
Touring the World on Muscle Power

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Erden Eruc will climb the highest peaks on each of the six inhabited continents of the earth and will try to cross the distances between these peaks by rowing and cycling; he will travel around the world on the power of his muscles. In 2003 Eruc bicycled the distance from Seattle to Alaska in rough winter conditions with his mountaineering equipment on his back, and then went another 100 km over the glaciers and to reach the peak of Mount McKinley.

Later, on October 3, 2004, Erden started out from Seattle on his bicycle and arrived in Miami after 82 days, pulling his climbing equipment behind him in a trailer. On January 29, 2006 he slipped anchor from the Canary Islands and landed on Guadeloupe after a 95-day journey and was named the first Turk to cross the ocean in a rowboat.

We met with Erden Eruc in Delray Beach, Florida after he became the first Turk in history to row across an ocean. We talked with Eruc about his dreams.

One of the main objectives of your "Six Continents, Six Peaks" project is to encourage children not to forsake their dreams. Do you still remember any of your own childhood dreams?

When I was 15 years old I found a National Geographic Magazine. There was an article about the first American team that climbed Mount Everest in 1963. That day I promised myself that I would climb Everest someday, and today Everest is on the list of my current expedition. I was able to realize some of my dreams, like studying at Bozaziçi University or being the first Turk to climb the rock walls in Yosemite Valley. Some others have come and gone unfulfilled, like being an Olympic wrestler.

Did you have someone to inspire you in your family? What was your family's reaction?

My father made me start climbing; he was a soldier, a sportsman and a parachute athlete. When I was 5, we used to exercise by throwing stones in the E irdir Lake, so I'd be a good discus athlete; when I was 11, we climbed Erciyes Mountain. In my father's mind I'm an engineer; at the beginning he used to ask, "What is going to happen to your job, your career?" but now he is one of my greatest supporters. Mom says, "What's wrong if you stay in the city?" But of course they know that I'd never gamble with my life, that I'm careful and responsible.

Why did you decide to get married and what was Nancy's reaction to your world tour plans?

I met Nancy in May 2000 when I was working, then I convinced her to move to Seattle and we got married in Alaska with a native wedding ceremony. On the first day we met, when she asked me what I did for a living, I answered her by saying, "Would you like to know not the job I do, but what I want to do?" and then told her that I wanted to travel the world with muscle power.

At the beginning Nancy supported me and sympathized with my idea. However, as things between us got more serious, difficulties arose. Making time for each other, preparations for the journey... We need money for the house every month, Nancy has her own career and when I started the journey the entire burden was left on Nancy's shoulders.

How was it crossing the ocean? Did you have moments of fear?

It was difficult to be alone rowing a boat for 95 days. Boredom was a problem when striving through the waves from sunrise until the sun set; I had to find something to entertain myself. I learned to set mid-way targets for myself, using music or food as rewards and sometimes postponing them a little. It was impossible to have any deep sleep in the shaking boat. The rashes that the salty water and the repeated movements caused were annoying.

Sometimes I felt anxious rather than being scared. The moments that I felt most defenseless were those when I knew there were big ships around.

Then, after 95 days you landed on Guadeloupe Island. What kind of a feeling was it? What had you missed most?

When I was having difficulties rowing against the current 10 miles off from Guadeloupe, a military boat came to pull me. I was totally enraptured when they took me to the air-conditioned hall in the boat. Then the French mariners offered me cold water and drinks, they listened to my story until we reached to the marina. Their curiosity about my story strengthened my trust in human beings, and I was proud to show my Turkish passport. They accepted me without a visa. The first thing I did when we landed was to have a shower with the soft water on the beach. What I had missed most was fresh fruit, yet I didn't miss the opportunity to have a breakfast with French pastries.

Were there any moments during your journey when you asked yourself, "what am I doing, this is crazy?" No. What I felt was more like... that the decision was made and there was no going back. On some stormy days, when I was on land there were moments that I said, "I cannot continue today"; but I knew that the next day

there would be sun, so I could wait. In the ocean it was different; sometimes for 4-5 days in the storm I had to close myself in the cabin. Even if I tried to use the wind and the current logically, I had moments that I felt exhausted, as the wind was blowing from the south instead of east for three straight weeks. But I never thought what I did was something crazy.

Did you miss your home, the comfort and the warmth of a house? Is there a place in the world that you feel like "home"?

Yes, I missed things. I have always felt like a nomad during my journeys. I don't sleep in the same place twice or do not see the same faces again. Maybe this is one of the things that attract me about journeys, new places, new experiences... but it is tiring. When you travel it is not possible to renew yourself and to benefit from the advantages of a settled life. When I was riding a bicycle from Seattle to Miami, my wife moved our house. I returned home to a house that I'd never seen. When I spent months between Lisbon and Guadeloupe our friends' kids were growing up. These are some interesting details. Nevertheless home is where my wife is, this is the only thing for sure.

PROJECT SIX PEAKS

Eruc lives in Seattle, and there, in the summer of 2007, he will start on a bicycle down to San Francisco and then will cross the Pacific Ocean, rowing towards New Guinea. His objective there is to climb the Carstenz Peak in West Papua. Then, Eruc will row his boat to Australia and will reach Port Carnarvon by bicycle. Then he will slip anchor at the end of March 2009 and will try to land on the southern coast of India. Eruc will go to Nepal by bicycle and climb Everest, and then he reaches the highest peak in Europe, Elbrus Mountain, which is on the border between Russia and Georgia.

ROWING FROM NAMIBIA TO BRAZIL

The highest peak in Africa is Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania. Eruc will arrive in Tanzania; then he will have to go to Namibia in the west. The distance between Namibia and Brazil has been rowed only once; by a Brazilian. The next objective is the highest peak of South America, Aconcagua Peak in Argentina.

Erden will then continue from Argentina northwards on land and he is hoping to return to the point he from which he started, Seattle, some day in 2012. It will be possible to follow the entire journey with updates on the web site www.Around-n-Over.org. The Turkish version of the site will be available at www.KaslaGit.com.

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