

PATAGONIAN ANCHORING

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Although both cruising guides we used while in Patagonia gave advice on anchoring techniques, the subject is so crucial to the safety of the boat when cruising in this area that I thought the following notes from our own experiences might be of interest.

We carry four anchors on board our Oyster 42: 60lb CQR bower, 50lb Luke (a Fisherman which disassembles into three pieces) and two Fortresses of different sizes. We also carry 80m of chain.

Sapphire's foredeck, showing anchor buddy, Fortress and Luke

We have four 100m floating shore lines, of which three are on reels while the fourth is in a bag for rowing ashore. We always use a nylon snubber, to add elasticity when the chain's catenary is lost in high wind, but since we do not have a dedicated chain stopper we also take the chain off the windlass and lead it to a cleat (in case the snubber fails or falls off the chain). We have two 30lb chums or angels (weights added to the chain to improve the catenary effect), one of them taking either rope or chain, the other only rope.

During the 70 days we spent sailing north from Puerto Williams to Puerto Montt we visited 36 anchorages. We used a number of different configurations of ground tackle and shore lines and these are detailed below:

Anchor(s)	Shore Lines	Frequency
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CQR	0	10
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CQR	1	1
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CQR	2	7
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CQR	3	3
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CQR	4	3
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CQR, Fortress	0	11
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CQR, Luke	4	1
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36

The above data lead to the following observations:

The figures in the table do not indicate the amount of time we spent in each anchorage. For instance, although we only took all four lines ashore on four occasions, one of them was for a period of five days at Brecknock, where we were glad of every one of them.

We took lines ashore almost half the time. Hal Roth in his book *Two Against Cape Horn* begins his discussion of the subject by saying: 'Unfortunately, in the beginning you doubt the necessity of tying ashore. My anchors are better. My anchoring techniques are good enough. My judgement is adequate. Lines ashore? Mooring to trees?

Humbug!' I am ashamed to say that I had some of these feelings myself. So, to recap, there are a number of reasons for taking lines ashore:

- a) Lack of swinging room. Many of the anchorages are quite diminutive and the violent *rachas* (williwaws) mean that much scope is required.
- b) Deep water. This is also common and exacerbates the need for scope.
- c) Steep bottom gradient. When swinging at anchor (assuming a prevailing wind from the shore) the holding power is greatly reduced. Conversely, when the boat is pulled into the shore with lines, the anchor is pulled uphill and holds much better.

The cliff face to which I was expected to anchor at Estero de las 1000 Cascados, Brazo Sudoeste

d) *Rachas*. As the British Admiralty puts it: 'Unlike the majority of gusty winds of more tropical and temperate areas (*vendavaís*), williwaws depend greatly, if not entirely, on the existence of strong winds blowing from the sea on lands of high elevation. When these streams reach the coast of the Chilean archipelago, they generate whirlwinds of different strength and kind. During the most violent williwaws observed west of Cabo Froward and along the continental coast, in one of the stormiest and heaviest sea, gusts may exceed the speed of 100 knots.'

They can hit from any direction and, when one arrives at 0200, gambling that the anchor will re-set after the boat has been spun through 180° is not the best tactic.

- e) Poor holding. Rock and especially kelp are common.

A relatively mild racha in Seno Pia, with gusts of about force 9

On the other hand, if none of the above is true, then have faith in your anchor. I felt that a number of cruisers had lost confidence in the whole idea of swinging at anchor and always took lines ashore, even when this was not necessary.

Even though we have a relatively heavy (60lb) CQR for our bower anchor, we felt comfortable swinging to a single anchor less than a third of the time. However, this is more often than not the practice of most other boats in the area.

We found tandem anchoring an extremely useful tactic. Whenever we could, we employed it in preference to shore lines to save time, as we had limited daylight and were trying to keep up a reasonable pace. On one occasion, we dragged while attempting to set the CQR (due to soft mud) and so added the Fortress. The rest of the time we used tandem anchors as a defensive measure against strong winds.

Although we only used the Luke once (when attempting to anchor to the side of a cliff – almost literally – and still not feeling safe even with four shore lines) I would strongly recommend it. It is a great, albeit expensive, insurance policy against rock and kelp. The only reason we did not use it more often is that we generally took

lines ashore when the holding was indifferent, which rendered the holding power of the ground tackle less crucial. We also used a chum on a couple of occasions, with good results.

Caleta Beaulieu, Eastern Arm of Seno Pia, Brazo Noroeste

North of Golfo de Penas the holding tends to be better in sand or mud and we did not find it necessary to take lines ashore at all, although we often tandem anchored.

For preventing chafe when tying to rocks we carried four 5m lengths of chain (which also had the advantage of not floating off when the tide rose.) When tying to trees, most people do not bother with chafe protection. However, we made use of an excellent tip from the skipper of *Magic Dragon*, an Oyster 66 which we met in Stanley – and bought a couple of 5m slings, of the sort used by travel lifts to hoist boats out of the water. These are immensely strong and chafe resistant, yet much easier to handle than chain.

Securely tied up with four lines ashore at Caleta Brecknock. You can just see the green lifting strop on the port stern line

We were spared winds stronger than 60 knots or so when at anchor. However, as mentioned above, 100 knot *rachas* have been recorded and at such times five or six shore lines may be necessary.

Initially we tried to anchor first, then row out lines. However, we found that even 60 seconds to row the first line ashore was sometimes too long and we were blown out of position. Instead, I would row the first line ashore in its bag, make it fast, then row the line back out to the boat. The anchor was then dropped while simultaneously taking in on the first shore line. This worked very well, though caused problems if the anchor did not set first time.

For the remaining lines, we found it essential to rig up semi-permanent reels on board for ease of handling. We kept two of the reels lashed horizontally (one on a broom handle, one on a fishing gaff) to the port and starboard gates. The third reel, which we only used occasionally, was rigged up on the foredeck when necessary.

Our broom handle was an acceptable substitute for permanently mounted reels

In summary, the conditions encountered in Patagonia provide a severe test of one's anchoring technique. However, with a little care, the wonderful scenery can be enjoyed in safety, even if the weather is not often conducive to sipping pink gins in the cockpit!