

Auckland to the Bluff

Until 2010 Rudy Sunde led a group of Auckland-based singers of sea songs and wrote this song in the 1970s, in the sea shanty style. Auckland has two harbours, Manakau on the west, giving access to the Tasman Sea, and Waitamata on the east, giving access to the Pacific Ocean. Bluff is a harbour near Invercargill at the bottom of the South Island. You could sail south from Auckland at 36 degrees, to the Bluff at 47 degrees from either harbour, but the Tiri light marks the entrance to Waitamata harbour, so Rudy's mythical Flora Belle sailed down the east coast, right through the stormy Roaring Forties.

I left the city when just a lad
Times were hard and no work to be had
So I went to sea in the Flora Belle
Little did I know 'twas a ship from hell

The ship was old and leaking at the seams
A dirty old tub somewhat broad in the beam
Its sails were torn, some planks were rotten
It lay at the wharf a gently rockin'

Chorus

*I've sailed from Auckland to the Bluff
A thousand miles and that's enough
A thousand miles on the heaving sea
Glory Hal-le-luja that's enough for me †*

We set sail on the evening tide
It was early on a Saturday night
All went well till the Tiri light
And then by God I got a fright

The ship was hit by a big beam sea
Christ, I thought, it's all up for me
She rolled and she lollopped like a big tin drum
Hell! I swore my time had come

Chorus

<more - a lot more!>

"Shorten sails" the skipper cried
"Shorten the sails or you buggers will all die
Get aloft, get aloft, right up the mast
Get aloft, get aloft, and get up there fast"

Never in my life had I been so scared
Never in my life had I wished I was dead
But I climbed up the mast and I shortened sail
Then I climbed down again and was sick o'er the rail

Chorus

Man the pumps the skipper roared
Man the pumps or you'll sail the ocean floor
So I pumped all night though my hands were raw
And I pumped and I pumped 'til the coming of the dawn

How we survived that night I don't know
The wind it did roar and the wind it did blow
But the sun came up and the sea went down
The wind did ease and we headed south

Chorus

For breakfast we had mouldy bread
For lunch it was the very same fare
For supper we had a stinking stew
Cookie couldn't eat his own damned brew

The skipper was an old man, old and mean
Tough as nails and just as lean
Voice like a foghorn in the gloom
When he cursed was a voice of doom

Chorus

<more - nearly there!>

The work was hard and the pay was mean
The food was rotten, and the quarters none too clean
The journey south was always rough
So I jumped the ship when we pulled into the Bluff

So here in Bluff I'll settle down
Never again will I leave this town
Never again will I go to sea
Never again will it see me

Chorus