

STUDENTS PEDALED THE *PYRÉNÉES* ... AND BEYOND!



just [my bike] and a few personal belongings, there is not one thing that I couldn't do. While that may not be entirely true, it is a nice thought that I am going to hold on to for a long, long time."

Future trips are being planned. For more information, contact [kennelly@webster.edu].

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Last July and August, Webster University students increased their linguistic and cultural proficiency in French by following the official 1999 *Tour de France étapes des Pyrénées*. Using their legs to tap hidden strength while discovering what makes this international bike race so popular, why the southwestern region of France is one of its most spectacular and historically rich, they also learned more about themselves, others, and French culture than they could ever have imagined.

Led in this adventure of a lifetime by French teacher Brian Kennelly, the group followed the Atlantic coast from Bordeaux to Biarritz, crossed the mountains, then from Perpignan followed the Mediterranean coast to Montpellier... and ultimately cycled onward to Nîmes. In addition to the linguistic obstacles they encountered in this non-traditional study abroad experience, each day brought with it new challenges...or opportunities for growth. Whether weather-related (rain, sun, wind), mechanical (flat tires), physical (seemingly never-ending ascents), emotional (home sickness, changing group dynamics, getting lost), or unbelievable (return flight from Montpellier diverted without warning to Nîmes), these and other difficulties were taken in stride.

"Every day was some sort of a new challenge, but everything was kind of perfect the way it worked out" noted one student upon her return to a reporter of *The Journal*, Webster's student newspaper.

Equally positive about the experience, another participant sums up "Webster on Wheels" this way in the reflection paper she wrote upon her return to St. Louis: "I am so glad that I decided to take this trip. Even through all the bad times, I would not change any of them. In retrospect, they don't seem that bad anyway. When people ask me how the trip was, my response is always the same: 'Wonderful!' And it was. It was absolutely unforgettable and I am so thankful that everyone else went too [...] We were amazing and I am so proud of all of us and what we accomplished. Where I doubted myself in the beginning, I am all the more confident in myself now in everything that I try. I feel that if I crossed France with