

# Learning

**watch** ▶ *ttn* is The Total News for students, weekly on digital television station TDT.

**wow** ▶ Tassie teacher Andrew Hughes starts cycling home after paddling around PNG.



**TRAVELLING MAN:** Andrew Hughes and the satellite phone and mini-computer he used to update his educational website while paddling around Papua New Guinea in his sea kayak (inset). Main picture: MICHAEL WATT, The Cairns Post.

# Incredible island

**Teacher ANDREW HUGHES reflects on the adventure that was his journey by kayak around Papua New Guinea.**

**T**HIRTY men stood watching from the beach. Some were from the quarantine station, others were netting fish or walking back from a day in the garden.

The orange kayak had captured their attention. The sharp shore-break banging in where I wanted to land had captured mine.

I waited for the set waves to roll beneath and paddled in on the back of the last one. A small wave caught up and turned the kayak sideways.

Bouncing and bracing into the whitewater, I thought I'd made it. Then the sail, lying awkwardly on

deck, grabbed a handful of water and dived under.

In a flash I was unbalanced and the world went upside down. The sail snapped with the weight of onrushing ocean, as the bemused men helped drag the whole sorry mess onto the sand.

The sail had blown me along for many of the 2000km since Alotau. That it survived as long as it did is testament to John, a passing fisherman who helped build it.

I remember lying in the tent, on an isolated island, when he came along. Without question or quibble he offered his time and expertise as we selected driftwood and cut the tarpaulin to shape.

At the time we decided that it might last a few weeks, in the end it was closer to two months. The final days would be without wind assistance.

The boss of the quarantine sta-

tion welcomed me as he explained his job of keeping a cocoa pod borer from spreading further down the coast. All I could really think about was the two days of paddling remaining to finish the journey.

They passed without incident and I arrived on the beach at Vanimo in early August to complete an eventful PNG expedition. To be able to share the experiences with students has been a privilege.

Thank you Australian Geographic and the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology at UTAS for helping to make it possible, and an extra special thank you to Ms Clymo's champion class at Campbell St Primary who raised \$360 for the Alotau General Hospital fund.

Thoughts are already turning to next year's adventure learning expedition. "8in8" will begin in March 2009 from Hobart. By pad-

dling, riding and walking I hope to reach the eight highest peaks in the eight states and territories, in eight months.

The learning program will focus on Australian geography (I should see plenty of that), and expedition skills. There's already a small team of students ready to tackle Mt Bartle Frere in northern Queensland with me.

I'll need a fair bit of help in the other far-flung parts of Australia too. There'll be something to learn under every rock and around every twist in the track. I'm looking forward to having plenty of schools along for the ride, paddle and walk.

**Andrew Hughes' expedition around PNG will be the subject of a Learning activity page in tomorrow's Mercury. Follow his bicycle ride home from Cairns to Hobart via his website: [www.expeditionclass.com](http://www.expeditionclass.com)**