NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

KON TIKI

THOR HEYERDAHL

Thor Heyerdahl

Kon-Tiki

ACROSS THE PACIFIC BY RAFT

Translated by
F. H. LYON

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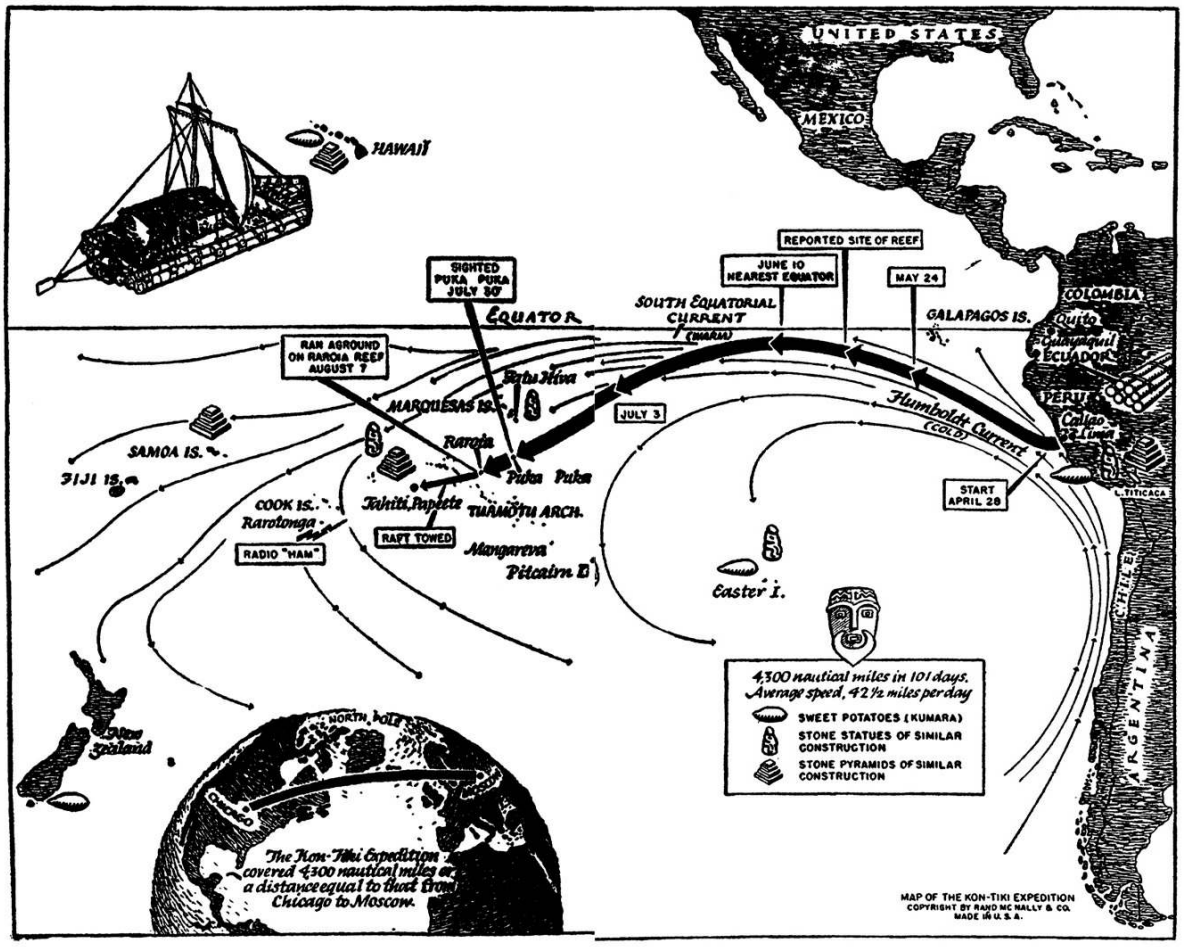
CONTENTS


UNITED STATES
MEXICO
HAWAII
REPORTED SITE OF REEF
JUNE 10 NEAREST EQUATOR
MAY 24
SIGHTED PUKA PUKA JULY 30
EQUATOR
SOUTH EQUATORIAL CURRENT (WARM)
GALAPAGOS IS.
COLOMBIA
Quito
Guayaquil
ECUADOR
PERU
Callao
Lima
RAN AGROUND ON RAROIA REEF AUGUST 7
Fatu Hiva
MARQUESAS IS.
JULY 3
Humboldt Current (COLD)
SAMOA IS.
FIJI IS.
Raroia
Puka Puka
COOK IS.
Rarotonga
Tahiti, Papeete
TUAMOTU ARCH.
RAFT TOWED
RADIO "HAM"
Mangareva
Pitcairn I.
START APRIL 28
L. TITICACA
Easter I.
4,300 nautical miles in 101 days. Average speed, 42½ miles per day
SWEET POTATOES (KUMARA)
STONE STATUES OF SIMILAR CONSTRUCTION
STONE PYRAMIDS OF SIMILAR CONSTRUCTION
New Zealand
NORTH POLE
CHICAGO
The Kon-Tiki Expedition covered 4300 nautical miles on a distance equal to that from Chicago to Moscow.
CHILE
ARGENTINA
MAP OF THE KON-TIKI EXPEDITION
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Foreword to the 35th Anniversary Edition

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE IN FATE, OTHERS DON'T. I DO, and I don't. It may seem at times as if invisible fingers move us about like puppets on strings. But for sure, we are not born to be dragged along. We can grab the strings ourselves and adjust our course at every crossroad, or take off at any little trail into the unknown.

The pages that follow recount the story of a young man pulled up against the wall until he grasped the strings of destiny. When today I read this story which once I wrote myself, I recall the most decisive moment in my life, when I, a sworn landlubber with a fear of water deeper than to my neck, cut all ties to the land and steered out into the largest and deepest body of water on earth, into a strange adventure and an unknown future. From then till the present day, my life has been filled with adventures linked together like pearls on a thread. Pearls rarely turn up in oysters served to you on a plate; you have to dive for them. Adventure for adventure's sake has never appealed to me. But I do not shun adventure if it comes my way.

I grew up as an overprotected boy. A dreamer. My university years were split between studies of man and beast. I was formally educated as a zoologist at Oslo University, but my heart was with my studies of Pacific peoples at the Kroepe-lien Polynesian Library in the same city, the world's largest private library on Polynesia (it has since been incorporated in the Kon-Tiki Museum Library, Oslo). And as a bookworm unable to swim, I went in 1937 to Polynesia to live for a year on the jungle island Fatu Hiva, severed from contact with the outside world.

I went to Polynesia to study how *animals* had reached oceanic islands, carried by winds and currents. I came home with a controversial theory of how *man* had reached these islands in prehistoric times. Scholars had invariably assumed that all early voyagers into the Pacific had sailed and paddled straight from Southeast Asia. I disagreed. Prevailing winds and currents would prevent their traveling directly eastward from Asia. Yet there were two feasible sea routes to Polynesia: One was a circuitous route from Southeast Asia by way of Northwest America to Hawaii, and the other from South America directly to eastern Polynesia.

This book tells the story of how six young men proved that a prehistoric voyage from South America was possible, contrary to the predictions of scientists and sailors. The South American balsa raft, which scholars had claimed would sink if it were not regularly dried out ashore, stayed buoyant as a cork. And Polynesia, held to be inaccessible for a watercraft from ancient America, proved to be well within the range of aboriginal voyagers from Peru.

How did science react to being proved wrong? Among the first to yield was the world's leading authority on prehistoric watercraft in Peru, Dr. S. K. Lothrop of Harvard University, the very scholar whose judgment about balsa rafts we had disproven. But the worldwide publicity given the *Kon-Tiki* voyage was considered a slap in the face by other scientists who had quoted Lothrop and based their own work and teachings on the assumption that balsa rafts would sink. From all over the world, scholars hit back, accusing us of a stunt without scientific merit. Public interest increased with the polemics. The book on the *Kon-Tiki* expedition became a best-seller, eventually translated into 65 languages, and our film of the voyage was awarded an Oscar as best documentary feature for 1951.

Years of controversy followed, during which scholars everywhere initially refused to even listen to the arguments behind the "Kon-Tiki theory." The first formal challenge came from the Royal Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, which asked me in 1950 to defend my views and as a result awarded me my first scientific medal. Other awards followed, in Scotland, then France. In 1952, five years after the raft voyage, I was able to publish for the first time my 800-page volume *American Indians in the Pacific: The Theory Behind the Kon-Tiki*

Expedition. The same year, I accepted an invitation to deliver three lectures at the 30th International Americanist Congress at Cambridge University; when the congress next assembled, in Brazil, I attended as an honorary vice-president.

Nonetheless, the polemics continued. The Galapagos Islands were said to disprove the Kon-Tiki theory. They lie closer to South America than any of the Polynesian islands. If South American voyagers dared to sail all the way to Polynesia, why had they not settled the Galapagos as well? A new challenge. New library studies.

Numerous scholars had been to the Galapagos since Darwin's visit in 1835. Zoologists, botanists, geologists—but not a single archaeologist. None had come to look for early human traces that far from the mainland. The visitors all quoted one another to the effect that no human eye had seen these islands before the Europeans arrived in 1535. Having discovered that Inca balsa rafts were entirely capable of reaching the Galapagos, I brought the first two archaeologists to investigate the islands in 1953. We searched in the few level places where early rafts could have landed between the rugged lava cliffs and rocks. Four prehistoric campsites were located on three of these arid islands. From the barren soil, the trowels of the scientists scraped up large quantities of potsherds and other artifacts, many of them identified as pre-Inca by the U.S. National Museum. This proved that numerous voyagers from Peru and Ecuador had visited the island group in pre-Columbian times. Permanent settlement had been prevented by only seasonal access to drinking water.

The nearest inhabitable island out at sea was Easter Island, halfway between South America and the rest of Polynesia. The colossal statues and stone walls of unknown origins that dotted the landscape were said by the Polynesian population to be the remains from an earlier people. Because this island lay farthest from Asia, most scholars believed it was the last to have been reached by aboriginal man. How then, I wondered, could the Easter Islanders have had time to develop and later forget this amazing prehistoric culture, which furthermore had surprised scholars by closely resembling pre-Inca remains? Dr. H. Lavachery, the only professional archaeologist to have visited Easter Island, admitted that he

had never attempted excavations because the soil seemed shallow and human settlement was thought to be late.

In 1955-56, I chartered an expedition ship for a one-year survey of Easter Island and eastern Polynesia with a multinational team including five archaeologists. Excavations revealed that the famous giant heads were actually statues buried to their necks, with huge bodies and arms below ground. One clan on the island, claiming descent from the statuemakers, demonstrated how the colossal stone figures were quarried, transported, and raised on end. The archaeologists uncovered previously unknown types of statues and stone houses that followed prototypes from pre-Inca South America. Carbon dating showed that the island had been inhabited at least a thousand years earlier than hitherto assumed.

A turning point in the still heated discussions came in 1961, when some 3,000 specialists assembled at the Tenth Pacific Science Congress in Honolulu. Our Galapagos and Easter Island expeditions were discussed in the sessions for archaeology, physical anthropology, and botany, and in a special symposium on the Galapagos group. A resolution unanimously passed at the congress stated that Southeast Asia with adjacent islands and South America constituted the main source areas of Pacific island peoples and cultures.

The fierce fighting on all fronts now petered out to occasional sniping. No tempest at sea is harder on a man than to stand alone encircled by a firing squad of international authorities. A firm conviction of being in the right becomes your only armor against the barrage of assaults that can often be both personal and unfair. Yet dissidence and controversy are what bring science forward. Agreement and acceptance rarely stimulate experiments and progress. By this time, invitations from universities and scientific academies allowed me to present and defend my case widely. Honorary professorates and doctor's degrees, scientific medals, and fellowship in academies of science from New York to Moscow reflected that the tide had turned.

I now felt free to turn to the ocean on the opposite side of America. The trade winds and currents of the tropical Atlantic pushed constantly from Africa to America on the same course and with the same strength as they left America's Pacific side for Polynesia. Planked ships were

unknown in America until Columbus arrived, but reed ships were typical for great pre-Columbian civilizations on either side of the Atlantic. On Easter Island, we had found outlines of reed ships incised on the chests of statues, and small reed boats still made by the islanders were the same as those used in the former Inca empire. They in turn were amazingly like the oldest form of ship among the great Old World civilizations in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus Valley.

Like the balsa raft, reed ships were assumed incapable of long sea voyages because of waterlogging. In 1970, seven of us from seven nations succeeded in sailing our reed ship *Ra II* from Morocco in Africa to Barbados in America at our second attempt at crossing the Atlantic in an Egyptian type vessel of papyrus reeds. In 1977-78, eleven of us from different nations spent five months on the *Tigris*, a Sumerian type reed ship, navigating from Iraq to Oman, the Indus Valley, and Africa.

With crews as unfamiliar with reed bundle boats and balsa log rafts as myself, I had found it possible in my lifetime to sail such vessels from Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley, from Asia to Africa, from Africa to America, and from America to Polynesia. Why could not the intrepid inventors of these seaworthy sailing craft, who built pyramids, have managed the same in the course of centuries?

Unlike pyramids, old boats sink or rot. With our ocean crossings, we had proved prehistoric seafaring possible, but the old wakes were gone. There were still those who insisted that, although the vessels were proven seaworthy, pre-European voyagers might nonetheless have preferred to sail within sight of land. The proof to the contrary came in 1982, when I went for the first time to explore the tiny Maldive Islands, far out in the Indian Ocean off the southern tip of India. During the last decade, airborne mass tourism has invaded this archipelago, which lies too far from any continent to have attracted modern archaeologists.

Maldive history began in A.D. 1153 with the arrival of Moslem Arabs, over three centuries before Columbus's time. Moslem religion rigidly forbids human illustrations of any kind, so it was a startling discovery when some islanders found a big stone statue with long ears emerging from the ground. Because of our reed ship voyage in the Indian Ocean, I was informed in 1982 by the Maldive authorities about this statue. I rushed to the spot to find that all but the head had been smashed by