



Decisions for a safe and successful Crossing. – John Tildesley, Navigator

A squeeze in the isometric pressure within a high pressure system coupled with predictive weather information would enable the decision to sail. High pressure prior to the start meant that the sea state would be reasonably flat due to the lack of wind and the squeeze meant that a cold front was passing overhead of the high pressure allowing some wind with no danger of gales. The alternative was to sail just as the high was being replaced by low pressure, this being more risky.

On Friday 7th of September things began to look promising with just this situation forming and by the following day it looked as if we had our first opportunity for a Monday departure. However Al had an important meeting on that day with AJ so it was not to be but we did use the time carefully to monitor the weather pattern that day to see if it would work....and to our delight it did! Back to staring at the Met-office web site to see what the gods would throw at us next. Bingo, exactly the same pattern began to form on Tuesday and on Wednesday and so it looked like Friday was the day.

Leaving Aberdovey in the Outward Bound 30' jet engined rib on Thursday afternoon made for a flat and fast trip across the Irish Sea to Wicklow. Averaging 16 knots, the crew of four arrived with plenty of time to sample the local black stuff, Rupe and Al arrived by car later with Al's Dad at the wheel. Fuelling up before the garage shut and then a good feed, meant that we were prepared as best as we could be for The Crossing (well if you call sitting in a Chinese restaurant at 12.45 am with good friends and lively banter suitable preparation, then we did it!) 6 am came around all too quickly and a rush to look out the window confirmed that yes, it had rained exactly when predicted and there appeared to be a breeze from the anticipated direction. Sailors parted for the beach and the support crew headed for the rib.

Al and Rupe needed a NNW 15-20 knot wind to sail back to Aberdovey, our preferred port to land. However that meant leaving the shore under the lee of the land. The wind was only 8 to 10 knots 500 meters off shore so the lads were faced with having to believe that drifting East away from the beach was the only course to take. Tough one for any kite surfer with the prospect of 75 miles to go! Once off shore, the wind picked up enough and the lads, albeit being slightly underpowered, were riding into the sun.

Two and half hours later, the Irish coast was still very much in sight and we were only 6 miles off shore. We agreed that the conditions were not ideal for a down winder to Dovey and the emphasis must be to sail as fast as possible to the East to find Wales. This meant a predominant port tack and no rest for the back legs as

tacking to relieve the pain meant going back in the wrong direction. Again tough for Al and Rupe. With there being a slight difference in speed between the two riders (one obviously having had more pies than the other!), it made the support crew work even harder to keep the lads fuelled up (skilfully planned by Sarah our quartermaster), while the leading rider was forced to have spells in the drink waiting for the other. Handing over vital sustenance in lumpy seas is no mean feat and Jay and AJ with their expert close quarters boat handling kept the riders safe at all times.

Four times the wind died off and the riders were left sitting in the sea trying to keep their kites in the air, wondering what was going to happen next. On the support boat, the only thing we could do was mull over the options and hope for an increase in wind (predicted to drop in the late afternoon). We debated whether there was more wind to come under that cloud and just hoped and prayed for the best. Deciding that neither rider was in danger, we hung in there and the wind popped up when Rupe transferred from a twin tip to his surf board with no straps. That made for some interesting riding through the over falls which were good and angry as the tides were on springs. Continually having to work their kites back and forth, up and down to maintain flotation was really hard for the lads. This went on for hours. Indeed these sorts of conditions are tougher for the riders than a really good powered up session, when the rider can lie back in his harness and just glide on the waves. Needless to say, neither performed any back loops, big airs or handle passes much to the disappointment of the support crew (and the one and only coaster passing by).

The decision to sail on the fastest track meant that the nearest landfall was going to be Anglesey. Hours later, Holy Island appeared on the horizon and the boys finally had something to go for. The closer we got, the more excited and determined were the sailors. The wind, which was due to drop, seemed to be holding and we knew that there would be more wind around the headland off Holy Island. The next decision was where the nearest sandy beach was.....at this stage I have to admit we were ill prepared with no charts for this particular area due to the fact that we never thought for one moment we would be this far north of Aberdovey - lesson learnt! All we could see were lots of cliffs and not a lot else.

Leaving the riders behind us, we went for a reconnaissance. But the wind then dropped again and the sea around this area is full of angry over falls so we aborted that and decided to stick with the riders. As we got in closer, a beach appeared, albeit between a hazardous pile of rocks.

Rupe skilfully negotiated his way through to the beach and Al, following at this stage, fell a little downwind and was obviously not going to make that particular beach. Sailing nearer and nearer to the rocky island, we thought he was just going to can his kite and hope that we could pick him off the rocks. The wind was dropping more. Amazingly he found a little inlet and landed on terra firma. Rupe body dragged round the rugged inlets and joined Al. They had done it! Shore to shore, West to East, Ireland to Wales, a first, a truly Corinthian achievement. Well done you guys and it was a privilege to be part of such a wonderful effort to raise much appreciated funds for such good causes.

Cheers, JT
John Tildesley.