

Log of the *HILDE M²*



Vol. 1, No. 13

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THE PROMISED FAT ISSUE! Here it is ...Letter from the Captain (the disk just arrived today), plus an extra -- Letter from the Crew -- plus a couple of special announcements you must read first.

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PLEASE HELP! One of the projects we didn't get done before the HM² departed was the gathering together of a SHIP's COOKBOOK. Now I'm getting some old standby recipes from the mountaineering (and other such) days, and plan to take with me on my famous Trip to Niku Hiva. Please send your recipes and/or galley hints in time for me to take with! Remember, everything has to be uncomplicated, economical of fuel, and preferably quick. K has a pressure cooker, skillets and saucepans, two burners an oven, an icebox, and a double sink, so he's luxuriously equipped compared to a tent, for instance, but space is definitely tight. Thanks in advance!

TEE-SHIRTS with the logo of The Voyage are available - I've been forgetting to mention this, they really are nice). They're good quality, gray with black silk-screened logo. Machine washable and dryable, handmade. If you're interested, send \$12.50 to Fritz Edler, 726 Upshur Street NW, Washington, DC 20011. State size, and please allow 6 weeks or so for guaranteed delivery. [Note: The limited edition was sold out in 1987]

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Letter from the Captain, written aboard the *HILDE M²* in Porvenir, Panama, on 18 January 1987, begins.

“Hello everyone, from the gorgeous south sea islands of the Golfo de San Blas.

“First a sad note. I am sorry to report that Alice Aloe was lost at sea on the night of Tuesday, January 13. I found her mostly empty pot in its wedged-in niche on the poop deck last Wednesday morning. Apparently a wave carried her away. Aside from that there were no major catastrophes on the moderately fast but rough thousand mile down-wind sail from St. Croix. I'll try to begin where I left off.

"I had planned to leave for the San Blas islands on Monday the 5th but the weather prediction didn't sound good so I decided to lay over a day or two. (Ed.: K's sister Bets and family were in Jamaica on their annual swim-and-dive vacation, and were very worried about K because they had a full fledged gale going and they knew it was his planned departure time.)

"I put HM² in a slip at St Croix Marine (the only game in town) to top up her fuel and water tanks and to do some odd jobs that went better at dock. While there I picked up the reinforced new dodger and reinstalled it with repositioned snaps on the port side so that it fits (not much) better. I also took advantage of the dock to pull the dingy out of the water and scrub away the rapidly developing marine growth before lashing it in place on deck.

"Tuesday morning I was up early for the weather forecast. As expected, it was not favorable - a front moving down across Hispaniola with gale force winds and 10' seas. It was a good morning to go back to bed. Instead, I scrubbed out the icebox and put in 50 lb of ice and then headed to the store for perishables. During the afternoon I worked at marking the main anchor chain at 6 fathom intervals with red and white spray paint. I'm hoping the paint holds up for awhile because it's rather helpful not to have to guess how much chain I have out.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 1. Wednesday morning's forecast sounded much better. The front had stalled and then begun to disperse with rapidly diminishing wind and seas. Wednesday afternoon departure would be reasonable so I buttoned everything down, put in a final bag of ice, paid my bills, had a nice lunch at the marina snack bar, and cast off my lines at 1 PM. After a final swing around the harbor for photos we motored out the Schooner Channel' pulled up the sails, and headed NW along the coast of St. Croix. At 3:25, having gotten around the northernmost point of the island, I switched off the engine and sailed along in the 12 - 15 knot breeze. About 4:30 a dark line of clouds passed over - the remains of the cold front that had been hanging over Puerto Rico. Behind it the wind shifted from SW to NW, still at about 15 knots, and the timing was perfect for me to come about and lay my course SW for Panama.

"The general plan of this passage was simple. I planned to stay somewhat N of an approximate 250 degree rhumb line between the W end of St. Croix and Punta San Blas in order to make as short a trip as possible while giving a little extra berth to the coast of Colombia in the SW Caribbean. There had been some discussions with SSCA people, some of whom felt a more northerly dog-leg course via the south coast of the Dominican Republic would avoid some of the frequent heavy winds of the S Caribbean. I debated and decided to stick with my modified direct course.

"At 6 PM we had the bright light on Hams Bluff at the NW corner of St. Croix abeam and were zipping along at 6 K with reefed main and genny. I had been warned about the very heavy shipping in the Caribbean and planned to keep a sharp lookout, particularly the first couple nights. Sure enough, I saw the lights of several ships heading E some distance to the N that first night. I slept in 10 minute snatches, using a timer to get me up to look about. After that first night I saw very few ships, not more than a half dozen more, and none at all for a stretch of four days. Perhaps my course was a bad one because all the ships avoided it. That made it a good one for me! I eventually lengthened my naps to 15 minutes and finally 20 minutes. Of course I used the masthead light throughout the trip so it's possible some fast-moving ship steered around me while I was below, but I think it's a bit doubtful.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 2. By dawn Thursday the wind had come around to the NE and slacked off to 6-S knots. We were rolling moderately so it was hard to keep the head-sail pulling. I poled it out and ran up the main, securing it with a preventer to run wing and wing and was rewarded with a steady 3.5 knot progress to the SW, still rolling, of course. In the mid-afternoon since the conditions were perfect for a spinnaker, I decided to try out the one Lam Sails had made for this trip. It took me about an hour to get it loaded in the Chute Scoop, get the lines ready, get it up, and break it out. All went well but I was a bit disappointed when our speed with it alone about equaled the wing & wing arrangement, with perhaps a touch more rolling as well.

"In the late afternoon I just had to take a nap but I was soon up again, positive that I heard voices on a nearby boat. Of course, there were none. We continued along at about 3.5 knots under a half moon on a nearly smooth sea with just enough swell to keep us rocking. Always rocking.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 3. Friday morning about 3 AM I dropped the chute since it had clouded over and begun to drizzle. I suspected a squall might come through, but none did. Instead, the wind died down and swung to the SE where it was to remain for nearly the rest of the trip. We rolled a lot and drifted along toward the SW under the genoa and waited for something to happen. At 10 am I broke out the spinnaker again, mostly to dry it out and partly to experiment using it with the main. In the process I discovered that its halliard was badly chafed, apparently by the upper roller furling gear on the main stay.

"The spinnaker/main combination worked fine, but only under hand steering with constant attention. The Aries couldn't cope with the light wind from aft at the speed produced by the combination. So much for that. I furled the spinnaker and went back to the broad reach using the main and genny which the wind vane could handle. During the afternoon the SE breeze freshened a bit and we moved nicely at a little over 4 knots with small seas and only a bit of rolling.

"Around 2 PM a twin engine Coast Guard plane flew by, turned, and came back for a second look. I didn't wave since I was still peeved at the CG for dropping the ball on my trip down from Beaufort. I know I hurt their feelings. My position was 16:29.40 N, 67:37.47 W in case anyone wants to check their records.

"During the afternoon the seas began to build and I considered reefing to slow down. It's hard for me to tell when to do this when I'm running downwind. We were moving nicely at 5 knots on our usual 240-250 degree course and I decided the reefing could wait a bit longer. At 4 PM a squall line came through and the Aries had us headed straight for Venezuela in the 18 knot wind before I brought HM² back to her senses. In ten minutes the wind was back to its SE 8-12 knot mode. In the early evening we rolled along at 4.3 knots under a bright moon and a partly cloudy sky and all was right with the world.

.'Things like that never last, you know, and by 10 PM we were screaming along at 6.5 knots and I scrambled to shorten sail. When I tried to pull in the genny the roller reefing wouldn't budge. Not up to dealing with a tangle on the furling drum in the dark on a pitching bowsprit (I've done it before and it ain't fun) I just dropped the main and fell off to 275 degrees. That got us down to 4.5 knots and I crossed my fingers and hoped the 20 knot wind would stay steady or die down a bit. The wind cooperated, at least this once, and I was appropriately thankful.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 4. In the wee hours of Saturday morning, one of the few ships was seen far to the north, headed E. After the moon set about 2 AM, I had a great show of phosphorescence in the bow wave and the wake of the HM². The waves were large enough that the boat tried to broach from time to time. The Aries always seemed to correct the situation, but I wondered if perhaps it weren't near the limit of its ability. It certainly worked constantly.

"By morning's light I was able to clear the jam on the furling gear easily enough. Generally this is not a problem if I keep some tension in the furling line when pulling out the foresail and I cleat it firmly at other times. In this case I had left some slack in the line. I know better. According to the speed log HM2 had run 108 miles since 10 am Friday morning. At 5 PM the Sat-nav fix said we had made good 280 miles in the 72 hours since we passed Hams Bluff. Not spectacular, but not too bad for a boat with a 25 foot water line either...

"At this point we were about half way between Santo Domingo to the N and the island of Aruba to the S. HM2 continued to run, most of the time at 5.3 to 5.5 knots, sometimes up to 6.5 in gusts. The ride was rough because the 6' waves came closer together than I would have expected in deep water. At 11 PM I somehow failed to set the timer before I fell asleep and dropped out of this world for two hours instead of the usual 15 minutes. I was shocked. The moon was still up and the scene was beautiful. I could see very clearly for several miles, but there was nothing to look at except the endless rolling water. The rippled surface looked like polished hard coal. After the moon set, it got almost pitch black until dawn began about 5:45. The wind and seas continued to increase slowly but the barometer held steady at 30.5 inches.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 5. At 6 AM I tried to pick up a short wave weather forecast and managed to get NMN, Norfolk on 6508 KHz but missed the first part. What I heard sounded like a front would come through from the NW late Sunday or early Monday with winds to 25 Knots from the N behind the trough. I set our course a little more to the N to allow a bit more sea room off Venezuela and Colombia in case I had to run downwind.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 6. Sunday dawned sunny with a few light hazy clouds. The wave action continued strong and HM² rolled with a kind of irregular action that made it hard to anticipate and balance myself. I had warmed up a can of chicken mushroom soup for lunch and had just ladled a second helping into my bowl, when an unexpected wave hit the port side and hurled me across against the chart table, bowl in hand. No harm to me, but the viscous soup coated itself all over that corner of the cabin, on the charts, the overhead, the photos on the bulkhead, the emergency pack by the companion way. Fortunately I had the electronics covered. It took more than an hour to clean up the mess. I tried to be thorough because the soup would eventually stink and get moldy and generally unpleasant. The whole experience was a great test of my sea legs because the general appearance and consistency of the soup might have been enough to send a weak stomach to the rail. I didn't even have a flutter in the tummy. Not even a twinge on this whole rough passage did I have!

"By 6 PM clouds began to build up ahead and to the N and we had a bit of drizzle. It looked like the predicted front but there was no dramatic wind shift. It continued to blow from the SE from 14-16 knots with occasional gusts to 20, and we were able to hold our nominal 250 degree course. The waves were the dominant feature of this passage. They were higher, closer, steeper, and more chaotic than

they had any right to be in winds of this strength and waters over 3000 feet deep. Occasional odd ones would slap one side of the boat or the other, and slop water into the cockpit. As usual when alone in warm weather, I had no clothing on to get soaked, and I kept two hatch-boards in the companionway to keep the water outside.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 7. Early Monday the wind calmed a bit, then blew more strongly again and shifted more to the ENE. The barometer dropped about a half inch in an hour. We continued to run, now directly down wind at 5 knots with moderate rolling. About 9:30 am one of those strange oddball waves hit the port side, and shot about 5 gallons of seawater under the dinghy and through the overhead cabin hatch, right onto my bunk on the starboard settee. Now I had to keep that last ventilating hatch closed and the cabin became miserably hot and humid.

"Doggedly, I mopped things up and made the bunk as comfortable as possible in the soggy conditions. There was much too much spray outside to consider washing and drying anything. Leaving the depressing cabin, I lounged in the cockpit and watched a group of dolphins playing around the bow. They seemed smaller on the average than my escort out of Beaufort last October.

"The barometer continued to fall more slowly, but there was no change in the weather that I could detect. I spent considerable time studying the waves. The major train of 4 to 6 footers was aligned pretty much with the prevailing wind, from the ESE and coming in on our port quarter. Another smaller set came in at about a 45 degree angle directly on our port side. The waves interacted to make occasional biggies that sometimes slammed the boat and sent water on board. I assume I could have had easier going if I steered more to the NW, but then that's not where I was headed. I ate a can of cold vegetable soup for supper to avoid a reenactment of the Great Chicken Soup Ballet and to keep the cabin as cool as possible. It reminded me of my mountaineering days when this was a regular item on the menu.

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 8. Tuesday the 13th was pretty much like Monday. The noon fix showed we had made good 130 miles in the 24 hours, and said we were about 115 miles N of Barranquilla, Colombia. At this speed we could reach the San Blas on Friday morning. That prompted me to pull out the charts of Panama and some old SSCA bulletins and look them over. The San Blas area will be the only one visited that I have no cruising guide for. The DMA sailing directions are cryptic and the DMA charts are based on surveys done in 1915 and 1917! I'll have to eyeball everything and use utmost caution. There are no bouys, beacons, ranges, or other aids we've become so dependent upon; and the area is shot through with reefs. This is Real Adventure, and I'm glad that Jim Wall will be there to help conn us through the islands.

"The wind from ENE freshened Tuesday evening until I pulled in everything but a tiny scrap of genny. Then we were still moving at nearly 4 knots and the rocking was furious. We took only one wave aboard during the evening, and passed the 75 west longitude line about the same time. I set the watches back to minus 5 on UTC but somehow didn't get that extra hour of sleep! Wednesday dawned with the wind still gusting to 27 knots and I was most thankful that it was with us rather than against us. A couple of times an hour, a side wave from port or starboard would slop a bucket-full of water into the cockpit.

“At this point, I could see three distinct wave patterns: the main one coming in on our port quarter, the next in size directly from port, and a third train off our starboard quarter. The interaction created still other "haystack" waves, isolated peaks that popped up here and there like volcanoes. I kept the speed down, to minimize water on the boat, but really believe that there is no way to avoid it entirely, given the chaotic wave situation. Our noon fix showed another 115 miles made good. Right on!

"PASSAGE 2, DAY 9. Wednesday I set the Aries for a slightly more southerly course, about 210-220 degrees, to bring us back closer to the rhumb line course and to close in on our destination. It seemed to me that HM2 crossed the waves more smoothly at the new angle and that we moved a bit more slowly with less surfing, but at 10:30 I was standing at the chart table just by the companionway when a freak breaking wave hit the back of the boat, apparently from port. It tore loose the companion curtain which was lapped out over the two hatch-boards to keep out spray and shot 10-15 gallons of water through the slot all over me, the chart table and of course my berth. We were moving at 4 knots at the time and there were no other breakers to be seen. It was weird. The water may have given the coup de grace to my poor T5430 ham transceiver. I had it on the chart table at the time, using it to pick up a weather forecast. Thank heavens the TS130 was draped in plastic, but some spray even got under that. I just can't seem to keep the seawater away from the electronics; the chart table area is too close to the companionway.

"Incidentally, the only water that got below on this trip came through the companionway or through the overhead hatch. My caulking of various deck leaks in San Juan seems to have done some good. The latest drenching didn't even phase me. I just shifted my catnaps over to the port berth which was merely soggy. A midnight Sat-nav fix showed only 130 miles to go, with an ETA of Friday morning at the current rate of speed. Not being in that much of a hurry, I experimented with running under bare poles directly down wind in an effort to keep the cockpit drier, but the triple threat waves seemed to slap the topsides as regularly (or irregularly) as before, so I reverted to our basic broad reach on the port tack.

"I had the cabin completely buttoned so now, with all hatch-boards in, the effect was that of a sauna. It was much more pleasant on deck. Thursday afternoon the wind began to slack off perversely, now that there was only ninety miles to go and I had gotten interested in a Friday arrival. Now we had a mere zephyr but the waves were still as large and chaotic as ever - maybe even more so. Everything was on automatic so I took a nap in the cockpit, followed by a much needed haircut using a gadget with razorblades that B gave me. I think I improved things, but it's hard to tell what I look like from behind. Surely it couldn't be much worse than before. We continued to sail through the night at about 4 knots, but were obviously bucking a current since the distance made good was not more than 3 knots and we were being set somewhat to the SE.

“PASSAGE 2, DAY 11. Friday morning the wind was directly behind us, blowing 5-6 knots with the waves still coming from three sides, and the Aries went bananas. I finally switched on the engine, for the first time since the day we left St. Croix (except for some battery charging) and we motor-sailed a 225 course. To the starboard, as far as I could see were dolphins playing in the water. There had to be hundreds of them. Some were to our port as well, but the school (academy?) extended at least a half mile out to the NW! Some leaped clear of the water, but most of them just did the standard dolphin

shallow surfacing and dives, swimming far faster than the boat speed. One dolphin shot up and did a twist in midair before falling back into the water, just like they do in Marine-land.

"Our noon fix said we had 20 miles to go, ETA about 4 PM, and we continued to motorsail in the light following breeze with gradually diminishing seas. At 3 PM I spotted the first low island ahead in the haze, slightly to port. I didn't know it at the time, but it was a perfect landfall by the Chichime Cays on the port side of the Porvenir Channel. Thinking they were the Holandes Group, I altered course to the starboard toward Punta San Blas. At 4 PM I had Porvenir directly in front of me - I thought it was the Chichime Cays - and it seemed that huge breakers were extending across the channel. I motored in slowly and then, knowing something was very wrong, I turned and powered out again. This is one of those situations where two people could have talked the situation over and figured it out. My sense of scale was off and I was bending the facts, trying to make them fit what I thought I saw.

"When I tried to call Porvenir on the VHF radio, a woman responded from *GODSPEED*, a yacht anchored in the Chichime lagoon. She sent her daughter out to look for me from the N shore of the islet and switched on her radar, but they couldn't spot me. 'You must be too far to the west,' she said, and then it finally came clear to me. By the time I had retraced our course back to the deep water of Porvenir Channel, it was dusk and I had to decide whether to tack offshore for the night and enter in the morning or to run in the channel and look for a deep anchorage clear of any reefs. I decided to continue in slowly, keeping to the deep (100'+) water, and to drop the hook in 40' just S of the Lemon Cays when Tina, the lady on *GODSPEED*, offered to come out in her dinghy and guide me through the gap in the reef into the Chichime lagoon.

"I accepted instantly and thankfully! We both turned on our masthead strobes so we could spot each other, and I headed slowly for her position while she dinghied out the pass and anchored on its S side of with a kerosene lamp. When I came up to her, she escorted me through the dogleg entrance of the lagoon and we were safe in 30' of calm water. You could hear the breakers roaring on the reef just a hundred yards away, and 50' in front of me was a low sandy island with palm trees and native huts with a slight smell of wood smoke on the air. My anchor dragged on the first try and I had to pull it in and set it again before we were secure. I switched off the engine, shouted profuse thanks to my rescuing angel, ate a can of fruit cocktail, and fell into the bunk for nine hours.

"Saturday morning, after a minimum of straightening up and with my "Q" flag flying, I headed for Porvenir about 5 miles diagonally across the channel. As soon as the dinghy was launched, I dressed and rowed ashore to clear into Panama but found the customs house closed. A lounge nearby said customs would open at 2 PM so I returned to the HM² for a spot of lunch and a bit of writing on this opus. Just before I was ready to set out again, a dugout canoe (powered by an Evinrude) brought Sr. Philippe Morales, the Jefe de Migracion out to the HM². He came aboard and acted as though he was on boats with the settees all pulled apart to dry every day! He was quite gracious and explained the procedure in English that was far better than my Spanish. My understanding is that entry at the San Blas is separate from entry into Panama and that a cruising permit is required. The upshot was a \$95 fee for everything. I could only agree and rowed him back to the dock.

"The customs house is probably the most deluxe building on the island except, possibly, for the small aircraft control building by the airstrip. The nearby Hotel Porvenir is nothing more than a row of shanties along a beautiful beach. Inside the customs house, the rooms were bare except for the Jefe's office which had a rusty metal desk and two swivel chairs. On the desk was a corroded manual

typewriter on which he proceeded to type and fill out a complete form at pretty good speed. One striker stuck in the up position every time its key was struck, and without stopping or looking he would flick it back with his finger. With the forms completed (he did most of them because I had forgotten my glasses), he took my travelers check and asked me to follow him to his room in a nearby building where he found change in various little boxes. He couldn't have been nicer but I'm sure I paid more than I should have.

"Now I'm hanging on the hook just off the island and waiting for Jim to fly in. In the meanwhile, it's a good opportunity to finish up this Boatlet and straighten up things aboard the HM². While I was typing the last paragraph, *COLUMBINE* came in to anchor. She's the boat I talked to at the SSCQ party, that came via Jamaica to avoid the strong winds. She just this minute arrived (started 10 days before I did), and had an extremely rough five day passage down from Jamaica with headwinds, they say. They lost their backstay in the process and had to jury rig one. Guess I'm not the only one that breaks up equipment.

"I've heard about the terrible cold weather up north and wish all of you could be here! You could even bring some cool air as it's downright hot and muggy here -- enervating, to say the least. I'm looking forward to all kinds of news in the mail when I get to Cristobal next week. In the meanwhile, I hope all is well with you.

"God bless! Karl, Dad, etc."

"PS: I did manage to get a phone patch via ham radio with B Saturday morning to let her know I'm ok. It's the first chance I had to spend the necessary time to log into the net, besides it was far too rough to even attempt putting the ground plate overboard on this passage. It was sure good to hear her voice." (Ed.: Sure was good to hear his voice, too...)

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LETTER FROM THE CREW (Jim Wall, of Burke, VA and Cookeville, TN) writes from San Jose, Costa Rica:

"Dear Barb, I flew in to San Jose last night after leaving Karl a bit abruptly Saturday morning. [In Panama City] We were walking by the Navy HQ and I thought I'd just stop in and ask if they could provide me transportation to the airport (cab is \$20 and the bus is complicated, slow, tortuous, and comes only within a Km). Before I knew it, the Marine guard had called me a Navy van, so I was off to the airport hours before necessary!

"I'm afraid I left K stuck with the Dutchman who crewed (one of the three linehandlers we picked up) for us through the Canal. He wants to go on to the Galapagos with K, but K hadn't decided if he wanted to sacrifice his solitude.

"The whole cruise was a fabulous experience for me: the leisurely cruising in the San Blas, the runs up to Portobelo and then to Colon, the lovely lovely bay at Portobelo, and the excitement of the Canal Transit! We never seemed to rush, but K just seemed to have an instinct for getting us to the right place

at the right time. He's quite a fellow (as I'm sure you have long-since concluded). His mind is continuously in gear, charting native lore and nautical data and gifts for home and a million other things. And unflappable -- even when I crash the dink into the HM², or nearly blow up the stove, or misunderstand the nature of packages 'in transit' and let him get taken for \$36, and I don't know what-all else.

"There was a bit of poignancy in his musing on Friday morning (after making the Panama Canal transit on Thursday) that it seemed a bit strange to dream of doing something for 25 years, and then in one mad 10-hour dash, suddenly it's over'. But, as an old teacher of mine used to say, every sport has its recreational carryover (reliving), and this one will last a long time for me ...

"Just wanted to give you a quick report. Best to all. Love, Jim"

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As indicated before, K really appreciated the letters so many of you have sent to him. I'll try to scribble on your newsletter envelope if he mentioned receiving yours. I know some other people have told me they wrote him, however, and so if you wrote him and there's no scribble on the envelope from me, it either means he overlooked telling me or else that it never got to him. International mail isn't absolutely foolproof. Somehow I expect that he got your thoughts, though ...

TECHNOLOGICAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT (CONTINUED): Exactly what is the name of the HM² or *Hilde M²*, (pronounced "Hilde M Square"). She's the second boat named for Hilde Melena, our daughter. (Actually, K wanted "Prinz Karl" and I wanted "Barbara, her boat" and neither one of us would give in, so we settled on Hil's name since we could agree on that ...). The "2" is "square" rather than "2nd" for we observed that boat prices go up exponentially with the length - HM² is four feet longer than the first HM and cost four times as much ...

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