

'Impossible dream' becomes reality

By Chris Robinson and Neil Sackley
BBC News

Becoming the first quadriplegic sailor to cross the Atlantic has been more than a physical challenge for Geoff Holt.

When the father-of-one was last on the beach in Tortola, British Virgin Islands, it was 1984 and he was a fit 18-year-old.

But his life was to change forever following a diving accident, which left him confined to a wheelchair and paralysed from the chest down.

More than two decades later, Mr Holt has made an "emotional" return to Cane Garden Bay on the island, where the accident happened.

His wife Elaine, seven-year-old son Timothy and his supporters sailed out to give him a hero's welcome as he approached the coastline.

" It has been my dream to sail back across the Atlantic to Cane Garden Bay, and I have done it "
Geoff Holt

But the family - last together four weeks ago - were unable to give each other a much-needed hug until the crew

cleared customs.

Clearly emotional and overjoyed, he told BBC News "It's absolutely wonderful to be back 25 years after sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, it's quite emotional really.

"Not just the trip, it has been years in the planning.

"It has been my dream to sail back across the Atlantic to Cane Garden Bay, and I have done it. It's very emotional.

"It has been a long Christmas and new year without [my wife and son] so I am looking forward to having a big hug."

'Christmas drinks'

The 43-year-old is no stranger to sailing the Atlantic - he has sailed it three times before.

However, his latest journey is the first since his accident in 1984.

The 3,000-mile (4,800km) voyage took him south from Lanzarote in the Canary Islands, where the trade winds traditionally help sailors navigate the southern Atlantic.

Mr Holt, who set off on 10 December, planned the challenge from his home in Shedfield, Hampshire, and read through his old log books to remind himself of the difficulties the Atlantic can pose.

He may be modest about his achievements, but re-building his life after the accident and not letting his disability end his passion for sailing has attracted international acclaim.

In 2006 he became the first wheelchair user to gain a powerboat licence and in 2007 he became the first quadriplegic sailor to sail around Britain.

Mr Holt sailed the 60ft (18m) wheelchair-accessible catamaran Impossible Dream alone.

But as he is unable to move himself from his bunk to his chair, dress himself, wash or cook, he required the

assistance of a carer on board.

He was joined by professional carer Susana Scott, who is now a qualified ship's doctor, and cameraman Digby Fox who documented the challenge on video.

Neither assisted him with his sailing, and the voyage which was originally set to take 17 days, has not been without incident.

Early in the crossing he had to contend with a broken generator and contaminated fuel.

And, just a day before completing the challenge, the Impossible Dream was forced to stop just off the island of Antigua to refuel.

The sailor has also battled light winds and mechanical problems aboard the vessel during the voyage.

But there was fun to be had too.

On Christmas Day, with tinsel decorating the inside of the specially-built vessel, he celebrated with his carer and cameraman with a roast chicken dinner, presents and "a little drink or two".

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