

STRAITS TIMES

Round the world in 11 years... and counting

No wings, but lots of prayer, muscle and determination propel intrepid adventurer Jason Lewis on his odyssey

► Melissa Sim

ADVENTURER Jason Lewis has battled a crocodile, outwitted a shark and covered over two-thirds of the globe, relying only on his own two feet.

The journey has taken him a whopping 11 years and he's not done yet.

The 38-year-old Englishman, who used to be a singer in a band, left Greenwich, London, in 1994 on Expedition 360.

He wanted to circumnavigate the globe using just human power. That meant using bikes, boats, rollerblades, kayaks and his feet — no motors or sails allowed.

Since leaving Greenwich, he has covered about 40,000km.

He biked his way through Europe, crossed the Atlantic Ocean on a pedal boat, rollerbladed across North America, cycled down Central America, pedalled his way to Australia before arriving in Singapore on Nov 17.

He now has approximately a third of the journey left.

But why would anybody devote 11 years of his life to such a project?

"At the time, we didn't think I would take so long, we planned to take three years for this big adventure. It has such romantic appeal and the idea just got us all fired up," says Lewis, who adds that the delays were mainly due to a lack of funding.

Lewis' friend Steve Smith, 39, came

up with the idea. They travelled together for five years, from Greenwich to Hawaii, before Lewis went solo for the next few legs of the expedition.

The ocean legs were the most physically demanding. With just one person pedalling away, Lewis suffered from salt sores and chronic tiredness.

While his adventure may be physically taxing, Lewis says it is mental strength that keeps him going.

He points out: "It can be really difficult when you're on your own, especially at night. It's pitch dark in the middle of the ocean so you could well be in outer space.

"Music and books help, but I made the mistake of bringing philosophy books on the Atlantic crossing.

"No more Dostoevsky."

He spoke to Sweat at the SAF Yacht Club last month. His pedal boat, christened Moksha, or liberational freedom in Sanskrit, is stored there until he continues on the Asian leg of his journey in April next year.

He has had harrowing encounters at sea. There was the 1.5m Great White shark which circled his pedal boat for two days. Then there was also an 8m-long crocodile which raced him to shore on his way to Queensland.

"It was tailing me and I didn't know whether it wanted to mate with my kayak or kill it. Either way, I thought I would have a better chance of defending myself on shore," Lewis recalls.

And when he reached land, he had to hit the crocodile repeatedly with his pedal before it would go away.

But the intrepid adventurer did not always escape unscathed.

While rollerblading through North America, he was hit by an elderly driver. He broke both his legs. But after



BRUSHES WITH A SHARK AND A CROCODILE are some of Lewis' most interesting experiences during the ocean legs of his epic journey. And he lives to tell them.

PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

nine months, he was back on the road, this time, biking alongside local school teacher April Abril.

She now helps to coordinate the link-up with schools, in which children calculate their impact on the environment each day, and compare it to Lewis' impact on his environment.

"It's all about sustainable development. We want to send the message that technology is great but we must question what it is used for," he says.

Now taking a break, he has flown to

Colorado for Christmas with April.

While there, he hopes to raise the US\$55,000 (S\$92,400) needed for the remaining part of his journey, from Singapore back to Greenwich.

With so little time to spend with his loved ones, does he ever look back on the past 11 years with regret?

"My parents have always taught me to finish what I do, so I'm going to do just that," he states emphatically.

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