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## 41,000 miles the 'hard way'

Gloucester sailor's  
voyage around globe  
is true adventure tale

By Glenn Gaslin  
Daily Press

**YORK** Talking to Michael Johnson is like debriefing explorers Marco Polo and Neil Armstrong at the same time.

His stories swell with exotic lands, cities in the desert, weird treasure, pirates and bandits and civilizations at the edge of the Earth.

Not to mention whales, sharks, communists and ship-shredding waves.

The 50-year-old psychologist has just sailed around the planet, circumnavigated the globe, gone the long way from Gloucester to Grafton.

After six years and 41,000 miles, he looks like a water-proof archetype of the hero/sailor — dirty-snow beard, deep-carved eye sockets, thin, strong hands — and talks matter-of-factly about his journey, as if that sort of thing happens all the time.

His main residence, a 40-foot fiberglass sailing yacht called *Aissa*, is docked on an island near Venezuela, so the College of William and Mary alumnus tells his tale from the Grafton home of his girlfriend, Stephanie Panzera.

The skipper flips through his log, a thick notebook emblazoned on the front with "*Aissa: Norfolk, Virginia*" and stuffed with artifacts and pencil-scribbled tales and tidbits. The

boat is named for a dangerous and crafty woman in Joseph Conrad's "Outcast of the Islands."

"I'm always interested in the history of the places," he says, flipping as he talks.

One photo shows him with naked African nomads on a seaside dune, while another has him waist deep in weeds and water, somehow exotic.

Nineteenth-century European coins found in Sri Lanka stick to several of the log's pages. Scorpions found in Johnson's boots are pressed between others.

There's a drawing of a pink dolphin he saw in the Amazon. There's a newspaper clipping from South Africa, where a reporter described Johnson as a "tough-as-teak former U.S. paratrooper." He used to be a paratrooper in the Army.

Johnson left Gloucester in 1988 with plans to sail around Cape



Please see Sailor/A2



**Top:** Michael Johnson is pictured during his voyage around the world. **Above right:** A shot off the bow of Johnson's yacht *Aissa*, named for a dangerous and crafty woman in Joseph Conrad's "Outcast of the Islands."

**Above left:** Johnson points out a picture postcard and coins he collected from Sri Lanka that are part of his log book. *Dave Bowman/Daily Press*

