

As soon as this literally fantastic series was announced, I noted it as 'a must try very hard'. And not only because such great work and much research was being put into the announcing by OPS leader, RainbowChaser, but also because I am connected in a peculiar number of ways with Sir Ernest.

1. I live in Ireland, the country of the great adventurer's birth
2. I once had a house in the Strawberry Beds, a mile downriver from the weir at Shackletons Mill on the river Liffey between Lucan and Chapelizod
3. When I was captain of Trinity University 3rd Hockey XI, Arthur and Jonathan, grandsons of the erstwhile miller, who was Ernest's brother, were teammates
4. Arthur recently did a garden design for my wife's great friend Heather
5. Jonathan could well have been down there in Antarctica as we raced ([www.quarkexpeditions.com/en/why-quark/our-people/special-guests/jonathan-shackleton](http://www.quarkexpeditions.com/en/why-quark/our-people/special-guests/jonathan-shackleton))
6. I am a member of the 'Sir Ernest H. Shackleton Appreciation Society' Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/6533344678/>)

And more coincidence - I too, in my little way, had to overcome challenges in this re-enactment that I had not anticipated, my equipment failing me, from time to time, in a 'hostile' environment.

### Leg 1

Preparing for Leg 1 at the start of September, I found myself back on board 'Damacle' lying in Tuscany's Marina di Pisa together with my travel-anywhere laptop. I'd left 'Damacle' there over August, and she was in good shape, unlike the laptop, the right hinge of which was breaking up (half-life: maybe 10 more 'open/close's).

As we (brother, nephew and I) sailed out for Elba IRL on Monday 4, the barquentine 'bonknhoot' was handily placed in the leading SOL group heading into the Wedell Sea. Tethered to the mobile, enjoying my free roaming Red 20 Vodafone deal, things were well under control, with good GSM coverage well beyond 6nm off any coast (mainland or island). Gribs were being regularly downloaded, for IRL purposes from OpenSkiron, and for SOL purposes from AGL.

By Wednesday we had reached the Bay of Anzio, where I had hoped to moor up in the harbour of a town named Nettuno (like the marina where we find ourselves now). But they had no room and we diverted to Anzio itself, where we moored off for a second night (we'd anchored under Gianuttri the night before) and as reported previously, two terrible things happened. We ran out of water, and, the Gods, having an evil sense of humour, then drowned us in a proper thunderstorm at around four the next morning while we slept. Many windows were open, including the one over the chart table, and much drying out was required when we realized what was happening, but alas the laptop (on the chart table) only recovered briefly. So that was the end of the routing and indeed of accurately assessing the hopping angles for 'bonknhoot' as she thundered on south. An 8th place finish in the circumstances wasn't bad, I opined.

### Leg 2

By the time Leg 2 of the Challenge started, 'Damacle' had been safely – if propellerless, said propeller having spun off in Milazzo (north Sicily) – moored up in her winter berth on Malta, and I was back home, and amazingly enough my laptop had recovered to such an extent that by hooking in an external keyboard and mouse, it was working as before, and all my files and programs (nowadays apps) were accessible again, but the hinge had had it.

I routed and fine-tuned with great intensity, and after two days of SOLing, 'bonknhoot' perhaps was enjoying the slenderests of leads. But then, a big change in the weather forecast four or so days ahead gave Fifi cause to propose a radical swerve off course to the left of the direct GC course. It seemed to make sense as it meant more BS and a gain of height in anticipation of a big header those four days ahead. I followed Fifi, but nobody else really did, and many not at all, and at the next WX Fifi changed her mind. The header ahead was going to be so severe and the blue goo it was going to

be part of ditto, that keeping well East to tack on it and lay the finish on starboard was now preferred. Typical!

There are times when it is better to be hanged for a sheep rather than a lamb, and this turned out to be one of them. I switched Fifi off, kept the hard-earned height to the West and sailed SOTP at basically max BS from then on. Imagine my surprise to find that six hours out from the finish the blue goo and the associated severe header had drifted further north beyond the finish line and I could romp in on a TWA of 60 odd for a very satisfying win.

With an 8 and a 1, the gap to 'Rafa' in P2 overall was surprisingly considerable, with 'Belliberda' a bit further adrift, and then the rest of the fleet really already out of it. That change of weather late on in Leg 2 had done me not one, but two favours. A win for 'bonknhoot' and a 'pity there are no discards' for most of her competitors.

### Leg 3

On to Leg 3 then and a rowing boat with a rather oversized square sail, time-warped out of the distant into the more recent past: the Draken. Thing with the Draken is that the polar you find on 'brainaid' starts at 24 degrees TWA, so doesn't capture the rowing option properly, so make your own or get one from your AGL polar directory. The other thing with Leg 3 was that it was starting when I would be at sea again; bringing a HR48 from Mallorca to Malta. So I asked 'psail' to do some boat-sitting. Now 'psail's skipper is a rangy, broad-shouldered Portugeezer so you'd think he'd be good at rowing, but no, he warned me, he preferred sailing.

Rowing is a slow business, and when I took over the helm, now with a new PC partially loaded up with the old files and software, nobody had got very far yet and so, although a little behind, 'bonknhoot' was by no means out of it. Thank you, psail! Instead, it was I, me, myself who took her down the rankings, by rowing too much to keep bonk west of various islands that the router didn't see, which then didn't matter when the new laptop went blank entirely. Romping in to Elephant Island with the big sail billowing, some places were regained, and with 'rafa' doing well, I was lucky enough to pick up a 17th, and stay 8 points ahead overall.

### Leg 4

From the 'get-go' it was clear that rowing was not going to be necessary to get from Elephant Island to Stromness on Leg 4. The laptop, though the judicious use of F12 by a draftsman in my brother's waste/water process engineering design office, had become fully functional again, but broad reaching and running in big wind, Fifi felt that a straight line great circle course would be simplest and not worth bothering to deviate from. It took quite a bit of work to persuade her otherwise, time and WX time again. It was all very close, and with so many 'in it', loosing 8 places to 'rafa' was obviously a possibility. And then, messing around, between one window and another, I put 'bonknhoot' head to wind, only noticing this eight or so minutes later. Arrghh!!

Keeping my old routings alive, which all favoured keeping east of the rhumb line, every WX update I compared Fifi's latest suggestion with up to four of the old routings re-optimised, and generally picked one of these instead. Little by little I recovered ground. However, the finish was once again going to be anyone's guess, with 'bonknhoot' committed to luffing up into a dying, heading breeze, then tacking, and with the wind continuing to clock, to sail to a second tack point and race for the line. At least, that's what I think I remember, and, anyway, it worked, and, with 'rafa' having kept much more to the west and all three podium placers not having featured strongly in at least two of the other legs, a second P8 was more than enough to take the title.

It is easy to be enthusiastic about a series, when, despite a few calamities, you win, but this was:

A GREAT EVENT – DIFFICULT BOATS – STRANGE WATERS – HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Thank you, SOL, and everybody for racing!