

ALDEBARAN

World Sailing Circumnavigation

25th Report

THE 3,000 mile PACIFIC CROSSING. (from The Galapagos to The Marqueses)

Our last report ended with the following paragraph.

“Thur. 5th April at 1120 hrs we lifted our anchor and began what would be our longest ocean passage which we estimated would take 25 to 30 days. On our previous ocean crossing, the Atlantic, we had had two extra crew members, John Cotter and Micky McCaldin, on this crossing we would be on our own. Our next report, will include a full account of the passage.

That is, if we make it!!!!”

Were we nervous? NO.

After 20 months living on and sailing ALDEBARAN we are much more relaxed and confident in her and our ability in handling our floating home.

As mentioned earlier, Villamil on Isla Isabella in the Galapagos is a popular setting off point for the Pacific crossing with one or two boats departing each day during the crossing season. However the day we left we were accompanied by six boats, three Americans **SOMEDAY IS HERE**, **ARGONAUTA** and another **ALDEBARAN** from Milwaukee, two English boats **MUNA** and **CAP D'OR** and a Canadian boat **MARITIME EXPRESS**.

Daily journal:

This report is extracted mainly from our daily journal and log book and as such the format and composition is somewhat different.

With 630 litres of diesel aboard we were prepared for a lot of motoring, which is the norm on this passage. Luckily, after 20 minutes of clearing the anchorage we hoisted our sails and for the next 10.5 hours had lovely sailing conditions. In our **first 24 hours** we covered **129 miles** with 8 hours motoring to position 01-46' South / 092-54' West.

Lost engine:

On the second day out our friends in **MUNA** lost the use of their engine due to a leak in the fresh water cooling pump. Not having a spare, and even if they had they would not have been capable of replacing it due to its inaccessibility on their Perkins Prima, they were faced with the dilemma of continuing or returning to the Galapagos in the hope of getting a replacement. They soon discovered that by catching as much of the leaking water as possible, recycling it, as their supply of fresh water did not allow for such emergency, it enabled them to run the engine for short periods to charge the batteries although not sufficiently to run the refrigeration. To perform this the engine covers had to come off and this allowed water to spray all over the galley etc. Not a nice situation but continue on they did.

Monday 9th:

For the first four days we had excellent conditions, even with the wind very light much of the time, clear skies and lots of sunshine. On **day two** we covered **110 miles** to position 02-09'S / 094-40'W, while day 3 saw our mileage reduce to **91** (posn. 02-36'S / 096-05'W). **Day 4** was also very light with only **102 miles** (posn. 03-20'S / 097-33'W). During these first four days we used our cruising chute a lot and it was most beneficial especially when we set it up to easily convert it from a cruising chute attached to the bow and then setting it on our spinnaker pole to fly as a conventional spinnaker. This system works great. For non-sailors a cruising chute is a sail hoisted on a halyard and attached at the bow and used in light weather. It does not work well with the wind directly aft due to being sheltered by the mainsail and so by attaching a guy (rope) to its tack (the corner at the bow), releasing it from the bow, setting the spinnaker pole, pulling back on the new guy we could "spread" the cruising chute (sail) out on the opposite side to the mainsail and thus allow it catch undisturbed wind.

Our four day "Pacific Honeymoon" ended at 1700hrs on Monday when we had our first bad squall. Thinking it would only last a short while like the two we had earlier in the day we did not reef. Big mistake. It lasted all night with winds constantly in the 25/30 knot range accompanied by torrential rain, a reminder of home except for the temperature. **It was the first rain we had in over three months.** With full mainsail and reefed headsail we were regularly reaching speeds of over 8 knots. At day break we wasted no time in putting two reefs in the mainsail. For the **5th day**, even with light winds for the first 8 hours we logged **127 miles** (posn. 03-57'S / 099-30'W) leaving a distance to go of 2,363 miles.

Until being hit by the heavy squall yesterday, we had been in visual contact with **MARITIME EXPRESS, ARGONAUTA** and **CAP D'OR**, this certainly made the first few day very pleasant, as we were able to speak regularly on the VHF radio. We only lost visual with the other **ALDEBARAN** the day before.

We did not shake out the reefs until 1020 hrs on Wed 11th or 25 hours after putting them in. For our 6th day we covered **137 miles** to position 04-56'S / 101-31'W.

First fish of crossing:

Going into our 7th day in the middle of a very heavy rainsquall with lots of wind we caught our first fish of the crossing, a 5lb dorado. It provided us with our main meal for two days.

First Week Summary:

The **last day of our first week** at sea had us cover **146 miles** to position 05-28'S / 103-49'W and a total for the week of **842 miles** with **2,092 miles** to go. Our engine hours for the same period were 35 or 21% and generator hours 19 or 11%. Our generator is used to cool the fridge and charge the batteries. For the 35 engine and 19 generator hours we used 92 litres of fuel or 15% of our 629 litres. These figures are much better than expected. We have not seen the sun in over three days and in the same time had some ferocious rainsqualls lasting many hours. Only one ship was sighted in the week, this is a very big and lonely ocean. However with our long range single side band radios we are in regular contact with other boats and know exactly where they are in the event of an emergency. So far, keeping our fingers crossed, **ALDEBARAN** has performed great.

Day 8 and we were still in rainsqualls and 100% cloud cover, however the wind was good and we did **122 miles** in the past 24 hours to pos. 06-07'S / 105-44'W. We are operating a 3 hours on and 3 hours off watch system during the night, we had started the passage doing 4 hours on and 4 off but found we were not getting enough sleep and it was very tiring.

Day 9, Good Friday, saw us cover **137 miles** (06-50'S / 107-53'W), an improvement in the weather with sunny spells for short periods gave us an opportunity to dry things. Our only contact with other boats now is by SSB radio during the various arranged listening times.

"The Big Fish Net" has been the main daily radio net each morning when we all give our position, weather report and any problems that have arisen in the past 24 hours. The number of boats on the net grew to almost 30 when it was decided to divide it into smaller groups in order to reduce the work of the net controllers. I am now net controller for the first 20 boats on the passage. How do I get these jobs?

Day 10, Easter Saturday, was a day to remember. It started raining at 1000 hrs and did not cease for 18 hours during which we had numerous thunder and lightning storms. It was the first time we were concerned about a lightning strike. **ALDEBARAN** for the first time leaked a little from two windows. We replenished our water tanks and filled all available containers with rainwater. Somehow or other we thought of Scotland. Rainwater is perhaps the purest you can get and is lovely to drink. At least we will not die from thirst. Bad and all as the day was we managed our best days run of the passage to date at **149 miles** to position 07-34'S / 110-15'W. Having now covered a total of 1,250 miles we still have 1,693 to go.

Day 11, Easter Sunday began as the previous day concluded with lots of rain. The wind eased to 4 or 5 knots and we motored for eight hours in blinding rain and a lumpy sea. Another **143 miles** to position 08-24'S and 112-29'W satisfied us. Our friends Julius and Sally in **ARGONAUTA** caught and passed us during the night. It was very nice to be back in VHF range with another boat.

Day 12, saw a vast improvement in the weather with only a few showers and lots of sunshine. We again went ahead of **ARGONAUTA** for the third time on the passage, they are 47 feet long but have problems with their auto steering and have to hand steer a lot. We stayed within VHF range for the remainder of the day.

Half way was reached last night at 0115 hrs and we now have "only" 1,471 miles to go. Imagine saying "only" 1,471 miles to go. Back home 100 miles was an epic voyage. By days end we covered **146 miles** to position 08-35'S and 114-56'W.

Why am I giving the latitude and longitude positions? It is to allow people to plot on charts and also for the boats we know are coming through next year and later and who are following our reports with interest.

Food is Olivia's speciality, she is able to produce the most appetising of meals despite some very uncomfortable conditions, of course you hear cursing from the galley every now and then. Yesterday unfortunately was not one of her better days. In the process of making French Bread she came across rotten eggs one of which exploded when she went to crack it. These were eggs we bought in Isle Isabella less than two weeks ago. Olivia was very meticulous in turning them each day in order to preserve them. I am sure the boats downwind of us for about 200 miles could smell them. However, the variety of food she produces is truly amazing.

What about morale? So far we are really enjoying the passage but it will be interesting to record how we feel after 25 or so days at sea. We tend to relax a lot, what else can we do, as long as the boat is going at a reasonable speed and in the right direction we are happy and do not worry about tweaking the sails every few minutes to get an extra fraction of a knot. An extra day or two at sea does not worry us. The

constant rolling of the boat does not bother us any more, except of course when it gets really bad for a sustained period.

How do we pass the day, you might ask?

From 0700 hrs until 0930 hrs we listen and partake in various radio nets talking to boats up to almost 2,000 miles away. Reports from boats ahead gives us a good idea as to what to expect weather wise and if there is an area of very bad weather gives us time to steer an avoiding course. During the same hours we have breakfast consisting mainly of cereal, bread, butter and marmalade and of course one or two cups of tea. Unfortunately we have run out of our favourite Bewley's tea. Before or after breakfast we would set the sails for the wind conditions which mainly means shaking out the reef or reefs in the mainsail and headsail put in the previous night. Because our mainsail is fully battened we have slab reefing which has to be performed at the mast and thus for safety reasons we have a policy of reefing for night sailing. If you get caught in a squall in the middle of the night it is not very nice having to go on deck to reef. Of course boats with in mast furling would not have this problem and neither would those fitted with single line reefing led back to the cockpit. After setting the sails, Olivia goes for a rest until about 1100 hours at which time we would have a cup of coffee and a little treat which Olivia always seems to produce. The next couple of hours would be spent reading, working on the computer or doing odd jobs on the boat. Yes, there are always jobs to do. We normally have our main meal about 1300 hrs after which we read and rest until about 1500 hrs. Boggle, a word game, Yahtzee, a dice game and cards pass a couple of hours in the afternoon. However, in our everyday mode of undress "strip poker" does not have the same appeal. Just prior to sunset we have a "little drink", Olivia has not touched alcohol since this passage began and I might have a beer or maybe a brandy and sprite but there are many days when I do not have alcohol. A lot of boats stay "dry" on passages but I enjoy the odd little drink. After a light tea we listen to the evening radio nets before setting the sails for the night. I take the 1930 to 2230 watch, Olivia the 2230 to 0130, and me again from 0130 to 0430 and finally Olivia back from 0430 to 0730. This then brings us to a new day and more or less the same routine.

10 Foot Breaking Waves on day 13 was without doubt the roughest weather we have had on the passage. All boats in our vicinity reported similar conditions. For almost 24 hours it was like living in a tumble dryer. It was blowing over 20 knots, and we had a reef in the mainsail and headsail. The only element missing was rain, not a drop all day and thus Olivia got the washing dry. **ALDEBARAN** behaved exceptionally in the conditions and we were pleased to have almost 17 ton of boat under us rather than one of the much lighter mass produced designs. Despite the stronger winds we only covered **142 miles** to position 09-11'S and 117-12'W leaving us with **1,268 miles** to go to our planned landfall of Fatu Hiva in the south east of the Marqueses group.

Day 14, two weeks out, dawned with a clear blue sky and 15 knots of wind from the usual southeast. We are sailing wing on wing i.e. the mainsail on the starboard side and the headsail boomed out on the port side. At times it is very roly but we are getting used to the continual motion. After the radio nets we put our clocks back one hour to GMT -7 hours or Irish Summer time -8 hours. This always confuses us for a few days until we get used to the change. On this passage we travel through three time zones and will on reaching the Marqueses be GMT -9.5 hours or Irish Summer time -10.5 hours. We have covered **1,821 miles** for an average of **130 miles per day** and miles to go are down to **1,131**. The engine was run for **43 hours** and the generator **41 hours** using a total of **121 litres, only 19% of our 629 litres**. These figures are much better than expected.

Problems on board:

Of the seven boats that left the Galapagos together five have problems, **MUNA** lost her engine on the 2nd day due to the fresh water cooling pump leaking, **MARITIME EXPRESS** also lost her engine on the 10th day due to diesel in the oil, **CAP D'OR** have an oil pressure problem but are still able to run the engine at low revs, **ARGONAUTA** have to hand steer in most conditions due to their autopilot being unable to cope, they also have problems with their SSB radio, **SOMEDAY IS HERE** also had autopilot problems and three days ago the shackle at the top of the headsail came undone and the sail came down the foil and into the water resulting in major tears, the following day they rendezvoused with **MARITIME EXPRESS** who gave them the loan of another headsail. The transfer itself was a very difficult manoeuvre in rough seas. **ALDEBARAN (USA)** tore a spinnaker.

In addition to the above five, yesterday **LIBERATOR** who left about four days ahead of us blew a hole in their exhaust and at present are trying to make a repair. Also yesterday **FAIR HIPPOLYTA** who left a day ahead of us is unable to start their engine and is also at present trying to find the reason. Later they reported a leak through they believe the keel bolts and prepared to abandoned ship, luckily they solved the problem. **VINDROSA** (Swedish), who crossed the Atlantic with us, lost their autopilot early on the passage and hove-to each night to give them a rest from hand steering.

So far so good aboard our ALDEBARAN, but keeping our fingers crossed.

AT THIS MOMENT:

Friday 20th April at 1630 local (2330GMT). The wind is blowing at 25 plus knots or force 6, the seas coming up astern are huge, about 10/12 ft. We are sailing wing on wing with a reef in the mainsail and the headsail set on the spinnaker pole also reefed. The boat is being tossed from side to side on a regular basis. Anything moveable has already been sent to the floor, the teapot has just been tossed of the cooker and the remaining cold tea spilt over the floor. We have just come down from the cockpit after watching the surrounding seas in awe. Waves are breaking all round us. As long as the waves are moving faster than us we are ok, its when the boat begins travelling faster than the waves and thus catching up with the one in front that you have big problems. The boat can then nose dive into the wave ahead, be stopped and pitch pole head over heels. We would rather not think of the consequences. Have just heard on the radio re the progress of the arranged meeting between **SOMEDAY IS HERE** and **MARITIME EXPRESS** with **ARGONAUTA** who lost their forestay last night. They hope to rendezvous early in the morning when **Ken** from **SOMEDAY** and **Henry** from **MARITIME** will attempt to board **ARGONAUTA** and help in lowering the remnants of the forestay and headsail furling unit and secure the mast with additional halyards. All these boats are being crewed by couples and when a crew member leaves the boat the remaining member has to take full control. This is not an easy task for some of the female crews who would not normally be as experienced as their male partners.

Don't believe what you read:

All the books you read about this Pacific passage guarantee a smooth sea, nice weather and wind, plenty of sunshine etc. etc.. We have on the contrary experienced the opposite; perhaps I should produce a book entitled "Pacific Crossing, the Truth".

Day 15 and 16 saw us cover **139 and 154 miles**, to position 09-20'S and 124-29'W, leaving **841 miles to go**, this was our biggest daily run of the passage to date. We have altered course to avoid going to far south, our landfall is at 10-22'S. We have a good current with us here, but I think we would lose it if we went south to soon. We also have a good wind of 15 knots from the East South East, are going in the right direction and very happy with our progress

A successful rescue:

We have just received news that **ARGONAUTA's** broken forestay and roller furler have been lowered to his deck and secured. Henry from **MARITIME EXPRESS** and Ken from **SOMEDAY IS HERE** transferred via rubber dinghy in very dangerous conditions. **ARGONAUTA**, while hove to in order to slow down trailed his dinghy on a long line. Ken and Henry's wives then drove their boats at the dinghy, and the boys jumped into it, they of course wore lifejackets. The first boarding attempt at 0900 had to be abandoned and it was not until 1200 hrs that the transfer was achieved. It took three hours to secure the rig. The headsail halyard was already chafed through half way and would certainly not have lasted much longer with the possibility of the whole mast coming down. Returning to their respective boats also had its dangerous moments. Wendy on **SOMEDAY** and Gail on **MARITIME** showed great seamanship (or should I say seawomanship) in manoeuvring their boats, under extreme conditions, to offload and recover their men folk from the trailing dinghy. Unfortunately during the earlier boarding attempt a rope got caught on **Someday's** propeller and Ken had to don his diving gear to free it. It proved to be a very dangerous exercise under the conditions. This was **MARITIME'S** second time to assist a boat on the crossing, they had earlier transferred a replacement headsail to **SOMEDAY**.

Day 17 saw us cover **147 miles** with just **694** to go to Fatu-Hiva. We are already watching every mile count down and looking forward to reaching land. At present the nearest land is 3 miles down, i.e. the Ocean bottom. Conditions are still very rolly and uncomfortable at times especially for Olivia cooking. Last night on the horizon I saw the lights of a fishing trawler. This was the first boat we had seen in over two weeks. It really is a very big and lonely ocean and we are glad we have the Single Side Band long range radio for communicating with other boats in case of an emergency.

E-mailing from the boat has been a great luxury, we are able to send and get daily reports from our family. Being restricted to a maximum connection time of ten minutes per day and the system being quite slow means we can only send and receive short messages with no attachments. Any message over 4000 bytes will not get through. To set up the system we had to purchase from Germany a Pactor 11e modem, connect it to the single side band radio and finally register with the server "Sailmail" for \$200 per year. The daily e-mailing does not cost anything. It has been one of our best buys.

Day 18 brought a mixture of conditions. Up to and including during the night we had a good wind of 15 knots from East South East with the occasional squall up to 25 knots but little rain. Then at 1000 hrs the wind died to nothing with very heavy rain. Bobbing round on the ocean with no wind and a confused sea is not pleasant and so we motored for about four hours when the wind returned, blowing a steady 20 knots, again from ESE. As a result of the light winds we only covered **129 miles** in the 24 hours leaving **567** to go.

Day 19 saw us change our clocks back another hour, we are now 8 hours behind Greenwich and 9 behind Ireland. Changing clocks and the times of radio nets gets me very confused. At 0600 hrs a tanker crossed our bows 0.7 miles ahead, I tried raising him on the vhf without success. Since departing the Galapagos, that was only the second ship we saw in addition to a fishing trawler two nights ago. With good steady winds we covered **147 miles** in the last 24 hours and are now in position 09-54'South and 131-34'West with only **420** miles to go.

Getting uneasy and tired:

With 420 miles to go we are trying to plan our arrival time so as not to approach the islands in the dark. When we had 2000 miles to go we were much more relaxed and were unconcerned about our speed or sail configuration as long as we were generally going in the right direction. Now we are wishing the miles away and looking forward to getting a full night's sleep. We are barely getting five hours sleep per night and with the boat rolling heavily even that would be a good night's sleep. But we are not complaining, better here than back in the cold and wet of home. The rewards at the end of this very long passage hopefully will be worth it.

Day 20 sees us with **266 miles** to go having covered **154 miles** yesterday, one of our better daily distances. The wind is still blowing 15/25 knots from ESE and we are still sailing with a reefed mainsail to starboard and the headsail reefed and boomed out to port, in other words "wing on wing" for the benefit of non-sailors. We have been running like this for over a week now.

The cook, poor Olivia, has for some "unknown" reason lost interest in preparing her exquisite meals. Do you think it has something to do with having cooked for 20 days in a very unstable galley and knowing we should be back on dry land in two days? Yesterday she found creepy crawly things in some of the flour bought in Panama. I think we might be eating out for a few days on arrival.

An emergency:

Sadly, this morning we heard of a yacht named "PANDORA" who may be in difficulty about 900 miles North of us. His Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) has been activated and the American Coast Guards are searching for him. Hopefully he/they are ok. Again I stress this is a very big ocean and we are like a cork bobbing about in it.

At this moment, Wed 25th April at 1600 hours (2400 GMT) I am being thrown about trying to type this report. I popped my head up a few minutes ago and the scene is not for the faint hearted. The seas bearing down on us from directly astern are massive; they must be about 12 feet. Their blue crests are turning to a raging cauldron of white water as they break round us. At times like this you keep your fingers crossed that nothing breaks, it could be disastrous. Olivia has just been up and had a look and has now retired to bed with another book, what else can she do. As soon as I complete this report I will do the same. Wow! We have just been hit broadside by a huge rogue wave and water poured in through the galley window, not the place for a cook. Mop up will now take place so bye for now. Olivia has just said she would love a bar of Cadburys whole nut chocolate, some chance.

Day 21 and the end is only 124 miles away. To avoid arriving in the dark we have slowed down by putting a second reef in the mainsail and headsail. If the wind holds this should have us arriving early in the morning. We need to anchor before 0920 hrs (our time) to complete the voyage in under 22 days. This would be great considering we estimated 25 days. There is an isolated rock only four metres above water fifteen miles from Fatu-Hiva and directly in our path. For no apparent reason this small navigation hazard has been playing on my mind since leaving the Galapagos so the sooner it is behind us the better. The seas are still confused and so we are continuing to "rock & roll" to our destination.

At 1945 hrs I decided to alter our approach to the island by sailing round the south end rather than the planned north end. This has three advantages, (1) we would avoid going any way near my feared isolated rock, (2) it would avoid gybing onto starboard in the middle of the night and then having to gybe back onto port on rounding the north coast early in the morning and (3) as we are heading straight for the south end of the island we do not have to alter course and will only have one gybe onto starboard early in the morning.

Spotted on radar:

At 0620 hrs I switched on the radar and saw landfall on the radar screen for the first time in three weeks, it was still dark and I looked forward to seeing it as dawn broke.

Land ahoy!!

Was the shout that woke Olivia at 0635 hrs, while still only a dark outline, it was land. We were only 8 miles from it with a further 10 miles to the anchorage.

On rounding the south tip of the island, which is only about 8 miles from north to south, we gybed and at 0905 hrs had to start the engine due to the lack of wind in the lee of the island. It was a nice feeling.

Day 22:

At the end of day 22 we still had 2 miles to anchoring. Eventually at 1010 hrs after a slow approach we dropped the anchor in position 10-28' South and 138-40' West, and thus **we missed our 22 days by a mere 50 minutes.** We could easily have saved the 50 minutes had we not slowed down so early. But, "what the hell" we got here safely and our only damage was a small snatch block that broke on the spinnaker guy (rope).

"Now that we have crossed the big Pacific, I think we are terrific"

Fatu-Hiva: For anybody following in our footsteps (watersteps) this landfall is a must. The high mountain penile shaped peaks are stunning. Our next report will cover the Marqueses in depth.

Keep sending your e-mails, we love to get even the smallest bit of news or better still "gossip". But, please no jokes or attachments, if you have an attachment please paste it to the message.

Pat and Olivia
Yacht ALDEBARAN
Pacific Ocean