

Lumina through the North West Passage

The fleet splits with two different strategies

Post 16



We were alone at Letty Harbour with most of the rest of the boats doing the East West transit choosing a bigger bay just on the headland, about 20 miles up the coast from where we were. With the gale blowing itself out we pulled up the anchor and said goodbye to our private little haven wondering when the next visitor may come by. We had a fine sail up the lee of the headland of Cape Parry but as we got to the end we had to turn into the wind to cross Franklin bay, then round another headland, Cape Bathurst and on to Tuktoyaktuk. Initially I had hoped that we could have done a couple of tacks into the bay and out again to take in a view of the Smoking Hills but a severe current and unhelpful wind meant that this was not to be.

Across the bay we went but later as we heard from another boat ahead of us, the current was strong on the other side towards the headland, so we then headed out towards the mouth of Franklin Bay to give Cape Bathurst a good offing. Then with Cape Bathurst behind us we continued into the wind which was now getting rather nastily strong. With nowhere to go to hide, and also no time to be lost we continued. By now we had the engine running at 2200 revs when normally we tick along at about 1500 but still were managing less than 4 kn. We therefore had one of the conundrums of sailing. We could have set a different course, direct for Alaska and Nome which would have enabled us to sail at this stage, or we can ex-



Waiting for the fuel truck on the Dock at Tuktoyatuk

pend even more fuel going to the settlement with a fuel station. It is around 1200 miles direct or 1300 to go via Tuk and having already expended about 40% of the fuel since Cambridge Bay one would be committing to be able to sail a good proportion of the way, whereas by doing the detour we could refuel and potentially motor all the way if necessary. Now being September, time is really not on our side and I thought the detour would be pretty much mandatory for all boats.

So now there were 4 boats heading for Tuk, and a couple going

direct, plus two more who had left Cambridge Bay late due to mechanical issues (one of which was now at another settlement waiting for an injector pump!) With the wind dropping, we arrived at the entrance to Tuk which is situated on the delta of the Makenzie river. This apparently is only second to the Mississippi in terms of volume. The whole coastline as you approach is very shallow and you have to get used to sailing in water 5-6m deep when normally you would have your eyes glued to the depth sounder in such situations. The channel is several miles marked with buoys, and we met Voyager coming out at the entrance. They had arrived the night before and just refuelled. Eventually after rounding a gravel spit you enter the lagoon which forms the harbour. There were rusty barges everywhere, some moored, some on the shore and a few wharfs. We could see Thor, another passage maker up ahead and tied up to some rusty piling next to them.

After a WhatsApp call to Rick, the fuel truck man and within about 10 minutes he had arrived. We took on 432 litres, exactly the same amount as we had in Cambridge Bay. With night approaching there seemed little point in dashing back out as after all it isn't a race although some seem to think it is... Also it would be a shame to have come this far and not actually have a brief look at the place. So as it started to rain, we set off into town, about a mile away. To reach the road we first had to pass a number of semi derelict sheds and then a massive accommodation complex that may have a thousand rooms. All this and the barges in the lagoon is a relic of the





The first road to anywhere we had seen since Oban. You could drive from here all the way to Patagonia if you so desired...

oil boom of the 80s and 90s. Like the USA exploring further along the coast at Prudhoe Bay, Canada looked for oil here, however unlike the US, which subsequently developed the oil field and built the pipeline across Alaska, Canada explored the oil field but never developed it and consequently all the infrastructure created during that time is now gradually falling into disrepair.

Passing the accommodation blocks, three story buildings all built on stilts to stop them sinking into the permafrost, we came to the road and turned towards Tuk. After walking a few hundred yards in the rain I realised that this is an actual road, one that goes somewhere, not just round the settlement as everywhere else we had been since Oban. All the settlements in Greenland and the Canadian arctic are not connected, but here you could carry on walking, or maybe driving until you got to Patagonia! With the rain steadily falling I stuck my

thumb out and the first pickup stopped. It was a retired couple who had been out to pick some blueberries but the rain convinced them to return another day. They said that before the road was completed and they had the oil boom, the town had everything. However now since 2017 the Dempster Highway was complete but now they have nothing except for a couple of supermarkets. They did however say they would take us to Grandmas Kitchen in case it was open.



Downtown Tuk

Unfortunately, as they thought, grandma was feeling her advancing years creeping up and had closed early for the day so we went to the store, bought a pizza and some Coke (and an emergency 900g packet of Werther's originals for Carol) and walked the mile or so back to the boat. Its strange what you crave after just living on provisions on the boat for four months!

At first light we cast off from the dodgy dock and headed over to Hauru, another yacht that had arrived in th night and were anchored. We exchanged info on the fuel delivery situation and continued back out, past the gravel spit with the famous End of the Road sign which is the destination for all the motorhome explorers on their big adventure, to us however it was the nearest we had been to civilisation for months. Following the buoys out it became immediately apparent that the wind was not quite in the di-



One of the remaining active DEW stations erected during the cold war to detect incoming missiles

rection forecast and we would be motoring into it.

With the trusty Starlink not missing a beat we could now see that the fleet were in fact split, with some electing to go direct to Nome, missing the Tuk fuel stop, but saving about a hundred miles. I had never had this on my radar on the basis that the detour was worth having full tanks for the 1300 mile leg to Nome. However, bearing in mind the three day struggle against the wind and extra fuel used getting there, the direct option may prove to be a good move. It really depends on how much they will be able to sail rather than motor. Time will tell.....

So now we are on the fourth day of motoring along the North coast towards Point Barrow, where we finally turn south. We have had two patches of wind up to 20kn against us, a period of complete calm and everything in between, but no wind in our favour. Another 24 hours should see us turn the corner with at last some decent wind—that is unless the forecast does not change by then.

Best wishes from the good ship Lumina, Tim and Carol

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