Holland's Sail Transport Success Today

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Voyage of the Tres Hombres, June 3-6 to Amsterdam

A sailboat can be part of nature, a living state that no motorboat can ever accomplish. This makes intellectual sense, but you feel it on the sea especially in a wooden boat under sail. The relationship between a human being and the sea is intimate and deep. It is also the basis of the current revival of sail transport.

But in this Oil Age, even during its recent decline as cheaply extracted oil has peaked globally, sail transport needs all the help it can get. Fortunately, interest is rising faster and faster. At the Sail Transport Network we see more projects than ever. The proof of this movement's rise and manifestation of its global destiny is in the Tres Hombres, a modern but traditional cargo ship of the schooner-brig rig.

I joined the ship on June 1 for the annual celebration of its return from the Caribbean to its home port of Den Helder, a significant harbor two easy days' sail north of Amsterdam. Laden with rum, molasses, cacao and chocolate, the ship's large community of supporters and volunteers were excited to compare notes and introduce new members of the public to the adventures of the Tres Hombres.

Named after its three captains and founders of Fair Transport, the 32-meter ship has completed four main voyages for cargo to the Caribbean and many others in northern European waters. I had last been aboard the wine run to Copenhagen last summer, when 8,000 bottles of biodynamic wine were delivered with a jolly crew of 13.

My next trip had to wait until last week. On June 3 we sailed for Enkhuizen, a lovely old town that is home to the world's preeminent sailing-captain school. After a short stay we sailed on to Amsterdam.

Traditional sailing is big in Holland. There are two kinds of traditional ships: those for the North Sea and beyond, and those for inland seas and canals. The latter type has a round bottom, no keel, and has dagger boards on each side of the hull.

For the upcoming Sail Den Helder 2013, which goes from June 20 for 11 days, tall ships from Holland and afar will dazzle the public. Fortunately, some of the best beer in the world is brewed on the adjacent Island of Texel, and the brand is catching on in Holland.

To get a flavor for the most recent voyage and the interaction with the land support network, here is the web log I compiled for the ship's Fair Transport organization, dated June 6: Crew's web log (scroll down). It is reproduced here:

by the Crew of Tres Hombres on 06/06/13

The return of the tall ship Tres Hombres from the Caribbean was celebrated in its home port of Den Helder on June 1. The turnout of the public and long-time volunteers was large, competing with many other musical events in town that day. Many bands and singing groups entertained the revelers at the Tres Hombres' own dock at the harbor museum cantine. To kick off the good mood, the shareholders annual meeting for Tres Hombres ownership was held, where the news was favorable.

We departed Den Helder (latitude 52 degrees north 57.6, longitude 4 degrees east 48.6) the following Monday, with the aid of a tugboat to go through locks, at 13.00h. With the aid of Force 4-5 conditions blowing us downwind, for a while we were going 10 knots. Beautiful two- and three-mast traditional Dutch sailboats passed by in the other direction.

We arrived late afternoon at Enkheizen (latitude 52 degrees north, 42., longitude 5 degrees east 17.). It is an ancient, beautiful town that boasts the finest captain's school for sailing ships. (All three Tres Hombres captains graduated from there.)

We stayed a whole day, taking in museums and receiving visitors. Signs in town and at the ship's dock directed people to come sample and buy sail-transported rum, chocolate and other goods displayed on deck.

Wednesday morning June 5 we sailed at 11.00h for Amsterdam. Two film crews got on board to sail with us and take footage. Seeing all 21 of us off were a couple of small skiffs from the Sea Shepherd direct-action group. After going through the lock with the aid of a tug just south of Enkhuizen, we had most sails up when we ran aground. The shifting sands had encroached right up to the navigational channel. A tug returned to get us back on track.

On this the Ijsselmeer (formerly South Sea, before the 35-kilometer dyke-highway was built between Noord-Holland and Friesland), we enjoyed Force 3-4 conditions. We arrived at Amsterdam (latitude 52 degrees north, 24., longitude 5 degrees east 02.) at the dock of the Goudfazant Hotel where the rum in barrels will be picked up today by the bottlers. The early evening still had sun shining on the opposite side of the channel when the Douane/Customs boat departed. One of our crew members talked the armed agents into giving her a joy ride in their speedboat, which certainly jazzed up her evening and entertained the rest of us.

Soon after, passenger-trainees were sad to depart their floating home, after the camaraderie and excellent sailing conditions. Not to mention excellent food prepared by Erma! A skeleton crew remains, headed by Captain Andreas, and will have no trouble moving the Tres Hombres further into town for more media exposure. And I will be sad to leave our

ship when I must take my train to Berlin all too soon.

- Jan Lundberg, Sail Transport Network (pictures and text)

North Amsterdam was a major ship building area, but is now given over to leisure and local tourism. The Tres Hombres docked at IjKantine, a big indoor-outdoor restaurant benefitting from having a "pirate ship" in full glorious view. Business and visiting at the ship was for various groups and parties, such as a company dinner by Chocolate Makers (see photo of deck group). The company had taken delivery of a few tons of cacao beans sail transported from the Caribbean.

The skeleton crew enjoyed the ambiance of the area and its splendid views of the larger Amsterdam waterfront. Next week will feature a musical event to cap off the successful trip from Den Helder. The relaxed sail transporters are on a course through history, but few people in the world have begun to realize it. Why wait to get involved in a growing movement that, unlike the cheap-oil global economy, has a future of growth?

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On the Sail Transport Network website SailTransportNetwork.org see more stories on the Tres Hombres' adventures:

How Captain Longhair Saved the World

and

Sailing 8,000 bottles of wine to Copenhagen on the brigantine Tres Hombres of Holland

and

Video: see Captain Jorne's TED Talk on sail transport and green cargo.

Starting Monday see the above report on the SailTransportNetwork.org website.

All photos by Jan Lundberg