

Headlines

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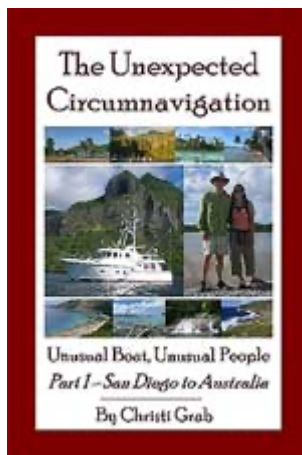
Book review

The Unexpected Circumnavigation by Christi Grab

Reviewed by Jeff Merrill

The ocean crossing achievements of long range power boats has occurred with much more regularity over the past few years. But make no mistake, crossing an ocean under power is still quite a noteworthy accomplishment for a recreational trawler and it doesn't happen by accident. Taking a Nordhavn around the world to complete a circumnavigation is, in my view, comparable to an Everest climb – it's a pinnacle achievement shared by a rare few. Eric and Christi Grab piloted their Nordhavn 43 *Kosmos* around the world in 2008-2009 and shared their adventure daily through their blog <http://kosmos.liveflux.net/blog/>.

Once back home in San Diego, CA, Christi transitioned back to the real world by editing their blog entries to tell their story in a book and earlier this year published part one of a four-part series. Their story is "unexpected" because many people who knew of their plans felt they were too young, too inexperienced and couldn't seriously take on the world in a small power boat. No one said it would be easy, but four years of preparations, book smarts and cautious determination coupled with exhaustive preparations proved that their small dream could evolve into reality.



This is a remarkable travelogue that takes the reader from California to Australia aboard *Kosmos*. It's well written and brutally honest in sharing both the good and the bad, while leaving you anticipating the next series of adventures – especially since we know this story has a happy ending!

Life at sea and successfully skippering your own boat to safely arrive to distant islands is a pursuit many of us would like to turn into our own journey. Christi shows us the way that worked for them and there are many astute observations and lessons to help any other sailor better understand the considerable challenges required to prepare and plan for such an ambitious journey. It is fun to relive this trip and experience the adventures of first timers who admittedly learned much about cruising and themselves as each new day unfolded. This story is especially gratifying to those of us who followed along from the beginning, from the days of picking which boat to buy and how to equip her, through the learning curve of getting ready to sail and all of the details required to check off their list before finally casting off.

The first leg, from San Diego to the Marqueses islands – over 2832 nautical miles traveled in three weeks – was their longest and toughest passage and you can appreciate that landfall in Nuka Hiva was not only inspiring, but built an inner confidence in the crews' abilities and

solidified their faith in their Nordhavn 43 – a mindset that would steer their resolve forward no matter what lay ahead.

Christi has a very inviting writing style that truly “grabs” (couldn’t resist) you and this book is hard to put down. And it’s not just a collection of blog entries; it’s an edited summary which has been re-written with the benefit of hindsight and reflection that brings in more detail and a heightened perspective. Re-reading the various “In Retrospect” segments interspersed throughout the book, I see a wealth of experience that is truly invaluable. Knowing that so many people were following their blog they had to be careful what they said in each post so as not to unnecessarily worry some key admirers (notably their parents and their insurance agent)! With their trip complete a few of the abridged stories are now filled out in more detail.



This is not just another boating book, it is a travel adventure story that delves into the details of not only what life is like underway, but what the destination can offer for the hearty cruiser who has crossed a large body of water in their own small boat and wants to explore what lovely surprises each new piece of land has to offer.

The day to day monotony of plodding along in the middle of the ocean living through rough, uncomfortable seas is not sugar coated. In fact the word “miserable” is used quite regularly to describe how Christi is feeling – not exactly the kind of message a trawler manufacturer wants potential buyers to focus on – but it is a very genuine reflection of what the crew of *Kosmos* endured and I applaud their transparent and honest recounting.

The good stuff is also well represented, like smelling the vegetation of each landfall and meeting the local people along the way. The “low-lows” (including serious contemplation of ending their trip and selling *Kosmos* rather than pressing on) are more than compensated by the “high-highs” of enjoying the vagabond lifestyle piloting your own boat, at your own pace, on your own schedule – in complete control of your own destiny. An independence of spirit and purpose that is nearly impossible to replicate by we dirt dwellers who wake up each morning, hop in the car and commute to work, then drive home to repeat the process tomorrow. (And the view out the windows can be pretty inspiring...)



The Grabs’ Nordhavn 43 as the right vehicle to accomplish their travel itinerary was never in doubt and many times provided them solace during uncertainty and helped them soldier on even when emotionally there were deep concerns about what they had gotten themselves in to. The Nordhavn 43’s sturdy construction and the Grabs’ sensible outfitting with all of the comforts of home provided security and refuge in even the worst situations that

cruisers inevitably encounter. As has been said many times of a Nordhavn, “the boat can take it, even when the crew doesn’t think they can”.

There are so many apt quotes I could lift from the book to elaborate the fulfillment this story provides, but by including some things and skipping others it would be an unfair assessment. A “Cliff Notes” recap would not do the book justice so I will simply encourage you to order a copy from their website and read it for yourself, <http://kosmos.liveflux.net/blog/useful-resources/our-books/>

Boat maintenance and service tips/advice on chores and responsibilities are sprinkled throughout (including trouble with tenders and cleaning “fresh” local produce by dunking in a bucket of water with a bit of bleach to de-bug hidden critters). Learning to do the simple things like preparing food and using the head in a continuously rollicking home – well, in this book they literally “spill the beans”. The importance of SCUBA diving is submitted as not only a fun recreation, but a useful skill to have for un-earthing stubborn anchors. The handling of visitors travelling by air to share a leg as crew also introduces many pros and cons. Standing on the rim of a volcano, meeting the local people, dining on exotic fruits...this book really has a lot of substance. If you are thinking of someday taking off for the faraway magic of paradise you will find *The Unexpected Circumnavigation* an inspiring and easy way to alert your mind set.

OK, there is one excerpt that I would like to share as I find it to be a wonderful highlight:

“As we trudge back through the soft soil, I reflected on the day. I saw the president of a country speak. I flew to a beautiful island. I stood on the rim of a volcano. I saw lava shoot up over my head. I got to partake in the customs of a village that hasn’t been Westernized. This very well may have been the most amazing day of my life! Today embodies exactly why we are travelling.”

The book covers six months of cruising as *Kosmos* treks westward. It begins with a prologue of how they formed their plans and accomplished their goals, a nice succinct recap of an obviously successful method. Throughout they share anchorages with fellow Nordhavn owners and quite a few sailors – there is clearly cruising community camaraderie still prevalent (and you can sense many of the sail boaters secretly wish that if they had it to do over they would love the luxuries and amenities found on a proper sea going trawler like a Nordhavn 43).

Having been back in civilization for just over a year now, Eric and Christi have mostly adjusted from life on the slow land to life in the fast lane. They still live aboard *Kosmos* and occasionally head out to sea for a dose of salt air. In January they were featured speakers to a packed room of TrawlerFest attendees in San Diego, CA giving a summary slide show of their trip. They are next scheduled to speak at the Anacortes, WA TrawlerFest happening May 20 – 22. Their most recent adventure is currently underway – they are travelling across the country from California to Maine in their 2009 Volkswagen Jetta TDI (diesel engine naturally!) with a plan to cover 2832 miles without refueling – a land tribute to the same distance they covered on their first Pacific leg aboard *Kosmos*. This new trip is allowing

them to post new blog updates and to continue refining their mastery of calculating fuel burn and estimated mileage to go! I called them on May 2nd (the anniversary of their circumnavigation) and they were in Connecticut with 10 gallons left –on their final leg with plans to then swing back through Chicago to speak and continue back home. Follow along, it is fun reading!

This is the book Christi wishes she could have read before she and Eric took off and she had done an incredible job of recounting what a trip like this is like. There are nearly 300 pages of stories including a glossary of terms and an end section devoted to a facts and equipment summary. There are not many photos, but that's where you can interact with the blog and do more research (all photos posted courtesy of Eric and Christi Grab). Incredibly, *The Unexpected Circumnavigation* is already a best seller – topping the sales charts on the Lulu.com site as the top travel book – pretty exciting accolades for any first-time author. I look forward to Book Two and strongly encourage you to pick up your own copy.

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