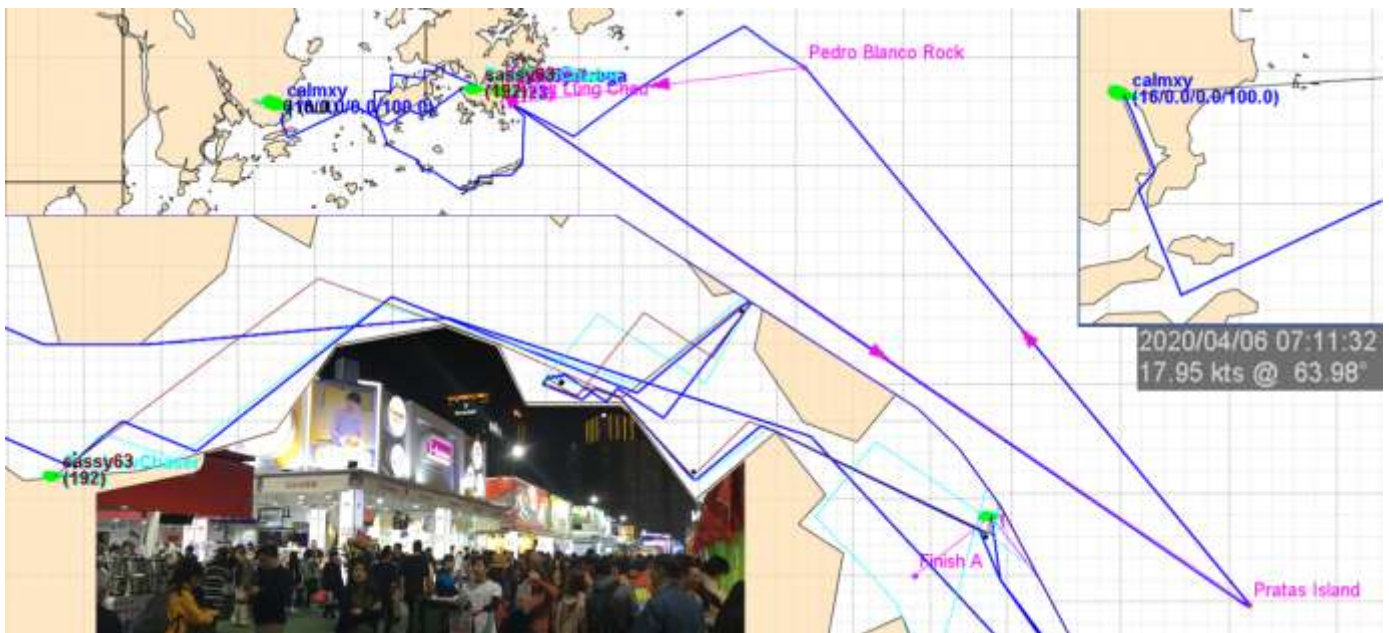


Happy Easter, fellow SOLers!



My “practice sailing” comprised making a clockwise loop around Hong Kong’s islands on 6 April, passing Junk Bay and then sailing the actual race course on 7-8 April before ending with a Practice Race past Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club (where M5/M6 marks were) to Macau. Although I initially planned to sail the actual race course first, the expected time of 44 hours meant that I was better off doing something shorter first, so that I would risk missing only one Practice Race rather than two.

For the practice around the actual race course, consistently strong wind from the ENE made sailing the rhumb lines to Pratas Island and then to Pedro Blanco Rock viable. It may have been slightly faster to curve these slightly to the south, as the winds were stronger there. From Pedro Blanco, a direct tailwind meant that I had to gybe for the optimal route to return to Junk Bay. I performed two gybes to take advantage of small wind shifts, arriving within 1nm of Junk Bay at 6pm UTC on 8 April.

Since there wasn't a Practice Race at Junk Bay, I drifted around at TWA -0.3° for most of the next day (perhaps virtually “touring” Hong Kong Island?) until the Practice Race start on 9 April.

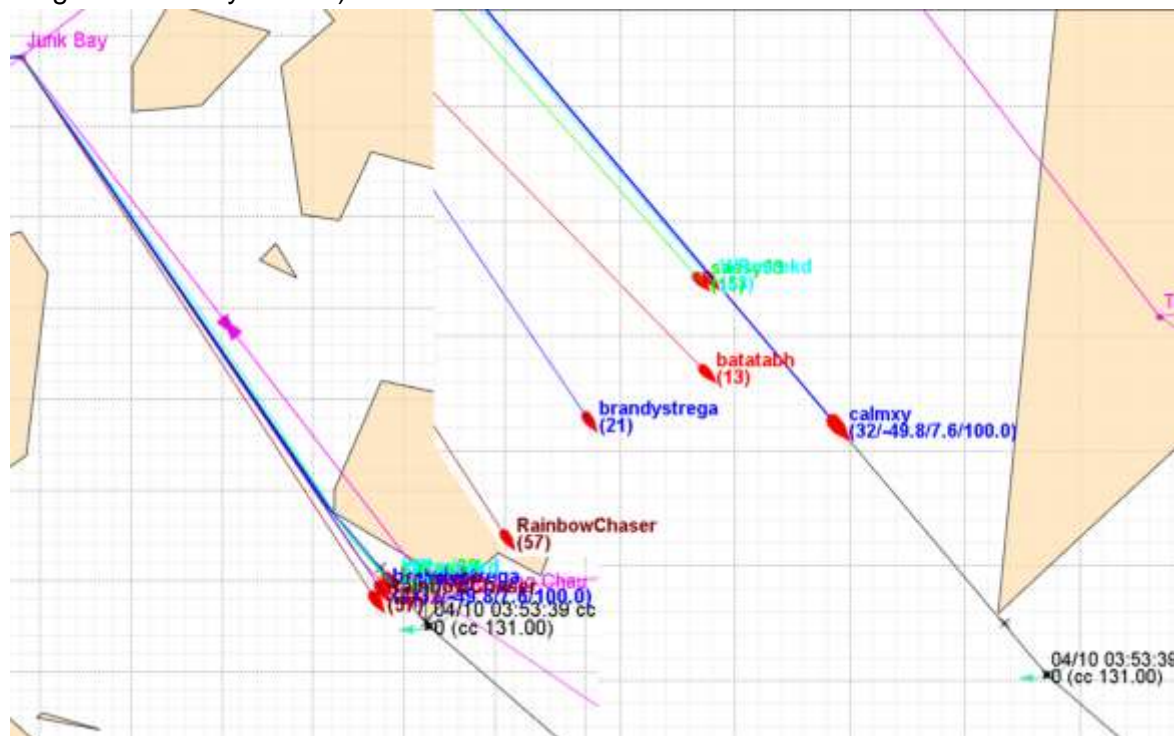
The Practice Race started with Greatskua heading towards the southwest for a BBQ and sassy63 heading the wrong way after setting a DC towards the southeast. Otherwise, most of us headed at $\sim\text{COG } 296^\circ$ towards M2. Nothing significant happened at M2. But on the way to M3, I had to switch my attention to rounding that last corner for Hook Island Timed; the hastily set DC resulted in around 30 seconds of overshoot, thus losing much of the lead to sassy63. I suppose it was worthwhile as a literal split-second more there and I would have lost to Cippalippa.

The rest of the Practice Race went fine, except that perhaps I made a few gybes too many, which caused performance loss outweighing the benefit of more winds and hence eroding whatever advantage remained over sassy63. Hence, despite the bad start, sassy63 won this Practice Race by a hair. It was only a few short hours later that Towback came and I returned to Junk Bay instantaneously.

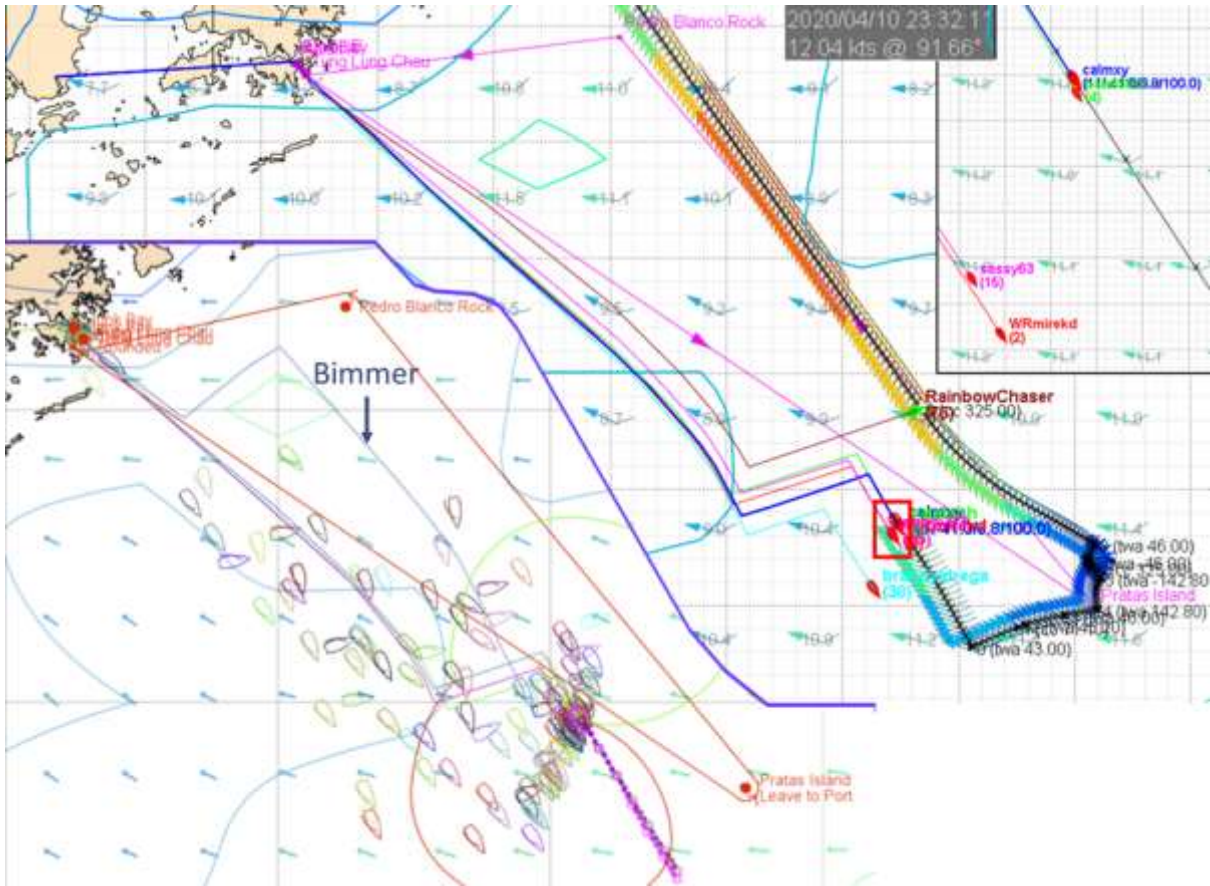
The actual race proved to have less favourable winds in general. Remember in the “Practice Sailing” where you could get an average TWA of 65° by sailing the rhumb line? Well, this is what would happen if one tried to sail the rhumb line in the actual race:



This measurement was taken 14 hours before the actual race start, but there were no significant changes in the next two Wx updates. There simply wasn't enough height to optimally sail the rhumb line to Pratas Island; it was required to tack at least once somewhere along the way. However, that didn't stop some from sailing this rhumb line (and falling considerably behind).



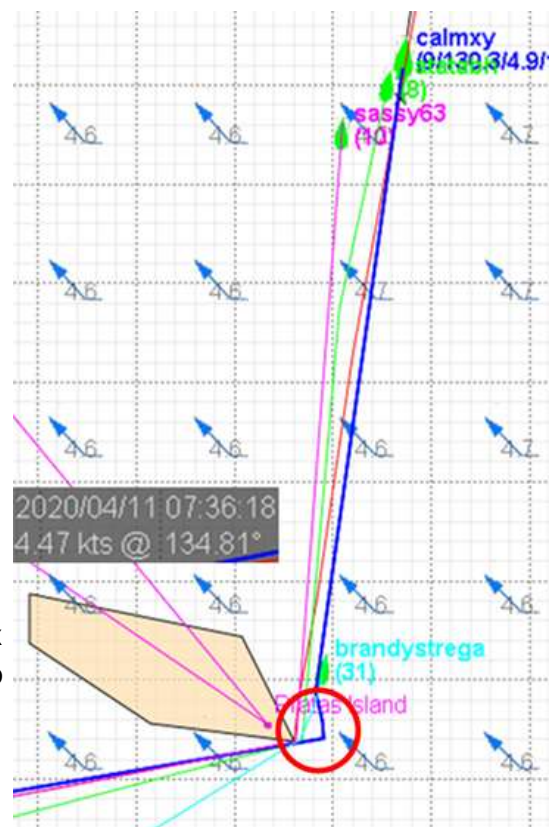
But before considering where to tack (or exactly what choice of commands to use in general) on this long stretch, Tung Lung Chau had to be rounded first. This was easily done, but having to race Brisbane to Gladstone too added some difficulty as that race was also at the phase where several marks had to be rounded in (relatively) close succession. A few BBQ'd, but most made it onto the next leg without a hitch.



From Tung Lung Chau to 21.5°N, a balance had to be achieved between higher boat speed (points further away from Pratas Island) and the TWA angle (lowers boat speed when more close hauled). A few tacked almost immediately after Tung Lung Chau. My strategy was to keep on a COG of 131-134° until the max VMG upwind angle was achieved, then switch to TWA of 40°. I kept on the same COG angle, which worked out fairly well. WRmirekd, aner59 and bonknhoot probably made some minute changes in their direction, which gave them a lead over the rest of us. At 21.5°N, a tack was made as wind speed and angle was favourable along that line of latitude. This was followed by another tack several hours later.

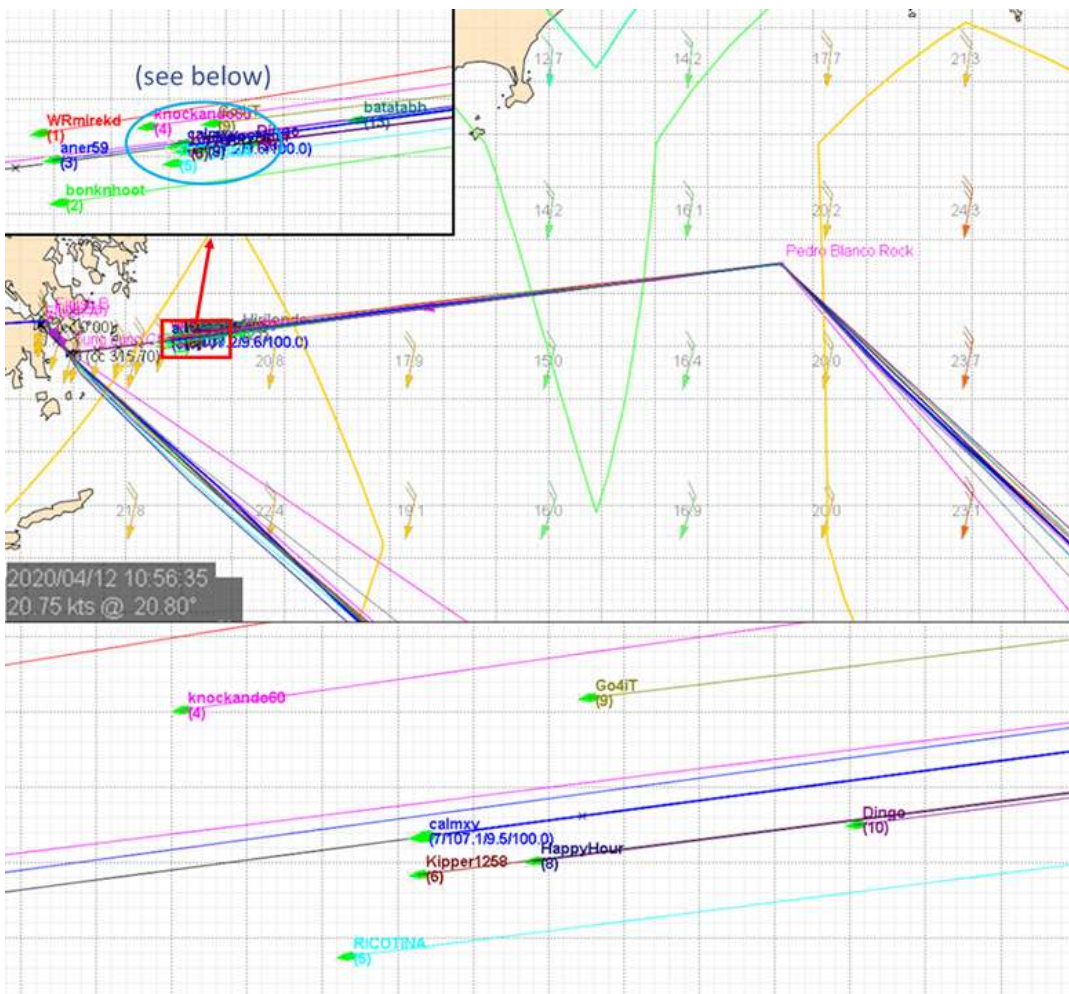
The effects of a windhole approaching from the general direction of Shantou was starting to affect the race area. It would pass through relatively quickly but its exact dynamics were unknown, given that there were still a couple of Wx updates in the way. This would determine how we would negotiate around the windhole and to strong winds on the other side.

Approaching Pratas Island, I was in 5th place but I dropped to 9th when I overshot by a minute as I forgot to check that the commands on the updated Wx were sent. After Pratas Island, there was a balance on how far east to keep; keeping further east reduced the impact of the windhole, but would also result in a longer distance to travel to the finish. Determining when to tack to the northwest was also essential. The idea was to sail on max VMG upwind, then (with both indicators enabled) switch to the COG equivalent immediately after the COG indicator pointed slightly east of Pedro Blanco Rock.





My tack was such that the average TWA of that straight line would be around 54° (I'm not exactly sure why, but somehow this specific number works well, as observed with rafa and others in other races). aner59 and knockando60 went along the same path as me, while WRmirekd and a few others tacked a few minutes north and others tacked a few minutes south. It's quite possible that if I tacked a few minutes later, I might have finished better, but at least I overtook those who opted for an early tack as that long straight was on a slower TWA angle.



The remainder of the race was geometric; a slight northward curve could be (and was indeed) attempted to shorten the distance via the great circle, but this wasn't really necessary as many fine adjustments had to be made to avoid performance loss and realize a couple seconds of time savings. What was more important was to avoid BBQing on Tung Lung Chau or missing the finish line (things like that have happened to me before). Thankfully, neither of these happened, and I remained in 7th place throughout, ahead of HappyHour.