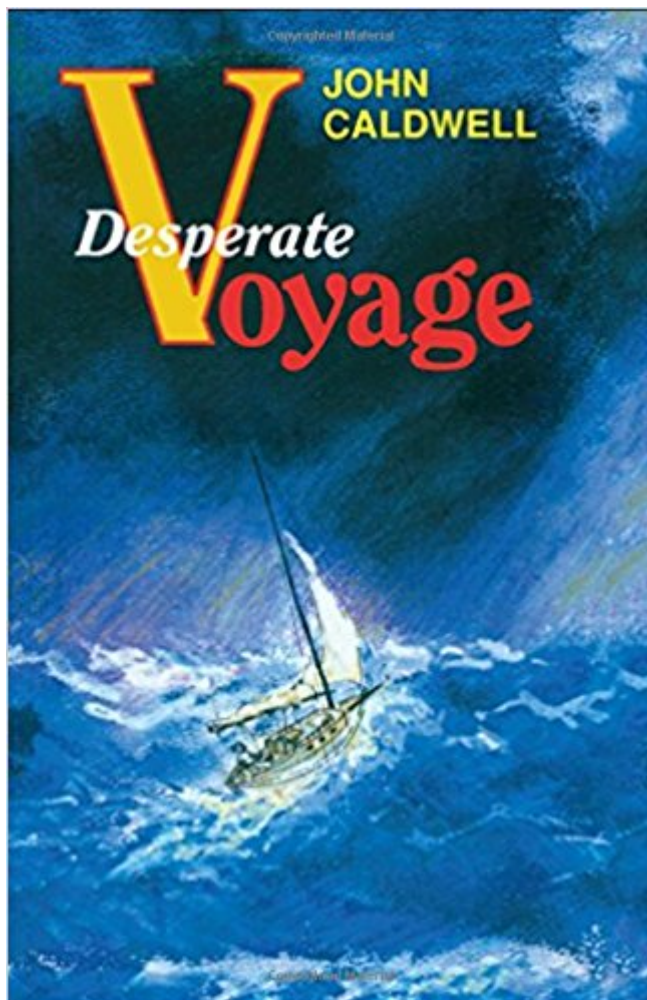




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Desperate Voyage



Synopsis

In May 1946 John Caldwell set out to sail from Panama to Sydney to reunite with his wife who he hadn't seen for more than a year. Eager to reach his destination and unable to secure any other form of transport, he had to resort to singlehanded seamanship. After an ignominious scene in the harbor, where a tangled anchor led him to take an early dip, he spent ten days learning the rudiments of navigation and sailing from a book, before embarking on the 9,000 mile journey aboard the 20-foot Pagan. Ahead lay a mission that was to reveal in him elements not only of astounding courage and determination, but also of incredible foolhardiness. Within 500 miles of Panama John Caldwell had already been shipwrecked once and had his boat's engine and cockpit destroyed by an angry shark. Indefatigable, he decided to press on towards his goal. He endured the terrors and discomforts of life on the high seas and enjoyed the triumphs of fighting and winning against the elements. This is more than an exciting tale of sea-adventure. It is as compelling and unpredictable as a thriller. It is the story, witty and moving, of a man, motivated initially by love, and ultimately by his own fierce determination to survive.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Sheridan House; Reprint edition (January 25, 1991)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0924486201

ISBN-13: 978-0924486203

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 53 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,049,180 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Outdoor Recreation > Sailing > Excursion Guides](#) #2768 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Water Sports](#) #5498 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers](#)

Customer Reviews

A must read for all would-be voyagers. (Latitude 38)[An] astounding tale of courage and adventure....an engaging, well-written story that combines elements of romance with incredible adventure, farce and foolhardiness. If ever there was an argument for the benefits of sail training, this book cements it. Riveting stuff. (Sailing Today)One of the classic 'How I did it on a shoe-string in an unsuitable boat, knowing nothing about sailing' books....A good read and

hooray for the days when people could do this sort of thing without attracting condemnation. (The Island)

John Caldwell went on to graduate from the University of California Santa Barbara. He sailed all over the world with his wife Mary and their two sons. While sailing in the Caribbean he caught a glimpse of his dream island, Prune Island. He obtained a 99-year lease on the island, planted palms, renamed it Palm Island and established his own resort. The rest of his life was spent sailing around the islands he loved and sharing his passion with lucky visitors to his Caribbean paradise.

This is a true story that is more engrossing than pretty much any novel you are likely to find. After the end of the Second World War, the author's Australian wife is ten thousand miles away, and it is impossible for him to book passage from the States to Australia, what with the war just having ended and available shipping tied up for years. So he decides to do a solo sail in a small sailboat from Panama to Sydney. Therein lies a tale of hardship, resourcefulness, courage, and (may I say it) at least one part bad judgment, as the author single-handedly crosses the better part of the Pacific Ocean in a small and primitive, but plucky sailing vessel. I am sure that I am not giving anything away when I tell you that the author stares death and starvation in the face on more than one occasion. The author knows how to tell a good story, and I was unable to put this one down once I got past about the first chapter. I was up until 3 in the morning trying to finish it, unable to put it down or go to sleep. This is a terrific story with equal parts humor, desperation, and audaciousness. This is a classic mariner's tale that anyone who loves boats or the ocean will want to read, own, and read repeatedly. Highly recommended.

Every bit as incredible a survival story as Shackleton is. Starts a bit slow, but by the time he hits the hurricane, it's an irresistible page-Turner!

I first read this story as a twelve-year old in high school, and was fascinated by the amazing adventure undertaken by one man as he strove to cross the largest ocean on Earth against almost insuperable odds. At that age, I was thrilled by the dangers and daring involved. Stumbling across the book again forty-five (yes, forty-five) years later, I was delighted to find the tale just as exciting as it had been so long ago. However this time, I was much more impressed not by the author's hair-raising adventures, but by the amazing love he must have had for his wife to embark on such an epic voyage. All in all, it is great read for both young and old!

Great story! John Caldwell is one heck of a gutsy guy, and his story is amazing! Several times, scenes from the book gave me chills up my spine. A true tale of survival! Easy to read as well.

So many times I wanted to reach into the book and stop Mr. Caldwell from making some terrible mistake! You'll marvel at his abilities and be awestruck by his errors. I had the pleasure of meeting James Caldwell while sailing in the Caribbean in 1985. I couldn't help but buy my copy of "Desperate Voyage" from him after our conversation. I'm delighted to see that it's available from and that other sailors and adventurers have had the chance to read this tome. I had to remind myself that if I'd been the same age as when he made this journey I might not have done as well. One thing is clear - Never invite a SHARK to dinner! Best regards, Tom

John Caldwell was in love. So in love he bought a less-than-adequate 29 foot sailboat to sail thousands of miles across the Pacific (from Panama to Sydney, Australia) to be with his new bride. On his way, adventure and obstacles ensue, and he really shows what he's made of throughout the story. What a great book! A real page-turner. You will have a hard time putting this one down. I know I did!

Many times throughout this book I felt like slapping the author. He made so many foolish decisions and reflects on them by saying "but what else could I do?!". Plenty, but I'll leave that to others to ruminate. Regardless, the author survived both his poorly considered voyage but also the Darwin principle. I almost put it down midway but decided to read on to verify that he actually survived.... The story is basically 1001 things that go wrong on a transoceanic solo sail voyage (of which 900 were avoidable).

I have recommended this book to all my sailing friends. Amazing story. Well written book that is hard to lay down.

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