

**Since our last regular SOM finishing with our visit of the Aconcagua** lots of water run down the rivers. You remember that Erwin seduced us and Gustavo encouraged us to sail to Brasil on JUST DO IT's own keels. Not following the Atlantic coast but navigating on the large rivers of this continent to visit the heart of South America.

Well, leaving Rosario we thought the real trip we dreamed of now would start. Just in this moment the trip could have ended. Passing the next city we nearly crashed into a *remolque*, the motor vessel of the big pushing units called *chatas*. I had looked around three times before stepping down to Anke to look at the satellite charts on our notebook. Out of some hidden place this vessel showed up and of course the captain wanted to pass in front of us. Suddenly hearing engines noise I hurried up to the cockpit and with a short look aside recognized lots of launches in a small side river to the east. No time for more contemplations. The vessel is really close, too close, and is still running with maximum speed. And the distance is short, too short. I jump to the steering wheel, clutch off the autopilot and make a maximum turn on the rudder to starbord side. We pass in a short but safe distance. The captain of the *chata* rushes to the nock shouting at us and shaking his fist. I don't shout back because he cannot hear me. And I am sure he would not understand my German except of some four-letter-words. I think by myself: nice start!



But after this our journey gets manifold and full of experiences and therefore I have some difficulties how to talk about. For this reason I confine myself to talk about some aspects only. Who is interested in details has to read the diary. A good possibility to start some German lessons. ;-)

**Now we had survived the first close encounter to the merchandise ships.**

And this was the only unpleasant encounter. During the following weeks we met crews of those *remolques* and they all were friendly and helpful guys. Captains and pilots supported us by VHF, giving a lot of important informations about the navigational channels which you often cannot recognize in the big lakelike parts of Río Paraná because of the lack of bouys.



The ships on Río Paraná have unbelievable dimensions. Until San Lorenzo, a short trip river up from Rosario, you will find big ocean liners. Further on you will mainly encounter vessels for coastal traffic though there are a few ships built for worldwide travel which proudly show their home port Asunción. But the biggest are the pushing units navigating between San Lorenzo and Corrientes. They are not as high as an ocean liner but their dimensions are enormous. The number of launches is changing but most of them have 20 to 30 units of 70 m length and 11 m widths each. Depending to the arrangement they reach a width of 60 to 70 m and are up to 460 m long. We take off our hats to honour their achievements in this waters. Many of them still continue their travel in the night, other simply stop at the rivers banks. Lonesome sailors like we can go alongside and spent the night in their shelter. This



can be helpfull if you couldn't find another anchorage. And if you are a lucky you will be towed upriver alongside a launch. We did this on the Río Paraguay. For many hours it was a fine trip but then wheather and wave conditions became worse. At the end it was impossible to fix our boat properly without big movements. The conditions finally forced us to a nocturnal escape to avoid damages to poor JUST DO IT. The time aboard the *chata* was very interesting and full of informations the two captains from Asunción gave us. Many thanks to Wladimir, Elvio and their crew.

**Beyond Rosario the river is dominated by an enormous steep coast** on the left hand side while on the other hand flat swampy land widely stretches out. Unfortunately this year the rivers summer water level was extraordinary low so the swamps weren't as wet as they are usually are. Somewhere further up steep coast and shallow banks change sides and north of Bella Vista the whole landscape is reduced to a big plain. Thick woodlands are forming the vegetation. Most of the trees are willows but there is another species whose fruits are the only food of a certain fish species. Extremely basic fishermen's huts and angler camps are spotted between the woods. Regularly you will find little towns. The most



pretty ones are greeting the traveller on the Río with pitoresque church towers (or radio masts). The further we are struggling on our way up the sandfreighted Paraná the more spacious the waters become. The Río splits into several arms and smaller creeks which occasionally bring with them an idea of clear waters. Here and there you see a lagoon. Happy guys we were when we could hide away in some nice tiny places. We dangled our legs and let our souls slip away. We swam in the sandy waters and enjoyed the thrill of a hungry cayman or some left back piranha waiting for us.

The entrance of Río Paraguay is as narrow and insignificant that I could not believe that we were in the right place. But Anke insisted this little hole to be the right and only one and we had to enter it. And you know - women always are right. After this small narrow mouth the Paraguay outed itself as much wider and even more sandy than we expected. Anke was not impressed by the landscape, for her it was boring. And after passing 100 km she thought about returning to Corrientes. I also thought about a return but because of other reasons. I feared for the engine. This sand, this sand. It caused much attrition. But a short time later we were towed to a *chata*, the sun showed up again and enlightened a new and varied landscape, here natural and there cultivated. Both coasts were flat, steep coasts occasionally about 10 m but mainly much lower. So we had a better view on the landscape around. People had told us about endless agricultural steppes, exclusively soja plantations, but we can say: calm down, we didn't see one single soja field. On the Argentine side you see another specialty: in certain distances mighty columns of smoke enriched the impression of the landscape. People like to burn. What they burn and why - we never discovered it.



**Encounters to *contrabandistas*, fishing men, customs officers and above all friends.**

Certainly all we could do wrong we did. What did people tell us:

„Be aware of *contrabandistas* (smugglers).“

„*Contrabandistas* are dangerous.“

„*Contrabandistas* live along the whole river.“

„You don't have a gun? I only travel with a pumpgun. Look, here, this is what you need!“

„Drop your anchor close to villages, never in the wilderness.“

„Drop your anchor in the wilderness, never close to villages.“

„Don't drop the anchor on the first 40 kilometers.“

„If you want to be towed only ask argentine ships, never paraguayans. They all are thieves.“

Many warnings. And you will not believe me but in the first morning on the Río Paraguay I found an amunitioned emergency gun. Look, Anke wanted to be prepared. But in the next night the gun disappeared in a locker and wasn't seen again. All those stories are exaggerated. Who did not travel far up the river only knows rumors und continues to spread them. And between argentine and paraguayan people sometimes exist some animosities helping such kind of stories. „Our“ *contrabandistas* mainly were poor but friendly fishermen who did their job and sometimes worked as a ferryman rowing people across the river for little money. And when in this case they smuggle a radio? Put your hand on the bible, who of us not is a little *contrabandista* deep in his soul and who did not try some tricks to outwit the customs or the german (or british or southafrican or ...) tax man. We preferred to buy a *contrabandistas* Surubí, look the picture, and we could have get a wild pig too. And the crew of „our“ *chata*, paraguayan nationality, did not rob us and we never were in fear of that. It was the other way around: we were forced to share their meals und drink their wine. Because of weather and wave conditions we had to leave the *chata*, otherwise we could have continued together up to Asunción as friends. The captain and the pilots family later visited us in Asunción and we spent lots of nice friendly hours in the paraguayan capital. We choosed Villa del Pilar as port of entrance (what a word for this place: port) for Paraguay. There too we were forced to go alongside a ferry boat and to join an *asado*. At that time we did not finished the paper works. Worse, we did not even start to do! „*No hay problema*, this guy is a politician. If you have a problem, please call and you won't have a problem any more.“ It was like that. Next day the woman in the immigration office did not know how to deal with our case. She made a phone call and look – „welcome, you are the circumnavigators with a yacht without a shower, welcome.“ The customs officer welcomed us the same way. „You don't need any customs paper. *No hay problema*, welcome and have a good trip.“



Only in Formosa, sailing down the river weeks later, we met a kind of a rascal customer. At the day of our arrival he refused to notice us though we visited his office twice. Next day he wanted to charge us because of delayed declaration and missed announcement. We should pay 70,- Euro and 1125,- Pesos (some 300 Euro) penalty. Ha! Well, he had bad luck. We had the better connections. We know the consul of Paraguay, ha, and with him the chief of the *Prefectura Naval* (best friends). This shot went the wrong way, ha, but it took us one day.

Our travel turned out to be a journey to many new friends. Everywhere we made new warm friendships. Mori lifted our boat with his 30-tons-crane in Paraná and when we wanted to pay him he invited us for a dinner. José found the final solution for our shaft sealing problem and again we were been invited. Jean-Pierre helped us in several cases, with his help we could repair the damaged steering wheel. Many thanks to all of you. Though I would mention more names the list would not be complete. Dear friends be sure a part of you now is part of us and will accompany us on all our ways.

**Somehow the experience of nature** is retarded by telling the human aspects. With big interest and joy we read the stories of Ruth, Kyall and Anne and compared them to our experiences. Two travels totally different. But our trip not was trip without any nature. Suddenly and unexpected we found a little lagoon full of *Victoria regia*. Anke wanted to step on one of this enormous leaves but they were full of little holes and started to sink when she touched them. She was very lucky not to fall into the water because stalks and lower parts of the leaves are full of nasty big prickles. Due to this prickles the leaves are fixed together and we were not able to pass through them to reach one of their spectacular big blossoms.

One evening anchoring close to the shore, sheltered to the floating trees and trunks by a little sand bank, we were scared by a noise never heard before. We thought about asthmatic bellows. From this moment this sounds accompanied us nearly every day. For a long time we could not imagine who was the one that makes this noise. It was at the *estancia* of Marcos where we found the solution of this riddle: Howler Monkeys.



Water pigs and crocodiles hid away very successfully so we decided to make a trip to the swamps of *Iberá* to see these animals (look at SOM 14). Even birdlife hold themselves back. We saw many species but had only rare opportunity to see them at a close distance. In Paraguay we met the first big flocks. But most of them seemed to winter in Brasil or somewhere else. I'm sure they wanted to annoy us. So we were content with that we could see and started a little trip to the paraguayan Chaco to try our luck there. You can read more about this trip and the menonites living in this area in our diary numbers 577 – 581, but don't forget the diary is written in German. ;-)

**We don't fear shallow waters but simple sand can hit you hard too** - this could be the slogan of the navigational aspects. The trip uprivers didn't let us miss some thrill. I felt years older afterwards. Our maps, called *croquis* in spanish what means sketches, really only were sketches. In certain parts of the trip there was no, absolutely no similarity to the reality. For some time we got a little help by satellite fotos but mostly we had to find our way by observation and inspiration.



What I'm doing here?

Why this different perspectives?

Why I'm laying in front of the oven?

What happened?

Anke is amazed and astonished. Later she tells:

"I found myself on the floor in front of the oven, the coffee pot aside me, leaking, rice spread on the floor and I'm thinking 'That's impossible, that can't be true!' I was unable to believe that happened what had happened. From 5 knots to standstill! But there is only one explanation: we hit something. The head hurts. While falling down she must have knocked here head somewhere.

A horrible hit and a dull bang. I've lost my view. Hanging over the steering wheel like a wet bag. Can hear the engine running, loudly und continuously. Quick, clutch off the gear. The words "run aground" are in my brain. But why that hard?!

„I don't see anything! Damned, where are my glasses?“

I'm looking for my glasses and find them hanging at the power grip. Clear sight again: The echosounder shows zero – any other number would be a surprise – and Anke is laying next to the oven.

„How are you?“

„What happened?“

„We run around. Must be a wall of sand, a reef. From one second to the next!“

„Are you okay? Can you help me to lower the main?“

The mainsail pushes JUST DO IT onto the reef. Only a few moments later we were free again and could continue our way north.



If we were lucky we could follow a *chata* or just in the right moment a *chata* came down the river and we could recognize the right channel. But noisy hits are not only caused by reefs. The same noise appeared when we hit drifting trunks. Specially towed by the *chata* we had no chance to get out of their way. Sometimes JUST DO IT moved half a meter backwards after a hard bang. Our nerves, our nerves. Going down the river was much easier. In most cases we knew where to go and in passages we found difficult when we went up the river we now often found the better track. And travelling with four people we had much more time to enjoy and relax. Jochen and Anne visited us.



They got lot of experiences in the Cape Horn region and now they were interested to face the hell of Río Paraná. We could offer all that. Strong winds on the nose, steep breaking waves and ship movements that even Jochen had to complain: spray would enter the cockpit and inside the boat the movings would be hard to stand. Bad conditions made it impossible to enter the emergency port Bella Vista and that meant one hour more sailing by engine. But thanks to its strong machine ;) JUST DO IT hold on marching against wind and waves and finally we could hide away in a small *riacho*. We found calm while some 300 yards away at the mouth of our tiny *riacho* the waters seamed to bubble.



**Currents mostly face your course**, no question they do when you are going upstream. *Claro*. Insider and experts of the hydrographic institute of the Argentine naval administration assured there only would be a current of 1 to 1.5 kn. This may be correct between Baires and Rosario. But further on – don't believe it. Or did we make our trip in the wrong season? The current in Río Paraná was increasing to 2 and 2.5 kn, occasionally more. Therefore our task was to look for shallow waters with less currents. But if you accelerate really well please reduce your speed and look for another

route. Or you will hit the ground. See above. Really hard it was in the Río Paraguay. 3 to 3.5 kn of current. Our daily distance decreased to 30 km (all distances on the river are given in km by the officials). But that was nothing. 10 km beneath the mouth of the Río Bermejo we had to struggle against 5 and 5.5 kn. Some *chatas* separate their launches into two units and each is pushed by its own motor-vessel. Many *chatas* are unable to pass this part of the river in their entire size. Due to the bad weather conditions we did our fight ourselves and with a speed of incredible 1,9 km/h over ground we were admired by the professionals. They thought we could not continue without some help. This stupid Río Bermejo is the one and only reason of all the difficulties. All the muddy water, the floating islands, trunks, complete trees, nearly everything which harmed us this ridiculous little river spews out in the world. Shortly after you have passed it the current decreases to 1.5 kn and beyond Asunción it nearly disappears. No tree is banging to the hull any more. Only peace.



Well there is much more to tell about. Some stories about Asunción, where we nearly bumped into the Paraguayan president. And some more of the three weeks Jochen and Anne joined us. But this will be too much here. More fotos and so on ..., well, who is interested knows where to look.

Now I'm sitting as a lonesome rider in the restaurant of *Club Nautico Goya* thinking about how to spend the next days. I forgot to organize nice company, for example nice and pretty Carmencita. *El jefe del restaurante* and the people at the table nearby couldn't understand that. Unanimous they urge me – men and women too – to take a *chica*, a *novia* aboard for some days. This seem to be really common here and obviously they expect it. These are habits, aren't they?! As a consolation *el jefe* invites me. Today the diner is for free. *Viva Argentina!*

Well, if there was a *chica* or not I'll tell you next time. In case of Anke can have a *chico* too, *clard!*

;-)

Fair winds and hugs and kisses (to the female ones)  
Martin aboard SY JUST DO IT now in Goya  
and Anke from aboard an Iberia flight to Germany for vacation

PS.: The trip to the Chaco and much more you will find in a few weeks in the diary numbers 561-600 under [www.justdoit.de.ki](http://www.justdoit.de.ki)