



The Unlikely Voyage of Jack De Crow: A Mirror Odyssey from North Wales to the Black Sea

By A. J. Mackinnon

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Equipped with his cheerful optimism and a pith helmet, this Odysseus in a dinghy takes you with him from the borders of north Wales to the Black Sea - 4,900 kilometers over salt and fresh water, under sail, at oars, or at the end of a tow rope - through twelve countries, 282 locks, and numerous trials and adventures, including an encounter with Balkan pirates.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

More nutty stunts come from the British Isles than from anywhere else on earth, and the escapade Australian-born Mackinnon recounts here is as addled as anyone's. One day, he stepped into a dinghy, intending to sail a few hundred miles down the Severn River, stopping at pubs and having a lark for a few days. He named his little craft Jack de Crow in honor of his childhood dream of owning a tame crow (not a cuckoo?). To make a short story even shorter, he passed up most of the pubs in England, almost got gored by a bull, sank Jack in a drunken stupor, patched the little boat back up, battled pirates, and landed in Romania. Loaded with self-deprecating humor and one giddy adventure after another, this fun account of Mackinnon's voyage is definitely for armchair travelers. as it is highly unlikely that anyone would be wacky enough to use this book as a guide to try a similar stunt. Highly recommended for all public libraries.

Joseph L. Carlson, Allan Hancock Coll., CA

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Review

...[a] blend of high adventure, immeasurable charm and comedy... (*Latitudes & Attitudes*)

...a wonderful idea for a book--a series of ever bolder improvisations...undertaken in praise of the spirit of adventure. (*Times Literary Supplement*)

...one of the most original and entertaining books on sailing and voyaging to come out in years. (*Sailing*)

...the cavalier attitude, wit, and romanticism of this book are enough to capture the heart of any adventurer... (*WaterCraft*)

...will have you alternately laughing and shaking your head in disbelief at the brilliant insanity of the ill-defined quest. (*Cruising World*)

There are as many ways to live aboard as there are boats that float. Some sailors take a more Spartan approach. Mackinnon took this latter style to its perhaps illogical extreme, when he sailed a Mirror dinghy from Wales to the Black Sea. The Mirror is about 11 feet long, and is used primarily as a sail trainer by instructors who believe in giving students lots of strings to pull; it has a gunter mainsail, a tiny jib and a toy spinnaker. I can't imagine a less suitable vessel for a trip across Europe, but this voyage provided the material for a fascinating book.

The author borrowed the little boat from the secondary school where he had been teaching, intent on a brief holiday before leaving England. But, seduced by his initial success in battling down small brooks and drainage ditches to the River Severn, he continued on, powered only by oars and that small mainsail, wearing his trademark pith helmet. His achievements encouraged him...and even his frequent disasters proved motivational once he figured out ways to overcome them.

Eventually, he reached a port on the English Channel and discovered to his surprise that no one in a position of authority was inclined to forbid him from crossing. So away he went, and fortune preserved him despite a serious navigation error. Once across the Channel, it was clear sailing to the Black Sea. Over the course of this great adventure, he sailed or rowed through 12 countries and 282 locks.

Readers may be inclined to dismiss Mackinnon as the sort of amusing, colorful, harmless eccentric famously produced by England, although the author is not English. But there's more to it than that. In his miniscule boat, Mackinnon was not only close to the water, he was close to the hearts of those who saw him rowing his way east, and he was taken in, repaired, fed, and generally treated with great affection by those he met on his voyage.

Mackinnon has a pleasant outgoing personality, and he writes with the sort of stylish flair you might expect from a literature teacher. However, the smallness of his boat was probably the largest factor in attracting so much kindness from the strangers along his route. Sometimes he slept under a tarp on the damp floorboards, but more often he stayed with newfound friends. (*Living Aboard*)

"This amiable book is about what can, but probably should not, be attempted in a Mirror dinghy...The experience is by turns cheering and terrifying, but always met with humor and described with style...It's the sort of book people buy in quantities to give to their friends." (*Classic Boat*)

Loaded with self-deprecating humor and one giddy adventure after another, this fun account of Mackinnon's voyage is definitely for armchair travelers. as it is highly unlikely that anyone would be wacky enough to use this book as a guide to try a similar stunt. Highly recommended for all public libraries. (*Library Journal*)

About the Author

A.J. Mackinnon was born in Australia in 1963. He got hDiploma in Education and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, Linguistics and Anglo-Saxon from the University of Adelaide. His teaching career started at Westminster school, Adelaide, where he taught English and Drama for four years. After this time he traveled overland England by yacht, hitch-hiking, river-canoe and even horseback-spending a brief time in a Chinese prison after accidentally swimming into China and being attacked by Komodo Dragons, amongst other experiences.

In England he taught at Sherborne and Cheltenham before becoming Head of Drama at Ellesmere College, Shropshire, where he also taught English. From Ellesmere he launched his unlikely voyage aboard his dinghy *Jack de Crow*. He is currently teaching English and Drama at Geelong Grammar School in Australia where he also coaches sailing.

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