

EXPEDITION NEWS



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EXPEDITION NEWS, now in its 14th year, is the monthly review of significant expeditions, research projects and newsworthy adventures. It is distributed online and to media representatives, corporate sponsors, educators, research librarians, explorers, environmentalists, and outdoor enthusiasts. This forum on exploration covers projects that stimulate, motivate and educate.

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS RETURN TO SECRET CAVE

It's one of the least known survival stories of World War II. In 1942, three dozen Jews sought refuge from Nazi persecution in a vast unexplored cave in the western Ukraine. As the women and children remained underground continuously for 344 days, even longer if you count their six months spent in another cave nearby, the men would sneak out at night to steal food. A small underground pond provided a reliable source of fresh water.

In 1993, an American climber and Explorers Club member named Christos Nicola, 57, of New York, was one of the first Americans to explore a large cave system named Priest's Grotto about five miles from Korolowka. During his descent he stumbled across names written on the walls and medicine bottles, shoes, mugs, buttons, burnt wood, and railroad spikes, all seemingly abandoned years ago. At 77-plus miles, Priest's Grotto is the 11th longest cave in the world. Nicola, an experienced 32-year veteran of major cave systems in the U.S. and Mexico, spent 10 years trying to track down the names etched into the gypsum cave walls. His posting about the cave on his Web site struck pay dirt in December 2002 when the son-in-law of a survivor e-mailed to say his wife's father, Sol Wexler, was living just a subway ride away in the Bronx.

On Aug. 17, Nicola and a team of explorers, along with a TV documentary crew from Ikana Media of New York and Chapel Hill, N.C., will return to Priest's Grotto with four of 14 living cave survivors (out of the original 38).

Sol Wexler is staying behind, but his cousins Shulim Stermer, 88, and Shulim's younger brother Shlomo

COMMONWEALTH WOMEN'S ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

In December 2009, two teams of four women from across the Commonwealth will set off from opposite coasts of Antarctica to ski to the South Pole. They will travel some 500 miles across the most hostile environment on Earth where temperatures fall to minus 22 degrees F., winds reach speeds of over 80 mph, crevasses lurk beneath the ice and disorientating blizzards last for days at a time.

The women will be pulling sledges containing all the food, fuel and equipment they will need for their journey. Camping in tents on the ice when they sleep, they will survive on lightweight dehydrated rations and melted snow. Unguided, they will rely on each other to navigate themselves safely to the Geographic South Pole.

Led by experienced British polar traveler Felicity Aston, the teams will include women from the Republic of Cyprus, Ghana, India, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand and Jamaica. The team members will be chosen through a selection process which begins with an online application.

By creating a team from such diverse countries and cultures across the Commonwealth, the expedition hopes to demonstrate the potential of greater inter-cultural understanding and exchange, while at the same time, highlighting the core values common among all people.

The teams will meet each other at the South Pole around New Years Day 2010 – the year of the Commonwealth Games to be held in New Delhi, India. On reaching the South Pole the team members from Cyprus, Ghana, Brunei Darussalam and Jamaica will be the first representative of their nation (male or female) to ski to the South Pole. The

Stermer, 80, from Montreal, and two women survivors, the sisters Pepkale Dodyk, 70 (who was four when in the cave), of Montreal, and Shunkale Hochman, 76 (nine at the time), of Lake Success, N.Y., will return to the cave for the first time since the war. They and others have told Nicola of the various hardships they faced – among them hypothermia, bats, malnutrition, cooking fire smoke, sensory deprivation, and getting lost within the labyrinth.

With the survivors now in their 70's and 80's, medical personnel, including Explorers Club members Kenneth Kamler, M.D., of Plandome, N.Y., and Granis Stewart, R.N., of Charlestown, R.I., will be on hand to provide medical support.

"I've been on over 20 expeditions in my career. This will be the first time we've brought elderly and fragile people into such a harsh environment," said Dr. Kamler, author of *Surviving the Extremes* (2004, Penguin Books). "If we don't do this now, we lose forever their perspective on the unimaginable horror of living underground in fear and darkness for a year and a half."

(For more information: Chris Nicola, 718 204 8373, www.priestgrotto.com or read *The Secret of Priest's Grotto: A Holocaust Survival Story* by Nicola and Peter Lane Taylor [2007, Kar-Ben Publishing]). ▲

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team members from India, Singapore and New Zealand will be the first women of their nation to ski to the South Pole.

It is hoped that all the women taking part will act as role models on their return, undertaking a program of lectures and school talks to inspire others in their home countries. (For more information: www.commonwealtheexpedition.com). ▲

Quote of the Month

"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page."

– Augustine (354-430). A philosopher and theologian, he is one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity.

EXPEDITION UPDATE

From Mountains to Molehills

From mountains like McKinley in Alaska, and Whitney in California, to lower highpoints like the summits of Florida and Delaware, Denver schoolteacher Mike Haugen was on a nonstop quest.

At 11:55 a.m. local time on July 25, when he reached the top of his 50th state highpoint, 13,796-foot Mauna Kea in Hawaii, Haugen established a new record for the fastest ascent of America's highpoints with a time of 45 days, 19 hours and 2 minutes. The clock started when he reached the summit of McKinley on June 9. (See *EN*, June 2008).

Haugen, 31, shared the record with his climbing partner, Seattle architect Zach Price, 30. But for Haugen, who previously summited Mount Everest and Vinson Massif, the highest mountain in Antarctica, the 50 States in 50 Days project sponsored by The Coleman Company, Inc., was not about reaching the top of some lofty peak.

"This has never been about a record. Don't get me wrong, we have definitely been working to make sure we finished in 50 days, but it has been more about the personal challenge in order to get kids more interested in the outdoors," Haugen said.

The lower, flatter peaks were coined "flip flop" highpoints because it didn't take much to summit them. Just park the car and pose by a sign in sandals. Even though some highpoints weren't very difficult to scale, Haugen still enjoyed the uniqueness of each. "Each highpoint has had a special beauty that usually leaves us speechless on the way back to the car," Haugen blogged after summiting the Kansas highpoint (4,039 feet) known as Mount Sunflower.

The second phase of the project, the Coleman 50 States in 50 Days Challenge, begins when online registration opens on Aug. 21. Children and adolescents from upper elementary to high school will record and track their outdoor physical activity in minutes and/or steps in order to virtually reach the summit of the highest point in each of the 50 states. The online challenge will link from www.coleman.com/50states and continue through Dec. 31.

Haugen, Price and team member Lindsay Danner, 24, of Denver, spent most nights camping using Coleman equipment and gear. The team drove approximately 15,000 miles across the continental United States in a Highlander Hybrid SUV provided by Toyota. Total distance traveled, including plane trips to Alaska and Hawaii, was 23,684 miles. The public followed the project in real-time thanks to a SPOT

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Satellite Messenger GPS that pinpointed their exact location every 10 minutes. The team was also supported with donated apparel and gear from Marmot and K2 Skis.

A video cameraman spent approximately 35 days with the team shooting a documentary that will be submitted to various film festivals in 2009.

The previous highpoint record was set in 2005 by Ben Jones of Lynnwood, Wash., with a time of 50 days, 7 hours and 5 minutes, according to the records maintained by the Highpointers Club (www.highpointers.org).

Around the Horn

Mike Horn, the 42-year-old South African adventurer, is set to go on a four-year environmental outreach expedition around the globe, aiming to cover 62,000 miles, cross all the continents and oceans, and reach the North and South Poles (See *EN*, June 2007).

He will walk, kayak, cycle, paraglide, ski and sail across rivers, lakes, mountains, desert, jungle, tundra and ice fields. Working with educational specialists along the way, Horn hopes to inspire young people to clean up the planet and make people aware of the Earth's uninhabited areas.

He spoke recently to the *Associated Press* from his 115-foot yacht, *Pangaea*, named after the expedition and the super continent that existed millions of years ago, docked on the Thames close to the Tower of London.

Pangaea's aim is to "cultivate respect for the environment and the protection of its resources for the sake of future generations." Along the way young people ages 13-20 will be invited to join Horn and learn about flora and fauna, and humankind's interaction with nature and the elements.

The expedition kicks off Oct. 9 from Punta Arenas, Chile. From there, Horn will head to Antarctica, where he will trek to the South Pole. Then his route meanders through New Zealand and China, then through Russia to the North Pole, across Greenland, over to North America and back down through South America back to Punta Arenas. Mercedes Benz is providing sponsorship support.

Steger Takes Up Kite Skiing

Recently, polar explorer Will Steger, 64, returned from a training expedition in Greenland, where he took up kite skiing in preparation for a spring 2009 expedition. Next year, Steger and other accomplished young adventurers will kite ski 500 miles across the Greenland Ice Cap to document the rising summer thaw level and the impact climate change has had on the ice cap. (See related story, *EN*, March 2007).

This fall, Steger will once again be joined by youth leaders in the climate change movement during a domestic expedition entitled, "The Longest Summer Tour." From October 13-22, Steger and company will travel throughout the Great Lakes Region to galvanize action in major cities, and at college and university campuses to address climate change. The tour will produce a series of high profile public forums with local policymakers, including governors and mayors, to bridge generations in discussion of climate change action steps and support statewide initiatives across the region.

"After more than 45 years of polar expeditions, I have travelled to places that no longer exist," says Steger. "I hope that my upcoming tour will empower people to make real changes in policy and lifestyle, so that we can preserve what is left of the world we know." (For more information: www.globalwarming101.com). ▲

EXPEDITION NOTES

Just One Word: Plastics – "Everybody's plastic, but I love plastic. I want to be plastic," said the artist Andy Warhol. Be careful what you wish for. A vast swath of the Pacific, twice the size of Texas, is full of a plastic stew that is entering the food chain. Scientists say these toxins are causing obesity, infertility ... and worse. To call attention to the problem, two men are currently sailing the Pacific in a strange-looking raft that evokes images of the fabled *Kon-Tiki*.

The 1.5 ton, 30- x 20-ft. raft, called *Junk*, looks like a Cessna had crashed landed on a bed of plastic bottles. In fact, their cabin is actually the cockpit of a Cessna 310, white with a blue racing stripe, salvaged from the desert. It floats on a system of handmade pontoons – 15,000 plastic bottles held together with recycled nets – propelled by currents and wind. If it sounds dangerous and makeshift, that's the point. The pilots of *Junk*, as the vessel is called, want to get your attention.

The *Junk* crew consists of Dr. Marcus Eriksen, director of research and education at the Algalita Marine Research Foundation (AMRF) in Long Beach, Calif., and Joel Paschal, a former employee of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The two left Long Beach, in early June for a six-week, 2,000+ mile trip to Hawaii.

Eriksen teaches and conducts research in earth science, lectures at schools and museums and supervises an annual field course in paleontology in Wyoming. Currently he is AMRF's Director of Research and Education and hosts "Commando Weather," a series of Weather Channel public service announcements about the science of weather.

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While at NOAA, Paschal spent four months at sea studying marine debris. He is videotaping the *Junk* project for a future documentary.

A particularly dense accumulation of debris can be found in a holding pattern 1,000 miles off the California coast, in an area known as the central North Pacific gyre. It is the calm core of a convergence of four major ocean currents rotating clockwise under a large high-pressure zone. Plastic that works its way in can be trapped for decades.

Hoping to arrive in Honolulu by mid to late August, they are using four sails to take full advantage of the varying weather conditions – including what they call “Frankensail,” a main sail that was MacGyvered at sea.

The effort is a project of the Algalita Marine Research Foundation. (For more information: Darren Shuster, 818 744 1851, shuster.paul@gmail.com, www.junkraft.com).

World’s Smallest Snake Found in Barbados – The world’s smallest species of snake, with adults averaging just under four inches in length, has been identified on the Caribbean island of Barbados. The species – which is as thin as a spaghetti noodle and small enough to rest comfortably on a U.S. quarter – was discovered by Blair Hedges, an evolutionary biologist at Penn State. Hedges and his colleagues also are the discoverers of the world’s smallest frog and lizard species, which too were found on Caribbean islands. The most recent discovery is scheduled to be published this month in the journal *Zootaxa*.

Hedges found the new snake – a type of threadsnake – in a tiny forest fragment on the eastern side of Barbados. He believes the species is rare because most of its potential habitat has been replaced by buildings and farms. “Habitat destruction is a major threat to biodiversity throughout the world,” he said. “The Caribbean is particularly vulnerable because it contains an unusually high percentage of endangered species and, because these animals live on islands, they have nowhere to go when they lose their habitat.”

Finding new species, collecting them, and naming them is a necessary first step for other types of research. Hedges said this exploration and discovery of new species also is critical for protecting biodiversity. “It is difficult to protect a species if you don’t know it exists,” he said. (For more information: <http://www.science.psu.edu/alert/Hedges7-2008.htm>).

First-ever Death on McKinley Summit – A climber collapsed and died on the summit of Mt. McKinley on the evening of July 4. James Nasti, 51, of Naperville, Ill., was a client on an Alpine Ascents International expedition that

began their climb on June 20. According to the two expedition guides, Nasti exhibited no signs of distress or illness throughout the trip, and was climbing strongly immediately prior to the collapse. The guides administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for up to 45 minutes, but Nasti did not regain a pulse.

Denali National Park mountaineering rangers at the 14,200-foot camp were immediately notified by the guides via radio. The team was instructed by the NPS rangers to descend carefully with the remaining four clients to the 17,200-foot camp, as there was no safe means of recovering Nasti at that time. Conditions were initially calm and clear on the summit, though weather began to deteriorate as the incident progressed.

The 20,320-foot summit of Mt. McKinley features an exposed flat area roughly the size of a single car garage. Just below the summit, climbers must negotiate a 500-foot-long knife-edge ridge. A recovery along this ridge would require a highly skilled technical rescue team and a rope rigging system. Considering the high risk involved in such a ground lowering, as well as the excessive risk of a helicopter recovery at this extreme elevation, the National Park Service announced that the safest alternative is to leave the remains of the deceased climber on the mountain for the time being.

Nasti, a senior manager in the finance department of Kraft Foods, was a member of the Highpointers Club as well as the AAC, and Denali was his 49th high point of the 50 U.S. states. According to his son Chris, Nasti had only White Butte, N.D. (3,506-ft.), left in his highpoints quest.

According to the NPS, the incident represents the first time a mountaineer has died on Mt. McKinley’s summit. In 1988, a climber died at an elevation of 19,600 feet on a descent from the summit; the body was never recovered.

Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea – Fifteen large may not buy much these days, but it does get you behind the wheel of a 22-ft. submersible for three days. This month, Sub Aviator Systems of Redondo Beach, Calif., is conducting four submersible underwater flight school sessions on their *Super Aviator* based in Port Lucaya, Grand Bahama Island. The cost of each three-day school session is \$15,000 per student, which includes meals and ground transportation.

The *Super Aviator* was built to fully explore the concept of underwater flight and to introduce the public to deep-sea exploration. The sub, a two-seat underwater flight trainer, is designed for exploration, adventure science, filming, and search/survey, among other uses. Think of conventional subs as slow, bulky, underwater balloons, and the electric Aviator

as a lightweight, high-powered composite airframe with wings, thrusters, and flight controls. In conventional subs, you perch on a seat. In the *Sub Aviator*, you strap into the same 5-point harness restraints used by Indy race car drivers. (For more information: www.subaviators.com).

Running with the BigDogs – Explorers we know are going to be chewing through their restraints to get their hands on BigDog, the most advanced quadruped robot on earth.

BigDog is the alpha male of the Boston Dynamics, Waltham, Mass., family of robots. It is a quadruped robot that walks, runs, and climbs on rough terrain and carries heavy loads. Think about what you'd give for this bad boy on that trek into Everest Base Camp.

BigDog, the size of a large dog or small mule, is powered by a gasoline engine that drives a hydraulic actuation system. BigDog's legs are articulated like an animal's, and have compliant elements that absorb shock and recycle energy from one step to the next.

The robot has an on-board computer that controls locomotion, servos the legs and handles a wide variety of sensors. Its control system manages the dynamics of its behavior to keep it balanced, steer, navigate, and regulate energetics as conditions vary. Sensors for locomotion include joint position, joint force, ground contact, ground load, a laser gyroscope, and a stereovision system. Other sensors focus on the internal state of BigDog, monitoring the hydraulic pressure, oil temperature, engine temperature, rpm, battery charge and others.

In separate trials, BigDog runs at 4 mph, climbs slopes up to 35 degrees, walks across rubble, and carries a 340 lbs. load. BigDog is being developed by Boston Dynamics with the goal of creating robots that have rough-terrain mobility that can take them anywhere on Earth that people and animals can go. The program is funded by the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA). (You won't be able to keep your eyes off the video demonstration posted to: www.bostondynamics.com). ▲



MEDIA MATTERS

Weihenmayer Sees with His Tongue – Born with retinosis, a rare disease akin to macular degeneration, Erik Weihenmayer of Golden, Colo., was sightless by age 13. Even so, he continued to pursue his dream of mountaineering, and he succeeded: in 2001 he became the first – and to date the only – blind climber to summit Mount Everest. Today he is climbing with the aid of a tool that allows him to “see” in a new way – with his tongue, according to the July *Discover* magazine.

In normal vision, light hitting the retina provokes electrical impulses that the brain translates into images. According to the story by Buddy Levy, Weihenmayer used a device called the BrainPort to convert light into electrical impulses that stimulate the tongue instead of the retina. “With more tactile nerve endings than any other part of the body except the lips, the tongue can discriminate two points spaced less than a millimeter apart. ... tests have shown the BrainPort delivers enough information for users like Erik to navigate with.”

Testing the BrainPort, Erik says, involves “learning to climb in a new, different way. I’m learning another language in the same way someone would be learning Braille or French for the first time. I’m figuring out how to map it spatially.” ▲

EXPEDITION MARKETING

Steady as She Goes

Everest continues to cast its halo on companies that send products on expeditions. If it works on Everest, the reasoning goes, it will work under any application. Tiffen's Steadicam Archer SE and Tiffen Color-Grad filters pushed the limits in filmmaking when used to cover the filming of three news programs from Mount Everest. Rob Turner, cameraman and Steadicam owner/operator, and reporter Phil Reay-Smith of ITV1 News (ITN) in the U.K. ascended Mount Everest last May with the equipment to cover Sir Ranulph Fiennes' ascent of Everest (www.everestchallenge.org.uk). They were there to help Fiennes raise the £3 million target he had set himself for the Marie Curie Cancer Care Charity.

Although Sir Ranulph was not able to complete the journey due to exhaustion and lack of oxygen, just missing the peak by only about 1,300 feet (400 m), he passed his flag to his climbing team, who then proceeded to reach the summit. Steadicam is a division of The Tiffen Company (www.tiffen.com). Meanwhile, Fiennes, who suffered a heart attack on Everest in 2005, has vowed never to climb a mountain again. (For more information on the expedition: <http://www.itv.com/News/newsspecial/Everest/default.html>).

Explorer of Light

There are “Explorers in Residence,” cars named “Explorer,” a love boat called the *Explorer of the Seas*, and here's one we just came across: “Explorers of Light.” Canon USA has nominated Aspen photographer Tyler Stableford as their newest Explorer of Light. Stableford has won numerous “Picture of the Year” awards for his dramatic images shot in challenging environments,

including those of Icelandic glacier caves and Colorado miners. In addition, *Men's Journal* named him one of the seven "World's Greatest Adventure Photographers."

Canon's Explorers of Light program has earned worldwide acclaim since its inception in December 1994, sponsoring 82 photographers around the country. Explorers make presentations at colleges and universities; appear and participate in on-site and online workshops as well as seminars; act as panelists, and make appearances at photo trade shows. As members of the Explorer program, the photographers are able to broaden their audience by teaching (something they are generally too busy to do otherwise), communicate their enthusiasm for photography, as well as deliver their messages about life and the work that they hold most dear. (For more information: <http://www.usa.canon.com/dlc/controller?act=ArtistsListAct>). ▲▲

BUZZ WORD

Canicross – Sled dog racing without the sled. Even without snow. Tethered together with a short length of bungee cord, man and dog work as a team. Six legs leap and bound together, a train of power running down the trail. The human shouts voice commands and directs the course on trails and grassy open fields. Says one fan, "It's like a turbo-charged run." (Source: Stephen Regenold, www.thegearjunkie.com).

Muni – Mountain unicyclists who put an extreme twist on the most whimsical of wheeled devices. Muni enthusiasts can ride the same trails as someone on a large mountain bike, without the hassles of complicated equipment. Tires are covered with rubber knobs for better traction. At least 10 companies make mountain unicycles, which can cost more than \$1,000 each. (Source: *New York Times*, July 27, 2008). ▲▲

ON THE HORIZON

In Darkest Africa – Col. John Blashford-Snell will present "The Story of Stanley and Livingstone" at the Royal Geographical Society in London on Oct. 1 at 7 p.m. What makes this more interesting than your usual PowerPoint "slide" show is that Blashford-Snell will incorporate magic lantern pictures used by Sir Henry Morton Stanley in his own lectures. Stanley's voice from an early recording will

be heard and the compass he carried when finding Dr. David Livingstone will be displayed. Tickets are £15. (For more information: www.rgs.org or www.johnblashfordsnell.org.uk).

RGS Hosts Explore 2008 Conference – For those planning fieldwork or exploration in 2009 – whether the objective is field research, conservation or adventure – the Royal Geographical Society's annual Explore 2008 conference, Nov. 22-23, in London, can provide valuable inspiration, contacts and practical advice. Over 100 leading field scientists and explorers with a wealth of knowledge are expected to attend. This expedition and fieldwork-planning seminar includes morning lectures, workshops, one-to-one advice sessions and numerous case studies. Registration is £100. (For more information: www.rgs.org/explore). ▲▲

EXPEDITION CLASSIFIEDS

Himalaya Climbs and Treks – Five percent discount for Explorers Club members. Climbs and Treks with Dan Mazur and SummitClimb.com – Africa, Himalaya, Aconcagua, Everest Basecamp Treks, Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya Treks and Climbs. Ascents and walks around Africa, Tibet, China, Nepal and around the world with our experienced friendly team. Established for 18 years. Novices, and experts are welcome. 360 570 0715, info@SummitClimb.com, www.summitclimb.com.

New LEKI Antishock System – LEKI, the leading international manufacturer of trekking poles, has introduced a Soft Antishock-Lite (SAS-L) System that provides much more comfort along the trail. The impact energy is absorbed directly into the lower shaft. The perfect combination of steel spring and elastomer provides precise synchronization between spring strength and compression – making trekking with a pole more comfortable than ever, reducing stress on the joints, muscles and ligaments. (www.leki.com)

Tights, Tops and Sport Support Bras for Athletes – CW-X Conditioning Web is specifically tuned to provide total support to the key muscle groups and joints of the lower limbs and upper body. Tights and Tops, and the company's new Sports Support Bras, are made for a wide variety of high-energy activities, including running, fitness walking, hiking, cycling, skiing, snowboarding, track and field, and other fitness activities. It has been worn to the summit of Everest on at least two occasions. (www.cw-x.com). ▲▲