

FREE INSIDE!

40-page travel special, including Jeremy Seal and Anthony Sattin

The Oldie makes old age seem like a lot of fun' TONY BENN

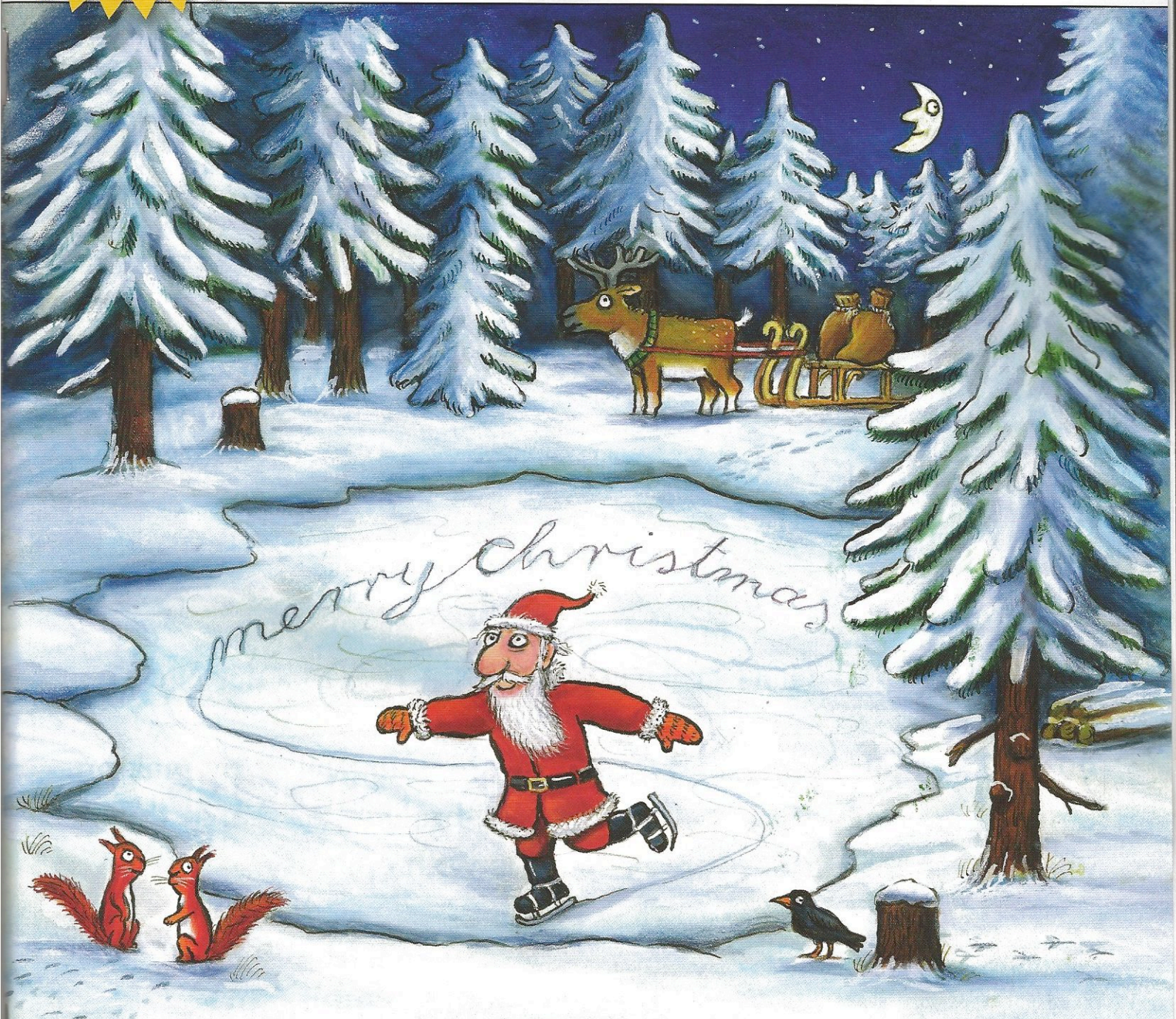
Frozen Virginia: see page 47

The Oldie

LOVINGLY HANDCRAFTED FOR YOU



January 2013
www.theoldie.co.uk



HAVE AN ICE DAY!

DON'T MENSCHEN THE TWEET MP WARNS MY BUTLINS HEAVEN
THE PUNK PUNCHER LIBERAL LEADER'S MIDNIGHT SEX SHOCKER

ISSUE 291
0.1 >

£3.75

9 770965 250130

TRAVEL SPECIAL MUSIC FOOD FILM CARTOONS LITERARY LUNCHES CROP CIRCLES WINE TELLY

INTO THE DEEP



Main picture: *Tiger Blue* anchored at Pulau Wayag islands. Above: the teakwood schooner in all her glory

to carry spices from Indonesia to China and the Middle East. Owned by two families who hire it for holidays from Sorong or down to the Banda Islands and Komodo further south, it's decked out with a crew of eight Indonesian men, who were always on hand to fix my snorkelling kit, mix me cocktails or help me land a tuna or a wahoo off the back of the boat, and then slice it into the freshest sashimi in the world.

For five days we sailed across the Dampier Strait, exploring the clusters of islands called Raja Ampat, an archipelago of 1,500 islands, stretched out between the Indian and Pacific oceans, with Darwin 600 miles to the south, but far beyond reach of anything so prosaic as a mobile signal, let alone another boat. As part of the Coral Triangle that spreads between the Philippines to Bali and the Solomon Islands, these waters are justifiably famous for diving, to goggle at some of the 1,309 species of fish and 537 types of coral that jewel these underwater worlds.

We covered most of the nautical miles at night, which makes dealing with momentary sea-sickness much easier, our only companions the dolphins that flipped alongside the boat. While there were big comfortable bedrooms below deck, I preferred to sleep on deck, enveloped by the wooden creak and sigh of the boat, a warm breeze on my face, and an electric storm slashing through the

CLOVER STROUD spent five days on a schooner in one of the most remote parts of the world, following in the footsteps of the nineteenth-century anthropologist Alfred Russel Wallace

Because every route across the world feels so well beaten, I often feel I'm more likely to find virgin territory in a pocket of my handbag than at the end of a flight. Long-distance has to be truly extraordinary to be worth the long haul, especially when I know I can find deserted white sands in the Outer Hebrides without changing my watch once to get there. And whenever I've gone looking for desert island paradise, I've usually found high humidity playing havoc with my hair and a bridal shoot ruining the view.

But Papua New Guinea? There be

dragons there – and head-hunters too, I was told – so there I went, flying longest-haul for twenty-four hours, stopping in Dubai, Jakarta, Makassar and then

By day the anchor was lowered and we could discover the islands that Alfred Russel Wallace spent eight years exploring, covering 14,000 miles in his canoe

finally to Sorong, off the tip of northwest New Guinea in West Papua, eastern Indonesia. I was spending a week on a 34-foot, teakwood phinisi schooner, the type first used in the sixteenth century

inky blue night somewhere far away on a distant horizon.

By day the anchor was lowered, and we could discover the islands that the nineteenth-century anthropologist

Alfred Russel Wallace spent eight years exploring. He covered 14,000 miles in his canoe, putting together his own theories of evolution. Darwin may be more famous, but he couldn't have developed the idea of natural selection without Wallace's leg-work. At the island of Sawinggrai, we left the boat to sit among swarms of mosquitoes in the same jungle where Wallace spotted the elusive birds of paradise. Wallace was more successful than we were, and shot several of them.

I am a reluctant diver, but these are magic waters to swim and snorkel in. I bobbed, head down, over giant manta rays with a wingspan of five metres, which swooped through the water below as millions of tiny fish darted in shoals around them. Our furthest point north on the trip took us to the Pai Islands, popular with a large colony of hawksbill turtles. Their nests on the empty beach, strewn with cowrie shells, are protected by five piratical men who live on the island as part of Conservation International, living in a wooden hut in a scrap of trees. They grinned at us under heavily weather-beaten brows, apparently delighted we'd visited, as we were one of the two or three boats they will see every year on the island.

Sailing back towards Sorong, we threw the anchor down again at the Wayag Islands, a cluster of tiny limestone humps in the middle of the ocean, surrounded by the eerie tangle of mangroves; the waters below were coloured with corals and giant clam, and giant conch shells lay forlorn on the beach around the islands.

On a final morning, at the island of Gam, the shimmering flat surface of the sea was suddenly sliced open as a giant sperm whale lifted its mighty head just yards from the boat. It ejected a spout of water, then silently vanished again into the depths. No head-hunters, but a whale so close you could touch it is well worth crossing the world for.

Ampersand Travel offers a seven-night trip on *Tiger Blue* from £3,820 per person, including unlimited diving, on a full board basis. *Tiger Blue* sleeps up to ten adults (plus three extra beds for children) and sails the Raja Ampat National Park from October to March, and the Komodo region from April to September: www.ampersandtravel.com 020 7289 6100



Plain sailing

Travelling from Liverpool to Dublin, DEA BIRKETT found herself on a proper ship with a proper crew...

Every night a ship sails out of Liverpool freight dock. The *Norboy* is a conventional ferry, not a roll-on roll-off, but there's nothing ordinary about her. She's one of a fleet of three – the last of Britain's real ferries, working the Liverpool to Dublin route.

I'd lost my way in the deserted dock's wastelands trying to find the port. It was forty minutes until departure when my mobile rang. 'Miss Birkett, it's the dock here. Where are you?' I said I wasn't sure. So they talked me in, giving me directions. When I eventually arrived at the large iron gates, the dockhand greeted me like a lost friend he'd been reunited with on the quayside. 'We were worried about you,' he said. 'We've kept the doors open for you. We're ready to leave.'

The *Norboy*, now operated by P&O, has named passengers, not day-trippers, and I was glad to be one of them. The crew greeted me as if I were signing up to join them. We'd be together a while. On a new high-speed vessel you can make the crossing in under four hours. This ferry takes over eight.

I was the only lone female passenger. The *Norboy* is for truckers. There's no shop selling Baileys Fudge Cake and cut-price scent, no Costa coffee franchise, no hierarchy of restaurants and bars. There are cabins, a canteen and a proper crew – the sort that sleeps on board the ship. It's their home. So they want to make it feel like yours.

Everything is included, from the cabin to the canteen food – chicken and chips, chops in gravy, sausages and mash, which is served according to quantity, not quality. My fellow passengers are built like walls with biceps attached. They eat a lot and talk about the efficiency of their clutches, the contents of their containers and weighbridges (which they despise). They spend most of the approaching

I was the only female passenger: the Norboy is for truckers. There's no Costa coffee franchise

evening outside smoking. There were always more on deck than in the canteen or even the bar, where I was served a bottle of beer without a glass. I don't know if they had any.

Outside, you could be on an oceangoing vessel working the Panama passage. I sniffed. Oil, salt, rust, smoke. It smelt like a ship should. I could hear the slapping sea, the grinding engines, the trucks and cargo clanking below in noisy kisses.

I slept soundly to this iron lullaby. A rat-a-tat woke me – the Filipino steward bringing a cup of builder's tea. Breakfast was porridge. The *Norboy* slid into the heart of Dublin with the dawn. I disembarked, driving my car backwards, into a quiet city waiting to awake. Already, before daybreak, I'd been on a voyage.