

**Chris Lauf** Porter '06, biology; jazz minor

# Pedaling Science in the Outback



COURTESY OF CHRIS LAUF

**C**HRIS LAUF is a confessed bicycle fanatic—he rides them, of course, and he also plays bikes as percussion instruments and even uses a pedal-powered blender. But Lauf, 25, also loves teaching science—and he's found an unusual way to mesh his passions.

In April, Lauf and partner Danene Jones set off on a seven-month, 2,000-mile bicycle trek through Australia's Cape York Peninsula, taking their Cycling Scientists program to dozens of remote out-

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back schools. Their dynamic shows and workshops put bikes center stage to help kids explore physics, sustainable energy, and sustainable transportation.

"The story line of the show is based on our cycling adventure," says Lauf. "A bicycle stand lets me 'ride' on stage, and I often

jump on and off, sometimes with flaming rocket balloons on my back. A bike-powered dynamo runs lights and buzzers to show the transformation of moving energy to electrical energy."

A potted cactus named Charlie helps demonstrate the effects of gravity. "We swing him like a giant pendulum toward a terrified teacher's face. Just before impact, we place a balloon in front of the teacher, and Charlie slams into the balloon, popping it with his spikes."

But the most popular demonstration is Wheel Up a Hill. "We make a bicycle wheel roll up an incline by attaching a hidden weight to the rim; the weight falls and pulls the wheel up. Kids are stunned every single time."

Unfortunately, there is no such uphill magic for Lauf and Jones as they pedal their heavily loaded bikes (each carries more than 80 pounds of gear, not including food and water) up some of Australia's toughest climbs. Although Lauf keeps a sharp eye out for crocodiles, the biggest problems so far have been torrential rains and a windstorm that sent Jones's tent sailing down the highway. That and getting enough to eat. "With all this cycling, it's unbelievable how much food we consume," joked Lauf, whose lanky 6-foot frame is becoming lankier by the day.

Lauf and Jones are already hatching plans for new projects that mix adventure, sustainable transportation, and education. "We welcome suggestions," says Lauf. "Maybe Niagara Falls in a barrel? The Sierras by pogo stick?"

To find out more about the Cycling Scientists, visit their web site and blog at [www.cyclingscientists.com](http://www.cyclingscientists.com).

—VICTORIA BOLAM

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