

A photograph of a sailboat's deck and rigging against a blue sky and sea. The sail is white and partially visible on the left. The deck is white with various equipment, including a blue cooler and a solar panel. The rigging consists of numerous ropes and lines extending across the deck. The sea is a deep blue, and the sky is a lighter blue.

ONE TACK & TWO JIBES

1,300 MILES FROM ALASKA TO SAN FRANCISCO



Wedged between the lee cloth and cushions on *Yahtzee's* starboard settee, I stare aloft through the dark of the cabin and the main hatch, listening intently to the boisterous wind and waves of the North Pacific. We're nearly five days out from Craig, Alaska and 150-miles off the Washington coast, fore-reaching slowly to the southwest. Having tacked four hours earlier into the teeth of a building gale and struck the mainsail, our crew safely and patiently awaits a change in the weather.

With our staysail flying in 35 to 40 knot gusts, 10- to 15-foot seas and pouring rain, I illuminate the Timex Ironman on my wrist, read 0100, and think, "This has to be the worst of it. The wind is going to shift soon."

Just then, I hear a wave break overhead, sending a torrent of water under the boom and across the top of the hatch in a glowing rush of phosphorescence. "Whoa", I think with eyes as wide as saucers, "I've never seen phosphorescence on top of a boat." An hour later, as I predicted, the wind started to calm and shift to the west. Then northwest. Soon after, we're home free and back to running for San Francisco. That one tack was well worth it.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The keen Pacific Northwest mariner may wonder, though, why we chose to jump offshore from Southeast Alaska to San Francisco instead of taking the traditional route down the Inside Passage through British Columbia before heading out. For us, deciding to go offshore hinged on a few key factors, the most significant of which was the weather. Our thinking went like this:



After spending several gorgeous weeks motoring around windless, though warm and sunny Southeast Alaska, maximizing time under sail was a huge priority. By going inside and into a variable weather pattern with little to no wind, we'd almost certainly be spending many days, weeks and miles under power slogging south. *Not that fun. Sailing = Fun.*

Our crew doesn't take conventional or well-worn routes just because that's how it's typically done. *Not our style.*

We wanted to sail offshore from Alaska to the west coast of Vancouver Island, but, alas, Ucluelet and Bamfield are no longer points of entry. *Not cool, Canada.*

Taking all of that into consideration, [REDACTED] and I talked through our options over evening libations in a quaint anchorage and when I said, "How about we just sail to San Francisco." She quickly replied. "Yes!" And with that, we watched the weather and waited for the right window to open.

When a consistent westerly and northwesterly pattern established itself from the Gulf of Alaska stretching down the coasts of British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California, we knew it was go time. Accordingly, we stocked *Yahtzee* with food in Craig, topped up our fuel and water, put the boat in offshore mode, and made a course south for California on August 16 knowing full well that there were going to be some serious highlights and lowlights along the way. Fortunately, the highs far outnumbered the lows, and the stories go like this...

OUT TO SEA

Motoring over a glass calm sea out of Southeast Alaska, the open ocean and long horizon in front of us is calling. Once clear of Baker Island, the wind promptly fills in from the west and with a hoot and holler from the crew, *Yahtzee* heels to port and off we sail. Up and down the wind goes over the next 24 hours and on and off goes the engine. But on day two, the breeze steadies and keeps pumping. Completely out of site of land, we settle in on a starboard tack and let the wind do its thing.

Bounding south in a 25-knot westerly, *Yahtzee* turns into a rocket ship downwind and we tick off three consecutive 160-mile days past British Columbia with one jibe tucked in to keep us near the rhumbline. All the while, dolphins play on the bow, the stars and sunsets and sunrises put on daily shows, and the deep blue of the open ocean captivates our senses.

As for the crew, wind brings larger seas and with 10-plus foot swell, as usual, we all take a couple of days to get our sea legs and stomachs right, and to find our patterns in sleeping and watch keeping. Our onboard routines are flowing seamlessly by now, with [REDACTED] and I alternating 3 hour shifts at night and napping during the day. As expected, [REDACTED], our youngest, overcomes a mild case of mal de mer by day three with a combination of rest, fluids, and a little bit of food.

We know that making fast and comfortable offshore passages means being prepared and confident in what the weather is going to serve up along the way, and we were happy to have made a solid plan with good information coming to us from my brother [REDACTED] and friends [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Over those first few days, our spot-on forecasts of westerly and northwesterly winds allowed for exactly what we'd hoped for, a ton of amazing sailing—until that one day...



Sitting in the cockpit facing aft, I watch as monster waves roll in from behind us, pick up our stern and then launch Yahtzee forward with plumes of white water shooting off each side of the bow. My smile is as wide as the horizon.

STORMY TUESDAY

With *Yahtzee's* staysail set and two reefs in the main, water washes over the deck while battling a southerly wind that has gone from 10 to 15 to 30 knots in the matter of a few hours. The seas, too, have jumped in height and are now like big rolling hills that we climb over and then down again. Rinse and repeat. Saltwater starts finding its way in through the deck into any tiny nook and cranny possible, and several waves sweep under the dodger and down the companionway.

In the moment, we know this struggle is just the beginning, but the edge of the low will also pass relatively quickly. Onward we push throughout the day and into the night, fighting an unforgiving and unrelenting sea. All the while, the crew remains steady, upbeat and undeterred. Then, just before sunset, I look at the blue sky to the west and see a line of clouds approaching. "That's it! That will bring the new wind!" and we tack to head west into the teeth of it. Sure enough, by 2 a.m. the now 40-knot breeze is abating and by 3 a.m. the once strong southerly has turned into a moderate westerly. We've made it out the other side and are relieved to know it will be all downwind from there.

When we left Alaska, I knew full well that we'd potentially be skirting the edge of this low off the Washington coast. No matter how good an offshore forecast is, it's exceedingly difficult to make any 10-day passage without at least a day or two of adverse weather. Having encountered and sailed in similar storm conditions at sea before, [redacted] and I were also well aware that our boat and crew would be fine. We'd just need to make good decisions, keep the sails small and carry on until it passed over us. In the end that's what we did, and it was never

unsafe, just uncomfortable. Back to our downwind routines we go...

SURFS UP

Sitting in the cockpit facing aft, I watch as monster waves roll in from behind us, pick up our stern and then launch *Yahtzee* forward with plumes of white water shooting off each side of the bow. My smile is as wide as the horizon. With the low past us now and high pressure bringing bright blue skies and 30-knots of northerly wind, we're having the ride of our lives. And the boys love being in the cockpit, watching the swell roll underneath us and the boat surf.

Needing to maintain a southeasterly course deep downwind in the strong breeze, we make our second jibe and play with a variety of different sail combinations. First we sail with two reefs in the main and a scrap of jib out, all the while averaging 7 knots of boatspeed. Then we strike the mainsail and opt to sail with just the genoa for a couple days and nights, which is comfortable and easy-to-handle and still gets us 7 knots.

We're ticking off days of more than 160-miles now and only turn the engine on a couple times to charge the batteries and keep the autopilot diligently working through the dark of night. All the while, our crew is back to normal passage routines.

"I feel like we just left an anchorage this morning." Jill says to me while we bask in the sun and wind on day nine, our last full day at sea. "I know, we could just keep going. How 'bout we hang a right and head for Hawaii?" I half-jokingly reply.

It's true though. After so many days at sea our crew is dialed and comfortable with everything from mundane tasks to weathering storms. [redacted] and [redacted] are completely unfazed.

They eat and sleep on the same schedule they normally would at anchor, and there are plenty of activities to fill the days: Learning to tie Turks Head knots, racing RC cars down below, hanging out on deck, painting, cooking and baking, reading, cleaning, playing everything from music to dodgeball, resting with some screen time, and completing their schoolwork. This is a life they know well, and it certainly shows throughout the passage.

█, for her part, continues to be a wizard offshore. Her jack-of-all-trades ability to capably stand watches, execute a meal plan for a passage (see sidebar), and take care of me, the boys and the boat, all while assisting with sailing and navigating duties is remarkable. I can't say enough how proud I am of our crew. We roll pleasantly towards San Francisco...

BUMP IN THE NIGHT

It's 5:00 am and pitch dark when █ comes on watch and I head below for some much needed rest. The wind abated overnight and *Yahtzee* is cheerfully motoring at 6 knots over a smooth sea, pushing through a thick blanket of fog in zero wind with the Golden Gate Bridge 40 miles ahead. About 15 minutes later, laying in my bunk thinking about our impending landfall, the boat suddenly feels like it plows into a huge wake, not quite coming to a full stop but close to it. Then there is a big bump on the port side followed by a shower of stinky saltwater baptizing the cockpit. █ screams █ and I'm already running on deck into the black night in my underwear. All I hear next is a deep groaning sound then a loud spout. "Holy crap. We just hit a whale!"

It was too dark to actually see what was likely a humpback before the impact or after, and we obviously hope that it wasn't badly injured. *Yahtzee* came away unscathed except for some seriously anxious crew members impatiently awaiting daylight; which, when it did arrive, revealed humpback whales and sea lions all around us. Go figure.

SWEET, SWEET LANDFALL

Through a thick morning fog, land, which we haven't seen in ten days, finally becomes visible when we're about 5 miles out from the Golden Gate Bridge. As we approach, our excitement grows and a slight breeze starts to trickle in from the west and then pipes up to 20-knots right before the bridge. With sails set wing-and-wing, *Yahtzee* rips through the gate with massive smiles and an even bigger sense of accomplishment from all aboard.

Just beyond the bridge, we weave through traffic of sailboats, tour boats and a kiteboarding race to find the marina. Docking at the St. Francis Yacht Club, our crew jumps on the pier with wobbly legs, makes the lines fast and then we consume each other in a huge family hug. We've done it, 1,300-miles non-stop from Alaska to San Francisco—what a romping ride! Ⓐ

Tips From a Sea-going Galley

Making and implementing a meal plan for a passage of any length is a difficult process that must be done with a focus on keeping crew members full and energy and morale levels high. And because you know it's going to be rough at times, meals need to be easy to make and minimize dishes to wash. Fortunately, having made and planned for longer passages before, our incredible galley guru, █ knew what to expect and how to keep our crew fed and happy. Beyond having lots of snacks aboard and trying to make one-pot meals whenever possible, here are a few tips that can be applied to any length passage.

Breakfast burritos for the win. Whip up a huge batch of breakfast burritos (in our case 12) before leaving the dock or anchorage. Wrap them in tin foil, store them in a zip lock bag in the fridge and then simply pop them in the oven in the morning and your crew has a nice hot breakfast in about 20 minutes. Ingredients can vary, but our burritos included sausage, eggs, potatoes, onions, green peppers and cheddar cheese wrapped in a flour tortilla.

Keep it simple and easy. Similar to pre-making breakfast burritos, it also helps to prepare a baked ziti or chicken or tuna casserole that can go in the oven on one of your first nights out. A meal like this also tends to leave leftovers that can be easily reheated and eaten on watch. Along with preparing a hot meal, it's also helpful to grill and cut up chicken and make a skillet of taco meat to keep in containers in the fridge. You can then add the chicken or beef to tacos, quesadillas, pasta dishes, etc. along the way.

Cup of cheer. Assign each crew member a dedicated cup to use throughout the passage. In our case, we use YETI-style metal thermal tumblers with lids that are perfect for hot and cold drinks. They can also be used to safely and easily eat ramen noodles, cereal, oatmeal or soup out of while on watch or when wedged into a spot in the cockpit.

Candy Party! Who doesn't love candy? Bring a lot. With a four-year-old and six-year-old onboard, it is necessary to keep some sweet treats around for a morale boost. And, to be honest, we adults love it too. █ bought a variety of chocolate and sweet candies and stashed them away for a half-way party on a sunny afternoon after lunch.