

**MICHAEL PALIN**

TRAVELLING  
TO WORK

**DIARIES 1988–1998**

Weidenfeld & Nicolson

LONDON

# Introduction

In the last entry of the last published volume of my diaries I was in my bed at home trying to salvage what sleep I could before leaving for nearly twelve weeks away on the most ambitious project I had ever got myself into.

It might well have been a dream then, the semi-wakeful fantasy of a would-be traveller who had reached his mid-forties with no great adventures to show for it. By the time this third volume of Diaries begins, it is no dream. In my first entry I'm just out of bed, washing my smalls, no longer in the comfort of my own home, but in a ship's cabin halfway down the Adriatic Sea. I'm a full four days into a very big adventure which will shape my working life for the next twenty-five years.

This volume charts my attempts to steer an often bumpy course between the emerging potential of the television traveller and the reputation as actor and writer which I'd built up over twenty-odd years of a professional life that had begun in 1965. Even as I'm crossing the oceans filming *Around the World in 80 Days*, I'm hearing snatched messages suggesting that *A Fish Called Wanda* could be the most commercially successful film I'd ever appeared in. As we struggle with the heat and grimness of the streets of Bombay, I hear that my screenplay *Number 27* is pulling in overnight figures of near to eight million on BBC One. Clear signs that this is not the time to give up on the acting and writing. At first, as these diaries reveal, I regard the travels as a diversion from my real work, and no sooner am I returning to London – seventy-nine days and seven hours after setting out in Phileas Fogg's footsteps – than I am hard at work on *American Friends*, the film based on my great-grandfather's diary, in which I was both actor and co-author. Almost simultaneously, I take on the biggest acting challenge of my life, as Jim Nelson in Alan Bleasdale's *GBH*.

The early years of these diaries reveal the roller-coaster ride as I try to hold three careers together. I can't quite believe I took on so much, and many of the entries remind me how the doubts substantially outweighed the delights. By the mid 1990s my head was above water and I was breathing a little more normally. My confidence, and my bank balance, boosted by good numbers on *Around the World* and *Pole to Pole*, I began to take faltering steps in completely new directions. One was to fulfil a long-standing desire to write a novel, and the other to try and make a go of my stage play, *The Weekend*. The creative chicanes I had to negotiate on both these projects flung me all over the place,

and the birth pangs of *The Weekend* in 1994 and *Hemingway's Chair* in 1995 find me confiding my insecurities to the diary more and more. I make no apology for exposing my doubts and fears. After all, as has often been said, you learn more from failure than from success. And diaries can be raw and emotional places, unsanitised by historical perspective.

It became increasingly obvious to me during these years that I was addicted to travel and there was no point in resisting the lure of map and atlas. Not only had the books and programmes been well received, but my tolerant wife didn't try to stop me signing up again. Indeed, rather suspiciously, she encouraged it. Thus, *Full Circle*, the circumnavigation of the Pacific Rim, was born in 1996. It was the longest and most ambitious of the adventures so far, and did not altogether run a smooth course as my wife had to undergo a brain operation whilst I was on the far side of the world. I kept a little of my old life alive playing film comedy again as the head of the insect house in *Fierce Creatures*, John Cleese's long-awaited, long-delayed follow-up to *A Fish Called Wanda*.

As this current volume comes to an end I am still wandering off in all directions: trying my hand at an arts documentary, toying with a second novel, attempting to distil my interest in Hemingway into a book or a film, being seduced, once again, by Hollywood. This is the rough-and-ready, on-the-spot account of a fundamentally wary and conservative soul, drawn to risk like a moth to a flame. Someone who's convinced that his gut instinct is more important than all the advice in the world. Someone grounded and safe who can be tempted into almost anything.

The great journeys which underpin these diaries make me realise, more clearly than ever before, that I don't like to be confined to the main road ahead, that I'm drawn to the backstreets and the side alleys, to the quirky ordinariness of everyday life, to the unexpected and the unexplored. When I'm not travelling I experience something very similar. As soon as life looks predictable, or secure or straightforward, I hop off to one side, lured by whatever it is I've never done before.

All the entries were written at my home in London, unless otherwise indicated.

Michael Palin  
London, 2014

# 1988

*Wednesday, September 28th: Aboard Espresso Egitto on the Adriatic*

I've just got up, washed two pairs of socks and pants and considered what to wear for the day. As we have shots that are continuity with last night, I have to settle for the trousers I've worn since leaving London on Sunday morning and my second shirt of the voyage.

The sea is calm, my cabin, which is one of the more comfortable, has two beds alongside each other and a shower and loo. A porthole looks onto the deck and a lifeboat hangs above.

The journey has been fast and furious until now. Yesterday we were up and filming at first light in Venice – we left the city yesterday evening.

I still find the nights a problem. Last night I slept six hours, but that was with the help of a pill which I took in a panic about two. I swear not to take them again except in extremis. They do so little anyway.

Occasionally the realisation that this whole project is supported on my shoulders and demands not just my survival but my wit, energy, exuberance and enthusiasm quite terrifies me. It is going to be a supreme test, and now, only onto my fourth day and feeling low on all levels, I just can't contemplate the same continuing for two and a half more months.

But I'm determined to pull this off. Failure is unthinkable.

*Thursday, September 29th: Espresso Egitto*

It's nearly one o'clock and clear skies outside over the Saronian Gulf. We've just completed the quite dramatic navigational feat of the passage of the Corinth Canal – a man-made gorge it took us an hour to pass through.

Feel in good spirits today after a long sleep.

Phone Helen after breakfast and, despite the crew crouching and filming every word, it is one of our better phone calls and Helen sounds clear and very pleased to hear me – and surprised too. I don't think she'd expected a call from the ship.

These boat journeys will, I think, be a necessary interlude between periods of intense rush and activity.

The crew of the boat are treating us nobly, though I suspect they could turn ugly if they're not enjoying themselves. Today I got up in my *Adriatica* T-shirt,

which pleased them – I was promptly given a sailor's hat.

It's hot outside now – the scrub-covered mountains of Greece are all around. Glad of the air-conditioning on the *Egitto*.

*Friday, September 30th: Espresso Egitto*

This boat trip has been restorative. I'm eager and receptive to places – especially glad I stirred myself from bed this morning to run into Heraklion. I don't suffer, as yet, from seasickness or homesickness.

Fears about my adequacy for the journey persist. I don't think now that I shan't make it, as I did that gloomy first morning on the *Egitto* – my worries now are what I shall make out of it.

My style is friendly, humorous and laid-back. It isn't best suited for revealing things about people – whose right to privacy I respect, as I would want them to respect mine. How much of the time should I be acting?

*Saturday, October 1st: Espresso Egitto*

Slept fitfully until finally rising at 6.20 to watch us approach Alexandria.

A thorough break with Europe, which I suppose could have been disturbing, but which I find exhilarating and energising. So the day dazzles and everything, all the hard work and the rushing around from location to location and city to city, encourages and stimulates me.

All we need at the end of our first week is sleep. We've filmed well and interestingly on the whole – though it is hard to get people on camera to be as easygoing and informative and anecdotal as they are off.

*Sunday, October 2nd: Cairo*

Sour taste of tourism at the Pyramids, and back to film two interviews in the bar of the Windsor<sup>1</sup> (where many stars of Egyptian theatre and opera gather!). Conscious of asking easy questions, not probing enough, being almost too respectful. Always after the interview I think of the one question I should have asked.

<sup>1</sup> The Windsor Hotel. Eccentric city-centre hotel. The air-con unit was noisier than the traffic outside. 'I now know why they laughed at me when I'd asked for a quiet room' (*Around the World in 80 Days*).

*Monday, October 3rd: Suez*

Seven o'clock at the Red Sea Hotel – the silence outside on the straight, empty avenues is quite a shock after Cairo. So is the hot water, even though it's only a shower – no bath since Venice. The room is quite characterless and depressing, as is Suez. Can't wait to get on a boat tomorrow and get moving.

This morning we completed various shots in and around the hotel and I didn't have to go out. As in New York City, one has to be fit and strong to go out into the streets of Cairo, and a two-hour lay-off in the morning to write cards and ring the office was much needed and appreciated. *Wanda* is over 50 million in the States now. [The film *A Fish Called Wanda* had been released in the USA on July 15th.] Terry J starts *Erik the Viking* in Malta on the 19th.

The journey by taxi to Suez was pretty grim. The heat, dust, traffic and fumes of Cairo for the first half-hour were as uncomfortable as anything I've experienced so far on the trip. Once out of Cairo we were in desert – relics of war, barracks and endless rubbish tips.

The hotel is dry and we're all meeting at 7.30 to seek out a place for beer.

*Wednesday, October 5th: Aboard the Saudi Moon 2,<sup>1</sup> on the Red Sea*

As of today the journey has become quite an adventure. Information reaching us from Jeddah indicates that all our options must be reconsidered. I might have to drive across Arabia – but our visas, we think, confine us to Jeddah. I may be dropped from a container boat to go ashore at Muscat, or we may be in Jeddah for four or five days, losing precious time.

The Arab world was always to be the most difficult, Clem Vallance<sup>2</sup> had warned. Even he is now lost for answers. So we move on a rolling sea towards Jeddah and uncertainty on a considerable scale. It will be very hot, we shall have our patience tested to the limits, and we shall have to work a hard and long day.

What's more, we have been eleven travelling and filming days in succession and a day off would be an orgasmic pleasure. None beckons. Add to this poor food on the boat and a delicate situation in my stomach. Still, thanks to Allah – *Insh-Allah!* – it'll be the longest time I've been without alcohol for decades!

Out on deck as I write (10 p.m.) are sleeping, like corpses, hundreds of Egyptian workers, many of whom are leaving everything behind for a year or more.

<sup>1</sup> Danish-built ferry. Her sister ship, the *Saudi Moon 1*, ran aground and sank on a reef near Jeddah. The *Saudi Moon 2* caught fire and sank in May 1994 with the loss of nine lives.

<sup>2</sup> Deviser and co-director of *Around the World in 80 Days*.

*Friday, October 7th: Red Sea Palace Hotel, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*

Day 13, country number 9. Outside my fourth-floor windows to the left it is a modern cityscape that looks back at me, dual carriageways, roundabouts, traffic moving in plenty of space, tall, featureless concrete high-rise clusters. Move a little to my left, say, to pick up an apple from the complimentary basket, and I look down on a beleaguered, ill-kempt quarter of older houses, four storeys at most with balconies of wood and screens and carved details about the windows.

First thing to be said about Jeddah is that it has been a rest and renewal stop. Our arrival on an uncluttered dockside, even our efficient clearance through customs, thanks to Ahmed and the presence of young Nick from the embassy in Riyadh, was much less of a strain than doing anything in Egypt.

The hotel – affluent, international, but really conforming to American standards of comfort and service – may be nothing to do with the real Saudi Arabia, but it has provided hot water and a bath and space and service and laundry and room to move and gather wits.

*Sunday, October 9th: Riyadh*

It's 8.30, dazzlingly bright outside and two weeks since I left home on a grey, London autumn morning. Ironically, here in the middle of the Arabian desert, I find myself in surroundings as familiar, comfortable and un-foreign as I've known in those two weeks. English businessmen and English voices downstairs in the lobby of the Al-Khozama, and in the breakfast room croissants and coffee almost as good as any I might have been sharing with Rachel two or three weeks ago.

Perhaps that's why I woke with an unspecifically dissatisfied feeling. Not about the travel, which I'm thoroughly enjoying and responding to, but about this sort of place – it's like America. In my *Arabian Nights*-led imagination it's an exotic, romantic location on the map, but the reality is depressing. Neon bursting out everywhere, buildings everywhere. Commerce and no culture, except the Islamic culture which the West doesn't really seem to want to know about. Cairo was grottier, but it moved me, made me think.

*Tuesday, October 11th: InterContinental Hotel, Dubai*

Midway through our second day in Dubai. Very hot this morning as we filmed at the dhow-builders – 110 in the sun – sweat poured off us. I took the opportunity for a run this morning, half an hour from 7.45, along the waterfront,

past dhows loading, past the small, wood-hulled boats ferrying people to work across the creek, past ancient, wafer-thin old gentlemen in white robes who remind me of my mother.

A pleasant, cosmopolitan scene – Indian, Pakistani faces and Iranians and Syrians, African faces and Semitic faces, fat noses and long, beaky noses. Dull eyes, frightened eyes and calculating eyes.

I've now run three times since we left and would like to have done more, but feel in good shape still and fit for tomorrow's real adventure – the dhow trip.

From tomorrow we have a week in another world, one much simpler and more rugged than our own. Instead of bending them to us (as places like the InterContinental Hotel do), we shall have to bend to them.<sup>1</sup>

*Wednesday, October 19th: Taj Hotel, Bombay*

It's late – 11.45. Later, by several hours, than I've been to bed for the last seven days. I feel a slight tiredness in the eyes, an ache, otherwise well. Have eaten today for the first time since my stomach turned on Sunday night. My bags are open and airing, laundry is being done, I'm spread out and reordering my life in this disorderly city after seven days and nights on the dhow.

The experience was unique. Never have I been in a situation where, for so long, I depended upon a group of people quite different from me in wealth, class, race, religion and circumstance. All of us unequivocal in our appreciation of the crew from Gujarat.

How I shall sleep without the stars and the sea remains to be seen.

*Thursday, October 20th: Bombay*

The end of my first night in Bombay. Post-dhow euphoria dissipated.

I realise in the unblinking light of the morning sunshine that I have days ahead as hard, in their way, as any dhow journey. There's not a day off as we record Bombay, the overnight train and Madras.

I must rise to it all. There's no way one can retreat from the demands of

<sup>1</sup> The journey on the MV *Al Shama*, a dhow carrying goods from Dubai to Bombay, took us seven nights and eight days. We had no radio, radar or GPS and the crew consisted of eighteen Gujaratis, all from the same village in north-west India, only one of whom spoke English. The friendships I struck up with the crew over that agonisingly slow week convinced me that, from then on, it was to be the encounters with ordinary people that I felt most comfortable with and which seemed to produce the best television. A formula that was to hold true through my next seven travel series. In 2008 we returned to India to try and find the crew of *Al Shama*. We found many of them in the dhow-building port of Mandvi in Kutch. We sat down together and watched the journey we made twenty years earlier.



India, no way one can do it on the defensive. Unshaven, unrested and uncomfortable, I must up and face the day and hope I shall pull through. The next five or six days are the most testing of the whole journey.

*Friday, October 21st: Bombay*

Bombay is the most difficult place to film yet. The people who stare at camera, the dripping humidity, the extraordinary locations – today in amongst grinding poverty watching a mongoose driven to draw blood from a snake. It is wearing us all down. Roger [Mills, one of our two directors] drives us gently, considerately, but persistently on.

*Monday, October 24th: Connemara Hotel, Madras*

Thirty days have gone. We've been through twelve countries, spent two nights on trains, 13 nights on boats, including seven on an open dhow, and I've slept in 13 different beds since we left London. We've recorded our progress daily, on film, tape and in notebooks. Though there are still 50 days available, I think, on paper, the worst is over. Only six more countries to pass through, and 28 days and nights will be spent at sea.

Hopefully we have more than half of the series already shot. My contribution, I think, will not be precision, analysis and revelation, but honesty, directness, openness and enthusiasm. I hope I reflect the fact that anything can happen on a journey if you allow it to.

Is this enough? I think of seeing all this through Jonathan Miller's and Alan Bennett's and Terry Gilliam's eyes and how much sharper and more original it might all be. But the fact is I have the easy, untroubled character that will, I hope, make me an interesting victim rather than a cool observer.

As of midday on Day 30, at the Connemara in Madras, in my room which was once in the summer palace of the Nawabs of Wallajah, I feel I've achieved something.

*Sunday, October 30th: Aboard Susak,<sup>1</sup> Bay of Bengal*

It's a Sunday and Sundays seem to be the days most susceptible to the stirrings of homesickness. And today aboard the *Susak* I have time on my hands. We've

<sup>1</sup> The *Susak* was a Yugoslav freighter chartered by Bengal Tiger Lines to transport goods between Calcutta, Madras and Singapore. They could take only two of us, so Nigel went aboard with the camera and I was handed the sound equipment. We were quartered in the ship's hospital.

filmed most of our sequences over the last three days of the voyage, so, at the time of writing – 9.20 in the morning – I’m on my bed in the sickroom with the indistinct but mountainous skyline of Great Nicobar Island on the port horizon, nearly a thousand miles from Madras and with two and a half more days’ sailing down the busy shipping lanes of the Malacca Strait until we reach Singapore. So, plenty of time to think.

It was a Sunday, too, when I last saw the family, five weeks ago. Five weeks doesn’t sound much to me now. Can all that we’ve done and seen and recorded thus far have taken less than half our scheduled time? All this to go through again and still not be home?

Allied to these thoughts comes the image of Rachel following my progress, pinning up another of my postcards and, I realise, with a guilty and inadequate feeling, that it’s Rachel I miss most, because, in a sense, I’m sure she misses me most. All of this quite unfair on Helen, but then she’s been through it before and she has such a well-organised support system of friends and activities.

What I do know, and what keeps me from ever feeling desperately sorry for myself, is that the journey is, at every stage, remarkable and memorable. I shall never travel like this again, I shall never see so much so quickly, and when I am home and with the family again, I shall miss moments like this, in the hospital bay of a Yugoslav container boat, crossing the Bay of Bengal with the coast of Great Nicobar Island coming closer, and I shall feel sick for travel – as potently as I ever feel sick for home.

*Tuesday, November 1st: Susak*

It’s just after nine in the morning. I sit on deck writing at the table at which we enjoyed the great barbecue party on Sunday. Today the weather is markedly different. Skies are grey and the air is sticky, warm and humid.

Last night was my sixth night in the hospital with Nigel and it was a night of doubts and broken sleep.

Should I be doing this programme? Am I the right man for the job? Should I not be extending my acting and writing skills? Have I not taken a journey round the world as a convenient way of avoiding other career decisions?

As we move slowly by sea, I have plenty of time to think. I’m better when we’re on the move, working fast. But I have to face a lot more of this slack-paced travel in the next few weeks and maybe good will come of it . . . insights will be revealed.

1988

*Thursday, November 3rd: Aboard the Neptune Diamond,<sup>1</sup> South China Sea, Singapore to Hong Kong*

Forty days out of London: quite a landmark. We're currently in 'moderate swell' for the first time since the English Channel, but the wind has grown over the last 24 hours to a Force 7, heading almost straight at us, out of the north, so outside my yellow-carpeted suite with its all-plastic bathroom and yellow flower-pattern chair cover with plaid/gathered fringes, there is a spectacular seascape.

All of a sudden the sea that has been for so long our firm, friendly, cosseting and encompassing supporter is agitated with ridges of water flying before the wind and smashing against the side of the ship, sending columns of spray high into the sky and waves upturning themselves against the wall and somersaulting backwards to crash back on the next wave, propelling a boiling white wash a hundred yards out to sea.

*Sunday, November 6th: Peninsula Hotel, Hong Kong*

Yesterday my bag strap broke as I stepped off the *Neptune Diamond* gangplank. Now it's mended, thanks to the Peninsula's expertise. This morning the task I have to set them is to try and plug the holes in my trousers which a parrot made in an unprovoked attack on yesterday's visit to the Bird Market. Well, all right, I had asked the parrot if he knew John Cleese.

*Friday, November 11th: Aboard the Jian Zhen<sup>2</sup> between Shanghai and Yokohama*

We're four and a half hours out of Shanghai at the mouth of the Yangtze River. The whirlwind week in Hong Kong and China is over, tiredness overcome by the fascination with what I was seeing. A sore throat has been threatening for two or three days.

In my cabin, and sipping the first of my three-day course of Chinese reinvigoration medicine – bought at the shop in Shanghai.

Clem has declared tomorrow a day off.

<sup>1</sup> The *Neptune Diamond* was a container ship owned by Neptune Orient Lines.

<sup>2</sup> Once-weekly ferry between Shanghai and Yokohama. A connection we couldn't afford to miss.

*Saturday, November 12th: On the Jian Zhen*

Second day off out of 49. It's welcome, of course, but I'm not terribly good at days off. I catch up with the experiences of the last extraordinary week – notebooks edited and clarified, tapes numbered. I'm glad to rest this niggling sore throat. Treat it to another Disprin gargle after lunch, which relieves, but the air-conditioning's no help.

I have one of the brown parcels of Chinese medicine and, at the time of writing (6.30), feel pretty good. Drew the curtains across and lay and listened to Billy Joel and Pat Metheny and emptied my mind for a couple of hours.

A month tomorrow I'm due home. Light at the end of the tunnel. Will be difficult to keep up the momentum with 19 of the next 31 days on board ship – hard to work feeling the hard work has been done.

Must resist temptation to regard it as over.

*Tuesday, November 15th: Tokyo*

In bed in the pristine, antiseptic whiteness of the Akasaka Prince Hotel.

Maybe now we're in more controlled, familiar Western environments we'll have to strain harder to find the original material which was all around us in India, Cairo and the Bay of Bengal. (I'm now at the stage where I feel deep pangs of nostalgia for those early days.)

Have made the phone contacts I have to when in the big cities – spoken to Tom who's been sea-cliff climbing in Cornwall, Helen and Ma, whom I got out of the bath.

*Thursday, November 17th: On board MV Neptune Garnet,<sup>1</sup> on the Pacific*

Safely out of Tokyo Bay at half past eleven. The last night in Tokyo not as bad as I feared. The karaoke bar was very lively and silly and the Japanese there were very courteous. Many autographs were handed out. I think they just accepted I was a television star of some sort, even though they had no clue what I did.

But I sang 'You Are My Sunshine' and it didn't feel embarrassing at the

<sup>1</sup> Another container ship, sister to the *Neptune Diamond*. Indian captain and largely Singaporean crew. It took us twelve days to cross the Pacific, but it took Phileas Fogg almost three weeks, so we caught up valuable time on the *Garnet*.

time, though I'm sure it will when I watch it sober. When I finished there was much orchestrated applause from the young Japanese, who chanted 'Eng-land! Eng-land!' just as enthusiastically as they had chanted 'Nip-pon! Nip-pon!' half an hour earlier.

When the chant changed to 'Thatch-er! Thatch-er!' we entered the realms of Grand Surrealism.

*Saturday, November 19th: Neptune Garnet*

Back in from a run along the deck. Reckon I covered about 10,000 metres altogether up and down the 250-metre starboard gangway beneath the groaning, screaming and today even trumpeting containers – Pacific swelling beneath me, puffing itself up and heaving our 42,000 tons about with contemptuous ease.

Another squally front is chasing up on us from the south-west, so I'm running between last night's gale and the one that's coming.

Somewhere halfway round the world (for once the cliché is permissible as we approach 170°), William is waking up to his eighteenth birthday. I rang and talked to him from Tokyo and wished him well for his exams, which he takes on the 21st – the day I have twice!

Wish I was at home – either to console or celebrate, as well as to be a sounding board if necessary. Feel I'm somehow missing a vital time in his life. But this is traveller's melodrama, I think.

*Sunday, November 20th: Neptune Garnet*

Bingo evening. The captain takes these particularly seriously and buys blocks of five tickets (one Singapore Dollar per ticket) each game. This strains the concentration, but between myself and the long-haired, pebble-glassed, slightly manic second cook and steward win five dollars from five cards.

This morning the engines were shut down to repair a leak in a pipe, which gave me a restful lie-in until 9.15. But I could not really relax – the weight of the project still hangs round my neck sometimes, feeling like the albatross that Nigel Walters [cameraman on this second leg of the journey] claims he's seen off the stern, following us.

The storm and an early call (6.30) to film the moment of crossing into the Western Hemisphere is bad enough – but there's also the promise of a wholly unlooked-forward-to 'initiation' ceremony to mark such a crossing. This is said to involve ugly humiliations such as daubing with emulsion paint and drinking some foul liquid. It'll be hard to make it funny, graceful or, really,

anything other than humiliating. And as I'm being thus daubed, my son will be taking his Oxford exam!

*Monday, November 21st: Neptune Garnet*

A first, and probably a last, for the diary. An extra, untitled day. It's not yet the 22nd, but we've already had the 21st, so it's called the 21st again. 'It will be Monday again tomorrow,' as Jason announced solemnly on the PA last night.

Rose about a quarter to eleven and made a cup of coffee and went up to the bridge. The officers were tracing a strange, zigzag course on the map table and only after a while I realised they were marking out a crown for tomorrow's Crossing the Line ceremony. At one point it was tried out on a sheepish electrical engineer. It looked fairly ludicrous against his oily blue overalls.

The wind has shifted to the north today and is cooler, also I think the chief engineer has put on the air-conditioning, after I mentioned to the captain yesterday that it was becoming unbearably fuggy in the cabins. The captain is extraordinarily solicitous and sensitive to our needs. He's lent me his dictionary for Scrabble, and this morning, as we passed a westbound Filipino freighter pitching and taking on water, he ran through the whole of his phone call to the other boat twice, so that we could record it.

*Thursday, November 24th: Neptune Garnet*

Mid-morning, Day 61, ninth day on the Pacific. Our position is 38.09 N and 138.44 W. Our speed 20.2 knots. A wind from the north-west, Force 6-7, flecks the sea with flying spray.

Everything that could slide about, slid about last night and glasses smashed in the day room. Roger's room developed a squeak he could never track down and Ann's chair broke loose and shot across her cabin with a crash they heard up on the bridge.

I slept badly, as did everyone else. Up a mile one minute and slithering down the next. I would nod off only to be woken by a swingeing change to my centre of gravity, or the sticky heat of the airless cabin, or backache from the awkward, semi-foetal position I'd concertinaed my body into.

But the journey is accelerating. At the time of writing, *Neptune Garnet* is 1,000 miles away from California and 4,000 from Tokyo.