

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.

[Madeira to La Graciosa](#)

Fathom departed the anchorage at Funchal late morning on Tuesday and was soon sailing directly for Graciosa, 270 miles to the south east in a moderate north easterly breeze. I decided to try my luck with the fishing line and sure enough an hour later pulled in a Bonito which provided a tasty dinner that evening. After making a mess of my shorts and most of the cockpit when trying to kill the last fish by knocking it on the head several times with the bilge pump handle my new technique is to squirt some cheap vodka from an old washing up bottle onto the gills. This seems to work nicely and quickly without creating a mess.

That afternoon I took the opportunity to try the towed generator for the first time. This was purchased from Ebay a year or so ago and although I had wired it up had never tried it. A metal propeller shaft is attached to 30m of rope towed behind the boat which when spinning powers a generator in a gimbaled ring mounted to the pulpit. I was pleasantly surprised how well it worked generating about 1 amp per knot of boat speed and not noticeably slowing the boat. Satisfying to be able to create all the electrical power I need with a combination of solar and wind energy.

As Tuesday progressed the wind began to increase and by evening it was quite uncomfortable on board with a considerable swell running and a confused sea. Occasionally a large wave would cause Fathom to round up slightly into the wind which would then unbalance the self steering and she would struggle to bear away again back on course. A 2nd reef in the main before dark did the trick and we made good progress towards the Canaries at speeds between 5 and 6.5 knots. I had noticed another yacht leaving Funchal at the same time on Tuesday morning and throughout the day had been keeping a close eye on them via the AIS which indicated they were 33 feet. Both yachts were doing near identical speeds and remained within a couple miles of each other. It was obvious we had the same destination so my competitive streak made a reappearance and a race was on!

It proved quite difficult to sleep during the first night but I snatched some 25 minute naps. With the other yacht so close I didn't feel comfortable sleeping longer and I had to turn the AIS alarm off as it was constantly triggered by the other boat. By 3am the wind had increased to over 20 knots and I went into the cockpit to make an adjustment to the self steering. At exactly that moment a large wave decided to deposit itself right on top of me

and although I was clipped on I was only in my boxers so I received an unwelcome salt water wash! I hadn't felt comfortable trying to pull in the towed generator the previous afternoon in that sea state but there was now a danger of overcharging the batteries. I was forced to turn on every electrical appliance I could in order to neutralise the power being generated by the towgen. Not only did I have the fridge on full blast the radar was on constantly and both my laptop and ipad were on charge and the chart plotter on full brightness!



self steering & towed generator doing their jobs



Bonito and Tuesday's dinner



yacht on same passage from Funchal



yacht on same passage from Funchal



yacht on same passage from Funchal

By first light on Wednesday the conditions were beginning to moderate but the sea was fairly messy still. The other yacht were alongside and I managed to take some photos in between them disappearing behind the waves. Progress was good and Fathom charged on to the south east. 133 miles in the first 24 hours. I gave considerable thought to how to get the towgen back in. One option was to stop the boat to stop the rope spinning but instead I decided to cut a slit in a plastic funnel and placed this over the rope. Once it had slid down to the propeller it stopped the rope spinning and I was able to pull it in fairly easily. A problem with the electrics then appeared whereby every few minutes all power would go off then instantly turn back on again. This caused the VHF and chartplotter to turn off and restart each time. Thankfully I managed to find the cause which was a loose nut on the back of the battery isolator switch. Fathom began to make some miles on the the other boat and by evening were 5 miles ahead which was very satisfying :). Cooked steak for dinner with potatoes and vegetables.

Sleep was easier to come by on Wednesday night as I was far enough ahead of the other yacht to turn the AIS alarm back on and the sea was calmer. I woke from one nap at 5am to find the wind had veered and we were sailing south west. The next hours were then spent sailing upwind in a dying breeze. By lunchtime on Thursday there was only 4 to 5 knots of wind coming directly from the south east so reluctantly the motor was used for the remaining few miles to Graciosa. On arriving at the anchorage it was nice to see Jan and Corrie on 'Livingstone' and a few other familiar boats from previous places. Overall the trip from Madeira had taken 51.5 hours which was good going and Fathom had beaten a larger boat (more on them later..). Well done old girl!

Sines to Porto Santo

I departed Sines early on Friday morning bound for the small island of Porto Santo which lies 470 miles to the south east. The weather forecast suggested two days of fresh north east winds followed by a 24 hour period of light south west winds and then a northerly wind returning following the passing of a weather front. Not a perfect forecast but decided to push on anyway. In fact it was a mixed bag including two beautiful sunsets, some great downwind sailing, some tedious upwind sailing, some sun, some rain, a squall, several calms and a fish called Houdini. Below is a small summary from my log for each day of the trip. Scroll down for some video. More on Porto Santo later.



departing Sines



enjoying the sunset



another nice evening



checking the course



approach to Porto Santo

Day 1: Friday 9th September

Departed Sines just after 08.00. 15 knots of wind from the NE this morning

allowing a broad reach and good progress. Must admit to feeling a little queasy for the first hour as there was quite a swell running but soon settled in to the motion and now feeling good. Just after lunch the wind rose slightly and the speed over the ground hovered around 7 knots for a few minutes. There is about 1 knot of favourable current so Fathom was pretty much at hull speed. Really great sailing.

Keen to clear the shipping lanes by sunset and early this afternoon the AIS collision alarm went off and I could see that a 300 ft cargo ship had a closest point of approach of 90 feet. A little close for comfort! Called them up on the VHF and the officer told me he would change course by 20 degrees and insisted on calling me 'Sir' which I thought was very polite. Trouble was with only a few minutes until the two boats would be at their closest point he still hadn't altered course so I called the ship up again his reply being 'i'm very sorry sir changing course now'!

It is now 21.00 and just put a 2nd reef in the main as wind is over 20 knots and I like to be conservative at night. Hasn't really made any difference to the boat speed which is hovering around 5.5 knots.. Cooked spaghetti bolognese for dinner and appetite was at 100%. No fish today.

Day 2: Saturday 10th September

At night I sleep in 30 minute blocks and put my faith in the AIS alarm and the radar (which does a sweep every 15 minutes and beeps if it detects any other vessels within 6 miles of the boat). It does take some getting used to when the boat is sailing on by itself into the dark and I am trying to switch off and sleep below. Fathom has travelled 138 nautical miles in 24 hours since leaving Sines at an average of 5.75 knots so very happy with progress so far. Downloaded a weather forecast (GRIB file) and checked emails via the Iridium sat phone while drinking my morning coffee. Forecast still showing 24 hours of headwinds from later tomorrow so progress will slow.

This afternoon I really felt in rhythm with the sea and in good spirits. So good in fact I decided to cook for dinner a chicken leg I had in the fridge with some sage and onion stuffing, potatoes and veg. This evening the wind hovered around 10 knots and I sat on deck and watched the sunset which was very pleasant. Tried to take some video (see below). Still no fish despite using the lure Jean gave me which he promised always works. I have noticed that about 30 minutes after sunset each day the wind tends to increase by 5 to 10 knots.

Day 3: Sunday 11th September

Fathom really does like a decent breeze from aft of the beam and 123 miles sailed in the last 24 hours so no complaints. Despite saying I would refuse to use the engine I did so for two hours this morning when the wind dropped to 4 knots and the sails were banging about in the swell. I hate that sound! It did though allow some juice to be pumped into the batteries which were under 60% as the solar panel cant keep up with the fridge and radar running through the night. The towed generator will come into its own in the trade

winds but not used it yet.

This afternoon I went on deck after a short nap and noticed our boat speed had dropped by half a knot. Looked astern and could see a big fish thrashing about on the end of the line. At last! Began to haul in the line but the damn fish did a Houdini and managed to free itself. Not a happy skipper for a few minutes after that.

One moment of concern this afternoon was after another short 20 minute nap I went up on deck and noticed a fairly large ship passing me less than a mile away despite the AIS alarm not having gone off. Turned out the ship wasn't broadcasting an AIS signal which is illegal. I called them up to tell them but they didn't answer.. Hope not to meet many like that again.

Wind has dropped to 7 knots this evening and speed over ground is down to 4 knots. Headwinds on the way tomorrow. Pasta and Pesto for dinner. 150 miles to go.

Day 4: Monday 12th September

Tired this morning as didn't get any decent sleep last night. Was up on deck constantly adjusting the course and resorted to using the engine twice during the night for an hour at a time during two periods when the wind was down to 3 knots and the boat was rolling about in the swell. At least the batteries are charged. Skipper is a bit grumpy.

By 08.00 the wind had backed to the west as forecast and by 15.30 this afternoon our heading was due south. Don't want to slip any further south so just put a tack in. It is now 21.00 and Fathom is sailing on a course of 300 degrees away from our destination. Waiting for the weather front to pass so the winds return to the north. At sunset Fathom has only progressed 25 miles towards Porto Santo since 08.00 this morning.

Day 5: Tuesday 13th September

Woken up at 03.00 by torrential rain. Wind suddenly rises from 10 knots to 25 knots then to 30 knots as the front goes through. Throw on my oilies and lifejacket and harness and on deck to put another reef in. 20 minutes later all is calm again, the rain has stopped and the wind has veered 90 degrees. Fathom can now head directly for Porto Santo again.

Swell is from the north but the 24 hour period of SW winds has made the sea very confused and Fathom is rolling about all over the place. Eat up the rest of the miles to Porto Santo during the morning sailing downwind in 10 to 15 knots of wind. The island appears at first to be a series of several steep and isolated hills but soon merges into one. Arrive Porto Santo 15.00 and call the marina who say they are full but anchor in the harbour which is preferable anyway. 470 miles covered in 4 nights and just over 4 and a half days. Now for a cold beer!

Cascais

The day after I arrived in Cascais, Sunday before last, Claude turned up on his boat 'Oui Oui' having departed Madeira a few days earlier. After completing the Jester Challenge to the Azores he had then sailed to the Canaries and was on his way back north. Apparently the Jesters that reached the Azores, including several who had done the trip and solo transatlantic's before, all agreed "Never Again!" A few (quite a few) beers were drunk and a couple of days later I left Fathom at anchor and sailed with Claude on his boat to Seixal. This is a very nice local place a few miles down river opposite Lisbon, where he will leave the boat for a month. I will likely take Fathom there for a few days soon. Must be careful with the pronunciation and spelling of this town for obvious reasons.

While Claude was still about Chris and Cath on 'Harlekin,' arrived in the anchorage. I was surprised to find out they all knew each other as it turned out Claude had purchased his boat from Island Harbour and spent some time there. So there we were, three boats from Island Harbour on the Isle of Wight all at anchor together in Portugal. Chris and Cath had some problems installing a replacement compass for their autohelm but four heads are better than two and we managed to get it working for them just in time to see the Tall Ships departing Lisbon.

One day I received a message from a friend of mine Charlie from uni who was on holiday just up the road. Charlie is a top Figaro sailor and aiming for the Vendee in 2020. Great to have an unexpected catch up with him a couple of days short of the 10th anniversary since graduation. Where has the decade gone.



Claude on 'Oui Oui'



Catch up with Charlie



Tall ships leaving Lisbon



beach near Cabo da Roca



Cascais in background

The anchorage at Cascais has had a real cruising community feel about it. In addition to bumping into several boats I had met previously further north, last week I had a very nice evening and dinner with Norwegian couple Erik and Britt onboard their boat 'Harry Z'. It has been particularly satisfying anchoring for free off the marina which is ridiculously expensive and has unhelpful staff and a general bad attitude. I know of other cruisers who were

quoted 10 euros a day for permission to tie their dinghy in the marina while going ashore from the anchorage. I thankfully discovered the Naval Club on the edge of the marina which is very friendly and allowed me to tie up the dinghy for free and have free showers. Not only that they have a TV in the club which showed the Formula 1 and the Americas Cup series racing which was a bonus. The wind has really been blowing at times particularly in the early evenings though the anchorage is well protected from swell. Several days the wind has been in excess of 25 knots with gusts up to 35. I have a lot of faith in my Rocna anchor and touch wood have never dragged. Last night the wind was so strong the dinghy, which was tied astern, tried to do a back flip several times.

This area really has been a great place to spend time and nice to meet people from outside the sailing world too. New friends from places including Sweden, Norway, Germany and Italy. Days spent up the coast on the beach and nights out in Lisbon. Fun times.

This morning I eventually pulled up the hook and left the anchorage. Fathom has not travelled far, just five miles or so down the coast towards Lisbon, in a nice and friendly marina called Oeiras. I need to fill up the water tanks, do the laundry, exchange gas bottles etc. Some friends are still in Cascais so I will stay around this area a week or so longer. I want to explore Lisbon properly too. I am in no rush and current plan is to arrive in Porto Santo, Madeira, in early September. On entering the marina here at Oeiras earlier I was hailed by John and Jenny who I had met a few weeks back in Baiona. Within five minutes of tying up I had been invited aboard their boat for home made burgers and some red wine. How will I ever be able to return to the real world?!

[Figueira da Foz – Peniche – Cascais](#)

I was aiming to arrive in the anchorage at Cascais last weekend to meet up with Claude who after completing the Jester Azores challenge was passing through on his way north from Canaries and Madeira. I had the option to do the trip from Leixoes direct over a couple of days or stop a couple of times on the way. Non stop would mean heading offshore at least 20 miles before heading south in order to avoid the fishing markers and other unlit coastal hazards at night but I decided to do day trips.

First stop on the 21st was Figueira da Foz. The wind for the 60 mile passage was again very light and after departing Leixoes at 06.00 managed a few hours of sailing in about 9 knots breeze from astern. As I was sitting eating breakfast in the cockpit there was a splash alongside and a dolphin came to say hello. Somehow I managed to get a photo just as they jumped out of the water alongside. Only later when I was looking through some photos on the laptop, did I notice that exactly one year ago to the day, I was sitting in

the cockpit eating breakfast a few miles south of Jersey when a Dolphin did exactly the same thing – the two photos are almost identical. In the afternoon I'm pleased to report Manuel's magic lure worked and the first fish was caught – a decent sized Mackerel or similar. Hopefully on a roll now... The entrance to Foz is renowned for being dangerous when a swell is running and water can break in the entrance but all was calm on arrival. Unfortunately there is nowhere to anchor at Foz and I was disappointed that the marina charged 23 euros for the night so only stayed one night. Didn't get a chance to explore the town but enjoyed eating the fish for dinner finished off with a glass of Port from a few miles north.

Early the next morning departed on another 60 mile trip south this time to Peniche. During the morning the wind hovered around 10 knots and as I was out of bread decided to bake a loaf. Nothing quite like the smell of baking bread when at sea. By lunch the northerly wind had piped up to a good 20 knots and Fathom flew south at 6 to 7 knots over the ground, really fantastic sailing. A large sea was running as we rounded Cabo Carvoeiro but the anchorage off the breakwater at Peniche was nicely protected and a good place for the night. Very few other yachts spotted at sea except a 50 footer 'Christine' who for the 2nd day running had blasted past Fathom at 9 knots with help from their huge Parasailor spinnaker. I never like being overtaken by another boat even if they are nearly twice the size!



morning visitor



flying south



anchorage at Cascais

The trip from Peniche to Cascais was shorter than the previous days but the conditions were far livelier. While trying to hoist the main I realised that it had flipped itself around the radar reflector at the top of the mast which would have required a trip aloft to free it. Could have used the topping lift to hoist the main but just the headsail poled out was sufficient. Very exhilarating sailing and for the last couple of hours into Cascais the wind topped 30 knots with decent sized waves. On rounding Cabo da Roca and heading east towards Cascais the coolish air which had been blowing down the coast over the sea was replaced with wind that had been blowing south over the land. It was suddenly like a hair dryer had been turned on but unfortunately at that very instant a huge swarm of flies appeared out of nowhere and covered the boat both inside and out. Luckily after anchoring they disappeared as quickly as they had arrived. Being a Saturday the anchorage at Cascais was rammed with locals as well as cruisers. Claude was due in the next day and the town looked liked it would be a fun place to spend a bit of time.

Leixóes & Porto

The 35 mile passage from Viana do Castela to Leixóes was not the most relaxing. Monday dawned beautiful with a light westerly breeze and sunshine but soon died and the engine was on again. Manuel from the chandlers in Cangas had sold me some new fishing lures which he assured me would guarantee success along the coast. I gave one of these its first outing and after pulling it in to check an hour later found something had bitten the lure in half and just missed the hook.. Lucky fish! I'm getting closer though...

A couple of hours later a thick blanket of fog descended and never again lifted. The huge numbers of fishing markers and flags which are a nuisance in perfect visibility become a right pain in the fog because they are only seen when a few metres away. On the approach to the busy commercial port of Leixóes I put my trust in the AIS and radar with our course passing several large container ships at anchor outside the port. The visibility was so poor that I never saw any of the anchored ships we passed less than 100m away. The eerie sound of the fog horn on the end of the breakwater and those of the ships entering and leaving the port added to the atmosphere. After holding position for a few minutes the AIS showed the the entrance to the port was clear and no ships were leaving or close to entering so Fathom made her way in slowly and only when within a few metres of the marina could I make out any features of the shore. Certainly the worst visibility I have ever witnessed and a sigh of relief once all tied up.

The reason for visiting Leixóes was that it is the nearest and cheapest place to moor up in order to travel to Porto. Yesterday I took the bus for a 40 minute ride into the city. It really is a fantastic place and I went on a three hour walking tour to take in the main sites. One of the highlights was strolling out along the top of Dom Luis Bridge and looking down on the city. Before catching the bus back in the evening I enjoyed a Francesinha, which is a Portuguese sandwich originally from Porto, made with bread, wet-cured ham, linguiça, fresh sausage like chipolata, steak or roast meat and covered with melted cheese and a hot thick tomato and beer sauce served with french fries. Damn good. Couldn't resist taking a bottle of Port back to the boat too. When in Porto...









