

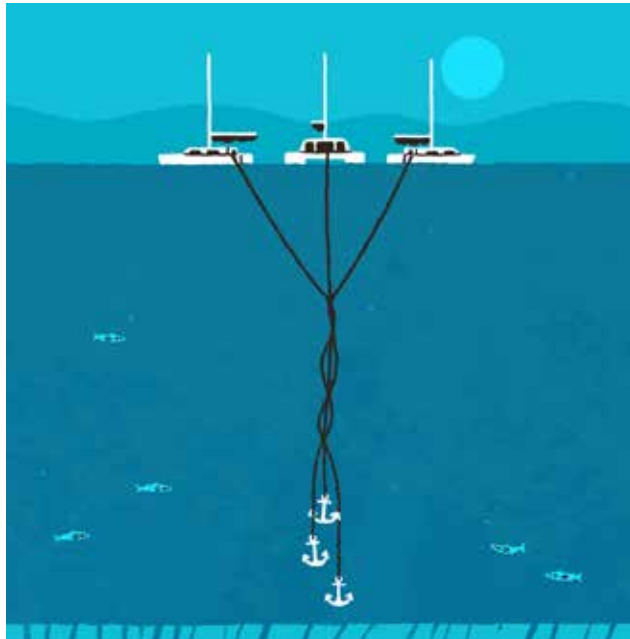
Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Sailors are lonely, right? It's a solitary thing, just the man, his boat and the wind and waves, out there in the elements.

Well no actually. From spontaneous pot-lucks to rallies, race crews to drinks at the bar after, those of us involved in sailing know first-hand just what a friendly and welcoming world the cruising community truly is. And no practice exemplifies this better than the idea of "buddy-boating".

It's an expression we first heard from American friends of ours, keen to have company on a trip they were planning in the Caribbean. They suggested we buddy-boated along the Panama coast, from Bocas del Toro to the San Blas islands to spend Christmas and New Year there, before heading back westwards. We were already great friends and found to our surprise that they, with their small, coastal catamaran and us with our blue-water monohull, were equally well-matched in terms of speed. The trip was a great success and we island-hopped together, always following the rule that the first ones into the anchorage would get the dinner arranged too. It meant that we always had friends close enough to hail on the VHF if a squall was closing in or to double-check elements of pilotage with. It even meant that when we arrived into Portobelo in white-out rain our friends already had their dinghy in the water and sped over to help guide and support us.

When we set off to cross the Pacific we had amassed a veritable flotilla of boats with similar plans who were all helping each other, poring over the weather forecasts together and criss-crossing routing plans on charts. We would anticipate a good weather window and all scurry to get our fresh provisions bought and stowed only to find that the conditions then changed and there were lots of crews left with fast-ripening bananas in the marina. When we did eventually leave it meant that we could keep tabs on one another by SSB radio and would all report in to Pacific 'nets' to relay our daily position and make a note if anyone we knew hadn't checked in. It felt comforting to know that out there, in the largest expanse of water in the world, we were still sailing in company, knowing others had our backs and were looking out for us. Once we all made landfall in different spots in the Pacific there were joyous



'Once we all made landfall in different spots in the Pacific there were joyous reunions'

reunions and stories to swap.

Buddy-boating with kids is a whole different ballgame. Families who sail are generally on the lookout for other families with kids of similar ages. And it's something that many take pretty seriously. "Kid-boats" will buddy-up together for months or even years at a time, as it's a travelling floating community and reaffirms the friendships and bonds that are so important for children. And it's not always just two boats. We know a group of three catamarans and a monohull that sailed alongside each other for 18 months, from the South Pacific into South East Asia. The only thing that ultimately divided this merry band was when Covid-19 hit and each boat crew had varying needs and challenges to tackle.

And it's not always firm-friends who take it upon themselves to band together this way.

There are facebook groups and marina noticeboards where people announce they are looking for friends to sail with along certain routes. We made new friends as soon as we arrived in Singapore as they had four kids on board and both our boats were somewhat stuck due to the pandemic. Liveboard kid boats are very unusual in South East Asia so both crews were thrilled to get to know each other. One year on we were still celebrating birthdays and special occasions together at our favourite hidden anchorage.

I think what surprises non-sailors by this long-term camaraderie is that there are still many ways in which boating is thought of as a personal challenge. We think of the big-name solo circumnavigators and are excited by the tough circumstances they overcome entirely alone. We think of Slocum and Knox-Johnston. Or perhaps now the idea of couples and families living aboard and sailing worldwide is more understood but again we tend to think of them in isolation, going along their journey and documenting it.

What's comforting to learn and makes us long-term sailors just like everyone else is that we too need work colleagues to gripe to and share problems with; we also long for an extra helping hand or sympathetic ear; and how else do you get that lovely family photo without someone else there to hold the camera? Thanks buddy.



JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com