PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP RECAP —

It's often said that the verdant isles and atolls of French Polynesia comprise one of the most spectacular cruising grounds on the planet. But sailors must earn the privilege of exploring them by crossing at least 3,000 miles of open water while en route from the West Coast of the Americas, with no possible rest stops along the way — an often-life-changing voyage we call the Pacific Puddle Jump.

As regular readers know, we've been reporting on this annual westward migration of international cruisers for two decades, yet we never tire of meeting each new fleet of Jumpers, as their backgrounds and cruising aspirations are as diverse as the boats they sail on.

We first met some of the sailors featured in these pages in March at our annual PPJ Sendoff Parties in Puerto Vallarta and Panama. (See our features on those events in the April and May issues.) Others we've only met via email.

Whether sailing on gold-plater yachts or well-worn fixer-uppers, they all seem to share the same wanderlust for meeting the challenges of the open ocean, making landfalls at dreamy tropical anchorages skirted by jagged volcanic peaks, swimming in turquoise lagoons, and immmersing themselves in the rich Polynesian culture.

As you'll read in the comments from fleet members that follow, this year's crossing was particularly challenging for many westbound sailors due to unsettled

The 'Bonono' crew celebrates their equator crossing with a toast of Champagne during a brilliant sunset.

conditions both north and south of the equator, and especially in the everchanging the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ).

During the principal crossing months — March, April and May — conditions in the Eastern Pacific didn't quite meet the specific definition of an El Niño 'event' (that officially began in June), but that's not to say things weren't a little weird out there. While some experienced plenty of glorious sailing, others saw mostly light winds accompanied by sloppy seas. And in the ITCZ, at least a few encoun-

"The surprise was that the time flew by. We looked at each other on day 14 in astonishment at the date!"

tered stronger-than-normal winds and squalls.

That said, residual swells from big storms far north and south of the equator often make at least the first half of the trip a bouncy ride over competing wave trains. The bottom line is it's usually a bit of a crapshoot, weatherwise, no matter where you leave from, as conditions can change quickly, and the GRIB files that most cruisers rely on aren't always spot-on near the equator.

Rowdy sea conditions contributed to the fleet's most unfortunate incident:

Randy and Dawn Ortiz were forced to abandon their S&S 42 *Nirvana Now* in mid-ocean after her steering was irreparably damaged and she began taking on water. Luckily, Bob and Mona Jankowski were relatively close by on their Caliber 40 *Continuum*, and were able to rescue the Ortizes safely. We're happy to report that the shaken yet undeterred Canadians already have another boat, as they were fully insured.

With that introduction, we'll share a variety of insightful comments from the 2015 PPJ fleet, culled from our annual crossing survey.

How did your passage-making experience differ from your expectations before the trip? Were there any surprises?

Kiapa Nui — "Like everybody, we had expectations of beautiful, down-hill tradewind sailing, but we knew that conditions would be all over



the map, and changing with an almost exasperating frequency. And they were."

Solimar — "The whole squall thing seems a bit overblown. Sure they rolled through consistently and I got blasted several times, but it wasn't any big deal. Mostly inconvenient. That said, I experienced no lightning."

Sail La Vie — "The biggest difference in what we expected vs. what we experienced was the almost constant disorganization of waves. We expected them to come from the east-southeast, but they came from the north and the northeast as often as the southeast, usually at the same time — made some granddaddy-sized swells that tried to climb up into our laps quite frequently."

Jacaranda — "For me (Chuck) it was a much better PPJ passage than I made 25 years ago. The installation of roller furling made a huge, huge difference. In my previous jump from Mexico I made over 100 headsail changes. Now it's all done from the cockpit."

Iolani — "The experience surpassed the dream! We were surprised we had minimal squalls and lightning, and that we loved the doldrums."

Family Circus — "The squalls were a big fear for some of our crew, yet they turned out to be much less of an issue. We were surprised that there wasn't that much wind. We never saw the doldrums,

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Inset: Brittany braces for a squall aboard 'Tipsea.' Spread: After 20 days, 'Scintilla' makes landfall at Fr Poly's easternmost isle, Fatu Hlva.

and we were surprised that the days went by quite quickly."

Bonono — "Major disappointment regarding wind and sea conditions on the passage Galapagos to the Gambiers. We had extremely difficult cross seas with long periods of no wind, and the need to use the engines much longer than expected."

Ambler — "We saw light to no winds at 5° and 3°N, as expected, but also at

> "Once I was out there. it was a great relief to have such tranquility and solitude."

4°S. But no real ITCZ, with the associated lightning, thunder, squalls, and compass-boxing winds. The seas were more confused than on our previous crossing, with several contrary wave trains - reminded us of the Indian Ocean, not the Pacific."

Winterlude — "We thought it was going to be long, boring and drawn-out, and the surprise was that the time flew by. We looked at each other on day 14

in astonishment at the date! We also thought watches would take some time to get used to, but we were into the groove right away.'

Centime — "The leg from Las Perlas, Panama, to the Galapagos was far more fun and pleasant than expected. Contrary to most expectations and weather gurus' prognostications, we had some of

the best sailing we've had in 10,000 miles.

Thinking of Dave — "We departed Panama earlier than most of the Puddle Jump fleet on February 23. The biggest difference from my expectations was the lack of wind all the way across to Bora Bora (no doubt due to our timing). We rarely experienced more than 7-12 knots on any of the passages across to the Society Islands and only had our first real squall just one day out from the Marquesas. However, vachts coming across just several days behind us told a different story."

Bella Vita — "This was our second time crossing the Pacific from Mexico, so we knew what we were

getting into. Our first crossing in 2008 was much rougher than this year's. In 2008 the crossing took 27 days from Manzanillo to Fatu Hiva on a 46-ft boat (Cal 2-46). This year the crossing took 22 days from Cabo San Lucas to Hiva Oa on a 53-ft boat."

Antares (singlehander) — "From my experience crossing the Sea of Cortez alone I knew it was going to be a challenge day in and day out. But once I was out there, it was a great relief to have such tranquility and solitude. I was forced to relax during the down times, which gave me lots of time to read, think and write."

Wairua — "I (Megan) had read all sorts of books about the Pacific crossing where people were hanging out in the cockpit naked sunbathing on watch; that was not our experience. Andy had crossed the equator several times when leaving New Zealand and knows what a 'Milk Run Passage' should be. We started calling it the 'Milk Shake Run.' Absolutely not what was expected!"

Pacific Spirit — "This was not my first long passage, but being part of the Puddle Jump was one of the most fun trips I have ever done."

hey say a long crossing is often a balance of highs and lows. What were some of the high points, or low points, of your crossing?

Solimar — "Some of our high points

Aboard 'Miss Behaving', Cap'n Justin holds up the whopper wahoo that apparently broke the net's pole, held by daughter Hayley.

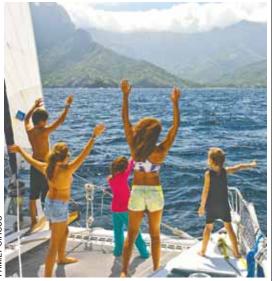


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were sailing at hull speed for days at a time. Being surrounded by nature and the amazing palette of colors. Lows included the inevitable periods of the Windex spinning wildly on the masthead."

Second Wind — "Highs were catching a large wahoo — yahoo! — and days of 160-plus-mile runs (even without a spinnaker). Those were exhilarating! A low was catching only two fish. We were hoping for a lot more sashimi."

Sea Note — "The PPJ SSB net was wonderful and helped with wind predictions from other boats that reported in. (Thanks to Dawn Hillard on Destiny, net manager for the Banderas Bay PPJ group.) The low point was the wind was not as expected; we had to zigzag across until we got to the equator."

Scintilla — We saw a total eclipse of the moon, which was red, by the way, and one night we saw a double moonbow. We've never seen that before."

Panthera — "Highs were a fast 21-day crossing with only 16 hours spent in the ITCZ."

Kiapa Nui — "Some of the highs were the reactions of our rookie crew member during the first night watch with the autopilot steering in 15-20 knots of breeze and making 12-15 knots of boat speed: 'Is it supposed to do this?' Also, seeing orcas at Clarion Island, and doing 1,000 miles in five days. We had a perfect tradewind sailing day with flat seas and 15 knots of ESE breeze on the first day after crossing the ITCZ. We saw three sperm whales, one of whom gave

"A big highlight was being overtaken by a large pod of pilot whales — probably close to a thousand which lasted over an hour."

us the serious 'stink eye' — we had to alter course to avoid it."

Jacaranda — "Overall this had to be one of the best passages we have ever had. Wind from aft of the beam about 80-90% of the way. No traffic and the only course changes were for chasing the positive current."

Family Circus — "Some highs were fly-

ing under asymmetrical chute for hours on a favorable heading in warm weather. Most importantly was the building feeling that we were actually going to do this — to culminate a long-term dream and goal. Lows included seasickness and pounding on a bad wave angle for the last four days."

Bonono — "High points were crossing of the equator, magical sunsets and nights. Lows were the unexpected bad weather and the long periods of no wind, but with cross seas that made the trip hell. A strong gale south of our track resulted in unusual weather."

Ambler — "A big highlight was being overtaken by a large pod of pilot whales — probably close to a thousand — which lasted over an hour at 9°S."

Another highlight for the *Ambler* crew was completing their 26-year circumnavigation when they crossed their outbound track on April 17.

Centime — "One high was the sail from Panama to the Galapagos. I remember on one particular night that I had one of the most perfect night watches I can ever remember or wish for: Perfect wind, perfect night sky, mild seas — fantastic!

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Clockwise from upper left: Cooling off aboard 'Laya'; equator crossing on 'Scintilla'; a jolly Neptune aboard 'Time Warp'; the 'Helios' crew chills in pristine waters; father-son catch on 'Family Circus'; anti-scurvy remedy; "Even old ladies like to be nude," says Nancie of 'Second Wind'; lazy sailing aboard 'Winterlude'; an idyllic Marquesan pool; 'Suluk' in paradise; 'Family Circus' landfall.

"Another was getting 'Grace', our new Hydrovane system, dialed in. We had one stint of over 36 hours on a dead run with the genoa poled out to port, the drifter flying free to starboard and the windvane steering us gracefully along. Awesome!

Thinking of Dave—"For me there were many high points: the periods of solitude on watch where you had time to reflect; encounters with whales, dolphins and sea birds; endless warm to hot summer days with their exquisite sunrises and sunsets; and the night sky, especially on moonless nights when you could see the Milky Way panorama."

Joana — "The low point was when our French press coffee pot fell onto the cabin sole and broke into a thousand pieces, due to the heavy swell."

Antares (singlehander) — "Physically and mentally, I went through a great number of highs and lows due to exhaustion, the heat, and at times depression. A couple of times I found myself so tired from dealing with squalls through

the night that I would just sit there for hours looking at the ocean, not moving a muscle except the ones bracing my body against the coaming on the leeward side of the cockpit.

"My greatest reward was seeing the shadows of Ua Huka in the sunset on April 25, I emailed and texted everyone I knew to let them know I'd made it, and it felt amazing to be able to say that I'd crossed such a vast distance alone."

Escape Velocity — "One day we looked at the chart plotter to find that while the boat was pointed in the right direction, we were actually moving backward at one knot, pushed by a current. All of our low points were of the no-wind variety, and all of the high points were whenever we could move at faster than three knots.

"We took advantage of the doldrums by cleaning the bottom, doing laundry, cooking more elaborate meals. We just found our zen happy place and read and talked and listened to music, then sailed like crazy whenever we hit squalls. Eventually we got far enough south to catch steadier winds.

"Some of the most beautiful night watches I've ever experienced were ghosting along at three knots, not worrying that we were slow, watching the stars and the moonrise. Once we accepted that our passage would be a long one, we just enjoyed the peace and quiet (and prayed for wind)."

Wairua — "The low point was losing steering and wallowing with the seas that boarded the boat while the captain replaced the steering cables. Not fun!"

Miss Behaving — "High points were catching big fish — our biggest was a six-foot wahoo. We also did more than a week of over-210-mile days, which was fantastic!"

Pacific Spirit — "It's always great to know that there is some other earthling out there and Dawn Hillard, the net controller, has to be the best ever. We loved the way she genuinely 'cared' about her troops and the 'hugs' she sent in emails. That woman rocks!

"Lows included blowing my kite out in 20 knots of breeze and the freezer breaking down in the first week, which

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meant we ate too much pasta from then to Nuku Hiva."

Iid you celebrate crossing the equator? If so, how?

Time Warp — "We popped Champagne, gave some to Neptune, and one of our crew, Robert Tinus, dressed up as Neptune. We had a lovely lunch including seared tuna (caught the day before), Champagne and homemade brownies

that were cooked for the occasion.

Solimar — "Dumped a bottle of Champagne over the side and thanked Neptune for allowing me to pass with minimal pain and suffering. He clearly was not satisfied with the inexpensive brand as a day later he took my primary anchor."

Kiapa Nui — "We enjoyed the moment enough to sail back and forth over the line five times, the last of which was so that the younger crew could jump in and swim across."

French Curve — "My wife Cheryl swam across and I surfed across on my surfboard pulled by the boat."

Winterlude — "We crossed the equator at 6 a.m. on a perfectly calm morning. After opening a bottle of Champagne, the boys went swimming and John was able to retrieve the Champagne cork almost 20 minutes after it went overboard. It was so calm we drifted back across the equator."

Centime — "We and our friends on Wavelength, sailing mostly together, had agreed on a rendezvous

waypoint to both shoot for, and soon we were in sight of each other. They got there a bit ahead of us and swung around so we could cross together. We then "raced" across close-hauled and crossed almost

simultaneously.'

Apropos — "We mixed a bowl full of raw fish, sea water, mustard and pasta, and each took a bite. We all kissed a dead flying fish on the lips, then toasted King Neptune."

an you remember the feeling you had when you first made landfall?

Time Warp - "It was totally awesome! We pulled into Nuku Hiva, and before we dropped the hook Steve from Pannikin came in his dinghy to welcome us with a cold six pack. It was the best beer we ever had."

Second Wind — "There were many emotions, but perhaps the strongest one was relief. Not that the passage was over; our passage was as good as it could have been! But because all of the obstacles that arose prior to our departure - which were many and formida-

> ble — had not prevented us from making the voyage."

Iolani — "First relief, then elation. We we drank in the gorgeous



After weeks at sea it's great to stretch out your sea legs with a hike on a Marguesan trail. Inset: As the 'lolani' crew discovered, some lead to ancient tikis.

rain shower didn't even send us down below. We just sat in the rain, amazed."

Family Circus — "Personally for me, as someone who has read about this, and seen the pictures in Latitude 38 for 31 years, it was an amazing feeling; very emotional and terribly exciting."

Tipsea — "We were hove-to outside Atuona and it was dark. When the sun began to rise, the islands came to life as if the light itself had created the islands. A rainbow formed an archway over the entrance to the harbor, and we sailed right through it as if it were a door that had been opened to show us a new life.'

Winterlude — "Seeing land on the radar first, then a shadow on the horizon, and finally the craggy mountains of Hiva Oa in the sunlight made us speechless at the achievement we had made by crossing the Pacific. As they say you can smell land before you see it, we also were hoping to get the aroma of fresh baguettes."

Antares — "When I first got to land I started shaking from excitement and almost couldn't walk for a good half hour."

Escape Velocity - "As we looked at the 15 other boats in the anchorage, all shapes and sizes, I felt an instant kinship with them all, and that we'd become part of a very exclusive club of long-distance sailors. I don't think we stopped smiling for days afterward, and we greeted the new arrivals with the same enthusiasm that we were greeted with."

What advice would you give to future Puddle Jumpers?

Suluk (singlehander) — "Buy more beer before you set sail!"

Sea Note — "Make sure there is a SSB net. That was a support system, not only for contact with other boats and weather prediction, but you get to know them and when you arrive you say hello like old friends."

Panthera — "Don't believe the GRIB forecasts. They are not localized enough and we found we had generally 10 knots more wind than forecast, or less, but rarely as forecast!

Sail La Vie — "Mount your windvane on the starboard side of your transom so it will actually be in the water while you're on an endless port tack, so you

won't have to steer by hand. Don't count on catching fish for meals."

Kiapa Nui — "The best preparation is an equal mix of sailing and projecting, with significant emphasis on the former. For newbies, offshore racing provides an incredibly valuable framework for boat and water safety."

Jacaranda — "We dragged a line the length of the boat on each side for 30 minutes a day to keep the gooseneck barnacles at bay. We had very dirty topsides when we arrived, but not one gooseneck barnacle anyplace that the line had touched.

"Mentally be prepared for the cross swell. It's there just about every year and makes for some bouncy conditions. Remember this is not a race. If you push

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too hard you will be spending a number of days fixing broken items when you arrive. We heard numerous reports of torn sails and broken rigging."

Family Circus — "Do it! These islands are amazing, and the passage is much less of an issue than expected.

"While amateur weather debate can be stimulating, we know that we aren't experts. We used a weather router and are thankful that we did. The cost was very low to have a router provide the window, then three updates along the way."

Tipsea— "What helped me was advice before the trip from a few circumnavigators and lifetime cruisers who said, 'It's not a puddle and it's not a jump. It's

fucking serious shit.' This is not to say it won't be fun, but make sure your boat is ready for a 24/7, one-month rigorous test. The most important thing, though, is to go as soon as you can. Don't wait. Things change and life is short. If you are reading this and you have the bug to do it, go for it!"

Winterlude — "Slow down every night and don't worry about going off course for a while to avoid bad weather. Keep it level, keep it safe. It's not a race"

Thinking of Dave — "Prepare well and leave nothing to chance. If any gear looks as if it could fail then replace it or carry a spare because it almost certainly will fail. Also, don't leave too early in the season as there could be extended periods with

little or no wind."

Escape Velocity — "Trust your boat, be prepared for slow days, don't be impatient. This is an incredible passage wherever you start from, so appreciate every minute of it, good and bad. You'll likely never do anything quite like it again."

That's a nice sentiment to end with, but if you think there might be a Puddle Jump in your future, check out the website: www.pacificpuddlejump.com. There you'll find recaps of previous years and lots of other useful info. Registration for the 2016 crossing will begin in early November.

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2015 PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP PASSAGE DATA

Although not all Puddle Jumpers responded to our survey, those who did give a representative sampling of passage data.

Bost Name	Boat Make oth	cafajclen	Boat Sometort	Departed From	Landfall & Date	Days of King	es of King Equato	Engine Hour	124 Hous 24 Hous	Reed Caught Breakers downs	
Ambler		Tom Olson & Jan Holbrook	Olympia,WA		Hiva Oa, May 4					control lines on windvane	
Althea	Westsail 32	Larry & Margie Linder	Morro Bay, CA	Pto Vallarta, n/a	Hiva Oa, n/a	31 3,000	127W40) hrs148 nm	16 nm50 k7	outhaul connection, fridge, diesel	l lift pump
Antares II	Alberg 30	Justin Hoye-House	Portland, OR	Pto Vallarta, Apr 1	Nuku Hiva, Apr 25					ripped main, radar, topside paint p.	peeled off
Apropos	Hans Christian 43	Jim Shutt & Karen Wong	Seattle, WA	Pto Vallarta, Mar 20	Fatu Hiva, Apr 12	232,880	130W12	? hrs160 nm	95 nm36 k2	chartplotter	
Bella Vita	Pearson 530	Arkady & Iwona Glabek	Portland, OR	Cabo, n/a	Hiva Oa, n/a	22 3,000	131W60) hrsn/a	n/a30 k0	none	
Bonobo	Banana 43 cat	Marc & Nadine Verstraete	Brussels	Galapagos, Apr 4	Gambiers, May 2	293,200	87W1	Va148 nm	75 nm29 k1	none	
Centime	Shearwater 39	Heidi Love & Dennis Jud	Portland, ME	Galapagos, Mar 30.	Nuku Hiva, Apr 20	21 4,060	87W13	8 hrs169 nm	95 nm35 k 0	ripped main, autopilot	
Desire	Cavalier 39	Tom & Britta Hamilton	San Pedro, CA						90 nm40 k 0		
Escape Velocity	Manta 40 cat	Jack & Marce Schulz	Annapolis, MD			42 3,622	121W19) hrs160 nm	21 nm24 k 0	.none	
Family Circus	Lagoon 470	Tzortzis family		La Paz, Mar 21	/ F -					chafed running rigging, generator	
French Curve	Beneteau First 47.7	Mark & Cheryl Mitchell	San Diego, CA							.autopilot leak, freezer, rudder pos	st leak
Full Circle	Lidgard 50 cat	David & Cindy Balfour	Austin, TX						87nm30 k0	steering tie rod unscrewed, bilge	pumps
Helios	Island Packet 380	Dominic & Corinne Dolci								halyard chafe, jib stitching	
lolani	Hughes 48	Barry & Sylvia Stompe	Sausalito, CA	7 · 1	' I				20 nm35 k 0		
	Allied 39	C Houlihan & L Edeikin	0 /	10,	,					bolt holding windvane broke, lost	
Joana	Roberts 53	Wade Alarie	Ottawa, CAN	1071	, ,	,		head, gene	rator fuel pump, refrigerat	SSB corroded wire, sea water in o for gas (joint leak), sail track UV de	egradation
Kalliope	Tayana 37	Deb & Gregg Burton	Clark, CO							.failed web loop at head of genoa	
Kiapa Nui	Looping 48 cat	Pete & Sue Wolcott	Bear Valley, CA							.we "grinded" a horizontal tear into	
Laya	Morgan O/I 51	Hans Palmberg	Sweden	1 0 /	, i	,				pressure switch on the watermake	er
Miss Behaving	,	Justin & Deb Page	Melbourne, AUS	1 0 / 1					160 nm40 k 6	0	
Pacific Spirit	Island Spirit 40 cat	Peter Benjamin	Brisbane, AUS						87 nm46 k 0		
Palarran	Hans Christian 38	Tawn & CB Midkiff	Seattle, WA							head, running rigging chafe	
Panthera	Nordic 44	Richard Davies	Bristol, UK						65 nm40 k2		
Rainbow	Crowther 10m cat	Cliff Shaw	Emeryville, CA		Hiva Oa, n/a				n/a24kn/a		
Sail La Vie	Morgan 45	Lars Larsen & L Crowell	Park City, Utah			,				snatch block on genoa roller furle	
Scintilla	CT 49	Chris Harry & C Barnes	Seattle, WA	Pto Vallarta, Mar 21	Fatu Hiva, Apr 10					weld on windvane, lost GPS, AIS	
										o, propane solenoid, furling drum ca	ame apart
Sea Note	Endeavor 43 ketch	Raymond Wood	Fort Mohave AZ		' I				87 nm45 k4		
Second Wind	Nordic 44	Arthur & Nancie Shaw	Anacortes, WA						96 nm 35 k 2		
Solimar										Neptune swiped primary anchor	
Suluk		Pieter Bokhoven	Netherlands						N/a N/a 1		
Thinking of Dave.	Beneteau 50.5	Mark & Tina Emery	Sydney, AUS	Galapagos, Mar 9	Hiva Oa, Apr 4	,		fridge thermo	stat, BBQ regulator, torn	.generator impeller, multiple mains gennaker, burst hose on electric wa	ater pump
Time Warp	Jeanneau 45.2	C Deykin, E Wilkinson	Brisbane, CA	, .	Nuku Hiva, n/a					.autopilot malfunction 700 miles or	ut
Tipsea	Ericson 35	Matt & Brittany Erickson	Coronado, CA						35 nm37 k7		
Ulysses Blue	Irwin 52	Bailey Family	Cairns, AUS	Ecuador, Apr 26	Fatu Hiva, May 19	233,681	80W20) hrs199 nm	118 nm35 k 16	halyard shackle, lower shroud, au	utopilot
Wairua	Freedom 33	Andy & Megan Vance	Kerikeri, NZ	Panama, Apr 4	Fatu Hiva, May 7	32 3,880	85W8	hrs180 nm	78 nm35 k2	steering cables, minor windvane i	issues
Winterlude	Hunter 50	Laird O'Connor	Vancouver, CAN	Costa Rica, Mar 21.	Hiva Oa, Apr 17	26 3,693	102W27	1 hrs161 nm .	113 nm37 k3	.none	