

modation when he's on the road, thanks to a special hanging tent that enables him, when necessary, to sleep in a tree alongside his bike. "It is a suspended sleeping shelter and flat-bed hammock, which I invented," he says. "My company supplies it to universities doing research in the jungle."

He may sound eccentric, but unlike some others with bright ideas, he's got a good record of making them happen. Indeed, he has built businesses from several of them.

His latest idea is to lead up to 200 cyclists from around the world on the mother of all adventure holidays, the Tour D'Afrique: a 10,500 km, four-month bicycle



PETER REDMAN / NATIONAL POST

Michael de Jong surprises fellow air passengers when he tells them he rides his bike to the airport.

'CARS [IN TORONTO] ARE NOT HAPPY WITH CYCLISTS ON THE ROAD'

expedition from Cairo to Cape Town. He is organizing it with fellow Torontonian Henry Gold, 50, a former electrical engineer and founder of Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief.

The trip will set off in January (see sidebar). Most participants will travel on mountain bikes, but the expedition is open to any human-powered vehicle. Self-reliance, again, is the theme.

Cycling across Africa may sound challenging, but de Jong has already cycled across India, Brazil, most of Europe and, scariest of all, downtown Toronto.

"Cycling in Toronto is tough," says de Jong, who grew up in Holland but now lives in the Annex. "Cars here are not happy with cyclists on the road. By law, cyclists are entitled to occupy a whole lane, but cars don't like that. They cut you off, speed to the next red light, then a few moments later, you catch up with them. I call it the 'Hurry up and wait' syndrome."

He first arrived in Canada as an exchange student at the University of Manitoba 20 years ago. "I realized that, unlike in Holland, there is absolutely no bicycle tradition in North America. The development of the suburbs and the highway system is stamped on the North American landscape."

He moved to Toronto 12 years ago. "I started off in the bike business and there were almost no cyclists in the city back then. The number has grown a thousand-fold in recent years, thanks to the subway strike, among other things. But it is still rare for a person of my age to be cycling here."

How would he improve the lot of the Toronto cyclist?

"The city's whole bike infrastruc-

ture needs to be overhauled. We need a lot more bike lanes. Plus, the bike lanes here are just painted on, whereas in Holland there is a concrete bump separating the bike lane from the main road."

The problem is that Toronto's bike lobby is weak. "It does not get enough funding from the bike industry."

Between cycle expeditions, de Jong works as an inventor, product developer and entrepreneur. His latest invention is an amphibious boat-bike, comprising an inflatable kayak, which packs aboard the bike, while the latter in turn folds up small enough to pack on the boat.

"It is the perfect solution," he says. "It takes five minutes to set up and it gives you the best of both worlds, whereas most previous amphibious bikes gave you the worst of both worlds."

"What is really good about it," he continues, "is that you can ride your bike to the bank of a river, and then put the boat in the river and travel across. So you're not reliant on any other transport service."

He tested a prototype of the bike-boat off the coast of Brazil. In theory, at least, he could now circle the globe using no other form of transport.

And should he choose to do so, he will be able at any point en route to collect his voice mail via e-mail, thanks to another invention of his, which will be available to Tour D'Afrique participants. His software has been launched in Canada and, he believes, does for voice mail what Hotmail has done for e-mail. The Web site is www.3point.com.

Shortly after leaving university, de Jong started cycling to airports.

"I was importing bicycle fenders and I had to visit distributors across North America, but I had no money. And so the cheapest way to do it was to travel by bike." Plus, turning up at a client on his bike had the advantage of offering an instant product demonstration.

Does he travel anywhere without his bike? "Yes," he says. "But then I take my roller blades; I can't stand being stuck anywhere."

National Post

RACE IS OPEN TO FIT AMATEURS

The Tour D'Afrique won't be just the first Cairo-to-Cape Town bicycling expedition, it will be the longest and most difficult bike race in the world — cycling's equivalent to climbing Everest, says its creator.

Unlike the Tour de France, for which only top cyclists can qualify, the Tour D'Afrique is open to anyone over 18 able to pass a basic medical. While the pros will treat it as a race, amateurs will be able to approach it as an adventure and personal challenge.

Participants will cycle 10,500 kilometres (6,600 miles) through 11 countries on a trip that will depart the Great Pyramid at Giza on Jan. 18 and dismount at the Cape of Good Hope on May 18.

Almost 40 Canadians have signed up for the US\$7,000 expedition, including a man of 61 and a woman of 52.

With partner Henry Gold, de Jong hatched the idea a dozen years ago. The project aims to raise at least US\$1-million for environmental causes by contributing 5% of each participant's entry fee and combining that with other money-raising ideas.

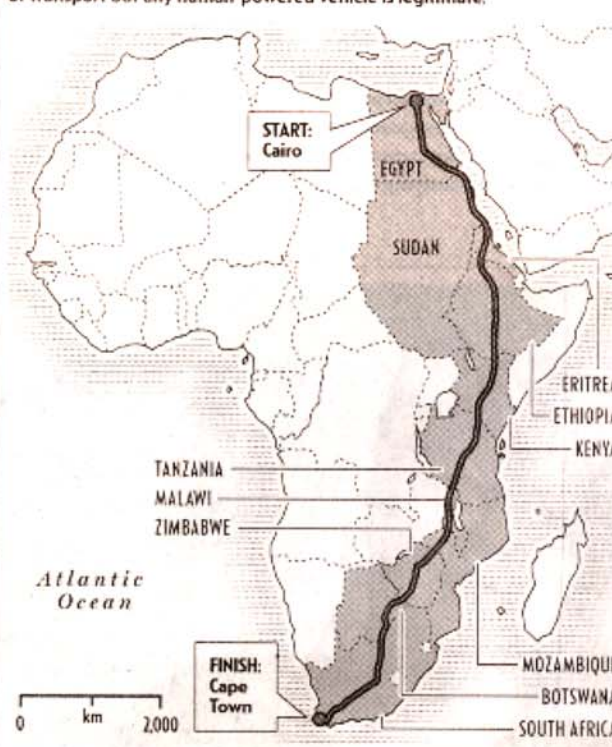
"We want to build it into an event that takes place every two years and gets known, so that people go. 'I wonder who's gonna win this year's Tour D'Afrique?'" says de Jong.

For more information, call 416-364-8255 or visit tourdafrique.com.

National Post

CYCLING FROM CAIRO TO CAPE TOWN

The first Tour D'Afrique is billed as the longest and most difficult "human-powered" expedition ever, covering 11 countries over 100 days (an average 105 km per day, with 20 rest days for relaxing and sightseeing). Mountain bikes will likely be the preferred mode of transport but any human-powered vehicle is legitimate.



SOURCE: WWW.TOURDAFRIQUE.COM

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