

EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch
ISSUE #8 - August 2024

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Billionaire Trekking - Can Adventure Be Combined with Luxury?

by Richard Bangs

Back in the mythopoetic days of Mungo Park, David Livingstone, Ernest Shackleton, and more recently, Edmund Hillary, adventure was rugged, rough, and uncomfortable, tasty as hardtack, soft as rock and ice. But things change, and **now it is quite possible to undertake grand adventures with the same thrills and sense of discovery as predecessors, but in style and splendor, without privation and indigence.** A challenging trek or a river run during the day can fold into a five-star property and a Michelin-ranked eatery in the evening.

Over recent years I've designed and organized such adventures for the likes of Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Barry Diller, Martha Stewart and others. Am today organizing a safari for a legendary producer base-camped out of [Xigera](#) in Botswana, a lodge the Financial Times called "The Versailles of Africa."

In my 20s I made a number of first descents of upper stretches of wild rivers around the world, huddled for weeks on end in my sleeping bag on rocky banks enveloped sometimes in blizzards of biting insects. Earlier this year, under the auspices of the high-end Ugandan outfitter, [Ace Safaris](#), I made a whitewater raft run down the Victoria Nile, and on either end I stayed at two of the most spectacular lodges on the continent, [Wildwaters](#), which hangs over a class-V section of the Nile; and the [Nile Safari Lodge](#), below the enormous bask of crocodiles at the base of Murchison Falls. It was the quintessential blend of luxury and adventure.

And last fall I escorted an adventure designed by my friend Jack Wheeler, a week-long helicopter tour to the eight highest peaks in Nepal, disporting among high-altitude glaciers during the day and nesting in well-pillowed lower climes at night. Pushing limits, testing mettle in the wild, that's exhilarating. It's the rush of adrenaline on a first ascent, the satisfaction of completing a challenging trek, the camaraderie forged in shared hardship. But after a day spent battling the elements, wouldn't a steaming hot shower and a bed softer than a yak's underbelly feel like the ultimate reward? Wouldn't a perfectly cooked meal, enjoyed under a canopy of stars, taste ten times better after a day fueled by trail mix and grit?



Luxury nights in Africa at Onduli Ridge, Namibia

Luxury on an adventure isn't about canceling the challenge, it's about amplifying the experience. It's about knowing that at the end of a long day pushing your physical and mental limits, there's a haven waiting. A place to rest weary muscles, soothe sunburned skin, and relive the day's triumphs with a shared bottle of something fine.

As a passionate traveler and advocate for both the magnet of the unknown and the allure of refined comfort, I assert that not only can elements of adventure and luxury coexist, but they can also enhance one another, creating a richer and more fulfilling journey. **This synthesis of adventure and luxury opens new horizons, offering experiences that stimulate the mind, soothe the soul, and invigorate the spirit.**

Adventure, at its core, is about discovery and pushing beyond the boundaries of the familiar. It's about traversing uncharted terrains, engaging with diverse cultures, and immersing oneself in nature's raw beauty. The exhilaration of rafting the Zambezi River, trekking through the rainforests of Borneo, or scaling Andean peaks represents the quiddity of adventure. These experiences challenge us, broaden our perspectives, and leave indelible marks on our memories.



Hotel Exterior at Explora Patagonia



Xigera Safari Lodge, Botswana

Luxury, on the other hand, is often perceived as the antithesis of adventure—a realm of comfort, indulgence, and relaxation. However, luxury in travel has

evolved beyond mere opulence and extravagance. **It is now about authenticity, exclusivity, and personalized experiences that cater to the nuanced tastes of discerning travelers.** Luxury is found in the serene tranquility of a secluded villa in Bali, the meticulous craftsmanship of a bespoke safari camp in Botswana, or the refined elegance of a multi-course meal under the stars in the Moroccan desert. It eliminates the frets of leaky tents, lost supplies, or cold, lumpy meals. You can focus on the dazzling sights, the unexpected sounds, the rapture of the unknown.

The confluence of adventure and luxury creates a harmonious balance that elevates the travel experience. Imagine exploring the rugged landscapes of Patagonia by day and retreating to a cozy, boutique lodge by night, where you can unwind with a glass of chilled Chilean wine. Consider the euphoria of diving among the coral reefs of the Maldives, followed by a rejuvenating spa treatment in an overwater bungalow. This synergy allows travelers to fully engage with the wild and untamed aspects of their journey while having the assurance of comfort and care at the end of the day.

This synthesis of adventure and luxury is not merely about juxtaposing extremes but about enhancing the essence of each. It's not a contradiction, it's the perfect marriage. Luxury, when intertwined with adventure, provides the necessary respite and rejuvenation that enables travelers to delve deeper into their explorations. It ensures that the body is well-rested, the mind is at ease, and the spirit is ready for the next day's adventures. Conversely, adventure imbues luxury with a sense of purpose and excitement, transforming passive indulgence into active engagement with the world.

Moreover, the fusion of adventure and luxury promotes sustainable and responsible travel. High-end adventure operators, like [MT Sobek](#) and [Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions](#), are committed to preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the destinations they explore. By investing in local communities, supporting conservation efforts, and adhering to eco-friendly practices, they ensure that impact on the environment is minimal and positive. This conscious approach to travel fosters a deeper connection with the places and people encountered along the way, enriching the overall experience.

Adventure and luxury are not mutually exclusive; they are complementary forces that, when combined, create a travel experience that is both exhilarating and rejuvenating. This dynamic duo allows travelers to savor the intoxication of discovery and the joy of comfort, making each journey not just a trip, but a transformative experience. As we venture into the wonders of the world, let us embrace the best of both realms, seeking out adventures that challenge and luxuries that soothe, for it is in this delicate balance that the true magic of travel is found.



Land of the Thunder Dragon

by Jack Wheeler



The photo above is the **Tiger's Nest, the Taktsang Monastery in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan**. It is a country as close to the Shangri-La of James Hilton's 1933 classic "Lost Horizon" as you'll find on earth today.

Smaller than West Virginia, hidden between Tibet and the crest of the Himalayas to the steamy jungles of India, Bhutan is known as the Land of the Thunder Dragon. Independent for centuries and never colonized, Bhutan is a magic place that is spectacularly unique.

We will be exploring Bhutan Nov 1-13, 2024 and you can see it for yourself.



Experiencing Bhutan is a true adventure. Quite frankly, Bhutan is as fabulously exotic as our world gets. At the same time, no other country is as serenely peaceful as Bhutan, no people more contented and cheerful as the Bhutanese, no land more welcoming and hospitable.

Bhutan's culture is a unique mix of the ancient Himalayan animism called Bön and Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. **The Bhutanese are renowned for being among the happiest people on our planet.** They love to laugh, sing, dance, and play – and you'll be invited to join them. Bhutanese happiness is infectious. One very good reason we Extraordinary Travelers will have a happy time of our lives on our Bhutan adventure.



In addition to Taktsang, we'll visit Bhutan's castle temples called *Dzongs* and witness the lama monk ceremonies.



The Dzongs hold spectacular costumed music and dance festivals called *tsechu*. We'll attend the famous Black Crane Tsechu.



We'll dine and luxuriate well. We'll float/raft down beautiful rivers, and walk through gorgeous countryside.



In remotest eastern Bhutan, we'll meet and stay with the semi-nomadic *Brokpa* people, yak herders making their living bartering for what they need with yak milk, yak cheese, and woven yak wool.

You may have never lived with a people so basic as the Brokpa. But you will be in touch with a basic humanity as never before. One thing you can count on is that you'll make friends.



CLICK FOR DETAILS
BHUTAN EXPEDITION
Land of the Thunder Dragon

This is only a tiny glimpse of what you'll see and do – for so much more with a full itinerary and *lots* more pictures, here's the link:

**A Wheeler-Windsor Expedition
Co-Led by Jack Wheeler and Rebel Holiday
November 1-13 2024**

We invite you to experience the enchantment of Bhutan as only Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions can provide. Come with us and from now on you will always have Bhutan in your hearts, the memories of this extraordinary Happy Land of the Thunder Dragon will never fade.



Luxury in Nature of the Serengeti

Serengeti Luxury Birthing Safari - March 8-19, 2025

by Jack Wheeler



Just about everyone with adventure in their soul dreams of experiencing a safari in the Serengeti of Africa. But what is the absolute best way to do so?

First – you want it during the *birthing season*, late winter-early spring, where all the animals are in one place giving birth to and caring for their calves and cubs.

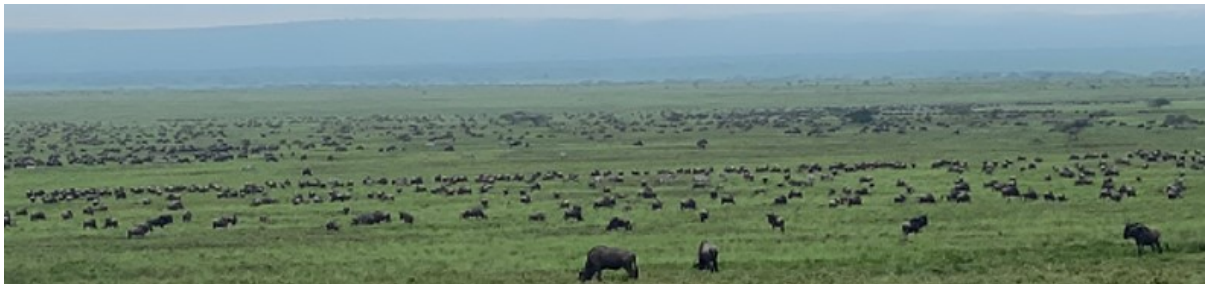
[Click for Details](#)

**Serengeti Luxury
Birthing Safari**

March 8 - 19, 2025



Imagine enjoying a marvelous bush breakfast on a hilltop with 100,000 wildebeest on the plains below. *This is our group in March 2024.*



While the great predators decide which ones are for dinner.



You'll want a luxury private tented camp like out of the movies, with an open bar, private chef for gourmet dining and wines, a lounge area with plush sofas, a staff that warmly caters to your every need, and no one else around for miles and miles.



And your private tent with a king size bed, *ensuite* bathroom and a hot shower - whenever you want it!



Most important is what you actually see, learn, and experience amidst the greatest wildlife spectacle on earth. You learn, for example, that a group of zebras is called a *dazzle* – because their stripes confuse or dazzle a predator from targeting a specific one of them. (Lions see zebras in shades of gray.)



You learn so much because your native guides and trackers are immensely knowledgeable about the Serengeti and all the animals living there. Ideally, among them will be the Serengeti's original inhabitants, the *Hadza*, known to anthropologists as "*The Last of the First*," the only people on Earth directly descended from the first *Homo sapiens* evolved in East Africa some quarter-million years ago.



Your safari will be unique as they take you through the bush explaining their original nomadic hunter-gather lifestyle of countless millennia. A group of male and female Hadza sang for us, repeating "Nu-be-ea" -- it means "thank you." They danced and some of us danced with them. It was an experience of a lifetime.

Of course, you'll get to know the Serengeti's legendary *Masai*, who'll guide for us, perform their famous jumping ceremony...



...and we invited them to join us for a barbecue and campfire one night.



What do those who have experienced this have to say what it's like?
Two examples from our Serengeti safari this past March (2024):

"It was an unforgettable experience. The entire staff were wonderful and did everything possible to make it an extraordinary adventure. We saw and learned so much about the wildlife and the people of Tanzania, who were exceptionally warm and hospitable. The food was outstanding, and our needs were cared for at every step. Our fellow travelers and now new friends were terrific, as well. I couldn't recommend a Wheeler-Windsor Safari more highly! Just great!" Don in Pennsylvania

"For me, it was a life-changing experience. First it was the graciousness of our accommodations, the careful planning that had gone into putting the trip together, and the warmth of our traveling companions. Our experiences on the Serengeti were amazing: each day was like stepping into the pages of history. Watching herds of animals interacting was a reminder of what God had intended at the beginning. Our guides were incredibly knowledgeable - about the wildlife and the vegetation and I learned something new on each and every outing. The bush camp team was outstanding, meals and services were of the highest quality. The safari made me aware of how much there is to see/learn/do in the world, and

*how important it is to do it! I'd go back in a heartbeat!" Helene
in Florida*

Extraordinary Travelers Soaring High! Can You Join Us in the Himalayas Oct 26th?

by Eddy Downpatrick



This year the Himalaya Helicopter is Oct 26 to Nov 2, 2024. It is always an experience of a lifetime. We ran two helicopter expeditions in the Nepal Himalayas, in 2023 **led by Richard Bangs, Jack Wheeler, and myself, Eddy Downpatrick.**

The objective is to see all 8 of the highest mountains in the Himalayas of Nepal. It is simply extraordinary to be so close to some of the highest mountains on the planet. More than life-memorable, it is deeply moving to be so close to the natural beauty of these majestic Himalayan Mountains.

The first photo below is the first group (*Eddy on the left, Richard Bangs on the right.*)
The second group is next at Annapurna Base Camp (Jack and Rebel in middle.)



In addition to the stunning mountains and gorgeous vistas, the cultural aspect includes visiting the ancient kingdom of Lo Manthang, the only place in the world where you can visit monasteries that practice true Tibetan Buddhism. There are NO other tourists there. It's stepping into another world.

The **2024 HHE Expedition will be led by Eddy Downpatrick**, (Club Co-Founder, below) who is always thrilled to share this extraordinary experience.



Click for Details

**Himalaya Helicopter
Expedition**

Oct 26 - Nov 2, 2024

This has been a favorite expedition of participants since 2016. We meet and finish in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Keep in mind, October is the best and only time of the year for this adventure. There are a few spaces left -- so reach out today! Click gold box above or contact: holiday@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com

The time for a Great Adventure is NOW!

Extraordinary Traveler - Steve Chapple

Steve Chapple is a novelist and adventurer. **Kayaking the Full Moon** was a New York Times Notable. **Outlaws in Babylon** is the origin story of American cannabis. **Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run** was written with David Brower. His latest is **Last Days on the Zambezi**, and the just finished "Two Guys Steal a Buffalo," a novel, is looking for a good publisher. He is a Visiting Scholar at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and a senior fellow at the Samuel Lawrence Foundation. He divides his time between Hawaii and Montana.



Extraordinary Traveler Profile

Steve Chapple

July 2024, La Jolla

Q. How old were you when you began to imagine extraordinary adventures?

Steve: Probably when my parents took me to the Big Island of Hawaii when I was five, back in 1955. There wasn't a condo in Kona then and I fell in love with the tropics. Later, when I was 12, we used to saddle up horses at a lake in the Beartooth Mountains, and just follow trails over to Yellowstone National Park. If we didn't catch trout, we didn't eat. That's an exaggeration. We packed heavy cans of berries packed in thick syrup and Hershey bars.

Q. What is one of the more extraordinary travel experiences that you've had?

Steve: My historic First Descent down the Mighty Los Angeles River, chased by gangs, pulled over by police helicopter, avoiding chemical spills. Roll on mighty river, roll on. Down the entire length of the Yellowstone, the last free-flowing river in the US, with two kids and a beautiful wife along. Not the usual solo descent. Also, down most of the Zambezi alone, but with the wildest days being with the raucous Sobek crew and clients through the Batoka Gorge. Also the Mississippi from Angola, MI, to New Orleans. I like rivers. They carry you downstream.

Q. Have you had a close call while traveling, and if so, did it motivate a re-assessment or change in behavior?

Steve: Yes, I foolishly launched a Feathercraft folding kayak alone on the Lower Yellowstone at sunset in March and got caught on a freezing river way after dark. It was a cloudy night and if I had not been very lucky I might have tipped into fast, cold water and not gotten out. Some ducks on a near bank called out and showed me the way to the shallows. I had gotten bad advice but I was stupid to follow it, and I've never forgotten it. It was all to push a deadline for National Geographic and catch a small plane at the Billings airport. But there's always another day.

Q. Who are extraordinary travelers whom you admire? If you could sit down and speak with any extraordinary traveler, living or dead, who would it be?

Steve: Richard Bangs, of course.

Also, Baran Von Humboldt who made it 19,246 up South America's Chimborazo without oxygen, in about 1803, a world record at the time, though you should count the Incas themselves. There are no major ocean currents currently named after me. Humboldt has the Humboldt.

Also, especially, Wm. Clark of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. They made it from St. Louis to the Oregon coast and back, 8000 miles, in 1804-06 with only one altercation with indigenous peoples. Plus, what fun to see the original herds of bison, the land, the animals, the locals, before, you know, the Sphere got installed in Las Vegas.



Steve Chapple, Kona Dive

Q. What mindset do you adopt, or have naturally, when you venture out into the world?

Steve: I'm pretty much all-focus. Mind open and eyes wide. I like to start every day relaxed, however, a swim if possible, for executive function. You want to think fast but relaxed. Watchful but smiling.

Q. What characteristics do you like to find in your travel companions?

Steve: Logistical geniuses of which I am not one. A good chef and an interesting talker.

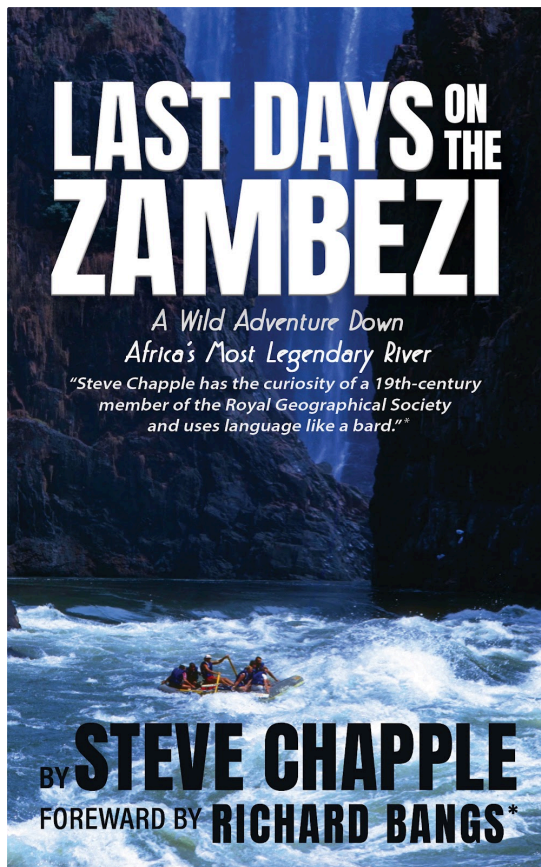
Q. What do you dream of doing – or a place that you dream of exploring?

Steve: I'd like to go through the Northwest Passage on a nice summer's day. And if peace returns to the world I'd like to get up close to the Siberian tigers of Kamchatka, reasonably close!

Q. As a veteran explorer and extraordinary traveler, any advice for a young traveler just setting out?

Steve: Clean underwear and socks, as they say. If it doesn't work out, don't force it, think the problem through fresh. Be thoughtfully paranoid, as in, malaria country, sleep inside a tent on your bed with the AC on full blast, assuming there is an "inside." Ask directions, the people you meet may be the best part of the story. Likewise, accidents can lead to the true route. And disaster makes for better writing.

Extraordinary Travelers Bookshelf



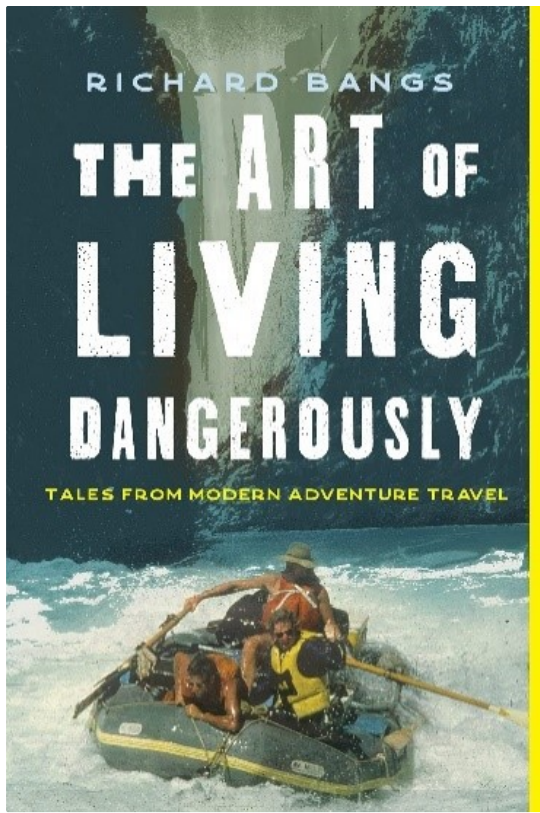
Last Days on the Zambezi by Steve Chapple

This wild adventure down Africa's most legendary river, is now available on Amazon. The foreword is by Richard Bangs, who describes it by saying, "One does not so much read the accounts of Steve's unquenchable quest as fall under his bravura spell."

What reviewers say:

"A survivor's adventure of the highest order, it makes a compelling plea for saving one of the last watery treasures on earth. A page-turner. . . ."

[Last Days on the Zambezi](#)



The Art of Living Dangerously by Richard Bangs

Be swept away by these awesome and implausible tales from Richard's 50 years of insanely great explorations.

What reviewers say:

Thom Beers, creator of *The Deadliest Catch*, says ***“Richard Bangs is the epitome of living life to the fullest. Danger is and has always been his comfort zone.”***

Paul Maritz, conservationist, tech investor, former senior exec at Microsoft and VMware says, “Richard tells great stories, some of them true.”

[The Art of Living Dangerously.](#)

Adventures with a Purpose: A River of Unity

by Ken Powley



Four of us—though there should've been five—found ourselves atop Wilhoyt's Rock, where the river's relentless force bore down on a perfectly pinned raft. The raft's red tubes pulsed in sync with the river's somewhat sinister heartbeat. One of our videographers stood precariously on the boulder's edge, right arm raised skyward, clutching his expensive but not entirely waterproof camera, hoping to safeguard it in the moments to come. As a boat from our small flotilla drifted close enough, he made a daring leap from rock to raft, camera held high. Mission accomplished.

Except for the urgent cry from the Senator's intern, slicing through the roar of the rapids: "WHERE'S THE SENATOR?!" The Senator, we soon learned, was safely downstream in an eddy, being helped into another raft. Those of us on the rock found our way downstream as well, reuniting with the raft that had finally been extricated from its temporary entanglement with Wilhoyt's.

A few hours earlier, we had hoped that the conservative state Senator from Pennsylvania, paired intentionally with a liberal hairdresser from his district—along with other mismatched pairs on this journey—would discover camaraderie, success, and genuine enjoyment by working together as red/blue couples on this inaugural bridging event launched by R.A.F.T. for America (Reuniting America by Fostering Trust). We hoped that award-winning director Kristi Kendall would capture footage that would fuel a steady stream of compelling social media content, amplifying the message that as Americans, we are all in the same boat together. Despite our ideological differences, we can achieve more by pulling together than by pulling apart.

We aspired to create a narrative that would resonate with the 87% of Americans tired of divisiveness and the 79% willing to help reduce social divisions if only they knew how. Above all, we aimed to generate irresistible content from some of the world's most magnificent places, countering the toxic rhetoric often dominating the airwaves.

This R.A.F.T. for America trip, and the dozens to follow on some of the country's finest whitewater rivers, was to be an "Adventure with a Purpose," borrowing a phrase from renowned whitewater explorer Richard Bangs, who hosted an eponymous PBS series that looked at how different cultures around the world solved local problems that might be applicable to global issues.



Richard Bangs and family resolve disagreements by paddling whitewater rivers.

"The Lehigh is no Omo, or Blue Nile, or Yangtze River," admitted R.A.F.T. for America Executive Director Ken Powley, "and it doesn't compare with any of the 35 extraordinary first descents that Richard is famous for. But it lent itself perfectly to the kind of 'purposeful' adventure that Richard has championed throughout his remarkable career, on and off the river."

In many respects, the Lehigh trip exceeded expectations. Several red/blue pairs gathered at the Whitewater Challengers rafting center on a Sunday morning in June. The only price of admission for a whitewater rafting trip on the Lehigh River in northeastern PA was the willingness to be paired with someone entirely different—someone outside their information bubble, someone they probably wouldn't choose to hang out with under other circumstances.

The day began with customary introductions and cautious conversation. We were all in unfamiliar territory, outside our comfort zones, nervous, unsure what was safe to say. Some were more anxious about their partners than the rapids, as each participant was paired with someone whom the prevailing narrative painted as an adversary.

Smiles abounded, but our red/blue pairs initially avoided tough questions and thorny issues.

By lunchtime, as we sat on a massive sloping slab of granite on river-left, affectionately known as Lunch Rock, the group relaxed. They'd been collaborating for a couple of hours through alternating rapids and pools, with the best rapids yet to come. Laughter and high fives were shared. Everyone felt safer, having stepped outside their comfort zones and become less nervous about both the rapids and their unlikely raftmates.

It turns out that shared outdoor experiences, even relatively short ones, can be immensely powerful. By day's end, as the Senator, his opposite-aisle raft-mate, and a dozen others encircled the evening campfire, the uncertainty of their early morning interactions had transformed into genuine affection and appreciation. We witnessed hugs between people who understood their profound differences but also recognized that what unites us is far more powerful than what divides us.

In that moment, we saw hope for America's future. The adventures we cherish on so many levels can become a vehicle for the transformation that America and its citizens yearn for. In that moment, we rekindled the hope and vision needed to move the needle towards empathy, understanding, and a willingness to listen first and disagree better.

R.A.F.T. for America is a nonprofit project of Team Democracy.

Coming Up in 2025...

Watch this space! Richard is putting together adventures to Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and perhaps Tristan da Cunha (the most remote

populated island on the planet) for 2025. Contact NicoleRusso@mtsobek.com to be on The List.



Yes, Let's Go There!



Jack Wheeler and Richard Bangs, always reaching for the stars. (photo by Jasper Bangs)



Extraordinary Travelers Club



The **Extraordinary Travelers Club** is a celebration of extraordinary travels and those who pioneer and partake. Each month we offer commentary, interviews and opportunities to explore our remarkable world, to turn unturned corners and breathe rarefied air.

This is a club for the bold, the curious, and those who seek exceptional experiences in the hidden scapes and the back of beyond. There is no membership fee; just the currency of curiosity. We invite you to be a part of this wayfaring League, a community within which to share the insights, codes and secrets with like-minded travelers from around the globe.

Join us in the [The Extraordinary Travelers Club](#).

Prior ETC Dispatch Issues:

<https://www.extraordinarytravelersclub.com/etc-newsletter-issues>

Your comments are welcome, email:

richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

Share with us your Extraordinary Travel experiences!

Connect with Richard Bangs



Special Thanks To Our Fellow Travel Pioneers...



Extraordinary Travelers Club

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