

From: Wotan [<mailto:mfuu8@sailmail.com>]
Sent: 23 June 2006 20:00
To: Bimbi Fawcett
Subject: Wotan's Wanderings for distribution

Hi All,

Here comes the next installment, now that we have reached Newport RI safely. We missed Alberto, which went way to the north of us but we did experience its fall out in the form of pouring rain as we were leaving Bermuda.

Bermuda is a long thin series of islands with the airport and St Georges at one end, Hamilton roughly in the middle and Ireland Island, on which stands the old HM Dockyard, at the other end of the archipelago. The roads would not disgrace a Devonshire country lane. There is a 35km/hr speed limit you would be pushed to break. There are no hire cars, but only motor scooters to hire. When a cruise liner comes in lorry full of scooters are off loaded at the liner dock for the punters to drive. More fun are the electricpowered scooters, designed by Clive Sinclair, on which you scoot around the dockyard. Why they don't fall over I cannot understand!

Tuesday morning was spent trying to get Nicole the NKE autopilot mended. A very efficient chap called Mark, who also runs the marina came to have a look at Nicole. I put him in touch with Joel Bars at NKE in France, who spoke English. They concluded that probably the control/command unit on deck had died. Mark put me in touch with Euro Marine the only NKE agent in the US based in Newport RI. They said they could replace the faulty command unit so I decided to change my plans yet again and sail to Newport rather than Norfolk, Va. or indeed New York. I think I can be reasonably accused of indecision.

On Wednesday Bim and I went to the supermarket and came out with 5 trolleys bursting with food and a very large hole in my wallet. How we would ever eat all this lot we did not know. However we ate though most of the food we bought for the Tortola-Bermuda trip so may be there is hope yet!

Bermuda is a mega cruising destination. There was a ship at the Dockyard almost everyday, as well as ships in Hamilton and St Georges. These liners disgorge hordes of tourists of all shapes and sizes, often of the maxi big pantie woman variety. They stream back and forth in time to meal times, because all the food on the liners is free and they need to get back aboard to feed themselves up for the next exhausting foray into Bermuda.

We took the ferry over to Hamilton and then a bus out to the airport to meet Chris, who as usual had paid almost nothing to fly First Class.

On Thursday morning Bim and Chris set off to do the fresh provision shopping. They completed this Herculean task in good order, but were defeated by the lack of a taxi and were forced to take a bus with their 20 large paper bags. As a final insult, bus would not come round to the pontoon, so they had to hire a taxi for the last 300 yards of the journey!

Simon Avison, armed with his US Visa acquired in record time, was due to arrive at 1820, so we had to head over to St Georges. We slipped moorings and motored out of the Dockyard east along the north coast of Bermuda. We had a good sail around with helpful southerly wind. I had tried to get a berth at Captain Smokes Marina, which, it turned out, had literally recently gone up in smoke, and at the St Georges Dinghy & Sports Club, but to no avail. We needed to refuel so Chris called the fuel berth on his mobile to ask where they were. The manager was somewhat non-plussed and asked uncomprehendingly "can't you see the Shell flag?" As it happened the fuel berth was hiding in between two cruise liners. There was a red post astern the second cruise liner berth which after much deliberation we left to starboard, "red right returning", which was not marked on our chart. Anyhow to cut a long story short we ran aground albeit very briefly, amidst anguished shouts from the shore! We got onto the fuel berth with no further incident.

We were soon tied up on the town quay by the fuelling berth and thinking about how to get to the airport and the Bermuda Weather Service for a weather briefing. We found the Weather Service offices underneath the airport control tower, where we were met by James, to whom I had spoken on the phone earlier. He gave us a brilliant briefing and showed us all his screens and weather models. He left us with a chart of the Gulf Stream and showed us how we could use a cold eddy and a hot eddy to sling shot ourselves towards Newport. The good news was that apart from pouring rain on Friday the weather was fair, with the wind going into the north east on Saturday and into the south sometime on Sunday, when we would be crossing the Gulf Stream.

Simon arrived safely and with Bim they came to collect us from the Weather Service and back to Wotan. We quickly stored Simon's gear and headed off by taxi to Blackbeard Restaurant under the walls of fort St Catherine. Negotiating the boarding ladder on the way back, down to the deck, now that it was dark, low tide and a rum punch or two later, proved interesting. Bim made it down like a gazelle!

Friday 16th June 2006 (Day 162) St George's, Bermuda to Newport RI

The day dawned shitty, the promised front was coming through as we trod the streets of St George's to clear customs. Clearing out was no problem, except that Bim had lost her immigration form. If it is not an immigration form it is a ticket. The lady in Customs was very understanding. She simply made out another one. I suspect this may just have happened before! For the princely sum of \$1 we were awarded copies of the latest met charts for the next 4 days. Back onto Wotan and to cast off.

The wind was still SW 3-4, so we made good progress north east out past Mills Breaker buoy and past the 200 metre line. By noon we were heading north towards Position X which, on the advice of the Weather Service, which was where we decided was the best place to enter the Gulf Stream. By early afternoon the wind had dropped and we had to motor, but later in the afternoon the wind filled in again and we were back under sail until 8pm when we took in reefs 1&2 and a number of rolls on the genoa, which by 10pm we had unfurled again. However at midnight we started the motor again.

Poor Simon was feeling very Uncle Dick and retired to his bunk, where he remained for until Sunday morning, having taken a share of the Friday night watch.

Saturday 17th 2006 (Day 163) St George's, Bermuda to Newport RI

I recorded in the log that at 4am we were still motoring but under a beautiful moon. By this time the front had gone through and we were entering the high pressure zone which followed it. At 6.30am we were able to cut the engine, unfurl the genoa and get sailing again. We kept going at about 6 knots for most of the day, with the sea state increasing from slight to moderate. We were crashing though the waves with the anchor playing tunes in its position on the bow roller. At 1220 I called up a container ship called Lorraine, which was able to confirm that they had no information of any bad weather ahead on the route up to Newport. This served to confirm what we had been told by the Bermuda Weather Service. During the day we measured the sea temperature periodically, at noon on Friday it was 24°, by noon today it had dropped to 22.4°C. The sea temperature was to prove important as an indication of the approach of the Gulf Stream, which is a body of hotter water coming up from the Gulf of Mexico.

Poor Simon was still feeling so Uncle Dick that we counted him out of the night's watches. The good news about Wotan is that despite the lack of Nicole she will generally steer herself when the wind is forward of the beam if you set the wheel up properly. Bim lent us her iPod nano for us to listen to during our watches. This made them go a lot more quickly. I listened to Cose fan tutte and in particular Soave il vento, or May the winds blow you gently.

Sunday 19th June 2006 (Day 164) St George's, Bermuda to Newport RI

At midnight we were still sailing but it was clear that the wind was taking off as expected. We were sailing into the middle of a high and we expected the wind to go round to the south as we track across it. Bim, who has been a brick, and even owns up to enjoying her starlit watch, had a bad time as the wind went aft and died. Thus when I came on watch at 4am we had to start the motor. At 5.30am I spotted a large floating metal object at 35° 58'N; 66° 48'W, about 15 feet above the water and 15 feet in diameter. As it did not look at all friendly and was not lit, I tried reporting it on my SatC using the Navigational Hazards code 43, but I could not make it work. I then e-mailed Falmouth CG and asked them to inform the USCG as did not have their e-mail address. The Newport- Bermuda race started on Friday 16th June, so the yachts would be going through area in which this floating hazard was situated. In the end I found the USCG e-mail address on a SatC message and I was able to send them the hazard report direct. I was rewarded later in the evening seeing my hazard report being promulgated by RCC Norfolk on the SatC. I was rather chuffed by this!

By morning the sea was mill pond calm and Simon was alive and well again, thank heavens. We were motoring at 1500 rpm to the east of a cold eddy which was supposed to sling us north at some undisclosed rate. In the even we have been experiencing a 3-4 knot as at 1500 rpm we would expect to do between 5 and 6 knots depending on the wind and are now doing 9 knots, heading towards the mythical Point X. By midday we were very near Point X and SOGing (SOG= Speed over the ground) along at

10 knots in the right direction, now that's a bonus for you! While all this was going on, Bim produced a brilliant chicken pasta lunch using the spare chicken left over from last night's dinner. There are some advantages in Simon not eating dinner!

During the day we saw a yacht heading south under spinnaker and called her up. It turned out that she was a Classic Swan 43 called Hirumaru on the Bermuda Race. We explained that we were an even more classic Swan 411 at which point Hirumaru rather lost interest in us! We also spoke to Priority a J44 heading from Bermuda to Montauk. They were much more friendly, and we agree to speak to them later in the evening, which we did. We scheduled a call for 0900 on Monday morning but we were not able to get through.

As we were half way at noon we celebrated with pink champagne and an extended happy hour as we moved our clocks back to Eastern Daylight Time. Chris produced a delicious Thai curry. We took in a reef after dinner, but no sooner had we done that than the wind dropped and we were motoring again.

Monday 20th June 2006 (Day 165) St George's, Bermuda to Newport RI

At midnight when Bim was due to come off watch, we cut the engine, but by 0200 all hell had broken loose. We had a 30 knot wind and rough seas. All hands were called and we put in two reefs and spent a miserable night with seas washing over the boat and getting extremely wet. The crew were wonderful and kept going through all this. The cabin was getting wet because water was coming down the mast and poor Chris had to go to sleep in his oilies and boots. Water was slopping around the saloon floor as water was getting in through the hawse pipe despite the fact that it had been blocked up. Because we were on port tack water was coming into the heads and this was slopping into the heads compartment. We were able to stem this by shutting off the offending outlet seacock and by pumping out the shower tray into which the water had collected. Chris and I bailed out the bilge and in the end we only took out about 3 gallons, but those three gallons were getting everywhere!

The wind rarely dropped below 23 knots all day and was quite often up to 30 knots+, so life was not exactly a bundle of laughs. Chris rose to the occasion as usual and produced a formidable beef curry, from a rather unprepossessing tin of soup which was advertised as "being more like a meal". We all ate it with relish as we had been on a no food diet all day apart from the occasional apple and the rare piece of Toblerone. Simon, who had been feeling Uncle Dick earlier, was completely unfazed by the filthy weather we had, and indeed seemed to be revelling in it.

The weather charts which we were given by the Bermuda Weather Service gave no indication of the strength of the wind which we were experiencing. The US NOA forecast which came out on Sunday indicated winds of up to 25 knots in our area. Interestingly our barograph showed a spike in atmospheric pressure to 1027, which occurred when I changed the paper trace. This pressure fell rapidly to 1025, the ambient pressure of the high reported by NOA. Perhaps spike this led to the higher wind speeds which we experienced crossing the Gulf Stream.

One of the features of the voyage though the Gulf Stream is the way the temperature changes. When we left Bermuda on Friday, the sea temperature was 24°C. By Saturday night it was down to 22°C. As we got into the Gulf Stream proper, past the cold eddy on Sunday afternoon it had increased to 26.2°C, the highest temperature we recorded. It soon began to drop so that by noon on Monday when we were banging around in the Gulf Stream it had dropped to 24.1°C and by 2200 it was down to 17.8°C. This was not all, by 0400 on Tuesday as we were approaching the New England coast it dropped to 12°C, under the influence of the Labrador current which flows from Labrador down the coast of Maine then follows the US coast round to the West and down Long Island. As we approached Newport, the temperature began to rise, such that at noon on Tuesday we recorded a temperature of 14.6°C. This is of course well below Barracuda bathing limits!

Tuesday 21th June 2006 (Day 166) St George's, Bermuda to Newport RI

By early morning the sea had reduced significantly as we left the influence of the Gulf Stream, which generates its own turbulence. The weather forecasters in Bermuda said that the Gulf Stream can appear at times like a wall. I am pleased to say we did not experience this phenomenon. The Gulf Stream induces its own weather because sea temperature has a profound effect on atmospheric conditions. The impact of a rapid change in water temperature can, and often does, produce changes in weather.

We had a lovely night's sailing with little in sight, or on the radar screen. During the morning visibility began to reduce. The NOA forecast warned of fog banks to the east, an area very susceptible to fog. By 1100 the fog had closed in to 50 metres and we had the radar running. Needless to say at this point a number of large echoes appeared on the screen, which kept me busy plotting them until the fog lifted as we approached the Brenton Reef Fairway Buoy, which we had been aiming for since we left Bermuda. We spotted the buoy just before 1430, but we still could not see land. Once we reached the Brenton Reef No2 buoy we could see land and the enormous seaside houses of the old monied New England WASPs.

We were somewhat fearful of our encounter with the US Customs, we had been warned that they would throw away all our fresh food and lock up the heads. The prospect of losing access to her precious heads, put the fear of god into Bim, who had otherwise exhibited impeccable sang froid throughout the voyage. I called the Customs as we approached land and after a few dropped calls I eventually got through to what must have been a central office, who wanted details of the crew, passport numbers, dates of birth etc., which fortunately I had to hand. I was then told to call Officer Notoriani on a Newport number. I spoke to him and we agreed that I would call him once I was near to the dock with the marina name and dock number. This I did, and true to his promise he was at the dock as we arrived, while two lads from the marina took our lines. He was charm personified, though he did pack a mighty big piece of artillery! He did not ask to see our food or the heads, so we reckon we got off lightly. He was last seen heading off to his car chomping on his cigar! Now for the bad news, the berth in this marina costs an eye watering \$4.50 per foot per night.

The next installment will take us from Newport to New York.

With best wishes from

Vasco Fawcett and all aboard Wotan