Flying Fish

2025

The Journal of the Ocean Cruising Club®

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2025 Introduction

As the files for this edition of *Flying Fish* are handed to the printers, I can reflect on the stories and adventures that will be revealed to fresh eyes as you navigate your way through the pages. Thank you to everyone who has torn themselves away from varnishing gunwales or servicing winches to write articles, it is a huge act of generosity for which all of us are the beneficiaries: thank you.

Readers, you have many a treat in store: from Harry Anderson's remarkable voyage to seven continents (page 88) or honorary member Susanne Huber-Curbey's second time sailing La Longue Route (page 164), there are enviable descriptions of exploring Indonesia (page 190) and the Bahamas (page 180) as well as a reminder not to race past the Cabo Verde (page 135). Things don't always go to plan, quick thinking and responding to adversity are an essential part of the ocean sailor's toolkit. Stark reminders of how this can happen to anyone are shared very movingly by Miranda Baker (page 81) and Stephen Foot (page 215), among others.

But the unsung heroes of producing a publication such as this are the generous, knowledgeable, hard-working and completely charming group of proofreaders who have carefully read every word of this 320-page journal. Even in the face of tight turnarounds and several megabytes worth of text, they have carved out time to pore over each article, correcting misplaced punctuation, rearranging sentences and bringing clarity to such a variety of stories.

Jenny Taylor-Jones, daughter-in-law of Mike (whose obituary can be found on page 308), has taken over the baton of drawing the chartlets. I hope you will agree that the results are excellent and there's not a continent that she hasn't had to outline, such is the variety of voyages undertaken in this edition.

My final vote of thanks is to Anne Hammick, from whom *I* have taken the baton of editorship. The journal evolved immeasurably under her guardianship and her contribution remains woven throughout, including masterminding the book reviews (page 271). I am particularly grateful to Anne, together with Beth Bushnell, for their sensitive and assiduous efforts in sharing stories of those dearly departed members (page 289). As a Club we mourn their passing, but to learn more about their lives, lived so fully, is a real privilege.

Whether you have accrued several years of membership or are flying your burgee for the first time, we encourage you to get involved in whatever way appeals. If you are just setting sail, would you like a mentor? If you are actively cruising, how about becoming a Roving Rear Commodore, presenting a webinar or writing an article? Why not attend an event, and if there doesn't seem to be one on your patch, we can help you organise something! Or if – as you read these pages – you lament a misplaced apostrophe or a glaring typo, perhaps you might like to help us proofread?

Fair winds!
Emily Winter, Editor
flying.fish@oceancruisingclub.org

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THE 2024 AWARDS

For only the second time, the Annual Dinner took place in the US. The historic Conanicut Yacht Club, Rhode Island, provided a perfect setting to congratulate the 2024 Award winners. Sadly, not everyone was able to attend in person, those that couldn't either nominated someone else to receive their award in lieu or supplied pre-recorded messages and will be – or have already been – presented with their awards at other locations on their cruising routes. Ted Rice, as Master of Ceremonies, ensured the momentum was maintained and the gathered crowd didn't get too engrossed in conversation!

Bruce Bachenheimer kindly volunteered to record the occasion and photographs taken during the ceremony are reproduced courtesy of him. Club Secretary Rachelle Turk and Regional Rear Commodores Janet Garnier and Henry DiPietro, together with local volunteers, ensured the smooth running of the event.

Thanks are due to Amy Jordan, who has seamlessly stepped into the role of Chair of the Awards sub-committee. Together with her panel of judges they had the unenviable task of fielding nominations.

The history and criteria for all the awards, and information about how to submit a nomination online, can be found at **oceancruisingclub.org/Awards**.

Bruce Bachenheimer, photographer

Past Commodore Simon Currin welcoming guests

The Annual Dinner was held at the Conanicut Yacht Club on 5 April 2025

8	The OCC Lifetime Award	**Victor Wejer**
10	The OCC Seamanship Award	**Pip Hare**
12	The OCC Jester Award	**Jacqueline Evers**
13	The OCC Award (members)	**Zdenka Griswold**
15		**Bill Weigel**
15	The OCC Award (open to all)	**Jesse & Sharon James and the Trinidad Operations Centre**
17		**Bob Bradfield**
18	The Vasey Vase	**Tim Riley & Carol Osborne**
19	The OCC Port Officer Service Award	**Cristian Yanzer**
21	The OCC Events & Rallies Award	**Reg Barker**
22	The OCC Environment Award	**Ivar Smits & Floris van Hees**
23	The OCC Water Music Trophy	**Carla Gregory & Alex Helbig**
25	The Qualifier's Mug	**Fabian Fernandez**
26	The David Wallis Trophy	**Elisabeth & Wim van Blaricum**
	The Vertue Award	**Pam MacBrayne & Denis Moonan**

In 2024, neither the **OCC Barton Cup** *nor the* **Australian Trophy** *were awarded.*

THE OCC LIFETIME AWARD

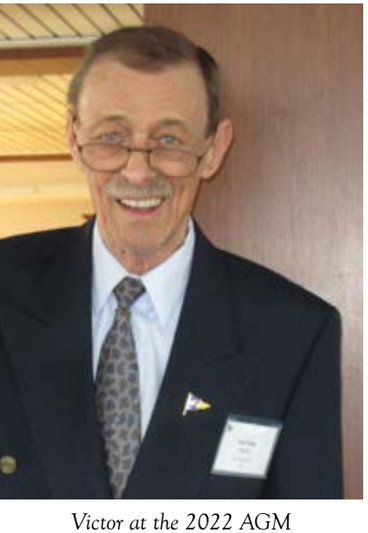
First presented in 2018 and open to both members and non-members, the OCC Lifetime Award recognises a lifetime of noteworthy ocean voyaging or significant achievements in the ocean cruising world.

In a characteristically self-effacing way, **Victor Wejer** has dedicated this Award to all those who have joined him in safely assisting over 100 sailboats undertaking the Northwest Passage (NWP), in particular to his dear friend Peter Semotiuk. Peter was the recipient of the OCC Award of Merit for his support of Arctic sailors in 2014.

The NWP is an under-explored region and for good reason: harsh Arctic conditions with extreme temperatures, unpredictable weather patterns and perilous navigation in its ice-strewn waters. To the amateur skipper, the NWP concentrates the mind like nowhere else because the challenges are so varied: the great distance to be travelled in a tightly defined season; the spottiness of charting; the endless coast, much without shelter; the variations in weather (usually cold and contrary); the grinding need always to be moving; and that alien interruption, pack ice. For over 20 years, Victor Wejer has been offering free and timely ice, weather and routing advice to OCC members and other cruisers transiting the NWP and facing these challenges. He has become known as the Guardian Angel of the NWP, instrumental in assisting a safe passage, looking after you day and night.

There seems to be no part of the NWP of which Victor does not have intimate knowledge, no part of the course that he cannot see better than you, even though you are in it and he is on a computer in a basement in Mississauga! There is no hour of the day he cannot be consulted and no wrinkle he has not smoothed many times before. Moreover, these intimate, knowledgeable and entirely free exchanges have been available to anyone who cares to establish contact.

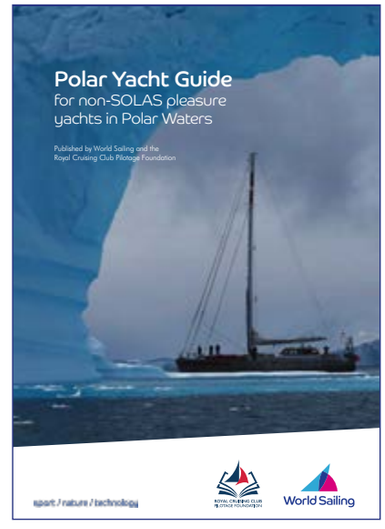
In this way, Victor has done more to enable safe and timely NWP transit than any other single resource. Victor's *Yacht Routing Guide to the Northwest Passage* is now in its 12th edition and can be downloaded free of charge from the Pilotage Foundation website (**rccpf.org.uk/pilots/191/Periplus-to-Northwest-Passage**).



Victor at the 2022 AGM

Prior to 2019, according to International Maritime Organisation (IMO) code, Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) regulations dictated that boats were required to have ice class hulls plus many other things which would prevent recreational boats from sailing freely in polar waters. This prompted Victor to set up a Correspondent Group formed of experienced specialists and delegates from World Sailing, national sailing authorities, international cruising clubs and IMO member countries. Many OCC members were among the participants. As a result of this collaboration, in late 2020, the Polar Yacht Code was born.

During the pandemic of 2020–21, only one sailing boat transited the NWP, skippered by Peter Smith, the famed inventor of the Rocna anchor. Canada revoked his permit halfway through his transit, Victor stepped in and (remotely) guided him for the rest of route to Greenland.



Clockwise from top left: NWP award; Gerd Marggraff accepting Victor's award on his behalf; Victor's Polar Yacht Guide; Red Fish trophy

With help from Ted Laurentius (Port Officer for St John's, Newfoundland), they found him a good maritime lawyer to escape punishment.

Last year, Victor embraced new technologies and, in addition to his regular advice and monitoring service, he hooked up for live group video conferences with OCC boats as they traversed the NWP. Several non-OCC boats chose to join the Club as a result. His videocasts are all archived on the OCC website (**oceancruisingclub.org/webinars**) and demonstrate how much Victor's support is appreciated by those hardy souls venturing to the loneliest cruising ground on earth.

In 2024, Randall Reeves completed another NWP transit supported, of course, by Victor. As a token of his thanks, Randall commissioned some local Inuit youngsters of Red Fish Art Studio in Cambridge Bay (**redfishartsociety.com**) to make a trophy from a piece of thin steel sheet, painted with a dedication. The Red Fish has clocked up an impressive mileage of its own. Having travelled from San Francisco, it got snared in the Canadian Postal strike, returning to California before being re-sent from Newfoundland when Randall returned to *Moli*.

Not only does Victor have a talent for helping people with their safe transit of the NWP, he also has an elegant way with words in his humble acceptance of this well-deserved award:

> *"Canada's High Arctic is a destination filled with beauty, wilderness and seclusion; a place to reconnect with nature and with your own soul. It's the perfect antidote to life in the current fast lane. A journey through Canada's High Arctic takes you through a world like no other. While many Arctic adventures leave you breathless, there's something about sailing this largely untraveled Arctic frontier that leaves you speechless, too. This unexpected Award has left me almost speechless, relying on the lyrics of Stan Rogers's "Northwest Passage" for these words:*

Victor receiving his award from Richard Hudson

Ah, for just one time I would take the Northwest Passage
To find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea;
Tracing one warm line through a land so wild and savage
And make a Northwest Passage to the sea.

Victor Wejer was unable to travel to Newport to collect his Award, but Gerd and Melissa Marggraff, with a recording of Stan Rogers' *Northwest Passage* (**youtube.com/watch?v=TVY8LoM47xI**) blaring out in the Conanicut Yacht Club, received the award on his behalf.

A presentation was made to him in May 2025 near his home in Toronto by OCC high-latitude sailor and his close friend, Richard Hudson, *Issuma*.

THE OCC SEAMANSHIP AWARD

Donated by Past Commodore John Franklin and first presented in 2013, this award recognises feats of exceptional seamanship and/or bravery at sea. It is open to both members and non-members.

Pip Hare was one of 40 entrants in the 2024 Vendée Globe race, the 'greatest sailing race around the world, solo, non-stop and without assistance', racing aboard *Medallia*, a foiling IMOCA 60.

Pip Hare
Photo © Jean Louis-Carli

On Sunday 15 December 2024, at 2145UTC, 800 miles south of Australia and lying 15th, *Medallia* was dismasted. Fortunately, Pip was uninjured and the dismasting happened in daylight, which made the immediate aftermath marginally easier. Pip's first priority was ensuring the hull's safety. Armed with a hacksaw and gloves, she removed most of the rig managing to save the boom, furlers and one outrigger in the process. Her swift action ensured that the hull remained intact; she then set to erecting a jury rig. After only three hours *Medallia* had a new mini-mast (the outrigger, set vertically with a forestay and two backstays) rigged with the trysail and was making way towards Australia. In a 35-knot southerly wind and following sea *Medallia* made 4 knots for the first 24 hours, the 'slow boat to Australia' as Pip's blog hailed it.

Over the next 13 days, Pip made improvements to the rig, adding an extra sail and carrying out routine checks of all parts to ensure that it wouldn't fail her again. She did all this whilst alone, in up to gale-force winds, and providing daily video messages to her followers and sponsors.

In February 2021, Pip finished the Vendée Globe on Medallia *in 19th position, taking 95 days 11 hours* *Photo © Richard Langdon*

On 28 December in amazingly positive spirits, Pip made landfall in Melbourne with her sights set on shipping *Medallia* back to Europe and campaigning the Vendée Globe again at the next iteration.

One often reads of yachts being abandoned mid-ocean for a lesser reason than dismasting and doubtless Pip's team and the Vendée Globe organisers could have effected a rescue for her and the yacht. But instead Pip determinedly and single-handedly raised a jury-rigged mast and sailed the 800 miles north to Melbourne, an inspiring figure of determination and seamanship to all those who follow in her wake.

Although she was unable to attend the Award ceremony in Newport, a video recording of Pip's acceptance speech was shown at the dinner in which she thanked the OCC for recognising her with this award:

"I know that you all know what seamanship is. When any of us go to sea, we must acknowledge and recognise all of the bad eventualities that might happen to us when we cross oceans. We have to take responsibility for ourselves, for our crew, for our boat in a way that people don't always have to on the land. When I dismasted I was 800 miles south of mainland Australia, almost halfway between Australia and Antarctica, and it never occurred to me that I would ask someone else to rescue me. Once I had cut the wreckage clear, I was not in any danger. I was not where I wanted to be and I knew it would be some task to get to the land, but all of that was within my gift. I had the necessary tools, the necessary equipment and the necessary training, and we had thought about what we would do if that happened. It wasn't the way I wanted to finish the Vendée. It is still beyond devastating when I think of it, four years of training and preparation and then to dismast halfway round is brutal, but sharing the onward journey in my slow boat series, sharing with people how I jury-rigged the boat and how I took responsibility

for myself and got back to Australia was important to me to get over the disappointment and to show that the story didn't just end there. I am really honoured that you have chosen to give me this award in recognition of that. Thank you very much."

Pip's Facebook page with all the entries from the Vendée Globe, including the 'Slow Boat to Australia' posts, is at **facebook.com/PipHareOceanRacing**. She also has a website **piphare.com**.

Loveworkx *anchored in San Blas Islands, Panama*

THE OCC JESTER AWARD

Donated by the Jester Trust as a way to perpetuate the spirit and ideals epitomised by Blondie Hasler and Mike Richey aboard the junk-rigged Folkboat Jester, *this award recognises a noteworthy single-handed voyage or series of voyages made in a vessel of 30ft (9.1m) or less overall, or a contribution to the art of single-handed ocean sailing. It was first presented in 2006 and is open to both members and non-members.*

Jacqueline Evers's love affair with sailing began aged 10, spending countless hours on the Frisian lakes in The Netherlands. At 18, she set off sailing with her friend in a Grinde on bigger lakes and the sea. She ventured further into the world of competitive sailing, working for a sailmaker, was a flotilla leader and skipper, then skippered a women's racing team. Sailing evolved from a hobby to a passion and way of life.

Jacqueline entering Fakavara South Pass

As she reached her fifties, Jacqueline decided to leave the rat-race for the serenity of the oceans and to bring her lifelong dream to sail solo around the world into reality. In October 2020, she bought *Loveworkx*, a 27ft Grinde built in 1977, a boat she was familiar with from her youth, easy to sail solo and relatively easy to maintain and repair, especially with so few luxuries on board (no fridge, freezer, watermaker, shower or rollerfurler).

It took nearly three years for Jacqueline to raise sufficient funds, prepare *Loveworkx* for safe ocean sailing and acquire the necessary additional skills for her adventure. In 2021

Sailing to Moorea in French Polynesia

she started solo sailing on her Grinde, in 2022 she did her first sail across the English Channel to Lowestoft, in 2023 she set sail. Her husband and son support her journey and said: "Follow your dream, we will follow you". They visit her from time to time.

So far, Jacqueline has sailed from The Netherlands to New Zealand via Spain and Portugal, the Cape Verde Islands, a 22-day Atlantic crossing to Trinidad, Grenada, Bonaire, the San Blas Islands, Panama, a 30-day crossing to the Marquesas, the Tuamotus and the Society Islands, a 16-day passage to Tonga and, finally, a 17-day passage to New Zealand.

Her nominator cited the historical significance of this award:

"Jacqueline is continuing the formidable achievements and tradition of the Club's female solo sailors crossing oceans in small yachts. Her boat Loveworkx, *a 27ft Grinde, is not much bigger than Ann Davison's* Felicity Ann *in which she was the first woman to sail single-handed across the Atlantic in 1952. Ann Davison flew back to England to be one of the Club's founders at its first meeting in 1954 and thus it is appropriate that Jacqueline's efforts should be recognised in connection with the Club's Platinum jubilee."*

Jacqueline's account of sailing solo from The Netherlands is documented on YouTube **@sailingloveworkx**.

THE OCC AWARD (MEMBER)

The Club's oldest award, dating back to 1960, the OCC Award recognises valuable service to the OCC or to the ocean cruising community as a whole. It was decided in 2018 that the OCC Award should be split into two categories, one going to a member, normally for service to the OCC; the other, open to both members and non-members, for service to the ocean cruising community as a whole. Both (and in 2024 were) can be awarded to multiple awardees.

Zdenka and Jack

Previous Vice Commodore **Zdenka Griswold** joined as an Associate member in June 2009, qualifying for full membership two years later with a passage from the Galapagos to Marquesas with her husband Jack aboard their 42ft Valiant Cutter, *Kite*. They were appointed Roving Rear Commodores in 2014 and, during the course of their

Jack and Zdenka enjoying lobster, Matinicus Isle, Maine

Four OCC boats gathered in La Réunion in 2014: Fi & Chris Jones (Three Ships)*, Roger Block & Amy Jordan* (Shango)*, Jack Griswold* (Kite)*, Jake & Jackie Adams* (Hokule'a) *and Zdenka*

seven-year circumnavigation, proposed many new members from a variety of countries. On returning home to Maine in 2016, she and Jack were appointed joint Port Officers for Portland. They still found time for a cruise most years, covering the eastern seaboard of North America from Newfoundland to the Caribbean.

In 2017 Zdenka joined the General Committee and was elected a Rear Commodore two years later. Somewhat reluctantly, she agreed to become Chair of the Publications sub-committee, where the editors of *Flying Fish* and *Newsletter* considered her the perfect 'boss', never interfering but always ready with constructive advice if asked. Having co-edited the Cruising Club of America's journal *Voyages* for five years this advice was based on practical experience. In 2019 she was also appointed Chair of the OCC Governance committee, which is tasked with the running of the Club including overseeing the actions of the Board/Directors. Then in 2021, at a time when many clubs were shrinking in the wake of Covid, Zdenka also took on the Membership brief. Numbers increased by 11% during her three years in post.

Zdenka invariably saw the bigger picture and, when standing for Vice Commodore in April 2024, wrote:

> *"The world is never still. Climate change, a pandemic, natural and man-made disasters inform blue water cruising plans worldwide. These challenges are balanced by unsurpassed opportunities to visit beautiful and often isolated places, learn from local people and cultures, and slowly and sustainably explore far and wide. The OCC works hard to provide support, guidance and inspiration, striving to do so most effectively under each unique set of circumstances."*

Zdenka

The description of this award, 'recognising valuable service to the OCC' is truly exemplified by Zdenka's many contributions, all undertaken with diligence, wisdom and an enormous smile.

Ernie Godshalk accepted the award on Zdenka's behalf at the Award ceremony and was able to deliver it to her the following day. It was with great sadness that just three weeks later, on 27 April 2025, it was announced that Zdenka had passed away at her home in Portland, Maine. A full obituary can be found on page 289.

Bill

Bill on Chase n Sadie, *with Chase and Sadie*

Bill and Helen in Horta

THE OCC AWARD (MEMBER)

Bill Weigel and his wife Helen joined the OCC in 2015 to take part in the first Suzie Too Rally in the Western Caribbean. They continued cruising between the Caribbean and their home waters in Maine until 2018 when they sailed their Whitby 42, *Alembic*, across the Atlantic to participate in the OCC Azores Pursuit Rally. They enjoyed several seasons in Northern Europe returning each winter to Maine to pursue their passion for skiing. More recently, Bill and Helen have been cruising in northern New England with a different boat, *Chase n Sadie*, named after their first two grandchildren.

Over the past five years Bill has worked tirelessly, unremunerated, on the OCC's digital systems. In the early days of lockdown, Bill volunteered his project management and IT skills to co-ordinate the development of our website, database and app. Since then, he has worked hard with our various committees and contractors to continuously refine and improve our digital presence and has done so in an exemplary fashion. Always the diplomat, Bill has had to juggle the demands of our members and our General Committee within the constraints of our budget and the technology. His knowledge of the technology and his ability to manage contractors has been, and continues to be, invaluable to the Club. Through his endeavours we have state of the art digital platforms.

THE OCC AWARD (OPEN)

This award, which can go to either a member or a non-member, recognises valuable service to the ocean cruising community as a whole.

In July 2024, in a magnificent show of humanity overcoming bureaucracy, Trinidad officials did everything they could to help those cruising yachts fleeing Hurricane Beryl. As the Category 5 hurricane approached Grenada, many crews wisely decided their safest option was to get out of the way and take their yachts to Trinidad. Their AIS tracks formed a solid block as they converged heading south. Not everyone had time to jump through the usual bureaucratic hoops and clear out of Grenada, but the instructions from Trinidad were loud and clear: it did not matter; "come anyway . . . even if you have pets on board,



From left to right: Jesse; 'Members Only' Maxi Taxi Service; YSATT, now known as MSATT

just come and we will take care of you when you get here . . ." (Don't try this without a hurricane!)

As nearly 200 yachts descended on Trinidad, the island prepared. **Jesse James**, Vice President of the Marine Services Association of Trinidad and Tobago (MSATT; previously known as YSATT), winner of quite a few tourism and yachting awards, and the mainstay of yachting information in Trinidad, was at the centre of co-ordinating the response for all the incoming yachts fleeing Beryl. This influx of yachts involved a lot of extra work for authorities. Jesse, together with his wife **Sharon**, set up a pop-up **Operations Centre**, which included all the main services such as Immigration, Customs, Port Health and the Government Vets together under one roof, to ensure all the necessary papers could be filled out as easily as possible and the necessary documents could be photocopied. This saved everyone a huge amount of hassle, especially as Jesse recruited volunteers from the local business community to assist with filling out the arrival forms. To make things even easier, the Coastguard announced that any yacht not wishing to land, could take safe shelter as the hurricane went by, and then return to whence they came without formalities. They wanted to know who and where they were, but there was no paperwork.

The yachts had to spread out to find suitable places to anchor, they stretched all the way down to Carenage. The bays they used are not normally yacht anchorages and the Coastguard, Customs and police put on extra patrols to make sure all anchorages were secure as well as providing extra security on the land side.

News of the hurricane was all over the local TV as Jesse went on two morning shows and explained what was happening and lobbied to get relief supplies to assist the islands that were devastated by Hurricane Beryl. As a result, the relief effort was tremendous. NGOs, local community groups, local businesses, individuals, the business community in Chaguaramas and church groups all responded. Cruisers even set up a GoFundMe fundraiser which helped to raise funds to assist. About 45 of the sheltering boats stayed to help ferry supplies back to the affected islands. These included four large catamarans from Trade Wind Yachts in St Vincent as well as many private yachts. Trinidad, with Jesse James the driving force, has set an exceptional new standard in dealing with yachts escaping a hurricane and in facilitating them leaving again with emergency supplies for the devastated area. Let's hope his experience is not called upon anytime soon.

THE OCC AWARD (OPEN)

While sailing in Scotland, **Bob Bradfield** discovered that whilst the official charts were adequate for navigating between the main ports, they had very little detail of hazards in the beautiful out-of-the-way anchorages, channels and bays that he wanted to visit in his cruising yacht, *Antares*. So, Bob started to survey the bays and anchorages in western Scotland properly so that he and fellow cruisers could enjoy visiting them safely. In 2011, he published the first Antares charts which included accurate surveys and pilotage guidance for 40 anchorages. By 2016 he had produced 309 accurate large-scale charts and each year he adds around 60 more from the surveys that he completes whilst exploring the Western Isles. The 2025 batch of updated charts was released in January and includes an incredible 755 large scale charts. This is a not-for-profit retirement project for Bob and he charges an admin fee of just £20 (less if you are renewing) for the full set of large-scale charts.

Anyone who finds themselves lucky enough to be cruising the Western Isles of Scotland is likely to be asked "have you got Bob's charts on board?" They truly are an indispensable aid for cruisers piloting this region. Looking only at the official charts you would be foolhardy to attempt many of the most beautiful anchorages. Yet the Antares charts enable safe pilotage around the rocks and other hazards and have opened up the most interesting parts of the region.

On hearing of his award, Bob wrote:

> *"I know that the OCC is firmly in touch with the needs of its members and, indeed, the yachting community as a whole, as was evidenced by the amazing support it provided during Covid. So this award really is a very special honour, although I have to say that I was somewhat surprised as 'Scotland' and 'Oceans' are words that don't sit comfortably together! I have sailed in every ocean and cruised in some dramatic areas – Chilean Patagonian, the Antarctic Peninsula and Spitzbergen stand out. But crossing the Atlantic has been my only cruise of OCC qualifying length and I did find it rather tedious – checking the GPS with the sextant was the chief form of entertainment! So, in 'settling down' in such a fantastic cruising area as Scotland, I know from first-hand experience that it is one of the very best, worldwide, especially for those, like me, who find too much heat to be sapping of energy and who derive as much pleasure from the changing moods of the sky as from the more tangible scenery. I feel incredibly lucky to have stumbled across such a wonderful hobby, that I absolutely love and am addicted to, and that others seem to find useful. So awards of this kind, while neither needed nor sought, are the icing on a very rewarding cake."*

Bob receiving an MBE in 2019

Bob relaxing on Otter

Bob at work in the Kyles of Bute

THE VASEY VASE

Donated by past Commodore Tony Vasey and his wife Jill, and first awarded in 1997, this handsome trophy recognises an unusual or exploratory voyage made by an OCC member or members.

Carol and Tim receiving their award

Some might say that an east-to-west transit of the Northwest Passage (NWP) is no longer particularly unusual or exploratory, but the two-handed passage made by new OCC members **Tim Riley and Carol Osborne** as recounted in their article (see page 254) is more than worthy of recognition.

Always interested in water as a means of reaching remote places, Tim started out as a sea kayaker but, in a quest to go further and remain drier, this gradually evolved from the kayak, to a 20ft Swallow yacht in which he met Carol. The quest continued with an old Ovni which took them initially on a 'delivery' of the yacht from Essex to Milford Haven via, of course, Shetland and St Kilda, and later to North Norway.

They had been pushing the boundaries of what was feasible in smaller vessels for years before a chance arose to buy a Boreal 47 which had become available in the UK. They realised that opportunities like this did not come up often, so raided the coffers and upgraded, becoming proud owners of *Lumina.* She is well suited to more serious exploration, with her dry doghouse, endurance and resilience capabilities. Without wasting too much time getting to know the boat they made a shakedown voyage to Svalbard in 2023. Next on their bucket list was the NWP.

After crossing from Scotland to Greenland in May they cruised the west coast of Greenland to Upernavik before crossing Baffin Bay to Pond Inlet to begin the transit proper. It wasn't long before they encountered serious ice.

As Tim says, "the press would let you believe that there is no ice in the Arctic these days", but clearly this is far from true and at one stage it looked as though they might have to turn back. With commendable persistence and good seamanship, they reached Nome in mid-September, having hand-steered from Cambridge Bay after their autopilot failed. With masterly understatement Tim remarked, "Four-hour watches are not too bad double-handed once you get used to it but when you have no autopilot they are very tiring."

On receiving the award, Tim humbly said: "We did not set out to do anything too intrepid so are deeply honoured to stand amongst our heroes in receiving this award."

With the yacht now in Alaska they are looking forward to a relaxing season exploring and cruising before deciding where to head onwards. When the world is your oyster it does create some dilemmas: across the Pacific, Cape Horn, Panama, Northwest Passage again – what a choice! We look forward to hearing where Tim and Carol decide is next (**yachtlumina.co.uk**).

Fuelling up for the last time before haul out in Kodiak

Tim

Carol

THE PORT OFFICER SERVICE AWARD

Introduced in 2008, this award is made to one or more OCC Port Officers or Port Officer Representatives who have provided outstanding service to both local and visiting members, as well as to the wider sailing community.

Cristian and Andrea

Cristian de Lima Yanzer was appointed Port Officer Representative for Lagoa dos Patos, Brazil in February 2024. His nomination didn't take long to be approved by the General Committee. He ticked all of the boxes! Not only is sailing Cristian's passion, he is also an airline pilot with a keen interest in pilotage. Together with his wife Andrea, he seeks out and collates safety issues and important navigation information which he uploads on to Navionics, ensuring visitors less familiar with his home waters are as safe as possible.

Cristian and Andrea are proud to call Veleiros do Sul Yacht Club, one of the most important sailing schools in Brazil, their home club. It has a long and enviable reputation in sail training, with a disproportionate number of sailors from the club participating in the Olympics, representing Brazil (sometimes securing podium positions).

But if thousands of contributions to Navionics and assisting numerous OCC members were not sufficient to attract the attention of Awards sub-committee members, Cristian's contribution to the response to the deadliest and most devastating floods in the history of the city of Porto Alegre in May 2024 certainly did. A full account can be read in Jurriaan Kloek's article for the September 2024 *Newsletter* (**oceancruisingclub.org/members/Newsletters**).

Cristian was a leading force in the rescue efforts started by the local sailing clubs named Velejadores Solidários (or 'Support by Sailors'); together they saved countless lives. Using their own dinghies and motorboats, the team ventured to remote villages sometimes retrieving people from roofs, sometimes using empty fridges as floatation devices, sometimes assisting the Brazilian navy to offload supplies when their ship could not reach shallow waters. When not on the water, Cristian and his team organised the collection and distribution of food and other essential supplies

Sailing Viking *in strong winds in the Guaiba River, Porto Alegre*

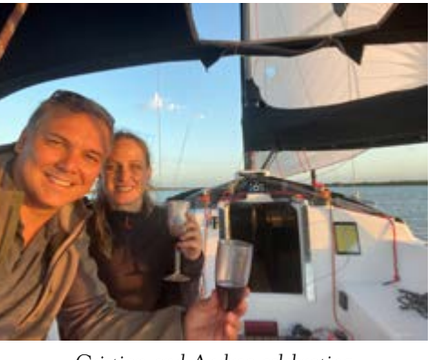





Clockwise from top left: Cristian together with the group Velejadores Solidários ('Support by Sailors') taking hot meal to people's homes during cleaning process; Helping the Navy to unload 90 tons of goods donated from other Brazilian states; Fellow sailors saving a horse near Pelotas city; Rescuing an elderly lady from her home (her daughter said she hasn't seen her smile for years due to a stroke); One of the kitchens working at full power helped by the organisation, All Hands and Hearts; Rescuing a baby

for people in need. During these floods, across all regions of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, at least 169 people were killed, 806 others were injured and 56 were left missing. At least 580,000 others were displaced from their homes. Flood damage occurred in 431 of the state's 497 municipalities. At least 90 per cent of businesses suffered partial or total losses.

As the area gets back on its feet, Cristian has resumed his pilotage efforts in his sailing yacht, *Viking*. Her retractable keel is ideally suited for measuring even the shallowest of depths, ensuring that OCC members visiting Lagoa dos Patos in the future will be able to navigate these waters safely.



Cristian and Andrea celebrating

Viking, *aground in light winds*

THE OCC EVENTS AND RALLIES AWARD

This award, open to all members, recognises any member, Port Officer or Port Officer Representative who has organised and run an exceptional rally or other event.

Reg receiving his award

When then Rear Commodore **Reg Barker** was asked to organise the OCC's Platinum Anniversary celebrations, the remit was loose but the focus was on one large gathering. Reg quickly realised that this had several disadvantages, the main one being that very few of the Club's 3,000+ members would be able to attend the main function. Never one to shy away from a challenge, he instead decided on a year of gatherings, spread across the world, to aptly celebrate the global nature of the Club.

The concept was simple but Reg needed all hands on deck! He started marshalling event organisers early and set about ensuring there would be events held across the globe to coincide with the usual migratory patterns of ocean sailors. In late 2022 he wrote to all the Regional Rear Commodores and the Port Officer team asking everyone to do their best to host a party/get-together/cruise-in-company in their area at some point during the anniversary year. Many agreed with alacrity. Some required a little more prompting. But the number and spread of events promised at this stage did not fit Reg's plan for a year's worth of celebrations around the world so he wrote individually to numerous members to find people willing to organise and host events. Months of hard work and hundreds of emails paid off and in 2024 there were over 80 Platinum Anniversary events ranging from lunches and pot-luck suppers to mini-meets and cruises-in-company. In addition, there were innumerable informal get-togethers of crews in anchorages and harbours, brought together by the OCC burgee and the Platinum Anniversary flag. The vast majority of the 'formal' events were organised by OCC members or PO/PORs but some were run by, or in conjunction with, sister clubs, e.g. the Royal

Reg presenting the 70th Flag

Nicky and Reg

Reg at the helm

Cruising Club (RCC), Irish Cruising Club (ICC), Cruising Club of America (CCA), Seven Seas Cruising Association (SSCA), and Salty Dawgs Sailing Association (SDSA) through links forged by Reg and other members.

Reg advised each of the event organisers on how to plan, advertise and arrange the accounting for their events and kept a close eye on all the planning cycles, prompting when it was clear that things were falling behind time. In addition to the events, he organised the printing and sale of the Club's 70th Anniversary flag (which had kindly been designed by Alex Blackwell), the photo and cocktail recipe competitions and a monthly article in the e-Bulletin and numerous ad-hoc emails to the membership to keep everyone updated.

Not only did Reg's efforts ensure the Platinum Anniversary was suitably celebrated, he did so at a time when the Club's usual annual events in the aftermath of Covid were in danger of dwindling. In all, during 2024 there were 46 official events, attracting some 1,500 attendees. But these headline figures do not come near to conveying the sheer amount of effort Reg put in to marshalling the milestone.

THE OCC ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Presented for the first time in 2021, the OCC Environment Award was suggested by OCC member Jonathan Webster as a memorial to HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. It recognises cruisers who contribute towards the environment, or cruisers who raise issues pertinent to the environment especially where ocean cruising is concerned.

Floris and Ivar

RRC Willie Ambergen (left) presenting Ivar and Floris with their award

Ivar Smits trained as an industrial engineer and **Floris van Hees** as a lawyer and had busy corporate jobs and busy lives, but they became convinced that fundamental changes are needed to ensure that future generations can live in harmony on a healthy planet.

It was these insights that shaped their plan to quit their jobs, sell almost everything they owned, and leave behind their family, friends and lives in Amsterdam. They were on a mission to find solutions to sustainability challenges: solutions that work in practice and which could be shared widely and for free. And so 'Sailors for Sustainability' was born.

During their eight-year circumnavigation aboard *Lucipara 2* they clocked up visits to 38 countries and travelled over 56,000 miles. They have published 67 sustainable solution stories, sent 61 newsletters, created 145 videos, given 25 radio interviews and numerous presentations covering climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, pollution and social inequality. A book, *Overstag*, about their mission to further promote sustainable lifestyle choices is their most recent addition to the mission.

The solutions they cite cover a wide range of environmental and social topics. For example, they

Their website

Their new book

Lucipara 2 *sailing along the coast of New Zealand* *Photo © s/v Pazzo*

described how young French Polynesians are saving coral reefs, how Scotland is leading the way in tidal energy, how an island community made their island fossil-fuel free and energy independent, and how turtles are being saved in Cape Verde. By sharing these positive real-life stories, they promote lifestyle choices that respect the environment and lead to a more equitable society.

But, most importantly, they spread a message of hope. In times when so many news items are negative, their sailing trip has inspired and continues to inspire individuals, communities, and companies to change their habits and accelerate positive change (**sailorsforsustainability.nl**).

THE OCC WATER MUSIC TROPHY

Presented by Past Commodore John Foot, and named after his succession of yachts all called Water Music, this set of meteorological instruments set into a wooden cube was first awarded in 1986. It recognises a significant contribution to the Club in terms of providing cruising, navigation or pilotage information and is open to members only.

The Water Music Trophy recognises a significant contribution to the Club in terms of providing cruising, navigation or pilotage information. Although 'The Marshall Islands' by **Carla Gregory and Alex Helbig** (*Flying Fish* 2024) was written as an account of their visit to the archipelago rather than with pilotage information in mind, there's no doubt that it will be of considerable interest and practical use to those following in their wake. Indeed, their mouthwatering photos and patent enthusiasm for the islands are certain to encourage more OCC members to visit in the future: "We had spent a fabulous 2½ months in one of the most remote areas of the Pacific, an unspoilt archipelago almost lost in time."

Alex and Carla receiving their award in Whangārei, New Zealand, April 2025

Ari B

Carla, on the foredeck with kids of friends, in Viani Bay, Fiji

Alex and Carla met in the Maldives on a small island in south Ari Atoll called Dhidhoofinolhu in 1994. At that time the resort was called Ari Beach, a 'no news, no shoes' island, quite different to the luxury resorts of the Maldives today. Alex was working in the watersports centre during the high season and in Cannobio in Italy during the summer months. After 10 months travelling the world they settled in the UK, building up funds and immersing themselves in the sailing world, becoming members of Speedbird Offshore Yacht Club, a British Airways club, where they both qualified as yachtmasters. Carla went on to become Commodore and then Chairman and Alex a cruising instructor.

When they bought their dream boat, a Van de Stadt designed Trintella 45, in 2012 'Ari B' seemed the obvious choice for a name both of the boat and their next adventure. Their journey has taken them across the Atlantic via Cape Verde, the Caribbean, Cuba, Colombia and San Blas before transiting the Panama Canal, then across the Pacific. They explored French Polynesia for most of the pandemic, then sailed to New Zealand via Fiji for a major refit. Nearly 18 months later they circled back north to Tonga via Minerva, Fiji, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands.

Carla and Alex were unable to attend the Awards ceremony in Newport, but joined the Whangārei BBQ where Mary Schempp-Berg presented them with their award:

> *"We love* Flying Fish, *which gives us countless hours of engagement and enjoyment, so it's doubly rewarding to receive recognition for our contribution to a publication we value so highly.*
>
> *We are humbled to have been nominated for an award and most certainly never expected to win one, so we will find a prominent place aboard* Ari B *to display the trophy. No doubt it will be a great talking point when fellow OCC members pop over for a drink!"*

Carla and Alex are currently cruising the islands of Fiji before heading back to New Zealand for the cyclone season. They write a very readable blog at **sy-arib.com**.

THE QUALIFIER'S MUG

Presented by Admiral (then Commodore) Mary Barton and first awarded in 1993, the Qualifier's Mug recognises the most ambitious or arduous qualifying voyage published by a member in print or online, or submitted to the OCC for future publication.

Fabian

Fabian Fernandez is one of very few Malaysian sailors to undertake a short-handed circumnavigation in a sailboat. In his webinar for the OCC 2024/25 series (**oceancruisingclub.org/webinars**) he explained some of the cultural, linguistic and financial barriers that he faced. His 1,800-mile double-handed qualifying passage began in Langkawi and ended in the Maldives; one of only two members who quote Langkawi as the starting point for a qualifying passage!

As an Asian sailor, Fabian found himself in a minority group at almost every port. He contributed an article to the December 2024 *Newsletter* (**oceancruisingclub.org/members/Newsletters**), in which he summarised some of the highlights of his route, particularly the fantastic welcome he received in South Africa, where the Malaysian flag was flown in his honour. Fabian received great support from his OCC mentor in America, Fabio Mucchi.

Once his trade-wind circumnavigation is complete he hopes to prepare a new boat, *Courage*, for a more arduous Northwest Passage and Figure of 8 circumnavigation of the Americas. Fabian looks likely to be a regular fixture in the pages of *Flying Fish* and perhaps on the roll call of OCC Award recipients too. Let's hope so!

> *"Sailing has changed my life, and I want to share that experience with others. I hope this award helps inspire more people to embrace the sea, take on new challenges, and discover the freedom that only sailing can offer."*

Destiny 12 *in an anchorage, St Helena; arrival into Richards Bay, South Africa; an article in* Zululand Observer, *10 November 2023*

Wim and Elisabeth

THE DAVID WALLIS TROPHY

Presented by the family of David Wallis, Founding Editor of Flying Fish*, and first awarded in 1991, this silver salver recognises the 'most outstanding, valuable or enjoyable contribution' to the year's issues. The winner is decided by vote of the* Flying Fish *Editorial sub-committee.*

It is never an easy task to single out a single article from a journal packed with tales of intrepid cruising and sailing escapades, but **Elisabeth and Wim van Blaricum**'s name appeared on each of the editorial team's ballot paper for their article '*Bengt* in Chile'. This followed on from their equally gripping '*Bengt* in the South Seas - Towards Chile' which appeared in *Flying Fish* 2023/2.

"This ticks all the boxes, being a thoroughly enjoyable account of cruising remote and potentially difficult waters accompanied by some excellent photos", "Wim and Elisabeth are exactly the sort of people that I like to meet while cruising" and "An excellent account of a well-planned and successful cruise in one of the few unspoilt areas of our crowded planet".

Perhaps extra brownie points were earned by the Editorial sub-committee because despite Wim and Elisabeth not writing in their first language, their articles have required less red pen than many submissions to *Flying Fish* by native speakers.*

Elisabeth and Wim van Blaricum hail from Göteborg on the Swedish west coast. Elisabeth was raised at sea (her parents were crab and lobster fishermen),

* Although of course we truly don't mind wielding the red pen, and would far rather hear about fellow member's adventures, typos and all!

Bengt

Wim smiling, whatever the weather!

and sailed extensively along the Swedish coast. She purchased her own sailing boat, *Betty Boop*, a Triss, when she was just 17 and made no secret of telling her three children that she intended to live on a boat as soon as they left home. This dream was realised when she met Wim from Dordrecht in The Netherlands, who also has three children.

Between 1984 and 1988, Wim sailed around the world in 24ft, *Anna*. Meeting a Swedish girl on Tahiti meant settling in Sweden. Many years later, he met Elisabeth and in 2012 they decided to sell their respective houses and buy a cottage in the country. But Elisabeth wasn't ready to give up her dream of living on a boat, a determination which resulted in *Bengt*, a steel Bruce Roberts 44 Offshore (built by Bengt Matzén in his garden in Stockholm between 1987 and 2001); they moved aboard in 2013.

Bengt left Sweden in 2016 and sailed around the Atlantic, a test for both crew and boat. After a year in the Azores they continued westward, via the Caribbean, Panama and Rapa Nui, arriving in Polynesia in 2020 which was to become their playground for three years. Since then, they have sailed to Valdivia in Chile, with overland trips to Argentina, Bolivia and Peru, before sailing back to Polynesia.

At the end of their article they mention "the long crossing to Polynesia", and in late November 2024 emailed *Flying Fish* to say that they'd reached the Gambier Islands after a 33 day, 3,926 mile passage from Valdivia, downwind all the way: "a great passage under two poled-out head sails. Now we have to get used to the tropics again!" After hauling out in Raiatea during March/April, they plan to continue to Samoa, Tonga and New Zealand in October. The question is, what will they choose to write about for their article in *Flying Fish* 2025?

If these two articles only served to whet your appetite, they write eloquently and regularly on their blog (**sailblogs.com/member/bengt**), in Swedish but readily translatable.

Members who become aware of achievements that may merit recognition should check the full criteria and requirements for each award and then complete the online nomination form (**oceancruisingclub.org/Awards**). You will need to provide details of both yourself and your nominee, and a short rationale for the nomination: **awards@oceancruisingclub.org**

50TH ANNIVERSARY

MARION BERMUDA RACE

1977-2027

Marion, MA. USA to St Davids Head, Bermuda at 50 years, is the oldest offshore race designed specifically for Corinthian cruising sailors.

- ★ **ADVENTURE** – A 645 NM bluewater adventure from historic Marion, Massachusetts to the turquoise waters of Bermuda managed in the most safe and supportive way.
- ★ **CRUISER FRIENDLY FOCUS** – No professional crews or high tech race boats. Focused on family crews, shorthanded teams and cruising designs.
- ★ **COMMUNITY AND CAMARADERIE** – You'll meet like-minded sailors, share stories, and become part of a welcoming offshore community.
- ★ **FAIR HANDICAPPING** – The race uses state of the art VPP programs to rate boats ensuring the best available handicapping system.

2027 being the 50th Anniversary of the Marion Bermuda Race will be celebrating over the next two years with special videos, promotional events and human interest stories. The 2027 race will be a not to be missed experience, one you will talking about for years to come.

RACE START – *June 18, 2027*

For more information, visit our website at marionbermuda.com, and be sure to sign up for our race eNewsletter. Also visit our Facebook page and YouTube channel. If you have a specific question, please email race@marionbermuda.com for a prompt response.

Photo by Spectrum Photo

REFLECTIONS:
THE EVER-CHANGING WORLD OF OCEAN CRUISING

by Chris Jones (s/v *Pyewacket*)

Husband of OCC Commodore, Chris has brought his wisdom to Flying Fish *several times over the years. His articles include "Around Iceland" in* Flying Fish *2018/1, "Sail Indonesia" in* Flying Fish *2010/1 and "Galapagos Update" in* Flying Fish *2006/1.*

Chris Jones

As my run up to four score years looms ever closer, the urge to reflect on past experiences of ocean cruising becomes as pressing as annual boat maintenance. So, with the toolbox back in the locker, here goes.

It all started back in October 1989 when I managed to get 12 days off work, as head of a residential outdoor education centre, to help deliver a Sweden Yacht 38 from Holyhead to Las Palmas in Gran Canaria. A few months previously I'd also completed the Observer Round Britain and Ireland Race, with another OCC member, in a Dufour Arpège 29. Clearly, we had a very supportive staff team at work! More to the point, why did the owner of that fine Sweden Yacht, which he planned to sail in the ARC, not want to sail the boat down to the Canaries himself? That seemed strange but for some reason, he preferred that we did it and it turned out to be an opportunity for me to participate in a 1,000-mile non-stop passage. I felt reasonably confident that with three of us on board, rather than just two on the Round Britain and Ireland Race, the passage couldn't be *more* difficult . . . or could it?

The Sweden Yacht was equipped with a compass, both VHF and SSB radios, a trailing Walker log and a sextant together with the appropriate sight reduction tables. There was also an autopilot on board, but sadly it was rendered inoperative soon after we left Holyhead. A surge in electromagnetic interference when attempting to transmit via a faulty SSB radio may have been the culprit, but it could have been any number of faults. Anyway, by that time it was too late to do anything about it. The skipper was a reasonably experienced ocean sailor so, in a heady cocktail of naivety and bravado, the three of us agreed that we could hand steer all the way by adopting a '3 hours on / 6 hours off' watch system – or at any rate, we'd give it a go!

The memories of that passage are still as clear as day. A smooth start, to lull us into a false sense of security, was followed by a northeasterly gale developing as we crossed Biscay. We stood our lonely three-hour watches driving through the stormy black night, concentrating only on the dim light of the compass as a large quartering sea sent spray into the cockpit at regular intervals. After 36 hours a hot southerly wind arrived, wafting with it the aromatic scent of

Three Ships

herbs and pine, to announce the proximity of northern Spain somewhere over the far horizon. The sky cleared and picking a star to steer by at night as the heavens rotated above was pure joy. We navigated by dead reckoning and a sun sight, when conditions allowed, and after 10 days land appeared over the horizon. We found ourselves on track but well ahead of our estimated position. We'd obviously underestimated the effect of the south-going Portugal current. Landfall was reluctantly sweet.

Over the subsequent years navigation became a little easier. Used in comfortable parallel with well-established methods of navigation, technology moved on and GPS and radar became widely adopted on many ocean-going yachts. However, chart tables were still well named and the RYA programme of theory and practical courses enabled us to match our growing experience with a well-developed system of ability verification.

When we bought our Gitana 43 *Three Ships* in the United States in 1999, Fi and I thought that sailing her non-stop from Florida back to Caernarfon in Wales with a couple of friends wouldn't be too much of a problem. We'd only sailed her for a few hours, but we spent a couple of weeks prior to departure carrying out the necessary maintenance. We fitted a Monitor windvane and a Garmin 128 GPS, so together with the compass and an occasional sun or star sight we were able to track our progress.

Two days out from Fort Pierce in Florida the power amp on the SSB radio failed and once more we were unable to transmit but we could still hear Herb Hilgenberg giving updates to other vessels nearer the coast. No worries, I'd been there before! Without any way of getting weather forecasts for our area, we dealt with what we were given. Little did I realise that we were about to experience first-hand two phenomena we had only hitherto understood in theory: an ocean current called the 'Gulf Stream' and a meteorological event known as a 'Polar Front'. At first surprising, the appearance of tidal stream separation lines 1,000 miles from land, unpredictable back eddies and the sudden formation of fog banks associated with significant water temperature changes, indicated the edges of the Gulf Stream. We sat in the flow on the southern edge and made good progress for a couple of days until the stream spat us out into a counter-current back eddy. That slowed things down a bit.

The next lesson was heralded by black clouds and a waterspout on the northerly horizon. "This must be the polar front," we thought and we were not wrong. A 3D collision lay ahead between the rising air of a warm, moist, southerly air mass and a cold, dry air mass to the north. The result was 12 hours of hyper convection during which we passed through an unforgettable string of violent thunderstorms, accompanied by St Elmo's fire and a mind-numbing lightning show. While all this was going on, the helm could only

Waterspout

Dramatic sky

crouch behind the wheel while the crew all tried to hide in the heads to get as far away as possible from the mast! When we finally emerged on the north side of the front, stormy conditions persisted and an on-going lightshow provided a dramatic backdrop in the southern sky for several days. This apparently was all part of the game.

Less part of the game – and totally unexpected – was running over an unlit fishing net at night 300 miles off the west coast of Ireland. The skipper of the trawler, lying at a safe distance, was sympathetic but unhelpful. Fortunately, Fi was prepared to adopt a more proactive approach. With a safety line attached, she dived over the side into the long, 3m swell, swam under the boat, braced her feet on the bottom of the hull and tugged the offending rope from around the rudder. It's true that she does rather enjoy swimming but that dip certainly earned her a chocolate biscuit.

When we anchored off Caernarfon Bar 33 days and 4,300 miles from Fort Pearce to wait for the rising tide, we were rather surprised to find that none of us wanted to get off. We had all been completely absorbed by the peaceful routine of living at sea, 24 hours a day, working together to manage the trials and tribulations associated with an ocean crossing. We were reassured by our ability to cope.

Importantly, I realised we had gained a valuable insight into the power, unpredictability and behaviour of an intense weather system. At the time, the learning was off the scale but it was invaluable during subsequent ocean passages. Predicting the actual way that phenomena such as the ITCZ (Intertropical Convergence Zone), frontal boundaries, cut-off lows, short-wave troughs and coastal katabatic thunderstorms may develop lies beyond the capacity of broad-brush shore-based advice from a weather routing service. At the end of the day, we realised that when we were on passage, it was up to us to adopt a strategy based on what we saw ahead, based on our understanding of how and why a weather system might behave. A ready supply of good fortune was, of course, always a bonus.

By 2002, we'd been operating *Three Ships* as a commercial sea school for a couple of years and we decided to enrol on the ARC, thinking it would be an interesting event for our crew of four previous customers, one of whom was a 72-year-old Master Mariner whose bucket list included crossing the Atlantic under sail. As we prepared for the passage in Las Palmas, we were berthed next to a couple with a brand new Beneteau 40. The wife looked distinctly nervous. When I enquired as to whether she felt able to cope if the skipper fell overboard, he immediately appeared in the companionway and announced

Taking a sight

that, unlike ours, his vessel had a sugar scoop stern and autopilot, and that if he fell overboard his wife could easily start the engine and back the boat up – and that was the end of the conversation. I'm glad to say that they did arrive safely in St Lucia but his approach was very different from ours and as far as we know they never sailed the boat out of Rodney Bay after that crossing.

By way of contrast, our crew had been very specific about how they wanted to experience the passage. This involved a watch system with hand steering all the way, on-deck sail management and using traditional methods of navigation, none of which posed a problem with six of us on board. The navigation was aided hugely by having a Master Mariner who was willing to lead three of us taking our daily 'sun-run-sun' sights, a delight from which we all derived great satisfaction. And no one went overboard, accidentally or otherwise!

On reflection it seems that commercial events such as the ARC are open to anyone with the motivation and wherewithal to apply. Crews are supported by some initial guidance and safety stipulations, though the effectiveness of this preparation and backup will always be up for debate and will depend on to whom you talk. On our passage, the crews of the vast ARC fleet were instructed to keep in touch via small SSB radio nets. Each net had an appointed net controller who was supposed to report the position of their vessels to 'shore control' each day via sat phone. Once we were all at sea it soon became evident that sitting below on the radio on a regular schedule, regardless of sea conditions, was not what several of the volunteer net controllers had bargained for. Some role re-negotiation soon followed. Exactly what 'shore control' would have done with the position information had an incident occurred remained unclear and in fact several serious problems did occur during the passage. These sadly included a death on one vessel and a broken rudder on another, the latter resulting in the boat being abandoned. Fortunately, all the incidents were managed adequately within the fleet via the radio nets and with the support of a participating sail training vessel.

It was sometime later, having crossed the south Pacific Ocean, that I remembered why I was first attracted to the OCC by this ethos to co-operatively problem solve: a disparate fleet of ocean cruisers coming together in a shared appreciation of the freedom of being on the open ocean.

The reality is that humans have been crossing oceans for millennia in all manner of craft and for all sorts of reasons, but the ocean is still the ocean. Recently, a neighbour of ours had heard that we had done some long-distance sailing and, in general conversation, enquired as to whether any of it was dangerous and whether we stopped each night to go to bed. My reply 'all of it is potentially dangerous' and 'we sail 24/7', seemed to surprise him. This response illustrates an issue often mentioned by crews when recounting their experience to friends after returning from a first ocean passage. How can we expect anyone to understand the distance, isolation and demands associated with crossing one of the greatest wildernesses on the planet unless they too have been there? For newcomers, some serious research and very well-considered preparations may be the only solution.

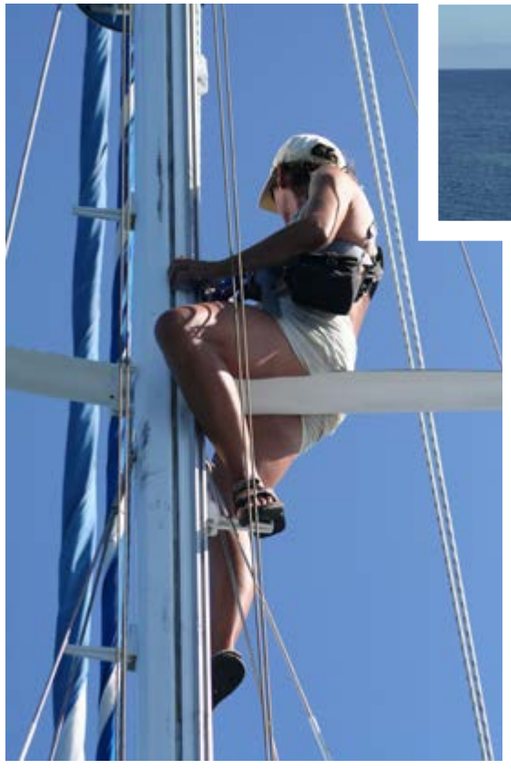
So perhaps it's worth reflecting on how the way that folk used to go ocean cruising fits with a contemporary approach to the activity. As we know, ocean-going yachts didn't always have an engine, usually employed hand steering or a windvane and mariners navigated by a combination of dead reckoning and astro navigation. Communication was managed via VHF and SSB radios. For some purists this still defines one end of a continuum, the other end of which might be a yacht with a powerful engine, driven by a powered autopilot, equipped with a rig where all lines lead back to the cockpit and fitted with a 24/7 internet-accessible comms suite (e.g. Starlink). Nowadays, strategic decisions relating to the likely weather conditions on passage seem to be delegated to a distant on shore 'weather router'. However, this can have certain limitations at times of greatest need. We even heard one 'weather router' direct a sponsoring vessel into an area of more favourable winds where a significant counter-current reduced their expected 24-hour run of 130 miles to just 80 miles. Not ideal.

Nowadays, with course plotting, radar, depth and AIS all displayed simultaneously on one screen – assuming the power supply is maintained – one person can, in theory, be on watch below decks monitoring a screen while all the other crew members play on social media or sleep. Who knows if this approach will become common practice or remain a rarity, but the prevalence of widespread screen obsession in everyday life is undeniable and the impact of such preoccupation among crews on passage is yet to be documented. The ultimate decision on determining the style of an ocean passage and where it sits on this historic, and constantly evolving, continuum is intensely personal and remains the responsibility of whomever takes on the role of skipper for the passage.

Unsurprisingly, looking back on our 96,800-mile leisurely circumnavigation, it was how we equipped the boat that had the greatest impact in time of greatest challenge. The Monitor windvane drove the boat for days on end and we didn't end up fitting an electric autopilot until we arrived in New Zealand some six years and 25,000 miles down the track. (Even then it was only because our time in New Zealand was to be spent coastal cruising, as we circumnavigated South Island and beyond, rather than undertaking offshore passages.) Watching the Monitor handle a variety of wind directions and conditions, while the boat sailed in complete harmony with the ocean, was a delight and it seems strange that such equipment is apparently less popular among ocean cruisers today.

Our next favourites were a forward scanning echo sounder and foldable composite mast steps. This combination made navigating in poorly charted shallow coastal waters very straightforward. One person standing on the first set of spreaders spotting colour changes in the water while the helm kept a close eye on the seabed profile via the EchoPilot in the cockpit was all we needed, even when negotiating the narrow, potentially hazardous, entrance passages around the Tuamotu atolls. We also adopted similar tactics when looking for leads through 30% ice off the east coast of Greenland, though on that occasion the crew on the spreaders needed rather different dress! It's true that it may be possible to obtain similar information today via Google Maps or equivalent – but is that really what an adventure is all about?

Radar is great for spotting and tracking squall development and, together with the forward scanning EchoPilot, facilitated passages through poorly charted waters in many of the south Pacific Island groups. At the other extreme, in thick fog the radar accurately identified the break in the high ground signifying



A bommie
Left: Fi on bommie watch

On ice watch

the entrance to Prinz Kristiansund in southern Greenland. Fortunately, we also received a VHF report from an ice reconnaissance aircraft telling us that visibility was perfect once we got a mile out from the entrance. All this time, communications within the maritime community still worked well, depending on propagation, via SSB radio nets. The ability to talk to a dozen or more vessels, some 800 miles ahead and others a similar distance astern, was comforting, informative and an interesting challenge. Things have clearly moved on, but it would be interesting to know if the fishermen in the fiords of South Island, New Zealand, when running out of toothpaste or needing to arrange a crew change, have abandoned Mary's 'Bluff Fisherman's' SSB radio net in favour of setting up a WhatsApp group – I guess anything is possible. In any event, a simple, flexible approach to using the most appropriate equipment on board for the job in hand has always worked well for us and hopefully will continue to do so for others.

What motivates crews to venture out into this oceanic wilderness is eternally open ended and as old as the hills. Today this might vary from the traditional 'because it's there' to buying a spot on a commercial round-the-world rally and regarding it as a 'potentially bloggable tick on social media'. However, regardless of the motivation, it still comes down to the skipper to ensure that the vessel and everyone on board is adequately prepared for the passage, whatever that may entail.

When we had crew who were new to long-distance cruising, the rapid shift of an overstimulated screen-driven brain into the simplicity of life on a three-week ocean passage was sometimes seen as boredom. However, we found that

From left to right: Dolphin watch; whale spotting; shooting stars

the calming impact of concentrating for a while, taking turns hand-steering the boat for two or three hours in rotation for a couple of days and nights, led to a reassuring sense of confidence, if only in the knowledge that should the autopilot fail the crew knew that we could continue to keep the boat running in the right direction. And we shouldn't underestimate the value, for any of us, of feeling the boat's motion through the pressure on the wheel or weight on the tiller, of having the time to experience the revolving night sky, of seeing shooting stars or a fragmenting meteorite fall to earth in a shower of bright green sparks and, maybe, of smelling the breath of a whale as it surfaces alongside.

Some problems are worse than others

Of course, things can – and do – go wrong and this is where we found identifying a workable 'Plan B' came in (commonly known as problem solving before the problem arises). In conversation with other cruisers we heard of many varied problems, and the following examples relate only to navigation and vessel handling issues, rather than to catastrophic disaster: the motherboard failed on an integrated navigation system; chart details on a plotter disappeared after crossing the international date line; and nearby lightning strikes took out all the instruments. Total or partial electrical failure was often resolved by applying the mantra 'connection, connection, connection'; and engine failure, the loss of battery power after a controllable ingress of water, and rigging and sail damage all occurred for any number of reasons. The phasing out of paper charts between 2025 and 2030 will make dealing with instances relating to the loss of navigation instruments that much more difficult and how navigation training will be adapted to accommodate the move to 'Electronics First' remains to be seen. Similarly, the training programme for the RYA Yachtmaster® Ocean qualification – with its emphasis on manual astronavigation – will also need significant revision to fit the 'Electronics First' mould. Interestingly, for me, the more often we were faced with problem-solving challenges, the more I came to rely on an intuitive response rather than succumbing to an avalanche of mind-numbing potential options. On one occasion we had an engine problem which had me completely baffled. I could not figure out how to solve it, so I finished my watch and went to bed. Two hours later at 0400, I woke up with the solution, squeezed down into the engine compartment and fixed it. The brain is a wonderful tool given the time and space to work without distraction, although that too may fall into disrepair by constantly resorting to AI models such as Chat-GPT to solve our problems.

Social gatherings

Thankfully, most ocean passages are completed without incident and, for us, remain one of the precious jewels in the crown of our sailing experience. At best they have been rounded off with spontaneously arranged social gatherings with other like-minded cruisers and have provided us with some of the most memorable moments and enduring friendships in our cruising life. This perhaps underpins why, when making landfall, we may have felt that moment bittersweet – the satisfaction of a challenge completed and the sadness associated with a journey that has come to an end.

I think that the following two quotes sum up my views on long-distance cruising: "It is always better to travel in harmony with our surroundings in the company of like-minded friends, than to arrive" – and – "True success is measured only by our effort and participation when faced with uncertainty and challenge". We are all captains of our fate, and we can but sail on the winds we are given.

Bon Voyage! And never run out of chocolate biscuits.

PACIFIC CUP REGATTA:

THE BEST GRADUATION PRESENT, EVER!

by Heather Richard (s/v *Carodon*)

Heather wrote to Flying Fish *shortly after the 2024 deadline had passed, we are pleased to report that over a year after finishing the race, Julius is now fully immersed in his oceanography studies – and they are both still sailing:* **finedayforsailing.com**.

My three kids and I had long dreamed of racing in the Pacific Cup Regatta from San Francisco to Hawaii aboard *Carodon*, our 43ft aluminium sloop. *Carodon* is a 50-year-old one-of-a-kind cruiser, loosely based on a classic Sparkman & Stephens design. The race was cancelled in 2020 due to the Covid pandemic and our life and livelihood were upended for a few years. By the spring of 2023 I had started thinking about the race again. My middle son, Julius, was on track to graduate high school in June 2024 and start university as an oceanography major shortly thereafter. Oceanography is natural to him having grown up entirely living on boats in the idyllic little waterfront town of Sausalito, California, with an ecosystem rich in aquatic life. He already owned his own sailboat, a Pacific Seacraft Flicka 20, worked as a sailing instructor, was co-captain of his high school sailing team, had been an open water diver since the age of twelve, was an avid fisherman and had sailed the Pacific coast from Port Townsend, Washington to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. In fact, he had never actually lived on land.

It seemed a fitting high school graduation present to a budding oceanographer to give him the gift of crossing an ocean – even if it proved a stretch for me to take that much time off work, not to mention the expense. The original crew we had lined up for the 2020 race (including his two siblings), now had summer commitments, so the two of us decided to doublehand the 2024 race. I selfishly thought that if I knew he could turn and turn-about with me across the Pacific I would not worry about him as much in the future when he might decide to sail his own boat offshore. It was potentially also the last quality time sailing together – he might want to do his own thing after college! And, the race could serve as our qualifying voyage for OCC membership because, although we had both clocked up many thousands of sea miles, neither of us had done a non-stop ocean passage that far offshore.

Carodon *and Captain 'Mom' with passengers*

It was a good thing that I started musing about the race early in 2023 because the prep took a full year to accomplish. The rules, equipment requirements and inspection checklists specific to this race have been developed over many years in response to the unique challenges of crossing the Pacific in mid-summer. There is potential for intense fog and heavy traffic just offshore along the northern coast of California, a chance of typhoons rolling off Mexico, a notorious squall alley for a large portion of the course and no medical services once you get past the US Coast Guard's helicopter range. All create serious challenges, with lessons learned from mishaps in past races dictating the long list of requirements to enter now. I had 276 items on the list and approximately US$10,000 to spend before we were allowed over the starting line, and that was for a boat that was already well-equipped and outfitted to US Coast Guard chartering standards! *Carodon* is also our family home (for myself and three kids), so there were a lot of things to remove for the race. Plus, we had to take the required safety-at-sea courses, beef up on our offshore first aid skills, and get health checks and prescriptions for just-in-case medication. On top of all that, I had to plan for crewing and outfitting the boat for the delivery home without my son, who would be flying back in time for his first day at university.

The weeks and days leading up to the race were a race in itself. I called in a handful of tech-savvy friends to help me set up the new PredictWind DataHub that would be used to track us. It would also allow us to maximize data downloads of GRIB files, make the mandatory daily check-ins with the race committee and permit our laptop and phones to access the internet whilst offshore. I called in a rigger friend to teach Julius to handle the foredeck with our new 20ft spinnaker pole and heavy new asymmetric spinnaker, the only 'race' sail I could afford to buy. Our budget was a fraction of that of the racing boats and mine was almost entirely spent on mandatory safety gear rather than race optimization. With a heavy displacement cruising boat, we knew we would not be competitive but we did want to keep up and be in the mix, so competent spinnaker handling would be essential.

Julius, moments after leaving the Golden Gate Bridge behind

We had little time to practise but Julius caught on quickly and embraced the challenges of doublehanding. In fact, he singlehandedly sailed *Carodon* for a full 24 hours on one of our race qualifying voyages when I had the worst bout of seasickness I have ever experienced. It taught me to be sure to have prescription anti-nausea medication on hand. As a professional captain who had never before been debilitated by seasickness, my ego was hurt and my confidence shaken; a little doubt set in about whether we could actually pull this race off, just the two of us. But once we were underway, the adrenaline kicked in: we just felt so excited and there was nowhere else either of us wanted to be but at sea together, racing our home to Hawaii.

DAY 1 & 2 ~ We had little wind at the start. We were on the line with the ten or so other slow or doublehanded boats. The faster boats, of which there were 60, would start hours or days behind us depending on their handicap, in this pursuit-style race. Our family stood on the Golden Gate Bridge to watch us head out to sea. It was calm enough for us to hear them, cheering us on, as we beat upwind to the Pacific. We played the tidelines well and stayed in the mix for the first 12 hours or so, despite our not having a light-air genoa for sailing upwind in 10 knots and despite *Carodon* weighing close to 30,000lbs (13,000kg), the heaviest boat of its size in the race. It was a really exciting and fun day: our music blared out, our adrenaline pumped and our smiles beamed. By nightfall it was clear that the wind would die and we would have a challenge keeping up. Some of the first starters made it out of the land shadow and into the synoptic breeze that first night, or had enough light-air sail-power to keep going, but we struggled just to keep the bow pointed in the right direction. We drifted with the tide 30 or so miles offshore near the Farallon Islands and still had the Golden Gate Bridge faintly within sight while our competition disappeared, over the horizon.

Out came our oldest sail: a wire luff drifter. It had been lovingly dubbed 'The Rainbow Barf' by my children when they were little because they said it looked like the sock was vomiting a rainbow as it was hoisted! This sail is probably 50 years old (we think it is original to the boat), made of a thin parachute-style ripstop nylon that isn't used anymore and the blue dye has leached out giving the entire sail an unintended tie-dye look, right out of the 1970s. Luckily it was light enough to stay full with the wind aloft through the night and managed to keep us pointing in the right direction, albeit moving slowly. We had time to fly the drone and catch some really cool shots of the whales that surfaced in every direction. Sea lions tried to jump aboard and thousands of sea birds surrounded us those first two days. We also saw a large shark, which we think was a great white. The bioluminescence at night was spectacular and, with a full moon rising a few hours after sunset, it was quite easy to trim sails for the first few nights and stay awake as we adjusted to the new rhythm of our watches.

The 50-year-old drifter, dubbed 'rainbow barf' kept us pointed in the right direction in zero wind

We had decided on five watches each 24-hour period: three four-hour watches at night and two six-hour watches during the day so that each night we will rotate from standing the sunrise and sunset watches to taking the dreaded middle shift. It also gives us each a longer chunk of time to catch up on sleep during the day when it is easier for the other person to stay awake. We didn't deviate from this for the race – or at least, not until the final 14 hours when the navigation into Oahu became tricky and it was all hands on deck for the last hurrah. Perhaps a more surprising decision was that we decided to hand steer for the entire race, even though we had a Hydrovane and a tiller-pilot that worked perfectly. The race instructions allowed the doublehanders to use an autopilot, but we chose not to. I am not sure what prompted this choice, but we both agreed and stuck to it. Hand-steering definitely forced us to trim properly at all times and, though it was exhausting we had no regrets and felt proud to have helmed the whole way.

Wildlife kept us well entertained when the wind died

The fleet newsletter summed up the first day pretty well: "The light winds are making it every bit as challenging as predicted. We are watching with sympathy and respect as we see the Monday fleet [us] make forward progress in very challenging conditions. Some boats have managed to inch their way into the 'synoptic' winds. Others continue to be stuck [also us]. Our forecast shows gradually building winds over the next 24 (or so) hours." It could be worse. It could be raining. Oh wait … "There is the chance of a few isolated showers through the morning of 19 July, but the first few days of the event will largely remain dry."

Reports from the fleet:

Vera Cruz: What we have a lot of: whales and dolphins. What we have very little of: WIND!

Chance: Overnight was a driftathon. Better pressure presently, but still very patchy. The brochure said that this was the 'fun race to Hawaii', sailed in the trade-winds?!?!?!

Rägeboge: Winds light. Slow going … saw lots of whales and other wildlife: sunfish, breaching whales and whales smacking the water with their flippers.

Domino: All good on board, *Domino*. Just trying to find some breeze out here! It's rather shifty this morning!

DAY 3 ~ The wind has finally filled in and all the fast boats that started after us rapidly closed the gap on us. It has been damp, cold, foggy and windy all day. We beam reached on a course of about 220 degrees to get as far away from land as possible before taking up a more southerly heading. I have been wearing three jackets and down mittens to stay warm at night. Earlier, we passed lots of cargo ships which were waiting for the thumbs up to go into port so we had to maintain a sharp lookout night and day in the fog. We ate only snacks as neither of us felt able to be in the galley to cook.

DAY 4 ~ We got the spinnaker up and had a fast run all day. It felt great to finally hit full speed. We were in 20–25 knots of wind by sunset so we both agreed to play it safe and take the spinnaker down for the night. Despite the strength of the wind, it was a tough decision but I am not yet confident in our ability to singlehandedly helm and trim in the dark and it is important for the off-watch crew to sleep. Seasickness is also a factor as it worsened for me at night, but I managed to keep dinner down, which felt like a win.

DAY 5 ~ The skies cleared today and the solar panels finally had a chance to do their job. Before leaving San Francisco, we discovered that the main panels had sustained some damage during our practice sails in gale-force winds and were no longer putting out the kind of power they had previously provided. The day before leaving I grabbed a few portable solar panels and power packs from an outdoor camping supplier, which Julius has now soft-shackled all over the deck trying to catch up with the needs of the power-hungry navigation instruments and the all-important fridge.

There are now no more birds or seals accompanying us, just a few ships in sight and white fluffy clouds rolling over us all day. The winds went light and variable and the port spinnaker halyard chafed through its cover and got stuck in the sheeve at the top of the mast so we had to spend some time together sorting that out. I had carefully inventoried everything that was on board and had brought a few spare halyards and sheets so we had a chance to replace it. Within hours, the second halyard also chafed through and we had to haul the wet spinnaker on board as fast as possible before we ran over it. No rips, fortunately! It is warm enough now to go without shoes and to wear only one layer at night. Julius plays his small didgeridoo at random intervals to break the monotony of steering and trimming; somehow it fits the mood perfectly.

Julius setting up back-up solar panels

DAY 6 ~ The fleet newsletter this morning brought interesting news: "Our Top Story – FIVE boats now retired:

Rum Tum Tugger: Medical, advised

Keaka: Steering, heading to Santa Barbara

Imagine: Steering, tied up in Santa Cruz

Pendragon: Steering, heading to Monterey

And the weirdest one . . .

Rapid Transit: Collision with a shark, damaged rudder and transom. Heading back. A prior racer (*Hula*) had reported a shark circling and charging them. THIS shark, at least, will not be doing any circling or charging in the future."

Power issues prevailed as it became overcast *again* and our batteries drained down to empty. We attempted to deploy the 50-year-old hydrogenerator which had worked for us before but which needs some adjustment, a task neither of us is up to doing underway as it is quite unpleasant down below in the rolling sea state. Instead, we just turned everything off and conserved power. There has been nothing on the horizon in any direction all day. We have eaten nearly everything in the fridge (except some cooked sausages and the parmesan cheese that Julius spilled in the bottom and didn't feel like cleaning up) so we shut the lid, turned it off and forgot about the fridge.

We both agree that this race would be much more fun with a full crew on a really fast boat, which is how we will compete next time. We are doing fine despite the lack of sleep but it is really monotonous at the moment and we are both working very hard between hand-steering and trimming the sails, and trying to either eat or sleep all of the off-watch time. Julius is doing all the foredeck work and sail changes while I do all the navigating, weather routing and check-ins with the race committee. I have chosen a more northerly route, closer to the rhumb line, since a heavy boat like ours will not gain as much from sailing hot angles, but it is hard not to question that decision when the boats to the south are getting 5 knots more wind and pulling ahead.

DAY 7 ~ What a bright night with the waning full moon backlighting the clouds. Our track on the chartplotter weaves in undulating curves as we chase the pressure. Julius keeps practicing his evil-villain laugh at full volume, relishing the ability to be as loud as he feels like without bothering anyone and it makes me giggle every time he does it. We have found that poling out the jib and sailing dead downwind (DDW) is faster in the swells than sailing with the spinnaker at hotter broad-reaching angles. *Carodon* feels quite heavy when she attemps to surf, it feels more like snow-ploughing than graceful surfing, so I have given her a pep talk! A front with heavy rain rolled by earlier and we donned our wet weather gear but it dumped it all a few hundred feet away and we stayed dry and windless. The daily fleet newsletter was really fun to read. It is clear that the other boats were having a very different race to us, and also compared to each other, depending on how seriously they are taking the racing and themselves. Here are a few excerpts:

Tweety: Lost a cool headlamp while doing midnight gybe. Also, spilled more coffee than consumed. The struggle is REAL!

Move: Perhaps a bit further south than we want to be but a full night of clear starry sky, a giant moon and surfing with the kite up. [*Move* is on a pretty deep track right now, let's see how that works out.]

Cascade: A flying fish jumped onto our boat overnight: top of Bill's 'Pac[ific] Cup' bucket list was to see a flying fish. He described it as similar to the size of a large sardine and held it long enough for him to return the fish to the Pacific. He is happy!

Domino: We are running for our lives from a *Green Buffalo*!

Green Buffalo: At 8 knots, we hit a log the size of a telephone pole yesterday afternoon ... a 'double bump' (bow and keel?). The *Buffalo* has a half inch solid glass hull so shrugged it off as a love tap! Wind continuing to oscillate 30 degrees while wind speed varies from 11 knots (scary, is the High coming to get us?) to 22 knots (sporty). Been in sight of *Domino* for two days ... we catch up at times ... she leaves us at times.

Festina Lente: Still going strong despite a few minor injuries (scrapes, smashed fingers, etc). We broke a spinnaker halyard (cover broke under tension from the clutch) but managed to cobble together a repair. Much better sleep all around the second night. Night sailing last night was particularly memorable with incredibly bright stars and bioluminescence in our wake.

Rage: We have several drivers now in the 'over 20 knots' club – everyone is smiling!

DAY 8 ~ As we are approaching the tropics, I can't tell if Julius is as tired as I am but he seems to be functioning really well and is yet to be seasick. The seasickness has hit me pretty much every night but I am fine during the day as long as I stay above deck when I am not sleeping. We aren't eating hot meals since we are unmotivated to make them and we have plenty of food that doesn't need to be cooked. However, it is clear that we are both losing weight. Hydration is our focus and having stopped making coffee by Day 3, we drink a lot of electrolyte powders and eat small snacks of fruit and protein bars.

DAY 9 ~ Overnight was wet and wild. We seemed to sit in an endless squall for six full hours with torrential rain and winds of up to 28 knots. We barrelled along with full white sails. The steering took total concentration but *Carodon* never felt out of control. By the end of the night I felt so very tired and my hands starting to look pretty worked. We sailed over a seamount called the 'Moonless Mountains' on the chart. I wonder who named them and how long ago they were charted so deep? It is incredible to ponder that they are closer to us than any dry land this far out in the ocean!

Halfway root beer celebration cheered us up from losing the second spin halyard to chafe

DAY 10 ~ More challenging squalls today but we celebrated reaching the halfway point. Conditions remained very windy and rough, gusting in the thirties. I feel bad about not being able to go below and cook because I had planned a nice party for Julius at the halfway stage. Instead, he downed his root beer and saved his favourite Italian quadratini cookies for later, but I think he appreciates the fact that I had thought about him and hidden the ingredients to make one of his favourite meals – even if I wasn't able to actually cook it! Albatrosses are now regular sightings, nearly every day! Sometimes they try to land on our masthead but each time they give up after several attempts as it is far too roly-poly. Today the fleet report was a bit different: no individual boat reports, just a general one of "much damage among the fleet" and they asked us all to "be safe out there". The race committee must have been dealing with some serious injuries or breakdowns to forego the usual report and ask for caution. So far, the only thing we have broken is a shackle on the boom vang and the chafed spinnaker halyards. We have decided to play it safe and not fly the spinnaker given the conditions. Our speed seems to be averaging 8 or 9 knots regardless since *Carodon* refuses to surf. I imagine the ultralights are having a hell of a time.

DAY 11 ~ Pretty miserable conditions again. It has been extremely hard to steer all day but we found that adopting a downwind course with a poled-out genoa helped. It is very loud below when trying to sleep with the foresail slamming if someone helms a bit too deep. The preventers are holding but have had a real workout! It remains very overcast so the electronics have been off for several days to save battery power. Julius forgot to batten down his hatch and about a gallon of seawater forced it open and landed on his bunk. Unfortunately, the portable battery pack was also soaked and so failed, we are down to a very small battery and only my phone to navigate. The top windspeed recorded in a squall so far is 55.7 knots, yet we still have not felt the need to reef the main going downwind. I had no idea that she would comfortably take so much wind and remain so steady. It is at times like these when I am very grateful for a heavy boat!

Oooops! The broken vang shackle, spinnaker pole and halyard – not too many breakages, thanks to a thorough job prepping for the race and constant inspecting

DAY 12 ~ Fast sailing DDW and I'm feeling better, or at least I was until I took a flying fish in the face! I braved opening the fridge and managed to throw out all the rotting produce and cleaned up a bit down below. The reward was finding a ripe watermelon which we promptly devoured. But Julius and I are finding the helming very demanding and so now overlap very little, going straight to sleep when our watches finish. Conversation rarely extends beyond 'I love you, goodnight' or 'Love you more, have good watch'. I feel very proud. He really is a good kid, a love bug in a giant's body now at 6'3" (190.5cm). With his height and his long blonde hair he is looking ever more like a Viking, and for the first time he is even growing a beard! At last, I managed to make a full meal comprising baby potatoes, the last sausage from the fridge and baked beans, the first meal I have 'cooked' since we were becalmed ten days ago; instant noodles don't count.

DAY 13 ~ Moonbows last night and for the first time Julius understands why the Milky Way is named as such. We flew the spinnaker again, on the port pole, using the last available halyard, and hoped to be able to stay in the race with the winds steady at just under 20 knots. Hawaii is undeniably getting larger on the chartplotter which is good for morale and we were having a fast day until . . . we broke the end off the spinnaker pole. No longer being able to pole the jib/genoa out DDW, nor use the spinnaker DDW, means that we have to try to reach the rest of the way. The other notable, and distressing, change is hugely worrying; we have both noticed that we can no longer gaze at the ocean without seeing a piece of plastic float by. We have seen so much out there that we want to cry.

DAY 14~ Unable to pole out the jib, when the squalls came overnight we had to sail with only the mainsail, which was very rolly and uncomfortable, but we feel blessed as there are several boats with far bigger problems limping into Hawaii. As we get closer to land, we have seen some unusual birds, which we think might be long-tailed frigate birds. The day's fleet newsletter kept us well entertained. Everyone is sailing with such different outlooks, some serious, some downright silly, but it truly is a fun race with so much of it sailed downwind and with the weather getting warmer every day. By this point in the race it is getting very hot by midday: shirts off! The daylight hours today brought a long, smooth spinnaker run and Julius drove very well with the chute hardly ever close to rounding up and going quite fast for this heavy girl. We are finding the long hours of hand-steering are tiring but we are sticking to our watches like clockwork: it is working but we are undeniably exhausted and dreaming of hot showers.

Squalls for days

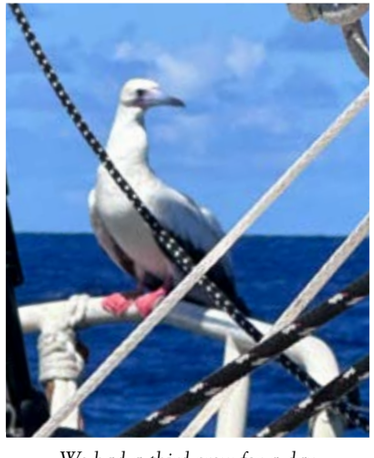
DAY 15 ~ Julius was painfully sunburnt today and there is no relief from the sun on watch. Running with the spinnaker again, we had a very steady 15–18 knots but our course took us a little too far south. At night without the spinnaker flying it was incredibly uncomfortable and loud down below. Everything was rolling, pitching, swinging, crashing and scraping, even lashed down, and I was surprised nothing broke. We chafed through the tack line for the third time, so we put the spinnaker away to reach under mainsail and jib for a while and troubleshoot a better tack line pennant. There have been some concerns about a tropical storm or cyclone forming in our path but the race committee have been monitoring it closely and have kept us informed. The fleet newsletter reminded us in a few words that there is a world out there beyond the toe rail: "*Note Dogma* hit something big and soft at 31°07N 133°19W. Let's see, what else . . . *Biden* drops out. No word on whether that is due to steering difficulties."

WRI weather report: "Will increase over the next few days" and "You are not about to get a tropical disturbance" so . . . "Carry on".

Finally hot and sunny nearing Hawaii

DAY 16 ~ At 2200 on Day 15 we found the floorboards floating with a lot of water in the bilge and had a panicked few hours looking for the source. It turned out that a brand-new bilge pump hose had popped off the pump and the pump had been shooting water directly onto the electrical terminals and shorted out both pumps. I fixed the bilge pump, got the water out of the boat and then found out where the water had been coming in: when we smash down hard and fast on a big wave, a squirt of water comes up through the rudder bearing and, with both pumps out of commission, it has probably been building up for hours – maybe days – without being detected. Once the bilges were dry and we could see that very little water was actually coming in, we stopped the hourly checks and went back to just pumping on every watch. However, this event added to our exhaustion and when Julius caught a small mahi mahi on the handline we were too tired to gut and cook him so we let him go.

DAY 17 ~ The wind dropped today and, with no more water coming in through the rudder bearing in the lighter sea state than yesterday, we caught up on sleep again. We are literally itching through a thick layer of salt on our skin to get to a shower and surviving on tinned fish with either crackers or instant noodles; garlic mackerel being the favourite, of which we have four tins left. The breeze dropped later so we are now only making about 4 knots VMG, which is sad because we are so close to the finish and thinking that all the other boats have finished the race. A red-footed booby sat on the bow pulpit all day preening himself, reminding us of how dishevelled we look. In contrast, he looked gorgeous. We cleared out all the fresh food and tossed the compost, an act that emphasised our proximity to the finish line!



We had a third crew for a day

Hands after hand steering for 18 days

Little brother at the finish line not sure about the souvenir: a flying fish!

Julius's fourth grade teacher, along with many friends and family, met us at the finish line with beautiful leis to celebrate his rite of passage!

DAY 18 ~ We had a night approach to Oahu, not ideal but it was calm enough to make decisions slowly and carefully. We needed to be vigilant on watch when so close to the coast with the reefs and fishing boats all around and having never been to Oahu before. We could see the clouds sitting on top of the high hills from far away and could almost taste landfall. The shooting stars firing away all night proved to be quite a show, celebrating our arrival. Julius was so happy to get back into cell phone coverage and text all his friends – I lost him for an hour before he surfaced back into the present and really noticed where we were and the sheer beauty of the island as we approached. We arrived at daybreak and crossed the finish at sunrise on the last day of the allowed race period, just in time for the awards party.

We did it! We had crossed the Pacific, hand-steering for 18 days non-stop without a single harsh word exchanged between us the entire trip. I felt total confidence in Julius as a sailor after all the heavy weather we had seen; apparently one of the heaviest races on record. The post-race high was incredible, and it felt like we had accomplished much more than a race; it was a real rite of passage for us both. Those first steps on land were a bit wobbly but we had an incredible welcome. Some friends on a Swan 65 (who had won their division and arrived several days ahead of us) came out on a dinghy to greet us in the channel and there were fresh pineapples and Mai Tais* in our hands before we even had the lines tied to the dock. We were presented with piles of leis† that smelled so sweetly Hawaiian. *Carodon* was draped in foliage by friends and family. She looked a little like a tired old racehorse finally let into the barn, but we learned soon after arrival that she probably sustained less damage in all that heavy weather than any other boat in the fleet.

I tried to gift the dried-up flying fish on deck to my nine-year-old son, Sawyer, who flew over with my parents to greet us but he was not impressed with my souvenir, saying it smelled a bit fishy! I probably smelled just as bad but he didn't complain and only wanted an endless hug from me and his big brother. I think both Julius and I showered three times that day and spent half of it in the pool at Kaneohe Yacht Club, what a luxury! Julius's favourite elementary school teacher happened to be in Oahu and showed up with even more sweet-smelling leis of plumeria and we just rejoiced in the warmth of it all. The race was a challenge for us both, in all sorts of ways, and yet we both agree that we hope it will be the first of many ocean crossings.

* The Mai Tai is a cocktail made of rum, Curaçao liqueur, orgeat syrup and lime juice.

† A lei is a garland or wreath common in the Pacific Islands of Polynesia.

DIFFERENT HORIZONS:

CRUISING THROUGH WESTERN AND ASIAN EYES

by Fabian Fernandez (s/v *Destiny*)

Fabian Fernandez was awarded the Qualifier's Mug in the 2024 OCC Awards, see page 25. He is one of very few Malaysian sailors to undertake a short-handed circumnavigation under sail and describes the cultural, linguistic and financial barriers he has encountered, as well as the support received from his OCC mentor.

As I have sailed into various ports on my – soon to be complete – circumnavigation, one thing has struck me time and again: the long-distance cruising community is dominated by sailors from Western countries. Marinas and anchorages are filled with yachts from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America. The stories of their crews are familiar: selling their homes, cashing in their savings, quitting their jobs and setting sail to chase the horizon. It is a lifestyle celebrated in countless books, blogs and – increasingly these days – YouTube channels.

But coming from Malaysia, my perspective is very different. For most Asians, the idea of giving everything up to live on a boat is almost unthinkable. Selling possessions to fund a voyage across oceans is often seen as reckless. Walking away from a secure job, even more so. In Asian cultures, family responsibilities are central to our lives. We are expected to support our parents,

Fabian passing Cape of Good Hope

The stunning contrast of colours at Aitutaki, Cook Islands

Clockwise from top left: The gorgeous colours of greens and blues in Tahiti, French Polynesia; amazing sunset at Aitutaki, Cook Islands; picturesque at Neaifu, Tonga; dining with sharks

Below, from left to right: Rattan hammock; Marae Taputapuatea; coloured ropes

provide for our children and remain close to our extended family. Sailing away for years is often seen not as an act of freedom, but as an abandonment of duty.

The economic realities also cannot be ignored. Many Western sailors benefit from the strength of their currencies. A pension from Europe or the US stretches comfortably across the islands of Southeast Asia or the Pacific. For me, and for many from this part of the world, the opposite is true. Every marina fee, spare part or haul-out feels more expensive because of the exchange rate.

The financial weight of cruising is a far greater barrier for Asians than it is for those from the West.

Culturally, success in Asia is still measured by stability, career progression and wealth. The cruising lifestyle challenges all of those markers. To leave behind a steady income or a respected profession for life at sea is often misunderstood, if not frowned upon. Sailing is still viewed as a luxury sport for the rich — an indulgence, not a meaningful way of life. I had to overcome so many negative narratives when I mentioned my desire to sail around the world. To put this in perspective, I am only the fourth person from Malaysia to do so, the first to round the Cape of Good Hope and sail through the South Atlantic. I am also the first Malaysian of Indian origin to do so and to do so completely self-funded.

There is also the question of exposure. Many Western sailors grow up with dinghy sailing clubs, family weekends on the water, or easy access to affordable boats. That early familiarity builds confidence and makes the leap to ocean voyaging less daunting. In contrast, most of us in Asia grow up with very little connection to sailing. The sea is often seen through the lens of fishing or commerce, not recreation. Without that foundation, the dream of blue-water cruising rarely takes root. The struggles I faced included lack of local skills and support, and lots of negativity towards my desire to complete this goal. And when we look outward for inspiration, the role models are almost always Western. The books we read, the videos we watch, the stories we hear — they all reinforce the image of ocean sailing as a Western pursuit. Few Asian voices are represented, which makes it harder for us to imagine our place in the same story.

Destiny *in Huahine, French Polynesia*

Yet change is slowly happening. I have started to meet more sailors from Asia testing the waters, daring to step outside the cultural norms. It is still rare, but it is no longer unthinkable. Perhaps in time, our anchorages will reflect a richer mix of voices and experiences. The cruising community, in my own experience, is such a giving community and supremely helpful, it is a community that transcends background. In every anchorage, sailors helped one another, no matter where we came from or how we arrived at sea. That sense of generosity is one of my greatest takeaways as I near the finish line of my circumnavigation.

For me, this journey has been as much about navigating cultural expectations as it has been about navigating the sea. And maybe that is what makes the voyage even more meaningful – knowing that by casting off, I am not only following the wind, but also quietly charting a new path for others from my part of the world.

This circumnavigation is, without a doubt, the greatest achievement in my life so far and the experiences I have had have been of far greater value and significance to me than the costs and the difficulties I have incurred. We have only one life and we need to live it in our own way.

A JOURNEY WITH PURPOSE:

FROM VICTORIA, BC TO THE HEART OF POLYNESIA

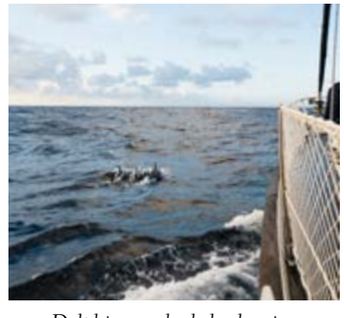
by Larissa Clark & Duncan Copeland (s/v *Freeranger*)

Ocean advocates Duncan Copeland and Larissa Clark are recipients of this year's OCC Conservation Challenge Grant, awarded to their non-profit organisation Free Range Ocean. They run the project from Freeranger, *which is currently in Fiji, where they are just over a year into a world voyage with their young children Eden and Skye-Elizabeth. For Larissa, the passage from Punta Mita to Henderson Island, an impressive 3,468 miles, in which she served as First Mate as well as mummy, was her qualifying passage.*

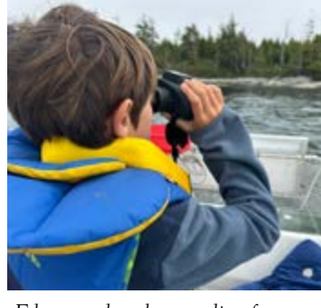
In July 2024, our family of four slipped our lines in Victoria, Canada aboard *Freeranger*, our Beneteau 50. We were loaded with provisions, curiosity and a family mission: to journey with purpose, raising the profile of ocean citizen science along the way. With Eden (then 7, now 9) and Skye-Elizabeth (then 5, now 7) as our crew, we had no illusions that this would be a simple sail from one latitude to another. It would be a voyage of seamanship, schooling, citizen science and – inevitably – surprises.

All aboard for a family photo as the crew visit Vancouver during the early days of their journey

The family joins in a beach seine survey and demonstration by the Raincoast Education Society in Tofino, BC



Dolphins at the helm leaving Canada and sailing south
Photo © Nikkey Dawn



Eden watches the coastline for bears and sea otters during the rounding of Vancouver Island

BEFORE SETTING OFF

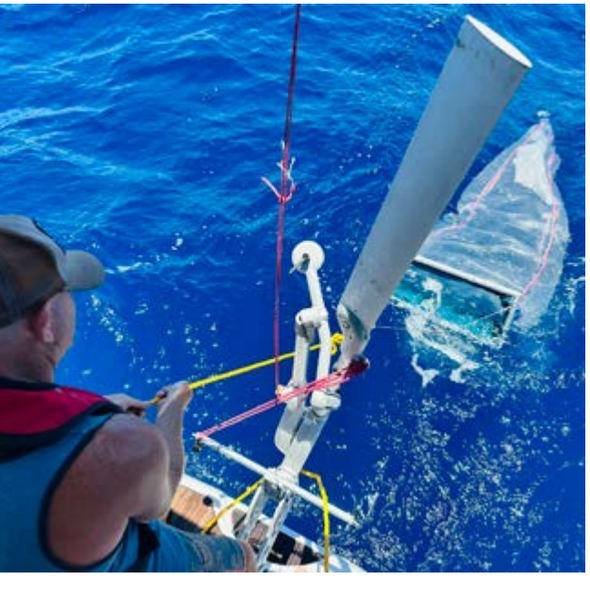
Having spent many years living and working in Europe and Africa, we moved to Vancouver Island in the spring of 2023 to spend time with Duncan's family (including his parents and OCC members Andy and Liza Copeland) and to prepare *Freeranger* for a multi-year voyage. We also wanted our son Eden and daughter Skye to spend a year in the British Columbia (BC) school system before we set off, as BC has an excellent distant education system, which we planned to use as the basis of boat school while we were away.

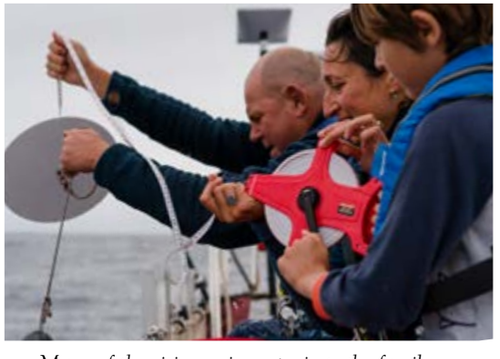
In parallel, we set up Free Range Ocean, a small not-for-profit organisation. Free Range Ocean brings together the best of our combined 40 years in environmental campaigns, development and communications, and channels them into a personal and professional project designed to positively impact the people and places we visit aboard *Freeranger*. Our focus is on three things:

1. **A Journey with Purpose:** *Contributing to, and enabling other boaters and coastal communities to contribute to, the smorgasbord of ocean citizen science and community projects that urgently need support and volunteers, including the establishment and expansion of the first global citizen science directory dedicated to ocean projects.*
2. **Adventure Science & Storytelling**: *Advancing knowledge and understanding of our global ocean by collaborating with local initiatives, early-career researchers and storytellers on board* Freeranger *in the countries we visit.*
3. **Outreach and Innovation:** *Using* Freeranger *as a platform for outreach and innovation, and as a testbed for innovative research-based or green-operational maritime technologies, from the simple solutions to the high-tech.*

THE END GOAL?

To inform, inspire and enable others to have their own positive impact on our ocean with an 'everyone, and every action counts' philosophy.





Many of the citizen science projects the family participates in are full family events with everyone taking part bringing homeschool science to life!
Photo © Nikkey Dawn

Left: A Neuston Net is deployed from Freeranger *as part of International SeaKeepers Society project while offshore during their Pacific crossing*

NORTHWARD FIRST:

Warming Up in British Columbia

Freeranger *on anchor near Tofino, BC*

Rather than point the bow south straight away, in July 2024 we set off north, almost circumnavigating Vancouver Island. Desolation Sound's fjords and sun-warmed coves, Campbell River's busy channels, and the wild isolation of the Broughtons gave us a great shakedown though, it has to be said, more for our new engine than for the sails, as little breeze and flat calm seas were the conditions of most of the summer.

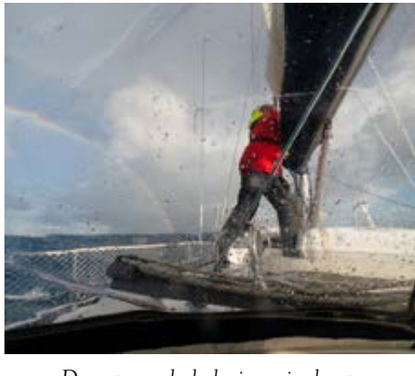
As always, however, there is a silver lining and the calm conditions made for incredible wildlife spotting. Daily we spotted whales, sea otters, seals, sea lions and dozens of species of sea birds. Ashore, bald eagles were everywhere, and more than once we sat in the cockpit as black bears picked their way along the shoreline. But perhaps the most incredible of all were the evenings we sat together listening to the sea wolves* howl nearby. These sightings also gave us our opportunity to take part in local citizen science initiatives, as we added them into wildlife sightings apps such as the Ocean Wise Sightings Network Whale Report app.

Rounding Cape Scott, we tasted the Pacific's edge for the first time this voyage before dropping into the whale-rich waters of Clayoquot Sound and the surf-town charm of Tofino, returning to Middle Beach where we'd been married nine years earlier. Our final Canadian stop, Ucluelet, would also be the launch point for our first big offshore leap.

DOWN THE COAST AND INTO THE WEATHER

Early September brought our departure south and, with it, Cape Mendocino at its spirited best: 4–6m swell peaking under a steel sky. 'Character-building' is the polite term. The reward: rare whale sightings, including sei whales, and a blue whale so close it swam under our keel. Landfall in San Francisco was made at 2200, sailing under the glorious lights of Golden Gate Bridge. Generally, we try not to make nighttime arrivals, but it turns out that this is a good time to enter the Bay – there's no fog and no large shipping at this time.

We felt very welcomed in San Francisco. This is truly a sailing city, with dozens of yacht and sailing clubs dotted around the area. We enjoyed several reciprocal docking privileges due to Duncan's membership of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, and we managed to catch the end of the local OCC 70th Anniversary event held at Angel Island. We hiked mountain trails lined with giant redwoods and took part in the Sausalito Boat Show.



Duncan on deck during mixed seas sailing south to San Fran
Photo © Nikkey Dawn

* Sea wolves are a subspecies of the grey wolf, living on the Pacific Northwest coast.

Clockwise from top left: Larissa, Eden, Skye and Duncan in San Francisco Bay; Freeranger *and her crew sailing south to San Francisco (Photo © Nikkey Dawn); Sailing from Ucluelet to San Fran in big seas around infamous Cape Mendocino (Photo © Nikkey Dawn); Duncan, Larissa, Eden and Skye give cruisers talks and presentations on citizen science along their journey as in this photo in La Cruz Mexico*

After a couple of weeks in San Francisco – visiting the wider area, seeing friends and having an unplanned haul out – we set off southwards again. We followed the California curve – San Francisco to Monterey Bay – where the aquarium enthralled the kids almost as much as the thousands of sea lions that had commandeered a public park, sprawling across swings and benches in an unending, barking carpet. Our thanks to Grant and Amelia Howerton (PO Monterey) for their kind welcome.

Catalina Island was a tangle of kelp (literally, as it wrapped our prop again and again). The prospect of going over the side to remove it was rarely met with enthusiasm given that juvenile great whites typically enjoy Southern California's coastline as nursery grounds! Less sharky and more popular was a pitstop in Newport Beach and an obligatory Disney detour for the young crew. By San Diego in mid-October our newly-installed engine had reached a new low, with the third gearbox since June failing – forcing us to cross 1.5 miles of the bay in reverse to a boatyard to the soundtrack of The Star-Spangled Banner drifting from the nearby Navy base . . .

MEXICO SEA OF CORTEZ AND PACIFIC COAST

In early November, we joined the Baja Ha-Ha rally southbound – a convivial fleet of over 100 boats, 30 children among them. For Eden and Skye, it was like finding a floating schoolyard. While the rally was certainly helpful in meeting other boats and assisting with the quite incredible amount of paperwork required to take a boat into Mexico, overall we found that the schedule was too fast, and we'd have preferred to take additional time to explore more of the incredible Baja peninsula on the Pacific coast. Our amazing wildlife encounters continued as we migrated south with the humpbacks, dodged sleeping turtles and more than once had marlin leaping out of the water around us. These sightings were almost daily shared into relevant citizen science projects for the region.

Family hammock time on the dusty shores of Baja Mexico and a day of turtle spotting

One of the incredible marine mammal encounters was the whales
Photo © Nikkey Dawn

The Freeranger *crew contemplate their passage from the coast in San Diego*

We peeled off at La Paz, swapping the Pacific rollers for the Sea of Cortez's desert-rimmed anchorages. Isla San Francisco, 41 miles north of La Paz, treated us to Baja's trademark 'northers' whilst, in the opposite direction, the little-known treasure of Isla Isabel treated us to more fabulous wildlife encounters. Alive with fearless and massive seabird colonies (including frigatebirds, boobies and pelicans) that are remarkably unafraid of humans, whale sharks, humpback whales, sea turtles (olive ridley, green, Pacific hawksbill) and thriving coral reefs, Isla Isabel became an instant favourite, a place so clearly deserving of its nickname, 'Galápagos of

Mexico'. A family snorkel here turned into an unforgettable encounter when 20+ pilot whales glided straight through our path, their shapes ghosting in the blue, and their 'chirps' singing through the water.

From December 2024 to late February 2025, we ranged down to Manzanillo, spending idyllic time in Tenacatita and stopping at Barra de Navidad – famous for its picturesque lagoon and infamous for the tight, sandbar-flanked channel that nearly every visiting skipper seemed to graze.

By this stage we'd already taken part in six different citizen science projects: from photographing whale flukes for ID databases to collecting microplastic samples, logging seabed depths for a global seabed map and sharing sea grass samples for research archives. We hosted several talks for fellow cruisers in yacht clubs and in anchorages aboard *Freeranger* – a mix of salty yarns and practical 'how-to' for contributing data from a boat. Particularly fun was joining the morning cruiser nets on VHF that are not only a great resource and way to meet people in this region, but also gave us the opportunity to share information about our Free Range Ocean Citizen Science Directory, and invite fellow cruisers aboard to take part in projects. And, along with other families, we held some excellent kid science sections that were not only fun but ticked more than a few home school boxes!

PACIFIC CROSSING PREP

In February we tucked into Marina La Cruz on Bahía de Banderas for a month of prep and provisioning, the kids happily absorbed in the much-loved marina kids' club in between their home-schooling lessons. It was also the perfect place to share our growing Free Range Ocean Citizen Science Directory with the cruising community at large. Several OCC members joined in the 'Journey with Purpose' event we ran in collaboration with PV Sailing in the marina clubhouse to hear about ways to get involved in citizen science at sea. The next day, we had a very enjoyable evening on board *Freeranger* with OCC members present and pending, including Roving Rear Commodores Anne and Michael Hartshorn on *Nimue* who happened to be moored right next door.

Freeranger *hosted an OCC gathering in La Cruz, February 2025*

The family giving a presentation to show the citizen science directory and explain how to get involved

THE BIG ONE: CROSSING THE PACIFIC

After a very busy few weeks in which every centimetre of the boat and all the supermarkets in La Cruz were covered, we set off in mid-March 2025 on our Pacific crossing to Polynesia. The first part of our route was pretty standard, taking us first to the marine reserve of Isla Socorro, where we dropped the hook for an afternoon swim with some very friendly grey sharks. Then we moved on into the vastness of the Pacific blue. Like other boats crossing from Mexico, we first headed in the general direction of 10/120, 10°N and 120°W, generally considered to be the sweet spot for crossing the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). In the event, a nice window opened up for us a little earlier than that and we bore south away from the rest of the fleet, who were headed to the Marquesas, for our slightly unusual destination of the Pitcairn Islands, a dream destination for both of us.

The passage was a very mixed bag of conditions. Anyone out in the Pacific this year will attest to the fact that it has not been a normal trade wind year (are there any 'normal' years anymore?). We had calm conditions out from Mexico, lovely sailing to the ITCZ, very squally conditions but barely any calm through that, and then into steady 20+ knot winds from about 10°S through to our eventual landfall at Henderson Island at 24°S. Unfortunately, despite the models consistently showing that we should have had those winds on the beam, they in fact came from a far more southerly direction. *Freeranger* is happy to sail close-hauled – although her crew have mixed feelings about it, particularly in those conditions – and we had some fast days with 198 miles being the best, but my goodness it was wet and lively. Morale was not helped by a couple of leaky hatches – ones that had never leaked before!

There were highlights galore: some good, some challenging, some both! Under a rainbow, in full nautical fancy dress, we appeased Neptune as we crossed into the Southern Hemisphere. His reply was a soaking squall that pushed us through the equator at 11.6 knots, followed by glorious sunshine. Galley disasters became running jokes: a full dozen cracked eggs decorating the saloon after a rogue wave was particularly memorable.

While overall the boat performed superbly, repairs were part of the rhythm. We chafed through a spinnaker halyard and an outhaul – the only 2 lines we had not recently replaced. None was more intense, however, than the six hours spent drilling 12 holes through a 5mm stainless steel plate to replace the bracket for the autopilot's hydraulic ram that had sheared in the small hours. Courtesy of this incident, and a small diesel leak that took two days to trace, Duncan is now intimately familiar with the bottom of the starboard aft locker!

Pages from Skye and Eden's Trip Report from the Pacific Crossing between Mexico and French Polynesia

Mixing science and art during boat school onboard

Duncan, Larissa, Eden, Skye and their fantastic voyage crew Emme and PiL fly across the equator at 11.6 knots in full nautical attire en route to Polynesia

Eden investigates curious creatures in our Neuston Net water sample mid-ocean on the Pacific Crossing

The crew get ready for a session towing a neuston net to collect water samples for a study with Dr Rebecca Helm

The family takes a dip mid-Pacific Ocean

Crossing the Pacific also gave us the opportunity to contribute to citizen science projects particularly focused on the high seas. These included: deploying a Neuston Net at slow speeds and recording the plankton samples gathered for a study mapping ocean surface life run by Dr Rebecca Helm and The International SeaKeepers Society (for which we are a Discovery Yacht); and contributing to the Global Ocean Environment Survey (GOES) through documenting the plankton and microplastic samples taken on most days (weather permitting!).

Eden and Skye took it all in their stride, inventing 'Yes Day' (mercifully without too many outrageous requests), staging theatrical performances in Skye's cabin, and running backgammon and Yahtzee championships. School underway was pragmatic: whatever didn't induce queasiness during the final nine days of lively close-hauled sailing was fair game.

LANDFALL IN THE PITCAIRN GROUP

After 22 days and 3,468 nautical miles, sailing right across the tropics and out the other side, we made landfall at Henderson Island. To land after a Pacific crossing at a truly remote and uninhabited island was a privilege. To find somewhere safe to anchor, however, was a challenge.

Our visit was wonderful and heartbreaking. The setting and landscape are incredible, the unique vegetation and birdlife are breathtaking but the plastic pollution, for which the island is notorious, is truly awful and it's everywhere along the shoreline. Some of it had obviously been at sea for a long time, some looked very new. Fishing gear made up a large proportion of it, but we found everything from toys to shoes, plastic bags to bottles.

After two days, changing conditions meant that we had to leave Henderson in something of a hurry as the breakers built and we set course for Pitcairn Island itself, a place both of us had long wanted to visit. The anchorages are awful and the landing, frankly, crazy, but once ashore we have never felt more welcomed,

A happy crew reaches Henderson Island after a 22 day passage from La Cruz, Mexico in April 2025

Freeranger *looking for a place to anchor at Henderson Island*

or been somewhere more peaceful, than this island and its community. To be able to explore Pitcairn and its history in person was just wonderful; to learn more about this community, their lives, and their pride in their islands and the huge Pitcairn Islands Marine Reserve was humbling. The kids particularly enjoyed their rides around on the islanders' ATVs and meeting Miss T, a Galapagos tortoise brought by a visiting yacht in 1935: a truly once in a lifetime experience.

The infamous landing at Pitcairn Island can easily leave your nerves in tatters but we were happy to successfully make it several times

Clockwise from top left: Eden collecting plastic; Larissa with Brenda Christian, the most delightful immigration officer you'll ever meet; The family explores Pitcairn Island home of the descendants of The Bounty *mutineers and visits the lush sites happy to be on land among the trees after the passage from Mexico; In Pitcairn Island by the original anchor of HMS* Bounty

ON TO FRENCH POLYNESIA

By Easter, we were in Mangareva, French Polynesia – the landscape a lush green counterpoint to our months of desert coasts and bluewater horizons. Here, the pace shifted. We explored anchorages, traded with locals and continued citizen science efforts – the kids helping observe water clarity and species logs. Starlink meant they could join their Canadian classmates' video calls, answering the inevitable, 'Where are you now?'

The atoll-studded Tuamotus demanded respect. Our entries were timed for best estimates (not always right!) of slack tide, eyes peeled for coral heads. There were sharks everywhere but in the Fakarava UNESCO Biosphere Reserve they were a particular highlight. In the Societies, the scenery turned cinematic: Bora

Rainbows, islands and a family at sea in French Polynesia

Freeranger *rafted up alongside two OCC families* Tempus *and* June

Clockwise from top left: Maupiha'a (Maupihaa), also known as Mopelia, is an atoll in the Leeward group (Iles sous le Vent) of the Society Islands; Putting the kids to work as coral spotters as the family voyages between atolls; Enjoying island life in French Polynesia; Eden and Skye demonstrate a citizen science app to other boat kids

Bora's volcanic peaks, Moorea's dolphin-filled passes and Tahiti's urban bustle (and incredible – albeit pricey – provisioning top-ups).

We reconnected with *Sailing Tempus*, OCC members and close friends from our years living in Norway (2019–22). Their daughters, Tiril and Frida, are the same ages as Eden and Skye, and the four kids had previously gone to school together in Norway. They slotted straight back into the easy play and shared adventures that mark a true 'chosen family' afloat, along with OCC friends from British Columbia aboard *June*.

June 2025 in the ocean conservation calendar was a big month. Over in Nice, France, the UN Ocean Conference was in full swing – it's an event we'd likely have been at in person before this new cruising life. For two years now Free Range Ocean has been endorsed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (better known as the Ocean Decade) and for the event we were delighted to do a live Instagram event to talk Ocean Citizen Science with the Ocean Decade **#GenOcean** initiative, aimed at engaging young

Clockwise from top left: The family crew off to snorkel with manta rays in French Polynesia; Snorkelling with Grey and Black Tip sharks in Fakarava Atoll in the UNESCO biosphere reserve during World Ocean Week (Photo © s/v June*); Frigate bird chicks and juveniles nested on Bird Island in Maupiha'a; The crew take a walk on Bird Island at their last atoll stop in Maupiha'a; Skye loves to paint her underwater experiences – in this case her first swim with a manta ray*

people in ocean issues. We probably don't have futures as Instagram influencers, but the engagement, questions and enthusiasm of the participants was inspiring.

THE OCC CONNECTION

Mid-voyage, we were thrilled to learn that we had been awarded the OCC Conservation Challenge Grant – a boost that has enabled us to expand our Free Range Ocean Citizen Science Directory and widen outreach. With this support we've been adding projects to the directory and, increasingly, as word of our efforts spreads, receiving them directly from researchers, sailors and conservationists who are helping us to get them all in one place. We've had some exciting local collaborations recently, including with Conservation International in Samoa in August where we hosted a joint workshop called 'Creative and Connected Citizen Science Dialogue' with representatives from the national government, university and NGO community to explore the role and opportunity for engaging visitors (cruisers!) in local conservation efforts. Later in the year, in Fiji, we'll collaborate with the Pacific Blue Foundation and Women in Ocean Science on a pilot project to get more local women into diving so they can become ocean guardians in their own communities. We will also make *Freeranger* available for two weeks to support

OCC member families of Freeranger, Tempus *and* June *sailed French Polynesia in company with friends*

Pacific Blue Foundation's coral restoration efforts. We've met many wonderful OCC boats along the way, hosted several get-togethers on board, and are planning a webinar with *Shimshal II* in September to share progress and citizen science tips. Just as we'd hoped, the OCC community's advice, encouragement and camaraderie have been as tangible as the trade winds.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

From the first cold spray off Cape Scott to the balmy lagoons of the Societies, our voyage so far has been a blend of traditional cruising, purposeful science and family life in its raw, rewarding form. We've navigated weather, seasickness and repairs, met rare wildlife, taught our children in the cockpit and on the foredeck, and watched them cross oceans with open eyes and resilient spirits. We've met wonderful people both ashore and afloat. Last and not least, we've seen the start of what we hope will become something useful to many. One day we hope that for most of us afloat, taking part in ocean citizen science will be as much a part of our daily lives as our morning swim, checking the weather or wondering which boat job needs to be tackled next . . .

And we're only just getting started!

A DELIVERY TRIP:

SAILING FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO IRELAND

by Michael Sadlier (s/v *Varuna*)

Michael is an Irish veterinary surgeon who specialises in racehorses. He grew up in Blackrock in Dublin, beside the sea, and spent his childhood as a sea scout in Dun Laoghaire. He is married to Judith and they have four children. They have a house in Dungarvan in Co. Waterford where all four children, now adults, spent their summers sailing with the Dungarvan Harbour Sailing Club. Michael is a member of the Royal Irish Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire and also a member of the Irish Cruising Club. He has sailed extensively in Ireland and has been up and down to Madeira, the Azores and the Canaries from West Cork on a few occasions. In 2023 he participated in a west to east transatlantic crossing as part of the ARC on a Moody 46. Michael and Judith hope to cruise the Mediterranean extensively over the next few years, and Michael is also secretly planning to do a North Atlantic Circuit – Europe, Caribbean, East Coast USA, Labrador, Greenland, Iceland and Norway – before he is too old!

My wife Judith and I sail *Varuna*, a Hallberg-Rassy 43, hull number 102, launched in Sweden in 2005. *Varuna* is the latest of the boats we have owned and we bought her in The Netherlands in June 2021. We had been looking for a Hallberg-Rassy 46 and had had two surveyed in The Netherlands, but both failed the survey for a number of reasons. The surveyor had noticed *Varuna* when he was doing another survey in a boatyard, had had a quick look at her and had rung me to tell me what a nice boat she was. She was in really good condition and, although she was not exactly what we wanted (two rather than the three cabins we had hoped for), she had had just two previous owners and, more importantly, she had been very lightly used. The surveyor described her as immaculate. We went over to see her, liked what we saw and decided to proceed with a survey.

Varuna*'s bow*

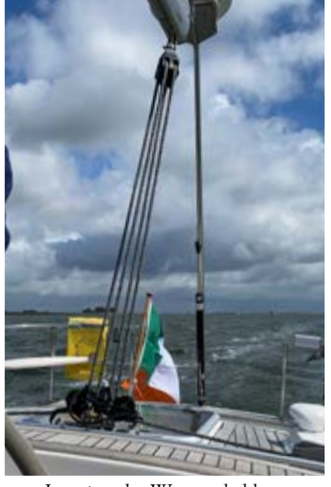
One issue that had arisen pre-survey was her first name: *Ice Cream*. The second owners had, wisely, changed her name to *Varuna*, the Hindu God of the Sea. However, 'Ice Cream' could still be seen on the aft section of the blue line, both port and starboard, no amount of polishing got rid of it completely. The only solution we could think of was to cover the remains of 'Ice Cream' with the name '*Varuna*' and that is why our yacht has '*Varuna*' fore and aft on both port and starboard!

Varuna passed the survey without issue and we suddenly became her third owners. While she was still in the boatyard in The Netherlands, we did some preparatory work. We removed: all the original electronics and replaced them with new Garmin instrumentation on an NMEA 2000 backbone, all the

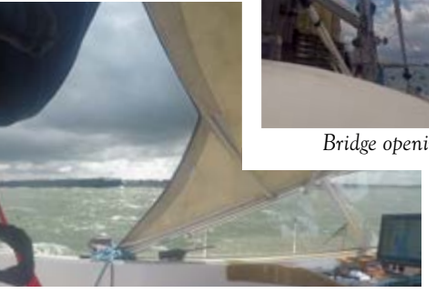
Lock in Bruinisse

Approaching lock

Bridge opening

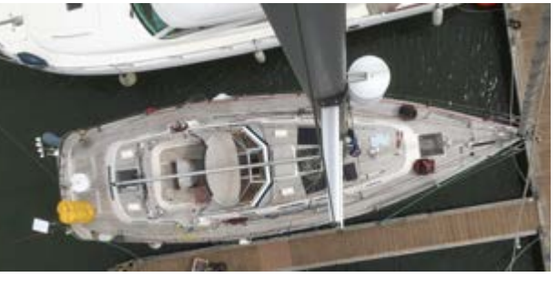


Leaving the Westerschelde



Above left and right: Barge along the canals

Below and right: Varuna *in marina*



old interior halogen lights, replacing them with LEDs, and the old halogen navigation lights, which we replaced with Aqua Marine LED lights. Finally, we registered *Varuna* in Ireland which meant she was given an Irish call sign and an Irish MMSI number.

We had sold our Hallberg-Rassy 352 earlier that year and packed our life jackets, wet-weather gear, tools, navigation equipment, galley essentials, spare parts and other nautical bits and pieces that we had accumulated over the years into nine cardboard boxes, which we shipped by courier to The Netherlands. We arrived a few days before our planned departure date, loaded all the gear on board and prepared for the journey back to Ireland.

I had taken ten days' holiday and, slowly, our assembled hardy crew of young – and not so young – gathered in early July, in a cold and wet Jachthaven Bruinisse, in the Grevelingenmeer.

Varuna was moored in the tightest of spots in the marina and we had a 20 knot wind, with rain, blowing us on to the starboard dock for 24 hours,

making our departure to port very difficult. Finally, early the following morning, the wind decreased enough to allow me to attempt my first voyage at the helm. To my surprise, using the bow thruster, and with crew stationed at vital areas, fenders at the ready, we got away from the dock without a problem and *Varuna* proved very easy to handle in the confines of the marina. We left the Jachthaven Bruinisse with aplomb and headed straight into the lock on the Keeten/Zijpe waterway. Along with another 12 boats, of all shapes and colours, we descended into the Oosterschelde estuary.

From the Oosterschelde we sailed southeast, with a decent breeze on the beam, to the town of Wemeldinge where we dropped our sails and entered the Kanaal door Zuid-Beveland, continuing south to the giant locks at Sluizen Hansweert. Halfway down the kanaal, we called kanaal control to open the motorway and railway bridges that were ahead of us but as we approached the bridges, we were stopped by the Dutch police, who came up behind us in a high-speed craft. They tied onto mooring poles near the side of the kanaal and insisted that we moor to them. In the meantime the bridges opened. They boarded us, took all our details, went below and had a good look around and, despite the production of the recently stamped purchase papers, they gave us a thorough going over. They found no contraband in all the stowed gear and eventually let us continue our voyage, none the wiser as to why they stopped us! Perhaps they were wondering what an Irish registered yacht was doing in the Dutch canal system?

They left, heading south and easily fitting under the bridges. Meanwhile, we had to contact the kanaal control centre again, and had a 45-minute wait before they reopened both bridges. Once through, we motored down to the Sluizen Hansweert, which we passed through without incident, and exited onto the Westerschelde River. Although technically 21 miles from the North Sea, we were surprised by the size and frequency of the shipping heading in and out of the port of Antwerp. We worked our way down the river, first with and then against the current, stopping for the night in the marina at Breskens, right at the entry to the North Sea. The next morning, we set off, out on to the North Sea and enjoyed good winds but a short chop. We had wind against tide from Oostende heading south and finally called it a day at Dunkerque where we pulled in for the evening, as our plan was to use the tide early the next morning to head across the Channel.

At 0100 we left the marina in Dunkerque and shot south with the tide and a following wind. At Calais, we were quite taken aback by the number of lights, ships and the amount of general maritime traffic. However, with all

Sunset in Dunkerque

Dungeness on Varuna*'s starboard bow*

Leaving the Solent

Varuna *on the River Barrow*

Varuna *in New Ross*

hands on deck, we managed to keep focused, passing about 100m behind the Dover Seaways car ferry and out into the shipping lanes. We contacted the UK Coastguard who were very helpful, advising us to cross at MPC Buoy (51°06'N 1°38'E). We crossed the busy northbound lane first, having to make minor speed alterations to avoid the bigger ships. The southbound lane was relatively quiet and did not require any course or speed alterations on our behalf. We arrived in Dover as the sun rose in the eastern sky.

Although we had had no issues entering marinas on the continent, it was another matter altogether in England in that immediate post-Covid period. We contacted half a dozen marinas on the south coast from Dover to the Solent with one marina after another refusing to let us in, even to refuel. To add to the pressure, we had also ordered some new sails from Peter Sanders in Lymington which we had hoped to collect along the route. Out of desperation, I contacted Berthon Marina in Lymington by phone. Once I had told my tale of woe, the helpful marina staff-member answered with kindness and reassurance, 'We are all men of the sea so come in and if there are any Covid issues, we will find a place to put you in strict isolation.'

In general, *Varuna* had performed well on our delivery trip so far. However, one problem we had had since leaving Jachthaven Bruinisse was that, although the shore power system would fully charge the domestic battery bank, the alternator would not charge it – yet the engine battery was always at full charge. Naturally, we were concerned about heading out beyond Land's End and running out of power, so getting the problem sorted out became a major priority. I explained the issue to the chap at Berthon Marina and he said that he would get someone to look at our system the following morning. We arrived into the Lymington River at 2150, having come direct from Dunkerque and were given a berth in the marina. One of the crew dryly observed that we were probably the smallest boat there!

Some of the younger members of crew disappeared almost as soon as we were moored, on the hunt for a pub, while the rest of us had a quick meal before heading to bed. We were woken the following morning at 0830 by the electrician. We showed him our battery bank and, for him, the problem was obvious. The previous owners had attached the starter battery to the alternator and the domestic bank to the shore charger. There were two unconnected 70mm^2 wires beside the battery bank whose presumed role was to connect the domestic bank to the starter battery or vice versa. On his advice I went to the local chandlers, bought the last voltage sensitive relay they had in stock and the electrician used it to connect the two battery banks. Job done, problem solved.

With the electrical problem solved, we collected our new sails from Peter Sanders, a mere 300m walk from our mooring, refuelled, resupplied and headed back to sea that afternoon. We sailed past the Needles with the tide, and continued southwest, as far away from Portland Bill as was reasonable. Then we crossed Lyme Bay, rounded Start Point in the dark, and motored past Salcombe in the moonlight, before finally docking in Plymouth in the dark of early morning.

Due to an approaching westerly storm, we decided that discretion was the better part of valour and cut our trip short. We left *Varuna* in the Mayflower Marina for a few weeks with the intention of returning to finish the voyage. Sadly, work was unrelenting that summer and I could not find the opportunity to muster the time, nor could I find the crew, to return to Plymouth to take *Varuna* the last few miles home. In the end, I contacted Halcyon Yachts and, in what proved to be a seamless and professional operation, *Varuna* was safely delivered to Waterford Harbour in late August 2021.

We sailed *Varuna* a few more times on the southeast coast of Ireland that autumn before we took her up the River Barrow to a boatyard run by the Keogh brothers in New Ross. There, we left her on the hard for the winter, during which time we had the electrical system upgraded to a Victron lithium battery bank with charger, inverter and Lynx battery management system. We also had a number of other jobs completed, such as checking the through-hulls and then changing a few from metal to Tru Design plastic models, servicing the Gori propellor, renewing the anti-fouling, changing the anodes, servicing the bow thruster and installing a Metz VHF aerial on the mast.

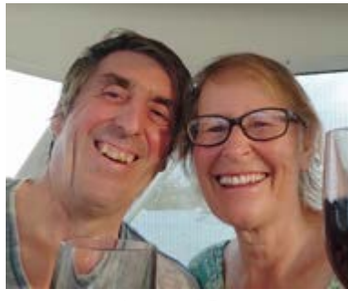
Come spring, *Varuna* was set up exactly as we wanted, ready and well-positioned for the new season and our many sailing plans.

GOING THE WRONG WAY:

SAILING FROM FRENCH POLYNESIA TO PANAMA

by Andy & Sue Warman (s/v *Spruce*)

Andy and Sue left the UK in 2009 and have clocked up many thousands of miles under two iterations of Spruce, *first an Ohlson 38 and, since 2011, a Hallberg-Rassy 42.* Spruce *circled the Pacific between 2013 and 2021, and the plan was to continue on to the Indian Ocean. However, this account describes their rapidly and dramatically altered plans made in response to Covid restrictions. The Warmans were Roving Rear Commodores from 2017 to 2023, Vasey Vase winners in 2018 and authors of a gripping article 'Sailing the Ring of Fire' which was published in two parts in* Flying Fish *2019/1 and 2019/2. Their blog is at* **sailblogs.com/member/littlegreenboat**. *This account provides information aimed at enabling a crew considering sailing from French Polynesia to Panama to understand what might be involved.*



Andy and Sue

'You must be crazy!' was the common retort from fellow cruisers anchored in Taiohae Bay. Our folly was to contemplate sailing to the Panama Canal from French Polynesia.

In March 2020, just before the Covid-19 pandemic swept the globe, we set off from Mexico to Les Îles Gambier in French Polynesia. This passage followed a North Pacific Crossing from Japan to the Aleutian Islands and through British Colombia in 2018. *Spruce* was now poised to re-cross the South Pacific Ocean culminating in a refit in New Zealand scheduled for November. Sailmaker, rigger, shipwright and boatyard were all booked. A previous refit based in the same yard at Whangarei had gone well in 2013–14. We needed another major overhaul before once again heading through the Torres Strait but this time onward across the Indian Ocean.

During our 25-day passage to Rikitea, several emails arrived from friends reporting developments concerning a suspected expanding international pandemic. As per our clearance paperwork from the Mexican naval representative in Manzanillo, we continued towards Les Îles Gambier and towards an unanticipated 16-month sojourn in French Polynesia as the cruising world we had known since 2009 shuddered to an abrupt halt. Bureaucracy introduced due to the pandemic was subsequently slow to disappear. Eventually, the New Zealand authorities did issue a permit to enter, but only because we had already contracted work of sufficient value to be undertaken in Whangarei. Moreover, this permit was not issued until December 2020; the South Pacific cyclone season had already commenced and we were unwilling to risk venturing 3,000 miles westwards from the Marquesas at that time of year.

Sunset near the ITCZ

Additional uncertainty was caused by the UK's drawn-out departure from the European Union. New legislation was expected to impact vessels away on extended cruises. Letters to our Member of Parliament gave no clarity on the thorny subject of paying sales tax again. The response did not answer the questions raised and amounted to 'Take one for the team! It's good for the UK!' Indications were that vessels re-entering the UK after three years absence would be liable to pay VAT, regardless of prior status. However, the introduction of the revised legislation had moved later to June 2022. We could potentially get back before this date. The primary questions to be answered: which way to go and how to arrive within 11 months?

We considered many potential routes. Via Easter Island and Patagonia: problems existed in moving within Chile and in using the Argentinian border for visa renewals. Across the Indian Ocean: it was unlikely we could obtain a permit to stop anywhere prior to South Africa, 11,000 miles distant, without a risk of the boat being impounded. Directly to Panama: a long slog against the trade winds and current. Via Hawaii to Mexico then south to Panama? No option was ideal. A key concern about a 'trade wind delivery-trip' strategy via the Cape of Good Hope was that should equipment failure necessitate a stop, bureaucracy might detain us beyond the commencement of the following cyclone season. At that time national pandemic rules were in a state of flux. We heard of yachts and their crews arriving in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Indonesia who were arrested in spite of being

Spruce *anchored at Amanu, Tuamotus*

Haul-out at Hiva Oa

granted prior permission to travel. Australia was still closed to foreign yachts and even Australian vessels. French Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean might be open to vessels arriving directly from French territories . . . or perhaps that would only apply to French vessels. Information seemed unreliable.

A chance conversation with Patrick, a French yachtsman in Nuku Hiva, suggested he knew of two French craft that had returned to Panama from French Polynesia. One departed from the Marquesas, the other from Tahiti. Although third party stories, Patrick had real data on a few positions during their passages. Interestingly, they both sailed northeastwards across the Equatorial current into the Equatorial Counter-Current (ECC). Detailed analysis of pilot chart information revealed this route might best be travelled during six weeks each year, when the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) is at its most northerly: around the month of August. Southern hemisphere east and southeasterly stronger winter winds normally reduce in frequency by the end of July, thereby offering a window of opportunity to leave the Marquesas more easily. The course initially achieved over the ground would be pushed more eastwards by the Equatorial current. As one progressed farther north and east, the current should ease and the wind would slowly veer more towards the southeast. Progress to the east should then bring the wind eventually on the beam and finally on the quarter for a broad reach. The expectation was to be close-hauled on the starboard tack for some 2,000 miles, although during this period the COG would gradually be changing from NNE to E. Approaching the Gulf of Panama, one would probably suffer light winds or calms. Additional jerry cans of fuel could help avoid days spent drifting during calms.

The decision was made. New sails and rigging were already in transit from the UK. Our existing rigging was almost ten years old and a passage of 9,000 miles lay ahead: essential maintenance work would now be done at Hiva Oa. A haul-out facility, new since our last visit in 2013, gave us four weeks ashore

Heading north-northeast

Plenty of mangoes

at Atuona Harbour. Many smaller tasks were undertaken. However, the major job was to remove the mast, carefully cut new rigging wires to length and to fit them with Sta-Lok terminals and bottlescrews. The upper end of each had already been swaged by the same rigger who last re-rigged *Spruce* in the UK.

Two final complications struck prior to our proposed departure date of 29 July 2021. Three days before we planned to sail, a gathering with over a thousand dancers and representatives from across French Polynesia was to take place in Hiva Oa. The French President would visit after attending the opening ceremony for the Japan Olympics with a globe-trotting entourage of bureaucrats and media personnel. People from Tahiti, a Covid hotspot, would also attend. We suspected – and feared – this might precipitate a jump in Marquesan Covid cases, which did subsequently happen. Although we had been vaccinated in May, illness during a long passage with only two aboard might become a serious issue. We isolated ourselves for the three days between the event and our launch date. The second complication occurred immediately prior to launching: the island's fuel delivery was delayed due to a hawser snapping while the supply ship docked in large swell. However, within a few hours of launching and, thankfully, refuelled, we moved to a remote anchorage, conducted final preparations and set sail for Panama the following day.

We treated the first few days as a shakedown cruise, if anything went wrong we could sail downwind to somewhere in French Polynesia. We set a waypoint just beyond the Equatorial current, over 1,000 miles off. Our COG was approximately 035°T but we had shifty winds and squally conditions initially. Wildlife abounded; a whale surfaced abeam. Different species of booby dived; nazca boobies with their bandit black eye-masks far outwitted their clumsier brown booby cousins. Within a couple of days most avian life fell astern and a few terns and stormy petrels were all that remained.

The wind direction was less favourable than we had hoped, maybe because a stronger west-going current shifted the apparent wind. We did not sail hard on the wind but remained a little more free, keeping the boat speed higher and reducing the likely time spent in the foul Equatorial current. Average speed was around 5.5 knots, with bursts up to 6.5 knots. Seas typically measured between 1.5m and 2m. These came from ahead of the beam: maintaining a good boat speed was critical for acceptable progress.

By day 3 the current was strengthening. SOG was down to 4.5 knots, a foul component of current was estimated to be slowing us down by 1 knot, with another 600 miles before we might reach the favourable counter-current. We continued with a fairly tolerable motion. Apart from earlier squalls, the winds were around 8–13 knots with occasional periods of up to 17 knots. That was ample while sailing almost close-hauled.

As dusk drew near, a cooling atmosphere generated more cloud during the first half of the night. Overnight the skies often cleared and dawn approached with a ribbon of distant cloud glowing as the sun moved up towards the horizon. Stars overhead gently disappeared as the sky lightened in the east. Goodbye hunter Orion, until the following night.

During the fifth night the foul current reduced; we were delighted. However, we expected the peak-flow zone of the Equatorial current still to be to the north of us, so perhaps we benefited inadvertently from a favourable swirl. Our COG was 038°T and we still had 410 miles until clear of the foul current. The wind speed had increased to around 14–20 knots but spray over the whole boat was infrequent. Our position was 6 degrees farther east and 9 degrees farther north than Hiva Oa and sunrise was noticeably earlier. Fresh fruit and vegetables from French Polynesia were plentiful and delicious, so we were feasting on cereal and fruit for breakfast. There was at least no risk of scurvy, yet!

Another sunrise, still close-hauled

By day 6, the Equatorial current reduced further and even occasional bursts of fair current materialised, which was measured by comparing a Doppler-log with GPS. The peak-flow zone of the Equatorial current should still have been north of us. Could we be through it already? During the night watch, the wind backed a little and we couldn't lay enough easting for the desired course. Morale dipped. However, both morale and the situation soon bettered when the COG improved to 047°T and the SOG to 5.5–6.1 knots. The intermediate turning waypoint north of the Equatorial current was now bearing 045°T and 247 miles distant. We crossed the equator at around 4pm. Though it was our eighth time across, it still warranted a toast to Neptune. The wind veered slowly and remained steadier between 11 and 14 knots, almost 'Goldilocks sailing'; a boisterous chop remained from squallier weather the day before, but good progress was being made, and conditions remained relatively comfortable for upwind sailing. Moonrise came later each day and in the morning the waning crescent glowed warmly.

On 5 August, it became clear that we were not fully out of the Equatorial current. During an unexpected period with no wind, *Spruce* pirouetted while drifting the wrong way. We treated ourselves to a couple of hours under engine: frugal use of limited fuel saved time flopping about, reducing wear on gear and crew. The breeze came back from the southeast, but it was still less than 10 knots. Our focus was on sailing in a direction that held the apparent wind ahead of the beam to achieve maximum

Not always sunny, but always close-hauled

boat speed, thus making sufficient progress against the current while we awaited the predicted 15 knot breeze that would assist going towards the elusive counter-current. The waypoint we had initially been aiming for was no longer relevant. We were cutting the corner and would make our northing more slowly while bucking the reducing current. If we turned on to a more northerly heading, in the hope of escaping the still foul current, our apparent wind speed would fall dramatically, along with boat speed and we would move northwards only slowly while being swept inexorably westwards by the current, away from Panama!

Too much whistling for wind brought a squally 22 knots of breeze. Those night watches, accompanied by drizzle, were miserable but compensated for by signs that the current was clearly reducing; it was now ranging between 0.3 and 0.9 knots and we were at latitude 3°40'N. With the wind having been well ahead of the beam for the past eight days, our wind generator had been keeping our batteries topped up, as the solar panels had struggled to provide enough power due to the overcast skies. An impending major milestone, escaping the Equatorial current, boosted morale noticeably. Although Panama's famous canal was still 3,200 miles ahead, we were well rested, eating a range of foods and, thus far, the initial uncertainty about the viability of our passage plan was dissipating. The wind steering was performing well. When one is attempting to maintain a constant angle close to the wind, wind steering is a boon, dealing with the necessary minor corrections in heading without troubling the crew.

By day 9, we had put another 200 miles under the keel and progressed another degree northwards. The Equatorial current was slack, indeed sometimes a fair counter-current of up to 0.5 knots propelled us onwards. The wind at night varied between 11 and 18 knots, whereas during the day it was averaging around 16–18 knots. We were still sailing fairly close-hauled, with the wind direction generally being SSE. After a night of doing a splendid 6+ knots, the speed diminished due to bashing into lumpy seas. Making 070°T at 5.7 knots SOG was satisfactory. The goal was to maintain a latitude of between 05°N and 06°N for the remaining 3,000 miles to Panama.

We longed for the wind to veer – or reduce – a little so we could achieve the required course without as much heel or thumping into choppy waves. We were seeing far fewer birds now and only an occasional shearwater skimmed close. Flying fish skittered across the wave tops and their drying carcasses lay on deck each morning. The seas were confused, particularly when the wind increased above 15 knots, so we kept our boat speed down to reduce motion and to minimise the risk of breakages. We still had a long way to go. During the beautiful sunrise on the morning of day 10, the sun came up on the opposite side of the bow from the day before, a visual demonstration of our course changing more towards the east.

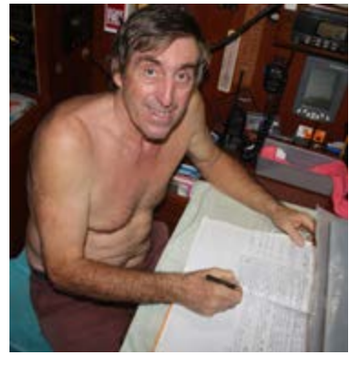
By day 12, we were fully into the routine of being on passage. 'Another day . . .' We monitored small milestones to gain a sense of progress and to feel rewarded: passing the 1,000 and then 500 miles to go points, countdowns of the estimated distances ahead and the psychological importance of reaching the half-way point. It was all about maintaining morale and a sense of achievement on our longest passage yet. There was not much point at this stage in predicting arrival dates, although some time during the first week of September was looking possible. Conditions could change rather a lot between here and Panama. Progress was fairly swift at around 6 knots over the ground. However, we knew there would be zones ahead with lighter winds and winds from abaft the beam

A fine day for laundry

where speed might drop below 3 knots. We jealously guarded our reserves of fuel for the final 1,000 miles where we anticipated periods of total calm.

Breakfast continued to be cereal and fresh fruit. We added hard-boiled eggs into salads and wraps for lunch: the race was on to consume a copious number of eggs before they went bad. Slowly the fridge emptied and fresh provisions reduced, but our stores aboard included over three months of canned and dry goods.

Light overnight winds on day 13 were compensated for by 2 knots of fair current, which we still enjoyed. Cruising friends ashore monitored the current models, the data showing that we were passing on the north side of the centre of a huge clockwise gyration, which would hopefully be providing a fair current for a while longer. The downside of the fair current with the wind direction partially opposed was a current against wind effect creating short choppy seas. Fortunately, the waves were not yet too large due to less wind overnight. We had our fingers firmly crossed that the wind direction would go more southerly and thus remove the conflict between these two elements that affected our progress and comfort so much. As the wind came more abeam, we took the opportunity to do domestic chores. It was good to clean and air the boat throughout.



Uncomfortable humidity

Making steady progress eastward

The following day saw our latitude at almost 06°N. A distance of 1,916 miles lay in our wake, covered at a respectable average speed of 5.8 knots and we estimated our distance to destination to be 2,315 miles. The latest course made good was 095°T and we were now able to aim either slightly north or south of east to position ourselves at the optimum

A roosting visitor

latitude to balance wind speed and current. Too far north and the wind diminished. Too far south and the counter-current would fade. Worst case, we might rejoin the foul current. The wind was almost on the beam and stronger than expected, up to 22 knots in squalls. There was a mass of roiling cloud just north of us, which may have increased the local wind speed. The current was neutral or sometimes slightly fair at 0.3 knots.

One model showed a low-pressure zone developing ahead of us at latitude 08°N. We moved slowly south, aiming for a waypoint at 05°N 105°W. Meanwhile, just north of the ITCZ, cyclogenesis was in full swing as the northern cyclone season was currently active! As we moved east, turbulent convection activity increased and was occurring farther south than when it had been further west. If we should run into the foul Equatorial current, we would need to hold a more northerly latitude to stay clear and accept the more squally conditions. Later in the passage, we could take a view on when finally to move north towards the Bay of Panama. The humidity increased and living conditions below became much more uncomfortable.

High astern a frigatebird *(Fregata magnificens)* soared in our wake. We assumed he must reside at Clipperton Island, an atoll we had passed on our way from Mexico to the Gambiers in March the previous year. A number of different types of shearwater often swooped past, looking for morsels of fishy fare disturbed by our passage.

Celebrations were in order the morning of day 16 when we reached the halfway point. 2,100 miles to go to the Panama Canal! From here on, we anticipated the wind being lighter and more often from abaft the beam. Unfortunately, a breeze from behind the beam at any less than 13 knots slows our boat speed markedly, so we speculated that it would likely be another 15 days before our arrival at Balboa.

On day 18, winds of 18–24 knots came from SSW through the night. By the morning, skies remained low, grey and menacing but with fewer squalls. The forecast indicated the wind would reduce later that day and through the next night. A satisfyingly fair current of between 0.4–1.2 knots boosted progress. The nearest land was Mexico. Acapulco lay some 700 miles away. As we progressed,

Troublesome convection ahead

Coco Islands, where we expected them!

the North American continent drew slowly closer. However, our destination, the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal at Balboa, was still 1,600 miles ahead.

After 21 days, clear overnight skies and a glorious gibbous moon illuminated our path. The favourable current disappeared, displaced by neutral or 0.1 knots of adverse flow. The wind was expected to slowly increase to 12 knots, then up to 20 knots, from SSW during the next couple days. The juggle of which latitude to sail on continued. Too far south lay a foul current and to the north lay lighter winds and more convectional weather.

The short lull in wind, seas and rain gave another opportunity to have a thorough clean of the cabin, wash sheets and make extra water. Airing the boat with the hatches open was a boon in the tropical humidity. We tackled a refresher of our Spanish language skills after 16 months in French Polynesia. By the time we had departed Mexico a year and a half ago, we had developed a good smattering of the language, but this was now very rusty.

With around 1,000 miles to go, dark grey foreboding squalls periodically materialised. These brought winds of around 20 knots accompanied by 30-degree wind shifts. More frustrating was the lull of only 9–11 knots immediately behind each squall. It felt as if we were constantly reefing down and then shaking out the reefs. These were not the intense squalls associated with huge convection cells and compared with similar conditions earlier in the passage, when the wind came from well ahead of the beam, these squalls had less impact. San Cristóbal in the Galápagos lay south of us, to the north El Salvador in Central America. Only 140 miles ahead was Costa Rica's Cocos Island. We expected to pass close enough to see it at dawn the following day.

Sure enough, the following day, we carried out a check with the radar when we were at about 12 miles' range to verify the chart's accuracy of the island's position. It was still dark and thick rain and cloud obscured our view. One hour later, with dawn broken and a rain shower retreating, we sighted the island and ended up passing some seven miles north of it. A vessel appeared far on the horizon pointing in our direction and we hoped it was not a patrol boat coming to intercept us. Apart from anything else, it would render void the 26 days built up in Covid quarantine! As we scooted past at 7 knots the craft eventually dropped back and did not pursue us. Onwards! Only another 550 miles to Balboa.

The next night and morning were horrible! Convection cells with large thunderstorms passed just north of us bringing wind shifts of 50 degrees and the wind speed jumped between 10 and 25 knots. We had to keep the reefs in, ready for the blasts, but that left us under-canvassed much of the time. We ended up running the engine for a short period while waiting for the wind to restabilise. Panama was only 400 miles away, but we still needed to conserve fuel in anticipation for perhaps two full days under power at the end.

The following night, having been running under mainsail and poled headsail at over 6 knots, the wind direction shifted into that annoying zone where it is far

Downwind sailing

enough abaft the beam that the headsail is blanketed by the mainsail but not far enough around that it is possible to use a poled-out headsail. So, we changed course early and turned onto a heading of ENE, towards the Gulf of Panama. There were signs that the current was slackening off and we forecast that there would be a foul current towards Punta Mala. Our plan was to sail an extra 28 miles on a wide curve into the Gulf, hoping to minimise the adverse effect of that current. Despite the sailing difficulties, we made positive progress in advancing our ship's clock the final hour to Panama time.

Our penultimate day on passage was very wet with some strange winds which blew from all directions, not as forecast, possibly due to rain squalls and thunder clouds. After a few cycles of messing about with poles and the preventer, gybing and tacking in breezes of between 6 and 12 knots, we gave up sailing and pressed the 'iron topsail' into service. This avoided tiring ourselves out with frequent sail configuration changes in the pouring rain and, at this point, we had plenty of fuel in hand. Two whales cruised alongside for a short period, perhaps a minke and her calf. Sue's exclamation 'I can see right into its blowhole' brought Andy on deck rapidly. These creatures look truly huge from a 5m range. We also saw several leaping blue marlins during the final few days on passage, their beautiful palette of iridescent colours shimmering in the sun.

Sue in a supermarket in Panama

On 28 August, at 0810 local time, we anchored off Flamenco Island as instructed by the Signal Station watch officer. Over the 30-day passage we logged 4,225 miles on our Doppler log and 4,167 miles on the GPS Trip. During this time we appear to have experienced 59 miles-worth of adverse current and made an average speed of 5.9 knots. In addition, we used the engine for a total of 61 hours, mainly during the last two days, but also for a few hours on departure, a couple of short spells on passage when winds fell light, and a half hour run every five days to keep the engine sweet.

We had commissioned an agent in Panama before we departed Hiva Oa and he promptly arranged for our arrival Covid PCR tests so, by 1600 on our arrival day, we were fully cleared into Panama and at liberty to go ashore. Our agent had also made arrangements to get us through the Panama Canal within a few days, before any new restrictions might delay our transit. Three days after our arrival in Panama we motored out of the final chamber of Gatun Locks into the Caribbean Sea. We were safely on the Atlantic Ocean side of the Americas.

Although our experience is a 'single boat' snapshot, we believe that this is a generally viable route during the month of August. Patrick, with whom we discussed this route in Nuku Hiva (see beginning of article), also sailed it, but not until October 2020. He experienced less favourable conditions with more convectional weather and more headwinds and had a rougher passage overall. His vessel was 57ft compared to our 42ft but his passage ended up similar in duration. Looking further back, in late 2012 we met a New Zealand boat that had previously travelled from the Marquesas in December. They had had light headwinds, short choppy seas and had run out of fuel near the Cocos Island. The Costa Rica Navy brought them fuel while at sea.

MEDICAL EMERGENCY:

RESCUE MISSION IN WEST PAPUA, INDONESIA

by Miranda Baker (s/v *Fortaleza*)

Miranda Baker and Elliot Russo bought their 1985 steel hulled 48ft Mason, Fortaleza, *in New Zealand during Covid and spent nine months on the hard there refitting her for remote cruising. After selling everything that wouldn't fit on the boat, they eventually set off to sail the world in 2023 with a vague plan to head west until they ran out of money. They have now clocked up over 14,000 miles together. Before this adventure Miranda had no sailing experience but was obsessed with houses that move, while Elliot, as a qualified Offshore Yachtmaster, had already left thousands of miles in his wake. A version of this article was published in the June 2025 edition of* Yachting Monthly. *Their adventures are recorded on Instagram at* **@nosharksnopirates**.

Elliot and I have spent the last four years living aboard our Mason 48 *Fortaleza*, cruising around New Zealand, Niue, Tonga, Fiji, New Caledonia, Australia and Tasmania. By November 2024 we had reached the vast and wonderful cruising ground of Indonesia. Raja Ampat had always been in the 'Top 5' of both our bucket lists, thanks to its still thriving reefs and fabulous diving, so we pushed on up there as soon as we had checked into Tual from Gove in Australia.

Exploring the area over the next three months, we had our minds blown by the karst rock formations of Misool and the giant mantas of Wayag. We dived on bustling, busy and diverse reefs, hung out for weeks in remote spots, met some wonderful fellow cruisers and fell in love with Indonesians and a particularly friendly cuttlefish called Colin. Our time in this

Elliot and Miranda, in Indonesia, having sailed over 14,000 miles together

The couple seek out empty and remote anchorages on Fortaleza, *their Mason 48*

The karst rock formations of Raja Ampat provide a stunning backdrop to magical remote cruising

Elliot and Miranda enjoy a view of the fringing coral reefs of Wayag, Raja Ampat

isolated part of the world was nothing short of amazing.

At the end of February 2025, we had started to make our way slowly to Malaysia, heading south back to Misool from Sorong. We arrived at Weeim Island in the afternoon of 21 February. Weeim is a tiny jungle-clad island with a small longboat fishing village at one end. At the opposite end is a lagoon, uncharted but possible to anchor in if you have someone on the bow directing the passage through

Fortaleza *is a steel hulled, Mason 48, built in Auckland in 1985*

Raja Ampat provides up close and personal encounters with the richest marine biodiversity on earth

Some anchorages are easier than others!

Elliot and Miranda can't hide their smiles after diving with giant manta rays in Wayag

the narrow entrance and around the bommies. We anchored there, expecting to head off again early the next morning as soon as there was enough light to navigate our way back out.

As usual we enjoyed a relaxed evening with a meal and a game or two of Uno and went to bed.

Just after midnight, Elliot woke to find he couldn't move his right arm or leg. Initially he thought he must have slept weirdly on a nerve and a little while later some movement came back. He wondered if he'd had a stroke and made his way to the heads to see if we had any aspirin. The noise of him moving around woke me and I rather grumpily asked him what he was doing.

"I think I've had a stroke" are words no one ever wants to hear from someone they love, but in this place, at this time, they were totally terrifying. Weeim is 70 miles from Sorong, the nearest town. The nearest boats with AIS were showing up 40 miles south of us. The village on the island was uncontactable. And there was no way I could drive *Fortaleza* out of the lagoon on my own, in the dark. We were completely alone and Elliot was in trouble.

The dawning of the seriousness of what was happening clawed its way through our half-asleep brains. I scrambled through our medical supplies for aspirin. There were boxes of every other drug you could possibly imagine, for every single medical emergency, except this one. I panicked. I didn't know who to call or what to do. Elliot was on the sofa, looking frightened. Realising that we had no medical way to help the situation my attention turned to finding help. My phone was dead. Elliot's was working but I didn't know how to work it. Fumbling, trying not to freak out, I found an email address for our insurance company and bashed out a clumsy email asking for immediate emergency help. They replied immediately with a WhatsApp number to text and within minutes I was texting a medical team. They confirmed what we suspected – Elliot had had a stroke. And almost on cue, he had another one. Worse. This time his mouth drooped into a sideways gash, and his entire right side flopped uselessly. He looked terrified and mouthed "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry" with tears soaking his cheeks. I wondered if he was going to die, here, alone, with me in this hot, gluey, thick-aired, dark place.

My insurance company contact said that the team was arranging a helicopter to rescue us but I knew that this couldn't be true. I imagined some young girl sitting in a busy office in London with no understanding of the isolation that

surrounded us. The jungle on Weeim comes to the water's edge and, as with much of Indonesia, there's the possibility of crocodiles in the mangroves. There was nowhere for a helicopter to land or to safely deploy a rescuer. And anyway, in three months in this part of the country I hadn't seen a single helicopter.

We waited . . . and after some time received a text to confirm that indeed there was, in fact, no helicopter. It was time to Mayday for help.

Making a Mayday call is a thing most sailors only ever imagine. It's the final option. It's the last resort. My heart sank at the idea that we had found ourselves in this situation. It felt as if everything hung on that one word. Elliot's life hung on it. I took a deep breath and radioed "Mayday Mayday Mayday – this is yacht *Fortaleza*, yacht *Fortaleza*."

Slow seconds passed in silence.

I tried again. Slower, louder, and waited, my eyes locked on Elliot's – both of us holding our breath.

Not a single sound broke the silence. Nothing.

There was no one out there. We were completely on our own. The floor beneath me seemed to give way and I had a sense of falling as if I were spinning out of control in a void so vast I had no context to grab on to. It is singularly the most weird and terrifying feeling I have ever experienced in my life. Darkness, distance, heat, fear, love, isolation, panic, surrender - all spinning together in a whirl. A ride I couldn't get off.

I found myself on deck whispering prayers to the dark sky, to any God listening.

Down below again, I wrote a text message to Wick, the owner of Tampa Garam Marina in Sorong and the only local I knew in the region. I asked for his help and pressed send, weirdly embarrassed that my message might wake him up.

We heard again from the insurance company representative: the medical emergency team there was trying to contact a Search and Rescue (SAR) team; meanwhile, Elliot should rest and I should wake him every 30 minutes to make sure he was still conscious. Instead, every 10 minutes, I sat on the bed beside him holding my breath to hear his. I have never felt as alone in my entire life. The night was so dark. Other humans were so far away. The silence around us was so suffocating. Elliot, my best friend and captain, usually so strong and certain, desperately needed help

Sunsets on passage never grow old

Anchored beside Josh and Kat on Phoenix *at Wofoh Island, Raja Ampat*

we couldn't get. Just writing this now, three months later, I am transported back to the desolation.

I set about packing up the boat. If we were going to be rescued, we would need to leave *Fortaleza* here, inside this reef. Everything we own is on *Fortaleza*. She is more than our home; she is a member of our little team – precious beyond words. It seemed unfathomable that we could abandon her here with no idea of when or how we could return. I tried to make her as secure as I could while I waited for news of our rescue.

It was a long night. I kept busy, riding on adrenaline and fear. By morning Elliot had regained his movement and his face had returned to normal. It was a huge relief but Google had made it clear we weren't out of the woods medically and we were both very afraid that he could have a third episode.

Our insurance company rep told us that they had made contact with the SAR authorities in Sorong and they were preparing a team to get underway. They estimated the team would be with us in 9 hours. Even at full tilt the journey was a 6-hour passage and they needed time to get all the required personnel together. It was something. It was hope. Help was actually coming. And, soon after that news, my phone rang and a voice said "Miranda, it's Wick, I'm going to help you" – the first voice aside from Elliot's that I had heard since this nightmare began. I bit my cheek to stop myself crying.

Quite quickly Wick and I hatched a plan for him to deliver two cruisers we knew, Josh and Albert, to the Sorong SAR boat so that they could hitch a ride out with it to rescue *Fortaleza* and sail her back, over 24 hours, to Wick's marina. It was a huge act of kindness that Elliot and I will never forget and a reminder that the cruising community is a truly beautiful thing. To help Josh and Albert, I spent the day filming operational videos about *Fortaleza*'s unique quirks and secrets, humbled by the generosity of these friends.

At some point during the next few hours, exhausted, stressed and busy, I noticed a dugout approaching with two men on board, one of whom was dressed in what looked like a homemade police shirt. There are some places in Indonesia where locals try to demand money from cruisers, pretending that they are an authority, and my tired, triggered brain wondered if I were now dealing with pirates. The two men boarded without waiting to be invited, teeth stained beetle-juice red and grinning, and I am ashamed to say that I was spooked. But

After his 14 hour rescue, Elliot spent two nights in hospital in Sorong, West Papua with no medical treatment or diagnosis

I shouldn't have been. After a lot of gesticulating, misunderstandings and failed Google Translate attempts, we finally established that Bernard, the policeman, actually *was* a policeman and he had been sent from the local village to see if we were OK. It was a heartwarming moment of connection and, even though there was nothing he could do, it was reassuring to know word of our predicament was out there.

At 3.30pm, 14 hours after Elliot's first stroke, the SAR boat finally came into view. Only then did I allow myself a gulping sob. I stood on deck holding my breath as I watched the crew clamber off the SAR boat into a red dinghy, which made its way towards us through the narrow reef opening. The relief at seeing other living people, other humans who were able to help, after so many hours feeling so alone is not something I can put into words. Suffice to say the hugs were the most heartfelt I have ever given, the gratitude overwhelming.

Within an hour, Elliot and I were on the SAR boat – Elliot on oxygen, with a doctor and several other medics in attendance, and I was watching *Fortaleza* already weaving her way out of the lagoon behind us as we sped away.

The SAR boat, a large motor catamaran, was staffed by more people than I could count. They were amazing. Respectfully giving us room to rest and process what had happened, whilst at the same time welcoming us with such sweet warmth. The main area of the boat was a sort of living room – like many SAR boats in Indonesia, the crew members live on board. A meal was prepared during the 6-hour trip back to Sorong. Fresh fish curry and rice – the best I've ever eaten – followed by bread, spread thick with gloopy condensed milk.

Incredibly they also didn't have aspirin. And while they kept a keen eye on Elliot for the entire trip, the only medical intervention he received was oxygen. It has since come to light that these vital resources are desperately under-funded but, amazingly, are free for everyone, including international cruisers, to call upon. We were not asked for a penny for the 12-hour round trip the SAR boat made. Without the SAR team I don't know what we would have done. I don't like to imagine it. We are forever in their debt and have undertaken to raise money to help them upskill on training for medical emergencies and first aid best practice. Our plan is to fund some cardiac training for their first responder teams and to stock them up with aspirin – it seems the least that we can do.

Elliot and Miranda were eventually med-evac'd by Learjet to a Singapore ICU

ICU in Singapore identified a previously undiagnosed hole in Elliot's heart

In Sorong, Elliot was transferred to a local hospital that had no doctors, no bed sheets and, unbelievably, no aspirin. In the end it was the sailing community in Tampa Garam Marina who dug through their medical supplies to find some, delivered to us, along with hugs, in the middle of the night by Wick. Elliot finally swallowing 6 years out-of-date pills 24 hours after his stroke.

Our insurance company spent the next 30 hours trying to organise a medical evacuation (med-evac) flight to Elliot's native Australia. But Australia wouldn't take us without a doctor's report and so, out of desperation, we were finally transferred by Learjet to ICU in Singapore, seemingly straight into an episode of *House*. Every beeping machine you can imagine, every test, every specialist, clean, efficient, reassuring. An MRI taken there showed that Elliot had indeed had a stroke and his physical recovery was hailed as something of a miracle, one we will take without questions. The culprit? A previously undiagnosed hole in his heart. One hell of a way to find out.

Three months on the adrenaline is settling. I am visiting family in the UK and Elliot is in Sydney awaiting heart surgery to plug his hole before we regroup together in Sorong, where *Fortaleza* is – apparently – still afloat, patiently waiting for us to return.

Fortaleza *waits patiently for Elliot and Miranda in Indonesia*

SOLO VOYAGE TO SEVEN CONTINENTS:

MOVING FROM WINGS TO SAILS

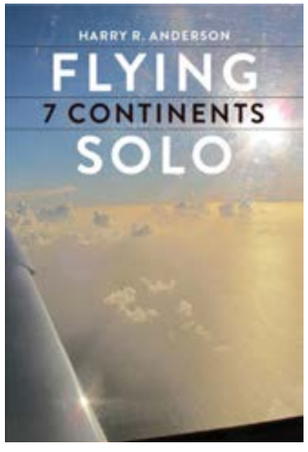
by Harry Anderson (s/v *Phywave*)

Harry R Anderson is a PhD engineer/entrepreneur who has created businesses that develop software tools for designing and optimising wireless networks. With his flight to Antarctica in 2014, he became only the fifth person to fly solo to all seven continents. With the completion of his solo voyage to seven continents in January 2025, he became the first person in history to both fly and sail solo to all the continents. Over five decades he has travelled to more than 100 countries, hitchhiked across Africa, worked on four continents, and lived in England and France. Dr Anderson is the author of Fixed Broadband Wireless System Design *(John Wiley & Sons, 2003),* Flying 7 Continents Solo *(Phywave, 2015), and his upcoming book* Sailing 7 Continents Solo *(Phywave, 2025). He lives on Bainbridge Island in the Pacific Northwest. Visit* **phywave.com** *for more details.*

Harry Anderson, crossing the Atlantic westbound, December 2024

I was trying to get some sleep in the shallow Antarctic night when there are only a few hours of solid darkness in between long half-light dusks and dawns, a sunlight limbo, that reinforced my feeling of being stuck in between. I was sailing back from Antarctica across the renowned and feared Drake Passage, about halfway towards my destination of Puerto Williams, a small town in Tierra del Fuego. I hove-to and essentially let the boat drift for 48 hours to wait out a violent storm north of me that refused to abate. I finally gave up waiting and started sailing north again despite 6m waves and gale-force winds. My tentative sleep was disturbed by a new motion of the boat that seemed much faster and more heeled over than when I had turned in. Getting out of my bunk, pulling on my boots and jacket, and going out on deck, I saw the genoa was fully unfurled instead of having three reefs in as I had left it. It made no sense. Then I looked at the genoa furling line on the port side deck. It was lying there slack, having snapped at some point while I slept, letting the genoa fully deploy. The boat was ripping along in 40-knot winds and violent waves driven by a large sail I could no longer control.

That was one of the crisis moments on the voyage I had undertaken, a voyage that began with flying an aeroplane or, more specifically, while writing a book about flying an aeroplane to seven continents. Between 2011 and 2014 I had flown solo in my single-engine aircraft N788W, a Lancair Columbia 300, to all seven continents. In 2015 I published a book about those flights, *Flying 7 Continents Solo*.



Harry's companion book

As I was finishing the book, it occurred to me that if I were to sail solo to seven continents I'd become the first person to do both. I know the other solo pilots who have landed on all the continents – there's only a few of us – and none of them are offshore sailors. Becoming the first person to both fly and sail solo to all the continents became the primary objective that drove the voyage described in this article.

I had sailed for many years, first as a teenager in my dad's boat off the coast of Southern California and later in a small Capri 22 sailboat on Fern Ridge Reservoir near Eugene, Oregon, where I lived for many years. After moving to Bainbridge Island, Washington, I bought a Bavaria 37 which I sailed around the Pacific Northwest for 12 years, though I never took it offshore through the Strait of Juan de Fuca. In 2018 I sold the Bavaria to my neighbours across the street. I wasn't sure I would ever own another sailboat – it seemed like sailing was a chapter of my life that had come to an end.

While the idea of sailing solo to seven continents was compelling, I had many reservations about it. With my previous sailing experience, I knew that sailing could be a lot of work and physically demanding. It was also really slow compared to flying my plane. Ocean crossings that took hours in the plane would take weeks under sail. Being on the ocean for such extended periods also meant I would be much more exposed to bad weather. With the plane I could easily outrun bad weather or fly around it, something I'd done many times. If the weather was really bad, I could always stay on the ground and wait for a better day. I couldn't do any of those things while sailing. Once offshore, I would have to deal with whatever weather came along. With sufficient warning I could run for shelter, but shelter could be days away. Considering all of this, while writing the flying book in 2015, I dismissed the idea of sailing solo to seven continents. "Nope, not for me" I thought.

Fast forward to 2020 when I changed my mind for two reasons. First, in the intervening years I had completed two more solo international flights I really wanted to do. In 2018 I flew my plane over the geographic North Pole from Resolute in northern Canada to Longyearbyen in the Svalbard Islands. The second flight was a westbound solo circumnavigation that took me through Alaska, Russia, Japan, China, Kazakhstan and across Europe. With those two flights completed, in addition to my original flights to seven continents, I felt satisfied with what I'd accomplished in solo international flying. I didn't feel a need to do more; I wanted to turn my attention to something that offered a new challenge.

The second reason I changed my mind was the global COVID pandemic. Like most people, I spent much of 2020 sitting around my house, not able to travel anywhere and frustrated by an inability to do something truly engaging. To deal with that, I decided to resurrect the idea of sailing solo to seven continents. If nothing else, thinking about it and planning it would give me something interesting to do.

I began my research into such a voyage by reading the many online blogs written by people who have been cruising the world's oceans, sometimes for years. I also started buying books, mostly cruising guides but also books about equipping and provisioning a sailboat for long ocean passages. Books written and published by Jimmy Cornell, in particular *World Cruising Routes* and *Cornells' Ocean Atlas*, have become fundamental sources of information for anyone undertaking their own voyage across an ocean.

PLANNING THE ROUTE

I wanted to complete this voyage and accomplish my mission as efficiently as possible. This wasn't intended to be a pleasure cruise or a holiday. I laid out an approximate route that would take me to all the continents and then consulted ocean pilot charts and route recommendations from Cornell's books to set a schedule. The primary driver for the schedule was making it to Antarctica towards the end of the austral summer when ice concentrations could be expected to be the least dense. That meant I had to be there in January or February at the latest. I also didn't want to be crossing oceans during the typical tropical storm seasons. If I left the east coast of the US in late spring, May for example, I would miss the hurricane season crossing to Europe and then proceed south after it ended to arrive in Antarctica in the desired austral summer window.

I wanted to begin my voyage on the East Coast of the United States. Oddly, landing in Europe was out of the way because all the other continents were progressively south and west of my starting point. In effect, I would have to back-track east to reach Europe, then begin sailing south and west to reach the other continents. Not surprisingly, I made some major modifications to the original route as the voyage progressed while maintaining the imperative of landing on all the continents.

BUYING AND OUTFITTING THE BOAT

Because I was going to Antarctica I was determined to buy an aluminium boat. I considered some used boats I found online but they were located in places that were inaccessible due to COVID. I gave up on that idea and instead decided to order a new boat I could configure exactly the way I wanted. I had been a high-tech entrepreneur with a very successful business that made software tools for designing and optimizing wireless networks. I sold that business at the peak of the tech boom in 2000 so, unlike other cruisers, money was not an issue for me. I could afford to buy exactly the boat I wanted.

Phywave

After considering boats from Boreal, Ovni and Allures, I settled on an Allures 40.9. It was not much bigger than the Bavaria 37 that I had sailed solo for many years, so I felt comfortable with handling it on my own. Generally, I think boats about this size are ideal for single-handed ocean sailing. Significantly, Allures was represented in the US by Swiftsure Yachts which is headquartered in Seattle, a short distance from my home on Bainbridge Island. Ryan Helling in Seattle and Kevin Bray, Swiftsure's project manager at the Allures shipyard in Cherbourg, were instrumental

in getting the boat specified and built the way I wanted. Both are expert sailors and more experienced at offshore sailing than I was at the time.

After considering and rejecting many contrived names, I named the boat *Phywave*, a name I had used for a consulting engineering business I had started after selling my software business. I wanted something that was unique in the US Coast Guard registry and *Phywave* certainly qualified.

Allures promised a one-year delivery after I ordered the boat in September 2020 but it actually took them 18 months to deliver *Phywave*, something I was certainly unhappy about, though there was nothing I could do to change it. My boat was transported fully-rigged on a SevenStar transport ship and offloaded in Baltimore on 1 June 2022. Boarding *Phywave* as the transport ship lowered it into the water, I drove it south to Annapolis where I put it in a marina for final outfitting.

I wanted a Schaefer furling boom on *Phywave*, something Allures wouldn't install, so I had lined up a rigger in Annapolis to do that work, as well as add a Forespar track-mounted whisker pole, something else Allures wouldn't do. I also added a watermaker, a 6 kW Northern Lights generator, an SSB radio, an Iridium GO! satellite data system and a dodger and bimini. In addition, I bought an AB RIB dinghy and a 6 hp Yamaha outboard to run it.

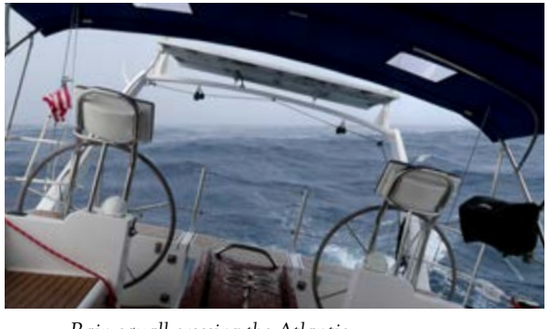
With the boat outfitted, I loaded it with provisions and sailed down to Norfolk, Virginia, for final refuelling before setting off across the Atlantic.

EUROPE

I left Norfolk on 2 August 2022 and headed east to the Azores. My first night sailing offshore was a pivotal event for this voyage. With the AIS and the radar monitoring for navigation hazards and the autopilot driving the boat, I went to bed. Letting the boat sail off into the darkness with nobody standing watch and nobody at the helm was an essential thing I needed to master on this voyage. After those first few nights I was convinced I could do this solo voyage. Every solo sailor has his or her own approach to sleeping and standing watch. Some alternate 45 minute periods, some 2 hours. At home I normally would sleep for 4 hours, then be awake for an hour, then usually go back to sleep for about 3 hours. With a high level of confidence in my boat and electronics, I decided to just keep that same schedule and not try to artificially impose another with shorter sleep periods.

I soon discovered that I was very sensitive to the motion of the boat and the sound of the wind. Rain squalls hitting in the middle of the night would quickly

Approaching rain squall



Rain squall crossing the Atlantic

get me out of the rack and up on deck wearing a headlamp to reduce sail.

The winds and currents on the first ocean crossing were variable but I still managed to average 5 knots on that passage. I arrived in Horta on 23 August, happy to have made it across the Atlantic hurricane zone without having to deal with any tropical storms. I cleared immigration and customs and was able to get a convenient, close-in berth since it was now past the peak sailing season in the Azores. I visited the usual cruiser places in Horta and, of course, following tradition, painted *Phywave*'s name on the jetty.

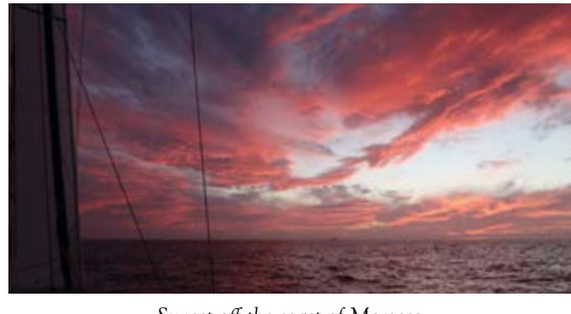
After about a week there repairing and improving various things, and topping off the diesel tank, I started my next leg to Lagos, Portugal and my first continent landing. The winds on this passage were less cooperative than I had expected so I motored more to make tangible progress. As I approached the coast of Portugal I crossed a very busy north–south shipping lane at night. I was surprised at how well-coordinated these ships were. Very little VHF radio traffic was needed to avoid collisions. I had one 400m container ship pass less than 1km in front of me but no radio call was needed. We both were using AIS and knew no collision was possible. It's important to maintain course and speed in these situations so that AIS estimates of the potential for collisions remain accurate.

Phywave*'s name on the jetty at Horta, Azores*

Pushing through an early morning fog bank along the coast with visibility less than 1km, I arrived at the marina in Lagos on 11 September, cleared in and was assigned a berth on a pontoon near the pedestrian bridge. I treated myself to a steak dinner to celebrate my first continent and then wandered around the centre of Lagos, enjoying the street music and the late-night crowds in restaurants and bars.

AFRICA

I spent three weeks in Lagos, including a short trip to Switzerland to spend time with round-the-world pilot friends who were having a reunion in September. Though my long-term plan was to land in South Africa near the end of my voyage, I decided to sail across to Tangiers in Morocco to add my second continent. It was a short trip from Lagos, only complicated by high winds through the Strait of Gibraltar followed by dense fog as I approached Tangiers. Making my way into the marina I was surprised to see several boats still tied to the reception pontoon waiting for the fog to lift, the fog I had just come through. Every sailor has their own personal limits for safe travel. As an instrument-rated pilot, I am accustomed to flying



Sunset off the coast of Morocco

around in the clouds where I can't see anything and must rely on instruments. That's a three-dimensional navigation problem. Driving a boat around in fog is a two-dimensional navigation problem, inherently much easier.

The marina in Tangiers was busy and, though I had a reservation, they didn't find a space for me until late that night. That berth was nearest the inside wall and I could only access it because of *Phywave*'s shallow draft with the centreboard up.

I spent just a few days in Tangiers. I had been to Morocco a few times before, travelling farther inland, even landing my plane in Casablanca, so I was not really motivated to tour the country. I added Africa to my continent tally and moved on.

SOUTH AMERICA

I left Tangiers on 10 October en route to South America with a planned stop in the Canary Islands. Rather than go to Gran Canaria, which was getting busy with boats arriving for the annual ARC, I instead booked a berth at Marina Rubicon on Lanzarote. I had a good time there. I rented a car to explore this volcanic desert island while enjoying the many restaurants around the marina. I replaced my Iridium GO! which had failed on the passage from Tangiers. I also had repairs made to the luff tape of my mainsail. I was still getting used to how best to use the Schaefer furling boom; if the roll up is not done properly, a lot of wear can result to the luff tape, especially around the batten ends. Such chafing would be an on-going problem on this voyage.

I left Lanzarote on 21 October, headed for Cabedelo, Brazil. Though I had wanted to stop there, I decided to skip the Cabo Verde Islands because I was concerned about making my Antarctica sailing window. I had good winds for the first part of this passage, usually sailing downwind or on a broad reach. I got more adept at setting the genoa on the whisker pole to take best advantage of these winds. I crossed the equator southbound at 0623GMT on 10 November 2022 and later made a point of sailing closely past the St Peter and St Paul Archipelago, a tiny outcropping of rock far from the coast of Brazil but still occupied as a research station of some sort.

I arrived at Cabedelo, Brazil, on 14 November and made my way south down the Paraiba do Norte River to the Marina Jacaré Village for my third continent landing. Using stern ties and bow mooring lines, the marina could accommodate perhaps 30 to 40 boats. While at Jacaré I enjoyed hanging out with a great group of cruisers at the marina's restaurant/bar. I was also able to fill the fuel and propane tanks and reprovision for the next passages south.

St Peter and St Paul Archipelago, Brazil

ANTARCTICA

From Cabedelo it was still a long way to Antarctica so I planned a few stops in between to break up the passage. The first was at Mar del Plata, Argentina, after sailing far to the east to avoid rough weather along the coast of Brazil. I cleared into Argentina so I could make use of anchorages along the coast going south. To wait out one of Argentina's famous Roaring Forties pamperos, violent wind storms out of the west, I sheltered in an open roadstead in the lee of a 300ft cliff just north of the east entrance of the Strait of Magellan. I had good holding in 8m while I waited there for a few days for the storm to move on.

Sailboats rafted in Puerto Williams

Adjusting my speed so I would arrive at the entrance to Le Maire Strait when I had both a north wind and south-setting tidal current, I had an easy passage into Tierra del Fuego and the Beagle Channel. I anchored at a few places on my way to Puerto Williams, Chile, the usual gateway for yachts headed to Antarctica, arriving there on 9 January 2023.

My time in Puerto Williams was busy loading *Phywave* with fuel and provisions for the trip to Antarctica. I bought extra jerry cans because I knew cruisers sometimes begged diesel from research stations there when they ran out. I also spent time at the Chilean Armada (navy) office showing them the Initial Environment Impact (IEE) and Waste Permit documents I had submitted and had had approved by the US government. With that, they issued me a float permit itinerary, a zarpe, for my voyage to Antarctica.

Phywave *anchored in Antarctica*

I left Puerto Williams on 17 January and stopped for two nights at Isla Lennox waiting for gale-force winds to clear out of the Drake Passage. Leaving there on 19 January, I had inconsistent winds out of the north; first light and variable, then picking up speed as I continued farther south, crossed 60°S latitude and entered the Antarctic Territory. Nearing the continent, the warmer north wind over the cold waters of Antarctica created dense fog. I could detect cruise ships on AIS passing within a few kilometres but I couldn't see them.

My destination was Deception Island where I knew there was a good anchorage in Stancomb Cove in the northwest corner of the caldera. With clearing weather, I anchored in Stancomb on 24 January. I spent a week there, launching the dinghy and going ashore on the second day to have a look around and, in so doing, adding the fourth continent to my mission accomplishments. There was one yacht there when I arrived and a few others came and went during that week, which saw a mix of sunny skies, 40 knot winds and even snow and a blizzard for a while.

Deception Island from Stancomb Cove anchorage

Standing on the beach at Deception Island

I considered going farther south along the Antarctic Peninsula but finally decided I had accomplished my primary goal and continuing south would increase the risk. With that decision made, I left Deception Island on 30 January and headed back north into what I thought would be a favourable weather window. A large storm in the north half of the Drake Passage, which I thought would have cleared out by the time I got there, stalled instead. To wait it out, I hove-to in the middle of the Drake Passage for a time. That strategy was only partly successful as I got tired of waiting and started sailing north again just as the storm started to move. The return passage from Antarctica took seven days, with some of that time spent replacing a broken mainsheet block and repairing the genoa furling line that snapped in high winds letting the sail fully deploy. It was a long, cold task at the bow with those winds and rough seas, the frigid water splashing over me as I worked.

After a stop anchored at Isla Picton, I finally returned to Puerto Williams on 10 February. My voyage to Antarctica, certainly the Mount Everest of my 'Solo Seven Continents' mission, was a success but there were many things on the boat that needed to be repaired. The six months I had been on *Phywave* had been intense at times, so I decided to take a two-month break at home.

AUSTRALIA

To move my project forward, I decided to hire a local delivery crew to move *Phywave* from Puerto Williams to Puerto Montt in Chile along the channels of Patagonia where high winds and rachas make anchoring difficult and usually require multiple shorelines to hold a boat's position. Setting shorelines when solo is often challenging, almost impossible in high winds.

I planned to begin my passage across the Pacific to Australia, the fifth continent, from Puerto Montt where I decided to have the boat hauled for new anti-fouling and to replace the anodes which, in one case, had been completely eaten away.

I set off from Puerto Montt on 7 July and headed for French Polynesia. Initially, my intended destination was Gambier, then Tahiti, so I sailed north along the west coast of South America looking for the southeast trade winds to push me west, I was surprised that I had to go much farther north than I had expected to find them, all the way to 6°S latitude. It was an El Niño year, so the trade winds were not the strong, reliable presence they normally are during La Niña years. That reality caused me to change my destination to the Marquesas.

Sunset crossing the Pacific

I arrived in Nuku Hiva on 20 August after a 5,400 miles, 45-day passage from Puerto Montt, certainly the longest of my seven continents voyage. After a week there, I pushed on to Papeete where I needed urgent repairs to the luff tape of my mainsail, sadly passing straight through the Tuamotus where I had hoped to experience anchoring in a coral atoll for the first time. With the repairs made to the mainsail, I set off for Vava'u, Tonga, where I arrived on 30 September. There was a lively cruiser community there and I enjoyed meeting the other sailors as well as the opportunity to take a break after a fairly rough 1,500 miles crossing from Papeete.

I was focused on getting to Darwin, Australia, at around the beginning of November when the tropical storm season traditionally starts in this part of the Southern Hemisphere and so I had to keep moving. I sailed through the Fiji archipelago, around the south end of Efate Island in Vanuatu and across the Coral Sea to Cairns, Australia, where I could add my fifth continent. From there I went back out to sea and headed north for a shortcut I had devised across the Great Barrier Reef that started at Raine Island, went past Cape York and Thursday Island and through the Torres Strait without having to contend with any large ships. Then I had a slow crawl across the shallow Arafura Sea and through the channels south of Melville Island finally to arrive in Darwin on 10 November. From here I returned home, leaving the boat in Darwin until April when the tropical storm season normally ends.

Yacht sailing into Vava'u, Tonga

Fishing boats in Lombok, Indonesia

ASIA

While at home, I made a significant change to my original planned route for Asia. I had originally planned my Asia landing in India but, after reviewing the monsoon weather patterns and the route beyond India to the Seychelles and the Mozambique Channel and on to South Africa, I decided that it would be better to make the Asia landing in Indonesia. From there I would continue west in the southeast trade winds to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, then to Réunion Island and, finally, around the south end of Madagascar and on to Richards Bay in South Africa.

I set off from Darwin on 1 May 2024, headed for Lombok, Indonesia, with good following wind. Nearing Medana Bay, I experienced a serious leak in the exhaust elbow of my engine. It was a challenge for the bilge pumps, with assistance from me using a bucket, to keep the water level in the bilge from rising too high. I had originally planned to spend a week at Medana Bay but that turned into nearly a month as I repaired the engine, including a trip to Australia to buy parts since getting parts shipped into Indonesia is difficult, expensive, and may take a long time to clear customs. In spite of the engine problems, I was glad to arrive in Lombok and log my sixth continent.

Anchorage at Cocos (Keeling) Atoll

NORTH AMERICA

The final, seventh, continent on my solo voyage was North America, which was still quite far away, but feeling like I was on the home stretch motivated me. I could see, conceptually at least, the finish line over the horizon.

Dinghy on the beach at Cocos (Keeling)

I finally left Lombok on 4 June and arrived at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands 9 days later, on 13 June. Having missed the experience in the Tuamotus, I was finally able to anchor in an atoll. The 10 days I spent there were some of the most enjoyable on my voyage. I managed to get some great photos and videos with my drone at this beautiful place.

Moving on, I had a quick trip with strong favourable winds across to Réunion Island, arriving on 10 July. I spent nearly a month there, exploring this interesting volcanic island by rental car, enjoying French food and taking advantage of the many large stores and the ease of buying things from international sources.

I left for Richards Bay in South Africa on 8 August. This passage is often difficult with strong storms spinning out of the South Atlantic and Antarctica and moving contrary to the strong southwest-setting Agulhas Current along South Africa's famous 'wild coast'. I was lucky to jump on a weather window where I could sail with the easterlies on the north side of a string of high-pressure systems. Compared to the horrendous experience others have had, my passage across to Richards Bay from Réunion was pretty benign.

From Richards Bay, I took the usual approach to moving along the coast of South Africa to Cape Town. I would wait for a weather window, when the wind was out of the north or northeast and blowing in the same direction as the current was flowing, to move down the coast to a next available port where I would wait again for another window. It took three two-day passages over 15 days to accomplish this. I made intermediate stops along the way in East London and Knysna. I arrived in Hout Bay, past Cape Agulhas and just south of Cape Town, on 23 October.

After talking to sailors around Hout Bay, I decided to add a stop at Walvis Bay in Namibia, primarily because I knew I would probably never be in this part of the world again. If I ever wanted to see it, this was the time. Exiting South Africa at Saldanha Bay, I had a fast sail north, arriving in Walvis Bay on 13 November. I rented a 4x4 truck for driving the rough roads in Namibia and visited the main tourist highlights I had heard about, including the huge red sand dunes at Sossusvlei.

Pushing on again, I was now crossing the Atlantic for the third time, headed for a planned stop in St Helena island before a long 4,000-mile passage northwest to Antigua in the Caribbean.

I had favourable winds and currents for much of the passage, crossing the equator northbound on 17 December and continuing through rain squalls and sometimes contrary currents in the intertropical convergence zone, finally to arrive at Jolly Harbour on Antigua on 3 January 2025.

I experienced a major autopilot problem in Antigua, but because I had ordered *Phywave* with two separate autopilot systems, I was able to complete the final legs of my voyage using the back-up system.

With two more stops, both in the Bahamas, at Great Harbour Cay in the Berry Islands and at Bimini Island, I completed the final leg of my voyage across the Gulf Stream current to Fort Lauderdale, arriving there on 29 January 2025. With this landing in North America, I had completed my solo voyage to all seven continents.

CONCLUSION

My arrival was not the champagne moment you might expect. In a way it was anticlimactic, the difficult parts of the voyage long behind me and the last legs sailing across the Caribbean a lame, unremarkable finale to such a grand adventure. I had messages of congratulations from friends and family, but no one met me on my arrival because I really don't know anyone in South Florida and my exact arrival time, until the last few days, had been uncertain.

This project had largely consumed my life since I first started thinking about it in the summer of 2020, 4½ years before. The energy I had summoned to get it done, an energy level I wasn't consciously aware of, started to dissipate, being replaced by a feeling of relief that the ambitious goal I had set for myself had been successfully achieved. With my arrival in Fort Lauderdale, I had become the first person in history to both fly and sail solo to all seven continents.

WALLIS AND FUTUNA:

EXPLORING ON NO STRESS

by Alexander Ramseyer (s/v *No Stress*)

Alexander joined the OCC in 2019, the same year as he began his new life as a liveaboard on No Stress, *an Amel 54. Since then, he has logged over 45,000 miles, exploring large parts of the Atlantic, the Caribbean and, after transiting the Panama canal in 2022, the Pacific. Tamara joined Alex in the Pacific, and they are now enjoying the adventure together, sharing their love for outdoors, especially sailing, diving and hiking in new places.*

After just over a year in French Polynesia aboard *No Stress*, we weighed anchor and headed west, our sights on Fiji. We had picked a weather window which promised to provide fairly consistent westerlies and set a heading of 290 degrees for the lesser-known islands of Wallis and Futuna. These islands sit along the same volcanic range that forms the Samoan and Fiji chains and, by all accounts, provide a less commercialised experience of Pacific island life.

Alex and Tamara aboard No Stress

We expected our planned two-and-a-half-day crossing from American Samoa to Wallis to be generally uneventful. However, high swell and frequent rain squalls kept us busy, scurrying up and down, to and from the open cockpit. The light winds drove us to set our whisker pole just before dark, both to help reduce the genoa's flogging as *No Stress* rolled on the swell and to improve our speed. In the high swell and the onset of rain, it took us more time to deploy the pole than normal. We finished just before dark and weren't in need of an additional shower that evening!

Our days settled into a gentle rhythm of sleeping, reading and watching an occasional seabird circle our boat, usually eyeing our fishing lures with a mixture of suspicion and delight. The nights were dark with an early-setting moon and cloud cover. Bioluminescence danced in our wake, leaving a glittering trail of our passing. As ever, we planned our arrival to coincide with slack tide in the entry pass. The current in the pass is reported to run up to 6 knots, which makes our arrival time crucial to ensure that our boat name (*No Stress*) doesn't turn into a lie.

On the morning of our arrival, we noticed a difference between the estimated arrival time on Navionics and the tidal information shown on our other devices. This created quite a stir as we hurriedly compared dates, times and day of the

week on the various devices. We gradually realised that we had unknowingly crossed the dateline and, in so doing, had also crossed into a new time zone though our devices were still set on American Samoa time. Slack tide on Sunday was different to the slack tide time on our original Saturday arrival plan. Consequently, we realised in the early morning that we had almost 2 hours less to get to the pass, whilst the wind was forecast to decrease. There was no other option than starting the engine in the ever-lighter winds in order to keep up the speed to meet our new ETA.

At 10.30am, we got our first sight of Wallis, a faint stripe on the horizon. As if on cue, the sun started to show itself and some blue sky emerged from the monochromatic grey panorama. Our spirits rose as verdant green hills gradually appeared from the swell. On this occasion, navigating the pass was a non-event: we had made good time and the tide was slack.

Once inside the atoll, we followed a well-marked but convoluted course past a variety of smaller motus and around reefs to the port. We dropped anchor on sand close to a French military vessel off the end of the pier at Matu Utu, hoisted the yellow Q flag and retired to bed.

Our Monday morning check-in was very relaxed. We completed two forms, supplied a crew list and met officials from two offices (Customs and Police). All the formalities were completed within an hour thanks to the very helpful and nice officers, and then we were cleared and free to explore.

Church

To explore the island we rented a car for about US$60. The rental agency recommended we hired a four-wheel-drive vehicle, which turned out to be well advised. On our way south, we passed two big churches. Christianity is an important part of the local people's culture, and the churches are much larger than would be expected given the size of the towns. The only other major town is Halalo. Here there is a modern microbrewery run by a Frenchman. We met the brewer and had a nice talk, learned a lot about the challenges of brewing a good beer in a tropical climate and tasted their three beers which were on tap. They were wonderful. The brewer was proudly sporting his first – and relatively fresh – island-style tattoo. He proved knowledgeable and well-trained, and took the time to explain many interesting aspects of the business. The place offered casual open-air seating and a small bar. On Fridays and Saturdays, happy hour, with a local band providing entertainment, started at 5pm and ended when everyone left in the morning (usually around 3am). We didn't take full advantage of the opening hours!

Afterwards we proceeded to the crater lakes which seemed to be the main attraction on the island. The lakes are in the midst of dense rainforest and we visited two – one of them had a man-made viewpoint that allowed us to spend time sitting quietly, observing the wildlife unfold around the lake. Wonderful white-tailed tropic birds hunting insects gave the place a magical touch.

Soon after the second lake, the road began to peter out. Roadside foliage began to encroach and we found ourselves zigzagging around huge, muddy potholes. Progress slowed as we eased over obstacles in our rental car and then sped up again to generate enough momentum to prevent getting stuck in muddy ruts. Since the car rental company hadn't provided a detailed map, we ended up at a dead end, needing to turn back the way we had come to our last

Above left to right: Forest infested with Kudzu vine; Crater lakes

intersection. You can't possibly get lost on a relatively small island like this, can you?!?

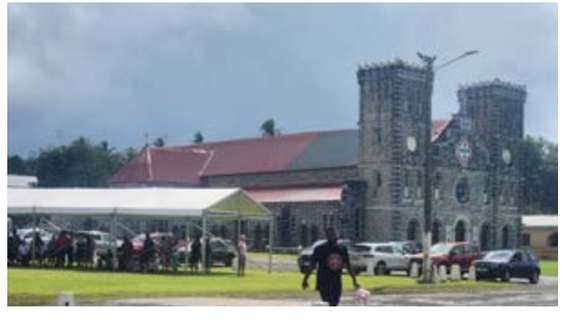
Large parts of the forest are completely inundated with a fast-growing vine called Kudzu. It was brought to many of the South Pacific islands during the Second World War to camouflage military equipment. Known as 'mile-a-minute', Kudzu (*Pueraria montana*) is native to Japan and southeast China. Sadly, here, it outcompetes indigenous flora and is choking out native plants on the island.

Anchorage at Nukatea

After a couple of days, we moved our boat from the wind-exposed town anchorage to an anchorage near the pass, west of the motu Nukatea. We chose to anchor in 30m over sand as the shallower anchoring spots (24m) turned out to have large bommies. Once set, we enjoyed some snorkelling and diving. We found little of interest when diving the main pass, but on our snorkelling trips we found healthy coral and a beautiful variety of wildlife, among them turtles and Moray eels.

We returned to the main town anchorage for the next weekend because our visit coincided with the island's national day (Territory Day on 29 July) and there were rumours of an unforgettable celebration. The islanders and the French residents joined forces to execute an elaborate two-day celebration. Upon arrival at the fairground on Saturday morning, we walked along the pier to the community hall where we were not only offered a free breakfast but

Below left to right: Nukatea Territory Day; Evening celebrations



Ocean outrigger canoes preparing to launch

Paddlers preparing for the start of the race

the women who prepared breakfast gave us an abundance of fresh fruit to take away with us. Music, dancing and food were at the heart of this jovial party.

On Sunday we were very fortunate to watch modern and traditional paddling and sailing side-by-side. Ocean outrigger canoes are still very popular, with the races starting early in the morning, and included both youth and adult events. It was fascinating to watch the ancient sailing methods employed without the use of winches or furlers. The sails are rigged on a centrally stepped mast and controlled with woven fibre lines. The amount of strength required to handle the sail is impressive, needing two strong sailors. Usually the oldest – or most experienced – crew member handles the rudder. After sailing, the entire setup can be dismantled and stowed within minutes. They call their wooden sea-going boats *va'a tele*, which translates, rather wonderfully, as 'big boat'.

On Sunday evening the festivities started with traditional dance demonstrations. Each island village performed its own routine in front of the honoured guests and spectators. Dancing is synchronised in large groups, men and women together, and consists mostly of strong noble gestures and stances. The costuming is fascinatingly detailed, each village displaying unique patterns and symbols. The costumes are mostly brown and earth tones, quite different from other Polynesian costumes.

Va'a tele *boats racing*

Snorkelling at the Blue Hole

At the very end of our wonderful stay, we snorkelled the famous Blue Hole. It's a big pool, located in the middle of a very large reef between two motus (Nukuhifala and Nukuhione), where the water is incredibly clear. The corals are healthy, and we saw a wide variety of fish including a small shark patrolling his territory.

Wallis and Futuna are off the beaten path, probably because many of the anchorages around the islands are rather challenging. It's worth noting that because of the remote location, prices in the grocery stores were terribly high so, if you plan to come here, stock up in American Samoa or in other cheaper locations. For us, the onward passage to Fiji was both easy and comfortable. We had fair winds on our one-day trip to Futuna and again on the following two-day trip to Savusavu. For us, that route worked well and we were very glad not to have missed visiting Wallis and Futuna.

CLEW BAY:

THE SUMMER OF '25 IN CLEW BAY

by Daria Blackwell (s/v *Aleria*)

Daria and Alex Blackwell live in Clew Bay on the west coast of Ireland, where they are OCC Port Officers for nearby Westport. Daria is an Honorary Member and a Past Vice Commodore. They are regular contributors to Flying Fish*, including 'Retreat from Paradise' an article in 2023/1 describing the part played by Daria and Alex in the Club's response to cruisers in tricky situations as a result of restrictions imposed during the Covid pandemic. Daria and Alex have published several books, including* Happy Hooking *and maintain a blog at* **aleriasadventures.blogspot.ie**.

Reg, Daria, Alex and Nicky enjoying the views over Clew Bay

Most people who sail along the west coast of Ireland may stop in Bantry or Dingle and then sail directly to Scotland bypassing the West's stunning beauty. A few may make a pit stop in Inishbofin or the Aran Islands, but almost no one comes into Clew Bay.

Clew Bay has a massive island in its mouth, Clare Island, where the pirate queen, Granuaile, had a castle and her fleet was usually tucked into sheltered inlets within Clew Bay where she had more castles. Along the northern shore is the Wild Nephin National Park and Achill Island, Ireland's largest island. Along the southern shore is the imposing Croagh Patrick, the Holy Mountain, from which St Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland. Along the bay's eastern rim are 365 islands, drumlins left behind by retreating glaciers. There are few navigational aids and the chart surveys date to the 1800s, so it tends to be a bit daunting to visitors. We have no marinas (yet) and no easily accessible services, which adds to the consternation. Local knowledge and a bit of assistance are essential.

This year, we had two brave OCC boats come into our pristine haven, perhaps a record. Could it be that we hadn't received any OCC visitors since Toby Peyton-Jones and the crew of *Truant* waited out Hurricane Lorenzo in 2019?

Aleria has been undergoing a refit, so we were at home for the early summer months, and the weather mostly cooperated. Our summers have become warmer and drier, so our climate is quite temperate now. So much so that we have a vineyard in the grounds of our home and, yes, we do make some very drinkable wines. In fact, the new thing for continental holidaymakers is to come

Alex discussing the restoration of our Century Black Demon speed boat

Reg and Nicky visiting Westport House Demesne and the statue of Granuaile

to Ireland to cool down, so we are practising by giving vineyard tours to visitors.

The first visitors we had were Vice Commodore Reg and Nicky Barker aboard *Blue Velvet of Sark*. Reg and I served on the OCC Board together when I was Vice Commodore. They had planned a leisurely cruise up the west coast to eventually meet up with a CCA Western Isles Cruise in Scotland (see page 200) and Clew Bay was in the plan. As we always do with visitors, we met them just outside the inner islands in our little motorboat and led them to *Aleria*'s mooring near our house. There was a bit of trepidation when the chartplotters showed us passing over the shoreline, but Reg and Nicky trusted us enough to follow in our wake to our mooring.

We enjoyed their company for the next few days. We toured our land (including the vineyard) and introduced them to the stunning views over Clew Bay from the top of our farm. We showed them around Westport, told them about things to do (there are so many choices), gave them the keys to our car and sent them off for provisioning and exploring. The weather had turned hot and still, hot for Ireland that is, in the mid-20s°C.

One morning the sky was clear so we encouraged Reg and Nicky to climb Croagh Patrick. The climb starts at sea level and continues up to 764m (2,507ft). Croagh Patrick, nicknamed The Reek, is an important pilgrimage site and the views from the top over the Bay are breathtaking. After their workout, we treated them to dinner at our favourite restaurant in town followed by pints

Musicians playing traditional Irish music at Matt Molloys

of Guinness and a dose of exceptional traditional music at Matt Molloy's. Matt is a flautist with the Chieftains and can often be heard joining in. He was there that evening listening to the rather large gathering of musicians, so we knew it was a very special session.

The next day, Reg and Nicky took over our kitchen while we took care of some business in Galway. They cooked up a feast and we cleaned up. We learned that Reg and Nicky met when they were both in the RAF and had flown Chinook helicopters and other aircraft on assignment in the Middle East. We solved all the world's problems and then planned the future. It felt like not more than a day had passed since we last saw them. Soon, they were on their way north, and we were back to pruning the vineyard.

Grant, Alex, Brigitte, Helen and Gordon making landfall at Clew Bay

Brigitte, Grant, Alex, Daria, Gordon and Helen enjoying pints at Matt Molloys

A few weeks passed and we received a message from Grant Gordon. Grant and his wife, Brigitte, were cruising with fellow OCC members Gordon and Helen MacKenzie. They were heading south along the west coast and wanted to stop in. We agreed on a time and place to meet to pilot them into our mooring. It was a breezy day and there was a good chop on the water.

When the inlet started getting shallower, the skipper decided to drop anchor in a deep-water channel between two islands. That wasn't a problem as there are usually no boats around and the wind had calmed. The occasional fisherman may pass by but otherwise we usually have the Bay and surrounding islands all to ourselves.

Grant, Brigitte, Gordon and Helen came into the village dock by dinghy. We gave them a tour of the "farm", including the gardens, the vineyard, the donkey shelter, the shed, the polytunnel and the apiary. We then piled into two cars and headed into town. Though we were lucky to get a reservation as it was Monday evening when most restaurants are closed, it turned out to be an exceptional dinner, both in terms of food and company.

It had been Gordon's idea to stop in at Clew Bay after he had read an article about Alex and me in the OCC *Newsletter*. The conversation over dinner took us back to our transatlantic crossings and Grant's circumnavigation. When it harked back to our youth and how we all grew up – given Scottish, German, Ukrainian, Irish and American roots – we realised our stories may have crossed in the past despite our divergent paths. Gordon was in the music business as was Alex's stepbrother, Chris Blackwell. Helen had worked for Island Records

Alex and Garry strolling through our vineyard

Alex with Marie and Garry at the top of our farm

of which Chris was the founder. Grant's father had an apartment next to Washington Square in New York City where I had attended University and lived just down the street. Grant had stayed at his father's apartment routinely.

Naturally we had to treat them to a visit to Matt Molloy's. It was more crowded than we've ever seen but a trad session soon got underway. They'd never experienced traditional Irish music. It's not a performance but rather a gathering of different musicians and instruments, playing for the simple enjoyment of the evening's session; there can be anywhere from two to 20 musicians playing. The session will be led by one or two musicians who start the tunes and, if the other musicians know them, they join in. Otherwise, they sit it out. It is not a jam session, and there is no improvisation. They either know the tunes or they don't. Sometimes, a singer will stand up to perform a folk song or Sean-nós in a haunting unaccompanied vocal style. Often, musicians have to be asked to join the session.

That night, Guinness 0.0 on tap made the ride home uneventful. The crew made their way back to their anchored boat in the dark at low tide and, as they vanished into the darkness, we realised that we'd forgotten to warn them about the mud bar in the middle of the inlet. They were gone in the morning so we knew they'd made it home intact. After a quick stop in Inishbofin, they'd be leaving *Louise* in Galway for a spell, having to return home for work commitments before continuing onwards.

Reflecting back on their visit, we marvelled over how well we'd got on with four people we'd never met. But that's the OCC; what binds us together is often eerily familiar.

The third OCC member who dropped in came by land from Derry in Northern Ireland. Garry Crothers and Marie were on their way to visit family in Galway when they decided to turn their trip into a land cruise. They contacted us and asked if we'd be in residence. As it was, we were entertaining our cousins visiting from Germany.

To go back a few years, Garry is a single-handed sailor who had become stranded in Sint Maarten when Covid reared its head. His daughter was soon to be married and he had to get home. Garry normally crosses oceans with family and friends as crew, but as no one could fly in to join him for his return to Northern Ireland, Garry had made the brave decision to sail across alone and nonstop to Derry. This was all the more remarkable as Garry is, quite literally, single-handed, having had his left arm amputated after a motorbike accident in 2009. But he wasn't completely alone because our support team

kept a close watch and Alex was with him every day of his solo journey by SMS communication.

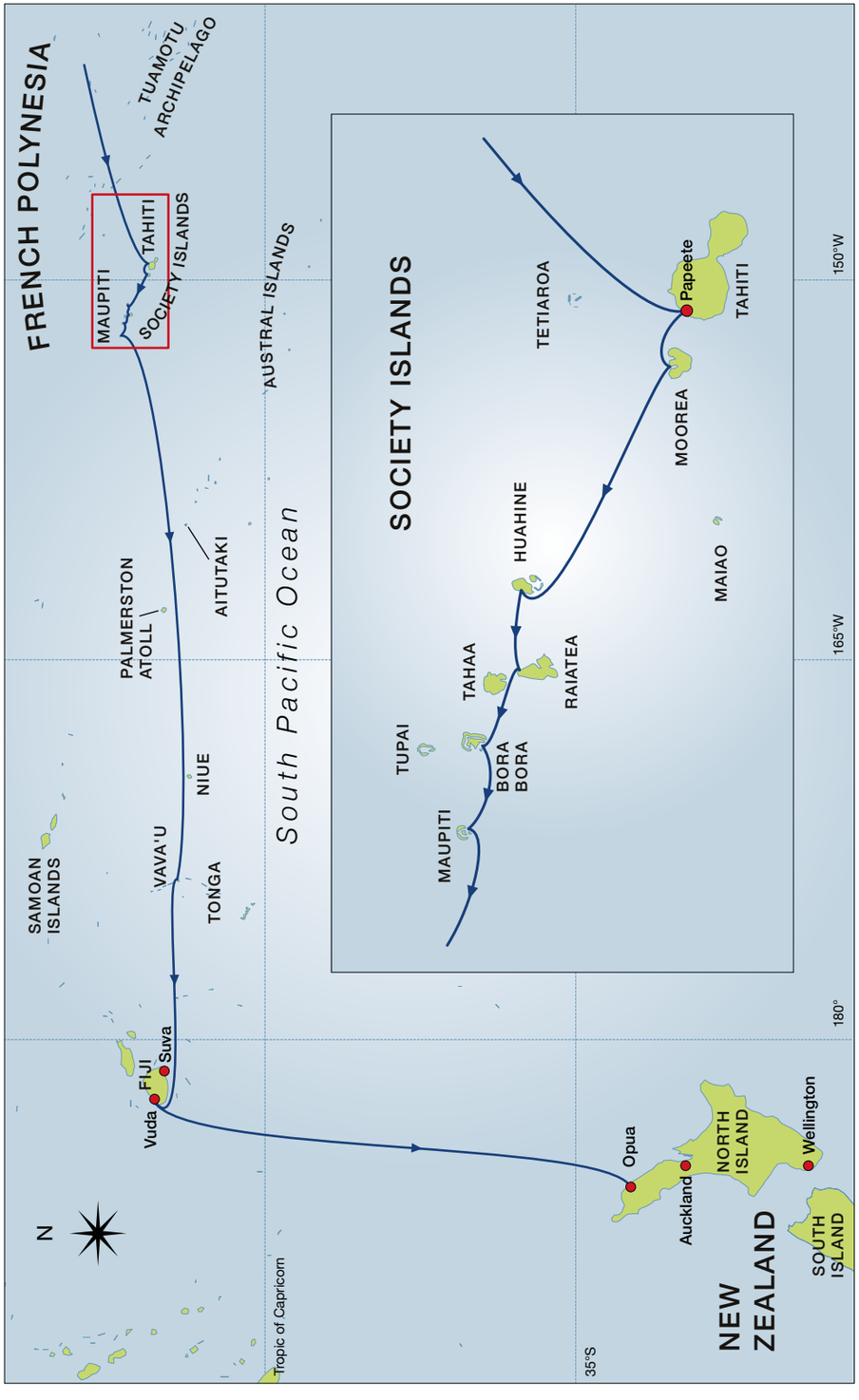
When you talk to someone every day out there, you get to know them fairly well. Garry wanted to stop in and meet Alex in person, he who had provided him weather routing advice and general company mid-ocean. For his accomplishment, Garry was awarded the OCC Seamanship Award in 2020.

It was a joy to meet Garry and Marie, both delightful personalities. We spent the morning walking the vineyard and farm and talking about viticulture, interspersed with reminiscences about the Covid era. Garry and Marie have planted a grapevine in a polytunnel so we had a good deal in common to discuss. In a couple of hours, we got the sense that we'd be seeing each other again, perhaps next time in Derry. It was delightful to be with them if even for such a brief period.

A visit by OCC members is always so memorable and, though our own sailing days this year were so limited, the summer of '25 is now high on the list of good sailing memories as a result of these visits. It is a joy to host all our OCC friends, and with the climate becoming increasingly intolerable in so many places, perhaps Ireland will become the next "Costa del Sol" or, in Irish, "Cósta na Gréine" of Europe.

POSTSCRIPT

Alex and several other local residents and sailors have been working diligently on a proposal to get a marina built in Westport in Clew Bay. They've cleared the initial hurdles and both the County Council and the Irish government have included the marina in their regional development plans. Stay tuned! And come visit, by land or by sea, before the adventure is forever altered.



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CAPTAIN COOK:

SAILING *HAWKEYE* FROM TAHITI TO NEW ZEALAND

by Richard Freeborn (s/v *Hawkeye*)

Richard Freeborn and his wife, Alexandra Blakeman Early, started their circumnavigation from Italy in 2019 aboard their catamaran Hawkeye. *After crossing the Atlantic, they cruised the Caribbean and transited the Panama Canal in late 2023, arriving into Tahiti having stopped in the Galápagos, the Marquesas and the Tuamotus. This article, first published in the* Royal Thames Review, *covers their passage from Tahiti to New Zealand, roughly following in the footsteps not just of Lieutenant James Cook's first voyage but also those of his later ship's master and Richard's fellow Cornishman William Bligh, on HMS* Bounty. *You can follow* Hawkeye*'s track on No Foreign Land* **noforeignland.com/boat/yachthawkeye/journey**.

It's hard to visualise the vast distances across the Pacific Ocean or appreciate just how much larger it is than, say, the Atlantic. *Hawkeye*'s satellite tracker log showed that we had already sailed nearly 6,000 miles from Panama to get to Tahiti but there was still another 5,000 miles yet to go before we would reach New Zealand. In practice it would be further than that because, on *Hawkeye*, we tend to weave our way around the islands as the fancy takes us, mostly guided by the wind but also by the restaurant reviews, never taking a direct route to anywhere.

On his first voyage, Captain Cook's ship His Majesty's Barque *Endeavour*, stopped in Tahiti on 3 June 1769 to observe the transit of Venus across the sun. This recording meant that two years later the exact distance of Earth from the sun was able to be calculated. Modern calculations show that Captain Cook's observation was incredibly accurate, with an error of just 0.8%; I wish I could obtain such results with my sextant!

Captain Cook called Tahiti, and the other nearby islands he later visited, the Society Islands because they are in relatively close proximity, being less than a day's sail apart from each other. To try to atone for behaving like spoilt kids when we took a quad bike tour of Moorea, we followed an ancient Polynesian custom and fitted Tikis, who are gods, to each of *Hawkeye*'s bows. "How do they work?" we asked the locals. It turned out that the Tikis need instructions in the form of prayers, so we asked our port side Tiki to give *Hawkeye* kind weather whereas the starboard Tiki was asked to keep us safe from hazards such as rocks, other boats or anything in the water. So far, their help has been impeccable!

Alexandra and Richard

Quad bike tour of Moorea

Alexandra swimming with massive manta ray in Raiatea

We sailed on to the first of the Leeward Islands which is Huahine, then to Raiatea, where the pace of life slowed right down and the glitzy hotels of Tahiti and hordes of people were a distant memory. Our luck was in when we were visited by a trio of massive manta rays, perhaps 3m or more across, several nights in a row; they seemed to enjoy playing around in *Hawkeye*'s underwater lights. They weren't in the least bit bothered by us and Alexandra happily snorkelled above them. Other cruisers joined us as we sat on the aft deck, sipping drinks and watching their mesmerising underwater somersaults as they fed.

We had a short sail across to the renowned island of Bora Bora, which is often referred to by other cruisers as Bora Boring because it has a focus as a honeymoon destination. However, our experience was very different, perhaps because we scratched the surface a little more. We discovered an interesting Second World War history, where Bora Bora was a vital link to supply the US and UK submarines based in Australia. These submarines sank the vast majority of the Japanese merchant navy fleet, which largely contributed to Japan's surrender. There was even a massive Second World War naval gun in place which could, in theory, still fire.

After Bora Bora we headed to Maupiti Island, which is – so the locals say – how Bora Bora used to be. The entrance to Maupiti is very narrow, with often rather nasty waves and high currents. Captain Cook didn't even attempt entry in *Endeavour*. There are no hotels or resorts, just a few small pensions (B&Bs) and the locals are clearly very happy to keep it that way. The hike to the summit of Teurafaatiu was hard work, hand over hand climbing on rocks at the steepest part near the top, but the view from the summit was the most stunning we've ever seen, anywhere.

We initially took *Hawkeye* into Maupiti to wait a few days for a weather window for the next long stretch across the Pacific but ended up being gale bound there for ten days, during which time we cycled around the island and snorkelled on the reefs. We were lucky enough to be there at the same time as their annual festival, called a Heiva which in Polynesian means 'community gathering' and runs for about four weeks. The dancing and music were amazing, but what was most wonderful was that there were no tourists, this was just for local people, so we felt privileged to be made so welcome. As there are no shops in Maupiti, we set off for the ten-day voyage towards Tonga having already pretty much consumed the fresh food we had budgeted for the voyage.

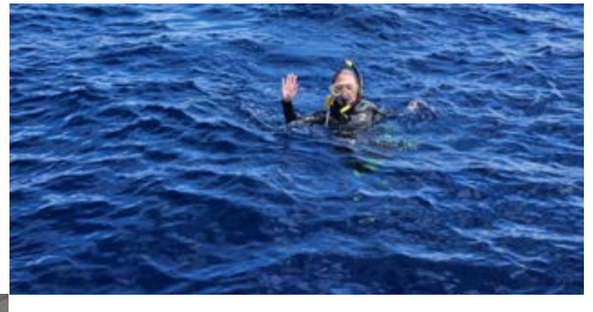
We treated ourselves to a helicopter flight around the islands which gave stunning views over Bora Bora

Left: View from the summit of Teurafaatiu

The annual festival, called a Heiva, at Maupiti

Our paths now diverged from that of Captain Cook on his first voyage, as we headed west where he had gone south. When leaving Tahiti, Captain Cook had opened his secret instructions from the Admiralty to discover that he was to sail south into freezing cold weather, in what became a fruitless search for Terra Australis Incognita, which we now know as Antarctica. Captain Cook gave it his best effort but there simply was no land where expected, as no one then knew that Antarctica was actually many thousands of miles further south, so he abandoned that mission and instead explored the coast of New Zealand.

Our sailing plans were constantly dashed by the weather, with the culprit being the South Pacific Convergence Zone which is a complex weather feature that is hard to predict, even for the super-computers that generate the weather models. Our two favourite computer weather models, for the entire world, are actually both UK based: the UK Met Office at Exeter and the European Centre for



Left to right: Snorkelling with humpback whales, or trying to; Anchorage in Tonga

Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) at Reading. We use a specialist weather router, a highly experienced Kiwi called Bob McDavitt (known as MetBob, reachable at metbob.com) whose advice is invaluable, including interpreting how the weather relates to *Hawkeye*'s sailing characteristics. Once the nasty weather had gone and we could pass through Maupiti's reefs safely into the open sea, all our plans were slowly dashed. As each island approached, MetBob wisely suggested that we scrub our stops at Aitutaki, Palmerston and Niue or otherwise face more nasty weather. Sailing on towards Tonga, we crossed the 'false' international date line, so-called because Tonga decided it wanted to be in the same time zone as Fiji, so they changed to Fijian time. Thus, we lost a day; Monday suddenly becomes Tuesday plus one hour. Later, between Tonga and Fiji, we sailed across the "true" date line, where our longitude went from west to east. Weird! As ever, we had a mixture of balmy weather with no wind through to near gale with

Sunset at sea between Fiji and Tonga; Crossing the International Date Line

sails reefed down, and the sun set right in front of us each evening. Fresh bread seemed to improve with every baking session. Alexandra and I share the watches evenly, with our radar and AIS alarms giving extra comfort, especially at night, and of course the ever-watchful Tikis on the bow.

Nine days later, as we approached Tonga, we were greeted by breaching humpback whales. After docking in Vava'u, which was as calm as a millpond after the oceanic waves outside, the officials were welcoming and efficient. This is the first English speaking country we have visited since leaving Antigua a year before. Here, cars drive on the left, there are photos of King Charles III pinned up and almost every country ahead of us, through Asia and Africa back to Antigua, drives on the left and has many English-speaking people.

The ancient Polynesian Kingdom of Tonga consists of 176 islands scattered over the ocean and it is the first country in the world to greet each new day. We took a tour to snorkel with the humpback whales but soon discovered that getting to swim anywhere near them is very tricky, even in a specialist whale watching boat that could motor at over 30 knots.

We explored Tonga but the draw of Fiji proved too strong, so we left for the three-day sail, navigating through the treacherous Fijian reefs. Here we followed close to the path of Captain Bligh, who was thrown off HMS *Bounty* near Tonga. Captain Bligh managed to navigate his way through the entire Fijian archipelago with just a compass and sextant, which is an extraordinary feat. To an extent, we had one significant issue in common with Captain Cook, which was getting fresh food on board. We have the luxury of using specialist sailing apps like No Foreign Land to discover the best restaurants and shops whereas Captain Cook had rather the opposite problem, which was not ending up on the menu himself, as the Polynesians were cannibals!

We were met by Fijian officials from customs, immigration, health, port and biosecurity. After establishing that we didn't have any prohibited products on board – such as pork or honey – they left, but not before they gave us something

Reef in Yasawa Island, Fiji

Richard with Tiki and dolphins

Hawkeye *at Yasawa Island*

Above left to right: Alexandra and Richard on Fiji's National Day at Musket Cove; And at the start of Musket Cove Regatta week

Below left to right: The start of the Round Malolo Race in Fiji's Musket Cove Regatta week; Hawkeye *underway*

that we really didn't want. Some days later we both succumbed to Covid, so our initial exploring of Fiji had to be by not leaving *Hawkeye* for the next week whilst we self-isolated and recovered. But Fiji: wow! Out of all the places we have seen in the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Caribbean and Pacific, Fiji is certainly the best cruising ground. The people aren't just very welcoming and friendly, they also seem happy in their lives, something that many in more developed countries could try to emulate.

Fiji has it all, crystal-clear warm water, amazing snorkelling with plenty of fish, stunning anchorages and lots of islands to explore; we were made to feel welcome wherever we went. We joined in with Fiji's famous Musket Cove Regatta Week, participating in everything from

a pretty gruelling running race to a comprehensive beach clean-up where the sailors collected four tonnes of plastic. There were also plenty of regatta parties!

We entered *Hawkeye* in the regatta week's highlight, the Round Malolo Race, borrowing two crew from another Lagoon catamaran. This was to be *Hawkeye*'s first race in the 14 years since she was launched. Although we started at the back of the fleet (the only yacht with grey sails in the fleet photo) she clawed her way to overtake 11 yachts by the finish. Lagoon 450 catamarans, like *Hawkeye*, are very firmly at the cruising end of the performance scale and with all the world cruising kit that we carry, she is heavier than most. But she does have one redeeming performance feature, which is her state-of-the-art North 3Di sails, complemented by her custom electric in-boom furling, which allows her

Volcanic mud baths in Fiji

Catching a Spanish Mackerel

Snorkelling in Yasawa Islands

Lizzie and Ross at Yasawa Islands

to point higher and faster than similar boats. In the very light airs we outsailed and outpointed a number of monohulls, and even two performance catamarans, we could see some of their crews looking at *Hawkeye* in some disbelief.

As Captain Cook had headed straight down to New Zealand from what we now know as French Polynesia, he had to wait for his second voyage before exploring Tonga and Fiji.

All too soon, the tropical cyclone season started to loom, which meant that – like so many other yachts – our insurance rules kick in and we must be below 30 degrees South from 1 November to 30 April. The only other options are to head up to less than 10 degrees south, which means going upwind 7,000 miles to the Marquesas Islands, which is hardly appealing, or to continue onwards out of the Pacific, which was even less appealing. Luckily, New Zealand's most northerly point is 35 degrees south so, like many cruisers, we opted to leave the tropics, in our case for the first time since 2019, and head south, where it would be colder, but where there is no significant risk of cyclones. However, the 1,100-mile passage between Fiji and New Zealand is notoriously dangerous because of quick changes in weather.

We had the most amazing celebration of our departure from the Fijian port of Vuda where we were berthed. The staff gathered to sing us a song which promised us fair winds and kind seas before we were presented with a lovely wreath of flowers. We each had private words with our two Tikis, asking for their help on the passage. We needed that help because from the second we left the marina, we headed into nasty, steep, 2m waves which lifted *Hawkeye*'s bows right out of the water, and straight into a 25-knot head wind.

We were both expecting and fully prepared for this. The advice from experienced Kiwis who have sailed this passage many times is that it is better to get smashed leaving Fiji, where it is warm, than have nasty weather when you approach New Zealand. So, with MetBob's blessing, and as part of Viki Moore's Sail South rally accompanied by many other yachts, we set sail for New Zealand. The passage was the usual mixture of weather, wind up and down, everything from becalmed to wonderful sailing but also motor-sailing when the wind didn't cooperate. When we were about three days into the eight-day voyage, MetBob said that we either had to slow right down and stop, to wait for some nasty weather to sweep across the top of New Zealand from the Tasman Sea or speed up and beat it. We opted for the latter, as *Hawkeye* motor-sails very well and we carry enough fuel to motor perhaps 2,000 miles.

We kept up an average of nearly 9 knots and arrived at Opua in northern New Zealand exactly six days after leaving Fiji; the first Rally boat to arrive, by some distance. New Zealand's Māori name is Aotearoa which means "land of the long white cloud" which was certainly accurate as, when we arrived, we couldn't see land until we were almost upon it, because it was enveloped in cloud. Crews that arrived over the next few days told some unpleasant tales including of one yacht which was dismasted and another scuttled because it developed a leak that could not be staunched.

Of the dozens of countries we have visited on *Hawkeye*, New Zealand has the strictest entry requirements we have ever seen, with piles of paperwork required even before we arrived. There is also much scrutiny over how clean your boat's bottom is, as they don't want any nasty foreign critters appearing in their waters. However, the officials were very efficient, welcoming and friendly and, like all the Kiwis we've ever met, unbelievably proud of their country. They were quick to stress how much they wanted us to enjoy it. It's the little things we noticed, such as the fact that the marina staff that helped tie up *Hawkeye* not only weren't expecting a tip (we have become accustomed to tipping for this service) but they probably would have been insulted if we'd offered it. New Zealand is generally the half-way point of many circumnavigations although over the years we have already sailed *Hawkeye* the equivalent of almost two complete circuits. But we still treated ourselves to a glass of bubbly once we had completed all the clearance formalities.

Captain Cook's first landfall in New Zealand could hardly have been more different to ours, with two of his crew killed by the local Māori tribe and the failure to find supplies leading to the first place being named Disappointment Bay. Luckily for the crew of *Endeavour*, their next landing, further to the north, proved much more suitable, and even today is called Bay of Plenty.

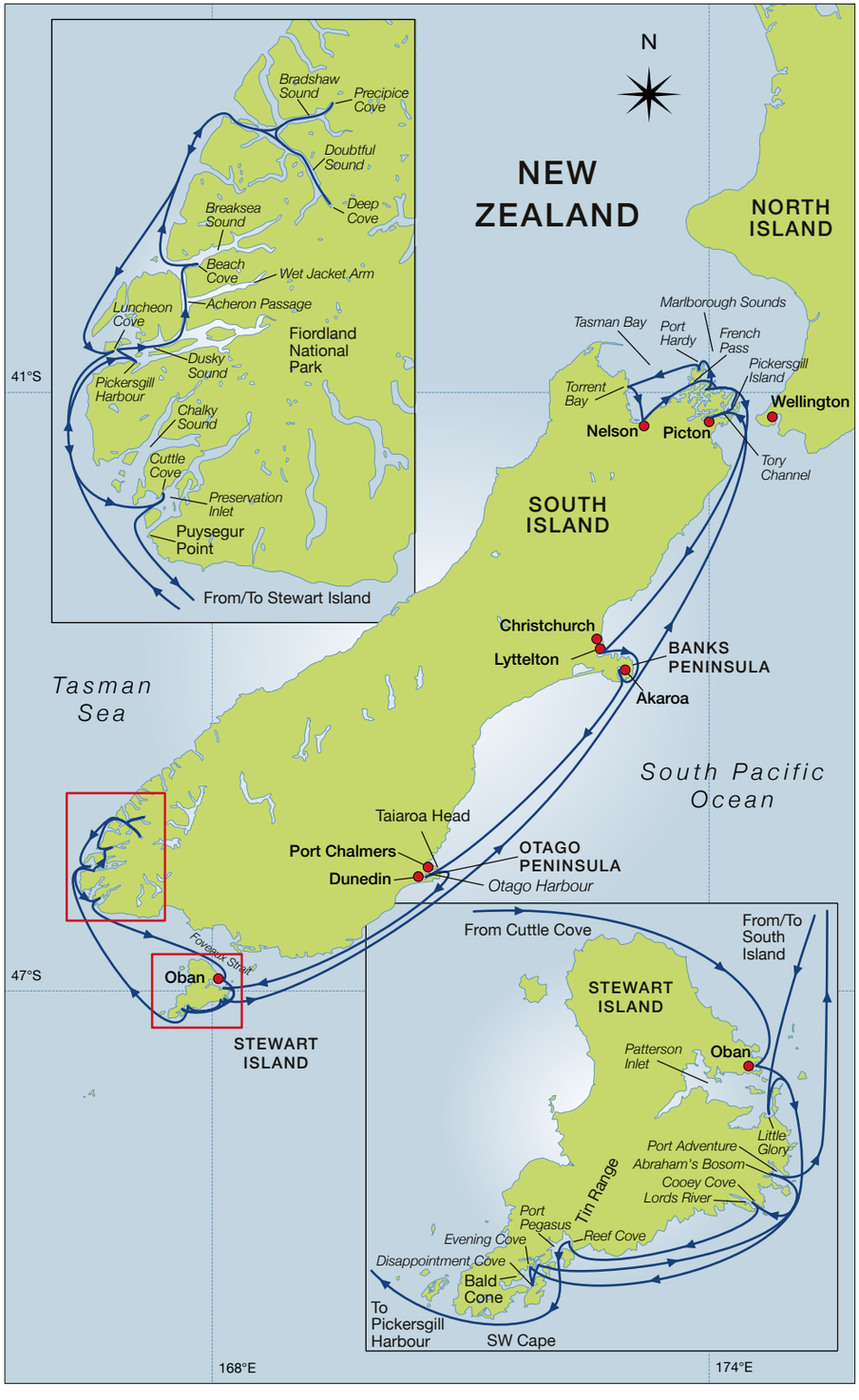
I sometimes wonder what James Cook would think if he were magically transported in time from *Endeavour* on to *Hawkeye*. He would surely recognise the sails and their controls, as well as the rudders, keels and steering wheel and he would have been familiar with catamarans, as they were invented by the ancient Polynesians. So, I'm sure he would not only have been able to sail *Hawkeye*, but probably would have been impressed that she sailed better than *Endeavour* on all points. As for the rest of our modern technology, I'm not at all certain that he would have appreciated our Starlink satellite communications system being able to give him instant instructions from the Admiralty in London, as he would surely have preferred the anonymity of no one expecting to hear from him for many years. I think he would have loved the cold beers, hot showers, refrigeration, abundant fresh water and, perhaps most of all, not needing a vast crew of almost 100 men.

Richard with send off from Vuda

Richard with send off from Vuda

Lizzie playing guitar

Richard, Lizzie and Alexandra arriving in Opua, New Zealand



THE EASY WAY SOUTH:

SAILING TO STEWART ISLAND AND FIORDLAND

by Tom & Vicky Jackson (s/v *Zest*)

Since departing the UK in 1997, Tom and Vicky Jackson have circumnavigated via the southern capes and sailed two circuits of the Pacific Ocean. They are now based in Nelson on New Zealand's South Island. They have been regular contributors to Flying Fish, *and although they may claim to be shying away from more adventurous sailing, their mileage aboard* Zest, *a locally designed Craddock 36 proves otherwise. They have been Port Officers for Nelson, in New Zealand's South Island since 2013.*

Gone are the days when we thought nothing of setting off on a 2,500 mile, 24-day passage. Now age and decrepitude have brought on a desire for conveniently short hops during which we have only one or two nights of sleep disturbed by watches.

This past summer with its predicted La Niña, we intended to head for Fiordland and Stewart Island in New Zealand's far south for three months of fine-weather cruising in *Zest*. Normally we would head south down the west coast of South Island for Milford Sound. However, in December 2024 the weather pattern was set obstinately against us. Losing patience, we decided on the east coast, which is easier given the opportunities for stops along the way.

On 11 December, a fast sail from Nelson took us through the tide rips of French Pass to a mooring in Annie's Bay in Marlborough Sounds. An early start the following morning allowed us to catch the tide through Cook Strait, past Cape Jackson and The Brothers, while a fresh northerly pushed *Zest* to Cape Campbell by early afternoon. We had planned to head directly to Akaroa on the south side of the Banks Peninsula, but intermittent electrical faults with the instruments and autopilot changed our minds and Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, became our destination, where we arrived by early afternoon the next day, 13 December, after only a single night at sea.

A couple of pleasant days in Lyttelton allowed us to visit Christchurch, avoid a southerly gale and find the loose connection causing our electrical faults. On 17 December we made the easy passage around the Banks Peninsula to beautiful Akaroa, one

French Pass

Clockwise from top left: Repairs at Lyttelton; Hector dolphins; Hike at Akaroa; Akaroa Heads

of our favourite harbours. There we caught up with friends, hiked in the hills and enjoyed the town, which is quieter without the visiting cruise ships which now stop at Lyttelton.

On 23 December we set off for Otago Harbour. Light winds kept the engine on, though we managed to motorsail some of the time and even used our Code 0. By dawn on a drizzly Christmas Eve we approached the fairway buoy off the entrance at Taiaroa Head – in company with *Ovation of the Seas* on its way to Port Chalmers with 4,000 passengers. There is a convenient visitors' mooring in Deborah Bay which we picked up to wait for the tide, as the entrance to the little basin at the Otago Yacht Club is only accessible an hour or two either side of high water. Though welcoming, the Yacht Club is generally closed, but the basin is convenient for walking into the city or into the grounds around the University and botanic gardens.

At Dunedin we had a Christmas break and hired a car for a quick trip to hike in the Catlins. We also stocked up and filled with diesel, as we intended to head straight to Little Glory Cove, Paterson Inlet on Stewart Island rather than to Oban, the only village on the island.

Taiaroa Heads

The one possible problem with the 'easy' way down the east coast is the passage from Otago Harbour to Stewart Island. The course is WSW, well into the Southern Ocean 40s. If the westerlies are set in, it can be a long and unpleasant beat or a very long wait for a favourable

Cruise ships near Dunedin

Zest *berthed at Otago YC*

window for this 140-mile jump. However, as for the whole summer, La Niña was our friend. This climate variation means that high pressure tends to stay further south in the Tasman Sea and around New Zealand, giving pleasant conditions and more easterly winds to the southern half of New Zealand. So it was that, departing on New Year's Day 2025, we had an uneventful motorsail all the way to Stewart Island, dropping anchor in the peaceful, wooded setting of Little Glory Cove shortly after noon the next day.

Our next move, to the anchorage at Whitestone Beach, Paterson Inlet, gave us a chance to explore the detritus left behind at the nearby whaler's base. The stop at Cooey Cove, Lords River, allowed us an opportunity for a long dinghy exploration upriver, as well as an appreciation of the swell and surf rolling in from a depression far to the south.

We reached our first 'challenging but achievable' target at Reef Cove, North Arm, Port Pegasus on 9 January. Port Pegasus is a fantastic miniature cruising ground with sheltered anchorages only short distances apart and excellent hiking through the bush, across moorland and up steep granite outcrops. All of this is only a few miles from Southwest Cape, one of the five great southern capes.

Cruising plans need to be flexible. We had intended to explore Port Pegasus for weeks not days, then head north to Fiordland and possibly home up the west coast later. However, after only two days and a quick hike up the Tin

Clockwise from right: Vicky on cold watch; Tom and Vicky on Stewart Island; Whaling base, Paterson Inlet

Shore rope stowed on coach roof

Rounding South Cape

Swell by Solander Islands

Dusky Sound

Range, an excellent window of brisk easterly winds opened. We decided to take it up to Dusky Sound, re-explore the southern sounds as far north as Doubtful and Bradshaw and then return via Dusky and Preservation Sounds to Stewart Island and the east coast for the homeward passage.

The easterlies were, indeed, brisk with 25–30 knots of wind speeding us north under reduced canvas and a full moon so quickly that the passage to Pickersgill Harbour, Dusky Sound took only 24 hours. This was our second target achieved, with a total of only four single nights at sea – easy indeed.

Vicky's idea of a cook book is one about James Cook, and Dusky is very much Cook country, with evidence of his exploration everywhere. In 1793 in *Resolution*, Cook approached what became Pickersgill Harbour through the very narrow passage west of Crayfish Island. So did we. He moored in the narrow cove south of Astronomer's Point, using a long, stout tree branch as a gangplank for access ashore. The branch is still there, as is the stump on the point where he made his astronomical observations. In both Pickersgill and then at Luncheon Cove we moored with lines to the shore, as is so often necessary in the sounds. Luncheon was delightfully free of the sandflies which infested Pickersgill. Sandflies are a species of black fly, whose bite is worse than a mosquito's, especially for those unaccustomed to them. Sadly they are the one major blight on the pleasure of cruising southern New Zealand.

We knew we would call in again to Dusky on the way back south, so on 17 January we headed up Acheron Passage past the wonderfully named Wet Jacket Arm to Breaksea Sound for a peaceful night on a mooring at Beach Cove. In beautiful sunny weather we then made our way along the coast and up Bradshaw Sound to Precipice Cove,

Clockwise from top left: Narrow cut by Crayfish Island; Shore tie to tree; Precipice Cove, Bradshaw Sound; Dolphins at Bradshaw Sound

having greeted the resident pod of large dolphins along the way. In Precipice there are permanent lines set by fishermen which make mooring easier. After a few days of quiet, wonderfully scenic contemplation and dinghy exploration, we moved on to Deep Cove in Doubtful Sound. Deep Cove and Milford are the only sounds with road access and both have considerable tourist traffic, with small cruise vessels taking day trips along these spectacular sounds. For the cruiser, Deep Cove also offers an opportunity to refill with diesel and a chance to do some gentle – or more challenging – hiking. These steep-sided sounds often experience fierce day breezes. On a warm, sunny, summer day winds funnelling down the sound can reach gale force. It pays to move in the morning and be moored and secure by midday.

By Doubtful Sound our third target had been achieved. We have visited the northern sounds previously. This year we decided that their scenic splendour was not sufficient reward for the difficulties of mooring or the clouds of sandflies which are worse the further north you go. We prefer the variety of the southern sounds and

Strong day breeze, Deep Cove, Doubtful Sound

Stewart Island – and so turned back south, heading directly along the coast to Dusky once again and to Luncheon Cove to wait out a brief spell of unsettled weather.

Though the holding in Luncheon is like that of a ploughed field because of its popularity, it is perfectly sheltered. The many tracks on Anchor Island give pleasant opportunities for hiking, though the various signposts are as likely to lead you astray as to help you find your way. The island was also the location of the first ship-building efforts in New Zealand. On this trip we explored Dusky no further, but there are pleasant, protected anchorages also at Earshell Island and Cascade Cove. For fishermen, the Nook in Duck Cove is so full of blue cod that you could almost walk across their backs.

Seals at Luncheon Cove, Dusky Sound

On 24 January, we moved south to Preservation Inlet, bypassing Chalky Sound. The latter has few well-sheltered anchorages apart from Lake Cove which is several miles inland. In Preservation we swung at anchor in Cuttle Cove. The inlet has some history, with an early settlement at Otago Retreat and several attempts at mining for both gold and tin. From Kisbee Cove there is a pleasant hike up the old, disused, wooden tramway lines to some of the old mine workings.

With high pressure set in, we made our move back to Stewart Island, this time heading to Oban to restock. Leaving Preservation, we rounded Puysegur Point, the South Island's southwestern tip. Puysegur is also the name of New Zealand's stormiest coastal weather forecast area, with storm-force winds experienced an average of 120 days a year. For us the gentle easterly soon died out and we spent a long, sunny day motoring along Foveaux Strait and then down Stewart Island's east coast to pick up a mooring in Half Moon Bay.

Below from left to right: Dinghy at dock in Oban, Stewart Island; Gale on mooring, Oban

Since Stewart Island's listing as a World Heritage site, visitor numbers to Oban have increased, but fortunately not to the extent that it is overwhelmed. Its small '4 square' store is remarkably well stocked and the South Seas Hotel has a welcoming bar and a raucous, well-attended quiz night. The friendly backpackers' hostel offers laundry facilities and even showers. There are numerous local day-hiking tracks as well as the start of the much more challenging, three-day Rakiura Track, one of New Zealand's 'Great Walks'.

Oban is familiar territory for us, having visited five times, both cruising and racing. With a southwest gale looming we were happy to sit it out on a mooring as the gusts blasted spray across the Bay. However, by 31 January the weather had settled and *Zest* was full of provisions, water, diesel and LPG. With an early start, we set off to return to Port Pegasus, just laying the course along the south coast in a light to moderate west-northwesterly. By afternoon we were anchored in Evening Cove, South Arm, with one line ashore and another to the fishermen's set line astern.

Bullers albatross

The moorland and bush around Port Pegasus offers wonderful, if sometimes challenging, hiking. From Evening Cove the granite outcrops of Gog, Magog and the Scotsman are silhouetted against the skyline as potential destinations. We have reached the Scotsman once before and failed twice, having strayed into impenetrable bush. This time we found the best route and succeeded. Three days later we moved to a temporary anchorage near Bald Cone, which we call Sunstone's Corner. From there we could access the route to the Cone. Though it is mostly across easy moorland, the final ascent is up 'The Chute' with the aid of set ropes. The reward is a wonderful view out over the harbour and the Southwest Cape. In the afternoon we moved to anchor in Disappointment Cove, a completely sheltered anchorage which the local fishermen call 'Peacehaven', after the retirement home in Invercargill where some of them end their days.

We spent 5 and 6 February anchored in Islet Cove, gently preparing for a passage north. There are several other excellent anchorages in Port Pegasus – Waterlily Cove and Ben's Bay being two of the best protected. The former also offers

Below from left to right: Hike to Scotsman, Port Pegasus; Back down the chute, Port Pegasus

Clockwise from top left: Vicky and Tom at Islet Cove, Port Pegasus; Looking down from Bald Cone, Port Pegasus; The beach at Anchorage Cove, Abel Tasman Park; Walk from Snug Cove, Marlborough Sounds

good, if somewhat tea-coloured, fresh water. Then we spent 8 and 9 February at the very sheltered and wonderfully named Abraham's Bosom in Port Adventure at the southeast corner of Stewart Island.

On the morning of 10 February we set off northward in a light southwesterly, initially heading for Lyttelton. The wind freshened the next day and came more southerly. We made good progress and it was clear from the forecast that we could hold good southerlies for the next two or three days. However, after that northeasterlies were forecast to set in for some time. We decided to avoid any stops along the coast, which might prove lengthy, and headed straight to Tory Channel and the Marlborough Sounds at the northeast corner of the South Island. The forecast proved accurate in both respects with the southerlies carrying us all the way north and even giving us perfect timing to catch the very strong tide through the tidal overfalls and into Tory Channel. By noon on 13 February we were moored in Waikawa Marina, near Picton in Queen Charlotte Sound, the easternmost of the Marlborough Sounds. The northeasterlies came in the next day.

Though Picton is still 80 miles from home, we think of the Marlborough Sounds as home waters. Now all the pressure of passage-making was off and we could have a leisurely time heading slowly homewards, stopping in several of our favourite local spots. After a few sunny days in the marina it seemed appropriate that our first stop echoed an earlier one on the cruise, Pickersgill Island. Yes, Cook's not overly imaginative naming skills also made their mark here. Because of the depths much of the moorage in the Sounds is to moorings set and controlled by local clubs. Anchoring is often only possible in depths of 25–30m. We were happy to sit out a three-day spell of gusty winds on a

mooring at Pickersgill before moving on to round Cape Jackson, through its tide-swept inside passage, and to find another mooring in Snug Cove, Ketu Island. Here we climbed to the top of the Island for expansive views across much of Pelorus Sound.

By the last week in February we were ready to move closer to home and motored over calm seas to take the narrow passage between the Rangitoto Islands, through the strong tides of Hell Gate and round into D'Urville Island's Port Hardy, mooring up in Philante Cove on the western arm. After such an easy sail we accepted the challenge of bush-bashing our way to the ridge line up the entangled stream bed at the head of the anchorage. Having seized the high moral, as well as physical, ground we then spent three days lolling with occasional boat maintenance and cleaning.

Hell's Gate; Zest anchored at Philante, Port Hardy

On 26 February, we motorsailed away into Tasman Bay until a moderate northwesterly filled in giving a delightful reach and enough speed to entice an Albacore tuna onto our trailing lure. By mid-afternoon we were anchored in Anchorage Cove, Torrent Bay, off its beautiful golden sand beach, a highlight of Abel Tasman National Park. To welcome us truly home, Tasman Bay turned on its summer weather with bright sun, light winds and sea breezes. We were ready for home.

Three days later *Zest* was back in her berth in Nelson Marina after covering 1,734 miles over the 81 days of the cruise. When we were in our 30s, we completed cruises of similar length in a little over three weeks. Now, more than twice that age we are more inclined to adopt an easier pace and look for easier windows of opportunity. We reef earlier and reach for the engine ignition key sooner.

Albacore tuna

So perhaps we should just surrender to the inevitable, buy a power boat and steer from a padded chair in a pilothouse for the odd weekend outing, or even lounge on the sofa at home watching golf on the TV. Not yet! We still have the satisfaction of fulfilling our challenges, even if our cruising coat has been cut to suit our aged cloth. The satisfactions are the same as they were 40 years ago. Anyway, there is still the swish of the bow wave and the feel of the helm. And why go to sea for a short time when you can go for longer?

MELBOURNE TO OSAKA RACE:

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

by Cyrus Allen (s/v *White Spirit*)

First held in 1987 to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the opening of the Port of Osaka, the race is now held roughly every five years to celebrate the City of Melbourne and the City of Osaka's 'Sister City and Sister Port' relationship. The 2025 race was the ninth such race and is the longest north–south double-handed race. Newly qualified member, Cyrus Allen, Commodore of the Ocean Racing Club of Victoria, entered the Melbourne Osaka Cup aboard his Beneteau First 50. He double-handed the race with Lillian Stewart as co-skipper.

I've long been fascinated by the Osaka Cup – a 5,500-mile double-handed yacht race from Melbourne, Australia to Osaka, Japan. The idea of sailing across the Pacific to a country I once called home was too enticing to resist. It's one of the longest double-handed ocean races in the world, and for sailors who crave challenge, solitude and the raw beauty of distance sailing, it's a rite of passage.

This year, I finally made it to the start line aboard *White Spirit* – a Beneteau First 50 performance cruising yacht I'd spent years refining – with my co-skipper and sailing partner, Lillian. We couldn't have been more different in background. Turning 28 the day before the race, Lillian had only been sailing for four years, but had already clocked over 5,000 miles in offshore races, including three Melbourne to Hobart campaigns. I brought 27 years of experience to the table, mostly from England, the Mediterranean and Australia's east coast. What we shared, though, was a sense of adventure and an ambition to achieve something enormous in our mutual field of interest and passion.

Left to right: Cyrus Allen and Lillian Stewart, before the race; The Osaka Cup Formal Presentation at Melbourne City Town Hall

THE START: *Portsea to the East Australian Current*

Fourteen boats lined up at Portsea Pier in Port Phillip Bay on a mild autumn morning. We were buzzing with anticipation, trepidation and that electric feeling you get when you know something life-changing is about to begin. We quickly discovered that the race unfolded in five distinct chapters:

1. *Melbourne to the East Australian Current (EAC)*
2. *Trade winds reaching up to the Solomon Islands*
3. *The drifting, squally hell of the Doldrums*
4. *A dream run up through the Philippine Sea*
5. *The battle against the Kuroshio Current and the fluky winds of the Yura Seto Strait into Osaka*

Critically, we made an early tactical decision to punch out 200 miles offshore to pick up a northerly eddy of the East Australian Current, while the majority of the fleet hugged the southeastern coast of Australia. The cost? Two days of bashing into rather messy seas, and the boat that was once dry, very quickly becoming saturated, humid and very uncomfortable – but it paid off. We latched on to that north-bound conveyor belt and rode it hard, gaining serious ground with our dramatic increase in speed from the (at times) 3 knots of current assisting us.

White Spirit

Adjusting the rigging

LIVING AFLOAT, TWO-HANDED

Inspecting halyards; Reinserting mainsail battens

When you're sailing double-handed across an ocean, you live in a strange, beautiful blur of motion and fatigue. We took an adaptive approach to watches – more a conversation than a schedule. Whoever was more rested or less seasick took the helm. It worked because we trusted each other and because we also prioritised time together to socialise, reflect and plan the next steps. We cooked and ate together daily, marking evening meals as a kind of ritual, complete with an electric candle for ambience. Sometimes there was music and cockpit dancing. Always laughter.

We each lost weight (7kg for me, 2.5kg for Lillian): probably a mix of heat, movement and effort. We kept up a routine of seawater showers with more laughter as we dumped buckets of water over each other, followed by a splash of fresh to rinse. It helped us feel human.

Provisioning was one of our unsung strengths. We had homemade soups, roast veggies and 46 pre-cooked meals (lasagnes, fried rice, etc.) from our dear friends and sponsored meals from OnTrack Meals, which included slow-cooked steak and lamb, chicken curries, vegan delights and desserts. A heap of fresh and long-life staples gave a bit of roughage, but the real highlight? Weekly 'care packages' from friends. Each was filled with goodies, personal notes, and love. We'd open one each Monday, and it became something we looked forward to more than we could have guessed.

BOAT LIFE AND CHALLENGES

White Spirit was solid, but she didn't get through unscathed. Day one, our hydraulic vang hose burst, spraying oil all over the deck and cabin top. We replaced it with a 3:2 block-and-tackle solution that lasted until the finish line and retrieved about 80% of the hydraulic system's function. We blocked the aft

Celebrating a friend's birthday

Taking time out to share the Experience

Improvising a new backstay flag from an old one!

Dressing up for making offerings to Neptune

Entering the Northern Hemisphere

Lillian enjoyed drawing in her off-watch time

toilet on day 2 – with an errant piece of paper towel. From then on we used the forward head, which made for an often eventful bathroom break as the boat ploughed through the swell, . . . or the transom.

Then there were the halyards. Something in the mast chewed through them like spaghetti. With each drop of the kite or the Code 0, another foot of halyard had to be removed as it was chewed to the core. Eventually, we would have run out of spare halyard length, so 'MacGyvered' a solution by splicing abrasion sleeves onto the halyards using the outer sheath of spare, slightly larger diameter line. It worked – but we started calling them "single-use halyards" by the end. We had investigated the masthead (a difficult and high-risk task at sea that resulted in bruised limbs and valuable time spent) but were unable to determine the cause. The sheathed approach may have been a medium-term 'band aid' solution, but it worked well enough to buy us time with the halyards.

Our generator gave us all sorts of problems requiring a fair bit of tinkering, and two of our fridges failed. Luckily, I brought one back to life and I had also installed a 12V camping fridge as a back-up. It was an invaluable source of frozen treats and ice cream.

We carried 500 litres of water and a 12V watermaker that we used three times. That let us be generous with hygiene, which felt essential in the tropics, yet still focused on resource conservation, because watermaking requires a lot of electrical power.

NATURE, NEPTUNE AND STARLINK

Crossing the Equator was unforgettable. We went all-out with costumes, celebratory gin and pearl offerings to Neptune, hand-painted certificates and bracelets marking the occasion. It was candid, heartfelt and the perfect way to mark the momentous milestone. We were treated to oceans alive with dolphins, schools of jumping tuna on the hunt and curious, exhausted booby birds looking to roost. The boobies became a crowd favourite, adopting our bimini each night to preen, and tuck their heads beneath their wings. Every visit felt like a blessing and a reassuring reminder that we were not alone out there.

All boats carried Starlink this year: what a game changer! Not just for navigation and routing, but for morale. We stayed in contact with the rest of the fleet, swapping updates, jokes and support. It turned competitors into comrades. I even managed a tele-physio consultation via WhatsApp when I developed a strain; the advice worked, and I was back on deck in a few days.

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THE FINAL PUSH

Navigating the Solomons was intense. We threaded the gap between New Ireland and Bougainville – seven days of sticky heat, no wind, strong tides and constant tweaking of the drifter and main. We barely slept. It was hot, hard sailing, not because of the squalls, but in the way our effort was spent to keep the boat moving, even 0.5 of a knot through the water. One challenging moment was having to dive under the boat to find an errant spinnaker sheet that had got itself wrapped around the prop. However, eventually we made it through.

The final legs were a lesson in patience, but provided us with some of our most exhilarating sailing – nearly 2,500 miles on the starboard tack, running under either the Code 0 or the Assy,* and changing down to the jib when the inevitable squall passed through. The Kuroshio Current that guards the southern entrance to Japan is a beast: fast, messy and hard to work with. At some 60 miles wide and running at 3–4 knots, it required a lot of focus to navigate an optimal route across it. Then the Yura Seto Strait greeted us with fluky winds and wild current. It took everything we had to coax *White Spirit* through those last hundred miles.

PREPARATION & PRACTICE

We didn't wing this. A year before the start, we began racing together double-handed enjoying the learning that came from the notorious Southern Ocean and Bass Strait waters. King Island, Devonport, Melbourne–Hobart were the major events, each an opportunity to learn and prepare for the next. Each one was longer, harder and more revealing. We refined our comms, deck flow and sail handling, learning not only about the boat, but ourselves and each other.

Off the water, we trained in remote first aid, customs procedures, sail repair and navigation. It all counted.

* Slang name for an asymmetrical spinnaker.

MILESTONES AND MAGIC

The race had its moments of ceremony:

- *The Melbourne Town Hall dinner with families and dignitaries*
- *The "Blessing of the Fleet" at Sandringham*
- *The spiritual welcome at Osaka's Tenmangu Shrine*

We crossed the finish line at 3am, we were exhausted, exhilarated, relieved and somewhat saddened that this amazing adventure was over. *White Spirit* came fourth across the line – a result we're proud of. But more than that, we arrived changed. Under tow from a committee boat because our throttle mechanism had failed, we floated into dock to the welcome of friends, family and the wonderful volunteers of the Osaka Hokko Yacht Club.

Safe arrival

It was a special moment for me as my daughter and sister had flown in and were my first shore-hugs after so many days at sea.

This race isn't just about miles or tactics. It's about partnership, patience, trust – and that sweet, strange feeling of sailing toward a place that once lived only in your dreams. Everyone has their reasons for embarking on the Osaka race. For the crew of *White Spirit*, it was an adventure begging to happen and, most certainly, a springboard into many, many journeys and projects to come where we will embark with a greater sense of confidence, capability and determination.

To everyone who made this possible, we thank you sincerely.

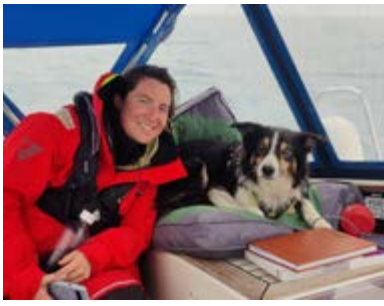
THE REPUBLIC OF CABO VERDE:

SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST A PIT STOP!

by Romy McIntosh (s/v *Valkyrie of Orwell*)

Romy, a commercial archaeologist by training, together with her partner, Rhys, bought a 1978 Nautor Swan 43 ketch, Valkyrie, *in November 2022 and, after a fairly extensive refit, set sail from the UK at the end of July 2024 together with their dog, Artie. Romy started working for the OCC in April 2025 and has already got stuck into many aspects of the club's activities, including developing the young cruisers' community. Romy and Rhys are currently cruising the eastern seaboard of the USA. Romy regularly posts on instagram* **@sv.valkyrie** *and they have a blog at* **sailingvalkyrie.wordpress.com**.

The Cape Verde Islands, or The Republic of Cabo Verde, is a nation formed of ten volcanic islands situated in the North Atlantic Ocean approximately 400 miles west of Senegal. Though historically they have often been missed by sailors crossing the Atlantic, with many opting to sail direct from the Canary Islands, this trend is steadily changing. With a concerted effort by the Cape Verdean authorities to crack down on crime, and especially with the ARC+ now stopping on the island of São Vicente, more and more cruisers are choosing Cape Verde as the leaping-off point for their Atlantic crossing. However, many of these intrepid sailors are choosing to make a single stop at Mindelo, which hosts the only marina of the tiny nation, and not to visit the other islands. By doing so they are sorely missing out on a chance to explore a gorgeous cruising ground with steady northeast trade winds, tropical blue waters teeming with fish and lush volcanic islands with stunning views and black sand beaches.



Romy and Artie

When planning our Atlantic crossing for December 2024 we decided that this small cluster of islands was one stop we didn't want to miss for two reasons:

- It would shorten the amount of time we would be at sea and with a dog aboard we felt this was important
- We reasoned that we were unlikely to be sailing in this part of the world again and not to visit would be a missed opportunity

Therefore, when we left Gran Canaria we set our sails for the town of Palmeira on the island of Sal, the most northeastern island in the Cape Verde archipelago and an official Port of Entry.

Palmeira is a small town made up of a port that services the local ferries and supply ships, a handful of restaurants and souvenir shops, a couple of small shops for groceries and a police station where you can check in to the country. This normally quiet town can get quite lively in the afternoons with tour groups that have been bussed in from the hotel resorts in the south of the island.

Sailing towards Sal Rei

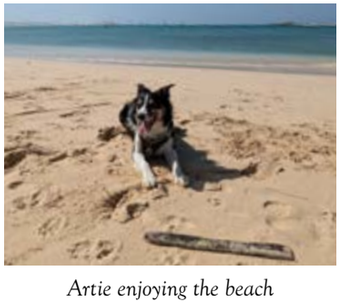
We arrived just before sunset and dropped anchor, on to sand with good holding in a sheltered bay, after seven days at sea. We were in high spirits and excited to explore a whole new country and continent, but first we needed a solid night of sleep. The following morning we got up and dinghied over to the beach where we were met by our first boat boy repeating "watch dinghy, watch dinghy". We handed a couple of Euros over to the kid and asked for directions to the police station, which turned out to only be a hundred metres or so walk from the beach. After checking in, we scouted out a restaurant for our dinner that evening and found an ATM in the port's terminal building where we could withdraw some Escudo, the local currency. That evening we went ashore again but this time with our dog Artemis, a Border Collie, and we tied up to the dinghy dock. A group of young lads helped us out of our dinghy and one even knelt to tie up my shoes for me, whilst others held the local street dogs at bay; for this level of service we didn't resent the couple of Euros it cost us.

We ate at Esplanada Rotterdam, a restaurant on the waterfront serving freshly caught fish and seafood alongside fries, rice, salad and vegetables. It was here that we discovered that we had a taste for Mahi-Mahi (Dorado or Dolphin fish), and that we would be able to treat ourselves to several meals out whilst in Cape Verde, as it was such good value following the expensive Canary Islands and the Algarve of Portugal.

We were on the move again the next morning and hoisted our spinnaker as we pointed our bow towards the town of Sal Rei on the island of Boa Vista to the south. We had a delightful sail and even saw a shark which leisurely turned to follow us for a few minutes between the islands. We dropped anchor into clear water and on to white sand in a relatively busy bay off Praia do Estoril, just in time to collect our third crew member for our Atlantic crossing, Jess, Rhys's sister.

Sal Rei is a larger, busier town than Palmeira, with multiple all-inclusive resorts and more amenities for your cruiser in need. It has a beautiful, long, pristine white sand beach dotted with small pieces of coral and a couple of beach bars, as well as spots from which you can rent wing foils and windsurfers, which zip around the bay. It also didn't have the expected gang of youths wanting to look after the dinghy, so we left it pulled up on the sand with some trepidation. However, after staying in this anchorage for about five days we never had any issues with leaving it unattended on the beach. There is a small dock in the fishing harbour, but we had been advised not to leave our dinghy there as from there things have a tendency to go wandering!

Zelito delivering water



Artie enjoying the beach

Deserto de Viana

In Cape Verde you are required to check in and out of each island at the local police station. However, we found that if we visited the station the day before we planned to move on, we could check in and out at the same time and get away with not having to hand over our ship's papers for the duration of our stay.

When in Sal Rei we were put in contact with Zelito, who we affectionately referred to as the local 'fixer' for the anchorage. He sourced for us: refills for our three Camping Gaz bottles, 100 litres of diesel, 300 litres of potable water *and* arranged a pick-up tour of the island for us later in the week, all for an incredibly reasonable price! Oh, and he could also sort out laundry along with myriad other things.

On the day of our island tour we dinghied over to the fishing harbour and were greeted by Zelito, who took our dinghy over to his own boat for safe keeping. We then met two Swedish ladies from another yacht in the bay who would be joining us and who were also crossing the Atlantic in December. The five of us, plus dog, jumped up into the back of a truck that had been outfitted with some benches and headed out to explore Boa Vista.

As we drove out of the town we were blasted with warm, dry air, a testament to the desert-like conditions of this particular island. We made our way through the town of Rabil – with Artie enjoying the wind in her fur – to our first stop at the Deserto de Viana. The route took us through rolling dunes which sometimes had us white-knuckled, gripping our benches as the wheels of the truck slid in the soft sand, but eventually we slowed to a halt at the top of a white expanse dotted with occasional hardy bushes. This was one of the stops I had been most looking forward to. It was incredible to be surrounded by sand as far as the eye could see. There were locals selling rides on small wooden boards down the dunes and Artie had a great time pelting around after a stick and kicking up white clouds. Before long it was time to move on to the next stop and after another hair-raising ride through the dunes we were on our way to Povoação Velha. This was a small town where we stopped for a drink and snack in the pretty square whilst people-watching the large groups of tourists heading off on ATV excursions into the wilderness.

After this it was time to visit the beaches. First we went to the Praia da Varandinha, where the swell was too much to go swimming but where there were several caves eroded into the rock which were great to explore. Next we

Street in Povoação Velha

Forte Duque de Bragança

Bay at Tarrafal

Main square Ribeira Brava

went to the Praia do Curralinho where the swell was large but more manageable to jump over to get to the turquoise waters beyond for a refreshing swim.

Finally, we made our way back to Sal Rei where our driver took us into the favela at the back of the town. Here, he stopped outside an unassuming building with a beaded net curtain across the door. Inside was where we would have our lunch, and we were treated to a tasty spread of grilled fish with a tangy onion relish, steamed vegetables, rice, fries and a bowl of feijoada, the local bean stew.

Before long it was time to leave Boa Vista and to move on to São Nicolau, where we anchored off a town called Tarrafal. After a long and quite rolly day-sail we dropped anchor off our first black sand beach. A word of warning: black sand holds its heat much better than white sand, so be careful not to burn your feet! Unfortunately, the beach at Tarrafal is also home to a group of men who demand money for watching your dinghy, and not in the endearing way of the children of Palmeira. We had a particular run-in with one of them after an absolutely fantastic day driving ourselves around the island. Having paid one of the men that morning to watch our dinghy for the day, we returned in the evening only for him to demand more money than we had already given him. It wasn't until we were waist deep in water yelling at him to let go of our dinghy that he relented. Don't let this put you off visiting though, as the preceding day had been one of our best days exploring of our whole visit.

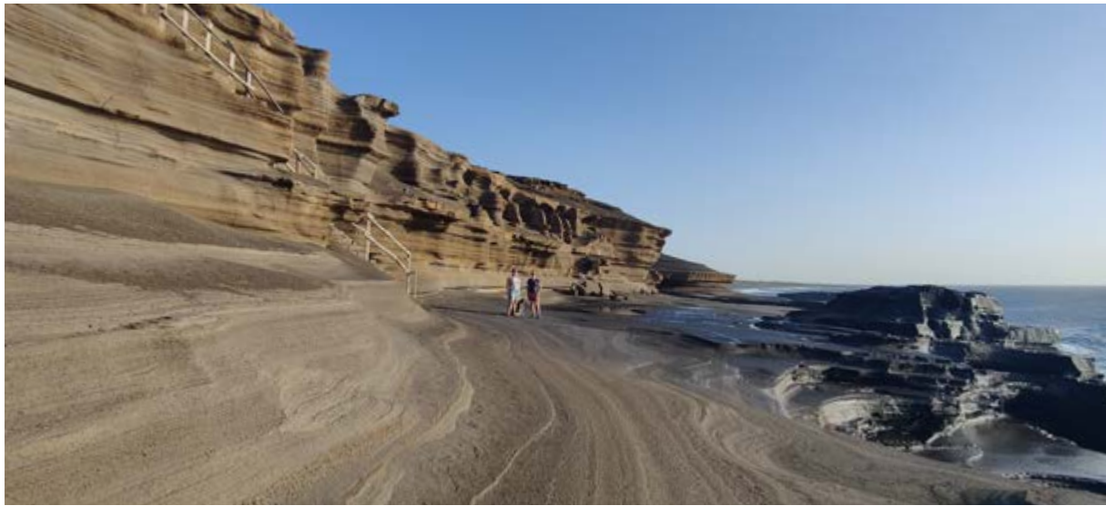
The course of that day went something like this: first we rented a pick-up truck from a man named Toy in the main square of Tarrafal. As the day progressed we were delighted to have hired a pick-up rather than a car as the roads we often found ourselves on were more of a track than a road! The first stop on our tour was Vulcão do Juncalinho, an extinct volcano on the north coast where we were able to drive right up to the rim. The volcano looked like it had been frozen in time at the point of explosion with bubbly, jagged pieces of rock looming outwards from the crater and it was a good reminder of the volcanic origins of the island we were exploring. Next, we drove to the natural pools at Piscina Natural de Lagoa. We didn't swim as it was too early in the morning to be open, but it got us excited for a swim later in the day and we were able to enjoy the scenery as we breezed down the coastal road between stops.

We then drove to Ribeira Brava, the largest town on the island, for some lunch. The colourful houses of this bustling town rise up around you as you drop down into a valley between looming volcanic peaks. In the centre is a quaint town square with side roads hosting bars and shops. Here we enjoyed a whole fried fish with boiled potatoes seasoned with fried onions and herbs and a salad, all for the equivalent of just a couple of pounds. From Ribeira Brava we took the main road back to the west side of the island. This route winds up and over the central mountain range with plenty of switch-backs and looming drop-offs that open to breathtaking views, as well as small townships surrounded by green slopes and coated in swathes of spider webs which had us hastily winding up our windows!

Piscina Natural de Lagoa

Next, we arrived at Piscinas Naturais de Largo on the northwest coast. Unlike the previous pools there was no infrastructure here and it felt as if we had wandered into a hidden gem that we had all to ourselves. Although mostly quiescent we still had to keep our wits about us as the occasional wave crashed over the rocks, sending water and spray everywhere and threatening to drag us back out with it. Sad to leave the idyllic spot, from here we drove to the carved cliffs at Carbeirinho. We had timed our arrival for an hour or so before sunset so that we could enjoy the golden light reflecting off the curved rock faces that had been worn smooth by the water, and marvel at the power of nature. These last two spots of natural beauty were wonderful places to pause and reflect on how far we had come since leaving England and that, having arrived into Cape Verde, we suddenly felt very far from home for the first time.

Our final stop of the day was at Restaurante Bia back in Tarrafal, where we ate grilled chicken, fries, rice and salad in what felt like (and probably was) someone's living room which had been converted into a restaurant. We then returned to *Valkyrie* after the aforementioned tussle over our dinghy, determined not to let it ruin our impression of what so far had proven to be a gorgeous nation with friendly, helpful people.



Carved cliffs at Carbeirinho

The following morning we decided that we were done with towns for a few days, so we picked up the anchor and moved around the corner to Baixo Rocha. Although exposed, deep and a bit unsettled we had a great time in this anchorage. The water is crystal clear, with rocky outcrops on either side of the bay that gather hoards of brightly coloured fish. It's perfect for snorkelling. The beach is prone to a bit of surf, so be careful landing a dinghy, but then have fun riding in on bodyboards or inflatable rings like we did. You can also climb the steep sand dune at the back of the beach, or walk along the shore and admire the rock formations.

Our sail to Mindelo, on the island of São Vicente, took us past the uninhabited islands Santa Luzia, Ilhéu Branco and Ilhéu Raso. After another rolly sail we were happy to round the Ponta João Ribeiro and turn up into the (only slightly) more sheltered bay that hosts the only marina in the islands. As we were running low on water and knew we were going to spend a couple of weeks rolling around at sea, we decided to pass the large anchorage, host to boats flying a multitude of flags from all around the world, and took a berth in the marina. It was our first ever attempt at Med-style mooring, and we were pleased with how we manoeuvred into our spot, pulling in between two other British flagged yachts.

For a boat heading out across the Atlantic, Mindelo marina is a perfect spot from which to top up with water, reprovision, discuss plans and sailing strategies with other sailors over a beer at the bar and enjoy some last on-land luxuries before setting off into the blue. Whilst waiting for a weather window we made friends with our neighbours, who we have managed to keep in contact with via the wonders of Starlink and social media. We were also pleased to find a shop selling tubs of ice-cream and (better yet) a passable cheddar cheese from a deli counter that would even rival some of that found back home!

Cape Verde is one of the few African states to host a Pride Festival

Mindelo town, like a lot of Cape Verde, is certainly a bit rough around the edges. Its vibrant architecture, reminiscent of its Portuguese past, is slowly being replaced with modern concrete buildings as the town sees an increase in tourism. Pick-pocketing is common; we met one boat crew who had been shouted at whilst using an ATM and we were accosted by a man asking for change, but were prepared for this tactic to try to get us to pull out our wallets. However, we also experienced great kindness, great food and met some fascinating people. One of these was Salvador, the vet who came to issue us our onwards health certificate for Artie. Salvador told us a bit about life as one of the few vets on the islands; from dolphin necropsies one day, to horse castrations and visits like ours the next. We wish we had been able to visit more of these wonderful islands, but the four we explored will hold a special place in my memory.

Eventually a weather window opened up and it was time for us to say goodbye to the cluster of islands we had called home for just over two weeks. The start of our journey was slow as we were caught in the wind shadow of Santo Antão, but once we cleared the island we picked up 30 knots on our starboard quarter, unrolled a small piece of genoa, and went on our way.

MONTENEGRO TO TUNISIA:

SURVIVING A SEVERE WEATHER BOMB

by Lane Finley (s/v *Mai Tai*)

Mai Tai is an Annapolis 44 built in 1963 in GRP from the same moulds as the Navy 44s of the same era. The twelve Navy 44s were rigged as yawls and used as training ships at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Mai Tai and her five sister ships are rigged as cutters and she has been lovingly cared for by Lane and Kay Finley for the last 35 years. They have cruised on her extensively from southeast Alaska to the fiords of the South Island of New Zealand and most of the Pacific in between. They left New Zealand on this current voyage seven years ago and are now almost halfway round a slow loop around the world.

It was early July 2024 when we sailed from Albania and headed for Montenegro, enjoying the beautiful calm conditions of our overnight sail. The winds began to pick up during the night to 18 knots and, just before dawn, we could see serious lightning up ahead. We decided to head for the port of Bar to check in to Montenegro, rather than continuing to Kotor as originally planned. By 0900 we were tied up to the concrete customs dock to check in and, hopefully, to be safe from the storm on the horizon.

With all our fenders protecting us from the high concrete pier, we climbed ashore to do our routine check-in with the port authorities. The day was becoming a little overcast with a few clouds moving in above us.

With customs formalities complete, we needed to go to the Port Captain's office but, as we stepped outside, we felt some huge rain drops falling, so we headed back to the boat to pick up our jackets. This is when we saw a nearly solid grey wall of rain coming towards us, moving fast. The wind was starting to whistle in the rigging and the sea was building. We were tossed about by 2m waves in the harbour even though we were just 300m inside the outer sea wall.

We could barely stand in the horrific wind but managed to jump on board *Mai Tai*. Already heeling over at 45 degrees against the concrete wall, she was pinned against the windward side of the pier in the onslaught and we could do absolutely nothing. As the wind and sea continued to rise our fenders burst while being smashed between us and the pier. Our situation was truly frightening. Kay went down below, and

Mai Tai *calmly swinging on anchor*

Clockwise from left: The 32mm x 6mm stainless jib track bent; ceiling panel inside the cabin cracked; cracking along the inside of the bulwark

each time the boat was smashed against the wall, she could hear the cabinets cracking and groaning. Up in the cockpit, the screeching sound of the wind through the rigging was deafening. We thought we might lose the rig as the slamming against the unforgiving concrete was so violent, especially with the collapsed fenders.

The worst of it lasted just under an hour, then the skies cleared and the wind died. It was a very long hour. We experienced the fear of losing our precious *Mai Tai*, the sadness of watching her being battered and the shock and awe of the power of Mother Nature.

When the harbour calmed down and after checking our bilges and inspecting *Mai Tai* for damage, we stepped on to the pier to complete our check-in, but what we saw on our way to the Port Captain made us realise just how bad this storm really had been. Trees had been blown over on to the roofs of nearby restaurants and boats that were out on the hard had been toppled like a pack of cards. Roofs had been torn off buildings, power lines were down, large glass windows were lying broken inside buildings, and streets were flooded.

We managed to move *Mai Tai* around to a spare berth in the small marina so we could assess the situation and dry out the gallons of rainwater that had poured in through the open hatches. This was our assessment:

- We were very happy to be unhurt.
- All the damage to *Mai Tai* seemed to be above the waterline. This was due to the wind heeling us over so far that most of the damage was on the rail.
- *Mai Tai* was not taking on any water.
- The port jib track had been severely damaged, but we have a staysail track further inboard that was unaffected.

We got a copy of the local TV news report which said this was the worst storm they had had in 100 years; the wind gusts at the storm's peak were reported to have been 100 knots in the harbour. One person had died and there had also been severe damage to many of the villages up in the surrounding mountains.

After much consideration, we made the decision to continue with our cruising plans for the season even though *Mai Tai* was in a pretty sad state.

So, we set off to join our friends in Kotor and then continue and complete our cruise of Montenegro, Greece, Italy and Malta. After this we planned to go to Port de Peche boatyard, close to Monastir in Tunisia, where we could do all of the required repair work on *Mai Tai* ourselves. Boatyards in Tunisia are less expensive than yards in the EU and, since Tunisia is outside the Schengen Zone, we could stop our Schengen clock. The only drawback was that we would be unlikely to find everything we needed in Tunisia.

Over the rest of the cruising season Lane had time to assess the work and make a comprehensive list of the materials he would need. We then bought as much as we could in Malta before sailing to Tunisia. This included materials for fibreglassing the hull and deck, all the various paints, the marine plywood to rebuild the interior cabinets, the stainless steel flat bar to replace the bent jib track, personal safety equipment, new fenders and even masking tape!

THE WORK BEGINS

Once in Monastir, the work began. We made arrangements to haul out at the small local yard in Marina Cap Monastir and do a more in-depth check.

Lane began by sanding around the area of impact. As soon as the paint was removed it became obvious that to repair the damage, we would need to grind back the layers of fibreglass that showed surface cracking and then, once down to solid fibreglass, add new layers using epoxy. The crack in the rail would be ground back and any holes filled with expanding foam, which can be easily sanded smooth and which would form a strong backing to which the new fibreglass could bond. We ground the

Clockwise from right: Lane filling the stanchion bolt holes with epoxy; cabinets removed revealing more repairs needed; even the port settee had to go to re-tab the bulkhead cracking along the inside of the bulwark

As it was just the two of us we used small sheets of glass that were more manageable

Finally finished we admire our work!

fibreglass off, cutting in about halfway across the side deck. This allowed us to lay the new fibreglass across a wide section of the side deck to ensure a structural bond, then up and over the rail and down the outside of the hull to just above the waterline.

This part of the job was critical to the overall success of the project. We spent several days carefully grinding the hull and deck while balancing on old wooden planks laid across what they call scaffolding in Tunisia, which is basically a few pipes welded together: no guard rails here!

After the grinding was complete and the area cleaned completely, we cut the fibreglass cloth into manageable-sized strips that we could lay in an overlapping pattern to give the maximum strength to the repaired area. Using West System Epoxy we laid a total of six layers of biaxial fibreglass cloth across an area of almost 5m^2 along the port side of *Mai Tai*.

We then turned our attention to the interior. First, we removed the cabinets, deckhead panels and settee on the damaged port side. Once this was clear and we were down to the bare hull, we began grinding the damaged fibreglass tabs on the bulkheads and the hull-to-deck join where there were signs of delamination. The new fibreglass, heavy with epoxy, kept wanting to fall off when we put it on the deckhead. In the end we worked out a pretty good method to get it to stay in place and the job turned out well.

The inside is finished as well so Lane can sit down and read Flying Fish

We knew we would have to paint the damaged area on the port side after fibreglassing, both the hull area and also the deck where we had cut in the new fibreglass. However, since *Mai Tai* was already overdue a new paint job, we decided that we would take the opportunity to paint the hull on both sides. The deck, cabin top, hard top and cockpit were also in need of new paint so we decided to do that as well. 'Why not', we said, 'what could go wrong?'

We hired a couple of the Tunisian boatyard guys to help with sanding the hull using longboards to get the curves fair with the rest of the boat. We used epoxy fairing compound and sanded literally for weeks. We mixed fairing compound at the end of the day and spread it over the area. The next morning, we started again with the longboards. At the same time, we stripped the cabin and deck of all hardware, rails, jib tracks, cleats, winches, rigging and lifeline stanchions. Each bolt was carefully undone and bagged with labels, but to do this we had to remove all of the ceiling panels in order to have access to the deck hardware fasteners. Next came more weeks of sanding and filling all the surfaces, as well as stripping all the old non-skid surface off the decks.

We finally began painting, starting with the cabin, hardtop and cockpit using sprayed 2-part polyurethane. First came three coats of primer, sanding between each one and finally three layers of topcoat. Working around the winter weather was the main complication but with patience and persistence we finally finished the top areas.

We had finished building the new cabinets and decided to repaint everything from the aft quarter berth to the forward cabin including all of the deckhead panels that we had removed earlier. We used the roll and tip technique to reduce to a minimum the amount of taping off required (spraying would have required everything to be taped off).

Finally, we moved back outside to paint the topsides. By now the weather was a bit more predictable as spring was upon us. The same familiar formula of sand – primer – sand – topcoat began. However, even after the final coat we were still not finished, not by a long shot! We now spent weeks carefully re-assembling all the rails, winches, cleats, hinges, latches, hatches and other hardware we had taken off, making sure each bolt was properly sealed.

It has been a huge amount of work, but we have our floating home back, better than ever. We are now preparing to leave the Mediterranean to head across the Atlantic early in 2026, where we hope there will be lots of opportunities to show off our handiwork as our paths cross with fellow members. Sometimes a catastrophe can lead to improvements.

Good friends and fellow members: resuming our sailing in Malta, with fellow OCC members: David & Juliet Fosh (Reflections)*, Trip & Nicole Von Hoffmann* (Kalyra)*, Lane & Kay Finley* (Mai Tai)

FRENCH POLYNESIA TO BRITISH COLUMBIA:

25 DAYS CLOSE-HAULED IN THE PACIFIC

by Neil McCubbin (s/v *Milvina*)

Milvina is a Passoa 47, an aluminium centreboard cutter. Her hull and all aluminium work was undertaken by Garcia in France and finishing by Neil and his wife Helen in Quebec. She was first launched in 2004 and has since cruised from Quebec via Cuba, Spitzbergen, Panama and Tuamotus to her new home in British Columbia; with lots of wandering and diversions along the way! Milvina normally sails for about six months of the year. The crew varied while in the islands in 2025, and included Heather Tyler, Heather's husband André Poirier and her brother Peter, as well as Neil's son Derek, with two to four on board at any one time.

Milvina

Our article in *Flying Fish* 2024 left *Milvina* on the hard in Atuona on Hiva Oa in February 2024. André, Heather and I got back on board in late January 2025 to recommission her, which included the usual fun of painting her hull and, once again, replacing the motor on our Lofrans Tigres anchor windlass. André has done that several times and knows *Milvina* well, so I just had to ask him to do it and could then forget about it; an ideal crew!

The anchorage beside the yard is rather bouncy, even in the best weather and – unusually for the Marquesas – not at all appealing for swimming or running the watermaker, so we sailed the 5 miles or so under jib alone to Hanamoenoa Bay on Tahuata to finish the commissioning work.

Hanamoenoa Bay is sheltered with a beautiful beach, no inhabitants and normally sufficient swell to make it difficult to get a dinghy ashore. Nonetheless it is popular with cruisers and is a safe anchorage under normal wind conditions. We revisited Fatu Hiva and Ua Po in the Marquesas, which are also described in my article in *Flying Fish* 2024, page 88.

Like many sailors, I was fascinated many years ago by Thor Heyerdahl's great book *The Kon-Tiki Expedition*, in which he, along with four tough and resourceful Norwegian former Second World War resistance fighters, built and sailed the raft *Kon-Tiki* over 3,500 miles from Peru to the Tuamotus to test the theory that South Americans could have populated Polynesia a millennium ago. We downloaded the Kindle edition while en route, which led us to try to land on Angetau (Heyerdahl called the island Fangatau).

Coconut plantation on Amanu from Milvina's *masthead*

Thor Heyerdahl tried to land *Kon-Tiki* there in 1947, because it was the first island the winds took his raft close to. He had hoped to sail his raft around to the lee side of the island but found that impossible. The locals were, of course, astounded to see the raft approaching and came out in canoes. Some of the *Kon-Tiki* crew went ashore and would have been stuck there had the locals not paddled a long way out after the raft in the dark, as it drifted off downwind, to put them back on board.

When we tucked into the lee of Angetau it looked idyllic, a total contrast to the mountainous silhouette of the Marquesas. After three fairly fast days in the open Pacific swell, we enjoyed cruising along on a slow beam reach on the flat water.

There is no pass into the lagoon so *Milvina* lay off in deep water. There is a small cut suitable for a dinghy in appropriate weather, which we had hoped to use. Unfortunately, the southeast trade wind was pretty much south that day, making the entry too rough for a dinghy. This was frustrating, because it would have been interesting to discuss the stories of Heyerdahl's attempted landing with the grandchildren of the canoeists.

Regretfully we set sail for Amanu, arriving at first light. We attempted to enter the pass against the ebb but were turned back by a 6-knot current even before reaching the narrowest part. After several attempts we succeeded at around 10am and then motored across the lagoon to an excellent anchorage near a coconut plantation, using the satcharts described at the end of this article to dodge the numerous shallow bommies.*

It is possible to anchor on sand at many spots in the lagoon, with the windward side being the most comfortable, of course. There are deep coral patches around most sand patches and it is recommended to buoy anchor chains so that only a short section lies on the bottom. The procedure is described in the local guidebooks. Wandering ashore we found several rigid spherical floats about 0.5m in diameter from an abandoned pearl farm. These are more effective for buoying the anchor than fenders, because the latter partially collapse when under water, losing floatation power. We moved around the lagoon, including

* "Bommie" is the local term for coral stacks rising abruptly from deep water

one night at a unique star-shaped reef in the middle. Snorkelling was excellent everywhere, so we did not get our SCUBA gear out.

After an enjoyable week snorkelling and wandering on the beaches, we sailed the 15 miles to Hao. This was the French base for their infamous nuclear tests from the mid-1960s until 1996. About two thirds of the tens of thousands of employees were from outside the islands, so there must have been major social changes, but none of the locals we met were interested, or had concerns.

There is no natural pass into the Hao lagoon, but the French military cut an easily navigated and well-marked pass. We found the small docks left behind quite handy because I had to fly to Papeete on Tahiti for a scheduled ophthalmologist treatment and *Milvina* was safe at the dock. The people were very friendly, as in all the islands. My crew even found a couple of restaurants to enjoy while I was away.

From Hao we made an easy overnight passage to Raoria, entering its lagoon with wind against current but no significant breakers. We anchored on the east side of the lagoon, beside the motu* where the *Kon-Tiki* raft finally landed in 1947. The motu is properly called Tahuna Maru but is often called "Kon-Tiki Island" by cruisers.

Kon-Tiki approached from the east, hitting the reef about ¼ mile east of the motu, and bounced up on the rocks. The picture shows Peter standing at the landing site, with the deep water about 20m behind him. We were there close to low tide. With that water level I suspect the raft would have broken up, rather than floating up onto the reef as it did, allowing the crew to walk off and salvage sufficient material to build a fairly comfortable camp on the motu. I can only assume that the *Kon-Tiki* crew was lucky enough to hit near high tide. The reef is quite flat between its edge and the shore (as is apparent in the photo), so it was probably not too difficult to wade ashore near high tide, when the water would have been about a metre deep.

Kon-Tiki *landing site*

The only village on Raroia is across the lagoon, a few miles downwind. One of the locals told us that when her grandfather saw a fire on the motu at night he was scared, because he knew that all of the island's inhabitants were in the village. Everyone finally got together, and the *Kon-Tiki* crew saved a boy's life by providing antibiotics to cure a serious infection. We even met the boy's grandson. While the anchorage at the Kon-Tiki motu was excellent, the only usable spot beside the village was rather sketchy, so we stayed only long

Motu from Kon-Tiki's *landing site*

* Motu is the local term for a tiny island on the edge of the deep

Clockwise from top left: Sharks a plenty; Napoleon Wrasse; sharks in a shoal of fish; diver with shark

enough to meet a few friendly locals and to buy some pearls and vegetables but did not stay overnight.

Leaving in the afternoon, we had a very easy overnight passage to Tahenea, disturbed only by Heather waking me at 2200 to tell me that something funny was happening to the moon. We watched for a little while and realised that it was an eclipse. We had perfect conditions to enjoy the full eclipse: a beautifully dark tropical night. Of course, the eclipse was not unforeseen but we had not been reading the media reports of its schedule.

We sailed all the way into Tahenea's lagoon by the south pass, relying, as usual, on our satcharts and eyeballs. We anchored inside the North Pass because it reputedly has the best snorkelling and diving. The snorkelling was indeed good, with the best being to dinghy out to the edge of the deep water in the pass and drift in with the current. The next day, we moved on to an anchorage in the southeast corner of the lagoon, again with good snorkelling, including dozens of giant clams. The island is a national park and is a nesting site for the rare Tuamotu Sandpiper, but we did not see any.

An early start had us entering the south pass on Fakarava in late afternoon the following day, using the east branch of the channel which is tricky but well marked. There aren't many good anchoring spots, but we found ourselves comfortable at 16°30.4N 145°27.4W in sand, with reefs around.

There is a small, rustic, dive resort there, with scattered cabins on the motu on the east side of the pass. When we went ashore to have our tanks filled, Peter dropped his credit card through a gap in the dock into the water, where the current moved it slowly towards the fairly fast main current. Without a word, the young lad running the dive shop desk whipped off his shirt, grabbed a mask, dived in and retrieved it. We got lots of advice from the shop on diving

in the pass, which is well-known for the proliferation of sharks. Peter and I made several dives in the pass while Heather snorkelled above us, towing the dinghy.

We saw sharks aplenty and were constantly amazed to see them swimming through shoals of apparently shark-mouthful-size fish, yet the fish showed no signs of alarm. Perhaps the fish can sense when the shark is not hungry, or perhaps the fish are too stupid to realise that the shark can eat them at will. When I swam into a shoal of fish, they kept a metre or so away from me, while they seemed quite happy with sharks much closer. Most fish we saw – except for the sharks – were under half a metre long, but there were some massive Napoleon Wrasse, weighing about 100kg according to the local divemasters. Although the sharks didn't seem dangerous, and the local divemasters had no worries on that score, the situation was quite different when the chef from the resort cleaned fish on the dock in very shallow water. As soon as he banged his knife on the cutting board, dozens of small sharks arrived and embarked on a feeding frenzy with the reject material he dumped. While diving was our main activity on Fakarava, we had some good short hikes on the motus and enjoyed paddleboarding in the calm waters.

Wrasse with pilot fish cleaning his gills

In the middle of our stay on Fakarava, we motored up the marked small ship channel to the town of Rotoava, which is just inside the north pass. It is the only place in the Tuamotus or Marquesas where it is practicable to take on diesel directly from the dock. We also managed to have our propane tank filled with butane and – importantly – enjoyed an excellent restaurant meal.

We took the opportunity to make a couple of dives in the north pass with a local operator, from whom we had excellent service. For example, the divemaster noticed that I was running my air down faster than the others, so got me to breathe off his secondary regulator to avoid shortening the dive for the group. He gave me an extra-large tank for the second dive!

Neil getting air from divemaster

André flew home from Rotoava, while Peter, Heather and I sailed on overnight to Aratika, arriving while the tide was ripping out of the west pass. After a few failed attempts we got in without any problems as the current slackened. We anchored near the inside of the northeast pass. This pass is narrow, deep and winding and, with no useful navigation markers, is tricky to pilot, as evidenced by a wrecked yacht on the side of the deep channel. This same channel gave us great diving and snorkelling. The bottom drops off vertically at the ocean end, where we found a colony of sharks who swam up from the deep to check us out.

The 150 or so residents live on various motus, with no central village. We enjoyed biking on the highways, walking the beaches and meeting the locals.

Paddleboarding in sunset

Rays and sharks at Aratika East Pass

Aratika highway

Peter on Aratika Beach

Having seen the northeast pass, we left Aratika by the west pass for an easy daytime beam reach to Toau, entering the southeast pass and anchoring near the coral gardens described in the Soggy Paws guidebook. Anchoring was by eyeball, in shallow water amongst visible reefs – not difficult in the good weather we had. Here we met Ralf and Wiebke Gerking (fellow OCC members and Roving Rear Commodores) aboard their Hallberg-Rassy *Flora*, whom we had met previously in other Tuamotu anchorages. We found the coral gardens to be the best shallow-water snorkelling we have ever seen, with lots of small, colourful fish and one large jellyfish.

After a few good days in this anchorage and another one at the south end of the lagoon, we sailed out of the pass and round to the False Pass at the northwest corner of Toau. This is technically a pass, but the water inside is too shallow to allow access to the main lagoon. Simon Currin described it in his 'Tuamotu' article in *Flying Fish* 2024, page 151.

From False Pass we sailed overnight to Rangiroa. The wind and tide conditions made the east pass look quite rough, so we sailed on to enter the west pass, then motored back down to anchor inside the east pass, in a spot quite well protected from the 25-knot wind. The only other anchorages that seemed appealing were quite far from the town and we wanted to provision for our imminent voyage to Hawaii.

The several motus between the east and west passes are connected by a paved road, so we biked up to the shops at the west end where we had fairly good luck is finding what we wanted. We also dived the east pass a couple of times with a local divemaster. While diving in the Tuamotus is always good, we did not like this location as much as the atolls described above.

After clearing out with a very friendly customs officer we left Rangiroa on 7 April, bound for Hawaii. As expected, the wind was not favourable. We started heading NNE, close-hauled then, after a few days, eased off about 10 degrees. The wind strength varied from 12 to 25 knots, mostly in the upper teens, with only 5 knots on one day. We spent almost all the passage on a very close reach, with the staysail constantly set, the genoa varying from fully furled to fully out, and mainsail varying from full to three reefs, but mostly with one or

two reefs in. We let the autopilot keep us at a constant angle to the wind, and adjusted sail size about half a dozen times per day.

In mid-passage I was finding it unusually hard to roll in the genoa, I tried using a low gear on the winch, but still failed to roll in the sail. We discovered that our code zero halyard, which terminates on the bowsprit, had loosened enough (due, I think, to creep in the line, having not been used for several weeks) to become wound into the sail. We adjusted the halyard but discovered that the wrap had jammed the swivel at the head of the sail to the foil such that the swivel would not move up or down the foil but would still allow the sail to be rolled in and out. The Facnor Furling Systems distributor in the US was very good about shipping replacement parts to Hawaii, but the local rigging shops were not very helpful. Fortunately, we were able to undertake the repair ourselves.

We normally deflate the dinghy and carry it on deck on long passages, but this time we just took the motor, fuel tank and anchor off and kept the dinghy high on the davits. Several passengers enjoyed it, usually for hours at a time. These were no trouble, but a flying fish which became stuck in a dorade vent was an unwelcome visitor. Fortunately, he was big enough for Peter to extract, once the source of the smell was located!

Visiting fish

One of our passengers

After 15 days at sea, we entered Honokohau Harbor (aka Kona Harbor) on the west coast of the big island of Hawaii at night. Entry was simple, although docking inside was tricky. This was a great stop for us, but only because one of the two 'big boat' visitor berths was available, and we had pre-booked it on advice from Steve and June Sage (Port Officer for O'ahu, Hawaii). Anchoring outside is possible but uncomfortable.

For me, the highlight of our month in Hawaii was a manta dive. There is a population of large manta rays near Honokohau Harbor and dive operators have set up lights close to the shore at a manta feeding ground to attract plankton, encouraging the mantas to come in to feed in the evenings. We went for a dive amongst the mantas – or, rather, put on SCUBA gear and sat on the bottom – watching a number of huge mantas (12ft wingspan!) cruise and cartwheel over,

Manta head on

Manta brushing Neil's hair

and amongst, our heads. Many of the feeding runs the mantas made through the plankton were a couple of feet from the bottom. This frequently meant that I was faced with a manta head-on, his giant mouth agape as he filtered plankton from the water. Their mouths would be big enough to swallow me but – fortunately – they prefer plankton! Had I not been assured of that key fact I would have been terrified as they regularly approached to within a metre before directing their glide path up to skim over me, sometimes ruffling my hair and once even hitting me very gently.

We visited O'ahu, Maui, Molokai, Lanai and Kaua'i in the month we spent in Hawaii and enjoyed hiking and touring by car in all the islands. Peter left *Milvina* while we were in Hawaii, and Heather's husband André joined us until early June, and my son Derek joined us for the voyage home.

Peter in a Hawaiian banyan tree

On 10 June, we set out for British Columbia, with nearly 3,000 miles to sail to Victoria, at the south end of Vancouver Island. The straight-line distance is only about 2,300 miles, but the northeast trades forced us to sail on a very close reach just a little east of north for the first 11 days. We let the autopilot follow the varying wind, and adjusted sails as appropriate for winds varying between 12 and 18 knots. By the standards of sailing to windward, it was relatively comfortable, although being heeled about 20 degrees to port all the time is tiring. With her centreboard and relatively high ballast, *Milvina* is much more comfortable than a deep-keeled racing boat in such conditions, although a knot slower and a bit further off the wind.

On 21 June we were finally able to fetch Cape Flattery at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. By the next day we had the wind far enough aft to sail with our genoa poled out on the windward side and our code zero flying on the other with the main squared well off, giving us 2,000 square feet of canvas when the wind was light. We carried a reefed main with partially rolled genoa when the wind picked up.

From 21 June until midday on 28 June we didn't see the sky, indeed from 26 June we were in fog or drizzle. Then, suddenly, on 28 June we found ourselves in bright sunshine halfway down the Straight of Juan de Fuca, never having seen the notorious Cape Flattery – except on radar. Navigation in these conditions was easy with modern equipment, but the same conditions would have been a nightmare when I started cruising in the 1970s without GPS or other useful electronics. Sextant navigation would have been straightforward *if* we had had sufficiently clear skies.

Late on 28 June we docked at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, thanks to arrangements made by Lisa Copeland (the long serving OCC Port Officer and Regional Rear Commodore). Heather flew home from Victoria, while Derek and I sailed on to our home in Quathiaski Cove to finish this year's cruising.

PRACTICALITIES

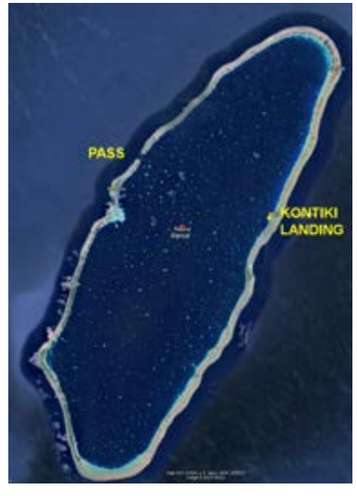
The best cruising guide for the Marquesas and Tuamotus we found was at **svsoggypaws.com/files/index.htm#frpoly**. The Soggy Paws website, built by OCC members Sherry and Dave McCampbell, has a massive amount of cruising information.

We used the guide downloaded from **noodlesnotes.com** in Hawaii, and advice from Steve and June Sage (Port Officer for O'ahu, Hawaii). There are more comprehensive guides available but we did not explore them.

ActiveCaptain has useful notes on some anchorages, mostly quite up-to-date.

Navigation is simple in the deep waters of the Marquesas and around the Hawaiian islands.

The Tuamotus are known as 'The Dangerous Archipelago' on some charts. This was a very reasonable name in pre-GPS days because the islands are very low, look similar from a distance, and the inter-island currents are not charted. The lagoons inside many of the islands are uncharted, while others are only partially charted. Typically, the lagoons are 10m to 40m deep, but they are littered with coral towers, known locally as "bommies". These usually have less than 2m of water over them, and often much less. They are very steep sided, so a depth-sounder is ineffective for avoiding them.



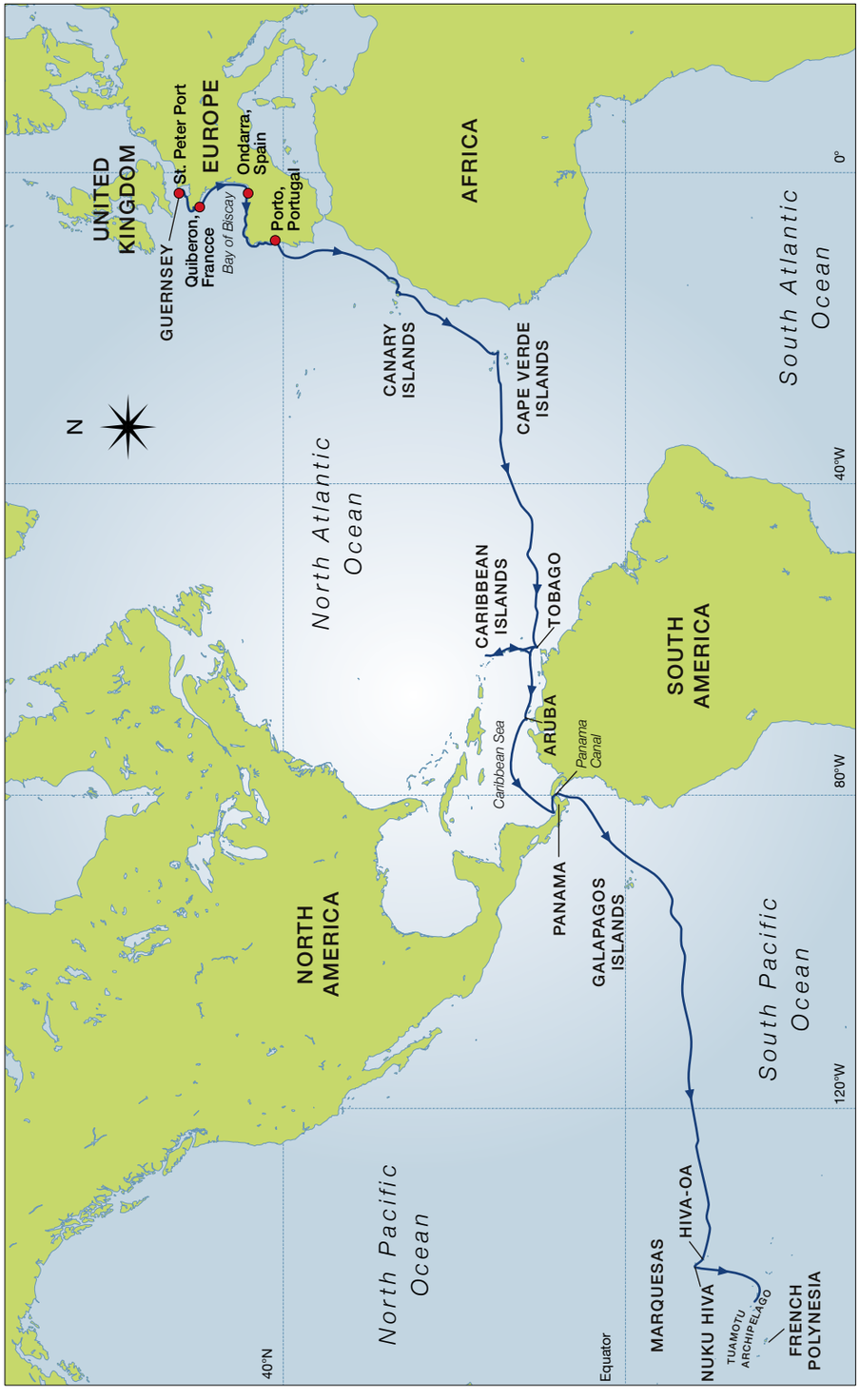
Satchart of Raroia

Most old-time cruisers crossing the Pacific avoided the Tuamotus and carried on to Tahiti. Today, the situation is dramatically improved, thanks both to GPS and to supplementary charts based on Google Earth and other aerial/satellite images. We call the latter 'satcharts'. These show the positions of reefs and shorelines more accurately than standard marine charts, and are more up to date, but lack soundings. In the Tuamotu lagoons, it is quite safe to sail by staying away from the bommies visible on the supplementary charts, as shown in this example. Boat position and other data such as course and speed displays on the PC, just as with classic electronic charting. There is free software available so that you can make your own charts, but it is now possible to download satcharts from various sources. We used, and like, the charts available at **svocelot.com/Cruise_Info/Equipment/Chart_Downloads.htm**.

For open-water sailing, we use TimeZero navigation software, along with the charts that they sell. TimeZero does not support satcharts (I don't think any of the dedicated chartplotters do) so we use the excellent, free, OpenCPN software for lagoon navigation. Sometimes we have TimeZero on one computer and OpenCPN with satcharts on another.

Virtually all businesses in French Polynesia are listed at **tahiticruisersguide.com**.

Papeete (700 miles from the Marquesas) is just like a medium-sized town in France. All other French Polynesian communities are tiny with limited services. Virtually all yacht equipment has to be purchased in Papeete and shipped to the other islands if required. Unfortunately, Tahiti and the Society Islands have become overcrowded and I think are best skipped by cruisers, except perhaps for a quick stop in Papeete to make use of the practical facilities.



SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL:

SAILING OVER 14,000 MILES BY THE AGE OF 24

by Olivia Bennett (s/v *Nanuka*)

After meeting in 2020, Olivia Bennett and Adam Harvey shared dreams of travelling the world as sustainably as possible. After a summer spent exploring their home waters of Guernsey on Adam's boat Cleo Maria, *Olivia fell in love with the laid-back lifestyle. Despite having never sailed before, when Adam suggested buying a boat and sailing around the world, she immediately said yes! They bought* Nanuka, *a Rival 41, in Falmouth in 2021 and spent two years preparing her. In July 2023, they set off in search of sun, surf and solace and are documenting their adventure at* **ecosailingdiary.com**.

The moonlight filtered softly through the galley window, I felt delirious after a long day and night of final preparations. At 2am, we were still loading our essentials on to the boat, deciding which half-deflated dinghy to take with us and stowing endless provisions. At times it had felt as though this day would never come, the day we finally left. After a few hours of sleep, we took one last dinghy trip to Guernsey's shore to say goodbye to loved ones who were waiting on the harbour wall. With tears threatening, we hopped back into the dinghy and knew it was time. I had no idea what I had signed myself up for. All I knew was that I was ready to leave home and set sail.

Adam and Olivia at the last lock of the Panama Canal

WHY SAIL?

I had always wanted to travel. And when I met Adam, he told me of this beautiful life, in which people make a sailing boat their home. I had not even imagined it, let alone considered it a life for me. I love the ocean but had never stepped foot on a yacht. I couldn't believe people spent their lives sailing and living on the sea.

When Adam took me sailing for the first time on his Van de Stadt 26, I was instantly hooked. With no toilet and just one hob, I revelled in the slow-paced simplicity of life on board. The way the wind propelled us forward; it was like I was seeing a life-changing invention for the first time! When, just one year into knowing each other, Adam asked if I'd like to sail around the world with him, it was a no-brainer. I had found a partner who not only shared my goal of travelling but enhanced it by showing me that there is a more sustainable way to see the world.

Nanuka *in Guernsey*

Nanuka *anchored in Tréguier, France*

SETTING OFF

Having not grown up on boats and my longest sail to date having been to Alderney – an island just 22 miles away – I had no idea about life on the open ocean. I left home knowing nothing, quite literally.

Adam had done a few extended sailing trips, including crossing the Atlantic in 2018 and buying a boat in Panama just before Covid hit, so I was putting all my trust in Adam and he was trusting that I would like the lifestyle. Little did he know that I would come to love it perhaps even more than he did! Friends and family were endlessly suggesting that I should take a sailing course, but we decided that the best lesson was a practical one, leaving on our own boat, so that's what we did. With over a year spent doing work on *Nanuka* on the hard, we had no time on the water. Fundamental skills like learning to raise the mainsail, reefing and helming were usurped by hours of antifouling, installing new hatches and preparing the vessel for long passages.

As I looked back on my island home slowly getting smaller, I had no idea what I had set myself up for. I didn't feel scared or excited, just ready to embark on a new adventure and a new stage of my life. 22-year-old me had no idea of the incredible community of cruisers I was about to meet, the experiences I was going to have and the love I would find for *Nanuka* and the ocean.

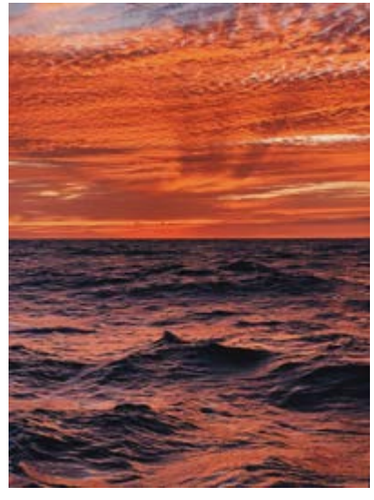
As our first destination came into sight just four hours after leaving harbour, it felt somewhat anti-climactic! We had reached . . . Jersey (Guernsey's sister island just 30 miles away!). Still, we cracked open a bottle of champagne and celebrated that we had actually left. The summer that followed was filled with blustery gales, meaning the majority of our European season was filled with wet and windy days spent anchored up rivers. Nevertheless, I had fallen in love with life on board. From baking bread, to sewing all my old clothes, to painting, I realised what I had signed up for, a life lived slowly. Activities that I 'didn't have time for' at home, or didn't prioritise, became part of my daily routine. These first few months were restorative. They formed the foundations for our life on board *Nanuka*.

A LIFE FILLED WITH THOUGHTS OF ORCAS

Sailing across Biscay from Quiberon to Ondarroa in Spain was my first multi-day passage, albeit we had no wind and the coast was in sight the entire time. Just as we were planning to set off from Quiberon, orcas had been spotted in Biscay. We didn't want to encounter these beautiful but troublesome creatures so followed all the advice. This meant sailing close to the coast and if possible, in less than 20m of water. I had heard that Biscay can be vicious, so I was expecting the worst although, once we were bobbing at 1 knot with no wind, I was wishing for a bit more of a blow.

We were sailing so close to the coast that a local pleasure boater came to check we were okay! Were we being over cautious? Probably, but we didn't want to risk causing damage to *Nanuka* and with just three months in Europe due to Schengen regulations we couldn't afford to be back on the hard if *Nanuka* sustained damage from orcas.

As we were bobbing across Biscay, orange and red hues lit up the late evening sky and Adam said it was time for my first night watch. By now we had been sailing for a month, but mostly hopping from bay to bay. We hadn't yet sailed at night. I was excited but apprehensive. Dressed in layers of warm clothes, I wished Adam goodnight and took my pew. There were a few times where I couldn't figure out the lights, so woke Adam up. Concerned that I couldn't tell the difference between red, green and white, he insisted I book an optician's appointment as soon as we reached Spain. (Manuel, the optician in Bayona, later revealed I was short-sighted and now I'm living life in high definition!) After my two hours in darkness, I was ready for bed. It was a bit of a shock when I was woken up again two hours later. The novelty of night watches soon wore off, but I enjoyed my first passage immensely.



The sunset before Olivia's first night sail

Many layers and reading at dawn!

Sailing down the European coast

After a hop, skip and a jump down the European coast – sticking to our plan of routing where there is less than 20m depth the whole time (the orcas seemed to follow us) – we were running out of our permitted time in the Schengen area, and the Canaries were calling.

We had a week sheltering from gales in Porto, where we met another young couple, Eoin and Caoimhe, who were to become our 'buddy boat' for the next year. It was wonderful to realise that other people did this too and to feel a part of this welcoming community. It may not be common, but this is a 'normal', sustainable and very fulfilling way of life. 50 knots of wind and 4 knots of tide made for some uncomfortable nights anchored outside Porto marina, but we left Eoin and Caoimhe hopeful that, both having relatively old and slow boats, we would cruise at a similar speed, so we promised to keep in touch via the radio.

OUR FIRST STORM

The weather forecast was okay; not amazing, not awful. For our first offshore passage we had two friends – also with limited sailing experience – on board. We left Porto in the wind and rain, filled with apprehension. We headed directly west at first, since we wanted to get as far offshore as possible to minimise the risk of an orca attack, before turning south, aiming to get to that sweet spot where the butter begins to melt.

On day 3, I woke to find our friend Ben struggling with the helm and Adam reefing the sails. Daunting, thick grey clouds were rolling quickly toward us. Within a few hours waves were crashing over the cockpit and the wind had increased dramatically. Charlotte and I sat securely in *Nanuka*'s cosy cockpit as the waves bubbled up beneath the sprayhood. No one said a word all day until Ben suggested we sing sea shanties to lighten the mood, each creating a verse. As we went around singing, laughter eventually replaced the tension. In this moment, I trusted Adam and *Nanuka* with every fibre of my being. We learned a lesson during that passage, being never to underestimate the forces of nature and the energy of the oceans. *Nanuka* handled herself brilliantly and it gave me great confidence to know that she can handle whatever the wild open sea chooses to throw at us.

Adam helming during the storm

Arriving in the Canaries was a relief, but also left me itching for more time at sea, more time in the solitude of the ocean. Our sail to Cape Verde gave another small glimpse of what was to come, eight days of gliding down ocean swells and living with the elements.

Cape Verde was wonderful, but the anticipation of the Atlantic was building. With our friends Ben and Charlotte still with us, despite the storm, we were eager to start our journey west. By now we had met many boats on the same journey and I soon realised that what we were doing was not that extraordinary. Hundreds of boats do the same journey every year!

SAILING ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Leaving Cape Verde in a cloud of Saharan dust made our surroundings feel almost apocalyptic, certainly other-worldly. Setting the sails, the 20-knot trade winds blew us west, until they died down and we spent five days becalmed in the big blue. Those days were unforgettable – swimming in a 5,000m crystalline ultramarine abyss, the company of playful spotted dolphins, the complete disconnection from society and the outside world. And then the winds came back and burst the bubble that we were living in, in the middle of nowhere.

On the dawn of day 21, the dusky green hills of Tobago came into view. I can't quite describe that feeling of seeing land again. I couldn't believe we had done it! I was proud of myself, proud of Ben and Charlotte and proud of Adam for getting us there safely and trusting us. *Nanuka* was our home and I knew I was going to miss the routine we had at sea. I almost imagined there would be people waiting for us, congratulating us on our safe arrival, but many of the other boats at anchor had done the same. In this little world, it's perfectly normal to have just sailed across an ocean!

Becalmed in the middle of the Atlantic

Arriving in Tobago with friends Ben and Charlotte

CARIBBEAN LIFE

Cruising the Caribbean we soon found a rhythm to life on board – sundowners, snorkelling, surfing, baking, cooking, painting and, unfortunately, working.

You may have got this far and wondered how, at 22, I had managed to leave on an indefinite sailing trip? Luckily, I have the most incredible boss in Guernsey who has allowed me to continue doing zero-hours work for a sustainability consultancy. I can work as much or as little as I like or am able. We live frugally on board so, provided that I earn enough to cover food, boat maintenance and have a little backup if anything major goes wrong, I am able to be self-sufficient. The passages are my 'time-off' as I can't look at my laptop whilst at sea, which means that when we are at anchor, we spend most mornings working.

Hurricane season was approaching, so we sailed (still with our buddy boat and her crew, Eoin and Caoimhe) to Aruba, where we hauled out to complete some much-needed maintenance. Before embarking on this trip, I hadn't appreciated how much time goes into maintaining a boat, especially a Rival from 1977. Aruba proved challenging. Endless boat jobs in a consistent 25 knots of hot wind in a place where it never rains. Perfect for boat jobs, but not for morale when living on board! Knowing we had three months of this before tackling the sail to Panama, we made a last-minute decision to fly home for a bit. This goes against our philosophy – to travel sustainably. There was no justification, but we both decided it was the right thing to do.

'Home' no longer felt like home; I realised then that *Nanuka* is now my home. She had carried me thousands of miles and I felt more myself at sea than I ever had on land. The lessons I had learned so far were monumental, not just in sailing but in life: I almost felt too young to have found exactly what I want and where I want to be. I felt so fortunate to live this incredible life away from societal norms. Nevertheless, being 'home' allowed us to top up our funds and mentally reset for the next part of our journey.

ARUBA TO PANAMA

Arriving back in Aruba, refreshed and excited, I dived into the boat jobs. Research became my forte; if anything goes wrong, I am straight on a forum finding out the best solution. Getting *Nanuka* back in the water felt momentous,

the next part of our journey was commencing and living back on the ocean was much needed, allowing me to appreciate it with fresh eyes.

With an open window to sail to Panama, we provisioned one final time and set sail. The longest passage to date for just Adam and me. Unfortunately, we had a miserable sail; too many days of no wind, lots of lightning and endless rain meant little sleep and constantly feeling damp. Arriving in Panama was a welcome relief and, reflecting on the passage, we decided that the sail had been 'Type 2 fun' – not fun at the time but, to look back on drinking a cup of tea at 4am with a homemade gingerbread man while watching an incredible lightning storm, isn't your average Tuesday!

Finding paradise in Panama

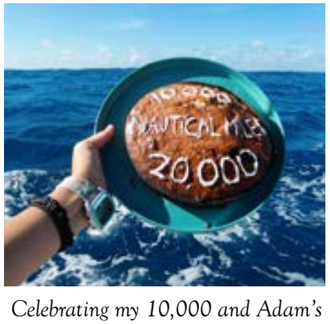
After three wonderful months in Panama, we went through the canal. We had enough line handlers, so my job was to keep everyone fed and hydrated. I was in the galley preparing chicken curry for dinner, the artificial light from the locks beaming through the window, and I had a moment of reflection: I just couldn't believe I was here, in the Panama Canal, in my boat, that I had sailed from Guernsey. I was almost dizzy with the thought. How had I done that? Still thinking about the journey makes my head spin, but it's become so normal, so intrinsic to who I am.

SAILING ACROSS THE PACIFIC

Once we were through the canal, the biggest adventure of our journey lay in wait, the Pacific. I knew *Nanuka* was ready. I knew Adam was ready. But was I? I was apprehensive. We had calculated the journey would take us 40 days. Could I survive 40 days at sea? Just Adam and me aboard *Nanuka*? I was terrified that something would happen to Adam and then it would just be me, alone. I knew I couldn't think like that and I had to have confidence in myself if something were to happen. Within 24 hours of setting sail, my fears had evaporated. I was in my happy place. The wind pushed us along, there was minimal swell and, at last, there was time once again for doing the activities I love.

A few hundred miles past the equator, we got boarded at sea – a story for another issue of *Flying Fish* – but suffice to say it was one of the most terrifying experiences of our journey so far. We decided to see the best in people, to be as

Becalmed in the Pacific



Celebrating my 10,000 and Adam's 20,000 miles sailed

friendly as possible to our unwanted visitors and we came out unharmed, but it was a reminder of just how remote and isolated we are in the vast open ocean and how impossible it is to predict what might become a problem.

Nowadays, it is possible to be completely connected to the wider world at sea, which is great for safety and weather planning, but not so great for the solitude that once came with sailing long passages. I decided to turn off my phone for the duration of the crossing, which allowed me to be fully present with the weather, the waves and the wildlife. It's nice to know we have the means to communicate if we need to, but also have the option to find solitude.

On the morning of day 39 we saw the towering pinnacles of Hiva Oa and our time together at sea drew to an end. Once again, I felt conflicted between my enjoyment of the passage-making solitude and my excitement at arriving and exploring this beautiful place, but ultimately people (and fresh food) called! Who would have predicted I'd be yearning to stay sailing after 40 days of seeing only the ocean beyond the confines of *Nanuka*?

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

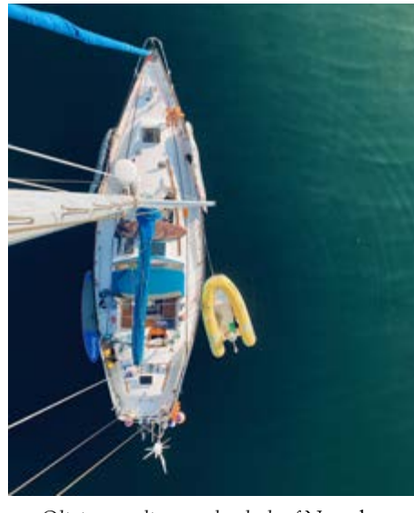
Having sailed over 14,000 miles by my 24th birthday, I feel as if I have found my purpose: to live simply and sustainably, to sail and to have a minimal impact on the world around me. I never imagined this type of life being possible, a life so full of connection yet so untethered, a life where everyone gets along, young and old, helping one another.

I don't know whether I would call myself a sailor. Yes, I sail, but I sail to live: to avoid storms, to reach uncharted destinations, to explore. Sailing is my vessel – quite literally – to explore the world around me.

The last two years living on the water have shown me just how fragile our world is, how our actions have an impact. From howling storms to completely unpredicted weather, I can feel the world changing around me. It's frightening and I'm watching it unfold. I never got to see the once magnificent reefs and many of the islands where we have spent time won't be there much longer. I feel grateful that I can see them now, before it's too late. Sailing puts you at the forefront of the ever-changing world and it cements my reasons for living sustainably.

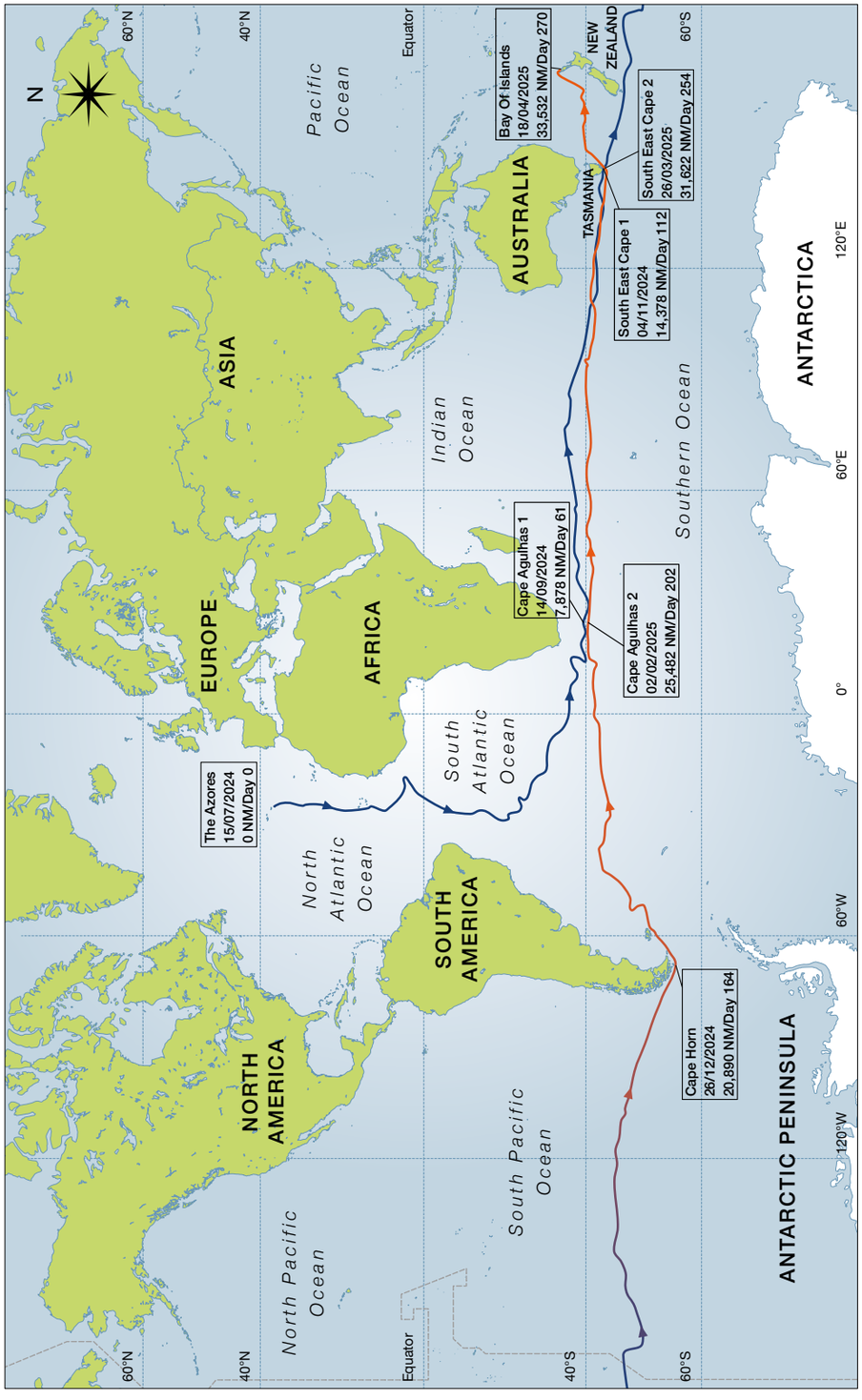
Our adventure has only just started and I can't wait to see what the rest of the world has in store for *Nanuka*.

Celebrating her birthday in Fatu Hiva



Olivia standing on the deck of Nanuka *whilst Adam is up the mast*

Adam and Olivia on Nanuka *in the Tuamotus*



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.

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

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.

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.

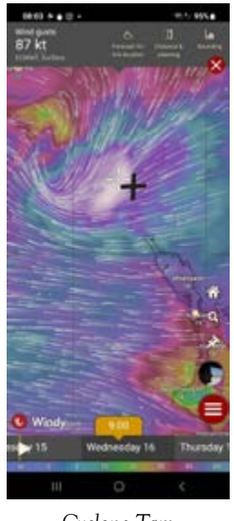
The second journey brought significantly more weather extremes and I had better satellite communication.

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'.



Cyclone Tam with our position

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.

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?

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.

Christmas dessert on Nehaj

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.

Citrus fruit kept very well

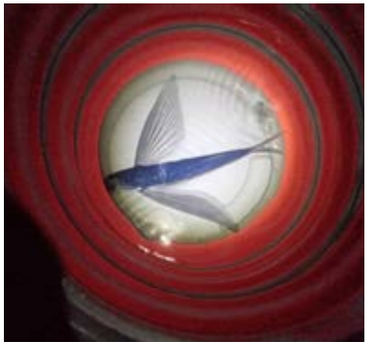
Every supermarket has a wide variety of foods that last wonderfully without refrigeration: vacuum-packed cheese and ham can last for months. Plus there is the well-known range of flour, rice, pasta, dried beans or peas or tomatoes, all spices and stock cubes, milk powder and possibly dried egg, coffee, 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.

NOTES FROM THE NORTH:

LESSONS FROM THE VIKING ROUTE

by Brian F Russell (s/v *Helacious*)

Brian Russell is a retired independent studio artist working in a variety of sculptural media, including glass, steel, bronze, aluminium, wood and stone. In 2009 he and his partner Helen began work on a custom aluminium sailboat, which they launched in 2016. Since then they have sailed more than 35,000 miles from the Caribbean to the Arctic Circle – and back again! Brian has been an avid photographer since the mid-1970s. Helen and Brian became Roving Rear Commodores in 2025. Their website is **sailinghelacious.com**.

After sailing *Helacious*, our aluminium Dix 43 cutter, around the British Isles, southern Norway, western Sweden and through Friesland in The Netherlands over the past two years, Helen and I decided it was time to head south to warmer regions. In our usual counterintuitive way, the solution was obvious: point the bow north!

We had followed *Zora* (Ireland) and *Linnea* (Sweden) during their 2024 west-to-east transit of the so-called 'Viking Route'. Both crews had raved about the scenery and didn't think the conditions were too bad. Our route would take us from Stornoway at the top of the Outer Hebrides, 200 miles north to the Faroe Islands. Another 250 miles northwest and we would land in southeast Iceland. The next leg would be the longest: 650 miles anticlockwise around the northern coast of Iceland to Ísafjörður, our staging port for Greenland. We believed that the direct route, 600 miles southwest to the tip of Greenland and the eastern entrance to Prince Christian Sound, would be expedient given the timeline – our insurers required us to be in Newfoundland by 1 September. The stunning Prince Christian Sound connects east

Nolsoy, Faroes

Greenland to Nanortalik on the west side of Greenland. From Nanortalik there's another 600-mile passage southwest to Mary's Harbour, Labrador, the closest N American landfall. After that, it's a further 600 miles onward to Halifax.

This year, the low-pressure systems were farther north than in 2024, causing more havoc in the Denmark Strait and the Labrador Sea. Since the lows appeared to be rolling through every 3–5 days, these 600-mile passages required precise timing to avoid the gales. Pilot charts with 60 or 100 years of data are becoming outdated in today's rapidly changing climate. I have found it helpful to refer to the recent historical weather charts available on ventusky.com for more detailed information about past events. The GRIB charts from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) were remarkably accurate up to three days. We used the Rák app (from the developer Bogi Magnussen) for tidal flow in the Faroes, which was much more detailed than the those shown on the various GRIB viewers.

And then there's the ice. This year, the sea ice cleared early in July on both east and west coasts. Many Europe-based boats were able to sail from Ísafjörður in Iceland to Tasiilaq, on Greenland's east coast, and back. Icebergs and 'bergy bits' were more of a curiosity for us than a threat, although constant vigilance was still required. All it takes is one, even for a stout metal boat like *Helacious*.

Once again, modern technology gives us a huge advantage over our predecessors in the satellite imagery now available from NASA **(worldview.earthdata.nasa.gov)** and Copernicus **(copernicus.eu/en)** and in the information provided by the Danish Meteorological Institute ice charts **(ocean.dmi.dk/arctic/icecharts.uk.php)**. We have been using Starlink for several years and it has performed admirably, allowing us access to far more detailed information than other connectivity, such as Iridium GO! or SSB.

Every season is different, of course, and one must evaluate the capabilities of one's own boat and crew. Sailing short-handed can be an exhausting challenge in rough conditions, so it is vital to have reliable self-steering gear, that tireless third crew member! *Helacious* uses a Jefa 5:1 transmission steering gear, with a direct drive electromagnetic drive motor on her powerful spade rudder. Whatever type you have, make sure you carry vital spares (for everything!) and spend some time inspecting, lubricating and generally communing with your systems. Although it won't work on our boat due to the full enclosure, I like the Hydrovane wind pilot as it can also act as emergency steering.

Regarding crew comfort, the major advantages of our full enclosure and hard dodger is in reducing fatigue caused by sitting in cold, windy and wet conditions. In my opinion this far outweighs any inconveniences. Watching for ice while standing in the companionway under the dodger, with the warmth from below keeping the shivers away, is almost pleasant, at least for the first hour or so!

Our night time watch system has evolved over the years. Conditions allowing, we will dine together about 1900, check the weather, discuss the plan, and enjoy the view together. Helen then retires by 2100, and I am on watch until 0200. Unerringly, Helen cheerfully relieves me on time, and I sleep until 0700. She then snoozes for another 2–3 hours before we have breakfast together. The daylight hours are usually more loosely structured, with a big nap sometime during the day.

The first day on passage is undoubtedly the hardest and we usually eat little, mostly snacking on nuts, granola bars, fruit and dried soups. But by the second day, I'm hungry. One-pot meals are key, with rice or pasta dishes prevailing.

Faroes

Having several pre-cooked frozen meals like chili or spaghetti bolognese is helpful. Huel makes some freeze-dried camp food that is quick to prepare, palatable and nutritious, if slightly costly. A galley strap for securing the cook, along with non-skid pads, high fiddles and cup holders are good additions.

The waters on this northern route are turbulent enough to make one think of taking up farming, with numerous currents colliding, strong winds (or – even worse – light winds and leftover seas), and cold, dense air, which can increase the force exerted on sails by up to 10%. Reef early and reef often. A new tool we recently acquired (after several years of deliberation) is an E-Wincher electric winch handle. Much more practical than the right-angle drill I also carry, the E-Wincher makes reefing the genoa easier and quicker: we now don't hesitate to make adjustments, even when tired. It also helps protect my damaged rotator cuff from further injury.

The geography of the Faroe Islands essentially precludes anchoring – it's just too steep and deep. However, berthing was not an issue, and the typical tides are less than 1m, so even when tied to a quay or wharf, accessing the boat remains easy. Several harbours featured floating pontoons. Possibly the most useful and affordable item one would acquire for this Viking Route is a sturdy wooden fender board. The board is positioned on the outside of several hull fenders to create a bridge that spans gaps in uneven quay walls and rubs against the ubiquitous truck tires. I will never forget Helen and me carrying a 50mm x 250mm x 3m plank from a lumberyard in central London across Tower Bridge to our berth at St Katharine's Docks last winter! We also rely on a large, round, orange fender to protect our life raft canister on the port quarter. And it's indispensable when springing the bow off a quay in tight quarters or when pinned to a pontoon by the wind.

Midnight arrival at Iceland

Once we reached Iceland, the tides became more noticeable, and I was glad to have made another small purchase: a collapsible aluminium ladder. There are sometimes built-in ladders on the quay walls, but they aren't always accessible, and the bottom half is often slimy. Just make sure you tie your ladder to your boat. We anchored more in Iceland, even though the anchorages are generally huge and open; there are

Helen at Eskifjordur

Ladder to the quay

no snug, Scottish-style coves here! We made good use of the *Arctic and Northern Waters* pilot (Imray), as well as the Cruising Association's publication *Cruising Guide to Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Jan Mayen*. We met the authors, Mike Henderson and Helen Gould, in Torshavn, in Iceland and then again in Greenland. They know these waters well after 12 seasons. The eponymous *Viking Route*, published by the CCA, provided little detail.

Other essential items for northern explorations include a reliable diesel heater. We have a Dickinson drip diesel stove, which – unlike the Refleks – can be operated at heel. It's the height of luxury to be night sailing in cold weather with that small flame twinkling warmly below. Another luxury for pure comfort at anchor on a cold summer's evening is an electric blanket. The Dashews mentioned this in their *Offshore Cruising Encyclopaedia* and we became converts

Bogarfjorour anchorage

Ladder at Isafjordur

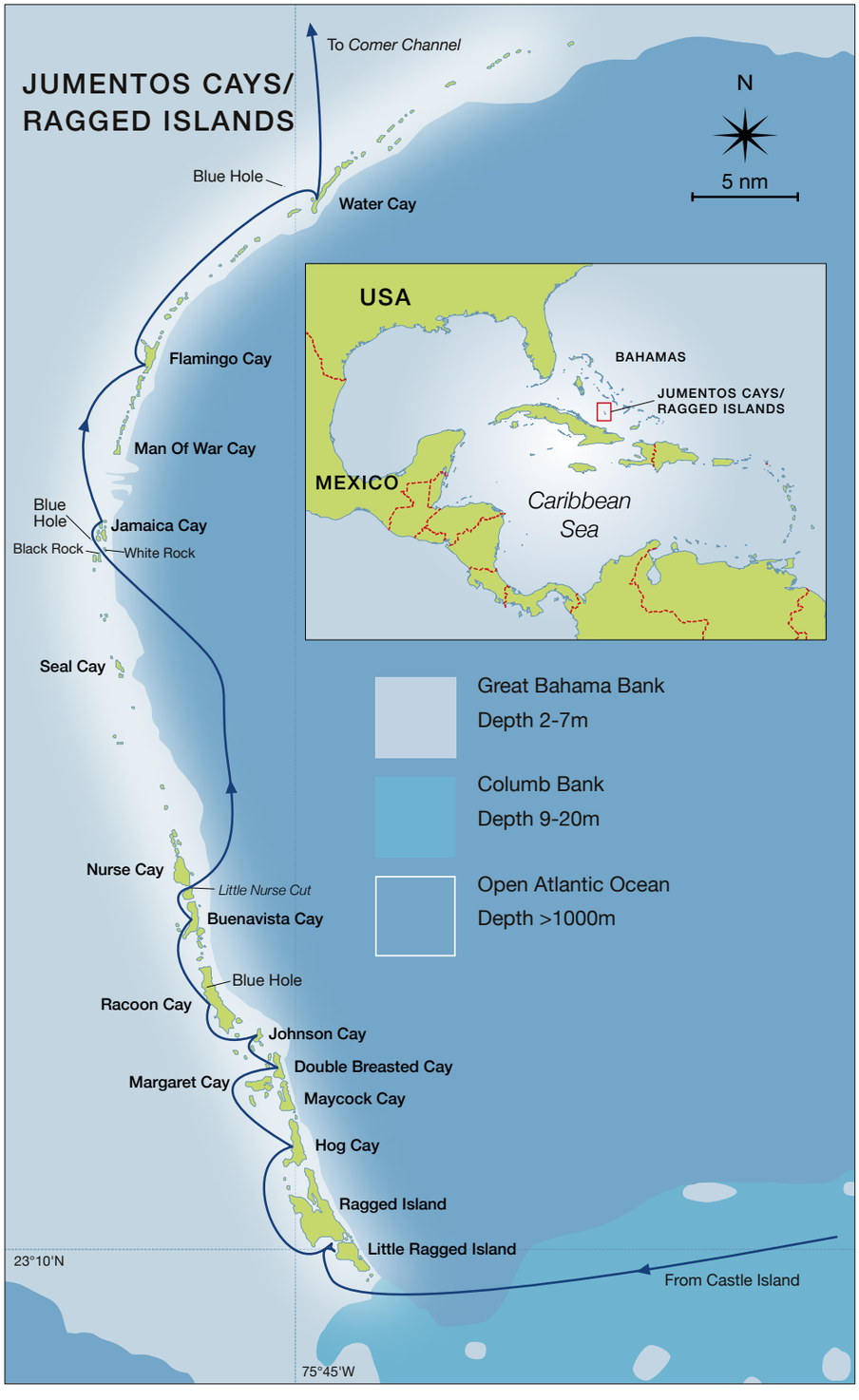
Drone footage of iceberg and Helacious *near Louise Donning, Greenland*

years ago. Drawing only 100W maximum, it can take the chill off the bed in 20 minutes and uses only 33 watt-hours, or about 3AH at 12V.

In the fjords and along the coast, the winds tend either to blow fiercely or not at all. Here's our little secret: when the wind died during our Viking passages we motored without hesitation, trying to avoid getting caught by the next gale. I am simply not willing to be a sitting duck for Norðri, Vestri, Austri or Suðri, the legendary Nordic dwarves who hold up the sky. When I built *Helacious*, I doubled her fuel capacity to about 700ltrs. Diesel is available in most communities that serve fishing fleets, but getting it isn't always easy or convenient. The Faroes and Iceland use special payment cards for marine diesel purchases to protect the lower-tax status for non-highway fuel. Several times, we had to ferret out a phone number and wait for someone from the fuel company to attend the pump – no big deal, but something to consider. Only once, in Aappilattoq, Greenland, did we need to carry fuel in our two jerry cans.

As the last light faded and the rain started in earnest, we tucked into Fox Harbour, just north of our intended landfall of Mary's Harbour, Labrador, Canada. We had been motor-sailing southwest, hard on the wind at 45° AWA, for the past 60 hours, trying to outrun the stiff westerly winds that were forecast. True to the Atlantic Canadians' well-deserved reputation as the friendliest folk on Earth, a couple of guys saw us arrive and drove to the wharf to catch our lines. As required, we called Customs and Immigration as soon as we were secure. The pleasant lady on the phone at the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) in Ottawa checked us in cheerfully, even though we were not at an 'official' port of entry. 'Your safety is the most important thing', she said.

Three months and 2,672 miles after leaving Scotland, we were back in North America, slightly bent but not broken, and much wiser about the ways of the north, with a new respect for the Viking cruisers of old and with lessons and memories we will carry forever.



RAGGED ISLANDS, BAHAMAS:

SAILING IN SHADES OF BLUE

by Ralf & Wiebke Gerking

Newly appointed Roving Rear Commodores Ralf & Wiebke Gerking have been cruising since 2019, when they left Greece on their German-flagged Hallberg-Rassy 43, Flora. *After crossing the Atlantic, they sailed the Caribbean and the US east coast. They then transited the Panama Canal, sailed to the Galapagos, Hawaii and Alaska, before wintering on Vancouver Island and then spending the next season in the waters of British Columbia. Coming down the US west coast, they explored San Francisco Bay and, further south, the Sea of Cortez in Mexico, before setting sail for French Polynesia where they have explored the different island groups for more than a year now – all documented on their website:* **syflora.blog**.

The alarm clock was set, for us long-term cruisers this had become an uncommon act. But we had a good reason. We were to sail from Castle Island to Ragged Island, which lies about 80 miles west. In order to arrive in daylight, we had no choice but to leave early.

Ragged Island lies at the southern end of the Jumentos Chain, a series of islands and rocks in the Bahamas that stretches in a semicircle about 100 miles from Long Island down to the Columbus Bank. The unique feature is that to the east of the chain, the depth drops quickly to over 2,000m; whereas to the west, the water remains extremely shallow, with depths of only a few metres for up to 50 miles, until it reaches the famous 'Tongue of the Ocean', which is several thousand metres deep. But it's not just these extremes that makes the Ragged Islands attractive. The islands are quite off the beaten track of classic Bahamian routes. Although only 60 miles from Cuba, the chain is not along a typical transit route, such as between the US and Puerto Rico, and it is far less frequented than, for example, the Exumas.

Ralf & Wiebke Gerking

With the strong trade winds filling our sails, wing on wing, the mood on board was mixed as we sped toward the Columbus Bank, not slowing down as the depth went from a few thousand metres to just tens of metres. But nothing happened, except for the water colour brightening and several barracudas biting on our trolling line. We released them all (one caught in deep water and three from the shallows); only the beautiful King Mackerel was kept.

We passed Little Ragged Island at the south end of the chain and found a spot to anchor in the bay between Little Ragged Island and Ragged Island. Unfortunately, the swell shifted around the island making the anchorage, where we found very good holding on sand, a bit rolly, especially in our position quite

Sailing over the blue hole off Jamaica Cay

a long way from the shore to accommodate our 2m draught. But the snorkelling trip and, especially, the beach walk on Little Ragged, more than made up for this little inconvenience. We had grown accustomed to the impressively vibrant colours of the sea in the Caribbean, but in the Bahamas, with the wide, mostly sandy areas dotted with turtle grass, the colours are almost magical: brilliant and bright.

On the beaches we found an abundance of sand dollars, the calcareous skeletons of flat sea urchins that instead of spines, have a multitude of fine hairs, and which live in the shallow waters of the Bahamas.

The next day, we moved a few miles further north to Hog Cay, together with our buddy-boat *Easy-One*. And what a joy, we met up with our friends Helena and Steve on *Flora*'s sister ship, *Amalia*! We had last seen them in the Chesapeake Bay but have enjoyed many sailing adventures together. As soon as our anchor hit the bottom, they zoomed over in their dinghy with an invitation for dinner. But first, we were encouraged to join them for a sundowner at the Hog Cay Yacht Club. Even on the beach of this uninhabited island, there was a palm-leaf-covered, open-sided pavilion with a long table and chairs, a grill on one side and an improvised trash incineration area on the other. A tradition had become established for the crews of almost all the boats in the anchorage to gather here at 6pm – invariably a very sociable and very international group.

Hog Cay has, like so many islands in the Bahamas, two completely different sides. Together with *Easy-One, Amalia* and several other boats in Middle Pen Bay,

Flora was anchored in about 2.5m, with good sandy holding and wonderfully clear turquoise water. Ashore was a beautiful, fine-sand beach, perfect for strolling and dinghy landings, with just a few coral bommies or rocky outcrops marking the boundaries of the various coves on the west side of the island, and sheltered from the prevailing winds.

Wiebke showing sand dollars

A little walk along the beach, a quirky signpost marks the start of a path that cuts across the island to the east side of Hog Cay. Through the increasingly dense, low bushes, a path winds its way uphill. It's easily recognisable by the volume of beach debris: plastic bottles stuck on branches, nets tied to the bushes, stuffed animals and endless flip-flops.

It gives a hint of what awaits on the island's eastern side. On the windward coast, the deep blue water crashes against the shore with a force that you wouldn't expect on the leeward side. The shape of the coast seems to be perfectly formed to funnel flotsam, especially plastic waste, which gathers in small depressions behind the first line of the beach in many of the coves on this uninhabited island.

It is frustrating, embarrassing, heart-breaking, depressing, . . . but what can be done? If only it were as 'simple' as taking big black bags and collecting everything. Sadly, that is not the solution. Rita and her husband Will have been coming to Hog Cay for over 20 years and know an incredible amount about this

Hog Cay 'Yacht Club' at sunset

Rubbish washed up on the beach

Signpost on the beach

island in particular and the Bahamas in general. She has helped create some of the paths across the island and shared much of her knowledge with us as we walked. The Bahamas doesn't have a proper waste separation system, even on the larger islands. Refuse is piled up in heaps and occasionally set on fire, with the rest buried (their DIY version of landfill). The locals mostly blame their neighbours on Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Even if we were to collect the trash, where would we take it and how could it be disposed of in an environmentally friendly manner (since it seems there's no such system here, not even incinerators with the necessary temperatures and filters)? The real problem lies deeper (in every sense). Yes, new rubbish keeps blowing in. But it's not just the big pieces that wash up.

The sand around these beautiful islands is filled with small – tiny – plastic particles and invisible microplastics. One could cry, but of course, that is no help. In the end, it only makes us more aware of how far things have gone and how important "reduce – reuse – recycle" is globally. And, of course, some cruisers collect and burn, because it is the only feasible option locally. But, unfortunately, this does not change the structural problem and creates poisonous dioxins.

Despite the plastic, the anchorage on the western side of Hog Cay is beautiful but unnervingly shallow. We opted not to anchor too far out where it would be rollier, so compromised with 2.5m depth, plus about 60cm of tide. At high tide it was comfortable; at low tide, a bit less so, especially when the tide dropped a further 20cm due to the recent full moon and wind conditions!

A barracuda still fits between the bottom of Flora*'s keel and the sandy bottom – just!*

We encountered some nice fish whilst snorkelling. In addition to the barracuda, I was delighted to identify a small horned boxfish with magnificent blue stripes, which it can make appear and disappear, directly beside the boat.

What makes this anchorage particularly special is the sailing community that gathers here. For an uninhabited island to have a 'clubhouse' on the beach is truly remarkable. It serves as a perfect meeting point for a sundowner or a potluck supper,

Cruisers gathered around the campfire at Hog Cay 'Yacht Club'!

Flora *and* Amalia *anchored in turquoise waters*

where everyone brings something to share for dinner. There are two fire pits: one for burning trash (a necessary evil) and the other a campfire for a cosy gathering.

The following afternoon, Wiebke and I took another hike, this time to the south side of Hog Cay. We used our tender to get round to the next bay, from where we wanted to start walking. The bay stretches in a crescent shape from Lobster Hole Point to Hog Point. We had become familiar with the local waymarkings: a sneaker on a stick pointed the way to the path's entrance through the bushes; a little further on a green fishing net hung from a branch; then a piece of driftwood marked the way to our next beach, House Bay.

The time had come to leave the Hog Cay anchorage, but first we needed to follow the local tradition of making a driftwood sign with our names, our ship's name and the year, which we hung under the roof of the yacht club alongside,

Not a bad place for a stroll on the beach

undoubtedly, a fair few other OCC members who have been as lucky as us to visit. A blue piece of plastic almost matched the shape of our ship's logo, which made the task easier.

After a wonderful week, we weighed anchor and, together with *Amalia*, dodged Maycock Cay and the shoal west of Margaret Cay, before cautiously motoring towards the anchorage off Double Breasted Cay. Although only 4 miles as the crow flies, we covered over 11 miles to avoid the shallow waters, some of which were not even navigable in our dinghy, with sandbars rising up like white beaches from the light turquoise water. The anchorage, originally intended only as a stop for coffee, turned out to be quieter than expected, so we stayed overnight.

What is the plural of turquoise? The incredibly intense and vibrant shades of turquoise amazed us every day. The abundance of sun, sand, seagrass meadows and coral in shallow depths goes some way to explain the optimum conditions for these colours, but it doesn't explain the radiance and magic. Maybe it is that elusive, mysterious quality that particularly fascinates, creating reflections of light. It also provides perfect conditions for eyeball navigation.

Blue hole on Racoon Cay, resembling a green dragon's eye

Unusually, the next day started with some clouds. We got up late and found that the shallow water around our anchorage at Double Breasted Cay only sparkled occasionally. But as we moved over to the nearby bay of Johnson Cay, the gaps in the clouds grew larger, and the bright sandy beach seemed to glow white.

By the afternoon, we had moved a little further north to the west coast of Racoon Cay and had anchored in Spanish Wells Bay. Here, just one bay over, we found a geological feature that we hadn't seen before but which is relatively common in the Bahamas: a 'Blue Hole'. The blue hole we found here is actually 20m *behind* the beach, whereas often they are found at sea. Blue holes are deep, usually circular, or slightly oval, water-filled holes that appear deep blue as the water is so deep that it absorbs light of almost all wavelengths, reflecting back only blue light. Sometimes it looks as if a landscape designer drilled a vertical hole into the limestone rock or coral with a giant drill. How deep? It varies. The deepest known and measured blue hole is over 300m deep, and the second deepest, Dean's blue hole on Long Island in the Bahamas, is 202m deep. Often, there's a large cave below the vertical entrance, as blue holes are sinkholes formed by erosion in porous coastal reefs. The blue hole on Racoon Cay is relatively shallow but still impressive. Only – it's not blue. Even in bright sunshine, it looks more like the green pupil of a dragon's eye. Maybe it's algae, or perhaps the depth isn't enough to absorb all the light waves except the blue ones: it looks mystical.

From Racoon Cay, we sailed just 5 miles north and anchored again, this time on the west side of Buenavista Cay. Both islands have trails crossing their

shallow ridges, just like Hog Cay. And of course, we seized the opportunity to walk to the rougher side, exposed to the prevailing east winds. Occasionally, we found sandy beaches, but mostly the coast is formed of jagged, sharp-edged coral rock. The sea crashes against it, undermining the cliffs and emphasising the primal force of the ocean.

Uninhabitable, like the interior of most of these islands, barren coral soils dominate, sparsely covered with low bushes, on which little humus forms. Trees and shrubs cling to cracks and holes with gnarled roots, trying to find a small bit of nourishment. It's certainly not easy, as the little water available is usually very salty. This becomes obvious in the salt lakes. On many of the cays in the Ragged Island chain, white and pink areas in the interior of the island shimmer. On the east side of Buenavista Cay, we found a path leading to the large, elongated salt lake in the southern part of the island. We walked along its shore, where even the salt-resistant mangroves don't survive.

Dried out saltwater lake

Nevertheless, in such a hostile environment, there are still surprises. A small bird ran agitatedly along the beach, drawing our attention. In front of a tree stump, we found the nest of a little ringed plover, dug into the salty sand and cushioned with stones and seashells; well camouflaged, but Andrea spotted it right away.

Even up on the cliffs, natural salt pans can be found where salt accumulates. But the times when people in small settlements could make a living from saltworks are long gone; it's just not worth it anymore.

Only rarely does someone try to settle on one of the islands in this chain. Edward Lockhard was the last one here on Buenavista Cay; he built a house and a few outbuildings and lived here for some time. At 78 years old, he survived Hurricane Irma in 2017, reportedly tying himself to one of the trees with a rope. Three days later, he was found and rescued. Edward has now moved to live with his family on another Bahamian island and his buildings are just sad ruins. The equipment and machines are rusted, but the barn is still surprisingly intact, though the termite tracks on the adjacent wooden fences suggest that it won't last much longer. Buenavista Cay is once again as uninhabited as most of the islands of the Jumentos / Ragged Island chain. Cruisers are the only regular arrivals and, from the west side of the islands, they can indulge in the romantic idea of island life without the need to stay.

Blue Wonders!

From Buenavista Cay to Jamaica Cay is just over 20 miles. As we motored out through Little Nurse Cut into the deep water east of the island chain, set the sails and glided through the dark blue, we left the turquoise water behind.

There's a reason it is not called 'turquoise-water sailing', and this really was blue-water sailing at its best, with a steady wind and cloudless sky. Just before Jamaica Cay, the depth sounder started registering again, but the numbers quickly dropped into single digits, as the passage between Black Rock and White Rock is not only narrow but shallow. The unmarked – but easily recognisable – reef passage lay right on our track, so we could sail the last mile to Jamaica Cay under full sail. The route offers one more highlight: directly in front of Jamaica

Heart-shaped blue hole

Snorkellers swimming over a school of Bigeye Jacks

Cay, there is a blue hole in the sea. Unlike the one on Racoon Cay, where the blue hole appeared as a green eye on the island, this blue hole is surrounded by water over 5m deep. The walls of the hole fall steeply to nearly 30m, and the diameter is just a little more than two boat lengths. As we approached, it shone deep blue against the turquoise surroundings. And of course, we didn't miss the chance of sailing directly over it. It was a very special moment; although there are several blue holes in the Bahamas, not all of them are suitable for keel boats to sail over. Many have a shallow coral rim, great for snorkelling but less ideal for sailing over!

We anchored *Flora* on the sandy bottom at the edge of the blue hole and were immediately greeted by two curious reef sharks, who quickly retreated into the hole. The initially empty-looking blue water soon revealed a steep wall filled with coral and reef fish. Two large lobsters wandered around a ledge, as if they knew that we'd leave them alone (closed season). A large turtle with a cleaner fish approached before disappearing into the deep blue. Occasionally, we spotted the sharks patrolling further down in the darker depths.

We continued on to Flamingo Cay and enjoyed several more snorkelling trips, which never failed to delight in the crystal-clear water. Our next destination was Water Cay, but we made two intermediate anchor stops in open water on our way. The calm weather was perfect for exploring more blue holes, so we anchored in incredibly turquoise water, initially in front of a heart-shaped blue hole that really seems to glow dark blue from the depths.

Together, we snorkelled along the edge of the reef. Two small reef sharks briefly greeted us but quickly retreated into the dark depths. We were surprised by a large school of Bigeye Jacks, most at least 0.5m long. They circled around in the blue hole, apparently completely unbothered by us.

Just a mile further on, we stopped at yet another blue hole. This time the sinkhole was smaller in diameter and only around 20m deep, and we could always see the bottom whilst snorkelling. We found the blue a bit lighter, but the entire edge almost entirely covered in beautiful coral, making it an excellent spot for colourful reef fish and schooling fish. Another fantastic snorkelling experience!

We couldn't resist staying a bit longer at Water Cay, enjoying the spectacular rocky scenery at the anchorage and the calm, smooth water. We inflated the SUPs to explore a little further afield by paddle; Wiebke even doing yoga on the board.

When we visited the third blue hole off Water Cay by dinghy, we were struck by the surprisingly large number of sharks, which made our snorkelling rather brief. It transpires that some fishermen use the bay to sort and clean their catch, attracting more sharks than we might have expected.

Water Cay was our final stop in the Jumentos / Ragged Islands chain and, when heading north to Long Island, in order to avoid having to go all the way around that island, we needed to carefully calculate the tides so that we could pass through the shallow Comer Passage at high tide. The weather window cooperated perfectly with the calculated tides, and we were able to sail nearly the entire 23 miles from the anchorage at Water Cay to the waypoint west of the Comer Channel, most of the time under gennaker. We arrived precisely 2 hours before high tide. North Sea sailors might be unimpressed but, hailing from the Baltic, we find it exciting to sail through a 12-mile-long unmarked shallow water passage with a charted depth often less than the draught of our boat.

As expected, the tide provided us with an additional cushion and we made it across to Long Island without scraping the bottom of our keel, all the time gliding over what felt like an infinite infinity pool!

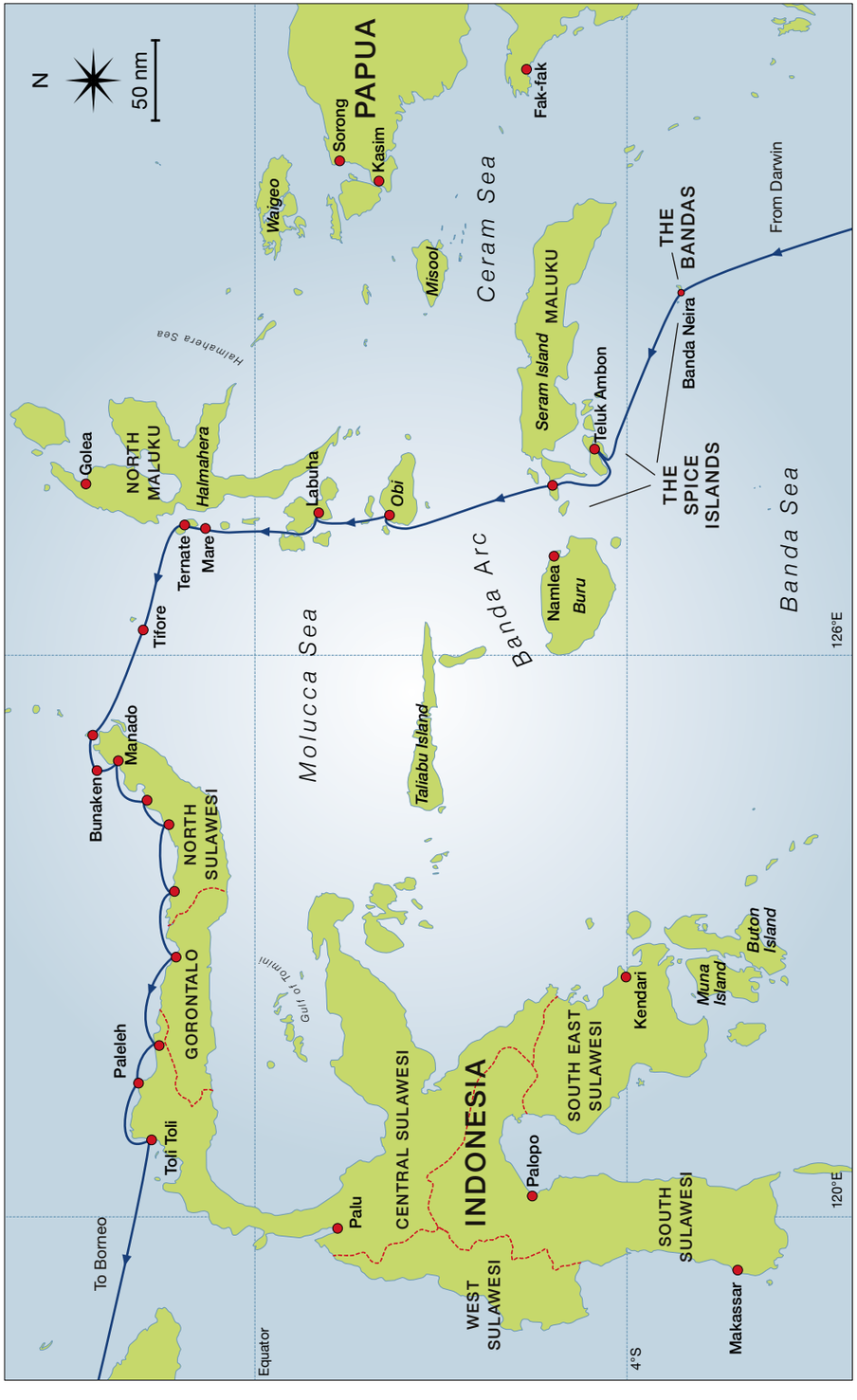
The relatively weak wind was, unusually, not coming from the east but from the south, meaning that we didn't have to sail into the waves. High tide fell shortly after noon, allowing us to pass through the passage in perfect visibility. Along the route, over the flats, there are only a few rocks or coral heads, and the sandy bottom shimmers continuously in a nearly unreal light turquoise.

The remote Ragged Islands lay behind us and much more of the Bahamas lay ahead. *What* a cruising ground!

Small blue hole

Wiebke doing Yoga on a SUP

A drone captured us sailing our Gennaker as we glided through the water



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK IN INDONESIA:

THE MOLUCCAS AND NORTH SULAWESI, IN 2010

by Irene & Peter Whitby (s/v *Catspaw*)

This article is based on a chapter from a book Irene has written for younger generations of her family who might wonder 'what Grandma did'. It follows an article in Flying Fish *2024 documenting their 2004 visit to Palmerston Atoll. Six years later, after exploring Fiji, Vanuatu, New Zealand – as far south as Dunedin – and northwest Australia, Peter and Irene describe two months sailing in* Catspaw, *their 39ft Gib'Sea, from Darwin to Toli Toli in Sulawesi. Their journey continued west to Borneo, exploring the Kinabatangan and beyond. Catspaw is now based in Krabi Boat Lagoon, Thailand, with a new owner, after Peter and Irene hung up their cruising boots in 2021 and sold her.*

We had laid *Catspaw* up in Spot-On Marine, Ludmilla Creek, Darwin for the 2009–10 cyclone season and returned in June 2010 to continue cruising. This time with Brunei as the destination, in order to spend time with Irene's daughter, Susan, and her family, who lived and worked there. After recommissioning, launching – on a 7.1m high tide – and sailing over the extensive sandbanks across the bay, we anchored close to the city. With a list which seemed endless, we started to provision the boat with basics for the next four months.

We both really liked Darwin with its relaxed, laid-back atmosphere, but it sure was hot! When walking into town we would pop into shops, trying to appear interested in whatever they were selling, but soon admitted that we were just doing 'an air-con crawl' cooling down a bit before continuing in the outdoor oven. The shopkeepers were lovely and understood, appreciating our honesty.

Considerable time was spent trying to find detailed paper charts of the Moluccas, and in particular North Sulawesi, frustratingly only getting two larger scale ones from an Indonesian Navy vessel in the harbour – after being escorted to a copy shop in town. We also drew a blank on Gérard Depardieu's superyacht, which obviously did not expect to visit such backwaters. In the end we found a C-Map package of chartlets, which would have to suffice.

The paperwork required to enter Indonesia was complicated, expensive and very time consuming so on this one occasion we registered to join a rally, the Indonesian Rally, which had agents already appointed to deal with the bureaucracy. There were 110 boats registered, with around 80 taking the 'well-travelled route' to Kupang, Komodo, Bali, then Singapore. The rest of us were initially going north to the Banda Islands, before continuing on to Ambon. The rally yachts would then head southwest via Bali etc to Singapore – but not us! Our plan was to head north on a totally individual route through Indonesia and around Borneo eventually to reach Brunei.

Finally, fully provisioned, all systems working, we were ready to go!

Banda Neira Harbour, from Fort Belgica

The first leg of the rally was organised as a race and was a 'very lively'(!) 500-mile sail from Darwin to the Bandas, taking us three days and six hours of uncomfortable sailing; 5m seas were reported. We were first over the start line, dressed to impress as the rally requested, but not first to arrive in the capital, Banda Neira. The first to arrive was a 66-footer owned and skippered by Randy Repass, chairman of West Marine. This boat, along with the other faster boats, had taken the shallowest spots meaning the only water we could find to anchor in was 35m deep, not ideal!

Peter had had a book for about 20 years entitled *The Spice Islands* and been fascinated by their history. In brief, in the 1400s the Banda Islands were trading happily with the Arabs and Chinese: nutmeg in exchange for fabric and foodstuffs. At that time nutmeg grew nowhere else in the world. When the Portuguese, Dutch and then the English found these islands and discovered that nutmeg was worth more, at that time, than gold, some horrendous behaviour ensued, with much loss of life, to acquire the monopoly to trade the precious spice. The full history is both spellbinding and heart-rending. We found the islanders so warm and welcoming, which is amazing considering how we treated their ancestors.

The history of the forts on the island testifies to the battles fought. We saw no trace of the first Portuguese fort, but saw the remains of the 1613 Dutch one and the several times rebuilt/expanded Dutch-built Fort Belgica, now overlooking the harbour. This was twice surrendered to the British, in 1796 without a shot fired, and stormed and captured again in 1810.

Everywhere we went there was nutmeg, cloves or cinnamon drying in the streets outside the homes of the people. Irene had never seen a clove tree, so a local man took us behind his house into the forest, climbed to about 30ft in a matter of seconds and came back down with a branch for us; it was both fascinating and a lovely gesture. In no time at all, a dozen smiling children had also gathered.

Cloves for you, with a smile!

Kora-Kora: Dragon boat racing

Over the next few days we were entertained with rally-organised dragon boat racing and dance shows, all of which started some two hours later than advertised. We learned that there was a local expression 'forget your watch'. We soon understood why!

We enjoyed excellent local food, tours of nutmeg plantations, visited several of the islands and snorkelled in water with visibility of over 30m. There was no need to bother to scuba dive as the water was crystal clear with fabulous coral and amazing, weird and wonderful fish.

The President of Indonesia, Randy Repass, and ladies

Leaving Banda meant motoring the 140 miles to Ambon as there was zero wind. Here lay our problem with joining a rally: there is always a schedule to keep to and we struggled with that. We were so used to leaving when the weather was good to sail. Having said that, we ended up having dinner in the Governor's mansion with the Indonesian President and First Lady which we are absolutely sure we wouldn't have done if we'd been travelling alone. In our honour they served European food for us. It was awful – nobody seemed to enjoy it – and I am sure we would have all preferred local food, but the gesture was pure kindness!

On our last evening in Ambon, there was a ceremony where, to our surprise, we were presented with a plaque and an envelope containing 8,000,000 Rupiah (about £600) for coming third in the race from Darwin; we had not seen anybody at the finishing line when we arrived in Banda Neira so had no idea who decided this ranking! We were thrilled, not least because it was more than the rally fee. Happy days! All this was followed by singing, dancing, a fashion show and a delicious dinner of local cuisine. Not a bad way to end our time in these lovely islands.

It had rained a lot of the time we were in the Spice Islands, so we were happy to see a bit more sunshine again as we left the rally to travel north. One night, when anchored off a tiny uninhabited island, a freak storm blew up and we almost ended up grounded on the beach – not ideal in the middle of nowhere. Little sleep was had that night!

We were now definitely in non-tourist land. When there was habitation, it was generally on low-lying territory with small, basic villages, often on stilts due to frequent flooding, and with fabulous, friendly, local markets selling home-grown, fresh produce. We saw no other foreigners.

House on stilts between Ambon and Ternate

If we anchored anywhere near an inhabited island visitors soon appeared in their dugout canoes "hello mister" (applies to man or woman), "where you come from?", "where you going?", "what's your name?". Generally, that was the extent of their English so after that it was sign language and our faithful phrase book. We asked several people when they last saw a sailing boat and the general consensus was that one passed by in 2005, five years earlier! This really was a less travelled route.

One night, we tried to anchor exactly on the equator off the west side of the island of Halmahera. Irene was so excited but it turned out that the reefs were just too dangerous, so we ended up anchoring half a mile off the line. The last time we had crossed it was in deep ocean between Panama

and the Galápagos Islands. Our fridge had broken down on that occasion, so we felt justified in opening a cold bottle of champagne this time – we were so close!

That evening, just as it was getting dark, a dugout canoe appeared out of nowhere. We hadn't seen any sign of habitation, not even any wee shacks. Anyway, the paddler came on board, sat down and said his name was 'Man'. Gentle, curious, fascinated by Peter's chest hair, he tried hard to converse with us. He struggled to read our phrase book, so Peter passed him an old pair of his glasses – still no good. Irene gave him an old pair of hers to try. As if by magic, we could see the light being switched on! He couldn't stop reading the phrase book. Rubbing his fingers together (a sign for how much money), we said 'gift'. We will never ever forget the look on his face. Irene gave him a case to keep his new glasses in and when he left he placed it almost with reverence in the centre of his dugout canoe. We also gave him a book of course. 'Man' went home a very, very happy man. It is a very precious memory for us. We never did ask how or where he learned to read, a skill all the more strange because this was such an isolated territory.

Man and his glasses case

. . . and leaving with his sacks of Copra

More visitors from Toabi, in the Kayoa group

As we sailed north up the remote, jagged, reef-strewn coastline of Halmahera, anchoring each night, quite a few locals in dugout canoes came calling, some looking to trade. For example, two coconuts for an old pair of shorts; most wanted *makan* (food), and some were simply curious. They would sit, uninvited, in our cockpit perfectly relaxed, then suddenly say *'berangkat'* (I'm going) and off they went.

We began to travel very slowly between islands. It was the only time we had peace and could eat when we liked – being Ramadan, it would have been rude for us to eat when people were aboard, which now seemed to be most of the time when we were at anchor!

It was almost Indonesian Independence Day so we headed for Ternate, capital of Northern Maluku and once the clove capital of the world. We presumed there would be big celebrations there.

Peace in a beautiful anchorage

Irene had read somewhere that villagers on an island called Mare, just south of Ternate, made basic pottery and were quite famous for it. We anchored off the southern village but were told that the pottery was only made in the village near the north coast. We then anchored off the north coast but Skipper Peter wasn't comfortable that the location was secure, so was not keen to go exploring and leave *Catspaw* unmanned and out of sight.

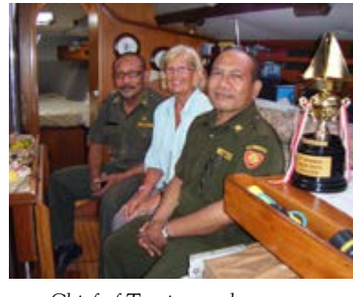
Of course, a dugout canoe soon appeared and confirmed that pottery was indeed made in his village. He said 'wait' and soon came back with a small pot which we bought for the equivalent of £0.30. The next morning a fisherman arrived and, trusting that she wasn't about to be kidnapped, Irene got into his smelly canoe, said farewell to Peter and was motored off out of sight around the side of the island, into the unknown. Trusting – or . . .?

The fisherman navigated through the reef off the village and dropped Irene off to be looked after by a very friendly woman who escorted her around the spotless village paths, stopping off at small homes, each with their own family design of pot, bowl or vase. Both the people and their houses were coated in white clay, and all were happy to show the various stages of their craft, ending with the final product drying on a small balcony outside each house.

The potter returns, mission accomplished!

The village was a charming collective cottage industry, the villagers friendly, warm and welcoming, and Irene couldn't resist buying four of the basic clay pots, now on display in our apartment. Needless to say, when the lovely man brought Irene back in his smelly boat, there was the inevitable canoe hanging off the back of *Catspaw* with Peter entertaining yet another fisherman.

Once anchored off Ternate within the sound of around eight mosques quoting the Quran from their loudspeakers, all at slightly different times, we dinghied ashore to look for the Chief of Tourism whose name we had been given, eventually finding the well-hidden, grubby Tourist Office, staffed by about ten people all doing absolutely nothing. The Chief didn't speak English but, much to our relief, his Deputy did and to our surprise asked if he and his Chief could come to see the boat. They came, and we discovered the real reason when he asked for some bottles of wine – for his alcoholic Chief!



Chief of Tourism and Deputy on board

Asked about celebrations for Independence Day they looked vague, shrugged and said "no", but then seemed to remember a parade the next morning in front of the Sultan and Governor! Finally, after prising the time and place out of them, we left clutching two brochures. We never saw any other white people while we were in Ternate so I guess they weren't used to being asked the odd question or two! The parade was poor, the sun very hot, but we had some great conversations with people in the crowd around us.

Spices drying on the road

After a long motorbike taxi ride up into the hills along roads covered with drying spices, we were taken by a local man on an extremely hot climb through the forest and up into the interior to see 'reportedly' the oldest clove tree in the world. According to the tiny sign beside the small, very dead tree, it was between 100 and 350 years old! More interesting were the 50 or so people high up in the living trees, collecting cloves. It must have been a long climb from their village, followed by a hard day's work clinging about 50ft up in a tree before the long walk home before dark, day in, day out. That was their life.

Clove pickers, 50ft up

Ternate, once the clove capital of the world, has a very long and interesting history of European contact beginning in the 1500s. The Portuguese were first, capturing the lucrative spice trade, but they were expelled in 1575 after murdering the Sultan in their fort. Sir Francis Drake arrived shortly after in the *Golden Hind* and was warmly welcomed. We were told that he helped the Sultan of Ternate in a battle with the Sultan of Tidore, an island to the south, was given a gold ring for Queen Elizabeth I and was offered many cloves. However, he could not accept too many cloves as his hold was full of gold looted from the Spanish in South America.

We left Ternate to sail 120 miles to Sulawesi but decided to stop halfway at a very small island called Tifore, as always dinghying ashore to explore. The Head Man took us to his house on the other side of the island, with Irene feeling like the Pied Piper as she couldn't take a step anywhere without falling over children trying to get close to her.

Head Man and 'Pied Piper' in Tifore

Having walked a long way in over 30°C with 90% humidity and then found not even a fan to stir the hot air in the Head Man's home, we drank hot tea and ate the very dry biscuits we were offered. Peter looked as if he had just been for a swim and Irene thought she might faint! The Head Man, ever friendly, was thrilled with the dictionary Peter gave him as he was keen to practise his English.

In Bunaken, at the northeast corner of Sulawesi, we got the air tanks out and dived on the wall but didn't find anything interesting. It turned out to be famous for macro-diving. After meeting a diver who specialised in this, he showed us incredible photos of seahorses less than a centimetre in length. Over the years he had spent many hours scuba diving, posh camera in hand, keeping himself still against the coral wall until he spotted and photographed these perfectly formed micro creatures! It is truly amazing how different people choose to live their lives.

By this time we needed to extend our Indonesian visas, so we anchored outside the busy, filthy harbour of the city of Manado. Each day, a ten-year-old boy, Bitun, who lived on one of the small fishing boats in the harbour, enthusiastically waited for us to help park the dinghy. He proudly looked after her and brought her to the bottom of the steps for us after we had shopped, done our laundry and returned from many trips – sometimes by horse and cart – to the Immigration Office. There, we smiled a lot and greased palms as necessary, for example to help one department with lunch costs, and in another, to help with expenses of a young pregnant member of staff!

Fishing float, in deep water

We also reported to the Harbour Master, who had no idea what forms we should be given to fill in as he had never signed-in a sailing boat and warned us to be very careful in the area where we had anchored. Asked if it was dangerous in his harbour, he said "of course not", followed by "goodbye". We had to laugh. Manado was unusual in that it was 80% Christian – respite from the loud mosques – and the opposite of the country as a whole. While exploring the city we saw the oldest Chinese Temple in Eastern Indonesia which was very beautiful.

Bitun was obviously a bright boy and Irene would have loved to send him to school, but we'd have had to be living there to make sure he attended. His parents certainly couldn't afford to educate him, and nor could they afford for him to be at school rather than working. We gave him an atlas, and he was thrilled and showed it to the old men sitting on the dock. Some had travelled and could point out places to him which was exciting; we also showed him where he lived. With our visa extension eventually stamped (or 'chopped' as they say in the east), we left, saying a fond farewell to Bitun.

Love-in in Pindjang

We day-sailed west along the north coast of Sulawesi taking 12 days for the 260 miles to Toli-Toli, our point of departure for Borneo. Fishing was the major activity on the coast with literally hundreds of floats, unlit at night. We always chose to find a place to anchor for the night, in a quiet bay or off a village and – needless to say – had many visits from canoes. Spontaneous warm welcomes were the norm ashore.

Our mission in one village, Paleleh, was to find some eggs. However, all was strangely quiet and we were approached and directed to the community hall where there was an apparently important gathering. Interpreted by the local English teacher, whose English wasn't great, the local policeman decided to ask for our papers. It was the last day of Ramadan, hence the gathering and the 'need for formality'. Our papers were on *Catspaw* so we invited them to come to the boat to see them. Clearly amazed by the boat and the facilities aboard *Catspaw* we ended up taking both the teacher and the policeman for a demonstration sail across the bay; excitement levels were through the roof and the bureaucracy of the papers duly forgotten! They couldn't wait to

Kidnapping the policeman and teacher

Polite, respectful, lively and friendly youngsters

Send off at Paleleh

Two- and Three-wheelers in Toli-Toli

get back to tell everyone about their adventure. Having first sailed directly away from the village, tongues were certainly set wagging – were we kidnapping them? There were many children on the jetty when we returned our 'hostages'.

The next morning Peter was checking the engine and Irene making bread when 11 teenagers in 7 dugout canoes arrived and hovered off the stern hoping to come on board. They were so polite and waited to be invited, but full of life and fun when they did come aboard. One lit a cigarette and Irene said *tidak merokok* (no smoking). He immediately apologised and sat in his canoe smoking before coming back. The two lads with the best English asked many questions and translated for the others.

We showed them through *Catspaw* and they were awestruck that we had a cooker, fridge, two toilets, table, seats, beds, a watermaker and that we could play music: all better than some of their homes. The excitement was palpable.

Ramadan had ended, and we were invited into homes in the village to share food and drink, non-alcoholic of course. Asked whether tourists ever came to the village, their answer was that a couple had got off a bus two years before – and got straight back on - and they had never seen a 'spaceship' like ours before. Many of the youngsters gave us a lovely send-off when we left.

Finally, we reached Toli-Toli, our last port of call in Sulawesi, where we would provision, get fuel and water, and clear-out before heading to Kalimantan, 140 miles away on the huge island of Borneo.

Toli-Toli was a sprawling frontier town supplying all the outlying villages and was probably the dirtiest and most unhygienic town we had ever seen – and we've seen a few! The fruit and veg market had a mud floor with broken bits of wood and polythene on the ground so you were always squelching as you walked, there were quite a few insects and we spotted the odd rat. Many houses were raised off the ground with stagnant water beneath them, some littered with plastic bags, bottles and goodness knows what, but the people, as elsewhere, were very friendly. Three-wheeler bicycles were a popular form of transport here, two wheels at the front.

The Harbour Master had no idea what to do with us since he, like a few other officials we had encountered before him, had not dealt with any yachts before, so he asked how much we had been charged in other ports. Looking crestfallen when we said 'nothing', he followed suit and didn't charge us. Seeking fuel, Peter was taken some distance to a petrol station on the back of a motorbike. Returning with two 20 litre dead-weights – his arms got longer and longer as the journey progressed – he

Irene 'taken hostage' at send-off from Toli-Toli

decided to get a taxi for the next trip! We decided not to risk filling the water tanks, nervous of what bugs might be in the water, and just hoped that we could replenish with rainwater soon.

All set, we said our 'goodbyes' and received yet another friendly send-off – this time from the dock workers, surrounding Irene – and set off on the140 mile trip from Sulawesi to Kalimantan in Borneo.

Wherever we went in Indonesia – larger towns, small villages or isolated anchorages – we felt safe and were never threatened or worried about theft of any kind. In fact, we always received the sincerest of welcomes, were treated politely and met with the warmest of smiles.

SIX CLUBS AND A CRUISE:

THE CCA WESTERN ISLES CRUISE 2025

by Nicky Barker (s/v *Blue Velvet of Sark*)

Flying not only two flags – being a member of both the RCC and the OCC – Nicky also wears two hats: proofreader and author; she has written two articles about cruising in Cuba in Flying Fish *2019/2 and 2020/2. Nicky and Reg, OCC Vice Commodore, sail a Rustler 42,* Blue Velvet of Sark. *After several years back at their home in Guernsey, they are on the move again:* **blue-velvet-exploring-the-world.blogspot.com**.

The Cruising Club of America (CCA) holds an annual cruise in company, the location for which is chosen by the Commodore when he/she is Vice Commodore. Thus, current CCA Commodore, Jay Gowell, selected the Western Isles of Scotland as the venue for the 2025 cruise over two years ago and planning for the event had been ongoing since.

In line with similar past events, five British and Irish cruising clubs – the Clyde Cruising Club (CCC), the Irish Cruising Club (ICC), the Royal Cruising Club (RCC), the Royal Highland Yacht Club (RHYC), and the OCC – were invited to join the CCA's sojourn. Representatives from each club assisted the CCA team in the overall cruise organisation, as well as each leading an evening/day event during the cruise.

The programme was ambitious, as anyone who has cruised the Western Isles with a planned itinerary will attest:

Date	Event Location	Event / Comment	Club
19 July	*Kerrera Marina, Oban*	*Event start, welcome dinner, speeches etc*	CCA
20 July	*Tobermory*	*Oban to Tobermory race*	CCC
21 July	*Loch Drumbuie*	*Sunflower raft*	RCC
24 July	*Talisker Distillery, Loch Harport, Skye*	*Distillery tour and lunch*	ICC
27 July	*Vatersay Bay, Vatersay*	*Evening shore party*	RHYC
28, 29 or 30 July	*TBC during cruise*	*Pot-luck supper. Details TBC at Vatersay dependent on weather. (Event took place on Wed 30 at Loch Spelve, Mull)*	OCC
31 July	*Kerrera Marina, Oban*	*Farewell party*	CCA
1 August		*Yachts depart*	

Not only was flat calm required for the sunflower raft, but following that cruise participants would need a decent sailing breeze from the right direction

in order to get to Skye and then out to the southern tip of the Western Isles (60+ miles into the prevailing wind) and back again . . . all on a timeline. And, as if the itinerary were not demanding enough, the CCA organisers were keen to have high participation. Indeed, in the planning stages they were anticipating up to 100 yachts and 400 participants. In the end, 60 yachts took part with 250 crew members; quite the largest cruise-in-company with which we have ever been involved.

Reg and I had invited Bob Shepton to join us aboard *Blue Velvet of Sark* (*BVoS*). Bob is a CCA Blue Water Medal winner and thus an honorary member of the CCA. He also lives but a seagull's wing flap from Oban; as an honorary member of both the OCC and the CCA and an RCC member too, Bob had to be involved in the event.

We arrived in Oban on Monday 14 July and picked up one of the Oban community moorings for the week. We needed to refuel and prep *BVoS* for Bob's arrival and wanted to provision fully before he arrived as we foresaw difficulties in packing away all the food we would need with more than the minimum number of people aboard. With the cruise lasting 13 days in total, plus an extra day or so before that when we had Bob aboard, we reckoned on needing 15 days' food (albeit with a couple of dinners and a lunch catered for by cruise events). It was much like provisioning for an Atlantic crossing, though with a guaranteed end date and no night watches, but more drinks parties. With a comprehensive menu plan (that's a first for me!) we made several supermarket runs over the next few days. We purchased all the fresh food on the morning of Thursday 17 July and, though I couldn't fit everything I wanted to in the fridge at first, it all lasted surprisingly well, particularly the blueberries and the lettuces.

Bob arrived later that afternoon and the next day we headed across to Kerrera Marina. There was a non-cruise yacht in the berth next to the one we had been allocated and it was a bit of a squeeze to get in, whereupon the crew of said yacht appeared from their stroll ashore and immediately departed! We spent the afternoon helping Barbara, the cruise's *major domo* to fill and organise goody bags for the cruise participants, and then enjoyed an evening catching up with Fi and Chris Jones and meeting other cruise participants.

Inquisitive local

The fleet assembles at Kerrera, dressing overall was de rigueur for all the cruise's main events

Saturday's events were all to take place in the afternoon, so Reg and I spent the morning replacing the anchor windlass motor. Happily, it had chosen to expire before the cruise rather than at an inconvenient time during the fortnight but it was still a tedious job, all the more so since we had fitted it new last November. Having removed the gearbox and motor assembly it was clear that the upper shaft seal had failed. The gearbox was full of rust-coloured, salt-encrusted gunge and, doubtless, the inside of the 'sealed' motor was too. After much cleaning and rebuilding we had a fully functional windlass again, which was a huge relief since we knew we'd be doing a lot of anchoring.

Members of the CCA who have sailed across an ocean are presented with a pennant to mark the achievement. Those who crossed the Atlantic to be at the Western Isles Cruise were presented with their pennant at the welcome party by CCA Awards Committee Chair, Jim Quanci. From left to right: Jim Quanci, Rob Childs (WIC Co-Chair), CCA VC Chase Anderson, Elizabeth Gowell, CCA Commodore Jay Gowell, Jonathan Brewin (WIC Co-Chair), Steve McInnis, Mary Lovely

Afternoon registration was followed by welcome drinks (rum punch), speeches and a superb buffet dinner, with tables groaning under the platters of cold meats, bowls of salads and piles and piles of langoustine. The Kerrera Marina team did us proud. After it all officially wrapped up, the marina remained alive to the sound of new-found friends enjoying the first of many (long!) whisky tastings.

We awoke on Sunday to a flat calm. During the morning's VHF briefing Ken Andrews (CCC, Race Officer) briefed us on the day's race procedure. We didn't intend to race but cruise participants had been encouraged to enter an ETA at the finish line off Tobermory. Such 'cruising racers' were to cross the start line within a time window after the 'racing racers' and, without use of the engine, were to aim to finish as close to their nominated ETA as possible. I had nominated an ETA but the lack of wind didn't fill us with enthusiasm to wait around for a drift so we set off at the motor, following the trail of nearly half the fleet up Bob's 'Sound of Dull' (aka the Sound of Mull). Having made that decision the wind, of course, filled in nicely and funnelled down either side of Lismore Island. We had a

Tulla Mhor *showing a good turn of speed passing Lismore Light*

Clockwise from top left: Colourful Tobermory; misty dawn at Tobermory; the Western Isles Cruise fleet gathers in the small marina at Tobermory
Photo © Donald Wood

lovely, short sail and then ground to a halt in a flat calm a little to the northwest of Duart Castle. We motored. It was, indeed, dull, though the conversation was fun. But we reached Tobermory in good time to bag a finger pontoon berth, rather than raft, which made the following day's start ahead of most of the rest of the fleet much easier to manage.

Reg and I took a stroll ashore to enjoy the colourful delights of Tobermory, while Bob visited the crew chartering *Morning Star*, a yacht he had sailed aboard just a couple of weeks before and whose manager/owner he knows. On our return to *BVoS* we were invited aboard neighbouring yacht, *Pinocchio,* to join the crew for drinks along with their buddy crew. Imagine Bob's surprise when he discovered that his new friends from *Morning Star* were *Pinocchio's* buddy crew. We had a fun couple of hours, discovering in the process that *Morning Star's* charterers are good friends with Ted Laurentius (OCC PO for St John, Newfoundland) and that one of the crew's ancestors hailed from Guernsey, our home island. It's a small world. When the other crews headed ashore to eat, we returned to *BVoS* to make inroads into the small mountain of food aboard. Yet again, not a tin of corned beef in sight; sorry, Bob!

Tim Trafford (RCC Vice Commodore and OCC member) had volunteered to lead the most difficult event of the whole cruise – the building of a sunflower raft. To assist him, he'd drafted in a couple of experts in this field, people who had been intimately involved with the construction of several sunflower rafts for the RCC, but he still held overall responsibility. The instructions in the cruise book were comprehensive and Tim had spent several hours at Kerrera visiting

the crews of the eight yachts that would be anchored at the cardinal and inter-cardinal points of the raft to ensure that they fully understood what was required of them. He and his team had calculated the circumference and hence the radius of the raft from the beam of all the participating yachts and had marked that radius up on long reels of floating line which would run from the cardinal/inter-cardinal yachts to a strong point at the centre of the circle. These anchored yachts would then tension up their anchor chains against this line and the opposite anchored yacht and then, between these eight yachts, the remainder would fill in the circle.

Monday 21 July dawned calm and foggy, though the wind was forecast to increase as the day progressed. Tim had drafted us in to assist with running the tensioning lines from the anchoring cardinal yachts to the strong point and then later to help direct the arriving 'infills' to their places. So we made an early start to motor around to Loch Drumbuie, where we anchored in the north bay and set to work in the dinghy. It was fascinating to be so closely involved but we were very grateful not to have been nominated as one of the first yachts in place. Much to everyone's amazement, the 8 cardinal/inter-cardinal yachts were settled by 1100, about 90 minutes ahead of Tim's exacting timeline. With the wind gradually increasing as per forecast, Tim abandoned his carefully planned arrival schedule and essentially told

The completed sunflower. The radius of the sunflower, set up at the beginning of the build process, is critically dependent on the number of expected yachts. A few yachts dropped out on the day so there were a few 'missing petals' in the flower. Still a hugely impressive feat to achieve. BZ Tim and team!
Photo © Somers Kempe

Inside the completed sunflower

The 'dream team' who organised and led the sunflower build. From left to right, front row: Sophie Trafford, Jamie Cochrane; middle row: James Scott, Alastair Mill, Jenny Mill, Tim Trafford; back row: Becky Trafford, Nick Muir, Jason Lawrence

the fleet "turn up ASAP before the wind builds too much". We quickly slotted *BVoS* in alongside *Aphrodite*, which had been the first yacht on station, and then jumped back into the dinghy to direct new arrivals and, as necessary, help push them into position. Amazingly, by 1400, and a good two hours ahead of schedule, the sunflower was complete, though there were a few gaps due to a couple of boats opting out on the day. Somers Kempe had a drone flying from Commodore Jay's *Moonstone* and recorded the event from above and it certainly looked splendid. Though it would have been lovely to have spent an hour or so as a circle, with the rising breeze risking overstraining cleats, particularly on the leeward side of the raft, Tim recommended that boats leave the raft and move away to anchor solo or as small rafts. We returned to the northern bay, whilst the commodores of the six clubs, plus Tim and his immediate team, gathered on *Moonstone* to celebrate a significant achievement.

Overnight the rain poured down and the wind picked up strongly from the northwest. Our next destination was Loch Harport on Skye, over 50 miles to windward, and we had to be there in two days' time. Much of the fleet switched on their engines and motored grimly into wind, through the rain and bouncing waves. *BVoS* really doesn't do that, or at least not at the speed required, so we tucked some reefs in and started beating to windward. As a long-time ocean sailor, Bob's approach to windward work is to sail on a close reach on the making tack but we wanted to get to Loch Harport in time for our distillery tour, preferably having had two nights asleep at anchor, so together we worked on Bob's upwind racing helm technique, not easy in the conditions on the day. It was a long beat out of Loch Sunart, with enough tacks to ensure Reg and I had plenty of practice grinding the winches but off Ardnamurchan Point we could free off a little (though not quite to the fabled close

Warisha *entering Loch Scavaig,*
Photo © Anne Kolker

reach) and we headed out towards Rum. By the time we got there, Loch Scresort was filled with Western Isles Cruise (WIC) yachts, but there was still plenty of space to anchor, which we did, just NE of the moorings in about 3m of water. It had been a long day and we enjoyed dinner, a discussion about boat systems, and an early night.

The low cloud of the previous day was still firmly in place when we arose on Wednesday, augmented by mist and poor visibility. After our morning porridge we set sail again, still going directly into wind but, thankfully, in more moderate conditions than the previous day. The visibility remained poor for most of the day and we felt sorry for those crews that had battled north to the spectacular anchorage at Loch Scavaig, only to see little of the view. With conditions gentler than the previous day, the beat to windward was a lot more pleasant, but we were still pleased to bear away at the entrance to Loch Harport. We dodged a small cruise ship beetling out at great speed and then ran gently down the loch to the anchorage off Carbost where we dropped the hook in the growing fleet. Having inflated the dinghy, Reg and I took a stroll around the village as a recce for the next day, finding the local convenience store and the oyster and seafood shop, though we reached the latter just after they sold out of oysters for the day. Most disappointing.

Talisker Distillery

Thursday dawned much brighter than Wednesday but the forecast for the following days wasn't promising – south to southwest winds up to force six, not at all ideal for sailing southwest to Vatersay. So, like many other crews, we planned for an afternoon departure 'out to the west, somewhere' to make the most of the moderate southerly winds of the day. But first we hurried ashore to enjoy a tour of Talisker

The stills at Talisker

Carbost oysters at Talisker Distillery

Music and fun for the crews of Salut, Ballyclaire *and* Pure Magic Too, *Photo © Jim Houston*

Upwind racing helm enjoying the conditions

Lady of Avenel *at Brevig Bay*

Momentum
enjoying the brisk beat

Distillery, followed by a 'light sandwich lunch' – all organised by the ICC and the Diageo team. The tour was excellent; we were taken through the full whisky-making process and shown the various areas of the distillery where production takes place. The final parts of the process, maturation in barrels and bottling, take place off-site, but they bring examples of their finished product back to Carbost for visitors to taste (and buy!). We were offered a sample of one of their newly developed 10-year-old malts, and very good it was too, though I have to admit to preferring it with a little water or ice added. Some would consider this sacrilege! The 'light lunch' afterwards was anything but and showcased some excellent oysters from the local oyster farm, as well as delicious Scottish salmon and beef. Hats off to Diageo for hosting us so well, especially given the number of participants, and all whilst maintaining a throughflow of non-WIC tourists.

Back at *BVoS* we joined the long line of yachts heading up Loch Harport and out to the west. The wind stayed solidly in the south for the 5-hour sail across the Minch, and under full sail we romped across (not hard on the wind for once, hooray!). We, and many other cruise participants, had our sights set on Wizard Pool in Loch Skipport, though a good number headed to Loch Boisdale and its marina. We arrived to find 10 or so yachts already at anchor, with a further 4 or 5 in neighbouring Caolas Mor. But Wizard Pool is remarkably large and we easily found a space in about 7m just north of the islet, perfect for when the wind went southwest overnight. After a chilli dinner, we slept soundly in preparation for yet more windward work the next day.

Bob later admitted that he had been dreading Friday's beat south from South Uist down towards Vatersay. In the end, whilst we had a full 7 hours underway and the wind was reasonably brisk (SW up to 18 knots), the sea conditions were pretty benign and Bob graduated as upwind racing helm with almost a full day at the wheel. He afterwards professed to having enjoyed the experience! Meanwhile, Reg and I worked on our upper body strength as sheet grinders again. With two reefs in the main, full genoa and staysail, *BVoS* covered the miles nicely, helped along by the south-going tide. Longer, faster boats passed us (*Momentum* looked particularly impressive) but when it became clear that our intended destination, Acairsaid Mhor on Eriskay, was filled to capacity with WIC yachts, and that some had found the holding not too good, we carried on south. We ended the day at Brevig Bay, just a couple of miles north of Vatersay, and shared the peaceful anchorage with *Lady of Avenel*, a 31m brigantine-rigged tall ship. A slight swell entered but the holding was excellent on sand and we slept well after a busy day.

The forecast for late Saturday and overnight was dreadful: SW force six, gusting to gale force, and rain. Having made the short hop to Vatersay Bay under power as we were, again, headed directly into wind, we anchored on the north side of the bay, dropping in 10m onto good sand. We dug in hard and laid out 60m of chain; we didn't want to go anywhere unexpectedly. To reduce yawing we set our delta riding sail, but decided against dropping the foresails or setting a second anchor like one of the other yachts. Reg and I went ashore, visiting the memorial to the wreck of the Annie Jane, which was wrecked in 1853 *en route* from Liverpool to Quebec with the loss of 350 lives, and then climbing some high ground to get photos of the anchorage. Later we were hosted by CCA Commodore Jay and his crew aboard *Moonstone*, along with Patty and Tom from *Lyric*. It was a lovely evening of fun and laughter but the wind was rising and the rain came in waves. We returned to *BVoS* in a gap between downpours and enjoyed dinner whilst listening to the wind start to howl properly. Nevertheless, we slept well; as Bob said, "I do love being safely at anchor whilst listening to a storm". Sadly, not all the boats on the cruise had such a peaceful night. The crew of one in Vatersay Bay was alerted to their boat dragging by the anchor alarm and, happily, managed to safely re-anchor after a long struggle to remove kelp from the anchor. Another boat, anchored in Sgeirslum (8 miles or so NE of Vatersay) dragged and ended up high and dry on the rocks, needing a tow off by Castlebay lifeboat the following morning. Thankfully, the yacht survived, albeit with significant rudder damage, but it must have been a horrible experience for the crew.

A beautiful start to the morning at Wizard Pool

The calm after the storm as the fleet gathers at Vatersay Bay

The wind dropped and as Sunday progressed the sun came out and the anchorage filled further. Many of the crews enjoyed the craft fair at Vatersay's Community Hall, as well as lunch and/or one of the delicious-looking cakes. Later, Vatersay's community came out in force to host us for the evening event, headed up by RHYC Commodore Martin Clarke. The chef, who professed to have been worrying about the event for weeks, need not have been concerned. The spread of food was, quite frankly, amazing. Two young men shucked oysters as fast as we could eat them, there were piles and piles of langoustines and crabs, and so many varieties of salads, meats and quiches that we were quite spoilt for choice and totally overfed. Finally, there were the homemade cakes – which to choose? As the food ended, the entertainment began. 'The Vatersay Boys', a pipe and drum ensemble of the Castlebay School band which had won the freestyle competition at the Scottish Schools Pipe Band Championship earlier in the year, entertained us royally and kept feet tapping and Americans reeling. The mid-teenaged pipers were excellent, the much younger drummer outstanding, with the latter egging the audience on as we called 'More, more' as the set, sadly, ended. But, even after an encore, end it must and we wended our way back to our boats, or other peoples' boats, for nightcaps and chats and finally sleep.

From top left: Martin Clarke (Commodore RHYC) and Jay Gowell (Commodore CCA) mark the start of festivities at Vatersay Community Centre, Photo © Kate Crosby; The Vatersay Boys entertain the crowd; a bird's eye view of the fleet at Vatersay Bay, Photo © Somers Kempe

Unlike many, we made a less than prompt start on Monday morning and later suffered for it by having to fight the tide through Gunna Sound between Coll and Tiree. But before that we had a lovely gentle off-wind sail, sailing wing on wing with poled out genny, following the trail of yachts eastwards. Having made it through the sound we rounded up into Gott Bay, Tiree and joined a line of WIC yachts at anchor off the immense beach. Several crews went ashore but the midges were biting even where we were, well off the beach, so we put the insect screens in and retired below to recover from two days of socialising.

We awoke to a flat calm. Nevertheless, we needed to make progress towards and up the Firth of Lorn as the OCC was hosting the next day's pot-luck supper and mussel feast at Loch Spelve and we needed to get close enough to make an early arrival to be able to help Commodore Fi and her husband, Chris, with the preparations. So, we motored the 25 miles around the Ross of Mull to a tiny anchorage that felt barely large enough for one yacht, just to the W of Ardalanish Bay. The scenery was stunning and we enjoyed a lunch of baguettes, cheese and salad in the sun. Glorious! With the wind building we headed east, drinking in the views of basalt cliffs, the famous arch and Carsaig Bay, before crossing towards Seil and then Puilladobhrain. We arrived too late to find space inside Puilladobhrain itself and whilst there might have been space for us to anchor along with WIC yacht *Big Bear* just outside we felt more comfortable a little further NW, anchored to the ESE of Eileen Duin along with *Big Blue of Lorn*.

After a very peaceful night, we made a prompt start and headed straight across to Loch Spelve. It was a short passage but under full sail we enjoyed a 7-knot

Clockwise from top left: Anchored for lunch just west of Ardalanish; Big Blue of Lorn *anchored NW of Puilladobhrain;* Wot Not *off Staffa (crews chose their own routes between events) – Staffa and Fingal's Cave was a popular diversion, for good reason, Photo © Val Glen; dramatic basalt scenery on the south coast of Mull*

Clockwise from top left: Chef Commodore Fi; OCC pot-luck supper – and we even had colour coordinated bunting thanks to Evelyn and Darrel of Carpe Diem; *Commodore Fi and Chris serve up a mussel feast at the pot-luck supper;* Locheil Lady's CCA *yachts – they looked far too good to eat!*

reach putting smiles on all our faces. Though we had arrived quite early, the fleet gathered in Loch Spelve was already sizeable. Bob helped Fi and Chris with food prep aboard *Pyewacket* and then the five of us plus Darrel and Evelyn from *Carpe Diem* went ashore to clean mussels and to prepare the cooking and serving areas. The evening went incredibly well. CCC members Douglas and Helen who own the Inverlussa Mussel Farm gave us the use of the facility, as well as 42kg of mussels, free of charge on the understanding that we would collect donations for the RNLI in lieu. Fi and Chris took charge of the cooking, with the rest of us helping as required, and each of the crews brought a plate of food to share. Some amazing platters were presented. The professional chef on *Blue Clipper* had baked a mountain of sausage rolls and haggis rolls, and the chef on *Zuza* provided several kilos of langoustine. The crew of *Locheil Lady* brought cute little rye bread and salami CCA yachts, and there were bowls of salad, platters of canapes, pans of chilli, plates of quiches and, finally, a cake. Everyone had a great time, we raised £700 for the RNLI and, amazingly, most of the food was consumed; someone even went back for an eighth helping of mussels! But at about 8pm the midges came out in force and everyone scattered to their yachts, though from the sounds drifting over the evening air, the party continued in small groups afloat.

And so dawned the last day of the cruise, happily with a decent southwesterly breeze for the final sail back to Kerrera. We romped along at 7 knots – off the wind again, Bob was delighted – but those who left later had an even better breeze. By late afternoon the fleet had reassembled and the Kerrera Marina

staff welcomed us all back with bagpipers, a fabulous 'Food Fayre' and an excellent ceilidh which had everyone dancing reels and attempting to strip the willow. There were speeches of thanks and farewell, including a poem summarising the cruise written and read by our Commodore, and goodbyes and adieus aplenty. When the dancing had ended, the party, as had become the norm, continued in groups around the marina as crews dug out the last of the scotch and raised toasts to the CCA, to Commodore Jay's vision of the Western Isles Cruise and to friendships across the ocean between the six clubs – the CCA and the CCC, ICC, OCC, RHYC and RCC. "There are good ships and wood ships and ships that sail the seas, but the best ships are friendships and may that always be."

Clockwise from top left: A glorious final morning in Loch Spelve; dressed overall to celebrate a fabulous cruise-in-company; bagpipers summon us to the farewell party

Left: Enthusiastic participation in the ceilidh

Right: CCA Commodore Jay presenting OCC Commodore Fi with a bottle of malt as thanks for writing and performing her poem about the cruise

MUSSELS IN A DIJON CREAM SAUCE

by Fi Jones (aka From the Galley of Pyewacket)

Ingredients:

2kg very fresh mussels (cleaned and de-bearded)
25g butter
2 tablespoons of olive oil
1 small onion peeled and chopped
2 leeks finely sliced and rinsed
2 cloves of garlic chopped
2 sticks celery finely chopped
1 courgette diced
1 red bell pepper chopped
1 yellow or orange bell pepper chopped
Small can of sweetcorn drained
Sprig of thyme
Sprig of rosemary
Large glass of dry white wine
1 heaped teaspoon of Dijon mustard
Ground black pepper
Pinch of salt
Large glass of double fresh cream
2 tablespoons of chopped parsley

Method:

1. Melt the butter in a large saucepan with the olive oil
2. Add the onion, sliced leeks, garlic, celery, courgette, peppers and corn and sauté over a low heat with lid on for 5 minutes. Make sure it does not brown
3. Add the herbs and seasonings including the mustard and stir really well
4. Stir in the wine and warm through then stir in the cream
5. Tip in the mussels and replace the lid keeping the heat low
6. After 5 minutes add the chopped parsley and using a long handled spoon turn the mussels and sauce over and over until well coated
7. Stir every 2 minutes until all mussels are opened and entire dish is steaming well
8. Remove and discard any unopened mussels if the dish is steaming nicely and all but an occasional one have opened. It should not take more than 10 minutes from adding the mussels to reach this stage
9. The Dijon Cream Mussels are now ready to serve, ensure each portion has a good spoonful of sauce to soak up with fresh crusty bread

MUSSELS IN A TOMATO AND MARINARA SAUCE

by Fi Jones (aka From the Galley of Pyewacket)

Ingredients:

2kg very fresh mussels (cleaned and de-bearded)
25g butter
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion peeled and chopped
3 cloves of garlic chopped
Large glass of dry white wine
1 green bell pepper chopped
1 yellow bell pepper chopped
2 sticks celery chopped
1 carrot peeled and finely chopped
2 spring onions finely chopped
1 teaspoon chilli flakes
1 can of tomatoes
Ground black pepper
Pinch of salt
1 large sprig of thyme
1 large sprig of rosemary
2 bay leaves
2 tablespoons of chopped parsley
1 large sprig of fresh basil

Method:

1. Melt the butter and olive oil in a large saucepan
2. Add the onion, garlic, carrot, celery and chilli flakes and put the lid on the pan over a low heat for 5 minutes - sweated rather than browned
3. Add the chopped peppers, spring onion, bay leaves, thyme, rosemary, salt and ground black pepper
4. Pour in the can of tomatoes and the glass of wine
5. Turn up the heat until bubbling gently.
6. Tip in the mussels, replace the lid and simmer for around 5 minutes
7. Using a long handled spoon turn the whole mixture over and over to coat all the mussels in the sauce and add the chopped basil and parsley
8. Stir and check to see whether all the mussels have opened every 2 minutes; remove any unopened ones if the dish is steaming nicely and all but an occasional one have opened. It should not take more than 10 minutes from adding the mussels to reach this stage
9. The 'Moules Marinara' are now ready to serve - make sure that each portion has a good spoonful of sauce to soak up with fresh bread

WATER MUSIC'S LAST ACT:

THE END OF A CRUISING DREAM

by Stephen Foot (s/v *Water Music*)

Water Music, a Centurion 45, was built in 1991 and has been owned by Stephen and Grace Foot since 2008. During that time, they have sailed extensively throughout the Mediterranean and completed their first Atlantic Circuit in 2012/13. They set off on their circumnavigation in 2018 and arrived in New Zealand by late 2019. Returning to New Zealand in 2022, they continued back into the South Pacific, into Australia and then Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Stephen has been an active OCC member, delivering a webinar in 2021 telling the story of Water Music's voyage to New Zealand.

This article was originally drafted for the Royal Thames Yacht Club Review 2025.

At the end of 2023, we left *Water Music* in Phuket, with us in a quandary as to how we would most safely find our way back to Europe after a great year sailing through the Indonesian Archipelago. The route up through the Red Sea was becoming increasingly ill-advised due to the activities of the Houthis at the southern entrance and yet the route round South Africa would take an extra 10,000 miles, two more Atlantic crossings and another year to complete. After getting advice from friends in the military, the decision was simple and unequivocal: imagine the situation of us carrying a British flag, motoring in a windless sea at five knots and a pirate pirogue came across us . . .

Getting the weather window right for entry into South Africa and then rounding the Cape of Good Hope would entail an arrival in October/November. To make this work, we planned to leave Phuket in January and head to Jakarta via Langkawi before setting off on the long crossing of the Indian Ocean in September. In Langkawi, we slipped the boat to antifoul, repaired damage to the keel and rudder and checked the skin fittings before going to the remotest parts of Indonesia off the western coast of Sumatra. In just over 1,000 miles, we saw precisely six tourists and two yachts. We had the place to ourselves, which meant that Jakarta was an even bigger shock to the system than it might have been: crowded, dirty, polluted and smelly. We touched the bottom on our way into the marina at high

Water Music *in happier times*

Water Music *in full sail*

water, but had found what we assumed was a secure berth to leave *Water Music* for six months.

Within days of arriving back in the UK, we received a call from the marina saying that the yacht was fine – but that the pontoon to which we were attached had sunk. It transpired that this caused a massive power surge, blowing the battery charger and the entire domestic bank of batteries. With no one there to repair it, that added a rewiring of the power system to the list of tasks to carry out when we came back. We also received advice that the polluted waters in Jakarta tended to be very acidic and would cause havoc with anodes.

The *Water Music* crew for this next leg comprised three OCC members: Stephen Foot, Richard Hill and Ian Harrison (who had already done one Atlantic crossing with *Water Music*). After the usual shenanigans with Indonesian authorities, we left for the Australian islands of Cocos Keeling some 700 miles to the southwest of Jakarta. After a very wet start (it was blowing hard and raining heavily as we sailed past Krakatoa overnight), we made a fast passage to Direction Island, arriving after three days at sea. Direction Island provided us with shelter from the ocean, but was uninhabited and we needed to visit both of the two main islands for provisions (West Island) and authorities (Home Island). It did afford the opportunity to check the anodes after the warning about Jakarta, replace the bilge pump and check the watermaker. One of the anodes, whilst only slightly pitted, had lost two of the three bolts holding it in position and so I donned our diving bottle and replaced the missing bolts. Whilst under the boat, with a full tank of air, I took the opportunity to check skin fittings again and the rudder before our long passage to Mauritius. On the morning of our departure we took the final opportunity to use the Go-Pro amongst the local fever of manta rays as they cleaned themselves on the nearby reef. Happy after our rest in Cocos Keeling, we headed back out into the Indian Ocean for the 1,900 miles to Rodriguez, some 500 miles to the east of Mauritius. This time the wind was slightly further aft, which made for a drier passage, albeit there was still the same 25 knots of wind and a 2.5m swell running.

The first two days went quickly as we settled into our ocean routine and we were covering an average of 180 miles a day. At about 1430 on the third day, there was slight 'klonk' from around the steering and suddenly the boat veered up to windward and did an involuntary tack. My first instinct was that the autopilot was playing up, but that was clearly not the problem. We then checked that the wheel was still connected to the quadrant – all of which was working properly. All the pointers were that there was a problem with the rudder and the only way to ascertain the facts was to look at the underside of the boat. We

tried and failed with the Go-Pro, which meant that someone needed to take a quick dip to double check. After some discussion, we concluded that, with the swell running, the risk of getting a safety line caught under the boat meant that the diver would be safer untethered. Whilst this was unquestionably the right decision, it broke our golden principle of never becoming detached from the boat.

There was no rudder and no evidence of any sheared or fatigued metal where the rudder stock used to be. Our minds immediately turned to the options available to us. We were in about 5,000m of water, had plenty of food and water on the boat and were watertight but were some 2,000 miles to windward of the nearest haul-out facility in Mauritius. Nearer ones included Langkawi (about 1,500 miles across the Malacca Straits), Broome (about 1,500 miles upwind) and Lombok (about 2,000 miles upwind). With the sea running, the only tenable option was to make for Mauritius, but the challenge remained whether we could get there.

We had two options for a jury rig. The first was to use a spinnaker boom with floorboards as a steering oar. The second was to use the sea anchor to steer us. Even with blocks and tackle attached to the end, we found the spinnaker boom simply wouldn't work and risked breaking the pushpit, to which we had to strap the pivot. The (until then unused) sea anchor failed within about 30 minutes of deploying, leaving us with the straps as the drogue disappeared off into the Indian Ocean. We recognised that we had zero chance of reaching a safe destination and concluded that we had no option other than to seek help. We put out three distress calls: on the VHF radio as we knew we were close to the main shipping lanes to and from the Far East; on the HF radio, which we knew had a range of up to 4,000 miles and transmitted on multiple emergency frequencies; and on the satellite phone. We made the decision not to communicate with home on the basis that there was nothing they could do to help us and would only worry. We had overlooked the fact that they could now see our tracker and that we were no longer sailing at 8 knots. We later discovered that they were worried that we had lost a man overboard.

Shortly after dark, we received our first contact with the Australian Joint Rescue Control Centre (JRCC) in Canberra, some 4,000 miles from where we were. They set in train the events that would lead to our rescue and eventual collection by the Indonesian Authorities in Jakarta. The closest ship to us was a 230,000 tonne Chinese bulk carrier that was heading up the Sunda Straits, past Jakarta and on to northern China with a cargo of iron ore from Brazil. Two other slightly smaller ships were a little further away and had rescue boats, although both Masters concluded that it was too rough to launch them.

Knowing we were in the hands of the JRCC, there was little else we could do and so we had a Titanic-like last supper on the boat. We used our best china plates and crystal wine glasses and cast them overboard when done, knowing that there was no longer any need to wash up. We got what little sleep we could and prepared for what would be a long next day.

Dawn broke on Friday, 13 September and we could just make out the shape of the SAMC Transporter in the distance. His plan was to approach us from the windward side and provide us with some shelter to come alongside. Given that this massive ship is not manoeuvrable at less than 4 knots and takes about 4 miles to stop, and we had no steerage way, it must have looked like a couple of blind drunks trying to do a slow dance at the end of a long evening. During

The ship's first sighting of us

Right: SAMC Transporter ahoy!

Ship in ballast

this process, there were times when we were passing to windward, some when we were too far to leeward and others when we were likely to get strung up on his bows and anchors.

When we eventually got close enough to their bows, they fired a rocket-propelled heaving line directly at us. As we saw it coming, it looked like a sidewinder from a fast jet and we instinctively ducked. Fortunately, it went straight into the sea as the 0.5kg brass weight on its end could have done us some serious damage. The second one was fired into the air and went over the yacht, allowing us to safely retrieve the line and start pulling ourselves in. With the inevitable language barrier, a mistake was made resulting in the line being dropped and our being set adrift again. By this time we were close to the back of the ship (some 330m long) but, fortunately, we were close enough for them to throw a conventional heaving line to us and we were able to make this fast.

That should have been the beginning of the end of the drama, but there was more to come. Whilst we did manage to get a second line on, the seaway running along the lee side of the ship meant that *Water Music* was going up and down 2–3m in the swell, whilst the ship remained still. The swell was also pushing our bow further out, filling the mainsail and causing us to veer further away. The loads on our 5 tonne breaking-strain lines were immense and the Chinese deck crew were clearly terrified of standing in the "snap back" zones and so were reluctant to tighten our lines. It was no better on the yacht and, by this stage, we had already ripped off two deck cleats and about 0.5m of toe rail. Other damage to the yacht included breaking the guardrail and one of the backstays – which meant that we had the potential for a wire tangle as we went up on to the ship. As one of our cleats flew off it missed the Chinese crew by a matter of inches – so they were right to be worried. The safety handrails on the ship had also got bent under the loads.

By about 1300, *Water Music* was alongside the ship and we were ready to climb the 25ft rope ladder up to their deck. We were attached by a line around a cockpit winch and a line to the sole remaining foredeck cleat, which we had then led back to a halyard winch on the mast, in case that last remaining cleat flew off as well. These two mooring lines would never take the full weight of the boat (estimated at about 20 tonnes) and were now at an angle of about 70 degrees to the horizontal, whereas the fittings were designed to take the load horizontally. Each of us had to go up the ladder in turn, with Ian volunteering to go first. Getting the timing right was critical. We had to judge the leap on to the ladder carefully, balancing the pitch and roll of the boat, with her either going out 2.5m from the ship, or down 2.5m, as each swell passed. Even then, there was the real risk of a stanchion post attacking from behind, the main winch no longer holding the weight and flying vertically upwards or being caught in the yacht's flailing rigging.

Each of us went up with a small backpack, containing passports, money and phones and, in my case, the ship's papers. We had each packed a bag to bring up separately, so we were each able to bring spare clothes and shoes. For me, selecting what to take from 17 years of memories was a hard task indeed, but at least we salvaged the name board, made for us at the end of our first Atlantic circuit by Astilleros Lagos in Vigo. Richard was able to take a light line with him attached to the bags, which meant we could retrieve them without jeopardising the people. Before I went up the ladder, I cut the saltwater engine inlet to scuttle the boat, but forgot to switch off the (new powerful) bilge pump or turn off our engine.

My last act, once on board the ship, was to cut the lines holding *Water Music* to the side of the ship. She leapt free from her unnatural captivity and bounded off, but it seemed to us that she immediately realised something was wrong and turned around to find out why she was being abandoned. Did no one want to sail with her again? It was at this moment that the emotions of the last 24 hours and the enormity of the challenges we had met came to us. Logical thinking had guided us through the crisis, now was the time for the emotions to catch up.

After a while we were shown to the bridge to meet our rescuer and see on his chart exactly where we were. We were also able to make phone calls to the JRCC and to home to say we were safe and sound. The JRCC then stood down the aircraft that were on their way to us and turned their attention to liaising with the Indonesians to take us from the cargo ship as we passed Jakarta in five days' time. Their only question to us was whether we had taken the EPIRB off the boat – which, in time, would have gone off and would then have triggered another air-sea rescue operation. When I explained that we had scuttled the boat, they were enormously grateful as this would remove a hazard to shipping – including to the two singlehanders that we had just met in Cocos Keeling.

Life on board SAMC Transporter settled down into a routine, with copious quantities of food and an increasing level of communications with the Chinese crew. Being on an aging Chinese ship meant that we had very little internet (no Starlink for them!) and no Google. That meant no Google Translate, which we had come to rely on for much of the last few years in South Asia. We also had, as is common in Asia, endless requests for photos and the crew always had their

Preparing to come aboard

Bidding farewell

Transferring off SAMC Transporter

Lost in translation!

Medical check

phones by their side. One of the engineers came in one day and flashed up on his screen the message below. That had us looking around quizzically before we all saw the funny side.

There were too many kind gestures from these seafarers to relate here. Suffice to say, they had their "mid-year" party, their equivalent to our Harvest Festival, a night early so that we could join them and it could act as our farewell party. The captain even took it upon himself to ensure we were supplied with toothpicks – Chinese food three times a day is not a normal western diet!

Getting off the ship was more difficult and dangerous than getting on to it. Although it was flat calm off Jakarta, it was now 0100 and pitch dark. The 70m-long lighter we were to transfer to tried to force the bulk carrier to come to them, which was never going to work, with the lighter determined to stick within the 20m depth contour and the ship drawing 18.5m. Eventually common sense prevailed and we made our final leap, down about 2m onto a narrow landing strip with so many Indonesians seeking to help that they ended up getting in the way. Once on board, we were each medically examined and they wondered why our blood pressure was so high!

After another hour, we were taken off the lighter and driven round the back streets of Jakarta by Immigration officials in a car with no headlights. We were then detained as illegal immigrants and offered a stone floor to sleep on. Some 12 long hours later, and after intervention by the British embassy in Jakarta, we were finally released from custody and driven to the airport where we only narrowly caught our flight back to London. Even then we were stopped at passport control at Jakarta Airport as our visas were not valid. None of this was necessary as our flights had been pre-booked out of Jakarta on the day we arrived and the Indonesian authorities had known for five days that we were coming (thanks to the efforts of the Australians). All they had needed to do was to allow us to get a taxi to the airport; we never needed to "enter" Indonesia. Which is what the British embassy staff had thought they were doing. I never thought I would look forward to the moment of take-off on a long-haul flight so much!

The clean up afterwards was far simpler than we had feared it might be and the three key parties to making this so straightforward were the JRCC in Australia, the captain and crew of the SAMC Transporter and our insurance company. When we thanked the JRCC, they downplayed their part, saying that it was just their job and they were glad to put their training into practice. The Chinese captain recorded a special video for Christmas for us. The insurance company clearly thought we had been through enough already and did not need any more. They settled within hours.

OSTAR 2024:

THE ORIGINAL SINGLE-HANDED TRANSATLANTIC RACE

by David Southwell (s/v *Alchemy*)

New member David Southwell cites his qualifying passage as Plymouth, UK to Newport, RI – however, the directory neither mentions that this passage was completed under race conditions as part of the OSTAR, nor that he won! He is only the second American ever to do so. David is a keen racer, and has competed in four Chicago-Mackinac races, a Marion-Bermuda, a Marblehead-Halifax, four Newport-Bermuda and four Bermuda One-Two races. He sails a J/121, Alchemy, *and his homeport is Nantucket, MA. His Instagram handle is* **@alchemyracing1**.

"If you're lonely when you're alone, then you are in bad company" Jean-Paul Sartre

David Southwell

As a child in the 1960s and 70s I dreamed of escaping the humdrum world of schools and parental supervision to sail around the world on my own. No one had sailed the clipper route single-handed until Francis Chichester became the first in 1967 with only one stop in Sydney. When I was seven Robin Knox-Johnston went on to win the Golden Globe race in 1969, becoming the first solo non-stop round-the-world sailor. I was gripped by these adventurers, and my childhood was full of these sailors.

The Observer Single-handed TransAtlantic Race – known as OSTAR – was conceived by Herbert 'Blondie' Hasler, the inventor of the first self-steering system, in the late 1950s. The challenge was to race, solo, in May and against the prevailing wind, across the North Atlantic from Plymouth in England to New York. On average, four lows coming eastwards across the Atlantic would traverse the course, and there would also be the challenge negotiating the ice, fog and fishing boats off Newfoundland and the Nantucket shoals. Chichester won the first race in 1960, and it has been run every four years since. The OSTAR became the precursor for transatlantic races such as the Route du Rhum and the Transat Jacques-Vabre (in 2025 this was renamed the Transat Café-L'Or), as well as being a training run for round-the-world races such as the Vendée Globe.

The dream of being alone with the sea was the ultimate counterpoint to my protected life on land but it took me 50 years to experience it. I couldn't wait to trade the self-imposed stresses of civilisation for the real challenges of the ocean. As Ayn Rand wrote: *"The question isn't who's going to let me; it's who's going to stop me?"*

Alchemy *in training for the OSTAR*

Alchemy *flying her asymmetric in training*

THE RACE

The OSTAR, by tradition, has very few rules. There are no ice gates off Newfoundland and competitors are free to sail the course they wish so long as they leave Eddystone Lighthouse off Plymouth and Nantucket Island in the US to starboard. The easiest – but longest – route is the 'Azores' route which goes south to catch the easterlies, the shortest is the 'northern' upwind route which traces the great circle south of Iceland and Greenland, brushing (but hopefully not touching) Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Cape Cod and Nantucket. These days World Sailing has deemed Traffic Separation Schemes off-limits and the finish has shifted from New York to Newport, but otherwise the rules are the same.

The OSTAR winners board has, predictably, been dominated by the French. Of the 17 races run, only two British sailors have won: Chichester in 1960 and Geoffrey Williams, then only 25, in 1964. Two Americans have won: Phil Weld in 1980 and the author in 2024. The remaining 13 winners are primarily French, including legendary names such as Eric Tabarly, Philippe Poupon, Loick Peyron and Francis Joyon. The most interesting perhaps was Alain Colas who won in 1972 with Tabarly's trimaran; he then built a 236ft long four-masted schooner for the 1976 race! The race record of 10 days was set in 2000 by Francis Joyon in a 60ft trimaran.

Over the years the number of OSTAR entrants has varied considerably, from five boats in 1960 to 125 in 1976. In 2004 the organisers limited the size of boats to 60ft, and the Transat was born, to optimise reaching and larger boats. The OSTAR lived on and added a double-handed division. Even so, there were only five boats competing in 2024, three of whom were solo sailors. My 40ft J/121 *Alchemy* was one of those, completing the race in 20 days 11 hours.

PREPARATION FOR SINGLE-HANDED SAILING

It is said that getting to the start of a solo ocean race is half the battle. Single-handed ocean racing is, in any country except France, a very niche sport. In the US, the major solo race is the Bermuda One Two which I've started four times and completed three. The inherent dangers of single-handed offshore racing require most competitors – including me – to become pretty obsessive about training. Safety at Sea courses, CPR, first aid certifications and extensive qualifying voyages are required, but most of us go well beyond that. I've been trained in sail repair by North Sails and carry a substantial kit of glues, tapes and sticky stuff that was put to very good use in the OSTAR. I also used an excellent service called Regatta Rescue to equip me with and train me in the use of a medical kit that included IVs (along with training on self-administration), seemingly every painkiller available, and all manner of splints, traction devices and bandages.

The first question asked by potential single-handers is invariably about sleep. In a way it's like asking different cooks about their sourdough recipe: we all handle it differently. Inescapably, when we are sleeping there's no human on watch for passing ships or changing conditions, so we rely on catnaps close to shore and anti-collision (AIS) alarms offshore to wake us up. As a practical matter we get so attuned to the motion of the boat that if anything changes weather-wise we almost always wake up immediately. Many fishing boats don't carry AIS and they have right of way over us. As a result, when I'm in the fishing grounds of the European shelf, the Grand Banks off Labrador or the approach to Newport, I can't sleep for more than 20 minutes at a time. I don't find it all that difficult to sleep in nap cycles for two days, but as soon as I get off the continental shelf I start to take one-and-a-half-hour sleep cycles, REM and all with crazy dreams. I am relatively safe as my AIS alarm will go off if a ship gets to within 5 miles, so long as the alarm wakes me up!

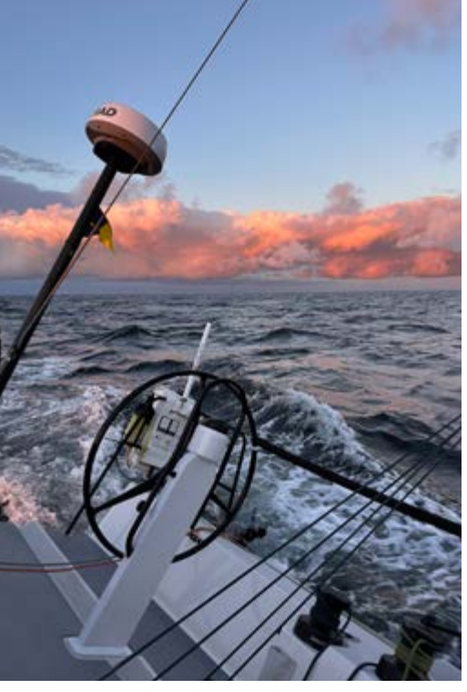
Starlink has truly transformed the experience of solo ocean sailing and enabled the experience to be shared by a wide audience via Instagram (*Alchemy*'s is @alchemyracing1) and other social media. It has also significantly improved the amount – and quality – of available weather data. Until two years ago, I relied on a slow and quirky Iridium satellite phone which limited my downloads to 100kB. With Starlink, the internet speed is almost the same as my home wifi. This is a double-edged sword, as the whole point of being out there is to be alone! On the other hand, I prefer the safety advantage and the ability to call home. The benefits extend from my boat to my family, who have the peace of mind of knowing I'm okay through frequent phone calls. We are also tracked by Yellowbrick which, as I was about to find out, can cause unneeded consternation on shore.

THE OSTAR

The race started in a pouring rainstorm on 5 May 2024 in Plymouth, beginning with a close reach to the iconic Eddystone Lighthouse, after which I hoisted my A4 spinnaker and had a wonderful sail west down the English Channel past the Lizard to the Irish Sea in 15 knots of breeze. As the sun set on my first day I was approaching the Isles of Scilly and passed them all at night. I've always wanted to visit these lovely islands and was sad that I couldn't see them. Before dark I took the spinnaker down to be conservative – there were many miles to go and I didn't want to get the asymmetric wrapped around the forestay at night. The following day brought the prevailing southwesterlies to the Irish Sea as I headed west, dodging fishing boats and the occasional ferry. I was hoping to pass within sight of the Fastnet Lighthouse, but my course kept me several miles south of that.

Eddystone Lighthouse

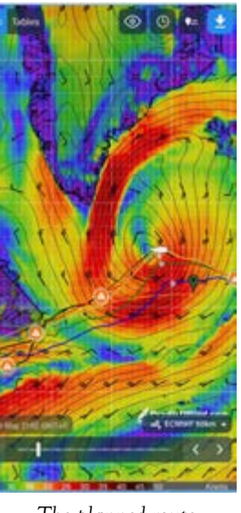
By day 3, I was pretty exhausted from the 25-minute napping



Flying the OCC burgee

cycles. I was happy to see the depth increasing from about 600ft to over 6,000ft in a few miles. That meant I'd crossed the edge of the European continental shelf so I could set my AIS alarm and get my first full sleep cycle of 90 minutes without worrying about trawlers. I was beginning to track the first low coming towards me that would have me going directly upwind in 25–35 knot winds the following day. I decided to sail northwest towards the centre of the low with the wind on my port quarter, through the middle and then down to the southwest with the wind on starboard quarter to resume my course on the other side. This seemed, as they say, like a good idea at the time . . .

As I sailed north at 10–15 knots, my initial exuberance turned to real concern when I realised that the storm had taken a turn to the north as well! I clearly wouldn't make it to the centre in time to avoid the strongest winds, so I reduced sail to the third reef, rolled the storm jib out and battened down for a rough night. We spent the next 12 hours sailing into 30-knot winds, gusting to 50 knots. As daylight broke, I took a look at the mainsail and saw several holes, a separated leech in places and some worn batten pockets. I didn't have a spare mainsail, so I'd have to repair it on my own. I turned off the Starlink, headed the boat south to give myself a good mid-reach to sail under jib alone, and took the main off the mast. The repairs, which involved pinning successive parts of the sail to the bunk below, took six hours during which we were clearly not headed to Newport!



The planned route through the Low

Inner genoa battle scars

Right: The view from the cockpit in mid-Atlantic

When the repairs were done and the sail was back on, I decided to check where the nearest land was, just in case. I was truly in the middle of the North Atlantic: England was 800 miles to the east, Iceland 800 miles to the northeast and Newfoundland 900 miles to the west. The closest point of land was Greenland. Those repairs had better hold! When I turned on my Starlink my emails revealed a series of very concerned messages from the race organisers at the Royal Western Yacht Club telling me they were tracking me through Yellowbrick and had alerted the UK Coastguard who had in turn notified the Royal Navy who had a ship in the area. Yikes! I emailed them that all was well and that I was sure the Navy had better things to do.

Alchemy *sailing upwind*

The next week and a half were spent dodging other lows, posting on my Instagram and changing sails several times a day. It was also a time to catch up on sleep as I knew there would be no fishing boats until I reached the Grand Banks. My AIS alarm, set to 5 miles, would wake me from the deepest sleep and is set to the most annoyingly jarring tone possible. I had one such encounter at 2am when I woke to a cargo ship headed right at me. Fortunately, the watch captain answered my VHF call and changed course to avoid me.

Two weeks into the voyage the weather turned markedly colder and more humid. I was approaching the Grand Banks where the cold Labrador current meets the relatively warm air from the Gulf Stream. The result is high winds, dense fog and temperatures in the thirties (Fahrenheit). I was surprised to encounter no ice or fishing boats, which made me happy for the near term but sad for the changing climate and overfishing.

From Newfoundland to the finish the depth would be less than 300ft; I was on the US continental shelf with fishing boats and therefore short sleep cycles again. Georges Bank, by contrast to its northern neighbour, was full of fishing boats so I had a long night of conversations and dodging their nets. I found that they would often offer to alter course so long as I acknowledged they had right of way and asked them which way they wanted me to go.

By the last dawn, I was south of Nantucket flying along! I texted my family to say that I expected to finish in Newport about noon. Almost as soon as I'd pushed send, the wind shut off and I had to wait for the sea breeze to fill in. I made it to Newport at 6pm, just as the wind was dying. As I was taking down my sails, I was met by two Newport harbour master boats with blue lights flashing. "What did I do?" I shouted to him. "I've cleared in properly!" "You won the race and we're here to escort you to your slip" was the reply. The police escort through Newport Harbor passed at least one wedding, and I imagine they thought there was a major bust going down! After a reunion with my wife I was back to my regular land life. I immediately missed the ocean.

Clockwise from far left: Leaderboard of OSTAR winners since 1960; 1964 winner with 2024 winner; With family at Prize-giving; Hasler, Chichester and Jack Odling-Smee

THE AFTERMATH

Six months after the finish, I flew back for the prize-giving in Plymouth joined by my wife and sisters. As the Royal Western Yacht Club (RWYC) dinner got underway, the Commodore stood up and introduced a man who had entered the original 1960 race but who had had to withdraw. He went on to race in 1964 and is now 91 years old. He stood up and spoke without support or notes for 15 minutes – truly a hard act to follow! When it was my turn, I spoke about how different the race is now with no icebergs, and with GPS and Starlink that he didn't have. I was amazed that he could navigate with sun-sights when I only remembered seeing the sun a few times. While the race is clearly safer today, I was envious of the true isolation he must have experienced.

As the Marquis of Halifax wrote, *"He that leaveth nothing to chance will do few things ill, but he will do very few things."* Most of us, including myself, count these experiences among the best of our lives when viewed in hindsight. The fatigue involved can bring on extreme emotions, there are times at night when I wonder why I do this and determine that I will never sail solo again. In the dark, the field of vision is typically just the cockpit, and the seas always seem higher because they can't be seen clearly. Then dawn comes, the ocean is visible and the loneliness or anxiety turns into pure joy. The great thing about offshore sailing, like rock climbing, is that you simply can't concentrate on anything else while you're doing it. There's not much downtime offshore, which keeps the mind off whatever stresses await on land. In the end, the ocean lends perspective to what really matters.

GAIA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC:

PATAGONIA TO PAPEETE

by Thierry Courvoisier (s/v *Gaia*)

Astrophysicist, author and professor are all titles that could precede Thierry Courvoisier's name, but within the OCC he may be more familiar as a Roving Rear Commodore, an office he has held since 2022, and as a regular contributor to Flying Fish, *"South America via the Beagle Channel" in* Flying Fish *2024 neatly precedes this article. His account of "Cérès through the Russian Inland Waterways" was published in four parts between 2018/1 and 2020/1 and provides a wonderful way of experiencing a part of the world that sadly feels impossibly unexplorable today. His website is largely in French:* **sy-gaia.ch**.

Having sailed south along the Argentinian coast, around the southern tip of the Americas and north again through the Patagonian channels (see *Flying Fish* 2024), we left *Gaia* for the 2024 austral winter at Marina Estancilla in Valdivia, Chile. This well-protected marina is 10 miles up the Valdivia Rio and another 10 miles from the city. Valdivia lies in an earthquake region, like most of Chile, and was deeply shaken in the 1960s when the land sank enough so that large areas now lie below sea level and are huge lagoons providing a habitat for a rich variety of birds. The earthquake devastated most of the historical heritage of the city, although it is now a pleasant enough town, but somewhat lacking in significant buildings.

The marina is quiet. There are no shops, neither for boat supplies nor indulgences for the crew, no restaurant, cafe or other distractions! There seem to be regularly three or four visiting yachts there, enjoying the limited facilities: a washing machine and cold-water shower. Loud and rattly buses connect the riverside to the city every few minutes during the day: a mixed blessing! Barges – mostly transporting pallets – glide down the river every few hours. The landscape

Valdivia Rio, as seen from the Marina Estancilla

Rio Maule: the fruitful region of the country

Some water in the midst of the Atacama Desert in northern Chile

VLT on top of Cerro Paranal in the Atacama Desert

Valle de la Luna, Moon valley

is peaceful and beautiful. The marina is safe from the weather and feels protected from any human-inflicted damage, so we felt very comfortable leaving *Gaia* there until November 2024, when we travelled back from Switzerland with the plan to cross the Pacific to French Polynesia and cruise there for some months.

Before leaving, we wanted *Gaia* to be checked from the tip of the mast to the bottom of the keel, and we were able to do just that with the help of competent local technicians. Although they didn't have suitable equipment to lift *Gaia* out of the water, the hull was thoroughly checked by divers. *Gaia* is a relatively new boat (she was first launched in December 2019) and has been carefully maintained over the years, so we were relieved that there were no issues flagged that could not be solved in a few hours, certainly within the two weeks we had allocated.

We were familiar with sailing the Chilean Patagonian channels and have learnt the pattern of fiery winds and extensive rain that is a feature of the impressive, isolated and rugged landscape of the southernmost region of Chile. However, since we hadn't yet visited the central regions and the north of the country, we were keen to explore there whilst we were in the region, especially as some friends we had met in Switzerland now live in the Maule Valley in central Chile and had invited us to spend a few days with them on their estate. They own a large piece of land on the slope of the valley which they made fruitful by clearing the forest and growing avocadoes, grapes, apricots and more; their attitude has been very much in the spirit of 'Go and make the land bear fruits'. And it has! They produce honey, liquor, wine and essential oils, all from their homegrown products. In addition, they built a few *cabanas*, comfortable and well-decorated houses to host guests and friends, all of this with a magnificent view over the Rio Maule. We had a wonderful time, enjoying local products and learning about the central, agricultural regions of Chile.

The north of Chile is home to the Atacama Desert, one of the driest regions on Earth. It is not easily visited by boat as there are no good harbours or marinas along the rugged rocky coastline but, unwilling to miss the opportunity to explore, we flew to San Pedro de Atacama, a small touristy city at its heart, a place with breathtaking landscapes and a geologist's playground. The broad valleys

are rich in evaporites (sedimentary rocks that form through the evaporation of water, leaving behind dissolved minerals and salts), in this case formed from minerals being washed down the Andes by the scarce water that then evaporates in the valleys, depositing precious minerals (see the *Science et voile avec Gaia*: sy-gaia.ch/les-richesses-du-desert/). The landscape is so barren in places that one dries out just by looking at it.

The driest part of the desert is also home to the best astronomical site on Earth. Here, one – if not *the* – best telescope, the Very Large Telescope (VLT), has been built by the European Southern Observatory (ESO). We visited the site and telescope as guests of ESO's Director General, Xavier Barcons, also a long-time friend and colleague. The installation is not a single mirror but four 8m telescopes, meaning that the main mirror of each telescope has a diameter of 8m. The telescopes can be used independently of one another or combined by interferometry to produce images of a quality that corresponds with what can be obtained by an instrument as big as the distance between them, i.e. around 100m. This project was conceived in the 1980s, built in the following decade and is now most successfully operated (read more at *Science et voile avec Gaia*: sy-gaia.ch/les-grands-telescopes-de-leso-un-raccourci-personnel/ for a personal account of the evolution of large telescopes in Europe).

The quest to understand the universe requires ever larger instruments. This is mainly because only 4% of the matter in the universe is similar to what we are made of, or what we can study – in laboratories or at CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research). A further 26% of the mass in the universe is made of a still mysterious matter that feels gravity but none of the other forces of nature and is hence not detected in any laboratory, it is called 'dark matter'. The remaining 70% is even more intriguing as it causes an acceleration of the rate of expansion of the universe. It is as if you throw a ball up and it accelerates upwards rather than slowing down and coming down again. This 'matter' is called 'dark energy'. Understanding the history of the universe and, hopefully, the nature of its content requires observations of the farthest objects which appear extremely faint from the earth. A further challenge of modern science is the observation of planets around neighbouring stars, also very faint objects. Observing objects that are this faint requires telescopes considerably larger than the VLT.

A single VLT enclosure; the mirror inside has a diameter of 8m

The ELT under construction by ESO; the primary mirror will have a diameter of 39m

ESO has tackled this challenge by designing, and now building, a 39m telescope. The main mirror of this instrument is 39m in diameter; its area comparable to that of an Olympic pool. This telescope is called 'ELT' for 'European Large Telescope'. The construction site is close to the VLT to benefit from the same excellent sky conditions. We had the privilege of spending half a day visiting the construction of the telescope with the site manager. Combining the sheer size of the telescope and its associated building with the precision needed for high resolution optics is a challenge that ESO is mastering and, for the time being, is the only institution able to do so. The telescope is expected to become operational by the end of the decade.

A stop in Santiago on the way back gave us the opportunity to meet some old friends and colleagues, and a former student of mine who is now professor in a university there. From Santiago we flew to Rapa Nui, or Easter Island, an island difficult to reach sailing, as our Pacific crossing will prove. While the Easter Island civilisation is fascinating and the landscapes wonderful, the anchorages looked unprotected and rolly, and they were devoid of any sailboat while we were there.

After our gallivanting, it was good to be back on board for the last few days of the year. The time had come for us to start provisioning for the Pacific crossing and for supplies to cover us for some of our time in French Polynesia, where shops are said to be few and far apart and, we were told, very expensive. Valdivia was the perfect place to buy wine, beer, flour, pasta, rice and canned food. Fresh products would come later, in Algarrobo.

On New Year's Day our crew, Uwe Koehler, arrived from Switzerland. He is an experienced sailor, serving as a skipper on boats of the Cruising Club of Switzerland (CCS), and he was keen to sail the South Pacific. On 4 January 2025, having informed the Capitania in Valdivia, we left our 'home' at the Marina Estancilla for the 10-mile sail back down the Valdivia Rio to its mouth in Puerto Corral. This was the opportunity to test all the sails in a fresh breeze and to satisfy ourselves that we had set up all the rigging, ropes and sails properly. We spent the night at anchor in soft mud of moderate holding, but acceptable in the prevailing conditions. We left the next morning for Algarrobo, some 400 miles north, which was to be our last stop on the American continent.

An archeological site from the Birdman civilisation on Easter Island

Large Easter Island sculptures, mo'ai, were cut in the rock of this stonepit

There are very few, if any, safe anchorages along this rugged coast. Algarrobo is one of them, or at least one in the southerly winds that prevail in summer. The sail was bumpy and windy, good conditions to test the crew and to establish a watch system. Algarrobo is a small marina run by the 'Cofradía Náutica del Pacífico', an organisation that was developed for rather well to do people close to the system during the military dictatorship, as we were told. The entrance is barely wider than *Gaia* and prone to swell. Aware of these conditions, we had called ahead and were met by staff who showed us the way in, to a berth at the very end of the marina next to a bird sanctuary. Seagulls, pelicans and hawks circled in the evening sky, providing a wonderful and noisy ballet. The downside of this proximity was that we had to clean the deck every morning. Good friends of ours live close to Algarrobo, a driving motive for our stop there. We visited them for a couple of days, provisioned with as much fresh produce as we could store and did the paperwork required to leave Chile.

Gaia*'s crew to cross the Pacific: Uwe, Barbara, Thierry*

When we arrived at the Capitania as required in Chile, we inquired about the checking out procedure to leave the country and were advised that we should go the following day to the immigration office in San Antonio, a large commercial port and city some 35km from Algarrobo. We therefore had to drive there, which our local friends kindly arranged. They also accompanied us. The conversation at the immigration office was easy (especially with the help of our Spanish-speaking friends) and pleasant but fruitless: we were told to come back shortly before leaving. During a second enquiry at the Capitania in Algarrobo a few days later, we were told to drive to the customs office, also in San Antonio to obtain a form that was to be filled in, brought back to the Capitania and then taken back to the customs office in San Antonio. The marina provided a driver for these trips up and down the coast. The customs officers in San Antonio told us that

A night in Puerto Corral at the mouth of Valdivia Rio

Algarrobo. Gaia *in the marina and the bird sanctuary*

the papers we had were fine, no need for a further form, but that they could not deliver the permission to leave the country there, one of them would have to come to Algarrobo to see us leave. Back to the Capitania in Algarrobo. We filled in some more papers, always with the same information about the boat and crew, and were sent for a further fruitless trip to the immigration office in San Antonio where we were told that, like the customs officers, one officer would come to Algarrobo and stamp our passports at the time of leaving. At our next visit to the Capitania in Algarrobo we were told, after a long wait, that the port captain would come in person to the marina to wave us off. Coordination between offices seems to require driving many kilometres up and down the coast. Maybe one day they will evolve this system to fax, telephone or – you never know – email; it would certainly save burning a lot of gasoline on endless trips up and down the coast between their offices.

Birds are kings in Algarrobo

The next morning, the day of our announced departure, we went to the fuel mole, filled our tanks and waited three hours for all these officials to arrive, hand us papers and stamp our passports. The last one was the port captain who filled, by hand, a page in a very official looking booklet, repeating the same information on *Gaia* and her captain. He asked me to sign the page and authorised our departure. I wouldn't take our experience as a guide as to how it might work for you, as it feels unlikely they would do the same procedure each time. South American bureaucracy has an endless imagination and they seem to make it up as they go along.

The marina entrance had not grown any wider since our arrival and the swell had increased as had the wind, making the exit as nerve-wracking as the entrance, but it was exciting finally to be on our way.

We had hoped to make a stop in Juan Fernandez, Robinson Crusoe's island, but this proved impossible. We were told in no uncertain terms by the authorities in Algarrobo and San Antonio that from an administrative perspective yachts are not permitted to leave Chile from Juan Fernandez. Although we know that this did not prevent our friends aboard *Songster* from stopping there, we know that it does mean they did not leave Chile officially, which may have repercussions the next time they visit the country. For us a nasty depression over the island removed any niggling hesitation.

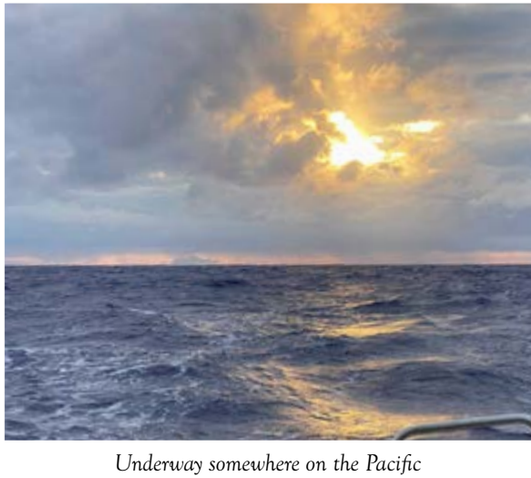
Leaving Algarrobo (33°S), our route was northwest to 22°S. We then sailed west to come down south towards the Gambiers (23°S), the first Polynesian archipelago on our path. We started in a fresh southerly wind which made for a fast few days followed, as expected, by easterly winds. The sea was never really comfortable and remained bumpy for most of the way. The days followed one after the other, the landscape remaining unchanged; I started to wonder why we should work hard to get to a place tomorrow that looked identical to where we were today! Even the chart had nothing to show. We saw one cargo ship on the second day of our crossing. The officer on watch refused to alter his course to prevent a collision, a rare occurrence. A few days later we saw what was probably a Chinese fishing vessel devoid of AIS identification. And on the 20th day of our crossing, we were called up by a container ship that we did not see. The officer on watch asked whether everything was well on board. We saw very little marine life, a few dolphins on a couple of occasions and some birds. Every few days we adjusted the ship's clock forward one hour, arranging the on-board time so that the sun set between 7pm and 8pm, after dinner!

Easter Island also proved difficult to reach. We were some distance north of it when a depression established close to the island. Unfortunately it prevented our visit and was the cause of westerlies on our onward route. The tactic to minimise the discomfort of sailing against the wind was devised with Pierre Eckert, our meteorological expert. He suggested we sail southwest for 24 hours before altering course west again. Unfortunately, the centre of the depression was poorly defined, a situation we have seen quite frequently in these waters where ground weather stations are few and far apart. We found ourselves close to the centre of the low-pressure system with no wind and endless enormous grey clouds, sometimes pouring rain and a very confused sea. Not much fun. We motored for some 12 hours to outrun it, which indeed we did, and two days of wonderful southwesterlies under brilliant sunshine followed, with magnificent night skies. The Milky Way was clear, the Large Magellanic Cloud, a small galaxy close to the Milky Way, and even the Small Magellanic Cloud, another even smaller galaxy in our vicinity, could be clearly seen. In the Milky Way, a region close to the centre appears much darker than its surroundings. This dark cloud, the Coal Sack, is not due to any lack of stars, but to the presence of an extended region of dust that absorbs the light of the stars.

This pleasant period did not last long before another weather system disturbed the trade winds and replaced them, again, by poorly modelled westerlies in high uncomfortable seas. The last days of the crossing were more of a punishment than a delight, as we tacked repeatedly to make the best of the wind shifts.

We were 30 days at sea for the 3,900 mile crossing. The provisioning, overseen by Barbara, had been excellent. She vacuum-packed a number of fresh items – meat, fruit and vegetables – meaning that we were still chomping on fresh vegetables at the very end of our crossing. Thanks to Barbara, *Gaia* was certainly the best table on the Pacific while we were there.

Close to the centre of a depression north of Easter Island



Underway somewhere on the Pacific

Land in sight, the Gambier archipelago

The main pass into the Gambier atoll, and the only one that is marked, is in the northwest. We had heard that *Songster* had used the southeast pass some months earlier and Juriaan had assured me that it could be used without danger. Since it was the only pass on the lee side of the archipelago when we arrived, we followed Juriaan's advice, but it was only when we were within the lagoon that the conditions moderated. The last difficulty was the large number of pearl-farm buoys between the islands and also along the routes within the archipelago. Once we had mastered the obstacles, we arrived at the anchorage in front of Rikitea, a small settlement, albeit the main one, on the island of Mangareva, the largest island in the Gambier. We anchored and were greeted by the crews of *Songster*, *Ithaka* and *BoatyMcBoatface*, who had also sailed with us in the Patagonian channels the year before. We were surrounded by more friendly boats, including *Yalow* and *Melania*, of which more later. Fruit and vegetables were offered, together with a warm welcome.

The day following our arrival, Rolf and Wolf, the crew of *BoatyMcBoatface*, showed us around: the garbage collection spot, the mini-market, the medical outpost, the gendarmerie, where we were to announce our arrival, and the much-too-large church for such a small community. The latter is a reminder of the role of missionaries in the region during the second half of the 19th century. All this along the one and only street, the 700m main street. Rikitea is provisioned twice each month by a small cargo ship which also brings fuel to the island and for the yachts. We were lucky that the cargo ship arrived just three days after our arrival. The fuel is sold and delivered in 200 litre barrels, the contents of which have to be poured or pumped into jerrycans which are carried to the dinghies, brought on board and poured into the tank. To carry out this operation we borrowed a number of jerrycans from the surrounding boats at anchor. It was a long and physically strenuous job, but it all went well. A windy afternoon followed on Wednesday when we had to re-anchor, before we could start thinking of enjoying the Gambier, so often described as a paradise for sailors.

However, enjoying the Gambier was not to be. On Friday night my urinary tract got blocked, which would have been a deadly problem had it happened just a few days earlier whilst we were at sea, without the proper tools or knowledge. Being in Rikitea was marginally better but it was still a major problem in a place with such limited resources. Thankfully, the nurse and doctor at the medical outpost (they live on a boat in the anchorage) were knowledgeable

Rikitea on Mangareva, Gambier

and were equipped to insert a catheter, which they did the next morning and which undoubtedly saved my life. However, it did not solve the problem. For that, I would need to fly to Papeete: a four-hour flight that is available twice a week. I left the following Tuesday, with a meeting arranged some days later with a urologist, who confirmed that a surgical intervention was necessary. I then had to undergo all the associated medical checks required before an operation. During this period of ten days, Barbara stayed on *Gaia* at anchor in the Gambier – in a very stressed state. Uwe, our crew, developed a fever during that time, leaving Barbara with very little support on board. Barbara wanted to fly to Papeete to join me as soon as possible after the operation, so we needed to have *Gaia* delivered to Papeete. This was done by the two lady skippers of the neighbouring yachts *Yalow* and *Melania*. One of them, Mélanie, is a professional seaman, and both she and Daniela of *Yalow* are experienced sailors who know the area well. They offered to sail *Gaia* the 800 miles to Papeete and did this with Mélanie's daughter, leaving their boats unattended in Rikitea. This generous offer by competent sailors was an immense relief for us. Other crews, like those of *Songster* and *BoatyMcBoatface* kept a caring eye on *Gaia* and her crew while I visited the necessary medical offices in Papeete. They delayed their departure from Rikitea until Barbara left to join me. The help we received from all our friends anchored around *Gaia* cannot be overstated. Yachties truly do look after one another.

While I was in Papeete in a somewhat diminished state and Barbara on *Gaia* at anchor in Rikitea, communication between us was important. The Gambier, including Rikitea, is in a rather underdeveloped state with regard to connection with only a 2G network that does not allow data, so no WhatsApp or email which has become such a mainstay of 21st century communication. For people like us, resisting Starlink and its thousands of satellites modifying the night sky for the whole of humanity and causing major problems to scientists working to understand the universe, this is a problem. Friendly crews like those of *Yalow* and *Songster* were kind enough to anchor close to *Gaia* so that we could use their Starlink connection. Another way in which the help we received was so generous and thoughtful. And it also illustrates the inconsistency of our stance towards Starlink in our moment of adversity.

Barbara and I are currently recovering in Papeete. Reflecting back on the last few weeks, we have realised that a urinary tract obstruction on the high seas can be deadly. Indeed, Tycho Brahe, the astronomer on whose data Kepler built

his famous three laws, died of a similar problem in very intense pain in 1601. We did not carry a urinary catheter on board *Gaia*, which would probably have resulted in my death, should the problem have arisen just a few days earlier during the Pacific crossing. It is hard to imagine the trauma for Barbara should this have happened. The decision not to have a catheter on board was clearly wrong. The right decision would have been not just to carry one on board, but also to have learned how to put one in place in an acute situation. Indeed, to drive the catheter through the obstruction means applying quite some force, which inflicts a pain the like of which I had never known. This makes what looks like a straightforward procedure much more difficult, for the (unqualified) person carrying it out.

The stress we have undergone and inflicted on others during the last few weeks has made us reflect seriously on our advancing age and – evidently – not such good health. With a heavy heart, we have decided that it is now the right time to bring our blue-water sailing chapter to a close and part company with our beloved *Gaia*, which is now for sale here in Papeete.

ESCAPING THE SEA OF CORTEZ:

WHERE VEGEMITE WAS USED AS CURRENCY!

by Marea & Rendt Gorter (s/v *New Life*)

Rendt, a Dutch-Kiwi sailor from Aotea, New Zealand, regularly crewed for his Dad who sailed from Auckland to the Philippines. Coming from a family passionate about the enjoyment and protection of the sea, Rendt is now working to instill those values in his son, Nico. Marea's great-Grandad, from Ireland, settled in SavuSavu, Fiji where his son built boats. Marea was a late starter by New Zealand standards, not taking up sailing until she was 14! In her twenties she worked in the superyacht industry as a deckhand in the Mediterranean, across the Atlantic and through the Caribbean. Since then, she has moved into the marine education field, skippered her own keelboats and crewed for races. Over the last four years, Marea and Rendt have worked relentlessly to move their New Life *home.*

"A jar of Vegemite," Jack said.

"Really?"

"Well, she's turn-key so let's make it *two* jars of Vegemite. Okay?"

"Okay. Deal," I replied, not sure if it was a good deal or not.

You wouldn't think you could go wrong with a solid steel cutter for just two jars of that iconic Australian yeast spread, even if it was a little beyond its prime. But in the end, it cost us our house, changed our son's life irreversibly and nearly had us shipwrecked on a remote desert coast. So, would we do it again? You bet!

When my ex-husband, Jack, learned that my mother had died, he reached out to send his condolences. By this time, I was happily remarried and living with my husband, Rendt, and our four-year-old son, Nico, on Aotea,* Great Barrier Island, New Zealand.

Jack and I had bought the boat, *New Life*, from a Swiss family in 2013, and had trucked her from Maryland to Rhode Island and painted her red. She was a 13m steel, Vulcain IV, cutter-rigged sloop, by that time lying in Mexico – a mere 6,000 miles away as the albatross flies.

Sailing the Pacific had been my dream for decades: both my mother and grandfather were born in Fiji and my brother had lived in Tonga. Rendt shared this dream. So just like that, the boat was ours in exchange for two jars of Vegemite. But we were to find out the hard way that the real payment was yet to come, and it would be measured in patience – lots of patience – with lashings of rust, tar and stubborn determination.

New Life *still shiny and red*

*Aotea is the original Maori name for Great Barrier Island.

Clockwise from above: New Life *looking so bright and shiny on the surface; At anchor in San Carlos; A blue-footed boobie escorted us; Despite looks, we delved deeper (using the endoscope camera to inspect under the water tanks)*

A SEA OF DUST AND DREAMS

We left New Zealand bound for Mexico in a nearly empty plane in January 2022, with the Covid pandemic still in full swing. At this point *New Life* had been abandoned in a Mexican boatyard for two years. What condition was she really in? Would this steel boat really unlock our future or was it going to be no more than a dream? After two weeks of making *New Life* liveable, we finally moved on board. On the surface she looked great, but I knew we needed to delve deeper. An endoscopic camera revealed rust marking a leaking hose from the anchor locker. That was the cue for Rendt to remove the intricately assembled 'Swiss-made' wood panels and for me to don my overalls.

A NEW LIFE AT SEA

After three months of relentless work, *New Life* was relaunched in April. We went straight out on anchor; it felt amazing to finally be floating. However, our elation was soon crushed when the next morning my Dad rang with tragic news: my brother, Ben, and his wife had been killed in Tonga in a freak electrical accident whilst welding his metal boat. This hit hard, really hard. The temptation to stop and turn back was immense. Though we still had a to-do list a mile long, we weighed anchor and simply sailed out of the anchorage. Sailing helped. At that point it didn't heal but it definitely helped, and it gave me time for much introspection. I knew Ben would have wanted me to carry on pursuing my dreams – and so we did.

While I was still reeling from the news, Rendt spent another month doing boat work, on anchor near San Carlos. The next month we spent exploring the nearby coast, for the first time diving with sea lions at the remote Isla San José, and dropping the anchor in pristine, empty bays, all whilst getting to know *New Life*.

Eventually, I felt both the crew and *New Life* were ready to venture further afield. We started looking for a weather window to cross the Sea of Cortez. Our destination on the other side was Isla San Marcos. This island offered a different kind of beauty, having a rugged coastline with hidden caves and beaches, numerous swimming channels and fish, so many fish. It was to be the perfect setting for a reset.

A JOURNEY NORTH

After exploring southern destinations, the unbearably hot summer was fast approaching, which meant hurricane season, so we made the decision to sail north to the safety of Puerto Peñasco. I was still waiting to discover when the Tongan authorities would allow my Dad and I into their country. Whilst we waited, our journey north would become its own unplanned adventure, a testament to the rewards and risks of this new life.

We spent several days anchored off the remote Isla San Pedro Mártir, with its towering seabird sanctuary that rises like a fortress from the sea. The air was thick with the calls of thousands of birds and the guano-covered rocks looked like miniature snow peaks. Below, the water was a kaleidoscope of fish, sea lions and seaweeds. It was a place of wild, untamed beauty.

Slowly continuing north, we made our way to Bahía de Los Ángeles – a remote bay with islands carved into the northern Baja Peninsula. After provisioning for our final push north, we joined other boats anchored in La Gringa when we saw a small fin cutting through the water surface. The waters here are fertilised by runoff from the mountains feeding extensive wetlands. As it turned out, we had found ourselves unwittingly anchored in the feeding grounds of giants. A whale shark half the size of our boat was circling us, its huge mouth agape as it fed on the plankton. Nico and I slipped into the water, watching as the immense, gentle creature passed just an arm's length away, quite unperturbed. We were in awe!

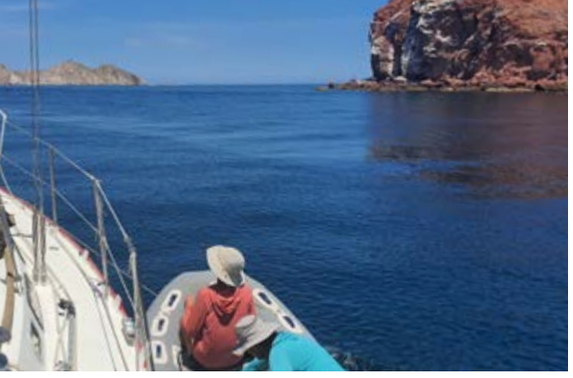
WE DON'T NEED AN ENGINE, RIGHT?

It was in the midst of this magic that disaster struck. While rewiring the starter battery, Rendt inadvertently short-circuited the starter motor. After failed repairs and well-meant advice from other boaters, it was clear that the engine was just not going to start.

Meanwhile, our non-refundable tickets to New Zealand were ticking like a time bomb. Puerto Peñasco, where we planned to leave *New Life* on the hard whilst we flew home, was 150 miles north and our only way of getting there was under sail. We knew the risks: strong tidal currents that ripped through the narrow island channels and the ever-present threat of a *chubasco* (high winds associated with lightning storms). The local names said it all, like the ominous Canal de Salsipuedes, which translates as the 'Leave If You Can channel'.

We didn't have the time to travel overland to look for a new starter motor and then make the flight. So we hip-tied our dinghy to *New Life* and manoeuvred out of the bay, into the light wind. Our day sail was, thankfully, uneventful! We made our first anchorage, in a small indent half-way up the channel, before the tide turned against us.

The next day we waited until noon to time the tide and catch the light winds to Puerto Refugio where we arrived just before dusk. As arranged, our new



Shelby and Mike hip-tied their dinghy to New Life

Nico finds a shell in Puerto Refugio

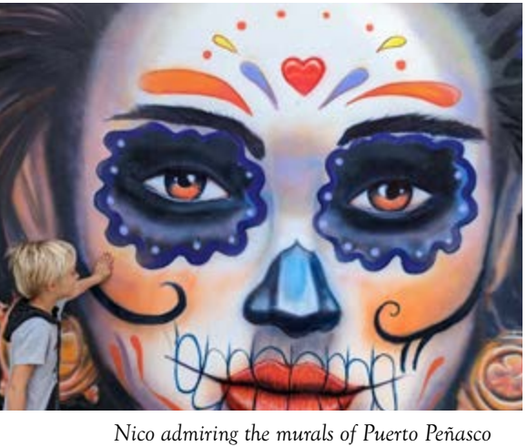
friends, Shelby and Mike on *Calla Lily* were waiting – their more powerful outboard a welcome sight. They towed us into the anchorage and we thanked them with a jar of Vegemite. Shelby was grateful, really, she was!

That night, a *chubasco* hit. At 0430, Rendt, who was on anchor-watch, saw a dark shape moving steadily towards the shore, *Calla Lily*! He ran to the VHF, no response. When there was a gap in the wind, he jumped in the dinghy to go and wake them. They recall a calm voice calling "Hello, helloooo!". *Calla Lily* had stopped just a few boat lengths from disaster.

The next day, they towed us out of the anchorage so we could again catch the tide and escape the opposing currents. After midnight, another *chubasco* caught us, this time out in the open. The lightning on the distant shore to our east appeared first but upon seeing this, we were ready for the ensuing wind. Following a few puffs of higher winds, I got the main down then, with a few more puffs, the foresails too. Minutes later, *New Life* was hit with 35 knot winds and torrential rain. Fortunately, the sea remained flat. We were pushed west a mile and then, just like that, it was all over. It only lasted 35 minutes. We had survived our second *chubasco* in the Sea of Cortez without damage.

We reached Puerto Peñasco the next day and three days after haul-out we flew back to New Zealand. Soon afterwards the news came that Tonga was finally open.

THE POINT OF NO RETURN



Nico admiring the murals of Puerto Peñasco

All the hard work and near misses had not dampened our enthusiasm but we knew that the boat still needed a lot of money and work to carry us safely across the Pacific. So we flew home resolved in what we would have to do and what we would have to give up in order to return in earnest and continue the journey.

First, we sold our house, which meant our safety net was gone. So when we returned to the boatyard in Puerto Peñasco, the feeling was different. This wasn't a project anymore. This pile of steel was now our home, our *only* home, and it needed to be able to get our family safely back to New Zealand.

With the bricks and mortar gone, we felt we needed to decide who we were going to be on this journey. We chose a motto: The Curious Sailors. It was more than just a name for the YouTube channel we planned to start; it was a mission statement. We were already a well-travelled family – Nico had been to the Philippines, Spain and Ireland before he even turned two – but we wanted to continue being curious about the world, especially for Nico to continue being curious. We thought a YouTube channel would give our travels a purpose beyond ourselves, a way to share our story – and the stories of locals we might meet along the way. It sounded like it would be fun . . .

We soon learned that the relentless work of a refit is a seemingly never-ending taskmaster. The ambition to document our curiosity took a backseat to the immediate reality of dealing with rust and raising a child in the dust. The exhaustion of boat life left little enthusiasm for the demanding work of editing videos. It became another victim of the price we had to pay!

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

As we got to know the boat better, we realised all the work needed to get this boat into shape. The list of 'must-do' jobs during the long months in boatyards seemed to get longer every time we crossed something else off.

You can imagine the drill: replacing the port-lights, alternator, charge controller, head, solar array, battery bank, charging system, navigation instruments . . . we also installed a new radar, its dome a promise of foggy coastlines and squalls to come.

The final touches were about liveability: comfortable cockpit cushions, a small freezer unit that would be a luxury on the long passage ahead and, of course, more Lego!

GROWING UP IN BOATYARDS

When we had first arrived in Mexico, we had already enrolled Nico in New Zealand's correspondence school, even though he was only four. We had been provided with an online programme and support teacher and, mindful of the importance of social skills, we planned to seek out other kid-boats and also to introduce Nico to local schools wherever possible.

For Nico, living on a boat on the hard was just life. He saw the boatyards not as we did, a place of stress and endless work, but as a giant playground. He made friends with the children of other cruising families and the local Mexican kids, a fluid community that communicated in a mix of Spanish, English and the universal language of play. We watched him in awe. He was a small boy thriving in a world of dust and machinery. We were giving him an education, but a different kind of education: one of adaptability, resilience and perseverance.

THE WILD HEART OF THE SEA

After the engine refit in Puerto Peñasco, we finally splashed again! We were free to really explore the heart of the Sea of Cortez, rather than being chased through the islands without an engine by *chubasco* winds. The nights were still fresh when we left the mainland and pointed our bow towards the Midriff Islands, a remote archipelago where the desert mountains plunge into the sea. Here, the world felt

Salt and carbon had built up on the third piston before our time causing the engine to no longer turn over

A deserted building on Isla Carmen

Admiring the red curvy rocks of Puerto Los Gatos

ancient and untouched. We shared anchorages with colonies of sea lions and birds again but also traded stories with the local fishermen in their pangas, men whose families had worked these rich waters for generations.

Arriving at the entrance to Bahía Concepción, we immediately spotted several boats with friends we hadn't seen since leaving Puerto Peñasco months earlier. We became a floating village, hopping between beaches, our days filled with shared meals, kite flying, and exploring pre-European rock art ashore. While the list of boat jobs was ever-present, this was a time defined by community and the simple joys of watching Nico thrive, bringing new friends back to the boat.

From Bahía Concepción, we made our way south to Isla del Carmen, an island of dramatic contrasts with its steep volcanic cliffs and dazzling white salt flats. There were many abandoned stone buildings left over from a bygone era of salt extraction. We anchored in quiet coves, hiked into the rugged interior and felt the deep history of the place, the silence broken only by the wind, the waves and the odd big-horned sheep!

THE CRUISER PARENT'S PARADOX

As we had been home to New Zealand for the last Mexican summer, we decided to save our travel money and stay in the Sea of Cortez, 'hiding' from storms and the heat in Bahía de Los Ángeles. However, this too became another test. The heat was relentless – consistently over 40°C – the electric fans only provided relief when combined with spraying water mist into our faces. During what should have been a 4-hour passage, our engine overheated. We continued, in the dark, under sail. While clawing against the current towards our destination we were hit by yet another *chubasco*. This time we were out in the open but wholly unprepared, with our sails fully up.

Damage to the impeller

The tar and lead filled bilge

The wind shrieked, the waves rose sharply and the boat was knocked on its side, spreader tips in the water, again and again. Water came through the cabin top dorade vent and poured over the electrical switchboard and, unnoticed by us, onto the control unit of our hydraulic autopilot. An aluminium strut of our solar

array broke leaving the flailing jagged end to repeatedly stab the bow of our inflatable. Meanwhile, Nico's skateboard had become partially freed under the solar panels leaving this innocent toy to bash around violently: it literally beat up our shiny BBQ resulting in it spilling its guts into the darkness. However, we were lucky. Though the *chubasco* was the most violent we had encountered with 50 knot gusts and 3m waves, it did not worsen and 'only' lasted an hour. It was a sobering reminder of our vulnerability.

The summer was also a time of incredible freedom. We were part of a small, isolated community of cruisers, weathering the storms together. We met up with friends we'd known from various boatyards, our reunions happening in abandoned resorts or on remote islands against the stunning backdrop of the majestic Baja mountains.

For Nico, it was a world of swimming, exploring and learning from the sea itself. It was the perfect illustration of the parental paradox: we lived with the constant, low-level anxiety of keeping him safe in a wild environment, yet we were rewarded with the immeasurable gift of watching him flourish in it. What could compete with seeing our boat and crew cope with a formidable storm or the experience of swimming with a whale shark at arm's length?

Cruising parents live with a low-level hum of anxiety. The primal fears of Nico going overboard, of drowning or being abducted in a busy, foreign market are just heightened when living on a boat that is constantly on the move. But the deeper worries are more subtle. Will he feel grounded without a fixed community? How will he learn to navigate friendships when the ones he makes are only ever fleeting? And yet, for every fear, this life offers a powerful antidote. We see Nico transforming into a boy with incredible self-confidence. He spontaneously and unhesitatingly calls out a greeting to a new boat in the anchorage; he's unafraid to dive deep or talk to adults.

Of course, things don't always run smoothly. When Nico attended local schools, the lack of a shared language was a real barrier. We saw him try to compensate with overwhelming physical affection, a hug that could sometimes turn into a hit out of sheer frustration. However, gradually Nico collected a few Spanish words, which later turned into phrases. Then the local kids started to respond to him more warmly, to the point that we would start hearing excited cries of "Nico, Nico!" coming from houses along the route to school. This life gave us, and Nico, direct experience that life isn't about getting it perfect the first time, but about the resilience to try again.

THE CRUCIBLE OF GUAYMAS

Then came Guaymas. It was not the expat resort town of its neighbour, San Carlos where we had purchased *New Life* two years earlier. It was a salty, authentic old port town with a Navy base; it was a place of wild dogs, loose horses and dusty streets where life felt raw and real. Raw in the state of the street dogs, the sewage running across the road and real in the state of the homes, real in the military presence – soldiers on the back of utes driving around town, guns at the ready.

We hauled to repaint the bottom one last time in preparation for our Pacific crossing. Upon scraping at the base of the keel, beads of water started to appear. Was this water sitting under some flaked paint? As I dug deeper, I found a hole with a sickening stream of water dribbling out. As we scraped more paint off, two more holes appeared. Our hearts sank.

Collage above: Holes in the keel were discovered during a haul-out: one side of the keel was cut away to expose the lead weights, each weight was pulled out, scraped of tar and sat in a diesel bath overnight, then scraped again and wiped with a cloth; once both sides of the keel were welded and the lead returned they welded plates on the top from the inside; then the hull inspection and rust chasing continued on the inside of the hull

We would have been lost without the generous help of Clemens of *Infinity* who cut into the keel allowing for an internal inspection. We dug out the lead ballast by hand, every piece of it coated in a thick, black layer of tar, which looked a lot like Vegemite. Disappointingly, we discovered that throughout the inside of the keel the steel was heavily pitted: it would need replacing.

The local welders operated on a 'mañana' schedule that tested our patience, but in the end, Julio agreed to do the job – "It will only take a couple of months", he said with confidence. The keel repair was the ultimate test of maintaining our sanity: this eight-month process involving a lot of welding, the very task that had recently killed my brother, was incredibly hard. The process involved first cutting off both sides of the keel from the vertical baffles, extracting all the lead, 164 nuggets, from the keel then ridding every lead piece of its tar coating and finally cleaning – with diesel – the insides of the keel from the tar. The boat became unliveable: the smell of tar, diesel and burning welding rods was inescapable. Also, the saloon table, water tanks, batteries and sole came out. We were lucky to find a wee apartment at a walkable distance from the boatyard. Although it was in the same, very poor neighbourhood, it felt like such an oasis to not be in the dusty, work-filled yard away from the burning smell. There were days of despair when the task seemed impossible. There were other days when the task seemed never-ending. But, deep down, we knew we were going to get through this and get the job done. We had to! *New Life* was our home. Our only home.

Luckily, the boatyard was populated by a tribe of long-timers, those who literally lived there and who hauled out every season. They were a supportive community even though most were astounded at the scale of the project we were tackling. In this small, tight-knit world, we weren't just fixing a boat; we were part of a community that understood the struggle and celebrated every small victory – and big victory, like when our keel was finally completed!

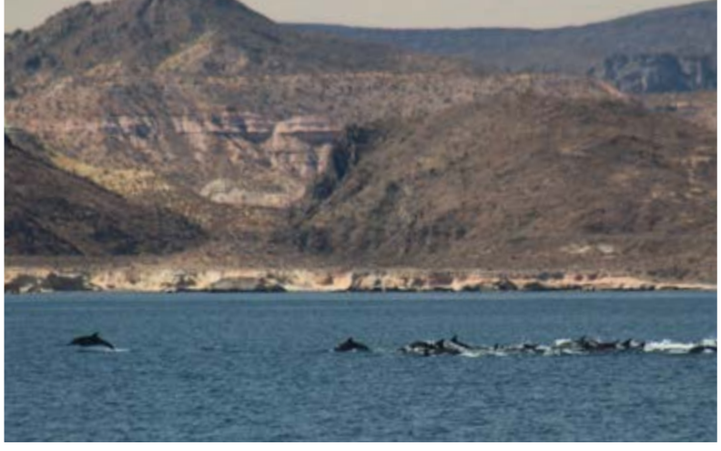
THE LONG GOODBYE

After eight months on land, we relaunched in June 2024. We spent the next three weeks sailing north . . . to haul out again. We needed the reward of sailing after the marathon boatyard refit, even for only three weeks, but it meant we were far enough north for *New Life* to be safe from hurricanes.

The scorching summer heat was descending again on Puerto Peñasco as we sat on deck with *New Life* back in the slings of the travel lift, relieved that the engine had worked all the way north and no *chubasco* had chased us. In four days' time, we'd be flying home to New Zealand once again.

When we returned to Mexico in October, we enrolled Nico into a local school and, after a modest two months on the hard, we splashed again. After more work in a nearby marina, we finally began our journey south. Our last foray down the Sea of Cortez. Fingers crossed!

After splashing in Guaymas, we headed north to San Carlos where we met OCC members from Dovka *and* Nimue

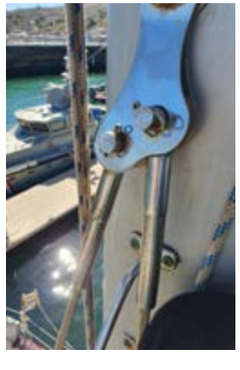


Clockwise from top left: Hanging out with fishermen on Isla Salsipuedes while they sort their day's catch and cook dinner; One of the many large dolphin pods within the Sea; The stark barrenness of the Sea of Cortez mountains

We stopped in Santa Rosalía. Here we continued preparing *New Life* for a Pacific crossing: removing the wind vane at the dock to replace the bushings and blocks, doing a two-day rigging inspection and clean, replacing a lip seal on the engine raw water pump plus, of course, the constant fun of teaching and entertaining Nico.

We loved exploring Santa Rosalía, a most unusual Mexican town. It is like no other in the Baja Peninsula with its wooden buildings left over from the French colonial mining days. We also got to hang out with old friends from the boatyard, Bill Streever and his wife, Lisanne, who are writing a book on the ecology and geology of the Sea of Cortez. They graciously entertained Nico while I was up the mast and Rendt was down in the bilge replacing our main pump!

Below, from left to right: We replaced this window and a portlight to get to the rust; This pole attachment point was not fixed properly the first time; We had to remove the Aries wind vane for a refit; Work on the rigging



LEAVING THE SEA

When the day finally came, our departure from the now familiar waters of the Sea of Cortez, our playground for over three years, was cinematic. We had stopped for a few days at Los Frailes, near the end of the Baja peninsula, to dive at the renowned Cabo Pulmo marine park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Cabo Pulmo had been one of our first stops after landing in Mexico for the first time in January 2022. We had promised ourselves to return with *New Life* and dive here, and we felt lucky to be able to fulfil that promise. If you ever get the chance to dive there, do so. It is quite remarkable and a testament to the difference marine protection makes!

We were now ready to say goodbye to the Sea and depart for a last overnight crossing to mainland Mexico. To bid us farewell, a pod of humpback whales came close. Not content with just swimming by, they repeatedly leapt high out of the water, splashing down onto their sides, making this moment even more memorable.

It was three months after departing Puerto Peñasco at the top of the Sea of Cortez, and three years and three months after leaving New Zealand for the first time, that we finally left from Banderas Bay to cross the Pacific.

THE GREAT EXPANSE

For the passage we were joined by Carlin, a fellow boater and Kiwi friend. Thanks to the weather gods – and Jamie, our weather router – no adverse weather slowed us down or sped us up! We made our food supplies stretch and got settled into a comfortable night and day routine only interrupted by stopping at the equator to swim across it and scrape off gooseneck barnacles!

However, the ocean gave us one last test. Only a few days out from Banderas Bay, a leaking freshwater tank forced a diversion to the volcanic San Benedicto Island. Without a working watermaker our reserves were critical but we knew that dive boats regularly go to these islands, so our plan was to ask one of them for some fresh water. Thankfully, our plan worked and, having replenished, we were about to epoxy the inspection ports in place, when Carlin noticed that the O-rings on them were cracked and oversized.

After 35 days we finally made landfall, anchoring in Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas. For the last few days, the winds had freshened uncomfortably, the sky had darkened and rain was in the air. Nuku Hiva was shrouded in clouds. In the end, the feeling was not one of triumphant celebration but more like a quiet, profound sense of relief. The anchor was down. The work was done. We had arrived. It was time to sleep.

Nico had the privilege of meeting triple amputee sailor, Craig Wood as his family helped him prepare to sail solo from Mexico to Japan

Carlin repairing the wind vane before departure and then the watermaker underway

From left to right: Swimming across the equator; Gooseneck barnacles from the hull

HALFWAY THERE

For three years, our social media and email address had identified us as 'Sailing to Fiji'. It seemed a strange name for a family so thoroughly stuck in the boatyards of Mexico. But the name was a promise, a lodestar that oriented our entire journey. It was connected to a small, brown, rectangular suitcase secured into a corner of the aft cabin, which holds the true purpose of our voyage west. Arriving in the Marquesas, as monumental as it was, meant we had reached the halfway point. The real destination was still over the horizon: Fiji, Mum's final resting spot.

Nuku Hiva emerges through the cloud; The beauty of the Marquesas is such a contrast to Mexico or the ocean; Smiles all round once the anchor has dropped

POSTSCRIPT

We still carry Vegemite in our galley. It is not so much a good luck charm, rather a treat we all enjoy. But the jar also reminds us of the house we sold, though it means so much more now: it stands for the price we really paid in the years of labour, worry and tar-covered hands. That jar is a reminder that a home is not a place you buy, it is a thing you build; in our case with stoic determination!

SNOWBIRD RUNS:

BACK 'N FURRIT

by Stuart Letton (s/v *Time Bandit*)

Stuart and Anne have been Roving Rear Commodores since 2019, during which time they have contributed half a dozen articles to Flying Fish, *usually combining tales of ocean exploring with land-based travel on their beloved motorbikes. Follow their blog at* **sailblogs.com/member/timebandit** *and their YouTube channel* **@svtimebandit**.

Our OCC cruising life had largely been made up of a succession of OCC-style qualifying passages: long-distance, sleep-deprived and rolly. Note the past tense! Eventually we saw the light, sold the one-hulled Island Packet ('nice but sluggish'), bought a catamaran and haven't looked back!

To a degree, we've got all the long-distance, ocean goals under our belts and out of our systems. Almost. Sailing to Patagonia is still an unscratched itch and, in pursuit of that, after many, many hours of virtual cruising in the Beagle Channel (largely courtesy of YouTube), we thought we should go to Patagonia on a road trip to see if taking *Time Bandit* south was really such a great idea.

It took a bit of organising but in September 2024 we parked up our two hulls on the Chesapeake and substituted them with two wheels in Santiago, Chile – pointing south. Six days after leaving Santiago, events conspired to force a change of plans. We parked up our two wheels in Puerto Montt and proceeded further south by ferry and public transport. When we arrived in Ushuaia the sun was out, the waters sparkling and the Beagle Channel was so flat you could have kayaked it without getting your feet wet. What was all the fuss about? Bringing our plastic fantastic down here would be a doddle.

Patagonia recce on two wheels not two hulls!

A few days later, watching safely from the deck of a mini, last-minute, 'adventure' cruise ship, we watched the spume and spindrift being blasted off the sea's surface by the ferocious, katabatic winds. "Hmmmmmm. Maybe this is what the fuss is all about!" Perhaps it wasn't such a great idea to cruise around these parts in our performance catamaran, as we find she goes better the right way up.

We produced a YouTube video of that trip, and in it I summarised my thoughts, saying that maybe 'we needed a bigger boat'. We got two responses to

that video, ironically both from Island Packet owners, saying that they had the perfect boat. One was from our home port of Largs, Scotland; the other, from Oleg, the young guy who bought *Beige Bandit* from us in Sydney! In the absence of a bigger boat, Patagonia remains an unscratched itch, the effort of changing boats for a one-year project feels too much to contemplate, especially when our insurance company has made no secret about their lack of interest in covering us!

Consequently, we find ourselves on what's known as the 'Snowbird runs', sailing Back 'N Furrit, up and down from the east coast of the USA to the Caribbean or the Bahamas. This cunningly contrived commute ensures cruisers can sip cocktails under a palm tree instead of digging the car out from under 3ft of snow, returning north to skip the somewhat breezy hurricane season. However, we have found that, just like the nicknames given to the North Atlantic (The Pond) and the Pacific (The Puddle), these nicknames tend to trivialise the potential for seriously scary sailing. We've done a few Snowbird sails; again, immortalised on our extensive but largely under-appreciated YouTube channel: **youtube.com/@svtimebandit**.

In late November 2023, we were anchored off the home of OCC members Gary and Greta Gustavson in Norfolk VA, waiting on a kindly weather window to head to Grenada. Kindly wasn't on the menu and for days we had the VHF telling us how rubbish the weather was and no matter how many GRIB models we looked at, we couldn't find one we liked. It was during this waiting period that yet another garbled, hyper-speed-spoken message came on air from the US Coastguard. The US Coastguard must pay for their airtime by the second as, to our ears, most messages are given at the pace you hear at the end of an advert, where the advertiser fulfils their legal obligations by spewing out all their terms, conditions and life-threatening side-effects at a speed few can understand. Nonetheless, we were able to pick up the headline: there was a white yacht with a blue stripe reported overdue.

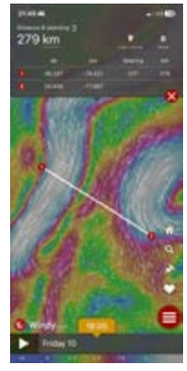
Time Bandit

We finally found a window. Three days into our passage, we were surfing along quite nicely in 25 knots with a biggish sea, on time to get into Bermuda before the next front caught up with us. When the weather was a tad inclement, or when we just fancied a comfy seat, we retired to our interior helm position and drove from there. Sometimes sailing *Time Bandit* is a bit like playing a role in Star Trek: we can sit in our comfy, sprung chair, patio doors firmly shut, Webasto heating purring, pushing buttons and keeping a lookout through the windows for any passing vessels; all while still in our pyjamas and slippers, should we so choose. Occasionally, as prudent skippers, the on-watch will slip out through the patio doors for a quick look around the horizon, or perhaps just to stretch their legs.

It was on one of these unprompted walk-arounds that, on scanning the horizon, I spotted a mast in the distance. It was a few miles away, but notable for being our first sighting of another vessel of any description since leaving Norfolk.

"Hey, we've got company!" I picked up the binoculars for a closer look and the penny dropped: "Oh . . . I've a feeling this might be that overdue yacht, the one reported as missing when we left Norfolk." Through the binoculars we could see the genoa was in tatters and things were obviously not right. We hardened up and set a course to intercept the yacht. We didn't have to do much triangulation as it was hardly making any headway.

As we got closer, we spotted the blue stripe running the length of the hull, confirming that it was definitely the overdue yacht. Ominously, there was no sign of life. Then, Anne squealed, "There's someone at the wheel." We had a closer look through the binoculars and, indeed, there was a body. No sign of movement but at least someone was there; we just weren't sure whether they were alive or dead.

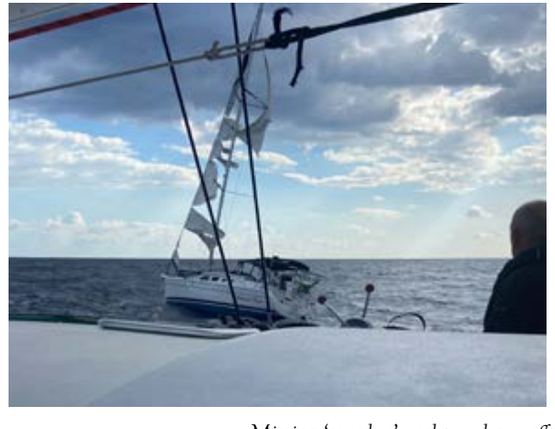


Angry weather forecast

As we made our first pass, we could see signs of a severe knockdown. The anchor was deployed, so the boat had obviously rolled enough to let the anchor and its chain run out. The genoa was in tatters, its remains fluttering from the forestay like so many Nepalese prayer flags. The saloon roof hatch was completely smashed, as was a side window: both lay completely open to the elements. The mainsail, boom and accompanying sheets and lines had parted company with the boat and were streaming alongside and astern creating a massive sea anchor and making a close approach under engine hazardous.

We circled the casualty – as that's clearly what she was – and nudged as close as we dared with all the floating lines. To our immense relief, we finally saw signs of slight movement from the occupant. Waving, yelling and adopting charade-style signals, we asked him to "pick up your radio", but the instructions just didn't get through. Verbal communication and sign language weren't working. The occupant was moving around a bit more, showing signs of life and then, for some reason, as we yelled and gesticulated for him to stay in the cockpit, he moved up the wildly pitching side deck, untied a can of diesel, carried it back to the cockpit and proceeded to pour it into the filler cap . . . and the ocean. It was a positive sign that he wasn't totally incapacitated.

Now what? As we'd motored towards the casualty, we'd called a tanker we'd spotted on AIS who was about 20 miles away, alerting them to the situation



Missing 'overdue' yacht and our efforts to establish communication

and asking them to call the US Coastguard and to stand by. "That'll get things moving" I thought, "and, what's more, it might save us a few quid on the Iridium bill." Meanwhile, we considered the options. Float down a line so we could send our dinghy and pick him up? But, given he didn't even seem to have the strength or cognitive ability to give us a wave, that didn't look like a realistic option. Launch the dinghy, leaving Anne on our boat while I dinghy over? Although that was a possibility, it had the hallmarks of making a bad situation worse, with me floating around in the ocean, in 3m breaking seas, with only our dodgy Honda 15hp between me and an impromptu Atlantic mini cruise. Just getting back aboard *Time Bandit* would be a risky manoeuvre. Putting Anne in the dinghy and sending her over didn't feel any less risky (and I couldn't find the life insurance policy!). In all of these scenarios, we'd firstly have to get him off his boat and secondly, haul him aboard ours, without any of us ending up in the water. There didn't seem to be a good option. We concluded that we had to establish communication to see how physically mobile he was.

Watching out for lines in the water, we again backed down as close as we dared but never getting close enough to communicate. Our "man" now back in his static position at the wheel, worryingly seemed to be trying to steer the boat. We made several attempts at throwing him a line but the wind stole it from us each time. Even when we launched our largest fender with our handheld VHF attached, hoping it would blow down on the breeze, we had no success. He was drifting as fast as the fender and we just couldn't risk getting closer. We motored around to his lee side thinking that if we approached bow on, our props would at least be 14m further away from the spaghetti of ropes in the water. Anne went up the bow to get closer but our man was back to being unresponsive. I'd come up with the idea he was Spanish and so tried out my *Idiot's Guide to Spanish* which I'd been learning in anticipation of our forthcoming Patagonia trip, but even if he was Spanish, my English version of Manuel from *Fawlty Towers* certainly didn't elicit a response.

We concluded that we needed to call for assistance. We fired up the IridiumGo, paired it to our iPhone and called the US Coastguard in Norfolk, VA. Fortunately, we had their number in our contacts (remarkably, inserted in a moment of 'just in case' preparation!). A few rings and, before we knew it, we found ourselves being told that "Your call is important to us. While you wait, please enjoy some music." Unbelievable. I hung on for about five minutes before hanging up and ringing back, only to get the same response. Step in the OCC network in the form of the Stricklands.

Before leaving the Chesapeake, we'd touched base – and had a few steaks – with cruising buddies Bill and Lydia Strickland. We called Lydia, explained the situation and asked if she could break through the Coastguard 'muzak'. Fortunately, Lydia had more success than I and before we knew it, the cavalry was on the way: a Search and Rescue C120. While all this was going on, at the back of our mind was the current forecast: heading our way was a 50+ knot front; not something we either wanted or planned to get caught out in.

About an hour later, the C120 arrived overhead and we had a chat to update them on the situation, our efforts and failure to establish communication, and the options we had considered and ruled out – bearing in mind the incoming weather. While they circled above, we kept up our attempts to communicate and seeing just how close we could nose up to the boat. None of it was successful.

The helicopter crew agreed that getting off our boat wasn't smart. They whistled up a Coastguard cutter which was en route and would be on station in the morning. We offered to stay as chaperone to the incapacitated vessel but, with the severe forecast, they agreed we'd done our best and should push on out of harm's way. They would remain on watch until the cutter arrived. We felt really guilty and uncomfortable about abandoning this distressed helm, but we'd exhausted our options. He'd shown enough strength to get his diesel can and pour it off the back so he wasn't at death's door and he'd soon be in safe hands.

On arrival at the Town Cut in Bermuda, 36 hours later, we fired up the engines only to find our port engine had no cooling water. On checking the impeller we found it was kaput and it seemed likely that the vanes were blocking the cooling system. Had we continued to motor around the casualty, we would likely have also found ourselves in difficulty, or at least limping on with only one engine.

Over the next few days, about six or eight boats followed us into Bermuda from the US, pretty much following our track, yet none had seen the casualty. It's a big ocean, not a pond.

What we learned:

1. Have phone numbers saved in your phone, and a back-up friend or family member who is willing to be called for help (and have the necessary technology to do so).
2. Have a lead-weighted length of fishing line to throw to a casualty as a messenger line via which a heavier line can be transferred to the casualty. We could possibly have had success with the VHF transfer by throwing a heavier line, or our plumb line, attached to some rope.
3. Have a 'Float Plan' lodged with someone you trust.
4. Petition the US Coastguard to speak more slowly.

POSTSCRIPT

So what happened to our man? When we followed up with the US Coastguard to find out what happened, we were told that they used a helicopter to get within range, from which a rescue swimmer was deployed. The swimmer reached the distressed vessel and hauled himself aboard. He proposed to the skipper: "Okay here's what we do. I grab a hold of you, we jump in the water and the helicopter will pull us to safety." The skipper responded with absolute clarity, something along the lines of: "Not on your life, mate!" Consequently, the swimmer made his way back to the chopper leaving the skipper on board for one last night. The next day he was evacuated in a somewhat more dignified manner: by the Coastguard cutter RIB.

Some months later, after we had long forgotten about the incident, we got an email from the skipper, Michael, thanking us for 'saving his life'.

One further lesson we have learned, having spent the last few days trying to retrieve a lost suitcase from Santiago airport, is to put some form of tracker on your property. An Apple AirTag on a suitcase meant we knew exactly where it was, when the airline didn't. Perhaps it woudl also be wise to attach a tracker on a tender: at least if it goes missing you'll know where thieves have taken it or which beach it has washed up on!

THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE:

EXPERIENCE IS SOMETHING YOU GAIN … SHORTLY AFTER YOU REALISED IT WOULD HAVE BEEN HANDY

by Tim Riley (s/v *Lumina*, NWP vessel no. 411)

Tim Riley and Carol Osborne were somewhat surprised to receive an award for a gentle cruise through some Canadian islands (see page 18), Tim fills us in on how they made the passage from Ardrossan to Kodiak, from early days in a sea kayak to fighting against a closing ice pack. All their sailing blogs can be found at **yachtlumina.co.uk**.

Adventuring to remote places has always been a passion of mine and the High Arctic in particular has always been a destination to aim for. When you are brought up on a diet of *Swallows and Amazons* and tales of explorers like Scott and Amundsen, a thirst for adventure and exploration is bred into you. The 1960s were probably at the end of the Heroic Age of exploration when proper 'firsts' were still out there for the taking and young chaps were captivated by new heroes. People like John Ridgway and Chay Blyth rowed across the Atlantic, Francis Chichester sailed around the world single-handed, then people did it non-stop, and soon after there was the Golden Globe Race. In the Arctic, Wally Herbert crossed the Arctic ice in a traditional way with dog sleds despite the Antarctic already having been crossed by new-fangled mechanical means.

As soon as I could escape my mother's moderating influence but with funds for expedition vessels finite, I was testing the limits of what you can do in a sea kayak: first I cut my teeth in the wild conditions of Pembrokeshire, Wales, then further afield in Scotland. A kayak is probably the cheapest way you can get to places other people either cannot get near or would have to pay a fortune to do so. The coast of Fiordland, New Zealand is one such place. 'Normal' tourists can sample it by going on a boat trip in Milford Sound but if you want to go any further you need deep pockets or your own transport.

An expedition starting in Doubtful Sound with my then wife Marie, which apart from Milford is the only other sound easily reached, seemed doable. I had a lengthy fax correspondence with Paul Caffyn, a world-renowned New Zealand sea kayaker, who offered invaluable advice. To fit in with my work and the tomato growing season, we needed to be there during the UK autumn. Such timing was not really ideal and Caffyn's final words were "By the sound of it you are capable of doing it but you will end up spending a lot of time sitting on the beach waiting for the weather and I would not recommend it". With that

Taking a sea kayak to the limit

You don't need an expedition yacht to get to remote places

wisdom ringing in our ears, we bought our tickets! I suppose if someone came to me and said I want to kayak round the north of Scotland in April I would probably have said the same thing. Further complications arose when the hire company got cold feet about bad publicity and refused to hire us their kayaks. We subsequently had to buy them but fortunately managed to sell them successfully on our return.

Caffyn was right, we spent many days in a dripping tent with a cloud of sandflies outside as we waited for storms to pass. At times it was real 'seat of the pants' stuff with very limited weather forecasts and committing to passages past many miles of inhospitable coast with no chance of landing before the next fjord. The Southern Ocean swell was anything between 4 and 6m and was relentless. Once off the ocean, we then had to travel some distance down a fjord before finding enough shelter to land. However, after three weeks we managed to reach our pick-up point at the head of Dusky Sound where a float plane was arranged.

Flash forward a few years and the realisation hit home that for long-distance travel a kayak is only as good as your strength and is thus pretty limiting. A Swallow Yacht Bayraider captured my heart and I found myself pushing the boundaries of what could be done with what was essentially a 20ft dinghy with a small cabin. However, even with Carol recruited as "intelligent ballast" (but now a very capable first mate) I had to face the realisation that when it comes to the ocean, there is a limit to the seaworthiness of such a vessel and limits to the duration of a voyage.

Having spent a long time dreaming and perusing the websites of yachts for sale, I found an Ovni. This fairly old model of the popular brand of aluminium lifting-keel yachts was reasonably priced and had been sitting in a yard in Essex for the previous three years. After many weekends travelling to play with her – fettling and upgrading – she was ready to leave to take up her new home on a mooring in Milford Haven. I had crewed a few times for a friend in Croatia but had never been a skipper. Naively trusting that you 'get experience by doing' and wondering 'how hard can it be?', we weighed anchor. Of course we did not go via the South Coast, a route that any sensible, certainly any novice, person would take, but via Shetland, the Hebrides and St Kilda. With a crew made up of the ever resourceful Carol and further bolstered by old sea dogs from fellow Swallow yacht owners and unsuspecting friends and family we had a most successful voyage.

The following year, we made it to Tromsø. Our insurers at the time dictated that this was the furthest north we could go. As we turned for home I regretted that we weren't continuing on to Svalbard which suddenly seemed perfectly achievable. As for so many others, the Covid pandemic disrupted many exciting plans but did focus our attention on boat projects. We made it to the west of

Scotland, which was a compromise because we could not go round Ireland, only to hear that Ireland was opening up. Turning around we headed off to round the northwest of the island only to quickly realise why everyone normally circumnavigates Ireland clockwise. Rounding headland after headland against the wind brought us eventually to Dingle. We ended up moored next to a Boreal: my dream boat. A Boreal has a similar underwater profile to an Ovni but with an additional 30 years of development from which to benefit. When one came up for sale a couple of years later (VAT paid) I couldn't resist. Timing was far from ideal as I had only just finished upgrading our Ovni but, on the basis that another might not become available for many years, I bought her.

January can be pretty miserable, even in the Solent. The wind whistled around the masts in the Berthon marina. We needed to move the Boreal away before the combination of marina charges and owning two boats at the same time bankrupted us so, at the end of the month and despite the weather, we cast off, bound for Milford. The ability to sit in the doghouse, warm and dry whilst we plodded westward against the wind, soon convinced us that this was not a massive mistake. The way she behaved as we beat our way round from Falmouth to Milford Haven in over 36 hours of inclement weather further vindicated the decision to buy. We crashed our way, overnight, against an unseasonal easterly with waves occasionally sweeping over the doghouse. On arrival at the entrance to Milford Haven, with neither pilots nor tugs working due to the inclement weather, we found a number of tankers drifting around as we picked our way carefully to the entrance. On occasions the entrance channel looked white all the way across and we surfed past the many buoys to the sheltered water beyond.

Unfinished business led us back to Tromsø and on to Svalbard where we spent a wonderful summer exploring the historic sites and fjords of the archipelago. The calving glaciers gave some experience of navigating through broken ice but it was very much like playing at it and about the only thing to be learnt is that the novelty of dodging ice wears off pretty quickly.

On our return, we began planning for the next project. Now was the time for the Northwest Passage, which had been on my bucket list for a long time. Somewhere along the planning process I came across Rev Bob Shepton and made contact. I asked him about timings for the passage and his reply came back pretty quickly, "You have to buy my book". Now, I am not saying he is motivated by money but for £12 not only did we gain access to a wealth of knowledge but a book as well.

Our usual boatyard in Milford Haven was not able to lift *Lumina*, so we decided to leave her in the yard at Ardrossan for the winter. With this being our starting port for the next adventure, I suggested to Bob that we would love to host him when we stopped in Oban. He replied that it would be even better if he were to come to Ardrossan and we were to have him on board for the first part of the voyage round to Oban. So, complete with our hitchhiker aboard, we had a shakedown cruise to Oban to resolve any issues with the boat and of course download as much of Bob's knowledge of the Arctic as possible.

Bob was quick to promote the value of joining the OCC. In response to my assumption that you had to do some great ocean crossing to qualify, he replied, "Well, you will have by the time you get to Greenland." So, application submitted, off we set on our first ocean crossing. The North Atlantic in May is not a particularly quiet place but *Lumina* looked after us well and with some really

First ice in Svalbard

nasty weather systems to negotiate, as well as plenty of ice off Cape Farewell and on up beyond Cape Desolation, we had a very interesting voyage. Eventually we rounded the top of a tongue of old ice, which had made it around the south of Greenland and was slowly moving north. Our sheltered anchorage had a few bergy bits floating around but we thought little of it until it was time to move on a couple of days later. The north moving floe had continued past our haven and now we were faced with several miles of quite dense broken ice to navigate. Not knowing if it would hang around for long, I decided to try and find our way through. It seemed to be a good time to try out the ice pole, but once we got moving we realised that the best method was just to gently push with the boat to open up the gaps.

On arrival in Paamiut, with the ice just behind us, we asked the locals if it was likely that we would get trapped there as the pilot book warned. "I doubt it" came the reply. And sure enough, the entrance remained clear. We then had a glorious month of day-sailing and exploring along the coast of Greenland until we reached Upernavik at the end of July, which was to be our jumping-off point for the Northwest Passage. By now some of the other passagemakers were congregating. It was great to meet up with fellow sailors, as we had been ahead of the pack and had had little contact with them.

The crossing to Pond Inlet was fairly uneventful with a little ice to be avoided in the centre of the Davis Strait. We lingered there for a few days, waiting for more favourable weather as we had time in hand and there was still plenty of ice further on. A windy couple of days anchored at Beechey Island was followed by a lull which enabled us to visit the famous grave site from the Franklin Expedition, but the wind returned necessitating another stop in Gascoyne Inlet nearby. Prince Regent Inlet was showing some ice across the entrance but it was narrow and green (less than 3 tenths coverage) on the ice chart so we assumed we could find a way through.

How many tenths is that?

Soon after entering Prince Regent Inlet we arrived at the ice edge. It stretched from east to west as far as the eye could see. Initially we followed it eastwards but after about half an hour we retraced our steps and headed the other way as this meant we were actually going more in the direction of travel. The ice chart had shown that the depth of the ice field was less in the centre of the inlet so it seemed we should be trying to find our way through. We came to an area of less dense ice and pushed our way through the tightly packed outer skin. Initially we made good progress but it soon became apparent that there was more and more ice and less and less water. This was where I suddenly realised that I was rapidly gaining experience – but not in a good way. We decided to try to extricate ourselves and return to clear water, which was just half a mile behind us. With the wind strengthening from our starboard side and more dense ice to leeward, we needed to make the turn into the wind. However, it was difficult for Carol to push the bow away from the ice as, at the same time, the stern was also hard against the ice so I could not steer us into the wind as the boat would not turn about her pivot point. At one point I looked back and saw a lot of green on the ice behind that I wondered how algae could grow there, before realising it was just that we were cleaning the hull at the same time. Eventually we managed to turn, and an hour of pushing and zig-zagging brought us back to open water – we had spent nearly two hours in a tiny area. We continued to follow the edge of the ice, heading into the wind as my gut suggested, and eventually we could see the other side of it and made it through. I suppose it is obvious really that clear water would be found on the windward side of the inlet as the ice would tend to be blown away from there but the ice chart had promised exactly the opposite! We continued to Fort Ross, with ice gradually forcing us closer to the westward shore, but by the time we were just about a mile off it dissipated and we breathed a sigh of relief.

Fort Ross is one of those iconic places in the Arctic and we felt privileged to arrive there in our own vessel. Today, most of the local population has migrated to the larger settlements and it is difficult to imagine it as a trading post with hunters coming and going. By now, the ice situation was becoming a little more concerning as we were into the third week in August with no sign of an opening in the ice to allow us to do the usual route round King William Island to Gjoa Haven. It was beginning to look as if the only option this year would be to go via Victoria Strait, a route less travelled by small vessels as the ice there generally lingers longer. An ironic situation given that news reports had led us to believe that there was no ice in the Arctic and we began to wonder if we might end up returning east.

Probably the most people partying at Fort Ross in many a year

There were several other yachts in the anchorage at Fort Ross, so we had an impromptu party in the Hut (the Hudson Bay Trading Company's abandoned trading post), where we were joined by part of the crew of an icebreaker, now anchored in the entrance to Bellot Strait. Someone had flown a drone as far as they could to get a view down the strait, which looked relatively clear but

Relaxed sailing in the Bering Sea

there was ice on the other side and this was now also finding its way through and circulating around the anchorage. The only private vessel lost in the Northwest Passage in recent years was a yacht in Bellot Strait in what appeared to be similar circumstances to the conditions with which we were faced. The combination of loose ice and strong currents is not particularly inviting. However, with increasing amounts of ice coming through from the other side, we, together with two out of the four yachts in the anchorage, decided to go through on the next tide.

Whilst it was not ideal, we managed to find a way through and only had to push through thick areas on a couple of occasions. On the Peel Sound side we were met with plenty of ice that appeared to be travelling north (to the south it was definitely impenetrable). We turned north and picked our way through fast ice still holding on to the shore and the main floe further out for a few miles before the ice surrounding us became less dense still and had more open areas. We forged on to get through it to the open water promised by the ice chart about half way across Peel Sound. Reassuringly, a motor yacht was coming towards us meaning that there must be a route through. It was the first west-to-east vessel of the year which was also a good omen for future progress. Maybe we would be successful after all.

With the weather deteriorating, we anchored across the other side in Willis Bay for 24 hours, but the news ahead was still not good. Three yachts were ahead of our group and they were also taking shelter waiting for better news from Victoria Strait. We knew that the motor yacht had got through and several cargo ships had been escorted by ice breakers, but no smaller yachts – yet. News from Fort Ross was not good either. We heard stories of having to re-anchor due to the ice accumulation and also an epic tale of one yacht which had been partially pushed up whilst trapped by the moving ice in Bellot Strait, so we were glad we had come through when we did. It all goes to emphasise a point that I never fully understood before we set off, and which seemed very different to Svalbard, in that once an area 'opens' (where the ice dissipates or moves away), this does not necessarily mean that it remains that way. It could get better but it could just as easily get worse.

We left Willis Bay in thick fog with about a hundred miles to run before we would meet the ice. Gradually, the wind strengthened from astern, giving us a push onwards and saving a bit of diesel. However this also meant that the swell was building and would probably also mean that the ice on the windward edge would be getting blown together, making it more difficult, or impossible, for us to push through. With nowhere to go apart from retracing our steps, it was not a very enticing prospect. By the end of the night we found ourselves at the front of the pack, the other two boats having slowed down in case they arrived at the ice during the short night. At 0400 we came to the first ice. Luckily it was different to previous encounters where we had suddenly come to a definite ice edge, for here it was very sparse. Gradually it became denser with thicker

patches but we could always sail around without slowing down and, happily, by the end of the day, we were through. So much for the 3 tenths on the ice chart! Or maybe it's because I can't decide how many tenths of ice there really are when I look at it. More experience needed perhaps.

That was the last ice of any significance we were to see. Every yacht made it through in the end and, after regrouping at Cambridge Bay where we were slightly delayed due to no fuel being available at the weekend, the race to Alaska began. All I can say is that it's a very, VERY long way from Cambridge Bay to Alaska. The current and wind always seem to be against you, there is little to see, the nights are getting longer at a staggeringly fast rate and all you can think of is the programme *Deadliest Catch*, about the crab fishermen in the Bering Sea who always seem to be out in the roughest conditions, which just happened to be where we were heading.

Journey's end: ashore in Kodiak for the winter

Two dates had stuck in my mind from early research: don't bother leaving Greenland before the beginning of August; but be out of the Bering Sea by the middle of September. We arrived in Nome, Alaska (on the northern extremity of the Bering Sea) on 12 September after 8.5 days of constant motoring from Tuktoyaktuk. A replacement autopilot was waiting for us here as we had been manually steering since Cambridge Bay. Four-hour watches are not too bad when double-handed but when you have no autopilot it is very tiring and four hours feels very long. Luckily the replacement autopilot worked straight out of the box and a few days later we set off for False Pass in the Aleutians, on the southern edge of the Bering Sea where we arrived on 20 September. Though we got through more-or-less on the recommended timeline, we were also fortunate that the Bering Sea had not lived up to its reputation. We finally reached Kodiak and *Lumina's* overwintering place in the boatyard at the beginning of October.

It wasn't until we had unwound a little in one of the bars that a fellow skipper said "Well, we have done it now and our boats have their names in history". It was true. We had actually done something significant. It is lovely to see that even to this day, they are still keeping a record of transits through the Northwest Passage at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, UK. In a way it is surprising that the number still only stands at just over 400 since Amundsen in 1906. Compare that to the number of vessels going through the Straits of Dover every single day or people climbing Everest each year. But the Northwest Passage is still a real challenge to the boat, the skipper and the crew and, contrary to popular belief, there is still a lot of ice up there. It certainly is a good way to further your experience.

On a forum someone asked which insurance companies people were using for their boats in the Northwest Passage. The reply came back that if he was asking that, then perhaps it was not for him. They say that there is no adventure without danger and indeed, *you do* get experience by doing it, you just have to be able to handle whatever brand of jeopardy is on the menu each day!

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC:

SAILING FROM CAPE VERDE TO GRENADA

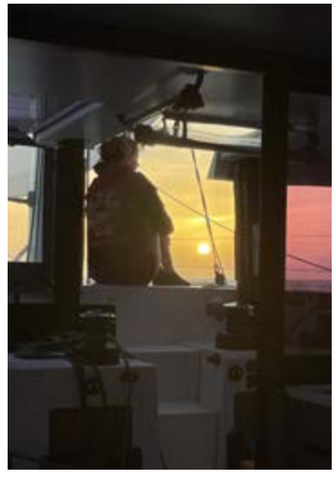
by Vivienne Mack

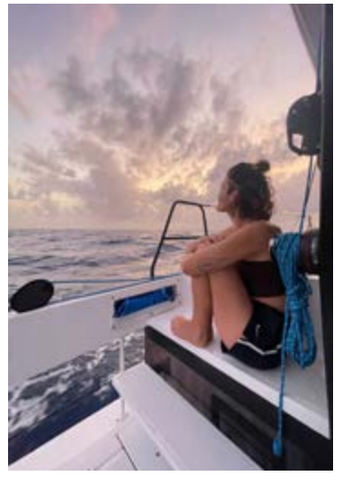
YSP recipient Vivienne hails from Germany. On finishing her bachelor's degree she decided to take a gap year to travel, explore inspiring social community projects, and meet new people: it was during this time that a transatlantic sailing adventure came up. It was the perfect mix of challenge and discovery – a chance to push herself out of her comfort zone and experience life at sea.

In November 2024, I set off on an unforgettable adventure: a 16-day transatlantic passage on a 42ft catamaran, sailing from São Vicente in the Cape Verde Islands to Grenada in the Caribbean. There were four of us on board: the boat's owner, an experienced sailor from Germany, a woman from Switzerland, a good friend and me. Our catamaran, *Topas*, was well-equipped with modern navigation tools and enough supplies to last us the journey across the ocean. The trip was the result of months of planning and preparation. It was a chance to challenge ourselves, work as a team and embrace whatever surprises the sea had in store.

São Vicente turned out to be the perfect place to start our crossing. Its rugged landscape provided a stunning backdrop as we made the final preparations for the trip: checking the rigging, loading provisions and poring over weather forecasts. We were excited as we left Mindelo's harbour on a calm morning, with steady

Last chance to provision at the local market in Mindelo





Favourite spot for watching sunset . . .

. . . and sunrise!

The sunsets were never boring and never the same

trade winds promising good sailing. As the island's volcanic peaks disappeared behind us, we adjusted the sails and settled into our westward course.

Life aboard quickly fell into a routine. We took turns on a watch schedule, with each person spending four hours steering the boat and keeping an eye on the instruments. Although the schedule was tiring, it gave us a rhythm that felt both steady and reassuring in the vastness of the ocean.

The trade winds made for generally smooth sailing, though it wasn't always easy. Some days were thrilling, with 20-knot winds driving us forward, while others were calmer, giving us a chance to put up the spinnaker. We also had to deal with sudden squalls, but thanks to the skipper's skill, we handled them without too much trouble.

The beautiful sail . . . before it ripped

Halfway through the trip, we had a scare. A sudden gust of wind tore one of our sails with a loud ripping sound. We scrambled to secure it as it flapped wildly in the wind. It was a stark reminder of how powerful the ocean can be and how quickly circumstances can change. Luckily, we had backup sails and were able to keep going, albeit at a slightly slower pace. This incident was a stark reminder of how important it is to stay flexible and adapt to the unexpected.

Food became a big part of life on *Topas*. With plenty of provisions and some creativity, we managed to cook tasty meals that kept us going through the long days. A real highlight was celebrating Christmas on board – something none of us had done before. We baked classic German Christmas cookies, filling the cabin with the smell of cinnamon and spices, and made vegan stuffed cabbage rolls for dinner. It was a cosy and special way to mark the holiday, even in the middle of the Atlantic. Sharing those meals brought us closer as a crew and added a touch of home to our journey.

One of the most surprising parts of the trip was dealing with flying fish. These little creatures would occasionally land on our deck, especially at night. At first, it was more scary than funny as they flopped around unpredictably in the dark. We found ourselves nervously sweeping the still-living fish back into the sea as quickly as possible. It wasn't something we'd

Land ahoy! Grenada came into sight on Day 16

expected, and it reminded us of how wild and unpredictable life at sea can be. Unlike many sailors, we didn't fish during the crossing. Instead, we focused on making the most of the provisions we'd brought with us. The flying fish episodes, while unplanned, left a strong impression on all of us.

Although we didn't have any close shaves or catastrophes, the journey wasn't without its tough moments. A constant swell made moving around the boat tricky and tiring. Some of us struggled with seasickness during the first few days and the torn sail meant we had to adjust our sailing strategy. On another occasion, we noticed wear on one of the halyards and had to make a quick repair, which involved climbing up the mast; a nerve-wracking task that demanded teamwork and problem-solving. I found the night watches particularly tough. The dark ocean stretched endlessly around us, with only stars and the occasional bioluminescent glow of plankton to break it up. Staying focused during those long hours wasn't easy, but it was also a unique and humbling experience.

As we got closer to the Caribbean, the air grew warmer and carried the faint scent of land. The seas calmed, and our excitement grew. When we finally saw Grenada's green hills on the horizon it felt like a huge reward. The thought of solid ground and tropical fruit gave us energy for the final stretch. We arrived in St George's Harbour just after sunrise on Day 16. The colourful town and the smiles of other sailors made for a warm welcome. Dropping anchor was an incredible feeling: a mix of relief, pride and gratitude.

Reflecting back, crossing the Atlantic was an experience I'll never forget. It taught me a deep respect for the ocean and the value of teamwork. Every day brought something new: whether it was the peaceful beauty of a starry night or the adrenaline rush of dealing with unexpected challenges. I hope that my gap year will be full of amazing experiences, but sailing across the Atlantic will certainly take some beating. It was truly transformative. The ocean is vast and unpredictable, but it's also incredibly rewarding. These 16 days were a reminder of the magic and adventure waiting out there for anyone willing to take the leap.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

TIME, GENTLEMEN

by Malcolm Robson

This article is reproduced from Flying Fish *1972/1, when sailing – and particularly navigation – was a very different art. Malcolm Robson was a well-known British sailor who wrote cruising guides to the Channel Islands and the Normandy coast of France during the 1970s and 1980s.*

Years ago when I was struggling with the mysteries of Astro Navigation they divided the thing into three parts. Three very unequal parts. There was the actual juggling with the sextant, the accuracy, the experience required, the steady arm, etc. Then there were all those tables, the small corrections, the adding here, the subtracting there, the position line, the day's work, the Perplexificating Parallel-o-Iax, etc. The third, ah, yes, the third part was time. You can read a clock, can't you? Well, that's all you need know about time.

So now, after 20 years' voyaging, I feel just about able to confirm that my tutors were correct in that there are still three parts to Astro. Still a tiny bit unequal parts, too. As my pupils are quick to agree, it's just that the accent is on the wrong letter. I mean, any bloke who can read a railway timetable or fill in his Income Tax form; any cove who can add up the grocery bill in decimal money; or any grandma who can follow a knitting pattern, all these can after an hour or so shake hands with Capt Norie or *HO 214*.* As for dexterity with a sextant, well! Providing he has sight in one eye a sailor of about six could be taught in ten minutes what to do. Beyond perhaps the more dull chimpanzee, I agree, but quite possible for my 98-year-old aunt in Bognor.

Which leaves only – TIME. Well, we can all tell the time from three onward! All we want is a timepiece. I am going to tell you how to battle with this problem of the timepiece; of carrying time around with you aboard your boat.

First the timepiece must be portable. Time, by which I mean dear old Greenwich Mean, not this new atomic stuff which purports to show that GMT can be as wildly out as 0.006 micro-seconds at certain times of the year. You match your timepiece up with some clock, ie. Big Ben, and rush down to your boat and sail away to spend the next few months worrying how much out your clock is – you know, four seconds error makes a mile and all that. So for the beginner in Astro I can but recommend that you repair to the National Maritime

* This article first appeared more than 50 years ago when such sexist attitudes were more acceptable than they are now.

† The Royal Observatory moved from Greenwich to Hurstmonceaux Castle in Sussex in 1948.

Museum (entrance free) and steal one of Harrison's chronometers complete in a glass case. It's a beautiful thing, a work of art which would enhance almost any cabin. Most are about a cubic yard and weigh 100lbs so take a friend. Just say 'Hurstmonceaux'† meaningfully to the doorman as you go out. Make sure you have a driving licence.

For the slightly keener navigator, may I suggest buying one of those molecular clocks, about the size of a sewing machine and which can be seen in the Science Museum. They are currently listed at £8,000 though for cash you might work it a bit. They have a disadvantage in that they tend to become erratic when more than a mile from South Kensington. If you really mean to quibble at this price, then for a cheap but reliable instrument what about a Bulova Marine Chronometer at £395? This includes the wood case, by the way, in simulated Formica. In it there are several tuning forks but these are only of marginal use since they all mutter the same note. No use for starting off the madrigals after a dirty evening ashore.

Those of you who have been demoted from larger ships, particularly those of the Queen, will be familiar with the plain clockwork chronometer sitting snugly in its gimballed teak box. It was just before Christmas that I strolled into that rather well-known jewellers and manufacturers of crowns in Regent Street, a young nephew with a 5-tonner* in mind.

'Chronometers? Certainly Captain.' Would I kindly step this way. I followed, thinking the 'Captain' suffix a trifle ostentatious. One assistant opened a glass case, another reverently lifted the box onto a baize cloth spread by a third.

'What accuracy might I expect?' I asked, eyeing the clock with distaste.

'This one,' said No. 2, glancing at the label 'will have a clean rate within five seconds a month.'

'Can it be moved?' I enquired thinking of the 5-tonner in Biscay.

'We do not recommend it is ever removed from the bridge.'

'How about temperature?'

'That of the chartroom will do.' No. 1 seemed to be an Old Salt.

'And the price?' I thought I'd better get this as early as possible.

'A hundred and seventy,' No. 2 said clearly and, thinking of his commission added 'guineas.' I sighed and turned away.

The Regent Street air felt cool on my heated brow. Perhaps a Japanese timepiece at around £2 might do for him as a start, I lamely considered.

But don't despair. If you are a navigator of great and continued experience, brave and fearless and an extrovert, I can offer you two solutions. The first is to invest about £6 on a battery-powered electric kitchen clock (plus 10p for the battery) and if it varies more than ten seconds a month which is most unlikely, throw it overboard and get another. The battery lasts a year. Alternatively, buy about six cheap Russian pocket watches at thirty bob† a time, hang them on six hooks, wind daily and take the average. If you find yourself out more than a second a week, I will personally post you six more free of charge.

Checking your chronometer/kitchen clock, etc. at sea is, by comparison, child's play. It is done either by asking a passing ship the time or by radio.

* Typically around 25ft (26.7m) LOA.

† £1.50, worth around £15 today.

As ships are always in the way when you don't want them and never when you do you will have to depend on GMT by Radio. Anyone who can read can do it with the aid of Vol. V, *Admiralty Radio Signals*. And a radio set. And a cool head.

Suppose, for example, you are stooging about the eastern Atlantic trying to locate, say, Rockall, where it is your intention to find out if it is possible to develop it as a 'Get Away from It' package deal holiday place. You want to check your GMT having set out a month previously from Boston, Mass. From BBC Radio 3 you can only get the Amadeus String Quartet. From Radio 4 the Archers seems to be on all day. From Radio 2 not a sound, you are too far from Daventry. Your nerves aren't up to Radio I. You thumb through Vol. V and begin again. Ah, yes, Radio Tomsk on 364 Kcs but the sounds of a visit to a plastic caviar factory don't help much. Radio Tibet? Try 654 Kcs – is that really 'Letter from America?' But this is ridiculous. Strasbourg on 1096 Kcs but (Vol. V tells you) half strength on Tuesdays and Fridays. Rugby, deep down among the bass notes at 16 Kcs but changed, without notice, on even months (perhaps) to 14,562, 14,589 or 14,982 mcs. All right then, Montreal on 2145 mcs but (says *Vol. V*) not between the 7th to 15th of each month. Today it is, you think, the 8th.

Desperate now, what about the trebles? Washington on 5 mcs – only groans. 10, 15, 20, all whistles and bathwater running. Even Auntie BBC thinks of you on the 'metre bands' if you have the quarterly time table aboard, if you can tune in to 6.467 mcs *before* the pips, if you can mentally make a wave-bounce calculation and be sure that you are included in the transmission for Queensland, Atlas Mountains and Upper Wimbledon, if it isn't Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Saturdays only, Saturdays and Sundays omitted or the first Friday after St Candlemas. Rome and Venice I see don't give time on any public holiday, and they include in this major Saints' Days so your chances are remote. Sadly you sit back and gaze with loathing at the £700 those four radio receivers cost you. Don't you wish the salesman was here so you could slowly and painfully strangle him? All that gup about a guaranteed reception of Auckland, or Mao Tse Tung at strength nine?

Even if you are dead lucky and as, in a super-fruit-machine, every one of 35 variables are all working for you at the same instant and – lo, there it is – faint but clear. Bleep – bleep – bleep – blaap – bleep – booooooing – silence. Or perhaps, boing – boing – boing – bam – bam – bam – silence. Or any one of 16 different time signals: BBC, American standard, International standard, ONOGO, Japanese Rhythmic, Russian Roulette etc. I have even heard a gentleman telling me in an earnest confidential voice that he is "Say-ash-who and ven ze note changes eet vill bee joost zero neuf quinze heurs JayEmmaTay".

I give up. Why not let's just point the boat towards the sun and squint through the holes in the coconut shell? At least we shall arrive back where it all started.

BOOK REVIEWS

REACHING BEYOND: THE MOUNTAINS AND VOYAGES OF DENISE EVANS

An Autobiography

Published in soft cover by Delfryn Publications (delfrynpublications.co.uk) at £19.95. 300 pages (140 x 216mm) bearing many superb photographs and maps as well as examples of the author's own splendid watercolours.
ISBN 978-1-9163-6743-2

Reaching Beyond takes the reader on an extraordinary excursion over land and sea, through adventures and adversity, joy and sorrow. Reading Denise's account of her life-lived-to-overflowing will draw you into the realms of the seemingly impossible. Her feats were improbable even by today's standards, let alone when she achieved them, relying on her celestial navigation skills to skipper her Tradewind 33 *Dunlin of Wessex*.

Denise's quest for adventure lured her to the Azores, across the Atlantic and to circumnavigate both South America and Iceland, the latter twice. Increasingly bold escapades led to her pioneering voyages to Greenland and Arctic waters, including a rounding of Spitzbergen and forays to Disco Island and Scoresby Sound.

All this is remembered and eloquently described in this riveting book, an account of an action-packed life written by a modest but fiercely determined woman, a woman without an off-switch, Lady Denise Evans. A Lady by name, a lady by nature, rarely found far from her hefty handbag, albeit cluttered with marine chart SIM cards and other assorted boat paraphernalia. It is an accurate and enthralling record of Denise's life, recounted in her own words extracted from her detailed logs and diaries, as well as from articles published in *Flying Fish*. Denise is a no-nonsense narrator describing events 'as they were' without need or recourse to exaggeration or drama.

Whenever I visited Denise in her nineties at her home nestled amidst her beloved Snowdonian mountains, I would find her deskbound, pounding the keys of her laptop, typing out her memoir. She 'wanted there to be a record' . . . and so there is! A record of her lifetime's adventures, written primarily not for you and me but for her family.

She died in November 2023 aged 92, having completed the mammoth task of typing up her 222,000 word autobiography earlier the same year. She called it *Waypoints to Eternity* – a nautical and apt title capturing the essence of a life that was active well into her eighties. Only 75 copies were printed, which Denise delighted in gifting to family and visiting friends. Many thought that an edited version would be an enlightening and lasting memorial for a much wider audience to appreciate. Retitled *Reaching Beyond*, it will fascinate, stimulate,

inspire and excite sailors, climbers and mountaineers. Armchair adventurers will also find themselves stirred as they read accounts of Denise's audacious voyages to high latitudes, of mishaps and near-misses, of happy family ventures and of misfortune.

The edited version opens with a heartfelt introduction by Peter, one of Denise's three sons and also a high-latitude sailor, recalling the highs and lows of their shared adventures and of his mother's resilience in the face of adversity. "She was tough", he says, and one realises just how tough when she describes *Dunlin* being blown back out of the Magellan Straits during a raging storm, warps streaming astern.

The narrative then takes you aboard *Dunlin* as the pair, she and teenage son, run before a southwesterly force 7 in mid-North Atlantic, a week from anywhere on their homeward leg from Greenland. Denise entices the reader along on her exploits as she takes you to the summit of Greenland's Mount Atter in 1956, on her visit to Russia accompanying her husband Sir Charles Evans on his Mount Everest Expedition Lecture tour, or on her 1962 ground-breaking All-Woman expedition to Jagdula Peak in the Himalayas. *Reaching Beyond* includes photos of the perilous situations she put herself into while recording the expedition on cine film.

Denise's talents extended way beyond risk-laden adventures. She was a fluent French speaker and literary translator, and a lover of art and classical music who enjoyed playing her grand piano on the landing of the family home where her superb watercolours hang. As well as being an outstandingly bold pioneering rock climber she was an accomplished skier, continuing into her mid-eighties. Then to cap all her achievements, throughout the narrative Denise clearly conveys the joy and importance of their happy family life.

I personally found that one of Denise's greatest qualities was her ability and willingness to motivate, foster and inspire others 'to give it a go'. She was my sailing mentor and, while crewing for her, *Dunlin* was the first boat on which I slept on passage. I was one of many whom she took under her wing. Her eagerness to encourage others, her patience and her sense of fairness were all-prevailing and shine through her narrative, as does her mischievous and, it has to be said, often non-conformist sense of humour.

Of all sailing/mountaineering books, I give this one top marks for its factual frankness and searing honesty: a breath of salty mountain air!

P.S. You'll need to read it to find out who said, when asked if he knew Denise Evans, "Oh yes . . . a hell of a man that woman, a hell of a man!"

SYC

PASSAGES: CAPE HORN AND BEYOND

by Lin Pardey

Published in soft covers by L&L Pardey and available via Amazon at £17.62 / US$22.93. 304 pages (152 x 229mm) with many colour and mono photos and chartlets. ISBN 978-1-9292-1-4808

Passages: Cape Horn and Beyond is a very personal account of Lin Pardey's life, primarily with her husband Larry aboard their 30ft home-built traditional wooden cutter *Taleisin* and latterly with her partner David Haigh in *Sahula*. The book starts by describing a 20,000-mile journey of adventure and reflection from the North Atlantic down around Cape Horn, up to Victoria in Canada and finally across the Pacific Ocean to New Zealand. There are countless descriptions of how they managed the trials and tribulations inherent in such a voyage, particularly during stormy conditions, but Lin's description of the seemingly casual approach they adopted when setting off on each of these long ocean passages underlines the deep affinity and understanding they developed over time with the oceanic environment, together with the affection and trust they held for each other.

There is a frank brutality in this well-written book which encompasses the full range of practical, personal and family issues which many serious liveaboard cruisers will have been forced to confront. The strength of individual personality found as a necessity among cruising couples can, on occasion, exacerbate the challenge of finding a mutually acceptable solution to unanticipated problems. But when conflicting options inevitably arose for Lin and Larry, their ability to focus on the task in hand allowed them to manage such stormy seas with the alacrity required to ensure the best outcome. The resilience shown when disasters struck, and the fact that Lin and Larry found a way to navigate this morass of uncertainty and still maintain a close working relationship, is a worthwhile lesson for us all.

In a world so often characterised by homogenised mediocrity, media obsession and the easy life, such examples at the upper end of a continuum defining human achievement will always stand out as beacons of hope and reassurance for us all. We may not personally wish to replicate the trials and tribulations associated with sailing an engineless vessel through some of the most challenging waters on planet Earth, but there are many reminders and valuable lessons in seamanship to be learned from *Passages* for both aspiring and current ocean cruisers. The detail and diagrams of Lin's favourite sailing vessels (in Appendix II) give a clear impression of her preferred style of ocean cruising and the illustrations throughout the book, with many photos, both colour and mono, plus many chartlets, demonstrate the richness and diversity of places visited and conditions encountered.

Lin's account of what she achieved stands out as a beacon for ageing seafarers and a reassurance that quality of life is not just about luck but about the decisions we make and not giving up. Her personal sacrifice and the ability to reinvent herself in the light of life's changing circumstance – the journey from liveaboard cruiser to local politician, to caring for a husband with dementia, to event organiser, to public speaker and publisher – speaks for itself.

Just as completing a circumnavigation must eventually end in closing the loop, so Lin's story of personal relationships finally resolves, after a period of tortuous introspection and reflection, in a similar happy culmination with David Haigh on a sunlit shore. There are many nautical tales that, once read, gather dust on a bookshelf. *Passages*, on the other hand, is a book that strikes a chord and may well grow weary and dog-eared from repeat visits. It is likely to be remembered as a much-valued source of practical maritime advice and personal reassurance derived from a lifetime of rich experience. A very enjoyable and informative read.

CNJ

WILD PREACHING: SERMONS THAT WEREN'T

by Reverend Bob Shepton

Independently published in soft cover and available from Amazon at £8 / US$10-16. 82 pages (127 x 203mm) with many mono photographs.
ISBN 979-8-3026-6125-8

If you have met the Rev. Bob Shepton you will probably have been regaled by stories of derring-do, of climbing, skiing and sailing expeditions, of how he took a school group sailing around the world in a small fibreglass boat, of dismasting in the Antarctic and a jury rig back to the Falklands. Subsequent trips took him climbing in Greenland with the Wild Bunch and transiting the Northwest Passage both ways! Yes, an extraordinary life and well documented in his previous three books.

This book is somewhat different. Those of us who know the Rev. Bob are enthralled by his exploits and delight in his company, but do we know why he has the title 'Reverend' and what it really means to him? Despite having spent time in his company over many years he has never touched directly on his faith. At annual dinners he is often called upon to say Grace, but that has been the sum total of our understanding of the Reverend bit.

So for those who would like to understand a completely different side to the Reverend, I commend this book. It is preachy in that it is a collection of short sermons and therefore it refers frequently to the Christian Bible. But it is refreshingly direct concerning what God and Jesus mean to him, how they have been a key part of his life's journey and how he sees the hand of God in the great outdoors that has formed so much of his life experience.

Wild Preaching is written in an easy style, with humour and humility, drawing on his experiences in the mountains and on the sea. I think that, within its pages, there is something of interest for those of any faith or none, and many from a Christian background will, I am sure, appreciate the shortness of the sermons! If you choose to read it, from whatever background, you will enjoy a great exposition of what believing in God and Jesus mean to the Rev. Bob Shepton.

SAC

IN MY ELEMENT

by Pip Hare

Published in soft cover by Adlard Coles (bloomsbury.com) at £14.99 / US$24. 256 pages (154 x 232mm), a high-quality midsection containing a great array of colour photographs add a nice touch to an immense journey.
Also available as eBook and Audiobook. ISBN 978-1-3994-2049-5

I have admired Pip Hare for years as a steadfast example of the commitment required to build a world-class ocean racing team. While preparing for the 2023 Clipper Round the World Yacht Race in Gosport we were based beside Pip's IMOCA* as the *Medallia* team prepared for the 2024 Vendée Globe. It felt a privilege to be so close to a huge part of British ocean racing history.

Pip's book is, unsurprisingly, a fantastically organic, brutally real and introspective account of her challenges and successes on the journey to becoming one of the world's top solo sailors. From the outset it's clear that Pip was an underdog – a person full of potential but with many hurdles to overcome before reaching the start line. Her mission in writing about this journey is, in her own words, because she will '*not allow the veneer of perfection to descend on to our story*'.

In pursuit of this raw, honest storytelling, *In My Element* is much more than an account of racing solo around the world. It's full of valuable insights on resilience, leadership, philosophy and values. I love how human the focus is throughout and how clearly the book shows sailing to be a deeply spiritual sport.

So often, we sailors – and here I speak for myself – feel pressure to tell the stories of our ocean adventures in a certain way. People expect tales of rugged extremes, hardship and elemental beauty, and we shape our stories to match. But the reality is far more complex. Many of us go to sea for reasons we struggle to articulate and we often face challenges that go beyond the elements.

We've moved past the unrealistic archetype of the hardened solo sailor, driven purely by brawn. Pip offers a far more nuanced, realistic view of our sport. Sailing is intrinsically human. When she writes, '*The vastness of the ocean hangs heavy on the human mind*' she articulates so clearly how the ocean reshapes the way we think. Her stories capture those raw moments of struggle – battling problems alone on deck, with minimal cockpit protection compared with the new IMOCAs. These moments aren't just for salty seadogs. They are lived by ordinary people who choose to do extraordinary things – and commit to performing them with skill, seamanship and speed.

Pip's reflections on goal-setting really put the challenge of the 2020/21 Vendée Globe for *Medallia* into perspective. With the boat and resources available to the team, anything above second-from-last place was statistically unlikely. But Pip and *Medallia*, a non-foiling boat, confounded the sceptics by finishing 19th out of the 25 finishers (and 33 starters), within 24 hours of foiling boats. In addition, Pip was the first British sailor over the line.

Her immense success, despite the odds, is made even more powerful by her ability to tell the story with such honesty. As a young woman in sailing, I find particular inspiration in how Pip navigates the immense pressure in this world to be polished and performative. She uses her platform to promote the oft-hidden reality: how difficult this path can be and how much self-doubt even the most accomplished sailors face. *In My Element* is a must read!

LJH

* IMOCA, which stands for International Monohull Open Class Association, describes a class of high-performance, 60ft monohulls designed for single or two-handed offshore racing.

CCA CRUISING GUIDE TO LABRADOR

editor James Grosvenor Watson

Published in soft cover by the Cruising Club of America at US$64.95 / £46.50. Available in the US from Paradise Cay Publications (paracay.com) and in the UK via Amazon. 240 pages (203 x 280mm), with many colour photographs and three-colour chartlets. ISBN 978-1-7344-0863-6-2

In May 2023 Stephanie and I left Lewisporte, Newfoundland to head home to the UK via Labrador, Greenland and Iceland. Unquestionably, the two months spent cruising north along the Labrador coast* was the highlight of our voyage. The coast offers many challenges, not least of which are ice and fog. The rewards, however, are countless. We were the first yacht into St Mary's Harbour in southern Labrador that season and it was here that we saw our first and last yacht while cruising the coastline. Labrador is demanding, not least because of its remoteness and the need to be self-sufficient. It was therefore reassuring to have the guidance of the previous edition of the CCA cruising guide to lean on when seeking safe anchorage – to know where someone else had found refuge while navigating through growler-filled waters and dense fog.

This new edition, published in early 2025, has been updated using accounts from experienced sailors who have cruised these waters, although not all locations have been visited recently due to the limited number of yachts which venture along this coastline each year. Rocks do not move, however, and the revised edition represents an excellent update with clear layout and simplified text. It offers directions for 198 anchorages and harbours along what is a very remote and beautiful coastline with just a few small and friendly communities throughout its length. While the southern section of the coast up to Cartwright does see visiting yachts in most years, the northern part up to Cape Chidley is seldom cruised in its entirety, thereby providing the more adventurous cruiser perfect solitude, magnificent scenery and interesting cruising.

The CCA *Cruising Guide To Labrador* provides useful advice for sailors as well as some interesting historical and environmental background. The emphasis however, is on providing clear sailing directions, accompanied by simple chartlets, for potential anchorages between Blanc Sablon in the south and the Button and Knight Islands in the north. An index at the front lists (and numbers) all the anchorages and harbours from south to north, dividing them into eight sections (A to H). There is also an alphabetical index at the back. A useful feature of this new edition, following immediately after the index, are coastal maps for each section showing all the numbered locations. These provide a very good visual guide for passage planning and orientation.

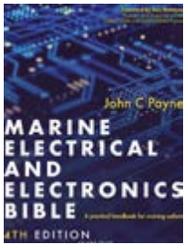
Whether visiting Labrador for its own beauty or passing along its rugged coast en route to or from Greenland or Baffin Island, the CCA *Cruising Guide To Labrador* provides excellent guidance for both isolated and fascinating anchorages and for safe bolt holes when seeking shelter. Whilst challenging in its remoteness, Labrador offers those enticed by its lonely anchorages the chance to cruise amidst magnificent scenery and wildlife, to be alone with nature and to enjoy some wonderful cruising. It is highly recommended.

MNF

* See *CRUISING LABRADOR, 2023* by Martin Fuller in *Flying Fish* 2024.

MARINE ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS BIBLE

by John C Payne (4th edition)



Published in hard cover by Adlard Coles (bloomsbury.com) at £60. 652 pages (185 x 260mm), including 16 pages of colour photographs and many mono tables and diagrams. ISBN: 1-978-1-3994-1418-0

My much-thumbed first edition of this book was on our boat's bookshelf 10,000 miles away when the fourth edition landed on our Welsh doorstep, making it impossible to compare it directly with its 30-year-old predecessor. Boats have grown considerably and so too have their systems. This growth is reflected in the dimensions of the new edition, which has become a formidable tome covering everything from watermakers to lightning mitigation and weighing just under 1.5kg. It is densely packed with information, advice, directories and a comprehensive index. The author, an engineer with vast experience of marine systems, has made a great job of presenting his knowledge in a readable format illustrated with good quality diagrams and colour pictures.

I must confess that I found the task of reviewing such a comprehensive and technical work quite daunting. My initial plan was to use it as a companion text to assist in some of the many tasks to be completed before our delayed return to our boat, but publication deadlines prevented this approach. Instead, I sat down with and read the whole text from cover to cover. In the process I learned much and discovered, to my horror, all the maintenance jobs I should have been doing every year for the last 30 years. The chapter on lightning I found particularly terrifying and will be referring to it when we get back to our boat. To be clear, I am a jobbing amateur boat maintainer and cruiser with no engineering background and so I had much to learn!

The *Marine Electrical and Electronics Bible* is a 'must have' when planning those big boat projects and when clicking a link to a YouTube video doesn't solve the problem. It describes the various national and international standards and delves into the complexities of galvanic corrosion, plasma bubbles and scintillation without dumbfounding the ardent amateur.

It seems churlish to pick holes in such a worthwhile publication but, like nearly all textbooks, it was slightly out-of-date on a few topics before it was even published. I was disappointed that the chapter on battery technology didn't delve deeper into the safety profiles of the Lithium Iron Phosphate (LiFePO), batteries as they have captured the market in recent years. Similarly, 10 pages were devoted to Single Sideband (SSB) & HAM radio but only 11 lines to Starlink, even though a recent survey of OCC members showed that it was used by more than 67% of our ocean wanderers. There's a chapter on mobile phones and cybersecurity, but this doesn't mention the emergence of the eSIM and VPN. The AIS chapter made no mention of 'Over the Horizon AIS' which has become a wonderful tool for the ocean navigator in the past year or two.

The principle of a modern textbook is to provide a firm foundation of knowledge and leave the internet – with all its forums, chat groups and instructional videos – to provide the latest word. *The Marine Electrical and Electronics Bible* makes a great job of fulfilling this principle, even though it doesn't point to any of the specific online resources that can fill in the inevitable gaps exposed by rapidly evolving technologies.

Despite its weight I will be squeezing this into our luggage when we fly back to the South Pacific, and have no doubt that it will soon be smeared with oily fingerprints as I use it to solve the puzzles of recommissioning failures and the installation of a new RayNet network. I have much head-scratching to come in the next few months, but am very grateful for John Payne's efforts to demystify the wonders and woes of modern boat electrical and electronic systems.

SC

UNDER WIDE AND STARRY SKIES: 50 SAILING DESTINATIONS IN SEAS LESS TRAVELLED

by Nicholas Coghlan

Published in hard cover by Adlard Coles (bloomsbury.com) at £22 / US$35. 336 pages (156 x 232mm), most bearing a colour photograph, chartlet or drawing. ISBN 978-1-3994-1375-6.

Nicholas Coghlan and his partner Jenny have sailed more than 70,000 miles over the last 40 years in two yachts, *Tarka the Otter* and *Bosun Bird*, both quite small at only 27ft. Their aim in this book is to suggest some of the more unusual places to visit under sail, so getting away from the well-travelled and often crowded routes.

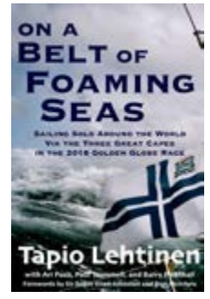
The 50 anchorages described are very varied. None are truly extreme, in fact most are reasonably accessible and safe, but none can be visited in a charter boat or by a day sail so the chances of solitude are high. Destinations include islands and harbours in the North and South Pacific, the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean, and on the west coast of the USA and Canada. Each is described in detail and illustrated by a sketch chart, with information including navigational aids, entry formalities, security risks, cultural differences and what you might find on arrival. It makes no claims to be a pilot book, of course, and should be viewed as a supplement to the usual charts and guides, not a replacement.

The author's experiences, along with fascinating historical details – several places had visits long ago from the very early explorers and navigators – make for very interesting reading even if you have little chance of actually visiting these places yourself. It's a perfect book to dip into and would bring back great memories for anyone whose cruising, possibly many years earlier, included some of these destinations – six of them for this reviewer.

There are sketch charts and evocative colour photos on almost every page and, because each chapter is complete in itself, the destinations in *Under Wide and Starry Skies* can be read in any order. There's well-researched historical and cultural information together with observations on how things change, places that were considered too dangerous for yachts forty years ago are now okay and vice-versa. Likewise costs: in 1974 it cost US$100 for a 40ft yacht to pass through the Panama Canal, by 2025 it was more than US$2,000.

Excellently written, beautifully produced and very entertaining, *Under Wide and Starry Skies* is highly recommended.

EHMH



ON A BELT OF FOAMING SEAS

by Tapio Lehtinen with Ari Pusa, Paul Trammell & Barry Pickthall

Independently published in soft covers and available from Amazon at £9.50 / US$11.99. 258 pages (152 x 229mm), illustrated with several dozen mono photographs. ISBN 979-8-8426-3113-1

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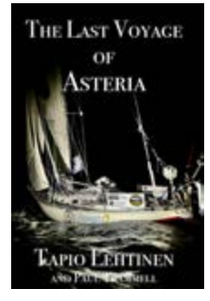


THE LAST VOYAGE OF ASTERIA

by Tapio Lehtinen with Paul Trammell & Ari Pusa

Independently published and available from Amazon in soft covers at £10.04 / US$12.99 or hard covers at £23.26 / US$30. 192 pages (152 x 229mm), carrying a limited number of mono photographs. ISBN 979-8-3151-6641-2

On a Belt of Foaming Seas (*OBFS*) tells of Tapio Lehtinen's first single-handed circumnavigation aboard *Asteria* in the 2018/9 Golden Globe Race (GGR18). *The Last Voyage of Asteria* (*TLVA*) recounts his second attempt at the race in 2022/3 (GGR22), which ended in the loss *Asteria* and his subsequent rescue from the Indian Ocean.

The 2018/9 Golden Globe Race was conceived and organised by Don McIntyre, an Australian adventurer and circumnavigator, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the original Sunday Times Golden Globe Race. In it, and in subsequent GGRs, entrants are limited to yachts and equipment similar to that available to Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, the winner – and only finisher – of the 1968/9 race. Modern technology is not permitted except for emergency and safety use, though there are some exceptions which are clearly laid out in the rules.

OCC member Tapio, a Finnish engineer, was 61 when he started GGR18. He had a background in dinghy, day keelboat and yacht racing and had been a watch captain on *Skopbank of Finland* in the 1981/2 Whitbread Round the World Race when he was just 23. His entry in GGR18 was expected to be competitive, even though, like many short-handed race entrants, he was working right up until the start to get his boat ready to go. Indeed, he and others felt that a podium placing was within his grasp, but this was not to be ... and by a long way.

Three months into GGR18, which was expected to take about eight months, and wondering why *Asteria* seemed to be going more slowly than other competitors, Tapio took advantage of a calm and discovered the whole of *Asteria*'s underwater hull covered in gooseneck barnacles. Antifouling regulations for the Baltic Sea are stringent, and although *Asteria*'s was the strongest that could legally be applied in Finland it did not pass muster in the open ocean. The barnacle growth was too much for Tapio to deal with at sea, and biosecurity measures meant that he was not permitted to scrape *Asteria*'s hull in the water at

the film gate stop at Hobart. Unwilling to retire, or to lift out, scrape, re-antifoul and then continue in the Chichester Class, Tapio resigned himself to a very slow 'race'. But although he wasn't competitive he did finish, coming 5th overall in 322 days, 110 days more than race-winner Jean-Luc van der Heede. Thirteen of the 21 starters did not finish at all.

Four years later, Tapio was on the start-line for GGR22 and, again, a leading competitor in the race. Eleven weeks into the race *Asteria* was in second place behind Kirsten Neuschäfer's *Minnehaha*, beating into 'a nice ENE force 3', when he was woken by a loud crack. By the time he had wriggled out of his bunk he was knee-deep in seawater. *Asteria* sank remarkably quickly, but Tapio managed to get into his survival suit and collect his emergency communications grab-bag before launching and boarding his liferaft. Happily, the weather was good. Kirsten reached his position in less than 24 hours and, having initially struggled to see the liferaft in the swell, took Tapio on board. A few hours later the bulk carrier *Darya Gayatri* rendezvoused with *Minnehaha* and Tapio transferred to the ship via his liferaft, leaving Kirsten to continue – and win – GGR22.

As an ocean sailor I found the books fascinating and I think that both, in particular *On a Belt of Foaming Seas*, have a lot to offer any reader. In it Tapio's patent excitement about the race, the feeling that he was a competitive entrant, and his subsequent disappointment when he realises that he will 'only' be a finisher are clear. However, I particularly enjoyed his descriptions of the environment and his reflections on the birds, the sea life, the skyscapes and the seas. In this era of climate change, and at a time when so few people have the opportunity to experience total solitude and true wilderness, this book brings home the real meanings of 'at one with nature' and 'self-reliance' almost poetically.

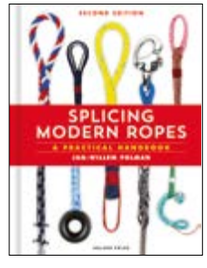
I think that Tapio said much of what he wanted to say in *On a Belt of Foaming Seas*, so I found that quite a lot of *The Last Voyage of Asteria* felt like 'filler' – e.g. there were several pages of verbatim dialogue between Tapio and Race Control which would have been better summarised. The latter part of the book, from the sinking of *Asteria* to the follow-up discussion on 'Lessons Learned' and 'The Most Likely Reason Why *Asteria* Sank' were very interesting, however, though again parts would have benefited from greater précising.

For offshore sailors, Tapio's experience of, and reflections on, abandoning ship are particularly valuable. He did everything right (other than have spare glasses in his liferaft or grab-bag) following the 'Protection, Location, Water, Food' mnemonic. He dressed in his survival suit, grabbed the comms grab-bag and launched the liferaft, but had to leave other grab-bags behind. Once in the liferaft he concentrated on securing it, deploying the drogue, bailing, applying sunscreen and taking seasickness pills before looking to activate the PLB (personal locator beacon). One of *Asteria*'s EPIRBs deployed automatically as she sank, but it took a further two hours for Tapio to manually activate the liferaft's PLB, thus proving he was still alive. In today's 'always connected' world this might seem dreadfully slow but, isn't when you consider the shock Tapio must have been suffering and the difficulty of performing tasks in a liferaft, even in good conditions. He was very lucky that the weather was benign, both to make his time in the liferaft relatively comfortable and to enable his rescue and subsequent transfer to *Darya Gayatri*.

Overall, I enjoyed both books very much, although there were times when both slowed. This was more obvious in *The Last Voyage of Asteria* than in *On a Belt of Foaming Seas*, primarily through lack of paring the text. *OBFS* contains a glossary of sailing terms, usefully for the non-sailor, though *TLVA* does not. Both include black and white photographs, diagrams and chartlets, which provide useful and interesting illustration. Unfortunately the text on some of the images is very small, requiring a magnifying glass to be read, and these would have been better printed on a page oriented in landscape rather than in portrait. Similarly, in *TLVA* there are two chartlets of *Asteria*'s near shipwreck on Fuerteventura in the Canaries which are rather difficult interpret – they'd have benefited from compass roses, a wind direction arrows and direction of travel indicators.

Finally, at times it is not immediately clear who is narrating. Parts of the texts were not written by Tapio and it would assist the flow of the book, as well as being interesting for the reader, to know which of the contributors wrote, or led on, each chapter. This may result from the books being self-published rather than professionally edited. Nevertheless, they are enjoyable and informative and I would recommend them to all sailors, not just ocean sailors.

NSB



SPLICING MODERN ROPES

by Jan-Willem Polman (2nd edition)

Published in hard covers by Bloomsbury Publishing (bloomsbury.com) at £22 / US$30. 192 pages (196 x 252mm), with many hundreds of colour photographs. ISBN 978-1-3994-1726-6

Splicing Modern Ropes is sub-titled *A Practical Handbook* and it doesn't lie.

It kicks off with a few pages about the development of synthetic ropes, various types of construction, their different properties and which too choose for each application. Then come a few pages about splicing tools (most of which will probably be aboard already) and techniques such as extracting the core from inside the cover, tapering the end of a rope and 'milking' the cover.

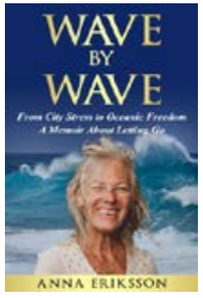
Very sensibly, those new to splicing are eased in on the 'bottom rung' – making a soft eye-splice in three-strand rope, something which should be familiar to nearly all boat-owners and certainly all OCC members. Next comes splicing rope to chain, splicing 12-strand rope and splicing braided ropes, including around thimbles, and finally splicing Dyneema. Every possible type of splice seems to be covered in every variety of marine rope currently available.

What makes *Splicing Modern Ropes* outstanding are the exceptionally clear, step-by-step instructions, with every stage illustrated by a colour photo. Most splices involve six or eight photos spread over two or three pages, though 'Joining a single braid Dyneema rope with double braid polyester' requires a sequence of 23 photos spread over seven pages. It would, incidentally, be perfectly possible to learn splicing from this book with even with very limited English.

Towards the end we find a variety of whippings, followed by instructions for reeving a new halyard. Again, things which every OCC member ought to know, but a few may not. The Appendices, covering Features of Synthetic Fibres and Breaking Loads, are followed by a comprehensive index.

All in all an outstanding book and worth having aboard even if your boat, like mine, features nothing more modern than ordinary polyester braid. Very highly recommended.

AOMH



WAVE BY WAVE:
FROM CITY STRESS TO OCEANIC FREEDOM
by Anna Eriksson

Published by Avalona Publishing and available from Amazon in hard covers £20.87 / US$28, soft covers at £19.99 / US$24 and for Kindle. 242 pages (178 x 254mm), with 20 photographs in the Kindle edition though none in the print versions. ISBN 978-9-1988-1465-1

Anna's book is subtitled *A Memoir About Letting Go* and is an exploration of personal development set in the context of the decision to make a circumnavigation and through the experiences, feelings and nature of such a journey. It is an account with which many OCC members will identify as Anna describes in a self-effacing way the practical challenges of preparing for and undertaking a circumnavigation.

Anna's professional life was as a coach of senior executives in leadership development. She met her husband at a meditation centre, and though Arthur had sailed extensively in the Baltic she had virtually no sailing experience. The decision to become a circumnavigator was a massive one for Anna, leaving behind her career and comfortable lifestyle in Stockholm. Even so, they chose to sell up and sail away. Anna describes the emotions involved in parting with their 'stuff' – they chose not to put things into storage – and moving aboard.

The chapters are short and make for easy and enjoyable reading, focusing on individual aspects of the practical journey as well as their 'self-awareness journey'. At the end of each chapter is a question to ponder at leisure, though these questions could also be used as a focus of discussion. Anna often mentions the improvement in their communication and understanding as she and her husband explore issues together.

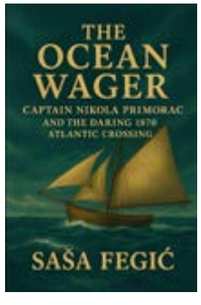
They set sail in May 2019 from their home city of Stockholm and passed through the Panama Canal in 2020, the day before it was closed due to Covid. Like many of us they thought the closures would only last a matter of weeks. The Pacific transit became for them, as for many, a tense time of hoping and waiting for permission to land. They were allowed into Hiva Oa in the Marquesas and then into New Zealand, one of very few boats which managed to get permission. They spent an extended time in NZ as Covid played out around the world, and Anna used the enforced downtime to write up her reflections on many aspects of her life, drawing on her coaching and therapy background. For them, as for many, NZ was a prime location for maintenance, but for Anna this was more than replacing the standing rigging, it was an opportunity for 'inner maintenance'. She then describes the passage to South Africa and across the

South Atlantic before reaching the Canary Islands and the completion of their journey in November 2024.

Anna's first language is Swedish but she has chosen to write in English. This occasionally results in idioms that native English speakers may not fully understand. Even so, many of Anna's reflections on the sailing life resonated with me. I loved the phrase 'every ocean is new for the first time so it is hard to get an exact feel for it until you have sailed it yourself'.

This book will particularly appeal to those who already are, or would like to be, exploring their thoughts and emotions in more detail than our busy lives usually permit. Through the descriptions Anna gives of her own internal journey she encourages us to 'follow the dreamer in us'. Overall, a very refreshing insight into a professional coach's journey around the world, exploring the opportunities for self-development in many aspects of our experiences of crossing oceans and visiting new places. I very much enjoyed it!

SAC



THE OCEAN WAGER:
CAPTAIN NIKOLA PRIMORAC
AND THE DARING 1870 ATLANTIC CROSSING
by Saša Fegić

Independently published in soft covers and available from Amazon at £9.70 / US$12.99. 77 pages (152 x 229mm), including seven mono images. ISBN 979-8-2847-5198-5

OCC Member and Qualifier's Mug winner Saša Fegić has written and published a book about an extraordinary early ocean crossing. Intrigued by snippets of information about an Atlantic crossing by a fellow Croatian instigated by a bet made in a pub, Saša investigated various sources of information and pieced together a story that deserved to be told.

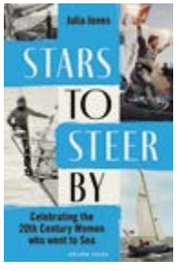
It's a story that only someone who has crossed oceans could imagine and recreate. In the summer of 1870, Captain Nikola Primorac from Dubrovnik, a sailor of modest means, was in a bar in Liverpool when a man announced that you couldn't cross the Atlantic in a yawl. Nikola stood up and said he could. They made a wager and Nikola set about finding a boat.

He found an abandoned 6m (20ft) yawl that had served as tender to a vessel which had sunk, and together with Irishman John Buckley set about restoring her and equipping her for the North Atlantic. He named the boat *City of Ragusa* to honour his home town. They departed Liverpool after provisioning with salt rations, water in barrels and dry bread. Ninety days later they reached Boston, 'half-starved, half-mad and 100% victorious'. The east-to-west crossing had been a gruelling experience. They achieved some notoriety in Boston but Primorac didn't do it to achieve fame, he did it because he knew he could.

Then the return voyage had to be accomplished. Irishman John Buckley did not return with Primorac and instead he was joined by an Englishman named Edward Hayter. They made it to Ireland in 36 days, less than half the westward crossing. What later befell Primorac is a sad story but the *City of Ragusa* was preserved in the Liverpool Museum until destroyed by bombing in World War Two.

The Ocean Wager is a very east read and preserves a little bit of nautical history that most of us would never have known.

DOB



STARS TO STEER BY

by Julia Jones

Published in hard covers by Adlard Coles (bloomsbury.com) at £19.80 / US$30. 335 pages (163 x 243mm), with a couple of dozen mono photographs. ISBN 978-1-3994-1546-0

Firstly, I must declare an interest as my sister and I are mentioned in this book, albeit briefly and, I fear, on somewhat false pretences as nothing we did was particularly groundbreaking or challenging. Secondly, a reviewer is generally expected to start at the beginning and read through to the end. Having done so I don't think this is the best way to approach *Stars to Steer By*. There's so much detail about so many different people that I began to feel slightly overwhelmed, even towards the end when nearly all the names were familiar and many of the women known to me personally. It's much more of a 'dip into' book, aided by the detailed contents page, bibliography, endnotes and index.

Stars to Steer By is subtitled *Celebrating the 20th Century Women who went to Sea*, but this is something of a misnomer as the first to be featured is Anna Brassey, born 1839, who circumnavigated with her husband and four children aboard the 159ft, 532 ton *Sunbeam* in the 1870s – though with 29 paid crew it's unlikely she took a very active part in the sailing. In contrast, Barbara Hughes, born 1872, raced a variety of small boats with her father, brothers and sisters with considerable success and 'without even the luxury of a paid hand'. Other successful female racers of the time were sisters Maud and Winnie Suttton and the five Smith-Dorien daughters who grew up on the Isles of Scilly ... and there were many more. Fascinating asides describe their sailing clothes – and hats! – and the dismissive attitude of all too many men and nearly all yacht clubs. The latter took a very long time to change, as I discovered on being barred from parts of the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club and the Royal Yacht Squadron in the 1980s and '90s respectively.

The part played by women in both World Wars is not neglected. Although the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS or Wrens) was formed in 1917, women were never allowed afloat and it was disbanded two years later. It was very different in World War Two when many Wrens went to sea, either on troop ships or as Boarding Officers, Boat Crew, stokers (effectively engineers) or deck crew. Other the women took over 'men's' jobs ashore, including Kathleen Palmer who edited *Yachting Monthly* magazine during the war years despite little sailing experience, a lack she made up for later.

Among the famous women sailors who grew up between the wars were Beryl Smeeton, née Boxer – anyone not already familiar with her and Miles's achievements should read *High Endeavours*, by Miles's godson – and Susan Sclater, better known as Susan Hiscock. In contrast, Aussie Jeanne Day stowed away on the four-masted barque *Herzogin Cecilie* in 1928 when she was just 23. Six years later the ship was carrying a few 'paying passengers', including journalist Pamela Bourne. Victoria Drummond, one of Queen Victoria's many grandchildren, trained as a marine engineer – sadly but perhaps inevitably, she seems to have faced male hostility throughout most of her 40-year seagoing career.

Later in the book we encounter women such as Ann Davison, the first woman to cross the Atlantic single-handed, and Rozelle Raynes, née Pierrepont, the daughter of an earl who had been a Wren Boat Crew during the war and who later sailed single-handed to the Baltic. Many wrote about their experiences, but none rivalled Mary Blewitt, a sought-after racing navigator who, in 1950, wrote the classic *Celestial Navigation for Yachtsmen*, now in its 13th edition.

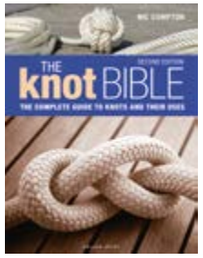
These are followed by a cohort of yachtswomen such as Nicolette Milnes-Walker, in 1971 the first woman to sail direct from the UK to the US – see *When I put out to Sea*, reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2024 – and Clare Francis, who went from singlehanding in the 1976 OSTAR to skippering *ADC Accutrac* in the 1977/8 Whitbread Round the World Race. A later chapter highlights sailing partnerships and 'co-skippers' such as Rob and Naomi James, who sailed and raced both together and separately, and Tom and Vicky Jackson, frequent contributors to *Flying Fish*. In contrast, prior to going solo, Blue Water Medalist Annie Hill sailed with two outstanding skippers, neither of whom were willing to let her be more than crew despite her obvious capabilities.

The achievements of Tracy Edwards, Ellen McArthur and Kirsten Neuschäfer are likely to be known to most readers, all having achieved notable success in the racing world. They are among the women who Julia Jones was able to interview at length, which naturally makes for interesting stories. The book ends on a largely positive note – Abbey Molyneux runs a respected boatyard on the east coast, while in 2014 Elaine Bunting became the first female editor of *Yachting World* magazine in its 117-year history.

As with the same author's *Uncommon Courage*, reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2022/2, the depth and breadth of her research is truly impressive. Even so there are some notable omissions, including Lady Denise Evans, whose autobiography *Reaching Beyond* is reviewed on page 271 of this issue, and single-handed racer Mary Falk, whose obituary appeared in *Flying Fish* 2022/2. My only other criticism is that photographs are placed at the end of each chapter rather than with the relevant text. I cannot think of a logical explanation for this when all the photos are mono.

To sum up, *Stars to Steer By* is a fascinating book and one I'm sure I will return to. The comprehensive index and bibliography make it easy to locate a specific person and an invaluable resource for further research. Highly recommended subject to the proviso in the first paragraph.

AOMH



THE KNOT BIBLE

by Nic Compton (2nd edition)

Published in hard covers by Bloomsbury Publishing (bloomsbury.com) at £25 / US$35. 320 pages (197 x 253mm), with multiple colour photographs on every page. ISBN 978-1-3994-0436-5

I thought I recognised this title and, sure enough, not only did I review the first edition for *Flying Fish* 2013/2 but there it was on my bookshelf. Back then I wrote (précised somewhat):

> *'Despite regarding with suspicion any book which describes itself as The Xxxx Bible, and/or The Complete Guide to Xxxx, I'm aware that the author is often not responsible for either title or cover lines, and in this case there's no denying that Nic Compton has done an excellent job – as have all the others involved in the production of this handsome book. After a dozen or so pages covering the history of knots, useful tools, and types of rope (natural and synthetic) and their care, Nic presents his list of the 'ten most useful knots'. My suspicion is that if you asked a dozen yachties you'd get a dozen different lists, and indeed his omits one of my favourites (the fisherman's bend) and includes one I'd never heard of (the zeppelin bend).*
>
> *Such a vast subject needs organisation, achieved by classification into hitches, bends, loops, knots, lashings, coils, decorative knots, whippings and seizings and, finally, splices. Most occupy a page, some two pages, with between two and five captioned photographs illustrating different stages of the tying. Each knot is given a 'score' for strength, security, difficulty tying, difficulty untying (how sensible!) and usefulness.*
>
> *A great many of the more specialised knots are fun but unlikely to be in regular use – it's a long time since I've needed to hitch a camel, for instance, let alone a zeppelin – but anyone who thinks that a knowledge of knots is passé should study the last few pages, which cover the Spectra splice and the Dyneema reduction splice, loop and soft shackle.'*

So what has changed? To be honest, not very much. Nearly all the text, the vast majority of the photos and much of the layout is identical to the first edition. But that is not a criticism – the first edition was outstanding and this one is too.

Additions which caught my eye are the 15 'Best for . . .' double-page spreads: Best for tying a bucket, tying a fender, lashing things down, etc. Various possibilities are discussed and an overall winner suggested for each purpose. A few knots are presented under new names – e.g. the Mooring Hitch from the first edition is now called the Crossing Knot (pages 65 and 71 respectively). Finally, the dust cover has been dispensed with, but now the author's name appears on both the spine and the cover, which previously it did not.

In summary, a very nice book to add to your bookshelf ashore or afloat, but not sufficiently different to the previous edition to be worth replacing that if you already have it.

AOMH

OBITUARIES & APPRECIATIONS

VICE COMMODORE ZDENKA GRISWOLD

Zdenka Seiner Griswold died on 27 April at home in Portland, Maine with family by her side, following a July 2024 diagnosis of endometrial cancer. She was 68. Born in Prague, Czech Republic, she grew up in Prague and Vienna. Her family moved to New York City when she was 11 and, though her roots were in Prague, she called New York City home. She attended the UN International School from grade six through high school, followed by Sophia University International College in Tokyo while her father, an international lawyer, worked in that city. She received a BA in English and American Literature from Brown University in 1978, an MPA (Masters of Public Administration) from Baruch College/City University of New York in 1982, and a JD (Juris Doctor) from Fordham University School of Law in 1992, where she was Editor-in-Chief of the *International Law Journal*.

On Crane Beach, Massachusetts, 1992

Exploring Panama's San Blas Islands, 2011

St John, US Virgin Islands, 2016

On passage to Newfoundland, 2016

She met Jack, her life partner and husband of 35 years, while working with refugee organisations in New York, after spending the early years of her career as a refugee and immigration advocate in Washington D.C. On finishing law school, she became a derivatives lawyer at Hughes Hubbard and Reed, a New York law firm, and later at Merrill Lynch and Lehman Brothers.

In 2007 she and Jack quit their jobs and moved to Portland, Maine. From 2009 until 2016 they circumnavigated aboard *Kite*, their 42ft Valiant, Zdenka citing their passage from the Galápagos to the Marquesas when she upgraded from Associate to Full OCC Membership in 2011. They explored more than 40 countries along the way, including numerous islands in the South Pacific, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and South Africa. Zdenka especially loved her time in Cartagena (Colombia), the San Blas islands off Panama, the Galápagos and stunning Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas. She and Jack watched the Tamure during the Heiva Festival in Tahiti, walked the Milford Track in New Zealand, drift-dived the crystal-clear waters of Cocos Keeling and climbed Piton des Neiges on Réunion Island, the tallest mountain in the Indian Ocean.

On the summit of Katahdin, 2023

From 2014 until 2016 she and Jack were OCC Roving Rear Commodores, and on their return were appointed joint Port Officers for Portland, a post they held until 2018. They sailed extensively along the Maine coast, up and down the Eastern Seaboard, throughout the Bahamas and in Bermuda, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Their land travels included frequent visits to Prague and the Czech Republic as well as trips throughout Europe. They skied in Utah, cruised the Nile, fell in love with Spain and hiked the Ecuadorian Andes.

Beginning in her youth, Zdenka was an avid hiker and mountain climber, scaling multiple peaks, including the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc in the Alps, Mount Fuji in Japan, Triglav in Slovenia and Mounts Whitney and Washington in the US. During high school she climbed in the Shawangunks near New Paltz, New York. While living in Japan, she was a member of the Japanese Alpine Club, mountaineering and skiing in the Japanese Alps. At age 66 she climbed Katahdin, Maine's highest peak at 5,267ft, solo in one day. Her skeptical husband stayed home.

Zdenka was an active and valued member of both the Ocean Cruising Club and the Cruising Club of America. In 2017 she was elected to the OCC's General Committee and became a Rear Commodore two years later. On becoming a Flag Officer, she was appointed to Chair of both the Publications sub-committee and the Governance committee. In 2021, at a time when many clubs were shrinking in the wake of Covid, she took on the Membership brief, numbers increasing by 11% during her three years in post. In 2024 she was elected a Vice Commodore, and this year received the OCC Award in recognition of her more than ten years' service to the Club.

Merchant Row in Penobscot Bay, Maine, 2019

At the CCA she was editor of *Voyages*, the Club magazine, from 2017 to 2021, and served on the Boston Membership committee and the Awards committee. She received the Vilas Literary Prize, the Circumnavigation Award, and the Commodore's Award.

Zdenka lived a marvellous life. She was blessed with much good fortune, a loving family and loyal friends from across the country and around the world. She felt extraordinarily lucky to have found her soulmate in Jack. Together they had a wondrous time, seeing, experiencing and doing much more than they could have imagined or hoped for. She was grateful for it all. In her last months she faced her cancer with exceptional openness and courage which even her doctors remarked upon.

Few things in a sailor's life are worse than seasickness and Zdenka would succumb on rough ocean passages. Yet no matter how terrible the conditions or how terrible she felt, she always stood her watch. And so, with her life, she always stood her watch. She was open-hearted, kind, whip smart, adventurous and a lifelong learner who was always generous with her time, her laughter and her friendship. She will be deeply missed by the wide circle of family, friends and colleagues whose lives she touched. She is survived by her husband Jack, mother Dagmar Drahoslava Seiner, brother Yan Seiner, two nieces and a nephew.

Jack and Zdenka Griswold

Commodore Fi with husband Chris, Zdenka and Jack, plus wonderdog Miki, in Portland, Maine, 2025

We met Zdenka and Jack whilst crossing the Indian Ocean. In La Réunion we shared a car, toured and hiked and started what became a strong and close friendship. Whilst sharing an OCC members' meal before the last leg to South Africa we formed an SSB radio net of *Kite*, *Shango*, *Houkule'a* and *Three Ships*. Zdenka was always on time and we shared our experiences and our fears with tales of the Mother of all Lightning Storms, Boisterous Seas, and High Winds but we also shared light-hearted moments and much laughter. The four of us shared our love of hiking, of wildlife and the natural world, of having to reach the highest spot on any island, of the OCC and of enjoying life. We spent time together in many unfamiliar lands and in each other's homes too.

Zdenka and I joined the OCC General Committee at the same time and also served together on the OCC Board. We shared beliefs, ideals and commitment and there are few who have given more to the Club, her amazing eye for detail and her loyalty helped us all. I was so sad to lose her as Vice Commodore and she hated having to resign when she became ill. In her last text to me Zdenka wrote "meeting friends like you is what makes cruising so amazing and so worthwhile".

How true were your words, Z, and how grateful we were that, despite all that was happening to you and to Jack, you still welcomed us with open arms to share precious last days together. The trouble with finding your true soulmate is that one of you has to go first and our hearts go out to Jack as he looks back on your amazing life together, which thank goodness you both lived to the full.

You will be sorely missed Zdenka by us all, rest in peace, you were one in a million and will be remembered always.

Fi Jones, Commodore

It's hard to believe that Zdenka's adventurous life has come so quickly to an end. When we last saw her she was full of energy, charm and good humour. Her illness was swift but she bore it with dignity and positivity despite knowing that her prognosis was hopeless.

During her many years of service to the OCC (and the CCA) she always gave her time unstintingly and took on many arduous roles. Her tact, intelligence and sound judgement made her an invaluable Board Member who excelled at any task she took on. But it was our friendship and her infectious enthusiasm for the cruising life that we will remember most.

We are fortunate to have been inspired by Zdenka and to have been a trusted friend. We will miss her.

Simon Currin, Commodore 2019–24

I first met Zdenka and Jack in 2016 when, newly-elected as Commodore, I was invited to attend the legendary Maine Rally. Zdenka was clearly an exceptional person and I was delighted when she joined the GC the following year.

Finishing my three years as Commodore coincided with Zdenka joining the Board and I worked hard to persuade her to take over from me as Chair of the Publications sub-committee. I was unaware that she was also editor of *Voyages* but there couldn't have been a better fit – she was the perfect 'boss', never interfering but always ready with constructive advice when appropriate. There's no doubt that *Flying Fish* benefited from her input.

We rapidly became e-friends, exchanging photos, corresponding on all kinds of topics and disproving the old idea that Brits and Americans don't share a sense of humour. I miss her greatly.

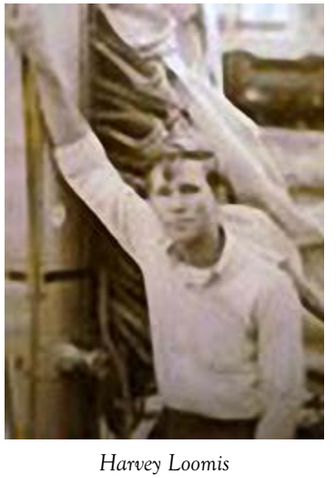
Anne Hammick, Commodore 2016–19, *Flying Fish* editor 1990–2024

The only time I met Zdenka in person was at the 2018 AGM weekend in Bristol. I remember two things: her charming smile and that clearly she knew a great deal more than me about editing cruising publications. I was looking forward to meeting her again in 2020 at the Annapolis AGM that never happened. In the meantime, we conducted a somewhat desultory but always entertaining correspondence supposedly concerning OCC publications business. However our emails also ranged over diverse areas of mutual interest from US politics to the cultural joys of my two favourite central European cities whence she hailed.

Her management style was light of touch but always ready with support when necessary and advice when asked. The OCC was lucky to have her contributing to its administration and unlucky not to have had the benefits of her wisdom and skill for longer.

Jeremy Firth, *Newsletter* editor 2016–22

FOUNDER MEMBER HARVEY LOOMIS



Harvey Loomis aboard Gulvain *in 1950*

Harvey Battell Loomis died peacefully from the effects of Alzheimer's disease at his home in Sagaponack on New York's Long Island on 20 March 2025. He was 93.

He grew up in Manhattan, attended the Buckley School and Deerfield Academy, where he played lacrosse and soccer, and was president of the debating club and managing editor of the school newspaper and the president of the senior class. He graduated from Yale University in 1953 and following Officer Candidate School served in the US Navy for three years, mainly aboard the USS *Coral Sea* in the Mediterranean.

His father, Alfred F Loomis, was a distinguished yachtsman, a Founder Member of the CCA, editor and columnist for *Yachting* magazine and author of several sailing books. His mother, Priscilla Lockwood Loomis, was a suffragette and a founding member of

Gulvain *under sail*

the New York Child Care Council. Harvey, the youngest of their four children, started sailing at a young age. He made his first long cruise, from Long Island's Cold Spring Harbor to Nova Scotia's Bras d'Or Lakes when he was 15, as crew aboard *Mustang* skippered by Rod Stephens. He was a Founder Member of the OCC, having crossed the Atlantic from Bermuda to Plymouth, UK with OCC Founder Humphrey Barton aboard the 55ft *Gulvain* in 1950 at the age of 18. This was followed by his first Bermuda Race (Newport to Bermuda) in 1952 at the age of 20, aboard *Bloodhound*, which was later to become famous under royal ownership.

Circe, *a classic 57ft Sparkman & Stephens yawl built in 1950*

The crew of Circe *following the 1956 Bermuda Race. Harvey is standing second from right with his father Alfred seated next to him*

Harvey in later life

As well as making two more transatlantic passages he completed 15 (biennial) Bermuda Races – missing only four between 1952 and 1988 – two Fastnet Races, three Annapolis-Newport Races, two Marblehead-Halifax races, the Buenos Aires-Rio Race, the Sydney-Hobart Race, the Miami-Montego Bay Race and many others. More locally he competed in the Vineyard and Block Island races countless times, as well as races on the Great Lakes and in Maine, Florida and England. He was heard to express regret at not having sailed in the 1979 Fastnet Race, in which the fleet was hit by storm force winds and heavy seas, and 18 lives were lost, saying he felt it would have been exciting and memorable experience.

He took part in the OCC-CCA Azores Cruise in 1985, sailing there from Stonington, CT aboard *Wissahickon* with Sheila McCurdy, Ian McCurdy and John Rousmaniere, and also cruised the Caribbean and Bahamas, Tahiti, New Zealand, Scandinavia (twice) and Vancouver Island, Canada. He raced and/or cruised on a variety of yachts, many of them famous, including *Mustang*, *Stormy Weather*, *Circe*, *Gulvain*, *Moonbeam* (Bill Rothschild), *Weatherly*, *Pageant* (John Page) and *Toscana* (Eric Swenson).

An inveterate traveller by land as well as sea, he visited most of the countries in Europe; visited Egypt, Kenya, Tanganyika (now Tanzania) in Africa; Nunavit in NE Canada; Alaska; the Far East, including Japan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Singapore and India; Micronesia including Hawaii, Palau and Tahiti; Australia and New Zealand; Central America; the Galápagos islands and made a number of trips to Russia.

When not sailing or travelling he worked for Time-Life Inc in Manhattan, first in the photography department at *LIFE* magazine, then as a reporter and finally as a writer and editor at Time-Life Books. When the book division relocated to Alexandria, Virginia he opted to stay in New York and become a freelance editor from his new office in Times Square, producing books on music for Time-Life and nautical books for other publishers.

For two decades he sang with the Blue Hill Troupe, an amateur theatre company in New York which produced Gilbert & Sullivan operettas and Broadway musicals for charity. On moving to Sagaponack in 1980 he joined the Choral Society of the Hamptons, both singing and producing their programme notes. From 1979 until 1984 he served as OCC Rear Commodore USA East. He was also a trustee at the Hampton Library, served on the Tree committee for Sagaponack Village and sailed his DN iceboat, *Rose of Mecox*, when the pond froze.

From the 1980s onward Harvey devoted more time to family life as a wonderful stepfather to his partner, Linda's three children and as part of the year-round community in Sagaponack. He stayed in touch with the sailing world more remotely, but was always excited to get out on the water and to talk about boats, sailing and adventures.

He is survived by his wife and partner of 45 years, author Linda Bird Francke; three step-children and ten nieces and nephews.

Al Loomis and others

PATRICIA ('PAT') POCOCK

Pat died in December in Lymington, Hampshire at the age of 90. She was the daughter of OCC Founder Humphrey Barton, wife of Past Commodore the late Michael (Mike) Pocock and mother of Richard Pocock and Jenny Bennett.

Pat grew up in Milford-on-Sea and was a keen sailor from an early age. She and her twin brother Peter were a very successful team, racing Fireflies and National 12s and Pat also crewed on 13 major delivery trips with her father to and from Scandinavian and Mediterranean ports – Naples, Monaco, Marseilles, Trieste, etc – as well as around the UK.

Mike and Pat met sailing National 12s in Lymington, after Peter started sailing Finns. They married in 1960, after which they lived in Lymington. Their wedding present money was used to buy *Minion*, a 21ft cruising boat without an engine which took them on many exciting adventures around the English Channel and into the Bay of Biscay. Their next boat was *Whisper*, a Folkboat which Mike and Pat finished in the driveway of their home and used for more cruising.

Departing aboard Blackjack, *1987*

A string of yachts followed, forming a charter fleet. All were completed by Mike and Pat during the winter months while summers were spent turning them around every weekend for the next charters. Even so, there was always a boat available for family sailing. Pat handled all the business administration and correspondence with clients.

A story which Pat only told Jenny in the past few years was how, when she and Mike were newly married, they had a plan to emigrate to New Zealand by sailing there, the only hitch being lack of money to buy a boat. They had been keenly following – as much as you could in 1960 – the first Observer Single-handed Transatlantic Race and had an idea: would another Newspaper like to sponsor them? They proposed to the Daily Express that, with sponsorship, they would buy a small yacht and sail to New Zealand, providing articles on their voyage. The Daily Express was interested and obtained references on their sailing experience, from which the Editor concluded that there wasn't enough likelihood of a catalogue of newsworthy mistakes and dramas at sea to provide enough of a story, so sponsorship was not forthcoming.

Pat was always quietly game for any challenge. On one occasion she and Jenny were sailing a Starlight 30 down channel and, as dusk came down, the rudder fell off and floated away. Jury steering was attempted – trailing ropes and buckets, then floorboards on a spinnaker pole – to sail in somewhere. Jenny's over-riding memory of Pat during all of this is of her saying: "I've always been curious as to how hard rigging a jury rudder would be".

In 1987, 27 years after the Daily Express New Zealand plan, Pat and Mike did set off around the world in *Blackjack*, a 38ft cutter which Mike had designed for the 1981 Two-handed Transatlantic Race. They had quietly been dreaming

Sailing Whisper, *1954*

Aboard Starlight

of and planning this for years, and their preparations involved an Atlantic circuit in *Blackjack*, a voyage round Iceland, and moving into a smaller house in Lymington.

They were back after less than a year, however. Mike had a stroke when they were near Curaçao and the local medical advice was 'go home to see a specialist, but don't fly'. So Pat banished Mike to his bunk, took charge, and sailed *Blackjack* the 4,000 miles home in 30 days. Mike was seen in London by a friend who was a heart specialist and off they went again in 1988. They had a wonderful time and were a great team, joined on several occasions by Pat's stepmother (and later OCC Admiral) Mary Barton, as well as Richard and Jenny.

The voyage enabled them to meet and enjoy the company of many OCC members and Port Officers. Pat's favourite way of socialising was to ask guests aboard *BJ* for tea parties . . . she had so many cups and mugs stashed away and was always baking cakes and flapjacks. They returned home in 1994, after a seven-year circumnavigation which had included visits to Alaska, many Pacific islands, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.

Pat and Mike made one more long voyage with *Blackjack*, a Millenium cruise to the Caribbean and back in 2000, while Mike was OCC Commodore. Their objective was to meet as many OCC members and Port Officers as possible, and escape the English winter!

There was one more yacht, *Twilight*, purpose-built to Mike's design. Another ten years of cruising and OCC rallies followed, visiting France and Ireland. On the final leg Pat again had to take charge and sail *Twilight* back from Ireland to Holyhead.

After Mike died in late 2015 Pat surprised everyone by travelling to New Zealand on her own to see her twin brother Peter once more. On the way back she stopped over in Australia and had a fun time around Sydney with Richard. But once home in Lymington she said 'never again'! She moved to a smaller house across the road from Jenny and

Blackjack

In Sydney Botanic Gardens, 2016

her husband Jeremy. They would sometimes open their fridge and find a box of blackberries, so-called 'spares' after Pat had been picking to make pounds and pounds of jam. Cakes would also appear in their kitchen as if by magic.

On nice summer days Pat was occasionally persuaded to paddle a kayak with Jenny, and riding her bike around Lymington was always a passion. Persuading her that her 1950s bike should be replaced was hard work! Her final bicycle was *Yorvik* the power assisted trike – she definitely didn't want a mobility scooter, although they are very normal transport in Lymington. A trike is quite different to a bike to ride, but Pat was quite determined and mastered it at 88.

Pat loved Milford and lived in a house on the cliffs until her late 20s where, as she often told Jenny and me, the windows were always salty. As children we were taken over to Milford for outings, whether it was to go swimming after school on hot summer days, to buy school shoes, or for walks on the cliffs. Pat passed away at St George's Nursing Home in the same road as the house on the cliffs, and we all said good-bye at Milford Church in January 2025.

Richard Pocock

Canoeing on Lymington River, 2020

Pat on Yorvik, 2024

PAMELA ('PAM') K WALL

Pam Wall, who died in August 2024 at the age of 80, was barely 5ft tall but had a vast influence over the cruising community, particularly in the USA. Her legacy will continue to inspire and guide future generations of offshore sailors and adventurers. Born in 1944 in Highland Park, Illinois, Pam was immersed in the world of sailing from a young age and spent her early years sailing various family boats on Lake Michigan.

When she met Andy Wall, a tall, dashing Australian who had crossed the Pacific from Sydney to San Francisco and later been the first Australian to sail around round Cape Horn, it was a union of kindred spirits. Their shared love for sailing and adventure quickly blossomed into a profound partnership and Pam joined him in a life of exploration. Their 1972 honeymoon, spent crossing the Atlantic from Fort Lauderdale to England aboard his 28ft sloop *Carronade*, was just the beginning of a remarkable life together. Pam later described that first ocean passage as 'the happiest time of my life'. She joined the OCC three years later, citing a 1974 voyage in *Carronade* from the Galápagos to the Marquesas.

Pam and Andy in Horta in 2006

After spending three years exploring Europe and the Pacific, Pam and Andy returned to Florida to build a larger vessel. They bought the plans for a Freya 39, an iconic ocean racer which had won the Sydney Hobart Race three years straight in the 1960s. The hull was laid up in California, after which they trucked it back to Fort Lauderdale and completed *Kandarik* themselves, Pam working at Mack-Shaw Sailmakers and contributing to the boat's construction while also caring for their growing family. Their commitment to the project was evident in every detail of *Kandarik*'s design and construction.

In 1984, Pam, Andy and their children Samantha and Jamie, aged seven and four respectively, began an ambitious 6½ year circumnavigation. They experienced diverse cultures and landscapes, immersing themselves in the traditions and educational opportunities that each port offered. Their journey became a transformative experience for the whole family, Pam and Andy sharing with Samantha and Jamie not just the beauty of the world but also the values of resilience, adaptability, and open-mindedness.

Their return to Florida in 1991 marked a new chapter in Pam's life. She joined West Marine's flagship store in Fort Lauderdale as a fitting-out consultant, where

Kandarik *in 2014 with Pam at the helm*

Pam in the Bahamas

her hands-on cruising expertise became a valuable resource for fellow sailors. Pam's knowledge was unparalleled, and her guidance helped thousands of cruisers prepare for their own adventures. She also helped those already at sea to source essential parts and equipment, including organising a windlass motor to be sent to Thailand, radio parts to Sri Lanka and a replacement forestay to Sudan.

Pam also became well-known on the US boat show lecture circuit. Her talks were a blend of education, history, entertainment and championing of women sailors. She shared her own experiences and insights, making her presentations not only informative but inspiring, encouraging her audience to embrace the challenges and rewards of long-distance sailing. She also presented several OCC webinars during the long months of Covid. She was a mentor and role model for many aspiring female sailors, offering guidance, encouragement and support. Helping others achieve their goals was a hallmark of her character and a testament to her passion for sailing, while her problem-solving skills were legendary.

Pam served as OCC Port Officer for Fort Lauderdale, Florida from 2011 until 2019 and was always a perfect hostess – not least by inviting many OCC members to make use of her dock. This was recognised on her retirement by the The Port Officer Service Award. She never parted with her beloved *Kandarik*.

Clint Bush, Milt Baker and others

(Reprinted by kind permission of the Cruising Club of America, in whose journal *Voyages* parts of it previously appeared.)

JILLIAN ('JILL') VASEY

Jill Vasey, née Tracey, sailed out of this life on 19 March 2025, after 92 years living a very full life. Born in Norfolk to sailing parents, Jill grew up sailing Norfolk Punts with her father on the Broads and racing Firefly dinghies with her brother Peter. On going up to University College London to read Botany and Geology she immediately joined the University Sailing Club and spent most weekends on the water. In 1954 she was asked by Chris Ellis to join the crew of *Theodora*, a Bristol Pilot Cutter, as ship's cook for a boatload of school boys on a cruise to Spain and back – it was on this voyage that her passion for ocean sailing was born.

The following year she was invited to join a party of six for a weekend's sailing by an old school friend, Jill Williamson and her husband Peter on *Thoma*, their

140 ton barge yacht. Although it was a short cruise, for Jill it was nonetheless life changing as 18 months later she married one of the party, Tony Vasey, a young RAF fighter pilot who was quite new to sailing. Once married, Jill taught Tony all she knew about boats and together they bought *Mariner*, a 30ft Polperro-built gaffer which they lovingly restored and spent all their spare time sailing. This became the template for their life together. Wherever Tony was stationed, there was always a boat in a nearby harbour. From 1994 until 1998 he was to serve as Commodore of the OCC.

In Singapore they had *Brigand*, a 30ft Cheoy Lee ketch, and with her explored the islands and the east coast of Malaysia. They had planned to sail her home, but the Suez Canal was closed so they swapped to a VW van, which they converted and drove back with their two young children. This three-month, 12,000 mile voyage – which, being by land, did not qualify for joining the OCC – was nonetheless, a great adventure.

Jill and family on Brigand *in Singapore in 1966*

Seaboot, *Tony and Jill's lovely Alden yawl, in 1976*

It was not until 1979 that Jill finally had the opportunity to fulfil her ambition of making a long ocean voyage, crossing the Atlantic from Gran Canaria to Antigua in *Seaboot*, their 39ft Alden yawl. She cited this as her qualifying passage on joining the OCC in 1985. The voyage marked the end of a five-year partnership with *Seaboot*'s Canadian owner – Tony had brought her back to the UK from his posting in Toronto in 1974 and in 1977 they took her with them to Malta when Tony was appointed CO of the RAF base.

On Tony's retirement in 1983 he and Jill bought first *Whistler*, a 35ft Sovereign, and then *Shiant* a Rival 41 in which they made a classic Atlantic circuit in 1992/3 (see *Flying Fish* 1992/2 and 1993/1). They sailed from the Canaries to Barbados, island hopped north through the Caribbean, headed up through America's Intracoastal Waterway and finally crossed back to the UK from the French islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon in the Gulf of St Lawrence.

Taking sextant sights with Mary Barton in the Caribbean in 1992

With Andy Burgess on Shiant *in the Baltic in 1997*

In the early 1990s Jill and Tony took *Shiant* to the Baltic for two seasons, cruising and contributing to the *Baltic Pilot* book, for which Jill twice won the Royal Cruising Club's Archie Black Prize (see *Flying Fish* 1997/1 and 1998/1). They regularly joined OCC rallies in the UK and Europe with *Shiant*, and often flew to America to take part in rallies aboard their shared Cornish Crabber, *Clara*, which was moored on the US East Coast. In the 1990s Jill also found time to serve the OCC as Regalia Officer, a position she thoroughly enjoyed.

Jill aboard Shiant *in the Baltic 1997*

As the years started catching up with them and hauling sails was no longer fun, they bought a converted Dutch reed barge, *Penelope's Ark*, to explore the inland waterways of Europe, travelling the length of France, Holland, Belgium and Germany. Whilst no longer active ocean sailors they hosted many memorable OCC parties, a tradition started in the '80s at their home on the banks of Cornwall's Helford River and continued after their move to Dorset in 1992, where they converted a vast, empty barn into a lovely home with a magical garden – a unique party venue.

Jill will be remembered for her cast-iron stomach, her impeccable planning and victualling, her ability to produce tasty meals whatever the weather, her great interest in people and places and above all her excitement at what lay just over the horizon.

Tony Vasey

MICHAEL MCKEE

We regret to announce the passing of Michael McKee of Bangor, at the age of 94. He upheld the highest standards of seamanship throughout his extensive sailing career. Offshore sailing, whether cruising or racing, was his primary passion though with meticulous pilotage he also took great pleasure in exploring inshore waters and, over the years, skilfully navigated a wide variety of boats.

Although his family operated an auction house in Belfast, the spirit of seafaring ran in Michael's blood. His grandfather had commanded square-rigged ships on runs to Australia and South America, passing down cherished memories of rounding Cape Horn. In addition to his love of high-seas adventure, Michael was deeply involved in the administrative side of sailing. In his home town, he served on the committees and as officers of both the Ballyholme Yacht Club and the Royal Ulster Yacht Club which he had joined in 1958.

Elected to the Irish Cruising Club in 1962, Michael dedicated his service to the committee before being elected Rear Commodore and then Commodore from 1998 until 2000. He had an ebullient personality and quick wit which could energise any social gathering. He and his wife Anne – whom he had met at a regatta in Donaghadee – made a sought-after team both afloat and ashore. As a dedicated practitioner of the finest sailing traditions, he maintained a steady and disciplined routine while cruising and voyaging, whether on his own boat or crewing for others. A fellow skipper who sailed with him in far northern waters recalls that, regardless of the conditions, Michael always managed to find a space to quickly and neatly shave, stating that it was, "to get my day properly under way".

Michael

Throughout his offshore sailing years, which included a transatlantic passage and participation in two Fastnet Races, he primarily sailed under Bermudan rig. His first love was always gaff rig, however, which he embraced with his first boat, a 14ft Ballyholme Insect Class dinghy which he named *Moth* and in which he won every race during the 1951 Festival of Britain series of regattas in Belfast Lough. He later owned *Ente* (meaning 'duck') a 31ft ex-German war prize, before buying the gaff-rigged cutter *Marie*, built in 1894.

Marie was everything Michael McKee sought in a boat. Designed by Marie Doyle of Dun Laoghaire, the daughter of boatbuilder James Doyle, she had already proven her seagoing capabilities with a successful heavy-weather cruise skippered by Hugh Wallace, for which he was awarded the Royal Cruising Club's Claymore Cup in 1928. Three years later *Marie* became the first recipient of the Irish Cruising Club's Faulkner Cup, for a venture to western Scotland by Keith McFerran and Desmond Keatinge. As a remarkable gaff-rigged yacht with an interesting history, *Marie* and Michael McKee were a well-matched pair.

As time went on, however, the maintenance challenges of an 1894-built boat necessitated a change to a GRP hull. Michael made this transition by purchasing *Isobel*, a 28ft gaff-rigged Heard 28, designed on the lines of the traditional Falmouth Working Boat. Even when *Isobel* became too challenging to manage – long after Michael was entitled to a free travel pass – he refused to abandon the sea and sought advice from his longtime friend, Crosshaven yacht broker Donal McClement, who suggested and located a well-maintained Westerly Griffon 26 and it was with this boat, named *Carrigeen*, that Michael concluded his long and varied sailing career.

Michael is remembered as a kind and generous man who brought light and laughter to all who knew him. Whether in the auction house, on the water, or at home with family, his presence was always a source of strength and joy.

SIMON JULIEN

From 2012 until 2019 Simon and I spent November to March sailing *Brisa*, his Cape Dory 33, between Puerto Rico and Grenada to escape the English winter, returning home in time to grab a last-minute skiing holiday. In 2016 he took over from John and Chris Lytle as Roving RC Caribbean, and also became responsible for running the OCC SSB net, useful back then for passing on information and organising gatherings, persuading members with good radios to host some of the morning nets to widen their appeal.

Sailing was important throughout his life, from childhood holidays in Shaldon, Devon sailing hired dinghies with his cousins to his final summer of 2024 cruising around South Devon and Cornwall in his Sadler 34, *Calisto*. In the years between he took part in many races around the English Channel, including the 1979 Fastnet and a Tall Ships Race when the vessel he was on nearly sank on the way to Denmark.

Simon using café WiFi to keep up with the news in St Lucia

Before starting cruising in 2000, Simon spent over 30 years as a Royal Navy Engineering officer. During the Falklands War in 1982 he served aboard HMS *Arrow*, which was in the thick of fighting in San Carlos Sound, firing the first and last shots in that conflict and standing by HMS *Sheffield* to assist in firefighting and evacuating her crew. It was only due to the expertise of his engineering department that HMS *Arrow* reached the Islands as part of the Advanced Group sent from exercises in the Mediterranean. Short of engine spares, one repair – which kept the ship operational until her return to Devonport – was made using a washing machine belt!

After leaving the Navy in 1996 with the rank of Commander, Simon spent a few years in business, then became a rather elderly apprentice sailmaker with Andrew and Jenny Hooper, enabling him to construct his own mainsail and help other sailors with sail repairs during his years cruising in *Calisto*.

His career as a Royal Navy marine engineer had started with six months at Dartmouth followed by three years at Manadon RN Engineering College. The College owned some yachts which were regularly used by the students and Simon looked after one, *Gauntlet*, thereby learning early on what yacht ownership entailed. In 1975, while serving at Jupiter Point, HMS *Raleigh*, he bought a kit and hull to build a Waarschip quarter tonner. After this he owned a Sadler 25, then upsized in 1991 to a Sadler 34. It was on this yacht, *Calisto* that, in 2000, he crossed the Atlantic from La Gomera to Barbados with his wife Hilda and daughter Clare, thus qualifying for OCC membership.

Calisto *underway in the Caribbean. Simon was probably down below cooking*

The plan was to cruise the Eastern Caribbean, then head north via the Bahamas and the Intracoastal Waterway to the Chesapeake Bay for the hurricane season, returning to the Caribbean during the winter of 2002–3 before sailing back via Bermuda and the Azores. This was completed successfully, but both he and Hilda missed the wonderful cruising life so prepared *Calisto* for a return trip. This time they decided to take it more slowly, returning home to England each summer. After spending the winter of 2003–4 in Portimão, Portugal, Simon took *Calisto* back to the Caribbean, the USA and Canada, leaving her in Ontario for a winter and spending a summer on Georgian Bay, Lake Huron. He joined the Canadian snowbirds travelling south to the Caribbean, spending a memorable month in the Bahamas. While at anchor in Nassau harbour *Calisto* was hit by a microburst and knocked down during a thunderstorm. Her dinghy, which was tied alongside, was lifted over the boom and the outboard flew through the wind generator taking out all the blades and the tail and damaging the transom of the hard dinghy.

Brisa *in the Caribbean, well reefed and with the OCC burgee flying*

On his return to Devon's River Yealm in 2009 Simon made the mistake of joining the committee of the Yealm Yacht Club, which led to him being elected Commodore. He took on the job enthusiastically, working as thoroughly as he always had, and only managed to leave by buying another boat in Puerto Rico and announcing that he was going off sailing again! So in November

2012 we crossed back to Puerto Rico on a repositioning cruise ship, his preferred way to return to the Caribbean, and equipped *Brisa* for cruising. Simon was well known for his KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) approach to boat ownership, so a typical addition to his new boat was the ham radio from *Calisto* with copper ribbon spread through the bilges and a rope antenna. This worked well, and from Culebra he was soon able to talk to John and Chris Lytle in Antigua.

In 2019 we decided to sell *Brisa* and find other ways to minimise wintertime in England. We missed the easy sociability of the cruising life during which we had met so many wonderful people, but returned to sailing *Calisto* during the summer and found others with whom to sail in company. *Calisto* is now owned by two young Royal Navy sailors and is gradually being restored by them.

What a life!

Hilda Julien

STEPHEN CARLMAN

Stephen completing Fairwyn*'s painting on the marina wall in Horta, Faial in 2009*
Photo © Nancy Carlman

Stephen Carlman, who died in February 2025 at the age of 81, was born in London and did not set deckshoe on a sailing boat until he was working as a writer in Nassau on the *Bahamas Handbook* and went out sailing with a journalist friend 'looking for crabs and girls'. After that he was hooked on sailing. He bought his first boat, a 26ft Thunderbird, in 1971 and, with his wife Nancy, cruised from Montreal up the St Lawrence River to Lake Ontario. Wanting a bigger boat, in 1975 he commissioned a Contessa 32 from J J Taylor and Sons in Toronto, named her *Akvavit*, and cruised down the St Lawrence from Montreal to the Magdalen Islands, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

In 1978, when Stephen took a job as an editor for *The Province* in Vancouver, *Akvavit* and the Carlmans crossed Canada by road. After having cruised to innumerable marvellous anchorages in British Columbia, including to Haida Gwai (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands), Stephen sold *Akvavit* in 1981 and bought *Fairwyn*, a classic 1957 S&S wooden 42ft yawl, which he had trucked to Vancouver from Halifax, Nova Scotia where she had spent the first 25 years of her life. Stephen and Nancy joined the Bluewater Cruising Association in 1993 and took various courses to help them learn about ocean cruising and maintaining their boat. From 1982 to 1999 they transformed *Fairwyn* from an offshore racer (winner of the Prince of Wales Cup in Halifax in 1959) to an ocean cruising boat.

Stephen, Nancy and *Fairwyn* left Vancouver in 1999, sailed down the North and Central American west coast from Vancouver, visited Ecuador and the Galápagos, passed through the Panama Canal, survived Hurricane *Katrina* in 2005 while moored a few miles up the Tchefuncte River on the north shore of Louisiana's Lake Pontchartrain, circled Florida and in 2006 made their way north to the Chesapeake Bay.

Stephen hand-steering Fairwyn *on passage from Tenerife to Antigua in 2013, the autopilot quit on the first day out*
Photo © Chris Boulsbee

There, in Deltaville, Virginia, they met Tom Kenney who invited them to attend an OCC gathering at the Fishing Bay Yacht Club. Stephen couldn't believe how many OCC members had circumnavigated, some more than once. Stephen joined OCC shortly thereafter, citing a passage from Port Angeles, Washington State, to Santa Monica, California aboard *Hanalei* – owned by a fellow member of the yachting section of the Vancouver Rowing Club – made 15 years previously. In May 2007 *Fairwyn* participated in an OCC cruise from Cape Charles City, Virginia across the Chesapeake Bay to Solomons Island, Maryland before leaving to sail north to Shelburne, Nova Scotia.

After taking the children of Charles McCullough, the man who had commissioned *Fairwyn* from the McGruer yard in Scotland, for a sail in Halifax Harbour, Stephen and Nancy left to cruise north to Cape Breton and the south shore of Newfoundland. Stephen left *Fairwyn* in the water at the Dartmouth Yacht Club for the winter is 2007/8. The boat was fine come the spring but the canvas cover had 37 holes in it, partly due to post-hurricane storm *Juan* in the fall of 2007.

In July 2008 Stephen and Nancy left Chester, NS, with friend Chris Boulsbee as crew, to sail to the Azores. They had to wait for two post-hurricane storms to pass but the passage to Horta was easy, taking 16 days traversing the north edge of the Gulf Stream. Stephen's original idea had been to take *Fairwyn* north to the UK in the spring of 2009 and entertain his North London school friends at St Katharine Docks. However, he preferred warmer weather so sailed to Portugal and then into the Mediterranean. Five years later, after winters in Sardinia, Malta (twice) and Sicily, *Fairwyn* sailed from Morocco to Tenerife where Chris Boulsbee rejoined for the 22-day crossing to Antigua, hand-steering after the autopilot failed failed on the first day.

The trip home from Florida to Vancouver was first by truck to Anacortes, WA, where *Fairwyn* was launched and could re-enter Canada in 2014 'on her bottom' after 15 years away – not a circumnavigation but half way around the world and back. After cruising for three years in British Columbia, Stephen sold *Fairwyn* to a Californian who has maintained her beautifully.

A sailing friend, Sally Perreten, said about Stephen: 'I have to say that Stephen was one person who did the stuff of his dreams, lived the life he wanted and was able to with the person he wanted to. A very fine life. A very fine sailor'.

Nancy Carlman

Fairwyn *sailing in English Bay, Vancouver*
Photo © Chris Boulsbee

With Matilda *at Manningtree, 1978*

MIKE TAYLOR-JONES

Michael Kenneth Taylor-Jones was born in Cheshire on 4 February 1942. His parents were Kenneth, a solicitor, and Joan Fenter, a textile designer. They had married in 1939 just as war was breaking out and Mike's father was soon called up. He joined the Border Regiment and, not long after Mike was born, was sent to fight in Burma where tragically in 1944 he was killed by a Japanese sniper. He was just 31. This loss had a major impact on Mike's whole life.

Joan married again, to Edmund Hodge who lived in the Lake District and where Mike grew up. His paternal grandmother lived nearby – she was a great fell walker and a huge influence on his upbringing, engendering his life-long love of the mountains. His mother's parents had retired to Dorset, where they taught Mike to sail off the beach. Soon *Chameleon*, a 9ft dinghy built by Grandpa, was delivered by rail to Elterwater for Mike and his brother to mess about in on the lake.

Mike was sent to Oundle, his father's old school, where his happiest memories were of the workshops where he developed his skills as a carpenter, a trait he inherited from his grandfather. His passion for sailing was also growing and he had the opportunity to sail offshore on the Arthur Robb-designed *Wishstream*. Coincidentally, many years later we were to own her sistership *Rampage*.

In the summer of 1961, prior to going up to Cambridge, Mike joined the crew of *Mischief*, a 1902 Bristol Channel pilot cutter owned by the renowned mountaineer HW Tilman, on a five-month voyage to Greenland. In many ways this adventure defined his entire life. He defeated seasickness and cemented a passion for adventure at sea, as well as proving his physical and mental tenacity.

At Cambridge, Mike became a member of the University Cruising Club where he met Liz, also a keen sailor, whom he was to marry in 1965. He was introduced to Peter Carter-Ruck, father of Liz's school friend Julie. Peter owned a Nicholson, *Fair Judgement III*, and Mike became a regular mate on his offshore racing campaigns. In 1971, having sold *Fair Judgement*, Peter chartered *Griffin III* to enter the Falmouth to Gibraltar race. They finished second and as it was just over 1,000 miles qualified for membership and joined the Ocean Cruising Club. Soon Peter Carter-Ruck, David Nichol, Colin Fergusson and Mike were on the committee. Peter was Commodore from 1975 to 1982 and in the 1980s Mike became treasurer.

Glencoul, 2004

With a growing family we moved from London to Beaumont-cum-Moze in the depths of the north Essex countryside. Our first boat was *Matilda*, a 16ft Uffa Fox-designed clinker-built dinghy. Mike laid his own mooring off the muddy East Coast beach at Wrabness. In 1978 we bought *Vonder,* an Illingworth and Primrose centre-cockpit sloop and now there was no stopping Mike's adventurous spirit. The first summer we sailed to Great Yarmouth, the following year it had to be Holland. Setting off on these adventures with three young children was always a challenge. Transporting children, bags, clothes, food, books, toys and everything else needed for a North Sea crossing followed by a holiday onto a small boat on a mooring at Wrabness by dinghy was not without its difficulties. There were many more family holidays with William, Tom and Mary in *Vonder* and then, as we outgrew her 27 feet, in *Drumlin* a Contest 33.

In 1987 an S&S 34 offshore racer built by a friend came up for sale and Mike snapped her up. He planned to get back into the offshore racing he had so enjoyed with Peter and to get the boys, now in their late teens, involved. With a very loyal and primarily family-based crew, over the next decade *Deerstalker* became increasingly competitive with overall wins in the 1989 North Sea Race and the 1992 Round Britain and Ireland Race. They won their class in the 1991 Fastnet and the 1994 Round Ireland, and in 1995 were second overall in the Fastnet and RORC season points winner.

In 1997 Mike commissioned Stephen Jones to design a new boat to the Whitbread/Mount Gay 30 rule. Mike and Will, now a trained boat-builder, built her with help from family and friends in a Suffolk barn. They then campaigned her effectively until 2001, including the 1999 Fastnet. *Wildwood* was a fabulous family/crew project and hugely satisfying for Mike.

By 2001 and retired, Michael and I bought *Rampage*, a 1961-built Arthur Robb classic yawl. For nine years we cruised her extensively over the summer months from A Coruña in Spain, Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden and, in 2009, to the North Cape of Norway. She was teak planked on oak frames with bronze floors, and built to Lloyds A1 standard – a beautiful yacht. The maintenance was hard work, however, so in 2010 she was replaced by *Tsunami*, a GRP Starlight 35 also designed by Stephen Jones and Mike's last boat. We continued cruising for five more years.

Mike was a quietly intuitive sailor, a natural navigator and tactician as well as a great adventurer. He loved the challenge of exploring using the power of the wind and would never use an engine unnecessarily. Mike didn't suffer fools and was extremely tough, sometimes shy and often serious, but a true gentleman with a twinkle in his eye that we all loved.

Liz Taylor-Jones

Aboard Rampage, *July 2010*

Mike and Liz

CHARLES WESTBROOK MURPHY

Westbrook

Westbrook's Freedom 36 Sea Devil

Westbrook Murphy, Port Officer for Annapolis, Maryland from January 2014 to June 2023, passed away peacefully at his home in BayWoods of Annapolis on 19 December 2024 from complications of Parkinson's Disease at the age of 84.

He was born in Silver Spring, MD, graduated from Montgomery Blair High School and held a Bachelor's Degree in history from Duke University and a law degree from Yale University. Professionally, his distinguished law career included positions with the Department of Justice, Civil Division and US Treasury where he served as the General Council of the bureau responsible for the regulation of National Banks, Managing Director at PricewaterhouseCoopers and, for 40 years, as General Counsel of the Truman Scholarship Foundation. Over the years, he also very actively supported several political candidates. At different times he also supported several political candidates very actively.

Westbrook showed his love of music by playing the autoharp and, over the years, singing with the University of Maryland Chorus and the Annapolis Chorale. But his greatest love was the water and he started sailing on the Chesapeake Bay in the 1950s. Moving to a waterfront house on Almshouse Creek gave him more time to sail his beloved Freedom 36 *Sea Devil* crewed by many different people with widely varying experience.

Westbrook joined the OCC as an Associate Member in 2011, qualifying for full membership six years later with a passage from Hampton, Virginia to Antigua as crew aboard *Spray of Rochester*, an Oyster 47. He was not new to ocean sailing, however, having made the shorter passage from Bermuda to Annapolis aboard Wolfgang Reuter's Bristol 45 *Ru'ah* in 1990. On the Chesapeake he would often rendezvous with members of the Back Creek Yacht Club and offered berthing and land support to many OCC boats during his time as Port Officer. He was chosen to receive

Enjoying a rum and coke in the sunshine

At the helm of Saorsa, *Pauline Lamb's Hallberg-Rassy 53, in 2019*

the Port Officer Service Award for 2021, one of his nominators writing: 'Westbrook and his wife Cindy provide exceptional service to OCC members. He not only welcomes members to use his private pontoon on the South River, often for extended periods at no charge, but they also extend generous hospitality and assistance'.

He was survived by his wife Cynthia until her death in April 2025 and is currently survived by his three children Cameron, Graham, and Allison, whom he called his favorite crew, their spouses and six grandchildren.

Cameron Heutill

Westbrook receiving his Port Officer Service Award in April 2022, flanked by his wife Cindy and their daughter Cameron Heutill

SHAUN WEAVER

Shaun Weaver died unexpectedly in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea on 25 February 2025, aged 59. Shaun's passing was a devastating shock for all his colleagues and friends, but most of all for his wife Ainur, now left alone aboard their Gitana 43, *Three Ships*. Shaun was a much-loved father and grandfather and admired by all who spent time in his company. He was a completely off-the-wall character and a brave adventurer as well as a consummate engineer.

He left the UK when he was 21 to go to Australia for a working holiday, and before long gained employment with Western Atlas as a mechanical engineer for their seismic operations. This was followed by posts in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia, India, America and finally Russia in 1992. He then moved to Kazakhstan where he worked for the next 27 years. He learnt to speak fluent Russian and some Kazakh, plus some German and Italian.

Eight years ago he decided that he wanted to move on, follow his passion for sailing and start his journey around the world, and that is when we first met. Shaun had seen online that our Gitana 43 was for sale and

Shaunskie and Ainur

decided that she was the boat for him. This was in spite of not even having seen the boat, let alone sailed her, and having just spent his cruising budget paying off the mortgage on his house in the UK. We indulged in some serious negotiation, Shaun made some serious promises, all of which were kept, and a year later the vessel was his.

We became trusted friends and there are few people in the world that I judged more dependable, equally mad at times, but more likely to fulfil a promise. He subsequently sailed from the UK across the Atlantic, around the Caribbean and finally, with his wife Ainur, crossed the Pacific non-stop from Panama to Papua New Guinea, a voyage of 144 days and 9,000 miles. Their passage in many ways epitomizes what the OCC is all about and it gained Ainur the much-prized Qualifiers Mug – see *Destination PNG* in *Flying Fish* 2022/2.

A large group of his friends and fellow conspirators gathered to see him off and spread his ashes on the sea, as was always his wish. The day had finally arrived; he'd met his big wave and ended up on his beloved ocean where always he was most at home. Shaun is best summed up as a person in the words of a poem written by his friend Cor.

Crossing the Equator, 2022

Marvellous, Mate

"How are you, Shaun?" we'd always say,
And without a pause, come what may,
His answer, bright, without disguise –
"Marvellous!" with laughing eyes.

Life tossed him high, life pulled him low,
Yet on he'd sail, with steady flow.
Through storm and swell, through broken gear,
He'd fix, he'd fight, he'd persevere.

Three Ships carried dreams untold,
Through seas both calm and wild and cold.
With Ainur near, his heart set free,
He danced upon the endless sea.

In Papua's land, he paused to mend,
To fix the boat, to make, to spend.
But fate – oh, fate! – it played its hand,
And left him resting on the sand.

Now Shaun sails where stars ignite,
On cosmic winds, past moons so bright.
He cracks his jokes, he lifts a glass,
To those who've gone, to those who'll pass.

We miss him more than words can tell,
But if we listen, if we dwell,
The waves still whisper, soft and light–
"Marvellous, mate. I'm sailing right".

DAGMAR MARIE IBE

Fate struck mercilessly on 27 February 2024 in a hospital room in Sint Maarten, when the Dutch doctors told Marie and me that the MRI scan had detected a large brain tumor. Two weeks earlier Marie had been hiking in St Johns in the USVI. From life in paradise to horror within a minute, dreams of further life on *Greyhound* shattered.

Marie was born on 16 April 1962 in the small town of Bad Segeberg in northern Germany 60 years earlier. Dentistry studies brought her to Hamburg where she also did her post-graduate training in orthodontics. Work as a researcher and clinician at the university clinic was followed by 20 years in private office and international lecturing on orthodontic treatment of adults. Her interest in sailing was initiated by looking at pictures of turquoise waters from a colleague's charter trip in the Caribbean and she never lost her attraction to the sailing lifestyle. In 2007/8 she and I had a 48ft aluminium sailboat built to our design specifications and named her *Greyhound*. While Marie's profession allowed flexibility for a lot of sailing in the North Sea, Baltic Sea, Bay of Biscay and ultimately a first Atlantic crossing in 2011, the longing for permanent live-aboard cruising and exploration of faraway shores required the selling of her office and in July 2017 the cruising life started in earnest.

Magnificent sailing under gennaker in the British Virgin Islands, 2012

At first she was unsure if the cruising lifestyle would keep her as happy as her professional job had, but any doubts soon evaporated. We crossed the Atlantic again and enjoyed life in the Caribbean, the Bahamas and on the US East Coast, and along the way Lisa and Mark of *Wild Iris* suggested we join the OCC. During the lovely OCC South New England Cruise Anne Lloyd of *Sofia* suggested that instead of returning to the Caribbean we should continue straight to the Pacific. What a good recommendation! After wintering in the Bahamas, Cuba and Panama, in 2019 we enjoyed a marvellous year in the

Greyhound *in Cuba, 2019*

Marie in Suwarrow Atoll during her 2019 Pacific crossing

Landing a mahi mahi in French Polynesia, 2019

Champagne sailing in Spain, 2017

Pacific, starting with Marie's lifelong dream come true visiting the Galápagos, Marquesas, Tuamotus and the Society Islands. Members of the OCC Pacific Crossing Facebook group know *Greyhound* from the lovely cover picture taken in Fatu Hiva, French Polynesia. When Bora Bora didn't live up to expectations Maupiti made up for it in big style. Our travels continued to Suwarrow in the Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga, Minerva Reef and finally to New Zealand.

Nearly all the way across the Atlantic and Pacific we enjoyed sailing within sight of buddy boat *North Star* with Kim and Marie, also OCC members. The week we spent at Minerva Reef with 23 other boats, waiting for a weather window and enjoying the sushi from mahi mahi caught the previous day were unforgettable. Marie could enjoy life to the full.

We had planned to stay in New Zealand for six months but this turned out to be 18 months thanks to Covid. There is no better place to be to engage in the cruising lifestyle. The year 2021 saw the return of *Greyhound* to Europe, and Marie enjoying the culture of the Old World in the Mediterranean harbours and towns that we visited. For a year she relished in the culture, architecture, history and culinary delights, but the lack of wildlife and nature resulted in her wish to return to 'more wildlife and a wilder life'. So we signed *Greyhound* up for the 2023 Viking Explorers rally and Marie's third Atlantic crossing, then enjoyed anchoring, swimming, hiking and snorkelling until fate struck in February.

After evacuating Marie to Germany on an ambulance flight and with maximum medical treatment she was able to enjoy a final year of quality life with some sailing in home waters, some land-based journeys and enjoyment of the roses in her garden. As well as sailing and living on a boat Marie very much loved getting to know new and interesting people and building profound friendships. This was evidenced by sailing friends from New Zealand, the USA, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the UK and Holland visiting Marie during her last year in Europe and/or attending her funeral service. In her heart she always loved the sea, and notwithstanding the 80,000 miles in her wake she always modestly claimed to have 'not a lot of sailing experience'. May she find calm waters.

Dietmar Segner

SENDING SUBMISSIONS TO FLYING FISH

CONTENT:
Anything which is likely to be of interest to fellow members – cruise and liveaboard accounts, technical articles, letters and recipes. All articles need a title and the name of the author. Most articles need a short intro (about who you are, your boat, details of membership, etc.). We don't demand exclusivity over an article, but please let us know if it has already been published or is scheduled to be. The 'house style' sheet is available on the website and all articles will be edited to comply with this.

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The usual maximum length is 4,000 words, a few articles of up to 6,000 words may also be accepted, but only by prior agreement.

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COVER IMAGE

Flora *sailed by Ralf & Wiebke Gerking over the blue hole at Jamaica Cay*

Photo © Ralf Gerking

From 'Ragged Islands, Bahamas: Sailing in Shades of Blue' (page 180)

"Although we have done it several times, flying the drone (and especially catching the buzzing thing on board the moving boat) while sailing short-handed is still always a bit nerve-wracking. You don't want to shred your sails, wreck your drone on the shrouds or cut your fingers grabbing the quadcopter mid-air, so some extra adrenaline is guaranteed!"

Printed by
Hobbs the Printers Ltd
Totton, Hants SO40 3WX, UK.
hobbs.uk.com

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