

# METRO/STATE

## World traveler relying on human power

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Steve Smith was approaching his 25th birthday three years ago and thought his life was incomplete.

So, the London native jumped into a wooden pedal boat in Lagos, Portugal, and landed 111 days later in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Now, he is bicycling to San Francisco. Then he plans to head north, kayak across the Bering Straits, then head south to Shanghai, China.

"I was working as an environmental engineer in London and Paris and thought I needed something," Smith said Thursday during an overnight stop in Baton Rouge before pedaling on to Houston. "I didn't want to settle for a mediocre office life."

Smith, now 28, plans to circumnavigate the Earth using only human power — his arms and legs. He started in the pedal boat with Jason Lewis, 27, who is now roller blading somewhere near Arkansas toward San Francisco, where the two will meet up, Smith said.

"Going around the world is the most ambitious and romantic thing I could think of," he said. "But I don't like following in previous footsteps, so going by only human power was exciting and ambitious."

That is how it also sounded to Eilbhe Donovan, 21, of Dublin, Ireland, who joined Smith a month ago in Florida. When she started the journey, she had not gone more than three miles at a time on a bicycle. These days, the two usually travel about 100 miles a day.

"People back home are saying, 'You're nuts,' ...and I say, 'good,'" she said.

The two met when Smith stopped at a school in Europe to give a presentation on his travels. She asked him a few questions and decided just seven days later to join him on a quest of her own — to see the United States.

"I have never been to the States, and I thought this would be the best way to do that," she said.

The two are video taping their travels to make a documentary, which was only an afterthought to the adventure, Smith said.

"It is still worthwhile, even without making a documentary because of the immense personal challenge, but if we have something positive to say, why not do that, too," Smith said.

When stopping at summer schools and camps along the way to speak to children, Smith said he tells them of the importance of accepting different lifestyles.

"We try to inspire the children with what we are doing and ask questions about their expectations for the future and where do they see themselves at my age or older," Smith said.

The two travelers said they have found that American children are more open and comfortable when



Advocate staff photo by Bill Feig

Eilbhe Donovan, left, and Steve Smith stop in Baton Rouge during their ride across the U.S.

speaking than British children.

"Especially when talking with a camera present," Smith said. "There are more genuine answers from American children, they are more enthusiastic and they don't seem afraid to say something in front of their classmates."

The two talk with classes along the way, usually by contacting schools when they arrive in each

city. Smith said some hosts make a donation to their effort, called Pedal for the Planet, which pays for food and video tapes. The two usually camp outside.

And so far, the journey has matched their expectations, with the exception of Southern weather, Donovan said.

"The humidity and the heat is what has been difficult," she said.

Smith plans to reach China sometime in 1997. Donovan will stop in San Francisco and then sail to Australia, she said.

When asked what would he do if the journey failed to make him feel complete, Smith said he hopes he never really feels complete.

"That is when you just lay down and die," he said. "So, I hope I never get to that point."