

One-Man Mission

Cyclist David Kroodsma will talk climate change all the way to Argentina

BY SAM WHITING

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RIGHT ABOUT NOW DAVID KROODSMA IS NEARING Mexico City on a bike ride that started in Palo Alto on Nov. 5. Kroodsma, 26, is on a campaign to raise awareness about global warming. Before he tossed his cell phone and slipped over the border, he took one last call.

What is your mission?

One component is simply biking and seeing the world and adventuring. The other component is spreading the word on climate change, and helping people think about this as a global issue.

Spread the word how?

Just talking to people I meet and classrooms I have visited. People approach me and say "what are you doing?" when they see all this gear on the bike. Right there is an avenue to talk about issues. The other way I'm getting the word out is the web site (www.rideforclimate.com). I've been getting 1,000 hits a week.

How has it gone over?

Talking to a farmer in the Central Valley was really interesting. I started out asking directions and then asked if he'd heard of global warming. He was adamant that it was not happening and it was just environmentalists out to destroy the economy.

So are you an environmentalist out to destroy the economy?

(Laughs.) No.

Who won that debate?

I didn't try to convince him of anything.

Anybody point a shotgun at you?

No. Cars are far and away the most dangerous part of the trip.

How have you been received?

I have been shocked by how nice people have been to me. At four different places people have let me crash at their place.

Can you describe your day?

I get to a town. I go to school when it is closing and talk to teachers and set it up for the next morning. The reason it works is that the bike trip is so exciting that they want to hear about it. It also helps that I've studied this here at Stanford.

What was your degree in?

I have a bachelor's degree in physics and a master's in earth systems.

Where did you grow up?

Amherst, Mass.

What got you interested in long-distance biking?

My father is a professor emeritus at University of Massachusetts who studies birdsong. I biked across the country with him two years ago. We did a lot of early morning recordings of birds. It took two months.

How long is this trip?

Fourteen months. About 14,000 miles. I'm going to the southern tip of Argentina.

What will it cost?

I'm thinking about \$13,000. I saved for the past two years and I'm asking people to donate. I'm also trying to raise money for the Union of Concerned Scientists.

What are the challenges south of the border?

I've lived in Chile, so I speak Spanish, but I'm not fluent yet.

What makes you think they care about global warming?

One of my goals is to convince kids how interconnected we are through the Americas and how climate change affects all these places.

Been homesick?

I feel lonely sometimes for sure. But mostly you are just seeing so much. It's very exciting.

Been rained on yet?

Biking through the Central Valley I got poured on. There's a good picture of me on my Web site. My hair is soaked and I was exhausted.

What's the worst of it so far?

Biking anywhere in L.A. is the worst. I was following the bike route but there is no way you would ever feel safe, so I rode on the sidewalk.

What do you think about Stanford replacing the stadium where you graduated?

They're building a new stadium? Stanford has too much money, man.

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