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Around the world on his own steam

Briton Jason Lewis circles the globe using only human power, a 46,000-mile odyssey that took 13 years.

By **KIM MURPHY**
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GREENWICH, ENGLAND — He was a young man then. Fresh out of the University of London, Jason Lewis was running his own window-cleaning business and playing in a grunge rock band when his friend Stevie Smith was struck by the terrifying thought that the prime of his life would turn out to be less than it should.

"What I see, day after day, are captured lives, half-lives, dedicated to a mirage of fullness that never comes," Smith would explain later. "My greatest fear is of mediocrity and of a slow, unremarkable acquiescence to society."

Come with me around the world, Smith told Lewis. We'll circumvent the globe like Magellan did riding the wind, but we'll do it under our own power: by bicycle, pedal boat, kayak, skates and our own remarkable feet.

"When do we start?" Lewis replied.

The answer to that question was July 12, 1994.

One of them finished Saturday, more than 13 years later, but it wasn't Smith.

Leather-faced, thin, weeping, and now 40, Lewis pedaled his boat up the River Thames to the prime meridian here — 46,405 miles later, and exactly to the spot where he and Smith had started. Smith, who dropped out five years into the journey, stood back quietly among the cheering spectators, jostled by the television camera crews.

Along the way, Lewis capsize in two oceans, was chased by a 17-foot crocodile in Australia, suffered from two bouts of malaria, underwent surgery for two hernias, nearly died of blood poisoning 1,300 miles out to sea from Hawaii, stumbled upon a civil war in the Solomon Islands, suffered acute altitude sickness while biking over the Himalayas, got hit by a car and sustained fractures to both legs in Colorado, was robbed at the point of a

machete in Sumatra and arrested as a spy in Egypt.

He sold T-shirts and worked odd jobs to raise money, and then kept going. He fell in love, but said goodbye and kept going.

"Thirteen years, coming to an end. It's been a big, long journey. It's good to be back," Lewis said simply as he pushed his 26-foot-long pedal boat, now resting on a trailer, across the famous cobblestone courtyard outside the Greenwich Royal Observatory.

Though it is still in dispute, Lewis and his Expedition 360 team believe it to be the first true human-powered circumnavigation of the globe, a voyage that spanned 37 countries both north and south of the equator and ended at Greenwich, 0 degree longitude, where Earth's time zones begin.

Standing opposite Prince Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, a patron of the voyage who had christened the boat Moksha (Sanskrit for Freedom) Lewis was clad in canvas sandals, bicycle shorts and an old orange windbreaker.

"It gives me great pleasure to inform you," Lewis declared, holding aloft a magnum of Taittinger champagne, "that as of this moment, the world has been circumnavigated using only human power."

Before Lewis left Greenwich 13 years, 2 months and 23 days ago, he had spent a grand total of three days crewing on a sailboat and had ridden no more than three miles at a time on a bicycle.

With Smith, he crossed the English Channel, bicycled to the Portuguese coast; spent 111 days crossing the Atlantic to Miami in the pedal boat (at a speed of 2 to 4 knots) and spent a year rollerblading across the United States, including several months in Colorado recuperating from the car accident.

They set off early in 1997 by bicycle for South America, intending to cross from Peru to Australia. They made it as far as Honduras, covering 3,500 miles in seven months by bike and kayak, but unfavorable El Niño currents and winds forced them to reverse

[See *Journey*, Page A7] and go thousands of miles north to San Francisco. They decided to cross the Pacific near the

equator instead, with a stop in Hawaii.

It was in Hawaii, already five years into the journey, that a no-longer-aching-for-adventure Smith threw in the towel.

Lewis kept going. Later he would bring in occasional crew members on various legs to help, but he pedaled alone for 72 days across the Pacific.

"I just let the boat drift when I was sleeping," he said, which caused a problem when he ran into countercurrents near the equator.

"I'd pedal in the day and go to sleep, and wake up in the same space where I started the previous day," he said. "That was probably the most demoralizing part of the whole expedition."

He arrived in Australia \$40,000 in debt, and spent more than three years raising funds and working with schools while traversing the Outback on bicycle. Lewis then pedaled his boat to Southeast Asia; bicycled through China and eastern Tibet to India; took his boat to Djibouti in East Africa; bicycled and kayaked through Africa and Turkey; and bicycled to France, before setting out one last time on the pedal boat to cross the English Channel and go up the Thames.

At sea sometimes for weeks at a time, he had freeze-dried rations in one end of the boat, a small sleeping compartment known as "the rathole" in the other, and a desalinator for processing drinking water.

"The idea was to be able to travel through countries, meet people, experience culture. I suppose it was part physical challenge and part the human-powered element, to be able to travel slow enough to experience culture at a very grass-roots and grounded human level," Lewis said in a telephone interview from Belgium last week before beginning the final leg of his trip.

"I loved the Atlantic. Being away from the clutter and distractions of normal day-to-day life on land," he said. "I found this sort of Zen-like state being on the boat, doing one thing at any one time well, rather than a lot of things badly, like one does on land."

Smith, on the other hand,

never seemed easy at sea after being washed overboard in terrifying, 30-foot seas during a storm, Lewis said.

"I thought he'd gone. I was thinking: 'What the hell am I going to tell his mother?' Miraculously, there was a rope that somehow got wound round his foot as the boat was being blown away from where he fell, and about three minutes after it happened, he crawled up on the back of the boat," he said. "He was always very much on edge from then on, being on the ocean at all."

But the two also had begun to get on each others' nerves.

"The biggest row we had was I had some laundry dragging over the side on a rope, wrapped up in a sweater with a bit of washing liquid. I'd forgotten about this laundry, it was about two or three days out there, I guess, and finally Steve blew a gasket."

"If it was Americans, you'd talk about it before it became an issue. But being Brits, he kept quiet until it became a problem, because the drag was slowing us down. . . . I think it was really the straw that broke the camel's back."

Smith, 41, whose book "Pedaling to Hawaii" chronicles his experiences on the trip, now operates a ferryboat on an estuary in southern England.

He said it was not nervousness or even annoyance that ended his journey, but a desire for roots and permanence.

He began to realize that he was carrying on to reach a goal, not because he was enjoying it, he said in an interview Saturday.

"It was never about finishing. It was about the journey. And I just felt like I didn't need to do it anymore," he said. "Sometimes it takes more courage not to do something than it takes to start something in the first place. The idea of staying true to yourself, and not being captured by a dream, or anything else."

The two have remained friends, he said.

"I had a last pedal around the Thames this morning with Jason," he said. In the hubbub of the day's celebrations, the memories of what they had been through together all came back.

In addition to financial help

from more than 1,800 individual contributors and sponsors, Lewis earned money with odd jobs, including working on a cattle ranch in Colorado and in a funeral parlor in Australia. He sold expedition T-shirts for \$20 apiece. One company donated the 340 rollerblade wheels he chewed through crossing the United States.

Lewis' father, retired army Col. Seberty Lewis, meanwhile, helped with logistics and plotted his son's position on navigation charts with a fix Lewis would send each day by satellite communication.

"I'd get a message: 'All OK.' Then latitude and longitude, then date-time-group," the elder Lewis said.

Later, Lewis and his traveling companions began posting diaries, photos and video on an Internet blog.

"I'm hugely relieved that this whole thing is over. And sad in a way, that a whole chunk of my life will be missing — that which is the daily and nightly anxiety over what's happening to the boy," his father said. "It's been like a military exercise for 13 years. The dining room table will no longer be covered with charts and maps and situation reports, looking after Jason in some far distant clime."

Lewis now faces another challenge: establishing his feat as a record.

There is a challenger. Canadian Colin Angus claims to have completed the first human-powered circumnavigation last year, in 720 days. Lewis says Angus' journey was not a true circumnavigation — it was much shorter, spanned only the northern hemisphere and failed to pass through two antipodes (diametrically opposite places on Earth). Angus says Lewis had help pedaling the boat and had to double back on one of his Australian legs, disqualifying him.

Two Americans have separate expeditions underway now.

Lewis also plans to write a book, to give a series of talks and help develop educational materials from the trip. In between, he hopes to find the kind of ordinary life that he and Smith once scorned.

"On the trip, I fell in love,