



I'LL NEVER FORGET THE DAY...

I made it out of Cape Horn

PAUL HAWRAN: *Against all advice, I took the helm to realise my decade-long dream of circling Chile's notorious 'sailor's graveyard'*

Cape Horn is a headland I'd wanted to round for well over a decade. My interest began when I read about Patagonia and thought... if I go down to Patagonia, why not circle Cape Horn? I did as much research as I could about the area and was well aware of the dangers and potentially lethal sea conditions.

When I arrived at Port Williams, I spoke with a number of mariners who had also circled the Horn and the advice I received was, "Do your business and get the hell out of there." The weather is so erratic where the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans meet that there's no telling what can happen. I cleared my Outer Reef 880 *Argo* with the Armada who provided advice on the best route. I had engaged a really good weather router to provide me with the weather window – and away we went.

Cape Horn is about 90 miles south of Port Williams so the plan was to get to Caleta Martial, a bay a few miles away, anchor overnight and then move to the Cape in the morning. On reaching Caleta Martial, I was filled with a gamut of emotions – anxiety about the trip, relief that the journey to the Cape was nearing an end and excitement at going to a place few boaters go. Questions like what will the seas be like when we circle the Horn, is *Argo* ready for this trip, am I and the crew ready and what on earth am I doing here filled my head. My friends saw someone who was sullen, serious, concerned and were perhaps amazed I wasn't smiling. After hearing the horror stories of ships sinking, I just didn't want to become another statistic.

We awoke at first light and as I approached the north side of the Cape, I could see the barren nature of the island – gone is any vegetation due to the winds. There is, however, a surrealistic picture of an island saying, 'Come on sucker, let me show you what real sailing is all about.' As we headed west, I began to see the seas swell and become disorganised, the winds a mild 30 knots (which for Cape Horn is a spring breeze). We turned south to begin the circumnavigation and were quickly thrown into the power of two oceans colliding. The rocks on Cape Horn were being smashed by the seas. As we turned east, there was no manoeuvre which would have prevented *Argo* from rocking and rolling. I honestly don't know how high the swells or the waves were but *Argo's* stabilisers were working

Argo made it out of some of the world's most hazardous waters in one piece



Photo: Andrew Ulitsky

Turning south, we were quickly thrown into the power of two oceans colliding, the rocks on the Cape being smashed by the seas

overtime. We passed the high cliffs of Cape Horn, which had been photographed by many people, showing the magnificence of Mother Nature and the awesome power she holds. As we turned north, we began to see the famed lighthouse and the bay where we would stop (it wasn't an option to anchor – rather, we held the boat inside the bay). It was as if Neptune had looked at *Argo* and said, "Okay, enough is enough; I'll give you some tranquility now." Indeed, the seas became calm and the winds subsided somewhat as we entered the bay.

As we lowered the dinghy, I reminded myself of the counsel from other mariners – "Do your business and get the hell out of there." We climbed the rickety stairs leading up to the top of the island and were met by the Armada officer who had the duty – for one year – to stay on this barren island with his family. I thought to myself, "Is this just stupid, or a dedication that I can't appreciate?"

The officer reminded us of the power and fury of the weather in this part of the world, where winds

had been 175mph just a few days earlier. We walked the island and viewed with reverence the multiple memorials dedicated to the sailors who ventured along this part of the world and lost their lives. We left the Cape and began our journey back to the safe waters of Port Williams.

My feelings on the day of arrival to the Cape can be summed up as a sensation of full-body numbness. Was it because of everything I'd read about the Cape, the warnings of the mariners, the stark reminder of the dangers depicted in the various memorials or just sheer exhaustion of having gone the distance? I really don't know, and I guess it really doesn't matter. I made it full circle, and now I'm returning home having seen a wonder of nature that few boaters have or will ever experience. **MBY**

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