

Suvretta - Tonga to Strangford Lough by way of Cape Horn

Sam Davis



THE FAULKNER CUP

THE CLUB'S PREMIER AWARD

It was the beginning of November and getting late for departure south to the Southern Ocean. I had been in the northern group of the islands of Tonga since 14th August and whilst there I ordered a small storm jib of 70 sq ft with provision for a 20% reef. The storm jib I had on board of about 110 sq ft was much too large for the higher winds I expected to encounter. A friend at home offered to send out the new style 'Jordan' Series drogue that he had made up, but fortunately a New Zealand yachtsman had the makings of one that he sold me, which I started to make up, and later finished while on passage.



Suvretta Neiafu - Tonga

I stocked up on food stuffs, cleared out on 14th November and headed around to Thanna Island about ten miles away to finalise stowage before departing.

The first tropical depression was passing west of the Fijian Islands and tracking southeast towards the first convoy of yachts which was making its passage to New Zealand. This was quite nasty with open sea winds of 45 knots and gusts of 74 knots in Tongatapu. Vava'u in the northern group of islands missed that blow but some of the yachts already on passage and close to the Minerva Reefs turned back whilst others which were too far into the passage carried on. A 42ft modern design yacht, *Windigo*, managed to capsize - it was probably knocked down due to carrying too much sail. The rig was still standing at the time of rescue. Although both crew sustained some injuries, the vessel was undamaged. Nevertheless they activated their epi-irb and called to be rescued. This brought a NZ rescue aircraft and another yacht plus fishing trawler to the location. The vessel was abandoned two days later and that, together with the life raft which had been deployed, created

yet another hazard for seafarers. The yacht and life raft were still adrift a couple of weeks later when I passed a few hundred miles to the east. This type of seamanship now seems to be accepted and is a common occurrence.

As this depression was passing I noticed that the wind had moved into the north. When it was time to leave I was fortunate that another tropical depression was moving south eastwards just to the west of Fiji. Although these revolving storms can track in any direction, they mostly move south east passing to the south of the Tongan Group before dissipating into the Southern Ocean when they reach the colder waters.

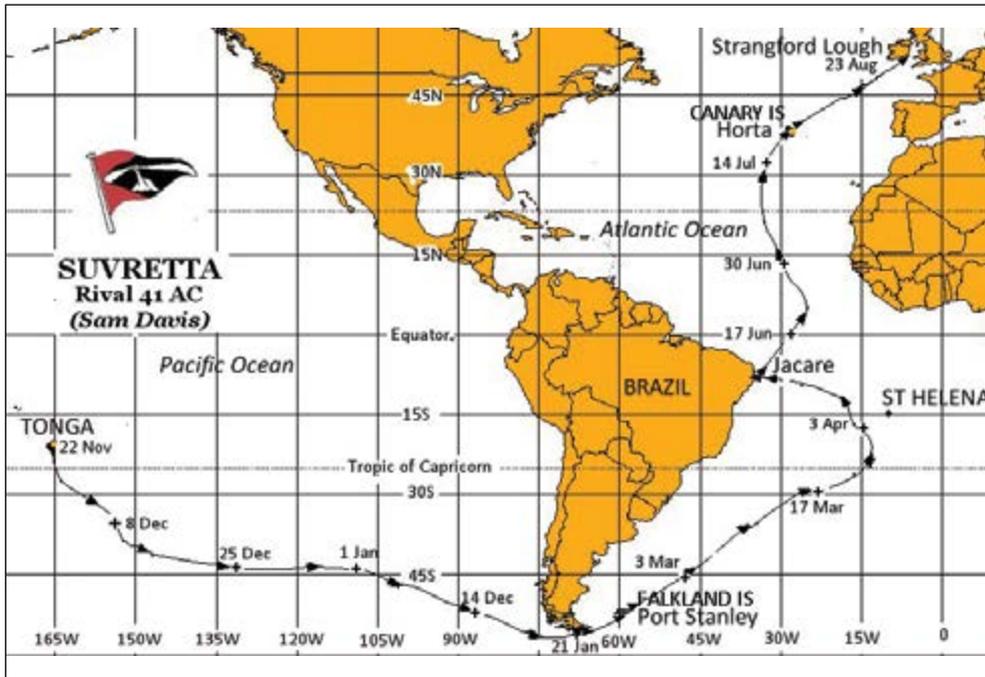


Sam Davis Aug 2013

I finally departed on 22nd November. The latest depression had formed at Vanuatu to the north west of Fiji and I hoped it would track south eastwards like the previous one. The winds moved into the north east as predicted and I made good passage time over the deep water of the Tongan Trench. This was very relaxing compared to what it would have been to the west of Tonga where one has to pass over the shallow waters of the Tongan Ridge, an area subject to earthquakes. There had been several over the past few months, as well as an eruption, with a lot of pumice stone floating around. One of these earthquakes shook *Suvretta* when she was at anchor in Neiafu during September; it woke me up early one morning. But these earthquakes were low on the Richter scale and presented no problem to sailors.

I was making good progress and on 27th November I was at 23° 30' south, 166° 44' west, departing the Tropics. The winds were less than 15 knots and still northerly. I was glad of this as I had hurt my left elbow a few weeks back and the pain and swelling were giving me sleepless nights. The elbow would give me grief for the next few months. The next day the wind shifted to the east and I was now hard on the wind on a course of south south east. I was now back in the trade winds with the influence of the depression passed.

On 29th November I listened to Russell Radio from NZ and to David who provides weather forecasts and shepherds yacht convoys back and forwards from Fiji and Tonga to NZ. He informed the fleet that, although it was not now



officially the Cyclone season in the south west Pacific, a Tropical Storm which had formed just north of the equator had developed into a Tropical Typhoon. It was now at 2° 40' north, 144° 00' west, and tracking 295 degrees at a speed of 6 knots, with winds over 65 knots, gusting over 80 knots. This was very unusual storm for the north west Pacific. As the depression had started up at 01° 30' north it would have been a shock to those who believe that they were safe within 10 degrees of the line, and also to those yachts that went north to the Marshall Islands to seek safe anchorages away from the southern cyclone season.

The Admiralty publications clearly state that these revolving storms can track almost anywhere and at any time. One may get away with being ill-prepared or careless, but every year some yachts are caught out - usually the ones that are not prepared for heavy seas.

The most frustrating part of this passage was transiting the *Variables of Capricorn*, which lived up to their reputation. The further east you go on the transit, the wider the band. I was becalmed for days and days with the sea eventually becoming so calm that even the long swell for which the Pacific is renowned was completely gone. At times the sails just hung without a whisper of wind. I sailed in all directions to try to reach the famed Roaring Forties. I tried all combinations of rig, sometimes with full main combined with full genoa, staysail and gennaker, all set at the same time, boomed out in various ways to get some miles each day. I finally gave up and, with sails on the deck, resorted to reading books and putting my feet up, which was much more productive.

Eventually I worked down to 39° south and for a couple of days got hard winds from the west, probably the remains of a tropical disturbance passing by. I had changed to heavy weather sails and to prepare for the westerlies. I changed the genoa and bent on the yankee, removed the dorade vents and then stowed or re-arranged deck equip-

ment, etc. My Series drogue was ready with its bridle attached, ready for deployment. I also carry two tyres with chain bridles for use with warps and weights if needed. This was the first time I had a Series drogue on board - it was to prove beneficial later in the passage.

Now that *Suvretta* was settled for the long 4000 mile run eastwards and south towards Cape Horn, I read up on the conditions I could expect. Some great books like those written by Alan Villiers, Bob Griffith and Gerry Clarke gave me a flavour for what was to come. This part of the passage is probably the loneliest anywhere - you track through a position which is further from any land mass or community than anywhere else on earth.

The Atlas of Pilot Charts describes the gale frequencies and wave heights south of 40° during the southern summer. They resemble the mid-winter conditions in the North Atlantic with a continual procession of depressions heading eastwards.

I now encountered some quite strong winds, and at times *Suvretta* had bare poles and was still doing 7 to 8 knots, providing some lively and enjoyable sailing. Only once did I get any water in the cockpit and then it only half filled. The long swells had a period of 12 to 17 seconds, but as we were in deep water they presented no unusual problems. There are some reefs and seamounts far from land that are noted on the French and Admiralty paper charts which are not shown on the electronic charts that I used. It really is good practice to carry paper charts and professional publications as some of the Yachting Guides and Pilots also leave out some essential information.

There was one gale with breaking seas of note, which in general presented no undue problem but which lasted a few days.. *Suvretta* was under bare poles and I was down below when a sea broke just at the stern. I was lying in my quarter berth when I felt *Suvretta* being shunted forward so forcefully that it moved me in the bunk. These conditions were getting close to the need for trailing some gear, but as the directional stability was still good and seas were from directly astern and mostly breaking up the side decks, I decided to leave it as I was making good time and making up for all the calm periods. The only annoyance was that, because the Rival 41 AC has internal scuppers, the water running from the decks and draining to just below the water line made a loud gurgling noise - and these scuppers were situated right at my bunk.

In the open ocean and in deep water the seas rarely curl and break, even in storm conditions. But this does

happen around areas of seamounts or other local areas such as arriving at a continental shelf, especially where currents are present that tend to follow the contours.

I planned my passage using the *Admiralty* publications, mostly *Ocean Passages for the World NP-136* and the associated charts, *Currents Chart No.5310*, *Climatic Chart 5301* and the *Sailing Ship Routes No.5308*. The information contained has been collated over many years by professional seafarers. I don't have internet on board so I pay particular attention the barometric pressure, etc. I find this works well enough for me, but at times it would be beneficial to have the facility to download grib files and to adjust course accordingly. I mostly got it right, except for a couple of memorable occasions which I will describe below.

On Day 31 of the passage, on 22nd December I noted in the log a day run of 125 miles and a beautiful clear sparkling sunny day. My position was 42° south, 140° west, and the falling barometer indicated that another low pressure front was imminent. These depressions were regular and moving eastwards one after the other, some with little wind and others with considerably more than needed.

Day 34 was Christmas Day and I had a Fray Bentos chicken and mushroom pie with potatoes and peas for lunch and for dinner, followed by a pleasant sleep. The weather had been calm with a day's run of only 89 miles.

In the early morning on Day 37 and 44° south the wind was blustery all day with the swell rising, and by 02.00 the following morning it had become very nasty as the wind changed. I was considering slowing *Suvretta* down. I was under bare poles at the time, but the wind suddenly dropped to 10 to 12 knots. Now I had to set full sail to keep her steady in a confused sea. The wind had moved to the north as the low was passing to the south and I had high pressure to the north.

I continued running eastwards around 43° to 44° south. I was getting enough wind at these latitudes so there was no need to move further south yet. The climatic chart for January shows that at 110° west there is an area where the ice can come as high as 40° and where the warmer current and air from the north west converges with the cold waters from the Antarctic to create misty weather. I began experiencing poor visibility and thought it wise to pass this zone before shaping my course directly towards Cape Horn. I had these conditions for a week. Although I thought there was ice around I saw none. I enjoyed a full undisturbed night's sleep every day. I was about 1200 miles south of Pitcairn Island and gave some thought at times of sailing back up there again for another visit.

On 1st January 2013 the wind became changeable and dropped off. It was a beautiful starry night with an almost full moon on the wane: a night to remember. I was now 2000 miles from Cape Horn, so I began to shape my course to pass just to the south of the Diego Ramirez Islands, which are just south of the continental shelf and lie 65 miles to the south west of the Horn. All was going well

and I was making steady progress.

Early on the morning of 9th January in position 49° south, 100° west, I saw a Wandering Albatross. It circled and landed very close to starboard. It just looked over at me and settled down, totally unafraid. Sadly these solitary far-ranging birds are losing out to the long-line fishing boats. This was the only one I was to see in the Southern Pacific Ocean. It was nice to have this visit as the barometer was down to 996mb - and still falling. I was getting set up for more wind and was now in the Fifties south, but this was to be only a short bout of foul weather.

On 16th January, at 55° 30' south, the weather started to close in with rain and poor visibility. This was a worry as this is one of the signs that ice is about. A gale developed which lasted for a few days. By this time I was tracking towards the Diego Ramirez Islands and in deep water outside the continental shelf. However as I was becoming familiar with these depressions and knew that I had a few days of reasonable weather ahead, I couldn't resist coming to port a bit and steering a little north of east to have another look at Horn Island. The wind and seas continued to moderate as I closed Cape Horn. It was shrouded in cloud as I passed a



Passing Cape Horn

few miles to the south at 07.30 hrs on Day 61 (21st January) and went on to enter the Bay of Nassau. This lies between the Cape and Staten Island (Isla de los Estados). I was now completely becalmed, with the sails on deck. As the cloud lifted we lay under a beautiful clear sunny sky with a calm sea around. It was almost two years since I was last down in this area. There were lots of sea birds about and I could see far away Tierra del Fuego.

The weather here changes quickly and later, as a light wind got up, I made my way slowly to pass to the south and east of Staten Island, then west and north of the Burdwood Bank and then north eastwards towards Port Stanley. Only another four or five days left to finish the passage.

As I was passing to the south and east of Staten Island

the wind started to rise some more and the barometer dropped as it backed to the west by south west.. I was soon down to working sail and moving along at 6 knots plus. The wind rose quickly to over 20 knots with *Suvretta* heading on a north easterly course.

At noon on 24th January, when I was 277 miles from the entrance to Port Stanley and now out of the long Pacific swell, it all seemed to be much more peaceful. But not for long. The wind began to increase and it stayed all day with the sea temperature going down to 3°C. Midnight was dark and by 00.50 on 24th the wind had increased to 45 to 50 knots. It backed a little more and was now south west. By 02.00 I logged that I had passed the northwest edge of the Burdwood Bank and was now on track for the run in to Stanley harbour which is situated on the south east of the Falkland Islands. (Incidentally the Burdwood Bank is an area of 190 miles by 55 miles and is as shallow as 60 metres in places. It is not a place to be caught out in a heavy swell).

At 0020 on 25th I noted the cabin temperature was down to 5°C and the sea down was 3°C - one of those cold and dark windy nights with the seas and the wind getting higher. At 0400 I logged Beauchene Island bearing 350 degrees, distance 23 miles, the water depth 500 to 600 metres and the barometer at 998mb and falling. I was tracking 071° and, under bare poles, making 7 knots with the seas starting to break. I was getting further into shallower water by the hour. Just after I had taken one breaking sea, *Suvretta* was noticeably losing directional stability and the swell was moving slowly around to the south. This was a cause for concern as swells get steeper as the water depth decreases. After a semi broach, I deployed the Series drogue. This took only a minute to do, and as it took hold it was just like putting the brakes on. Suddenly *Suvretta* stabilised, but as the stern was held down, a sea immediately filled the cockpit. I saw it coming and got down in the cockpit protected by the wheel and binnacle. The cockpit emptied slowly through the small drains, but I had a large bag of warps tied down in it to reduce the capacity and weight of water it could hold.

By the evening the seas were getting so steep that they were all breaking and the cockpit was filling every 10 or 15 minutes. Once, when I was down below, the pressure on the wash boards was such as to press sheets of water inside the cabin at the sides - something I would not have thought possible. The cockpit hatches did not seal properly and they were letting water inside to the bilge;. Consequently I was pumping out every hour, sometimes 100 strokes. The inside of *Suvretta* was getting damp - or should I say damper than it was before?

The period of the waves was 5 seconds but as I was getting into ever more shallow water there was nothing I could do about it. The seas were so steep that I could not risk a course change. I just hoped as I watched the wild beauty of the seas that the drogue wouldn't part or a cleat pull out. Should that happen then I would get rolled over



Suvretta at Port Stanley

or pitch-pole. This was as bad as it could get. I stood at the stern watching the seas and, as each passed under *Suvretta's* stern and she dropped into the trough, the next sea looked so high that it was hard to believe that the stern would rise to it. But it did and the important thing to do now was get some rest. *Suvretta's* helm was lashed amidships and so she was tracking directly downwind with the seas directly on her stern. Thankfully all the seas were from directly astern and there were no cross seas evident.

I went down below and my radar detector's alarm went off alerting me that another vessel was close by. I switched on my VHF and listened to two stations talking, and then went up on deck - but could see nothing. I went down below again and asked for a radio check and subsequently found out that they were two large survey vessels standing by because of the weather. I gave my position and tracking and was informed that one of them was only five miles away but was unable to pick me up on their radar. I went on deck again and after a while saw it on the port bow a few miles away. Visibility was dreadful due to the wind blown spray. When I next spoke to them I was informed that I would present no danger as I would pass by more than a mile off. Later I got a forecast and they informed me that the wind was 60 knots and gusting more. This was a good F12 with waves of more than 10 metres. I found the shallow water steep waves of 30 ft or more with the short period very awkward and uncomfortable. Anyway this was the afternoon of 25th and they told that the forecast was for the seas to drop the next morning to 25 ft and the winds to moderate to 35 kts, still a good force seven.

I had been moving quite fast even though the drogue was still deployed and I was tracking to miss the entrance to Stanley Harbour by 16 miles to the south. This was going to be a bit of a disaster because I was almost out of diesel as I had used it to charge batteries (as my wind charger had failed a few days after leaving Tonga). The present sea and wind conditions would not allow me to make a course change to port by the 15 degrees which was needed; we

were just over 60 miles from the entrance. If I missed Port Stanley the only option would be to head on to South Africa. I would have to wait to see what the next morning would bring. During the night I could feel the wind decreasing but the seas remained steep and high.

I was just drifting off to sleep when there was an enormous bang and a crash followed by *Suvretta* falling over on her port side. I was flung from my bunk and must have bruised every part of me. She straightened up and when I got on deck she was stable. What had happened was this; as the wind speed had reduced *Suvretta* had less directional stability and, because we were moving steadily into shallower water, the seas started tumbling. One larger than usual wave had caught the boat and stood her on her bow. As she fell over on to her port side the Aries self steering oar had got over the top of the starboard leg of the drogue bridle. On the oar-to-pendulum leg fitting, there is a weak link which is designed to break if the oar hits a log or other such debris in the water. However on this occasion the bridle had come up hard above this weak link, breaking off the oar and bottom part of the pendulum leg. There was nothing I could do except pull in the steering oar which had a safety line attached and await daylight. The wind was indeed going down and the seas getting sloppy. I went down and to my bunk for what rest and sleep I could get. I have locking devices on my main hatch and wash boards that I dog down and fasten when I come on deck and retire

as I had thought of a solution to the problem of how to go some 30 degrees to port and to steer for the entrance to Stanley harbour without having a serious broach. This entailed releasing the starboard leg of the drogue bridle. *Suvretta* was now hanging on the port leg. The wind had reduced to the predicted 35 knots and the seas, although still big, had lost their steepness and were not breaking as much. I set some foresail, let out some of my furling yankee and used my electronic steering to hold *Suvretta* to port a few degrees. This was worked very well. The drogue was preventing *Suvretta* from broaching - although she was making a good attempt at times!

At 06.00 I commenced recovery of the drogue. The job was about ten times worse than I had anticipated. Under normal circumstances the drogue would be left until the wind had reduced to 20 knots or less; but I didn't have the time for this, so had to reach out over the stern and attach a small line on a rolling hitch, feed that to the winch in order to get a few feet of the drogue in each time. This went on all day. As the seas decreased a little I steered a little more to port until I was on course for Port Stanley entrance. Now and again a sea would wash over my head and down my neck. I was sweating at this work but eventually got enough sail set to make sufficient speed to keep control. I stopped recovering the drogue when I had about 75 % of it in and was able to steer into the calm waters of Stanley's outer bay, Port William, where I recovered the rest.

I entered Port Stanley at 16.30 on 26th January, feeling very tired and with the heel of my winch hand worn down to the flesh. I called the authorities and was directed alongside the pontoon in the middle of town and was quickly cleared in. It happened that this was my birthday. As I don't drink alcohol while at sea I poured a large gin and tonic, congratulated myself, and made my way up to the first restaurant for a large steak with all the trimmings. Wine was taken. I suppose I was feeling so tired that I just remember waking in my bunk the next morning wondering why everything was so still and quiet. But when I tried to move I was sore and stiff. I could hardly get up and could barely walk properly. So that was my arrival in the Falkland Islands after rather more than 6600 miles and 66 days from Neiafu Tonga. All very enjoyable miles, and some of them more so than others.

The Antarctic survey vessel the *Earnest Shackleton* arrived in harbour from the south on the evening of the 25th. They had reported by email to the Port Authorities about an enormous swell with winds of 60 knots. The authorities copied me on this email for the record. The high winds were caused by a high pressure system just to the north and a low pressure squeezing past to the south, closing in the isobars. Each year there are half a dozen or so sailing yachts quietly making long passages in the Southern Ocean, some of them single-handed and mostly without support.

The Falkland Islands.



Sam Davis and *Suvretta*, Howth, 2009

below.

On 26th at 05.00 our speed was down to two and a half knots. The drogue was doing its job. It is worth remarking that heaving-to or lying a-hull in short and steep breaking seas like these would not have been an option as any yacht would have been rolled by them. The only feasible protection is to achieve directional stability by putting out a drogue. When I woke I was feeling sore but in great spirits

I stayed along side the pier pontoon in Port Stanley for a couple of days before moving down to the FIPAS Dock where I stayed for a month making repairs to my Aries steering gear. I had a spare unit minus the cracked mainframe from the time in Puerto Montt when a small ship went adrift in the harbour and broke the original Aries circumnavigator. I had to get a new unit from Denmark. I must say it is not nearly as efficient as the one I had as they substituted the Teflon cage rollers with plain nylon bearings. It seems that Teflon is too expensive.

I enjoyed the Falklands and went over to Goose Green for a visit, and then met with Jerome Poncett who circumnavigated in the original *Damien* and who now lives in the Falklands. He showed me through *Golden Fleece* which he uses for South Georgia charters. *Australis*, another 70ft charter vessel arrived from South Georgia; they had been shepherding an army expedition 'In the footsteps of Shackleton' and said it had been successful with very good weather. Peter Smith, the designer of the Rocnor anchor was there on *Kiviroa*, a 54ft aluminium cutter he built himself; we exchanged some information. Phil and Julia, both Canadians were cruising their 36ft steel cutter *Illawong* and had been there for some time and were getting ready



Southern Ocean sailing

to depart for Patagonia. Phil kindly found my wind charger fault and repaired it.

Port Stanley to Jacare, Brazil

I cleared out for the 'High Seas' with South Africa as a possible destination; but at the back of my mind I was always thinking of Strangford Lough. There was a high pressure system to the north and west which was stable at this time. I slipped the lines at 13.00 on 25th February and had good winds to take me north east. The wind dropped off on 26th and when I went up on deck at 07.00 I got a fright when I saw my second Wandering Albatross very close alongside, observing me quietly. It stayed with me for a few hours. This was to be the only one I saw in the South Atlantic; in fact I only saw two during the entire trip since

Tonga, although I did see quite a few of the smaller Black Browed Albatrosses, which range further north.

On 1st March we ran 119 miles and we were at 46° 30' north, 50° 00' west, and the wind was south westerly at 25 to 30 knots. Next day the wind dropped off and then veered southeasterly signalling a front passing from the northwest. The barometer was high at 1016mb and the sea temp was 12°C. The wind increased and I reduced sail to a three reefed main and a small patch of jib, still making good progress north eastwards. On 3rd March I hove-to under the deep-reefed main, with no foresail. Later the seas built up, the wind rose to around 40 knots and the pressure dropped to 1007mb. Early next morning the wind died completely and I recorded that I must be in the centre of the depression. At 15.00 the barometer was down to 996mb having dropped from 1016mb since morning. This did not look good, so I prepared for the worst. As the wind started to rise I was down to storm sails with a treble reef in the mainsail. By 18.30 the pressure was down to 995mb and the wind was getting fluky, rising and falling. As the barometer continued to drop the wind steadily increased until I reckoned it was blowing well over 60 kts. I knew that this was going to be a hard one, but was not overly concerned as I was in deep water. The wind was from the east and I hove-to under triple reefed main so as to keep what easting I had. My position was 44° 00' north, 47° 32' west, and the barometer at 994mb, but now steady.

I was down below at 23.00 when I felt the conditions change. The noise was horrendous, but that is normal with all the rigging a cutter has. There was a quiet - followed by a crash. I was knocked about a bit down below but got on deck quickly to discover things amiss. The spray cover and its stainless supports had been torn off and swept up the deck. There was also something unusual about the way the vessel was behaving. As the wind was still increasing I decided it was very important to get the reefed mainsail handed. I did this quickly while *Suvretta* was swept again and from the starboard quarter. Prior to this I had been hove-to on the starboard tack with the wind broad on the starboard bow. While I was handing the mainsail a large wave from the starboard quarter picked *Suvretta* up and she knocked down well past the horizontal. Fortunately I was amongst the mainsail as I had it almost down and been tying it off; probably the best place to be, otherwise I would have been in danger of going overboard.

I finally got the situation under control and had *Suvretta* pumped out. For a while I thought I had I had breached the hull as I was at over 150 strokes of the pump before it lost suction. It's times like this that you enter the detached mode. As the situation was now under control and we were comfortable and *Suvretta* had settled down, I was able to observe the wild beauty of the seas and decided it was all well worth the trouble. I marvelled as it was all just a jumble of cross seas and pure white - a privilege to see.

The problem had occurred because the wind had been in the east and had built up a big sea. When the wind shifted

through north to the northwest it left me in a very dangerous cross sea. *Suvretta*, being hove-to, had moved around with the wind and presented her starboard stern quarter to the east swell and allowed the seas to board. We were stable now and lying a-hull. This is the first time in my life that I have ever lain a-hull; you experience a completely different motion. But you require high winds to achieve this, otherwise the vessel can roll and expose the deck and the superstructure to heavy-water damage should a sea break at the wrong time. When the wind drops you need to be prepared to set some sail to stop any rolling. It is around this area that many sailing boats founder due to the quickly changing conditions and I consider myself very fortunate to come out of this one relatively unscathed, with only superficial damage to *Suvretta*.

I now had a high pressure to the west and maybe south a bit. There are depressions continually moving south eastwards from the River Plate and the usual depressions to the south coming eastwards from Cape Horn. When these join up and get squeezed together, with the added influence of a high pressure system, sometimes violent 100 degree wind shifts are caused. These winds can be blowing at 60 knots and more, and then change direction 100 degrees in a matter of minutes. This kind of circumstance is described in the old sailing books and in the professional publications.

Two years ago the *Marepoles*, a 70ft Antarctic charter boat got dismasted going to Mar del Plata from the Terra del Feugo, but eventually got to safety under jury rig. Last year the chap who writes the South Atlantic Yacht Pilot abandoned his steel yacht due to rigging failure. There are several more recent incidences I can mention; it was in this area that Bill Tillman, when on a voyage to the Smith Island



Rain in the South Atlantic

in November 1977 was lost. He was on *En Avant*, a 62ft steel yacht with six crew. It is not an area to be taken lightly. I must have been getting complacent. It was a good lesson.

I had hurt my ribs during this episode and as I was feeling a bit tender, I decided to take it easy. The wind charger which I had got repaired in the Falklands had got dipped and had been screeching so much I thought it was going to take off. I finally managed to tie it off and while doing this I noticed a bit of one of the blades was broken off. How that happened I do not know. I use small cable ties to tie down my cockpit dodgers and they broke free as usual; it was little things like this I attended to first as I assessed what all the other damage was.

When I went to start the engine there was nothing. I had that sinking feeling as I need to have an engine because, when the boat broaches badly, the blades of the Maxi propeller go out of feather. To feather them again the engine has to be started and then stopped while the engine while going slow ahead. It has to be feathered otherwise there is turbulence which prevents the Aries vane gear from steering properly. Water ingress through the centre sliding hatch which is just over the engine had got around the starter and caused this problem. I removed all the engine covers and got out the dry rags and WD 40, great stuff. After a few hours of doing everything possible without success, I hit the starter solenoid with a hammer and, believe it or not she started!

This was a relief, because not having self steering is a nuisance. I know it is quite easy to set up the sails and a steering balance sail, but with a wheel it is more difficult. I've done it with a tiller before and navigated many miles but never with a wheel. I started and ran the engine with the covers off every few hours to dry out the electrics and promised that at the first opportunity I would board over the sliding hatch, which incidentally sits down in a well therefore has



South Atlantic sunset



Fishermen's Church Jacare

a constant supply of water at hand to run through to the inside. A board over this and an opening hatch will serve much better. Under normal sailing the hatch works fine.

Now I had to make a decision where to head for to make some repairs and dry out. When I had raised the mainsail I discovered that it had burst between the second and third reef. This meant that there was only a small part of the mainsail that I could use. I had a spare main on board but I would have to transfer all the hardware from the old one and it would be better if I had somewhere to do this. I also needed to look at my wind charger again - and at the radar dome which was swaying about in danger of falling down; it is situated between the first and second crosstrees. Something had come loose. I also needed to make sure my electrics would hold out.

I decided to head up the middle of the South Atlantic on the old sailing ship route and maybe edge over and visit St. Helena. During the next few weeks the winds were from the southern quarter and allowed me to make north easting but when I was about seven hundred miles south west of St. Helena the wind dropped and I suffered a few days of mirror calm. This was welcome at the time as it gave me time to dry the boat out a bit.

The *Admiralty Ocean Passages of the World* says that one should head for 35° north, 30° west, and then stand north by north east to 25° south, 20° west, before running north to pass the equator between the longitudes of 22° west and 25° west. As the calm got calmer and the high seemed to have established itself, and I had recovered a good bit, I decided to try to sail out of this calm area. It's called the South Atlantic High and is well known. I set every combination of sail over the next few weeks and some days only made 15 miles. There were many days like this; when I made 50 miles one day I thought it an achievement. This was very trying.

The wind was fickle in direction and strength, but generally from the north east. One tactic I developed was

to steer a bit west to stay in front of the rain cloud systems that were coming from the north east and then edge north so as to get to the north and let them pass to the south. This way I could hold the wind, but sometimes I was making only two knots and usually less. But if I let the systems pass over me or to the north then I would lose the wind for many hours. This went on day after day and was an enormous amount of effort to make a few miles. But eventually it paid off and I picked up the south east trade winds and reached Jacare near Cabedelo in North East Brazil. I had logged just over 5100 miles in 56 days from Port Stanley. I arrived at night and navigated up the river to Jacare and anchored at 04.30 in the morning, having been deluged by heavy rain from the fairway buoy. I went alongside Phillip's small marina at 11.30 on 22nd April, just over two years and three months since I left there in January 2011.

I received an email from Peter Smith on *Kiviroa*.

On his way to Cape Town he had suffered a severe knockdown to 160 or 170 degrees. The months of February and March in the South Atlantic were not good weather-wise south of 40 degrees and I found the endless calms of the South Atlantic High a very difficult and frustrating experience.

Jacare Brazil towards Strangford Lough

It took me a month and more to make repairs and get *Suwretta* ready for the next part of the passage to Strangford Lough. I moved all the hardware from my old mainsail to my spare and also got some other sail repairs done. I then had Brian Stevens make two new polyester sail battens. I drilled out my radar dome bracket and refastened it. Then the re-fixing of my spray dodger caused me more problems than I had thought. I needed this spray dodger as I would be on the wind for over three thousand miles.

I departed on 13th June at 08.00. I had a good forecast and was on the starboard tack hard on the wind heading north east. There were varying degrees of wind during this initial part of the passage and never once did I have to take down sail except to reef for a few short periods. I passed Fernando do Noronha late in the evening four miles to the west and passed over the equator at 30° 24' west. The Aries was allowed to claw me as much to windward and eastwards as the seas allowed.

On mid-summer's day I encountered a severe line squall. I was still in the south east trades; this squall heralded a change. I had been on the wind for around ten days now and covered over a thousand miles. On 24th June I lost the south east trades and had to work slowly northwards in variable winds for a few days. With squalls and calms it was slow progress. On 26th June I picked up a light north east wind which was the start of the north east trades. The wind went up and down for a day or so before settling in. I was now on the starboard tack again and hard on the wind, heading a little north of west, and as I moved further north



Looking south over Horta harbour

the wind veered more to the eastward and allowed *Suvretta* to track on a north west course. I was to hold the north east trades to a position, as recommended in *NP-136*, of 28° north, 38° west.

I departed the tropics near midnight on 4th July at 23° 30' north, 34° 05' west. I felt a lot closer to home. I keep a close watch on the barometer in this area because there is a good chance at this time of the year of getting a tropical depression, as this is where they develop before tracking over to the Caribbean. The northeast Trades now freshened for a few days as I passed over the stronger band that lies on the Trade wind route to the Caribbean; eventually I ran out of the Trades just to the south east of the position recommended. This left me with a few restful days with the sails on the deck. I could have sat here for a month as I had stocked up with a new selection of books; but it was soon time to be on the move again.

I slowly worked north hoping to reach the westerlies and then pass the Azores a couple of hundred miles to the west following the sailing ship route. I then got wind but it was northwest and I could only hold a course north easterly to Horta, where I arrived on 19th July at noon. On this passage I logged 3348 miles in 36 days. This was a relaxing and uneventful passage.

Horta, Azores towards Strangford Lough

After clearing in I went up to Café Sport and met with Jose who I last met with Peter when he was only 19 years old. We went through the old log books and I saw the entry I made in 1979. I had happy memories of this place and it has changed out of all recognition, and mostly good changes. I felt at home and almost dug in for the winter and had to drag myself away. On the way up from Brazil my main halyard sort of seized up at the top of the mast and it was difficult to raise and lower the sail. When I went up the

mast to check, half of the sheave fell out. I ran a heavier line through the topping lift and swapped around the halyards.

I noted while looking at the weather that on the 23/24 July a Tropical Storm had developed at the Cape Verde Islands. As I mentioned before, that had been one of my concerns when I was passing to the west of the islands. I had been a few weeks later in leaving Jacare than was prudent. I departed Horta at 1600 on 2nd August and as there was a low just to the west and a little south I got good winds for a few days. The fair winds continued all the way north to the shelf and when I came to the Spanish fishing fleet I just steered a direct course through and they moved out of my way and let me past. This took about 24 hours and they inform each other that a sailing vessel is passing. I steered a course without variation so it caused little

inconvenience to them. The usual school of dolphins came to visit me and stayed for a while.

I arrived in Kinsale at 1500 on 12th August which made my passage almost 10 days and about 1180 miles. I had departed Kinsale on 23 September 2010 - so this made my whole cruise about six weeks short of three years. From here I harbour-hopped and mostly day-sailed up the coast, visiting with some of my ICC friends on the way up. I picked up a friend's mooring in Strangford Lough on 25th August at 13.00. We had lunch and a celebration bottle of Pico wine, followed by a good sleep. And that finishes an enjoyable cruise.

Since leaving Neiafu in Tonga I had logged about 17,000 miles and about 170 sailing days, which averages about four knots. I am now finishing off this narrative sitting in a seriously neglected cottage beside the water with waist high grass. So I'll be here refitting the cottage and *Suvretta* for a year and more. By then I'm sure I'll be ready for the seas again. If you have persevered this far you will realise that writing is not something I'm used to, but if I can explain anything or be of assistance to any of the club members I'll be happy to do so. I will write up for the club the way I deployed the Series drogue and some brief particulars on it that may be helpful and of interest. I developed a simple method for doing this from the way I handled lines going up the Patagonian Channels.

Also if anyone is interested I can explain an easy way to preserve fresh meat that keeps for periods of more than a year and can be done on board. I found this very useful as in remote places you can only get corned beef and such like.