

By Mark Sinclair

Mark's seamanship and tenacity have amazed Members, and we can now congratulate him on completing the loop for the Golden Globe Race which he started on 1 July 2018. He arrived at the Squadron on 5 December 2018 when barnacles and water shortage forced his decision to withdraw. After three years Mark made the decision to resume the race, as a participant in the Chichester Class which allows one stop. The Summer 2021 edition of the SQ featured his preparations for the GGR before he departed on 5 December last year. Mark drafted this article in the two weeks before he arrived in Les Sables d'Olonne, and typed it up when he reached shore so that we could include it in this edition of the SQ.



Mark taking a break

TODAY is Friday 13 May, *Coconut's* 160th day at sea. We are in the North Atlantic, south-west of the Bay of Biscay, about 850 nm from Les Sable d'Olonne. There is a gentle breeze from the east; *Coconut* is headed NNE under full mainsail and two staysails. The forestay is broken and inner forestay repaired, which restricts the amount of sail that I can carry up forward and reduces our speed of advance. Blocks, halyards, a nylon anchor rode and D-shackles are helping to keep the mast in place. A temporary forestay has also been rigged using a spinnaker halyard to which a headsail can be laced through eyelets in the luff which were sewn in by Bravo Sails.

This voyage is a continuation of *Coconut's* participation in the 2018 GGR (Golden Globe Race), a recreation of the original around-the-world race in 1968-69, which was won by Sir Robin Knox-Johnston in *Suhaili*. The re-enacted race commenced in Les Sable d'Olonne in France on 1 July 2018 in which *Coconut* sailed non-stop to Adelaide in 157 days; by coming into port we were moved into the Chichester Class. As the GGR has no time limit, the voyage from Adelaide back to France is a continuation of *Coconut's* participation in the 2018 GGR.

Coconut and I had a fantastic send off on 5 December 2021 and we were farewelled by a flotilla of RSAYS Members. Subin Wright-Simon, a Cadet, helped with setting sail, then disembarked over the stern and was picked up, just prior to crossing the starting line. *Coconut* was accompanied part way down Gulf of St Vincent, sailed out through Backstairs Passage the following morning, and was



Mark taking a sun sight



Southern Ocean heavy weather



Coconut entering Les Sable d'Olonne Photo: Bernard Geraud

farewelled by VMR American River on VHF channel 21. A number of ships were around and good situational awareness was provided by the Echomax radar transponder, AIS alarm and Nomad portable AIS.

On the passage to Tasmania headwinds were experienced for the first week. I enjoyed listening to the first cricket test at the Gabba on the ABC. A daily radio schedule was also run through vessels *Sylph VI* (RSAYS) and *Ambler* (based in Tasmania). On approaching Tasmania communications were established with TasMaritime on VHF Channel 68. *Coconut* passed between Maatsuyker Island and Mewstone off the south coast of Tasmania, then ran up Storm Bay to the Derwent to pass through a 'race gate' off Kingston Beach. *Coconut* was warmly welcomed by a small contingent, who noted we were the 7th GGR boat to pass through the gate, the previous being *DHL Starlight* (Susie Goodall), more than three years previously.

Course was then set to the south of New Zealand which took nine days. On 20 December the first gale of the voyage was experienced, a force 8 westerly. *Coconut* ran before it under reefed staysail while towing a tyre as a drogue to keep down sea alignment. On this passage I listened to the second cricket test. New Zealand was approached in poor visibility on 24 December, course was altered to the north-east to make a landfall on Stewart Island, and I had a magnificent sail along the south coast leaving North Trap to starboard.

Course was then set for Cape Horn while enjoying the third cricket test. *Coconut* passed 80 nm south of Chatham Islands and crossed the International Dateline at midnight on 31 December. I then



Finished at last Photo: Bernard Geraud



Last of the fresh food



Repairing a staysail down below



Swallow resting below

heard on Radio New Zealand of the devastating volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga. The passage across the Pacific was made by sailing at a latitude of approximately 47° south to avoid calms and easterly winds, although I was becalmed on a number of occasions. On 23 January 2022 I started heading south to avoid the north-east quadrant of a vigorous low pressure system and to commence the approach to Cape Horn. *Sylph VI* passed *Coconut* on 28 January in our informal race.

A procession of SE-heading low pressure systems overran our course and there was nowhere to hide on the approach to Cape Horn. On 9 February the barometric pressure dropped to 962 hPa and a deep low passed close south. The following day *Coconut* passed between the islands of Diego Ramirez and Idelfonso without sighting either, and then picked up the 100-metre charted depth contour on the echosounder, which provided a line of position. In the early morning of 11 February *Coconut* passed close to the south of Cape Horn in poor visibility and the arrival of a force 10 gale. *Coconut* was heavily knocked down and boarding seas broke off the plywood Aries self-steering vane and flooded into the main saloon ankle deep. The starboard rubbing strake was smashed, 8-day chronometer thrown out of its gimbals, Nomad portable AIS antenna broken by a flying tin of baked beans and the cassette player and tapes immersed. I was restricted in seeking a lee to the north due to uncertainty of my position in the darkness, and so remained in unsheltered waters.

I gradually moved to the north-east and as another more violent storm was imminent I decided to pass through Le Maire Strait, in lieu of facing the dangerous overfalls off the south coast of Isla De Los Estados which was a lee shore. After waiting until daylight the following day as the passage is unlit and unsuitable for at night visual navigation, and to catch the flood stream, I sailed through the Strait the following afternoon. I was becalmed in the Strait and engineless as a washed overboard sheet had fouled the propeller; *Coconut* was swept out of the Strait through dangerous overfalls off Cape San Diego into a force 10 storm in the South Atlantic. We clawed offshore to gain sea room off Isla De Los Estados with a three-reefed mainsail which was far too much sail in these atrocious conditions. I breathed a sigh of relief the following morning when conditions abated, after a very anxious night.

A course was shaped up the South and North Atlantic Oceans passing west of the Falkland Islands, west of Trindade Island off Brazil, across the equator and through the doldrums, through the Azores and clockwise around the notional North Atlantic high pressure system.

The voyage is being conducted entirely using astro navigation: Michael Rossiter's Carl Zeiss sextant, a 1946 Hamilton deckwatch, NP401 sight reduction tables and the nautical almanac. Daily time checks are received by HF radio and BBC Radio 4. The distance run between fixes is measured by Adrian Donald's Walker Trailing Log which has faithfully rotated for 15,000 miles since Adelaide.

Fresh food ran out long ago. I sailed with 100 lemons which were sourced by supporter Beth Koth and they were also consumed long ago. Remaining tins of food are being supplemented by dehydrated

food left over from the first leg of the voyage in 2018. The fresh water supply remains healthy with over 100 litres caught in the doldrums in a specially designed boom bag. I attempted to grow spring onions but unfortunately the garden was destroyed in a knock down.

During the voyage there have been a number of birds that have spent the night onboard for a break, some resting down below. Earlier this week a minke whale surfaced five metres ahead of *Coconut* while we were sailing slowly in very light conditions. Dolphins are aplenty, even far offshore, and they often accompany whales. These interactions with life on the high seas are stimulating and are fundamental to maintaining my spiritual equilibrium.

Onboard entertainment took a disastrous hit with the loss of music and talking books when the cassette player and tapes were immersed off Cape Horn. This necessitated more active use of the HF radio receiver. I had great joy in listening to Radio New Zealand, even from the Atlantic Ocean. Other enjoyable stations include Falkland Islands Radio, Radio Mar Del Plata, BBC World Service and Radio 4. Interestingly, I picked up an episode of Pigs in Space from Hobart International Radio, a quirky station which is irregularly transmitted on HF through a radio station in the USA. Sadly, Radio Australia no longer transmits on HF which I think is an extremely retrograde step.

Although the voyage is taking longer than planned my perception is that time has become immaterial. The sun rises and sets, the moon waxes and wanes and the sun's declination has moved from south to north which has changed the seasons. Far removed from the digisphere I am immersed in an ever-present analogue world. *Coconut* will keep sailing and we will reach Les Sable d'Olonne later this month.

It is now Wednesday 18 May and I am approximately 500 nm west of Les Sable d'Olonne. Over the past days we have weathered a severe gale force 9 with some negative consequences. The number 4 staysail was washed out of the end of its clipped-on bag and was lost overboard. I tried to race up forward and grab it but a tangle with my safety line tether slowed me down and I was too late. The number 3 working jib supporting the forestay and furling foil worked loose half-way up and the leech has flogged to ribbons. A boarding sea bent the transom-mounted HF receiver whip 90 degrees aft to the horizontal; the emergency satellite phone SIM card has become unserviceable and charts in use, nautical publications and the ship's log books have been immersed and are now drying out. I am running under staysail and as the wind abates I will set the trysail then the mainsail. There is still some way to go before this voyage is complete.

Postscript: Mark arrived at Les Sables D'Olonne on Friday 27 May, to be greeted by Don McIntyre, organiser of the GGR, who presented him with a basket of fruit and a bottle of bubbly. Mark told Don he was looking forward to being ashore before preparing for the 2022 GGR starting on 4 September. He has a list of jobs to be done that he hopes to complete in time, but will only leave if the boat is ready.

