



Before I left, I did a huge amount of work on the Intrepid, an old boat I bought for \$6,500 I'd saved from summer jobs fixing up and selling boats.



I made this sketch so we could check for leaks in the hull.

the boy who sailed around the world

Battling sea squalls and sleep deprivation, Zac Sunderland, a 17-year-old from California, spent a year cruising 25,000 miles in his 36-foot boat to become the youngest person ever to sail around the world solo

WRITER SUSAN HEEGER PHOTOGRAPHER JEN EDNEY



Zac Sunderland didn't even have a driver's license when he left home to circumnavigate the globe on June 14, 2008. He did have a bond with the ocean and a confidence around boats courtesy of his father, a California shipwright. At sea for 13 months and three days, Zac warded off fear and loneliness with a strict routine of boat maintenance, housekeeping, fishing, equipment checks, reading, and satellite phone calls to his parents. But he often had to scrap the schedule when his engine failed or rigging broke—and once when he was pursued by pirates off the coast of Indonesia, until they veered away as suddenly and mysteriously as they had appeared. Sharks followed Zac's boat and strong seas threw him off course, but he was determined to reach this goal. "I have to keep my thoughts focused on the task at hand," he recalls thinking early in his trip. "Can't get too caught up in what-ifs."

Here I am in Panama, winching in my Genoa sail as I head for open seas. Between stops, I sailed in 20-day passages, meeting up with some pretty crazy stuff.

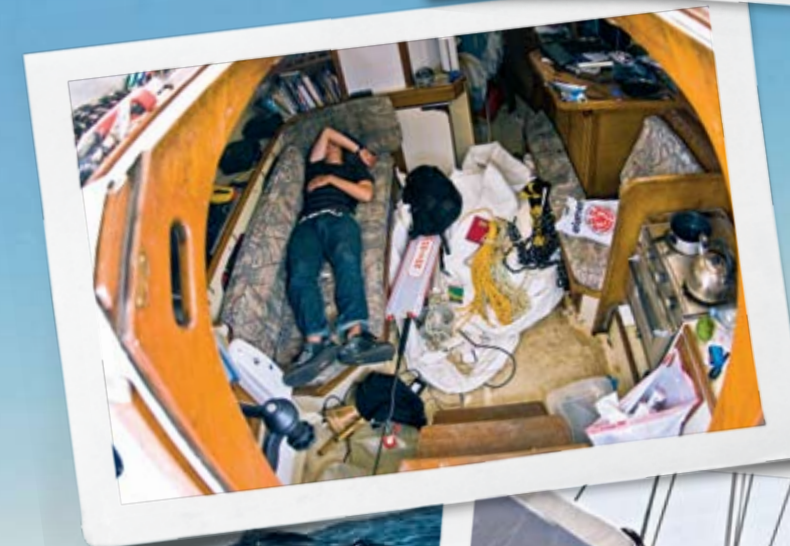
“I respect the ocean, but I’m not scared as long as I’m in control”



Brief stop for provisions: Cape Town, South Africa



on the lunch menu in the Marshall Islands—pigs' liver in blood and fish with eyes! I tasted a tiny bit of everything and left hungry!



Me, crashed out in Mauritius, surrounded by pieces of ripped sail after being up 30 hours hand-steering with a broken forestay and boom!



Another quick nap, just before pushing on

Zac's Journey

departed: June 14, 2008
returned: July 16, 2009



MARINA DEL REY, CALIFORNIA, TO OAHU, HAWAII

The first leg of the trip was spent getting in a good groove and finding his sea legs. All in all, the water was calm and sailing was a breeze.



OAHU, HAWAII, TO DARWIN, AUSTRALIA

Zac dealt with communication issues this leg of the journey and wasn't able to call or e-mail for more than a week. He communicated via radio with other ships, which relayed messages to his parents. An engine problem meant an unscheduled stop at Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.



DARWIN, AUSTRALIA, TO CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Some 300 miles off Indonesia's shore, a mysterious boat seemed to chase Zac one night. He passed the boat without incident, but it was tense. A broken boom and other difficulties also challenged him during this part of the trip.



CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, TO MARINA DEL REY, CALIFORNIA (by way of Grenada and Panama City)

During the longest continuous stretch in the water (five weeks), Zac navigated the Panama Canal, dealt with more boat damage, changed his route because of tropical storms, and was warmly welcomed home.



My new replacement boom arrived from California covered in good-luck messages from all my friends!



The hurricane hit Puerto Vallarta just after I was towed in through 30-knot winds and high seas.



Reuniting with Mom

It was awesome getting back...just great to hug my mom! she'd managed this trip for me, giving me daily weather reports, helping with my blog, and supporting me so much!



Here I am sailing into Marina del Rey for my homecoming. There was a huge party at the yacht club. But what I really wanted was to have things go back to normal. I had a craving for a burger!

GLOBE ILLUSTRATIONS: MATT CASERTA

What Zac Brought on Board

What he wore: men's Puma Inshore Jacket. "It's warm, lightweight, hooded, and watertight."

What he ate: Mountain House chicken teriyaki with rice. "I like freeze-dried food—you just add boiling water and it's done!"

His go-to tools: self-steering Monitor Windvane from Scanmar International.

- three different Raymarine GPS systems for navigation.
- four Husky adjustable wrenches. "For fixing the engine, tightening bolts on the tiller, adjusting the rig."
- two 10-packs of AA lithium batteries. "For my spot transponder, which identified my position and sent a text message to my mom and dad when my satellite phone went down."

- three Panavision night vision cameras. "For filming a documentary of my trip!"

How he passed the time: on his 5'10" Roberts shortboard. Zac surfed some of the world's best breaks. His favorite? Durban, South Africa.

- on his Panasonic Toughbook laptop. For

blogging and other communications, games, and DVDs.

What he read: *North to the Night* by Alvah Simon, about Simon's trip to the Arctic with his wife on a 36-foot sailboat.

What he listened to: his iPod, loaded with Blink-182, Sum 41, Taking Back Sunday, and more.

Read Zac's blog at zacsunderland.com/blog