

Couple bikes around the world

by CAROL MARINO

The Daily Inter Lake (Kallispell, Montana)

A tandem bicycle isn't your typical wedding gift. But for Julia and Stefan Meinhold it held the key to their lifelong dream — cycling around the world.

One of the points on the planet the German natives recently wheeled their way to was Kalispell. On Sept. 17, the couple rode into town on their tandem en route to Polson and eventually to Yellowstone National Park.

A seasoned cyclist, Stefan already has a cross-country tour of the U.S. under his belt; along with extreme mountain bike tours crossing the highlands of Iceland and the Alps. Both in their early 30s and bankers by profession, in Germany he and Julia had both worked at Deutsche Bank — Julia as assistant vice president and product manager in the head office; and Stefan more recently as vice president at DWS Investments — before tying the knot and strapping the panniers on their bicycle built for two.

After meeting and falling in love in Frankfurt, Germany, the newlyweds soon saw they made a perfect tandem team. They'd made several extended cycling trips before planning their world tour which they launched at the end of 2006.

They started out on New Year's Eve in New Zealand, then went on to Hawaii, Alaska, and crossed into Canada, heading back to the states this fall, by way of Waterton Glacier Peace Park.

Their trip through the Flathead included a stop at Wheaton's in Kalispell. Faced with a stout headwind on Montana 35, they lingered at the Grateful Bread Cafe in Bigfork, and made another pit stop at Flathead Lake Brewing Co., in Woods Bay, spurred on toward Polson by stunning views of the lake and cherry orchards, which they said looked to them more like an ocean that day with the waves.

"Though we arrived late (in Polson,) a spectacular sunset sweetened our arrival," they wrote.

Their plan was to cycle through a bit of Yellowstone before heading to Utah and the Southwest for warmer climes. And that they did, by way of Portland so they could participate on Sept. 30 in the city's Livestrong Challenge bike ride and fundraiser for cancer research. Though the 100-mile course was canceled due to heavy rain, they rode the 70-mile route, on board what other riders called "the Hummer of bikes," and collected \$1,500 in pledges.

In their next e-mail they wrote about their trip through Yellowstone: "What a day — 28 degrees and snow! People thought we were crazy ... Are we?" They started at the park's north entrance in Gardiner and by the time they reached Norris they needed to hunker down for awhile in a heated restroom to thaw out. They continued on to West Yellowstone — a total distance of about 55 miles.

"We thought our hands would fall off," they said.

In spite of the cold, the bison they saw and a friendly coyote encounter made it one of the most memorable days of their tour.

Their ultimate destination, at this point, is Argentina. They will return to Germany briefly for Christmas to reconnect with their families and friends and to plan their route for 2008.

If you want to wish them luck or see where all they've pedaled over the past year, you can visit their Web site at www.bankerbiker.de or e-mail them at jus@bankerbiker.de.

