Americans to kayak from Havana to Key West

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Ten Americans plan to attempt the daunting journey across the Florida Straight in kayaks - covering 113 miles (180 kilometers) from Havana to Key West in just 30 hours.

The team, led by Joe Jacobi, who won the gold medal in slalom canoeing in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, and kayaker David Smith, hopes to set out from Havana's Marina Hemingway on Friday at around noon and arrive on the coast of Florida's Key West just over a day later.

At a news conference at the marina on Thursday Smith said the 10 kayakers who will cross the straight in 5 two-man kayaks hope their adventure will help bring Cuba and the United States closer together just as the nations have improved relations.

"Really, the motivation for us was beyond just doing some kind of athletic feat. We were looking for a way that we could connect with people, especially the Cuban people, it's been 60 years since our countries have had normal relations and we felt that this was a perfect opportunity especially since things are changing so quickly to be a part of this, a part of this change," Smith said.

Diplomatic ties between the former Cold War adversaries were restored this year with a détente announced in December between Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro culminating in the raising of the American flag at the American embassy in Havana in August for the first time in 54 years.

"It is so clear to me, after just being together here in Cuba for one week that I think we are all four of us at this table and all of us in this room we're planting new seeds that are going to enrich the relationship between the United States and Cuba in ways we can't even imagine," added Jacobi.

The team of kayakers have been in Cuba for a week and plan to remain in their kayaks the entire 30 hour trek across the straight.