



On day 65 of his bike trip from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska to Ushuaia, Argentina, Erich Kuball crosses the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Kuball started on the trip in June 2001 and completed it in May 2002.

Alaskan on tip to tip global bike journey

By Bill Howes
Associate Editor

Attention all cyclists, it's the excursion you've all been waiting for, one that provides the ultimate test of endurance while requiring death-defying determination. The exhilarating journey that you embark on will extend from one end of the globe to the other and will rarely use any motorized transportation along the way.

As you complete this 15,000 mile journey you will gain an enormous sense of accomplishment, knowing you finished something most humans wouldn't dare to attempt—bicycling from one end of the world to the other. Alaska resident Erich Kuball is one such person who has achieved this incredible feat and he did it in less than a year's time, 326 days.

Kuball, 37, bicycled from the northernmost point in North America, Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, to the southernmost point in South America, Ushuaia, Argentina. He started this mammoth journey on June 15, 2001, and completed it on May 6, 2002.

During the trip Kuball traveled through 14 countries in North, South and Central America and crossed 22 international borders. He traveled with two different people along the way and occasionally ran into and traveled with other cyclists who were doing similar trips.

Kuball lives in a village in Alaska called Aniak (pop. 540) where he is a school counselor for the Kuspuk School District, which services seven different villages. He

is the brother of Chariton resident David Kuball and he was recently in Chariton visiting David and his family. While he was in Chariton he took part in the Chariton Classic Bike Ride on June 15.

The most recent bicycling trip that Kuball completed from Alaska to Argentina was one of several long trips he has taken dating back to when he was in his early 20s. Kuball's interest in bicycling began when he was 22 when he and a friend had decided to go to Europe.

They originally decided to travel through Europe by train but at the last minute they decided to buy bicycles and travel this way instead. Kuball and his friend rode through a number of different countries including Portugal, Spain, Monaco, Italy, Germany, Holland and France and their trip lasted 80 days as they rode 3,500 miles.

After this trip Kuball discovered that he enjoyed bicycling and since then he has taken four other such trips including his most recent one from Alaska to Argentina, which was his longest. Kuball is unusual in that he only rides a bicycle when he goes on cycling trips, he doesn't ride to exercise or keep in shape. In order to keep in shape, Kuball does other things such as cross country skiing and running.

There are several reasons why Kuball enjoys bicycling. "I enjoy traveling and camping in the outdoors. I get an incredible sense of

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accomplishment from going from point A to point B by using only my own legs, which was why traveling from Alaska to Argentina was an all-time high for me," Kuball said.

Kuball said that he only bicycles in the summer months because of the climate in Alaska and that there aren't any highways in the area he lives in. There's only five miles of roadway where he lives and if people want to come into this area they have to fly in, they can't drive in. When he bicycles, Kuball wears a helmet as well as a t-shirt, bicycle shorts and tennis shoes. He carries along a rainsuit as well in case he needs it.

Kuball had come up with the idea for the Alaska to Argentina trip by reading about a couple of other people who had rode on the same trip in 1971. Kuball said that about 10 people from around the world ride on this same trip each year.

Kuball had thought about taking this trip for several years before he took it but he wasn't sure about when to do it. "I'd been thinking about it for five years prior, but it was tough to find the right time to take a year away from my career and social life. But at the same time, I wanted to do it while I was still young enough to do it," Kuball said.

In order to take the trip Kuball had to apply for a leave of absence and have it accepted. He had some grants to help pay for different equipment such as a laptop computer and a digital camera. He also had \$3,500 donated by various organizations and fundraising activities. In all, the whole trip cost about \$16,000.

Kuball had decided to take the trip for a couple of reasons, one to reinforce his enjoyment of cycling and he also thought it would be the ultimate adventure. In addition, Kuball said that he tied the trip in with the school district that he worked for and that the teachers would use his trip as a theme and tie it in with the different subjects they taught. For instance, the teacher of a health class asked Kuball about his diet and what he ate on the trip. One math class would ask about how fast he went and how many miles he rode each day.

One school had a big map on the wall of both North and South America and kept track of Kuball's route and where he was. Teachers would keep in touch with him via e-mail as well.

Kuball began the trip in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, in June 2001 and when he first left he said that he had 24 hours of daylight. When he finished the trip in Argentina

the amount of daylight had been reduced to eight hours. For the trip he traveled 15,000 miles and was gone a total of 326 nights. Of these nights, he camped out for 99 of them in campgrounds, forests, deserts or on the side of the road. Other nights he would spend in inexpensive hotels or with families he met along the roadway.

Kuball started the trip with a man named Brian Wiggins of Anchorage, Alaska, and a man named Marc Perry. Wiggins quit the trip about 2/3 of the way through and Perry traveled the first 1,000 miles with him as well as the last 1,000. Of the 326 days he was gone, Kuball traveled 77 alone.

Kuball traveled an average of 61 miles each day and the most he traveled in a day was 105. The average speed he traveled was 10-12 miles per hour and he carried 100 pounds of gear as he rode.

He rode through Alaska in the early part of the trip into the Yukon

he wore t-shirts and shorts and while he was in Chile he had to buy winter cycling clothes.

He said that the hottest temperature that he encountered was 110 degrees near El Central, Calif., and the coldest was 20 degrees in Tierra Del Fuego, Argentina.

Kuball lost a total of 30 pounds on the trip and would eat as much as he could whenever he could. A lot of restaurants he ate in outside the U.S. only had one dish they would prepare and so he had to eat what they served him. "When I was burning so many calories each day, I learned to eat what was put in front of me," Kuball said.

Kuball started the trip on a bike called a Novara Safari and finished on an Ironhorse mountain bike. He would swap off different parts of his bike as they broke and by the time he finished the trip, all the parts of the bike had been changed except the pedals and the handlebars. He had two frames on



Erich with loaded bicycle in the Sechura Desert in Northern Peru. Kuball stops to enjoy the beautiful scenery on day 220 of his trip.

Territory, then British Columbia, then into the United States through Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona and into Central Mexico. He traveled through Central America as well through Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama and into South America through Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.

There was one small part of the trip that Kuball didn't ride on and that was where he flew from Panama City, Panama, to Quito, Ecuador, bypassing the country of Colombia.

Kuball said that he was fortunate in that the 11 months he was gone, that the weather he rode through was very nice with summerlike conditions. The last two months of the trip were cold and wintry and on the last day of the trip he rode through four inches of snow. For the first nine months

his bike break along the way and also had 46 flat tires.

During the trip Kuball kept a journal and took a plethora of pictures along the way. He had a website donated to him and it contains maps and journals of the trip he took from Alaska to Argentina as well as 2,500 pictures. The website contains statistics from the trip as well and the address for it is www.bikeamericas.schoolaccess.net.

Before Kuball set out on this mammoth trip, he thought it would be the ultimate adventure and his unwavering dedication and determination helped him achieve this remarkable feat. The fulfillment garnered from such an accomplishment can only be matched by the love Kuball has for bicycling and the enjoyment he gets from it each time he rides.