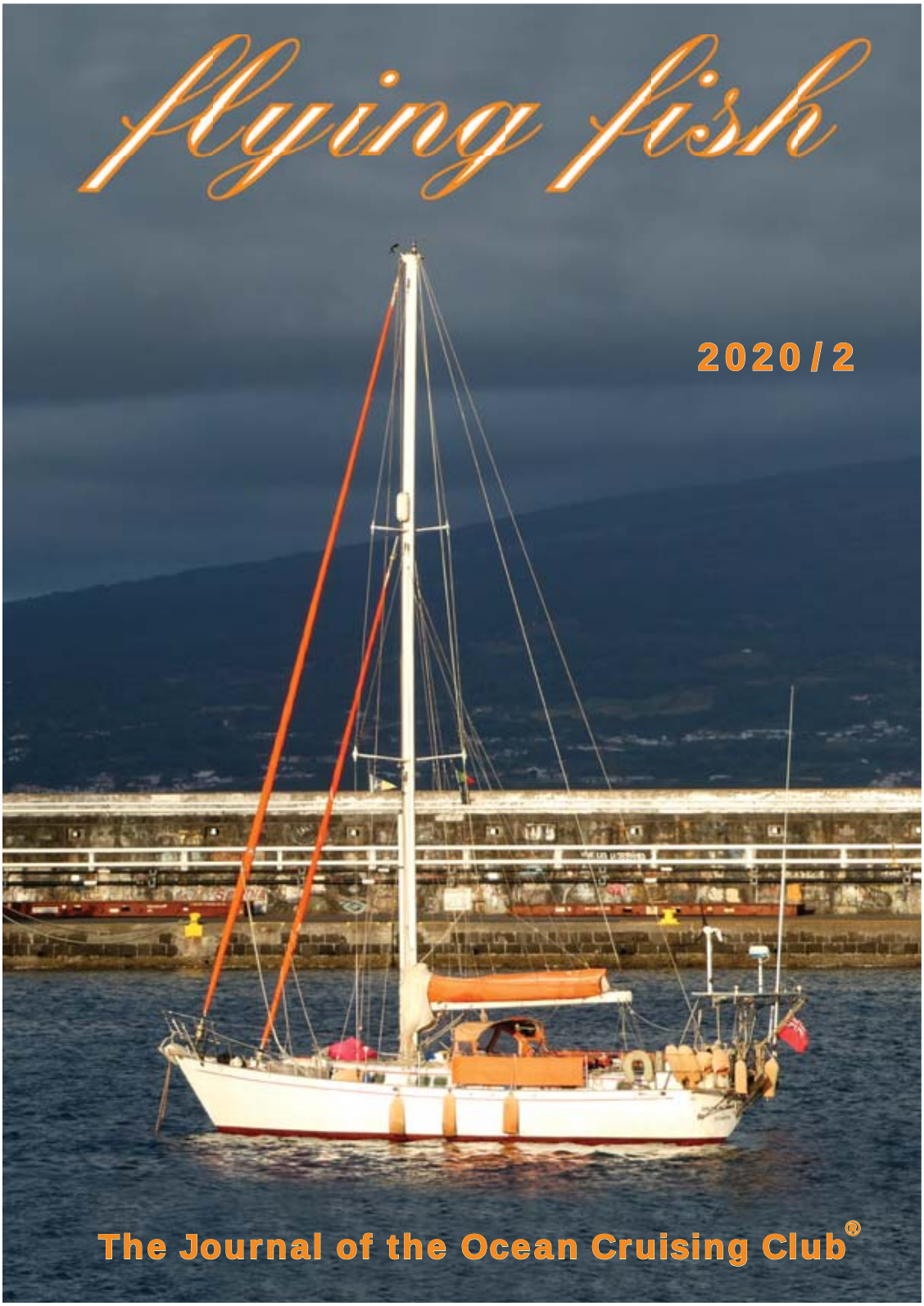
Flying Fish

2020/2



The Journal of the Ocean Cruising Club®

"I am not afraid of storms for
I am learning to sail my ship."

—Louisa May Alcott

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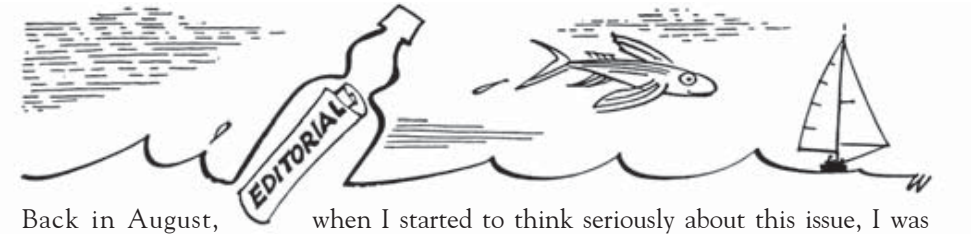

Back in August, when I started to think seriously about this issue, I was worried there would be a lack of material. Almost no normal cruising had taken place in the previous six months, and those members forced by COVID-19 to make unplanned dashes for home had more important things on their minds than writing for *Flying Fish*. Fortunately it was always intended to be a relatively slim issue, in contrast to the distinctly portly June *Fish*, but even so...

Then articles began to trickle in, and once again I was taken aback by the amazing achievements of some of our members and the sheer enjoyment of less spectacular cruising shared by others. *Flying Fish* 2020/1 included reference to Randall Reeves's unique Figure 8 Voyage aboard *Mōli* for which he received the Barton Cup earlier this year – turn the page to read his account of the Southern Hemisphere segment of this awe-inspiring voyage. I very much hope Randall will tell us about his Northwest Passage transit in a future issue. In the same cold southern waters, but navigating only by traditional methods, Bert ter Hart's account of circumnavigating south of the Five Great Capes in his long-keeled *Seaburban* is equally impressive. Part 1 appears here, with Part 2 promised for the next issue.

Like Randall, Bert had a schedule dictated by the various seasonal 'gates'. Not so Graham and Avril Johnson, who recently returned to the UK after 18 years circumnavigating aboard their 44ft cutter *Dream Away*. Regular contributors to *Flying Fish*, it always brightens my inbox to receive an article from them (think exotic location, articulate writing, stunning pics ... what's not to like?)

Among other stand-outs in this issue are octogenarian Jack van Ommen's defence of continuing to cross oceans for as long as you're able to, and Dag and Ma Theresa Hoiland's account of ensuring their young son Vetle not only remains safe aboard, but gains the absolute maximum from his cruising experience. But that's not to ignore all the other excellent articles in this issue, in particular Vice Commodore Daria Blackwell's account of how the OCC linked with others to assist all cruisers – not just OCC members – caught far from home by the COVID-19 crisis. We truly have a Club to be proud of!

Changing the subject completely, many years ago I was invited to a 'winter solstice' party aboard a small cruising boat in English Harbour, Antigua. It's a moment relevant to all cruising sailors, including those in the southern hemisphere for whom it's the summer solstice, of course. This year it occurs at 1002 UTC on 21st December, and though a little early in the day for members in the UK to raise a glass, and well before dawn for those in North America or beyond, it marks the turning of the year for all of us ... a year which most will probably be very happy to see turned. As I write this in late November there's finally hope on the horizon, so here's to a much happier and more normal 2021 – and if you have the chance to spend part of it sailing, do please tell *Flying Fish* about it! Probably too late for ***Flying Fish* 2021/1**, which has a **deadline** of **1st February**, but *Flying Fish* 2021/2 will be rolling around before we know it...

Cover photo: Dream Away at anchor in Horta near the end of her circumnavigation. See 'The 19th Hole', page 39. Photo Graham and Avril Johnson

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A SECOND TRY AT THE SOUTH
Randall Reeves

(*Born and raised in Northern California, Randall grew up reading and dreaming of the sea. He learned to sail on the rivers of central California and often 'borrowed' the family boat for solo ventures to San Francisco Bay. While in college he interviewed world-famous solo sailor Bernard Moitessier for his campus radio station. He began his own solo adventures in 2010 with a two-year Pacific loop in a 30ft ketch.*

He then acquired Mōli (*whom he refers to throughout as* Mo)*, a 45ft (13·7m) aluminium sloop previously owned by OCC member Tony Gooch, and in October 2017 left on his first attempt at the 'Figure 8 Voyage' – a solo circumnavigation of both the American and Antarctic continents in one season. Forced to call it quits after* Mo *sustained damage, he set off again a year later … and the rest is history.*

Randall sent in daily posts from sea, including high-resolution photographs, and has since produced The Figure 8 Voyage *book, a picture book of images from some of the remotest places on the planet, which can be purchased from his website at www.figure8voyage.com. A more detailed book is planned for the near future.*

Randall received the 2019 Barton Cup for his and Mōli*'s achievement, as reported in* Flying Fish 2020/1.)

"Reeves, you are a beacon on the shoals of life," yelled a man from up the dock. All morning I had worked on deck. The weekend had emptied the yard of its workers, quieting the bustle of lifts and cranes. Today there would be no interruptions from passers-by and I could happily focus on the present task, preparing Mo for her second

Randall and Mo on their return to California in October 2019

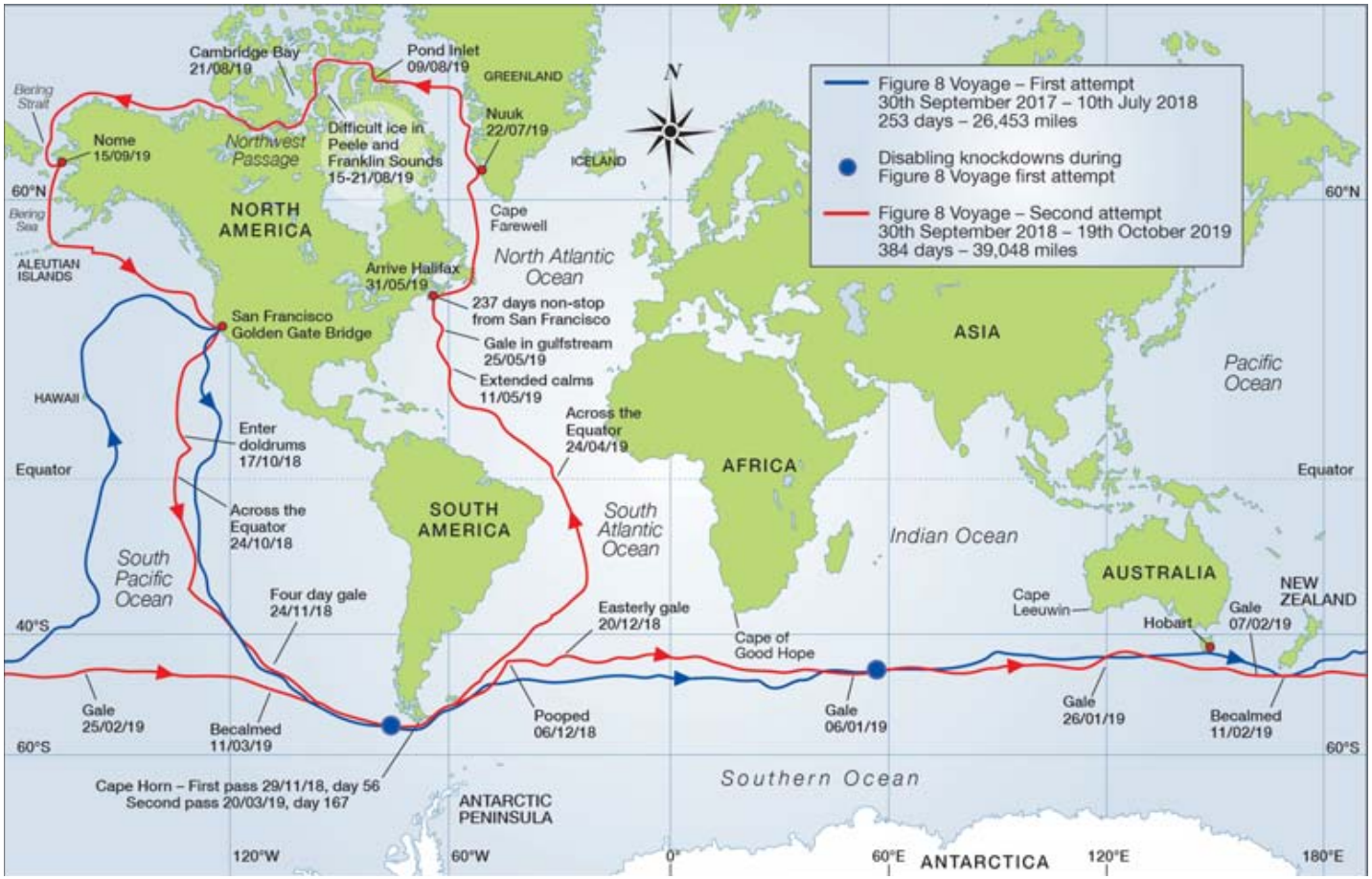
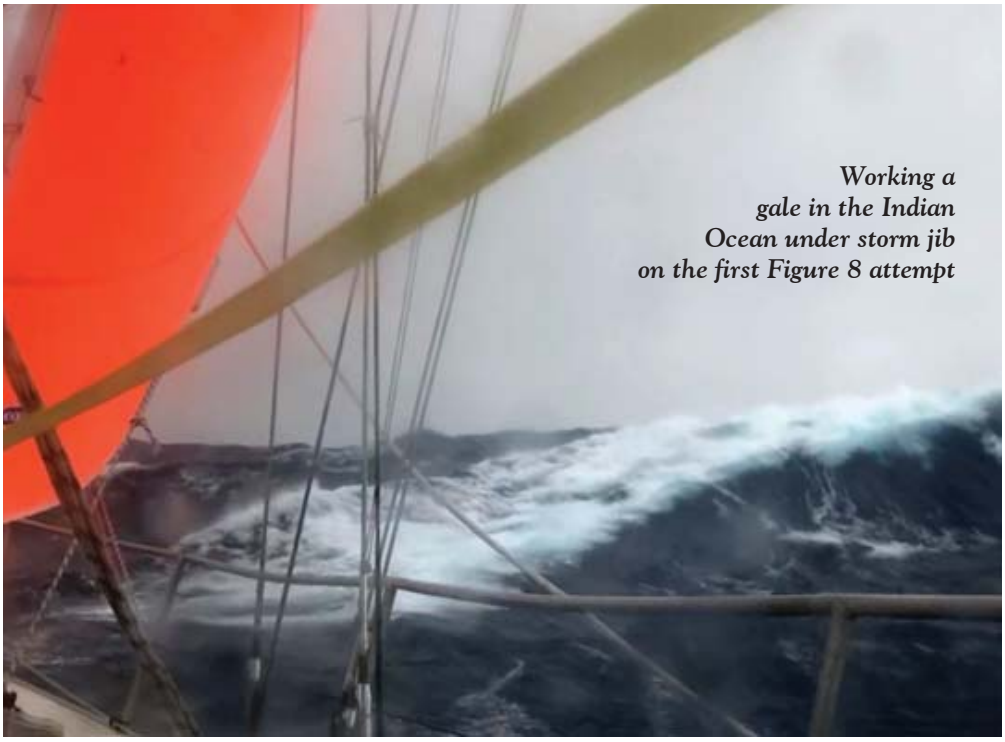


Figure 8 Voyage – First attempt
30th September 2017 – 10th July 2018
253 days – 26,453 miles
Disabling knockdowns during Figure 8 Voyage first attempt
Figure 8 Voyage – Second attempt
30th September 2018 – 19th October 2019
384 days – 39,048 miles
N
Cambridge Bay 21/08/19
Pond Inlet 09/08/19
GREENLAND
Bering Strait
Nome 15/09/19
Northwest Passage
Difficult ice in Peele and Franklin Sounds 15-21/08/19
Nuuk 22/07/19
ICELAND
60°N
Bering Sea
NORTH AMERICA
Cape Farewell
North Atlantic Ocean
ALEUTIAN ISLANDS
Arrive Halifax 31/05/19
237 days non-stop from San Francisco
San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge
Gale in gulfstream 25/05/19
Extended calms 11/05/19
ASIA
Pacific Ocean
HAWAII
Enter doldrums 17/10/18
Across the Equator 24/04/19
Equator
AFRICA
Equator
Across the Equator 24/10/18
SOUTH AMERICA
South Atlantic Ocean
Indian Ocean
South Pacific Ocean
AUSTRALIA
NEW ZEALAND
Cape Leeuwin
Gale 07/02/19
Hobart
Four day gale 24/11/18
Easterly gale 20/12/18
Cape of Good Hope
40°S
Gale 25/02/19
Becalmed 11/03/19
Pooped 06/12/18
Gale 06/01/19
Gale 26/01/19
Becalmed 11/02/19
60°S
Cape Horn – First pass 29/11/18, day 56
Second pass 20/03/19, day 167
Southern Ocean
ANTARCTIC PENINSULA
120°W
60°W
0°
60°E
ANTARCTICA
120°E
180°E



Working a gale in the Indian Ocean under storm jib on the first Figure 8 attempt

Figure 8 Voyage attempt. Then the voice: "I am thrilled to follow your adventure," said the man, "you show me places I never wish to go, you have experiences I never wish to have. You are a warning to others, 'Pass not this way'".

Such sentiments, I had found, were not uncommon and even I had to admit that the first Figure 8 attempt – a solo circumnavigation of the Americas and Antarctica in one season – had not gone exactly to plan. The plan, in brief, had been to sail the Pacific southwards from my home port of San Francisco and, after rounding Cape Horn, to proceed on a full eastabout of the Southern Ocean. After rounding Cape Horn again the course would proceed north through the Atlantic, into the Arctic, and then would transit the Northwest Passage for home. Admittedly, it was a challenging goal.

Mo and I departed for the first time via the Golden Gate Bridge on 30th September 2017, but heavy weather knocked *Mo* flat west of Cape Horn and then again in the Indian Ocean. The former dealt fatal blows to both self-steering devices, and the latter broke a window in the pilot house, drowning most of *Mo*'s electronics. Both required unscheduled stops for repairs, by which time it was too late in the season to continue. The only logical solution – sail home and start again.

On 10th July 2018 *Mo* and I returned under the Golden Gate Bridge, closing the loop on a 253 day, 26,453 mile solo circumnavigation, which some dubbed, and not by way of a compliment, 'the longest shakedown cruise in history'. Three months later found me in the boatyard readying *Mo* for her second attempt when the stranger's words broke my solitude.

Our second departure came on 1st October 2018. Indian summer in San Francisco is warm but windless, so *Mo* motored out to sea under full sail with an escort fleet of exactly one vessel. On departing the year before I had looked to the horizon from under a cloud of

Boarding up the window broken by the Indian Ocean knockdown

foreboding, but now I felt relaxed. Now I knew what lay ahead, and I had a plan.

Our first test on this second attempt came in the Pacific at 49°S in the form of a force 8/9 northwesterly which lasted four days. My assessment of the previous year's failure was that I'd not sailed fast enough. From the beginning, I had intended to follow the example of heroes like Dumas and Moitessier and keep moving through the worst of blows, but as conditions eased and seas stood up I made the repeated mistake of staying on the tiny storm jib for too long. Counter to all intuition, speed is safety for a heavy boat in heavy weather because it provides the rudder with the necessary corrective power when the extremes of motion are making control a precious commodity. Thus, my vow on this second attempt was to keep the speed up, to carry more sail – to leave the damned storm jib in its bag.

By day two of the blow we were surrounded by great blue heavers with long troughs and cascading tops. Under a deeply-reefed working jib (over twice the sail area I'd

Departing the Golden Gate Bridge for the second Figure 8 attempt

Mopping up after the November gale

carried on previous occasions) *Mo* rushed along with a steadiness that thrilled me. Several times she surfed straight down a massive wall, throwing a bow wave whose roar rivalled that of the gale. But she never faltered. Standing watch in the security of the pilot house amid this orchestrated chaos I felt my satisfaction growing. Now we had a chance at a full circuit of the south, I thought. Soon I found myself whistling happily along with the whine in the rigging. Only later did I recall with embarrassment that whistling in a blow is terribly bad luck and forthwith scrawled instructions on a piece of duct tape fastened to the companionway hatch by way of reminder: 'No Whistling Allowed!'.

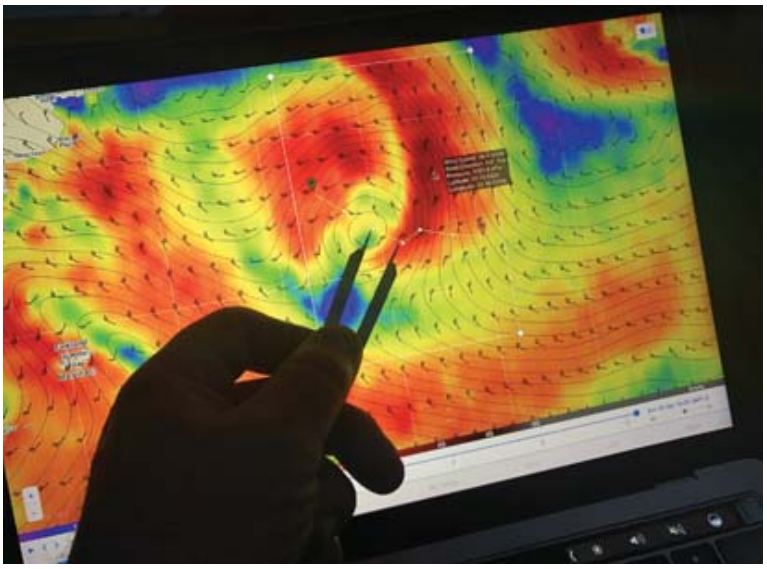
Then it was time for the Cape Horn approach. Out of prudence and heart-felt respect, I had planned this rounding to pass south of Islas Diego Ramirez, a group of rocks 20 miles south of the Horn and on the edge of the continental shelf. South of these is open water of true oceanic depth, but between Diego Ramirez and the Horn the bottom quickly shelves to as little as 300ft (91m) and seas unmolested by land since New Zealand can pile up dangerously when the weather is foul. On this occasion, however, a low sky brought only a cold and spitting rain. We had a fast wind but an easy sea and on 29th November, 56 days out of San Francisco, *Mo* and I swung in so close to the famous Cape that we could kiss her on the shins.

By morning the headland could still be seen as a black smudge on the grey horizon astern. *Mo* creamed along under twin headsails in a brisk southwesterly and, as the water of the Pacific blended into that of the Atlantic, so my pride at the summit just attained was quickly cooled by thoughts of the challenge ahead.

Approaching Cape Horn under the working jib in force 8/9

My Southern Ocean strategy was simple – to stay as far south as I dared. There were two reasons for this. One was that at my target latitude of 47°S the circumference of the circle from Cape Horn back to Cape Horn was almost 2000 miles shorter than at the more typical rounding latitude of 40°S. The other was that *Mo* would wallow in fewer calms. The monstrous lows that march endlessly below the capes tend to hoover up everything around them, leaving vast windless spaces in between. The further north of the lows one sails, the longer the calms last; the further south, the more consistent the wind.

As it turned out, lack of wind would not be a problem during this passage. By early December we were north of the Falklands and had turned onto an easterly course when our first major low approached. Its winds built during the day but really came to force overnight with the anemometer touching 45 knots and gusting higher. The main had been doused, the boom lashed to its crutch and the working jib was deeply reefed. The sea continued



Using dividers to measure-off a route through a large low east of the Falklands

Tending the headsails

to build. Near midnight, I was dozing fitfully in my bunk when I felt *Mo* lift sharply. Then there was a heavy slam of green water hitting the cockpit and companionway hatch, the boat rolled well over, and I rolled with her from my bunk and onto the cupboards. Then she righted and I could hear the tinkling and splashing of water in the pilot house.

I groaned at the thought that we'd yet again broken something vital. Grabbing a flashlight, I crawled into the pilot house but found no shattered glass. In the cockpit, the dodger's* plastic door had been ripped open and the windvane paddle had been pulled from its socket. We'd been badly pooped, but all that streaming wet below was from nothing more than the wave squirting in between the companionway hatch and the locked companionway slide. 'Keep the water out' was Eric Hiscock's advice for those making a Southern Ocean passage. As it turns out, this is rather more difficult than it sounds.

* 'Sprayhood' in the UK

Leaden sky and steel-blue sea at 47°S

Two weeks later and halfway to Good Hope we'd already ridden out three gales and two more were in the forecast. My log was a succession of 'large low arrives tonight', 'winds 35 gusting 45...', 'chaotic seas – wind continues to build', 'the ocean is like a boulder garden', 'another low on the way'. By Christmas we were well past the prime meridian and into the Indian Ocean. So far *Mo* had averaged a fast 140 miles a day and the storm jib hadn't budged from its lashed position on the rail.

> The most dreaded of question an adventurer can face is 'why?' ... why pursue such long, lonely, tiresome, risky voyages? At first, such inquiries caught me off guard and my responses were halting. Wouldn't anyone, given the opportunity, put at the top of his or her priorities list a solo sail around the world?
>
> To me the answer is an immediate 'yes', but to others – and when the endless days of discomfort are weighed in, the sleepless nights, meals eaten from a can, the perpetual, clammy damp, hands so raw the skin sloughs off, the gut-gnawing fear of an approaching storm, the inescapable wrath of a heavy sea, and months of exposure to a remoteness that makes the crew of the space station one's nearest neighbours – when all that is known, most would choose not to go to sea and regard as crazy those who do.
>
> But here's the attraction – sailing the Southern Ocean is like exploring an alien world. Down here there isn't the evidence of civilisation that one finds in other oceans. Down here there are no ships on the horizon, no jet contrails in the sky and no plastic trash ever clutters one's wake. For months

Pondering why we do it?

Running under deep-reefed twin headsails in a heavy sea

on end there isn't so much as a lee shore and the waves, freed from all confinement except gravity, roam like giant buffalo upon a great, blue plain.

Moreover, down here the animals one encounters live in such a purity of wildness that you could well be their first human encounter. On many days *Mo* and I are visited by that absolute marvel, the wandering albatross. As big as a suitcase and with a twelve foot wingspan, this bird lives most of its life on the wing and beyond the sight of land. It can glide in any direction in any strength of wind – so adapted is it to this environment that it can even sleep while aloft. When my little ship is struggling to survive this bird hangs in the air with an effortlessness that defies understanding. There, above that crashing wave, it is poised so still as to seem carved out of the sky.

An immature wandering albatross, master of the Southern Sea

Prions at play in the break of a large wave train

> Or take the stars. Out here on a clear and moonless night the heavens shine such that our brother constellations recede into the melee of twinkling and are lost. On such a night, looking upwards with binoculars is like dipping one's hands into a basket of pearls. Look down and galaxies of phosphorescence spin in your wake.

By 18th January, day 105 out of San Francisco, we were nearing the opposite side of the world and the halfway point in our circuit of the south. After dinner I noticed that the barometer had dropped from 1010mb to 1002mb in a mere four hours. What had been an easy, 20 knot westerly soon veered into the north and hardened. At midnight I dropped the poled-out twin headsails and raised the main. The winds continued to build, and by 0200 the main was down again and lashed to the boom. By 0400 the pressure had reached 998mb and brought with it a freight train of wind from the northwest. Now

Tending to chafe in the southern Indian Ocean

there was just enough light to make out the cement-coloured sky pushing down upon the water. The seas were smack on the beam, but manageable.

The front hit at 0600 with winds of 40 knots gusting 45 and a pelting, horizontal rain. Crests of waves were blown off and the barometer dropped another two points. When the front had passed, the gale settled down to do its business. Long, wide crests of sea broke together and stained the black water with city-block-sized patches of cream and ice blue. The barometer kept on sliding. At each two-hour log entry it was down another two points. Four reefs in the working jib and *Mo* was labouring. At 1400 we reached the bottom of the low and the barometer flattened out at 989mb. The wind roared and *Mo* shuddered in its force. The log read, 'Seas massive, some plunge-breaking'. Then two hours later, 'a crazy, mish-mash heavy sea. Pyramidal'. At 1700 'Long gusts to 50. Working jib down to a hanky'. Later that night, 'Our first screaming surf down a wave I cannot see'.

Moli plying her way toward Cape Horn for the second time

To this point *Mo* had been sure-footed – always at the centre of the surrounding chaos, her decks seeming as still and solid as mother earth. Yes, there were times when she stumbled, fell off a breaker and was thrown over to the windows, but she came back to rights and shook things off so quickly that the fall seemed hardly worth mentioning. Only when I went on deck did the fierceness of the gale become apparent. As I moved aft to adjust the windvane I heard a crashing from the blackness astern. But I did not look aft – instead I looked up, at white wall. I leapt for the rail as it consumed the boat. *Mo* rolled and was under – immediate cold down foulies and boots – and then she was up, the cockpit a bathtub, sheets trailing in the water. The main halyard was wrapped around my leg but, amazingly, there was no damage.

The second pass of Cape Horn closed a 110 day, 15,343 mile circumnavigation of the South

By 0100 I had been working the boat for 20 hours, was achingly cold was and beginning to feel undone. The wind had eased significantly, and with its diminishing so too the sea subsided. The moment had come to start adding back the sail we'd withdrawn so long ago, but this time I did not. I left *Mo* with but a handkerchief of a jib, tore off my foulies and hit the sack. I didn't even set an alarm.

On and on like this goes the Southern Ocean. By 12th February we were south of New Zealand, by 5th March we were 5000 miles due south of San Francisco, and as we descended for the second Cape Horn rounding *Mo* and I were weary but battle hardened. This approach proved more tempestuous than the first, but now even

The Cape Horn gale brought an explosive sea

dangerously foul weather couldn't keep us from spying that great rock, that Everest of the watery south. Another gale came on. *Mo* pointed steadily onward and to within sight of our goal. The seas built, the wind roared, and then it cleared and Cape Horn came out of the abyss, a grey, hulking rock not so much barren as raw, with breakers throwing themselves at her feet. Then we were round, and on we raced. On and on and on...

On 20th March 2019, as part of the Figure 8 Voyage, *Mo* and Randall completed a 110 day, 15,343 mile circumnavigation of the Southern Ocean. Then they continued north for a first stop in Halifax, Nova Scotia after 237 days at sea, before transiting the Northwest Passage from east to west – hopefully the subject of a future article. By the time they returned to San Francisco they had covered more than 40,000 ocean miles over 384 days.

RETREAT FROM PARADISE
Vice Commodore Daria Blackwell

(Wearing multiple hats as Vice Commodore, OCC PR Officer and Web Editor, Daria co-ordinated the Club's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in support of the cruising community, with primary focus on the Atlantic.)

Who would have thought that in this age the Q flag, or indeed the L flag, would take on its intended significance of a vessel in quarantine or harbouring contagious disease aboard?

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 created unprecedented chaos for coastal and ocean cruisers worldwide. Ports and countries were closed to cruise ships, airline passengers and cruising yachts without notice – often occurring long after a yacht had departed on a several-week-long passage. In other cases, yachts were left stranded in harbour with no access to the shore and nowhere else to go. Many faced enormous obstacles as borders closed both behind and ahead of them. Suddenly, paradise became a prison to escape from instead of the idyll cruisers had sought.

We estimated that some 900 vessels were in the Atlantic, 500 in the Pacific and another 250 or more in the Indian Ocean, all scrambling to find a country that would allow them entry before the hurricane and cyclone seasons descended. A few skippers acted early, stowed their boats on the hard, and flew home while they still could. The World Cruising Club suspended the World ARC in French Polynesia.

This article describes the OCC's efforts on behalf of the cruising community in 2020.

The early days

Having been very involved with development and marketing of numerous vaccines over the years, I had been following the situation in China closely from the beginning. I had studied the 1918 influenza pandemic, but this was a new virus that didn't behave like any of its predecessors. It posed a serious threat and no one had immunity. My husband Alex and I adopted precautionary measures weeks before the lockdown in Ireland. The feeling of dread was overwhelming.

The speed with which the novel coronavirus spread from China to Europe was limited only by the frequency of transcontinental flights. As countries in Europe began locking down, tourists flocked to the Caribbean to escape the nightmare pandemic at home, taking SARS-CoV-2 with them. In many ways it started as a pandemic of the more wealthy, who could afford skiing and island holidays. The medical facilities in many island and remote nations are rudimentary, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and ventilators are scarce, and many don't even have a hospital. As COVID-19 cases showed up, borders were shut tight and restrictions on movement were imposed. The amount of misinformation circulating on the internet and among the cruising community was alarming and the panic level among cruisers not knowing how to make decisions was escalating.

* Until the International Code of Signals was revised in 1965, flag L (black and yellow squares) meant 'I have or had some dangerous, infectious disease on board.'

When a family was prevented from anchoring upon reaching Curaçao from St Maarten, Port Officer Victor Langerwerf used media channels to put pressure on politicians to allow them to anchor and re-provision on humanitarian grounds. They had a small child aboard, limited food and water and posed little risk*. Several other boats were similarly denied entry.

In the Pacific, the situation was even more dire as hundreds of yachts became stranded in cyclone-prone regions while the borders of Australia and New Zealand remained closed. In the Indian Ocean, a boat was turned away from South Africa and initially denied access to St Helena. Short on food and water, this was not a voyage for which they were prepared.

We decided we needed to assist cruisers caught up in pandemic politics and help panicked governments understand the risks that a long-distance cruiser faces but does not present. We needed to provide a place where cruisers could exchange ideas and share reliable information. The first step was to open our OCC Facebook Group's Atlantic Crossing, Pacific Crossing and Caribbean Net+ to non-members and spread the word.

Pooling resources

In this extraordinary time, the cruising community banded together to provide a unified approach to the pandemic response. A decision was made to forward all reliable information on port closures and openings, including quarantine rules and other information, to Noonsite – it would have made no sense for us to duplicate what Sue Richards and her team were doing on a global scale. OCC Port Officers around the world could collect, verify and translate official information for their respective countries, while Noonsite would act as a central repository for trusted up-to-date news about which ports and borders were open and what the conditions of entry were. Many jumped in to help, especially those in strategic locations.

In the US the Seven Seas Cruising Association (SSCA) was also feeding information to Noonsite, but keeping up with individual US states proved impossible, while in Great Britain the Cruising Association (CA) set up a border information site for European ports. The Salty Dawgs organised a flotilla of 300 yachts sailing to America from the Caribbean and TransOcean organised a tracker and net in German, but we all exchanged information. Another member was representing a large group of Swedes whom he was supplying with information from our group. It was a valuable co-ordinated effort.

Glenn Tuttle of BoatWatch, a non-profit organisation that reports and helps locate vessels that are overdue or in distress, approached the OCC to assist with BOLO (Be On the Look Out) requests. We agreed and he became an important contact and go-between with the US Coast Guard when things didn't go according to plan. In the interim, the US National Weather Service predicted a more active Atlantic hurricane season than normal. This was not about a rally or flotilla – every skipper would have to make their own decisions about when to leave and how to cross. We'd just supply some of the information they needed to help them reach their own conclusions and make their way safely across an ocean.

* See *Cruising in Times of Closed Borders* in the September *Newsletter*.

The cruising lifestyle hits the news

It became clear very early in March that decisions were being made haphazardly by government officials who, in many cases, had no understanding of the needs of cruisers nor appreciation of the challenges they were facing. In some cases, families were forced to stay aboard their yachts at anchor with children who were not allowed ashore nor even permitted to swim near the boat. In other cases, yachts were being turned away from remote stop-overs and forced to sail extraordinary distances without support. Hurricane season was fast approaching in the Atlantic and cyclone season in the Pacific. Yachts were stuck in perilous places and flights were grounded. Risk was mounting.

An early attempt to involve World Sailing, which has global influence with authorities and purportedly represents cruising as well as racing, proved fruitless. All they could offer was advice for cruisers to stay put wherever they were and to avoid cruise ship ports.

As OCC PR Officer I understood that the only way to get the attention of world leaders was to publicise the plight of cruisers in the general media. As it happened, solo sailor and digital nomad Susan Smillie, who is a journalist for the *Guardian*, joined our Facebook groups. She was at anchor in Greece. Susan knew that I was helping yachts in difficult situations and we hatched a plan. I would be interviewed by Susan as the voice of the ocean cruising community overall, and would also provide access to willing OCC Facebook group members who were planning challenging voyages or facing tough circumstances. The story was published in the *Guardian* on 12th May and sparked a storm of media attention around the world. BBC World News asked for a live interview the next morning. RTE and BBC Newsline followed, as did CNN, Seascapes, numerous documentary makers and others, including BBC News Russia. I wrote a major story on the OCC website which was picked up by sailing media and others.

I explained many times that cruisers are among the safest people to encounter, especially after being at sea for weeks out of contact with other humans, and what challenges they face, especially when sailing short-handed. I explained the need for fresh water, fuel and provisions to countless media outlets and documentary makers in the following weeks. I debunked the image of superyachts, and instead painted a picture of families with young children choosing an alternative way of living in the natural world. People were fascinated.

I also explained that we were not asking governments to enable unfettered cruising, only for the ability to stop, rest and get desperately-needed supplies so sailors could safely continue their journey home, or at least to safe harbour. I also made it clear that we recognised the limited resources of small nations and respected the need to protect their populations. It was a whirlwind of media interaction, all hungry for a positive story.

As cyclone season starts on 1st November and distances across the Pacific are vast, a long lead-time was needed between getting permission to enter cyclone-free countries like Australia and New Zealand and departure, but they weren't budging. Australian member and Roving Rear Commodore Guy Chester, who was attempting to return home, has extensive diplomatic experience. He and Fiona Jones, OCC IndoPacific Region Co-ordinator, with my input as OCC PR Officer, wrote letters to the various governments of island nations asking them to reconsider. Fi and Guy used the OCC Pacific Crossing Facebook page to communicate with cruisers and put together a list of some 200 yachts expressing interest. They worked with John Hembrow of the Down

Under Rallies and John Martin of Sail South Pacific to formulate a plan for cruisers to enter Australia and New Zealand safely, and were successful in convincing Fiji to set up Blue Zones whereby cruisers could enter the country under quarantine.

When the NZ government declared that escaping cyclones was insufficient reason for entry and the Australian regional government declined yachts who applied for entry in a test case, we had to spring into action with a last ditch effort. We drafted a press release which, as OCC Press Officer, I sent out to the media in New Zealand. Guy and Fi spent the weekend doing TV and radio interviews and speaking to newspaper and web magazine reporters. Between us we drew a massive amount of attention to the plight of cruisers stuck in islands that had limited services, with insurance about to lapse as cyclone season approached. On Sunday evening, PM Jacinda Ardern appeared on TV news to declare that New Zealand would take seasonal issues into account for cruisers and, further, "We are asking the NZ Government to 'Be Kind' and allow cyclone refuge for genuine cruising yachties as a compelling need to arrive in New Zealand for humanitarian reasons". Even so, the Health Minister refused.

Officials in the Galapagos collected donations from cruisers who had heard the appeal for PPE for the islands. $1200 was raised. Photo Andrew Glasspool

Three British yachts leaving Antigua. Photo Caroline Dobbs

Creating resources

I enlisted Past Vice Commodore Peter Whatley, who was in Antigua on the first leg of an intended circumnavigation aboard his 15m *Henry*, to help with co-ordination in the Caribbean. He and his crew, along with everyone else, were weighing their options. The ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao) had closed, as had both Grenada

Cruisers delivering relief funds collected from cruisers in the Bahamas who had been inspired by the generosity of OCC members in the Galapagos. Photo Kristi Black

and Trinidad and Tobago, islands typically on the hurricane safe list. Their only choices were to 1) haul out in Antigua and fly home while they still could, 2) wait it out until they could continue on, or 3) sail home. Those were the types of choices everyone was facing on every island in the Caribbean and in every port around the world. Frances Rennie managed the Facebook groups, setting up questions for anyone wanting to join and approving or denying access. She then monitored and communicated with everyone almost around the clock for many weeks. I started a list of boats intending to cross the Atlantic, with a disclaimer about volunteering contact information. A surprising number of singlehanders signed up.

We learned daily of boats that needed crew to sail home, often short-handed or with young families onboard. When the airports closed all flights were cancelled, along with all hope of crew reaching them. So we started a crew-finding service within the group and assigned a member to manage it, linking people who had got stuck in the Caribbean when tourism shut down and wanted to get home with those who had the means – a berth on a sailing boat – and needed crew. It worked surprisingly well.

We organised OCC members with SSB radios to set up an OCC Atlantic Crossing SSB net and multiple volunteers came forward to take radio duties once or twice a week. We also encouraged members to file float plans* with the USCG and to tune into the SSCA Transatlantic Cruisers' Net which offered weather routing by Chris Parker and had a powerful land-based transmitter, callsign KPK.

One member, Tim Goodyear, offered to help with the growing boat list until he was ready to leave himself. He expanded the spreadsheet, then contacted PredictWind

* A float plan – the marine equivalent of an aircraft's flight plan – is an overview of a boat and its intended passage that can give the authorities a head start should a search become necessary. It should include a description of the vessel, the number of people aboard, the destination and the general route to be taken.

The crew of Danú – OCC member Peter Owens with Vera Quinlan and children Lillian and Ruairí – arriving in Horta to be greeted by the heroes from Peter Café Sport. Photo José Azevedo/Peter Café Sport

– with whom he had an account for weather routing – and told them what was happening. They offered to set up a fleet tracker for the group free of charge. It was a new service for them and we were essentially beta testing it. Boats could send in position reports by e-mail or SMS, and it proved a huge benefit for all who signed up as their relatives and friends, as well as our small team, could follow their progress. Those who bought the PredictWind weather service could also avail themselves of the brilliant routing program, but it was not necessary to buy anything to be on the tracker. Alex joined the team when Tim started preparations for his own departure, standardising sign-up procedures and communication with the tracker at sea, as well as taking over management of the lists.

My main job was that of enabler, and back-up to other team members. If there was a need, I sought approval and resources to do it. I also provided a 'newsletter' to members who did not access Facebook, letting them know what we were doing to assist and where to go for information, and posted information on the Forum.

José Azevedo, Honorary OCC Member and PO for Horta, secured permission for cruisers to stop in the Azores en route to Europe. Initially the Azores closed down completely and would not permit yachts even to anchor, but José worked hard to convince the authorities to allow boats to anchor, isolate and pick up fuel, water and provisions. Linda Lane Thornton, based in São Jorge, provided essential information about the other islands to the Facebook group each day.

Another member of the group, Alexander Wyssling, had four crew, each of whom had a satellite phone. He volunteered to set up an emergency communications and position-reporting capability for boats that did not have SSB but did have SAT phones. We set up a special e-mail address – fleet@oceancruisingclub.org – and directed the address to all the group administrators. That way, any communication with any vessel via e-mail would be seen by everyone for continuity.

Administration of the OCC Facebook groups started with me and Frances Rennie, who worked very hard to answer questions and direct new members to vital information. I quickly realised that we needed backup and cajoled Alex into joining in as an administrator, which he took on gladly. Alex maintained constant contact with the members of the OCC Facebook page so we could track who was leaving from where and when.

One member, a retired anaesthetist, advised the group on medical considerations prior to departure – ie. 14 days' quarantine before departure to avoid the risk of getting sick at sea – and debunked myths that were being propagated. Another member, also a medic, offered to consult on medical emergencies at sea via SSB.

In the Pacific, John Hembrow and John Martin organised flotillas to approach Australia and New Zealand in waves so as not to overwhelm the authorities. Together with Guy Chester they wrote procedures for safe tracking and reporting of health status and quarantine on arrival, but unfortunately those borders remained closed.

Expanding the team

The Atlantic team had Alex and me in Ireland, Frances in Scotland and Peter in the Caribbean. When the first problem came up while we were all asleep we realised we needed coverage through the night, so put out a call to OCC members on the east coast of the US and Regional Rear Commodore NE USA Moira Bentzel volunteered – bless Moira! As all things that go bump do so at night, she was the first to pick up most of the emergencies. The 'group' e-mail address forwarded to all team members, so that e-mails could be fielded close to 24/7 and everyone could remain in sync.

Now we had a machine that was working well. We were sending updates on border restrictions to Noonsite like clockwork, we had a list of boats and their details and a tracker to keep a visual on them. Glenn Tothill of BoatWatch was feeding in US Coast Guard alerts and brought in the SSCA Net. The time spent by the OCC Atlantic Crossing Team on monitoring and responding to Facebook posts, responding to e-mails, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp messages and messages received and forwarded by Rachelle Turk increased dramatically. Every comment to every post had to be reviewed, as often they contained information that needed to be documented or required a reply.

The crew from Peter Café Sport taking fresh water out to Thom D'Arcy aboard Fathom, his Vancouver 28. Photo José Azevedo/ Peter Café Sport

Decision-making

One by one, members of the groups started making decisions as their confidence grew. This boat would take off next week, a Scandinavia group would sail in company in early June, some would

Staff from Peter Café Sport take chocolate cake to the healthcare workers conducting COVID-1 9 tests in Horta. Photo José Azevedo/Peter Café Sport

wait to see if the ABCs, Trinidad or Grenada would open up. Some would stop in the Azores while others would go direct. Some would decide to sail short-handed when they would have preferred more crew, while some decided to wait until flights resumed to get their crew in. They were armed with the information they needed to reach their own conclusions.

Pretty soon we had a fleet strung across the Atlantic like neon beads on a necklace. Once in a while Alex or Moira would e-mail someone who seemed to be off course, only to learn they had hove-to in order to sleep or had gone off course when the wind shifted. We had two singlehanders caught in an early season tropical storm which caused enough damage to one vessel that he diverted into the Chesapeake. Moira talked him safely into harbour and we kept the USCG apprised all the way.

Meanwhile in the Pacific...

The Pacific fleet had its own difficult challenges – vast distances between potential stops and no one letting boats in. Some 200 vessels were signed on to the lists and 800 were members of the OCC Facebook Pacific Crossing group. French Polynesia eventually relented and allowed cruisers into its waters, Fiji opened Blue Zones for clearance of yachts into the country and one by one other countries allowed cruisers to stop and reprovision. But Australia and New Zealand remained closed to all but their own citizens and cyclone season was rapidly approaching.

Rear Commodore Jenny Crickmore-Thompson, based in South Africa, was helping people in the Indian Ocean, albeit not through an OCC organised effort. South Africa said it would allow cruisers to enter, but the rate of infection was skyrocketing and one well-known American couple who made it to South Africa contracted the virus on arrival. Tragically, Patrick Childress died at the end of June, leaving his wife alone, devastated and recovering aboard *Brick House*. It's the only case we're aware of in the sailing community. Cruisers who stopped in South Africa needed to quarantine for 14 days before departing in order not to risk becoming ill at sea. At the time of writing (late September), the situation is still evolving and will continue to do so as infection rates flare up around the world. No-one planning to leave can be sure of their reception when they reach their destination.

Outcomes in the Atlantic

In addition to providing help and information to hundreds of yachts, the overall media effort elevated the visibility and credibility of the Ocean Cruising Club and the appeal of the cruising lifestyle immeasurably. Overall, more than 200 yachts sailed from the Caribbean to Europe under the OCC 'umbrella' in 2020 and another 25 sailed with the TransOcean fleet. We don't know how many more sailed on their own, or whether that number is exceptional for a given year. It was a strange weather year, many boats encountering periods of calm alternating with strong northerlies – the trade winds were not playing their usual part this year.

The implementation of this safety net proved invaluable and the feedback from participating OCC members and non-members was universally positive. Several urgent and distress situations were assisted and disaster averted. These included two steering failures, three dismastings, one sinking, two significant storm damages, one lightning strike plus other lesser incidents. Alex and Moira in particular made some close friends out there and were able to talk them through their darker moments.

We had several boats reach the Azores from St Helena and Brazil. A vast fleet congregated at anchor in Horta, with José Azevedo and crew doing a masterful job supplying boats with provisions and meals and organising refuelling and water. They were heroes! They instilled hope in place of fear and sold quite a few 'Resistance' beanies and bottles of Peter Café Sport gin. Eventually the Azores let cruisers ashore in Horta following a negative COVID-19 test.

Matroos after deploying the liferaft from which the skipper was rescued. Photo Gabrielle Lyne

Gabrielle and Jonathan Lyne of Aqualuna, who rescued a sailor off the Azores when his yacht hit a whale and sank

A champagne reception greeted Garry Crothers, one-armed solo sailor, on his arrival in Derry from St Maarten. Photo Derry City Council

OCC member Nicolas Charpy, who had been down below when his steel vessel took a direct lightning hit, suffered burns (on his bum) when he sat on the deck to contemplate his situation. He returned to Antigua for repairs, Alex talking him back as he had no electronics – all fried by the lightning. Another vessel suffered keel damage and sank after striking a whale near the Azores. The skipper was rescued by one of our group, OCC members Gabrielle and Jonathan Lyne.

One member spent time searching for a vessel abandoned due to steering problems after hitting a whale, only to hit a whale themselves but fortunately with no damage, while members Beverley and Kevin Harris of Kailani reported being attacked by orcas (killer whales) off Portugal, their Beneteau Oceanis 50 being turned through 180° and rammed repeatedly. *Kailani* did not sustain major damage, but other boats reporting the same later weren't so lucky.

Several boats in the US decided to head north via Greenland and Iceland to return to Scandinavia. One skipper broke the rules, however, and stopped in Canada which was closed to all foreigners. He was promptly arrested and fined.

Northern Irish sailor Garry Crothers, who lost an arm to amputation following an accident, sailed about 4000 miles alone and non-stop from St Maarten to Derry in time for his daughter's wedding. We were on board with him the entire way – virtually, of course. Garry would normally have had several crew but they could not join him as there were no flights. He arrived home to a hero's welcome.

By late July things were winding down in the Atlantic, but two boats – one French, one British – were still sailing toward the Azores, both low on fuel with no wind and running out of food. We kept the Coast Guard appraised and they diverted commercial shipping to deliver food and fuel. Personnel from a Portuguese naval vessel fixed one

sailor's engine. Then we were warned of the earliest hurricane on record, *Gonzalo*, which fortunately fizzled out, and multiple tropical storms and hurricanes that thankfully veered away from our fleet.

Of the more than 1000 people who had joined the group and the 150 yachts we followed on the tracker, the vast majority had no incidents and just thanked us for being there when they reached their destinations. Significantly, many of the members of our groups were from countries that are not well represented among our current membership, including Sweden, Norway, France and Germany. Our efforts earned much awareness, gratitude and respect for the OCC, and a few new members as well.

Postscript

The thank you notes received when people reached their destinations were heart-warming. For the most part, people noted a sense of growing confidence in the decisions they were making due to trustworthy information being shared in the group. They told us the fact that we were watching their backs when many were sailing short-handed for the first time, some with young families aboard, was a big relief. Those of us on the team felt very proud of being members of the OCC – 2020 is definitely a year to remember ... or maybe to forget.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PROVIDING SHORE SUPPORT during the 2020 west-to-east Atlantic crossing

Alex Blackwell, Regional Rear Commodore, Ireland

As Daria writes in the preceding article, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 created unprecedented chaos for coastal and ocean cruisers worldwide. Amongst other efforts the OCC implemented a safety net for yachts crossing the Atlantic, which proved invaluable. It is an honourable tradition of the sea to render every assistance to those in distress or requiring help, and both members and non-members did indeed need help. For several months it became a full-time job, with significant overtime to boot.

We were able to assist with numerous urgent and distress situations, and also provided weather routing suggestions to several yachts which requested it as well as to yachts receiving assistance. The weather routing was made possible by PredictWind, who provided us with professional-level access to their weather forecasting and routing. Co-operation was also established with Coast Guard Regional Control Centres (RCCs) on both sides of the Atlantic and in the Azores. We reported incidents as they arose and requested their help when situations deteriorated. They also contacted us for assistance and feedback on specific incidents once they learned that we were indeed in earnest.

In the process of providing this hands-off support to so many yachts the team learned

a great deal. The following is a synopsis which may assist members planning their own passages or future shore-support teams watching out for their friends on a crossing.

Record keeping

Similar to the need to maintain a logbook on a yacht, the recording of information quickly became an integral and very time-consuming task when keeping track of literally hundreds of yachts crossing the Atlantic. Multiple task-specific Excel spreadsheets were set up for this and, where appropriate, shared with the team via the 'cloud'.

Float plan

Perhaps one of the most important aspects – initiated by Daria, implemented by Tim Goodyear and then expanded by me – was listing participating yachts. In essence this became a tabulated float plan* which helped team members contact individual yachts if it became necessary.

Filing a float plan neither diminishes the accomplishment of making an offshore passage nor can it be seen as hand-holding the skipper and crew, but rather is just there should something go awry. In addition to suggesting that boats crossing should provide their information for the boat list, we also recommended a proper float plan be submitted if not already done so elsewhere. The US Coast Guard, for example, will not accept float plans, but they do provide a very useful template for one. It is important that yachts undertaking a passage provide this information to a trusted person ashore in case something should happen.

There was one incident where a singlehander got into difficulties. The person holding the yacht's information contacted the UK and US MRCC and relayed the communications from the yacht. The MRCC contacted us for assistance, relaying the information. As this was not a distress situation they then needed to stand down, but were unable to pass on the contact information due to data protection regulations. A very frustrating week passed before the person with the information contacted the OCC and direct communications could be established with the yacht. We were then able to relay the re-escalating urgency of the yacht's situation back to the MRCC in the US and later in the Azores Rescue Co-ordination Centre. Two commercial ships and a Portuguese naval vessel were diverted by the respective RCCs to assist the skipper. Had a float plan been lodged, this whole process would have been greatly simplified.

Position Tracking

When boats that we were assisting for one reason or another were not on the PredictWind tracker (see below) we plotted their reported positions on Google Earth. We recorded their track and calculated their bearing and speed, precisely the information the RCCs needed for their own logs.

Communication Logs

When we realised that much of the communication with yachts (see below) was

* See page 22.

via SMS satellite communications and that no record of these was retrievable from the providers, logs (Excel spreadsheets) were initiated of outgoing and incoming messages. A positive side-effect of this was that the character length of the message could be calculated automatically – a limiting factor with text messaging, with each technology having its own peculiarities.

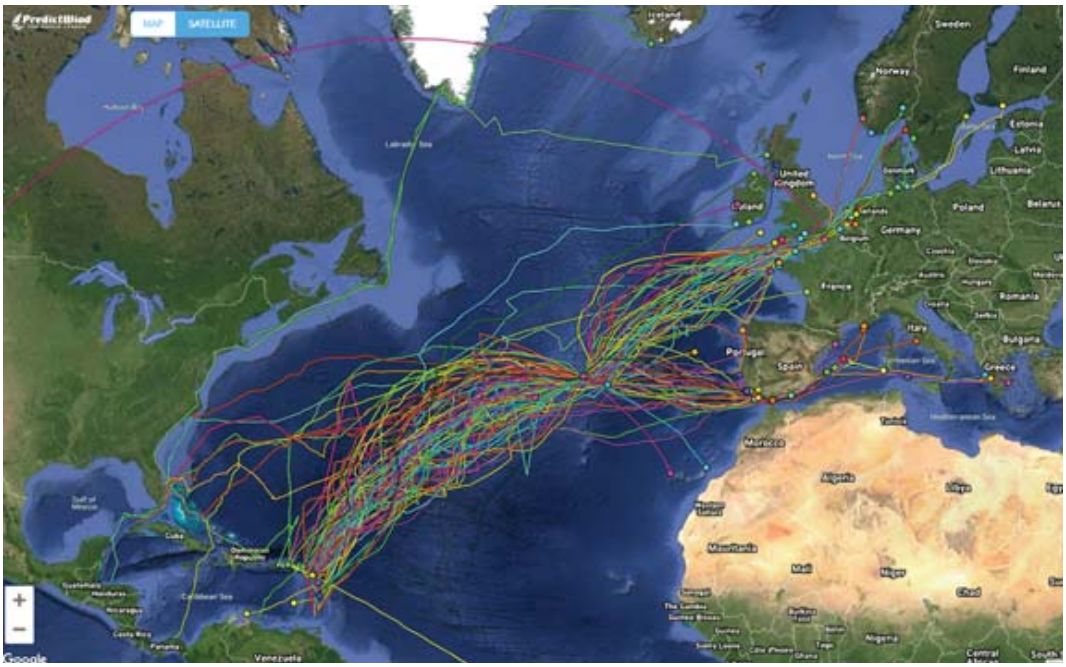
PredictWind

In addition to their weather forecasting services, PredictWind provided a fleet tracker for our fleet at no cost, organised by Tim Goodyear. PredictWind had just developed the tracker and we effectively became the beta-testers. Inclusion in this was recommended for all yachts with Iridium Go!, Garmin inReach, YellowBrick Tracker or using a Sat Phone with e-mail.

PredictWind provided wind forecasting and a tracking map that showed the location of participating vessels in the passage to Europe. Participants had free access to upload positions and were able to view the positions of other boats on the PredictWind Offshore App, which could be installed on Windows, Mac laptops, or on IOS or Android. Each vessel's personal page could be shared with friends and relations and also included a very useful blog feature. We posted a detailed instruction sheet on Facebook, adapted from those published by the Salty Dawg Rally.

The information needed by PredictWind to get a yacht set up on their tracker as part of the fleet was collected by our team and added to an online spreadsheet. The PredictWind support staff had access to this spreadsheet and drew what they needed from it. The team then co-ordinated with individual yachts to ensure they were up and running.

The OCC Fleet Tracker after most boats had arrived home safely. Courtesy PredictWind



Communication Resources

Whereas satellite voice communications are generally one-to-one, we remain proponents of the one-to-many option of HF/SSB radio. Having said that, satellite communications have evolved and by using e-mail and data a vessel may indeed transmit a message to many (pre-selected) recipients at once. Examples of this are sending an SMS text or e-mail message to more than one recipient or uploading a message to a blog, social media or other interface. Either way multiple people can be alerted to a 'situation'.

In our opinion, satellite communications are essential on board an ocean-going vessel these days

The communications systems that the team had to deal with were wide ranging, each with its own quirks. We will leave out VHF, which is generally of little use mid ocean – with the exception of one relay where the distressed yacht only had VHF and one of 'our' fleet happened to be listening and was able to relay. Daria has addressed the HF radio nets that we had in the Atlantic, so that too is omitted here.

When it comes to satellite communications, we worked with:

- Iridium phone – allows voice and data communications, the latter including e-mail and SMS. PredictWind position updates were done manually via e-mail.

- Iridium Go! – communications options are via voice, e-mail and/or SMS, depending on the subscription package. SMS to the Iridium Go! is via a specific Iridium web page form. There is a 160-character limit, which includes the sender's e-mail address. PredictWind position updates are via a built-in tracking feature and can be at intervals or when sent manually. Iridium Go! also allows data downloads. PredictWind and other weather routing resources are thus relatively easily accessible.

- Garmin inReach – communications are via SMS. Outgoing messages from the yacht are forwarded to an input e-mail address, while messages to the yacht are sent through a recipient-specific Garmin web page form. There is a 160-character limit, which does not include the e-mail address. Garmin inReach provides its own tracking page but can also be interfaced with the PredictWind tracker.

- YellowBrick – can include SMS messaging, though to send messages to a YellowBrick device a special app is required. YellowBrick provides its own tracking page but can also be interfaced with the PredictWind tracker.

- SPOT – Of all the Sat Comms equipment we worked with, only SPOT is on the Globalstar network which provides poor to non-existent coverage mid Atlantic. Communications are SMS sent to and from e-mail. There is a 140-character limit which includes the sender's email address. SPOT uploads positions to its own tracker, which gives a good visual but with little information other than a position.

The bottom line when it comes to satellite communications is best stated in the old adage that 'You get what you pay for'.

SENDING SUBMISSIONS TO FLYING FISH

CONTENT: anything which is likely to be of interest to other members – cruise and liveaboard accounts (including humour), technical articles, recipes, letters, book reviews and obituaries. Please check with me before to submitting the latter two, and also tell me if you're sending the same piece elsewhere, inside or outside the OCC. Finally, please make sure all place, personal and boat names are spelt correctly.

LENGTH: no more than 3500 words and preferably fewer than 3000, except in *very* special cases – and normally only one article per member per issue.

FORMAT: MS Word (any version) or PDF, with or without embedded photos (though see below), sent by e-mail to flying.fish@oceancruisingclub.org.

ILLUSTRATIONS: up to 20 captioned photos, professional-standard drawings or cartoons. **PLEASE** don't send more than this – while you have a single piece to illustrate, I receive up to 20 articles for each issue, so may have 400+ images to juggle! Any digital format is fine, but please contact me before sending prints.

Photos should measure at least 16cm wide at 300 dpi or 67cm wide at 72 dpi (the default setting for most cameras). If this means nothing to you, please send your photos **EXACTLY** as they were downloaded from the camera – merely opening and saving under another name degrades the quality. If sending photos by e-mail, **manually** attach no more than three per e-mail (do **NOT** use the 'attach to e-mail' facility available in many image programs, which compresses the file data), rounding off with a separate message telling me what you've sent. Alternatively use WeTransfer [www.wetransfer.com] a great little free (!) internet program. Finally, please send a list of captions, including credits, in the order the photos relate to the text. Something along the lines of: '**01** (DCM 3285) Preparing the boat for sea; **02** (DCM 3321) Leaving Horta, John at the helm; **03** (DSP 00045) The whale! Photo Sue Black'; is ideal.

CHARTLETS & POSITIONS: a rough chartlet if relevant, for professional re-drawing. If your article includes cruising information useful to others, include latitudes and longitudes where appropriate, preferably as a separate list.

COVER PHOTOS: eye-catching, upright photos of high resolution and quality, with fairly plain areas top and bottom – sky and sea? – to take the usual logo and wording.

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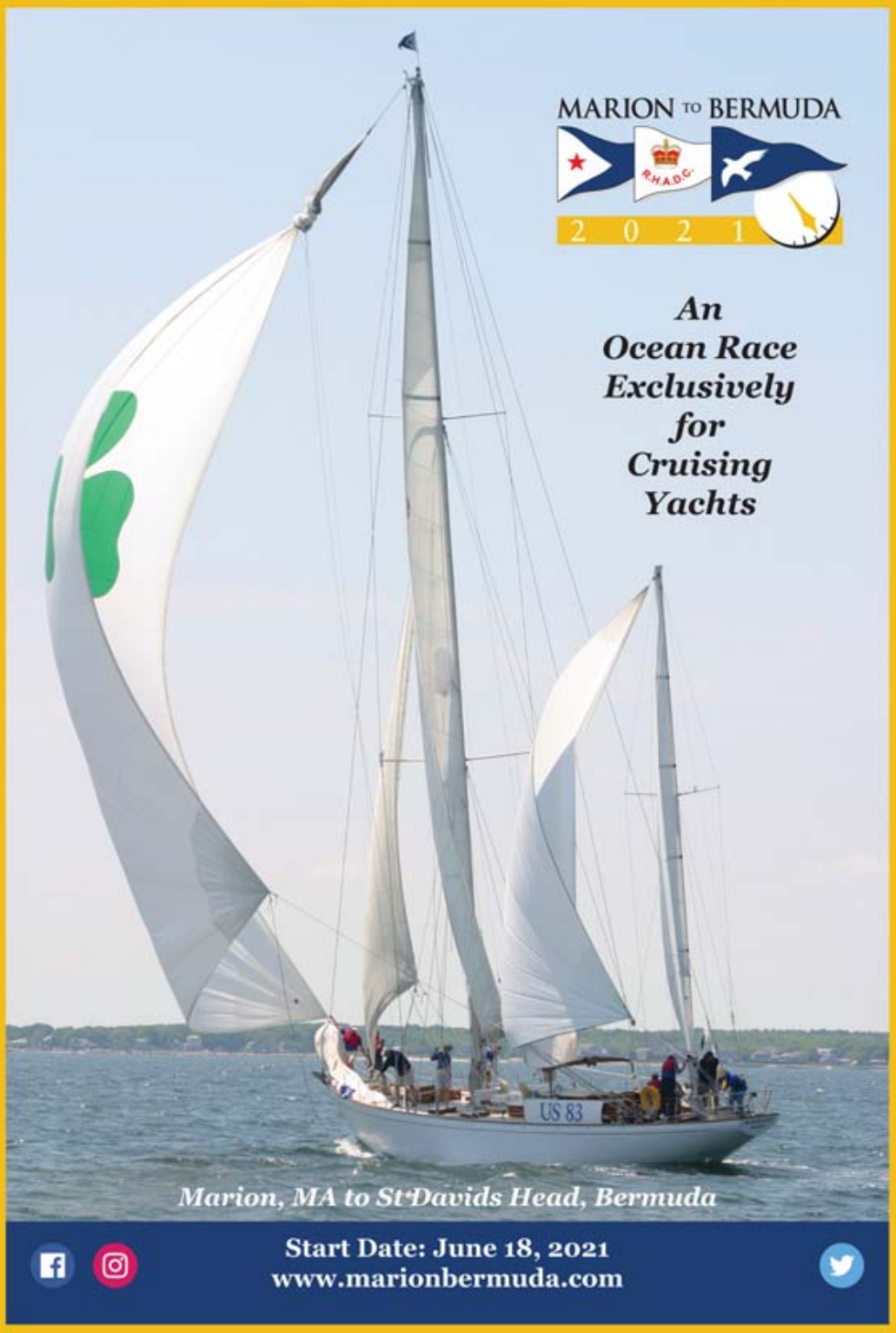
DEADLINES: 1st FEBRUARY for June publication and **1st OCTOBER for December** publication, though an issue may be closed earlier if it becomes full.

For more information, either e-mail me or refer to the ***GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS*** to be found on the website. Thank you.

Anne Hammick, Editor
flying.fish@oceancruisingclub.org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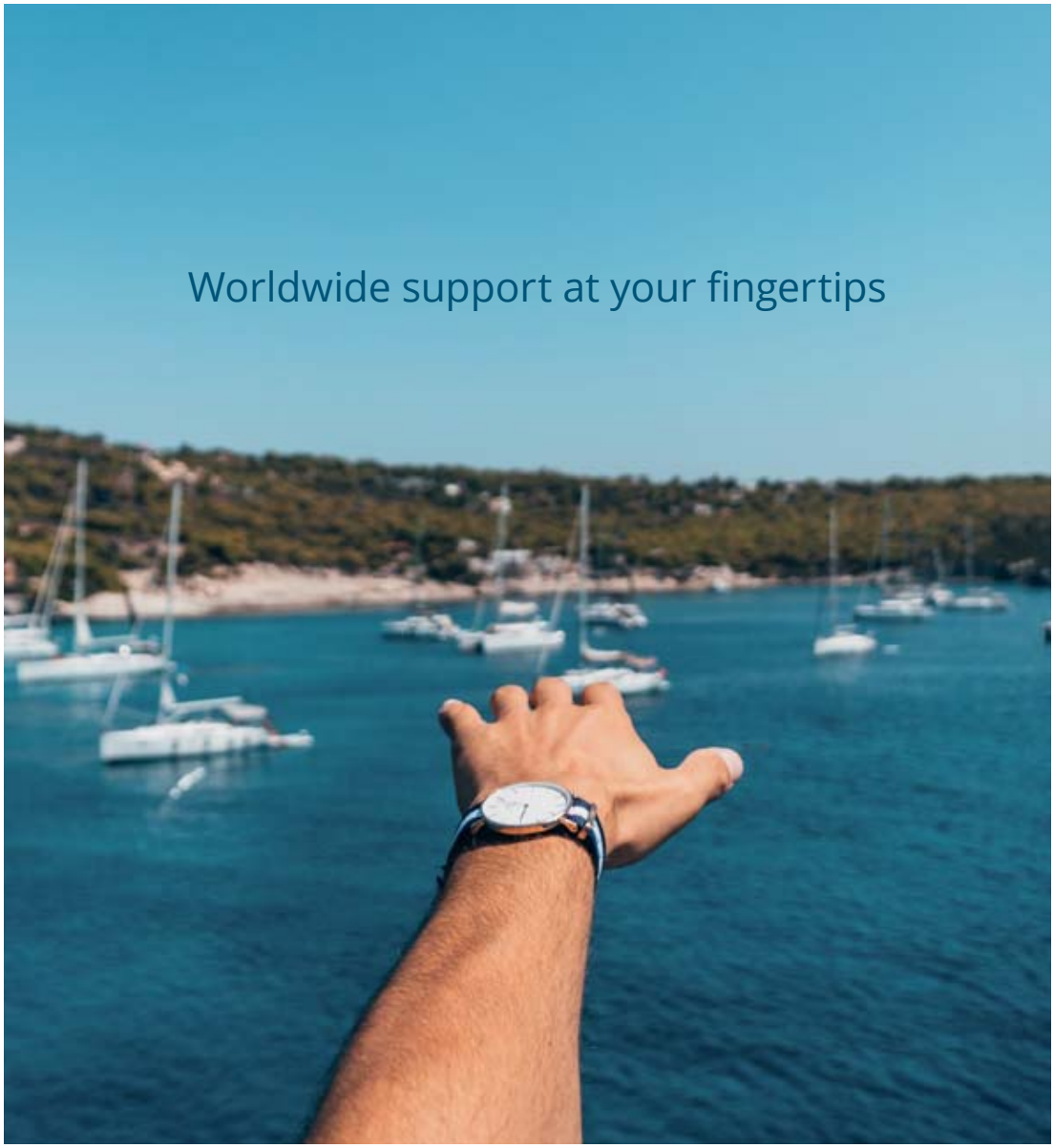

Every day at sea is an adventure where unpredictable events can occur. We are well aware of that. When things turn out differently than expected, we are there to assist you. 24/7. With advice, but above all with action. Wherever you sail in the world, we are close by. Just one phone call away.

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AN UNFORTUNATE EVENING IN BRITTANY
Brian Hall

(*In addition to the Fastnet, mentioned below, Brian has completed the Round Britain and the Azores and Back Races as well as cruising extensively in Europe. His present boat has over the years been based in Brittany, The Balearics, Tunis, the Cyclades, Corsica and now Marseille.*)

More years ago than I want to admit to, but when the Beatles were young men, I crewed in the Fastnet Race and it was all quite benign and easy. Soon afterwards I invited one of my fellow Fastnet crew to come racing with me in my National 12 dinghy on a gravel pit in Northamptonshire. It was blowing hard that weekend and we noticed with some amusement that most of the other competitors were rolling their mainsails round their booms a few times. No reefs for us, we said, we are Fastnet veterans.

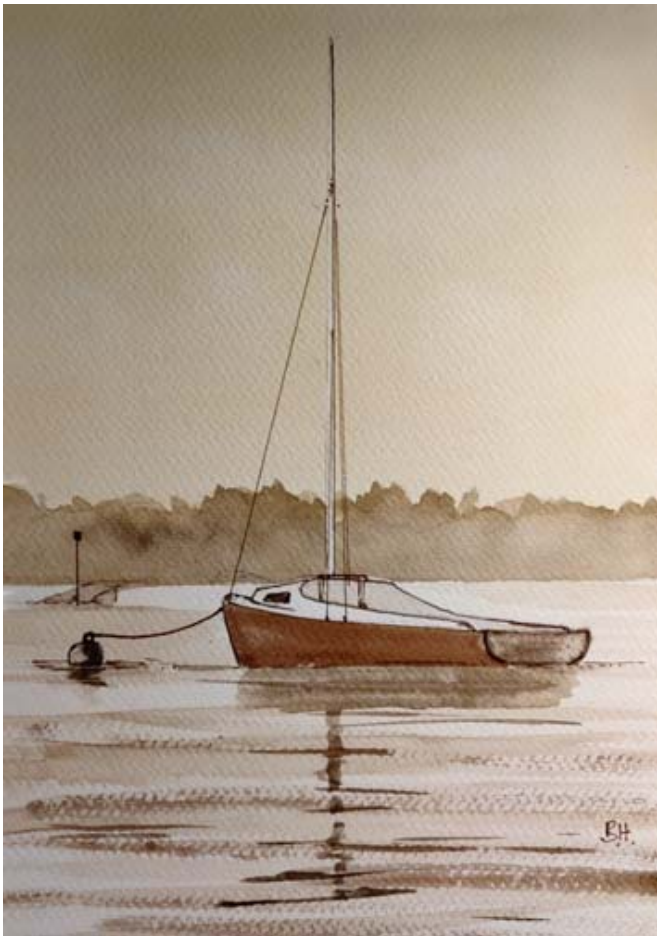
Not long afterwards we had cause to regret this decision. Rounding a mark of the course we bore away downwind and the power of our unreefed mainsail drove our bow under, the boat diving like a submarine and leaving us swimming on our own. When the boat resurfaced some distance away there was a large amount of weed trailing from her masthead.

My point is that it is not only on the great oceans that one can get into trouble and it pays not to be cocky. The following incident is paltry when compared to those tales of high latitudes and great capes which I routinely read with awe in every edition of *Flying Fish*, but it reinforces the feeling that you don't need to be on a great ocean to get into a spot of bother.

This was brought home to me this summer. While my sturdy Rustler 36 was quietly moored in Marseille, I went to Brittany where my wife Martine's family have a holiday home on the Ile aux Moines in the Golfe du Morbihan. The house comes with a pretty little 17ft centreboarder, complete with small cabin, called *Penard*, which roughly translates as a laid-back person. A couple of years ago I decided to take this craft in hand as she seemed in danger of becoming derelict. I like boats to be in good shape but *Penard*'s owner, Martine's father, survivor of an exploding mine in the Italian campaign of 1943 and as a consequence generally more sanguine about life than I am, has tended to have an 'it should be okay' approach to boat maintenance, particularly as he is now 97.

I have done good things with this little boat. She has been re-rigged, painted a smart green, most of the gear is in good order, the antifouling has been re-done properly and the launching trailer repaired, but I am not there all the time and she is still not quite up to scratch. Her worst feature is a diabolical little plastic dinghy which, being a lot smaller than I am, gets us to and from the swinging mooring with its gunwales awash.

This year, post COVID-19 lockdown, we started late, anxious to have the house and boat ready for the arrival of the younger generations for their summer holidays. On a fine summer evening at high water the local tractor driver backed the little boat down the beach and she was afloat for the summer. The outboard wasn't working so I rowed her out the couple of hundred metres to the mooring using cumbersome



Penard on her mooring

lifeboat oars (which are not even the same length) and, helped by a fresh offshore breeze, Martine steered us neatly to the swinging mooring which we picked up deftly, making everything fast in a correct manner.

Time to head back, so I stepped into the nightmare little dinghy which instantly skidded away under my weight. I made a grab for the boat on my way into the water, dislocating an already arthritic and damaged shoulder as the dinghy's oars floated gently away on the tide. The water was quite cold, the pain excruciating and I had no feeling at all in my right hand. How do you get back into a boat with one arm? Martine was looking anxiously down and passed me a loop of rope to put a foot into, but this didn't seem to work. Then we remembered there was one of those little boarding ladders with umbrella handles in the cockpit locker and she hooked it over the transom. I managed to get a foot onto the lower rung and tried to lever myself up with my remaining arm, but the ladder broke under my weight and I was back to one-arm swimming.

It was becoming quite difficult now – and cold. Martine is agile, nimble and determined but 30 kilos lighter than me. I had been in the water quite a long time, probably 20 minutes, and we were both getting anxious. No oars in the dinghy, no motor on the boat, freshening offshore breeze and the tide beginning to ebb. One-armed swimming is not too practical. It was becoming hard to see how this could end well.

I'm not quite sure how we did it in the end, but with massive mutual willpower and synchronised physical effort I was eventually a landed fish, safe in the cockpit of the little boat, in great pain and very cold.

Usually there are lots of boats around on a fine evening but that evening – no-one. At last, maybe half an hour later, a smart black RIB with two men aboard in smart black jackets spotted our waving and, making a broad arc with their powerful engine, came alongside. Stefan and Nicolas were perfect. They pointed out that the last ferry from the island would leave soon and proposed taking us to the mainland. They called

an ambulance, then gently eased me aboard the RIB and headed back to the mainland shore. They both took off their smart black jackets to give me some protection, but even so I cried like a baby with pain as the RIB hit each little wavelet and shivered uncontrollably in my wet clothes. The ambulance was waiting when we arrived, ready to leave for the hospital in Vannes half an hour away.

Meantime Martine, not allowed in the ambulance, was alone on the mainland and the last ferry back to the island, not far but across a roaring tide race, had left. In the end a kind man with a boat, who had seen the drama with the ambulance at the quay, gave her a ride back to the island, only for her to find that the island taxi had already packed up for the evening. She walked the 4km back to the house on a mixture of tarmac and gravel – barefoot.

Nobody wants to be in a hospital during COVID-19 and overworked hospital staff don't welcome injured foreign sailors with sunny welcoming smiles during a pandemic. However, by 9pm they had X-rayed, relocated and trussed up the dislocated shoulder, the acute pain was relieved and the worst was over. The doctor told me not to move my shoulder for a fortnight and hurried off to his next case.

'You are free to go now,' said the nurse, but it was not that easy. Soaking wet shorts, a T-shirt, a wristwatch, some boat shoes and a Leatherman multi-tool on my belt were my only possessions. No money, no phone, no reading glasses, no ID – nothing. I was 20 miles from the island with one usable arm, and the last ferry back had long departed. 'You can't stay here,' said the nurse, 'this is a casualty ward'. She lent me a phone and I tried Martine's number. No reply – out of coverage. Anyway, what could she have done? That was the only useful phone number that I knew by heart.

The nurse was back at her screen, which seemed to be occupying her more than the patients scattered around her on trolleys. When I could catch her attention again I asked if there was some kind of social service in the hospital. She said there was, but not in the evenings. At the next opportunity I asked if they had any possible accommodation and she said they did, but only for people in distress who had nothing. I said that described me perfectly, but she replied that it would be very complicated.

At 10.30pm I decided to discharge myself and find a hotel. My wet clothes were in a plastic bag under the trolley and, with the help of my one available arm I was able to crawl under the trolley and recover them. I slipped on the soaking shorts with my one working hand and worked my feet into the clammy boat shoes, though failing to lace them one-handed. Then I took my X-rays and walked out of the hospital into the night, dripping seawater and trailing shoelaces, still wearing my hospital gown and wristband.

Opposite the railway station in Vannes is a hotel, but the night-duty man was not enthusiastic about taking in this shivering refugee, who was dripping seawater on his carpet and without financial means of any kind. However, after I had carefully explained my situation he turned out to have a very good heart, took pity on me and agreed to put me in a comfortable room for handicapped people. He found me a toothbrush but kept my X-rays as collateral. One final thing, could he please e-mail Martine? What should he say? Just say '*J'ai votre mari à mon hotel*'. Does she read French? She is French.

All's well that ends well, but you're never too old for a nautical adventure even if it's not in the Beagle Channel or halfway across the Southern Ocean.

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THE 19th HOLE
Graham and Avril Johnson

(*Graham and Avril need little introduction, having written for* Flying Fish *18 times since leaving the UK in 2002 for a leisurely circumnavigation aboard their 44ft cutter* Dream Away. *We last heard from them in* Flying Fish 2019/2 *on their arrival in Madagascar.*

Dream Away *finally returned home to Hythe Sailing Club near Southampton at 1515 on 11th September 2020, 6618 days after she had left (a little over 18 years), having put 60,085 miles under her keel.*

The cover of this issue carries a photo of Dream *Away at anchor in Horta near the end of her circumnavigation.*)

Richards Bay entrance was a welcome sight after our tortuous 1600 mile passage down the Mozambique Channel from Baly Bay, Madagascar. With helpful advice from Des Cason we had been dodging southerly blasts from vicious little depressions and chasing favourable currents. The final night, 25th October 2019, was dire – we encountered an intense electric storm, experienced winds up to 55 knots and suffered a gearbox transmission failure.

Zululand Yacht Club in Richards Bay provides a welcoming refuge for cruisers after crossing the Indian Ocean. It is a well-documented destination that caters for most sailors' needs, with haul-out facilities, workshops, laundry, fuel, water and excellent provisioning in a large shopping mall a taxi ride away. We hired a car, which not only made re-provisioning easy but also enabled us to visit the nearby self-drive safari game reserves – enthralling! It also facilitated movement outside the club at night following warnings against walking out after dark.

Even in protected game reserves poachers threaten these animals' very existence


Greenwich Meridian
60°N
N
North Atlantic Ocean
ENGLAND
Hythe
Rade de Brest
Brest
BRITTANY
EUROPE
40°N
AZORES
Mediterranean Sea
CANARY ISLANDS
Tropic of Cancer
20°N
CAPE VERDES
AFRICA
Red Sea
Equator
ASCENSION ISLAND
Georgetown
South Atlantic Ocean
ST HELENA
BENGUELA CURRENT
20°S
Tropic of Capricorn
NAMIBIA
Walvis Bay
Luderitz
Johannesburg
SOUTH AFRICA
Richards Bay
AGULHAS CURRENT
Saldanha
East London
Cape Town
Cape of Good Hope
Port Elizabeth
Cape Agulhas
Mossel Bay
0°
40°E
Mozambique Channel
Baly Bay
MADAGASCAR
THE AZORES
40°N
To Brittany
GRACIOSA
Praia da Vitoria
Horta
FAIAL
TERCIERA
PICO
SÃO JORGE
SÃO MIGUEL
From Ascension Isand
SANTA MARIA
30°W

Cape Town, our next significant destination, required a demanding passage down the wild, barren, eastern coast. As sailors know, the Agulhas Current is legendarily lethal in a southerly blow and these are depressingly frequent. Patience is required to await the necessary safe window so in the meantime we carried out the inevitable maintenance, ordered a new mainsail and genoa, restocked the boat, laundered everything and were ready to go.

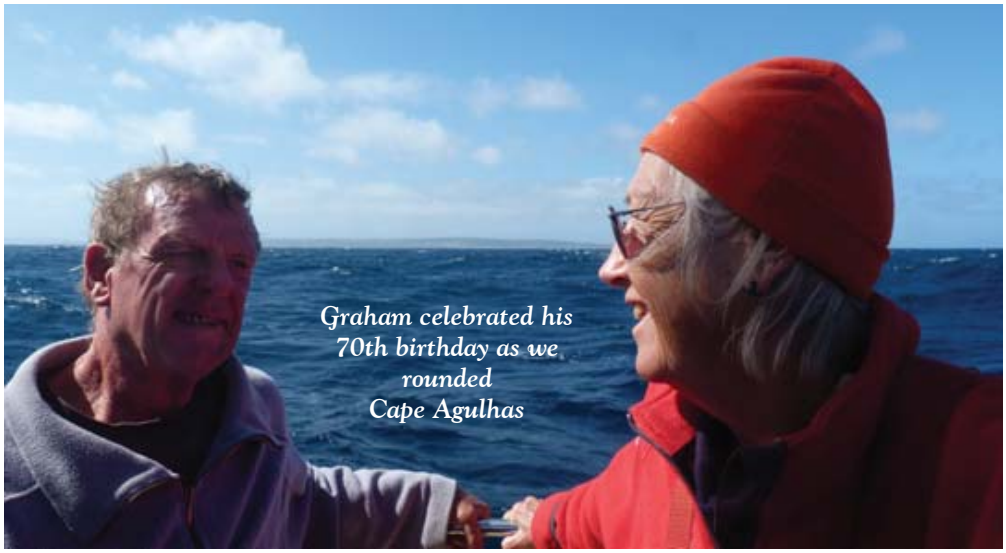
Christmas was celebrated with a giant *braai* (barbecue) at the yacht club amongst many friends with an abundance of food and drink. Still no good window to travel, so we looked forward to the New Year's Eve party with live music and the inevitable enormous *braai*. It was a very lively affair and great fun. In the meantime a favourable weather pattern was developing, so we set off on New Year's Day hoping to make it to East London before the weather window closed.

The first night out a vile weather cell brewed up, with torrential rain and intense lightning activity but mercifully little wind. It was a long, wet, scary night and we were pleased when at daybreak the system packed up and left. We were less pleased to find two sliders on our new main had opened out and come adrift from the mainsail track. We were passing Durban, however, and the wind had shifted and strengthened from the north, so the main was doused and the genoa poled-out as we found the Agulhas Current. Now we were flying, setting a *Dream Away* record of 240 miles in 24 hours. We flashed past East London after two days so, with a day of favourable wind remaining, we continued to Port Elizabeth.

Substandard mast slides caused endless trouble

At friendly, welcoming PE we were allocated a berth in the ramshackle yacht club marina. It is not a particularly attractive place, however, and as the active port was busy loading ore, dust soon covered the boat. It also has a deservedly poor reputation for swell, creating havoc amongst the berthed boats. Lines are frequently broken and deck fittings ripped out, so we had no wish to stay for long. Happily the worst part of the voyage was behind us, as there are more frequent refuge ports along the coastline on the passage to Cape Town.

South Africa requires yachts to check in with the authorities on arrival at every new port, and to file a passageplan before departure. In Richards Bay we had trailed around the various offices to accomplish this, so were pleasantly surprised to find that in Port Elizabeth the whole process could be completed by e-mail. Two days later we were off again. The southerly 15 knot wind soon backed into the east and strengthened to 20 knots, so once again we were bowling along downwind having a great time, making for Mossel Bay a mere 200 miles away. Unfortunately, the mainsail sliders let us down again during the night and, additionally, the headboard pair chafed through the webbing attaching them to the sail. We reached Mossel Bay next evening and were allocated a slot alongside the jetty wall against enormous black tyres, though the following day we were asked to move alongside a fishing boat on the other side



Graham celebrated his 70th birthday as we rounded Cape Agulhas

of the jetty. No problem – it was easier than lying to the big tyres. As in PE we were able to check in and file the passage plan by e-mail. Mossel Bay was noteworthy for housing the *Bartolomeu Dias*, a replica of a 15th century Portuguese trading caravel. Her sistership, the *Boa Esperança*, was hosted by the OCC in Cowes in 1990 during her maiden voyage to Holland*. Both were built in Portugal and sailed under the flag of Aporvela, the Portuguese Sail Training Association which had hosted an OCC rally to Lisbon in 1988.

Two days later another weather window afforded us the opportunity to make passage around Cape Agulhas and the Cape of Good Hope, with a strong chance of sailing directly to Cape Town. We made an evening departure, setting out in a slight sea with 10 knots of south-southwest wind. Clearing the headland lighthouse, the wind moved into the east as forecast, rising steadily as we romped along towards Cape Agulhas. Late afternoon the following day we passed the Cape, leaving the Indian Ocean behind with

* See *A Caravel in Cowes*, *Flying Fish* 1990/2.

We hired a car in Cape Town to tour around and revisit Cape Agulhas

Table Mountain dominates the vibrant waterfront

the South Atlantic beckoning ahead. We were making great progress with 25 knots of easterly wind and lively seas. The wind died down overnight and we drifted up the west coast of Africa, passing the Cape of Good Hope shrouded in mist the following morning. By late afternoon on 11th January we were entering the Victoria and Alfred (her son) Waterfront Marina in the heart of Cape Town, having enjoyed spectacular views of Table Mountain on our approach. To enter the marina we needed to negotiate two bridges, one swing and one lifting, and had been warned that if 'load shedding' occurred we would have to wait. Load shedding refers to random power cuts, often several hours long, as the grid becomes overloaded. We were fortunate, however, and everything worked well for our entry.

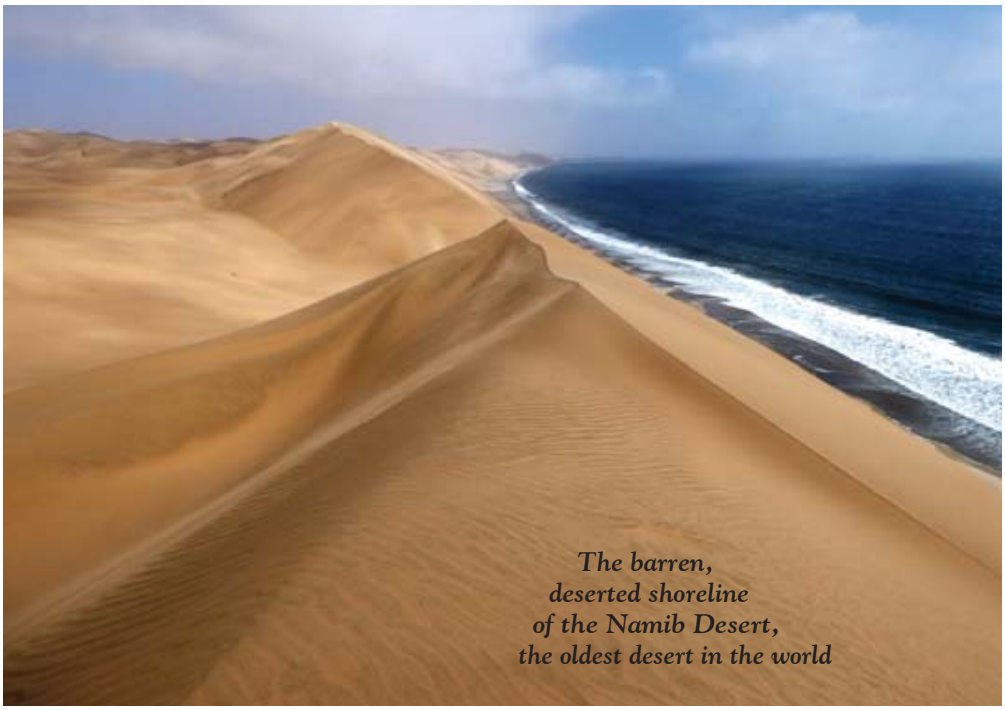
The lifting bridge into the V&A Waterfront Marina

The V&A waterfront is an incongruous upmarket zone to which tourists flock to enjoy the luxury-brand shops, expensive restaurants, palatial hotels and vibrant waterfront atmosphere in a setting dominated by the towering Table Mountain. The marina berths are surrounded by multi-million pound apartments, so people were paying a lot of money to watch us mending our yacht. An early entertainment was the arrival of our sailmaker, who stripped off the main, offered apologies for the pathetic head-fastenings and promised to investigate the issues with the opening sliders. Later they were treated to a couple of days watching our rigger replacing all the rigging we had not changed earlier and installing a new furling system on our staysail. We trust the onlookers felt they had good value.

Checking out is a bizarre paper chase and we were very grateful for the help of our excellent OCC Port Officer, Robert Ravensberg. Apart from confirmation from the marina that we had paid our account, we also required clearance from the Royal Cape Yacht Club and the Port Authority, with neither of which we had conducted any business. Then it's the usual immigration, customs and Port Captain circuit. We got stymied there, as they breathalyse you at the door and we'd just enjoyed lunch at the Royal Cape Yacht Club.

We left at 0815 on 18th February, the first bridge opening, and bade Cape Town farewell, heading out past Robben Island. The predicted southeast wind had been replaced by an annoying light northerly, so we tacked out but never found the forecast wind. We noticed a fishing float with the sort of wake one usually associates with a strong current, but this wake was going in the wrong direction – 'perhaps some unforeseen counter-current?' was our first thought. Then the surface broke and a large whale breached. Clearly the poor beast was in trouble, tangled with some fishing gear,

Total protection in the V&A Waterfront Marina



The barren,
deserted shoreline
of the Namib Desert,
the oldest desert in the world

so we put out an 'all ships' call and had a response from an inshore rescue station who promised to investigate. Others reported the same plight and eventually we were pleased to hear that the whale had been located and freed from the encumbrance.

We were heading for Namibia, but elected to stop in Saldanha about 60 miles north of Cape Town. It is the largest natural harbour in South Africa and allegedly a wonderful cruising destination. We were not so impressed, finding it too industrialised in the northern part and too shallow in the south. Being surrounded by true desert was an interesting experience, however.

After a couple of nights we left, encountering a huge pod of humpback whales with at least 50 cavorting around us. Luderitz was our intended destination and the forecast was for a good southerly wind. We also had the favourable cold Benguela Current, but this creates dense fog all along the remote, deserted, desert coast so we sailed about 60 miles offshore to keep out of the fog banks and to avoid becoming ensnared by the occasional violent onshore squalls. We found ourselves due to enter Luderitz in the middle of the night with at least 40 knots of wind at the entrance. With 30 knots of wind and the current behind us, slowing down was problematic so we continued towards Walvis Bay. Inevitably, the following day the wind shifted north, blew hard for a few hours, and then disappeared, to be replaced by a dense fog bank overnight. We were happy to reach Walvis Bay, fractionally inside the Tropic of Capricorn, on 26th February after nearly six days and 750 miles sailing.

We anchored in the large bay adjacent to the extremely friendly and helpful yacht club. Checking into Namibia was simple, fast and cost-free. We immediately noticed the more relaxed, laid-back and friendly atmosphere amongst the entire population than that encountered in South Africa. We had a great time reuniting with many friends and the yacht club bar profits soared.

We saw even more wildlife on our Namibian safari

We hired a 4x4 with a tent on the roof to explore Namibia, returning at the start of the pandemic crisis. The prevailing advice was to stay where you were if possible. We accepted this until the end of April heralded the finish of the second period of Namibian lockdown, with a further extension looking inevitable. The weather was appreciably colder and the strong winter southwesterly winds were building, making our current open anchorage both chilly and uncomfortable. We had planned to return to the UK via the Caribbean, Bermuda and the Azores, but this was impossible as Western Atlantic ports were closed, so we decided to make for the Azores via St Helena and Ascension, with a possible restock/break in the Cape Verdes.

Walvis Bay Yacht Club under lockdown

Finding a home for our stores

Walvis Bay had all we needed to prepare the boat for departure. The local gas supplier could refill our 9kg bottles, our favourite hardware store had watermaker drive belts and, coincidentally, a new stock of hand sanitiser. Supermarkets were well stocked, some were willing to vacuum-pack small quantities of fresh meat and the alcohol sales ban had been eased.

The rules and regulations in St Helena were changing frequently so we set off unsure what reception we would receive. We left on 26th April, as soon as the early morning fog had cleared sufficiently to pick our way safely through the mass of anchored shipping. We lost the fog 20 miles off the coast, thereafter enjoying the strengthening afternoon breeze that provided sparkling downwind sailing conditions. These lasted for the next couple of days, with *Dream Away* romping along and covering around 160 miles a day, then the wind lightened up and it was time to get the spinnaker out. A couple of days later there was a loud report like a gunshot – a big rip had occurred across its centre panel, so down it came and we were back to poled-out genoa.

The following day was Av's birthday, the first at sea in our 18 years of adventuring. It was a glorious, sunny, blue sky, gentle breeze day, perfect for champagne celebrations, pressie opening and fine food. Since it was such a lovely day we held a spinnaker-repairing party!

Happiness on a birthday at sea

Next day we crossed the Greenwich Meridian from east to west – now our degrees of longitude were increasing rather than decreasing – and the day after was an even more significant landmark for us. We crossed the longitude of Hythe Sailing Club on England's south coast, our home base and departure point of this great odyssey. Technically we had now sailed around the world ... obviously time for another bottle of bubbly.

The somewhat inadequate gentle breezes of the previous couple of days had picked up and once again we were bowling along downwind in a steady force 4. It was about this time that Av reported a broken tooth, not nice! Being a couple of days from St Helena we e-mailed the Port Captain, alerting him of our imminent arrival, requesting a mooring and describing Av's dental needs. We received a reply to the effect that we would be allowed two days on a quarantine mooring but no physical contact with anyone apart from his port staff. It didn't sound like dental help was on the agenda.

St Helena is not a place to arrive in the dark, so we spent the night trying to slow the boat down and approach our destination at first light. We had covered 1250 miles in 10 days, not setting any records but a perfectly enjoyable, relaxed, sunny downwind passage. We were directed to the quarantine mooring at the furthest point in the field and told not to leave the boat. The Port Captain asked what we needed in the way of fuel, water and stores, promising to do his best to deliver. The VHF was alive with folk calling us up, as we knew many of the people already moored there. It was good to be amongst friends again but frustrating not to be able to get together. The authorities duly arrived, masked and rubber-gloved, to pass over the inevitable sheaf of forms to complete, then took away our triple-wrapped plastic garbage. Next day our supplies were delivered along with the edict that we could not stay beyond 48 hours.

The spinnaker-repairing party

The nearest we got to St Helena

We departed St Helena towards Ascension Island at mid-day on 8th May in a light southeasterly breeze, enjoying calm seas, a blue sky and hot sunshine. We had already obtained the necessary visa for Ascension Island online and were hopeful of a more welcoming attitude. The island lies northwest of St Helena, so with the prevailing east or southeast wind we had a most delightful, tranquil, stress-free downwind passage covering the 700 miles in just over six days.

We made easy landfall, sailing around the island to the open anchorage off Georgetown on the northwest coast. After settling in we contacted Port Control, who had been advised of our arrival by St Helena so our time at sea and stop at Jamestown was already logged. Could we come ashore, we asked? Within half an hour we had a positive response and were told to report to the harbour office. It could not have been easier – the paperwork was simple, a medic from the hospital arrived to give us a quick temperature check, and then we walked to the police station to get our passports stamped. Everyone was friendly and it was comforting to know we were on a COVID-free island with unfettered freedom to move around.

Ascension is a large military installation, British owned but with both British and US bases plus a number of European tracking and relay stations. There is no true resident population as everyone is there under some type of contract. We soon found the local dentist, whom Av reported as the most gentle she has ever encountered, and her tooth was quickly repaired. The landscape is largely rugged volcanic lava beds, incredibly difficult to negotiate, therefore chosen as the test site for the moon buggy. The anchorage itself is generally quite rolly, making getting ashore from the dinghy challenging and at times impossible. Beach landing is forbidden as it is a major nesting site for green turtles. Thousands come ashore each year to lay their eggs, and at night we could shine a torch into the clear water teeming with tiny turtles frantically flapping to freedom.

The administrative centre around the quay at Georgetown, Ascension Island

The small-boat landing point is at the head of a long concrete pier, where a set of steps leads down to a two-level concrete platform with a steel ladder at one end. Several strong knotted ropes hang down from an overhead gantry to assist stepping ashore. On a quiet day coming alongside and dropping or retrieving crew is relatively easy, but it is more usual for the swell to be sweeping in over the platform and, when things get really lively, crashing up the steps to the top. Success depends upon watching the swell pattern and split-second timing.

We were awaiting the start of June to move on, as this heralds the commencement of the monsoon in western Africa, producing frequent westerly winds. Early in the month we headed north with wonderful sailing conditions, averaging about 160 miles per day in the brisk easterly trades. Crossing the Equator for the sixth time, we kept the fair winds

Timing is critical for safely negotiating the quay

Should a 70-year-old be doing this in a rolly anchorage?

up to about 5°N. Then came the doldrums with light and variable winds, often less than 5 knots. Nevertheless the log shows only 16 hours of engine use for an extended period as we worked our way into the weather pattern of the northern hemisphere. We soon encountered a westerly wind on one of the many depressions spinning off the African coast, which allowed us to continue north whilst maintaining our easting. We were gently moving around the big bulge of western Africa, keeping a minimum of 100 and

We enjoyed wonderful downwind passages from Namibia to the Equator

We last saw José 25 years ago. The whole family gave us a wonderful welcome, and of course we exchanged burgees…

…the one we presented being particularly well-travelled

preferably 200 miles off the coast to avoid the inshore fishing traffic and any threat of opportunistic piracy. All was going incredibly well to plan, and it was a great highlight when we finally crossed our outbound track from the Gambia. Now we really had completed our circumnavigation – definitely a champagne moment, and we took time out to reflect back on the previous 18 years of cruising and adventuring.

Approaching the Cape Verdes the news was not good – there was a high COVID-19 infection rate and the authorities were not allowing anyone ashore. So, despite an adverse weather pattern, we carried on past the islands. We were soon into 20+ knot northeast trades and *Dream Away* went bounding off towards the Azores. For the first few days the sea state was rough and we kept the boat speed down to avoid unnecessary stress or damage – it was somewhere in this period that our wind generator suffered a bird strike, shedding a blade which destroyed one of our solar panels. It is a bizarre coincidence that a similar bird strike and resulting blade loss occurred on our outbound passage from the Gambia to Brazil. Perhaps it is a region inhabited by particularly dumb but tough birds.

Eventually we broke through into quieter winds nearer the centre of the high pressure and enjoyed some great sailing, albeit still to windward. Finally we sighted the summit of Pico on the neighbouring island to Faial, our destination. It was 7th July, and we had sailed 3069 miles in 28 days since leaving Ascension, the last 16 days and 1670 miles on one tack, which took us to the harbour entrance of Horta. It was our fifth time in Horta and a wonderful feeling to be back, another champagne moment. Soon the guys from Peter Café Sport arrived alongside offering to fetch anything we needed whilst awaiting our COVID-19 test. This service was free and an incredibly generous act – José Azevedo and his family deserve a huge vote of thanks from the yachting fraternity.

Following a wonderful month on Faial we moved on to Praia da Vitoria on Terciera, another COVID-free environment. It's a smaller and more tranquil town than Horta, boasting spectacular beaches, a great anchorage and the cheapest marina in the Azores.

It had been an unsettled year in the North Atlantic and some serious depressions were crossing at the start of August. We waited patiently, eventually spying a good window that, incredibly, coincided with England taking Portugal off the quarantine list. We sailed east underneath a passing depression, then headed directly for the Brittany peninsula enjoying another great sail. We anchored overnight in the Rade de Brest to carry out repairs, then sailed onward towards England's south coast and home.

After a round of 18 years and an over par 60,000 miles we returned to the Hythe Sailing Clubhouse bar to reminisce on the highlights of our epic odyssey. We hope to share them with you soon.

FROM THE GALLEY OF ... Alex Blackwell, aboard *Aleria*

IRISH '*CROQUETAS*'

Proper Galician *croquetas* follow a fairly complicated (to me) flour-based recipe, but these Irish *croquetas* are based on mashed potatoes. They're a great way to use up leftovers and, more importantly, very easy to make. The result is very much like true Galician *croquetas* and quite delicious.

Ingredients

- 2 or 3 cups mashed potato (these are leftovers, so the quantity is not critical)
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- a dollop of sour cream or plain yoghurt
- salt and pepper
- other herbs and/or spices to taste
- optional: ham, cheese, shrimp, or whatever you want to use up, chopped or grated as appropriate
- plain flour (may or may not be needed)
- sunflower oil
- breadcrumbs

Pour about 15mm of sunflower oil into a medium sized saucepan (a smaller saucepan uses less oil but will also hold fewer *croquetas*). Warm a ceramic or Pyrex plate in a low oven ready for the finished *croquetas*, and place a few sheets of paper towel on the plate to absorb excess oil.

Mix the egg, potatoes, sour cream, herbs and/or spices and any optional additions in a bowl. Add flour as needed to achieve the desired consistency, which is sticky but formable into small balls. Roll the balls in the breadcrumbs and place on a plate.

Heat the sunflower oil – they'll stick if it's not hot enough – and carefully place a single layer of croquetas in the pan, leaving room between them. Agitate them as they go in and turn them over as they start to brown. When nicely brown, remove from the pan and place on the plate in the warm oven. Repeat until all are cooked.

VOYAGING WITH VETLE
Dag and Ma Theresa Hoiland

(Escape *is a Beneteau First 47.7, home port Stavanger Norway, which Dag and Ma Theresa (Con for short) had already sailed thousands of miles. She has served them well and it was time for new horizons, literally and figuratively.*

Dag, Con and four-year-old Vetle shared their decision to depart with family and friends in October 2018, and in July 2019 Escape *left Stavanger for Gran Canaria. They continued across the Atlantic in December/January 2020 and cruised the Caribbean until COVID-19 caught up with them in March/April – see the September* Newsletter.

Escape *is currently on the hard in Curaçao Marina and the Hoiland family are back in Norway waiting for the opportunity to continue their learning and exploration.*)

Our thoughts were on the table

When will you be back? You don't know? What do you mean? Where will you go? Atlantic? That's far! And deep! How did you decide to sail across the Atlantic? What about Vetle? He's only four years old – today!

It was the end of October 2018 and Vetle's fourth birthday party. The cake was on the table, the coffee was warm and kids were running in and out. We put our thoughts on the table and were mildly surprised by the questions that flew across the room. We were happy because it meant they cared. 'They' are our family – cousins, uncles and aunts in Norway, and cousins, uncles, aunts and grandparents in the Philippines. 'They' cared. That was the best start we could imagine. One needs a home to be outward-looking.

We have no answers to these questions, or to a bunch of other good questions, and we don't look for any. Answers put too many frames on our journey, limit our exploration and prevent us from learning. Answers build expectations that trigger more questions requiring more answers. Phew...

We had lived the comfortable, safe life in Norway for more than ten years, working and weekend sailing. Nothing bad happens if you buy into the suburban 9am to 5pm formula, but we never did. Con had, after her education, worked overseas as many Filipinos do. I had lived outside Norway during

Vetle and Con

Dag … dreaming of sailing south?

my university years and later in Africa doing humanitarian work at the tail end of the Angolan civil war. We are a well-travelled, multicultural family which rubbed off on our priorities, world views and perspectives. Exploring is ingrained into our marriage. Now it morphed into a sailing trip.

The arrival of Vetle in October 2014 made a change. We instantly transformed from an adventurous couple to a small family, but we did not let go of our curiosity and it was during these first months of Vetle's life that we started talking about how to let him explore, learn and share his world. How could we, as responsible parents, not go?

By Vetle's fourth birthday *Escape* was already on the hard in Stavanger and preparations were well underway. We needed to change her from a performance cruiser to a long-term, safe, liveaboard kid's boat. We needed to transform ourselves from weekend sailors to a long-term liveaboard family.

Escape ready for a winter of preparations

Big knife, small fingers

Preparing is not planning

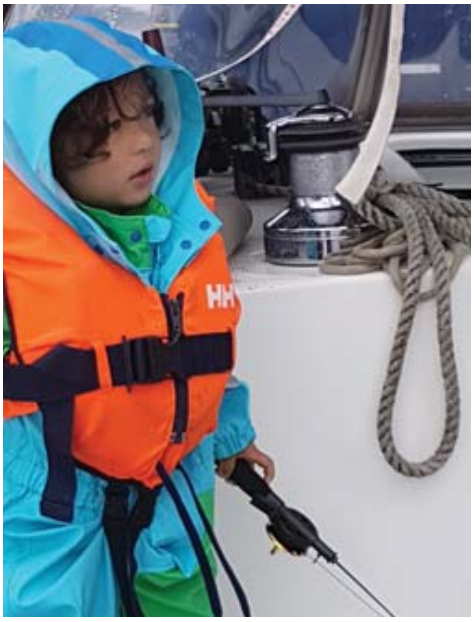
There is a difference between planning and preparing. To us, planning is of limited value; preparing is practical, fun and invaluable. Safety is found in the balance between adapting behaviour and eliminating known risks. We find behaviour to be the more important of the two.

Our biggest safety concern is the galley. From birth, Vetle had been allowed on the kitchen counter while cooking at home. We gave him space to explore and learn. Stirring hot sauces, cutting vegetables with knives, using the mixer and making smoothies with the blender. Instead of limiting, we supervised, taught and guided. The mess was total but he got used to being on the tabletop participating, as opposed to standing on the floor looking up at pots of boiling water. We brought this habit to the boat – he is still always in the galley participating in the cooking – and we look forward to the day when he starts to churn out muffins.

Our second major concern is the running rigging and cockpit – our layout is not kid safe. The sheets and halyards are led back to the cockpit, as in most contemporary boats, and

our companionway – the favourite playground – is lined with clutches for the halyards, reefing lines, cunningham and kicking strap. Small fingers explore and find their way to these clutches, which have no lock or brakes. Our sheets are led back to four self-tailing winches, with loads in the thousands of kilos. The same goes for the mainsheet on a traveller across the cockpit. Small hands want to winch. We considered moving the halyards to the mast with granny bars and fitting cleats to secure our sheets. Both were the norm before self-tailing winches appeared on the market and someone decided the deck was a dangerous place. Both changes would be safer for small hands and exploring fingers, but we did not move anything.

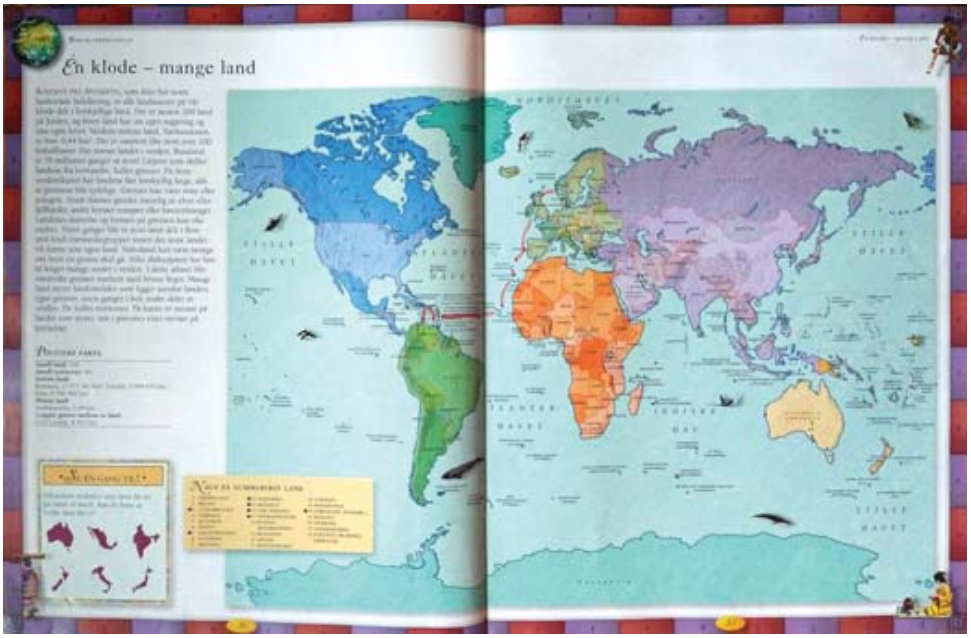
Vetle has been sailing from birth. At 8 months he spent his first season in a cockpit locker and secured in a bicycle seat on the pushpit. His second season he learnt to trust his harness and lifejacket to stop him falling into cold Norwegian water. Now, at five, he wants to winch and we let him ... supervised and guided.



Departure, expectations and routines

We departed on 11th July 2019. The route was Stavanger – Caledonian Canal – Ireland – Spain – Portugal – Madeira – Gran Canaria. After upgrades in Gran Canaria we continued to Mindelo in the Cape Verdes and then onwards to Barbados, where we arrived in January 2020.

With departure our major concern was tested. What would it be like to have a five-year-old on a small boat on the ocean for days on end? Boredom for him? Too much energy in a small body for tired parents? Too little space? This was unknown territory and no books gave us the answer.



The world, as shown in our atlas

We had, from the start, included Vetle in the preparations. A large world wall-map filled our kitchen wall and we used it every day leading up to departure. We drew our intended route on the map. We pointed out countries. We followed the route with our fingers. We talked about what we would see ... drew dolphins, boats and strange fruits. We YouTubed orcas, whales and other families travelling the same way. *Finding Nemo* is a great film for curious kids and can be the source of many stories.

We made promises. We promised him he could choose the fish hooks he wanted in Gran Canaria. We promised him he could choose fins and a mask for his swimming. We promised him he'd be able to swim without his lifejacket. We promised him we'd see dolphins. This built expectations and highlights to look forward to. For us as parents, it is hard to understand and remind ourselves that his day-by-day journey is made up of the small things while we are thinking about provisions, weather forecasts, rigging and blocked toilets.

In Gran Canaria we bought him a mask and fins, the largest fish hooks around, and gave him his own box for his fishing gear.

Ready for swimming…

Picnic on the foredeck

Throwing off the shorelines meant that we started watches and new routines. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are the milestones we work around, and we have a set schedule at 0800, 1200 and 1600 whether at anchor or on crossings. The first 300 miles from Norway to Scotland was blessed with fair winds and a rapid crossing. We saw orcas, caught mackerel, cooked dinner and could enjoy North Sea sunsets from the deck.

It was on this crossing that Vetle introduced us to his picnic routine. One banana and one apple, go sit on the foredeck together and talk about the happenings of the day as it passed into night. For him this pushed bedtime, for us it was a door opening into his world. It was during one of these picnics that Ploppy the fish first appeared. Since then we've seen him between the waves from the foredeck on many occasions. Ploppy is a curious fish-kid who puts his head out of the water to observe the weird world on land. When he has seen strange things – eg. sailing yachts – he swims down to tell his parents about them. There are no limits to what Ploppy tells his parents, and the parents ask questions...

After breakfast it is school and then inspection. School does not yet follow any curriculum – we focus on writing, reading and numbers. Being a multilingual family we practise words in Tagalog*, English and Norwegian.

Inspections are daily highlights for Vetle. On crossings we inspect the foredeck, genoa tack and clew, sheet wear and clevis pins. On the aft deck we inspect the Hydrovane and check the Garmin Navigator for speed, course and wind. We practise using our safety harnesses and the routine of securing ourselves with the safety lines

* Tagalog is an Austronesian language spoken as a first language by the ethnic Tagalog people, who comprise a quarter of the population of the Philippines, and as a second language by the majority.

while working the foredeck. We do this even if there is water on the deck and we're heeling. At anchor we inspect chain, bridle, snubber, hook and seaweed. Often, he concludes that we need to swim and inspect in the water.

Breaking routines conquers boredom

The 300 mile run from Stavanger to Scotland and the 700 mile run from Dublin to Baiona were merely preparation for the 2100 mile crossing to Barbados from Cape Verde.

School

We noticed as we cruised down the Portuguese coast that Vetle missed having other kids to play with. We kept him active, but we couldn't keep up with him – he simply missed playing with kids his own age. When he met other kids to play with it worked out fine for a few hours on the beach, but as night fell it was only the three of us. We had downloaded films and some games to his iPad and noticed they took more of his time now that the novelty of travelling had worn off.

The long crossing came up. We celebrated Christmas in Mindelo in the Cape Verdes – no snow, a small look-alike Christmas tree and *bacalao** for dinner. No, it was not what he was used to, but luckily Santa had been aboard while we ate ashore on Christmas Eve.

Again, we threw off the shorelines, this time for 12 to 14 days at sea and the first test for the three of us on a longer passage. We left harbour in the afternoon and by the time the sun set and *Escape* was sailing things calmed down. Dinner at sunset and then

* Dried or salted cod, a traditional Christmas dish in both Norway and Portugal, as well as many of the latter's former colonies.

Christmas in Mindelo

bedtime ... that is a good routine. When Vetle was in bed the first evening, we tried to explain what 14 days are – not an easy concept for a five-year-old. We counted fingers and toes and talked about sunsets and picnics, but in vain. His eyes lit up, however, when I told him I would wake him up after Con was sleeping so we could look at the stars together. Hush-hush. Secret. I kept my promise of breaking the routine and he had his first night watch looking at stars. Ploppy was out exploring.

The east to west Atlantic crossing is pleasant at the right time of year. We sailed conservatively, giving us time to be together as a family, and held on to the routines but broke them often to light the light in Vetle's eyes. Bucket showers on deck are more fun than fresh water. Dolphins deliver a break from

Helping service a pump is fun!

Ice-cream for all…

schoolwork. Spraying WD40 while servicing a pump is fun. Building boats for towing always takes hours. Skipping brushing his teeth always made his face break out in a nice smile and it is undervalued by dentists. Joint drawings in the schoolbook are more fun than practising letters.

Then we started the countdown. Ever done mandatory military service? We did it. With seven days left we started the countdown to ice-cream. From a pile of seven sheets of paper, we made a drawing every day of what we wanted to do when we arrived, folded it neatly and threw it in the ocean at picnic time. We drew ice-creams, kids, swimming, sharks, turtles. There were no drawings of stuck toilets, of watermakers not making water or of empty gas bottles. That was not a part of the world anymore.

Finally the signs of landfall came. Birds – we looked at, talked about and checked up on the birds we saw. Then we picked up Radio Bardados, and before long Mount Hillaby was on the horizon. We passed South Point, rounded Needham's Point and anchored in Carlisle Bay off Bridgetown. Sail down, boat tidied, tender in the water and then ... then there was ice-cream for all in Pirate's Cove.

We had reached the land of pirates, turtles and kids to play with. Motivating a kid for a Caribbean cruise is not about swimming, beach bars and hikes. It is about buccaneers, fortresses, real antique cannon, cannonballs and volcanoes. Caribbean history is a treasure-chest of stories and the islands themselves are full of fortresses, anchorages and trails to prove it is true.

And then some...

In Norway in late September 2020 Australia is at the centre of our new wall map, surrounded by beautiful blue oceans. The Pacific to the east, Southeast Asia to the north and, on a good day, we see Madagascar and Africa in the west. We explore and prepare, but we do not plan. There is no timeline. *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson has been replaced by *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe and *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

We will continue west, hence the name of our journey – Escape West. When we continue we will be better able to seek out boats with other kids, stay longer in the same anchorages and take water sports to the next level. That is how we explore, learn and now share Vetle's world.

THERE'S NO MANDATORY AGE LIMIT FOR OCEAN SAILING

Jack van Ommen

(*Although born in the Netherlands, Jack emigrated to California in 1957 at the age of 19. His home port between voyages is Gig Harbor, on Puget Sound in the Pacific Northwest.*

For more background visit his blog at www.ComeToSea.US, or look for his videos/slide shows on YouTube – check under his name.)

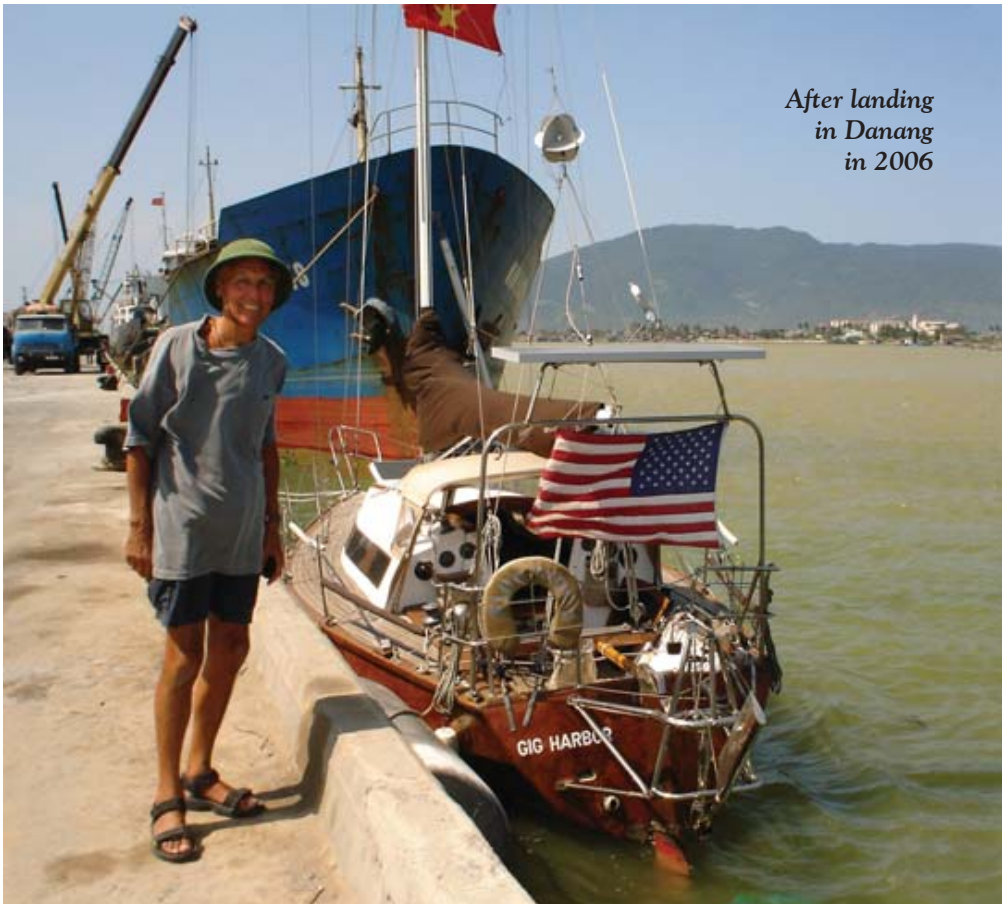
It is 28th February 2020, my twin brother's 83rd birthday. *Fleetwood* is at anchor at St Barts in the French West Indies and OCC geriatric sailors are in the news – Bill Hatfield has just bettered Jeanne Socrates' solo non-stop circumnavigation record.

When I congratulated my brother on his 70th birthday 13 years ago, from Simon's Town, South Africa, I told him that when he turned 75 I'd be 65, because ocean sailors drop a year for every year at sea. He has a sense of humour and replied that I'd better slow down soon otherwise he'd have to tag along to buy my adult beverages.

I started my solo circumnavigation in 2005 from California aged 68 and – following a few long detours and visiting sixty countries – finished it in 2017, a month after my twin's 80th birthday. Shortly after that, on 23rd June 2017, I had my second shipwreck while leaving Chesapeake Bay en route to New England.

It took 18 months to repair *Fleetwood* at Cape Charles, Virginia but in the process the anchor started to get too familiar with its new surroundings. I did not want to spend another winter on the Chesapeake but due to family holiday obligations was not able to leave Cape Charles until 15th January 2019. I took off into the Atlantic from Beaufort, North Carolina on 3rd February and sailed into the anchorage at Marigot Bay, Saint Martin, on the 17th. It was a very rough trip with gale-force conditions and I prayed a lot, but all's well that ends well.

Leaving the Golden Gate



After landing in Danang in 2006

It is amazing how quickly one reconditions when the need is there. At the beginning of the passage I was stiff and had to use my hand to lift a leg up high enough to clear the companionway entrance. Not any more. In 2017, before reaching the Panama Canal, I compressed a vertebra by being thrown against the chart table in rough seas off Cabo Malo. I had an operation and ever since have had a problem straightening my back, while walking has been a tiring and painful exercise. Most of my errands are done on my folding bicycle. But recently I have done a lot of walking and climbing to lookouts and I am doing much better.

I have a suggestion for anyone contemplating an extended ocean cruise but with concerns about age limitations. I have observed many couples quit prematurely because of the size of the boat and the complexity of the equipment. Keep it simple – large sails, bow-thrusters, watermakers, hydraulics, air conditioning etc are wonderful, but they tend to keep you tied to your mooring at the most inopportune times. I ended up at the very low end of comfort and simplicity, which works for me as a solo sailor. My choices became very limited when, after years of running a successful wood export business, I ended up in bankruptcy in 2000. I lost my house, my 401-K savings* and my wife. In 2002, at age 65, Social Security came to the rescue.

* An employer-sponsored pension scheme popular in the US.

Fleetwood, the 30ft Naja plywood kit-boat that I had purchased from Whisstock's Boatyard in Woodbridge, England in 1979 had sat on its trailer since 1993. It was a great boat for sailing out of my home port on the Puget Sound in the Pacific Northwest, and I had sailed it from San Francisco to Hawaii in the Singlehanded TransPac in 1982. It was not exactly what I had intended for an around-the-world voyage but it just had to do. Now I had the time and resources to finish the maintenance and reinforcements.

The hull is triple-chine and built of ½ inch plywood, displacement is a mere 3 tons, there is a 14hp 2-cylinder diesel engine, Monitor wind vane and a 12 volt Tiller Pilot for steering under power. There is no anchor windlass, no roller-furling and no outboard for the inflatable dinghy. It is usually the smallest boat in the anchorage.

In February 2005 I trailered it to Alameda, California where I sold the trailer and the pickup truck. When I left Santa Barbara on the 28 day, 3000 mile passage to the Marquesas, I had $150 left in my bank account and the assurance that there would be another $1,450 Social Security deposit on my arrival. It became the start of an incredible experience. After my financial setback and failed third marriage there was peace and a spiritual renaissance. The subtitle to the book *SoloMan**, which I wrote after my first shipwreck in 2013, is *Alone at Sea with God and Social Security*. The Dutch version also rhymes – *Alleen op Zee met God en AOW*. I rediscovered that the best experiences are God's free gifts, like friendships, family, sunsets, starlit skies, the breathing of a dolphin alongside in the night while I am half-awake in my berth. In my busy working life I took these for granted, but now I recognise the source again. I am convinced that peace and happiness also add to my physical condition – no home, no car, no bills, no worries.

* Reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2016/2.

Fleetwood in De Lemmer in 2010

The same location a century earlier. Left to right: my great-grandmother, mother, grandmother and grandfather (with an aunt on his shoulder)

I had two particular goals for the voyage – visiting Vietnam, where I had spent time from late 1961 until early 1963 in the US Army, although still a Dutch citizen. My first wife joined me in Saigon for a year, a very meaningful part of our lives. My second goal, which I achieved in 2010, was to moor *Fleetwood* in front of the mastmaker's business in De Lemmer, a Dutch-Frisian seaport, where my mother had been raised.

Being Dutch means that you need to know a few more languages to travel abroad, which allowed me to communicate with many different nationalities during my circumnavigation. I am fluent in French and German and get *complimenti* from Italians (they were my best customers for my wood export business). *Español: mas o menos, mas menos que mas* ... still working on it. Over the years I have accumulated small talk in a number of other European and Asian languages. It is heart-warming to see the reaction and hear the response from a Muslim sister or brother when I greet them in Arabic.

Instead of the more standard South Pacific 'coconut milk' run, which includes a southern summer layover in New Zealand or Australia, I chose to keep sailing through Micronesia and the Philippines. The main part of the circumnavigation was accomplished by June 2007 when I reached the US Atlantic Coast. Then, after a winter visit to the northern Caribbean in 2009, I crossed the (North) Atlantic again and spent four years in Europe, crossing from the North Sea to the Black Sea in 2010/11 and thence into the Med. Having sailed north through France to Holland in 2012, and south again in 2013 intending to make my way back to the Americas, in November 2013 I was shipwrecked on the island of Tagomago northeast of Ibiza. Ten hours later nothing was left of *Fleetwood*. I figured that God had a new plan for me and that my sailing days were over.

My circumnavigation, completed on 30th March 2017, included 60 countries, 569 locks and 54,325 miles at sea

The remains of Fleetwood at Tagomago. Photo Maria de los Angeles Peña Milla

Instead I ended up purchasing an exact copy of *Fleetwood* which had been built from a kit that I had sold and had been launched in Tacoma, Washington in 1987. I repainted it the same colour and again named it *Fleetwood*. I lived aboard in Gig Harbor, Washington State, from April 2014 until I left in early September 2016 to complete my interrupted circumnavigation by making the connection from the Pacific through the Panama Canal to connect with my 2007 inbound track from Trinidad to the Chesapeake.

It is now 10th March 2020 and I am back in Sint Maarten*. On 26th February I was treated to a very nice birthday dinner at Eddy's harbourfront at St Barts by Richard and Dona Spindler. Richard started the very popular monthly sailing magazine *Latitude 38* in the San Francisco Bay area and has been a regular here at St Barts for the past 35 years. Before dinner he introduced me to a group of his friends in the bar at Le Select – one of them was Luc Poupon, the younger brother of Philippe Poupon.

Luc has crossed the Atlantic 60 times. He started his trophy collection when I jumped into my new passion in the mid-1970s, and I remember reading about his and his older brother Philippe's sailing accomplishments, most but not all in *Fleury Michou*. He started *Les Voiles de St Barth*, which has become one of the world's most sought-after events for top racing boats. With us at dinner were the skippers of *Bolero* and *Juno*, both beautiful traditional sailing vessels built in New England yards.

* Marigot Bay is on the north (French) side of the island, where it is spelled Saint Martin. The south side, where the Heineken Regatta takes place, is part of the Netherlands Antilles where the island's name is spelled Sint Maarten.

With Luc Poupon at Le Select in St Barts. Photo Richard Spindler

I returned to Sint Maarten on 29th February to meet three couples from my homeport of Gig Harbor, Washington. They sail a catamaran, and from 4th until 8th March we watched the 40th Heineken Regatta. A fourth home port couple joined us and I took the opportunity to be hoisted to the masthead to replace my tricolor bulb and the Windex that had blown off on the rough passage south.

Back on my soapbox for simplicity, I am often asked how much water I carry on long passages. I filled my 12 gallon bladder and a 6 gallon spare jerry can before I left Cape Charles on 15th January. Two days ago I rowed to the Sint Maarten YC and refilled my 6 gallon spare water tank. On departure from Beaufort, NC – the last time *Fleetwood* was tied to a dock – I topped off my 12 gallon diesel tank and a 5 gallon jerry can. I still have 9 gallons in the tank and the 5 gallon container. I have not used shore power since 15th January and my last shower was on 3rd February, the day I departed from Beaufort. I take saltwater cockpit baths and use a cup of fresh water to rinse my hair.

Working at the masthead in Sint Maarten. Photo Janet James

Postscript: The COVID-19 lockdown cut short my intentions for visiting the islands south of St Barts and my plans to stop at Puerto Rico and Cuba on the way back to Florida. The US Virgin Islands were the only option, so I stopped in Saint Croix and Saint Thomas. They felt like uninhabited islands. On 2nd June I reached Cape Charles, Virginia, my adopted away-from-home port since my June 2017 shipwreck on the nearby Barrier Islands. My youngest daughter also lives nearby.

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SEA JAY'S MAIDEN VOYAGE ~
South Africa to New York City with barely a hitch
Chris McNickle

(*New Yorkers Fred Walters and Chris McNickle were cruising aboard* Sea Jay *in French Polynesia when Chris wrote this article in June 2020. Both cited the passage from Cape Town to St Helena, described below, as their qualifying voyage for the* OCC.)

"How could there be shallow water there?" Fred yelled from the helm. I jumped up from the cockpit where I had been lounging comfortably to see a light green patch amidst the deep blue water in front of us. Our 18 ton catamaran was sailing way too fast to avoid it and a crash at that speed risked wrecking the hull, toppling the mast and leaving us stranded at sea. My heart raced. We had sailed *Sea Jay* across the South Atlantic from South Africa, where she had been built, to warm Caribbean waters and our navigation technology had proved so consistent that we could rely on it to avoid rocks and coral from the moment we left one harbour until we arrived at the next. The object in front of us had appeared out of nowhere – it made no sense.

As I braced for sudden impact the first whale appeared. It had been hovering just below the surface, where its massive form made it look like an uncharted reef. Four or five humpbacks, each some 30 or 40 feet long, passed by our starboard hull. The presence of such magnificent creatures a few arm lengths from our boat was captivating and intimidating at the same time. Every sailor has heard stories of instances – rare but real – when whales weighing 35 or 40 tons have breached and landed on a yacht. Sure enough, a little while later we spied one launching its huge body almost entirely out

Sea Jay under sail in French Polynesia in June 2020

of the sea and landing with a mast-high splash. Several others repeated the ungainly performance in a majestic display of nature's power. No one is sure why whales make these leaps – to show off as part of a mating ritual, to stun the marine life they feed on, to warn predators to steer clear, or to communicate danger. Impressing cruisers is not on the list, but that it does. It was just the sort of spectacle we had hoped to witness when we planned our sailing adventure.

I first raised the idea of a bluewater voyage with Fred in 2006, shortly after we competed in the Newport to Bermuda Race on a friend's boat. "Let's sail from New York to Kinsale, Ireland", I suggested one night. His reaction was not encouraging. "You're crazy and have no idea what you're getting yourself into", he warned. Fred and I have been partners since 1976 and married in 2011. He is an accomplished sailor who is in his element at the helm of a boat, I am a kid from the Bronx who has learned to be pretty good crew over the years. "Well", I responded, "I want to do it, and the chance of me arriving safely on the other side will be a lot higher if you come with me". Besides, it would be more fun.

Slowly, Fred warmed to the idea. The sailing magazines he subscribes to are filled with articles about couples and families who leave the terrestrial world behind and set out on seafaring excursions. Everyone is smiling in the photos that accompany these stories, as happy people float carefree in fair weather from one beautiful port to another with the wind at their backs. We began to talk seriously about a long excursion, but a tropical one, on a vessel built for the purpose since it would be our home for the duration. After two years of research we decided on a 50ft catamaran manufactured in St

Sea Jay under construction at St Francis Marine, South Africa …

… and nearing completion

Members of the build team taking a photo break at Port St Francis

Francis Bay on South Africa's southeast coast. Fred suggested the name *Sea Jay*, a homonym for the initials of my given names, Christopher John, which also evoked the image of a bird in flight over water, so we went with it.

During the 18 months of construction we took the 30-hour trip from New York to St Francis Bay seven times and spent a total of four months there. Slowly, *Sea Jay* progressed from an empty mould into a fully-equipped sailing boat with an elegant maple interior and a light green fibreglass hull. She has four sleeping cabins, each with its own head, a well-equipped galley, two 57hp diesel engines, a generator, solar panels, two desalinators, and tons of creature comforts like a 50 inch TV and a Bluetooth sound system. On the day she splashed water for the first time, in the local harbour dominated by squid fishing boats, we still had a list of some 170 items that remained to be completed before she would be ready to sail. Many were modest tasks but a few were not. Six weeks later we had completed preliminary sea trials and had begun planning our initial transit from St Francis Bay to Cape Town.

The headland that gives one of the world's most dynamic cities its name was first called *Cabo das Tormentas* by western explorers, the Cape of Storms. But a Portuguese king decided that name was bad for business and, with a bit of marketing genius, renamed it *Cabo de Boa Esperança* – Cape of Good Hope – to encourage sailors to round it and strengthen his realm's trade with lands to the east. Sailors consider it one of the world's most dangerous coasts. Winds of 20 to 30 knots are common, and 50 knots or more not unusual. Two reefs, one 6 miles offshore and another 12 miles off, can cause huge waves travelling unimpeded from Antarctica to break and toss a small vessel around in ways that range from intensely uncomfortable to fatal.

Author Chris McNickle aboard Sea Jay in Cape Town Harbour

Delays in *Sea Jay*'s construction meant we would be sailing during South Africa's winter. It is a season when howling winds typically come from the wrong direction for our 400 mile passage. To avoid conditions best left to Hollywood movies, we planned to pick a weather window – at least three days of favourable skies. As the boat neared completion the three weather forecasting models we were relying on showed five days of following winds of acceptable force and just a modest risk of a manageable headwind during our final approach to Cape Town. The good weather was forecast to arrive on the morning of Friday 18th August 2017. The longer we delayed, the more chance we had of bad winds towards the end of the trip, so it was time to go. As we exited Port St Francis a wave sprayed up through *Sea Jay*'s front trampoline baptising me. Whales escorted us out of the bay at a discreet distance, disappearing behind us as we entered the Indian Ocean and turned west towards the Atlantic.

We were intent on arriving in Cape Town before the headwind set in, so we ran both engines and flew the genoa. The winds blew 12 to 15 knots for a time, then rose to 20 knots, then to 25. When it howled past 30 we took in a reef, shrinking the genoa, and we reefed it again when the gusts rose higher still. Water rushed between the hulls, and my adrenaline surged when we caught a wave just right and *Sea Jay* surfed for brief moments at speeds that topped 24 knots. I felt the thrill of testing our boat for the first time in open water, with a stunning mass of stars, the Milky Way and the Southern Cross above us. After 37 hours we entered Cape Town harbour, tied up to a dock at Cape Grace Marina and slept the sleep of the just.

Preparation for our Atlantic crossing began in earnest in October 2017 with help from Glen Roberts, a friend of some 25 years. We had plenty to do – everything from adjusting our complicated electrical system to repairing a faulty engine and resealing outside storage compartments that had leaked during our passage from St Francis Bay. We also had to test sails not yet deployed, set up our secondary anchor for emergencies and do the same for our drogue. We took an overnight trip to Saldana Bay, 60 miles north and a worthy way to test all our systems. We crossed paths with

several whale pods, a few times spying the graceful motion where they roll forward and down, raising their tails in the air as if waving good-bye as they descend into the depths. We found otters lounging on large clumps of kelp floating six or seven miles from land. We saw seals everywhere, and were particularly amused by one which escorted us out of Saldana Bay and into the open water, much the way a dog follows a master leaving for work down the road until some spot marks the invisible end of his territory and he turns back home.

The two remaining members of our transatlantic crew, John Fryer and Joerg Esdorn, arrived in the days before departure. Joerg is a German-trained engineer and an American attorney who had worked and sailed with Fred for many years. He navigated the Baltic Sea as a youth and had recently purchased a 55ft yawl to cruise the Mediterranean. John, a stocky 48-year-old with a younger man's wit, is an experienced ocean sailor with whom we had crossed paths over the years. Mutual friends confirmed our impression that he would be an excellent crew to have aboard for a deepwater passage and we felt lucky when he accepted our invitation.

Team Sea Jay ready to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Left to right: co-captains Fred Walters and Chris McNickle, and crew members John Fryer, Glen Roberts and Joerg Esdorn

We finally left Cape Town on Wednesday 8th November and headed out to sea, clear weather and moderate following winds offering perfect conditions. The first night we stood four-hour watches with two-person crews so that we could settle into our journey in pairs, but the next day we switched to solo watches of two hours at night and three during the day. I came to enjoy the 0400 to 0600 watch, since the sun rose

while I was at the helm. The day opened softly with a pale grey-blue sky, a colour unlike any I have seen on land. The rhythmic noise of the following seas signalled forward progress, while the white tips of the waves made me smile because they looked like an endless series of lips from a Got Milk* magazine advert. Alone in the cockpit at first light, everywhere I looked there was nothing but water as far as the eye could see, the majesty of the ocean unmistakably present.

On the tenth day out we spied St Helena from nearly 30 miles away, and a few hours later, we were tied to a mooring and heading to shore on the harbour launch. The landing dock there is more dramatic than most. Ropes hang down from a bar and sailors grab one and hop ashore with a slight swing as the ferry bobs up and down in the surge.

St Helena is something of a lost-in-time enchanted island, and at some 1600 miles northwest of Cape Town is about as close to nowhere as a place can be. Yet built on its lush landscape is a happy society of some 4000 souls known charmingly as Saints. Technically it is located in the tropics, but its cliffs are ruggedly rustic, the

First transit stop in St Helena after ten days at sea

clear water that surrounds it chilly, and the climate temperate. The island remains mostly a cash-only place of business, in local currency** and British pounds. The bank – there is only one – opens on Saturday morning but was closed until Monday by the time we arrived. We had only a limited amount of British currency, but this turned out to be less of an issue than we feared as the local merchants we met that day simply kept tabs to be settled when we could get some cash and happily handed us money from their tills to see us through the weekend.

* No, not a typo – see www.gotmilk.com/

** The St Helena pound, which trades at parity with sterling.

Thanksgiving 2017 aboard Sea Jay en route to Brazil

After a few days' rest and reprovisioning as best we could from local fare, we set out to sea again in easterly trade winds, heading for the Fernando de Noronha islands some 1700 miles away off the coast of Brazil. For the first few days the breeze was light and a bit chilly as rain clouds hovered above, but we never suffered more than slight drizzle. On the third day the air warmed and the wind blew harder. We watched eagerly as the thermometer tracking the water temperature rose a little over 1°F each day from a refreshing 68°F (20°C) in St Helena until it finally hit 80°F (27°C) as we neared our destination. A hatch set low in the hull inside the forward shower stall (which doubles as an emergency exit) offered a view of the water near the surface – it was a strong, rich, beautiful blue.

We stirred up flying fish on a regular basis. Sometimes just one or two, but more often a dozen or more would break the surface as we neared them, their small wings spread like a dragonfly's. They would travel just above the surface for a couple of hundred feet and then plunge. We realised we had become unintended scouts for birds which hovered above us, swooping down to grab an airborne fish we had caused to jump. Many mornings we found a few flying fish on our deck, victims of night-time pilot error.

The wind filled our sails and propelled us forward while the ocean roared between our two hulls. Ten days after departing St Helena, the Fernando de Noronha islands emerged in front of us as the sun rose behind. Their tallest point, Pico, is a volcanic rock carved by the wind and sea into a captivating presence. It juts up from the water like a lighthouse constructed by the gods. To its west sit two small, identical mountains called *Os Dois Irmãos*, The Two Brothers, though locals mischievously refer to them by the name of a big-bosomed Brazilian singer. We anchored in full view of these in 35ft of water and before we had been there an hour a school of porpoises surrounded us. I jumped in, GoPro video camera in hand, and recorded them swimming around me, sometimes just two arm lengths away. It was a marvellous welcome for a man who remembered *Flipper* as one of his favourite childhood TV programmes.

The Praia do Sancho on the island's southwest shore has been called the most beautiful beach in the world. Superlatives of that kind are always suspect, but the spot is very

Os Dois Irmãos, part of Brazil's Fernando de Noronha islands

special. Volcanic rock filled with tropical growth surrounds a crescent-shaped stretch of sand that flows seamlessly into blue water. Access from the land is a challenge and many tourists opt to visit the spot via tour boats. Otherwise, from atop a cliff, beachgoers descend a steel ladder built into a wedge in the rocks which is so narrow that one's shoulders brush the back wall while descending facing forward. A brief walk in a cave-like passage leads to a second ladder, followed by a long staircase. The rocks are home to cute gecko-like lizards, all black to blend in with the local stones. We spied a crab, similar to crabs everywhere, but this one

Joerg Esdorn and Fred Walters relaxing in Grenada

Sea Jay alongside in St George's, Grenada

had coloured glitter covering its body, something neither Fred nor I had ever seen before. The image of a creepy-crawling seaside critter, dipped in sprinkles at an ice cream shop, appeared in my mind's eye and made me smile.

John flew home from the Noronha islands as planned, and Glen, Joerg, Fred and I pulled up *Sea Jay*'s anchor to head for Grenada, 2000 miles away and the last long passage on this leg of our adventure. For the first few days the weather was as pleasant as it had been during our approach, but as we headed north the wind came more from the starboard beam than from behind, and then swells began to rise – first to 5ft, then to 7ft and then to 12ft. Waves driven by current from a different direction came at random intervals, bouncing the boat uncomfortably. The sky turned overcast, the air became more humid and tropical, and the risk of squalls set in. One finally hit, with winds of over 30 knots for a brief period

A barbecue aboard Sea Jay in the glow of the Statue of Liberty (see overleaf)

Sea Jay docked in lower Manhattan ready for a homecoming party

lower Manhattan, the top of the One World Trade Centre Tower* visible from *Sea Jay*'s deck, we had dinner with family. The next evening we hosted a party with friends. Fred and I were pleased. A conversation that had begun nearly 12 years earlier had progressed into a plan that we had seen through to completion. Our arrival home felt like a triumph well worth celebrating.

* The main building of the rebuilt World Trade Center complex.

while it rained hard, but that was the extent of the drama. Twelve days after leaving the Noronha islands we reached Grenada. The next day Joerg flew off to be with his family for the holidays and two days later Glen did the same.

Fred and I cruised the Caribbean from January to April 2018 with adventures to recount another time. As spring advanced we set our sights on New York City and began to head north. On 23rd June at just about noon we passed beneath the Verrazzano Bridge and into New York Harbor, where we anchored behind the Statue of Liberty. That night, we barbecued in the glow of her lights. Days later, alongside in

Author Chris McNickle aboard Sea Jay in the shadow of Manhattan's One World Trade Centre Tower

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CUBA – NEVER HAVE A SCHEDULE! Part 2
Nicky Barker, Roving Rear Commodore

(By the time this story – the first part of which appeared in Flying Fish 2019/2 *– opens in early 2019, Nicky and Reg had already spent six years cruising aboard their Rustler 42,* Blue Velvet of Sark*. They had hoped to continue north to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland for the summer of 2020, but in light of the COVID-19 pandemic instead decided to head home to Guernsey in the English Channel. Read more on their blog at www.blue-velvet-exploring-the-world.blogspot.com/.)*

We had spent our first two weeks in Cuba in and around cities, towns and villages, moving west from Santiago de Cuba to Niquero. Next, in mid-February, we headed northwest into the remote mangrove cays of Los Jardines de la Reina. This was another case of 'never have a schedule' as in an ideal world we would have continued further into the Golfo de Guacanayabo to Manzanillo, a medium-sized town unfrequented by visitors. Manzanillo had been recommended to us by Neil and Ley Langford of *Crystal Blues* for its fresh food market and excellent music scene. But we had spent an extra couple of days getting this far and Reg's daughter Charlotte, who was sailing with us, had a flight home booked out of Havana two weeks later so we needed to make progress westwards.

It took us three full days to get to Cayo Cuervo, the mid-point on the passage to Cienfuegos and also almost the middle of Los Jardines de la Reina. This is not an area for movement after dark – while there are navigation marks, relatively few are lit and you need good light to see the coral heads as you work your way into the anchorages around the reefs. So we stopped at suitable-looking cays en route, the first night at Cayo Blanco and the second at Cayo Grenada. Neither is anything more than a cluster of mangrove cays and shallow reefs with a narrow entrance through the reefs, though Cayo Blanco is generally deep (about 15m) whereas Cayo Grenada is quite shallow at about 5m. Both offer enough protection from the sea but very little from the wind. Happily, we found the holding in both to be good – in Cayo Blanco we sat through the passage of a couple of storm cells, with the wind up around 30 knots and clocking through 360°, while in Cayo Grenada we had a strong tropical cold front go through with 40 knot winds and torrential rain howling in from the northwest – the entrance

Lots of motoring on the way to Cayo Cuervo

of that cay. In both cases our anchor held, though we have to admit to holding an engine-running anchor watch in the latter case as our back was to a coral reef which we couldn't see in the reduced visibility. This area is so remote and unpopulated that there are no police stations to check in with at night, so we enjoyed a week without any bureaucracy.

We spent two of the three days of the passage to Cayo Cuervo under engine due to lack of wind (never have a schedule!) but fortunately, following the fuel problems we'd experienced around Cabo Cruz and Niquero, the engine ran faultlessly. We were delighted and not a little relieved, given the remoteness of the area and the timeline to which we were running. We hadn't expected to spend so much time under power and the pilot charts certainly don't reflect such extended periods of little or no wind, but that season there seemed to be a particularly large number of cold fronts moving down from the US towards the Bahamas, cancelling out the trade winds.

We reached Cayo Cuervo late in the afternoon of Friday 15th February and were thrilled to see that *Nomadica*, with OCC members Cheryl and Morgan Morice and one-year-old Gael, had arrived just before us. When we had met them briefly in Santiago Gael had only just started toddling, and they had spent much of the intervening time unsuccessfully searching out cays with beaches on which he could practise his new-found skill. Cayo Cuervo has numerous beaches and they had spent the afternoon on the sand with Gael happily toddling and splashing in the shallows.

Reg, Cheryl, Gael and Morgan returning with buckets of shrimp and lobster

A large shrimping fleet bases itself in Cayo Cuervo, fishing by night and laying up by day, and the following morning Reg and the crew of *Nomadica* dinghied across to the newly-returned fleet to trade for shrimp and lobster. Morgan speaks fluent Spanish and the Cuban fishermen loved the fact that Cheryl had little Gael on her knee, and they were soon the delighted owners of two large buckets of shrimp and twelve lobsters. The fishermen waved away talk of payment or trade so we left them a bottle of rum because we couldn't just take such largesse with no recompense.

It turned into one of those perfect cruising days. First we dealt with the shrimp and lobster, keeping some aside for a beach barbecue that evening and consigning the rest to the 'fridge, and then set out to explore. We had a fabulous time snorkelling the reefs amongst forests of soft and hard coral, with barracuda, myriad colourful reef fish and some of the largest and softest-looking pillow stars we have seen. Cool from the water we strolled on an idyllic mini-cay with beautiful soft white sand and numerous mature conchs just off the shoreline. Then in the early evening we met up on yet another picture-perfect beach, where Gael toddled enthusiastically and we cooked lobster and shrimp on a driftwood fire. We were joined by the owners and crew of *Child of Lir* and the party continued until late. When the tide rose the immature conchs started to crawl up the beach, the *no-see-ums* returned with a vengeance, and our dinghy tried to float off back to *Blue Velvet*! Maybe it was trying to tell us something...

Over the next couple of days we continued westwards. *Nomadica* stayed longer but we needed to keep going, though we could happily have stayed for a week (never have

An idyllic mini-cay at Cayo Cuervo

Barbecue on the beach at Cayo Cuervo…

… and lobsters on the barbecue

a schedule!). On both days the wind was light but sailable as we worked through the mangrove cays and shallows. We had hoped to spend a night at anchor in the channel between Cayo Breton and Punta Breton, but it has silted since our cruising guide* was researched and we ended up anchored about half a mile north of Cayo Cinco Balas. It was as close in as we could get due to the depth, so we were thankful for a benign forecast ... and benign weather in reality too. At Cayo Zaza de Fuera we threaded our way carefully through the fringing reefs to the south and east before making a final, cautious approach from the north to a much more satisfactory anchorage than the previous night's. We snorkelled but failed to see any lobsters, despite the promises of the cruising guide. Reg and Charlotte had fun exploring the channels through the mangroves by dinghy but they found no beaches. Two American catamarans, *Carlotta's Promise* and *El Gato*, which we had seen briefly in Cayo Cuervo, joined us in the anchorage and invited us to drinks and homemade pizzas. We had a very interesting evening hearing of their Cuban exploration and the time pressure they were under due to the US Coast Guard only giving them a 14-day permit to visit – and we thought we had issues with the schedule!

* *Waterway Guide Cuba*, by Addison Chan (2nd edition), published by Waterway Guides [www.waterwayguide.com].

El Gato and Carlotta's Promise at Cayo Zaza de Fuera

Before reaching Cienfuegos we wanted to visit Trinidad, which is described as a 'perfectly preserved Spanish colonial settlement, frozen in time at around 1850'. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the oldest European city in the Americas. There's a port, Casilda, close to Trinidad plus a small marina and anchorage with very shallow flats outside it. Our cruising guide suggested that with a sufficient rise of tide we might just be able to get in, so on 20th February we moved to Cayo Tabaco in the large bay just south of Casilda in preparation for an early start to catch the next morning's high tide.

Nothing ventured nothing gained, but in this instance we couldn't quite squeak our 2m draught across the shallows to the marina and anchorage, despite it being HW springs. Instead we continued west to Cienfuegos and, in the process, enjoyed a blisteringly fast broad reach – our best sail so far in Cuba. We arrived off the entrance to Cienfuegos in 20–25 knots of onshore wind with rising seas, at about the same time as two freighters. The first took on a pilot and began its approach, so we took the opportunity to request clearance to enter the port behind it. Permission granted, we surfed in through the entrance and made our way along the channel, dodging the small ferries that darted back and forth, to the large bay beyond on which Cienfuegos is situated. The marina and yacht anchorage are on Punta Gorda a little

The entrance channel at Cienfuegos

Cienfuegos marina

south of the city, which used to be one of the wealthy suburbs. Many of the buildings date from the 1920s and 1930s, when sugar merchants ploughed their profits into building ostentatious mansions there.

The marina at Cienfuegos operates on a first-come-first-served basis. Though we had expected to spend a few days at anchor, moving into the marina just before travelling to Havana, a space came up just after we arrived so we grabbed it, just in case. We ended up alongside Mike and Karen Bury aboard *Chapter 2* and spent a couple of very interesting evenings with them hearing about their circumnavigation, including some of the diving they had done, and their plans for the future.

We spent two days exploring Cienfuegos and working out the mechanics of visiting Trinidad and Havana by road. Cienfuegos is a lovely, rather French, city with wide streets and lots of neo-classical buildings. The city centre was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2005 for the beauty of its architecture and the progressiveness of its urban planning – revolutionary for 19th century Latin America. We very much enjoyed wandering around the vibrant and bustling centre, drinking in the cupolas, columned arcades, statues and decorative additions to the stone and plasterwork. We

Bustling and vibrant Cienfuegos

Parque de José Martí, Cienfuegos

also did our bit for boosting the economy, buying tourist-tat souvenirs (maracas and dominos for Reg and me, Che Guevara T-shirts for Charlotte) and then repairing to a cigar and rum shop for some more serious souvenir-hunting. Then we had excellent sundowner *mojitos* on the roof of the 'baroque-meets-Moorish' Palacio de Valle close to the marina, with fabulous evening views and a Cuban band playing in the background.

Having failed to reach Trinidad by sea we arranged for a *collectivo* taxi to take us there for the day. Our transport was a 1952 Chevrolet with deep, leather covered bench seats front and back and bouncy springs. The drive to Trinidad took 90 minutes on good roads with virtually no traffic other than the ubiquitous horse-drawn carts. As we always find when we travel inland, the views of the countryside away from the coast were fascinating. This part of Cuba is hilly and very green, with lots of palms and a surprising number of other fruit trees given that buying fruit in the markets appears quite difficult.

The 'baroque-meets-Moorish' Palacio de Valle at Cienfuegos

Trinidad and the hills beyond

We spent a fascinating few hours wandering Trinidad's cobbled streets and visiting museums. Huge fortunes made in the 1800s from growing sugar and trading slaves provided the funds to build the town's fabulous colonial mansions, complete with frescoes, Wedgwood pottery and chandeliers. As the rest of the town needed to look as opulent as the plantation owners' townhouses, this money also paid for the impressive churches and squares. We visited the rather tired *Museo Histórico Municipal*, once the home of a plantation owner, and enjoyed the views over the city from its tower, and later the view from the bell tower of the *Convento de San Francisco*.

Looking from the bell tower of the Convento de San Francisco, Trinidad

Iconic Trinidad

Trinidad is a rabbit warren, but at the end of the day we found our taxi, only to discover that the driver and his wife (who had accompanied us to Trinidad, along with their young daughter) had made good use of their time in the city. The car was laden down for the return trip to Cienfuegos, with a mattress on the roof and the boot (US: trunk) full of bedding and soft furnishings.

Our transport to and from Trinidad

Havana

Habana Vieja

The next day we took another *collectivo* to Havana. It cost 20 CUC* per person for a 3½ hour journey – the same price as the Viazul coach and far more convenient. It was another fascinating ride through much flatter lands, with many more palm and fruit trees. Our *casa particular* was right in the centre of *Habana Vieja* (Old Havana), difficult for the *collectivo* driver to find but perfectly positioned for our tourist activities. Pepe, who ran the place, spoke some English and had family in Orlando, and we found his

* The Cuban convertible peso, pegged 1:1 with the US dollar.

Havana taxis

flat an interesting mix of relatively old-fashioned furnishings and décor and brand-new appliances – the American-style 'fridge/freezer was larger and newer than ours at home! It was comfortable with A/C, en-suite bathrooms and 'fridges in the rooms, and breakfast each morning was far more than we could eat.

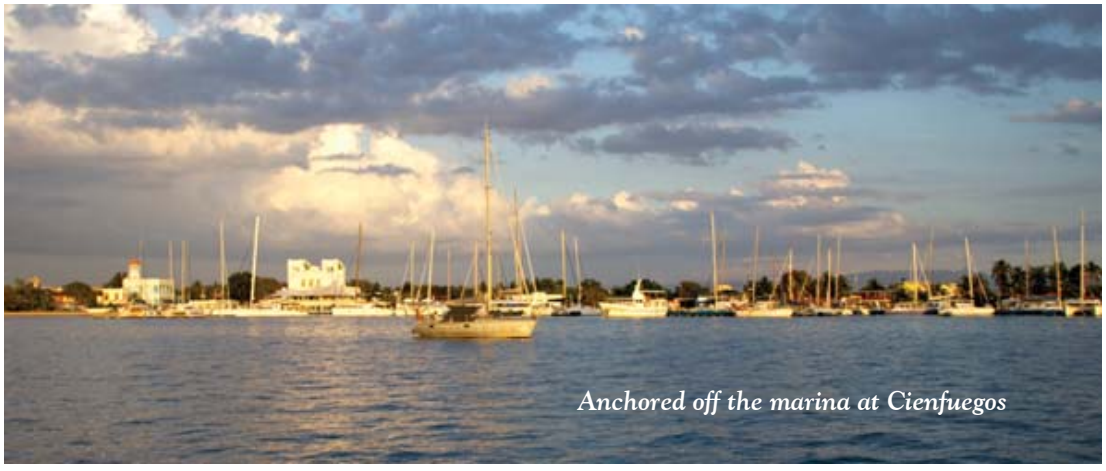
We explored Havana hard. By day we quartered the old city, visiting museums and galleries, enjoying the bustling streets and gawping at some of the complete wrecks of buildings propped up by their nearly-as-ancient neighbours. By night we visited bars and restaurants and enjoyed the busy city nightlife. We sampled *mojitos* at La Bodeguita where Hemingway had drunk them, but enjoying them more a few doors down where the barmen were friendlier and less harassed and the *mojitos* tasted better. We had a couple of excellent meals following advice in our *Lonely Planet* guide. Cuba isn't known for the quality of its food, and for good reason, but in recent years restaurants catering to the tourist trade have opened, particularly in Havana. And everywhere we went we were offered rides in impossibly shiny, brightly-coloured old American cars. But we'd done that, and 'properly', in Santiago and Cienfuegos so we declined and just took the iconic pictures instead!

'My mojito in La Bodeguita, my daiquiri in El Floridita'
(Ernest Hemingway)

Última?

Charlotte flew home from Havana and we returned to Cienfuegos, now with a new deadline – we were due to meet friends in Nassau in about three weeks – but first there was still plenty of Cuba to explore. A priority was to extend our visas – not a difficult process, but time-consuming and easier if you speak more Spanish than we do. A visit to the BANDEC bank to obtain two 25 CUC stamps was followed by a visit to a tricky-to-find immigration office with an enormous crowd outside (in Cuba one doesn't queue in line, one queues in a gaggle or, perhaps, somewhere else). As a new arrival you call "*Último*?" until you find the last person in the 'line', and thus you become the new *último* until someone else joins the throng. If the person ahead of you wants to go off to, say, have a coffee or sit in the shade, they point out the person ahead of them and then find you again when they return. Happily, most of the 150-strong gaggle weren't waiting to see the same officers we needed, so our prospective day-long wait turned out to be just a couple of hours – and the immigration officer spoke good English too!

After a big provisioning shop we left Cienfuegos in company with *Nomadica* heading for Cayo Sal, 60 miles southwest of Cienfuegos (once you've avoided the shallows to its east and the Bay of Pigs) and 23 miles east of Cayo Largo. In contrast to the mangrove



Anchored off the marina at Cienfuegos

The marina at Cayo Largo

cays of Los Jardines de la Reina, we found the cays to the west of Cienfuegos to be rockier with more sand, clearer water and much better snorkelling. We spent a couple of days anchored off Cayo Sal before heading on to Cayo Largo, where we also found excellent snorkelling on the reefs south of the entrance to the anchorage and marina. We spent Cheryl and Morgan's last evening in Cuba with them aboard *Nomadica* celebrating Gael's first birthday with, of course, shrimp and a large birthday cake (not at the same

Alongside at Los Morros to check out

time!). They headed off towards Belize next morning whilst we stayed for an additional couple of days, waiting out some strong winds and doing boat jobs. Cayo Largo and its anchorage are pleasant enough but we preferred some of the other places we had been to – either more vibrant, or quieter and more rugged.

From Cayo Largo we had planned to bounce west over the next ten days via Isla de Juventud and various cays to Los Morros, but we only got as far as Cayo del Rosario, where we found more excellent snorkelling, albeit very shallow. As we left, Chris Parker's forecast spoke of a vigorous cold front bringing very strong northeasterlies in the medium term, just as we would be trying to make progress to the Bahamas to meet our friends, preceded by a dearth of wind for a week from a couple of days' time. Never have a schedule! So we decided to make best use of the wind we had then, left southwest Cuba for another visit and, instead, had a great 200-mile sail westward along the coast and around Cuba's southwest tip to sleepy little Los Morros. We were welcomed with open arms by the harbour master who was understandably surprised that we should want to arrive, check out and leave immediately, but we knew that we had a good sailing wind for our onward passage.

Come visit!

The paperwork took under an hour, including spending the last of our local currency, and as twilight fell we left Los Morros astern. We'd had a wonderful six weeks in Cuba and were very sad to leave. The culture, the people and the contrasts all stand out strongly, even a year on. If there weren't so many other places to explore we'd be back in a heartbeat, but it's certainly a place we want to revisit, and hopefully fairly soon too.

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HIGH LATITUDE SAILING – Jon Amtrup and Bob Shepton. Published in hard covers by Adlard Coles [www.adlardcoles.com] at £25.00. 208 246mm x 171mm pages including many colour photos. ISBN 978-1-4729-7327-6. Also available for Kindle.

In smaller text the front cover of the book adds: 'self-sufficient sailing techniques for cold waters and winter seasons'. I can confirm that the text is emphatic about the requirement for self-sufficiency, and this book is a great addition for anyone preparing to voyage into the higher latitudes where assistance is often not available. But what stand out head and shoulders above the narrative are the super and inspiring photos. So, as well as being good reading material for those preparing to go to the far north or south for the first time, it's also very interesting for those who've already been there and done it – as well as for those who prefer to travel vicariously.

High Latitude Sailing is a compendium of the experiences of the two main authors – most notably for OCC members the Rev Bob Shepton – and the book is peppered with photos of *Dodo's Delight* in various chilly anchorages and alongside gleaming chunks of ice. As a compendium it is repetitive in a few places as both authors touch on some of the same issues, but issues that are worthy of note, such as the risks of leaving your boat at anchor when going ashore – basically don't leave it unattended! Also, as I would expect those venturing to the far north or south to be experienced sailors, some of the text seems a little too basic. It is a difficult to determine the intended audience, unless the idea is to appeal to a broad church.

As with all publications, some information is outdated before the ink is dry and this book is no exception. Currently a major headache for those trying to venture outside the standard cruising routes is insurance, and on this topic the recommendations in the book can no longer be relied upon.

What brings the text to life is the interspersal of anecdotes, and what better way to remember what not to do than to hear directly of the experiences of others? For those familiar with the Rev Bob and his penchant for following in the footsteps of Tilman, the encouragement to do without showers in the section on water will not be a surprise. Tilman, of course, had none of our modern aids and the book does not always refer to the latest information available, such as satellite photos of ice cover. It is not intended to be a technical treatise, but is a good introduction to the challenges and delights of the high latitudes, to be used alongside such texts as Andrew Wilkes's *Arctic and Northern Waters* (reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2014/2) and of course chatting to those who've sailed those waters. It is particularly good at raising awareness of the key issues when venturing to these dramatically beautiful and awe-inspiring regions.

High Latitude Sailing might be recognised by a few members, as some of the material

was self-published by Jon Amtrup a few years ago. Adlard Coles has done a great job in sprucing it up and I particularly liked the inclusion at the beginning of the two overview charts of the north and south poles. It is better organised than previously, with more material and short contributions from a few other high-latitude sailors. Sadly the credits make no mention of the Ocean Cruising Club and the awards that the Rev Bob has received from the Club over many years. Something to be amended in the next edition?

SAG

THE GIFT OF A SEA: A Short History of Yachting in the Mediterranean – Rod Heikell. Published in hard covers by Taniwha Press UK [www.taniwhapress.com] at £29.99. 380 254mm x 201mm pages illustrated with numerous photos and illustrations from the author's collection and other sources. ISBN 978-0-9954-6995-2. Also available for Kindle.

One evening some years ago, we nosed into a little bay on a small Greek Aegean island whose name I cannot recall and anchored for the night. There was just one other boat there, a handsome American 45 footer and, as we were rowing around the bay for a little exploring, the owner invited us aboard. 'Typical Brit,' he said over a glass of wine, 'you come in here, go straight to where you want to be, drop your anchor and fix yourselves gin and tonics'. I replied that we didn't like having to re-anchor (particularly in those days before we had an electric windlass) and had simply picked a patch of sand in good anchoring depth in the corner of the bay recommended in the Heikell pilot. He brightened up and said that he knew Rod Heikell – would I like Rod's phone number? I thought about this and said no, because I really couldn't think why Rod Heikell would want to hear from me or what I would say to him. Now, a quarter of a century later, I find myself enjoying reading and reviewing his *The Gift of a Sea*, a very different kind of volume from his excellent Mediterranean pilots.

Rod Heikell has chosen an early start for his *Short History of Yachting in the Mediterranean*, going back to the pharaohs. Technically, the Nile near Luxor is not the Mediterranean and the ornate boats built to take the pharaohs over the Nile were there to carry their dead bodies to the other world rather than being used as pleasure craft, but it is no less interesting for that. One pharaoh had a real pleasure craft in which he was rowed around a lake by nubile young women dressed only in netting, which he seems to have enjoyed. As for Cleopatra's 'barge she sat in, like a burnished throne', Shakespeare never mentioned that in real life she was rowed in it to Turkey for peace negotiations, although the trip sounds as if it were more business than pleasure.

We move on to the Romans and find they had little interest in pleasure boating with the notable exception of the Emperor Caligula – he of the equine consul – who commissioned a vast craft and installed it on a small lake inland from Rome (not the Med again) and appears to have used it for static corporate hospitality and some religious practices. It was excavated in the early 20th century, all 73m length x 24m beam of it. Bad people sometimes do good things and Mussolini, as well as inventing Fascism and brutally invading smaller countries, is legendary for making the Italian trains run on

time but less well known for salvaging this historic vessel and building a magnificent museum around it. Conversely, sometimes good people can do bad things, and the Allies bombed it to splinters some twenty years later, so none of us are able to visit it now.

The reality is that the history of pleasure yachting in the Med does not go back very far and we take a fairly long jump from ancient Rome to the exploits of Byron and Shelley with some visits to the Ottoman Empire on the way. I had no idea that these two romantic poets were early yachties and, although I knew Percy Bysshe Shelley had died in the Mediterranean, I did not know that he had perished while sailing his boat somewhere near La Spezia in Italy, after ignoring weather advice*. This book is full of interesting facts like that, as well as very comprehensive references to other works.

From Byron we move into the second half of the 19th century when a mixture of steam power and British industrial wealth started to open up the Mediterranean as a nautical playground. Rod Heikell covers the marine adventures of a number of exotic characters around the turn of that century (I never knew before where the exclamation 'Gordon Bennett!' came from**). Then there is quite a lengthy 20th century section about some of those certifiable people who make long voyages in open boats – Wayfarer dinghies, Drascombe Luggers and the like, evincing admiration but not envy.

In the last part of the book there is a substantial section about the beginnings of flotilla sailing holidays in the Med, which is to be expected because Rod Heikell was a pioneer in that area. Purely selfish I know, but as someone who goes cruising for the pleasure of the wild places I couldn't get excited about mushrooming marina developments to cater for the flotillas and charter fleets in the Ionian, Turkey and elsewhere. Everyone should be able to share in the fun, but it is getting rather out of hand now and, certainly on the French and Italian Mediterranean coasts, sailing boats cannot expect a very warm welcome these days due to their sheer numbers.

The monstrous, gas-guzzling, ostentatious and mind-bogglingly expensive superyachts he describes, though, are in a different class of modern life. These craft, seemingly built to bolster the already bloated egos of their owners and which are often to be found reversing forcefully into tiny, pretty harbours so that passers-by on the quayside can ogle these narcissistic people at play, are the antipathy of all that the OCC stands for. They are definitely not condoned by Heikell.

The book ends with some sensible words on the dying art of traditional navigation with which most of us will heartily agree.

In the limited space on the bookshelf above my chart table I will not be removing one of the priceless Heikell pilots to replace it with this volume, but it is an interesting read, beautifully illustrated, and it will have wide appeal. Setting aside the 'History of Yachting' aspect for a moment, this book is in reality a well-written, well-researched and affectionate account of the Mediterranean by someone who has lived and worked there for several decades. It shares with the reader a wealth of information and observations, historical, anecdotal and factual, about the 'Middle Sea'.

BH

* It's also claimed that he insisted on increasing the rig, over-canvassing her and reducing her stability in one fell swoop.

** For more about this flamboyant man see Sam Jefferson's *GORDON BENNETT and the First Yacht Race Across the Atlantic*, reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2016/1.

CHILE: Arica Desert to Tierra del Fuego – Andrew O'Grady, 4th edition. Published in soft covers by Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson [www.imray.com] and the RCC Pilotage Foundation at £45.00. 210 296mm x 211mm pages in full colour throughout. ISBN 978-1-7867-9020-0. Also available in PDF format.

The coast of Chile presents formidable challenges to the long-distance cruising sailor. Some come here to complete a circumnavigation, dipping down into the latitudes of Cape Horn just in order to 'get around' the American continent. Others come here for the certainty of adventure offered by this least known of coasts and settle in for some years. For whatever reason, any guide which attempts to describe this immensely long and tortuous coastline represents a monumental amount of work and is a must-have for any who decide to attempt it. The challenges presented by the navigation of this coast are perhaps unique, in that there are vast stretches which are wild and unpopulated, where facilities are scarce, and where weather conditions are some of the most extreme and unpredictable encountered anywhere in the world. Preparedness is the key for all sailors, and the key to preparedness is information on what one might expect when embarking on any journey into this amazing region.

The only edition of *Chile* that we currently have on board is the first, by Ian and Maggy Staples. It is obvious that this 4th edition has come a long way since that was published more than twenty years ago. The rough hand-sketched maps in the anchorage descriptions have given way to clear but not over-detailed coloured sketches which appear similar to raster chartlets. Anchorages are listed in logical north to south order (Chile's geography helps greatly in this regard!) and those listed should be more than sufficient once the entrance has been ascertained. New to this edition are the fabulous aerial photos of some of the anchorages, especially of the area around Puerto Montt. We have not yet used these photos as a guide to navigation, but we expect that they will be very helpful. As more boats start packing drones as standard equipment, no doubt we will be seeing more aerial photos in future editions. Contrary to what the author states in this guide, we have found the official Chilean SHOA charts to be very inaccurate and are very thankful for any extra information, especially in poor conditions.

As Andrew O'Grady points out, it would be impossible to list every single spot which, with time to explore, could serve as a safe mooring in the Southern Patagonian sections. However, the information is sufficient to string together a set of anchorages each of which is reachable in a moderate day, one from another, in order to make a safe transit of this most demanding of passages. There is still plenty of room for adventure here, but following this guide does offer a framework from which further exploration might proceed. Since Patagonia is somewhat special though, in that the use of shorelines on a daily basis is the key to safe navigation, the author has included a section on techniques for managing these. While most of the information presented in the Introduction is reasonably accurate, it is Section 11 that we find somewhat alarming. The technique described is, in our view, antiquated and dangerous, and seems to be a throwback to the reliance on information gathered from singlehanders in the earlier editions.

Similarly, concerning the Introduction, the guide supports the idea of collecting wood to fuel a wood stove as a heat source for the boat. It should be pointed out, however, that the route through Southern Patagonia is almost all contained within Chile's system of National Parks and Biosphere Reserves. Even though the rainforest

on this coast may seem endless, it is precisely the anchorages listed in this and other guides which will take the impact from this kind of activity and we have witnessed considerable degradation of the wilderness qualities of various anchorages over the last twenty years as a result. Perhaps for future editions there is room for discussion of ways of limiting our impact so that sailors may still enjoy these wild locations in the years to come.

So to the bottom line, is it worth the money? Of course it is. The first time you squeeze your boat thankfully into one of the myriad nooks and crannies described in the guide whilst the storm rages over the treetops, and you don't hit the rock close off your starboard side getting in there, you will be glad you had it aboard.

GL & KP

REEDS NAUTICAL ALMANAC 2021 – Perrin Towler and Mark Fishwick. Published in soft covers by Reeds [www.reedsnauticalalmanac.co.uk] at £49.99. 1070 265mm x 192mm pages, in full colour throughout. ISBN 978-1-4729-8021-2

and

THE CRUISING ALMANAC 2021 – The Cruising Association and Imray. Published in soft covers by Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson [www.imray.com] at £37.50. 482 295mm x 214mm pages in full colour throughout. ISBN 978-1-7867-9179-5

European cruisers have a choice of two handsome almanacs for 2021. *Reeds* is an annual classic which has been around for as long as any of us could possibly remember. The *Cruising Almanac*, with a similarly long a pedigree, comes from the Cruising Association in co-operation with Imray and makes use of their charts. These two volumes can be considered competitors, as they cover a lot of the same ground and do many of the same things. Because an almanac is not something you actually read, like a novel, but something you refer to, like a telephone directory (if such a thing still exists in the digital world), my principal aim has been to compare them. Both are superb pieces of work and veritable mines of information.

What do they actually do for us? They begin by providing lots of useful information about lights, buoyage, safety, first aid, regulations and the like. In terms of current information, for instance, each tells British yacht owners rather depressingly where they will stand in European waters following Brexit (and they won't stand very well at all). Anyone who ever has trouble remembering what the top marks on a cardinal beacon mean will easily find the answer in either of these almanacs. In a more likely scenario though, a watchkeeper might consult one of these books in the small hours to identify confusing lights, such as a tug pulling a badly-lit tanker hulk on a very long tow. We can't be expected to retain these unusual things in our heads all the time, particularly in the small hours, and such information readily at hand can suddenly become invaluable when you really need it. Each almanac therefore provides in a single volume a lot of things that a sailor needs to be able to access.

The first thing to note is the difference in size. At 482 pages compared to 1070 pages there is obviously a lot less in the *Cruising Almanac* than in *Reeds*, although you do get a foreword by Tom Cunliffe. Both follow a similar pattern of general information, followed by round-the-coast port and passage-making notes, then tidal stream atlases and tidal curves. That is where the *Cruising Almanac* ends, while *Reeds* then launches into a comprehensive marina directory, covering not only marinas themselves but a useful kind of yellow pages (not actually yellow) of marine trades. This additional part of the almanac has its own page numbering system, 1–128, so the almanac is actually 1198 pages long, to which can be added a lot of unnumbered full-page advertisements so that the whole volume adds up to a remarkable 1233 pages.

The port and passage-making notes are comprehensive in both books, very well presented and in full colour, firstly making their way round the coasts of Britain and Ireland before doing the same job around the entire western coast of mainland Europe. Both offer access to free corrections and updates, at www.reedsalmanac.co.uk/updates and www.theca.org.uk/almanac/corrections respectively. The target audience for both is those who sail in and from Britain and Ireland and both are therefore Brit/Irish-centric. Traditionally, home waters for British sailors range from Brest to the Elbe, but both almanacs usefully expand this range up to the Baltic approaches (southern Norway) in the north and down to Gibraltar in the south, in both cases covering pretty much everywhere in between. The *Cruising Almanac* also includes some limited information on European inland waterways, which *Reeds* does not. There is some more detail in *Reeds*, not necessarily all essential, but *Reeds* does have a strong edge over the *Cruising Almanac* by providing full tide tables for the year in each sector.

There is so much information here that I decided to take three examples of places I know quite well and see how useful the descriptions are and how they compare across the two almanacs. I chose the great English Naval haven of Plymouth, the little drying port of Rye in East Sussex, and the tidally complex Golfe du Morbihan in southern Brittany:

- **Plymouth**: both almanacs provide good notes and useful plans, with not much to choose between them.
- **Rye**: is tricky because you have to cross the bar near high water and the entrance is dangerously exposed to the southwest. Both almanacs provide a good plan and good notes, although Reeds goes further and told me to anchor in the lee of Dungeness if the bar was dangerous – useful, but if they hadn't told me my chart would have made it obvious.
- **Golfe du Morbihan**: rather disappointing. The plan was poor in both cases and the information wouldn't have got me very far.

In this comparison, the two almanacs scored a draw.

The tidal stream atlases and curves look really useful. A navigator would probably prefer a proper atlas covering a specific area, particularly where the tides are complicated, but we can't buy and carry everything aboard and this is a valuable feature of both almanacs.

Now to the *Reeds* marina and marine trades guide, which the *Cruising Almanac* does not have. The marine trades section really is a telephone directory in that it only gives phone numbers, with no e-mail addresses or websites. This section is about 128 pages long

but, and this is important, it does not venture out of Britain and Ireland, so if you need an engine part in Portugal or want to book a marina berth in Normandy, *Reeds* will not help you. That is what I mean by being Brit/Irish-centric. If that sounds like a criticism, I should stress that this section does look really handy, so far as it goes geographically.

On the face of it you get more with *Reeds* than you do with the *Cruising Almanac*, as you would expect because it is more than twice as long. However, *Reeds* is a bulky volume to handle and stow. It is also swollen, at my rough count, by 238 advertisements, many full page. You have to plough through 20 pages of adverts before the almanac even starts, but they are all appropriate and relevant. The *Cruising Almanac* has only about nine ads altogether, of which eight are for either the Cruising Association itself or for Imray, plus one for a Belgian inland waterways guide. If it is wild and windy and you're in a hurry to try and find a port in *Reeds*, the ports index is not easily found at the back but on page 1059, which could be tiresome.

And what do they cost? *Reeds* comes in at £49.99 (what a relief – it could have been £50) but you can buy it at a hefty discount provided you take out an annual subscription. This sounds odd but may make sense if you primarily buy it every year for the tide tables. The *Cruising Almanac* costs £31.50, which is good value, particularly as it is not supported by advertising (except for the Belgian inland waterways guide, of course).

Which to go for will be a matter of personal choice. I can't really recommend one over the other because they are both very good, but you won't want both. Either would be an excellent and valuable addition to a chart table bookshelf, and a very acceptable if weighty addition to a Christmas stocking. The cover prices are much of a muchness, which will quickly vanish into a sailing budget, and either will easily pay for itself on the day (or night) that it gets you out of trouble.

FA

A SHIPMAN was ther, woning fer by weste:
For aught I woot, he was of Dertemouthe.

But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,
His stremes and his daungers him bisydes.
His herberwe and his mone, his lodemenage,
Ther was noon swich from Hulle to Cartage.
Hardy he was, and wys to undertake;
With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.
He knew wel alle the havenes, as they were,
From Gootlond to the cape of Finistere,
And every cryke in Britayne and in Spayne;
His barge y-cleped was the *Maudelayne*.

Prologue to the Canterbury Tales – The Shipman
Geoffrey Chaucer

SEABURBAN AROUND ALONE, PART 1
Bert ter Hart

(*Bert is a Canadian member with sailing experience including many circumnavigations of Vancouver Island, numerous trips to and a circumnavigation of the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii), three cruises to Alaska, and a cruise to the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea. At the age of 61, with the aid of an OCC Adventure Challenge Grant, he set his sights on new horizons...*)

On 18th July 2020 I stepped off *Seaburban* and into the record books as the first Canadian to sail non-stop around the world using only traditional navigational tools – sextant, tables, pencil, paper and a watch. Moreover, I had no sponsors, no endorsement deals and no high-tech headquarters watching over me. I had left Victoria BC on 27th October 2019 with only my wife waving me off the dock at a time when much of the world thought that Corona was a rather watery Mexican beer. Some nine months later I returned home to a worldwide pandemic and lockdown. This is a glimpse into my circumnavigation aboard an ageing Cruising Club of America-designed family cruiser while the world struggled to cope with a devastating new economic, social and political reality.

The author headed south in the Tropical Eastern Pacific

Where does one start when trying to describe an experience as entirely unworldly and alien as a solo circumnavigation? Something almost as rare as going to the moon and back? After all, 24 astronauts have been to the moon (twelve walking on it) and only ten people have circumnavigated solo, non-stop using only traditional navigational tools (Knox-Johnston, UK; Moitessier, France; Blythe, UK; Freeman, NZ; van den Heede, France; Slats, Netherlands; Raandma, Estonia; Kopar, Hungary/US; Lehtinen, Finland and now ter Hart, Canada). Of that list, five finished just months before I started in 2019, as part of the inaugural Golden Globe Race. I could not imagine reading, let alone writing, something as mundane as a selective re-hashing of my log or a journal. But there is something in a solo attempt at sailing around the world that seems to capture the imaginations of sailors and non-sailors alike. I had no idea that my own attempt would be followed by thousands, that my blog entries and posts would be read by tens of thousands and that school children from countries as diverse as Kenya and New Zealand would be interested in my trip. In that light then, let me take a page out of the Canadian Special Service Forces training manuals and begin at the end.

I arrived back in Canada with a boat and sails in good enough condition to set out again on a similar trip in a matter of weeks. Provisioning, a general clean-up, and a

Seaburban on the ways at Silva Bay Shipyard on Gabriola Island, BC, prior to her heading north to Alaska. Her keel and forefoot, narrow beam and long overhangs are testament to her CCA roots

trip up the mast to fix a broken halyard is all that would have been required to get *Seaburban* back into form. This, I can only imagine, would be the goal of every sailor – sailing the boat or yourself to bits when help is highly uncertain at best is simply foolhardy. The end goal, as far as I was concerned, was to arrive back in the place from which I had departed with myself and the boat in very nearly the same condition as when I had left. I had made it clear to my family and friends that my plan was not so much to sail around the world as to sneak around it – I would sail as conservatively as possible. Given *Seaburban*'s age and design and my own inexperience, this seemed not only a wise plan but a necessary one.

Seaburban is an Ocean Cruising Yacht 45. Basically, she's a Reliance 44 hull finished to a very high standard in 1987. Luckily for her, she has benefited from good owners and she shows it. The Reliance 44 was designed by Canadian Pierre Meunier and 42 were built, of which most were purchased as bare hull and deck and finished by the owners. They are heavy displacement, full-keeled cruisers and I seriously doubt if her designer ever imagined that one of his boats would be punished mercilessly in the Great Southern Ocean. For my money, circumnavigating solo, non-stop via the Five Great Capes in a Reliance is a bit like doing the Paris-Dakar Rally in an RV*. It's possible but certainly not recommended. I've been asked numerous times since I got back if I would go again. Unhesitatingly, my answer has always been, 'Yes, but in a different boat'. It's not that I was uncomfortable, or that the boat wasn't up to the challenge, it's just that there are better options.

I knew that going in *Seaburban* wasn't the best idea I'd ever had. Going, period, wasn't

* A Recreational Vehicle such as a motor-home, campervan, caravan etc, with living quarters designed for accommodation.

necessarily a good idea, but I know *Seaburban* very well. I had sailed her more than 15,000 miles since buying her in 2007 and figured that, with a bit of a refit and a chance to shake the changes out on an Alaskan cruise, I could manage if I sailed conservatively. Sailors know that 'conservatively' is synonymous with 'slower' and, although it sounds sensible and looks good on paper, sailing conservatively and therefore slower translates to greater exposure to adverse weather which can come in the form of both light and heavy airs.

Preparation

To get *Seaburban* ready, my wife Nani and I started a comprehensive refit in January 2019. The start was not auspicious. We were trapped by hurricane-force winds that badly damaged White Rock's famous pier and destroyed more than a dozen boats. We rode out the storm little over a mile away from White Rock at the Semiahmoo Yacht Club's reciprocal dock, with 14 lines, 13 fenders and constant vigilance.

Hurricane-force winds batter White Rock's historic pier. Photo Surrey Now-Leader

New Year's Eve 2019 found us and *Seaburban* at Strait Marine in Steveston awaiting haulout. January, February, March, and April were spent on overhauling, working on, replacing and/or upgrading the systems I thought had to be bomb-proof. Working with Ocean Rigging & Hydraulics and A-Sea Marine Electrical we tackled the following:

- Completely overhauling the mast and boom
- Replacing all the standing rigging
- Adding a strong point at the bow pulpit designed to take the loads of a top-down furled Code Zero* or asymmetric spinnaker
- Adding a landing point for a Solent stay** on the foredeck and integrating it with the stemhead fitting

* A cross between a genoa and an asymmetric spinnaker, used for sailing close to the wind in light airs.

** A Solent stay attaches to the deck slightly aft of the existing forestay and to the mast only slightly below the existing backstay, so the mast requires no additional support.

Installing the Monitor windvane. It more than lived up to its sterling reputation and steered Seaburban through thick and thin for months on end

- Reinforcing the foredeck attachment point for the staysail stay above and below deck
- Adding chainplates to each quarter designed as attachment points for all drogues and/or warps
- Adding a reaching strut and associated hardware
- Adding line clutches for all halyards, furlers, and foreguys
- Adding a boom brake and associated cockpit-led adjustment lines
- Removing the Cape Horn windvane and replacing it with a Monitor
- Replacing and upgrading all batteries

The navigation station in ruins. I worked on electrical problems, upgrades, and new installations, but left never having managed to get ahead of it all

- Completely re-wiring the DC/AC ground bus (the negative ground for both battery and shorepower electronics)

Nani worked tirelessly on the storm canvas for hatches, companionways, dorades and windlass

- Replacing and upgrading the battery monitor and charger systems
- Replacing and upgrading the AC inverter
- Replacing and upgrading the solar panels
- Adding a towed DC generator
- Adding an AIS transponder
- Sewing storm covers for all hatches and companionways
- Replacing the mainsail cover with a custom stackpack system
- Sewing ready bags for all hank-on canvas (staysail and two different storm jibs)
- Measuring for and ordering new sails (Code Zero, 110% working jib, Solent, and 80ft^2 storm jib)
- Replacing the bottom-paint and adding an antifouled boot-stripe

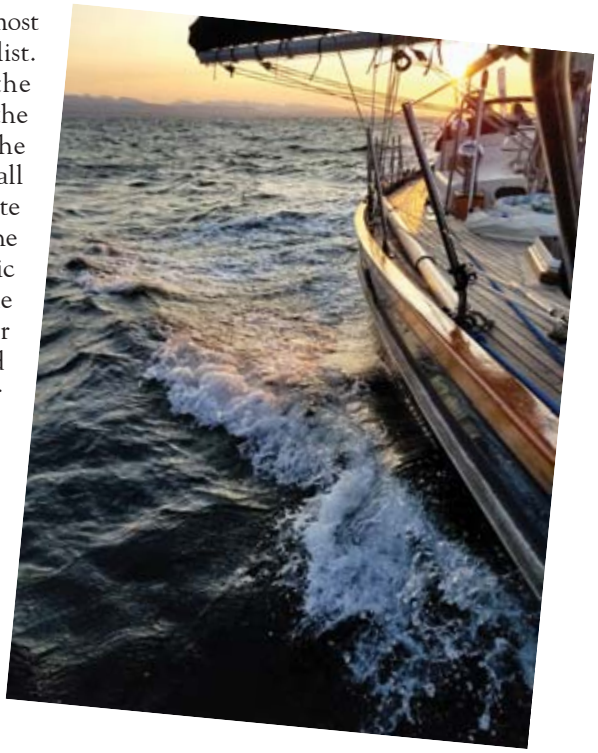
With only Nani and me working on the boat full time, to say we were pressed for time is an understatement. Coupled with a cold, snowy Canadian winter, getting the work done on time for our intended Alaskan shakedown cruise was an impossibility. We left late, cut the shakedown cruise short, and still ended up

Nani and I rolled and tipped the bottom paint trying to get as good a finish as possible

On the hard at Strait Marine, Steveston, BC. Nani and I pressed on despite the cold and snow

working right up until my departure in October with the to-do list seemingly taking on a mind of its own. Even the sails, which needed considerable reinforcement before I considered them up to the rigors of the circumnavigation, were only bent on the night before I left.

Departure itself was delayed by almost a month and not just by the to-do list. Leaving the northwest coast of the Americas bound eastabout around the world via the Five Great Capes, the only window that makes any sense at all is September or early October. A late summer/early autumn departure runs the risk of an end-of-season Eastern Pacific hurricane, while November spells the onset of some of the worst weather the Pacific Northeast serves up. I had planned to leave as soon as possible after 1st October with whatever window I had, but no plan survives the battle and on 19th September, while installing the tang for the Solent stay at the top of the mast, I fell the full 55ft to the deck, fracturing four ribs and



North to Alaska – our shakedown cruise finally gets underway

Despite four fractured ribs, I'm up the mast again finishing installing the tang for the Solent stay

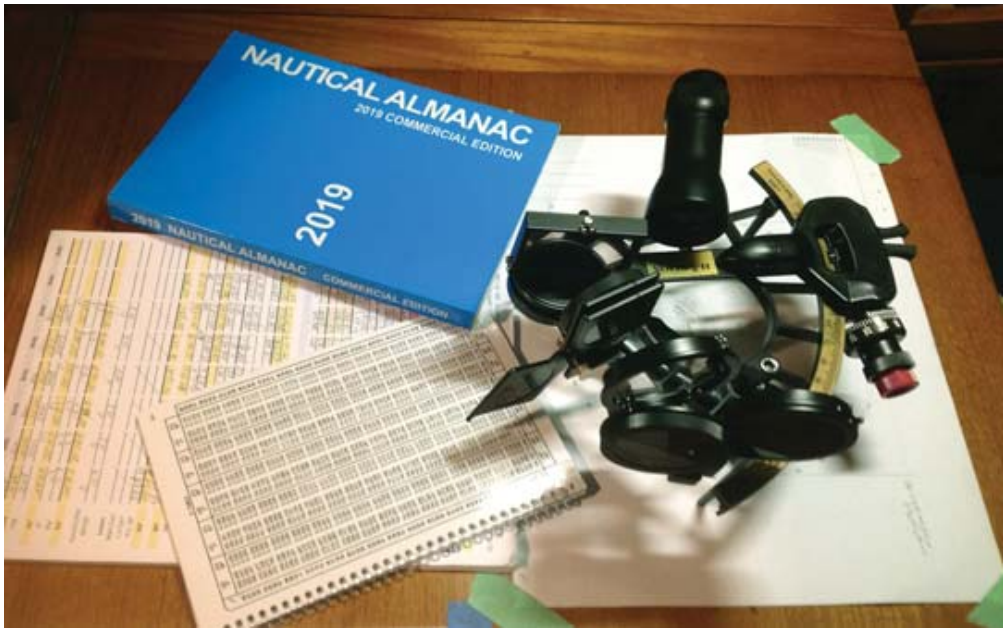
collapsing my right lung. By all measures and accounts I should not have survived the fall, let alone walked away from it.

The fall left me debilitated but undaunted. I would delay as long as I could, hoping to heal up enough to allow for departure before the end of October. Once into November, getting safely down the west coast of North America, let alone through the Southern Ocean in late autumn the following year, would be a crapshoot at best. I was loath to put the trip off for another year, however, so hoped for the best. I figured that if I could leave before November, I could take advantage of the relatively benign weather I would experience off the coast of the Americas before getting into the higher latitudes below 35°S. I took a week off but by 25th was back up the mast finishing the work required to install the tang and, most importantly, install the furler on the Solent stay. I knew this furler and sail would be the workhorse of the sail plan but I had no idea just how crucial it would turn out to be.

For traditionalists, taking your departure marks the beginning of the passage proper and the official start of your DR record. My position early in the morning of 28th October 2019 went into the log as my departure. I dared to look back at the smudge on the horizon that was Cape Flattery only briefly as I turned *Seaburban* southwest. With a little luck, I expected to raise the same Cape some seven months later.

The First, the Last, and the End

It is no mean feat, condensing nine months at sea alone into 3500 words or less – even just the first part. Add the Southern Ocean, the Five Great Capes, deprivation, isolation, calms and storms and I would say it's nigh on impossible – something like Einstein's response to the contest that would have the winner explain relativity in 500 words or fewer. He famously quipped that anyone claiming to do it didn't understand relativity. It's easier to describe the trip in one word than just about any number of thousands. In one word, the trip was extraordinary. It was exhilarating ... or perhaps astounding. Or maybe incredible, phenomenal, or unimaginable. You pick. Any one of the above will do. I'll attempt an insight into the voyage by focusing on the two most important roundings and a brutal introduction to a changed world.



Tools of the trade. I had customised work-forms and laminated, spiral-bound S-Tables (concise sight reduction tables) made up for the trip. I used a superb Cassens & Plath Horizon sextant exclusively throughout the voyage

A difficult, tearful goodbye. My father, Jan Daniel ter Hart and I hug before leaving the Royal Victoria YC in Cadboro Bay, Victoria

The small silver charm my sister Leah gave me just prior to leaving Victoria. It was carefully wrapped, with clear instructions not to be opened until I was underway

The First: Cape Horn – 8th January 2020

The run to the Horn had been remarkably easy. I had prepared for the worst, and Randall Reeves' first attempt at the Figure 8, Susie Goodall's rescue and Jean-Luc van den Heede's pitchpole and rig failures were forever on my mind. As soon as was prudent I beelined for the Horn, pressing *Seaburban* hard as the southern Pacific raged through the patch of ocean I had just traversed. Luck had been with me and it seemed the fates would smile on my rounding of the greatest cape of them all – Cape Horn.

Hard on the wind and headed south

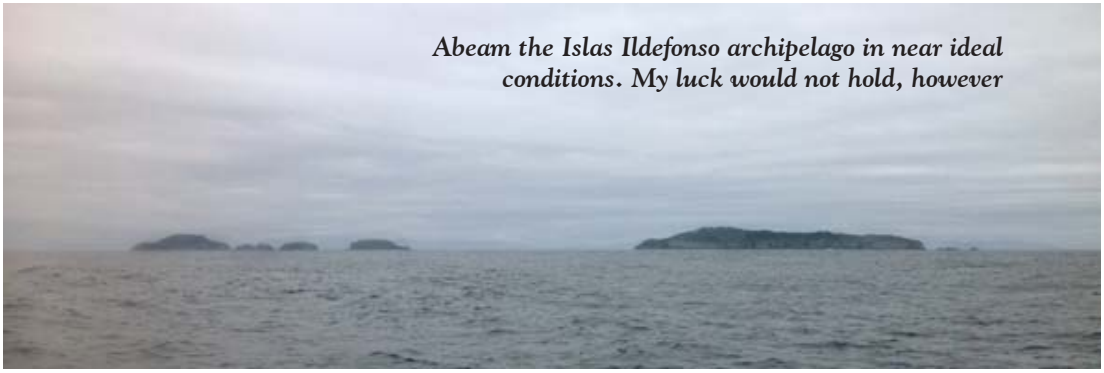
The long-range forecast wasn't promising. The model forecasts that formed the basis of my route planning and weather avoidance had become increasingly unreliable the further south *Seaburban* and I sailed. There comes a time when you must commit to a strategy and that time had come and gone. It seemed foolhardy to wait for a better, more stable forecast and the weather behind and catching me up was the worst I had seen to date. The Horn it would be – I would simply have to deal with whatever was served up at the time.

Ghosting along under twin poled-out headsails, I raised Patagonia off the port bow early on the morning of 7th January. I was elated – almost beside myself – and spoke aloud for the first time in weeks. "Patagonia! Patagonia! Pata-bloody-gonia!" I began to shout and then roar with laughter. The Chilean mountaintops were the first land I had seen in more than two months. My navigation seemed spot-on – I had made landfall when and where expected and I couldn't have been more pleased with myself. It was a perfect day. The classic fair winds and following seas that had been wished upon me by friends, family and a totally unexpected following on social media had

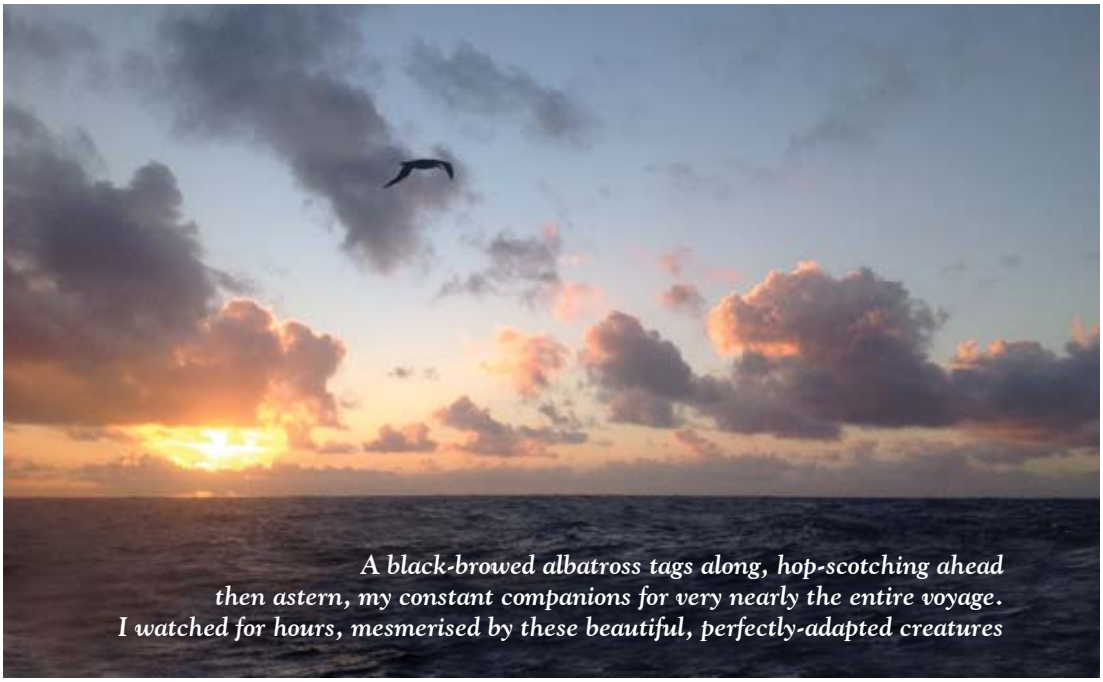
The Southern Ocean finally makes an appearance. The consistent westerly swell would be with me for the next five months

come to pass. Within the half hour the mountains vanished in high cloud and, in due course, the Islas Ildefonso archipelago appeared almost dead ahead. The Horn it was going to be, in what I figured would be near-perfect weather.

I should have known better. Near perfect is nearly always never. The ambiguity in the long-range forecast evaporated as the weather models coalesced into a single solution. Within the next 12 to 18 hours Cape Horn would be blasted by storm-force



Abeam the Islas Ildefonso archipelago in near ideal conditions. My luck would not hold, however



A black-browed albatross tags along, hop-scotching ahead then astern, my constant companions for very nearly the entire voyage. I watched for hours, mesmerised by these beautiful, perfectly-adapted creatures

winds, and any hopes of a close approach were cast aside as I attempted to come up with a plan that would have me safely around the Horn and into the South Atlantic. The forecast was bad, my options seemed limited and poor, and I was running low on faith. I needed a second opinion and another set of eyes on what was shaping up to be a world-class beating. I reached out to Tony Gooch and asked for help.

Tony responded immediately and recommended that I get the hell out of Dodge City as fast as I possibly could. In no uncertain terms he recommended that I head southeast away from the Horn as long and as fast as possible. Any thoughts of a picture or, heaven forbid, seeking refuge in the nearby islands were not to be entertained under any circumstances. Tony recommended that when progress became impossible I should heave-to and wait for the first opportunity to head east, clearing Isla de los Estados well to the south.

It made sense. It was a prudent, safe course of action that would have me putting the most distance between *Seaburban* and a lee shore in the least amount of time. The storm was not forecast to be long-lived, and I would not be exposed to the full fury of the Southern Ocean for long. It was wise – but it wasn't what I chose to do.

Poring over the GRIB data, I had the notion that if I could get as close as possible to the centre of this particular depression I could take advantage of the dramatically lower winds and calmer seas within the confines of the centre. Good in theory, but it would mean gambling that I could cross the maximum wind gradients before the winds rose to storm-force. If I made it, I could shelter in the safety of the centre and heave to in relatively benign conditions as the outer fringes of the storm ravaged Cape Horn.

I did not round Cape Horn with raised fist, shouting at the wind and sea to do its worst as I piled on canvas and cursed Neptune. Instead I slunk southwest as fast as I could, tail between my legs and knees shaking, wondering with every puff if I had gambled away my boat and my life and hoping against hope that the weather gods had

Becalmed on the badly-placed Burwood Bank after clearing Isla de los Estados, I attempt to dry out towels, clothes and foulweather gear. Not wanting to tempt fate, I celebrated my rounding of Cape Horn here

neither noticed nor been incensed at my insolence. The wind slowly built to gale-force as I pushed southwest, visibility closed to a mile or less and I set about in earnest to prepare the boat for far worse. Then suddenly and without warning the wind died to a comparative calm. I had made it. I was through.

I spent the next 24 or so hours lounging about and languishing in the calm that was forecast near the centre of the low. I saw nothing of the Horn – fog and drizzle made sure of that. Anything else of Cape Horn would have to be in my future. By way of consolation, my father reminded me that I was one of the very few people to have sailed in both Willem Schouten's backyard and his birthplace's namesake, Kaap Hoorn*.

A solo circumnavigation is something of a misnomer. There is nothing solo about it. It is an impossibility to properly thank all those who had a part in my successful completion of the voyage. There are literally thousands around the world who, nameless though

* Willem Cornelisz Schouten an employee of the Dutch East India Company was, in 1616, the first to reach the Pacific Ocean via Cape Horn (previous ships had used the channels further north). He named the cape after the *Hoorn*, a ship lost in Patagonia, itself named after the Dutch city of Hoorn where he had been born.

they may be, followed on social media and both motivated and inspired me when the days seemed darkest and obstacles loomed insurmountable. My wife Nani, sister Leah, son Alex, John Bullas and Dr Don Butt all deserve special mention (Nani, Leah, Alex and Don formed my 'Shoreteam'). Tony Gooch and Randall Reeves cannot be thanked enough – they are princes amongst men.

Last but not least, the support of the OCC in the form of the Adventure Challenge Grant cannot be understated. Without the grant I would never have been able to document the voyage via blog, posts or images. I wrote over 440 blog posts, almost every one accompanied by an image, and was able to send them via satellite back to a Shoreteam contact. Those posts connected with more than 5000 followers on social media, some 2500 schoolchildren around the world, and resulted in hundreds of thousands of engagements, views and interactions with my journey. All the credit goes firstly to the OCC, its members and executives for enabling my story, and secondly to the Shoreteam for executing a communications strategy that was wholly conceived and developed on the fly. I can assure you I had the easy job.

Part 2 of Bert's voyage is scheduled for *Flying Fish* 2021/1. To learn more about Bert's journey in the meantime, visit https://the5capes.com, https://facebook.com/the5capes, or https://instagram.com/svseaburban.


125°E
140°E
N
RUSSIA
44°N
44°N
CHINA
HOKKAIDO
Hakodate
Tsugaru Strait
NORTH KOREA
Sea of Japan
Kesennuma
JAPAN
SOUTH KOREA
OKI ISLANDS
HONSHU Tokyo
36°N
Yellow Sea
Busan
Yumenoshima Marina
IZU PENINSULA
Shimoda
Fukuoka
SHIKOKU
Kochi
GOTO ISLANDS
Fukue
Nagasaki
KYUSHU
Shanghai
Kagoshima
Pacific Ocean
East China Sea
YAKUSHIMA
AMAMI OSHIMA
RYUKYU ISLANDS
28°N
KAKEROMA
SENKAKU ISLANDS
OKINAWA
140°E
YONAGUNI
Naha
HONSHU
Osaka
Naruto Strait
Hiroshima
ISHIGAKI
TAIWAN
HATERUMA
Seto Inland Sea (Setouchi)
SUO-OSHIMA
Agenosho
SHIKOKU
Kochi
Kii Strait
125°E

JAPAN, THE NEXT CRUISING FRONTIER
Part 2
Kirk R Patterson

(*In 2012/3 Kirk, a Canadian citizen who'd previously worked in Tokyo, crossed the Pacific from Oregon via Honolulu to Hakodate on the northern island of Hokkaido aboard his 40ft steel cutter* Silk Purse. *Part I of* Japan, The Next Cruising Frontier – *see* Flying Fish 2020/1 – *described the first year of his three-year circumnavigation of the country, finishing in Fukuoka where we pick up the story…*

Kirk is Port Officer for Japan and runs Konpira Consulting – www.konpira-consulting.com – a company dedicated to 'Opening Japan's Oceans' to foreign cruisers.)

In the spring of my second year circumnavigating Japan I headed south from Fukuoka, visiting the beautiful Goto Islands off the west coast of Kyushu and Nagasaki, which is one of Japan's most interesting cities. I always say that if a foreign tourist can only visit one place in Japan it should be Nagasaki.

From the small town of Fukue at the southern end of the Goto Islands I headed for the island of Yonaguni, Japan's westernmost point (and so a 'must visit' place if I was to do a full Japan circumnavigation). That passage – 625 miles in just under five days – turned out to be the most challenging of my six years' sailing in Japan. A few hours out from Fukue my propeller became badly fouled by a large mass of *hondawara*

Silk Purse at Dejima Yacht Harbor, Nagasaki

Wending my way through packs of Chinese fishing boats

sargassum seaweed (a major problem for those cruising southern Japan in the spring). 'Fortunately', however, I had steady 35–45 knots of wind from north-northwest, putting me downwind or on a broad reach so, with a partly furled jib and two reefs in the main, made a solid 6–7 knots over the ground despite losing up to 2 knots to the Kuroshio Current. The 3–4m waves were more westerly than northerly, however, making for a rather rolly ride and making it difficult to rig the whisker pole and to switch it from side to side as necessary to adjust my course.

At times I had heavy rain and thick fog, and a steady stream of oil tankers, container ships and other large commercial vessels heading toward Japan forced me to take a more westerly route than I'd intended. This put me rather close to the Senkaku Islands whose ownership and control is a matter of hot diplomatic debate – and occasional naval clashes – between Japan and China. But the real challenge was that every night I had to go around or through packs of twenty or thirty rust-bucket Chinese fishing boats (luckily, albeit strangely, AIS equipped), that moved erratically and occasionally circled back to their mothership. I would breathe a sigh of relief after safely passing through one pack only to see another one dead ahead and, being wing-on-wing, I didn't have the manoeuvrability to easily avoid each boat. Then at dawn they would all drop anchor (in depths of 100–200m!) so that their crew could go to sleep, turning off their AIS transmitters ... and forcing me to keep a careful radar and visual watch. All in all, I only got a total of about twelve hours' sleep over the five days. Reaching Yonaguni, my seaweed-fouled propeller barely gave me enough forward motion to let me enter the small fishing port and tie up to the high concrete wall. I slept very soundly that night!

From Yonaguni I went to Hateruma, Japan's southernmost inhabited island, Ishigaki (the place most foreign cruisers clear into Japan), and Naha on the main island of Okinawa.

Island-hopping north, I fell in love with the small island of Kakeroma and the nearby, larger island of Amami Oshima. All of Japan's southern islands used to be part of the independent Ryukyu Kingdom. From the 15th to the 17th centuries this was a flourishing entrepôt trading centre before being gradually absorbed into Japan, formally becoming part of the country in 1879. Of all the Ryukyu islands that I visited, I was most aware of the ancient Ryukyu culture and spirit in Kakeroma and Amami. The people

The beach at Kakeroma

have a distinct aura about them, a unique connection to the land and a calmness that is in sharp contrast to the fierce typhoons that visit the islands every fall. The scenery is beautiful, with untouched white-sand beaches, steep jungle-clad mountains, lovely waterfalls, mangrove forests (great for kayaking) and many well-protected anchorages. My planned two-day stay there extended to two weeks, and I would have stayed longer had I not wanted to reach mainland Japan before typhoon season.

Silk Purse at Ikenma, Kakeroma

From Amami I went to Yakushima, which is a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site and famous for its towering, ancient cedar trees, high mountains and plunging waterfalls, and then to Kagoshima at the south end of Kyushu for some repairs. I then sailed up the east coast of Kyushu and over to the city of Kochi on Shikoku's southern coast. There I met up with Japanese sailing friends Yoshi and Mayumi Miyoshi, whom I had first met in Prince Rupert

Dinner with Pacific circumnavigators Yoshi and Mayumi Miyoshi in Kochi

on Canada's west coast back in 2009. They had just arrived after a non-stop 51-day passage from Kochi and were obviously overwhelmed by the prospect of cruising in Canada. Although experienced cruisers, they were unfamiliar with anchoring (one rarely anchors in Japan) or dealing with large tidal ranges or strong currents, and nor did they know how to get weather information without access to the internet (in Japan, one always has internet access). I had only cruised in British Columbia and Alaska so it all seemed obvious to me, but helping them figure things out made me realise that what is common sense in one part of the world can be very uncommon in another – an insight which was very helpful in planning my Japan circumnavigation. Yoshi and Mayumi went on to do a four-year Pacific circumnavigation, becoming real pros at anchoring in many different conditions, and returned to Japan a year before I arrived.

From Kochi I went around the eastern side of Shikoku and into the Seto Inland Sea, or 'Setouchi' as it's referred to in Japan. Setouchi, 250 miles long and 10 to 30 miles wide, is bounded by the islands of Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku and contains

Setouchi

hundreds of islands, many uninhabited. After four years of sailing in the open ocean since leaving Canada, I breathed a huge sigh of relief as I entered its calm, sheltered waters. Although cruising Setouchi does have its challenges – notably large tidal ranges, strong currents in the narrow passages between the islands and heavy shipping traffic – it's a walk in the park compared to offshore cruising. The attractions of Setouchi are numerous, including its lovely scenery, many good, cheap mooring options, short distances between destinations, a wealth of cultural and historical sites to visit and, perhaps most important, excellent protection from the many typhoons that strike Japan every year.

By now I had become convinced that Japan is a wonderful cruising ground that should be brought to the attention of the global sailing community, and decided to postpone my departure from Japan and stay longer to write a Japan cruising guide. For that I needed to set up a land base somewhere in Setouchi, so I started to consider options for where I could safely moor my boat and find a cheap house to rent. Just as I was pondering, my cruising friend Sasa-san (see Part 1) called to say that he was at the lovely island of Suo-Oshima. He invited me to join him and, as it was only a two-day sail away, off I went.

Shortly after arriving in the fishing port of Agenosho on Suo-Oshima, Sasa-san and I went off to explore the area on our bicycles, but not before leaving a sign on my boat giving my telephone number in case somebody needed to call me (I always leave such a sign in case I have accidentally moored in a fisherman's spot etc). While at the local supermarket my phone rang and the person at the other end said, "I guess you want to go to the hot spring bath, but it's rather far away so why don't you use my car? I'll leave the car by your boat, with the keys in it". Wow! Sasa-san and I took him up on the offer and that evening, while we were having dinner in my cockpit Urakami-san, who owned the car, dropped by and joined us for some beers ... which led to more beers and sake at his nearby home. I had planned on leaving the next day but Urakami-san and I really hit it off and he encouraged me to stay longer, which I did, although Sasa-san departed on schedule.

Dinner on Silk Purse in Suo-Oshima, with the mayor on my right

Another day turned into a week, during which I made many friends, including the mayor, and drank a lot of sake. I explained that mooring my boat against the

Silk Purse alongside in July 2017. This pontoon in Suo-Oshima is now available for use, for free, by OCC members

high concrete wall was not a good long-term option and so I would look for a place with or near a marina. At that point the mayor piped up with "We'll build you a dock!". Fast forward 15 months to the end of my Japan circumnavigation and I was back in Suo-Oshima with *Silk Purse* moored at a very solid 16m pontoon and living in a classic, ocean-view farmhouse (for ¥15,000 / US $140 per month). After leaving Suo-Oshima I continued cruising Setouchi for another two months, including joining the Setouchi International Yacht Rally, held annually in May and an excellent event for Japanese and foreign cruisers to explore Setouchi together. Then, leaving *Silk Purse* at a marina near Hiroshima, I returned to Canada for the winter.

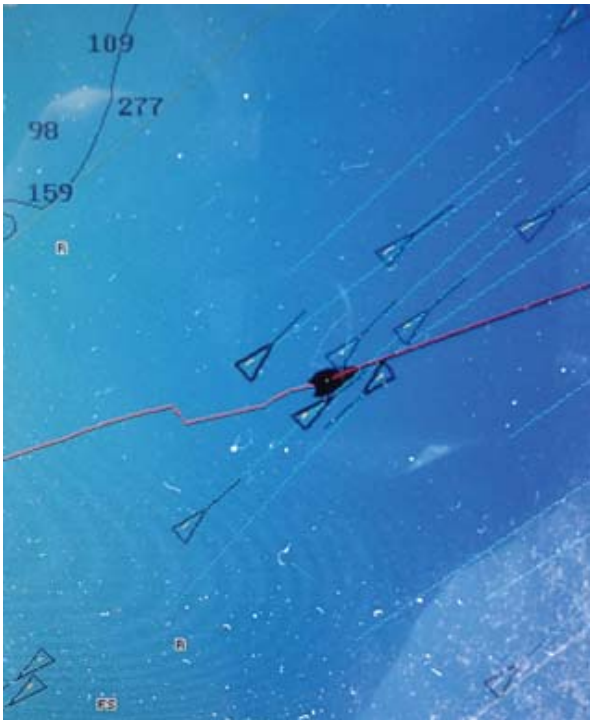
The Setouchi International Yacht Rally

Returning to Japan for the third year of my circumnavigation, I first made a quick stop to see my friends in Suo-Oshima and then headed towards the eastern end of Setouchi. The narrow passage separating Setouchi from the Pacific Ocean is the notorious Naruto Strait, well known for its wicked whirlpools. With a freighter coming up fast from astern I focused on steering a straight course through the whirlpools while watching my SOG exceed 14 knots. At the first whirlpool my bow rose up as I crested the lip, I felt a sucking sensation as I plunged into its centre and then I was spat out the other side, all in the space of a few seconds. After two more whirlpools I was safe. I pulled off to the side to let the freighter pass ... and to let my heartbeat slow down. Having gotten

Whirlpools in the Naruto Strait

used to the calm Setouchi waters it was a bit of a shock to be back out in the open ocean, but it also reignited the feeling that an adventure was waiting around every headland, which was somewhat missing from Setouchi cruising.

A few days later, and keen to get to Hokkaido ahead of typhoon season, I decided to do a 170 mile overnight passage to Shimoda on the southern tip of the Izu Peninsula, near Tokyo. I had to make several course corrections as I crossed the busy shipping lane to/from Nagoya, but otherwise it started off as a wonderful beam reach in 10–15 knots. Then the autopilot died, so I switched to my trusty Hydrovane. But then, quite suddenly and not as forecast, the wind jumped to 30–40 knots on the nose, with sharp 2–3m waves. Wanting to stay in the lee of



Crossing the shipping lane near Nagoya

the Izu Peninsula and out of the shipping lane, I had no choice but to head to Shimoda under power and almost straight into the wind. After hand-steering for 18 hours overnight in very rough conditions I was very glad to get in. Two more hand-steering passages got me to Yumenoshima Marina at the head of Tokyo Bay, where I had to wait almost a month for a replacement autopilot drive to arrive and be installed. So much for my haste in getting to Hokkaido!

With the autopilot fixed (although, as I realised later, not properly) I continued northward, up the Pacific coast of the main island of Honshu. This is the area that was devastated by the 2011 tsunami and nuclear reactor meltdown. Along the 500 miles of coastline all the commercial harbours, fishing ports and marinas were badly damaged or completely wiped out and 90 percent of the fishing boats sank or were write-offs. Almost ten years later, despite massive and continuous construction, things are still not back to normal, although much progress has been made. I passed the crippled nuclear reactor – suddenly finding myself in radioactive fog for about an hour – and struggled to find a mooring spot each night. Following so much devastation from the tsunami detailed port charts were useless, and a seabed littered with sunken boats, cars, vending machines and other debris made anchoring impossible. But somehow I managed to find a place to moor at every port, often with the advice of local friends, occasionally side-tying to other boats or doing a tricky parallel-parking manoeuvre to squeeze in between two large fishing boats. (I understand that since then most of the marinas have been rebuilt and that it's easier to find room in the fishing ports.)

The highlight of this part of my trip was my visit to the fishing port of Kesennuma, where I stayed a week waiting for a typhoon to pass and made many friends. From them I learned about the physical and human toll that the tsunami had wrought on the community and about the legal, social and engineering complexities of rebuilding

The blue line on a building in Kesennuma marks the height of the tsunami. Silk Purse is on the far left

Celebrating my arrival in Hakodate

the town almost from scratch. Particularly poignant was talking with elderly people (like all of rural Japan, Kesennuma was suffering from a rapidly ageing, shrinking population even before the tsunami) who said that they were too old and too tired to rebuild their lives in Kesennuma but that they had nowhere else to go.

Continuing north I experienced thick fog and falling temperatures, reminding me of my many days of sailing blind and cold in Hokkaido. And then it was time to cross the Tsugaru Strait and return to my starting point of Hakodate to complete my circumnavigation of Japan. It was a great celebratory sail – a beam reach in 15–20 knots and warm, sunny conditions – until, with a great feeling of accomplishment and relief, I tied up in exactly the same spot from which I had left, greeted and congratulated by friends. In total, my Japan circumnavigation over three cruising seasons had covered more than 6400 miles and involved 149 days at sea.

Postscript

After dealing with some electrical issues in Hakodate I did a second passage down the Sea of Japan coast as I headed toward Suo-Oshima where friends, a new dock and a new home were awaiting me. However a dead alternator forced me to make a detour to Fukuoka for repairs and while I was there I met the woman whom I would marry just nine months later. As a result my time in Suo-Oshima was all too short. I commuted back and forth for a while but in the end relocated to Fukuoka, where my wife works (she manages marinas). As the expression goes, 'Life is what happens when you're making other plans'!

Information and advice for cruising Japan

Paperwork

Cruisers must file a Pre-Arrival Procedure Form with the appropriate Coast Guard office 24 hours before arriving (most submit it before leaving their last port). The Coast Guard office may contact the local quarantine, customs and immigration offices on your behalf or they may tell you to contact them yourself. In some ports you also have to reserve (and pay for) a mooring spot to clear in.

Most foreigners can get a 90-day (180-day for some nationalities) short-stay visa upon arrival. Although technically you can get an extension while in Japan, most cruisers make a quick overseas trip, usually to Korea, and then return on a new visa. The rule is that a foreigner can only stay in Japan for a total of 180 days in a year, counting from the date of first entry, but cruisers can usually find a way around this and stay for about 250 days per year for three or four years with multiple in/out trips. One cruiser managed to do it for eight years!

Of Japan's 3000 ports, only about five percent (all the large commercial ports) are open to foreign boats. For the other 95 percent you have to obtain a Closed Port Permit, which gives permission to enter all Closed Ports and is valid indefinitely. It takes about a week to get the Permit after submitting the application but you can apply before arriving in Japan.

Technically you are required to submit Port Entry/Exit paperwork with the Coast Guard office whenever you enter and leave an Open Port. In practice, though, that requirement is rarely enforced for cruisers. In my case, after a year of diligently contacting each Coast Guard office and filing the required paperwork I realised that they really didn't want to deal with small cruising boats, so I let them contact me. I always had my AIS in transmit mode so they knew where to find me, but they very

Moored in a fishing port

rarely visited. A few ports, such as Nagasaki, Yokohama, and Hakodate, operate more formally and will require the paperwork.

A bigger issue is the relatively recent requirement to do customs paperwork in all ports, Open and Closed. That is a real hassle, but the requirement is waived if you have a *Naikosen* Permit (which essentially makes your boat a domestic boat for customs purposes). Local customs officials are often unfamiliar with the *Naikosen* Permit, however, or are unwilling to issue it, and the inconsistent application of the *Naikosen* Permit policy is a source of considerable frustration for foreign cruisers. The *Naikosen* Permit should be obtained at your first port of entry and cruisers should be politely forceful in trying to get one.

The good news is that there are no fees for any Japanese paperwork.

Leaving a boat in Japan

Although visa policies limit how long a foreigner can stay in Japan, there are no limits on how long a foreign boat can remain in the country and no import duties or other fees. I know of several foreign cruisers who came to Japan, fell in love – with the country and/or a local! – and settled, even taking up permanent residency, but left their boat foreign-registered for years or even decades. A Belgian couple keep their boat in Japan full time, cruising here for six months and spending the other six months in their condo in the Philippines. As for me, *Silk Purse* remained Canadian-flagged for the six years that I cruised Japan, only switching to local registration when I sold her to a Japanese buyer.

Mooring in fishing ports

Fishing ports are the most usual place for cruisers to tie up overnight. Except in those near large cities there is almost always room and mooring is free (I have only once paid a fee in a fishing port – of ¥525 or US $5!). Sheltered behind massive concrete breakwaters, fishing ports are usually well protected from wind and waves, and restaurants, shops and hot-spring baths are normally within walking or at least bicycling distance. One cannot, however, make a reservation and one can only stay for a few days.

Mooring in a fishing port involves tying alongside a concrete wall, made easier by having:

Generous fenders are needed when moored against a wall

- Several very large fenders and fender boards to keep the boat off the wall and, especially, off the large black bumpers that are usually bolted onto the wall, occasionally with exposed bolts!
- Chains or heavy steel cables to take the chafe over the edge of the wall;
- A ladder to get on and off at low tide. Tidal range is usually 2m or less, but adding in a metre or two for a high wall means that one should have a 4m ladder. (In Setouchi the tidal range is as much as 4m, but fortunately there are a lot of floating docks so one rarely needs a ladder there.)

In fishing ports you often find ladders bolted onto the wall, and first tying your midship line to one and then using it to climb up to set the other lines makes mooring very easy, especially when arriving at low tide. Or there may be steps set into the concrete.

Other tips

- It is very difficult (albeit not impossible) to get foreign propane tanks filled in Japan (for regulatory, not technical, reasons), so cruisers should arrive with their tanks as full as possible. If necessary one can buy a Japanese tank.
- Other than at marinas there are no fuel docks in Japan. While moored at a fishing port, however, you can just go to the local filling station and ask for *keiyu* (diesel) while pointing vaguely in the direction of your boat. They'll get the message and a few minutes later a small tanker truck will pull up on the wall beside your boat and the driver will very carefully fill your tanks and, if you want, your jerry cans. There is no charge for delivery.
- Overnight passages are not recommended – there are too many things that 'go bump in the night'. These include aquaculture nets (hit one of those and you're in for a ¥300,000+ / US $3000 fine and a week or two in port for 'questioning'; one-man fishing boats on autopilot (such as the one that hit and dismasted a German

Filling the fuel tanks

Nets at the entrance to Kesennuma

cruiser, delaying their departure from Japan by a year) and freighters hurrying to port. Fortunately, distances between ports are short so you can nearly always get to a secure mooring spot every evening.

Cruising Japan is unique, and with that comes unique memories that will last a lifetime. And because Japan is off the cruisers' beaten track one spends all one's time meeting local people and experiencing local customs and culture, not meeting other cruisers. There are many positives and very few negatives about cruising Japan and I look forward to meeting OCC members who do manage to get here – you'll never regret it!

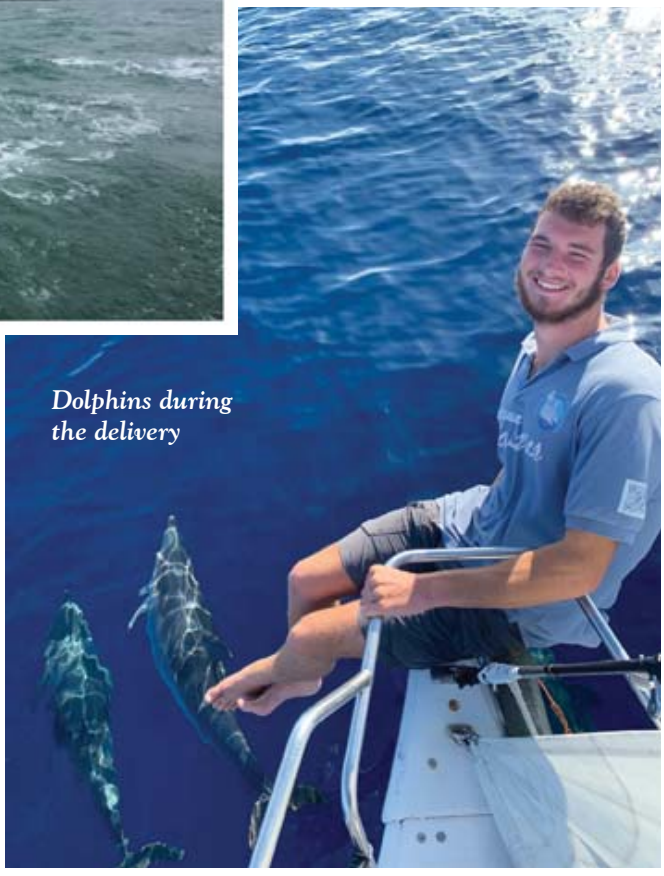
UK TO NZ AT 20
Greg Williams

(*20-year-old Greg was still fairly new to sailing when this story begins. After leaving school he started by crewing on deliveries, and before long was offered a place on Global Yacht Racing's Yachtmaster training programme. Following a season in the Caribbean as a trainee he continued to work and race in the Solent, and towards the end of 2019 left the UK on another delivery trip with the aim of returning to the Caribbean.*

Greg later applied for, and received, an OCC Youth Sponsorship grant.)

We left England in the murky drizzle of a dark October morning and, after heading west out of the Solent and a stop in Portland Harbour, set course for Ushant. My last glimpse of home was a scrap of the Bill through the driving scud. Any sense of occasion that might have been warranted had been smothered out of me by five days shut up in Portland, waiting for weather which was to the insurer's liking, and now all I could feel was impatience to be gone. It hardly felt like the start of the great adventure I'd psyched myself up for. Nonetheless I was off, southward bound, with no fixed plans beyond getting to the Caribbean in time for the start of the season. Although I'd spent the previous months learning my trade in the race charter business, this would be my first time heading properly offshore.

Goodbye to England – Hurst Castle, guardian of the western Solent



Dolphins during the delivery

The delivery itself was uneventful enough. We spent another week or so holed up in Camaret, waiting for the next weather window, then headed straight to Las Palmas with only a few hours' stop in Cascais for fuelling and victualling. Once in Las Palmas, for the ARC+ I transferred to a very nice Hallberg-Rassy 41 owned by OCC members Shaun and Theresa Rowlatt. Thus followed a leisurely passage to St Lucia via Mindelo, during which I ingested copious amounts of cream crackers and pictured with pleasant smugness my friends who were racing across – sleep-deprived, lashed with spray, struggling with viciously flogging sails through thundering squalls. My smugness was only heightened in St Lucia when I saw the condition of some of the racing yachts – sails shredded, tracks ripped out, stanchions warped and twisted. All the same, I couldn't help but feel I'd missed out on some of the excitement.

Racing in the Caribbean

For the Caribbean racing season I managed to find a crewing place aboard *Liquid*, a somewhat infamous J122 with a very successful racing record. When I wasn't racing I sustained myself via all and any day work I could lay hands on, from a Volvo 70 to a Morgan 44 and everything in between.

Crossing the Pacific happened more on a whim than anything else. One idle evening I sent off a message on Crewseekers to a Pacific-bound catamaran, not expecting anything to come of it. As luck would have it the yacht in question, *'Ohana*, was anchored nearby. Owner Chris Claydon, a British expat with a Kiwi passport, was taking her back to New Zealand where he intended to settle with his family. On 18th March, just as the situation with coronavirus was starting to look worrying, I joined *'Ohana* and left St

Uta, Alice and Chris

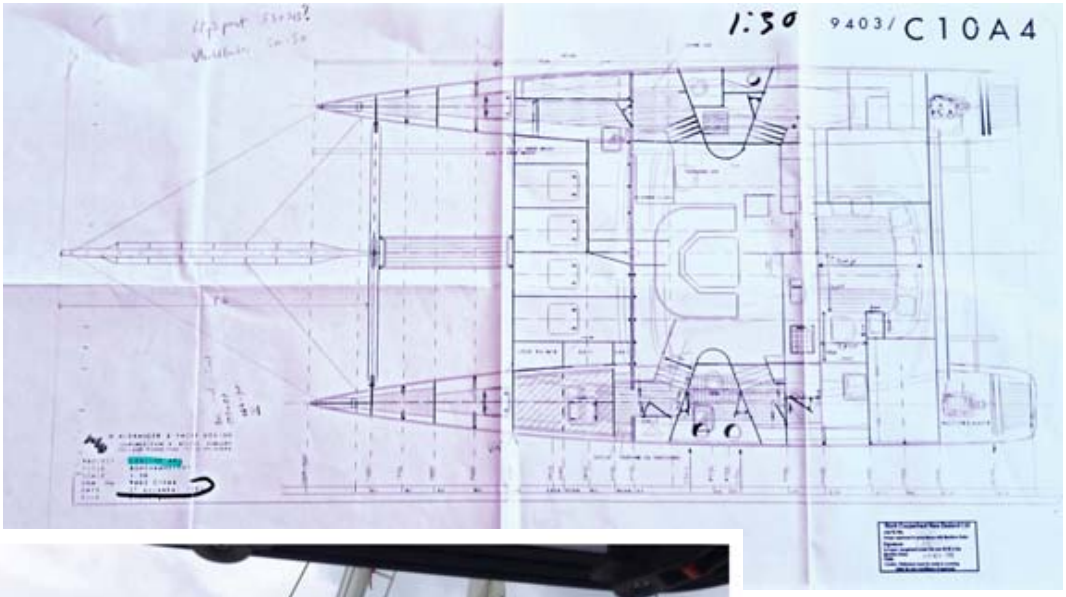
'Ohana under sail

Maarten for Panama. As I remarked in an e-mail home, 'We seem to be the only people going anywhere at the moment'.

Due to quarantine restrictions and the like, neither of the two scheduled crew members made it – one got stuck in the UK and the other in Martinique. Instead Chris had decided to take his wife, Uta, and their two-year-old daughter Alice across the Pacific. It was certainly a different experience sailing with a toddler on board – all the usual swearing, drinking and general brutality naturally associated with seafaring (and certainly with racing) had to be done away with and I'm not sure I uttered a single expletive for the first two weeks aboard. *'Ohana* was a pleasant change from the stripped-out racing yacht I'd been living on for the previous few months, although at first I couldn't shake off the nagging worry that I'd sold my soul in exchange for an autopilot, watermaker, spacious accommodation and other decadent luxuries.

The passage to Colón was uneventful. However, the reality of the situation hit us hard when we arrived in Panama to find ourselves quarantined for two weeks and the canal closed. Then, on 6th April when we were two days from the end of our quarantine,

Quarantine in Panama



Designing the "essential modifications" …

… putting them into practice …

… and success!

the canal authority announced that the canal would be closed indefinitely to vessels under 65ft. While other crews wallowed in disappointment, Chris and I spent a hard half-day unshipping the boom from the gooseneck and rigging it as a bowsprit, which made *'Ohana* 65ft 4in overall.

Chris then spent the remaining two days of quarantine trying to persuade the canal authority that we were legitimately over 65ft and trying to have measurers sent out to ascertain this. The canal authority replied that *'Ohana* was only 49ft the last time she went through the canal, to which Chris replied that we had made essential modifications since then. He even drew the boom-bowsprit into the boat plans and e-mailed them a scan. The authorities, however, refused to send out the boys with the tape measures.

Just as I was thinking about finding another boat, however, the canal people changed their mind and decided to let some boats under 65ft through. Thus followed another frantic half day's work moving the boom off the bow and back onto the mast, while Chris assured the measurers that we were only 49ft after all, to save on fees. It appears that all the badgering by embassies paid off in the end – either that or the canal people realised they'd have a lot of other boats copying our 'essential modifications' strategy to try and get through the canal. At any rate, you don't look a gift horse in the mouth and the first morning after finishing quarantine we were cleared to go through. Suddenly we were all haste to prepare *'Ohana* for the transit.

Chris sent me down into the disgusting harbour water to spend the afternoon scrubbing barnacles off. Harbour rot had well and truly set in during quarantine – imagine hulls coated in crunchy peanut butter except with barnacles instead of bits of peanut. There was time pressure as well, but all in all it was more satisfying to blitz great swathes of barnacles off heavy-duty cruising antifouling than gently trying to get slime and seagrass off delicate racing paint. It was a far cry from the usual backdrop to a hull scrub, which is a shallow sandy bottom in some quiet Caribbean bay. Instead I was in murky green water where I could barely see my toes and with industrial stinkpots rusting all around. For added interest there was also a resident crocodile near the marina, although I wouldn't have been able to see it from ten feet away. The crocodiles in Panama have been described as 'mellow', which reassured me greatly as you can imagine ... a mellow crocodile slowly eating me in a suitably laid-back fashion. I could reconcile myself to being eaten by a shark, but being eaten by a croc – a mere freshwater animal – would just be embarrassing from a professional point of view. I'd never hear the end of it.

We all had an early night, and woke at 0030 to clean surfaces before the pilot arrived. Then, in the wake of a Norwegian tanker, we passed under the new Atlantic Bridge. Its twin spires resemble cupped hands rising out of the murk to cradle the thin ribbon of the road, like hands raised heavenward in prayer or mute appeal. The light from the lamp-posts shone down and spilled over the road in a ghostly white. Further off, the receding tiers of the locks shone gold in the floodlights, resembling some fantastic made-up palace. A dark puff of diesel smoke rose from the funnel of a tug and, silhouetted in the glow, it ambled off to leeward like a carefree genie. We rafted up with the other yachts and, arm in arm as it were, approached the locks, pressed in on all sides by the smell of the land ... the dusty hum of the New World.

Morning found us 200 feet above sea level at the eastern end of Lake Gatun. I didn't realise it was near dawn until I noticed the dim, softly luminescent blue that was slowly climbing up the eastern rim of the sky. All around us was jungle – not the scrubby, hurricane-stunted jungle of the West Indies, but the full-canopied billowing of a million shades of green, with creepers and vines carpeting the lower trees as though

Night-time transit of the Canal

they'd been vacuum-moulded in place. Dawn rose up to greet us as we glided over the fresh waters of the lake. Swallows feasted on swarms of mosquitoes just above the water, which feasted in turn on us (I refuse to wear mossie spray as the mossies seem to think of it as their equivalent of ketchup or hot sauce). There was the smell of the earth, of green leaves, of fresh water and of a mud entirely different to the salty mud of the foreshore. Surrounded as we were by the low rise and fall of the uplands, we could have been forgiven for believing ourselves on top of the world. After locking out of the canal, it was but a short motor up to a pleasant anchorage overlooking the skyscrapers of Panama City. We weren't there to enjoy the view for long, however, and made our departure the following day.

Chilling out on Lake Gatun

Catching some rest

On the first night after our departure a finger of cooler air from the Humboldt Current slipped northwards and brought with it a layer of cloud at medium altitude, which gave a feeling of claustrophobia in spite of the coolness of the night. It was all very still and eerie, and even the occasional soft rain shower, which broke with no warning, brought with it not a breath of wind to cut through the muggy calm. Occasionally lightning would flash at the boundary layer of the air masses, far overhead and blanketed by the folds of the cloud. It was not like the steady, measured rumbling of a lightning squall, but instead patchy and irregular, crackling angrily for a while in one quarter before setting adrift in the high atmospheric winds and breaking out in some new arena. All this was hard on the nerves, especially when a fresh patch broke out in forks, westward of us and quite close, shortly before Chris's watch was due to begin.

Just as we were passing north of the Galapagos the wind and seas died down – not totally, but enough for a hull scrub, which Chris and I had both been itching to do. I jumped in while Chris was on shark watch. A small, thick nylon chopping board made an excellent barnacle scraper on the hard antifouling. The grey-white barnacles resembled constellations on the black hull, with larger specimens, which I'd missed in Colón, surrounded by swarms of tiny new ones. All perished, however, beneath the terrible sweep of the chopping board.

Hull scrubbing in the open sea

Scaling the mast

While we were at sea Chris put me forward for the OCC's Youth Sponsorship Programme, a welcome boon in more ways than one. Crossing oceans on a budget is great fun but a little precarious, which is why having the security of a flight home makes for wonderful peace of mind. And seeing how much help the Club had been to Chris at different times – without it we'd probably still have been stuck in Panama – showed me how useful membership can be.

The night before landfall in the Marquesas carried all the anticipation of Christmas and going on holiday rolled into one. Landfall was more eagerly anticipated than Christmas, even – imagine you'd had an advent calendar going for seven weeks. On 8th May we made a perfect dawn landfall, with Ua Huka taking shape in the gathering light, soon followed by Nuku Hiva.

A happy Greg with Nuku Hiva in the background

Taioha'e Bay

We passed the bay of the dreaded Typees, where Herman Melville was held captive. The smell of the land came upon us as we threaded the sentinel rocks at the head of Taioha'e Bay – a peaty, earthy odour. The bay was a lot different to my expectation, chiefly because it was about three times as tall and steep as I'd imagined. The sun, being low in the sky, gave it a brooding, misty aspect which was unexpected yet beautiful. No sooner was the anchor bedded in than we all put on our shore rig and piled into the dinghy. I would love to report that we all felt the land heaving and surging under our feet the minute we stepped ashore after 50 days at sea, but that simply wasn't the case. I personally felt the land sway (slightly) for about five seconds before regaining my land legs.

Taioha'e was pleasant enough, a sleepy sort of place with dogs and chickens wandering about and locals driving around in SUVs. Again, not quite what I'd expected but still very nice. Cosy-looking, bungalow-type dwellings with spacious, fruit-studded gardens were dotted all over the little defiles and the shoreline. Lockdown was a thing of the past by the time we arrived.

Chris had spent many afternoons on passage gleefully telling us of the sparse pickings that awaited us in French Polynesia ... 'You can only get white flour or mackerel, and sometimes rice if you go just after the supply ships pulled in' etc, etc. Imagine our surprise then, when we found a shop like a cross between a newsagent and a hardware store which was stocked with everything from Nutella® to toy Nerf® guns*. I took a moment to give unspoken thanks to Charles de Gaulle, Emperor Napoleon III or whoever it was who decided that everywhere in the French colonial empire should have access to wine, cheese and other essentials – for wine and cheese there was in abundance.

* Foam-based dart guns which shoot ammunition also made from foam.

For the first few minutes we didn't quite know what to do with ourselves – we just wandered round the shop in circles. At length I called to mind a previous conversation with Uta in which we were both pining for a can of coke and fetched three from the 'fridge. Even so, I did this more out of respect to a previous iteration of Greg, who toiled on the ocean and pined for Coca-Cola®, than I did out of any wild impulse centred around carbonated soft drinks. Eventually we left the shop with a can of coke and a mango apiece, and a pasty which had I insisted on trying. Even so I felt – I knew, almost – that I should have been reacting differently, as if the experience of 50 days away from land had been cheapened by our nonchalant return.

The following day I followed the road up to the head of the valley, where I enjoyed a beer at a viewpoint. Needless to say, the scenery was gorgeous. From the water the bay called to mind less palm trees and flower garlands than the ominous beating of drums, King Kong, Jurassic Park and the like. Since the island peaks are permanently wreathed in cloud, a patchwork of shadow is forever at play over the whole of the valley with sunbeams peering dimly through onto the matt green of the jungle forest. The inevitable wispy trail of smoke snakes perpetually upwards from some obscured corner or other. From the viewpoint, however, the bay looked much less forbidding, with the yachts at anchor taking centre stage in the sunshine and the granite spires of Ua Pou rising through the distant haze over the sparkling waters of the Pacific.

Next morning we weighed anchor and motored up the coast to a bay with clearer water, with the aim of water-making and hull-scrubbing. It was a lot closer to my original concept of a Pacific anchorage – low and scrubby, with an open valley snaking up into an obscured interior. The little headland which afforded shelter was of a terraced, volcanic rock, the darkness of which was flushed with a ruddy hue. I drowned the last of a hangover in the cool, clear waters of the bay as I set about the familiar routine of fussing over the hulls with a scraper and scrubbing brush. This is an exercise

A goat track in the Marquesas

Alice joining in with the press-ups

which may not appear arduous at first but becomes just that after a couple of hours. Yet at the same time you are conscious that you are swimming in a picturesque bay in the heart of the South Pacific in waters which, even if they are not gin-clear, could at least pass as a gin martini, perhaps with a little olive brine stirred in. Nothing like the Guinness-clear waters of Colón ... there are certainly worse jobs to be done, and worse places to do them. Nevertheless, I was glad to get ashore that afternoon and flop down onto the beach for a while. The following day, Chris and I finished the second hull, after which we left for Daniels Bay with the intention of walking to the base of the world's third highest waterfall.

Daniels Bay is easily the most stunning anchorage I've ever seen. In the generous shelter of the headland, the low spine of a ridge divides a couple of wide, flat valleys, the shorelines of which are ornamented with the archetypal white sand and palm trees. Unlike Taioha'e there is plenty of sunshine to fill the low bowls of the valleys and to the west rises up some thousand ttt of cliff – not sheer, but studded with branching, jutting buttresses of granite, all rendered with a stubbly tangle of green vines and stubborn shrubbery. It is awe inspiring.

In Daniels Bay we spent a jocular evening entertaining a friendly cruising couple with drinks aboard *'Ohana*. This culminated at some ungodly hour with my trying to relate the process of a dip pole gybe to the unfortunate and bewildered cruisers. Next morning I was up bright and early for our waterfall trip but Chris, feeling much the worse for wear, vetoed any run ashore. This left me a little disappointed but, as Uta remarked to me, it does give me all the more reason to return here one day. Instead we returned to Taioha'e, which appeared much reduced after the grandeur of Daniels Bay. After grappling with the usual bureaucracy we got our clearance, said our goodbyes and left Nuku Hiva.

Pretty soon – almost eerily soon – our way of life at sea was resumed. Chris and I stood six-hour solo watches – easy enough in a yacht with autopilot. For me this meant waking up at 0600, perhaps shaking a reef out with Chris, breakfasting with Uta and

Alice and whiling away the forenoon trimming sails, writing e-mails, eating bread etc. Crossing the Pacific during a worldwide pandemic is a far cry from the Solent on a bank holiday weekend, so it took a conscious effort to keep up watch-keeping standards when the AIS could be blank for over a week and the weather was benign. Lunch was served at the change of watch and the afternoon would be spent either napping, chatting or reading. I got through a lot of Joseph Conrad and Jack London ... 'when in Rome' and all that. Sunset and supper would herald another watch change, and the night watches were definitely something of a slog. Squalls, especially lightning squalls, were our main worry, although we suffered nothing more untoward than a chafed-through jib halyard in the entire voyage.

Our first landfall out of Nuku Hiva was Raoul Island, some 550 miles northeast of New Zealand. We didn't land, however, so for me it remains a land of mystery, alike in that respect to the thousands of others which dot the Pacific. Things were getting chillier by that point, and I had to dig out my cold weather gear from the bottom of my bag. On 11th June, a few anticipation-laced days later, we reached Opua, where we received a warm welcome from Port Officer Nina Kiff and her husband Tony, as well as from four amicable gentlemen with face masks and thermometers. Soon we were safely ashore and checked in.

It would be impossible for me to thank everyone who has helped me to get halfway around the world on a minimal budget. Without the goodwill of friends and strangers alike, who have provided me with everything from work and accommodation to the occasional free drink, I would not be writing this from the COVID-free comfort of New Zealand.

Sail changes on the passage to Opua, NZ

Cold and rain on the final leg to New Zealand

The OCC, through their Pacific co-ordinator Fiona Jones, was instrumental in helping us get across – feeding us information, putting us in contact with the right people, working on our behalf with the authorities, and generally smoothing out the wrinkles of uncertainty in a confused and turbulent time. The OCC is certainly a worthwhile organisation of which to be a member.

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One Thing Leads to Another — John Maddox, Australia

Some years ago, I decided that a few days before Christmas *Simarjon* would take four of us on a day sail from Clareville Beach at Pittwater near Sydney to Refuge Bay. We had lunch there before returning to the mooring, arriving back in time for our guest Tass to drive back to Sydney for the Christmas party at his pharmacy at Newtown.

On board were Martin and David, two of the usual crew. When we'd picked up the mooring I asked David to take the dinghy and tie the painter to the stern cleat, but there was a shout from him to say that he'd fumbled securing the dinghy and it was floating away. I immediately took off my T-shirt, dived in, and swam after the dinghy which was being pushed towards the beach by the onshore wind. (We were lucky that the wind was not from the opposite direction as the dinghy might have been blown out to sea or on to the western shore.)

Not being the fastest of swimmers there was no way I could catch the dinghy to tow her back to *Simarjon*. I knew that I could swim ashore, as the previous year when we'd had five people aboard, four of us swam ashore while one rowed the dinghy, avoiding two trips in a dinghy which only holds three even in good weather.

When the dinghy arrived on the beach before me some boys asked what had happened. Then I looked out to *Simarjon*'s mooring – and to my astonishment she was not there! I searched with borrowed binoculars and saw that she was rafted up to a large yacht which did not have a dinghy at the stern, which probably meant there was no one aboard.

I was on the beach with the dinghy but without oars – they were still on board, as when we sail the dinghy is left on the mooring while the oars are taken aboard *Simarjon*. Fortunately, when I explained what had happened to a yachtie on the beach he kindly said I could use his oars for 45 minutes as he was not leaving for an hour.

When I reached *Simarjon*, Martin told me that he had wanted to take Tass to Taylor Point Public Jetty so he could get to his pharmacy for the Christmas party. They were on the way there when the engine stopped and would not restart. I rowed Tass ashore using our oars, wished him a fast trip to the party, and returned the borrowed oars to the kind yachtie. Back aboard I realised that the engine had stopped because the valve on the fuel tank was shut. I'd closed it because the tank, situated under the cockpit above the engine, was leaking small amounts of diesel onto the engine, so I'd arranged to have it replaced the following week. The engine started as soon as I opened the valve – the tank feeds the engine by gravity as there is no fuel pump.

I didn't continue to Taylor Point under engine as Tass's car was at Clareville Beach and it would have been a long walk back from Taylor Point for him to collect it. Clareville Beach has no jetty for keel-yachts as it is too shallow, though there is a large dinghy rack, car park, toilet block and launching ramp for fishing boats of up to 4m LOA.

The morals of this story are:

1. Always secure the dinghy to the stern yourself or entrust the task to a reliable crew member, and
2. Tell a responsible crew member if you have closed the fuel valve and explain why.

We were lucky. Tass got back in time for the Christmas party at Newtown, while I had exercise in a long and unexpected swim.

(John is one of very few members whose involvement with the OCC spans more than 50 years, having joined in 1968. Although born in the UK, he has lived in Australia for many years and holds Australian nationality. Simarjon *is an Endeavour 30.)*

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A SELECTION OF THE BERTHON BLUEWATER CRUISING FLEET

ESCAPE FROM LOCKDOWN ~ Altair from St Lucia to Antigua via Martinique, Dominica and Guadeloupe

Charles Griffiths, OCC Treasurer

(*Charles joined the OCC in 2016 following his and Frances's first-ever ocean passage, from Falmouth to Madeira in July that year aboard their Rustler 36* Altair. *Ancient mariners in their late 60s (Charles's words!), they crossed to St Lucia in December and have since cruised the Leeward and Windward Isles extensively, both single and double-handed. Charles was elected OCC Treasurer in April 2020.*)

My wife's birthday was the only reason I was not one of the many small boat skippers attempting a west to east Atlantic crossing to escape the Caribbean lockdown from COVID-19. I had intended to move *Altair* from the hard in Rodney Bay, St Lucia to Jolly Harbour Marina, Antigua at the end of March to have her in position for the Peters & May Southampton transporter scheduled for early May. Frances was less than impressed that my plan absented me from the UK on her birthday, however. Nothing to do but to bring the plan forward so that I was back by 26th March which, with the help of travel experts Trailfinders, I was able to do.

With very little hint of the coronavirus pandemonium on the horizon, I flew from Gatwick on 3rd March and was met at Hewanorra Airport, St Lucia by Vision, my Rasta boat-minder, taxi, all-round boat maintainer and good guy. He drove me to the hotel opposite the yard in Rodney Bay where I was invited to a party by others off the Virgin flight. Unbeknownst to me they were on an all-inclusive package, which meant that rum punches flowed without need for any reciprocation on my part. The effect ultimately was alarming as, feeling drugged, I could not get off my bathroom floor

On the hard at Rodney Bay, antifouled and ready to go

A mangrove heron perches on the pulpit in Rodney Bay

– I think the punch must have had 100% proof *rhum agricole* in it. Eventually I crawled into bed and, astonishingly, was none the worse for wear the following day.

I found *Altair* in good shape and she was soon back in the water for recommissioning by Vision and me. Checking the dinghy, I was horrified to find the manual pump connector was missing. It being a critical piece of kit I had certainly left it in the cockpit locker, but we could not find it. I had to buy a new pump, and eventually found one which almost fitted if held tightly to the valve. Inflating the dinghy was going to be a long and tiring process.

Meanwhile, news of coronavirus was beginning to filter through, and it was rumoured that a cruise ship was being held in quarantine in Castries harbour.

For provisioning I travelled using local buses and had an incredibly lucky moment on one when, on alighting and paying my fare, I failed to notice my mobile phone fall from my pocket until a local lady beside me touched my arm and pointed it out. As the holder contained my credit cards as well as the phone I could not have been more grateful or thankful – it would have been mission over without it.

By 10th March *Altair* was ready to go and at 0800 I presented myself to customs/immigration. Clearing out was not difficult, but it was apparent that the officers were tense and unsmiling and COVID-19 information notices were stuck to the

Altair off St Lucia

Leaving 'HMS' Diamond Rock off Martinique astern

walls. At 1100 I headed out into Rodney Bay where I raised the main, not always a simple procedure singlehanded because the autopilot cannot cope with wind shifts, the battens snag easily on the lazy jacks and the main halyard often catches on a mast step. And there are other boats at anchor or on the move to be avoided. With both sails set I was soon heading for Martinique, visible on the horizon. Passages between the islands can be choppy and this day was no exception. With two reefs in the main I was happily proceeding to Anse Mitan when there was a sudden small explosion that liberated the liferaft. No crew to blame! I considered recovery but eventually cut it loose because it was due a service which, last time, cost nearly as much as a new raft. No further excitements occurred on the crossing and I tacked up La Baie de Fort-de-France in 25 knots of wind, reaching Anse Mitan after a seven-hour passage.

I had left Rodney Bay with the dinghy deflated and lashed to the mast because inflated and roped to the foredeck it can be a hazard. The next day it had to be inflated before going ashore, which took a while. Although the connector loss was not my doing, I felt somewhat self-conscious in the anchorage where I felt sure the French crews would be wondering what *le rosbif* could possibly be up to. My preferred anchorage at Anse Mitan is on its western edge where there are very popular, beautiful,

Anse Mitan at sunset

Anse Mitan dinghy park

palm-fringed golden sandy beaches. Dinghies are only permitted to tie up at the rocky and unwelcoming dinghy park. Getting to the dinghy park was a hard row as my outboard had gone AWOL the previous year (another story) and paddling had to be timed between ferocious offshore gusts.

While ashore during my two-day stay I noticed shopping restrictions due to coronavirus. The bars were still open, however, and I was able to get on the internet to message Frances and learn of virus developments in the UK. My 20-year-old chartplotter had expired between St Lucia and Martinique, perhaps disturbed by the liferaft explosion, so I spent some time trying to upload chart-plotting software to my phone but to no avail. It would be paper charts from then on. I had not cleared in because there is no facility at Anse Mitan, but knew I could do this at St Pierre, 20 miles to the northwest. So on the Thursday morning I sailed off anchor in leisurely fashion heading for St Pierre, without causing alarm for the neighbouring French boats. I towed the dinghy.

Altair anchored off Anse Mitan

St Pierre Cathedral, which survived the volcanic eruption

St Pierre was once the prosperous capital of Martinique until, in 1902, all but two of its 30,000 population and all of the ships at anchor were wiped out in a few minutes by a volcanic eruption. The two survivors were prisoners in the local jail whose walls were thick enough to withstand the heat. Most of the cathedral also survived. Mount Pelée, the volcano overlooking the mostly reconstructed town, is still active and Fort-de-France became the new capital.

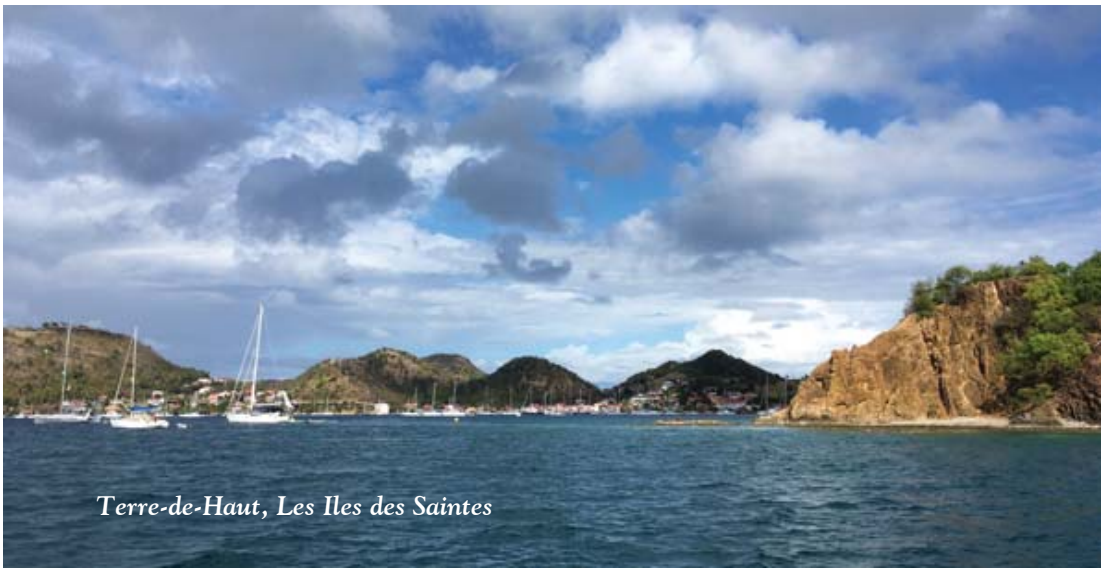
The St Pierre dinghy dock is on the side of a jetty and a fair degree of agility is required to haul oneself to the top so, as the swell was innocuous, I decided to paddle the dinghy to the volcanic sand beach. I had anchored in 3m and laid out maybe 30m of chain because the holding shelves steeply close-in and offshore gusts can hit 25 knots. Once ashore, I found the restaurant authorised to clear vessels in/out was shut on Thursday, which meant I would not be going further north before Saturday. I stocked up on provisions from the local Huit à Huit*, which did not seem to be experiencing any lockdown problems.

* A French chain of supermarkets and convenience stores. As the name implies, stores are typically open from 8am to 8pm.

St Pierre Regatta

Having survived my own boat cuisine for at least a week I decided I deserved a modest break and booked myself into our favourite restaurant, Le Tamaya. The meal was top quality, as always, but Madame was very worried for her business because of a sharp decline in boat traffic and even more concerned by the potential effect of coronavirus. That evening she had just five diners, including me, two of whom were a charming Swedish couple who may become OCC members in due course. On Friday I was able to clear in at the Alsace & Kay restaurant and followed this with a light lunch in their first floor dining room from which I could watch *Altair* lying serenely at anchor.

My next port of call was Portsmouth, Dominica, some 50 miles north of Martinique, and daybreak departure was needed to be sure of arrival before nightfall. At 0600 on the Friday I again sailed off the anchor and headed towards the Martinique Channel. This stretch of ocean can be lumpy, and I had experienced 35 knots of wind there a couple of years earlier. My initial anxiety evaporated quickly in a moderate northeasterly on the beam, however, and once I reached the lee of Dominica the wind became light and variable and I had to fire up the engine.



Terre-de-Haut, Les Iles des Saintes

At Portsmouth I was hoping to hear news of a yachtie party. The harbour was crowded with boats when I arrived, and as no buoys were free I again anchored. I got on the Portsmouth Association (PAYS) website to find out what the programme was, but nothing was posted. Having visited Dominica not long after the 2017 hurricanes and done many of the tours, I decided it was more important to press on north than to wait to see what social activity might transpire. Leaving behind a donation for my prospective island guide, at 0900 next day I sailed off the anchor and headed for Les Iles des Saintes.

The passage from Dominica to Les Iles des Saintes that Saturday was nothing less than magical. Wall-to-wall blue sky, a light breeze on the beam and slight swell. I found the time to explore the film-making capabilities of my Samsung Galaxy and there is

The anchorage at Deshaies

now a short sequence of the views from bow to stern on Instagram. Flying fish were about, as were numerous pelicans as I approached my destination. Halfway through what seemed to be an enticing short cut to Terre-de-Haut I realised that this was not the route we had taken the previous year and I was about to run out of water. A swift change of course followed, and I eventually arrived in the town bay and anchored. I had been prepared to lasso a buoy, but mindful of our 2019 experience of lassoing the propeller at the same time I played it safe...

On Monday 16th March, after laboriously inflating the dinghy once more and paddling the short distance to the beach it was a fifteen minute walk to the immigration office. It was here that my worries about the effects of the virus really kicked in. Macron had declared France to be in lockdown that day, and France was where I was. One new arrival in the office was refusing to sit down for fear of catching COVID-19 via her (clothed) posterior – *c'est pas possible!*

I believe I was the last arrival to be cleared in, and began to work out alternatives (not many) to failing clearance on Antigua. It looked as though a singlehanded west to east Atlantic crossing was a distinct possibility. I met Tim and Julie of *Whisper*, a Scanmar 34 anchored not far from *Altair*, and over several beers we discussed our options. By Tuesday evening I had decided to move on towards Antigua and set sail early on the Wednesday for Deshaies on the northwest coast of Guadeloupe, 35 miles distant. Arriving towards sunset in a cloudburst, it was cold enough to have me wearing waterproofs, not used since Madeira in 2016. Although there were plenty of boats anchored or on buoys in the bay, I found a spot without too much trouble and laid the usual 30m+ of chain in 5m of water so as not to drag in the fierce gusts.

Although I was keen to reach Antigua, it seemed a shame to press on the following day without going ashore to explore this beautiful village. So, more dinghy inflation activity and a hard paddle ashore between the offshore gusts. At the jetty a French yachtsman told me that, although Antigua was shut, I would probably be allowed in as I had a confirmed flight out. That was some relief. It was sad to explore what, under normal circumstances, would have been a vibrant, charming Caribbean village. There

were few people about, one *boulangerie* open with social distancing to be observed, and one or two fast-food outlets. I bought fruit from a roadside vendor and went to the supermarket for other supplies. The shelves were very full, which was surprising but also encouraging, and I was able to stock up on beer and other essentials.

The 45-mile passage to Antigua the following day was exhilarating. *Altair* was close hauled under two reefs in a 25–30 knot northeasterly with a 3m swell on the beam. I had finally decided to lash the dinghy on the foredeck and it was threatening to take off in these conditions. I edged forward, secured it with a sail tie and then even further forward to release the genoa furling sheet that had snagged on a cleat and was preventing the sail from reefing. By then *Altair* was creaming along at 7 knots, motor-sailing to increase her punch through the swell.

Antigua was soon visible and reached in about seven hours. With no chartplotter and a 2011 Doyle's Guide I had to find my way into Jolly Harbour where I believed I could clear in. As I closed the marina, an OCC member passing in his dinghy very helpfully told me that, because of coronavirus, clearing-in was only now possible at St John's, the island's capital. It was late, so I decided to anchor in Jolly Harbour and visit St John's the following day. There were literally hundreds of boats at anchor and little more than 2m depths anywhere in the harbour. I found a spot eventually, however, and laid the usual precautionary length of chain on account of the ever-present 25 knot gusts. Next day the wind was blowing directly from St John's, still at

Altair and Aries dealing with an Atlantic swell

Anchored off Jolly Harbour at sunset

25 knots, and there was no choice but to motor. *Altair*'s Yanmar has been known to deliver maximum power on just 2000 revs, which is not much use in a strong breeze on the nose. However an instinct, justified a few days later, caused me to motor to St John's at no more than 2000 revs, and though at times *Altair* was almost stationary we arrived eventually.

I tried to find out where I should go from Anchor Concierge, the Peters & May agent, but what they said did not make a lot of sense. Clearly I could not tie up on the large ship jetty, so decided to anchor on the eastern side of the harbour where there were already a few yachts. From there I could paddle the dinghy ashore and walk into town to find immigration. I did at least establish that their office was on Heritage Quay. As there was still an almost constant 25 knots blowing out of the harbour, my paddle ashore had to be timed and quick. It was, and I walked round into town through a heaving local market. No sign of social distancing there!

I found Heritage Quay, and I saw that it would have been possible to tie up there had I had a chart or plotter. Anyway, I was duly grilled by immigration officers who expressed surprise at the absence of a doctor's report on *Altair*. To my enormous relief I was eventually cleared in and I made my way back to *Altair*. My return to Jolly Harbour was uneventful with the wind now astern, though I overshot the entrance because it seemed a waste not to be flying the genoa on such a lovely evening. I anchored the furthest out of any craft.

Although I had not visited the marina on Friday I did know roughly where I was going as I motored inland. The weather was not helpful and just as I reached the pool outside the marina it started to rain as I had never seen rain before in the Caribbean. Visibility dropped to almost nothing so, in slight desperation, I called the marina on VHF and was eventually attended to after the downpour had passed. The mooring guys were brilliant and *Altair* was soon trussed up fore and aft, with a spring keeping her stern and the Aries just off the pontoon.

A day or so later my caution with the engine revs was vindicated. I had been unable to get the shore power working, so called in the electrician from the list of marina

services. He found the alternator wiring disconnected because the engine bracket immediately behind it had broken. This must have occurred during the passage from Deshaies, and in terms of battery power I had been on borrowed time ever since. With a fractured bracket not pushing the engine had been wise, albeit from instinct rather than knowledge.

The broken engine bracket

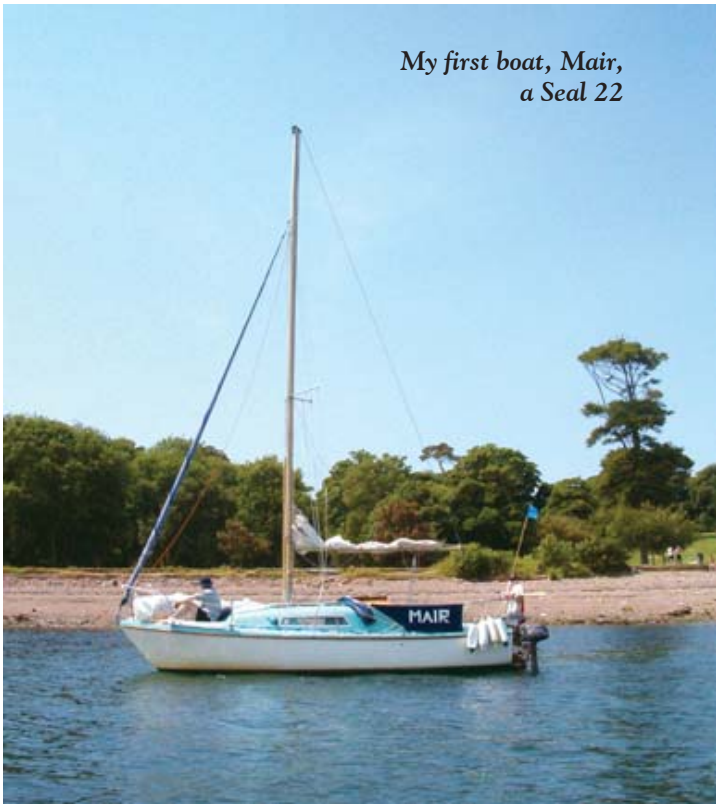
I was booked on a British Airways flight on Wednesday 25th March, so my last few days on the island were a little tense as I decommissioned *Altair* for shipping in early May, at the same time checking the BA website for flight cancellations. There were none – only after arriving home did I discover that my flight had been the last to leave Antigua. Three days later Antigua denied entry to all inbound pleasure craft for 14 days. Frances's 27th March birthday had saved the day.

DEAR FLYING FISH
Jamie Dunn

Dear *Flying Fish* ... I have come to think of you as a pen friend. Your bi-annual communications have been a nugget of joy injected into the daily grind of that epoch of life where the mortgage is simply too vast to contemplate, children too young to be let out of sight lest they escape or set fire to themselves, and work still requiring the competitive drive of the determined to 'up and come'. So it's true I haven't written since 2010, and I'm sorry. Forgive me? I love hearing from you because for a little while I can shut out the world and live vicariously through the eyes of others ... and there *is* life on the other side, it seems...

Anyway, it got me thinking. I am not sure what I would have written about. You have hundreds if not thousands of pen friends and I suspect that the bulk of us 'met' you following one of the adventures of our lives, then as we've had to settle back into 'real life' there has not been much to write about. I mean, I spent my grandfather's legacy on a Hustler 30 and did about 8000 miles in her, but never in epochs of longer than a week and never in passages of longer than 130 miles. I am not sure that floats your boat – not when others are girdling the globe.

Early in 2000 I had decided to learn to sail and, with some experience in dinghies in my youth, bought a Seal 22 which I kept on that safest stretch of water that is the Bristol Channel. I have to admit the learning curve was steep. The low point was one of those things which, with retrospect, I still cannot fathom how I let happen. Suffice to say, if your inboard engine fails, don't extend your outboard bracket with an L-shaped jig fashioned from medium-density fibreboard and water-soluble glue and set off with all 3·3hp at full tilt into a 7 knot tidal stream – or if you do, don't expect your engine to still be attached after 14 miles of windless motoring... The Barry pilot boat saved that day and it remains the only time I have ever had to call on external assistance, but the memory still makes me shudder.



My first boat, Mair, a Seal 22

My beloved Hustler, with my wife at the helm …

A notable high was catching a conger eel and a thornback ray in the same hour, with salami as bait, whilst anchored off Ilfracombe. Both made it into the cabin with violent thrashing before the hooks could be removed and, with the conger at least, there was a period of negotiation about how she and I were going to deal with her return to the water with me keeping my fingers. I was working as a vet back then and partial to my fingers.

… and my current boat, a Drascombe Lugger

Then in 2004 the chance came up to crew from Stavanger to Oban via the Lofoten Islands and Shetland, but no single passage was quite long enough to join 'the gang'. It came about because David Perkins, who owns a Swan 38 called *Suomi Kudu*, approached me at my brother's wedding and suggested I might enjoy the trip and learn a little. I suspect my long-suffering father put him up to it, or rather issued a *cri de coeur*. I was and remain a person who prefers to find my own way in the world, otherwise I would have started by doing an RYA course on a Bavaria 32 instead of the many hours of mending and fiddling and getting mud-stranded which marked my early days. But David's offer was too good to refuse, and the trip was a sensation ... such a sensation that in 2006 I sailed from St John's, Newfoundland to Falmouth, Cornwall with him and finally joined 'the gang', although it was 2010 before I told you about it all.

In the years that followed I moved up to the Hustler 30 and, with many solo hours, a huge socket set, a basic multimeter and a diet of *Practical Boat Owner* I became totally competent and could fix any system in the boat upside down in a seaway. Life was nicely on track ... cue a career change into medicine and the arrival of children. Budgets contracted from slim to anorexic and time vanished. The Hustler made way for a Drascombe Lugger which sat unused on my drive for three years while I kept my shoulder to the wheel.

Then there was a flicker of dawn – in the spring of 2019 David rang. The offer, as ever, was selfless. "Jamie, Jamie, Jamie can you hear me?" followed by squeaks, squelches, a small thump, a cuss and then, "Hold on, Hold on, I've dropped my hearing aid in the bath". David is 86 this year – he is astonishing. In essence he told me that *Suomi Kudu* was in Lisbon, he wanted to sail in Newfoundland and would have room for a crew from Lisbon to Ponta Delgada in the Azores. The timing I could, within reason, dictate. Over the previous year my wife had registered all the signs in me of building stress and only a week or two earlier had gone so far as to say she was worried... So the timing was perfect, she gave me a liberty pass and the game was afoot.

The anchorage at Cascais

David Perkins helming Suomi Kudu

When the allotted time came, I flew a serpiginous route to Lisbon and joined the boat at Cascais at about 9pm on a Saturday night. After a catch-up and a good white wine I slept like a baby. Sunday brought the commissioning of *SK* with the decision being made that 'issues' would have to be dealt with in the Azores due to my timing constraints. The 'fridge was dead, but after the compression plate/ice box was surgically removed there was room for ice, and the self-steering had clearly had a knock over the winter and was out of alignment – something that only took me an hour to fix once we were in Ponta, but we decided to sail with it out of commission. There is no other automatic steering on the boat so David announced that this would be a lesson in sail balance.

Ready for departure

Peter Crowther

David is the skipper. He is slightly ostentatiously un-ostentatious. Ensign discipline is closely observed, he ranks high in the Royal Thames Yacht Club and has been invited, but declined, to join the Royal Yacht Squadron. Every stitch in every sail is pristine, with the possible exception of the spinnaker which he has not, he tells me, removed from its bag since 2004. The head leaks freely, and he neither notices nor cares. *SK* is a real bluewater boat from the 1970s. There are foot pumps for fresh and salt water in the galley and a fixed Garmin 128 GPS at the chart table – a table which still holds a meticulously-kept, hour-by-hour log book and paper charts. There is an AIS, so I suppose that is a doff of the cap to the modern world, but there is no electric bilge pump.

The other crew member was Peter Crowther. Over two weeks I built up a huge affection for this humorous, softly-spoken, self-effacing man. I had not really realised he was a core member of the sailing elite, but since getting home have acquired a second-hand copy of his book, *Single Handed Sailing in Galway Blazer*. This is a man who went sailing on his honeymoon. He was dismasted in the Southern Ocean and made his way home under jury rig. He stopped off in Horta by sailing straight into the harbour wall, but rather than regarding that as the end of a frightening ordeal, he restocked and, just as jury-rigged and engineless, completed the homeward leg.

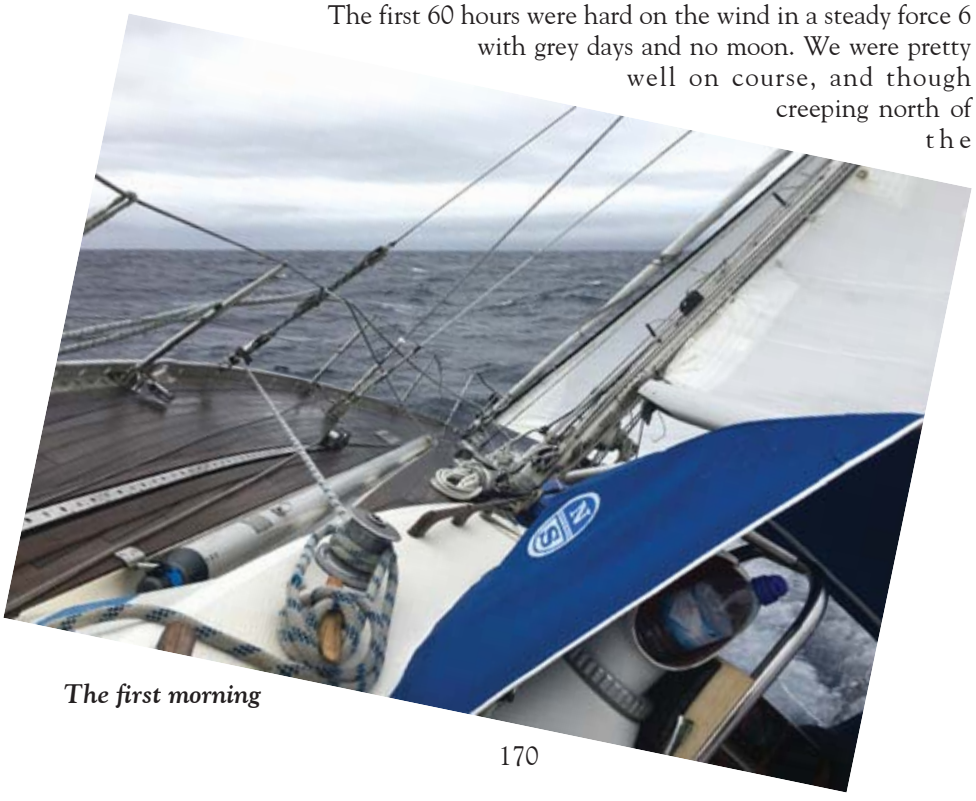
We left Lisbon early on a grey Monday morning, with an accompanying cavalcade of dolphins which I managed to video and WhatsApp to my children before the signal died. For the first time in about five years I started to relax ... because that is what being at sea is about. No one could contact me to tell me that unless I magicked an impossible operating list out of thin air someone was going to miss their window of cure – I was once again just me with the boat and the sea. The pair of them would have completed the passage fine without me – my main addition to the crew was a degree of mechanical nous and a love of cooking, but nonetheless they welcomed the addition and we quickly settled into a rhythm. The only concern my wife had raised was that, after tapping on her phone, she told me I dropped the average age of the crew from 80 to 67. But these two are men who could manage the foredeck between them, with or without me.

The author, apparently auditioning for 'Pirates of the Azores'

We had agreed a four-off two-on watch rota overnight but from the very first night Peter stood four hours and so I slept, and slept and slept ... indeed on the first day I think I slept for 16 hours and by the end of the trip I was a mended man – rested, with an empty stress bucket to use modern employment jargon. And it is enduring – three weeks back at the coalface and nothing has changed. Somehow it is just an enduring cathartic experience being on the ocean.

(At this point I put the computer aside, meaning to pick it up the next day, but almost a year has passed. Surgical 'Referral to Treatment' deadlines exploded and then for these last months COVID-19, but I am determined to finish the letter I started, and I shall.)

The first 60 hours were hard on the wind in a steady force 6 with grey days and no moon. We were pretty well on course, and though creeping north of the



The first morning

Slow progress…

rhumb line a pinch where we had wanted to be south, it was marginal. The leaking head was to windward, which made for a daily 'experience', but the galley was to leeward as was my bunk and life rolled on. After 60 hours thankfully David called enough. The main came down and to hell with the rhumb line. *SK* pulled her knickers out of the water and life became easier.

Actually no sooner had we borne away than the wind backed, then died and for 48 hours we made little or no progress. As is ever the difference between the sailor with no time constraint and the man watching a calendar, this affected the crew in different ways. The maths however was simple – we could motor towards Santa Maria but would not have fuel to get there and would have to hope for wind, or we could motor on a tangent to the wind (the blessings of a still functional Metfax). We chose the latter and over 48 hours of optimistic setting and furling of the genoa we chugged our way south. If we could make 2 knots under sail we sailed, below that we motored. It really was a trip of perfect weather – we had literally everything except wind above force 6.

It's always worth having a rummage in the bilges

Airing bedding on arrival in Ponta Delgada

Having left Cascais on the Monday morning we cruised into the marina on Santa Maria in the early hours of the following Tuesday, moving on to Ponta Delgada a couple of days later.

And now, with COVID still very much in the air, I must stop writing and return to the recovery plans of how to recommission elective services, so do excuse me for going.

The purpose of the letter was really a 'thank you' to all ocean sailors who from time to time take crew for long passages...

Fair winds and following seas, Jamie.

One cannot make any very serious mistake in the selection of one's provisions, but to take the wrong man with one on a voyage that involves a complete severance from all the influences of civilisation for months at a time may bring exceedingly unpleasant consequences.

The Cruise of the ALERTE, E F Knight
(first published 1890)

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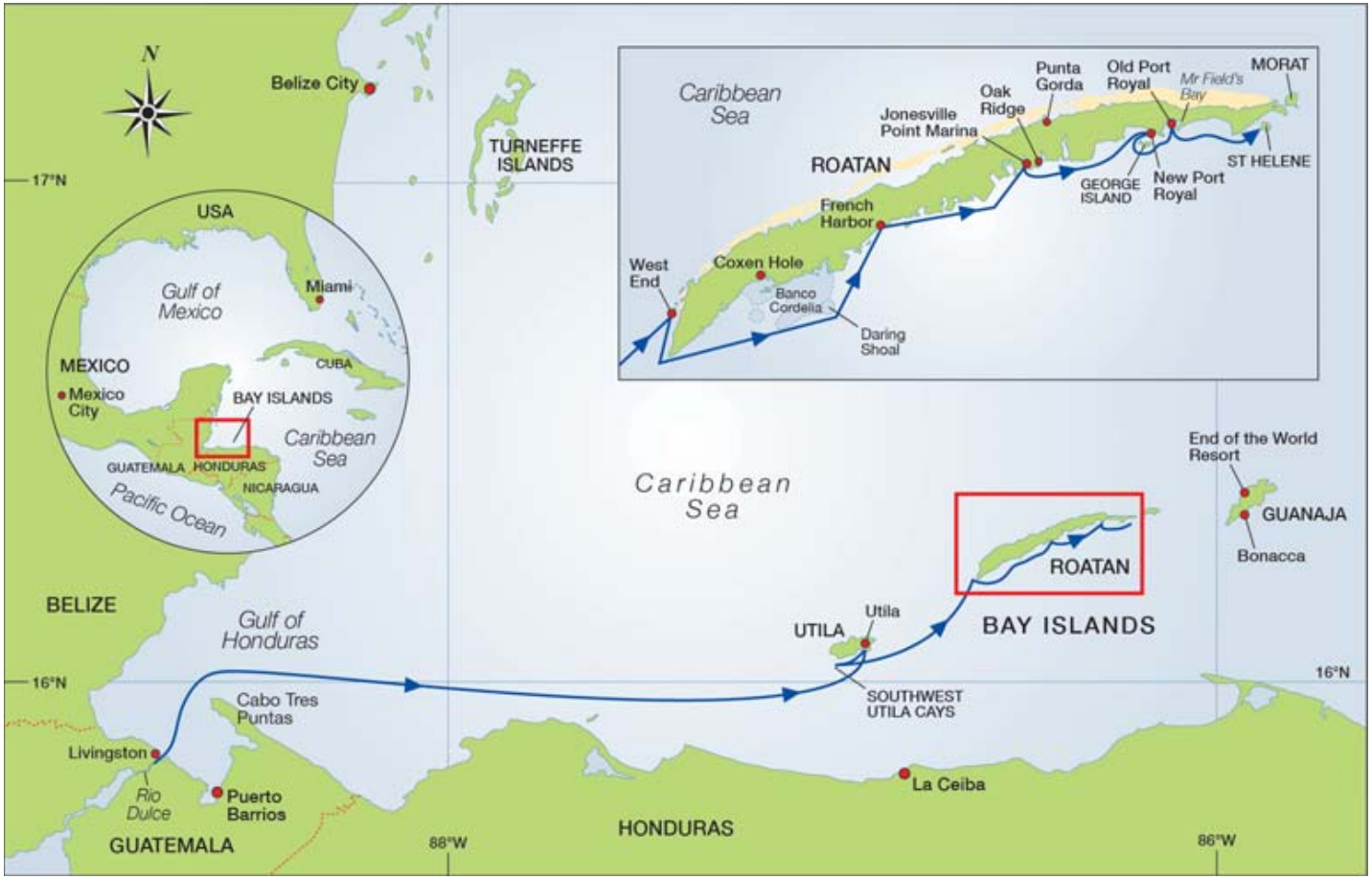
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Belize City
17°N
TURNEFFE ISLANDS
Caribbean Sea
Punta Gorda
Old Port Royal
Mr Field's Bay
MORAT
Oak Ridge
Jonesville Point Marina
ROATAN
ST HELENE
GEORGE ISLAND
New Port Royal
French Harbor
West End
Coxen Hole
Banco Cordelia
Daring Shoal
USA
Gulf of Mexico
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UTILA
Utila
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16°N
SOUTHWEST UTILA CAYS
Cabo Tres Puntas
Livingston
Rio Dulce
Puerto Barrios
La Ceiba
GUATEMALA
88°W
HONDURAS
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THE BAY ISLANDS OF HONDURAS – PIRATES OR PARADISE?
Chris Burry and Madeline Hibberd

(*Chris and her husband Bill own* Plover, *a Dickerson 41, and have twice crossed the Atlantic in her. Most summers they cruise to the Canadian Maritimes from the southern Chesapeake Bay where they are Port Officers for Deltaville and Mathews, Virginia. In late December 2019 they travelled to the Rio Dulce in Guatemala, where they joined OCC friends Roy and Madeline Hibberd who live aboard their Prout 46 catamaran,* Mithril of Newhaven, *for a month-long cruise to the Bay Islands of Honduras.*

This was the second time Chris and Bill had been guests aboard Mithril, *having previously cruised with Roy and Madeline on the coast of Belize – see* The Western Caribbean's Best Kept Secret *in* Flying Fish 2019/2.)

The Bay Islands of Honduras are the country's prime sailing attraction and conjure up images of palm trees swaying in tropical sea breezes and coral-studded reefs teeming with sea life. They comprise several small islands – Utila, Roatan, St Helene, Morat and Guanaja. We were excited at the chance to cruise there on *Mithril of Newhaven* even though friends and family questioned the wisdom of travelling there given Honduras's reputation for violent crime and piracy at sea. After preliminary research we concluded that the only way to find out was to investigate ourselves. What we discovered was a perfect cruising ground whose popularity with yachts has increased

steadily in recent years as an alternative to the Eastern Caribbean and the Virgin Islands – less crowded, yet scenically on a par with the Virgins. There is the added benefit of English being the primary language for islanders, even though Spanish is the official language in Honduras.

Our trip began when we joined *Mithril* in the Rio Dulce, Guatemala, where she had spent the previous hurricane season. The Rio Dulce is a beautiful waterway dotted with local flora and fauna, whose story merits a separate article. From the coast of Guatemala it is a 110 mile overnight hop to Utila, the westernmost of the Bay Islands.

Log Entry Christmas Eve, 24th December: 0700 Anchor up. Rolly overnight so ready to depart. Set jenny and we are on our way.

The passage was uneventful thanks to our weather forecaster, Chris Parker, but the seas were lumpier and the winds more on the nose than anticipated so we motored the whole night. The only excitement was catching a seagull on the fishing lure – we promptly reeled him in and released him safely to live another day. We had timed our landfall in Utila for first light on Christmas Day. Our first impression was of a sleepy island town lost in time. We celebrated, Q-flag flying, with a 12lb turkey purchased in Guatemala with all the trimmings – cranberry relish, sweet and white potatoes, Brussels sprouts and gravy. Madeline had a Christmas pudding that we enjoyed with homemade custard.

On Boxing Day we went ashore to clear customs and immigration. The cruising guides warned of petty crime, and specifically mentioned Utila as a place where we should keep our guard up. When we landed our dinghy at Bush's dock and asked about locking it, the young man on duty told us they have security cameras on the dock and not to worry. While waiting for the immigration office to open we met the Mayor, Troy Bodden, a local man born and raised on Utila. He was loading a golf cart with Christmas gift care packages for older people on the island. He said that they had persuaded the Honduran government to place extra security on the island since they can't afford to lose tourism revenue due to crime. While we saw no specific evidence

Departing Rio Dulce, Guatemala

Madeline, Troy Bodden, Mayor of Utila, Roy, Chris and Bill

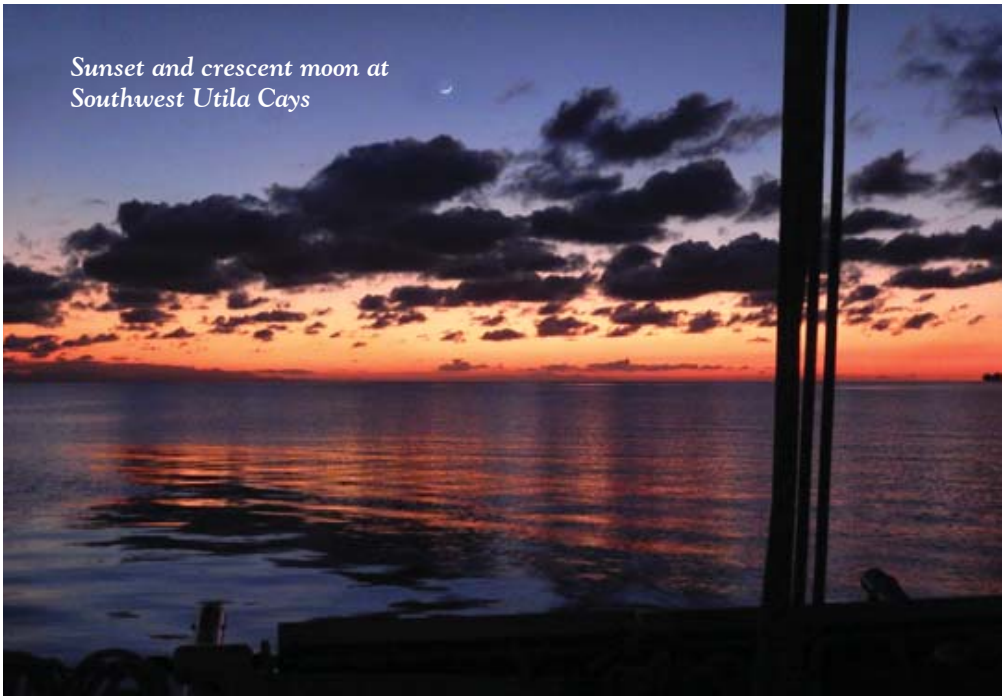
of the military presence, neither did we experience any crime throughout our stay nor feel threatened at any time.

We enjoyed our walk around the town of Utila and visited a local iguana farm, bought a CLARO SIM card (see page 186), and used the ATM to withdraw Honduran lempiras (at the time of our visit there were 25 lempiras to the US dollar), though most local businesses accepted dollars or credit cards. We sampled a typical breakfast favourite called *baleadas* – a traditional Honduran dish composed of a flour tortilla filled with cheese and beans and maybe additional items such as eggs, meat etc. We strolled through the gardens of the Jade Sea Horse, an eclectic hotel with a large collection of artfully displayed mosaics, and had an introduction to local Honduran boats – unique, canoe-shaped one-off designs with external rudders and inboard engines. Back aboard *Mithril* we settled in for a quiet evening, but loud music started up ashore and continued till 3.30am – Utila's reputation as a party island was alive and well. So at first light we made the decision to depart the main harbour and move west to the Southwest Utila Cays.

Utila is known as a dive mecca with PADI facilities for inexpensive certification. We didn't dive on the island but did enjoy snorkelling off the reefs at the Cays. We motored between Jack O'Neil's and Pigeon Cays but, as the charts were not reliable, Madeline downloaded a Google Earth image on her iPad so we could see the reefs entering and exiting, plus we had Bill and Roy on the bow through the cut between the reefs. We also used Julius Wilensky's *Cruising Guide to the Bay Islands of Honduras* (see page 185). It was an extremely peaceful anchorage and we spent a quiet night before heading off to West End, Roatan.

Log Entry 28 December: 0815 Underway headed to Roatan. Retraced our track coming back out. 20 miles to West End. Sunny, light easterly winds.

West End is one of the most touristy locations in the Bay Islands and is close to the cruise ships at the main harbour in Coxen Hole. There are about twenty moorings

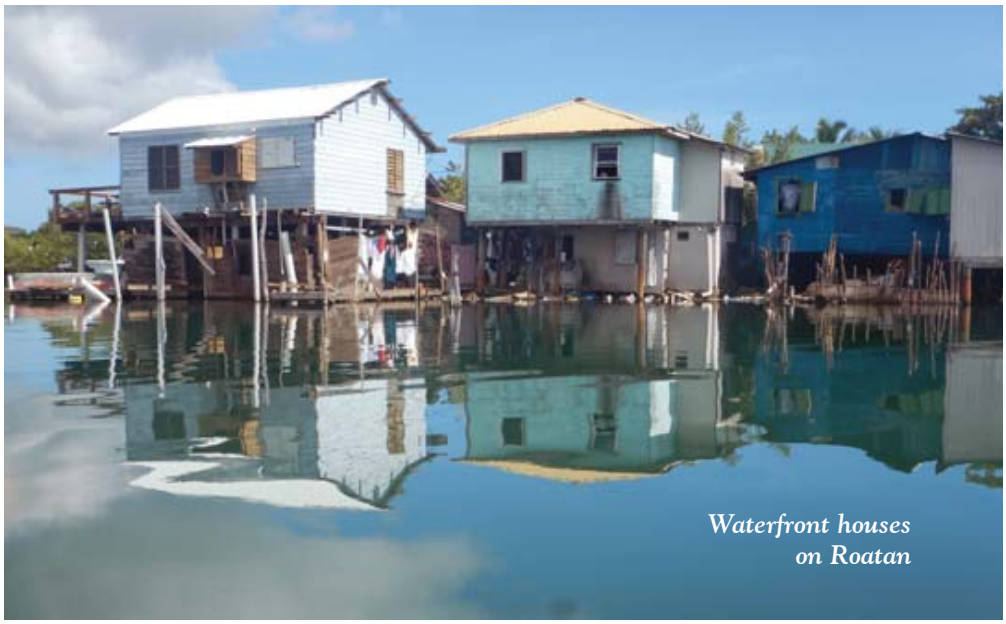


Sunset and crescent moon at Southwest Utila Cays

available, maintained by the Roatan Marine Park [www.roatanmarinepark.org]. It is a beautiful spot with gorgeous sunsets and the reef right off your stern for diving or snorkelling. There is no designated dinghy dock, so we tied up at one of the local watering holes for a walk around the dusty streets. The waterfront teemed with local *pangas* (runabouts) carrying tourists to and from the cruise ships. There are a few small grocery stores where we found Island Harbor lettuce mix grown locally at Blue Harbor Plantation.

French Harbor Marina

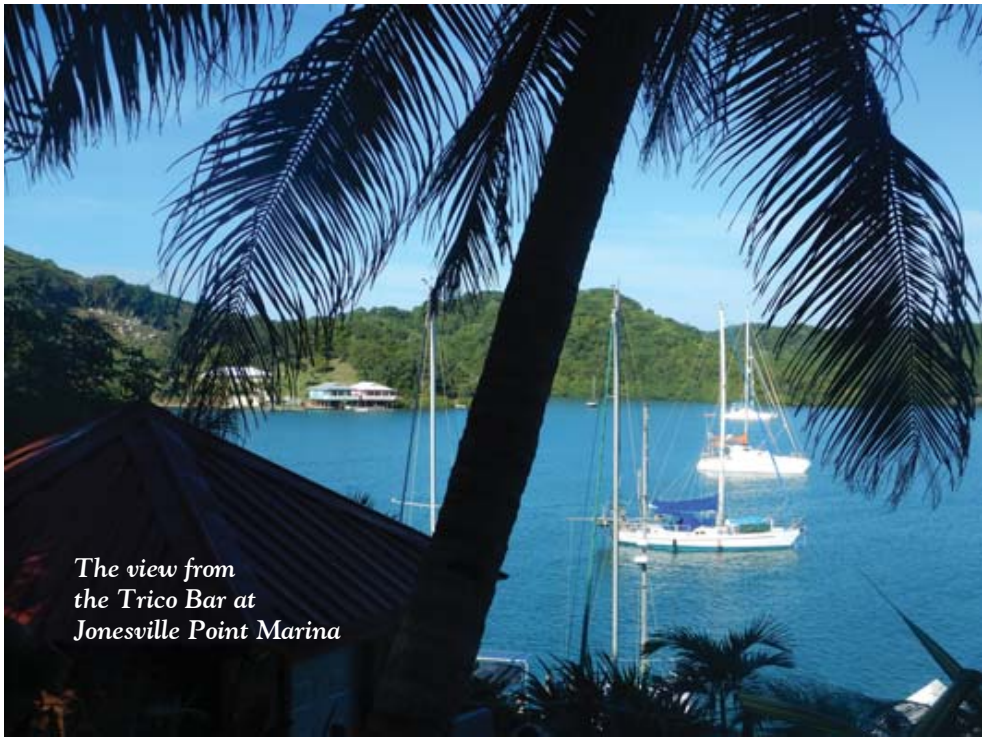
From West End we motored the 12 miles to French Harbor, heading out around Banco Cordelia and Daring Shoal. French Harbor, where one of several marinas is located, has good protection from the prevailing easterlies and is the closest location to Eldon's store, one of the best for grocery shopping (every Tuesday the marina runs a van service there for visiting cruisers). There is a good reef to explore just east of Fantasy Island resort. We had a cruiser's potluck with several OCC boats at the marina for New Year's Eve, then awaited fireworks and live music at midnight which continued until 3am.



Waterfront houses on Roatan

On New Year's Day we departed early before the easterly trade winds came up and moved 6 miles up the coast to our next stop at Jonesville Point Marina. We spent two weeks there while the easterlies blew and it rained on and off for days – very unusual weather for the non-rainy season! Chris Parker said, 'there is a big change coming in the weather for the next few weeks and no one will be able to travel. Strong high pressure to the north and strong low pressure to the south will cause a tight wind gradient and high winds for an extended period. Trade winds will build in and last, possibly until early February'.

So we hunkered down and enjoyed the local sights. The Jonesville Point Marina provides free internet in the Trico Bar in addition to casual dining, a full bar, and laundry service. They will assist with hiring local taxis to pick up groceries or run other errands. We employed Miguel to drive us to Coxen Hole so Roy and Madeline could renew *Mithril*'s cruising permit. Miguel was born on Roatan and described the culture of the *caracoles*, the English-speaking people who have been established in the Bay Islands since the early 19th century and are chiefly of European descent. The native islanders prefer the term 'islanders' when being referred to and English is their first language, regardless of race.



The view from the Trico Bar at Jonesville Point Marina

One of the most interesting aspects of being in Jonesville is the ability to travel both east and west along the south coast by small boat in protected waters inside the reef. Another cruiser described it as a series of twists and turns through mangrove channels and under a bridge, making it sound complicated, but in fact it was easy to follow the local boats running through the channels. One of the coastal villages, Oak Ridge, is primarily accessible by water and all the locals ride around in skiffs. There are a few

Chris, Bill, Madeline and Roy celebrating at the Trico Bar

Back channels at Oak Ridge

hangouts for the expat community offering live music on different days of the week, including BJ's and the Hole in the Wall. At another location, the Reef House, we walked out on a concrete dock to the reef and snorkelled right offshore before enjoying lunch under the shade of the porch.

It proved easy to hire a car, so while the trade winds blew we did some touring around Roatan. We drove east to Old Port Royal, where we walked among coconut palms along the sandy shore, and decided we should bring *Mithril* there, weather permitting. From the anchorage at Old Port Royal there is a nice walk along the road to La Sirena with stunning views and on the way back we stopped at La Sirena Tiki bar. Returning to Jonesville we drove along the north shore of Roatan and stopped at a Garifuna village named Punta Gorda. The Garifuna are descendants of the Afro-indigenous population from St Vincent who were exiled to Honduras in the 18th century. Many of them now live in Belize but there is also a settlement in the Bay Islands. We ate a typical Garifuna meal of *marucha* seafood soup, a local speciality with lobster tail, king crab, fish, conch and shrimp in a coconut soup base – delicious!

The trade winds finally eased enough for us to venture eastward in *Mithril*

An Oak Ridge water taxi

along the south coast to Old Port Royal. We anchored for a few nights in the large bay at New Port Royal of Caribbean pirates fame, occupied by the English as far back as the 1740s. We discovered a dinghy channel through the mangroves that the locals use to go east, so upped anchor and moved 5 miles east outside the reef to Old Port Royal, where we had driven a week earlier. We enjoyed the bay to ourselves, took walks ashore in an old coconut plantation and snorkelled on both entrance reefs.

Mithril at Old Port Royal

A fisherman at St Helene

After watching the locals take a channel further east through the mangroves, we took our own dinghy and found a cut through to the north coast at the east end of Mr Field's Bay. Halfway across the island the water changed colour dramatically from Caribbean blue to muddy river brown. It poured with rain the whole day and was a wet but interesting dinghy ride. In better weather you can reach the north coast by dinghy through this channel.

Our last foray east took us to St Helene, an isolated island at the eastern tip of Roatan, which has one of the poorest villages in the Bay Islands. It has been left behind by the others and only recently have electric power and potable water reached the village. Ashore we found the Mangrove Inn and Restaurant where we met owner Willis and his wife who run a small beach bar. He was born and raised locally but has travelled extensively. We ordered beers, and he had to walk up the beach to get them out of a friend's cooler. We took the dinghy around the corner to the uninhabited island of Morat, which has a lovely white sandy beach with a few conch shells. It was a very pretty spot with crystal-blue water, although the locals told us about a large lagoon with lots of crocodiles.

Before long, it was back to Jonesville to prepare for our return flight home. The timing of our trip was fortuitous as we departed the Bay Islands just prior to the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak. Madeline and Roy chose to ride out the virus in the Rio Dulce in Guatemala waiting for the opportunity to continue their adventures.

So what did we conclude about the Bay Islands? No pirates, less crowded than the Eastern Caribbean and scenically on a par with the Virgins. Definitely paradise!

The End of the World by air

We longed to sail to Guanaja, the most easterly and remote of the Bay Islands. This is where most cruisers clear in if arriving from locations further east in the Caribbean. It became apparent that Bill and I would not be able to sail there aboard *Mithril* due to the trade winds, although Roy and Madeline were able to do so after they eased. If planning a limited stay in the Bay Islands, it may be worthwhile to head as far east as possible to Guanaja before heading west.

The End of the World resort

We realised the best way to get there was by air. We chose a resort on the west coast called End of the World [https://endoftheworldresort.com] and, as there are no direct flights from Roatan, had a layover in La Ceiba on the Honduran mainland to change planes. Then it was a short hop out to Guanaja. The airport is located next to a narrow channel which runs between the east and west parts of the island. Brian Rowland, the owner, was off the island but put us in the care of his staff, Armando and Marlee. We were the only ones there and had a fabulous two-day stay. The scenery from our treetop room was spectacular and justified the long climb up the stairs to the top.

Marlee, the cook, was born in the town of Mangrove Bight on the northwest corner of the island and was raised on Guanaja. She lived through Hurricane *Mitch* in October 1998 which devastated the island, nearly destroyed the mangrove forest and resulted in her village being renamed Mitch. She served us three delicious meals daily plus drinks at the thatch-roofed bar, including rum in frozen coconuts one evening. Armando took us out snorkelling both days to see some of the best reefs in the Bay Islands. They teemed with large lobsters, nurse sharks and colourful reef fish. Plus we saw our first lionfish. These predatory fish imported from the Indian Ocean are taking over the reef and eating all the indigenous fish. We learned that you can take a course in how to kill and cook lionfish! On the last day, Armando and Marlee took us on a walking tour of Bonacca, the island's main town, where 2000 people are crammed close together on a series of walking streets built up on stilts.

Practicalities

Customs and Immigration

Foreign yachts can clear in at any of the three major Bay Islands – Utila, Roatan or Guanaja. First stop should be immigration, which costs US $3 per person. They take fingerprints and photos, and usually grant a 60-day visit. Next stop is with the Port Captain where they require a digital photo of the yacht and, for no charge, grant a

60-day cruising permit. Both officials were courteous and spoke English, and further month extensions are usually obtainable.

Note that foreign yachts coming from Guatemala are subject to the Central America-4 Free Mobility Agreement, known as the C-4. This was established to permit free movement across the borders of the four signatory countries – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. However there is a three-month limit for foreign nationals, so if cruisers are near the end of their three-month limit they may consider a stop in Belize before sailing directly to Honduras.

Cruising Guides

There are several cruising guides for the Bay Islands. *A Cruising Guide to the Northwest Caribbean* by Stephen Pavlidis is one of the newest and does a good job of offering suggestions for places to visit with sketches of the anchorages. Although somewhat dated, Julius Wilensky's *Cruising Guide to the Bay Islands of Honduras* has excellent hand-drawn sketches of the anchorages.

Navigation

We found Navionics digital charts to be the best but even they were not always accurate. The best option is to rely on eyeball navigation with a sharp lookout on the bow, especially when navigating passes between the reefs.

Weather

Chris Parker's Western Caribbean forecast is broadcast six days a week and covers a wide swath of the Western Caribbean from Cuba west to Mexico and Belize and south as far as Colombia – check www.mwxc.com for frequencies and schedules. You can also subscribe via the website, in which case Chris will tailor his forecast to your location.

Provisions

Food and spirits, including local rum, are readily available but expensive at the Bay Islands' well-stocked supermarkets. Stocks can vary after shipments arrive from the US and often include well-known US brands. On Utila, Bush's market on the waterfront is the best stocked and is convenient by dinghy. On Roatan, the best store is Eldon's in French Harbor. Fruit and vegetables including papaya, plantain, pineapples, potatoes, tomatoes, eggs, lettuce, zucchini, oranges and limes are also available from outdoor stalls along the highway and in villages.

A roadside fruit and vegetable stall

The trade winds blowing…

Marinas

There are several marinas in Roatan but they are small by first-world standards:

- French Harbor Cay Marina is associated with the Fantasy Island resort [www.fantasyislandresort.com/marina-en.html]. Current rates are US $0.90 per foot per day up to 14 days, and $8.00 per foot per month for longer stays, or you can anchor off the marina and use the dinghy dock for $2 per day. On Tuesdays they run a free van to Eldon's supermarket.
- Jonesville Point Marina [www.jonesvillepointmarina.com/marina/] is east of French Harbor and has limited dock space though there is ample room to anchor off. Americans Sherri and Brian Visker manage the Trico Bar as well as the marina itself. Amenities include hot showers, laundry, free internet, access to local transportation to Eldon's and assistance with shipping packages from the US. They host Trico Tuesdays with live local musicians at the bar.

Communications

We used a cellphone (mobile phone) with a Honduran SIM card for communications, both as a cellphone with local number plus for data on the internet. This worked everywhere in the Bay Islands. There are two cellular companies, TIGO and CLARO, with CLARO offering better coverage.

Security

Cruisers should practise caution in the Bay Islands and adopt basic security rules – lock your boat at all times, use alarms, raise and lock your dinghy at night and lock it at the dock during the day, travel in groups whenever possible and keep the VHF tuned to Channel 16 plus the shared channel with fellow cruisers in the area.

OBITUARIES & APPRECIATIONS

Mary Falk, Rear Commodore 1989–1993

Mary, an OCC member since 1983, died on 19th September from cancer of the oesophagus, aged 74. Her remarkable life included many achievements both on and off the water. Over 28 years she competed in all the UK's major short-handed, long-distance races, including three OSTARs, three AZABs, one Fastnet, six Round Britain and Ireland Races and numerous Petit Bateau (now renamed the Solo Offshore Racing Club) events.

Mary enjoyed a happy childhood in Rugby, where her father taught at the famous boys' school. At 13 she went to St Mary's Calne, a girls' boarding school where she did well, eventually becoming head girl. Many years later she served as a governor at the school. After leaving school, and before going up to Newnham College, Cambridge to read classics, she spent six months in Italy learning Italian. At Cambridge she kept up her swimming and lacrosse, winning half blues at both.

Mary then embarked on a career in law, becoming a trainee with Farrer & Co in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, where she later became an assistant solicitor and then a partner, eventually retiring in 2003. Farrer's was well known for its work for the Royal Family and other distinguished clients, and was a very traditional firm, somewhat male-dominated – she was one of the first women to be made a partner. To celebrate passing her law exams Mary booked an extended holiday in the Alps to learn to ski. Alas she broke her leg within days. She was told that she would never be able to ski again, but how wrong they were!

It was at Farrer's that she was first introduced to sailing, when a colleague took her out in a clinker dinghy on the Blackwater Estuary. By the time she bought her first dinghy in 1977 she had the zeal of a convert – a passion which never left her. She began racing with Philippe Hamon, crewing for him in the 1981 Fastnet aboard his Sigma 33, *Charlotte Pico*, her first taste of long-distance racing. Fortunately Farrer & Co was always supportive of her sailing ventures.

The following year Mary co-skippered her first Round Britain and Ireland race, sailing with OCC member Fiona Wylie aboard *Wild Rival*. It wasn't long before she bought her own boat, *Quixote*, a UFO 34, which she kept in Lymington, her home port for most of her life. She followed this up by competing in the 1983 Azores and Back Race two-handed with Penny Benvoison, the first leg of which became her OCC qualifying passage. Three years later she sailed in the Two-handed Transatlantic Race (aka Two-Star) with Kitty Hampton, now Van Hagen, in the 40ft *Ntombifuti*, achieving second in class.

In 1987 Mary entered her first singlehanded race, the 1987 AZAB (a race which has both single and double-handed classes), followed by the 1988 Observer Singlehanded Transatlantic Race (OSTAR) in which she came 7th in class. A very focused and competitive person, while sailing in the 1989 Round Britain and Ireland race with Jenny Bennett (née Pocock) Mary decided that she wanted to win her class in the next OSTAR.

For this she needed a new boat so went to Jenny's father, designer Mike Pocock (later to become OCC Commodore), with a simple brief – she wanted a yacht to beat all

Mary at QII's chart table in her rally car seat

comers in the 35ft class. The yacht was to have water ballast, together with a fractional rig and roller headsail. The interior was designed around Mary's slight, 5ft 4in frame, with a full-sized chart table sited centrally just aft of the mast. This was complemented by a swivelling and reclining rally car-style seat with, according to *The First Fifty Years*, 'a full seat harness with which Mary tethers the boat to her person. She then drives it like the rally car for which the seat and harness were designed.'

Construction started in March 1990 and by August the distinctive red and white *QII* was afloat. By way of tuning-up, Mary sailed her in the 1991 AZAB. The 1992 OSTAR followed, in which Mary came second in her class and gained the nickname 'the fastest woman across the Atlantic'. She received the OCC Award for that year in recognition of her many short-handed racing successes, though many may also have seen it as being partly for her stance as a trail-blazer, keen to show that a woman could sail competitively as well as having a demanding career.

The 1993 Round Britain and Ireland Race, again sailed with Jenny Bennett, saw them placed first in class, and in 1995 *QII* continued her winning streak with Mary and Jenny claiming the AZAB record for the fastest outward leg for a water-ballasted monohull, covering the 1180 miles from Falmouth to Ponta Delgada in 6 days, 16 hours and 35 minutes. But it was in the 1996 OSTAR that *QII* showed her real pedigree, winning her class by crossing

QII pictured against the Old Head of Kinsale during the 2007 Petit Bateau Race. Photo Paul Beggs

Mary at home on her 70th birthday

the Atlantic in 19 days, 22 hours and 57 minutes – a record for a 35ft yacht which remains unbroken to this day. The Royal Cruising Club recognised the feat by awarding her their coveted Medal for Seamanship. A further Round Britain and Ireland Race followed in 1997.

As well as being an outstanding sailor herself, Mary was a strong supporter of others. She was one of the founder trustees of the Pioneer Sailing Trust which operates from Brightlingsea in Essex and encourages young people, especially those with disadvantages, to sail. During the OCC's 'troubles' in 1988 – see Chapter XII of *The First Fifty Years* – she provided invaluable support to Commodore Mary Barton, both morally and legally, and in 1998 was elected Rear Commodore despite an already busy schedule.

In 2006, soon after completing seven months of treatment for breast cancer, she took part in the Petit Bateau solo race, a series of testing passage races taking in both sides of the English Channel. Her mission was to raise money for The Institute for Cancer Research and to highlight that there is life after cancer. She finished second in her class and raised over £40,000 for the ICR, adding another £20,000 the following year. She was forced to retire from the 2008 Petit Bateau following gear failure, while a leg broken in a skiing accident thwarted entry to the 2009 event. 2010 saw her continue the fundraising challenge, however, competing with OCC member Jerry Freeman aboard *QII* in her sixth Round Britain and Ireland Race – during which they had to row through a windless stretch on the final leg to avoid being set onto the rocks by the tide. This was her last competitive race, by which time she had raised over £100,000 for The Institute for Cancer Research.

When the passage of years eventually made serious ocean racing difficult Mary returned to skiing, with similar enthusiasm. She skied in France, preferably for the whole season from early December to April. Famous for going out in all weather and making only minimal stops for food and drink, she became a very good skier on and off piste. She broke her leg three more times, making four breaks in all.

In retirement she enjoyed living in her house in the centre of Lymington, a property which included, of course, a small gym in the garden. For many years she was to be seen

in and around Lymington bicycling energetically, and to get fit for a trek in Nepal at age 70 she bicycled with others from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Mary was liked and admired by all who knew her and, though no longer active in our Club's daily life, will be remembered with affection and possibly a little awe by many older members. Her passing is a great loss to the sailing world as a whole.

Andrew Falk and others

William Blunt White

On 16th September 2020 William Blunt White (Bill) sailed over the horizon aged 93. He cast off peacefully from his home in Stonington, Connecticut with his son and daughter by his side. Bill was one of the OCC's most senior members. He joined in 1962, having qualified for membership in 1957 during a transatlantic race from Newport, Rhode Island to Santander, Spain aboard *White Mist*, his father's 46ft Nevins-built S&S yawl.

Bill's significant sailing achievements included seven Newport to Bermuda Races between 1962 and 1984, winning Class C in 1978 with *Snow White*, a Tartan 41. In 1985, while Commodore of the Cruising Club of America, he made his second Atlantic crossing, sailing *White Mist II* from Stonington to Spain in a joint Cruising Club of America / OCC Azores rally that drew boats from both sides of the Atlantic. His voyage home from Spain was via Gran Canaria and the Bahamas, and then north to Stonington. In 1987 he sailed *White Mist II* from Stonington to Newfoundland and explored its coves and bays.

Bill enjoyed the teamwork of organised sailing and volunteered his time and energy, serving as Commodore of the Off Soundings Club (a Long Island Sound sailing club established in 1933) in 1975/76 and eventually as Commodore of the Cruising Club of America in 1985/86. He was also a senior member of the Royal Ocean Racing Club, which he joined in 1965, and of The New York Yacht Club, in which he was member number 50.

Bill learned to sail from his father, G W Blunt White, a noted sailor in the early era

Bill White, then Commodore of the Cruising Club of America, in the Azores during the CCA / OCC rally in 1985

Bill, aged 89, attending his granddaughter's wedding in 2015

of ocean racing. Over his lifetime Bill owned five sailboats and one motorboat. His first was *White Mist*, his father's 46ft yawl, which he inherited at the age of 36 following Blunt's untimely passing in 1962, aged 66. A day out from Nassau at the conclusion of a transatlantic crossing aboard *Cyane*, a 46ft S&S sloop, Blunt had suffered a heart attack, dying in a Nassau hospital. Bill owned *White Mist* only briefly, but sailed her in the 1962 Newport Bermuda Race.

Bill's next boat, in 1968, was as one of eight partners in *The Hawk*, a 37ft William Tripp design and one of the early One Tonners. Bill was aboard *The Hawk* when she competed in the International One Ton Cup series of races held in 1968 and 1969 off Heligoland in the North Sea. His third boat, bought in 1973, was *Snow White*, a Tartan 41 aboard which he won Class C in the 1978 Newport Bermuda Race. His fourth boat, his favourite, was *White Mist II*, a S&S-designed Swan 47 in which he had his greatest adventures, sailing transatlantic twice and cruising Newfoundland. His next boat – *Green Pastures*, a Wilbur 34 – was powered by twin diesels, her design based on a Maine lobster boat. Aboard *Green Pastures*, Bill and his wife Shelley enjoyed coastal cruises. By then in his eighties, Bill's last boat was *Summer White*, an Alerion 28. He appreciated her club-footed jib and easy manners, and day-sailed her easily.

Bill was born in 1926, the son of G W Blunt and Marion (Gildersleeve) White of Mystic, Connecticut. He grew up in Mystic, Connecticut, graduated from Yale University in the class of 1949 and served in the US Navy aboard the diesel submarine USS *Becuna* in 1951. In 1952 he married Shelley Bindloss of Stonington, the next town over. They were happily married for 64 years and had many adventures together, until Shelley predeceased him in 2016. They raised their family in Stonington and built a successful business there, retired to Boca Grande, Florida, and then in their later years returned to Stonington where they enjoyed their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Bill also contributed his skills as a Board Member at the Washington Trust Bank and as a Trustee of Connecticut's Mystic Seaport Museum. His interest in philanthropy led him to be one of the early contributors to, and a Trustee of, the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

Up until the last five months of life Bill's health was good and his mind sharp, but congestive heart failure finally caught up with him. His last months were lived in the comfort of his home with a wonderful view of Stonington harbour and the ocean beyond.

Blunt White

Glenn Wakefield

On 6th September 2020, one month after his 70th birthday, Glenn left his home port of Victoria, British Columbia to sail solo down to Cape Horn in his beloved Sparkman and Stephens-designed Comanche 42, *West Wind II*. Nine days later, 500 miles west-northwest of San Francisco, Glenn suffered a stroke. Before losing consciousness he was able to get one message to his wife MaryLou, saying that he needed help. The US Coast Guard took charge and asked a nearby eastbound container ship, *Colombo Express*, to take Glenn aboard. In rough seas, a skilled small boat crew got the unconscious Glenn off *West Wind II* and aboard the *Colombo Express*, which then continued towards the coast. A helicopter met the ship and took Glenn to a medical facility, an operation which required mid-air refuelling from three-fixed wing aircraft to extend the helicopter's range. Two weeks later Glenn was medevacked home to Victoria, where he passed away peacefully on 5th October.

Glenn's lifelong dream started when he was a young boy sitting on the beach, looking out to sea and imagining himself one day sailing a tiny boat on a big ocean. He grew up reading of the adventures of Captain Cook, Sir Francis Chichester and Sir Alec Rose. Throughout his life he read and reread hundreds of books about sailing, particularly those of the singlehanders with whom he most closely identified – John Guzzwell, Robin Knox-Johnston and Dee Caffari.

A born adventurer, at the age of 19 Glenn travelled around the world, making friends everywhere he went. He kept in touch with many of them throughout his life, recently celebrating a 50 year reunion. He worked as a logger, a fisherman, a surveyor and a carpenter, and built a reputation in Victoria for his skill in commercial and residential construction and heritage restoration.

Glenn aboard Sannu II in 1997

Glenn aboard West Wind II in September 2013

Glenn's love for his family was well known. He met MaryLou in 1979 and theirs was a storybook love affair. Their two beautiful daughters, Claire and Nicola, were his pride and joy.

In 1997 Glenn sailed his 26ft Haida *Sannu II* singlehanded from Victoria, BC to the Marquesas Islands, covering 5000 miles in 42 days, the passage he cited as his qualifying voyage when joining the OCC in 2008. MaryLou and their two daughters, aged 9 and 11, joined him in the Marquesas to sail across the South Pacific through French Polynesia, the Cook Islands, Niue and Tonga. Glenn then singlehanded the 18-day leg from Tonga to New Zealand, dealing with a cyclone along the way, after which the family travelled around Australia and South Africa.

In September 2007 Glenn set off on his first attempt at a solo, non-stop westabout circumnavigation from Victoria on his 40ft Cheoy Lee *Kim Chow*. Few people have made such a voyage. Glenn sailed south of New Zealand and Australia but on 24th April 2008, after 220 days at sea and about a thousand miles off the coast of Argentina in the Southern Ocean, he was forced to abandon his disabled vessel after a series of relentless storms rolled his boat, causing serious damage and injuring him. Glenn was rescued by the Argentinean Navy, but *Kim Chow* was lost.

In late 2010 Glenn bought a 50-year-old S&S designed Comanche 42, which he trucked across the US to Victoria. After an extensive two-year refit/rebuild, most of which he did himself, *West Wind II* was ready to go. On 2nd September 2013 Glenn set off again to make a non-stop westabout solo circumnavigation south of the Great Capes. After again sailing south of New Zealand and Australia, Glenn was well out into the Indian Ocean when a routine inspection found that rigging wire was unravelling on two shrouds. With great reluctance he realised that he could not expect to sail safely against the west winds to round Cape Horn and would have to sail back to Fremantle, Western Australia to make repairs. By then it was too late in the season to attempt the passage around Cape Horn, so

Glenn aboard Kim Chow in September 2007 before departing on his first solo circumnavigation

Departure Day,
West Wind II,
6th September 2020

he sailed back to Victoria eastabout with stops in New Zealand, the Cook Islands and Hawaii. In 2014 Glenn was awarded the OCC Endurance Award in recognition of his perseverance over the previous eight years.

Over his lifetime Glenn logged close to 55,000 ocean miles and made three attempts to complete a singlehanded non-stop circumnavigation his way – westabout. While many couldn't understand what could drive him to undertake something they viewed as nigh on impossible, those closest to him understood that it was enough that it mattered to him and they supported his dream every step of the way.

His last voyage would have taken him eastabout around Cape Horn to 48°10'S 51°57'W – near the Falkland Islands and the precise location where he had lost *Kim Chow* and been rescued in 2008. After that, he planned to stop in Argentina to meet members of the Argentinean Navy who had rescued him, and then head back around Cape Horn and home to Victoria. Tragically, fate had other plans for Glenn who was taken from us before he could fulfil his dream. However MaryLou intends to publish Glenn's story, to ensure that he has a place among the finest singlehanded sailors of our time.

Fair winds and smooth seas, Glenn.

MaryLou Wakefield
and Tony Gooch

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