

May, made of full-length pitch pine planks on oak frames. Six such boats were constructed just after World War One. 'It even came with its original Thornycroft Handy Billy petrol/paraffin motor,' Nick remembers.

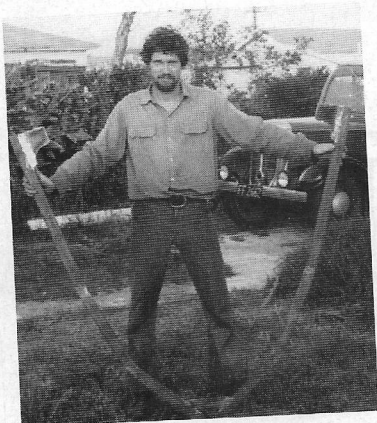
His obvious love of sailing led to him setting off from the River Hamble in 1975 aboard *Wylo* 'for my first warm winter,' says Nick. 'I ended up in New Zealand in 1976 without having any intentions of going there!'

Shipwreck!

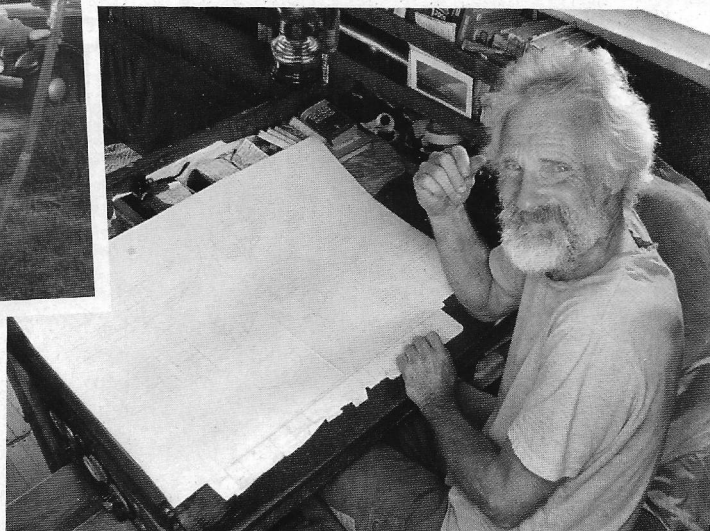
The following year, with New Zealander Dorothy Fisher aboard whom Nick met in Whangarei, *Wylo* was approaching Fiji from Tonga. Unable to get a sun sight for 26 hours due to very poor visibility, Nick thought conditions would clear, and kept going – but they didn't. With 25 to 30-knot trades, *Wylo* was moving along. 'The first I knew I was in trouble was seeing a lot of white water aft,' Nick recalls, 'then crash – we were on a reef. It was mid-afternoon: we had to get off the boat, we couldn't stay the night on it. There was a lot of movement: she was breaking up. Looking at the chart, I realised that we must be on a circular reef north of Kadavu with a central lighthouse. I spent some time looking very carefully for the lighthouse, finally spotting it about 1.5 miles away, and took a compass bearing.'

Dorothy and Nick loaded their 7½ft dinghy with only the essentials – water, whiskey and tobacco – plus a bunk cushion, passports and the Ebbco plastic sextant Nick still uses today, and they set off.

'It was the hardest row of my life,' he grimaces. 'The dinghy was overloaded, and if I missed the lighthouse we wouldn't have been able to row back.' Luckily, they made it. Sadly, there was no lighthouse keeper with the kettle on – the lighthouse had just been automated – but it was at least open. The rocks, and the building's first three stories, were infested with poisonous sea snakes. Stepping quickly and gingerly past, Nick and Dorothy made their way to the sanctuary of the top of the lighthouse. Apparently an incurable romantic, Nick chose this moment to propose to Dorothy. Clad only in gumboots, as they had escaped *Wylo* just in oilskins, he went down on bended knee. His proposal was accepted.



ABOVE A 31-year-old Nick in 1978 in Whangarei, with the first frame of *Wylo II*



RIGHT Nick with some early development drawings of *Wylo II*

Sleep was not possible, as every 20 seconds the acetylene-fired light yards from them ignited with a whoosh, illuminating their haven as if it were day. Fortunately, a Fijian naval minesweeper entered the reef the following day, dropping anchor for the crew to sleep off hangovers incurred at a big party in Kandavu, before returning to base in Suva. 'The Fijian Navy were brilliant,' Nick says. 'They had a whip-round for clothes and helped strip *Wylo* of many salvageable parts, including the old Humber motorbike which now sports a Tongan front mudguard and New Zealand wheel rims, and which survives aboard *Wylo II* today.'

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Back in New Zealand, Nick and Dorothy – now married – wanted to carry on sailing, but with only \$4,500 to buy a boat and set it up for offshore there was nothing available. Nick had always been interested in boat design and had carried a notebook round for years, recording good design ideas. Needless to say, this was lost in the wreck, but with the ideal boat in mind he decided to design and build his own.

She had to be suitable for a couple or for single-handed sailing, for which he

considered 32ft (9.7m) to be the ideal size and a steel hull with wooden decks (for lightness) to be the right materials. He wanted raised cabin sides for more interior space, and no cockpit to allow an aft double berth: furthermore, the boat would be gaff-rigged for ease of sail handling and high average passage speeds. A centreboard for nosing up creeks and canals, which Nick loved, would also achieve low wetted area for good boat speed. The mast would be only 2ft longer than the boat, in a tabernacle with an A-frame forward to allow the mast to be lowered with the gear on the boat.

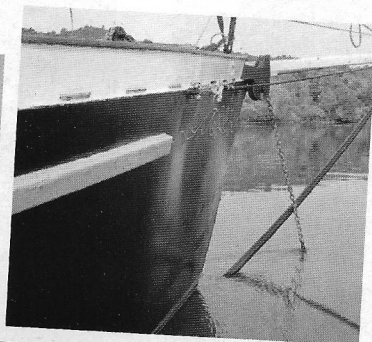
On 11 April 1978, nine months after Nick and Dorothy were shipwrecked in Fiji, the lines of *Wylo II* were drawn and construction began in a mate's back garden in Whangarei. She was launched 20 months later on 26 March 1980, and her first sail was in

November 1980: the rest is history. Nick says he never intended to sell plans or build *Wylo* hulls, but people began asking for the plans and he has now built three more hulls and decks for owners. With about 40 *Wyls* afloat today and 147 plans sold, Nick's designs span the globe: a 35ft fixed-keel version has even been round Cape Horn.

With four circumnavigations under his belt (his best day's run being 190NM, with plenty in the high 170s) and numerous round-Atlantic cruises – plus a number of what Nick calls 'side trips' up to the Pacific Islands – he has covered more than 250,000nm in the 30 years since *Wylo II* was launched.

Dorothy completed the first circumnavigation with him before they parted. Nick has since sailed with crew when they are available, and solo when not. Some crew have stayed a long time, and appear from the photographs to often be beautiful blondes.

Nick sometimes has a faraway look in his eye. 'Might head south this year,' he mutters. I suspect this is how all his circumnavigations begin, so New Zealand's 'Upper Waitemata harbour boys' had better light the barbecue and keep an eye on the horizon!

PBO


ABOVE The dent from *Wylo*'s collision with a 40-ton whale

Nick does some work on *Wylo II* from his dory

