

HIGH AND DRY IN ANTARCTICA

Steve Brown

(Novara will be a familiar name to many members – see also page 143 of this issue. She is a Bestevaer 60C, designed and built in Holland as a ‘scientific research vessel’. Of aluminium construction, she is very strongly built with a double bottom (containing tankage) for much of her length.

Steve and his wife Trish have cruised the entire coastline of the Americas with her, including a Northwest Passage transit in 2014, following a circumnavigation aboard Curious, their previous yacht, between 2008 and 2012. The brief ‘mission statement’ on their impressive website at <https://www.sy-novara.com/> reads ‘Still Curious!’.

All photographs courtesy of Bjorn Riis Johannessen and Andrew Cassels.)

There cannot be many yachtsmen who can claim to have been knocked down and driven ashore inside an active volcano, and even fewer while their boats are covered in inches of snow and ice! This is a claim that I would rather not make, but our arrival inside the volcanic caldera at Antarctica’s Deception Island is not easily forgotten.

Having made the 685 mile passage from the Falkland Islands to the South Shetlands in five days, by 11th January 2018 the weather GRIBs showed winds building to over 30 knots from the northeast so we changed course to transit the islands through English Strait, with the intention of running before the wind to the anchorages in Deception Island. Once through the straits we made a fast passage in rapidly deteriorating weather, with the wind building to 45 knots and driving snow reducing visibility to 30m or less and with ice and snow building up on the rig, sails and deck.

Deception Island showed clearly on the radar, our charts gave us an accurate position, and we were able to transit Neptune’s Bellows without any problems, but where to







A shredded jib

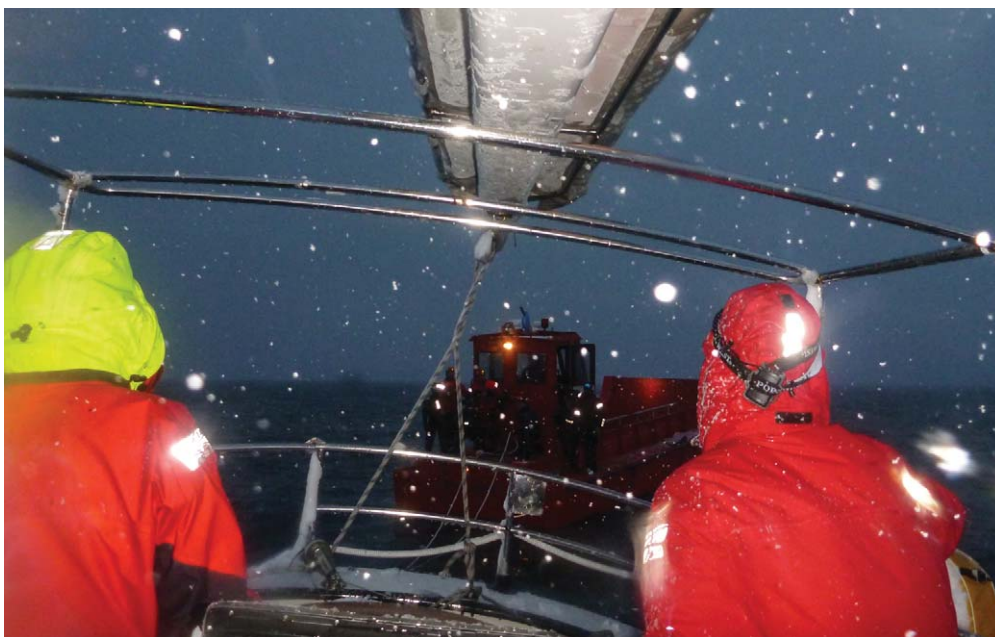
anchor? Only Bjorn of our team had been into Deception before and he suggested Telefon Bay as our preferred choice, but our AIS showed that there was at least one yacht already in the bay and we were unable to contact them to see if they had lines ashore that would prevent us anchoring safely.

The anchorage in Pendulum Cove would put us on a lee shore, Whalers' Bay was said to be fouled with debris from the old whaling station, so we took the decision to anchor under the lee of the headland at Pendulum Cove until conditions improved. As we rounded the headland we encountered very strong williwaws, with over 75 knots registered on a couple of occasions. Visibility was down to just a few metres, the boat caked in ice and snow from the blizzard we had sailed through, the centreboard raised as we approached the shallower water, and the foredeck team sent forward to ready the anchor. Then, as we were about to drop anchor, a gust estimated at 90 knots or more knocked the boat on her side to around 75°.

The next few seconds passed in a blur. *Novara* has high gunwales and solid, 25mm stainless steel rails and the foredeck crew were hanging on grimly. Bjorn was thrown out of the cockpit and washed against the guard-rails, where fortunately his fall was checked. But one of the mainsheets that had been flaked



Tons of ice



Not enough pulling power

over the cockpit coaming was washed overboard, fouling the propeller and stopping the engine. Incredibly, despite so much ice aloft and the centreboard in the raised position, *Novara* bounced back upright in an instant, caught the wind, and with no means of controlling her we were blown onto the shore.

A quick check showed that all crew were safe and uninjured, while *Novara* was stable sitting on her keelson, listing at about 5°. An inspection showed that the few other items on deck were still secured, and in the survival conditions we were encountering I made the decision for the crew to go below to the shelter of the cabin and put the kettle on! A Pan Pan was put out to the two other vessels in the area and to the Spanish and Argentinean bases and immediate assistance was offered, but as both crew and vessel were safe we decided to wait until the storm had eased a little before venturing outside.

An Argentinean supply ship, the *Canal Beagle*, was in the bay and offered assistance, and later that evening we attempted to tow the boat into deep water using one of their landing craft, but with only 300hp available the attempt proved unsuccessful. This showed that we might not be able to pull the boat off the beach ourselves, and although *Novara* has 10mm aluminium hull plating with double spaced ribs and stringers, because of the potential environmental impact should one of the hull tanks be ruptured, I took the decision to ask for additional assistance. We notified UK MRCC of our position and they contacted the Chilean authorities.

The following morning when the winds abated we dived on the propeller to clear the lines, but with the boat sitting on the beach and the sea water intakes blocked by shingle, we could not use the main engine to attempt to pull ourselves clear. A further update was made to UK MRCC and the Chilean Armada, who diverted the *Lautaro*, a large supply/service ship, from its base on King George Island. She arrived on Saturday evening, but too late to use the evening's high tide to pull the boat clear, so we used the time to lighten the load by moving surplus stores ashore.



Setting the tow

damage and none found, the seawater intakes were cleared of debris, and all systems were checked and operable. After thanking Capitan Gibbons and the crew of the *Lautaro* we motored into Telefon Bay for the night.

On the following day Capitan Gibbons sent his own divers across to survey the hull and ensure that there was nothing to stop *Novara* being pulled backwards into deeper water and, with surprisingly little effort, at 2000 local time on Sunday 14th January she was refloated.

She was inspected thoroughly for



The Lautaro



Throughout all my dealings with the Chilean Armada, from Easter Island to Antarctica they have always been friendly, helpful and professional. During the recovery process both the Chilean Armada and UK MRCC kept in contact via the Iridium sat phone and e-mails, and our thanks went out to both sets of professionals for their help and reassurance.

The following morning we checked the boat thoroughly once more, and finding all systems sound and operable we continued with our expedition, heading south through the iceberg-filled channels.

Afloat once more

