

In the Summer edition of the *Squadron Quarterly* Mark Sinclair wrote of his preparations for the Golden Globe Race and mentioned that *Coconut* might be accompanied on the voyage to Cape Horn by his friend Bob Williams in *Sylph VI* who was planning to leave nine days later for a solo circumnavigation. An article by Bob Williams as a New Member in the same edition referred to a 'friendly race to the Horn' with *Coconut*. We have used some excerpts from Bob's blog (blog.mailasail.com/sylph) to summarise their progress and experiences.



Bob Williams

14 December 2021 *Sylph VI* Departs

The morning the big day of our departure arrived. I motored over to the visitor's berth to await clearance by the Australian Border Force. Three officers duly arrived and, with all the paperwork completed, we cast off lines at 1015 hrs.

17 December Radio Sked

I have established a daily radio sked with Mark on *Coconut* and Wayne in Tasmania, and it is proving to be an invaluable link. Wayne is an experienced sailor, and as our dedicated shore base he is able to provide good safety back up as well as personalised weather reports.

20 December Gale One

This morning as *Sylph* and I came face to face with our first Southern Ocean gale. We were moving fast but *Sylph* seemed comfortable with the wind vane self-steering holding course well. I retired below, getting up on a regular basis to check that everything was as it should be on deck and below. Some time during the night I heard a crash of a wave and a loud screech of what sounded like metal grinding on metal. All seemed fine excepting the port solar panel had broken free from its mounting. As I was lashing it in place I noticed that the pushpit was bent out of alignment on the port side. As *Sylph's* speed increased the apparent wind angle was changing and the wind vane was losing control. (I later checked the GPS for our maximum speed and laughed to see that it read 20.2 knots – impossible!) Then the mainsail started to go aback. I made my way aft to the cockpit as fast as I could to get to the tiller and correct *Sylph's* course before she gybed. But I was too late and we ended up lying beam on the wind and sea. I concluded there was only one thing to do under the circumstances and that was to drop the main. I went aft to increase the gain on the wind vane self-steering then to the mast to drop the mainsail. With the wind pressing the sail against the shrouds it took a bit of effort to drag it down. Once down, *Sylph* settled a bit and I threw on a couple of sail ties to keep the main in place.

21 & 22 December Repairs in Rocky Bay

Yesterday afternoon I was about ready to give up. We pushed on under a scrap of jib making good six plus knots before the gale force winds. At 2230 hrs we managed to get some shelter under the lee of Whale Head and were able to come further onto the wind and beam onto the sea without fear of being knocked down. I dropped anchor

*Sylph VI*

in eight metres of water in the shelter of Rocky Bay, Tasmania. I had breakfast and got to work assessing the damage and making repairs.

23 December Shortest Day's Run: 26 nm

Coconut is now some 700 nm ahead of *Sylph* and enjoying fresh favorable winds, whereas we are stuck in light winds. Now this is just a friendly race, just for fun, and as Mark rightly says it will be achievement enough just to get safely around the Horn; however, my ultimate goal is to round the Horn in company with *Coconut* and to be able to take a few photos of each other. So perhaps it isn't so much a race as a rendezvous. I know Mark isn't going to wait for me so we had best catch him up.

9 January 2022 A Fair Wind and Following Sea

During last night's sked, *Coconut* reported a good run for yesterday, some 140 nm, so she has maintained her lead of about 230 nm. Mark suggested (facetiously I suspect) I do a lap around Easter Island but I think that might be a bit of an over-correction.

14 January Half Way to the Horn

Coconut has made somewhat better distance over the last 24 hours. We have closed her by another 20 nm but she remains 100 nm ahead of us. So, at a rate of closure of 20 nm per day, we should be in sight of her in five days' time. This forenoon, by my calculations, we passed the half-way longitude to Cabo de Hornos.

21 January Where is *Coconut*? and Passing Point Nemo

According to Mark's reported position we were within about 20 nm of one another. We have strong and clear HF radio communications with one another and by this forenoon we should have been well within VHF range. However, thus far I have not been able to raise *Coconut* on VHF (perhaps the VHF antenna needs looking at). Of interest, at midday we passed 110 nm north of Point Nemo, a point in the ocean that is the furthest you can get from any land. I had thought of jogging down there to pass through it but pinning down *Coconut* has been my priority and that has taken longer than anticipated.

22 January Light Winds

Coconut has actually opened her lead on *Sylph* by a few miles. Good old *Coconut*! However, we still have over 2,000 nm to go and I cannot help but feel a little chagrined that after closing *Coconut's* position so rapidly in the first few weeks of the voyage, that now when we are so close she is proving as elusive as the Scarlet Pimpernel. She has



Mark Sinclair

become my Moriarty (though of course I always enjoy a good chat with her ebullient skipper).

28 January Ships Passing in the Night

I had a cup of tea and was settling things down for the night prior to turning in when the GPS alarm sounded. When I looked up at the display it was indicating an AIS target only two miles away. It had to be *Coconut*. I tried calling her on VHF but with no success. I flashed a spotlight in her direction and tried the VHF again. No response. We ended up passing about 400 metres on *Coconut's* starboard beam and as we did so I sounded a fog horn multiple times, flashed the spotlight and then called on VHF. Still no response. Mark was obviously sound asleep down below. It would have been nice to have effected a rendezvous off the Horn but that was always going to be a real long shot.

2 February Preparing for Heavy Weather

The Horn is very unlikely to allow us past without paying homage and it looks like it is setting the weather up to exact the payment. A deep low is forming about a thousand miles to the south-west of us and is tracking east. I am sure it will get to us before we get around the Horn, and at this stage I don't really see any way of avoiding it. All we can do is to try to position ourselves to minimise its impact and to prepare for heavy weather. I have been getting the drogue ready to deploy and going through my checklist of heavy weather preparations, in particular securing everything down below so that it stays in place and does not become a potential missile hazard.

4 February Fresh Breeze Increasing

Coconut is somewhere astern of us. Being quite a bit smaller than *Sylph*, she is not going to be able to get ahead to the Horn as soon as *Sylph* and consequently maybe exposed to more severe weather. *Coconut* is a well found little ship with an experienced and competent skipper so I am confident she will manage whatever the Horn throws at her.

Distance to Cape Horn: 580 nm

5 February Sunshine and Mast Climbing

I was looking around on deck and noticed a line hanging slack from the mast. It turned out to be the boom topping lift. The shackle securing the block to the masthead had come adrift and the only way I could fix the problem was to climb to the top of the mast and re-secure the block with a new shackle. I thought about what other options I might have for quite a while, being very reluctant to climb the mast at sea with *Sylph* rolling about 20 degrees or more. But, after much thought, I decided conditions were not going to get any better and trying to control the boom without the topping lift was likely to create worse problems down the track, so after much adrenaline and rapid breathing the job is done. The block has been re-secured to the masthead, the topping lift re-reeved through the block and its tail re-attached to the end of the boom.

Distance to Cape Horn: 415 nm

*Coconut* during an Opening Day Sail Past

7 February Furthest South

From this morning's radio sked with *Coconut*, it would seem she is getting a more torrid time of it. Mark reported he was experiencing force 9 winds gusting force 10, that the seas were large and confused, and that in the gusts the wind was absolutely screaming. He reported that one particularly strong gust had laid *Coconut* over on her side and she hung there for quite a while but eventually recovered. Unfortunately the sked was cut short as Mark was just too busy taking care of *Coconut*.

Distance to Cape Horn: 140 nm

8 February Horn Ho!

We have a perfect day for raising Cape Horn – a fresh following wind and sea and the sun is shining. We run wing-on-wing, the wind fine off the port quarter, with three reefs in the main and 50% jib poled out to port making 6 ½ knots. At 1133 the Everest of the Sea revealed itself, a grey shadow emerging from the grey sea and sky. It was and is a moving moment. As I was passing Cape Horn I had a call on VHF from the Chilean base. They asked, "What was your last port of call?" Reply, "Adelaide, Australia." "Next port of call?" "Adelaide, Australia." "And how many people on board?" "One." Silence. "Only one?" "Yes, only one."

12 February Loitering off Falklands Islands

We have now sailed past Port Stanley and positioned ourselves off the north-east coast with a view to waiting for the forecast 40 knot winds. In fact they are kicking in about now. I spoke with *Coconut* this morning and am very pleased to report that Mark has passed the Horn and is now sheltering as best he can in the vicinity of the Wollaston Group. His estimated position at 1130 hrs *Sylph's* local time (1730 UTC) was 55°30S 066°15W, drifting under bare poles with his tyre drogue streamed, making good a course of NE at two to three knots. His plan is to loiter in the area and try to seek shelter from further 50 knot SSW winds forecast for tomorrow morning behind Staten Island. I was certainly relieved to hear Mark's voice come up on this morning's radio sked. He has done very well to weather the extreme conditions without any serious mishap (only a broken self-steering wind vane which he has spares for) and then get *Coconut* into the relative shelter behind the Wollaston Islands, particularly as he was relying on sextant, compass and log for navigation.

13 February Later News

Over the last few days, Mark has been battling against severe weather as he sailed past Cape Horn. He is expecting another big weather system in the next day or two. He is very tired, cold and wet! He reported a broken AIS antenna and damage to the self-steerer. Unfortunately, during the rough weather he was hit in the head by a metal water bottle and split his eyebrow open, but he is otherwise OK!

