

EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch

ISSUE #18 - October - November 2025

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What Is Real Adventure?

by Richard Bangs

Adventure can be found almost anywhere, but some places lend deeper authenticity to bold actions of uncertain outcome. **I felt that while co-leading a pioneering trip to North Korea with Jack Wheeler.**

The mountainous state is an opaque land sealed by ideology and myth, where curiosity itself feels like contraband. To step across its tightly guarded threshold is to enter a parallel world, one that resists the homogenizing tide of modernity.

The air hums with the tension of the unseen, yet beneath the rigid surface, the traveler senses the beating heart of humanity, yearning quietly behind the walls. **In such a place, every glance, every whispered exchange, every controlled movement becomes an act of discovery.**

It is adventure in its purest form—not measured by distance or altitude, but by the depth of wonder and the courage to engage a world so wholly other.



Richard Bangs, on a "Real Adventure" in North Korea at Sobek River, Photo by Jack Wheeler

In the shadowed aftermath of the Everest Disaster of 1996 I found myself in Darjeeling, visiting Ed Hillary, then New Zealand ambassador to Nepal and India. He was also on our Board of Advisors at Sobek, a fellow member in fine standing at The Explorers Club, and a kindred spirit joined by the pull of far horizons.

Over dinner, in the cooling highland air, we chatted about how Everest climbing had changed since his historic ascent in 1953. He was not thrilled with the evolution, or devolution, of the activity, and his words rang with the melancholy of a golden age gone dim: **“How thankful I was that I was active in a pioneering era when we established the route, carried the loads, all worked together for the ultimate objective. The way things are now, I don’t think I would have bothered.”**



Richard Bangs with Ed Hillary, then New Zealand Ambassador to India & Nepal, Explorers Club Members

Today some lament that Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, Kilimanjaro and Victoria Falls have lost transcendence because of their manufactured and commercial accessibility, and that the backcountry is no longer so if one can call for help on a Starlink set or sat phone. Others protest that denying access is an elitism of its own—a kind of spiritual hoarding. **Why should the summit belong only to those with iron lungs and summit swagger?**

In my years as a river guide, I escorted blind children, senior citizens, and paraplegics down the Colorado River, and I can testify that the transformational aspects of the experience were as vital for them as for the young and strapping.

Sure, Everest today may be more crowded, its paths GPS-tagged, its climbers clipped into systems of convenience. **But when a traveler, heart pounding, cresting the summit under a wheeling sky, feels the sting of tears and the thin, electric joy of having arrived—does it really matter that the boots were Gore-Tex and not hobnailed?**



Richard Bangs on bactrian camel in Mongolia in June 2025

True adventure isn't measured in danger—it's measured in awakening. It is that moment when the world expands and the self dissolves into the grandeur of something larger. **It is the tickle of risk, yes—but more than that, it is the ignition of wonder.**

The universe of those who will leave the warm glow of comfort for the cold fire of the unknown is small—very small. I've seen the glazed eyes when I speak of Zambezi whirlpools or the hush of dawn in the Hindu Kush. To many, these places live in the fog of the mythic, as accessible as Middle Earth. But they are real—and reachable.

Adventure is not a relic of a past age. It is not owned by mountaineers or explorers. It is not an exclusive club. Adventure is for everyone... unless, of

course, the heart beats only for concrete, the eyes widen to fluorescent light, and satisfaction is found in seeing the air you breathe.

Shaking off the cloak of many cares and setting off to new lands not only validates existence, but it also evokes exhilaration and the splendid frisson that comes with gliding by the edge. **To push aside the tangle, venture beyond the mainstream, and taste heart in mouth is to vitalize the impulse of life, to reassert the play of passion, and to shed luster on the little gleam of time between two eternities.**



Richard Bangs on adventure with a new friend!

So come—step off the well-worn path. In 2026, join us for something that shimmers with the spirit of real adventure. Walk Kenya's wild tracks with me. Or explore Brazil's Pantanal, the great expanses of Central Asia and Mongolia with Jack Wheeler and Rebel Holiday, or join one of the many soul-stirring journeys offered by [MT Sobek](#).

There's a peculiar alchemy that happens when shedding the weight of everyday obligations and pointing toward an unmapped quadrant. **When you push through the undergrowth and leave the marked signs behind, when you taste the metallic flavor of genuine risk, you're not just passing time. You're stoking the fire that keeps us human.** You're reasserting what it means to play, to want, to be utterly present in the narrow space between nothing and everything.

Take A Walk on The Wild Side - October 20-31, 2026

by Richard Bangs



An Elephant Encounter on Walking Safari, Photo by traveler

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 disgorges 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.



Walking Safari, Photo Courtesy of MT Sobek

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.

October 20-31, 2026 -- for details:

<https://20008055.hs-sites.com/trip-interest-request-kenya-walking-and-wildlife-safari-with-richard-bangs>

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Photo Courtesy of MT Sobek

Being An Adventurer

by Jack Wheeler



Jack Wheeler, kneeling, leading overland adventure to the Kingdom of Lo, Nepal

Humans are unique living organisms. They must *choose* to live, *choose* their goals and *choose* to achieve them. **Only you, an individual human being, can select your objectives and values, and only you can achieve them.** In other words, life, *your life*, is as dull or exciting, as happy or painful, as meaningful or meaningless as you make it.

The world is a place of unlimited potential for human greatness, achievement and happiness, but no one can experience it for you. No one can live it for you. You just can't live life second hand.

Adventure! What a magnificent ring to that magic word in its purest and truest sense. There are few to equal it in any language on Earth. **Those who lift themselves above the crowd, fix their eyes upon the horizon, take that all important first step and *do not stop*, will not go to their grave with a sterile heart and empty hands.**

How to take that first step towards being an adventurer? Stop trying not to. That's the secret. Don't ever tell yourself that the heroic, the adventurous, the remote and challenging is the not-realistic, the not-to-be-striven-for, the not-to-be-accomplished-by-you.

High Adventure does not belong to those who spend their time figuring out very carefully all the reasons why they are unable to do what they dream of, **but to those who sit down and decide what they want, decide how to achieve it, and then *do it*.**



Richard Bangs, Jack Wheeler, Nomad eagle hunter, and Eddy Downpatrick - Mongolia 2025

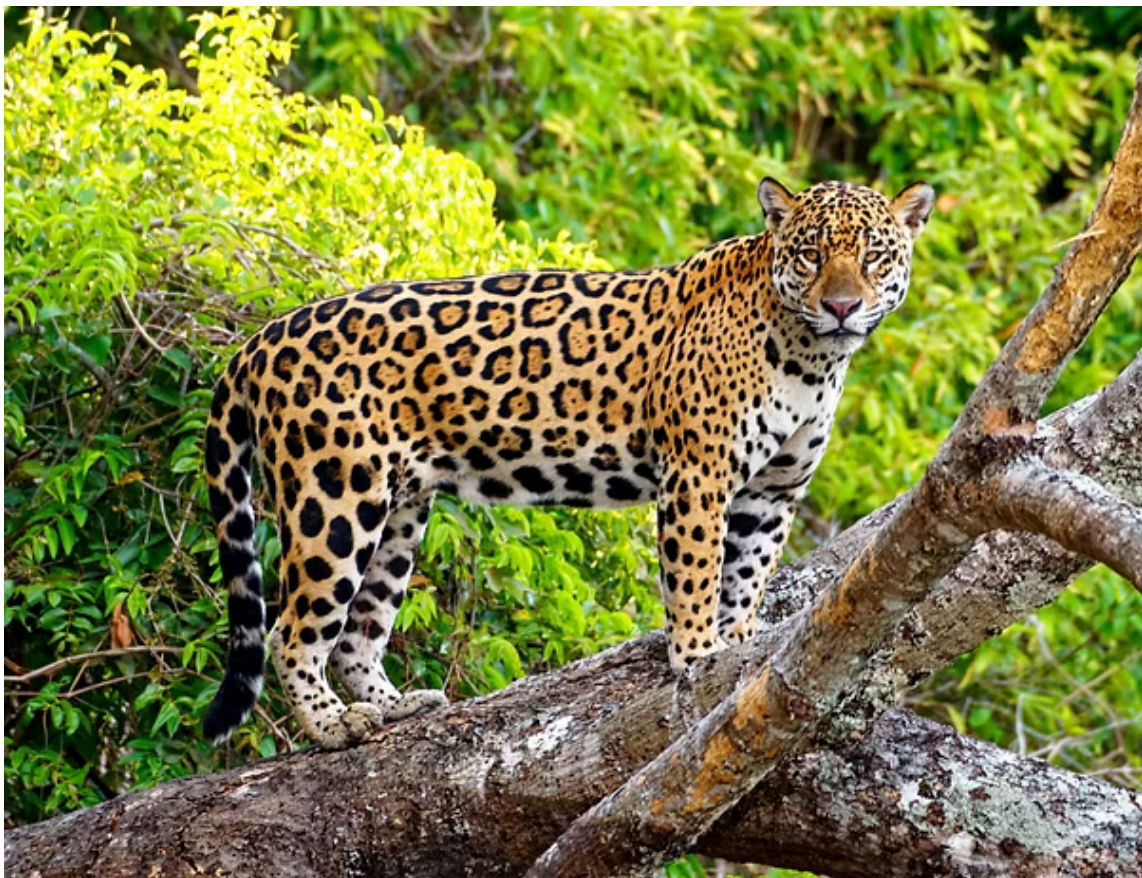
The easiest thing in the world to do is to figure out an excuse not to do something. I tell you, your brilliance at coming up with an almost inexhaustible number of incredibly persuasive excuses will astound you. Try it and see. Write down all the reasons you can think of why you shouldn't climb the Matterhorn, follow the footsteps of Marco Polo across Chinese Turkestan, explore the Sahara with Touareg nomads, or take a dugout canoe up the Xingu River to live with the Kayapo people in the heart of the Amazon. Fine. All done? Right.

Now, take that paper and throw it in the waste basket. You've taken that vital first step to being an Adventurer. You stopped trying not to be one.

SAVE THE DATE: Our extraordinary **Mongolia Adventure** will be **June 18-30, 2026** will be open for registration soon. **It's once in a lifetime opportunity to experience this incredible journey. Watch for details in the next dispatch.**

Pantanal: The Unknown Wonder of the Amazon

By Jack Wheeler



Photos in this section courtesy of Jack Wheeler

Tucked away in a hidden corner of South America, National Geographic calls *The Pantanal* “Brazil’s best kept secret” bordering Bolivia and Paraguay.



Comprising the world’s largest tropical wetlands, the Pantanal contains **the largest concentration of wildlife and tropical birdlife in the Amazon, in all South America, the entire Western Hemisphere**, and quite possibly the entire world. Yet its remoteness keeps it unknown to all but the savviest world travelers.

Designed and led by **Jack Wheeler and Rebel Holiday** - you are invited to be a part of it. **This adventure is May 17-26, 2026.**



You'll visit tribes of Amazon Indians; snorkel in crystal clear lagoons like an aquarium of tropical fish; see **parrots, toucans, hyacinth macaws, roseate spoonbills and other birdlife in astounding numbers, giant anteaters, an unbelievable profusion of caiman alligators,** and be up close and personal with the **Amazon's iconic yet rarely seen animal, the jaguar.**



You'll do this and more safely and in comfort, enjoy great food and hospitality of people so happy to meet you. You'll learn so much about this wondrous place, and experience a life-memorable adventure few others have ever had. It's a real adventure -- here we go!

For more photos, itinerary, and registration details, just click the gold box.
Contact us if any questions **holiday@wheelerexpeditions.com**.

[Click for Photos & Details](#)

**THE PANTANAL:
The Unknown Wonder of the Amazon**

May 17-26, 2026



Serengeti Birthing Safari - Private Luxury Tents

By Rebel Holiday



Cheetah Mom Standing Guard with Cubs - Photo by Rebel Holiday

As you can imagine, I've been on a number of safaris. Here are some of the reasons that this may be my favorite. First being in a private place in the

Serengeti bush makes me feel deeply grounded and renewed.

As a mother, this one is special because it is so invigorating to see new life and watch the animals interact. It's a precarious situation as the mothers have to keep a close eye on their young.

We're in the South Serengeti at a time with perfect weather and the flowers are starting to pop up. Our custom built camp is private, our tents are very well arranged and spaced apart. Plus each one has an en-suite bathroom.

The staff team knows us and totally spoils us, cooking delicious and varied fresh meals. Making us drinks. Washing and folding our laundry. Small touches that make it relaxing and renewing. All with big smiles and cheerful attitudes.

With all the bush comfort, it's definitely an adventure! I hope we get to share it with you!



Rebel on a Game Drive in the Serengeti 2024

[Click Here for Details](#)

**SERENGETI BIRTHING
SAFARI**
A Luxury Expedition

February 28 - March 10, 2026

Note: **We can take 2 more couples on this spectacular safari** -- so if you might go, click the gold box for photos and the itinerary! This one always fills up.

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

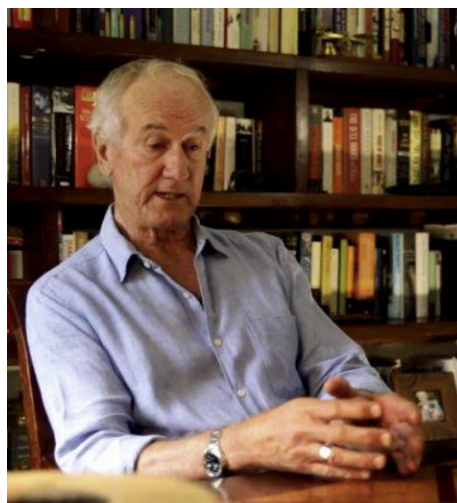


Questions? Reach out to us:

richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com
or
rebelholiday@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

We're happy to discuss!

Extraordinary Traveler - Iain Allan



<p>About Iain Allan</p>

He's the author of "Outsider - A Life With the Elephants and Mountains of Africa." He's climbed Kilimanjaro thirty-two times, climbed Mount Kenya over one hundred and fifty times, has climbed major mountains of the world like Denali in Alaska, and Ama Dablam in Nepal, as well as the face of El Capitan in Yosemite. As the founder of Tropical Ice's Great Walk of Africa, he's led adventurers over a hundred times, walking over 10,000 miles across Tsavo National Park. He's been charged by lions, leopards, buffalo, hippo, and elephant, and has come through it mostly unscathed. This man is Iain Allan. This is his story.



May 23, 1981 Summit of Mt. Denali by Iain Allan

Extraordinary Traveler Interview: Iain Allan

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

IA: I was about 10 years, when we sailed from UK to Kenya. I knew then that the idea of a 'normal' life simply didn't appeal.

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

IA: I have had many, but that first voyage with only my mother and I was an awakening. Little did we know that it was a journey which would soon no longer be possible. Neither of us had ever travelled before, and to sail across the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, and down across the Red Sea was beyond exciting.

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

IA: I have had so many close calls, either climbing, or walking through the African bush that it is simply impossible to select one over another. What they have all taught me is that adventure needs to be thoroughly calculated, and the importance of making decisive decisions. Bad decisions can be worked out; indecisiveness can't be.

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?

IA: He was more than simply a traveller, but T.E. Lawrence has always been a hero of mine. I regard "*The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*" as perhaps one of the five greatest books I

have ever read. The other two adventurers I have admired greatly are Beryl Markham and Bruce Chatwin. To write great prose like the three aforementioned people has always been something to strive for. Beryl gave me the sentence, which I have always tried to guide my life with: Every tomorrow ought not to resemble every yesterday. Her book, "*West With the Night*" is, in my opinion, Africa's greatest literary work.

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

IA: I believe there is only one mindset when travelling: open mindedness. I could back that up too with the need to be nonjudgmental.

Q: What characteristics do you choose in your traveling companions?

IA: Optimism, sense of humour, and the need to be able to acknowledge your mistakes.

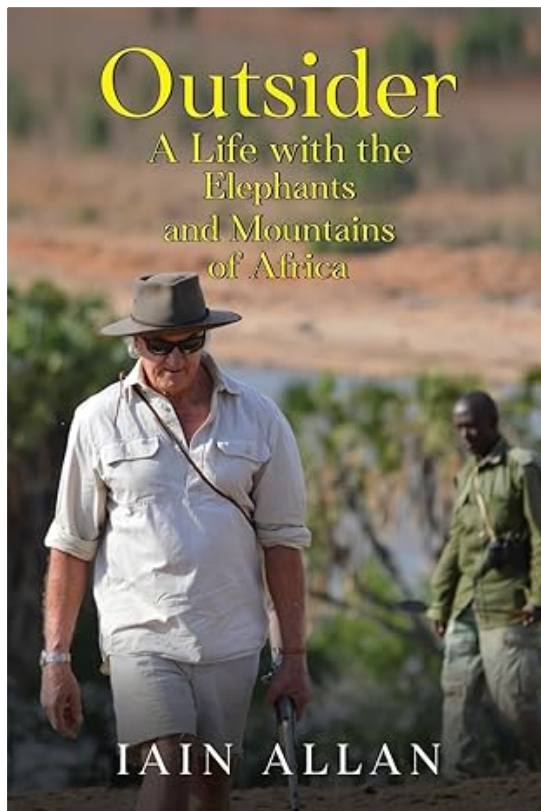
Q: What is something you dream of doing – or a place that you dream of exploring?

IA: I would love to go to Iran.

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

AI: Choose several significant books to take; leave your phone behind.

Extraordinary Travelers' Bookshelf



Outsider

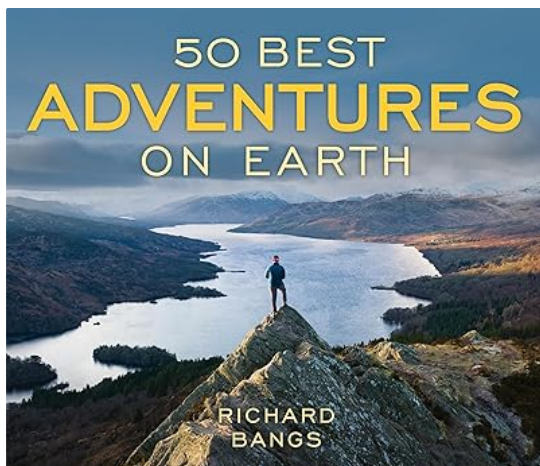
A Life with the Elephants and Mountains of Africa

by Iain Allan

About the book: Who is this man?

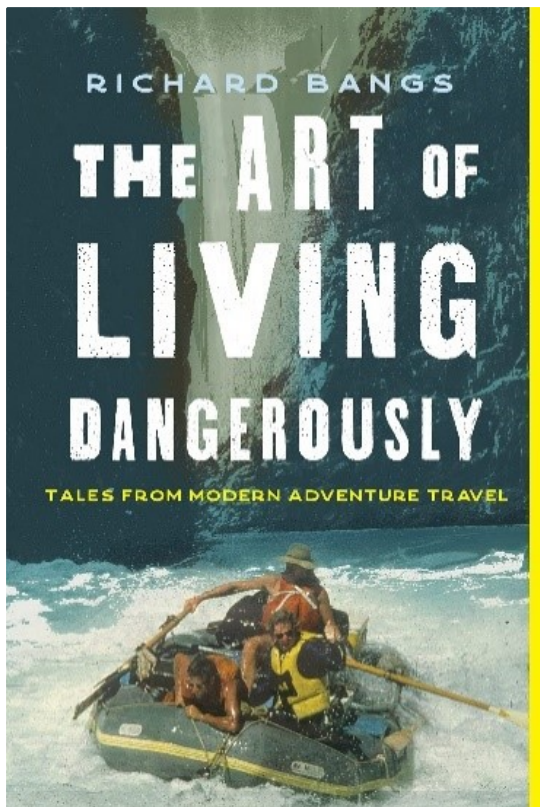
He's climbed Kilimanjaro thirty-two times, climbed Mount Kenya over one hundred and fifty times, has climbed major mountains of the world like Denali in Alaska, and Ama Dablam in Nepal, as well as the face of El Capitan in Yosemite. As the founder of Tropical Ice's Great Walk of Africa, he's led adventurers over a hundred times, walking over 10,000 miles across Tsavo National Park. He's been charged by lions, leopards, buffalo, hippo, and elephant, and has come through it mostly unscathed.

This man is Iain Allan...and this is his story.



50 Best Adventures on Earth by Richard Bangs

About the book: From scaling untouched Himalayan peaks to navigating pristine Amazon rapids, *50 Best Adventures on Earth* is your ultimate guide to the planet's most extraordinary experiences, handpicked by legendary explorer Richard Bangs. Transform your travel dreams into reality with this definitive guide from the founder of Sobek Expeditions, who has led over 35 first river descents across six continents.



The Art of Living Dangerously by Richard Bangs

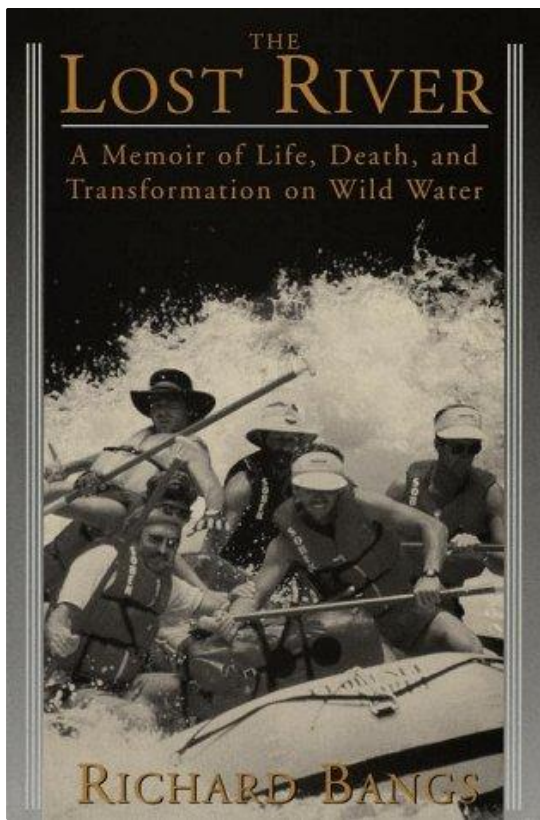
Be swept away by these awesome and implausible tales from Richard's 50 years of insanely great explorations.

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



Richard Bangs
Founder



Jack Wheeler
Founder



Eddy Downpatrick
Founder



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](https://www.extraordinarytravelersclub.com/etc-newsletter-issues).

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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