

Checklist

A good rest the night before	✓
Reliable hi-speed broadband	!?
Intel Core i5 processor or better	✓
Alarm Clocks (plural)	✓
Spreadsheets (plural)	✓
Router (any old one)	✓



S/V Nora source: www.telegraph.co.uk

There are many things to love about this SOL perennial race in partnership with “Promote Shetland”, but that mazy navigator’s nightmare to the Finish through the sounds and passes between the islands of Mainland, Yell, Fetlar, Unst, Whalsay and Bressay, almost inevitably in the dark, perhaps isn’t one of them. IRL, frankly, it would be the sort of thing only Bob Weise and Stephen Shapiro might care to attempt, especially in the conditions that prevailed during our latest running of the race. Did you have a look at the chart, lads!?

AWOL’s potted history lessons on all things Scottish, Viking and Pictish in the Chat, however, compensate amply, helping one enormously in keeping awake. Och aye, ma wee ooye.

This was bonknhoot’s third attempt for victory Up Helly Aa, and there is little doubt that (virtual) local knowledge was a boon to me and her. For one thing, I didn’t need to zoom out all the time.



Gruney & Stacks source: www.maps.nls.uk

A lucky race for bonk too, as it provided she and me with our first ever SOL podium two years ago. Last year was not so good, but this year: drie keer is scheepsrecht!

Ignoring the cornering fest then that tends to round things of and indeed start things up as well, this year’s event turned out to be a surprisingly meteo-influenced affair, since going into Moray Firth to round the buoy off Inverness, and then coming out again, the wind clocked about mightily.

Out on errands with my mother in the morning I started bonk on a DC straight for Bodam Head. Back in time for that first turn, I kept bonk in the hunt as we continued to rotate westward, headland by headland. Passing Kinnaird Head, bonk then was nicely tucked in among the leaders, and like others I held a West North Westerly course coming away and out into the open sea, since the wind was commencing to clock steadily westward and was forecast to go north of West.

In other words, it was going to be a beat to the mark and picking the tacking point was likely to be vital. A router helps to determine this, but only roughly, and I was going to be out for dinner at T-t. Thank goodness for the Android App and the benign simplicity of the Elan 410’s polar (above 12.9kn always 41.9°). Tacking slightly earlier than some, I put bonk on a 41.9° curve on starboard tack whilst enjoying a very apposite Drambuie. Back at my pc after dinner I saw that I had kept bonk pinched too long and eased sheets, but rumskib who had actually gone further into the header freed off more in anticipation of the next header under the Moray coast and to good effect but then went a little too far, and so around GMT midnight we rounded 1,2 neck-n-neck in a light to mod breeze.

Coming out of the Firth on port tack, the wind’s rotation immediately started to reverse and six hours later off Helmsdale the wind was astern and we were all gybing onto starboard. But the wind had by no means steadied up, with the forecast saying it would rotate the other way again and that stronger wind would be arriving from the West by the time we got to the Orkneys. The temptation was to gybe back early and hug the Orkneys where there would be more pressure. I resisted this urge and gybed later for better angle, as did Hirilonde, BodanRacer and one or two others. This made our race and gave bonk a lead of c 0.4nm on rumskib, Hirilonde P3 just 0.2nm astern of rummi, and put Bodan into the T10.

Ans so, despite an opportunity to curve from Fair Isle to Papa Stour which rumskib exploited well, and an opportunity to hop from Fetlar to the top of Unst which bonk alone took, as well as a variety of options to tack through the very very (see chartlet below) rocky sound between the Fluggas and Unst, this is how things stayed all the way to Lerwick, except that Bodan raced onwards and upwards to finish 6th and be the first ever winner of an SMPF (!?) “SYC Membership Pay Forward” prize. A good Portuguese friend of mine who shall remain nameless might say “Fair Justice Bodan”, no visual pun intended (obviously).



Justice Bodan source: poshmark.com



The Rumblings, the Burrafiord Holms and the Fluggas source: www.maps.nls.uk

More than cornering then, and a topographically interesting race through yet another “must visit before I die” place. But first of all, I’ll have to wait for the storm to calm down. Thank you all and thank you SOL.