

Dondra to Sanya 2020

Rather than write about how everything went swimmingly for bonknhoot when it does, my new editorial policy is to focus on the races 'when things go wrong and will not come right, though you do the best you can; when life looks black as the hour of night, and a pint of plain seems your only man' to borrow from Flann O'Brien's brother, or alternatively to seek some cathartic release by talking about it.

For bonknhoot that means Ocean Races, where old salts like DIKKEHENK and SCARABOCCHIO and more modest (no UPPERCASE) newbies like appelkrat and FR_vostro, as well as many others too numerous to mention, regularly show bonk all the corners of the race course. The longer the race, the worse it can get; doesn't always mind – every dog has its day, barknwoof!

But Dondra to Sanya wasn't a long race, it was three races; a race across the Bay of Bengal, a race through the Malacca Straits, and race up the South China Sea. Not an ocean race at all really, but it still went badly wrong. Yes, you had to assess whether entering the South China Sea through the strait between Java and Sumatra might be a better option than the Malacca Straits, but once you had decided NO, what remained was three races of 4-6 days duration each. It should have been straightforward!

The first leg then. Trusting my router, which for days before the start had repeatedly advised taking a few tacks up along the Sri Lanka coast before setting off east, I did so. I planned the tacks carefully with the DC-editor, but alas, keeping seaward of the point at the western end of Dikwella Bay by what looked like a server hop in the checker proved too tight and I stopped for an Aliya (Arrack coconut flower liquor diluted down with coconut water, and ice of course) on the beach. STUPID. A 15-day race is never going to be won or lost by that server jump.

Of course, once we had got halfway across the Bay of Bengal, it started to become obvious that the whole exercise of getting closer onto the layline for the entrance to the Straits had been a big mistake, and by the time we were beating up to the entrance, bonk's ranking was somewhere in the 30s, along with all the quite many others (all slightly ahead of me; no cocktail stops).

Really though I should have known better. Hitting the layline early when racing round the cans is always wrong. Any (unexpected, just like at every SOL WX) windshift up or down is going to help those to leeward of you, either to fetch up, or to tack across. SILLY BILLY.

Entering the straits, the race became a tacking duel to get north up under the coast of Malaysia. bonk was climbing up through the fleet nicely when a fresh WX came with news that the better way through a large patch of blue goo ahead was going to be along the southern Sumatran shore of the straits. Like many others, including my much-respected friends Dingo and SCARABOCCHIO, I went with it, but it was those who ignored it who came out smelling of roses, including DIKKEHENK and all three to eventually make the podium in Sanya.

It is easy to second-guess these things in hindsight, and it was a 50:50 call, but perhaps, given my position in the fleet, I might have thought take a chance. The choice of north or south had bounced around a bit at previous WXs. Did that mean there was a chance it could be north again at the next roll of the dice? A VA BLANC moment.

I found two more opportunities as we dawdled on through the straits to let the router help me get it all wrong. The first was simply operator error. Without realising, I had at some WX moment or other entered a WX into slot 1 of QtVIm. This is the slot where I normally place the 15 day ahead forecasts, truncated by a little bit of self-programming to last 8 days, that I obtain from saildocs. As I have

learned to my cost, it is important to remove these when they are no longer actual, as they will interfere when they overlap with the latest 7-day SOL WX. Anyway, it was there for at least 24 hours encouraging to cross back over to very close under the Malaysian coast. ALWAYS check both slots ONLY have weather that is relevant!

The second opportunity was what seemed like a fair gamble, and again the router supported the idea, which was to stay close under Malaysia for height. It was going to be all upwind to Sanya and there was a fabulous bend lifting you up 'n up on port tack, so I tacked in to Singapore and stopped on a headland again but only for a swifty Singapore Sling and I waved at calmxy. It looked good for a while, but it was not to be. The header as we approached Subi-besar Island turned out worse than initially forecast and an opportunity to two-tack to the north of it avoiding the worst of the blue goo vanished.

The thing here perhaps was to recognise that your next waypoint was not Sanya, but an arbitrary X north east of Subi-besar, which then might have led you to realise that putting those hitches in north, just like before, was just getting you onto the layline with nowhere to go early. THINK about where you really want to go next.

Finally, the third leg - the beat up the South China Sea. Steady wind, subtle changes from one WX to the next and religious routing started to pay off, but not enough and, after inside curve tacking around the coast of Vietnam, I took a calculated risk (knowing there was less wind the closer you were to the coast and made my last tack slightly early. It didn't work, but slotting in behind my nearest rival appelkrat wouldn't have worked either.

Oh well, onward to the next (right proper) ocean race – Lisboa to Cape Town through the Doldrums!

bonknhoot / February 2020