

# Dangerous Decisions



iBy Rich Wilson  
aboard *Great American II*

Date: April 24, 2003  
Position:  
32° 26'S / 017° 16'E  
Boat Speed: 7.8 knots  
Boat Course: 360°

The Agulhas Current runs strongly south down the east coast of Africa, wraps around the southeast corner and heads west along the 300-mile southern coast. At the Agulhas Bank, a shallow area extending 100 miles south of Cape of Good Hope, the current swerves south around the Bank. A strong current running into a strong wind, common for this area, can create seas that are huge and deadly. Such conditions have been known to break large ships in half, and we knew we might run into them.

Our weather forecasts showed that a cold front was approaching with strong west winds. These winds could create havoc in the Current,

the Bank, or both. We had to decide which place would minimize the risk to *GAIL*. To make this decision, we used current weather analyses, satellite pictures, practical at-sea experience from a knowledgeable merchant mariner, and advice from local South African sailors. We also used our knowledge of our boat and our skills.

We decided to exit the main body of the Current and cut across the Bank, hoping to get around the corner and head north into the Atlantic before the strong wind arrived. This choice, if it worked, would also cut off some of the miles on our route. Of course, we knew that if we made the wrong

choice, we could be in for some dangerous seas.

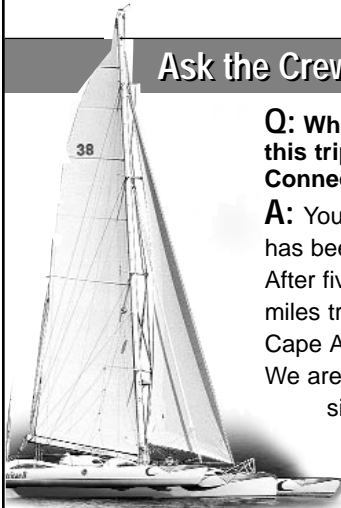
Although the winds arrived early, and the seas on the Bank did build up quite high, we eventually reached the Atlantic with an intact vessel and crew. It was a good decision-making process and a good decision.



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1. In what ocean is *Great American II* located?
2. How does wind affect waves?
3. In what direction does the Agulhas Current flow?

## Ask the Crew of *Great American II*



**Q:** What has been your favorite part of this trip so far? From Shannon, Connecticut, USA

**A:** Your question is very timely! Today has been the best day of our voyage. After five weeks at sea and over 7,000 miles traveled, we have finally rounded Cape Agulhas, the southern tip of Africa. We are sailing north for the first time since we left Hong Kong, and we are heading for home.

—answered by Rich du Moulin



Search the newspaper for examples of people making decisions, including cartoon characters, if desired. Identify the factors that affected the choices the people made. Was the outcome what the decision-maker anticipated?

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