

Kayak teacher set to take to the road

Nearing the end of his adventure in Papua New Guinea, teacher **ANDREW HUGHES** is planning a new route home.

A STRANGELY uneventful day, I thought. Barely a puff wind, no fishermen to talk to, nothing much to share with the students on the website that night.

Just hour upon hour of rotating shoulders and crusty salt build-up on my forearms as I paddled ever onwards in my kayak.

Then a bump from behind. I looked under my armpit and saw a shark keeping perfect pace, just below the surface. That's not good. Then an explosion of energy as it thrashed around. I panicked and held my breath with arms aloft.

I wanted to climb my small flimsy sail, but could only sit and wait. Left and right it dashed with lightning speed before eventually sinking out of sight.

Fishermen later told me it sounded like the shark was chasing a fish that was using the kayak for protection.

After eventually making a full recovery from my knee infection, I've made fast progress along the northern PNG coast.

The disaster-struck Oro Province still shows signs of the fierce storms of last year, with a battered coastline and rebuilding villages.

Into Morobe Province I hopped along the white sand fringed islands and bought bananas and pawpaw for lunch.

Instead of stopping in Lae, a major city, I cut across the Huon Gulf and headed for Finsschafen. In a blur of villages, beaches, colourful people and biting insects, I find myself past Madang, beyond Wewak and nearing the end. Perhaps as you read this I'm already there.

Climate change has been the major learning focus for this expedition. The weather — a product of the climate — has never been far from my thoughts. A few nights ago, in the tent during a thunderstorm, it wasn't far from my head either!

In Tufi the kaukau (sweet potato) was rotting in the ground because unheard of rain was falling in their dry season. Local phenomenon or global climate change, earthly explanation or human expiration? Hopefully students have a better understanding and can make up their own minds.

I've decided to take a carbon bullet and will ride a bike from Cairns back south.

I'll be home by Christmas and, as they say in PNG, we'll have to share some stories then.

● Review Andrew Hughes' adventure and follow his bike ride home via his website at www.expeditionclass.com