

Aisling I Bermuda Bound Halifax Bermuda leg



May 19th marked the culmination of months of preparation for our Bermuda adventure. In the weeks leading up to departure, there were moments when it seemed the trip would have to be postponed or even cancelled. During the freezing spring weather, Rick and Roy had steadfastly toiled on Aisling- day after day spent repairing leaks, replacing windows, installing the single side band (SSB) radio, replacing lines and fittings- the list was endless. Launch day in late April brought the first of a series of equipment problems when the main GPS failed –and the next problem followed almost immediately when the engine overheated as Rick and Roy and Darryl Arnold approached the dock at the Squadron. The newly purchased raw water pump had failed.... Re-installation of the old pump provided a temporary reprieve, but traveling to Bermuda won't be possible until this is resolved. Equally worrisome are crew cancellations- with less than three weeks to departure we have one vacant slot for the way down and two on the way home.

Our luck improves when Steve Risley agrees to join us for the trip down (and bring meals!) and Rick Dube for the trip back. A new pump is ordered and installed, a new GPS is purchased, and we push forward with our planning. Wally buys mounds of food and “healthy” snacks and assembles the first aid kit and ditch bag, Nancy and Bonnie calk, clean decks and polish brass (we absolutely can't appear in Bermuda with dull brass!) and Roy and Rick continue to tackle the almost endless to-do list .

A trial sail in brisk winds the weekend before departure goes well, and we think we are on track for our departure on the 19th. But new tribulations await-when the new pump fails only days before departure, it becomes clear that we have an alignment problem, probably dating back to our engine-rebuild the previous summer.

With help from Hans Himmelman, Phil Wash and Roy, Rick tackles the engine problem himself. Who else will do it on the weekend? So the floorboards are lifted again, every bench and bunk is covered with gear, and in the midst of all this Alex Cross from MMOS is attempting to install the GPS, Wally and Steve are delivering massive quantities of food and drink, and a constant stream of family and friends drop in to check our progress. By the evening of the 18th the engine is repaired and has run without overheating for 14 hours, so it appears that we can leave on the 19th after all, although our we are unlikely to meet our schedule for a 1 p.m. departure. Wally has brought "Aisling I Bermuda Bound" T Shirts for the entire crew so we can't back out now!

May 19th , 2002

A rush to the start line! Wally and Steve arrive in early morning and begin to work on "the list" joined by Roy, Rick and Nancy later in the morning. Wally begins the day with some acrobatics- a trip to the top of the mast to install the new windvane, only to endure the ignominy (not to mention terror) of being left dangling high above the deck for "*what seemed like forever*" by his heartless fellow crew members, safe on deck below.

The new mainsail cover, repaired staysail cover and lee cloths (the kind that hold you in your bunk) were delivered at the 11th hour-. shortly after the sailmaker's departure we realize the staysail cover has not actually been repaired, but we can't do anything about it now - so we just hope the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club won't be offended by a few rips and tears!

Bonnie is last to arrive (as tends to be her habit) driving over with Joanne Ryan and Martha who have come to wave us off. By then things are almost ready- Nancy and Roy are tying and re-tying knots to install the leecloths, Wally is meditating in the quarterberth, and everyone is anxious to get underway. Martha has brought gifts of coffee, brownies, poppyseed cake, magazines and playing cards. The last moments before departure are spent frantically trying to stow the numerous items of gear and equipment that are strewn around the cabin- a task that is still not complete when the dock lines are thrown off (causing "lost item" problems that haunted us again and again during the trip)

Our eventual time of departure is 5 p.m. We leave the harbour under cloudy skies, with Steve at the helm and Rick below in the cabin monitoring Herb Hilgenberg from the Southbound II weather routing service (hereafter just called Herb) on the SSB. As we leave the harbour, we take our last cellphone calls – within two hours we will be out of range (although Steve has brought a satellite phone that will prove invaluable in the days to come).

Within an hour the seas are choppy and the air temperature is *cold*. Bonnie naively asks if it will get any colder, a question which provides a humorous moment for the more experienced crew members. (Steve assigns her a quota of “one blonde moment a day”) In spite of the cold and rough weather the mood is heady, and we are all filled with excitement and anticipation. Our watch schedule is:

1900-2030 Steve and Roy, 2030-2200 Roy and Rick, 2200-2330 Wally Bonnie and Nancy, 2330-0100 Wally and Steve, 0100-0230 Steve and Roy, 0230-0400- Roy and Rick, 0400-0530-Rick Bonnie and Nancy, 0530-0700 Bonnie Nancy and Wally, 0700-0830- Wally and Steve, 0830-1000 Steve and Roy... And so on, on a recurring cycle.

The first signs of trouble begin about an hour later. Steve has tripped and twisted his finger before leaving the dock and it is already starting to swell. Wally (who has been working steadfastly at tying on the canvas leecloths around the cockpit, in spite of the choppy conditions) complains of being “hungry” and shortly thereafter announces that he has “puked”. Nancy’s delicious Irish stew is heated for dinner, in the hope that full stomachs might fend off seasickness, but this is only partially successful. It is not long before Roy and Bonnie join Wally at the rail (feeling lousy, but amazed by the beautiful bioluminescence observed from that angle) Later, Bonnie and Wally experience the up-close-and-personal experience of tag-teaming in the head... proving once and for all that misery does NOT love company. Bonnie wonders (again) if it is possible to die from seasickness.

By 1 p.m. Rick is on deck alone with Nancy, his only remaining healthy crew member, whom he thanks profusely for coming along. “Just your bad luck” she says, “that your only healthy crew member has no experience!”. Wally is very ill, there is a possibility that Steve’s finger is broken, and Rick is becomingly increasingly concerned. Turning back becomes a real possibility. Nancy takes the helm, with Rick providing coaching, but the exhaustion of the past week catches up with Rick, and he begins to nod off.. “Don’t you dare go to sleep and leave me alone to steer this boat!” says Nancy

In the cabin, sleeping is a bit of a problem. The lee-cloths seem like a tenuous restraint from the motion of the boat, and our last minute stowage has not been particularly successful. As Roy tries to sleep on the side bench, loaves of bread tumble from various places. Well, at least bread does not hurt when it lands on your head! Wally sleeps fitfully in a corner of the round couch.

The situation on deck improves when Steve gets up and takes watch. He has decided his finger is “*only dislocated*”. Rick grabs some sleep and Nancy stays up with Steve. They assume Roy will be too sick to take his watch but they have underestimated him! Roy appears at the assigned time, reportedly not too perky but coping. Steve plies him with treats and jokes, and before long Roy’s recovery is complete!



May 20th 6 a.m.

Bonnie and Nancy wake to calm seas- in fact, the sea is so calm Nancy wonders if Rick has decided to turn back. Are we re-entering the harbour?? It is a great relief to discover that we are still underway, and there is lots of giggling in the bunks until Roy tempts us up on deck with coffee, tea and Martha's poppyseed cake for breakfast. Bonnie is relieved to discover that her seasickness appears to be cured.

0853 hours, 43.15.6N 63.51W Speed 5.4 knots Course 203T

Wally is still recovering and we decide not to wake him for his watch. We see two fishing boats sighted, and many shearwaters and storm petrels. Then, a bonus....a pod of white sided dolphins leaping on our starboard side!

We decide to have one of Wally's giant size cans of soup for lunch. Nancy puts the soup on- and realizes moments later that she has used seawater to dilute it! (some confusion between the salt water tap and the sea water tap- a small detail we skipped in our abbreviated "orientation"). We decide to eat it anyway- a little electrolyte replenishment will probably do us good! Nancy doesn't need electrolyte replenishment though, and she pronounces it unfit to eat.

Herb has advised a course change to go further west. He warns wind will pipe to 30-35 knots. Also warns of a navigational hazard- a dismantled boat at 32.30N 69W . Steve suggests we may have better likelihood of missing the storm if we go even further west, based on local weather and appearance of sky. Course change to 249 True at 1753. Lasagna and salad for dinner- truly delicious- life at sea has its rewards!

Genoa taken down and yankee put up, sandwiches and thermoses prepared in anticipation of the predicted storm from the NE. Now we have the genoa rolled and stuffed onto the couch in the dining area in the main cabin, reducing our living space during waking hours by about 30%. Overnight, the hull begins to make strange creaking noises near the master cabin bulkhead. None of us like it much.

Wally is now fully recovered and we are maintaining our regular watch schedules – 3 hours on 4.5 hours off. So far one of the biggest challenges is finding all our gear when we wake up to start watch. Shoes/boots, wet pants, jacket, hat, gloves, life vest, harness,...even in daylight it's quite a challenge and in the dark it's almost impossible.

May 21st 6 a.m. 41.41N, 64.53W Speed 6 knots Course 180 T Air temperature 19C



The day is calm and sunny. We appear to have missed the predicted storm, probably because of going further west. Roy and Steve begin the day by sighting dolphins riding our bow wave! They find a flying fish on the deck and save it in the cooler so the rest of us can see it.- a strange pre-historic looking thing with bat-like wings.

The air and water temperature are much warmer, we peel off layers and realize we have reached the warm eddy. Another delicious dinner- Shepherd's Pie. Everyone seems healthy and happy and we are relieved to have dodged the gale (so far).

May 22nd 0349 hours 39.23.7N 65.08.9W
1512 hours 3815.3N 64.41.5W

Rick comes on early watch and discovers a problem- the engine switch is in the "off" position and the engine is running. This is not a good thing- he concludes there is strong likelihood that the electrical system is damaged. There is much discussion. The batteries do not appear to be charging. Rick shuts engine down to check out situation. Rick and Wally attempt to restart the engine, but no luck. The water is flat and calm. Luckily, Rick had purchased an auxiliary starter switch, and we know it is onboard. Unfortunately, no one has the slightest idea where it is. We systematically search from bow to stern. No one can remember putting it away before we left. Finding things is a frequent and frustrating problem.

After trying various things, Rick calls Bob Coughlin (our diesel mechanic from Dartmouth) on the Sat phone. ""Where are you?" asks Bob. Rick says " I'm on a cell phone in the middle of the Atlantic!" Bob proceeds to troubleshoot with Rick via Sat phone. After several calls ("Bob, you can run but you can't hide") they eventually get the engine restarted using the portable auxiliary battery. But unfortunately the batteries are still not recharging. Bob eventually is no longer reachable (?gone home in surrender?) and Rick gives up for now. At least the engine is running but power will be a concern. The SSB uses a lot, and then there is the fridge...

But at the moment we are still eating well, creamy corn chowder for dinner, yummy!

Without power it becomes even more difficult to find our gear in the dark. Roy suggest an innovative system. Put all your stuff together in the same place so you always know where it is. A place for everything and everything in its place. He repeats it like a mantra throughout the trip but we continue to misplace our belongings in the close quarters and shared sleeping spaces.

May 23, 2002 The Storm Winds gusting to 40 knots Waves ranging from 6-15 feet

We are experiencing gale-force conditions, although we are coping amazingly well. One large wave swamps the cockpit. We take a few more hits from the larger waves during the day, with Wally hiding his eyes while Bonnie is at the helm.



Steve provides Bonnie with some much-needed coaching, on the art of steering down wind in big waves. She hopes she will not need to use this skill on a regular basis. Everyone is amazed at this display of nature, but the boat is solid and no one appears to be nervous. Herb's 5 p.m. weather check says a bigger storm is ahead, winds up to ? 50 knots. Recommends go west until we hit NW winds. We sail through an eerie area of calm winds and sunshine, but it does not last (?eye of storm?) Big squalls all around us, sheet lightning. Dinner is leftovers, but still very good!

We have some debate about our course and the weather forecast. Going west instead of south is a big disappointment, and the delays are worrisome in view of our declining amp-hours in the batteries. We head further west but the overnight watch slows the pace a bit . The NW winds eventually hit early next morning. We have dodged the bullet again!

The thumping and creaking in the bulkhead is very loud at times. Bonnie lies in her bunk and wonders, in an almost detached fashion, if the boat can break apart and if this happens will we have time to get the EPIRB and the ditch bag.

Some crew members are having a tough time sleeping. Some can't sleep with the engine on, others need the sound of the engine to drown out other noises. Between watches, everyone trades advice on methods of sleeping- Wally prefers his "nest" in the round couch, Steve sleeps upside down in the quarter berth with pillows wedged beside his head. The "musical beds" plan caused by the watch system make for some interesting sleeping arrangements and our lee cloth system is gradually disintegrating.

May 24th 34.35N 6614W (?time) Course 101.8 Speed 5.1knots Winds NNW
Warm mild weather, Confused waved, cross seas, blue, blue water



We are finally pointing at Bermuda! 690 miles down, 186 miles to go! We make a sail change to put the genoa back up. With no engine to keep the boat into the wind this proves to be a challenge. Lots of yelling and screaming and confusion on the foredeck; and bad vibes in the cockpit. Perhaps not our finest hour as a crew...but considering sleep deprivation, the weather, the worry of the electrical problem and our extended time on the water, we are doing quite well.

The winds pick up again and we go to the genoa only. Good humour is restored by lunch in the cockpit and things are well on track when we have ham and scalloped potatoes for supper. During the 5 p.m.. broadcast , Herb says the low “defied all models”. From our perspective, that seems like a good description.

Late that night the thumping continues to be a problem, and dishes are sliding back and forth in cabinets . Wally appears in companionway half an hour before his watch, wearing a miners’ headlamp complemented by a jaunty neck scarf. He has been investigating the source of the thumping problem. “Ah” says Rick, “it’s the coal miners daughter!” Undeterred, Wally demonstrates the advantages of his headlamp (twin battery packs) over Rick’s “landshark” model.

Bonnie Nancy and Wally experience a beautiful moonset and glorious sunrise on their watch. This makes it all worthwhile!

May 25th

The thumping and crashing through the night has been extreme, Rick and Roy improve the situation by stuffing towels into cabinets and wrapping carpet underlay around pots.

The seas are calmer in the morning although there is still a lot of swell. It is very hot. There is very little wind. We try to start the engine but the auxiliary battery is dead. That’s OK, we can change it with the AC adaptor. Or we could if we knew where the AC adaptor was. Oh oh. Here we go again. Another frantic search through every compartment in the boat. It is very hot. We do not find the adaptor. But wait- what’s this in the bunk of the forward cabin- it’s the auxiliary starter switch! It was there all along! Maybe we can use this instead...

Wally and Rick out their heads in the engine compartment and within minutes the engine roars to life! Hooray! Then it gets even better- Rick does some further investigation, tests and few things, and discovers that the electrics are fine! A little switch in the wrong position had created all the trouble. We weren’t sure at the time how this had happened, but later we discovered that a built in protection device had clicked in.

The restoration of the electrics causes great jubilation. After a brief celebration, Nancy and Bonnie undertake a clean-out and reorganization below decks and Rick and Roy decide to get the anchor out. Have we mentioned it has been very hot? What would we give for showers! We finish our clean up job and decide to dig out some food for lunch. It is very hot. We are all very hungry and thirsty. With the engine off and the guys trying to install the 50 pound anchor, the sea is rocking and rolling us side to side like a pendulum. As Bonnie is on her hands and knees getting food out of the fridge, the coffee pot flies off the stove and lands on her back. Cold coffee and coffee grounds everywhere! Yuck!

The idea of lunch is abandoned for the moment. Bonnie asks Rick for an exemption to the “no pressure water” rule to rinse off the coffee with the cockpit showerhead. Luxury. “I’ll bet you all wish you’d had coffee poured down your back now” she says. “Well” says Roy, “I don’t know about the rest of you but if that shower nozzle is out, I’m having a shower too!” A round of showers boosts everyone’s morale- and when Wally shaves off the week’s growth of beard we know we are almost there!



The weather continues to be calm with almost no wind. Rick wants to sail the rest of the way to Bermuda but isn’t sure what to do. The crew’s opinion seems clear- so the iron sail roars to life. Dinner is a medley of appetizers on deck. Shrimp ring, wings, baked brie, smoked oysters, meatballs, grapes and cheddar cheese. And a small glass of red wine for everyone! Sheer decadence. Unfortunately Rick is on the SSB with Herb for most of the feast. Listening to Herb kept Rick from enjoying some of the high points of the trip, but it kept us out of danger. We all agree that we owe Herb a big debt of gratitude. After dinner, we experience our last spectacular sunset of the trip. Nancy puts a message in the wine bottle, and tosses it into the sea- we hope some day she will receive a reply. On the other hand, Rick worries about her leaving an address in case we get fined for off-shore dumping!

We sail into St. George's under a beautiful full moon. What a sense of accomplishment! We savor every moment of the experience- the sound of Bermuda Radio on the VHF ("Vessel approaching at a speed of 5.4 knots excuse me 5.5 knots, this is Bermuda Radio- good evening.....") and the good fortune of being allowed to tie up at the customs dock when we arrived instead of being sent to a mooring. We pull up to the customs dock, jump off and kiss the dock, and then dance on it! With our well- developed sea legs this is a bit of a challenge because the dock seems to be rolling below us! Rum and cokes to celebrate our arrival, and we rejoice until the wee hours. The feeling of satisfaction and celebration is hard to explain, but wonderful!





So, that's the story of our great adventure. For some of us, this marked the end of the trip, for others, it was just the mid-way point. But all of us were looking forward to some R&R in Bermuda, land of turquoise water and pink sand!

