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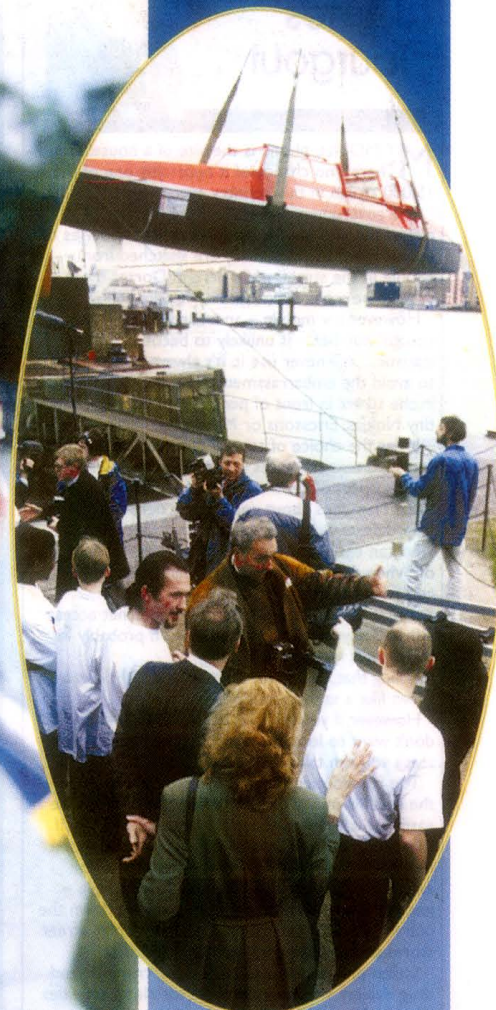
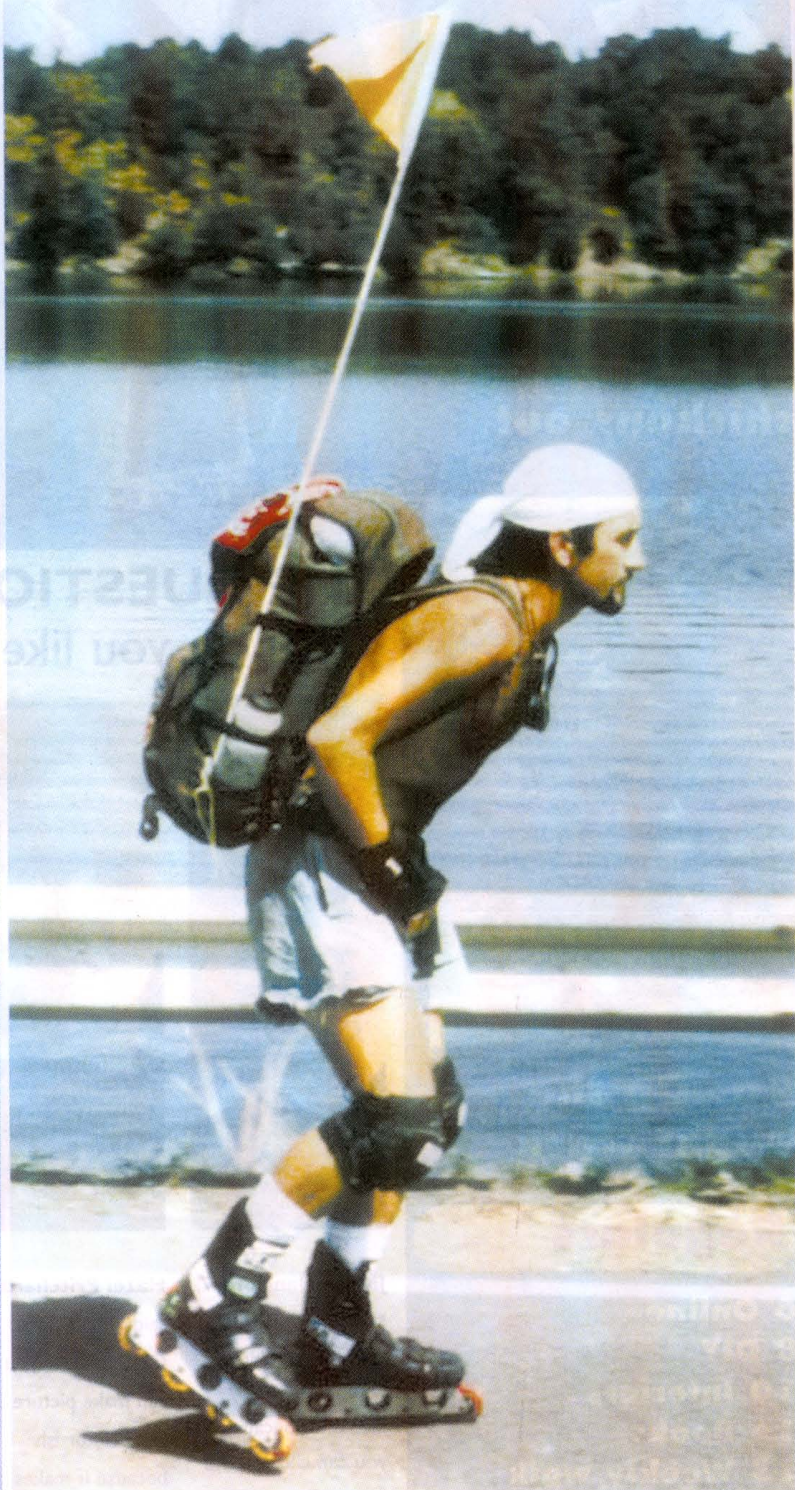
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Land ho

Jason
Lewis
pedals
home

Homeward musclebound



THE MAN WITH THE WORLD'S ADDRESS: Jason Lewis, left. Above, the Moksha is lifted into the River Thames, July 1994

RENE GERRYTS asks what could possibly have motivated Dorset's Jason Lewis to want to skate across America and circumnavigate the globe – using muscle power alone...



WANDERLUST struck early for Jason Lewis. At the age of 18 months he disappeared down a small country lane. Panic set in, search parties were mobilised, frantic calls made. But the toddler had just toddled off to investigate a big bright yellow JCB and, curiosity sated, he returned home. Later, the travel bug sank its teeth into Jason with such ferocity that it still hasn't let go. But the adventures that befell the genial West Dorset bachelor are not what the ordinary back-packing wanderer would experience in several lifetimes. And for a man who thought sailing was rather a bizarre, cold and wet way to do things, Jason chose a strange way to spend many months of his life – pedalling across two oceans in a tiny wooden boat. Then again, who knows what motivates an otherwise sane man to spend the past six years of his life making a bid to circumnavigate the world using muscle power alone?

What drives a person to take up in-line skating for the first time when aiming to cross the American continent, break both legs while doing so, then carry on skating while living on \$2 a day? What motivates you to keep going after being upturned in a tiny boat by a nosy whale at three o'clock in the morning, suffer the gastronomic attentions of a hungry oceanic white tip shark in the depths of the Pacific and nearly die from blood poisoning? What is it like to be chased out of a lake in Florida by a hungry alligator, sleep partially under water in Arkansas to escape bird-sized biting insects or to share 26ft by 4ft boat space with a fellow human being when neither of you can see the funny side of being thousands of miles from the nearest land? Best to ask him really. When you meet him, Jason doesn't immediately strike you as the stuff heroes are made of, but after time spent in his company it is apparent he obviously has what it takes to

make his dreams a reality and push himself to the limits of human endurance and beyond. Jason's family moved from the village of Nettlecombe to nearby Askerswell in 1976 while his father was still in the army and constantly being posted all around the world. Jason went to boarding school in Sherborne where he confesses to barely scraping through his English exams, having a very unscientific head and being mediocre all round. Music and theatre, he maintains, were his only apparent talents. Nevertheless, he left with A levels in English, biology and geography, but no idea what he was going to do. The first real taste of adventure came on a trip to Kenya with his mother in his gap year where he remembers taking a train trip with friends down the coast. "It felt quite daring and exciting for someone who had come from a relatively sheltered background. That pricked up my ears a bit."

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● **From page 5** Jason tried a short spell in the army, partly to please his father, and partly because they offered him a bursary to go to university. "It was a very short spell. It was a two months course but I realised in the first two minutes when this guy starts yelling at me on the station for being late that the army wasn't for me." He did go to London University where he changed courses from biology to geography. It was there he met fellow adventurer Steve Smith. "We both shared a common interest in pushing ourselves to the limits. We'd take expeditions off into the middle of nowhere and just start walking." Jason retained his interest in music and played with a band in London with a couple of friends from Beaminster, but fame and fortune eluded him and a job cleaning carpets and windows for West London hotels kept body, if not soul, together.

Then one of those accidents of fate occurred; the type that shifts the direction that your life is taking. Jason broke his foot and took a three-month break in America to recover. He bought a battered old Chevy Caprice in New York and got as far as Montana before the car blew up in a snow-storm. "I remember walking through snow drifts until I found a cabin by the side of the road inhabited by a madman of Scottish descent. After we'd got through his bottle of whisky he'd convinced me to forget about the car and hitchhike the rest of my way round. There was this immense sense of space and freedom, a space that I had never experienced before. I thought I'd like to have more of this. The bug really caught me." On returning home, and with wanderlust a terminal condition, his friend Steve, who had already thought of the idea of going round the world on muscle-power alone, asked Jason if he was interested.

Between them they developed the idea further and brought in an educational angle. Ever since, that has been an important part of the venture.

Jason has visited hundreds of schools and spent months at sea thinking up brain teasers, mathematical, technical, geographical and even psychological problems for schoolchildren to solve via his e-mail and internet links on his pedal-powered boat, *Moksha*.

To start with, Steve and Jason had the idea of kayaking from Greenland. "We soon found that that would be a quick way to freeze to death."

The next option was to head eastwards, but they changed their minds again and decided if they were going to run out of money it would be better to do so in America rather than Russia.

To make that a reality they contacted the Council for Education in World Citizenship and UNESCO and, through the two organisations, they were able to start the ball rolling.

They started fundraising and borrowing money. The journey began from London's Greenwich

Meridian in July, 1994; they crossed the Channel and finally set off across the Atlantic from Portugal on their 4,500 mile voyage across the sea in the 26ft by 4ft *Moksha*.

There were no manuals for this type of expedition so what to take and what not to relied a lot on common sense, research and guesswork.

"Even the day before we set off people were giving us stuff that we didn't have – like charts for the other end of the journey – that proved invaluable."

For a man who doesn't appear to complain about anything, he did admit the first month was dreadful and he wondered what on earth he had done. It took him and companion Steve Smith 111 days to get to Miami in the tiny craft.

They were not the easiest 111 days he's ever spent, but to cope with the immensity of the task they'd taken on Jason tried to concentrate on the little tasks of everyday survival on a tiny

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CRAMPED CONDITIONS:

Above, Jason Lewis and Steve Smith hard at work in the claustrophobically close confines of the 26ft by 4ft *Moksha*. "Unless you can keep a sense of humour, you're in trouble", comments Jason

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craft cooped up with another human being.

"After the first month you have almost moved through the pain barrier, you just forget about the land and immerse yourself in the wilderness.

"You have to try and find equal things of beauty and interest on the boat and just build a different universe with a different value system – like making a cup of tea. That became very special, almost Zen-like, how you do things and how you can get a great amount of pleasure from doing simple things. It was a very meditative state."

The problem was it was not anywhere near the same state as his companion Steve had got into.

"The trouble was that Steve had in his mind an almost romantic idea of what it was going to be like, according to the books he'd read, but the reality was, you get out there and it's just a grind.

"His sense of well-being was directly linked to the number of miles we'd gone on the chart. The human mind can't motivate itself like that in such a harsh environment when you are surrounded by only blue and white hues for 111 days.

"There is something very primal about never being more than four foot away from the other bloke, you can try and be nice to each other – and you have to really try hard – but now and then you can't deny that you just want to punch the other guy's lights out.

"The key to the whole thing is humour. Unless you can keep humour you are in trouble. We couldn't laugh anymore.

"If I have a regret, it's that I remember deciding half way through that I wasn't going to let my voyage be spoilt by a bloke who was not having a good time.

"If anything, I ostracised him and let him stew and get on with his own problems. If I had been a nicer person I would have tried harder to help him get over his problems."

They have since done another sea crossing together – when they had both grown older and wiser.

"That actually turned out to be a good crossing. We'd both come closer to a point of compromise."

Steve has now decided that he really doesn't like cycling or pedalling in the middle of nowhere and is pursuing other projects. They remain the best of friends.

When that initial crossing was over there was some serious fundraising to do. Jason decided to skate across America and in so doing earned his place in the Guinness Book of Records.

But at 5.30pm one fateful evening in Colorado, disaster struck. An 82-year-old motorist, who was booked in for cataract operations, mowed Jason down from behind. He didn't stop until run off the road by another motorist who'd witnessed the accident.

Jason broke both his legs and was told by the surgeon that because of the nature of the wound he might lose his left leg.

"I was a little bit gutted," said Jason, in what is undoubtedly a monumental understatement.

But the surgeon offered him a home on his Colorado ranch to convalesce.

He spent nine months getting back on his feet and two years waiting for compensation. It was that money – and an indomitable spirit – that allowed Jason to continue following his dream.

Jason had already decided even if he remained in a wheelchair he would carry on trying to fulfil his goal of getting round the world on muscle – and willpower – alone.

Understandably, Jason was a little nervous to get back on the skates, but get back he did.

Luckily, he was joined by schoolteacher April Abril who came with him on a bicycle



and the pair finished off what Jason began in June 1995.

The travels continued. They include his solo 2,200-mile trip from Hawaii to Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, his trip from there with *Moksha*'s builder Chris Tipper and from the Solomon Islands to Cairns on the Queensland coast of Australia with April, who'd never been to sea in her life.

He is still paranoid of main roads and the next leg of his epic journey, which will begin in April, will be most definitely be in the outback of Australia, off the beaten track.

There are planned regular live satellite link-ups with 1,000 schools across Britain.

Jason has six years to complete 20,000 miles of his epic journey across land and sea since setting out from London – and reached Australia last August.



The next leg will take him and his international group on a supported 100-day 4,000-mile mountain bike marathon across the centre of Australia.

Depending on sponsorship levels, Mr Lewis is hoping to lead a party of between five and 10 people from Britain, Australia and the United States. Those selected for the Australian leg will have to raise up to £3,000 to help pay for the costs of this stage of the cash-strapped expedition.

The adventurers will tackle tropical rainforest, flood plain and searing desert – including Ayers Rock – as they pedal from Queensland to Darwin in Northern Territory.

Jason reached Australia in August having pedalled the £26,000 *Moksha* into Port Douglas, Queensland, with 42-year-old April, from Colorado, after a 1,100 voyage from Tulagi, Solomon Islands.

He is now ready for the next gruelling test.

"I am planning to be off-road if I can. You can deal with the creepy-crawlies and crocs with a bit of common sense; it's interacting with the other human beings in large tin boxes that's the trick."

When Jason finishes his odyssey – he reckons it will be another four years before he returns to his Greenwich Meridian starting point – he is hoping to settle down and concentrate on developing the educational side of his trip.

He wants to tap into the maths and science context of the expedition and using that, and the cultural exchanges he's had, to really fire up the enthusiasm of children to learn.

"Still using the hook of adventure, expedition and discovery." During the trip the children he has aimed his teaching at are between nine and 14.

"We have gone to lots of schools and given lots of talks to fire up kids using stories of our adventures. We are letting them know it is about personal choices they may make and how to live a dream, so they can recognise the immense capacity of human potential when your heart and mind is set.

"Whatever I end up doing, and I am not quite sure what that will be, I want to get the message across to kids that the most important thing in this life is to realise your potential as a human being.

"That takes many forms, that you don't have to fit into any mould or be dictated to by society to get along in life. You must identify what you believe in and what you are passionate about and follow your dream."

He also wants to use his experiences to teach people to be aware of the way their actions affect the rest of the world.

"If we don't find a way of living sustainably we're going to be living in a very grey world."

The best way to really get a feel for the whole trip is to log on to [/www.goals.com](http://www.goals.com) > www.goals.com, the Global Online Adventure Learning site, and read their daily reports, although those daily reports are one of the reasons he feels it will be a relief for his family when he does hang up his pedals.

"It has been hard on the family, although with modern technology I had more contact with them from the boat than I did when I was in London. Although it is statistically safer pedalling across the ocean than being on a road, people have the perception that it is more dangerous than it really is.

"Also, because I was writing for the web update I didn't want to play things down. I wish I could have written one version for the family and one for everyone else, but it doesn't work that way."

At least it means they have never had to send out a search party.