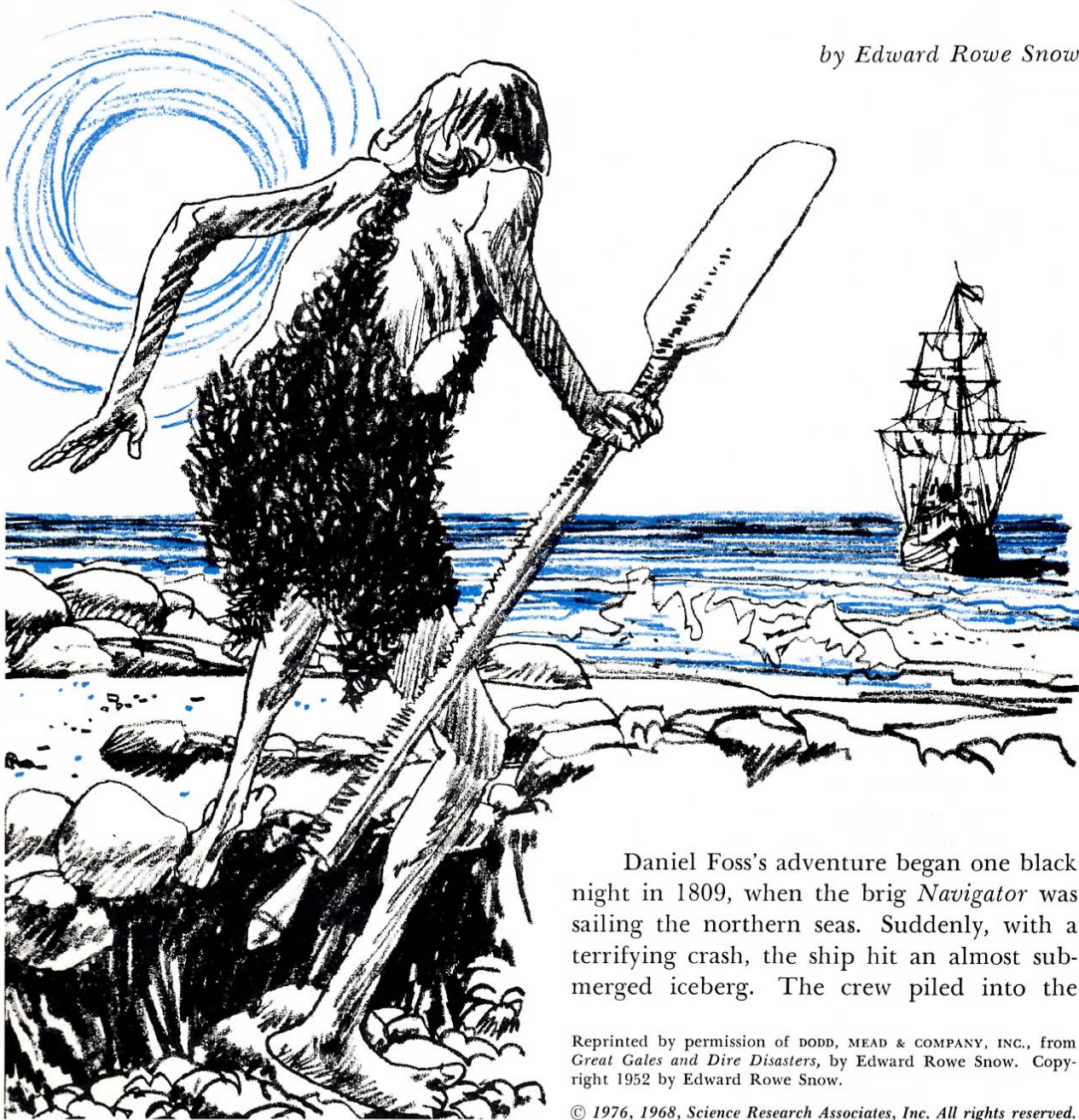


He Outdid Robinson Crusoe

by Edward Rowe Snow



Daniel Foss's adventure began one black night in 1809, when the brig *Navigator* was sailing the northern seas. Suddenly, with a terrifying crash, the ship hit an almost submerged iceberg. The crew piled into the

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whaleboat, and in less than five minutes the *Navigator* sank, leaving them alone on the icy sea.

They set a southerly course, but it was many long weeks before the boat reached a moderate climate, and by that time all but two—Foss and Nicholl—were dead.

Eventually the survivors sighted a rocky, precipitous island deep in the south Atlantic Ocean. As the whaleboat approached the rocks, a mighty wave capsized it, throwing its occupants into the ocean. Foss came to the surface, grasped an oar, and with it made his way to land, but he never saw his friend again.

After resting his bruised and bleeding body, he decided to explore the island before darkness fell. The walk was a bitter disappointment, for although the island was half a mile wide and three-quarters of a mile long, there wasn't a blade of grass, a tree, or a particle of soil in which anything could grow. Not even sea gulls lived there, and it was evident that it had never been inhabited by human beings.

The next morning when he awoke he had a moment of panic at the thought that he might have to spend an indefinite period without food, water, or refuge, for he felt sure that no sailing vessels would normally pass the rock. But soon a calmness fell over him and he realized that he might as well accept whatever was going to happen. If he was going to spend the rest of his life there and never be rescued, or if he was going to die of hunger or thirst within a few days—well, there wasn't much he could do about it and getting panicky wouldn't help.

That afternoon he hiked all over the

island and found several natural cavities in the rocks that could store rain, and also a good cavelike depression where he could live. But as the days went by and no clouds appeared, he began to wonder if it was one of those barren areas where rain falls only once or twice a year. He grew so weak that he was unable to leave his rude bed.

Late one night, when he realized that his life was almost at an end, he thought that he heard the barking of hundreds of dogs. In the morning, summoning all his strength, he stumbled, crawled, and pulled himself along until he reached the southern shore from where the sound had come—and there on a ledge near the sea was a seal.

With a cunning born of desperation, feverish with anxiety, he edged his way closer, drew out his clasp knife, and plunged it into the animal's body. The meat satisfied his terrible thirst and hunger, and saved his life. He sliced up the remainder of it, and on the following day his strength had returned enough to arrange it for drying.

A few nights later he again heard the barking. Now much stronger, he sprang to his feet and hurried down on the rocks, where, to his delight, he saw hundreds of seals. The animals seemed to be fearless, and Foss waded through them with his oar, killing them right and left until finally they seemed to realize what was happening and left the island.

He had killed 125 seals, and slicing up the nearly 10,000 pounds of meat kept him busy for several weeks, but at the end of that time he had enough meat to last him indefinitely.

And then came the blessed rain, pouring

day and night for almost a week, while Foss worked feverishly inventing methods of storing it. His chief worries were evaporation and the salt spray that broke on the island in stormy weather. He eventually arranged a system of flat stones with which he capped the water-storage areas, and in this way he conserved as much as two hundred gallons of pure water. The dry spell, he found out later, lasted four months, and he had been wrecked at the height of it.

Now that his food and water problems seemed solved, he began to plan for his uncertain future. Using the salvaged oar as a calendar, he recorded each day with a scratch, and in this way he watched the weeks and months speed by until a full year had passed.

At about this time he decided to build a tall beacon at the highest pinnacle of the lonely rock, hoping to attract the attention of a sailing vessel. On top of the twelve-foot beacon he erected a spar of driftwood, and to the spar he attached his shirt.

Before Foss had realized it, a second year of complete solitude was indicated on the oar, and then a third. In June, with great excitement, he sighted a ship, but wept bitterly with disappointment when she continued her journey over the horizon. In March of the fourth year a terrible storm destroyed the beacon, but the gale was also a blessing, for it left hundreds of flying fish scattered on the rocks.

The following spring a giant dead whale

floated ashore, a harpoon still securely fixed in its back, and the lonely mariner ate whale steaks for several weeks.

After five long years of anguished waiting, the almost unbelievable morning came when he awoke to see an American sailing vessel anchored off the island. Desperate in his fear of being left behind after all this time, he grabbed his oar, rushed down the spray-swept ledge, and plunged into the ocean. Ten minutes later he was on the vessel, which proved to be the New Bedford-built *Neptune*.

Captain John Ross, master of the ship, listened incredulously to Foss's story, but then the castaway produced his oar with the five long years of timekeeping engraved on it, and the captain reluctantly admitted that his story must be true.

The rescued sailor's first meal was a delight that he never forgot, and even a week later the crew caught him storing extra pieces of bread and meat against a possible famine. They told him kindly that that was quite unnecessary, but for the remainder of the journey he continued to hoard food.

Finally he was landed safe and sound at New Bedford. Eventually he moved to Elkhurst, New Jersey, an inland town which he never left. When asked why, he replied, "Here I have no view of the sea. After five years alone, looking at nothing but ocean, why, I've seen enough of it to last the rest of my life!"

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The *Navigator* sank when**
 - A she hit an iceberg
 - B a boiler blew up
 - C fire swept the hold

2. **Foss felt sure that the island**
 - A had never had human occupants
 - B was not on a main trade route
 - C Both A and B

3. **The seals made a sound much like the**
 - A squawking of gulls
 - B barking of dogs
 - C mewing of cats

4. **When Foss began slaughtering the seals, they**
 - A fled to a cave
 - B called to companions
 - C paid little attention

5. **Foss stored the rainwater in**
 - A hollow logs
 - B rock depressions
 - C oil drums

6. **The gale that destroyed the beacon also**
 - A contaminated Foss's water reserve
 - B renewed Foss's supply of food
 - C Both A and B

7. **Foss lived on the island for**
 - A three years
 - B five years
 - C seven years

8. **When Foss saw the American ship, he**
 - A built a signal fire
 - B waved his shirt
 - C swam out to it

9. **The captain finally believed Foss's story when he saw the**
 - A water Foss had stored
 - B cave where Foss slept
 - C marks on the oar

10. **Throughout the voyage, Foss insisted upon**
 - A keeping the oar beside him
 - B hoarding scraps of food
 - C staying belowdecks