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Biking coast to coast is natural trip

Friends pedaling 4,000 miles and planting trees all along the way

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COBLESKILL -- After pedaling more than 500 miles, Steve Cash and Ben Kelchin will roll into their hometown on Saturday for a short respite before heading to the West Coast on their Spokes & Stems bike tour.

The pair ceremonially dipped the rear wheels of their bikes into the Atlantic Ocean on May 31 in Eastport, Maine, beginning a 4,000-mile trek to Cape Mendocino, Calif.

Traveling with just their bikes and whatever they can carry, the duo -- who have been friends since elementary school -- will be planting as many trees as they can from coast to coast.

"I grew up in an environmentally aware family, so this trip has a lot of meaning," said Steve Cash, 23, who recently graduated from SUNY New Paltz. "The environmental movement is very politicized and we're trying to show that everyone can make a difference; the planet doesn't care who you vote for."

After nearly three years of planning, research and saving, the bike enthusiasts decided to embark on their journey -- which so far is entirely self-funded -- after graduating from college.

Kelchin received his degree from RIT just days before heading to Maine.

Carrying about 30 six-inch tall saplings on their bikes at a time, the pair will do most of the planting on private property, because it's illegal to plant trees in nature preserves, Cash said. His father, Chris Cash, will ship about 300 trees to various points along the route in order to keep them as viable as possible.

As they traverse various climates, different species of trees will need to be planted in each. Red and sugar maples will be planted in the northeast, honey locusts and poplar trees in the Great Plains, Colorado blue spruce in the west and dawn redwoods on the West Coast.

"We have to cross the west slope of the Rockies sometime in September, because after that, who knows what kind of weather you'll run into," Cash said. "Years from now, we'll be able to map our tour by the trees we planted."

A party will be held at the Cash residence, 372 Myers Road, at 2 p.m. Saturday. For information, go to <http://www.spokesandstems.vox.com>.

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