

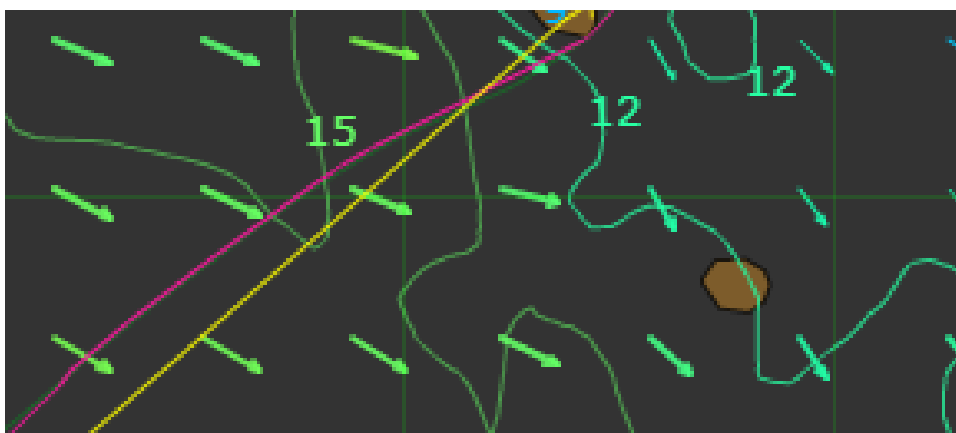
It is a considerable disappointment to those of us who enjoy a bit of post-match analysis, especially when it involves basking in once own self-reflecting glory, that hmm's Log and Data Center is no longer available to us to help us jog and illustrate our memory. However, if you are quick, and the race has not taken too long, you can screengrab your track from start to finish, as I have done on this occasion (barring the first few hours after the start, that is). I will borrow sections from it, as I write, and the full trace is displayed at the end; bonknhoot's is in magenta, my rival SKOVSER's in a greyish blue.

As you can see, the differences in our tracks are very minor, and so it was that the differences in our DTF's were also very minor, until the very end. As you can also see, the leaders are just coming into the finish, night has fallen over the Coral Sea, and WRF is giving us a beautiful model of lighter winds over and in the lee of some of the islands of the New Hebrides archipelago, and slight acceleration in the straits between them. Who knows, perhaps it was like that? Or not, seeing how, slightly delayed (for processing?), our model regularly changed its mind from one WX to the next, upsetting some and pleasing others, all race long!

To the race then. I wasn't around at the start, but I recall setting bonk up to depart on a rhumb line course straight for the southern tip of We Island. There must have been a WX as we approached, as I can also remember setting a short series of DCs with a mix of care and confidence to round up and then tack a hitch north to get further inside a lifting breeze on a course to take me slightly above the next island's waypoint. As you can see, SKOVSER didn't tack and instead just rounded up onto close-hauled.

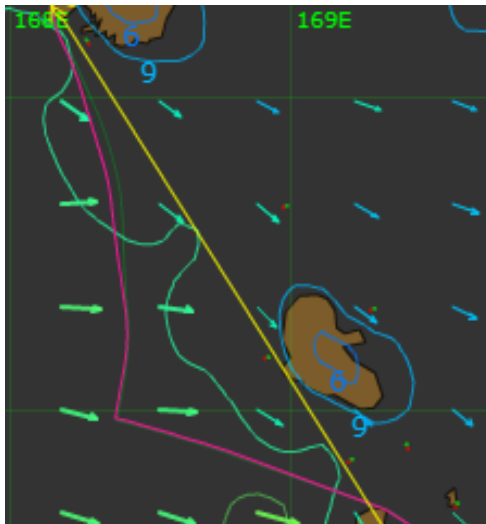


When, midway across the gulf to Tanna, I next went to check progress, bonk had headed up a little more again (not sure why, but DC-driven), SKOVSER had got to where I was, but without that tack and slightly ahead, and, according to the new WX it was very much time to start to bear off. There must have been less pressure to leeward; I can think of no other reason for our deviation north of the rhumb line, and certainly by the time we got to Tanna, the yachts coming in from a more northerly position had gained a small jump on those who had sailed a second point-to-point rhumb line. bonk was there or thereabouts, but with work to do.



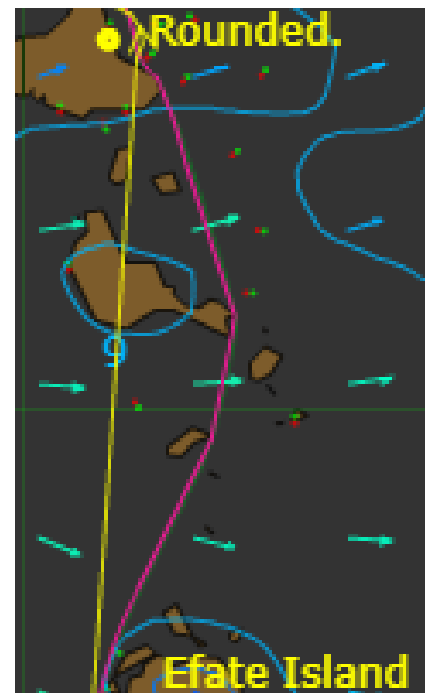
Once round the bottom corner, it was upwind. With the breeze tending to anti-clock further west of north, but much slacker under the shore, the right course was a balance of tacking in for better angle and staying out for more pressure.

Allowing for PL, I decided to simply close-haul out to the breeze and tack to lay the island's northerly point. SKOVSER, on the other hand, went for more of a compromise. I'm not sure anymore, but I think I gained a bit.

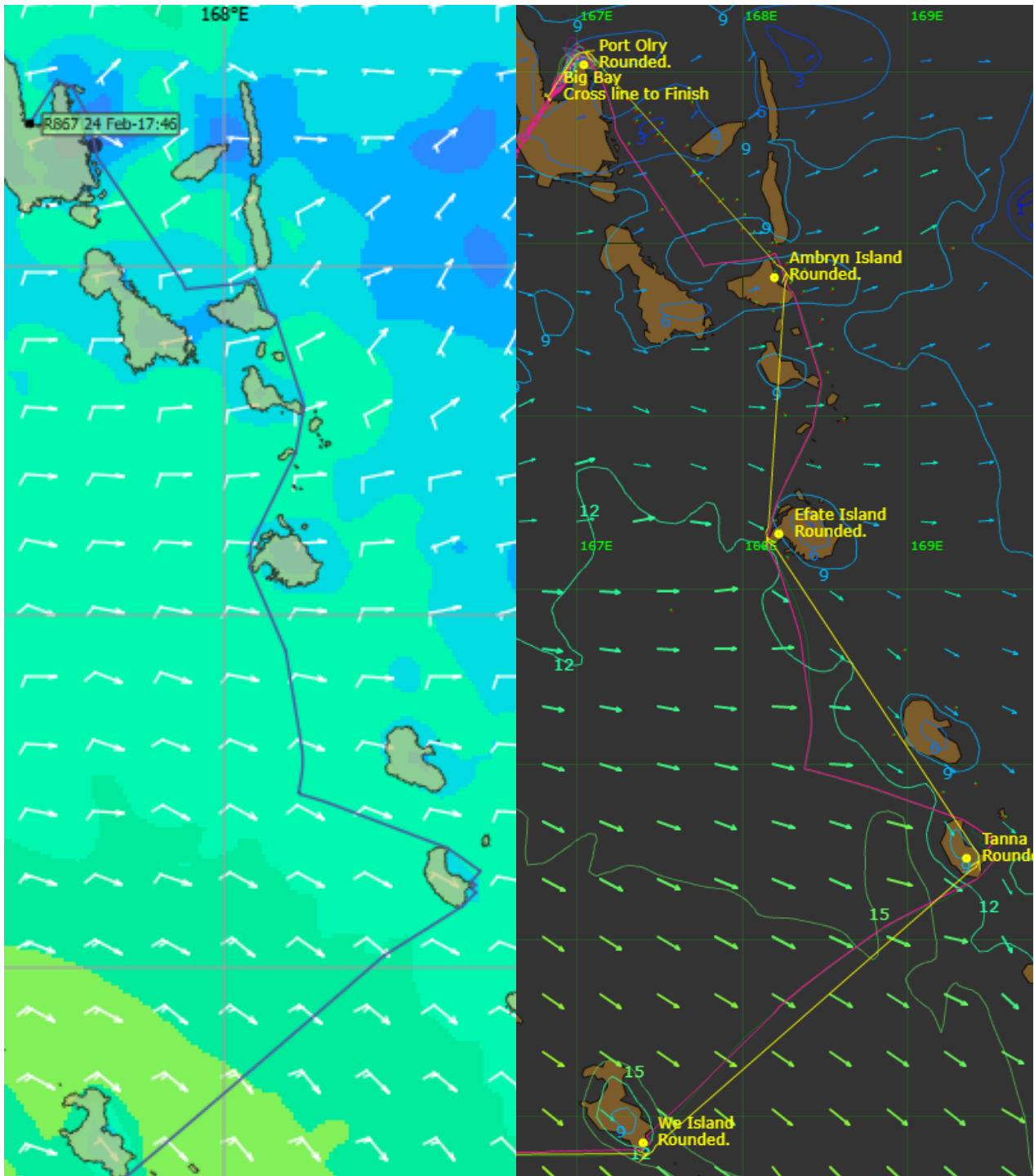


Having cleared the point, I bore my Farr400 off sharply to get away from the stalled wind blowing onto the island, and out to sea for more pressure and better angle, to tack almost simultaneously with SKOVSER. The Farr400 has a very round billiard-ball-like polar, not pointing very well, and building speed continuously as you open her up. Free is fast, very fast in a Farr400 and so SKOVSER went for more of a curve on wider angles up to the next island, Efate, than I opted for on bonk. However, my course took me through more pressure and when we reached Efate, bonk was just ahead of SKOVSER and aner59, who had been swapping the lead with SKOVSER. But others – Wolff, WRmirekd, ij, Kipper1258, to name only a few – were also all in contention.

An obstacle now blocked the best route to Ambryn, the last island to be rounded before heading to Vanuatu for the finish in Big Bay. Unnamed on our charts, naturally it was another island, Epi, which this time you could leave to port or to starboard. Bit of an epi-centre Epi proved to be, as quite a few took the longer route round it over the west, reckoning it would be quicker, whereas SKOVSER, aner59 and bonk went east leaving it to port. Apparently if you had been routing that far ahead at earlier WX's you would have seen the western route being favoured repeatedly. Fortunately, I had only been routing short-leg-by-short-leg and having routed with 'avoid coasts' off and 'avoid coasts' on, had come to the conclusion that over east was the way to go. But this time, it was SKOVSER's turn to do it better, curving slightly wider to Epi and then again from Epi to Ambryn to get more speed from more pressure on both legs and as the two of us rounded Epi's south east cape, we were in a dead heat for the lead, with aner59 a little bit adrift and the westerners perhaps out of it.



The enclosed sea between Malekula, Ambryn, Pentecote, Aoba and Vanuatu was now preferring a lot of variation in wind direction ahead. Straight across was not the way to go. Instead the router suggested bonk should hug the coast of Ambryn, before heading as quick as she could more or less due north to a tack point a little offshore and then west to tack again onto a north westerly course to come up close under the Vanuatu shore to the turn at Port Olry in slightly better breeze than further out to sea. And so I did. And so did SKOVSER. It was still neck-and-neck, but then alas for SKOVSER tacking for the finish, SKOVSER carried on further perhaps aiming for the north western end of the line, but then correcting for the favoured other end to hold onto second place. Phew!



Having written so much, I thought I might as well check what QtVIm would have made of it all, if I gave it a pathway to follow and a merged set of consecutive WXs (which first I trimmed to the first eight hours of each forecast, e.g. from 10:00 to 17:00, since otherwise you can't be sure which bits of forecast Qt is merging). Well as you can see, Qt's solution is remarkably similar to what SKOVSER and I sailed, except that:

- My tack north under We in hindsight Qt considers unnecessary, unsurprisingly
- SKOVSER's tack under Tanna it prefers to my 'Rodney Pattison at Kiel in 72' solution
- It is predicting an ETA of 17:46 which I beat by a lucky 13 minutes.