

Life in the Free Air

THE MAKING OF AN ADVENTURE FILM
IN NORTHERN NORWAY

By Michael Powers

I stared down into Saltstraumen, the world's most powerful maelstrom, which was churning the surface of the sea to foam on all sides of our boat. The image of the whirlpool was a scene so terrifying that for long moments I forgot to take pictures.

Ragnar Mogstad, a renowned athlete from Hammerfest in Northern Norway stood beside me at the controls of his Zodiac inflatable boat. Even though normally he towered above the others in our film crew, in the midst of the raging water on Norway's northwest coast, he suddenly looked small and uneasy.

Then Ragnar threw open the throttle of his powerful motor, enabling our small film crew to barely maintain our position in the middle of the mighty current. Leaning over the bow of the boat, award-winning adventure filmmaker Allison Chase recorded the spectacle with her video camera. Another crew member grasped Allison's legs tightly to prevent her from being swept overboard. Grinning wildly, she glanced back and motioned Ragnar forward.

He hesitated. "You don't understand," Ragnar shouted above the roar of the maelstrom and the straining engine. "At any instant, a whirlpool could open, and we might fall 10 or 20 meters beneath the surface of the sea!"

Three members of our small film crew had traveled from California to Northern Norway near Bodo last summer to shoot footage for a sport adventure film for U.S. television. We had promised Outdoor Life Network

we'd show the fierce beauty and spirit of this Nordic land. We persuaded the local guides to lead us where possibly no one had ever deliberately gone before—into the heart of the raging Saltstraumen maelstrom.

So Ragnar relented, edging the Zodiac closer to where crew member Gordon Brown was battling to remain upright in his whitewater

police awaited them. "I hope no one called the authorities to report we were in trouble today," crew member Eric Ellingsen, a local diver, responded. "If the rescue helicopter leaves its pad, they charge 50,000 crowns (approximately \$7,000)!" But once again good fortune had smiled upon our group. My filmmaker friends were ecstatic with the 40 hours of video footage they



kayak. Brown, Allison's husband and filmmaking partner, had deliberately paddled into the epicenter of the maelstrom. He and his tiny craft were now being thrust violently, first one way and then another.

Yet Brown was smiling, and we knew he was all right.

Our adrenaline was still racing as we sped back across Skjerstadfjorden later that day. Ragnar entertained us by recounting the time his wife, Nina, also a champion athlete, waterskied through Saltstraumen. When they arrived home after that adventure,

Allison Chase films other kayakers off the northern coast of the Lofoten islands.

had gathered in Norway.

"It's a wrap," Gordon announced triumphantly, expressing in filmmaking lingo that the sports adventure show we had been sent here to make for U.S. television was "in the can."

I then reflected upon the series of events that had brought us to this magnificent northern land. I'd come to Norway the previous summer as a photojournalist and returned home

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EXPEDITION



Photos © Michael Powers

PHOTOGRAPHY

BY MICHAEL POWERS

Sunlight pours from the blue Chilean sky like molten Inca gold. The legendary Rio Bio-Bio, the greatest watercourse flowing from the South American continent to the Pacific, rushes seaward a few steps away. Our journey down the river has led us deep within the ancestral homeland of the once-fierce Mapuche Indians. Even now, dark eyes set in faces the color of ancient bronze observe every move from the forest's edge. The Indians have good cause to be concerned. Construction is about to begin downstream on a dam that will flood and destroy this lush canyonland where they have lived for thousands of years. Our little band of *expedicionistas* has gathered from three continents to stand in solidarity with the Mapuches.

Paddlers, support crew and native guides rally behind a hastily unfurled expedition banner. Kayakers struggle to

balance their boats on end upon the uneven ground. I whisper a prayer for the capricious canyon winds not to appear, and make a few quick exposures. There will be no second chance. One by one, the kayakers slip into their sleek crafts and push out into the powerful current. Moments later, they vanish between the narrowing walls of *Cañon Cien Saltos*—Canyon of a Hundred Waterfalls.

Webster defines an expedition as "A journey or excursion undertaken for a specific purpose." All modern day expeditions, whether unheralded individual efforts or multi-million dollar

My wife Nani was in a reflective mood at sunset after a long hike through the Santa Lucia Mountains to a pinnacle high above the cloud-covered sea in Big Sur. The rich blacks and high contrast of Fuji Velvia film delivered dramatic silhouettes.



PATAGONIA, 2009

GUIDING POWERS

MICHAEL & MARIKA POWERS

"I don't want to be cute anymore, I want to be tough and brave."

Michael Powers still chuckles when he remembers his three-year-old daughter, Marika, uttering these words. *Adventure Kayak* caught up with the elder Powers, 76, from California's Miramar Beach, where he's lived in a Viking-style home of his own creation, facing the Pacific for the past 47 years.

Best known for his exploits with the Tsunami Rangers, a group of pioneering extreme conditions sea kayakers who hit their heyday in the '90s and early 2000s ("We're kind of over the hill now," he admits), Powers has also made some remarkable journeys with his equally adventurous daughter. When Marika isn't busy guiding wilderness expeditions in Alaska, Baja,

Costa Rica and Hawaii, she joins her father for ambitious trips all over the world. Together, they've made two multi-sport crossings of Patagonia, explored Cuba, paddled Mavericks and Alaska's Tracy Arm Fiord, and much else.

"My parents filled my childhood with wonder and even a little magic," Marika says. "They lived unconventional lives and gave me perspective and experiences outside the norm."

Here, father and daughter share some of those insights and discoveries.

ON FAMILY LIFE

Marika: Growing up, I realized that my family life was different, but not that it was special until I was older. I remember being totally embarrassed at my father clad in animal skins, running around like a wild man.

Michael: I was immature myself when I had



MARIKA, MOKELUMNE RIVER, 1988

kids. I wasn't the solid, patriarchal example. My own upbringing had very little stability; I went to 14 different schools in half-a-dozen states before high school. Marika is the same way as me—unconventional, adventurous—and probably for the same reasons. There's always a trade-off. You can't be an outdoor guide and a family patriarch.

ON PARENTING

Marika: My father was more relaxed in his parenting; my mother had to maintain a watchful eye to ensure no loss of limbs.

Michael: I'm not in Tsunami Rangers mode on trips with Marika. We've swum, we've been uncomfortable, but she's never been hurt on our adventures.

ON KAYAKING

Marika: My father took me on my first kayaking trip, and I hated it. Totally traumatizing. We flipped multiple times. I remember him holding onto his camera bag with one hand and his freaked out seven-year-old with the other, floating down the middle of the river.

Michael: I had just gotten into kayaking and I read about the East Carson River, which flows out of the Sierras into the Carson Desert. The article said it would be easy class II, but it was actually pretty challenging. We were novices; I had these little inflatable boats, no helmets, no life vests. It was a two-day trip, with a camp out at a hot springs. I shudder now to think how ill-prepared we were. Marika didn't hold it against me, though.

ON PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Marika: I love being out in Alaska. I feel most content out there, and while I don't 'live' anywhere, coming back to Alaska always feels like coming home.

Michael: I've expressed my concern to Marika that she's 40 and hasn't got a home, you know, 'Where do old guides go?' I'd like to see her have roots. She just tells me, 'I like my life.' There's a Spanish saying—*paso a paso*—which means step-by-step. To stay in the moment—that's been my philosophy and it's hers as well.



THE GOOD FIGHT

MARTIN LITTON AT 89

A FILM BY

MARK FRASER

JAMES FOX

MICHAEL POWERS

AN OCEANSTUDIO PRODUCTION

COPYRIGHT 2006 MARKFRASER

DVD

The image shows three kayakers in red kayaks navigating a turbulent white-water rapids. The kayakers are wearing helmets and life jackets. The water is churning and white with foam. The kayakers are positioned at different points in the rapids, with one in the foreground and two further back. The overall scene is dynamic and action-packed.

Extreme SEA KAYAKING

ERIC SOARES AND
MICHAEL POWERS

FOREWORD BY
DEREK C. HUTCHINSON

Ragged Mountain Press

The joys of adventure travel

It was one of those free-spirit days that adventure tour companies usually include in their trip itineraries.

Our group had just returned from the lost city of Machu Picchu to Cuzco, Peru. Now my wife Nani and I were eager to engage in a little exploration on our own.

The cobblestone streets of the ancient Inca capital were glistening with morning mist as we made our way to the edge of town. We boarded an old bus and began to rumble up from 11,000-foot Cuzco towards the towering Andes. After about an hour, we disembarked on impulse in a rustic mountain village.

As the noise and dust of the bus faded away, we noticed a young Indian woman standing a few yards away, a sack of raw wool on her back and a beautiful baby gazing out contentedly from within her home-spun rebozo.

"An Inca Madonna and child," I thought, resisting the desire to pull the camera out of my backpack. The woman walked up, a smile spreading across her ageless features. She spoke Spanish as well her native Quechua, and invited us up to her hilltop casa to see her weavings.

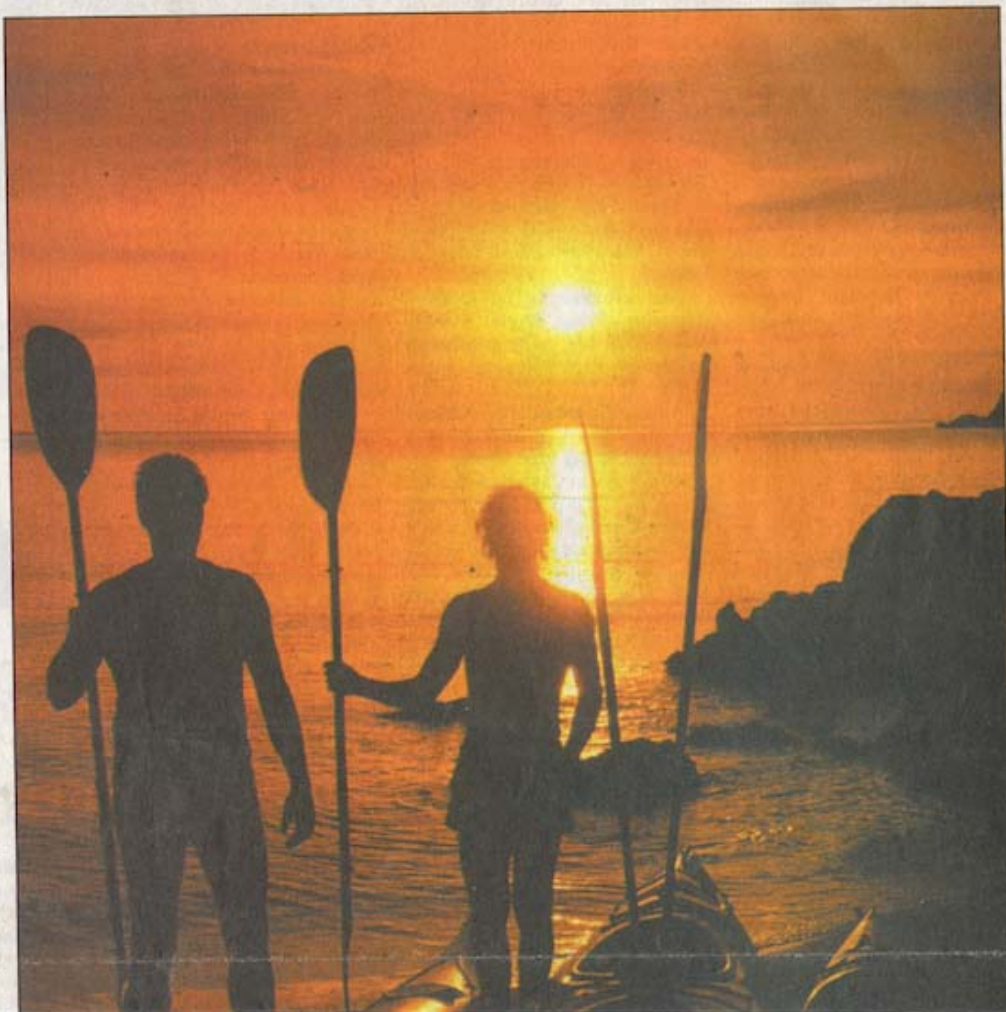
As our pleasant visit was ending, Esmerehilda placed her baby girl in Nani's arms. "I have three daughters and you have none," she observed. "Now my husband and I are building a new casa, and the cost of a door will be one million soles (about \$30). If you want this baby, you can have her for an million soles, nada mas."

Reluctantly, we declined her offer, imagining the stir this little item would create when we reached U.S. customs! Yet whenever I project that photo of Nani holding Esmerehilda's baby and smiling ecstatically at slide shows, it always moves my American audiences deeply.

Have you ever yearned to wander through a mystical, faraway land, unencumbered by little more than the thirst for adventure and a daypack containing your passport and camera?

Exotic wilderness locations far beyond the reach of most of us a few years ago have become easily accessible today. However, extremes of weather, geography and politics can make venturing into unfamiliar territory seem difficult, perhaps even dangerous.

Fortunately, infrastructure supporting adventure travel is now established worldwide. Professionally guid-



[FILM]

Keeping a legacy flowing

MIRAMAR'S POWERS BRINGS CONSERVATION LEGEND TO FILM

BY STACY TREVENON
[stacy@hmbreview.com]

Michael Powers of Miramar won't forget one particular moment in his first river trip with conservation giant Martin Litton.

It was in 1997, when they approached the roaring Kwagunt Rapid on the Colorado River deep in the Grand Canyon. That was old stomping grounds to river veteran Litton, but it was an uneasy new experience for Powers.

"Like an old lion with his mane of white hair blowing in the wind, Martin Litton rose to his feet from the cockpit of his classic wooden dory, 'Sequoia,' and glared downstream into the rapid he'd faced countless times before ..." Powers wrote in his first draft of an article he published in *Paddler* magazine this month.

He goes on to tell in detail the hair-raising trip down the rapid and how Litton, then 80, handled the dory despite the fact he hadn't had a guide's license in years. At one point a thunderous wave knocked him out momentarily before he regained control of the flat-bottomed river boat.

Images like that pervade the 22-minute DVD "The Good Fight," which Powers produced and made with friends and fellow filmmakers Mark Fraser and James Fox. The film is a documentary of environmental crusader Litton, 90, and his work from saving the Grand Canyon in the 1950s to his current battle on behalf of giant Sequoia redwoods in California today.

It is an official selection for the Telluride Mountainfilm Festival held in Telluride, Colo., last

month where it received a Filmmaker's Award.

Powers attended the festival, but Litton was absent: He was stranded in Idaho after a river run when the Federal Aviation Administration closed local airports.

"It made for more drama that Litton didn't appear because he was stranded in Idaho because of the weather. This guy's a legend," Powers said admiringly.

Powers, who founded Miramar Beach Kayaks,



PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL POWERS

Michael Powers, left, and legendary river runner Martin Litton, share a moment on the Salmon River in Idaho last summer.

met Litton some 15 years ago and has run rivers with him in Litton's beloved Grand Canyon.

Litton's no-compromise stance first surfaced when he was 16 and battling the proposed Angeles Crest Highway, which would have cut its swath through hiking land he loved in Southern California. During World War II he served as a glider pilot in Europe and then came home to fall in love with the Colorado River.

He has worked as a senior editor for *Sunset*

magazine and founded Grand Canyon Dorys with old river boats he brought down from Oregon. His environmental and conservation efforts included protection in Dinosaur National Monument in Utah and Colorado, Redwood National Park in California, the Grand Canyon and now California sequoias.

"Nature has a right to be here, untrammelled, unfettered," he says in Powers' *Paddler* article.

Currently Litton lives in Portola Valley with Esther, his wife of nearly 60 years. They share the same house they did nearly half a century ago, and he boycotts computers, preferring his old manual typewriter, Powers said.

Powers' article chronicles classic Litton adventures like flying his old Cessna plane low through the Grand Canyon, running the Salmon River in Idaho as well as Grand Canyon waterways, and more colorful stories that enchant fellow campers on wilderness forays.

Powers previewed "The Good Fight" at the Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society before it went to Telluride, and says that if there's interest he will show it again, among other films he is planning to screen there. He said he is also negotiating with public television outlets to show it.

Powers is not the only person involved with championing this film. He and his fellow "Good Fight" filmmakers belong to the OceanStudio, an alliance of filmmakers, writers and photographers who are kindred spirits in promoting the goal of protecting and nurturing a deeper understanding for the natural world.

This synergistic group numbers about 12 from all around the country, he said, and is in the process of completing a coffee table book of photos and essays, "Spirit of Adventure," due to be published within a year.

Powers can be reached at 726-2748. ■

Half Moon Bay Review

JUNE 14, 2006

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL POWERS

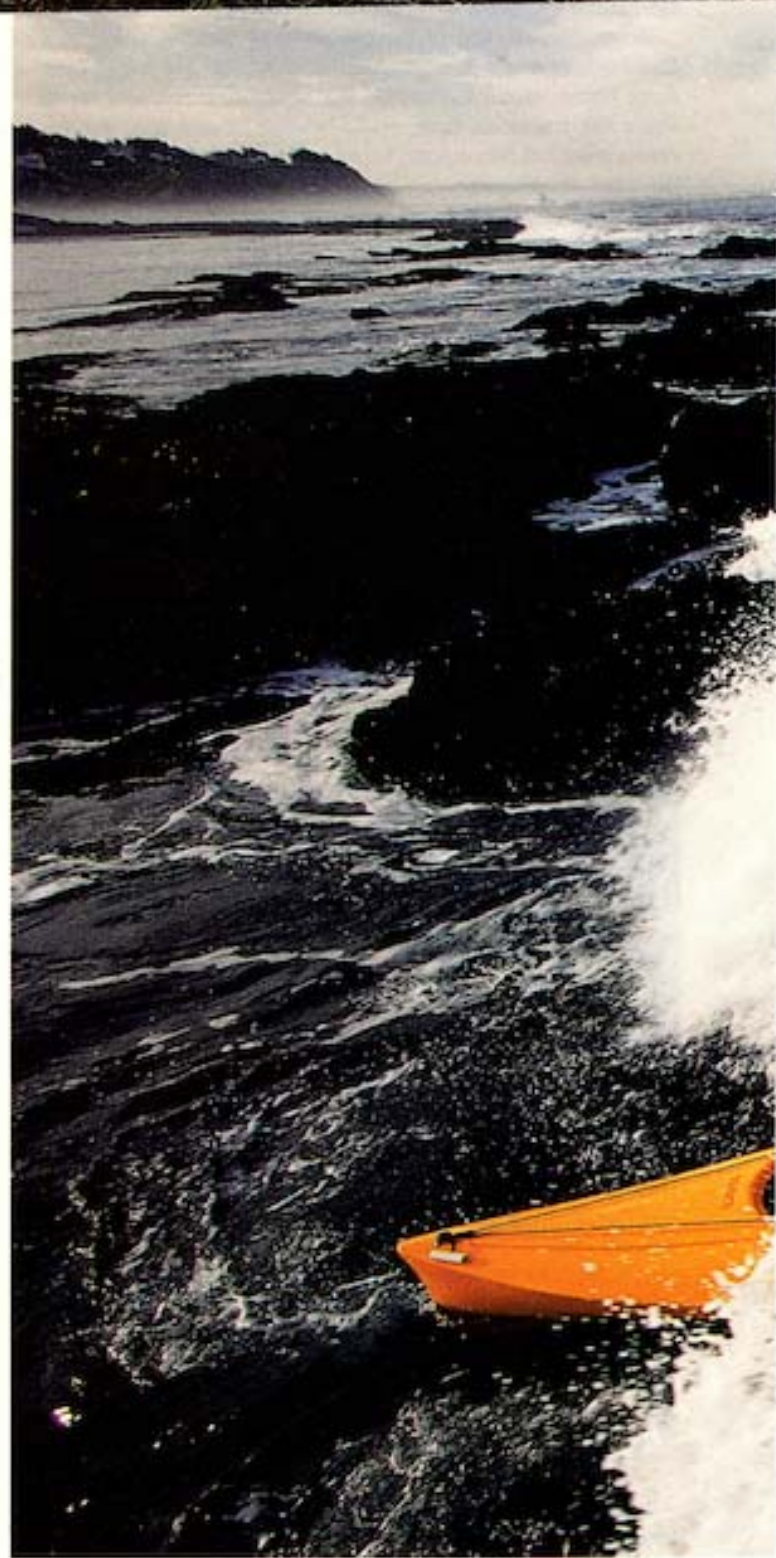
A Maverick Adventure

Legendary waves and an occasional great white shark make paddling the infamous Mavericks Reef on the northern California coast a memorable experience.

“The ocean out here is like a cathedral, a place of worship!” Eric Soares, commander of the Tsunami Rangers, an “extreme condition” sea kayaking team, was expounding from his favorite pulpit, the cockpit of a sleek Tsunami X-1 Rocket Boat. He had rendezvoused with members of the Miramar Beach Kayak Club for a surf-zone mission at Mavericks Reef, a few miles south of San Francisco on the northern California coast.

Right on cue, a squadron of brown pelicans sailed down out of the turquoise sky and began surfing the invisible air currents inches above the waves. A silver-pelted sea otter floated on his back in the midst of a kelp forest, relishing a succulent morsel plucked from the rocky bottom. Pure white gulls hovered overhead, eager for any scrap of sushi the otter might disregard. Two California sea lions came bursting to the surface at the crest of a wave, surfed effortlessly down the falls, and vanished beneath our boats as suddenly as they had appeared. They were the masters here, and we were the students. Even Soares seemed temporarily humbled.

“Outside!” Eric cried, spinning his X-1 around to get into surfing position. The first of a set of formidable waves, flung from afar by some distant and unseen storm, was racing straight toward the battered stretch of open sea reef where our band of kayakers had paddled. Everyone watched for a few moments, mesmerized, as the swell encountered the quickly rising floor of the sea beyond the reef and began to rise skyward. Soon it had formed a translucent green wall 15 feet above our heads. The rest of us charged seaward,



hoping to punch over the towering wave before it broke. But Soares swung the bow of his boat around toward the golden hills rising above Half Moon Bay. Now he was totally committed. As I clawed my way up the steepening wall and over the top, I glanced back over my shoulder toward Soares. For a split second I glimpsed his kayak,

Michael Powers

Michael Powers became involved with the Tsunami Rangers, an elite "extreme condition" sea kayaking team, in 1987, and was swept into the realm of serious sea kayaking. In 1992, the Tsunami Rangers were featured in a National Geographic Explorer TV special, *Wave Warriors*. Since then, Powers and the other Rangers have participated in numerous television productions. Powers presently holds the rank of commander in the Tsunami Rangers. He and fellow Ranger Eric Soares recently co-authored a book, *Extreme Sea Kayaking*, published by Ragged Mountain Press, a subsidiary of McGraw-Hill. He is currently working on a new book, *Kayak in the Sea*, featuring his stories and photographs of paddling adventures all over the world.



IN THE ZONE: For those with the skills, paddling northern California's Mavericks Reef is an exhilarating experience. Pat Tierney and Lloyd Hopkins punch through an incoming wave.

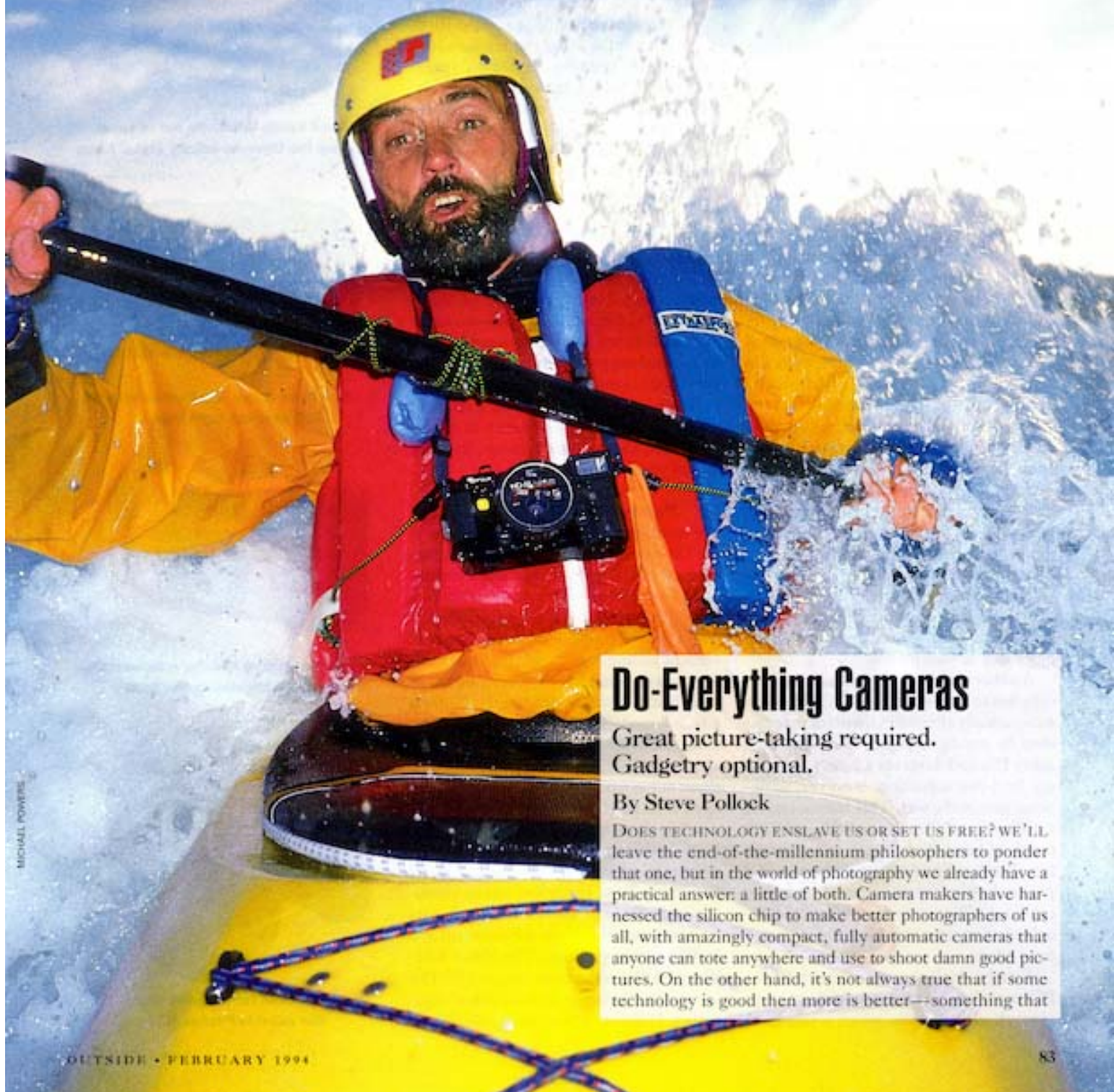
nearly vertical on the face of the breaking wave. Then he was gone, hurtling shoreward on a long, thrilling ride.

To safely enjoy this world of jagged rock and breaking waves, the Rangers always paddle as a closely knit team. Following their lead, a group of northern California paddlers have banded together to

form the Miramar Beach Kayak Club. On a typical weekend morning, a half-dozen intrepid souls converge at the club's headquarters at Miramar Beach on Half Moon Bay. Kayaks of different sizes and styles are pulled off storage racks. Seasoned trip leaders help the less experienced select the right boats and gear for the conditions they

REVIEW

H A R D W A R E • S O F T W A R E



Do-Everything Cameras

Great picture-taking required.
Gadgetry optional.

By Steve Pollock

DOES TECHNOLOGY ENSLAVE US OR SET US FREE? WE'LL leave the end-of-the-millennium philosophers to ponder that one, but in the world of photography we already have a practical answer: a little of both. Camera makers have harnessed the silicon chip to make better photographers of us all, with amazingly compact, fully automatic cameras that anyone can tote anywhere and use to shoot damn good pictures. On the other hand, it's not always true that if some technology is good then more is better—something that

(Main image) Michael Powers positioned his own whitewater kayak just a few yards away from Emmy-award winning adventure cinematographer Gordon Brown as they ventured out onto an open sea reef off the Northern California coast. When a big wave crashed over the reef, Powers had a split second to record the action before the breaking wave engulfed him. (Fuji HD-M waterproof camera; Sensia 100.)

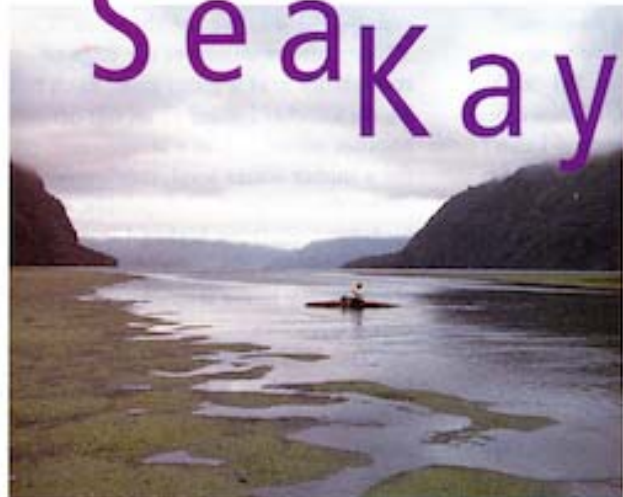
(Lower left) Arlene Burns ran a stretch of the wild Chatkal River in Siberia in her kayak. She then scrambled out on an overhanging rock and pulled her Nikon FE2 with a 80-200mm lens from a dry bag to capture this perspective of her Russian companion hurtling through a "Vodopod" (waterfall) in a homemade raft.

A New Wave In Water Sports Photography



© Michael Powers, 1987

Sea Kayaking



Last night a violent storm from Antarctica swept into Fiordo Cahuelmo on the coast of southern Chile. Now with the dawn, bird songs announce that peace has returned, enticing me from my warm tent. I gaze upward into the rainforest canopy, inhaling deeply. Through a luminous corridor where vines and bamboo have been cut away with machetes, I can see mist swirling across the surface of the fjord. I yearn suddenly to be out there, beneath the open sky. I carry my foldable kayak to the water's edge and slip away from the sleeping camp.

The fjord is narrow here in its uppermost reaches, squeezed between lush green palisades rising steeply on both sides, the westernmost flanks of the Andes. The bow of my kayak slices cleanly through the thick mist clinging to the water's mirror-like surface. High above, a waterfall shimmers down in the soft pre-dawn light. The tide is

**"Look, the little white lambs are free again
and running across the sea!"**

—said by Chilean fishermen when Antarctic storms lash the sea into foam

ebbing, and I can feel the grip of sea-bound current against my boat. Ahead, I make out a maze of barnacle-encrusted boulders. A sweep of the paddle swings me back on a parallel course with the rugged shoreline. I move from one eddy to the next, much as I would on a river, until the rock labyrinth plays out in deeper water. The fjord grows wider and the first rays of the rising sun stream down to warm me.

I rest my paddle across the cockpit and relax, allowing the current to sweep me towards the mouth of the fjord. My mind travels back over the series of events that led me here. Several years ago, reports filtered back to the States about an American named

Rick Klein, a radical young forest advocate who had gone to South America to search for specimens of the legendary alerce tree. For millennia these gigantic conifers flourished in the coastal rainforests of Chile. But in just a few generations, early European settlers, coveting the alerce's beautiful and durable wood, cut most of the great trees from their accessible lowland habitat. Klein was intrigued by rumors of cathedral groves of the ancient trees said to exist in remote Andean valleys. Eventually his quest to find the lost alerce ignited the interest and support of others, and in the late '70s he emerged as the founder of a grass roots environmental organization called Ancient Forest International (AFI).



TO SAVE A CHILEAN COAST

story and photos by Michael Powers

A series of exploratory expeditions followed. Klein argued that proving the existence of cathedral groves of ancient alerce would encourage the preservation of their remaining habitat. Yet he and his followers soon learned a few hard lessons about getting around in the Bosque Valdiviano, the temperate rainforest sprawling along the Chilean coast south the 40th parallel. A glance at a topo map reveals why even today the region remains nearly roadless. Beyond the quaint town of Puerto Montt, southern terminus of the Pan American Highway, a series of fjords cut deeply into the coastal mountains. The coastline begins to crumble and form thousands of islands, the beginning of a vast archipelago that extends all the way to the end of the continent. On an early AFI expedition, someone brought an old folding kayak which

proved invaluable for reaching areas inaccessible by foot. From then on, Klein encouraged sea and river kayakers to bring their boats to help.

When I met Klein, he was in the midst of planning yet another ambitious eco-expedition to southern Chile. The possibility of paddling to help save the wilderness proved irresistible, and I talked two of my long-time kayaking friends, John Weed and Bob Stender, into joining me. For months, we honed our expedition and paddling skills along rugged sections of the Pacific Coast from Alaska to Baja. Then on a winter day in California, we boarded an Aero Peru jet bound for the southern hemisphere.

We reached Puerto Montt in early February, at the peak of the austral summer. The town had a frontier spirit, like Jack London's Seattle during the

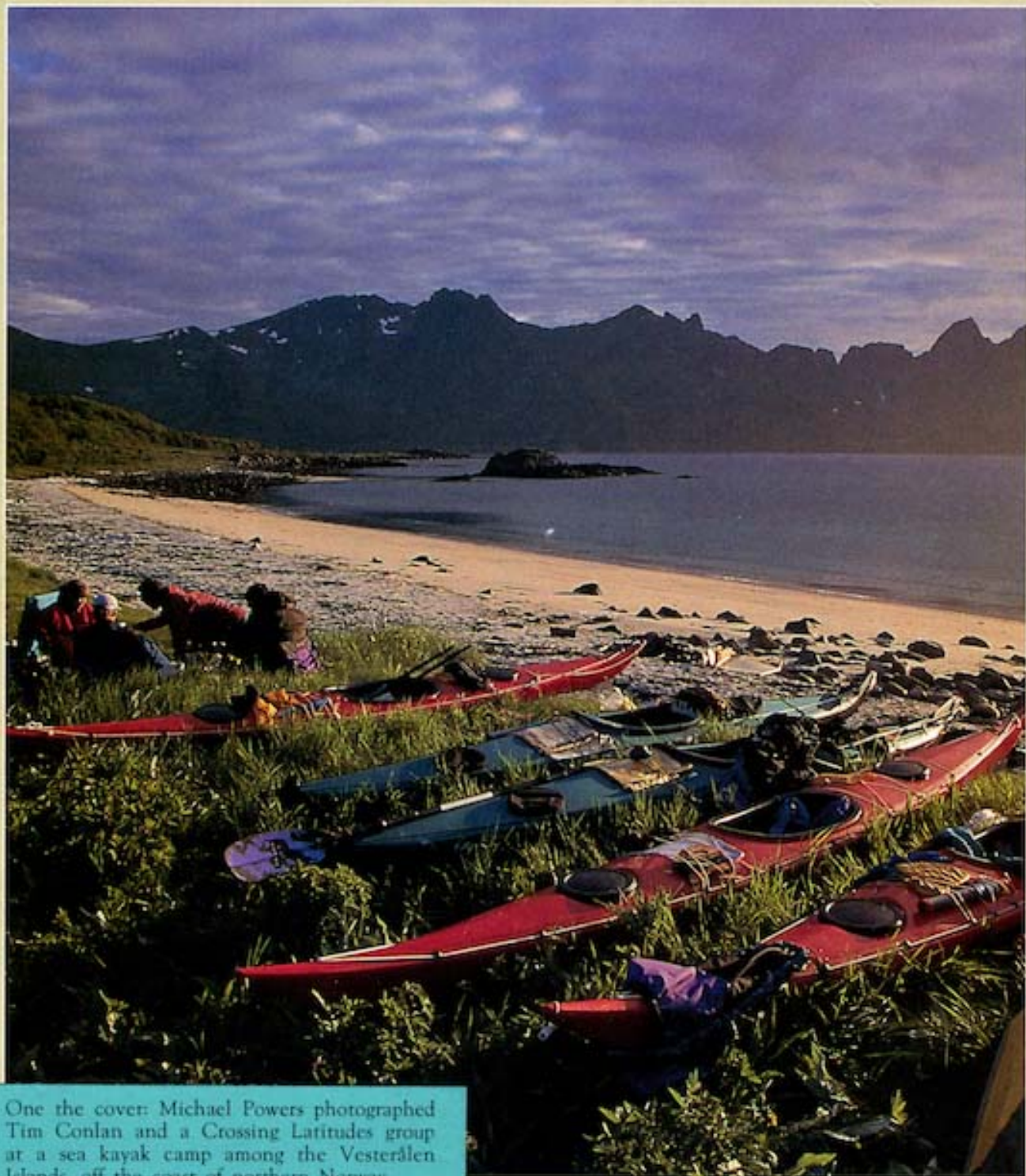
Yukon Gold Rush, with a dash of Gauguin's Tahiti thrown in for good measure. For two days, we gathered provisions and information. On our final afternoon in town we lingered at the Cafe Central, where pretty, dark-eyed girls served us steaming cups of *te con leche*. Mountaineers who had just returned from climbing Aconcagua and fishermen from the *costa del sur* fueled our enthusiasm with stories of the great wilderness surrounding us.

Early the next morning we crowded aboard a local bus bound for La Frontera. The pristine seacoast and rainforest we passed appeared as our own Pacific Northwest might have looked a century ago. Periodically the road ended at a deep fjord, where a ferry eventually arrived to transport us to the other side. Between fjords, the narrow road wound up and over steep

Clockwise from top left: exploring Fiordo Cahuelmo; relaxing on the boat ride back to camp; the endangered alerce trees; Team Expedition Chile; hiking through the alerce forest; and spreading the word about the expedition's cause.

SEA KAYAKER

Sculling Made Easy ♦ Paddling in Norway ♦ Kayak Seating



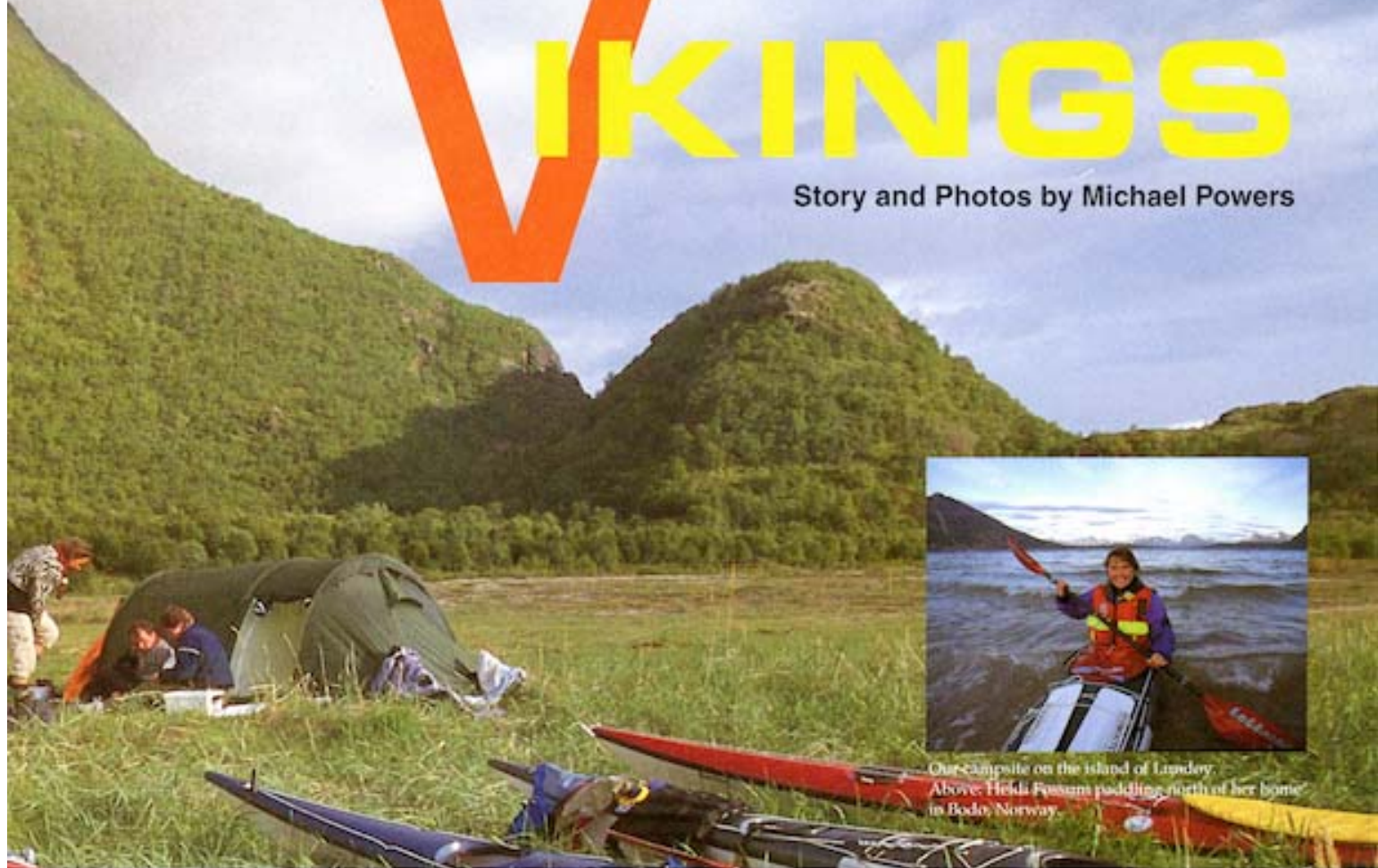
One the cover: Michael Powers photographed Tim Conlan and a Crossing Latitudes group at a sea kayak camp among the Vesterålen Islands, off the coast of northern Norway.

\$3.95 U.S.

August 1997 VOL. 14 NO. 3

Realm of the VIKINGS

Story and Photos by Michael Powers



Our campsite on the island of Landoy. Above: Heidi Fossum paddling north of her home in Bodo, Norway.

forms a weather fence between the northern ice cap and the rest of Europe, a meteorological battlefield where tropical and polar forces meet and interact, sometimes explosively.

I heard about an American wilderness guide named Tim Conlan, who was seeking others to join him kayaking among the Lofoten and Vesterålen islands. Because of the exploratory nature of the trip, he was encouraging only those who were fit and prepared to "...enjoy the daily mental and physical challenges of a serious expedition." He wrote: "You must be capable of hiking ten or twelve miles at elevation or paddling twenty-five miles in moderately rough seas...and be willing to participate in all aspects of decision making and being an active member of a challenging expedition." I signed up.

In mid-June, a series of flights bore me from Seattle across the top of the world to Copenhagen, then to Oslo, and finally, northward along the ragged Norwegian coast to the town of

Bodo, about eighty kilometers above the Arctic Circle. A week remained before my scheduled rendezvous with Tim Conlan farther north, so I looked up two members of the local sea kayaking club, Heidi Fossum and Frank Jacobsen. We piled into Frank's VW van and drove along the waterfront until we came to a wooden building, modern, but built in a traditional Norwegian style. Inside the Bodo Kajakk Klubb, I saw a dozen club boats and about eighty privately owned sea kayaks, mostly of European manufacture, neatly stored in racks that rose to the ceiling. The clubhouse had been designed by Jacobsen himself, one of the town's leading architects. The land had been purchased collectively and the facility built by club members. I'd heard about the popularity of highly-organized sport clubs in Scandinavia and it was inspiring to actually visit one. Cooperation like this was unknown among paddlers in the states, and I pondered how we might benefit by

considering the advantages of the Norwegian system.

Over dinner that night, we made plans for a paddle among the islands scattered along the coast to the north of Bodo. The club provided me with a sleek, Finnish-made craft, appropriately called a Viking. Heidi and I met the next morning to buy provisions before boarding an express passenger boat with our kayaks. Soon we were racing north through a maze of green mountains.

At Engeløy ('øy' at the end of a place name designates an island), Heidi's friend Inge awaited us on the dock. We loaded our boats on top of his vintage Saab and drove across the island on a winding road. En route, Inge pointed out the fish farm where he worked. The sun was sinking low in the sky by the time we had finished stuffing our boats with camping gear and a week's worth of food. When I appeared anxious about reaching our first campsite before dark, my companions laughed. "We're in the midst of the

THE SONS OF NORWAY

Viking

APRIL 1998

ABOUT THE COVER

U.S. filmmaker Gordon Brown balances suspended between two walls of ice on Svartisen Glacier in Northern Norway. Brown was part of a small crew that shot a sport adventure film for Outdoor Life Network.

Photo by Michael Powers

Life IN THE Free Air

Filmmakers conquer Northern Norway's Svartisen Glacier

6 Life in the Free Air

Photojournalist and writer Michael Powers takes us along on a risk-laden journey through oceanic maelstroms and glacial avalanches along Norway's northwest coast—all in the name of capturing the region's splendor on film.



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Put In

- ◆ *Wanted: Your Perfect Canoe*
- ◆ *Arkansas Rivers Protected*
- ◆ *Olympic Slalom on Hiatus in '96?*

Speaking for the Bio

Environmental politicians — Kennedys, even — step up to help preserve the world's wildest river

by Michael Powers

Jaime Prado, the whitewater slalom kayaking champion of Chile, and I drive the dirt road along the Rio Bio-Bio in a lashing, drenching rainstorm. We stop periodically to clear the road of washtub-sized boulders that have plunged from above. Overhead, waterfalls roar and the sky bathes the verdant canyon walls in swiftly changing patterns of light and shadow as the year's first big Antarctic storm rebounds across the cordillera.

It is March, and the sensible season for running the Bio-Bio, southern Chile's fabled, endangered, whitewater river, has passed. I shift *Pablito*, our ancient VW Klienbus, into low and jam the pedal to the floor. We lurch forward toward a rendezvous that offers new hope in the desperate struggle to save this beautiful canyonland from damming and destruction.

By mid afternoon, nearly 50 rain-soaked souls have gathered at a remote camp on the upper Bio-Bio, preparing to run the river and see this spectacular place first-hand. Among us are three sons of the late Robert F. Kennedy — Bobby, Jr., a senior project attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, and his brothers, Michael and



Bobby, Jr., at work on the Bio for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Max. Also along are members of the power elite from Washington and Santiago, leaders from the Chilean and U.S. environmental movements, assorted journalists, and a stellar convergence of old Bio-Bio river hands.

The high-profile gathering signifies the level of international concern for the Bio-Bio,

which flows unimpounded to the Pacific from its headwaters in the Andes. The Chilean government and ENDESA, the national power utility, are trying to secure a half-billion dollar loan from the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank to help build seven hydropower dams on the river.

before it decides whether to make the loan. The study, created by ENDESA, is only a cursory statement, providing no alternatives to the dams and promoting the project with promises of jobs and limitless prosperity for everyone. Everyone except the native Pehuenche Indians. The Pehuenches, wise in the ways of the earth, are not so easily fooled. They know that the dams would wipe out their land, and with it some of the last vestiges of pure Indian culture remaining in Chile.

Chilean law does not recognize Pehuenche ownership of their territorial homeland. Currently, the land they occupy is privately owned, and ENDESA is negotiating to buy it. Unless, of course, the mounting political pressure on the World Bank and IFC can

Save the Bio!

To express your support for efforts to save the Bio-Bio, contact:

- ◆ **Grupo de Accion por el Bio-Bio** Director Juan Pablo Orrego, Antonio Lopez de Bello 075, Barrio Bella Vista, Santiago, CHILE; phone: 56-2-375251
- ◆ **International Rivers Network** 1847 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94703; 510-848-1155
- ◆ **Natural Resources Defense Council** 1350 New York Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20005; 202-783-7800
- ◆ **River Conservation International** 1200 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Suite 220, Washington, DC 20036; 202-463-4378



Dennis Kuhr blasts through the surf zone on the Northern California coast. Shot while standing in the shorebreak immediately behind the kayaker, with a waterproof Fuji HD-M with 38mm lens and built-in fill flash, loaded with Fujichrome 100.

America,

Michael Powers

A Globe-trotting

American photojournalist returns home to the land of ultimate adventure

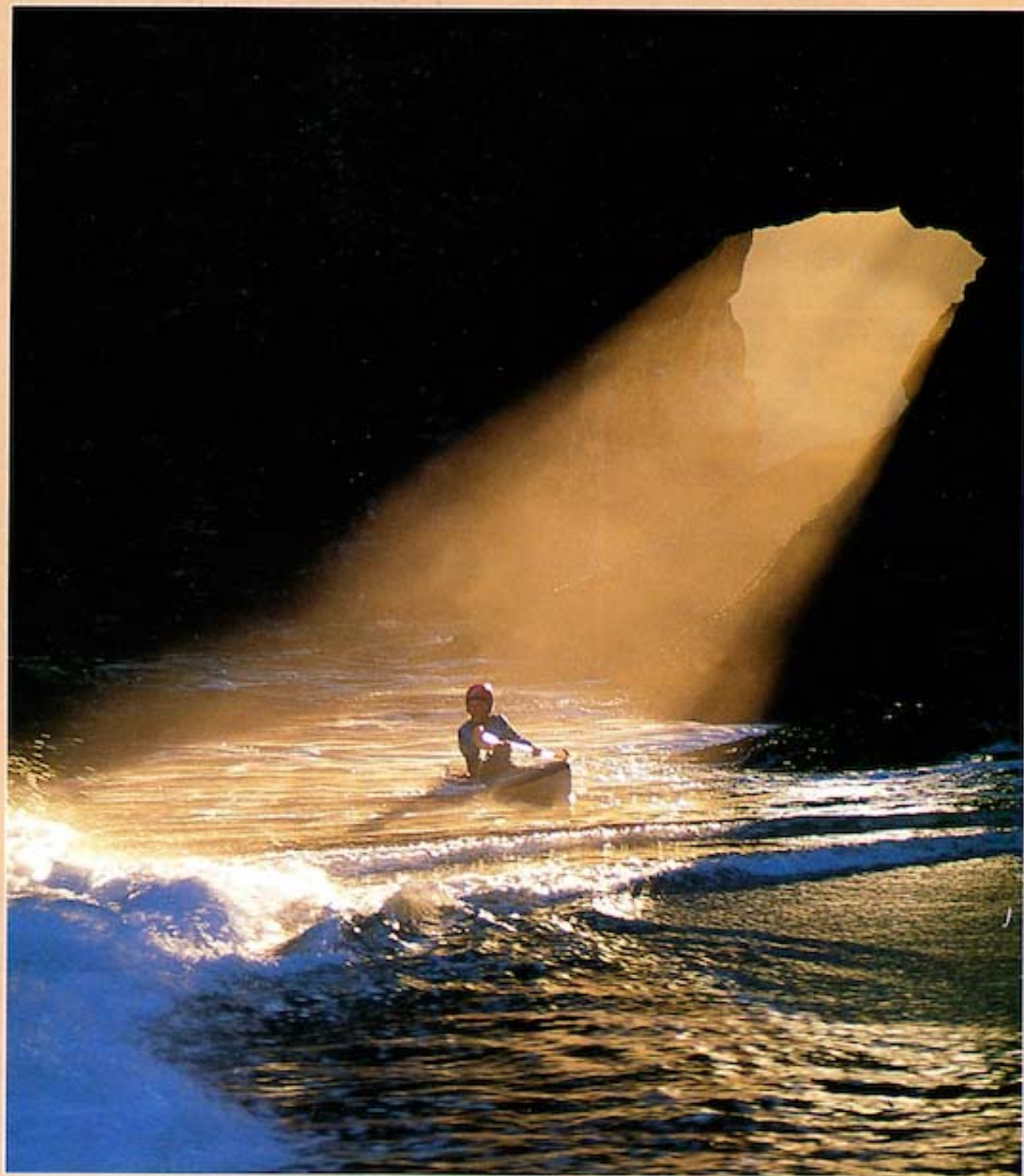
I never saw the rogue wave that bore down silently behind me. With the waterproof camera tethered to my life jacket, I was photographing my fellow Tsunami Rangers, an “extreme condition” sea kayaking group, as we paddled in storm surf off the Northern California coast. We had approached a jagged-toothed reef where a herd of sea lion bulls were hauled out, starkly silhouetted against the sun path on the sea. When the alpha bulls congregate like this, it means their mating season is about to begin, and these 1500 pound aquatic quarterbacks were obviously in no mood for company. As we drew closer, they stampeded into the surf, which was soon boiling with the movement of their powerful bodies. They began taking turns charging up to our kayaks with their impressive canine teeth bared. A hasty retreat would have been the sensible course at this point, but the dramatic interaction between the big bulls and the Rangers was an irresistible photo op. Shooting wildly, I had soon exposed the roll of Fujichrome 100 in my Nikons. I unclipped the camera in order to exchange it for a backup waterproof bungied to the deck of my kayak. Too late, I turned back to face fifteen feet of translucent green water cresting above my head. The next instant I was capsized, right in the midst of the pack of angry bull seals.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL POWERS

Adventure

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ON THE COVER

Patrick Powers captured this action shot that Michael Powers set up while battling the waves off the Northern California coast. Powers is a member of the Tsunami Rangers, an "extreme condition" sea kayaking team.



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TEXT AND
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The Sherpas say ... the greatest sins are to pick wildflowers and to threaten children.

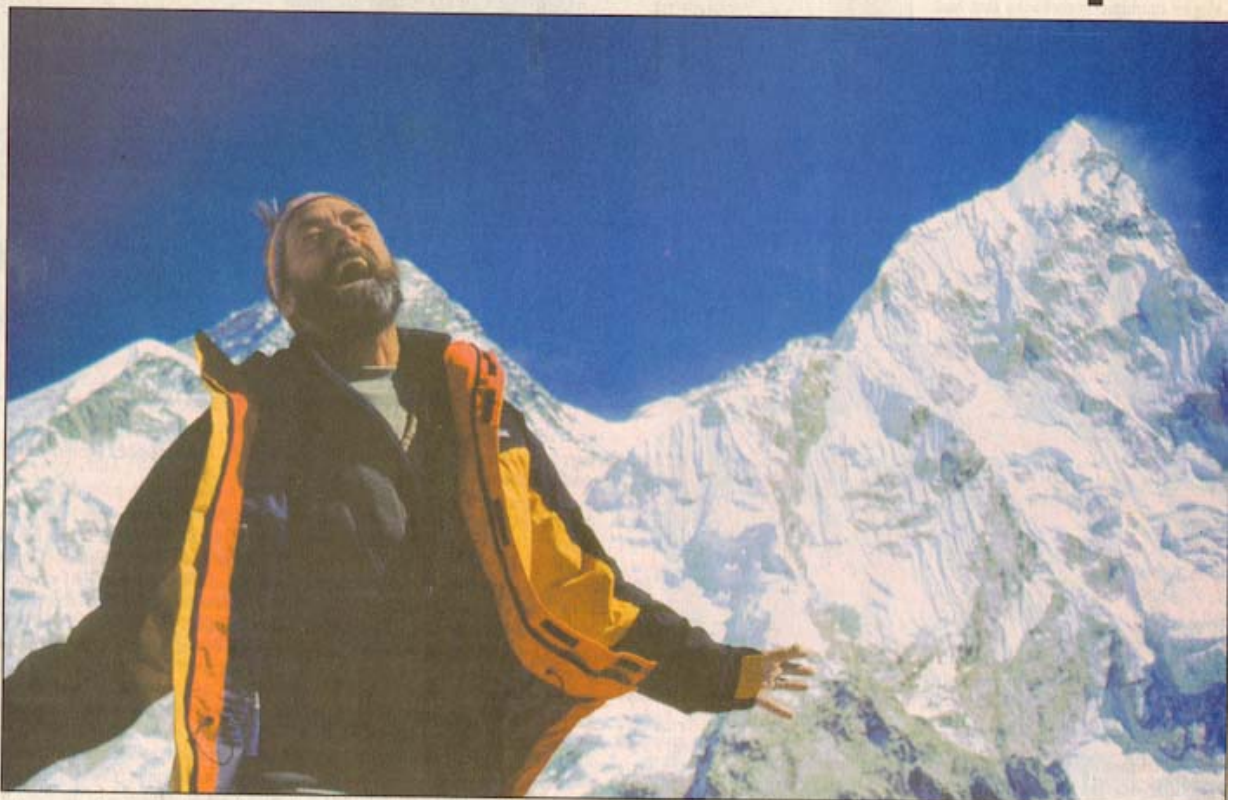
— Peter Matthiessen, "The Snow Leopard"

Like playful mountain devas, powerful winds buffeted our little plane as we approached the Himalayas.

Suddenly, Lukla village, gateway to the fabled Khumbu region, appeared through the mist ahead. Our landing place, a steeply sloping strip of grass, hung suspended between the immense massif of ice and stone rising up beyond the town and the dark rainforest below.

In just a few hours, we would be trekking among those snow-covered peaks, the highest mountains in the world. Yet up here in the Himalayan sky, the adventure had already begun. The Nepalese pilots cut back on their throttles, and the Twin Otter began a bumpy descent towards the airstrip. I whispered a prayer that we would not overshoot the tiny runway.

Safely on the ground, we were greeted by the smiling, sun-burnished faces of our Sherpa team, eight men and two women. The trip leader, a free-spirited Brit named Richard Munro, had flown up with us from Kathmandu.



Above, exultant photojournalist Michael Powers on the summit of Kala Patar with Mt. Everest behind him. Below left, a young Sherpa porter in the Khumbu Region of Eastern Nepal. Below right, a young Sherpa woman on trail to Mt. Everest.



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Cover photograph: Michael Powers captured this pod of swift-moving dolphins along Kauai's Na Pali coast with a waterproof camera.

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The Making of a Sea Kayaking Film

The call came in mid-January at the height of a big winter storm. The voice was Gordon Brown of Summit Films, and he sounded excited. "Hey, Michael, *National Geographic* wants us to do a documentary about the Tsunami Rangers for their *Explorer* series. We start shooting next week!"

After I hung up, the significance of Gordon's words began to sink in. Soon a crack adventure film-making team would be arriving, right at the height of the winter storm season, expecting to see "extreme condition" kayaking demonstrated on cue. True we love to bash around in sea caves and rock gardens in storm surf conditions. And we are accustomed to these activities attracting attention, but not always in such a flattering manner. We have been banned from a number of beaches by nervous park rangers, concerned that we might prove an embarrassment by drowning ourselves in their jurisdiction. Then the American Canoe Association, after reviewing our video *Adventures of the Tsunami Rangers*, promptly cancelled our race insurance. Yet we continue trying

to demonstrate that "extreme condition" sea kayaking, when undertaken by highly experienced and properly equipped individuals who adhere to certain principles and procedures, can be a reasonably safe activity. Yet until now our high-risk ocean adventures had always been strictly on our own terms.

As the first day of filming approached, the sea seemed to grow increasingly violent. "Ay... Caramba!" sighed Eric Soares, commander of the Rangers, as he studied the weather satellite picture on TV. Storm fronts were lined up across the Pacific, like jostling schoolboys eager for the final bell to ring.

Word came that *National Geographic* felt a woman paddler might bring an added dimension to the film. Yet there were no women among the ranks of the Tsunami Rangers. No doubt it was our reputation (largely undeserved) as kayakers on the lunatic fringe that had discouraged many candidates of either sex from paddling forth to join us. The crisis was resolved when director Gordon Brown recalled a Class V river boater

and expert rock climber named Maura Kistler, whom he had worked with recently on a commercial for the State of West Virginia. She had the *right stuff*, Gordon assured us. "But how will she react to paddling in storm surf along rocky coasts?" Eric wanted to know. That was precisely the point, Gordon argued convincingly. "The Rangers will introduce Maura to the challenges of extreme condition sea kayaking."

By the final week of January, the film crew had assembled in Northern California. We soon realized these folks were, without exception, highly qualified, seasoned adventure film-makers. Adrienne Ciuffo, former senior story editor for *National Geographic Explorer*, was the film's producer. Lisa Blackaller would soon prove indispensable as the production coordinator. Veteran film maker Roger Brown had earned an Emmy and numerous other accolades for his action-packed documentaries over the years. His sons Gordon, Michael and Nick had grown up mak-

When National Geographic decided to make a documentary about "extreme condition" sea kayaking, nobody counted on the weather being so darn cooperative.

ing movies with their father in some of the earth's wildest regions. This would be 29-year-old Gordon's first crack at directing an important production. Jim, Eric, Maura and I, referred to in movie making jargon as the "talent," would do the paddling.

Filming commenced in front of the Miramar Beach Kayak Club, the Rangers' headquarters on Half Moon Bay. The normally mellow surf on this south-facing embayment was pumping, energized by big swells rolling in from Mexico. This was Maura's introduction to ocean paddling, and we were all relieved to discover that she was a com-

Story and Photos by Michael Powers



PADDLING TO SAVE A WILDERNESS

The
Coast
of
Southern
Chile



DURING THE FIRST THREE months of 1992, a group of American and Chilean paddlers explored over a thousand kilometers of the southern Chilean coast with sea and white water kayaks, and an ancient VW van. Their expedition had three objectives: to bring the attention of

the world to a unique and endangered wilderness, thereby encouraging its preservation, to search along the coast for the perfect location to create an "eco-community," a permanent base camp for Chile's growing environmental movement, and to have a great paddling adventure.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL POWERS



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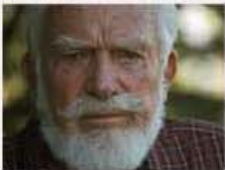
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