

The Odyssey 2020 Leg1 – Report by Zorba777

Fooling around in Google Earth is something I like to do. So, I proposed some possible SOL race courses on the forum and was very happy to be informed by the team that the Odyssey proposal could be done in 4 legs during Q4. So, I want to start with a thanks for that chance.

Around that time I came across a [video of the full-size trireme replica](#) that the Greeks built in cooperation with British archeologists. Some digging on the internet yielded info on how that trireme had performed in sea trials, both on oars and on sail under various wind conditions. Enough information to guesstimate a realistic polar diagram for a trireme.

I did some test routings in Mediterranean waters under different wind conditions and compared the achieved average speeds with the reported known travel times from ancient Greek literature. Here is a great scholarly overview on that topic:
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Journals/TAPA/82/Speed_under_Sail_of_Ancient_Ships*.html

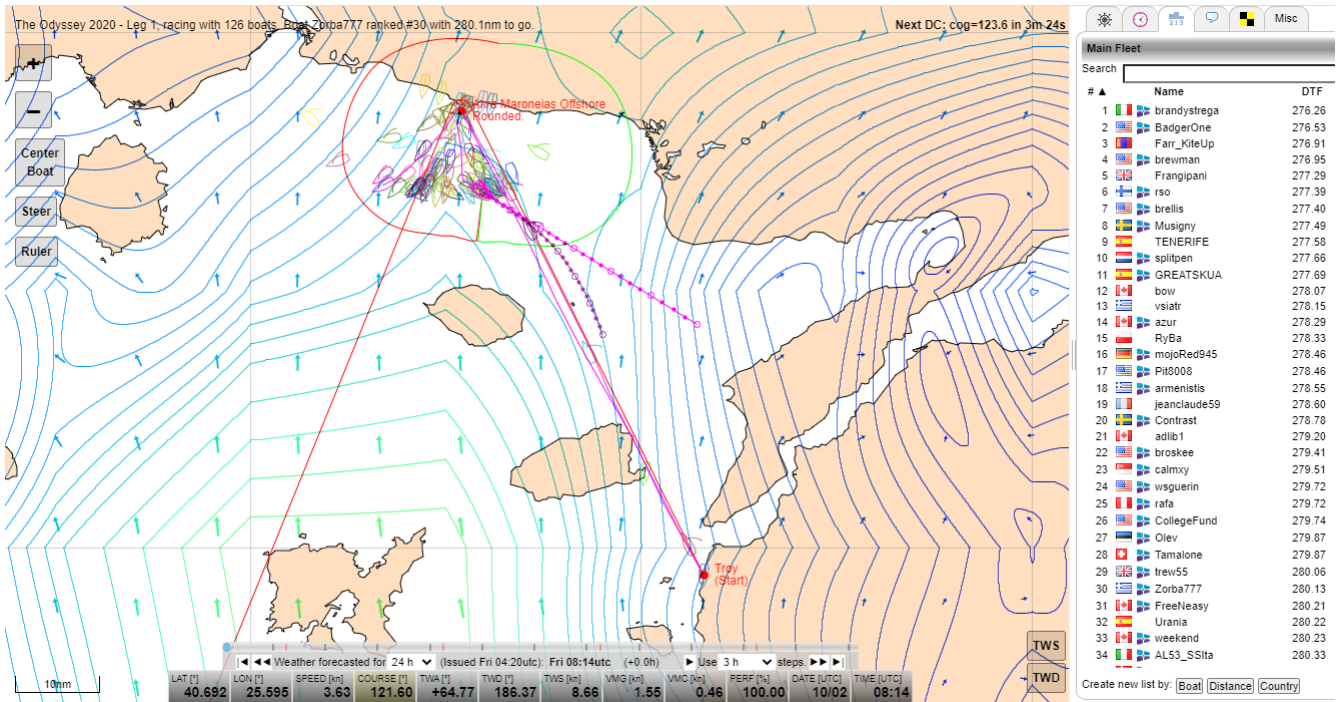
That's how the polar diagram could be fine tuned to match the real speeds from those days.

The Odyssey is a story that speak to the imagination. Countless boats are named after figures and places from ancient Greek mythology. Doing a virtual race like this is part nostalgia/dream, but it's also a real race. And just like in Homer's descriptions we were blessed with very slow winds for our trip to Cape Maleas, the finish line of Leg 1. Luckily we had virtual oarsmen to keep the boat going at 2 kts speed in any direction when needed.

Some people do not like to race in slow winds (virtual or IRL). Of course, it's in a racer's blood to want to go fast. But I think the trick is to stop thinking in terms of speed. Racing 100 NM at 2kts is no different from a 500 NM race at 10 kts. Both are 50 hours of racing, and depending on the WX and navigational challenges along the way, the slow 100 NM race can be just as difficult. The Aegean sea is known for changing winds and lots of islands, so this track had all the ingredients.

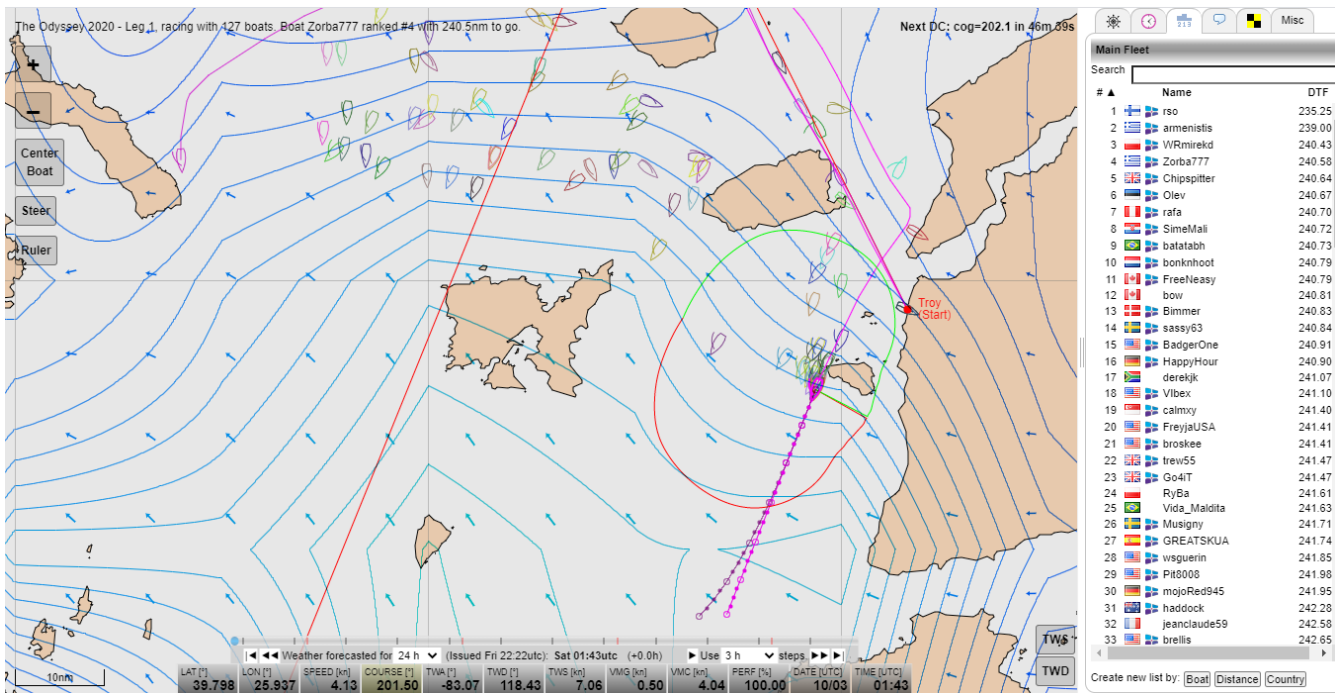
From the start near ancient Troy it first went North. Why? Well, Odysseus wanted to "visit" the Cicones, who had fought on the side of Troy, to settle some open accounts. They sacked the old city of Ismaros and took enough wine for the rest of the journey. So we did the same:).

This was the race situation after that first (and only) buoy:



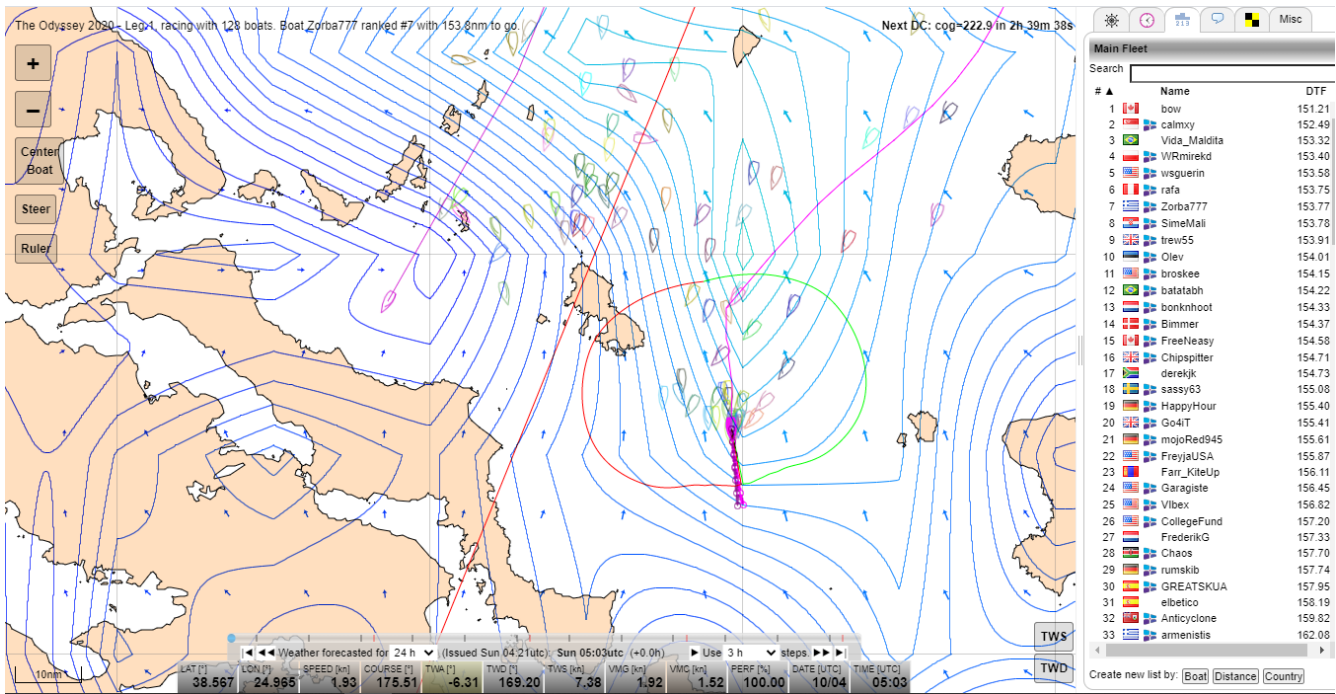
Winds were OK in that first part and we progressed at normal trireme speeds. The fleet split up here with some SOLers trying to take the more direct route that enjoyed good winds early on. The rest of us turned back towards Troy, to take advantage of the somewhat better winds that were supposed to blow there in the next days.

After 36 hours we got this situation, with the boats already spread out over a very wide area:

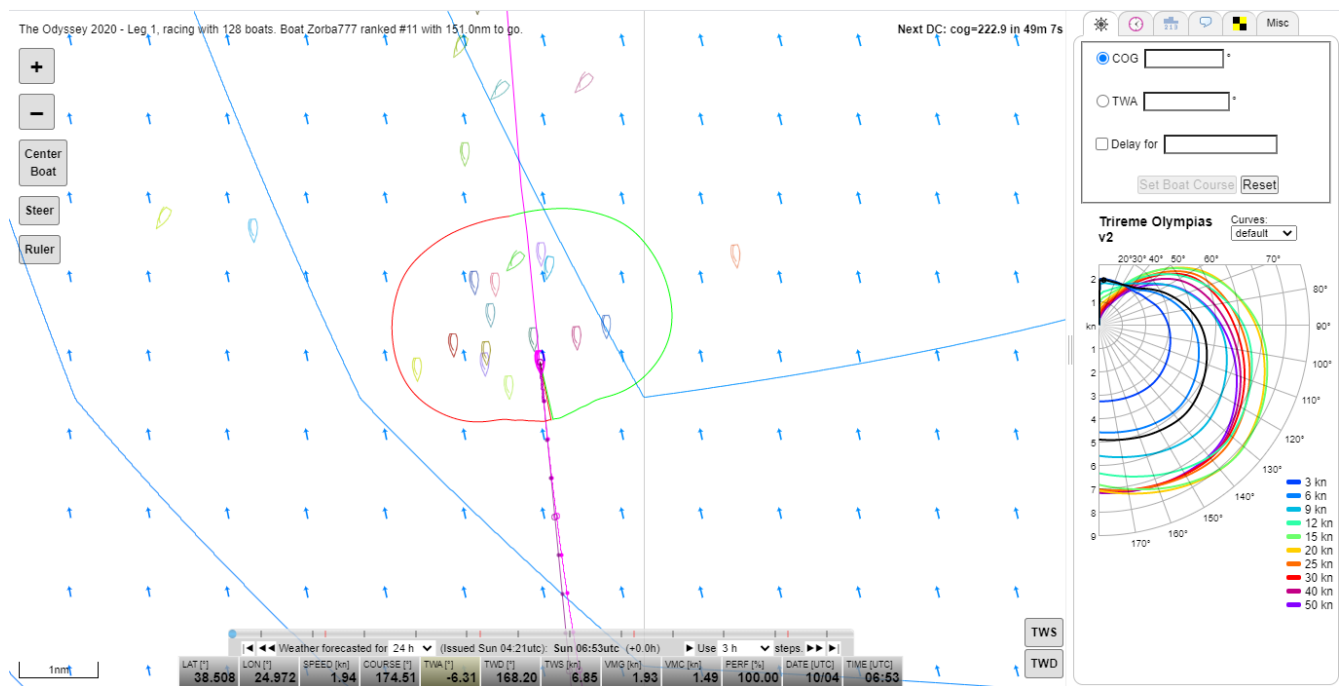


I was up to 4th place, just behind Mirek. We had passed back in front of Troy and were doing 4kts boat speed, making good progress.

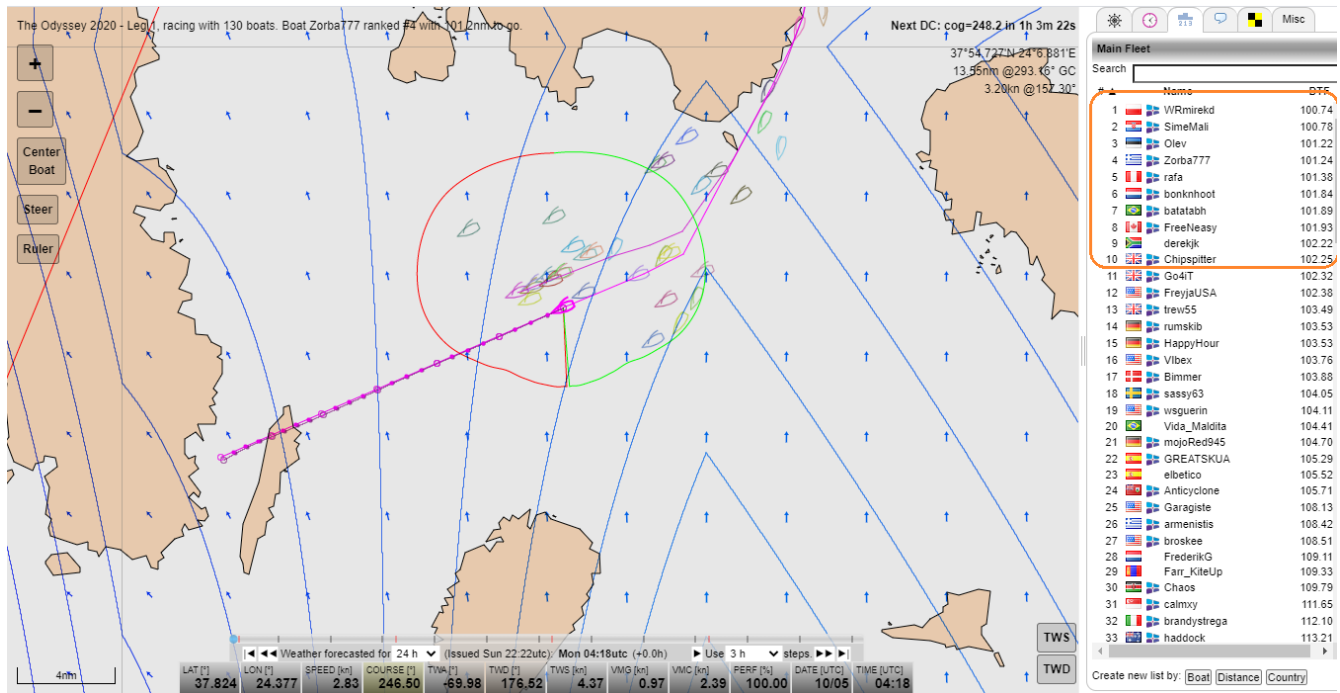
A day later the wind turned against us and we were forced to use the oarsmen:



7 kts winds on the nose. Without oarsmen we would be tacking our way to Euboea (how do you pronounce that?) island. Thanks to our virtual rowers we can sleep a bit easier and with this polar that means staying close to 6 degree TWA. Here a closer zoom, my boat nicely on the optimum 6.31 TWA. Note in the polar diagram that rowing against the wind only makes sense at wind speeds below 9kts. That could give us some interesting variations in the next legs of this Odyssey series :

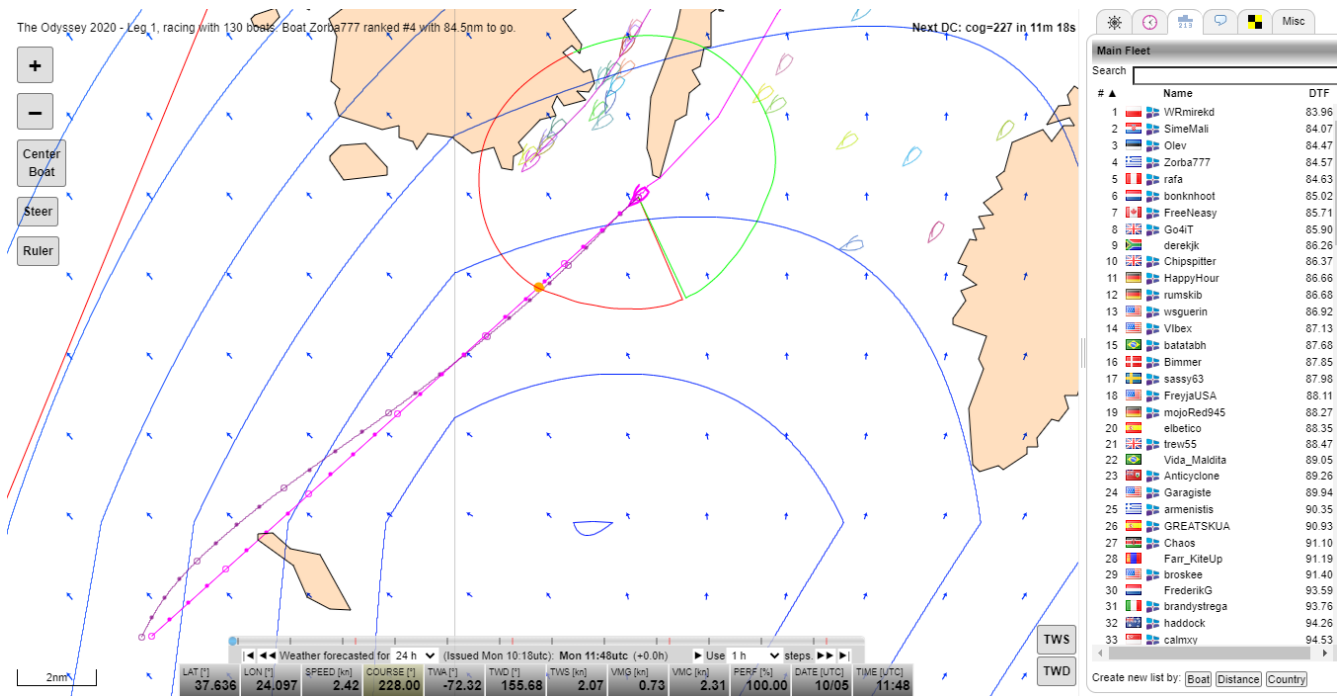


After rounding Geraistos Cape (Euboea) we could let the oarsmen take a rest and a drink, and went back on sail a bit. The winds were dropping below 4 kts and it would get worse. I had done the night on DCs and woke up to this situation:



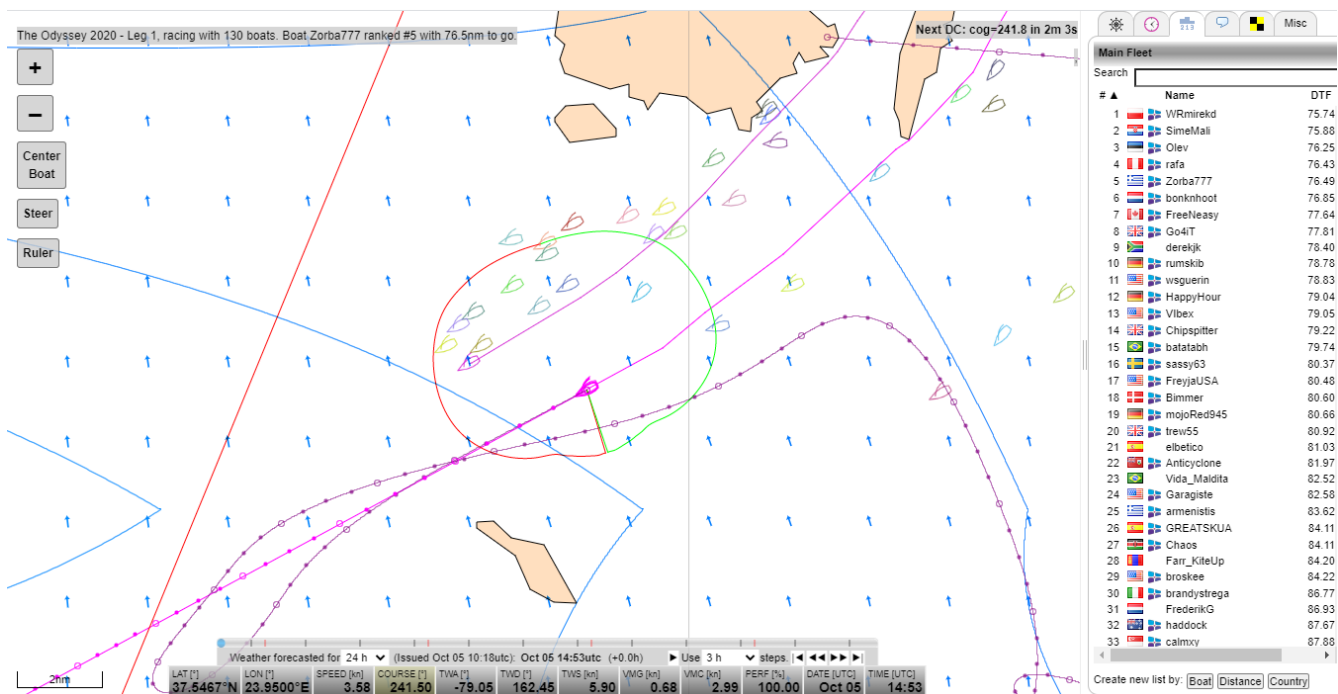
Mirek and SimeMali had opened a 0.5 NM gap. I was in close battle with Olev and Rafa, and with Bonk, Batatabh and FreeNeasy were also not far behind. In slow winds it was to be a battle for inches. I was on a more Southern route than most boats and the island Makronisos was right in front of us. My router did show the route passing North of the island as being a bit faster, but I could see that my best chance to get on the podium would be passing under the island and hoping for the next WX update to make my path a few minutes faster. Different paths almost always get blessed (or cursed) a bit differently by weather updates. It worked for me in the recent Silverrudder race. Could it work again? In my native Belgium we have a saying: *"die niet waagt blijft maagd"* (translated: who doesn't risk stays virgin). So, I took the risk :-D

This was the outcome right after that next WX update. It was not clear to me if the WX had favored my path or not. It looked very close, and would continue to do so...

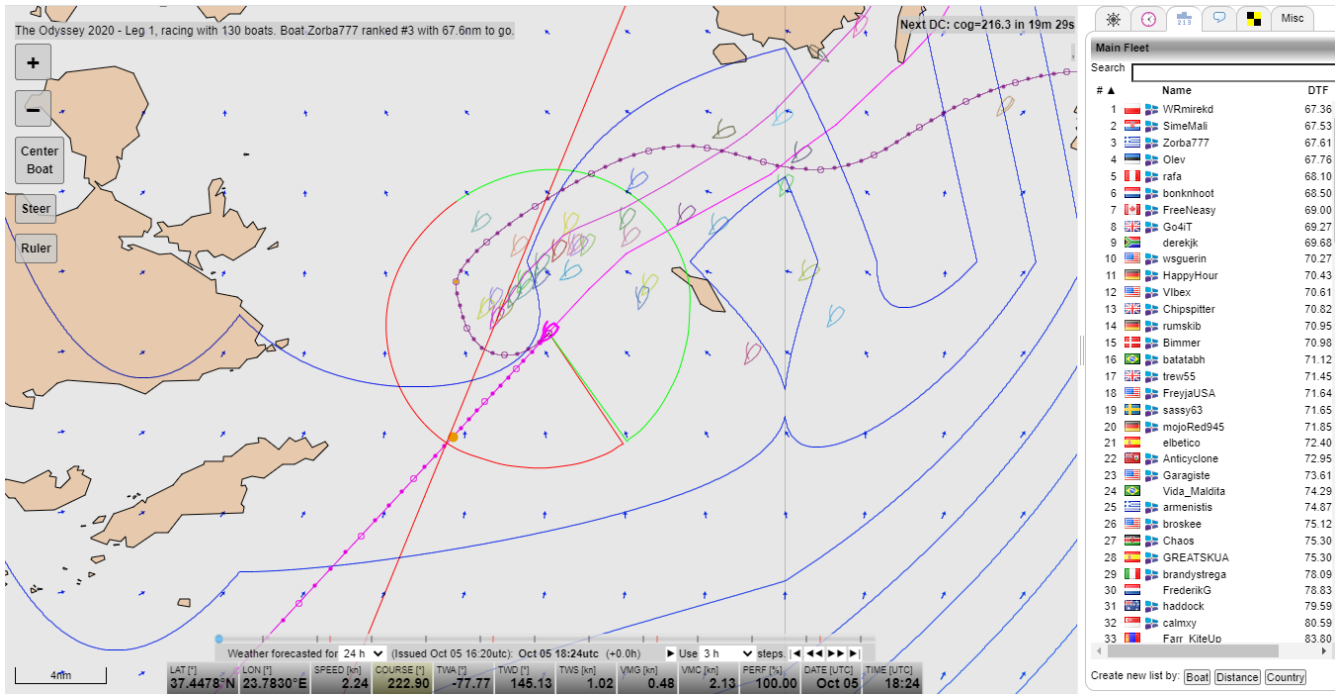


Winds were dropping below 2 kts, especially on my side. But sailing at 2.4 kts is better than rowing at 2 kts. My strategy was to pass close to the next small island and hope that next WX update would be good to me. Only 84 NM to go, but that's a long journey at 2 kts. Olev was 0.1 NM ahead of me and Rafa was about to pass me as well. Didn't look good.

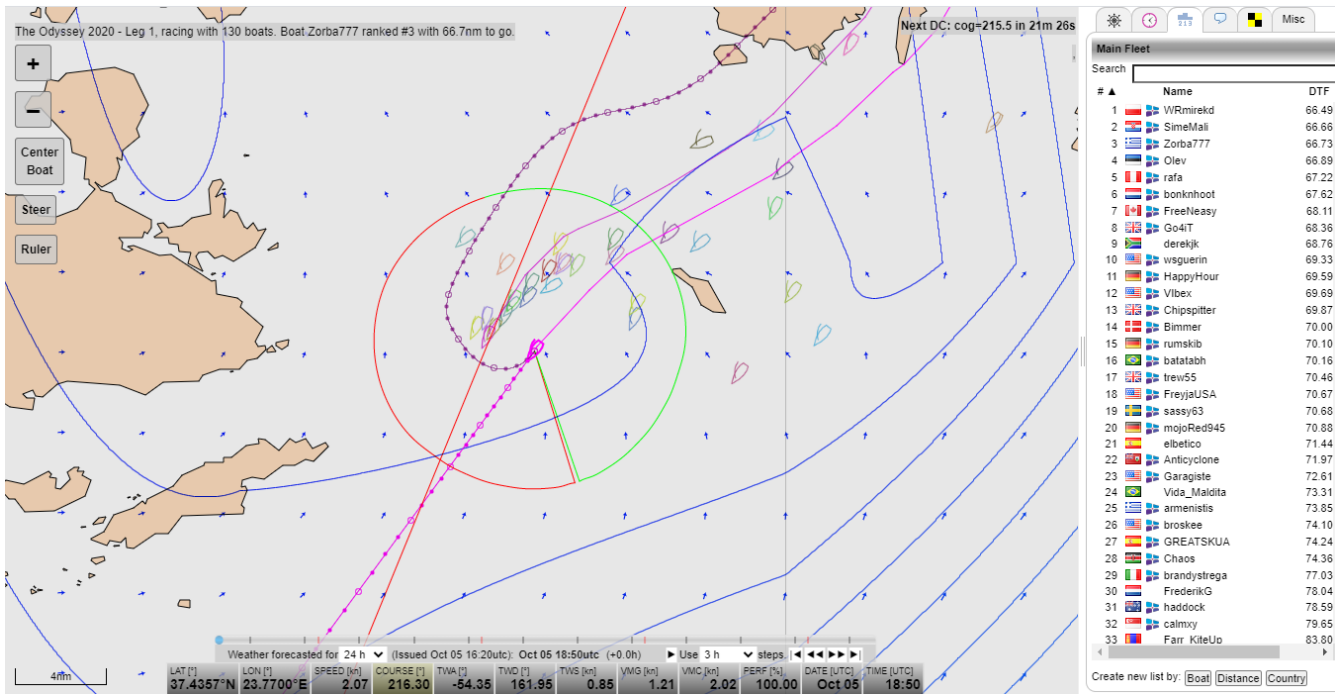
Note: sailing on a trireme in ancient days was probably not for the weak and the fearful. At those speeds I was starting to understand why they took enough wine to last a month on their ships. A few hours later:



Down to 5th place, almost a full NM behind the leaders and with Olev starting to get out of reach too. My plan was failing. So, I started watching the artful patterns that the new 48 hours predictor line (thanks @lj) was weaving on my screen. Does this look like a taichi symbol? Better wake up Zorba, you have crawled back into 3rd place:



I was back among the undead... Hades had to wait :)



An even better taichi symbol! And even coming close to Mirek and Sime. But in 0.8 kts wind?

That was as close as I would get. The plan nearly worked. It became a long slow row into the finish. The field would compress a bit because of dying winds, but the positions didn't change anymore.

Olev, who has been a tough opponent ever since he came on SOL a few months ago, gave me work to do on the last day of the race. It's only a matter of time until he makes his first podium. Well done, Olev. I can be happy with grinding out a 3rd place in "my own" race. And I have to congratulate Mirek and SimeMali, #1 and #2, who understood the trireme polar immediately and did a near perfect race. They made it impossible to catch up on them after they had grabbed a small lead.

Hope to see you all soon in Leg 2, 3 and 4, which promise to be very different races.

A few more tidbits:

1 - During the race I found a great online resource where you can read all classic texts. It is full of links and cross-references to all mentioned people and places, which helps the reader to understand what is being talked about. Here is the Odyssey and the actual journey of Odyssey is described from book 9 onwards: <https://topostext.org/work/3#9.1> It's an easy way to follow along in the upcoming legs. For example a click on "Ismarus" shows a popup map with its location.

2 - If you are in Greece in summer you may have the chance to go on a real trip with the Olympias trireme. It didn't happen this year because of the covid mess, but normally they do it every year. See: <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2019/05/21/calling-all-rowers-ancient-trireme-olympias-set-to-sail-video/>

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