

Charity Bike Trip Takes Couple South

By Margaret Speirs

Terrace Standard, October 21st 2009

Northern Connector, October 23rd 2009

One couple who wants to raise money for a charity close to their hearts, promote cycling as an environmental friendly way to travel and experience an incredible adventure passed through town on their 25,000 km journey from Alaska to Argentina last week.

Husband and wife Lucie Poulin and Torrey Pass from Montreal began their odyssey in Anchorage Sept. 4 and stopped in Terrace Oct. 13 on their way to Prince Rupert to take the ferry to Port Hardy on Vancouver Island to continue their journey. They want to assist the charity Cyclo Nord-Sud with this fundraiser bike ride they've tagged "Pedaling South."

Cyclo Nord-Sud collects used bikes, fixes them and provides them to poor communities in southern countries for transportation, a way to generate new income and to fight poverty.

In the past eight years, the charity has shipped 27,748 bikes to several countries.

The couple is looking forward to seeing the work of Cyclo Nord-Sud in the countries they visit and to meet new people and experience different cultures. They hope to talk to countries not involved with the charity and hopefully form more partnerships for the charity.

They expect to be in Mexico in December this year and believe they will reach Argentina by next August. One year isn't a leisurely pace, they will have to keep moving – most people take 18 months to do a trip they're doing, they say.

From their involvement in the cycling community in Montreal – the pair met eight years ago when they both worked as bicycle messengers – they knew several people who are involved in Cyclo Nord-Sud and became involved.

This trip merges the couple's passion for biking with a good cause that allows them to do something for the community.

"For us, it's the perfect thing and perfect way to be doing it," says Poulin. It took six months to prepare for the trip. One difficult part of planning was knowing how much clothing to bring for winter temperatures and for warmer weather.

They've had an amazing time in northern BC, having taken the Cassiar Highway down from the Yukon.

"It's definitely the wildest place we've been," says Pass. "Probably the most removed place to ride through."

Seeing a black bear was a highlight for them, a mixture of enjoyment and fear, even though the bear was a fair distance from the road, they say. And grocery stores are also highlights.

Canada is way behind Europe and Asia in using bikes to get around – only one or two per cent ride here while in Europe it's 40 per cent, says Pass. They're hoping to inspire others to bike to work instead of driving.

Most people think it's impossible to make biking part of their lives but they just have to adjust their lifestyles so they can bike to the grocery store and to work, says Pass.

Pass and Poulin thought that the bike lanes on various streets around town were a great idea and say the city can go one step farther.

The mayor of Montreal has begun a public bike rental program, based on a similar system in Paris, where people can rent them, ride them a distance and drop them off at another rental station when finished.

The bike rental stations are run on solar power and people get a card or a key or use their credit card, select the number of a bike, it unlocks and they ride away. The first 30 minutes is free. It's primarily in downtown Montreal right now but it's being expanded.

A Montreal company designed the bikes to be durable, rider friendly, to fit a wide variety of people and so the wheels and other parts can't be stolen. The bikes have a GPS chip in them so they don't get lost.

The pair had their bikes made more durable for their trip too and didn't bring any extra bikes along. They did bring extra tubes and spare tire spokes. Pass says their bike tires are sturdy enough that if a thumbtack pokes into a tire, the tire is strong enough to push it back out.

They don't have a GPS or satellite phone but will update a map on their website, pedalingsouth.com, so people can follow their progress. The couple plans to take many photos and will upload the best ones into photo galleries on the site.

They welcome encouragement and say people can purchase a postcard on the site and they will send it from the country the person chooses.

Anyone interested in holding a bike drive for Cyclo Nord-Sud can check out how to do it on the website cyclonordsud.org.