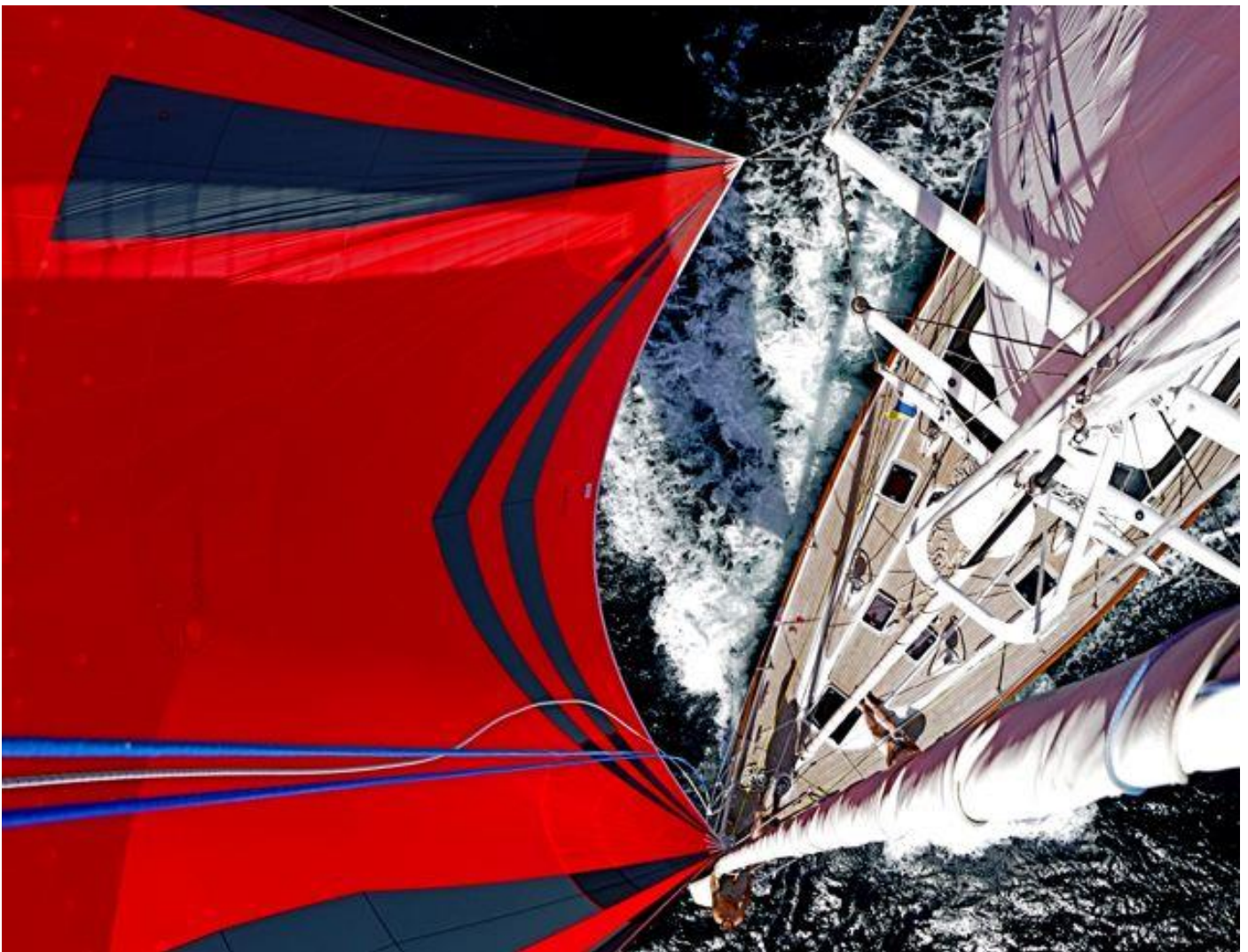


The Summer of '08

The summer of 2008 has to have been every sailor's dream, we spent the summer learning how to sail a 62ft boat and training friends and family to help. Then just one week after success in my little *RS Elite, E'Tu* in Cowes Week, we set off from Lymington to the Med then Gran Canaria to take part in the ARC. It was to be my first time sailing across the Channel, in fact my first proper sea passage.

Our first big challenge was going to be the Bay of Biscay. The first 12 hours saw no wind at all so we kept heading south hunting for wind. The forecast promised a NE wind filling from South.

As soon as we got some wind we put the Parasailor up and she really started to sail. We were cracking along having dinner at the table, and doing a steady 9-10kts on the rum line for Cape Finisterre. At this point Lucie pipes up that she was a little disappointed as she had been dreading Biscay for months and "it's a bit easy".



Big Red flying in the Biscay, tacked to the forestay to act as an Asymmetric.

She almost wanted bad weather just to "see what its like". Talk about 'out of the mouths of babes'. We made her suffer for those words later.

I had decided that as the forecast was a steady 18-20kts for the next 24-36 hours we should try running with the Parasailor up all night as this was our plan for the ARC. We should see how it goes. I can remember thinking as I was

going off watch that evening “Maybe I should take it down? The problem with this Parasailor is that it’s so stable it’s going to make us a little complacent if we’re not careful”. How right I was to be proved.

The wind built all night to a point where we couldn’t get the spinnaker down. Then a big gust hit us, we broached, and in trying to recover we blew the spinnaker out at the head. So we had 183 sq meters of sail, sheets, guys and sock all over the place; most of it over the side. Given the conditions, pitch black with a now F7 ‘up our chuff’, I had very few options but to get all hands on deck and start cutting. We managed to save all the sheets and guys, the sock and the carbon feeder and just about enough sail for pirate outfits at the next fancy dress party. The rest was floating away in the Bay.

Then followed the most exhilarating 24 hours of sailing I had ever experienced with big Atlantic swells coming in from the west clashing with a short sharp sea and a F7/8 coming in from the North East. The next day we checked our Maximum Wind recorded. 49.3kts, well it impressed me! Well done Lucie you got your wish.

I learnt my first expensive lesson that night. ‘If you think of it, do it’. Invariably you will regret it if you don’t. We weren’t racing so why was I pushing so hard? After that I changed my attitude to passage planning, it would no longer be ‘How quickly can we do it?’ but can we do it without damage to the boat or rigging. We had a long way to go and success would be judged by getting there safely not quickly.

Bob Marley land, here we come.



The ARC was fun, as it usually is for most people, a very well organized event and apart from the insane start that nearly had us de-masted from the get go, it went very well. Why do we all seem to get the ‘red mist’ at the start of a 2700nm Atlantic crossing? Mad!

Our arrival in St Lucia was a very emotional experience, Beans had left us in Gran Canaria and after few weeks at home she and my daughter Sophie, with others friends and wives, were waiting for us on the dock as we came in at 4 o'clock in the morning. After a very successful Caribbean season, visiting and enjoying most of the islands in the Eastern Caribbean we headed north to Newport, Rhode Island, via Bermuda, for the hurricane season.

The Taking of Manhattan

After leaving the boat in Newport, RI, for a couple of months while we had some home time we came back in September to cruise the North East coast. This has to be one of the most beautiful cruising areas in the world, and the seafood, amazing.

We ended up in Stamford, Connecticut, in Long Island Sound looking at the East River passage into Manhattan, NY.

The Official Pilot book describes it as follows. *"The East Rivers reputation as a tricky passage is well deserved. It's not and never will be a popular spot for casual sailing. In fact the East River is not a river at all. It's a 14 mile long tidal gate that's narrow and twisty with eight bridges that cross it and a tide that runs at up to 6kts".*

The toughest section is dog leg called "Hell Gate" named by the first European to navigate the East River, Dutchman Adriaen Block (of Block Island fame).

"The waters seem to boil at Hell Gate, where the river bends and the Harlem River joins from the northwest".

We set out from Stamford just before dawn on a freezing cold and wet morning. The winds and the tides were in our favour as we goose winged down Long Island Sound towards the entrance to the East River and our first bridge. We hadn't planned to do the East River under sail, we'd been advised that motoring is generally the preferred option, but as we progressed with the wind behind us and a favourable tide our confidence grew and with many quick gibes, we made excellent progress, timing the tidal switch perfectly. The early section of the river was pretty rough as we passed Rikers Island, the state penitentiary and Harlem but our first true view of Manhattan was quite special.



*'Our first view of Manhattan was quite special'. **UHURU** approaches Manhattan Bridge.*

In the end Hell Gate proved to be a pussycat, we came across it very quickly having just gone under two bridges very close together. Next thing we were heading directly towards Mill Rock (in the middle of Hell Gate) at about 11kts. A couple of 'calm' instructions to the crew, and we managed a perfect gibe in the middle of Hell Gate and were spat out the other side in an instant. Then we were then careering down a very narrow section of the river at 11-12kts with rush hour traffic jams on either side, I often wonder what the drivers must have thought that morning.

To actually sail down the East River was never my plan, but sometimes the moment is right and it all comes together.



UHURU goes 'up' Wall Street

Grenada bound

During a celebratory dinner at the New York Yacht Club, aren't reciprocal club rights a wonderful thing; we discussed plans for the rest of the 'season'. I needed to be in Grenada, WI, by the end of April. I planned to take *UHURU* out of the water for a few months during the Hurricane season this would allow me a chance to go home for a little while and do all the final preparations for going south to Antarctica. So we had six months to enjoy the cruise south.

School Holidays over



Taking her out of the water in Grenada.

By the time I finally sailed her into Spice Island Marine, Grenada, to be lifted into a hurricane cradle for the summer, there was a definite 'School holidays are over' atmosphere on *UHURU*. In the back of our minds was the knowledge that everything up to now had been just fun, when we come back, in three months' time, it was all going to get very serious. From the get go, we had a tough 2000nm up wind and against the prevailing current just to get around the 'shoulder' of South America, never mind what the Southern Ocean and Antarctica were keeping in store for us.