

The Sevenstar Round Britain and Ireland Race 2014



A view from the back half of the fleet (most of the time)

Background to the race

- Background to this Race
 - Started in 1976,
 - Only held once every 4 years
 - Early on it was two handed with 5 legs and 48 hour compulsory stops
 - Now fully crewed

The Course

The course is around Britain and Ireland and all outlying rocks etc. to Starboard



Entries

- Fast professional teams
 - Volvo 65s
 - 70' Trimaran
- Well funded and/or semi professional teams
 - IMOCA 60, Canting keel, Custom design
- The rest
 - Amateurs with own boats, charter boats (that's us)



The Yacht (1)

Saga – Hanse 531



Specification:

Build by:	Hanse
Length:	16.15m
Beam:	4.91m
Draft:	2.43m
Sail area:	155 square metres
<u>Fuel tank:</u>	400 litres
<u>Water tank:</u>	750 litres
<u>Engine:</u>	100hp
<u>Berths:</u>	10
WCs:	2



The Yacht (2)

- Very much a cruiser/racer – at least to begin with.
- Displacement around 20t – almost twice as much as Volvo 65!
- Better in heavier airs although pointing ability not so good
- Kitted out for family cruising and corporate entertainment
- We spent a lot of time trying to make it (a) a bit faster and (b) 'bomb proof':
 - sail wardrobe replaced and/or extensively recut, new storm sails, new high performance ropes, many fittings changed for stronger ones, navigational equipment 'upgraded'.
- Equipment not required was removed to reduce weight e.g. saloon furniture, dinghy, leisure equipment, spare diesel tanks, jib furler, even the barbie and the wine cellar.

Requirements

- Personnel requirements,
 - Not a race for beginners. We started the preparation campaign in June
 - Minimum of 500 race miles on the yacht you are sailing on to qualify
 - Training w/e 120 nm
 - Morgan Cup 125 +100nm
 - St Malo Race 180nm
 - Channel Race 125nm
 - Unfortunately most of the above races were in fairly benign weather conditions
- Boat and RORC requirements
 - Category 1 (the highest):
 - “Races of long distance and well offshore, where yachts must be completely self-sufficient for extended periods of time, capable of withstanding heavy storms and prepared to meet serious emergencies without the expectation of outside assistance”
- Yellowbrick position tracker mandatory

People

- Varied group; 2 women and 7 men, experience from 5 to 30+ years
- Organised by Equinox Sailing (www.equinoxsailing.com)
- Highly experienced professional ocean racing Skipper with c.200K sea miles
- Others had offshore racing and/or long distance cruising experience .
- Charity sponsorship for OYTN
 - www.justgiving.com/jrw14gbr
- RBI was on everyone's 'really want to do' list

The Team



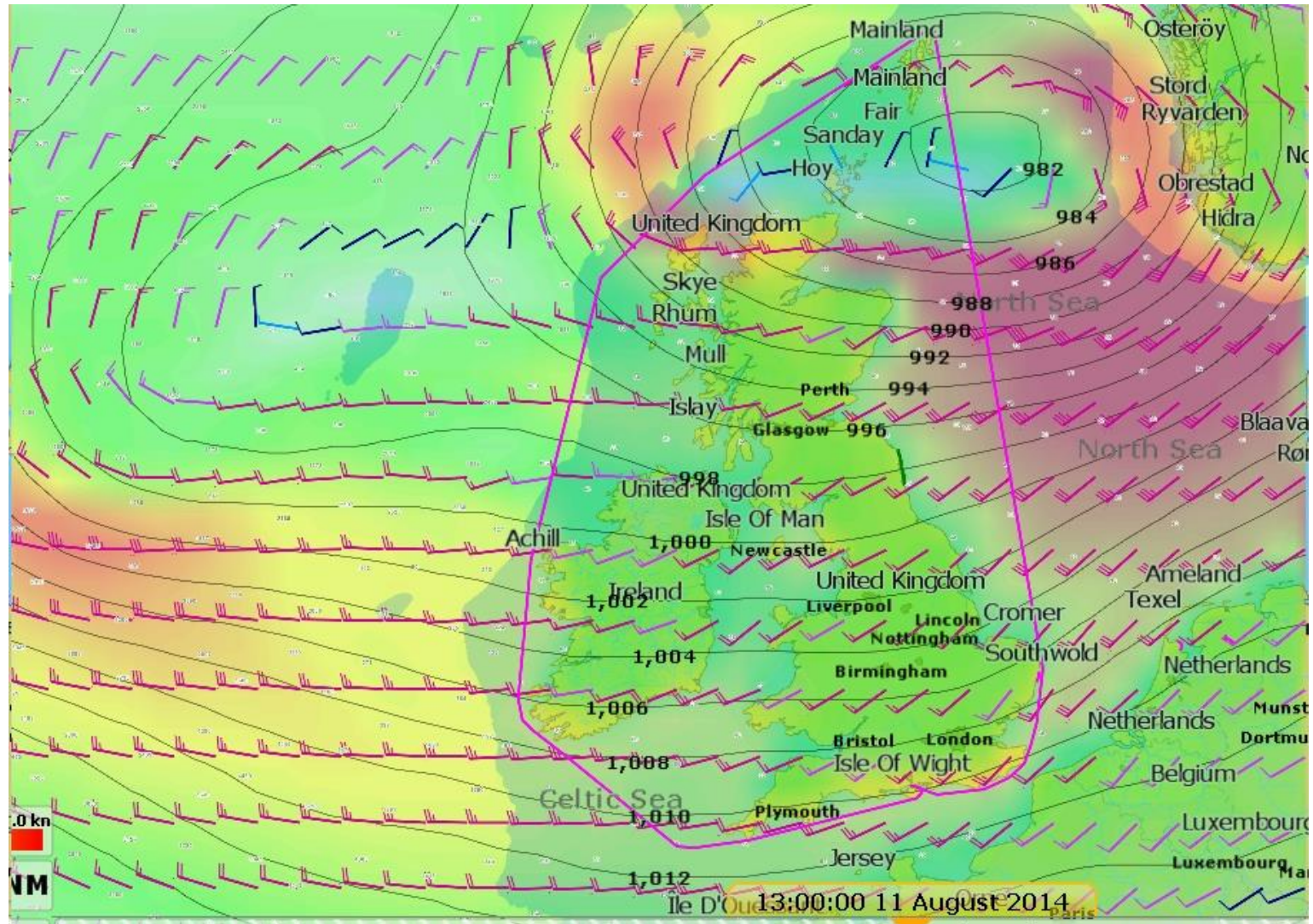
Operational Considerations

- Watch systems
 - 2 watches of 4 people - 4 hours on during day, 3 at night
 - Skipper navigating and spare hand
 - Took a long time to get ready to go on deck when everything was very wet and crashing about
- Food/drink
 - Heated up from frozen for first week, then packets – worked OK but did get a bit short towards the end
 - Plenty of liquids but a dry ship
- Personal safety – RORC requirements
 - Lifejackets, tethers (used most of the time)
 - Internal ropes rigged across the saloon after a few incidents
- Navigation
 - By Skipper mostly, ‘traditional’ + electronic, input from Watch Leaders on weather strategy
- Hygiene
 - Hot bunking in aft cabins
 - Very noisy, violent motion and difficult to sleep for’d. Also a bit wet
 - Fresh water not used much, lots of wet wipes
 - Clothes very wet at times
 - Top tip – knee pads and waterproof socks work well

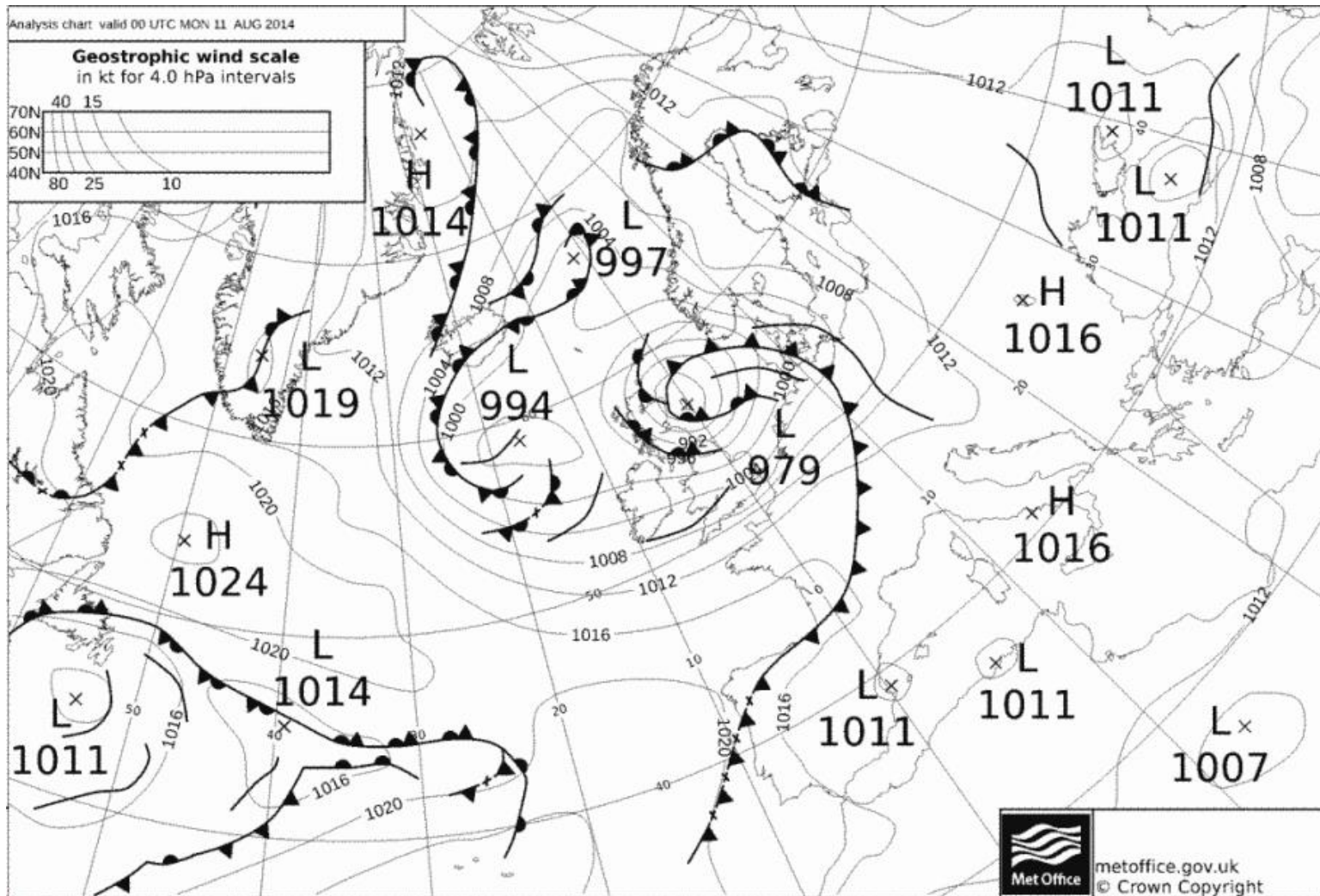
Weather systems and routing

- Predominantly strong winds forecast for at least the first 4 or 5 days
- Inputs from:
 - Grib files from sat. phone
 - Other sources when in mobile, VHF or LW radio range
- Weather map overlays
 - Mostly grib, some synoptic charts

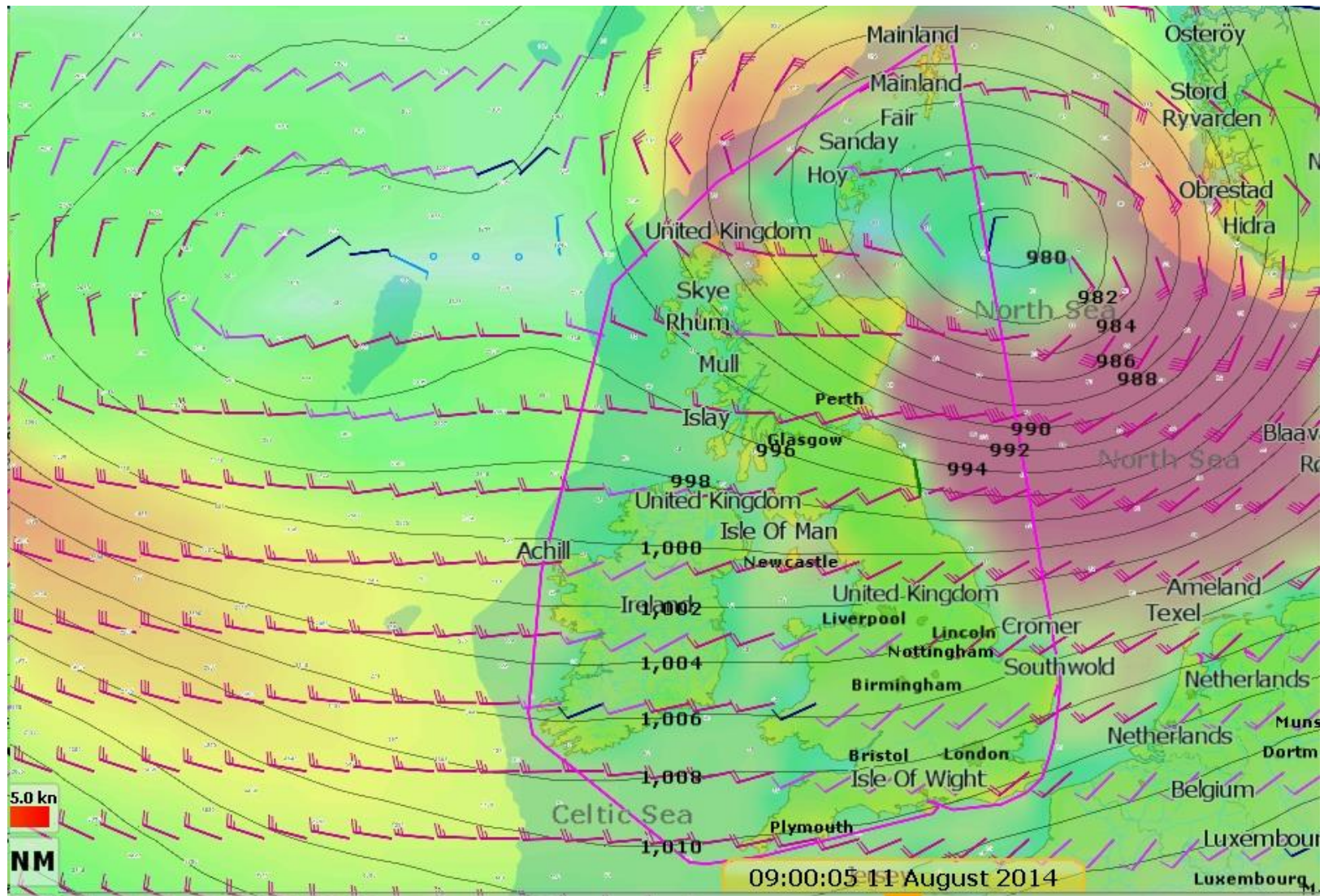
Weather patterns: Start day -1



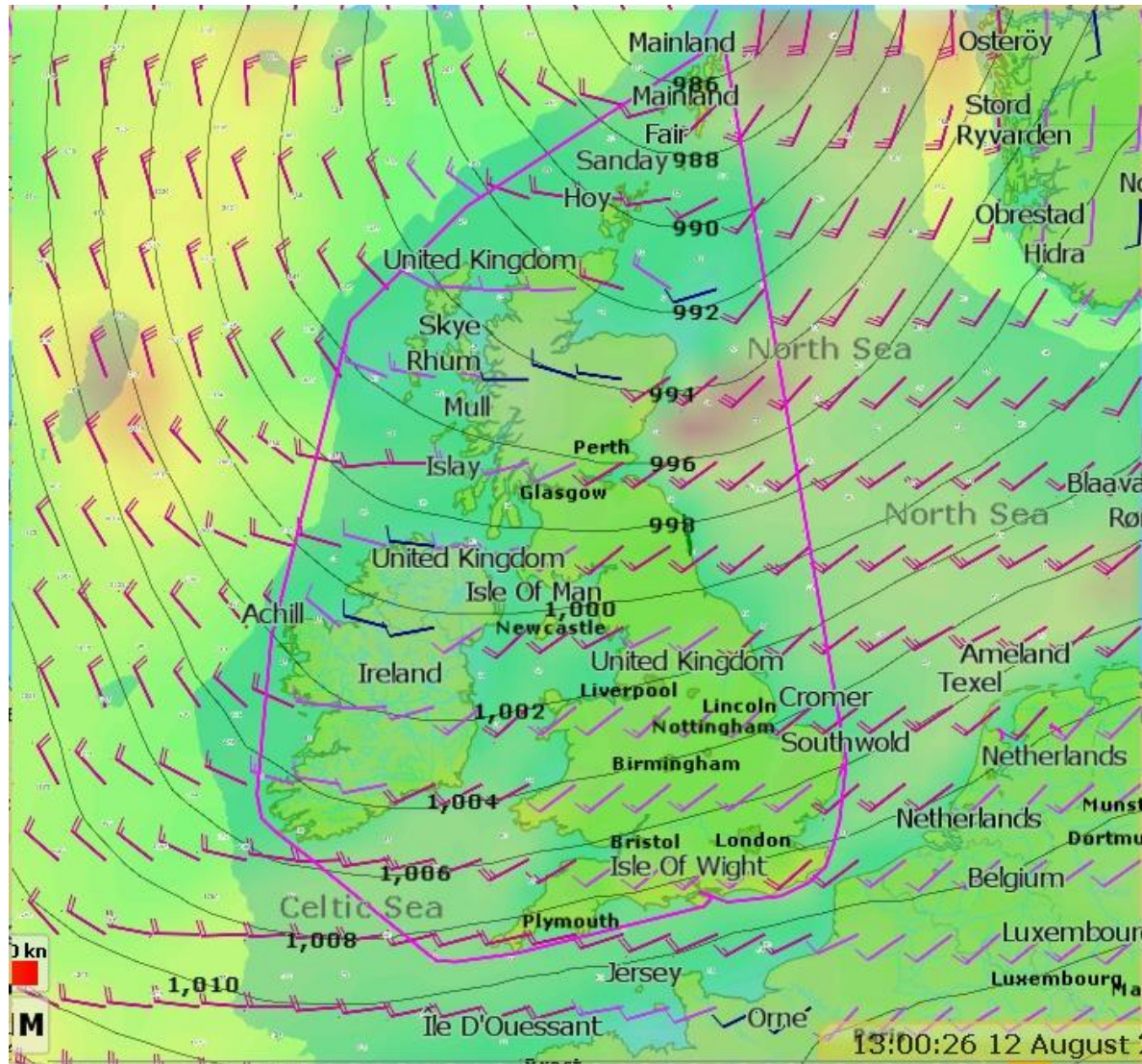
Weather Pattern at start – Synoptic chart



Weather Pattern at start – Grib files

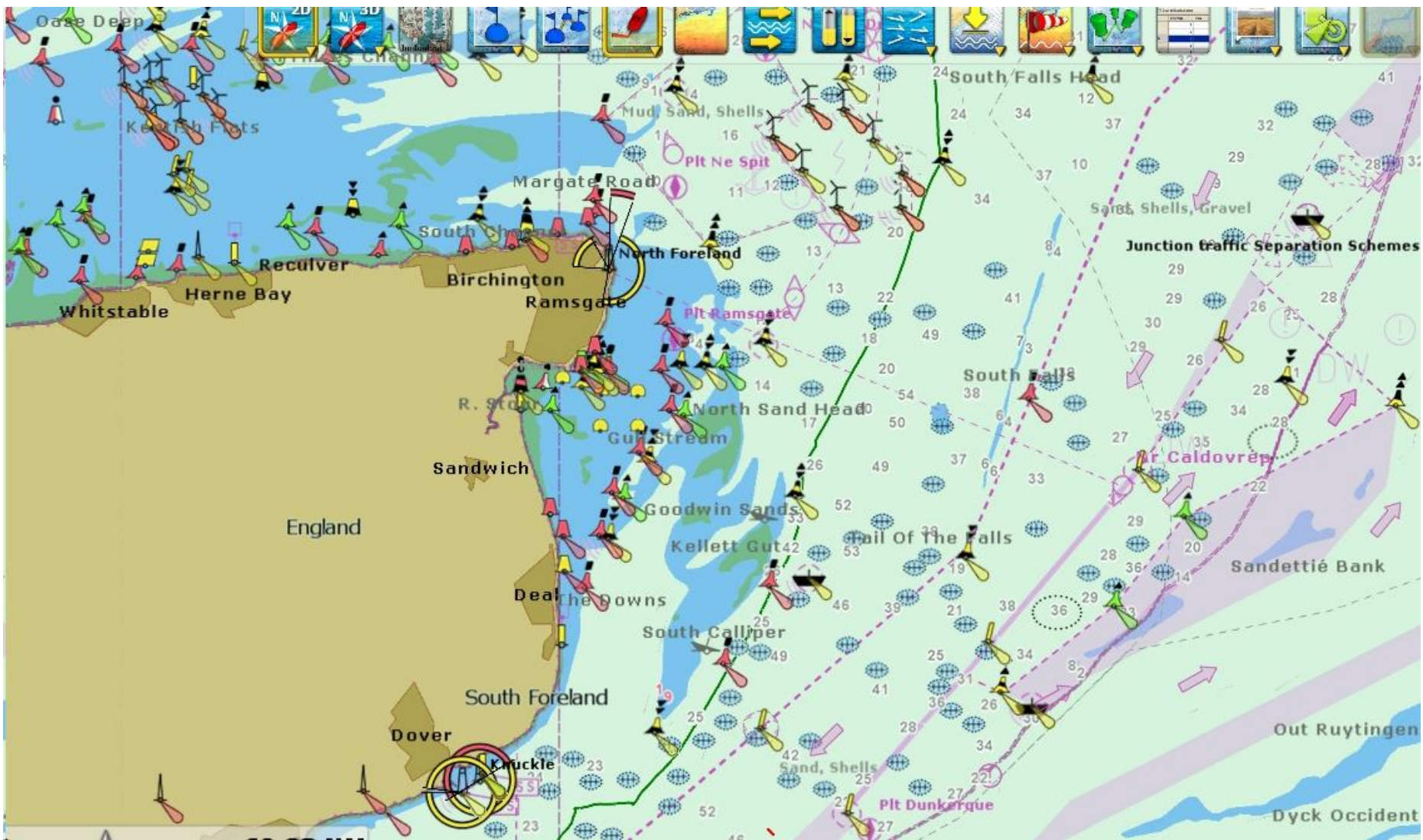


Weather Pattern at Start + 1 day



The Race (by location)

- Start (off the RYS line at Cowes)
 - Postponed for 20 hours then round anticlockwise
- Channel
 - Wind 20 to 30 knots, broad reach on stbd. then a dead run
 - Shipping, Goodwin sands, strong tidal streams
- East coast
 - Still strong winds, dead run becoming a port reach
 - Wind farms, gas rigs and a number of TSS to avoid (SI requirement)

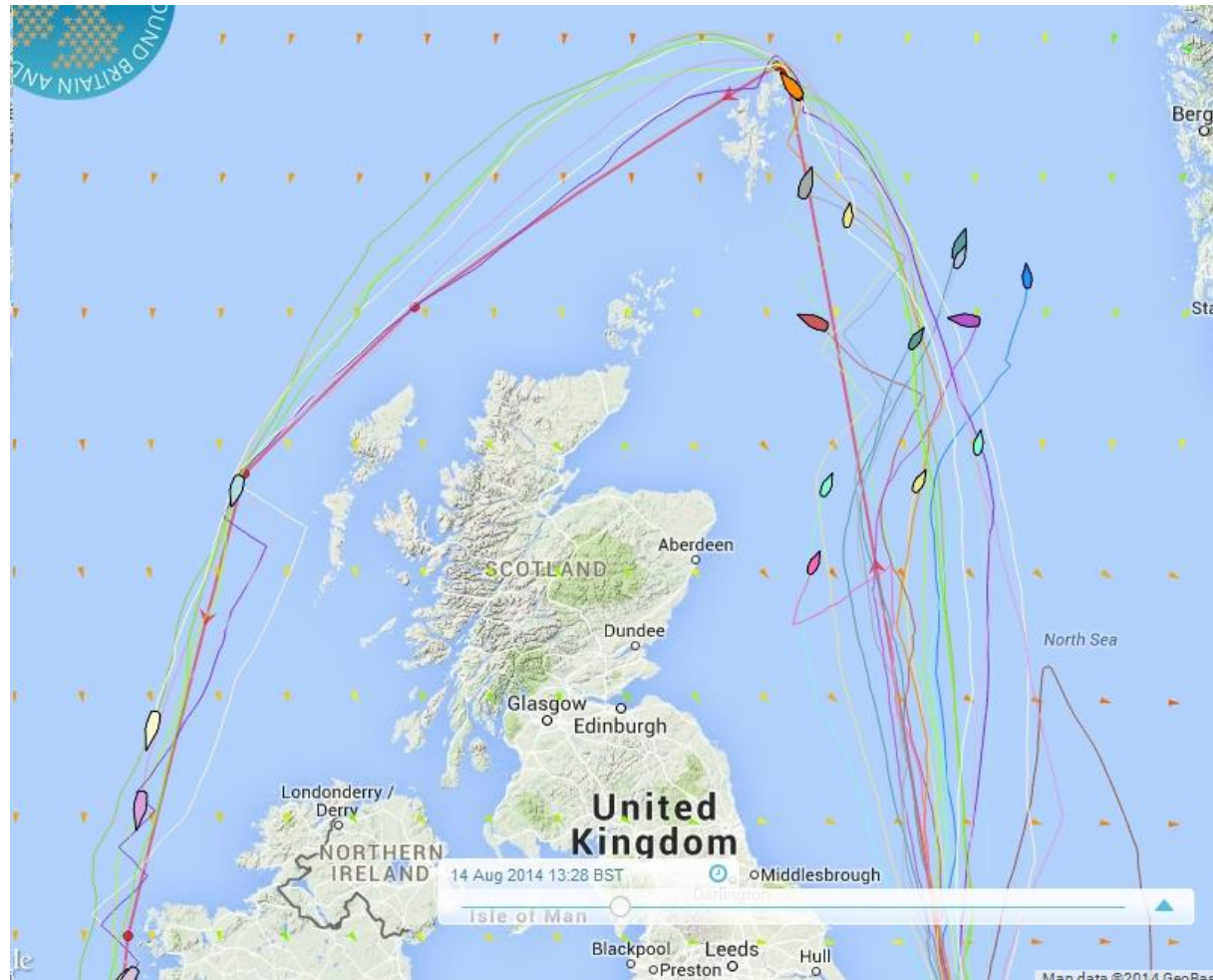




The Race (by location)

- Northern part of North Sea
 - Wind easing but coming ahead, how far East to go before tacking?
- Orkney/Shetland
 - Wind right ahead becoming lighter
 - Tidal influence

Yellowbrick Tracker – Day 3



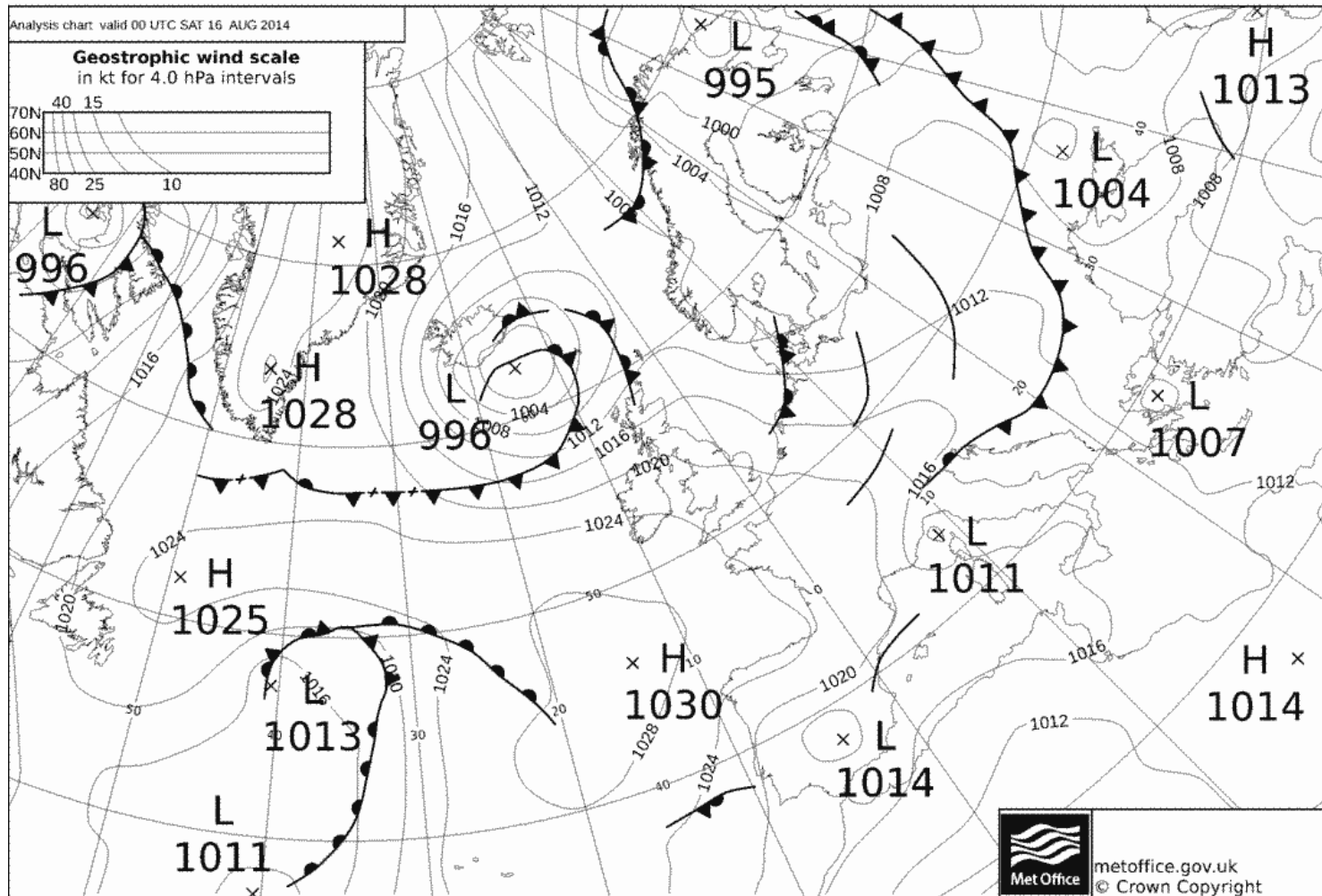
Top of Shetland



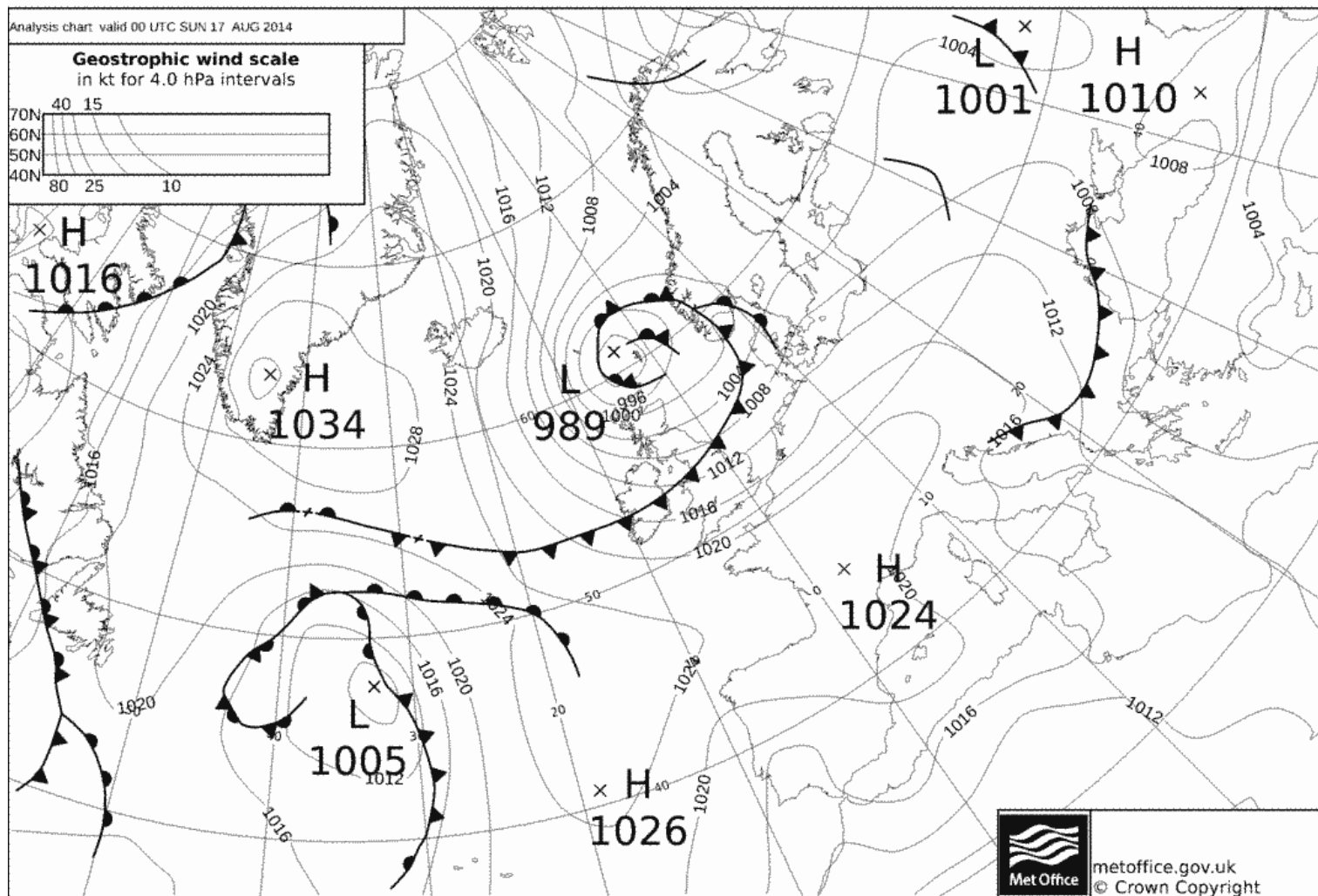
The Race (by location)

- West of Shetland
 - Next set of gales appear
 - Very strong winds (40 knots+ to the South) but forecast to veer
 - Keep going West then tack
 - Big seas, jib sheet breakages and doubling up
 - 3rd reef breakage and MOB

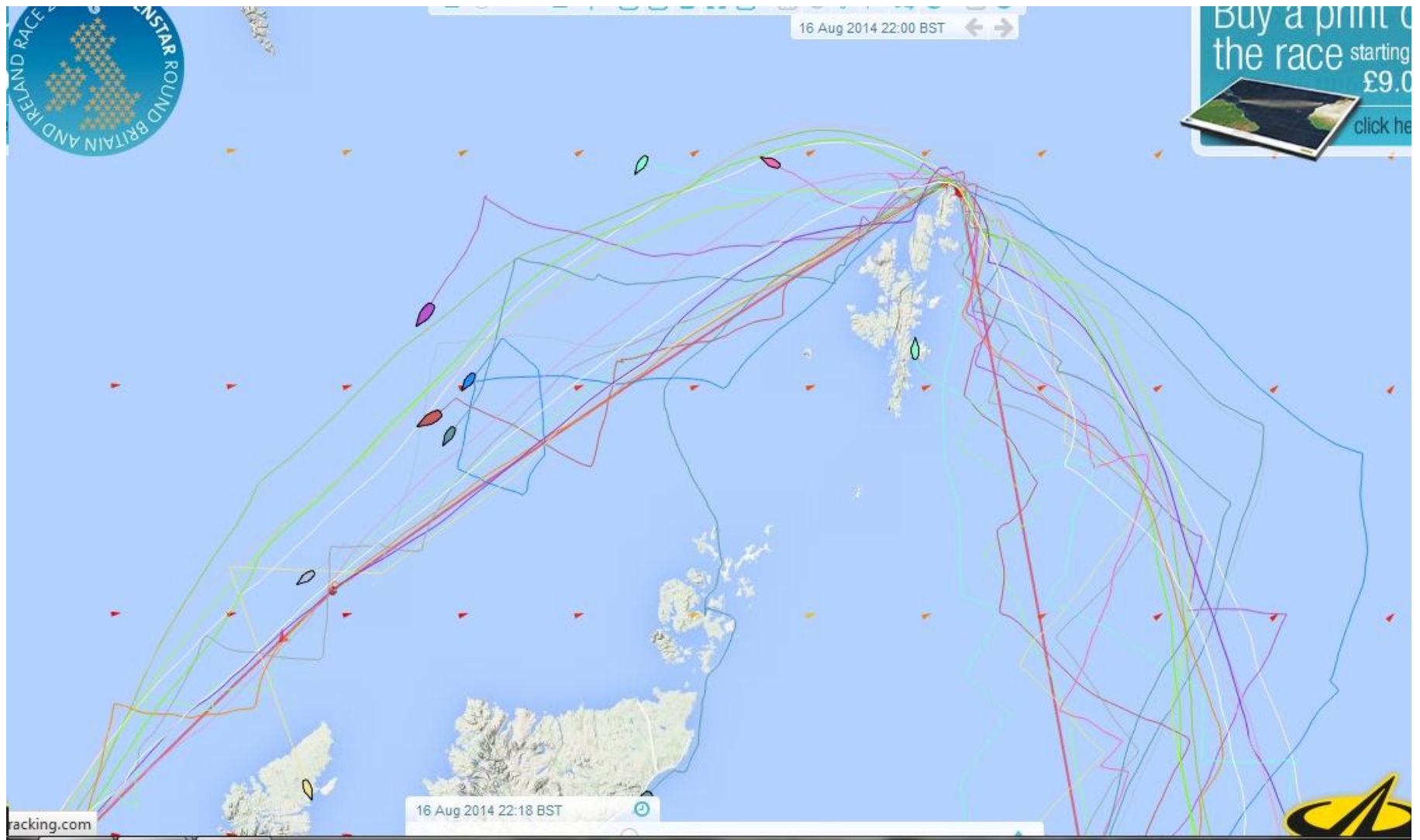
Synoptic chart – Day 5 (Wind SW)



Synoptic chart – Day 6 (Wind NW)



Yellowbrick Track – Day 5





The Race (by location)

- North West Approaches
 - Continued full gale but more favourable direction
 - Still on much reduced canvas
 - Heard over email that everyone else in class had now retired – the aim therefore changed to preserve the boat (and crew) and finish the race.
 - Undertook repairs as conditions allowed e.g. 3rd reef line, lazy jack.





The Race (by location)

- West of Ireland
 - Wind moderates, sun comes out, sea is blue, dolphins appear, spinnaker up, life's good (relatively speaking)
 - Rest a bit and try and dry out
 - Becalmed in sight of Fastnet rock for a while





The Race (by location)

- Celtic sea
 - Wind fills from West
- Back into the channel
 - Wind back to more than 25 knots, kite or poled out headsail at night
 - Fishing boats, more traffic, tides





The Race (by location)

- Round the back of the IOW, complete change of wind direction
- West up the Solent and the final beat to the finishing line
- Congratulations from the organisers RORC and Huzzars! all round from the guys on 'British Soldier'.

Finished just before the pubs shut



Things that went wrong

(Caused by stress of weather, chafe, violent motion of the boat, new demands on equipment, operator error)

- Breakages and repairs
 - Sheets, halliards, spinnaker tack, guy block/s, jib clew, mainsail (spreader poke), instruments, steering gear mountings, luff cars, heater, reefing lines, lazy jacks, minor leaks.
- Personal injury
 - assorted cuts and bruises, lower back damage
 - However, no one was seasick, just very tired at times

Lessons learned

- It's a race, not a cruise
- a marathon not a sprint
- Training essential, constant trimming and sail changes are exhausting
- Break everything you can before you go
- If it doesn't work change it and if it's not needed get rid of it e.g. spray hood, stack pack
- If in doubt replace it, watch out for wear all the time.
- Pay great attention to safety
- Sometimes you have to throttle back a bit

Outcomes

- 28 starters, 18 finishers (64%).
- Retirements due to:
 - hull damage
 - gear failure
 - Injury
 - exhaustion or a combinations of the above
- Saga's elapsed time: 11 days, 13 hours, 57 mins., 10 secs.
- Rhumb line distance 1802nm, actual sailed 2035nm
- Average Speed 7.32 knots
- We won IRC class 1 simply by finishing and were 8th overall

Some time afterwards.....

