

Dare we depart on **FRIDAY THE 13TH?**



“Security is mostly a superstition... Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” -Helen Keller

Cruisers are a superstitious lot.

Some sailors wouldn't dare embark on a passage on a Friday, let alone Friday the 13th! We decided to tempt fate on our passage between the Gambier and Austral Islands of French Polynesia. As we readied to boat for a week at sea, Neil and I teamed up to tie down Ms. Sassy, our temperamental dinghy, on the bow. During the mundane endeavor, Neil slipped, his feet rocketing out from under him and his face careening directly into her fiberglass undercarriage. Face down, he slapped Ms. Sassy's bottom furiously amid a barrage of swear words, some of which cursed our decision to depart on Friday the 13th. Neil sat up, looking as if he'd taken a right hook to the bridge of his nose, and with a bright red abrasion carved in the center of his forehead. Yes, sailing across the Pacific is indeed a most hazardous endeavor!

We weighed anchor just before 10 am on Friday the 13th of May 2016 and motored through the necklace of coral that surrounds the Gambiers. Seas were lumpy, at 3 meters every 9 seconds, but our CM440, The Red Thread, was well-stowed and the skies were blue. From the get-go we set a good pace and raced under full sail at over 6 knots

within a few miles of Romano, a British-flagged Najad with Mike and Gill aboard, with whom we'd been buddy boating since Rapa Nui (Easter Island).

They say bad things come in threes. The second Friday the 13th mishap involved one of Neil's precious scotch glasses. A treasured gift from his brother, he had two glasses etched with the logo of his alma mater, the University of Washington. Both had survived for thousands of sea miles tucked in the corner of our dish cabinet, but it seemed King Neptune required the sacrifice of one. I opened the cabinet to retrieve a plate, and the shattered remains of one of his glasses stared back at me...

Friday the 13th's final trick also took place in the galley. Late in the afternoon, I was busy cooking a large pot of green curry with half a saddle of freshly slaughtered pork we'd bought from an islander just before departing. We were living without refrigeration in an effort to wring the last breaths of life from our waste of a battery bank (which we would later replace in Tahiti), and every nibble of fresh meat aboard our ship was in the pot, which was, I admit, too full to be simmered in a seaway. I lifted the lid to give the concoction a stir just as we heaved to starboard. Our gimble stove cocked backwards and then abruptly rocked the other direction as we rolled to port. The stovetop cover that generally rests unobtrusively behind the stove caught the lip of the pot and flung a ladle of curry, white potatoes, purple sweet potatoes, onions, garlic, carrots, and several hunks of pork behind the stove. I shrieked so loudly that Neil assumed I had been injured, and moments later he was at my side. Overfilled the pot as I may have, I naturally blamed the stove, who had robbed me of pork and precious rounds of our last remaining carrots!

By Jessie Mackelprang-Carter
Catalina Morgan 440

I dropped to the galley floor and folded over crossed legs, eyes inches from the floor. With the aid of barbecue tongs, I reached beneath a hot oven (I had bread baking) and retrieved as many morsels of food as I could clench with the tongs and plopped them back into the pot above. All the while my husband—his face abraded from the morning rendezvous with the dinghy—balanced the gimbaled stove with one hand and a now not-so-overfilled pot of curry [above my head] with the other.

We had paid the piper, which paved the way for the lovely sail we experienced thereafter. Conditions soon improved. We were graced by splendidly easy sailing, with light but consistent winds and fair seas, and the spinnaker we hadn't hoisted in nearly 5,000 nautical miles finally got to fly. The peacefulness of it all was worth the snail's pace.

We are sailing downwind along the 23rd parallel on seas as flat as the plains of middle America in a mere 6 knots of breeze. The only sound I hear is the gurgle of our hull skimming through the Pacific, the telltale sound that Red

Thread is trotting at just over 4 knots. Not even the breeze utters a whisper.

And like the hem of a silk nightgown dancing delicately in the breeze, the foot of our spinnaker sashays in the twilight. A three-quarter golden moon dangles teasingly amid billowing clouds, cascading gilded ripples across the sea. The moon reappears beneath the nightgown's hem just before the bow dips ever so gently, curtsying again and again and again. There is a spine-tickling sensuality to the scene.

Lovely, lazy sailing

There were no aggressive seas selfishly tearing a kayak from our stanchions, like the passage to Rapa Nui, nor back-to-back gales to test our stamina and conviction, as between Rapa Nui and the Gambiers. Other than hand-steering for several hours daily to compensate for our dilapidated batteries, the passage was flat out easy. We ran our Honda 2000i generator multiple times per day and turned on our chartplotter only intermittently to conserve energy. Our only breakages were the whisker pole, which fell onto

the lifelines when the topping lift cleat broke free when we were deploying the pole in the pitch black of night, and chafe at the luff of one of the batten pockets. Both were manageable and would be easily repaired in port.

We set a record for our slowest 24 hours in our 10,000 sea miles, covering only 84 nautical miles and, courtesy of a full moon and benign conditions, we sailed through a night under spinnaker for the first time ever. Our days were delightfully mundane, as we succumbed to the zombie-state of watch routines, meal prep, sail trim, and attempts to entertain ourselves. Neil read and watched movies. I read and wrote and turned the galley into a lab of culinary experimentation. I felt gratitude for the simplicity and monotony of the sail. On the afternoon of day 5, my logbook entry reads, "Enjoyed a pamplemousse topless on the bow in the sunshine." If that isn't a most delicious taste of freedom, I don't know what is!

The hand of bananas gifted to us by friends we'd made in the Gambier became a menace aboard. All of the fruit ripened at once, and we ate



28-inch yellowfin tuna caught on a hot pink hoochie approximately 400 nm from land.



Filleting the day's catch!

Vista from the summit of Mount Hiro on Raivavae, arguably one of the most stunning islands in the South Pacific.



bananas until we questioned whether banning the fruit altogether might be easier than ever consuming it again! Banana bread, banana muffins, banana pancakes, banana smoothies, bananas on oatmeal, bananas straight out the peel, bananas, bananas, blasted bananas! To be whinging about a banana surplus was a manifestation of how little we really had to complain out.

The aroma of banana bread, my mama’s recipe, is wafting from the galley oven and swirling with the scent of salt on the air, making my tummy growl. Daylight has broken my night watch, and the glow of the morning sun is diffuse behind the sea of clouds that blankets the sky, adorning it with a patchwork of shapes and shades of gray. It’s 7:30 am and only days separate us from the Australs, French Polynesia’s southernmost and least-visited island chain.

Mid-passage, we hauled in a 28-inch yellowfin tuna, and my cooking bonanza intensified! Beer-battered fish tacos (awesome!); dill, garlic, and lemon butter tuna steaks (divine!); fish head stock for soup (good); and eggs benedict with scratch hollandaise sauce (borderline failure). I even tried my hand at pickling the tuna (tasty!)

Two days later, as dusk fell and our fishing lines had already been pulled in, our depth sounder began to ping at 95 feet when we were in more than 10,000 feet of water! Neil quickly unspooled the handline and before he could fully release the line, we had a bite! He was a child fishing from the kiddie pond! Minutes later, our second 28-inch yellowfin tuna of the passage was being filleted in the cockpit! We turned on the refrigerator, pleased that we would have tuna to share with our friends upon landfall.

On the morning of our seventh day at sea, the spires of an emerald island palace etched the horizon and begged us near. Raivavae. Luihi the totem who resides in our cockpit laughed gleefully in the breeze, his hair a mop in a tornado, as we motored through the pass into Raivavae’s lagoon. We arrived with sun-kissed cheeks, eager to celebrate another successful passage beneath our bluewater belts.

Hereafter, we shall embark upon passages on Friday the 13th whenever the option presents itself! Will you?

Passage perks

- Point of departure: Taravai, Gambier Islands of French Polynesia; 23°08'.932S 135°01'.409W
- Point of arrival: Rairu, Raivavae, Austral Islands of French Polynesia; 23°51'.985S 147°41'.347W
- Distance traveled: 756 nautical miles
- Total time: 7 days, 3 hours
- Engine roaring: 6.5 hours
- Sails soaring: 164.5 hours (96%)
- Average speed: 4.4 knots

Author’s bio

Jessie and her husband, Neil, set sail from their home port of Seattle, Washington, in 2014 aboard CM440 hull #33, The Red Thread. In early 2017, they docked in Melbourne, Australia, where they are currently working to refill the sailing kitty. Read more about their adventures at www.svtheredthread.com. NOTE. This article is adapted from a previously published post on the author’s blog.



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