

July 5, 2004

The passage from Bermuda to the Azores was a mixed bag of wind and sea conditions. The Azorean and Bermuda highs that usually are prevalent this time of year were just not there. Instead, there were quite a few fronts coming off the north American coast. For the first part of this passage we stayed south of these lows. We started this passage with a new moon and ended with a full moon. During this passage we also wore sweats for the first time to keep warm.

Our first three days we sailed a broad reach. Friday, June 18, and Saturday, June 19, the winds were WSW to SW 15-20 knots, seas 6 feet, and at times KUHELA was surfing down the following seas. On Sunday the wind increased to SW 21-23 knots, seas 8-10 feet, and now KUHELA was really surfing. This wasn't a comfortable motion as the boat did a lot of rolling. The first two days we sailed with a reefed main and poled-out jib. When the wind picked up, both sails were reefed even further.

Monday through midday Wednesday saw winds fluctuating from 4 to 11 knots, coming first from the north on Monday and swinging around to the south by Wednesday morning. Seas were mostly 2 feet. When the winds were light and variable, we motorsailed or even just motored. It wasn't until Tuesday that we had our first blue sky day. Before that, the days were overcast, sometimes with light drizzle, and dampness permeated the cabin. What a wonderful feeling it was to finally have the cabin dry again.

By midday Wednesday, the wind was 16-18 knots SSW with another low forecasted. During the day we enjoyed ½ to 1 knot favorable current. By Thursday morning the wind was 17-21 knots SSW, and the cloud cover had returned causing dampness once more inside the cabin.

On Thursday morning, June 24, we noticed that the alternator had stopped charging the batteries. As the auto pilot was steering the boat at this time and needed battery power, we decided to switch to the self-steering vane. While engaging the self-steering vane a fitting broke rendering it inoperable. An hour later, after troubleshooting the problem, Phil fixed the alternator. During that hour, though, it occurred to us both that if he hadn't been able to fix the alternator we might be steering full time, not a pleasant thought.

By late Thursday evening we passed through the front, and the wind shifted back to the NE. On Friday the wind was still from the NE 12-15 knots, seas 4-6 feet, but now we were encountering for the first time a NW countercurrent of 1 to 1½ knots. Our ability to tack was hindered by this countercurrent; we were "in transit to somewhere," but definitely not to the Azores. On Friday we made only 94 nautical miles toward our destination.



*Mid Atlantic Ocean*

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Saturday morning, June 26, with the wind still out of the NE, we took advantage of the reduced sea and wind conditions to motorsail north in order to get out of the countercurrent. By midday, the wind had eased to 4 knots ENE with seas 2 feet, and we were enjoying beautiful weather. Around 36 degrees north latitude we finally lost our countercurrent. Because of the NW countercurrent, we made only 67 miles toward our destination on Saturday.

Saturday evening, with the wind increasing to 10-13 knots ENE, we began to sail. When Phil tried to send off emails and our daily position report later that evening he found that the email modem had become inoperable; the modem would not key the transmitter. Luckily for the remainder of the passage, Phil was able to put in our daily position reports via ham radio operators.

On Sunday, after two days of NE to ENE winds, the wind finally came around from the south. We sailed with 15-20 knots of wind, seas 3-4 feet, and 1½ to 2 knots favorable current. Sunday ended up being the best run of this passage, 150 nautical miles. This day also saw a mixture of blue skies and overcast skies, and this daily mixture of sun and clouds continued throughout the remainder of the passage. By evening, with the winds increasing to 28-30 knots and seas to 8-10 feet, we took down the main and sailed with just the staysail. All the motion caused from the southerly seas and westerly current made for a long night. We both were tired on Monday.

Monday morning, June 28, with the wind subsiding to 16-20 knots SSW and seas to 6 feet, Phil started to hoist the mainsail but found that the main halyard had become wrapped around the mast steps during the high winds Sunday night. After trying unsuccessfully to undo the main halyard, Phil used the drifter halyard to hoist the main. From midday Monday until Tuesday evening, with winds SSW to SW 10-15 knots, seas 2-4 feet, and ½ to ¾ favorable current, KUHELA peacefully sailed along through the water. What a difference from 24 hours earlier.

Tuesday evening we started to motorsail due to light airs. Early Wednesday morning Phil took advantage of the calm conditions to climb the mast steps to the spreader and untangle the main halyard. By midmorning we were once again sailing with winds SW to SSW 8-12 knots. By evening, though, the light airs had returned, and all through the night and all day Thursday we either motorsailed or motored. We didn't start sailing again until Friday morning.

Friday, July 2, our last full day at sea, we sailed with winds SSW to WSW 7-10 knots and seas 2 feet. During the night as we approached the island of Flores in the Azores, we had some squalls and the winds became variable. At first light, with the island only nine miles away, we were able to see just a sliver of its outline as it lay hidden behind the overcast.

We arrived at the small harbor of Lajes, Flores at 6 a.m., Saturday, July 3, hoisted our quarantine flag, and anchored shortly thereafter. We had traveled 1800 nautical miles from Bermuda to Flores in 14 days, 15½ hours. Our intention was to stay at this island for about 3 days before heading to Horta on the island of Faial. As Flores was considered by many the most beautiful island in all the Azores, we wanted to experience firsthand its beauty. Plus, we were both tired and were looking forward to a good night's sleep without having to be awakened every 3 hours for watches.

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Some sails are easy, and some sails are hard. The sail from Lajes, Flores to Horta, Faial was a hard “hold on“ sail with lots of “rocking and rolling” due to sloppy seas caused from opposing wind and current. During this sail we had winds NNE to NE 15-20 knots, seas 4-6 feet, and a countercurrent of ½ to 1¼ knots. Sailing hard to windward, we took quite a bit of water over the boat at times. We had to tack several times around the southern end of Faial. Then, in the channel between the islands of Faial and Pico, we had to tack several more times before reaching the Horta harbor entrance due to a 2 knot countercurrent setting against us.

Once inside the Horta breakwaters, we were amazed to see all the boats in the marina (about 200) with so many different countries’ flags flying. The sail from Lajes, Flores to Horta, Faial had taken us 27 hours. As the marina and immigration offices were closed until morning, we came alongside the main wharf for the night squeezing in-between two larger boats. With our arrival on Sunday, July 4, we immediately set our clocks ahead 3 hours to Azores Daylight Savings Time. Relaxing in the cockpit that evening, many different languages could be heard. As we were both very tired, we looked forward to our first “continuous” night’s sleep in 16 days. On Monday after checking-in, we moved the boat into the marina and rafted outside two other boats along the inner breakwater.



*Landfall Azores*



*Kuhela Moored Horta Azores*

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