

Kids Making Sea History: Zac Sunderland

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It's dark and you're wet and tired-but jumping into a nice warm bed isn't an option. While some of your friends are up late, studying for a test at school tomorrow, you're taking a test of a different sort, and your school is the ocean all around you. You are Zac Sunderland, a 17-year-old from California crossing the Indian Ocean all by yourself on a 36-foot-sailboat.

On 16 July 2009, Zac sailed his boat back to Marina del Rey in California, the place where he'd left just over a year before. Upon his arrival, he became the youngest person in history to sail solo around the world. To accomplish this remarkable feat, Zac had to overcome countless challenges, from storms and sleep deprivation to equipment failures and even being chased by pirates.

When something breaks on your boat, thousands of miles out to sea, you have to fix it yourself or figure out how to go without. Fresh food doesn't last long, so get used to eating freeze-dried meals and lots of canned food. And, it's lonely.

Zac's experiences at sea were not all difficult and miserable. He got the chance to gaze at a night sky more brilliant than you'll ever see from land, witness spectacular sunrises and sunsets, and marvel at sea life all around. His hair grew long and his muscles got firm-he now sports six-pack abs.

Zac sailed solo but not non-stop. He made port stops along the way to resupply his boat with food, later, and fuel. During these stops, he got to meet people from different cultures all over the world. Zac kept in constant contact with his family via e-mail and satellite phone, and his father, a shipwright, flew to meet him in many of his port stops to take him out for a good meal and, oftentimes, help repair the boat when something needed fixing.

Now that Zac is home, he'll have to get used to sleeping through the night, having people to talk to all the time, and staying in one place for a while. He still needs to finish high school and practice how to drive a car! Despite the uniqueness of Zac's accomplishment, two challengers are not far behind. 16-year old Mike Perham is scheduled to arrive home in Portsmouth, England, by the end of August...and he's three months younger than Zac.

By the time of his arrival, 15-year-old Jessica Watson from Australia will have embarked on her own quest, where she'll attempt to sail solo around the world, non-stop. In the meantime, congratulations Zac and fair winds on your next adventure.

