

Falklands to Cape Town Delivery 2018

By Nick Shepherd

I'm lying in bed on shore, watching through the window the sun raise its head above the Indian Ocean over to the left - with the Atlantic immediately to the right. The uniqueness of Cape Agulhas, the place I chose to come to, the very southern tip of Africa - after finishing our six week journey on *Pelagic Australis*. I came here to reflect and to celebrate. To be more precise, I'm 172 miles from Cape Town, just 150 nautical miles, a mere fraction of the distance we traveled over the South Atlantic to get to Cape Town. It's five days since our very late night arrival into the basin at The Victorian and Alfred Waterfront where we tied up - 20 days after leaving Stanley way across to the West in the Falkland Islands. Six of us came together to take the challenge of sailing *Pelagic Australis* across the Southern Ocean with its massive weather systems and challenging sea conditions. But to me, this was not a challenge about distance. This was a challenge about time - investing six weeks of that most precious of commodities - in the hope that the return would be knowing myself, ourselves better, our limits and our real capabilities as well as our tolerance and our spirit. And, so we did.



Pelagic back in Cape Town Basin

I got a huge return and each of the five days since we tied up has unearthed increasing amounts of that return, teased out through simple reflection, usually with a smile on my face. A journey like this needs reflection to fully savor what just happened - the relationships we formed, the boundaries and limitations we pushed past, the learning and the gifts we received.

Maybe it was the third day of the last twenty when the watch system bedded itself in and the rhythms of the boat became a friend. Individually contributing to collectively running the boat - the cooking, the cleaning, the watch keeping and the sailing that filled our time as the miles clicked off and we moved closer to our goal of successfully sailing across a serious ocean. Lying here this morning, luxuriating at the view, it's not the memories of a couple of brief moments of fear (72 Kt gusting winds, or green water washing up and over us as we lay a hull in a huge blow) no, that's not what lingers in my mind. It's the comradeship we experienced, the small, but significant details of the ocean that so continuously surrounded us - and the way *Pelagic Australis* held us safely within her, how she looked after us - that's what's filling my head. When we were finally done and tied up, our crew continued to come together with our Skipper Dave and First Mate Thomas and each of the four nights after we docked, we continued to share time and relive shared memories. I think that sums up the implicit bonding that occurred during this unique experience.

This experience builds on the uniqueness of each element. Sitting in a classroom and learning to navigate by the sky - a new world of possibilities and self reliance to offset the bank of instruments that accompany every sailing trip these days, and now we no longer need to rely on them if we so choose. Then - cruising the beautiful, the serene and the testing Falkland Islands, learning to work and respect the solidness and power of *Pelagic Australis*, sharing a meal and a glass of wine each evening down in the safety, comfort and warmth of the saloon after an unparalleled glimpse during the day of nature at its finest.



Falkland landscape with Albatross chicks

Significantly, getting to know each other and build the relationships that would carry us through the ultimate piece - sailing over 3700 Nm across to Cape Town suspended four miles above the ocean floor, too many miles from any place to have a plan B bolt hole to fall back on. This is not Coastal Passage Making - this is not what I normally do, this is serious passage making. That is what I came to do - a proper sailors' passage - a long passage, a passage with like minded folks, united in a solid purpose, each contributing to the plan. Sailors on a sail boat powering across an ocean that doesn't like to make it too easy for you.

Each day I told myself "you can do this". My doubts were never about the boat or her skipper, or the rest of the crew. They were personal doubts-doubts about myself and the challenges to my comfort and ability level. Now I can set those fears aside, because I did indeed do it - I crossed the Southern Ocean and I contributed everything I needed to. The days where I made rookie errors, like leaving a winch handle on the winch while I pulled in a sheet by hand. Or, when I tried to load up the lazy sheet on a winch when I should have been on the other side to sheet in on the working one - baby errors that I haven't made in 15 years - errors I made because I was so anxious to contribute - those days don't linger because we quickly got passed them. What lingers with me now - the enormity of the

achievement, the uniqueness of the experience and the solidity of the friendships we created. We did what we set out to do - we sailed a serious ocean - we sailed the Southern Seas safely.

This was a trip about time over matter. We chose to invest our time, and we've come away knowing what matters.

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