

The West Australian

Busselton-Dunsborough Times South West Regional WA

Lockdown yachtie in safe haven

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Thursday, 2 April 2020 1:58PM



Jeanne Socrates visits the Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse on land. Credit: Kim Rhodes

Being stranded in the South West is just the latest complication in a life of exploring for esteemed sailor Jeanne Socrates.

The 77-year-old is the oldest person to have sailed around the five major Capes non-stop.

Originally intending to set sail in 2016, Socrates met with weather and mechanical issues which forced her to reschedule. A fall a week before her third planned voyage in 2017 resulted in serious neck and rib injuries.

Finally, in October 2018, she began her long journey from Victoria, British Columbia, around the South Cape of New Zealand, the South East Cape of Australia, our Cape Leeuwin, Cape Agulhas of South Africa, and Cape Horn, Chile. The circumnavigation of the world through the Southern Ocean was expected to take about eight months, but after several issues on her boat the S/V Nereida, she completed the task in 11 months.

The boat suffered a broken main sail and malfunctioning autopilot, but Socrates persevered with the help of new friends on the Austravel SafetyNet, who radioed support and guidance from land.

The long-range radio operated by members of Austravel SafetyNet Inc. assisted Socrates with running repairs while sailing near Australia.

Socrates said, after thinking she had to hand-steer from Tasmania to Canada, it would have been easy to give up, but she was determined.



Sailor Jeanne Socrates persevered through multiple complications during her record-breaking voyage, her only saviour - a radio. Credit: Jackson Lavell-Lee

“I had so many problems getting around, I’d prepared very well with supplies, re-rigged and replaced worn items but everything I hadn’t thought of replacing broke,” she said.

“I thought I might have to come into Melbourne after the second storm but I didn’t give up.

“I managed to fix things and overcome that adversity — you can always find alternative solutions to any problem.”

Socrates was booked to speak about her sailing experiences at Dunsborough Bay Yacht Club among other Australian dates, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, her motivational tour is cancelled.

She is now stranded in the South West staying with friends she met through radio communications along her wild journey.

“I’m lucky that Kim and Toni have become such good friends through the radio, but I don’t know how long I’ll be there,” she said.

Always the optimist, Socrates said despite the current social restrictions, if we thought our way through problems logically, there was always a way to get to the other side.

“Age is just a number, it’s your health that matters,” she said.