

## Cape Verdes

Time has flown by since arrival at Mindelo on the 15th. More and more yachts have turned up at the anchorage every day waiting for the weather to improve before crossing the pond. Daily conversations between boats usually contain "have you seen the forecast today" "glad i'm not out there now" and "when do you think you're leaving". The weather has been very strange with the prevailing north east trade winds, which should be blowing consistently at 15 to 20 knots, replaced with days of calms and even south and west winds. Possibly a knock on from La Niña. The first week it was very humid with rain most afternoons which again is very rare at this time of year. Stories have fed back from yachts sailing the ARC (Atlantic Rally for Cruisers), which departed 10 days ago, that many are low on fuel mid Atlantic having been forced to motor into the calms and headwinds for days on end. Not my idea of fun.



The anchorage here at Mindelo is very good and there is a nice village atmosphere about it. Friends I met previously have turned up and in turn introduced me to other friends of theirs of similar age (mid 20's to mid 30's). We now have a nice collection of boats enjoying each other's company and spending evenings together. I think it must be my turn to cook though unfortunately. The majority of visiting yachts appear to be French but for the first time since Spain there are more British boats about including another solo sailor with similar plans to me.

Mindelo is said to be the cultural centre of the Cape Verdes and most of the activity revolves around the harbour. The buildings of the town are painted different colours and you don't have to walk far without hearing the sound of local live music known as 'morna' or 'coladeira'. People are poor though and there are many beggars and care has to be taken when walking alone at night. I have been hoisting the dinghy out of the water after dark as there are stories of dinghies and outboards going walkies. Despite this most the locals are friendly. There are two supermarkets and a vegetable and fish market so it is possible to obtain a good enough range of provisions.



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Market, Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo



Mindelo





San Antao



San Antao



Looking down on volcanic crater, San Antao



San Antao



San Antao



San Antao



San Antao



San Antao



San Antao

I have been busy doing jobs on the boat. The self steering paddle that caused me a few problems on the sail here has been fixed by filing down a washer that had swollen in its socket. I have added some eye bolts to the dinghy so a bridle can be attached allowing it to be hoisted out the water using a halyard. I've also gone through nearly every locker and improved some of the stowage onboard. More chafe tape added to the mainsail where it rubs against the lower shrouds and up the mast for a rig check.

A couple of days ago a few of us took the ferry over to the island of Santao Antao for a day trip. It has very contrasting landscapes with the south and west quite desolate and barren but the centre and north mountainous and rich in vegetation. We paid for a small minibus to take us over the volcanic pass through forests of fir and pine to Ponto do Sol on the north coast where we walked into the hills and past some isolated homes of the local people. Then back to the village to sample the local dish of the Cape Verdes known as Cachupa. This is a type of stew consisting of mashed maize, onions, green bananas, manioc, sweet potatoes, squash, yams, tomatoes and cabbage which is served with meat. All for 3 Euros per person!

The weather is at last looking good from Friday onwards with the trade winds becoming consistent and gaining strength. I'm looking forward to getting sailing again and interested to discover how I am going to find spending 3 weeks alone on a small boat. I will be 'racing' three other boats to Barbados where we all hope to spend Christmas together. More on this in another post tomorrow ☐

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## Canary Islands to Cape Verdes

On departure from Marina Rubicon, Lanzarote on Monday 7th conditions were light with a gentle 10 knot northerly breeze pushing Fathom towards the Cape Verde islands, 886 nautical miles to the south. Within a couple of hours a small tuna took the lure which made for a very nice dinner that evening. Once Fuerteventura had been passed the wind increased to 15-18knots but the 2 to 3m swell made life a little uncomfortable onboard as the boat began an excellent demonstration of rocking and rolling.



Bye bye Lanzarote

By lunchtime on the second day the wind was hovering around 20knots allowing good boat speed and encouraging progress. 124nm from noon to noon. Before dark I decided to gybe and head away from the African coast as our course would have put us very close to the shipping lanes which run north to south. During the night the paddle of the self steering gear popped up out of the water on two occasions resulting in Fathom heading off course and a trip on deck required to reseal it. Hanging over the stern trying to position the paddle with the boat hook in a decent swell is not my idea of fun! Very frustrating when I was all settled down below and trying to sleep. I have put this problem down to a washer becoming unseated slightly in its housing and I'll investigate further when in port. The air temperature suprisingly cool and I had been wearing a jumper on deck and sleeping under a blanket.

The batteries were starting to get low during Wednesday as the solar panel couldn't keep up so I deployed the towed generator. This is a 60cm metal propeller and shaft attached to 30m of rope which is towed behind the boat and spins a generator mounted on the pushpit . It puts in about 5amps of juice at 5knots of boat speed and is very effective despite the disadvantage of slowing the boat slightly. I dare not deploy the fishing line at the same time in case it all ends in a massive tangle! Daily run of 126nm so again great progress. Excellent nights sleep setting the alarm at 1.5 hour intervals to wake me so I could check the compass and that we were still on course without leaving the bunk. Complete faith being put in the AIS and radar alarms to warn me of any collision risk with other vessels.

Thursday morning was pleasant and I took the oportunity to practise some celestial navigation and went on deck at local noon to take a sun sight with the sextant subsequently calculating our latitude within 3 miles of the GPS reading. Just about respectable but the noon site is the easy bit! Throughout the afternoon the wind increased and by evening was hovering around 25 to 27knots. The swell was also building and I estimated the waves were up to about 4m by sunset making life uncomfortable onboard and performing any task

down below increasing difficult as the boat rolled up to 30 degrees one way to 30 degrees the other. Daily run from noon to noon 134nm the best ever for Fathom and I beating the previous highest by one whole mile! Thursday night I was on deck at 02.30 and again at 04.30 firstly to drop the mainsail and then later to completely furl the Yankee and hoist the staysail as the wind hit 30 knots with big seas and I wanted to make life as easy for the self steering (and me) as possible.



Staysail only with the wind around 30knots

Sailed through the whole of Friday with just the staysail up as the wind was still at 30 knots. In moments like these I often ask myself why on earth I am doing this! I gave some thought to our destination and decided to head for Mindelo instead of Sal. I was always going to end up at Mindelo before crossing the pond but as it is the best place for provisioning and best anchorage in the Cape Verde decided to head straight there and relax for a week or so rather than moving from island to island beforehand. Despite the conditions I got a good night sleep.

Wind and swell started to reduce during Saturday and I hoisted the mainsail again during the morning. Most the day times were spent either listening to podcasts or reading books on the Kindle. I never used to be a fan of the Kindle preferring a proper book but it comes into its own on a boat when space is limited and it can hold hundreds of titles. Daily run of 114nm.

During Saturday the towed generator was hauled in and the fishing line deployed alas no fish were interested. Noticeably warmer and for the first time lots of flying fish darting about as they try and avoid capture from their enemies in the deep. Daily run of 122nm.

On Sunday I realised at our current rate of progress it would not be possible to arrive in Mindelo during daylight hours on Monday and I never like to arrive in a new port during darkness. Therefore decided to slow down with the aim of arriving on Tuesday morning.

Wind dropped to 10 knots on Monday morning with a much calmer sea. Decided we better not slow down too much more otherwise we wont arrive until Wednesday! Full sails up and full speed ahead. Monday night marked the longest time I had been at sea at one stretch on my own and also the closest the moon had been to the earth since 1948. Sailing under this super moon was quite an experience. It was so bright that I could easily have read a book without a light at 3am in the cockpit.



Show off



Lots of time to read



Sailing under the supermoon

On the approach to Mindelo on Tuesday morning I was met by an excitable pod of dolphins. After spending 8 days talking to myself I took the opportunity to sit at the bow for 20 minutes and have a natter with them as they darted in the wake and dived under the bow. It really felt like they were responding to my voice and whistles or maybe it was just I had spent too long on my own and I was just imagining that. In any case it was a special moment and one of the highlights of the trip so far. An epic jump from one dolphin after I had encouragingly asked for an improvement on its last effort was the icing on the cake (see video).

The anchor went down at 14.20 local time on Tuesday and a cold beer was cracked open almost immediately! 950 nautical miles from Lanzarote in 8 days which I think was respectable and it was nice to see some familiar faces and boats in the anchorage. Watch the videos below (sound needed). Apologies for the messy cockpit! More on the Cape Verdes to come in the next post.

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## Fuerteventura

The last week has been spent moored in Corralejo, Fuerteventura. Corralejo is a lively town focused on surfing and kitesurfing and has a cool buzz about it. The harbour is government run which means the mooring costs are cheap at EURO 6.50 per day but the downside is that they only allow a max stay of 3 days. Fortunately the port captain was in a good mood when I mentioned to him mum and sis were flying out to see me and please, please, please could I have another 3 days.

It was nice to catch up with ex-colleague Sharon and her husband Ken in the sleeping town of El Cotillo where they own an apartment. Mum and sis then flew out for a few days and I stayed a few nights with them at the apartment which was great. Felt strange sleeping on dry land and not on a rocking Fathom. My impressions of Fuerteventura are that it is quite desolate and barren and there is not that much to see apart from the fantastic sandy beaches for which the island is best known. Would be the perfect place to learn to surf or kitesurf though.



sands of Fuerteventura

A low pressure system is currently passing just north of the Canaries and has resulted in some southerly winds and thunder storms this weekend. I'm back in Lanzarote as it was proving difficult to try and get a clearance stamp in the passport organised from Fuerteventura. Fortunately I managed to get this done yesterday by visiting the port captain at Arrecife and am now just about set for departure to the Cape Verde islands on Monday. Productive day today ticking jobs off the list including going up the mast for a rig check and adding some anti chafe tape to the main sail. Important to minimise wear and tear with so many miles of sailing coming up in the next weeks. Tomorrow I need to sort out the stowage in the cabin and stock up on fresh food and water.





with mum and sis



with mum and sis



clearance stamp in passport

The forecast is showing a return to the prevailing north easterly winds on Monday which look quite punchy for the first few days at 25 to 30 knots before moderating slightly further south. Debated heading west to have a look at Tenerife and La Gomera but decided Cape Verde would be more interesting. The passage to the island of Sal is just over 880 miles and i'm aiming for around 7 day at sea. Currently experiencing the pre-passage emotions of excitement mixed with a touch of apprehension but ultimately looking forward to getting some more miles on the log. Will send a few updates via twitter while on passage and the tracker map should update at 4 hour intervals.