

On Saturday 20 April, in 105° W 6° south, we celebrated reaching halfway to the Marquesas. We'd been out 38 days and sailed 2,100 miles (3,890 km). But now we had the SE trade wind and expected to complete the remaining 2,100 miles in 25 to 30 days, even with the barnacles slowing us down.

As in the NE trade winds in the Atlantic, we were now usually surrounded by fish (the barnacles probably helped). There were flying fish ahead of us, being hunted by dorado swimming alongside us, and almost a wall of skipjack tuna in the leading edge of the big blue swells sweeping up from astern. I'd learnt to spear the dorado from the cockpit, but they were almost family, and I hated doing so. I had no such feelings for the skipjack off the stern. I'd also learnt how to catch them with a big hook and a strong line with a section of strong rubber to take the shock of these powerful fish taking the piece of a flying fish (from the deck) I used as bait. They were easy to catch but so strong they could pull the boat off course before I landed them. For weeks I caught one every other day for dinner, alternating with corned beef and rice, our favourite, alternating with Protoveg curry.

Dinner was a time for chatting and watching the sunset, one of us sitting in the cockpit helping the self-steering, the other standing in the hatch. As the light faded and the sun slowly sank into the sea, we'd watch for the mythical 'green flash' the instant it disappeared (we never saw it). We'd always chat, often reflecting on our lives and discussing the future.

'I reckon we should try and make Brisbane, Australia, by November,' I proposed, outlining my latest plan, cooked up on my watch while looking at a world chart showing world winds and sailing routes. I thought we would be able to find work in Brisbane, and then five months later, when the wind became right in April, sail north up the Great Barrier Reef, then west through Torres Strait into the Indian Ocean. We could aim to make Cape Town by November '75 and then sail north through the South Atlantic to the Azores in the middle of the North Atlantic. Then on, to be back in Britain in the summer of 1976.

It was an ambitious idea. But rolling gently across the Eastern Pacific, it seemed that the cruise from Australia onwards would be more complex and dangerous than everything so far. And at the end of it all, where would we be? Back in Maggie Thatcher's Britain, with its strikes, high unemployment, and energy crises. Why would we fight so hard to get back to all that?

Well, all of that was far ahead. Right now on *The Aegre*, it was dark, dinner was finished, and there was the washing up to do. Not hard with the ocean lapping at the lee rail within hand's reach. Except at night, we weren't too keen on putting our hands in the water. There were often torpedo-like phosphorescent wakes rocketing along beside us: the night presence of the large dorado fish, or maybe something larger? We kept our pinkies well inboard.