

CORAL OF COWES Atlantic Crossing

April 26 – May 25, 2015
Sint Maarten to Azores (2200 nm)
Azores to Cowes, UK (1300 nm)



Coral of Cowes was built in 1902 by White Brothers of Southampton. She was designed by Fred Shepherd who was known for his mastery of the use of space, and Coral of Cowes is a fine example of his art. With a refit in 2011, her interior exhibits all the character of her original build. She is a magnificent example of her genre - essentially quite unspoilt – and devastatingly beautiful to behold.

This classic sailing yacht accommodates 8 guests in 3 cabins, and is available for charter in Cowes this summer.

Click for Coral of Cowes [ebrochure](#)

Introduction

The master and commander of the ocean seas, Richard Oswald (owner/captain of **Coral of Cowes**), has instructed me to chronicle our voyage across the Atlantic. As loyal crew member and scribe, I will do that. But this duty comes with trepidations. I sail with six Brits, two of which disavow allegiance to the UK since they are from Guernsey. The seventh is Dexter from the island of the spices, Grenada. I am the eighth, an American, and as it has happened on so many of my world travels, again I find myself the only gringo on the bus.

Now for you who are not familiar with that North American cliché phrase, “gringo” refers to a white person who finds oneself south of the border of the US, usually making numerous cultural blunders without really wanting to offend anyone. In some ways, I am beyond that description. I’ve traveled much of the globe—all the continents except Antarctica, and don’t have any desire to complete the list. I now find myself aboard the Coral of Cowes, a classic 1903 schooner about to embark on a voyage across the Atlantic eastward bound from Sint Maarten.

Honestly, it is not that surprising. I am here to fulfill a lifetime dream, sailing across the ocean. It is bucket list time for me. This involves a physical challenge that at my age of 67, could be considered by certain sensible people as over the top, pushing the edge, simply acting silly. Nonsense. Captain Oswald told the crew at dinner last night that the crossing is more mentally demanding. Cerebral stress? After living the life of a documentary filmmaker for nearly 40 years at times in worn-torn countries, I am not too worried about the mental aspect.

I could be wrong. But what I am sure about is that we are going to have a hell of a voyage. I invite you along for the ride. We leave tomorrow and there is still much to do. I need to get back to the ship missing our last cocktail hour until Horta. Appropriately, this gringo is cooking Mexican food. Until the next one.

Patrick Holian

Days 2-4

A fish story. We run two long filament lines graced with flamingo pink lures off Coral's stern. This morning Dexter the bosun yells, "Fish!" and starts pulling in the line tied to starboard. He hauls in a whitish-gray creature and declares it a tuna. "Dexter calls all fish either a tuna, a mahi mahi or a barracuda," claims Henry and then makes a mad dash to find the fish ID book. In the meantime, I plead my case to Dexter for an unconditional release. The beast has the fins and shape of something like an ocean perch and a peculiar black stripe that orbits its head. At less than a foot, it is not ready for the frying pan. I haven't seen this species before, but a tuna it is not. Henry fails to find the book in the hold. Dexter finally releases our mystery fish so it can live another day.

The captain begins to talk the word "spinnaker" to the crew. We want to stay north of the rhum line and pick up some speed as well. A compromise is reached and the crew hoists a flying jib, which give us at least another half knot. Not long after, our beautiful SSE winds begin to shift. We perform a late afternoon gybe that puts us on a more northerly course. This is a good move since continuing to move easterly will send us into the doldrums of the Azore high. Our immediate goal is to reach latitude 30 and then sail east above the high to the Azores. In Sint Martin we bought and stowed additional diesel in jerry cans on deck just in case we get low on fuel, but would rather save the fuel if we can. As Captain Richard says, "This voyage is all about conserving resources."

I spend countless hours simply staring at the sea. Its endlessness is mesmerizing. I spot my first airplane in three days. Those air passengers will cross the Atlantic in 9 hours. In that time we will sail but a small fraction of the distance to Europe. And while this "only gringo on the bus" spends time with his mates, I get to learn new words like "journo" for journalist and new phrases like "Tip me the wink" for 'let me know'.

Patrick signing off at:
24 degrees 47' 44" North, 57 degrees 54' 39" West

Days 5-7

Special note for Za Za...

The crew is in horror in discovering that they did not purchase enough British tea to make it back to the UK. Can you please contact Alexander's mom through email and ask if she can bring 2 boxes of PG tips to Horta? Thanks.

We left the Tropic of Cancer early morning of Day 4. Since then the temps have dropped, the waves are higher, the swells bigger, and the sunsets-when not obscured by clouds-last much longer. Since we were unable to download weather charts from Iridium, we received a weather forecast by the passing freighter, Phoenix One. The storm that had passed through Bermuda a few days ago was now to our north. The plan was to grab the force from the tail end of that system and race east. We gybed. The force did not disappoint. We had 15-20 foot waves and Force 6/7 winds. "This is for the record," exclaimed Captain Richard. "We just did 14.9 knots on a 75 ton, 100 year old surfboard!" as Coral carved up the downslope of a huge wave.

Later, a hole in the main sail was spotted and had to be lowered for repair. The good news is that the fore main, top sail and fore sails powered us just fine. Helming was a bit easier. The downside is that the ship rocked and rolled in the still disturbed seas. It was a very long night for all. Sleeping was challenging at best. Plus the main could not be easily raised again due to waves. Our speed dropped to 6 or 7 knots.

Day 6 brought lower waves and easy helming. We all enjoyed our first showers since departing. Now on the 7th day we have gybed again, heading north. We are still about two degrees south of 30 latitude that will take us easterly to the Azores. A new weather report from another freighter predicts Force 5-6 winds. We leave the main down-now repaired-for calmer times. We have about 1250 miles to go to Horta.

Special thanks to Captain John Magruder who gave me a pair of foul weather pants before leaving. The pants have been keeping me dry and comfortable through the mist.

Wildlife Report

We have seen several storm petrels, fascinating pint-sized birds that are rarely seen on land. They maneuver between waves just inches above the water in search of small fish. Yesterday we also spotted a couple of white-tailed tropic birds. These graceful flyers have two slender tail feathers at the rear, about a third the length of the body.

Dexter pulled in a meter long sailfish yesterday, but it escaped just yards from the stern. I failed to mention this Day 3 event earlier, but it deserves repeating now. Two crew members claim that they saw a whale 'chasing' a yellow fin tuna toward our lures. I think most whales other than orcas ingest food and kneel through their mouths rather than doing the predatory chomp-chomp. But I have no Google to confirm this. In any event, the tuna never took the hook.

Patrick signing off at 28 degrees 06' 24" North, 50 degrees 57' 35" West

Day 8

Sunrise starts with a close encounter of the freighter kind. As I come up on deck I see the massive ship steaming off our stern 100 meters away. I have been surprised about how many vessels we have met during this voyage--at least one every night and sometimes a day sitting as well.

Then the day gets busy with strikes from our two lines. The first catch is a foot long mystery fish. Richard declares it to be a bream. Whatever it is, we eat it this afternoon as part of a fish stew. Then we get lucky and pull in two mahi mahi, perhaps three feet long for the larger one.

With this abundance of catch we celebrate our progress of passing the midway point on this eighth day of the passage. I eat pancakes cooked by Charlie and top them with guava jam for breakfast. At midday it's sashimi from this morning's catch along with soy, wasabi and ginger. To top off the lunch, we gorge on a menage of French cheese bought on Sint Maarten. Then more mahi mahi for dinner, this time baked, accompanied with fresh peppers and mashed potatoes.

Day 9

Charlie and I are on watch during a midnight passage. The moon is full tonight and the man in it is saying his usual 'oh' but with adding the line, "Coral, you are beautiful!" The lighting director in the sky is mixing dark, ominous clouds with slashes of silver moonbeams here and there on the black ocean surface. A squall threatens to overtake us and ruin the mood. It splits, though, and finally fades away. We are clocking nine knots, rolling on a northeast course as the surrounding waves make a fizz sound like a Coca Cola being violently poured into a glass.

The day brings gray skies and seas. An accidental gybe on the last crew shift resulted in a broken preventer for the main sail and our stern light was lost. More importantly, no one was injured during the "all hands on deck" alert at 5am. We are now under 1000 miles to Horta--990 at lunchtime with 20+ knots blowing.

Wildlife

Claire spots a Portuguese man of war drift by.

Last night at sunset a small, sparrow-sized, terrestrial bird passes us on a northerly course. It glances at our boat momentarily and then decides to move on. Then a second appears. And a third. A total of six fly by while we clip along at 7 knots. They are in migration, northward bound. On a size versus adversity scale, these tiny birds are simply amazing and the immensity of this big, blue ocean only accentuates that.

Patrick signing off from
32 degrees 38 minutes North, 47 degrees 38 minutes West

Day 10

OK. Now is not the time for flip flops or shorts, snorkel gear or adult beverages with funny looking umbrellas. We are out of those little latitudes of which I am so fond. The Atlantic has just got serious on us. A low pressure storm that we started tracking 1000 miles ago decided to join another of its kind that just arrived from Newfoundland. These two bad boys together are churning up the sea and making us adjust to a few things. We have brought out the heavy artillery--wellies, foulies, hats, gloves. There is now a chill in the air and we have changed course drastically. To avoid the 45-knot storm north of us, we had to set a southerly course, losing precious distance that we had gained just the day before.

We have just now gybed again and are now on a more favorable course, northeast, which keeps us south of the storm to a degree but allows us to continue to head easterly toward our destination somewhat. It is a compromise. But the winds cranking and waves huge, Richard has ordered harnesses for anyone on deck regardless of time of day.

Day 11

We just had 24 hours of big waves (4 meters average) and Force Seven winds. Richard had only Coral's permanent crew and Paul, who has sailed the English Channel extensively, to helm the boat. The rest of us--Claire, Christopher and I--were ordered to galley duty until the storm ends. Today, now that the winds are down, we are back on regular shifts. Sails are mended and we prepare for the next blow.

Destination Unknown

After 11 days at sea we are less sure about our destination than when we departed Sint Maarten. Horta is still possible, but as each low passes through, we are forced to stay south to avoid the storm systems. A northern approach to Horta would be easier for us. With that taken away, there is now talk of landing in the Azore's Sao Miguel, Lisbon or Madeira. Tomorrow is Friday and perhaps we will know more by then. Today was sunny, warm enough for T-shirts on deck and more boat maintenance.

Wildlife

Two small dolphins to starboard. Perhaps their parents swim under.

On my 8-11 pm shift late night, the moon did not rise until afterwards. That allowed me to see a dazzling display of bio luminesce exploding off our port at waterline. These micro beasts release their chemical energy when wave meets hull. What a grand light show.

Patrick signing off at 31 degrees 51' 88" N, 37 degrees 55' 69" W

Day 13

Hello, all. This will probably be the last blog for this voyage since tomorrow is expected to be a busy day. When we make landfall I am sure that the crew will be eager to directly contact friends and lovers.

Early morning we gybe again on an easterly heading. Thanks to weather information from Alex based in Grenada and Dick in Guernsey, we are alerted that another low is approaching. This change of direction will keep us out of its rage. Once it passes, probably tomorrow, we will gybe again north in the direction of our landfall. Richard expects we will arrive on Monday, Day 15.

The Crew

Richard has organized the shifts so that everyone aboard works with each crew member whether helming and doing deck work or cooking and cleaning. It has allowed this gringo to learn a few new things. For instance, I discovered what it is like to be an entrepreneur jeweler from Chris who has crafted in gold and silver his entire adult life for a living. Then there are Claire and Paul Briggs from Guernsey. I found out the Guernsey cows still do exist, that the island is not part of the UK but rather the British Isles, and the number one industry there is off shore banking. Talk about a cash cow.

And then there is bosun Dexter Telesford from Grenada. I always wanted to visit 'the island of the spices' and hearing Dexter's tales only want me to go that much sooner. He tells me about the various kinds of mangos. There are heavenly sounding ones like rose, peach and Ceylon. Strange industrial monikers such as

starch and turpentine. And funny names like split belly, tin tin and belly full (you can only eat just one they are so massive). All these mangos, and Telesford listed 14 varieties, ripen at the same time between May and July. Now I know when to plan my visit. "Pack carefully," warns Dexter, "Once you arrive on Grenada you won't want to go home."

Day 14

The chess match continues. We have 270 miles to go to Horta. Our goal is to get as close to the island before the next low comes in. That is predicted Sunday night. Richard thinks that the storm will arrive before we do and will be into the wind on the last leg. How much of a slog will we have? That's the big question at this moment. If the low is late in forming, we could make it to Horta with few problems. If the forecast holds true, it will be a challenging end to a 2200 mile voyage.

Patrick signing off from
34 degrees 41' North, 31 degrees 47' West

May 17

From Captain Richard Oswald

On Tuesday we limped into Horta with a broken bowsprit. Like the characters in a Patrick O Brian novel we fashioned a new one out of a pair of 200 year old house beams and today we sail for Cowes on the evening tide. Great team work from a brilliant crew. Thank you. Richard

Hello All, we have a new blog writer - Henry, who will continue the Coral blog for the last part of the voyage, Azores to Cowes.

The Next Leg

May 19

Day 1

After a five day turnaround and our new Bowsprit in place we disembark from the Azores in the evening with the turning of the tide, bidding fair well to Patrick our Journalist (and any chance of a decent blog). Peter's Bar shall be sorely missed by the crew. The Azores High has moved North and we sail out into calm waters and light South-Easterly winds, perfect for training our new crew member Alex.

Day 2

The weather remains overcast with a 5-10 knot breeze and no swell, pods of dolphins have been passing by every couple of hours and some whales were spotted from afar. Just as we go to turn in after dinner a small bird decides to take up residence in the forepeak and despite Dexter shouting at it, it has refused to leave.

Day 3

I woke up at 5 this morning for my watch to discover Charlie "Attenborough" Couture attempting to feed the bird small pieces of cookie, as I write this it is loitering with intent around the breakfast table, taking shelter from a small squall disturbing the otherwise tranquil weather. We sit in hope that the High stays put or moves South, keeping the weather in England true to form. Sunshine at home means cold Easterly headwinds for us.

Henry leaving you in suspense for the next instalment at:

41 degrees 23' N, 25 degrees 30' W

Day 4

A cloudy, cold start to the day. The air full of smoke and the wail of fire alarms as Michelin Star Chris cooks up a storm: bacon, eggs, fried bread, the works. We have caught a Tuna due to Charlie and I's tactical, and completely deliberate, decision to keep the fishing gear out all night. The wind has increased slightly and

veered allowing us to head North East, hoping to avoid the headwinds on the other side of the High. The day brightens up in the afternoon, the boldest among us going sunbathing despite the chill.

Day 5

The sun is shining today and it is actually hot! Wet weather gear and thick jumpers are cast aside all round. Our course has moved round to East-North-East overnight. The wind dies in the evening signaling our arrival in the center of the High and a day or so of motoring ahead. Richard and I are in the galley with the result that the place looks as though we cooked Christmas Dinner for thirty shortly before the ship was riven with cannon fire.

Day 6

Thick fog this morning with only 100m or so of visibility but it's warming up, another sunny day could be in the cards. Still very little wind and flat calm although it has come round to a Northerly, we may be able to raise the sails again soon. In their free time several members of the crew have taken up making conch shell jewelery under the instruction of Chris with... mixed results. Dexter has his name put on a bracelet for fear of forgetting what he's called or indeed losing the bangle. He explains enigmatically that this is also why his name is tattooed on his leg.

Day 7

The fog finally subsides but there's tragically not a drop of wind so the motoring on a course of 80 degrees continues. The crew are now all but out of cigarettes and Dexter, the sponge, has been rationed harshly. The flying jib is going up when the wind arrives. We set to work after a lengthy, and not entirely civil, discussion on making up new netting that will support us and the sail without damaging Charlie's spar. We maintain a steady speed of 7 knots with a pod of dolphins swimming on our bow.

Day 8

We crossed the continental shelf in the night and entered the Western Approaches. The intermittent fog has returned and we study the AIS and radar fastidiously as the number of ships we come across increases. The Northerly Wind picks up allowing us to turn off the motor, building over the day until in the afternoon it becomes a force 5 and we cruise at 10 knots for the first time in too long.

Day 9

Land! Hope is restored as we catch sight of the Lizard, a North-Westerly and a favourable tide continues to push us on home. Impromptu, off key but rousing renditions of Jerusalem and I Vow to thee my Country are abounding. Keep your phones switched on. See you all soon.

Henry signing off at:

49 degrees 46N 005 degrees 29 W