

VENTURE How To

In mid-April, Tim Shaddock set sail from the Mexican port of La Paz aboard his 9m catamaran with his dog Bella. His destination: Nuku Hiva, an island in French Polynesia, almost 5,000km away across the Pacific Ocean.

The 54-year-old Australian had sailed since he was a kid, but this was the biggest journey of his life. The previous summer he'd crossed the Sea of Cortez over three days in preparation, and he anticipated his first solo offshore expedition would take roughly six weeks.

But a few weeks in, a storm hit, severely damaging his sails and equipment. Shaddock's once-in-a-lifetime adventure had become a story of survival. Although adamant he was never lost – "I had GPS coordinates and was sending Garmin inReach messages [to my sister] and receiving small weather updates" – things looked dire as he floated adrift on the world's biggest ocean.

Three long months after Shaddock set sail, a helicopter surveilling for a tuna trawler 2,000km from the nearest coastline flew overhead. Its pilot notified the ship, which sent out a rescue party for the sunburnt, dehydrated sailor and his dog. Salvation arrived just in time, with Hurricane Calvin looming. "I was probably a lot more optimistic about my situation [than I should have been]," he says. "Sometimes ignorance is bliss. [The 'copter] showed up just as I realised that I probably wouldn't be able to fix my boat sufficiently to outrun the hurricane."

Here, he shares some of the tricks that kept him alive...

Catch calories

When it comes to calorie intake, says Shaddock, be prepared to improvise. Armed with a speargun and a fishing line, he hooked small tuna and even a shark, but there were also fish he'd never seen before. "There are ways to figure out if they're poisonous or not," he says, adding that spikes, spots and

bright colours are best avoided: "A pufferfish, for instance, has a distinctive colouring and markings." After losing his cooking equipment, he and Bella ate the fish raw. When his speargun broke, he was forced to grab any form of protein he could. "These sea

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Tim Shaddock, ocean survivor

ducks were landing right next to me. I was always shooting them because they'd poo on my solar panel, but when my speargun broke I just grabbed one by the neck and found myself killing it to eat. There's not a lot of meat on them, but they source some of the best fish, so they're very nutritious."

Find liquid salvation

Fresh water is the difference between life and death at sea. Shaddock had an emergency manual watermaker to remove

salt and other contaminants from seawater, but his onboard water supplies were running low. "You don't want to rely on [the watermaker] – you have to pump slowly for 20 minutes to make one cup of water." He knew every drop of rain water would be precious. "There was none until I got to the equatorial regions, but thankfully there was quite a lot after that. I had a gaff rig sail and positioned it to catch the rainwater. I was sometimes collecting 20 litres from the sail and the buckets [on deck] in one dump."

Know your limits

With food scarce, Shaddock says, fight the urge to work too quickly and exhaust yourself. The rigging urgently needed mending before the hurricane struck, but Shaddock took things slowly. "I had to climb the mast a few times to sort the problem if I was going to get the boat fully operational, but I realised I was losing a lot of weight, just not recovering as well." Repairs that would usually take a morning were spread across days. "I paced myself, seeing how well I could climb the mast. My recovery the next day was important. I needed to keep something in reserve, just in case."

Master the mind

The mental toll of being adrift can be as severe as any physical issue. Just a needle in an ocean-sized haystack, Shaddock knew his chances of survival were slim. "You have to constantly be vigilant about what the mind can do," he says. An experienced freediver, he found that one-two breathing – the technique where you exhale for twice as long as you inhale, used to lower the heart rate before a dive – helped to quieten his mind at sea. "Do a bit of breathing before you go to sleep at night, when you wake up in the morning, and also when things get a bit hectic, you're fatigued or you're feeling stressed," Shaddock says. "It's very effective."



ENDURE

Calming the waters

Tim Shaddock knows a thing or two about survival – when his boat was hit by a storm during a solo Pacific crossing, the Australian was left adrift for three months