ALL IN!

THE ATLANTIC SUP CROSSING – 93 DAYS ALONE AT SEA

CHRIS BERTISH

An inspiring story about grit, courage, passion and purpose!

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THE ATLANTIC STANDUP PADDLE CROSSING
– 93 DAYS ALONE AT SEA

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'To cross an ocean alone requires real courage. Getting to the other side takes huge resilience. To conceive of such a journey in the first place, you need incredible self-belief. Chris Bertish has them all.'

- Lewis Pugh - Endurance swimmer and UN Patron of the Oceans

'Chris Bertish is always totally committed to the various extreme challenges he assigns himself, and does them in full support of other people's needs. I've watched in awe for a number of years as Chris selflessly uses his time and skills to bring awareness to various causes dear to him and many others.'

- Kelly Slater - Eleven times Surfing World Champion

'There is a fine line between remarkable and crazy. Read this book to find out which side of the line Chris is on and how you can be on that side too.'

- Guy Kawasaki - Author, host of the *Remarkable People* podcast, past Chief Evangelist at Apple & now of Canva.

'After reading this account, I conclude that Chris's Atlantic crossing ranks as one of the great expeditions and achievements in the history of exploration!'

- Professor Timothy Noakes - Sports Scientist, Nutrition guru: Sports Scientist- (MBChB) MD + DSC (Med)

'Chris is the truest definition of what is possible when we believe in ourselves. From winning at one of the fiercest big waves on the planet, Mavericks, to his solo adventures across the world's largest oceans. Thank you Chris for showing us that we all can live our own Heroes Journey.'

- Kai Lenny - Professional Big Wave Surfer, SUP Champion & Waterman

'Nothing comes close to what Chris Bertish accomplished in his transatlantic SUP crossing. This 93-day solo expedition is the single most impactful and inspirational journey to ever occur in the history of stand up paddling. Period.'

- Evelyn O'Doherty - Chief Editor - *StandUp Journal / Session*

My Commitment to Sustainability

In everything I do in my life, my business and brand, I try wherever possible to set an example for positive change and this book is no exception. This is one of the main reasons for self- publishing, so I can control and manage that process to ensure I am doing the best I can to make a book that I can be proud of, that is not only doing good for business, but also for you he reader and for the planet.

I do this by printing on FSC® (Forest Stewardship Council®) approved and certified paper or post consumer-waste(PCW) recycled paper. Using printers that use FSC® standard facilities, that try to print in the most responsible and environmentally friendly manner possible.

I go over and above this, by planting a dedicated All In! 'book forest' through the Platbos Forest Reserve in South Africa, and another in aja, Mexico, through the SeaTrees initiative.

My goal is always to be a better human, each and every day in some small way; to be a role model for positive change. is book, I believe, is a great example of this.

I'm also creating a Limited Edition book, which will be the first of its kind. The book will be printed on plant based paper, using water based or soy based inks, eco thread binding, using non-toxic glues, while using the first ever, Toile Ocean-Recycled plastic bottles for the books hardcover. Using a printer that is completely powered by nature-wind and solar. I hope that authors globally can also move towards creating more sustainable books like this, even though it increases the costs and impacts on profits, but even more importantly, it creates awareness and a knowing that there is a better way, while simultaneously giving back to people and to the planet.

So read this book, enjoy it and know that your purchase makes a small difference, by helping us plant multiple forests around the world. Why? Because it's just the right thing to do.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.
– William Ernest Henley, 'Invictus'

And once the storm is over, you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about.
– Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

Only those who will risk going too far, can possibly find out how far one can go!
– T. S. Eliot


NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
Agadir, Morocco
English Harbour
Antigua, Caribbean
SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
Atlantic SUP Crossing
4050 NM / 7500 KM
Africa to the Caribbean

Distance Measurements

NM – nautical mile – The nautical mile is based on the Earth's latitude and longitude coordinates, with one nautical mile equaling one minute of latitude. A nautical mile is slightly longer than a mile on land, equaling 1,1508 land-measured (or statute) miles.

sm – statute mile – The familiar land mile is called a statute mile. It is based on paces and is 5,280 feet, or 1,609 kilometers.

km – kilometers – there are 1,852 meters, or 1,852 kilometers in a nautical mile. To travel around the Earth at the equator, you would have to travel 21,600 nautical miles, 24,857 miles or 40,003 kilometers.

kn – knots – one knot equals one NM per hour (or 1,15 statute miles per hour).

Chris Bertish covered 4050 NM/7500 km on his solo Atlantic crossing.

Nautical Terms

Bow – The front of the craft or boat.

Stern – The back of the craft or boat.

Port – If you are looking forward to the bow of any boat/yacht, the port side would be the left hand side.

Starboard – If you are looking forward to the bow of any boat/yacht, the starboard side would be the right hand side.

The deck – The top side of the craft that I stand on and paddle from, between the stern area and the front pod (my cabin).

Trades / trade winds – The winds over a certain section of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans that are normally fairly consistent in strength and direction are commonly known as the trades; they blow in the same direction, every year over that area of ocean.

Para-anchor / parachute anchor – The sea anchor that I deploy off the side of the craft when the weather is bad, in order to get dragged slowly with the ocean conditions to slow down and stabilize the craft and drift ratio. It looks like a parachute – 6 feet wide, and attached to a line 20 meters long, which connects to the front of my craft. I retrieve it with another line called the retrieval line, which I pull it back in with, onto the side of the craft, where it is stuffed into a small bag on deck, waiting to be deployed again.

Waypoint – A particular position on an ocean chart indicated by a GPS point, which is given by a latitude and longitude coordinate to give the exact location. A route on the ocean is often made up of a sequence of waypoints.

GPS – Global Positioning System, uses a device that gives your exact position in coordinates, also using latitude and longitude, via an array of orbiting satellites.

Contents

Foreword

When I had completed the foreword to Chris Bertish's first book, *Stoked!*, I presumed that this would be the end. For the book described enough quests to fill a legion of lives; surely there was no need for yet more explorations.

The defining moment in Stoked! occurred during the 2010 Mavericks Big Wave Invitational surfing competition in Half Moon Bay, California. The event featured the most monstrous waves – in excess of 50 foot – in the history of competitive surfing. Given only 36 hours to travel from Cape Town to San Francisco; arriving just three hours before the competition began and with his board and wetsuit lost en route, in his first heat Chris was held down under multiple 60-foot waves, experiencing a near fatal drowning. His choice became to retire gracefully from the competition. Or to continue. He chose to continue. Later that afternoon after surfing another five monster waves in the semi-finals and finals, Chris was crowned the winner of what will forever be remembered as perhaps the most epic competition in surfing history.

Having once been scared rigid surfing a rather less gigantic six-foot wave I realized that, although we inhabit the same city, Chris and I exist in different universes.

When Chris informed me that he was planning to cross the Atlantic alone on a tiny stand-up paddleboard, I was quite certain that there would be no sequel to *Stoked!*. For in my more limited universe the probability that Chris could survive a paddle of 7500 kilometers across the Atlantic Ocean on his own, was infinitesimally small. The certainty of a fatal outcome was simply overwhelming: illness; injury; being run over by an ocean liner in the middle of the night; equipment

failure; starvation from running out of food, etc. In my universe the list of dangers was simply overwhelming.

Of course in Chris's universe, the list was very much longer and, for us but not for him, even more frightening. And that is exactly why he would dare to challenge the impossible. He did not choose to cross the Atlantic because it is easy. Rather, in the words of a former US president, 'because it was hard'. Very hard. Almost, but not quite, too hard. Having now read this complete record, I conclude that his ocean crossing ranks as one of the great achievements in the history of exploration.

So how do I justify that opinion?

Some years ago I wondered what the greatest human endurance performance of all time was. This took me to the iconic Polar explorers from the beginning of the 20th Century including Nansen, Shackleton, Scott, Amundsen and, more recently, Sir Ranulph Fiennes and Dr Michael Stroud. I graded the difficulty of their performances according to the total energy they had to expend in their quests compared to modern athletes like cyclists in the 21-day Tour de France, a particularly demanding event.

The clear winner was Captain Robert Scott's team that expended more than 1 million kilocalories (kcal) in their ultimately fatal 159-day trek to and from the South Pole in the Antarctic summer of 1911/12. This compares to about 170,000 kcal expended by Tour de France cyclists, which is about half the energy cost of running across the continental United States. Of the modern Polar explorers, Fiennes and Stroud expended an estimated 570,000 kcal in their 95-day 2300 km trek across Antarctica. By the end both had lost 20 kg, had exceeded their physical limits and were close to death.

In his 93-day Atlantic crossing, Chris Bertish paddled an average of 10 hours a day, averaging 36 strokes/min for a total of 930 hours of paddling involving more than 2 million paddle strokes. The energy cost of stand-up paddling varies between 500 (light paddling) and 900 (competitive paddling) kcal/hr. A conservative measure would be that Chris expended at least 550,000 kcal in paddling across the Atlantic. Which

places his performance in the same league as that of Fiennes and Stroud in their near fatal Antarctic crossing.

But as you read this epic account you will realize that by comparison the Polar explorers had it rather easier. They were walking and sleeping on a stable surface; their navigation was less complex; they were not at risk of getting irretrievably lost in an enormous ocean; they had no scarcity of water; they did not go backwards if they stopped moving forwards; they were doing what others had already done; and they had others with whom to share their mental burden. Nor was there the constant danger of falling overboard and drowning.

Sir Raymond Priestley who accompanied first Shackleton in 1909 and then Scott in 1911 to Antarctica, wrote: 'For scientific discovery give me Scott; for speed and efficiency of travel give me Amundsen; but when disaster strikes and all hope is gone, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton.'

Perhaps if he was now alive to read this book, Priestley might revise his opinion.

Perhaps like me he would conclude: To cope effectively with all eventualities, always give me Chris Bertish.

My friend, my hero and my inspiration.

Professor Timothy Noakes

PROLOGUE

Just Add Water

Mavericks, CA | 37°29'32.97"N 122°30'8.75"W

Just add water, and everything is okay…

Everything I do has always involved water and the ocean. After winning the Mavericks Big Wave Invitational in 2010, in the biggest waves ever paddled into at the time, I needed a new challenge, a new ocean sport to push my limits. I found it in stand-up paddleboarding.

Stand-up paddleboarding combines all my water sports experience – windsurfing, surfing, and sailing – with a greater understanding of the ocean and the elements. It's the most versatile sport I know. I love the fact that I can still ride big waves on my stand-up paddleboard (SUP), but at the same time, use it to explore coastlines, rivers, waterfalls – and create my own adventures.

Naturally, I always wanted to push it further.

One day I was chatting with some friends around a fire.

'What if I could use only the strength in my arms and the skills I've learned across all the sports, over all my years as a waterman and use all of this knowledge and experience to paddle solo, completely unsupported, all the way across the Atlantic Ocean, from one continent to another?' I asked.

'That's impossible,' they said.

'Is it?' I smiled.

'All In'

Kommetjie, RSA | 34°8'35.24"S 18°19'53.03"E

What would you put on the line, give up or sacrifice for what you believe in?

People talk about being 'All In', but often it's just a loose expression implying that they are committed to something, but they're not actually prepared to put much on the line.

For me, the definition of 'All In' is being totally committed. It's being prepared to put everything in your life on the line for what you believe in – no matter what! It's about letting go, shedding your skin, freeing yourself from material things and everything you have accumulated in order to follow your passions, because you believe in it with every fiber in your being and are prepared to do whatever it takes to achieve something greater than yourself.

'All In', in its purest sense, is a state that I have lived all my life. It's the reason for every success in everything I have done.

Another is something I call 'Visual Blueprinting'. If you've read my previous book *Stoked!* you'll know my mantra *See it, Dream it, Believe it, Achieve it*.

Visualization is the key that unlocks this process. I've used visualization, manifestation and visual imaging in all my biggest projects and to achieve my greatest goals – not just in sport, but in all areas of my life.

The way it works is this: I imagine every detail of the thing I am striving for, until I can see it so clearly it's like being able to watch the movie in my head over and over, in full HD.

I imagine it so completely that I can see the colors: vivid, raw and

rich. I hear the sounds, smell the scents in the sea air, see the water in perfect motion… Once I can play it in moving color with sight and sound, I start adding the emotion, which is the purpose, my 'why'.

Those feelings are like rocket fuel – pure power. When it gets really tough out there, you need this fuel to keep you going, it becomes your superpower.

Some things are so epic you can't even imagine them. I never imagined that I would get towed towards the cliffs of the Canary Islands by a giant sea squid; or surf down 10-meter waves in the middle of the Atlantic, hanging on the edge of my modified SUP for dear life; or get breached on and circled by a giant Great White shark thousands of miles away from any help. At that point, I was actually closer to the International Space Station than to any other human!

These are the things I didn't visualize, but which all happened to me during my 7500 km transatlantic solo SUP crossing. In the pages that follow, I'll tell you all about them, how I survived them and overcame the odds to succeed in something everyone thought was simply impossible – if not totally bonkers!

I hope you enjoy the story, I hope it positively impacts on your life, like it has mine, that you will be inspired and possibly have your horizons widened and your perceptions of what is possible in your own life altered forever.

Remember, the only way forward is *All In*!

Just Start!

Molokai, HI | 21°11'13.66"N 157°14'38.58"W
July 25, 2015

The Molokai is a 31-mile (51-km) race from Molokai to Oahu, Hawaii, against the world's best stand-up paddlers. It's known to be the most grueling, most difficult, and longest stand-up paddleboard race in the world. Entries are strictly limited to 80 participants. In 2015, because I held the 12-hour SUP World Record, I was invited to be one of them.

It was something I'd wanted to do ever since I first heard about it. The timing wasn't ideal, just two weeks after my 24-hour Open Ocean Record, but I felt privileged to be part of it and was keen to see where I stood in relation to the world's top SUP paddlers.

We were going to be showing *Ocean Driven*, my film about my 2010 Mavericks win, at one of the main cinemas on Oahu. So a couple days before registration for Molokai, my wife Clellind and I flew out, attended the screening, and then flew over to Maui the following day.

I wasn't able to bring my own ocean race board because of its length. The board I had done all my records on was a 17-foot 'bullet', a pretty standard size for this kind of race, but not one that airlines will accommodate.

One of my sponsors, SIC, was based in Maui and said they would provide me with a board for the race. Sadly, when I arrived there it turned out they didn't have a 17-foot board, only a 14-foot – not what I was used to, but since I was technically on honeymoon, I just accepted it, I was happy to compete and see how I would do.

It turned out that ferries don't accept ocean race boards easily either.

Special transport boats had been arranged to take all the race

participants' boards from Maui to the start point of the race at Molokai, but by the time I got there with my borrowed board, they had all left for the island. The last ferry was for passengers only; boards were definitely not allowed – the ferry driver made it clear he would get fired if he made an exception.

There was really only one option for me: put my wife on the last ferry and paddle myself over to Molokai, or miss the race.

The race from Molokai to Oahu runs across the 'Channel of Bones' – renowned for big seas, strong winds and currents. On the other side is Maui with a 29-mile wide channel – but there is more wind on that side, so most people don't do that crossing. This is the one I was about to do.

There are thousands of miles between these islands and the next one, which is Fiji, so if you don't have a support boat and you go missing, you are gone. But there was simply no other way I was going to be able to get myself and my board over there.

Most other people probably wouldn't dream of doing that channel crossing solo or alone. But for me it was a really simple solution and the only option available with a guaranteed outcome. This is what I had been training for the last couple of years – all the solo journeys I had done, in way more treacherous waters… *So just paddle it! It's that simple*.

So I just paddled the Maui-to-Molokai channel, alone and unsupported, almost the exact same distance as the actual race from Molokai to Oahu, only the afternoon before.

I did the 46-kilometer paddle in just under six hours, with all my gear and no one else around. And man, it was the most incredible crossing! It's probably still to this day the best downwind crossing I've ever done on a stand-up paddleboard anywhere on the planet. Beautiful warm, blue water, a couple of reef sharks and turtles and flying fish, and some of the most amazing runs I've ever experienced.

I got to the pier at Molokai at six o'clock that evening. I met my wife and checked into the hotel room just before the welcome function. No one else in the race knew that I'd just done one of the longest, heaviest channels in the world, completely unsupported, just to get to the race!

But if I thought the race itself was going to be easy by comparison, I was mistaken.

I managed to get a decent night's sleep and was up early in the morning for the opening ceremony and special blessing led by Clark Abbey.

Then I met up with my support boat crew. Every racer has to have his or her own support boat. We'd been through everything before so we had everything prepped. It looked like the wind would be very light across the journey, so a lot of people were worried it was going to be very hot, which could result in heat exhaustion. But since I'd done my own private Molokai the day before, I was ready to rock and roll!

I was waiting on the start line, happy to be there and just be a part of it; a dream come true. The horn went for the beginning of the race, I took three strokes… and on my third stroke, my paddle shaft snapped in my hand and came apart completely in two pieces.

This was my favorite race paddle that I'd been using for the last two and a half years through all my different journeys. Now I was standing at the start line, watching everyone else disappear off into the distance, with two pieces of paddle in my hand.

I've never, ever had a paddle snap on me before. The only other paddle I had brought with me was my wave paddle, which is completely different – it has a different blade, different strength, different flex pattern and, most importantly, it's almost two feet shorter than a proper downwind race paddle.

The race rules stipulated that if there was any problem on the start line, no one could call in backup until everyone had cleared at least 200 m from the start. So I had to sit there waiting, literally watching everyone disappear off into the distance before I could even try and find my team amongst the hundred-odd support boats that were there. It probably took me 10 minutes before I located them and got the other paddle sorted.

At that point, I could have dropped out – just thrown in the paddle, literally. No one had ever done a Molokai with a wave paddle – never mind starting 15 minutes behind everyone else. Anybody that's paddled

a SUP knows how completely different a race paddle and a wave paddle are, and what the difference of almost two feet in shaft length makes to your stroke. I just thought to myself, *Well, I'm just going to have to learn a different kind of stroke and different way of paddling on this crossing.*

Then I looked out into the distance. I was so far behind that the entire fleet had already gone around the corner. I couldn't even see them. I could literally only just make out the last competitor, one yellow jersey ahead of me.

I said to myself, *Well it's really simple. Think of that person as your 'Golden Monkey'. He's your target, and you are just going to do your damnedest to try and catch him up.*

That was my only goal: just to catch that one last person I could see with the bright golden vest on. So for the next hour, that's all I did; I just focused on trying to catch that one 'monkey'.

Amazingly, within about 45 minutes I'd caught up with him and then reset my target to the next monkey. And when I got to that monkey, I was like, *Well, now I can see lots more monkeys in the distance.* So I set my sights on the next monkey that I could find. And I caught that one. And then I caught another. And then another, and another, until I realized that I wasn't actually doing too badly, I was catching a lot of monkeys! Now my goal was to catch as many monkeys as possible.

It turned out to be one of the toughest Molokai races in the history of the race. More than 30% of the fleet pulled out because of heat exhaustion. There wasn't a lot of wind, which made it absolutely brutal. By the time I got to the iconic China Walls, the rock point just before the beach where the race finished, I had caught over 63 monkeys. And because I'd mapped out that location and knew it pretty well, and because by random chance there was a big south swell that day (super rare that time of the year) I ended up catching a wave all the way from the outside right through till just before the finish, overtaking another five monkeys on the way in.

Even though I started a couple miles behind everyone else, and

paddled with a wave paddle and a stock standard 14-foot board, I still ended up making the top five in my division.

It just goes to show that if you put your head down, focus on what's in front of you, break it down and just pick off one monkey at a time, you can achieve anything. That's my Law of the Golden Monkeys.

I believe that everyone needs their own monkeys to keep them going; goals on their journey and a golden monkey they may never catch, but which keeps them going even when the going gets tough. *Especially* when the going gets tough. It's called being driven by passion and powered by purpose.

It's what helped get me across the Atlantic Ocean just over a year later.

Back to the Beginning

Crayfish Factory, RSA | 34°10'44.25"S 18°20'35.80"E

I like to keep learning and growing and trying new things. Stand-up paddleboarding was no exception – but it made me realize I'm a lot more competitive than I thought.

Whenever I get into a new sport I become super passionate about it – obsessively focused, some would say, until I've got it down to a point that I feel I'm well skilled at it.

In 2012, I started to get obsessive about stand-up paddleboarding. I was in Cape Town, and I started riding big waves at my local breaks – Sunset and Crayfish Factory. Even taking supping to another level by getting barreled at Dungeons, our local, very scary big wave.

I finally got a big wave SUP made by my great friend and legend, Jeff Clark, and started riding locations all over the world, including Mavericks. I became the first person to stand-up paddle into Nelscott Reef in Oregon and got caught inside by some really big waves.

While all that was happening, I was also starting to get into open-ocean downwind stand-up paddleboarding. It was sort of like all the water sports I'd ever done combined; it connected the dots between sailing, surfing and stand-up paddleboarding. The way it utilized the weather, the wind, riding the bumps and the energy of the ocean really fascinated me.

Basically, because you are standing up, your body acts as a sail, which means downwind is a lot easier than going into the wind. So I started to do all the downwind runs in South Africa around Cape Town, distances of between 10 and 20 km. At the same time I was also doing SUP wave riding, trying to juggle surfing on the Big Wave World Tour, while running a business full time, to pay the bills.

In order to be successful at anything, you have to challenge yourself constantly and tackle things head on. So even though I was very accomplished in big wave surfing, I wanted to lean into a new sport. I wanted to challenge myself, evolve and grow through to something else. And I think you can use that principle on anything, not just sport, if you go 'All In'.

Following your heart, creating a burning desire, gives you the passion to keep going and keep pushing through the tough times. Fear can be a positive thing too. When you move through your fears and tackle them head on… that's where the magic happens, and where your greatest potential lies. That's when we are forced to lift our game and become the best versions of ourselves. That's when we shine and live our greatest life.

So, I started really getting into downwind stand-up paddleboard, doing downwind runs with 30 to 40 knots of wind across an 8-mile (12-km) distance downwind. I became the first SUP to join the local surfski race every Wednesday night; within a year I was beating the back third of the surfski fleet.

I held the record as South Africa's top downwind stand-up paddleboarder or three or four years and was part of the team that represented SA in the ISA SUP World Championships in 2012 and 2013. I started comparing my times with the guys overseas and found that I had some of the fastest times in the world over the long distances. That got me thinking about the 12-hour record, which was just over 60 miles (96 km). So I started looking for a section of coastline where I could do 100 or 110 km over two days.

This was a long time before I had the idea to stand-up paddle solo across the Atlantic Ocean. But the germ of the idea was there, in those hours of being alone at sea, just me and my board.

Before I could even come up with the pitch, I had to prove it could be done.

That started the idea for the expedition I called the 'Proof of Concept'.

Proof-of-Concept Paddle

Cape Point, RSA | 34°21'16.47"S 18°28'13.80"E

For most of 2012, I was thinking of how to cross the Atlantic on a SUP. I figured out the way to do it was to go from Senegal to Brazil, which is probably the shortest route, and planned on using a support boat. I even launched the idea that October, at The Toad – my good friend Dougie Boyes's restaurant. I told everybody my plan, but I didn't really get any buy in or positive feedback. Pretty much everyone thought it was impossible. And if you know anything about me, you'll know that word doesn't ever sit well with me. It's like a red rag to a bull.

The more I researched the idea, the more I realized that the greatest challenge and expense would actually be for a support boat. You need a boat that is nimble enough to come alongside you in unpredictable seas, but big enough to handle the distance. It needs to be able to stop, start, and return to a specific GPS position after each shift, daily and through the night, through all conditions, rain, shine or storm, for more than three months. That suddenly became a totally different logistical challenge, because the type of vessel you needed to do all that, was a very big, 65 ft-plus, expensive yacht or research vessel, built to withstand long durations at sea. That narrows things down to a very unique vessel, that costs an untenable amount of money. You are also 100% reliant on them; if anything goes wrong with that vessel or crew and they need to return to land for whatever reason, your expedition is over!

So then I thought, *What if I could do it without a support boat?* What if I could build the right little craft so I could carry everything I needed – dehydrated food, watermaker, navigational and comms equipment – and be completely self sufficient?

I needed to do a proof-of-concept paddle, which would be to paddle, unsupported, over 350 km (220 miles) – about a tenth of the shortest distance across the Atlantic, from Senegal to Brazil. If I could do that, and possibly do a 12-hour open-ocean record to show that I could handle the relentlessness of the task, then I could prove that it was possible and I'd be able to give it a crack. So that's pretty much what I set out to do for the next year.

▪ ▪ ▪

The West Coast of South Africa is known as one of the gnarliest coastlines in the world. The water rarely gets above 14°C (57°F), the winds are notoriously ferocious, consistently blowing over 40 kn, through the summer, with seas that are big and wild and there are plenty of sharks. The infamous Cape of Storms, which is a graveyard of shipwrecks, is known globally as one of the world's most treacherous coastlines, and if you can learn to survive in these conditions, you can survive pretty much anywhere and any ocean conditions on the planet.

So I mapped out a 350 km stretch from Cape Point in the south (the second most southern point of Africa) to Lamberts Bay in the north, up the Atlantic West Coast.

This was to be a solo mission, which meant carrying everything I needed on the board: tent, sleeping bag, cooking gear, food, hydration, communication equipment, emergency, first aid and safety gear. Everything had to be watertight and strapped down to my SUP, meticulously, with backups of most of the main critical safety devices. It all added up to over 40 kg, strapped down onto my 17 ft Naish Javelin.

Finally the day came and I was ready. The forecast looked promising with steady southeast trades predicted, which should have given me epic downwind conditions for most of the way. Should have is the key phrase there… because they didn't.

Leaving from Cape Point was the first challenge. The heaving five-meter surf that week was causing havoc along the entire coastline. It

made it almost impossible to get out through the surf and across the outer reefs. It was ridiculous to try and get through those conditions, even with nothing on your board, but with all my gear strapped down there was just no way I could do it safely and survive. After three or four attempts I moved about two kilometers north, to Olifantsbos. I knew the channels from surfing here and managed to sneak out, watched by ostriches on the beach, some gemsbok and a few baboons.

Paddling just under 40 km that day I went past Scarborough, Kommetjie, Hout Bay, and Dungeons – one of Cape Town's premier big wave spots and I was very mindful of those big four- to five-meter waves and gave it a wide berth. It didn't help that a giant sunfish just off Dungeons scared the living hell out of me – the fin sticking out of the water looks just like a giant Great White shark!

I spent the first night at Sandy Bay, setting my alarm for 4 am to be on the water between 5 and 6 am. On day two I woke up to a howling 35-kn offshore wind. It was not supposed to be that strong, but luckily it backed off by 8 am – I had to cover 40 km to Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for so many years. You're not allowed to stay there, but I figured if I got close in the late afternoon, I could skirt the back end of the island and come in under the mask of darkness. So that's what I did. As the sun began to set I came in amongst all the kelp beds to camouflage myself, pulled all my gear up through a penguin colony and set up my camp hidden amongst the bushes, with the most amazing view of Table Mountain lit up by the city lights. It was one of the most special and unique nights under the stars in my life.

I woke up super early because I needed to be gone by first light, not to be seen by the rangers. Day three was probably my biggest paddle day: a monster 52 km to Dassen Island. That's like paddling more than a Molokai Race, open-ocean, 10–20 km offshore, but with NO support or support boat, in far more testing and severe conditions, in icy Atlantic water, with the equivalent in weight of a small human tied to the deck of your board.

The journey between Robben Island and Dassen Island had never been paddled before. I would be between eight and fifteen kilometers off the coastline, and if I got it wrong and missed the island for any reason and got blown out, the closest form of land after that point is Brazil! I wasn't quite ready to cross the Atlantic just yet, and definitely not on my normal SUP!

Unfortunately the predicted SSE wind never got out of the south-west corner, which was really bad for me, as I had to paddle the entire way, paddling only on one side, with the wind 90 degrees off my left shoulder. By the time I reached the lee of the island, over 10 hours from my 6 am start, I was completely broken, fatigued, sunstroked and beyond exhausted. But I knew if I sat down, took a break at all, I'd be pushed so far off course that I wouldn't be able to make the island, so I had to just keep on paddling on one side.

At 4:45 pm I only just got to the corner of the island as the wind picked up to over 30 kn and I grabbed the first piece of kelp that I could find, just off the outer reefs. I lay there, holding on for what seemed like hours, but was probably only 20 minutes, just trying to regain my composure and my breath. My hands were blistered across all my fingers, and I was feeling deep fatigue through my muscles and bones. By the time I found a way in it was a quarter to six. I was so exhausted I just pulled all my stuff up onto the beach, collapsed face down on the sand and passed out.

When I woke up it was pitch black. I was completely dehydrated, but found some water on the island. My eyes felt scratchy and really sensitive and I was worried about how they would be in the morning. I set up my little camp, made some food, and checked in on my sat phone tracker, to let people on the mainland know I'd made it.

When I woke up on day four I could hardly open my eyes – my corneas were badly burnt. To make matters worse, a thick fog had set in down the coast, taking visibility down to less than 50 meters. To start in that mist, with a northerly headwind that would swing to the south-west, made the 55 km to Langebaan Lagoon a nightmare; it would be

pushing me onto land and the surf was forecast to be massive.

About an hour in I heard engines, getting louder and louder in the middle of the fog. A lot of these fishing boats don't have any lights or safety equipment on board, so they wouldn't even know if they ran me flat. I was looking around everywhere but by now, I couldn't see more than 20 meters in front of me. It was absolutely terrifying. Eventually the engines went away; the vessel had obviously gone past.

I started to get really disoriented, with white everywhere around me. I checked my GPS and my paper charts to make sure I was going in the right direction – the wind felt like it was on the wrong side. Then I started hearing this really weird noise. I didn't know what it was, but it started getting louder and more consistent. Just when I thought I must be hallucinating, a big humpback whale came up out of the fog right next to me!

Then another one came up and blew its spout. And then another. There was a pod of 15 or 20 whales surrounding me. I just stopped in awe of these incredible creatures. When they are swimming underneath and around you, there's an amazing connection that's hard to describe. I felt like they were guiding me.

I double-checked my GPS and charts and found I was actually going in the wrong direction. Then the fog started lifting and I realized that the whales seemed to be guiding me back towards land. I made a change in direction and the whales swam with me for another 10 minutes or so and then disappeared. It was an incredible experience.

I had a side-wind the entire way once again, with a huge 5-metre swell. The last 25 kilometers of coastline was massive rocky cliffs with zero place to go in, so I really couldn't afford to get it wrong.

The wind picked up in a southwesterly direction and started pushing me towards the coastline. With about eight kilometers still to go the cliffs were getting scarily close. I could feel these giant swells coming underneath me and see them detonating on the rocks.

The sea state was absolutely terrifying. I was quickly running out of space and I knew I didn't have time to call the NSRI (National Sea Rescue Institute) to come and get me.

It was touch and go, mentally; that last corner, which was still two or three kilometers away, felt like there should be a big ocean sign along the stretch with blinking red lights saying 'Enter only at your own peril!'

I gobbled down a bar of chocolate and just pulled as hard as I could. I literally gave it everything that I had, and finally got around the corner and came into the mouth of Langebaan Lagoon. There I got my first downwind for the entire trip, after four grueling days, for the 4 km run down into Saldanha Bay Harbour.

By the time I got my stuff out of the water, I was so fatigued I couldn't even see straight. I realized my eyes were burnt really badly and my feet were blistering. The sun was becoming a massive problem. I decided to make day five a rest day and found a doctor to give me antibiotic drops for my eyes. They would just stream with water every time I opened them, and I couldn't look into the light.

Day six resumed, early. I packed up in the dark, contemplating another 50 km paddle around Shelley Point into St Helena Bay. My brother Greg joined me to paddle the first 20 km to a place called Jacobs Bay, and I continued on to Stompneus Bay by myself. Once again, the wind didn't play along – I had a light headwind the entire way.

Day seven's objective was make a bee-line right across the bay from Stompneus Bay to Elands Bay, a place I knew well from surfing. The West Coast is known for its microclimates. As I was paddling across the bay anticipating the south wind, it swung around and became a direct onshore – the opposite of what was forecast. Are you starting to see a pattern here with forecasts? At 15–20 kn it was another side-winder from hell.

I still had 23 km to go to Elands Bay when I realized that there was no way I was going to be able to keep paddling across it; the wind got stronger and I wasn't going to be able to keep myself offshore if I left it too late. It's a super rocky coastline and very arid, with no road access and no one around for miles, so I got to the point where I had to make the call. I knew it was dangerous for me, with all my gear strapped

down on my board, but I had no other choice, I was going to have to pick a spot where there was a gap in the rocks and a sandy beach section and just go in through the surf.

The swell was still four meters. To ride in on that with a 17-foot stand-up is a task in itself, let alone when you have 40 kilograms of gear. I sat down just before I got to the surf line, put on my life jacket and strapped everything else down super tight. I managed to time the sets wisely and ride halfway in on one, before I got rolled. I lost my hat, one of my water hydration packs and a couple of other valuables. When I got up onto the beach I collected what gear I could find washed up on the sand, set up camp on the beach and looked at the forecast for the next morning.

If the wind stayed at this intensity there was absolutely no way I would be able to get off the beach. I'd lost some water and food, so now I was on severe rations. I was shipwrecked, and I still had another roughly 20 km to go before I even got to Elands Bay.

That evening I had my last bit of food. I had one energy bar left and half a two-liter bladder of water. I'd lost my hat so things weren't looking good. I just prayed that when I woke up in the morning, the wind, the sea state and the waves would have dropped enough to allow me to get out through the surf. I needed to paddle out before the wind changed and pushed me in the wrong direction again.

I knew that the wind was going to blow onshore again from 10 am onwards, so I mapped out a route and put a new waypoint in my GPS. I worked out the angles on the chart so that I could paddle out and offshore, just over eight kilometers (about five miles) off the coastline, so when I got to the waypoint about 30 kilometers away from Elands Bay, when the wind picked up in the onshore direction, that I could still come in to Lamberts Bay with the wind mostly on my back.

I knew this last day, day eight, would probably be my longest day. I got up at 4:30 am, collected all my gear and strapped it onto my board. I couldn't really see the surf yet. The first time I tried to get out, I didn't make it, and the second time neither, but the third time I managed to

punch through. I got two more hours of paddling in before the wind started picking up significantly, to a point that I couldn't keep my course. I started getting pushed sideways, but by this time my angles were pretty much spot on to do the last five kilometers into Lamberts Bay with the wind mostly behind me.

When I finally came in to Lamberts Bay there was no one there to meet me because no one thought I was going make it. My team – Pete Peterson and Clells – were busy going up and down the coast looking for me. I found a little restaurant in the harbor and ordered a burger and a beer, which I couldn't even sip because of the blisters on my lips. I was fatigued and sunburnt after eight days and 350 kilometers, paddling six to ten hours each day. The good news was we raised enough money for The Lunchbox Fund charity to be able to feed 300 kids.

Not only that, but this Proof-of-Concept paddle showed that, if I built a craft that could take all my gear and allow me to get out of the sun and the elements during peak times of the day, and if I managed myself, my hydration, nutrition and sun exposure correctly, I could not only do 350 kilometers, but I could possibly paddle across an ocean.

Serious Training: Source-to-Sea and Channel

English Channel, UK | 51°7'9.91"N 1°19'1.03"E

After the Proof-of-Concept paddle I knew it was possible to cross the Atlantic solo and unsupported. But I also knew it was going to take everything to get to the starting line: the funding to build the craft and even more so, a hell of a lot of training to get me fit, fine-tune my craft, prepare myself, physically, mentally and emotionally, and learn everything I could from these micro expeditions along the way.

Little did I know at the time it would take me three more years of training and preparation. In the process I would set and break some records, and develop a new motivational strategy: Catching the Golden Monkeys. (Disclaimer: no real monkeys were involved.)

Straight after the POC paddle I was headed to the UK to meet my client Gul International (my agency was the distributor for their wetsuits and accessories in South Africa), and so I decided to use that opportunity to SUP from the source of the River Thames to the sea. It had been done before as a run, swim and cycle, but no one had done it running, stand-up paddleboarding and cycling. The distance was just under 300 km, and I wanted to see if it was possible to do it in under four-and-a-half days.

I consulted Professor Tim Noakes regarding whether I could do it non-stop without sleeping. He told me that after 20 to 30 hours, my body would start shutting down, so I'd need to take micro naps. I wanted to test that theory – and to try to fit in doing an English Channel crossing at the same time. Neither of these are small feats, and both require huge logistical preparation in advance.

I also had to contend with a flare-up of an old injury. I hadn't run

any sort of distance since I'd broken my knee 12 years before; in 2000 they told me I would never be able to run again. For the Source-to-Sea I would need to do a 21-kilometer run – a half marathon.

A couple months before I left for the expedition, I went for a five-km test run. About three quarters of the way through it felt like my knee popped, and afterwards it became really sore. I went to get X-rays and was told that the titanium wires in my knee had snapped – which apparently shouldn't be possible. If I tried any more running, they said, those wires would stick into my muscle and become excruciatingly painful – unless they operate immediately. I couldn't go for surgery, as I had to leave that week – so just decided to see if I could pull it off. All I could really do was work through the pain and practice methods to distract my mental state, learn and grow from it. As soon as I got back, I promised my surgeon, I'd get all the wires removed.

And so, 10 days later, in August 2013, I found myself in the beautiful lush green Cotswolds, under an old ash tree, 20 km from Cricklade, the first downstream town on the Thames. From here I was able to launch my SUP board into the river – with barely enough water to float.

My aim was to paddle over 90 km each day, sleeping less than three hours a day, paddling night and day for 16–20 hours, and complete the challenge in 60 hours. It took a lot longer.

One thing I hadn't counted on was having to carry all my gear up and over the many locks (almost 50 of them), which weren't open during the night. Unexpected strong headwinds didn't help either.

My good English friend Ben Grenata agreed to meet me at the different checkpoints, where I was going to change disciplines. He dropped me off that first early morning, and I ran up into the Cotswolds to find this beautiful big stone declaring the official source of the River Thames (even though there is no water to be found anywhere near it). That carved rock has been there for centuries; to be part of that history and start my run from there felt incredible.

After about 10 km my knee started becoming really painful. About five kilometers away from the point where I could switch out and start

to paddle I could actually see the wires poking up against the skin. I was worried they were going to break through the surface! I was so happy to meet Ben at the switch-out point, because I could barely walk, let alone run. I rested for five minutes and then got straight onto my board.

The water was only three or four inches deep and the stream was super overgrown with reeds and trees for the first couple of kilometers. There were areas where I had to walk with my SUP, or get down on my belly and pull my way under branches. It was only after about six hours of pretty crazy foliage navigation that I could actually start paddling freely.

I spent the first night at Newbridge. It was only then that I realized that the charts and the maps for the river only show the major locks, but there were many, many more – one every two to three kilometers, in fact, which meant 15 different locks that first night. Some of them 10 to 25 feet (13 meters) high – it's pretty amazing to go through and have the water drop down by 20 feet before they open up on the other side. But if they were closed, which 90% of them were, I had to climb up and pull all my gear and my board over them.

Every now and then I was fortunate to be let through by a kind lock keeper, but by the time I got to the tenth lock, it was getting dark. My body was literally shutting down, so I just stopped on the side of the river and, keeping one leg on my board to stop it floating away, slept on the ground next to it.

I slept for 45 minutes, woke up freezing cold, and carried on going. I was so tired I actually started hallucinating, but it was still amazing going through the little towns, chatting to people walking on the riverbank, or to the geese and ducks in the water.

Sometimes I'd stop to have a quick swim. On the second day, it turned out I was in an area where the water was pretty badly polluted and I ended up getting diarrhea, so not only was I paddling for 24 hours non-stop, but I was also getting dehydrated. I lost about five kilograms in four days.

I got to Putney Bridge at 8:15 pm, after paddling over 243 km and having four power naps in three days.

The Port Authority told me it was illegal to paddle from Tower Bridge because there's too much river traffic, so this was where I'd have to bring my craft out of the water and do the last 35 km by bike.

I thought that last part was going to be easy; it wasn't. Within two hours, I had two flat tires, and no second backup puncture repair kit, so I hired a Boris bike – one of those funny little ones with a basket on the front. Even so, with much of central London Thames Path closed and gated at night, I could only reach the Thames Barrier the following day.

When I finally got there it was raining. I had a chance to repair my other puncture and changed back over to my normal bike, but it had all taken a lot longer than planned. Ben, my trusty friend and support crew, had to head back to attend a wedding, so I celebrated the first ever Thames River Source-to-Sea Run/SUP/Cycle on my own. It took me 3,5 days, 321 km, and 9,5 hours sleep to complete.

It turned out I wouldn't get much rest before the next adventure either.

I popped a bottle of champagne at the Thames Barrier and had a couple of sips to celebrate the end. Then I got back on my bike and rode to Putney, where my van with all my stuff was parked. It started to rain quite heavily, so I pulled into a little pub and ordered a beer. That's when I got an alert on my phone.

I'd booked three different potential days/slots with my support-boat pilot for the Channel crossing, because the weather and tides across the English Channel are so volatile; the two later windows were looking terrible and the only other slot I had booked that was still available was the next morning, at first light – in 12 hours' time!

I'd thought I would have at least 36 hours to recover after my Source-to-Sea, but it had taken 24 hours longer than I'd anticipated. It was now 5:30 pm, with less than 12 hours before I was set to start the crossing and I still needed to get to Dover! I called a taxi to come pick me up with my bike, got a lift to my rental van, and put all my gear inside. Then I walked across the road to the supermarket, got some pasta salads, energy and rehydration drinks, got back to the car, changed from

my cycling gear into jeans and a t-shirt, sent a message to the pilot that I would meet them in the morning, and started the three-hour drive to Dover.

I got to Dover at 10:45 pm, just as the last little hotel was closing for the night. They let me in and I prepped my equipment, nutrition and hydration until 12:30 that night. I woke at 5:30 am, had a couple of bananas and some coffee, and drove down to meet the pilot and the boat that would support my crossing.

The weather window looked really good for the day; light and variable with not too strong a current. I knew I would probably never get this opportunity again. Sometimes, whether the timing isn't right and regardless of how you feel, you just have to grab an opportunity and give it your best shot. Whatever is meant to be is meant to be.

We can always find excuses for why we can't, but you just need to focus on one reason why you can and make it happen. If you can deal with it, you can learn from it. It may not work out the way you want it to, but you never know unless you try. So less than 12 hours from finishing my Source-to-Sea journey, I started the Channel crossing from Dover.

The goal was to try and do it in five hours and 10 minutes. The world record was five hours and 38 minutes. I couldn't get out in France, so I had to turn around in the middle of the Channel and come back. Despite having to stop and wait for three different ships to pass, and doing an extra mile just to make sure we were well over the halfway mark before turning around, I ended up making it back to Dover in five hours 26 minutes, which was 12 minutes off the old world record. So I set a new record, clocking an average speed of 7,1 km/hr. Fortune favors the brave and those who have the courage to just start and try, no matter what!

© Richard Hallman

The first ever SUP session off Nelscott Reef, Oregon.

© Craig Kolesky

The first ever SUP session off Dungeons, South Africa.

© Frank Quirarte

The winning wave of the Mavericks Big Wave Invitational, 2010, California, USA.

© Maleen Hoekstra

At the finish of the 12-hr Open Ocean World Record paddle, crossing the mouth of Langebaan Lagoon entrance with passing oil tanker!

© Maleen Hoekstra

The start of the 12-hr World Record paddle, with whales in the background – a perfect day.

The 12-hr World Record paddle statistics.

The route and plan for the first ever Source-to-Sea River Thames expedition: 297-km Run/SUP/Cycle.

The start of the Source-to-Sea Run section, which started in the Cotswolds, under an old ash tree.

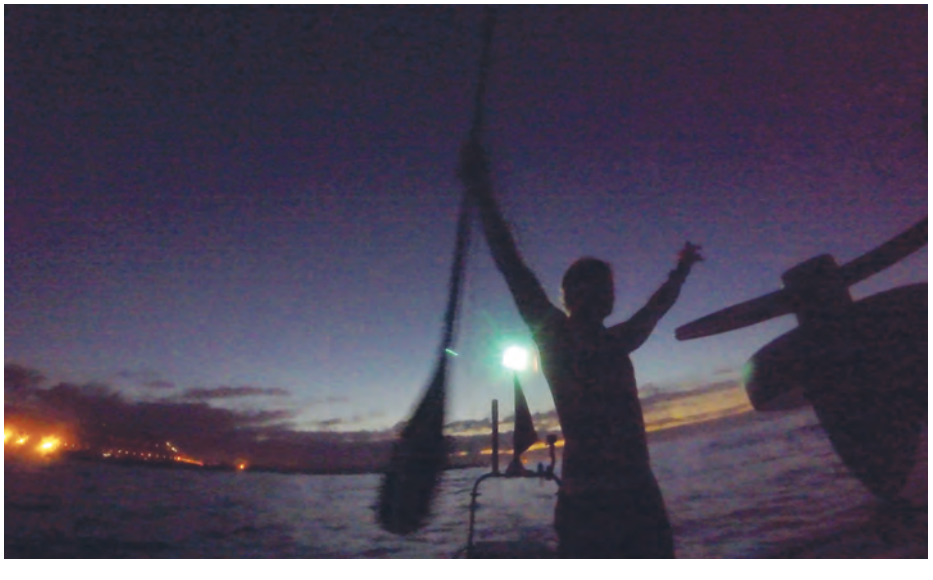
The need for wind and speed, deep in the Namibian desert, at the Lüderitz Speed Challenge.

The final shoulder surgery before the SUP crossing, which was nerve racking.

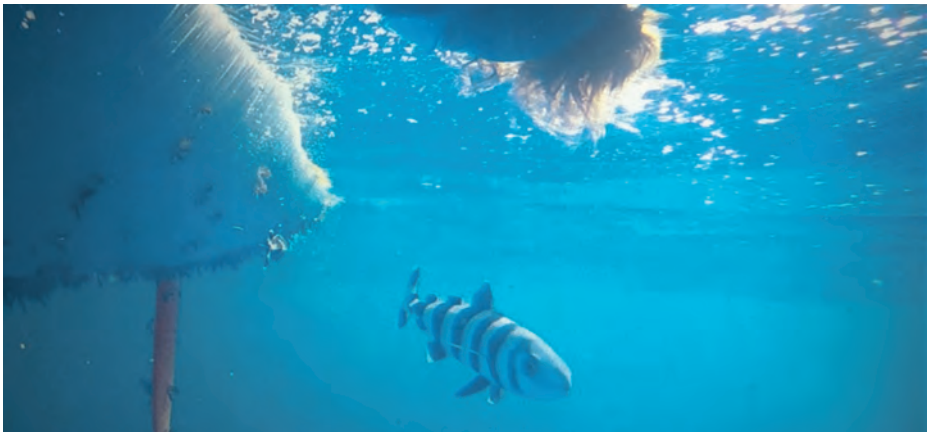
A happy face as my little craft the *ImpiFish* finally arrives in Morocco.

© Alan van Gysen

Team work makes the dream work: Leven Brown and I on the Agadir dock days before leaving.



Solo and alone, early morning at the start of the SUP crossing, from Agadir Marina, Dec 6th 2016.

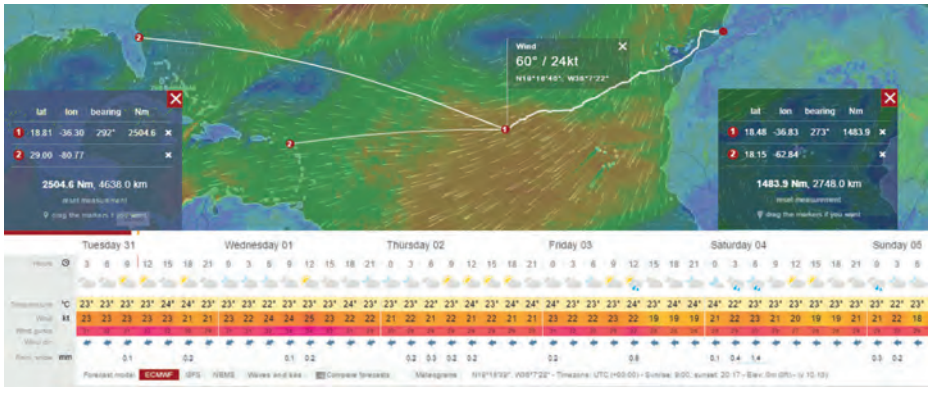


Stripe the fish, my greatest companion for the entire journey.

A bad Christmas, made positive with an attitude of gratitude.

My badly cut finger, from when I was trapped under craft in the storm.

Exhausted inside my tiny cabin, after a heavy and intense night!



© Steve Pike

The midpoint, choices and course change.

Mr Wings the flying fish, who made me so happy.

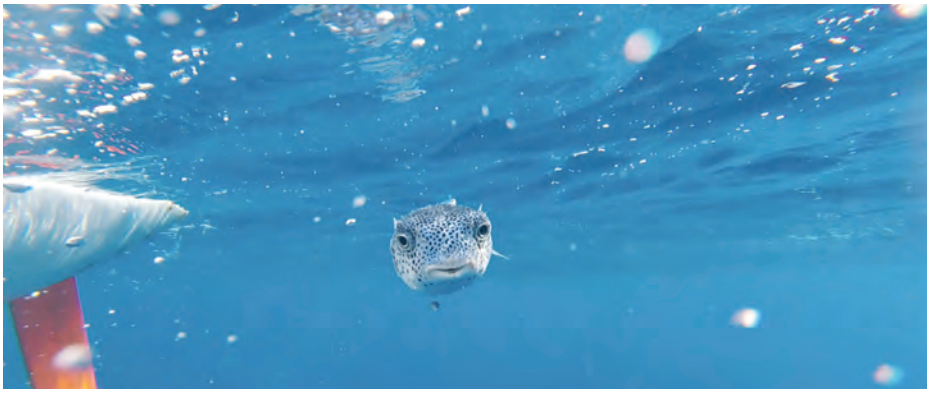
ABOVE In flow on my morning underwater glide.
LEFT My favorite 'Blues' – the beautiful tuna fish.
BELOW A bad day at the office, cutting away lines from the consequences of the centerboard storm problems.

One of the many turtle friends I met on the Atlantic crossing.

The same freeze-dried meals, every day for 3 months – very unpleasant.

The lonely yet perfect bluebottle, all alone in the Atlantic blue.

Any time you're pumping water out from your craft, that's a serious problem!

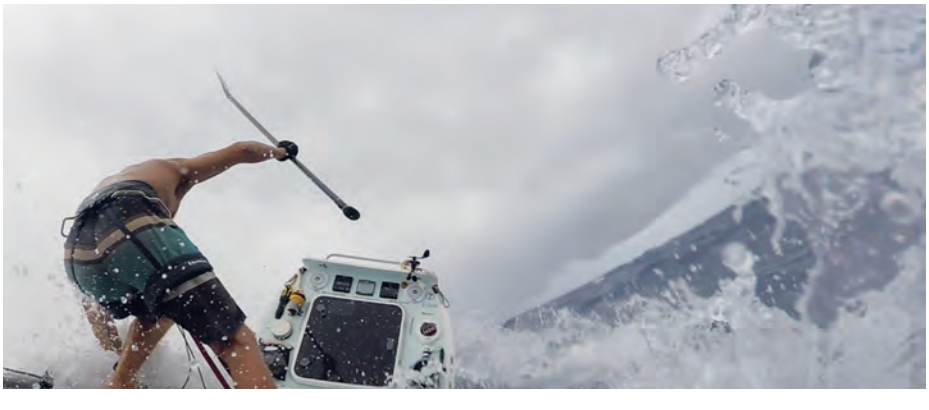


This little pufferfish was a positive and friendly visitor in a challenging time.

Weather updates on the satellite phone with Leven Brown.

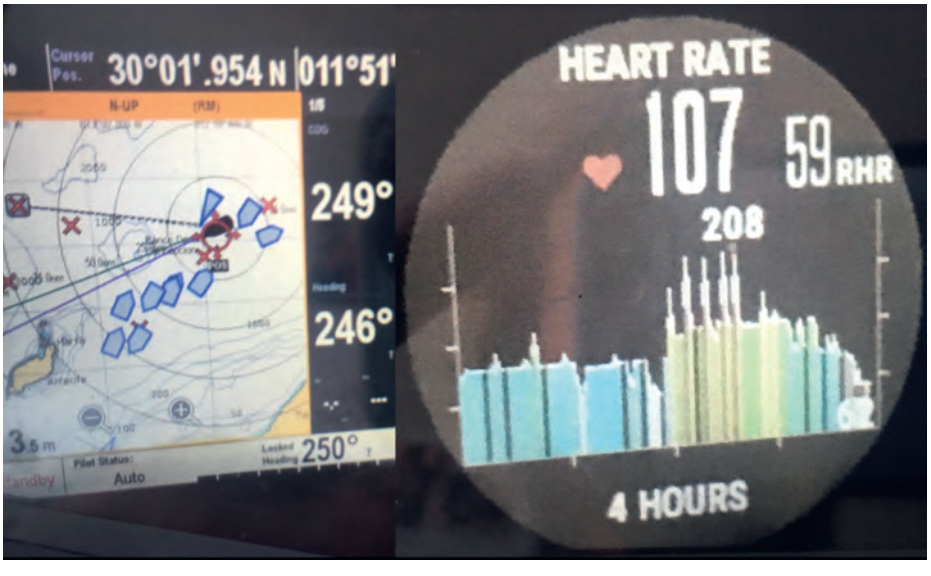
24-hr Open Ocean Record broken, so celebrations must be had.

Air guitar and the dancing sea pirate.



Becoming the Squall Rider!

Paddling north across all the challenging conditions damaged my shoulder even more.



My Garmin watch heart rate and the screen showing all the ships passing me through the shipping lanes!

© Brian Overfelt

Bury the bow and keep riding and surfing.

© Brian Overfelt

A mighty claim and celebrations after almost being rolled by a big wave, while coming in to Antigua.

© Brian Overfelt

Managing to surf the *ImpiFish*, completely at ease, in flow, while in crazy conditions.

© Brian Overfelt

Triggering the final finishing flare to celebrate the end of the journey, triumphant, beneath the 'Pillars of Hercules' cliffs of Antigua.

© Marco Bava

This image sums up the final day and the conditions I had been experiencing alone for 93 days.

© Brian Overfelt

Finally stepping onto land – let the celebrations begin! Mission impossible, just made possible.

© Craig Kolesky

A shoot done after the crossing was complete showed how my body and face had changed from 93 days at sea.