

EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch

ISSUE #15 - April 2025

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Omo River, by Bart Henderson

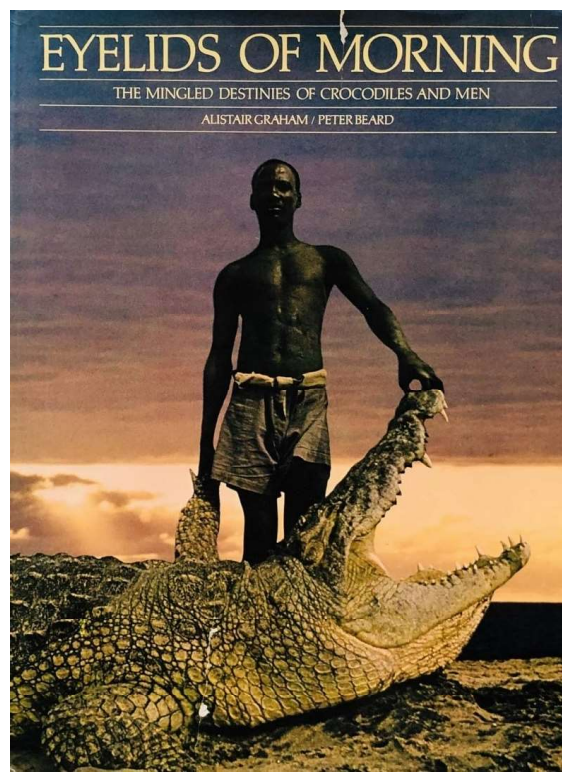
Go Somewhere You've Never Been

by Richard Bangs

"Once a year, go somewhere you've never been before."

It's a divine piece of guidance, often attributed to the Dalai Lama, and one I've tried to live by since my teens. **There's a particular kind of magic that awakens when we step beyond the perimeter of the familiar—a childlike wonder that arises with every new horizon, every foreign scent, every untraveled path.** My own compass, it seems, was magnetized early.

In 1973 I picked up a book, *[Eyelids of Morning, The Mingled Destinies of Crocodiles and Men](#)*, by Alistair Graham, with more than 200 haunting photographs by Peter Beard. It was a graphic account of an expedition to Lake Rudolf (now Lake Turkana) in Kenya, the terminus of the Omo River that coils like an ancient serpent from the Ethiopian highlands.



I fell headlong into the imagery of the book, as though it had thrown open a portal to a dimension geographically distant and hypnotic in its otherness. I vowed to go. A few weeks later, with barely more than a notion and a map, I was rowing a raft down the Omo River, a first descent. That trip became the foundational offering of the adventure travel company I co-founded, [Sobek](#), a concept built on the principle of venturing into the uncharted with a mission to democratize the sublime, to invite travelers to taste the adrenaline of fast waters, and the serenity of untouched wilderness.

For three weeks we navigated the untried flows of the Omo. **We read the river's moods through the blades of our oars, dodged hundreds of hippos and crocodiles, forged friendships with Mursi tribespeople, and passed through a world largely unbroken by time.** But a rather inconvenient lack of sustenance towards the end (we were down to two tins of tuna) forced us to exit the river just short of the Kenya border and the blue-green saline waters of Turkana. **It was a journey unfinished, in geography—but not in spirit.** The call of the lake so powerfully painted in Beard's photography remained just out of reach, a tantalizing ellipsis at the end of that OG adventure.



Hippo, Omo River, Ethiopia by Bart Henderson

It was, more importantly, the first chapter in a lifelong philosophy: **go where you haven't gone, even—perhaps especially—if it scares you.**

In the decades since, I have made it a personal prescription to visit places I have never been every year, and have never failed to take my medicine. And like the best medicine, it has cured my stagnation, lifted my cynicism, and revived my sense of awe.

Why is this important? Because the unfamiliar reshapes us. Each new place is a mirror, not just of another culture, climate, or cuisine, but of ourselves—how we react, adapt, and evolve in the face of difference. When we go someplace new, we momentarily shred the scripts of our daily lives—the roles, the assumptions, the routines—and we become explorers again, not just of the outer world, but of the inner terrain that often lies dormant in the starch of the commonplace

It's about cultivating a habit of mind, a radical openness to the world's boundless tapestry. To go someplace you've never been is to actively resist the insidious creep of the normal, the dulling effects of the prosaic. It's a potent antidote to predictable rhythms that can so easily lull us into a state of comfortable, yet ultimately limiting, slumber.

Each new vista, each exotic scent carried on the breeze, each encounter with a culture that dances to a different drumbeat – these are not mere coordinates on a map. **They are vital jolts to the system, rewiring our neural pathways, forcing us to recalibrate our understanding of the world and our place within it.**

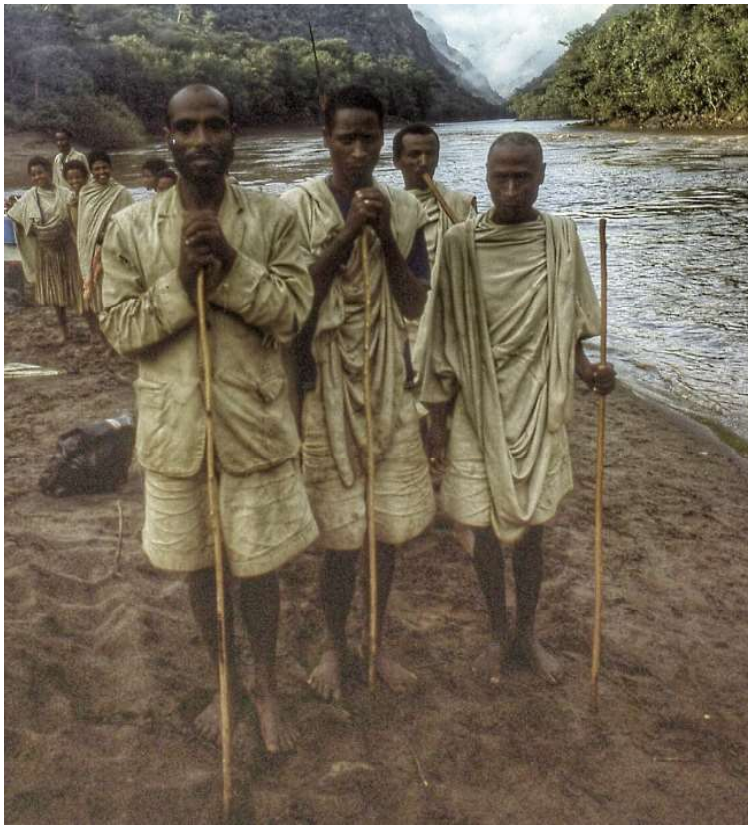


The legendary Lake Turkana, Northern Kenya

There is the profound cognitive refresh that comes with novel experiences. The brain tends to catalog the familiar into shortcuts and patterns that become well-worn ruts over time. But when we place ourselves in unschooled surroundings, these pathways forge anew. The mind awakens from its torpor.

I've seen it happen time and again, in myself and in those I've guided. There's a moment when the eyes widen, the breath slows, and the face relaxes into wonder, when one steps out of their known self and becomes something more expansive. The petty concerns of daily life—the bills, office politics, social media scrolls—fall away, replaced by an acute awareness of the present moment. This isn't just psychological; studies have shown that novel experiences trigger the release of dopamine, improving our mood while enhancing learning capacity and creativity.

By stepping outside our own cultural context, we begin to understand that there are countless ways to live, to love, to believe. **We witness the shared humanity that binds us all, even across vast distances and seemingly insurmountable differences.** The world shrinks, not in size, but in the perceived chasm between us.



Lower Omo Tribe, Ethiopia, photo by Bart Henderson

Kenya Walking & Wildlife Safari with Richard Bangs

Custom Designed by MT Sobek & Led by Richard Bangs

September 15-26, 2025 - An Invitation



Cheetah photo, courtesy of MT Sobek

Why I Want to Have this Safari Adventure Now

by Richard Bangs

Fifty-two years ago, I made the first descent of the Omo River in Ethiopia, a watershed expedition that launched Sobek and introduced adventure travel to the world. We ended our trip short of the Kenya border, where the Omo disgorge into Lake Turkana, the world's largest permanent desert lake, an ancient tributary to the Nile.

Now, after five decades, I am returning to finish that expedition and see and touch the alkaline waters of Turkana, which some claim is the “Cradle of Man,” where the earliest hominids were unearthed. The Lake is now threatened by the construction of the Gilgel Gibe III Dam in Ethiopia, which could dry up the legendary lake, so this may be the last time to experience.

So, take a walk on the wild side with me in the remote corners of Kenya.

This safari includes incredible wildlife encounters, moderate walking with various tribes as guides, and deeper explorations of Nairobi National Park, the Mathews Range, Lake Turkana, Laikipia, and the legendary Masai Mara.



Walking safari, courtesy of MT Sobek

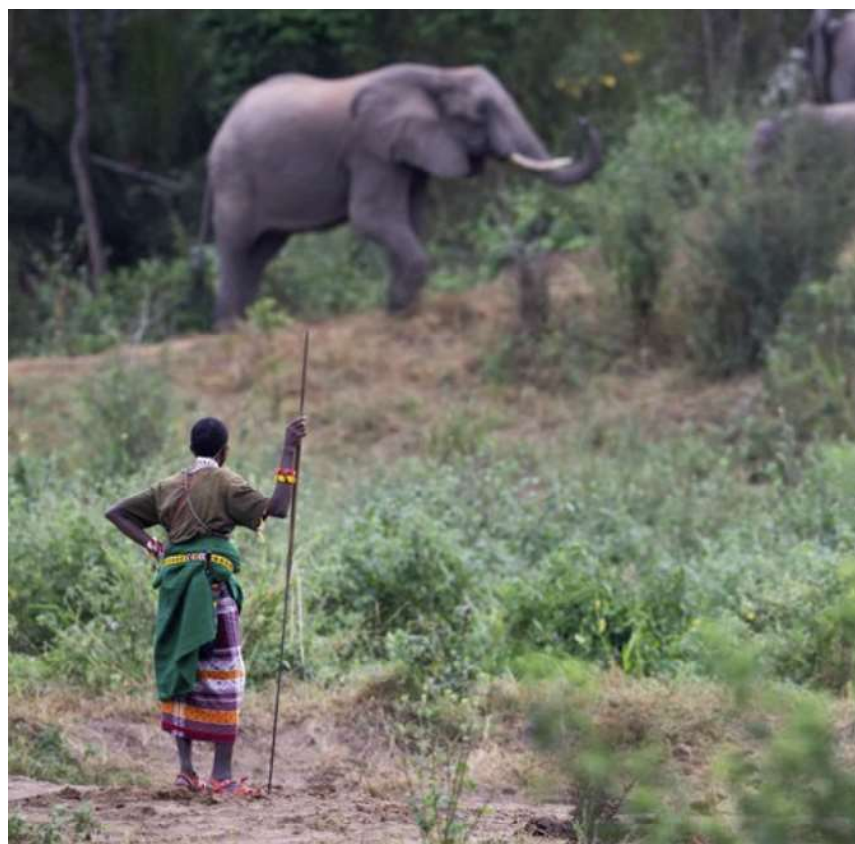


Photo courtesy of MT Sobek

Kenya is an iconic safari destination characterized by hauntingly beautiful natural landscapes of vast savannas dotted with acacia trees, arid scrublands, rocky outcrops called kopjes, and dense riverine forests brimming with an abundance of wildlife.

On this active adventure you will stride across it all on expertly guided walks, discovering the wonders of Lake Turkana, remote valleys in the Mathews Range, diverse ecosystems on the Laikipia Plateau, and the legendary plains of the Masai Mara.

Combine immersive explorations on foot with game drives, cultural connections, and even a hot-air balloon ride! Spend nights in a curated collection of comfortable permanent and mobile camps surrounded by nature. **This ultimate Kenya walking safari trip offers an unparalleled blend of active adventure and wildlife encounters.**

Join legendary adventurer and MT Sobek co-founder Richard Bangs on a truly extraordinary walking safari across the wild heart of Kenya in September.

To discuss this extraordinary expedition to Kenya contact:
NicoleRusso@MTSobek.com or call +1 (510) 594 6041.

[Click for itinerary and details](#)

**MT Sobek
Kenya Walking Safari
with Richard Bangs**

September 15-26, 2025



Richard Bangs with friends, photo by Chris Sharpe

[Click for itinerary and details](#)

**MT Sobek
Kenya Walking Safari
with Richard Bangs**

September 15-26, 2025

**The moment is fleeting. The time is now.
Come join us on an Extraordinary Travel Experience. *Carpe Diem!***



Questions? Reach out to us:

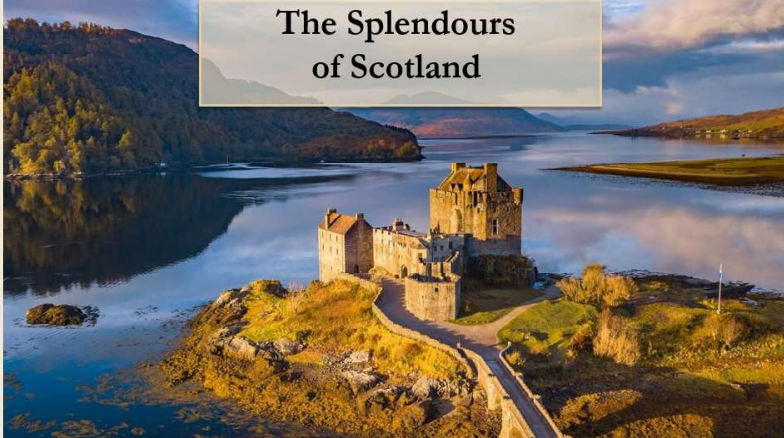
richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

or


rebelholiday@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

We're happy to discuss!


Featured Travel 2025 - Invites for You



The Splendours
of Scotland



The Splendours of Scotland:
Edinburgh, the Highlands, and the Western Isles
Designed and Led by Eddy Downpatrick
Sunday, October 5th to Tuesday, October 14th 2025



Click for Details
Splendours of Scotland

October 5-14, 2025



Designed & Led by Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday

Lisbon, Sintra, Cascais, Portuguese Riviera, Silver Coast & Porto

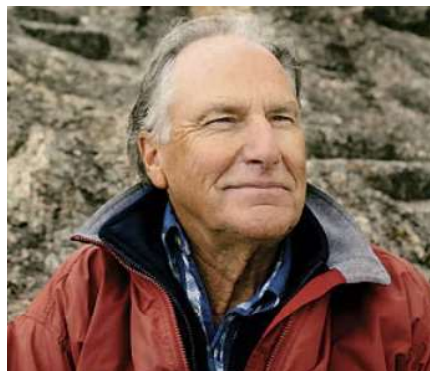
Friday, October 3 to Sunday, Oct 12, 2025



Click for Details
Portugal Exploration

October 3-12, 2025

Extraordinary Traveler - Leo Le Bon



About Leo Le Bon

Leo Le Bon, known as the “godfather of adventure travel,” is the lead co-founder of Mountain Travel, the pioneer adventure travel company founded in Berkeley, California in 1968.

Le Bon started in the travel business in 1956 in his native Belgium with Thomas Cook & Son. In 1959 he made his way to California where he re-joined Thomas Cook in San Francisco. At Cook, he rose to District Manager and was the earliest travel professional in the U.S. to become involved in outdoor and adventure travel through the Sierra Club, whom he assisted with their first large foreign expeditions to the South American Andes, the European Alps, and New Zealand. While in California, Le Bon became an ardent climber and mountaineer with ascents in the Sierra Nevada mountains, Yosemite, and worldwide.

In 1968, Le Bon left his job at Thomas Cook & Son and founded Mountain Travel, The Adventure Company®, with fellow mountaineers Allen Steck and Barry Bishop (who climbed Mount Everest in 1963). He was president and CEO from 1968 until he retired in 1990.

Over the course of the past 40 years, he traveled the world in search of new journeys and exotic trips and pioneered a number of alternative forms of travel, such as trekking and camping in Nepal, foot safaris in Kenya, hut-to-hut hiking in the Alps, small-vessel expedition cruising to Antarctica, and opened new adventure travel destinations in the mountains of Tibet, China, Chile, Peru, India, Kenya, and Greenland, among the many countries he has visited.

He is a veteran mountain climber with expeditions in the Himalayas, the Karakoram, China, the European Alps, the Andes, and the former Soviet Union. Le Bon is also an experienced ocean-kayaker, a blue-water sailor, and a long-distance cyclist. His Italian wife, Nadia, has accompanied him on many of these adventures for the past 40 years.

Le Bon's vision of a new form of adventure and recreational travel earned him a mention in *Newsweek* magazine (October 1989) as one of the 25 prominent American innovators in the U.S. He has also been featured in newspapers, journals, and magazines, including *California*, *Outside*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Adventure* and many others.

He has authored three books: *Majestic Mountains* (New York: Abrams, 1989); *Where Mountains Live* (New York: Aperture, 1986); and *The Adventurer's Travelers Guide* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984). In 2005 Le Bon was awarded the first “Pioneers of Adventure Travel, Lifetime Achievement Award” by the Adventure Travel Trade Association in 2005.

When asked “why do you do what you do?” Le Bon replied:

My life's ambition as a keen outdoorsman, conservationist, and a travel innovator has been to inspire people to participate in an alternative style of travel, known today as adventure travel. I feel I have succeeded, since active travel has become immensely popular. More than ever, we need to become aware as concerned individuals of our vanishing natural resources and do something about it.

By traveling in an adventurous and more sustainable way to remote cultures, pristine mountain areas, rivers, jungles, oceans, and deserts of the far corners of the world, we see, we learn, and we strive to protect them, while at the same time changing the way we live our everyday lives.

Extraordinary Traveler Interview: Leo Le Bon

Q: How old were you when you began to dream of and imagine extraordinary adventures?

LL: Just 17 or so, watching this movie of an adventure on the Matterhorn, called The White Tower, produced after WWII. Eventually I climbed that mountain and better yet, guided many Mountain Travel parties to the summit. The story is in my book.

Q: What is one of the more extraordinary travel experiences that you have had?

LL: Too many, really, that's why I wrote the book. Climbing mountains: the Siachen glacier traverse (not in the book), Karakoram, India. Minya Konka expedition in China, Greenland highest summit expedition. The wildlife: Gorillas, Tigers and Grizzlies. Antarctic cruises and to North Pole by Russian nuclear icebreaker all in the book. We can discuss.

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

LL: So many...losing my camels who ran away in the Sahara, forcing us to walk 12 hours in sand to the closest village. Another to just miss a tornado in the middle of Lake Titicaca during the circumnavigation by kayak. Another is missing an avalanche on a 24,000 ft climbing expedition peak in China. Yet another being shelled by Pakistani fire at 18,000' on Mt. Sia Kangri in the Karakoram mountain range...and an elephant charge deflected in Kenya. As a company, we always anticipated objective danger. MT has had a few deaths on our trips, accidental drunkenness, tripping on rock by clients. On the other hand a client with artificial legs climbed to the highest altitude on any MT trips, and summited Muztagh Ata in China...in the book.

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?

LL: Marco Polo's Il millions, Sven Hedin, Ed Hillary, John Roskelley, James Cook, I spoke with Hillary and Roskelley, also with Diemberger and Eric Shipton, read their books.

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

LL: I go with the expectation to see something new.

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

LL: Laid back but strong and eager for new vistas and experiences.

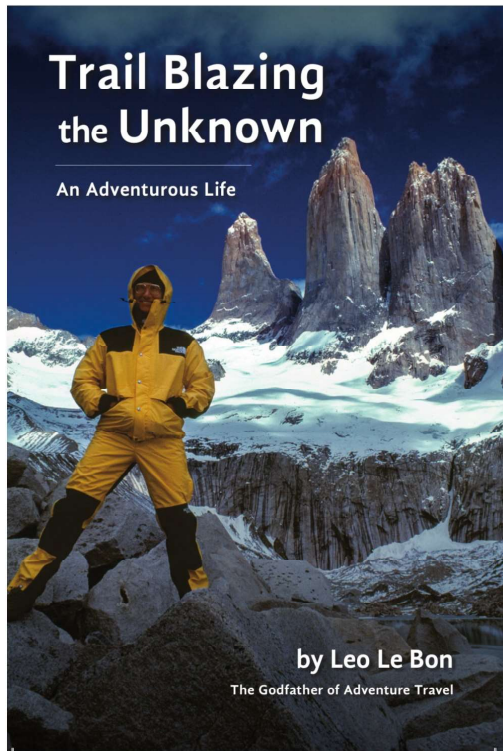
Q: What is something you dream of doing – or a place that you dream of exploring?

LL: I have only seen a fraction of the world, or so it seems to me, so anywhere new, unexplored or unknown. Now that I am 91, staying home, riding bikes.

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

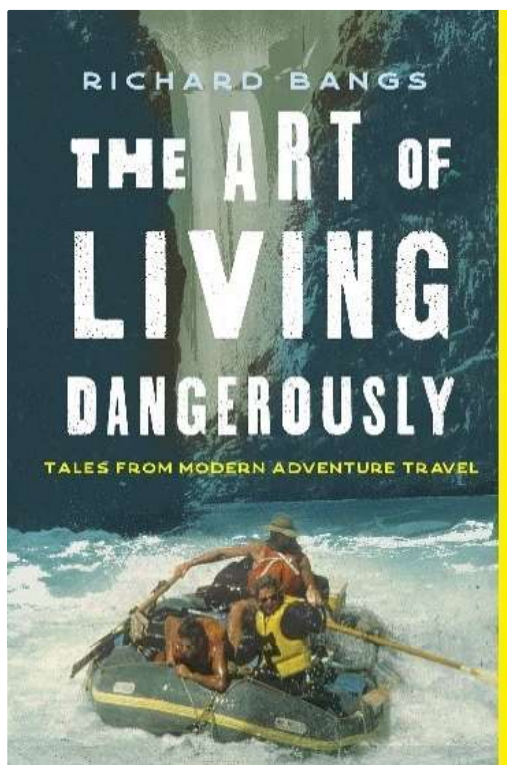
LL: Intense research, books and maps by those who came before, if climbing is the objective, you have to be all around well prepared. Cooperation with teammates and willingness to work hard are essential. Well-honed skills, and endurance will assure success. Prepare to be tough.

Extraordinary Travelers' Bookshelf



Trail Blazing the Unknown **by Leo Le Bon**

About the book: This is a photo adventure book covering the author's 50 plus years of exploring the most remote parts of the earth, including the North Pole, Mt Everest, Patagonia wildlands, Tibet, Kenya wildlife, Alaska, The Inca Trail, Antarctica, the Karakoram and K2, the circumnavigation of Lake Titicaca by kayak, and the Himalayan mountains.



The Art of Living Dangerously by Richard Bangs

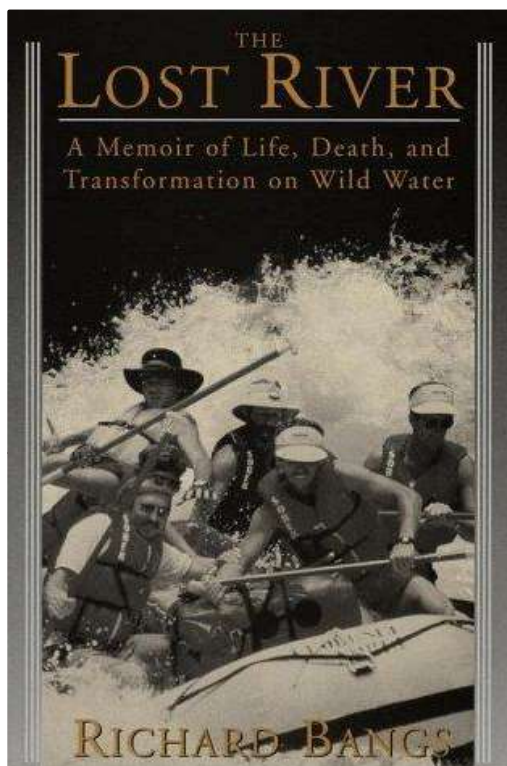
Be swept away by these awesome and implausible tales from Richard's 50 years of insanely great explorations.

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](#)



The Lost River: A Memoir of Life, Death, and Transformation on Wild Water by Richard Bangs

Finally, now available in Kindle.

What reviewers say:

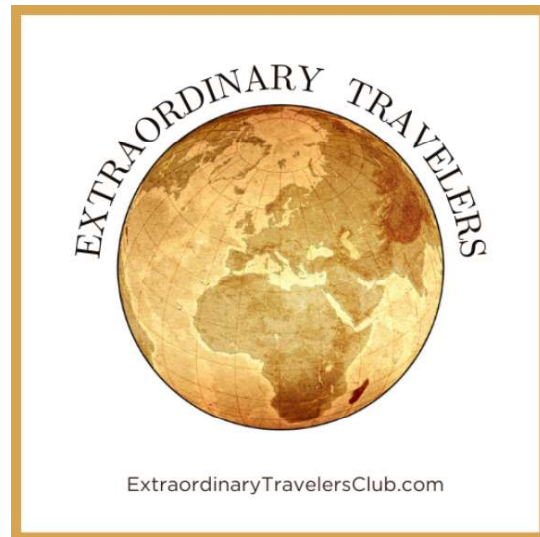
"It is not only a wonderful adventure story...it is also an intensely personal self examination by Mr. Bangs. This is one of the great adventure stories of all time, but for me, it also served as a "self help" book. You'll be amazed and entertained by a fabulous story while going through your own internal exam at the same time.."

[The Lost River: A Memoir of Life, Death, and Transformation on Wild Water](#)

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>

Upcoming Club Expeditions:

<https://extraordinarytravelersclub.com/extraordinaryexpeditions>

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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