
N
60°N
40°N
Equator
40°S
60°S
120°W
60°W
0°
60°E
120°E
NORTH AMERICA
EUROPE
ASIA
AFRICA
SOUTH AMERICA
AUSTRALIA
ANTARCTIC PENINSULA
ANTARCTICA
North Pacific Ocean
North Atlantic Ocean
South Pacific Ocean
South Atlantic Ocean
Indian Ocean
Pacific Ocean
Southern Ocean
TASMANIA
NEW ZEALAND
The Azores
15/07/2024
0 NM/Day 0
Cape Agulhas 1
14/09/2024
7,878 NM/Day 61
Cape Agulhas 2
02/02/2025
25,482 NM/Day 202
Cape Horn
26/12/2024
20,890 NM/Day 164
South East Cape 1
04/11/2024
14,378 NM/Day 112
South East Cape 2
26/03/2025
31,622 NM/Day 254
Bay Of Islands
18/04/2025
33,532 NM/Day 270

LA LONGUE ROUTE:

1½ HALF TIMES NON-STOP AROUND THE WORLD

by Susanne Huber-Curphey (s/v *Nehaj*)

Based on an interview with **Kirsten Kurze** for ***Trans-Ocean***

Elected Honorary Member in 2022, Susanne Huber-Curphey has not used that as an excuse to slow down! She started breaking records in 2017, when she became the first woman to single-hand through the Northwest Passage, completing Route 6 eastbound (ie from the Bering Strait to the Davis Strait via the Chukchi Sea, Beaufort Sea, Amundsen Gulf, Coronation Gulf, Simpson Strait, Rae Strait, Bellot Strait, Prince Regent Inlet and Lancaster Sound). In 2018, Susanne sailed the 'La Longue Route', departing from Maine, and kept sailing, replicating Moitessier's voyage of sailing 1½ times around the earth, clocking up 33,043 miles in 251 days. During that voyage she became the first woman to complete a circumnavigation of Antarctica solo non-stop from Tasmania (October 2018) to Tasmania (February 2019) in 121 days and 16,873 miles.

She's done it again! For the second time Susanne Huber-Curphey has sailed around the world non-stop, this time whilst participating in 'La Longue Route' 2024/25, a single-handed, non-stop, unassisted circumnavigation in a yacht under 52ft long. It was just her and her beloved *Nehaj*.

For Susanne the event was one of weather extremes, with many calms and many storms; she had to deploy her Jordan Series Drogue (JSD) seven times to get through severe weather safely. Right at the end of her voyage, after a stormy journey through the Tasman Sea, Cyclone Tam, a category two cyclone, crossed her path only 100 miles from her New Zealand destination. Susanne had to turn northwards, away from a dangerous lee shore and the hurricane passed just 50 miles away, bringing wind speeds of over 80 knots.

On 18 April, she arrived in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand. Of the original 16 entrants, only five French sailors and Susanne Huber-Curphey started La Longue Route 2024. Of these six, only three reached their destination non-stop, with Susanne Huber-Curphey being the only one who sailed a 'real' Moitessier route, where she headed for the Indian Ocean rather than re-enter the Atlantic to return to her starting point.

LA LONGUE ROUTE

In 2018, the event of 'La Longue Route' was established for the first time to honour Bernard Moitessier. Fifty years after the 'Golden Globe Race' in which he – unknowingly – created a monument to himself: rather than returning to Europe with prospects to win and be celebrated, he chose to continue his journey to Tahiti, completing the longest non-stop voyage ever completed, over 37,000 nautical miles. He described his experiences in a book titled 'La Longue Route'.

With the format of 'La Longue Route', the creators want to revive the spirit of freedom and adventure. Therefore, there are no winners, no required routes, no fixed start times or start ports and no fees. Among the few prerequisites is a solo circumnavigation, without stops, sailing south of the three great capes (Cape Horn, Cape of Good Hope and Cape Leeuwin), starting in the North Atlantic and in a boat with a length of under 52ft. Having been held in 2018 and 2024, it has been announced that the next opportunity for 'La Longue Route' will be in 2027.

Just before her departure from New Zealand for a new journey, she took the time for an interview:

Susanne Huber-Curphey on deck of Nehaj

Susanne aboard Nehaj *at the start in the Azores*

One and a half times around the world, 33,532 miles in 270 days, solo and non-stop. What an impressive achievement! Congratulations on your second successful completion of the 'La Longue Route'. In this edition of the event, you turned one circumnavigation into one and a half and headed from the Atlantic into the Indian Ocean once again. Did you plan to complete 1½ circumnavigations at the start?

Actually, it's obvious that, for an event with this name, one should really sail the same long route as Bernard Moitessier did in 1968/69. I'm quite surprised that none of the other sailors did it, neither in 2018 nor in 2024. I don't know if any of them thought about it, as I had practically no contact with the other sailors. In any case, I kept my intended 'True La Longue Route' to myself, both times. Only once I was on course from Cape Horn to South Africa was I unable to keep this second lap a secret any longer.

Did you and *Nehaj* manage the journey well and without injuries?

Yes, it is almost unbelievable how well *Nehaj* coped with the high demands of these nine months at sea, with numerous critical situations, without any damage. My criteria for every sailing yacht at sea, including the so-called 'barefoot' trade wind route, is "Hull – Rudder – Rig must be untouchably strong". Unfortunately, in my opinion, a large proportion of today's yachts sold for ocean voyages do not meet these requirements.

Leaving for the Longue Route 2024

I felt very good throughout the entire journey. Only when I suffered a stabbing pain in my right abdomen from time to time for a few weeks was I concerned as I thought that it might be appendicitis. Fortunately, it was a false alarm. My little onboard pharmacy mainly consists of several courses of antibiotics. They can be used for all kinds of emergencies or injuries, that I don't really want to think about too much.

Can the two circumnavigations in 2018 and 2024 be compared? What was the same? What were the differences?

Of course, this route has been sailed many times since Moitessier, and really is nothing special. Nevertheless, both journeys were a personal challenge to me. Overall, it was the fantastic experience of my perfect unity with the boat and with the mighty nature.

When embarking on such a non-stop journey, one does not think about the five oceans ahead. In fact, during the

Susanne

Susanne aboard Nehaj *at the start in the Azores*

entire journey, almost only the present and the next day matter. I was focused only on the upcoming waypoint: the equator, the first major cape in South Africa, waiting for the southern spring and then for summer in the Southern Ocean, etc.

The second journey brought significantly more weather extremes and I had better satellite communication.

In 2018, Hobart in Tasmania was your destination; this time you sailed over 1,400 miles further to New Zealand. Was that a spontaneous decision?

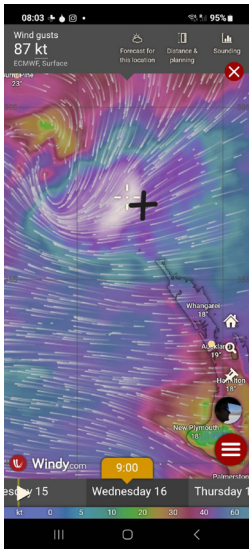
I had hoped for landfall in Hobart, not least because I love Tasmania and good friends were waiting for me. However, as it was already late autumn, I changed the destination to New Zealand in order to cross the often tempestuous Tasman Sea at the beginning of winter. The passage from Tasmania to New Zealand was quite challenging. Not only was there very severe weather, but we also met a cyclone with winds over 80 knots off the coast of New Zealand.

How do you cope with such weather? What helps you to endure such severe storms? Would you like to give us insights into your storm tactics?

In meteorological terms every low-pressure system is a cyclone, while high-pressure systems are called anticyclones. Wind speeds of above 64 knots are referred to as hurricane in the Beaufort wind scale. In both hemispheres, Tropical Revolving Storms (TRS) have different names in different parts of the world: hurricane, cyclone or typhoon. Therefore, this Category Two TRS in the Pacific was named 'Cyclone Tam'.

I am not prone to panic, but every storm is a physical and emotional challenge. What really reassures me is knowing that I have a really safe storm tactic with the Jordan Series Drogue (JSD). The JSD is essentially a large number of small cones, each about the size of a coffee filter, attached at intervals of 50cm onto a thick rope, which is towed behind the boat. The number of cones on the JSD depends on the boat's displacement; for *Nehaj,* it is 150 such cones.

The secret of the JSD is that the force of heavy breaking waves onto the boat is distributed across those many small cones. Therefore, there is no sudden shock-load. In fact, it feels as if the boat is hanging on a gigantic rubber band in total safety. However, there is always a safe forward movement. Rolling sideways or pitch-poling over the bow are impossible.



Cyclone Tam with our position

You used your JSD seven times during this event. When do you decide on its use? How do you secure it? And how do you get it back on board?
In short: "Don't let the mast go into the water, and don't let the water get into the boat, then everything will be fine."

Depending on the conditions, I set the trysail at winds of about force 8, the storm jib at force 9, and up to force 10 I can still sail slowly and safely under just the tiny storm jib. Anything more creates dangerously high breaking waves, when *Nehaj* would be knocked down onto the water despite her very high stability (righting moment) or even be rolled all the way through.

The Jordan Series Drogue (JSD) is deployed off the stern

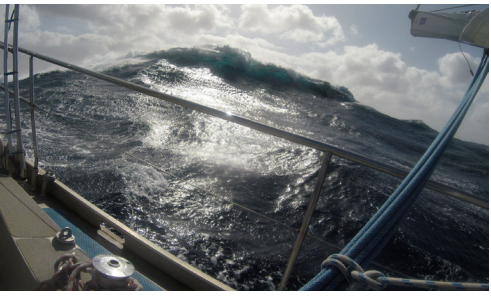
At this point it's time to deploy the JSD. With a bit of planning this can be done without danger, even whilst still sailing under the storm jib. Once it's deployed there's nothing more to do on deck, because all sails are lowered and stowed tightly, the tiller is fixed amidships and the rudder of the windvane self-steering system is removed and below decks. So, close the hatches and wait out the storm, safely inside.

After use the JSD should be dried and packaged again

I wouldn't wish this experience on any sailor, but if it comes to it, one's storm tactics should be considered and prepared well in advance. Nor do I want to lecture anyone; every skipper should decide for themselves how to deploy the JSD. However, I strongly recommend starting with the ropes at the stern and feed out the entire JSD slowly and under full control, in a large loop. Finally, the end weight is released, sinking vertically into the deep.

I find the method most commonly recommended, by starting with the end weight and then letting the JSD drag out freely under full boat speed, poses great dangers. The many small cones can get tangled on a winch, on a cleat, or on themselves under uncontrolled heavy loads. Complete self-steering systems have been torn off; or even worse if a finger, arm or leg gets dragged along.

Contrary to many misconceptions, retrieving the JSD is not a problem. If I can do it, anyone can! But two factors are crucial: first, the JSD has just brought you and your boat safely through a severe storm without damage. In comparison it's irrelevant if the retrieval takes about two hours, some report needing only one hour. Second, after a storm there are always high seas, which is very helpful for the retrieval. When the boat is in the trough of a wave the tension on the rope is momentarily very low or even completely slack. I wrap the thick rope of the JSD twice around my large cockpit winch and retrieve the line when there is no tension on it. I NEVER use a winch handle.



Sailing in big swells

Did you think weather conditions had changed compared to 2018?
The second journey had significantly more weather extremes. I waited for wind for a total of 332 hours in complete calm with lowered sails, which corresponds to 14 days – or five per cent – of the total time.

On the other hand, we encountered a remarkable 40 weather systems with gales of force 8 or above. According to the international Beaufort scale, 'storm' is force 10. Eight and nine Beaufort are 'gale' and 'severe gale'. To be precise, *Nehaj* endured persistent wind strengths of force 10 Beaufort, and thus storm force, nine times on this trip. During that time I had to deploy my tried-and-tested JSD seven times, totalling 310 hours – or five per cent – of the total time.

It is remarkable that the periods of calms and storms were almost equally frequent.

What forecasts were you working with and how reliable were they?
Until this trip I basically only sailed with the readings of my analogue barometer and very occasionally received weather information via amateur radio. This time I was able to download GRIB files almost daily covering a significantly larger area. Of course this is very informative, but on the other hand it took away a certain amount of calmness. Observing an approaching storm – or a hurricane – days in advance will certainly rob you of your tranquillity. At the low speed at which we are sailing I can rarely alter course to meaningfully avoid weather systems. Most of the forecasts were very reliable. However, when it became critical as Cyclone Tam approached, the forecast expected wind strengths were quite contradictory, ranging from only 30 knots to the frightening – and actual – 87 knots.

What sail wardrobe do you have on board for such a trip? What has proven useful or what do you avoid?
Besides the storm sails and a rarely used asymmetric spinnaker, I have two sets of all the sails.

Although furling sails, especially foresails, have now become the norm, I do not want them on board. In fact, I fear the many potential problems with furling sails. It could be a total failure of the roller system, or just a snapped reefing line. The consequences can be catastrophic, especially for a small crew or when sailing alone.

Many of my journeys are ocean crossings, where the nearest workshop is weeks or even months away. The wonderful thing about hank-on sails is that you only

Poled-out staysail

Trysail, staysail and storm jib

Trysail and storm jib

Trysail seen through the main hatch

have to release the halyard and the sail always drops on its own, no matter how strong a sudden gust might be. However, it's important to keep the sail sheeted in so that it doesn't flog wildly. One disadvantage of not having rolling sails is the sheer number of sails I have on board.

With my new mainsail, I opted for a sail without any battens, and for a fourth reef.

The same question applies to the equipment. When on board non-stop for so long, *Nehaj* is probably extremely well fitted out. What equipment is essential for you, and what do you consider unnecessary?

For me, simplicity applies to all boat equipment and generally to everything on board. For example, I have installed only a few electronic instruments and they are completely independent of each other. All sail handling is done at the mast; I have no halyards and no reefing lines leading to the cockpit.

The list of equipment that I do NOT have on board is quite long: no furling sails, no fridge/freezer, no built-in watermaker, no complex autopilot, a chart plotter that's only used for the radar, no wind indicators at the masthead, no pressurised water, no shower, no washing machine, and so on.

Half of the life of today's cruisers seems to involve repairing or replacing their extensive equipment, buying spare parts, or paying expensive experts. In short: expect that all the expensive electronics will fail at any time.

Catching rainwater. I rarely achieved this, therefore I pumped a manual watermaker for one hour daily during the last three months of journey

In the Southern Ocean sunset was in my wake for half a year

How important is the topic of redundancy to you? Do you have duplicate systems on board?

Everything that is important to me is of the best possible quality and most of it is duplicated. This includes for example, a second solar panel that I have stowed below deck, a complete depth sounder with transducer, a second fully installed AIS system, a second VHF and a spare HF radio. Additionally, I have several GPS devices, although I also have a good sextant, nautical tables and a 50-year almanac.

Finally, I have a large collection of spare parts, many tools, thread cutters, screws and bolts, wood and plywood. After all, I built *Nehaj* myself so boat-building is still ingrained into my offshore bones. Some technical know-how certainly is helpful.

How do you plan your diet for such a trip? Do you – like the professional sailors – have freeze-dried food on board, or do you really cook properly?

Christmas dessert on Nehaj

Citrus fruit kept very well

I explored freeze-dried ready meals briefly, but they are really expensive and have a rather low calorie count per pouch. Furthermore, they create a packaging madness. So, yes, I 'really cook properly', although my gourmet standards are rather low at sea. So it may not always be 'really good'. I baked bread about twice a month. In the end, I only needed three of my seven 4.5-litre aluminium propane cylinders.

I have been using a cooking pot with an insulation box (initially home-made) for many years. Just bring pasta or rice to the boil, then put it into the box and after half an hour everything is done, nothing can burn either. I also love using a small 2.5-litre pressure cooker, in which a meal/curry/stew keeps for days without refrigeration even in the tropics. The leftovers are briefly brought to pressure, then the lid mustn't be opened for 24 hours. I add something every day, maybe a can of tomatoes or fish, new spices or coconut milk. In the end, I almost always end up with curry.

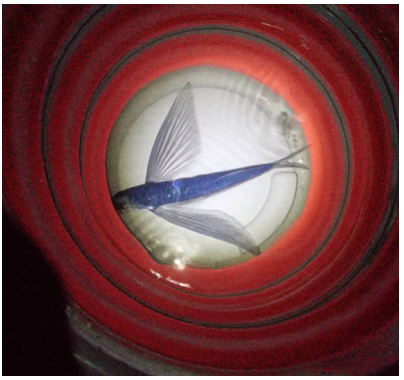
Every supermarket has a wide variety of foods that last wonderfully without refrigeration: vacuum-packed cheese and ham can last for months. Plus there is the well-known range of flour, rice, pasta, dried beans or peas or tomatoes, all spices and stock cubes, milk powder and possibly dried egg, coffee, tea, cocoa, oats, muesli, olive oil, mashed potato, maple syrup, chocolate, biscuits, nuts, raisins, honey, jam and similar items. With a little imagination you can always create something. In contrast, I took far too many tins once again.

In terms of fruit and vegetables, whatever makes it across the equator will last for a long time afterwards. Right up until the end I still had a pumpkin, one grapefruit and a slightly shrivelled onion.

How does one cope with loneliness on such a long journey? How do you pass the time along the way?

At sea I don't feel lonely. I practically always have email contact and send my so-called 'blue water letters' to interested friends. Sometimes a nice radio connection arises on the amateur radio. Or I simply watch the ever-changing

Hove to in Cyclone Tam



A flying fish jumped into a bucket

sea for a long time and observe the albatrosses in their endless circles around the boat.

Boredom is also no problem, as I'm always on standby on my 24/7 watch. There were lots of sail changes on the foredeck and hundreds of reefs in the mainsail to tie in, or release. Additionally, there are always small jobs, repairs or touch-ups to do. Then a bit of reading or writing, or take an observing walk on deck, always with eyes on the rigging – and before you know it, the day is over.

In fact, I believe that *Nehaj* speaks to me, maybe an unusual sound in the hull if something has come loose in a locker. Fortunately, there are no creaking hull noises in a solid metal boat. It could be a vibrating sail or halyard in a gust. Or a different boat movement in the waves if the wind direction has changed. On rare occasions, and under perfect sailing conditions, I hear a mysterious 'happy hum' without really knowing where it comes from. Perhaps solo offshore sailing is more a matter of listening than seeing?

When you come close to land, isn't landing also tempting? How do you motivate yourself to keep sailing and overcome all the challenges?

On such journeys I sometimes feel like a 'Flying Dutchman' in a positive sense, wandering for months without a destination port. The longer I'm at sea, the more I dread the proximity of land and its coastal dangers. Then I would choose a port large enough for a cruise ship.

The truly beautiful thing about this route is that I could head north at any time, 'turn left' so to speak, to be in the tropics in about two weeks. Be it towards St Helena in the Atlantic, to various island groups in the Indian Ocean, or to any of countless atolls and islets in the Pacific. Naturally that's only possible if one doesn't feel obliged to anyone with promised successes or great pictures and adventure stories!

Do you sometimes feel scared on board? How do you deal with it?

Everyone experiences fear at some point. That's a good thing, as fear is part of our survival instinct, while inner panic would paralyse us completely. Additionally, there is a wonderful natural stimulant that activates unexpected physical and inner strength and security: the body's own adrenaline.

What was the biggest challenge?

Nothing springs to mind, somehow every day at sea had its little challenges and

Garbage from 50 days at sea

When approaching Tasmania land came temptingly close

rewards. Perhaps it's my hope to continue this pelagic gypsy life on board for a long time to come?

What was your most beautiful experience?

That was probably the visit of a dozen humpback whales, somewhere in the southern Indian Ocean. On that day I had tied an underwater camera to the boat hook for the first time in very calm weather, intending to check the intense growth on the hull in almost calm conditions. I then tried to get those gentle giants in front of the lens. They passed just beneath the keel time and again, and very often surfaced right next to the hull.

I was a bit worried about the servo rudder of the windvane self-steering, but not once did they touch this vulnerable rudder blade nor the hull of *Nehaj*. In the end, all the photos and videos were rubbish because I had never done this before.

By the way, there was a funny episode on the second night after my arrival in New Zealand, when I had taken off the lee cloth of my bunk. It was only during this second night that the restless rhythm of the journey gradually subsided and I was in a deep sleep. Meanwhile, my body – apparently – still believed it had the all-round protection from 'falling out of bed' and rolled over the edge. Just before a free fall to the cabin floor 80cm below, I woke up and managed to stop myself from falling just in time. It would have been quite bizarre to injure myself by falling out of my bunk when *Nehaj* was in harbour after such a long time at sea!

Do you have plans for what comes next?

In a few days' time, I'm planning to leave New Zealand because my three-month permit is coming to an end, and because it's not so hot in the Pacific Islands during the Southern winter. I intend to sail to Tonga, a distance of about 1,200 miles, to the tropics. Of all the island groups on the 'round-the-world cruisers highway' in the South Pacific, life in Tonga is still unchanged and calm. Yachts are welcome which, unfortunately, is no longer a given in many places around the world.

Additionally, I hope to see migrating humpback whales there as they mate in the calm waters of Tonga and give birth to their young. Perhaps one of them might remember me?

Then we will see what comes next.