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Lewis completes epic world voyage

Jason By Adam Lusher

Shortly after noon, watched by a crowd of more than 100, a weather-beaten Englishman steered a pedalo up the Thames, put it on a trolley and pulled it across the Meridian line at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich.

For some observers, this was a vaguely surreal spectacle, and reassurance perhaps that some still uphold the national reputation for eccentric endeavour.

For Jason Lewis, however, it was the end of a 46,505-mile odyssey that saw him become the first person to complete a human-powered circumnavigation of the world. Shunning motor, sail and anything other than his own muscle power, Mr Lewis has kayaked, rollerbladed, bicycled, pedalled, paddled, walked and swum his way around the world.

In his trusty 26ft-long wooden pedalo Moksha, named after the Sanskrit word for liberation, he has travelled more than 17,000 miles, crossing the Atlantic in 111 days, the Pacific in 178 days, and the Arabian Sea in a relatively short 46 days.

Most incredible of all, however, is that his epic journey has taken him 13 years, two months, 23 days and 11 hours – a delay of about half an hour for the arrival of the Duke of Gloucester before he crossed the finishing line yesterday must have seemed irrelevant.

When Mr Lewis left the Meridian at the Royal Observatory, on a bicycle, at 1pm on July 12, 1994, he was 26. Now he is 40. 'At last, I have closed the loop,' he said, moments after crossing the line. 'I have this huge sense of accomplishment and closure.' Then he explained why he started his 13-year journey: 'I was burned out with London. I needed a bit of a break. I thought I would cut my teeth on some adventures for three years. I had no expectation of what I was getting myself into. Otherwise I probably wouldn't have started.' Mr Lewis, a surprisingly sane-sounding former public schoolboy, began the trip with his London University friend Steve Smith. The setbacks are legion: he caught malaria twice, and blood poisoning 1,300 miles from land in the Pacific. Mr Smith became fed up with the expedition in 1998 and gave up.

By 2001, Mr Lewis, who has received mostly small-scale sponsorship along the way, was 23,000 in debt. He paid it off with three years' work on a Colorado bison farm before continuing his journey.

Mr Lewis returned to Britain only once, to be with his father for two months in late 2000 while he received cancer treatment.

Last night, he was still wondering where to sleep. 'I have absolutely no idea where I'll go,' he said. 'I think I might pitch my tent in Greenwich Park and hope no one kicks me out.' Information appearing on telegraph.co.uk is the copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited and must not be reproduced in any medium without licence. For the full copyright statement see Copyright

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