

French adventurer on world tour

His love of children is this wanderer's greatest motivation

□ M. VONGSAM-ANG

Phileas Fogg and his French servant Passepartout's adventures fuelled travel lust in a legion of readers of Jules Verne's book: 'Around the world in eighty days.'

A French adventurer is on a similar world tour, which has lasted longer than Fogg's, during which he hopes to find out about the dreams for the future of children around the world.

Starting his journey in Nancy, France on May 28 last year, Mr Manuel Boileau arrived in Vientiane last week in his 35-year old Citroen crossing via the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge.

"It's my old dream to make a world trip to meet children around the world driving my car," said Mr Boileau.

He has successfully driven through 15 countries across Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia before arriving in Laos, a country he finds rich in culture and natural attractions.

During the journey, he will meet children in different countries to talk about their dreams for the future, and collect images of the lives of people including children around the world and the tourist attractions of the countries he visits.

Mr Boileau said he was also making a documentary film about the trip including a video featuring one child from each country. "The video is meant for UNICEF France," he said.

All the children he has filmed have marked his car with their hand prints in different colours. "I have got some 15 handprints on my car," he said.

Boileau, who works as a web and graphic designer back home, will have travelled several thousand kilometres through many countries in Europe, Asia and America before returning to France next year.

Boileau's car is an ambulance that has been modified to facilitate his two-year trip. The car, which has become his home for most of his journey, is equipped with a stove, a refrigerator and a bed.

"I sleep and eat in the car on most days," he said.

During the tour, he needed to be absent from this job. "It is a lot of pressure on me because I need to work." But Boileau is not completely absent from work as he mails sends photos and stories regularly for uploading on his website.

"I also send both stories

and images to my association in France for publication while I am on tour," he said.

Boileau has covered more than 18,000km so far. "My adventure is not just over land, I have sometimes put the car on a ship," he said.

It is the first long trip for him and his first visit to Laos. "I had planned to stay in Laos for two weeks but I think Laos is a beautiful country so I have decided to extend my stay by one more week even though I am behind schedule," he said.

While in Laos, Boileau plans to visit tourist attractions in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Xieng Khuang provinces before leaving for Vietnam via

the Nam Kun international Border Checkpoint in Xieng Khuang province.

"I have come to Laos because it is in Asia and it is part of the route that I have to travel through before visiting other countries in the region."

He added that he looked forward to meeting Lao children in Luang Prabang.

Boileau, who has already been in Laos for a few days, said, "Lao people are nice. The country is peaceful and Vientiane is very quiet and beautiful."

He has 11 sponsors supporting him on his journey and all of them have only given support in the form of materials

such as spare parts. "I am spending my own money."

After about nine months of travel his car had mechanical problems when he was in Pakistan but with help from Pakistani mechanics, Boileau was finally on his way again.

But later on in India, his car broke down. This time the problem was more serious. "I had to wait for spare parts from France for days. It took two days to repair it after that," he said.


After Laos, Boileau will go to Vietnam, China and other countries in East Asia before heading to America. His journey will end by the middle of 2007 in France.



This map shows the route taken by Boileau so far.



Mr Boileau poses in front of his car in Vientiane.


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