



## Around-the-world bike ride will bring attention to amputees

By Drake Lucas

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Daniel Sheret is an amputee who considers himself lucky | his leg was amputated below the knee, he had the benefit of a good surgeon and he has access to a \$14,000 prosthetic leg that allows him to participate in cross-country bike rides.

He is dedicating the next year of his life to raising awareness for amputees in other countries where up-to-date equipment is unavailable and land mines make the threat of amputation common.

Sheret, 45, sets off June 1 to ride his bike around the world for a year.

"My prostheticist told me I had a responsibility to help other people. He said I had a debt to pay and he was right," Sheret said.

Sheret's foot was amputated in 2002, two years after it didn't heal from a jump he made off a 3-foot fence that broke his leg while he was living in Oregon.

That was the catalyst for Sheret to leave behind a job of furniture-making and turn to work as a prosthetic and orthotic technician.

He also has ridden his bike across the United States and parts of Europe.

Sheret, who now lives in North Carolina, stopped in North Andover last week to meet with Bob Emerson, his former boss at Lifestyle Prosthetics and Orthotics in North Andover.

Emerson, an amputee since the age of 9, is creating Sheret's foot for the trek, making careful predictions about weight Sheret might lose as well as muscle he will build during the ride.

Emerson also is an athlete, a skier on the national team.

"It's a daunting task in a lot of ways. Look at what he is tackling, pounding the pavement for a long time," he said. "It would be fascinating to take time out and have that meaning. It's pretty powerful."

Emerson also is going to be involved with another cause that Sheret wants to highlight with his ride: the need for prostheses in Iraq.

Rotary groups, mostly based in the Washington, D.C., area, are collecting prostheses to donate to amputees from Basra, Iraq. The Rotary has set up an exchange in Amman, Jordan. It also will have a clinic at the hospital where people can come from Iraq to Jordan to be fitted for prostheses and trained in using them.

At last count, the Rotary found that 5,000 people in the Basra region alone needed prostheses. Many were the victims of land mines planted by Iraq's former leader, Saddam Hussein.

Ted Hamady, co-chairman of the Basra Project, said he hopes the project will be long term and spread to help people in other countries, including amputees in Lebanon.

A law in America forbids medical equipment from being reused if it came in contact with a patient. Prostheses usually end up being thrown out, but they can be broken down and refitted for patients in other countries who are using whatever materials they can to make the limbs they need.

Sheret plans to stop and help at the clinic in Amman during his ride.

Other highlights for Sheret will be in Vietnam, Cambodia and the Thai-Burma border working with a project known as Clear Path International, which helps to give medical assistance to victims of land mines and their families.

Traveling in these countries is more difficult, however. Travel visas provide limited windows in some places.

### The journey

Sheret will start by riding across the United States, then Australia. After that, his path is not as clear and will depend on the stability of various countries and the timing of visas.

Sheret will be alone, but not entirely. He will stop in different towns to talk and get to know people. He also has support back in North Andover from Julia Farley who runs the Web site [abilitytrek.org](http://abilitytrek.org) about his journey, and its

accompanying children's Web site, [abilitytrektracker.blogspot.com](http://abilitytrektracker.blogspot.com).

She will be in charge of food, media and logistics. Sheret will have a laptop with him, with solar panels to keep it running.

Farley will edit the blog and keeps up the children's blog, which uses his trek to teach lessons on math, biking and sports.

Sheret said his amputation ended up improving his life, not holding him back, and that is the message he wants to spread.

"Life is richer now. I don't regret the amputation, I welcome it. I never traveled outside the United States before this," he said.

Drake Lucas writes for The Eagle-Tribune in North Andover, Mass.

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#### Photos



North Andover, Mass.: Daniel Sheret is an amputee who planning to ride for a year around the world to raise money and awareness for amputees of various causes, including Vietnamese and Thai victims of land mines. Thursday, May 17, 2007 Tim Jean/Eagle-Tribune