

Six Trans-Canada adventurers cross the Columbia in one week

By Aaron Orlando - Revelstoke Times Review

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Gary Rota, Roger Echlin, Twyla Martin, BJ Cummings, Dwayne Franco Voykin and Ty Greg pose for the camera with Sonny Davis on June 10.

Mimi Nakamura/Times Review

Terry Fox's Marathon of Hope is seared into Canadians' memory as an iconic odyssey of courage and determination, inspiring many to emulate his journey – even 30 years later.

This past week, six different cross-Canada adventure tours walked or rolled through Revelstoke, each seeking to raise awareness and funds for a cause. More are scheduled to pass through this week.

A few of them were solo, shoestring expeditions, the traveller camping in local campsites, or appealing online for a place to stay.

Others had support vehicles and hotel reservations.

All of them had at least some type of internet presence, ranging from a Facebook page to slick websites with GPS tracking widgets that plotted the journey minute-by-minute.

What is the state of the cross-Canada human-powered adventure? How are they received as they journey across Canada? Do Canadians open up their hearts, homes and wallets to help? Do the tourists manage to achieve their goals of raising money and awareness? What works and what doesn't? Do they make it to the Atlantic? Looking back, what is their advice for those who will follow in their footsteps?

The Times Review will highlight these and possibly more travellers as they come through Revelstoke this summer, and then check back with them in the fall for a feature story to find out about their journeys.

Here are the six (individuals and groups) who came through last week:

Wheelchair athlete Sonny Davis, 30, from Edmonton says his Canadian coast-to-coast journey is designed to beat his own personal challenge, muscular dystrophy.

Calling his journey The Marathon of Freedom, Davis wants to inspire people and raise awareness about the condition.

"Being out here, my emotional bubble has expanded," Davis says. His goal is to "connect with as many people along the route and offer freedom and love."

Follow Davis at his website www.marathonoffreedom.com. He also has similarly-named Twitter and Facebook pages.

Kevin Glenney, 36, of Dunnville, Ont., is riding his bike across the country in support of the Huntington's Society of Canada and Engineers Without Borders. The U.S.-based aerospace engineer says the journey has been a personal goal and dream for 12 years, and he hopes to complete the 8,300-kilometre ride by September 10. It includes a dogleg into the States. He hopes to raise \$30,000.

You can follow him online at www.kevinglenney.com, where he'll be blogging and posting pictures.

Art Denton rode his bike across Canada 15 years ago, and despite a heart attack in the meantime, he's doing it again at the age of 68, this time to raise funds for Haiti relief. His son maintains his fundraising website at www.bikingforhaiti.com.

He raised \$26,000 last time, and hopes to top that this outing.

What inspired him to take the trip again? "The pictures on TV of little children walking, covered in dust," he says. "What would they do? I really needed to do something."

Denton tells me he originally planned to pull his bike trailer across the country without wearing a helmet. Due to a medical condition, wearing one is painful. He also jokes that he only has a couple weeks' worth of heart medication left, and that he'll have to remember to stop at a pharmacy somewhere to pick up more.

He heard that the Times Review was looking to find out more about the cross-Canada adventurers from Kevin Glenney. The two strangers were coincidentally camping right next to each other at a local campsite.

Brad Cownden, 23, of Victoria is the rider behind brainStormRIDE, a cross-Canada cycle to help raise awareness and funds for brain injury-related causes.

"Ten years ago my aunt, Connie McKenzie, received a traumatic brain injury in a car accident, and I watched my family rally around and help her with everything," he says. "It made a big impression on me, I wondered what happened to people who didn't have a support system like she did."

He's been preparing for the ride for two years and has gathered a support team who is updating his website and providing general support from home base on Vancouver Island.

Cownden refers everyone to the Brain Injury Society of Canada's website at www.biac-aclc.ca, which is an umbrella organization for smaller community-based brain injury groups.

He left Victoria without enough money to make it to St. John's, so any personal help is appreciated. His full-service website is at www.brainStormRIDE.org.

He spent a day riding with Ben from the UK, who is riding across Canada for Help for Heroes, a charity created to help support veterans. The Times Review missed Ben, but we will try to track him down.

Leslie MacDonald and Megan Kirkpatrick arrived in Revelstoke on June 13. MacDonald's goal is to make it to PEI on August 14. Kirkpatrick is going as far as Calgary.

They were the only female travellers so far.

'Going the Distance for Dad & ALS' is MacDonald's way of commemorating her dad Bob MacDonald, who died from a form of ALS in 2003.

"Tragically, like many people, talking and laughing were core elements in my dad's life," said MacDonald. "To see these precious abilities that we often take for granted, escape from him, was heartbreaking to all that knew him."

MacDonald is raising funds for a cure or an effective treatment for ALS.

Her final destination is Summerside, PEI, where she plans to visit her father's burial site. Along the way she plans to raise \$25,000 towards ALS research. Her website is www.goingthedistancefordad.com, and donations can be made at www.als.ca/goingthedistancefordad/

So far, their best story was meeting samosa vendor Manjet at the Coquihalla Lakes rest place, who made a great donation, gave them bananas for the road and made up a poster for the rest stop so others would be aware of the journey.

Justin Young, 27, is a member of the Bloodvein First Nation in Manitoba. He moved from near Winnipeg to Kamloops about eight years ago, hoping a change of scene would help him overcome his struggles with alcohol and drugs. Unfortunately, he discovered in Kamloops the problem was not his surroundings, but himself.

In a speech to Revelstoke Rotary Club on June 10 he said he's been clean and sober since 2009 and is planning on walking from Kamloops to Winnipeg in order to raise awareness about the struggles facing First Nations peoples.

He says his person goal is "to grow in my own health so that I can help others to heal."

"This is my healing journey," said Young. "I'm not doing this for fame or money. I'm doing this for my people because they have to have healthy lives."

Follow him on Facebook at 'The Official Justin Young Walk of Healing Group.'