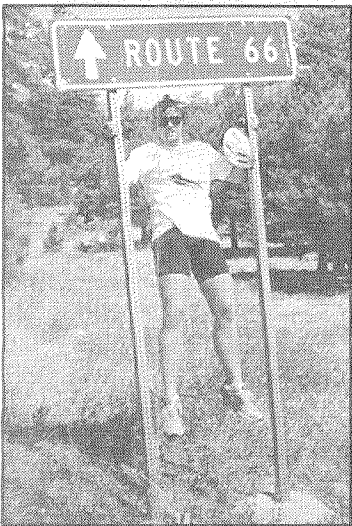
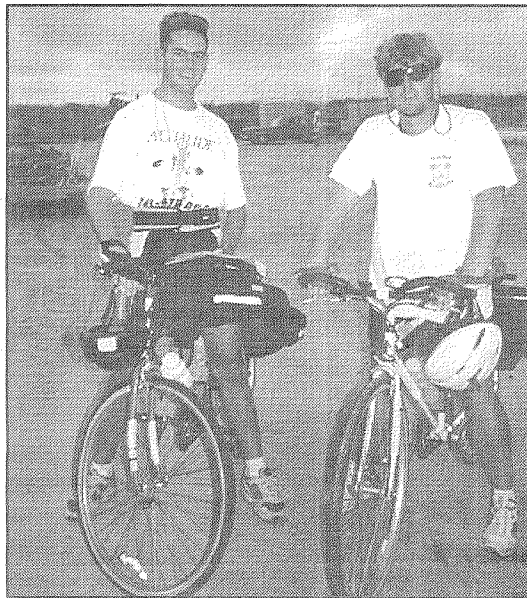


The Lawler Brothers have sent this postcard, which shows the route of their cross-country bike trip, to the people they met along the way.



Anthony (left) and Greg Lawler take one last look at the sandy beaches of Miami before they leave on their trek across America.



Photos courtesy Anthony and Greg Lawler

Anthony Lawler (top photo) takes a breather after crossing into Arkansas from Louisiana. Greg Lawler exercises his biceps on an old road sign, a sign of highways past.

Brothers bike to City College

By ELISE JOHNSON
Managing Editor

Greg and Anthony Lawler faced 20 miles of open desert highway ahead, with 10 behind, when they pedaled into Hackburry, Nevada. Rationing their water in the 110 degree heat, they ran out as planned just before reaching the next town on their map.

There was one problem: Hackburry is a ghost town. "No one was there," says Greg, 23. "We begged, and held out our empty water bottles by the road."

A bone-dry ghost town and five flat tires were acceptable inconveniences in an 11-state, 3,210 mile bike trek that brought the brothers from Miami to Santa Barbara and City College.

After class on a windy afternoon, the brothers have time to sit at a picnic table on campus and reminisce about their spur-of-the-moment trip. A photo album thick with images of friends and press clippings collected on their route illustrates the tale.

"Neither of us had ever done any cycling," says Anthony, 21. "It was really a challenge."

Riding up to 140 miles per day, and resting 2 days per week, the brothers averaged nearly 100 miles a day on the 33-day trip.

The Lawlers are from Zinkwazi Beach in Natal, South Africa, where they worked for their parents' computer business. They left last year to travel, stayed in England six months doing restaurant work and saving money, then headed for Miami.

After being "beach bums" for six months and meeting only other foreigners in their youth hostel, the brothers decided it was time to see the rest of the U.S.

"We hitchhiked extensively throughout the United Kingdom," says Anthony. "You meet people who live in the area when you hitchhike."

"We wanted to hitchhike in the U.S., but everyone said it was unsafe. We came up with the idea of cycling."

The brothers bought touring bikes and planned on training but "it never happened," they said. The cyclist who sold them the bikes recommended 100 miles per day as a good average for the trip.

"The farthest we had gone was two times to Ft. Lauderdale from Miami," says Anthony. "That's about 50 miles, round trip."

Deciding to wait no longer, the Lawlers gave away their CD's and rollerblades, and on May 28, set out for the Pacific. The first nights, they pitched their tent in roadside campgrounds. But the fees soon proved too expensive.

"By the time we left Miami, our money was getting pretty low," says Greg. "We met a girl who said churchyards were a good place to stay. It worked out much better."

Come nightfall, the brothers began heading for the first church and asked permission to camp. The response of the church pastors and their families was always cordial.

"Sometimes they'd let us shower," Greg says. "Some would spend their time with us."

The Dobbins family of Donalsonville, Georgia was one

of those families.

"Donalsonville is a real small town," said Tom Dobbins, pastor of the 1st Baptist Church. "They came to our house, hot and sweaty and looking for a place to camp."

Dobbins added, "We're a little leery of folks like that."

Leery or not, Dobbins, his wife, Carol, and their two teen-age children invited the Lawlers to stay the weekend. They played volleyball and basketball, and went canoeing. They taught the Lawlers how to play softball.

"We had our first glass of iced tea there," Greg says.

"They were real apprehensive about asking for anything," Dobbins said, "but we sort of forced some hospitality on them."

The Lawlers have kept in touch with the Dobbins family, as well as many others they met along the way.

"We made postcards and sent them to all the people," says Greg. The bright yellow postcard features a map of the U.S. with their route.

The Spore family of Whitesboro, Texas, receives more than postcards from Santa Barbara, however. They also get letters from South Africa.

"They hadn't told their parents what they were doing until after they left Miami," says Roy Spore, pastor of the 1st Methodist Church in Whitesboro.

"When they left, I told them, 'In all fairness, I'm going to write to your parents.' We did, and three weeks later we got a call from their father in South Africa."

"It's the beginning of an international friendship."

From Texas westward, the Lawlers experienced high temperatures and 15-mile uphill grades. Still, their most vivid memories are of people who helped them throughout their trip—sometimes in the most unexpected places.

Like the "desolate" and isolated churchyard where they camped outside of Lamont, Florida.

"Early the next morning, an old woman brought us root beer, cookies, and \$10," says Greg. "She said, 'Have a good journey.'"

Or the driver who passed the ghost town of Hackburry, drove 10 miles to the next town and returned with water, "and the best apple we've ever eaten," says Anthony.

The brothers wound up unexpectedly at City College.

"It was time to study and we decided to do it here," says Anthony, who is studying finance. Greg is studying computer science, and both plan on transferring, possibly to UCSB.

Of the political changes in their home country, Anthony says, "We're just like Americans and watch what happens on T.V. And of course we hear from home. Things are settling down now."

The Lawlers say they may return to South Africa after earning their degrees, to work for their parents.

Anthony says the cross-country bike ride was a once in a lifetime opportunity. "We met loads of cool people."

The Lawlers' admiration seems mutual. Kristi Dobbins, 14, of Donalsonville, Georgia says: "They were a lot of fun to be around."

"They can come back anytime."