

## OBITUARY – Gerald Stanley (Gerry) Clark (1927-1999)



Gerry Clark on board *Totorore* in Bluff Harbour, New Zealand, on 30 December 1994, after a trip to Antipodes Islands; with Christine Hanel.

Gerry Clark was born in Colchester, England, on 9 May 1927, and began his seafaring career on his 14th birthday by enlisting on the Merchant Navy training ship *HMS Worcester* (a battleship permanently anchored in the Thames estuary). In his spare time he bird-watched in the local estuaries. He followed his 3 older brothers to sea at 17, as a cadet with the Union Castle Steamship Co. for 2 years. After the war he joined the Straits Steamship Co. of Singapore as a 2nd Mate, and rose through the ranks to become Assistant Marine Superintendent.

In 1951, he had obtained his Master's Certificate in Southampton, and there he met Marjorie Ellen Bates. They married soon after and settled back in Singapore, where their 4 daughters were born. The family moved to New Zealand in 1958, to Homelands Orchard near Kerikeri, which they developed eventually for the organic culture of citrus and sub-tropical fruits: it is still the family base.

From his arrival in New Zealand, his seagoing became erratic and less conventional: overseas trips, mainly delivery voyages, in small ships, fishing boats, and yachts kept his hand in, and also helped develop his keen interest in seabirds. He attended evening classes to learn boat-building and, in 1968, built the 7 m, motorless yacht *Ketiga*. In her he took part in the first Single-handed Trans-Tasman Yacht Race, in 1970. Three years later they sailed around New Zealand via the subantarctic Auckland and Campbell Islands, and the Chathams, with their magnificent wildlife, bountiful and accessible. This voyage was also for publicity and fund-raising for land conservation around the Kerikeri Stone Store, Gerry being a founder member of the Society for preservation of this area.

Gerry was now hooked on the subantarctic and its birds. On his return he revealed his plans to build a slightly larger boat in which to circle the globe in

high southern latitudes and study the seabirds of the Southern Ocean. *Totorore* was conceived. An 11 m motorised yacht or cutter with a bowsprit and twin ballast keels, the 4-berth *Totorore* was constructed of kauri by Gerry, at Homelands, over a 7-year period and launched in 1982. Its name is the Maori word for the Antarctic prion (*Pachyptila desolata*) and the purpose of the *Totorore* expedition was to study the seabirds of the Southern Ocean and help in their conservation. The expedition is described in 'The *Totorore* Voyage' (Clark 1988). Setting off on 26 February 1983, the expedition lasted 3 years 8 months and 16 days during which the small vessel travelled 38,413 nautical miles in an easterly circumnavigation of Antarctica. Gerry usually had 1 or 2 companions on board.

The most significant ornithological observations were made in Chile and South Georgia. First, there were petrel observations and contributions to knowledge of conservation problems in the Juan Fernandez Islands. In South America, breeding colonies, including northernmost colonies in Chile, of rockhopper and macaroni penguins were discovered. Large colonies of black-browed mollymawk, southern giant petrel, blue petrel, thin-billed prion (the first confirmed record of prions breeding in Chile), and sooty shearwater (largest colony known in Chile) were found. Great numbers of Magellan diving petrels and grey phalaropes were observed. Further on, and further south, at South Georgia the expedition made valuable counts (and at most sites the first accurate ones) of wandering albatrosses and king penguins during 2 winters at otherwise inaccessible colonies along the whole indented coastline of this 160 km long Antarctic island and its satellite islands. This was an incredible feat in such arduous conditions and by then Gerry was 57. The scenery was a bonus.

On the voyage home from Cape Town, he found black-browed mollymawks breeding on Iles des Apôtres and Ile des Pingouins, in the Crozet Archipelago, at about the same time as French ornithologists found them. However, this section of the expedition was most famous for his survival against the odds. Between Cape Town and Marion I, *Totorore* lost her mast when capsized in a storm. From Marion Island, Gerry continued alone with a jury rig (a makeshift mast and sail). Beyond Heard Island, *Totorore* was rolled 360° 5 times in seas reputed to be among the stormiest in the world, with waves that reach 35 m. But *Totorore* stayed afloat, Gerry survived, rigged the sail and, after 68 days of drifting and sailing generally north-east, they arrived in Fremantle. Gerry's irrepressible humour comes out in his description of their reception by Australian Customs. After nearly 7 hours of their 'going over', *Totorore* was in the worst disorder since she had been rolled by the sea: "I suppose we could easily have had a load of drugs on board, and gone south and chucked

the mast overboard as a blind!" The New Zealand challenge for the America's Cup yachting trophy helped him out, and vessel and owner arrived home 4 months later, on 6 November 1986.

For these achievements he was awarded an MBE (1987), Northland Harbour Board's Blue Water Trophy (1986), the Tilman Medal for Cruising in High Latitudes (1986), the Blue Water Medal of the Cruising Club of America (1987), Devonport Yacht Club Fred Norris Medal (1988), the Royal Akarana Yacht Club's Tequila Propeller Award (1988), the New Zealand Yacht Navigators Society Stoberger Medal (1988), and he was elected Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1988.

But by November 1987 Gerry and *Totorore* were headed south again, this time to help with the radio telemetry of Chatham taiko and, incidentally, to find the first cape pigeons recorded breeding on Chatham Islands. Over the next decade they made 16 visits to the subantarctic islands of New Zealand, providing logistical support for volunteers and students studying seabirds on limited budgets, as well as contractors and staff of the Department of Conservation. By obtaining grants, sponsorships, or even his personal contributions he provided opportunities for many conservation-minded people to participate in projects that had a low priority for government funding. In this he and *Totorore* are irreplaceable.

It was on such a trip to Antipodes Island in June 1999, with Roger Sale as crewman, that they met their fates, in unknown circumstances. They had dropped off 2 albatross researchers on the island and gone to South Bay for anchorage. Grey petrels are plentiful above the bay, so it was a favourite place for Gerry (indeed, he had plans to return the following winter with a small research team to study them). There was a weather change. Only pieces of wreckage were ever found. In the end it was not the sea *per se* that claimed them, but the treacherous conjunction between land and sea.

Gerry loved the sea, boats, seabirds, and the subantarctic. He seemed quite happy to stay on *Totorore* and keep her shipshape while others did the birdwatching, the major trips ashore, and, if sufficiently well (for *Totorore* challenged almost every stomach), the cooking. If there was a competent ornithologist on board he was quite happy to attend to matters maritime. However, when good sightings were made, as when we saw 2 Chatham petrels near The Pyramid in 1987 (among the first sightings at sea of this petrel at the time), he was as enthusiastic as any twitcher. He maintained a very happy disposition and showed much concern for fellow travellers suffering in their bunks. As the galley was very small, Gerry was always grateful for anyone who could turn out an omelette or even a soup for a meal. This limitation led to the comments in "The *Totorore* Voyage" about fine meals

had ashore, including the passage through stormy seas to get to the BAS (British Antarctic Survey) Saturday night dinner on Bird Island.

Gerry made major practical contributions to subantarctic ornithology in the Chilean and New Zealand regions. The New Zealand work was ongoing at his death and his loss has left a void that

cannot be filled. His name and *Totorore's* were so inextricably linked that it seems tragically appropriate that they met their fate together. The Ornithological Society of New Zealand extends its sympathies to his family and the family of Roger Sale.

Michael J. Imber

She'll be right!

Some of us dream of stepping out the door and going somewhere that few have ever been. Sadly, money does not grow on trees and these adventures seldom come about. Gerry Clark had a wanderlust that did not know the bounds of "fiscal responsibility". Sell a few acres, build the boat yourself, and get sponsorship were his response to practicality. Born in England, he was nevertheless a New Zealander's New Zealander – "nothing is impossible with a bit of hard-work, luck and kiwi ingenuity". His catch phrase on our voyage was always "she'll be right".

The sub-Antarctic is a horrible, wonderful place. As a boy I had been hypnotised by accounts of bravery and misadventure in this mythical realm. I had read of explorers such as James Clark Ross, Mawson, and Shackleton. Then I heard of a New Zealander who was on just such a voyage of discovery! And a 17-year-old, 1st year university student, such as I was, could join. Needless to say I was off! Weeks of work on *Totorore* in Cape Town led to days of torment, weeks of worry and 4 months a maroon on Marion Island. It changed my whole life.

I visited southern Chile last year and, rather than finding Gerry a forgotten memory, I found people throughout the country who remembered

him. People who were in the fjords of Chile to emulate his feats, people who had read every page of his book a hundred times until it had fallen apart, and people who begged me to send copies of his book to them so they could have an original. I visited Cape Horn in November - the weather was terrible and it was late spring! I could scarcely believe that that little boat's crew had camped on top of that desolate rock in winter!

The voyage to Chile was one of pilgrimage and of penitence for me. Scarcely an hour in the fjords was not punctuated by seeing an island, a glacier or a channel that Gerry had visited and where he had had an adventure. Of course I was on a tourist boat with a bunch of backpackers and other urban refugees for which this 3-day voyage was simply a pleasant interlude, not an adventure.

What of Gerry's legacy? On the shelf in my office I have the publications of 4 pioneering seabird biologists: Robert Cushman Murphy, Rollo Beck, Lance Richdale, and Gerry Clark. Gerry's life will not be forgotten. Gerry thought he had missed the era of the explorers and adventurers but I suspect he simply was the last of them.

R. Paul Scofield

The history of man's encounters with the New Zealand subantarctic islands is filled with stories of hardship, bravery and incredible endeavours. Some of these were successful, some, inevitably, were not.

Gerry Clark loved this area. He understood its dangers and was at home there. Navigation was as natural as breathing to him. His greatest joy was to be out with his seabirds. The only thing that could mar his pleasure was the sight of another vessel, particularly in an isolated anchorage. Luckily, that did not happen too often, given the kind of places he visited.

Everything he achieved – and his achievements were many – was a tribute to his determination,

self-discipline, and the constant loving support of Marjorie. He was not really a natural craftsman, yet he built *Totorore*, within whose hull we always felt safe and secure whatever the weather, and which took us to places we never dreamt we would visit, to exciting discoveries and rewarding work. *And it was fun*, because at sea Gerry was a different person. His joy and enthusiasm were infectious.

My feelings are of deep gratitude for being privileged to share a very small part of all of this, for lasting memories of times at sea with the birds, of friendships made, of experiencing another dimension to life.

Anthea Goodwin

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Compiled by Alan J. D. Tennyson



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