

## EMERALD ANECDOTES

– a coastal commentary, SOL-ing from Galway to Dublin southbound in 2020 –

Galway to Dublin is an interesting race that returns to SOL every couple of years. It's not a course that so far has ever been raced IRL. Ireland's major yachting centres are in Dublin and Cork, and Belfast too, of course, and offshore races tend to depart from Dublin or thereabouts.

Having started, but never completed, one or two earlier runnings of the SOL event, and now living back in Ireland again, the land that taught me to sail, and a land more COVID careful than most, I decided I'd give it a proper go this year, and reminisce at the same time a little in 'Chat' about where and how I learned the one constant in my life.

And then RainbowChaser suggested I save my scribbles for posterity. A few had scrolled to purgatory destined I know not where, but as the musings were all from memory of long ago, which unlike those of a minute ago, don't seem to fade, I have been able to reconstruct my words of the first few hours of the race, undoubtedly rearranged. As we progress along the coastline, it will become more verbatim, lightly edited.

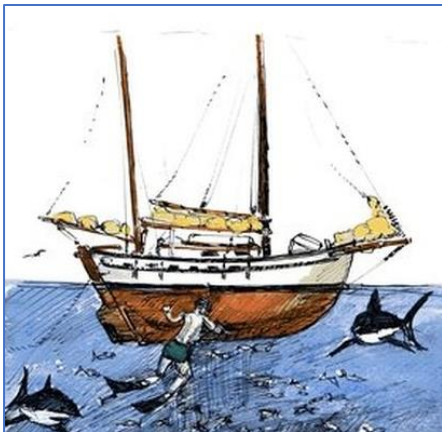
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Look north astern from the top of the mast as you beat away from the start and you may just see the skyline of Galway City, but you probably won't. Further north again, on your chart, you will note a large body of water – Lough Corrib. There's great fishing on Lough Corrib, but no sailing – the lake is unusually shallow.

However, a river runs south from the Lough straight through Galway City and into the sea. To manage its flow, a weir stalls its progress before reaching the city centre. It doesn't entirely prevent flooding on a bad day, but it helps. It also creates a watersports arena for UCG (University College Galway, or NUIG, National University of Ireland Galway to give this seat of learning its full name).

The UCG campus is on the west bank of the Corrib. Naturally, it is a great little university and like all universities it has its various societies and sports clubs for the all-important extracurricular activities, including its sailing club which operates on the backed-up waters of the river beside.

University sailing clubs in Ireland compete with each other team racing (so that's 3 boats vs 3 boats, and whichever team's boat comes last loses the match). Every year one of the universities hosts the Intervarsities, and in 1972 it was Galway's turn and my turn for my first visit to Galway.



I studied Engineering at Trinity College in Dublin, and by 1972 had made it to a helmsman for the Seconds. My fellow teammates were Pete Hogan and Jamie Wilkinson.

Pete went on to sail around the world in a 30-foot ketch which he had finished and fitted out himself in Vancouver, adding an engine for the rest of the voyage when he got to Dublin. He never fitted a heads, only giving in to that unnecessary comfort when preparing for a second circumnavigation now with his newly-wedded wife. Pete is an artist and he wrote an illustrated book about his voyage, which you can order here: <http://www.books.ie/the-log-of-the-molly-b>.

Jamie switched from Engineering to Computer Science because he failed the Organic Chemistry (!!!) exam (twice!) and went on to work for IBM in Southampton and to crew the Irish silver medal winning FD at the 1980 Games in Tallinn.

I don't know how we fared; we were the Seconds after all. However, I do remember the next time I returned to Galway, again for intervarsity team racing now representing UCC (Cork) where I had started on a postgrad degree, my teammates, Colin and Ronan Lyden, and I came second.

I raced in Galway once more after that. It was in 1981. The venue this time was Galway Bay Sailing Club (53.2086, -8.9446) who were hosting the Fireball Nationals on the open sea. Finn (hoot, and Colin and Ronan's elder brother) and I had returned to the love of our lives after two years of high-intensity 470 campaigning and I had built a new boat (my 4th build) over the winter.

We were quietly confident this was finally going to be our year. But instead of gold, we won the Shark, as various shortcuts (to save time, I was a working man again and now with a family) and weightsaving ideas let me down. The Shark became a new perpetual trophy – a blow-up bathing toy, awarded annually to the boat experiencing the most grief.

So, that was Galway, and now we skate close-hauled along a very inhospitable lee shore. A big swell is running in from Mid Atlantic. There is no shelter, just mighty breakers onto high cliffs, including the ones named Moher, until you reach the Shannon estuary, where you could retire to Foynes perhaps.



That island an hour and 20 ahead is Mutton. It lies off Spanish Point, so named after the foundering Spanish Armada. Here's planxty singing about the west coast of Clare and Spanish Point. Great place for surfers but they don't mention that... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a911pAxe6nk>.

I walked to Spanish Point, I knew I'd find you there  
I stood on the white strand, and you were everywhere  
Vivid memories faint, but the mood still remains  
I wish I could go back, and be with you again

Finn, my Fireball and 470 partner was very swarthy for an Irishman. His family hailed from Galway and he always claimed he was descended from a shipwrecked Spaniard. So, Mind yourselves, Skua and Gua!

Once we are across the mouth of the Shannon, in about six hours time, we may find ourselves standing into Tralee Bay, where the 1970 Fireball Worlds were held. I was 16 years at the time, but a year later, my brother Henk (DUNNEHENK) and I got a Fireball.

The hosting club in 1970 was Fenit SC at 52.2618, -9.7503. Here's a clip about the event... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGWk4e9kf-Y>. The winners that year were the UK's John Caig and Jack Davies, sailing a seriously old boat.

That's Jamie Wilkinson, who won the silver in the FD in Tallin with the big mop of brown hair and big glasses launching with Barry O'Neill at 19:00, and that's Freddie Harrison at 16:30 with blond mop dancing at the disco. Freddie was six years ahead of me in the same little boarding school and was highest placed Irish crew in 1970 at P8 crewing for David Lovegrove. Ireland is even smaller than you thought biking across it, broskiee.

Mornin' Geir, mornin' all. Now, if you look east behind you, you see the mouth of the Shannon, Ireland's longest river (by far). Not too many yachting harbours in there, Zorba, but at the very eastern tip of it lies Limerick, famous for the 1691 Treaty of Limerick between the surrendering Jacobites and William III of Orange. The Treaty promised substantial religious freedom and rights to Roman Catholics, which over the centuries thereafter were successively reneged on.

No yachting harbour in Limerick, but if you follow the Shannon inland (you can't, there's a big hydroelectric dam in the way) you come to Lough Derg.

Zorba, yes, Denmark could well have a higher sailing pop per cap Ireland, but not all of Ireland is sailing unfriendly. And PS Z, 1000 nm or more (fractal factor depending) of rocky Irish coastline gives more shelter than 50nm of Belgian beach, eh eh. But, yes, NZ surely has the highest pop per cap stat in the world, but Finland that's a surprise.

Ahah, Smo, so you have long coast, lots of lakes and Helsinki is technically an island, and marinas are reasonably priced, lots by cities (for people not for profit, I guess), but the winters are long, but as you say, not for hardcore sailors.

Anyway, I sailed X-79 with my German brothers-in-law in 1986-88. As did rumskib, by the way, on another boat. I remember a Europeans (80% Danish boats, rest from Flensburg) with c 50 entries). Impressive turnout. Shows you how big sailing is in Denmark, and how that little mass market helped the Jeppesen brother build X-Yachts into a leading international boatbuilder.

We finished top Germans in P5 or P6; it must have been 1987. Jesper Bank won it. I was on the stick. Tom, my younger brother-in-law flew the very oversized kite. We were thrilled.

But back in Ireland in 1998, after 10 years living in Holland, Finn and I raced Cork 1720's. The 1720 was a very similar boat to the X-79. Both 24ft, both over-canvassed, but the 1720 flew an asymmetric, and you couldn't hike, which you could and had to in the X-79. In 1998, 55 boats turned up for the 1720 'Europeans' in Cork (80% Irish, rest English). Finished 6th again but now, as always, with Finn on the stick. We'll be passing Cork tomorrow.



OK, back to topography. The lighthouse ahead of us marks the south western extremity of The Blasket Islands. The furthest one south is called Inishvickilanne. Inishvickilanne notoriously was the holiday residence of ex-premier (taoiseach) Charles Haughey in the 90s, and you were not allowed to land there, but, of course, in Ireland the shore below the high water line belongs to everyone, so when I chartered a Moody 32 out of Dingle, I moored up there and swam ashore.

It was very strange that Haughey could afford to operate a holiday island, a grand country house outside Dublin, a yacht and horses out of a politician's salary. Nobody questioned it much, until it was discovered that a supermarket chain owner had provided him with funds. A very long and expensive tribunal followed and his life ended in disgrace. Bob Geldof, an Irish Belgian, Z, wrote a song about that culture. It was called 'Banana Republic'.

Dingle, by the way, is the second harbour east on the peninsula at 52.1359, -10.2929. Very lovely and popular place. The last harbour on the end of the peninsula is Ventry. Much quieter place, but somewhere to shelter to wait for the wind to turn from north west to south west, or turn around and change the plan to eastbound, as we did in 1983.

The estuary we are crossing of course is Dingle Bay. Bit open and apart from Dingle Town and Ventry not much shelter, but that peninsula sticking out across the top is Inch beach - fabulous and remote. You could race on the sands and shallows behind the beach on SOL but not IRL (although maybe in sand yachts at low water, race proposal?).

Next island some of us have in our sights is Puffin Island. Not the only Puffin Island in the British Isles and none are so-called because you can get your sandboxed cloud-based browser there. The islands further out to sea are the Skelligs, once the habitat of monks busy preserving civilization after the collapse of the Roman Empire.



And the next (deep roundy) bay is Ballinskelligs. You can be sure there'll be a swell rolling in, but you can get some shelter behind Horse Island in the SW corner. Some great golf courses though - Waterville and Hogs Head.

SOLer chofmann played the Old Head (see later) Dingle, Balybunnion, Lahinch, even Doonbeg pre becoming a Trump asset. Wonderful, but the day he was to play Waterville, continuous sideways rain kept him and his friends in the clubhouse. The course would not refund them, but issued a credit note that choffman has now held for 14 years. 300 euro's worth, if anyone wants a stop-off for a BBQ and golf. I might take him up on that later in the year!

The next inlet we are crossing is known as the Kenmare River (the whole damn thing). We are still in Co Kerry (where the butter comes from!). At the head of the 'River' is Parknasilla Hotel, complete with very nice golf course naturally.

You will have noticed by now that a few of us are heading for a narrow sound between Dursey island and the mainland. There's a rock in the middle of it - Flag Rock. Reason we are going for this, is because Kipper of amongst us did this before with great success and so we router-checked. Barring BBQs, it is faster.

Ok, so Bantry Bay is interesting. Off the northern shore you see Bere Island, a famous rebel's nest in times gone by. Opposite the island across the sound is Castletownberehaven, which was a British Royal Navy base until 1938, but somehow Ireland's leader at the time, Eamon deValera, son of a Spaniard and a Clare woman, persuaded Britain to vacate all her naval bases just ahead of WWII. There is great anchoring in the Haven behind little Dinish Island, but it is tight and get crowded.

Your alternative is Lawrence Cove marina on the north west end of Bare Island. Roomy but at the cost of more pecunia than you might expect, but then these are empty waters, so trade is thin and that there is a marina at all is a pleasant surprise.



Top north west the bay is Glengarriff, and Garnish Island with its famous sub-tropical gardens. This most southerly part of Ireland lies directly in the Gulf Stream, and thus it is never cold. Never very warm either! Truly idyllic anchorage. The smaller estuary to the south of Bantry Bay is Dunmanus Bay. There are only a few places to drop a hook including in Dunmanus Harbour, and nothing much else.

But now, as we bear off for the Fastnet, we are crossing the heart of West Cork. Ireland's sailing 'riviera'. Immediately around the corner of the Mizen, the headland ahead, is Crookhaven – sandy beaches, sheltered moorings, pubs and restaurants. Further east and slightly further north behind a string of islands named Long and Castle, Goat and Horse and Calf is Schull – just as wonderful. And then when we round The Fastnet and square off more to the wind on the horizon we may just see Hare Island, Sherkin Island and The Baltimore Beacon. The Beacon at 51.47282, -9.38973 marks the entrance to Baltimore Harbour where many a dinghy championships has been held over the years, mainly Fireballs and Lasers.

OK, that peninsula sticking out at 51.6103, -8.5389 is the Old Head of Kinsale. When I was young you could just go for a walk out to the very end. Nowadays it's another golf course. Easy to loose a ball there. It's at quite an elevation and the drop to the sea is pretty sheer.

The big meandering creek before it is Courtmacsherry. It's a long narrow channel between mudflats but you can go up there to the town and drop a hook in the channel. If you turn north before entering the creek you'll run aground on Howe Strand. My F15 helmsman, Morgan Sheehy, lived there in the Noughties when we teamed up for a two-year campaign. Morgan had been a rival of mine in Lasers in the mid 80s and had crewed for me team racing for UCC when as an MBA student I represented the college again. This time we won. We had a super team.

The F15 campaign goal was to win the Nationals, 30 years after his dad had done so – the 'Father Ed Campaign'. We failed. In 2004 we came 2nd. The venue was Strangford Lough (up in the far North).

Do you see the little triangular SLI at 51.6763, -8.5217? That's another Goat Island and on the inside, that's Sandycove where I lived at the time with wife and three little sons. The main inlet beside it is Kinsale Harbour. I know every shoal and every back-eddy there. It's actually where those 1986 Intervarsities were hosted.



However, it is Cork Harbour, the next much larger inlet past Kinsale, where I grew up. These very sheltered waters were my brother Henk's and my backgarden, the family home's backgarden belonging to the parents' horses. I know every shoal and every back-eddy there too. Here's Henk and I launching our very first Fireball from the horses' backgarden onto the upper harbour's Monkstown Bay.

Top right across the water is Pfizer's main Irish plant, where they manufactured citric acid at the time (no lemons involved) and where today they make Sildenafil citrate, the active pharmaceutical ingredient of the little blue pills.

We are now passing the coast of East Cork. It is good fox hunting and farming country, but the coast is less spectacular and has only a few sailing clubs and even fewer safe anchorages. The first bay with a sailing club is Youghal Bay, with the town located at c 51.9473, -7.8474. The bay is open to all directions and upriver (the Blackwater) from the club and the town, although initially very wide, the waters are shallow.

However, if Smo has his canoe handy he could paddle it up and find that after a while there is a turn to the left and paddling on, he'd see Lismore Castle towering above him. The castle and lands were once the property of the Earls of Desmond, whose ancestors would have invaded Ireland under the command of the Norman Strongbow in the 12th C. However, they were expropriated at the end of the 16th C by Elizabeth I for being rebellious, and Liz let Walter Raleigh have it 'for a song'. Raleigh then sold it to another Englishman, Richard Boyle (of Boyle's Law) when Raleigh got into trouble with Elizabeth himself.



A descendant of Boyle married a son of the Duke of Devonshire sometime in the 18th C and since then the castle has been the Devonshire's private property (Irish independence notwithstanding). The Devonshires also own another stately pile - Chatsworth House, quixotically in Derbyshire. They run that as a business.

Another morning, and unlike the morning before, when bonknoot short-tacked DC controlled up to the mouth of the Shannon and into the lead, running downwind well offshore during the night, bonk has fared less well and the lead has gone to Kipper. Clearly, it is trickier to find the course that will find that perfect compromise between pressure for speed and distance sailed, when your downwind VMG is almost constant over a wide range of TWA.

Anyway, back to the coast and due north of us, you now see another large inlet. This is the mouth of the Barrow, which runs north and north and north. If you were in your canoe, you could nearly get to Dublin this way instead of up that dangerous Irish Sea ahead. But, if you are in a sailing boat, you

could go to Dunmore East to pick up a mooring in the sheltered cove behind the sailing club at 52.1516, -6.9905. Alternatively, you could also sail on up to Waterford, originally a Viking settlement at 52.2575, -7.1035, where you'll find a marina. Waterford is actually on the Suir (mind! spelling), a west to east flowing tributary of the Barrow.

What's the polar for the canoe? calmxy asked, but on realizing 2 knots seemed to be about as fast as you can paddle on SOL, he decided to soldier on at sea.

Go4iT remembered replacing some Waterford Crystal (broken wedding presents) at Waterford on a visit to Ireland and road distances to destinations being in kilometres but speed limits in MPH! One thing at a time, I suppose. It's sorted nowadays and the French system is now common good. But of course this self-styled republic still has common law, to help the lawyer fraternity maintain a pleasant way of life, I suppose.

Anyway, as we now leave the coast of the province of Munster behind us, which we have been following ever since we tacked for the Cliffs of Moher (in Clare, a Munster county), it's WX time.

So, just to recap: 4 great dinghy and keelboat racing venues – Tralee, Schull/Baltimore, Kinsale and Dunmore East – scenes of very many 'nearlys' by bonknhoot (that's Jan & Finn)... 'n bonknhenk (with bro Henk)... 'n bonknhedgehog (Denis O'Sullivan, whose father built great swathes of London suburbs and who holds the F2 Brands Hatch lap record – F2 not raced anymore) in the 505... 'n bonknmogs (Sheehy) in the Flying Fifteen.

And then inland, there is Lough Derg, also in Munster, where perhaps bonk had his most pleasing and ironic successes; 470 National Champions with hoot in 1980 when we should have been racing in Tallin; and National Laser Team Racing Champions together with my local little Monkstown Bay SC fellow club members, Dave and John O'Connell, which weekend away my first wife claims ultimately cost me our marriage.

I am anticipating a second divorce when I turn 80 or so with SOL being cited as a correspondent :)

Continuing our half circuit of Ireland, on your left now you can see the Rosslare Ferry Port - careful there could be a vessel crossing your course coming for or going to Fishguard or Cherbourg. Further in at 52.36051, -6.48226 is Wexford inner harbour and the waters of the local sailing club. I only ever raced there once. It was an early Laser event. Joe English went as well. Joe as they say in Ireland was a 'mad fecker' and even has a Wikipedia page [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe\\_English\\_\(sailor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_English_(sailor)).



Just a few years post our little Laser regatta, in 1979 Joe skippered NCB Ireland in the Whitbread Round the World Race. As it turned out, a smart choice by him and his all Irish crew, because if they hadn't been in the Southern Ocean, they surely would have been racing in the disaster storm-struck Fastnet that year.

Anyway, Joe decided we needed to play a prank on a pretty prissy sailor whose identity shall not be revealed. As said, we're talking mid 70s here and there was this guy who had over and under-covers for his boat and a two-piece two-tone wetsuit, over the legs of which he wore knee pads/supports! So on the morning of the second day, let's call him John couldn't find his boat, until somebody looked up and said there's a boat on the club house balcony. Tut tut. Childish.

OK, that's it for a while, no more clubs until we reach Wicklow. Just miles and miles of beaches and sandbanks, perfect for landing longships full of invading Vikings or Normans.

Right, we are now about to enter what was historically known as The Pale, being the bit of Ireland that the King of England (and Ireland) and his LOYAL vassals could feel safe. Today, I suppose we could call it the Greater Metropolitan Dublin Area. About 2m of the 5m plus inhabitants of the Republic live here.

The first sailing club we come across then is Wicklow Sailing club, tucked in behind two breakwaters just around the corner from the headland. Wicklow Sailing Club is the annual host for the Round Ireland Race and it is also where Henk and I won our first podium in our first home-built Fireball in 1974, our breakthrough year. wsguerin may be amused to know we named that boat Siberian Khatru after side 2 of Close to the Edge by YES – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0HnIr6jYWU>



A new mast with a whippy top had transformed us from mid fleet to P3 in the pecking order and four events later we had qualified for the Worlds in La Rochelle and so spent the second half of the Summer racing our boat in France.

Next up is Greystones (53.14083, -6.06306). Nowadays it's an affluent Dublin dormitory town. Never raced there, but there is a sailing club and a marina. The marina was only recently completed, but the breakwaters have been there for a decade – the collapse of the Celtic Tiger in 2008 having foiled the developers' ambitions.

We are seeing a small lift from 2200z onward as we approach Bray, and it looks like Kipper has allowed to regain the lead by anticipating a bigger lift and keeping low for a little more pressure. And rafa has sailed too high. Looking good!

Ah Bray; raced there only once, but a vibrant sailing club. Once, no twice - two of the three races for the Leinster Champs in 1978.

Won't both, but then had to de-rig, cartop up and drive for the ferry to France for the Europeans in Brest, France. We changed out of our wetgear, swapping the wheel as we drove!

We was now Finn and Jan, plus a new Fireball (my 3rd build) and an even whippier mast. Finn weighed in at 8.5 stone (54Kg) perfect for a 470 but not so much for a Fireball. Henk had been 11 stone. Came 6th in La Rochele, which was one worse than in Uddevalla, Sweden with Henk in 1976,



but hey ho, everybody thought my boat was gorgeous. We named her 'Skill' by the way, but were not sponsored by any well-known electric handtool manufacturer.

Clouddancer wondered about our crew weights – why was 8.5 stone optimum, I was a bit light for a Fireball at 10 stone. Well, Finn (hoot) was the helm. I'm crew, except when team racing or Laser racing. I got my weight down to 11 stone (70Kg), and together we were still slightly heavy for a '70, but light for a Meatball. Our English rivals nearly all had overweight helms - Lawrie Smith, Eddie Owen, Roger Tushingham - and had to sail with lighter crew. Steve Goacher with Harry Ashworth was the exception. Didn't matter for Lawrie of course, but Eddie and Roger, yes, it did.

The '70 has a wider, more powerful hull, very slightly less white sails and a same size spinnaker (looking back on it, hankies really). The 505 on the other hand had a v big spi (200 sq.ft. vs 140, I think). and nowadays their spi's are even bigger and are hoisted from way above the hounds.

Soon we can go to bed but first we must cross Killiney Bay, pass by Dalkey village and Dun Laoghaire harbour (breakwaters missing) and tack for the line, set smack bang in the middle of the shipping channel by the original course designer.

When I worked in Dublin I had an apartment atop Killiney Hill with clear view from the French doors over the entire bay below, which we are now crossing. Imagine me watching me virtually coming in to finish. A M.C. Escher moment.



Below me nearer the waterfront were various more substantial properties housing the likes of Bono, Van M, Enya, Eddie Irvine and Jim Kerr, and some of the more indigenous wealthy. They kept to themselves; you'd never see them in the Druids Chair next door the apartment having a pint. That's Enya's pile, actually just across the road from my old apartment, and enjoying the same view across to Bray of the incoming sailonline fleet.

Privacy is indeed why they are there, as Clouddancer remarked, yes, that and Ireland's quaint 0% tax treatment of creative artists, but exactly because of their non-social lives, local services and facilities are much the same as anywhere else in Dublin. Plenty of pubs and bistros in Dalkey at the foot of the hill, but no Michelin Stars or the like.

Once passed Dalkey and its island and The Muggins rather large SLI off it, we are into Dublin Bay proper. All the yacht clubs on the southside of the bay are in Dun Laoghaire; 3 of them style themselves Royal, even though the sway of the Crown is long gone - the George, the National and the Irish.

The fourth club is affectionately known as the Motor Bottle (in full the Motor Yacht Club). it's in the far northern corner the other side of a rail level crossing opposite the redundant coal harbour where there is a free access slip (still used by Fireballs today).

Club raced here for years of course, but also many champs including the 1981 Fireball Euros. You'll recall my last build fell part a bit in Galway earlier that year, so we borrowed a plastic Rondar. How Dick Jobbins managed to convince his customers the Rondar Ball was a competitive product is one of life's great mysteries, but anyway I think we finished 9th, which was so-so/OK.

On the other side of the bay, you see Bull Island and at the eastern entrance to the creek/wetlands behind it there are two further dinghy clubs, Kilbarrack and Sutton. Sutton is where it all began for the Fireballs in Ireland, when a guy called Roy Dickson built one from a kit back in 1963.

The round-shaped peninsula at the northern outer end of the bay is Howth, which like Killiney features large homes in own grounds looking out to sea. Howth Yacht Club faces north i.e. is not on Dublin. Howth would have hosted the Fireball Worlds this year, but for the dreaded virus.

If we were to race on, I'd regale you further with stories about Carlingford and Strangford, Bangor, and Carrickfergus and RNIYC on Belfast Lough, and then, when we clear the green teddybear's orange-coloured head, Sligo and Newport on the north west coast.

Nice to win this one, especially this one, although victories are always hard to come by on SOL. And thank you for being interested in my nostalgia!

bonknhoot/September 2020