Their 1,200-km cycling trip will include a taste of the race's thigh-busting ascents

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FOR the next 18 days, avid cyclist Adrian Lim will be traversing parts of the world's most famous and toughest road bicycle race: The Tour de France.

No, he's not aiming to be the next Lance Armstrong. Rather, the 24-year-old Singaporean will lead a group of 10 students from the Singapore Management University (SMU) on a cycling expedition to the western coast of France.

This is part of SMU's Zero Limits X3pedition Series, which allows students to engage in extreme sports by organising and executing an expedition.

The team, all Singaporeans except for a Vietnamese student, will travel more than 1,200km, including to the scenic heights of the Seven Mounts of Lacune at 1,258m above sea level.

“We are trying to capture the spirit of the Tour de France, which is held every July, in challenging ourselves physically and mentally,” said team member Ng Chong Geng, the publicity manager of the expedition, Cheers Zero Limits 2006: La Connection Francaise.

The students will follow just one part of the route of the gruelling race, and spend the rest of their trip riding past ancient temples, ruined churches, the countryside and through the streets of Paris.

The trip is estimated to cost about $23,000, with part of the bill sponsored by Cheers convenience stores.

“The trip is not just a physical one, it's also a cultural experience for us as France has a different history and language. We hope to conduct cultural exchanges at historically significant places,” said Mr Ng, a first-year student.

Adding to the challenge is the fact that the students will be unsupported by guides, although several team members will double up as translators and safety officers.

Expedition leader Mr Lim said: “We mapped the hospitals along the route in case of an emergency. We have also rented a vehicle that we will take turns to drive.”

To prepare for probably the toughest ride of their lives, the team has also been training over the past six months, with local and overseas cycling trips to Desaru, Kota Bahru and Kota Tinggi.

The team will be keeping journals, and uploading photos and videos of their expedition to zerolimits2006.funkygrad.com.