

2025 Pacific Puddle Jump Rally

Fleet Letter #3

Opting-In For Fleet Contact Sharing

If you've crossed large bodies of open water before, you know that it can get a little lonely out there. Even if you leave port with several buddy-boats that are headed in the same direction, after the first 24 hours or so you're not likely to see them again until you make landfall.

With that in mind, we assume you will have no objection to us sharing both your offshore and onshore contact info with other PPJ 2025 fleet members. However, **we respect your right to opt out of fleet contact sharing, other than during an emergency situation.** So if you need to opt-out please email us a note ASAP to: pacific.puddle.jump@gmail.com.

Check Out the PPJ Fleet Map

We strongly encourage all Puddle Jump crews to participate in our fleet tracking program, facilitated by PredictWind's Offshore App.

You can set up automated position reporting from a variety of devices such as an InReach, Iridium GO! and PredictWind's DataHub. This allows you — plus your family and friends ashore — to monitor your boat's progress and that of other PPJ boats, while showing detailed weather info. Check out the fleet map on the PPJ homepage. To participate, or simply get more info, email support@predictwind.com.

Needless to say, knowing which other boats are traveling on a similar course as yours can provide an added element of safety and increase your peace of mind. Beyond that, having the ability to make direct contact with your offshore neighbors can give you access to localized weather info in real time, and poten-



Making new friends is an obvious benefit of every Puddle Jump.

tially give you some new friends with whom to talk or text.

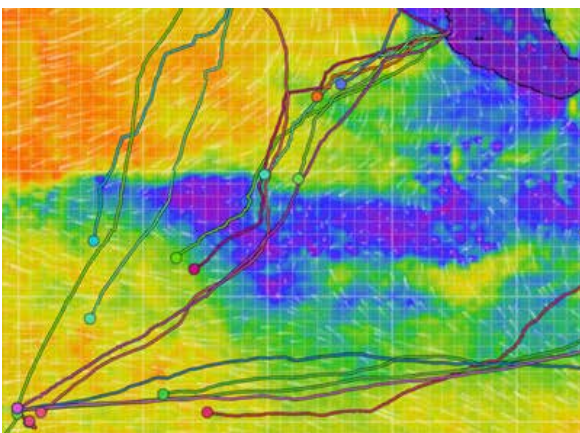
What to Expect Out There

When it comes to weather expectations for the Pacific Puddle Jump passage, the late Bob Bechler of the Gulfstar 50 *Sisiutl* said it best: "Prepare for the worst and deal with whatever you get!" Bob made the PPJ crossing at least three times — possibly four or five. But of course, no two trips were ever exactly alike, weather-wise.

Although Bob's advice may seem too simplistic to be useful, he actually made a very good point. That is, because you are setting off on such a lengthy passage (3,000 to 4,000 nm) not even the best weather routers can tell you in advance precisely what wind angles, wind speeds and wave heights you'll encounter along the way, or how large the dreaded doldrums will be when you finally reach them.

But after reporting on the Pacific Puddle Jump fleets for the last 28 years, I can tell you that no one has ever found themselves battling 50-foot waves or sustained winds of 50 knots or more during the cross-

PredictWind fleet maps can be viewed with or without weather data illustrations — fabulous resources.



ing. In fact, a complaint we inevitably hear from some fleet members every year is that they wish they'd had a bit more wind, not less. Since the first PPJ crossing in 1997, boats crossings from Mexico or Panama typically experience sustained wind speeds up to about 25 knots, with gusts potentially in the low-to-mid 30s.

With careful planning and a little luck you are likely to experience some of the glorious tradewind sailing that you've dreamed about. For navigators, one of the biggest challenges is picking the shortest route through the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (aka doldrums). This unpredictable mix of fickle winds, calms, squalls and thunderstorms is the ultimate "weather wildcard," as it constantly reshapes itself over a vast area. A few years ago, it even separated into two parallel bands for a day or two. So, while some boats might experience hectic conditions that call for multiple sail changes and course corrections, others might be able to motor across the ITCZ in a day or two during a flat calm.

As the tracks of previous fleets confirm above, Puddle Jumpers generally follow one of two routes toward their initial landfall in the Marquesas Islands or the Gambier archipelago. Many of those jumping off from Panama initially head SW toward the Galápagos Islands — whether they intend to stop there or not — to get clear of often-powerful mainland weather influences. From the Galápagos, it is roughly a 3,000 nm sail W through the single-digit latitudes, before

making landfall.

Boats leaving from California or Mexico angle to the SW or WSW and with any luck may hook into the prevailing easterlies until they're forced to cross the ITCZ.

One of our favorite overviews of the PPJ crossing comes from veteran offshore racer and cruiser Rob Macfarlane, who sailed from Banderas Bay to Hiva



Crossing the equator is a cause for celebration.

Oa in 19 days aboard his vintage Morgan 456 *Tiger Beetle*: Rob wrote, "Once in the trades we watched the ITCZ to the south, and paid attention to the East Pac High Seas Forecast, as they call out the areas of moderate and strong convergence, and you want to avoid those if possible. To that end we more or less aimed at a point 7°N x 130°W, which did four things for us: kept us in the

NE trades so we could make good westing, brought us to a narrow point in the ITCZ, such that the SE trades were roughly 300 miles south of us, kept us out of the ITCZ major convection zones, and set us up on a beam reach across the light SE trades to Nuku Hiva. The farther west you get while north, the better your reaching angle into Nuku Hiva to the south."

The only footnote we would add to Rob's advice is that you don't want to get too-o-o far west — many PPJ veterans would say not past 128W — or your reaching angle down to the Marquesas could get uncomfortably tight, especially if you're sailing a catamaran or a heavy-displaced monohull that's uncom-



Lying close to the equator, Nuku Hiva is a popular hurricane hole. Well-protected Tiahoe Bay is capable of hosting more than 100 boats.



With its tooth-like volcanic spires, Ua Pou is an unmistakable Marquesan landmark.

fortable when wind's on the beam.

One final thought here: Only a small minority of sailors carry paper charts these days. But if you can find a large “planning chart” of the Eastern Pacific, plotting your daily progress can give you and your crew the “big picture” perspective in a way that electronic charts can't replicate — it's also kinda fun, in an “old school sort of way.”

Are Cyclones a Threat in French Polynesia?

If you've done a little homework on the subject, you know that due to the Marquesas' location close to the equator (between latitudes 8° and 10° S), it would be virtually impossible for a full-blown cyclone to strike there. Consequently, the Marquesas, and particularly Taiohae Bay, is a favorite seasonal refuge for international cruisers.

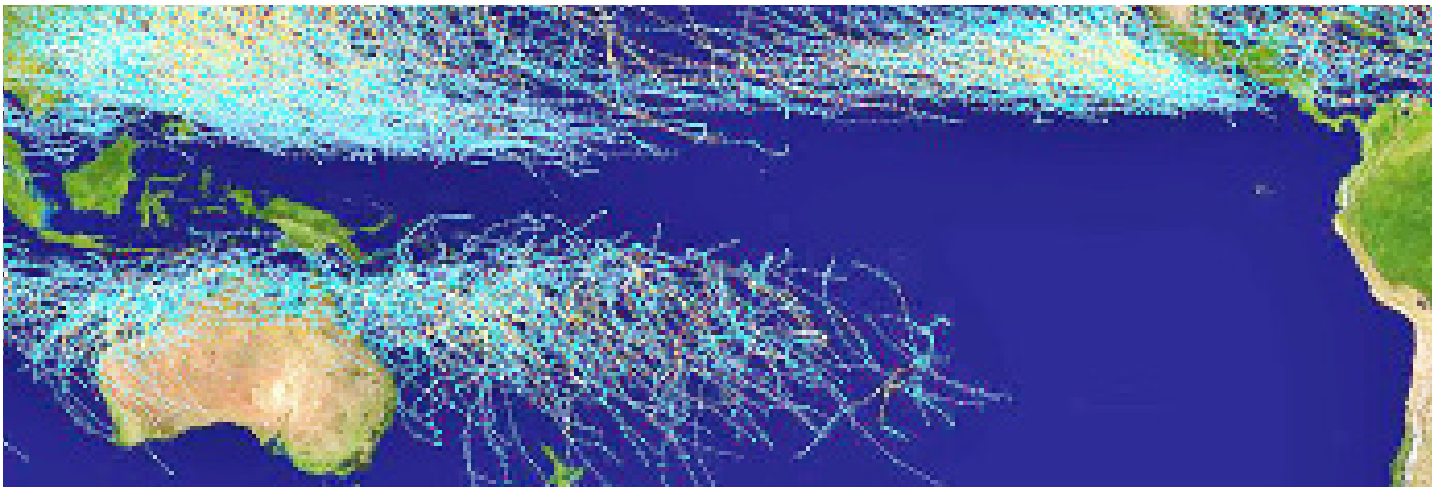
In the other four archipelagoes of French Poly-

nesia, the greatest possibility of a cyclone forming would be during March or April, at the end of the so-called rainy season (December – April). That said, there hasn't been a bona fide cyclone in these islands since 1983 — 40 years ago.

Why does French Polynesia see fewer seasonal storms than its neighbors to the west? Because its five archipelagos lie at the eastern end of the South Pacific cyclone belt, where tropical disturbances rarely have time to become threatening before moving further west. Meanwhile, Tahiti's westward neighbors, such as Fiji (1,800 nm farther west) tend to get stronger and more frequent storms, so they must prepare defenses appropriately.

While we are on the subject, here's a quick run-down of storm shelter options within French Polynesia. As mentioned, Nuku Hiva's Taiohae Bay is an excellent refuge (although often roilly), and there is a

Scientists tell us it would be virtually impossible for a cyclone to form near the equator. (Courtesy NASA)



well-protected boatyard on Hiva Oa.

In the Tuamotus, Apataki Atoll has a well-protected doldrums (or boatyard with dry storage).

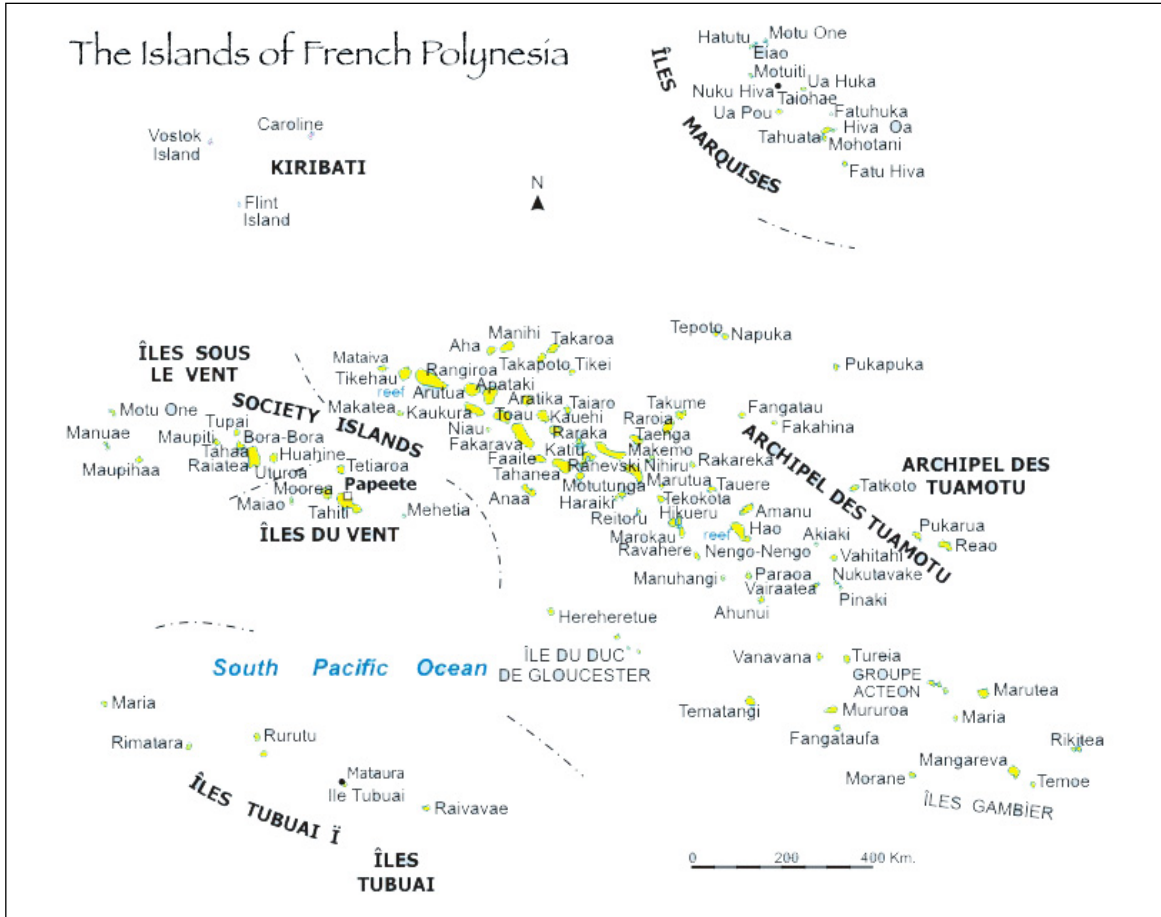
In the Society Islands, there are two marinas in Tahiti plus several hundred moorings that are somewhat protected by a large fringing reef. At the southern end of Tahiti, where it connects to smaller Tahiti Iti, a huge natural bay at Taravao offers excellent storm protection. And it's free to anchor.

In the Leeward Islands of the Societies, there are two boatyards, which are extremely popular for both

haulouts and dry storage. Both take advance reservations. There are also three marinas on Raiatea, but they are usually chock full of charter boats. Smaller monohulls, however, can sometimes find a temporary berth there.

You can find contact info for all these facilities in the Yellow Flag Guide to French Polynesia, which has just been updated, and is downloadable for free from the homepage of www.pacificpuddlejumps.com.

— Andy Turpin
PPJ founder & director



Rangiroa is French Polynesia's largest atoll. A day trip to its famous Blue Lagoon is always a highlight for sailors.