

have a valuable part to play. In due course the RN, RNR, RNVR and Royal Navy Volunteer Supplementary Reserve all had their full involvement, some without pay, without training, without uniforms and, in some cases, without reference to rulebooks.

This is mostly a history of those in smaller boats although it does feature major events including the Dunkirk evacuation and D-Day landings. Usually they were powered craft, well armed, but there was some canoeing activity, often of a clandestine nature.

Gino Watkins' British Arctic Air Route expedition is mentioned more than once, not for the paddling but for the associated activities and introducing such people as Augustine Courtauld and Quintin Riley, who feature much more prominently later in the book.

A canoe was borrowed by John Miller and Stephen Tuckwell from the borough engineer at Barking Creek to reach and defuse a mine half buried in soft mud, washed by yellow foam from a sewer, a particularly dangerous mission that Miller did not expect to survive.

A canoe was also used by submarine HMS *Sealion* to identify an agent on a fishing vessel to collect secret documents in 1941 and then dive quickly because another boat was drifting suspiciously closely. Folding kayaks were also used for picking up agents but were not always successful as getting inexperienced paddlers from beaches out through breaking surf was fraught with problems. Dinghies were chosen as alternatives.

Joe Goodwin's 1943 Operation Checkmate with its disastrous outcome is covered. More successful were Combined Operations Pilotage Parties, usually folding kayaks operating from submarines, used for surveying beaches for suitability ahead of major landings, such as north Africa and Sicily, although training needed to address the wind, tide and sea effects which some had not anticipated would have such an influence on kayaks.

There is even some content from the enemy, such as Lothar-Günther Buchheim, a photojournalist in U-96 and author of *Das Boot*, who had acquired his sense of adventure by paddling with his brother on the Baltic and along the Danube to the Black Sea.

This is a book that draws attention to wartime activity around the coast and its lasting effects. Ten times as many mines were removed from the water after the war as had been cleared from it during the war. Southsea's Canoe Lake had been used for successful trials of a method of removing magnetic mines.

It is not a book to read slowly or comfortably. There is much heroism and death. There were dilemmas such as choosing between leaving hundreds of sailors to drown after their ship had been sunk and risking being caught and sunk with many hundreds more being killed.

Some household names come up repeatedly in central roles, Ian Fleming, Nevil Shute Norway, Peter Scott, and there are some less usual names about which you will wonder if such names in canoeing circles are related.

If this book was before your time, be very grateful and consider what affected the entire population and beyond.

slightly younger Aussie paddlers like Dave Winkworth have never heard of Michael.

The Fomenko families' escape from Russia in 1930 to the far east, then south through Manchuria to China, was perilous. The family were so fortunate to eventually arrive in Sydney, not much detail on that journey but Michael did well with sports at secondary school but after a rejection for the Commonwealth Games he headed north and began working in the sugar cane fields.

There he began planning a dugout canoe trip from near Cairns, up to Cape York (the northern tip of Queensland), across Torres Strait and west into what was Dutch New Guinea. Interviews with yachties who actually met and helped Michael once he was underway in his dugout ring true but so much of the story is pure fiction, comparisons with Homer's *Odyssey*, long term clashes with a big boar (Caly) and a crocodile (Poseidon).

Michael Fomenko was one of the very first hippies in Australia, only too happy to be totally on his own on the North Queensland Coast, fending for himself by fishing and collecting bush tucker. Newspaper speculation about his nomadic life led to the Queensland police tracking him down to an outback station, cruelly placing him in handcuffs and then jail.

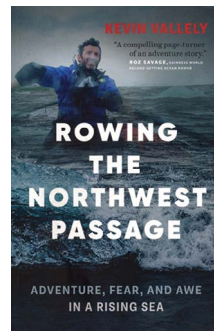
A few scant black and white photos show a very fit, bare chested, bearded Michael while one newspaper pic from 1959 shows him in his single ama dugout canoe with very basic survival kit.

Michael did achieve a long solo voyage in a dugout canoe from near Cairns to Dutch New Guinea in the 50s. He was one of Australia's very first hippies. His last six years were spent at a Gympie old age care facility where he died in 2018 at the age of 88.

For me there is too much made up stuff about conversations, beasties that he encountered and dramas of paddling a dugout canoe north along the Queensland coast but if you don't mind historical fiction it is an engrossing book.

**Paul Caffyn**

### Rowing the Northwest Passage



Kevin Vallely  
Greystone

978 1 77164 134 0  
2017

220 x 140mm  
226 pages, paperback

This is the story of a 2013 rowing boat expedition from Inuvik on the Mackenzie River, eastwards across Arctic Canada to Cambridge Bay. However, kayaks do crop up in the narrative. 'Tis another one of the 'last firsts remaining in the adventure world' genre, this one for a crossing of the Northwest Passage under human power.

A well written adventure narrative with both historical snippets on the search for the Northwest Passage, interaction with local coastal hunters and villagers and research on the rate and effects of global warming, the research on the melting of Arctic ice sheets echoed by Inuit village elders.

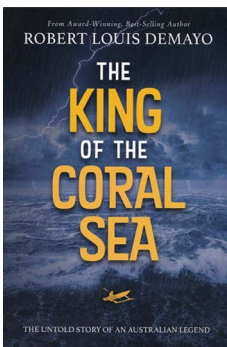
The choice of expedition vessel, an expensive sophisticated high tech four person rowing boat, does come back to bite them on the arse, particularly when a solo 57 year old Dutch grandmother overtakes them in her single kayak, cruising easily past their vessel when they are struggling to make headway.

To make progress into headwinds, they towed their boat through shallows, fortunately in their drysuits.

Forward progress with their behemoth sized rowing boat, a four person sleeping cabin at the stern, two seats for rowing midships and a storage compartment forward, depends much more on weather and sea conditions than on the strength of two blokes on the oars. The virtue of these drift boats is that their volume topsides will right a vessel if capsized but the serious downside, with headwinds, is that forward progress is b... all, if not backwards.

Although Amundsen is credited with the first full transit of the Northwest Passage and both Franklin and Richardson are mentioned with their early 1800s coastal exploration, the author's claim of a first human powered crossing of the Northwest Passage really bugs me. Author Kevin Vallely claims their voyage was only possible 'because of the dramatic effects of global warming in the high Arctic'. Absolute b...! Perhaps this was necessary to raise sponsorship for building of the

### The King of the Coral Sea



Robert Louis Demayo  
Wayward

978 1 7365984 8 1  
2022

230 x 150mm  
300 pages, paperback

The 'Australian Legend' subtitle is, I feel, a tad overstated as few paddlers in Australasia are today aware of Michael Fomenko's story. Historical fiction describes the narrative, with much drawn from press clippings, an earlier book on his life, interviews with those who had met or heard of Michael and the author's vivid imagination.

The title refers to a mission to sail a dugout canoe from near Cairns (north Queensland coast) to what, back in the 1950s, was Dutch New Guinea. Chapters alternate between Michael's voyage and his 88 year long life. I have a vague recollection of his name when growing up in Brisbane with a few snippets in the newspapers from the 50s but even