

# FINDING YOUR 'WINDOW' —

I awoke with a stiff neck a few days ago, which is not too unusual for an old sailor like me. But on that day the soreness wasn't from raising halyards, grinding winches, or manhandling anchors.

I had to smile when I realized that morning's pain was from carrying a full stalk of green bananas the day be-

Why an entire stalk of bananas? On tiny French Polynesian islands like Tahuata you won't often find fruit for sale in neighborhood food stores — if there is a store at all — because virtually every house is typically shaded by towering mango and breadfruit trees, and almost every garden contains a wealth of lime, banana and papaya plants, plus at least one tree bearing the sweet local grapefruit called *pamplemousse*, which grow to be nearly the size of volleyballs.

That said, for visiting sailors to gather fruit without asking permission is considered extremely disrespectful. Yet if you greet remote islanders by simply attempting to pronounce the local Marquesan greeting, "Ka'oha," or even a few badly mangled words of French, you'll generally receive a warm response. And the offer of fruit or fresh-caught fish often follows — sometimes with an eagerness to exchange locally unattainable treasures that you may have brought from beyond the horizon, such as perfume, lipstick, reading glasses, or fishing gear.

Visiting sailors might feel as though the cultural differences between themselves and their Polynesian hosts are nearly as vast as the ocean that separates their homelands. But slow-traveling sailors who make even minor efforts to bridge those gaps, through brief yet heartfelt interactions, are likely to regard their travel experiences with a richness that fast-traveling tourists never know.

Every year at this time, hundreds of North American and European boats make the ambitious bluewater passage to French Polynesia, and I'm happy to report that after more than a decade of preparation and anticipation, this writer's Cross 42 MkII tri, *Little Wing*, was among them this season.

Much like the experiences of other sailors who did the so-called Pacific Puddle Jump from the West Coast of the Americas in recent weeks, our crossing was a mix of many highs and a few lows, with plenty of lessons learned along the way; some that we might have anticipated, and others that were completely surprising. We'll share some of our insights here, with hopes that they'll provide food for thought for future passagemakers.

(As you read this, some PPJ boats are



*When you smell the sweet scent of tiare flowers, you know you've arrived in the dream-like isles of French Polynesia.*

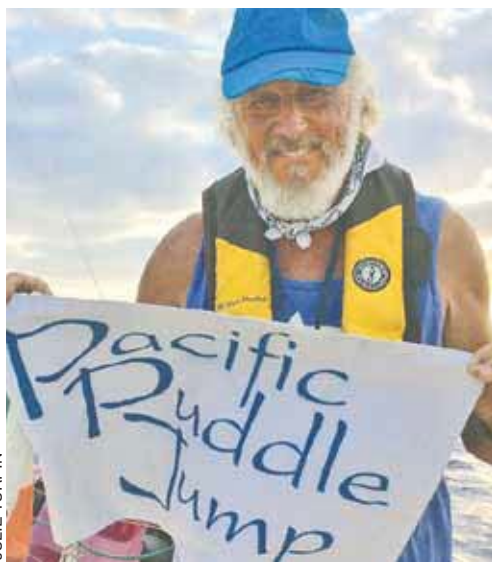
*still at sea, so our annual Puddle Jump recap won't appear here until later this summer.)*

## Finding Your 'Window'

If you've been considering making a major bluewater cruise to the South Pacific or elsewhere, you may have already figured out that fitting out your boat and squirreling away a cruising kitty are *not* the only impediments to setting sail on your dream cruise. As time-consuming, costly and exhausting as it can be to upgrade a boat's systems and equipment from stem to stern, many would-be voyagers find that it's even more challenging to find a 'window' of time when their responsibilities to family members, careers and other commitments allow them to break away for several months or longer.

As a result, a large percentage of long-haul cruisers are retirement age — including this writer. I'm happy to report that the cruising life has made me leaner and more fit than I've been in decades, but there's no denying that offshore passages are often exhausting, and it demands strength and stamina that's harder to muster the older you get. Bottom line: If extended offshore sailing is really your ultimate dream, you'd be wise to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to do it sooner than later — including taking a long sabbatical while you're still young, despite the loss of traction in your otherwise upwardly mobile career.

One way to avoid getting bogged down in multi-year preparations is to buy a boat that is truly cruise-ready, mean-

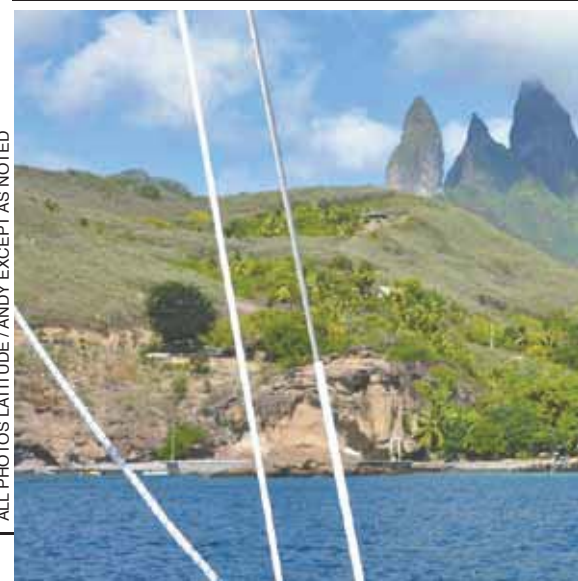


JULIE TURPIN

*After 23 years of wishing bon voyage to Tahiti-bound sailors, Puddle Jump founder Andy Turpin finally got to make the crossing himself.*

fore from a new friend's garden, on the remote Marquesan Island of Tahuata, to the dinghy landing at Vaitahu Bay. Lying roughly 3,000 miles southwest of the Mexican mainland and 4,000 miles west of Panama, Tahuata is the sort of roughly chiseled volcanic isle that fills the dreams of would-be bluewater voyagers the world over when they picture themselves escaping the stresses of mainstream living.

*Now better equipped than ever, the cold-molded Cross 42 'Little Wing' provided a sweet ride to the islands, even in sloppy cross-swells.*



ALL PHOTOS LATITUDE / ANDY EXCEPT AS NOTED

# AND MAKING YOUR EXIT

ing fitted out with all the gear you deem necessary, rather than being seduced by the bargain price of a fixer-upper with 'great potential'. As a sailor friend often says, "Nothing is more expensive than a cheap boat."

## Modern Gear & Gadgets

The boats that surround us here in the far-flung anchorages of the Marquesas reflect the full spectrum of pre-cruise spending and styles of cruising. In contrast to spartan, decades-old sloops whose crews schlep fresh water out to their boats by dinghy in jerry jugs filled at public taps ashore, there are nearly new, custom-built yachts equipped with both dishwashers and clothes washers, with enough water-making capacity to supply an entire Marquesan village.

*Our crossing was a mix of many highs and a few lows, with plenty of lessons learned along the way.*

Of course such luxury wasn't always part of the cruising life. When you talk to folks who cruised two or three decades ago, you learn that most of them carried only a fraction of the sophisticated gear and gadgetry that many cruisers have aboard today. Cutting-edge chartplotters, satellite communications devices and high-wattage solar arrays are wonderful additions to a cruising boat. But if attaining and installing such goodies

**Not long after 'Little Wing's landfall, brother Bear flew in to explore the marvels of the Marquesas, such as Ua-Pou's volcanic spires.**

will add another 10 years to your departure timetable, you might consider the advice of those who preach, "Go simpler, but go now."

## Are You 'Ready Enough'?

Would-be passagemakers are often plagued by their pursuit of a nearly unattainable goal: being completely ready to head offshore, with all gear properly stowed and 'all systems go'. But it's been our experience that no boat owner ever really gets to the bottom of the 'to do' list. So, rather than torture yourself by asking, "Are we completely ready?" ask, "Are we ready enough?"

## The Journey or the Destination?

In preparation for an extended visit to the South Pacific isles, we, like most passagemakers, did our homework by reading up on the region's rich history and highly revered cultural traditions. But along the way, prior to making our first landfall in the islands, we were pleasantly surprised to discover that the crossing itself held many special moments that have now become seared into our memories.

Although we paid close attention to our weather resources, it was probably more luck than skill that gave us sailable winds of at least five knots almost the entire way. And we never saw flat calms, lightning strikes nearby, or gusts over 30 knots.

Rotating watches of three hours on, six off with my wife Julie and longtime



**At San Benedicto the dolphin greeting party took their job seriously, escorting and entertaining us all the way to the anchorage.**

friend Craig, kept us relatively well-rested — at least compared to the many 'mom-and-pop' crews who did three on, three off for a month or more.

Looking back, I think that getting adequate sleep probably helped us to maintain upbeat attitudes most of the time and appreciate the rugged beauty of the open ocean, glorious star-filled nights and countless fiery sunsets, as well as the awesome intensity of the massive tropical squalls that intersected our path.

I was on watch late one afternoon when the first huge squall rolled over us, blasting torrents of rain down on us as if projected through a fire hose. After days of taking meager deck showers, it was a thrill to be given a thorough soaking, as if the rain gods above had decreed, "This guy *really* needs a shower."

As we angled southwest from Mexico toward the equator in early April, we enjoyed day after day of sweet sailing in steady winds of 12 to 18 knots. Late one afternoon I was alone on watch in the cockpit as the sinking sun painted billowing towers of cumulous clouds nearby with dramatic golden hues. Back on the sugar scoop, our windvane steering device, Ozzie, was doing all the driving, leaving me nothing more to do than marvel at the magic of the moment. I remember thinking, "There are probably countless sailors around the world who daysail for decades and never get to enjoy conditions as sweet as these."

Staring out across the swells while alone on watch, you couldn't help but





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**Crewman Craig Anderson strikes a pose as our ancient asymmetrical spinnaker pulls 'Little Wing' down the rhumbline.**

marvel at the immensity of the Pacific's watery wilderness. During our entire 26-day passage from San Benedicto Island (300 miles off the Mexican mainland) to the Marquesan island of Hiva Oa,

**"Bananas? Of course I've got bananas," said our new friend Jimmy, who runs Vaitahu Bay's only eatery. His curried shrimp was awesome.**



we saw a total of three 1,000-ft tankers, one enormous fishing vessel, and the faint profile of one yacht on the horizon that seemed to be paralleling our route to the islands.

My favorite memory of the crossing occurred about three weeks out, when the moon was gradually increasing in size every night. We were booming along on a beam reach, with *Little Wing's* ketch-rigged sailplan so well balanced that I barely needed to touch the wheel to keep her on track.

All of a sudden the full moon peeked over the leech of the mainsail as if to say hello. So I lay back across the cockpit lazarette to get more of a skyward view. Staring up at the heavens, I steered with my bare toes for an hour or more, while Mr. Moon kept me entertained by dancing in and out of the cloud banks like a playful child. That's one happy memory that I won't soon forget.

There's no denying that fitting out even a no-frills boat for open-ocean cruising is no small task. And finding — or creating — a window of time when you can slip into a new cruising lifestyle may be equally daunting, even if you've already salted away a sizeable cruising kitty.

But if the cruising bug has become inextricably lodged in your



**Radar inset above: As we head south, a four-mile-long squall passes east to west. Above: In the ITCZ a thick squall upstages the sunset.**

psyche, then we encourage you to bottle up your fears, ignore all the 'what-ifs', and follow your pipe dreams beyond the horizon. We'll keep a lookout for you.

— **latitude/andy**

**Julie enjoys a quiet moment on the foredeck while surveying the craggy coastline of Hiva Oa, in the southern Marquesas.**



## Our Favorite Pre-Cruise Upgrades

We don't claim to be experts on every potential gear upgrade on the market, but we're happy to tell you about the pre-cruise improvements we made to *Little Wing* that we consider to be money well spent.

- **New Hood sails** — We bought our new suit of (American-made!) white sails from Hood in Sausalito. Full battens in the main and mizzen deliver lots more power and sharper upwind angles.

- **Hydrovane** — This amazing, non-electrical windvane steering device performed brilliantly, even in sloppy following seas.

- **B&G Zeus 3 chartplotter & radar** — Mounted at our pilothouse helm station, this cutting-edge plotter earned its keep day and night, with low power draw, split-screen options and seamless AIS integration.

- **Frigoboat refrigeration** — We've owned a lot of boats, but never one that kept food solidly frozen in hot weather and made ice. Seriously, ice in the tropics!

- **Solar power** — With a deck roughly the size of a volleyball court, we installed four panels (from Southbound Solar) totalling 400-watts, that produce enough juice on a sunny day to make both ice and water, run the nav and comms gear, and more.

- **Iridium GO!** — It wasn't until we got offshore, far from shoreside Wi-Fi, that we fully appreciated the potential of this compact satellite hotspot (bought from San Diego's Satellite Phone Store). It serves as a portal for making satellite phone calls and texts, plus sending and receiving simple emails. And it can import complex weather files such

as those generated by New Zealand-based **PredictWind**, which helped us steer a fast, safe route to the islands.

- **Rocna anchor** — After a few sketchy situations that we've been in since taking off, we're convinced that our 44-lb Rocna could hold a battleship in a hurricane.

- **Muir vertical windlass** — Our rugged Aussie-built Muir is a rock-solid workhorse with a disengageable capstan, and can dead-lift our 250-feet of 5/16 chain plus the Rocna. (Bought from Imtra.)

- **Achilles inflatable-floor dink** — After an unmentionable mishap destroyed our previous dinghy, Sal's Inflatables of Alameda set us up with this easy-planing and east-to-stow dinghy that weighs only 80 lbs — light and compact enough to take on a commercial flight as oversize luggage.