

Sunny Spray's adventures, episode 10

April 14, 2016, 14°01.313'NB; 16°42.574'WL, Marigot de Ndangane, Senegal

Translated, April 15-19, 2016

Dear all,

My last report dated from March 12, and ended in the middle of the sea, 300 miles north of Dakar, Senegal. In the meantime we have visited Dakar and travelled further south to Sine Saloum, an extensive river delta and nature reserve south of Dakar and just North of Gambia.

This week was the first one in which we started to enjoy some higher temperatures (although the last few days were really bad, with a *harmattan* blowing and temperatures rising to 42 degrees Celsius inside). At first we were anchored in the Marigot de Gokhor, a creek opening perpendicular to the coast, its opening directly facing the main entrance of the Saloum River. Only an extensive sandbar at the entrance made it a suitable anchorage, and the in-blowing sea breeze made it fresh to even cold! Our current location, though, is much farther inland.

We have to leave Senegal before April 30, because that is the expiry day of the Senegalese boat permit. The plan is, once we have left, to see whether we can sail to the Cape Verde Islands. If the wind is too much against us, we will fall off to the south and go directly to French Guyana or Surinam.

One consequence of this plan is the need to leave here with plenty of ship stores, in particular drinking water and fresh fruit and vegetables, and a bit of meat. We anticipate it will be quite difficult to get enough together, since not much can be bought around here, and it is quite difficult for us to land ashore. More about that later. Let's first return to our, as yet not documented, leaving of El Hierro and crossing to Dakar.



Two days after leaving El Hierro: we have passed the wind acceleration zone, but the wind remains strong (between 15-20 knots, with gusts of 28 knots), and 3-4 meter high waves.

In episode 9 I already reported that we managed to tear our mainsail on only the second day out, because the entire bundle of sail and battens had become stuck under the railing while we were hoisting the sail. We carried out an emergency repair, and reefed both the mainsail and the mizzen sail to reduce speed.



Before reefing we easily did 6,5 kts, after reefing we tried to keep the speed around 5 to 5,5 knots to reduce pressure on the main sail. It all looked a bit messy, but it sailed fine!

Olivia took care of steering and did a magnificent job. It came in very handy that the boat behaved very gently despite the high waves, because kitchen chores were waiting!

Of course we had bought quite some provisions in La Restinga, resulting in my little freezer filled to the top with minced meat for six meals and chicken filet for at least three meals. Unfortunately, the cooling unit of our big refrigerator had been playing up for some time, and at exactly the morning of departure, the water pump completely failed to pump up and circulate the cooling water, so we had to turn the unit off (the underlying problem is constantly blocked water filters). Fortunately, we had anticipated this demise of our pump, and a replacement unit, bought in Gran Canaria, was already on board, but Bob thought he needed at least two days to install everything properly. We therefore decided to leave anyway, without a functioning big refrigerator (we still have a very tiny one, but only to keep stuff cool).



As a consequence, I had to make haste frying all the meat and stowing it into our small cooling box .In the picture above you see me doing that job, meanwhile hanging in a sling to prevent me ending up at the opposite end of the galley. In addition I had to bake bread, which I finally seem to have mastered, mainly due to excellent dried yeast, sold by Belgian company, Bruggemans.

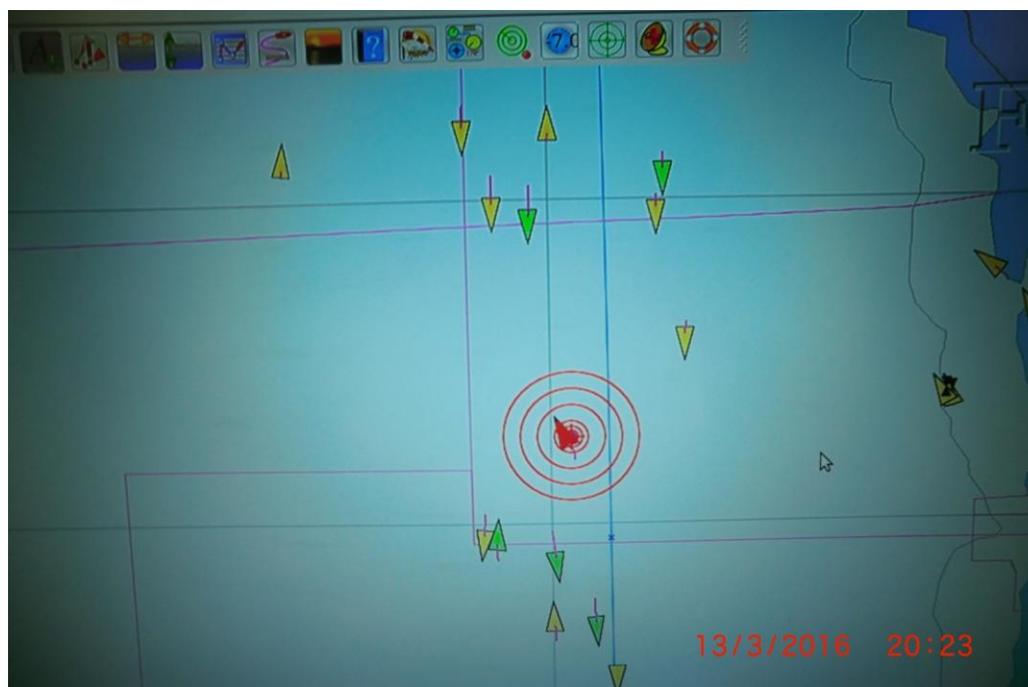
For those of you who followed us through marine traffic: at first, we set course for the Cape Verde islands, because of the wind being mostly northeasterly. After three days the wind turned North, allowing us to creep back towards the African coast. Whilst doing this we had to cross the North-South shipping lane, which nearly resulted in a collision with a Russian commercial vessel. We had seen him coming, both visually and on the AIS, obviously he had not seen us. We called him on VHF channel 16:

We: Sailing vessel Sunny Spray for merchant vessel at position xx.xx, over.

He: Merchant vessel xx for Sunny Spray, what is your problem?

We: **WE** don't have a problem, **YOU** are the problem. Our CPA says we are on a collision course with you. Please turn to port. (because of the wind and the sail setting we could not turn to starboard, so both we and he had to turn to port to avoid a collision).

And right after this exchange our collision alarm started shrieking (surely his must have been screaming as well). While the Russian sailor was still confirming the manoeuvre (normally you both turn to starboard, turning to port is unusual), we already saw the ship's head moving to port, and we did the same. That was a narrow escape!



Quite a crowd in the shipping lane leading towards Dakar. Our position is in the middle of the concentric red circles (each circle is 2 miles distance from the next). The Russian vessel (red arrow) turns to port at the last possible moment.

When we click on the red arrow, we see identity, course, speed and position.

After crossing the shipping lane it became quieter, both with respect to wave height and to ships. It nearly became a Sunday afternoon pleasure sail!

In the early hours of March 16 we approached Cap Vert at Dakar, which we had to round. But we never saw the cape, because we entered a zone with heavy fog. Fortunately, the AIS kept us very well informed about other shipping, and by keeping a double look-out, we managed to avoid small fishing vessels (called pirogues, although twice they made haste to get out of our way!). We do have a working radar (Yves installed it in Lanzarote), but we still do not know how to work it properly, that is a learning curve we still have to follow. Hence the old-fashioned double watch keeping and of course, the AIS.



And all of a sudden the fog cleared and we passed Isle Madeleine and Isle de Goree. From there we crossed Dakar's main harbour's fairway and set course for the Anse de Hahn, a sheltered bay to the south of Dakar.

Our first sighting was very favorable: we identified the Cercle de Voile de Dakar (CVD), a blinking white beach, tall trees and palm trees, and a pier. A relatively small number of sailing boats were anchored, and we nestled ourselves between them. Land!



At the left Isle de Goree, a Dutch nucleus of the infamous slave trade. We did not visit it, we were not in the mood to see all this evidence of misery, and besides, we have read Roots several times. To the right the anchorage at the CVD.

The idillic spot with its nice pier, football-playing youngsters, palm trees and white sandy beach, turned out to be a delusion: everything was dirty, rotten and in decay.

Within three days Sunny Spray had acquired a thick coating of red dust and soot. The pier could have served as a décor in a horror movie or a Harry Potter film. The football playing boys and we as well had to plough through ankle-thick layer of garbage. The dark lining between the white beach and the sea is a wide zone of stinking, rotting seaweed, aptly called by the locals “merde”. Overlaying all this the stench of the fishmarket at Hahn, where day and night hundreds of people were gathered to bring to land, barter, trade, sell, clean and dry fish.

We visited the fish market a couple of times, and although the fish was of excellent quality, the stench and the noise made the place unbearable.

The social life could not compensate for this: when we arrived only four other boats had live-aboards, all the other boats were abandoned and covered in birds and the attending bird shit.



The pier is built above the garbage belt. The pier itself might serve as a décor piece in a horror movie.



Left, view from the CVD on the anchorage. To the right, abandoned boats, favorite landing spot for seabirds.

On the plus side, everything a sailor needs was, in principle, available at the CVD. After the first shock of landing, we entered a really nice compound, with several buildings, shaded by very tall trees, a nice inner court-yard, a bar-restaurant, a terrace, cold beers, a toilet, a water tap, and lots of very, very nice people, all looking for an opportunity to earn something.

Within a day everything had been set in motion to bring the main sail and the battens to the shore, and they arranged for a welder who managed to score within two days the correct-size aluminium pipe for the broken batten. One day after arrival the sailmaker (Diego) arrived with a group of strong men to collect the sail and bring it to the shore. One week later it was repaired and brought back. Meanwhile, the “*responsable de administracion*”, called Famara, explained to us the clearance formalities: the best thing to do would be to hire a taxi for the day (15 Euros), go to Dakar, and let the taxi driver take us to the various addresses we needed to visit to follow the correct procedure.



The main sail and its battens were already removed from Sunny Spray one day after arrival. The yellow tender is the CVD's ferry, here driven by Musa. To the right Bob on the inner courtyard, laying out the mainsail for inspection.



No lack of manpower to fold and transport the repaired sail. Diego asked quite a high fee, but we thought it was worth it. I gave the helpers five Euro each, which made us friends for life.

The yellow boat that transported the mainsail and the battens served as ferry 6x a day, to transport goods and people from the various boats to and from the pier and the CVD. This came in very handy, because it saved us a tiring rowing trip in the dinghy if we wanted to go ashore, and we also did not need to worry about leaving behind the dinghy at the pier.

Rowing, you ask? Yes, rowing, because we soon found out that the cute, silent electric outboard motor we had acquired prior to leaving was totally unsuitable for situations with a bit of wind, a bit of waves, a bit or a lot of current and a bit of distance. It cannot deliver sufficient power, and every trip we have to lug along a large, heavy battery to keep the engine running. Of course, the rather large battery is very quickly drained of juice. All in all a failure, and in particular here, in the Saloum delta, it is quite a nuisance not being able to easily go ashore (there is quite a current running). As soon as we find one we will buy a polluting gasoline outboard engine!



Bob with gas bottle, French neighbours with water cans, Mustapha to help with the water and Musa driving the "navette".

However, for us sailors it was all pretty well organised, although it cost money each and every time. The helpers need to earn a living!

For a couple of Euros they went off to fill our jerry cans with diesel oil, walking to the pump, coming back by taxi (paid by us, but since they travel much cheaper than we, we still gain). Or for a couple of Euros they would take the small, painted bus to go into a shanty town, where they, of course, knew a place where to fill a gas bottle. Unfortunately, the job was so badly done that our gas bottle came back with a leaking valve, so Bob and two Africans had to go back in a bus, find the place, negotiate for another bottle, drive in a bus to another place, fill the bottle and come back again by bus. Needless to say that this costs you at least half a day, and sometimes even more. But Bob found all this too-ing and fro-ing quite adventurous, although we just lost our beautiful new Canarian gas bottle and now instead have an old German bottle, he was all big smiles.

Water was another commodity that could be delivered to the boat. Normally we did this ourselves, every day we brought along 3 jerry cans of 10 liters each, which we could fill using a very tiny stream of fresh water. Only prior to departure did we ask (and pay) Mustapha to bring us a larger quantity.

The contact we had with three ladies who plied their trades in the shade of the tall trees nearly every day was absolutely lovely: Madame Bijou (her real name, we found out later, was Safi) sold tailor-made clothes and ornaments such as necklaces and earrings; Madame Legumes took your shopping list and went by bus to the local market to negotiate for fresh fruits and vegetables; Madame Nougat sold home-made sugared nougat with earth nut (peanuts), and other peanut-based products such as sauces or a type of peanut-butter.

A fisherman lived at the beach who liked to sell us fresh fish which he acquired at the fish market, or he accompanied us to that market. Through him we managed to buy a really nice tuna for 1000 CFA (1, 50 Euros). Unfortunately, he was a bit too pushy, so we tried to avoid him.

Just outside the CVD compound is a 1, 5 square meter shop, filled with everyday hardware store items. The owner, Babou, also sells telephone cards and SIM cards. Through him we acquired a Senegalese data SIM-card (provider Orange), which he installed on our smartphone. That allowed us to have internet from Sunny Spray (we use our smartphone as a 3G- hotspot), so we were no longer dependent on the very bad Wi-Fi of the CVD.

The installation of this SIM card and data credit is utterly modern, and I would not know a European country where a similar procedure can be followed: we wanted to buy a SIM card with 10.000 CFA (15 Euro) data credit. So, you pay Babou 5000 CFS (7, 50 Euro) for the SIM card and 10.000 CFA in cash. He then takes out his own smartphone, and sends, using a smartphone-based app, 10.000 CFA from his money account to your smartphone, which by now has the Orange data SIM-card inserted (with a

telephone number). Once your phone receives an SMS that the 10,000 CFA has been received, you can use those 10,000 CFA to contract the amount of data you want. We let Babou take care of that. A couple of weeks later the data credit was finished, so we went back to Babou, paid him another amount and he repeated the procedure. Very nice and slick!



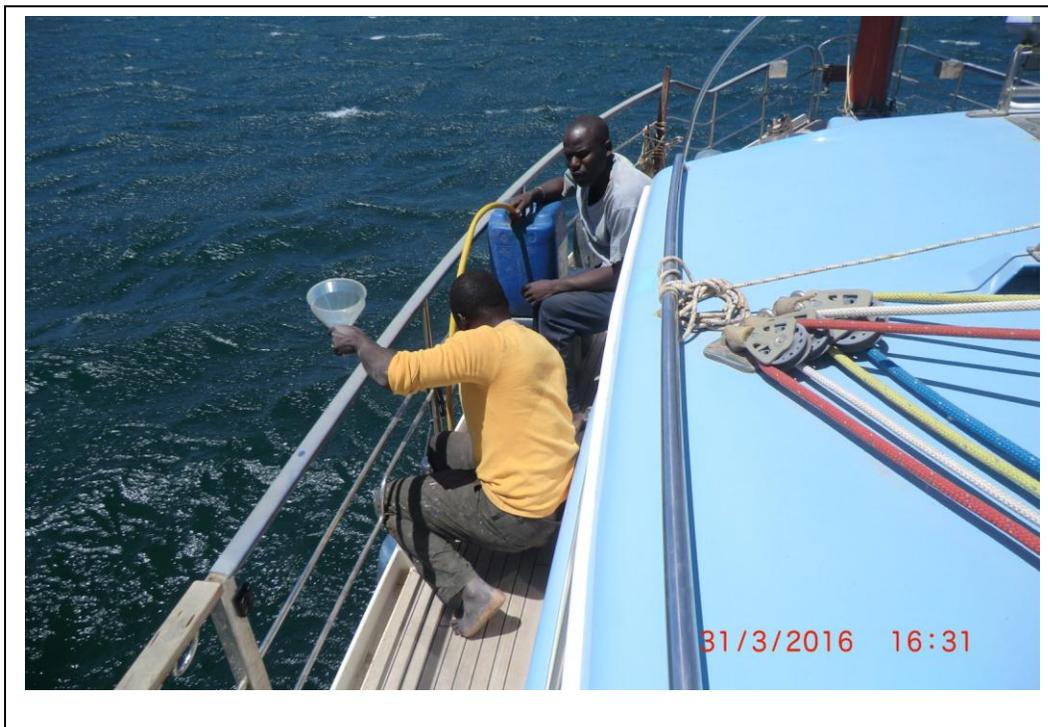
Bob's measure is taken by Safi (Madame Bijou). He ordered a pair of pants and an African shirt. Both had to be returned to the tailor for a better fit (they were too big). The tailor worked from a room hardly bigger than a WC closet located on a one meter wide dirt street.



Madame Legumes arrived every day in another dress. A very intelligent woman, proud of her trade. Madame Nougat was the opposite, sad and unhappy, so I often bought her nougat (while Bob did not even like it) or her peanut sauce.

Of course everyone wanted a present, or additional attention. One day I gave a pair of shoes to a homeless guy who slept on the beach and tried to make a living (500 CFA or 0,75 Eurocents per job)

carrying heavy water jerry cans to the end of the pier. Of course, Mustapha, who had seen the shoe-giving, wanted shoes as well. I gave him OK-looking, but used, linen boat-shoes. Mustapha is nice and has only one eye. He was so pleased with this gift that he spontaneously started calling me *mamam*. That was when he had just been given the assignment to supply a charter boat with a couple of hundreds of liter of water, and he wanted to share his happiness with *mamam*!! Now, in order to supply a ship with 400 liters of water it takes you many trips with many jerry cans and costs you many hours of work. The water trickles very slowly, every jerry can has to be walked to the end of the rickety pier, and only every two hours one can go to the boats with the jerry cans. Of course one needs several trips to bring 400 liters across. It took him about 5 hours, and for all that work he was paid the agreed price of 5,600 CFA (10 Euros). He was very happy with that.



Mustapha filling our water tanks (150 liters only) prior to our departure to Sine Saloum. When he learned that we did not have any children, he offered that we could adopt him as our son! Then he could call us mamam and papa, and inherit our money, otherwise it would all go to the state anyway. He gave us a copy of his passport, in case we wanted to take up his offer!



Madam Bijou (Safi) had an equally brilliant idea. Although she has six children, two still at home, she has no husband. So she offered to become Bob's second wife. That would allow her to make a lot of babies, and also save her from working so hard.

I paid her for her work (one shirt, one pair of pants) and like a well-trained actress she adopted the pose of a second wife, showing the ping-ping in triumph!

After this I was hugged and kissed every day we met (as a second wife you have to keep number one wife as a friend!). Bob did not receive a single kiss; men are not kissed in public!! Nevertheless, Bob found her totally charming!

Despite the stench and the dirt we had a very good time at CVD. Also, we had quite good contacts with the other live-aboards, notably with Frenchman Ben, his wife and three school-aged children, and another family, Russian couple Andresz and Marina, with their two daughters. The latter couple hailed from Siberia, and wanted to continue until reaching Thailand, from where they hoped to catch a cheap flight home. There were two other French boats, both with guys alone (Erik and Jean), but we never had much contact with them.

There were no other boats. Although two more boats arrived during our stay, but both left again within a couple of days. The small number of boats is surprising, the more since Dakar since old times is a popular destination for sailors, in particular for French sailors. On old pictures we see up to 30 boats or

more being at anchor, and business must have been thriving then. Are boats shunning Senegal because of HIV-AIDS, because of Ebola, or because of stories about Boko Haram and other rebel groups?

Before coming here we had our doubts about all these factors as well, but speaking to sailors in i.e. Gran Canaria convinced us it would be safe to travel here. The WHO says Senegal is Ebola-free. Political unrest, with actions by Boko Haram or other rebel groups date from some years back. A guy working for the CVD had the following to say about rebel groups: "well, it is not that bad, probably they have been tipped off some westerners are traveling on the bus. So they stick you up with guns, you give all your valuables, and off they go, no shooting or nastiness whatsoever"!!!! Senegal is a democratic, politically stable country with free elections. Independence Day is celebrated with gusto, they are a very proud nation.

We were not very pleased with Dakar itself. It is a megacity (5 million people), and we think these 5 million are all out on the streets at the same time. Traffic is a nightmare, and a taxi ride from the CVD in to town could easily take 2 hours (without traffic 15 minutes). There are a lot of buses, but we never figured out how to take them and where they are going. No official bus stops (apart from centre of town, there are some signs indicating bus stops). Invariably, the buses are packed to the rafters. Taxis are very old, dents and broken mirrors, holes in the upholstery, and one taxi we took managed to get three new dents while we were in it. Taxis are cheap, once you know the going rate, and stick to it. Invariably a taxi driver asks you for double or triple the price it should be.



We visited Dakar four times, and every time it was for clearance formalities. It started off well: the taxi arranged by the CVD first deposited us on Pier 2, to go to immigration/police and get your passport stamped. Then on to pier 10, to visit customs. Then on to a photocopy shops to get all the documents copied, back to customs. We were quite pleased it had gone all this smoothly. However, two weeks later we decided we wanted to stay longer, so we applied for an extension for the stay of the boat (we ourselves could stay for 3 months, the boat only one). On advice of Famara we applied for a six month permit. This time we had to go to another customs office, where we learned that we missed a certain paper the police should have given us (*une attestacion*). So, back to the police on Pier 2, where we were scolded for not having the paper (we never got it!), but in the end the man relented and with the *attestacion* we returned to customs. The customs man said it would take a week, so a week later we returned, but the document was not ready. Two days later it was still not ready. Then Famara said we could also do it another way, go back to the first custom officer we visited, and ask him to extend our boat permit with one month. At first he was very reluctant, but in the end complied. We now have a permit until the 30th of April

To officially leave the country we need clearance documentation, which can only be obtained in Dakar or Ziguinchor on the Casamanche. We do not want to go to the Casamanche, as that will bring us too far south, so we will have to go to Dakar. It is no option to do that against the prevailing northerly wind. Fortunately, we have found out that we can do the trip overland in one day by bus, which leaves at 3 in the morning from Ndangane, and returns the same day. The trip takes 3-4 hours, and requires that we go to Ndangane the evening before. All that for a stamp. We plan this trip next Wednesday, after that we are free to leave Senegal and move on again.

There are not that many sights to visit in Dakar. There is a monstrously tall statue, the Monument de la Renaissance Africaine (social-nationalistic style, equals the Statue of Liberty in size). There is Isle de Goree (where African slaves were traded and shipped to the new world). Outside town is Lac Rose (a kind of Death Sea with an extremely high salt content). And a museum with masks. We visited none of these sights, being way too busy trying to score the needed documents and surviving Dakar (but honestly, we never felt unsafe for a moment!).

We did visit Kermel-market, a beautiful Victorian building housing a large open air market (pictured below). We photographed near the Place de l'Indépendance, no problem. We did not take other street scenes, as people are not pleased when you photograph them. I don't blame them; if I were living in Dakar I would not like it either when strangers came to photograph, as "couleur locale", the dirt and poverty of my city.



The outside neighbourhoods, which we had to pass through since the CVD is outside the centre, are terrible: dirty, dusty, unpaved roads, loads of smelly diesel fumes, and crowded, crowded, crowded! Bordering the main roads are hundreds of tiny shops or workshops, more often than not surrounded by scrap. An average European breaker's yard is neat compared to the streets of Dakar. This city once was called the Paris of Africa! The old colonial buildings are still there, but most are in decay. Dakar overtaxes all one's senses, certainly mine! (I normally like seeing details as other people pass by; in Dakar this skill leads to sensory overload).



Much pleasure was found in small-scale observations. The CVD housed a large variety of (to us unknown) birds. The high trees surrounding the courtyard housed at least five nests of birds of prey, who found plenty to eat on the garbage nearby and from the fish market.



The blue bird on top is a keshet (the only Wolof word I learned). I cannot find it in my bird's guide. To the left one of the (big) birds of prey at the CVD. Can anyone identify him?



We also liked observing the various types of boats used by the fishermen and other people. Small pirogues, very large, colourful painted sea-going pirogues; occasionally a one-man pirogue with an improvised sail.

Super-special was a large pirogue paddled by 14 men and a steersman, who also called the rhythm. You heard them approaching from afar, since the steersman would call out, and all fourteen called back in unison. They paddled at an enormous speed, at least 10 knots, maybe even more. We learned this was a national sport, and the pirogue pictured here was training for a competition.





They kept up the giga-speed they manage to reach for at least an hour, criss-crossing the bay various times, close to the beach, out in the ocean, and once very close to Sunny Spray (you see some looking at me, I am standing higher on deck of Sunny Spray).

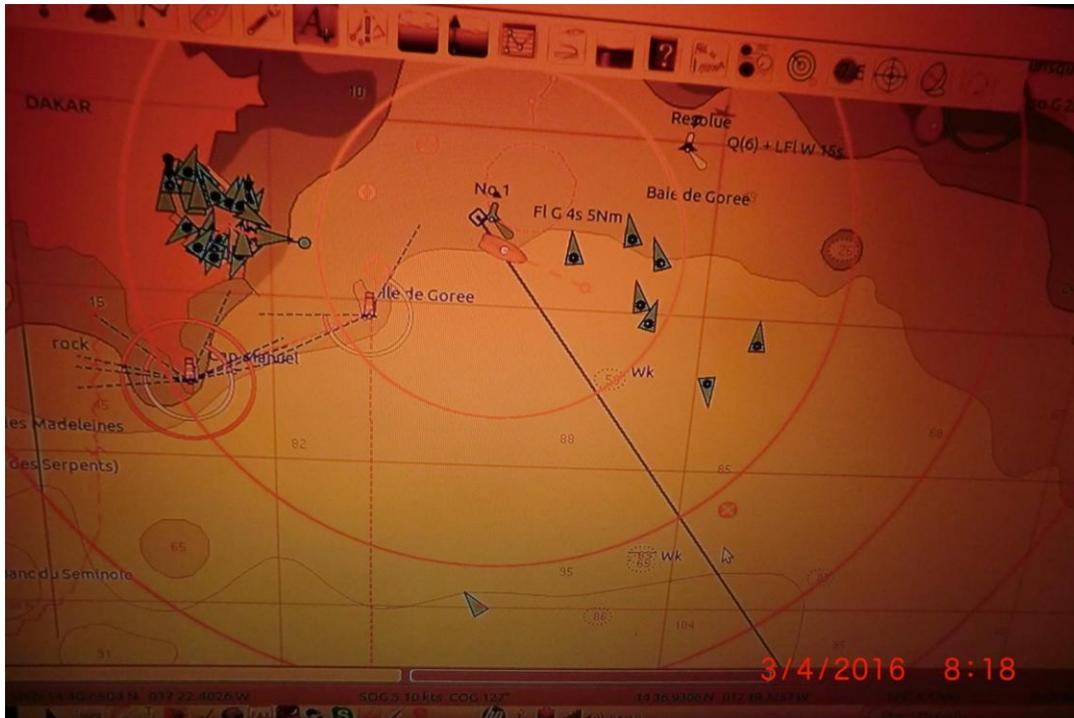
By Saturday April 2 we had seen enough of Dakar and CVD, and prepared Sunny Spray for leaving. Mustapha brought 150 liters drinking water, and we hoisted anchor at 7 in the evening. That took nearly half an hour, because we were not only hoisting the anchor but also tons and tons of the merde-seaweed, which had to be removed by hand and boat hook. The electric anchor winch was groaning. But finally we were free and off we went!

Not for long. After only 500 metres, Bob reported complete loss of electricity on the entire panel feeding all ship's instruments, depth sounder, autopilot, navigation lights, etc., etc.

This was a no brainer, we turned around immediately and went back to the anchorage. While I prepared a hot meal, Bob found an electricity switch in the off position. It looked as if a fuse was gone, but the switch in the wrong position was no fuse! Until this day we don't know what really happened, but flipping the switch back restored the panel to its working state. We had dinner at half past 8, and went to bed at 9.

We were woken by the alarm at 4 in the morning, and half an hour later we were once more on our way, with all instruments and lights working perfectly. Course south-east, distance to go - 68 nautical miles.

It was quite exciting to leave Dakar in the dark (no moon), trying to pick out the lights from arriving ships, buoys and anchored ships against the lights of the city. Fortunately, we have AIS nowadays!



Early morning departure from Dakar (camera time is two hours wrong, still on European time). In reality it is 6:18 here. The AIS screen can be set to red, so that we will not be blinded switching between looking at the screen and looking outside. The distance between the circles is 2 miles. Sunny Spray is the pinkish-red ship icon close to the no.1. Buoy. At the left Dakar commercial port; at the bottom other ships arriving. To our right ships at anchor. When a ship is at anchor the AIS assigns its icon a black dot. In reality a ship at anchor has special lighting, and during daytime a black ball. Very neat!

Unfortunately there was not enough wind to sail, so the engine had to do the job and Olivia had a day off. We made good progress under power, despite the fact we had to slalom to avoid stakes and nets set by the approximately one hundred fishing pirogues we met on our way. Many pirogues came alongside, for some small talk, asking for cigarettes or chocolate (we had none), or water. Fortunately we carried water to spare.



Large seagoing pirogue, angled because of the weight of the nets. The nets are taken in by hand, which is why they carry quite a large crew.



Seeing the age composition of the crew, probably a "family" enterprise. One of the sons makes ready to collect the water bottle they requested.

At 6 in the evening we approached the new entrance of the Sine Saloum (Saloum Delta). New, because a narrow strip of land was swallowed by the sea in 2008. The new entrance is not indicated on our CM93 charts that we run on the ship's computer; fortunately, Navionics, which runs on a Samsung tablet, is more up to date and shows the new entrance and accompanying buoys. Thus, we looked at the tablet, occasionally glancing at the computer, where we had the unnerving experience of seeing ourselves gliding over land!

Once past the entrance we followed a zigzag course set by waypoints, which we had downloaded from www.sy-gabber.com, a Dutch sailing yacht that visited this area in 2012. After some scary moments we arrived safe and sound at the Marigot de Gokhor, and dropped anchor. We had arrived!

In the next episode we will cover the very challenging navigation on the river Saloum and its side creeks/ivers, and relate the adventures in this beautiful delta. To whet the appetite:

Animal of the Month: the donkey

Until now, we have not seen a single car in the Saloum delta. Nice and quiet! Transport is by pirogue over water. On the islands in the delta, transport is by foot, or using horse or donkey-driven wooden carts. The donkeys have to pull heavy carts laden with small boys and many, many, jerry cans filled with water or other supplies. Through loose sand, there are no roads.

Occasionally, donkey and cart have to be transported to another island, and you see them standing sweetly in a pirogue in between the human passengers. They are beautifully coloured, a bit like a gazelle, and on their shoulder is a zebra-like stripe. We have no idea how they load cart and donkey into the pirogue.



If you zoom in strongly, you see just left of the middle the donkey's head, its ears standing upright.



Football-crazy boys at their cart with jerry cans. These boys were very fond of their donkey, and asked me if I could take a picture. Nowadays this has to be done using a Samsung tablet, since my good camera fell, with me, into the water after a failed landing attempt with the rubber dinghy.

I managed to show the boys their picture on the tablet. When we left they spontaneously applauded, it had been a good show with a lot of magic tricks!

Lots of love, and hasta la Próxima!

Helma

You can still follow us on www.marinetraffic.com or on vesselfinder.

Boat name: Sunny Spray (or Sunnys Pray, although we have checked the name and the AIS software really states Sunny Spray). MMSI: 244780434.

If you cannot find us through marine traffic, this is probably due to a lack of receiving stations in the area where we are at that moment. These receiving stations will pick up our AIS signals and transmit these to a shore-based, more powerful station. A receiving station can be a commercial vessel or airplanes. Along the coast of Mauritania there obviously were few receiving stations. Various people reported losing us for a while.

