

SUN, SEXTANTS AND SCRIMSHAW

Charlie Frost

(Charlie started sailing Optimists on Cornwall's Helford River when he was seven, gradually moving up the scale through larger dinghies, keelboat racing and tall ships. Membership of the Sea Cadets gave him the chance to become a sailing instructor, and while studying at Plymouth University for a degree in mechanical engineering he spent the summers teaching sailing and powerboat courses at Mylor Sailing School on the Carrick Roads. Following his return from the passage described below he was promoted to manager of the sailing school.)

In mid June 2018 I flew out to Horta, on the Azorean island of Faial, to meet Peter Flutter, Peter Morgan and Will Murray, who had sailed the former's 45ft steel ketch *Tyrian of Truro* down from Falmouth in the Azores Pursuit Rally. *Tyrian* was built in Penryn, Falmouth's near neighbour and my home town. Before starting the passage back we had two marvellous weeks in Horta, soaking up the atmosphere of this small Portuguese island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. It is a busy, friendly place. The weather was hot, usually around 28°C, and the coastline mainly volcanic cliffs, with a few beaches with black volcanic sand. The rally was to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Café Sport, a bar/ restaurant in Faial with which the OCC has long had strong links. It is a lively place, run by José Azevedo whose father 'Peter' and grandfather before him had run it too. The bar is also a celebration of the art of scrimshaw – carving or decorating whale teeth and whalebone – with a scrimshaw museum on the floor above filled with cases of intricately-carved whales' teeth.

There is a tradition in Horta of sailors leaving a signature painting to mark their visit, and Will and I were given the job of drafting and painting a design on the harbour's concrete surround. We made a sketch of *Tyrian*, with waves and a sperm whale tail fluke alongside our names. Be sure to look out for it among the hundreds of others if you visit!





We left the traditional painting beside Horta marina

We had an opportunity to see real sperm whales when we went out on a whale spotting trip in a commercial RIB with an experienced marine biologist. We were lucky enough to spot sperm whales breaching, as well as Risso's dolphins, with

shearwaters flying above us. Another day we took a taxi up Faial's *caldera*, and looked down into its large volcanic crater before cycling back down the hill – apparently we hit 35mph, faster than I have ever cycled in Cornwall. You'd think it would be easy to cycle down a mountain track, but I did get lost a couple of times before reaching the bottom!

At last it was time for us to head home. We said goodbye to Will and shipped our stores. I knew I was in good hands with the two Peters, a dentist and a merchant shipmaster, both of whom are extremely knowledgeable and experienced sailors. The roughest part was leaving the archipelago – we were motor-sailing upwind and I surprised myself by being seasick for the first time in 15 years of sailing. A few Stugerons and I was back on my feet, however. Once north of the neighbouring island of São Jorge we set a northeast course for Falmouth.

A sperm whale fluke





Leaving Horta

Life on board *Tyrian* was very comfortable. The food and drink were excellent and we were always sure to have at least one Super Bock (a Portuguese beer) each day. After the first few hours we turned the engine off and set out quietly into the night. The watch system had started and I had my first night watch under the stars. With the expertise of the skipper and first mate, plus a useful app on my phone, we identified planets and prominent stars and practised some of the skills learned in a lecture by Stokey Woodall back in Horta, such as telling the time using the North Star and the pointers in the Ursa Major constellation.

During the day, outside of my onboard duties I was taught many useful techniques in both navigation and sailing. The main skill that I learned was how to use a sextant to take a sun sight, and then how to do the calculations to find a position. Some practice is required in this, and my position was usually out due to user error or forgetting a minus sign somewhere along the way. It's not like the films where it can apparently be done in a few seconds! Luckily the GPS was still working.

We seemed to have the same two shearwaters follow us all the way home, and other wildlife was abundant in the North Atlantic. Animals such as sperm whales and basking sharks and a suspected fin whale swam right up close to the boat during a sail change at night. Other creatures included Portuguese man o' wars (men o' war?), flying fish and other jellyfish that I couldn't identify.

For me, the best day of the passage was the very last. I came on watch at 0600 on my 21st birthday. There was a northerly force 1 so everything was silent. There was not enough wind for the self-steering gear to work, so I helmed the boat right into the glorious clear sunrise. I have always prided myself on my upwind sailing in dinghies, but sailing a 23 ton steel ketch close-hauled in less than 5 knots of wind and making 2 knots of headway is a new achievement.

After breakfast and a few birthday celebrations I stayed on deck for the whole day, excited to see land but sad that the trip was near its end. Several pods of common

dolphins approached the boat, along with basking sharks and lots of jellyfish. We passed the Isles of Scilly on our port side and pressed on, and when I saw the familiar sight of the Lizard Peninsula with the signature Goonhilly satellite station on top of the hill, I knew I was nearly home.

We entered Falmouth at about 0400 the next morning and had a well-earned rest after painfully trying to locate Tyrian's mooring in the dark. After a good sleep I woke to find myself in very familiar surroundings, with a short trip to the fuelling pontoon to replace the large amount of diesel we had used during the very light wind passage. My family met me on the pontoon.

Later in the summer I was presented with my OCC burgee in the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club by Commodore Anne Hammick and my skipper, Port Officer Peter Flutter. The evening was very enjoyable and I received lots of advice from experienced OCC members on how to set about buying my own boat for a bit of cruising myself. However, I think I still have some way to go.



Desperately trying to get a sun sight

Dolphins keep pace with Tyrian south of the Scillies





Receiving my OCC burgee from Peter Flutter and Commodore Anne Hammick

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ocean Cruising Club for organising such a great rally and for providing me with generous sponsorship to help me undertake the voyage. I'd also like to thank my friends at Seaware Ltd for sponsoring me and helping me to get the best kit for this passage and for many passages to come. And finally, my thanks go to Peter Flutter and Peter Morgan for taking me on this marvellous voyage, organising my accommodation in Horta, and providing me with a breadth of information and knowledge that will stay with me for the rest of my life.



People on land think of the sea as a void, an emptiness, haunted by mythological hazards. The sea marks the end of things. It is where life stops and the unknown begins. It is a necessary, comforting fiction to conceive of the sea as the residence of gods and monsters – Aeolus, the Sirens, Scylla, Charybdis, the Goodwins, the Bermuda Triangle. In fact the sea is just an alternative known world. Its topography is as intricate as that of the land, its place names as particular and evocative, its maps and signposts rather more reliable.

Jonathan Raban, *Coasting*