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Wednesday, October 3, 2012

Fwd: Pirate tactics

I'm posting here a very interesting email I've received from my friend Matt, who's at the moment on his way from Bali to Madagascar.

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Pirate tactics

Date: Mon, 1 Oct 2012 14:25:08 +0100

From: Matt Steadman

I've spoken to lots of people about the pirates, including a few who were stopped and robbed on their passage through the Red Sea. There are far more attacks than those which make the headlines. Some yotties getting robbed a bit on the high seas - and no nice pix - isn't headline news. The Chandlers got kidnapped but that's rarer, it seems. More common is just a quick working over, take any cash, computers and so on. This doesn't make the headlines, or even if it does, it doesn't make the international headlines. It's only when the people to whom I spoke came to report their attack that they saw how many attacks there had been - several every week.

The previous feeling was that there was "safety in numbers" and hence yotties would band together in flotillas to make a passage to the Red Sea. I know one or two who have done this in the past few years. But things have changed. More recently it seems groups are easier to target, and pirates know that they don't much help each other if one gets attacked - it's every boat for themselves - the others thank their lucky stars and keep going.

The round the world Blue Water Rally went bust because of the Somali-based pirate issue. Their route was all around Thailand, India and then Med via Suez... and the 2011-2012 departure only attracted one or two entrants. So the Blue Water Rally is now just an unofficial bunch of pals, of which Karacool is one, and which probably won't go round the world.

A friend in the City reports that pirates have been seeking proper funding with CV's and so on - £20m gets a proper set up with a tooled-up mothership and ten or so attack boats to send over the horizon. This means that an attack could happen almost anywhere in the Indian Ocean - the Chalmers were kidnapped over 1000 miles south of the Horn of Africa, but that's a few years ago.

So the 2012 World Arc is possibly the riskiest gig at the moment - a massed group hence easy to find, a published route, published sailing dates, and diverse boats which won't/can't sail as a group. It says on the worldcruising web site that they leave Cocos Keeling today on Monday 1st October, next stop Mauritius 2/3 weeks later.

All WARC boats have yellowbrick - are they turned off in the Indian Ocean? I hope so. Lots have AIS - is that universally turned off by rally participants? And they have VHF and a daily SSB net too - is all of this going to stay silent? Not easy to enforce radio silence. But they'll likely all have nav lights on, and anyone who wants to know where they are can simply guess - they're 50-100 miles WSW of Cocos towards Mauritius right now, a fleet of 20 or so boats spread out every 5-10 miles or so.

So if one were out there it might be best NOT to be part of the WARC group

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(or any group), to be on a different route, at a different time, without broadcasting position on AIS (which gives a position to other boats with 20 or so miles) or Yellowbrick devices (which give a position on Google Earth website) or on anything.

Is an attack on boats heading south around the Cape of Good Hope likely? It's another 1200 miles SE from Seychelles area so in that regard alone it's less likely. 14th-15th of October would be almost moonless, and plenty of targets NE of Mauritius. Hum. But realistically? - nah - I think it's far too far for them and not an easy enough return, based on attacks to date, and current/trending data. I hope so anyway.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:02