

German pair set out to discover the real America via Route 66

By DOMINIKA MASLIKOWSKI/The Daily News

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LAUGHLIN - For Detlev Henschel, the real America is the 85-year-old in a cafe along Route 66 in Bagdad, Ariz., who's been a regular there since the 1920s. It's the Hole in the Wall campground in the middle of the Mojave National Preserve, where neighbors bring you oranges and the ranger stops to chat. Or rattlesnakes in the desert and rain in Laughlin on a cold day in April.



DISCOVERING AMERICA: Detlev Henschel hikes through the Mojave Desert on his way to Laughlin. Henschel and his wife Katrin Frommhold of Germany have set out on a 4,000-mile journey to revisit historic trails of the New World. Contributed

Henschel and wife Katrin Frommhold set off from Santa Monica and began their journey where Route 66 ends. They entered Arizona and camped in Laughlin for several days earlier this week on their way to follow the Old Spanish Trail into Santa Fe, and then north to Kansas City.

Their trip will mostly follow Route 66 and revisit old cattle and pioneer trails on a journey that will take them to the other side of the continent, ending in Newfoundland, Canada.

Henschel does most of the walking and normally logs in 20 miles a day while Frommhold

often joins him or follows in a Dodge van, updating the Web site that narrates their journey.

The couple are chronicling their experiences for Henschel's next book on the historical trails of the New World. But they're also hoping to give Europeans a new look at the United States - away from Washington politics and Iraq.

"We love America and we're fed up with the news we read everywhere around the world," Henschel said. "We would like to see the good things because politics are bad everywhere."

They will cover more than 4,000 miles in less than a year for a book about America then and now, pioneers and nature. The trip is part of a larger, two-year project that also has the Germans tracing historical trails in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

But the trek across the continent isn't Henschel's first expedition. He's traveled to the African desert, kayaked to the Polar Circle, faced grizzly bears in Siberia and spent nights in mountains smelling of incense amid Japanese temples.

He's written several books and often freelances for outdoor magazines about his adventures. His business card says 'ronin' across it in red ink - Japanese for a Samurai warrior who has no master.

He says he never battles nature and likes places where no guidebooks go, unlike foreigners who only visit big cities and spend their time shopping. Some people envy his lifestyle and dream of roaming the earth and seeing nature, he says, but they get tied down to their lives or have loans to repay.

But Henschel says before his globe-trotting developed into a slew of full-time projects, he was also once tied down to a high-stress career.

He quit his job 15 years ago as CEO of a company responsible for projects worth millions, saying the stress and office politics put him close to a heart attack and had him sick with three-week fevers. Frommhold urged her husband to quit, and Henschel says he's never regretted the decision.

Some friends in the company later suffered tumors or other stress-related ailments. One unexpectedly dropped face-down into his breakfast after a heart attack.

"You have a job and the more you earn, the less time you get. I know these people. I was a part of that. Everyone wants to have the Porsche, the house and the shiny new things," he said. "We found that less is more."

To follow Henschel's and Frommhold's trip, visit detlev-henschel.com.