



EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch

ISSUE #10 - October 2024

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Do I have the right gear? Photo by Bart Henderson

From Cold Duck to Cowboy Boots: The Art of Adventure Preparedness

by Richard Bangs

Some years ago, when I was a guide on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, a white limo purred up to the put-in for the raft trip at Lee’s Ferry. Out stepped a man wearing an Irish Linen Bedford suit, white dancing shoes, and a tan cowboy hat. He looked around at our 33’-long inflated pontoon rafts and asked, “Where’s the cruise boat?”

When explained that this was the launch ramp for whitewater rafts heading downstream, he cursed, “Damn my secretary. I asked her to book a Colorado cruise, not a rafting trip.”

He went on to explain that he was an attorney in Phoenix who had just unexpectedly won a big case, and asked his assistant to book a celebratory

cruise, complete with dance band and wet bar. To be sure he would have the spirits he preferred, he brought three cases of Cold Duck, which the chauffeur now unloaded from the trunk.

Confronted with the reality of where he was, he argued with himself and lost. He decided to give the raft a go.



Are you prepared? Photo by Richard Bangs

The total trip was ten days, with four to Phantom Ranch, a small resort at the bottom of the Grand Canyon where the Bright Angel trail winds upwards to the 7,000'-high South Rim. There, vehicles can be met or hired. The first couple of days, Cold Duck, as we started to call our guest, was game and did his best to enjoy the rapids and the hikes, even in his only footwear, his dancing shoes. But on the third day, a storm blew in, the river turned muddy, and the wind whipped sand into every orifice and furbished every face. It was a miserable few hours, but Cold Duck sportingly pitched in to batten down gear and wipe grit from the kitchenware.



Lava Falls, Colorado River. Photo by Bart Henderson

That night, over sips of sparkling wine, he told me the trip was not for him, and that he planned to hike out at Phantom Ranch. “It’s almost ten miles up. You might want to get better footwear,” I advised.

As soon as we pulled into the beach at Phantom Ranch, Cold Duck high-tailed it to the little supply store near the lodge. Minutes later he returned, sporting a new pair of cowboy boots he had traded in for his dancing shoes. “Adios,” he grinned, and headed up the trail.

A few hours later, as we pulled into the next camp, a helicopter whooshed into the canyon and landed on the Bright Angel trail. We confirmed later the evacuation was for Cold Duck, who sprained an ankle in the upwards climb in his new pointy Tony Lamas.

Clearly, he was not prepared for the adventure.



Photo by Richard Bangs

At [Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions](#), and at [MT Sobek](#), the adventure travel company I co-founded, we’ve had too, too many examples of guests inadequately outfitted or misinformed, and who suffered for it. There was the woman who showed up to hike The Inca Trail in high heels; another, who signed for the Tour du Mont Blanc, read the pre-trip information that informed the only thing she would have to carry was her camera, as all other gear would be bused around to the refuges each night. She then went to the store to buy her first Kodak. On the first day, the guide couldn’t help but notice how she strained under the weight of her bulky daypack. As everyone pulled out their Canons and Nikons at the first view of Mont Blanc, she hauled out a Kodak slide projector and asked how it worked.

These little stories, while amusing, highlight a crucial tenet of adventure travel: preparedness. **At its heart, adventure is about embracing the unexpected—transforming trials into tales that ignite the spirit. Yet, preparedness serves as the foundation on which those tales are built.** It’s not merely about

packing the right gear; it's about understanding the environment, the physical demands, and the cultural nuances of the journey ahead. It's the difference between a positive life-changing experience and a miserable ordeal, between safety and danger, between success and failure, sometimes between even life and death.

In my decades of exploring the world's wild places, I've learned that nature is both magnificent and unforgiving. It doesn't care about your social status, your professional accomplishments, or your good intentions. It demands respect, and that respect is shown through thorough preparation and awareness.

When one steps off the beaten track, one must recognize the rhythms and challenges of wild worlds. Trekking in the Himalayas demands not only proper footwear but also an understanding of altitude sickness and acclimatization strategies. When on safari it is good to wear khaki or white as dark colors attract mosquitoes and tsetse flies. Similarly, rafting the glacial waters of the Zaskar River in Ladakh or the Tatshenshini in Canada requires proper layering techniques to keep warm and dry.

Equally important is mental preparedness. The best-laid plans can unravel when confronted with unforeseen obstacles. Adventure travelers should be equipped not only with physical tools but also with a mindset that welcomes adaptability. Flexibility in the face of changing conditions—whether that means rerouting due to weather or adjusting plans based on local customs—can transmute potential frustrations into enriching experiences. **Being mentally prepared for discomfort, for unexpected changes, for moments of fear or doubt—this psychological readiness can be the key to persevering through difficult moments and ultimately finding joy in the journey.** Over the years some clients threatened to sue when an itinerary was altered because of externalities (landslides, floods, war). Others embraced the changes as adding to the adventure and creating material for good stories with the return.

Another key is research. “Never stop learning” is a holy rule I practice. Familiarizing ourselves with the customs, languages, and histories of the places visited deepens our connection to them. It allows us to navigate cultural landscapes with sensitivity and respect, enhancing the quality of our interactions with locals and fellow travelers alike. This preparation fosters a richer tapestry of experience, making the passage not just a series of selfies and photo ops, but a deeply engaging exploration of the human spirit.



Helicoptering the Himalayas. Photo by Richard Bangs

Then there's the importance of being prepared for emergencies. Know basic first aid. Carry a well-stocked medical kit. Understand the risks specific to your adventure and how to mitigate them. Have emergency plans and backup plans. Hope for the best, but always be prepared for the worst.

Finally, it's about using the right gear for the right trip. As Cold Duck learned the hard way, inappropriate footwear can turn a difficult hike into a dangerous situation. Quality, well-fitted boots, weather-appropriate clothing, proper backpacks—these aren't luxuries, they're necessities. They protect you from the elements, prevent injuries, and enable you to focus on the beauty around you rather than your pain.

Through my travels, I've employed Patagonia, The North Face, Arc'teryx, Smartwool, Merrell, and many others without disappointment. **I have used the incredibly durable [Eagle Creek](#) luggage for over 40 years, and still use some of my original gear, which at this point is like an old friend.**

At MT Sobek and Wheeler Windsor Expeditions, we've made it our mission to help travelers prepare thoroughly for their adventures. We provide detailed packing lists, comprehensive pre-trip information, and expert guidance. But

ultimately, the responsibility lies with each traveler to take these resources seriously and put in the effort to be truly ready.

The goal of adventure travel isn't just to survive—it's to thrive.

It is about so much more than the destination. It's about the quest—one that requires both heart and head. Cold Duck's misadventure serves as a reminder that the best stories are often born from challenges faced and overcome, but they can also serve as cautionary tales about the importance of being adequately prepared.

So, before you set off on your next great adventure, take the time to plan and practice. Do your research, get in shape, invest in proper gear, and ready yourself for the provocations ahead. Of course, the most essential gear you can bring is an open, ready mind. Your future self, standing atop a mountain peak, walking with wildebeests or plunging down a Class IV river, will thank you for it. **Because when you're prepared, you're free to fully embrace the magic of the adventure—dancing shoes and all.**



Eagle Creek Bags from 30 years ago. I still use them. Photo by Richard Bangs

We are delighted that **eagle creek** is our sponsor this issue.

eagle creek



The fusion of adventure with connection and compassion promotes sustainable and responsible travel. This important combination is found in high-end adventure operators, like [MT Sobek](#) and [Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions](#), both are committed to preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the destinations they explore. This conscious approach to travel fosters a deeper connection with the places and people encountered along the way, enriching the overall experience.

Portugal Experience - May 2-11, 2025

Led by Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday
for Extraordinary Travelers



By Rebel Holiday

Since Jack and I have had a home in Portugal since 2009, it is one of my favorite countries to share. Why? First, it's got unspoiled natural beauty, wonderful weather, delicious food (*we know the best places*) great hospitality -- and centuries of history. Yet, it's a modernized country that is clean and safe.

It may look small on a world map, but there is SO much here! With so many cool castles, palaces, cathedrals, forts, museums, -- the big challenge is paring it down. From Lisbon to Porto, each region has distinct scenic beauty, culture, arts, customs, history, food, wine. It's simply a pleasure to share.

The Portuguese are warm, kind, humble yet proud, "family people" who treat foreigners very well. They welcome travelers with "open arms" -- now many speak English.

You'll see Lisbon, Sintra, Cascais, the Portuguese Riviera, Obidos, Coimbra, Porto, the Tejo, and more back to Lisbon!

We hope you join us - I'd bet you'll love it.





Click for Itinerary, Photos & Details

**Portugal
Expedition**

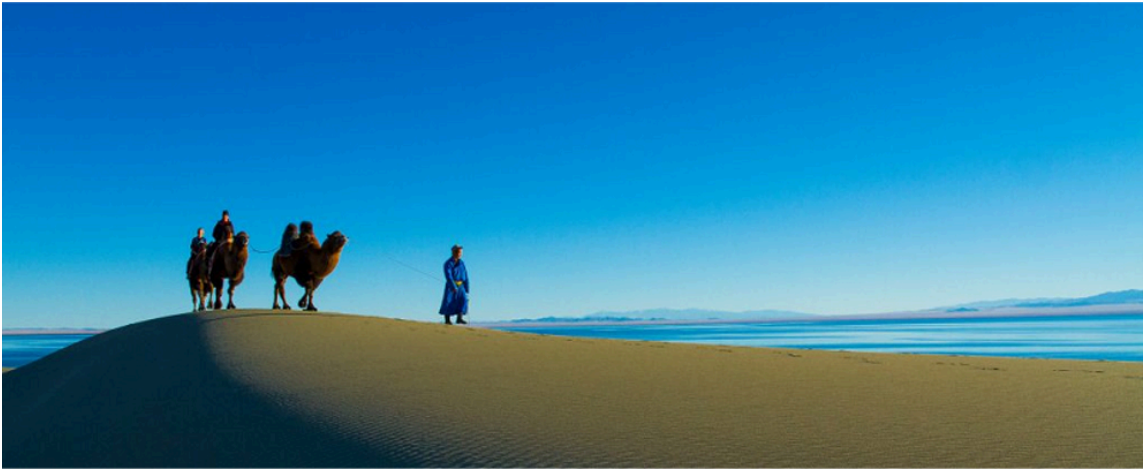
May 2-11, 2025

This has been a favorite of many -- and May is a wonderful time for Portugal.
Click gold box above or contact: holiday@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com

Explore Mongolia - June 16-27, 2025

Co-Led by Richard Bangs & Jack Wheeler

An Extraordinary Journey



Exploring Mongolia is the dream of anyone with an adventurous spirit.

It is not easy to do just overland unless you have 4-6 weeks. Mongolia is enormous – 2½ times the size of Texas and it's mostly empty. Outside of the capital of Ulaan Bataar and a few towns, the population density is 3 people per square mile, most all of whom are nomads.

That emptiness is of extraordinary beauty and diversity, while the people you meet are marvelously welcoming and hospitable. We will stay at times nearby, learn about their lives and customs. See how they herd, hunt, and ride camels over the sand dunes.

This is your dream of Exploring Mongolia come true. How can we do it in just 11 days? By private charter plane to see remote wonders, land cruisers, even camel-back over sand dunes of the Gobi.

**Explore Mongolia with Richard Bangs & Jack Wheeler June 16-27, 2025
Limited Space on planes - Registration Open Now**



Co-Led by Richard Bangs & Jack Wheeler

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, click on the gold box:

Click for Details

EXPLORE MONGOLIA

June 16 - 27, 2025



Ready for a camel ride at sunset? Hop on - there's a photo to send home.



Extraordinary Traveler - Wickliffe "Wick" Walker

Wickliffe "Wick" Walker is a product of Dartmouth College, the John F. Kennedy School for Special Warfare, and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. **He represented the United States in international whitewater competition at several World Championships and at the 1972 Summer Olympics at Munich. (photo below)**



A Fellow of the Explorers Club and a National Geographic Explorer, he has led whitewater expeditions around the world, including to Bhutan and Tibet.

He served 21 years in the United States Army as an Engineer, Military Intelligence, and Special Forces officer, retiring in the rank of lieutenant colonel after overseas service in Vietnam, Thailand, and Germany.

He is the author of: *Paddling the Frontier: Guide to Pakistan's Whitewater*, *Courting the Diamond Sow: A Whitewater Expedition on Tibet's Forbidden River*, *Goat Game: Thirteen Tales from the Afghan Frontier*; and, most recently, *Torrents As Yet Unknown: Daring Whitewater Ventures into the World's Great River Gorges* (available in hardback, e-book, audio book, and, on 3 September 2024, paperback editions). Wick now lives and writes in the Blue Ridge of Virginia.



Extraordinary Traveler Profile
Wickliffe "Wick" Walker
October 2024

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

Wick: The train north from Montreal deposited me and several other boys onto a muddy whistle-stop clearing in the Quebec wilderness. Not a structure to be seen. I was twelve. Cadre from Camp Kapitachouane soon arrived, outfitted us with canoes, gear, and food, and sent us off (with counsellors) on a month-long journey through the Great Northern Arboreal Forest. Wood and canvas canoes, canvas tents, wooden wanigan boxes with tumplines for portaging supplies. No wimpy Gore-Tex, self-inflating air mattresses, freeze dried meals, GPS. Bags of flour and beans, cans of Spam. Green-tinged slabs of bacon. Want fresh food? Catch some walleye, bake some bannock in a reflector oven. And it rained. Cold rain. I returned home ready to travel anywhere, do anything – so long as it was outdoors.

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

Wick: In April of 1973, on the banks of the Mekong in Thailand's far northeast, a friend and I unwittingly rode our bikes into the middle of a remote village's *Songkran* celebration (the Thai "New Year", marking the end of the dry season and the coming of life-giving monsoon rains). With no knowledge of the now-famous festival and tourist destination throughout Thailand, and with but a few words of Thai, we were immediately surrounded by a pack of the village young men. Grinning at our discomfort, they began daubing our faces and chests with a blue, clay-like paste, as if preparing us for some gruesome pagan ritual. But then, as the thunder rolled and the first drops of rain began to fall, they smeared themselves as well, and equally bedecked girls and elders joined the party to dance in the rain, throw buckets of water, wash off the "warpaint", and share the joy with their accidental guests. Some experiences just happen.

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

Wick: Several. Each prompted deep introspection and appropriate changes in my planned behavior going forward. For about three days. Then lack of imagination and lifetime habit reverted to normal.

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?

Wick: Too many to list, but of them all, Lieutenant Colonel F.M. Bailey, one of the legendary British military political officers in the late 19th & early 20th centuries. He stretched/defied Raj military orders to sneak into Tibet and explore the Tsangpo Gorges on foot with just one companion, in 1913. He infiltrated into occupied Tashkent to collect intelligence about the Communist Reds during WWI, and when the Cheka secret police (predecessors to the KGB) discovered they had a spy in their midst, Bailey's disguise was so good that he was recruited to search for ... himself. All the while amassing a butterfly collection for the British Museum. He was the inspiration for the *nom de guerre* of U.S. Special Forces officer Bailey, my protagonist in *Goat Game: Thirteen Tales from the Afghan Frontier*.

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

Wick: That all recirculating whitewater holes and armed locals will let me go on my way, eventually.

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

Wick: The best leaders make the best followers. I've had the privilege of conducting my whitewater expeditions with carefully selected, long term partners – each of whom were just as or more skilled and experienced than I, and just as capable of leading the expedition. Without exception, these were people who would speak up with good advice in hard places, then willingly get behind the leader's decision regardless of ego or personal preference.

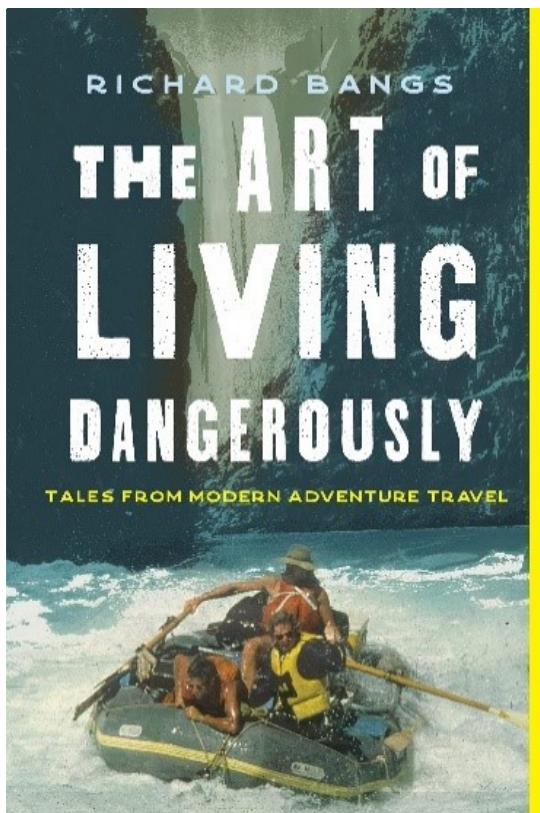
Q: What is something you dream of doing – or a place that you dream of exploring?

Wick: The deep oceans - the last frontier on earth. Oceanography has fascinated me all my life. But, it seemed to lack the raw physicality and cultural landscapes I have found in mountains, rivers, and, yes, irregular warfare. As I get longer in the tooth, however, the idea of a cozy, climate-controlled submersible becomes more and more alluring. And my god, what would be just outside the window!

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

Wick: Language! Learn several! Sir Richard Francis Burton spoke 29. And *toujours de l'audace!* Burton had plenty of that too.

Extraordinary Travelers' Bookshelf



The Art of Living Dangerously by Richard Bangs

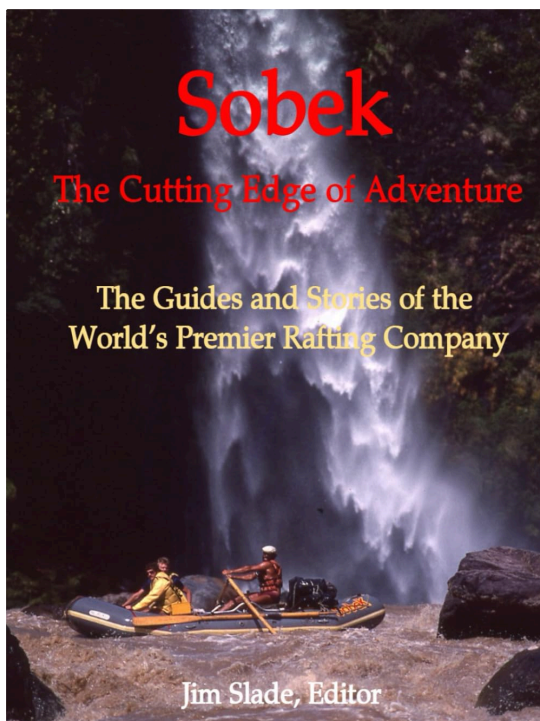
Be swept away by these awesome and implausible tales from Richard's 50 years of insanely great explorations.

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.”

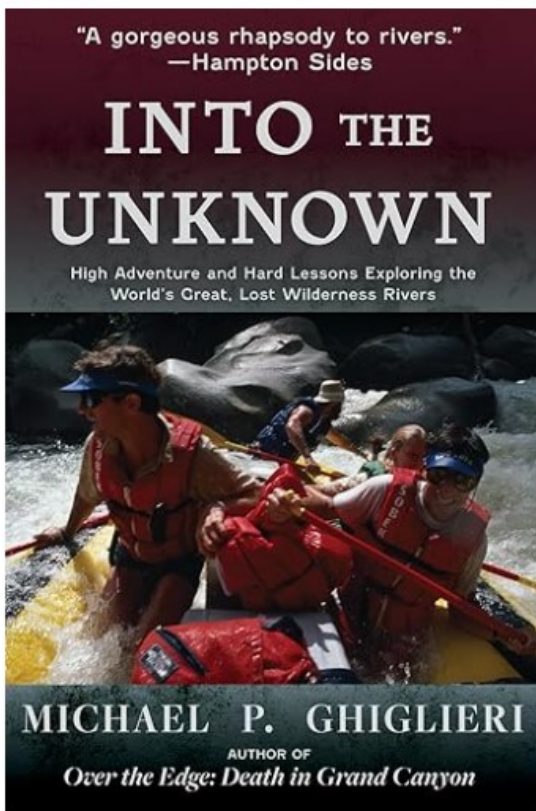
[The Art of Living Dangerously.](#)



Sobek: The Cutting Edge of Adventure

Jim Slade, Editor

More than a century after Major Powell completed the first descent of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, a great many of the world's rivers had still never been run. The guides of Sobek set out to change that and made more than 100 first descents of rivers around the world, many of which became classic. Meet the guides and hear their stories from the cutting edge of adventure. Forward by Richard Bangs.



Into The Unknown

by Michael P. Ghiglieri

Veteran wilderness guide Michael P. Ghiglieri takes you into the unknown-- among white-water rapids, crocodiles, hippos, gorillas, lions, and impossible waterfalls. His riveting memoir not only serves up true high adventure, it also presents the ecology, natural history, conservation (or the lack of it), and exploration history of nine far-flung wilderness regions across the globe. Order now!

Yes, Let's Go There!





Extraordinary Travelers Club



Richard Bangs
Founder



Jack Wheeler
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Rebel Holiday
Founder

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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