

Roadtrip of a lifetime

Couple combines love of travel with journalism
as they explore the Americas



Top photo, Karen Catchpole and Eric Mohl.
Middle, Mt. McKinley in Alaska
Bottom, grizzly bear in Denali National Park in Alaska.



By JENNIFER H. CUNNINGHAM
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It's a dream for everyone working a nine-to-five job: Trading those days spent in front of the computer for traveling the world.

For Karen Catchpole, 41, and her partner Eric Mohl, 42, that dream became a reality. The duo moved out of their Manhattan apartment, sold their belongings and set out driving through the Americas — North, Central and South — to Tierra Del Fuego in Chile, the southernmost location in the Western Hemisphere.

Catchpole, a journalist, and Mohl, a lawyer-turned-photographer, hit the road to quell their rampant wanderlust.

"Why go back to an office if we don't have to?" Catchpole asked. "Travel is an amazing way to get smarter and more empathetic. We also didn't want to be one of those people who said, 'Remember when we had this idea?'"

Catchpole and Mohl began heading south from New York City on Dec. 5. Their plan — a three-year excursion — involves visiting 23 countries in Central and South America, writing, shooting photographs and blogging about their experiences for magazines and their own Web site, trans-americas.com. With no set itinerary, they plan to focus on the outdoors, targeting national, provincial and state parks along the way.

"The whole point of this trip," Mohl said, "is to explore."

After returning from a four-year backpacking trip across Asia in the late 1990s, Catchpole and Mohl were looking for another adventure. Then the 9/11 terror attacks occurred, right down the block from their apartment. The experience made them reassess their priorities, they said, and reflect on life in the Americas.

"That was right in our backyard," Mohl said, referring to Ground Zero. "It's one of the ways the idea got sparked in us and one of the ways that it changed our lives."

Catchpole concurred: "We really had a renewal in our faith and our country. We had a greater sense of having more in common (with other Americans)."

The road trip is also a way to combine the two things they like most: traveling and journalism.

"It's a working road trip," Mohl said. "We just love the act of going somewhere. Ideally, we'd like to turn this into a sustainable lifestyle."

The couple will finance their trip through journalism — writing and taking photos for magazines and the Web. They also plan to conserve money by camping at some places along the way.

They completed the first part of their trip in 2006, when they took a year to drive across the United States, Canada and Mexico while writing and photo-

graphing for magazines, such as National Geographic, Elle and Jane.

But the second leg of the trip almost didn't happen. A management change at General Motors meant that the new truck with which the auto firm planned to sponsor the trip didn't materialize. No truck, no trip.

"We were a little bit heartbroken and sad," Catchpole recalled. "It was a little frustrating."

But then the couple persuaded companies such as GPS giant Magellan to donate products and services — camping supplies, a water purifier, even snowshoes — to their cause. They also bought a new Chevy Silverado from Schumacher Chevrolet in Little Falls at a "deep discount" (though they declined to divulge the price).

Catchpole and Mohl now spend most of their days in the car. Mohl drives "99.8 percent of the time"; Catchpole rides shotgun, watching the scenery pass by and brainstorming for story ideas.

"We're very thorough," Catchpole said. "If it were up to us, we'd see every place. We might get excited about a little road and see someplace we never knew existed. We never know what's around the corner."

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ON THE WEB

Visit: trans-americas.com for journals and photo galleries.

Days on the road: 382 or 1.05 years

Miles driven: 49,236 (1.98 times around the earth)

Total spent on fuel: \$9,274.15

Gallons used: 3290.4

Hours driven: 1250.2 or 52.1 days

Flat tires: 2

Countries visited: 3 (United States, Canada & Mexico)

MAP ■ Approximate route followed ■ Route planned