

This is my first race report so I will begin with a little background about me.

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My first SOL race was the *Great Lakes Winter Run*, in January 2009. I initially registered as *Insolitum* but a month later, and I can't remember why, I created the *NagaJolokia* account and started using it exclusively. Those curious about my boat name, can check here: <http://ushotstuff.com/Cpages/NagaJolokiaChilePowder.htm>

Races used to have 700 to 1500 boats and names like *brainaid*, *SWE54*, *nightmare*, *skalis*, *mac*, *wwwTANGOSAILINGnu*, *ita10267*, just to name a few, were frequently seen as top finishers.

However, sailing SOTP, I could barely finish among the top 100 and start getting frustrated with the amount of time invested creating routes that were never taking me to the right place. I couldn't manage to make any router work on my Mac so I abandoned SOL a few months later.

In 2011, I tried to sail online again and luckily crossed paths with the late Aaron Gage. What a great guy! *AGage* could spend hours helping someone with no sailing background that had just registered in SOL. I joined the SYC and, but even with Aaron's help, sailing SOTP was not for me. I felt like playing chess online with someone backed by an engine and, for the second time, quit SOL.

Fast forward to April 2020 and now, "locked" at home and with time to "spare", I started looking for a router to run on my Mac. I quickly discovered qtVlm and decided to give SOL another try.

I late registered to the Percé to Saint Malo Transat and started the race many hours behind the leaders. While trying to deal with qtVlm, hours became days and I finished 198th, but this time it was really fun, not only because I was using a router for the first time but, foremost, because I had the opportunity to get in touch with other Brazilian SOLers. Through the SOL chat, I connected to Adriano (*batatabh*) and Nelson (*SeeUlater*) and together we created a WhatsApp group, that was later joined by Guilherme (*guimazza*) and Rodrigo (*rodm67*). The group was a game changer for me because I could quickly learn the routing techniques from Adriano, actually one of the top SOL sailors.

Good results came fast: 38th in Bay2Bay Leg 1, 30th in A3 Leg 4, 27th in Quiberon Island Sprint, 12th in Cape Town to Auckland, 7th in Baltic 500, 5th in SoCal 300 and 3rd in A3 Leg 6.

This last one was a terrible (but important) experience for me. After unbelievable BBQs from top SOLers, I saw myself in first place right before the last mark (Green Island) but completely screwed up the round allowing *bonkhoot* and *Alexandria* to pass me with no

mercy. It hurt a lot, but this was one of those experiences that define us, that make us improve.

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So, let's talk a little bit about the Auckland to Fiji race.

After my A3 Leg 6 "tragedy" and still whining for my bad decision of going east in Migaloo Migration (hence losing any chance to win the SMPF prize), I was not in a good mood to run another regatta in that part of the globe.

But I couldn't resist seeing Adriano and Nelson discussing strategies in our WhatsApp group and decided to register less than an hour before the start.

After a quick routing and a few manual adjustments, my ETA was close to theirs (Figure 1). The route to Fiji was pretty straight, with absolutely no gybe or tack, which is amazing for a race three days long. Immediately I realized that any slight advantage could be decisive.

My route out of the Hauraki Gulf was naturally avoiding the smaller islands (Figure 2) so my only concern was about rounding the big Rangitoto Island.

I followed the router until Rangitoto, when I "switched off the autopilot" and decided to round it from its west side, as close as possible to its coastline. In fact, a quick hesitation about to when delete the DCs made me lose a few seconds and I reached the island a little bit behind *Dingo* and side by side with *rafa*. From the lesson learned in A3 Leg 6, I knew that micromanaging crucial moments like that could become worthy later.

Dingo, *rafa* and me were the only boats among the leaders to choose to round Rangitoto really close to land.

The fleet started to spread orthogonally to the rhumb line. Wind direction was favoring those in the west but the router option to move east was clearly an investment to get better wind angles in the last day of the race, when winds would blow stronger.



Figure 1



Figure 2

A few hours later, right before the first Wx, I was sailing in close formation with five great SOLers: *Dingo* at my port, *rafa* at my starboard, with *batatabh*, *Beliberda* and *WRMirekd* behind us (Figure 3).



Figure 3

That Wx came around 1:20am local time and there were important islands ahead that I could not lose sight: Little Barrier and Mokohinau.

I learned from *Alexandria* on that A3 Leg 6 race that switching off qtVlm's "Avoid Coasts" works better when you have many little islands on your way because it avoids unnecessary distortions of the route.

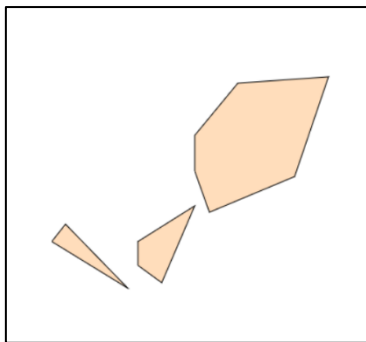


Figure 4

Little Barrier was not a problem because the router didn't want me to fly over it, but this was not the case of Mokohinau Islands, a cluster of rocks in real life, represented in SOL client by its three bigger islands only (Figure 4).

The router was sending me directly to a BBQ in the middle island so my decision was easy: correct the route to west and leave the whole cluster to my starboard.

It was around 3:00 am local time and, once again, I deleted the DCs that would be triggered until Mokohinau Islands to approach the islands manually. I tried to minimize the deviation by passing as close as possible to the left island.

I was shocked when I realized that *Dingo* decided to do what my router was probably suggesting me to: pass through the narrow space (0.1nm) between the left and the middle islands!

Along Saturday, June 13th, each new Wx was basically a copy of the previous one. The adjustments were minimal, but I kept rerouting, repositioning POIs, adding a few and optimizing every time I could. My only break was for a quick BBQ! No worries, a real one (Figure 5).

Monitoring *Dingo's* metrics became an obsession and it was quite easy since we travelled more than



Figure 5

100nm side-by-side, with our hulls always around 0.06nm apart.

On Sunday, our routes started to diverge with *Dingo* moving west getting closer to the rhumb line. This subtle approach to the west fleet, where *rafa* was standing out, made me realize how better positioned he was when compared to the rest of the fleet. From that moment, I was certain that *Dingo* was the race leader, the man to be beaten, and I was one of the boats in better conditions to do so as I would have the better wind position ahead.

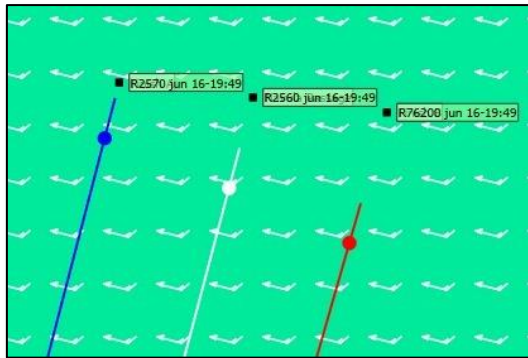


Figure 6

Monday morning, I started to plan where exactly I would cross the finish line. Given the wind direction, it was pretty intuitive to guess the west end, but I decided to route not only this option, but also the center and the east end of the finish line.

The router put all three options in the same ETA, but it was clear which bus was arriving earlier to the final station: the blue one (Figure 6).

I couldn't avoid an immediate recall of Jim Morrison in the famous live version of The Doors' masterpiece "The End":

*The west is the best
The west is the best
Get here, and we'll do the rest
The blue bus is callin' us
The blue bus is callin' us
Driver, where you takin' us?*

With this song in my mind, I went to bed in 40th position and wake up on Tuesday as 8th.

Nine hours before the finish line, the leaders were already converging and it was clear that *Dingo* was leading the fleet (Figure 7).

I started to move west and got surprised when I crossed *Dingo's* course: our DTF difference was about 0.2nm.

I knew that the time zone would favor me for the rest of the race and when *Dingo*

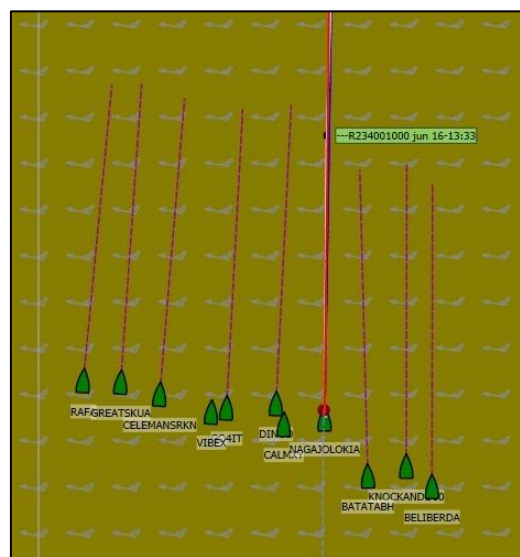


Figure 7

announced in the chat that he had set the DCs and was going to sleep, I started to believe that I had a chance to win the race.

In the west the wind was better, but the course was longer. One and a half hour before the finish, I decided to delete all DCs and switch to manual TWA mode. In the last hour, we exchanged first and second places dozens of times.

I was sailing TWA to the left mark of the finish line but was very afraid to miss it. *Dingo's* VMC was slightly better than mine and I felt I needed to do something new to win the race.

So, for the first time ever, I enabled the extra-zoom setting in the HTML5 client. I have always been afraid to use it because of the disclaimer "incompatible with PR rules" but I had no other option in hand.

The extra-zoom allowed me to see how far from the left mark I was. It was the last minute of the race or so, and I immediately corrected my course, still keeping a decent margin from the mark (just in case...).

After my boat crossed the finish line, I kept reloading the race leaderboard until it finally showed me in first place, with *Dingo* arriving in the same second (Figure 8).




Rank	Boat Name	Boat Type	DTG	DBL	Finish Time (UTC)
1	NagaJolokia	Steinlager 2	0	0	2020-06-16 19:48:49
2	 Dingo	Steinlager 2	0	0.0	2020-06-16 19:48:49
3	 calmxy	Steinlager 2	0.2	0.3	
4	 knockando60	Steinlager 2	0.3	0.4	

Figure 8

In a post-mortem analysis, I compared the finish line positions of me and *Dingo*, with and without the extra-zoom (Figures 9 and 10).

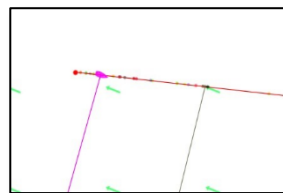


Figure 9

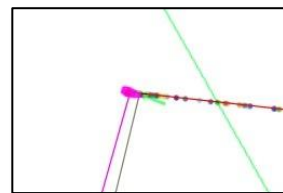


Figure 10

Given the centesimal distance between us, I'm pretty sure this last-minute decision of using the extra zoom to improve my speed was decisive to arrive in first place.

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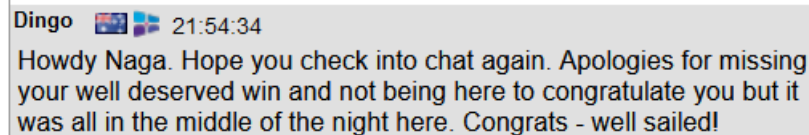
Finally, I want to spend some lines to show my reverence to those who made this achievement so special.

First, I want to thank Adriano and Nelson for all the support during the race and knowledge they shared with me in the last few months. And Guilherme for his wonderful "qtVlm to DC" tool that we are beta-testing.

But I think I need to talk a little bit about the guy that really made me give my best in this race.

Dingo is an amazing SOLer. Not only because he is fast but because he has a big heart. During the race he found time to initiate *FarrQ2* into the routing world, listing tools and explaining their functions. I am sure many others learned a lot from that chat between them. He offered his precious time to help novice SOLers to improve. The same behavior that made Aaron Gage such a special SOLer.

After waking up and checking the race results, *Dingo* left this amazing message for me:



Dingo 21:54:34
Howdy Naga. Hope you check into chat again. Apologies for missing your well deserved win and not being here to congratulate you but it was all in the middle of the night here. Congrats - well sailed!

Dingo, I hope you read this report too. Thank you very much for the fight. I fought a guy that was sleeping in the last round, but I am still proud of it!

And I want to repeat here what I said in the chat, a few minutes after we crossed the finish line: **you are a legend!**

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"This is the eeeeeeeeeeeend." – Jim Morrison