

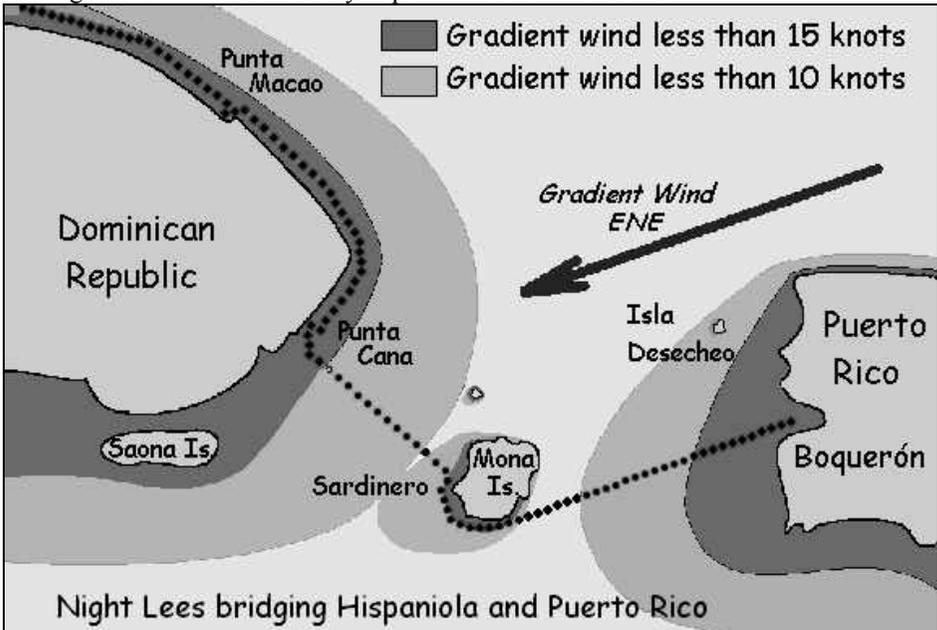
INTEGRATING EFFECTS

As my run from Rum to Mayaguana using the Crooked-Acklins night lee shows, the longer sailing route through the islands can beat the rhumb lines. I gained several days with just one overnight! And the alternate landfall would have worked almost as well.

When I step off various routes for the conditions I've got, I often wish my dividers could lay out the miles in yellow and blue for daytime and nighttime sailing. Then I could bend the routes near different islands and slide the day and night strips back and forth until I knew exactly where I would sail and when, such that each island's diurnal effect got used to best advantage. Maybe someone can do a computer program that lets me drag day and night denoted routes around like elastic Bezier curves. Don't you wish?

With or without nav aids for it, the real payoff of threading the islands comes in integrating their effects. For an easy to understand example of this technique, consider a trawler crossing the Mona Passage between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico.

Assume that the trawler does 8 to 10 knots, and that it leaves on the northeast corner of Hispaniola. The forecast calls for under 15 knots for the first night, dipping to 10 or under the second night, returning the following day to normal trades. The trawler uses two night runs in calms and a day in port while the wind blows.



The first night the trawler sails to one of the east coast ports in the weak night lee, hugging the big island's coast to get the most of it. The second night the trawler runs in the much larger night lee, following it out into the passage as it spreads eastward from the big island. She then gets the most out of Mona Island's shelter from seas and wind, and continuing, scoots into Boquerón in the morning with the Puerto Rico night lee just evaporating behind her.

A slower boat can make four steps of it, resting at Mona Island to see, as the weather reports unfold, if it gets another night added to the window.

Most motorsailers can follow the fast or the slow trawler routes.

Sailboats that can't do the quick stepping needed here should use an ESE wind less than 15 knots. On the night run down the coast in ESE light wind, the night lee extends more than it does with ENE wind. At daybreak a sailboat should take a sailing tack north-east, getting off the coast before the daytime accelerated winds and heaping seas begin. Later that night the sailboat can outflank any storm cells which might blow out to sea from the collapsed Puerto Rican coastal front. Finally, they tack down through the Puerto Rican night lee to a calm and peaceful early morning arrival (see *A Tale of Two Crossings*, p59).

If you draw a sure two day forecast of flat seas and no wind, then you should of course drive straight across the Mona and damn the tactics. But don't wait for that to happen.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Routes against the trades had little or no traffic until the age of steam. Only commercial sail existed until then, and owners who valued their ships found the windward route to the islands not commercially viable. Even the infamous Triangle Trade, slaves for sugar for rum, swept through downwind and along the North Equatorial Current from Africa to Boston. Without trade nations don't advance, and the small economies of the windward islands of the trades remained desperately poor through the 20th century.

By the time steam came to replace sail in the trading routes, the production and population centers had already established themselves, and they didn't include the islands. Real development didn't begin in the islands of the trades until the air age which brought tourists. Now yachting enthusiasts brave the thorny path between them.

Vague notions of iron men on wooden ships have shamed some of us into navigating on the "you have to take whatever comes" principle. Yet for four and a half centuries practically no one agreed to take what came by sailing against the trades. Those iron men loved their ships and their skin too much to take what the trades dished out. Then came the yachties: yuppies, early retired baby boomers, brokers and lawyers who thought they had the stuff the old iron men did not. And Mom and Pop who knew they didn't.

Gung-ho yachties turned cruisers punch the rhumbline from island A to island B like they imagine the iron men of old had, but never did. But despite their brave and knowledgeable talk at the bar, I've noticed some curious behaviors. For example, the deeper the water the quicker they seem to want to go and get it over with, though it takes only inches of water in which to drown. Few sailboats actually take my sailing route across the Mona Passage during light prevailing conditions. Halfway across they crank up the revs and bash straight east like I zipped by graveyards in my childhood. Many seem to fear the dark. They start out in the morning and take 2 days and a night to cross, discarding the night lees of the large islands on either side to crash and bang into daytime trade seas.

Somewhere between quitting the job and casting off, many cruisers have lost their first principles of cruising navigation: safety, comfort and pleasure. I profoundly hope the above discussion increases your understanding of the effects of islands on the trades to the point that you can reap your return to those three basic principles when you sail them.