

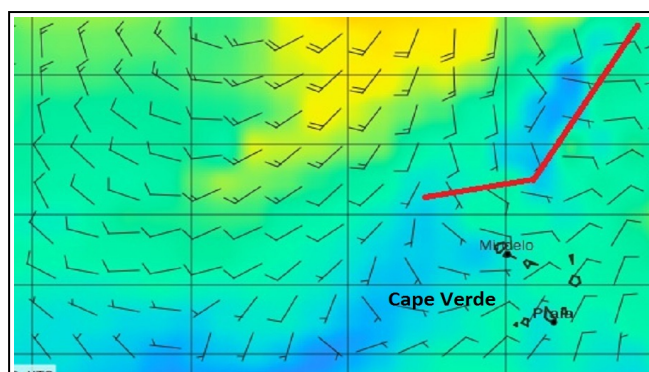


1. Crossing the Atlantic 2016

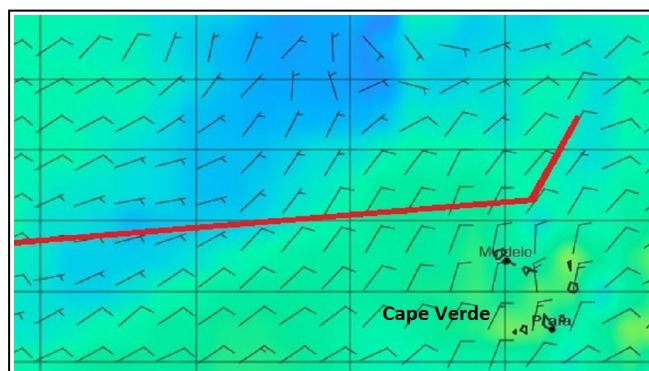


by Johan Kjellander 2016

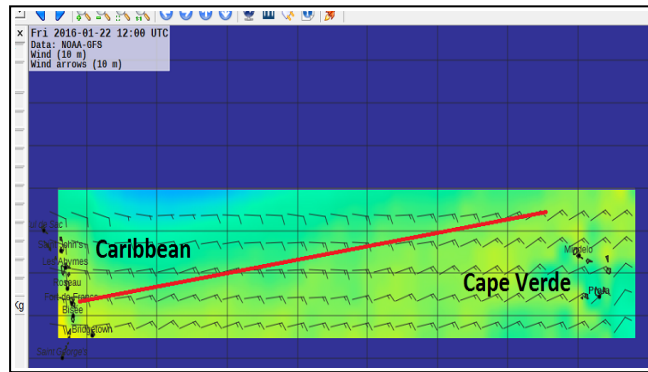
Planning an Atlantic crossing from the Canaries to the Caribbean is relatively simple. Wait until Christmas, head south for Cape Verde until you find the trade wind, then turn right and head directly for the Caribbean. This is what most people do today and this is the advice you get in most cruising guides and pilot books.



It helps a lot if you can download GRIB-file wind forecasts on your way. You can then fine-tune your course to get the best possible sailing conditions. The wind forecast above shows the weather situation when we left Gran Canaria on the 9:th of January. As you see, there is a depression west of our planned route giving southerly winds. To avoid southerly winds we kept our course well east and continued south in relatively weak winds (blue or green colors).



Five days later we were close to Cape Verde and the depression had moved up north enough to let us turn right and head for Martinique. This was a nice feeling. We knew that we were now in the trade wind and that we could count on this stable wind to continue for the rest of the voyage.



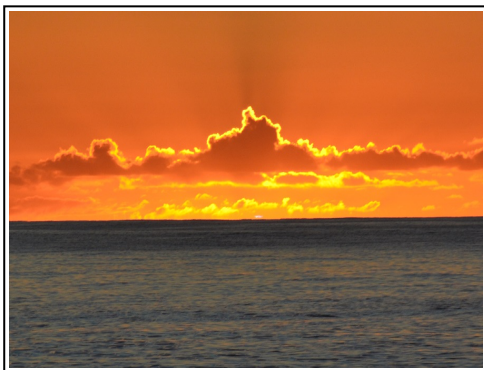
The GRIB-file above shows what the wind forecasts looked like for the rest of the journey. Very stable easterly Trade winds.

In order to download GRIB-files you need wireless access to E-mail. This can be done through satellite (Inmarsat, Iridium etc.) which is expensive or by shortwave radio which is less expensive. Sailmail, using marine SSB frequencies, costs around 150 €/year. Winlink, which uses HAM frequencies, is free to use if you have a HAM (radioamatör) license.

To use Winlink you need a HAM radio installation and a modem. PACTOR modems are very good but you can also use a simple soundcard with your PC to do the same job but slower. On Bird of Passage I use an ICOM 706 MKII HAM radio with a Signalink USB soundcard as a modem. During our Atlantic crossing I downloaded GRIB files almost every day, usually 5-10 kB in size with a 3 day forecast. A file like that downloads in 5-15 minutes depending on radio conditions. Most of the time I connected to a Winlink station in Switzerland (HB9AK) but as we came closer to the US i also used American stations (NOIA).



It's not easy to explain what it feels like to be in the middle of the Atlantic. I think that most sailors would tell you how beautiful it is. The sun downs for example, are fantastic. Many evenings as the sun came down we took our cameras outside and tried to catch the beautiful light.



If you are lucky, you might even see the Green Flash. A rare optical phenomena that creates a short glimpse of green light, just a second or so after the sun disappears below the horizon. We were happy enough to see it twice on our crossing and both times I tried to catch it with my camera.

Unfortunately, none of the images above show what it really looks like. You have to be very lucky to press the button exactly when the flash is at it's maximum. Still, if you look closely, you can see some sort of greenish light on the horizon in the middle of each picture.



Once the sun is down, darkness comes quickly when you are only 20 degrees above the equator. Our home in Scandinavia on latitude 60 usually has an hour or more of dusk before it gets completely dark.

Dark nights are beautiful with millions of bright stars above. When the moon is up there is more light and if there were any other boats around, you could probably spot them even if they were relatively far away. We often had our anchor light in the top of the mast turned on. This made it possible to see the Windex and as you see on this picture the wind is from behind.



Bird of Passage is our first boat with electronic navigation. Our primary tool is an Ipad with built in GPS and charts from Navionics. We also have OpenCPN on one of our laptops and finally we also have Navionics charts in our Simrad navigator/autopilot. The Simrad system has one internal and one external GPS receiver.

Twenty years ago on Lynx, we had only log, compass and sextant. Most of the time the log and compass were enough, but some times I used the sextant to take heights and calculate our position. A lot of job with complex calculations involving various data that you had to find in books with thousands of tables.

I still have the sextant but my tables are now outdated. Instead, I have purchased an Ipad app (ezSights) with all the tables built in and also a calculator that does the mathematical work automatically. We tried it for the first time on our Atlantic crossing and it proved to be simple to use and accurate, giving positions that were only a few miles away from our GPS readings.



Many sailors catch fish during their voyages. Fresh fish makes a nice dinner after days of canned food. On our Atlantic crossing we pulled a line with a plastic squid after us and caught several Dolphins. A beautiful fish with excellent meat.

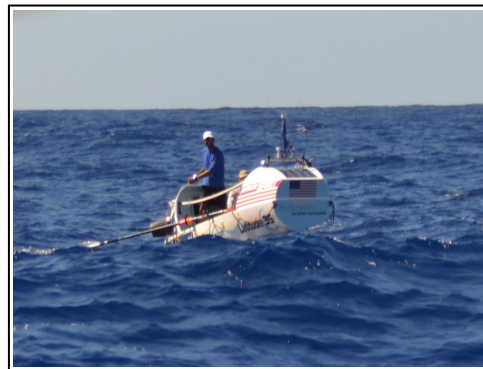


Flying fish is even easier to catch, you pick them in the morning. It seems they can't see your boat during the dark hours and once in a while some unlucky creature happens to land on your deck and gets stuck there. They are very beautiful and taste well but you need many to make a dinner. Good for tapas though.



Bird of Passage has two tanks, 400 litres each, for fresh water. With four persons on board on a 20 day voyage this means 10 litres per person per day. That's not much if you take in to account the water needed for cooking, dishes and personal hygiene but you can live comfortably if you use sea water instead when possible.

We used our aft deck as a sea water shower. If you finish off by pouring one or two litres of fresh water over your head you get rid of most of the salt and feel fine afterwards.



Sailing across the Atlantic may seem adventurous but what about rowing ? On day on our crossing Dan said he saw something ahead of us. We hadn't

seen a single boat for two weeks so this was exiting. As we approached we understood it had to be a relatively small boat, without rig !

We changed our course to come as close as possible and then saw it was one of the row boats participating in the Tallisker Whiskey Atlantic Challenge from La Gomera (Canaries) to Antigua (West Indies). As we passed by we changed a few words with the crew and understood they were originally a crew of four but that two of them had been picked up by a support vessel for various reasons. The remaining two were now continuing alone and planned to finish the race within a few weeks.

According to the race website there were 15 boats this year with a crew of one, two or four. The fastest crews row across in 40 days but some need more than 70 to finish. I wonder what the odds are to run into a rowing boat in the middle of the Atlantic ?



There are not many birds in the middle of the Atlantic. We did see a lot of Storm Petrel (Sv;Stormsvala) while we sailed south along the African coast, but when we turned west and headed for the Caribbean they vanished. It was not until the last days of our journey that we saw birds again and this time it was the Brown Booby (Sv:Brn sula).



End of the Atlantic crossing 2016

