

## Logbook from the Gulf of Mexico (Southwest Florida side) (apologies to J. Steinbeck)

### **Minus day 11. St. Petersburg FL 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020, twelve days until the start of EC2020.**

Captain Rob Waddell and crewman Johnny MacDonald (Johnny Mac) do the U-Haul shuffle and retrieve our Dovekie 21 from its storage yard in East Tampa. On the way home we pick up our 100 Amp-hour Lithium battery and charger from Lithiumbattery power in Clearwater. A Lithium battery, more precisely LiFePO, weighs about 1/3 of a comparable lead acid battery and includes on-board battery management electronics. It is going to be used to power our new Garmin GPSMAP 942 sx chartplotter for the entire four to seven days we estimated would take to complete the EC2020. I can recommend this company as Technical Manager Charles Henry bought into our story and gave us a big discount as well a tax exemption.

Dinner that night a Nueva Cantina in Old Southeast St. Petersburg or more precisely a Margarita tasting contest.

### **Minus days 10 to 5. 26<sup>th</sup> Feb to March 3<sup>rd</sup>**



*Fitting out 'Southern Cross' in St. Peter Petersburg FL*

Purchase all the parts we need to fit out the Dovekie 21 as well as provisions for the challenge. West Marine Tyrone and sales rep Mike Kelly, a retired yachtsman, give us excellent advice and great service along with an offer to retrieve our boat from Key Largo and store until 2021; now that's an offer you can't refuse. Bill Jackson's Shop for Adventure easily provided all the other items required. The Garmin GPSMAP 942 sx chartplotter, battery in its new housing and other items installed and we are nearly ready to go, just need a try-out sail in her.

Thursday night 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 'EC2020 social' attended. We meet other competitors and organisers Paula and Chief. Clamcounter and Coastie kindly donate an ancient waterproof chart of the Florida Bay area to us suggesting exotic and dangerous channels and cuts. Clamcounter's words 'In Florida bay, you *will* get out and push' invite challenge and derision; not us we silently mumble.

Carolyn and Lesley arrive from New Zealand via Houston Texas. More Margarita tasting contests in downtown St Petersburg.

### **Minus days 4 to 2. 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> March**

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March. Sailing practice in 'Big Bayou' St Petersburg. The Dovekie performs very well in the flat waters of this small bay. Goes wherever we point her at a good clip including tacking in narrow channels. Total time sailing -1 hour. The next day we venture out into Tampa Bay. Winds moderate to strong, my guess up to 20kn. We tack out to the channel and ease sheets slightly, 3.5kn into a 1m wind swell and that's OK. Chicken gybe back to base and she takes off, up to 8kn down the waves, almost dangerous but exhilarating. Total sailing time now five hours. Crewman refuses to helm and control mainsheet at the same time, no problem he'll get the hang of it soon enough. Wives visit 'Harry Potter' in Orlando and Lesley waves new magic wand over us to protect us from evil.

### **Minus day 1. 6<sup>th</sup> March Sign in and boat inspection**



I believe we are suitably prepared, but we are pulled up as lacking some safety items although we remedy these in a short time. It's good to see all the other boats of every description lined up ready to go. Legend sailor Jarhead congratulates us on our choice of vessel and wishes us the best of luck. It's going to be a great race with on the beam winds all the way to Cape Sable where it is blowing 40 bastards from the east. Anyway, that's what the wind modelling says, and its predictions have accurate so far. We are Good to Go.

*Boat inspection day Friday 6th March 1. 'Southern Cross' qualifies.*

### **Day 1 Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March EC2020 Start**

Strong wings in Tampa bay delay the start until 10:00. A 'Plan B' is in operation but we decide to launch from Mullet Key. We are off when the wind moderates at 11:30 sailing

south on a beam reach with a stiff breeze aside us. We take a shortcut and head south of Anna Maria Island. Our first mistake. Easily pass under the Perico Island Bridge. Mast head connects with Bradenton Beach bridge and Garmin wind sensor is last seen plunging headfirst into the water. No matter, it only required for 'statistical' reasons but could have been saved with a lanyard.

We quickly abandon inland route and head out into the Gulf of Mexico via the next bridge across Longmans Pass this time beaching and derigging. Only a few minutes time wasted then we are off again through the channel to our next waypoint opposite CP1 Stump Pass where we pass at 21:30 under Plan B rules. We completely ease sheets and in slow-mo prepare dinner before heading south again under a stiffening breeze with a single reef in place.

Heading south to Captiva Island waypoint, our second mistake; should have been Charlotte Harbour waypoint. Now the Johnson shoals are directly ahead, the wind has significantly increased and the escape path puts us on a quartering reach. We are nearly out of control and decide to anchor up for the night. A suitable deep spot is found just off Cayo Costa near Murdock Point and we spend a cold night with the wind howling in the rigging but the Dovekie stably holding at anchor.

## **Day 2 Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> March**

We are up at first light and off again to Captiva Island waypoint then all the way down Sanibel Island to our Sanibel Exit waypoint before heading SSE to Marco Island. Easy sailing so far but now the main is double reefed ready for the eastward turn onto the 35nm Marco Island track. If anyone asks me, I'm a blue water sailor and direct line or passage is in in my makeup so for good or bad, off we go. The sheets are slightly eased, and this track is good. Further into this passage the waves and wind increases; it's a wild ride, bumping and banging and we are only making 3-4 knots in the short wind chop. Lots of concentration is required to keep this flat-bottomed boat going quick and it's long and tedious trip to the mysterious Marco Island which take forever to appear. In the daylight it looks like two sandcastles in the distance but as night approaches and the distance decreases, this hallucination takes on a more comical appearance and eventually the brightly illuminated buildings become an amusement park complete with Disneyland type attractions. It's funny how the brain-eye combination works when exhaustion sets in. Nevertheless, we sail past Fantasy Island a few more miles and we anchor up for the rest of the night in a delightful bay in Kice Island, hallucinations abate and we rest up and so we are ready for day 3 and the short hop to Chokoloskee.

## **Day 3 Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March**

It's an easy sail with the main unfurled until we pass Cape Romano shoals and veer eastward towards Indian Key Pass entry. It's just off the nose and we can't lay the entry but only by half a mile or so. We overlay the pass entry, tack to port and in we go. It's on the nose and stiffening as a reef is put in but with a massive tide assist it's an easy trip to Chokoloskee.

Trying to avoid the commercial traffic we make good time but still manage to run aground a couple of times and have to gybe out from the shallows near the Barron River outflow. Our support team awaits in Chokoloskee and we take an hour or so to eat, cleanup and then say goodbye again as we take advantage of the outgoing tide to try to go as far south as possible. Heading back out the familiar Indian Key Pass we find the wind on the nose but put in two big tacks to end up at Demijohn Key on the entry to Chokoloskee Pass where we anchor for dinner and a comfortable night's rest. Not too far down the track admittedly but we are ready for an early start the next day.



*Southern Cross arriving in Chokoloskee Island*



*Johnny Mac reflects on a beautiful sunset at Demijohn Pass*

#### Day 4 Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March

Awaken 05:00 to see that the wind has moved much further to the east and off we go to new waypoint, Northwest cape via the outside of Pavilion Key. For a couple of hours, we are heading in the right direction with eased sheets and making good ground. At around midday the winds become very fickle in direction and speed. Eventually the oars are broken out and Crewman Johnny Mac (ex NZ Olympian kayaker) attempts a different class of human propulsion; unsuccessfully. No matter, soon the wind has picked up but it's just off the nose, so we tack towards shore near Ponce de Leon Bay. We discover a large westward flowing current that almost stops the boat, apparently the Everglades is a large river system, this is the effect of this flow even 2 miles from the coast. We tack out of this current towards Northwest Cape and its now plain sailing for us as the wind swings around back to the northeast. I get some sleep while born again sailor Johnny Mac sails all the way around Cape Sable to the waypoint to Flamingo channel aided by a large flood tide; it's just too easy for this natural sailor.

#### Day 4 Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March

We arrive at Flamingo jetty 05:20. After a short break waiting for the tide to peak, a hot drink and a peruse of Clamcounters donated Florida Bay chart of we head off to Key Largo via the westward channel system. With the assistance of a kind beam breeze, Murray Key, Clive Key, Man of War Channel, Rabbit Key and their associated basins are easily navigated in the dark using our fabulous Garmin chartplotter. Daylight arrives and Gopher Key gives us a further challenge, the tide is ebbing fast and Johnny Mac must eventually get out of the boat and push. Luckily its fine sand not the slimy mud Clamcounter and Coastie had warned us about. The winds on the nose now and we must head south east to the main channel just past Ironwood channel. A few big tacks and we are now at Cowpens Cut and the finishing line is just beyond; or so we thought. Johnny Mac uses all his strength to paddle through the 2knots opposing current here hoping that salvation is just around the corner, but a misplaced waypoint has led us to a dead end at Hammer Point 6nm short of our destination. We are dog tired and lost and phone calls to our shore team and Paula confirm this and we are commanded to stay put and wait until tomorrow to arrive. Some locals in a beach house are paged with a request to allow us to tie up for a few hours, 'do you have any weapons' is the response. They also confirm that we are 6nm southwest of our destination. Having previously read the historical Everglades novel 'Killing Mr. Watson' (thanks Halfbaked) we politely thank them and head offshore again to Pigeon Key where we anchor for the night.



*'Push the boat'. 'get your mother to push the boat'*

## Day 5 Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March



*The EC2020 challenge ends for us at Key Largo 09:13 Thursday 12 March.*

Wake up to glassy conditions and head out up the channel to Bakers Cut and Key Largo finish. Navigation is all good now, final waypoint plotted and it's only a few hours before we reach the finish line just past 09:00. Paula and our shore team greet us along with a good number of Tribers astonished to see the kiwis finally arrive. Then it's straight to breakfast with Andyman and Nate at Mrs Mac's Kitchen replete with Bloody Mary's and bacon and eggs. Soon the 'Southern Cross' is on the trailer and fifth team member Mike Kelly and his beautiful service dog – Maggie May, depart, taking 'Southern Cross' back to Tampa and placing her in storage until 2021.

The next few days provide a good catchup with other Tribers and organisers. We have made some new friends and really enjoyed ourselves over the past three weeks. The troubles of the 'world' are forgotten until we leave Florida where flight bookings mysteriously disappear but all good in the end and everyone is now back in New Zealand safe and well.

See y'all 2021.

Rob & JohnnyMac