

Peter Crozier and Alex Whitworth (below receiving a trophy at the end of their second Sydney-Hobart race) sketched their route through the North West Passage on an atlas (left). Below from far left: the pair arrive in Hobart, *Berrimilla* off Kerguelen in 50 knots of wind; rounding the Fastnet; triumphant return to Sydney

# THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF BERRIMILLA

It was some feat for two retired Aussies in a 33-footer to notch up two Sydney-Hobarts, a Fastnet and a circumnavigation in a single year. But that turned out to be just the start. The duo have gone around again, this time via the North West Passage and the Kerguelen Islands. Alex Whitworth leafs through his logbook



In 2005 two retired Australians, Peter Crozier (now 64) and Alex Whitworth (66), completed a circumnavigation in their Broga 33 *Berrimilla*, having taken part in two Rolex Sydney-Hobart Races and one Fastnet Race in the space of just over a year. The irrepresible duo – whom Whitworth describes self-deprecatingly as ‘two old deros [derelicts] in the bus shelter’ – wrote about their voyage in *Yachting World*.

On the way round, via Cape Horn and the other great capes, they had a number of adventures, the most intriguing of which was a satellite radio communication with the astronauts in the International Space Station at a point in the Southern Ocean where Whitworth calculated they were the closest human beings to the lonely pair on a vast ocean.

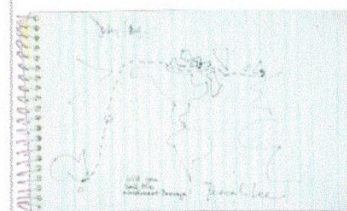
This contact sparked an extraordinary chain of events, which began when Dr Leroy Chiao, commander of the space station at the time, met up with Crozier and Whitworth in the Chain Locker pub in Falmouth and they formed a firm friendship.

One result of the meeting was an invitation to take part in a symposium on risk at Louisiana State University, where *Berrimilla*'s voyage was seen as a simple analogy for a journey into deep space. And that was where it all began again – *Berrimilla* was off on another adventure...

## 'Testing the local brewery with a bunch of astronauts'



Cape Desolation is on the south-west tip of Greenland. I took this photo (above) from a British Airways 777 on 25 October 2007 as I was flying to Dallas and on to Baton Rouge to take part in the symposium on risk.



The North West Passage looks so easy on Pascal Lee's sketch chart. Not to be used for navigation, presumably

After the symposium, Pete and I found ourselves in the bar of the Varsity pub on the campus of Louisiana State University, testing the quality of the local brewery's product with a bunch of astronauts, Everest climbers, space scientists and polar explorers.

Pascal Lee, a NASA scientist who runs the Houghton Mars Project on Devon Island in the Northwest Passage, drew this little chart (above) in my notebook and invited us up to view the total eclipse. It seemed like a neat idea – how could we refuse?



## 'Serious ice from the west, big bergs from the south'



Our only modification to the standard Broglia 33 was to add a jib furler

Six months of hectic planning and 9,000 miles later, *Berrimilla* was within 40 miles of Beechey Island, with its Erebus Harbour and Terror Bay, where we had arranged to rendezvous with Pascal. Pete had to jump ship at the last moment. Corrie McQueen had sailed up the Pacific to Dutch Harbour, Alaska, with me and Kimbra Lindus joined us there for the North West Passage transit.

We had been delayed by ice at Point Barrow and in Queen Maud Sound and were a couple of weeks late for the eclipse, which nobody saw anyway because it was cloudy.

We had serious ice drifting in from the west, big bergs coming south down the Cornwallis Channel and driving rain that was freezing in the rigging. It seemed sensible to get out of there, so reluctantly, we turned east and headed for Lancaster Sound and Baffin Bay.

## 'The Aurora seemed to have put on a display just for us'



Paamiut seemed an ideal place to hide from a gale—we hadn't banked on the fish factory. Phew, what a stink!



This skipper came over to say hello, recognised our Australian ensign and offered us a skinned and rather green reindeer head: "Kangarroul Kangarroul!" he assured us

Past swimming polar bears in Baffin Bay through more ice and south into Davis Strait, where we crossed the Arctic Circle on 25 August and completed our transit of the North West Passage after 31 days. Icebergs everywhere and frequent very poor visibility helped to keep the knuckles white. And the Aurora—it seemed to have put on a display just for us.

Across to Nuuk and on to Paamiut, a small fishing port where we sheltered from a gale. The smell from the fish processing plant is still with me! And—astonishingly—there was Cape Desolation, about ten months after I was last there, six miles above.

## '0200 and wouldn't be in London for quids'



There's solid ice across the middle of this serene splendour

*"Cloudless, moonless night sky, light haze, so the universe and all its marvel and mystery shining through lightly frosted glass. Wonderful! Two light trails on the water—Jupiter, setting to the west, and Sirius, just risen to the east. Mintaka, our zenith star for the Equator in a couple of weeks at about 20° to the south-east. The haze just smothering the glow of the nebulae. The lights of Valverde on the horizon 25 miles to the south-east. Wouldn't be in London for quids."*

## 'Nightmare: no engine, no wind and last orders in the pub'

Around Cape Farewell, way to the south of land, and into the Atlantic. The less said about that crossing the better—for a time we had a huge following sea and despite a plug in the exhaust, water got into the engine. By the time I discovered this, it was well and truly seized and a day of sweat and frustration later, I gave up. About 21 days to The Lizard and frustrating time to Falmouth without an engine.

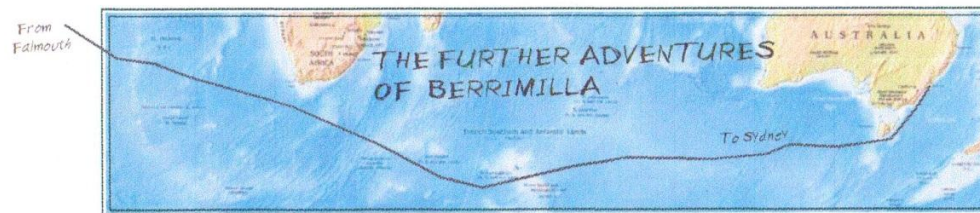
We made it to within a couple of miles of St Anthony's Head with no wind, a falling tide and the prospect of several days stuck out there. So, close to closing time in the Chain Locker pub, I phoned a friend and he organised a tow for us. It is hard to describe the relief I felt when David caught my towline and Gordy opened the throttle—nearly a year of tension and responsibility fell away and it was a joy to see the welcome party on the visitor's jetty.

## 'Aussie ingenuity comes up trumps again'



Lisbon and gearbox failure number two; we fix it by lifting the engine inside the boat. Thank God for a tool we'd had freighted out from Australia

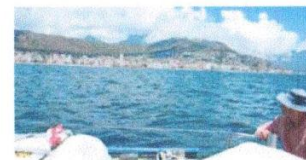
Scroll forward to 11 September and we left Falmouth hoping to visit South Georgia on the way home. Fate had other ideas. Our wind generator failed north-west of Lisbon—a botched repair in the UK as it turned out. We were three weeks in Lisbon sorting out that one. In the meantime, the gearbox failed again; we lifted the engine inside the boat, realigned the bell housing with a tool freighted from Australia and put it back together with the back-up reconditioned gearbox. Appendages crossed everywhere and finally we were off again towards South Georgia on 7 October.



## 'Calms and squalls—just another crossing of the ITCZ'

We reached our most westerly point at 25° 55' W on 22 October and turned for home. Go around the Cape Verdes, lost in their own haze and head south-east to make an angle for the trades. The usual calms and squalls in the ITCZ and we cross the Equator at 23° 40' 32' W at 0415 on 2 November.

## 'Farewell South Georgia, hello Cape Town'



Next stop Cape Town: Pete admires Table Mountain as we head towards the Royal Cape Yacht Club



Far left: about 20 minutes in a hoist was enough to clean *Berrimilla* of barnacles. Left: two days out of Cape Town we await our second meeting with reindeer

Into the South Atlantic—the weather trends seemed to indicate we could safely cut across the St Helena high pressure system and we started to head further east from the Tropic of Capricorn, which we crossed at 01° 54' 56' W on 16 November. Across the Greenwich meridian and a simultaneous consultation up the line with the gang in the Chain Locker in Falmouth. Then we ran out of wind—and the HF radio failed at about the same time. This resolved the need for a decision about whether to keep on for South Georgia—we crept instead towards Cape Town, eventually coming in from the south-west, and arrived at the Royal Cape Yacht Club at 1315 on 9 December, where we were royally looked after by Manuel and Felix, whom we had met just before the Fastnet in Hamble.

We lifted *Berrimilla* on the crane and scraped off all the barnacles. Udo fixed the radio and Raashid sorted the laptop and we climbed Table Mountain and followed the path around the public toilets to the Cape of Good Hope—rather insignificant for such a historically fierce barrier. A bigish replenishment of food and medicinal compounds and we left Cape Town on 23 December, aiming for the Kerguelen Islands.

## 'No wonder they call this the graveyard of ships'



Yet another huge, steep and quite vicious following sea rolls away from us in the Indian Ocean

The standard advice for sailors leaving Cape Town heading east towards Australia is to sail south or even south-west until well clear of the Agulhas Tongue and the south-west current from the Indian Ocean before turning east at about 38° S. The early Portuguese sailors called the area the graveyard of ships and, having negotiated it now in a vessel with at least some capacity to go to windward, I have the deepest respect for those who were in square-riggers.

We did our best, but we were forced by headwinds and seas to cut the corner and got stuck in alternating calms and gales until we had clawed our way east through the current and the steep and quite vicious seas almost to Port Elizabeth. Clear at last, we turned south-east and headed towards the Kerguelen Isles 2,500 miles away.

## 'Kerguelen landfall: fog streams past like paint'



0315, 25 knots of wind, thick fog and there ahead suddenly looms Bligh's Cap, big and ugly, but a landfall

The northernmost of the Kerguelen islands is a grim lump of rock about 300ft high named Ilet du Rendez Vous by Kerguelen. Cook, ignorant of Kerguelen's earlier visit, named it Bligh's Cap. Here are some extracts from the blog as we closed:

*"Excitement and some apprehension at the approach of an unfamiliar, alien coastline with bear traps everywhere. The same shiver as we approached Amchitka in the Aleutians, Cape Horn, the Falklands and ice in the Greenland fjords."*



"Trying to think of all the possibilities – lee shore, rocks, kelp, surge, how to anchor with Bert's bits of gear, bolt holes, magnetic anomalies, instant willwaws... It all churns around and we won't rest till we can have a look. I remember a conversation in Falmouth with a hugely respected sailor about age, experience and the increments in apprehension each time you prepare to do something out of the ordinary. Maybe it's a characteristic of the cautious. Or the geriatric!"



A cape petrel is a lovely escort into Baie de L'Oiseau. Appropriate, too. Cap D'Estaing rears in the background

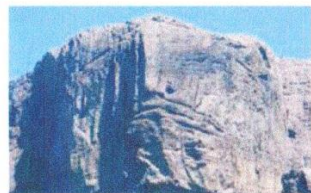
Makes me wonder how Cook would have dealt with it; with extreme caution and minimal risk, I think. He stood off here rather than risk going between the islands in poor visibility.

"Fog! Thick, wet, dank. This isn't just convergence zone mist, it has clammy coils and a glutinous texture. It's woolly dark and in the cockpit, in the red beam of my torch, droplets stream past like paint going on brick. We are directly south of a tight little low and 189 miles from the nearest rock... I hope! If it persists, we will have to stay a safe distance out to sea.

If the GRIB is accurate and we get lucky, it will be through by midnight – 17 hours' time – which is also first light here, so if we can manage to miss the rocky bits we should be close enough to see where we are going and can decide what to do. I've just finished a repack of the forepeak to give us access to anchors, fenders, inflatable, etc. Now we wait.

"0315: sighted Bligh's Cap – rolling fog, 25 knots wind and it was there – a solid wraith (if such can be) rearing vertically out of the ocean."

## 'HMS Discovery, HMS Resolution... and Berrimilla'



Cook described this big slab at Baie de L'Oiseau. Didn't mention it looked like a carved portrait of Slartybartfast from Hitchhikers' Guide, mind you

Later the same day we sailed into what is now called Baie de L'Oiseau, the name given to it by Henri Paschal de Rochegude, one of Kerguelen's officers who landed there in 1773 and left the message in a bottle found by Cook in 1776. Cook named the bay Christmas Harbour for the day he arrived. We anchored in almost the same spot as *Discovery* and *Resolution*. Indescribable feeling!

## 'Can't convey the thrill, the quiet satisfaction'



French captain de Rochegude buried a message in a bottle on this headland, Cook read it and amended it, now here we are!

"Impossible to convey the thrill, the absolute delight, the quiet satisfaction – here we are, anchored in Baie de L'Oiseau, 236 years after Ensign de Rochegude landed here from L'Oiseau, claimed the place for the French and left his message sealed in a quart bottle. Cook's men found it three years later and Cook added his own message. We are anchored opposite the little headland where he did it. Brilliant sun, powder-blue water, kelp patches, king penguins and seals on the beach about 500m away.

"Seabirds escorted us in. Last 15 miles were on the wind in 25 knots and rising sea – interesting! Worth every thump of the head to get here from Cape Town. Once in a lifetime exhilaration – more immediate than sailing out of the North West passage, but comparable to Cape Horn.

"I wonder how many other vessels have anchored here since de Rochegude. Far more than made the North West Passage, although up there the whaling ships in the Bering Strait and Chukchi and Beaufort seas must have numbered in their thousands on the west approach to Amundsen Gulf.

"Unimaginably bleakly beautiful here, classic igneous landscape, thick moss, no other obvious vegetation to see except clumps of Kerguelen cabbage. Binoculars only at the moment – we might try to land tomorrow if the wind dies. A massive igneous extrusion just to the south of us which looks for all the world like one of the presidents' faces on Mount Rushmore transmogrified as a lizard.

"Other uncanny reflections of the past – Doug Morrison sent me a sheaf of papers from his research into the French and other explorers, among which were James Clark Ross's chart and soundings for the Baie, possibly compiled by Francis Crozier. I used this to find a spot to anchor. There were also detailed drawings from out to sea of the entrance

## Statistics and other nonsense

- When *Berrimilla* crossed the Arctic Circle heading south on 28 August, 2008, she became the 77th vessel since Amundsen's *Gjaa* in 1903-6 to complete a transit of the North West Passage
- When she reached Falmouth on 1 September, as far as we can ascertain, she became the first vessel ever to have sailed from Australia to England via the Passage.
- Back in Hobart on 1 March 2010, she became the first vessel ever to circumnavigate under sail via the North West Passage and the first vessel to complete a circumnavigation via both the Passage and Cape Horn.



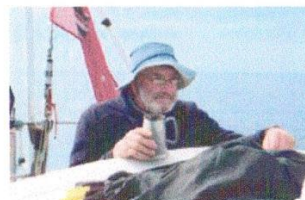
A young albatross – possibly a snowy or southern royal – was one of the many seabirds to chaperone us into our anchorage

and the arch, now collapsed, by R Benard published in 1784. Benard was with Cook. I used them to identify the entrance from five miles out. I could not read the photocopy of the soundings chart he had given us, so I used Ross's.

"Ross's account also had an engraving of the harbour with HMS Erebus and Terror at anchor, one almost in our position now. They also went to the North West Passage with Sir John Franklin ten years or so later and are still there, somewhere off King William Island with the bones of their crews. We felt the presence of their ghosts up there, particularly in Simpson Strait.

"I never imagined we'd meet them again, let alone here, almost at the opposite end of the planet."

## 'Storm's acoming, time to seek shelter'



Call this the Southern Ocean? Pete celebrates the calm with a tankard as we scuttle around to the Baie du Morbihan ahead of a 50-knot low

I pulled in a weather GRIB which showed us that we had a 24-hour window before a predicted 40- or 50-knot low hit, so we weighed anchor early the next morning and headed out through the rocky and kelp-infested Passe de la Resolution and on around the north-eastern lowlands into the Baie du Morbihan on the most glorious, calm morning.

## 'Seem to have arrived in an Aussie mining camp'

"Ain't we been lucky??!! We have just entered Baie du Morbihan with about 12 miles to Port aux Français. Misty sunshine and kelp! You think you've seen seaweed? We were between huge forests of the stuff covering perhaps 500m² – and then there were all the loose mats that had to be spotted and avoided – when we snuck in through a narrow channel on the chart, saving about an hour.

"Bert's well-travelled Q flag is flying, but we haven't got a French Southern Territories courtesy flag. That would be one for the collection! If, of course, they let us land...

"Arrived around 0800 UTC – Bert on a mooring 50m from the jetty and we're in the settlement being well looked

after. Settlement is just like an Australian mining camp: demountable buildings, communal eating, movies, the works. The postmaster – selected for his knowledge of philately as well as soundness of mind – is going to issue a special edition envelope to commemorate our visit. Internet access almost impossible, so will go outside into the cold cold wind with the laptop and the satphone and try to send this. After which, totally knackered and going to bed. Seals and penguins not far from window."



A special envelope issued at Port aux Français for the 'voilier Australien'. That's Bert!

## 'Only 3,200 miles and we're back home!'

Several fascinating days in Port aux Français [select dates after 21 January on the blog at [www.berrimillaz.blogspot.com](http://www.berrimillaz.blogspot.com)] and off again towards Hobart, about 3,200 miles away.

## 'A scrub and a new propeller. Now where's the party?'

The usual Southern Ocean bashing along the way, but a more or less uneventful passage to the D'Entrecasteaux Channel in Tasmania, where we were met by friends who accompanied us into Hobart. We were given permission to ignite a couple of flares as we crossed our outward track and completed the second circumnavigation on 1 March. A scrub and antifoul and a new propeller and it's off again to Sydney for a homecoming welcome party at the Heads.

Pascal gave us the sketch map that started it all. Now at last we return the favour with something just as useful – a silver beer tankard

