

Boats + Boating

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A Raft Of Dreams Nears Reality

By RON REEVES
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The adventurous plan of five young men to build a raft and sail out of Monterey Bay some 7200 miles to the Society Islands of the South Pacific is rapidly becoming a reality.

Not only are the men more convinced than ever that they can make it, but they are seriously considering an extension of the trip to island-hop to Australia.

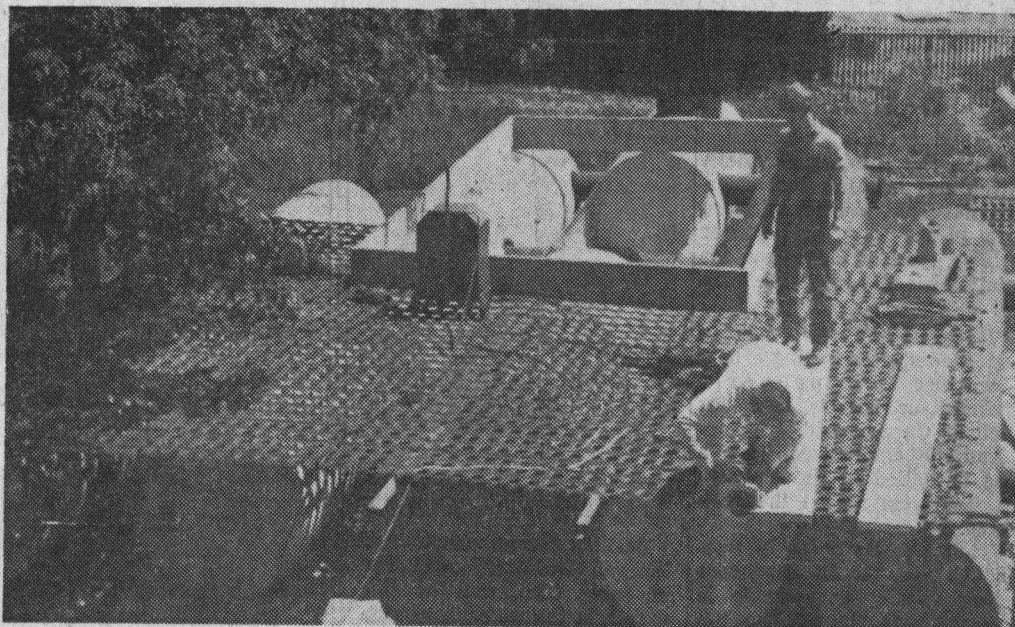
Since last December they have been using all spare hours to work on the 20 by 36-foot raft.

Heading the project is Doug Otis, 25, of 234 Spreckles drive, Aptos. He is the originator of the venture, which was inspired by Thor Heyerdahl's historic drift on the "Kon-Tiki" raft, and is also chief builder of the craft. To accompany him are Melvin Higley, 21, of 409 Pennsylvania avenue; Chuck Starbird, 18, and Al Parvin, 26, both of Capitola, and Larry White, 24, of Aptos.

"It's more assured than ever that we'll be going now," Otis said.

He confessed that the only trouble so far is money. The raft has cost about \$2400 so far and it will cost at least \$700 more to complete. Provisions and equipment must also be obtained.

The craft, which is being built at Freedom, now weighs about eight tons. Otis designed and built five large pontoons of 10-gauge steel which are divided into 14 compartments. Some of the



compartments will be filled with plastic foam for greater buoyancy and safety; others will be used for storage.

The steel mesh deck is now in place and the 9 by 14-foot cabin is started. The craft will have no engine, but will have a 33-foot mast to carry a square-rigged sail and perhaps a jib will be built.

"It looks like a monster, but we don't care what it looks like if it floats," Otis said.

The immediate looming problem is how to get the raft to the Capitola harbor in time for final construction and a September departure.

They are contacting house movers now, hoping for assistance. After a "couple of spins around the bay to be sure it works," the raft is to be towed 60 miles into the ocean where the drifting-

sailing adventure of six months to a year will begin, Otis said. The plan is to follow the Japanese current to Baja and then visit outlying islands on the way to the Galapagos Islands. Then they face a 4000-mile drift to the Societies.

The original intention was to move the raft to the Santa Cruz small craft harbor for the final building jobs and formal launching. Otis said the harbor officials wouldn't allow it, so Capitola was chosen. The Capitola Chamber of Commerce has taken to the idea and is planning a send-off celebration.

In preparation for the trip, the men are trying to anticipate any emergencies which may come up. White and Higley are taking navigation lessons from Captain

L. F. Bosshart at Monterey. Starbird has been studying first aid and Parvin has been digging into tropical disease prevention and treatment and food preservation.

White, who is an oceanographic research technician at the Monterey Naval Postgraduate school, plans to conduct a plankton study for Cabrillo college during the voyage. He also wants to observe habits of whales and dolphins during the trip as well as other ocean life.

They are all working on their ideas to document the trip with photographs and movies and plan to keep logs with the intention of preparing an adventure movie for television and writing a book.

They're handling the monetary portion of the venture equally, and are willing to take in a non-sailing partner

who would share in the costs for a split of eventual profits from the movies or books. They're also accepting donations from people who have caught on to the idea. Particularly needed are lumber, food provisions, heavy fishing gear, first aid equipment and other items to round out the raft's facilities.

Some people are helping out already, Otis said. Tom Shanahan of the Capitola wharf has offered free moorage and use of his boats, the Monterey Yacht center has donated a bilge pump and generator, diving gear came from the Seven Seas of Monterey, life jackets were donated by Jim Ekejian of Rio del Mar and Lt. J. C. Kennedy of Monterey has put some money into the venture.

Otis has complete confidence in the trip and apparently other people also have, because there have been several requests for passage. They're coming in from across the nation, as their raft-sailing project has been picked up by the newspaper wire services. Other than Parvin, no new crew members have been accepted since the project began to crystallize.

"I've turned down about four females so far," Otis commented. "There'll be no women on this ship," he said.

Otis, White and Parvin are married and although the wives are reconciled to the trip, shipboard women are strictly out.