

SAILING THE EASTERN SEABOARD AND NORTH ATLANTIC

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(Timothy received assistance from the OCC Youth Sponsorship Programme – see <https://oceancruisingclub.org/Youth-Sponsorship> – to make the passage described below.)

It was a typical November day, sitting in the lecture hall listening to my professors go on about something that I've mostly forgotten about now. I was daydreaming about sailing, as my boat had been recently pulled out of the water for the winter months. On my computer, I was scouring the internet for a new opportunity in the world of sailing. Enter the OCC Youth Sponsorship Programme. I eagerly applied, and a few weeks later my application was accepted so the hunt for a passage began. After a few months I received an e-mail from Vice Commodore Paul Furniss detailing that a skipper by the name of Steve Brown was interested in taking me on a passage across the Atlantic. I was absolutely beaming with joy.

I'm a 21-year-old Canadian who grew up learning how to sail dinghies on the Great Lakes. I purchased my first boat, a 22ft Tanzee, when I was 17 and still sail this, along with a 31ft Columbia Hughes that has recently entered the family. I also race on a 35ft C&C called *Firewater*. I was keen to make this passage because I wanted to challenge myself, and really figure out if ocean sailing is for me. It is, and I'm already looking for a Pacific crossing! If I were given a sailing wish, it would be to race in the Vendée Globe, not because it's the most notorious singlehanded race, but to become the first Canadian to take part – so far there's been no Canadian in the Vendée Globe.

I first laid eyes on *Novara* in June 2019 in the beautiful little seaside town of Camden, Maine. I was visiting for a few days to get to know the boat and learn how she sails,

in preparation for a 22 day voyage up the East Coast to Canada, and then across the Atlantic. Camden is a real sailing town, with a stunning harbour and well-crafted custom boats. There I got a feel for *Novara*, sailing around Penobscot Bay and enjoying what the place has to offer. After leaving Camden I headed home and took my mom sailing around the Great Lakes. When it was time to return for the passage, the excitement set in for what lay ahead.

The pump for the day tank was in the locker, and as junior crewmember it fell to me to top it up. Great fun...



We left Camden for Lunenburg, Nova Scotia on 29th July. It was an easygoing 260 mile passage and helped give me a feel for non-stop sailing. When we arrived we decided to stay a few days to get some repairs done before heading on to St John's, Newfoundland. The four day, 561 mile passage to St John's was a lovely cruise with fair wind and waves, fighting the Labrador Current until we reached port. We ended up making a quick stop in the small village of Fermeuse, a gorgeous fishing settlement with kind people and majestic scenery. After doing an oil change, we set off to make the remaining 42 miles to St John's.

We reached St John's on 6th August and were due to stay a few nights to do some repairs, provision, and welcome Bill Strassberg who was heading back to Camden after spending time in the UK and Greenland. His infectious laughter and larger-than-life personality really made me feel welcomed into the sailing community.

St John's is a beautiful city with pastel-coloured houses lining the steep hillside, and was originally founded by explorer John Cabot in the 15th century. As it turns out, we had sailed in at the best time of year. We were delighted to coincide with the Royal St John's Rowing Regatta, George Street Festival – and warm weather. The locals explained that in the brief summer that they get, this was the time to get out and enjoy what there was to offer. Some minor repairs were made, water tanks filled, and the crew of *Novara* got what would be their last eight-hour sleep in nearly two weeks. We were ready to cross an ocean.

How do you describe a 12-day passage across the North Atlantic?

For me, three words come to mind – wet, windy and cold.

Boy, was it an experience! How do you describe

*Tim grinning at the wheel,
with Paul Deakin on
the left*





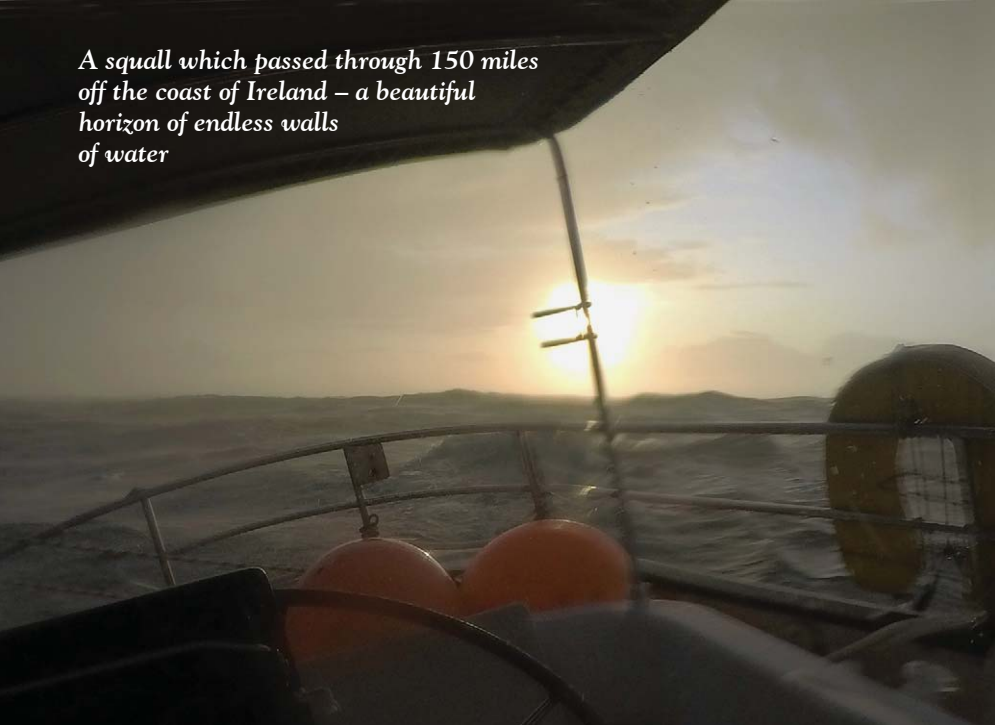
Completing a sail change at the forward mast

your idea of a good time? For me, it's getting out on the water and letting the mercy of Mother Nature take you where you want to go. Prior to making the crossing, I often wondered how people find joy in minimal sleep, being confined, and facing nature in its most unforgiving of forms. I wonder no longer now, but rather fully understand and appreciate the challenges that big water sailing has to offer.

Novara left St John's on 9th August for the 1970 mile leg across the North Atlantic. Aboard were Skipper Steve Brown, myself and two fine gentlemen from the UK, Chris and Paul Deakin. Our destination was Cardiff in Wales and the plan was to take a high-latitude rhumb line straight across. What lay ahead of us as we set out was unknown to me, but Steve assured me we would face conditions that many sailors tend to avoid. To me, this sounded like a heavy weather dream of gales and house-sized waves ... exactly what I was eager to experience. I was ready to face the North Atlantic.

We set out in steady 25 knot winds, just a taste of what this ocean had in store for us. On my first watch I nearly hit a whale that popped up in front of the boat – it was so close I could see the barnacles on its side. It was also the first whale I've ever seen up close and personal. But after sailing for another 24 hours it was clear to me that we were out there alone to face whatever was thrown our way. A few days pass and you realise how isolated you've made yourself, how vulnerable you are to the sea. You become self-reliant because you have no other alternative, an idea that's always appealed. Rescue is not an option hundreds of miles offshore, and neither would you want someone else to risk their life trying to save yours. It's all or nothing in the middle of the fierce North Atlantic, a time to focus on the boat and read what the sea is putting down for you.

*A squall which passed through 150 miles
off the coast of Ireland – a beautiful
horizon of endless walls
of water*



The most memorable part of the voyage had to be going through a full gale that lasted two days, feeling like an eternity. Wind gusts of 45 knots and a sea state to match ... this was what I had come to see. The howling of the wind and waves, the rolling of the boat, and the occasional bang that would reverberate through the hull. When the sea state rises to match the wind, you really begin to understand the power and ferocity you face in this part of the world. Feeling that small and vulnerable is a truly humbling experience. I'll never forget the moment that our speed-over-ground read 19 knots as we surfed down a monster of a wave. My eyes widened, and then a slight grin crossed my face as I knew a new speed record had just been set for *Novara*. I was the only one awake, as the crew were trying to catch up on some much needed sleep – or at least closing their eyes before their next watch. There really isn't much sleep to be had on a boat that's being tossed around in the relentless waves – it's a precious commodity in heavy seas.

When the heavy conditions subsided, it was back to 25 knot westerlies until we could see the south coast of Ireland. It was odd to see land after getting accustomed to the sea, but I felt a small sense of accomplishment at what I'd learned along the way. After 2751 miles we had reached Europe. There's much to be said for people like Steve, who have an eagerness to extend the sailing community with open arms and show the ropes to those wanting to seek out the knowledge that comes with the kind of experience he has.

I am truly grateful for what Steve and the Ocean Cruising Club have done for me. The OCC Youth Sponsorship Programme, and especially Paul Furniss, made it all possible. Without all of you I wouldn't have been able to connect with Steve and make my sailing dreams a reality. I hope that one day I will be able to give back to the community in the exact same way. I was happy to see land, but sad to see the open ocean fade away beyond the horizon. The sea is a truly incredible place and I can't wait to cross another ocean and see more of the world under sail.

