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Pedal-boaters abort voyage to Hawaii

BY MICHELLE MAITRE

Herald Staff Writer

The Pedal for the Planet expedition is doing a bit of a backpedal today.

The two-man expedition, which left Monterey Harbor Nov. 23 on a mission to navigate a pedal-boat to Hawaii, is heading back after high winds and rough surf hampered the journey.

"What's happening now is probably a great sea trial for both the men and the boat," said Steve Smith, a member of the Pedal Planet team who remained on land to help monitor the trip.

Five days of rough weather have meant that the pedalers, Casey Dunn and John Walker, haven't made much progress

since about Wednesday, Smith said.

The two men were 85 or 90 miles out, he said, when they hit rough seas that zapped battery power in the boat, a yellow craft christened Moksha.

With power low, Dunn and Walker weren't able to post daily updates on the Pedal Planet website, which can be viewed at www.pedalplanet.org, nor could they be reached by radio. Radio communication was finally made Sunday, Smith said, when the men were about 50 miles west of Point Sur.

"We had a conversation, and they expressed their desire to come back," Smith said.

The expedition is now following a southward current into

Morro Bay, he said, where they should arrive either tonight or Wednesday morning.

"I was a little bit worried a couple of days ago when they hadn't posted any updates," Smith said Monday. "It was a great relief to hear they were safe and well. It was very disappointing for us to hear they are coming back, but obviously it's totally their call."

The daily logs Dunn and Walker posted on the expedition website when power was still strong tell a dramatic story of a short journey punctuated by bouts with sea sickness and "night-fears" juxtaposed with moments of elation.

"It is now the morning of the second day," Walker wrote on Nov. 24, "and it is already apparent what a boost in morale the rising of the sun brings. During darkness some night fears began to rear their heads and I began to hear things ... It was a time of self-doubt and questioning, but at sunrise sanity reasserted itself and all was well with the world."

That same day, Dunn wrote, "I had hoped to send an update at some point yesterday, but looking at a small computer screen below

decks was the last thing on my mind — if I wasn't pedaling or sleeping, I was usually puking."

On Nov. 26, Dunn wrote: "Even as I write waves are crashing over the plexiglass canopy of Moksha. John is hunkered into a tight ball on the floor, and I am half in the sleeping cabin using the battery compartment as a makeshift desk. We haven't been able to pedal in almost 24 hours, and in the meantime, the sea anchor — a large, underwater parachute that acts as a break — has been deployed to stabilize the boat in the high seas and keep us from getting blown back into land by strong winds."

Walker's Nov. 26 entry reads, "I wonder how this much weather this soon bodes for the rest of the voyage — must be careful of the Doubting Thomas frame of mind."

Those were the last messages from the Moksha before radio contact was made Sunday.

Smith said the expedition won't be the last for the Moksha, which has ushered Smith and Lewis from London to Miami, Miami to Monterey, and from Monterey to Central America.

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