

The Challenge of Offshore Sailing

The Editors

We believe, in our prejudiced way, that sailing is one of the most complex human activities there is. That is especially true of offshore sailing, whether cruising or racing. The skills needed to be a good offshore sailor are remarkably varied and complex. There are the obvious practical, but extensive demands of boat-handling, seamanship, pilotage and sail trim. Then there are the skills required to maintain and repair a vessel's systems: engine, sails, rigging, electrics, plumbing and more. There are also more theoretical skills of navigation, passage-planning, weather forecasting and routing. Of course the good offshore sailor must be able to exercise all these skills when cold, wet, tired and frightened, while supporting other less skilled crewmates who are in the same or worse condition. These are some of the challenges which make sailing such a wonderful way of life, not just a sport.

Taking up new challenges has been an enduring theme of the sailing experiences of RCC members. This year's *Roving Commissions* takes up that theme in many of its accounts. There are the most obvious physical and mental challenges recounted in David Southwood's experience of being hammered by a North Atlantic storm during the OSTAR Race or Jason Lawrence's long, solo sail around Britain and Ireland. As so often in the past, Bob Shepton gives us a taste of both nautical and climbing challenges in remote places.

Equally there are the challenges of exploration or new experiences. Trevor Robertson's charting of remote Kimberley anchorages in Australia and Andrew Wilkes probing of Greenland fiords are in the best exploratory traditions of the RCC. Jo Winter, Jim Lott, Nigel Wollen and Clive Woodman all recount extensive cruising in waters entirely new to them. The exploration of new cultures is often as challenging as the pilotage. Then there are more unusual challenges, such as James Grogono's cruising on a windsurfer, Oliver Wells' first experience of offshore racing on the Fastnet and Alan Martienssen's account of swimming with whales in Tonga.

There are also subtler challenges. Tim Trafford's careful introduction of his children to offshore passages and Andrew Wilkes' introduction of disadvantaged youngsters to sailing are of this kind. In a different way so

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too are the accounts by four members of their reluctant but interesting transition from sailing yachts to motor yachts and in two cases from offshore to inshore waters. Many members face the annual challenge of fitting their cruising into limited time. This was true of several who fought both time and weather constraints to reach this year's very popular Brittany Meet at Le Roche-Bernard on the Vilaine.

Throughout these varied accounts there also runs a similar sense of satisfaction at having coped with or overcome challenges. Perhaps for cruising sailors nothing expresses that satisfaction more typically than returning home safe, well and with a sense of accomplishment. This rings true in David Southwood's log, but particularly in the final words of both Mike and Hilde Gill's, as well as Mike and Devala Robinson's accounts of returning home after years of very extensive cruising on the far side of the globe from home waters. It's good to be home.