





South Pacific Paradise

Choosing to sail across an ocean is a huge undertaking for most boat owners, so **Jenevora Swann** and her husband **Fergus** planned carefully before crossing the Pacific



When we looked at the logistics of sailing *Two Drifters*, our Lagoon 440 catamaran,

4,000 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean, the decision to do it double-handed wasn't made lightly.

My husband, Fergus, is a RYA-qualified yachtmaster and nothing much fazes him when sailing. I, on the other-hand, am not as confident a sailor, but I have a good instinct, so we thought we could handle the expected month-long passage from Panama to French Polynesia; which would be the longest sail we'd ever done together, by a long shot.

Getting the boat ready in the Panama City anchorage of La Playita seemed far less stressful than when we prepared for our first ocean passage, across the Atlantic Ocean, three years ago. Maybe because we had a clearer idea of what to expect this time, or were more experienced; but it didn't surprise us when there were the inevitable last-minute mechanical and technical issues that needed fixing.

Provisioning consisted of endless trips to the supermarkets to stock up on dried food, cans, bottles, milk and juices. Our final shop, the day before we left, was for fruit and vegetables, deliberately picking a selection of nearly ripe and totally unripe produce, which we hoped would last us the duration of our trip.

Being at sea for so long, it was

important to keep fruit and vegetables in nets in the coolest part of the boat to prolong their life. To be on the safe side, in addition to tinned produce, I also shoe-horned some frozen vegetables and a large bag of freshly cut up pineapple chunks into the freezer.

Passage Planning

From Panama, we planned to head to the Marquesas Islands. The diesel we were carrying in the tanks and jerry cans would only get us a third of the way, so a good weather window was essential so we could sail as much of the way as possible.

We needed to leave on a strong northerly wind, that would spill over the isthmus of Panama from the Caribbean, so we could sail on it for several hundred miles before the winds turned light and potentially contrary.

We also had to decide the best way to reach the trade winds in the South Pacific, taking in the Humboldt Current that pushes north from Ecuador, and the Galapagos Islands that straddle the route, forcing either a north or south-bound route around them.

Our eyes were also firmly on the ITCZ – the intertropical convergence zone, better known as the doldrums, because of its monotonous, windless weather. The ITCZ is an area near the equator where the northeast and southeast trade winds converge and

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Tiki on the bay of Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands

ABOVE LEFT

Two Drifters anchored off Panama City

BELOW

Sunset over the Pacific Ocean

it's typically plagued by light winds, squalls and thunderstorms. We intended to go through the narrowest part possible, to avoid having to motor for longer than needed.

As it was, our trip coincided with the equinox, which caused an interesting mirror ITCZ, south of Galapagos, making the northerly route our only option.

Once through the ITCZ, we expected the trade winds to kick in so we could clock-up high-mileage days in beautiful downwind sailing conditions.

Sail Away

The final job was to clean the hull, so we stopped for a night in Las Perlas islands on our way out of Panama. The clean, crocodile-free waters at Contrador and Mogo Mogo were the last chance for a quick swim and sense of normality before the journey began.





About the boat:

Make: Lagoon 440
Year: 2008
LOA: 13.61m (44'6")
Beam: 7.70m (25'2")
Draught: 1.30m (4'3")

With our new Iridium Go! activated and working, and the inReach tracking our route, our on-board communications were ready and so were we.

As I watched the islands of Panama disappear behind us, a modicum of panic set in. An anticipated month at sea, seemed to be a very long time with just the two of us sharing shifts and the highs and lows of ocean sailing. But the challenge of the sail and the lure of exploring the South Pacific island was so enticing; I quickly got over my concerns and looked forward to the adventure that lay ahead.

With the gennaker up, in 11kt of true wind and with a knot of current with us, we embarked on our journey with a very relaxed sail of 7kt, in perfect conditions. We couldn't have asked for more as we settled into our routine.

By monitoring the ocean currents

ABOVE

The last pit stop before crossing the Pacific; Mogo Mogo Island, Las Perlas, Panama

BELOW (L-R)

A Red Footed Booby pays a visit; reeling in dinner; Fergus celebrates crossing the Equator

closely, we used them like a conveyer belt, turning normally light and slow conditions into very pleasant sailing days. At times, these favourable currents reached 3kt, but on average across the entire passage we had a current with us of 1kt.

We ran a shift system overnight, which started around sunset. I was on watch for the first five hours of the evening, usually until midnight; and then Fergus took over until 5am.

My favourite part of the day was sitting on the bridge together watching first light appear. With a cup of tea in hand, we would chat through the emails and news that had come in on the Iridium Go! overnight. Fergus would then turn in to get some sleep, while I enjoyed the magic of the sun rising out of the ocean.

With the fishing lines out, it wasn't long before we caught a fish; and it just so happened to be a 7ft striped

marlin – the biggest fish we have ever landed on *Two Drifters*. We cut it into fillets and put as much as possible into an already-full freezer; the rest was enjoyed for lunches and suppers for the next week.

There was an air of excitement as we crossed the equator, which is not only the intersection between the north and southern hemisphere, but also the home of Neptune. Tradition has it, boats crossing equator, should dress up and offer Neptune a tot of the finest beverage on board as a thank you for the care he has shown while sharing his seas.

We totally got into the spirit of this and a large rum was donated over board – and a sip or two for us as we didn't think Neptune should drink alone! Although I hasten to add that we're technically a dry boat while sailing offshore, but this was one tradition we had to run with!





A Test of Endurance

The weather forecast improved daily as we headed south, allowing us to sail much further than we had hoped possible through the doldrums. Once we reached the trade winds, they announced their presence with a sudden wind shift to the southeast and a steady 15 - 20kt of true wind speed which stayed with us all the way to the Marquesas Islands. During our fastest day, we clocked up 183 miles in 24 hours.

While we were into a rhythm of each managing on two small sleeps in 24 hours, (about six hours in total), inevitably, tiredness was going to catch up at some point. For us, it was halfway through the trip, which was when a weather system, far south of our position,

caused a large swell and confused seas, making our first 48 hours in the trades uncomfortable.

It became remarkably noisy both inside and outside the boat. As the waves crashed into each of the hulls; in our cabin, it felt like a bulldozer had struck, and the whole bed shook. It was like being in a washing machine on a spin cycle; even with earplugs in, trying to sleep off-watch with the noise and the motion wasn't easy.

We didn't realise quite how much stamina was needed for this journey when doing it double-handed. Just a couple of days with less sleep, completely lowered our energy levels and we had to really push ourselves hard to keep up the pace. It was like running a marathon;

ABOVE (L-R)

Working as a team; big swells in the Pacific

BELOW

Landfall in Nuku-Hiva, Marquesas



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jenevora Swann and her husband Fergus Dunipace have been liveaboards on their catamaran *Two Drifters* since 2014. They sailed around Europe before crossing the Atlantic to explore the Caribbean, USA, South and Central America. [Facebook.com/TwoDriftersTravel](https://www.facebook.com/TwoDriftersTravel) / www.twodrifterstravel.com

a total test of endurance and the most challenging time of the trip.

But once the winds and the sea settled down, it became a sleigh ride for most of the trip. It was just the last few days, as we approached the Marquesas Islands, that we had to cope with some squally weather.

When the anchor eventually went down at the anchorage at Taiohae Bay in Nuku Hiva, we were euphoric. Around us were stunning vistas of mountainous emerald forests and colourful houses scattered along the shore. It was beautiful and everything we could have wished for from our first landfall in the South Pacific.

We sailed 4,157-nautical miles from Panama City to Nuku Hiva in 27 days. During which, we used our engine for just 24 hours (using only a tenth of our fuel);

PHOTOS: JENEVORA SWANN



Fact Box

There are various ways to receive weather and ocean current data while offshore. We used Iridium Go! paired with Predict Wind Offshore (predictwind.com) for weather downloads and accessed the Ocean Surface Currents in Real-Time (OSCAR) information via s/v Sarana's useful email query platform (svsarana.com).

We also used the services of Bob McDevitt (metbob.com), an offshore weather router for sailors in the South Pacific.