

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.

IS THE BICYCLE AN IDEAL WINTER VEHICLE?

The explorer H.W. Tilman is famously credited with saying, "Any worthwhile expedition can be planned on the back of an envelope." Well here's one that can be planned on the back of a postage stamp: it focuses on whether a mountain bike can be the ideal cold weather expedition vehicle.

The performance of mountain bikes over snow and ice is what noted Himalayan climber Andy Politz, 48, hopes to find out in Canada next month. He and five others are planning a bicycle expedition to Georgian Bay, the eastern lobe of Lake Huron, to the Thirty Thousand Islands. His expedition will depart in mid-February and take about a week. The team intends to ride Trek mountain bikes from Killarney (in the north) to Penetanguishene to the south across the frozen expanse of the area's 180-mi. small boat route that traverses the islands.

Politz has 12 years of guiding under his belt for Rainier Mountaineering Inc., with 146 successful ascents of Mt. Rainier. He has attempted Mount Everest seven times since 1985 and has been on both 1999 and 2001 Mallory and Irvine Research expeditions. He reached the summit of Everest in 1991, by the North Ridge. Since leaving Rainier, he has been teaching and facilitating adventures at a local high school near his home in Upper Arlington, Ohio.

"We are not trying to do any first here. I would not be surprised if somebody did exactly this in the 1930's. Certainly the Georgian Bay area gets pretty heavy kayak traffic in the summer," Politz tells *EN*.

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KAYAKING AROUND PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In May 2008 Australian teacher Andrew Hughes, 29, of Hobart, Tasmania, will attempt a solo sea kayaking expedition around Papua New Guinea, the eastern half of the second largest island on earth. Launching from the remote mining town of Kiunga, 528 miles up the Fly River, Hughes will paddle down river to the coast and continue to the northern border with Irian Jaya. The journey is expected to take six months and cover nearly 2,485 miles, and will be documented live on his Web site. Hughes is hoping to engage students from around the world in a climate change curriculum to be used by teachers in classrooms.

"It will not be the first sea kayaking expedition to Papua New Guinea, but it will be the most comprehensive," he tells *EN*. Challenges will include saltwater crocodiles, isolation, and communication barriers. In 2006, Hughes successfully completed a 3,045-mi. sea kayak expedition from Hobart to Thursday Island, past the far northern point of Australia. His primary sponsors are Australian Geographic and the University of Tasmania Faculty of Science, Engineering & Technology. (For more information: andrew@expedition-class.com, www.expeditionclass.com). ▲

STEGER TO GLACIERS: "SAY CHEESE"

An international team of young explorers will conduct an expedition to the Canadian Arctic next spring to draw attention to retreating glaciers and other apparent signs of climate change. Leading the team – whose

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“This is a training run that will allow us to explore the bicycle as a winter vehicle. We are only hoping to gain insight for the potential of bigger trips. It has been a fun trip to put together. We’ll see how it all works out.”

Politz continues, “I see this micro adventure as an intriguing concept allowing me to illustrate an adventure theory of mine.

“I am convinced adventurers have a fresh perspective, an essential toolbox of skills, a functional management style concerning risk and the unknown. If they stay in their arena, they are slick, sexy, faultless, bold, untouchable. Should they want to direct their skills and insights to inspiring, teaching and wrestling with their communities’ challenges, they have entered the classic Greek, ‘heroic experience.’”

Sponsorship support is being provided by two Trek bicycle retailers in Columbus, Ohio. Further assistance is being provided by another local retailer, the Outdoor Source. (For more information: <http://www.myspace.com/georgianbayadventure>). ▲

Quote of the Month

“People sense the Arctic is going to change. There is something in human nature that likes to watch things die, a morbid curiosity of human beings. And I think there’s a touch of that.”

- Dennis Schmitt explaining why Arctic tours are popular now that global warming has entered public consciousness. Schmitt discovered hand-shaped Warming Island off the east coast of Greenland, called by the *New York Times* (Dec. 9), “perhaps the greatest visual evidence of global warming in Greenland.” Schmitt says, “If global warming needed a poster child, here it is.” In years past Warming Island was connected to the mainland by ice and presumed to be part of the same mass. (See related story).

oldest member will be 28 – is Will Steger, 63, who last month met with former U.S. Vice President Al Gore in Oslo as he was receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on climate change. Steger says the 60-day Arctic expedition, scheduled to start in April, is meant to focus on emerging leaders and their technology.

“Young people have a really strong social network, and we can reach a lot of people that way,” he said. “The purpose of the trip is to bring an audience to the front lines of global warming.” Steger and his team – which includes two Americans, two Norwegians, a Canadian and a Briton – will travel 1,400 miles by dogsled to Ellesmere Island, a snow-capped mass on the tip of North America about 500 miles from the North Pole. The team plans to leave time-lapse cameras on northern Ellesmere Island to document retreating glaciers and other apparent signs of global warming.

In a related story, Steger was honored on Dec. 8 as the Grand Marshal of the 16th annual Macy’s Holiday Parade through the streets of downtown Minneapolis – a sound and light show where all costumes and floats are illuminated by Christmas lights. While this was an honor more commonly associated with local beauty queens than grizzled middle-aged polar explorers, Steger tells EN, “I even got to ride the Twinkle Bus which is decked out for the season in some 20,000 lights and snowflake-covered hubcaps.”

Steger continues, “This is one of the many public service events that I do. It is a way of meeting and reaching children. In a six-week period I spoke to over 18,000 people around the state of Minnesota, including serving as the commencement speaker for the University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts. “I am a public person, a global warming politician – this is what it takes to effect change – a lot of work and all your personal time.” (For more information: www.globalwarming101.com). ▲

ECO-EVEREST EXPEDITION PLANNED FOR SPRING

Dawa Steven Sherpa, 23, the son of Ang Tshering Sherpa of Asian Trekking in Katmandu, is preparing for the Eco-Everest Expedition in the spring of 2008.

Ang Tshering Sherpa, 54, president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, says of his son, “During his successful climb of Mt. Everest in spring 2007 he saw the real danger to lives and property posed by Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF). Although Mt. Everest is the highest peak in the world, she is still a fragile ‘Mother Goddess’ in terms of global warming,” he said.

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“This made him take a bold step – to organize the first Eco-Everest Expedition 2008 – to study the effects of global warming on the Himalayan glaciers and to document the high risk to the people and the land in case of a glacial lake outburst flood.

“In the future we hope to install an early warning system at Imja lake in case it should burst its banks and devastate the Khumbu valley – the bread basket of Nepal’s tourism industry,” writes Ang Tshering Sherpa. (For more information: angtshering@asian-trekking.com). ▲▲

EXPEDITION UPDATE

Larsen Ice Shelf Expedition Begins

Jon Bowermaster and his team have departed for the Antarctic Peninsula for five weeks (See *EN*, December 2007). They kicked off the latest Oceans 8 project from Puerto Williams, Chile, by sailboat on New Year’s Eve. The plan is to stop at King George Island, pick up their cached sea kayaks and spend all of January exploring the Weddell Sea from sea level. The goal is to get as close to the Larsen Ice Shelf as possible, to document how the ice and sea that surrounds Antarctica’s most exposed corner is changing. (For more information and dispatches: www.Antarctica2008.com). ▲▲

EXPEDITION NOTES

Death on Disney’s Everest – It’s one thing to die on the world’s tallest mountain doing what you love, but pretty pathetic when you meet your end on a thrill ride of the same name. Walt Disney World reported a man died Dec. 18 after riding Expedition Everest at Animal Kingdom in Florida.

Disney said Jeffrey Reeb, 44, a Florida resident, appeared to be unconscious and unresponsive when the train he was riding arrived back at the station.

Park personnel immediately rendered CPR to Reeb, but he was pronounced dead shortly thereafter. Investigators said Reeb appeared to be conscious in a photograph taken on the coaster approximately 50 seconds before the conclusion of the ride. Cause of death was a pre-existing heart condition.

The death is the first associated with the roller coaster Expedition Everest, which opened in early 2006. That ride includes tight twists and turns and some backwards travel but is not a particularly fast or steep roller coaster and has no loops.

Captain Kidd Ship Believed Found – The wreckage of a pirate ship abandoned by Captain Kidd in the 17th century has been found by divers in shallow waters off the Dominican Republic, a research team claims. The underwater archaeology team, from Indiana University, says they have found the remains of *Quedagh Merchant*, actively sought by treasure hunters for years.

Charles Beeker of IU said his team has been licensed to study the wreckage and convert the site into an underwater preserve for the public. It is considered remarkable that the wreck has remained undiscovered all these years given its location, just 70 feet off the coast of Catalina Island in the Dominican Republic in less than 10 feet of seawater.

“I’ve been on literally thousands of shipwrecks in my career,” Beeker said. “This is one of the first sites I’ve been on where I haven’t seen any looting. We’ve got a shipwreck in crystal clear, pristine water that’s amazingly untouched. We want to keep it that way, so we made the announcement now to ensure the site’s protection from looters.”

The find is valuable because of what it could reveal about William Kidd and piracy in the Caribbean, said John Foster, California’s state underwater archaeologist, who is participating in the research. The IU team examined the shipwreck at the request of the Dominican Republic’s Oficina Nacional De Patrimonio Cultural Subacuático. ▲▲

EXPEDITION FOCUS

Famed Axe Goes on Display

On Dec. 5, the Bradford Washburn American Mountaineering Museum in Golden, Colo., took delivery of one of the most historic artifacts in the world of mountaineering – the Schoening ice axe. The axe was used to save the lives of five men, and has come to represent the pinnacle of mountaineering ethics. The axe will be on loan from the Washington State Historical Society.

The year 1953 was a great one for mountaineering. By its end, the summit of Mt. Everest was achieved after so many previous failures. Austrian Hermann Buhl climbed alone to the summit of Nanga Parbat in Pakistan to become the first person ever to complete a solo first ascent of an 8000 meter peak. On K2, the world’s second highest mountain, however, a saga unfolded that has forever remained etched in the annals of mountaineering. It was not to be a successful expedition – the summit would remain unclimbed until the following year. But the tenacity and strength displayed by the members of the expedition team remain legendary.

A storm on the Abruzzi Ridge – 25,000 feet up on the slopes of K2 – sent climbers led by Charles Houston, a doctor from Seattle, scrambling to save the life of a fellow mountaineer. Climbing alpine style without the aid of oxygen, team member Art Gilkey’s legs were filling with blood clots. With no other option than to get Gilkey to a lower elevation as fast as possible, the team began to maneuver him down the precariously steep and icy slope in the middle of a vicious storm, in his sleeping bag. That is until George Bell lost his footing and, in the ensuing entanglement of ropes and climbers, five men started plunging towards their deaths off the face of the mountain.

The youngest and strongest man on this expedition team, however, would keep this expedition from being remembered solely for its tragedies. Moments after Gilkey, still in his sleeping bag, and the other five men began sliding to their deaths, a chemist from Seattle, Pete Schoening, instinctually jammed his ice axe behind a boulder – an impromptu rope belay, with the rope wrapped around his hip and the wooden shaft of the axe – and instantaneously arrested five men from hurtling to their deaths.

Unfortunately, Gilkey would later be swept into the void by an avalanche. Still, Schoening’s simple yet life-altering act has since defined the expedition: “The Belay” is now recognized as one of the most heroic acts in all of mountaineering history.

The five lives that dangled from Schoening’s ice axe in Pakistan have since blossomed into what has been described, by the daughter of a dangling expedition member, as “Children of the Belay.” Karen Molenaar Terrell, daughter of team member Dee Molenaar, was able to bring the children, grandchildren, and other relatives of those dangling souls together for a reunion— there are more than 30 people alive today because of “The Belay”— because of Pete Schoening.

In a final push to raise funds to support construction of the Bradford Washburn American Mountaineering Museum, the museum is throwing a “Fun, Fundraising Party” on Jan. 18. It’s a chance to see the museum, and the famous axe, before the museum opens to the public on Feb. 16. (For more information: <http://bwamm.blogspot.com/>). ▲▲

MEDIA MATTERS

Tourism of Doom – That’s what Ken Shapiro, the editor in chief of *TravelAge West*, a magazine for travel agents, calls the current trend to visit places that are disappearing due to global warming.

“It’s not just about going to an exotic place,” Shapiro tells the *New York Times* (Dec. 16), “It’s about going someplace they expect will be gone in a generation.”

From the tropics to the ice fields, doom is big business. Quark Expeditions, a leader in arctic travel, doubled capacity for its 2008 season of trips to the northern and southernmost reaches of the planet. Travel agents report clients are increasingly requesting trips to see the melting glaciers of Patagonia, the threatened coral of the Great Barrier Reef, and the eroding atolls of the Maldives, Shapiro said.

Even the sinking of the Antarctic cruise ship *Explorer*, which recently hit an iceberg, has not cooled interest. Other Antarctic tour operators say they have received frantic calls asking for last-minute berths from those who had been scheduled to take future *Explorer* voyages. Since most trips are already full, would-be paying customers are being turned away.

What these travelers are chasing may be a modern-day version of an old human impulse – to behold an untrammelled frontier. Except this time around, instead of being the first to climb a mountain or behold a glacier-fed lake, voyagers ... are eager to be the ones to see things last.

Almost all these trips are marketed as environmentally aware and eco-sensitive – they are, after all, a grand tour of the devastating effects of global warming. But the travel industry, some environmentalists say, is preying on the frenzy. This kind of travel, they argue, is hardly green. It’s greedy, requiring airplanes and boats as well as new hotels, according to the *Times* story.

In November, *Travel + Leisure* magazine came out with a “responsible travel” issue and listed on its cover “13 guilt-free travel deals,” No. 5 being an Inkaterra Rain Forest package. For \$497 a person, it included a three-night stay in a cabana on stilts, an excursion to the hotel’s private ecological reserve, a boat trip to a native farm and a 30-minute massage at the hotel spa.

This is all a ruse, said John Stetson, a spokesman for the Will Steger Foundation, an environmental education organization in Minnesota. “Eco-tourism is more of a term for the marketer,” he said. “Many people want to do what’s right, so when something is marketed as the right thing, they tend to do that.”

But, he says, traveling by jet to see the icebergs contributes to global warming, which makes the icebergs melt faster. “It’s hard to fault somebody who wants to see something before it disappears, but it’s unfortunate that in their pursuit of doing that, they contribute to the problem,” he tells *Times* reporter Allen Salkin.

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Advocates of green tourism counter that even carbon-consuming travel can help preserve destinations, as local people learn that there is more economic value in preserving nature for tourists than in farming or timber harvesting, said Lene Oestergaard, the executive director of the Rainforest Foundation.

Mind Over Mountain – “After a freak-out stage and a why-me stage – things everyone goes through – I accepted that there was nothing I could do but look forward,” says adventurer Andy Knapp, a 30-year veteran of Midwest Mountaineering in Minneapolis, who has been fighting kidney cancer for almost five years.

According to a story in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* (Dec. 11) by Stephen Regenold, a Twin Cities writer and author of the syndicated column www.thegearjunkie.com, in the past five years, while Knapp’s condition has waxed and waned, while tumors have grown and shrunk, his forward momentum has pushed him to revisit some of the key expeditions of his young adulthood. A 1,523-mile pedal north from Minneapolis, looping through Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, into Ontario, then back west to Minnesota and home again, took place almost 40 years to the day after the same trip on a three-speed bike in 1964.

This past summer, Knapp, 60, set out to ride solo to Alaska – 2,655 miles in 24 days. It was the 40th anniversary of a similar trip he started in 1967 with his brother Steve, and two friends, Howie Graham and Richard Dean Anderson, then an aspiring actor from Roseville, Minn., who’d grow up to be the never-say-die star of ABC’s primetime drama *MacGyver*.

“For five years, Knapp has taken one small step at a time with cancer. As he does with a mountain climb, he has mentally broken the fight into segments, each one manageable on its own even if the larger goal looks insurmountable. Each painful therapy, each new experimental drug is a pitch to scale on a steep face. Kick one foot into the snow, rest, breathe, then step up and kick again,” Regenold writes.

Knapp believes, “Cancer is pain, but it’s more mental than physical. Look forward and be positive about your chances; someone has to beat the odds and it may be yourself. The mental strength developed from outdoor skills, adventure and adversity can help you successfully face other challenges in life.” (For more information: www.andytknapp.com). ▲

CLIMBING FOR DOLLARS

Smile Network Expedition – Six Minnesota residents embarked this month on an expedition to help children across the globe through Smile Network International, a non-profit, Minnesota-based humanitarian organization. The program, Miles for Smiles, sends local volunteers of various backgrounds and professions on a hiking expedition to raise awareness and funds to perform reconstructive surgeries to repair birth defects of a cleft lip or cleft palate.

“Miles for Smiles is just one way that we are able to accomplish our mission of reconstructing lives, one bright smiling face at a time,” said Kim Valentini, founder of Smile Network International. “For as little as \$500, Smile Network International is able to repair a child’s birth defect, and in the space of 45 minutes, restore joy and dignity to their lives.”

From January 15 to January 25, six volunteers from all different backgrounds in Minnesota will hike the Inca Trail – a four-day, 26-mi. stone paved trek to Machu Picchu. The location was chosen because Peru, like many developing countries, lacks health care for those that cannot afford it. All trekkers pay their own expenses and raise money for their surgical mission. The trekkers give their time, heart and financial support to make these surgical missions possible.

Smile Network International is planning another Inca Trail trek in April and spots are still available to participate in the trek. Other upcoming missions for Smile Network include three surgical missions in Lima, Peru, along with Guerrero and Puebla, Mexico. (For more information: www.smilenetwork.org). ▲

EXPEDITION MARKETING

Save the Poles Picks Up Sponsors

Atwater Carey and Potable Aqua, two popular outdoor health and safety brands, will sponsor the Save the Poles Expedition. Arctic explorer Eric Larsen is planning the expedition for 2009, when he will attempt unsupported voyages to Mt. Everest as well as the North and South Poles within a continuous 365-day period – reportedly never before attempted. Larsen will utilize Atwater Carey and Potable Aqua products during the expedition and will then provide valuable performance feedback to Wisconsin Pharmacal Company, the manufacturer of both product lines.

Eric Larsen, of Grand Marais, Minn., has spent his entire life in pursuit of wilderness. As a dog musher, whitewater canoe guide, backcountry ranger, competitive cyclist and educator, he has explored throughout northern Minnesota, the American West, Alaska and the Canadian Arctic. (For more information: www.savethepoles.com).

You've Seen the Expedition, Now Get the Shirt – A selection of commemorative shirts to celebrate the completion of Expedition 360 are being hawked on the Web. The design marks the final route around the world from Greenwich, England, through the two antipodal points on the Atlantic and western Australia, and back to Greenwich again. This is the last in a total of seven designs that were printed over the years to raise funds to keep the expedition going in the absence of formal sponsorship. The original was printed with the hopelessly optimistic dates of 1994-1996. The final design gives the real tally of 13-years. (For more information: www.expedition360.com). ▲

ON THE HORIZON

Climbers Document Climate Change – On Feb. 22, the American Alpine Club will host “Climatology” in the American Mountaineering Center’s 320-seat theater in Golden, Colo. The event is a fund-raiser for the Alpine Conservation Partnership (ACP), and is presented in conjunction with Patagonia and the Mountain Institute.

Alton Byers, director of the ACP, will unveil dramatic photo documentation of climate change’s affects on the world’s tallest mountain. Byers spent 30 days in the Mt. Everest region last fall, recreating the 1950s-era photographs of Swiss glaciologist Fritz Müller and Austrian alpinist and mapmaker Erwin Schneider. Patagonia climbing ambassador Kitty Calhoun will present *Last Ascents*, a look at alpine routes that may never have another ascent because of the effects of global warming. (For more information: www.AmericanAlpineClub.org). ▲

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Correcting a Correction – Our December issue contained a correction concerning the first Americans to ski to the South Pole. Unfortunately our headline incorrectly read, “Who Was the First American to Ski to the North Pole?” It should have read “South Pole.” Our thanks for pointing this out goes to retired Du Pont employee and arm-chair explorer Robert L. Van Dyke of Wilmington, Dela. ▲

EXPEDITION CLASSIFIEDS

Across the World Drive – Not all of us are fit or young enough to climb Everest but there is still an opportunity to join an expedition. Starting in August 2008, Australian adventurer Lang Kidby will lead a small group, in their own vehicles from Vladivostok to Europe via the new Trans-Siberian Road, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey. Want to come along? lang@st.net.au. Check the Web site www.next-horizon.org.

Costa Del Mar Sunglasses – The leader in high performance polarized sunglasses is interested in sponsoring expeditions. Help us “See what’s out there™.” See Costa Del Mar’s online video network dedicated to water sports and angling adventures (www.costachannelc.com). Submit film footage of “you-had-to-see-it-to-believe-it” extreme water sports and fishing expeditions. Contact Laurie Driggs at ldriggs@costadelmar.com for information. Learn more about our commitment to exploration and adventure travel at: <http://www.costadelmar.com/adventures/>

Advertise in Expedition News – For just 50 cents a word, you can reach an estimated 10,000 readers of America’s only monthly newsletter celebrating the world of expeditions on land, in space, and beneath the sea. Join us as we take a sometimes-irreverent look at the people and projects making Expedition News. Frequency discounts are available. (For more information: blumassoc@aol.com).

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)

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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). 