



# VOYAGES



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# MUSTANGS RUN





# TO THE END OF THE WORLD

**F**or the past 15 years, a group of six friends who originally met on Hurricane Island as Outward Bound instructors three decades ago, gather on weekends to run with each other, talk about our jobs and families and generally share the most important details of our lives. We call ourselves the Mustangs for reasons that are too obscure and embarrassing to relate. With the approach of my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, I asked my fellow runners to leave their loved ones and work behind and join me for a two week sailing adventure. Since it is easier to leave mid-coast Maine in February than August, we went south to the Beagle Channel and chartered Skip Novak's *Pelagic* from Tierra del Fuego, which locals refer to as "El Fin del Mundo," the end of the world.

*By Tom Amory, Boston Station (GMP)*



Within the Mustangs, we have several talents, and I, as the admiral, needed to delegate authority before it became usurped by my friends. David Conover, a filmmaker, carried a still camera and provided us with these images. Bob Weiler became the senior watch officer and was responsible for all land activities. Chip Bauer acted as dinghy master and controlled who, when, and where we got on and off the boat. Philip Conkling, calling himself the naturalist, became our narrator and scribe. What follows is a condensed and edited version of his daily emails which we sent back home. Please understand, this cruise was more about friendship and appreciation of a spectacular region of our world and less about serious high latitude sailing. We went to have fun.

### Ushuaia, Argentina, to Puerto Williams, Chile

When we arrive in Ushuaia Argentina, after 27 hours of flying, we meet our British captain Miles Wise and first mate Laura Parrish – who is also Miles' best mate. They take us down to the harbor where we stow our gear aboard the 54-foot *Pelagic*, a cutter rigged, steel-hulled sloop, owned by the legendary ocean sailor and adventurer, Skip Novak (GLS), who pioneered cruising in this part of the world.

A freshening northeasterly breeze off the high mountains to the north suggests that we tuck in two reefs and we proceeded down the channel with the admiral at the helm. Within a quarter of an hour we see our first albatross as we head to Puerto Williams, Chile, where we will need to clear customs as we will sail primarily in Chilean waters.

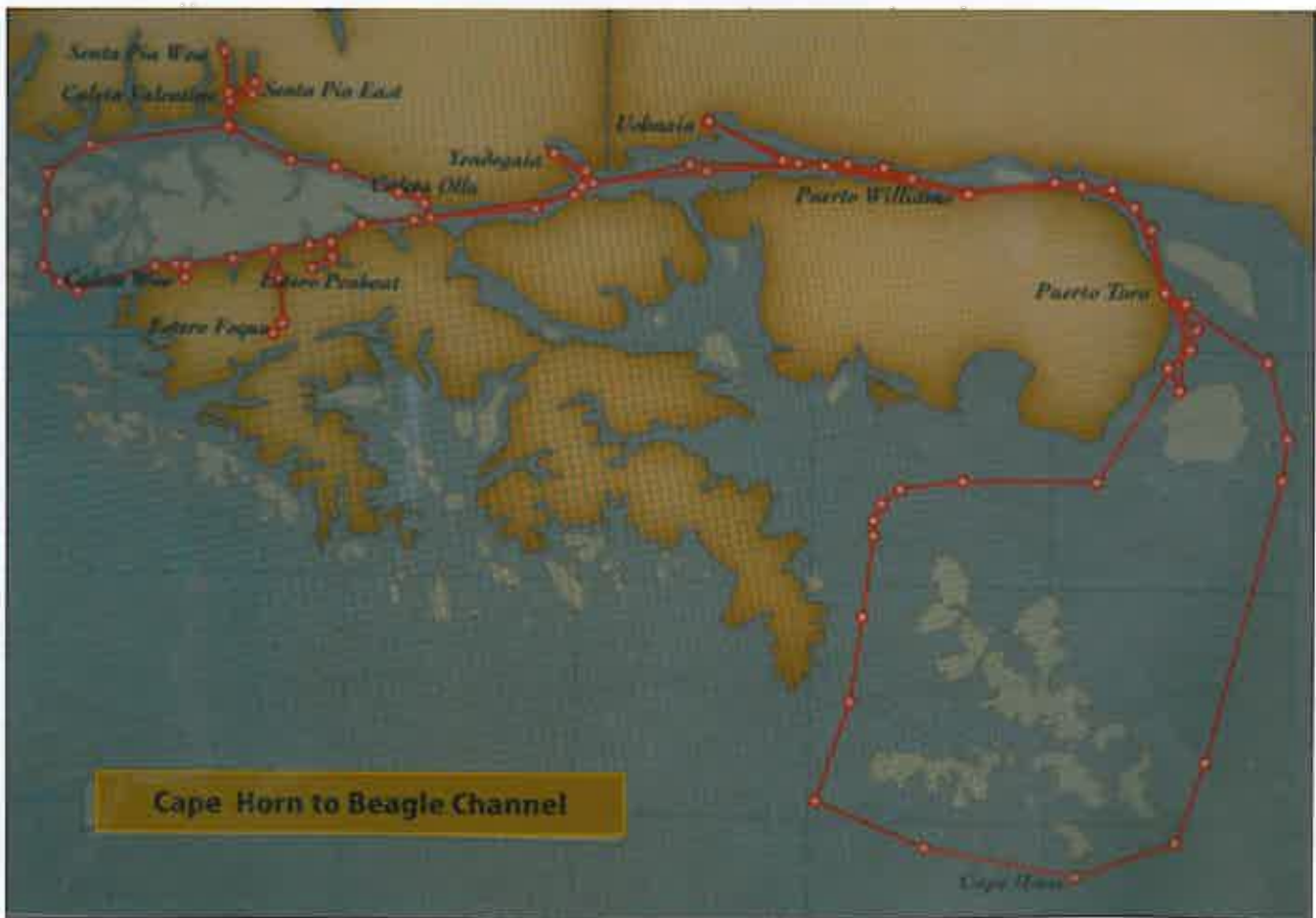
The harbor at Puerto Williams does not look like much on the

approach, but a deep creek enters from the west. We arrive to find a little fleet of cruising boats from a variety of nations tied up to a wrecked cargo vessel called the *McElvey*. The captain brings *Pelagic* carefully alongside the wreck where we tie up and clamber over its rusting steel sides. Chilean naval officials soon come down to stamp our passports and we are free to roam the town and the outback.

After dinner aboard that evening, there is intense peer pressure to visit the *McElvey's* interior, which aside from serving as our wharf, is also the liveliest little bar in the southern hemisphere. This bar serves a very potent drink, appropriately called a McElvey. According to the captain, it is impossible to drink three McElveys without losing track of your vertical dimension— an important local tradition for sailors returning from Antarctica.

We cast off the next morning and are underway for Puerto Toro near the extreme southeastern end of the Beagle Channel, where we intend to tuck in for the night to give us a shot the following day for Cape Horn. A stiff 20-knot breeze takes us down the Beagle under pelting rain. But it is magnificent. Albatross swoop by on huge dipping wings. Furious beating wings of Arctic terns swoop over shoals of fish. Sleek black and white cormorants skitter in and dive to the depths while rafts of strange Magellanic penguins paddle past our vessel.

We make Puerto Toro, the southernmost community in the world, by early evening. Earlier in the day our captain had brought a whole, skinned lamb out of the forepeak because the temperature below had increased after firing up the stove. He then decided to hang the ingre-







*Pelagic sailing free in the Beagle Channel*

“After a night in Puerto Toro, we awake early for an attempt to round Cape Horn. It is before 5 a.m. when our senior watch officer, who rarely sleeps, rousts us.”

dients of a future dinner from front and rear legs on the stern gantry under the radar. It does give us a certain man-o-war look, which we appreciate and so, too, does a hawk that our filmmaker finds perched on the gantry trying to pick off little lamb kebabs. The filmmaker chases the hawk off, but we have to take turns standing watch on deck before dark to make sure our celebration dinner will stay intact.

After a night in Puerto Toro, we awake early for an attempt to round Cape Horn. It is before 5 a.m. when our senior watch officer, who rarely sleeps, rousts us. It is still stormy out as the low that has dogged us for the past few days slips by. Miles says the forecast is for the winds to ease during the day. We cast off a short hour later under low scudding clouds, clear our plans with the Chilean Navy, which keeps track of all boats and head out beyond the eastern end of the Beagle Channel. Looking back to the west, we can see a silver edge of light under the clouds at the back edge of the low. Soon the winds freshen out of the southwest as we crank down close-hauled toward the southeast point of a distant island that we need to weather before reaching a wide stretch of open water to the Wolleston archipelago. There lies Cape Horn, 50 or 60 miles to the south.

It is now gusting over 30 knots as we shorten sail again. We're hull down as we continue to take in more sail – sailing with a third reef and a shortened staysail after the Yankee has been cranked all the way back in. The admiral (Tom Amory) wisely moves into the doghouse, while the rest cluster in the cockpit as spray tests the strength of our foul weather gear. Meanwhile our first mate clips in her lifeline and crabs her way forward to secure the anchor on the foredeck, while the filmmaker, who is also a trans-Atlantic sailor, tries to keep the helm from burying the bow in the short steep seas. He does not succeed as two waves completely wash over our plucky first mate on the foredeck.

Miles keeps going below to check the plotter and anemometer as the seas continue to build. Everything is just different shades of gray --



"Mustangs" sailing around Cape Horn

just like the southern ocean is supposed to be. Are we really having fun yet? After we have been knocked about by a number of 45-knot gusts, the captain suggests we postpone our attempt at the Horn and return to Puerto Toro for the day. No one protests. We bear off and run back to the small harbor and formulate Plan B: spend the day in port and depart after an early dinner for a night sail to Cape Horn, which we should make by sunrise if the forecast of diminishing winds is correct.

### Thirteen on the Fun-o-Meter

We slipped the lines at 6 p.m. Monday from Puerto Toro. The winds have spent themselves and the Beagle Channel looks benign. The first mate assigns the watches and those of us with the dog watches creep below decks to catch what sleep we may.

Coming on deck for the 2-to-6 a.m. watch, the naturalist finds the dingy master and filmmaker on deck with the first mate. We are all so smitten by the spectacle of the night skies that our speed has fallen to less than two knots on the inky ocean. We northerners get our first glimpse of the Southern Cross overhead in the star-studded firmament. The first mate points out Orion off to starboard and we watch him plunge slowly headfirst into the sea trailing his upside down sword behind him.

Meanwhile torpedo-shaped porpoises streak in from the port side and explode from the dark water to leap off the bow waves. Then they circle and approach again, trailing ghostly streaks of phosphorescence as they vector in on the bow. By 4 a.m., when the admiral joins the crew on deck, it is overcast and the winds are beginning to increase.

By 5 a.m. it is raining steadily and by the end of the watch, we are all thoroughly soaked on deck. An hour later, the senior watch officer comes triumphantly into the cockpit, thrilled by the dirty weather.

When the naturalist comes back on deck after a three and a half hour kip, all hands have assembled in the cockpit in a 30-knot slapping wind watching the vast Gothic cathedral of Cape Horn materialize out of the enveloping clouds and murk. The winds from the south continue to build as our expedition leader constantly adjusts the sails to keep us headed up with enough sea room to keep *Pelagic* a safe distance off this most famous of all lee shores.

By 11 a.m. we are abeam of Cape Horn, all of us howling into the howling wind, cold, wet, raw and exhilarated. We quickly cluster on the lee rail as the filmmaker sets up to record this immortal moment in our collective history. An hour after rounding the Horn, the rain slows to a few spits and then gives up altogether. The winds slacken to a gentler breeze, the sun burns a hole in the gray overcast and all is well in the world. The naturalist asks for his sunglasses and tells the admiral, "This is what we signed up for."

### A Day with the Gaucho

After rounding Cape Horn and beating back up the Beagle Channel for several days, we turn north into the fjord known as the Bahia Yendegaia, where our captain and first mate plan to introduce us to Jose, a gaucho and caretaker of a vast estancia, (ranch) who has wildish horses we might ride. Loosely translated into Americana, a gaucho is a cowboy.



We are greeted in front of the estancia by Anna Marie, a Belgian woman, who according to our first mate, came here on a cruising boat with her husband several years earlier and jumped ship to take up as the gaucho's mare. Apparently life with the gaucho is more exciting than life in Belgium.

Jose greets us in handmade horsehide chaps and a black beret with his long black hair pulled back in a ponytail. In a sling across his back, he carries an 18-inch blade called a falcone. Life may be simple and rough here on the estancia, but Jose unquestionably is a rake. Since he is a man of few words and doesn't speak any English, we are spared any sustained effort at communication. He and Anna Marie have briskly rounded up the horses from the huge outback pastures -- there are 40 of them that have been tamed -- and six are saddled up waiting for us.

We climb aboard a variety of horses of various colors and sizes and head out with Jose at the head of the column. We wind through thick brush, across beaver flooded terrain. We ford streams, cross bouldery outwash plains, and follow muddy trails along the lacustrine forest on the banks of the meltwater river as we make our way to the head of the valley. These old mustangs have finally found their calling. Suddenly we are caballeros! Jose, a real caballero, hand rolls cigarettes

at a full canter while the rest of us mostly concentrate on keeping one leg on either side of our horse with our minds in the middle.

When we reach the head of the valley after a two and a half hour ride, we dismount and Jose stays with the horses that he tied off under a huge mountain headwall. This is a real Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid landscape. We begin on foot up over the terminal moraine and through an unearthly landscape that has been massively reshaped by the grinding glacier. Vast slabs of melting ice have been stranded in front of the receding glacier and we feel like small specks walking up the valley toward the ice face at the edge of the high corrals of the williwaws. Three Andean condors ride the thermals overhead.

When we return to the horses, everyone mounts up for the ride back down the valley. The admiral, who is having a new experience as an equestrian, has been joking nervously about the ride back to the estancia. Our senior watch officer takes off in the lead -- because he is one with his horse. Jose does not like the challenge and gallops easily past the watch officer and suddenly it is all over -- all mounts are instantly at a full gallop and it's Katy Bar the Door. Most of us, most especially the naturalist, are holding on for dear life. The ride (remember: it took two and a half hours to get to the head of the glacier) is



"Mustangs" reincarnated as horsemen



compressed into less than hour during the return. Compressed is the operative word. It was one of the wildest single hours in our long lives.

When we finally get back to the estancia, it is all several of us can do to dismount and pretend to walk down to the shore where our captain retrieves us and gently lifts us aboard the dinghy.

### Over the Top at Yendegaia

We opt for another day in Yendegaia not only because it is spectacularly beautiful, but because for the past week the lamb hanging on the stern gantry has been curing and we plan to roast it over an open fire ashore. Our filmmaker observes that our intended lunch is perhaps the only lamb in recent times that has been carefully seasoned in the salt air while rounding Cape Horn.

Our first mate arranges an "asado," which is a Chilean word for cookout. Jose gestures to a fire pit in front of his woodshed, then to trees in the pasture. There we are to cut sticks for the spit on which we plan to cook the lamb -- just like we saw in a movie once. The admiral has arrived in the meantime with the lamb slung over his back and we drive the spits into the ground at either end of the fire we've built. Everything seems ready to go. Jose, however, takes one look at our efforts, shakes his head emphatically and heads back out to the pasture. Fifteen minutes later he is back with two perfectly-sized thin poles, perhaps 8-feet long, which he quickly debarks with his razor sharp falcone. The Boy Scouts have met the gaucho and have wordlessly deferred to his superior camp craft.

We have learned that Jose is famous throughout the whole Tierra del Fuego region for his prowess as a hunter. Back in the hills, there are many wild bulls. If you encounter them, the locals told us, "They kill you." Instead, Jose hunts the bulls and kills them. Jose has been hired by the owner of the land, Doug Tompkins, who started the clothing company, The North Face. He intends to return the 40,000 acres to its original complement of plants and animals.

After fashioning the new spits, Jose makes a few quick cuts with his knife near the joints of the leg and the shank and deftly pulls the side of lamb onto the skewers, which he places along the sides of the fire without using our spits. During the next several hours of slow cooking, Jose occasionally bastes the sides of lamb with a bouquet of fresh herbs, consisting of chives, garlic, oregano, and mint in a water and vinegar brew. We have a pot of couscous from the boat along with potatoes, whole onions and several heads of garlic that the admiral wraps in foil and places around the edges of the fire. Under the full sun of midday, we hydrate with numerous beers and glasses of fine Malbec wine. Haute cuisine meets cowboy cookery.

At last, Jose places the skewer with an entire side of lamb down in front of us. With a few quick cuts from Jose's knife, there is the largest pile of lamb any of us has ever been served. The first course is completely *mano a mano*. Never did the Mustangs dream of such a feast and the dogs chewed on the bones-oh!





Lunch on the spit

### Cruising Through the Andes

During the next five days of many adventures, we sail and steam to the far eastern end of the Beagle Channel – 130 miles from its eastern entrance at Puerto Toro and eventually round the corner of Isla Darwin, where we are soon bobbing along in the long high rolling swells of the Pacific. Then the wind begins to fill in off the starboard beam. We set the main and the Yankee and for the next several hours we are sailing again for the first time, it seems, since Cape Horn. We marvel at the feel of a wonderful downwind sail without wind and rain lashing our faces.

We entered our last uninhabited anchorage of the cruise as the

evening sun was quickly descending behind the tall mountains surrounding Estero Penhoat. The anchorage is in a small cove, up against a vertical wall that drops dramatically into very deep water, making it impossible to anchor. Someone has hung iron rings from the overhanging trees, which we use to run lines fore and aft to secure the boat in position. If it hadn't promised to be a fair night with barely a breath of wind, our captain never would have consented to spend the night in such an exposed location.

In view of the fact that this will be our final day, we plan to make a coordinated assault on the snow-covered ridgeline overhead. One group will get up at 4:15 a.m. to get ashore by 5 so that our filmmaker can gain enough elevation to record the dawn rouge on the distant snow peaks. The second wave of slackers, led by the naturalist, will rise by 5:30 a.m. and push off for the snowy heights before the clock strikes six.

As the faint light of dawn begins to turn the starlight off star by star, we are all climbing up the mountain to our various destinations. The naturalist leaves the first mate with the filmmaker and heads for the snowfields where the early intrepids have gone. At the Elysian heights, he discovers footprints on a sloping snowfield, clearly indicating he is on the trail of a pair of North American yetis.

After he climbs another 500 feet of elevation, the admiral and senior watch officer come tap, tap tapping down the rocky slope, feeling their way along with their ski poles. They have tales of great adventure where they reached the snowfields high above the anchorage. It was pristine at 2200-2500 feet as they began to traverse the large snowfield, but discretion trumped valor as they calculated the risks of effecting



Tom - wishing he'd brought skis

a rescue should one of them drop into a crevasse and need to be pulled out with what?-- a ski pole and a pair of shoelaces.

When we descend to the station where the filmmaker has set up his time lapse camera, the sun has begun to glow golden on the amphitheater of rock and soon dawn's last gleaming is complete, so we descend to the water's edge in twos and threes where the dinghy master retrieves us and returns us all to the boat. Our final run is complemented by a sweet 20 knot breeze on the beam billowing us along under full sun for the last 40 miles into Puerto Williams--a spectacular sail to cap our next to last day aboard.

During this exceptional voyage, we had been constantly overwhelmed by the outsized splendor of the region, the tame and wild weather, the seabirds, the numerous mountain ascents, the ride on a gaucho's horses, an asado of roast lamb, bracing swims, night sails, star gazing, downwind reaches and adventure beyond our wildest imagining. \*

"And laughter,  
laughter and more  
laughter round out  
this most grand  
weatherly experience  
of our lives."



From top:

Bob (senior watch officer) Weiler  
Tom (admiral) Amory

Phil (naturalist) Conkling,  
David (filmmaker) Conover

Chip (dinghy master) Bauer