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PEOTONE, ILLINOIS

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FIFTY CENTS

Man walks from sea to sea

by *Jenny Young*

To experience America from coast to coast, German scientist and adventurer Detlev Henschel is walking from Santa Monica, California, all the way to Newfoundland, Canada. Four months into his expedition, he trekked through Peotone, Crete and Beecher.

This 50-year-old media attraction came though our community as part of a mission to experience what he calls "the real America," or people and places beyond Washington, D.C. Also, he and his girlfriend Katrin Frommhold, who is traveling with him, needed new shoes, which were sent to the Peotone post office.

Small-town America is anything but insignificant to Henschel, whose philosophy is, "Buy a travel guide from America and don't go anywhere in the travel guide."

As much as possible, the couple travels ancient trails such as the Santa Fe Trail and Route 66. Henschel began walking on March 17 and plans to finish on November 4.

While Henschel walks, Frommhold drives an RV that contains supplies. If the two ever become separated, they communicate with walky-talkies or cell phones.

During their trek through Will County, the couple spent the night in the RV at a campground in Crete. They often stay at campgrounds or parks to sleep, shower and wash laundry.

So far, they have been impressed with our nation.

Frommhold says, "We have only good stories."

Henschel says Americans are very friendly and often invite them into their homes. He has especially enjoyed meeting Amish people in Missouri.

Frommhold has enjoyed meeting cops, who often stop to see if she is all right when she pulls off to the side of the road to wait for Henschel.

Henschel says people have been supportive of their endeavor. "Everybody in America admires what we're doing," he says.

He also feels very safe in our country, saying, "I don't think America is dangerous, but Americans think America is dangerous."

For example, he believes Americans may not feel safe visiting an Indian reservation, but he did and said, "I have no arrow sticking out of my back."

The couple is also impressed with the sights. "You have highlights everywhere," they agreed, noting the scenery ranging from the tropics to the Grand Canyon. So far, they say Santa Fe has been the most beautiful area to travel through.

Once Henschel walks his final mile, the couple will fly to their new home in Maui, Hawaii, to digest the information they've compiled. They plan to wait until 2009 before embarking on their next major adventure together. However, Henschel has been

Henschel, however, says, "A car for me is a transport, not a fetish." Henschel says he began "a new life." In addition to traveling, he writes books about his adventures. He has written five books and has five more coming.

For example, he has written a book about edible plants, and a survival guide that teaches how to bake bread under a campfire and much more. The book about his American adventure is scheduled to be published next year.

While free from the stressors of the corporate world, Henschel still faces many challenges during his expeditions. For example, in Siberia, he confronted grizzly bears that jumped into the water after seeing him on the lake.

"I underestimated that, and they almost got me," he said. "But I'm still alive." After that experience, however, Henschel decided not to travel alone.

Also, in Australia, he contracted Ross River Virus, which is like a light case of malaria caused from mosquito bites. The condition affects the joints, causing him to feel achy and tired. There is no cure for the condition, but the body fights it with time.

In America, Henschel faces challenges such as blocked roads, which forces him to rethink his route. Once, he had to change direction because he was not permitted

to walk alongside a nuclear power plant.

Henschel has also faced severe weather, such as tornadoes and lightning. He says, "I don't risk



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Each day, Henschel walks about 23 miles. "That's good for me," he said, referencing his age and health problems. Since his trek began, Henschel has walked off 26 lbs.

The couple will soon pass through Detroit, Michigan and then through part of Canada. They will return to the U.S. and travel on to the northeast coast. Panasonic and Echo shoes sponsor their journey. Henschel and Frommhold received the idea to come to America while in Australia, where they traveled 45,000 miles off-road to experience life with Aborigines.

They said, "We only heard bad stories about America." Therefore, they wanted to see for themselves what it was really like

invited to lead an expedition up Mt. Kilimanjaro. Frommhold is not sure if she will come along. "I need a little bit [of] rest," she said.

In addition to walking across our continent, Henschel has paddled a kayak from Germany to the Polar Circle, owned an African safari company, visited Lake Baikal in Siberia, hiked through Japan and more. Before embarking on this life of adventure, Henschel worked as the CEO of a company in Germany. After working about 80 hours a week and watching his health decline, he decided "money is too expensive," and quit about 15 years ago. He says America is much like Germany: everyone is seeking after money and fancy cars.

my life," and stops when weather is bad. Also, in Kansas, he walked during 100 percent humidity, which he says was exhausting.

In addition, Henschel has been sprayed by a crop duster while walking. He laughed and said he doesn't want to know what is in the spray. Also, their vehicle once sank into the mud and a sheriff had to pull it out.

Also, because of the heat and exercise, the couple worries about smelling when they meet people. Frommhold laughed and said the RV is filled with an aroma of "smelly old shoes and socks."

Frommhold says, "The worst thing is not having your own bathroom. Henschel, however, says as a man, he doesn't mind this as much.

However, to this adventureseeking couple, the trials are worth it. Henschel says he has just learned to "expect the unexpected."

Frommhold says she perseveres because she wants "to experience other countries, other states and other people."

To follow Henschel and Frommhold on their American adventure, visit detlevhenschel.com. Frommhold works as Henschel's personal video journalist and posts weekly updates on the Web site.



TO EXPERIENCE America from coast to coast, German scientist and adventurer Detlev Henschel is walking from Santa Monica, Calif., all the way to Newfoundland, Canada. Four months into his expedition, he recently trekked through Peotone, Crete and Beecher. He stopped at the Peotone Post Office to pick up supplies that were mailed to him. Here, he shows a map of his trek across the country that is fixed to a wall in his van.
—*photo by Tracy Ahrens*