

Tassie teacher's kayak adventure heads off in a new direction

Unexpected delays and a week in hospital forced teacher ANDREW HUGHES to change course in Papua New Guinea.

A SEA kayak expedition can't begin without a sea kayak. After arriving in Papua New Guinea on April 30 I waited in the remote Western Province township of Kiunga for the supply ship to deliver the goods.

Delay after delay meant arrival and unloading took nearly two weeks longer than expected. My anticipation grew with each idle day in the tropical riverland.

The bad news was delivered to the guesthouse: my kayak was nowhere to be found. The shipping company had somehow left it in their Port Moresby warehouse gathering dust and small ant colonies.

Faced with either waiting a fur-

ther two or more weeks, or flying back to Port Moresby, I chose to fly out and begin paddling a revised journey. The Fly River will have to be a future adventure.

On May 12 I paddled with a heavily loaded kayak out of the yacht club and into the gnashing teeth of the south-east wind. It forced me to paddle in the quieter early mornings, often under moonlight, as I crept towards Alotau.

In the afternoon I'd find a village or a quiet island to set up the tent. Sometimes the local pastor or a friendly fisherman would take me in for the night.

The people along this coast receive few outside visitors and the sight of an orange kayak always attracted a lot of interest. We'd get the map out over a cup of sweet tea and discuss the coastline ahead.

What began as a seemingly insignificant insect bite on my knee developed into a serious infection. When the pain stopped me from walking I knew I had to make the call for urgent help.

On May 29, still over 100 kilometres from medical help, I rang my coordinator in Australia, Rebecca, on the satellite phone from the tent.

With key people in Alotau and at the embassy informed, a boat was organised and dispatched quickly.

The family of Jack Buia at Isidiuidu village looked after me while my condition deteriorated through the day.

At mid-afternoon the rescue boat arrived with painkillers and antibiotics.

The bumpy five hour return to Alotau was a painful relief! After five days in hospital and a further 10 at Masurina Lodge recovering, I was ready to continue.

Before leaving I promised the wonderful doctors and nurses at Alotau Hospital that I would try to get some much needed equipment sent to them on return to Australia.

After rounding East Cape the dreaded headwinds turned to my back and progress became easier. With a day off the water with nasty

gastro I took the chance to build, along with local diver John, a simple sail.

Crossing 40km of open bay days later, it nearly proved my undoing when an unexpected storm hit with severe winds and rain. All I could do was lean into it and hold on while I hurtled towards Cape Vogel.

The knee infection has flared up again so I'm resting at Tufi Dive Resort, which is as relaxing as it sounds.

After a couple of close calls it's time to catch my breath and get set for the paddle/sail to the northern border with West Papua.

To the students who've been travelling online with me so far, and to those that jump aboard now, we've got about two more months of adventures and learning ahead.

● Students and teachers can follow Andrew Hughes' adventure online and find related educational activities on his website at www.expeditionclass.com.au