

Sunday, March 18. 2012

Doldrums

Sunday, 2012-03-18, 12:00 local (17:00 UTC), 1:31.8N 83:29.7W, COG 220, SOG 6kn, 1008mBar, 30C air, 25C water

We're in the middle of the Doldrums, also called the equatorial trough or the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). It's the area close to the equator, between the trade-wind regions of the northern and southern hemispheres. Because the wind is rising up there instead of blowing along the surface it has usually low barometric pressure and no or little surface wind. Usually, but we've picked a good time. At least during the day we're having nice wind, around 9kn, and calm seas because at night the wind dies down and the sea comes to rest again. Which is not so great during the night, but great for the next day. Fast sailing with around 8kn in almost flat sea. Just like on a lake! Only the next shoreline is 500nm in every direction. Which means we're half-way to the Galapagos. Celebrate!

Tomorrow we're hoping to cross the equator and can't wait to unpack the little present that Liesbet and Mark gave us for that occasion. We're also wondering how to celebrate the event. There are a lot of sailory customs associated with crossing the equator, most involving large amounts of sea-water and rum. But knowing us, we're likely just cheer, shout hurray, and move on. Or forget to check and realize it three hours too late.

A word about electricity on the boat: The last three days were mostly overcast, and the solar panels didn't get a lot of sun. The (any) wind generator is useless below 13kn because the blades don't spin fast enough to get over the 13V hump for charging 12V batteries. Our main consumers are the fridge (3Ah), then the autopilot (2Ah), and lastly the navigation instruments (1Ah). The laptops (10Ah) and desalinator (20Ah) too, but those are only plugged in one hour every other day. And we've got LED lights all over the boat and on the masttop, so the lights don't draw much. Many cruisers have a little diesel or fuel generator on board, or run the main engine to charge the batteries, especially when they have a freezer or air condition. We don't, but we have a relatively large battery bank for our boat size (480Ah), 430W solar panels in total, and a 600W wind generator. That means that one very sunny or very windy day is enough to charge the batteries up completely from half empty. Very ecological, I feel incredibly green. Usually we have around 80% charge in the morning and 100% charge in the evening, but as it is now without much sun and wind and the extra load from the autopilot we're hovering around 65% charge in the morning and 80% charge in the evening. Liz asked what happens if we run low on power on the trip and I said that we then have to turn off the fridge and eat all the cheese.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:30