

# *Latitude 38*

PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP RECAP

— PARADISE RENDEZVOUS

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# PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP RECAP

In the realm of sailing, one of the most predictable rites of spring is the migration of dozens of cruising boats from the west coast of the Americas to the storied isles of French Polynesia. Typically, few of the crews know each other before they set out, but when they arrive at the exotic anchorages of the Marquesas, Tuamotus and Society Islands, they greet each other as friends. Whether they've made the passage aboard late-model half-million-dollar yachts or decades-old fixer-uppers, the shared experience of having crossed more than 3,000 miles of open ocean 'together' creates a special bond which only Pacific Puddle Jumpers know.

We caught up with many of this year's crews in Tahiti last month, and were regaled with tales about both the highs and lows of their crossings. As you'll read in their comments which follow, regardless of whether they'd departed from the customary Mexican ports of Puerto Vallarta and Zihuatanejo, from Panama or from Ecuador's Galapagos Islands, no two boats experienced the exact same wind and sea conditions en route. After initially fretting about the possibility of stronger-than-normal winds due to the La Niña effect, most complained of *not enough* breeze rather than too much,

proving yet again that it's pointless to over-think the possibilities — especially concerning crossing the doldrums. We'd bet most Puddle Jump veterans would agree that the best 'strategy' is simply to prepare for the worst, then make the best of whatever Mother Nature throws at you.

Since coining the phrase 'Pacific Puddle Jump' more than a decade ago, *Latitude* has been closely involved with this annual migration. We're proud to play a key role in facilitating the sharing of info through articles, web resources and via our annual 'kickoff parties' in Puerto Vallarta and Zihua. And we're extremely pleased to have developed a warm relationship with folks at the Tahiti Tourism

Board, who now arrange a splendid annual 'welcome' event for Puddle Jumpers called the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous. The idea is to celebrate the arrival of the cruising fleet while introducing crews to time-honored Polynesian cultural traditions.

On the afternoon of June 27, 28 boatloads of cruisers gathered along the quay in downtown Papeete — Tahiti's principal town and the capital of French Polynesia. "Maeva!" cried two smiling Tahitian girls

as the salty voyagers came up to register and receive their free Rendezvous tank tops and bags full of promotional goodies. "Welcome to Tahiti!"

Between stints of swapping passage-making tales with new and old friends, the sailors were invited to peruse a variety of exhibits set

**Left: Dawn and Tom of 'Warm Rain' show off their unique trophy. Below: Marquesan landfall.**



ALL PHOTOS LATITUDE / ANDY EXCEPT AS NOTED



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up to inform them about the touristic attractions on each island, the delicate ecology of the area's fringing reefs and vast lagoons, the process of cultivating black pearls and more. Cruiser kids were even shown how to weave palm frond bracelets.

A troupe of brightly costumed musicians and dancers soon arrived, who gave a heart-felt blessing of the fleet

*Four young women with thick, waist-length hair swayed gracefully to sweet Polynesian rhythms.*

before breaking into song. The men played drums, guitars and ukes as four young women with thick, waist-length hair swayed gracefully to sweet Polynesian rhythms. Later, the Rendezvous crews moved to a nearby restaurant for a cocktail party, also hosted by the Tahiti Tourisme and several local partners.

The big fun came the next day, however. As the fleet motored out of the harbor toward a 'pass' through the reef, they slipped past hundreds of outrigger canoes blasting across the lagoon, each with a lone paddler straining to keep up with the frenzied pace of the leaders. The adrenaline-infused competition was one of a vari-

**Racing across the clear turquoise waters of Moorea's lagoon was a blast — even when you capsized.**

10-mile rally-sail to Moorea, but no one really seemed to care — especially after being greeted at Moorea's Vaiare Pass by elaborately costumed paddlers in tradi-



**Crews from 'Charisma' and 'Cop Out' combined to win the outrigger canoe competition — with a little help from two local paddlers, that is.**

Even still, one boat capsized three times before completing its loop, but its crew returned unscathed and smiling.

A mesmerizing performance by a group of young dancers served as the event's finale, leaving everyone asking, "Seriously, how *do* they gyrate their hips so fast?"

Because Puddle Jumpers travel independently, it's impossible to pick a date for the Rendezvous that allows them all to attend. But for those who do, it serves

as a wonderful celebration of one of their lives' greatest adventures. And each participant goes away with a deep respect for their Tahitian hosts.

With that report as background, we'll share some insights

from members of the fleet.

## Expectations vs Reality

We love to study the passage data from each year's fleet (see the table on page 147). And we also find it fascinating to hear about how the actual experience of making a 3,000-mile blue-water pas-

ditional dugout canoes. After anchoring in the lagoon's brilliant turquoise waters, each Puddle Jumper was greeted on palm-lined Temae beach with fragrant flower leis, cool fruit juice and fresh *tiare* flowers which they notched behind their ears in the traditional Polynesian style. A trio serenaded them nearby.

A huge Tahitian '*maa*' luncheon was laid out for those interested in sampling traditional foods such as taro, yams, roast pig and *poisson crue* (a delicious specialty of raw fish marinated in coconut milk). As the sailors digested, local strongmen demonstrated the ancient

sport of Polynesian-style weight lifting — using giant stones rather than barbells. The cruisers declined the offer to test their strength, but many did try their luck at the next traditional contest, javelin throwing. For them, though, hitting the target — a coconut skewered on a 40-foot-high pole — seemed just about



ety of annual cultural events cumulatively called the *Heiva*, which draw athletes, dancers and musicians from even the most distant islands of French Polynesia's archipelagos.

Outside the pass, the breeze was disappointingly light for the

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sage compares to preconceived expectations that the voyagers had before setting out. No doubt much of the variation found in the answers which follow has to do with when, and from where, each crew departed — and perhaps, how lucky they were:

"We dislike long passages, but ours was easy: no winds above 30 knots, even in squalls; no lightning; no seasickness. We just find passages to be boring and we hate the constant rolling motion. But it is the price we willingly pay to make landfalls in wonderful places."

— *Dave Pryde & Jan Eckmann*  
Baraka, *Slocum 43*

"The La Niña year didn't happen with most of the Puddle Jumpers. I think our boat was the fourth to set out, and I was one of the Net controllers. Most boats were complaining of lack of wind. Of course, timing was everything."

*Gordon & Jeanine Wunder*  
Vari, *Simpson 39*

"Having done some tradewind sailing in the past," says Captain Pete, "we had a lot more wind than we had previously experienced. We definitely had the enhanced trade winds that were forecasted due to the La Niña weather pattern."

First Mate Lisa adds, "The unknown

or the imagined is typically tougher than anything we experienced. The most extreme conditions that we encountered were no worse than those we found along the coast of Northern California. The difference is the duration of time that you're exposed to the tough conditions."

— *The Leib family*  
59th Street Bridge, *Cal 2-46*

"The crossing conditions were worse than anticipated. We had light winds and beam seas until well south of the Equator.

— *Mike Scott & Liz Strash*  
Argonaut, *Cal 40*



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"My crossing was really easy, often boring. I spent about 30-40 minutes per day analyzing weather, and it really paid off. Boats that sailed the rhumbline got killed in light wind and squally conditions. I only sailed 240 miles further than the rhumbline but had a really, really fast passage compared to what I've heard from most other boats that left at the same time."

— Wayne Meretsky  
Moonduster, S&S 47

"We have no idea if our experience was typical, but it was much calmer than we expected and we ran the spinnaker day and night, which ordinarily we don't do. Have a light air sail for sure. We proved it is possible to go the distance in a small boat (via Galapagos).

— Richard Spore & Betsy Plotkin  
Qayaq, Valiant 32

"We are fairly new to sailing and sought to learn more about passage

making, ourselves, people of other cultures. The knowledge gained from the experience surpassed all expectations."

— John & Mary Hallinan  
Horizons, Southern Cross 39

"We certainly were reminded that life intervenes, even when you have definite plans. My wife Sally and I were to cross the Pacific together, but this plan was changed as Sally was seriously injured when a motorcycle hit her in Mexico. Her replacement, our good friend Gary Bracken, became quite ill two days into his crossing, forcing Grace to turn back toward Puerto Vallarta.

With help from Harbormaster Chris-

**Clockwise from upper left: Waterside serenaders; the young dancers were delightful; 12-year-old Marret smoked the competition in the 'fruit carrier's race'; there was no shortage of fresh coconuts; greeters at the pass; Sally learns some new moves; traditional stone lifting; greeting the greeters; the light-air rally to Moorea; "There's nothin' to it. Just try to hit that coconut up there."**



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tian Mancebo at Marina La Cruz (Marina Riviera Nayarit) and the Mexican Navy. Gary was spirited back to a P.V. hospital after an in-the-water evacuation at sea. Gary was diagnosed with a serious brain tumor, and is now back on Bainbridge Island, getting the best possible care."

"Life is too short not to come out this way. It is everything you've read about and then some.

"One warning, though. Our family was affected by ciguatera (fish) poisoning in Baie Hanamoenoa, Tahuata, Marque-

Tapa and Tikis. They don't need money, but there is no store where they can buy perfume, lipstick, cheap digital watches, jerry cans, fenders, anchor/dock line, etc. And the kids always need notebooks and pencils.



(Ed. note: We should add that Sally has now rejoined the boat. She and Geoff are happily continuing their cruise.)

— Geoff Lane  
Grace, Peterson 46

"With four on board we found the crossing to be a lot of fun and not the endurance contest it can be with a two-person crew. We had good camaraderie and everyone had a great time. The experience turned out to be more about the people than about the sailing — perhaps it always is.

— Brad & Sally Bagshaw  
Pax Vobiscum, Seattle, WA

## Impressions, Observations & Advice

Although the experiences of every crew were unique, they all gained a wealth of first-hand knowledge that provide insights for future cruisers:

"You can overload your boat with gizmos and gadgets. Focus on your sailing systems and make sure that those systems are bulletproof.

"Pick the right weather to leave in because there's nothing worse than not making good mileage from the start. Don't be too hung up about your course — maximize speed. Keeping the boat moving is key, especially for your mental health. Carry enough fuel to be able to motor at least through the ITCZ.

— Pete Leib  
59th Street Bridge, Cal 2-46

**"Welcome to Moorea!" Paddlers in ceremonial dress paddled out to greet the fleet, reminiscent of the days of Captains Cook and Bligh.**

sas. Later we found out that we were not the only ones this year to be affected from the same reef."

— Paul & Michele Grego  
Free Spirit, Catana 43

"U.S. dollars are useless in the Marquesas. Take a handful of Euros until you can get to the ATM in Hiva Oa. Fatu Hiva doesn't have a bank.

"In Fatu Hiva they trade for fruit, **Several boats suffered some form of rigging failure. Here, Steve Bott repairs a broken diagonal aboard his J/44 'Elusive'.**



"Speaking French will enhance your experience immeasurably. English isn't widely understood in the Marquesas or Tuamotus."

— Mike Scott & Liz Strash  
Argonaut, Cal 40

"Make sure you are comfortable rigging your pole for downwind sailing. Practice in calm waters before you jump offshore. Ditto on your cruising spinnaker if you have one — it gives a far more comfortable motion and greater speed than a poled-out jib in light downwind conditions.

— Dave Pryde & Jan Eckmann  
Baraka, Slocum 43

"What a great experience. We learned a lot about ourselves, each other, the boat and the ocean.

"Some cool things: Sea creatures such as dolphins, whales, boobies, flying fish and turtles; phosphorescence; sailing for long periods without having to touch sails or steering; crossing the equator and swimming around the boat in the middle of the ocean; the camaraderie with fellow Puddle Jumpers.

— Alan & Kristen Spence  
Charisma, Amel Mango 53

"Anchorages in French Polynesia are often quite deep, requiring the ability to anchor in 70 to 90 feet of water with an anchor that will develop full holding

ELUSIVE

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power at 3-to-1 scope. While *Grace* has both the chain and the anchor for this, our windlass has, on occasion, proven a

*"Although we gazed for hours at the sea and sky, our thoughts usually found their way to people, concepts and things that matter."*

bit underpowered. We would consider a more powerful windlass.

"There was nothing on the passage to compare with the warm friendship, cold beer, and lemon meringue pie with which *Solace* greeted *Grace* upon our dropping anchor in Nuku Hiva."

— Geoff Lane  
*Grace, Peterson 46*

"Although the boat is always moving and the sea/weather always changing, there is an underlying sameness that is

conductive to contemplation. We found our thoughts drift beyond technical aspects, the immediate; beyond the sun, wind, moon, stars and water; beyond seaworthiness, the set of the sails and the cut of the jib. Although we gazed for hours at the sea and sky, our thoughts usually found their way to people, concepts and things that matter. We think of each other and the state of our relationships with family, friends and God.

— John & Mary Hallinan  
*Horizons,  
Southern Cross 39*

**When the Norseman 447 'Island Time' crossed the equator, Mary Ellen played the role of King Neptune for the obligatory ceremony.**



ISLAND TIME



**At Papeete, fleet members were called to the gathering on the wharf in the tradition manner — with blasts on a conch shell.**

Unless you have four or more crew, or multiple complete backup electronic autopilot systems, don't sail without a self-steering vane.

— Ron & Mary Ellen Leithiser  
*Island Time, Norseman 447*

"We were 'attacked' by a whale on the crossing. My wife would say it 'loved on us.' It surfaced under us while we were making 2 knots in light wind, scraped a bit on the keel and then gave us a bit of a push along. Luckily, it chose the keel rather than the rudder. We were a bit terrified at the time to think of making the 3,000 nm crossing rudderless. Perhaps the whale was lonely?"

— Jeremy & Meghan White  
*Madeline, Gib'Sea 34*

"Weather routing information from Don Anderson and Commanders' Weather was quite valuable. Our Iridium phone helped tremendously by allowing us to contact tech support to resolve generator and watermaker issues at sea. Our Monitor windvane steered over 95% of the passage and suffered no failures.

## 2008 PUDDLE JUMP PASSAGE DATA

Boat Name	Boat Make & Length	Captain & Crew	Boat's Homeport	Departed From / Date	Landfall & Date	Days Xing	Miles Xing	Eqtr X Long.	Engine Hours	Best 24 Hr	Worst 24 Hr	# Fish Cght	Breakage & Breakdowns
<i>Argonaut</i>	Cal 40	Mike Scott & Liz Strash	Seattle, WA	Puerto Vallarta 3/17	Fatu Hiva 4/14	28	N/A	132W	43	155	24	2	head, refrigeration
<i>Baraka</i>	Stocum 43	Dave, Joel Pryde & Jan Eckmann	Richmond Bch, WA	Puerto Vallarta 4/8	Nuku Hiva 5/1	22	2,903	130W	116	151	97	0	hatch & port leaks
<i>BeBe</i>	Amel 53	Bill & Judy Rouse	St. Thomas, USVI	Galapagos 5/3	Hiva Oa 5/23	20	3,000	88W	241	177	110	0	GPS antenna
<i>Charisma</i>	Amel Mango 53	Alan & Kristen Spence	Napa, CA	La Cruz, 3/15	Hiva Oa 4/9	25	1,900	132W	85	147	40	9	whisker pole, alternator, watermaker, self-steering vane
<i>Elusive</i>	J/44	Steve & Wendy Bott	Seattle, WA	Tenacatita 3/17	Fatu Hiva 4/4	17	2,919	131W	38	205	117	0	diagonal shroud, fridge pump
<i>59th Street Bridge</i>	Cal 2-46	The Leib family	San Francisco, CA	Mazatlan 3/11	Hiva Oa 3/30	19	3,000	131W	62	194	128	0	1970s-era autopilot
<i>Free Spirit</i>	Catana 43 cat	The Grego family	Hollywood, FL	Galapagos 5/3	Hiva Oa 5/23	20	2,980	87W	130	191	135	9.5	none
<i>Gingi</i>	King's Legend 41	John Bringetto & Amanda Berks	San Francisco, CA	Cabo San Lucas 3/15	Hiva Oa 4/10	26	2,600	129W	129	130	59	0	wheel pilot gear, broken batten, cracked gooseneck, furler failure
<i>Grace</i>	Peterson 46	Geoff Lane, W Hall, G Engelman	Bainbridge Is., WA	Puerto Vallarta 4/11	Huku Hiva 5/2	21	2,800	130W	48	174	60	0	inner forestay attachment, traveler block, bent gooseneck
<i>Horizons</i>	Southern Cross 39	John & Mary Hallinan	Seward, AK	Cabo San Lucas 3/24	Fatu Hiva 4/17	24	2,690	128W	53	143	26	0	watermaker switch, fridge pump
<i>Island Time</i>	Norseman 447	Ron & Mary Ellen Leithiser	San Diego, CA	Puerto Vallarta 3/22	Fatu Hiva 4/11	20	3,035	130W	16	186	77	0	generator pump, watermaker
<i>Linda</i>	Rhodes Bounty II	Steve & Linda Maggart	Elephant Butte, NM	Cabo San Lucas 3/15	Nuku Hiva 4/9	25	2,782	130W	19	162	51	2	injection pump, vane steering lines
<i>Madeline</i>	Gib'Sea 34	Jeremy & Meghan White	Portland, OR	Galapagos 2/26	Fatu Hiva 3/25	28	3,100	---	23	140	-32	6	chafe, port leak
<i>Migration</i>	Cross 46 tri	Bruce Balan & Alene Rice	Long Beach, CA	Galapagos 3/27, via Easter Is & Pitcairn	---	32	3,776	---	85	164	29	0	solar panel, windvane during gale
<i>Moonduster</i>	S&S 47	Wayne Meretsky	Alameda, CA	Punta Mita 3/22	Fatu Hiva 4/10	18	2,965	132W	22	186	95	0	fridge pump
<i>Morning Light</i>	Hylas 46	Jaime & Christine Tate	San Diego, CA	Puerto Vallarta 3/26	Fatu Hiva 4/15	19	2,850	131W	74	178	120	2	none
<i>Our Country Home</i>	Hans Christian 41T	Ralph & Glenda Johnson	Corpus Christi, TX	Puerto Vallarta 4/9	Hiva Oa 5/3	24	3,095	129W	71	155	102	0	none
<i>Pax Vobiscum</i>	Fast Passage 39	Brad & Sally Bagshaw	Seattle, WA	San Jose del Cabo 3/20	Nuku Hiva 4/14	25	2,800	130W	60	144	60	1	broken block, chafe, fridge
<i>Qayaq</i>	Valiant 32	Richard Spore & Betsy Plotkin	Seattle, WA	Galapagos 4/26	Hiva Oa 5/25	29	3,136	88W	86	132	89	0	deck light burned out
<i>Shilling of Hamble</i>	Oyster 435	Dennis & Janet Knight	Southampton, UK	Cabo San Lucas 3/29	Fatu Hiva 4/20	22	2,814	132W	60	170	95	0	none
<i>Vari</i>	Simpson 39' cutter	Gordon & Jeanine Wunder	Bellingham, WA	Puerto Vallarta 3/13	Hiva Oa 4/5	22	2,750	127W	33	161	80	1	spinnaker pole
<i>Wind Dancer</i>	Catalina 36	The Burns family	Juneau, AK	Cabo San Lucas 3/15	Hiva Oa 4/11	27	3,000	127W	100	140	60	3	running lights, chartplotter

Please note: Many more vessels did the Puddle Jump this year, of course, but those who responded, above, give representative sampling of passage data.

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"Overprovision as much as possible as everything in French Polynesia is very expensive. Having experienced crew on board made our passage that much easier and enjoyable."

— *Jaime & Christine Tate*  
Morning Light, *Hylas 46*

"As far as gear failures go, I have to go along with Captain Ron's theorem: "If it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen out there."

— *Gordon & Jeanine Wunder*  
Vari, *Simpson 39*

"Go now. It's wild, fascinating and beautiful. The places you read about 20 years ago are already long gone, but there's plenty to see, experience and enjoy. Take your kids, leave your dog, sell your car, rent your house. Get a new main, a spare jib, an oversized windlass, 1-2 gallons per hour per person of water-maker capacity, a big alternator, a couple of solar panels, an SSB with SailMail, radar, GPS and a fast dinghy. Overhaul your engine, install LED-based running and cabin lights, spend as much money



WAYNE MERETSKY  
**Steady breeze over the flat waters of a Polynesian lagoon made ideal conditions for spinnaker flying off of the S&S 47 'Moonduster'.**

as you can afford on high-efficiency refrigeration and icebox insulation. Practice reefing at night in the rain while naked and anchoring on 3-to-1 scope in 30 knots of wind until you learn they're both easy. Then write that resignation letter and get on with your life."

— *Wayne Meretsky*  
Moonduster, *S&S 47*

**A**s you read this, most 2008 Puddle Jumpers have already moved on to the Cook Islands, Samoa and points west. Many will find themselves in New Zealand before the beginning of the cyclone season, while a few will avoid the threat of storms by sailing north to minimally visited places like Kiribati and the Marshall Islands. In the coming months you'll find reports from many of them in our *Changes in Latitudes* section.

As for next year's fleet, sailors all along the West Coast are already poring over charts and cruising guides. And out in Tahiti our liaisons are already making plans for 2009 Rendezvous!

— **latitude/andy**