

A satellite-style map of the Pacific Ocean region, showing the Philippines and the Indonesian archipelago. A white line traces a sailing route starting from the northern coast of Luzon in the Philippines, heading south through the Sulu Sea, then westward through the Celebes Sea, and finally southward through the Indonesian archipelago. Several red dots are placed along the route, marking specific stops or waypoints. The text 'Monkey Sail' is overlaid in large white serif font, 'Fast Track North' is in a smaller white serif font below it, and 'Wolfgang Berg' is at the bottom in a large white serif font.

Monkey Sail

Fast Track North

Wolfgang Berg

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Monkey Sail

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About this book

I had sailed my Endeavour 43 ketch, SeaLife, to Grenada in 2004. The trip took three months. Hurricane Ivan destroyed the boat in 2004 and it took 5 years to rebuild her. In the following years we sailed up and down the Caribbean Islands, hiked, explored, and took underwater pictures.

The return trip to the Chesapeake Bay is reported in two different accounts:

- 1) **Wolfgang Berg: The Tunnel, Knappensuhl's Underworld. Caves, Coins, and Crooks.** This is historic fiction and available as eBook on Amazon's Kindle.

- 2) **Wolfgang Berg: Monkey Sail.** This short 25-page book is a brief non-fiction report of the actual sail back north in 2015.

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Caribbean Moon

I was sound asleep but a sudden flash of light woke me up. Could it be a search light from a following ship? Then it was gone. Damn, I overslept.

I wrestled out of my nest of pillows and blankets built across the companionway hatch. It had been hot in the islands and I had thought a light blanket would do. But an hour after sunset and with the wind blowing into my cockpit it got cold. I added another blanket, then a third one. Why did my egg timer not work? I had set it to ring every twenty minutes. Jerking my head up I checked the dark horizon for ships. There was the blinding light again. Thank God, no ship, it was the moon just rising over the horizon, and dipping down behind a wave, higher than my boat. And up again, shining its bright beam into the cockpit. There was my egg timer under a pillow.

I had built my bed on the sliding hatch just behind the windshield so I could quickly scan the horizon and go back to sleep. Now the moon was up and illuminating the cockpit. A high wave lifted the boat. Surfing down she accelerated; but the wave was faster and passed under me, letting me sink deep into the valley before the next wave. I grabbed the rail at the sliding hatch and slid down, my legs dangling above the cabin steps. The ocean was trying to shake me loose. Not me, sir. I got a foothold with my toes, lowered myself down, got hold of the post next to the nav station, and changed grips, just like in rock climbing, always secured at three points; I am a monkey swinging from branch to branch; my tree is rocking in the wind. With the next roll of the boat I swing over onto the seat at the nav station, wedge in between pillows, get my log book, and check the position on the GPS plotter.

8.4 knots, surfing. 7 knots, 7.5 knots. Roaring northwest like a freight train. I am 36 hours west of Martinique, crossing the Caribbean Sea, straight from Carriacou towards the Mona Passage between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. My biggest fear is being overrun by a ship while asleep. But I had not

seen one ship, not even a plane. I was alone with twenty tons of shaking, rattling, and stressed equipment. Would it hold up? The autopilot was working hard, left right, left right. I checked the hydraulic oil. It's OK, no leak. The waves were not exactly straight from behind but at an angle on the quarter. The autopilot was learning the rhythm and counter steered. But every few minutes a steeper wave would move the stern around and interrupt the up and down and left and right pitch and roll confusing the autopilot program.

The first night after leaving Tyrell Bay at Carriacou, which belongs to Grenada, the wave pattern changed frequently in a confused sea. Now the waves were steadier, seven seconds from crest to crest. It took my stomach a while to get used to it, although I had been on the boat for twenty days. But that was mostly between Prickley Bay, Grenada, and Tyrell Bay, Carriacou, where I was scuba diving with new camera models and lights, testing responses of sea creatures to different light frequencies. Five days I spent on land in a boat yard where the boat had been bottom painted.

I met Chris, who had just arrived on his 30-footer from Germany. Several other sailors in the bay had crossed the Atlantic Ocean. I had no desire to spend four or five weeks alone on such a passage.

But when the boat got out of the yard and I was about to sail south to Grenada, a crazy thought crossed my mind. Why not sailing the boat home for a change? It had taken me three months to sail SeaLife to Grenada, with crew. But 2000 miles alone? How long would it take?

I had to make it to the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, in time for a flight reservation in four weeks from the US to Germany. There are three ways from the Eastern Caribbean to the North-Eastern USA.

One route is straight north along the islands to St. Maarten or the Virgin Islands and from there directly on the Atlantic Ocean bypassing Bermuda. With good winds this can be made in two weeks.

The other route is island hopping, sleeping at night in a quiet bay, waiting for comfortable weather. Sailing along the chain of islands in the Windward and Leeward Islands may sound attractive but ever changing currents, waves and winds make it slow and often uncomfortable.

But how about a compromise of a fast straight passage across the Caribbean Sea, cutting through the Northern Caribbean Islands and then north in the Gulf Stream? I would be sailing within a hundred miles or so of islands in case anything would go wrong. The worst problem would be an autopilot failure. Steering manually day and night alone is next to impossible. If the weather turned bad or the wind died I could leave the boat somewhere and fly home. I checked the weather patterns with Chris Parker, my weather forecaster, and decided to go. I double-reefed the main, furlled the genoa one quarter out, hoisted the small mizzen sail, and off I went.

I smell Diesel. An engine failure would not be fatal. I can always sail. But there are heavy fines for leaking Diesel. I wedge in a position preventing me from sliding all over the cabin floor and open the hatch to the Diesel Tank. There is a fuel leak. A hundred gallons of Diesel in a flexible bladder tank are tossed up and down, left and right, and the hose flanges seem to leak. I take a spanner wrench and tighten the connections, one is a bit loose. Next I make it to the engine doors, holding on to the crew bunks. There is Diesel all over the engine. I point a light at it from all sides, at the injectors, the gaskets, and the fuel pump but cannot see any leak. Suddenly a bilge pump turns on and black bilge water with some fuel sprays out of a crack in a hose. I turn the pump off. That can be fixed tomorrow. I need to check the horizon for ships again. Or should I fix it now? Never put off fixing a defect. Never. Was I down for ten minutes or for half an hour? When in doubt, always act immediately. I climb up and look around. No ship in sight. I slide down again, it is an hour after midnight, I am hungry, lock my body into the galley, take a slice of bread, mayonnaise, cheese, high energy junk food, a pickle, and eat it in a safe position. Back into my cockpit bed, with three blankets and four pillows, I feel great and sleep right away. One gets used to the 20-minute egg timer sleep ritual.



Midnight meal, Caribbean Omelet

The night is short. Dawn at five. The sun warms up the cockpit. No ship in sight. I swing down, make it to my comfortable unused bunk in the aft cabin and do my morning exercise. I have to do it to save my back. Then I shave, rub my whole body with soap and water, put on fresh underwear and a shirt, rush up again, and check the horizon for ships. Time to repair the bilge pump hose. There is no more fuel leak. I take a hacksaw, cut the hose, find a spare connection pipe, hose clamps, now it is a real solid connection. Everything works. I turn the generator on to charge the batteries.

I am a day and a half from Puerto Rico. ETA (estimated time of arrival) at the heavy-traffic Mona Passage is in the evening. It is easier to see ships at night. But those freighters are moving fast, fifteen minutes from the horizon. What if I oversleep again? I can't afford to cross the passage at night. The wind is increasing, the waves are getting higher. I furled the genoa a bit more in. The boom is too loose despite of the preventer line. I crawl forward using my harness clipped to the jack line and tighten the preventer as hard as I can. The mizzen sail is swinging with the waves. That is too much for the shackles. Sure enough, the

sail breaks off the outhaul with a bang, luffs around wildly. I should have lashed it down tighter. Tied to the mizzen mast I attach a dock line to the mizzen boom, then through the sail, one hand for the man, one hand for the ship. Sailors of tall ships had to do this high up in the rigging. Nobody would look for them if they fall overboard from the heeling masts. Nobody would look for me either.

Why the hell am I doing this? I talk to myself aloud.



Every morning I find flying fish on deck

“When you are eighty, you are done,” said my friend Chuck. “You get born and then everything goes downhill.”

“I respectfully disagree,” I said. “Life is getting better every day. Aging is an attitude.”

“You may change your attitude but not your age.”

I attach my harness to the jack line and detach the other shackle from the mizzen mast.

“See, I got this fixed,” I said crawling back to the cockpit.

“You are just lucky.”

“Yes, I am lucky to be able to do this.”

“Until you kill yourself.”

“I know what I am doing. And when it’s time to go, I go. No regrets.”

“So, what do you prove?”

“I prove that I’m alive.”

Closer to Puerto Rico I am slowing down, now under seven knots. I furl out the genoa a bit more. But the wind is abeam and the ship is rolling. The sail is flapping and banging with alarming sounds. I can’t afford a blown sail. So I furl the genoa in and climb forward. Standing on the dinghy, which is lashed down on the foredeck, I lock the whisker pole into the mast and the sail, taking several attempts until it snaps in. Now I can furl the genoa out and the speed increases again to 7.4 knots.

I round the south west corner of Puerto Rico. In case of some equipment trouble I would have steered to Ponce with lots of marine services. Suddenly the sea is calm, the wind dies, I find the bouys into Boqueron Bay and drop the anchor in this large and well protected bay. Now I can check the rigging. I find screws on deck. Where are they from? I prepare everything for an early departure at dawn. Cook dinner, fried potatoes with eggs sunny side up, adding fried tomatoes and green peppers that lasted really well. I set up the cockpit table, light candles, and put on a Beethoven CD. A fast power boat with loud music roars by. That’s Puerto Rico. The economy is down, but fast power boats and scooters are everywhere. Darkness falls, the stars light up. A

shooting star. I make a wish. After three nights in the cockpit I enjoy sleeping in my comfortable bunk.

The Dominican Army

I motor north in the wind shadow of Puerto Rico. A Coast Guard boat approaches. I did not check customs and immigration. Should I? They catch a small boat illegally fishing in the protected reefs. The wind is barely ten knots. I try sailing but cannot make more than five knots. Some patient sailors would be happy but I have to push ahead.

At 5.45 NOAA reports the weather. 15 to 20 knots, 20 to 25 knots, 25 to 30 knots tomorrow.

At 6.15 I get my weather service from Chris Parker on Single Side Band radio. "Good morning Wolfgang." It feels good to hear my name. "You could cross over now with very little wind for the day. Tomorrow you might want to seek shelter somewhere at the north of the Dominican Republic. Wind will exceed 30 knots. You should not go to the Turks and Caicos until at least Thursday."

There are no ships. Ten years ago we encountered seventeen freighters. What has changed in shipping? Suddenly a huge freighter passes abeam. Where the hell did he come from? In the evening I get out of the wind shadow of Puerto Rico and I can turn the engine off. But then the gentle night wind from the Dominican Republic starts negating the powerful trade winds, carrying with it the smoke of the pine wood fires from the mountains. So I motor again, all night, past Cabo Cabron. At 9 o'clock in the morning the trade winds kick up with force. I make it into the still very rocky Ensenada Bay to the little fishing town of Rio San Juan. The direction through the reefs in my guide book are not clear. 67 degrees on a boat yard, a large building, but which one is the boat yard? I have no detail charts and run aground. Check the GPS. I went too far, turn back, then south towards a few anchoring fishing boats in calm waters.

As soon as I drop the anchor a small boat with three men approaches. A tall guy holds up an ID card. I read it. It's from the

navy. They want to check my papers. I say, I have no papers. They are confused, want money. I say I have no money and tell them I will check customs and immigration in Luperon. But I must pay money, they say. Twenty US dollars, for security. I show them my remaining bills of Eastern Caribbean Currency. That's all I have. I say it's worth twelve US \$. They take it and go away. At dawn, still at night-calms, I follow my GPS track out and motor for half the day across the 45 mile wide Ensenada Bay. Then the trades push me with eight knots to Luperon, the most beautiful bay in the whole region. I wished I had sailed on to the Turks and Caicos but the forecast of over thirty knots of wind was a bit heavy and I remembered that Luperon had the greatest freshest and cheapest variety of fruits and vegetables and also the cheapest Diesel.

I slowly drift up the bay and take all sails down. I want to tie up at a marina, saving me to launch the dinghy which is firmly tied down on the foredeck. But the marina does not answer my radio calls. Then I touch bottom on a shallow mud bank, turn back and round an anchoring boat with a German flag. I ask the young fellow about the marina. He jumps in his dinghy and talks to the marina owner. They move a boat away to make space for me. That boat gets stuck on a mooring line. A guy jumps into the water. Finally, I am ready to dock with the help of Daniel Krause, from Bremen, and Leo, the new marina owner.

Five men come walking down the dock. The army, the navy, drug enforcement, security, and health inspection. They search the boat. Their interest is caught by my swiveled stove. They look at clothing, at my cameras and lights, into the refrigerator. Then they sit down writing reports.

“Do I get a customs and immigration form?” I ask.

“No, you have to go to the customs and immigration offices.”

It is too late now. I stow sails, clear lines, get the boat in order. It took two hours and it then it was dark.

A girl knocked at the boat. “Welcome to Luperon, from Leo,” she said and handed me a fruit punch. I was too tired to go

for dinner but she came back again with a Ceviche salad. “You must be hungry. From Leo.”

The next morning Leo took me to the bank. I got a stack of paper money. Then he dropped me off at a small shack and a trailer, customs, immigration, tourism, harbor, and agriculture. I spent most of my pesos, but that’s not all. I had to sign in to the Comandancia on a hill, across a rotten bridge over a stinking greenish creek. The same guys that checked the boat sat in a gazebo playing domino. Nobody fixed the rotting boards on the bridge or picked up the trash around the command post.



Bridge over the deadly creek to the Comandancia

Luperon is surrounded by green hills with high blue mountains at the horizon. This is where Columbus found one of his ships that had escaped the fleet and was hiding here. Ten years ago the bay was full of boats. Now there were only a third, many damaged and not seaworthy. The fruit and fish stands had disappeared. Several houses were in ruins. Mike’s bar was not there anymore. Daniel took me to a small wooden bar with internet

access. I met two old German sailors from Hamburg and Kiel. They drank beer and told stories. Once sailors, now bums that you meet in many ports.



Bar in Luperon (I am the guy in the red shirt)

A woman sat down at my table. “Did you see me?”

“No,” I say, “why?”

“I am the ministry of agriculture,” she claimed, “you have to come to my office.”

I walked to her office, filled out a form, and paid again.

Daniel ferried me back to the only nice spot, the marina with its airy stylish restaurant. Curtains flew in the wind, I got a spicy lunch, strong coffee, and ordered Diesel in cans. For \$ 20 I had the boat washed. Ten years ago it would have been a dollar or two. The Diesel dealer poured in four canisters, \$ 200. He spilled fuel on the boat and I had it cleaned again. After he left I measured the fuel he put in. It was five gallons short. Cheating and stealing from sailors is a culture I am told. I wanted to leave

Wednesday night when the wind dies. I signed out at the offices and told the port control I would leave at night. But they don't allow departures after six pm, they said.

I explained that every guide book recommends to sail at night in the calm land wind. I could not even get away from the dock in the powerful daytime trade winds.

They recommended to sail in the morning at six. They would be up.

But to get to the Comandancia I had to travel three miles around the bay. At seven a young kitchen helper drove me on his moped to the harbor control station. The fellows on the hill had their breakfast, rice with chicken gravy. They said I did not have to come since they are coming to the boat. I took another moped back to the marina. The fare was US \$ 2.00. At 9.15 the first guy showed up, then, one by one, the others. They checked the boat again, probably to prevent me from taking on illegal passengers. Now the wind had kicked up. This game could go on for days. I had to leave. I turned the engine on pretending to leave. The five officials stood on the dock and waited.

"You leave now or we take your despacho," (the departure permit) they said.

I argued that I had to wait until the wind settles. They did not budge and offered to help. With four guys from the marina they pulled and pushed and I finally pivoted the boat away in reverse.

I went as far as I could on the bay and anchored. But at four in the afternoon they came in a wooden boat armed with Uzis and asked why I had not left.

I said, "You told me I had to leave before six."

"But that was six in the morning," said the commander, and climbed on my boat. "You must give back the despacho."

We argued about six in the morning or six at night. He looked at a new braided red line coiled up for emergencies in the cockpit.

"I can use a line like that," he said.

I gave it to him.

“OK you can stay, but you must leave before six,” he conceded. “Promise.”

I promised.

At a quarter off six I left. But outside the bay, still inside the inlet, at a protected spot, I anchored again, made dinner, and turned the anchor light off.

At ten the trade winds had died and I set course towards the Turks and Caicos.

On the Footsteps of Columbus

I had wasted four days. The fresh fruits and vegetables that I had bought already had brown spots. I was cheated on diesel and paid for useless government services. I should have tucked into a bay somewhere and not even clear in. The only good part was Leo with his little marina. I wish him luck. Perhaps he can convince the government not to destroy business. I paid my bill for four days in the marina, breakfast, lunch, dinner, multiple strong coffees. Nobody takes credit cards. I paid 37 US dollars.

After motoring for three hours the easterlies kicked in with 20, then 25 to 30 knots. Going north the wind was abeam which was easier for the autopilot. I made good speed and when the sun rose I could see the light blue Caicos Bank. The reefs on its south side stretch northwest. So, by following close along the well visible reefs I had good wind but waves of less than five feet and I raced along until at sunset I rounded the southwest corner of the Caicos Bank, only about 20 miles from the highly developed resort island of Providenciales, short Provo. I had good phone reception and sailed north in the protection of West Caicos.

The night crossing towards the Bahamas, the pass between the Plana Cays and Acklins/Crooked Island was comfortable. There were no ships or other sailboats. I followed the course of Columbus 520 years ago. Like Columbus, I saw dozens of islands, but coming closer they turned out to be just hills on Acklins. In case of approaching cold fronts I would have stayed south of Acklins but the weather was steady and the wind blew

from the east at 20 knots, ideal conditions for crossing past Samana Cay to San Salvador and, following the advice of my weather forecaster, rounding the Bahamas in good winds outside on the Atlantic Ocean.

These waters are rich in fish. I could have caught tuna, dolphin, wahoo, or grouper; but stopping the boat would have cost me a lot of time. I found two flying fish on deck in the morning but did not put them in the pan.

Weather and sea conditions always change and the captain of a sailing ship has to be flexible, always alert and ready to change strategy and sails. I was on a course east of Rum Cay and Conception Island when the waves became higher and steeper. Some went right over the deck. This was not what my weather forecaster had predicted. The wind was still 20 knots, but the waves told me more was coming. I changed my strategy from going outside around the Bahamas to sailing right through them although there the winds were forecasted to slow to only ten knots.

By staying west of Rum Cay and Conception I had less waves and my speed increased. In the morning I passed between Cape Santa Maria of Long Island and Cat Island where people said the pirate Cat had hidden his treasure in one of the thousand caves. The weather in the large Exuma Sound surrounded by flat islands was perfect. I kept up speed with no waves could walk upright on deck, dressed like the natives, the Lucayans that once populated these islands and paddled around in canoes.

On a day like this one should be able to relax and read a book. "Isn't it getting boring?" I was asked. But I am busy all day. Navigating, planning, comparing different routes, checking the weather, checking every screw and bolt, oil, fuel, electricity, water, the engines, electronics, adjusting the sails, and doing little repairs. I ate well, starting with my morning Müsli of tropical fruits that were stored in a hammock in the main cabin. I made yoghurt, baked brownies, and made a delicious tuna salad that I wrapped into flatbread.

The northwestern passage, named *Ship Channel*, out of the Exuma Sound to the Yellow Bank would take me to Nassau.

This passage is splattered with reefs and only passable in daylight. I had first thought of going to Nassau and then north along the Berry Islands but I was afraid that the Bahamians would check me and charge the cruising permit fee of \$ 300. Since I still had enough daylight I decided to sail north through the shallow bank to Flemming Channel, the pass from the Eleuthera Bank into the Northwest Providence channel. There I would have open waters without reefs. Northwest Providence Channel is the way cruise ships and ocean liners take from Florida to Nassau or from Europe to the crude oil terminal of Freeport. The sea is relatively well protected by the Berry Islands and the Grand Bahama Bank to the south, Grand Bahama Island to the north, and Eleuthera to the East.

The twelve mile cross over from the Exuma Sound was only seven feet deep and a few times I had to steer around black spots. Night fell and I was still in the shallows. But it got a little deeper with no more reefs in the way according to the chart. The lights of Flemming Channel should become well visible any time soon. But there were no lights. Instead I saw huge beam lights coming up behind me and heard a radio call "to the sail boat in front of me...." I answered but got no response. What was that light? It was certainly too shallow for any big ship. Could it be a helicopter? After a while the light turned away. I missed my radar which could have told me distance, bearing, and speed of the vessel behind me. Another big mass of lights was in front of me heading west according to the navigation lights. So, that would have been outside the bank. I came closer and closer. It was a big freighter that did not move. Finally, I was less than a quarter mile away, still not having passed through Flemming Channel. Was the channel here deep and wide enough to offer an anchorage for a big ship. Or was it aground? At a quarter after nine I was out in deep water, relieved to have escaped the coral strewn banks. I put the autopilot on, made dinner and went to bed.

This was the first area where I saw ships every time I looked up. But their navigation lights were a very good indication of their course and almost more comforting than total darkness.

The wind never decreased to less than fifteen knots and I continued swiftly along Grand Bahama Island, passing the oil

tankers at Freeport in the afternoon and rounding West End with a marina full of sailboats in the setting sun. I wished I could stop in the marina that I had visited so many times when sailing from Florida to the Abacos in the Bahamas. But I had no time to spare and the forecast was for two or three days of calm. I had to use every available wind that was still fifteen knots and helped me sail along the western edge of the Little Bahama Bank, the grave yard of many treasure ships.

Calms and Storms in the Gulf Stream

At midnight I entered the Gulf Stream and changed course to north along 80 degrees west longitude. At three in the morning the wind died and I had to turn the engine on. Here, falling asleep for too long could be fatal, so in addition to the egg timer I set up my alarm clock and my iPhone every 30 minutes. When the sun rose, the sea was as flat as a mirror. The wind was five knots or less. I tightened the sails, slightly backwinded, so my own wind kept them filled. Chris Parker had radioed the location of the center of the Gulf Stream with the fastest current north, which I had hoped, would have a speed of four knots but it never exceeded three knots. My speed over ground was eight to nine knots.



The ripple in the mirror-like ocean was just the wave from my boat

In the evening black clouds rose over Florida. Millions of stars were still bright in the sky but after midnight the front caught up with me. Still no wind. Then lightning and thunder hit all around me without rain. A mild breeze blew for a while and then the front passed through. I never turned the engine off.

Years ago I had taken five days from West End to Moorhead City, North Carolina. With the help of the Gulf Stream I might do it in three days or in four days all the way around treacherous Cape Hatteras to the entrance of the Chesapeake Bay.

But Chris Parker warned me. "A powerful cold front is on the way and you should enter port before Thursday afternoon." Thursday morning I had left the Gulf Stream and my speed was only 6.5 knots. Anyhow, being in the Gulf Stream in a cold front would be suicide. Strong northerly winds encountering the current would cause very steep high breaking waves that can sink a yacht. I saw big frontal clouds building up at noon. The wind started and increased to 25 knots from the south, fortunately not from the west. The inlet of Beaufort and Moorhead City is deep and wide and well-marked but I had no detail charts. The Coast Guard radioed a small craft warning. I asked them for a marina, closest to the inlet. They mentioned a name but are not allowed to give navigational information. I called my son Sven and asked if he could email a detail chart with the location of marinas.

I kept all sails up and ran the engine racing toward the inlet. A black squall line moved in from the North. At six in the evening I made it into the inlet, turned into the wind, and dropped all sails. The email came just in time.

"Turn right at the first buoy, then right again around Radio Island and you see several marinas," he wrote. I followed the chart, saw an anchorage in Beaufort with several sail boats, stopped, and dropped the anchor. That same moment a torrential rain started with a gust of wind of 40 knots. Thunder and lightning continued for two hours. Then it was quiet. I made dinner and slept perfectly in my real bed.

In the morning I called Coast Guard by phone. How great it felt to be back in the United States. They took my data, asked for

my location, and said that an officer was nearby at a marina, only 100 yards away. The officer helped me docking. In five minutes I was cleared. I got Diesel at half the price of the Dominican Republic and a large Café Latte, walked across the street and bought groceries and a detailed chart of the Intra Coastal Waterway that runs inside the East Coast from New York to the Florida Cays.

Sliding through Swamps

The weather was great, there are no waves in the Waterway, but it is the most difficult task for a solo sailor since I could rarely use the autopilot except when crossing large open bays or rivers, and I had to watch every marker in order not to accidentally enter a dead end lagoon or river.



The Intra Coastal Waterway or ICW is one of the most beautiful places in America. It winds through pine forests, endless swamps with birds and plenty of fish, past little fishing villages, and when I dropped the anchor at sunset, the sun turned the marsh grass into gold, and the birds returned to their roosting trees. For a while it was totally quiet. I sat in the cockpit and listened. Frogs started their nightly concert. Rising fog lit by the moon contrasted from the black tree line at the horizon.

I started the engine at six in the morning. Another long day. Sometimes powerboats throw up a nasty wave, but most of them ask if they may pass and reduce the speed. An occasional freight

barge takes almost all the width of the channel. There are few places to anchor. I tucked into a lagoon, ran aground, moved back a little and anchored in six feet of water. My draft is 5.5 feet.

Twice I crossed open rivers for ten miles and used my sails. The bridges are all 60 feet high and so is my mast. Each time I go under a bridge it looks as if I hit it.

It is Sunday morning. I start at 5.30. The osprey chicks in the nest on the marker cry for food, chasing the parents out to fish. There are no other boats. I should make it to Norfolk today.

At seven in the morning I tried to call my daughter. But there is an error message on my iPhone. I fiddled with the thing trying to resolve the problem. The waterway turns in serpentine. I steer around a curve and set the autopilot to the next turn. A bad time to use the cell phone. Suddenly an old dead cedar tree rises above me. I try to steer around it but forget to turn the autopilot off that blocks the wheel. Crash. Muddy pieces of wood, debris of a fortunately unoccupied osprey nest, sticks, grass, and feathers, fell all over the boat. The tree was old and rotten, leaned over, and broke off. I was about ten feet from the shore, way outside the marked channel. The boat touched bottom but slid over the mud and continued its course. I looked back and laughed. "Nice shortcut."

All the bridges over the ICW are now 60 feet high except some in the State of Virginia that open every half or full hour. Eight boats followed me and two boats waited for the bridge opening in front of me. I stopped, moved back, a little forward, then slowly in reverse, towards the stumps of broken off cedar trees that line the shore of the water way. When I tried to stop by moving the gear lever to neutral it broke off. I jumped down to get pliers. That did not work. The boat drifted further. I got a vice grip that allowed me to move the gear to forward. By now I was stuck between tree stumps. The bridge opened. All I needed now was a damaged prop. A short kick forward and I was off the cedar stumps.

I was approaching the only lock on the ICW. Expecting a problem with my vice grip I went as slowly as possible. My dock lines were ready. When I entered the lock I turned the wheel to starboard but vice grip interfered with the steering wheel. Before I

could detach and re-fasten it I crashed into the steel wall. The only good part of the collision was that I hit the same spot where I had collided with the ancient tree. The stern drifted around, across the lock, blocking other boats, who screamed obscenities at me. Finally a docking assistant caught my line and helped my tie up.

“You can stay as long as you want and do your repairs,” he said. I took my most powerful drill, a threading tool, and a spare bolt attached the gear lever in half an hour.

In the evening I passed the US Atlantic Navy fleet with three carriers and dozens of battle ships, all surrounded by in-water fences and patrolled by safety guards. On a rainy Sunday morning In 1977 I went through here with my brother Peter and a friend on our old Morgan Out Island. Peter was at the wheel and I was down below frying eggs for breakfast. He said there was a ship crossing our way but it was our right of way.

“OK,” I said, “then keep going.”

“But it is a big ship,” he sounded concerned.

“Watch his bow wave,” I said.

After a while he concluded, “I think they have stopped and are letting us pass.”

“That’s nice of them,” I said, “eggs are ready,” I carried a plate up into the cockpit to let my brother eat first.

And there was this ship, the British carrier *HMS Invincible* on its maiden voyage visiting the United States. Not only had the ship stopped but about a thousand sailors in white uniforms lined the railing, saluting someone. There was no other ship, no reception committee, and no band. We stood up on deck and raised our hands, all three of us, saluting the British ship.

“I told you, it was our right of way,” said my brother.

This time all battle ships were docked, only a few were under steam and ready to be deployed in minutes if needed. Dozens of pleasure boats and sightseeing ships cruised around. Music blurred from ships and shore. When the sun set I was out on the bay sailing north for three more hours to Mobjack Bay where I promptly ran aground by trying to get too close to shore at New Point Comfort. John Smith had landed here, the place of the

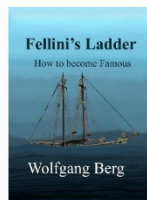
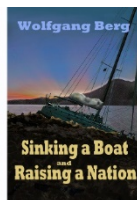
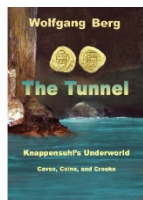
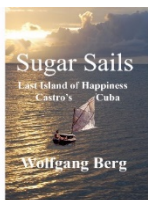
first British settlement in America. I headed further out to a windy and less calm spot and spent the last night on the boat.

In the morning I spread out the main and the genoa on a whisker pole wing o'wing, sailing in light southerly winds. I passed under the Annapolis Bay Bridge and at precisely 3 pm on May 26, three weeks after departing Carriacou I entered Tolchester marina, greeted by ducks, a heron, and an osprey on a marker.

Excerpts of other books by Wolfgang Berg:

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About the Author

Wolfgang Berg, born in Bremen, Germany, had learned to sail in the North Sea and on Bavarian Lakes. As a passionate sailor and underwater photographer he has established an underwater camera business in America since 1978. He has cruised the Bahamas for 25 years and in the Eastern Caribbean for 10 years where he photographed and wrote about his sailing adventures.

Explorations of caves, reefs and rocks, mountains, volcanoes, and rainforests got him into trouble more than once. Exploring the islands with “SeaLife”, his Endeavour 43 ketch, he observes islanders, their different cultures, and reflects on their life and history from the time of Spanish conquistadores through colonialism, piracy, and drug smuggling to modern tourism and present and future world politics.

