

# EXPEDITION NEWS

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**EXPEDITION NEWS, now in its 16th year, is the monthly review of significant expeditions, research projects and newsworthy adventures. It is distributed online to media representatives, corporate sponsors, educators, research librarians, explorers, environmentalists, and outdoor enthusiasts. This forum on exploration covers projects that stimulate, motivate and educate.**

## **MIT PROJECT ASKS: HOW DOES MODERN CLIMATE CHANGE COMPARE TO PAST VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS?**

A quarter billion years ago, before the dinosaurs, was one of the most catastrophic events in Earth history. It was not a meteoroid strike or a giant earthquake, but rather a vast series of volcanic eruptions. An estimated five million cubic kilometers of igneous rock erupted into and onto what is present day Siberia.

Apparently, this occurred simultaneously with a global extinction event. Far worse than the more famous end-Cretaceous extinction in which the dinosaurs succumbed, the Permian-Triassic extinction is the largest in Earth history. Approximately 70% of terrestrial species and 90% of marine species went extinct. This was almost the end of multi-cellular life of Earth and a turning point in the planet's history. Yet their causes and even whether the volcanoes led to the extinction are not understood. More disturbing still, there are strong parallels between the events of that time and the climate change occurring today.

This summer, an MIT team of 14 scientists from seven countries will try to understand this event. Traveling to northern Siberia, they will sample a thick sequence of volcanic rocks produced by explosive, gas-driven eruptions. These are the most promising and possibly most critical rocks to sample, because they are the oldest in the flood basalts, evidence of the most massive gas-driven eruptions in any flood basalt. Time is of the

essence: sadly, the region may be flooded starting this fall because of a new hydroelectric project on the Angara river.

The primary team will be traveling by Russian pontoon rafts down the Remote Kata river, then into the Angara river beginning this month. Sponsors include the National Science Foundation, MIT, Institute of Earth Physics Moscow, and Pakboats. (For more information: [ltelkins@mit.edu](mailto:ltelkins@mit.edu), [www.siberia.mit.edu](http://www.siberia.mit.edu))

## **AMERICAN EXPLORER BEGINS “WORLD’S TOUGHEST TRIATHLON”**

Charlie Wittmack, 33, has departed on a 12,000-mile, 11-month, intercontinental triathlon stretching from the River Thames in England to the summit of Mount Everest. He believes his World Tri project may be the toughest human endurance event ever conceived. The Des Moines attorney has been training for 15 years for this project; he survived an ascent of Everest in 2003 through notoriously bad weather.

Over 11 months, The World Tri will cross 13 countries, with a documentary filmmaking crew in tow. The expedition begins with a 275-mile swim down the River Thames to the North Atlantic Sea and across the English Channel to France.

From France, the project continues with a 9,000-mile bicycle ride across Europe and Asia, passing over many of the world’s most rugged and remote mountain ranges, and crossing hundreds of miles of barren sand desert, before climbing over the Himalaya to the Indian Ocean and Calcutta.

The triathlon concludes with a super-ultra 950-mile run from sea level at the Bay of Bengal, up into the Himalaya, to the summit of Mount Everest. Students are expected to follow along.

The World Tri team has partnered with Des Moines University (DMU) and the White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) to address maternal mortality in Nepal through its global health program. Wittmack is an adjunct professor at DMU’s Department of Global Health.

At press time, Wittmack was staying in a Youth Hostel in Oxford, England, a block from the Thames, amused by the fact that at age 33, he was hardly a “youth.” (For more information: [www.theworldtri.com](http://www.theworldtri.com)).

## **EXPEDITION UPDATE**

### **Stowe Returns to Media Frenzy**

The boat looks like something Kevin Costner would sail in *Waterworld*. The hull was barnacled and chipped; bailing wire was holding pulleys together, and there was a broken bowsprit lying along the deck. Yet for 1,152 days, this was home to Reid Stowe, 58, who shattered the previous non-stop/unresupplied sea voyage of 657 days (See *EN*, February 2010).

*EN* was there on June 16 off the coast of Sandy Hook, N.J., as Reid welcomed his first human visitors in 846 days. It was just hours before he returned to New York Harbor and a triumphant welcome. Accompanying us was a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer, and a reporter, photographer and videographer from the *New York Times* (see the story that appeared June 17 here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/17/nyregion/17voyage.html>)

The minute we arrived, Stowe was besides himself and immediately launched into a non-stop spiel, giving us a tour of his 70-ft. schooner, *Anne*, and welcoming us with snacks of coffee, dried nuts, three-year old crackers, and cheese. He lived on sprouts, pasta and of course, lots of fish (we joked that after 1,152 days at sea, most of which was alone, he was not only eating fish, but was probably talking to fish as well).

“I could stay out another year,” he gushed. Stowe seemed wistful about returning from his self-imposed sea-going exile, but knew he had a huge welcome waiting for him the next day – not to mention a first-ever meeting with his two-year-old son, Darshen, conceived at sea and borne by a girlfriend who had to leave on day 306 due to morning sickness which was initially diagnosed as plain old mal de mar.

A flotilla of boats escorted the *Anne* to Pier 81 the next morning, accompanied by a ceremonial spray of water by the retired *John J. Harvey* fireboat, which, during the 9/11 tragedy, was rushed back into service to pump water for 80 hours. Stowe’s band of faithful volunteers, including the staff of *EN*, were astounded by the pack of media awaiting his return. Photographers so aggressively jockeyed for the “money shot” of Stowe’s first hug with his son and girlfriend, that a 1000 days volunteer almost came to blows with a news service photographer. Over 40 media covered the event worldwide.

A few days later, NPR’s Tom Ashbrook, host of the syndicated call-in radio show “On Point,” asked Stowe, “Are you a rich guy?”

Stowe replied, “No, I’m just a normal guy. I never had a lot of money. It took me 20 years to get this voyage going, largely due to a lack of money. But we had 50 sponsors and a gang of friends helping me on the boat. ... it was basically a grassroots effort. I left without money and I’m not sure now if I’m in debt or not.”

Sailing journalist Charles Doane called in from out in the Atlantic via satphone to confirm that Stowe has his critics, especially among sailboat racers. “For them, sailing is a competitive sport about speed and performance. Reid is none of that. The idea of sailing slowly is totally alien to them. They’re all anonymous on the Internet and they express opinions more aggressively than when you’re talking to them face-to-face.”

Stowe is slowly re-entering society. Further coverage is scheduled in *Cruising World*, *Men’s Journal*, *New York Magazine*, and French TV’s *Thalassa*, among others. Even *Ripley’s Believe It or Not* is considering an item on the feat.

Stowe is getting back on e-mail, interviewing a personal management company, and is close to signing a book deal with a literary agent and best-selling author who will help him co-write his most unusual life story, one we've followed closely in these pages for over 20 years. What's next? Stowe dreams of sailing *Anne* to American ports, retelling the story of his extraordinary voyage in a tour tentatively titled, "Keep the Spirit of Adventure Alive." (For more information and to read some of the media coverage, log onto: [www.1000days.net](http://www.1000days.net))

### **Sixteen-Year-Old Sailor Rescued at Sea**

Capturing even more media exposure than Stowe last month was Abby Sunderland, the 16-year-old California teenager who was rescued from her crippled sailboat in the middle of the turbulent Indian Ocean, more than 2,000 miles from the Australia coast. When word came out that her father, Laurence Sunderland, was in discussions with a reality TV show, her story was likened to that of the infamous Colorado "balloon boy."

During a *Today Show* interview with Meredith Vieira on June 30, the elder Sunderland said the reality show pitch went nowhere, and that besides, the proposed TV show had nothing to do with her circumnavigation.

The teenage Sunderland says her ordeal in the Indian Ocean has not dampened her desire to try to circumnavigate the world again. "Crazy is the word that really describes everything that has happened best," she wrote in a blog post from "a great big fishing boat headed I am not exactly sure where.

"The long and the short of it is, well, one long wave, and one short mast," she wrote.

Miss Sunderland set out from Marina del Rey, Calif., on Jan. 23, trying to become the youngest person to circumnavigate the globe solo. Zac Sunderland, her brother, held the record for a little more than a month last year until Briton Mike Perham completed his own journey. The record changed hands again last month, when 16-year-old Australian Jessica Watson completed her own around-the-world voyage.

Soon after starting her trip, Miss Sunderland ran into equipment problems and had to stop for repairs. She gave up the goal of setting the record in April, but continued, hoping to complete the journey.

Her parents have come under criticism from some observers for allowing the high-risk adventure. Veteran sailors questioned the wisdom of sending a teenager off alone in a small boat, knowing it would be tossed about for 30 or more hours at a time by the giant waves that rake the Southern Hemisphere's oceans this time of year. Eighty-six year-old retired boat builder John C. Burkhart writes in the New York *Daily News* (June 18), "A rich, zit-faced high school girl – not yet dry behind the ears – looks for early stardom, by sailing 'solo' around-the-world.

“How ‘solo’ is it when she’s in constant radio contact with her base, which is advising her every move and course to follow? And yes! Still she gets in trouble.

“Countries have to spend thousands if not millions in the search for her screw-up. So she achieves a few minutes of fame at least.”

Her father defended the voyage. "I never questioned my decision in letting her go," he told reporters. "In this day and age we get overprotective with our children. If you want to look at statistics, look at how many teenagers die in cars every year. Should we let teenagers drive cars? I think it'd be silly if we didn't."

### **Plans Change for Hillary’s Ashes**

A plan to scatter Edmund Hillary's ashes on the summit of Mount Everest has been cancelled after Buddhist priests in Nepal warned it would bring bad luck (See *EN*, April 2010). There were also concerns that placing Hillary's ashes on the summit could set a precedent, with other people wanting their ashes also to be scattered there.

Most of Hillary's ashes were scattered in the sea off Auckland in his native New Zealand after his death in 2008 at age 88, in accordance with a wish expressed in his book, *View from the Summit* (Pocket, 2000). But some were given to the Sherpa community to be taken to the Everest region, where they were placed in the care of small Buddhist monastery in the village of Kunde.

Hillary’s ashes will remain in the monastery for now, but eventually will likely be distributed in a park being built to commemorate the world-famous mountaineer near the village of Khumjung, in the shadow of the mountain he and Tenzing Norgay summited.

### **EXPEDITION NOTES**

**Pre-Teen Climbs America’s Highpoints** – On June 19, Mountain Hardwear introduced 12-year-old Boulder, Colo., climber Matt Moniz to outdoor media assembled in Central Park at the Adventures NYC day sponsored in part by *Backpacker Magazine*.

Moniz hopes to climb the 50 U.S. highpoints in 43 days, thus besting current record holder Mike Haugen who during a Coleman-sponsored project in 2008, broke the highpoint record with partner Casey Grom in 45 days, 19 hours and 2 minutes.

Speeding the Climb7 team along is a donated Cessna airplane and a Mercedes Sprinter van with a bed and three volunteer drivers. Joel Gratz of ColoradoPowderForecast.com is providing microweather forecasting.

“We’re not pursuing age records here,” says Moniz’s father, Mike. “In fact, he’s not going to be climbing any 8000 meter peaks until he’s an adult.” The younger Moniz tells *EN* that the Climb7 Project is about exploring the country and inspiring kids to get outdoors. He also hopes to raise money in honor of his best friend, Iain Hess, who suffers

from pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), high blood pressure in the arteries of the lungs. PAH symptoms include fatigue, shortness of breath and dizziness similar to the symptoms of pulmonary edema commonly experienced by mountain climbers at high elevations. Last summer, Matt and his team climbed 14 of Colorado's famed 14,000-foot peaks in just eight days, ultimately raising \$20,000 for PAH research.

Says his father, "We're drawing attention to a serious orphan disease, and so we don't consider this a failure if we complete it in over 50 days." By press time (July 6), they had completed 45 out of 50 climbs in just 30 days. Mike Moniz emails *EN*, "Yes, we have five peaks left ... Kings (UT), Gannett Peak (Wyo.), Granite Peak (Mont.), Borah Peak (Idaho), then Hawaii for the last peak (Mauna Kea). Weather has been a bear for us but looks like a good run of weather for the next seven days."

Other sponsors include Adventure Medical Kits, Katadyn, LEKI, and Ryders Eyewear. (For more information: [www.climb7.com](http://www.climb7.com)).

**Rivers of Ice** – Asia Society in New York showcases the work of photographer and mountaineer David Breashears who, with the Glacier Research Imaging Project (GRIP), has retraced the steps of renowned mountain photographers of the past century to recapture images of the Himalayan mountains and glaciers from exactly the same vantage points. *Rivers of Ice: Vanishing Glaciers of the Greater Himalaya* comprises recent photographs by Breashears, shown alongside corresponding historic images, revealing the alarming loss in ice mass over the intervening years due to climate change.

Breashears has retraced the steps of the 1921 British Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition Team, using as a guide, the photos of surveyor and photographer Major Edward O. Wheeler and amateur photographer George L. Mallory, who would later perish attempting to reach Everest's summit in 1924. Returning to the same vantage points, Breashears has meticulously recreated their shots, pixel for pixel.

Images of special note include 55-inch video displays of two gigapan photographs (ultrahigh resolution panoramic images containing over one billion pixels that are comprised of multiple photographs stitched together), showing extraordinary detail. (For more information: [www.AsiaSociety.org/RiversofIce](http://www.AsiaSociety.org/RiversofIce); see Breashears' gigapixel image of Everest at: [http://www.hdrilabs.com/gallery/gigapanos/gigapano.html?West\\_Rongbuk\\_B&CYLINDER](http://www.hdrilabs.com/gallery/gigapanos/gigapano.html?West_Rongbuk_B&CYLINDER)).

**Harlin Circumnavigates Switzerland to Tell "Swiss Border Stories"** – Well-known climber and editor John Harlin III is on a mission to hike, climb, and paddle around the exact borders that Switzerland shares with its five neighbors. He departed in late June for the approximately 100-day non-stop, muscle-powered journey. Switzerland's borders with France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Austria, and Italy span 1,150 miles.

He tells *EN*, "I'm sticking to the exact political borders, climbing every one of the hundreds of peaks, and only coming down to pick up more food when I can't do it at the

border. The trip is called Swiss Border Stories – I'll be gathering historical and modern border stories the whole way and blogging them daily for my main sponsor, [www.swissinfo.ch](http://www.swissinfo.ch).”

He plans to produce a film and write a book about the project, in addition to by-lining a feature in *Backpacker* magazine. His journey can be followed through daily photo and video blogs at [www.swissinfo.ch](http://www.swissinfo.ch), plus a “Where’s John?” Google map and frequent Twitter feeds. Additional information will be posted to [www.MySwitzerland.com](http://www.MySwitzerland.com).

In 1966, Harlin’s his father died while opening a new route on the Eiger Nordwand, now named the John Harlin Route. The younger Harlin climbed the Eiger in 2005, a feat chronicled in the IMAX movie, *The Alps: Climb of Your Life* ([www.alpsfilm.com](http://www.alpsfilm.com)), and in his book, *The Eiger Obsession: Facing the Mountain That Killed My Father*. (Simon & Schuster, 2007). Since 2002, Harlin has been the editor of the *American Alpine Journal* (published by the American Alpine Club since 1929).

**Plane Facts About Bering Bridge Expedition** – The Wright Brothers historic airplane resides in the Smithsonian; a few miles away in Chantilly, Va., you can see the B-29 Superfortress bomber *Enola Gay*. Now an historic dogsled expedition will be immortalized in the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum in Anchorage. Polar explorer Paul Schurke, co-leader of the Bering Bridge Expedition in 1989, reports that the Boeing 737-290C jet with which they had flown the expedition team, sled dogs and supporters to the Russian Far Eastern Arctic on March 1, 1989, was being retired to serve as a star attraction at the museum, complete with the expedition name and logo still painted across its side.

On that 1,200-mile, two-month trek, the Bering Bridge team of six Soviets and six Americans, including native Chukchi and Inuit from the region, traveled the ancient trade route that for centuries had connected people of Siberia and Alaska via the Bering Strait, but whose timeless contacts had been completely severed during the Cold War era. The project caught the attention of both U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev who sent personal commendations for the success of their project and who, in September 1989, signed an accord re-opening the U.S.-Soviet border in the Bering Strait. (For more information: [www.Dogsledding.com/gnablog](http://www.Dogsledding.com/gnablog); [www.alaskaairmuseum.org](http://www.alaskaairmuseum.org)).

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“One doesn’t discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a long time.” – André Gide (1869-1951), *The Counterfeiters* (1925)

## EXPEDITION MARKETING

**Dress for Success** – Westcomb apparel and Schoeller Textil USA partnered this spring to build and supply the American Alpine Club with 50 Skeena softshell jackets that will be part of the AAC staff uniform and also be used in association with other club events and

programs. The jackets will be worn by AAC staff at events like the Craggin' Classic and the International Climbers' Meet. They will also outfit AAC section chairs and ambassadors, and avid climbers who volunteer at the local and regional levels to manage club activities in their areas. Finally, some will be used in association with the AAC's international Climber's Exchange program.

The special make-up jackets, which feature the American Alpine Club logo as well as the Schoeller and Westcomb logos, are made with Schoeller WB 400 fabric, a hard-wearing, four-way stretch, four-season softshell fabric.

## **MEDIA MATTERS**

**First Family of Climbing** – John Bouchard and Nancy Prichard-Bouchard, of Bend, Ore., could be considered the First Family of American climbing. “Whether John Bouchard, 58, and Nancy Prichard-Bouchard, 49, are climbing up a sheer mountain face, flying off a cliff with a paraglider or hurling themselves downhill on an icy ski course at 60 mph, you can bet they don't hold back. That's why this daring couple always managed to be at the top of their sports,” writes Penny Nakamura in Bend's *The Bulletin*, (June 15).

Starting in the late 1970s, and continuing for another two decades, John Bouchard was considered the top alpinist in the world, claiming several first ascents of mountain routes around the world. By 1981, Bouchard took on the north face of Switzerland's Eiger in 15 hours. He also has a climbing route named after him on Mount Blanc in France.

Prichard-Bouchard was internationally top-ranked in rock climbing and ice climbing. Winning many climbing competitions over several years put her in the forefront of popularizing the sport for women.

“I did a lot of ice climbing when there weren't that many female ice climbers,” said Prichard-Bouchard, who also did film, television and print work in the climbing industry. She turned down a role in the film *Cliffhanger* with actor Sylvester Stallone to complete her doctorate. Currently, she's a prolific freelance sports, travel and sports gear writer for magazines such as *Outside* and *Backpacker*.

Prichard-Bouchard says her favorite artwork is a framed page out of an old *Mountain* magazine showing Mount Blanc and the Bouchard route, a first ascent Bouchard climbed solo in the '70s. “It's a constant reminder of how lucky he was to have had such a fantastic climbing (and paragliding) career, but to have known when to quit.”

**Don't Go There** – In her new book, *101 Places Not to See Before You Die*, Catherine Price highlights an assortment of locales around the world – and beyond – which you don't need to feel bad about missing. Everest is one of them. She writes, “... you want the thrill of adventure that comes from paying \$65,000 for a guided climb and then risking a team of sherpas' lives (not to mention your own) so that you can spend 15 minutes breathing supplemental oxygen at the so-called top of the world? Unless you



love frostbite, hypoxia, blinding snow and high-altitude games of Russian roulette, do Nepal a favor and stay home.” Everest is in the book along with the Beijing Museum of Tap Water. (Visit [www.101worstplaces.com](http://www.101worstplaces.com) – or get the iPhone app).

## CLIMBING FOR DOLLARS

**Navratilova Takes Aim at Kili** – Tennis great Martina Navratilova, 53, is planning an ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds for the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. Navratilova, who finished radiotherapy treatment last month following breast cancer, will lead a group of 28 climbers, including Deshun Deysul, South Africa's greatest female mountaineer, German Paralympic cyclist Michael Teuber, and British mountaineer Annabelle Bond, up the 19,341-ft. mountain in December.

Asked how beating cancer and climbing mountains fit her overall life narrative – tennis legend, gay-rights activist, celebrity endorser, philanthropist and so on – Navratilova tells Greg Bishop of the *New York Times* (June 25), “I always win.” Donations can be made at <http://www.laureus.com/get-involved/mount-kilimanjaro-climb>

**Climb Three of Africa's Highest Peaks** – The 5th annual 3 Peaks 3 Weeks Challenge is now accepting applications for their fifth team of women from around the world. To mark this year as the biggest yet, the event aims to hit their \$1 million fundraising mark. Teams will climb three of Africa's highest peaks in less than three weeks and raise critical funds for grassroots organizations in East Africa (For more information: [fiona@savetherhino.org](mailto:fiona@savetherhino.org), [www.3peaks3weeks.org](http://www.3peaks3weeks.org)).

## EXPEDITION INK

***The Raven's Gift* (by Jon Turk, St. Martin's Press, 2009)**  
**Reviewed by Robert F. Wells**

I suppose if you're a Ph. D. research chemist who spends most of your waking hours laboring in labs and writing scientific textbooks, you develop an "itch." Four walls and a bunch of beakers become a burden. Thanks to a kayak, a pair of skis and a life-long dollop of wanderlust, Jon Turk breaks out in *The Raven's Gift* and heads for a frozen wilderness. How about Vyvenka, Siberia?

Across the ice and on through the night Turk befriends a 100-year-old female Koryak shaman named Moolynaut ... eeking out an existence, communing with "the other world," popping potent mushrooms (*amanita muscaria*), and calling up ancient spirit birds (ravens). At one point, an old skiing injury renders Turk unable to walk, flaring up literally in the middle of nowhere. Moolynaut, goes to work. Soon Turk is stark naked, balanced on one foot while she crouches in front of him, chanting and spitting on his pubic hairs. I know. I know. What's that all about? You hardly get this kind of treatment at your local hospital. Anyway, the result? Spiritualism trumps science. A once fractured hip with a broken steel plate heals miraculously.

Some things are no less than inexplicable. The Siberian wilderness calls Turk back, again and again. So, what's going on here? There's something to be said for transporting oneself from comfort zones of an ordinary life – to simply lose touch with one's usual reality. Siberian friendships are easy to gain and they haunt Turk. For years. He admits to running away from his faith, his profession and his family. And at one point cries, "... what's wrong with living out of your pickup and spinning your wheels?"

Sadly, in the process, Jon loses his beloved wife of nearly 25 years to the untimely vagaries of an avalanche. For some, journeys never end. "The Ordinary" stands as traps in life. If you have a bone in your body that compels you to reach for the unknown, by reading this book you can find yourself paddling along next to Turk – where few go, as a sun dips to kiss a far horizon.

*Robert Wells, a member of The Explorers Club since 1991, is a resident of Darien, Conn., and a retired executive of the Young & Rubicam ad agency. Wells is the director of a steel band (see [www.blueflamessteelband.com](http://www.blueflamessteelband.com)) and in 1989, at the age of 45, traveled south by road bike from Canada to Long Island Sound in a single 19-hr., 28-min. push.*

## WEB WATCH

**The GPS Girl** – Truth be told, after navigating through the world's remotest spots by map, compass and GPS, it's nice to come home and simply rely on those ubiquitous GPS gadgets on the dashboard of the family car. Voiceover talent Karen Jacobsen, tired of being the anonymous "Australian Karen," is a budding singer with a concert scheduled for July 12 in New York. Back in 2002, she spent almost 50 hours in a recording studio speaking every combination of syllables possible into a microphone. Now Jacobsen is in GPS units by leading manufacturers such as Garmin, TomTom and others. Her voice is in millions of cars around the world giving directions, telling people where to go and what to do. She's also an inspirational speaker who says you can "recalculate" anytime in life. Hear some of her favorite directions at [www.thegpsgirl.com](http://www.thegpsgirl.com).

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