

EXPEDITION NEWS

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EXPEDITION NEWS, founded in 1994, 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.

EVEREST'S MOST TRAGIC DAY

It was the deadliest, darkest day on the world's most revered mountain. April 18, 2014 will forever be remembered as the day when an avalanche buried 16 Nepalese Sherpa, 13 of whom were eventually recovered in a somber recovery effort followed worldwide. They were on the mountain hauling supplies and fixing ropes and ladders for expeditions funded by mostly western climbers. Sherpas skirt danger daily – many on Everest make a dozen or more roundtrips through the treacherous Khumbu Icefall over the course of a 10-week season, estimates professional climber and guide Freddie Wilkinson.

The role of the Sherpa is considered one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, ranked close to being a bush pilot in Alaska, or commercial fisherman in the Bering Sea.

Despite the hazards, Himalayan expeditions typically offer three months of work in a poor region where there are few other opportunities. A typical Sherpa makes from \$3,000 to \$6,000 by the end of the season, according to an article last year in *Outside Magazine* by Grayson Schaffer.

On that fateful day, blocks of ice the size of mansions came crashing down about a two-hour climb from base camp, near the top of the notorious icefall. Lakpa Rita Sherpa tells *The Discovery Channel* that the area where the Sherpa were trapped was only about 20 feet wide – “they couldn't run one way or the other.”

He continues, “It was one of the most difficult rescues I ever did, but there was nothing you could do.”

The New Yorker estimates 6,200 climbers have summited Everest in its history, at a cost of about 250 lives lost. To make sense of the tragedy, *EN* this month turns to the words of a few of those with knowledge of the disaster and the Everest region.

- Jon Krakauer reveals in *The New Yorker* (Apr. 21) that the slide wasn't entirely a surprise. New Zealander Russell Brice who owns Himalayan Experience (Himex) grew increasingly concerned as early as spring 2012 "about a bulge of glacial ice three hundred yards wide that was frozen tenuously to Everest's West Shoulder, hanging like a massive sword of Damocles directly over the main route up the Nepal side of the mountain."

Read Krakauer's blog post here:

<http://m.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2014/04/everest-sherpas-death-and-anger.html>

- Photographer Thom Pollard, who was on the mountain shooting a documentary about a climber who hoped to be the oldest American to summit, estimates on Facebook that there are now 47 children without fathers. He writes on Apr. 23, "I mourn for not only for the families who have lost a father but for those (Sherpa) who want to be here and are forced to leave. While dangerous, this is work people line up for."

Pollard's focus has since shifted and he is currently working on a "new" film about the tragic turn of events.

- Pasang Gelzen Sherpa, a past president of the Northwest Sherpa Association, acknowledges that Nepal's economy relies heavily on tourism. At the same time, he says, "I really feel that trekking agencies have to value Sherpa life."

He tells the *Seattle Weekly* (Apr. 29) that if companies just spent a couple hundred dollars more per Sherpa for life insurance, they could ensure a significantly higher payout when a tragedy like this strikes. Life insurance has emerged as a major point of debate in Nepal since the disaster, with Sherpa demanding that the government raise the minimum payout requirement, currently at about \$10,000.

- Freddie Wilkinson writing in the Apr. 20 *New York Times*, calls for an increase in the compensation and benefits for the climbing Sherpas to "square with the challenges they face while on the job. ... there is no better way to honor the lives of those who have perished."
- Columnist Giles Coren writes "Close Everest. Close All the Damn Mountains," in the Apr. 26 issue of *The Times* (UK). "On one hand, you have 16 Sherpas killed; on the other, a bunch of macho idiots whose holidays have been ruined. The Sherpas of Everest are on strike. A long queue of very rich white men with extremely tiny penises is furious because it wanted to go and play on the mountain."

He railed mercilessly against "the 330-odd foreign climbers currently waiting to haul

their fat, pampered arses up the once-revered peak for the sake of a stupid selfie and a handful of dull stories with which to bore the ears off their children and grandchildren until they are shut up in a retirement home for old bores with no toes.”

Coren pulls few punches in his blistering story and concludes, “So just close the damn mountain and send those idiots home.”

Read the story here (£1 fee required):

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article4073250.ece>

To help support the surviving families, a group of ten photographers who have worked extensively with the Sherpas are raising money for the non-profit Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, which has been working with Sherpa climbers in the Khumbu since 2003.

For more information: www.sherpasfund.org.

Another way to help: log onto www.everestavalanchetragedy.com/sherpa-fund.html for *Discovery's* link to the American Himalayan Foundation Sherpa Family Fund.

EXPEDITION NOTES

The Future of Space

Ira Flatow, host of *Science Friday* on Public Radio International, hosted a panel discussion on the future of space travel late last month on board the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York.

Bobak Ferdowski aka “Mohawk Guy” from NASA JPL who has 67,000 Twitter followers, said, “You can’t understand earth without understanding Mars. It’s easy enough to get to – we’ve proven it could have been inhabitable in the past. It’s not a totally foreign world. Water was once ankle- or knee-high on Mars. The moon is a much harsher environment.”

Will Pomerantz, VP special projects at Virgin Galactic, told the approximately 200 invited guests, “We’re at one of the most dynamic times in the space industry ever.” He says Richard Branson and his son expect to be on the first flight in 4Q 2014. In all, over 700 tickets have been sold so far at \$250,000 each for flights involving two pilots and six paying passengers. “It’s never going to be an impulse buy,” he jokes.

“But in 10 years the cost of spaceflight will come down to be about as much as purchasing a new SUV.”

NASA astronaut Mike Massimino, a veteran of two space flights, was asked about the Sandra Bullock movie, *Gravity*. He praised the look and feel of the film’s special

effects, and confirmed that the hand tools and the payload bay was accurate. “But flying around like cowboys is very discouraged.”

Young adults in the audience were pleased to learn that 2030 – just 16 years away – seems to be the logical date for sending the first humans to the red planet.

Conference Explores the Democratization of Space

Speaking of space (after all, this is *Expedition News*), a watershed moment in spaceflight occurred in New York on May 1 when 13 spaceflight companies – all part of the Commercial Spaceflight Federation – gathered at The Explorers Club to discuss suborbital spaceflight, asteroid mining, space tourism, astronaut training and spaceports of the future.

Frank DiBello, president and CEO of Space Florida, spoke about the democratization of space travel. “Space should not be the domain of the privileged few,” he said.

Chris Lewicki of Planetary Resources shared a presentation that explained one asteroid can contain more platinum than has been mined in all of history. The company hopes to eventually mine asteroids. He assured the group of 200 that doing so won’t affect its orbit (whew!).

Sean Mahoney of Masten, designers of vertical take-off and vertical landing vehicles, emphasized that dollars spent on space exploration are spent on earth. “We’re not putting dollars on a rocket ship and sending it into the sun,” he smiled. “We’re creating real value right here.”

The mission of the Commercial Spaceflight Federation (CSF) is to promote the development of commercial human spaceflight, pursue ever-higher levels of safety, and share best practices and expertise throughout the industry. CSF member companies are creating thousands of high-tech jobs nationwide, working to preserve American leadership in aerospace through technology innovation, and inspiring young people to pursue careers in science and engineering.

For more information: www.commercialspaceflight.org

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Have we vanquished an enemy? None but ourselves. Have we gained success? That word means nothing here.”

– George Leigh Mallory (1886-1924), who perished high on Mt. Everest.

EXPEDITION FOCUS

The Most Famous Climbing Gear in the World

Our recent visit to the Bradford Washburn American Mountaineering Museum in Golden, Colo., reacquainted us with what is arguably the most famous piece of climbing gear in history. We originally wrote about this artifact in January 2008 and it continues to fascinate us. On display beneath glass, it's a simple ice axe owned by the family of a climber, one of five, who owes his life to the axe.

According to museum docent Del Peterson, before the axe came to Golden six years ago, it was used to break boards and dig holes. The family was amused when white-gloved museum curators carefully placed it in a shipping container for travel to Colorado.

Regardless of its other uses, this single piece of climbing gear saved the lives of five men and has since come to represent the pinnacle of mountaineering ethics. The story bears retelling:

According to the museum, the year 1953 was a great one for mountaineering. By its end, the summit of Mount Everest was achieved. Austrian Hermann Buhl climbed alone to the summit of Nanga Parbat in Pakistan to become the first person to complete a solo first ascent of an 8,000-meter peak (26,247 feet).

However, on K2, the world's second-highest mountain, a saga unfolded that has forever remained etched in the annals of mountaineering. The tenacity and strength displayed by the members of the expedition team remain legendary.

A storm on the Abruzzi Ridge—at an altitude of 25,300 feet on the slopes of K2 – sent climbers led by Charles S. 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 left leg was stricken with thrombophlebitis and began filling with blood clots. He would die if a clot were to reach his lungs. With no other option than to transport Gilkey to a lower elevation as fast as possible, the team began to maneuver him down the precariously steep and icy slope in his sleeping bag, in the middle of a vicious storm.

Team member George Bell suddenly lost his footing and, in the ensuing entanglement of ropes and climbers, five men started plunging toward their deaths off the face of the mountain.

The youngest and strongest man on the team, however, would keep this expedition from being remembered solely for its tragedies. Moments after Gilkey, still sedated with morphine in his sleeping bag, and the other five men began sliding to their deaths, a chemist from Seattle, Pete Schoening, instinctively jammed his ice axe in the snow behind a small boulder. This impromptu rope belay – with the rope wrapped around both his hip and the wooden shaft of the axe – resulted in a quick-thinking arrest that prevented the five men from almost certainly perishing.

Unfortunately, Gilkey would later be swept into the void by an avalanche at the age of 27 Or perhaps he released the ropes himself in an act of self-sacrifice to protect his

teammates. No one will ever know for sure. Nonetheless, Schoening's life-altering act has since defined the expedition. "The Belay" is now recognized as one of the most heroic acts in mountaineering history.

The five climbers saved by Schoening in Pakistan that day went on to resume their lives and raise families – the "Children of the Belay" they're called, according to Karen Molenaar Terrell, the daughter of dangling expedition member Dee Molenaar. There are more than 30 descendants of the original team alive today because of Pete Schoening and his axe.

(For more information: americanalpineclub.org, bwamm.org).

MEDIA MATTERS

***RiverBlue* Film Hopes to Make a Difference**

Over the past few years, Mark Angelo, 63, a long time river advocate and recently retired professor from Vancouver, B.C., along with his film crew, have been on a major global expedition that has taken them down the world's great rivers to shoot an upcoming feature film, *RiverBlue*, which will premiere this fall.

The film is reportedly one of the most ambitious and extensive river documentaries undertaken in many years and Angelo's hope is that it will be an "agent for positive change."

The team, which ranged between four and seven people at different times, undertook an adventure that, in many ways, was unprecedented. During their around-the-world journey by river, they highlighted the many values of rivers while also focusing on the serious challenges that confront them. Along the way, they also ended up taking the first in-depth look at the textile and tannery industries in countries such as China, India, Bangladesh and Indonesia. These industries are a major but under-reported industrial contributor to global freshwater pollution. After watching this, after becoming aware of the impact of so-called "hydrocide," you may never wear blue jeans again.

Among the film's sponsors are Inspired Cinema Vancouver, Image Media Farm, and Mountain Equipment Co-op, along with Canadian environmental philanthropists Rudy North, Andy Wright, and Val and Dick Bradshaw.

For more information: www.riverbluethemovie.com, markangelo@shaw.ca

CLIMBING FOR DOLLARS

Kickstarter Kick Starts Completion of Headhunter Art Film

When we started *EN* almost 20 years ago, whoever thought there would be an electronic thing called the Web, and that this thing could actually help raise money for exploration

projects? Thus, we're thrilled to learn that a Kickstarter campaign for a film about a 1920's artist in Melanesia actually raised \$37,420 – over \$2,000 more than originally sought.

Michele Westmorland is a world-renowned photographer from Kirkland, Wash., who is telling the overlooked story of female adventurer and artist Caroline Mytinger and her paintings hidden in storage for the last 75 years. *Headhunt Revisited* is about the power of Mytinger's art to connect cultures across oceans and decades.

The expedition took two months and gathered over 90 hours of footage and 10,000 images.

The film, now in post-production thanks to Kickstarter funding, retraces Mytinger's improbable trip to the land of headhunters, with a goal to paint portraits of the native islanders. Nearly 80 years later, her paintings now inspire two contemporary artists. Westmorland, who lead her own expedition in search of descendants of Caroline's paintings; and Papua New Guinean portrait painter Jeffry Feeger, who has been inspired by Caroline's art to paint his own modern interpretation of Melanesia today, acknowledging that indeed times have changed.

“It's very exciting to have the Kickstarter campaign over and now begin the real process of putting the film together,” she tells *EN*. She hopes to premiere the film in 2015.

For more information: www.headhuntrevisited.org, michele@westmorlandimages.com

See the expired campaign here:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/michelew/headhunt-revisited-documentary-art-celebrating-mel>

Kokatat Supports 7 Rivers 7 Continents Project

This month, Kokatat-supported athlete Mark Kalch will begin his descent of Russia's 2,300 mile Volga River. The Volga is the third source to sea expedition in his “7 Rivers, 7 Continents” project, in which he plans to paddle the longest rivers on each continent.

In 2008, Kalch completed a descent of the Amazon River which was followed in 2012 by the descent of the Missouri-Mississippi. During each expedition Kalch uses multimedia storytelling and an online platform to tell the stories of the river and its people.

His other target rivers are the Nile, Yangtze, Murrau-Darling and Onyx.

For more information: www.7rivers7continents.com.

Live Your Dreams

The American Alpine Club grant for the everyday adventurer recently announced its winners. With the support of The North Face, the grant awarded 50 individuals \$28,075 for projects including: a first ascent in Wyoming's Cloud Peak Wilderness Mountain Range, a climb of the Regular Route on Half Dome in a day, establishment of a second free route up the East Face of the Central Tower of Torres del Paine, Chile, and an attempt to become the oldest person to climb the Nose of El Capitan in a day.

See all the award recipients here:

http://americanalpineclub.org/facebook/lyd14/?mc_cid=5239c35f2b&mc_eid=3a4709d248

EXPEDITION MARKETING

Picture This

Last month, Canon Europe sponsored a WWF and Norwegian Polar Institute (NPI) expedition to the islands of Svalbard above the Arctic Circle, as part of its role as Conservation Imaging Partner of WWF International. The NPI and WWF-Canon expedition collected critical data about Europe's most westerly polar bear population.

During the Svalbard expedition, the team of researchers had two specific missions: to place satellite collars on polar bears so that their routes can be tracked over the next year, and to scout for new denning areas on islands in the Svalbard peninsula. Completing these tasks help scientists assess the response of polar bears to climate change, and to understand if there will be anywhere for the bears to den in the future, following a recent report that the area could be completely free of summer sea ice by 2050.

The Svalbard trip is the third Arctic research expedition that Canon has supported. In 2012, the expedition traveling from Greenland through Canada's High Arctic to the Last Ice Area was designed to assess the future management options for that area. In 2013, researchers traveled to the Taimyr Peninsula in the Laptev Sea to collect genetic material to confirm the theory of existence of unique subspecies of the Laptev walrus population.

See the project's blog posts here:

<http://arctic.blogs.panda.org/field/back-to-longyearbyen/>

WEB WATCH

Shackleton in Living Color

Beginning on Aug. 8, 1914, Sir Ernest Shackleton led a crew of 27 Englishmen to Antarctica in an attempt to make the first land crossing.

Australian photographer Frank Hurley brought 40 pounds of color-photo equipment on the onerous journey and would have to dive into three feet of icy seawater to salvage cases of glass negative plates from their wrecked ship.

His work, as posted to www.BusinessInsider.com, became one of the earliest examples of color photography.

See the collection of 21 images here:

<http://www.businessinsider.com/1915-antarctic-endurance-expedition-photos-2014-5?op=1&tru=JUSU9#ixzz30zKpyQ5h>

EXPEDITION CLASSIFIEDS

Expedition Communications Director For Hire

Paul Buijs, a former U.S. Marine and New York City resident is available to provide onsite communications for outgoing expeditions, plus photography, web development and social media coverage. Buijs is the founder of Mud and Adventure (mudandadventure.com), a site focused on adventure sports and is a passionate travel and architecture photographer. (paul.buijs@mudandadventure.com)

Get Sponsored!

Hundreds of explorers and adventurers raise money each month to travel on world class expeditions to Mt. Everest, Nepal, Antarctica and elsewhere. Now the techniques they use to pay for their journeys are available to anyone who has a dream adventure project in mind, according to the new book from Skyhorse Publishing called: "*Get Sponsored: A Funding Guide for Explorers, Adventurers and Would Be World Travelers.*"

Author Jeff Blumenfeld, an adventure marketing specialist who has represented 3M, Coleman, Du Pont, Lands' End and Orvis, among others, shares techniques for securing sponsors for expeditions and adventures.

Buy it here: <http://www.amazon.com/Get-Sponsored-Explorers-Adventurers-Travelers-ebook/dp/B00H12FLH2>

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