

Featured Felines: Cats' Adventures & Travels 14

(page checked May 2026)

Bree Pacific sailor (2012)



In 1996, Chuck and Laura Rose decided they wanted to escape from the crowds, stresses and complications of life in the business world and take to a simpler and slower pace of life, voyaging and sailing aboard their 27-foot (roughly 8-metre) sloop *Lealea*. They enlisted as 'bosun' neutered female kitten **Bree**, from the Hawaii Humane Society on Oahu, at Christmas, when she was just six weeks old. Her full name was 'Boatswain Bree T. Cat'.

Their voyages led them to explore the Pacific North West, the San Juan Islands, the Canadian Gulf Islands, Alaska, British Columbia and the Pacific islands, as well as Hawaii. Initially, while in port, to keep Bree from straying too far a device was installed on the boat that emitted a high-frequency sound, unpleasant to cats, which sent her scampering back home if she crossed the beam. She soon got the message, so the device was no longer necessary and was put away. From experience with a previous cat Bree's owners knew that if allowed to roam when in port, it was all too easy for a feline to venture onto another boat, perhaps be unable to get out again and, if the boat was not in use for a while, no one would know the cat was there.



When the voyages got under way, Bree spent little time on land — only when she needed to go to the vet's. For the first few days she was seasick and ate little, but soon 'gained her sea legs' and then there was no stopping her! When she was young she was quite the acrobat; climbing all over the boat, up onto the awnings and all over the place. Consequently, she fell into the water quite often! Cats are good swimmers and have no problem climbing out of the water, provided they have something to get their claws into; a strip or two of carpet hanging over the side of the boat to the water line does the trick. The biggest problem Bree caused was that after falling in and then regaining the boat she would always dash straight to her humans' pillows, dripping salt water everywhere, to dry herself! They had to intercept her, put her under the hose to wash off the disagreeably polluted water of the harbour and then dry her with a towel. As she matured — and became older, wiser (and fatter!) — she rarely fell in any more.

Bree had her litter box on the cabin top, where it was out of the way and under the cover of the awnings; then, when they went to sea, the box went into the forward cabin on the sole between the forward lockers. Keeping the box clean and in a quiet position avoided numerous behavioural problems.



Her life aboard can be seen in a [YouTube clip](#) and she also features in stills throughout [Bree's boat tour](#). Bree also [kept a blog](#) (*archived copy*:last used 2007).

Bree died in August 2012, aged 16. She had been ill on and off for a few months, so while *Lealea* was in Alaska Chuck and Laura took the opportunity of taking her to the vet in Sitka. Kidney failure was diagnosed, so common in older cats, and the heart-breaking decision was made to put their bosun of 16 years to sleep, rather than have her suffer further. The [boat's log](#) (*archived copy*) pays tribute to her, and includes comments of sympathy (*the log was current up to 2016, but need to go to the archive section to find anything about Bree*: Sources:

[Life in the Sticks according to Bree](#) (*archived copy* – undated)

The *Lealea* pages at [Cruising: Lealea](#) (*archived copy* – Dec. 2017)

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Featuring Felines: Cats' Adventures & Travels 15 (2013)

Kittens sail across the Atlantic aboard *L'Égaré II*

(the 'Atlantic Kon-Tiki', 1956)

(page checked May 2026)



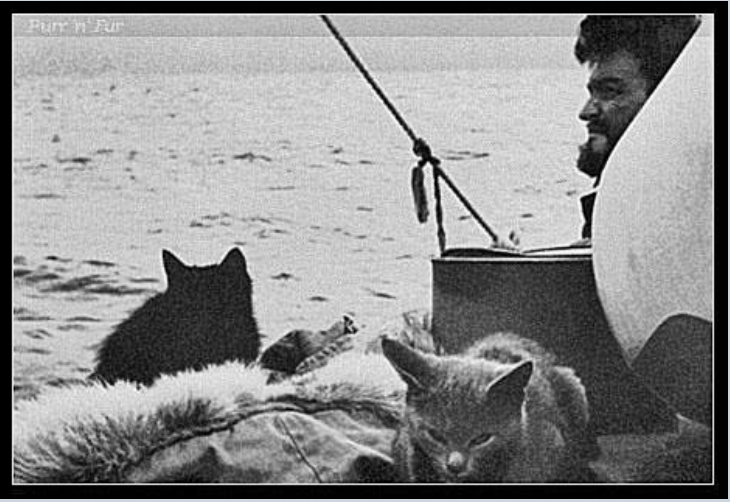
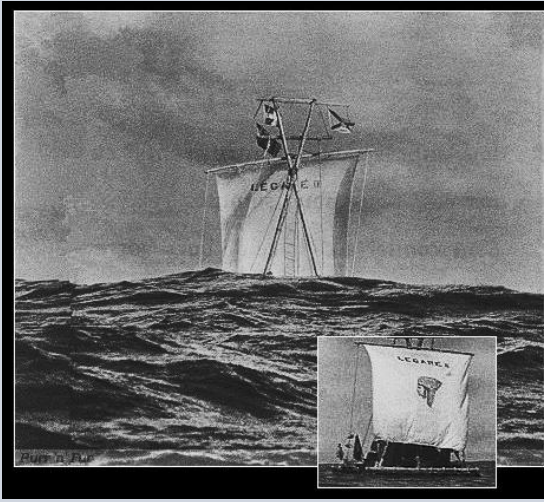
The raft at Falmouth, with kittens Puce and Guiton being held by the crew

In the mid-1950s Frenchman Henri Beaudout, inspired by a spirit of adventure and becoming restless with the daily round of life in Montreal, where he was working, became convinced that it would be possible to cross the Atlantic Ocean from west to east using only the prevailing winds and ocean currents. His research suggested that a timber raft would be the best kind of craft to make the voyage. To cut a long story short, he set off on 11 June 1955 with three like-minded companions (Paul Lapointe, Gaston Vanackere and Bernard Sorieul), also French, down the St Lawrence river on their tiny, single-sailed raft, named *L'Égaré*, 'The lost one', which was made of British Columbia red cedar logs firmly lashed together with stout manila ropes. They encountered all manner of unfavourable conditions and the expedition came to grief a couple of months later, in August, when the raft was wrecked in a fierce storm off the Newfoundland coast. They were lucky to escape more or less unscathed. There seems to have been a cat aboard, called **Charlotte**, also rescued safely, but I've found no other information about her.

A second attempt – with kittens!

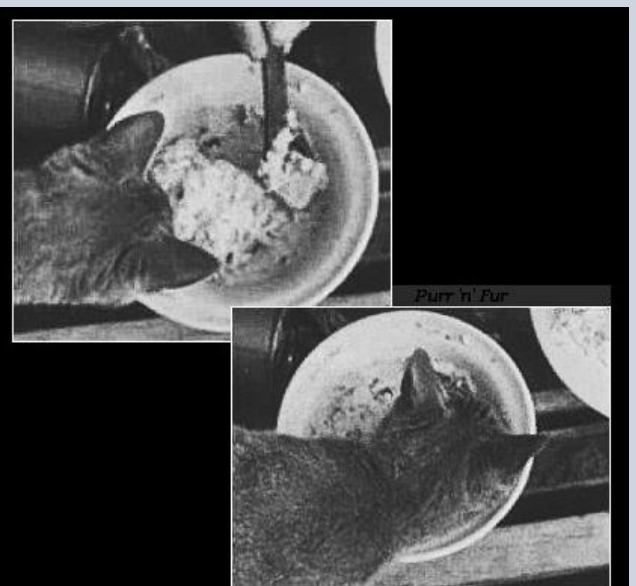
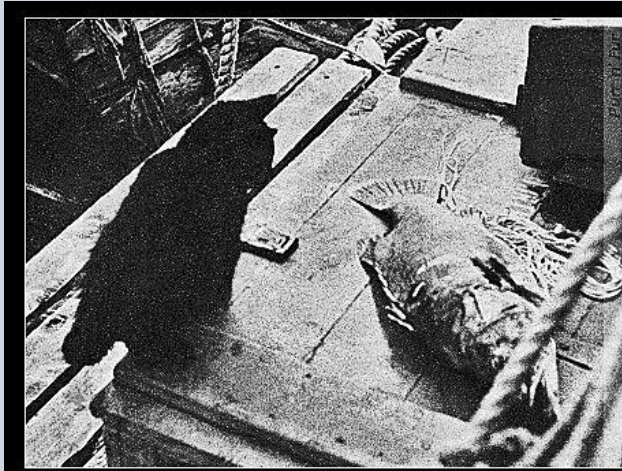
Nothing daunted, Beaudout set about raising funds for a second attempt, and by May 1956 he was ready to set out again with Gaston and two new companions, José Martinez and Marc Modena. This time they sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia, with *L'Égaré II* — and now they had on board two young kittens, only recently weaned. In his book (*details below*) Beaudout doesn't say where the cats came from or why they were taken, but other sources say they were presented as mascots, and it was thought they could act as useful 'weather watchers', with an ability to predict incoming bad weather.

The kittens were named **Puce** (meaning 'flea' in French), who was black, and **Guiton**, his sister, who was grey. They provided the voyagers — down to three since Martinez had to be taken off with severe recurring seasickness — with a great source of companionship and amusement with their antics, and although at times rations became desperately short, the men always made sure they were fed regularly and received their morning milk. In really rough weather they were secured in a small box for their own safety, but mostly they spent their days clambering around their small world, playing and sleeping.



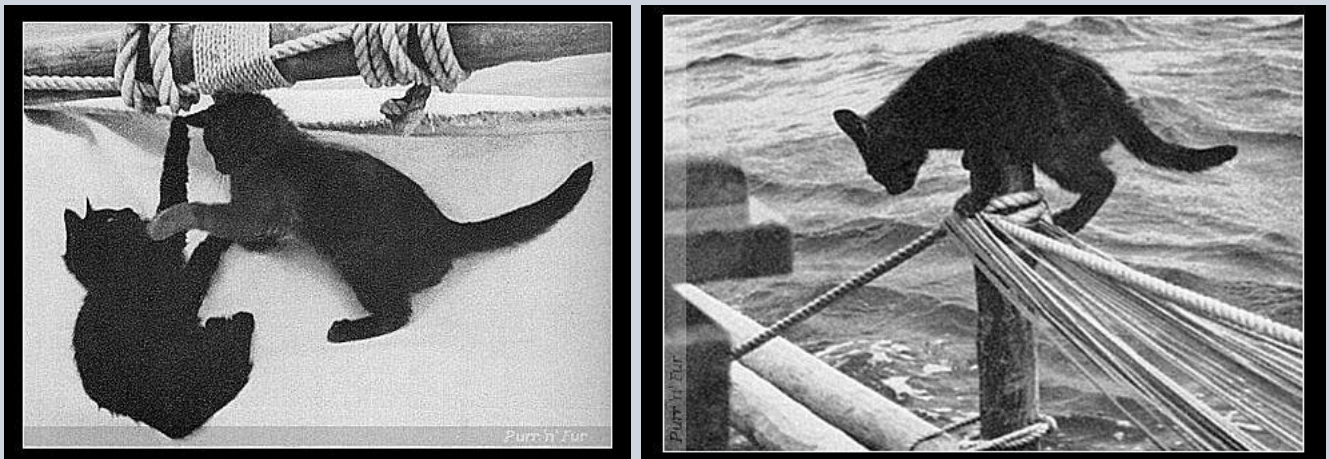
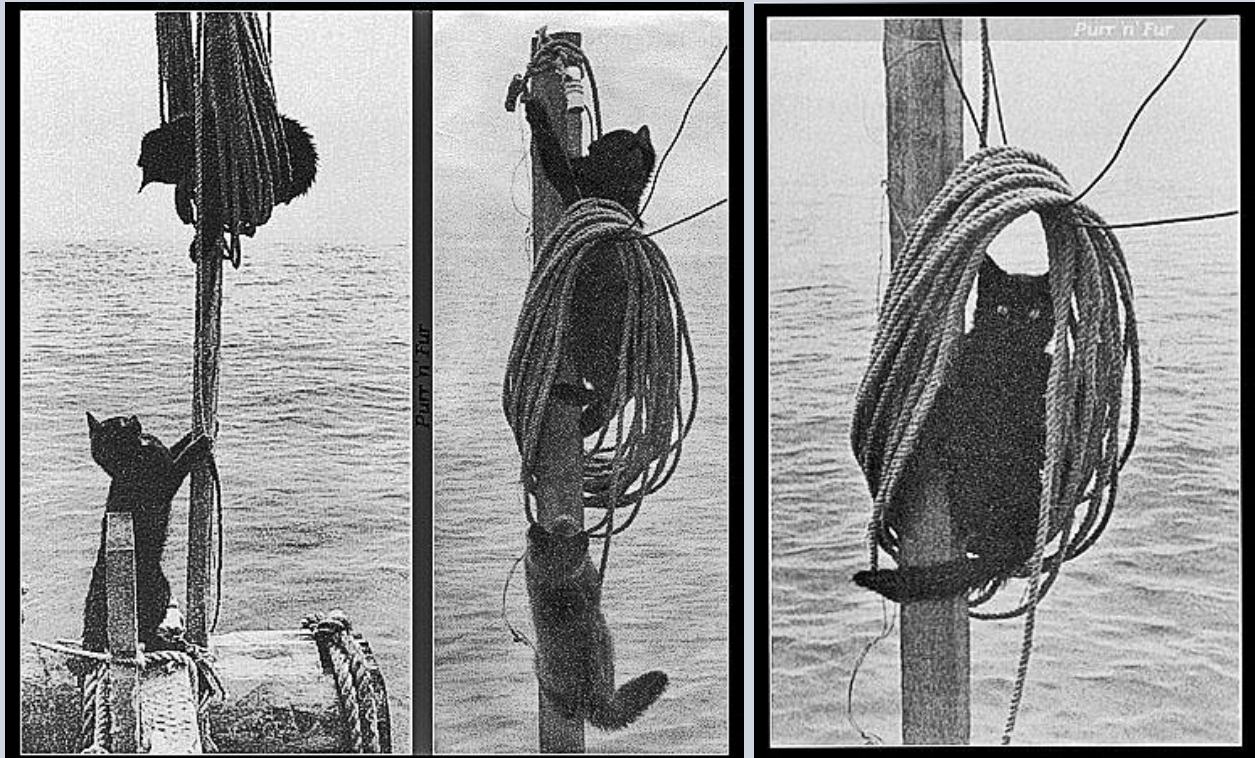
Life on board

The crew made many attempts at fishing to supplement the meagre rations, but mostly with a conspicuous lack of success; it was a month before they caught their first cod. Of course the fish was shared and 'Two very happy little cats retired to the sun on deck, rolled themselves into the tightest circles their full stomachs would allow, and slept in complete contentment.' Occasionally it was possible to catch gulls, and their meat gave a welcome addition to the diet for both men and kittens. An encounter with a German ship at one point also led to them being given some extra food to help them out.



It wasn't unknown for the two youngsters to play a bit too boisterously near the ends of the raft and fall into the sea, but 'without a sign of fear they would swim two or three strokes, sink their sharp

little claws into the wood and bounce back on board with nothing more than a vigorous shake to get rid of the water'. In fact they never showed fear of anything in their little world; they would tear about the cabin roof or fly up the mast with ears back and tails waving, seemingly trying to outdo each other with their feats of agility.

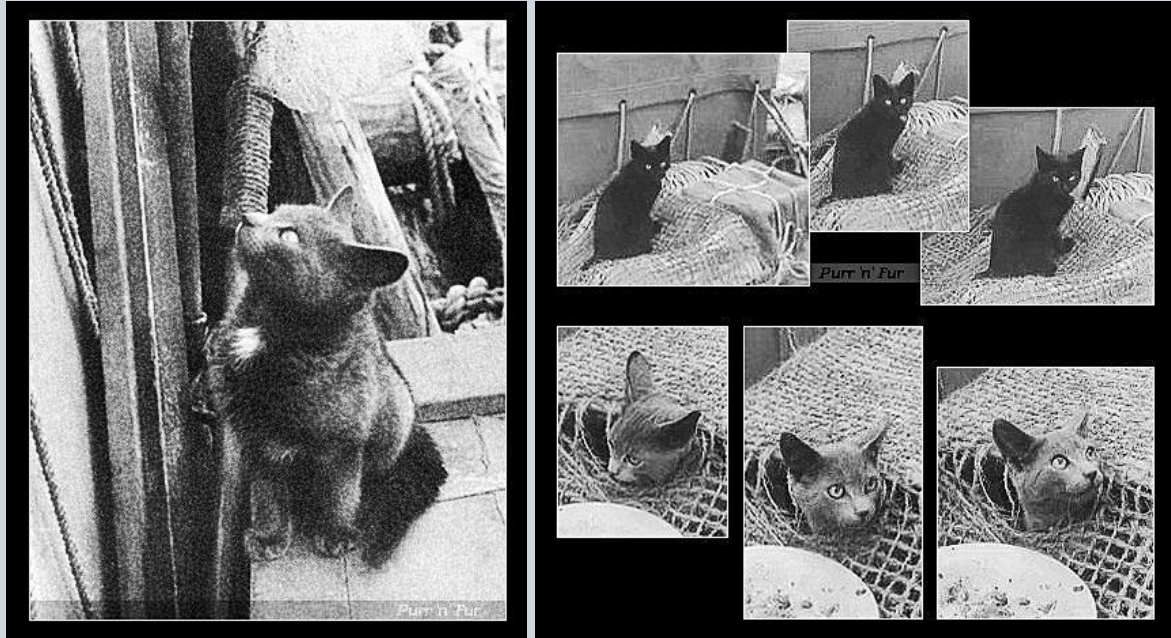


Arrival in England

What did upset them, though, was the reception given to *L'Égaré* and its crew when, after 88 days, they finally made landfall and went ashore at Falmouth, in Cornwall, south-west England in mid-August 1956. The crew had sailed some 5000 km (over 3000 miles) and had managed to overcome hunger, thirst, a shark attack, exposure and the unpredictable Atlantic weather and mountainous seas. Beaudout remarked later that 'Only the kittens kept us sane.' They were greeted by a crowd of hundreds, and the little cats were terrified by all the noise and people that had suddenly impinged on their world. The sea had been their horizon and they had only ever known four people at most. It was all strange and frightening and so they were kept in their little box for a while. Not long after their arrival the British *Picture Post* covered the story, including an 'interview' with the two cats, which is reproduced below.

The voyage of *L'Égaré II* had been largely forgotten for decades, but at the time it was headline news and was dubbed 'the Atlantic Kon-Tiki'. The crew became celebrities and attended various functions in their honour. The kittens, meanwhile, had to spend the then-obligatory six months in quarantine. However, eventually they were adopted by the Duke of Bedford, a cousin of Queen Elizabeth II; he agreed to take them in after he had invited Beaudout and his crew to meet him. A small replica of *L'Égaré II* was built to be their new home, and it was moored on the lake at the

Duke's estate at Woburn as part of the Children's Zoo (*below left*). Thus Puce and Guiton, little French-Canadian cats, rubbed shoulders with the English aristocracy, although I don't know how long they lived or how they enjoyed their new life.



There's a short [Pathé news clip](#) from 1956 of the craft's arrival in Falmouth, which gives an idea of the fragility and small size of *L'Égaré II*; it was just 30 feet long by 17 wide (roughly 9.5 m x 5 m). Henri Beaudout's book (in English) *The Lost One* was published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, in 1957 (no ISBN). Fortunately for posterity, Henri was determined the adventure should be recorded on film, and crewman Gaston Vanackere was the photographer, equipped with a 16 mm. camera. A documentary film entitled [Atlantic Adventure](#) (*'not available in your region'; title page is archived*) was released in 1961, and the two cats were named as part of the crew. The photo at right is from the book.

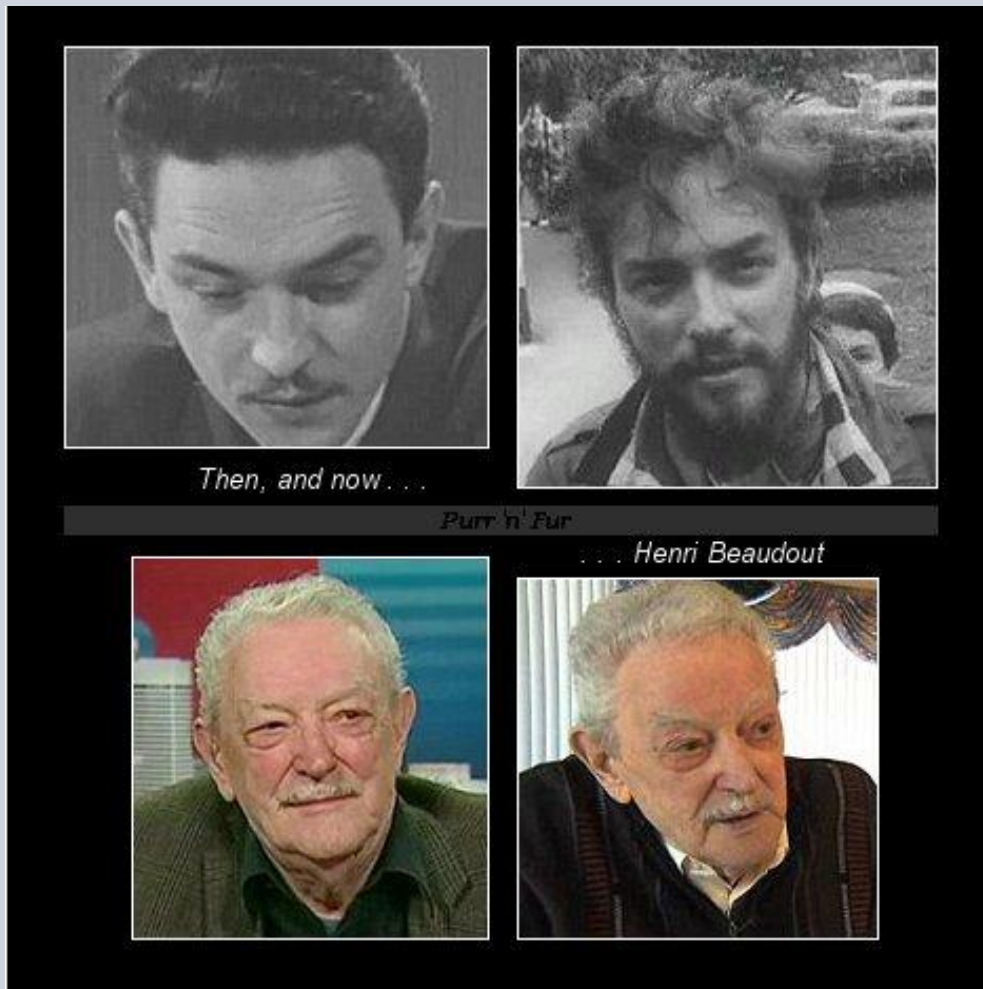


What happened next

After their epic journey the men returned to Canada, and *L'Égaré II* was also returned to Quebec, with a promise from the Quebec government of the time that it would be placed in a museum. But there was no Quebec museum able or willing to take it. It ended up as a kind of visitor attraction outside a motel named *L'Égaré* (no previous connection) in a small village called Neuville on the north shore of the St Lawrence river. After 10 years or so outside and exposed to the Canadian elements it was rotting, and it was cannibalised for wood by a local — a most unfortunate fate, as the English would have been pleased to keep it as a museum exhibit. However, after 55 years, the accomplishment of the crew of *L'Égaré II* was 'rediscovered', and a small team of volunteers in Canada was determined that this important piece of Canadian history should not be forgotten.

A lasting legacy

In the latter part of 2012 it seems plans were mooted to build a full-sized replica of the raft. Beaudout's compatriots had died, but he himself was alive (he was 85 in 2012) and gave his blessing and support to the project. But again no museum seemed to be interested in housing such a vessel, and also funding was a problem. To cut a long story short, eventually the Musée maritime de Québec (MMQ) stepped up and agreed to house an exhibit, having earlier refused. Plans for a full-scale replica fell through, though, partly from safety considerations; so a one-third scale model was produced by a skilled cabinet maker. It was unveiled at the MMQ in 2016, thus ensuring a lasting tribute to the remarkable voyage of three Frenchmen –and two kittens.



Links

- ❖ [The Raftsmen](#) website (Oct. 2015 – archived copy)
- ❖ [Twitter](#) (active until mid-2018)
- ❖ Video clip: [Rebuilding L'Égaré II](#) ('This video is private,' Oct. 2018)
- ❖ Video clip: [Puce and Guiton: The Kittens Who Conquered the Atlantic](#)
- ❖ Audio clip from [CBC Radio](#) (needed Flash player, no longer available): broadcast in May 2012 in their *C'est la vie* strand, this interesting programme related how the story of *L'Égaré II* was rediscovered. Briefly, retired sea captain Caleb Kean was, in 1956, bosun on *The Investigator*, which went to the assistance of *L'Égaré* on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland when fourth original crew member, José Martinez, had to be taken off the raft owing to illness. Kean was in the boat rowed over to the raft to make the transfer, and never forgot the incident and his involvement with the men and their little craft, which a month or two later made international headlines. In later life he began trying to find out what became of *L'Égaré* and the crew, but unfortunately he and his family made little headway until he was interviewed by CBC in connection with his long seafaring life. Among other memories and anecdotes, he mentioned the story and his part in it. With CBC's help Henri Beaudout was finally traced, and the two men were able to make contact. The clip filled in many other details and talked about the raft's voyage — and the cats! There's also a short clip at [YouTube](#) with a more condensed outline of Captain Kean's quest and the outcome.

- ❖ Catherine François at [TV5Monde](#): (*archived copy, but video doesn't load*) article in French with a 5m video clip of an interview with Henri Beaudout (also in French) and showing some footage from the raft's voyage — the kittens put in an appearance.

Interview with Puce and Guiton

(from the 15 September 1956 issue of *Picture Post*)

The Cats' Own Story

From the raft, in quarantine in Falmouth Harbour, our reporter brings this exclusive interview with the expedition's youngest members.

"I think," said the small grey cat, eyeing photographer Joe McKeown, "that he's an amateur. No flashgun. Not worth talking to."

"*Pardon*," said the small black cat with the white spot at her [*sic*] throat, "Guiton has a commercial mind. I am a Puce. You wish to know about our voyage? *Bon*. In the beginning — it was not easy. The Canadian SPCA did not want us to come at all. We were, you understand, very young then. The men smuggled us aboard under their coats. Then came the fog, the storms, the waves. But one soon learns to run with one's claws out —like the studs in *les soccerboots*, yes?"

"You wish to know how I became grey?" asked Guiton, leaping the gap to our launch and balancing on a narrow fender. "It was all that fog. In the sun, one becomes sunburned. In fog, one becomes grey. But that is all in my story. It will cost you *sept milles* — seven thousand."

"Cod's heads?" I asked.

Guiton shrugged her tail in disgust.

"The fish was the worst," explained Puce. "Sometimes I ask myself — is there nothing but fish in the sea? No hamburgers? No lamb chops?"

"Sometimes we were desperate," said Guiton, rubbing her tennis-ball tummy tragically. "We became nothing but fur and bone. Hunger made us so depraved that we actually stole from the men. But that, too, is in my story. It costs *six milles*."

"Not often did we go hungry," said Puce firmly. "But we got so very tired of fish."

"And did you find the voyage boring?" I asked.

"*Mais non!* Was there not the mast to climb, the insects to chase, the radio wires to chew?"

"You think the voyage was a success then?"

"But of course! You may write it was a great success. Except now —" she [*sic*] waved a sad paw around the harbour, "— except now they say we are illegal immigrants. We must live alone out here on the raft — and then be locked up ashore in quarantine."

"Just think," gloated Guiton, "not only have I crossed the Atlantic on a raft, but soon I shall be a jailcat as well. What a story I shall have then! You may take first option on it for a mere *mille*."

I shook my head.

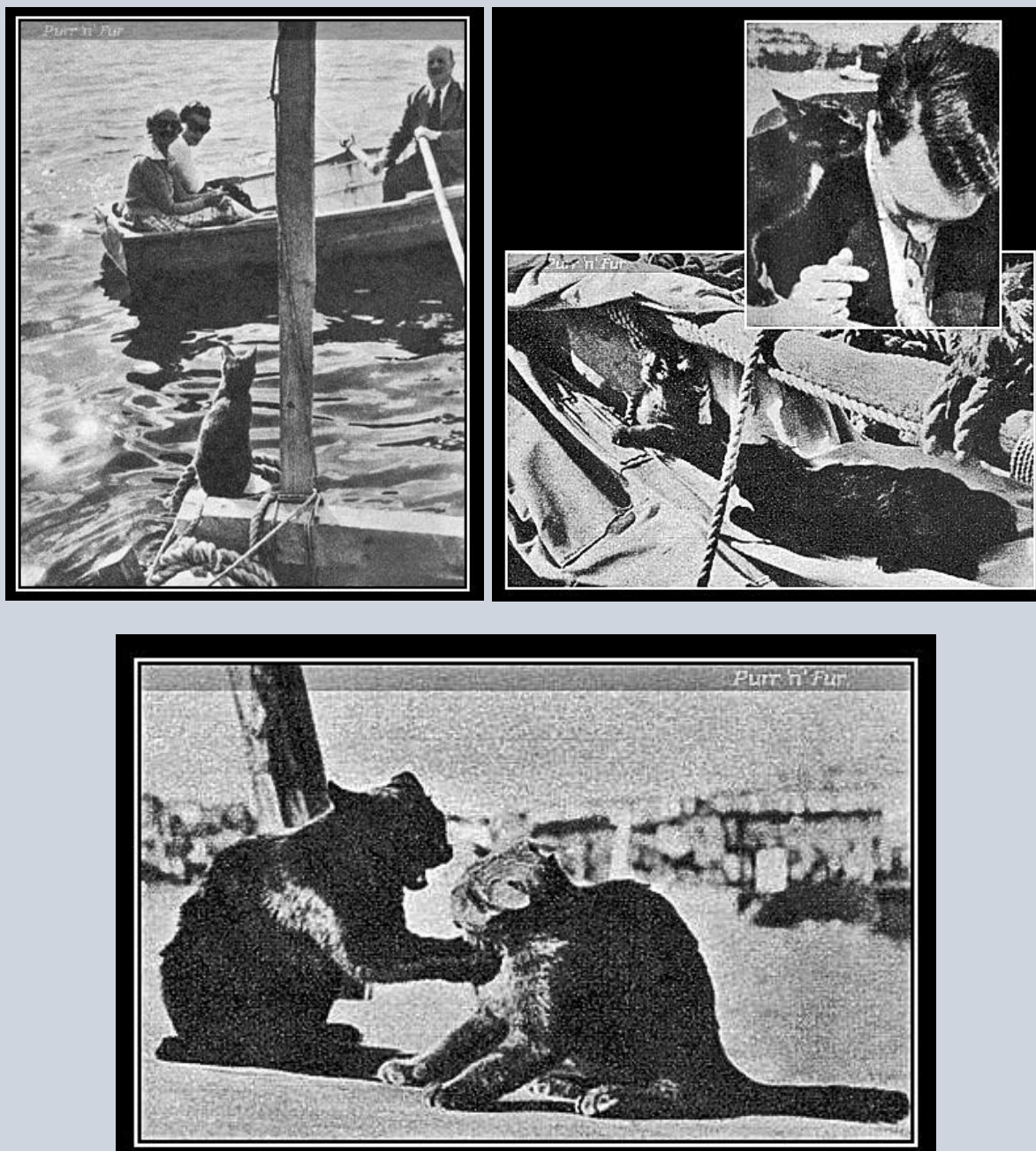
"I am retiring to my hammock," said Guiton, stalking to the furled sail and crawling inside. "Next time, send your editor in person."

"If you are now returning to shore," said Puce hastily, "would you kindly ask the harbour master, the good *capitaine* Edwards, if the morning food boat is coming?"

"Of course," I promised, clambering back on to the launch. "One last question: why did you make the voyage?"

"But *naturellement*," said Puce, "for *la gloire*; for the honour of catkind the world over."

"Because," said a small grey voice from the furled sail, "nobody *flamante* well asked us if we'd prefer not to."



There's a book about the voyage of *L'Égaré*, a comprehensive account with many photos: *The Raftsmen* by Ryan Barnett (Firefly Books, 2017, ISBN 978-1-77085-978-4)_.

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