

Atlantic Crossing – summary

Some thoughts on the crossing after a few days to catch breath



** The shortest distance between Mindelo, Cabo Verde and Bridgetown, Barbados was 2,020 nautical miles. Fathom's ground track was 2,068 nautical miles.

** 120nm was about the daily average for the trip (5 knots boat speed)

**I never once felt lonely or wished I wasn't onboard. Time seemed to go quickly especially the first week which flew by. I think the secret was having a regular structure to the day as I explained in previous posts. Practising celestial navigation was great fun and a good time filler.

**I was surprised how well I managed to sleep during the first week when I never really felt tired. It was a different story during second week where the squalls make it hard to sleep for long and regular trips to the deck to reef were required during the night.

**The Kindle was brilliant with an endless supply of reading material. Also enjoyed listening to podcasts downloaded before setting off – particularly Desert Island Disks and BBC Friday Night Comedy. Would like to have fished more but didn't risk deploying the fishing line when the tow generator was out in case of an almighty tangle.

**The tow generator performed very well when the wind was in excess of 15 knots. In tandem with the solar panel it meant the batteries stayed nicely charged and the fridge could remain on 24/7. Below 15 knots of wind it created too much drag which slowed the boat.

**The Aries self steering gear worked flawlessly. A few drips of light machine oil every couple of days kept her happy. I didn't have to touch the tiller once during 2,000 miles and in the messy seas and 40 knot squall Aries carried on unperturbed.

**The engine was never started from the moment of departure Mindelo to arrival Barbados. All the energy and propulsion requirements were fulfilled from the sun and the wind.

**I always seemed to be washing up or have a mountain of dirty dishes in the sink.

**I ate well and tended to cook a large pot of something every couple of days and keep a portion in the fridge for the next night.

**Baking bread and cake went well and the smell of them cooking was always welcome

**ah yes the race... Arwen was first in on Saturday morning. Ribouldingue and Hent-Eon arrived on Sunday morning (they both started a day later), Fathom on Monday morning and Sturmschwalbe Tuesday lunchtime. We tried to calculate the final results using duration of voyage, waterline length/hull speed, displacement and sail area. It gave the following results

1st Ribouldingue, 2nd: Hent-Eon, 3rd: Arwen, 4th Fathom, 5th: Sturmschwalbe

All the boats are so different it is near impossible to find a fair way to calculate the overall results satisfactorily so we declared ourselves all winners!

**Would I do it again? Yes without doubt.

Atlantic Crossing Part 2

DAY 10: Wind increased to 20-25 knots before sunrise so dropped mainsail and Fathom ran on happily with staysail flying out to port and partially furled yankee poled out to starboard. Around 07:00 the AIS signal of a yacht named 'Venture Lady' appeared. We had a chat on the VHF and it turns out she is the bigger sister of Fathom – a Vancouver 36 from the UK. Venture Lady quickly caught up from astern and sailed alongside for several minutes. Was quite surreal having a chat with another boat face to face and a Vancouver get together mid Atlantic. A good opportunity to take photos and video of each other too. Later in the day after sunset a large passenger ship called 'Berlin' passed a few miles to the north also bound for Bridgetown. The watch officer called me up for a chat and we spent about 20 minutes having a natter. He surprisingly offered to give me the ships internet wifi password which I could have picked up for a few minutes if I sailed a couple miles closer! Amazingly sociable day mid ocean. Daily run 129nm



DAY 11: Moved the boats clock back another hour today as past 45 degrees west. Especially nice sunrise this morning and I grabbed the camera for a few shots. Weather much more humid and by 20.00 it had become quite squally. Wind up around 27 knots after dark but Fathom continues to make good progress under staysail and partially furled yankee. Baked some more bread which turned out much better than the previous attempt. One large wave disturbed the tray containing the eggs this afternoon the result being my last half dozen have cracked. Sadly that means no more cake. Daily run 122nm.

DAY 12: Tired today as didn't get much sleep last night. Fathom travelled through a fairly potent area of disturbance with frequent squalls requiring sail area to be quickly reduced. The squall clouds always approach from the east and the wind typically goes from 15 knots before the cloud to 25 knots

plus as the rain hits. I tend to use the radar to look for the squalls which works well and allows more time to prepare. Around 03:00 conditions became fairly wild with the wind constantly over 35 knots for a couple of hours the highest gust I noted 40.5 knots. The sea became very confused with waves from the north combining with the swell from the E.N.E. Fathom sailed on comfortably under staysail alone but a few times she surfed down some big waves which was a little too exciting. Conditions not much better through the day but my appetite remained and a large pan of carbonara was cooked for dinner. Despite the wind and sea state I feel good and comfortable. Daily run 123nm.

DAY 13: By 05.00 this morning wind had moderated so hoisted mainsail again. At 07.00 a squall approached with 30 knots wind so dropped mainsail. Mainsail raised again at 07.30 as wind down to 15 knots. Another squall hits just before 08.00 so mainsail dropped etc etc. This becomes quite frustrating after a while as the boat goes too slowly between the squalls if sail area isn't increased. This pattern continued throughout the day before the wind dropped to 9 knots by sunset and I pulled in the tow generator. Managed to get some sun sights between the showers. A few more episodes of Breaking Bad on the laptop. Watching this is becoming guilty pleasure of the trip. Daily run 110nm.



dolphins often came to say hello



for those that doubt I bake bread!



following the sun



another sunset



sunrise



sunrise



squall cloud approaches from astern



and engulfs the moon



max wind I saw was 40.5 knots



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only decent photo of the fin whale



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watching the sunset – favourite pastime



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double rainbow welcomes Fathom to Barbados

DAY 14: During the night I heard a thump above my head and a flapping sound for several minutes. After going on deck to investigate I saw a fairly large flying fish which I took pity on and threw back over the side. Baked another loaf of bread this morning which turned out to be the best yet. Tried to finish watching the last series of Breaking Bad because it had become so addictive but in doing so ran the boats batteries down by having the laptop on too long. Forced to deploy tow generator again. Spent a couple hours before sunset trying new places to mount the go pro. Sea state much better today and the motion of the boat more comfortable. Finally a day of no squalls! Daily run 127nm.

DAY 15: Weather forecast suggests plenty of wind to push Fathom to Barbados with 20 to 25 knots expected for the next days. Surprisingly I feel in no great rush to make landfall and still enjoying being at sea. Despite racing the other boats have decided to slow down slightly so as to arrive in Barbados in daylight. At current rate of progress would arrive around 23.00 local time on the 19th. Most of the fresh food has been eaten or gone bad. Had to throw away the last two bananas. Thankfully don't think scurvy is a threat. Onions and garlic last for ages as do the potatoes and sweet potatoes. Spent a couple of hours on deck after sunset stargazing which was most enjoyable. Daily run 125nm.

DAY 16: Confused sea arrived later in the night and Fathom is rocking and

rolling all over the place. Makes any task in the cabin difficult. One particularly large wave hit just as I was pouring water from the kettle into the Aeropress to make my morning coffee and the whole lot ended up on the cabin sole with coffee granules ending up everywhere. Sailing at reduced speed of 4.5 knots under staysail alone in 25 knots wind. While I was on deck after breakfast I noticed a dark shape in a wave behind the boat. For the next minutes it would disappear then reappear again and then all of a sudden a whale surfaced right next to the boat. For the next couple of hours it seemed transfixed with the tow generator which was spinning at the end of 30m rope behind the boat. The whale would then surf down inside the next big wave and dive under Fathom before surfacing alongside. I was completely transfixed watching it and also quite terrified it would hit the boat as I estimated it to be about 5m long. My initial thought was that it was a killer whale but I have since realised it was a fin whale – black top and white bottom. One of the most memorable moments of the trip for sure. Fred and Mel on Arwen arrived in Barbados today which is very fast passage indeed. Daily run 125nm. Today is Friday and aiming to arrive Bridgetown Monday morning.

DAY 17: Not a good nights sleep due to motion of the boat in the increasingly rough sea. I estimate the biggest waves to be between 5 to 6m. While I was asleep a particularly large wave hit the starboard quarter causing Fathom to lay right down on her port side. I later discovered the life belt which sits on the port side of the pushpit had been washed out of its holder and a lighter and a roll of electrical tape which sit below the window on the starboard side had fallen vertically down to a shelf on the port side of the boat rather than falling onto the floor. Thinking a bit more about landfall now. From the email correspondence Fathom appears to be about 150nm ahead of Sturmschwalbe and a day or so behind Hent-Eon and Ribouldingue.

DAY 18: Back to short 30 minute cat naps during the night as Fathom closed on Barbados. By 04.00 the lights of Bridgetown could be seen from the top of the waves. The squall clouds made a reappearance and the motion of the boat was again uncomfortable in the large waves. I had timed arrival to be just after sunrise and as Fathom rounded the southern point of Barbados another squall hit. Once this passed a double rainbow appeared which I took to be a piece of good luck and a good omen for arrival. As Fathom motored into the anchorage at Carlise bay I was called on the VHF by Andy on Venture Lady who had arrived a couple days before. The anchor was dropped alongside Arwen, Hent-Eon and Ribouldingue, just as we had been 2,020 miles ago in Mindelo. I had crossed the Atlantic single handed in 16 days and 23 hours!

[Atlantic Crossing Part 1](#)

DAY 1: Fathom departed Mindelo today, 2nd December, at 14:36 UTC alongside Jan and Jule on Sturmschwalbe and Fred and Mel on Arwen. Hent-Eon and Ribouldingue still had to finish some preparations and leave tomorrow.

Loveboat discovered a small leak around their steering gear and have had to put back their departure. A light wind initially pushed the boats down the channel between the islands of Sao Vicente and Santo Antao and we took the opportunity to photo and video each other. Sturmschwalbe roared into an early lead when they hoisted their spinnaker but it was hauled down swiftly when the wind rose to 20 knots a couple of miles later. As darkness descended the boats were just passing the end of Santo Antao and while I was down below cooking some dinner was unaware the wind had shifted 90 degrees. A slightly concerned Jule called me up on the VHF to let me know I was headed S.E and Barbados was due West. Sausages, potatoes and vegetables for dinner.



Fathom departing Mindelo

DAY 2: Deployed the tow generator at midday to ensure the batteries stay nicely topped up and the fridge can remain turned on 24/7. Played around with sail configurations and decided that the motion of the boat is better and there is less rolling when the staysail is hoisted on the inner forestay and pulled in hard with the yankee (foresail) poled out one side and a reefed mainsail on the other. Only have one pole so poling out two headsails is not really an option (boom is a poor substitute for a pole). Had a chat with both Arwen and Sturmschwalbe on the VHF during the afternoon and all are well. Daily run, noon to noon, of 125nm. Nicely hooked into the N.E tradewinds. Last night set the alarm at 30 minute intervals due to proximity to land but apart from the lights of Sturmschwalbe didn't see any other vessels.

DAY 3: One big and several small flying fish on deck this morning. The big one went straight into the frying pan and was served on toast with a drizzle of lemon for breakfast. Struggled to get the boat balanced last night for some reason so was up on deck and out of my bunk frequently. Rather tired today as a result. Chat with Sturmschwalbe on the VHF this afternoon who appear to be 7 miles behind Fathom. Baked a cake which filled the boat with a very pleasant aroma. Daily run again 125nm.

DAY 4: Excellent nights sleep due to settled weather conditions. Stayed in bunk from 22:00 until 07.30 this morning. The AIS alarm should warn me if any large ships get close and I transmit an AIS signal too. I am able to connect the Ipad to the boats chartplotter through an app meaning I can stay in my bunk and check the AIS and boats heading. No substitute for a real look out on deck but when sailing alone and far out to sea away from shipping lanes I prefer to get as much sleep as I can when conditions allow. No longer in VHF contact with Sturmschwalbe or Arwen. Daily run of 115nm. Pulled in towgen before dark as wind had dropped to 10 knots and it was causing too much drag. I'm feeling nicely settled into life at sea and enjoying the trip so far. Gybed at 18.00 as wind had gone more easterly. Past 30 degrees west so put ships clock back 1 hour – now UTC -2. Cooked a kind of stew which will provide dinner for a couple of nights – potatoes, sweet potatoes, corned beef, tinned tomatoes, chick peas, chilli and piri piri hot sauce.

DAY 5: Up on deck at 02.30 to put 2 reefs in the main and a few rolls of the headsail as the boat was over canvassed and the wind had risen to 20 knots. Otherwise stayed in my bunk with the alarm set at 1.5 hour intervals when the boats heading could be checked. Gybed back onto starboard at first light as wind backed to the N.E again. Deployed fishing line for the first time but when hauling it in later discovered something had bitten off the lure. That was my favourite lure too. Determined to master celestial navigation so for only the second time since leaving England was on deck with the sextant. Took morning site and then noon site and obtained an observed position using position lines on a plotting sheet. Latitude from the noon site two miles out but longitude over ten – more practise needed. Towgen deployed as batteries approaching 50% charge. Pasta with pesto and tinned sardines for dinner. Daily run 102nm due to light winds.

DAY 6: Now nicely into a daily routine. Once I am out of my bunk around 07.00 I put the kettle on and make a cup of 'real' coffee. None of this instant stuff! I drink this while checking emails via the Iridium satellite phone and download a GRIB weather forecast file. Write up my daily journal for the previous day usually after failing to do it the evening before. Before breakfast go on deck to investigate the nights haul of flying fish and to decide if any are big enough to warrant going in the pan. If not, breakfast is either marmite or jam on toast followed by a banana, or if i'm out of bread, a bowl of porridge with a generous dollop of golden syrup. I then do a round of the deck to check for any chafe or wear or tear and check shackles are tight. A look up the mast with the binoculars to check all is well followed by morning sight with the sextant which then takes me some time to reduce to a position line and draw on the plotting sheet. Clean and tidy of the inside of the boat and do all the washing up which has accumulated since the following evening. Noon sight with the sextant and then position worked out by combining this with the morning sight transferred by distance run in the meantime. After lunch usually a nap followed by plenty of reading. Before dark cook dinner and eat while listening to a podcast or audiobook then on deck to reef down for the night in good time. For last couple of days wind has been blowing around 15 to 20 knots in the day with a slight increase just after dark. The swell only 1 to 1.5m so excellent and very enjoyable sailing. Daily run 122nm.



departing Mindelo



lets go – with Sturmschwalbe and Arwen



Fathom leaving Mindelo



Fathom leaving Mindelo



Fathom leaving Mindelo



Sturmschwalbe



following Sturmschwalbe



flying fish for breakfast



perfect tradewind sailing



selfie time – must have been bored




following the sun



double rainbow



 first shower cloud of the voyage



half way!

DAY 7: On deck at 04.00 to put a reef in. Onto last loaf of bread which is nearly stale anyway so will have to start baking soon. Towgen in and fishing line out but no luck again. Feeling well rested and enjoying life at sea. It is nice to be able to send and receive emails with Sturmschwalbe, Arwen and Hent-Eon using the satellite phone. We exchange positions, fishing success stories (or failures) and what's on the menu for dinner. Nothing quite beats the sound of the water rushing past the hull when I am lying in the bunk falling asleep and Fathom is galloping at 6 knots directly for Barbados. Daily run again 122nm.

DAY 8: Another day similar to the last. Good progress and still the sea is slight with low swell so conditions are comfortable on board. Baked first bread of the trip but used too much salt so I am forced to consume two glasses of water following every slice of bread. Daily run 132nm.

DAY 9: For the first time since leaving Mindelo the sky looks a little unsettled. No longer just blue sky and small cotton wool tradewind clouds. Instead some large cumulus indicating more unstable air with a couple producing short rain showers. Very happy to have calculated position using sextant to within 4 miles of the GPS position so practise must be paying off. Just before sunset one small shower produced an amazing double rainbow. An hour later @ 22:00 UTC Fathom reached the half way point to Barbados – 1,010nm to go! A really fantastic first week with perfect conditions and relatively straight forward sailing.