

Those considering doing so should check the specific details of their policies.

Fog

When a south or south-west wind moves warm moist air across the cold Labrador Current, fog becomes widespread on the coast of Maine and in the region of the Grand Banks. It is most prevalent in spring and summer, and can be expected on about ten days in each month. All of the coastal areas on the eastern side of the north Atlantic, from Norway southwards, are subject to fog.

British and European sailors who tend to associate fog with light winds or calms should be aware that this is often not the case in the western Atlantic, where fog may be accompanied by steady winds of 25 knots or more.

Ice

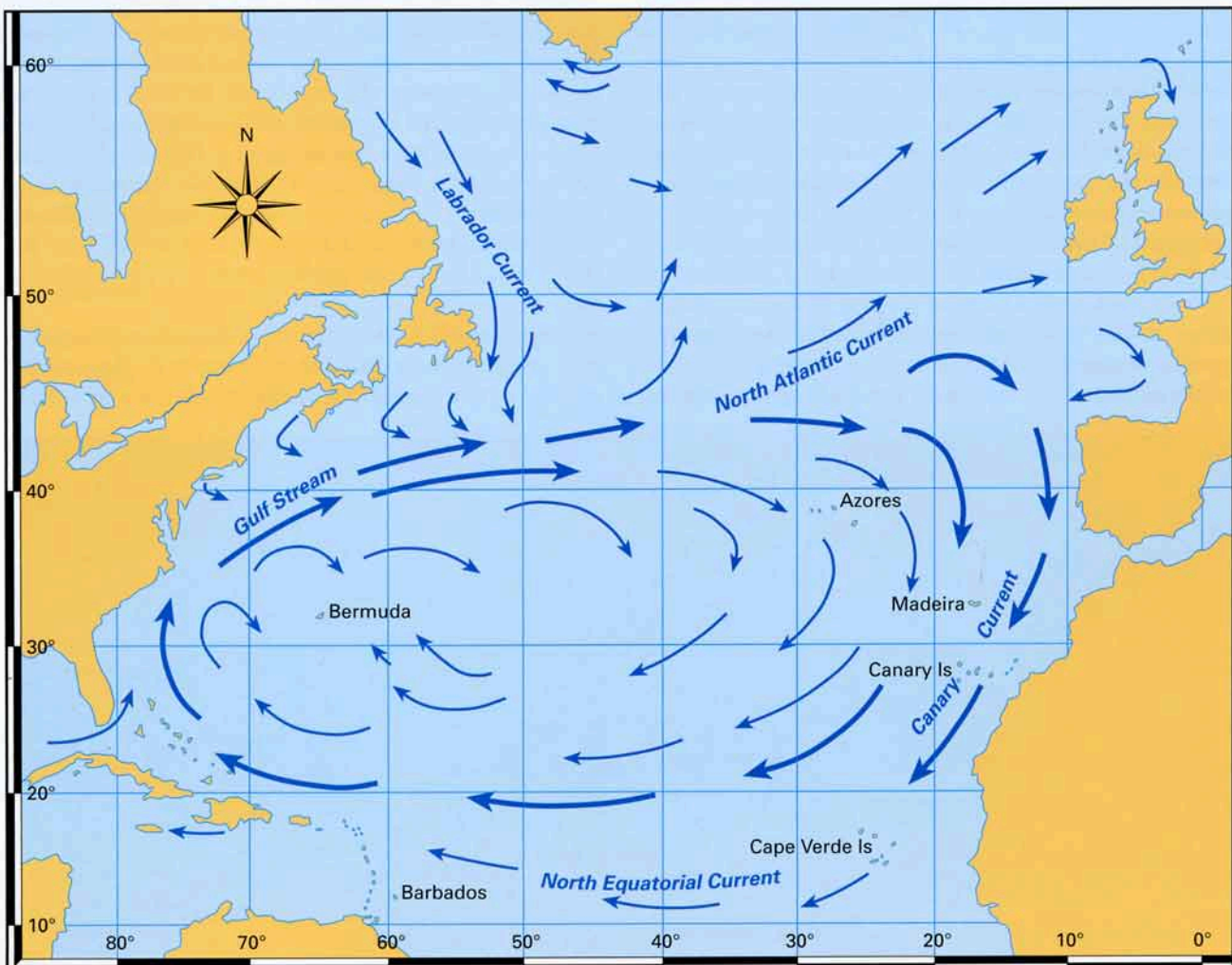
North Atlantic icebergs form by 'calving' from Greenland's glaciers, and are then carried south by wind and currents. They are almost totally confined to an area north of 40°N and west of 40°W, though stray bergs have very occasionally been found south or east of this; they are most widespread between March and July. The

International Ice Patrol locates the position of bergs and gives radio reports.

Ocean currents

There is a close but complex relationship between prevailing winds and ocean currents. That currents will be set up wherever the surface water is continually blown in one direction is fairly obvious, but that this should in turn give rise to coastal currents may be less so. Basically, the mass of moving water must go somewhere on reaching the continental margins, and is generally deflected towards the 'intake' area of the next major wind-driven current.

Thus the north-east trade wind gives rise to the North Equatorial Current, flowing east to west across the Atlantic between about 10° and 25°N. This creates a head of water in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, which emerges through the Strait of Florida and, named the Gulf Stream, flows in a north-easterly direction until it meets the Labrador Current flowing south around Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. This causes the Labrador Current to divide: one part forcing a passage down between the Gulf Stream and the American coast,



Plan 1 General direction of current flow in the north Atlantic.

United States or Canada to Europe via the mid-latitudes

The mid-latitudes, as far as this passage is concerned, may be defined as a track passing south of Sable Island and the Newfoundland Grand Banks but well north of the Azores high pressure system. If the yacht is lying west of Cape Cod, the choice is either to sail south of the Nantucket Shoals or transit the Cape Cod Canal and leave from further north.

In either case, to reduce the time spent in fog and avoid possible icebergs, make for the vicinity of 40°N 50°W – point P on plan 26. Up-to-date weather and ice reports may make it possible to shift this point further north and reduce the distance to be sailed, but the track may then coincide with the main shipping routes which it is preferable to avoid. If ice has moved particularly far south, it may be necessary to continue south of point P.

From point P, a great circle course can be sailed for most European destinations. Winds will be predominantly westerly, but may veer right around the compass as depressions pass through. West of 30°W, up to 1 knot of north-easterly current may be experienced, but both the strength and northerly component diminish further east.

Those remarks regarding landfall made in the section above entitled 'Azores to northern Europe' apply equally to this passage, and to the following one.

United States or Canada to Europe via the great circle

From anywhere in the north-eastern United States the great circle route to northern Europe runs close past the coast of Nova Scotia (well inside Sable Island) and thence to Cape Race on the south-east tip of Newfoundland. The winds are likely to be fair, but there can be a high incidence of fog and there will also be the weak adverse Labrador Current on this part of the route. St John's Harbour, 60 miles north of Cape Race, makes a good final port for provisions and stores. An up-to-date ice report should also be obtained.

From Cape Race or St John's, a great circle course can be shaped. Icebergs and/or fog may have to be contended with until around 40°W (crossed on this route at about 49°N), but east of 40°W normal north Atlantic conditions can be expected with a predominance of fair winds and current. Unfortunately, the Atlantic depressions spawned off Nova Scotia also favour the great circle route on their way to north-west Europe, and there is a good chance of at least one severe gale if crossing this far north. Larger seas may also be expected for much more of the passage than if crossing further south.

Passages westward

Any passage westward in the higher latitudes involves a lot of windward sailing and adverse currents with, in the latter stages, the chance of meeting ice and the certainty of fog on and to the west of the Grand Banks. For this reason few cruising sailors opt to sail directly from northern Europe to Canada or the United States, more often going via the Azores and possibly Bermuda. The direct routes are largely the preserve of entrants in the single-handed races run from Plymouth, United Kingdom to Newport, Rhode Island, who are in the main experienced sailors well able to decide their own routes and prepared to take their chances with the weather. Whatever route is chosen, gale-force headwinds may be met repeatedly as depressions track past, and at least some progress will be lost to the current.

A potential problem further south is the outside chance of encountering a hurricane – see 'United States to Bermuda' above. Weather forecasts should be monitored carefully, particularly later in the season, and the yacht should be readied to take evasive action if necessary. Ideally, landfalls on the American coast south of 40°N should be made before the end of June.

Azores to Bermuda

The route from Europe to the Azores (see Chapter 12), and thence either to Bermuda or direct to the United States, is the summer choice of most cruising sailors. Though headwinds and an adverse current are inevitable for much of the passage, it will at least be warm, and yachts with a good range under power may consider taking the rhumb line or great circle course along the ridge of high pressure that normally lies between Bermuda



Calm weather in mid-ocean between Bermuda and the Azores. Photo Georgie McLaren.