean what self-respecting big kid wouldn't, right; I would give my left leg to find a bronze cannon. Life is meant to be fun too, but unfortunately in the past few weeks, a local Tongan diver died while trying to plunder “treasure” from a wreck site. A few weeks before that another local diver suffered the bends and has serious complications below the waist after diving on these wrecks.

Gold fever is like a drug but if you are diving historic wrecks you need good training and equipment – we can only offer our sympathy to the families. But here is the *big* difference between us and what most people think of as treasure hunters. I will never claim any wrecks for me, they *all* belong to the people of Tonga who we are helping. We are working with them, only after they invited us to assist. If we find a wreck, we tell the locals: “Hey, we found your wreck.”

And just for a bit of fun next year we are also setting up a “pirate camp” for final-year students on Blue Base, to graduate young adventurers” or should I say “budding pirates”. So watch this space and say to your kids: “Argh, me hearties!”

Technology and safety is fast becoming affordable. My 220-year-old octant cost a ship's officer a few months' wages back then. That fish bowl on my right is my 1990 BOC Challenge trophy when a 406 EPIRB cost nearly \$2500 and didn't have GPS! In 2010, my Talisker Bounty Boat 406/GPS PLBs (around my neck) sold for \$700 each. I bought some more last week for \$249, so you have to ask why when a sailor fell overboard in the northern Pacific recently, in good weather, wearing a lifejacket but no PLB and was lost. His non-sailing girlfriend had to be rescued as she couldn't handle the boat.

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[BLUE BASE]

I am still looking to sponsor two budding, young *Trade-a-boat* Explorers, between the ages of 18 and 23 for a 10-week adventure in the Kingdom of Tonga, on the island of Nomuka Iki. (See last month's column for details). This promises to be a life-changing experience at best or an unforgettable adventure at worst. We have discovered some amazing historic wrecks and are about to start recovering, conserving and protecting them for the people of Tonga. With the support of HRH Crown Prince Tupouto'a 'Ulukalala, we have set up a camp Blue Base on this beautiful, deserted tropical island. You will join a team of 10 other adventurer/explorers including myself and five diving instructors as we explore the living world, 400-year-old wrecks, swim with whales and meet with Tongan culture head on. All the expedition details are on the bluetreasure.me website so you could be part of the crew... are you up for that? Email me if you are.



We think we may have found one of these ancient ocean-going carracks.



Harriet Spark from Qld is one of five dive instructors who have signed on to our [Bluetreasure](http://bluetreasure.me) expedition. The 10-strong team come from Switzerland, America, China, Australia and Tonga. We are all holding our breath in expectation of surveying unexplored historic wrecks.

Plenty of gunwale repair work after the cyclone, but labour is skilled and cheap in Fiji – casuals are about \$4 an hour and marine engineers around \$35.

covered.” Wow! I did and six hours later it blew over 120kts for three hours as the Category 4 beast went right over the top of *ICE*.

Fiji was devastated and boats sunk. Point Denarau Marina was washed away and boats damaged. *ICE* survived unscratched, as did all the others boats in Vuda Point Marina holes, while some boats in the water had damaged topsides. All Vuda boats survived and it can now claim itself as the best cyclone hole in the Pacific. It is a clever design and well managed but the

