FOR these 10 cyclists, Paris was more than just a romantic road bicycle race, a group of Singapore Management University (SMU) students mapped out a cycling route in the heart of a cyclist's haven, ending in Paris.

The Zero Limits 2006 Expedition — La Connectee Francaise (The French Connection) — which took the team from the Seven Mounts of Lacaune to the streets of Paris, is the second project under the SMU Zero Limits Expedition Series. The team covered a distance of over 2,000km from the south of France to Paris in 20 days from June 23 to July 13. Expedition leader Adrian Lim, 24, said France was chosen as no one in the team had been there before. The country's links with Tour De France made it even more appealing.

Recruitment for the cycling expedition began last December. Interested students had to endure a cycling trip to Desaru. Adrian said this one-day trip was to see how far the participants could challenge themselves. From the 20-odd initial group, only 10 people were left to form the new team.

These 10 were not professionals but ordinary students who were keen on extreme sports, stressed Adrian. He added that the ones who stayed on managed both the ride and their bikes well and were able to contribute to the team in terms of administration or planning.

To prepare for the expedition, the group of 10 had to undergo five overseas training trips to Malaysia. The training was progressive in terms of distance and difficulty to warm the team up for the marathon cycling distance of the actual expedition in France.

These preparatory trips helped the team a lot, said Adrian, as they enabled the members to cope with differences in the team. "When you form a group of people together, you are forced to conform and this helps us to understand each other better."

While the end result of the trip was sweet, the process was not without its share of sacrifices. The team had to make cold calls to over 50 sports-related sponsors to subsidise their trip, which cost approximately $4,000 per person. However, due to the poor response, the team managed to raise less than half of the amount per person. Despite the need to fork out the remaining amount themselves, Adrian said the members did so willingly as they saw this expedition as a form of personal enrichment for themselves.

During the trip itself, the team lost their way a few times. While looking for their booked accommodation, they realised that some of the maps which they had downloaded online did not tally with the actual place.

However, with directions from the French locals, the team was able to locate their accommodation. Having a translator within the team also helped the team to communicate and interact with the locals better.

At times, they also had to make do with nearby accommodations as it was getting too dark for them to continue cycling. Once, they even had to squeeze into an accommodation meant for eight due to the lack of rooms available.

Eating was another issue that the team had to grapple with. Lunch, for example, was a simple eat-and-go affair. Adrian recalled how the team scrounged for a hawker stand, where they could witness the stand, where they could witness the end of the race.

Jason, 22, who was also the team's assistant expedition leader, said: "It was a stroke of luck that we bumped into the director of the tourism board and he gave us the free tickets. The whole experience was overwhelming, like a dream come true!"

To chronicle their experience, the team recently staged a series of post-trip exhibitions and a cultural showcase at the National Library and on the SMU campus to promote extreme sports among SMU students. Adrian said the exhibitions were also held to spur students to stretch their potential by doing something out of the norm, as well as to encourage the planning of the next cycling expedition. Adrian said he also brought away something else from the expedition that could not be captured in the photos: it was the ability to think on his feet and make decisions quickly. The chief navigator for the expedition said: "At times, I had to make impromptu decisions such as whether to move forward into the highway or to backtrack. I also had to decide where to put up for the night quickly to prevent us from cycling all night looking for accommodation."

And that, to Adrian, was a most valuable skill acquired from the trip.