

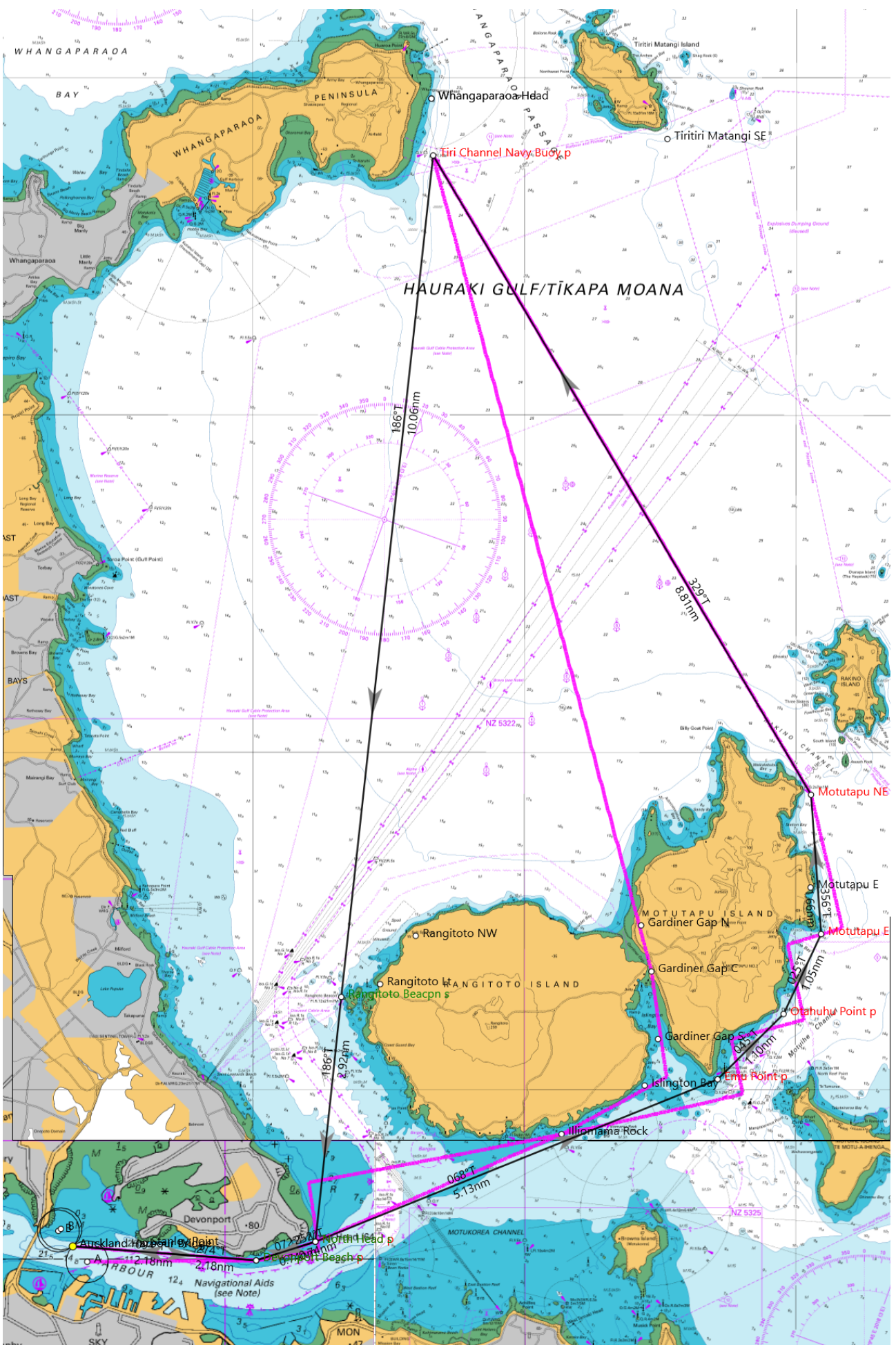
SSANZ Northern Triangle Leg 1

SOL race 1561

This 32 mile race out of Auckland Harbour around Rangitoto and Motutapu Islands looked to me like a nice way to start the weekend. The course started at 2022-02-18 20:00 UT near the Auckland harbour bridge towards the East, passing south of Rangitoto and Motutapu islands. From there it turned north across the Hauraki Gulf to a mark off the Whangaparaoa peninsula and from there back to Auckland, leaving a mark in the Rangitoto channel to starboard. At the time of this writing 102 boats have entered this race. 81 boats have actually started and 79 have finished.

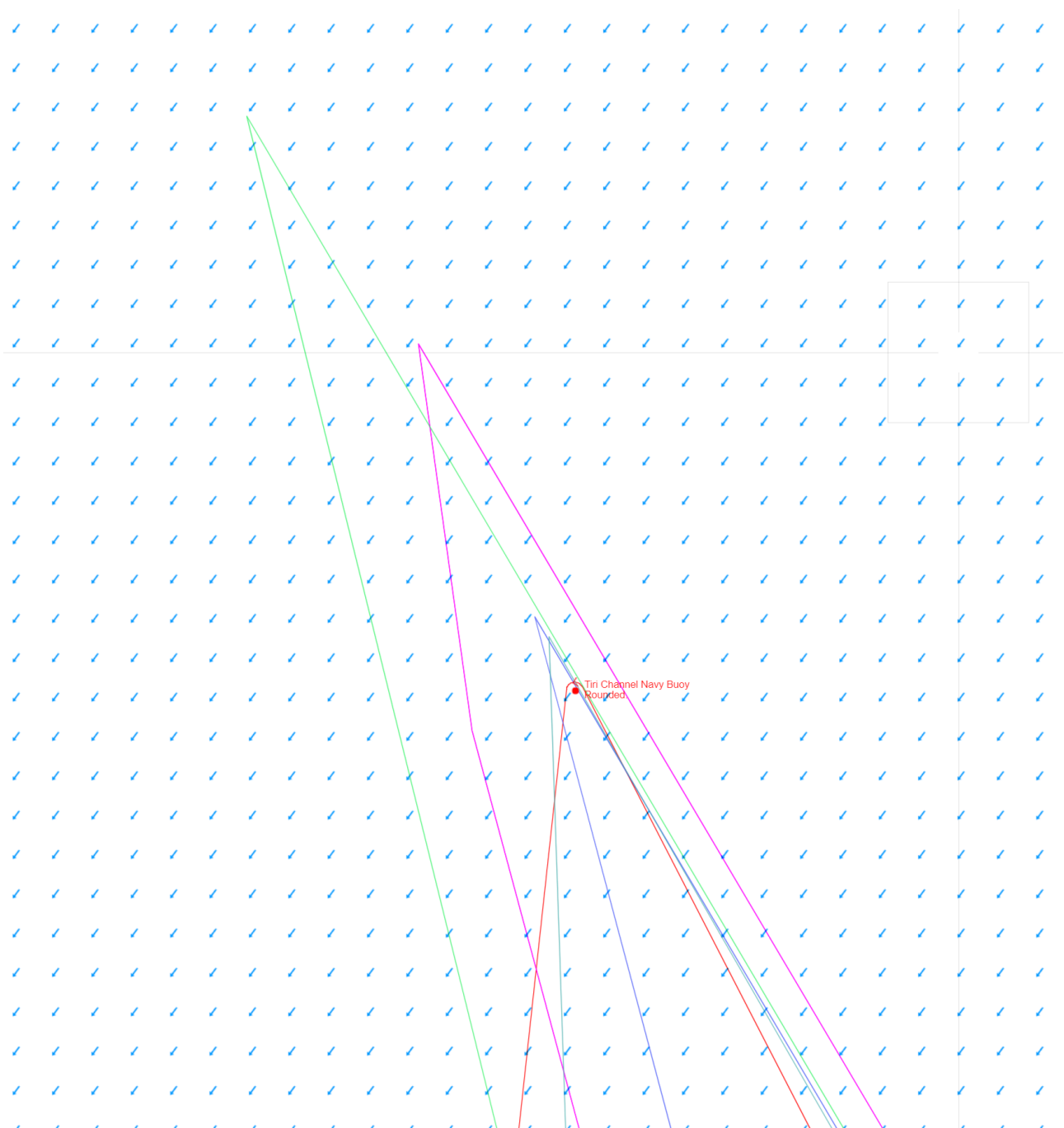
The wind was weak but permanent, averaging just 6 knots and backing from initially 040° to 030°. Therefore my strategy was to follow the coastline of Rangitoto and Motutapu with a couple of tacks. This is shown in the first picture. Most competitors did the same. Some of them tacked more often, but that did not make much of a difference.

The final weather forecast arrived when I had reached the Rakino Channel at the north-east corner of Motutapu Island, but it did not change much. The leg across the Hauraki Gulf was a close reach with 60° to 63° TWA in 6.5 to 6.7 knots of wind speed. So I put the boat on a straight course to the Tiri Channel Navy Buoy turning mark and took the time to plan the rest of the race.

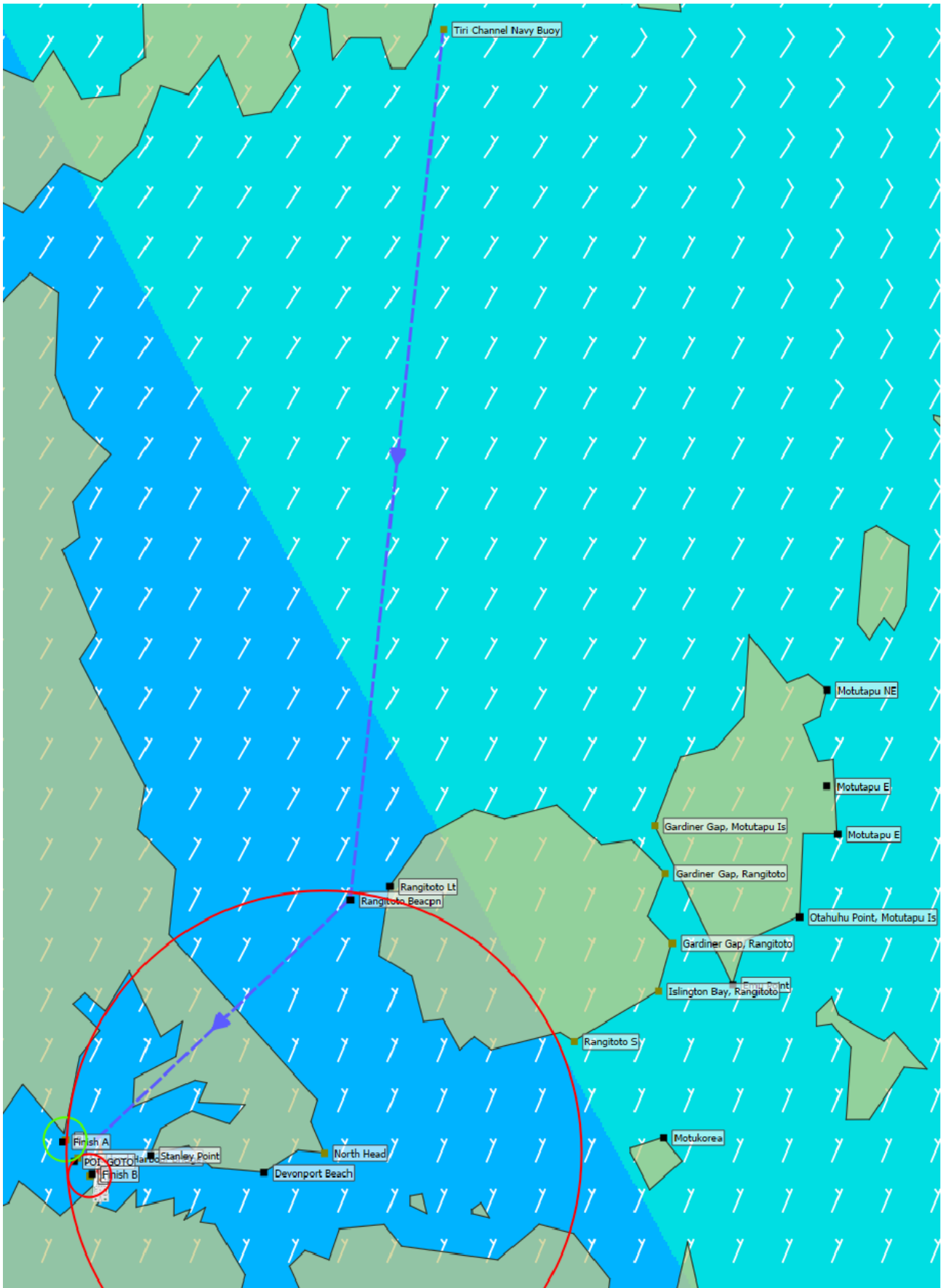


That mark posed the first challenge because the rhumb line course changed by more than 140 degrees. When approaching such a hairpin turn in open waters I used to go to full zoom and put the boat on a course that just touches the red dot of the mark. The closer one gets the smaller is the chance that the mark will be left on the wrong size after the turn. This has worked for me reasonably well with the Flash client. The new HTML5 client has an option in the settings dialog that allows to over-zoom. I have not used it so far.

The second figure below shows the tracks of the top 4 finishers with the extra zoom enabled. I thought that my track (the pink line) was really close to the mark, but apparently that was not the case and one can do better.

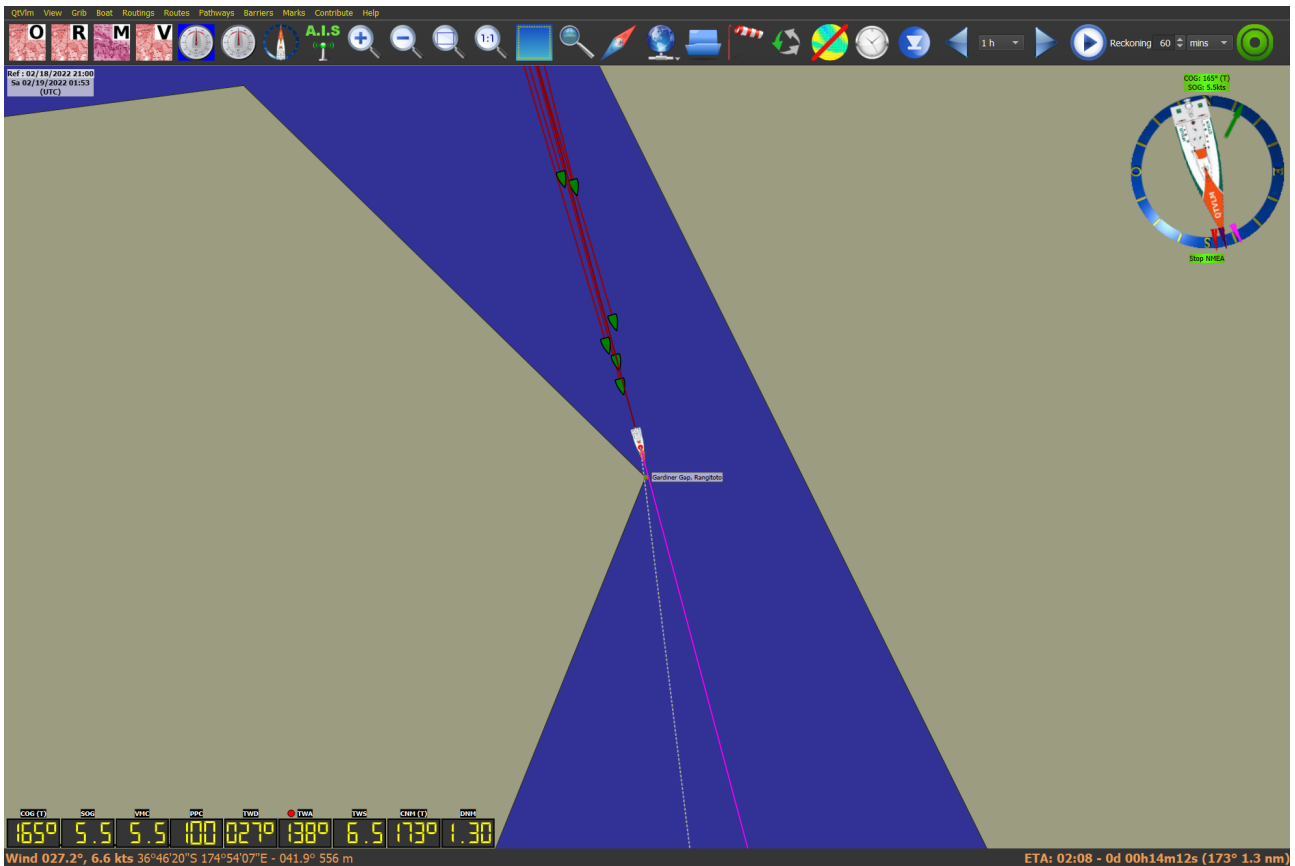


The return leg from the turning mark back to Auckland was downwind, starting in just under 7 knots and slowly decreasing and backing further. Because the Rangitoto Beacon mark had to be left to starboard the opportunity arose to leave the entire Rangitoto Island to starboard.

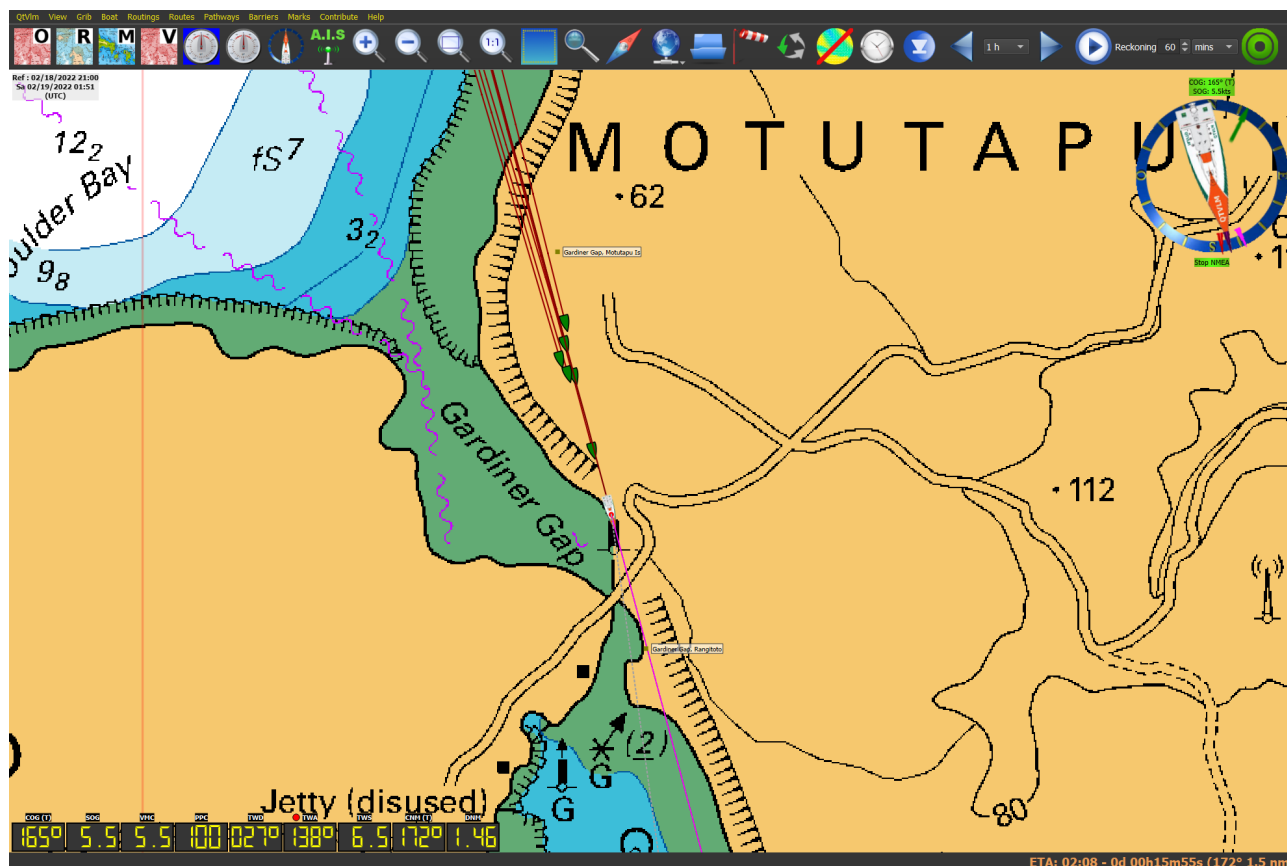


Looking at the figure above with the weather at the time the island was approached it crossed my mind that this eastern route could actually be fast, because the boat would remain in stronger wind for a longer time. I asked the qtVlm router for an opinion, but it did not come up with an answer, because it did not find a route through the narrow passage between the islands. But that has not stopped me from trying. As it turned out there was a group of about 10 SOLers that had come to the same conclusion.

The next figure shows the passage called Gardiner Gap from the SOL perspective. It looks really simple.



With a nautical chart as a background it becomes apparent that the passage is not possible at all in a keelboat. The sound dries at low water and the two islands are connected by a causeway. And there is a high cliff on the windward shore, so I would expect the wind conditions to be miserable.



And by the way, a close inspection of the Rangitoto beacon mark shows that it is also not safe to leave it to starboard on the way south. Maybe that was a mistake in the sailing instructions and it was the intention to leave it to port.

When the northern and southern fleets met again it became evident that my decision to leave Rangitoto to starboard was not a bad choice. After all, the three podium finishers took that course. But the advantage was not overwhelming. I had hoped for more.

The final leg from North Head to the finish was a nice reach to the leeward mark where not much happened.

My congratulations got to WRmirekd of Poland for a clear victory and to Vida_Maldita from Brazil for the podium finish. He mentioned in the chat that a better result was lost due to a poor rounding at the Tiri Channel Navy Buoy turning mark (green track in the second figure).

And I thank every competitor for actually taking the effort to race, because I am a little worried about the decline in participation. Just 100 entries is not much. When I got my first win in a SOL race almost 10 years ago, incidentally also in Auckland, there were over 1000 boats competing.