

Crew struggles in Coral Sea crossing



STRANDED: The crew of April Abril and Jason Lewis on Moksha at Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. Picture: Kenny Brown

PEDAL BOAT EPIC STALLS

By Rob Syme

AN ambitious attempt to circumnavigate the world under human power in a pedal boat is struggling against wind and high seas in the Coral Sea.

Yesterday afternoon, the 8m Moksha was battling to make headway about 70 nautical miles north-east of Lizard Island.

The two-person crew, originally

heading to Cairns, was seasick and fatigued with little hope of making Cook's Passage and an easier landfall at Cooktown.

They were hoping to be taken to Lizard Island by a member of their support crew who was flying to the exclusive resort island late yesterday.

Jason Lewis, 32, from Britain, and American schoolteacher April Abril, 42, left the Solomon Islands exactly one month ago — destination Cairns, 1700km away.

It proved to be the toughest test yet for what has been described as an "ill-ventilated broom cupboard" that set out from London six years ago.

The crew has been battling the

south-east trade winds, and yesterday morning was pedalling furiously and making only 0.15 knots headway south, while being carried 1.5 knots west by wind and prevailing current.

Freelance BBC cameraman Kenny Brown, 31, who provides logistics support for the expedition, flew to Lizard Island yesterday afternoon hoping to get a boat out to the

Moksha and tow it back to the island. "April is not well, and we would like to get her to the island as soon as possible," Mr Brown said.

"She is suffering from fatigue and they have both been very seaisick."

The Australian Customs Service is ready to assist Moksha's crew into Australia.

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"We are doing everything we can to facilitate the crew's arrival," customs service district manager Cairns Tony Scicluna said yesterday.

"They have come in under extreme conditions and with ill people we try make their arrival as easy as possible," he said.

Last night, the Aussar Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Canberra said it was keeping an eye on the situation and was in regular touch with the crew.

It is not the first time the crew have been hit by misfortune.

After leaving the Meridian Line at Greenwich on the River Thames in 1994, Moksha was pedalled across to France and then down the coast south of Portugal before an 111-day run across the Atlantic Ocean to Miami in Florida.

It was while adventurer Jason was rollerblading across the US to reboard Moksha at San Francisco, that disaster struck.

Jason suffered broken legs and other injuries when struck by a car in Colorado and it was another year before he was fit enough to travel to San Francisco and continue the voyage.

Two years ago, Moksha left San Francisco for Hawaii, before continuing to Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands.

A planned stop at Honiara in the Solomon Islands was abandoned during the recent civil unrest and Moksha made landfall at the island's old capital of Tulagi.

The expedition hopes to inspire children to achieve goals and to promote understanding between cultures. Expedition updates can be found on the website www.goals.org