

Caught in an Indonesian whirlpool

Red tape snags Briton's 11-year kayak journey around the world

VINITA RAMANI
vinita@newstoday.com.sg

SUNBURNT but triumphant Briton Mr Jason Lewis, 38, kayaked into the waters off of Tanjong Beach at Sentosa at around 2pm yesterday, bringing him a stroke closer to becoming the first man to circumnavigate the world using only human power.

Before arriving in Singapore, he was caught in a strange immigration whirlpool in Indonesian waters on Nov 16, the day he was scheduled to arrive. He had to paddle back from Singapore to Batam Island to get clearance because Indonesian immigration has no category for kayaks that travel through its waters.

"It caused a 90-minute delay to get the stamp saying we were exporting a kayak. But by then, the tide was really strong, so we got caught in whirlpools. The Singapore guide team's double kayak capsized and we had a close call with an oil tanker," said the adventurer.

But that was the least of Expedition 360's challenges.

The journey began in 1994 at the Greenwich Meridian Line in the UK when Mr Steve Smith, the man behind the idea that became Expedition 360, proposed the idea to raise awareness about ecology, culture and global citizenship.

Since then Mr Lewis has covered a total journey distance of 55,000km using a kayak, bicycle and a 26-foot ocean-going pedal boat named Moksha. When funding ran out, he worked a range of jobs until he had enough money to continue.

However, it has hardly been "romantic" or easy for the Dorset native.

"Authorities don't know what we are. We're not a canoe expedition, an educational programme or a bunch of travellers. So getting visas or tackling bureaucracy has been really hard," he adds.

Funding is equally difficult to obtain. The project has largely survived through sponsorships, self-funding and their Unesco-affiliated efforts to go to schools across the world.

Mr Lewis is aware of the practical drawbacks of being an unusual, undefined outfit.

He adds: "The longevity of the

project and our multi-faceted approach puts people off. Their money won't be paid off in a timely fashion, so that's a fear."

He has warded off flesh-eating komodo dragons. He has dealt with broken limbs and had to return home to Dorset to take care of his cancer-stricken father. There have also been moments of personal doubt.

He says: "I joined thinking it would take two and a half years to complete. The older I get, the lure of a transient lifestyle and travel wears off. I've become a weird outsider and a loner.

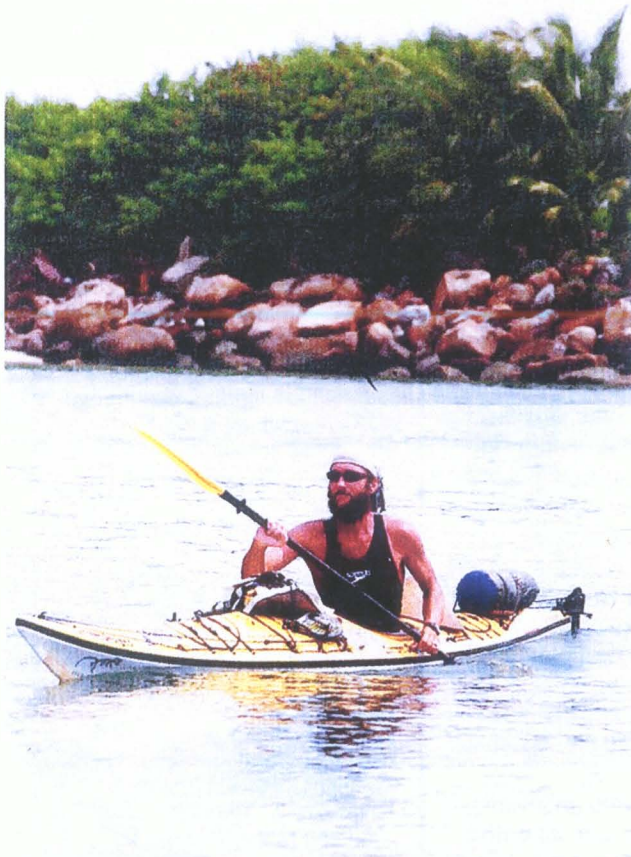
"But it's the educational part that keeps me going because we reach out to children and get them excited about the world and learning."

Expedition 360 has visited 640 schools in 13 countries and connected up to 10,000 students through cultural exchange programmes.

The team will also be working on a documentary for *Discovery Channel* that will target 10 to 13-year-olds.

Mr Lewis will be in Singapore until April next year, to run programmes, talks and slide shows cataloguing his journey so far.

For more details visit www.expedition360.com



A LONG JOURNEY FROM HOME: Mr Jason Lewis paddled from Sumatra to Singapore in a kayak. He has travelled 55,000km since he left London 11 years ago.

COI BOON KEONG