

Duluth News Tribune

Published March 11, 2012, 12:00 AM

Duluthians plan bike trip around Great Lakes

Kris McNeal and Zach Chase had already ridden their bicycles nearly 1,700 miles down the West Coast in 2008. Then they got to dreaming.

By: [Sam Cook](#), Duluth News Tribune

Kris McNeal and Zach Chase had already ridden their bicycles nearly 1,700 miles down the West Coast in 2008. Then they got to dreaming.

"We were nearly at the end of our trip," said McNeal, 26. "We were sitting on a mountain looking out at the vast ocean. And we thought, 'What can we do back home like this?'"

So the two University of Minnesota Duluth graduates decided they'd take on another bike ride. Their "Big Water Bike" starts May 1 in Duluth. It will take them about 5,300 miles around all five of the Great Lakes. They'll travel through two countries, eight states and 20 major cities, getting as far east as Quebec City on their northern leg before returning through the U.S. on their return leg.

The two will ride about 60 miles a day, camping at night. They plan to finish in Duluth Aug. 5.

Along the way, they'll use three video cameras to shoot footage for a documentary. Chase, 25, has a degree in digital arts and photography from UMD. He recently completed a year with the Minnesota Conservation Corps and works at Burrito Union. McNeal, who manages Burrito Union, holds degrees in outdoor education and life science.

They see the trip as a bridge of sorts to the next stage of their lives.

"We'll be starting careers," McNeal said. "Or maybe we'll be starting this as a career."

They've been planning the trip for a year and a half and have secured several sponsors for gear and equipment. They'll ride bikes that offer a compromise between road bikes and mountain bikes, and each rider will pull a single-wheeled trailer carrying about 45 pounds of gear. They plan to ride about four hours a day and spend additional time filming the documentary.

"First, we're doing the trip for ourselves," McNeal said. "Second, we want to bring awareness to the Great Lakes region and to encourage people to do something like this themselves. We want to promote bicycle touring for vacations, especially with gas prices so high."

For McNeal and Chase, though, there's a difference between a trip like the Big Water Bike and a vacation.

"A vacation is sitting on a beach in Mexico," Chase said. "A trip is not work ..."

"... but you have an end goal, and along the way you have freedom and exploration," McNeal said.

The riders acknowledge they have some concerns about the trip.

"I'm definitely nervous," Chase said. "It's the unknown, I guess. And I don't want to let people down. I want to make something big. I want to make sure we're filming all the time."

McNeal said he and Chase will be traveling not only through some idyllic rural areas but also through the heart of some big cities.

"We'll be going through some dangerous areas at times," he said. "We'll try to be as smart as we can. But we're putting ourselves on the highway every day. We had some close calls on the West Coast trip."

Tags: [lake superior](#), [outdoors](#), [travel](#), [duluth](#)