

Kiritappu to Elfin Cove 2021

According to the World Resources Institute, the World has 1.63 million kilometres of coastline. I'm not sure what resolution that is determined at, but this is probably longer than the coast of the Global Self-consistent, Hierarchical High-resolution Geography intermediate resolution tiles whose boundaries our online yachts bounce off to go head-to-wind for unplanned 🙄 barbeques.

In theory of course, if the resolution is increased and increased, that coastline length tends towards infinity, but nevertheless never becomes infinite as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle impacts the certainty of what you measure at the sub-atomic level, because by measuring it (requires at least one 🧐 photon), you change it. But I digress.

361 million square kilometres is the approximate surface area of the World's oceans and seas according to NOAA's ETOPO1, its 1 arc-minute topographical Earth model, and it doesn't matter how 'resolved' the coastline is, this only changes as the Earth heats up (or cools down) but can never exceed 510 million as that is the surface area of everything sea-and-land together, Kevin Costner's Waterworld.

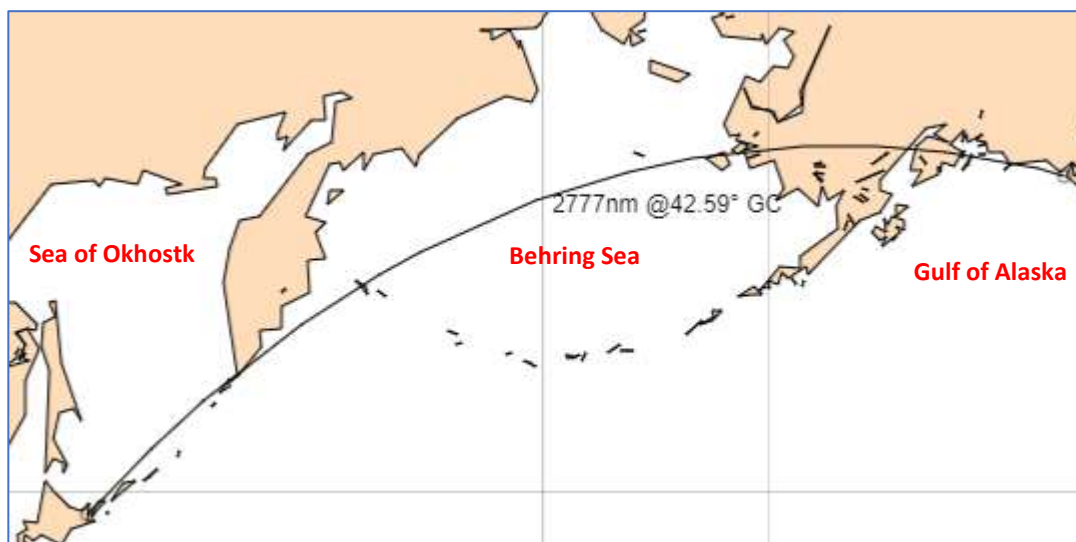
So, today, with anthropogenic disaster still avoided, the ratio of coast to ocean is about 0.45 km. per 100 sq.km. and probably a little less than that in Sailonline's idealised intermediate GSHHG world. So, it has not been difficult for Sailonline's Race Committee, acceding to popular demand, to select courses for ocean races with very little coastal interference thus far in 2021 – SCARA-proof races 😊.

However, 0.45 is not zero and Costner's calamity is not yet, so inevitably the time had to arrive for an ocean race, where, instead of a coast-to-ocean ratio of less than 0.45km:100km², that ratio was somewhat more. Welcome to Kiritappu to Elfin Cove at high latitudes.

Now, there are two things about high latitudes that are not immediately apparent from most charts:

1. Although they look the same, the distances east to west are much less than those north to south and the higher the latitude the worse that distortion is.
2. The shortest distance between two points is not a straight line (it's a corollary), no it's an arc.

As we know, this is because most charts are projections of the globe that is the earth, onto a cylinder – so-called Mercator projections, a mapping technique developed in the mid 16th C by Gerard de Kremer 🧐 from Rupelmonde in at the time the Spanish Netherlands and educated in 's Hertogenbosch.



The result of this is that what ostensibly looked like a race across the Pacific Ocean, broke down into a race across three seas – the Sea of Okhotsk, the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska – each littered with islands, to wit the Kuril Islands, the Aleutian Islands and the Kodiak group. It's hard to say, but I'd reckon that the coast-to-sea ratio for the waters to be traversed thus were a factor 5 higher than the global average, say 2.5 km per 100km of amenable open water, since said amenable open water is of course far less than what it looks like on the chart; I'd put it at about 4 million sq.km. tops. So with all those islands and the savage glacial indentation of the arctic Russian and American coastlines, to suggest that their combined length adds up to 100,000 km. is hardly a 😊 stretch, although on our virtual GSHHG SOL-charts it probably is less! All the same, as reference, the coastline of Norway alone exceeds 50,000 km according to the World Resources Institute; others put it at 100,000.

Anyway, 3 seas, a fast boat and 2800nm as the fulmar flies, thus breaking down into 3 races of 2 - 4 days duration each – the sort of thing that should have suited bonknhoot, who does have a knack of getting a bit lost on a never-ending ocean. Where though to aim for in the race across the Sea of Okhotsk, and where to aim for in the race across the Bering Sea?

With the wind abaft initially making it more important to pick the shifts as most of us gybed back and forth on a northerly track inside the Kurils, the first question did not need to be answered immediately, and when it did it turned out to be to pass well south of the most northerly and most on-the-great-circle Kuril Strait at the southerly tip of Manchuria. I got the shifts right and found the right pass through to take a slender lead. Mild elation 😊.

The GC route now was a serious curve over the north, but as there was a big hole moving around in that general direction, the router only liked it every now and then. I kept more to the south to exit the Bering Sea around the southern tip of Unimak Island. A number of my Italian friends did likewise, but, perhaps by curving that bit more over the north, I extended slightly on them. Others, who went for the exit south of Unimak Island (i, eye, aye) and even (my Greek friend) north of it via Bechevin Bay lost out – there was less wind than sometimes forecast and more times much hoped for. Light euphoria 🤪.

Aside (Ger: Fazit). I was surprised to find there was a Bukhta (Eng: Bay) Bechevinskaya on the eastern coast of Kamchatka, founded by the same Russian trader and explorer Ivan Bechevin in the middle of the 18th C that also discovered Bechevin Bay, before I realised that Alaska had been a Russian colony until in 1867 the newly burgeoning USA purchased the province for \$7.2 million from the Russian Empire. Like Manhattan, a bargain.

It should have been easy from there on in, and for the next day or two it was, with a clear line of wind blowing down a parallel (was it the 58th?) to be gybed along, and all dutifully followed and especially so Sax747, who seemed to be in exactly the same cadence as bonknhoot.

Alas, there was a further decision to be made and two options – north and come in from the west versus east and come in from the south – switched preference significantly from one WX to the next and back again. It wasn't a matter of minutes, but quarters of an hour. With Sax747 some 6 minutes astern my nearest competitor I covered him, but then when another WX came in and said keep tracking east, he gybed off and I let him go, the more as his two compatriots SCARABOCCHIO and Aner59 were showing well too leeward and footing faster. I hedged my bets! And as reported elsewhere I lost out to both sides, only just holding off Aner59. Quite a mistake and disappointing 😞 but a big congratulations to Sax747 and to SCARA, the latter surprising us all by effortlessly negotiating the SLI-infested waters!