

British cyclists pedal the coast for a cause

They told me the sun came out as soon as they crossed the Washington border into Oregon. What a fitting metaphor for two angels on bicycles — burly Union Jack angels — but angels nonetheless.

Sam Jack and Craig Craven — he goes by “Wes,” like the film director — were among those who joined the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan fighting for the British.

Craven, 34, married and the father of two, is from Wales; Jack, 31, from North London. They arrived on the North Coast this spring as part of a cycling tour from Vancouver to San Diego. The mission is to support Help for Heroes, a British counterpart to America’s Wounded Warrior Project, a group Jack knows well.

Craven and Jack served together in the Royal Engineers bomb disposal unit. Familiarly known as sappers, teams provide essential support to all areas of the British Army in peacetime and on operations.

Over the course of their military careers, Jack and Craven served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Germany, Cyprus and Canada.

Craven spent 10 years on duty in Afghanistan. Jack did five, until 2010, when he took a round to the head. A bullet went in through Jack’s eye and around to his brain, about a millimeter away from the brain stem.

Initially, doctors gave Jack only a 10 percent chance of survival.

“Then it went to 20 percent,” Craven said.

Of Jack’s fighting team of 120, 12 others were injured and one died.

Jack received serious, life-changing injuries. “I’m very happy to be here walking and talking, let alone cycling through the coast.”

Help for Heroes

Jack was hospitalized for three months; rehabilitation extended for three years. “That’s when Help for Heroes took over,” he said.

Help for Heroes is credited for helping more than 17,000 war veterans. “Together, building lives,” is their motto.

Founder Bryn Parry served for 10 years in the Royal Green Jackets before leaving the military in 1985 to become a cartoonist, a career he maintained for 23 years.

In 2007 Parry and his wife Emma met wounded vets in an Afghan military hospital, inspiring the couple’s mission to help those with injuries and illnesses attributable to their service in the British Armed Forces. Help for Heroes runs four recovery centers in England.

Through the organization, wounded veterans participate in

CANNON SHOTS

R.J. MARX



the annual Invictus Games, where athletes from 18 countries compete in 10 different sports — including bicycling.

‘Let’s do it’

Because of the support he received from Help for Heroes, Jack decided he wanted to give back to the organization.

After “too many beers” one night, Craven proposed the ride across America.

“Sam said, ‘Let’s do it,’” Craven recalled.

Craven didn’t own a bicycle, much less have experience in bicycle maintenance.

“We didn’t even know how to change a tire,” he admitted.

They contacted a local British cycle shop for a “massive maintenance day.”

Planning was relatively simple: “We booked our first nights in Vancouver and our last two nights in L.A.,” Jack said.

Then the hard part began.

“This a massive challenge for us both as we don’t normally cycle, never mind cycle touring,” Craven said. “Especially for Sam. His injury knocked his confidence. I’m hoping that this trip will show him and other people with injuries that they are still capable of amazing things.”

The ride is self-funded, with a strict budget of £1,500 for food and accommodation — about \$34 per day for the 45-day trip.

Jack, who had been advised by his doctors not to join a fundraising expedition to Mount Kilimanjaro, didn’t even consult his physician this time. “I didn’t want the answer. I kept this one to myself.”

Good day, Oregon

As they planned their tour, Jack and Craven reached out to contacts in America, including Seaside’s Al Smiles, who subsequently introduced them to Gearhart’s Tom Dideum, of the local biking group Old Spokes.

The group provided logistical and moral support, Dideum said as he accompanied Craven and Jack on their leg from Seaside to Cannon Beach. “What they’re doing is pretty amazing.”

With a shoestring budget, the cyclists are “relying on the kindness of strangers, really,” Craven said.

So far, they have found assistance from police, fire, military veterans and “all-round good people” in the course of their ride.

In Raymond, Washington, they’d



SAM JACK

Sam Jack as a member of a British ordnance disposal unit in Afghanistan.

been washed out for days. After making a call, they found lodging in a local pastor’s house.

Their stay began with a birthday party for a 4-year-old, with 20 young guests, a celebration followed by the milking of a cow.

Craven said he is “pretty sure” Washington state is the hidden land of Atlantis.

“It never stops raining,” he said. “We come into Oregon and literally the sun shines.”

Road to recovery

As the bicyclists prepared to head down the coast, they welcomed the challenges ahead.

“Yeah, we’re stubborn enough to do it,” Craven said as he donned his helmet, preparing to head south along U.S. Highway 101.

“The good news is once you get over the hill at Neahkahnie Mountain, it’s all downhill,” Dideum said. “I’ll just walk,” Jack said.

Jack and Craven said they hope to cover 50 miles a day, sightseeing along the way.

As we read headlines this week, the ride of the two British war veterans reminds us of the painful toll of war, not only of lives lost, but those on the road to recovery.

Two suicide bombings in Kabul killed 25 people, among them, 10 journalists. About 14,000 American troops remain in Afghanistan, a conflict in its 17th year. Those stationed there — American, British or international — risk their lives daily for our safety.

“Not a day goes by that I haven’t thanked God for keeping me alive and giving me this second chance at living,” Jack said.

As of this writing, the cyclists have raised more than twice their funding goal.

To provide support, visit just-giving.com; search for “Canada to Mexico: the long ride down.”



R.J. MARX/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Tom Dideum of the local bicycle group Old Spokes, left, with Sam Jack and Wes Craven on a stop as they ride along the coast.



EVE MARX

The author’s spring cleaning arsenal.

A lean, mean clean machine

For the first week or so following my cataract surgery, I spent a lot of time crawling around my house with Mr. Clean Magic Erasers, attacking the woodwork. Now that I could see, I was astounded and embarrassed by the level of grime on my baseboards. While waiting for my health insurer to deem me blind enough to warrant surgery, a year’s worth of grit, grime, sand, dust and the corpses of large black flies gathered in places I was too blind to notice. Not to mention the greasy fluff of fine, white Chihuahua hairs. When I remarked upon this filth to a girlfriend back east, she wrote back, “This is why when I clean, I don’t wear my glasses.”

They say there are none so blind as those who will not see, and I would have to say that applies to my current view of housekeeping. For much of my life, I was known, not always flatteringly, as a “clean freak.” My mother seemed to take great pleasure when I was shacking up with my college boyfriend to tell me, “He says you’re crazy for cleaning and it’s driving him insane.” A 10-year-old boy who was our guest for a week while he spent the bulk of his day at a nearby prison visiting his incarcerated mother told my son, whose bedroom he was sharing, “You’re mother is buggin’”. She’s cleaning 24-7.”

I let all that go for a decade or so when I decided cleaning was not half as compelling as spending time with my pony. I logged hundreds if not thousands of hours cleaning him. During that period, my adult son, who inherited my penchant for home décor minimalism and order, pointed out flaws in my housekeeping when he visited.

“What is this?” he said, running a finger along a dust-encrusted ledge. “You never let it get like this before. Are you blind?” he said.

Now that I can see, I’ve been a cleaning dervish. It isn’t even summer, but I find sand everywhere. There is a thin film of crud on the most hard to reach surfaces. Cabinet pulls, the refrigerator door handle, the place where you rest your fingers to open the dishwasher, all were sticky with the residue of honey, raspberry jam, and peanut butter. I blame this on my husband. For the last two weeks I’ve spent more time bending over and on my hands and knees than a yogi. (OK, I don’t actually do yoga, although I keep talking about doing it.) I’ve deep vacuumed. I’ve shaken out and laundered every pillow cover and throw rug. I’ve scrubbed tile. I’ve gone through a gallon of white vinegar. I’ve never mastered an effective method of cleaning Venetian blinds; maybe the answer when they get really gross is to replace them.

Of course I realize I don’t have to do all this cleaning myself. A friend in Cannon Beach whose home is always immaculate revealed she uses a cleaning service. Kukui House Services, by the way, comes highly recommended. My house has wood floors which I near daily Swiffer, but if you have carpet, may I recommend Brandon Stallsworth at Pro-Fresh? He offers free estimates for commercial and residential carpets and upholstery. He won my heart handling door-to-door pick up and delivery service for some old but fine Oriental carpets to Atiyeh in Portland for me.

I’m thinking it might be time to call Jonathan Tate’s Window Service. Even using a ladder and living in a one-story house, I’m not up for that. I’m also petrified to remove and clean behind screens. Truth to tell, I’m afraid once I got them out, I’d never get them put back. I met Jonathan when he was volunteering his time and energy cleaning the windows of the about-to-open Cannon Beach Academy. Super nice guy. I need to call him.

LETTERS

John Orr for Oregon District 32

Don’t be fooled by high priced campaigns financed by large donations from timber barons, PDX teacher’s union and others. John Orr is the best choice for Oregon State Representative District 32.

John has successfully worked and lived in the district for many years. He understands the hopes and needs of all of us living in a coastal environment. He is not held hostage by any big donors and will work for us all.

If you care about our environment, health care, education, and emergency preparedness, vote for John Orr. He is the right choice.

Les and Myrna Wierson
Cannon Beach

Vote for John Orr

As a retired public school librarian and member of Oregon Education Association I will not be voting for the candidate endorsed by my union. I will instead be voting for the candidate who will best represent me and my family in Salem — John Orr.

Both John Orr’s parents were teachers and his sister is currently a teacher. Orr has great respect for educators and

See Letters, Page 5A

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