

# Our longest passage



Neville Hockley describes a 3,000-mile, 28-day passage from the Galápagos to the Marquesas aboard his 38ft yacht, *Dream Time*

**T**here's a steady rotation of cruising boats coming and going from our anchorage in San Cristóbal. Boats arriving from the east replace those departing for the west. It's like a long distance nautical relay, and it's our turn to go.

Our 20-day visa for the Galápagos Islands has come to an end, so today, with our passports stamped and our *zarpe* (cruising papers) in order, we begin the longest journey most cruisers will ever encounter when circumnavigating the globe, over 3,000 miles of ocean. The sheer magnitude of what lays ahead is sobering – thousands upon thousands of miles of open ocean, a month at sea, no safe harbours to seek refuge in, no coastguard to offer assistance, and no turning back.

I'm eager to begin the journey, but at the same time, anxious about what lies ahead. Destinations that once only existed in adventure novels, distant and exotic islands discovered by intrepid mariners,

now seem vaguely familiar to me. The names of these Pacific islands, however, I can barely pronounce: Hiva Oa, Aitutaki, Tongareva, Pukapuka, Fakatopate... but over the next few years, we plan to visit them all.

## Day 6: adrift

Besides a brief moment when we started the engine to detour around a pod of whales, we've been sailing for almost a week now. Our pace, however, has been dismally slow. In the time it takes most air travelers to reach Australia, say, from London or New York, my wife Catherine and I have barely managed to cover the distance required to arrive at the airport by car. In the last 24 hours, *Dream Time*, our 1981 38ft Cabo Rico, has sailed – drifted would be a more accurate description – a rather disappointing 58 nautical miles.

Too slow for our autopilot to register an acceptable speed, we were forced to hand-steer through much of last night. In reality not a great deal of effort is required, but it's not a particularly enjoyable distraction. Catherine, whilst listening to her audio books, dangles her leg casually over the wheel, expertly bending at the knee to adjust our heading. I choose to lock the wheel in place, balancing the rudder against the sails until the light wind shifts or a particularly disruptive swell passes under us. Then, normally after just a few minutes, I slacken the locking nut, turn the wheel about an inch or so, re-tighten, and continue the routine all over again.

Considering the pitiful distance we've covered over the

last week – a mere 456 miles – and the distance ahead – a daunting 2,534 miles to the Marquesas – our spirits are in remarkably good form. Catherine and I have reached a level of resigned acceptance. After all, what choice do we have? We spend our 24 hours happily pottering around the boat in a routine of sleeping, reading, adjusting sails, writing, napping, fishing, listening to music and relaxing. With no pressure of a schedule or looming deadline, we're able to simply enjoy the journey, regardless of how long it might take (36 more days at our current pace). Occasionally, when the wind does hit double digits and *Dream Time* actually goes fast enough to form a bow wave, we're filled, temporarily, with a disproportionate feeling of euphoria, thrilled that we're actually moving. Regrettably, these moments have been short lived.

## Day 11: flying along

We found the wind five days ago and it is glorious! After crossing an area of ocean filled with lightning, squalls and wind gusting to over 30 knots, it seems that we have finally settled in to the South Pacific Trades. Sailing before 20 to 25 knots of easterly wind, *Dream Time* is charging through heavy swell at a determined pace of between 6 and 8 knots. When the larger rollers pass under our keel, sometimes reaching heights of over 3m, we surf down

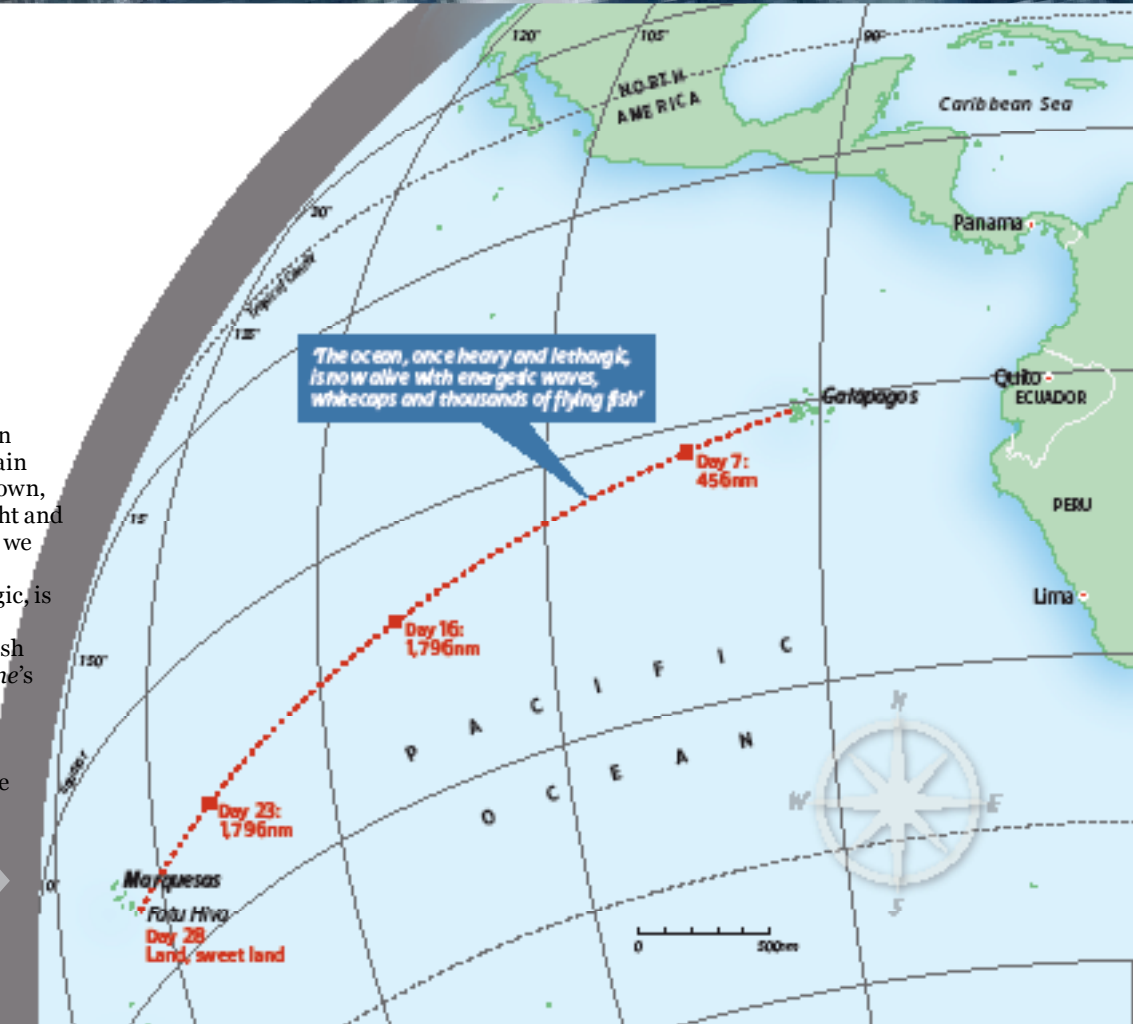


Below: Neville and Catherine had to i 20-day sojourn in the Galápagos Isla



their face, our record to date being an exhilarating 13 knots. Our reefed main and partially furled headsail have flown, untouched, for three days, drum-tight and held out far off our starboard side as we speed onward, our heading 255°.

The ocean, once heavy and lethargic, is now alive with energetic waves, whitecaps and thousands of flying fish that, in an effort to avoid *Dream Time's* path, soar over the crests in schools, gliding majestically on their silvery, outstretched dorsal fins, sometimes covering distances of over 100m. The larger, more experienced pilots expertly twist their bodies and fins, banking around and over wave crests, flicking their tails off the



PHOTOS: NEVILLE HOCKLEY UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED CHARTS: MAXINE HEATH



Reeling in a sizeable yellowfin tuna gave Neville a good workout mid-voyage



Left: For days, steady winds meant minimal sail-tuning  
Below: Flying fish even found their way into the cabin!



PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

water to gain speed and altitude before plopping back into the sea. The smaller flying fish scatter frantically in every direction, clumsily colliding into oncoming swell. Sometimes, those who misjudge *Dream Time's* speed and direction, slam headfirst into our sails or coachroof. My morning routine now consists of sea burials for the unfortunate victims unable to find our scuppers – twelve this morning. Last night, an hour before my 0300 shift, one managed to fly directly into the open v-berth hatch and landed with a light 'flump' on the blanket beside me, leaving a strong, salty, fishy smell in its slimy path. It took a few seconds for me to turn on the light, get

hold of him as he twitched and flipped around the bed, before hurling him unceremoniously back out to sea, the same way he flew in.

**Day 16: the reality**

Catherine is sleeping right now after a very noisy and roly night. I'm sipping my first cup of coffee, and besides the creaking of stretching lines, the groaning of teak bulkheads down below, the bubbling of sea water in our wake and the occasional electronic 'whirrrrr' as the autopilot gently nudges us back on track, I'm happily and quietly watching the sun rise on a beautiful Monday morning. Not a bad way to begin the week.

It's Day 16 of what will probably be the longest single passage of our entire world circumnavigation. Sure, I knew it was over 3,000 nautical miles of open ocean before we set-off from the

Galapagos, and I calculated that it would take us between 4 and 5 weeks to transit, but planning a major ocean crossing, such as this one, is quite different from the reality of actually doing it.

We're well over half way to the Marquesas and have covered a distance of 1,796 nautical miles, but the reality is that we still have another 1,209 miles before we raise the islands – a distance that, at our current speed of 6 knots in 15-20 knot trade winds, will take us another 9 days.

The passage is going remarkably well. We have a daily routine that operates like clockwork, but we're doing very little 'sailing'. Our sails have remained full and untouched for over a week, so Catherine and I feel more like passengers than captains aboard *Dream Time*. If the Trade Winds are as they should be, the reality is that the boat is happy to skip over the waves, sailing herself. The satellites orbiting above guide our autopilot below. We have remained on the same tack, on the same heading, in much the same conditions, for two weeks now. There's very little for us to do, except hold on.

Our ocean photos do little justice to the actual size of the heaving swell that surrounds us. The pictures show a light chop, or what appears to be a smooth, tranquil, rolling sea with the sun shimmering off its surface, but the reality is quite different. The swell is relentless and requires us to clutch, brace, grab,

twist and flex as serried ranks of waves pass under our keel. It's like balancing atop one of those giant orange rubber aerobic balls during in an earthquake. These seas are a combination of the easterly waves blown by the trades and a deep, slow, rolling swell from the south, probably a result of stronger winds down in the Roaring Forties. They occasionally decide to converge right on *Dream Time's* port quarter. Clinging to handholds with our fingertips, in a fashion not altogether different from mountain climbers, Catherine and I hang on grimly as *Dream Time* is heaved over to starboard, enough for our caprail to occasionally scoop gallons of seawater onto the teak deck, turning the water around us white and leaving the ocean bubbling, gurgling and hissing in our wake as we surge forward. The unfortunate reality is that these freak waves usually rear up just when Catherine is preparing one of her deliciously complex meals down in the galley (the ingredients invariably consisting of just about anything that rolls: tomatoes, onions, apples, cabbages, olives). Chasing a runaway onion or a pack of fleeing olives around an undulating cabin floor is most definitely not her idea of fun.

I see things differently out here. I'm more aware of the magnificent order of things: a simple, natural harmony of gargantuan scale, that, even on the rolliest of days, can be quite comforting. It is something that I rarely recognise when on land, but out here, in the open ocean, you're right in the very centre of it all. The sun and moon rise from the horizon immediately behind us, orbiting high above us before swinging down and sinking below the horizon directly in front of us. Night after night, the heavens are lit up by shooting stars. The Southern Cross floats off our port side, The Plough off our starboard, Orion's Cross dead ahead, *Dream Time's* bow nodding and pointing directly at the centre of her three stars. The world seems to revolve around us and even though at times it feels as if we're in the middle of nowhere, the reality is that we're at the centre of everything. And, at least for the moment, I can think of nowhere else I'd rather be.



The Trade Winds lulled just as the Marquesas Islands became tantalisingly within reach

*'We used less than 40 litres of diesel to travel the last 2,600 miles, the equivalent of driving across America, coast to coast, on less than half a tank of petrol'*

23 days it feels as if the landing gear is down and we're starting to make our final approach.

Mother Nature, however, perhaps exasperated by our presumptions and arrogance, is showing us who's really in control, and in an effort to teach us a valuable lesson about patience and humility, has stolen the wind from our sails. For the last 12 hours, the Trades have deteriorated, dropping from a steady 20 knots to a feeble 8 knots. With the light wind and rolling swell behind us, and no spinnaker on board, *Dream Time* has slowed to 3 knots, her sails occasionally flogging and crashing in protest.

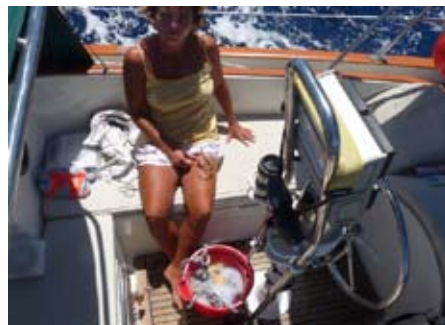
We could fire-up our 50hp Yanmar diesel engine and motor to the Marquesas – we probably have enough fuel to see us the remaining few hundred miles. But we've used less than 40 litres of diesel to travel the last 2,600 miles, the equivalent of driving across America, coast to coast, on less than half a tank of petrol, so to motor now would seem almost like defeat. Perhaps (almost certainly) our attitudes will change if this keeps up, but at least for now we're willing to wait and see.

In anticipation of our arrival on Friday, Saturday or even Sunday, we're tidying up the boat, doing some laundry and reading up about the Marquesas. Our first port of call will be Bay of Virgins on Fatu Hiva, featured in a book by Thor Heyerdahl and claimed by France to be 'the most beautiful harbour in the world'. We'll have to wait and see.

**Day 28: land, sweet land**

A dark, featureless mass appeared off our port bow long before the morning sun had brightened the night sky. But as the warm glow of a new day spread from

*'When Dream Time goes fast enough to form a bow wave, we're filled with euphoria'*



Above and above right: Laundry day! Right: Dream Time was fitted with GPS but Neville enjoyed taking noonsites. Below left: A lee cloth on the saloon berth was essential in the constant Pacific swell. Below right: A beer, cigar and a good book – Neville savours the good life



# CRUISING TRANSPACIFIC

the east, chasing away the last of the stars, it revealed what our radar had known for over two hours - we have reached land! After sailing for 28 days and 31 minutes, traveling 3,142 nautical miles, burning only 90 litres of diesel and one cylinder of gas, generating five small bags of rubbish, catching one yellowfin tuna, seven Mahi Mahi (spearing the last one from the boat), collecting a carpet of sea growth on the hull and growing an inch of facial hair (me, not Catherine), we have finally arrived at Fatu Hiva, the Marquesas, French Polynesia!

Sitting defiantly in the middle of the ocean, Fatu Hiva reaches over 3,000ft above sea level, its jagged peaks hidden behind a matching canopy of soft clouds – one island sitting atop another. Serrated crests and wrinkled valleys carve their way deep into the centre of the lush island, stretching down, reaching for the sea like outstretched claws rooting themselves to the world. After living for a month in constant motion, where everything around us changed, moved and shifted, sailing alongside such a vast, immovable mass was overwhelming, exhilarating and intimidating. We crept along its north-east shore as if we were sneaking up to a sleeping giant. Catherine and I sat on the coachroof in silence, mesmerised and in complete awe of what we were seeing, and in what we had accomplished.

We dropped anchor in Baie des Vierges at 1031 to the sound of cheering from John and Andy aboard *Happy Spirit*, friends we first met in Panama's San Blas Islands, which now seem like a world away and a lifetime ago. We spent our afternoon on board. We didn't need to go ashore – the breathtaking view from *Dream Time's* deck was more than enough stimulation,

*The Marquesan island of Fatu Hiva, with its friendly inhabitants and jagged peaks that reach more than 3,000ft, provided a memorable welcome*



*'We crept along the north-east shore as if we were sneaking up to a sleeping giant'*

at least for today. We sat on the foredeck and gazed in awe as the island before us changed in shape and colour, the setting sun streaming into the valley, filling it with a warm tropical glow, turning cliffs into towers of bronze, moving shadows across vertical rock spires, revealing faces that have gazed out across the ocean for centuries. Palm leaves softened and became thick blankets of rich, green velvet

draped over the island. A soft breeze fluttered down through the valley, across the anchorage and out to sea, carrying with it the sweet, rich, poignant,

unmistakable scent of land.

With the sun now deep below the horizon, *Dream Time* rests in the comfort of Fatu Hiva's solid and reassuring embrace, providing us with relief from a world of constant motion. It's a strange feeling to think that we'll wake tomorrow and the island will still be there. It's not going anywhere and, at least for now, neither are we. **W**



*The Baie des Vierges, or Bay of Virgins, on Fatu Hiva's western shore, made for a spectacular landfall after almost six weeks at sea*

## ↓ BIOGRAPHY Neville Hockley



Neville, 38, grew up in Southampton. He learned to sail with his father, racing dinghies around Mundeford Quay, and later crewed on larger yachts while traveling the eastern coast of Australia. In 1994, he sailed from Sydney to Italy via the Indian Ocean and Red Sea on a 44ft cutter, chronicling his adventures in a book, *Dream Time*, published by Vanguard Press in 2000. Neville and his wife, Catherine, bought their first boat, a 28ft Newport design, in 1998. In 2000 they upgraded to a 38ft Cabo Rico, which he named after his book and rebuilt in preparation for a circumnavigation. Neville and Catherine both passed their 50-ton passenger craft captain's license exams in 2007 and on 1 June 2007, set-off on their 10-year round-the-world cruise. Neville owns a graphic design and advertising studio, which he manages from *Dream Time*.

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