

# ARC+ 2021 'A Nomad Tribe with Families and Kids'

by Sally Erdle

"Seeing the kids get in the flow of days at sea, seeing the smiles and the delight on my previously seasick-prone daughter's face when she announced, 'I got my sealegs, Mummy!'"

As Lowenna, age nine, and Rowan, seven, swam in the pool at Port Louis Marina in Grenada, Jo Styles shared highlights of her family's experience as part of the ARC+ 2021 fleet, in which 66 boats carrying 219 crew — including 32 kids ranging from two to 16 years old — sailed across the Atlantic Ocean from Las Palmas, Gran Canaria to Mindelo, Cape Verde, and then onward to Grenada.

Jo and her husband Joe have owned their boat *Chula*, a 1981 Vagabond 47 ketch, since 2007. The English couple lived aboard for seven years, moved ashore when Joe started a business, and then moved back aboard sail in the ARC after doing much of the work on a major refit themselves due to the pandemic.

Why sail across the Atlantic? Joe says, "*Chula* is a bluewater boat and we always wanted to go long distances." Jo explains further, "It's an adventure we wanted to do as a family. It's helped the kids understand more about the world. It's obviously hard, but it adds an extra element to see things through their eyes."

When Lowenna was asked how she felt about sailing on the ocean, she beamed, "Amazing!"

## What is the ARC+?

Over 30 years ago Romanian journalist Jimmy Cornell visited the Canary Islands to interview skippers about their transatlantic passage preparations for an article in *Yachting World* magazine. The atmosphere among those sailors — the excitement, apprehension, and camaraderie — gave him the idea of organizing a transatlantic race with a different emphasis than other ocean races: it would focus on the fun of taking part and increase safety and confidence, especially among those making their first long ocean passage.



The Big Bubble crew, clockwise from top left: Tillman, Verena, passage crewmember Justus Albert, Matia and Caruso.

In November 1986, 204 yachts from 24 nations set off on the Inaugural Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC) from Las Palmas — the largest transoceanic race ever staged. Since then, the ARC has made the dream of sailing across the Atlantic a reality for thousands of amateur sailors. Jimmy founded World Cruising Club (WCC) and expanded it to include round-the-world rallies. After he sold WCC to Andrew Bishop in 1998, the organization continued to grow and is now the most popular way for people of all ages, nationalities and abilities to sail from Europe to the Caribbean.

ARC sailors now have a choice of transatlantic routes, with the majority choosing the original direct course, the ARC, from Las Palmas to St. Lucia. Since 2013, the addition of ARC+ — a course to the Caribbean via the Cape Verde — has increased capacity to meet growing demand. After 2017, ARC+ was so popular that two Caribbean landfalls were required, St. Lucia and St. Vincent.

Bringing the ARC+ fleets together again, the new ARC+ landfall for 2021 was the 227-berth Camper & Nicholson's Port Louis Marina ([www.cnmarinas.com/plm](http://www.cnmarinas.com/plm)) in Grenada. The Grenada landfall for the ARC+ eases pressure on facilities in St. Lucia and spreads boats within the southern Caribbean. Andrew Bishop notes, "The ARC+ route is now firmly established as a standalone rally, and the new landfall in Grenada gives the event its own identity."

ARC+ 2021 departed from Las Palmas on November 7th, bound for Mindelo, where the boats spent several days. Boats ranging from 9.55 to 25.15 metres (31 to 82 feet), a third of them multihulls, sailed under the flags of 20 nations. The majority made landfall in Grenada, 2,400 nautical miles later, between December 1st and 8th.

## Unique family time

Many of the families in the 2021 ARC+ fleet especially prized the experience. Some had children soon to leave the nest; others felt the future uncertain because of the coronavirus pandemic. For all, it was an opportunity to do something extraordinary together.

Aage Landro, who sailed on the Najad 490 *Albicilla* with his son Anders, daughter-in-law Marthe, and granddaughters Matilda and Lucie, aged nine and 12, tells *Compass*, "The children loved it. Of course there were moments, but it's the same at home. The joy outweighs any moment of boredom. I've never heard them complain. On the crossing they would come up in the cockpit at night and we'd sit together under the stars, and I'd tell them Grandpa stories. It was an absolute special time." He laughs, "I had my 70th birthday on this trip, with cake in the cockpit. I invited all my friends, but only my family came!"

Charlotte Havstad, who sailed on *Charlotte Sometimes*, a Norwegian-flagged Bavaria Cruiser 42, with her husband Johan and their teenaged daughter Jenny and

son Liam, says, "It was challenging, but we learned that we're good at figuring things out together, and we are tolerant with each other. You have to enjoy being with your family 24/7, which was not a problem for us."

Sailing with her father Brendan, mother Brenda and sister Clara, aged 24, aboard their Lagoon 450S *Lir*, 28-year-old Irishwoman Róisín Cahill says, "It was a unique opportunity to spend time with our parents, and we had a great time. We're so privileged to do this. We'll look back on it forever." Brendan agrees, "It was a great opportunity to spend time with our parents, and we had a great time. We're so privileged to do this. We'll look back on it forever."

Eighteen-year-old Megan Simonson sailed on the US-flagged Lagoon 52 *Helios* with her father, an uncle and two friends. Megan's father, Dale, tells *Compass*, "Any time anything needed doing at sea, I'd knock on her door and within seconds she'd be on



Father and daughter Dale and Megan shared a dream to cruise under sail for a year. Her gap year after high school provided the perfect opportunity.

deck in her lifejacket, ready. Once our liferaft went overboard and was just dragging by its tether. We had to figure out how to get it aboard in big seas, solving the problem together. These are the kinds of experiences we would not have had as father and daughter ashore."

## Safety matters

An ocean crossing is, of course, not to be undertaken lightly. Aage puts it in a nutshell: "Have a good boat and enough sailing experience for safety."

Joe advises parents considering a long passage, "You've got to be comfortable with the vessel, and the kids do, too. It has to be enjoyable for them. We got ours used to voyaging via a long-term strategy — for them, it's been a life-long ambition to do this."

Sailors embarking on their first ocean crossing often point to the safety aspect as a reason for joining an ARC event. Skippers and boats are expected to have completed an offshore passage in the year before the rally. Boats must have mandatory safety equipment of a certain quantity and quality, including communications equipment, aboard.

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Lucie (12) and Matilda (9) sailed 'all over Norway' with their parents Marthe and Anders before crossing the Atlantic.

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