

# THE DIRT



## Travels with Renata

In 1997 Renata Chlumska met Göran Kropp, the Swede famous for cycling to Nepal, climbing Everest, and then riding back home with Renata, the beautiful Swedish model-turned-mountaineer. The couple climbed numerous mountains in their few years together, then eventually formed a guide company and relocated to Issaquah, Washington. In 2000 the pair dreamed up the ultimate North American adventure: to circumnavigate the United States via in-line skates, kayak, and bike. But a year before their journey was to begin, Kropp was killed in a freak climbing accident in Washington. Renata decided to continue with their plans and in July 2005 departed from Seattle via kayak. The trip will ultimately take her 16 months, and she'll travel 11,200 miles. We caught up with her this spring as she was making her way through the American South.

In spite of Göran's death, I decided I had to do this. It's a great adventure. It's taking me around an amazing country, and I am experiencing all of the outdoors and nature America has to offer. So far I have seen everything from the wild rugged Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. As a professional outdoors person for the past 10 years, this puts all of the things that I love into one project. Nobody has done anything like this before, so it adds to the challenge. The whole idea is to be self-sufficient. Almost all of my gear I move by myself. When I'm paddling I send my bike to the next place that I'm going to ride; and when I'm cycling I tow the kayak behind me, so it looks pretty funny in the middle of the desert.

Most recently, I've been making my way through the Gulf Coast. Originally, the plan was to paddle around Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, but that changed. It was like a war zone, so I had to pick up my bike early and ride through instead of paddling. The devastation was amazing. I had a hard time finding places to stay. The campgrounds are all full because so many people lost their homes. It's one thing to see the news and see how it's portrayed on



television, but it's a totally different thing to see the disaster up close and travel through it by kayak or bike.

Most people think what I am doing is great. It's inspirational to them, although sometimes they think I am a bit crazy, but in a good way. I knew it was going to be an amazing trip, but it's even better than I could have ever imagined. One aspect I didn't count on was all of the people I've met; and so many of them have fed me and helped me along the way, and that just makes it even more terrific.

Still I am getting tired. It feels good to know that I am getting closer to home. My body hurts more and more. I have to rest more and take more breaks, and the weather has been hard. North winds for the past week and a half have pushed hard on me. It has been an unusually cold winter, too. It makes it more challenging and interesting than if it was all easy sailing. Every day that something doesn't break or I don't get injured, I feel very lucky. I hope my journey speaks to girls. I like to think that if a girl sees me, she'll say to herself, *If she can do that, I can do that.*

—As told to Shanti Sosienki