Tiny boat survived Ophelia in Atlantic voyage

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A TINY five foot boat has braved hurricanes and massive Atlantic storms to wash up at Doolin earlier this month.

The 5-foot long sailboat crossed the Atlantic in just 172 days - surviving a brush with the 185 kilometre per hour gusts of Hurricane Ophelia along the way.

The tiny ship, which is named Black Rock, was built by students at Swans Island Elementary School in Maine in the USA.

The boat was launched six months ago into the Gulf Stream near Bermuda by the crew of the Maine Maritime Academy (MMA) training vessel.

The boat was unmanned, and contained a number of messages from the students as well as a GPS tracker and battery which emitted a position update every 12 hours.

The craft was discovered by three doctoral students with the Mobile and Marine Robotics Research Center at the University of Limerick.

The small craft crossed the ocean relative unharmed - except for the loss of a mast.

“The boat only gave out a ping every 12 hours so we weren’t sure where it was going. It landed in Doolin at around 7am so we left straight away to make sure that we got it before high tide,” said Cathal O’Donnell, one of the three students who retrieved the boat at Doolin.

“We were very lucky to get the boat back in the condition that it is in. It would have come across a number of Atlantic storms on the way, with heavy wind and large sea swells - which would have been a number of metres high.

“It got pretty battered but by the looks of it the major part of the damage happened to it when it came ashore in Clare. It is a small craft and it is remarkable to think that it has travelled so far.”

The Black Rock was rescued off Doolin by Cathal O’Donnell, Oran Dolphin-Murray and Petar Trslic.

The three now plan to restore the boat with the help of interested transition year students and return it the Atlantic to make the return trip to the Americas.

“We have got the go ahead from UL to bring in some transition years students and return it the Atlantic to make the return trip to the Americas. It should wash ashore over in South America and hopefully someone over there will find it.”

Right: Two of the students who discovered the boat off of Doolin.