

Sunday, December 1, 2013

Notes from the Sail Locker - by Rob Antony

My friend and crew mate Rob, who also happens to be a writer in real life, wrote this about our trip. Makes me wish I had taken him aboard on the whole voyage as documentarist. I'm amazed he remembered so much from the trip. With the weather and seasickness etc everything tends to blurr very quickly.

Notes from the Sail Locker (Rob Antony)

Day One

Fiji. Temperatures in the Lava-Hot range as we rush to stow the last few items and get underway in time to make it through the reef during daylight. A last minute sweep of the café and I snap up some banana cake and sausage rolls for the sail out.

On board now and as we steam out of the marina shouts and waving hands, "Good luck! Fair sailing!"... two of the Fijian waitresses leap and shout in Fijian as we pass the Sunset Bar. I'm no linguist but I suspect they are yelling, "Look! Look at the magnificently bearded one!", "How we will miss his noble presence!", "Come and have one more delicious coconut drink!" but their voices fade as we leave the marina in our wake.

An hour or two out and we set the spinnaker and roll along with the island to our left (or port side as we sailors call it). The sun lowers and it is time for refreshments. A platter of sausage roll slices and an anejo rum and coke.

Not the most successful idea. Within ten minutes Axel leaps to the side and pukes them up. I follow suit soon after. And so the theme for the first three days is established.

We edge out of the pass through the reef as the sun sets and orange, purple and black clouds await. Axel retreats for a snooze while I lie on deck wondering what the hell I am doing here. Lightning ripples across the sky.

Axel wakes and we decide to edge past the clouds leaving them to our right (or starboard side as we sailors call it)... the entirety of that half of the sky boils with bruised cloud. Lightning constantly flashes lengthways through them. Occasionally a tongue of energy licks down across the surface of the sea. It looks as though we'll miss them.

But then, up ahead, lies a long thin tail of cloud. We feel like two tiny mice trying to sneak past a sleeping dragon. If we can just sneak under his tail here we'll be away. Axel aims for an arched section of the tail and we edge underneath. And the dragon wakes up.

Great arcs of lightning ripple all around us. The mice retreat below.

My bed is at a 45 degree angle. I wedge myself in by draping my feet across the table with my foot against the mast. I begin to doubt my sanity.

Day Two

We've noticed that being on board a boat basically means falling over a lot. I manage to fall across the cabin and smash into the dividing wall between toilet and chart area. The wall comes off worse. Further tumbles break a bin, tear the shower curtain and bring my knee down on the chiller bin upstairs spilling its contents into the cockpit.

I decide to spend most of the day in one place, on deck watching Fiji recede into the distance. We rig up a sunshade but it affords meagre protection from the scorching sun. I pop downstairs for relief but it is even hotter downstairs and a diesel leak means the atmosphere is even more conducive to puking which we indulge in regularly. I snag a couple of carrots and eat them quickly. Clearly I have no ambition to keep them down but, if I'm going to spend the day throwing up, I may as well ensure my vomit looks traditional.

An hour later Axel appears with a quizzical expression on his face as I cheer loudly. "My puke has carrots in it!" He does not seem impressed.

I notice one of the bolts holding the oven on has sheared off. This now means a huge cube of sharp metal could fly around the boat at any moment taking important equipment like legs with it. Axel appears unphased, "It should be alright". But it's dangerous! If it falls out it could smash a leg! "Oh, I've got a book on amputations, I'll have to find it". I retreat upstairs (or on deck as we sailors call it).

Later I become keenly aware of the need to pee. I spot a convenient bucket and fill it accordingly. Now, how to deposit the pee over the side without taking an involuntary golden shower?

I aim downwind and fling. My grip isn't firm. Half the pee flies over the stern. I look down at the bucket. Half remains. My hat falls off into it.

As evening comes I clamber down and try to sleep. Eventually I pass into some sort of coma. I am woken by Axel yelling, "I need you buddy!"

Rain lashes down outside. I pull a raincoat over my underpants. Axel laughs. It's a tropical squall and a big one. Visibility is down to a disc about 30 meters round. Seemingly in a dream we drop the mainsail. Everything seems bathed in an unearthly purple light until lightning crashes and freeze-frames us in vivid colour.

I inform Axel that I feel he should know that I am absolutely terrified. "What of?" "Er... well Death mainly". He makes the sort of noise a horse makes when it finds a handful of rabbit turds in its oats.

The storm builds in intensity. Down below I notice the lights in the cockpit flickering wildly. "Oh great, now these lights are broken", I think. Then I realise they are actually glass deadlights and the flickering is all the lightning around us.

I wedge myself into position. At this angle the mattress continually slips off the bunk and onto the floor taking me with it. By the judicious arrangement of a host of cushions and ¾ hours wiggling around I manage to make myself relatively comfortable. The lightning builds in intensity. Every 5-10 seconds a burst now. Flash. Flash. I look down at my foot placed against the metal mast. Metal. Gudrun's lightning conductor. I shriek, lift my foot and slide onto the floor.

Day Three

Lethargy envelopes us. Much of the day is spent lying in bed drifting in and out of sleep. At some stage I manage to rouse myself and cut a watermelon into slices but our stomachs are closed and we can only manage a few bits before seeking out slumber again.

Spend any waking moments wondering what on Earth I am doing here. It occurs to me that, had I been able to speak Fijian, then the two wildly waving waitresses were probably shouting, "Where are you going? Are you totally nuts?! Don't do it, oh magnificently bearded one!" Alas this revelation is too late; Fiji has dropped behind and the open ocean surrounds us.

Day Four

The wind has shifted slightly and, for a brief moment, we feel tolerably human. Axel, having not found his amputation book, has lashed the oven in place and painstakingly creates a chunky vegetable broth. The first proper meal in days, it is delicious.

We retreat to our bunks. Axel gets out one of his many navigational devices. I watch him study the tablet intently, no doubt working out tricky computations of degrees of latitude and longitude. It makes various encouraging bing bong noises. After about an hour, and a particularly encouraging bing-a-ling noise, I venture over to see if he has any news on our position. It turns out he has been playing a driving game and the noises are made by his car driving over coins. "Any news?" "I've got a new high score" "About our position?" "Oh yes, we're over half way". I celebrate the news by falling over.

German humour " Example One

Water drips from the ceiling. Axel wakes me and points to it. "We're sinking" "Huh?" "Yes, we're sinking."

Weâ€™ll have to abandon ship". "WHAT!!" He doubles over laughing, hooting away like an asthmatic camel.

Day Five

I force myself into the kitchen to try and actually make something to eat. I retrieve a pumpkin from its lair and cube it. Axel stands next to me chatting when a sudden lurch sends me reeling with a large knife in my hand. I have time to think "Donâ€™t stab Axel! Donâ€™t stab yourself!" before clattering into the navigation table and crushing a couple of ribs. Axel pisses himself.

I retreat to my bunk. Axel completes the pumpkin soup - which one has to hold at a ludicrous 45 degree angle and almost spoon horizontally into oneâ€™s mouth to avoid spilling it.

Later Axel cajoles me onto deck. He has a disturbing gleam in his eye that usually ends in frantic activity. Today is no exception. We clear the decks and set the parasailor. It fills and pulls but the wind builds. Axel goes to get ready to drop it and an astonishing flock of seabirds boil into the sky behind him like a cloud of bats.

A portent of doom however: Moments later the parasailor explodes into shattered rags of fabric. Axel laughs and shakes his head. Itâ€™s impossible not to be caught up in Axelâ€™s irrepressible good humour and energy. Itâ€™s hard to find fault in him as a skipper and shipmate (other than the ship itself is still in the middle of nowhere and there is a storm coming).

The storm builds. This is the toughest night yet. The sheer amount of noise as we smash through the waves is astonishing. Barely any sleep and during the night what seems to be a small van crashes into the side of the boat. Gudrun shivers and surges on.

Axel peers out into the night sky. "Wow! Look at all the stars, itâ€™s amazing!" I eye the distance between me and the view. About nine feet. A journey to and from, with re-wedging into bed, of about 45 minutes. "I'll have a look later".

Much later and my full bladder forces me from bed past the sleeping Axel. I peer out to see the stars. Clouds have swept in and covered the sky. I fall over.

Day Six

The day is spent in ferocious winds and seas. Axel pronounces he has a new high score. He also says we have missed the dreaded calms and might now have this wind right to the finish which should make for a super fast crossing but an extremely uncomfortable finish. I pin myself in my bunk.

Water streams in from every nook and cranny. Peering up from the cabin the seas are mountainous. I retreat to my bunk where I spend the night listening to trolls smash the side of the boat with large hammers.

German Humour â€“ Example Two

Axel wakes me with an urgent expression on his face. "Thereâ€™s a halyard stuck up the mast, Iâ€™m going to have to hoist you up" "Youâ€™re joking right?" "No, itâ€™s urgent mate, youâ€™re going to have to go up the mast". I sigh and reach for my shorts. Axel almost chokes to death laughing.

Day Seven

The prospect of sighting land spurs me on deck where I tie myself in and cling on. The sea is still huge and the swell pretty confused. The waves are short and sharp but then, every ten minutes or so, an absolute monster swell rises up from the South. It rolls in, a steely grey-blue and then, just as it reaches the boat, the very peak of the wave lifts and is pierced by the rising sun behind it. Startling aquamarine, icy blue topped with a perfectly transparent crest. "I am water", it says, "I am beautiful" and SMASH it hurls itself against us and tries to crush us to pieces. Looking downwind from the vantage point of the windward rail, the waves appear to roll downhill forever. If they were solid you could simply fall from the boat and tumble, tumble until you fell off the edge of the world.

Axel rests as I stay fixed on deck desperate for my first glimpse of land. A shadow on the horizon. Hard to be sure. Wait, there it is again, "Land Ho! Land Ahoy!"

Relief sweeps over me; we might just make it after all.

But the sea steepens, the battering continues and a watched headland is much like a watched pot and never boils. Or something. It takes forever but finally, finally we are inside the shelter of the Bay of Islands and the swell dies and the dread feeling of impending doom is finally lifted.

A last minute panic when Customs at Opuia appear to be about to knock off for the day before weâ€™ arrive is averted and I clumsily moor the boat as they sort the paperwork with Axel and clear us.

Finally. Time to moor and, hark, who are these likely looking strumpets racing down the marina pier ready to welcome us?

We stumble ashore and, much to Axelâ€™s satisfaction, have made it in less than seven days. Not a week one would want to ever repeat but, now that we have survived, one that we will relish forever. Food, beverages await. Our stomachs lead us from the boat. Towards anything but sausage rolls.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:04

Thursday, November 28. 2013

Gudrun V is a Kiwi now

Yesterday I went to the Customshouse to finish importation of Gudrun V into New Zealand. I presented the boat papers, my passport with resident visa, and the sale contract, and after 40 minutes of typing on the computer the friendly official handed over the stamped the "Delivery Order". Gudrun V is now a Kiwi. Cost: none.

The restrictions are that within the next wo years I am not allowed to sell Gudrun V or use her commercially, but that's fine. My plans for Gudrun V look a little different anyway. I would like to modify the interior to comfortably sleep six (two double, two single bunks), so that we can go out with friends and family for the weekend. Next time she's hauled out I want to do some modifications to the cockpit and superstructure to have more protection from the elements and a better ergonomy. They hadn't heard about those things when they built Gudrun in '81. And a new paint job.

A lot of work and money, but still a lot cheaper then selling her and buying a different boat - which would involve taxes and upgrades as well. And I'm much looking forward to exploring the NZ coastline and outlying Islands with Gudrun V.

So, end of the trip. Wow. What's next?

I've started a new software company and am building a business app, as well as some data migration tools and interfaces to my new client's ERP system. Sounds familiar, huh. This could be a similarly big thing to Transporeon, but my values changed a bit over the last years and I don't want to work 80 hrs a week just to make more money. There's too much fun to be had with the people around me, plus they can use my help, and then there's all that diving and photography to be done here as well. And I'm becoming passionate about governmental, economic, and environmental issues. NZ is not doing very well there at the moment, and it's my new home, therefor I care.

Four years on the boat haven't made me into a socialist tree (or dolphin) hugger, I'm still an entrepreneur at heart. But entrepreneurs care about sustainability, the long haul. And what's happening at the moment is not sustainable. It's not about saving the planet. The planet will be all right. It's about saving enough of the planet so that it's current inhabitants (e.g. us) will be all right as well.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:52

Wednesday, November 27, 2013

Photos from the trip to Auckland

Cape Brett, Bay of Islands

Dolphins!

Sunset with Rob

Sunset with Axel

Action at the winch

Passing Goat Island

Sailing through the Hauraki Gulf

Auckland ahead. Where?

Arrived, happy but tired.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:05

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Tuesday, November 26. 2013

Auckland!

Wednesday 15:00

Just passing Auckland waterfront on the way to Westhaven Marina. see us at P71 in a bit. We don't mind the rain, happy to be home at last.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 20:19

Hauraki Gulf sailing

Wednesday 12:00

The last few hours went very well and we're now just passing Huatoa Point (east of Silverdale).Â

Mt. Rangitoto and Sky City are in our sights and it's only 18nm more to Westhaven Marina where we should arrive in about four hours.

I'm very excited about arriving with my boat in my new home after leaving my old one half a planet away four years and three weeks ago.Â

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:07

Goat Island

Wednesday 09:15

We had bugged all wind after midnight, and the engine protested against its use with a oil pressure warning. After two changes of oil and filters and some applied wrenchwork didn't change that we could do nothing but drift next to Sail Rock off Waipu all night.

With the sun came the wind again and now we're doing a steady 6kn past Goat Island to SE in 9kn from the E and lovely sunshine and a very calm sea. Yes, sailing can be a nice experience too.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:28

Nightfall

Tuesday, 21:30

At 8:30pm the sun went down behind the Tutukaka coastline in a spectacular swirl of red, orange, blue, and black. And within 30min the wind changed from NE 15kn to S 5kn.

5kn is not a lot, but head on and with no swell we can use it. Down goes the cruising chute, up the main and genoa, close hauled, and we're doing 4kn.

That's a little slower than with the engine but it's a lot quieter.Â

Only problem is it's pitch black with no moon up, and we're heading towards Bream Head near Whangarua, approx 3nm ahead. Must not run aground. A hurry for navigation lights and charts. And Â GPS.Â

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:42

Tuesday, 18:38

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Just passing between Poor Knights Islands and Tutukaka. Lovely 15kn from NW and quite sunny, sailing along with the Cruising chute at 7.8kn.Â

We had a pair of common dolphins swim with us an hour ago. Now it's time for some Pasta.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:06

Monday, November 25. 2013

On the way to Auckland

Tuesday, 13:00

We left Opuia and are approaching Whale Rock, half way out of the Bay of Islands. Gannets are plunging all around us and we keep a keen eye out for dolphins. Four keen eyes actually.Â

Wind 15kn from the north, hope it lasts a while. But it probably won't take us all the way to Auckland and I expect some motoring towards the end of the 135nm trip.

Time for some left over pizza slices.Â

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:52

Saturday, November 23. 2013

Photos from the passage to NZ

Some photos from the trip Fiji to NZ.

Leaving Fiji in light northerly winds close to shore

A different situation off-shore: Rob experiences Force 8 for the first time

Rob gets used to the weather

Spray coming over, all the time

A selfie thanks to the GoPro and a trusty boat hook

View from the main sail towards the sunrise.

Arrived in Opuia

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:41

Friday, November 22. 2013

Arrived in Opuia

Saturday, 2013-11-23, 17:30, Opuia Marina

We arrived at 16:01 after 6 days 23 hours and 31 minutes at the customs dock of Opuia Marina after a lovely sail through the Bay of Islands approach, accompanied by the tall ship Essex (Rob thinks). The customs, immigration and biosecurity people were very friendly and cleared us in half an hour. Liz and Rachel were also already waiting for us.

We're now moored at Opuia Marina where we'll stay until Monday before sailing down to Auckland where we've reserved a berth at Westhaven Marina pier P (#71 I think). Looking forward to a shower and dinner with our wives.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:12

Fiji to NZ (7) - Land in sight

Saturday, 2013-11-23, 11:30, 34:54.925S 174:19.349E, COG 208, SOG 6.5kn, Wind 20kn SE

27nm to go to Opuia. The sun's out, the waves are down, and we're almost there. We spent the morning in the cockpit taking photos and watching out for land. 29nm out from shore Rob spotted the first mountain top through the haze while I was downstairs making sure we've filled out all forms. It's quite a package, fortunately neatly presented in a plastic folder "New Zealand Border Agency Information". Of all the countries we've visited on this trip NZ provided the most complete and helpful information up front, awesome. And the longest forms to fill out.

In about an hour we'll enter the 12nm zone and will then call ahead to customs. Then it'll be another three to four hours before we arrive in Opuia. Liz and Rachel are coming up from Auckland to greet us, can't wait to see them. We're a little damp and tired but very happy.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:45

Fiji to NZ - Almost there

Saturday, 2013-11-23, 05:05, 34:19.925S 174:33.349E, COG 202, SOG 6kn, Wind 20kn SE

Almost there, only 55nm to the entrance to the Bay of Islands and then 10nm more through the bay past Russell and Paihia to Opuia, the official port of entry. The way it's going at the moment we should be there in 10-11 hours = 4pm. That would be just 30min short of 7 days, I'd like that.

Only little has changed since yesterday but they make a difference. The wind's the same but the sea is a little calmer and we have less water coming over. Rob spent a few hours in the cockpit yesterday watching seabirds. We have no more water coming dripping the companionway and the inside of the boat is clean and dry again "I cannot say how much that adds to the comfort level.

The stars came out again last night and Rob had a long look from the companionway, but decided that it's too cold to lie down in the cockpit and gaze up at them. After sweltering hot nights in Fiji this here sure feels like we're almost in the Antarctic. I also only climb out to work the sails and have a good look around every 30-45 minutes. More often now that we're getting closer to shore. Another few miles and we have to look out permanently, but at the moment we're still far out of sight of land.

At 1am we passed another sailboat. It was on a heading of 60 or so, trying to make some way towards east. Very painful, I'm very glad we choose early to make east and can now use that capital. Again "Beginning with the end in mind" has paid off for us and we could avoid getting stuck in an uncomfortable situation (Thanks Dad for your lessons). Rob thinks this is all rather uncomfortable, but when I hear my friend's stories of their passages to NZ I think we got off very easy. One tack all the way, not becalmed, no storm, no high seas, little rain, medium winds (more or less). A bit bumpy and wet but hey, that's all part of the experience.

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Thanks Ruth for the phone number of the customs guy. My brother and Liz both forwarded me your comment to the blog, which I cannot read at sea. Thanks Ralf and Liz .

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:53

Thursday, November 21. 2013

Weather update and arrival plans

Just downloaded the weather files through the sat phone and had a look. There goes my hope of some nice weather for the last day. The low has passed us and it's centre is now to the east of us. I had expected that it would stay west and move further south. But now we're firmly caught on the 'bad' side. Here's a nice website with wind maps for the area:

<http://www.passageweather.com/index.htm?/maps/oceania/mappage.htm>

If we're lucky the low keeps on moving east, in which case the wind should drop and move back east-ish. And if we're unlucky it moves further south, in which case the wind will come more from the south as we get into the low's last quadrant. Then we might not be able to maintain course, depending on the strength of the wind. That would add a few hours to our trip. But considering we're only a day a way it shouldn't have a huge effect. The question is whether we'll arrive Saturday afternoon or in the night.

I wonder what hours Customs and immigration are working in Opuia on a Saturday. We cannot leave the boat until we're cleared in, and if we arrive too late we'll have to stay at the quarantine dock over night. Better than at sea, but I'd much rather be with Liz.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:34

Fiji to NZ (6)

Friday, 2013-11-22, 11:30, 32:42.589S 175:02.000E, COG 196, SOG 6kn, Wind 25kn SE, gusting 35kn.

It feels like we've reached the rinse and spinning cycles of the South Pacific Ocean washing machine, 1400rpm. I asked Rob for his commentary on today's blog entry: "Thanks weather for giving us one last lovely day. I'm clinging on with my fingertips."

The wind is still coming from the south east with 25 to 35kn and we have to sail close-hauled at 40 degrees apparent wind to stay on course to Opuia. For this to work at all I had to put the 3rd reef into the mainsail and change the genoa for the little staysail. A good morning exercise. The waves are properly developed now and pound the boat constantly. I begin to wonder about fatigue on the 32 year old welding seams. Just kidding, I have absolute confidence in the strength of the boat, but the volume and frequency of the bangs are very impressive and make the whole hull vibrate and shake.

The water coming through the companion way slider is a real nuisance, and trying to get rid of it is an uphill battle. Salt water sloshes underneath the floor boards and I'm not looking forward to repairing the damage it's doing to the furniture. Cooking is out of the question. For breakfast we had the last of yesterday's the Dal-Kumara-Curry, and I suspect for the rest of the trip it will be muesli bars. Good that it's only 153nm to go to Opuia. If the wind doesn't change further South we should get in tomorrow afternoon after pretty much exactly 168 hours = 7 days. That's 164 hours on the same port tack, we haven't tacked or gybed since we went through the pass in Fiji.

I'm pretty happy with our sailing and tactics so far. It would be nice if the wind would ease off a bit for the last day or at least turn North-East so we can get the water out of the boat and make ourselves presentable. But if not, well, then it has to wait until we get into port. We positioned ourselves as best as we could and now we have to deal with what we get. The best part of every passage is always when you reach land, especially when your loved ones are waiting for you.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:15

Midnight report

Friday, 2013-11-22 00:00, 31:35.473S 175:29.570E, COG 200, SOG 7.5kn, Wind 20kn SE

Another twelve hours in the tumbling program of the South Pacific washing machine. The cockpit-fillers that are coming over today have a special quality. The first ones ever to defeat the concerted efforts of the spray-hood and closed companionway-slider. They overwhelmed the drainage system and dumped a bucket of water downstairs. Two hours

after I mopped it up another bucket full of saltwater came to say hello. And just now another one. I have to sit on the floor and wedge myself with my legs between the furniture to avoid being thrown around while cleaning it up. And just to remind us who's boss one wave lifted the whole boat out of the water and it slammed down with a fearsome bang. That was just after another wave accelerated us to 12kn for a few seconds. Funny thing is, the waves aren't even big, mostly 2m with the odd one at 3m. But they are steep and fast and maybe a little angry about something.

Meanwhile Rob's gone catatonic in his bunk and leaves it only to pee. He now wishes for the wind not to calm down so that it's all over sooner. He wears a sweater and hat even inside because it got noticeably cooler - 15C water temperature = room temperature. Quite a shock from the balmy 30C in Fiji only a few days ago. No more jumping around on deck in undies and a light rain jacket, now we're wearing proper foul weather gear and thermals underneath.

At ten tonight the clouds suddenly disappeared and all the stars came out. All of them, even the ones that are on day-light duty on the other side of the world. Or so it appears, it's so many of them. I can't get enough of that sight. But now most are gone again because the (recently full) moon came around the horizon and scared them away. It's super bright in that eerie light and we're bumping and bucking towards New Zealand.

220nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:20

Wednesday, November 20, 2013

Fiji to NZ (5) - bye bye Parasailor

Thursday, 2013-11-21, 11:45, 30:13.385S 176:03.840E, COG 200, SOG 7.5, Wind 25kn ESE

Yesterday afternoon was as expected overcast and rainy but relatively calm. Rob cut up a pumpkin and I made pumpkin soup in the pressure cooker - 1/2 pumpkin, 2 little onions, 2 grated carrots, chicken stock, pepper, nutmeg. Cook for 20 minutes then stick the hand blender in. Delicious boat food, especially on a rainy day.

After 3pm the wind dropped to 10kn and came from NE, and with us going SSW it came almost from behind. I took this as a sign that we were entering the NE quadrant of the low and that it's time for the Parasailor to shine (the Parasailor is a symmetrical spinnaker with a horizontal gap through the middle and a dynamic pressure wing like a kite attached to the front. Doesn't need a pole and I've used it from 5kn to 40kn of wind). Together Rob and I prepared the lines and dropped the main, and while Rob furled in the Genoa in I hauled up the Parasailor up and out of its sock. Great team. Then we sat in the cockpit for a while, watched a giant flock of seabirds take off from the sea, and discussed the weather and our further tactics. Suddenly the wind shifted back to E and increased to 20kn. Same grey overcast sky, no idea where that came from. And while we adjusted the trim of the Parasailor the whole thing basically exploded in mid-air. End of life after 3yrs and about 7000nm.

It took a while to drag all the trailing pieces bag on board and stuff everything into the bag. By then the wind had increased to 30kn and the sea was getting rougher. I was just sitting at the tiller and wanted to turn the boat closer to the wind to set the mainsail again when a massive wave hit the bow, reached up to the spreaders, and then came crashing down on me. After we stopped laughing we decided to leave the mainsail down and just go with the genoa for the night. We don't really need a main to go fast downwind in 30kn, it just rolls a bit more without it.

And it rolled a lot. The wind came up to 38kn and turned further South. We were glad that we had made some way to the east over the last days and could sail SW for a while, but it was still the most uncomfortable night so far. Every 20min a massive wave crashed into the boat and filled the cockpit with foamy water, but we stayed below and only poked our heads out to have a look around. Nothing to see though.

Today the wind's down to about 20kn again and we pulled up the main sail. Despite the mugging about with the Parasailor we made another 160nm in the last 24hrs and it actually looks like we can ride this low all the way into Opuā, which means we would arrive Saturday. But then I totally expect everything to change overnight and that we're going to be flopping about in little wind Friday, in which case we might arrive on Sunday.

312nm to go to Opuā

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:58

Tuesday, November 19. 2013

Fiji to Nz (4) - half way

Wednesday, 2013-11-20, 11:30, 27:35.155S 177:07.342E, COG 187, SOG 7.0, Wind 15kn NE

All through yesterday afternoon the sea was nice and we were gently gliding along at 7kn in 15kn of Wind â€“ wonderful. For six hours we felt that all the trouble was worthwhile. We even cooked a proper dinner in the pressure cooker â€“ potatoes, carrots, onions, kumara, eggplant, garlic, chicken stock, nutmeg, pepper, a little salt and two cups of water. My favourite. It was a little tricky with the broken oven gimbal but I wedged the oven into itâ€™s nook and tied it down with a rope. The boat smelled delicious of steaming vegetables and then we ate and traded stories.

Of course during the night the wind increased to 25kn and it got bumpy again, but fortunately no thunderstorms anymore. I put the 2nd reef into the main but we were still going at 8-9kn, and so this morning we passed the half-way point after 3 1/2 days. Nice going, another 172nm in the last 24hrs. It got colder too, only 24C. Time to break out the merino underwear .

Now that Robâ€™s got a taste of how nice it can actually be he says he doesnâ€™t mind if it takes a little longer when it means that heâ€™s not thrown around so much or gets a wave in his face every time he steps into the cockpit. Well, looks like heâ€™s in luck: Judging from the way the wind turns north it seems that low coming from the west is slightly ahead and south of us, where I wanted it to be. Which means we should soon get some light northerlies for a while. Perfect Parasailor weather.

Other than a few birds that circle the mast now and then we havenâ€™t seen anything since we passed a rusty Chinese fishing boat on Sunday. Not even a squeak from the radar detector or the AIS signal of another vessel. I kind of like that, the less there is out here the less likely weâ€™re going to run into something.

Iâ€™m expecting a quiet afternoon, although overcast and a little rainy. When the wind shifts another 20 degrees north Iâ€™m going to take the sails down and fly the parasailor. Rob always wants to know how much longer until we get to Opuia, but itâ€™s really hard to tell at the moment. With dropping winds itâ€™s unlikely that itâ€™s only another 3 1/2 days. More likely 4-5 days.

477nm to go to Opuia.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:03

Monday, November 18. 2013

Fiji to NZ (3)

Tuesday, 2013-11-19, 11:30, 24:41.041S 177:17.244E, COG 182, SOG 7.5kn Wind 15kn E

Today's my Mum's birthday. Happy birthday Mum! I love you. Thanks for giving me the confidence to do stuff like this.

It's also a beautiful day today. Yesterday and last night were quite rough, with 25kn of wind on the nose and lots of water washing over the deck. Every few minutes a wave would slam into the front of the boat with a mighty bang, and we stayed horizontal as much as possible to avoid being thrown around. But we made 175nm in the last 24 hours and upwind that is quite an achievement for a 39ft boat of 32 years. Double reefed main and genoa.

Today the wind is down to 15kn coming more from the east and that makes for a much gentler ride. We're still doing 7-8kn but the occasional big wave slows us down to 6kn, and with less wind it takes a while to gather speed again. Sometimes too long and then next wave slows us down again.

Food wise we're still relying on an oat bar and some fruit. Today it's water melon. We don't have much appetite, but also the boat rolls still too much to think about cooking. And it's hot without a gas burner. But I expect it to get calmer over the next two days (and colder) as a low moves in from the west and I'm very much looking forward to a decent meal. I'm only worried that my stomach's shrunk already and I can't eat anything, now wouldn't that be a shame.

650nm to go, which means that tomorrow we should reach the half-way point, after four days. If we manage to sneak in front of that low from the west then we can make it in another four, but if not we'll be caught with less wind and it'll take longer. But will also be more comfy. We'll see, out here you get what you get and make the best out of it.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:32

Sunday, November 17. 2013

Fiji to NZ (2)

Monday, 2013-11-18, 11:30, 21:47.804S 177:29.830E, COG 185, SOG 7.5kn, Wind 17kn SE

Not much happening on the boat except for hiding from the sun and spray, feeling more or less sick, and thinking a lot. We both miss our wives and Rob vowed never again to be further than 3ft away from Rach. Very cute. There are a lot of thoughts going through my head about the blog entry when I'm lying in my bunk, when when I sit down to write the blog my mind's all blank. Which is partly because the boat is moving so much that it already takes some effort just to sit. Good news is that we finally managed to keep some food down - a muesli bar and a bit of pineapple. Yay! But we're making good speed and course, which is definitely a plus.

Our general tactic is to keep a little east of our target so we have some room to manoeuvre in squalls, or can take a gentler westerly course when the wind turns South. Which will happen eventually, the question is only when and where we'll be at the time, hopefully past Cape Reinga. So we're sailing close-hauled at 30-60 degrees apparent wind and that means a lot of heel, a lot of water coming over, and a lot of movement.

Last night the usual thunderstorms popped up and with no apparent gap to run through and the whole system stretching far across the horizon we hadn't much of a choice but to go for it. The first was quite tame, 30kn and only a little lightning, but it forced us on a SW heading for an hour before we could turn back S. But the second thunderstorm was already waiting for us with 40kn of wind and heavy rain and we took down the mainsail and hid inside for two hours. Not very pleasant, we hope that there'll be less as the water cools, it's only 24C already.

822nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:50

Saturday, November 16. 2013

Fiji to NZ - First day at sea

Sunday, 2013-11-17, 11:33, 19:20.430S 177:28.925E, COG 170, SOG 6km, Wind 10kn E

We left Vuda Point Marina at half past four yesterday and in the 0hrs since then travelled 100nm south. The start was very slow with 6kn of wind from the North, but once we had left Fiji behind and approached a big wall of thunderstorms the wind moved to East and freshened to 15kn. Ideal conditions - if it wasn't for the head swell and lightning. One after the other first I then Rob puked our half digested sausage rolls over board.

We got through the thunderstorms all right without being hit, but it didn't feel good. Now the weather is quite nice, the swells are longer and less steep, and we're making good speed. The boat moves still a bit and there's occasional throwing up but it feels like we're settling in slowly.

Interestingly the water temperature dropped already from 30C in Fiji to 27.2C, and we can slowly see it dropping. I think it's about 16C now in New Zealand, so a drop of 1-2C every day is expected.

Damages: The gimbal of the oven is broken, and the oven is hanging limply in it's box. So not sure if we can actually cook something. But at the moment we both don't feel like eating anything for the rest of our lives . Rest of the boat seems to be ok.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:15

Friday, November 15. 2013

Go go go

We've checked out, and everything is put away. Ready to go.

I'll try to post a blog entry at noon every day, but no worries if that doesn't happen. It probably means that the Satphone broke or whatever. We're looking at a few pretty nice days ahead of us until that low coming from Australia crosses our path. Then we're looking at some very fast and windy days.

You can reach us at iridium@gudrunv.com, but we probably won't be very good at responding.

Go go go!

Axel & Rob

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 20:22

Ready to go

Last night Tony from Ragin' Cajun accompanied the Reggae Band at the sunset bar and that was extremely popular with everybody. As Rob has been spreading the word all week - including at the nearby First Landing Resort - heaps of people turned up and we had a fantastic time. What a great way to spend the last night in Fiji. Because ... fanfares ... today we're leaving.

Tony and the Reggae Band

Hanging up my (Dwarf8) flag in the sunset bar

There are another eight items or so on the to-do list, but it's getting smaller and the items less important. And it's another few hours until twelve when the officials come to check us out. And then we're off. Weather is looking pretty neat at the moment, 15-20kn from the east. That is right there in the "sailing south very fast" category, awesome. Some time next week a low from the west will catch up with us, and then we'll have to turn a easterly so we don't run into the following southerlies. Tactics bla bla, it's going to be all right. Gudrun sails very well on all points of sail, it's just a matter of how comfortable we'll be while doing it.

Working on the wind vane

Fiji - the country where officials take care of your baby while you do the paperwork.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:09

Wednesday, November 13, 2013

Back in the water

Thanks to an epic effort by Baobab Marine and Rob over the last two days we could launch yesterday. The rudder is back in, cutless bearing replaced, winches cleaned, engine serviced, water tanks filled, bilge-pump repaired etc. After the splash we started to fasten the main-sail and during preparations discovered a few nests inside the boom. Took over two hours to get all the crap out again, crazy. But now the mainsail's on and Gudrun looks almost ready to go.

A few things are left to do though:

- climb the mast and check the terminals
- fasten genua
- fasten staysail - looking at the weather forecast we'll need it
- attach wind-vane
- replace some sheets and a halyard
- replace water filters (paper and charcoal)
- stow kayak and solar panel
- tie down life raft on deck
- shop for food
- fill fuel canisters (we have 60l in the tank and take 2x20l in jerry cans)
- check out

Gudrun in the lift

Approaching the slip

Back in the water!

It will be a busy today, but if all goes well we can leave tomorrow (Friday) morning. Which would be great because the weather's looking quite nice. The extended highs that have been sitting over New Zealand the last weeks have brought no wind or southerlies and have been very frustrating for everybody who's left so far. Rita and Ulli from SY Anni-Nad are now 14 days into their trip and have probably two more to go.

But it's changing now, new lows are forming east and west and the high's are moving up and east, and the wind's shifting to east/south-east and should be relatively stable for a few days. Only the waves are still from the south - pretty much head on. With a height of 2-3m we can expect a very bumpy ride. And not the fastest either, so I'm planning with 6kn average which would mean 7 1/2 days. I'd rather add a day to the trip and have it more comfy than blast through and arrive exhausted and with damage to the boat. I haven't consulted with my crew Rob on that but I think he'll agree.

Forecast calculation for next week.

Fiji sunset

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:21

Sunday, November 10. 2013

Reports from Fiji - Work on the boat

After the boat was moved to the hard stand I could discuss the work with the guys from Baobab Marine: Welding, sanding, painting, cutless bearing replacement, customizing the tiller, new companion-way boards out of lexan and a few other things.

Welding on the keel

More welding and sanding

While the welders worked on the keel I took apart the boat on the inside and inspected every nook and cranny for bugs and wrongs, so that it can be dealt with while the boat was on the hard. I didn't find any bugs, but a cracked frame that had to be welded and some electrolysis spots on the outside hull which had to be welded as well. Also in order to take the cutless bearing out the rudder had to be removed as well as the prop shaft.

Rudder being taken out]

.... and transported away for cleaning of the shaft.

Half-way through the second week Liz arrived and we had a few wonderful days together. Fiji really is a lovely place. Very pretty, very friendly, and not too muggy.

Liz in the hammock

Fiji sunset

Fiji beach

Then Liz left and Rob arrived - my crew. Rob's my neighbor from Auckland and became a good friend who used to do a lot of dinghy sailing when he was young. When he mentioned that he always dreamed of sailing a passage I invited him to join me. Now we're working on the boat together and play board games in the evening (Lord Of The Rings - The Confrontation). And together we observed as eight guys fought hard for over an hour to get a 100kg pig into a little launch.

Big pig in a little boat

Rob and Gudrun. Thanks for the help, buddy.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:19

Reports from Fiji - aerial photography

I had brought my quadcopter (a SteadiDrone QU4D) with me to take some aerial photos.

First Landing Resport

Vuda Point Marina

That went very well at first, but then the wind picked up to 25kn or more while the drone was up, and it got blown out over the reef. I tried to fly it back home but it was already 500m out and I couldn't really see it anymore. Then the telemetry link failed and with no way to tell it's position and orientation I send it up before flipping the "return to base" switch.

The drone slowly fought it's way back to Uli and me, but when I took over control again trying to land it it got turned around and blown out to sea - again. The camera hanging on the gimbal below the drone acts like a wind-vane and is a liability in these conditions. Impossible to fly by hand. Again I flipped the "return to base" switch, but this time the battery ran out and the drone crashed into the sea. "Noooooo" cries followed from the Marina Restaurant, where a crowd had gathered to watch the flight.

Fortunately the drone fell onto the reef, and the tide was almost out, about 20-40cm of water left. So I grabbed my kayak, paddled over, and began searching, helped by two other guys. 30 minutes later we found the drone and I took it back to the hotel room at First Landing Resort next to the marina to take it apart, clean it, dry it, and treat it with CRC 2-26, an insulating anti-corrosion spray (like Corrosion-X). Don't try this with WD-40 or the like, first of all it'll eat some of the plastics, and second it's conductive and that's not good for a microcontroller board.

Four days later - looks like flight controller and radio etc is still functional. I connected it to battery power and then the computer and everything is recognized and blinks and beeps nicely. But the battery that went down and the speed controller for the brushless motors are toast. I ordered a new speed controller (\$37), which has arrived in the meantime but it requires some soldering and I haven't gotten around to do that yet. Maybe today.

Starting the drone (thanks Uli Pusch for the photo)

Rinsing the drone

Taking the drone apart

Parts treated with anti-corrosive spray and put away.

Vuda Point Marina boatyard

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:57

Reports from Fiji - transition to the hard-stand area

The first days after I got back on the boat I was busy cleaning and organising transition to the hard-stand so that work on the keel could begin. The hard-stand area (and all stilts) were occupied by boats getting ready to leave, and although Monday was promised it took until Wednesday until it finally happened. No surprise there.

But I was quite surprised that I met so many people/boats that I knew already. I had thought they had all sailed on, but many had spent the southern winter in Fiji or the surrounding island nations and were now getting ready to sail either down to New Zealand (again), or onwards to Australia, or cross the equator and head for the Marshall Islands. Many evenings (and some afternoons) were spent catching up with old friends - or making new ones. While sailing across the oceans can be quite lonely, when in port, sailors are extremely social.

Fiji sunset

Meeting up with Uli, Uwe, Gisela, and Rita (SV Venus, SV Anni Nad)

New friends Patrick, Tom, Josh, Peter

Gudrun being hauled out of her cyclone pit

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:49

Thursday, October 24. 2013

Back on the boat

Yesterday afternoon I took a flight from New Zealand to Fiji to get the boat ready for a quick sail to Opuia and then Auckland, our new home. After coming all the way from Germany the last 1100nm really seem like a quick sail. But with the beginning of cyclone season here in Fiji, and the last of the winter gales down in New Zealand, it could potentially be a very, uhm, interesting, sail. So better make sure the boat's really ready, and the crew as well.

I had a quick look outside & inside Gudrun this morning before breakfast and she looks pretty much like I left her, didn't even smell too bad. No mountains of mould and gazillion cockroaches as I had feared in my worst nightmares. Only some bird droppings on the deck and gecko droppings inside, which should be cleaned away quickly enough.

At the moment it's rainy and muggy, but the rain is said to clear away tonight (of course) and then I'm looking forward to having it sunny and muggy. I've checked into the First Landing resort next to Vuda Point Marina, 5min walk from the boat, while I'm working on it.

Plan for today is to get the awning (suncover) up over the mast to be sheltered from rain (and eventually sun I hope) while I work. Then clean the inside, and prepare the work for the next days

To do:

- replace faulty depth sounder
 - replace cutless bearing
 - replace anodes
 - replace water filter
 - change engine oil, oil filter, diesel filter, impeller
 - check shackles, blocks, terminals, stays, lines, (on deck and mast-top)
 - check electronics, batteries
 - purchase antifouling
 - purchase fibreglass and resin to fix hole in keel
 - purchase propane gas
 - fastening sails
- ... and a few hundred other little things.

To organise:

- transition from cyclone-pit to hard stand
- work on keel (fix hole etc)
- anti-foul
- haul-in
- check-out

Weather (and repairs) permitting I'm hoping to sail some time around Nov 13th.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:41

Monday, May 13. 2013

Tin cans

Crossing an ocean alone in a little metal boat I often thought about the International Space Station and looked for it on the night sky. A sailboat and the ISS doesn't really compare ... but we can still dream, right?

So, check out this video by Commander Chris Hadfield and dream:

Chris and the crew of Expedition 35 will be returning to earth today after 142 days in space. Welcome back guys!

Just for laughs: an Ocean crossing is about 3000nm long, and most sail-boats travel about 150nm a day, with a spacing of one to seven days, depending on the season etc. The ISS orbits the earth approx. 220nm above the surface (in 93 minutes!). Therefore it is quite possible that at some point during the voyage the Astronauts on the ISS are actually the closest human beings to a lone sailor in the middle of the ocean.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:39

Monday, February 18. 2013

Married!

A quick summary of the last two months: The marina said all boats are fine after the cyclone, so that's good. I'm still waiting for my residence visa, which will allow me to import the boat tax-free. Unfortunately Immigration NZ said they're overworked and it can take until October to process my visa (huh?!), so it looks like the boat will have to stay in Fiji for a little longer. Liz and I are going to Fiji next month to check on Gudrun and bring a few things down to Auckland.

Christmas came, and with it a lot of friends and family. They arrived early for our wedding which happened on January 5th on Waiheke Island, a 30min ferry ride east of Auckland. Yay! . All went well, here is proof:

The ceremony

All the wedding guests

I'm dancing a Schuhplattler for my wife.

The sun setting over Auckland and Mt. Rangitoto.

Thanks guys for all the good wishes!

Well, there is also a short (10min) movie, shot by Marius and edited by me.

For a few weeks after the wedding we had guests in our home in central Auckland, and I travelled with my family a bit across the north and south island while Liz stayed in Auckland with her family.

It was wonderful to have friends from all over the world around for the wedding, but having guests for six weeks straight and making sure everybody is having a good time was also very tiring. It took us two weeks to recover and we're still busy following up on things that we had to let lie (like lots of emails and greeting cards and some administrative stuff).

Other than that we've settled into a routine here and don't miss life on the boat. Liz is writing on her book and doing some UX consulting on the side. I'm writing computer games and continue my diving training (TRIMIX at the moment).

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:41

Monday, December 17, 2012

Cyclone Evan Hits Vuda Point, Fiji - video

This video was filmed by John Hembrow "as the peak intensity of Cyclone Evan inched closer to Vuda Point, Fiji":

Thanks for filming and posting this, John! Looks like the marina is as safe from swell in storms as they promised.ı» ¿ But it's a looooot of wind. I hope the big tree didn't fall on Gudrun V

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:53

Sunday, December 16. 2012

Cyclone passes over Fiji, and Gudrun V

Cyclone Evan is right now passing over Fiji. I hope nobody booked a vacation on Yasawa islands resorts, they'll be hit hard. And my boat too, the cyclone's passing right over it. Well, it's just a boat, not a home. Thinking of the people of Fiji (and Samoa).

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:34

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Friday, November 2. 2012

So long!

Gudrun V is on the dry in Fiji, and Liz and I are in Auckland. The plan is to sail Gudrun down to New Zealand in 2013, but for the moment the voyage is over. Now we have to settle back into a regular life style on shore.

Here's a short video of the haul-out and storage:

And here - finally - photos of Gudrun sailing. Thanks to Corinna and Wolfgang from S/V Moin, who passed me as I arrived in Fiji.

Isn't she a nice boat?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:23

Tuesday, October 23. 2012

Video from sailing to Niue

Here's the video from sailing from Niue to Bora Bora:

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:13

Friday, October 5. 2012

Gudrun in the cyclone pit

After two days of frantic activity Gudrun was ready to be hauled out and put into her cyclone pit at Vuda Point Marina. Everything went smoothly and now Gudrun is a fish without water:

Gudrun in her cyclone pit

Next day (today) we were all going to say goodbye - Tim from Slick, Jessie from Obelisk, Alef from Batten Anna, (plus assorted crew) and me. Reason enough to go out party.

Anybody confused?

dancing

locals dancing too

It was a great night out, the first for me actually in, puh, I don't even know how long. You don't get to dance a lot when cruising, because you tend to stay away from the touristy places with the clubs and discos.

And today another rare experience: I'm wearing shoes. Not as usually barefoot or in thongs, but in real shoes. Boy does that feel weird! But I'm flying to Auckland, where it's cold (12 C) - brrrrr.

Shoed feet at the airport.

So, only a few more hours until I'm re-united with Liz. Very exciting!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:37

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

(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

Vuda Point Marina

I'm at Vuda Point Marina, getting ready to haul out into the cyclone pit today. Yesterday Tim from S/V Slick helped me to take the sails down and fold them. We also removed the solar panels, which from now on will decorate his boat. I kept one 85W panel to keep the batteries topped-up while the boat is on the hard. Gudrun looks very different without the bimini over the cockpit. Almost like a real race boat again

Mainsail, Tim, crew, crew, Jessie

Other than that I'm busy cleaning out the boat. Empty the deck, secure all lines and things that might flop around in strong winds. Remove all the food, clean the bilge, stuff like that. With a flight to Auckland on Friday evening the schedule's a little tight. But I'm very much looking forward to seeing Liz again.

Gudrun will stay here until April, when I'll sail her to New Zealand and finish the trip. A long break, but I have to attend to other matters first - NZ residence, wedding, and then wait for the end of cyclone season. Every thing has its time.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:02

Monday, October 1. 2012

Lautoka

Tuesday, 2012-10-02, 11:48 UTC+12, 17:38.344S 177:22.387E, 4nm south of Lautoka Wind 6kn SW

Pretty hot here in Fiji. But it looks nice, lots of little islands and reefs. Easy to see why this is such a tourist destination.

I'm almost in Lautoka now, 4nm to go. I've been motoring the last hour because with the little wind I was risking running late. As it is, I'll probably show up in the lunch break. Book says I have to call Port Control and get instructions, so I'm assuming I either have to wait at anchor or can go to a wharf if I'm lucky.

I'm very excited about the photos of Gudrun sailing. I've been complaining to Liz ever since we got to Tahiti that we'll probably arrive in New Zealand and still won't have a photo of Gudrun sailing. Very happy now, and a beautiful day for photography too. I had all sails up, and a blue sky as background. Very exciting!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:19

Through the pass

Tuesday, 08:00 UTC+12

Sailed through the pass and who do I see coming my way? Corinna and Manfred on S/V Moin! And they're taking photos. The first photos of my boat with sails up. Unbelievable that I have to sail around half the world just to get some photos of my boat

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:45

Almost there

Tuesday, 2012-10-02, 0:11 UTC+13, 18:20.975S 177:29.706E COG 260, SOG 5kn, Wind 15kn E

Almost there, 30nm South-East of Navula Passage, Viti Levu. I'm trying to time it so that I get there when the sun's up, which is in 7-8 hours. No point in getting there and night and running on a reef. From the pass it's another 25nm to Lautoka where I can check in. So I'll probably arrive after lunch-time. Apparently there's a lot of forms to fill outn Fiji. I've already spent an hour just with the forms I've downloaded from the immigration Website.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:25

Sunday, September 30. 2012

One of those rare perfect sailing days

Monday, 2012-10-01, 11:40 UTC+13, 18:28.955S 178:31.896E , COG 255, SOG 6.5kn, Wind 15kn SE, sunny

Great sailing today! All sails up, and Gudrun is zooming along just nicely now, fast and steady at 120degrees apparent wind. Suva is just up north, and there should be no problem with being at the Navula passage on the south-eastern corner of Viti Levu tomorrow early morning. From there I have to go 22nm north-east to Lautoka to clear in before going back south a 6nm to Vuda Point, where the marina is. Hope clearing in doesn't take too long and I can get there before evening.

Plan for the rest of the day is mostly just sailing and a little cleaning, getting ready for the inspection by the authorities. And cooking, hmm, I wonder what to have for lunch today. Yesterday I made Burritos, very tasty. Now I have one onion, one carrot, a little bit of cabbage, some potatoes and some apples left. Sounds like stew, but I don't feel like it. What I would really like right now is a plate of kebab with rice, salad, and sauce!

125nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:31

Calliope / date line

Monday, 2012-10-01, 18:27.182S 179:39.601E, COG 280, SOG 5.5kn, Wind 20kn SE

hey - did you notice? The longitude is E now, not W anymore. I passed the date line today (180 longitude)! So, after passing the greenwich Meridian (0 longitude) in February 2010 on the way from Ibiza to Almeria, I've sailed now officially more than half around the world. Almost exactly half of that distance (89 degrees, from St Martin to Tahiti) together with Liz. Sweet!

But that is actually not the most exciting thing that happened today. That was when at 7pm after another no-wind day suddenly a heavy rain-front passed with 25kn and at the same time the radar detector and AIS alarm went off. Another boat! And I can't see it for all the rain . So no photo. But thanks to the AIS I know it was the 42m Motoryacht Calliope, doing 12.7kn on the way to Denarau, Fiji. I verified it's position by Radar, and seeing that we'll pass each other with a mile to spare I went back to playing a roleplaying game on the iPad ("Aralon" - Nothing special, but you've got to do something when there's nothing to do all day because of no wind).

Now the rain's gone, but the wind is still 20kn. The sea is also pretty agitated at the moment, and the boat's rolling again. Ah, maybe going super slowly wasn't so bad after all

183nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:26

Saturday, September 29. 2012

Electronic ramblings

Sunday, 2012-09-30, 12:00 UTC+13, 18:33.284S 179:30.833W, COG 245, SOG 2.1kn, Wind 4kn E, overcast + rainy

Zzzzzzzzz ... so glad I have my little electronic distraction devices, otherwise I couldn't help but sleep all day on a day like this - overcast, rainy, 2-3kn of speed.

The investment into eBook reader and tablet are so worth it when you go cruising. I've read hundreds of books in the last three years on the boat. A lot of them reference books which I keep turning back to. No way I could carry them all in paper. Nowadays I only buy paper books if I can't get them as ebooks. And even then I photograph the important pages (of reference books) and convert them into text-ebooks with Adobe Acrobat and Calibre. Not that I could get the book I wanted on the route - download is the only way. And the tablet (Android or iPad, doesn't matter) are not only great for watching movies, playing games, or reading color ebooks (e.g. about photography, video), but also for navigation. They all have GPS, and some even GPS + GLONAS. And charts are cheap.

On this trip I've tested "SEAiq Open" for the iPad, which takes the standard CM93 charts that "everybody has", and it works great. Much more features than the Navionics software, and a lot cheaper too (only \$15). I'm only wondering why they didn't include a feature to measure distance between two points. Kind of essential.

My brother Ralf, the ingenious engineer, send me an email saying it can't be Diesel in my oil, otherwise I would definitely smell it. I ran the engine for another 1.5h yesterday, and the oil level didn't change. I also checked the transmission oil and it's at max, so didn't lose any of that either. Looks like I just did have too much oil in there to start with. Hm

235nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 20:01

gummi bears

Sunday, 2012-09-30, 0:00 UTC+13, 18:21.694S 178:49.078W, COG 270, SOG 1.5kn, Wind 5kn SE, raining

So glad the wind has finally established itself back South-east. Now there's a chance of getting some decent, steady wind soon. But it might take another day. Doesn't matter. Infinite patience here on the boat. If maybe the rain could stop.

Only the supplies are running out. No more Nutella! Absolute disaster. Gummi bears also strictly rationed, only 8 left. Lots of gelatine, sugar, juice, and jam though ... maybe I can make my own?

Still very excited about the whales. Totally made my day

270nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:35

Whaaaaales!

Saturday, 2012-09-29, 17:38, 18:29.560S 178:29.780W, COG 270, SOG 4kn (motor), Wind 4kn S

What a stressfull sailing day. All the time sails up, sails down, engine on, engine off, tack, reef in, reef out, tack, then all that rain and then on top of it engine trouble Btw, I had a look at that in between sailing stuff, and it actually seems I had too much oil. I removed 3/4 liter, and that solved the problem. Question is: how come? It's not water. So either I put too much oil in last time (but why didn't the alarm go of earlier?) or diesel got into the oil. Or oil from the transmission. Or am I missing something? Have to look some more.

But first there's reason to celebrate: I saw humpback whales! From my boat! While sailing! Isn't that awesome? Almost three years I've been waiting for that . I had just tacked, and looked toward Oneata Island to see if I could see the reef in front of it. And instead I saw a plume of water! Fortunately - tataa! - the camera is always ready in the cockpit in a PELI case, and I just managed to get some shots of a "hump" and a fluke before the whales went out of sight. Then I sat there for one hour with the camera in hand, waiting for the two whales to come up again. But no luck. Anyway, still very happy. But wow, that went so fast, I can see how you have to do a lot of watching to have a chance to see a whale out in the Ocean. And to be honest, I'm not doing that much watching *blush*.

But what I saw instead was: S/V Promise, a little catamaran. So funny. Promise left Niue with me, and five days later (is it only 5 days?) we get to this passage at the same time. I took some shots of them, maybe I'm lucky and they took some of Gudrun too. Although I doubt it, it's a boat delivery, and they didn't look like photography was a priority.

Have to complain a little here: This is propably the least miles for effort I've managed on any sailing day ever - 35nm in 17 hours! And just in the time it took me to write that email I had to work in the cockpit 6 times: 3x adjust sails, 1x reefing, 1x unreefing, and finally to take the sails down and start the engine.

Anyway, I'm pretty much through the passage now, after that I'm happy to drift again or whatever. And I saw whales today! Isn't that absolutely amazing? Whaaaaales

295nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:53

Friday, September 28. 2012

almost Fiji

Saturday, 2012-09-29, 12:11 UTC+13, 18:28.883S 178:15.409W, COG 240, SOG 4.1kn, Wind 6kn NW, overcast

So far the day was pretty crappy, lots of rain and little to no wind. The little wind that is keeps shifting from NW to NE and back, and because I have to go straight W it's a little bit of a pain. I didn't feel like playing catch-the-wind games and turned on the engine while I made pancakes, eggs, and coffee for breakfast. Then the wind felt slighted and went away completely, so I kept on motoring. I want to pass those first islands during daylight.

Ten minutes to twelve the oil alarm went off - beeeeeeeep! I turned off the engine in a hurry and looked over the engine - oil looks good, temperature looks good, no idea. I've only changed the oil and filters in Tahiti, that's like 19 engine hours ago. So I'm surprised there is a problem. Well, that takes care of my afternoon activities

But first I have to get through that oneata passage. Not that I expect any problems, it's 4nm wide, more than enough space to tack if necessary. Fortunately the wind just went up to 7kn, which allows for decent sailing. heyyyyyy!

sh....

So, wind just turned to W and because I was down here writing the boat tacked by itself and I had to clear the sails. Yep, busy. So, wind from west is really not very nice now, hopefully it keeps on turning S! Be a little more cooperative, come on.

Anyway, all clear, just a little busy. But that's sailing ... nothing to do for days and then everything is happening at the same time.

307nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:37

rain

Saturday, 2012-09-29, 00:00 UTC+13, 18:28.381S 177:51.528W, COG 240, SOG 1kn, Wind nada

Friday afternoon continued to be very nice, slow sailing. 8kn of Wind, main + gennaker. Then three hours ago little fronts started passing through. Rain and wind for 10 minutes, then no wind for half an hour. Then again some rain, followed by wind. Then nothing. Hope that doesn't go on all day today, it's a little annoying.

Sometime today I should reach the first Fiji islands - Oneata, Karoni, Thakau. Not islands really, more just reefs. Lots of reefs around here. But there's the "Oneata Passage" marked in the charts, so that part can't be too bad. After that pretty much nothing for 100nm until Moala, then nothing for another 80nm, and then 100nm more of going around Viti Levu to my destination Lautoka. That last leg is where it's going to be really busy, but that's at least two days away.

330nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:07

Thursday, September 27. 2012

slow and steady

Friday, 2012-09-28, 11:50 UTC+13, 18:25.530S 177:07.432W, COG 265, SOG 2.5kn, Wind 5kn NE

The wind was pretty good the rest of the night, sometimes up to 12kn. Calm sea, no rolling, perfect for sleeping. Except for the GPS alarm which went off every few minutes after 2am. "GPS Fix lost". Then it ackquired it again, then another alarm - "GPS Fix lost". Rebooted the whole navionics stuff but the error persistet. After five minutes I shut the GPS alarm off. No worries, GPS isn't that important out here anyway. I'm sure it wasn't my devices, probably a temporary bad coverage. South pacific isn't a priority I guess. Anyway, after an hour I didn't see the GPS signal get lost anymore.

This morning the wind dropped to 5kn, and that's where it still is. Very slow goig with 2-3kn. Nothing I can do about it, patience is the key. Maybe I get lucky again and it picks up 1h after this blog entry?

Lunch today is a very simple stew: potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, cabbage, chicken-stock and spices. Classic boat food

370nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:18

Pizza rampage

Friday, 2012-09-28, 0:00 UTC+13, 18:24.898S 167:13.335W, COG 280, SO 5.5kn, Wind 12kn NE

Wonderful sailing all afternoon and night so far. Steady wind, calm sea. At first main + gennaker up, come night main + genoa.

Problem with making Pizza on the boat is that there's nobody to share them with. Made dough for five, and, well, eat for of them so far. Sweet sin.

423nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:02

Wednesday, September 26, 2012

So funny

Unbelievable. 1:00pm on the spot wind came up. 8kn from North-East. Since then mai-sail and gennaker up and sailing along in clear sky and calm sea with 5kn.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:42

Becalmed - Pizza time!

Thursday, 2012-09-27, 12:00 UTC+13, 18:23.275S 175:21.030W, COG 270, SOG 1.0 kn, Wind: nada!

One of the mysteries of this voyage is that about one hour after every new blog entry the wind changes. Honestly. Like last night: At 1am it changed from NE to NW. I pulled the main-sail up, and sailed quite nicely for a few hours with full genoa, full main, and almost full moon. A few miles SE of me was a big cloud with continuous vicious lightning inside, and true to form it moved perpendicular to the wind so no danger for me. Then I saw the lights of two cargo vessels - the first cargo vessels I saw out on the ocean since Panama (Not counting Inter-island traffic in French Polynesia)!

So I'm definitely getting closer to civilization again. Makes me all motivated to cook some real civilization food today: Pizza! Prepared the dough earlier, fortunately the yeast was still alive. Once the dough's done rising I'm going to heat this little boat of for real with the oven. Not that it isn't hot already, especially with no clouds and absolutely no wind out there. I'm just drifting with the current, again, fortunately pretty much in the right direction. Unfortunately there's still some swell coming in, from the side, so the boat's rolling a lot again. Nothing new there.

But according to the correlation of blog entry and wind changes, there should be some wind in about an hour .

470nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:14

passed Vava'u

Thursday, 2012-09-27, 00:00 UTC+13, 18:28.887S 174:51.509W, COG 270, SOG 6kn, Wind 18kn NE,

The rest of the day was rather nice. The sea calmed down and it rolled less. For about an hour in the afternoon there was a flock of birds always just in front of the boat, diving in the water and fishing. But I never saw them with a fish in their beaks. Then a spectacular sunset - orange, red, and pink fluffy clouds. An hour ago the wind picked up some.

500nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:27

Tuesday, September 25. 2012

International Date Line

Wednesday, 2012-09-26, 11:40 UTC+13, 18:26.019S, 173:49.519W, COG 270, SOG 5.0kn, Wind 15kn NE, sunny

Whoaaaa - Wednesday already! Where did Tuesday go? Tuesday was a victim of the international date line. Well, almost. The actual, geographical, date line is 180W, and I'm not quite there. But Tonga and Fiji (and other islands) have decided to ignore that little detail for political and economical reasons (Asia, Australia and NZ being closer then the US) and put themselves on the other side.

And because I'm now just north of Tonga, which has the same time then Niue but a different date, Tuesday got overtaken by Wednesday in no time at all. Normally I don't change ship's time until arrival, because it makes keeping a log so complicated. But I figure a whole day is worth the effort. And since I have to start communicating with Fiji soon (advance arrival notice) anyway, it's better to be on the same date.

Another thing that has changed is the wind - to North East. Now that is not such a great thing, because it means there's a little trough or depression in the south (again), which means the wind will turn further North then West as that thingy moves east and I'll be left with pretty much no wind (and rain) for a day or more, depending on the speed of that thingybob in the south. Can't be helped. It's all part of that south pacific sailing experience, right. I signed up for it, now I got it. No complains

But that's a day away. Today the weather is very nice and sunny, and that's something to be very happy about.

560nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:04

audio books no good for watches

Tuesday, 2012-09-25, 0:00 UTC-11, 18:46.340S 172.59.100W, COG 320, SOG 4.5, Wind 15kn ESE

60nm south-east of the Vava'u group which belongs to Tonga. Apparently lots of yachties there, watching whales and getting ready for a fun regatta this friday and a full-moon party on the beach. Sounds like good fun, but I have to pass this time.

Everything ok on the boat. I'm pretty bored though. The boat's rolling too much to do any concentrated work like editing photos or movies or writing without getting seasick. Have a few interesting books left to read. But I've read so much over the last three years ...

Tried listening to an audio book instead but fell asleep after a few minutes, hehe.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:15

Monday, September 24. 2012

Choices

Monday, 2012-09-24, 11:44 UTC-11, 19:02.742S 172:06.745W, COG 280, SOG 5kn, Wind 15kn ESE

Not much happening here. Lots of clouds and rain during the night. Now less clouds and nice sun. Not quite sure what to do with the sails. I can't make it until Friday to Fiji, especially because Fiji is across the international date line and therefor a whole day ahead of me. If I pull the main half-way up I'll get there Saturday night or Sunday, and if I just go with the Genoa I'll arrive Monday. Arriving Monday seems a little smarter then to arrive Sunday and pay fines. On the other hand the boat rolls significantly less with the main up - but then I have to be more concerned about reefing and accidental gybes and all. Always those compromises

Even more important than the question of what sails to fly, is the question what to cook for lunch today. And more urgend, because I'm pretty hungry! I gave most of my supplies to other cruisers on Bora Bora and Niue, because I'll leave the boat in Fiji for a while and they'll just go off. I've still got more than enough for this week, but the choices are now a little more limited then before. Hmm, Wraps? Dal? Pasta? Had Dal and Wraps last week, but didn't have pasta in two weeks, maybe I'll make that. Yep, good idea. Now let's chop up some veges while they're still fresh.

663nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:48

Monday

Monday, 2012-09-24, 0:00 UTC-11, 19:12.336S 171:04.326W, COG 250, SOG 5.5kn, Wind 15kn SE, overcast

Very light wind most of the day, mostly around 5kn, sometimes 8kn. At first I had the full main and gennaker up which gave me ok speed despite having barely a breeze. But as it often is with light winds, it shifted a lot around between S and NE, and I got tired of gybing all the time and also of the flapping main due to the old swell and at 2pm I dropped the main and just sailed with the gennaker. Which worked better then I had expected. I could go down to 150 apparent instead of 130, and it didn't roll much more then before. And no banging.

10pm the wind increased to 15kn, at which point it gets a little hairy with the gennaker because the boat's doing hull-speed already. At night with an overcast sky I can't see what's coming my way wind-wise, and more then 15kn and I'm in trouble with the gennaker up. I didn't want to risk loosing my last light wind sail, so I took it down and am now sailing with the genoa. Slower then before, and it's rolling a lot more. I really do miss the parasailor. Well, not much point in getting all sentimental, you've got to work with what you've got. But I notice that the longer I sail, the more I prefer light winds. 10kn really is about ideal, nice and comfy and sufficiently fast. I guess I'm getting old & soft

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:20

Sunday, September 23. 2012

On the way to Fiji

Sunday, 2012-09-23, 10:02 UTC-11, 19:03.194S 169:58.639W, COG 240, SOG 4kn, Wind 12kn SE, sunny

Just left Niue for Fiji in light winds from the SE and old swell from SW. Originally I wanted to leave on Friday, but couldn't get hold of customs to check out. Friday the plane from Auckland (the only plane all week) arrives, and customs is busy at the airport all morning. They should be back for the yachties by three, but apparently they decided for an early weekend. I waited until five, then the immigration lady told me to come back Saturday. Island time

Saturday checking out worked all right, but no wind. A little depression passed through south of the island and the wind turned 360 degrees, causing some uncomfortable swell in the bay from the west. Against this swell I'm sailing today, but it should be down by evening. But at the moment there's a lot of rolling and banging going on, my favorite sailing days. At least the sun is out again. It was all rainy and overcast since Wednesday last week. The batteries are low and everything's a little damp, so the sun is definitely very welcome.

Weather forecast for the week looks quite nice, at least until Thursday. Light to moderate winds from the SE. Perfect if I still had my parasailor. With the gennaker I can not sail reasonably further downwind than 140 degrees apparent wind angle, so I'm going to do a lot of extra miles to Fiji. I had hoped to get there Friday, but as it is it's more likely to be Sunday.

I've read that they fine you 100\$ in Fiji for checking in on Sunday. I've also read that I have to anchor and pick the officials up at the dock. Which won't work with my kayak, so I guess I'm going to be immensely popular right from the start. Hehe. But we "cross that bridge when we get there". Next waypoint: Vava'u (Tonga), 232nm

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:41

Friday, September 21. 2012

Dolphiins!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:26

Niue Diving video

Check out the crazy clear water!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:24

Thursday, September 20, 2012

Beautiful Niue

The peculiar thing about Niue, from a mariner's point of view, is the lack of a dock as well as any local boats in the water. All boats are launched into the sea by crane, and craned out again upon return to shore. And the same applies to the dinghies of us cruisers:

Alex craning his dinghy onto the wharf. Local kids helping.

The only problem with this is during strong westerlies, when the waves are rolling right into Alofi bay and breaking against the wharf and it's impossible to launch, or retrieve, a boat.

The wharf from shore.

Together with me five Canadians from S/V Ruby Soho, a 47ft Catamaran, checked in. Next day Pierre and Lili from S/V Jotys joined us, and we spent pretty much all the time together.

Jeni, Ady, Dan, Alex, Shannon from Ruby Soho with obligatory arrival beers.

Pierre mixing drinks.

We rented a van and drove around the island together, because there are many "Sea treks" to explore. On one we were a little lazy and drove further than recommended and got stuck with the car on a holey gravel slope.

Don't take you're van down steep gravel tracks.

But with reduced tire pressure and a lot of pushing and jumping down on the rear bumper we got it back up again after an hour, phew!

The sea treks are a few hundred meters to a few kilometers long, and at the end there's always a pleasant surprise: caves, arches, ravines, pools, or spectacular breaking waves.

Beautiful, right? And the underwater geology is as spectacular! Well worth a diving holiday, especially with water as clear as I've never seen anywhere before. The reason: No rivers or other run-offs, and no sandy beaches. Only hard coral.

Another phenomenon is an abundance of sea snakes. You can see them all the time in the water, and especially in the caves with access from sea & land, where they nest.

More photos on my photo archive: <http://xlvisuals.smugmug.com/Diving/Niue/>

Another highlight are dolphins and whales. Only I didn't see any whales. But I got real close to dolphins:

Between exploring the island above and under water during the day, and meet-ups in the evenings, it was again a very "stressful" week (like in all the anchorages). I need a few lonely days at sea soon to relax from all the socializing!

Pizza time!

But yesterday Jotys, and just now Ruby Soho left, and at the moment I'm the only boat in the bay. I've got another two dives lined up for tomorrow, with the hope of seeing the whales after all. Then I'll also leave, either in the afternoon or on Saturday morning.

Bye bye Ruby Soho!

But I'll come back for sure, Niue is a great place for a relaxed vacation far off the beaten tourist track, not only for diving.

Local fishermen going out at sunset in their wakas (outrigger canoes)

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:54

Sunday, September 16. 2012

Arrived in Niue (Saturday)

Saturday, 2012-09-15, 10:26 UTC-11, 19:03.374S 169:55.570W, at mooring in Alofi

To arrive safe and sound in a quiet bay after two rough days and nights at sea is the best thing in the world. Right now at least. Coming in to the bay of Alofi I was wondering whether there will be a free buoy for me and how I'm going to tie to it alone. But all fine, at least three free big orange buoys, and the place is so protected from South-Easterly winds that it was no problem to grab the buoy with the boat hook and thread a line through the eye. Then I called Liz, and after that Niue Radio for clearance.

After a friendly welcome and basic questions (name of vessel, call-sign, number of crew, animals, last port, next port) Niue radio asked me to stand by on Channel 16 because there are two more boats in line ahead of me.

All together there are twelve boats here of which I know three.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:05

Saturday, September 15. 2012

in niue

all fine, arrived at 10 this morning. busy organizing stuff, more later

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 20:55

Almost there

Saturday, 2012-09-15, 0:00 UTC-10, 19:41.850S 169:31.510W, COG 280, SOG 5.6,
Wind 25-30kn SE

Waves are between 2 and 2.5m now, sometimes a little more, sometimes they break over the boat - very wet. The boat rolls a lot, bounces on the wave tops like a rubber duck. Not really comfortable. The autopilot thought so too and started acting up an hour ago - "No Data" on the display. Means connection problems, a wire must have come loose with all the rolling. So I took the panels down and fiddled with the wires to the compass. My favorite thing!

Looks like it was the ground wire. Seems to work now. I guess I can't complain, that's what you get when you change the unit in the middle of the ocean. Have to spend some more time on it at the mooring, but first I have to find the right cable connectors, mine are too big and don't sit well.

I'm taking a roundabout way to Niue to "waste time" at sea, and the genoa is almost completely furled in. Don't want to get close to the island while it's still dark. But I should be ok now. Should have a little nap, too.

Only 45nm to go. Yay!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:31

Friday, September 14. 2012

111nm to go

Friday, 2012-09-14, 11:50 UTC-10, 19:40.177S, 168:08.658W, COG 280, SOG 6.5kn, Wind 20-25kn SE

3:30am the trough finally passed through and I could turn the boat west again and toward Niue. No need to unfurl the genoa or pull up the main, there's plenty of wind. The sea is a little rough, but ok. It's drizzling, and sometimes spray is kicked over the sides.

I'm glad I decided to take an extra day. As the conditions were I wouldn't have made it yesterday anyway, I would only have gotten frustrated. Memories of the begging of my trip in the Mediterranean pop up. Feels like a very long time ago, hehe.

The weather isn't really nice outside. I went out to have a look, got drenched by spray, went down again. So I stay below mostly and just pop my head up every half hour. The one thing I'm concerned about a little is coming around Niue in the night. I better give it a berth of a few miles, there's going to be fishery stuff in the water for sure, and I won't see it in the moonless night. Maybe also whales "logging" (sleeping). Don't want to bump into one. Richard recommended to go all the way around then follow the leading line on the chart (leading lights are broken of course). Sounds like a good idea.

Plan for today: not much. I'm feeling slightly uncomfortable from the boat movements. So basically: into the bunk, read, out of the bunk, look around, into the bunk, read, out of the bunk, look around, ... Started reading "Google SketchUp for Game Design".

111nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:04

waiting for the trough to pass

Thursday, 2012-09-14, 00:00 UTC-10, 20:09.450S 167:25.517W, COG 015, SOG 4kn, Wind 20-25kn WNW,

All during the day the wind slowly changed further via North to West, and I changed my course from NE to SW in a nice arc. At nine pm a rainfront passed through and afterwards the wind came from almost due West and the pressure down to 1012mBar. I tacked, not wanting to sail away further to the south of my destination and thinking that the trough has almost passed now and the wind will come from the south.

Hmmm, three hours later and I'm still waiting, sailing north now. Pressure is at 1014mBar, wind North-West. I am confused. Looks like I tacked too soon. Maybe I should have kept on sailing south? Well, can't be more than another few hours now until this is over and the wind's back to normal. But I thought it would go faster. The sea is naturally very confused now with waves coming from all directions, banging against the hull. The wind was up over 20kn all day and the batteries are pretty full again. I even ran the watermaker, charged my laptop, and made a backup. Now nothing to do but sit and wait

158nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:05

Thursday, September 13, 2012

slowing down

Thursday, 2012-09-13, 11:30 UTC-10, 19:54.740S 166:39.575W, COG 260, SOG 5.0kn, Wind 20kn N

During the rest of the night the wind direction moved ever further north, and the strength increased slightly to 20kn. The rain passed and the stars came out again, but with no moon it stayed pretty dark. In the morning I was left with bumpy sea and 220nm to go to Niue. Decision time: hurry and get there tomorrow, or slow down and aim for arrival on Saturday morning.

In nicer conditions I'll probably have hurried up, 200nm is doable with a beam reach. But bumpy as it is at the moment, and with unclear conditions up ahead, I decided to take it slowly. I really don't want to have to do more boat work in Niue, just get the boat to NZ without too much trouble. So I took down the main and furled the genoa a little, and now I'm bouncing along with 5-6kn.

Not sure what to do today. Originally I wanted to do the laundry while it was raining, but that happened during the night. Maybe more rain later today. Otherwise I'll clean inside a bit. Or sleep. I'm done with all my books for the trip, and I never feel like watching anything or doing computer work while at sea, especially when it's bumpy.

195nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:55

pitch black

Thursday, 2012-09-13, 0:00 UTC-10, 19:52.781S 165:18.890W, COG 280, SOG 7, Wind 15-20kn ENE, dark

Afternoon was pretty nice weather-wise, light winds and sun. I spent most of the day in the cockpit, reading, watching, organizing the boat. The sea was strangely uncomfortable. No big waves, just lots of little ones with no pattern. And some old swell. Only 1m high, but very insistent. Every time one of them rolled underneath the boat it lurched sideways funny and I had to stop whatever I was doing for 5sec and hold on. Even while reading lying down! Very strange.

The gennaker did it's trick again and wrapped it around itself so that I had to take it down and patiently untwist it on the deck. It looks like the design doesn't work very well in roly seas. Put the genoa up the rest of the day.

Before nightfall I saw clouds moving in and getting thicker. Decided to reef the main-sail and finished just as the first rain-drops started to fall. Now making good speed in absolute pitch black darkness. Clouds and no moon. It's absolutely dark like you can't imagine. Visibility stops right in front of my eyes, I can't see the length of the cockpit. It's a little disquieting to blast along through the night without seeing anything. Fortunately there's isn't much around out here on the ocean. No beep from the AIS or Radar detector all week. To sail like this in a coastal environment would be absolute madness.

270nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:07

Wednesday, September 12, 2012

corrected position from 12:00

Wednesday, 2012-09-12, 12:01 UTC-10, 20:04.930S 164:04.061W

Markus noticed that I had a typo in my position info. It is 20S, not 10S. Sorry guys. And thanks for watching out, I almost sailed to Hawaii!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 20:26

sailing along

Wednesday, 2012-09-12, 12:01 UTC-10, 10:04.930S 164:04.061W, COG 275, SOG 7.0, Wind 10-15kn ENE

just finished unwrapping the gennaker. I went down to drink something and when I came back up it was wrapped around itself like a towel you want to wring out. Nothing to do but take it down, lay it along the side of the deck, and patiently unfold it. An hour later ... back up again.

Weather is great. Sun, calm sea. The wind shifted a little north-east this morning. I waited until it was settled and then gybed. Everything went fine. Now on direct course to Niue, ETA 48h at current speed. Well, tomorrow I'll be in the trough. Rain and no wind, so it's going to be Saturday for sure.

340nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:07

So many stars!

Wednesday, 2012-09-12, 0:00, 19:34.866S, 163:07.098W, COG 255, SOG 6kn, Wind 13kn E

The night sky far out at sea is always special, but tonight it's extra extra special. Exceptional visibility, no clouds above, and no moon. Absolutely amazing view of the milky way. Took about fifty photos (5D mk III + 24mm.1/10s, f/1.4, iso 25.600) and I'm surprised how well a few of them turned out. Motion blur being obviously the biggest problem on a sailboat.

Had full main and gennaker up all afternoon, trying to catch up some of the miles I've lost due to my autopilot experiments. I debated briefly keeping the gennaker up at night, but then brains won over balls (this time at least) - safety first! It's my last down-wind sail after all, and it can't take as much wind as the parasailor. But I like the gennaker a lot. Can't sail as far downwind as with the parasailor, but it's a lot quicker to get up and down, and faster in light winds or on the beam - same area but no hole.

On the menu today was burritos for lunch and chili on rice for dinner. Complete with fresh coleslaw salad, sour creme, and cheese. Yummy! But I almost decorated the galley with sauce after the gimbal thingy of the stove seized and the thing stopped swinging. Next wave and the pan started sliding. I was looking away, cutting leech, heard it sliding and just caught the handle of the pan before it slipped from the stove. Lucky. Looks like I have to take the whole stove out to fix the gimbal. Not sure if I want to try that at sea, might dump it on my foot accidentally. Have to use the

small pan now, the big one's too wide for the "rough-sea-brackets".

390nm to go!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:41

Tuesday, September 11. 2012

back on track

Tuesday, 2012-09-11, 14:00, 19:16.980S, 162:02.540W, COG 255, SOG 7kn, Wind 15kn SE

Yes Uwe ... "never change a running system". Oh, how I can see my friends chuckling at my foolishness. 3 years on the boat and I start playing with the autopilot half-way through a one week trip. Doh! Well, just shows how bored you really can get at sea.

So, I tried to calibrate the new autopilot for an hour, driving in circles, but it didn't work. I guess my and Raymarine's definition of calm don't match. So I installed the old autopilot again, and now everything is "sweet as". Now that is a New Zealand expression and means ... fine. Have to practice my NZ dialact ey, not far now

Liked the old autopilot (ST4000) better anyway. Raymarine ST6002 is for the can. First of all you turn it on have to wait one minute until it's ready. ST4000: immediately. Want to change rudder gain at the ST6002 because the sea got rougher: turn it off first. ST4000: no problem. And the remote control is crap too. The battery lasts for only about 8h, then it starts beeping. But you can't turn it off, you have to plug it in first, because the alarm that goes off every 2sec interrupts the shut-down procedure. You can also not turn it off while in auto pilot mode. So there's no way to conserve battery power. And no, the cradle doesn't come with a plug. Great user research guys. I know it doesn't sound like a big deal, but after a day it annoyed me so much I turned it off and not on again. Next upgrade (or boat) I'll rip all the Raymarine stuff out.

Time for lunch, I'm starving. 448nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:57

autopilot woes

Tuesday, 2012-09-11, 12:00, 19:13.816S, 161:57.834W,

Nice day today, like yesterday. I thought it would be a good day to complete the autopilot calibration. So far i've only done compass calibration, because the manual says it needs lots of space and calm calm conditions to do the autopilot calibration. And after my trial & error setup it was working ok, but doing more than necessary and using more power.

Anyway ... bad idea. Now it can't keep course anymore at all. Tried to fix it for the last three hours but no success. Now I have to take the sails down ,start the engine, and begin with the compass calibration all over. If that doesn't work i can always install the old system, or the wind-vane. Well, well.

Other than that all green. 450nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:22

Half way

Tuesday, 2012-09-11, 00:00 UTC-10, 18:53.363S, 160:50.845W, COG 255, SOG

6.5kn, Wind 20kn SE

The afternoon continued to be a great for sailing. Calm sea, blue sky, light wind, steady progress. This is how I imagined the Pacific. So there definitely are nice sailing days here.

At 2pm I passed 10nm north of Aitutaki and heard some yacht traffic on the radio, but didn't see anybody. So far nothing but sea, clouds, and very few birds.

After nightfall the wind picked up a little and I changed the gennaker for the genoa. I almost forgot, I'm so used to just let the parasailor up because it can handle pretty much anything. Now we have 20kn of wind from the SE and I have the genoa out and the main in the 2nd reef. Should have been ok for the gennaker, but better safe than sorry. Also, on a short downwind trip like this I like to keep the main-sail always reefed. Makes the whole trip so much more relaxed than having to turn into the wind "all the time" to reef and unreef, and I'm still fast enough.

Got an email from S/Y Jotys, Pierre and Lili, who Liz and I met diving in Fakarava. I met them again in Bora Bora and they left for Niue one day ahead of me. They've decided to stop over in Palmerston to let the trough pass. I read up on Palmerston and it doesn't say nice things about the anchorage with anything but an easterly swell, and it's going to be southerly. So thank you, but I'll try my luck at sea. I've tied my anchor so tightly to the bow it'll take me two days to untie it anyway. But maybe my info on Palmerston (from the south pacific crossing guide) is outdated and they have now moorings somewhere nice?

Anyway, for now the plan is to sail on. Let's see what the weather forecast says later today. Btw, passed the half-way point today, yay! 517nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:33

Monday, September 10. 2012

All sails up

Monday, 2012-09-10, 11:30 UTC-10, 18:37.170S, 159:34.390W, COG 255, SOG 5.5kn, Wind 12kn E

I'm always surprised how much of a difference the weather makes. I mean, of course it makes a difference, sailing is all about the weather. But still ... only 5kn of wind more or less and the whole experience changes completely. During the night it calmed down and when the sun came up this morning I felt so rested and energetic that I changed sails before even thinking about breakfast.

I set the main-sail and the new doyle gennaker (first time up!), then fiddled with the lines a bit. Happy with the setup I ran around the deck with the GoPRO, recording everything, and then I made pancakes with eggs and bacon for breakfast. Yay! What a difference compared to the last days, when I didn't feel like doing anything because it was so rolly that everything was so much effort.

Forecast says it's going to stay like this for two days, and then the effects of that trough coming from Fiji should show. Well, I don't mind two nice & slow days at all. Looks like I'll get to test that Doyle Gennaker thoroughly. Nice colors btw - green, grey and orange.

Had a little electrical problem earlier. The raymarine stuff was complaining about low battery voltage. But the batteries are 90% full, so it could only be ... always the same ... a connection problem. I tracked it to an old electric mains switch. I have three switches - one near the battery which I installed, and two near the switch panel which came with the boat (I wonder why the dude installed two in the first place). One of the old ones was causing the trouble. I should have replaced it a long time ago, but I couldn't find one that fitted and I was tired of drilling holes into my boat. Anyway, all I could do now was bridge it with a short cable, which I reckon is ok for now because there are two more switches left to turn off mains in case I get hit by a Klingon photon torpedo and the switch panel starts exploding or whatever. Again I'm surprised that the problem came up during nice weather - very unusual. Looks like this is my lucky trip! I keep my fingers crossed that my luck holds until Niue

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:13

troughs and friends

Monday, 2012-09-10, 0:00 UTC-10, 18:19.450S, 158.34:601W, COG 260, SOG 6kn, Wind 20kn E

The afternoon was nice and quiet. Wind only about 17kn, and the sun came out, and the sea got calmer. Around nightfall it rained again and now the wind is gusty and the sea is a little rougher, so I'm waiting for stronger wind.

I'm sailing only with the genoa. The main would give me another knot, maybe knot and a half of speed. But 6kn isn't exactly slow, and with the main-sail up come all the worries and work and also higher load on the autopilot. Not to forget shade on the solar panels, which means I'd probably have to turn off the fridge. Which is full of cheese, and wouldn't that be sad? So ... no

main at the moment. Might change tomorrow when the wind is supposed to drop a little and I slow down.

Venus (Gisela) forwarded me Bob McDavitt's Weathergram, which I had subscribed to but with the wrong email (ehem). Bob's talking about a convergence zone over Fiji and Tonga turning into a trough on Thursday and then move southeast. That is NZ time, so everything is happening one day earlier for me. Which means I might just make it to Niue before wind and waves pick up, or I might just not. ETA is Friday morning. Maybe I should re-consider about the main-sail? :-p. Well, not tonight.

Then I got an email from E Capoe (Andre), saying that they arrived in Suwarow two days ago after a fast passage, and that it's very nice and the park wardens are super friendly. There were more than 30 boats when they arrived, but after seeing E Capoe half of them took to the oars yesterday and ran away. Or sth like that

That reminds me that I won't see many of my friends again. A very few (e.g. Venus/Gisela+Uwe) decided to stay another season in French Polynesia. Understandable, fantastic place. Some take the southern route west (via Cook Islands), some the northern route (via Suwarow/Samoa), and only a few the middle (Niue). Then most seem to go to Australia without stopping in New Zealand, and others (e.g. Moyomo/Matt and Miepke/Andreas+Nana) decided that neither Kiwi nor Kangaroo is of any interest to them and they'd rather get back to the Atlantic/Caribbean quickly.

You'd think that sailing is a very lonely activity - especially when sailing alone. But in fact it's a rather large and very open and friendly community of people with a common interest and often similar values, so naturally friendships form quickly. Add some bonding by having lived through the same ordeals and you get pretty strong friendships. I'll miss my friends, and all the socialising at the anchorages. Dinghying from boat to boat, sharing meals and beers and stories, and helping with repairs and planning. It's a nice life. Not very comfortable or useful, but it definitely resonates with some old instinct deep inside.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:02

Sunday, September 9, 2012

Half a parasailor

Sunday, 2012-09-09, 11:52 UTC-10, 17:60.000S, 157:18.747W, COG 255, SOG 6.5, Wind 20kn E

I wake up from a brief light nap. Something is wrong with the parasailor. I hear a swish-swish sound that shouldn't be there. A quick look at the watch: 1am. I stick my head out of the companionway, turn around and have a look. It's dark and I can't see anything. Flashlight!. Ah ... interesting, so that is what half a parasailor looks like. At first I see only the wing and the top part, but then I notice the rest of the sail dragging in the water. Well, so much for a boring night.

The wind isn't too strong, but the waves are funny and the boat rolls a lot. Thinking of Liz in Auckland I don the life vest, click myself in and walk forward. Up close I see that the fabric is torn all the way down along both sides, right next to the belt. I wonder how you fix sth like that. Probably sewing? Well, not on the boat. I'm glad that I ordered that gennaker in Panama, I had a suspicion that the Parasailor wouldn't last me all the way to NZ. Not because it's a bad sail, but because it's pretty much the only sail I'm flying, and we had some rough nights between Europe and here.

I take down the Parasailor and put it into the bag. I'm surprised that it isn't blowing like crazy or raining. Usually stuff brakes always in the worst possible weather. I decide that's a good sign and start humming. Shouldn't I be worried? I guess not, I've plenty of sails with me, and it can probably be fixed. I unfurl the Genoa and we're going again. Sailing with the genoa will be a little slower, but a lot more rolly. Well, can't be helped now.

The rain comes in the morning. Heavy. But too late, hehe, nothing I have to do outside. So I sit inside and read and smile. The waves feel funny again. I take a look, and see them coming from the east as well as from the south. Some are 3m tall. They roll over and under each other and it looks quite spectacular, but not threatening. The boat bounces along like a rubber duck. I wonder what I'll have for lunch. Cooking could be a challenge. Feels like stew-in-the-pressure-cooker weather.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:26

Boring is good

Sunday, 2012-09-09, 0:00 UTC-10, 17:42.593S 156:02.800W, COG 250, SOG 7.0, Wind 25kn E

A brown booby circled around the boat for hours in the afternoon, and the wind dropped down to 15kn for a little while. Now the booby's gone and the wind's back up to 25kn, and that's about all there is to report at the moment. On a passage like this, the boring the better.

I'm slowly getting back into the routine: reading, sleeping, eating, watching out, pulling on some lines. But with the wind that steady there really aren't many lines to pull.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:27

Saturday, September 8, 2012

day two

Saturday, 2012-09-08, 12:00 (UTC-10), 17:25.291S, 154:41.784W, COG 250, SOG 6.5kn, 1019mBar, 33C, sunny

Still good going in 20-25 kn of wind from the east. 158nm in the last 24 hours, good for the parasailor. The sea is a little calmer than yesterday, waves still big but developed and regular. The sky is blue with some cumulus. I'm staying below decks out of the sun most of the time, just pop my head up to have a look now and then. Not much to see, some pelagic birds, mostly boobies. Radar-detector and AIS are helping me to watch out.

I made greek salad for lunch which I'll have with Christine's fantastic bread. It's too hot to cook a big meal for lunch. But I'm thinking what I could make for dinner. Maybe a curry? Food really is the only exciting thing happening on a lengthy offshore trip like this. Apart from big mammals in the water or bad weather, but I can do very well without the bad weather thank you very much. It was all so very exciting three years ago when I started. Now that I've seen it all a few times I'm happiest if the winds are light and the sea calm.

Richard said that I should definitely stop in Niue because the underwater visibility is fantastic, there are plenty of sea snakes, the people are friendly, and there's a chance to see whales although most are somehow in Tonga this year. Friendly people and great diving sounds like my kind of place. Only 875nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:13

a hole in the parasailor

Saturday, 2012-09-08, 0:00 UTC-10, 17:00.707S, 153:29.678W, Wind 20kn E,

At 1pm I started to feel a little sick with all the crazy rolling and set the parasailor. It's a lot better now, and since about 6pm, the ocean is getting a little calmer too, nice. Gisela was worried that I can't cook when the sea is rough, but that is actually not a problem. I do still cook, it just takes a little longer and I hit my head more often against the closet with the dishes.

Had some trouble with the autopilot at first. The idea is to do first a compass calibration, then a "seatrial calibration". The seatrial calibration needs lots of empty sea room, and calm seas. Aaaaah, right. Not enough sea room in the lagoon, and no calm seas outside. So instead of the seatrial calibration I did a good old trial&error calibration.

With the old model that was relatively easy because there were only two settings: rudder gain and response level. And you could change both while in autopilot mode, so you could see the effect immediately. Now there are a four more relevant settings, and you can only change "response level" in autopilot mode, and for the other you have to go to manual steering, fiddle with the buttons while holding the boat on course, then turn the autopilot back on and see what changed. A little tricky. Liz will be proud to hear that there was no swearing throughout the whole process. Now it seems to be fine, and I love the remote control. Don't even have to lift my head up from the bunk anymore to check or change course. yay!

Just received an email from Vulcan Spirit, who arrived in Tonga today. Says there are lots of whales there, and almost none in Niue. So I'm thinking that maybe I should not bother stopping in Niue and sail the extra 300nm? Would also be nice to meet up with Richard & Ali again. But it's too early to say now, will have to see what the weather does.

Oh, and there's a hole in the parasailor. Not that big hole, which is supposed to be there, but a new little hole where the fabric is torn. A triangle about 20cm sides, where the starboard control line of the wing is attached. The ripstop nylon seems to do it's work though and it's not getting any bigger, so I decided to leave the sail up while it's roly and take it down for repairs when the sea is a little calmer.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:03

Friday, September 7. 2012

On the way to Niue

Friday, 2012-09-07 12:00 UTC-10, 16:35.281S, 152:09.716W, COG 250, SOG 6.0, Wind 25kn E, Waves 2m 120D, 29C, 1018mBar

I dropped the mooring line at 7:30 this morning and turned away from the island. Moyo said good-bye from the, Miepke blew it's horn, and Schuessel was also on Deck waving and snapping photos. THEN they all looked a little confused while I turned a few circles just south of the mooring field, but I had to calibrate the autopilot and the manual says to do this in calm conditions.

No calm conditions outside the pass. Wind is quite gusty around 25kn, waves are only 2m but short and with no rythm. The boat is rolling a lot. Wind is from the east, and my destination is pretty much straight to the west. Which means I have to tack downwind to make life on a monohull bearable. After looking at the wave forecast I decided to tack south first for a few days, because it looks like the wave direction will turn further south the closer I get to Niue. Approaching Niue from the south rather than the north will allow me to have the waves more from the back than the front.

At the moment only the Genoa is up because the wind is not very steady. It should settle a little over the next few days and then I'll pull up the parasailor, which is much more comfortable.

Looks like lunch today will be mostly fruit, and dinner bread, cheese, ham and eggs.

Matt from Mojomo (www.mailasail.com/mojomo) send a photo of a fish he caught but can't identify. Judging by size, fins, tail, and stripes it very much looks like a Barracuda to me. But Matt says the teeth are wrong. Says it might be a spanish mackerel, but the sp m has dots and no stripes. A King Mackerell has stripes but is only found in the Atlantic. Mysterious! Any idea anybody?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:39

Bye bye Bora Bora

Friday, 2012-09-12 06:30, 16:29.435S, 151:45.654W,

Bye bye roosters, you won't wake me again at four in the morning. Today I'm leaving for Niue, 1060nm WSW. Smack in the middle between here and Niue lies Palmerston, which is handy should the weather turn bad. Otherwise I'm not planning to stop there.

Only thing left doing is set up the cameras, drop the mooring line, and then calibrate the new autopilot by driving some circles or so. I better have a look at the manual again. So I should be out of here in an hour or two. And then it's 7 or 8 days at sea. Lots of veges, fruit, bread and cheese on board. And Andreas from Miepke baked a chocolate-cake for me and Christine from Schuessel a german bread. Fanstastic, thanks so much friends. The plus of being a single-hander is that everybody feels like helping you.

Below some more photos from Bora Bora. Yep, it's a nice little island.

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:48

Thursday, September 6, 2012

last days on Bora Bora

Last week was a blur of working and socializing - regular life at the anchorage at a staging point like Bora Bora. During the day people get their boats ready for the next big trip, and in the evenings everybody meets up for drinks and dinner.

Only for me socializing started with breakfast already, usually on E Capoe. That's one of the nice things about being a single-hander: people invite you over all the time. As Andre said: if there's food for two, there's food for three. After breakfast some working on some boat, then coffee on Contina, then lunch on Gudrun, E Capoe, Miepke, or Moyo, then more working, then dinner again somewhere else, for example S/V Schuessel (Herbert & Christine). Very busy!

getting ready to go out for dinner

The menu at Bloody Mary's, Bora Bora

Good news: all the work is done! The new shrouds are in, the hull is cleaned, even the new autopilot with remote control (haha!) is installed, and a whole bunch of other small things. Only the depth-sounder couldn't be revived although I rewired the whole thing. It always shows 2.1m - the offset from the bottom of my hull to the bottom of the keel. Which means no signal, which means (probably) the sounder is broken. Can't change the sounder while in the water, so the hand-lead will have to do from now on. Just like in the old days. Only in the new days we have pretty good charts and GPS (and GLONASS too). So not at all like in the old days. Phew, lucky break.

picking up the shrouds from the supply ship

I had some reservations about upgrading the autopilot. I bought a new unit, because I needed a new drive unit anyway (looks like they only last one ocean crossing. 1 for the Atlantic, 1 for the Pacific), and the new X5 has three big advantages over my old ST-4000:

1. it has a gyro "course computer", which should help a lot with the waves from the back.
2. it has wind-vane mode, which means steering by the wind angle. Helps a lot with small changes in light wind
3. it has a remote control! Fantastic for making small adjustments while working at the mast. No need to walk back.

All three 'new features' are very useful when sailing alone, which is why I did the upgrade after all. But chances are something's going to go wrong on the first passage, so I'm expecting to spend at least half a day somewhere on the ocean with no sails up fixing the autopilot. Or reverting to the old one. I'm keeping it close at hand, just in case.

No more whales, but I went on a hike with E Capoe and that was very nice.

Canon overlooking the bay

Monday they left for Suwarow though, and later today I'm leaving as well. Destination: Niue. Have to run some errands in the city and check the stuff on the mast one last time, then it's bye bye and off to another week at sea.

Andreas from Miepke helping with the anti-fouling

Not happy with my bio-tin antifouling btw. it's only half a year old, but not much use. Andreas asked me whether I'm sure I didn't paint the hull with fertilizer instead. I cleaned the hull only two weeks ago, and had already 10cm long grassy beard all over.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:47

Friday, August 31. 2012

Swimming with whales

I swam with whales today, very exciting! The fever was forgotten Samo raced passed Gudrun shouting whaaaaales! I went quickly after him, jumped into the water from my dinghy and swam about 50m to where I thought the whales would pass.

Unfortunately visibility is only a few meters at the moment inside the lagoon because it's been so windy for over a week. Waiting in the water, I didn't see the whales until they almost swam into me. I got very nervous when that big shape appeared suddenly. Fortunately the whales saw me as well and turned away. I was only able to snap off ten very fast shots before they were out of sight again.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:28

Thursday, August 30. 2012

Pause

the first backing plate is fitted. Wind gusts of 25kn didn't help with the work, but it's done. The starboard side has to wait however until the little fever I've caught from somewhere is gone. Tomorrow the shrouds are supposed to arrive, and I hope to finish everything over the weekend - health and weather permitting.

First backing plate inside. Vectran rope to measure the required length.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:47

Bora Bora in the rain

When I left Tahiti one week ago I was certain to be on my way to Niue by now. Until Bora Bora everything went fine, then four strands of the port bottom shroud broke. Then I discovered that the backing plate and of the starboard shroud was cracked as well, and the mast was beginning to crack. I knew boat repairs would catch up with me again, I just hoped it wouldn't be before I got to New Zealand.

Some emails and calls with Christophe from API Yachting (Tahiti) later we had a solution, and yesterday I picked up new backing plates from the supply boat.

Supply boat being unloaded

Russell from Moonwalker pulled me up to the first spreader and I went to work with drill and Dremel. The hole is cut, today I have to file it into shape.

Then I can measure the length for the new shrouds. I hope he can send them out tonight so I can have them tomorrow morning. It looks like Monday would be a good day to leave for Niue weather-wise.

Gudrun in the rain

Staying here a few extra days allowed me to catch up with friends again, and to dive. Honestly, the diving is not worth it, but chats with the crew of E Capoe, Wet Lady, Contina, Lazy Lady, Moonwalker, and La Luz are totally worth the delay.

Giant manta rays, but bad visibility

Lemon shark

On E Capoe

Merlin's Lego Helicopter

BBQ on Wet Lady

Servicing dive gear on Contina with Wip

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:56

Monday, August 27, 2012

More whales and a dinghy

I'm in touch with Christophe from API Yachting in Tahiti regarding new shrouds. Saturday morning I send the port shroud to him via Air Tahiti (cost: 6\$).

Unfortunately Christophe doesn't have the T terminals for 8mm dyform, and I don't want to wait until a new shipment arrives. I discovered that on the starboard side the backing plate is cracked, so I have to replace those as well. In the end we decided to go for standard 10mm shrouds with stem ball terminals and new backing plates. So now I'm waiting for the shipment, and then I'll spend a day or two in the mast drilling, filing, and installing new terminals.

Fortunately for me Wip from M/V Contina gave me a dinghy! I had given mine to E Capoe, because their's falling apart and with three kids and they need it more than I do. Kayak's ok for me. But it's been very windy and rainy the last few days, and because I have to run errands now to the distant city Wip brought me his spare dinghy. Thanks so much Wip. Great to have good friends.

Whales: haven't seen them yesterday, but Samo from S/Y Wet Lady gave me his footage and I made a little movie for him:

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:12

Sunday, August 26. 2012

Whales

My first whale ever! After almost three years at sea. Very, very happy

Great news: there is a whale with her calf in the lagoon. I sat the whole afternoon in the dinghy with my telephoto lens, just waiting and watching out for the whales to breach. They only came up every 20min or so for a few minutes, but with patience I managed to get a few nice shots with my telephotos.

Mother ...

.... and calf. With cleaning symbionts.

Both together.

Whale cresting. In the background M/Y Contina.

I'm thinking about going out with the kayak and snorkeling gear and try to get some underwater shots. But I don't want to bother them. Hmmm

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:08

Friday, August 24. 2012

Arrived in Bora Bora

Friday, 2012-08-24, 14:30, 16:29.454S, 151:45:769W, Bora Bora Yacht Club

Arrived at Bora Bora Yacht Club after 6h trip from Raiatea. Gerd and Ingrid from S/Y Lazy Lady waited for me in their Dinghy at the last free mooring boy of the Bora Bora Yacht Club. What a service, thanks so much friends!

Unfortunately some damage on the way - four strands of the port bottom shroud broke. Not good, can't sail on with that.

Fortunately INgrid hat contact details of a rigger in Tahiti (yep, the place I just left) and I called him. We discussed the issue over the phone and he says he's got everything in stock to make two new shrouds for me. Andre then helped me to remove the shroud, which I'll send to the rigger by plane and if all goes well I should be able to sail on end of next week.

Andre, thanks mate.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:42

On the way to Bora Bora

Friday, 2012-08-24, 11:30 UTC-10, 16:35.925S, 151:38.785W, COG 310, SOG 5.5kn, Wind 15kn ESE, sunny with occasional showers

Only 10nm to Bora Bora. Unfortunately I'm approaching from SE, and the pass is on the west side of the island, so I have to sail about 18nm in total.

I left the quay at Uturoa at 08:30 this morning in 15kn of wind, unfurled the genoa, and sailed the 7.5nm through the atoll to the north-western pass. At 10:15 I went through the pass and once safely outside I switched the genoa for the parasailor. Apart from the occasional sun-shower the weather is great, and the sea is pretty calm as well. Looks like a day of nice sailing.

Uturoa seems like a nice place to stop over on the way west. Good snorkeling nearby, and the super-market and gas-station are just next to the quay. As is the town-center, but since it's a really small town, there isn't much there. After some provisioning and a quick check-over of the boat this morning I had a coffee with Gisela and Uwe, and we said our good-byes. They are staying in French Polynesia for another season, and we don't know when or if we'll see each other again. Hopefully they come to New Zealand one day. All the best my friends, fair winds, following seas, a cool fridge. And may you never run out of "Eselsmilch" and white-wine.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:33

Raiatea

Friday, 2012-08-24, 07:30 UTC-10, 16:43.765S, 151:26.567W

Forecast for today is 15-20kn of wind from the east, and rain. Right now we have 15kn of wind from the east and rain. So it looks like the forecast is pretty accurate. I'll wait for the rain to stop then leave for Bora Bora. Only 32nm, should be there early afternoon.

Yesterday Uwe and Gisela helped me to tie alongside the quay in Raiatea, and then they invited me for dinner on their boat. We chatted until about ten.

Internet here is very good compared to Tahiti, and back on Gudrun I was able to skype with Liz, even with video. Yay! This morning I checked the prop, but it's ok. But the cutlass bearing has a little play, maybe half a mmm, and that causes the noise. Have to replace it next time I haul out. Fortunately there isn't a lot of motoring coming up

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:44

Thursday, August 23, 2012

Arrived in Raiatea

Thursday, 2012-08-23, 16:30 UTC-10, 16:43.765S, 151:26.567W

Arrived in Raiatea and moored alongside the quay in Uturoa.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:09

Raiatea in sight

Thursday, 2012-08-23, 12:00 UTC-10, 16:54S, 151:10W, COG 295, SOG 5.2kn, Wind 12kn SE, 28C, 1018hPa, sunny with clouds

At 3am in the morning the promised SE wind arrived. Half a day late, but very much appreciated. It continued to rain until 4am, but since then it's nice and the wind steady. Parasailor is up and I sail along at 5-6kn. Not much swell now, very nice sailing actually.

Sailing alone again feels different after sailing with Liz for more than a year. Some things are easier, for example working in the cockpit is a lot easier in a pinch (e.g. sudden rain shower) when there's nobody sitting/lying "in the way all the time", haha. But something's missing as well. When the sails are up and the course is set there often isn't much to do really. Then we used to talk a lot, make plans, laugh, or just smile at each other, happy being together. Books and electronics are a very poor replacement for a good friend. Distance makes the heart grow fonder

20nm to go to Raiatea. It looks like I'll arrive between 4pm to 5pm in Uturo. The plan is to spend the night there, then continue to Bora Bora at dawn to arrive there around noon. I'm looking forward to seeing the crew of S/Y Venus and E Capoe again, good friends as well.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:20

very no-windy

Thursday, 2012-08-23 0:00 local, 17:16S, 150:11W, COG 290, SOG 5kn, Wind 2kn S

At 5:30, only thirty minutes after the last message, a big cloud caught up with me and brought rain - and no wind. So much for sailing. Sails flapping, boat rolling, and rain. Liz knows just how much I love it

Except for a brief "windy" two hours (up to 7kn of wind!) between 8 and 10 it's been quiet and rainy. But even then the wind shifted twice from NE to SE, and wrapped the Parasailor around the forestay while I was cooking dinner. Argh. Always fun to undo in the rain. Now the engine is running, but there are vibrations from the shaft which weren't there last time. It doesn't sound bad, just a little rougher than usual, but it can't be great for the cutlass bearing and I'm reluctant to motor all the way. If the wind isn't back in another hour I'll kill the engine anyway and just drift along.

Amazing really: only away from the boat for two months and you already forget how much no fun it is to go sailing when there's no wind. But I'm under way again, and that feels good even if it's slow. And the rain stopped for

now,
the sky cleared, and the stars are out - beautiful.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:02

Wednesday, August 22, 2012

On the way!

Wednesday, 2012-08-22, 17:00 local (Thursday 03:00 UTC), 17:27S, 149:42W,
Wind 5-10kn NE, 30C, 1016mBar, sunny with clouds

Sometimes it's best to just go. The weather forecast for today wasn't great (e.g. no wind), and then I got delayed further waiting for the delivery of my kayak that I bought yesterday. Of course the guys didn't show up in the early morning as promised, but only at 2pm. Too late to make it the 150nm to Bora Bora before nightfall next day. Two reasons to delay another day.

But I'm eager to get going. And while I can't it to Bora Bora in this wind, I can make it the 120nm to Raiatea. Which means I'll see Gisela and Uwe from SY Venus one last time before I leave French Polynesia, sweet. So ... bye bye Tahiti!

I cast off at Papeete at 2:30 That was 2 1/2 hours ago, now I'm 10nm further, and so far everything worked perfectly, even the sun came out. What a nice surprise. I was expecting some trouble after two months ashore. Well, plenty of time until tomorrow for things to go wrong. Only downside at the moment is the very light wind and some cross-seas (from the SE and NE), which make the boat roll and the sails flap now and then. But hey ... I'm sailing again! Single-handing in the south pacific. Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:20

Last days in Tahiti

Arrived back in Tahiti on Friday and since then I'm getting the boat ready for the last few thousand miles. We were lucky those last few months since Panama without much breakage, and some pre-emptive maintenance helps keeping it like that. As always the engine receives special attention.

Sunday afternoon Harry and Christine from Moyo next door abducted me to a little hike on the island.

Path-finding at it's best: with a map

Crossing dangerous streams

Lookout. Wind? not much.

I reciprocated Monday morning by taking Harry to a shark dive.

Ball of sharks. The more the merrier.

Seen so many sharks here now, it's getting kind of repetitive. I'm very much looking forward to Manta rays in Bora Bora and Humpback whales in Niue. For almost three years I'm waiting now to see whales. But now's the time and this is the place, so I'm hoping that I do get to see them finally before this voyage is over.

The plan for the next few weeks is to sail to Bora Bora for a few days to meet up with Andre and family (S/Y E Capoe).

Then on to Niue, which should take about seven days. Half-way between Bora Bora and Niue is Palmerston, but I'm not planning to stop there unless something comes up - or there are whales around. After Niue it's about five days to Viti Levu (Fiji), where I've booked a cyclone pit for Gudrun at Vuda Point marina, in case we leave the boat there over cyclone season (Nov to April).

the plan

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:41

Sunday, August 12. 2012

A little accident

In the first week after Liz left for Auckland I was very busy with photography and diving. When I wasn't training towards a Megalodon rebreather certification I was at Papara beach on the south of the island, photographing surfers. The surfers were very excited about the photos and asked me to shoot their contest on the following weekend, which I did gladly. But I think once is enough, I definitely don't want to start a career as sports photographer. Standing in the sand/sun all day is hard work, and too boring really.

Then I had a little accident while cutting an apple: a deep cut into the hand. Stupid, yes. Unfortunately it even had to be stitched and the doctor's stern voice instructed me to "keep it dry for two weeks". Which practically ended the diving - and all other boat/beach-related activities as well.

Ouch.

With nothing to do on the boat, and both my and Liz' birthdays coming up I flew to Auckland. I left Tahiti on the 29th at 17:30, and after crossing the date line arrived in Auckland on the 30th at 22:30 ... with 1.5h of birthday-day left. Liz welcomed me with a little birthday cake at the airport which we ate in front of McDonalds. A different kind of birthday.

Birthdayyyy!

Next day we began looking for stuff to help us get our life in new zealand started: An apartment, a car for Liz, and a motorbike for me. Tuesday morning we found the motorbike, and the apartment in the afternoon. Yay!

An orange KTM 990

Liz in our rental apartment, furnished, in Grafton.

We also spent a lot of time with Liz' family, and of course celebrated her 30th birthday.

Happy birthday Liz

Unfortunately it's next to impossible to get around in New Zealand without a car. Everything is so spread out, and the public transport system is not a priority. Liz hasn't driven much in the last 10 years and wanted something small but solid. Eventually we found something, a well-kept 2004 E46. I think it goes very well with Liz new shoes .

We also started looking for a home to buy. Liz read that you should look at 80 to 100 houses before you buy one, so she figured it's best to start early. We looked at two to three houses and apartments every day, all over central Auckland and it's surrounding suburbs (Grafton, Newmarket, Mount Eden, Sandringham, Grey Lynn, Ponsonby, ...). The idea was to find a place that's close to her family in West Harbor and Point Chevalier, as well as close to the center and potential future clients for our IT expertise.

And then it happened: Liz found the perfect home for us. A huge 173sqm loft on Karangahape road, in the center of Auckland. The ideal place to live and work in the city. Cafes, restaurants and shops right on the street, and good connection to the motorway to visit her family.

The timing isn't perfect with the EUR trading at an historical low against the NZD. But that will probably, unfortunately, not change for a while. It might even get worse while our politicians and the rating agencies follow their own agenda. A shame really what went on the last three years. In the meantime the real estate prices around Auckland are only going up and up. Besides, Liz says, it's not about being rich, it's about being awesome! Right. So ... we bought the place last Friday. I don't know if that makes me awesome, it definitely doesn't make me rich. But it's a fantastic place, and we can't wait to move in and start our new life.

In the meantime the hand is healed and I wanted to fly back to Tahiti today to finish the last few thousand miles of sailing. Can't just abandon ship in the middle of the pacific, the voyage is not over yet! But with the new place I have a few papers to sign (and some money to transfer, argh), and so I had to move the flight to next Friday, 17th.

Another thing I did last week was the "immigration medical", a compulsory medical examination before applying for New Zealand residence. Form INZ1007, very official.

It took two hours and included a chest x-ray, blood tests, and a lot of poking and questioning. The verdict: "appears fit and well", and a long list of stats. Nice to know everything is going well in the health department. It's the most important thing on earth - after love.

The rest of this week we'll be busy with wedding planning and paperwork for our new home. Friday I'll fly back to the boat and then hope to sail for Bora Bora within two or three days. Have to clean the hull first, replace two halyards, check the rigging and service the engine. Regular boat life . But thanks to my little accident with the knife our future is now a lot more real. We felt a little adrift those last few months, with the voyage almost over but no idea how the new life might look like.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:01

Wednesday, July 25. 2012

Home alone

Big news on Gudrun V: Liz moved to Auckland last week Sunday. She had stayed on board a lot longer than originally planned (18 months vs 6 months), and together we crossed the Pacific from the Galapagos to the Marquesas. A journey of 23 days without sight of land - not bad for a big-city girl that doesn't like the sea. Thanks for hanging on tough girl!

But now that we are in Polynesia we have a little conflict of interest. Liz wants to get to New Zealand as quickly as possible. Her family and preparations for our new life (and the wedding) are waiting. I am also very much looking forward to stepping back on land. But I don't want to pass these unique islands without getting to know some people or without exploring their underwater world. While for me this is the chance of a lifetime, all that diving is a little repetitive for her. I guess you have to be a little crazy about diving and photography to want to do it day after day. So we decided that while I'm spending time with the fishes, she'll spend some time with her family. With the option to come back on the boat and sail between the islands.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:44

Sunday, July 22. 2012

Rebreather

Two days ago Rafael (dive-limit.com) took me on an introduction dive with his Megalodon Rebreather. The first 40min under water were really weird - buoyancy works completely different then with open circuit. But then I got used to it and really liked it. No bubbles, no noise - amazing.

So next week I'm getting trained and certified for using the rebreather on my own. The advantage of a rebreather (official: CCR - Closed Circuit Rebreather) over normal open circuit breathing devices is that the exhaled air is not vented into the water, but scrubbed of CO₂, enriched with O₂, and then reused. Therefor no bubbles, no noise, and much longer dive time - many hours.

The disadvantage is that the system is quite complex, so I'm looking at five days of learning and training. Good, keeps the grey matter in my head busy.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:33

Fakarava

So, I have this new underwater camera gear. Of course I want to take some good photos with it, and the best place here to do this around here is in Fakarava. So we went back to Fakarava for a few days. Only this time we took the plane. Liz called it our pre-honeymoon.

Bungalows at Tetamanu Village, Fakarava

Tetamanu village and reef

Underneath the bungalow

For two days we were the only guests, which gave the staff a chance to dive with us. Here's the video, the chubby guy's the cook (and a good one!), the other the skipper of the dive boat:

Liz spent most of her time writing, but she also came along for two dives

Liz in the current of the pass

Just outside the pass Ken and Joni were at anchor with their boat "Dancing Walrus", and we dived together and had dinner on two evenings. Then they left for Rangiroa through the pass, and I was lucky to catch them and a little shark:

S/V Dancing Walrus going through the south pass at Fakarava

The most prominent feature under water were of course the sharks. Hundreds of them, lining up in the pass, nose in the current. But they were very shy and kept their distance.

Sharks

The reef was full of little fish, like this surgeon fish:

Surgeon fish

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:22

Wednesday, July 11. 2012

Papeete and Auckland

The last few weeks have been very busy, no time to update the blog really. Saturday morning we moved from the anchorage to the quay at Papeete city, and 2 1/2 weeks later we're still here.

Welcome to Papeete

Because our beds were wet we moved into the hotel across the street for three days. So nice to have a big, dry bed, and a warm shower! Also nice to have internet, although I had to move into the hallway, and do everything at night because during the day the net's too busy.

Internet access Tahiti style

Then we learned that Liz Grandma Edith passed away, and we flew to New Zealand for a week to attend the funeral and look after Granddad. And to visit Audrey and her new baby, born just the day before.

"One in, one out" says Granddad

Granddad and Olivia playing "Fruit Ninja"

Now we're back in Tahiti. I'm reluctant to leave because the diving is so fantastic here, and on the weekend we will fly back to Fakarava for a few days, where it's especially awesome. In the meantime I'm taking technical diving classes (NX100, Decompression), and underwater photos.

My best shark photo yet

Bob and Sue

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:39

Saturday, June 23. 2012

Arrived in Tahiti

Friday, 2012-06-22, 20:34, 17:31S, 149:33W, at anchor in front of Taaone, Wind 4kn SE

Today was one of the most unpleasant sailing days on the trip, and we're very glad we made it safely to Tahiti. The boat was hit hard by waves many times and water washed over the whole deck. A few times the boat heeled over so hard that the boom was dragging through the water. But Gudrun always righted herself quickly and got hardly pushed of course. If it wasn't for her great ability to go upwind we wouldn't have made it here on one tack.

We arrived with slack water but two hours past sunset. I avoid arriving in a new place at night whenever possible, but this time we didn't have many choices. Hove to we would have drifted past Tahiti, and I also wanted to get out of the rough conditions. In daylight we would have aimed for Pass de Papeete, and then tried to find a nice spot in one of the small boat anchorages. But that would have meant navigating a busy entrance and 6nm of channel at night, and we heard that the anchorages and marinas are full of boats for the Pacific Puddlejump Rallye which starts tomorrow.

Pass de Taunoa, just east of Pass de Papeete, and it's anchorage looked like it would be less busy and we aimed for that. Once we were past Pointe Venus the wind dropped from 30kn to 10kn, and the sea became flat. Going through the pass was easy, and as expected we didn't find any boats in the large but deep (20m) anchorage.

We dropped anchor, then programmed the anchor alarm, and celebrated our arrival with a Vodka Orange. Yay! Tomorrow morning we'll move out again and try to find a spot at Marina Taine, or in one of the anchorages in front of it. There are a few things to do and it's easier to work on the boat in the marina.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:24

Friday, June 22. 2012

Bumpy

Friday, 2012-06-22, 11:10, 17:31S, 149:31W, COG 210, SOG 6.5kn, Wind 20kn SE, sunny with clouds

The beginning of the trip was nice enough, but since we rounded the north-western corner of Rangiroa and turned south-east we are taking 20kn of wind, 3m waves, and some current at 60 degrees angle and it's very uncomfortable. Every few minutes a breaker washes over the deck and cockpit. We stay down below and only pop our heads up to have a look around every 20 minutes. We both feel a little seasick and don't talk much, just sit/lie there and look at each other.

Unfortunately the hatch, though tightly shut, is leaking and the bunks are soaking wet. So sleeping space is at a premium and I slept on the floor. I'm glad that we'll be in Tahiti this evening. Because waves and current are slowing us down we'll not make it before nightfall, but we should be in time for low tide, and the pass and lagoon are well lighted so it shouldn't be a problem.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:53

Thursday, June 21. 2012

On the way to Tahiti

Thursday, 2012-06-21, 11:40 local, 14:53S, 147:42W, COG 270, SOG 6kn, Wind 10kn SE

This morning the anchor wouldn't come up, probably because it was caught underneath some coral. I didn't want to go about it with brute force, and instead dived down to clear it. 14m is a little deep for freediving for me, but I have a little air tank called "Spare Air 300", about the size of a water bottle, and this is very convenient for those occasions. Just stick it in your mouth and it gives you air for about 50 surface breaths, a little less than half of that at 15m.

Thanks to the trip-line the anchor was freed quickly and we were on our way to Tiputa pass. We went through at 10:00, one hour before low tide. That gave us four knots of current in the back. Then we ran into some 2m standing waves (wind against tide) on the exit off the pass. Not so nice, I recommend to go through the pass right at slack water.

It's 200nm to go to Tahiti, which we can just make in 24h in 20kn of Wind on the beam. But at the moment we have only 10kn, so we'll probably have to spend two nights at sea.

Since leaving Ua Pou we've only stopped for a few days at islands (Nuku Hiva, Fakarava, Rangiroa), and we feel like we've made good progress towards New Zealand without rushing it too much. All those islands/atolls are quite small, and five days is more than enough to see everything there is. Papeete will be something else, especially because there are festivities now (leading up to Bastille day), and there are some repairs that need to be done before we go on a week's sail to Niue. So we think that we'll spend one or two weeks in Papeete.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:40

Wednesday, June 20, 2012

Honeymoon

Rangiroa. There isn't much on this beautiful atoll other than one very nice resort (Kia Ora), a few dive shops, a snack bar and one restaurant. The snack bar only opened three weeks ago. People come here for their honeymoon, and we can understand why. It feels like a honeymoon to us, although the wedding is still six months away.

People also come here to see dolphins in the wild during a dive.

Hi buddy

Liz with Dolphin in the wild

Hideo, Turtle, Liz

This place is so amazing. So much to see underwater. There's more fish in Fakarava, and definitely a lot more sharks. But the wild dolphins make Rangiroa very special.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:00

Tuesday, June 19. 2012

Diving with Dolphins

We were diving at the pass in Rangiroa today, when three Dolphins came along and said hi. One came very close and let us touch it. What a wonderful experience! Here's the movie:

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:52

Monday, June 18. 2012

Rangiroa

We went through the pass at 1:30, and dropped anchor 15min later in front of a tiny village and resort. Managed to arrange diving for tomorrow, then had a beer and panini - yummy!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:11

Sunday, June 17. 2012

To Rangiroa

Sunday, 2012-06-17, 11:30 local (21:30 UTC), 14:59S, 147:29W, COG 278, SOG 6kn, Wind 20kn SE, 30C, sunny

We left Fakarava yesterday afternoon with the destination Rangiroa. We heard that you're almost certain to meet Dolphins when snorkling outside the pass at Rangiroa, and since Liz is such a big fan of Dolphins, we decided to make the detour on our way to Tahiti.

Rangiroa is 150nm NW of Fakarava, within easy reach of an overnight sail. But sailing between the atolls in the Tuamotos is tricky. Obviously you want to leave and arrive during daytime, ideally with some hours safety margin. But because all the anchorages are inside the atolls, and there are only a few navigable passes through the reefs, you also have to pay special attention to the tides. You want to leave and arrive with a favorable current, or ideally during slack water (at high or low tide). The currents through the pass can get up to 6kn, and you can easily loose control of the boat and end up on the reef.

Slack water occurs every six hours at the change of the tide. Days being pretty much exactly 12h long here, there are two chances per day to make it through the pass during daylight. We choose to leave Fakarava with high tide at 2pm yesterday, planning to make good speed in 20kn of wind and arrive in Rangiroa around 1pm, 1 1/2 hours before high tide at Rangiroa at 2:30pm. That'll give us a slight current in the back, and some time for safety in case we take longer than anticipated.

Now we're 9nm away from the pass and doing 6kn - looks like we'll get there spot on at 1pm. Close to the pass we'll turn on the radar to see whether the map in the chartplotter is correct, or whether we have to work with an offset (like in the San Blas). But in Fakarava the Navionics charts were 100% correct, and I that bodes well for here too. Makes going through the channel and around the reefs so much easier! Thank god for technology.

We plan to stay only a few days for snorkeling and diving, hoping to shoot some good photos of dolphins or maybe even a whale. Although it's too early for whales, the dive guides in Fakarava said they generally don't arrive before August. But maybe we'll get lucky and meet an especially fast or eager whale who's here early. Then, probably Thursday, we'll sail on to Tahiti were (hopefully) the new sail and autopilot is waiting for me. One of the autopilot rods broke when we left Hiva Oa, and the spare also sounds like it's on it's last leg. Only one more day buddy, keep up the good work!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:03

Friday, June 15. 2012

Diving in Fakarava

Drift dive in the north pass of the Fakarava atoll, French Polynesia. Current was about 3kn. Unfortunately my G 12's display is broken and it doesn't let me shoot video anymore, so I had to use the GoPro. Less than ideal without the flat lens cover and at a depth of 25m, but you get the idea.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 21:04

Thursday, June 14. 2012

Diving in Fakarava

The last two days I was diving with the guys from topdive. Four drift-dives through the northern pass, and two dives at the reef just outside the pass. The depth is around 20m, and the coral and marine life absolutely stunning. Unfortunately both of my underwater cameras are broken. The Lumix doesn't work at all anymore after getting a little wet on the rainy hike in Hiva Oa, and the G12's display is not displaying anything after the Ikelite housing developed a leak. Which means I can't adjust the settings or aim the camera properly underwater. But the conditions are so good here that you almost can't go wrong.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:36

Monday, June 11. 2012

At anchor

The wind is changing all the time. Spend a few hours in the cockpit and you'll get a 360 degree view of the atoll. Not that I spend a few hours in the cockpit, there's way too much sun. Even with the awning up. Liz and I prefer it "downstairs", away from the sun. The open hatch and a ventilator above the table keep the air flowing and make it bearable, despite 30 degrees celsius.

Yesterday evening we dinghied ashore and walked the one street of the village along the beach. Here some impressions:

S/Y A Go Go, Romano and Luana's boat.

A jetty going out into the lagoon

My good friend, partner, fiancée, 1st mate, and galley guru Liz.

Well, I guess that's me then.

Sunset and a construction for hauling boats out of the water.

When not on passage we sleep in the forepeak (front of the boat). During the passage there's too much movement there, uncomfortable, and the weight up front is also not good for the trim of the boat. But at anchor it's quite nice, and sleeping up front has the benefit that I can hear what's going on with the anchor chain. Last night it was moving over rocks (or coral), which is not great. So today I dived to check it out.

As a result of all the swinging around the anchor chain was wrapped around a coral head. Not good for the coral, and also impossible to get the anchor up without diving. So I unwrapped the chain, and then undug the anchor and half dragged/half carried it to a area clear of coral. Inflating the BCD all the way helped a little, but the 24kg anchor is too heavy to be lifted by a little bcd. Eventually, maybe 20m to the side, I found a nice little hole in the sand into which I dug the anchor in.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:46

Sunday, June 10. 2012

Arrived in Rotoava, Fatarava

Sunday, 2012-06-10, 09:30 local (UTC), 16:03S, 145:37W, Wind 4kn E, sunny

We're at anchor in front of the village of Rotoava, on the north-east corner of the Fatarava atoll. Our first atoll! Yesterday wasn't very nice sailing at all (again) - Wind 20kn on the nose, frequent rain, and chopped up waves - and so we're glad to be at anchor now. And today is looking to be a wonderful day. Sunny and light winds from the E/NE, just perfect for sailing on our old course. Well, we're here now. No more working the sails in the rain while desperately holding on to a wildly rocking boat. The adventure is over for a while, now we can relax. Liz is already back asleep .

The interesting, because new, part was crossing through the pass of the atoll this morning. The atolls here are basically a large circular reef, with only a few passes. Fakarava is one of the largest atolls with a length of 30nm, and two passes. Through these passes the tide has to come in and out, and depending on the size of the atoll that is a lot of water. Which means a lot of current. Get your times wrong and you get stuck in the pass, or worse, get pushed onto the reef.

So the key thing is to start the entry or exit in time with slack water or a favorable current. We timed the arrival at the pass to 1.5h before high tide. That gave us still 1kn of current in our favor. Nice, but not too much to risk being pushed somewhere we don't want to go. The current can be up to 6kn. The pass here in Fakarava is huge, a couple of 100m wide, and 10m to 20m deep. Very good for first-timers like us. Incidentally the "Aranui 3" went through the pass just ahead of us, nice.

I use mostly the program WxTide, or the Navionics Gold charts to view tide tables. The service hydrographique et oceanographique de la marine website also has tide tables for the French Polynesia. The data from the institute matched WxTide, my charts don't have data for the Tuamotos.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:30

Friday, June 8. 2012

cross-seas

Friday, 2012-06-08, 11:45 local, 13:54.3S, 143:27.1W, COG 205, SOG 3.5-4.5kn, Wind 5-7kn E, 31C, 1009mBar, cloudy

Having some connection problems with Iridium lately. Usually connecting to the internet works fine, if slow, but since yesterday it takes many tries to establish a connection. Now and then Windows will not clean up all resources properly and I have to reboot the computer and try again, quite annoying.

Other than that everything as before. We're sailing SW in light winds between 30 and 120 degrees apparent wind angle. Two sightings: All through the night I saw a navigation light ahead, and this morning a roll-on-roll-off cargo vessel passed in front of our bow, heading east.

Since nine in the morning it's a little uncomfortable. We're caught in cross-seas coming from SE as well as NE, and the boat is dipping like a sea-saw. Hope we'll get through that rather quickly. I changed course further south so we have more pressure in the sails and more speed so that it's bearable.

184nm to go to Fakarava

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:18

Thursday, June 7, 2012

A race

Thursday, 2012-06-07, 12:00 local, 21:30 UTC, 12:10.22S, 142:10.16W, COG 215, SOG 5.5kn, Wind 8kn NE, 30C, 1009mBar, sunny.

It's going better than I had hoped for. The forecast was for 7-12kn of wind, shifting SE to NE. And that's exactly what we have so far. Predominantly SE winds, except for the afternoons when it's NE. So we're mostly sailing close-hauled at 30 to 60 degrees apparent wind angle at 4 to 7kn of speed. That can be uncomfortable, but the sea is so calm that we even have the hatch open at the front most of the time, and the wind is so light that the boat hardly heels.

Yesterday a 6pm, just before sunset, I made out sails on the horizon west of us, at 258 degrees. As usually I got very excited and ran for the camera, but the sailboat was over the horizon and so I only captured the top half of it's sails. Then I lost it in the background of clouds. Half an hour later, after sunset, I saw it's navigation light just over the horizon. This time at 265 degrees, falling behind. One boat is sailing, two boats and it's a race .

The night was quiet, no squalls. Liz and I are doing watches in our usual shifts. Liz in the morning and evening, me in the afternoon and the night. At the other times we're sleeping, reading, or talking about what it will be like in NZ.

312nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:38

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

On the way to Fakarava

Wednesday, 2012-06-06, 11:30 local, 21:00 UTC, 10:20.4S, 141:02.7W, COG 217, SOG 4.5kn, Wind 8kn NE, 29.3C, 1010mBar, sunny.

We like the Marquesas. Stunning landscapes, fantastic climate, and very friendly people. The food's a bit pricy, but then this is one of the remotest parts of the world, with a small population of only a few thousand and no local industry. No surprise then that the imported food costs more than back home. Liz is delighted that most meat, fruit, and dairy products are imported from New Zealand.

The flip side of seeing all the familiar products in the shelves is that the urge to reach New Zealand is getting very strong. There are at least three more weeks of sailing until we get to New Zealand. But in our minds the voyage is already over, and we find it hard to get excited about visiting the islands along the way. Maybe it will change when we get there. But last week we talked to the NZ immigration advisor, and now we be are busy collecting and requesting the necessary documents for my immigration. So New Zealand, the immigration, and our upcoming wedding is all we think of.

Which is why despite having a good time we said our good-byes to our cruising friends in Nuku Hiva yesterday, weighed anchor, and set out for the 4-5 day trip to the Fakarava atoll in the north-west corner of the Tuamotu archipel, our next stop. Before leaving the bay we practiced some man-over-board maneuvers with an empty jerry can. I'm happy to say that the jerry can doesn't need to worry about getting lost at sea.

Once out of the bay Liz set the Parasailor in 15kn of wind from the NE, while I assisted with, uhm, helpful comments. Two hours later the wind changed to ESE and we changed it for main and genoa. Unfortunately I stubbed my little toe against the fairlead, and judging by the pain when I try to move it it's broken. Well, it's not the first time and won't be the last. We kept the sails up all night, but reefed the main when a squall went by. This morning the wind was back to NE, and we put the Parasailor up again. Smooth, slow, sailing at 4-6kn in 8-10kn of wind. The sea is calm and the boat's very stable, Liz likes it that way.

440nm to go to Fakarava

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:37

Monday, June 4, 2012

Pacific Crossing video

Took me a while this time, but here it is finally. The video of the passage. Yay:

Originally we wanted to do a video diary every day, but never knew what to say. And after the first week the whole filming of more sea, and more clouds, got a little tiring. And what sea/clouds we filmed got cut out during editing to keep the clip to a maximum of 8 minutes. So the film speeds up a lot the further we go. Still, hope you get the idea of what it was like.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:21

Sunday, June 3, 2012

Gudrun V at anchor in Taiohae

Gudrun V at anchor

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 21:02

Nuku Hiva

Yesterday we weighed anchor in Ua Pou and sailed over to Nuku Hiva. Nuku Hiva is 26nm north of Ua Pou, and with 12kn of wind from the east it was a perfect 4h sail. Just before arrival some dolphins came along, icing on the cake.

Bye Ua Pou

Liz trimmed the mainsail perfectly

A lot of boats are here in the bay, many old friends we've met in or since Panama. That was only five months ago, but on the ever changing cruising scene that's definitely old friends. We're pl

Hi Nuku Hiva

Sunlight playing on the western ridge

The plan is to stay here for a few days and get some 'work' done, the internet connection is quite good here. I'm finishing the pacific crossing movie and hope to upload it today, and there are also a lot of photo albums that I would like to upload for backup, too. Then we want to sail on to the Tuamotos, ideally rather soon while the moon is still up at night.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:06

Saturday, June 2, 2012

Hiking on Ua Pou

These islands offer some fantastic hikes. But because the paths are not obvious, not much used, and cross private lands, it's best to take a local guide. On Ua Pou we walked with Jerome from the little pension up the hill, and he turned out to be a well of knowledge and a very good guide and entertainer. Highly recommended.

It's easy to see from the bay that there must be some fantastic hikes on the island of Ua Pou.

Jerome explaining about the local flora. No doubt poisonous.

Sue scratched herself, and Jerome wrestled her to the ground immediately to treat the wound.

The volcanic spires poking through the vegetation, into the clouds.

Ulli is taking in the scenery.

A rest for the wicked

refreshing waterfall on the way

In the evening we return to Hakahau bay

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:13

Voilier spectacle

Next to us is the " La Loupiote" at anchor. The yellow boat is owned by a Delphine and Franck, two "Navigartistes" - they sail around the world and use their boat as a home and as a stage for their artistic show. Thursday they did a show in Ua Pou.

People have gathered on the docks for the show

The first show is classic slapstick

Everybody is laughing their eyes out

The second show, after sunset, is artistic

Including artistic feats on ropes

high in the rigging of their boat.

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:52

Thursday, May 24. 2012

2x Eternity

Liz posted a new blog entry about our 23 day passage from the Galapagos to the Marquesas. Her observations always make me laugh. They also make me feel slightly guilty of nerdyness. Am I really that obsessed? Enjoy!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:05

Wednesday, May 23, 2012

Aranui 3

We're still in Hakatau, Ua Pou. Today the "Aranui 3", part supply-ship part cruise-ship, is expected to arrive. I wake up at 5am, hearing her engines from afar through the water and the hull of our boat. I look outside. It is still dark, and the Aranui 3 a small speck of light in the distance. I grab my camera, climb into the dinghy, and drive ashore.

A few people have already started gathering on the breakwater. A Landrover and Toyota SUV are parked on the edge, reflected in the puddles on the muddy ground. I walk over and watch Aranui 3 approach. She's going slowly, timing her approach with the sunrise. A little boy sits down on a stone and looks out over the sea. We wait.

Every three weeks the Aranui 3 comes to Ua Pou, bringing important supplies for the 2000 inhabitants of the small island. And a few tourists. She can carry up to 200 passengers, and all the island artists gather in the communal building on the beach to display their pendants, tikis, and other carvings. The visit of the Aranui 3 is probably the most exciting thing that happens all month.

She's now entering the breakwater. A small boat is launched into the water with one of her two cranes. The launch runs ahead, checking the anchorage. As I follow the launch with my eyes I see that it heads straight for Gudrun V. Oh, not good. I run to the dinghy and jump inside. Full throttle. I can see Liz standing on the deck, talking to a guy in the launch. As I approach he signals me to move Gudrun closer to the beach. I jump on board, ask Liz to start the engine, and start pulling up the anchor chain. Then I ask him how far we have to move. He shouts "Cinq metres". Five meters? Are you kidding me? I stop pulling in the anchor chain and instead let it all out. Then I go to the cockpit, and pull in the stern anchor line instead. Five meters, no problem.

After the little exercise I stand with Liz on the bow, watching Aranui 3 come into the anchorage and tie to the dock. Two launches run back and forth between ship and dock, carrying heavy mooring lines. Everything looks fast and efficient, very professional.

I scan the decks, looking for my friends. On the way from the Galapagos I've learned that Joachim and Rosi will be passengers on this trip. What a coincidence! We met first on a hike up Kilimanjaro, and three years later we meet again in the Marquesas, one of the remotest places on the planet. I spot Rosi on the aft deck, step into the dinghy and drive over. We greet and arrange to meet on the beach after breakfast.

We meet and start walking through the town, catching up on what happened in the last three years. Later we visit Gudrun, then they show us around Aranui 3.

At eleven we head back into town for a marquesan dance show. We like it a lot. Then the crew invites us to join our friends for lunch, which we accept gratefully.

After lunch it's already time to head back to the Aranui 3 and say our good-byes. Unloading and loading is completed, and departure is only a few minutes away. The mooring lines are cast off one by one, and the local kids swarm the one remaining line. Then the Aranui 3 pulls out of port. The dock empties, and life returns to normal. Tomorrow there will be fresh vegetables in the little supermarkets, we can't wait!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:56

Sunday, May 20, 2012

Life in Hakahau

What a lovely, protected, anchorage here in Hakahau. After three months of constant rolling it's so nice to be able to just put a cup of coffee or glass of water down and not having to hold on to it at all times. Big improvement as quality of life goes!

Kids jumping off the dock in the anchorage

At the beach, in the background the communal house. There is always a party going on and people bring their mattresses

The volcanic spires are the landmark of Ua Pou

The bakery with great baguette is helping, too. Every morning at 5:30 I pick up Andre on his boat E Capoe and we dinghy to shore, then walk the kilometer along the beach and up the main road. Back in the dinghy we distribute the bread among the five boats in the bay, and everybody is happy. One baguette is 66 Centimes, about 0,50 EUR.

The bakery. Come early, there is only one batch of bread

Merci pour le pain

Back on Gudrun I jump into the water for a swim and to clean the hull, before the sun rises over the mountains and it gets too hot. Until three we usually stay inside the boat, because it's too hot for us outside, then we walk through town, or visit other boats. Henry from Ashanti asked Liz what excellent sun-screen we are using, because we're not sun-burned at all. It's called "boat hull". No preservatives, and one package lasts forever. Not exactly cheap, though, and it doesn't fit into a backpack.

On our stroll through town yesterday we bought some fruit (Mango, Bananas) and a Tiki from a local artist, Tekohu. His full name is Tahiatututapu Norbert. We communicated with a mix of English and French, and he explained the meanings of all the carvings and wrote it into Liz's notebook. Tekohu has high hopes to sell a few more pieces on Wednesday, when the Aranui 3, a supply ship which is part cruise liner, arrives.

Liz and Tekohu, a local artist.

The church of Hakahau

The last two nights I had funny dreams about the boat. In one dream we had tied it to a dock. When we came back construction work on the dock had started, and the boat had been moved to the hallway of a house for protection. Unfortunately the mast was cut off to fit it. In another dream we took a flight somewhere, but ran out of fuel on the way back. The pilot landed on one of the islands with a military base where he could refuel, but after landing we learned that the base had been abandoned two days ago and there was no fuel for the airplane on the island.

No idea what the dreams mean, but I think we should get going to New Zealand. We've decided to stay here until my friends come with the cruise ship next week, then head for the Tuamotots and skip Nuku Hiva.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:24

Friday, May 18. 2012

Art

My friend and favorite artist Matthew Beall created another wonderful painting. I shamelessly copy the photo from his blog, because I know few people follow links. But I want you to see this:

Matthew Beall - Being on the Open Sea

The painting was inspired by the blog entries from our pacific crossing. I love it. I admire Matt as an artist for his ability to reduce and focus on the essence. I couldn't have helped myself and put a sun and some clouds in the painting. I do it all the time with my photographs. He left them out. I guess he knows them for what they are, ornamentation. Maybe you'll follow this link now.

Not sure if he sells this one. If he does, I want it. I just assume having inspired it gives me the right of first access. But check out his other art, the photography too, it's great stuff. Put a real, unique, Beall on your wall. Not the mass-market crap from furniture/department stores. They make great gifts, too.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:07

Ua Pou

Ua Pou, Thursday, 2012-17-05, 9:21.5S, 140:02.8W

We weighed anchor in Hiva Oa yesterday at 6pm, planning to sail the 70nm to Ua Pou through the night. Half an hour later the autopilot stopped working - thank god for the spare! Then the wind didn't come, at all, and we had to motor through the night and into the morning. Well, at least the batteries are full now ...

Ua Pou in the distance, just after sunrise

Just before sunrise we got visited by a pod of dolphins. Liz said to always wake her for dolphins, so I did, but they were hard to make out in the dark. Or maybe her eyes weren't open properly. She went back to bed again, and the dolphins went away. Then the sun came up. And the dolphins (or their friends) came back, yeah! I woke Liz, again, and we watched them for an hour. Liz stayed in the cockpit and I went down to edit the photos (lots, and lots of photos). When I came back up we had passed our destination and had to turn around. Not far, only 2nm. But still .. hehe.

Dolphins!

and a brown booby.

The bay we're at (Hakahau bay) is small but beautiful, especially the rock formations in the center of the island are spectacular. Reminds me of the game "Far Cry". Hiking should be good, and apparently there a number of small shops as well where we can reprovision. And, surprisingly, there is even internet to be had. I guess we'll stay here for a few days. We still have to clean the hull, I'll try to fix the autopilot, and then there is the solar eclipse in three days.

Inside Hakahau Bay. Very good holding in sandy bottom.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:30

Wednesday, May 16, 2012

Bye Hiva Oa

Hiva Oa, the second largest of the Marquesas Islands, is famous for having been the final home of Paul Gauguin (painter) and Jacques Brel (singer), and both are buried in the city of Atuona, which is an hour walk away from our anchorage. The anchorage itself is famous for being very rolly and rainy, which is something that we can only confirm. Today was the first rain-free day in five days, and for a change the boat is not swinging from left to right like a metronome. The dinghy dock, a concrete jetty, is a hazard to boats and people alike. Frequently somebody slips and falls, dinghies get scraped up on the concrete, and anchor lines are cut or anchors jam in the rocky bottom below murky, shark-infested water. We've lost two dinghy anchors in one week.

But despite all that we enjoyed our stay here very much. Rolling boats, wet bottoms, and lost anchors are just a part of the cruising life like icy winter roads are a part of northern Europe. A very positive thing about Atuona is that the people are incredibly friendly and cheerful, and the shopping is very good. We've refill our supplies of fruit and veggies and even have cheese and meat on board, something we haven't had in the last two months. Fantastic. Now if only the sun would stay out so that we can keep the fridge running. Saturday I went on a hike up with Richard from "Vulcan Spirit" and Michael from Barfly, and of the 10h it took us to go up and down 1270m high Mount Temetiu we walked 7h in pouring rain.

But it's time to move on anyway. Tomorrow we want to sail further north-west to the island of Ua Pou, where we'll meet E Capoe again. After that we'll head north to Nuku Hiva before leaving the Marquesas for the Tuamotu atolls on the way to Tahiti.

Here some impressions from Hiva Oa:

A common sight: Polynesian with outrigger canu

Another common sight: lines at the gas station, which is always short on diesel fuel

Taking a tour across the island

Saturday soccer match

Eating pampelmousse (pomelos)

A tiki site

View of the bay from half-way up Mt. Temetiu.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:26

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

Atuona, Hiva Oa

This is such a lovely place. It's so different from South America that you really feel you've crossed an ocean. The first big difference to South America when checking in: Super friendly, helpful, uncomplicated officials. The officer checked in three boats at the same time in 15 minutes. Unimagineable in South America! And it didn't cost anything. Also unimaginable . And only one form, too! Put your name here, your boat details here, and don't bring your firearms to shore. Why firearms I asked? Pour la chasse! For the hunt. lol, those French ...

Tonight we're only hunting for Pizza. Made a reservation at a lovely place for ten people - the crew of Gudrun, Venus, Moin, Vulcan Spirit, and another british boat. All arrived yesterday. Then tomorrow we'll clean the boat, Friday fix some things, and for Saturday we've booked a guided tour.

Tahauku Bay, Hiva Oa

Pointe Papaoa

Buying fruit

.... and baguette!

No doener though . Well, you can't have it all! Piiiiizzzaaaaaaaaa

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:33

Tuesday, May 8, 2012

At anchor

Arrived 14:30 local. At anchor at 09:48:422S, 139:01:952W

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:50

Land in sight

Day 24, Tuesday, 2012-05-08, 11:45 boat (17:45 UTC), 9:49S, 138:40W, COG 275, SOG 4.5kn, Wind 12kn NE, overcast

Only 20nm to go, in about 5 hours we'll arrive in the Baie des Traitres in Hiva Oa. After 23 days and 9 hours at sea, the longest for me so far (2 days more than across the Atlantic). From here to New Zealand the trips between the islands are not longer than a week, a fact Liz is very happy about. Yesterday I proposed to sail on to Tahiti straight away, but her comment was only: "Another few days at sea and I'll jump overboard". So Hiva Oa it is. Also we're running out of veggies and fruit. And I'm still getting my hopes up for a doener kebab, although Liz keeps telling me I shouldn't. It's French, not Turkish Polynesia.

Yesterday went very well, we had plenty of wind and made good speed until the squalls came at night. Then a mix of too much and too little wind from all directions, and rain. Almost the same thing every night for the whole trip. I have to admit I won't miss it. Sleeping through a night without having to stand in the rain and tend the sails every few hours is definitely something that 'landlubbers' don't value high enough in their lives. On the other hand, the mosquitos will be back. For three weeks we were safe from flies and mosquitos, but I've read that it's supposed to be quite bad in French Polynesia. Zzzzzzzzzzzz, that horrible sound. So there you go, good and bad, as usual. My advice: deal with the bad, but focus on the good. The mosquito nets are ready near the hatch and companionway.

To my surprise there are still no boats on the horizon yet. In my mind I imagined that there must be a steady stream of sailboats arriving. But of course there are only a few dozen boats crossing at any time, spread out over 3000nm. And no shipping lanes near either. No surprise we haven't seen another vessel in two weeks. Only some birds, and the occasional flying or jumping fish. I wonder what makes those big tunas jump. Maybe the same that makes us sail across the ocean: curiosity, and because we can.

Thanks to everybody who followed us across the Pacific on the blog, and who sent the occasional email. I hope it was a little entertaining, though I can imagine everyday the same reports about wind and sea must be getting a little boring. Just like it got a little boring for us on the boat. So hey, it's almost as if you've been on board

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:55

Monday, May 7, 2012

167nm to go

Day 23, Monday, 2012-05-07, 11:30 boat (17:30 UTC), 9:35S, 136:13W, COG 265, SOG 7, Wind 15-18kn E, sunny, 167nm to go

Hey, almost there now. Yesterday was quite nice. Good speed, not too roly, only one squall. I'm pleasantly surprised that we didn't have any breakage so far. Only the starboard spinnaker halyard seems to chafe somewhere up top, and I cut 20cm off the end of it. Have to climb up and check where it chafes when we get to port. But it can't be very bad, considering that I've used that halyard most of the time all the way from the Canary Islands.

There's a lot more things to check over on the boat when we arrive, and to clean too! But I hope that we can get it done quickly and that there won't be any nasty surprises. I'm very much looking forward to some diving and photography trips, and Liz can't wait to find a nice cafe where she can sit for hours, writing and watching people.

We keep our fingers crossed that the wind holds up so that we make it tomorrow before nightfall. Otherwise we have to sail in circles until the sun comes up again

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:42

Sunday, May 6, 2012

Three weeks at sea

Day 22, Sunday, 2012-05-06, 11:45 boat (17:45 UTC), 9:19S, 133:47W, COG 260, SOG 5, Wind 10kn E, sunny but leaning towards muggy

Three weeks (and four hours) ago we left Isla Santa Cruz. As is customary we had a very fast start, with up to 196nm per day, and now a very slow finish (slowest was just under 60nm). We've gotten used to that, it was the same on all passages so far. Now it's only 310nm to go. Usually a trip of two days, but in this wind more likely three, so we're planning with landfall on Wednesday. We're very excited about what it will be like in French Polynesia!

Yesterday I've learned that two friends of mine, Joachim and Rosi, are going on a cruise around French Polynesia this month. I very much hope to meet them, and from there itinerary it looks like Nuku Hiva might be possible. Last time we met on the Kilimanjaro, wouldn't it be just awesome to meet on one of the remotest islands?

It looks like it's going to be another very hot day today, fortunately with a little more wind. Yesterday it was so calm that we had to start the engine. But then it got so hot that we quickly turned it off again after a few hours. The heat from both the sun and the engine was unbearable. Fortunately the wind had picked up again just enough to fly the Parasailor, and we sailed with around 3kn most of the day.

The positive side of going so slow is that it's very comfortable. Not much movement on the boat, almost like at anchor. So you get more out of the day, instead of just holding on or lying down. Then in the evening we experienced the most spectacular sunset ever. Deep blue sea, dramatic clouds, the sky in all shades from deep purple above to a bright red on the horizon. And at the same time the full moon rose just behind us, not as dramatic, but very majestic. We stood in the cockpit for almost two hours, and turned from west to east and back to west and couldn't get enough of it.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:56

Saturday, May 5, 2012

Under motor

Day 21, Saturday, 2012-05-05, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 9:32S, 132:03W, COG 280, SOG 5.5kn, Wind 7kn E, overcast

Sunset is our special time. During the day both of us are busy with boaty things or our interests, or sleep alternatively and don't get to talk a lot. But before sunset we cook dinner and, weather permitting, have it together in the cockpit. Then we watch the sun set, and the stars come up, and talk about our thoughts. Very special. When Liz asks me, what we get out of this trip, I often think that this time together is one of the most important things, and that I will remember those evenings in the cockpit as the best part of the trip. Sure, exotic islands and a little taste of adventure is nice, too. But having time for each other is real special.

Last night, a few hours after dinner, Liz went back to her writing, and I took my laptop into the cockpit and coded underneath the 90% full moon. Then the wind started to drop below 10kn and shift, and I was busy with the lines trying to keep the boat speed at around 5kn. In the morning we heard a call on the VHF radio: "Sailing Yacht that just crossed my port side.", repeated a number of times, but no answer. Apparently the captain of a commercial vessel wanted to have a chat with a sailor, but the sailor wasn't listening. I know a few cruisers who, went night falls, close the hatch and sleep until the morning, trusting in god, good luck, and the vigilance of others to see them through. Maybe this was one of them. Well, the sea is big, traffic is scarce, and a sailboat is small and slow, so chance is on their side. But still ...

Out on the ocean and away from shipping lines we also sleep for up to an hour without looking around. But at least we have all our electronic eyes and ears turned on, and we get warned half an hour before a possible collision above the water. The aluminum hull is also a very good resonator, and a number of times I've heard the noise of another vessel below decks before I've seen it on the horizon. But now that we're approaching the islands and there is more traffic to be expected, we look around at least every half hour. And no sleeping within 50nm to 100nm of land, depending on the approach.

This morning the wind dropped below to 6kn, and we were barely making 2kn through the water. No surprise, given the thick forest of growth on our hull. I took the sail down and started the engine, we've only run it for 10h so far on the trip. Then I tied a big scraper to an aluminium pole and started working on the side of the boat from the deck down, to get at least the waterline clean. You have to wait until the side comes out of the water as the boat rolls, but it works quite well. Now we're moving with 5 to 6kn, and the desalinator is running. Unless the wind comes up to over 10kn we're going to go like this all day, filling up the water tanks. We used about 30l a day, but only made 60l every third day, so we have some catching up to do. Better do it out on the ocean than close to land.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:53

Friday, May 4, 2012

Voices

Day 20, Friday, 2012-05-04, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 9:37S, 129:58W, COG 265, SOG 7.3, Wind 20kn E, sunny

Not much to report, really. Days go round in circles. Yesterday we did some more washing while the sun was out. Then some rain came, followed by sun again and the laundry dried. The sun went down and the moon up. With almost a full moon it was very bright all through the night. No need for a lamp to work the sails. What a difference to the first week of the trip! With no moon, and the clouds, it was so dark that we often couldn't even see the big white sail a few meters in front of us without a light. Or the horizon, or anything else for that matter. Much better this way, and I had timed the departure from the Galapagos so that we would arrive in the Marquesas with plenty of moonlight. The worst is to approach a new landfall and not seeing anything. Not that we're ever going near a coast in the dark. But just knowing it is not far ahead (compared to several 100 miles), and not being able to see anything, makes you very nervous.

17:30 UTC today I heard a call on the VHF for the boat "Happy Bird", but I didn't understand the caller. Means there is another boat within sth like 60nm of us, nice. We haven't seen a boat in a long time. Also nice to hear another voice. Not that I don't like Liz' voice! I'm just saying it's nice to hear more voices (as long as they are not in your own head, that is).

Only 530nm to go!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:53

Thursday, May 3, 2012

Just sailing

Day 19, Thursday, 2012-05-03, 12:10 boat (18:10 UTC), 9:21S, 127:34W, COG 290, SOG 6kn, Wind 14kn E, partial clouds

It's great to be moving again. But yesterday was especially nice. Sunny, light but steady winds, calm seas. We sailed along with 4 to 5kn, ran the watermaker and filled the tanks, cooked, wrote, and coded. In the afternoon Liz baked Pumpkin-Ginger-Muffins and we had tea. Then we danced in the cockpit to music we got from Cuba. In the evening we showered and dressed up for dinner (just pasta) - which means we actually put more on than our underwear. We toasted the sunset with Vodka and Cranberryjuice, then lay in the cockpit for hours, talking and listening to music.

Today there is a little more wind, around 15kn, and we're making good speed. The boat moves more - don't leave stuff lying around and watch out for those mugs of tea!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:44

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

Wind!

Day 18, Wednesday, 2012-05-02, 12:10 boat, 9:13S, 125:37W, COG 280, SOG 6kn, Wind 10-15kn E, sunny

Yesterday afternoon we were lying unmoving (again), n 2kn of wind, but at least with a little sun. The sea was a deep blue, not a fish or fin in sight. I went into the water to have a look at rudder and keel, and see how the anti-fouling is doing. Rudder and keel are still there, unchanged. Antifouling is probably also there, but it's hard to say because the hull is completely covered in growth, some kind of mollusc, an inch long. There's so much I didn't even start scraping them off, it would take half a day, and the boat was still moving and rolling.

Back on the boat I pulled the main-sail up to let it dry. Liz thought I had turned on the hose, so much water came splashing out of it. And then ... wind! 4kn. 6kn. We're moving! I quickly unfurled the genoa and we sailed for a bit. And just as the mainsail was dry a raincloud came. So ... dry sail or more speed? Stupid question. Half an hour later the wind was gone again, and the sail wet again. Ah well, something to do.

Fortunately as night fell the wind came for real. A nice steady 10-15kn from the east. We sailed through the night with the Genoa, and first light I pulled up the Parasailor. Now we're moving ahead at 6kn, what a joy!

And just in time, too! Our friends Gisela and Uwe on SY Venus (syvenus.wordpress.com), who left two days after us, had almost caught up with us. At one point we were 500nm apart, yesterday only 90nm! The lucky two had steady 20kn of wind all the way from the Galapagos, incredible. I'm very happy for them, and it's a joy to read their happy emails. I hope the wind stays with them (and us, too), the rest of the way. Only 790nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:29

Tuesday, May 1. 2012

Same old, same old

Day 17, Tuesday, 2012-05-01, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 08:54S, 123:50W, COG 280, SOG 0.9kn, Wind 3kn N, muggy with patches of sunlight

Wow, we came 58nm yesterday! 27nm sailing, the rest drifting. A new record - lowest distance in 24h ever! But at least it's a little sunny today, not like the last two days. We spent most of the time below deck because it was raining so much, and at one point I counted 9 individual squalls at the same time on the horizon. They are already encroaching heavily on the last patches of sunlight. Let's hope the forces of light manage to fend the evil dark clouds off for a little while longer, at least until we had lunch!

Liz is cooking pumpkin soup with our last pumpkin (half of it). There's still onions, potatoes, tomatoes, kiwi, limes, apples, pears, oranges and garlic left. So we're still some way from opening cans.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:38

Same old, same old

Day 17, Tuesday, 2012-05-01, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 08:54S, 123:50W, COG 280, SOG 0.9kn, Wind 3kn N, muggy with patches of sunlight

Wow, we came 58nm yesterday! 27nm sailing, the rest drifting. A new record - lowest distance in 24h ever! But at least it's a little sunny today, not like the last two days. We spent most of the time below deck because it was raining so much, and at one point I counted 9 individual squalls at the same time on the horizon. They are already encroaching heavily on the last patches of sunlight. Let's hope the forces of light manage to fend the evil dark clouds off for a little while longer, at least until we had lunch!

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Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:38

Monday, April 30. 2012

Sail up, sail down, sail up, sail down

Day 16, Monday, 2012-04-30, 11:50boat (17:50UTC), 8:32.6S, 122:56.2W, COG 230, SOG 5kn, Wind 15kn NW, rainy

Last night I fell out of my bunk. No kidding. There had been no wind for hours, we were just drifting along, lying in our bunks waiting, and suddenly I find myself lying on the floor. Liz head pops up from behind the table on the other side of the boat. "Are you ok?". "Uhm yes, sure. Everything ok."

Another squall had come along and rocked the boat. They've been doing that all afternoon. No wind, then suddenly a gust and some waves from some crazy direction. SE, NW, N, S. For 30minutes or an hour, then nothing again. A wonderful exercise in setting and shifting sails. From 3am to 5am boat time (sth like 1am to 3am local) I could make out a small solitary light bopping up and down over the horizon. At first green, but when tried to get closer it turned white and ran away. Must have been another sailboat. Unfortunately it was too dark to see anything but the light, and in the morning it was gone again. I had hoped for a photo of a sailboat in the morning light. Photographic opportunities have ben very scarce so far, not counting clouds and waves.

Today will not enter the records as the most beautiful day in Pacific history. Overcast, drizzling on and off. But at least there is a little wind now and we're moving. The weather forecast predicst no real wind until Wednesday. But it's wrong all the time anyway, nice weather and steady winds might be just an hour away! Also Liz is baking bread, which is another thing I'm really looking forward to.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:13

Sunday, April 29. 2012

Calm, so calm.

Day 16, Sunday, 2012-04-29, 11:40 boat (17:40 UTC), 08:21S, 121:48W, COG 270, SOG 3.5kn, Wind 6-8kn SE, muggy, hot

Oh, yes, today is Sunday. Yesterday was of course Saturday, I totally got that wrong in my blog entry. So difficult to keep track of the time on the boat ...

Distance is easier. We came 92nm in the last 24 hours, thanks to a nice breeze of 16kn that came up yesterday afternoon and pushed us along at 8kn. With sunset the wind left, and I had to take the sail down so it wouldn't get wrapped around the shrouds and get damaged. All night no wind, and we just drifted along with the current. With sunrise some wind came up again, 6-8kn, just enough to sail, and now we're moving ahead with 3 to 4kn again. Slowly, slowly.

Which means that the program for today is the same as yesterday: We hide from the sun until sunset. Liz writes on her book. I write another iPad game. Both working on our next careers . Well, more like following our passions. My first program ever was a text adventure I wrote on the C64, loooooong time ago. I'm very excited that I now have some time to get back into that domain. Not text adventures, hehe, writing games. I bought a dozen (e)books in Panama about game design, -theory, -algorithms, and -development. With no escape and distraction on the boat I read them all. I hadn't expected that I could start coding so early, because there is usually too much movement (and things to do) on the boat to sit down in front of the computer for more than half an hour. But this weather is perfect for it.

Programming on the boat reminds me very much of the early 90s, before the internet was widely available, and all the programming forums and tutorial websites sprang up. You have your development environment, a book, and your brains. Go figure it out.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:19

Saturday, April 28. 2012

Becalmed

Day 15, Sunday, 2012-04-28, 12:10 boat (18:10 UTC), 08:08S, 120:16W, COG
270, SOG 1.8, Wind

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:02

Thursday, April 26. 2012

Better weather

Thursday, 2012-04-26, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 7:13S, 116:00W, COG 265, SOG 6kn, Wind 20kn SE, sunny

Good news, the sun is out again! After two days and three nights of rain and overcast sky a very welcome change. We're out in the cockpit, washing and drying our clothes and soaking up the rays - who knows how long it lasts. The watermaker is also running, filling up the jerry cans, which then go into the tank. I don't want to risk a malfunction and spoil my tanked water with salty seawater.

All through yesterday the wind kept shifting again from SE to NE, as one squall after the other went past. But you couldn't really tell whether a squall was approaching or not, because the sky looked the same all over. Winds increased to 38kn at one point, and waves got as big as 4m. Then we were in the center of a squall and the wind stopped. But the waves kept coming. Wohoooo! What a ride. We ran the engine for half an hour until the wind had picked up again, because sitting dead in the water the boat was swinging all over the place. Anchor under water, Anchor in the air, starboard side under water, port side under water, ...

After the wind was back the situation improved a little, but not a lot. I didn't dare set the mainsail because the winds were so unpredictable, and the boom would just have banged all over the place in the heavy sea. We hid in the cabin and couldn't do anything but lie there and wonder why somebody would even dream of doing this. We talked about the trip and our future and what we are going to do when we get to NZ, and that cheered us up. In the night the wind steadied and since then it's improving. We both slept through most of the night, looking out only ever few hours, counting on the radar warner and AIS. We were so tired. But now everything is fine again. Bad weather? Don't remember anything. This is the pacific, always nice and quiet!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:50

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Treasure

Wednesday, 2012-04-25, 12:15 boat (18:15 UTC), 07:15.4S, 113:31.6W, COG 280, SOG 5kn, Wind 15kn NE, very rainy

On a voyage of three weeks you can of course expect to encounter all kinds of days. The calm, the sunny with steady winds, the rainy with fluky winds, the stormy, and everything in between. You get the most out of the voyage when you accept them as they come, and treasure them for what they are. The sunny for their happiness, the rainy for their melancholy. The stormy maybe for the physical exercise.

But the truth is, the sunny ones are a lot easier to treasure than the rainy ones. Especially when fluky winds make you work on deck every half hour. Today is such a day. What a good day to practice treasuring all things in life, let that be the motto of the day. Fortunately there are good news too to make it easier: we're half way there! Only 1500nm more to go. And my french learning game for the iPad is finished. Tres bien!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:48

Tuesday, April 24. 2012

Battle of the squalls

Tuesday, 2012-04-24, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 7:03.2S, 111:11.7W, COG 255, SOG 7kn, Wind 20-25kn ESE, overcast & rainy

Liz says it was the longest night. Especially the time between 3am and 7am felt very long. At least we had the Parasailor down by 3am. 35kn of wind isn't a lot, but with a Spinnaker-type sail up it can get a little hairy.

The squalls had started coming around 5pm. Rainclouds dotted the eastern and southern horizon in intervals of only a few miles, and I knew it wouldn't be a dry night. But the clouds were small and only light grey, just like all the other nights before. So I left the Parasailor up, not wanting to give up the stability it gives the boat as Liz lay down to sleep.

Until 10pm everything was business as usual. Without a moon and a pretty complete cloud cover it was almost impossible to make out incoming squalls, just spots of deeper darkness in the dark. And because they were so small, holding little rain, they didn't show up on the radar either. But squalls bring their own distinctive wind pattern with them, and I knew one was coming close when the wind started to shift. Then I changed course higher to the wind and tucked in behind them, such avoiding most of the rain and wind. The anemometer barely went up to 20kn. Easy. It's when you feel like you are in control when it hits you hardest.

The sudden increase in wind speed to over 30kn came as a complete surprise. I had just passed one small squall and had run squarely into a big one. Torrential rain splattered down, and the wind hauled in my ears. Usually not an issue, but with 90sqm of sail up in the air ... ups. There's no way I could get the sail down other than dropping it into the water or cutting the lines. But it wasn't time yet for such desperate measures, there was a way out, and it meant: hand on the rudder, straight downwind, and fly the sail as high as possible. With the cleats 8m above deck the boat speed was a manageable 9 to 10kn, but keeping the boat straight was hard work. But it was impossible to see the incoming waves from the back, and two times I reacted to slowly and the waves turned the boat 40 degrees and heeled it over hard. Then the speed increased to 12kn, and the lee fence went under water. First time we lost the barbecue. Second time we had thrown everything from the cockpit down the companionway.

Usually it only takes about 20min for a squall to pass through, and there is a distinct lull in the wind behind it. I was waiting for that lull to head into the wind a bit and take the parasailor down. But the lull didn't come, instead we got hit by squall after squall with little respite. For five hours. I'm full of respect for Liz, no tear or complaint, instead she watched out and helped where she could, and didn't get in the way where she couldn't. The city girl is turning into a true sailor after all!

When the lull in the wind finally came a little past 3am it was about time. As much as I like adventures, they're so much more fun when you're not wet, tired and hungry. But the good thing about this route is that getting wet doesn't matter, because it's warm. The rest of the night passed, very rolly and very slowly. When the sun came up I cleaned up the mess of lines and assorted cockpit stuff, and when I was about done I smelled baking. Liz' head popped up in the companionway with a smile, and looking past her I could see pancakes on the oven. Fantastic!

Today the sky is overcast and it's raining frequently, winds between 20 and 25kn. Waves are 1.5 to 2m. But every half hour a 3m wave hits the boat and everything slides to one side. According to the weather forecast it's going to be like this for the rest of the week. But the forecast is usually wrong anyway, so I'm getting my hopes up that tomorrow will be nice again

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:13

Monday, April 23. 2012

On the right course

Monday, 2012-04-23, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 7:06.2S, 108:53.3W, COG 260, SOG 7kn, Wind 15-20kn ESE, sunny

What a lovely Sunday afternoon we had! Perfect weather, calm seas, good progress. Liz had a nap, then wrote on her book for a few hours. I learned some French, then read more about celestial navigation, and started to code a little iPad game to help me learn French. Liz calls it "French for attention impaired people". Pffff ...

Later we enjoyed a(nother) beautiful sunset with a cold beer in our hand then I took the first watch as the stars came up in a clear sky. Over the last days I had practiced my direction finding by the stars, with the help of the "Emergency Navigation" book and the "Star Walk" app. The book is quite good once you get to the meat. There is a lot of cross-referencing to later chapters and mentioning of different concepts which I find disorienting. I would have liked the book to be more focused on the lesson and hand and more concise overall.

This night I was putting everything I've learned to the test with only a stick, and verified my findings with a handheld compass. To my big surprise I could reliably point north, south, and west with an accuracy of 1 degree over the course of many hours. Only finding south by Scorpio didn't work so well and I was always 10 degrees off towards the east. I think it's easier from the northern hemisphere, where Scorpio is lower in the sky.

After midnight squalls came up and we were busy dodging them. What works quite well for us with this wind and course is to let them come close, almost overhead, then tuck in behind them. This way we avoided the rain and only had small wind changes of 20 degrees. I'm glad the Parasailor is good for up to a beam reach, otherwise we couldn't have done it without changing the sails. As it is, we haven't changed the sails since Wednesday, when we dropped the main and pulled the Parasailor up. We only pull a little at the sheet or downhaul every few hours, or adjust the course when the wind changes to Ethe ast again and it gets too roilly. But I also have to say that the squalls are very small and gentle, the wind never increased to much more than 20kn. Sailing in the Pacific is really nice.

Today the wind is blowing a little stronger than yesterday, 20kn, and changes between 90 and 100 degrees. Not ideal, but not too bad. We are trying not to go much more south for a while because we prefer lighter winds, 10 to 15kn, and the grib files as well as other boats report winds up to 30kn further south. No need for that, the stronger winds don't make the Gudrun go faster, they only put strain on the gear - and the crew. Safety first! And comfort not far behind.

We get frequent updates by email from our friends Gisela and Uwe on S/V Venus, who are a few days behind. And also from Andy on S/V Impiana, who left a day earlier and is 140nm ahead (speed freak!). Andy got punished for his hastiness with a chinese gybe in a sudden wind change, which tore the sheet from the boom. Ouch. Other than that everybody is enjoying themselves and are having a good trip. Gisela always makes my mouth water when she writes about the goodies she pulls out of her fridges and freezer. After eight years at sea they have their priorities figured out

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:33

Sunday, April 22. 2012

One week - one third

Sunday, 2012-04-22, 12:00 (18:00 UTC), 6:39.6S, 106:29.5W, COG 260, SOG 6.5kn, Wind 14kn ESE

Yesterday afternoon we passed the 1/3rd "mark" - only 2000nm to go. I remember how I always checked the GPS for distance and time-to-target when I started on this voyage in 2009. Typical over-eager newbie behavior. Now I hardly check the distances, and only keep a close look at course, wind angle, wind strength, and speed. We'll get there when we get there, and as long as I keep the sails trimmed and the course straight it'll be in good time. Checking the GPS every hour does not speed up anything, only makes you nervous and worried. Like checking your emails every 5 minutes keeps you from getting any work done.

But 1/3rd is, psychologically, an important milestone. Especially for a journey of three weeks or more. A decent progress has been made, and many difficulties and weather patterns have already been met successfully. Confidence grows. Now it's only a short leap to 1/2 the distance, then 2/3, 3/4, and then it's already time to plan the final approach. So, basically we're already there, break out the champagne

Well, not quite - stay sharp. But the last 24 hours have been special in more ways: We saw dolphins (only the second pod), a turtle (the first), and another boat (also the first). The boat announced itself at 4am this morning as a bright sheen on the horizon, due west. I knew it wasn't a star, or the moon, and the next island is 1000nm away. So it must be a boat. Half an hour later I saw it's lights, and thought it must be a cruise ship because it looked so big and bright. I looked at the AIS display to find out it's name, and was surprised to not see it on the target list. No AIS signal? All boats with more than 300 tons have to transmit an AIS signal. AIS is an invaluable tool for collision avoidance, especially in crowded sea areas - or for short-handed sailboats. Many sailors rely on it more than on their eyes. We don't, but it's still slightly disturbing. Then I noticed that our radar warner also hadn't beeped, meaning the vessel was under way without radar too. What kind of commercial boat does that? I took out my camera, mounted my brightest tele-lens (135mm f/2.0) and took a photo. Zooming in on the photo revealed my suspicion: a fishing boat. What else.

Then this morning I got an email from "Anni Nad", the boat of Ulli and Rita. They are five days or so ahead of us, and warned us that they've encountered two large fishing boats without AIS signal. As I said - stay sharp!

Rita also told us that their desalinator stopped producing fresh water, and that Ulli can't find the fault. I had the same problem two times and send them an email back how I fixed it. Here's brief summary.

Watermaker produces no fresh water:

If the pump runs, and salt-water is ejected but no fresh-water, then it's almost certain that the intake hose isn't 100% air tight. Often the fault is at the connection between pre-filter and pump, because this hose moves about quite a lot as the pump cycles. You can also hear a different pumping noise - usually it's a hard tacking sound. This sound loses its hard edge when air is in the chamber. Because the chamber is very small it only takes a little air and the pump is unable to produce the necessary pressure to push water through the membrane. Instead all water is ejected, and therefor

no fresh water is produced. Resolution: make sure the hose connectors between seacock, strainer, pre-filter, and pump, are 100% air-tight. Prefer flexible sealant over teflon tape.

So much for that. Fortunately our water maker has been behaving very nicely this last week. It's so great to be able to make your own fresh water, one less worry. And have I mentioned that the weather is great today? The weather is great today . I hope you've got good weather too, wherever you are. Have a nice sunday!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:40

Saturday, April 21. 2012

No damages!

Saturday, 2012-04-21, 11:40 (17:40 UTC), 06:19S, 103:47W, COG 260, SOG 8kn, Wind 18kn E

The weather is changing daily, today for the better, hurray! Clear skies, nice wind from the east, and the sea not too bad. Liz is lying in the cockpit sleeping while her iPad is charging. She's got a looong list of books to read for the trip. Very tiring. Gudrun is rolling a little, but not too jerky. The autopilot is doing fine.

I'm very glad for our self-steering gear. I remember very well the 1000nm I had to hand-steer single-handed through the Mediterranean, and it was no fun. In good conditions it's just great to be able to do something else then sit on the helm. And in bad conditions it's invaluable to be able to hide below deck. As self-steering systems go, there is the choice of a windvane, or an autopilot.

The windvane is big mechanical contraption bolted to the stern of the boat. It has a little vane that sticks up into the wind, and a rudder that sticks down into the water. The vane is adjusted to a certain angle to the wind, and through gears, levers, and ropes the rudder part keeps the boat on that course. Once it's set up it's very simple and reliable, and requires no battery. The autopilot is either an electrical or hydraulic system that gets it's direction from an electronic compass and works on the rudder of the boat. Nothing to set up, just switch it on. But depending on the model, boat size, and balance it can draw a lot of power. The important thing about using self-steering gear is to always have a good sail trim, and not too much heel. Otherwise the gear gets quickly overloaded and then it fails, which is almost impossible to repair at sea.

Gudrun has both, a windvane and an (electrical) autopilot (and a spare drive for the main autopilot and another whole spare autopilot. You can see how important self-steering gear is to me). The windvane came with the boat, but it's a pain to set up and requires a bit of attention every few hours. The autopilot also came with the boat, and is easy to set up, requires no attention, and is very robust. Partly because the whole steering system for Gudrun is simple, efficient, and robust. And because Gudrun is a very well balanced boat, the autopilot draws only about 1,5 Ampere per hour (20Watt). That is very little, and so we're exclusively using the autopilot and have the windvane as backup stowed away in the lockers. I used the windvane across the atlantic for a few days, and it works well, but why bother.

Also I have to say, we're almost a week into the journey now and no damages at all. That's the longest time in 2 1/2 years that I didn't have to repair anything, and that even at sea! Hurray and knock on wood! Simpy fantastic. I'm so happy I gotta go hug Liz now

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:42

Friday, April 20. 2012

Big seas

Friday, 2012-04-20, 11:40 (17:40 UTC), 5:50.1S, 101:07.2W, COG 240, SOG 7kn, Wind 18kn NE

Yesterday was one of those rare great sailing days. A day that makes you quickly forget that most days are not at all like that, and that some days are not nice at all. Like today.

The change came in the early morning hours, when the wind turned from E to NE and brought rain and stronger winds with it. Soon the waves came from the back as well, and Gudrun started to roll left and right again. And so far hasn't stopped. We're flying the parasailor high now, trading speed for more lift and stability, which improves things a little. Safety first! But the seas have gotten bigger as well, with the biggest being about 2.5m. Not dramatic, but enough to give the autopilot a hard time trouble keeping course as t. Every now and then a wave rolls underneath Gudrun, and the boat makes a quick dash to port or starboard and heels over mightily as the autopilot is too slow to respond. I'm sure somebody has built an autopilot with gyro- and acceleration sensors, which would do a much better job in these conditions. Maybe even with a little aft-looking radar or laser unit to register incoming waves? I'm certain it would sell very well on big yachts:

"I have a gyro-stablized steering system on my 70ft ketch, with three acceleration sensors that keep the boat always on a straights course."

"That's nothing. My latest 80ft sloop is equipped with the new 360degree waveaware (TM) unit, which detects incoming waves up to 50m away and automatically adjusts the sail trim. Our heel never varies more than 2 degrees!".

On Gudrun, however, I'm afraid this job falls to me. Time for some hand-steering after this blog entry. At least that solves the question of "what do do with yourself", which always comes up on dreary days like these. There is only so much reading and sleeping you can do before you feel like you're wasting your time. But the weather and movement don't permit much else. Today would be a great day for office work, or to meet friends in a cafe. Hope you're doing well at land! Liz says hi too, with a big hug to the Whitworths around the globe.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:27

Thursday, April 19, 2012

Yummy

Thursday, 2012-04-19, 11:30 (17:30 UTC), 4:53.5S, 99:06.0W, COG 245, SOG 4.5, Wind 7kn E

Yesterday afternoon was wonderful sailing: calm seas, blues sky, wind 10kn, boat speed 6-7kn, and no rolling. Couldn't be much better, and Liz enjoyed it. We spent the afternoon in the cockpit under the sunshades, and then sat mesmerized as the sun went down and the stars became visible. The sky was absolutely clear, incredible visibility. I applied my newly acquired knowledge about astronavigation to figure out the compass directions (they are all there!), and pointed out a few stars and constellations. But soon Liz' curiosity exceeded my knowledge and I had to get help from ESA's "Star Walk" app for the iPad. Fantastic piece of software, don't go looking at the sky without it.

We sat for many hours, talking and gazing at the stars. What a wonderful experience. Then I went to sleep below and Liz kept watch in the cockpit, learning french and reading. At 2am we switched, and an hour later the wind started to drop. 8kn, 6kn, 4kn. Everybody has his personal hell of things that drive him to the brink of insanity. Mine is having just not enough wind to sail properly. The boat rolls, the sails flap, the boom bangs, and there's nothing you can do. But it is too much wind to ignore it and sit still in the water! So I have to try, and I pull sheets and adjust course until the boat sails just enough to not make those horrible sounds. And half an hour later the wind changes slightly, and the whole procedure starts again. Torture!

After three hours of "torment" the wind changed to east, and I could pull the parasailor up. Ha! Liz says there are three ways to deal with stress: remove the cause, change your believes and values, or your reaction. My favorite is removing the cause. Now we're sailing along slowly with 4.5kn, pretty much pointed at our destination.

Pilot charts and gib files say there is more wind south, 20kn at about 8:00S. But 20kn means going fast, and Liz doesn't like that. Other parts of the crew like sailing fast very much, but they also like to keep the other part of the crew happy. Even more than sailing fast. So we want 10 to 15kn. With 5kn at 5:00S, and 20kn at 8:00S, I reckon a little south of 6:00S would be a good place to be. We'll know tomorrow or the day after if that's correct.

In the matter of the broken kindle there is good news: Thanks to the software Calibre I could remove the digital rights management from my purchased books and re-format them, and now I can read them on the iPad and my old Sony reader. Yay! And the "Emergency Navigation" book is getting better towards the end, especially the sketches are quite nice.

But even better than that is the fact that Liz is right now making a batch of her world famous "Twix" cookies. Maybe little wind has it's merits, too. Twix. Yummy ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:12

Wednesday, April 18, 2012

Laundry

Wednesday, 2012-04-18, 11:35 (17:35 UTC), 3:51.2S, 97:05.1W, COG 245, SOG 7.2kn, Wind 13kn SE

Not much change here. We're still heading SW, and the south equatorial current and the wind are still moving us NW off course, about 15 degrees from our heading. Yesterday afternoon it got so rolly that I changed the heading to due west while we cooked dinner (curry with rice, potato, tomato, onion, carrot, and cabbage). While we ate the sun set spectacularly behind a herd of dark, low rain clouds. But fortunately we were spared rain during the night. The wind calmed down too a little, and in the morning the sea followed. So until a few minutes ago it was actually nice sailing, and Liz said that she's almost happy! But now the wind is picking up again, and it's getting more rolly. Well, that's life on the boat. We're looking forward to getting the wind and current from further east in a few days. But for the moment all we can do is hold on. Something I didn't do very well yesterday, and as I toppled over I broke the screen of my kindle ebook reader. Not good. That's definitely something where paper books are still way ahead. Only problem is carrying them all, we read a lot.

But there's good news too: with all the wind and sun we have power to spare, and so we can run watermaker and fridge. The batteries and tanks are full and the beer is cold. Definitely three very positive things! Almost makes me forget about the kindle. Maybe if I drink enough beer, hehe. Better not. With enough power to run the desalinator we have so much water that I even started to do the laundry this morning (what else do you do without a book). Laundry on Gudrun works like this: All the clothes go into a big bucket of water, plus detergent, and then stomp it madly with a big plunger.

Liz has her watch set to ring the alarm every twenty minutes. Then she jumps up, shouts "Check for boats and dolphins", and looks around. Very commendable and cute, but other than a few flying fish and squid on the deck every morning we haven't seen any marine life since Sunday. And no boats either. I tried to listen to the shortwave cruiser's net yesterday to learn where all the other boats that left the Galapagos (maybe ten last week) are, but got only static. Anyway: greetings to everybody out there. Have a great day, whether on boat or ashore.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:08

Tuesday, April 17. 2012

More squalls

Tuesday, 2012-04-17, 11:30 local (17:30 UTC), 3:00 S, 94:23 W, COG 250, SOG 7.5kn, Wind 15kn SE

Yesterday afternoon passed completely uneventful. We were mostly busy holding on to things and not getting tossed all over the rolling boat. At night squalls passed by and pushed us further west, though at least we managed to avoid the rains this time by adjusting the course in time - so much for sleeping. The mainsail is (still) in the 2nd reef and my guess is that it'll stay like this for a while. We're trying to head further south, but wind, waves, and current don't let us. I asked Liz how she's feeling and she says pretty shitty. I replied that to me she looks as beautiful as ever, which made her laugh, so I don't think it's all that bad. Cheap trick, I know.

It's just that the heel and jerky movements of the boat discourages any activities, so we kind of don't know what to do with ourselves other than read, sleep, and watch out. I started on the book "Emergency Navigation", which is full of useful advice, so the reviews at Amazon told me. Only I'm 40% through the book now and all I'm reading is what awesome things you can do with just a watch and sticks and that I'll learn in later chapters exactly how to do it. I wonder how much later, because I'm running out of patience with the author David Burch. Didactically very disappointing, but I'm determined to make it to those magical chapters and finish the book. And then I guess I'll have to write it out in some recipes of my own that I understand and start practicing. And don't forget about the French of course

But now I have to dig out my shortwave radio and tune in to 8137kHz, where apparently some German sailors set up a radio network. I won't be able to actively participate because we only have a receiver, but I guess it will be interesting to hear where the other boats are and what they are up to.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:50

Monday, April 16. 2012

wind and rain

Monday, 2012-04-16, 11:45 local (17:45 UTC), 91:58.7W, 2:00.4S, COG 215, SOG 7kn

Everything fine on board of Gudrun! Liz is lying in the cockpit, repeating French phrases from her iPod language class, and I just finished catching up on the sleep I missed last night during my watch. Changing winds and lots of rain kept me busy from 11pm until 6am this morning, when Liz took over again.

Yes, there is Wind! And quite a lot of it too, we even had to put in a reef last night. It's not very steady though, varying between 4kn and 20kn of strength and changing from SE to SW as we make our way from raincloud to raincloud. I've long stopped adjusting sails to the wind in these conditions, especially at night. It takes too much energy, and any change is good for only a few minutes at best. Instead we simply adjust the course to 50 degrees AWA (apparent wind angle), which means we wriggle our way south-westerly-ish. Sometimes more south, sometimes more west, at times a little north. Beggars can't be choosers. The idea is to get between 4 and 6 degrees south rather quickly, because the trade winds should blow more steadily there. Then we turn west, put the parasailor up, and take it down three weeks later when we arrive in Hiva Oa. One can dream

Liz asked what she's going to do with herself for three weeks on the boat with only me as company. No Cafes, no internet, and not much chance to write on her book because she gets seasick when looking at the screen. "Learn French!" I said, and that's what she's doing. And I will too ... Je peux laisser mon dinghy ici? Je voudrais verifier l'alternateur. Stuff like that

A demain

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:14

Sunday, April 15. 2012

On the way to the Marquesas

Sunday, 2012-04-15, 11:39 local (17:30 UTC), 90:29.1W, 0:55.2S, COG 230, SOG 5kn

After shopping for fruit and veggies at the local market yesterday we had breakfast in Cafe Hernan, one of our favorite places. Then we went back to the boat to stow everything away and get ready for the voyage. As usual, item after item that wasn't on the list popped up and it was 4pm by the time we were ready to haul the dinghy up onto the deck. That is usually the last thing we do before leaving other than weighing the anchor (of course).

But first I had to take the outboard engine off the dinghy. Because we don't have a lift for that I usually push it from the dinghy onto the bathing platform at the back. Because the outboard weighs a little more than 50kg and the dinghy keeps moving about it's a little awkward, and the mantra "don't drop it into the water" is on an endless loop in my mind. Guess what? Of course, I dropped it.

The outboard was already half-way on the bathing platform when a wave jerked the dinghy away and pulled the outboard from the platform. That gave me the choice of letting go of the outboard, or going into the water with it. Of course held on to it! Don't want to lose my precious outboard. I threw both my arms around the housing, hugged the outboard with all my strength and splash!

Fully expecting to be pulled to the bottom of the bay by the 50-something-kg outboard I was determined to give it a fight nevertheless. I could always let go later, right?. To my big surprise I managed to resurface and keep us more or less afloat, long enough to get close to the boat and hold on to the bathing platform with one hand. With the other arm and both legs wrapped around the outboard I hung at the platform, mouth barely above the water surface, and called "LIIIIIIIIZ, LIIIIIIIIIIZ!".

Liz came, and to her credit she didn't start laughing but tied a rope to the boat and handed it to me. So glad she practiced knots so well! Together we got the outboard back onto the boat.

I heard once that the best thing to do when your outboard went overboard is to clean it and put it back on the dinghy and run it. So I rinsed the thing off and cleaned it, and also took out the spark plugs and cleaned them and cycled the engine a few dozen times. Then I put it back on the dinghy, attached the fuel hose, and ran it for a few minutes. After putting it onto Gudrun (this time without dropping it into the water) I thoroughly sprayed it with WD40. Hope it still runs when we get to the Marquesas!

Then we decided that it's probably better to leave the leaving until the next day. Instead we went out for happy-hour-drinks with the New Zealanders from the next boat, and then went back to Gudrun early.

After a long night's sleep we got up early this morning and weighed the anchor at 8am. Now we're on our way SW under engine, because there's only 3kn of wind. If the weather is anything like the last days we can expect some wind later and will be able to sail a few hours. But we won't get decent wind until we're at least 4 degrees south, so the plan is to go south-west or even south at first, and then mostly west.

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:00

Saturday, April 14, 2012

Good Morning Galapagos, last time

So, this is our last day here! It's six in the morning and after this blog post we're off to the farmer's market for fresh fruit and veggies. Then stowing everything away, another look around the boat and around noon we're planning to head out to sea. Hopefully with a little wind, because at the moment there's absolutely none.

Good morning Galapagos!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:04

Friday, April 13. 2012

Easter egg hunt / Gudrun on the rocks / Bye Galapagos

Last weekend was Easter weekend, and tradition demands that you hunt for eggs. This time, however, the eggs were already broken and all over the floor, and walls, of Gudrun. So the "hunt" was a little different, and not half as much fun.

Question is, how did the eggs get there? Weeeeell ... lying on the rocks for four hours and getting pummed by rollers does that. Fortunately we got off the rocks again before the rollers pushed us all the way to the shore or pounded Gudrun to pieces. Not by ourselves, the water was only 1.5m deep instead of the required 2.5m. But thanks to the water taxis, who did an enthusiastic job of trying to pull us off the rocks.

Snapshot during the rescue operation. Lots of action.

So, how did Gudrun end up on the rocks? Long story. Friday was full moon, which means moon tide, very low. We knew that, but we've been in the same spot for two weeks and had enough water under our keel.

But seeing the water drop deeper and deeper still made me nervous. So I thought it might be a good idea to change the anchor spot, just to be safe. So far so good. Unfortunately (and this is where it all went slightly wrong), I was alone on the boat, and the water level was already pretty low, and the wind came from the side (which it hadn't done before), and the sea was also rougher than usual.

So I turned on the engine, pulled up the anchor by hand (anchor winch is broken), and hurried back into the cockpit to drive away. Only the wind and rollers had already pushed Gudrun to the side (and back), and by the time the boat got going I felt a slight jolt and that was it: no more going anywhere.

Usually not such a big problem, just push the boat sideways with the dinghy. When it's only a matter of a centimeter, and it couldn't have been much more at that time, that works. But because we hadn't used our dinghy, it wasn't ready for that - the motor was still on the boat. And I was alone anyway. Jon from "Evergreen" saw I had problems and came over with his dinghy, but also without engine. By the time he had his engine on the dinghy, the water was already 5cm deeper and there was no going anywhere anymore. We tried to heel the boat over with the halyard attached to Jon's dinghy, but because the rollers were already swinging Gudrun left and right that didn't work - Jon's dinghy got pulled all over the place and he ended in the water, fortunately unharmed.

Then the water taxis started arriving, and pulling. But for some reason they wouldn't take the halyard, and without heel there was no way Gudrun could be pulled off the rocks. And the rollers kept on coming, and we got pushed more and more towards the shore.

Then my phone rang - Liz. I missed the call, but I called her back.

"Hey Axel, could you please come and pick me up? There is no water taxi coming."

"Yeah, that's because they are all here at Gudrun".

"What are they doing at Gudrun?"

"They are trying to pull us off the rocks."

At this time I was very glad that Liz wasn't on board, because the situation looked very bad. The noise as Gudrun was slammed onto the rocks again and again was heart-breaking, and because the water was only 1.5m deep (at 2.5m draft) the boat was lying on its side. And then another roller came, lifted the boat up, dumped it on the rocks, and it fell to the other side. People later told me that they had no idea how I managed to hold on. I don't know myself, but I'm sure the adrenalin helped a lot.

After two hours the tide was at its lowest, and started to rise again. But it would have been many, many more hours until it was high enough to be able to float free. I wasn't sure at all whether the boat would survive that long. All the time I tried to convince the water taxis to take the halyard, and heel the boat over so that we could float free. Finally a taxi took the halyard, but after the driver tied the line to the taxi and realized that it went to the top of our mast, he got scared and quickly cut it!

Other cruisers (Henry, Ken) started to arrive and talked to the taxi drivers, but they wouldn't listen. Well, half of the time they were busy freeing their own lines from their propellers. A for effort, but there is room for improvement in the coordination department.

Once another water taxi full of tourists came alongside, maybe 10m away. Everybody was looking, laughing, and taking photos and videos. Then another roller came and thre the boat their way, and as the mast seemed to come down on them they all let out a mighty scream. That cheered me up a lot, stupid rubbernecked gawpers .

Then the rescue coordinator from the Navy arrived and came on the boat. I explained the thing with the halyard to him, and then he took over and finally the rescue effort became more focused. I had tied a spare main-sheet to the halyard, and when I handed it over to a taxi it didn't get cut off but attached and the driver started pulling. Ten minutes later we were floating again.

They tied us to a buoy and then we went below deck to check for leaks. The whole floor was littered with dishes and food from the galley. We lifted the floor boards and found a little crack on the keel where water came in, maybe 500l an hour, not a problem for the bilge pump. With epoxy putty we were able to seal most of the crack until maybe 100l an hour came in, judging by the amount of time the bilge pump ran. That was ok.

Everybody left, Liz and I hugged each other, happy to be still afloat, and then we started cleaning.

Next morning I dived to survey the damage to keel, hull, and rudder, and to seal the hole from the outside (after some underwater sanding action). Surprisingly the rudder was still there, and even more surprisingly it didn't look like it had taken much damage. Scratches and a small dent, but everything straight. Incredible!

The keel hadn't been so lucky, and a big chunk was missing. No way to fix that here, since Gudrun's draft is too deep to haul out or fall dry. But the keel is compartmentalized, and only one compartment was missing. Looks horrible, but is fortunately not a voyage stopper. I hammered, bent, and sawed the parts that were sticking out back into shape, and we're confident that we can make it to New Zealand like that. We'll maybe go half a knot slower, but Liz likes slow anyway.

Damage to the keel

We also checked the rigg, but no damage there. One water taxi hit the bimini and bent a tube, but I can repair that (6m of spare tubing on the boat). We lost the dinghy pump, a dive boot, and the saltwater hose, but that's about it. Lucky, lucky, lucky!

Sunday we went diving to take our minds off the matter. We went to Floreana, which is known for the sea lion colony, and after diving with them for an hour we weren't depressed anymore at all. They are so playful and happy, how can you be sad?

Sea lion in the water

Liz and Axel in the water

And here's the movie - very cheesy, but worth watching because of the sea lions. And the music, thanks to M's Grace for the music. Go buy the album, it's called "Refurnish my heart".

Anyway. Tomorrow we'll say bye to the Galapagos. Destination: Marquesas, three weeks by sailboat.

Thursday, April 5, 2012

Crop robbers!

After concerns about having enough food for the three-week trip to the Marquesas we thought about growing our own food to become totally self-sufficient. Regular crops not being an option obviously, we settled for fast-growing algae on the hull. We planted the seeds two weeks ago after arriving in the Galapagos, and were looking forward to our first harvest this weekend. Imagine our shock when we found a turtle feeding on our precious food supplies today!

Turtle eating algae of Gudrun V's hull

We tried to scare the turtle off by shouting oh! and ah! and rapidly clicking the shutter on Axel's camera. But the turtle, obviously an experienced crop robber, wasn't impressed at all and continued grazing our produce. The sea lion that we'd hired as security guard was equally useless, as he was simply sleeping on the bathing platform. Probably digesting as well!

Parasitic turtle fleeing and lazy sea lion security guard doing nothing

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:13

Tuesday, April 3. 2012

Hammerhead sharks

Yesterday one of the best dives ever. Came upon a group of more than 50 hammerhead sharks, amazing.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:42

Sunday, April 1. 2012

Galapagos

We're a week in the Galapagos now, but I can't come to rest and feel in limbo. I think the long trip to the Marquesas is already on my mind. Although this island is rather nice! I brought Rappala lures from Panama for a local fisherman, and he invited us over for dinner. A fantastic evening with great food, music, and a birthday cake for Valerie (Andre's daughter). Then, as is the local custom, her face got smashed into the cake:

Valerie with artfully applied birthday cake makeup

But the event Liz still talks about was a little sea lion trying to take over our boat:

Then, this being the Galapagos, there is a lot of wildlife to be seen on Land:

Crabs

Iguanas

"Lonesome George" having lunch

And in the water, too. Just yesterday we had a fantastic diving trip to the other side of the island:

Turtles!

Hi from the Galapagos

We're going again on Monday, hoping to see more turtles, sharks, and sea lions. They are amazing to watch in the water.

Then we hope to have the fridge fixed, which is leaking gas again, buy fruit and veggies at the local market, and leave end of the week on the three-week trip to the Marquesas.

Liz at the local market

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:09

Monday, March 26. 2012

Panama to Galapagos Statistics and Video

So, I shot hours of video on the trip. But unfortunately I lost most of it due to my own stupidity, including all the video diaries, dolphins, and when we crossed the equator. But there was still a little footage left that'll give you an idea how it was. So here you go:

And here some statistics:

We were underway for 8 1/2 days (207 hours). We sailed for 143 hours (70%), drifted 45 hours (20%), and motored 19 hours (10%). Total distance was 950nm, out of which we sailed 765nm, drifted 90nm, and motored 95nm. We used 100 liters of water (mostly for showering and the dishes), which we replaced on the way thanks to the desalinator (Katadyn 160E). The fuel consumption was 36 liters.

There were no damages to speak of, but air in the desalinator intake line, a broken water hose connector, and a clogged up fuel tank vent and diesel filters kept me busy for a few hours.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:25

Saturday, March 24. 2012

Photos from the trip

Here are some photos of the trip:

- On my photo-website xlvisuals (high resolution images)
- On Facebook (you don't need to be on facebook to view the photos)

Swallow-tailed Gull looking to land on our mast-top

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 20:03

Friday, March 23. 2012

Arrived in Puerto Ayora, Isla Santa Cruz, Galapagos

This morning 8:45 we dropped anchor in Academy Bay on the south side of Isla Santa Cruz. There are 18 sailboats in the bay, about 10 dive/day-cruise boats, and two megayachts. Three of the sailboats we know already from France, Colombia, and Panama.

Shortly after arrival our friend Andre came over with his dinghy and our immigration agent Irene on board. Irene collected some documents then left to return an hour later with the Navy official who inspected the boat and didn't believe me when I said we have 5 GPS, 4 VHF radios, and 2 satphones on board. Which of course isn't true, counting the phones, tablets, cameras there are 15 GPS units on board. It's vital, so you gotta have spares, right?

I remember when I bought a GPS for my brother in 1994 for his Africa motorbike trip, how something special it was then. And how he lost it when he fell off the bike in a sand dune and only noticed it two hours later and drove back all the way to dig the thing out of the sand. So while my brother is perfectly fine crossing a desert without a GPS and find a little sand hole, I wouldn't be able to find an island in the Pacific without one. A continent, ok. A little island, no way. Maybe I should practice that ...

Back to the naval officer. He also told us in his gravest voice and most serious face that we can only stay a maximum of 21 days. If we stay any longer we are in big trouble. And that we cannot move the boat out of the anchorage. We can't take any trip, but the boat has to stay here until we leave. Which has to be before 21 days are up or we're in big trouble. He repeated that just to make sure we got it. Yessir.

We hope to finish all immigration procedures today, which also includes a "selective fumigation" of the boat so that we don't import any bugs. We'll know more in the afternoon. Overall we paid USD 610 in park-, immigration-, and agent fees for two people.

Then I would like to organize some dive- and photo-tours, and edit the photos and video of the trip. The boat needs a little maintenance as well, but nothing that should keep us more than three days. So we're thinking that maybe in 10, 14 days we're out of here. If there's wind ...

Yesterday a french single-hander who left 6 days ago drifted back into the bay with no diesel left after he ran out of wind on the first day of his trip to the Marquesas.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:16

Thursday, March 22. 2012

Are we there yet?

Thursday, 22.03.2012, 11:30 local (16:30 UTC), 0:21.928S, 89:05.144W, 32C, 1007 mBar, SOG 5.5kt, COG 254

Yesterday afternoon more of the same: Barely 4-5 kn of wind, sailing/drifted along slowly. Liz reading in the cockpit and I fiddle with the lines trying to squeeze out every 1/10 knot. I pull the GoPRO camera another time up the mast for more photos and movies. 4pm the wind dies completely and it gets incredibly hot. Liz starts mentioning that it's getting kind of boring now, and I jump into the water to cool off. And yes, there is a ladder on the boat, and I can reach it from sea-level. And I also trail a line behind we I go into the water.

At 18:43 we drift across the equator. We open the present from Mark and Liesbet for that occasion and then we eat all the potato chips that came out, among other things. Thanks guys, you're wonderful! Then we sat in the cockpit with another Gin Tonic, talked, and watched an(other) amazing sunset. But this one was really special. An hour after dark the wind came back, oh joy. Parasailor up and we sail along again. 30 minutes later the wind shifts to the beam: parasailor down again, genoa and main-sail up. We sail along with 6kn on a flat sea. The boat makes almost no noise, only a very low swishing. It's like we're floating.

2am the wind is gone again, but the fog is back. We drift for three more hours, then I start the engine. What little swell there was is dying down, and the sea is taking on an oily look. It's hard to make out the horizon as the sea reflects the sky almost perfectly and blends into it. I always wanted to see this so I'm glad it's happening on the last day. Camera out, click, click, click . Ok, I got the photos. Can the wind now come back please? It really doesn't look like it, I'm afraid we'll have to motor the last 75nm to Academy Bay, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos. Have to slow down though or we'll arrive in the middle of the night.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:32

Wednesday, March 21. 2012

The perfect calm

Wednesday, 21.03.2012, 11:30 local (16:30 UTC), 0:04.820 N, 87:24.280W, 30C, 1006 mBar, SOG 4.2kt, COG 262

Very calm all throughout yesterday and today too. The sea is almost completely calm, only light ripples on the surface and a very long and low swell. We're slowly half drifting, half sailing with 4-5kn towards the Galapagos. Liz says it's her best sailing experience ever.

The wind frequently shifts slightly and the speed drops below 4kn. Then the swell catches up with us and starts banging against the stern and I adjust the sheets to get the speed back up above 4kn, ideally 5kn, but often 4ish is the limit. I'd rather prefer to be busy keeping the speed north of 8kn, but this slow voyaging also has something for it. Very relaxing, once you are in the mindset. I read a lot and shoot a lot of photos, and Liz and I are talking a lot, discussing ideas and the world and making plans about our future. Quality time together. I wouldn't mind if the rest of the Pacific went like that as well. I can go back to sailing fast after we get to NZ.

Only 170nm to the Galapagos. Looks like we'll get there on Friday. It's almost inevitable given the current along the equator.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:44

Tuesday, March 20. 2012

Hot!

Tuesday, 2012-03-20, 11:55 local, 0:31.46N, 85:47.87W, 35C, 1006mBar, COG 254, SOG 5.5kn

It's hot! We're glad that we bought some black garden mesh in the "Discovery Center" in Panama, which we cut into rectangles and zip-tied all over the cockpit for extra shade from the sun. Works great, highly recommended.

Contrary to the weather forecast the wind didn't die completely down yesterday and we were moving along at 4-5kn all afternoon and night. In the morning the wind did stop for three hours, and we turned on the engine, partly to keep on moving but mostly to charge the batteries and run the watermaker. It started and run just fine, but when the wind returned shortly past 8am I was happy to turn it off and sail along quietly again. So much better. Today the sky is clear and I hope that we get up to 80% charge again with the solar-panels, but I have to confess that the heat and heal have more of an effect than I had anticipated.

280nm to go, and it's tempting to look at the map every hour and see how much closer we came and calculate how much longer it might take. But nobody knows what the next days will bring in terms of wind, and any estimate is pure speculation. 200nm south of Panama the grib files stopped making any sense, the wind was always different than forecast. So I'm not downloading them anymore and instead just go for the fastest course, or straightest course, to the Galapagos, whatever feels like the right thing to do at the moment.

Instead of downloading grib-files I uploaded that photo yesterday, I hope it arrived. Although tiny in size it took 5 minutes to upload with my iridium satellite phone, and at 1\$ per minute I don't think I'll upload another one anytime soon. Although I have a lot of photos I would like to show, because there is actually a lot to photograph. Sunrise, sunset, clouds, sails, Liz in the cockpit, birds, dolphins, and at night stars and a fantastic blue bioluminescent wake that Gudrun trails behind. But the highlight are of course dolphins, and Liz is always on the lookout for them.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:11

Monday, March 19. 2012

Engine trouble resolved

Now that the engine is running (although it's not running, because we're sailing, but it would run if we wanted it to, ...) and the boat's cleaned up again I can write a proper blog entry. But first a photo from today. Taken with a GoPro pulled up on the main halyard:

Gudrun V in the Pacific, with Parasailor up.

The first unexpected thing that happened yesterday afternoon was that the wind died at 4:30pm, two hours earlier than the days before. Doesn't matter, it will be back. We had nice dinner in the cockpit (wraps), watched a pod of dolphins go past, then a flock of birds on their migration go the other way. It's surprising how much life you actually see in the middle of the ocean, when you just sit on one spot for a while. Actually pretty busy out here. We felt happy and privileged and mixed some Gin Tonics and toasted to the great trip so far, and the fact that we were more than half of the way to the Galapagos already. The dreaded doldrums experience of sitting in the heat for days without end and no wind wasn't happening.

Then an hour later the banging started. Big waves against the back, rocking and rolling the boat in a dead calm. So somewhere there must be wind, only not here. Somewhere there was a lot of wind, and apparently all night because the banging and rolling just wouldn't stop. At four in the morning I saw another light on the horizon, and since it didn't move it was either a star or another sailboat drifting. Two hours later it was still there, so it must be another sailboat. Cool.

Guess what happened in the morning? Nothing. No wind. Not even after the sun was up. 9:00am and still no wind. I downloaded some grib files. Not good, the files said there would be no wind all week. I told Liz, and she screamed "Doldrums!", and smiled her big happy smile. Then she thoroughly enjoyed herself sitting in the calm (the banging and rolling had stopped after 14h), watching the sea and the sun and reading. But after 18h drifting I was antsy to get on. As Captain I felt responsible to get my boat and 'crew' to our destination. And we had to meet Andre and his family, who had to leave the Galapagos soon, because his Visa would run out next week. Therefore sitting around for a week and not getting there wasn't what I had in mind.

Liz wanted another hour of peace and quiet, and I was happy to wait for some wind as well. When it wasn't there by 10:00 I started the engine (with the newly repaired starter motor). It started immediately, and smiling happily I climbed into the cockpit to engage the autopilot etc. Then the engine stopped. Surprise! I tried to start it again, and it turned and turned but didn't fire. Thoughts: can only be air or fuel. I opened my "Marine Diesel Engines" book and called my brother anyway to get his opinion before I go chasing in the wrong direction. Yep, air or fuel, but probably fuel.

Four hours later the problem was resolved: it was related to fuel. And air, in a way, as well. The banging and rolling had pushed water into the hose for the fuel tank vent, which is connected to the bilge drain hose. That prevented fuel from getting out of the tank because no air could come. But not before the dirt of 30 years had filled the (20 engine hour old) primary fuel filter. Resolution: drain dirty fuel from the bottom of the tank, clean all hoses, replace all filters, empty the vent hose and run it in a high arc

so that it can't happen again. Busy, busy. Fortunately I carry a set of spare filters. And lots of zip ties! And even more fortunately wind had finally arrived and we were moving along at 4kn without much rolling. I still managed to hit my head on the aluminium frame . Now I have to get rid of a big back of diesel-soaked paper towels. Maybe burn them in the bbq?

All is well that ends well. Especially since we're now sailing along with 6kn, direct course to the Galapagos. The grib files were completely wrong the last days, wind came from SE when it should come from NE, and it was calm when it shouldn't etc. So the best bet is to go the fastest course towards the destination when there's wind, and hope that the periods of calm aren't too long.

Next calm we'll start the engine for a few hours and motor. I want to make sure everything is really working before we enter Academy bay and need the engine, and the batteries and water tanks could use a charge as well.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:50

A real doldrum experience and engine fun

Monday 2012-03-19 13:20 local 1:05.3N, 84:13.25W, SOG 4kt, COG 245

We were becalmed for 18 hours, now we're moving again. This morning it didn't look at all like if there would be any wind, and the grib files said it would be like this until Saturday at least. Having an appointment with Andre of "E Capoe", who has to leave the Galapagos soon, we decided to start the engine and motor for a while. Engine started. Then stopped after a minute. Now I'm busy getting it to run again.

Fortunately a little wind did show up around 11 so we're at least moving and not rocking and rolling anymore. More later, back to the engine .

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:04

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

Saturday, March 17. 2012

Hi coast guard

Saturday, 2012-03-16, 12:00 local (17:00 UTC), 3:04.6N 82:15.5W, COG 230, SOG 6kn

Everything great on board of Gudrun V. Yesterday we ran the desalinator for an hour to keep our tanks and the solar shower topped up. I've only just installed the thing, and being able to make fresh water underway is just fantastic. The desalinator is with 20A/h small enough that we can run it from the solar panels, but with 25l/h big enough that we don't have to run it for long because it makes quite a racket, whump-whump-whump-whump.

Shortly before sunset we arrived 8nm NE of Isla Malpeno. The small rock belongs to Colombia and is about 1/3rd of the way to the Galaps. We had timed it just right to watch the sun set behind the island while we passed it. Liz went to sleep and unfortunately the wind as well. Fog came up and with no moon it was pitch black and eerie. I fiddled with the sheets for the parasailor but before long the wind was gone completely and I began to take the sail down, while the boat was stomping and rolling in the old swell. Always a favorite that. Then out of nothing a floodlight illuminated Gudrun and the Colombian coast guard hailed us on the radio.

I had heard engine noise for a while, but saw no lights and didn't get an AIS signal either, which is typical for the coast guard. So it didn't come as a complete surprise. But I was nicely entangled by ropes and limply hanging nylon sailfabric on the front of the boat, so it took me a while to free myself and respond. I gave them boat name, home port, country, last port, destination, and our names. Then they asked me to spell everything out for them, which Li said I got mostly right. But they seemed happy enough with it, wished us a good trip, turned off the light and went away again.

The wind didn't return until midnight, but then I set genoa and mainsail eagerly in 6kn of wind from the SE. But the wind only lasted for half an hour, then the breeze was gone again. Just teasing me, eh? We drifted along for four more hours and I drifted in and out of sleep, until finally at four in the morning the wind was strong enough to turn the blades of the wind-generator, which I always take as a sign to pull up some sails. Anticipating the wind to change back to NE I set the parasailor. Then Liz woke up again and I went to sleep until seven.

And so another day at sea is underway and we're wondering what to do other than change the sails now and then and watch out for boats, birds, dolphins, and whales. We've settled on reading and smaller boat projects, like a sunshade for the cockpit, and I started recording some footage for our pacific crossing movie.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:21

Friday, March 16. 2012

NW of Isla Malpelo

Friday, 2012-03-15, 12:10 local (17:0 UTC), 4:36.0N 81:07.2W, 1006mBar, 28C, COG 195, SOG 7.5kn

Just a quick one, busy fixing the fresh-water installation which developed a leak after all that rolling last night. That's the problem with improvisations because the right parts are not available, you always have to go back to it. Liz says I shouldn't get upset about it, it was my choice to do this trip on a boat. Hard to argue that. Hope the new improvisation lasts until I can get the right parts. Tahiti maybe.

Other than that we saw dolphins and a bird, and during the night two aircraft passed low over us. Or the same twice, who knows. It's pitch black at night now. But we saw Jupiter and Venus nicely huddled together, even took a few photos. Then the wind increased to 30+ kn and I couldn't remember how to best get the Parasailor down in strong winds. Third attempt succeeded. Now I remember: don't let go of any sheets or downhauls and especially not of the line that pulls the sock down. Just gybe gently and when the sail deflates pull the sock down like crazy until you get to the dynamic pressure wing, then wait for this to deflate and then pull again.

The plan is to pass just east of Isla Malpelo (Colombia) and continue SSW, where the weather forecast says the wind is better. Then turn west after we're through the ITCZ.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:52

Thursday, March 15, 2012

Good progress

2012-03-15 17:20 local, 06:15.9N, 80:08.8W

180nm in the last 24h, not bad. In the afternoon we had to take the Parasailor down and unfurl the Genoa for a few hours because the wind was getting up to 30kn and the sea was a little agitated. Rolling left and right, The autopilot can't cope with that, and neither Liz nor I wanted to hand steer. Been there, done that. Now we just reduce sail area, is so much more comfortable.

But then the wind dropped again and we put the Parasailor back up. Now we have 18kn of wind from the back, and heading to 200 degrees at 7.5kn in a very calm sea. Perfect sailing. We keep our fingers crossed that it'll stay like this for a while.

The biggest question now is what we'll have for dinner. Pasta with sauce bolognese (pre-cooked by Liz yesterday) or mashed potatoes with sauerkraut? I love her pasta, but feel very germany-sauerkrauty at the moment :-p

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:31

Animal brain

Thursday, 2012-03-15, 11:40 local (16:40 UTC), 6:47.8N 79:53.7W, 1006mBar, 29C, COG 205, SOG 7kn

Second day at sea. We left much later yesterday than we had hoped for, it was 16:30 by the time we had the anchor up. It was one of those days where one trouble hunts the other, and we almost didn't leave at all. But now that we're underway we're very glad that we did. I'm very glad we're out of Panama and on the way. The place, and the incessant work on the boat, was slowly getting on my nerves. Out here at sea, moving, I feel much better than sitting in the same anchorage week after week.

The wind is up, 15 to 25kn, but it often changes around our back so we gybe with the Parasailor every hour. Some swell has also built up and we're rolling slowly left/right. But we're making between 6 and 9kn, sometimes 10kn surfing down a wave, which is very good. Only sometimes the autopilot can't cope and we get pushed 20 or 30 degrees of course and the boat heels heavily. Good thing Liz tied everything down before we left. But 132nm in 19h is not bad at all.

Over night Liz and I alternated with watches and sleep-cycles. Liz, ever the night-owl, stayed up until 1:30 while I slept in the salon, then we switched and I took the rest of the night watch. The temperature dropped to 20C at night, the temperature of the sea around us, and with the wind it felt cold and we added two more layers of clothing. There was also a lot of condensation in the air, and in a short while everything was wet and slippery. The water in the air gets everywhere, even below decks, which is why electronics usually don't last that long. Scott brought us waterproof covers for our iPads and Kindles, so we hope they last anyway.

Sitting in the cockpit and staring at the sea I feel like I should do something, like take photos, shoot a movie, write blog entries, etc. But the last months were so busy with preparations that all I want to do is lay

back, stare at the sea and at the stars at night, read a book, and sleep. Liz says that's our animal brain talking, which is always in conflict our our big brain. The animal brain just wants to do the minimal for survival, whereas our big brain gives us all these crazy ideas of how we have to make use of the time we're given. Today my animal brain wins.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:55

Underway

Course 170, speed 6.5kn. Downwind, parasailor up. Great sailing, Liz smiles. Would be nice if it stayed like that all the way.
980nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:39

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Go go go

What a day, complete fubar, including three jellyfish that got sucked into the saltwater intake for cooling and almost overheated the engine.

Anyway, now we're kind of ready. Last look at the wind forecast ... oh dear, not much. Waypoints for the next three days:

7:53.6N 79:26.7W

5:37.6N 80:20.9W

3:26.7N 82:00.8W

And then we'll probably run out of wind and drift for a while. Turtle-sailing for sure, drifting on the current. Expected duration for the trip will be around ten days.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:09

Wind? Who needs wind.

Another day, another weather forecast. This one proves that weather forecasts are usually not good for more than two days, because the weather after Friday looks now very different from before, including a noted absence of wind where we want to go.

The calculated ideal route has changed accordingly:

Only problem is that the route kind of ends a few days out from the Galapagos, with not enough wind to sail anywhere, too far to motor, and in a current that will send us back up north. Which means that we'll probably not take this route, but thanks MaxSea anyway.

Instead we'll probably take a southerly route, which brings us to a current that will move us towards the Galapagos at least, if only by 15-20nm per day. Sailing turtle-style: drifting on the currents .

Crop of the pilot chart with currents (green) and average wind direction and strength (blue)

But for now I'll have to put route planning aside because we're not quite done packing all the stuff away. And then we have to go fill up the water tanks, return the rental car, and mail postcards and a will.

A will, correct. Liz and I were sitting in the Cafeteria next to the dinghy dock when a guy asked us whether we would witness his will. He was about to sail for the Galapagos and wanted to post it, just in case. So we witnessed, and because his boat was sailing an hour later I took it and promised to post it.

So, as of now we're still set on leaving in seven hours. We're really done with Panama, and rather prefer to sit in the Ocean waiting for wind than here. But between now and then the tide will come in. And sometimes the tide washes away all plans.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:43

Monday, March 12. 2012

Route planning to the Galapagos

Wednesday we want to leave for the Galapagos. We've managed to clear most items of the to-do list except for:

- Get exit stamp for passports from immigration
- Buy vegetables and some sun cover netting
- Pick up laundry
- Refill water tanks
- Refill dinghy fuel tank
- Prepare food for the first two days
- Check over the starter motor one last time
- Clean the boat
- Post mail
- Plan route to the Galapagos
- Inform agent in Galapagos about expected arrival date

Looks manageable. So what about route planning? One tricky thing about this route is that we have to pass the ITCZ/doldrums, an area around the equator with notoriously little wind. Most boats simply store enough diesel fuel to motor through this area, but it can extend over several hundred miles.

Talking to other cruisers I identified three basic strategies to deal with the ITCZ:

Strategy A: Wait for a good forecast, then sail south close to land until through the ITCZ, then turn west

Strategy B: Wait for a good forecast, then sail straight SW while the wind lasts. Drift or motor the rest.

Strategy C: Ignore the wind, pack at least 500 l of diesel, and motor if necessary all of the way.

Not being very fond of motoring, and only having 60 liter capacity in the main tank, we'll obviously not go for strategy C. But to be save we've also packed a few extra liters of diesel, 140l in total, which will give us a reach of about 300nm.

But let's have a look at the weather:

Wind speed display for Tuesday, Panama to Galapagos, in zyGrib

The weather forecast actually looks quite good. Strategy B might be a viable alternative without having to rely too much on drifting or motoring. To test my theory I had MaxSea calculate an ideal route for us, starting on Wednesday afternoon, with the current weather forecast and a polar diagram of Gudrun V (boat speed at given wind speed and wind angle). And that's what MaxSea came up with:

Calculated ideal route based on the weather and our sailing performance. The weather forecast is only good until the 19th, which is why the route stops there. But it looks quite promising.

Here a polar diagram which is similar enough to Gudrun's performance for this trip. I'll have to record our actual performance and make a accurate one 'one of these days':

Estimated polar diagram for Gudrun for 15kn

I'll be watching the weather forecast over the next two days, and the final decision whether to keep more easterly or not will probably be made only after we've passed the Las Perlas archipelago.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:33

Shopping spree

We're shopping, again. Food is cheap in Panama, very unlike in the Pacific. So we're stocking up for good. Andre, who is in the Galapagos already, asked us to bring wine and chocolate.Å

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:48

Goodies from the galley

As you can imagine from her latest blog entry, one of Liz' worst fears is being stuck out in the ocean without tasty food. Therefor she has been experimenting over the last week what she can make on the boat: Bread, Yoghurt, Cookies, and now ... Twix.

Boat-made Twix bar.

Naturally I have to test all the food. Testing involves eating samples in representative quantities over a course of several days. In the case of the Twix this has led to feelings of elation at every occasion and , surprisingly, a loss of weight. 100% vote for boat-made Twix bars, I hope they are here to stay.

The recipe can be found here: http://www.melecotte.com/2011/06/homemade_twix_bars_recipe/

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:53

Thursday, March 8, 2012

Different side to the fire story.

I told you about the fire on board, right. Now here's Liz take on the story, and as always, her writing is leagues beyond mine.

The whole thing got me thinking: Hull breach and fire on board are the two most dangerous things on a board. Actually, it's the two things that makes boats sink. Everything else like a broken mast or an eskimo roll is a problem, but usually not a terminal one (the latter not so much on a katamaran).

So, I figure: Pretty much everything that is on the boat broke at one point in the past. And I got knocked flat by a freak wave. And I got caught in a force 12 storm and lightning storms. And we ran aground (twice). AND we had a hole in the hull. AND we had a fire on board.

That means now we're kind of through with all that disaster stuff, right? I mean, everything that could possible happen has happened. So now ... let the good times come!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:09

Wasser marsch!

The watermaker is running! Watch as it makes it's first milliliters of fresh water from salt walter and solar power:

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:01

Exciting times in Panama

We're busy preparing for the trip to the Galapagos and beyond. We're hearing a lot about how hard it is to stock up in the Pacific and that everything is very expensive, but by now we know that these reports have to be taken with a grain of salt. Information tends to develop a life on it's own once it's passed down the information chain, especially when sailors are involved in passing it on.

But yesterday an email from our friend Andre, who is in the Galapagos at the moment, came in, asking for a shipment of lures, wine, Nutella, and chocolate. He reports prices for wine 4x as much as here, so there is something to it, at least when it comes to wine.

Stocking up on fuel (140l) and water (300l)

While Liz managing the supplies, I'm still working on improvements, upgrades, and repairs for Gudrun. That work experienced a small setback on Tuesday, after I had to fight a fire near the anchor windlass.

Results of a brief cable fire.

The "Up" switch got stuck on the handheld control for the windlass and set it in motion. Only the motion was abruptly stopped a foot later by the anchor chain relieve line which is tied around the chain and a cleat. With the switch engaged but the chain locked in place, something had to give eventually, and it was the cable between control box and windlass motor.

Resolution: Fight fire with extinguisher, wait until smoke clears, take forepeak apart, inspect and replace damaged wires, install a new circuit breaker switch to prevent this from happening in the future. Put everything back together. Now, where can I refill my fire extinguisher around here?

Liz returning a dinghy that had 'escaped' from our neighbors.

When we're not busy with our own boat there is plenty of stuff going on on other boats to keep us entertained. Like dinghies escaping from our neighbors, or outboard engines not starting, which results either in a tow or a hand in repairing the thing. Or both. And then there's the Allbrook mall for shopping. I don't know why but the voices in my head told me to buy a PS Vita.

Despite all those attractions work on Gudrun progresses steadily. Last night I finished installing the PowerSurvivor 160E desalinator, which was the last big project - I hope for a while. Today I'll check over the installation (always advisable after working in the dark), and then we'll run it for a few hours for testing. Very exciting! We also have our Zarpe, so all we need to do before leaving is stock up on food, do the laundry, get the passports stamped ... and wait for the last shipment of spare parts to arrive from Miami. Amongst the shipment is a spare starter motor for the engine, which, given the trouble I've had with that, I consider now essential to have.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:31

Sunday, March 4, 2012

Anchorage life

With Scott gone we're back to the usual routine: working on the boat, shopping for supplies, meeting other cruisers in the evening. Having Scott on board and sailing a few days felt like a vacation, and made us realize how little cruisers actually sail, unless it's to go from one place to another. There are maybe 200 boats at anchor around Isla Flamenco, but in two weeks I haven't seen a single boat out despite perfect sailing conditions.

Thursday evening cruiser's regular table at the pizzeria

Saturday Mark and Liesbet came to visit and stayed over night. After a breakfast Sunday morning Mark winched me up the mast so that I could replace the VHF antenna which had broken off during one of the crazy Colombian christmas gusts which reached up to 60kn.

Breakfast

View from the top

Antenna: gone

Hope the new antenna fares better. Actually, I hope that there won't be any more 60kn gusts around.

The plan for next week is to finish installing the Katadyn desalinator, which is the last big project. There are a few smaller things which will take another few days all together, but with the desalinator installed I hope that the big projects are over until we get to NZ. Wouldn't that be nice?

And after next week? Wait for good winds and then head off in to the Pacific proper, destination Galapagos.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:46

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Sailing with Scott

Mark and Liesbet left us on Friday, but Scott's flight back to Princeton was only due on Tuesday. So after preparing Gudrun V for sailing on Friday we lifted the anchor on Saturday and sailed to Isla Tobago in the south where we tied to a mooring bouy and then listed to spanish disco music that wafted over from shore most of the night.

Scott at the helm

Village on Isla Taboga

Sunday we got up early nevertheless to sail around the little island in perfect weather - sun and 15kn of wind. We dropped anchor in a little bay on the south side where Scott went snorkeling. The water here on the pacific side is 8C colder than on the Caribbean side, and therefor 21C felt cold to my dangling feet. But, as Scott who is used to real winter temperatures assured me, it is not actually cold, and so I jumped in after a fe minutes consideration. I was quickly happy that I had done so. I haven't had a swim since early January in the San Blas islands. I inspected the propeller and hull of Gudrun and scraped of the first few barnacles that had already accumulated - after only three weeks. So much for the effectiveness of aluminium-compatible anti-fouling.

Lots of Pelicans around

Scott snorkeling

After lunch we slept some, then continued our circle around the island and then sailed back to the La Playita anchorage. On the way we cut 10m off the anchor chain, which is too long to fit comfortably into the tube and frequently jams on the last meters. We now have 50m left, which is ok for up to 15m of depth. For deeper water or in strong winds we have to throw in the spare Fortress anchor, chain, and rope that we keep in the cockpit locker.

Weight trim

Monday morning we went ashore because I had to order some parts, then Liz dinghied us back to the boat and left again to sit in a cafe and write while Scott and I went out again to sail. We set course downwind towards Isla Taboga again and tried different sail configurations. W then turned around to sail close-hauled towards Panama city. In 15kn of true wind and calm seas Gudrun set a new personal speed record to windward: 7.8kn at 60 degrees apparent wind angle. Fantastic!

7.8kn at 60 degrees apparent wind angle on a newly calibrated log

Parasailor

My old Gennaker from Vespina

Gennaker and Genoa

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:11

Gudrun's Panama Canal transit

Our guests and line-handlers Scott, Liesbet and Mark arrived Wednesday morning within minutes of each other. Liz and I were still busy getting the boat ready, so Scott took a seat in the restaurant and Mark and Liesbet went to another sailboat for a pre-arranged visit to sell and install one of their wiries. By noon we were done and had lunch together, then I checked out of the marina and at 2pm we cast off and headed for the "flats" anchorage to wait for our adviser.

Mark fixing my wirie which I smoked accidentally by switching the wires

The adviser showed up at 4pm and we proceeded to the first set of locks, the Gatun locks. We were scheduled to transit them with the "Sargento Aldea", an amphibious assault ship of 12000 tons that Chile had bought second hand from France in December and which was on it's way to Chile. Shortly before the locks we tied up with two other boats and then entered the locks together, Gudrun as the port hull of the makeshift trimaran.

Approaching the lock behind the Sargento Aldea and two other sailboats

Entering the locks as a raft

As the doors closed and water began to stream in I played Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" on the cockpit stereo which I had installed for that purpose, and everybody broke into a big laugh. It took the edge of the tension that had built up among the three skippers and crew, and started a row of bantering between the boats about British and Germans in general, and beers and humor in particular.

We passed through the locks without incident and dropped anchor in the anchorage just behind the locks. After dinner (Pasta) everybody went to bed early because we were scheduled to receive our adviser early the next morning at 6am, just like on Venus and Mojomo the week before.

Breakfast table

Only this time we had to wait until twelve before an adviser showed up. Surprise, surprise. We then proceeded at maximum speed (up to 7.5kn) and soon left the other boats far behind us. Which was just as well, because we just made it to the rendezvous with "Sophia Z", a freighter with which we were scheduled to transit the Pedro Miguel locks at 4:30pm. As we learned later, the two other boats had to spend another night on the lake.

Sailing on lake Gatun

Approaching the Centennial bridge

Between the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks I noticed that less cooling water was coming out of the exhaust than usual. Lacking a temperature gauge I took a reading with the infrared kitchen thermometer and measured the engine block at 76C, 10C more than I measure normally. As far as you can call somebody who regularly points a kitchen thermometer at his engine normal. I left the engine cover open to help in the cooling and in the next lock Mark and I checked the salt water strainer and impeller, but couldn't find a fault. Mark suspected that something was jammed in the hose, but we didn't want to take it off the thru-hull with 10.000 tons of freighter 20m behind us. When I took the hose off the thru-hull later I found a piece of a plastic bag inside, which we must have sucked up in the lock.

Side-wall in front of Sophia Z

Not a lot of space

But we made it through the locks and then proceeded down the channel to the La Playita anchorage where we arrived at 9pm and dropped the anchor to everybody's relieve. Beers and vegetable soup followed and then we went to bed because everybody was really tired after a long and exciting day.

Last lock opening

The lock crew

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:10

Friday, February 24. 2012

In the Pacific

Last night we arrived at nine in the La Playita anchorage at Isla Flamenco. Difficult internet, more in a few days. Will probably sail a bit with Scott.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:59

Thursday, February 23. 2012

Miraflores locks

We made it to the Miraflores locks. Only two more chambers until the Pacific.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:26

Panama Canal Crisis update

News from our canal agent came in that our advisor would arrive at 10:30. At 11 a boat arrived and dropped of advisors at the two boats that we went through the locks with yesterday. And then it left again.

So we are still waiting for an advisor, along with two other monohulls who came in very late last night, past 9pm. It looks like we've been reassigned to proceed with these boats, and I only hope that we're not going to go through the next locks that late. But it's all in the hands of the canal authorities now.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:27

Crisis continues in the Panama Canal

No official news yet on what is causing the lock-down on Gatun lake. All vessels coming in through the Gatun locks are dropping their anchors noisily, and we are now surrounded by three PANAMAX container vessels, a few smaller bulk carriers, and the cruise liner Zunderdam.

Channel 12 is still down, but Channel 16 is very busy, although no news is forthcoming. Have the Miraflores lock blown out? Have all lock operators been eaten by crocodiles?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:12

Panama Canal Crisis

Yesterday we left the marina at 2pm to pick up our canal advisor at the flats anchorage. We went through the first set of locks, the Gatun Locks, and dropped the anchor at 6:30 in Gatun lake.

According to schedule we were supposed to continue across the lake at 6:00 in the morning with a new advisor. Now it's 8:30 and nobody has showed up yet. Which gave us time for an extended breakfast, but now it would be nice if we could get going because we don't want to miss the cruiser's regulars table at la playita in the evening.

Speculations are running wild as to what is causing the delay. We tried to listen in on the canal channel 12, but it's busy with static. Very irregular. Is it the aftermath of Carnival?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:12

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Ready for transit Panama Canal

Today's the big day: in the evening we'll go through the Gatun locks and into the Panama Canal. Canal rules require to have four line-handlers on board, who's job it is (surprise) to handle the four mooring lines, two at the bow, two at the stern, and make sure that the boat stays in the center of the locks and doesn't crash into a wall or another boat.

Sailboats in the Panama Canal lock

Two of the lines will be handled by Liesbet and Mark, once by Scott who is flying in from Princeton for the privilege, and the last by Liz. The original plan called for Scott's wife Marilyn at the 4th line, but unfortunately she can't make it. You'll be missed Marilyn, hope to see you in the Pacific! Because Liz will be busy with the lines she spend the whole night cooking and preparing food for our guests - and the canal advisor who will come on board. As we've already learned on Venus and Mojomo, the advisors can get very grumpy when they're not fed.

The question is: are we ready? Kind of. After two more days of work on the starter motor and electrical system we made it out of the marina yesterday and took Gudrun for a test run. The good news is that we made it out and back in and that we also managed to reach max hull speed by engine, which turned out to be 7.5kn. The bad news is that starting the engine is still somewhat unreliable, but it seems to be improving.

Liz at the helm during the test run

The starter motor which is causing trouble frequently

Well, you've got to work with what you've got. We'll make it through the Canal one way or the other, and then probably spend another week on repairs. Two of the solar panels aren't connected yet, and the desalinator isn't installed either. But the Silentwind is working, which makes me very hapoy. And we have music and light in the cockpit now, which makes us even more happy. So if all else fails we can just run engine sounds through the stereo on max vol.

Let there be light. And music.

And we thought that we would be done in two weeks. Now it's four weeks of uninterrupted work on the boat, and we're not there yet. Shame is that there is a very nice pool here in the marina, but we haven't made it there once yet. But as Stein commented yesterday: "If you want to know how long it takes to finish work on the boat, you have to multiply the original estimate by PI". Because there are always complications, and you loose a lot of time looking for parts or improvising. And the formula seems to work out very well.

Anyway, a big THANK YOU to Liz for your incredible patience, persistence, stamina, support, and love. You worked very hard the last weeks, uncomplaining, and your help and presence makes a big difference. Love ya.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:47

Sunday, February 19, 2012

Provisioning and cleaning

While I've been busy with repairs and installation and sorting through the contents of lockers, Liz was equally busy (if not more). She planned the provisioning, went shopping, organized the shelving space, and thoroughly cleaned the boat. Which included the bilge, which certainly hasn't seen that much cleaning in the last 30 years.

Provisioning spree!

Liz 1 : Dirty bilge 0

One of the weak spots of Gudrun is the permanently wet bilge, because of the mast that sticks through the deck. Any time it rains water runs down the mast and accumulates in the top of the keel. Any other items that fall through the cracks in the flooring also make their way there, as do any leaking fluids from the engine (e.g. when the oil cooler exploded). And of course it's hard to reach, e.g. my arms just don't fit through the crack.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:41

Happiness

Happiness is indirectly proportional to the number of things that you perceive to go wrong. The more things go wrong, the unhappier you are. When everything looks like it's going well, you're pretty soon maxing out on happiness.

When the engine doesn't start five days before the appointed Panama Canal transit, a lot of things seem to go wrong and happiness goes down the drain. Which is exactly what happened Friday morning. I wanted to start the engine and nothing happened. Click, click, click. No cranking, no stuttering. Just click.

Normally four days should be enough time to sort this kind of problem out. But outside North America and Western Europe marine engine parts are notoriously hard to get. And because on four of the five remaining days shops are closed because of Carnival it's easy to panic.

But feeling panicked is exactly the wrong state of mind for fault-finding or crucial repairs. So instead of throwing myself at the problem immediately I went off to find Greg, the local tinkerer. Every marina has a Greg: Somebody with a knack for mechanical repairs who once sailed there, then got stuck, and is now a permanent installation and busy everyday fixing other people's boats. Which means Greg is notoriously hard to find. So I left a message with his son, asking him to come over to Gudrun when he has some time to help me with the engine.

Then I decided it would be best to ignore the engine problem for a little while and work on something else: filling the fridge cooling circuit with refrigerant.

The new gauges and 134a gas canister were hooked up quickly, but when I looked at the gauges I realized that I had no clue how much gas I should put into the circuit. So I started with "a little" and stopped when the temperature of the evaporator got below zero and then some more. Which turned out to be 8psi on the low side (fridge turned on), and 38psi on the high side (fridge turned off).

With the beer being cooled down I felt slightly more in control of my environment and turned to the engine. After starting at the beginning (electrical connections) and then making sure that the solenoid is ok, the evidence pointed to a faulty start motor. So I removed that from the engine and took it apart. Only to find that it was pretty dirty inside.

Source of the problem: dirty collector on the starter motor

While I was working on it Greg came along. Together we cleaned the starter motor, put it back together, and mounted it on the engine. Turned the key and the engine started. Hurray! From unhappy to very happy in a fraction of a second.

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

After that Greg checked over the pressure on the refrigerant and declared it to be fine as well. As the sun set I took two cans of cold beer out of the fridge, and zzzzisch, everything was bliss.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 04:16

Thursday, February 16. 2012

Shopping, cleaning, engine

This morning we went shopping: Liz for snap-lock containers and food, and I for o-rings, 134a refrigerant and gauges, water filters, and \$500 more worth of necessary tools and parts ... aaaaargh!

It's interesting how we fall into the traditional roles on the boat. Liz takes care of the 'household', while I do the 'home improvement' part. But since Liz isn't much into fixing engines and fridges ...

Liz cleaning the bilge

Axel very happy that the engine runs without spraying oil all over the place and no warning lights coming on

So Liz does the provisioning and cooking, and I do the repairs, planning, and sailing. Tomorrow we want to go out to test the engine, and to teach Liz how to handle the boat under motor. My hope is that by the time we get to the Galapagos she can sail the boat on her own if need be. So far the weather at sea wasn't great for starting to learn. But the winds between Panama and the Galapagos are much lighter.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 21:07

Wednesday, February 15, 2012

Solar panels, oil cooler, and silentwind news

The solar panels are up and working, and the oil cooler is installed. Now I have to re-assemble the cooling circuit of the engine, but for that I need new o-rings. So off to colon tomorrow morning to go search for spare parts.

New oil cooler being installed

Did I mention that the fridge stopped working yesterday? I think I did. And today the shower pump stopped as well. It's really like that: for every item that goes of the list, another one sneaks in. Boats!

Unfortunately that means that we probably won't make it to Panama for Carnival on the weekend. But with a little luck maybe Tuesday for the big parade.

Another thing that arrived yesterday via FedEx was ... a replacement charge controller for the Silentwind wind generator. The executive manager of silent wind got in touch with me last week, was very apologetic and helpful and immediately send the replacement controller. I switched the controllers and now the wind generator is running again. Before it was always on brake mode even though the brake was off, the batteries half empty and solar panels and land charger disconnected. Will be interesting to hear what the problem was, as the display etc. worked fine.

I'll keep the air breeze as spare, in case the charge controller stops working again after the next 30kn gust. But I hope that the issue is fixed, and that I get to sell the air breeze again eventually. The silentwind is rated with 600W, and the air breeze only with 300W,

Actually, now that I have another charge controller capable of controlling a solar panel, I can hook up every solar panel to it's own controller. 2 panels to a BlueSky 2000E each, one panel to the Silentwind controller, and one panel to a Rutland controller that I still have on the boat. Wow, i feel so much in control

Solar panels now mounted on top of the (extended) bimini frame. Finally a good view out the back!

The top of the Bimini is not the perfect place for solar panels. First, because there's often shade from the main sail, and second because I can't angle the panels to face the sun. But it's very, very convenient. So to make up for lack of angular flexibility I added two extra panels.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:20

Video from the haul-out, solar panels

A short video of some of the work done on Gudrun while hauled out. I can definitely say that watching the video is more fun than doing the work ;-):

Thanks to our two trips to Panama I was able to get some 1" stainless steel tubing for the bimini. First trip I ordered it at Abernathy's in Flamenco Marina, and Sunday I picked it up. Uwe came to shore with Gisela and a saw, and I cut the two 6m long tubes into size for transportation. Then we had ice cream, yummy.

Monday morning I picked up the oil cooler at the cargo terminal of Tocumen airport. But the package came with a surprise - a customs inspector. His job was to make sure that the package actually is for the boat, and so I had to hire a taxi right away and drive with him the 1 1/2h to the boat, leaving Liz in Panama to complete her shopping. Incredible. But I got it! Hope to install it later today.

The rest of Monday I spent emptying the lockers and preparing for work on the bimini/solar-panel construction. Tuesday morning at 5:30am I started and at 5pm it was done: Bimini-frame extended to support the weight and the solar panels fastened on top. Then I started running the cables to the charge controllers. Each panel has it's own cable, the 85W panels the 4mm² (AWG12) that came with them, the 135W panels 10mm² (AWG8) left over from installing the wind

generator. Today I want to connect the two BlueSky 2000E mppt controllers and finish the installation. Each controller will handle two panels, one the two starboard, and the other the two port panels. This way I hope to eliminate most shading problems, but we'll see. Total output is rated at 430W.

So Tuesday went very well and it looked like I was ahead of time. But then the fridge stopped working again, so there you go. One item off the list, another on it. Boat life. Now our cheese and butter is in the fridge over at Didier's boat.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 04:55

Sunday, February 12. 2012

Through the panama canal - again

Once isn't enough, the last two days we went through the Panama Canal again. This time on our friend Matt's Privilege 495, a catamaran of 50ft. Sooo muuuch spaaace!

February 11th, 2012 - Panama Canal transit on SY Mojomo

Here's something special - a short timelapse movie of the trip:

I've mounted a GoPRO camera on the bow of the port hull and let it take a photo every two seconds. Later I cut the longer bits on the lake out, because it's kind of boring. The locks really are the interesting part.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:00

Thursday, February 9, 2012

Launch and Canal passage

The "splash" on Tuesday didn't happen since the travel lift operators were a little disorganized and run out of time before end of the day. But Wednesday morning we put Gudrun back into the water, and in the afternoon we left for the passage through the Panama canal.

Not on Gudrun of course - there's more work for at least another week, and the oil cooler is still stuck at the custom's office at Panama airport. We helped out as line handlers on SY Venus, the boat of our friends Gisela and Uwe.

Gisela and Uwe

Line-handlers Liz, Axel, and Didier

Going into the lock behind a container ship

Uwe at the helm at night

The skyline of Panama City

Well, I don't want to say too much about the trip through the canal now. Mark of Irie said that it would be boring and exciting at the same time, and Liz says he's right. I was too busy shooting and editing the video to get a real feel for it. But since we're helping Matt of Mojomo tomorrow as well, I'll have a second chance. Oh, and of course there's our passage on the 22nd as well. Btw, here's the movie of the last two days:

A little rough (and long) and without soundtrack yet, but all I could manage during the passage.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 21:50

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

The post doesn't deliver here

For three weeks now I'm walking into the marina office every day to ask whether mail for my boat has arrived. And every day the staff asks me by what courier, I answer every day "postal service", and they say no, there is no mail. And I leave. But the letter is now under way for four weeks, and that seems like a very long time even for Panama. So I asked yesterday, how often they get mail. And they say "We never get mail." And then the conversation went like this:

"What do you mean?"

"The post doesn't deliver here."

"Why didn't you say that earlier? For three weeks I'm asking for mail now."

He shrugs

"So how do I get my mail?"

"You have to go to the post office in Colon and pick it up."

"And what do I tell them?"

"You ask for mail for Shelter Bay Marina and they show you a box"

"Well, thank you. I hope the letter is still there. Maybe you should be a little more specific about the shipping options on your website. Because both UPS and postal service don't work, and how should anybody know that."

"Yes maybe".

Well, the good thing is that they actually really updated their website:

http://www.shelterbaymarina.com/services/shipping_packages_marina.html

Instead of only the address and their fees for receiving a package they now clearly say that both UPS and postal service can be problematic and offer alternatives. It's actually a very good page now. It's just my luck that my senders picked those two services. If I had known in advance, I could have told them and avoided all the trouble.

Well ... voyaging is fixing your boat in exotic places. And fighting to get the necessary spare parts.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:11

How to glue nylon fittings

What do you do when you need a reducer, say from 3/4" to 1/2", but only have nylon elbow fittings of either size? Take a knife and a glue gun and build your own reducer.

It's not pretty, but it is strong and doesn't leak

Nylon (and PVC) is notoriously hard to glue with regular glue, super glue or epoxy. On the other hand nylon is a thermoplastic, and bonds well with other thermoplastics when heated. Pattex hotmelt sticks are also thermoplastics, and when the glue comes out of the gun it's hot enough to melt the nylon and bond together very well.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:09

Monday, February 6, 2012

Ready for splash

Today we moved the supports to sand, epoxy, and paint the places of the hull that were so far inaccessible.

Moving the supports

Those spots have to be sanded and painted too

With the anti-fouling completed I turned my attention towards the propeller: inspect, clean, readjust, and grease. With the current pitch of 22 degrees the boat is a bit slow, so I wanted to increase the pitch by one setting to 24 degrees, which should give us half a knot more maximum speed at slightly lower rpms. Unless I made a mistake putting the thing back together and we go backwards instead of forwards or whatever. But I guess they can always lift us out again to correct that.

Propeller parts

Propeller re-installed with new pitch of 24 degrees. Go measure.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 21:49

Getting there!

Saturday and Sunday we had the help of a contract worker. He sanded, Liz cleaned, and I applied the epoxy. This way we could go around the boat without having to switch tools and that speeded everything up tremendously. After the epoxy had set we roughed it a bit, then washed down the hull and applied the anti-fouling paint (Seahawk Biotin). Today we can move the supports and finish that job, hurray!

Painting the hull

Other than the hull I'm working on the solar panels and the Katadyn 160E desalinator. At the moment the solar panels are mounted on top of the small davids and hang out of the back of the boat. That is not only a lot of weight beyond the water line, but also that we have to duck under them every time we leave and enter the boat. Also the davids are too small for our dinghy, so we can't use them. The idea is to remove the davids and move the two 135W solar panels on top of the bimini, together with the two new 80W solar panels I bought to help run the desalinator. Fresh water from salt water and the sun, I feel sooo green.

Liz demonstrating how to apply anti-fouling to the boat and herself.

The desalinator uses 18A per hour for 24l of fresh water, Usually we use 5 to 10l a day, but you know how it is: usage always expands to fit the available resources. I therefor expect it to run for about an hour every day. The two 80W panels should produce about 80Ah per day together, so after the desalinator is taken care of we can charge our laptops. On the boat 20l is enough water for two to drink, cook, do the dishes, and even shower. So water and power 'in abundance' ... luxury! Until one of them breaks down . Makes you really appreciate the water & electricity grid we can just plug into at home (not to mention internet and all the other infrastructure services).

Regarding the UPS shipment of the oil cooler my canal agent Roy Bravo offered to help and pick it up for me at the airport.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:05

Saturday, February 4, 2012

Not going so well

After pressure-washing and sanding down the boat we had a unpleasant surprise. In more than 500 little spots the epoxy coating had peeled off and the hull was corroded through electrolysis, especially above the propeller and along the water line.

Electrolysis above the propeller

Spots marked and partially patched with Loctite Hysol 3475

There are a number reasons for that. First, the painter in Las Palmas did a bad job preparing the hull for the epoxy coating. Second, the previous owner made a mistake when installing the electrical systems. The hull should be completely isolated, but it isn't, the ground is on the hull. And I think the one anode at the keel is not enough for the whole hull. It's easy to see that the corrosion is worse the further away it is from the anode. For us that means a few days of extra work: repairing all the electrolysis spots, adding another layer of epoxy, rewire the electrical installation, and if at all possible add more anodes. But we've planned for delays, so we should be still ok. I'm more worried about the fact that some parts haven't arrived yet, especially the oil cooler for the engine. First it sat for two weeks in customs, then I received an email from UPS saying "A CORRECT COMPANY OR RECEIVER NAME IS NEEDED FOR DELIVERY. UPS IS ATTEMPTING TO OBTAIN THIS INFORMATION". Which basically means "we have a shipment but we don't know what to do with it". So I called. Turns out, they cannot deliver the shipment for some reason they wouldn't mention, and I have to personally go to the airport, pick it up, and take it through customs. Only problem: the airport is 100km away and Panamanian authorities are not known for being super efficient. Which means it will take a full day to get that package and probably substantial taxi and other fees.

There seems generally to be a problem with deliveries here, since many other owners I spoke to have stuff that is held up, arrived at the wrong place, or was returned without delivery. But I need that oil cooler, and can't risk having it send back to the UK. So instead of arguing with UPS, all I can do is make the best out of it. Making the best out of it seems to be a recurring theme on the boat. Another shipment that hasn't fully arrived is the one from Marinewarehouse.net regarding the changes to the plumbing. I'm still missing an elbow fitting to connect the toilet to the thru-hull, which I need because the hose doesn't bend as much as it would have to. But they didn't send it, they don't know when they'll send it, and I couldn't find one here. So I had to make one myself from a straight fitting with the help of a hand-saw, sandpaper, and "Uhu Endfest 300" epoxy glue (I love that stuff).

Self-made elbow fitting (Marelon)

It was kind of a desperate measure, but it worked surprisingly well. First I tried to brake it in two, then I pressure-tested it by closing the sea-cock and pumping the toilet until I could pump no more. It held. Thanks dad for patiently showing me how to properly use a hand-saw and cut a straight line.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:25

Wednesday, February 1. 2012

Progress

Surprise, surprise, the sanitation jobs are done. The old holes are sealed up, the new hole is cut and the thru-hull installed. It was my first thru-hull installation, and I was a bit nervous. After all, if I do it wrong the boat will sink. But now that it's done I can say that there really isn't much too it: a hole, a backing plate, the thru-hull, a seacock, and marine sealant. But I can imagine that it was a major headache before the days of 3M's 5200 family of products, which provide great sealing and bonding.

I'm so glad this is done. In total I got rid of 6m of hose, the thru-hulls are where I can inspect them easily, and the seacocks where I can close them without having to take half the boat apart. So today we can start on the hull. First we have to remove the calcium deposits left by barnacle shells with acid, wash it down, lightly sand the hull, and after that paint the anti-fouling on it. This is certainly a time where you wished the boat was smaller. I hope that together we will be done by tomorrow evening, which gives the anti-fouling 2 1/2 days to set before we go back into the water on Sunday. In the meantime I can work on the propeller and shaft.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 04:43

Tuesday, January 31. 2012

Changes to the blog

I haven't blogged a lot in the last months. So much was happening, and I was simply busy keeping up with real life and didn't have a lot time left for this electronic life. Which I guess is a good thing. It's also busier now that Liz is on board then before, and I spend more time with her and less in front of the computer. Although with photography, learning about repairs, ordering parts, planning the trip, and staying (more or less) in touch with home I do spend an awful lot of time in front of the screen. Anyway, I've set up my blog now so that I can make posts easier by email, including photos, and I hope that this way I will be able to keep the blog more up to date. I've also updated the design a little bit and did some general maintenance like removing content that was out of date. Over the next few weeks I'll add some general content, like how, who, why. I hope to start something like a tips & tricks section, basically so that I have a way/motivation to write down what I learn on the way.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:39

Successful haul-out

Everything worked fine and Gudrun V is now on the hard. One shock was when I asked the travel lift operator about the weight, and he said 10 tons. Last time I hauled out in Las Palmas it was 8 tons. But that was with empty tanks, no sails, no solar panels, no dinghy, etc. Since then I added a lot to the boat and this time I filled up all the tanks and jerry cans before getting into the lift. The boat is also filled with food, so this is the real cruising weight. 10 tons, wow. After haul-out I've managed to change the hose from the galley sink and it now goes straight down instead of through half the boat. Today I will try to remove two old thru-hulls that I don't need anymore now. I hope that works, but I expect the stainless steel bolts to be corrosion-welded to the hull, and the hulls are not very accessible. If I can't get them off, then I'll have to seal them with epoxy putty and 5200. That will work as well, but it's not as clean. After that I can drill the hole for a the new head outlet. Drilling holes in your boat always feels completely wrong. Like why would you drill a hole into something that is supposed to keep you afloat. But sealing two inaccessible holes with old, leaky, thru-hulls and replacing them with one new very accessible one is definitely a good thing. Here some photos from the haul-out action:

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:20

Monday, January 30, 2012

Panama

The capt'n taking a well-earned rest in the shade. Monday, 2012-01-30, 05:00 local, 9:22.7N, 79:57.4W, Shelter Bay Marina, Colon, Panama

Last week Monday we said good-bye to Irie and left the San Blas archipelago to sail to Colon, Panama. Here we wanted to haul-out and prepare for the canal passage and the Pacific. Unlike the sail from Colombia, the weather was next to perfect. Winds of 10-20kn and only 2-3ft waves (within the sheltered archipelago 1/2ft). Actually the archipelago is so sheltered because of the outlying reefs that sailing there reminds me of Lake Constanze, only with palm trees instead of apple trees. We wanted to arrive in Colon in the morning, so we left in the early afternoon for the trip of 100nm, all on a starboard tack. Liz had made plenty of pasta salad in advance so we didn't have to cook, and we spent the whole time lying in the cockpit sleeping, talking, reading, watching out. We arrived almost to the minute at 9am in the Marina. I called the dock master over the radio and he gave us a slip - C6. We docked and high-fived for a perfect trip from lifting the anchor to tying off the knots. Yes, sailing can be nice, too.

MS Queen Elizabeth entering the first lock to Lake Gatun. From Tuesday until Friday we were busy with paperwork and arrangements for immigration, canal passage, haul-out, local sim-cards, and following up on shipments that I've ordered before leaving Colombia. But Friday morning everything came together: First the measurer arrived to inspect the boat for the canal passage, an hour later I got the OK to haul out on Monday, in the afternoon the date for the canal passage was confirmed, and in the evening the big shipment from Warehouse Marine arrived - anti-fouling, Katadyn desalinator, wind generator, solar panels, new thru-hull fittings, and a ton of hoses, valves, and connectors. That will keep me busy for a while. Saturday we cleaned the boat and prepared it for haul-out as well as guests for dinner (Michele and Mark from Reach), and yesterday we could just relax. I played a round of "Legends of Yore" in the morning while Liz wrote, and in the afternoon I went out with Michele and Josie from Jedi to take photos while Liz met Mark on Reach to play guitar together.

Chestnut-headed oropendola in a few hours we'll haul out. The plan for today is to clean the hull, then take out the floorboards and remove the hoses from head, galley and the thru-hulls. When the previous owner changed the location of the head from fore to aft he didn't change the thru-hulls but just rerouted the installation in a way that now both the galley and the head have a few meters of hose and too many bends, which causes a lot of complications. Also the thru-hulls are very inaccessible and two actually can't be quite closed anymore due to electrolysis in the thru-hulls (made of stainless steel and aluminium). That is reason enough to move and replace them with marelon thru-hulls and seal the old holes. But it won't be fun. Fortunately we managed to get a hotel room in the marine hotel while we're hauled out. So we can move some stuff to the hotel room to make space for working, and have a clean place to sleep while work is going on.

Posted by Axel Busch at 04:48

Saturday, January 21. 2012

Another palm-tree studded island

Paradise! Saturday, 2012-01-12, 07:00 local, 9:30N, 78:37W, at anchor east of Olosicuidup island

The last week we were at anchor in front of Waisaladup, a very small island maybe 20m long and 10m wide with high palm trees surrounded by a white beach. It doesn't get much more picture perfect than that. Liz wrote on her book and I worked on the boat and went diving, and in the evenings we met up with Mark and Liesbet from Irie for drinks and dinner. Now and then another boat would come by, but most of the time Gudrun V and Irie were on their own. Then Irie ran out of water and had to go to a few miles south to a Kuna village to stock up. Upon their return we lifted anchor and intended to sail together to the next group of islands, the Coco Bandero Cays. Another set of palm-tree studded picture perfect postcard islands.

Liz shopping for "molas", patterned cloth panels The sailing together part didn't quite work out, because we had some trouble lifting the anchor and it took as half an hour until we could leave the anchorage. The chain on Gudrun V runs into a plastic tube instead of into a chain locker, and when I let out more than 20m of chain there is always trouble getting it back in because it fouls up inside the tube and then wraps around the anchor winch and is a lot of sweat and trouble to free. Though, Liz noted, I stopped cursing when things like that happen and just work on it quietly and patiently. So maybe something good is coming out of all that, but personally I'd rather have things running smoothly. It's not only more comfortable, it's also safer. So we have another big project on the to-do list there. The previous owner installed all kinds of ingenious solutions on this boat which, like the plastic tube, sound fine in theory but don't quite work in practice. I call it "Catalan Engineering", because he's from Barcelona and proud of it, and so far it has kept me busy with fixing things every other day since I bought the boat in July 2010.

By the time we were ready to go Irie was far ahead, and because it's only a one hour sail there was no way we could catch up. The sailing was great though. 15kn of wind on the nose in flat water due to the protection of the reefs. Perfect conditions to set Gudrun at a very sporty 30 degree angle to the wind and sail along with a lot of heel and a lot of fun. She is a race-boat after all. The fun stopped for a minute at the only tacking point. The dinghy and kayak we were dragging behind slowed the boat down enough during the maneuver that we didn't make it through the tack, and were caught in irons (pointed at the wind, not moving). Not a good situation with a reef only a few boat-lengths to the lee, so it got a little hectic until we had started the engine to help us through that rather embarrassing situation.

When we reached the cays Mark came out in the dinghy to guide us in. This was only our second "reefy place", and while we're starting to gain trust in our judgement of water depths by color, it just takes a while to feel comfortable running into a unknown rocky place with a 2.5m draft. Until then I'd rather ask a friend for help than foolishly run aground due to misplaced sailor's pride. Thanks Mark. For a sundowner we dinghied over to an outlying island, Orduptarboat, which is just big enough for two palm trees.

The island is only 50m south of the long reef that protects the cays from the Caribbean sea, and just north of the island a broken wreck of a coastal barge is lying on that same reef. Mariners beware. The plan is to spend today here then sail to Shelter Bay Marina in Colon, Panama, for haul out. Later today I have to call the marina and re-confirm the haul-out for the 25th. They weren't sure because of the arrival of boats for the World ARC, many of which needed to haul out as well before their passage through the canal on the 30th. I kind of expect that our haul-out will be delayed, but then we just spend a few more days here among the picture postcard perfect palm tree islands. What a life.

Posted by Axel Busch at 06:39

Monday, January 16. 2012

San Blas islands

Waisaladup, Gudrun V Monday, 16.01.2012, 04:00 local, 9:28.21N, 78:38.18W, at anchor

It's beautiful here in the San Blas. Hundreds of tiny little islands covered in one to many coconut palm trees. But don't go picking one! All the coconuts belong to a Kunda indian, and they get royally pissed if you just harvest their source of income for free. Reminds me of the "Obstbauern vom Bodensee", the orchard farmers from around lake Constanz. They also get quite angry when you pick an apple from their trees while cycling along. But quite unlike their south German counterparts the Kunda indians travel with dug-out kanus from islands to island, to catch coconuts and fish and lobster. Then they travel from boat to boat trying to sell them. A few have outboard engines, but most simply paddle, or use a sail downwind. So every day, depending on the weather, you can expect a knock or two or hey! hey! calls and visitors grinning up at you.

In the eastern caribbean that is often a hassle, since the locals don't leave you alone unless you buy something. And then they come back the more for it. Here it's more relaxed. No gracias and off they go. Since we arrived the wind has been blowing quite a lot and the sky is overcast. Without a working wind generator that is less than ideal, and it looks like tomorrow we'll have to turn off the fridge. When we wanted to dinghy over to Irie for dinner on Saturday the outboard engine failed to start, so we rowed. Rowing back against the wind was especially funny, and a little alcohol and the fact that Liz and I each wanted our own paddle had a lot to do with that. But we made it, eventually, guided by Mark and his powerful flashlight because we had forgotten to turn on the anchor light on Gudrun and it was pitch dark.

Kuna indians in an ulu Sunday Mark and I took the outboard engine apart and found that the air intake flap of the carburetor was corroded in place. On a one year old outboard, great. I'm also less than impressed with the maintenance friendliness of the Mercury engine. Should have bought a Yamaha. Unable to make it rotate freely we've twisted it into a semi-open position so that the engine still starts and runs reasonably well. But the output seems only about half of the nominal 15hp.

The next few days we'll hang around here some more. Hopefully the weather clears up and we can go swimming and snorkeling. Despite the wind the water is very calm because we're anchored between shoals. So the boat doesn't roll. But with only a few boat lengths of depth around us we're always worrying whether the anchor holds, because if it doesn't we'll end up on a reef very quickly. Navigating the reefs is tricky work, especially because the charts are hopelessly wrong. On the way to our current anchorage we had to run over three charted shoals and two islands in order to not end up on the reefs. And now we're anchored right on top of one - only it's 12m deep here. Two boats that came in Saturday trusted their charts more than their eyes and ran aground. And yesterday a big katamaran came straight at us (and a reef), then last minute realized that something must be wrong because of all the breakers and stopped. So between meals and drinks with Irie, the islands, the Kunas, fixing things on the boat, and crazy navigation action around us we have our entertainment here

Posted by Axel Busch at 03:59

Saturday, January 14. 2012

Ankerbier

anchor, starfish.

Saturday, 14.01.2012, 12:00 local, 9:28.21N, 78:38.18W, at anchor

Yesterday was nice sailing. We arrived at the eastern entrance of the San Blas archipelago at four in the morning, 2 1/2 hours before sunrise. So we turned around and sailed back for 1 1/2 hours and turned around again. The San Blas are a few hundred islands, some of them not bigger to hold a single palm tree. Some of the islands are inhabited by the native Kuna indians, who largely preserved their old way of lived. Enriched by cell phones and outboard engines, and trading with cruisers. By 0900 we were anchored in front of SV Irie (Mark and Liesbet), just south of Green Island. A postcard scenery from paradise. Unfortunately the palm tree postcard scenery didn't care much for Irie's wind generator (our Silent Wind still isn't working), so we relocated a little further away from the island. Our Navionics gold charts by the way are of limited use here. According to the charts we drove over shoals three times, and anchored on the beach. In reality the water was 10m deep and we were 30m from shore. We don't know how long we'll stay here, maybe a day or two. There is nice snorkeling in the reefs and a few things to fix.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:26

Friday, January 13. 2012

To Green Island

Friday, 13.01.2012, 12:00 local, 9° 48' N, 77° 42' W, HDG 256°, 6.7kn sleeping in the cockpitThe sea is much calmer today and since 2am we have the main sail up. At first in the second reef, after dawn full. Now we're sailing along nicely and feel both well. Mark and Liesbet have send us their co-ordinates in the San Blas islands and we changed course and are heading there now (9° 29' N, 78° 38' W). Unfortunately we won't make it before sunset, and we don't want to navigate the reefs in the dark. So we're going to hang around in the open sea and enter the archipelago in the morning. Yesterday we sailed slower than necessary. We only had the genoa up and could easily have increased our speed with the main sail or the parasailor. But we were both a little apathic from seasickness to do more than what was absolutely necessary and slept most of the day. Interesting. Well, no surprise really. Seven months on shore and then a force 8 on the first day out. But now we're back on track. It's great to be out again. I've missed it.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:23

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Thursday, January 12. 2012

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

10D 35M N, 76D 13M W. Liz is better. had 38kn wind in the night. now 20 to 25kn. sunny. rough sea. but so blue! going slow under reefed genoa for comfort.

Posted by Axel Busch at 10:45

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Wednesday, January 11. 2012

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

left st marta at 10. destination san blas. 30kn wind 2m waves. liz seasick, hope it passes. if not cartagena.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:01

Tuesday, January 3. 2012

Anti-fouling or no anti-fouling?

Growth on the hull. Four weeks after last scrubbing. We're back in Santa Marta, preparing the boat to be sailed again after seven months in the slip. And preparing for the Pacific as well, since shopping in Colombia is significantly cheaper than in Panama. If you can get what you need ... So we have a long list of things to do, and about one more week until we want to leave. Time to think about the next steps. I enquired at Shelter Bay Marina (in Colon, at the north end of the Panama canal) for a slip and haul out, but no reply so far. One of the reasons for hauling out is to replace the anti-fouling, which prevents growth, barnacles and other stuff from attaching to the hull. I asked marine warehouse in Panama for a quote and here's the reply: 3 gallons of Trilux 33 anti-fouling: 675.00 Ocean freight: 65.00 Insurance: 8.00 Local delivery: 25.00 Customs: 10.00 = US\$ 783.00 Add \$400 for hauling out plus other expenses and I'm looking at US\$ 1300. A lot of money, but worth it if it keeps the hull clean until we reach New Zealand. A clean hull makes for faster sailing. And for the 3000nm from the Galapagos to the Marquesas I want every half-knot of speed to make it across as fast as possible. More speed means less time on the water means less chance of hitting bad weather. The problem is that based on my previous experience I have reason to doubt that the hull will stay clean that long. The last antifouling, applied in September 2010 in Las Palmas, was basically gone by March 2011. 6 months. From then on I had to scrub the hull with a scraper every two weeks. And the warm south Pacific will be worth than the relatively cold Atlantic. With an expected two to three months stay in the Galapagos it's questionable whether there will be antifouling left for the 3000nm trip to the Marquesas in May. Unfortunately Panama (January) is the last chance to haul out until New Zealand. The reason why the anti-fouling is that bad (and expensive), is because it has to be compatible with my aluminum hull. Unfortunately you can't put good and cheap copper-based antifouling on an aluminium hull. Electrolysis would eat the hull. I have an epoxy layer to prevent that, but it still is risky. So I have to get more expensive and less effective anti-fouling. Or not, because for US\$ 1300 I can as well pay somebody \$50 every second week to clean the hull. Or dive myself like last year and spent the 50\$ on a good meal to recover my lost strength. Because scraping the hull up to 2.5m deep is hard work. And nasty ... all those little shrimps and barnacles and stuff that crawl over you and stick in you hair. It's definitely easier to clean the hull when there is a layer of anti-fouling on it, independently of how effective it is. Looks like a bad case of being caught between a rock and a hard place. What would you do?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:05

Saturday, December 31. 2011

2011 in review

What an exiting year, so much happened politically as well as economically. But even though the events of this year have changed the global community, they felt like reports from a different universe to us. In our current disconnected universe of sailing and travelling together 24/7 everything revolves around peak gusts, whether the anchor and lines hold, drinking water supplies, battery charge, finding wifi, budgeting, and getting along with each other. This is a month by month review of our year.

January

Muriwai beach, NZWe start the year in New Zealand. Both of our families get together to celebrate New Year at Liz' parents house. It is a wonderful party, until Liz is hit by fireworks. For a week we visit the hospital every evening for burn treatment. It is kind of funny but then it is not. Hardly anyone sniggers. We visit beaches and go on a fishing trip and catch 58 huge red snappers, which we distribute amongst friends and family. Unfortunately my big camera falls into the sea at one point and I have to buy a new one. Then the Busch family tours the north island by car. In Wellington Mum trips over a curb and ends up in the hospital as well, with a cracked arm and a bloody nose. But a day later she is laughing again, and at least now we know that the New Zealand health care system is working well and that the nurses are friendly and competent. After returning from New Zealand, Axel and Liz fly to Las Palmas to work on Gudrun V and prepare her for the Atlantic crossing.

February

2/3rd of the way across the Atlantic. Squall ahead.Liz reads everything about cooking on a boat and equips Gudrun V's galley with tools and food, while Axel works on the solar panels and rigging. When the boat is finally ready (enough) on February 3rd Axel throws a big Bon Voyage party for all his Las Palmas friends before he leaves the next morning. Only the next morning his hang-over is too big to do anything except drink water, so the departure is delayed for another day. February 5th Axel finally leaves Las Palmas after 7 months of repairs and upgrades, and then spends the following 21 days and 4 hours sailing alone to St. Martin in the Caribbean. The first week is nothing but bad weather, trouble, and damages. The second week the weather is better and only the furler and tiller break. The third week is very pleasant. In the meantime Liz cleans up her apartment in Berlin, sells her furniture, and says goodbye to her friends over lunches. When Axel arrives in St. Martin everybody (including himself) is very relieved that all went well. His friend Henk, who he met in Las Palmas, greets him in the bay and together they go to eat a big Burger each!

March

Heroic attempts at rowing. Sint MaartenAxel is at anchor in the Simpson Bay Lagoon in St. Martin. He edits the movie from the crossing and repairs Gudrun V's damages in anticipation of Liz' arrival. Most importantly the head (=toilet). Then Axel flies to Berlin to pick up Liz and to get a US tourist visa, which is required when entering US territory by private yacht. Liz says a final good bye to Berlin and flies with two big bags of clothes and books to St. Martin to live on the boat and sail with Axel. Only we don't sail much in March at all, but spent our time shopping, swimming, and adjusting to living on a boat together. Axel upgrades the wind generator to keep up with the significantly higher drain on the batteries. Liz plays the guitar in the cockpit and learns how to drive a dinghy and loves the speed. Then we run out of fuel and have to row the dinghy a mile across the lagoon to the gas station. It takes a long time.

April

Checking the rigging. Sint MaartenWe decide to stay in St. Martin until Liesbet's and Mark's wedding, friends we made since arriving. Liz is still settling into the boating life, and starts writing a book. In the mornings we swim to shore for pilates and Taekown-Do exercises. When Axel is not working on the boat he is diving, preparing for a Rescue Diver certification. We take a first aid course. In the evenings we usually meet up with Liesbet, Mark, Rosie, Sim, Jon, Sam, Matt, Denise, John, or Tony. It's a nice little community, bbqing, drinking beers and trading stories. Half-way through April Harald, a sailor we met in Las Palmas, arrives with his Katamaran. Together we install a new furler system for his boat and shoot a movie for Dwarf8. The wedding comes and Axel is busy as the wedding photographer.

May

Sailing to Puerto Rico. Among the Virgin Islands.Liz faces her great fear and goes on a shark dive with Axel and Ocean Explorers dive center. Nobody gets bitten. Then we leave St. Martin and sail to San Juan, Puerto Rico. It's Liz first offshore sail. The winds are light and Liz doesn't get seasick. During the day we hide from the sun. At night we lie on deck and watch the stars and talk. After two very nice days together on the boat we arrive in Puerto Rico and go sightseeing across the island. In between tours Axel works on the boat. He removes the traveller from the cockpit and

replaces it with a double main-sheet system. Now we can stretch out our legs and don't have to climb over the traveller all the time. We sail on from San Juan, heading for Cuba. The winds are light, and we only make it to Arecibo, where we stay at anchor for two days waiting for wind. We don't leave the boat. Liz plays plants vs Zombie on the Nintendo DS and Axel plays Galaxy on Fire II on the iPad. We feel like huge geeks. When the wind picks up again we leave the port, but need the engine soon again. In the afternoon the oil cooler breaks and we have to stop in Aguadilla for repairs. Only there are no spare parts and we have to improvise. We meet Nancy and Louis and his brothers and end up staying a week. We loose trust in the engine and decide not to sail to Cuba because we don't want to get stuck there. Instead we will head for Colombia and out of the hurricane zone for the quickly approaching season.

June

Attempts at repairing the starter motor. 40nm north of Colombia. We motor down the western shore of Puerto Rico, stopping in Mayaguez and Boqueron. The flies are eating us alive. We check out of Puerto Rico as fast as possible and head south-west across the Caribbean basin to Colombia. At first we have a lot of wind and Liz gets her first salt-water shower courtesy of a wave. We celebrate with rum punch. After two days the wind stops. Axel tries to start the engine to motor the last 40nm, but it doesn't start. The starter motor is broken. We drift for four days, becalmed during the day and beset by thunderstorms at night. We are scared. Then we finally make it to Santa Marta, Colombia, slowly sailing into the bay at 1.5kn. The marina sends a tug to tow us in, very kind of them. We are happy to have arrived and get off the boat. We spent the first two nights in Colombia in a hotel. Then we adjust to Colombia. This is clearly not the Caribbean anymore, this is South America. People are incredibly friendly and helpful, but everything is somehow different. There is more paperwork, people a shorter, dress more formal, listen to music with lots of accordeon in it, and the food is very basic - rice, meat, and tomatoes. And honestly, not that great. Except for the food from David's and Melissa's Cafe Lulo, which quickly becomes our favorite spot. Axel repairs the starter motor. Then we fly to Cuba on a regular tourist plane like we were sane people.

July

Tropicana. Havana, Cuba. We travel through Cuba. Naturally it's different from anywhere else. Not quite lost in the past and not quite arrived in the present, drifting somewhere, somehow, in a timeless state. Only the buildings are slowly crumbling, and the people are learning about the world outside of their small island and want change. Axel asks Liz whether she wants to marry him. This wasn't planned, but he feels the time has come to ask the question, so why wait. She thinks about it for a minute then says yes. Hooray! We travel some more and make friends. Then we leave again on our tourist plane and fly back to the boat and Colombia. In the meantime it got hot there, really hot. Stifling heat during the day and thunderstorms at night. The south Caribbean is no place to be in the summer. Axel's friend Andre arrives with his boat and family. Axel and Andre met when both started on their voyage in December 2009 in France, and both are very excited to meet up again. As July comes to an end we prepare the boat and lock her up and fly away again, to Germany. We hear that the summer's been horrible in Germany so far, but we bring Colombias sun with us and are happy to be back home for a while. Friends come over for Axel's birthday and it's like we've never been away.

August

Nebo's and Jovana's wedding. Belgrade, Serbia. We're back in Axel's apartment in Ulm. We buy engagement rings and throw a party for Axel's relatives. Liz' parents are joining over skype. We borrow Karin's car and start on a road-trip towards Belgrade, where friends are getting married. On the way we visit Liz' uncle Ian in Slovakia and spent two nights, drinking his home-made wine and playing pool in the garage. Then we drive on to Budapest and go sightseeing: old buildings and tourists with cameras. On the way to Belgrade we pick up hitchhikers. We arrive in Belgrade and fall in love with this city which is half Europe and half Balkan. So much energy, passion, lust for life, happy people, and fantastic vegetables. The wedding is great, and Axel takes a lot of photographs. It's Liz birthday as well and she gets a big birthday cake from Nebo and Jovana. We drive back via Zagreb and Pulst, Austria, where our friend Harald lives. We stay two days and he tells many stories about growing up in Austria in the 50s.

September

Food market in Marrakech, Morocco. We return to Ulm and then pack our suitcases again for another round of travelling and visiting friends. First we fly to Copenhagen to visit Pippin and Rilla, Liz' friends from grad school. We watch Pippin finish writing a browser game which makes headlines across the world shortly afterwards. Axel is in awe and inspired. From Copenhagen we fly to Puerto Sherry for a week to visit Antonio, who Axel met on his way to the Canary islands. Antonio shows us around Cadiz and Tarifa and we fall in love with Andalucia. We spent a day in Seville before flying on to Las Palmas where Axel wants to sell his first boat, Vespina. The sale is sucesfull and as we walk back to the hotel we talk about how easy it is to travel by plane and how nice it is to sleep in a real bed and have a comfortable bathroom and showers just next door, instead of hundreds of meters across the marina. We decide that voyaging on a boat isn't really for us and that we'll sell Gudrun V as well when we get back to Colombia. Instead we will move to Spain and work with Dwarf8 or start a new software company, maybe learning games. On the way from Las Palmas to Germany we stop over in Marrakech for four days. We are amazed at the friendliness of the people as well as their cunning and opportunism when it comes to making money. Not a culture we feel close to. We ride in a hot air balloon and Axel takes

many photographs while Liz enjoys the view. Back in Ulm we clean out the apartment and put everything into boxes ready for pick-up and shipment to New Zealand. We throw a last party and sell what we don't want to take and donate the returns to Avaaz and wikipedia. We find the perfect tenant for the apartment and then board a plane to New York.

October

Pizza workshop. NYC We rent an apartment in the east village, 7th and C. Axel takes a lot of photography classes and makes many new friends. Liz takes sewing classes and continues writing her book. Together we take a pizza class at Pizza A Casa and make friends with Mark and Jenny. We meet up with Liz' brother Alex and old friends from high school. Axel rents a car to chase the fall colors and takes many more photographs. We are in love with New York and think about staying for a year before we move to New Zealand. Liz looks for wedding venues near Auckland and we book a venue on Waiheke island for January 2013. We also find a photographer and a band, although our preferred choice is already booked for the date, incredible. Axel's friend Klaus comes to visit and we go sightseeing and to a Jazz club - more photographs. Liz's sister Elaine comes to visit and together with Liz' friends Renee and Tom we all dress up as a flock of penguins for Halloween. Snow falls and the power is out in many neighborhoods for days. We go to a Halloween party and in the early morning hours to a diner and eat until we hate ourselves. When we get back to Tom's and Renee's house the power is still out and it's fricking cold. We sleep under all the blankets we can find.

November

Empire State Building from our apt in the east village. NYC More New York. The snow melts, but the damage is done. The central park is closed until the fallen trees and broken branches are cleared up. We regularly meet up with new and old friends. Axel takes a few less photographs and starts writing Android and iOS apps instead. Liz is writing a lot. Axel's brother Ralf and mother Karin come to visit for a week. Then Liz' mother comes to visit as well. The days are full with shopping and sightseeing. Axel meets other entrepreneurs and business ideas are taking shape. In the meantime it's gotten cold. We decide that maybe New York in the winter isn't so great after all and that we should move to Buenos Aires instead. End of the month we pack our bags, leave the apartment, and fly back to Colombia with the intent to sell Gudrun V. We arrive and are relieved that the boat is still floating. But four months unattended in the humid climate have left their marks - dust and mold and funny smells. But fortunately no damages or cockroaches or other vermin. We empty the boat and start cleaning.

December

Penguins in the Beagle Channel, Argentina. We're still cleaning the boat and catching up on four months of missed maintenance. Axel looks at the bills and finds out that two months in New York cost more than a whole year of sailing. But we're getting used to boat life again, including a small fridge, no freezer, and long walks to the showers. We think over the selling-the-boat-and-starting-a-new-business plan and discover that we're not yet ready to end the trip. Life on the boat is incredibly inconvenient, but it would be a shame not to complete the voyage now that we're at it. And looking at the current boat prices it would also be a very bad return on the investment. We decide to sail on to New Zealand after all and make a detailed plan for the next months. Mark and Liesbet arrive and together we visit Tayrona National Park and have dinners and drinks in the evenings. After a week they sail on to Cartagena. For Christmas we fly to Buenos Aires and then down south to Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego. Axel wants to check out the location for a possible visit by boat one day in the far future. We spent Christmas eve unceremoniously half in the plane and half at the hotel bar with burgers and a beer. We go on day trips by Landrover and boat and take many photos. Axel goes hiking in the national park and diving in the cold Beagle Channel while Liz writes on her book. For New Year's Eve we stop over in Buenos Aires on the way back to the boat. We arrive late and just manage to toast the new year with Champagne and Ferrero Rocher from the mini bar. We're happy to be together.

Writing it out like this makes it obvious that we've kept ourselves very busy but did little, if anything, of consequence. But if our impact on the world in this year of travelling, cruising, and following our passions was very little, the impact of the world on us was the bigger for it. We learned a lot, about our passions, the world, ourselves, and each other. I've stopped wondering who is the braver of us two: me, who sailed across the atlantic alone pretty much knowing what to expect. Or Liz, who gave up her beloved city and her independence for a life on the boat. With no love for the sea, no previous experience sailing, no idea what to expect, and little power over her environment. Or maybe we're just both a little bit crazy. Despite all our plans to the contrary it looks very much like the craziness is going to continue in 2012. There is an awful lot of sea area to cross between Colombia and New Zealand, and west of the Galapagos nobody speaks Spanish any more. So at the very least we'll learn some french, although I expect that life has some more lessons in store for us. Here's hoping that they're joyful ones.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:10

Saturday, December 24. 2011

Merry Christmas and a happy new year!

Merry Christmas and a happy new year to all our friends. We miss you a lot and wish we could party with you. Have a good time, be safe, stay healthy, and drive (or navigate) carefully. Matt took that shot of us in a completely natural pose in July, and Liz added what she wishes most for on the boat - a puppy.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:29

Thursday, December 22, 2011

Planning for the Pacific

The route, more or less. All books about sailing tell you that you should spend as many days planning a trip as you expect to be under way. It sounds like overkill, but it actually makes a lot of sense. First of all there is so much to consider ... likely wind and weather, currents, route, likely stops, emergency stops, provisions, spare parts, navigational hazards, paperwork and customs, etc. Figuring all that out takes time. And then you have to make up your mind what you want to see on the way, and who you want to meet. The world is beautiful and has so much to offer, but there is only so much time. I've been thinking and reading about the Pacific crossing since I arrived in the Caribbean in March, and this month we've started planning in earnest. For background information we're mostly relying on World Cruising Routes, The Pacific Crossing Guide, South Pacific Anchorages, www.noonsite.com, Storm Tactics, How to Sail Around the world, Around the world sailing guide, and of course navigational charts. A lot of reading, and useful background information and reference when approaching a new location. But all the reading doesn't replace first-hand knowledge of a longer passage, and many hours talking with other sailors who are planning as well or have already done it. Like my friend Henk, who left Sint Maartin March 3rd in his 26ft Midget and arrived in Durban, South Africa, November 25th. Insane. You're my hero Henk, and thanks for all the information! When you plan a passage there are three things you should think of first: Where do you want to go, when is the best time for it, and when is the worst time for it. For short passages of a few days that is normally easy enough to figure out, and there are usually good weather windows spread out over the year. For a long distance trip of many thousand miles with multiple longer stops in between it's a little trickier. A good strategy is to look at the longest or most dangerous leg, and then plan backwards and forwards from there. For the Pacific crossing this is the leg from the Galapagos to Marquesas: 3000nm. Pilot charts and accounts from other sailors tell me that the best time to sail this leg should be in May. And for a trip that long you really want to sail with the best possible weather forecast if you want to have a pleasant memory of it. But the weather is nothing but unreliable, and therefore I plan to arrive in the Galapagos at the end of February. With a 90 day visa we'll have enough time to recover from the trip from Panama, see the islands, prepare the boat, and wait for a good weather window to sail the 3000nm to the Marquesas. Planning to arrive early also adds a good buffer in case something doesn't work out as expected on the way and you get delayed. Tracing further back, the trip from Panama to the Galapagos via Islas Perlas will be about two weeks, including a short stop on the Islas Perlas. That means leaving Panama City in the middle of February. In order to get to Panama City we have to pass through the Canal (2 days), and before that we have to haul out the boat in Shelter Bay Marina to check the hull and repaint the anti fouling. Add waiting time for the Canal that will be another two weeks ... start of February. The trip from Santa Marta to Shelter Bay Marina is three days, but on the way lie the beautiful San Blas Islands, where we want to stay for a week. Adding all together we should leave Santa Marta around January 15th, four months before we hope to arrive at the Marquesas islands, 4500nm away. From there onward it's relatively easy. The legs are never more than 1000nm, about a week of sailing, and there is time until November before you run the risk of encountering tropical cyclones. But since we're having our wedding in NZ in January 2013, we would like to arrive earlier than that.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:25

Wednesday, December 21, 2011

Down South

Shopping for parts with Uwe from SY VenusWe've made good progress with the work on Gudrun, and pretty much exhausted what Santa Marta has to offer in terms of repair facilities. For the rest of the work we have to haul Gudrun out onto the dry, which we want to do at Shelter Bay Marina in Panama. Not that there are a lot of options, especially with a draft of 2.5m. It's only three days sailing to Shelter Bay Marina, and on the way are the beautiful San Blas islands where we want to stop over for a few days and go swimming again - we haven't been swimming since we've left Puerto Rico in June. The beaches of Santa Marta with it's sewage outflow and industrial port facilities are not very inviting. Maybe we're just spoiled. So we're very much looking forward to the San Blas islands. And truth be told, I can't wait to go through the Canal and sail into the Pacific. It's two years since I passed the 166 locks from Heidelberg to Port-Saint-Louis-Du-Rhone, and I'm excited to pass through the huge locks of the Panama canal. Benefits of a big cockpit: space for lots of peopleSo ... bye, bye Santa Marta and off we go? Hmm, not quite. First of all, the weather is not too great at the moment. The wind's are up to over 40kn every night, and a little further west from Santa Marta it's pouring rain. Not the best conditions for trading the safety and comfort of a very affordable marina for an island anchorage surrounded by coral reefs. Over the last few weeks a dozen boats have come in, and all are waiting until January to sail on. And so will we. In the meantime tourists from all over Colombia are arriving in Santa Marta, and the city is gearing up for Christmas celebrations with decorations and lights everywhere. Every other night there is a christmas party at the big mansion adjacent to the marina, until well into the morning hours. And like in all Spanish speaking countries I've been to there is only one volume setting for the amplifiers: maximum. Sometimes I wish for the quiet and consideration of Germany (no to mention the efficiency, and lack of bureaucracy). And for snow! Christmas at 30C just doesn't feel right. But where to find snow in South America? The Andes of course, and ... Tierra del Fuego. Tierra del Fuego: Glaciers, the Beagle channel, and Cape Horn. I've always wanted to go there, and I'm dreaming of sailing around Cape Horn one day (in the not too distant future). It's far away from Santa Marta, 7000km, exactly at the other end of South America. But it's still a lot closer than from anywhere else we'll be going in the near future. Incidentally January is among the best times to visit, and flights are cheap on the holidays. Ushuaia we come! BogotaBuenos AiresYesterday evening we flew to Bogota, and continued this afternoon to Buenos Aires. We will stay here until Saturday and then we're flying to Ushuaia for a week.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:55

Tuesday, December 13. 2011

Repairs and an emergency at sea

Liz, washingPontoon, Gudrun VCleaning frenzySince arriving on Gudrun we've been busy with cleaning and improvement jobs. We completely emptied out the boat and cleaned all lockers, and then started on the to-do list for the Pacific crossing. Even without such a long trip ahead there is always a long backlog of to-dos for any boat. Knowing that you'll be in port for a while is a chance to start some of the bigger ones. For Gudrun this list includes stuff like (in order of importance) • Repair the fridge • Built and install cockpit table • Rebuilt the tiller • Install pressure- and temperature-gauges for the engine oil • Built cages for storing the water cans and liferaft on deck • Relocate solar panels to above the bimini The good thing about a country like Colombia is that people are incredibly skilled at fixing things. Nothing is thrown away. Uhm, not quite. A lot is thrown away and there is litter everywhere. But nothing that could possibly be fixed or reused is thrown away. There is no money to buy a replacement. Which means there is a good chance that something can be fixed for cheap, where everywhere else you would have to get a new part. Like with our fridge. When I had somebody look at it in St. Martin they said it's impossible to fix and that I needed a new evaporator, which would have cost \$250 plus four hours work at \$50 per hour. Here a nice guy named "Braulio" fixed it with parts for \$30 and also four hours of work - at \$10 an hour. Sweet. You don't know how much of a difference a fridge makes until you have gone without one for months - in the tropics. And it's not just the cold beer . So fixing standard things is great. Getting specific boat parts is something else. As it turned out, quite impossible. There is a small chandlery here, but they don't have what I need, and they can't get it. And Island Water World doesn't ship to Colombia. So, relocating the solar panels will have to wait until Panama, because I need some rail fittings for that which I can't get here. Or maybe I can come up with an alternative plan that only involves welding. Not sure I want that though, but it's a possible work-around. "Colombia" is a synonym for "workaround". Plan for the cockpit tableA new home for the solar panelsAnd thanks to the help of David, our friend from Cafe Lulo, I've found a stainless steel shop. Which is great for realizing all kinds of workarounds. So every week I go there twice to have stuff made for Gudrun - you've got to love the labor prices in Colombia! Tomorrow I hope to be able to pick up two stainless steel cages. I want to mount them on the deck, below the boom. The cages will take the jerry cans for water and diesel, as well as the liferaft and emergency grab bag. At the moment those things are distributed all over the boat and quite frankly are always in the way. Not to mention that in case of an emergency you really want the liferaft ready on deck, and not stowed away below. Sometimes an emergency comes up faster than you think. Yesterday a sailboat left the marina heading for Cartagena, which is only about a day away. This morning word got in by email that the boat sunk on the way. Fortunately the crew got rescued or made it to shore themselves, details are not known so far. The most likely cause is that the boat hit something in the water, maybe a large log, tree, dead cow, or whatever came down the Magdalena river. It's unbelievable what those rivers spill into the sea, and thanks to continental counter currents the floatsam stays huddled together a mile or so off shore and is a real hazard. Two years ago another boat was lost in these waters. At times I curse Gudrun's old overspecified aluminium hull. Compared to a modern fiberglass hull it's a lot harder to maintain and inconvenient to life in. But when it comes to collisions and handling bad weather I wouldn't want to trade her in. Gudrun's great.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:35

Sunday, December 4, 2011

Can not recommend Spreco Silentwind Wind Generator

This is not a product review or product bashing, it's an experience report after owning the Spreco Silentwind wind generator for more than a year.

A wind generator is a good thing to have, because it provides electricity when the solar panels don't (e.g. in bad weather or at night). I bought the Silentwind because the Rutland that came with the boat was rotted away and didn't work anymore, and the guy at Island Water World said that the Silentwind is really super quiet and better at low wind speeds. I like quiet. And it is quiet. Unlike most other wind generators the Silentwind is an AC generator, not DC. Therefore you need a special charge controller, which comes with the generator. Unfortunately that charge controller has already broken twice, which led me to post an entry named "The Spreco Silentwind Wind Generator is a piece of crap".

First time the controller broke I thought that I had made a mistake during installation. I send it to the factory and they repaired it (8 weeks, 45 EUR). When it came back I installed it again, but only a week later the winds reached 30kn over night and the charge controller broke again. As a result it short-circuits the generator wires permanently. This is easy to see because when the wires are short-circuited the blades turn only very slowly. When I remove the generator wires from the controller they spin much faster. I am very frustrated and unhappy with my purchase.

I called and emailed Spreco, but couldn't get a response from them for two months. Sending it to Portugal from Panama for repair or refund would have cost me 500\$ for air freight, with uncertain outcome. So I bought an Air Breeze wind generator for \$800 instead. Cut your losses. Just as I was about to throw out the Silentwind, Spreco contacted me. Apparently they had found this blog post, which was previously called "Spreco Silentwind Wind Generator is a piece of crap".

They apologised for not responding earlier and offered to exchange the controller again. They send a new controller to Panama, and I send the broken one back (which cost \$180 in shipment).

I switched the controllers and so far (3 months down the line) the wind generator is still working. But the wind has never been more than 30kn apparent, so I don't know whether they fixed the problem or this controller will break again when the windspeeds go up. I now always tie the blades down now when the wind threatens to increase over 25kn. Below 13kn of wind the Silentwind produces no output, and above 25kn you have to turn it off because it might break. That doesn't leave an awfully big window of operation. But the problem really is that nothing's happening below 13kn. And the wind speed for the last months was mostly between 8 and 12 kn.

The charge controller tells you the total Ah it contributed to charging the batteries, and that count is for me 580Ah after 3 months of use. Compared to more than 12.000 Ah I got out of my solar panels this is not a lot, almost not worth it. Next time I'm in a marina I'll switch the Silentwind for my backup Air Breeze, which starts up much earlier. So, independently of the issues with the breakage, I cannot recommend the Silentwind.

My recommendation would be to go for the Superwind 350. It has the same output as the excellent D400, but is much lighter and quieter. A friend of mine, Uwe, has both on his boat Venus for a few years now and he clearly favors the Superwind. Both give good output at 10kn already. Not an awful lot, but at least it's contributing a few dozen Ah almost every day. Unlike the Silentwind, which is not contributing at all most of the days. The Extreme Wind, or AIR Breeze generators would work too, or AIR X with the Spreco blades. On my old boat I had the Aero4Gen, and that worked wonderful too and is also quiet. Actually, get any wind generator except the Silentwind, it's just not worth the money.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:25

Sunday, November 27, 2011

Back on the boat

We arrive on the boat with our four heavy bags. We change into lighter clothes, then we head out for a welcome drink with Melissa and David, and dinner at their little Cafe. I eat one of David's fantastic arepa creations with chicken and a topping of fruits. Unlike the fruit in New York, it's ripe yet fresh and full of flavour. And quite unlike in New York the final bill for a delicious dinner for two with drinks is only \$12, not north of \$60. Welcome to Colombia! Then we return to the boat, and discover that we need to go to the bathroom. We should have stopped in the marina bathroom on the way to the boat. But we had walked past it chatting to each other because we're still in the apartment mindset, where everything is just one door away from the living room. Here in the marina the bathroom is 300m away, and it's raining heavily now. We decide to use the head, but I have to open the two seacocks first. I had lubricated and conserved them before we left, and number one turns smoothly. But number two is stuck, and I can't turn it. Of course it's the less accesible of the two, and I have to take the door off the closet, go on my knees, and stretch far to reach it. This seacock is cocky. 4 months alone on the boat must have convinced it that it's the master and commander, and it takes me 15 minutes to convince it otherwise. Finally the seacock is open. We can use the bathroom again. I'm drenched in sweat. Welcome to the boat. I look around, and the boat is already a mess. Just changing into different clothes and getting out the toolbox does that. The amount of effort necessary to keep a boat tidy grows exponentially with your desire to do fun or useful things. Everything is fine when all you have is the minimum clothes to keep you cool, warm, and dry. Only the absolutely necessary tools to keep the boat seaworthy, kitchen gear and food for simple meals, and some books for navigation and entertainment. It limits you in what you can do, and it takes more time to do it with simple tools. But everything is only a quick reach away. This changes dramatically when you add tools to make your life easier (e.g. for the kitchen and power tools), gear for your personal interests (like diving, photography, video, music), more clothes, and books and equipment for your business interests. The items for sailing and navigation are still only a reach away. But for everything else packing and unpacking becomes a necessary, frequent, and dreaded obligation. Not for us boaters the simple comforts of a 7 foot closet with big doors and plenty of shelf space. No, everything is stuffed in little boxes or bags and distributed all around the boat. Now that we're back on the boat, we have to divide our belongings into small parcels and distribute them among the many little lockers on the boat. My strongest advice for aspiring boaters: pack as light as possible. While I brush my teeth I wonder again why I'm doing this. Living in an apartment in a city is sooo comfortable. Why live on a boat and make live unnecessary hard? And an old racing boat with very little space at that, where I can't even stand upright. Then we go to bed. The first night on the boat after four months away. We crawl into the little forpeak triangle and lie down, our heads only a meter away from the ceiling. We talk about past experiences and remember the bad and the good times we had sailing and living together. How we watched the stars at night, how we helped each other, how we made it through bad weather and smaller emergencies, how we grew close and learned to trust and rely on each other. We talk and we agree that our small boat is an extraordinary environment. Not convenient or comfortable, quite the opposite. But absolutely wonderful in many other and unique ways. But we're not looking forward to catching up on four months worth of maintenance

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:17

Tuesday, November 8. 2011

New York Update

Live couldn't be more different from the boat than it is here in New York city. After living on a boat for two years I had forgotten just how comfortable and convenient living in a big city is. Makes you wonder why people choose the boat. Ahh, right, the money. Living in Manhattan is insanely expensive. And nature of course, although there is plenty of nature just an hour's drive away. For example Bear Mountain State Park, which I visited two weeks ago to shoot photos of the leaves changing colors. And that is the theme for me in New York: shoot, shoot, shoot. So far I've taken five photography classes, visited the PhotoPlus conference and expo for three days, met up with photography groups, and spend a lot of time (and money) at B&H. On average photography occupies me for about eight hours every day, shooting and learning. Some days it's more than twelve hours, and than I feel almost like I'm back at work . The rest of the day I write my photography blog, do some programming, and walk or cycle around New York to visit it's many tourist attractions or Liz' friends. Though it's getting dark early now, and with the city's streets full of homicidal taxi drivers the bicycle stays more often in the basement and I take the subway. Liz has signed up for the National Novel Writing Month and is very busy writing her first novel. I'm very exited about that, from the little she showed me this is going to be goood. Other than that we entertain the occasional visitor, cook a lot, and enjoy the comforts of our east village apartment: space, hot water, heating, washing mashine, internet, nothing to fix, no worries about electricity, gas, or water, and a nice view of the city from our rooftop. This week friday my brother and mum will come to visit, and that will surely take care of next week's activities . Here are the links to a few recent photo albums: • Bear Mountain State Park • New York City • New York Pizza School • George Washington Bridge • Lamborghini Gallardo • Halloween Blaze • Halloween Party • National Geographic Photo Workshop • Arlene's Grocery Punk Rock Karaoke • New York City Photo Safari • New York Central Park Softball

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:01

Wednesday, October 5, 2011

New York

Ups ... no update for two months. Time flies when you're traveling. First we travelled all over Europe to visit friends (10 countries in 4 weeks), then we cleaned out my house in Ulm in order to rent it out. The new tenant will move in this weekend, and I hope that he'll have a good time. We also went to Las Palmas to sell Vespina. The new owner has even less of a clue about sailing and boats than I did when I bought her. But he is no less determined, and the boat is in good shape and very forgiving. I'm sure he will have a great time. Maybe we'll see each other in a port or anchorage one day ... On the way back from Las Palmas we stopped over in Marrakech for three days. Our first arabian experience outside Dubai Airport. Very intense. Morocco from a hot air balloon. The most popular means of transportation in Marrakech. The most popular item in the souks. Second most popular item in the souks No machines, only craftsmen. Then last week we arrived in New York. We will stay here for two months before returning to the boat, which is still in Colombia (the marina staff has called in the meantime and assured me that everything is fine). Liz' brother became Dad last week and we want to visit, and then there are a lot of Liz' friends here from the time she studied at NYIT. After traveling for two years, it feels great to be in one place for a while. It's great to see all those new things and meet new people, but constantly settling into new places and making new friends takes a lot of time and energy as well, and so there is not a lot left for other stuff. We've now rented an apartment in the east village, and it's a great place in which to live and from which to explore the city. After one week I can already see how eight weeks will not be enough to do everything I wanted. Focus, focus, focus. This month I'm focusing on photography, while Liz focuses on writing. Every morning I get up for the sunrise, edit the pictures during the day, and go out again for the evening light. Wonderful. Liz gets up a little later, then sits down to write. We both still feel a little disconnected from the world. Like what we are doing doesn't matter. I think we miss being part of a community, and to contribute towards something bigger. I think we miss work. So there you go. Lesson after two years of bumming around on boats: work is important to your sense of identity and self worth. Empire State Building from the rooftop of our east village apartment. 6:30 in the morning. Empire State Building from the observation platform on Rockefeller Center. 6:30 in the evening. Downtown Manhattan from our rooftop. Central Park from Rockefeller Center. Observers on the observation platform on Rockefeller Center. Subway worker ducking away from the approaching train.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:11

Wednesday, August 10. 2011

The Serbian Wedding

Ice-cream!After visiting Budapest we drove on to Belgrade, where the wedding of Liz' friends Jovana and Nebo would take place. We arrived two days ahead of the event and together with more of Liz' friends we explored Belgrade. And there is a lot to explore. Balkan and European culture clash, mix and drive each other and produce a proud and friendly city with a lot of self confidence. No wonder it's the cultural and party capital for the neighboring countries. Must see. cool crownsThe wedding itself was quite an event too. The orthodox service was an interesting and very entertaining affair. And it was brief, which is very much to my liking. The following dinner was a very exhaustive, as excuses for not dancing were not accepted and everybody was on their feet, pretty much all of the time. Unfortunately the official wedding photographer was a bit of a let-down for the bridal pair. She came with the venue, and apparently their tastes didn't match. Fortunately I had brought all my gear as well and had been shooting throughout the ceremony and evening from the sideline for practice. Next day I uploaded some photographs to facebook, and Jovana and Nebo where relieved and happy to find pictures of their wedding that they liked. We met briefly to exchange USB-sticks before they departed on their honeymoon to Cyprus. Liz and I stayed two more days, then dropped her sister Elaine off at the Airport to fly back to riot-stricken London while we drove on to Zagreb where we are now.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:01

Thursday, August 4, 2011

In Europe

Back in Europe for the summer, and a full timetable. Rings, engagement party, renting out the apartment, dentist, friends, weddings On the way Liz picked up knitting lessons from my Mum. Awesome! While they were knitting away I stood on the scales in the bathroom, which read 83kg. That is 19kg less than when I left work two years ago. I'm wondering how this came about (I don't feel like I'm eating much less), where this is going, and also whether I should start a losing-weight-academy. From a sailboat of course. Learning knittingMy birthdayThe engagement ring After my birthday last Saturday we started on a road trip to Serbia, where a friend of Liz is getting married this weekend. On the way there we visited Liz' uncle Ian in Slovakia, and then drove on to Budapest. Today we will arrive in Belgrade, where we meet up with Liz' sister Elaine and friends from NJ. Uncle Ian beating us hands down at poolChain bridge, BudapestHurray! More Budapest pictures.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:52

Saturday, July 23. 2011

Timeout until December

Sunday in Santa Marta After returning to Santa Marta eight days ago we waited eagerly for the arrival of E Capoe, Andr f  's boat. I met Andr f   in December 2009 in Port-Saint-Saint-Louis, France. Port-Saint-Saint-Louis is one of the ports where the Rhone river flows into the Mediterranean sea, and it was the end of my three week river journey. For a month I was there, stepping the mast of Vespina and preparing her for sailing. Andr f   was moored next to me and working on his boat as well, and we worked and talked and celebrated Christmas together and grew close. Therefor I was very happy that I would meet him again, with his family, after so many months and miles. Valerie, Birgit, Andr f  , Merlin, Jutta, Zoe We didn't have to wait long - Saturday afternoon E Capoe was in Port. During the week we walked, talked, had dinner, went diving, and discussed our respective plans for the future. And it looks like we'll meet up again in the Galapagos next year in March. But today it's again time to say farewell, because Liz and I have a flight back to Europe in the afternoon (Santa Marta - Bogota - Frankfurt). The summer in the Caribbean is hot and humid, and the winds are unsteady, with a high hurricane risk. The hurricane season ends in November, and we will then return to Santa Marta and sail onwards towards the San Blas islands and Panama. The marina in Santa Marta is safe and cheap, and outside of the hurricane zone, so it's a very suitable location. In the meantime we can visit our friends in the northern hemisphere before we move to the southern hemisphere for a few years. Diving in Taganga. Not many fish around. I have to admit that I'm happy to leave the boat for a while. It's a wonderful life on the boat in many ways, but incredibly inconvenient and troublesome in others. I worry about weather, shelter, water, and electricity all the time and wait for the next thing to break (this week the keyboard of my netbook stopped working, it's the third keyboard in two years). The idea of putting these worries aside for a while and just focus on photography and video and get some projects done is very appealing.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:59

Sunday, July 17. 2011

Reflections on Cuba

Sitting in the plane to Cuba I wondered what to expect. I hadn't had much time to think about the trip beforehand, because I was occupied with the boat and two movie projects I had stumbled into in Santa Marta. One was a documentary about a young couple, the other was a film school for kids who were enthusiastic about movies. Having left all three behind with take-off, my mind became free to think about Cuba. View over Havana Thinking of Cuba, many images passed through my mind. The faces of Che and Fidel. Posters of shiny 50s cars. Catalog pages of exquisite beach resorts. Photographs of indifferent Soviet and Czech architecture. Romantic colonial-style buildings. Poor people working on tobacco fields and smoking cigars. Elegant men and gorgeous women singing and dancing salsa. I wondered if I would encounter all that, and how it could possibly fit together to form a uniform impression of Cuba. 9 am No work team Public transportation For three weeks we traveled through Cuba. Starting in Havana we visited the national park of Vinales in the west, then flew to the coastal town of Baracoa in the very east. From there we made our way by bus, taxi, and rental car back to Havana, visiting many small towns as well as tourist attractions. On the way we encountered all the images that I had associated with Cuba, although there are a lot more rusty cars than pristine ones, and they all smell horribly. But try as I might, I couldn't fit the pieces together. I talked to our hosts in casa particulares, locals and tourists we met in cafes, and tour guides we hired, with the intention to fill the gaps and clarify questions that had come up. Like why there are so many people on the street, when the unemployment rate is only 1,6%? Preparing a hot chocolate Meat vendor People were very friendly, and with the exception of some state-employed personnel very forthcoming with information. For example, the mystery of permanently busy streets is explained by the practice that workers register at their workplace in the morning, then go out on the street to talk and look for private work until checking back in to their official work before lunch-break. Reason being, that with the exception of cigar-rollers it doesn't affect your salary how much you work, and the salary is not enough to pay for the daily needs. This Cuban practicality, and a mentality of accommodating oneself with the circumstances, we found everywhere. Which doesn't surprise that much, when you consider that between the US-imposed trade embargo and a socialist government that allows little entrepreneurial freedom people have very limited ways to get by. Our landlady Marilyn Children playing with audio tape. Lesson: words hurt. Cuban porta potty Careful criticism towards the government in the fields of economic and personal liberties (property ownership, wags, travel-restrictions) was voiced often, but matter-of-factly: "This is the way it is, there is a historical reason why it is this way, and all we can do is hope that it changes in the future." And change is coming to Cuba. Since April the Communist Party Congress sanctioned reforms related the ownership and trade of houses and cars, as well as traveling and setting up small businesses. While Cubans await those changes eagerly, there are other areas that they don't want to change. Most prominently the free and very good health service and education system. Where many developed countries are developing a rift in the population between people than can afford it, and people that can't, Cubans trust that their government will continue to protect the interests of the whole population against a ruthless greed that often accompanies the privatization of public services. Still, the impression that I left Cuba with is that, at the moment, it all doesn't fit together very well, and the Government as well as the population has a lot on it's slate if it wants to improve the situation sustainably. On the morning of our departure Julio, our last host said to me: "I am not surprised that you are confused. I don't understand how this country works either." More pictures here

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:00

Wednesday, July 6, 2011

Cruising: a retrospective after 20 months on a sailboat

At anchor in Puerto Rico Cruising on a boat for a few years is just like any other vacation, only longer. A series of enchanting beaches, bustling bars, charming hotels, absorbing museums, all interspersed with dauntless voyages across limitless oceans on your fast and spacious yacht. Before I left Germany on my 33ft steel boat, acquired second hand only four weeks before, I was sure of that. The pent-up lust for adventure from 20 years of writing software needed a vent. I had tried hiking and motorbiking but it wasn't enough, so sailing was going to be it. I romanticized what was to come and planned every step of it ahead in detail. Just like it was a two-week vacation, only longer. Nighttime sailing, slowly. I had planned ten months for an Atlantic circle, Germany to Germany via the French canals, Mediterranean, South Atlantic, Caribbean, and North Atlantic seas. Two months into the trip it became evident that it would not be enough time. After two more months I admitted it to myself. Now, 20 months later, the journey is far from over. In the meantime I have not only changed the boat, but also scope and direction of the voyage. I am not longer alone, three months ago my partner Liz joined me. The destination is no longer Germany, but New Zealand, her home. At the moment the boat is in Colombia, where it will stay for a few months until the unbearably hot summer with frequent storms and hurricanes is over and we will sail from the Caribbean into the Pacific. This break is an opportunity to look back and give an account of what I've done, experienced and learned. Working on the mast, again. Sint Maarten The statistics for what I've done are easy, because it's written in the ship's log and my blog. Out of the 600 days and nights I sailed 80. On 38 days I went diving, on 35 sightseeing, and the beach saw me 14 times. About 100 days I spent on my hobbies: writing, photography and videography. Interests that I had since my childhood, but which I had only explored on the surface and not in depth. The remaining 300+ days, 50% of the total time, I either worked on the boat or was searching for supplies and spare parts. At first I thought that I did something wrong, because surely sailing must be less work. But talking to other cruisers corrected that belief. Cruising means fixing your boat in exotic places, is the common proverb. But fortunately the numbers don't tell the whole story, because there is a lot to be learned, and fun to be had, even when not at sea but sweating upside-down in tight compartments. Caught by a thunderstorm, 300nm north of Colombia The days at sea were without doubt the most exciting and exhilarating, but at times also the most frightening and frustrating, days of my life. Besting fierce storms or navigating difficult passages sounded great when I dreamed about it from the comfort of my home. It didn't feel so great when I was deprived of sleep, wet, cold, hungry, and my safety depended on numb fingers and a few tired brain cells between my salt-covered ears. In those moments I thought to myself: only a fool would set out on a journey like this. But those moments also gave me insight into who I am. Understanding nurtured acceptance, and sometimes change. Some perceived and long-loathed character flaws weren't that bad, I realized. Other traits had to change and I started working on them. But still I was happy every time I made it safely into the next port or anchorage. Then, inevitably, my life unwound in a blur: from the exiting to the mundane. Nothing cleared the adrenalin of arrival from my bloodstream faster than patiently sitting in the harbor master's office to complete paperwork. After the following customs and immigration procedures, complete with bills, I was already tired of land-life, and I wished to cast off immediately and be free again. I only needed to finish some maintenance work first, fill my water tanks, and buy groceries. And, always, acquire spare parts to repair broken equipment or add needed components. Admittedly, some days were more productive than others. Now and then an old, or newly acquired, friend would show up to lend a hand. Or I would walk or dinghy over to assist them. Sometimes this helped tremendously with the work, and I could finish tasks that I had despaired of earlier on my own. At other times we only diminished the supplies of beer and chatted into the night. Philosophizing with Peter, Las Palmas If these days were not as exiting and character-building as the one's at sea, they were valuable in other ways. I acquired a wide range of knowledge about how sailboats and their components are built and maintained, along with a host of mechanical and other skills necessary to execute the tasks. Working in a foreign country with local people also opened up their culture and language for me. And the beers and stories I exchanged with other cruisers built strong friendships, based on shared values and an understanding of what drives the other. But on hearing some stories and vitas I could only stare in amazement at the naiveté, or sometimes stupidity, and wonder how the person even survived through the years and voyages. This put my own feats into perspective, and showed me that with the materials and technologies available since the 90s anybody could do what I had set out to do. And the market is overflowing with affordable sailboats. All it takes is the guts to try it and the willingness to put up with some inconveniences. Spanish lobster, Sint Maarten If I had succeeded in my plans to restore an old sailboat and cross the Atlantic Ocean on my own, I had failed in another thing miserably. Part of the idea behind sailing was to get away from the computer screen, which had so far arrested my attention for up to 80 hours a week. But the computer is an integral part of the cruiser's life, if only to plan passages and stay in touch with home. In addition I choose writing, photography and videography as my hobbies for the trip, which glued me to mouse and keyboard for many more hours. But I enjoyed it tremendously, and for a hobbyist I've made it to a respectable enough level, at least in photography. Unfortunately, all the adventuring and learning doesn't make the world a better place, and it can be argued that I wasted my time instead of doing something useful. Be it social, political, economical or

environmental: belonging to something larger than a single personal life and contributing actively is important. I accept that, but I have no twinges of remorse. I knew from the beginning that I took some time off not only from work, but in a way from society. This trip was for myself and I would be the only one to lose or gain. One thing I gained unarguably was a lot of envy from my friends for the pictures I posted online. That people enjoyed my photography and videos made me very happy, and will continue to do so for a long time. It has become a true passion. But there are more noteworthy lessons and changes. Reasoning and acting myself out of difficult situations honed my out-of-the-box thinking and increased my confidence. Having to make the best out of unchangeable circumstances - e.g. the weather and bureaucracy - helped me to become more patient. And arranging myself with limited water, electricity, space, and amenities on the boat taught me to make do with less. The physical labor, sportive lifestyle and a balanced diet improved my health: I lost 16kg and have no more back- and wrist pains. All combined, the effect on my life is significant: healthier, happier, more patient, more confident, more agile, less needful. Liz and me, Havana. Many, maybe all, of these things I could have learned by staying home and continuing a regular life. Not in such a short time, and not working 80 hours a week, but maybe 40 or 50. Although it is highly unlikely that I would have. I am ambitious and competitive, and I lived in an environment that I had a lot of control over. With so much time, thought, and enthusiasm tied up with success in business I would have easily fallen behind in the self-improvement department. As it is, I feel that I have improved a lot and gained in many ways. For myself, and for my relationship. Last week I asked Liz, my partner in crime on the boat, if she wants to become my partner for life. She said yes. But on land. Which is fine with me. When we get to New Zealand I'll be happy to trade this adventurous but inconvenient life for more comfort and new challenges: a family of our own and a new business. After we get there. Between here and there, however, are the spectacular Panama Canal and the wide blue expanses of the Pacific Ocean - what an adventure!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 18:48

Saturday, July 2. 2011

In Cuba

View from our hotel roof, Havana. Car. Sofa. I am a shifty, devious, scoundrel. At least in the eyes of the customs officers of the world. Liz thinks it's the way I walk and look around, or it might simply be the bad jokes I tell when waiting in line. Doesn't matter whether it's USA, Australia, Colombia or Cuba, I seem to fit everybody's checklist of people to randomly pick for a thorough search and interview. The interview upon entering Cuba lasted for 90 minutes, followed by an inspection of every single item in my luggage. Liz noted, while waiting, that some other people had to open their luggage as well, but that only took a few minutes. Liz, however, must be looking pretty shifty herself, because she was selected for a methodical search and a walk through the body scanner on leaving Colombia as well. I attribute it to her looking impossibly cute and trusting. Heedful people must think it's an act. In the end we both made it into Cuba. And after the scariest taxi ride ever we made it even alive into the hotel. It had started out as your usual after-dark Caribbean taxi ride. No seat-belts and unlit streets full of people, bicycles and handcarts. The old Lada smelled of gasoline, the dampers were gone, and I could tell from the way the driver worked the wheel that the left brakes were gone as well. All that didn't stop the driver from going as fast as possible. Then he received a call on his mobile phone (I didn't know they had such things here). After that he was in a hurry, and the fact that the brakes didn't work so well was irrelevant, since he didn't use them anymore. Drifting around corners slowed us down enough to avoid what was waiting behind them - usually people. Am I not easily scared in a car, but I truly wished I was somewhere else. Dining in a "paladar", somebody's livingroom Since our epic arrival a week ago we stayed a few days in a hotel and then moved into a guest house, called a "casa particular". During the day we walked through the different parts of Havana, explored the Cuban cuisine (bad news for vegetarians), or worked on our respective projects in the hotel lobby (being the only place with internet access). Liz is writing, and I am making a movie about our favorite cafe in Santa Marta. Vinales valley Bottling station in the rum factory Yesterday we visited the obligatory Rum and Cigar factories, and tomorrow we'll fly to Baracoa at the very east of Cuba. From there we plan to travel back to Cuba by bus via Santiago, Santa Clara, and other notable sites of the revolution. I hope to go diving somewhere on the way as well. The first impression is that this is a country with some serious housing and transportation issues. Crumbling buildings and overflowing buses everywhere. The rest seems to work quite well, though a lot of people are very poor. But in this Cuba is no different from most other countries in the Caribbean and South America. But there are many areas in which Cuba is different, about which I'll write another time.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:02

Saturday, June 25. 2011

On the way to Cuba

Just a brief update. The last week was so busy I didn't get to write at all. The customs official did come around finally and 'inspected' the boat - with her radar eyes from the safety of the land. Because the engine was fixed and I felt useless without a project we started on a movie about our favorite Cafe in Santa Marta - Lulo. Work in progress. More than anticipated. Film school - William at the camera. Carrying my camera gear around caught some attention from other sailors, and they asked if I would give a film class to their kids. That happened on Thursday, and it was big fun. Friday morning we got the boat ready to leave it unattended for three weeks, and in the afternoon we left for Cartagena by bus, a four hour trip. Now we are in Cartagena in a nice little hotel with huge doors and had our first hot shower in over months. Pure luxury. I could shower for hours. Unfortunately it's late and in four hours we have to be up again to catch our plane for Cuba via Panama, so it's time for bed. Zzzzzzzz

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:42

Monday, June 20. 2011

Waiting for the paperwork

Gudrun in Santa Marta In order to leave the boat here until November it is necessary to import it temporarily. The mandatory boat inspection by the custom official was scheduled for last week Tuesday. Then Friday. Then Saturday. Then today, Monday, 08:30. So far nobody has showed up. Without the paperwork finished we can't go anywhere. I call Jorge, our official agent. He tells me that the new time is now 11:30. Cruising is waiting.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:37

Saturday, June 18. 2011

My brother, my hero

My brother Ralf just send me these pictures. While I'm bumming about on a boat, he designed and built an electrically assisted tricycle for our mum. From scratch. With suspension, motor, batteries, drive control, >100km range and a box for the shopping. Mobility for mum! (She has problems with balance and can't ride a bicycle and shouldn't drive a car) The tricycle Mark I. Mum on her first test drive. Bye mum. Happy shopping!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:52

Friday, June 17. 2011

No time for sailing

Every evening, after the heat of the day, the weather turns bad. Rain and gusts and thunderclouds. The summer is no time for sailing around here.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:43

Santa Marta: guns and motorbikes

The security guard steps out of his hut as we approach the exit of the marina. I notice the handgun in his belt holster as he opens the gate. His colleague is dressed in camouflage and has an assault rifle slung around his back. Ookay. We step outside the tidy marina and into real Colombia. In the heat, we are thankful that the road ahead is shaded by trees and buildings. Fruit vendors have parked their handcarts on the corner and a constant stream of motorbikes, taxis, SUVs and buses flow past us as we walk. The windows and doors of the buses are open, and people stand in the doors, encouraging us to get on. A few of the door-men, on what looks like overland-buses, carry shotguns, which I don't find particularly encouraging. We continue down the street. To our left we see people sitting on benches talking, swimming in the sea or playing on the sand. To the right the street is mostly lined by restaurants, busy with local guests. After two weeks at anchor in front of quiet villages in Puerto Rico and an even quieter week at sea, we enjoy the sights and sounds of a city full of half a million inhabitants. Soon we find "Ben & Josep"'s restaurant, a place recommended to us for it's steak by Zolt, a sailor from the marina. It's been a week since we had eaten meat, and steak sounds exactly right for tonight. We sit down and order the "Volkswagen steak" - a big, round lump of meat. The sun sets behind isla el morro, and more people walk in to the restaurant from the beach. We sit and chat and are happy to have arrived. The steak is delicious, the beer is cold, and . we only need to find a dry bed to complete the "back to civilization" checklist. The beds on Gudrun are still wet from a leak in the hatch. Newcomers to the city, we wander down to what we later discover is the bad part of town, an area in the shadow and dirt of the docks which we have since been advised to avoid. We walk into several reasonable looking hotel entrances only to find shared rooms with steel bunk beds which remind me a little too much of my time in the army. Further down the street we find ourselves in a part of the city that feels completely foreign to me. Bare bricks on dirty walls are exposed where large areas of plaster is missing. Through the open doors I can see people sitting in their sofas watching TV, and the walls inside don't look a lot better than outside. "I don't understand how they can live like this" I say to Liz. "Like what?" "Like, sitting on a sofa when the plaster is falling on your head. And not getting up to fix it." We back track and finally find a hotel on the way back to the city center. The room is simple, but clean. One out of three light bulbs works, the shower is cold, the minibar empty, but the bed is good, and that is the only thing that matters right now. We fall on the bed and are asleep in the next minute. In the morning we have breakfast in a street cafe: Coffee, potato, rice, beans, eggs and arepa, a plain cornmeal bread. We only finish half of it, and a bum, about my age, who walks by sees it and asks us whether he can have it. His poise, looks and manners remind me of Jack Sparrow. If Johnny Depp ever copied of somebody, it was this guy. I look in amazement at a thing he is carrying on his head, until I identify it as a pair of pants. I smile, and say that he can of course have my meal. The waiter comes and asks me again, I agree, and he packs it into a Styrofoam box and hands it over to the guy, who walks away eating. Friday and Saturday we clean the boat, dry the beds and do our laundry. Although we work in the shade of the awning it is very hot. At least the beds should dry quickly. Saturday evening we go out. The streets and plazas are full of people, standing and talking. The many little bars and restaurants are full as well. Live music is playing in many of them. Vendors walk the streets with trays or carts, selling drinks, fruit and sweets. "This is so sad. I always thought Ulm was special because of the Schwabingerwoche, where the whole city is on the street." "And?" "Look around you. The whole city is on the street as well. But they don't need a Schwabingerwoche to do it." Liz laughs. She was never overly enthusiastic about the nightlife in Ulm. "It's good to be travelling." I say and nod. "Puts things into perspective." We just walk around for a few hours and look at it all, then we sit down for a drink and keep looking at the people. Next day I don't feel well. Stomach bug. The other cruisers in the marine tell me that most of them got it after arriving here. I lie in bed most of the day, and Monday as well while Liz spends her time writing. Tuesday I feel better and begin working on the starter motor. I soak it in vinegar and cola for a day to dissolve the rust, then clean all the parts with a soft wire brush and degreaser. The insulating cloth around the coils is soaked with rusty salt-water, and the resistance between coils and housing reads only a few Ohm, not good. After two more days of cleaning and drying it's up to 10 Mega Ohm, much better. Time to start the engine. I install the starter motor, but it doesn't turn. Disheartened I remove it again. A physicist that can't even repair a lowly electric motor. I feel useless. Zolt, our neighbor, lends me some strong testing cables and I connect the motor to the battery. Zzzzzrrrrrr! It works! My inner physicist heaves a sigh of relief. Aha, but the solenoid, the magnetic switch that engages the motor and gears, does not work. I need a new one. Jonny, one of the Marina workers, offers to drive

me to Alberto with his motorbike. As he says the name I can tell that he holds Alberto in very high esteem. The other marineros nod. Yes, Alberto is the man. I agree, and Jonny hands me a helmet. It's worn and too big and has no chin-strap. I keep my baseball cap on so the helmet won't fall off my head. Jonny is a careful driver. He is very careful not to accelerate or brake unnecessarily. Instead he swerves around oncoming or crossing traffic. He does it expertly. But approaching a crossing without even the slightest touch on the brake just feels wrong. My body wants to feel at least some negative acceleration. We cross a street, take a shortcut through a gas-station followed by another shortcut through a backyard. The driver of a white Toyota SUV must have had the same idea, only coming the other way. And on our side of the narrow road. And he's in a hurry. I get ready to jump off the motorbike, but Jonny swerves to the left and avoids the Toyota. Then he swerves right again to avoid another car. Then left again to enter a different street. He hasn't touched the brake or the gas at all. But we made it. Seeing no immediate threats I start to relax a little. Alberto We turn into a backyard where a man with grey hair and mustache comes out to greet us. Alberto. After exchanging greetings, I hand him the starter motor which he tests and takes apart, nodding approvingly all the while. I feel a little proud, maybe I'm not completely useless after all. We wait while he gets a new solenoid and installs it and we return to the boat. An hour has passed in Alberto's workshop, and Jonny is in a hurry now. He turns into Calle 22, one of the main streets, and speeds up. Delivery trucks block the street and pavement ahead of us. I wonder when he's going to brake. Now maybe? No. But now. No. Instead Jonny swerves onto the pavement and squeezes through the gap between the truck and the wall. I sigh in relief that nobody was trying to walk the other way. Back in the Marina I install the starter motor and break out into a grin as the motor starts. Success! Then the oil pressure warning sounds. Not again. Looks like my work is not quite done yet.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:36

Sunday, June 12. 2011

Pictures from sailing to Colombia

Liz pulls up the mainsail enthusiastically. Then gets a sea-water shower as Gudrun ploughs through the waves. Watching the parasailor in low winds. Dolphins!.. Thundercloud. Skullcloud. Up with the sail. Broken starter motor trying to stop the mainsail from flapping.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:35

Saturday, June 11. 2011

The arrival

"How deep is it?" I ask nervously. Both echo sounders are not working and Liz is using the hand lead to sound the depth. "Eight?" she replies. She sounds and looks unsure. I am wound up tight and don't like unsure. I step away from the rudder and drop the lead myself. It hits the bottom at 3m. Our draft is 2,50m. Damn, let's get out of here! I decide to turn away and approach the anchorage again. This is not a wide anchorage, only a very small strip of 50m between the narrow channel for the freighters and the shallows near the beach where the fisherboats are. We turn south towards the marina and gybe. The water should be deeper here. The wind picks up and fills the sail. The boat heels a bit. But we don't move. "We've run aground." I state the obvious. I laugh at Liz. The tension falls away from me. It didn't work out as planned, but it could have gone a lot worse. Fortunately the bottom is sand, so damage is unlikely. And it is low tide, which means we will be afloat again in six hours at the latest. But it will be dark then and I don't want to wait that long. "Let's try to pull the boat off the shallow with the dinghy and move it further west." We drop the anchor and roll in the genoa. Then we winch the dinghy up from its position on deck and drop it over the side. Liz takes up position at the helm of Gudrun. I attach a long line to the bow of Gudrun and the stern of the dinghy and start to pull. I'm so glad I went for the 15hp outboard, the biggest I could fit on the dinghy. The outboard wails up, the propeller churns the water and turns it white. But Gudrun is not moving. Or is she? No. Maybe. HmMMM, no. I keep on pulling. "Necesitas ayuda?" A fisherman comes around with his boat and asks if I need help. "Si señor, gracias!" I throw him a line and attach it to Gudrun. We pull together. After ten minutes Gudrun starts to move. Yipieeh! We pull her westwards for 20m, then drop the anchor. "My name Alberto. You need. I am at beach. OK?". He waves good-bye. I smile. Happy that Gudrun is safe again. We ride into the marina with the dinghy. The marina is big, brand-new, and almost empty. I estimate that more than three quarters of the slips are empty. I can see no office building. But I see a man standing in front of what looks to be his sailboat. I ask Liz to approach him, and after seeing his Swiss flag send a greeting in German. We exchange names and I explain our situation, that the engine is broken. He said that he thought as much and wanted to go out to help us in. But nobody is allowed to leave the marina without a permit, which takes a day to get. "They are very serious about the permits." he says "Because of the drug smuggling, you know. But don't worry, everybody is really friendly and helpful." From then on everything goes smoothly. Silvio walks us to the marineros, marina staff. They call their boss, who insists to send us a tug complementary of the marina. And an agent to complete the check-in formalities. We return to the boat, which the tug is already approaching. I talk to the crew of the tug. They come alongside and we throw ropes. They tie the ropes to the tug and throw us some fruit, smile, and give us the universal thumbs-up sign. I smile back. I feel safe. The tug steers us into the marina expertly and drops us off on the end of a pontoon where the marineros are waiting. They tie down the boat. The agent is also here already, and we do some paperwork. He takes the passports to have them stamped by immigration. Then everybody leaves again after a lot of smiling, shaking hands and repeating names. Names seem to be very important here. Liz and I look at each other and hug. We've arrived in South America.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:05

Thursday, June 9, 2011

Arrived in Santa Marta, Colombia

We have arrived in the Marina Santa Marta. Finally. True to the spirit of the whole trip the arrival was a new experience altogether. And involved a lot of very friendly people. People are just wonderful. More later, I'm too tired to write.

Posted by Axel Busch at 19:57

So close and yet so far

Thursday, 09.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 11:18.1N, 074:14.4W (3,6nm north of Santa Marta, Colombia). The Parasailor is up and we're sailing towards Santa Marta. Slowly at first, 2kn, then towards evening ever faster. 3kn. 4kn. 5kn. Wow, finally some decent speed. We watch (another) beautiful sunset to the west. To the south the view is not so pretty. Thunderclouds are forming again. But none to the north or behind us, so we should be safe tonight. Liz watches the lightning in awe. It is pretty spectacular. But I'm done with lightning, there were too many close encounters this week. If I have to see no more for the rest of my life I'll be the happier for it. We sail westwards, parallel to the moving thunderclouds. But eventually we have to turn south towards Santa Marta. We go faster. 6kn, 7kn. I'm worried that we're going to fast and won't be able to turn south in a safe distance behind the thunderclouds. But it's so nice to go fast again, after days of just drifting about. After midnight the wind stops suddenly. Force 4 to 0 in three minutes. Interesting. The boat rolls and bangs like crazy. I can find no sleep. I move to the bow of the boat. I don't mind the wet mattress from where the hatch leaked, I just want to get away from the sound of the waves banging against the stern as much as possible. But there is no refuge, tonight the sea beats on Gudrun like a drummer gone mad. In the morning I study the maps closer and find out why. The wind dropped us right on the start of the continental shelf, where the sea floor rises up sharply. The waves always pile up there, and we're sitting there for five hours with no chance of getting away. With the sun the wind comes back, and we start sailing again. The wind increases steadily. Force 1, 2, 3, 4. Nice, this is great sailing. The Colombian coast rises out of the mist. South America. Finally! We laugh and sing. Colombia, we're coming! The wind increases still more. Force 5, force 6 in gusts. This is a little more than hoped for. I'm wondering how we're going to anchor in that wind. But beggars can't be choosers, I'm glad we're off that ridge. And the wind should drop to something reasonable in the shelter of the mountain. But we're not of the hook yet. As we approach the Cabo de la Aguya, the wind drops completely. Again. My, this is getting tiresome. At least we are still moving, even if at less than a knot. So much for getting to Santa Marta for a nice lunch. On the other hand we won't have any problems anchoring under sails or pulling the boat into the marina with the dinghy. And dinner is much more fun than lunch anyway.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:06

Wednesday, June 8, 2011

The race

Wednesday, 08.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 12:02.1N, 073:26.8W (62nm north-east of Cabo de la Aguja, Colombia). It is hot. The washing is hanging over the rail, drying quickly. We sit and sleep under the shade of the awning. The fish find shade under the boat. I make a tuna noodle salad. Canned tuna. Encouraged by Nur and Baha I have bought the lines, hooks and rubber squids as bait for catching tuna and set everything up. But we can't bring ourselves to trail the line. Killing big game for food is not yet part of our lifestyle. Consuming it in little anonymous canned portions is easier. Again we eat, sleep, sit, read and talk. There is talk of marriage, kids, writing and working. And a lot of laughing. I feel ready to turn to a completely normal life - a home, job, kids. But first we have to get to New Zealand. No, first we have to get to Colombia. During the afternoon we drift with some current back north to within a mile of where we were Monday at noon. Various items of garbage are drifting with us. Spilled into the sea either from a river or a freighter. As the sun begins to set thunderclouds form. Beautiful clouds, shooting high into the sky. Colored in layers from white at the top, through blue to a dark red at the base from the setting sun. I take out the camera and run around the deck excitedly. Click, review, adjust, repeat. With the thunderclouds comes the wind, from the north this time. There are individual thundercloud cells to the north, east and south of us. It was very hot all day, and the clouds are very big. This is not looking good. The only way out is west. We set all sails and hope that we can out-run the clouds. Liz has become very good with handling the lines by now. Halyards, downhauls, sheets, runners and reefing lines hold no mystery for her anymore. Well, almost. Still, I am impressed. There are 22 lines leading into the cockpit of Gudrun and it took me a while as well to get them all sorted out. The race is on: "Gudrun vs. Thunderclouds Of The Caribbean". One of the most exciting evening entertainments imaginable. Liz stands at the back of the cockpit and watches the spectacle as each of the thunderclouds fires a volley of lightning into the night. I go to sleep to be fit for the final, should we fail to out-run the clouds. It is 1am. Liz goes to bed and I take over. We're clear of the western and southern thunderclouds for the time, But the northern one is hot on our heels. Too hot. The wind has shifted to north-east and we're going west too slowly. The cloud is catching up. The way back is blocked, as is the way south. I change course to north-west, windward. Close-hauled we go faster. The moon has set and it is pitch black. Except when the lightning flares up the sky in shades of color from golden to purple. I get the camera ready. What a great photographic opportunity. 3am. The thunderclouds are firing off three to six flashes of lightning per minute now. I stare through the viewfinder into the black and try to compensate for the movement of the boat. When the sky lights up I click away. With patience I have found the right balance between aperture (1:2), exposure (1/30) and iso sensitivity (3200). But getting the focus right in the dark was the hardest. Most of the earlier pictures are useless. The cloud is also closer and more westerly. I estimate that we are ahead in the race and that the show will be over in an hour. But I'm not known for being the most accurate weather frog. I put the camera away, it's enough. I lie down on the cockpit cushions and enjoy the highlight of the show. I think we're winning the race. 4am. It's over. Gudrun has won. I gybe and turn south-westerly towards Santa Marta at 5kn. During the race we've sailed 14nm to the north that we have to sail south again. I am tired. Liz comes up at six and I go to sleep for a few hours. The wind drops gradually during the morning and we switch to the Parasailor. By 11am the wind is barely enough to keep the sail inflated. But we're moving. It's very hot again. Looks like there will be another race tonight.

Posted by Axel Busch at 12:03

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

Living among the fishes

Tuesday, 06.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 12:16.8N, 072:53.2W (44nm north of Riohacha, Colombia). Liz is washing clothes in the bucket. I sit under the awning - a big sun cover over the boom - and write my blog. I put the awning up this morning because there is no indication of any wind. Normally, in wind of more than force 2 that is, we sail 150nm. In the last 24 hours we sailed a glorious total of 11nm. Unfortunately all that distance was sailed in the evening, and since then we've drifted back half of that distance again. We will probably pass our yesterday's noon position sometime tonight. It's funny, really. The music is playing and thanks to the awning we have shade. Fortunately we left Puerto Rico with full water tanks and jerry cans. Provided we reach a port within the next ten days we'll be fine. Another blessing is the salt-water pump, which we use to spray the deck for cooling. Yesterday we had 34Å,Å°C in the boat, today it's only 32Å,Å°C. The difference is noticeable. We read, write, sleep, cook, talk and make plans about the future. When I get too hot I slide into the water. Briefly, because I still feel uneasy about swimming in the open ocean. But I'm glad for the chance, it's good to leave your comfort zone now and again. And the visibility in the water here is spectacular. Sometimes fish come to investigate the boat. I take pictures. After nightfall insects come, from wherever, and investigate our lights. Liz screams. In this way we pass the day. And tomorrow there will be wind. Seguro. Manana, manana .

Posted by Axel Busch at 12:12

Monday, June 6. 2011

Patience

Monday, 06.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 12:20.29N, 072:49.04W (47nm north of Riohacha, Colombia). So, the trip to Cuba is not going as well as hoped. First of all - due to damages and the weather - we're not going to Cuba at all, but to Colombia. Which looked like an easy trip from Puerto Rico given the predominantly easterly winds and our boat's very good sailing capabilities. The best sailing capabilities, however, are nothing in the face of no wind. And an impatient captain. Sometimes Liz comes and sits with me in the cockpit. I say sometimes, because according to Liz it is not often that I can be found just sitting in the cockpit. Either I work on something, I sleep, or I run around on deck doing sailory things. But sometimes she catches me sitting in the cockpit, and she will then always come and join me to hold, to talk, or to look at the sky and the sea together. I cherish these moments, because they are short lived. Involuntarily I will notice that something is amiss or needs to be done, and jump up from our quiet musings to go about a new task. She says it's one of the reasons why she loves me. I know it's one of the reasons why calms are so hard for me to bear. It is too hot to be out. It is too hot to be in. It is too hot to do anything but to lie unmoving in the most distant corner from the sun. It might be all right if everything was quiet. But the opposite is true. A sailboat sitting in a new calm is a very noisy place, as old seas slap against it's sides, lines rattle, and blocks bang. They call out for me to stop them. But I am helpless. And that is not a state any captain likes to be in, much less an impatient one. When I left Germany on a sailboat 20 months ago, I hoped that my experiences on the trip would teach me patience. So far my progress in this regard is incomplete. Maybe I have to sail for another 20 months. I'm running, however, out of patience. Instead I am learning to me more adept with tools. Take the grinder, for example. Coming from a family of weavers, carpenters and mechanics I learned at an early age to use files, sanders, saws, and drills. I sawed and drilled everything. One of my favorite subjects was the living-room furniture, despite the spanking that it earned me. But the wood was just too wonderful. To my defense I can only say that the holes and cuts were very small, and that I made them with great care. We also had a grinder at home, which impressed and frightened me with it's sheer abrasive power. But it is not a device you use on wood, since very quickly there would be nothing left of the wood. Therefore it was not until I started living on a steel sailboat that I came around to use it frequently. Reluctantly and carefully at first, but later more often and more confidently. Yesterday I used it to make a new hand crank for my engine. Because of the way the engine was put into the boat, the original hand crank cannot be used. The space is too small. With the help of my newly made hand crank I hoped to be able to start the engine despite the broken starter motor. Unfortunately, I couldn't. The hand crank worked fine, but I just couldn't turn it fast enough to start up the engine. The last of my options exploited, we will have to sit out all te calms. And sail into the anchorage or use the dinghy to pull us in. When we get there. We haven't made it very far in the last days. There is some wind in the morning before the oppressive heat builds up, and some in the evening when the thunderclouds pass through and we try to stay away from the lightning as much as possible. But otherwise we are sitting in the water, unmoving. This morning we went fast enough for dolphins to find interest in our bow-wave, and they swam with us for half an hour. Liz took a seat on the bow fence and watched them excitedly. I ran around with the camera and took pictures, as much of Liz as of the dolphins. Then our speed dropped below 4kn again, and the dolphins were gone in the blink of an eye. Now we are back to drifting with less than one knot, 1804m per hour. Which equals one step per second, slower than walking pace. Talk about patience.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:05

Sunday, June 5, 2011

Becalmed

Sunday, 05.06.2011, 13:00 local (1:00 UTC), 12:55.8N, 072:24.1W (44nm north of Cabo de la Vela, Colombia). It is five pm. The wind just dropped, earlier than usual. We drift dead in the water. Again. I try to fire the engine again. Nothing, no surprise. But fortunately the engine can be cranked by hand. I get the crank lever and put it into the socket. I start cranking but don't get far. The engine is mounted too deep in the boat and a strut blocks the way. Spanish engineering, I think. I try anyway, but to no avail. I am dripping sweat. Liz looks at me and laughs. I laugh back. I drop the main sail because it's making so much noise. I return to the cockpit, and feel a breeze on my cheek. Typical. Just when I drop the sail, the wind starts up again. I stop. This is not right, the wind is coming from the other direction than before. And strengthening. So that thundercloud that has been hanging out all afternoon to the west is moving in after all. And I had been suspicious of the one to the east. Ha, got me. Lightning strikes the water, maybe two miles away from the direction of the wind. Not good. We hurry to lash everything down. I furl up the genoa except for a bit and set course hard to starboard, to avoid the center of the thundercloud, I hope. We go below. I disconnect the GPS and Radio. We sit and wait. It is very hot inside. From outside we hear rain, lightning and thunder. Gudrun has no windows, so we don't see what's going on. A scene from the movie "Das Boot" comes to my mind. The submarine is depth-charged by a allied destroyer. They dive deep and stay quiet. "Jetzt wird's psychologisch" says the 2nd Watch Officer to the accompanying war correspondent Lt. Werner. It's nine pm, the thundercloud has passed to the south-east where it highlights the sky on a twelve mile wide front in bright flashes. A little wind remains, and I unfurl the genoa and head further west, away from the spectacle. Soon the rain stops. The night passes slowly. The boat rolls and clangs and bangs a lot, and I can find no rest. Two more times I raise and drop the main sail. It seems heavier every time. Why am I doing this again? Because it's fun and an easy life-style. Yeah, right. Today there is still no wind. I start to work on the engine. I remove the starter-motor and open it. A brown sauce and little bits ooze out. Not good. I clean it up and put it back together, not believing that it will do much good. But I have to try. I test it. It doesn't work. Well, so much for that. I climb into the cockpit and look at the sea. The water looks inviting. The sea here is 2200m deep, clear, and very blue. I'm scared of going in, and so is Liz. I go first. Liz brings me the diving mask and I have a look around. I am amazed at how clear it is. I can make out every barnacle on the hull of Gudrun. And there is a little fish swimming with us, just below the keel. But it is unnerving. The sea is too big, and I am too small. Liz goes next. We take some pictures. We have lunch. We wait. According to the weather forecast we'll have some more waiting to do. I don't expect to arrive in Santa Marta before Tuesday. More time to try stuff with the engine.

Posted by Axel Busch at 13:50

Saturday, June 4, 2011

Happy together

Saturday, 04.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 13:49.5N, 071:40.8W (83nm north of Punta Gallinas, Colombia). "You know, it's not that bad when it's like that" she says. I laugh. It's partially cloudy, bright but not hot. The wind is light, the sea is calm. We sail with 3kn, a little over walking speed. Slow going. But yes, it's nice. Very different from the morning, where we were speeding along with 7 to 8kn and reduced sail area in 25kn of wind. We talk. We laugh. We have each other, and other than diminishing supplies there is no reason to get somewhere quickly. Not that we could go anywhere quickly if we wanted, in this wind. Later I cook dinner, something Thai-like, we call it "Pineapple delight". I know she'll miss the chicken, but with a broken fridge we don't carry any meat. I notice that the boat is going slower. We sit down to eat. The wind drops. Without pressure in the sail the boat starts to roll. And to clang and bang, my nemesis. I get annoyed, and jump from my meal. I drop the main-sail and we tie the boom down. We work on the deck with our headlamps on. I look into the sea, and see little golden reflections. The eyes of some creatures. I am mesmerized. All my anger is gone. The seas hit the stern and make more noise. I decide to start the engine. The engine won't start. Fault finding procedures kick in. It looks like the starter motor is damaged or frozen. Probably a late gift from when the oil-cooler broke and showered sea-water all over the engine. The rate in which stuff fails on the boat is just amazing. I have to laugh. We finish dinner in darkness. Despite the rolling, the non-moving, and the broken engine we are in a good mood. "This is good!" she says. "Would be better with chicken" "I know" she smiles. The stars come out. I go to sleep. At 11pm we switch. I see thunderclouds and lightning around us, but above us it's clear. No rain. I think of a lightning strike. But I'm confident it won't hit us. That would just be too much bad luck. Nevertheless I make sure that I'm not in contact with the aluminium hull anywhere. Liz is safe in the salon. I look at the sky, the stars. Still no moon, I wonder where it's gone. But this night is not as dark as the last, I can even make out the horizon. I doze off. I dream. My dad brings me plans and spare parts for my engine. I wake up, smiling. I look around. A freighter is passing us in the distance. I watch the stars. The boat sails very slowly and quietly through the night. No engine noise. Peaceful. Liz comes out at six. I am happy to see her. I sleep a bit, then we have tea and cookies. As noon approaches energy from the sun fuels the wind and we go faster. We sit in the cockpit. We read about writing and talk about it. We are happy to be together.

Posted by Axel Busch at 13:03

Friday, June 3. 2011

Half-way

Friday, 02.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 14:52.2N, 070:38.3W (half-way between Puerto Rico and Colombia). Liz gets seasick quickly below, so I cook lunch. Potatoe curry in the pressure cooker. Yummy. As I fill the first bowl a sea hits the side of Gudrun and she heels quickly. I spill the contents of the bowl over my leg and on the floor. Ouch. Fortunately I've cooked enough for four. We eat lunch, happy. The wind drops and we take out the 2nd reef to increase sail area. The wind drops further and we take out the 1st reef as well. The wind drops further. We can't get more sail area up. We're going slow. It gets dark, real dark. This is the darkest night in my life. No stars, no moon, a thick cloud cover, rain, and no scattered light from civilisation. The wind is gone, but the old seas are still there and the boat rolls heavily from side to side. Bang, clang. The noise of the boom and rigging clanging and flapping is unnerving. We work with our headlamps to secure the boom and tie down everything. When people ask about sailing they always want to know about the storms. But to me the worst are the calms. A sailboat without wind is the most useless piece of equipment. Under sails it's elegant, graceful, fast. Becalmed it becomes a manifest of frustrated dreams and hopes. I look at the wind indicator. 5 to 6kn from the back. Barely enough to fly the Parasailor. But we have to try. We can't just sit there and get pounded to insanity. An hour later the Parasailor is up. It always takes ages and is extremely frustrating, especially at night. We move with 2.5kn. Only walking speed, but enough to not have the seas crashing into the back of the boat. Quiet. Finally. We fall asleep. We wake up to the proximity alarm of the AIS. A tanker is crossing our path and will come to within half a mile. I wonder what the chances are for that. Later we see the tanker turning around and heading back. It is circling. That solves the question of how we got so close, but why is it doing it? We'll never know. The wind has increased again and turned further south. We change the parasailor for the genoa to maintain course. Still completely dark, still raining. Liz is crying. The darkness, the noises, the event with the tanker is getting to her. I try to comfort her, she falls asleep. We have breakfast in the cockpit. "I feel so vulnerable, useless" she says. "It's not your environment, yet." "It's not my environment. Punkt." She laughs. I laugh. We wonder how we'll cross the Pacific together. She doesn't want to do it really, but she doesn't want to leave me alone either. I don't feel like doing it right now either. But I want to have done it. It sounds all very romantic and adventurous when you think about it from the shelter, safety and comfort of home. After a bad night at sea it doesn't seem like such a good idea any more. But it's just that: "It's an adventure when you want it to stop right now and go home."

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:30

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Waiting

Thursday, 02.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 16:01.2N, 069:15.6W (165nm SW of Punta Aguila, Puerto Rico). I look at the logbook. What happened yesterday? Ah ja, the wind increased in the afternoon. We put in the first reef, later the second. The seas get bigger and Liz gets her first salt-water shower. We celebrate with a rum-punch. The sky is overcast and it's not so hot. Liz likes that, she doesn't seem to mind so much that the going is rougher. But the wind is strong and I take down the Bimini. Even though it's only protection from the sun and rain, without it the boat feels much more open. More vulnerable. We talk of McDonalds Cheeseburgers, and how cool it would be to have a McDonalds in the middle of the Ocean. It's a popular demand, I've had this conversation with other sailors before. But no big yellow M in sight. Instead we have pancakes. Liz sees dolphins, but in the distance and going the other way. The sun sets and it gets pitch black. No moon, no stars, a thick cloud cover. It's Liz' turn to watch. Then it starts to rain. I go to sleep while Liz sits underneath the sprayhood. She says she's alright. I'm amazed. For a bloody landlubber she's doing exceptional. At 11pm we switch, my turn for the rest of the night. The rain has stopped. I sit outside. I hear birds flying around us, and I see bioluminescence as Gudrun ploughs through the waves. Other than that it's pitch black. Eerie. The rain returns. I go inside. Suddenly a loud Bang on the hull! And again Bang! from the keel. We must have hit something. I go out with a flashlight, check out the boat and surroundings. But there is nothing to see. I'm so glad for my aluminium hull. The rain leaves again. I lie in the cockpit. Thinking about my friends, my family. Sailing is waiting. Waiting for the weather to change. Waiting for the arrival. Today the sea is rough. The boat rolls a lot, seas come over the side. I notice that the front hatch leaks. I fix it, but the bed is wet. Now it's wet inside and outside of the boat, haha. Awesome. Suddenly the tiller pilot jumps off the tiller and the boat turns into the wind. We tape down the tiller pilot. We sit. We talk. We sleep. We wait. I check the charts. We've sailed 175nm, almost a third of the way. Have I mentioned that sailing is waiting?

Posted by Axel Busch at 13:01

Wednesday, June 1, 2011

Heading SW

Wednesday, 01.06.2011, 11:45 local (15:45 UTC), 17:45.7N, 067:28.18W (9nm SW of Punta Aguila, Puerto Rico). I wake up at six. The night was horrible, I can feel mossie bites all over my body. Later I count 42 bites below my right knee alone, despite a full covering of DET. There are even some on my butt, and one on my weener. Time to get out of this place. I think of the people that hole up in the mangroves for hurricane season, and wonder how they endure it. Liz awakens with me. Surprise, she must be motivated to get going as well. We get up, have a coffee and then start pulling up the anchor. As usual the chain fouls up in the tube and I have to crawl underneath the bed and shake the tube. Then we are free. It is seven, and we motor out of the bay. Outside the bay we catch wind, as expected. 10kn from the east. We turn into the wind and Liz hauls up the main-sail and unfurls the genoa while I take pictures of her. I am very proud. Most sailors I know haven't sailed more than 20lm off shore or for more than a day non-stop in all their life. Liz, who is afraid of the water, will sail with me the 1000km across the Caribbean basin for four days. The sails are up and we get back on course. Liz goes down to sleep again. I start trimming the sails. The wind varies in strength from 7 to 14kn and frequently shifts 70 degrees. I adjust the sheets, vang, outhaul and even halyard tension to keep the speed of the boat above 7kn. The double sheet system for the main works very well. I watch the sails and admire the work of Octavio. These are very good sails, thanks my friend. After two hours I get tired of climbing around the cockpit. There are simply too many lines to pull on. I decide to trim for a beam reach in 10kn. That gives us around 6,5kn of speed most of the time. Sometimes a knot less, sometimes a knot more. This will have to do until the wind gets more stable. But does it ever? Puerto Rico is out of sight. Around us only deep blue water. I like it this way, few other boats and no obstacles to bump into. The boat roles surprisingly much for the little wind as the waves pass underneath the boat. They are short and steep. This reminds me more of the Mediterranean than the Atlantic Ocean. I hope Liz doesn't get seasick. I also hope that we'll see turtles, dolphins or whales on the way. Liz would love that. But it's not really season, so the chances are not very high.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:04

Tuesday, May 31. 2011

Bye Puerto Rico - otra vez

"All your base do belong to us!" Today - another Monkey Island experience of running around and getting stuff organized. The first thing to organize was internet access. Absolutely vital for weather forecast, route planning and possible alternatives. The marina here has an access point, but it's password protected and everybody is on vacation or wherever. Fortunately there is Linux and aircrack, hehe. Thanks to the entries on Noonsite about Colombia I learn how important it is to arrive with correct paperwork. Especially the port of entry as stated on the last clearance document has to match the actual port of entry, or you're almost always in trouble. Which means I have to get new clearance documents, because we're not going to Cuba as originally planned. Documents are important, but even more important is water. Three runs with the dinghy and five 20l Jerry cans and we are good. In the meantime the fridge stopped cooling properly - out of cooling gas. I try to refill it, but have to find out that the connectors on the gauges I bought don't quite fit on the fridge. So ... no fridge until we get to Colombia. And the morning is over. From two locals I learn that the next customs & border protection office is in Mayaguez, 20km to the north. Damn. But hey, this is Puerto Rico, the friendliest place on the planet. One of the guys, Carlos, offers to drive me to Mayaguez. I grab my documents and we drive, trading stories. The guy is awesome. He runs the "Los Remos" restaurant in which Liz and I had fajitas yesterday, and you won't believe half of what he's got to tell. Much more adventurous than my little sailing trip. Go Carlos, go! In Mayaguez he waits while I wait for my paperwork. Getting the clearance document involved four customs officials and numerous phone calls, but after an hour and a half it's done. Only they spelled "Santa Marta" wrong - "Santa Malta". Well, I don't want Carlos to wait another hour, and I pray that the Colombian officials are that flexible. Back in Boqueron. We're almost done getting ready, except for the old engine oil which I still have on the boat. Don't want to carry that across the Caribbean basin. Finding an oil recycling container takes another two hours. As the sun sets Liz and I are back in the cockpit of Gudrun, and pop a can of the local Medalla beer each. Now we have to stow away all the Jerry cans and then we're good to go first thing tomorrow morning. Destination: Santa Marta, Colombia. Puerto Rico - live slow, drive fast! We would have loved to stay longer. The water is warm, the beach pretty, the people friendly, and the food is great. And there is supposed to be very good diving and snorkeling. But from the forecast it looks like the good weather window for a sail across the basin to the south is closing rapidly as the easterly trades subside and shift southerly.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:00

Arrived in Boqueron

Tuesday, 31.05.2011, 07:30 local (11:30 UTC), 18:01.326N, 067:10.505W (Boqueron, Puerto Rico) Approaching Mayaguez My work on the engine was put to the test when we left Aguadilla on Sunday morning, in winds too light to sail. The water was beautiful, and after a few hours we killed the engine and jumped into the water to swim behind the boat or holding on to the line to the dinghy and being dragged along. A speed of 1kn (1,8km/h) is hardly noticed on the boat, but you have to swim quite hard if you want to keep up with it. Shortly before arriving in Mayaguez, our stopover for the night, a rainstorm passed through with 27kn of wind and we raced into the bay of Mayaguez with the genoa. As we anchored in the bay the river mouths were spilling dirty and foul smelling water from overflowing sewers into the bay. Urgh. No swimming here. Watching out for shallows Monday morning we continued south to Boqueron in perfect weather. The strong sun created thermal winds and we reached our new anchorage under sail. The big bay is well protected by shallows in the entrance which only leave two small channels. The north and south coast are lined with mangroves, and the west coast by the town of Boqueron and a loooooong beach. The protection, the town and the beach make this place probably the most popular anchorage in Puerto Rico. But at the moment only a dozen sailboats lie at anchor, mostly local craft. We cooled off by jumping into the water and then went ashore with the dinghy or fuel and food. We found very yummy Nachos, Fajitas and Chicken wings in the "Los Remos" beach bar. Then strolled along the beach. Some days are better than others. And some nights are worse than others. Not the slightest breeze was blowing in the night, and it was hot. Then the mosquitoes from the surrounding mangroves all came around to look at the new arrivals - us, and the heat suddenly was the least of our worries. The angry zzzzzz is arguably the worst possible sound in the world, especially at night. There is a marina in the north-east corner, mostly motorboats, in which we want to resupply with water today. Then we'll study the weather charts in detail and plan the rest of the week. Oh, and put up some mossie nets.

Posted by Axel Busch at 08:45

Sunday, May 29, 2011

Engine power!

The solution to the low oil pressure alarm, as suggested in a forum post, was to partially loosen the oil filter, clean the oil-pressure release valve on the oil pump, and change the oil. Done, and now the engine is running again. Images from fixing the engine: Leaking waterCorroded oil coolerWorking on itSolution This is a long weekend with a holiday on Monday, and we could watch a number of festivities taking place on the shore. But much more interesting for me, as a fan of "rotary wing aircraft", was the display the coast guard put up: Helicopter rescue mission. And we had seats in the front row. Very cool. Swimmer is insertedHelp! Help!Swimmer is picked upAnd lifted into the heli Waldo and his boat, with girls.Luis, Nancy, Liz, on Gudrun.In the afternoon the wind picked up. Louis and Nancy came around to the boat and we lifted the anchor for two hours of sailing in perfect conditions. It was Luis and Nancy first time sailing, and both did a very good job on the tiller! We then anchored the boat just off the beach-house of Louis' brother Waldo, and went ashore for another evening among our laid-back Puerto Rican friends. We'll miss them. Agudilla has been a very pleasant surprise. There is no tourist development here, and the town seems a little time-locked in the past. The people are incredibly friendly and hospitable, and one of the most popular past-times seems to be sitting on the hood of a parked car, back against the windshield, watching the sea and fishing. But already construction on a hotel complex in the north has started, and there are plans for a cruise ship terminal. That will change the nature of the place for sure, and we are glad that we could experience it the way we did. Today we want to sail south to Puerto Real / Boqueron, to get water, fuel, and food for the passage to Cartagena, Colombia. Sadly sailing to Cuba is not part of the plan anymore. As the last week has shown (again) you can get stuck with a boat somewhere out of a sudden, and we don't want to be stuck in Cuba during hurricane season. So the plan is to sail to Colombia, which is out of the hurricane region, and then fly to Jamaica and Cuba.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:54

Saturday, May 28. 2011

It's all about the oil

Saturday, 28.05.2011, 07:00 local (11:00 UTC), 18:25.2N, 067:09.5W (Aguadilla, Puerto Rico) Good news: I found high-pressure hoses and fittings for the oil line in town and could patch up the oil and sea-water circuit. Getting everything back together took a few hours (and liters of sweat), and I had to cut the old oil cooler in half with the grinder because I needed some parts to mount the heat exchanger. But finally everything looked good and when I started the engine it ran smoothly and without any leaks. For about twenty seconds. Then the "low oil pressure" alarm went off. Beeeeeeeeeeeeeep. Kill the engine. Look for leaks. No leaks. Scratch head. Think. Check oil level. Start the engine again. Beeeeeep. Stop. Look for leaks. No leaks. Check oil level. Look in manual for plans of oil circuit. No plans. Be unhappy. Get cheered up by Liz. Have a tea. Call Ralf, discuss problem. Without the plans it's impossible to say what it is or how it can work, but we have some ideas and tomorrow I'll try them out. I'm afraid it will be very messy in terms of oil. Fortunately I have plenty of paper towels and a good oil pump. Which I tested yesterday. And, of course, it was not working and I had to fix it. Oh, and have I mentioned that the (brand new) wind generator also stopped working? As did my (third) mobile phone (so much for the theory that keyboard-phones last longer at sea than touch-phones). Then I cleaned the bilge and scraped growth from the bottom of the hull. Cleaning is good therapy. No plans needed, no alarms, no beeps. It's dirty. You clean it. It's clean. Works every time, guaranteed. Other than that it's going great. No, really! While I don't enjoy doing repairs on the boat, I love the way it brings you into touch with the locals. When I paddled to the beach on Thursday to buy parts I was welcomed by a couple of old men. Fishermen and pensioners. We're you're from? Where're you going? etc. and we talked a bit, a mix of English and Spanish. Really nice folks. I told them that my engine was broken and that I needed parts, and they immediately started discussing where to best get the parts from. Then one started to walk to his car and another said "follow him, he will drive you". Half an hour later I had my parts, then I reciprocated with breakfast. In the afternoon we got hailed by a boat with two guys, who invited us for dinner at their beach house. "Just follow the beach until you see the boat." We found the boat and had a wonderful time with Luis, Waldo, their three brothers plus wives and kids. BBQ, drinks, music and dance - fantastico! Friday we invited them for lunch to Gudrun, and in the evening we went again to the beach house for Dinner. Waldo also generously offered the use of his washing machine to us, which is too good an offer to refuse. And we learned to dance Merengue. We feel totally spoiled, thanks so much guys! We're very glad we came to Aguadillo for a taste of original, unspoiled and tourist-free Puerto Rico. We are so lucky. Again. So, never mind the broken engine.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:36

Thursday, May 26. 2011

Broken oil cooler

Thursday, 26.05.2011, 07:00 local (11:00 UTC), 18:25.2N, 067:09.5W (Aguadilla, Puerto Rico) I've managed to track down the problem. I dismantled the cooling circuit, and after removing the heat exchanger I found an oil cooler hidden behind it. The oil cooler is not mentioned in the engine manuals. It is also seawater cooled, made of cast-iron, and doesn't have an anode. Disaster waiting to happen. As it did, the casing is completely corroded and broken in two places. I guess that's good news, because it's not a major engine fault and explains both leaks - oil and water. However, I still have to fix it. The oil cooler is beyond repair with liquid metal, the damage is too big and the pressures involved are too high. And getting a new one will take at least a week, probably more. Time I don't want to spent on this roly anchorage. But my brother Ralf assures me that I don't really need the oil-cooler, and I think so as well. So I'm going to look for hoses for the water and oil lines in town today and cut the oil cooler out of the system. With a little luck we're good to go again tomorrow. Reminder: Always bring spare engine hoses (oil resistant). I feel stupid that this happened to me. I partly blame Volvo for hiding a sea-water cooled oil cooler behind the heat exchanger and not mentioning it in the manual. I ran the engine for less than 20h since I bought the boat last July and had done all the maintenance suggested by the manual. Somebody with more engine knowledge than I might have suspected the presence of an oil cooler from the run of the water and oil-lines. And that is the other part - I had failed to learn enough about engines to suspect it. And it shows, again, that living on a boat is very unforgiving in this regard. Ignorance is punished. And work never ends. Ralf suggested I hire a ships engineer, so that I can have some free time on my sailing vacation. He also volunteered for the job . I am very lucky to have a brother who's knowledge complements mine in many areas. And who's always ready to help and jump into the gap. Thanks bro!

Posted by Axel Busch at 06:50

Wednesday, May 25, 2011

Sailing is so much fun

Wednesday, 25.05.2011, 13:30 local (17:30 UTC), 18:25.2N, 067:09.5W (Aguadilla, Puerto Rico) Sailing is so much fun! As we rounded the north-western corner to approach Aguadilla the combination of trades, late afternoon landwind and channel effect produced a nice local wind of 12kn. After nine hours of motoring I gladly killed the engine and unfurled the genoa to sail the last 5nm on a beam reach with 6kn of speed. Wonderful! Not quite as wonderful was the discovery this morning that the engine is missing almost all the oil, and that there's water in the engine bilge. Lots. I topped off the oil and then started on the engine to see where the water was coming from. Holy moly! There was a whole waterfall of seawater leaking from the vicinity of the heat exchanger. I watched in horror, when suddenly the low-oil-pressure alarm went off and I shut down the engine immediately. Disaster. How come none of the alarms went off yesterday? I called my brother for advice and comfort then started to work on the primary cooling circuit. So far with little success. And then there is of course the oil pressure, which is a serious problem. It's not being burned in the engine, that would show in the exhaust smoke. I read some in my "Marine Diesel Engines" book, but I don't really know where to start. I guess I should take the cooling circuit and engine apart, exchange all the gaskets, and check the heat exchanger as well as the engine bearings. That will keep me busy for days, and then there is the question of getting spare parts. And the fact that I'm anything but an engine expert. Time for outside help I guess, I only hope that I can find some here, it's not really a big town. Sailing is so much fun.

Posted by Axel Busch at 13:54

Tuesday, May 24. 2011

North vs. South

Tuesday, 24.05.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 18:38.9N 66:54.8W I'm having big difficulties deciding when to go, and how to go, to Cuba. Sometimes I feel that my decisions related to passage planning are harder than any other decisions I ever made. Especially now that I also have to think about the wellbeing of another person. Liz's safety and comfort is more important to me than anything else. And the current weather isn't making things any easier. Normally, the trades blow from the east with 10 to 15 kn to the Bermudas. But not in May, as I read in my "Atlantic Crossing Guide", when the cold fronts from North America cease and the weather pattern changes. Which is what we have experienced in San Juan, and sitting in the anchorage in Arecibo. Except for Sunday morning (rain) the weather was pleasant enough in the anchorage, but we could see frequent thunderstorms passing slowly through to the south and north of us. The result on our passage planning was that there was not much planning to do because this is not sailing weather. However, we don't want to sit in Arecibo forever. Especially not with the Hurricane season approaching fast. So despite hanging flags we lifted the anchor this morning at six and went out of the harbor and due north. The plan was to get away from the island, catch some wind, see how it's going, then turn west. We motored for three hours until there was enough wind to fly the Parasailor. Two hours later I can say it's going slower than expected. And the wind forecast for the next week isn't very comforting. Going downwind in 3 to 5kn of wind is not very fast (about 2kn), and not very pleasant. Roll left, clong, bang, roll right, bang, clong. We would get eventually to Cuba, in two weeks or so. The question is which one of us two would go crazy first on the way and jump overboard, take down the mast with the axe, or set the boat on fire. But there seems to be a better way. South of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola is a lot of wind, thanks to the trades and a depression over Colombia. The forecast says 10 to 20kn from the east for the next week and it looks very stable. We would probably have to motor through the Mona Passage, but then there is enough wind for a nice and fast trip to Cuba. I love fast. So we dropped the Parasailor and started the engine, and instead of NW at 2kn we are now headed WSW at 5kn at 2000rpm. There must be a lot of growth on the hull (again) which is slowing us down. Normally Gudrun does 5kn at 1600rpm. I don't like going with the engine, but at the moment there is no other way. I can be stubborn at times, but not that much. We hope to reach Aguadilla on the NW end of Puerto Rico before nightfall. Aguadilla is a surfer paradise, so we might have to stay there for a day. Liz loves surfing, and I will clean the hull again. Then on to Mayaguez to pick up fuel and water. And then we'll see.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:14

Saturday, May 21. 2011

Leaving San Juan

Saturday, 21.05.2011, 17:00 UTC (13:00 local), 18:27.538N 55:05.356W The rain finally stopped and we'll be leaving San Juan in a few minutes. While here we had a wonderful time enjoying the city and Puerto Rico's sights (Old San Juan, Arecibo Observatory, Camuy Caves, Ponce Museum of Art, El Yunque National Forest). We also made friends with Nur and Baha, who were our neighbors in the marina for the last week. Next stop is Isla da Mona, and then on to Santiago de Cuba. Depending on the grib weahter forecast we will either circle Hispaniola to the south or north, but probably north. In case something comes up we can stop over in the Dominican Republic. The weather forecast is very light winds with occasional showers. So we surely won't set up a new speed record and will probably stay well below the normal average of 150nm per day.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:47

Friday, May 20. 2011

Bye Puerto Rico

Sightseeing in Puerto Rico ... check. The last on our list was El Yunque national forest, which we visited on Monday together with Jeremy from down the pontoon. After a little hiking we went to the waterfall and to my big surprise Liz beat me into the cold water and under the waterfall. It was hot enough that the bath can be said to be refreshing rather than punishing, and the water left a smooth, silky feeling to the skin. Definitely a must-do. In the evening we grabbed Nur, our new neighbor, and went to visited the

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:18

Sunday, May 15. 2011

A dream come true

My music teacher in school (Herr Chien, of Taiwanese origin) was obsessed with two things: the German national anthem and the song America from West Side story. We would frequently sing either one of them in class. Or both. And while I lived in Germany, Puerto Rico was a dream. rain clouds in light of the setting sun Now the dream has become a reality and I'm in Puerto Rico. Surprisingly to me one of the biggest differences between Germany and Puerto Rico seems to be the driving. Driving in Germany is safe. Driving in Puerto Rico is an adventure of it's own. The roads are bad and all drivers, with few exceptions, are preoccupied with their mobile phones. The sewers are not up to the rainfall or blocked by vegetation, and any rain will leave large areas of the roads flooded - in the cities as well as on the highways. Many cars are missing bumpers, lights, the grille or even larger parts of their body, which shows that accidents are frequent. When you hear a car honking close to you, it means that somebody just barely avoided crashing into you and now blames you for daring to occupy a spot in place and time that righteously should have belonged to them. But despite the risk it's worth renting a car and exploring the island. The road network, if not in prime condition, is extensive and there is a lot to see. And don't worry about going hungry on the way - all the roads are lined with diners, shops, and small food stalls. It's rare to go for more than a few minutes without seeing a restaurant of some kind. Among the more famous views are San Juan, the Arecibo Observatory, the Camuy Caves, the El Yunque rainforest, the Museo de Arte in Ponce, and some bays with high bioluminescent activity, most notably Mosquito Bay. Pictures from the Arecibo Observatory: Pictures from the Camuy Caves: We've also visited the Museo de Arte, but being a Museum, I have no pictures. I have, however, a few nice shots from yesterday's "Bob Marley Memorial Tribute" Concert, which we visited with some new-found sailor friends. The acts were Bushman and Cultura Profectica, both very good. The place was packed. As usual for Puerto Rico there was a lot of police around, but they bothered neither the "brownie"-vendors nor the many groups of weed smokers. Today we wanted to visit the rainforest, but it was raining (again) so much that we stayed inside the boat most of the day. Tomorrow I want to finish installing a water filter and stock up on fruit and vegetables for our next trip. Destination: Isla Mona.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:52

Friday, May 13. 2011

Space!

The first thing you notice after entering Gudrun's cockpit is the big main-sheet-traveler. It is great for adjusting the trim of the mainsail. The second thing you notice as you climb over it, is that it's a right pain to live with. Especially because it runs right through the cockpit and separates it into two halves. Neither of which is big enough to stretch your legs. When Harald was over for brunch a few weeks ago he suggested to replace the single-main-sheet and traveler with a double sheet system. One sheet running from each side of the boat to the boom. With two sheets and the vang you can trim the sail just as well as with a traveler, but you get rid of the obstacle in the cockpit. On the sail from St. Martin to Puerto Rico I tried the double sheet system to see how it would work on Gudrun. It worked very well. So yesterday I started up the grinder and removed the traveler. Wow! So much space now. Sitting in the cockpit it almost feels like a different boat.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 21:25

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Sightseeing in San Juan

The first days in a new city are always very confusing for me. After a sailing trip there is usually always something to be done on the boat, but you don't know (yet) where to get the parts. For example, we cannot connect to the shore power because we don't have the correct adapter, and were unable to find one so far. But yesterday we got a good lead and are hoping to pick one up today. Fortunately the battery charger can run on anything from 80 to 260V. The San Juan Bay marina is a little of a let-down, I had expected something bigger and better maintained. But it's reasonably close to the old town and there is shelter, water, electricity and even internet - what more do you want. The city, on the other hand, is magnificent. As are the people. I haven't met more helpful, friendly, lively, happy people anywhere. Even the customs and immigrations officials are just nice and friendly, amazing. The Castillo San Felipe del Morro guards the entrance to San Juan Castillo San Felipe del Morro Photo shooting for Miss Puerto Rico? Inside Cafe Berlin Mr. Columbus hanging out singing sleeping. Homeless. Sucks. Beetle! Bulli! Taxi taxi taxi taxi taxi taxi ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:04

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Tuesday, May 10. 2011

A different view ...

Liz posted an article on her blog about her first ocean sail: Sailing for beginners.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:32

Monday, May 9, 2011

to Puerto Rico

no boatsA lot of boats had left St. Martin over the last two weeks, which was especially noticeable from the empty megayacht berths of the Isle de Sol Yacht Club. Since the wedding Liz and I were also getting ready to leave. That included not only stocking up the boat and checking everything over, but also having friends over for dinner or visiting them. Less popular chores like cleaning the hull of Gudrun and the Dinghy were also on the list. Alianna going through the bridge ... bye friends! Rosie and Sim on Alianna, and Matthew and Denise on Mojomo were going to leave on Thursday, and Liz and I had also aimed for that day. While Mojomo and Alianna were planing to leave in the morning, we - lazy as ever - were aiming for midnight. The trip to San Juan would take a little more than 30 hours, and we wanted to arrive in the morning. But despite working all through the day we didn't get ready before 10pm, and leaving at midnight exhausted and tired was out of the question. By the time we lifted the anchor it was Friday noon. We headed out of the anchorage, with Liz on the helm while I was preparing the sails. When I returned to the cockpit after a few minutes she greeted me with a little frown and "I already hate this". It might going to be an interesting trip. On the way Liz loves shadelt turned out the reason for Liz discomfort was having to stand on the rudder in the sun. Unfortunately the rather complicated rig of Gudrun allows for no shade in the cockpit while sailing. We quickly set the sails, and then turned on the autopilot to relieve Liz from her chore. The sails provided shade on the foredeck, and she sat there with a book and immediately looked much happier. A happy girlfriend is a good girlfriend. I still wanted to arrive in San Juan during the daylight, preferably in the morning. In normal conditions we would need about 30 hours for the 200nm. Because we left at noon, that meant we would arrive at sunset the following day, unless we shaved off a few hours of the trip. Or added some. A look at the limply hanging courtesy flag quickly resolved that question: It's going to be a very slow sail. The wind indicator showed 5kn of wind from the back, just enough to keep the sails filled. But the important part was that we were sailing together - finally. Liz only sailing experience so far included only a few hours of sailing, mostly on Lake Constanz. It was probably good that the winds on her first bluewater sail, over night at that, weren't too strong. A question of sleep Sailing into the sunsetA hot topic among cruising couples is the question of how to organize the watches. Many seem to go for the three-hour shift model: Three hours you, three hours me. Since I've been sailing alone for more than a year now, I'm quite used to getting along on my own by napping for 20 or 30 minutes whenever possible. Any additional sleep I could get with the help from Liz would be a welcome bonus. As it turned out sleep was no problem at all. We took turns napping in the afternoon, then had dinner together. Then we stretched out on the deck and watched the stars together. Liz snuggled closer and we talked happily about the past and future. Then I went to bed while Liz read in the cockpit and kept watch. At 1am we switched, and I held watch for the rest of the night. HelloLiz' favorite book on sailingThe following day and night passed in a similar manner. Reading, talking, cooking, sleeping, interspersed with some line handling and course adjustments. Compared to the trip across the atlantic the passage was very busy. We saw three other sailboats and about a dozen bigger vessels - freighters and cruiseships. Liz handled the trip very well. The rolling of the boat and night watches were no problem, only cooking while the boat was moving and sitting in the sun were not so popular. I cooked the second dinner, and because the winds were so light we could set up the beach umbrella in the cockpit. Paperwork No wind The wind decided to leave us completely 6 miles out of San Juan, and we had to motor the rest. We arrived Sunday at 9am sharp, just as planned. Hurray! I stopped at the fuel dock to check in and get a berth. After filling out the form in the marina office we waited on the boat for the immigration officer. He was very friendly, stamped our passports, and told us to get a cruising permit the next day. Before leaving the immigration officer lectured us extensively on how important it is to arrive with a stamped US visa in the passport. Arriving on a private yacht is not covered by the visa-waiver program that applies to commercial planes and ferries, and the fee for a temporary visa has recently been increased to over 500 US\$. The only way to go cruising in Puerto Rico without a valid Visa is to take a plane or ferry from a neighboring island to Puerto Rico, which will give you a 90 day visa. Then you can hop on the private boat here and will have no problems. San Juan "They all look like the bad guys on TV!" were my first thoughts after leaving the marine. The years of conditioning by hollywood had clearly left it's marks. But unlike the bad guys on TV everybody seemed friendly and happy. The mother's day celebration were in full swing in the city. All streets were choked with cars and people, and bands were giving concerts on the plazas. Unfortunately I've left my camera on the boat ... doh! San Juan is the largest city in the Caribbean and, naturally, the center of culture, art, and history in Puerto Rico. After six weeks on the anchorage we are looking forward to spending some time in museums, galleries, bookstores etc.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:24

Wedding reports

Another view on what was going on in St. Martin from Rosie (The Wedding and other weddings) and the bride herself,

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Liesbet (Liesbet and Mark's Caribbean Wedding Party). Interestingly, both make their money writing articles for various online and print magazines. That adds another source of income to my list of "how to finance your cruising lifestyle": • Carpentering • Computers (Software, OS, Internet, Wifi) • Diving • Electronics (ship navionics, VHF and HF radio, satphones) • Engineering (engines, generators, gearboxes etc.) • Mechanics (Rigging, deck hardware, hull repairs) • Paint & varnishing • Photography • Refrigeration • Sewing (canvas, upholstery, sails) • Writing

Posted by Axel Busch at 04:50

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Sunday, May 8. 2011

Arrived

Sunday, 08.05.2011, 12:50 UTC (08:50 local), 18:27.54N 66:05.35W Arrived at San Juan Bay Marina.

Posted by Axel Busch at 14:21

Arrrr

Sunday, 08.05.2011, 04:15 UTC (00:15 local), 18:37N 65:42W Nice day sailing. I was sailing extra slow so we wouldn't get to San Juan too early. Now the wind has almost dropped completely (2,5kn) and I wish I hadn't .

Posted by Axel Busch at 01:41

Saturday, May 7, 2011

First night sail

Saturday, 06.05.2011, 16:00 UTC (12:00 local), 18:14N 4:58W We dropped the main-sail at nine last night to go slower and to time our arrival to shortly after sunrise. For the rest of the trip we will be sailing with only the genoa. We had spaghetti for dinner, then lay on the deck and watched the stars in an almost cloudless sky. No land in sight, only a faint glow on the horizon from the lights of St Martin, St Croix, and the Virgin Islands. Liz stayed up and read until 1am, while I slept. Then we switched and she went to bed for the rest of the night.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:19

Islands ahead

Saturday, 07.05.2011, 04:50 UTC (00:50 local), 18:14N 64:13W We're close to the virgin islands now and will soon tack WSW to line up for the passage between US and Spanish Virgin Islands. The easterly wind forced us on a slight upwards angle, on which the boat rolls less. While Liz prepared dinner at nine, Axel dropped the main sail. Since then we're underway with the genua in 10kn of wind at 5kn of speed. All the great food (Spaghetti!)) and sail-handling action tired our captain down and he retired into the bunk for a while. And now ... changing of the guard ^^^watch. Tromtatotatom.

Posted by Axel Busch at 00:16

Friday, May 6. 2011

Slow going

Friday, 06.05.2011, 22:00 UTC (18:00 local), 18:04N 63:40W Very light winds all through the afternoon, 5 to 8 knots. Now much better at 13 knots. Tried to catch some fish and lost two beautiful spinning squid lures to some big monsters of the sea. Liz is doing great, especially considering its' her first ocean sail. At the moment she's having a shower in the cockpit, fabulous!

Posted by Axel Busch at 18:22

Anchor up!

Friday, 06.05.2011, 18:00 UTC (12:00 local), 18:02N 63:06W Anchor up and away towards San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Posted by Axel Busch at 18:22

The loyal wedding

The saddest thing about voyaging is to have to leave new-found friends behind when you sail on to a new place. The good thing is that you always take something with you. Memories of good times, amazing stories, new knowledge. And more importantly a little part of the personalities that impressed you. My hope is, that over time, all those little parts add up and I become more balanced. Simpson bay lagoon And I'll be taking a lot of impressions with me from St. Martin/Sint Maarten. The island itself is nice enough, and the fact that it's half french and half dutch, with two languages, two currencies, aids flair, makes it very interesting, and at times very funny. Because of the huge sheltered Simpson Bay lagoon, the island has been very popular with boaters for a long time, and many marinas, boatyards, chandlers, bars and other stores have sprung up to support boats and their crew. Every year many hundred boats return on a regular basis, and a few hundred stay here more or less permanently. The lagoon and the surrounding bays could be described as a big boat trailer park. But not only the shops provide services for boaters, the boaters also provide services for each others. Whatever your problem - sails, electronics, carpentering, mechanics, engineering, refrigeration - there is somebody here that has the tools and knowledge to fix it, and quite a few boaters finance their voyaging with this work. It's through this network of worker-bees that I got to know what became my tightest friends here - Liesbet and Mark, and their wedding last weekend was the reason that I stayed more than a month longer than planned. In addition to running their business both worked hard to throw a great party for their friends and family. Taking some pictures for them was the least I could do. The wedding ceremony took place on the beach (Bay rouge), and true to Mark's and Liesbet's lifestyle it was small, informal, fun, and perfectly organized. It also went to the heart. Both are clearly very much in love with each other, and that after being together 24/7 for 6 years , 4 of which cruising on a boat. Sam, Rosie and Liz are setting up the beach. Sim and I are carrying very important items - drinks and cameras. The setting Apart form being a great event the wedding was also interesting photographic challenge. It was my first wedding. I had an idea of what pictures would be expected, but I've never set them up or interacted with people that have something completely different on their mind than a stupid picture. Sam constantly reminded me that I have to be more bossy, and that helped. What didn't help was the lighting. The couple was facing the sea to the west, in the direction of the setting sun. The light was spectacular, but the faces were in the shadow. Exposing the sea correctly would get me dark faces, and exposing the faces correctly would get me a white sky. And a flash would kill the magnificent ambient light tone. Bummer. The pictures in the villa after the ceremony were easier in this respect - pretty much no lighting at all . All together I was very happy to have my prime lenses with 1.4 aperture, and just enough experience in framing quickly, exposure bracketing, and digital post-processing. Rings are exchanged Kisses as well A little posing Party at the villa with food and dancing

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:39

Thursday, May 5, 2011

Shark dive

Here he comes ...Sharks are amazing creatures. 400 million years of evolutionary fine-tuning have a creature that is perfectly to it's role in the ecosystem - eat other fish. I saw my first sharks during a dive on a reef a few weeks ago. Not knowing much more about sharks than from the infamous Hollywood movies, I was very excited but not too comfortable at first. The dive master however seemed completely at ease, and I began to relax as well. I have a reputation to maintain after all . We watched them for a while as the four Caribbean reef sharks tried to chase a big fish from underneath an overhanging rock. It was interesting to see how they circled the overhang and tried to get to their prey. But the old salt was smart enough to stay. I guess you don't get that big and old as a reef-fish by hanging out with sharks too much. Then we began practicing to dive search patterns for my rescue diver class, with the sharks swimming around us in the beautiful reef scenery - very cool. However I was pissed at myself for leaving the camera in the boat. I hadn't wanted the distraction when practicing for the rescue diver class. But well, no pictures on the disk, only in my head. Later the sharks must have started to hunt for real, because I saw them circling something and then suddenly accelerating and swinging their heads. Holy moley, the buggers are fast! But it was too far away to make out what was going on exactly. Then last week I got a lot closer. Jeff also offers a "shark dive", where he hands out some small snacks to them - fish tails - on a certain location. I have to say the idea of hanging around while the sharks get all excited about eating seems not so smart at first. But then "diver" isn't part of their normal diet. Maybe because the air tank is a little crunchy and makes 'em fart. But the chance to see them eat up close and get a nice picture or two got the better of me and I signed up. Liz also wanted to come along. Given her fear of "everything in the water, especially sharks" I found that very remarkable and brave. Jeff is very enthusiastic about sharks and the shark dive. He says it's perfect to show people that a shark is primarily an amazing creature that's worth observing and conserving (the Caribbean reef shark is threatened in some areas), and shouldn't be killed just for the fins or fear of it. The dive itself was very nice. Calm and quiet, four sharks swimming around Jeff and receiving the odd fishtail. It was great to get up close and see them pass by within centimeters. They completely ignored the divers, about which I was very happy to be honest. It was a good shark primer, and I hope to see more of them during regular dives in the future.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:20

Friday, April 29. 2011

Time flies

Time flies. Over the previous two weeks the weather was mostly cloudy with little to no wind. Accordingly the batteries were being slowly drained. On Monday night the Battery-alarm went off ... 45% capacity. The batteries don't like it when you drain them too much, so in effect you can only use 50-70% of the nominal capacity, depending on the type of battery. Jon, from SY ImagineBut fortunately Tuesday night the wind was back. With a vengeance, up to 35kn, and more than a few boats started dragging their anchors in the night. Our neighbor too, and in the morning he was half a mile further out at sea. I wasn't worried about our anchor, because I had tested it only the day before. And we had nobody in front of us that could drag into us. Unlike John + Sam of Imagine of Falmouth, who got hit on the bow by a boat that dragged past. Apparently the owner wasn't on board and John raced after the boat in his dinghy, broke in through a hatch, started the engine and re-set the anchor. Big surprise for the owner when he returned from his shopping-trip three hours later and his boat wasn't where he had left it. On Wednesday Liz met with Rosi of Aliana to do girly talk and exchange girly movies. Not that we had watched any movies since Liz got here - too busy! Anyway, I dropped of Liz on Aliana and then went shopping for more boat parts. When I returned to Aliana the girls hadn't come back from whatever coffee place they had chosen to grace with their cheerfulness. But Sim was there, and we had a coffee in the cockpit, talking about boat work - boy talk . John, on his RingoThen the radio beeped. John from Ringo had dragged his anchor across half the lagoon in the night, hitting a fishing trawler on the way. He had kept watch since then and asked for help to re-anchor his 40ft catamaran. We went over in the dinghy to help. The situation was a little tricky, because the fishing trawler that he'd hit was only 30m in front of him, and swinging on his mooring from left to right. John was very certain that his anchor was fouled up on the mooring of the trawler, and that an attempt to simply get the chain up would result in another collision. A diver was needed to check on the anchor and unfoul it if necessary. John had the gear and a full tank, but hadn't dived in ten years. Anybody know any divers :-)? I went down to 7m while Sim kept watch in the dinghy and checked on the mooring and anchor. They were clear enough, but I went down another time to tie a buoy to the anchor see we could where it was in relation to that swinging trawler. The ground in the lagoon is mud topped with growth. The chain, a lump of mud and grass, had settled in the mud, and I couldn't reach it. When I attempted to lift the chain a little to get to the anchor a cloud of mud erupted from the ground and expanded quickly all around me. Great. I was reminded of the french sailor who drowned the other day when he wanted to free his anchor out of the mud. His feet got stuck in the mud and he wasn't able to free them before his air ran out. Not a nice death. The red buoy marks the anchorI held on to the chain with one hand, so I wouldn't loose my way. And stayed well clear of the ground with my feet. Visibility in the lagoon is no more than 2m anyway, and with no features on the ground but grass it's very easy to get lost. With a lot of fast traffic on the surface the last thing I wanted was to get lost and having to resurface in the open. I ignored the mud swirling around me as much as possible and continued to tie the line to the chain. When I was done I swam away, following the chain. But I didn't get very far, because the line had gotten entangled in the BCD or bottle. Great. I went up a few meters to get out of the mud cloud and worked slowly on the line. I avoided looking at the air supply, because I knew there wasn't much left and I didn't want to give myself another reason to panic. Ignorance is bliss . I managed to free myself slowly and then went back down on the line to the chain and followed it back to the boat. With the buoy in place we figured out a safe way to get the boat free and half an hour later we had anchored anew. Then I hurried back to Aliana to pick up Liz and get ready for tonight's event - bachelor and bachelorette party for Mark and Liesbet. The night out was fantastic. Lots of drinks, food and dancing. It is a great group here, and we'll miss them when we leave. Liesbet & MarkCheers!hmmmmmmWatering the flowers Follow me! I know where the girls are!We can dance.and sing Thursday morning wasn't too bad. I felt slightly hung over, but had no headache. I got up at seven, worked on the boat until nine and then went to get another load of water. Our consumption is now down to 10-12l per day, thanks to the salt-water pump in the sink and Liz, who very quickly adjusted her habits. She only forgets about the lights and laptop now and then, but I think that is so deeply ingrained that it will be hard to change. It's easier for me to watch out for that. Maybe over time, we'll expect to stay on the boat for a while. The rest of the day Liz and I fiddled more with the boat. Today we have a shark-dive planned for 1pm. We'll see how that goes, I'm a little skeptical about the whole organized thing. I had pumped into four big Caribbean reef-sharks while diving the other day, and that was great. Unfortunately I had left my camera in the boat, because the dive was part of the rescue diver training. Jeff practices search-patterns with me, and the sharks seemed interested but not hungry. Phew . And then tomorrow it's already wedding day! Crazy how time flies.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:24

Sunday, April 24. 2011

Last week in St Martin / Final Cut of the movie

Happy easter to all of you! We had our easter celebrations last night on Matt's 50ft Catamaran Mojiomo - niiiiice . The boat's so big and stable that we could even play Jenga, haha. MojiomoBelly-Jenga!MattAxel vs. Mattl Mark's freaking out over the swaying of the tower It's only one week to go until the wedding, after which I, uuuups, I meant *we*, want to leave pretty much right away. Puerto Rico is waiting! But before that I need to clean the hull again, file a replacement screw for the furler, install a water filter, fix the leak in the water tank and figure out a way to stow the dinghy. I would also like to get rid of the main-sheet traveller which runs through the middle of the cockpit and replace it with ... nothing. The deck is wide enough that we can use the double-sheet configuration and use the vang to pull the boom down. That would give us a lot more space in the cockpit and improve the handling dramatically because we don't have to climb over the traveller all the time. But before I start up the grinder I would like to test the new setup, and tge trip to Puerto Rico is going to be that test. So, there is a lot to do! Good that the Dwarf8 movie is done! Friday night I finished the final cut, and Saturday I worked on the score and sound effects. A lot of firsts in that movie for me: screenwriting, choosing locations, props and costumes, directing an actor and crew (Liz), creating an animation in After Effects, and composing a score in Soundtrack Pro. I can see how this could quickly get out of hand on a bigger set, and why you need so many people for a professional production. There is just so much to think about, and so many things to keep in mind, to control and to verify. And you have to get it right, because the audience notices even small mistakes and gets annoyed by them. Especially small mistakes like continuity problems, a cut that is a split-second off the mark, or funny noise in the background. And there is a lot of noise in the background of an anchorage, especially when the anchorage is close to an airport . Anyway, here it is - the final cut: Actually there is another version, too. Because the "client", Beat the Dwarf8 founder, doesn't like the last shot of the pirate on the beach. So I cut two versions of the movie, one for him and one for me - the director's cut . But this is the client's cut. I'm very happy with Harald's acting, the camera, and the edit. The soundtrack ... well. Let's say I'm glad it has a soundtrack. But I definitely need a lot more theory and practice in that department. All together I spent 30 hours on the movie. 3 on writing, 5 on preparations, 7 on shooting, 5 on editing, 3 on titles and animation, and 7 on sound and scoring. Liz and Harald spent about 12 hours each. 50 more of those little videos, with increasing amount of actors, and I might be ready for my first feature film. Maybe. That would be sooo cool. Funding might be a problem though ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:20

Friday, April 22. 2011

Of Divers, Dwarfs and Pirates.

A pink dawn. The weather has been exceptional over the last week. Sunny, very few clouds, little swell, and a full moon at night. "Just like Stuttgart", a friend of mine would say. Perfect conditions for completing my rescue diver class. It was good fun, and very educational. I'm glad I did the training, because I believe it raised my awareness for little things that sometimes become a big problem. The best emergency 'response' is to avoid an emergency from happening at all, right. Interestingly I have now completed every step of my formal diver training with a different school of the three biggest organizations - CMAS (Open Water Diver), SSI (Advanced Diver), and now PADI (Rescue Diver). So, is there a big difference? Not that I've noticed. Like in all other sports it's the instructor/trainer that makes the difference, and not what club name is written on his badge. And I think I was very lucky with my instructors. Thanks a lot Christian, Isaac, Orvil and Jeff! A Dwarf8 movie in the making. Another thing for which the weather was perfect was movie making. Ever since I've met the Dwarf8 team in Tarifa, I wanted to make a Dwarf8 movie. Not that Antonio and Beat need a movie from a fledgling amateur video maker like me. But they'd love it, and I'd love making it. And when Harald arrived in St. Martin and I saw him speeding in his dinghy I thought - here's my perfect Pirate! And perfect Dwarf too. Hmmmm ... Dwarfs and Pirates ... shouldn't be too hard to make something out of that. So I thought up a script and refined it with the help of Liz and Harald. Then we rummaged through our lockers for some props and costumes, charged the cameras, cleaned the dinghies and ... action! It took two afternoons to shoot the 45 scenes, and one night to edit a rough cut of 3 minutes. I was a little apprehensive of how it would go, because I've never directed before. Fortunately Liz and Harald were as patient as they were enthusiastic, and it looks like we don't have to re-shoot any of the scenes. Which is just as well, because Harald is leaving tomorrow. Here is a low-resolution version of the rough cut: I'm quite happy with the result so far. But there is still a lot of unexploited potential, and it will take a few more days before I'll be done fine-tuning the edit and sweetening the color. And of course creating a soundtrack, because it makes such a big difference. Good that most of the work on the boat is done and the wedding is still a week away.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:16

Monday, April 18. 2011

Dinner on Florimell

Harald's catamaran Florimell and Gudrun are anchored so close together that the ancient communication technology of whistling (to make a call) and talking (to transport the message) was enough to establish that dinner would be served on Florimell tonight. The second whistle announced that dinner was ready. The third reminded me of my mum - "hurry up, dinner's getting cold". But thanks to a freshly cleaned dinghy hull it took us no more than a heartbeat (or two) to cross the 20m gap between the two boats. There is the art of creating a truly sensational dish from a wide range of selected ingredients. And there is the other art of creating a truly satisfying dish from whatever could be found in the kitchen at a given time. Liz is on her way to mastering the first, but Harald is the jedi lord of the latter. "Noodles a lÃfÃj Florimell" were a big success, especially with my hungry stomach after three swims today and hauling the dinghy onto the beach to clean the hull from weed and barnacles (I wish I could do the same with Gudrun). Another big success were Harald's stories. Here's the prototype of all adventurers. Indiana Jones could sign up for lessons. Do you know what the guy's doing to relax at home? Practicing with the ice hockey club three times a week. At age 65, crazy. All people I know stop playing volleyball long before that age, and that's not exactly a contact sport. Getting to know people like Harald (or Peter, Hermann, Tony, Antonio, Sepp ...) make the whole sailing trip so much more worthwhile. You just don't meet those types at home, or you would never get to talk so much. Meeting within the close community of an anchorage opens the way for an easy friendship across the generations. And it also opens up a whole new universe of possibilities for the future. Age as a handicap? Think again! Smutje HaraldNoodles a lÃfÃj FlorimellDigg in!The biggest anchor-light in the world ^^solar system.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:59

Cocktails and plans

The rainy weather is gone again, and with it the fever that had a hold on me for the last two days. Hurray! Fortunately I am only very rarely sick, and never more than a few days. But when I am, I hate it. One day of inactivity in bed and I feel like I'm going nuts and am about to fall into depression. But Liz cared for me lovingly (and didn't mind my mood changes) and that helped a lot. A friend of mine is going through chemo therapy at the moment, and I can't begin to imagine how bad she must feel after months and months. All the best, Marilyn! Gudrun with awning. Protection from sun and rainBut Saturday I felt much better again and could continue work on Gudrun and Florimell, Haralds boat. We finished the work on his Furler, and then I fixed my Furler, set up the new awning (tent-like contraption for sun protection), and topped-up the gas on the fridge which had stopped cooling (there must be a tiny, tiny leak). Another cruiser, Robert aka "the wifi man", showed me how to do it and will get me some gauges and a gas bottle so I can do it myself in the future. Great, another skill picked up on the way. In the evening Liesbet and Mark threw a little cocktail-tasting party to figure out what to serve on their wedding celebration in two weeks, and we were invited. Liz baked chocolate-chip cookies, which were very well received (the ones that survived the dangerous journey in my vicinity). The party ended with a arm-wrestle competition between Denise and Samantha. Great fun! Irie with visiting DinghiesMark and LiesbetRosie and John mixing CocktailsBattle of the titans Sunday started out a little lazy, until Harald came over. The day before I had told him the outline of a movie which I want to shoot with him, and he was all excited and impatient to start working on the script together. Liz joined us and we sat in the shade of the new awning and had breakfast while bouncing ideas around. Then we wrote down scene after scene on index-cards together with a little drawing and arranged them into a time-line. After that we anchored Harald's Catamaran Florimell next to Gudrun, and then went for a swim and workout on the beach. A perfect Sunday! It is common among sailors to have a look at each other's boats to share ideas and find maybe a better way to do things. It is a prime example of how it is often easier to have a good solution when you're looking at a problem from the outside. Actually, most of the time you don't even realize that there is a problem or there could be a better way to do things. When I worked with Harald on his boat I had a good idea regarding his bowsprit. And when he saw me climbing over and under the obstacle course that's my racing-cockpit and the contraption at the back (davids and solar panels), which I've inherited from the previous owner, he had some incredible good advice for me. Other people had given me advice as well, but Harald's ideas differ by providing maximum impact for minimum money. Truly elegant. 20 years of experience living on boats, and an artists eye for details make a difference. I wished I had had his advice when Gudrun was on the boatyard in Las Palmas. Now's not the time to start a(nother) big project. I've worked on the boat since I got her in July last year, and am finally getting to a state where I don't have to take the toolbox out of the locker every day and we can finish settling in. So I decided to keep his ideas in mind for the next time Gudrun is on the dry for longer. Which will be when the missing holding tank is catching up with us. Which will probably be in ... New Zealand. Uuuuuups . Haven't I mentioned that yet? The planned route has changed. We will not sail back to Europe but try to go on into the Pacific and make it to Liz' home land.

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:31

Friday, April 15. 2011

Where's the sun?

Harald buying a "Wirie" from MarkA few days ago Harald arrived with his Catamaran. I met him in Las Palmas in November, and was happy to see the always cheerful man again. Yesterday I helped him to replace his broken genoa furler. Unfortunately we dropped a plate into the sea during the installation of the furler and Harald developed a back-ache. Because Harald was out of action I dived for the plate, and successfully employed the newly learned search-patterns to find the plate. But I caught a cold a few days ago, and the search at only 3m took all the strength out of me. Then we sat there with the pieces of the furler in our hands. Harald bent over at a funny angle, and I sneezing and coughing. And we laughed . Later I brought him Diclofenac, a food package which Liz had compiled, and DVDs. I'm afraid he will be stuck on his boat until his back is better. My brother told me that it looks like there will be a lot of surplus nuclear power plants in Germany. I'm not a fan of them myself, and neither do I like burning fossils. But having had only lots of rain over the last few days, with little sun and practically no wind, I can tell a story of how alternative energy sources are not so great either. At least until the storage technology is much more advanced. Let's keep the fingers crossed that the sun comes out today, or I'll have to run the engine after all.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:41

Wednesday, April 13. 2011

This and that

AntikiEclipseNot much has happened during the last week, and I fear that it will not be before we leave St. Martin and sail to Puerto Rico that there will be anything interesting to report from Gudrun. Island life runs its course around us, and boats come and go. One of the boats to come last week was the An-Tiki, a raft which has left the Canary Islands together with me in early February. And one of the boats to leave was the Eclipse of Mr. Abramovich, though it was back only hours later. Looks like a test run for the biggest private yacht in the world, it has been said the boat is up for charter now. So in case a raft doesn't appeal to you, grab some of those millions from your sugar bowl, jump into your helicopter, and arrange a landing on one of her two heli pads. Getting water, 100l at a time. No, we don't need no help. Meanwhile we are busy with little things. Or with bigger things like filling up the water tanks. Though after the installation of a salt-water pump in the galley the fresh-water consumption has gone down significantly. But we have to be careful to rinse the cutlery well with fresh water, or otherwise it starts to rust quickly. Usually the Dinghy-runs are quite fun. Unless we run out of fuel like last Saturday. Then it's "all hands to the oars!", which is especially fun when the hands are attached to a female body, as you can see on the picture. Though credit to the other sailors - three of the four boats that passed us offered help. But we were adamant in our shame and took turns for an hour rowing to the gas station. More skilled rowers would probably have done it in a couple of minutes. Mounting the new windgeneratorElectricity is still a concern. The two solar panels provide just enough power to run the fridge, two laptops, the stereo, and charge the cameras - on a sunny day. When it's cloudy the output is not enough, and the batteries are slowly drained. After I exchanged the Rutland Windgenerator for the Silentwind the situation improved. The Silentwind is more silent (indeed!) and produces more electricity at lower wind speeds, and we gained every day 10 to 20 Ah of charge. Unfortunately not for very long, because two days after I installed the Silentwind the wind dropped to less than 10kn and has stayed there since. And for the last two days it was cloudy and rained a lot, and the batteries are draining fast. But there will be sunny & windy days again, I'm sure, and I have hope that with our current setup we won't have to run the engine to charge the batteries. And of course there is a good side to little wind too. The swell is down and the boat doesn't roll so much anymore (only a little). I could finally take down the genoa and can now investigate why it takes so much force to furl or unfurl the sail. The beach in front of the dive shop. Other than that I am still busy with the Rescue Diver course, and almost every evening there is a social call to follow, either on a boat or a bar. We like it and enjoy hearing the stories and experiences of others. But between the morning exercises, diving, running errands, doing stuff on the boat and being social in the evenings there remains precious little time for our interests. So not much has happened in terms of photography, video or writing. Sunset on board of Sim's and Rosie's "Aliana" Sunset in La Bamba Beach Bar Post-sunset Burgers!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:30

Thursday, April 7, 2011

Rescue Diver class started

Yesterday I started my Rescue Diver class. I had prepared for the first session by watching the instruction movie and working through the first chapter of the PADI Rescue Diver Manual. My first diver certification was with CMAS, and I was a little sceptical about the PADI course to begin with. But I have to admit that the material is very well written and compiled. Jeff And Jeff, my instructor and owner of the dive shop is a very experienced, confident and laid back guy and good teacher. I'm the only student in the class, so I have the benefit of his undivided attention. Unless a stingray or the like passes underneath us. Then he always stops to look. He has obviously lost nothing of his enthusiasm for diving and the underwater life since he started diving decades ago. I guess he found his spot. From the book I've learned what factors promote stress before or during a dive, and how it can lead to a diver getting tired or panic. I've learned, in theory, how to assess a situation, approach a diver, and get him to safety. Now it was time to practice it. It went pretty well. Except for the time when Jeff "fell unconscious" face down on the ground in 10m deep water, and I had to get him back up to the surface. As I turned him around his air hose got caught underneath a stone, and his regulator slipped out of his mouth. Which I didn't notice. Then I didn't manage to get him up to the surface and instead just bounced up and down at about 6m. Uups. Fortunately the second attempt worked much better. In the evening we went for a night dive at the wreck Gregory. At night many of the animals that hide underneath the wreck during the day come out, especially lobsters and other critters, and there is so much more to see. In addition the blackness of the water around the little spots of light from our lights make the whole scene (even more) magical. A spanish lobsterA crab about to look for a new shell to hide in. Check out the evil eyes and spots! Otherwise it's going well too, although Gudrun V seems somehow in a constant state of semi-messiness. We clean, and half an hour later all tables and the cockpit are full of stuff again. Either from repairs or upgrades, or simply from going about our interests (for Liz cooking and writing, for me diving and photography). The reason is that we haven't found the right places for our things yet. Instead of grab-and-use it's search-curse-and-get-frustrated. But we're slowly working our ways out of that by finding places and buying little boxes or racks etc that help us keep stuff organized. The goal is to be always ready to go sailing. At the moment we're about an hour away from that. Installation-wise things are looking good. Yesterday I've taken down the useless wind generator. It was only putting out ten percent of it's rated power amid a lot of noise, and we decided to replace it with a new one. The solar panels are doing a good job and keep the batteries between 50% and 80% charged, and we didn't have to start the engine yet to recharge the batteries. But a cloudy day could change that, and thanks to the trade winds there is so much wind here that with a (working) wind generator we could live pretty carefree electrically. Which is very seducing, especially since the alternative is to constantly remind Liz to conserve energy. I went for the 400W "Silentwind". As the name suggests, it's supposed to be very, uhm, silent. We'll know tonight when the installation is finished. And then I hope to be done for a while. There is still the dread of having to add a holding tank should we decide to go to the US Virgin islands or the mainland. Which gives me nightmares when I think about it. But we can easily skip the USVs on the way to Cuba, and the mainland is a long time away. I think I'll delay the decision until we know for sure that we'll go there.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:14

Monday, April 4, 2011

Diving, Internet and a Wedding

No, not our wedding . On the 30th of April Liesbet and Marc of SY Irie, new friends of ours, are having a wedding party here on the island. We are invited, and this morning we decided to attend. We need at least another week to get set up anyway, and it would be sad to leave shortly before the party. So we'll stay in the vicinity and probably explore some other anchorages on the french side. Although we like it very much where we are at the moment. There are very few boats in the direct vicinity, most of them are anchored on the east end of the bay, close to the resorts, where the atlantic swell is less noticeable. But we like our current spot better because the beach is close and very clean and there is comparative privacy because of the few boats, and less traffic. And fortunately Gudrun V doesn't rock as much as other monohulls, and Liz doesn't mind the movement. And through a lucky incident we even have internet on the boat now! After returning from Saba yesterday I had a coffee at a little cafe next to the ferry terminal while waiting for Liz to get the Dinghy from the Dinghy dock (she's an expert dinghy driver now). The unsuspecting lady at the cafe gave me her internet access code for the network of the local resort. Not knowing that I can pick it up from the boat as well with the help of the awesome Wirie, incidentally manufactured and sold by above mentioned Marc. The trip to Saba island yesterday was wonderful. The ride with the catamaran ferry wasn't very gentle but fast, and it covered the 45km in a little less than an hour. At the dock we were picked up by Mike, who is probably the oldest dive guide in the Caribbean. And damn cool, a real character. We did two dives, and as you can see from the pictures we had a wonderful time. Because we will be here a little while longer I decided that I might as well use the time and advance my dive knowledge. Especially since Liz took to liking diving too, and I want to make sure I can support her underwater as well as on the boat. So today I signed up for a Rescue Diver class with Ocean Explorers. Luciana and Jeff, who own the dive shop, are very nice. Jeff is also a enthusiastic photographer and keeps a weekly video dive blog on his website.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:09

Saturday, April 2, 2011

A different perspective

I just read Liz' blog about her experience on board and cracked up laughing. Partly because it's just good, funny writing. But also because she sees things from an angle that comes as a total surprise to me. Surprises are always good for a laugh. But for me that also means that the learning starts all over again. My experience as a single-handed sailor is worth little when it comes to couple dynamics on the boat. Anyway, I have permission to post the link. Check it out for yourself: <http://straightedge.wordpress.com/>. George, Matt: Don't worry, she'll keep me grounded. It's so interesting reading Liz blog. Which comes as a total surprise, because we talk so much. Liz is a big fan of talking things through. Sometimes even several times. She says it's her Malaysian heritage, where nothing is really fixed until it's kinda happened, so you always have to re-confirm whether things are still what they were a few days (minutes?) ago. Whereas for me whatever you agreed upon "naturally" doesn't change until you bring it up again to modify or cancel it. The only way to reconcile both mentalities is to talk a lot. Which is just fine, especially because it's always funny. But still, despite living with Liz and all the talking, more than half of the things in the blog are as much news to me as they are to you. Amazing. Hilarious! This is going to be a great time together on the boat.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 20:49

Friday, April 1. 2011

Two weeks together

How can you not love that girl? It's now two weeks that Liz and I am together on the boat. We had lived together before, but since Liz always had her own apartment and I had mine it was more like sleep-overs. And now we are together on a small boat with only a curtain between cabin and forepeak (where we sleep), and a folding door to the bathroom. Brown pelican Liz was very smart about coming here. She says she didn't think about it too much and consequently came with little expectations. But she's never been the outdoors-type, so moving from the center of Berlin to an anchorage in the Caribbean is a big lifestyle change for her. No friends, no internet, no hot shower, no freezer, a fridge in a cramped kitchen, and always the need to limit the consumption of water and electricity. And no work. It's very easy to feel uncomfortable, even guilty, about not working. Especially when all your friends are hard at work, and you are still connected through email and facebook and share news and pictures. Of course they are jealous, who wouldn't be. In this moving on a boat to live there is very different from going on a sailing vacation. You are aware that in a way you leave the society you lived in all your life, and of course you quickly ask yourself "and now what?". Liz, Liesbeth and Rosie When you actually get around to thinking about it, because life on the boat is surprisingly busy. Part of it is just "normal life": Shopping, cooking, eating, only everything takes longer (including sleeping). Then we are still in the process of making a home for the two of us, which means there are many things to buy, throw out, organize, rearrange, clean etc. Other things that fill the day are very peculiar to this lifestyle: the morning swim, the workout at the beach, boat repairs, and a surprisingly active social scene. Every second day you have to go out to this or that place to meet and talk. And like in any social circle there are rules to be observed. One of the most important here is the the happy hour rule. Happy hour is usually from five to six, and when you miss it you get told off by your friends for being too rich. It's such a funny life. The main ingredients for making it a happy one seem to be: • do not to take things too seriously (especially yourself) • be patient with the world (there are lots of opportunities to practice that) • be accepting of other people (everybody has his own reasons, ways, and deamons). And then there is diving! Last Monday I went just outside the anchorage, and this Sunday Liz and I are going to take the ferry to Saba, which is supposed to be breathtaking. Glasseye fish (I think) Turtle (pretty sure) Lobster and "Al", my buddy for the dive

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:05

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

News from the Anchorage

Liz and I love it at the anchorage. Every morning we swim to the beach and do some Pilates (which Liz is learning from DVDs). We also do some Martial Arts. But not for very long, because Liz always starts to laugh after the second punch or so, drops on the sand, and curls up into a ball. Well, you can't have everything . Eeeek! Working in underwear because it's so hot. Other than that I was diving on Monday, and work on the boat is continuing. After having the bottle filled I could go down for a special "boat cleaning dive". Four months in Las Palmas and four weeks in the Simpson Bay Lagoon had left the boat already caked with shrimps and barnacles and stuff. Eeeeeek. Check out the picture. And today I was working (again) on the electrical installation. The kitchen appliances - suddenly high priority items - don't run on the old inverter, and I had to install a bigger one.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:30

Sunday, March 27. 2011

Liz' first sailing lesson

Come and buy! The flea market on Saturday was a great success. I was enthusiastically advertising our "Treasures of the bilge" and throwing in extras. After a very short time everything was gone except a #7 winch and a camping light. I'm so glad the stuff is gone. Now the cockpit lockers are only half full and it's a lot easier to get to stuff. The money was quickly re-invested - in a bathing ladder, a washdown pump and a bigger inverter so Liz can run her kitchen equipment (hehe). I had no idea how the washdown pump would increase the comfort level. I installed it underneath the sink and put a spray-nozzle to the sink and an outlet for a garden hose to wash down the deck. Now we can do the dishes with salt water in the sink under pressure and don't have to carry everything on deck to do it in the bucket. And I can simply spray down the deck, and especially the anchor-chain. Awesome! And it saves so much fresh water when doing the dishes. Liz trimming the genoa With all the stuff for the flea-market gone from the deck we could finally go sailing. Liz has been reading "Sailing for Dummies" over the last days, and today we went out for her first coastal sailing lesson. Which included: • starting and stopping the engine • raising the anchor • avoiding crashing into other boats at the anchorage (including the big ones that are so busy getting to their favorite spot that they don't look out for other boats) • basic right-of-way rules under motor and sail • use of the autopilot • unfurling, trimming and furling the genoa • tacking • anchoring That's plenty for one day, and after two hours we went back to the anchorage. And then ashore for some Mahi-Mahi with rice and veggies. Yummy . We want to sail out every day a little while I wait for the US Visa to arrive.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:22

Friday, March 25. 2011

Electronic life

Thanks to the help from Garvin and Ian from the Serendipity community forum the comment spam is now under control, and I don't receive any more messages informing me about cheap pills, great deals, or hot chicks. I'm don't need any pills yet, the only deals I'm interested in have to do with boating supplies, and the hot chick is right there next to me. Thanks guys! Mentioned hot chick, Liz, has re-activated her old blog (but I'm not allowed to post the link), and it's very interesting for me to read what she thinks about life on the boat. Although we share the same values and enjoy very similar things, her priorities and her outlook on life are very different from mine. Talking, working, and living with Liz therefor provides me with a different perspective on what is happening around and within me, and I feel like I learn and adapt much more quickly when she is around and gives feedback. I have met very few people in my professional or personal life that observe behavior so accurately and are able to give such precise and constructive feedback as Liz does. And there are more blog news. I often notice that I think I've understood a certain subject. But when I sit down to write about it, I realize that the knowledge is in fact pretty vague. I have to read up on it some more and try things before I know enough to actually finish the article. So for me writing is a great way to learn. Therefor it was a given that I would start a photography/video blog after I've decided that I want to pursue photography and video more seriously. It's also a great way to share pictures with the people I meet on the way. I am not quite done setting it up yet, but here's the link: www.xlvisuals.com. Enjoy

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:28

Thursday, March 24. 2011

Gudrun at anchor

Gudrun in Simpson Bay This is Gudrun at anchor in Simpson Bay. Every morning we swim to the beach, do some exercises, then swim back and have breakfast. Perfect!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:14

Impact aproved

Is it still impact approved? An "impact approved" tank container carrying gasoline - with damage that is patched up inexpertly with duct tape. This is the caribbean!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:02

Wednesday, March 23, 2011

At anchor in the bay

Tony explaining to Liz the concept of "bearing"Winching your woman up the mast is so much easier than going yourself Sunday we finished reorganizing the boat. During the process I had emptied the lockers and went through my tools and spare parts. There were just too many things, taking up too much space and making it difficult to get to the stuff that I really need. But in order to sort out more stuff I had to adjust the selection strategy. Originally it was "If you haven't used it in six months it goes out". And now I added "If you don't need it for emergency repairs or normal maintenance it goes out". Now I'm pretty happy the way it is, and I have a lot of stuff that will make good money on the flea market next Saturday. During the crossing some of the screws that hold the tiller to the rudder shaft had become loose. The threads were damaged and I couldn't tighten them anymore. On Saturday I replaced them with new, bigger screws, and reinforced the area. I had learned the hard way a long time ago that there are no shortcuts for doing a job right when it counts. Otherwise you have to do it over and over again. So I would never have done a sloppy job when it comes to the tiller, one of the most important parts on the boat. However, I still caught myself thinking "Axel, take care. You have to do a good job here. You have a woman on board now." Crazy! A woman on board increases the responsibility level dramatically. But she also increases the comfort level. And it's just a wonderful feeling to know there is someone else who will share the experience with you. Makes all the work more worthwhile. And easier, too! For example I don't have to pull myself up the mast for repairs, but I simply sit Liz in the bosun's chair, explain her what to do and winch her up. Then I can sit back and enjoy how the look on her face changes from skeptical, to confused, to eureka!, to satisfied. Quickly followed by "let me down again!". Just great. And of course the food is much better too. Tuesday morning we left the marine in order to head out of the lagoon and anchor in the bay. We were a little too late for the 11am bridge opening, and had to anchor in the lagoon for a few hours and wait for the next bridge opening at 4:30pm. That meant leaving the dredged channel and finding a suitable spot to drop the anchor. The lagoon is very shallow, and the anchorage only 3m deep in the best of places. Not very deep for a draft of 2.50m. The water is very muddy, and often sand is floating in the water, sucked up from the bottom by the wake of speeding power boats. The display on the depthsounder was jumping from 3 to less than 2 meters all the time, which gave me the creeps. With plenty of nutrients being washed into the lagoon from rivers and sewers most of the bottom is covered by thick weed where the anchor doesn't hold well, and I instructed Liz to look out for sandy patches where we can drop the anchor. To illustrate what I meant I steered close to one of the sandy patches that was next to the channel. I went very slowly because I was unsure of the depth, and wanted to give Liz a good chance to look. When I wanted to speed up again a little I noticed that we were stuck. Immediately I switched the gear into backwards to try to get off the shallow again, but to no avail. Fortunately only a few seconds later a guy in a dinghy came by and offered to pull the bow around. Great plan! I threw him a line from the bow, and when he started to pull I gunned the engine forwards. In no time at all we were off the sandy shallow and free again. I stayed inside the channel until I was at "my old spot" where I knew the water was at least 2.80m deep, and we dropped the anchor. We run it in in backwards and then gave plenty of chain. It held on the first attempt, and we were very glad and relieved. Ten past four we lifted the anchor again and went to the bridge where we lined up as the last of eight other boats. Outside in the bay we turned to the west and found a nice spot close to the beach to drop the anchor in 4m of water on sand. We plan to stay here for a few days and clean the hull, go swimming, sailing, have a bbq with Marc and Lisbeth, and (of course) do some more repairs.

Posted by Axel Busch at 16:40

Saturday, March 19. 2011

Back in St. Martin / computer issues

On Friday evening Liz and I arrived (back) in Sint Marteen - just in time to meet everybody at Lagoones for BBQ and Open Mic (bring your instrument and bang!). Saturday we spent mostly working on the boat. But in the afternoon we took the dinghy out into the bay and watched pelicans as they hunted for fish. In the evening we went to McDonalds for the internet. A few days ago I had started to receive lots of spam comments on my blog and I wanted to update and re-configure it. There are some issues though, and I might not be able to blog for a while. I ask for forgiveness in advance. Liz' first dinghy experience quickly followed by a hammock experience Pelicans going about their business as the sun begins to set. The fiddler (Tony from Darwin) doing the same after sunset

Posted by Axel Busch at 21:06

Thursday, March 17, 2011

They kept my passport!

This morning I visited the US Embassy in Frankfurt for my visa interview. No problem there, visa granted (yay!). But they kept my passport and will send it back together with the visa in about 10 days. Which wouldn't be a problem if they had told me that in advance, because my flight back to Sint Maarten is *tomorrow*. And I need my passport for immigration there, ID card is not enough. So now I have to hurry back to Ulm and get a temporary passport (for another fee) and hope that the immigration guys in Sint Maarten accept that. Neither the German nor the Dutch officials could tell me if it'll be ok, and nobody's available in Sint Maartin yet - wrong timezone. Well ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:53

Friday, March 11. 2011

Travel visa applications

On the list of countries that I plan to visit next are two that require me to get a travel visa while in Germany: Cuba and the United States (which includes Puerto Rico). Regular tourists (those that enter and leave the country by plane) don't need a visa for the US. But if you go with a private boat, you need one. And you better take this seriously: First you have to fill out an online form here. It took me almost two hours, but that was only because I could state the following information out of my head: Countries traveled to in the last five years, last five visits to the US, educational history, job history, military service history, contact in the US, parent's details, and of course whether I planned to be a terrorist, money launderer, pimp, etc. So be prepared! And don't forget to save the document regularly or you'll end up entering the information more than once as the time runs out. You also have to upload a picture that complies to US passport regulations (50x50mm, white background, 50% covered by face, max 240kB). Fortunately the online form includes some algorithms to verify the picture. After filling out the form you get a processing number. Then you call the Embassy to make an appointment (tel: 0900 1-850055 in Germany. EUR 2.99 per minute from you mobile phone). A friendly and well-informed person checks your information quickly, then explains the rest of the process. You can choose a date, and you will be assigned a time by the computer. I choose next Thursday, the computer choose 07:30 in the morning (argh!). You will then get a confirmation email, which contains a link to a website where you can register to pay for the visa (105 EUR) and tells you what documents to bring to the interview: • your passport, obviously • color print of the picture you uploaded (50x50mm) • print of the invitation to the interview • print of confirmation of filling out the online form • proof of payment for the visa • copies of documents that state why you want to visit the US • copies of documents that proof that you have sufficient funds to pay for your visit • copies of documents that proof that you will leave the country after a limited amount of time • addressed and postpaid return envelope for the visa Interesting to read is also what not to bring: • any electronic devices, including radios, iPods, mobile phones, USB-Sticks etc • umbrellas • luggage • and obviously weapons and explosives Everything but the umbrellas will be taken away from you and not returned. Overall the process is well organized and documented, and the embassy staff seemed helpful. But it sure takes a lot of time and I was lucky to get an appointment before my return flight next week Friday. If the interview goes well I will receive the visa by mail after a week or so. I only wonder how I can proof that I'll leave the US "after a limited amount of time". Will the mortgage and loan for my house in Ulm be considered "a binding tie to Germany"? Maybe I should apply for a job. Or fix a wedding date In case you wondered what you have to do to get a visa for Cuba: Go to the embassy (no appointment needed), enter your passport details into a document, pay 22 EUR and after 10 minutes you walk out with the visa. I even took my phone and iPod with me

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:23

Wednesday, March 9, 2011

Fair winds Henk!

While I'm taking the fast way to Europe, Henk enjoys the solitude and peace at sea on his trip to Panama. Here's the video of him leaving Sint Maarten. Fair winds my friend!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:22

Monday, March 7, 2011

Heineken Regatta

Yesterday was the last day of the 31st edition of the St. Martin Heineken Regatta - the biggest regatta in the Caribbean. 184 boats raced seriously for three days, and the crews partied even more seriously for four nights. But there are so many boats here on the island that you could have spent the whole time at the anchorage without noticing a thing. Not that the race is over some of the many superyachts are leaving to go wherever the next big party is, but that's about it. Personally I'm glad the race is over. I tried some of the parties, but I didn't like the crowd too much. Either hyped up t(w)eens that work on a megayacht, or the blokes that own one of the,. I much prefer chilling in one of the cruisers' bars, where the crowd is relaxed, the drinks are cheap, and there's life music every evening. And because I'm leaving for Germany tomorrow to pick up Liz and have to leave the boat unattended for a while I wanted a place in one of the marinas, and they were very busy during the race. Deploying the race markers. At the starting line Go go go Guy looking for his spinnaker? nice spinnaker Patty's got it all figured out Paaartyeahchilling

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:47

Friday, March 4. 2011

Atlantic Crossing Video

Video of my single-handed voyage across the Atlantic from Gran Canaria to St.Martin in February 2011. 3120nm in 21 days and 4 hours. Thanks a lot to Liz and Mat for their honest and creative feedback on the rough cut.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:33

The Treasure of Monkey Island

When I was I teenager I loved to play adventure games on my 16MHz '386 computer. I spent hours after hours on games like Space Quest, Day of the Tentacle, Indiana Jones, or the Monkey Island series. Central to those games is that you are stuck in a certain place and have to collect items and information before you can progress in the game, which which usually means traveling to a different location. In order to get those items and information you have to talk to game characters, complete little quests for them and solve riddles. The characters, quests and locations are all connected by the theme of the game and tell the story. Now, 20 years later, I'm back in the game. The game is called "Voyaging on a sailboat" and it moved from the computer to real life. And just like in the game, wherever I go, I'm busy exploring an island to collect items and talk to people to gather information which I need to fix the boat and continue on my voyage. Overall it's a pretty good game. Very entertaining, a little educating and good fun. But there are days where I wished I could get my hands on the game designers and shove a particular riddle or item down their throats. A large ceramic toilet bowl for example. Or the daily quest for good internet connection. Which is absolutely necessary to upload a video ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:28

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Tuesday, March 1. 2011

Pictures

I know that sounds a little funny, but I'm a little pressed for time at the moment. So much to organize and fix after the crossing. I've uploaded some pictures though, but only on Facebook since it was easier. But you can view them even if you are not on facebook with this link: <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=341184&id=647693059&l=b9e247a96b>
Here are some teasers:

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:27

Monday, February 28. 2011

A Dinghy

St. Martin, Monday, 28.02.2011, 23:00 UTC-4 First thing this morning I took the toilet apart to see what's wrong and what parts I need. But once I had unmounted the bowl and could inspect it I didn't had to look much further. The electrical pump was completely corroded. That confirmed my decision to go for a toilet with a manual pump. Simple and reliable (and they don't flood the boat even if the seacock is broken/open and the boat is heeled over). Because after three weeks without a toilet I know one thing ... having a quiet place to "do your business" is one of the more important parts of a comfortable and sociable lifestyle. With a shopping list in my pocket I had a little time to kill before Scott would come to pick me up in his dinghy, and I used that time to review the pictures. From the 1200 pictures taken on the trip there are about 100 good ones, of which 30 are special. Well, to me at least. I hope that I can upload them to the blog tomorrow. But it's a little awkward without fast internet on board, only the 0.002 MBit(!) Iridium connection. I went to Burger King today because they seem to have the most reliable wifi around (and nice toilets), but there were so many emails to answer that I didn't get to upload the pictures to the blog. Fortunately I am now the proud owner of a Dinghy and independently mobile! The experiences with the Dinghies that came with Vespina and Gudrun had been very depressing - both lasted only 2 days then spontaneously self-deflated. Not wanting to see such a sorry sight again I was adamant to invest in the best - a Caribe 9X RIB. Surprisingly it took the whole day to get everything sorted out and rigged up and I have yet to install the Hydrofoils. Therefore I didn't get to do much else. But now I can go places, and fast too. I love it. For example I can go shopping! The first thing I bought was the new toilet. The second and third were anchors, a Delta and a Fortress. I only had one anchor (CQR) so far, which is absolutely adequate ... if you don't anchor and only stay in the marina. But with three strong anchors (and chain) I should be fine. And with a little luck I will finish installing the new toilet tomorrow. Then I'm set up and can relax and take it more slowly with the rest of the repairs. As Gerd pointed out already I'm in the Caribbean now! Beer, Rum & Cocktails, right? Incidentally, from March 3rd to 6th the 31st Heineken Regatta is happening here, and the motto is "Serious Fun" ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 22:35

Movie in the making

St. Martin, Sunday, 27.02.2011, 23:30 (UTC-4) What a luxury! A full night's sleep without having to get up. I was actually surprised that I could sleep for 8 hours straight, after sleeping for not more than one hour at a time for the last three weeks (and then with an uneasy feeling). Some say ignorance is bliss. But I say sleep is even better! First thing in the morning I installed the new solar controller - a BlueSky 2000E with Max Power Point Tracking. Roy said MPPT is the thing to have, and I trust Roy. Then I put my kayak into the water to meet up with Henk, Scott and Midge for breakfast. It took me 20 minutes to paddle to Henk across the Lagoon, and I was pretty wet by the time I got there. Too much wind for the sit-on-top. Scott arrived quickly afterwards and took us all to the shore with his RIB. Against the wind and waves, and then we were really wet. Actually I took my shirt and shorts off on the way and just sat there in the Dinghy in my trunks. But the sun was shining and we dried quickly enough. We had breakfast at a great french bakery, and I had a chance to look at my regular emails for the first time in three weeks. That hadn't happened in 16 years. I had not forwarded them to the Iridium account, because with only 2400 Baud bandwidth is very, very precious. And I had a chance to read the comments on my blog. I cried from laughing. My friends, I love you. You are wonderful, and I'm the luckiest man alive to have you and your support. I'm not surprised that I didn't feel lonely at sea - you were with me all the time. Thanks so much! On my way back to Gudrun I stopped by at Nimble Navigator Mike's boat, and then I went back to see how the solar charger is doing. Wow! 20A charge. That is just unbelievable (do you hear me Chris - unbelievable!). Connected to the Rutland controller (also not cheap) the best I had got was 5A from one panel. And now the two panels give me four times that. Unbelievable! Then I started editing the movie of the crossing for real. I had three hours and thirtyfive minutes of footage. And now, 11 hours later, I think I have a version that I can show to Liz for reviewing. It's 17 minutes long, and at the moment I can't find more to throw out. But the most difficult part is yet to come - the soundtrack. I don't have anything out of the can that fits that length, even if I cut it down to half. So I'll have to spend some time to cook up a score of my own. I'm going to use "Soundtrack Pro" for that. And that's going to take me a day at least, because I have next to no knowledge of composing, and only very little of Soundtrack Pro. But I'm looking forward to it. I wanted to do that since I was 14 and mixed music on my tape deck. Some things are worth waiting for, even if it's 20 years. With a little luck I can upload it on Wednesday evening. So, the plan for tomorrow is: #1 get a dinghy #2 find fast wifi, upload the movie and skype with Liz #3 go shopping for groceries #4 fix the head #5 review and select pictures for posting to the blog Hang on Matt! The pictures are coming. Some of them are also worth the wait

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:07

Saturday, February 26. 2011

In the Caribbean

After arriving in St. Martin (or rather Sint Maarten, since it was on the south (Dutch) side of the island), I anchored in the Simpson Bay and called Henk on the VHF. The anchor didn't hold, and as I lifted it up to try a second time Henk was already coming out through the bridge. The bridge is of the lifting type and opens for boats two times a day. We hurried up to get into the Lagoon before it closed again. Actually we were 10 Minutes late, but I had called the bridge on Channel 12 and the guy was so kind to wait for us. He wasn't happy, but he waited. Cool. Then we anchored in the Lagoon, also on the dutch side where the water is deeper. Not really that deep. I have a draft of 2.50m, and the water below my keel is 2.80. Not much left to spare, huh. Then we did the maneuver again because the anchor didn't hold again. Then we celebrated my arrival with a beer, before heading to the shore with Henk's dinghy to check me in. Checking in was surprisingly fast and painless. And a little funny. The girl at immigration asked me to please specify all crew members on the immigration and not just myself. I said I was alone. "What, you came all the way from Spain alone? Are you crazy?". Maybe a little. We also reserved a place in the Simpson Bay Marina for the time when I'll fly home to Germany to pick up Liz. Until then I'll stay here at anchor and do my repairs. There's a lot to do. At Budget Marine I picked up a new regulator for the solar panel and looked at Dinghies. You have to have a Dinghy in the Caribbean, or you're socially below the horizon because you can't go anywhere and don't meet anybody. Then we went back to Gudrun, hoping that the anchor had held this time. It had. Now I'm getting ready to sleep because I'm really tired. I just hope the planes don't fly all night. They pass directly over my boat when they lift off the airport. And I was wondering why there are relatively few boats here, hehe. But before I go to bed I have to savor that thought: I am in the Caribbean. Came here on my own in the boat that I've rebuilt from keel up for the last seven months. Isn't that just sooooo cool?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 18:02

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

at anchor in the lagoon. yeah!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 10:27

Land!

Day 22, Saturday, 26.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (08:00 local), 18:00.4N 62:49.0W, 25.5°C, 1016mBar Almost there. And it's about time, too. Yesterday afternoon I had to tape the autopilot to the tiller because the bolt on the tiller to which it connects had come off. I can put it back in its hole, but I can't fasten it. With the sticky tape it's holding out surprisingly well, but I wouldn't want to have to go another day. The first thing I have to repair in port is that tiller. Take it apart completely and replace all nuts and bolts. Also I ran out of water this morning. Well, in the forward tanks. The main tank and the emergency supply is still untouched, so I'll probably survive the last three hours. The forward tanks hold 150l in total, but I lost about 30l due to a leak. 120l in 21 days makes about 6l a day. A little more than I had expected. Now compare that to your regular household consumption. The last night must have been one of the longest in my life. Even longer than a transcontinental evening flight heading west in the tourist class with a noisy neighbor and no in-seat IFE. I passed Barbuda in the middle of the night and entered the Leeward Islands. Sleep was hard to find after that, especially after I picked up the first vhf radio transmission since leaving Las Palmas an hour later. I feel much safer far, far away from land and other vessels. At five thirty in the morning I could make out the volcano ridge of St.-Barthelemy to the south-west. Land! Only 30nm to go to St. Martin. Because of my draft of 2.50m I can only enter the great Simpson Bay Lagoon of St.-Martin through the southern entrance on the Dutch side, and to get there I had to pass Pointe Blanche, the cape in the south-western corner. The water is usually between 20 and 40m deep, but the charts warn of shoal patches in the area. I'm pretty much done preparing the boat for anchoring at the entrance of the bridge, where Henk wants to meet me. Then I have to check in and find a place to put the boat. I'll probably go into a marina for the first few days to clean and repair the boat, before moving to the anchorage inside the Lagoon. Nimble-Navigator-Mike should be there too. 18nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:13

Friday, February 25. 2011

UTC-4

Day 21, Friday, 25.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (08:00 local), 18:23.0N 60:03.0W, 26.5°C, 1015 mBar Yesterday was one of the best sailing days ever. Blue sky with traces of cirrus clouds, wind of 10 to 15kn from NE, and a calm sea. I had full sails up all day and Gudrun was going fast and steady westward. An easy 180nm, absolutely fantastic. The boat was so steady that I finished reviewing and classifying the video footage and did some rough editing too. The night sky was clear and dark, the moon rising only early in the morning. Great for spotting stars and shooting stars, there were a few. But about five in the morning the wind increased and I had to reef. Now the sky is full of cumulus, the sea is getting rougher, spray is washing over the deck and yesterday's pleasant cruise is already a distant memory. Today is a holding-on-to-something-day. So, is this what my last day at sea is going to be like? Well, at least it's fast going and unless the weather is playing tricks on me I'll reach St. Martin before noon tomorrow (local time). And I have enough battery power left to run the fridge and have a cold beer ready for Henk, who is waiting for me. Incidentally I have just passed the 60th longitude and entered a new time-zone, UTC-4. Four time zones in 21 days. Well, three really, the canary islands are right at the border of UTC. Which means that at this pace I would circle the world in 168 days. Not that I intend to. This was a fun and interesting trip, but I'm looking forward to make landfall and sleep through a full night for a change. Without having to get up to have a look around or reef the mainsail. 180nm to go. Only one more day!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:02

Thursday, February 24, 2011

A ship!

Day 19, Thursday, 23.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 18:51.7N 57:04.8W, 26° C, 1014 mBar Yesterday was very nice sailing. The sea was pretty calm in the morning and at first it went very well and comfortably with the Parasailor up. But by noon (local time) the wind had gone gradually down to about Bft 1-2 and I wasn't happy with the speed I was making, only 4kn. Since the wind was coming from about 160° I took the Parasailor down and put the main-sail and genoa up. Which gave me upwards of 6kn of speed, much better. I kept the standard sails up for the rest of the day and night. See note below for a verdict on the Parasailor, if interested. One thing I always wanted to do is take a video of the boat while sailing. From outside. The idea was to string a camera to a kite and let that fly. For that reason I had brought two kites, one with 1m² and another with 1.3m². Yesterday was going to be the big day. But it turned out the wind was too light and the kites wouldn't fly. Later there was more wind, but they always kamikazed into the main-sail. Turbulence I guess. So ... no footage of the boat sailing yet. But I'll tr again today. I am getting close to the Caribbean and am expecting more traffic again. I haven't seen another ship in 15 days. And just as the sun went down I saw one. A freighter, the "Crystal Gate", bound east. Both the AIS and Radar Detector saw it too, but I saw it first. Suckers . We have this little competition going. Who is the last to see the first ship of the day has to do the night watch. Haha. After sunset the wind increased and I reefed down for the night, but the wind dropped again later and at three in the morning I changed from 2nd to 1st reef, and at five from 1st reef to full sail. At this point the first self-inflicted damage of the trip occurred. I tore the rope of the starboard lazy-jack. I had noticed that it was going a little hard on the winch, and looked out for the lazy-jack because it's the usual suspect. But in the dark I couldn't see anything wrong despite the flashlight and then ... snap, it was suddenly very easy on the winch. Uuups. Next time I'll use dark lines for the lazy-jack so they contrast better against the sail in the night. To fix it I would have to climb the mast up to the second spreaders. Since I have no mast-steps and nobody to haul me up on a winch I would need to go up with my climbing ascensors while the boat is rolling around. Sounds like fun. Or I'll just throw a rope over the first spreader and pull the lazy-jack over that for the time being until I'm in port. 345nm to go. Really close now! Verdict on the Parasailor I've sailed now for 18 days in 0 to 40kn of wind, using alternatively the Parasailor and the Main and Genoa. Though I didn't sail the Parasailor in more than 25kn of wind. After that trial it has become clear that my boat does always go faster with the standard sails than with the Parasailor. Depending on the angle to the wind the difference is between 10% (160°) and 30% (90°). I don't think that this is true for every boat, and that the difference in speed is that big on my boat for two reasons: 1st I have a 7/8th rig and my Spinnaker halyards don't come out at the top of the mast but just a little over the forestay. Therefor my Parasailor is a lot smaller than it would be if I had a top-rigg and it flies lower and creates less pull. 2nd my standard sails are very well cut (and very new) DC66/77 triradial sails and with the 7/8th rig I can trimm them just right. However I'm still happy with the Parasailor and downwind of 160° I prefer it to the regular sails for a number of reasons. 1st the difference in speed is downwind not so big. 2nd the boat rolls a lot less because of the lift of the wing. The added comfort is huge, especially in light winds and old swell. 3rd I don't have to be afraid of a accidental gybe. 4th it looks really cool. So my final verdict on the Parasailor: Great downwind sail. Needs no pole and is therefor a lot easier to use than a Spinnaker. Needs a little practice with the ropes (2 downhauls, 2 sheets). Can sail up to 60° to the wind, but in practice you would not go closer than 100° unless it's only for a few miles. Good investment.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:08

Wednesday, February 23. 2011

Footage

Day 19, Wednesday, 23.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 19:02:5N 54:24.0W, 26.5°C, 1014 mBar Every few hours I turn on the chartplotter to write down my position. So far there was only open sea around me, but since yesterday when I turn the thing on I see the Lee- and Windward Islands on the edge of the map. And every time a little more of them. Very good for morale, very good. The sea was rather cooperative yesterday. Noticing that I had difficulties doing the dishes the swell went down and the pots stopped sliding through the cockpit. Thanks sea. That encouraged me to wash some clothes as well and do some general cleaning. The wind also dropped way below 20kn, and I put the Parasailor up again. Now I have less than 10kn of wind, and it's going very slowly. No chance to finish the rest of the trip in three days, it's going to be four for sure. Then I sat down to edit some of the footage. Normally I shoot in 720p resolution, which is plenty enough for TV and Web. But because it's very unlikely that I will do this many more times in the near future I thought "let's shoot in full HD (1080p)". Now I have 50GB of movie clips, and working with them takes ages and is right at the limit of my computer (and my patience). Especially running of the battery. But some of the footage is surprisingly nice. There is one scene: boat sailing into the night, dark sea, sunset in the background, and a dolphin jumps out of the water in the middle of the picture. Cool. But I'll have to convert everything to 720p before going on (which the computer ensures me is going to take 12 hours). I only have a vague idea of what to show and no story-board, so putting a rough cut together takes a lot of reviewing and moving clips around. And I prefer to do this without a lot of waiting in between. But I noticed already that I'll need some more scenes where I "address the audience" and tell what's going on. Just watching the boat sail along and me doing stuff gets pretty boring otherwise, even for my friends ;-), and I don't like voice-overs much. 500nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:57

Tuesday, February 22. 2011

Rollercoaster

Day 18, Tuesday, 22.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 19:07:6N 51:57.6W, 25Å,Å°C, 1016 mBar I love it when a plan works out. Yesterday I sailed north-west close-hauled for 35nm in a light to moderate westerly. As the wind turned north I tacked and sailed west. Unfortunately right into the swell that had already built, but that couldn't be helped. The wind increased steadily and I started reefing. Slowly the direction of the swell followed the turning wind and instead of jumping up and down the boat started to roll left and right. With the odd jump in between. Very entertaining. Also entertaining was the sky. Mostly bright blue, but with some big and nasty-looking black clouds in my path from which a thick curtain of rain extended to the ground. Scary, especially as the sun began to set and colored the sky around the black clouds blood red. I dodged them as much as I could and only got a little rain. It was a fast but also very bumpy ride and I didn't get much sleep in the night as I was tossed around in my bunk. I tried to make myself comfortable and relax, but it's kind of hard when your face gets alternatively ground into the pillow or smashed against the wall while your butt is hanging outside of the bed in the lee-cloth. Hehe.. If the this night is the same I have to set up the camera and film it. This morning I dropped the main-sail and am now only going with the genoa.. I lost a knot of speed, but the boat sails more upright and doesn't turn so hard into the wind when hit by a wave. Easier on the boat, the autopilot and on me . Overall I sailed 180nm yesterday again, but only 140 towards my destination. I like going fast. But I have to admin that going slower and more comfortably is also very appealing at times. But I think so far on the trip I was very lucky and caught a good mix. Now I have to do the dishes from yesterday. I was a very hungry sailor and had outmeal for breakfast, sweet pancakes for lunch and tortillas verde for dinner. I was hoping that the sea would be quieter today, but no luck. There are still a lot of potatoes and onions left, so today I'll make some bavarian potatoe salad. 635nm to go. Getting there

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:07

Monday, February 21. 2011

So slow

Day 17, Monday, 21.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 19:04:0N 49:31.3W, 26^oÅ, 1013 mBar I was writing about how calms are much worse than storms, but in the end decided not to post it. It's just ranting. Only so much: I think calms are worse because in order to survive them you have to become Buddha. Desire nothing, wish nothing, just be. Yesterday was pretty calm, a little less than 5kn of wind from the east, turning south. But just enough wind that the Parasailor would fly and so I managed to log a surprising 90nm. I choose to head further north, because it was faster sailing and from the weather map it looked like there would be more wind there. If possible I wanted to avoid the center of the depression which is passing through from the west. And it looks like I just made it, although I got into quite some rain this morning. Now I have a slight breeze from the west and I'm heading further North-West under full sails and an incredible 3.5kn of speed . The wind should change back to North-East some time in the evening and then I can put the Parasailor back up and sail in a straight line to St. Martin. That's the plan at least. Otherwise not much news. Nothing broke over the last days, but I ate a lot yesterday because I was so bored inside my little hot boat and there was nothing to do. I tell you, calms are the worst! 775nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:09

Sunday, February 20. 2011

Time

Day 16, Sunday, 20.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 18:23.1N 48:05.3W, 26 \bar{A} , \bar{A} °C, 1011 mBar Yesterday I had an important decision to make: To shave or not to shave. Do I want to arrive in the Caribbean like a peaceful and law-abiding man, or like a pirate. Will Turner or Jack Sparrow? Put it that way the question is easy to answer. Will get's to marry pretty Elizabeth. So away with the stubble! Other than that the day held little excitement. Some dolphins came by, but were not interested as I was going way too slow for them. Twice a Sooty Tern circled the boat, but was gone each time before I had the camera ready. But he'll be back, and then I'll shoot the little bird . All through the day and night the wind remained very light (5-8kn) and variable, and every half hour at the latest I had to adjust the course and trimm of the sail carefully to keep my speed close to or over 4kn. I'd rather go a little zik-zak then just sit dead in the water. The sky was mostly cloudless and I hid from the sun during the day as much as possible. Instead I reviewed the pictures and clips I had shot. There are some really nice pictures, but I have to film more if I want to have enough material at the end to get a decent movie out of it. Maybe I'll edit some today which will give me a better idea of what is missing. As the sun set I moved back into the cockpit to watch the sky, spot stars, and read up on them. I'm not really good at astronomy. Although I find it most fascinating I've never spent the time. Well, looking at the weather I'll have a lot of time left on this trip to read up on the subject . Time! By now there is a 3h difference between ship's time (UTC) and localtime (UTC-3). But it doesn't matter much because I have little need of knowing the time. Like any other worthless idler my routine is governed by the sun. And the wind. The only moment I need to know the time is when I post to my blog every day at 12 UTC, when I also measure my progress over the last 24h. Hey, looks like I managed to log just over 100nm. I'm very happy about that, regarding the conditions, and I hope I can maintain that pace until the wind picks up again. 855nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:07

Saturday, February 19. 2011

Moss

After a request from Markus I checked my boom to answer a pressing question. There is no sign of moss. Or algae. Even on the molecular level. I've analyzed numerous samples with my tricorder and in the ship's state-of-the-art laboratory. There is, however, a thin crust of salt on the windward side. That's east. Maybe you guys can formulate a substitute theory for the marine environment?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:02

Two weeks at sea

Day 15, Saturday, 19.02.2011, 12:00 UTC (09:00 local), 18:23.1N 46:23.0W, 26.5°C, 1012 mBar Two weeks at sea! And I still like it, what a surprise. Even more of a surprise is that there is still fresh (more or less) fruit and vegetables left, and I still don't have an excuse to cook cheap pasta. But I'm down to oranges, apples, lemons, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and garlic now. But then I decided to use Buitoni Bolognese sauce anyway, just because I can, haha! Ok, with onions, carrots and garlic. Yesterday my brother told me that people are commenting to the entries on my blog, and wishing me all the best for the trip. Thank you all very much for thinking of me and caring. Also to the people who just read and care, and don't comment so much. Unfortunately I cannot read the comments while on the way, but I will catch up once I get to my destination. Apparently some even post the one or other helpful advice. For example regarding navigation in European forests. But what probably very few know is that one of the culprits who comments so much is actually guilty of inspiring me to these kinds of adventures. Yes, and at an early age too. My "Sandkastenfreund" Markus M. We were neighbors during kindergarten and primary school and actually played in the sandbox together. And it was his idea to walk across the Alps, Germany to Tirol, after High-School. Which I liked so much despite an injured knee (and wishing I was dead at one particular time) that I fell for the outdoors. So it's all Markus' fault, hehe. Thanks Markus. Back to the present. The weather was great yesterday, wind and sun, and I was absolutely over-motivated in regard to filming. I decided to film how the parassailor is set. Only instead of a "how-to" it became a "how not to". If this ever makes it into youtube the whole sailing community will crack up laughing. But when night fell the weather decided it had given me (obviously) enough sun, but (unfortunately) also enough wind. No more, and there is still pretty much no wind now (though the sun came back up). I had a hopeful look at the weather forecast a few minutes ago, but it doesn't look good. The overall situation is: no wind until Tuesday, then lots. Sun only during the daylight hours. Three days baking in the hot sun and not moving much. Oh dear, my worst nightmare is coming true. Morale is still high though. Very tempting to use the engine. But I only have fuel for one day, haha. Good that I have books for many, many more days.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:10

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Startup error

“Startup error, please contact your service provider” is all I get from my Iridium 9555 phone anymore. The thing is basically brand-new. Now it has packed up, after about 250 hours of use. It is a replacement for my last Iridium 9555 phone, which packed up after about 300 hours. Do I see a pattern there? Fearing something like that I brought a spare one. Expensive, yes, but what can you do. There are little options. But who knows how long this will last. So, just in case it stops working soon too and I can't post any more blog messages: I'm alive and well. Don't call the MRCC, SAR, Coast Guard, Ambulance, Marines, SAS, SBS, Newspaper, ... I still carry an EPIRB in case something bad happens and can notify the MRCC myself. Otherwise I'll just have to sit it out on my strong boat until the currents brought me to the Caribbean. The place is damned hard to miss, and there is enough food and water on the boat. Damn electronics. And they advertise it as the toughest phone on the planet. Yeah right.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 08:05

Becalmed

Day 13, Thursday, 17.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:28.7N 42:16.5W, 25C, 1016 mBar

Yesterday was the best day yet. Beautiful weather, little swell, and no damages. Awesome! The wind was very light, only 10 to 15kn, but with the Parasailor up I made nevertheless relatively good speed of 6 to 7kn. Until the evening, when the wind began to fall below 10kn and my speed decreased to 4 to 5kn.

But more annoying than the low speed is usually the strong rolling of the boat that comes with it, as every little wave sets the boat in motion. Something that is most annoying. Fortunately I was spared this experience mostly because the dynamic pressure wing in the Parasailor creates enough lift to stabilize the boat. Fantastic invention. So for the first time on this trip I could sit in the cockpit without getting wet and enjoy the trip. I played some tunes on my tin whistle, read in my books, wrote some, and even had a glass of Macallan as the sun went down. Life is good.

Octavio send me an email describing in detail the possible issues with the Furler and what to take care of when I have a look at it. And Stephan gave me some tips on how to trim the Parasailor properly. I have to admit that I have very little light wind experience. It's just my luck that there's a lot of it most of the times I sail. Or rather: I don't go out in light winds often.

I also took lots of pictures first of the sail, then the sun, and later the moon and the boat in the night. Thanks to a f/1.4 lens and a great sensitivity of the sensor in my camera. For the moon I used the f/4.0 400mm super tele at f/16. The first part of the night I slept in the cockpit, but then it got a little chilly and damp and I moved into the salon. The direction of the light wind wasn't very stable during the night, and every half hour or hour I had to get up to pull a little on the sheet and ease out the downhaul, or the other way round, to maintain my breathtaking speed of around 4kn. The Parasailor needs a little more attention than the genoa, but the reward of higher speed and stability is well worth it.

Well, that was the night. Now it's morning and .. where's the wind gone? Nothing moving. I set here becalmed. Looks like a day rather for fishing than for sailing ... Well, as a good friend once said: "You can have anything you want. But not everything."

1180nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:11

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

Lost in electronics

Day 12, Wednesday, 16.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:11.5N 40:05.5W, 25[°]Å,Å°C, 1017 mBar The relative peaceful weekend with no more problems had lulled me into thinking that I was on top of the game now, and that the rest of the trip would be nice & quiet. Haha! Monday taught me better with the Chartplotter and Furler causing trouble, and yesterday it went on in the same tradition. I was just cutting the cake to celebrate the fact that I've covered more than half of the distance, when the boat suddenly turned into the wind. I climbed into the cockpit, saw in passing that "STLK FAIL" was written across the autopilot display, and quickly jumped to the rescue of the tiller-pilot. The rudder was lying far on port, and the tiller-pilot was extended as far as I've never seen it before. I steered the boat for an hour myself, thinking about the best course of action. Then I decided to furl the genoa away, lash the tiller down and go over the complete Raymarine installation while the weather is relatively nice. I wanted to understand how the problem came about, fix it, and find out what possible alternatives there are in case it happens again and I'm pressed for time. Six hours the boat sat there without moving as I removed panel after panel to check each connection. I'll spare you the details. It's hard enough to connect the little wires in places you can hardly reach when the boat is not moving. But when it's moving ... Well, at least I think that I should not have any more problems with that stuff in the near future. And should the autopilot quit it's job next time with a "STLK FAIL" (Seatalk Link Failure) error, I know that it's enough to simply disconnect it from the other Raymarine devices. It will work happily on it's own. But if it detects a problem on the common bus it shuts down. Unlike the other Raymarine devices, which just don't show the missing data. Interesting, huh, considering that the autopilot is the only device of that whole installation that I really need. My phone, the iPod, even the camera has a GPS and can tell me where I am and where I'm going. But now that the wind-vane is out of action nothing else here can steer the boat while I eat my little celebration cake in peace. Think about it, Raymarine guys. After I was back on course, with the spare tiller-pilot steering, I took apart the other one and made sure it's going to move ok again. Then I cleaned the cockpit, galley and floor, because I like cleaning. It's dirty, you clean it, it's clean. That simple. No crypted error messages necessary to tell you it's dirty (e.g. NT CLN), no rebooting necessary to find out if the last two hours of work were wasted or not, and no jumping between states. Clean or not clean. And it looks nice too. In the meantime it was dark and the moon high above me in a clear sky. Time to practice some astronavigation! You never know, the way it's going on this trip tomorrow all the GPS satellites might suffer a catastrophic software failure and need a manual reboot. Or cleaning. Maybe I should apply at ESA/NASA for a position as janitor on the ISS after this trip. I could clean the station and in my spare time fix stuff. Like plumbing, solar panels, navigational computers etc. Hang on! The "Space Quest" adventure game series of the late eighties comes into a whole new perspective suddenly! 1310nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:25

Tuesday, February 15. 2011

More challenges

Day 11, Tuesday, 15.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:18.2N 37:47.5W, 24Å,Å°C, 1018 mBar It didn't clear up yesterday, but stayed overcast all day with the occasional drizzle of rain. Which didn't matter much, because I was busy inside with the Chartplotter (Raymarine C-80). The thing wouldn't turn on anymore but kept on rebooting. To my surprise this behavior was covered in the manual: do a factory reset like this then re-install the firmware. How fortunate that I had prepared a suitable compactflash card before the trip with the necessary utility and firmware! Before the reset I tried to extract my waypoints and tracks from the memory of the unit with the help of the utility, but that caused the thing to crash too. So after the reset I had to set up everything again. It tells something about the internal problems a company must have when a product is shipped like that and the latest firmware, which could solve the problem, is from March 2008 and labeled "Development build". Shortly after having solved that problem I received an email from my friend Henk, a fellow single-hander, who is at the moment waiting for me in St. Martin. He says I shouldn't worry too much about damages on the trip. A long journey like this is very tough on the material and everybody has damages.. Just repair them on the way or when you get there. That lifted my spirit somewhat. Knowing something in theory or having a friend tell you "it's ok" is not the same thing. By that time the wind had dropped and I wanted to furl in the genoa to set the parasailor. But the genoa wouldn't furl in. Or furl out. It wouldn't furl at all anymore. Talking about damages, ey. But usually that's no big deal, it's just the furling-line getting fouled-up in the drum. I had a look at that, but it seemed ok. Then I removed the line which should make the sail unfurl itself completely. But it didn't. Then I removed the drum. Nothing, at least nothing obvious. Nothing loose, no screws missing or sticking out. And looking up to the head of the sail it looked ok too, no halyards twisted around the slider either. A mystery. The next step is usually to unshackle the sail from the furler, pull it out and then take it down. But by that time the wind had already increased to 25kn and it was getting dark. Chances were I would be without my primary sail for the night, or maybe the whole rest of the voyage. So before doing that I called Octavio from Alisios Sailing, who had installed the thing. And I also asked my brother Ralf to have a look at the schematics, the guy's an absolute genius with everything that moves. But no news on either side. The big question then was: Sail down or not? I decided not to. Reasoning that it's furled away enough for the nightly 30kn-Party, and that I can always take it down and had done so in much worse conditions. Of course this night the wind increased to 40kn. It's hilarious isn't it . Well, I kept the sail up, but de-powered it by trimming it badly. I didn't get too sleep much, because I checked the sail often and when not the boat was moving so crazily and everything was banging and clonging that sleep was out of reach until things calmed down to 20kn this morning, the sail still furled in as before. I fell asleep. Dreaming of Sails, lines and wrenches. But hey, what's that! The angry sound of the genoa flapping in the wind intruded into my peaceful slumber. I jumped out of the bunk, went outside, and behold! The genoa had unfurled. Interesting. What had happened? Applying Occam's Razor, the simplest explanation is that I must have developed super powers on the trip and can now fix stuff in my sleep. Call me "Sleepman"! If you require my help simply project a big pillow-shaped icon into the cloudy night sky of your city and I'll come and fall asleep for you. I only hope it's not urgent, because it takes a long time to get anywhere with a boat. I put the whole thing back together and was able to furl the genoa in and out again. Whew. But it doesn't run as smoothly as it should. I have to pull a lot and then it turns one time. Pull, pull, pull, turn. Pull, pull, pull, turn. And it should turn just as I pull. Like the stay tension wasn't right, but it looks ok. Hmm. Maybe I have to sleep over it some more 1440nm to go. Half-way there!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:17

Monday, February 14. 2011

Books rule

Day 10, Monday, 14.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:19.4N, 35:11.8W, 24Â°, 1020mBar The sky is overcast today and there is a slight drizzle of rain now and then. But if the last days are anything to go by it should clear up a little over the course of the day. The afternoons are usually quite nice, and the wind becomes a little steadier. Unlike in the night, where the wind quickly and often changes from Bft 5 to 8 and back, accompanied by much and very sudden movement of the boat. Every evening I check the boat and reef down so I don't have to do it at night, because it's so much more work, and more dangerous too. Yesterday afternoon I cooked a huge pot of vegetable stew before the eggplant and leek go off. I'm surprised that the fruit and veggies are holding out as well as they do, and I still have a good supply. No need yet to open any cans or ready meals. Later I cleaned the boat a bit and when it got dark I sat in the companionway under my little sprayhood and watched a movie. But sailing and watching movies at the same time doesn't do it for me. A good movie is something that takes you completely in and away from your surroundings. In addition there's so much noise on the boat that I need to crank up the volume or wear headphones to understand the dialogues. But that makes me quickly feel disconnected from the boat and the voyage, because I don't hear the wind and the sea, and I don't like that. For the same reason I don't listen much to music. Books on the other hand are awesome, you can be in two worlds at the same time. At the moment I'm reading "Badass", "Eine kurze Weltgeschichte für junge Leser", and "The Republic of Pirates". But movies are a good thing to have in case I should get becalmed for a longer time. Because that drives me crazy, and some disconnectedness can only be helpful then. I guess that's one reason why they carried so much rum on the boats in the olden days. Disconnects you very quickly from your surroundings, hehe. I haven't touched my rum supply yet, but in the last nine days I've emptied one bottle of wine and two cans of beer. It would have been a lot more beers if Rolf or Arndt were around, right guys? While cooking, cleaning and watching the movie I neglected trimming the genoa a little and only made 170nm in the last 24 hours. 1590nm (2800km) to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:06

Sunday, February 13. 2011

The SPOT is dead

So far I've used a SPOT messenger to update my position on my blog and on facebook every 6 hours. But when I turned it on this noon and wanted to send a message, the little lights indicated "Unit self test failed. Contact Manufacturer". Subsequent attempts to make it work (like changing the batteries) didn't prove successful so far. Ok, Mr. Manufacturer, would you please be so kind and drop a new one by? I'm only a third way across the atlantic. Well, I guess from now on the daily blog at 12:00 UTC will have to suffice. I still carry a EPIRB in case of emergency, so it's only an inconvenience and not a problem. If you want to track me on a map, you can use my alternative blog at <http://blog.mailasail.com/axelbusch/>

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 08:59

Flying fish

Day 9, Sunday, 13.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:27.36N, 32:20.51W, 23.5°C, 1021mBar This morning I found two flying fish on my boat! Unfortunately they weren't even three centimeters long and not worth throwing into the pan. So instead I had bacon, eggs, toast and fruit. Sunday breakfast! Yesterday was actually a really nice day. Wind still very variable with 20 to 35kn, but very sunny and a somewhat settled sea, at least until the evening. I used the opportunity to shoot some pictures and even a few video clips, but I have to say I prefer other people than myself in front of the camera. I tried to record a video blog too, but felt so silly I quickly stopped. Most of my thoughts are on this written blog anyway, and as you can see they are hardly worth recording. But it will be a big laugh for sure when I read it again in a few years, and that makes it worth it. What I forgot to mention yesterday was that on the night from Friday to Saturday the wind had a keen edge, as did the waves. Little Gudrun was tossed about a lot, and I was reminded of the knock-down I had suffered west of Rabat last year. As a result I completely locked down the boat as an exercise, secured all lockers, hatches, and vital gear, and kept the grab bag etc. at the ready. And it's not as if I had anything else important to do here anyway. The knock-down didn't come of course, but it was a right pain in the a** every time I had to go out to pee. And, who would have thought, right that night I had to go a few times. Well, this morning I was glad that everything was still stowed away so nicely from Friday, because Gudrun was actually hit by two braking waves in rapid succession and the port side was under water up to the halyard-winch on the roof. Not quite a knock-down fortunately, but not far off. Of course I had just climbed out of the companionway a few seconds before and was hit in the face by the first wave, then flooded up to my butt by the second. Nothing like that to wake you up. But in no time at all Gudrun was up and on course again, the water drained out of the cockpit, and only a glass full of water had made it down the companionway. Great boat. And I went down again to change into dry clothes, yet another time. Another thing that has a big frustration potential on a moving boat is proper cooking. It's incredibly hard to cut something up nicely when the subject is always accelerating away from under your fingertips, while your body is moving in the other direction in order not to fall over. Makes me want to throw my anchor in the evening in order to cook in all quiet. But that wouldn't work here, would it. Besides I should have brought about 12km more anchor chain. Maybe for the next crossing (haha) I should get some crew. Or even better one of these awesome cooking machines my friend Ivo has. You throw everything into a bowl and it cuts the stuff up real sweet and in no time at all. I remember reading an ad for a sailing yacht with a gimballed salon that stays always level. Must be quite a sight, when you sit in all quiet and the whole hull moves around you like a rollercoaster. But after eight days I'm quite used to the movement now and pretty comfortable in my bunk with the lee-cloth. Which is where I'm probably going to stay most of the day if the weather stays like it is. The wind is still very variable, Bft 5 to 8, and I've reefed down a lot. The speed of the boat ranges from 4 to 11 knots, but it seems to average out at about 180nm every day. Only 1750nm left to go to St. Martin. We're getting there

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:25

Saturday, February 12. 2011

There goes the shoe

Day 8, Saturday, 12.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:33.75N, 29:21.28W, 24°C, 1021mBar To me, one of the most amazing aspects of human physiology is how the ability to detect annoying sounds improves dramatically as soon as you assume a horizontal position. For example, when I stand in front of my berth and listen everything seems quiet. But as soon as I've climbed over the sea-cloth and made myself comfortable in my little nest I hear them. The little annoying bings and bangs and clongs. And I swear they haven't been there a second before! And when I get up to check them out they are gone. The only way I can locate them is to lie down again and wait a little, then have a careful look around with the flashlight. It's like hunting for little monsters. I propose that further research be carried out on this topic. It has paramount importance for humanity and is sure worthy of a Nobel prize, though I'm not sure whether it's in the category Medicine, Psychology or Peace. On the boat nothing has changed much. Every day I check all the moving parts, and every day I'm surprised at what I find. Like yesterday I found out that I'd almost lost the tiller because the screws had worked loose (The tiller is vibrating slightly from little turbulences at the rudder.) I was just in time to screw them back together, and now I used nuts with a little plastic ring. I've also marked the place with silver sticky tape for further inspection. I'm doing this to all the places on the boat that are giving me trouble, like lockers that don't stay properly shut or lines that chafe. The idea is to remind me of each problem on my daily inspection and also that I see them every day and so fix them before the next trip. It's good to write the things in a book too, but "paper is patient". The wind is still 20-30kn from the North-East, turning more easterly as I get more west. I've only the genoa out and stay close to the 20th latitude. Still doing around 180nm per day. From the grib files it looks like the wind will go down a little on Wednesday, which I wouldn't mind at all. At the moment the cockpit is too wet to enjoy staying in, and every few hours a larger wave brakes over it in which case it's even a little dangerous. Yesterday I just happened to be forward of the sprayhood, checking the blocks on the runners, as one of those waves payed a visit and swept me off my feet and towards the open sea. I held tight to the runner so I wouldn't bang against the rail, and I was clipped in anyway and couldn't have gone overboard (but easily broken a rip). But it managed to tear the shoe of my right foot and took it overboard. That will be quite embarrassing, walking into the Marina office in St. Martin with only one shoe. So unless I'm working on something or giving the autopilot a break I stay inside and stick only my head out every half hour or so. The radar-detector and AIS do a wonderful job at looking out for commercial vessels, and there is no big need to worry about sail-boats because they all go in the same direction and at pretty much the same speed. Not that I've seen any. Visibility is only 3nm because of the high waves, and by far the most common thing to see are dolphins, which come by at least every other day. By the way, the first third of the trip is behind me now. I'm already eagerly eying the little cake for the half-way celebration in a few days. Very tempting. Maybe I should better hide it from plain sight.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:06

Friday, February 11. 2011

bye, bye wind-vane

Day 7, Friday, 11.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 19:53.7N 26:19.0W, 24.5°C, 1018 mBar I'm sailing west along the 20th latitude north, which is pretty much the southern route to the Caribbean. The wind is still blowing between 25kn and 30kn from the north-east, and now the famous atlantic swell is starting to build. Long and rather high waves, some reach already over my head when I stand in the cockpit. But the sea is still very rough with many smaller waves in between, and those little buggers make life pretty uncomfortable when they brake, as they spray deck full of water and toss the boat around. The dolphins seem to love it though and it looks like they have a hell of a time jumping out of the crests and darting beneath the bow of Gudrun V. Despite looking out for the wind-vane very carefully it stopped working yesterday. The stainless steel hinge that holds the servo rudder is bent out of shape, presumably by a wave, and I cannot fasten the servo-rudder anymore. I quickly switched to the auto-pilot and then took the servo-rudder out of the water and dismantled the vane. Then I had a chocolate bar. And then another. And another. Now it's done to me and the tiller pilot, and we take turns on the rudder. Fortunately I have a spare tiller pilot with me, in case one gets seasick, as they are known to do. I have a plan on how to fix the wind-vane with what I have on board, but for that I need much calmer weather and seas, because it involves drilling holes in the stainless steel hinge, which I can't take off from the back of the boat. Unfortunately no easy weather is supposed to come my way anytime soon. Ah well, nobody said it would be easy, right. There is also good news. The back-ache, which has visited me on Wednesday after some over-enthusiastic work at the main-sail halyard, is gone. The treatment as subscribed by the ship's medic (my humble self) had consisted of Diclofenac-Colextyramin (2x 150mg per day), a neopren bandage around the waist, the proper use of the halyard-winch, and a modest dose of excellent Rioja (2x 100ml per day). Otherwise I'm surprisingly busy on the boat. The first week is almost over, and I'm not even halfway through the book which I thought would last me a few days at the most. When not working the sails or maintaining or fixing things I'm mostly sleeping. Or cooking, but not very much really. I'm more tired than hungry. I usually start the day with fruit and bread, then yesterday's dinner for lunch around two, and a hot dinner (vegetables + noodles, rice, couscous etc.) around seven. Later some more fruit and maybe bread with smoked ham and parmesan. Glass of wine if the weather is nice. Not a bad diet I guess. I have lots of chocolate and cookies on the boat, but except for special moments (e.g. when the wind-vane brakes) they remain surprisingly untouched. My brother informed me that not all SPOT messages with my position arrive. Especially the one I send every morning at 6 UTC seems not to find its way to the satellite.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:59

Thursday, February 10. 2011

180nm in 24h

Day 6, Thursday, 10.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 20:19.06N 23:26.8W Yesterday afternoon and this morning I made very good speed towards west, 7-10kn in 10-20kn of Wind from north-east. During the night the wind dropped to around 12kn and I took the mainsail down for safety because clouds were coming up and I needed to get some sleep. I had been very busy yesterday looking after the boat and didn't manage to sleep during the day at all. The current tack and speed also don't lend themselves to sleeping until I'm very tired, because the boat is moving a lot and I haven't figured out yet how to catch some quality sleep in the saloon on a port tack. My berth is on the starboard side and I don't like hanging in the lee cloth. And outside is too wet, a lot of spray. Well, I have two more weeks to try different things I guess. Fortunately the wind-vane does a reasonably good job at the tiller and I don't have to have a constant eye on it. Being a wind-vane it's very sensitive to gusts, which change the angle under which the wind is perceived. But it usually stays within 20° of the set course even in stronger gusts or waves. As a result of that veering my speed (and heel) varies a lot and I'm covering some extra miles. But in order to deactivate the wind-vane I would have to take the servo-rudder off. That is quite an operation, especially because it has to be undertaken outside of the boat on the little bathing platform. With both hands under water and feet in the air. Nope, I don't want to do this unless necessary, so the wind-vane is supreme commander of the tiller at all times and I'm happy with the result and do all the other stuff. Like trimming the sails and keeping watch. Although there isn't much to watch. I haven't seen a boat, bird or fish in two days I think. And according to the radar detector no other boat has seen me, or it would have beeped. It does beep a lot when I use the iridium phone though. Once I jumped out of bed at night as the alarm went off to look for that freighter/fisherman/tanker. But it was only a message on the phone. Veery funny. Energy-wise everything is fine. Chris, ex-co-owner of "Maid of Mettle", advised me by email that I could always connect the second panel directly to the battery if I'm in dire need of a cool beer. Thanks Chris! But I think I'll reserve that option for a real emergency. I'm quite happy to wait with the beer until I'm sitting on a beach bar in the Caribbean. Gives me really something to look forward to. Only 2260nm (4080km) to go to my destination. At my current speed it would take me only 10 days, but that is completely unrealistic. I'm also not sure if the material would be up to it. 16 days is more likely. But it doesn't matter much, does it. "Der Weg ist das Ziel".

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:11

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

Back on track

Day 5, Wednesday, 09.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 20:44.8N 020:42.4W Back on course! A look at the battery monitor this morning showed that I've gained 15Ah over the last 24h, despite a very bad angle So my new energy plan works out. With no new troubles and sufficient food and water I've decided to go back on track towards the Caribbean and bypass the Cap Verde islands. New course: West. Because of the difficulties with the water, wind-vane, autopilot, head and solar panels, I had sailed a much more southerly course than originally planned. Simply because it had looked like that I had to stop over at the Cap Verde islands, and sailing on a starboard tack was more comfortable (my berth is starboard). It seemed like a good idea at the time. Well. On hindsight it wasn't such a smart move. I could have sailed more westerly without giving up the Cap Verde island as a safe haven. As it is now I have added probably two days to the crossing. Well, learn from your mistakes Axel and look ahead. The good news is that you're heading for the Caribbean now! And in pleasant weather too. The wind is a little light, and has been since yesterday. I took advantage of that and did my washing yesterday afternoon. Then I washed down the boat and especially the rails, which were caked with salt from the spray. Can't have that on a true swabian boat, can we . If only I could bring my recycling to the "Recyclinghof" too, hehe. I took care to take as little food in plastic wrapping with me as possible, but it can't be entirely avoided, especially for emergency meals and stuff that goes into the fridge. Because the fridge is now turned off and I had to eat that stuff quickly, I already have a little bag with plastic that I will now carry with me for the rest of the trip. This morning I set up the two GoPro HERO HD cameras in the cockpit, one on either side on the bimini frame. I can swivel both to look anywhere I want, including forward. That should allow me to film whatever comes up without too much trouble. A pity really I hadn't set them up before, because a lot of "interesting things" (e.g. trouble) has happen't already, and I hope that from now on it's going to be rather boring. Well, we'll see Because the wind is so light (6 to 8 kn) I'm only making 4.5kn of speed at the moment, which would mean about 30 days for the rest of the trip at that speed (aaaargh!). In an attempt to gain more speed I tried to set the main-sail (2nd reef) in addition to the parasailor. Which was another stupid move. No wind for the parasailor left, and it wrapped around the shrouds. But it had to be tried, hadn't it. And yes, I have that embarrassing event on camera. Fortunately no damage was done, and now everyting is back as it should. Plan for the rest of the day: check all lines, blocks and shackles. Then tidy the interior which is a little disorganized after all the repairs.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:10

Tuesday, February 8. 2011

Halfway to the Cap Verde islands

Tuesday, 08.02.2011, 11:30 UTC, 22:34.1N 019:24.8W The weather has been the same for the past three days. Sunny, with winds from 10 to 20kn from the North-East during the day, and 20 to 30kn during the night. As the wind increases during the night the waves get very choppy and the ride uncomfortable as the ship rolls with the waves passing underneath her, especially when a wave breaks. A right cacophony of clings and clongs. During the morning the wind goes down a bit, and the waves gradually too, until the sea is quite nice in the evening. And then it all starts again. I think it has something to do with the Sahara to the east of me, which might be the source of that wind as the land cools rapidly in the night. So it should get better further west. But the afternoons are really nice, and quite good for working on the boat too. Yesterday I fixed the problem with the head that was filling up. I removed the hose from the seacock and plugged that with a wooden peck. Good news and bad news: the boat is dry, but I have to use the bucket from now on. Then I had a look at why the Batteries are not being charged. I have two 135Watt solar panels at the stern, and even though the angle to the sun is bad on my current tack, they should charge at least a few Ah. Turns out the controller shows the battery voltage at 14 to 16V with the Solar Panels connected, and 8V when not. Maybe a broken diode, but whatever the reason, the controller is gone. Fortunately ... just for that contingency I had bought a controller for the wind generator which would accept at least one of the panels. I hooked that up, and now the batteries are being charged. With half the capacity, but better than nothing. I turned off the fridge and chartplotter, and am now only running the sumlog, compass, windinstrument and navigation lights. The AIS is gone with the Chartplotter, and I'm glad I invested into the little radar detector which worked very well through the night. Beep, beep, beep -- ah, there's another freighter. This evening we'll see whether the one panel is enough to balance the energy consumption. It's a little sad about the fridge, because it's full of cheese. But the Parmesan should be ok for a while, right? So, lots of problems on the boat. I didn't expect the voyage to be without problems, after all it's the first time I'm taking Gudrun out for a longer trip. But I hadn't expected that much, and in such a short time. On the other hand I'm quite happy that I managed to fix the things up with what I took with me. Feels a little like being an astronaut on a space station, hehe. Only they are in a much more dangerous environment. Minus the waves, lucky bastards. But also minus the dolphins. Last evening I cooked dinner and then went on deck to eat it. Only I put it down very quickly instead and took my camera because there was a school of dolphins playing around the bow of the boat. The sun was just setting, and I sat there in the cockpit eating dinner and watching the dolphins being silhouetted against the sinking sun as they jump out of the water. What a show!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:40

Monday, February 7, 2011

Quite windy

Monday, 07.02.2011, 12:00 UTC, 24:27.44N 17:46.96W My hopes that the conditions would stay as nice as yesterday afternoon were shattered when the wind increased to 30kn after nightfall. It's very gusty with irregular waves and the boat moves jerkily. Very noisy too. I need to hold on to something all the time and accordingly everything takes a lot of energy. Even sleeping it seems, and my neck is sore from trying to keep my head from lolling around. Consequently haven't been able to do much but mind the boat and trying to sleep. Originally I wanted to film as much as possible of the trip, but apart from two short clips I couldn't bring myself to do it yet. State of repairs: It seems I managed to fix the Wind-vane and it is doing the steering most of the time. The autopilot is also ok again, although the whole raymarine system behaves a little funny and I get "Lost fix" "Lost Heading" "Shallow depth" and all other kinds of alarm every now and then. I think it's seasick. I have some wooden pecks for hammering into the hull in case of a puncture, and it seems that the biggest one would fit into the hose of the untight seacock. Otherwise I'll make it fit with the thick silver sticking tape. Wonderful stuff. I will try that once the ride gets a little smoother. The sky is bright blue, no clouds, and it's impossible for me to see whether the wind will increase or not. A few times I changed the sails, only to change them back half an hour later. That also takes a lot of energy, and I don't really gain anything by it in terms of average speed. Plus I don't care enough for speed to force myself to do it for naught. It was very nice to go 9kn yesterday afternoon when the sea was relatively quiet, but as long as I'm going with more than 6kn I'd stay rather comfortable. I set the parasailor a couple of times, but handling a 90sqm sail, six lines and myself at the same time is not easy in more than 20kn of wind. I think it's better if I keep it in the bag for when the wind drops below 15kn. At the moment I'm doing 7 to 8kn with only the genoa, but I think I'll reef in an hour. The trip might take a few days longer, but what the heck. My esteem for the shorthanded long-distance regatta sailors grows by the minute. Absolutely crazy. Regarding morale it's ok. I wished the boat would move less so I wouldn't tire so quickly, and I hope that it gets better once I've reached my southern waypoint and turned west. That would be in about 3 days. Maybe a little earlier if I decide that I don't need to stop over at the Cap Verde islands. But last time I checked the weather forecast a storm was supposed to hit the area north-west of the islands on Wednesday and Thursday, so at the moment I'm keeping myself rather east. I don't want to make the same mistake I made when I sailed to Ibiza last year.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:56

Sunday, February 6. 2011

Smoother going

Sunday, 06.02.2011, 18:00 UTC, 26:02.037N 016:39.9W Today I slept until ten because I was so tired from yesterdays' weather and generally not being used to living on a moving boat anymore. Then I spent some more time on the wind-vane, and I hope it's repaired for good now. It's been doing a fantastic job since lunch. The autopilot worked through the night, but has it's glitches. I didn't get around to look into it because something else is keeping me busy: water. It seems something in the seacock for the toilet-intake gave yesterday, and the bowl is slowly filling up. "Slowly" depending on the heel of the boat. I reduced sail to go almost upright, and am now going at 6 to 7 kn. I could do more, but then I'd constantly be flushing the toilet. As it is now, with the boat rolling a little and a little heel towards the starboard side (where the toilet is unfortunately), I only have to do it once every hour. Not sure what to do about it. I think the best thing is to wait until I'm on another tack and then effect some emergency repair (e.g. stuff it). But I don't want to force it, since it could take a while to fix ... unfortunately I didn't bring anything suitable for the big vetus tube. Or stop over at the Cap Verdes and repair it for good? I'd prefer not to. Either way, I've decided to head pretty straight for the Cap Verdes for the moment, instead of keeping further west. See how it goes. Weather-wise today was pretty good after lunch. The ugly waves are mostly gone, and the ride is considerably smoother. I even managed to cook, although only pasta . At the moment the first freighter of the day passes me on port, as the sun begins to set starbord ahead of me. The wind is blowing with gentle 12 to 16kn from the east, and I begin to settle in.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:52

Sunday, 06.02.2011, 06:00, 26:53.76N 15:56.13W I left Puerto de La Luz yesterday at 11 in the morning, accompanied by Guiellermo in his boat along with Krasimir, Madonna, Marianna and Orlin. Krasimir had a hand-held speaker and was shouting encouragements, awesome.. Near the coast the wind was blowing with 20kn from southeast, and I had to go east for 18nm before I could turn SSW and pass the island. Guiellermo was already kidding me whether I want to go back to Germany . The sea was very choppy and I was glad when I could finally tack, because sailing close-hauled in 20kn is not very kind on the material. And the skipper. But Gudrun was going very well at 7-8kn, and within three hours I had passed two other boats that had left before me. Both Katamarans, which had a very hard time making any way towards the wind at all. Good downwind boats though, they'll probably pass me later. Then the wind-vane stopped working. And while I was lying on the bathing platform to fix it the autopilot stopped working too. What a wonderful start, just like in the old days! Well, I got the wind-vane working after a while, and then went below decks to have a look at the autopilot. The first thing I noticed was plenty of water in the bilge. The taste-test confirmed my suspicion that it was from the leaking water tank. I decided to pump that out first and see if it solves the problems with the autopilot, which it did. When the sea gets a little calmer I have to remove the floor-boards and have a look at that cable. At 6pm, Shortly before nightfall, the wind changed to East and dropped below 10kn. I exchanged main and genoa for the parasailor, and the ride become a lot smoother. Less rolling from left to right. Time for a nap! Unfortunately only three hours later the wind increased to above 20kn again, quite gusty, and I dropped the parasailor and unfurled the genoa a bit. The conditions haven't changed since, and I'm going with 6 to 7 knots at 217°, towards the Cap Verdes islands. The boat rolls a lot with the waves and it's not very comfortable. But it always takes a few days to settle in. Let's see what surprises today brings!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 07:24

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Saturday, February 5, 2011

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

on the way. sunny, 16kn wind from ssw. going 7 to 8kn at 60 degrees. only 2998nm to go

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:00

Friday, February 4, 2011

Ready and set

Ok, this is a little embarrassing. Half-way through yesterday I realized that the huge hang-over I had from the bon-voyage-party the night before wouldn't leave me quickly, and that there was no going sailing that day. Head throbbing and dead-tired I dragged myself through the day, and a few times I thought that maybe sailing with crew isn't such a bad idea after. Especially as I carried tons (at least!) of fruit and vegetables back from the market. So no sailing today.

With the extra time that this day gave I managed to do some of the lower-priority works, like changing the cushions of the cockpit seats. Not vital for sailing, but for sure some welcome extra comfort. Then I washed my clothes, filled the tank and two jerry cans with diesel, cleaned the head, galley, and bilge one more time, and fell into bed at nine. Now everything is as ready as it gets, and I'm waiting for Guillermo to come around with his boat in the morning and Marianna, Krasimir and Madonna to see me off. They insisted, and how could I decline. It's a so much nicer start into a voyage. I only hope Marianne wakes up early.

There are six questions everybody is asking me: Where are you going? How long will it take? How much fuel do you carry? How much water? How do you sleep? What are you going to do all that time?

I am heading for St. Martin via the Cap Verde Islands. I don't plan to stop on the way, but will of course do if necessary. The distance is about 3000nm (5400km) and it should take about three weeks. That is an average of 6kn or 10km/h. Though I have a friend who was underway for 38 days last year. I have 60 liters of diesel in my tank, and 60 more liters in three jerry cans, in case something happens to the diesel in the tank. At approx. 3 liter/h that gives me a maximum range of 40 hours or 200nm (which is 7% of the distance). So I'm not planning to rely on the engine to get me there. The engine is for taking me in and out of ports, and to charge the battery should the solar panels fail.

I have 300 liters of water in the tank, plus 60 liters of water as a backup in 5 liter bottles. At calculated 5 liters/day that means I can live comfortably for 70 days. I also carry a little desalinator (Katadyn Survivor 06) which produces about a liter of fresh water per hour with lots of work. I usually sleep from midnight to noon, half an hour at a time. Most of the time I spent in the cockpit, unless the weather is not agreeable. For that case I have a little sprayhood over the companionway with a flap at the back. I can sit in there and sleep or have a look around while being nicely protected. When I'm not sleeping I'm either reading, writing, cooking, taking pictures, recording video, playing the tin whistle, working out, and of course "sailory things" and keeping the boat shipshape. Bored? Never. Lonely? Sometimes. Scared? Certainly. But honestly, I've never been as scared on a boat as I am every time I drive with the Motorbike on the street.

So many crazy people on the road, and always distracted by other things - phones, iPods, eating, smoking, makeup, squeezing spots. Therefor my thoughts go out to you my friends that have to drive to work every day, and I wish you safe commuting and no traffic jams. The cockpit, where I will spend most of my time for the next few weeks. Awesome bbq, ey?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 23:05

Looking good!

The servo-rudder at workYesterday was a great day. After checking all blocks and tightening all shackles I configured the wind-vane and then went out to test it. I turned some circles and it worked. Just like that. With less than 6 kn of apparent wind I have to change to the bigger vane, but that's normal. No more surprises. Fantastic! In the evening I went for dinner with my friends. They had picked an Uruguayan restaurant, and the main course was lots of meat. Lots. Then they surprised me with a present and ... a captain's uniform (Carnival). A big laugh! Ah, I'm going to miss them. Meat! Surprise! Looking sharp, ey The weather forecast for the next few days is good, and after some final shopping today for fruit, veggies and fuel I plan to leave around noon. Seeing that it's already 9:30 (mucho fiesta ayer) it will probably be a little later than that.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:27

Wednesday, February 2, 2011

Test sail

This morning we finished installing the new terminals. The wind was ideal for testing the rigging - force 5 at 20kn. So I went out alone to see how it goes. I was a little nervous because I haven't sailed alone for a while now, and then you would wish for a little less. But well. I always get like this when I'm too long in the marina. Confidence at sea is something that takes constant practice. But usually once the mainsail is up and the engine off my nervousness fades as quickly as the exhaust fumes. Today was no different, and I quickly began to enjoy the little trip. Sails! - But where are the boats? I hope that the wind goes down a little towards the evening so that I can set up the wind vane nicely. With the current swell and wind there is just a little too much action to do this alone safely, because it usually involves a lot of leaning out of the boat. But everything together it looks quite good. The wind-generator is also working nicely again, everything is stowed away, and the to-do list is down to buy fruit, fillup fuel and water, setup wind-vane, pickup my diving gear, and put Vespina "in mothballs" (not sold yet). Maybe I'll even find some time to catch up on my emails and answer some, I was just too busy during the last weeks. Tomorrow I plan to be out for most of the day, and then have a look at the terminals again. If everything goes well I want to leave on Friday around noon.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:45

Tuesday, February 1. 2011

No more surprises, please

Netting to keep things organized. Three shelves covered, three to go. The galley. Because it was raining all weekend I spent most of the time inside the boat and organized everything for the voyage. I packed away clothes that I won't need so I don't have to search so long for the ones I do need on the way, and then did the same to pretty much everything else, including tools and camera gear. Then I put netting in front of the shelves that might spill stuff, and re-packed my grab-bag. One of the things I put inside is a orange 1.2sqm kite. Should I really have to enter the life-raft I can fly that up to 70m high and actually have a chance to be seen. Octavio removing the terminals of the runners. One of the things I always do before a longer trip is go up the mast to check that everything is ok. I did that yesterday too ... and discovered a problem with the terminals for the top shrouds and running backstays. Which has to be fixed before I can leave, because there is a risk that they break and then I would loose the mast. Octavio assured me it is no big deal to fix it and they will probably finish today, but it destroys my plans to leave for another few days. After the new terminals are in I should at least do a test sail and have another look, before heading off across the ocean. I also discovered that one of the expandable water tanks (100l) leaks. Luckily it's at the top, and if I don't put too much pressure inside it's more or less ok. I sure don't want to take that tank out now, because Murphy's Law and all, it will probably keep me busy for many days. So I just bought a dozen 5 liter bottles, just in case. No more works. I want to go! Luckily the weather looks like it's going to stay nice for a while, and so at least from that side everything should be fine. Actually most boats delayed their departure because the wind is a little strong at the moment, and it looks much better towards the weekend. But it's just always a big blow to morale when you get ready, stow everything away, prepare mentally for the trip and then can not leave. So, please, no more surprises for a while.

Posted by Axel Busch at 06:06

Saturday, January 29. 2011

Countdown started!

I'd so much love to say "Done!", but unfortunately I can't. Yesterday I installed the new solar panels (280 Watts), and while fiddling with the wires I short-circuited the controller for the wind generator. A replacement is coming from Tenerife and will be here on Monday. Which doesn't matter much, because at the moment another depression is passing through and the weather won't be right before Monday anyway. Then I'm done (more or less) - after six months of re-fitting the boat. The major works include: • new stanchions and guardrail • retractable bowsprit • new batteries • new solar panels • new sails • new winches • new deck organizers for the halyards • new blocks and clamps • new sails • mast and boom repaired and painted • new standing rigging • new running rigging • new chargers and controllers • new radio • new navionics, including radar and AIS • new electrical installation • water purifier • new closets, one for food, one for camera gear • keel welded • hull sandblasted and painted • new antifouling • deck painted • running backstays reorganized • new injectors, filters, hoses for engine • waste-water hoses replaced • new bimini • new sprayhood • new dodgers • new mattresses and a lot of small things like replacing screws, cables, lights, seals, anodes, ... There still is a backlog of small things like replacing more of the 20Watt lights with LEDs, sticking some panels up that came loose, refill fuel, and final adjustments to the wind-vane, and install a toggle for the second spinnaker halyard. I'll work on that today and tomorrow, but when the controller is installed and the weather is right I just have to leave. A boat is never completely done, and if I wait until the backlog is empty I will be here forever. For the last few days it's been raining a lot here, but I hope that the sun comes out later and I can take some pictures. The good thing about all those changes is that they really show. So I can see what I've done when I look at the boat, and feel it when I sail with her. Gudrun V always was a fantastic boat, but now she looks and handles fantastic again as well. Today Liz is flying home again, she helped me a lot with organizing inside the boat, especially the galley of course! She also bought all the food for the voyage for me, except for fruits and veggies, which I will buy from the market on Monday. I will definitely miss her on the voyage, but I can look forward to seeing her again in the Caribbean, and isn't that a nice thought .

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:19

Tuesday, January 18. 2011

Back in Las Palmas / Retrospective on a year of voyaging

Happy new year to everybody! After Christmas in Germany with my Mum and Brother we packed our suitcases and went to the airport to fly to New Zealand to celebrate New Year Eve with my girl-friend Liz's family. My mother is 70 now and hasn't traveled much in her life. So naturally she was very excited about the trip (around half the world!). Fortunately everything went well and also the family get-together was a big success. Auckland Alan at his BBQ inside Sky Tower Lake Taupo Mt Ngauruhoe (aka "Mount Doom" in LOTR) Ngauruhoe Crater Muriwai beach at Muriwai Beach Near the Whanganui River Now I'm back in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and there is only one thing on my mind: the crossing. Harry has finished building the new cupboard where the washing machine was, and now I have to empty the boat, remove all the saw dust (the stuff is everywhere!), paint the surfaces, and then stow away my gear. Fortunately Liz came with me, and together this will be much easier and more fun too. Also over the next two weeks a couple of people are going to have a look at Vespina, and I'm quite confident that I can sell her this month. She is in very good condition and ready to sail. So there is still a little left to do, but nothing that should prevent me from sailing away end of the month ... which is pretty much a year later than I had expected when I started on this trip in Germany on November 8th, 2009. Which raises a few questions ... What happened? Why did it take so much longer? What happened was, first, the weather. Instead of three months it took me six months to get to the Canary Islands because the wind was blowing predominantly from the south-west, which was exactly the direction I had to go to. In the short spells of easterly winds (mostly above 40kn) I managed to sail three or four days towards my destination, and then the wind changed to south-west again and was blowing head on. With the bilge keel there is no going towards windward outside of a day-sail, and I had to turn into a harbour for a week or a month and wait. I could have motored against the wind, and many sailors I met on the way did just that, but it's not my way. For me this is strictly a sailing trip, not a motor cruise. The second thing that happened was the boat and my inexperience. I had left Germany without doing anything to Vespina after I had bought her only weeks before. The idea was to get going, see how I like it, and fix anything that came up on the way. Was that a good idea? Actually, I think it was. This way I fixed everything by priority and with a clear idea of how it should be. And I learned a lot in very little time. One of the happiest moments on the trip was when I had finally reached the Canary Islands turned into Puerto Calero, and there was nothing to do on Vespina. The wind-vane had worked, nothing had broken, everything was still as it should be. After a week of non-stop sailing with two storms and being knocked flat by a huge wave. Awesome. Would I do it again that way? No. Sailing alone through storm after storm with a boat that is not set up to be sailed alone is not only educating. It is also extremely frustrating, tiring, and yes, a little dangerous. Even if the wind hadn't changed after a few days to head on I still would have had to turn into the harbor, because after three days on the rudder (wind-vane not working) I was just done for. Which is why after buying Gudrun V I spent all that time in Las Palmas to set her up the way I need it and didn't just leave like I did with Vespina. Vespina is a very strong and forgiving boat. Gudrun V, being a race boat, is not. But she goes to windward very, very well, which is what I had missed on Vespina dearly. So, looking back, would I have bought Gudrun V again, knowing how much work (and money) it would be to fix her up? No! Honestly, not in my worst dreams had I imagined that it would take six months to get her ready. I would have continued with Vespina and continued playing the waiting game. As it is, I will have to do it anyway I think. Going against the wind is great fun on a day-sail, but not at all on an extended trip, and very tough on the material. Do I regret it? Hehe. No :-), absolutely not. Again, I have learned so much. Not only about sailboats, electrical and mechanical work, but also about organizing work and people outside of the software domain (see note below). And then it also allowed me to spend a lot of time on diving, video and photography. Because I knew very little about either of them that full-immersion approach allowed me to come a long way in all three fields. So the last six months were definitely not wasted, just spent in a very different way than anticipated. By the way, here is the completed promotional movie for the diving school, my first real video project. Not quite as I had envisioned it, but the best I could do at the time. Here in German, here in Spanish. So, what is it like to live on a boat? Before I went on this trip I had this idea of how it would be like: Planning a trip, trimming the sails and doing all the sailory things. Arriving in a port or lying at anchor, resting on the beach, stocking up on food in local markets and then heading out again for another few weeks at sea. As it turned out, life on the boat is not at all like that. A voyage is not a race where many years of planning, working and training (and financing) culminate in a prolonged feat of skill and endurance. A voyage on a boat is much more about keeping your boat seaworthy, organizing your life away from home, friends and support, and not so much about doing "sailory things" such as accomplishing great feats of skill or endurance. The boat gets you from A to B, and of course there are difficulties at sea that have to be dealt with. The biggest challenges are encountered on dry land, however: among the hardest are mundane things like paperwork in ports, paying the bills without a regular income, making sense of life without escaping into work and mass entertainment, and getting to grips with the fact that living a dream is very different from dreaming it. Having said that, working on a boat on an exotic island beats office work 9 times out of 10. So yes, I'm loving it. But I do miss conferences and being part of a community that is trying to make the world a better place. Back to the present. This week Liz and I will mostly clean and paint Gudrun with hopefully a lot of

test-sailing towards the end of the week to grow confidence and make sure there will be no avoidable surprises. Then next week I will stock up on food and water, sell Vespina (tock tock tock) and then go, go, go! Expected departure date: 29th of January anno domini MMXI, wether Vespina is sold or not. Gudrun is finally ready and I have to cross now. I started this trip and I have to finish it. Once I get to the Caribbean Liz will join me on the boat, and we are going to sail together for a while. One year apart is enough. That will be a whole new experience again! -- Note: I've done more than a hundred software projects, taking from a few days to a few years to complete. But after renovating a 17th century house this was only my second "physical world" project. In software you can start by building a very small and simple working solution, and then extend this on all sides until it does all the things it has to do. Houses and Boats need to be built form the bottom up, and each step has to be pretty much completed until you can start on the next one. It is true that many software projects are also built that way. Having the direct comparison now I am not surprised that most of these projects are way over time and budget. That approach simply doesn't take advantage of the opportunities the software-domain offers, but introduces all the extra complexities you would have when building a house with too many specialized workers and changing the design every few weeks. How could that possibly work at all?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:35

Wednesday, December 22. 2010

Lost in Barcelona

Counter closed. Barcelona? Barcelona! Because of the reduced off-season flight plan to and from Gran Canary, and the winter chaos at a few major Airports, my choice of affordable pre-Christmas flights to Germany was somewhat limited. The best option seemed to be a flight with Vueling to Barcelona, and then continue to Stuttgart with Germanwings. Unfortunately the vueling flight was 90 minutes late. With further delays at the baggage retrieval (40min) and transfer between the two terminals (20min) I missed my second flight by 10 minutes. And there was no other flight to Germany that day. So ... a day in Barcelona. Could be worse I've been here a few times before, mostly on business. Walking again through the streets of my favorite city in Europe reminds me of the last time I was here, 51 weeks ago, on the way to Ibiza very early on in my voyage. I spent New Year here and incidentally met up with my friends Kym, Neil, George, Ville and Johanna. Celebrating with them took my mind of the two storms that I passed through on the way here. I remember, when I left La Escala for Barcelona another sailboat was coming into port, escorted by the marine rescue boat. Hehe, I'll never forget the look on their faces, though barely visible underneath the foul weather gear. Little did I know that I'd run into the worst storm of my life after leaving Barcelona! Only a year, but it seems a lifetime ago. So much has happened since then. The Christmas holidays will be a time for reflection for sure. I'm very glad that the work on Gudrun V is done and that uncertainty and pressure is off my mind. And the financial strain off my wallet! Refitting a racing boat ... what a stupid idea .

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:31

Tuesday, December 21. 2010

Simplify your boat - throw stuff out!

Yesterday I threw out the washing machine. Well, "threw" is a little exaggerated. "Lifted it out very slowly with the help of my friend the fork-lift" is what really happened. From now on washing is done (like on Vespina) by hand and laundry. But in exchange I get a lot of space to store food. I like food. I also gave away the TV and XBox 360. Haven't turned either on in 5 months. And everything that isn't used for half a year ... goes out. With it went a large amount of tools and "stuff". Simplify your boat! Preparations Ready! Bye bye! Harald the carpenter and his toys. The guy claims that's only half of what he has on the boat. Insane. And more important things happened: The wood for building a shelf where the washing machine was got delivered. Harald is going to do this while I'm gone. Check out the crazy amount of tools he's got. And the mast got sealed into the deck. Unfortunately without sailing with Domingo beforehand, but the guy just never has time. But I'm confident that the rake of the mast is ok as it is, at least Gudrun sails wonderfully with it. Today I am leaving for Germany (by plane) until January 16th. The last weeks here were full of frantic activity to get the boat ready before Christmas, because when I come back I want to leave within a few days. And it looks good. All the important systems - sails, rigging, water, electricity, navionics, engine - are done. Done! After five months of work. I'm so happy.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:37

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

Cleanliness is next to godliness

Carlos helping me with the engine. Good news: the cooling problem of the engine is a thing of the past. I removed all hoses from the saltwater intake to the exhaust one by one and cleaned them, lubricated them, and put them back. Halfway through the work Carlos came around, quickly followed by Krasimir. Together it was much easier, and more fun too. Plenty of opportunities for practical jokes involving water under pressure and handing the wrong tools :-p. Gudrun's bilge. Not easy to clean with all the cables and hoses. After the work was done the bilge was half-flooded with water from the hose-testing and -cleaning. Because I don't like half-finished jobs I removed all the floor-boards and flooded the rest of the bilge too. I thought that would be a good opportunity to test the three bilge pumps and really clean the bilge, because it looked like that job had been neglected for the last ten years at least. Turns out one of the manual bilge pumps is not working and I need to replace the diaphragm. Floorboards drying on the deck. Good morning! Took me a few hours to get all the dirt out and clean the boards, but now I feel much better. Cleaning always makes me happy, because with every swipe you get a little sense of achievement. Wonderful frustration therapy too, although fortunately I find little cause for being frustrated with my current life style. By the time I was done with cleaning the sun came up and greeted me with a beautifully colored dawn. What more can you ask for. Sprayhood frame. After having a Coffee with Inigo I started to mount the sprayhood-frame that Miguel welded for me. It's purpose is to protect the entrance from rain and spray while the hatch is open. It will also allow me to stand or sit in the entrance, feet inside the boat, and be well protected from the weather while having a look around. Most people have bigger sprayhoods that cover the whole width of the cockpit. But I don't like them very much, unless they are of the solid type liek Vespina had one. As far as canvas goes I only trust the small sprayhoods. Also suits Gudrun better. Can't have a sleek racing boat and then put a huge sprayhood on top of it, can you.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 06:34

Monday, December 13. 2010

|: sail, work :|

Bad weather = good pictures Bad weather = concerned looks Unfortunately I had to cancel the trip to Fuerteventura because of the weather - first the wind was stronger than I would have liked without getting the "ok" from the rigger first, and next day the weather changed and I was afraid to be stuck in Fuerte for a while, and there is still so much work to do. So after a few hours beating against the wind and getting soaked I returned to port. Looking back it seems like it was better this way, even though it was very sad not to be able to meet up with Klaus. Since then I've been sailing in front of Las Palmas almost every day, some days twice, and on the other days I rearranged stuff on the deck, replaced gear or installed new stuff. Now everything works great, and I can handle it well enough alone. I have a few more ideas for improvements but these are nice-to-have. The only thing the rig needs 'officially' before I can say "done" is, as far as I can tell, the approval of the rigger, another toggle for the second Spinnaker halyard, and sealing the mast where it goes through the deck. I hope to go sailing with Domingo tomorrow and finish that bit. Then I can start tuning the Wind-vane. In the meantime I am servicing the engine. The exhaust smoke is white, which can mean water in the fuel or faulty injectors. I bled of old Diesel from the bottom of the tank (dirty dirty!) and replaced the fuel filters, hope that helps. If not I'm afraid the injectors need servicing. I also exchanged the oil and oil-filter and at the moment I am working on the water cooling, because I think there should be more water being ejected through the exhaust. I've already cleaned the filters, valves, hoses and replaced the impeller, but still. My guess is that it sucks air somehow, maybe through the water filter. The plan is to bypass the water filter for a test and see if that improves the situation. And then see how it goes. The engine doesn't trouble me too much which is why I left it to the end. It will get me out of port here and into port in St. Martin, and there are not many lee-shores on the way across the Atlantic. The ParasailorThe "regular" sails.Regarding the sailing I'm happy to say that it's absolutely fantastic. Gudrun sails wonderful, with very little movement, and everybody I take out with me is impressed by her performance on all courses and wind speeds (though 30kn was the maximum so far). 90°, and downwind I usually only set the Parasailor as the only sail, and upwind the mainsail and genoa that Octavio made for me are absolutely fantastic (and pretty too). I can sail nicely up to 30° apparent wind, with the best speed at 35°. Impressive. I really like the deep draft (2.5m). PeterHarald, Gerhard, ClaudiameRegarding sailing single-handedly ... well. Very different from Vespina, where I could do everything at the same time: Tiller between the knees, main-sheet in one hand and genoa-sheet in the other. Gudrun is different. Very. Because of the runners, the cockpit size and it's compartmentalization by the mainsheet-track a crew of three would be ideal: One at the tiller and main-sheet, one for the runners, one for the genoa. Alone it's a little more difficult because I can't reach from the tiller to the winches for the runners or the genoa. And because of the size of the sails holding anything just in the hands is impossible. So the operation for e.g. tacking is like this: • turn on the autopilot • go close to the wind • harden the mainsail and the genoa • change the runner • set the autopilot to tack • switch the genoa tack • ease out the runner • ease out the sheets • change to new course Kind a lengthy. And gibing in strong winds is to be avoided. But it's absolutely possible to sail her alone, and the reward for all the trouble is a feeling like being "king of the hill" as she speeds through the waters. Then I leave the cockpit and sit on the windward side, feet dangling centimeters above the water and my arms hanging lazily over the rail, nose in the wind. Great feeling, absolutely exhilarating. Anybody wondering why I love sailing?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 05:23

Tuesday, December 7, 2010

Sailing!

NanaLizSailing! A lot has happened since the last blog entry. I was invited to Dinner by Nana and Andreas, who left Germany this summer on a sabbatical to sail around the world. Then Liz arrived. We went diving together, and when the high-load blocks arrived a few days later we installed them and went sailing together - finally! Gudrun sails wonderfully. After that some partying was required, at Krasimir's, El Mojo and of course also on Gudrun. We also went to see the Bodyboard World championship at El Confital, but arrived a little late :-p. Now Liz is gone again, and I'm back in my old routine. Fiesta at Krasimir's place. And el MojoCooking! Liz expands her horizon ...diving and climbing the mast. I'm very glad that Gudrun V can finally be sailed. Not everything is complete done yet, for example the final sail with the rigger still has to be completed before I can seal the hole in the deck through which the mast goes. At the moment only a few meters of cling film stand up to the wind and spray. But Domingo is taking part in a regatta in Florida at the moment, so this has to wait another week. Apart from that there are still various pieces that have to be fitted to the mast and deck, the engine has to be serviced yet and I decided to throw out the washing machine and install a cupboard for food instead. The only place I can store food now is in the bilge, and I had bad experiences with that on Vespina. So I will still be busy for another few weeks and not be leaving before Christmas. But I had given up on that dream shortly after the ARC left anyhow. To cross the Atlantic was the only thing I had wanted to do this year, but no personal goal is important enough to cause pain to the ones you love. And this Christmas and New Year's is for the family. I will be celebrating Christmas in Germany with my family and then we all fly to New Zealand for New Year's to celebrate with Liz's family. The first get-together of the two families, yeah! . And just in time before Liz will be joining me on the boat (!) ... after I've crossed the Atlantic. So we're talking about a crossing in January and then time together sailing in the Caribbean from February onward. Will be interesting to see how she likes it. After more than a year apart I'm very much looking forward to spending some time together. Therefore I am very relieved that I can finally sail with Gudrun V, and that that elusive goal - crossing the Atlantic - is getting within reach. The most difficult milestone on the way is reached - the rigging is complete. Having done all that work on Gudrun makes me realize just in what good shape Vespina was when I bought her. I was really lucky there (and Ulrich and Anke as trustworthy and honest as I had hoped). I could have very well been a nasty surprise after reaching the med, and I might still be stuck there getting Vespina ready - in the cold, and with very little sailing experience. Much better to work on the boat where it's warm, and when you know (more or less) what you are doing and what for . So the next big thing is practicing with the new rig. It's a lot more complicated than on Vespina, and it will take some time until I will have the hang of it and be able to operate it efficiently. A whole new world in sailing. A good opportunity to enter that world is an overnight sail to Fuerteventura. A friend of mine, Klaus, will be there for a week and I want to leave Gran Canaria on Wednesday evening to meet up with him. Let's keep the fingers crossed that everything works out fine!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 08:10

Monday, November 29. 2010

"Rescue" Diving

Yesterday Domingo came around to have a look at the rake of the mast and the forestay tension. He adjusted the length of the fore-stay and confirmed my suspicion about the current blocks for the runners: new ones are necessary before a decent test-sail can be undertaken. But fortunately they should arrive this week. Unfortunately he also dropped a piece of the roller furling into the water. Blob, and down it went ... 8m. Time to break out the diving gear! Well what have I been training for, rescuing innocent pieces of plastic from being lost forever of course . Unfortunately my gear was locked up at the diving school, which is closed sunday afternoon. So I had to wait for today. And during the night and today it rained. A lot. Which is not a problem in itself, especially when you plan to get wet anyway. However, it is a big problem for the Las Palmas sewer system, which is not very good and handling lots of rain. The system overflows and the whole sh*** drains into ... the harbor of course. So, completely surrounded by a comfy smell I donned my diving gear and went down. I had dropped a line down to the ground at approximately the position where the piece had dropped, and so I followed the line down and searched the surrounding. Visibility: 50cm. But luckily I found the piece. It was already mostly covered by, uhm, silt. Hurray! Ready to "rescue" the furler part.Got it! Apart from picking up a rental car and shopping that was pretty much all I managed today. In the meantime the wind has picked up quite a bit (the anemometer records peaks at 40kn) and it looks like it's going to be a rainy and rocking night.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:10

Sunday, November 28. 2010

The last winch!

Yesterday I mounted the last winch! It proved a little tricky because the old winch base was too small and I had to extend it with aluminium epoxy so that the whole winch base is supported. Which was easy enough, but unfortunately aluminium epoxy it's not strong enough to hold a thread for the screws. Fortunately after only a few "test drills" I found the right spots in the original aluminium base. Next time: drill the holes first, then extend the base with epoxy. Later today Domingo wants to come around to adjust the mast rake and forestay length and then we want to go out for a sail. The high load blocks still haven't arrived, but once they're here the rig is ... finally .. ready. Axel, riveter, Gudrun V Here's a picture shot of the "construction site" by Steffi from "Wildeman". I can't believe that I'm still smiling after working on Gudrun V for five months now! This refit is a special test of patience and determination. But at least now I know the boat inside out, and every now and then I can help out other people with advice and a hand. Always a good feeling to be of use. And now I go diving, har har har. Frederick and Steffi from "Wildeman" Dinner time on Wildeman! When I'm big I'm going to have a chair just like that

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:55

Thursday, November 25, 2010

Buyers and voyagers

Yesterday Isaac (from the dive shop) called me to let me know that there was a guy waiting for me at the Sailor's Bar because he was interested in buying Vespina. Mysterious! Massimo checking out Vespina Ten minutes later I met Massimo, the prospective buyer, and his friend Matthias. After confirming that Massimo's interest was genuine we took the Dinghy to Vespina at anchorage and I gave them a tour of Vespina. Including lifting the anchor and motoring into the marina, because a storm is coming on the weekend. Massimo really liked her, but as usual it's a price thingy - we'll see. To get a berth I had to wait in line at the marina office for two hours. Just as I was being served Andr  f   came by to return his keys because they were leaving for Tenerife where they would meet his mother-in-law the next day. Instead of moving Vespina into the assigned berth I gave Andr  f   a lift to his E Capoe. Afterwards I left the harbor, and sailed a bit while waiting for them to show up so that I can wave them goodbye and take some pictures. It's sad to see them leave so soon after not seeing them for a year. Originally they had intended to show up a lot earlier at Las Palmas, but engine trouble bound them to Lanzarote for a month. "Cruising means repairing your boat in exotic places" :-p. Maybe we will meet up again in the Caribbean. E Capoe coming closerVery close And sailing away

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 02:47

Tuesday, November 23. 2010

Video of the 25th ARC leaving Las Palmas

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:55

Start of the ARC

Sunday the ARC started. Thanks to my excellent connections to Buceo Canarias I found a place on their RIB, which was chartered exclusively by Oyster Marine, manufacturer of some of the priciest yachts around. All morning we watched the 233 boats leave the Marina, and then headed out to take pictures of the boats sailing across the starting line and beyond. "Let's polish the egos of our clients", as the sales manager put it with a laugh. Nice guy. A pro and his box of toysPolishing the ego of an Oyster owner.Breathtaking :-pA great opportunity for me to see a professional photographer at work and to take some pictures of my own. It was very educating to see what gear the pro had brought along and how he lined up the shots. I'm sure it will help sell Oyster some more boats. My own angle was to take some pictures for Parasailor, and maybe it helps to sell some of that great sail too. Here are my pictures for them. But after five hours I was very tired and glad that we returned to port. My hopes for a cool beer on board of Gudrun V were however bitterly disappointed. The fridge has broken down. While not necessary for sailing, it's quite nice to be able to keep some butter, yogurt and cheese around. Another piece of gear to fix, I really get to see the inside of everything on board . The compressor is running but the line is only a little cool, so it probably only needs a new refill of gas. The walls were packed with spectatorsThe boats are heading out to the starting lineReady to set sailGet that spinnaker up! Spectacular!Start of the racing divisionStart of the cruising divisionHere they go One of the OystersNo 6. TexeINice gennakerSpace! Yesterday the inevitable happened ... a long line at the marina office. One of the boats in line is "E Capoe", the boat of my friend AndrÃfÃ©. We've met one year ago in Port Saint Louise Du Rhone, where I first sailed into the Med after the three week cruise on the rivers after my start in Heidelberg. We both had our fair share of troubles and doubts on the way. It's so great to see that he hasn't given up either on his dream and is still going. Waiting in line. 30 minutes per yacht.E Capoe.AndrÃfÃ© Another boat that is here is the Maid of Mettle. We've also first met in Port Saint Louise, and have been meeting up in Ibiza and Gibraltar since. For Chris, Pete and Carolin the Canaries mark the turning point of their voyage, whereas AndrÃfÃ© and I hope to sail on soon. How soon? When the rig is ready and the winds are good. Unbelievable that it took me one year to find the correct answer to that question.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:11

Thursday, November 18. 2010

Results of the test sail

Over the last days I've been thinking about the test-sail with Gudrun V. What worked well, what didn't, what is an inconvenience and what could lead to a disaster in bad conditions. On the test-sail I was out with Jon and Stephan, two very experienced sailors with many hundred-thousand miles (!) under their keel in all weathers. They both admire Gudrun V, and we spent many hours since discussing how to sail her best. Both agree that Gudrun V is a great boat. Very strong, fast, powerful and with a lot of potential. With her 30 year old design she is not as aggressive as a modern racing yacht - which was one of the reasons for buying her. But that doesn't mean that she doesn't have teeth. Many of the mistakes I got away with on Vespina will bite me severely on Gudrun V. Now we don't want that, do we . So it is of paramount importance that I understand the boat, know what I have to do, and set the boat up in a way that I can do it safely and quickly in all conditions. Not an easy task. But fortunately with Domingo, Stephan and Jon I have a lot of knowledge to draw upon, and they share it gladly. So in addition to my thinking, dry-testing and sailing I have talked ideas and options through with those guys, and I am slowly beginning to understand my boat and work out the details of sailing her. My main concern in this is with trimming the mast with the backstay and double running backstays, because I have virtually no experience with that. And if I do it wrong I can break the mast. Hehe . the bowsprithad to take the forpeak apart for the installation. The best way to prevent that, I think, is a perfectly setup working places in the cockpit and at the mast, and a lot of practice. The working place needs gear, and the practice needs time. Unfortunately I'm having trouble getting the gear (high-load blocks, clamps etc.) and I still have too much work to get to sail much. But I'm getting there slowly. Yesterday I installed the bowsprit and today the deck organizers. This afternoon I will start on the halyard winches. Let's hope the high-load blocks for the backstays arrive soon so I can sail safely. I've spent hours browsing the catalogues of Harken, Selden and Ronstan and the internet for alternatives, but "3-4 weeks" for delivery is all I find. Which does not bode well for my expected departure next week. Well, well. I can still sail around the islands, just not in bad weather .

Posted by Axel Busch at 07:34

Monday, November 15. 2010

Back in Las Palmas

On my last day in Ulm the weather was exceptionally nice and so I climbed the 768 steps of the MÃ¶nster (Church) to take some pictures of 'my' city. The weekly market View to the east (from the middle platform).View to the west (from the top). (Update: change east to west and vice versa (blush)) Despite the well concerted and forcefully conducted plans of my friends at getting me out of my flat with invitations for lunch, coffee, dinner and drinks I got all the paperwork (health insurance, house, taxes, finances etc.) done ... 20 minutes before I had to leave for the airport. I'm glad that this is off my mind now and I can fully concentrate on getting Gudrun V ready for the crossing. I arrived back in Las Palmas on Sunday morning, just in time for the ARC opening ceremony and Don Pedro's dinghy race - an event so important that it is well covered by all the local newspapers. Don Pedro owns the gas station in the port, and he is the guy to ask when other people say "it's impossible". Watch the video: Today I went to Octavio to pick up the last items that need to be installed • Bowsprit for the Spinnaker • Self-tailing winches for the halyards • Deck-Organizers for all the lines (10) that lead into the cockpit • Sail rollers for the spreader tips Unfortunately a very rainy afternoon prevented me from doing any work on the deck. But I had to catch up on sleep anyway. I really shouldn't go home for just a week. Or not tell anybody that I'm coming. Which is impossible of course, because I like my friends. Thanks guys (and gals) for being there and not forgetting about me while I'm far away on my little boat. Talking about my little boat ... here are some pictures taken by Pip while I was sailing with her husband John. Gudrun V with Parasailor. Needs a bowsprit to prevent the lines from getting stuck on the anchor during a gybe.Sailing downwind without the boat rolling left-right thanks to the lift of the wing.The Parasailor.John from Isola MiaStephan, distributor of Parasailor in Spain.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:13

Tuesday, November 9. 2010

In Ulm

This week I am home in Ulm to do some last paperwork for the year and pick up my flag certificate and repaired Iridium phone. Such a strange feeling to life in a flat ... so much space ... and I can stand upright ... the floor doesn't move ... no fishes banging against it either ... no propeller sounds of other boats. A different world for sure. The highest church tower in the world. The other building that dominates Ulm's "skyline" - Maritim hotel. Autumn in the "Friedrichsau" Night @ "Neue Mitte".

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:32

Sunday, November 7, 2010

First test sail with Gudrun V!

Wind and sea weren't very favorable in the middle of the week for a test sail. The mast is not yet fully fixed where it runs through the deck and I didn't want to take Gudrun V out in the very choppy sea. But by yesterday morning it had calmed down a lot, and nothing could keep me in port. With me came Stefan and John. Stefan is the Spanish distributor for "Parasailor", a spinnaker with a dynamic pressure wing in the centre. John is another customer and was eager to see how the Parasailor would handle on "Gudrun V". But see for yourself: The marina staff didn't like it at all that we sailed into the harbor with the spinnaker and then gibed before pulling it down and sliding into the box. But the other Sailors at the "sailor's bar" loved it, and Gudrun got some favorable comments. Which I liked a lot. Regarding the Parasailor - 3.5kn speed with 6kn of true wind going dead downwind is not bad at all. In addition to the fact that the Parasailor is a great low-wind sail the test run revealed mostly good things: The boat handles very nicely, the electronics I installed worked all, the mainsail and genoa are beautifully cut and fly very well, all lines run smoothly through the mast and blocks, and the new clamps take the load. All I hoped for! Some things need to be changed. For example the mast needs a little more rake (lean backward) to give the boat a slight weatherhelm (tendency to turn into the wind when you let go of the rudder). That will also give more tension to the fore stays, which was another find of the test sails. For the spinnaker I need a bowsprit, because as it is now the lines get entangled in the anchor during a gybe, and I can't have that when I sail alone. There are more small things, but overall it looks pretty good! I'm still looking at the 23rd of November for the start of the crossing. Tock tock tock and keep my fingers crossed.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:33

Wednesday, November 3. 2010

Good things come to those who wait.

And that doesn't only refer to Guinness. Sometimes it's a private berth. I've mentioned before that officially visiting boats are not allowed to stay in the marina for any lengths of time because all transient berths are reserved for boats participating in the ARC. Now every day 10 or so of those are arriving, and not only the berths are filling up, the bars are as well. While I would like to move to another island, e.g. La Palma or El Hierro, it's not so easy. The rig and deck hardware of Gudrun V are still not quite finished, and then there is Vespina at anchor which I don't want to leave alone as a couple of boats seem to have major problems with their anchoring technique. Every time the wind increases above 20kn their anchor slips and they drift all over the anchorage. So, I need to stay in Las Palmas, and I would like to stay in the marina because I need electricity for the power tools and Octavio and Domingo are coming every day to do little things to the boat. After a few weeks of biding my time I got lucky yesterday - Octavio helped me secure a berth at the pontoon of the sailing school. Here I can stay indefinitely and go out for test-sails without having to worry about not being welcome back in port. And the first test-sail will be today! Because yesterday I have finished the last absolutely necessary work on the deck and the mast, and now it's safe to go out and test the rig. Preparing the climbing gear. Up the mast. Moving Gudrun V to the new berth. I think I've found a nice spot for the little "GoPro Hero HD" camera on deck. I am thinking about making a time-lapse movie of the crossing. But that would mean I have to remember to change the battery every three hours or so ... for 20 days. Not sure if I want the time-lapse that much. Oh, by the way: I am planning to depart on the 23rd of November and head for Trinidad, Grenada or St. Martin. That should give me enough time for thorough tests (and delivery and installation of whatever I need), as well as enough time to complete the crossing in 2010. Anyway, it's really time to move on and sail further south. It's getting chilly at night - yesterday I even had to use a blanket!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 22:00

Sunday, October 31. 2010

Better to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission.

Only five more days to a new moon, and with the clouds it is pitch black at night. Perfect for some night time shots of the industrial harbor. 30sec exposure, aperture 16, 85mm focal length. I like how the cranes and containers look like toys. Otherwise I am waiting for the wheels for the boom so that I can finish installing the outhaul and reefing lines. Meanwhile I am working on additional rope clutches in the cockpit. There are now 10 lines leading from the mast and the boom into the cockpit, but only 2 clutches on the starboard side and 3 on the port side. Yesterday I have removed the paint and epoxied 10mm thick aluminium plates to the deck to reinforce it. The epoxy supports a load of 350 kg/cm², which at 360cm² makes ... 126 tons. Well, theoretically. But even a fraction of that is more than enough for the lines. Tomorrow when the epoxy has dried I can sand the bases down and paint them before installing the spin lock. Tuesday I should get the missing wheels for the boom and then, well, I almost don't dare get my hopes high, but then it looks like finally all necessary work is done to go for a sail. Still a lot more I could do, like install the deck organizers (which haven't arrived yet), but nothing that I have to for a short test sail. I want to sail! But there is another reason why I'm not leaving my berth. As I have mentioned already, I should have left two weeks ago ("No, you can't stay any longer because all places are reserved for the ARC"). However there are a quite a few more empty berths around me, and I figured that while those are empty and I need electricity for the power-tools I am staying without asking for permission. It seems to work. They know I'm here, and I've been talking to the mariners about other stuff, and it seems that as long as I don't ask them 'officially' whether I can stay longer they don't mind me being here. I think it works like this: If the staff at the marina office 'officially' allows me to stay longer, but a boat comes in and they need the space, then they are in trouble. They don't want that. So they ask everybody to move out ahead of time so they don't get into trouble (the fact that for more than a month half the pontoons were empty is of no concern, because it's not their money). But if I don't ask, then it's not their fault. And so they let me stay as long as there is space, but of course not officially. It's another case of "Better to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission" (or: It is easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to get permission). But I'm afraid that if I sail out, they don't (can't) let me back in. So I don't want to sail out while I still need the berth with electricity for the grinder and Octavio is coming every day to do small stuff to the rigging (which he didn't do right the first time and I'm beginning to find out while I "dry-test" the stuff, sigh). But I expect every day a knock on my boat or a small notice with a request to come to the marina office. Complicated, isn't it. I can tell you, it doesn't make it very easy to be patient with e.g. Octavio when I don't know how much more time I have. But I'm becoming quite good at being patient, and Octavio has become a friend and I don't want to stress him. Well, poca a poca things are working out. I'm sure everything will be done in time. There are still hurricanes forming in the Atlantic and rampaging all over the Caribbean and it's too early to sail anyway.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 19:31

Saturday, October 30. 2010

No 6 Texel and other time-lapse movies

I am waiting for parts - again. Deck organizers and wheels for the boom. The old reefing lines and outhaul were partially wire, and my new (wire-less) lines don't fit into the old wheels. In the meantime I am working below decks, trying to organize my stuff and find a good place for everything (looks like I have too many clothes). Otherwise then that I've been very busy this week scripting and diving for the diving-school-movie, and making more time-lapse movies. One I am particularly happy about is the movie of setting the sails on the 90 year old Schooner "No 6 Texel". A beautiful boat! That movie literally was a lot of hard work, since I helped Albert hoisting the sails ... and they are heavy! Another time-lapse I always wanted to make was one of the sun setting above the harbor. Since I had to be up most of the night I thought I could as well setup all the cameras with time-lapse features that I have. Same scene, but very different result. Which one do you like better? Personally I am not too happy with either, and I'll probably do it again. I have been waiting for a cloudless night, but now that I see the movie I think it's better to have partial cloud coverage - not too much, but enough to see the clouds moving. It's so much more interesting. But at least I finally see the huge container cranes moving. I've never seen them doing anything when I looked, and began to wonder whether the cranes and the cargo boats are only there for show. But the time-lapse movie clearly shows that there is indeed loading and unloading going on! The final thing that is keeping me busy is answering request for Vespina. Two weeks ago it started that more emails were coming in, and now there is one or two every day. Does this mean I will be able to sell her before I leave for the Caribbean?

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:23

Sunday, October 24. 2010

Time-lapse of "Independence of the Seas" leaving the port.

After I woke up this morning I saw that the Independence of the Seas was in port again. Not the prettiest of all ships, but with 339m the second largest passenger vessel ever built (after Oasis of the Seas with 360m). Impressive. And a good opportunity to improve my time-lapse movie skills, because the ship has to turn around 180° inside the harbor when leaving. I'm glad I was there (just) in time to take the pictures. Though next time I have to plan the camera movement and focal length settings in advance to get a smoother movie. I'm not totally happy with that. But it's fun to watch how the boats at anchor move in the changing wind. Well, there's only one way to get better, and that is to do it more often. Technicalities: For this movie I took 2471 pictures (one every second) with the lowest resolution my camera (EOS 5D Mk2) would let me select (which is 5.2MP). After transferring them to my computer I used the "Open Image Sequence"-functionality of Quick Time Pro 7 to create an initial movie at 24 frames per second with a resolution of 2784x1856 pixels. The original is 5GB in size, but after saving it as a QuickTime movie with a reduced resolution of 1280x720 pixels and H.264 encoding it is only a 200MB file. I find that this is the best compromise in quality vs rendering time on my laptop. The final editing was done in Final Cut Pro. The Soundtrack comes from the CD collection "Soundtracks for iMovie". I converted the result for internet upload to MPEG-4 at 720x480 pixels, again with H.264 encoding. That produces a 24MB file at a significantly reduced quality. To which youtube adds funny Moiré patterns at the windows. But the internet connection here at the "Sailor's Bar" is not reliable enough to upload a much bigger file, so there you are.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:44

Saturday, October 23. 2010

Vespina at the anchorage

Yesterday Octavio, Domingo and I installed the reefing lines for Gudrun V ... which of course ended up with a new entry on the to-do list. Sigh. I spare you the details, but after a brief discussion I decided to order two deck organizers in which the lines will run in the future to the cockpit, and new cleats for the cockpit. The only thing that's itching me about it is that I could have seen that in advance. And would have certainly seen it had Gudrun had any reefing lines when I bought her. Well, well, a few more days. PeterSo instead of sailing Gudrun V today, I brought Vespina to the anchorage. The marina staff has now seriously started pushing people out of the marina or moving them around from pontoon to pontoon, and I didn't want to wait until they show up at my boat. So this morning I brought her to the anchorage, kindly assisted by Peter. Considering we are both two headstrong singlehandlers and did it without any previous talk it went pretty well. On the first attempt Peter didn't know how to drop the anchor, I was too close to another boat, and at the worst possible moment the wind changed and freshened up. Hehe. But at the second attempt everything went like a charm. Then Peter dropped me off at the beach and I walked to the marina office to give them the good news that there is one boat less to worry about. They looked totally surprised, which made me pretty happy. Hehehe . While they created my bill (takes a while here), a phone call came in. I could only hear the marina guy talking, but what I heard made me decide to better not mention Gudrun at all: "No, you cannot stay here." "Only one day for repairs" "Then you have to go" "Mister, do you here me, you cannot stay, all places are reserved for the ARC". They actually have a saying here that goes like "it's better to ask for forgiveness than for permission". And it looks like it works a lot better here too. So I'm going to stay with Gudrun in the marina without asking for permission (totally un-german!) until I'm done or they come around and ask me to leave. Later, when the tide was up, I took the kayak out again to check the anchor and take some pictures: Vespina at the anchorage. Problem area 1 Problem area 2 Problem area 3 Because of all the work on Gudrun I haven't had the chance to do anything for Vespina for the last four months, and I am actually surprised about her good condition. Thanks to the solar panel the batteries are always fully charged, and the engine started in the morning immediately. Only the tiller was a little heavy, so I had to pull out the grease-gun and give it a goad load. On the pictures you see the three main "problem areas", where some rust developed. Where the anchor chain runs (always a problem), where the windows have small cracks, and at the stern. But considering that it's six months since Vespina has last seen a paint brush (or a water hose) that's pretty good! When I started out I had to paint every two weeks, and I am very glad that all the work with the grinder, primer and rust converter has paid off. Anyway, now that I get an email every day for the advertisement on boatshop24 I will fix those spots too and then she is a real beauty again.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 07:58

Friday, October 22. 2010

The mainsail is up!

Three months after I took the mast out everything was finally ready to install the mainsail again. After trouble with regular slides because the in-mast track is so small I decided to go for an external track with the Harken Battcar system. Here is a short time-lapse movie, my first btw: Today we will install the reefing lines and sheets, and then Gudrun V should be ready for a test-sail tomorrow!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:09

Thursday, October 21. 2010

1:3 for the dark side.

The new track is mountedThe main-sail track is mounted, yeah! Today Octavio wants to come around to attach the chariots to the main-sail and install all the lines into the boom. After that the rig is ready, fantastic! Can't wait to go out for a test-sail. But of course there are more unpleasant surprises as well. I got the quote for getting Vespina out of the water and into the warehouse - 3000 EUR. Same for the return journey, plus 2000 EUR per year for the place. Ouch. It's not worth it. Hmm, need to make new plans. Liz in the Zodiac 260. Sorry excuse of a dinghy after three days in the sun. Loosing air and leaking water. But back to Gudrun. Saturday I had inflated the dinghy and after Liz paddled it around the harbor a little bit we hung it on the Davids at the back of Gudrun V while I serviced the outboard engine. Full of expectation I let the dinghy into the water yesterday and mounted the outboard engine. Result: outboard won't start, dinghy won't float. Regarding the outboard I think it is an electrical problem, which can be solved. Regarding the dinghy it's a problem of "falling apart at the seams", and can also be solved - by throwing it away. The thing wouldn't last a single day in the Caribbean. After talking to a few people I've decided not to buy a new dinghy here. They are cheaper in the Caribbean, it saves me storing it on deck for the passage, and I still have my kayak for the anchorage. Funny - whenever I touch something on this boat to check it over I have to replace it (except for the water pump and the fridge - toc toc toc). Maybe I should stop checking things, then I wouldn't find any more problems . Until I need the gear of course ...

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:01

Tuesday, October 19. 2010

Wiiiiinches!

Unbelievable: The winches have arrived! And the main-sail track too! I still don't understand how it can take two winches four months from the UK, when it takes 17m of mainsail track only seven days from the US. But I guess that's beside the point now that everything is here, and I'm awfully glad that I have the stuff at all. Of course not without more surprises, haha. Like the fact that the new #46 winches are actually smaller in diameter than the old #44 winches they are to replace, whereas the #48 winches I have at the backstay are bigger again. Lewmar must have changed their numbering at one point in the past. Well, the 12mm sheet of the genua fits, and I'll be content with that. Drilling new holes and cutting threads is one of the smaller inconveniences. After the hole has been drilled the thread for the coil is cut. The coil is inserted between the baseplate and the winch I put a nylon disk for electrical insulation. The screws are also electrically insulated (and sealed) using Tef gel. Drum on and done! But not only the winches were a source for more work. The mainsail track is too. It is installed by sliding up a lot of small counter-plates inside the mast-track and then screwing the individual 2m track elements to them. Only problem is that with my mast the counter-plates won't slide (just like the sail didn't). In the end we filed off parts of all the plates and now they fit more or less. But it's worth the effort, I'm sure. With the new track and the roller-bearing chariots for the main-sail the whole thing will go up and down with very little effort, and so I should be able to do the whole thing from the cockpit. Then I only have to go to the mast to trim the foot of the sail and bind the reefing lines. Problems with the track. We had to file off parts of the counter-plates to get them to slide in the mast-track. I hope that we can finish with the track tomorrow. And then we'll what the next surprise is

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 15:33

Thursday, October 14, 2010

The New Plan.

LizThanks Liz for that awesome picture!Liz is here and I like it very much. Sunday and Tuesday we went to the beach together - the first time for me since June that I was at the beach. Unbelievable. Yesterday she started a "Open Water Diver" class, and I came along with my camera to document the whole thing and make a little movie for my friends from Buceo Canarias which they can hopefully use on their website. Very interesting project for me. Today the class is at the pool again for some more exercises before going into the sea tomorrow, when I'll join them once more. Diving classThe camera.Apart from that we are cleaning and moving stuff between the two boats and waiting for the winches and spare parts from Lewmar UK and the mast equipment from Harken USA to arrive. It's four months now that I placed the order at Lewmar, and it was supposed to take three weeks. You can imagine how fond I am of that company by now. I only hope that Harken does a lot better than that. As much as I like Las Palmas and my friends here, I can't wait to sail away again. Talking about sailing away ... I've been asked what my plans are and whether "I will still make it across". Understandably Of course I will make it across. The "when" and "where" depends on when Gudrun V will be ready to sail. After all the gear is installed I still have to take her around the islands for some sea trials before heading off across the Atlantic. If I can leave the canary islands beginning of November I want to sail to Brazil (Fernando de Noronha or Natal) before making my way north to Trinidad. But seeing how slow things are going it is much more likely that I'll be forced to hang around until the end November and then I'll sail straight into the Caribbean. I can't say that I am happy with the situation. I would have very much preferred if I could have crossed the Atlantic in January with Vespina and sail the circuit as planned. Then I'll be home by now again with a lot of miles under my keel and a big sense of achievement. But the weather and my inexperience didn't allow for that. As it is now the sense of achievement is somewhat lacking, even though getting here on my own through the storms and completing all the work on the two boats is not a small feat in itself. I learned - and am still learning - a lot, and for that opportunity I am truly grateful. And I am still enjoying it, although I am getting more restless as each day goes by and the time window for the crossing season arrives. 28.163217 N, 15.441214 WBut there is a lesson in all that: Before the voyage things were either "good" or there was "a problem". On the way I've learned that real problems are actually (fortunately) pretty rare. More often it's just an "inconvenience". It might be a costly or painful inconvenience, but while there is a way or workaround it can hardly be called a problem. A problem means running out of options. And fortunately I haven't encountered a situation yet where I ran out of options. And I'm certain that when the time to cross has come and the winches and mast track still haven't arrived I will find another workaround. In the meantime I stay positive and spent as much time as I can diving and learning about photography and video. And some Spanish

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:53

Friday, October 8, 2010

Of thieves and holidays

This week started out very interesting and full of hope for leaving Las Palmas by Sunday. On Monday and Tuesday I stopped a shoplifter (same store, same guy. Unbelievable.), and retrieved my own bicycle from two evil 8-year old villains who tried to walk off with it (with the front-wheel locked, hehe). Apart from that I worked with Domingo on the rigging, and by Wednesday morning everything was ready to get the sails up. Genoa and staysail worked like a charm, and we were just working to bring the mainsail up. In addition I had received word that the winches where in Las Palmas since Monday and should be in the store for pickup any minute. No wonder that in my head I was already counting the minutes until I would cast off and leave Las Palmas. And then the sail got stuck on the way up. To cut a long story short: it won't work the way it was planned (using standard slides) with my crazy 30yr racing mast. Either I go back to no slides (just the sail), or I use an extra track with ball-bearing slides. The first option is ok to operate alone when the weather is not too bad. Haha. So it's the second. And that means another two weeks here waiting for parts, and another big hole in my wallet. Well, at least I could pick up the winches, because (after only a three month wait) I had received word that they had arrived in Las Palmas by ship and were being delivered to the store. Or not. Because to everybody's surprise they couldn't be found on the ship, and two days later the inquiry reveled that they are still in Madrid in customs. Which can take any amount of time. Great. Well, at least I could put Vespina into the warehouse. Or not. Because there is a vacation day next week and that seemed to have stopped all people from responding to calls. No appointment with the crane, the truck, or the warehouse. In the meantime plenty of ARC-boats are arriving and the marina is filling up. I was supposed to leave the marina today, but where should I go with two boats, no winches and no main sail? Will have to talk to the officials tomorrow. But there is good news too: My girlfriend Liz is coming to visit today for a week. Yeah!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 14:23

Tuesday, October 5, 2010

Diving with Dolphins and getting ready to leave

On the weekend before last I went on a diving trip to Tenerife, and came across a small school of Dolphins. And got very close. After a frustrating week in which the to-do list got ever longer instead of shorter that was exactly what I had needed: Thanks to Ralf we just got all scheduled items for the boatyard done last week (we were still working while the crane started lifting her and the supports dropped out underneath), and now Gudrun V is back in the water. Ralf is back home, and I am finishing the rigging with the help of Octavio and Domingo. Domingo is a Olympic gold medalist and two times Americas Cup sailor, and his tips and advice are invaluable. Welcome the new day! Hola! Cleaned screw with line cutter. Gudrun V, waiting for the anti fouling But not all work is done: Gudrun is still missing her backstays, the sails, and the winches. All of which was supposed to be ready 8 weeks ago. A pain. Reminds me of software projects . On the other hand waiting for the suppliers gave me enough time to thoroughly overhaul the whole boat, especially the deck hardware and the electrical installation: I replaced all batteries and battery-cables, installed new charge controllers, changed the solar panels, fixed the wind generator, and updated the navionics (Depthsounder, Log, Radar, AIS, Chartplotter, Windinstrument). But I was promised that everything will be ready by the end of the week, and so I hope to be able to leave on Sunday. After that I want to put Vespina on land. A couple of people were interested in buying here, but it seems not interested enough. My attempts to find a place for her on the dry in one of the harbors on the Canaries were unsuccessful, since nobody would rent me a space for more than six months. Something with being afraid of being stuck with a boat that nobody is paying for and nobody is picking up. Fortunately Gorka from the diveshop found a friend with a friend who has a big warehouse ... and I can put Vespina there for as long as I want. The only trouble is to get her there, which will require to take out the mast and put everything on a flat-bed trailer. But not here in Las Palmas, because Vespina won't fit through the bridge to the harbor. Should be interesting, let's see how much of it I am able to organize and complete before the end of the week! People have already warned me that there is a holiday next week, and so it's unlikely that much will happen this week. Oookaaaay. Life is definitely slower in the Canaries . The only trouble is: I am supposed to leave Las Palmas with both boats on Friday. The ARC is coming for its 25th anniversary with over 250 boats, and everybody else has to leave the port to make space. Big pain. We'll see how this turns out.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 04:42

Wednesday, September 29, 2010

Fire On Board!

Very exiting day today. First we (my brother is here to visit for a few days) drilled two 50mm holes into the hull (for the depth sounder and log). Then I started a cable fire. There were two "obviously old and unused" 4mm² cables. When I cut them off to easier pull them through the cable channel I short-circuited them and all of a sudden I was looking into flames and lots of smoke. As if the sun wasn't hot enough already . Fortunately nothing else caught fire and the flames died before I had to reach for a blanket or the extinguisher. Whew! After removing the burned (and fused) remains I checked that no other cables got damaged. Lucky. Then I had a look at the breaker switch. The switch is there to protect the cables from peak currents. But why wasn't it triggered by the short circuit? Why did enough current pass to melt a 4mm² cable, which is rated for 25 Amperes? One look told it all - the installed breaker switch is of the "C80" type, which will shut down at currents over 80A. But it was not installed correctly and would actually carry up to 160 Amperes. That is way too much. Lets see whether a 25 Ampere switch isn't enough. My brother's here. Same brother The brother of my brother drilling holes in his new boat.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:23

Monday, September 27. 2010

Too busy to blog

I've been neglecting my blog a little in the last few weeks. The (ugly) truth is that I've just been too busy. Gone are the days where all jobs on Vespina were done and I had nothing to do but enjoy the sea and country! Well, I guess refitting two boats in less than a year was maybe a little ambitious, hehe. Anyway, since today it looks like the worst really is over (e.g. pulling a 30 year old waste water hose in 40°C out of the bilge) and it will be only two more weeks or so until Gudrun is ready. Yeah! I really, really miss the sea. Electrolysis between stanchions and hull ate holes into the deck. In the boatyard. Working on the navionics - installing wind instruments and depth sounder.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:59

Wednesday, September 15. 2010

Another week gone by

A week after the mast has been put in, and still the rigging is not finished. Actually, not even the boom is painted. Work is going very slowly here. It's not that nobody is working - they are actually working quite hard. They are only amazingly inefficient at it because instead of sticking to one job and finishing that they work on many in parallel and so even the smallest thing takes ages to actually complete. And of course the winches haven't arrived either - three months now. And of course the request to delete Gudrun V from the Spanish registry has not been processed either - two months! So instead of working on the outside of Gudrun V I continued on the inside and checked the water installation, the electrical installation, cleaned the bilge, etc. On Thursday I took a break and went diving again. Chuchuna, a friend of Gorka (the owner of the dive shop) had asked me to make a little movie of her diving. Sure enough, I take any opportunity to improve my film-making skills. Check it out on Facebook. Then I spent some time with my new neighbors, Marius and Catalina from Romania. Turns out the guys are not only wonderful people, they are also celebrities! Every Friday evening a show is running on the Romanian TV about their voyage. They follow a route around the world as described in a popular Romanian adventure novel - Toate Panzele Sus (all sails up). Talking to them about the planning of the trip, finding sponsors, the editing process etc. was highly interesting and educating. And motivating! Marius and Catalina. Marius showing me his camera gear. At the Sailors Bar. Friday evening I first uploaded the movie from the sailing camp back in August, then packed my Camera and went to Las Canteras beach for a little photo session: A view to the west from Las Canteras beach. Las Canteras beach - supposedly the most beautiful city beach in the world. Uhm, yep. Training for the national team? A (pretty good) street musician. Judith! Saturday was "cleaning day" for Vespina and Gudrun V. After not having seen a trace of more cockroaches than the two I killed three weeks ago I think I can safely declare Vespina as a successfully decontaminated area. What a relief. Boric Acid - wonderful stuff. And Sunday I got to do something that I had wanted to do for a long time - a little "teaser" for my friends from www.dwarf8.com: New batteries! For the last two days I was working again on the electrical installation: Replacing the batteries. The old batteries were simply strapped to the hull and that didn't appeal to me very much. So the first thing after taking out the old batteries was to put in a wooden box that I had made some weeks ago for that purpose. Of course it didn't went all that smoothly as it could have, but after two days of heavy drilling, sawing and lifting I finished just in time to start the engine again this morning because I had to leave the berth. Why did I have to leave the berth? Well to lift Gudrun out of the water: As you can see it's time for a pressure wash of the bottom and a new coat of anti-fouling paint. I also want to check the anode, the seacocks, the gear, the rudder, the keel, replace some waste water hoses etc. Lots of work ahead!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 09:16

Wednesday, September 8, 2010

Waiting for the paperwork to arrive.

Officials love paperwork. And when traveling at sea one gets in contact with a lot more officials (and therefore paperwork) than on land: checking in and out of a port, and the odd visit by customs. If you want no trouble, then the following official documents are required: • Passport • Ship's 3rd party insurance • Certificate of entry in the country's ship's registry • Frequency assignment certificate (call sign, mmsi) I have a passport. And getting 3rd party insurance for "Gudrun V" was the first thing I did after signing the contract (170 EUR per year for a 10.000.000 EUR world-wide coverage), and it only took one day to process. With the other documents I am not so lucky. The German authorities (Bundesamt für Schifffahrt und Hydrographie) can only issue me a "flag certificate" (which says the boat belongs to me and entitles me to fly the German flag) after the Spanish authorities have deleted the Spanish registry for Gudrun V. Something I am now waiting for since the middle of June - 10 weeks. The problem is: I don't have anything official that says that Gudrun V belongs to me. This will get me into trouble for sure at any port, and especially should customs stop me. An alternative is the "International Bootsschein". This is also an official document and accepted worldwide (except in French waters). It is issued by the sailing clubs by order of the authorities. Because I hate being stuck here until the Spanish authorities find the time to process my request I decided to get one. Unfortunately the ADAC, which issues it in Germany, had problems understanding the sale contract. But everything could be straightened out on the telephone and the document should be on its way now. The other thing is the frequency assignment certificate, which assigns me a call sign and the number for participation in the GMDSS network. This number is known as the MMSI. Because the MMSI is coded into my VHF radio and EPIRB and can only be changed by the vendor, I wanted to transfer the MMSI from Vespina to Gudrun V if possible. In Germany the responsible body is called "Bundesnetzagentur für Elektrizität, Gas, Telekommunikation, Post und Eisenbahnen". Awesome, isn't it. Contrary to what such a complicated name implies they said that it is possible, and all I have to do is return the certificate for Vespina when applying for the certificate for Gudrun V and add a line that says that I would like to transfer the MMSI and call sign. So I did. Yesterday the frequency assignment certificate arrived. Of course with a new MMSI and different call sign. Yeah, right. Fortunately again the matter could be straightened out on the telephone and the new document (with the old number) should be on its way now. I keep my fingers crossed.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:26

Switchboard rewired

Now that the mast is back in the boat I can complete the instrument installation: connect the radar, wind instrument, navigation lights, anchor light etc. A pretty switchboard. The ugly truth. The lights are controlled by this little switchboard, and thanks to the voltmeter it is easy enough to make sense of the "cable salad". But behold - the nice little descriptions on the front are very misleading. The deck light is connected to "Sin Gobierno" instead of "Proyector", and the compass to " " (unmarked) instead of "Instrumentos Navegacion", whereas the switch "Compass" turned on the GPS. I see. Guess now's a good time as any to re-wire everything in a more "intuitive" manner. SwitchFunctionSin Gobierno no function Luz Fondeo anchor light Radio VHF, AIS, Stereo Luces Navegacion Tricolor lantern Proyector deck light Buque a Motor motor light Instrumentos Navegacion GPS, Chartplotter, Navtex, Radarwarner, 12V sockets Alumbrado Fluorescentes salon and head lights Alumbrado Incandescent cabin lights Alimentacion Motor water pump and desalinador Compass Compass, Autopilot " " no function The bilge pump, toilet and fridge have their switches and fuses not in the panel.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:14

Tuesday, September 7, 2010

The mast is back in!

A friend of mine has a dead sure way to calculate from any estimate the real time it will take to complete a project. It goes like this: Take the original estimate, double it, and then apply the next higher unit. Thus a two hour estimate becomes a four day project time. Unfortunately very many projects really work out that way, at least in software. And it seems rigging projects too. The original estimate was three days. And six weeks later the mast is back in! And just like in many software projects the initial shipment is not complete: Important features like the boom, middle shrouds, backstay etc. are still missing, and Octavio recons it will take him the rest of the week to complete the rigging. I think that is an accurate estimate. But I'm happy! Lolo did a wonderful job on the new paint, and as far as I can see the rigging is well done too - what's already there at least. Can't wait to sail with it. 18:00 - frantic activity 19:30 - the crane is ready 19:53 - the mast is hanging from the crane 19:59 - through the deck 20:01 - and out the other side. Yeah!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:32

Thursday, September 2, 2010

AIS class B trouble and purified drinking water

Chun's "Intrepid". From Korea! Tuesday I met Chun from South Korea, who is on a sailing trip around the world. There are not many South Korean sailors, but according to Chun sailing is booming in South Korea. Since he is a ship dealer that puts him in a nice position. He said it is particularly profitable to buy used boats from old men in Japan, sail them the 600nm to South Korea and sell them there to younger men. Another thing we talked about was his Class B AIS. For recreational boats AIS comes in two flavors: Class C (receive only) and Class B (transmit and receive). I have a class C, and Chun has the "better" (and more expensive) class B. As followers of this blog know I am very fond of my AIS and very happy with it. It's one of the electronic gadgets that make sailing alone a lot safer because it reduces the risk of a collision with commercial vessels. But Chun is not happy at all. While my class C AIS only receives the names, position, speed, course etc from other boats, his class B AIS also constantly sends out the same data about his boat. In theory that's a good thing, because other craft are aware that there is a sailing boat around and where it's going. In practice, however, it seems to be a right pain in the ass. Chun complained that he gets hailed on radio and questioned by every coast guard or military vessel. And whereas commercial shipping before couldn't be sure to what kind of boat the little light they saw at night really belongs, they now know for sure it's a sailing boat. Unfortunately they don't care very much for sailing boats. And where without active AIS many boats had changed their course, with active AIS nobody does. In two occasions Chun even got the impression they were chasing him. Be that as it might. For Chun his AIS is more trouble than it's worth and he only turns it on for a few seconds to have a look around and then turns it off again.

The water purifier. One item that everybody agrees is useful is a water purifier, especially the Seagull IV from General Ecology. It not only removes funny tastes ("tank taste") from the water, off which Gudrun is suffering a little. It also removes cysts, virus, bacteria and many chemicals, making virtually any kind of water drinkable. It can be argued whether on the long run this saves money or not compared to buying bottled water. My reason for getting one was that it is so much more convenient to draw drinking water from the tank then to buy (and carry) bottled water, and you can't trust the water quality everywhere. Some places it just tastes horrible. Along with the purifier I bought a water foot-pump. The idea was to install the foot pump in line with the electrical pump, so that I can use either. I'm certain the electrical pump will fail one day when it's least convenient, and I need a way to get the water out of the tank then. Unfortunately my plan didn't quite work out, because it's not possible to pull water through the electrical pump when it's turned off. So I had to install the foot pump in parallel with the electrical pump, not serial. left: purified, right: unpurified water. In the end I decided that I only need purified water for cooking and drinking. So I installed a divider before the electrical pump and led a hose first to the foot pump and then to the purifier which has it's own faucet. Now I have one (electrically operated) faucet for general use, and one (mechanically operated) faucet for cooking and drinking water. I love it, it tastes great!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:55

Tuesday, August 31. 2010

Vacations and unwelcome visitors

Last week Wednesday I returned to Las Palmas to find that I hadn't missed much. The mast was still in the same condition as when I had left: The boom was still unpainted. The batteries and spare parts for the winches not delivered yet, the request for deletion of the Spanish flag unprocessed, etc. August in Spain - the whole country on vacation. Because a hot wind was blowing from the Sahara and my back was still giving me problems I decided to take it easy as well and wait for conditions to improve. Back home everybody always called me a workaholic, but I have no problem at all to sit (or lie) on my boat for days and just read. My quiet reading on Vespina Thursday evening was however soon interrupted when I saw a little cockroach scurry past. Eeeeeek! After unmercifully killing it with a handy little anti-cockroach spray I went looking for it's brothers and sisters. And found one more, which was disposed of as quickly. Then I went outside to get away from the effects of the spray as well as to contemplate the next steps in the "retaking of Vespina". Cockroaches! On my boat! Unthinkable. I remembered reading that for each of the little buggers you see there are 100 hidden. Images of hordes of cockroaches crawling in the holds of Vespina sprang up in my head. Horror. But where had they come from? Why had they picked Vespina? How to get rid of them without harm to myself? I didn't sleep well that night, even though I moved to Gudrun, which seems to be free of cockroaches. Next day I talked to Roy, a great source of knowledge about all things connected with boats (as well as electronics and management). He wasn't surprised that I had found some cockroaches. Apparently half of the boats on the pontoon got invested while I was away. The boat of his neighbor so badly that he sprayed the whole boat with gas and went back to England. According to Roy cockroaches get on board usually in one (or all) of three ways: eggs carried on in cardboard or on the soles of the shoes, or they climb up the ropes themselves. In the latter they need only the tiniest gap to enter a boat. (Well, they don't have to look long for a tiny gap on Vespina. There are very big ones at the companion hatch!) Inside the boat they live mostly from remains of food (e.g. under the stove) or simply cardboard. They like the glue of cardboard boxes especially. And corrugated cardboard is like a purpose-built shelter and hatching environment. Fortunately they can easily be gotten rid of by cutting their access to food and water, and distributing boric acid. And patience, because it can take up to three weeks for all eggs to hatch. Here's the recipe for "anti cockroach cake": • 5g boric acid • 5g icing sugar • 10g flour • a drop of oil and a little water Mix, put on aluminum foil and distribute in the boat. water trapa serving of "anti cockroach cake" First I removed all cardboard from Vespina, and made sure that all access to water was plugged. Then I prepared the "anti cockroach cake" and put it into the holds and along the supposed "cockroach highways". I also built a "water trap", poisoned with boric acid and sweetened with icing sugar. Then I sprayed all possible entrances (wire holes, etc.) with anti-cockroach spray. After also spraying the mooring lines and cleats I left. But I was sure glad that I didn't have to fly "to england" but can just stay three boats down the pontoon on Gudrun . Today, four days later, I checked up on my "treasure hunt". I couldn't find any cockroaches (dead or alive), only some tiny flies in the water trap. Well, patience. New batteries. 3x40kg and 1x14kg In the meantime August is almost over and people are returning from vacation. Yesterday Octavia proceeded with the rigging, Lolo started to paint the boom, and today even the batteries got delivered! The winches & spares are still missing, but are supposed to arrive "within the next days". Good news, it looks like I can put the mast back in maybe as soon as Friday.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:45

Sunday, August 22. 2010

Sailing classes at Lake Constanz

A dinghy full of sailing students The instructor posing with one of his students For the last seven days I was "working" as a sailing instructor at the Lake Constanz (Bodensee). As usual at the lake in the summer there is either rain+wind or sun+none. We had plenty of rain this time. And wind, which was great. It's been the 7th or 8th time for me, but it is always exciting to see how the students learn to cope with the usually new situation on a boat. And this year it was especially exciting for me to see that I had changed since last year - a lot more calmer and patient. Interesting. Personally I think that few things are as rewarding as a good sailing class. Apart from acquiring what could be a survival skill it teaches lessons that are very handy in everyday life: Assessing a situation, making a decision, communicating it clearly and executing it in sync with others. And not surprisingly it's the communication part that takes the students longest to learn every year A pirate on board? Sheltered bbq. Next for me: Three more days in Germany, and then back to Las Palmas!

Posted by Axel Busch at 07:32

Friday, August 6. 2010

The ideal navigation dashboard

Yesterday I got interviewed by a "Strategic Design Consultancy" about route planning, navigation, chart-plotters and the like. One of their clients is working on a new line of products for the "light marine" market - fishing, recreational and leisure craft. I happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time (or right?), and ended up being the first interview subject. The interviewer wanted to know how I go about route planning and navigation. What software and devices I use and what I think about this and that. He had done projects for the same client in the aeronautic and maritime industries, but the private market was new to him. As was sailing. For two hours we talked about route planning, navigation, software, devices, interfaces etc. Only recently I had experimented a lot with the subjects on Smart-phones (iPhone, Android), Laptops (Windows, Mac), Chart-Plotters (Raymarine, Furuno and Lowrance). So I guess he could have picked a worse interview partner. Or maybe not. It seems while the client has admitted that at the moment he has no idea what his customer base really needs, he has already decided what they are going to get. Software for cool hardware like the iPad and with cool features like augmented reality. Which is a wonderful idea if all you want to do with the gear is to show off in the bar to your non-sailor friends. But actually using it on the boat? Not really. First of all capacitive touch-screens don't work at all with wet fingers or gloves on. Not that I wouldn't be fascinated by cool hardware and features. But as a sailor that has had his share of frustration with electronic gear I am begging on my knees: Please get the basics right first before you add the cool stuff. To me the basics are: • Course over ground (COG) • Speed over ground (SOG) • Compass course • Depth • Distance travelled (Log) • Distance, bearing and time to next waypoint • Time • Temperature • Atmospheric pressure • Battery voltage (• Humidity) Despite having spend more than 4000 EUR on navionics equipment this year (aaargh!) I still need to consult four displays and click buttons just to collect the data that I enter every couple of hours into my logbook. So ... here's my ideal navigation dashboard: My ideal navigation dashboard. See below for glossary. My Raymarine C80 has a dashboard, but it only shows a fraction of the info. And the font size is too small to read from further away than one meter. And the alarms are next to useless. And it uses too much power. And, and, and ... it's actual surprising how bad it is, given the price and the many years they are developing the stuff. We'll see. I send my design to the consulting company together with a summary of the preferred features and some issues. I don't think it'll help much, because I have seen too many times that products are more defined by what's considered cool and company politics than by real market requirements. But we have to try, don't we. Glossary: SOG: Speed over ground Vel: Velocity in water COG: Course over ground HDG: Heading, course of the boat in water Log: Distance travelled Lat: Latitude Lon: Longitude Dpth: Depth VMG: Velocity made good towards the waypoint. BRG: Bearing. Direct course from the current position to the waypoint. DTW: Distance to waypoint. TTG: Time to go. ETA: Estimated time of arrival Best BRG: Fastest course to waypoint. Calculated from VMG on different COGs. MMSI: Maritime Mobile Service Identity. The radio number of a vessel. CPA: Closest point of approach TCPA: Time to closest point of approach

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:31

Monday, August 2. 2010

The mast is painted, but not yet ready.

Cracked weld at the spreader base.rewelded and paintedOriginally the mast was supposed to be put back into the boat last week wednesday. As it turned out the spreader bases had to be completely rewelded, which took a few days longer. Then the entry to the sail-track had to be adjusted from racing-sails without cars to cruising sails with cars, which took additional time. On saturday the paint was finally sprayed on ... and it looks magnificent! The painted mast. In the background the boom with primer.But still all the rolls, terminals, wires, cables, mounts etc. have to be fitted, which will take two or three more days. Unfortunately the work won't be completed before I fly to Germany for three weeks on Wednesday morning to meet friends and family. So the mast will have to wait at the boatyard until I return. Well, better slow than sloppy. In the meantime my new friends here are totally determined to help me improve my Spanish to a level that allows conversation. Some even refuse to talk to me in anything but Spanish! I know I should be glad, but I can tell you it makes "going out for a beer" suddenly hard work. Fortunately, as we all know, the ability to speak a foreign language increases in direct proportion to the amount of alcohol consumed ... salud! Hicks!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:06

Saturday, July 31. 2010

Birthday in Las Palmas

Yesterday was my birthday! Can't have a birthday without presents, so I bought a "Radar Detector" for myself . That's a handy little device that uses next to no power and sounds an alarm when the radar beam of another vessel passes over Gudrun V. The last one of the little gadgets that makes sleeping without a lookout safer. Then I read my birthday email (so much, thanks guys!) and applied another layer of paint to the battery box. In the evening I went for a night-dive at the wreck of Kalais. Diving through the ship's cargo hold and passages only with a flashlight is really something special, definitely to be recommended. And after the dive I was surprised with a chocolate birthday cake (thanks Gricel!) and about 20 people, and we all went for drinks and some food. Just great! No pictures unfortunately, way too busy talking. I got back home early in the morning and needed, quite honestly, most of the day to recover.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 16:09

Thursday, July 29. 2010

1.111.307 nm in four months

The proof: I have sailed 1.111.307nm. New world record! My Raymarine C80 chart plotter came with a lot of features - and a big problem. Out of the box the ground log showed more than one million nm sailed. There is a feature to reset the ground log. But it didn't work. There is also a feature to reset all settings and restore the factory defaults. Which worked. But since the factory default seems to be to set the ground log to a random number, it didn't help an awful lot. Sounds like an uninitialized variable to me. Naturally I checked the Raymarine website for a new firmware version. It turned out that I have Version 4.30, whereas the officially available Version is (still) 4.29. It also says "Development Version" on my info screen. Interesting! Update problems. A little confused (and amused) I registered at the Raymarine website and filed a bug report, complete with screenshot. The reply was not so amusing, because it never came. So the only option left to me was to downgrade to the older version from the website and hope that this one doesn't show the problem. During the update the device crashed once, but in the end it completed the update. And - eureka! - I was able to set the ground log to 0 - finally. Side note: the version 4.29 is also labeled "Development Version". Sigh. As Arndt commented already - all these problems sound way too familiar to our regular working life. Because I can't be having that here on the boat I put aside the little electronic troublemakers after the update and went to the diving school to take the theory class for the "Night/Low Visibility Diver" specialty. Surprisingly the Spanish in the exam was considerably harder to understand than that for the "Nitrox" specialty. Probably because Nitrox is only about simple physics (partial pressure calculation mostly), whereas night diving is about very complicated things like communication, orientation and following procedures. Anyway ... I'm looking forward to a special treat for my birthday tomorrow: night diving!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:37

Wednesday, July 28. 2010

Second thoughts about the batteries

Current draw (@ 12V) Radar 2,4A Autopilot 1,7A Chart plotter 0,8A Stereo 0,8A Lights (night) 0,8A Navigation lights (night) 0,3A VHF Radio 0,2A AIS 0,2A Navtex 0,1A Sounder/Log 0,1A Sum 6,6A ! Ever since I've ordered the batteries I've been thinking. Something doesn't feel right. Adding more batteries is one way to deal with the power consumption. But is it the right way? I don't think so. I should reduce my power consumption, and not buy bigger batteries. Actually, all I really need during a crossing is the Sounder/Log, the AIS, Navigation lights and a little light inside. That adds up to a current draw of 0,5A during the day (6W) and 1A during the night (12W). However, in addition to what I have I would need a little device to show my GPS position and sound an AIS warning, because I would keep the power-hungry chart plotter turned off. Hmm. Actually ... I have a Lego Mindstorms NXT "intelligent brick" with me. With a interface converter from RS-232 to RS-485 and "a little programming" to parse the NMEA data from the AIS engine that should be able to do the job just fine. And it only draws 0,1A. Come to think about it, I also have a compass sensor for it, hehe. Hey, this is cool! So here's the plan: I'll cancel one of the batteries, 3x168Ah is enough. And turn my LEGO NXT into an AIS display. Should it turn out that I "can't live" without the stereo, chart-plotter (not much to plot on an ocean) and radar, I'll get an Ampair towed water generator.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:17

Tuesday, July 27. 2010

New Batteries

so much stuff! After the strengthening BBQ my back was ready for more challenges. Like emptying the huge lockers to get to the batteries. Even though I knew there was a lot in those lockers, I was still impressed when everything was finally arrayed on the deck. Then I had a clear view of batteries. They are not in good shape and loose their charge rather rapidly, so I need to replace them. Gudrun's current "battery bank". Which raises important questions like "What type?" and "What size?". In addition to a starter-batterie I have two 108Ah maintenance-free wet-cell batteries on Vespina. These 216Ah are just enough to run the navionics, lights, radio and auto-pilot for about 30h in "adverse charging conditions" - not much apparent wind and clouds, and then the battery is in desperate need of a recharge. First of all I would like to have a bigger safety margin than that, and second the batteries last a lot longer when they are not discharged to less than 50%. So in the long run it's actually cheaper to buy bigger batteries. Fortunately I have a lot more space on Gudrun, and after a little calculation I decided that 500Ah to 600Ah would be about ideal. There is also the question of type: serviceable wet-cell, maintenance-free wet-cell, AGM or GEL? But once I started reading about the different types it became quickly apparent that AGM is what I wanted to have. They cost more than wet-cell batteries (about 2.5EUR/Ah compared to 1.4EUR/Ah), but they last at least twice as long. In addition they are truly maintenance-free, charge faster, keep the charge longer, can operate when submerged, and are in general safer. GEL-type batteries are better in hotter climates and can be discharged deeper, but the higher costs (about 3.5EUR/Ah) are not worth it. In the end I decided for four 168Ah AGM batteries from Mastervolt - 42kg each. Plus a small 65Ah as a starter battery for the Engine. And today I go shopping for plywood to build a nice battery-box.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:53

Monday, July 26. 2010

Pictures from the BBQ

Yesterday I had the privilege to attend the best planned & executed barbecue ever. For half an hour Carlos seemed to be everywhere at once, and then the fire was going, the meat salted, the drinks covered in ice, and everything else also at the ready. It's always great fun to see professionals at work! Orvil is starting the fire. Carlos, el rey de el asado Check out the girl-to-guy ratio. Football is mandatory slingshot shooting plain fun. A survivor.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 01:12

Saturday, July 24. 2010

Of AIS and BBQ

Not much happening here at the moment. Last week I managed to move the VHF Radio, GPS, AIS, Navtex, Radar, Chartplotter and Iridium antenna from Vespina to Gudrun V. Unfortunately not without protests from my back - too much time spent in awkward positions while removing and adding electrical cables. So this week I was forced to take it very slowly. So slowly, actually, that for four days all I could do was to lie on my back and read or sleep until the pain went away. On the positive side that gave me time to improve my Spanish a bit, so that I was able to attend an "Enriched Air Nitrox" diving class in Spanish for the last two days and successfully passed the written exam today - also in Spanish. It's not a big thing, but I'm proud of it anyway. Unfortunately I'm still absolutely useless when it comes to any meaningful conversation. Obviously more practice is necessary! Which I'll probably get tomorrow at a big BBQ hosted by Carlos, one of the diving instructors. Carlos is Argentinian with a special interest in lots of meat, and he's been planning that BBQ for the last two weeks now. Should be interesting. Carlos is also one of the guys I've been diving most with. He speaks as little English and German as I speak Spanish, but mixing all three languages together we somehow manage to get a simple conversation going. Well, hands and feet are also often necessary. And it certainly helps that we share the same sense of humor. Other than that I am working on a document that describes in detail how to install AIS receivers and hook them up with Chart-plotters and Laptops. Many of the sailors I've met had expressed their interest in the matter, since AIS is such a simple and inexpensive way to make sailing in high-traffic areas safer. Unfortunately there is no comprehensive how-to available, so I thought I could write one while I'm into the subject. Patience conquers technology! It's not a big thing really: find out where the data is coming from and where it should go, then read the manuals and figure out what cables to connect. Finally wire everything together and pay special attention to the grounding. It's easy enough to do, especially with a good voltmeter and - patience. Btw, here's my opinion on what it really takes to stay sane in a world where electronics and software are encroaching on all aspects of life: patience. Simplified AIS installation on Gudrun V. But after I started writing I noticed that there are quite a few different scenarios to cover, and that every vendor of the involved devices uses (of course) a different color coding for the wiring. And then of course there is the software configuration part. Baud rates, COM ports etc. So ... unsurprisingly it takes me a lot longer to write the document than I had anticipated, and I'm afraid it's not quite possible to target the electronically ignorant as I had hoped initially. Which Roy, my neighbor, will be probably glad to hear: Roy funds his voyage mostly by carrying out electr(on)ical installations as well as computer & diving works for other sailors.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:02

Tuesday, July 13. 2010

The mast is out

Rolo is guiding the mast out. Here it comes. It's only seven months since I stepped the mast on Vespina. I did not think then that I'd see a crane so soon again. Fortunately the memory of what to do and in what order is still fresh, and I only had to reverse the steps to prepare Gudrun V. Only an empty hole remains. No innocent bystanders (e.g. Frederick) were hurt. The appointment with the crane was for 1pm at the shipyard, which is just two pontoons away. I arrived 10 minutes early, and so did the crane. The guys from the shipyard checked Gudrun V briefly over and after a nod and a grunted "no problem" the spectacle started. Half an hour later everything was over. Every hour spent on preparation is two hours saved during the operation. And Gudrun V is now a motorboat. Before and after. Tomorrow Octavio will check over the mast and together we'll then prepare everything for sanding and painting. I already spotted a small fracture at a welding near a spreader, which will have to be re-welded. Apart from that the mast looks like it's in good shape even after 30 years. No visible bends, dents or cracks.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 10:27

Monday, July 12. 2010

Campeones del mundo!

Ole ole ole ole! Up and away ... al agua! al agua! Enhorabuena España! The best football team of the world won the world-cup. I watched the game together with my new Canarian friends in the diving school, after a party on the boat of Gorka, the diving instructor. Everybody had brought food and drinks (I had made Raisin-Walnut-Paprika-Couscous), and it was a wonderful party. It was also very hot, and many jumped (or were made to jump) into the water frequently. This practice got totally out of hand after the match, as people were lifted up and dragged away to be thrown off the 5m high jetty. Gathering around the food and chilling. Even though I had to climb out of the water four times I am very happy to have found some friends here. It makes a huge difference to my life. Most voyagers are easy to get along with and you get acquainted very quickly, often within minutes. But it's different with locals. To them voyagers come and go so quickly that it's not worth the effort to get to know them better. And often enough the boaties don't care much for the locals and stick to themselves. So if you want to you have to make the effort yourself: Stay at the same place for a while, show a little respect, do as they do and be consistent. But it's impossible to do that when you sail every few days from one harbor to the next in order to get to see the country. Instead of seeing all of the country I prefer to get to know the people where I stay. So for me doing longer sails and then staying somewhere for a few weeks is the better choice. 1. Scrape away the rubber sealing. 2. heat the base with a gas torch. 3. hammer away on the impact drill. Otherwise the work is going well on Gudrun V. Only the winches are giving me a hard time. The stainless-steel screws are firmly locked into the aluminium threads, and it takes a gas-torch, impact driver and a lot of patience to get them out. After three days of work I only have six of the twelve winches removed. But today I will finish preparing the rigging for having the mast taken out tomorrow. It needs new fittings, rolls etc. and new paint - a lot of work. In the meantime Octavio and Domingo from Alisios Sailing Center are working on the new sails and rigging. As it turned out Octavio knows Marti and Yaiza (Gudrun V's previous owners), because his wife comes from the same town. And Domingo is an Olympic gold-medalist and two times Americas Cup sailor (1999, 2007). In addition they are really nice guys, and talking and working with them is great fun. Unfortunately even though Octavio made a good price, the new sails (genoa, full-battened main-, stay- and storm-sail) are costing me an arm and a leg: 6000 EUR. Originally I wanted simple cross-cut Dacron sails. But as the difference in price is not very big I went for the better performing DC Sandwich Polyester with a radial cut in the end. Fortunately I can at least reuse the Gennaker from Vespina.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 04:12

Wednesday, July 7, 2010

Clip form the first passage on Gudrun V

A short clip of the uneventful passage with "Gudrun V" from La Graciosa to Las Palmas. There really isn't much to see, except how little the boat moves while doing 9 to 10 knots.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 21:50

Sunday, July 4, 2010

In Las Palmas with Gudrun V

Back to front: Henk, Sepp and Christa. Sepp and Christa sailed to New Zealand, where their boat burned down. Now they go again. That's the spirit! Las Palmas has the best facilities for yacht repairs in the Canaries. Since Gudrun V needs a pretty complete overhaul of the rigging (old), the sails (very old) and the deck hardware (blocked with sand), this is where I had to take her. I expected that the trip would reveal other problems that I had missed on the survey and test-sail. I had estimated that I would need approximately 24 hours for the 120nm, give or take 2 hours. Because the harbor office in Las Palmas is open from 9am to 2pm on Saturdays, I wanted to leave La Graciosa around 11am on Friday. Well, with all the last-minute-preparations and saying farewells it was 1pm when Sepp, Christa, Henk, Patrick and his girlfriend waved me good-bye. For the first hour I only used the engine, to check that this is going well. When I was confident that the engine would bring me back in case of trouble I turned into the NNE wind and set the sails. Left to right: Patrick, Henk, Christa, Sepp. The mainsail is with 40sqm almost twice as big as on Vespina, and I had to use the winch for the last few meters. Theoretically I can set it from within the cockpit. But Gudrun V also has a winch next to the mast and I'm so used to working on the mast from Vespina that I set it from there. The genoa also unfurled smoothly from the freshly fixed Profurl furler. And then the furler came apart. Damn, looks like our repairs on the gear were not as good as Marti and I had hoped. I gave it a little twist and it looked like I could furl it back in anyway. Contrary to Vespina on Gudrun V the genoa is a lot smaller than the main-sail. Uups. Broken furler. I estimated that I would only have to drop the main-sail to sail downwind with the genoa completely unfurled up to wind force 6 easily, probably more. So I very likely wouldn't need the furler until I arrived in Las Palmas. And there I could always drop the genoa the old-fashioned way without using the furler. So no worries. I went back on course to Las Palmas and sat down in the cockpit, eager to see how Gudrun V would handle. I sailed on a broad reach, with a gusty wind of force 3 to 4. Contrary to Vespina a gust showed itself mainly in more speed, and very little heel. Sail away! The pressure on the rudder was very light and constant. Just wonderful. At first I made between 6 and 8 knots, but when I started trimming a little the speed increased to beyond 9 knots. For an hour I sailed like that. A huge smile split my face in half and I could hardly believe that I found such a wonderful boat. This was almost too easy. I know there will be times in the future where I'll curse the deep draft of 2,50m. But right then it made me the happiest sailor in the world. Fantastic. A look inside. View from the navigation table. An hour later the wind increased to a force 5. Gudrun started to heel more as she was approaching 10 knots, and the force on the tiller increased. Time to reef the main-sail. Or drop it, because at the rate I was going I would arrive in Las Palmas in the early morning hours. So I dropped the main-sail and just sailed on with the 35sqm genoa at about 5 knots on average. I wondered briefly whether sleeping alone on a boat at night during the first trip is a proper "seamanlike" thing to do. I came to the decision that it was probably not. But Gudrun sailed so smoothly and quietly that I had not a single doubt about her capabilities and my safety. In that she is very similar to Vespina. So seamanlike or not - I made myself comfortable in the cockpit and started to sleep in my usual 30 minute intervals. By now I'm so used to it that I don't need to set the alarm anymore. I still do it, but I always wake up two or three minutes before it goes off. Then I take a look around, check everything that I feel needs checking, reset the alarm and go back to sleep. After a few hours I switched to sleeping in the cabin as it got colder during the night. "Optimist" sailing school in the harbor of Las Palmas. The entrance into the harbor in Las Palmas was without complications. The furler worked despite being broken, and coming alongside the pontoon is a well-practiced maneuver. The paperwork was a different matter, and I was a little apprehensive as I entered the office. The German flag-certificate hadn't been issued yet, and I knew trying to check-in without one would not work. But after talking with Yaiza to the harbor master in La Graciosa we had agreed that I would sail under the Spanish flag and act as if the boat still belonged to her and Marti. She wrote a note for me saying that I am allowed to move the boat in her name. So I showed the Gudrun's Spanish documents, the note and my passport, and everything seemed to go well. Until the harbor master pointed out that the insurance document was outdated. Marti or Yaiza would have to fax a current copy before I could check in. But fortunately I had already applied for insurance for Gudrun myself and had received and printed the documents. I showed them and that was good enough for the dear harbor master and he finished checking me in. The fee for Gudrun V is 280 EUR per month, water and electricity included. That is 80 EUR more than I pay for Vespina. 40% more, but still affordable. Over 12m length is where it really gets expensive, and Gudrun is 11,98. Now Gudrun V is tied up only four boats away from Vespina on the same pontoon, and moving stuff back and forth between the two boats is easy. Sure, right alongside would have been even better, but on a marina with more than 1000 berths being on the same pontoon is more than I could have hoped for. For tomorrow morning I have an appointment with Octavio from the Alisios Sailing Center, the company that will make the new rigging and probably also the sails for Gudrun V. Very exciting!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 07:50

Friday, July 2. 2010

On the way to Las Palmas

So far everything works great. I left just after 1pm and set the sails after one hour of motoring at 5kn. Gudrun V is doing 6 to 9 knots ever since. Even though she sails almost upright. At the rate I'm going at the moment I'll be too early in Las Palmas. We'll see, still 100nm to go.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:55

Family life on Gudrun V

Marti sewing, Anna helping. Yep, there is a sailing boat somewhere. After Marti and his family left on Wednesday afternoon I started to prepare Gudrun V for sailing to Las Palmas. Marti had already helped me with fixing the Profurl roller-furling (new gears) and mending the genoa, while Yaiza was sorting through their stuff on the boat, and the children were playing in the cockpit. From Sunday to Wednesday the cockpit has been a mess of toys and tools, and it was impossible to see that there is a sailing boat below all that stuff. Yeeehaaa! Anna Quim During those days we five lived together on Gudrun. It was a very special time for me, to share the life of this wonderful family with the two little kids Anna (1,5) and Quim (3). Living on the boat with kids is very different from regular "crew life". Everything takes unbelievably longer, and it is very hard to actually finish some work because always the kids have to pee, are hungry, hurt themselves, or want to help. I can imagine that this could possibly be a very frustrating experience, especially with the time pressure of getting everything done before the flight home. Talking in the evenings. Lunch with Patrick. But I've watched Marti and Yaiza deal with this situation over and over again with all the patience and calmness you would attribute to a Zen master. They worked while the kids where playing or sleeping, and when the kids needed attention they immediately dropped the work and cared for the kids. Sometimes to play, sometimes to give in, sometimes to be firm and make a point. But always calm and patient. After a while the kids were fine again on their own, and then Marti and Yaiza picked up the work where they had left it. Sometimes with a sigh, but always with a grin. So despite the bustle the last few days have been very quiet, and without all the screaming and stress that I had feared. Very educating indeed. Yaiza and Anna dancing. Bye, bye!! I've always wondered how people sail with little children, and I'm glad that I had the chance to get a glimpse of that. Being in a hurry is always a bad thing on a boat. With children it becomes madness. But I think when one accepts that the adults set the direction but the children set the pace, then it becomes very relaxed. Certainly it takes more time to do anything, and you have to be a lot more careful and plan ahead. But you still can do everything. And in a way it is much more fun too, as you see the kids explore and learn and adapt to their environment. Or adapt it to their liking, so maybe you want to pack some extra spare parts . La Graciosa harbor. Now Gudrun V is ready for sailing to Las Palmas. Everything is stowed away, I know where all the seacocks and tools are, and the Diesel and water tank is full. Just in case (by the way: 83 Cent for a liter Diesel). The weather forecast predicts 15 to 20 knots of Wind from the NE, a little less during the night. With Vespina that would be about 30 hours for the 120nm from La Graciosa to Las Palmas. Let's see how long it takes with Gudrun V. I am very excited.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 04:59

Saturday, June 26. 2010

Diving Retrospective / Back to La Graciosa

Inside "La Catedral" Around La Catedral The last days I went mostly diving, as you might have guessed already. I have completed 13 dives now, most of them between 25 and 30 meters deep and lasting around 40 minutes. What is interesting is that I feel a kind of anxiety just before the descend. But it is easy to fight and once I'm underwater and breath regularly it is completely gone. The dive itself is just wonderful. I check my depth, my air and my timer regularly. I stay close to my buddy, and I have no care in the world. Just floating. Once I had trouble with my mask. It kept filling with water and I couldn't blow it out. I was about 27m deep and I couldn't read my instruments anymore with the mask full of water. I was afraid I would sink down, or even worse, go up rapidly. That was pretty scary, and I started to breath more quickly. The whole idea of diving felt like a pretty stupid thing to do suddenly. Pietro from Milano. Now lives in Munich. My buddy was a little ahead of me, but Pietro, another diver, was right behind me. I signaled him that I had problems with my mask. He came to me, and I held on to his vest with one hand. That took care of my anxiety to go up (thanks Pietro!), and I could begin to check what was wrong. As it turned out my hood somehow interfered with my mask (I think it was a bubble of air that had caught in the hood) and when I took off the hood and put the mask back on without it I could clear the mask and everything was fine again. Now I'm diving without the hood. Another wreck. Lots around here. On the deeper dives, more than 30m, I also start to feel itchy when the decompression time limit approaches. Then I get a little nervous and want to ascend with time to spare. I guess that's just inexperience, because I don't have a good feeling yet for the ascend. And how the deco limit changes with the depth. And I really don't want to have to do decompression stops on the way up. It's not really rational, because the dive computer tells me how slowly I have to ascend, and it's easy to calculate how long the air will last. But well, better safe than sorry, right? So far I usually surfaced with 50 to 70 bars left in the bottle and more or less with the other teams. I think that's ok for my level of experience, and I don't want to start pushing it before I feel really confident and have more air left at the end of the dive. These will be the last diving movies for a while: And now for something completely different ... Gudrun V! Tomorrow I fly to La Graciosa again, where I will meet with Marti and his whole family on Gudrun V. They want to collect some personal things, and then we will get Gudrun V ready so that I can sail her to Las Palmas. I visited the harbor master today and managed to reserve a berth at the same pontoon that Vespina is - lucky again. I am really interested in how other people that bought boats feel towards their sellers. Either I am exceptionally lucky, or all boat sellers are the most wonderful people in the world. Ulrich and Anke, who sold me Vespina, are just fantastic and helped me a lot in preparing for the voyage. Even when I was well underway they always made time when I called with a question. Very kind and caring. Same with Marti: First he left his sailing school for three days so that I could survey Gudrun V thoroughly before buying. Three days and two nights on a boat - what more can you ask? And now the whole family is coming for almost a week to make sure that my first voyage on Gudrun V will be a success. Amazing! I guess I am exceptionally lucky. But then again it is said that "luck favors the prepared", so maybe it is not totally undeserved. Only a little. Even though: it will be sad day when I leave Vespina and move to Gudrun V. There is nothing really wrong with Vespina, she is as fine a boat as they come. I feel Vespina was just the right boat for me at the time. Certainly I couldn't have handled a boat like Gudrun V alone in November, much less could I have sailed on the rivers with 2,50m draft. Truth be told, I will be hard pushed now to do everything right, and Gudrun V will not be as forgiving as Vespina. But that's how you improve - constantly and slowly pushing your limits ever outward. Never stop, never give up.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:41

Wednesday, June 23, 2010

Paperwork / wreck diving

Dive Guide Whatshisname Wreck diving is awesome. At the moment I am forced to wait while the paperwork for Gudrun V is being processed. A good chance to catch up on some studying for the Sportseeschifferschein and other interesting things like Spanish etc. But all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, which we can't be having of course. Well, the Canaries are known for good swimming, diving and hiking, which is exactly what I am planning to do. Since the weather is a little unstable the moment (there was even a slight hint of rain), I started with diving! There are a couple of wrecks outside of the harbor, and today we visited the KALAI, a Greek cargo vessel. Or what is left of her. Check out the movie: My buddy for the dive was Susana. It was her first dive after completing the PADI Open Water Diver course, but that didn't slow her down in any way. Up, down, left, right, spin around and the other way - I had a hard time keeping up with the little water flea. But in all the excitement she must have missed the part about the three minute "security stop" at 5m on the way up, and I pulled her down and helped her to the anchor line. But hey, that's what the buddy system is for, so no sweat. Looking for mermaids? Maybe down there? Word is there's one around the corner.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:03

Sunday, June 20. 2010

A new sailboat!

Last week Liz came to visit. We met on Lanzarote on Sunday, because from Monday to Wednesday I had arranged to look at a boat there - Gudrun V. Because Gudrun V is a big boat (39ft), and I expect to sail her for many years, I wanted Liz's input before deciding on a purchase. Female intuition and all. Marti's. On Monday morning we took the ferry to La Graciosa where we were met by Marti, the current owner of Gudrun V, at the port. He and his wife Yaiza had send me many emails over the last weeks with pictures and all the information I had wanted, and I felt that I had a good idea of what to expect. In turn I had send them my checklist for the pre-purchase survey, and we knew it would be two busy days. The side So we started right away. First with a look at the bilge, which is usually the worst part of a steel or aluminum boat. Then we worked our way upwards through the lockers and along the hoses and cables. Normally it is very hard to get access to the hull, if it is possible at all. On Vespina I have an axe and crowbar close at hand if I have to do it in an emergency. But on Gudrun V all panels can be taken away without turning a single screw. Same goes for access to the engine and propeller shaft from all sides. The only area that is hard to get to is the space behind the galley (kitchen). Wonderful setup, especially since it makes checking (and later maintaining) the boat very easy. Sprayhood and tentHugging, a very important sea trial. We worked our way through the checklist until 9pm, and then had dinner in town before crawling into the fore peak to sleep. After a quick breakfast on Tuesday morning we took Gudrun V out of the harbor. First we sailed a few tacks upwind and then downwind before throwing the anchor in a little bay. I put on my diving goggles and grabbed my camera to inspect the keel, propeller and rudder while Liz went snorkeling a bit. Then we motored back to the marina with the autopilot, which concluded the sea-trails. Wednesday morning we cleaned up and then escorted Marti to the airport. We had clicked very well in those few days and it felt already like saying good-bye to an old friend. Well, not for long. Gudrun V is such an awesome boat, that I've decided to buy her. The contracts are already signed, and only little paperwork left. We want to meet in a week to hand over the boat, papers, etc. Chicken on the volcano grill - yummy! Playa de las Canteras, Las Palmas The rest of Wednesday and Thursday Liz and I spent on Lanzarote, where I showed her my favorite places. Thursday evening we flew to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria for a visit to Vespina, the beach, and sightseeing in the city. Now Liz is on her way back and it will be August until we meet again. But more about Gudrun V: The stern. She was built in 1981 by Astilleros Gudrun of Cartagena. She is the fifth boat in a series of aluminum racing boats that the shipyard has built for trans-atlantic races. The primary work of the shipyard is for the Navy, and the racing boats are a sideline. More a hobby of the owner of the shipyard really. When you built battleships for a living some of the philosophy is going to end up in all your designs, and consequently Gudrun is a strong, practical ship that is built to last. The last 30 years hardly left a sign at the material. The cabin Marti and Yaiza bought Gudrun 10 years ago. They have sailed Gudrun V to Turkey and back, and lived on her throughout the winters when their sailing school near Barcelona is closed. During that time they have rebuild the interior for living comfortably with their two children, while taking care not to overload the boat and distribute the weight perfectly. The result is a real home in the harbor and at anchor, and a secure, fast, stable and very well-balanced ship at sea. Now they are expecting their third child, and the boat is getting too small. The sail plan Of course there are also drawbacks. The biggest one is probably the draft of 2,50m. What is great for sailing is going to be a pain when entering harbors and especially near reefs. Will be interesting in the Caribbean. The other drawback is really a two-sided sword: no windows. Very safe in heavy weather, and very private in the marina. But unlike in Vespina (with her 360° vision) I cannot look out to see what is going on around me and will always have to climb into the cockpit. So what's the plan now? I will bring Gudrun V here to Las Palmas because I want to have the mast checked by professionals and change the standing and running rigging. She also needs new Batteries, new Antifouling, a coat of paint for the deck and mast, and new sails. Then I want to move some of the electronic equipment from Vespina to Gudrun, like the Satellite phone, Navtex, AIS and maybe Radar. And of course all my other gear. Then a test-sail around the Islands or to Madeira and back. Liz and I stayed for two full days and nights on Gudrun V, which is more than I could have hoped for before a purchase. But I expect that I have missed some things, and as usual many other little things will come up. With the trip to Germany in August it will probably be late September by the time I can leave the Canary Islands and sail to the Cap Verde Islands. And Vespina? Yep, tough question. I really like her and she is a good and reliable boat. It turned out she is not made for long passages, but she is very safe and really wonderful for day-sails around islands etc., especially because you don't have to worry so much what is happening underneath the water surface. I guess I'll put her on the dry somewhere here or find a cheap berth (e.g. La Graciosa) and place an add online. But I won't be too unhappy if she doesn't sell very quickly, and instead my friends come and sail or live a little on her now and then.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:56

Friday, June 11. 2010

Bye bye Fuerteventura

Christina and Chris. Chris up the mast. Lunatic. After two weeks on Fuerteventura it was time to move on. Thanks to Michael and his family I had seen the interior of the Island, and in Morro Jable/Jandia I had made extensive use of the great sandy beach. The diving added another (new) dimension to this, and with every time I liked it more. There is something special to swimming weightlessly among the fishes, and seeing what usually remains hidden from view on the boat. Lucky for me Bettina, my new-found diving buddy, had an underwater camera with her. Unfortunately it stopped working at 20m. But it's enough for a very very short movie: Preparing the gear blub blub Nice, ey? Seems like 'some people' get the rapture of the deep already at 5m meters, tststs. Usually we were diving at the reef between 20m and 30m, but one time we went down to 41m, and that was really something. Very blue, very tranquil. Magical. During the two weeks Vespina was mostly in the harbor. Except for the two Saturday excursions, once with the Reuthers, and once with Chris and Christina from the diving school. Unfortunately most days the wind was too strong to put the boat at anchor and leave it unattended. Vespina at anchor. But on my last day there was only a very light breeze during the day, and I anchored in front of the old harbor and paddled around with my kajak. A good opportunity to take some pictures of Vespina. Gran Canaria, the next island, is only 58nm from Morro Jable. With my "speed limit" of 4 knots that means either to get up very early and arrive late, or to leave late, sail through the night and arrive early. I prefer to arrive early. So in the evening I lifted the anchor and set sail towards Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. After 14 hours and an uneventful night I was about to enter the harbor and started to furl in the genoa. When the lumbago (Hexenschuss) struck. Dammit! I had taken great care when lifting the anchor. Sitting down, back straight, etc. But 21kg at the end of 50m chain is a lot of weight, and there is just no really comfortable way to get it up. I had noticed a slight discomfort at the small of my back at the time, but it was quickly gone. So it was a big and very painful surprise when half a day later I suddenly crumbled over the genoa winch. Painkillers helped me to get Vespina into the harbor, where I started treatment with capsaicin and diclofenac. At the moment I can hardly walk, and I'm afraid washing the salt of Vespina and exploring the city will have to wait a little while. And it looks like an electrical anchor winch just made it onto the very top of the must-have list.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:31

Friday, June 4, 2010

Swimming and diving.

Helloooo little fishes This week I spent mostly swimming and diving. The beaches here are absolutely fantastic. After a little research I signed up for a CMAS bronze course at the Tauchschule Felix, and I am really happy with my choice. The theory goes deeper than I had thought, and the teachers are laid back and competent. Tomorrow I'll take some of them sailing on Vespina. Let's see how they like it. The other major activity besides swimming and diving was looking for boats on the internet. Vespina's designer, Mr. Reinke, never got back to me regarding the center keel. As I have mentioned I am really unhappy with the way Vespina sails. And after pounding the issues for days in my head, I decided that I will not sail much further with Vespina. In this regard "our personalities" just don't match, and so it is very frustrating. This sounds like a catastrophe for the voyage. But I think it is not. Vespina was the perfect boat for my relative inexperience, the journey on the rivers and the horrible weather in the Mediterranean throughout the winter. But the nature of the voyage changed over those miles, and my knowledge and confidence as a sailor increased. Considering with how little I started, it is not surprising that I now look for different things in a boat than I did nine months ago. Financially it is also not a catastrophe, because I knew from the beginning that something like this could happen. And true to my beloved KISS-concept I kept it simple and didn't invest too much into my first boat. There were some upgrades, but they either increased the value of Vespina or I can take them with me to the new boat. Of course there is the question of the new boat. Fortunately I found one that seems almost perfect, and she is right here on the Canary Islands. I hope to get a chance to sail her soon, so stay tuned.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:12

Monday, May 31. 2010

Fuerteventura

FuerteventuraFuerteventura is the next island from Lanzarote, and after Tenerife the second largest of the seven major canary islands. It is best known for it's awesome beaches on the east coast. With fine white sand that was blown over the water from Africa. My friend Michael and his family had arrived in Fuerteventura a day before I've arrived in Lanzarote. The closest port to his hotel is Morro Jable, at the southern end of Fuerteventura and we wanted to meet there. The distance from Puerto Calero to Morro Jable is 65nm, or about 14 hours sailing with Vespina. When I left Puerto Calero the weather was fine and the forecast good. Then the wind quickly increased to a force 7. As usual . Nice for sailing, but not so good for anchoring. Especially not on this coast it seems. I had hoped to be able to anchor over night on the way south, but the descriptions in my cruising book where little promising: ... in calm weather ... approach in good light ... daylight stops in settled weather ... unwise to stay overnight ... Well, the weather didn't settle and it stayed far from calm. So I had the choice of either turning into one of the few suitable harbors on the way (Puerto del Rosario Castillo, Puerto Castillo), or sail through the night. I was a little close to the coast for my comfort, but I hadn't encountered any other vessel on the way. And so it seemed safe to sail through the night. I furled most of the genoa away to slow down because I didn't want to arrive in Morro Jable before dawn. Morro Jable. Horrible, isn't it .During the night I passed one vessel, but again with ample warning from my AIS and radar. And at about half past nine I entered the harbor of Morro Jable. The cruising guide advised to lay alongside the fuel pontoon to check in. But when I approached that, the harbor master came out of his office and waved me away, pointing to the smaller pontoons which were mostly empty. After I've secured my boat to one of these, another guy came along and send me off again, pointing to the far eastern corner of the harbor. On the way there I used the rocky ground to scrape away some weed from my keels before tying Vespina to one of the two remaining pontoons. The third had apparently lost it's chains and had snuggled up to the breakwater. I grabbed my papers and wallet and wanted to step off from the pontoon, only to realize that there was no bridge (anymore). But there was one on the other pontoon. So I cast off again, and secured Vespina to the other pontoon. Then I walked to the harbor master's office, where I waited for two hours because the guy was around and about somewhere. But at least it's cheap - 3 EUR/day. The rest of the day consisted of reading and sleeping, as often after a sail through the night. Saturday morning the Reuther family picked me up with a rental car to show me their Fuerteventura. It was a beautiful road trip through the barren, desert-like interior of the island, the rocky western coast and the sandy eastern coast. And at the end we were all very tired and everybody but Michael fell asleep in the car. Fortunately Michael was the driver . On tour with the Reuther family A popular surfing spot on the west coast.Anybody care to anchor here?The caves were used as dry-docks for submarines in WW2. Jule fearlessly exploring the caveMysteries of the world: What is waiting beyond the next dune?Niklas!Daddy has to carry the shoes Birgit and MichaelJule and NiklasOn Sunday we all went sailing with Vespina. Niklas steered her out of the harbor and then Michael unfurled the genoa. At first there wasn't much wind, but it picked up as we approached the lighthouse at the south-eastern tip. We didn't make it quite that far however, because one by one they got seasick, and I steered Vespina back into the harbor among a lot of retching and fish-feeding. Only Jule, the youngest, remained totally unimpressed. Hehe. Now the question is whether to stay here a littler longer and enjoy the beaches, or sail west to Gran Canaria, where I would have wifi and showers. Hmmm ... the beach wins

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 07:03

Thursday, May 27, 2010

Lanzarote

Driving along the east coast. The last two days I've been exploring the island of Lanzarote. I didn't bring a guide book with me, but the island is not big, and the rental car company gave me a map with places of interest clearly marked in green letters. Upon closer inspection it turned out there are quite a lot of them! So I stopped at the tourist information and the friendly elderly (German) ladies picked the best ones for my two day stay. How very nice of them! But first I had to get food supplies for the boat and a cruising guide for the islands. The search for the latter turned out to be an odyssey through all the ports of the island which lasted my entire stay. My last stop was Playa Blanca in the very south. And here, in the Marina Rubicon, did I finally get my sailing guides. I was so relieved that I picked up all the other cruising guides and maps for my future route that I could get my hands on: Capo Verde, Brazil, Barbados, and St. Lucia. Better safe than sorry, and it is not safe to depend on the electronic charts alone. Typical landscape The island offers many spectacular sights, most of them related somehow to the volcanic activities of the past. Which is not very surprising, because the whole island is one big ash- and lava-field dotted with volcanoes and craters. In between nice little villages, and along the coast not so nice tourist centers. Because of frequent pirate raids the original inhabitants lived far inland, and only in the 19th century did the development of the coasts really begin. Today I will leave Lanzarote and sail south towards Fuerteventura, where I will meet Michael and his Family on holiday. Castillo de Santa Barbara A poser. Entrance to Jameos del Agua Blind albino crab in the Jameos del Agua Jameos del Agua Driving in the north. Rocks! The marina Puerto Calero Crater next to Montana Negra. La Graciosa to the north of Lanzarote

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:53

Tuesday, May 25. 2010

News regarding the keel

Yesterday I did some research online, and found several references that people had changed the keels on their Reinke Yachts. Some had removed the bilge-keels and put center-keels on instead. And others had done the opposite and traded a center-keels for bilge-keels. Both had the unique chance to compare the different effects of the two keel shapes on the same hull. These are their findings: With bilge keel: • less draft • less drift towards lee • hard to hold on course • problems with autopilots With center-keel: • more draft • sails better to luv • holds course steadily It looks very much like their experiences match up with mine. Which puts my mind at rest, because it means that it was not a fault of mine that the boat behaves the way it does. And there might be a cheap way out for me. As a result I contacted Reinke Yachts, and asked them for information on a center-keel for my boat type. I am also in touch with a broker who has some interesting alternatives for me. Funny enough it seems the guy is almost more keen on getting a hand on my Reinke, then on selling me one of his boats! Looks like Vespina's type is very much in favor.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:39

Monday, May 24, 2010

Results of the "passage test"

I've mentioned in my last entry, about my sail to the Canaries, that this trip was to be a test for me and Vespina. So how did the 650nm (1200km) and 7 days turn out? Personally: wonderful. I had no problem at all with being on my own for a week, and being far away from shore and help. Actually I loved it! I also found out that while sleep periods of 10 minutes are a little short in the long run, periods of 20 or 30 minutes are all I need to stay fresh. Far away from the coast and shipping lanes, and with the help of Radar and AIS, that should also be safe to accomplish. Vespina: she did also fine, except for two things: Speed and stability. An average of less than 100nm per day is slow. More speed is not only more fun, it is also safer. A faster passage means less risk of running into foul weather (or no wind). You also need less supplies. But I knew that Vespina was no record-breaker before I bought her. I bought her because she was a strong boat. And for my first voyage I thought it would be wise to be rather safe than fast. But on the way I learned that while strength does provide a lot of safety, it does not go all the way. Speed, to an extent, increases safety too. But even more so does stability, especially in stronger winds. When I discussed the design of Vespina with other people before I bought her, the general understanding was that she would heel quickly to about 20°, but then remain stable. To me that sounded stable enough, and since she scored high in all other areas of importance to me (especially the budget department), I took my chances. And Vespina did very well on the 2000nm (3600km) from Heidelberg to Cadiz. The bilge-keel with only 1,15m draft was a blessing on the canals, which were low on water. And her strength carried me safely through the many storms I encountered on my way through the Med. I will never forget that one time north of Ibiza where the wind howled with 63 knots. But most of all I love the 360° vision through the saloon windows. This wonderful feature sets her quite apart from other boats, and it is a joy to sit inside in foul weather and still be able to see everything that is happening around me without getting wet. As long as the wind-vane or the autopilot is working, and as long as she doesn't get pushed over by waves. And this is where it looks like my gamble didn't turn out so well. Vespina is a great boat in a certain environment, where her bilge-keel is an asset. But I'm sailing her in a different environment and with a different mentality, and for me the bilge-keel is more a liability. Because of her very low draft she lacks in stability and as a result I get thrown around inside a lot as she jerks suddenly from one side to the other, and the wind-vane and the autopilot only work in a small range of wind speeds and angles. Furthermore I have to reduce the sail area early and she doesn't sail to luv very well. The former means I'll be always sailing rather slow, and the latter could be necessary to bring me out of trouble. Well, here we are. Of course I could remove her two small keels with a grinder and weld a deeper one to her bottom. But I think this is the point for a business-like decision: Accept the state of the product as it is and stop complaining, or cut my losses and find a different boat for the rest of my voyage. Because giving up is of course out of the question. This is just another lesson on the way, this time in ship design. But for the next few days or weeks I'll enjoy the Canary Islands on Vespina. Which is, incidentally, what she was built for. I've heard this area is supposed to be great for diving too. Maybe it's about time I make a license!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 08:08

My first ocean passage

Vespina, Ocean. Finally out in the ocean, water of the deepest blue. Sailing to the Islas Canarias was to be the test before the crossing of the Atlantic. Alone on Vespina for a week, with nothing around me but the ocean and the sky. A test for the ship, for sure. How will Vespina sail in the Atlantic? Will the waves be different from the Med? Will the wind-vane work? The autopilot? How useful is the solar panel ...? And a test for myself, too! Will I have to sit at the rudder again all the time? How will I handle the solitude? How will I sleep? Will I get sick? Will I enjoy the trip or get bored silly and hate it all the way? Have I maybe overestimated my endurance? It was important to get the answers to these questions before setting out to Brazil or the West Indies. But the questions were not at the top of my mind when I left Puerto Sherry. Despite my initial skepticism I had grown very fond of Puerto Sherry, and I can recommend it most warmly for anybody on his way in or out of the Med. And like in Almerimar and on Ibiza before, I had made many good friends there. But unlike in the other ports, these had not been other yachties like me, but locals. Which is not very common for such a short stay as mine, and I feel honored and thankful for the hospitality that I have received. So my heart ached at the thought of leaving them and lovely Andalusia behind. Topping lift having an affair with the wind generator. But Vespina has a charming way of freeing my mind from such troubles. As I was hoisting the main-sail one of the reef lines caught at the end of the boom. As I pulled on the halyard the end of the boom got lifted up together with the main sail. As a result the topping-lift (holds the boom level when no sail is up. German: Dirk) wasn't tight anymore and flying out to the rear, where it quickly wrapped itself tightly around the wind-generator. So I went back to the welcome-pontoon and spend an hour freeing the "Dirk". Great start! I left the port again, hoping that none of my new friends had seen the embarrassing incident. For a few hours everything looked fine. Beautiful weather and a perfect

force 5 easterly. And even the wind-vane was working! But in the evening the wind quickly increased to force 9, and the wind-vane started making trouble again. A spanish AEGIS frigate. Tiring conditions. The original problem of the slipping cogwheel had been solved by my modifications in Puerto Sherry, but now new problems had come up. As the sun set and I reached the latitude of Cabo Trafalgar I was hanging out at the back trying to convince the wind-vane to do it's job. My new position added ferocious waves coming with the wind out of the Strait of Gibraltar to the fun, as well as a lot of commercial traffic, going both east and west. The prospect of threading my way through the lines of vessels at night was not great, but it had to be done. Fortunately the AIS display, which shows the speed and direction of vessels around me, proved to be every bit of help that I had hoped it would be. Traffic going in and out of the Strait of Gibraltar. Vespina in the middle. It was stressful nevertheless, and I grew tired quickly. But well after midnight there were still too many ships around to rest for a minute. I had to fight my way further south before I could even think of sleep. By four in the morning I was finally far enough away from the traffic to get some rest. I dropped the sails and went down to sleep for an hour, while Vespina danced in the waves. Would the whole trip be like that? I desperately hoped not. I love cable binders! When I woke up the situation hadn't changed much: lots of wind and lots of waves. But during the morning the wind dropped gradually as it changed to north-east and settled around force 5, plus-minus 2. Which meant I got to reef and un-reef quite a lot. Between reefing exercises I continued to fiddle with the wind-vane. Gradually I was able to eliminate each of the new problems with the simple help of string and cable-binders. And then I got incredibly lucky. I had gone down for a minute to get a tool. After descending the stairs I had closed the door behind me, which I always do when the weather is rough. Just as I had grabbed the hand-holds on the stairs to climb up again a wave hit Vespina from the side. Amidst a mighty clatter of pots and other things Vespina got tipped over heavily to starboard and the cockpit flooded all the way up to the winches. I stood completely baffled and looked out through the acryl door as Vespina righted herself again and the cockpit drained slowly of incredible amounts of water. Had the wave hit only seconds earlier or later I would have been thrown around down below, or out in the cockpit, and would have very likely hurt myself badly. Instead I was standing in the dry laughing. As the sun set I celebrated my luck and my success with the wind-vane with a drop (or two) of Macallan Whiskey and a chocolate bar. Then I reduced the sails and let the wind-vane steer for the rest of the night, while I settled into my routine of 10-minute-sleep/5-Minute-watch cycles. Wednesday was pretty much the same. North-easterly winds between force 3 and 7, and the wind-vane steering, which made me happy. But I was not totally satisfied. First of all there was still one issue with the wind-vane: It only works when the boat is not going much faster then 4 kn. If I put more sail up, Vespina develops a strong weather-helm (tendency to turn into the wind) and the wind-vane is unable to cope. And secondly I was still brooding over last day's lucky escape. If that wave had been much stronger, or followed by a second one, Vespina would have been rolled over just like Jeff's Beneteau a month ago. I took out my books about trimming, seamanship and boat construction and started reading. I read on through the night, and Thursday morning I felt a little wiser. I had read the books before, but now after 2600 nm (4600 km) on board of Vespina it made a lot more sense. After a little sleep and breakfast I grabbed my toolbox and went to work on the rigging. First I wanted to see if I could do something about the strong weather-helm. I tried all combinations of sail-area, and when that didn't improve the situation I tipped the mast forward and I bent it backwards and every time I tried again with the most promising sail configuration. But nothing helped. As soon as Vespina heels over, which she does very quickly, all chances of using the autopilot or the wind-vane are gone. They only have a chance if I have just the genoa up and furled away so that Vespina doesn't heel over too much and the weather-helm is well below 10°, on the tiller. That gives me a speed of 4 to 4,3 knots. If I put more sail area up to go faster she heels more, which produces a weather-helm of 20° and more on the tiller. That is too much for the wind-vane and the autopilot. So it looks like Vespina likes it slow. Well, one thing I've learned in my life is that it's no good to argue with a lady. Slow it is then. Sailing ever onward. During the night to Friday the wind dropped well below force 3, which made all thoughts about speed academic anyway. The autopilot did a great job of steering, and I put all troubles out of my mind and relaxed. The sun was shining, the sky clear, and the sea a deep blue. Vespina was slowly but steadily making her way towards my destination, and I didn't have a care in the world. I sat on deck and enjoyed the scenery (or lack thereof), and suddenly an incredible feeling of peace and happiness settled over me. It lasted, and lasted. And the memory of all the trouble I went through from my start in November to this moment only made it the sweeter. As did the memory of all the friends I've made. It is a feeling that I have never experienced in this intensity before, and the solitude only makes it stronger. I begin to understand why some people sail around the world alone again and again. It is a feeling born of the ultimate solitude on a vast and apparently lifeless ocean. A feeling that cannot be found in a crowd, or on any other path walked upon by man. This I will carry forever in me. Saturday not much happened, except that the wind dropped for a few hours and I had to start the engine. The V-belt (Keilriemen) began to squeal and I tightened it. I cooked curry with tuna and rice, squashed some oranges, read a little, slept a little, studied Spanish, and wrote the first part of this entry. I also proved the theory that any organism will expand until it has consumed all available resources: I had cooked enough curry for two days, but manage to eat it all in only six hours. AIS info screen for a vessel. Cool, ey? In the night to Sunday I was very tired and tried something different: I hadn't seen any ships in two days, and decided that I could risk it to let the radar and the AIS look out while I sleep a littler longer: 30 minute intervals. I set a "safe zone" of 2nm radius around Vespina, and a "time to safe zone" of 24 minutes. That means the system should alarm me 24 minutes in advance if another vessel will pass within 2nm of Vespina. I was excited like a child and surprised that I could sleep at all. Around four in the morning a slight fog settled, and my vision was reduced to only a few hundred meters. "This thing better work", I thought. And it worked! At half past six the alarm woke me in the

middle of a half-hour sleep period, because a ferry was on collision course. But far out still, and time enough for me to change my heading without stressing out. I would have seen the ferry in another 15 minutes myself without the alarm, because the fog had lifted again. But I was very relieved to find that it is actually working. And 24 minutes warning is better than 15 minutes. Awesome. Blister & dwarf power!Poser!The wind was still very light on Sunday, and it is about time that I got to test my Blister (cruising chute). The five times I had pulled it out of the bag so far, the wind had either increased or died completely, and I always had to put it back. But not today, and 20 minutes later I was sailing for the first time in my life with a Blister. Wow . Unfortunately it turned out that the wind was too light for the wind-vane to work. And also the autopilot had big troubles with the Blister. So when the sun got too hot and I wanted to get into the shade I had to put the Blister away again and start the engine. And still 65nm to go. I hoped that the wind would increase again soon, because I am not very fond of motoring. Approaching Puerto CaleroIn the evening the wind picked up again, and I set the genoa and sailed through the night. I was closer to land again, and I could smell the volcanic ash in the air. And feel it under my soles as it settled into the cockpit. I kept a tighter watch for fishing boats and ferries, but the night was very quiet. After dawn the wind died again, and I motored the last two hours into Puerto Calero. I've arrived on Lanzarote and successfully completed my first ocean passage. And surprisingly ... I didn't even break anything! Levantine Shearwater. I love my "Seabirds of the World" book.Unfortunately I didn't see any whales or dolphins on the way. But I saw a few turtles (which look from a distance like old plastic bags), Black Terns, Seagulls of course, and a wasp (!). No idea how she made it 100nm off the coast. But on the same day I had half a dune of sand in my cockpit, so maybe she had hitched a ride.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:03

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Thursday, May 20, 2010

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

half-way there! the weather is great and the sea is beautiful. i'm very happy

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:04

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Tuesday, May 18. 2010

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

Last night was not so nice. 45kn wind, big waves, and lots of traffic near the strait. Today is better. And many turtles!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 07:50

Friday, May 14. 2010

Preparing for the longest cruise

My time in the Bay of Cadiz is coming to an end. The weather forecast is very favorable for sailing to the Canaries, so unless something comes up today I will leave tomorrow. In the morning a regatta starts in Puerto Sherry, and the plan is to sail out with the other boats. That way I can take some parting pictures of my new friends Antonio, Louis and Cesar on their boats before heading towards the Canaries. Mounting for the spinnaker pole. Over the last days I emptied all lockers and looked behind every panel to make sure Vespina is in good shape for the trip, which will be my longest non-stop trip ever. I also tested all the electronics gear, climbed the mast and checked every line and fitting. The spinnaker pole was so far tied to the fence, and it was a pain to untie it and to tie it back on alone. Because I expect to have to do this quite frequently from now on, I added proper mountings for the pole to the fence to make it easier. And to remove an excuse for not using the pole. Ideally the spinnaker pole would be fitted to the mast, and one end just lowered when needed. But in my case the box of the fluxgate compass is in the way. Bay of Tarifa had a wonderful time here in the Bay of Cadiz. Much of it thanks to Antonio Luque from Vespaluz, who lend me his scooter and showed me around the place. Especially memorable was the hospitality and easy-going attitude of the people here, the trip to the MotoGP race in Jerez, the Feria del Caballo, the many evenings in the "Taberna del Marinero", and a visit to Tarifa last weekend. In Tarifa I also met Beat and Mitchel. Together with Antonio they are the team behind the Dwarf8 movement, The beach in front of Beat's apartment. The idea behind the movement is to build a community of individualistic people on a mission. And by setting examples to inspire other people to find their own mission in live. The little dwarf symbolizes the free spirit on a mission. According to Beat he is the happy 8th brother of the seven dwarfs, the one who didn't stay in the little hut with the little beds and the little forks. Instead he set out into the world despite his smallness to complete his mission. Which is secret of course . You gotta love it, don't you! Axel dwarfed-up We had a great time at the beaches of Tarifa, watching the kite surfers and talking about the movement and the impressive followers it already has - adventurers, race drivers, surfers, skaters, sailors. All of them cool people on a mission, and many of them world-champions in their chosen sport. I especially like this guy, who drives his little Vespa all the way through Africa to the soccer world cup to cheer on his team. I'm not a world-champion, but as you have probably guessed I'm now a Dwarf8 follower myself - a little dwarf on a sailing mission . Go Vespina, go!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 04:05

Solar Power

My new solar panel. Installation instructions were in finish, so maybe I put it the wrong side up. Solar Power on the roof! The roof is not the ideal place, because I can't angle the panel 90° to the sun. But I don't want the panel on the frame at the back, because I would feel obliged to keep it aligned to the sun perfectly all day. What a bother . And the roof is the 2nd best place. It's a rather small panel too - only 45 Watts of rated output. But it should be just enough to balance the power consumption of the navionics equipment and the stereo. The rule of thumb is that on a sunny day you need 3x your power consumption in rated panel output. To cover the Ultrasonic Antifouling, Autopilot and Radar I would need another five panels of the same size . But as Jens pointed out to me, I should run my engine anyway every couple of days for an hour under load to make sure it stays in shape. Which also charges up the batteries. And the solar panel together with the wind-generator should nicely cover for the time in between. The good thing about my panel however is that it has 36 cells. This is important, because the voltage output of a panel is proportional to the number of cells. And unfortunately the voltage also depends on the temperature inside the panel. On any day in the tropics, or very hot days elsewhere, the temperature inside the panel can easily reach 50°C. Then the output voltage of the 30- and 33-cell panels drop below what is necessary to charge the batteries. I learned that from my beloved book, the "Boatowners Electrical and Mechanical Manual", 2nd edition. If you can only take one technical book on a cruise, take that. It covers everything in exactly the right detail. I have a couple of others that also got five stars on Amazon, but Calder's is the only one I use.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 04:02

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Getting ready for the Atlantic

A look at the weather map shows that a new high is establishing at the Azores. This should bring perfect conditions to sail to the Canaries for the weekend, and so I'm getting ready to sail on Friday. I estimate that the trip to Porto Calero on Lanzarote will take about 8 days. The wind will be from the back all the time, so I know from experience that the wind-generator will be pretty useless. This is because as the boat is pushed along by the wind from behind, the apparent wind speed on board is not enough to turn the generator fast enough to charge the batteries. I have 216 Ah of charge in the batteries, which is enough to run the GPS, Navtex, VHF Radio, Iridum and iPod four to five days. But if I have to turn on the Autopilot and Radar, then the batteries can be drained in 36 hours. Either way the batteries won't last until I reach the Canaries. So I either turn on the engine now and then to recharge the batteries. Or I get a solar panel. Well, I guess it really is like Matt commented a few days ago: "Must haves are always a must! The nice-to-haves will soon become musts". Looks like the solar panel just made it into the must have category. Fortunately my favorite ship-chandler here, Nautica Sherry can supply one until tomorrow. 50 Watts only, but it should be enough if I don't have to use the Autopilot too much. I am really looking forward to the sail. I'm sure it will be something very different from the trip through the Mediterrean. Not only will it be with 600nm twice as long as the longest trip I sailed so far (Ibiza to Almerimar). But instead of 50nm to the next coast it will be more than 100nm (the Moroccan). Quite a distance if something goes wrong. Jeff did an eskimo roll with his boat and lost the mast. Like it did for the french boat in the berth opposite of Vespina's. They were on their way to Canaries one month ago, when a freak wave hit them in the night and turned the boat through an eskimo roll - 360°. Fortunately everybody was secured with their life-lines. But the mast snapped, and so did a lot of other stuff. They made it to Rabat in Morocco with their engine after pumping the water out, and now they are back here where they fit a new mast. I talked to the skipper Jeff about the incident, to learn what can be learned. He said they only had half of the genoa up when it happened, and didn't see the wave coming in the night. It suddenly crashed down on top of them from the rear quarter. But he doubted that he could have done much in any case. Maybe turn the boat directly away from the wave, so that they might have had a chance to ride with the wave instead of being hit from the rear quarter. Fortunately the whole thing happened very quickly and the boat was up again after only a few seconds. Unfortunately the hatch wasn't fully closed and so quite a lot of water made it into the boat. So I'll make sure I have my hatch closed tightly when conditions get rough. And I wear my lifeline and have it picked in all the time anyway. Don't you worry, I'll be fine.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 04:52

Monday, May 10, 2010

Voy a ir a las canarias!

Friday evening I met Pocholo and we talked a long time about how to create a sustainable business from his popularity, and not just one-timers. He is a fast thinker, a very energetic person and a fountain of new ideas. And I was surprised how well developed and thought through the ideas were. But he's an overflowing fountain actually, and his attention span is very short. Not easy to deal with. He clearly needs a marketing company who collects the ideas from him, and grills him patiently (oh, so patiently) about all the little details he has already thought of. Then add some more meat to the story and screen the whole thing for common sense, feasibility and profitability. If the results are positive, go and use his connections and popularity to market the stuff and cut Pocholo in on the revenues. Do I see any takers out there? Then Pocholo can do what he's best at: Come up with new ideas, fascinate people and get attention. Unfortunately not all of this attention is positive. Like this Saturday evening, when he lost his driving license for a year. Well, so much for the trucking through Spain . We put the truck on the yard of a construction company, and I'm afraid it's going to stay there for a while. Which means that I'm free to sail off to the Canaries this week, as soon as the wind changes from it's current southerly direction and picks up again. Yeah! Go Vespina, go!

Posted by Axel Busch at 04:57

Friday, May 7. 2010

The ultimate movie: 6 months compressed into 10 minutes

Friends, this is it: The highlights of the voyage - from Heidelberg to El Puerto de Santa Maria. Including so far unpublished footage from the river journey. Enjoy Background information: The footage was shot with a Lumix DMC-FT1 and a Canon EOS 7D in 720p High Definition. The movies so far were edited with iMovie. But that is unfortunately not a very reliable program, especially version 9. It crashed frequently and didn't always save all changes. So I switched to Final Cut Express 4 now for the post-production, and use iMovie only to render some special effects like the globe map. The learning curve is a little steeper in Final Cut, but it is well worth the effort. Finally a piece of software that actually behaves as expected, does not crash, and does only do what you tell it to. Most of the audio adjustments I can do right in Final Cut too, but sometimes I switch to Audacity. For video conversion I use Quicktime and the iSkysoft Video Converter. Last but not least a big thanks to you my friends for all the feedback on my movies. I am still a beginner, and your constructive critique helps me to improve my skills and videos.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:16

Feria del Caballo

Caballo y Caballero! This week Jerez celebrates the "Feria del Caballo" - the horse festival. Antonio said the festival is muy espectacular, and he invited me to go together with him. He left me his scooter in the Marina, and on Wednesday afternoon I drove to Jerez where we met at his office. The festival was indeed muy espectacular! The horses looked magnificent, and the carriages were beautifully adorned. I don't know a thing about horses, so the full beauty was probably lost on me, but I was very impressed nevertheless. Not only by the horses, but also by the people. The riders and the ladies especially. All the ladies had dressed up in special costumes, and everywhere there was singing, clapping and dancing going on. Check out the video! Thanks a lot to my host Antonio for showing me around and explaining everything. La Playa de la Caleta Hehe Thursday I had the scooter again, and went to have a look at the city of Cadiz, on the other side of the bay. Cadiz was originally founded by the Phoenicians 1100 BC. With over 3000 years it is the oldest continuously-inhabited city of all western Europe. The fact that the city is surrounded by Spain's most beautiful beaches might have had something to do with that. Columbus sailed from Cadiz on two of his voyages, and the city was the home port of the Spanish treasure fleet, which brought gold, spices and other valuables from the new world into Europe. The city's wealth made it a favorite target for Spain's enemies, particularly the English, who attacked and blockaded it many times. Most renowned is the raiding of the city by Sir Francis Drake in 1587. Cadiz is the same size as my home town Ulm. But due to its location, architecture and historical importance it feels very differently. Especially for a sailor. Unfortunately I was very tired today from all the partying at the Feria yesterday, so I had little energy for taking pictures. But it was too hazy for spectacular pictures anyway. Me, Bili, flying Waiter Antonio! In the evening I had dinner with Antonio again. Antonio is a very special man. He is a wonderful host and very generous - I can hardly move anymore because Vespina is laden with whole pallets of "Dwarf8". No idea how I have deserved that. But what strikes me most is his amazingly balanced personality. A guy like the sea. Amazing. Because I hang out so much with him and his friends my Spanish is also improving rapidly. A chat with friends is a much better motivator to learn a language than shopping or asking for directions.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:08

Monday, May 3, 2010

A new crewmate

Dinghy. Blae. During the last few days I have used my dinghy to paint the sides of my boat where they were rusty. While the dinghy provides a pretty comfortable platform for painting, it is very awkward in all other regards. Although it's with 2,5m a short dinghy, it is already pretty bulky and heavy. Getting it in and out of the water is a real effort. And once on deck, it is in the way. It also loses air slowly. It became quickly obvious: Vespina is too small for me, my ego and my dinghy. One of us has to go. After a brief discussion I pulled rank on the dinghy and removed it from the crew list, together with the outboard engine, which is still not working. I've tried everything the owner's manual asked me except changing the spark plug and bringing it to an authorized dealer. Since both are too young to go into retirement, Antonio has agreed to look out for them. This of course creates a vacancy on Vespina. I need some way to paint the sides of her in the future, and I also need some way to get to the shore and back when at anchor. And the life-raft is just a little too posh for that. Shopping at Decathlon. In my mind a small surfboard, canoe or kayak seemed like the right thing. So I rode with my BMX to Santa Mario to see what "Decathlon", a huge sports store, has to offer. And I found what I was looking for. It's a sit-on-top kayak, 3m long, 80cm wide, weighs only 21kg and it is blue. It also has a platform at the back which I can use to strap stuff to, or lie on it and push the kayak with my feet (preferably with flippers on them). But how to get it back the 10 km to Vespina? Not on the BMX. I called a Taxi and made sure to mention "Una persona, una bicicleta y una kayak!". 5 minutes later the Taxi came - a sedan. Sigh. The driver looked at the heap on the ground incredulously and shook his head, and I asked him to call un taxi mas grande por favor. 5 Minutes later a Peugeot 308 (5 door) arrived and the driver magically managed to squeeze everything inside, including myself and his own considerable bulk. Wow. Kayak + Vespina =

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:41

Yachts and Motorbikes

Saturday was a beautiful day for a day-sail, plenty of sun and 20 knots of wind. Because it was 1st of May and a national holiday, the bay was packed with Yachts and Surfers, a couple of regattas were under way too. I joined the fray to test my wind-vane. There was only little swell, but the wind was strong enough to get an idea whether my latest modifications had improved the effectiveness of the wind-vane. At first I only let it steer Vespina while motoring, to see whether it works at all. And it did! Then I unfurled the genoa and tried all angles to the wind. Close-hauled and on a reach the wind-vane worked extremely well, and the pins I had inserted prevented it from getting mis-aligned. I sailed along for about an hour like that - wonderful. Then I changed course downwind. There the wind-vane didn't hold the course as steady. But if I don't set the main-sail and thus avoid the threat of a chinese gybe, then it should be good enough. Quite happy I returned into port and had a nice seafood dinner at the "Taberna del Marinero" before taking a taxi to Jerez to look at the hundred thousand motorbikes that were expected for the race on Sunday. Insane. I-n-s-a-n-e. It really got me motivated to watch the race on Sunday. Most visitors arrived on their bikes, of course. Ups. Helping hands Sunday morning I went to the race-track in Jerez early to see the 125cc race, where Pol Espargarol, the guy I've met on Friday, competed. The Circuito del Jerez is a very fast track, with many high-speed corners and plenty of opportunities for overtaking. And boy, did they make an exciting race out of it. The crowd went wild. And when in the end Pol won the race, I was very happy. It's not often that you meet the future winner before a race, and it adds a nice personal touch to the whole experience. Thanks Antonio, for making that possible! Pol kissing the trophy. Nasty, nasty! After that was the Moto2 class race. All bikes share the same powerful 600cc engine, which keeps costs down and the performance of the bikes comparable. As a result the starting grid is huge - 42 bikes, the bikes stay close together during the race, and the positions during the race change often. I didn't know any riders, so I felt a little detached. But the lead changed so often during the race, that it was dramatic anyway. Nice silver pants. Aussie Stoner finished 5th. Then the MotoGP class with famous riders like Valentino Rossi, Dani Pedrosa, Casey Stoner etc. The deafening noise, pure power and ridiculous speed of the bikes is enough to have the blood boil with adrenaline. Pedrosa was in the lead for the most time, and managed to gain a small lead over Rossi and Lorenzo. Eight laps before the end of the race Lorenzo began to attack his teammate Rossi on 2nd in earnest, and managed to pass him with five laps to go in the race. But would he be fast enough to catch up with Pedrosa in the remaining time? Everybody was on their feet. Lap after lap Lorenzo gained on Pedrosa, and it looked like he might just make it - or just Rossi finished third. not. With one lap to go last year's second caught up with last year's third, and the bikes locked in a battle that stretched across five corners. And Lorenzo came out victorious, to race to his first victory in the season. The guy was so happy that he got off his bike during his celebration lap and jumped into a pond, lol. I've been to a number of races before, mostly Formula 1 and DTM. Formula 1 is faster, but MotoGP is so much more exciting because there is a lot more action on the track. Anyway, check out the movie: I couldn't make out any public transportation after I've left the race-track. The few

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hitchhikers were completely ignored, and so I just walked for two hours into Jerez, where I finally found a taxi at a gas-station. Back in Puerto Sherry I met Antonio in the "Taberna del Marinero", where we concluded the evening with a can of his awesome Dwarf 8 bio-drink, served on ice and mint-leaves. So, really a nice weekend for me. I missed my friends, but I guess you can't have it all. The plan for today is to replenish my provisions and plan the trip to the Canaries. I hope the weather let's me leave soon.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 04:29

Saturday, May 1. 2010

Something completely different - Moto GP

Yamaha team event. This weekend the Moto GP Championship visits the city of Jerez. Because Spain is motorbike crazy, this is going to be a huge spectacle. Jerez is only 20km from where I am, but a little bit of the action came on Thursday to my Pontoon in the Marina: the drivers of the Yamaha team went out for a joyride on waverunners. Of course TV and long-legged ladies in tight outfit were also present. Not that I would be interested in such things. In the evening I went to the showers, where I met a hyper guy that calls himself Pocholo. We talked a little and then he dragged me along for a beer with his friend Antonio and some girls. Antonio and Pocholo. The girls were primarily occupied with their cigaretts, but talking with Pocholo and Antonio was a lot of fun. And just watching Pocholo, the guy is a crazy combination of hyperactive nutcase & deep thinker. Besides he is also a very popular DJ in Spain, and is here to do some DJing at the race. His friend Antonio sells Aprilia and Vespa motorbikes, runs an events company, and is getting a new bio soft-drink on the market - Dwarf 8. Wow, surprise. I was even more surprised when they invited me to join them at the race. Cool! Well, the things you say over beers. Not so here, shortly after noon on Friday Pocholo called out: "Hey Axel, grab your camera and wallet. We leave in ten minutes". Antonio gave me VIP ticket for the weekend, and off we went. Which one would you take? A ticket to the paddock! In style of course. And as you would expect from a crazy guys as Pocholo, his ride is as crazy - a big old 15ton heave and 5m high off-road truck, from the roof of which he does his DJ-ing. The ride to the race-track was a happening in itself. The truck is well-known, and everywhere people screamed "Pocholooooo!" and waved their hands. The original idea was to set up the truck and play some music at the race-track. But in the life of Pocholo change is as constant as the ringing of his mobile phone. 5m high, 15 tons heavy, 90.000 Watt stereo system on the roof. Team bosses posing behind paella. So after we arrived at the race-track he had to go to a Foto-shooting with some top brass of the Guardia Civil, and dropped me off at the gate. Antonio produced a special ticket for the paddock, where we met up with another Antonio, who is the Andalucia Manager of Aprilia. After some food in the VIP area we visited his team as it got the bikes ready, and talked to Pol Esparagaro, who finished fourth in the Championship last year. Hopes are high he will win the Championship in the 125cc class this year. I'll keep my fingers crossed. Derbi's Box. Pol Esparagaro Friday practice. A crane for the truck. Me, Pocholo. After Pocholo was done with his interview we met him outside and set off towards the city and Antonio's garage. For a future event the truck needs a lift at the back for Motorbikes and Jetskis, and we all set to work. That was great fun too. My spanish is absolutel lousy, and so was the english of the mechanics, but we got along splendidly. Later Antonio gave me a lift back to the Marina, where I reviewed the pictures and made a little movie: My VIP ticket is also valid for today and tomorrow, and I'm really tempted to go. Today I'll have to do some more work on Vespina, and would also like to test the wind-vane in the bay. So I probably won't make it to the race-track for the qualifying. But seeing how motorbike-crazy everybody in Spain seems to be, including the King Juan Carlos, I shouldn't miss the race on Sunday.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 02:48

Thursday, April 29, 2010

Vespina 3.0 and new plans.

The last three days I've been working on Vespina again. It sure feels like I'm working more than sailing . But I'm not complaining. All the people I've met on the way spend months, often years, working on their boat before they left home. And I basically just grabbed Vespina and started. The plan was to get going, and then see what needs to be done and do this as I move along. I can't say the plan didn't work - even if it's a lot more work than I had imagined. I've always said I never wanted to own a boat, because I imagined it would be a lot of work. Chartering is so nice: hop on, sail, hop off. Let others do the work. Now I know in detail what that work is. In part it was just maintenance, and in part it was repairs due to the rather windy conditions. But a large part comes from converting Vespina into a boat that can be safely sailed alone for extended periods. I hope that in the last three days I made some more progress in that last direction: by fitting a self-tailing winch for the Furlex, and by improving the wind-vane. The old winch. The new winch. Self-tailing. Awesome! I cannot count the many cries of frustration that the old winch caused me to shout into the wind. It is the combination of where it is placed, and that it is not self-tailing. I wouldn't believe how much that complicates operations if I hadn't experienced it myself too often. Rolling the furlex in and out became the most dreaded piece of work on the boat. Far worse than reefing the main-sail. I wanted to replace the old winch with a self-tailing winch a long time ago, but the shipchandlers were never able to get one. Or "in three weeks". Yeah, sure. Double that time. But the shipchandler here in Port Sherry said his supplier has one on stock, and I could have it the next day. Hurraaay! Two pins should make all the difference. Now the cogwheel can't slip anymore. The second improvement regarded the main character of my nightmares: the wind-vane . I'm kidding of course, it's a long time since I last had a nightmare. I like my wind-vane, even though it doesn't work. But maybe it will work from now on, because with the latest improvement it cannot slip anymore. Check out the pictures: the pins and corresponding holes are new, and will hold the rod, the spacer and the cogwheel forever aligned. Now the screw through the middle only has to hold the cogwheel in place, but not transmit the torque anymore. I further optimized the setup by changing the way the line to the tiller runs through the reels, and by replacing the rusty and slightly too short chain across the tiller with a longer one made from stainless steel. While I was in the vicinity I put a new coat of varnish on the tiller. I also spent a whole day on "the war on rust". Which is a lot more meaningful than the war on terror. And you even see progress . My trusted companions in that epic battle are: A grinder, a screwdriver, a can of rust-converter, a can of primer and lots of paint. Especially the combination screwdriver + rust-converter is pure magic for places where I can't reach with the grinder. Poke the rusty bits with the screwdriver and generously apply rust-converter. Does the job! Then it was time to inflate the dinghy and try my outboard engine, because it's anchoring weather now - bye bye Marinas. Well, the engine didn't start. So I serviced it, which is a very oily affair. Unfortunately it still doesn't start. So I'll have to look into that a little more tomorrow. My new stainless steel frame at the back is quickly becoming my favorite item. Not only does it securely hold the equipment mast in place. It is also great for attaching the clothesline and, even better, a lift for the outboard engine. Hehe. So despite the fact that I'm still not over the Atlantic, the morale is good. The plan now is to test the wind-vane on a day-sail in the bay. If it works I'll spend a night in Cadiz itself and stock up on fruit, vegetables and water, and then head for the Canaries. If it doesn't work ... nah, it will work.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:21

Tuesday, April 27. 2010

Through the strait, and into trouble.

My debut in the atlantic ended like probably many debuts do: in disaster. And it all started so well! I had planned to leave Gibraltar at 4pm, 2 hours after high water. While I got the boat ready I thought it might be a good idea to leave an hour earlier. It shouldn't be a problem with the tidal streams, and I would be past Tarifa well before nightfall. AIS is cool. Lots of ships in the Bay of Gibraltar. Another boat heads out for the strait. By 2:30pm everything was ready and double checked. Time enough for a late lunch - DÄfÄ¶ner Kebap! With a full & happy stomach. and a light tingling in the mouth, I cast off around three, only minutes after another boat. Big surprise in the bay: two other sailing boats are heading for the strait with me. Looks like my planning was ok. The second surprise wasn't long to come - the wind blew around the rock with up to 40 knots. I only set the self-tacking jib, which is about the right size for that wind on a broad reach. I wanted to try whether it makes any difference to the autopilot or wind-vane. Unfortunately it didn't, and neither could hold the boat on course steady enough. It seems they just don't like waves, or when the boat goes faster than 4 knots. One of the super fast ferries. As for the strait, I needn't have worried so much. The entry is a little crowded, especially because of the high-speed ferries between the two continents. But in the strait a traffic separation scheme is in effect, so the big vessels are out of the way. In addition the traffic is tightly controlled and guided by Tarifa radio - channel 16 on VHF was always busy. The waves gave me a hard time at the rudder. They couldn't decide whether they want to come from the east, south or north. In places all three types met at the same time, splashing me thoroughly wet. But the sun was shining, so I didn't really mind. Triple treat: Cruiseship, Sailing Yacht, Dolphins. Dolphins! Unfortunately it was also hazy and so I couldn't see the african coast. But plenty of dolphins! Half a dozen groups of 2 to 3 animals each. Unfortunately the boat was moving too wildly and I was too occupied with the tiller to take a decent shot. So I just held the camera up with one hand, pointed it in the approximate direction and clicked away. Tarifa. Kite-surfing and wind-generator heaven. There was not much traffic in the strait, I only had to make sure that I did not enter the traffic separation scheme as I sailed before the wind towards Tarifa. The 40 knot gusts became more frequent as I approached Tarifa, the narrowest point in the strait. Then, only two miles away, I heard a loud "bang" and suddenly the jib was flapping like a courtesy flag. It took me a couple of seconds to realize that the sheet was gone! The sheet of the self-tacking jib is attached with a pulley to a metal bar on the foredeck, where it can move freely. And as I looked forward, the whole thing - pulley, sheet and all the shackles were simply gone. Parts of it were custom-made, and will be hard to replace quickly. But - "allzeit bereit", always at the ready - I had a spare sheet already prepared in the locker a long time ago. But preparing it in the marina and attaching it with 40 knots of wind are two different things. After many more salty showers I had the sheet on the jib and running via underneath the metal bar to the mast-winch for the mainsail halyard. Just as I had gotten back into the cockpit and set course for Tarifa again, a voice started calling the "sailing yacht east of Tarifa" on channel 16, and then stopped as they, probably, saw that I had the boat under control again. They must have meant me, because there was no other sailing yacht in the strait. Good to know the guys are watching. That's the wrong way, dude. Lonesome sailer sailing into the sunset. I sailed on, and met a sailing yacht going the other way! Under engine, mind you, bobbing up and down like a rubber-duck in the strengthening current. I would really love to know what extraordinary circumstances made the crew go through the strait into the night against a 40 knot wind and at the very worst time, just as the tidal current gets started. I noticed 3 knots going my way. But the strange encounter was quickly forgotten, because a utterly beautiful sunset was waiting for me. I continued on into the night, heading for Cadiz. At 11:30pm the wind died, and I had my first break - stretch, eat, drink, pee. Then I changed the jib for the genoa. I also changed the fuse of the autopilot which had just blown out for the second time today. Then I spent some time messing with the wind-vane, but it didn't help much. After midnight the wind increased again, and I had to take the tiller in my hands. It was 4:30 in the morning when the wind had gone down enough so that I could let the autopilot steer without blowing fuses and I finally got some sleep. The usual routine: Set the alarm to 15 minutes, lie down to sleep. Then have a look around, and if everything is ok sleep another 10 minutes. Usually there is always something, but that night I got a full hour of sleep that way - awesome! Sailing alone for a while now has drilled one thing into me thoroughly: Eat, drink and sleep (and pee) whenever there is a chance. Because the conditions will probably not be right when you need to. So whenever it is relatively quit, I lie down and grab 10 minutes of sleep. Sometimes I'm not so lucky and I have to sail all through the night and well into the next day without sleep. But then I usually drop the sails and heave-to and sleep for an hour, unless I'm close to my destination. The sun coming up over Cadiz. Dawn was only slightly less spectacular than sunset, because sun came up over Cadiz, and not the sea. I could be there by noon - or sail on towards the Guadiana river on the border between Spain and Portugal. Everybody keeps telling me how beautiful it is, and Ulrich and Anke, the previous owners of Vespina, spent many happy months on Vespina there. The sun was up, the sky cloudless and a nice force 4 was blowing from the east. Reason enough to keep on sailing, so I changed my course further north towards the Guadiana river. I quickly had breakfast while the conditions were good and the autopilot could steer Vespina. I slept for another half hour then looked at the wind-vane. Aha, the screw that holds the gear worked loose, and I quickly tightened it. How could that happened? I had put loctite on the screw when I put it in. Now the wind-vane was misaligned, and any

chance to use it gone. Around noon it looked as though the wind would increase soon, and I wanted to furl the Genoa in a little, because it is very frustrating to do once we wind is too strong. Not enough hands on deck to pull at the lines and keep the boat pointed into the wind at the same time. But I couldn't pull the Genoa in, the line wouldn't move an inch. I crawled to the prow, and saw that the line was fouled up inside the drum of the Furlex. I had to get the whole line out of the drum and thread it back in, which took almost an hour. I was just done when the wind increased. But not before the shackle of the starboard sheet roller broke. Sigh. I threaded the sheet through a big shackle as emergency repair. When five minutes later the autopilot ripped it's mounting from the cockpit, I thought "First the sheet, then the wind-vane, then the genoa, and now the autopilot. What will be next?". I shouldn't have asked that. Because only a few minutes later I heard an alarm going off. It wasn't the clock, and it wasn't the chart-plotter. So ... the gas alarm! I stuck my head inside the boat and reached for the gas-knob, which was in the right place. But by then I had already seen the reason - the boat was flooded a foot high with water. The salt water must have short-circuited the gas-alarm, which is mounted close to the floor. Despite the shock I had to laugh, because I thought how lucky I was that the gas-alarm had noticed the water. I often don't look down there for hours, because I can't leave the tiller long enough. The reason for the flooding was also obvious - the sink. I had forgotten to close the sea-cock. Oh dear, how stupid. It took the 500-GPH bilge pump about 45 minutes to pump out most of the water. Then it took me another hour to get the rest out. It must have been about 200 liters, and a lot of stuff got soaked. That will teach me for a while. Like many small things, this should not happen. But I guess it's just too common, that every couple of years you make such a "stupid" mistake, again. Like forgetting to put salt into the rice water, or cutting your fingers instead of the apple. Or leaving the seacock open. Which normally would not be such a big issue, since it is usually noticed early enough, when the sink is half full. But not when there is nobody else around and you have an intimate relationship with the tiller. After that I didn't ask myself "what next". There was a lot to repair and a boat to clean, and by now the wind was howling again. So I turned around and headed against the wind for Cadiz. There are five Marinas in the Bahia de Cadiz - Puerto America, Royal Club Nautico, Club Nautico Elcano, Puerto de Sherry and Puerto de Santa Maria. Where to go? I hadn't been able to get a map or pilot for the region in Gibraltar, so all I had was the Map on the chart-plotter, which did not have much harbor information. Puerto Sherry looked like it was the largest by far, and it said "Boatyard" on the map information. The decision was made easier as I saw two ships entering the bay before me, and both went into Puerto Sherry. So I followed them. Approaching Cadiz. I made it to the welcome pontoon shortly before 7pm. I docked and walked to the torre de control - closed. The welcome pontoon was not a good place for the night, because it was not protected from the wind and the waves. So I cast off again, and headed into the marina proper, where I docked at the first pontoon. As I walked down the pontoon towards the shore I realized how huge this marina was. 13 pontoons for 40 12m boats, two for 40 15m boats, one for 30 20m boats, and one for 20 25m superyachts - 650 boats. Guess which one I had picked. Next time I should look around more carefully, I guess Vespina felt a little intimidated next to all the multi-million-EUR boats, hehe. Sadly the marina has no Wifi network, so I will have to look for a restaurant to post this entry. There is indeed a huge boat yard and some shipchandlers, but not much else. There are few holiday homes, a small grocery store and three restaurants. And many "Bauruinen", unfinished buildings, like so often on the coast. But here even more than usual. I went back to the boat and started cleaning. Afterwards I had just enough energy left to make fresh potato salad and heat a sausage, and then I went to bed a little past ten. Where tonext? I'm undecided. Part of me wants to go south as fast as possible and cross the Atlantic. Another part wants to explore the area, head up the Guadiana River a bit, stop over at Madeira, etc.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:16

Sunday, April 25. 2010

Planning the passage through the strait

View from the rock into the strait. When planning a trip through the Strait of Gibraltar it is important to get the timing right. Many skippers have ended up sailing for hours on the same spot, or even sailed backwards, because the currents were going the opposite way and they can be stronger than a small boat can sail. The currents through the strait own their strength to three facts: • The water level in the Mediterranean is some meters below that of the Atlantic, because water evaporates in the Med faster than all the waters from the rivers flow into it. This creates a constant current into the Mediterranean between 1 and 2 knots. • The wind creates a surface current, depending weather it is levante (easterly) or poniente (westerly). Tarifa, which lies in the middle of the strait, records more than 30 knots of wind on 300 days in the year. This makes the wind definitely a factor, and it is practically impossible to sail against the wind through the strait. • The tides. While they are negligible in the Mediterranean, the spring range is 3m on the western end of the strait, which adds to the current. Fortunately the tidal streams through the strait are well documented, so all I have to do is leave Gibraltar at the right time with the wind from the back (levante). And the weather forecast for the next weeks looks good too: Easterlies the whole week. The tidal streams are documented in my pilot book, and I couldn't find an online reference. Looking at the tidal stream charts it is relatively obvious that I need to be past Tarifa 2 hours before high water in Gibraltar. On the other hand, I should aim to get there not much earlier than 5 hours before HW Gibraltar in order to sail with the west-going current. The distance from Gibraltar to Tarifa is about 20nm, and Tarifa is 10nm into the strait. That translates into 5 hours of sailing, which means I have to leave Gibraltar 10 hours before high water. Because high water happens every twelve hours, this is the same as leaving 2 hours after high water. Next I have to look at the published tide tables for Gibraltar to get the times for high water. Today it will be at 13:49, which means I should leave shortly before 16:00. Hm, this would mean to reach Tarifa just at sunset, and sail the rest in the dark. I do not really want to do that. I want to take pictures! The next high water is at 02:00 in the morning, which means I would have to leave 3 hours before sunrise and sail in the dark until I am halfway to Tarifa. Damn, also not great. Because the hour of high water is getting later over time, it would be best to wait at least until Friday, when high water is at 04:55 in the morning. Fortunately the boat that reserved the berth I am in is late and will not arrive for another week, so I could stay here that long. On the other hand, who knows what the weather will do until then? Sail today into the night, or wait a few days and sail in the morning. Both options are not ideal, but I could live with either of them. At moments like this I wish for a second hand on board, just to talk things through and swing the decision either way.

Posted by Axel Busch at 02:17

Saturday, April 24. 2010

Sightseeing in ... Gibraltar

All the long shiny bits are new. This morning Matt from Gibstainless came to weld a fitting to my equipment mast, which clamps down on the new stainless steel frame. Now my equipment mast is held securely by the new frame, and I can start moving the Compasses etc. to the centerline of the boat. Awesome. Come on guys, really, this is sooo cool. With the last puzzle piece of all the upgrades I had planned in place, I was finally ready to do some serious sightseeing. The friendly fellow from the tourist information office told me that the only way to do this was to hire myself a taxi. Because all the sights are too far apart for walking. Ha, little did he know that he was facing a veteran sightseer, who's shoes had walked a million miles (at least) on all continents of the world. Minus south america, australia, and the arctics that is. Well, some on some continents at least. 426 meters in 6 minutes. All hands ready to repell boarders! Me ape. So I grabbed one of the free maps, and off I went ... to the cable car. The first thing that caught my eye after the nice ride to the top of the 426m high rock was one of the famous apes. She jumped right on the car as it approached the landing, hoping to surprise us and grab some fruit or chocolate no doubt. By the way, the fine for feeding one of the apes is GBP 500. I do not know if this also applies for unintentional feeding by way of having your lunch pack stolen from you. I hope not, because one of the ladies in the cable car had her lunch-pack stolen after a minute, hehe. She took it out of her backpack to get at her sweater. Just what the apes were waiting for. She got jumped immediately, and the food was gone. View to the south-west. View to the north-east. The way I've come. Although it was quite hazy today, I could see the african coast to the south, and also a long way up the coast to the north-east, from where I've come. The view is very spectacular, and by itself well worth a visit to Gibraltar. The multimedia guide that I had received on leaving the cable car informed about the Greek Legend that is attached to the place. According to the legend the rocks on either side of the strait bore the warning "Nec plus ultra" ("nothing further beyond"), serving as a warning to sailors to go no further. I stood a long time on the viewing balcony. I thought about my trip so far, and looked along the Strait of Gibraltar to where I will sail next. All hidden in the mist - how fitting. I watched the big commercial vessels moving out of the bay and into the strait. From up here they look like toys, and the world like a model railroad landscape. In the morning I had planned my trip through the strait, and I imagined myself sailing along that route through the strait. Very soon now. The southern-most point of the rock with it's big gun. Looking out of a gun-port to the east. Nice view on some ships at anchor. Tingling with anticipation I left the viewing platform and walked along the ridge to the south. At the very south is a military installation with a huge gun, which can shoot all the way across the strait into Morocco. Hasn't been used, and I don't think it will ever, which is a good thing. This part of the rock was closed-off by big fences and gates. There is a way leading down the east face of the rock, called the "Mediterranean steps". The first few of the steps can be seen in the picture of the view to the north-east. St. Michael's Cave The cave is also used for concerts. One of the most important things to see in Gibraltar is apparently the St. Michael's Cave, which is a little way down from the top. The cave is indeed imph http://www.brainforge.net/serendipity_admin.php?ressive - very large, high ceilings, lots of stalactits. The multi-colored lighting and music spoiled it a little bit for me, I like my servings of nature raw. But still very impressive. "Halt, who goes there?" The siege tunnels. After a visit to the siege tunnels I started to have enough of crawling around underground and skipped the World War II tunnels, even though they are said to be worth a visit as well. The Moorish Castle wasn't very impressive - I guess I am a little spoiled from my visits to all the great medieval castles and ruins as a child. It's spring. But she's not in the mood yet, hehe. The castle steps. Hungry and thirsty I made my way down the "Castle Steps" to the Main Street, where a pint and generous helping of "Steak & Ale pie" cared for my bodily needs, and concluded my sightseeing trip of Gibraltar. Here is the link to my picasa album with the best pictures from Gibraltar.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:25

Thursday, April 22. 2010

Back in Gibraltar!

The plane to Gibraltar left Luton with barely an hour delay. There were only about 20 passengers on the Airbus A321-200, and so the acceleration at take-off was noticeably higher than usual - nice. The pilot must have been really experienced at flying fully occupied aircraft. Because he fumbled the landing of the empty plane shortly after 11pm. After it had finished kangaroo-hopping down the runway I rearranged my bones and everybody left the plane. Immigration was deserted, so we helped ourselves through the closed but not locked doors and picked up our luggage. On the way to customs I picked up an english couple headed to Fuengirola. I had arranged for a airport transfer to Gibraltar. Fuengirola is on the way and I had two empty seats. The driver waited after customs, happily waving a sign with my name. We threw our luggage into the car and the rest of the trip went in a blurr of lights and fast corners. The driver explained, in very good english, that the police doesn't control the speed limit at night. So there is no need to be worried about speeding along with 200 km/h - through towns and all (3 year old Merc E320 with 470.000km!). He dropped me off at the border to Gibraltar, and I walked well past midnight through a deserted (of course) immigration and customs building and across the runway into town. After another 30 minutes of walking I was back on Vespina - oh joy . Now I'll visit Gibstainless to pick up the extension to the equipment mast, and at two the mechanic from Sheppard's will come around to service the engine.

Posted by Axel Busch at 03:43

Wednesday, April 21. 2010

Hello London. And now?

A quick look at the departure information for Berlin SchÃ¶nefeld and London Luton airport confirmed that flight operation has been resumed and my flights were on schedule. Relieved I made my way to the Airport, checked in my luggage, and boarded the plane without delay. The delay came while waiting for take-off: "Dear passengers, this is your captain speaking. Ground control has just informed us that the airspace over Berlin is closed and take-off will be delayed by approximately two hours. I am sorry for the inconvenience. More information will be available in about half an hour. Parents with small children are invited to have a look at the cockpit." Ten minutes later my wild dreams of jumping out of the window or posing as a small child and hijacking the plane were interrupted by another announcement: "Dear passengers. The airspace has been opened again and we are cleared for take-off. Please proceed to your seats and fasten your seat-belts. Crew prepare for take-off." Very trust building, isn't it? . But the remainder of the flight from Berlin to London was uneventful. No funny cloud colors, no smell of ash, no burning engines (hehe), nothing. After I've arrived at London Luton my first concern was the departure information screen. Quick glance: all green except for the Ryanair flights, who had said they would only resume operations on Thursday. Looks good. Wait, one more flight is cancelled. Which one? Ah, to Gibraltar. To Gibraltar? But that is my flight! What the "Yes, we are very sorry. The flight plan has not been approved by the authorities. We can book you into the 18:30 flight to Malaga if you like". I did not start to wonder why a flight to Malaga was approved, while one to Gibraltar 100km to the west was not. I thought briefly about flying right back to Germany, just to get off the Island again and be able to take another means of transportation. But then I remembered that all trains had been sold out for days in advance. Well, to Malaga then please. I don't really expect to arrive there tonight. And then there is of course the question of how to get to Gibraltar at 22:30. But I've decided that this is also a kind of adventure by itself. And the harder it is to reach Gibraltar, the happier I'll be once I get there and can set sail again. Right?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:08

To fly or not to fly

Good news: a new guidance by the authorities "allows a phased reintroduction of much of the airspace which was closed due to the volcanic ash plume over the UK" from today onward. Which means that planes are flying again, hurray. However, I received two emails this morning from Monarch, the Airline that operates the flight to Gibraltar: #1, at 2:21am: A Volcanic ash cloud drifting over the UK has resulted in the closure of UK airspace and forced the cancellation of all Monarch flights on Wednesday 21st April. #2, at 2:42am: Monarch will be resuming flights from 21 April. Additional services are being operated to and from Europe to repatriate customers currently displaced as a result of the recent airspace closure. Flights operating from the UK will operate as standard Monarch operations and passengers holding bookings for these flights should proceed to the airport and check-in for these flights as normal. So ... canceled or not? I guess we will see. It is a little risky, and I might be stranded in London. Hehe. We'll see

Posted by Axel Busch at 00:37

Monday, April 19. 2010

Grounded

"We would like to advise passengers that all flights have been suspended, owing to the ash cloud generated by an Icelandic volcanic eruption." Isn't it just too funny? The short trip to see my mum will, again, take longer than expected. Friends, please admire my skills at picking just the wrong time for my trips . Mum broke her wrist and elbow. Mum is fine though, and was really happy to see me. Which is all that matters at the moment. She will be in hospital for another week and then in rehab for three weeks. Let's hope her wrist will be fine again. And folks, take care with your gardening work now that spring is here! It is obviously much more dangerous than sailing. Now I am waiting for my return flight to Gibraltar via London. Because of "the ash cloud" I've rescheduled my flights to Wednesday. The fact that the authorities are prolonging the flight suspensions on a half-day basis gives hope that it is only a temporary situation and the planes will fly soon again. Surely they have gathered hard data by now and would inform us if the conditions were not expected to improve for a while. Or would they? It never surprises me how often authorities act unreasonable and obscure. So a plan B is required. In my case this is the 28 hour train ride via Paris and Madrid to Malaga, and then a Bus to Gibraltar from there. I've decided not to take the Sunday or Monday trains, because they are traditionally overcrowded at the best of times and I didn't want to take the space from people that need to get to work. But depending on the developments today I might book a ticket for the train tomorrow because I have to get out of the marina on Friday. And there is still the engine service and some welding to do. Ironically the wind has been blowing pretty steadily from the east for the last three weeks, and the forecast says it will continue like that for the next two. With that wind it would have taken me only two weeks to sail from Barcelona to Gibraltar, and not three months. To quote Robert Burns: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley." . In the meantime I am enjoying a few sunny days in Berlin. I've never been here as a tourist before, so I can catch up on a little sightseeing today and maybe tomorrow.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:24

Tuesday, April 13. 2010

More upgrades / shopping around in Gibraltar

The first day in a new place is always very busy, but yesterday was even more so. After a shower and breakfast I did my laundry and spread out the sails to dry. When I arrived I was told that I had to leave after four days. This wouldn't have allowed me to fly home, so after the office opened I went to the harbor master again and got permission to stay until the 25th. The harbor master had also given me the address of a stainless steel workshop, and I spent two hours with yardstick, Mike and his son from Gibstainlesspencil and paper to create a drawing of the back gantry which will support the equipment mast and take all the antennas and compasses. By now this is an impressive array (2x GPS, Iridium, Navtex, Wifi, AIS, "regular" compass and Autopilot compass), and it would be just a little inconvenient if I lost it in a storm. With the drawing in the backpack I went to Gibstainless to discuss the setup with Mike, the owner. After incorporating his suggestions I placed the order. It should be ready by the 21st and will set me back $\text{€}300$, but I think that is well worth it. Actually I had calculated with a little more than that, so I was happy. Gibraltar Main Street. After that I went to Sheppard's yacht maintenance to get an appointment for servicing my engine. It is quite a while since it has been serviced, and on the way to Gibraltar it started to puff air out of the little tube that you use to measure the amount of oil in the engine. Nothing serious I think, should be just a clogged up valve or tube that feeds back to the air intake. But it's a good opportunity to make sure everything is fine before I leave Europe. And going over the engine together with an expert will help me troubleshooting it myself in the future. Another well invested $\text{€}80$. The main square. Next stop was Sheppard's ship chandlery. The winch for the furlex is not self-tailing and is giving me big headaches because I'm often running out of hands to hold on to things. A self-tailing winch makes sure that the line is always secured and cannot slip out after it has been hauled in, and that is exactly what I need here: a Lewmar #7 self-tailing winch. Another thing that is giving me headaches is the block for the genoa sheet. At the moment this is simply a block shackled to a rail with many holes, and impossible to adjust without leaving the cockpit. It also bangs noisily against the boat often. What I want instead is a rail on which a car with the block can be moved by pulling a line from within the cockpit. Now I'm waiting for the quote and expected delivery date. I'm afraid that will be a lot more expensive than the back gantry. That concludes all "must-have" upgrades I have on my list for Vespina for now. There are a number of things on the "nice-to-have" list, like a solar panel, an electrical anchor winch or a small stereo sound system. But I haven't missed either of them really so far, so I'm not getting them. Then I had to book the flight to Germany. Unfortunately it turned out that the flight via Madrid which I had planned to take had just been discontinued two weeks ago. The only flights from Gibraltar are now going to the UK. After a lengthy search I ended up booking flights from Gibraltar to London Luton (Monarch), London Luton to Berlin (EasyJet) and Berlin to Stuttgart (Germanwings). Lol! A somewhat extended itinerary is the price for the novelty of walking from the city center to the Airport - only 500 meters. I think that's cool, and in a masochistic kind of way worth the trouble. Just this once. Curry in the Maid Of Mettle Having successfully completed all errands I visited the Maid Of Mettle. Carolin, Chris and Pete planned to leave today towards Cadiz, and had invited me for a Curry. Yummy! Little did I know that they had devised an evil plan to pay me back for beating them at "Gotham City Racing" on the Xbox. They had set up a multiplayer version of "Bomberman" on their Laptops, a classic console game. They had practiced for the last weeks, and I got bombed to pieces without the slightest hint of a chance, haha. I hope they made it through the strait all right and will arrive safely in Cadiz. They are not quite sure where they'll go next. Maybe, hopefully, we'll meet again somewhere.

Posted by Axel Busch at 10:45

Monday, April 12. 2010

In Gibraltar

Vespina in Duquesa. I've finally made it to Gibraltar. Originally I had hoped to get here in January, but between the weather this winter and my excursion to Germany I lost a lot of time. Not really lost, just spend in other ways than anticipated. I've made a lot of new friends on the way, and have very dear memories of time spend together on boats and on land. Something which would not have happened had I been able to rush through. Approaching the rock from the south. Collision course with a freighter. Solved by a quick tack. The last leg, from Duquesa to Gibraltar, was just a regular day-sail on a reach with a pleasant force 5. The swell of the last days was almost gone. After I've rounded the rock it got a little more exciting, because I had to stay clear of the many commercial vessels and ferries. The AIS chart overlay, which shows all vessels with course and speed, worked very well. Although during the day it is easy enough to guess that by just looking at the ships for a few moments. Entry into the Ocean Village Marina. On the left the Airfield. I knew the Maid of Mettle was still moored at Ocean Village Marina in the north, right next to the runway of the Airport. So I headed there and was greeted my Caroline, Chris and Pete on the pier. After plenty of cheering, hugging and a reunification Whiskey I wanted to clear into the marina. But the harbor master told me that the marina was closed because of the boat show, and that I'd have to leave immediately. The berth I was in was not really free, it only looked so. But he was kind enough to arrange a mooring for me at the other marina, Queensway Quay. Which is not next to the runway, better sheltered, closer to the city center and cheaper too. So no reason to complain really. Plenty of cannons line Queensway Quay Marina. The marina is really very nice, and there are a lot of very expensive boats around. All in the 50+ foot range. Although I was told the most expensive ones are all at the boat show at the moment. I therefor expected to pay a lot of money per day, especially because space is at a premium and the marinas at the Costa del Sol extorted 25 EUR per day from me. But no, Å,Å£8.50 it is. Great! The British Pound. I hadn't expected Gibraltar to feel that British. There are strong traces of north-african and spanish, like some of the architecture and the many scooters. But at first glance it looks (and sounds) like a bustling British city, just with a lot nicer weather.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:00

Saturday, April 10. 2010

Vespina likes muscle

Wow, what a trip. Although it was only a healthy force 7 today, that one deserves a nice meal and a beer. Make that two beers. And a chocolate fudge cake for dessert! Leaving Fuengirola look back I left Fuengirola, and got immediately and thoroughly soaked by a big, cold wave. And then again:-). Once clear of the breakwater I unfurled the genoa a bit, which was enough for 6 to 7 knots. Really no need for a main sail today. Without a main-sail Vespina didn't keel over that much and shoot into the wind, just as predicted. But the waves pushed her mightily off course anyway when I was not extremely carefull. Sadly the wind-vane and the autopilot where again useless. I tested with more or less sail area, sheet length, rudder gain etc, but to no avail. The downside of having no mainsail was that she rolled a lot more. Very uncomfortable. But on the good side again I could sail a lot better downwind, without having to fear a chinese gybe (Patenthalse). Another interesting incident today was the near-loss of my equipment mast. The screw that had fastened it to the stainless-steel fence must have tired after all the beating. The lines held it still in place, but it moved precariously back and forth. I tied the mast back on to the fence with a heavy belt as an emergency repair, and replaced the screw when I got here. Of course I had to half lean out of the boat, but was securely tied to Vespina at all times. I am so glad that I made a stainless-steel fence one of the number one priorities when I looked for a boat. The number of times this helped me are uncountable. Now I'm thinking about upgrading the equipment mast to a proper back gantry and weld it to the boat. That would also be a convenient place for a small solar panel to power the radar/chart-plotter on the crossing. Approaching Duquesa Swell at the entrance to Duquesa. Hmm, doesn't look like much from a distance. Surprisingly Vespina set up a new personal speed record today - 9.4 knots SOG, without current. The waves assisted a little;-). But the best (and adrenalin richest) part was the harbor entry into Duquesa. The swell was so crazy that the two harbor masters watched with binoculars from the pier as I made my way in, waves washing over me and Vespina keeling strongly. After I've safely docked at the welcome pier we all shared a big at my expense and they clapped me on the back heartily. Lol, awesome . I'm not surprised that Vespina is the only sailing Yacht out there in this weather when all harbor entrances are like that. The beaches at the Costa del Sol are very shallow indeed. But then I also have to say that the conditions in which I've happened (had) to sail so far were hardly what you would take your mother-in-law out in. Unless you wanted her to never again talk to you;-). Except for three nice since January the wind was always force 6 to 9, and the sea-state 3 to 5. But what can I do. I have to sail on the few days where the wind blows from a good direction. Whos's steering? Fortunately on the one occasion where I sailed on a nice day with the help of the wind-vane (last Tuesday), it worked very well. So there is hope. I also have good video footage of that. It will make you all jealous! Can't wait to edit the next movie:-). Regarding the rest of my voyage I can only hope that my luck changes and that I'll have more nice days ahead of me. The winter's over, and the regular sailing season very close. Also the Med is almost behind me, only a few more miles. Just around the corner really. I'm sure it will work out all right. And the very good thing about Vespina is that the only thing I have to be afraid of is: getting soaked. The cockpit is a little low. But she's incredibly tough and save and I never had a reason to be scared. Which is what I had hoped for when I bought her, so no reason to complain. Unfortunately my mother will be in hospital for a week because she broke her wrist badly yesterday. So tomorrow I'll sail to Gibraltar, my second major milestone of this voyage, and then fly home again to visit her and see whether I can help out. Get well soon mum!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:50

More muscle than brains

The harbor of Motril. In the background the still snow-covered Sierra Nevada. Vespina at the pier. "Something big" in the commercial harbor of Motril. Yesterday I left Motril to make my way further "as far as possible" towards Gibraltar. I planned to stay closer to the shore, where the wind should come at a slight southerly angle to the land. That way I hoped to be able to sail a more easterly course, and avoid the worst of the waves. The plan worked in so far as that I could sail a course of 260°, as much east as I needed to. I was less lucky with the waves though. The problem was the same as yesterday: neither the autopilot nor the wind-vane could cope once the boat got pushed of course. With a new wave coming in from behind every 4 seconds (I stopped the time), and many of them breaking, that happened quite often. I have some nice footage which I will upload after I've reached Gibraltar. Swell overtaking Vespina. Approaching Fuengirola. Lots of muscle needed yesterday. I can't remember the last time I had to earn my miles so hard. By the time I arrived in Fuengirola my arms hurt so much that I could hardly finish the entry in my log book. All very heroic . But stupid. Had I used my brains instead of my muscles, I might not have had to work so hard. After I arrived here I checked my emails. Roland (Äfâ€"streicher), Jens (Detlefsen) and Thorsten (Braun) had answered to my last post, suggesting that I don't hoist the main sail and simply sail only with the genoa. Moving the center of pressure thus forward will probably not prevent Vespina to get kicked off course given the current swell. But it should prevent her from keeling over

and shooting into the wind, which should allow the wind-vane or autopilot to adjust the course again. Roland described in detail how he hadn't managed without a wind-vane at all. Sounds like a plan, thanks a lot my friends! Let's see whether I can put that in effect today, and how far I get. Gibraltar is a little beyond my reach for a day-sail, and after last night I don't need another night-entry in a gale for a while. Originally I wanted to anchor off the coast, but there's no good spot in an east gale. Specifically I recommend not to approach Fuengirola in an east gale as I did. The rollers are madness. But once you are behind the breakwater it is very nice and quiet. Anyway, I hope my sailing gets smarter again quickly. I'm not particularly proud of the last days. Maybe too much of that easy land life made me all soft in the head . I've just checked out at the marina office and am ready to go. The weather forecast says 30kn of wind from the east. Yep, that fits to what I'm seeing here. Oh, I have to leave going out against that horrible swell. Better get the camera ready, that will be "fun"!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:02

Thursday, April 8, 2010

My little prima donna

Lifting the anchorLast night the wind changed from west to east, and increased to 30 knots. At half past eight I pulled up the anchor (no electrical anchor winch), and set sail towards Gibraltar. Or as close as I could set the course towards Gibraltar, which was not very close. With the wind from east, I should have been pretty much running before the wind. Because it is very hard to hold that course, and boats roll uncomfortably from left to right, I usually sail at an angle of up to 20°. More or less, depends on the boat. Looks like it's rather more for Vespina. She was still rolling heavily at 30°, and the waves were constantly threatening to push her off course. Broad reach instead of running. I had to be very alert and stem with all force against the rudder to keep her from getting turned into the wind. Unfortunately the wind-vane was no help at all today, because it could only hold a course of about 60° to the wind. So instead of running before the wind, I was more or less reaching and baby-sitting the rudder again all day. At first I blamed it on the wind-vane. But then I remembered that I had encountered the same phenomenon a couple of times before. With no swell everything is fine, but Vespina acts all funny as soon as those waves start pushing her around. I have to work the rudder so much that it feels more like rowing, and not sailing. No kidding. Maybe the problem isn't the wind-vane, but just Vespina's bilge-keel design? I looked into my log book for past wind direction vs. course steered. And yes, there seems to be a pattern. Either I'm doing something continuously horribly wrong, or Vespina has some severe limitations. Here is my highly scientific conclusion in form of a drawing: It shows at what angles of wind Vespina is easy to sail (green), hard unless there is no swell (yellow) and very frustrating (red). Angles of windLooks to me like Vespina is a little prima donna who likes nice weather. Which is no problem for a 40nm or 50nm day-sail. But it is not so great when the plan is to cross an ocean alone, where the wind is pretty much always from behind. 20° more or less on course matters a lot when the distance is more than 2000nm. Hell, it even annoys me tremendously when it's only 100nm. But the real problem of course is that the wind-vane can't cope. Hm ... Well, over the next days I'll continue and try to make my way towards Gibraltar. I'm afraid it will not be pleasant. Any tips are highly appreciated! Or maybe I can simply weld a deep long-keel to Vespina's belly?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:33

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

At anchor

Who's steering? Not me! I left Almerimar yesterday morning. It was slow going with a light breeze from the south-east, but it felt great to be sailing again. Especially because the wind-vane did all the work on the rudder and I could enjoy it as never before. The wind changed slowly to the south, and around 15:00 it died completely. At anchor in front of Adra. Night falls. Because the forecast for today was a westerly, I had to find a place to stay. I made my way north and dropped anchor in front of Adra. My first time anchoring with Vespina! Anchoring in the sun is much nicer than lying in a marina. Today the wind is indeed coming from the west, force 3. But the sun is hot and it's a great day to sprawl on the deck reading. Could be worse .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 09:52

Sunday, April 4, 2010

Storm coming up (Updated)

The weather forecast: Force 8 to 9. I just downloaded the latest GRIB file with the meteorological data for the next few days. Very interesting. This would be a nice opportunity to test that third reef which I had put into the main sail. On the other hand it seems almost a little reckless to leave into a storm. Well, I'll see how it develops over night. Always think positive. Update It's eight in the morning now. I've only slept three hours last night, and spent the rest thinking whether to sail today or not. Which kind of answers the question already, doesn't it. The psychology of staying too long ashore: I get all excited about leaving, but at the same time scared to do it. Of course that's the thing about courage: You are scared to do it, but do it anyway. On the other hand I just now watched a seagull as I looked out of the window: It caught a fish, but the fish was too big and the seagull couldn't fly away with it despite all its crazy wing flapping. Don't bite off more than you can chew. And I don't feel like I can chew a storm today. I'll stay. The forecast for tomorrow is still wind from the east, force 2 to 3. And only a light breeze in the night. The other extreme. But that means I could try some light wind sailing with Vespina, which I haven't had the chance so far. There was either a lot of wind, or none at all. That would give me the opportunity to use the Gennaker and boom out the Genoa with the Spinnaker boom and see if everything works as expected before heading out into the Atlantic. *yawn*, I'm really tired. back to bed.

Posted by Axel Busch at 15:12

Saturday, April 3. 2010

Getting ready to leave for Gibraltar

Good news: the weather forecast predicts a full week of strong easterly winds beginning on Sunday evening. Over the last days I have been frantically working on Vespina to get her ready for the next trip. It never ends to surprise me just how much there always is to do, especially after the boat has not been sailed for a few weeks. The last I want to do is run into any avoidable surprises at sea. The usual "pre-flight" check includes: Run the engine for a while. Check the fuel. Check the engine-oil. Climb the mast. Check the boom and the lines inside. Check the stays and shrouds. Check the halyards. Check the winches. Check the rudder. Check the through-hull-fittings. Check the windows. Check the spinnaker pole. Hoist the main sail and unfurl the genoa. Check the sheets. Check the mooring lines. Check the anchor & chain. Load & check the batteries. Check the navigation & masthead lights. Check the instruments. Check the VHF radio. Check the GPS. Check the gas bottle. Check the maps. Check the weather forecast, tide tables and navigational warnings. Do the laundry. Backup the hard-disks. Re-pack the grab-bag. Stock up on water, food, toilet paper, soap, sunscreen etc. ... And a good thing I checked: One of the stays for the equipment mast had come loose, the lamp of the position lights in the front was broken, and the rudder needed greasing. In addition I replaced the sheet for the Blister with a thinner one (6mm instead of 12mm). That way the Blister should be more usefull in very light wind because the lighter rope doesn't drag it down so much. All of that is done, and then some. What's left to do is to plan the trip! Ideally I would leave Almerimar at daylight and approach Gibraltar well after dawn, and with enough safety margin should the trip take a little longer then planned. The distance is a little less than 140nm. All of it in a straight line with the wind of force 4-7 at about 15°, from the back. That means that I should be underway for approximately 30 hours. Sunrise is at the moment at 08:00, and sunset at 20:45. So I could leave Almerimar at 08:00 in the morning and expect to arrive around 14:00 next day in Gibraltar. Which means I will be well away from the rock during the night, I will come in with the rising tide, and I will have about six hours of safety margin before the sun sets. Sounds good. However, the weather forecast predicts gusts of more than 40 knots in Gibraltar for Monday during the day. Fast sailing, but because the Marina in Gibraltar is not too sheltered I would like to avoid arriving in these conditions. I'm a chicken, I know. Tuesday afternoon looks much more promising, only about 25 knots. So here's the plan: Leave Almerimar on Monday morning at 08:00, and arrive in Gibraltar on Tuesday afternoon. Visit the caves, take pictures of the apes on the rock, and with any luck leave again on Thursday and pass through the strait and into the Atlantic. Finally!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:34

Tuesday, March 30. 2010

Friends come, friends go.

Aefnityr is leaving. Bye Lasse, Malene, Sebastian and Marie. Probably the best part of the voyage are all the people I get to meet, especially when their boat lies next to mine for a few days. When I came back from Germany the Danish Aefnityr was lying to my starboard side. Lasse and his family had just arrived a few hours ago in an almost biblical downpour from the west. Over the week we got to talk a lot, and his 5-year old son Sebastian tried to hammer some Danish into my skull. There's a persevering 5-year-old if I've ever met one. On Friday they left again, heading for Cartagena first, and then on towards Turkey. I wish you a safe journey! But the berth was not empty for long, for on Saturday Carlos (a ka "Giotto") arrived on his new boat, a beautiful Dutch steel cutter. He was all excited, because he had just bought his first own boat and it was his first trip on it. Reason enough to open a bottle of wine! Carlos is from somewhere in the mountains of Galicia, and as I found out yesterday night an enthusiastic player of the bagpipe! Carlos the piper. Galician rumba on the bagpipe.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:03

Sunday, March 28. 2010

O wind, where art thou?

Yesterday around noon a light easterly breeze started up. But not enough to sail downwind with, and the three boats I saw passing Almerimar during the day did so under motor. By five in the afternoon the wind stopped, and didn't start up again since. Well, well. Fortunately the sun is out, and there is no urgent work to be done on Vespina. So today I'm looking forward to a sunny day reading in the hammock. The fever is gone since Friday, and I feel very well again. Only a slight cough remains.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 04:12

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Surprises while painting the cockpit

Freshly painted cockpit On Ibiza I had sawed off a piece from a iron bar in the cockpit. Even though I scrubbed the cockpit afterward, some sawdust remained. It rusted, and soon the cockpit looked like the boat was centuries old and sick to the bone. Tiny yellow stains everywhere! But because it was raining pretty much all the time, I couldn't do anything about it. But this week the sun came out. So yesterday I took a can of regular white paint, and a different can of anti-slip white paint and went at it. First I painted the sides of the cockpit with the regular white paint. And since it was going so well, I painted all other parts of the boat that looked like they could use some paint too. Specifically around the windows. After the paint had dried I took the can with anti-slip white paint and went to work on the floor of the cockpit and the deck. But when I was done I realized that both cans had contained anti-slip paint. Doh! At least now the deck as well the window frames are totally slip proof! Only trouble with it is that the anti-slip paint collects dust and looks grey after a short time. So I'll have to repaint the windows rather sooner than later. Maybe I shouldn't have been painting my ship with 39°C fever. But today I'm feeling a lot better. The fever is down to 37,5°C. There's still a lot of coughing and nose blowing and a headache, but it's definitely going uphill. Probably the sense of achievement worked wonders. My plan was to leave here Saturday and sail to Gibraltar. But I probably should wait for a few more days until I'm fully recovered. At least from the weather forecast it looks like the wind is changing more frequently now.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 07:36

Monday, March 22. 2010

Back on Vespina

Finally back on the ship. My first night wasn't too good, partially because of the cold that I brought with me, and partially because I have to get used again to the confined space. Banged my head and elbows a couple of times tonight . Apparently the weather was pretty foul here over the last weeks, with lots of rain. But today the sun is shining and the forecast for the next weeks is very good. At the moment I still have to wait for my life-raft to return from the service. At least the servicing part is done and so it should be here within the week. The wind is supposed to change more frequently between west ("Poniente") and east ("Levante"), so I really, really hope that I can make it to Gibraltar by Sunday. Which leaves me some time to get rid of the cold, practice with the third reef and the wind-vane, and do some more paint jobs on the boat. Steel is sturdy, but there are always rust spots.

Posted by Axel Busch at 08:48

Friday, March 19. 2010

Plans for the future

Only two days and I'll be back on Vespina again. This morning I wasn't sure whether I could get everything done here by Sunday. The whole week I felt like a juggler with too many balls in the air. But then this afternoon everything finally clicked into place, and now all that's left is to pay two bills, to post three letters, to pack my bag and to clean my flat. I've been only away for four months, but already a lot of things had added up and kept me busy throughout the last three weeks. I guess that's the price for not having burned all my bridges when I left in November. A price I pay gladly, because one of the things that was keeping me so busy was visits to and from friends. As a lesson from that experience I am already planning my next trip home, probably in August. Hopefully that is after I've crossed the Atlantic. Speaking of which, here's the new plan for the next stops on the way: Gibraltar, Marokko (Casablanca, Agadir), Canary Islands (Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, La Gomera) and then to the Cape Verde Islands. And then, well, it looks like Brazil would be a good choice. Another lesson I've learned is that I need something "big" to think about and work on while I'm waiting for better weather. Now that the winter is over I hope that I won't have to wait anymore for weeks at a time like I had to in Port-Saint-Louis, on Ibiza, and in Almerimar. Also the bike-rentals should be open where I'm going, the water should be warm in enough to swim and dive, and there will be more people around. So overall more distraction and entertainment. But the thing that has bothered me most on the trip so far was not bad weather or loneliness, but the question of what I will be doing when the trip is over. I know, I still have a long way to go. But compared to what it took to start the voyage, the actual doing is quite easy: Wait and sail, wait and sail, wait and sail. So I can't help but ask myself what I will do after I've returned home, because I've learned one thing about myself on the trip already: there is still a lot that I want to do, and I can't do it from a sailing boat. And the thing I want to do most is ... start another company. A company with a good influence on the world. Oh yes, I can hear the laughter of you, my friends. Of course you knew this all along. Well, I didn't. After having started a new business from scratch three times (the first a failure, the other two very successful), I might as well have had enough of it. Time to take it slowly, enjoy life. Things like that. Well, I'm enjoying life. Tremendously! But I'll enjoy it even more when I work on a new business plan and do some research while I'm voyaging. This will give me something to look forward to for when the voyage is over. And having always something to look forward to is one of the most important ingredients for happiness.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:47

Sunday, March 14. 2010

Obituary for Marta Werner

On Friday morning the voyage of my aunt Marta ended, following an illness of two years. Marta always inspired me with the ease with which she made everyone around her feel loved and accepted. She was of high moral character, but never distant and accepted others despite all their flaws. She was caring and understanding, and always found words of appreciation and encouragement. To me she was the best godmother I could have wished for, and a role model whose example I will forever struggle to live up to. The funeral will be on Wednesday in her home town, Pfullingen. Now I am glad that I am not halfway across the ocean and can be there to say goodbye to her. My flight back to Almeria is on the following Sunday.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:21

Saturday, March 6. 2010

Home leave

I've arrived in Ulm last sunday just in time to see the start of the overtime of the hockey final - the only thing I've seen from this year's olympics. And then I fell into my wonderful and very comfortable big bed. What a change from the 50cm wide (and 1cm too short) bunk on Vespina! Throughout the week I was very busy with meeting friends and family. I also went shopping for new clothes, because my old jeans and t-shirts are two sizes too big now. Today we had 20cm of fresh snow, and I am thinking about going snowboarding tomorrow. But I am also looking very much forward to getting back to Vespina on Wednesday and continuing my voyage.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 09:40

Saturday, February 27. 2010

Got you on my radar, baby ;-)

Max, boss of "Inox Almeria", applying a free polish to the radar gimbal. My new chart-plotter with radar overlay: the purple "haze" is the radar echo of the ships and structures around me in the marina. The last three days I worked on the installation of my new GPS Chart-plotter, radar, Navtex-receiver and AIS receiver. What a "Kabelsalat" - cable tangle. Also the new radar dome is bigger than the old one and didn't fit on the gimbal. But Max helped me out and welded a new platform on top of it. The chart-plotter is able to integrate all data from the different receivers as layers into it's display, and of course I didn't want to settle for less than that. But - surprise - every piece of equipment has a different cable and connector type - Coax, RS232, Seatack, NMEA, you name it. So my brain, the multimeter, the pocket-knife and the crimping pliers saw heavy use again. But the biggest surprise was when I turned everything on today and it simply worked. I really wasn't expecting that. So now Vespina's navigation system is state-of-the art, and I'm certain it will be of good use next time when there's a lot of traffic, it's dark and I'm getting tired. But I'm glad that I came all the way without the little electronic helpers. Because I have learned to navigate well without them, and so I won't be in trouble should the stuff fail. I've also picked up my sails from the sail-maker yesterday. The main-sail has a third reef now, and the broken seams of the genoa are fixed. I've also bought a 6sqm storm-jib - thanks again to Chris, Pete and Caroline for letting me have theirs. And since the wind-vane is in perfect shape too I'm ready to go again! Well, if only the wind wouldn't be blowing from the west all the time. For tonight gusts of up to 100 km/h are expected, that will be fun. I guess I should be glad that I haven't made it to the Canaries yet, the second super storm in ten days. Because the long-term weather forecast isn't too optimistic about the next two weeks (west, west, west), I've decided that I'll have a little break and fly home. The plane is leaving tomorrow from Almeria, and I'll be back on the 10th of March. See you in Ulm!

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:40

Wednesday, February 24. 2010

Welcome sunshine!

The rainclouds are gone, the sun is shining, and the thermometer is creeping towards the 20C mark. If only the bloody wind would die down for a day, I might actually get some work done on the boat. But with the exception of Saturday (where I was in the Sierra Nevada) it has been blowing with more than 60 km/h every single day for the last week. So except for some insignificant tasks (like painting my survival gear bright orange and writing "Vespina DF5903" on everything) all I (can) do at the moment is sleep, read and eat chocolate. Horrible life, I know! Taking the wind-vane apart and putting it back together was an adventure by itself, as the boat was rocking violently on it's mooring. So I've decided against climbing the equipment mast to exchange the radar dome and installing the AIS antenna - the water is still too cold to go swimming involuntarily. This will have to wait for a less windy day. Everybody I've met so far on my trip was telling me how this winter is the worst - coldest and windiest - they can remember. Just my luck to go sailing now. But in a way I enjoy it immensely. It wouldn't be half as much fun if it was easy, would it?

Posted by Axel Busch at 12:17

Sunday, February 21. 2010

Sierra Nevada and Alhambra

The last week has been raining mostly. I know, you guys have been freezing half to death, and others are being blown away. I won't complain! But when the sun came out yesterday it was nice anyway. I had arranged to pick up Caroline, Chris and Pete in Caleta de Vélez, and together we drove to go to the Sierra Nevada to get our dose of snow! Bratwurst for breakfast in the Maid of Mettle. On the way to the Sierra Nevada could almost be in the Algarve. Turn right here. Some walking and sculpting. Pete, Caroline and Chris. A band of fearless sailors in the mountains. On the way home we visited the Alhambra in Granada. Beautiful gardens! It was a great road-trip and beautiful day out, and I enjoyed being in the mountains. Not to mention the snowball fight. Today it's raining again.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:25

Thursday, February 18. 2010

Essential equipment, software and books

A little more than three months on the boat, and this is probably my first "useful" contribution for other sailors: A list of essential equipment, software and books. I have linked it permanently from the navigational menu, because I will probably add to it now and then.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:11

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Bushings, sails, greenhouses and a new radar unit

On Monday I did a big tour of all the shops in Almerimar with ship-related assortment of goods. At "Inox Almeriar" I ordered a replacement for the Nylon bushing for my wind-vane. Colin, the sail-maker, agreed to put the third reef into the main and patch up my genoa, which had some small damage at the clew (Schothorn). And because everything went so well I let Spencer from Nautico Almerimar talk me into buying a new radar unit plus chart plotter, but that's a different story. Letting my sails dry. The last puzzle piece for my wind-vane! Tuesday morning it was raining heavily. I was pacing in my boat like a caged tiger, waiting for the rain & wind to stop so that I could hoist the sails and let them dry - the sail-maker won't work on wet sails. At 1pm the rain finally stopped, and I jumped out of the cabin and hoisted the sails. After two hours I saw the next rain cloud coming, and quickly took them down and stowed them away before they got wet again. I had just slammed the hatch shut when the next downpour started - whew, close! Today I collected the inox bushing for my wind-vane (that should settle it!), hired a car, dropped of the sails at Colin's, and then explored the immediate surroundings a little. Have you ever wondered where our Oranges are coming from? Every inch from the mountains to the coast which is not city is covered by greenhouses. Look at the pictures and judge for yourself. On the road to the mountains. Greenhouses stretch all the way from mountain to coast. My rental car - a Fiat Panda. Regarding the new radar: In the "good old days" the biggest challenge for a sailor (after the weather) was navigation: He had no reliable charts and no accurate way to pinpoint his position. Nowadays we have very good charts, and we have GPS to tell us where we are. On Vespina I only have a very simple GPS device that just displays the coordinates, so I still use paper charts, compass, pencil and a ruler a lot. But most yachts are equipped with chart-plotters that show your position, course etc. on an electronic chart. There is still a lot of navigation to do, but it has gotten a lot easier. But now there is a new challenge, and it is even more dangerous than being confused about your position: traffic. Modern cargo ships plough through the sea with 25 knots. If I keep a sharp outlook and the visibility is good, I can see them from a distance of 10 to 15nm when I stand in my cockpit. That gives me half an hour to prevent a possible collision at the best of times. That is not much. And at night, it is a lot less. This is where radar and recently AIS come in. Both systems can detect other vessels from a much bigger distance (because the antenna is higher up in the mast, they don't depend on visibility as much and they never tire), and provide information about the course and speed of the detected vessels. Usually the devices also provide the means to set an alarm, should a vessel come inside a certain range or be on a collision course. I really like the "old style" navigation: paper chart, compass, ruler etc. I even have a sextant with me, which I am looking forward to use once the wind-vane is working. Not that I expect to be any good at it, but I just like it - call me a romantic. But the other night, off Cabo de Gata, when it was pitch black and every five minutes a cargo vessel was zooming passed, I really wished for a modern radar or AIS system. Just for the ease of mind, and to be able to get some rest. And of course for entertainment, I am a technology aficionado after all. So when Spencer offered me a great deal on the perfect bundle: GPS Antenna, Chart-plotter, Maps, Radar and AIS all on one display (Raymarine C80), I just couldn't say no. Now I am eagerly awaiting delivery of the package! What I also like about it is the redundancy. Because the new system is just one display, I can keep my old system in place untouched. Should one fail, I still have the other. Then I have a handheld GPS, a sextant, two electronic and three mechanical compasses. Even if both primary systems fail I should be able to find land eventually

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:46

Sunday, February 14. 2010

Back in Almerimar

Torre de Control, Almerimar. The Sierra de Gador in the background. The whole coast is covered by greenhouses. So, the wind-vane worked. For almost two hours I watched in total fascination as it kept Vespina reliably on all possible courses. And then it suddenly stopped working: the servo-rudder was twisted out of its vertical axis again. I strapped myself to the back of the boat, realigned the servo-rudder and then stayed there to see if it would happen again. Which it did. But now I know what exactly is wrong, and so I can fix it for good. What I need is the bushing between cogwheel and shaft made from Inox or Aluminum, and not Nylon. A beautiful day sail. The self-tacking jib is up. The part of the wind-vane which is causing the trouble. The bushing is now made of Nylon. Has to be metal. So I turned the trip to Malaga into a wonderful 30nm day-sail off Almerimar, where I will stay the next week and get everything sorted out: The bushing, the 3rd reef, the storm-jib. And whatever else comes up. I'm pretty sick of struggling because my gear is not 100% up to the task. And the wind turns back to West on Wednesday anyway. And now ... a steak and a beer!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:01

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

Eureka! The wind-vane is working . And in the worst possible conditions too: light wind and big swell from aft.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:19

Saturday, February 13. 2010

Reefs, jibs and a video

On the trip from Ibiza to Almerimar I had wished again for a third reef in the mainsail when the wind exceeded force 6. And once you get started on thinking about sails, there is really no end to it: A smaller storm-jib than the 9sqm one would be useful, maybe 6sqm. And then all the books are telling me that as a prospective blue-water sailor I need a Trysail. But that means adding a second mast track to allow easy hoisting of the sail. However, thinking about how bad it was in the force 10 storm with gusts of 11 to 12, I honestly doubt whether I would be able to get the lugs into the track alone and hoist the sail. But the third reef seems like a very good investment, and so does the smaller storm-jib. So I went to the local sailmaker, Colin. Adding the third reef would take him a morning and cost about 180 EUR. But a lot of sailors came to him over the last two weeks with torn sails (no surprise!), and he has a lot to do. Especially because he's going skiing in a week from now. The storm jib would take one to two weeks to complete. If I want it cheaper and have the time, he suggested I have the canvas laser-cut in Thailand instead of Spain and send here, which would add another week. But looking at the weather forecast, I don't have much time to spend in Almerimar. The current easterlies only last until Tuesday, and then it's back from the West for at least another week. So the plan is to sail to Malaga tomorrow and visit a friend of Colin there to get the third reef added to the main sail. I'm also thinking about ordering the storm-jib in Malaga, and have it send to the Canaries while I sail there. Then I spent some more time on the wind-vane today (in between showers). I think I made some progress ... the rod that leads from the gears to the servo-rudder is not 100% straight and there seems to be a "sweet spot" which I have to hit when tightening the screw. I'm excited about the next trial tomorrow! And then ... there is a new video

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:41

In the Alboran sea

In the bay of Sant Antoni, leaving Ibiza. Na Gorra. Sailing into the sunset. Tuesday morning Cha came to say goodbye before I leave for my next trip. And also Ramon, a sailing instructor from the Marina. Ramon wants to sail next winter to Turkey and back. Good luck for your trip Ramon! I had a last coffee at The Willow Tree (and thanks again for the Oranges, John!) and cast off at noon. The north-westerly was blowing strong into the bay, and I had to motor against the big swell for the first four miles until I passed the lighthouse at Isla Conejera and could turn south. The swell was so bad that I got seasick within minutes after leaving the marina, and I participated three times in the popular "feed the fish" program. Tom, now I know how you felt in Croatia! The problem with seasickness is that it totally takes the fight out of you. I could hardly convince myself to leave the cockpit and set the sails. But once they were up and I was sailing, things improved quickly. And then I thought: I've done it, I have escaped the magic of the island and actually left Ibiza! Inside Vespina, my home for the last three months now. "Team Germany" on tour. The last two days before leaving I had worked on the wind-vane, and when I dropped the servo-rudder into the water I expected a reasonable chance that it would be working. But no such luck - the swell twisted the shaft of the servo-rudder out of its carefully aligned axis, and then bent its mounting sideways. And that was basically it. I fiddled with it for a while longer, bent it back and realign it, but the result was the same: wind-vane not working. Unbelievable. Later more on that topic. Unfortunately my Tiller-pilot is also useless in a big swell. It doesn't react nearly as fast or strong enough, and the boat gets pushed off course and into the wind. Oh joy, this trip was going to be another workout for my arms and abdominal muscles. In the night to Wednesday the wind changed to West force 5 to 6. Close-hauled the swell is uncomfortable, but it is very easy to trim Vespina so that she stays on course by herself. The trick is to put just the right amount of sail area up, align the sails at the correct angle to the wind, and then use the traveler on the main-sail to fine-tune the pressure on the rudder. Easy :-p. But I had sailed most of the way to Ibiza like that already and it gets easier every time. So I managed to catch up on some nap-time while the rudder was lashed down and Vespina sailed herself towards my destination. Things felt good again. A ferry. Reminds me of the Jawa Sandcrawlers from Star Wars. One of the many, many container vessels. One of the three or four cruise liners that pass me every day. On the night to Thursday I was passing Cabo de Palos, the cape east of Cartagena, where a traffic separation scheme is in effect. A traffic separation scheme is something like a "Autobahn" for the sea (minus the white lines and MacDonalds of course): You are only allowed to go one way, and it is very busy. Since a sailing yacht compares to the other ships like a bicycle to a truck, it's best to stay out of it. I feel safest at sea when I'm far away from land and other ships. In my mind this makes perfect sense: With only unoccupied water around me I cannot run aground or into other ships. And should the weather get too bad to sail I can simply shut myself inside Vespina, be safe and wait it out. So my plan was to pass the cape 20nm off the coast, which should put me outside of the traffic I had encountered so far. The plan worked. I was sailing in peace and silently through the moonless night, looking at the stars (so many!) and the lights of the far-away commercial vessels. And then the strangest thing happened: another sailing yacht passed only 50 meters from me, going the other way! The first sailing yacht I've seen

on any crossing, and we almost run into each other. Seems like there is somebody else who feels the same as I do about traffic separation schemes . I stared at it in disbelief and missed the chance to take a picture. You cannot imagine how happy it made me to finally encounter another sailor at sea. Shortly before dawn the wind changed to North-East 7, and Vespina was flying along with up to 8 knots through the water. Which is pretty fast for a boat with a design limit of a little over 7 -> surfing. Hard work on the rudder without a wind-vane, but great fun! But as much fun as it was - by three in the afternoon I was very tired. So I layed by for half an hour and got a little sleep. Then I continued towards the Cabo de Gata. A freighter at dusk. And this is how it looks at night. Or even like this. Not much to see, is there? The traffic increased with every mile I came closer to the cape and the Alboran sea. I stayed even more south to get out of the way, but there was no chance that I could stay clear off the commercial vessels at the cape. There were dozens all around me, zapping this way and that in complete darkness (clouds, no moon). Theoretically as a sailing yacht I have the right of way. But who wants to argue with a superfreighter? So I tried to hold my speed and course very steady, and hoped that my lights were bright enough and my radar signature good enough. One of the longest nights in my life. Scary. Now I had to make a decision: sail on towards Gibraltar or stop at one of the next marinas? With my Iridium phone I downloaded a weather forecast. It predicted only 5 knots of wind for Friday and showers. Five knots is not enough to get Vespina going. Rain is not getting me going. And the wind-vane is not working and needs looking into anyway. Dawn, the time of day I'm looking most forward to. The lighting at sea is nothing less then spectacular. Approaching Almerimar under motor. Mainsail up for stability against the swell. So I decided for a stop-over. The chance to catch some real sleep and a hot shower had nothing to do with the decision . The Mediterranean Almanac advertised Puerto De Almerimar as a "Useful yard with all facilities" and having "Good discounts for winter stays", so I decided to have a go for it. I had to motor the last 10nm because the wind failed completely, and arrived at noon. As far as I can see the Almanac was right: six shipchangers, a boatyard, and only 8 EUR per night. 320nm in pretty exactly 72 hours - not bad. I could have made it faster (and a lot more comfortable) if the wind-vane was working. My model is a home-made copy of the "Windpilot Pacific". I am sure it was working for Ulrich, and I am at a loss to explain why it isn't for me. Obviously having to replace the cogwheel and spacer didn't help. Maybe the little "bump" against a pontoon on my way down the Saone did more damage than can be seen by the eye? A wind-vane is a very delicate machine with little tolerances. Maybe Ulrich used it in different conditions, not in a force 6 and higher? The fact remains that the wind-vane is probably the most important piece of equipment when sailing single-handedly. I absolutely need a reliable way of holding the boat on course. Not only so that I can rest, but also to work at the sails, for which I have to leave the cockpit. At the moment I have either to lay by, or sail a close-hauled course with the rudder lashed down. The tiller-pilot is of some help, but it only works when the wind is light and there is no swell. But the tiller-pilot uses up energy, and my wind-generator is not charging the batteries when the wind is light, so I cannot sail like that for long. I am very happy with my voyage in all other respects. And Vespina proved to be a fine ship - predictable, maneuverable, reliable, sturdy, watertight, and easy to maintain. But the self-steering situation is getting to me. Today I'll take the wind-vane apart again and put it back together. It can't hurt, I learn more every time I do it, and maybe I have an "Eureka!" moment this time. Then I give it another try on a day-sail or on the way to Gibraltar, depending on the weather. A new wind-vane costs EUR 2850, maybe half the price for a used if I can find one. So definitely worth spending the time. And the matter is too serious to take any chances. The trip from Gibraltar to the Canaries is 700nm, twice the distance I have sailed so far on a single trip. I don't want to imagine doing this without reliable self-steering, seeing how tired I am after only (ok, "only" is relative I guess) three days. Anyway, having to baby-sit the rudder around the clock takes all the fun out of sailing on anything but a day-sail. But this trip is as much about having fun as it is about learning, at least that was the plan. And not some masochistic undertaking, right?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:21

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Wednesday, February 10. 2010

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

Caught a fine northerly. Passing Cartagena and heading for Almeria.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 21:52

Monday, February 8. 2010

Getting ready to leave Ibiza (again :-)

The weekend was business as usual: First I won the World Championship ("Project Gotham Racing" beaten). Then I survived the final suicide mission (!?) on my spaceship, rescued all my crew-mates from evil aliens and saved the Galaxy ("Mass Effect 2" beaten) . Afterwards I put the XBox back into the (cardboard) box - enough gaming for a few months. Weather forecast for Tuesday... and Friday. But the real world is no less interesting: The weather forecast promises NW to E winds from Tuesday on! Looks like the waiting paid finally off. Maybe those guys should have waited too, hehe. So I'm getting Vespina ready for another go at Gibraltar. That includes doing the laundry, filling all tanks, charging all batteries (boat, handheld emergency radio, cameras, navtex, gps, flashlights, laptops, phones, ebook-reader, mp3-player, radio, portable speakers, ... Oh dear, do I really need all that?), stocking up on food (especially fruit & chocolate!), checking the rigging and lines, testing the lights, downloading weather charts, updating the route and the GPS waypoints, backing up the hard-disks, packing the grab-bag and finally stowing away everything that is not absolutely necessary. I can't stand it when stuff is (f)lying around on the boat while I'm sailing. I had a great time on Ibiza and made many new friends which I hope to see again. But the Island really is a place for youths on vacation and pensioners. The weather is great and it's really nice, but every day's the same. So my recommendation is to not come here for an extended time unless you can leave ambitions and big plans behind, or you'll go crazy eventually. Ok, back to work!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:46

Thursday, February 4, 2010

Bon voyage "Maid of Mettle"

Yesterday morning there was a very (very) light easterly (0 to 5 knots), and Maid of Mettle set sail, no, started the engine, around 11am. Destination: the mainland. I hope they found some wind on the way and managed to get the sails up. But they wanted to take advantage of the calm water, and were ok with motoring all the way if necessary. It is interesting how different the priorities are among sailors. Chris and Caroline are mostly concerned about the wave heights, since they get seasick easily. I don't mind the waves (as long as they let me sail my course at all), but I get bored easily and flapping sails get on my nerves. So I prefer stronger winds, say 3 to 8 Bft. Great fun, plenty of work and you never get bored. Though with more than 6 Bft I prefer not to sail close to the wind if it can be helped. It does get uncomfortable, I'm not that tough. Then there is my friend Rolf, who doesn't mind the conditions or whether he is motoring or sailing, as long as the anchorage at the destination is safe and the beer is cold. And Arthur, who enjoys sailing fast, but is very careful when he plans a trip and wants every aspect covered. Planing a trip with him is like watching an artist while he prepares to paint a masterpiece. So after another look at the weather forecast I decided to stay here and wait some more. It wasn't easy seeing Maid of Mettle leave and stay behind. Especially as the wind picked up a little after noon. But then it turned west again in the afternoon. Then it dropped. Then for a while from the east again. Then no wind. Then rain ... I think it was a good idea to stay. Thinking about my trip so far, I really don't know why I hurried so much at all. It seemed like the right thing at the time. And yes, it was cold and I wanted to get south as fast as possible. But I think it was also because I was still in the same "hurry mode" in which I've been in since I started writing software for other people 15 years ago. And with all the stuff I had planned for my sabbatical I didn't get out of that mode after I left the company. So maybe there is a lesson for life in this for me after all. At least I will try to approach things a little calmer for a while. Even if this will add some more time to the voyage or change the route. For example, should I arrive too late on the Canaries for sailing to the Carribean (hurricane season), then I could simply wait until November or sail to Brazil instead. I've never been to South America before anyway, why not sail there?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:21

Monday, February 1. 2010

A day on Ibiza

Wayne and Cha. I have to write this down, because I'm sure that in a few weeks time I'll be asking myself what I've done on Ibiza while waiting for easterly winds. I got up shortly after eight. After a light breakfast and checking the weather forecast I went a little running. Wayne and Cha had an appointment at ten to get their boat lifted out of the water, and I checked whether I could be of help. No need, so I went on my way and bought a new mattress. After throwing out the old one I had a real breakfast at "Rita's Cantina" and read emails and news with their wifi network. I got to talk to the guys sitting next to me, and it turned out they were from Ravensburg. The "LÃfÃndle" is everywhere. After fiddling a little with my boat (there is always something to do) I went to the beach with Caroline, Pete and Chris. I tried their inflatable canoe in the bay, we played football, and sat a while in the sun. After a shower, a nap and some fruit I discussed with Chris the best place to install the iridium antenna on the "Maid of Mettle". Yesterday I had talked with Wayne about Rapid Prototyping, and I read some articles about the current state of the art, available products and prices. When the sun went down I switched on the XBox 360 to advance my "career" in Project Gotham Racing. Next I'll have a look what's happening in the "Willow Tree", and then I'm looking forward to making myself comfortable on my new mattress with a book until I fall asleep. Yes, life is good

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:20

Saturday, January 30. 2010

Life goes on

Vespina at her new mooring
Project Gotham Racing Pretty windy today
Bad news from Andr f  : One month after Arthur he had to give up too. He made it to Alicante, but his ketch got badly damaged several times (boom, rudder), and he doesn't feel safe anymore. Understandably. So "Vespina" and "Maid of Mettle" are the only ships now left from the ones that have started from Port-Saint-Louis-Du-Rhone. And "Maid of Mettle" is moored just 10m away from me, also waiting for better conditions. I changed my mooring the day before yesterday from my temporary place at the end of one of the outside pontoons to a permanent mooring on one of the inside pontoons. It is quieter here, which I just now appreciate very much. The wind is blowing from the West with 40 knots again. After pondering over the options and the weather for many days now, I have made the decision that I will stay here until the conditions are good to sail onward. Maybe Monday, maybe next week, maybe in a month. C'est la vie. Tranquilo. I could be motoring west, but where is the fun in that on a sailing boat? Exactly. Yesterday morning the British Embassy called me on behalf of the daughter of late Bob. She needs to come to the Island and wanted to know whether I could help her with the ship. Certainly. But the day before Eddie and I were talking about the ship, and Eddie had said that he would be glad to look out for it. And since he's more qualified for the job than I am and will stay around a few more months, I gave them Eddie's number. He called me later after a lengthy conversation with Bob's daughter. She was very glad that Bob had made friends here who had looked out for him. I can imagine it is somewhat comforting. And then yesterday "Mass Effect 2", a science fiction role playing game, was released for the XBox 360. I am a great fan of science fiction (with a strong emphasis on science), especially the works from the 60s. And now and then I still like to immerse myself into a computer game, especially Strategy, RPGs and Driving Simulations (my top three favorite games: Civilization, Fallout, Gran Turismo). Well ... a XBox 360 and a small HDMI flatscreen became the latest upgrades to Vespina. Along with a copy of "Mass Effect 2" and "Project Gotham Racing 4". Awesome! I'm looking forward to some split-screen racing tournaments on board of Vespina when the weather is not that great. Another interesting development is that the locals are starting to talk to me. I can only speculate how this change came upon them, but suddenly the guys from the marine come around and talk to me. The lady from the laundry knows my name. And the ship chandler is giving me rebates on my shopping. Weird, but nice.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 04:18

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

Caught in the spider's web.

Entangled stay and halyard. The new tiller pilot mountings are working very well. It was raining all morning, and I hadn't slept very well last night. No sense in starting the next trip already soaked and tired. But around 11 the weather cleared up. I said goodbye to Pete, Chris and Caroline from the Maid of Mettle and cast off. Yipieeh! Originally I had planned to set the self-tacking jib. I had it already out of the bag when I changed my mind and decided to go with the genoa instead. I'd be reaching after all. In order to use the genoa I need to remove the second forestay, usually a matter of a few minutes. Not today. The strong wind and rough sea whipped the forestay around the mast steps. I tried and tried but couldn't get it free again. And the sea was too rough to climb the mast (without really, really, really having to). But with the forestay around the mast-steps, I couldn't set the main sail. No main sail, no sailing. No trapped stays or halyards anymore. As Dad used to say: if it happens once, it'll happen twice. And if you fix it, do it right the first time. And right he was. So I turned around and headed back to the Club Nautic to free the forestay and tie lines down the edge of the mast steps. At least this way I found out that Bob did not drown yesterday. He died of a stroke before/when falling into the water. No water in the lungs. A friend of Dirk from the Guardia Civil had let the information slip. I feel somewhat relieved. A crack pot. I also found out what's wrong with the boat in the picture. It's genoa got unfurled in the storm that blew me here three weeks ago, and nobody has touched it since. I wondered why. The genoa is of course totally shredded by now. The reason is simple: The boat is a evidence in a case of drug smuggling, and nobody is allowed to go onboard while the case is not closed. I just hope the guy used his own boat and didn't charter it. My recommendation: Don't sail to Ibiza. Give it a wide berth. This place is a spider's web and will not let you go again. I've been told it's even worse in the summer. The weather forecast for tomorrow until Sunday is: Wind from the west. But there is a chance that it turns North on Monday. So there is still hope that I'll get away before the summer! Well, I was stuck in Port-Saint-Louis for three weeks too and survived. And Sant Antoni beats Port-Saint-Louis hands down, not only in regard to the weather.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 10:59

Tuesday, January 26. 2010

Bob / A Case for ladders

Yesterday evening around 8pm Eddie came to my boat to ask me whether I had seen Bob. Bob, a voyager from Bristol, is in his early sixties and arrived on Ibiza a few months ago. He had just started voyaging after leaving the British Navy (ex Harrier Jump-Jet pilot). I had seen Bob around 6pm, when he had left "The Willow Tree" with his grocery-shopping after a plenty (and then some) beers. He had wanted to go right back to his ship with his Dinghy before the wind got really strong. The ship is at anchor in the bay. Eddie had found Bob's shopping and the Dinghy on the Pontoon, but no sign of Bob. Eddie was worried. Bob might have met somebody and went for another beer, which had happened before. But drunk as he was he might also have fallen into the water. John had warned him many, many times. There are no ladders anywhere on the Pontoons here, and the only thing Bob could have done was hold on to his Dinghy or a line until somebody pulled him out. So we walked around the pontoons with the flash-light, shouting "Bob, Bob", and looking under the Pontoons etc. No sign of Bob. And Eddie hadn't seen anything floating in the water either when he came with his Dinghy. So a good sign? Before calling the police we went to "The Willow Tree" to see whether Bob had gone back or somebody else had seen him. Nobody had seen him. Everybody was a little worried, but said that calling the police was useless because they don't do anything before 24h are up. Many tourists disappear on Ibiza for a few hours and then pop up again. By looking for Bob we had done all we could do for the moment. Only a week ago Eddie had rescued Barry, who had fallen into the sea while heaving his shopping on his boat. Barry couldn't climb into his boat by himself despite a ladder, and he was lucky that Eddie saw him clinging onto it. Barry was less than half an hour in the water then and sober, but he was already too weak to talk and about to let go. It took him days to recover. By the time Eddie and I were done looking for Bob, three hours had passed since he had left "The Willow Tree". The water temperature was 13C. And Bob was thinner, older and weaker than Barry. And mighty drunk. He was either safe in a Bar, or already dead. Tomorrow would tell. Divers fished poor Bob out of the water this morning and put the stiff body on my Pontoon, just a few meters away from Vespina. I saw it and went over to see the Guardia Civil and tell them what I knew. They asked me to come to the station to give a report, they would organize an interpreter. It took a few hours and signatures. They were very friendly. They asked a lot of questions (Had I touched his Dinghy, had I called his name, what was in the shopping bags, ...). They didn't ask me why nobody had called them. They said it happens very often. Not only people drowning, but also falling from cliffs, out of windows, or even jumping. Not suicide, just craziness. Especially young British under the influence of drugs, or old British under the influence of alcohol. It seemed they stopped caring. And it seemed they were very relieved that they had a witness that was not drunk. But I don't feel great at all. We should have made a nuisance out of ourselves until they were looking, 24h-rule or not. In a way I understand it that they stopped caring about tourists. I can only imagine the crazy situations and people they have to deal with every day here on Ibiza. The island is not exactly known for especially sane and responsible visitors. And I don't think there was any chance to find Bob alive, and that he was already dead when Eddie and I went looking for him. But I don't think I'll be able to rest in the future until I'm dead sure. What I don't understand is that there are no ladders anywhere. What if, say, a child falls into the water. Of course you'd jump after it. But how would you get it out? Or yourself? The pontoons are too high to even reach their edge from the waterline. And the beach is a kilometer away across the bay. But before everybody gets worried: This is not going to happen to me, simply because while it's cold I'm staying at the Marinas and am not using my Dinghy at all. I haven't even put any air in it. And I don't get drunk. And I'm as strong and fat as a polar bear. At least. But what I will do anyway is upgrade the "ladder situation" on Vespina as soon as possible. At the moment I have an "emergency ladder" folded away in a little yellow bag with a string hanging out to the water surface. Pull the string and the ladder drops down. Not bad. But what I want after hearing the story about Barry is a big rigid (e.g. steel) ladder that drops deep into the water from the back of the boat. Not easy to do with the wind-vane and all the stuff at the back, but definitely worth putting the effort into it.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:28

Vespina 2.1

New mountings for the autopilot. The upgrades are completed! Through folks at "The Willow Tree" I got to talk to a guy named Alec on Sunday. He was confident that he could come up with the necessary spacer for the wind-vane quickly. I spent what seemed like an eternity making sure I got all measurements right, and then sat down on Sunday evening and made the appropriate technical drawings for Alec. We met Monday morning and just as promised by noon today I had my spacer. Very well done and at a fair price (42 EUR). In Nylon and not Inox, but that doesn't matter much. I put everything together and it fits very well. So the wind-vane is ready for a sea trial. While Alec was busy with the spacer I made two new cockpit-mountings for the autopilot out of 21mm marine plywood. And the tiller-side mounting I sawed, filed and bent out of a mighty steel door hinge which I found at a hardware store. One of the best things about a steel

boat like Vespina is that all you need is a clamp/vise to turn it into a big workshop. Add a power-drill, a hammer and a saw, and you can do almost anything. Half of today I was busy with other matters (more later), but in the afternoon I was back on the boat and now the mountings are painted and screwed onto the cockpit and the tiller. Also ready for a sea trial! Because I had so much time on my hands over the last weeks I did some other upgrades to Vespina: Added a proper socket to connect land-based electricity (instead of threading the cable of the drum through a hatch). Installed power outlets for the land-based electricity in the engine room and saloon. Replaced the silicone sealing for the huge saloon windows who had started to leak. Sanded and repainted all rusty spots. Inspected the main-sail and the genoa and repaired everything that looked suspicious. And re-arranged a lot of stuff in the lockers. Looks like everything is ready for the next part of the voyage. Finally! The weather forecast for tomorrow is not really great: NE force 6 with light showers and 8 to 10 degrees C. My plan is to leave Sant Antoni after dawn (and a hot shower) and test the autopilot and the wind-vane while heading west/north-west towards the exit of the bay. Sail some circles and see if the autopilot and the wind-vane work well enough. If either does and the conditions aren't too bad, I will probably make use of the NE winds while they last and head West. Yet another attempt to leave the island - third time's a charm, for sure! Otherwise I'll have to come back I'm afraid. I've met so many people here that came 2, 5, 10, 20 years ago for a week, and never left again. I had planned to stay three days, and now it's almost three weeks already! Maybe I'd better start looking for an apartment too .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:52

Sunday, January 24. 2010

Getting un-stuck

Things are not going as well as I had hoped. The wind-vane is not working yet (it turned out I need to replace more than just the cogwheel), and I have to decide now whether to leave Ibiza without a working wind-vane but with the current NE wind, or spend some more time on the wind-vane and risk being stuck until the wind is favorable again. Because I'm already late on my schedule, that might mean that I will not be able to cross the Atlantic this season anymore. On the other hand, I can't go on forever without some way of automated steering. The tiller-pilot is, as it is now, not able to handle the ship in the conditions I find at this time of year. I didn't worry about it much while I was crossing the Gulfs, because I was far away from land and popular shipping routes. So when I was tired, I could just drop the sails and sleep. In addition my trips were never longer than three days, and that is short enough to not need much sleep. But I need to increase the duration of my trips to gain more experience before leaving the Mediterranean and heading for the Canary islands. And I am also entering now areas with a lot more traffic, and I will be much closer to the coast than before. I was going to leave anyway, until Eddie talked some sense into me over breakfast this morning. And he is really right. Especially the incident with the storm has shown me that I now need to get all parts of the ship into a state where I can rely on them to work on pretty much any conditions. The alternative is to get a second person to sail with me. With a second pair of hands you can get away with a lot. But alone, you can't. I feel stuck. And I often find that the best way to get out of a sticky situation is: 1. Retrace your steps until you feel you are on safe ground again 2. Take stock 3. Ask yourself: What do I want to get out of it? Why am I doing this? What are the constraints? What are the variables? What are the risks? 4. Find out what decisions have to be taken now, and which ones can be delayed. 5. Make the decisions and update the plan. Ok, let's do it! 1. Retracing my steps I new from the beginning that the schedule was very tight and the chances of finishing the trip as planned far from 100%. I dealt with that by only doing the minimum necessary to safely reach the next milestone. I reached the milestones "Launch", "Mannheim", "Saone" and "Mediterranean" in very good time. The weather was exceptionally bad and I lost a lot of time on my way to the milestone "Gibraltar". 2. Taking stock I made some mistakes on the way but didn't do too bad overall. I feel safe and confident. I enjoy what I am doing. I am on Ibiza with a safe boat, good rigging, but no working automated steering. I need to leave the Canaries March 1st at the very latest if I want to cross this season. It will take me three to five weeks to reach the Canaries from Ibiza. Which gives me only one more week on Ibiza. My funds will last until November. The winds for going to Gibraltar are favorable until Saturday, with the risk of a very uncomfortable storm on Tuesday. 3. Motives, Constraints, Risks What: I want to cross the Atlantic. Why: I am doing this for myself to become a better sailor. Constraints: Sail alone. Use the engine only in emergencies. Limited funds, approx. until November. I believe that I need automated steering, and I need time to get acquainted with it thoroughly before leaving the Mediterranean. Variables: Time and funds. I don't need to cross the Atlantic this season, I can do it as well next December/January. I am confident that I can extend my funds over the summer if I need to. Risks: If I start to do something else, especially in a new business environment, I might like it more than voyaging and I might not complete this voyage. 4. Identify decisions Have to be taken now: How much do I want to do this single-handedly? Am I willing to risk the ship and possibly my health more than risk not finishing the voyage this season? Have to be taken within the next two days: Do I leave with or without a working wind-vane? Can be taken later: All others 5. Think & decide Thoughts: The easiest solution would be to take somebody else on board, and four people have already offered their help. But after "listening to my heart" I found that doing this trip alone is really very important to me, even if it is a little thick-headed. So: no. Regarding the risks, I don't mind bad weather and being uncomfortable, but I am not willing to risk more than necessary to make the voyage this season. Decisions: I will ask some people here for help with the wind-vane and will continue to work on it. I will also look into the tiller-pilot. By increasing the leverage on the tiller it might be possible to make it work in rougher weather than now. If I get either to work until Monday evening I will leave. Hm, I guess that's it for now. The voyage as planned is not yet impossible, but it's dangling on a string. Looking back I think I've always done what seemed like the best choice at the time, and so I'll be happy no matter how it turns out. I'm definitely a better sailor already than I was in October. Back to work now! Oh what an awesome trip! I just love big challenges

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:40

Friday, January 22. 2010

Another attempt to leave Ibiza

Deserted IbizaDirk & EddieDirk's Trimaran John, owner of "The Willow Tree".EddieChristine & Bill My time on Ibiza is coming to an end. Or so I hope . The weather forecast predicts easterly winds for Saturday, changing to NE on Sunday and staying there for a couple of days. Perfect to head SW, so it should work out this time. I really like the Island. But despite having toured the whole city of Sant Antoni in search for other voyagers, I hadn't found any. Pretty boring. However, I noticed that almost daily a guy with a scottish beanie-hat would pass Vespina with his Dinghy on his way to the Pontoon. So there had to be at least one other boatie! I resolved to wave him over next time I saw him. But I always noticed him too late. Same story Thursday: I heard the engine, but by the time I was out of the boat he was already past. But I was determined not to leave Ibiza without having met at least one other voyager. So I ran after him, yelled out and caught up with him. This is how I met Eddie. And what a nice guy! He took me with him to the "The Willow Tree" for a few beers, where we met up with other voyagers. I mentioned that I had planned to rent a car on Friday to go to Ibiza city for a particular screw, and asked whether I could help anybody out with the car while I had it. Eddie was certain that we could find the screw on his or Dirks's boat as well, and that there was no need to go to Ibiza. To cut a long story short - we met in the morning for breakfast and then chased around the bay and the town for most of the day in search of the screw. Without finding it of course. Which doesn't matter at all, because I met some wonderful people. Eddie for one, who maintains the biggest sailing catamaran I've ever seen. Made by a Hungarian on his own - hull & all - over the course of 25 years. They want to circle the world, but are staying in Ibiza over the winter while Eddie is recovering from an accident. Dirk, who lives on a Trimaran the size of a small island. The Trimaran was made by an ex Tank-Commander, and certainly looks like it. Right out of Waterworld - Kevin Costner would be jealous! Bill & Christine, both 75, who have been living on a tiny racing-Catamaran in the bay for the last 13 years. Extraordinarily good-natured folks. Carlos, who's motor-boat has two tank-engines complete with dual turbo-chargers each. Probably the most over-powered boat on the island. He rents it out to swingers only, because they make no trouble. And last but not least John, who owns "The Willow Tree" and is the first bar owner ever to have given me a free beer. Thanks John! I had a great time with them, and I'll just go to Ibiza city tomorrow morning and leave the island a few hours later. Or a day, it doesn't really matter. It's really sad that I've met them now that I'm about to leave. But as Dirk told me: "You have been quite observed. But you were never on your boat, so how should we have met you?". And right he is. Next place I go I guess I'll just have to stay on my boat for two days and wave at everybody that passes Vespina, or make a round trip myself in the rubber dinghy. The problem is, I don't like rubber dinghies with their noisy outboard-engines at all. And they're hard to row. I'll keep my eyes open for an affordable inflatable canoe.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:44

Wednesday, January 20, 2010

Playing hide & seek with DHL [Updated]

I am still waiting for the new cogwheel for my wind-vane. Neptun snatched the old one from me while I wasn't looking. I hope the fellow is having fun with it. My brother ordered the cogwheel in Germany and had it send by DHL ahead to Cartagena, where I had wanted to arrive last week Friday. My reasoning was that sending it to Cartagene would be faster then to Ibiza, and that I will get there with the help of the tiller-pilot. But it didn't work out with the wind as I've already written. And it didn't work out with the tiller-pilot either. The casing became very hot while sailing and I was worried that the strain of the strong wind and big waves were be too much and I turned it off. And returned to Ibiza. The weather forecast made it clear that I'll have to spend another week on Ibiza, and so we placed a new order last Thursday to have the cogweel picked up in Cartagena and send it to Ibiza. My friend Regina was so kind to talk to the Club in Cartagena and explain everything. So far so good. The packet should have arrived on Monday, but it never did. Today I found out what had happened: The courier from DHL was faster than the fax from Germany with the new labels. So the packet was picked up in Cartagena with the old labels still on, instead of the new ones! Not good. So I called DHL. Same story as before: Recorded spanish voice instructing me to do things to the telephone which I didn't understand. I hoped that if I just hang on long enough, I will eventually get some real person on the line. That worked, and she did not only speak english, but was very understanding and helpful too. I supplied the old and the new tracking number, and after a lot of typing she gave me a new processing number. She said that the packet is probably in Palma now and that Marina from the back-office there will call me back under my cellphone number as soon as they have found the packet. That is more than I had expected. So now I'm waiting for dear Marina to call me. Can't remember last time I was so excited about a phone call from an unknown lady. Wednesday 17:45 Update I am very impressed with DHL. They called me twice today to update me on what's happening. The packet was found in Murcia, on it's way back to where it was picked up. They printed new documents and the packet is now addressed to it's correct delivery address on Ibiza and will leave Murcia tomorrow morning at the latest. Considering that this is all not DHL's fault, I think they went to a lot of trouble to make me little customer happy. But the packet is not here yet, so I'll keep my fingers crossed for a little while longer. Thursday 16:00 Update The packet has arrived! Thanks DHL, you have a new customer for live!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:26

Saturday, January 16. 2010

News from Andr f  

Andr f   Yesterday I got a text message from Andr f   after not hearing from him for a while. He had left Port-Saint-Louis-Du-Rhone one day after me, also with the goal to cross the Atlantic. Last time we talked was on New Years day. He was then in Barcelona and wanted to sail to Mallorca the following day. Andr f   is a Biologist who worked on the Galapagos islands for three years. His plan it to sail to the Carribbean with friends, and then onto the Galapagos with his girl-friend and their three kids and spent some years there. Looks like he liked it there . But unfortunately things didn't work out for him too well either. He only arrived on Mallorca this Wednesday, with a broken boom. What a bad luck! I had hoped that with his bigger & abler ship (a 47 foot Ketch) and a crew of three he would be long past Gibraltar, and not stuck here like I am. Now it's me that's ahead, crazy. But I'm confident that once he got the spart parts and the damage is repaired he will fly southwest and reach the Canaries in good time. Talking about spare parts. The gearwheel for my wind-vane is in the mail and supposed to arrive here on Monday. I had it sent ahead to Cartagena, but since I couldn't sail there I decided to have it picked up again and sent here instead. Not oo smart, I know. Thanks again Ralf and Regina for your help!

Posted by Axel Busch at 05:55

Friday, January 15. 2010

Exploring Ibiza

Today it's one week since I'm here, and after my failed attempt to leave to Island on Tuesday I have nothing to do but to wait for the wind to change. Not something I'm incredibly good at yet After only a day hanging around on the boat reading and studying I got pretty bored. At sea this is not a problem, because there is always so much to do, the attitude is different, there is progress, and somehow the sea provides enough distractions by itself. But here it seems the whole Island is shut down for maintenance. All hotels closed, all bars boarded up, no activities available, and very few people around. Thursday morning I decided that "this can't go on". I hired a car to explore the Island, since I might as well see something from Ibiza while I'm here. What a splendid idea! As it turned out, the whole Island is one big scenic Kart-track. The streets are all in excellent condition, winding their way up & around little hills and along the coast. Plenty of sharp bends, no traffic, beautiful scenery, and every few kilometers another empty beach to stop at and look at the sea longingly. Because the Island is so small, I estimate that after two days I've covered about 60% of the roads and about 30% of the beaches. At least . My absolute favorite was what I call the "Sant Joan - Portinatx circui"t in the North-East of the island: On a one-lane country road from the eastern end of Sant Joan across the hills to Portinatx, then a sharp left turn and back on the brand-new two-lane street along the coast. Absolutely thrilling. I want this road in the next edition of "Hot Pursuit" or "Gran Turismo"! Hmmm ... surely they rent out motorbikes somewhere on this Island?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:21

Tuesday, January 12. 2010

Worth a try.

Well, I didn't get very far . After leaving the harbor of San Antonio I set sail, and half a mile later I had to set the small jib, because the wind was already blowing with 24knots. For a few hours I fiddled with the sail area, the sheets and the traveller, but I didn't manage a better course over ground than 320°/170°. That wouldn't even get me around the Isla Conejera to the west of San Antonio! Looks like Vespina doesn't like it very close to the wind, and so I couldn't go for Cartagena, or even another port on the spanish main as I had hoped. I fear it's partly due to the bilge keel design of the Reinke Yachts, and partly because the jib hangs so high above the deck. This is aerodynamically not optimal, because it allows air to pass from one side of the sail to the other, instead of along the sail to the back. Ideal would be a jib that almost touches the deck. But then again it might also simply be that I'm a horrible sailor . Be it one way or the other - I returned to the harbor, with the memory of a nice day-sail of 20nm, top speed 6.5kn close hauled with the smallest sail area I have. All I can do now is hang around on Ibiza until the wind changes out of it's current S/SW/W-fixation. Which is supposed to happen on Friday. Of course with another mighty storm, haha! What else . This is the Med in the winter! On the positive side, this gives me time to work on my horrible Spanish!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:50

To Cartagena

Cartagena's history goes back to 228BC, when it was founded as "Carthago Nova" by the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal. It is a walled town and has a fine harbor defended by forts. It is still an important naval sea port, and the main military haven of Spain. I'm looking forward to some sightseeing! But first I have to get there. The NAVTEX weather forecast for today reads: ISSUED BY AEMET AT 120530 UTC JAN 10 BALEARES: W/SW 3/4 INCREASING SW 5/6 BY AFTERNOON, LOCALLY W 7 AT END. SMOOTH INCREASING SLIGHT OR MODERATE. SHOWERS BY AFTERNOON CABRERA: WESTERLY 3/4 INCREASING SW 5/6 BY AFTERNOON AND 7 AT END. SMOOTH OR SLIGHT INCREASING SLIGHT OR MODERATE AND ROUGH AT END. SHOWERS AT END In general the forecast for this week has been relatively consistent. Tuesday: Dominantly SW, force 4-7, Wednesday: Dominantly W, force 1-4, Thursday: Dominantly SW, force 3-8 Friday: Dominantly N, force 3-7. So I can expect quite some wind again, nothing new there. The direct route to Cartagena is about 160nm, mostly towards SW. That means that I will log significantly over 200nm by the time I arrive, because I cannot sail the direct route with a dominantly W/SW Wind. I hope to arrive Thursday afternoon, before the gale. A forecast of force 8 usually means peaks of force 10, and I don't really want to be caught in that again. In case I shouldn't be able to pass the Cabo de Palos by Thursday morning, I will probably head for the Mar Menor to the north-east.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:12

Monday, January 11. 2010

Lament for my iPhone

My iPhone 3GS is dead. The one wave that got inside when I climbed out of the ship drowned it. Afterwards it greeted me with the message "This external application is not meant to work with iPhone". Did it mean the wave, or me? Then the screen flickered, and now it's all white. A whiteout, if you excuse the pun. Now that I'm a few days without it, I realize how useful the little bugger actually was. I am considering a sea funeral with all honors. Here are a few things that suddenly got a lot harder. Instead of simply looking into my palm where I stand, I have to sit down somewhere and start up the laptop: Chart-Plotter The iPhone has a compass and GPS receiver in-built. For 20 EUR I bought the complete offline set of electronic marine charts for Western Europe and the Canary Islands from Navionics. Great for Route-Planning and entering an anchorage. Easier to handle than the Laptop or the little Garmin. On the Laptop I use "OziExplorer". Email & Blogging The iPhone allowed me to update my blog easily with whatever network connection was available - GSM, EDGE, UMTS or WiFi. With a regular keyboard I type about 500 characters per minute. With the iPhone still 200! More than with any hand-held device I've known. Weather-Station Weather reports and forecasts complete with wind- and wave-maps for the desired area. Skype! Talk to my friends for cheap. Knowledge database: Offline Versions of the German and English Wikipedia and a searchable version of the CIA World Factbook. Translator and Trainer: Offline translation programs and dictionaries for English, Spanish and French. And language courses for French and Spanish. And visual dictionaries. Cookbook Lots of little Apps with recipes. Naturschutzbund VogelfÃfÃ¼hrer: A great little application to identify birds. From the German Nature Conservation Fund. Music Player Cheered me up with my favorite music without having to wear headphones, which I don't like. Unfortunately a new iPhone is not something I had planned for in my budget. But I can't go without a phone, so after a weekend of considerations I went to a store today. I decided for a Nokia 5530, which is "only" one-third of the price of my iPhone. It has everything except the GPS, but there are no marine charts for Symbian phones anyway. The touch-screen with handwriting is surprisingly good, too. But the Nokia online application store (Ovi) still has way to go, so I searched the internet and found and downloaded Skype and some Dictionaries. I also bought "Handy Weather" with a one-year plan for 19\$. Unfortunately there is no offline wikipedia or other useful encyclopedia, so I installed "WikiTaxi" on my Laptop and downloaded a German wikipedia dump. Works well enough!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:31

Saturday, January 9. 2010

Video from the trip to Ibiza

I started keeping a video diary, because it's the easiest way to keep track of what is happening. I've compiled a short movie of the trip from MatarÃ³ to Ibiza. The camera work needs some improvement. I'll guess it's best if I install a fixed mounting somewhere. Fortunately the little Lumix is waterproof . Enjoy! After that first wave there were many others, and I was too busy to record the rest of the trip.

Posted by Axel Busch at 14:20

Friday, January 8, 2010

An extreme experience

Barcelona At night. At five this morning I arrived in Sant Antoni de Portmany. Now, after a few hours of sleep, a hot shower and lunch I am slowly beginning to recover from the events of last night.

Until 12nm to the north of Sant Antoni everything went pretty much according to plan. All of Tuesday the NE winds carried me quickly SSW across the Golfe de Valencia to the east of Mallorca. With NE Wind of force 6 and big waves coming up directly from behind it was hard work on the tiller and required my full attention and concentration. But I like going fast, and hoped to set a new personal noon-to-noon record (etmal). It didn't quite work out (only 105 nm), because the wind dropped to nothing in the night. The following 24 hours were a little frustrating at first because Vespina was swinging left and right in the old swell. But after a few hours I settled into the "The journey is the reward" mentality and began to enjoy the solitude on the water nevertheless. I also had time to sleep and to replace the mounting of the tiller-pilot, which had broken down completely. The wood had rotted away. The following trip to the north-west corner of Ibiza was one of the best of the whole journey, although it rained heavily. But since the tiller-pilot was doing the work in the cockpit now, I had - for the first time on my whole voyage - the luxury to comfortably stay inside, watch the world, and cook and read a little. What a difference from sitting at the tiller all day!

Upon reaching Ibiza the wind changed from NE to S, and I made my way well clear of the coastline SW to the NE corner. When night fell I was tempted to steer a more SSW course in order to get to my destination faster. But I remembered that I must have had good reasons when I planned the route as I did, and decided that being hungry, tired and impatient disqualified me from making any last-minute course adjustments. Which proved to be one of the wisest decisions of my life.

At midnight on Thursday, after 38 hours at sea, I reached my waypoint for heading S into the bay of Sant Antoni. At this time the wind changed from a moderate S force 4 to a W force 6. My exhilaration about not having to tack south was quickly replaced with concern as the wind speed increased dramatically. Within minutes the anemometer read 45kn - Bft 10. I quickly dropped all sails and was about to set the storm-jib, when the howling increased even further. Wind speed 56kn - Bft 11! And that in the cockpit, barely showing above the waves. How much more at 10m height? Interesting.

I quickly dropped the idea of setting any sail. Even without sails, Vespina was lying 30 degrees in the water. Occasional floodings of the cockpit from the lee, and waves coming over from windward provided further entertainment. At that wind speed, the hull, mast and boom alone are a lot of "sail" area in the wind. So I hoped that I could set a course that would keep me clear of the coast. Unfortunately the waves were still coming big from NE, and the only directions I could go were SW to SE - the exact angle covered by the rocky north coast of Ibiza. No luck today!

But overall the situation wasn't too bad. The water, though 10C cold, drained as quickly from the cockpit as it got in, and I had at least eight hours before the wind would push me to the shore. No storm had lasted that long so far. I talked to Palma radio for a weather forecast. The question was: will the wind speed drop below 40kn within the next six hours? The answer came fast and clear: The situation is very bad. Storm expected to last until Sunday. Start your engine and get out of there, or we send a tug.

When I got back up into the cockpit, a wave greeted me in the face and flushed water down the stairs. That settled it. I checked that no lines were hanging over board, that the day-tank had enough fuel, and that the engine and propeller-shaft were clear of any thrown-about items. The good old trusty Mercedes Diesel started immediately and I turned SSW to cover the 12 nm to Sant Antoni. This time I was thankful that the waves were coming from NE, pretty straight from behind. I managed to keep Vespina pretty upright most of the time, but it was a fight at the tiller.

It was cold too, 5C, and my hands locked into a permanent claw. I couldn't operate the GPS anymore to look at the map. But I had memorized the paper map of the bay and harbor entrance, and knew that I'd be safe on my current heading. When I reached the harbor at five in the morning I was exhausted. It was utterly dark, and I almost ran into a boat at anchor in the harbor, unlit of course. It turned out there were plenty of boats at anchor and moorings, and I didn't want to practice my first single-handed anchoring maneuver at night, exhausted, with an incredibly strong wind. So I made my way to the marina and docked at a pontoon.

I was lucky because two security guards came along and helped me with the ropes. They weren't too happy to see me though, because I hadn't called in advance. Now how come I hadn't thought of that. But they let me stay provided that I

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check in at the office at 9am sharp.

Retrospective: That a depression of that severity caught me only two hours out from the safe harbor was unlucky. Or lucky, it could have happened earlier. But attentiveness, careful route planning, a strong & safe boat, and a little luck at the right time (the guards) helped me to see it through. However, it was an extreme experience and it is easy to despair in such a situation, lose the head and make a wrong, possibly fatal decision. What helped me most of all was the knowledge that you, my friends, were with me and thinking of me. Thank you so much! Other than bruised knees and arms I'm unhurt, and the boat is a little wet inside but no other damage.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 06:37

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Wednesday, January 6, 2010

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

sigh, all movement is an illusion. good night.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:07

SMS from 881631634938@msg.iridium.com

finally! after 4 hours of dead calm i'm moving again . eta: +60 hours

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:19

Tuesday, January 5, 2010

Heading South

Illes Medes south of La Escala I managed to get all spare parts yesterday and complete the repairs, except for the wind-vane. Upon hearing that I lost the cogwheel, Ulrich, who built the wind-vane, searched his papers for the specifications and was able to supply me with the item number. I called the company in Germany to order the wheel. But the lady said she couldn't understand me very well on the phone. I said I'm sorry, but I'm at a marina in Spain and we'll have to manage somehow. She said I should call again when I'm back home. So I called my brother Ralf, and he ordered the cogwheel for me. Thanks bro! Whatever happened to customer service in Germany? I know what happened: it moved to Spain. The shiphandler here didn't have enough anchor chain (8mm, 50m). Because most of the suppliers are still on vacation, it took him 30 minutes on the phone to reach one that had enough chain. So tomorrow - mañana - might be possible. Well, we've all heard the stories about "mañana", right? But what could I do, so I ordered. The same afternoon I hear a knock on my boat, look up, and there is the guy with his son and the chain! Not mañana, but hoy! Muy rapido, unbelievable. So all repairs are done and the grab bag is packed. The weather forecast promises N 3-5, with thundery rain and showers. Sounds perfect for going to Ibiza.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:34

Sunday, January 3, 2010

Lessons learned / damage report

After only a few days out at sea I begin to understand just how sheltered my journey on the rivers has been. I realize how different voyaging alone in an aging steel sailboat is from charter-sailing with friends on the latest well-maintained and well-equipped plastic cruisers. It's not just adding a little paint here and there. Everything is so much more work and has to be planned and looked after carefully. In the last days I have faced more challenges, made more mistakes, broke more equipment and hurt myself much more than in all the 15 years of charter sailing. How arrogant of me to have considered myself a sailor. The learning curve that I have to climb if I want to complete this undertaking is very steep. As a result progress is slower than anticipated, because there is so much to learn and work to do. And of course apart from sailing and maintaining Vespina there are also all the other things in life: shopping, cooking, washing, cleaning, and blogging . No doubt - I love it! And it's not that I'm a total failure either, I think. All the regular maneuvers are like out of the textbook. I weathered the gale very well, haven't rammed anything, and haven't made navigational errors or many other mistakes. But I have also had some very sobering experiences. Here are the confessions of a would-be sailor: #1: The twisted ankle It happened during my first week in Port-Saint-Louis, when I was working on the rigging in strong winds. I jumped from the boat to the quay, but in the air a sudden gust pushed me in the back and I twisted my ankle when I landed. It wasn't the first time that I twisted an ankle, and from the pain I knew that the tendons were at least partially torn. I had to avoid a huge swelling immediately or I wouldn't be able to walk/work for a week. So I hopped into my bunk, applied cooling-gel, took anti-inflammatories, stuck the foot up to the roof and waited for the rest of the day. Next day there was a big bruise, but the swelling was not too bad. I bandaged it and could go back to work carefully. Three weeks later the ankle is as good as new again. Lesson learned: No stunts! #2: The lost anchor Yes, I've lost an anchor. And 50m of chain. How embarrassing! The anchor was tied tightly, as I had of course checked before leaving. But the rope was old, and it must have broken when the big waves swept over the deck in the gale. Then one of them must have lifted the anchor out of it's mounting and the chain from the winch. Within seconds everything was gone. Good that I brought two more 20kg anchors. Lesson learned: Replace all old strings with new ones. Check everything thoroughly every time with the hands. #3: The entangled propeller The usual way to dock here is with the bow or stern to the quay and mooring lines at the other end. Small lines lead from the mooring lines to the quay, so that you can get the mooring lines up. Because I've got the wind vane and other stuff at the back, I dock with the bow to the quay. When I leave the berth, I have to make sure that the mooring lines are well clear of the propeller. I did, and they were lying on the ground. So I engaged the propeller and ... thud! Engine out. Sigh . The diver from the marina told me later: A small line that connects the two mooring lines had layed itself over the propeller shaft and got wrapped around it when I had engaged the propeller. Happens often, no worry. Well, it worries me, because I had looked and hadn't seen the dirty line in the murky water. Very embarrassing again. Lesson learned: Docking with the stern is safer. Don't trust your eyes. Fish with the boat hook for any lines. #4: Wind-vane minus cog equals dead weight Vespina is equipped with a home-made wind-vane for self-steering, but I hadn't managed to get it to work yet. As a result I can't leave the tiller, and I have to lay-to every time I have to leave the cockpit to eat, pee, change sails, reef, etc or do it really fast. On my journey from La Escala I looked into the wind-vane and found the problem in the mis-aligned water-vane. To set it right, I had to undo the screw that fastens a cog to the axis of the vane, align the vane, and tighten the screw again. But the wind was too strong for a test run, and so I left it with that until later. When I wanted to lower the water-vane into the water yesterday I realized that the cog was gone. Obviously I hadn't tightened the screw enough. I guess finding a new set of cogs for the self-made wind-vane will be a major problem. Lesson learned: Don't tinker with the gear at sea. Maintenance is for the anchorage. At sea only emergency repairs. #5: The lost spanner Vespina has a second forestay for the self-tacking jibs. The stay is fastened with a hook to the mounting on the boat and tightened by a spanner between hook and stay. When I want to use the genoa, I loosen the spanner, unhook the stay and tie everything to the mast. I was tired after a night sailing against the wind, close to port, and must have not retightened the spanner carefully enough. It worked itself loose and suddenly ... clong! ... spanner gone. Now I have to get a new spanner before I can use the jibs again. This includes the storm-jib, so basically I'm stuck for security reasons until I get a new spanner. The shipchandler in Arenys de Mar didn't have one big enough. Let's hope I can get one in my current location, Mataro, on Monday morning. Lesson learned: sloppy work is inexcusable, no matter how tired I am or how close the next port ist. #6: Flying battens The main sail is ok, but a little old and baggy. I can't quite get enough tension on the leech (Achterliek), and as a result it flaps when sailing close-hauled. In the gale that flapping caused some of the battens to work themselves out of their pockets, and in the night I saw it too late. Before I could drop the sail to stuff them back in three went flying away. That didn't help with the shape at all, and it flapped even more. Now I have to repair a couple of small tears in the main sail. Lesson learned: I have to watch out for my sails more in the future. It might be necessary to replace the main sail. #7: Not quite Barcelona On Tuesday, Dec 29th, I was in La Escala. 65nm to the NE from Barcelona, where my friends met to celebrate the New Year. Naturally I wanted to join them for the 31st, and the weather forecast was favorable. So I told them I would be coming, and left noon on the 30th. The fact that the life guard just escorted another sailing boat into the

harbor didn't scare me, and as I was sailing south towards Cabo San Sebastian with 7.8kn my spirits were sky high. But when I passed the cape it became clear that the predicted light S wind wouldn't happen that night. Instead a stiff SW was blowing into my face with 25kn, and despite all the trimming and fiddling I made only very little progress towards my destination. As Thursday morning broke, I had 95nm on my log, but I was still 35nm out from Barcelona as the bird flies. I realized with frustration that instead of fighting against the wind to get half-way to Barcelona, I could have made it to Menorca in the time. That would have brought me ahead in my voyage a big deal. And I wouldn't have been as tired and frustrated. And probably wouldn't have lost the spanner and the wind-vane cog either. Lesson learned: The route can't be forced with the gear I have. Accept that the wind determines the direction and take it easy. Personal preferences come second place. Not exactly a list of triumphs. Especially that I've lost the use of the wind-vane worries me, because the tiller-pilot hasn't proved to be very reliable so far, and lashing the tiller also only worked well when sailing close-hauled. So after having spent a two-days vacation in Barcelona with my friends, I now have to put in some extra maintenance hours today and Monday before I can leave for Ibiza. But overall I'm quite happy. After I bought Vespina in September my strategy was always to get going as quickly as possible. Everything that is not absolutely necessary for the start I would learn and finish step by step on the way. It is the same iterative (agile) approach that worked very well in my professional life in many small and large software projects. It helps focussing on the essentials and keeps the budget low. I think it can also be applied to voyaging.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:12

Saturday, January 2. 2010

SPOT messenger rules

I hadn't realized that anybody but my closest friends would follow my voyage. Or would be worried about me. So I hadn't put much thought to not checking in with SPOT when I got stressed getting to Barcelona. But of course established rituals and publicity bring obligations. So following the episode with the Meschkat family, who got worried when I hadn't checked in (I'm so sorry. You are wonderful people!), I set myself the following SPOT rules, effective as of now: - I will check in every day around noon (local time) - I will check in every time I leave or enter a harbor/anchorage - I will post an entry to the blog if for some reasons I cannot check in

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:36

Everything ok!

New Years in Barcelona Neil and Kym visiting. Sorry for being out of touch for a little while. There was some foul weather Wednesday/Thursday as I was making my way towards Barcelona to meet friends for New Years. I was running late and when got to Arenyas de Mar I had to stop at the Marina and take the next train to Barcelona to be in time for the dinner reservation. It was hectic and I forgot to check in with my SPOT messenger. Sorry again. And thanks for caring! Now I'm back on Vespina and am getting ready to sail to Ibiza. I had some damage though, and have to wait for the shipchandlers to open on Monday again to get spare parts. Everybody's on vacation since Christmas.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 10:11

Tuesday, December 29, 2009

Maiden Voyage

Arthur in his 7m l'ImprÃ©vu. Approaching the Spanish coast after 30 hours. What a trip! I set sail on Sunday at 9am, and 20 minutes later, before I've even left the relative shelter of the industrial harbor I had the mainsail on second reef and the genoa furled mostly in. Arthur had left the shipyard half an hour before me. At 2pm I saw him coming the other way. Over radio he told me that the waves outside of the Golfe Du Fos were too big and he was afraid for his boat and the new rigging. I decided to continue on. Later I measured 25kn wind from NW in the cockpit (6 Bft), and I furled the Genoa away completely and set the self-tacking jib. I had no luck with the tiller-autopilot: a wave ripped it's wooden mounting to pieces. I also couldn't get the wind vane to work. So I trimmed the sails until Vespina held more-or-less course with a lashed rudder. Around 8pm the wind dropped to about 4 Bft and I slept for half an hour sitting in the cockpit. Then it was back to work, because the wind began to change frequently up and down the scale, and I was busy reefing and unreefing the main and changing from Genoa to jib to storm-jib and back. With a rough sea (5) balancing on the foredeck in the dark was not very easy, but a cloudless night and almost full moon shone enough light to work with. Needless to say that I was tied to Vespina with my life line at all times. Around 3am the wind changed to S, and in the distance I could see that it brought plenty of clouds. At the time I had the mainsail in the first reef and the genoa furled mostly out. But I had a funny feeling, and decided to put the main into the second reef, furl in the genoa and set the storm-jib. I also doubled-checked that everything was ok and secure inside. Then I ate and drank a little, changed into my warmest jacket, and waited. A little later it became utterly dark and the wind and waves increased very quickly. Vespina was rocked thoroughly and plenty of spray was blown into the cockpit from the sides. I was glad for the shelter that the steel sprayhood provided from the froth that swept over the deck. Earlier I had seen lights of cargo vessels a few miles away to the south and west, but now I couldn't make them out any more. Not being able to see worried me a little, and I turned on the working light, which bathed the deck and the foresail in a harsh light. This way at least other boats had a chance to see me. By this time it was 5am. I realized that I had done everything I could do, and now there was nothing left but to wait it out. For a while I watched the spectacle that happened around me. From the sea state the wind speed must have been well over 30kn, probably a low 8 Bft. I looked at my hand-anemometer, but I was too tired to hold it into the air and so can't say for sure. I felt very secure tied to Vespina, and anyway 8 Bft is pretty uncomfortable, but not something to worry too much about on a ship like Vespina. So I wedged myself tighter into the cockpit, set my alarm to 30 minutes and slept. After 30 minutes I had a look around, but the scenery hadn't changed much: very dark and plenty of water in the sea and in the air. I slept for another 30 minutes, and another ... until when I woke up at 7:30am the night was gone and with it the clouds and the wind. I had just spent my first night ever alone at sea. For half an hour I sat totally mesmerized by the scenery. No sign of land or other ships could be seen. The sun shone, the sky was blue and almost cloudless again, and nothing remained but a pretty rough sea (which annoyed me until well into the afternoon). After a total of 36 hours and 120nm I reached the marina of La Escala at 9pm on Monday night. After docking and checking Vespina over quickly (a little water in the bilge, but everything ok) I prepared my first hot meal in two days. Then I crawled into my sleeping bag and slept for ten hours .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 11:33

Sunday, December 27. 2009

To Spain!

Finally a decent weather forecast for the next 24 hours: Winds 2 to 5 Bft veering from NW to S, a moderate sea and only little rain with reasonable visibility. So today I will finally set sail for Spain, with destination La Escala. I hope to do the 120nm in 25 to 30 hours. I've downloaded the maps regarding wind, waves and precipitation for the Golfe Du Lion from weatheronline.co.uk, and it should just be possible with some safety margin before the wind turns to a strong SW for the rest of the week and I'd be stuck here even longer. For the last week Arthur and I have been sitting daily over the weather forecast and the map. We are both longing to be gone from Port Saint Louis Du Rhone. Arthur even more than I, because he has been waiting for an opportunity for three weeks now. Because of the weather I'm now already one month behind the optimistic schedule. But I knew that the first months would be the hardest and most unreliable ones in terms of planning of the whole trip, especially crossing the Golfe Du Lion. And rushing it means accepting unreasonable risks at this time of year. But I'm still one month ahead of the pessimistic schedule. I'll just have to see how today will go, and how fast I can then make it to Gibraltar. I thank you all for your kind XMas wishes. In case you wondered, I spent XMas mostly working on Vespina (additional bilge pump, gas alarm, external iridium antenna, radar connected but not working, tiller extension fitted) and reading about storm tactics. I also slept a lot.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:32

Wednesday, December 23, 2009

Adventures in the Golfe de Fos

The weather forecast for yesterday read: "S 4 to 6, locational 7. Gusts. Moderate or rough. Locational very rough." Not too bad. But Arthur and Andr   warned me that "locational" would include our location, the Golfe de Fos, because it opens to the south and is very shallow. But because I've never sailed here, I couldn't help wondering what "very rough" meant exactly. I also believe that it makes sense to learn what Vespina and I can take as early in my journey as possible, and as long as there is still help close by. So I decided to find out. I started the engine and motored first towards the east out of the canal, then keeping clear of the traffic separation scheme I turned directly south past the huge ocean going freighters at anchor, where I wanted to set sail and head east for Marseille. It was indeed rough going directly against the short and steep waves from the beginning. But Vespina handled them very well, and feeling secure I had quite some fun. But as I got more south the waves became longer and higher, and I began to wonder whether turning 90 degrees and having them coming from the side would still be fun, or even save. Moments later a wave stopped me, turned me around, and pushed me almost flat onto the side. Question answered. After four more times I very much doubted that I had stored away everything securely enough, especially the two heavy spare anchors. But it was also obvious that leaving the Golfe de Fos in these conditions would be absolutely impossible. I would have to wait for northerly winds, NW ideally. So I turned around and headed back to where I came from, surfing down the waves this time. Yeah. Checking the hold later I was happy to find everything just where I had tied it down, especially the anchors. But I will have to do something with the mast for the generator and radar, it was swinging like crazy in the wind. The southerly winds will prevail over the next few days, so I will have to spent Christmas in the harbor and not at sea, as I had hoped. But there is a chance for NW winds on Friday, which means I can hopefully leave Saturday.

Posted by Axel Busch at 08:57

Sunday, December 20, 2009

SecuritÃfÂ© SecuritÃfÂ© SecuritÃfÂ© ...

.... is all I hear on the radio these days. Gale warnings. Reefed mainsail. I've attached the reefing lines permanently to the bottom of the boom. Last night has been the worst yet. 10 Bft wind, a very rough sea even in the harbor here, and temperatures well below zero. Vespina was shaking so violently that I was afraid the mooring lines would break (all six of them) and I got up several times to check them. One had broken last week, as well as two fenders. But this time everything held. Around four in the morning the storm began to weaken and I could finally find some sleep. When I woke up at nine everything was completely quiet, no breeze at all. Today was only the third day after my arrival 1 1/2 weeks ago, that the wind dropped below 7 Bft. Like before I used the chance and spend some hours working on top of the mast, on the rigging, the wind generator and the radar. The radar is still not working, but everything else is ready now. My soldering iron has simply not enough power to heat the wires in the cold & wind. This work will have to wait until I get somewhere warmer and less windy, or until I find a 200 Watt soldering iron. But the radar is not vital. More important is the fact that I could practice putting the reefs into the main sail and setting the storm jib. I have also stowed away all gear securely, and now Vespina and I are finally ready for the sea. But unfortunately the forecast for tomorrow is again very bad: Gale warning, from the SW, and very rough sea. Yep, SW is exactly the direction I need to go. But the temperatures are predicted to rise to 15C, and stay there for a while. This is very good news, because the low temperatures stopped me actually more from working and leaving than the wind. All I need now is a forecast of not much more than 6 Bft for two days, and I can finally leave Port-Saint-Louis. I'm placing my bets on Wednesday.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 18:44

Thursday, December 17, 2009

Finally - the rigging is complete

Reefed Mainsail. On Tuesday afternoon the wind had changed from NE to N, which is straight ahead and ideal to set up the rigging. Unfortunately with 6 to 7 Bft it was still way too strong. But yesterday around 1pm the wind finally dropped. I had prepared for this over the last few days and had every shackle, line, sheet and all five sails ready for the great moment. First I adjusted the alignment of the mast - it was leaning a little to port. Then I could increase the tension on the stays to the right amount. The stays keep the mast centered and prevent it from bending under the load of the sails in the wind. After that I quickly set one sail after the other to check that everything is working fine and all equipment is in place and works as expected: main sail, genoa, self-tacking jib, self-tacking storm-jib. Everything worked great, and the sails seem to be in good shape. The jibs look brand new. I had hoped that I could leave for a test run today, but the weather forecast does not look favorable: 8 Bft and the coldest day of the year. As much as I can hear and feel from inside my sleeping bag at the moment, the forecast was accurate. Yesterday was already cold, with -4C and ice on the windows in the morning. The cold, especially in combination with a strong wind, is slowing down all the work. Everything takes a lot longer because the fingers go numb within a few moments, and everything needs to be fastened and unfastened all the time. I got more done yesterday afternoon when the wind was light, then I had in the whole week. Today I won't get much done either, I'm afraid. Sailing is out of the question, and all outside work will again progress at a crawl, with a lot of stomping of the feet and clapping my arms about me. But hey, the rigging is finally set up and now Vespina is a real sailing yacht again! And as Arthur said: "Welcome to the life of a Voyager: waiting for the right weather."

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:01

Sunday, December 13. 2009

Making friends in Port-Saint-Louis-Du-Rhône

Attaching the Tricolor lantern to the masthead. My favorite pastime these days: connecting wires. André, Arthur, Birgit having tea on board Vespina. After the mast was stepped on Thursday morning it became very windy, 7-8 Bft, and stayed like this until this morning. During this time I could work only little on the rigging, because I did not want to go up the mast in the cold & wind. Strong wind is typical for the season, and one really has to adjust his plans according to the weather. But I didn't get bored during this time, because the electrical installation kept me very busy. Now everything except the radar is connected and working. For the radar I will need probably another 4 hours. I am becoming very proficient with my Digital Multimeter, at interpreting cable layouts and at connecting wires. Today it was finally ok to climb the mast, although with 3°C it was still pretty cold. It was the first time I've ever climbed a mast, and to be honest, when I was up I was pretty scared for a few minutes. It is something very different to climb up a thin 12m mast alone with the boat moving underneath you, than to climb a solid rock when your best friend is securing you from the ground. The difficult part is not so much the climbing itself. But once you're up, you have to let go with both hands to do the work you climbed up for. But after the second time it was already routine, and by the fourth time I felt as comfortable as in my sleeping bag. Well, almost. Now all the halyards are in, the VHF antenna is connected and my new tricolor led sailing lantern with anchor-light is installed. This is a very cool piece of equipment with very low energy consumption and a good range. A must-have, really. Tomorrow I want to whip up the sails and set up the wind vane. On Tuesday I hope to finish the radar and stow away everything nicely for the sea. Fortunately the weather forecast predicts good weather for Wednesday, when I can make the first sea trials. I plan to sail to an anchorage near Carro. From there, provided the rigging is ok and the weather is good, I want to cross the Golfe Du Lion on Thursday to Cadaques in Spain. It is a little over 100nm, and so I will need 20 to 30 hours. Thinking about that trip, I feel very excited and a little anxious at the same time. It will be the first time that I will be sailing alone throughout the night. I don't expect everything to go well, and it will be surely a very cold and very long night. But I trust Vespina and myself enough to get there without too much trouble. My neighbors here at the shipyard are André and Arthur. André is equipping his boat to sail to the Galapagos with his family after Christmas. Arthur is another single handed sailor (and very gifted musician), who installed a wind vane and new rigging here and is now waiting for better weather to test it. He is sailing in the Med since Mai, when he bought his boat, and is now heading for the Canaries as well. Maybe we will see each other a few more times on the way. We became quite good friends over the last week and meet every day on each other's boat for tea or dinner, or to help each other out with the various tasks that are a lot easier done with another pair of hands.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:02

Thursday, December 10, 2009

The mast is up!

Vespina - mast. Vespina + mast. Yesterday I've prepared everything for the big event today: stepping the mast. I've never done it before and have also never seen it done before. But everybody told me it takes approx. 30 minutes and is painless. If everything is prepared right. It took approx. 30 minutes and was painless. Guess I must have prepared everything right. Which wasn't that hard either, because I have a copy of the "Boatowner's Mechanical And Electrical Manual" from Nigel Calder. The book is as big and heavy as the title makes you think. And inside are lots of pictures, drawings and descriptions on what to look for, how to do things, and also how not to do things. I love those pictures the most, some are absolutely shocking. But it turned out that Ulrich, Vespina's previous owner had done everything right in the first place. And he had put all the bits into one big red bucket with "Ketchup" written on it. So all I had to do was put the pieces from the bucket in the right places. Easy! After cleaning them and checking them for any signs or material fatigue, rust etc of course. Finally all the long hours I had spend as a child trying to put together Lego puzzles without the help of the booklet payed off! I have to confess I'm still doing Lego puzzles now and then. What remains to be done now: • straighten the mast and tighten the shrouds • climb the mast and put the halyards into it • attach the boom • whip the sails up • mount all blocks and rollers • attach the sheets to the sails • mount the mainsail stacking system (lazy jack) • mount and connect the VHF antenna to the masthead • connect the 3-color-lantern to the masthead • attach the back gantry • mount and connect the radar to the back gantry • mount and connect the wind generator to the back gantry I hope I don't need a day for each item. Unfortunately the wind is blowing too strong now (Bft 6-7) to do any decent job on the rigging. So I'll start with the back gantry until the wind dies down a bit. A bucket full of goodies. Andr f   helped me to identify some parts. Vespina, the mast, and my new best friend the crane. Almost there!

Posted by Axel Busch at 06:13

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

The sea!

After 1480 km and 165 locks I have arrived in Port-Saint-Louis. I have thoroughly enjoyed the last four weeks, and got to know Germany and France from a very different point of view. Now the rivers are behind me, and the sea ahead, and my little adventure can begin for real. After the mast is stepped and the rig is made ready - not a minor detail . I gave myself one day to prepare, and fixed an appointment to step the mast for Thursday 10am. Gulp. Then I'll probably need another day or two to get everything stowed away properly and Vespina and myself ready for our first sea trials. Very exiting!

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 10:29

Sunday, December 6. 2009

Night run / Avignon

Yesterday it was very busy at the locks, I spent literally half the day waiting. It wasn't too bad because the weather was very nice (got a little sunburned even) and I could clean Vespina thoroughly. But of course it totally ruined my plan for the day, and by four I had only made 25km. Not enough to reach Avignon in time today for a little sightseeing. Because the sky was clear, the river wide and the traffic light, I decided to drive into the night. I was lucky because I could follow in the wake of a unusually slow freighter. Usually they pass me, but this one was only going at 5 knots. With it's radar and strong searchlights I could follow savely a few hundred meters behind and enjoy one of the best hours of this trip. I am very much looking forward to sailing at night. Now I'm in Avignon in a little Cafe with wifi and am enjoying my first coffee on land for a week before exploring the local Christmas market.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 08:11

Friday, December 4. 2009

Mistral!

Clear night sky above the Rhone valley seen from Condrieu. A clear (and freezing cold) night had promised it already, and the morning brought it: Mistral, the famous wind which blows from the north-west along the Rhone valley. It pushed me with up to 17km/h (instead of my usual 13km/h) down the river. Which was great fun, especially with the newly mounted and configured autopilot doing most of the steering. Until I came to the first lock. With the wind blowing up to 24kn (not a very strong mistral) from behind, and the Rhone pushing with 3-4kn, everything had to happen a little faster and more precise than usual. Good that I had have enough practice in the last 154 locks! Now I'm in Valence in a, uhm, McDonalds. Free wifi exerts a strong gravitational pull on ex IT people. The Marina here is by far the most expensive I've encountered. 19.50 EUR per night. So far I have never payed more than 10.00, mostly 6.50 in France. But usually I'm staying for free at some suitable quay along the way. I came here for the gas station, because I wanted to refill my diesel tank in time. Unfortunately the machine's data connection to the bank was broken, and it doesn't provide fuel for cash. So no fuel for Vespina this time - again. I'm not very lucky in this regard. All of the gas stations I have encountered in France were either dismantled or shut down for the winter. Luckily Vespina has a mighty huge diesel tank for a sailing yacht her size, 500 liters, which I had filled up in Worms.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:39

Thursday, December 3, 2009

On the Rhône

Autopilot fitted to the tiller. The Borg have landed in Lyon! Today I've made it past Lyon and 40km down the Rhône. Originally I had planned to stay in Lyon for half a day. But then it stopped raining just as I got there and so I decided to use the chance and drive some more miles. Good decision - it's raining again already. Driving has become a lot easier now. The Rhône is often several hundred meters wide, which means I can fix the autopilot to the tiller and let it steer the boat by compass for a few hundred meters, while I get something to eat or simply pee. What a relief! I've noticed that after about eight hours without even a short break my skills begin to deteriorate. Unless the conditions are perfect I often need a second try to dock for example. I could stop somewhere for a lunch-break, but then I would lose valuable daylight time. Instead I prefer to just push through and reach my destination by 4pm at the latest. I am very much looking forward to coastal waters and the open sea, where there is more space and I can rest a little now and then and stay fresh. But if I can maintain the speed of the last three days, I should make it to the Mediterranean by Monday. And maybe it'll be a little warmer too. Fog in the morning is very romantic, very much indeed, until a cargo ship pops up 100m in front of you.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 22:07

Monday, November 30. 2009

Alone on the Saone

Vespina in one of the two 600m long tunnels. Vespina docked in Chalon-sur-Saône. For the last three days I've been driving alone now. Not only alone aboard Vespina, there is also no other ship on the Saone river. Maybe because of the weather: All Saturday and Sunday morning the wind was blowing with 5-7 Bft (max was 32kn), and it was 3°C Celsius cold. Sunday afternoon added rain, great. By nightfall I was so tired I almost rammed the bridge pier at Pontallier-sur-Saone. I docked 100m later and stayed for the night. Today the rain and wind stopped, but it's still only 5°C Celsius. I felt a little miserable today because the cold was getting to me. I had adapted to 10°C Celsius day and night, but less than 5 ... well. How long to the Caribbean? But now the thermometer behind me says 4°C, and my hands aren't even cold anymore. I guess I have adapted again. I've also noticed that I've lost another 4kg of weight, in one week. From shivering for sure! I've made very good progress though, and am now in a huge Marina in St. Jean-de-Losne. Shops, showers, electricity and ... WiFi! I stopped here because I had to buy a new waterway vignette (54 EUR for 16 days), and St. Jean-de-Losne is one of the few cities with a VNF office that sells it. I like the town though, it has a nice feel to it. Tomorrow I want to make it to Chalon-sur-Saone, with 60.000 inhabitants one of the larger Cities on the river. And then it's only two more days to my next big milestone - Lyon, where the Saone flows into the Rhone.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 14:13

Friday, November 27. 2009

Daily routine

I've been asked what I'm doing all day. So here's a brief account of a very typical day on board of Vespina: I usually get up at half past six. Wash (cold water ;-), and then it's into the engine room: pump Diesel, check the engine oil, check the bilge, look for any leaks or loose fittings, cables, hoses etc. Have breakfast (tea, porridge, bread. Eggs every 2nd day), wash the dishes. Because the locks only open at 09:00 in the winter season, I can not always leave as early as I would like. So depending on the distance to the next lock I cast off between 08:00 and 08:45. Halfway to noon I usually give in to chocolate cravings (oh lovely Lindt!). When Hermann was still on board I made soup for lunch, now that I'm alone cooking is not possible unless I stop and it's bread and an apple or banana. Sometime in the afternoon I post my position via SPOT. And give in to more chocolate cravings . When I get bored at the rudder I do isometric exercises, take pictures, or listen to the radio. By five at the latest I have to be at my destination for the day, because then it gets too dark to navigate the narrow rivers. I check the batteries for charge and the bilge for any fluids. If there's a town around I go shopping for groceries, and then cook a nice meal. After dinner it's time for cleaning the boat and checking panels, closets and foodstuff for signs of moisture, mold, etc. Then I write another entry into the captain's log, sometimes the blog, and have a closer look at what tomorrow will bring. Around half past eight, nine at the latest, I'm dead tired, wash, and snuggle into my sleeping bag. Read a page or two and fall asleep. In fact, pretty much every day's like that. The only thing that varies is the number of locks and what's for dinner. As I wrote in an earlier post, it takes some getting used to. I had to align my perception of "progress" and "optimization" to the new situation. But now it's great fun, and also strangely satisfying.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:57

Wednesday, November 25, 2009

Locks on the Canal des Vosges

Because I am often asked how it is in the locks, I made a little movie. As you can see, it is a pretty straightforward and smooth process, once you get the hang of it: Use the remote or call the operator on the VHF radio to have the lock opened, wait for the green light, drive in, throw the ropes up, climb the ladder, fasten the ropes, tighten them a little as the boat rises, wait for the green light (or doors to open fully), drive out. Of course it took a while (about 10 locks) until it was running that smoothly. It involved a great deal of pulling, shouting and running around at first. Here are four tips that made all the difference for us: Tip #1: No hurry. Tip #2: Stay as far away from the incoming water as possible. Tip #3: Let the ship move a little inside the lock with the water and don't pull too much on the ropes. Tip #4: If you are behind a commercial vessel, wait until it's fully into the lock our out of the lock and the water has calmed down again. VoilÃf , my first youtube movie. Hope you like the soundtrack, it's called "rushing water"

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 09:05

Tuesday, November 24. 2009

Halfway to the Mediterranean

The last lock of the Canal des Vosges. Vespina in the marina in Corre. After 14 days, 102 hours of motoring, 125 locks, 210 liter Diesel, 2 liter engine oil and 740km of rivers, Vespina is now docked in Fluvial Loisirs in Corre, France. This is pretty much half of the way to the Mediterranean sea. It is going downstream and there are only 30 or 40 locks and two tunnels (!) left, so it will go a lot faster from now on. I think about 9 more days to Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône. Because of the circuitous route I had to take along the rivers, I am still pretty close to home - only 5 hours by car. Since there is still a lot of paperwork to do before I can be away for a year, I am using the chance and return home one last time for a few days. It's also my Mum's and Brother's birthdays. Looking back, I spent about the same time preparing personal and official matters for being away that I spent preparing myself and Vespina for the voyage. It is amazing how entangling modern life is. Hermann, who accompanied me for the last two weeks, is also returning home. We had a great time together, and it is sad to say farewell. But on the other hand I am very much looking forward to single-handed sailing (or motoring), and so I am also very excited at the same time.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:31

Saturday, November 21. 2009

Downstream

Leaving a lock in the Canal. On Thursday I've reached the highest point of this voyage - 360m. The slow crawl upstream is at an end, from now on it's going downstream only. It's still more than 800km to the Mediterranean, but I feel like I can already smell the sea. Yesterday my brother and mother came to visit, and we had dinner in Epinal. It was my mother's 70th birthday, and this her birthday-trip. They also brought my Liferaft and Emergency radio beacon, which returned late from service. It's good to have friends & family that help out when things don't go quite according to plan. Today we will go together on the boat to Corre, where I want to leave Vespina until Wednesday. I have to return home for a few days for some last paperwork that wasn't important enough to delay the start of the voyage but has to be completed before I can be away for months.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:05

Tuesday, November 17. 2009

Au revoir la Moselle!

Frost and fog in the morning. Fighting herons in the afternoon. Today we left the Mosel river around noon - after seven days, 396km, 26 locks, uncountable castle ruins and lots of rain. Now we're in the Canal de Vosges (also known as Canal de l'Est until 2001), which will lead us further south to the Saone river. The canal is 121km long and has 93 small locks, nine of which we navigated this afternoon. Yep, it's raining of course. But It's fun anyway . We were issued with a remote control, which can prepare and open the locks. After entry and securing the boat, you have to lift a lever, and the rest is supposed to happen automagically. It worked well for five out of nine locks, and at the others friendly lock tenders helped us out. I was told the lock tenders in the canal are all recruited from veterans and ex-hookers. Well, if all veterans and ex-hookers are as friendly and helpful as the ones we met today, then the world could use some more .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:08

Saturday, November 14. 2009

Vive la France!

Sierck-les-Bains. First stop in france. Today we crossed the border to Luxembourg, and five hours later to "la grande nation", France. It was a little embarassing, because the lock operator spoke only french, and I had only started to learn french yesterday evening. To complicate things there was also a coal freighter waiting for the lock. But somehow we got it sorted out . I'm glad I spent the time fixing the radio antenna yesterday evening though. Now we're moored in Sierck-les-Bains, a little town just across the border with a huge castle. After a walk around town and up to the castle we celebrated the occasion with a bottle of Bordeaux. Lots of ducks around, btw. And signs on the bridges saying that it's forbidden to chase them away . Are ducks the holy cows of the french?

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:10

Friday, November 13. 2009

Stopover in friendly Trier

A commercial vessel passing Trier at six in the morning. After six days into the journey my mind begins to leave the land-based life behind, and settle into the new routine. This morning I cleaned the Diesel from the bilge for an hour. Luckily the weather was surprisingly fine, with 12 Celsius and only little cloud cover, and so I was too happy to mind the work. Then we drove for only four hours to Trier, where we stopped for a little sightseeing and shopping. Because I only had a few weeks to prepare the ship, every day new items appear on the "urgently required" list. Like for scrubbing the deck. Trier is said to be the oldest city in Germany, dating back to roman times. It's also a beautiful city with good shopping opportunities. We were a little clueless at first, but people here are extremely approachable and friendly, and so we had a very good time. After having scrubbed the deck thoroughly ;-), I will now have a look why reception on the VHF radio is so bad (I suspect the antenna), dutifully add an entry to the captain's log, and then probably 'retire early'.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 13:07

Thursday, November 12. 2009

PfÄhlich

Today we've made it to PfÄhlich, not far from Trier. It is nicknamed "Moselherz" (Heart of the Mosel), because it is pretty much halfway up the Mosel. A marketing joke, if you ask me. The town is too small and remote, if there is any town on the Mosel not worth visiting, it's this one. Nice try though, it worked on us . But the trip today was quite nice. Only very little rain and temperatures around 11 Celsius. Even the sun almost showed. I think this is pretty good considering it's November . I'm almost over the lost pictures. But before my spirits got too high, Vespina surprised me with Diesel in the bilge of the engine room. I tracked the source to a leaking pump, which I use to manually pump Diesel every day from the 500 litre holding tank to the 50 litre day tank. I have to get the Diesel out, or risk a fire. Of course it gathered in the most inaccessible corner. I'll give it a second try tomorrow morning, too much Mosel wine in my head right now to work upside down . Some statistics: on average we manage 35nm a day, pass three locks, and use three liters Diesel per hour.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 23:22

Digital desaster

Yesterday desaster struck: my cf-card reader malfunctioned and destroyed the cf card with the pictures and video-blog of the journey so far. The error message "a USB device is drawing too much power ..." was the last thing I saw of my pictures. I only use 4GB cards anyway, so that I don't loose a lot of data in case something like this ever happens. But it still hurts.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:07

Tuesday, November 10. 2009

In Treis-Karden

Myself at the rudder. Again we've made it to our destination just as night fell. We had major luck at all the locks though, and never had to wait. The low traffic at this time of year is a big plus there. But then, in summer you can afford to wait: four extra hours of daylight - and it's not that cold. With any luck we will make it to Trier by Friday morning. All manoeuvres like docking, locks etc. work in perfect harmony now. No need for commands or synchronization. Very amazing. I'm doing the radio communication with the locks and harbors, and it's quite interesting. Of course there are very different personalities at the other end of the 'line', and not all are equally fond of small leisure craft. But it seems that calling the lock one kilometer or so in advance generally speeds up the whole procedure a lot, and prevents getting shouted at. I love my VHF radio

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 15:50

On the Mosel river

On the Mosel river. We've left the Rhine and are now navigating the Mosel upstream towards Luxembourg and then France. Today we hope to make it to Treis-Karden. The early nightfall limits our range somewhat. The weather is better - not so much rain today. But with 5 Celsius it's not too warm. Beautiful landscape all around us - meadows, hills, vineyards and plenty of castles and ruins.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:35

Monday, November 9. 2009

Underway!

Underway! From the bridge in Heidelberg. Photos courtesy of Ulrich Winter. It took all Saturday to pack and stow away the gear and get Vespina ready. So Hermann, who will accompany me for the next 14 days on the rivers, and I spent the night moored in Neckarsteinach and left Sunday at 8:30. The weather was fair, even the sun showed a little. Temperature 12 degrees Celsius. We navigated the five locks to the Rhine without any problems, and spent the night at the Yachthafen Marina Worms, where we stocked up on Diesel - 400 liters. Today it's rainy with only 8 Celsius. Morale is high nevertheless, a hot soup for breakfast helped. We left the Marina at 8:30, and hope to reach St. Goarshausen 115km down the river before nightfall. Speed above ground is 14,4 km/h. The Rhine is pushing us with 3 to 4 km/h. Thanks old dude .

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 03:52

Friday, November 6. 2009

Radio interview

Torsten Bläse. Another surprise - this morning the radio called. Whether I would have time for a brief interview regarding my voyage. Well, actually I didn't have the time, but can you say no when the radio calls? So 30 minutes later I was sitting panting across from Torsten Bläse in the Ulm studio of SWR, southern Germany's public radio station. With no time to prepare, the first question - whether I'm a millionaire or burned out - left me pretty speechless/stumbling/sweating. I was very happy that it wasn't live and we could start over again. In case you wondered - neither. My budget for the trip, including the boat, is 60.000 EUR. A lot of money, but not a fortune.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 05:48

Pictures from the "Bon Voyage" party

Last Saturday I threw a little party to say good bye to my friends. The pictures are now in my Picasa Web Album. Thanks again to the great team from Café Omar. Special thanks to Anna for organizing the party while I was busy working on Vespina.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:40

Thursday, November 5, 2009

Big surprise - press coverage

On Monday I got interviewed by the regional newspaper Südwest Presse regarding my little adventure. I wasn't expecting much, because I know from my experience with TRANSPOREON that a one hour interview often ends up as three or four lines in the paper, if at all. Usually with the facts all mixed up. To my big surprise, they printed half a page this time. With picture. And didn't even mix up the facts (except minor details). I am very impressed with the editor, Henrik Wilhelm. Here's a link to the online version. The picture shows me sailing in Thailand four weeks ago.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 16:10

My story so far

My name is Axel Busch, I'm an entrepreneur from Ulm, Germany. I have left my last venture, TRANSPOREON, after nine years as CTO for a sabbatical in June 2009. The idea was to get proficient in an area very different from the software business, and to spend some time away from the computer screen, from airports and from meetings before my next venture. I choose sailing. I have been sailing for many years, but I have never owned a sailing yacht myself, or lived for longer than two weeks in a row on board of a ship. So first I had to educate myself about sailing yachts, sailing routes and voyaging in general. I read a lot of blogs and books, made plans, and talked them over with people that had done it before. In August I felt ready to start looking for a ship. Because I wanted to take only a relatively short break from regular life and work, I was looking for an inexpensive ship that I could get under way quickly. Six weeks later I found and bought Vespina. Vespina was in good shape and had most of the electrical, navigational and security equipment which I wanted already on board, if somewhat basic. As a strong believer in "keep it simple", this suited me fine. Maybe as importantly, I liked her owners (Anke and Ulrich Winter) a lot. They sailed Vespina for two years in the Mediterranean Sea, and both have been of great help since I bought Vespina. I spend two days on the ship and compiled to-do and shopping lists. After placing the orders and applying for the necessary official documents I went charter-sailing in Thailand with friends. Not ideal, but we had booked it half a year ago. When I returned after three weeks, most of the stuff had arrived and I could get to work. Now, three more weeks later, packets are still arriving daily. Looking at the ship I could easily spend many more weeks and a lot more money before she would be the ideal ship in all aspects according to the books I've read. But there is nothing vital that needs to be done for the first part of the voyage. So she is for now as ideal as she will ever get and I can safely depart in two days. The last three months were already very educating and fulfilling. Even should I sink Vespina in the first lock, which is just 300m downstream from her mooring, it was definitely worth the time and effort. But it's more likely that I'm looking ahead to a year at sea, and I'm very excited about what I will encounter.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 01:30

Wednesday, November 4, 2009

The route as planned

Click to enlarge. The map shows the route as planned. Since Vespina is at the moment in Neckarsteinach, Germany, I have to navigate the rivers through Germany, Luxembourg and France to get to Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône in the Mediterranean Sea. The trip on the rivers took three weeks, and I arrived in Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône on Dec 8th. In Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône I had to step the mast and set up the rigging. But for three weeks the winds were blowing with force 8 to 10, and it took me three weeks to complete all the work and get going. I spent New Years in Barcelona and then sailed to Ibiza. 12nm before reaching the harbor of St. Antonio a storm wind gusts up to 63knots caught up with me, but I made it safely into the harbor. Unfortunately for the next four weeks the wind was blowing from south-west, and I had to wait before I could continue my voyage. I sailed without stop to Almerimar, where I had to wait for another few weeks. By that time the window for this season's crossing to the Caribbean was over, and I decided to take it slowly from then on and cross late in 2010. I sailed along the coast to Gibraltar and then through the strait to Cadiz, where I prepared Vespina for her first Atlantic passage to the Canary Islands. The trip to the Lanzarote took seven days. It was both wonderful and frustrating, as I learned that Vespina is not designed for such a long trip. Vespina has a bilge-keel with low draft, which is great for coastal or inland waters. But out at sea she is lacking balance, and I was forced to reef very early if I wanted to use the wind-vane or autopilot. Instead of sailing along with 6 or 7 knots, I only made 3 to 4 knots, and the heavy rolling got on my nerves after a few days. It hadn't bothered me much on the shorter trips, where I just sat at the rudder myself most of the time. But the trip to the Canary Island was the test for the Atlantic crossing. And I realized that this is not the way I want to sail the next 12000nm. On the Canary Islands I looked for and found a boat. I had expected to spend two months on the refit and then sail to the Cap Verde Islands. However the refit took me seven months (July 2010 to February 2011). In February I sailed across the Atlantic to the Caribbean. I didn't stop over at the Cap Verde Islands and sailed directly to Sint Maarten. From Sint Maarten I plan to sail further west and visit Cuba, and then go north and visit the US and Bermudas. I would like to return to Europe via the northern route which takes me to Iceland. This route can only be sailed late in July or early August because of the icebergs. Alternatively I could skip the trip to Iceland and return via the Azores. In which case I would probably not head for Germany but to the Mediterranean sea and cross my backwash at Gibraltar.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 00:51

Monday, November 2. 2009

Back in the water!

Last Saturday Vespina was launched again after lying at the shipyard for almost three years. This was very exiting because I've never launched a ship myself before, and I've also never seen Vespina in the water before. But everybody at the shipyard helped out with coffee, advise, a hand where necessary and plenty of jokes at my expense. The weather was great too, and after the whole show went according to plan and even the Diesel started immediately we motored a few kilometers up and down the Neckar river. I was surprised at how smooth and quiet the engine was running, and she made 6 knots without any effort. Big thanks to Ulrich Winter, the previous owner, who taught me a great deal after the purchase about Vespina and about owning a boat. Thanks also to Roland "streichler" for his advise and energetic personality. And of course to Ralf, Mum and Liz, who are constantly providing help and support in so many ways.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:35

About Vespina

Vespina is a self-made steel Yacht of the Reinke 10M design. She has a semi-cutter rig with a roller-furled genoa on the first fore-stay and a self-tacking jib on a second fore-stay. Specifications LOA: 10,35 m (34 ft) LWL: 8,70 m (28.5 ft) Width: 3,00 m (9.8 ft) Draft: 1,15 m (3.8 ft) Sail area: 56 sqm Displacement: 7,5 tons Engine: Mercedes OM 621/3 inboard Diesel with 55 HP and a fixed shaft Diesel: 550l Water: 200l History Her original owner started building her in 1990, and finished in 1999. She was mainly motored and sailed up and down a river for three years, until her previous owner bought her in 2002 and fitted her out for a cruise around the Mediterranean Sea, which took place from 2004 to 2006. Since then she has been lying on the dry, until I bought her for 29000 EUR on Sept. 17th, 2009 and since she was in pretty good shape launched her again on Oct. 31st, 2009 after only a little overhaul. Here is her profile at the date of purchase, with pictures and the equipment list (in German). Pictures Vespina in the Mediterranean Sea Vespina after overhaul.

Posted by Axel Busch in Vespina at 12:34

Blog Export: S/V Gudrun V, <http://www.gudrunv.com/>

Saturday, October 31. 2009

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Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 17:00