

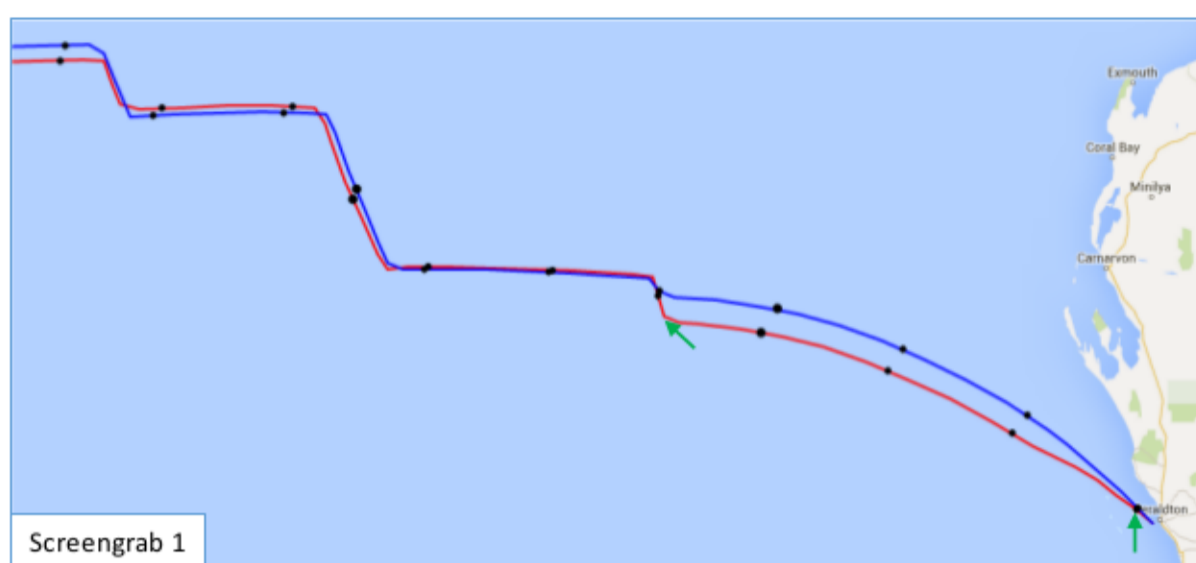
An extraordinary race!

Total elapsed hours sailed:	305
Hours wind from ahead (TWA<90):	19
Hours close-hauled (TWA<50):	3
Hours sailing deep (TWA >135):	224
Average wind strength:	F5 (17.6kn)
Total distance sailed:	c 5650 nm
Average boat speed:	18.5 kn!!

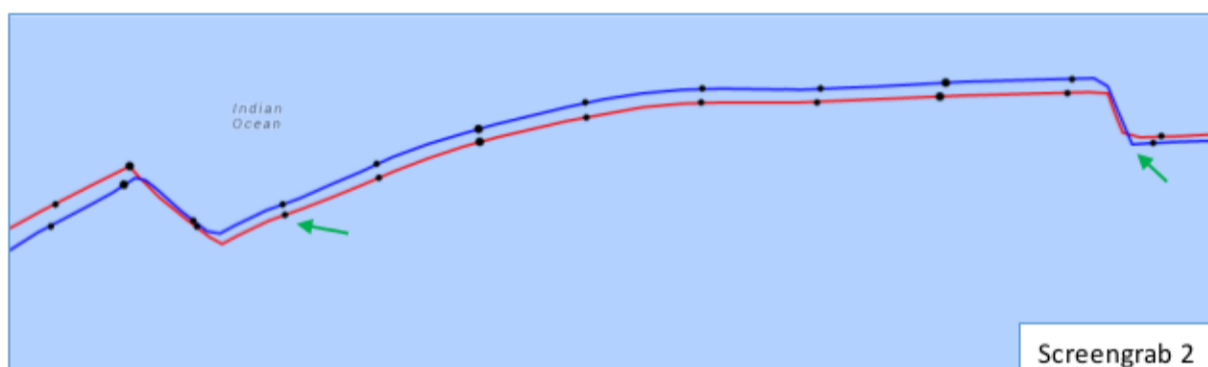
And then two hours before the Finish, Outlaw, leading by more than an hour from Dingo and aner59, came to grief on the Cape of Good Hope, gifting the victory to Dingo and P3 to bonkhoot, obliging me by so doing to bother you, dear reader, with some thoughts.

In honour of Outlaw, who up to his denouement had sailed an inspired race, our viel bewunderte Verbrecher shall in what follows never be far from my thoughts.

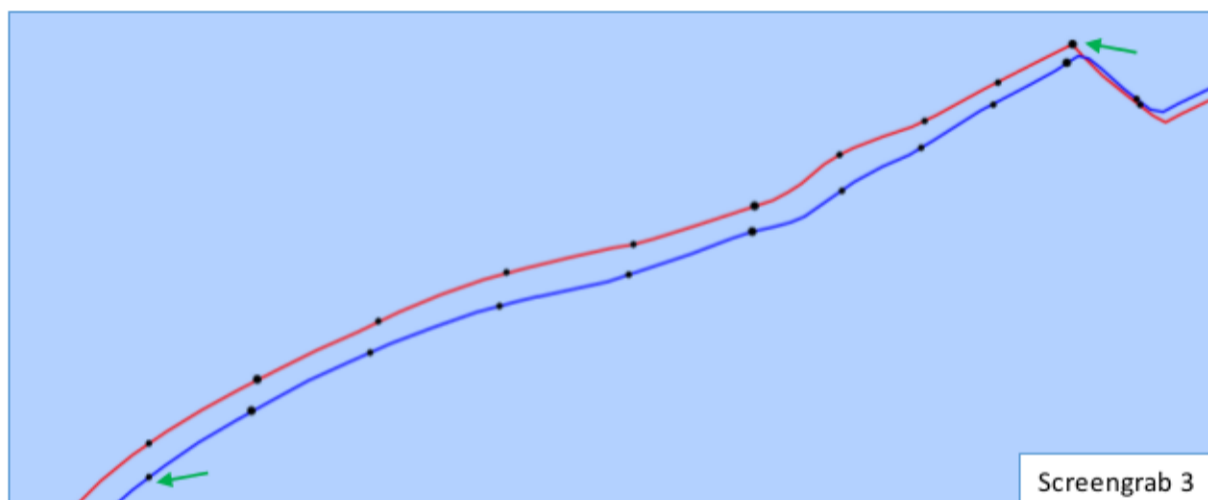
I raced a very similar race to Herr Verbrecher (and indeed aner59). However, out of the blocks, despite being very sure I had to head generally North West having run the router with 14 day gribbs regularly for several days before the off, I sailed a bit tight but then a bit deep and then a bit tighter again. My track is in red below; Outlaw in blue (Screengrab 1). In consequence of this early hesitancy, by the time we got to the end of the first series of gybes to hit that optimum northing balancing 'detour taken' and 'bigger breeze found', we were lying mid-fleet together with many of the other usual suspects, but Outlaw had got that bit further North than I had managed.



Things looked good straightaway, and as we started to sail due East at speeds in excess of 20kn, the pos no's clocked rapidly down. The wind over our port quarter slowly but surely backed out of the South East to more or less due East, so that four and a half days out from Geraldton we were gybing again for more northing (Screengrab 2). Our rankings, which had fallen to just inside and just outside the top 10, with more than half the boats ranked ahead and around us on a much more southerly direct route starting to run out of wind, started to fall back again. It was time for my second mistake; a simple matter of carrying on for 15 minutes beyond Outlaw's gybe point, but in line with the router's suggestion, for a little more pressure but further to the outside of a lifting curve.



I kept wide on the new gybe (as did Zero, just behind me) and even sailed a bump around some blue, but it didn't work (Screengrab 3). The wind kept backing and if only there was a chance of good wind under the African coast or water in the Kalahari Desert as assumed by SOL's ranking reporter but time-and-again discovered not to be so by qT when it got as far as Durban, a gybe for Madagacar would have paid.



Eventually, the wind moved round behind us to North of East and a gybe could no longer be postponed. Outlaw (and aner) gybed first and I followed their example quickly, not wishing to cross behind them and concede my mistake (Screengrab 4). But I was clearly behind and instead of taking the hit on the nose was getting it drip-fed as the wind remorselessly continued to back and we all started to hunt for a stepping stone across the blue river (as Javakeda coined it) stretching straight across our path all the way from Madagascar to Antarctica.



Early doors as we approached 'the river' it looked like a stepping stone well North was available, which might have saved the day for bonk. But a further WX on, a crossing much further South was favoured and I bore off for it. Luckily the northern passage reopened at the next WX and I luffed up again, but Outlaw, who had never wavered had moved an hour ahead and peskasail (who had been following much the same route as Outlaw) had pulled ahead as well, and Dingo had come from nowhere to challenge aner59 for what was looking like it could be the runners-up spot behind Outlaw.

With the wind starting to move from behind to square over North and then ahead, I put bonk on DCs and went to bed. Not like me! Next morning, the wind was from astern again but now from the South East (Screengrab 5) and outlaw, aner and Dingo were gone, but peska was only a few minutes ahead. A very good SOLer; could I catch him? And if I did, would aner or Dingo slip up to allow me sneak onto the podium. Always assuming of course that the many and mighty who had kept further South would not be proven right after all. Like... karriv and Dikke were going scary fast for a while!



It took two and a half days. Every now and then I ranked ahead, but then peska would regain the lead. Mostly this was just the ranking system logically applying its DTF calculation, but there was a moment when I thought I had got clear ahead, but peska immediately reacted. However, on the penultimate gybe to head North up to the western coastline of South Africa, peska made a small mistake to give me a defendable lead. Defend it I did and then, alas for Outlaw, two hours ahead of me, it was he who made the mistake, and not Dingo nor aner.

Which gave me a hard-fought but undeserved podium.

And as I crossed the line I thought, now head South and skirt the Kerguelens and I could be back in Geraldton even quicker than I got here. Now that would be an even more extraordinary race!