

SKIP NOVAK

WHEN DOES BEING PREPARED BECOME HOARDING? SKIPPERS SHOULD AVOID THE TEMPTATION OF 'JUST IN CASE'

How many times have you heard, or said: "You never know when you might need..." It's true that when cruising on the far side of the world, with few or no marine services to hand, self sufficiency is key. You need spare parts galore, a full range of tools, and basic materials to make things for the unpredictable gear failures.

However, this philosophy can be taken to extremes. I always had an annual routine purging the contents of the original *Pelagic* back in the 1990s. This was a time when we were based from Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego, there were no spare parts available whatsoever, hardly any useful tools on offer and materials like stainless steel and aluminium were rare earth metals. We carried lengths of spare standing rigging of every size as well as the terminals; timber, cut to length to fit odd spaces in the bilges, and we always had plenty of wooden wedges on board; too much rope always; metres of plumbing hose; boxes of bolts and screws; and a huge selection of stainless steel and galvanised shackles with no purpose or justification other than "Might come in handy..."

Added to this were small sheets of stainless steel, aluminium and plywood, plus threaded rods of several sizes (the latter two once used in earnest to fashion an emergency rudder). In addition to a very comprehensive tool kit we also had many hardware items: a sledgehammer, shovel, woodsman's saw, ratchet straps. But when all this and more was loaded off the boat on to the dock in a pile it was shocking. How did it all fit in? We'd pick through it debating each item's merits, and then proceeded to reload most of it with not much going in the trash bin.

The fact was we were hoarders. If we found an orange fishing float on a rugged shore we always made an effort to get it, even taking some risks, as that was a useful fender. Any piece of castaway cordage from another yacht was assessed and gobbled up, ditto pieces of plumbing that might, with a bit of modification, be 'useful'.

There were also the 'leave behinds' of our charter clients. Often we'd discover we had piles of sea boots and wellies,

tangles of ski poles, and various pieces of clothing donated or forgotten. With a certain nationality, if you looked hard enough in the bilge spaces you'd find empty vodka bottles.

I recently went through this exercise in Cape Town on *Pelagic Australis*. In spite of the charter season in the South American sector looking to be a total washout due to the COVID-19 hurdles that are too high to jump over, we managed to land a unique project taking a five person UK film team down to Marion Island in the South Indian Ocean, along with a seven person science team that needed to get there for their term manning the meteorological and biological research base maintained by the South African government. With our three crew that meant a full boat of 15. And film teams don't travel

light – we loaded 60 boxes of technical equipment.

In order to accommodate this cargo we had to be ruthless about creating space.

I thought we'd be able to purge many debatable items and gain some ground. But

because we're now much better organised than in the pioneering days, we were already paired down to the essentials. Everything had a purpose. Only a few things were offloaded and stayed ashore: a 40kg bag of rock salt lost to memory after our icing up experience in 2014, which was prised out of a corner of the lazarette. Fender boards could stay behind, and so too all the fenders and dock lines: where we were going there was nowhere to tie up alongside. We gained a locker space by offloading all my climbing equipment under my bunk. All this dunnage went into our storage container.

We keep what we think is a very meticulous parts and equipment list, often updated. Entries are listed under what should be on board; what is actually on board; and what is needed.

But still it is never 100% accurate. I was sure we had a 10m piece of anchor chain for our back-up nylon anchor rode in case we had to 'lose' our main anchor and chain. It was not there no matter how hard we looked. I had to buy another at the last minute. Not a biggie cost-wise, but a critical piece of equipment. My advice is to offload and reload often and keep your spreadsheet updated. You never know... ■

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