



BOUND FOR BORNEO

*Nine youngsters from around the world have joined a growing team of **EARTH AMBASSADORS** who are passionate about saving our planet. Mercedes editor Adelle Horler boarded the yacht Pangaea to meet them and expedition leader Mike Horn in Borneo.*

The yacht Pangaea, which has Mercedes-Benz as its title sponsor, is on a four-year, seven-continent voyage around the world, exploring beautiful and vulnerable places on the planet, and raising awareness of their plight. Pangaea started her voyage in Ushuaia, Argentina in October 2008, before sailing down to Antarctica, where she was joined by the first group of Young Explorers. She sailed via Cape Town to New Zealand, for a second Young Explorers Programme, before the third group joined the yacht to explore the Malaysian regions of Sabah and Sarawak, on the island of Borneo.



Pangaea is the brainchild of intrepid explorer Mike Horn, who has seen the world in its extremes. He's visited both Poles, walked around the Arctic Circle, journeyed around the globe on the Equator using no motorised transport, and boogie-boarded the length of the Amazon River. 'I want my children, and their children, to see the world the way I've seen it. Pangaea's aim is to show the youth of the world how beautiful the Earth is, so that they grow up to become its custodians,' he says. Anyone aged 15 to 20 can join the Pangaea expedition. Youths apply online, from which around 16 are selected to attend a training camp in Switzerland, where they learn survival skills. They're also taught media and marketing skills, so that they can go on to spread an environmental message. A final group of eight or nine Young Explorers is chosen at the camp, and these lucky ones go on to join Pangaea on her voyage.



▾ Pangaea's motto is *Explore, Learn, Act*: all through the adventure around the north-eastern tip of Borneo, the Young Explorers, or YEPS, took part in practical projects - such as mammoth beach and island clean-ups. On one small island alone, no more than 100 by 50 metres, the youngsters filled 10 large bags of plastic bottles, old shoes, fishing line, polystyrene, plastic bags, chip packets and more. Mike held up a bright orange cigarette lighter. 'This is the kind of thing that kills turtles,' he told the YEPs. 'Lighters, toothbrushes, lids - the turtles love the bright colours, but they get stuck in their throats and they die.'



▾ Back on board the rubbish was sorted into types, and compressed for recycling when next in port. Glass was left behind. 'It's silica, a natural substance, and it's a waste to use heat to recycle it. It's better to use the natural energy of the sea.'



▾ Michelle Nay of Switzerland clammers up the side of a chamber in the Clearwater Cave system. Judging by how clean her clothing is, this was very early in the muddy, messy hike ...

'We were so hot down there, the cool water of the Clearwater River was like Christmas for your body.'
 Eugénie Guillaume, 18, of France

▾ Some serious exploring took place in the Mulu Caves, far inland in Sarawak. The caves are a world heritage site, and they include the largest cave passage in the world as well as the largest chamber - the Sarawak Chamber is 600 by 800 metres, and 100 metres high. But we were destined for tighter spots, that pushed us all well beyond our comfort zones: a five-kilometre hike through the immense Clearwater Cave system, which meant five hours of slipping, slithering, squeezing and scrambling through majestic chambers and galleries of stalactites and stalagmites, connected at times by extraordinarily narrow passages, so skinny you couldn't bend a knee; you had to inch through head or feet first like a snake. Eventually we came to a clear, strong-flowing river in a chamber hung with huge stalactite chandeliers. We followed it for the last 1.5 km to the end of the trail.





▾ A major Act project in Borneo was conducting reef transects, surveying the coral reefs and assessing their health in terms of damage and the amount of life around them. YEPs counted and recorded fish and invertebrates – sea cucumbers, sea urchins and so on – on a marked areas on the sea bed, looking especially for ‘indicator species’ that suggest the health of the reef as a whole. No mean feat, when many of them were still getting to grips with scuba diving.

▾ PangAir will hopefully one day be a whole new eco-system ... The team built a metal framework of an aeroplane (to make a change from shipwrecks), which was anchored to the sea bed off Langkayan Island in the conservation area of the Sulu Sea. A battery attached to the metal causes a chemical reaction that attracts coral lava to the infrastructure, which will grow into a new coral reef.



‘We’re always hearing things like ‘30% of the fish are dead’ but we don’t know where these numbers come from. Now we can say for sure what is happening – we’re researching it ourselves.’
Rodrigo Steinman, 16, of Brazil.





‘I was pulling empty egg shells out of an old nest when I saw this little black thing sticking out of the sand, wriggling. I helped it a bit with my finger and out it came. It was amazing, I saved a life!’

DongKyun Seo, 20, of South Korea



Simon Havas, 16, of Prague, Czech Republic, with Mike Horn and one of the rescued hatchlings released by the YEPs



Lankayan Island is a turtle sanctuary working to protect green and hawksbill turtles that use these islands as nesting grounds. Over 24 hours we witnessed the full circle of life: a turtle coming ashore to lay her eggs, and the hatching and release of a batch of babies making a desperate dash for the sea.