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Woman-Powered Ripple Effect Rows the Great Pacific Garbage Patch - Earth911.com

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In June, the only all-women team in this year's Great Pacific Race will attempt to break a world speed record on their human-powered trip across 2,400 miles of the Pacific Ocean. Rowing day and night in two-hour shifts, the international team of environmental activists will record their journey through the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Great Pacific Garbage Patch

While most people have heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP), very few understand what it is. When this garbage gyre in the western Pacific was first discovered in the 1990s, many people imagined a vast floating island. That fanciful image was eventually replaced with the less easily visualized idea of a microplastic soup.

Today, scientists still struggle to describe the GPGP, even as the data to understand it improves. A recent study concluded that the "patch" is at least four times larger than previously supposed. The pollution zone is roughly the size of the western United States, more than 600,000 square miles. By mass, nearly half of the waste is fishing nets. Microplastics make up only about 8 percent of the mass of the waste but comprise over 90 percent of the pieces of plastic floating in this zone. Due to their small size, microplastics are much harder to remove from the water than bulkier items. They also can enter the food chain, posing a health risk to sea life and even humans.

PLASTIC SAMPLES COLLECTED FROM THE GARBAGE PATCH BY THE OCEAN CLEANUP FOUNDATION. PHOTO: THE OCEAN CLEANUP

Ripple Effect

The all-female crew of the international Ripple Effect rowing team intends to use the attention generated by the Great Pacific Race to illuminate deteriorating conditions in the Pacific Ocean. During the race, they will record what they see as the boat passes through the GPGP, sharing their discoveries online. People following along at home will see for themselves what tons of floating plastic garbage accumulating hundreds of miles from shore looks like.