

Kon Tiki (raft from Peru to S. Pacific) by Thor Heyerdahl (1950)

Thor had a dream to set out from Peru to prove that 1500 years ago the Polynesians did the same thing of sailing on a raft to the South Pacific islands. The government gave them some equipment to test out; mostly scientific instruments, but also powder that could be sprinkled in the water to deter sharks. They found financial backers & put together a team of six men.

They first had to go to Peru, get permission to cut down balsa trees to make the raft & set sail. It wasn't as easy as that, but the Kon-Tiki [sun god] set sail 28Apr1947. The wood was soft enough the ropes cut into it & were protected from friction & sun. The raft was 24'x45' with an 8'x14' bamboo hut & main sail. When water came onboard, it would drain out through the logs. The rudder & adjusting the center boards [planks pushed down into the water between the main logs allowed them to steer.

The southeast trade winds & Humboldt Current carried them north to within 6 degrees of the equator, then west to their destination. Averaging 42 miles it would take them 96 days to cover the 4000 miles. Two months into the voyage their parrot was washed overboard [20' waves] & they could not turn around & it did not fly back to them. Once a man fell overboard & was saved only by a life line. If they wanted to wash or swim, they tied a rope to themselves.

They stored 275 gal of water, but became stale after 2 months. It was replaced with rain water. They had to take salt tablets to replace what was depleted from sweat. Fish, dolphins, sharks & barnacles were plentiful & provided protein.

Their ham radio was heard in USA. The ocean water was 80dF, but by adding carbonic acid they created ice. Near the end they would set their course where the birds flew home in the evening. July 30th they saw land, but could not reach it. 4 days later another South Sea island, but a reef kept them at bay. Aug 7th they ran aground on the 25-mile long Raroia reef, but they could swim to the uninhabited island there. Soon natives from nearby islands came & celebrated with them. Then a schooner was sent to bring them & the raft to Tahiti.