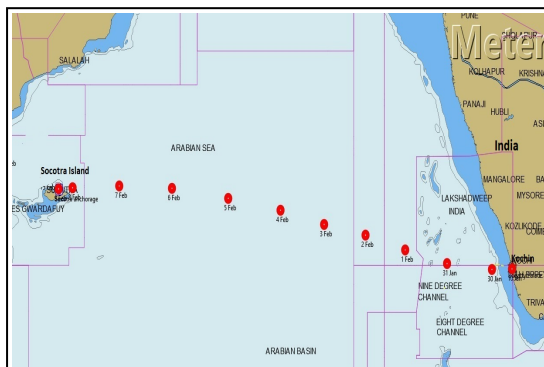




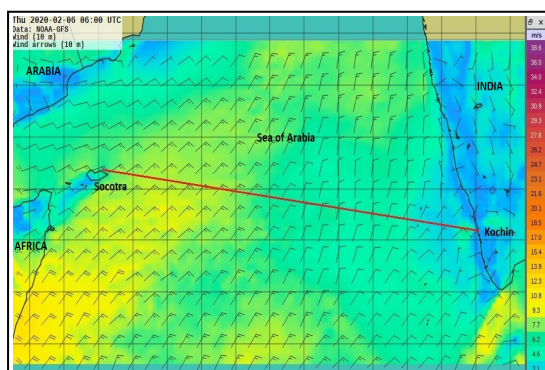
### 3. Socotra 2020



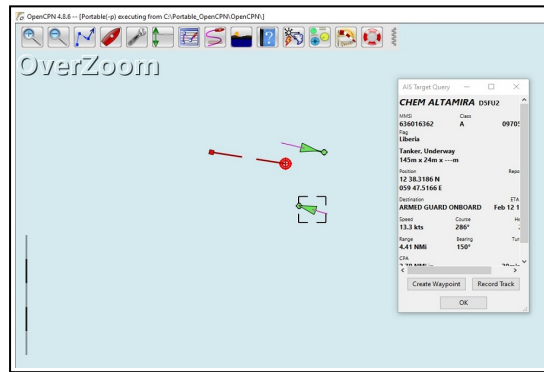
by Johan Kjellander 2020



We had 1400 NM from Cochin in India to our anchorage in Socotra. Started on the 29:th of January and arrived 10 days later. For the first time since the Philippines two years ago I managed to make contact with a WINLINK radio station, (3B8DU in Mauritius). I could now use my HAM-radio for e-mail. I also used it to talk to other boats on their way over the Indian ocean to the Red Sea. Together we had a network on 8137 kHz 3AM and 3PM every day UTC.

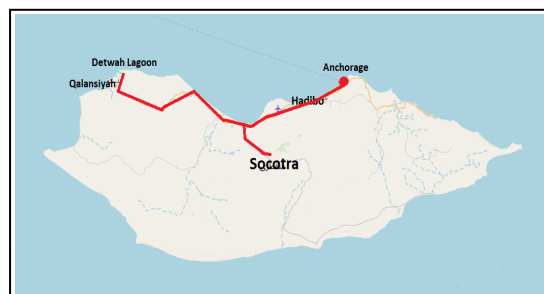


Information about weather is essential. Apart from understanding over all weather patterns and how they vary through the year, you also need detailed forecasts for the next few days, ie. GRIB-files. GRIB-files can be downloaded free of charge from internet and viewed on your local computer using a suitable GRIB-program. I use "xyGRIB" and the picture above shows what it can look like. Not so much wind to begin with when we left Cochin in India (blue color) and then increasing winds (green-yellow) as we moved west. We were lucky to have acceptable wind almost all the way and used less than 100 liters of diesel for motorsailing. The last days we had strong winds (more than 20 knots) and made good daily distances, more than 150 NM per day.



The route from India across the Sea of Arabia and up through the Red Sea had serious problems with pirate attacks some 10-15 years ago. International navy forces were sent to patrol the area and the pirate attacks stopped. Naval forces are still present and all yachts that want to use this route are advised to register with the military command and send daily reports of their position. As you see from our AIS output above, merchant ships still have armed guards on board. Red dot is Bird of Passage.

We registred with UKMTO (UK Maritime Trade Operations) and MSCHOA (Maritime Security Center Horn Of Africa), and twice a day I sent position reports to UKMTO from a satellite telephone (thanks Ben for letting us borrow your telephone).



Socotra belongs to Jemen. Its capitol city is Hadibo on the north coast, about five kilometers west of our anchorage. Population is Muslim and all women above 15 wear black dresses that cover everything except their eyes. Alcohol is forbidden and when boys and girls are old enough to get married their mother makes the descision about who is going to become their future partner.

A majority of the 70.000 people on Socotra are "Beduins" that live in the mountains with goats and other simple farming activities. They have practically no money at all and very primitive lifes. Internet is only available in a few WI-FI hotspots in the city.



The view from our anchorage is really something special. The mountain along the shoreline is partly covered by a big sand dune. I can see no other explanation than this sand must have come through the air. Maybe with strong northerly winds from the deserts of Jemen or Saudi Arabia.



First thing to do after arrival was to dive under the boat and investigate why one of the propellers was not working properly. For almost a week it had been stuck in something. We suspected a fishing net but what Andrei found after a short dive was a "birds nest" of thin line. The ocean is full of garbage and as far as I am concerned, the problem is getting worse.



There is no real harbour but there is a concrete pier where relatively big ships can dock. It seems that quite big wooden cargo ships are still used in the traffic between the Gulf states and Socotra. If you look closely you can see their outdoor toilets hanging on the stern.





One ship was unloading food aid from UAE. Another ship had ice onboard. We also saw big loads of plywood from Finland on the dock.



You can get water in jerrycans close to the dinghy landing. The security guards are very helpful.



Vultures are common on Socotra. This one with the yellow head is called Egyptian Vulture. There were many of them in the streets of Hadibo.





During the 1980s Soviet supported Socotra with military equipment. A number of unusable Soviet T-34 tanks still remain in the sand. This one we found outside Qalansiyah village on the west coast.



On the extreme north west end of the island, near the village Qalansiyah there is a very beautiful beach with a salt water lagoon called Detwah Lagoon.



And if you go for the mountains you will see some very strange trees. To the left is a Cucumber tree. This one grows directly on a big block of stone. Mid picture is the Desert Rose tree with its conically shaped trunk and just a few leaves at the top. The last picture is a Destert Rose in bloom.



Higher up in the mountains you find the magical Dragon Blood Trees. Very old and beautifully shaped. Their red juice is used for healing wounds but also for makeup.



The pictures talk for them selves. Beautiful, isn't it?



We also saw the endemic Socotra Starling. A beautiful black bird with brown/orange colors on their wings that you could only see when they were flying.



The last night of our stay the wind increased and a tough swell started building up in our anchorage. In the middle of the night we had to take our anchor up and seek shelter closer to the pier where the local boats were staying. Finally, after sunrise, we managed to tie up in safety on the leeward side of Gulf Star, a small cargo ship. The crew on Gulf Star was very helpful and one of them asked if he could come aboard to have a look at our machine room.

He was very dissapointed when he saw our two little 40 hp Volvo engines. He expected something much bigger. When I told him that this is a sailing yacht and we are happy if we can keep 6 knots in average over a longer period without any engine at all, he was very surprised.





The waves broke over the pier and continued onto the deck of Gulf Star. The crew had to put out a lot of lines to secure her.



Bird of Passage was well protected from the wind behind the Gulf Star but the swell was still a problem. Many lines were needed before she was happy and not all of them made it more than a few hours before they broke.



It was now clear that we were not going to leave until the weather was better. So, we had lots of time to kill. I looked forward to a long nights sleep but woke up early to the crowing sound of a rooster. A visit on the Gulf Star showed that they had live chicken and a rooster in a box on their aft deck.





I also had time to study the birds around us. This one we had not seen before. It's a Sooty Gull (Sv:Sotmå, Lat:Ichthyophaga hemprichii), common in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea.



So, finally after a full week, we said goodbye to Socotra. A very different island with only 10-15 yachts visiting each year. Our agent, Ghanem Ali, came with our passports and we paid for our visas. Watertanks full and still lots of diesel. Time to go. A lot of people in the harbour followed our departure.



Goodbye beautiful Socotra. The Galapagos of the Indian Ocean.



**End of Socotra 2020**



