

Spike Africh - October 2004 San Diego to Nawiliwili

By Laura Wong-Rose



The day started out normally enough. I was sipping my second cup of coffee and checking my E-mail when I noticed a message originating from Nawiliwili Yacht Club. The E-mail stated "another sea miles opportunity" had just developed on a 70 foot wooden schooner named SPIKE AFRICA. The boat's owner had donated her to the non-profit organization Save Our Seas to be used for whale research and youth sail training programs in Hawaii. She'd had a delayed departure causing her to lose most of the delivery crew and they were looking for replacements to bring her from San Diego to her new home at Nawiliwili, Kauai. After a few calls to the captain I was told they were expecting a crossing of 14-16 days and the spot was mine if I could get to San Diego by Sunday, Oct. 10th.

Captain Steve and his father Chris picked me up at the airport in San Diego at 9:40pm and by 11:30 I had met my crewmates and was tucked into my bunk. The next morning was spent stowing galley supplies, lashing fuel barrels, removing sail covers and tidying the deck. After a few small delays we cast off 5:00pm on Oct 11th for what turned out to be an excellent adventure.

Our captain was Steve Voris, executive director of Save Our Seas Foundation and a resident of Kauai. The delivery crew consisted of Chuck Wilson, our navigator, who is also a delivery captain and resident of Long Beach, Louis Labonte, a true adventurer from Quebec who works as a professional guide for more adventurous hikers, climbers and skiers and myself, the live aboard owner of a 27' Albin Vega in Honolulu. I had thought there would be at least six crewmembers for a boat this size but between the four of us we had logged 8 trips from California to Hawaii. So far we had worked well together but I figured it could get challenging quickly with only four people. As we were leaving the harbor I started mentally working out the watch schedule which we had not yet discussed. Well, I had come with the idea of gaining more sailing experience and at that moment I was sure I would get it.

We spent the first few days getting to know Spike and falling into our watch schedules. We had decided to run 8pm-8am on dog



watches and 8am-8pm on regular 4 hour watches giving one of us a day “off” every 4th day. Our first test of working together as a team both mentally and physically came late evening on Day 4 when we were smacked by the tail end of a weather front that had hit the California coast. It took 3 hours to accomplish the task of bringing in all the sails, while doing the “victory at sea” thing, and we were exhausted. Spike had taken on water from both sea and sky. Having sat in the California sun for many years and her deck seams had shrunk. Captain Steve got very little sleep in those first few days and what sleep any of us had after that night was in a wet bunk. Days 5-8 held their own charms, no wind then lots of wind, frequent squalls and some great fish dinners.



Our next real challenge occurred around 3pm on Day 9 when our engine overheated. The guys spent the rest of the day and most of the night troubleshooting. On the 10th day thanks to our mechanic Louis, the installation of a new impeller, a roll of duct tape and a Fruit Loop box (long story) we got the problem solved. Spike had been down for a full 24 hours and was sitting at N28.18 / W130.17; not good for 9 days out! Before we got underway again we decided to take a vote, turn back or go ahead.

Louis’s words “I really want to see Hawaii” decided it all and said it all. We hadn’t come this far to turn back now.

Day 11 found us at N27.17 / W131.12 and still wearing our foul weather gear most of the time. Large swells started coming from the NW making Spike roll constantly and sleep became either uncomfortable or impossible. That day we also lost the use of our staysail after it blew out completely. On Day 12 we had another mishap that resulted in an 8” tear in the jib requiring a volunteer (me) to sit on the bowsprit and make repairs. The following days flowed together and saw us logging our first 100+ milers although we were still wearing F.W.G (the “F” standing for something completely different by this time!) Day 17 produced light enough winds to encourage Captain Steve to drop the mainsail, foresail and fisherman to hoist the mighty Gollywobbler which is classified as an A symmetrical spinnaker or “freaky big sail”. We “gollied” for two days before the winds dramatically changed direction and we dropped all sail to motor. Day 19 saw us sitting at N25.30 / W148.23 with 638 miles to go and again getting hit by large NW swells sometimes rolling Spike a full 30 degrees off our compass heading although we were still averaging 5-6 knots with just the jib. While sitting on the wheelhouse steering one got the sense of bull riding in slow motion. The most memorable part of the trip came on Day 21 when the swells changed direction and came directly from behind letting me “Spike Surf” on 15-18’

swells my whole watch.
What a rush.

The last evening of our trip was spent debating which came first, a long hot shower or an ice cold beer. We talked of how eager we were to get home and in the same breath how we couldn't wait to go out again. That night in my bunk I realized how lucky I was to have such an experience.



On the morning of Nov 2nd after 23 days at sea SPIKE AFRICA gracefully made her way into Nawiliwili harbor where we were met by friends bearing gifts of leis and hot pancake breakfasts. I couldn't think of a better welcome. My thanks to Captain Steve Voris for his unwavering patience even with the lack of sleep! Crewmates, Chuck Wilson and Louis Labonte for sharing their culinary skills



and endless humor and of course, owner David Katz for allowing me to bring Spike to her new home and her new career with Save Our Seas. I would also like to dedicate this article to the memory of Chris Voris who passed away in San Diego, CA. on Nov. 3rd, 2004 the morning after we arrived. Fair winds and following seas, God Bless.

The Crew: (From left to right) Captain Steve Voris, Chuck Wilson. Laura Wong-Rose and Louis Labonte at the end of the voyage in Nawiliwili, Kauai, Hawaii

