

**Blue Goose Sailing Log / Sea of Cortez**  
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**N27°56.54, W111°03.76**

The cup is half full, but it doesn't feel like it. It's like I'm depressed.

No, not quite depressed. It's dread. I'm dreading what starts tomorrow. The sense of the dread is at the top of my stomach, a bit like when you eat too many spicy hashbrowns, and follow it up with too much coke, and it fizzes up and you start to feel the pressure and realize what you've done. It is a lump of sizzling, fried dread.

What I am about to do will be difficult and I do not want to do it. But I know I have to go. One part of me is the owner, the other part of me is The Dog. The Owner is telling The Dog, "Get in the car." The Dog hates the car. But get in the car he will, and leave they will. Tomorrow at 5am. 3 or 4 if I can't sleep.

The trip up from Topolobampo was four of the hardest days of my life. I have eight more to go. The problem is that I'm doing something very unseamanly, and that is sailing solo.

My wife is in France, my autopilot is in the shop (it was new, and it never worked in the first place), and my boat is a fin-keel speed machine that handles like a dream. It's like a sports car. It is a skiddish, super-refined, very responsive machine that at first is an exhilarating dream which quickly becomes a fatiguing nightmare after a session of about two hours at the wheel. Now since there is neither wife nor autopilot with me, and since I'm making a mildly long-haul passage, these sessions at the wheel can last for 24-hours. Several 24-hour sessions, in fact. Last time I had four of them and it nearly killed me. Okay, okay, I slept twice at anchor, but only for a couple of hours, and another time I slept on the sea, but fitfully, as I don't like sleeping where large ships plow dark waters.

Imagine driving a motorcycle for four days, and being able to sleep for two hours per night, and you will most likely have a sense of what it is like. It is not like driving a car because it requires constant attention. You can relax in a car. Sailing The Goose is like driving a motorcycle. It is not that there's vibration (though there is constant motion, some of it strong enough to knock you over) and it is not like there is the risk of hitting something (though there are deadly dangers that lurk just under foot), but it is like a motorcycle in that you have to be alert to everything, all of the time. All of your senses are on high volume. The smells become very intense as several times a day I will smell a school of fish nearby, or smell a change in the wind that indicates a shift of humidity or direction of airflow, which can mean that winds will jump up from 5-10 knots to 10-20 knots in a matter of minutes. Eyesight, of course, is heightened as the form and quantity and color of the clouds, or the texture of the water, or the color of the sea, or even the humidity above the land which is usually in sight, all indicate whether some mob of winds will come galloping down upon your tired head. My sail has already been torn by these winds. Then there are your ears. The sound of the sails are constantly your guide, telling you how the boat is heeled, and if even a slight flapping begins it can seem deafening, it is so important, and there is always the strange voices of the water as it pats the sides of the boat, the liquid hands of the little waves that seem to be trying to grab your boat, as if you are sailing through some alien graveyard where souls of generations hunger for a little taste of polyethylene, cotton, and you.

The paranoid rabbit stays alive, and when you are making a solo passage you dwell in a state of paranoia, extreme alertness, a kind of ambitious glazed-over exhaustion that is framed by the unending concentration on the little lines of the compass and the pounding of the boat as it lurches through the waves. At least, this is the experience, solo.

You stare at that compass for days. More than anything, you watch the compass. The ship's

bearing is a dictator, and the wheel is a tyrant, and you may not move, nor vary, nor change your mind and all the while you become more mind-numbingly bored, more stir-crazy, more exhausted, more sunburned, more thirsty, and the tyrant wheel does not let you leave, nor even lift your hand, and you soon come to realize why you are the the weakest part of your vessel.

The hours crawl by. This is perhaps the worst. Once I checked my watch, thinking an hour had passed, but only three minutes had gone. I waited an hour, checked my watch again, and was stunned to see that only four more minutes had passed. A day can last for weeks.

But somehow, eventually, you arrive. Then you eat like a starving pig and sleep like one that's comatose, and after a few days you feel better. It takes about as many days to recover. It's like jet-lag. I might call it boat-throw because it is somehow the opposite experience. Too much happens in a small space, and time goes very slowly. Life is magnified this way. It's part of what it means to go slow. You get more for your hour's worth.

That was four days last time. This will be eight. I will probably stop along the way.

Eight days would kill me. No, it wouldn't kill me, but I think I would pass out. There wasn't time to eat on those last four days, and I barely had time to get water down my throat, and I think I lost some good 5 or 10 pounds from the effort. I needed to lose some weight, anyway.

But eight days would find my boat up on some beach, torn sails whipping about in the Sonoran wind, sand piling up on the hull, and me, sitting up in the cockpit, blinking at the Mexican sun, and trying to remember how it was I had convinced myself it was safe to take a nap.

Nah, that's not going to happen. I'll stop for a break. Even if I want to get it done, I have to stop for a break. I'll try to take it easy.

Since I'm leaving in the morning, I decided to do some inspections on the boat, make sure she'll keep me out of death and doom for the week or so it will take to get her north.

Putting on my goggles and stuffing a small piece of wood and a green scrubbie in the pockets of my shorts, I jumped off the side of the boat into 30C water. It's refreshing and warm and suddenly I'm aware of all my skin in this beautiful world of water (this is why I love sailing - the proximity to swimming in clear, clean, warm water). I start checking for barnacles. If all the barnacles are off then the boat's been inspected. I was pretty confident all would be in good order, but it's a boat, and so naturally, I found a problem. The cutlass bearing, the black rubber sleeve that holds the prop in place while it spins, has split and is coming out of the bearing shaft. Last time I found this problem was only nine months ago, so I'm not sure what the repeat is, but it's something that doesn't bode too well as it means I'm limited to how much I can use the motor. And that doesn't bode too well because I was occasionally using the motor to help stabilize the steering, turning it on once every couple hours, and that's what was allowing me the time and space to get a drink of water.

The next eight days aside, the prop is now going to have to be fixed, and that means hauling the boat out of the water, pulling the shaft, and replacing it. Whatever. I kept scrubbing. There's another \$500 down the shaft. I ignored it and kept looking for barnacles.

Several hundred little sardines swarmed around my feet, collecting the algae I was knocking loose. Some of them brushed my toes, and I slowly wiped the hull as I hovered over their quick collections. They have bright eyes, and flash silver in the clear water.

After discovering the cutlass bearing I again dove the bottom of the boat to do a closer inspection on the bearing, but also to look at the hull to see if any cracks had appeared. The night that I spent high grounded, when the tide went out and the boat sort of listed on the dock, was a good lesson for me. I have to pay more attention to the depth. I hear that tides in the north of The Sea can drop by as much as thirty feet. It's usually not a problem for a boat to be on its keel, but today I checked the hull anyway. I went over it carefully, feeling the skin with my fingers, with my face close to the paint (I'm a bit blind underwater) and I didn't find anything. All seemed solid. The keel was still firmly attached to

the boat.<sup>1</sup> There was a crack on the port side, but i think it was from a paint problem, and it was only about as long as my little finger, and didn't seem deep. The rest of the keel looked fine, normal, solid. There's blisters to be fixed, for sure, dozens, so we need to get some money together to pay for that this November / December, but otherwise things were good. I rose, took another breath, and descended down to the bottom of the keel, all the way to the lowest point of the boat. And there I found something interesting, which were two indentations on the bottom, little deformations in the keel itself. I think that there was metal on the floor of the marina and the boat, when the tide receded, finally rested on pieces of metal, creating these deformations. One was a little lip, about the size of my thumb (I measure these things with my hands so I can measure them again later, when under water, and see if they've worsened), the other was an indentation across the keel, about as big as my ring finger. Probably a piece of construction rebar that the boat had rested upon. But I looked carefully, and I didn't see any cracks or anything. Just pressure deformations. My nose filled up with water while I hung upside down. I wriggled for the surface.

Meanwhile, the dingy now has a leak. Day before yesterday, after rowing a half mile or so, I found myself sitting in a good couple of gallons of water. I had gone to get groceries, and was rowing back, and this thing was discovered. So after my underwater inspection of The Goose I threw the dinghy in the water, flipped it over (with me underneath) and looked for light. The hypalon glue on the port side, a bit forward, seems to have popped open and the poor little pony probably deserves to come apart a bit as he's carried us many miles, faithfully, without complaint or cause, for about four years now. So I used some 5200, lacking official hypalon glue, squirted the stuff into the cracks, and told myself that The Goose was my lifeboat. Who needs a dinghy, anyway? Hell, I'll swim the groceries to the boat in a dry sack if I have to.

So the cup remains half full. I just have to keep an eye and make sure the bottom doesn't fall out.

Back in the water, to finish my inspection, I wiped off all of the algae, and ran my fingers down the length of the boat. All of the barnacles are finally off, for the first time since May. The little fuckers are non-stop. Even with the toxic paint that's used to discourage them they still insist on setting up camp on what feels to be my arse. Finishing my inspection, at the nose of the boat, I flip the little paddle-wheel, only about as big as a thimble, and notice that it had been pushed up, and was about to fall off. Damn dolphins. Those things probably come up to the boat three or four times a day, and never even apologize for knocking my speedometer loose. This is the third time the rascals have done it, too. Not that I blame them for finding entertainment because if I were a dolphin, I'd play at the helm of boats, too, and I'd probably knock loose gear from time to time, too, just for fun. But at least they could tell me what they've done. Leave a note or something.

I surfaced and inhaled.

The bottom's in good shape, pretty much ready to go. I've got about 100 gallons of water, my huge stock of vegetables are already starting to brown, my fruit is a bit past ripe, and I've got enough rice, beans, and tortillas to feed the entire Zapatista army. What else do I need?

I floated there in the water and noticed that sense of dread in my stomach. I needed desire to go. I needed the courage and a Popeye attitude.

But I don't have the courage, and I didn't buy any spinach, and I'd really rather just sit here in this lagoon and consider dolphins and cutlass bearings than brave the Sonoran cliffs and uncaring deadly waters outside this nice little bay.

But it's not that I'm afraid of dying so much as it is that I'm afraid of having to repeat what i already did. I don't really see this as a problem of life or death. Sure, there's danger, and sure, I could fall in and my boat could sort of sail away without me. But its the boredom and the hours and the sun

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<sup>1</sup> While writing this sentence I just got up and opened up the bilge. I was very happy to see that no water was in the bilge, indicating that the keel bolts had come loose and were leaking.

gets pretty damn hot, and your feet get pretty damn numb, and the arms start to hurt, and it's hard to do much more than grab a bottle out of the fridge (which means you have to think of that before leaving in the morning, and you only get the water you've prepared, which isn't much, considering the heat), or maybe there's time to grab a stick of gum before the sails start slamming and the boat goes off-course and slows down.

Going so slow is part of the torture of the process. It's not that "taking it slow" is really a solution. If you're going to drive a nail into your hand do you do it slow or do you just pound it in and get it over with? I prefer to go fast, hit it hard, get it done, and then recover from it all. Sprint. But if I exhaust myself in the first four or five days I'll increase the danger of making a mistake, and forgetting some detail could be fatal.

I'll trail that the rope out behind the boat again, just in case I fall in.

I have my harness, but I don't often have time to attach it. If the sail starts to bang, and I have to fix that and also steer, I might have five seconds to move and if the harness takes up two then I only have three seconds to move a cleat and refasten a slip-line. And that won't happen in less than 7 seconds. So I risk it, wearing the harness, but not being attached. In the end, it's probably not my greatest problem because if, somehow, I should fall in, then the boat will turn upwind and wait for me. That is, without the autopilot. There, at least, is one advantage.

I have a sense of what Thor Heyerdahl, or William Willis, or Bombard, or some of those other 1950s loons felt like before they set off on some trans-Pacific drift. Yeah, with them in mind what I'm doing seems like nothing. That notion is pepto-bismol to my dread.

Well, the 5am alarm is set. That's in 12 hours. If I go to sleep at 8pm, I'll stock up on sleep and hopefully, going to sleep so early won't mess up my cicadic cycle.

Then, in the morning, I'll haul the anchor in, pull the mainsail, tack out of here, and head north. If I'm really ripping, and making good time, and the winds look to be on a good port-side tack, promising to blow me north, so perhaps I'm not too far off), and if I throw some wishful thinking into this, then the itinerary will be:

Day 1. from Guaymas --> punta baja (cardonal / san rafael)

Day 2. --> punta willard (turner's island)?

Day 3. --> el desemboque / cabo lobos (maybe i can make it to puerto libertad)

Day 4. --> cabo tepoca ?

... stop... breathe...

Day 6. --> isla san jorge ?

Day 7. --> puerto penasco ???

But that I would be so lucky. We'll see. Perhaps these favorable winds and following seas will allow me a little time, perhaps ten minutes, away from the wheel. Maybe I'll get the gaff hook and gently poke a dolphin or two along the way, keep 'em off the speedometer.

"No," Owner says, "You won't."

Oh, right. I won't. I'll have my eye on the compass and my hand on the wheel, just like a good sea-doggy.

Time to make sure all the books are tight on the shelves, the lines are clean, the dishes are put away, and the clothes are folded. Time to check headlamp batteries, running lights, GPS batteries, sharpen the pencil, check the harness, test the radio, close the hatches and through-hulls, and ensure that everything has been thought of and prepared for four days of something strange.

Time to get ready for a new kind of time.

After all, traveling at the edge of the world is a trip.

