

EXTRAORDINARY TRAVELERS CLUB Dispatch

ISSUE #14 - March 2025

- Carpe Diem: The Urgency of Exploration - by Richard Bangs
- A Journey in Western Ukraine - May 15-27, 2025 Invitation
- Explore Mongolia - The Best Way - Jun 16-27, 2025 - Invitation
- Best Adventures for Extraordinary Travelers in 2025!
- Kenya Adventure in September with Richard - Coming Soon
- Extraordinary Traveler Profile - Piotr P. Chmielinski

All Photos - Courtesy Richard Bangs, unless noted



Carpe Diem: The Urgency of Exploration

by Richard Bangs

Many, many years ago I organized and led a first rafting expedition down the Euphrates River in Eastern Turkey, running through the Dark Canyon (Karanlık Kanyon) to the town of Birecik at the Syrian border. It would have been an easy exercise to keep going, following the course into the Fertile Crescent, the cradle of civilization, but after a month of paddling, I decided to head back to Istanbul for a hot shower and crisp sheets. **I told myself I would return and finish the survey into Syria, and looked forward to it.**



Richard Bangs and crew on their 1st and Last Descent on the Euphrates River

But, by the time I was ready to trace the unfinished trip, the Turks had thrown a giant concrete plug into the river, the Keban Dam, and **it was no longer feasible** to float the Firat, as the Euphrates is locally known. **I missed my shot, and have regretted it ever since.**

There is an unspoken truth in the soul of the traveler: the world is in flux, and the windows to its most profound experiences are forever opening and closing.

Horace's great Latin call to arms, ***Carpe Diem***, is not just a romantic notion or a poet's plea—it is **a traveler's imperative, a mandate for those who yearn to witness and immerse themselves in the full splendor of our planet before time and circumstance steal away what was once available and accessible.**



Few places embody this urgency more than **Western Ukraine and Mongolia**—two landscapes of deep authenticity, cultural vibrancy, and precarious futures.

Western Ukraine: A Door Closing

The echoes of medieval Europe still ring through the cobbled streets of Lviv, where baroque facades whisper the stories of centuries. The Carpathian Mountains remain a sanctuary for the Hutsuls, whose traditions—elaborate embroidery, soulful polyphonic songs, and age-old woodcarving—stand as testaments to resilience. **But as history surges forward with geopolitical tremors and cultural shifts, the opportunity to experience this region in its undiluted form is narrowing.**



Political tides and global conflicts threaten to redefine these lands. To walk the streets of Chernivtsi today, to sip coffee in a café that feels plucked from Vienna's golden age, is to embrace a moment that may soon be rewritten by forces beyond our control. The intricate blend of Ukrainian, Polish, Romanian, and Jewish legacies here is fragile, and those who wish to witness this mosaic must move quickly before time, like an unrelenting tide, washes it into memory.

The specter of conflict casts a long shadow, but within that shadow lies a unique opportunity. **To witness the resilience of a people, to experience a culture forged in the fires of adversity – this is a privilege, a fleeting glimpse into a moment in time.**

Mongolia: The Last Wild Frontier Under Siege



Across the steppes of Mongolia, the nomadic heartbeat of Genghis Khan's descendants still drums against a vast and unbroken horizon. Yurts dot the grasslands, their felt walls harboring a way of life unchanged for centuries—one where the eagle hunter's cry pierces the crisp dawn and herders ride the windswept plains, their connection to the land almost mythological in its purity. **The whisper of horse hooves on the grasslands, the haunting melodies of throat singing – these are perhaps the *pro tempore* treasures that tempt the extraordinary traveler.**

Yet, modernity looms, threatening to homogenize a culture that has thrived in defiance of time. Chinese economic expansion encroaches, bringing with it infrastructure projects that chip away at the autonomy of Mongolia's nomads.

Simultaneously, Western influences seep into Ulaanbaatar, transforming the cityscape with glass and steel, while traditional values erode under the pressure of globalization. Modern cultural currents flow through smartphones and satellite dishes even in the most remote encampments. The young increasingly migrate to cities and other countries, trading traditional knowledge for white-shirt opportunities.



Jackson Holiday Wheeler, age 11, in Mongolia - Photo by Jack Wheeler

To experience Mongolia now is to grasp a moment teetering between past and future. It is to ride with Kazakh eagle hunters in the Altai Mountains before their ancient practice becomes relegated to staged performances. It is to share *airag*, the fermented mare's milk that fuels the spirit of the steppes, with a family who may soon trade their yurts for high-rise apartments. **It is to feel the pulse of a world that may soon be tamed beyond recognition.**

The Call to Action

Travel is more than movement; it is an act of witness, a declaration that these places—these people, these ways of life—matter. To seize the day in travel is to embrace the world in its purest form, to step beyond the predictable and into the extraordinary, before the extraordinary fades into the past. The world, in its relentless march towards sameness, is losing its medley, but there is still the chance to see and sing.

This is not alarmism but pragmatism. The wise traveler understands that cultural ecosystems, like natural ones, evolve and sometimes disappear. **Traditional ways of life persist only as long as they remain viable for those who practice them.**



Carpe Diem in travel means recognizing the ephemeral nature of opportunity. It means prioritizing experiences that may not be available in a decade, a year, or even a month. It means understanding that the most profound journeys often occur at the edges of change, where traditional ways of life still survive but face uncertain futures.

For in travel as in life, our most poignant regrets stem not from what we did, but from what we postponed until it was too late. To this day I remain a remorseful stranger to Syria. “Euphrates” now is the code word I use for my too many missed opportunities. Why did I Euphrates that place? That path? That chance to visit?

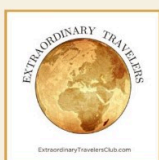
Western Ukraine and Mongolia beckon now, their doors still ajar, their stories still unscripted.

The moment is fleeting. The time is now.

Come join us in these Extraordinary Travel Experiences. *Carpe Diem!*



Your Invitations to "Sieze The Day"



WESTERN UKRAINE EXPEDITION

*Led by Richard Bangs and Rebel Holiday
and Sasha Vosk, Ukraine Expert*

May 15 to 27, 2025



Click for Details

Western Ukraine Expedition

May 15 to 27, 2025

To Sieze the Day join our extraordinary tour of Mongolia in June, 2025.

Explore Mongolia - now with 2 Dates Available!

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

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



[Click for Details](#)

Explore Mongolia

Co- Led by
Richard Bangs & Laura Hubber

June 16 - 27, 2025
Limited Space Available

[Click for Details](#)

Explore Mongolia

Co-led by
Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday

June 3 - 16, 2025
Limited Space Available

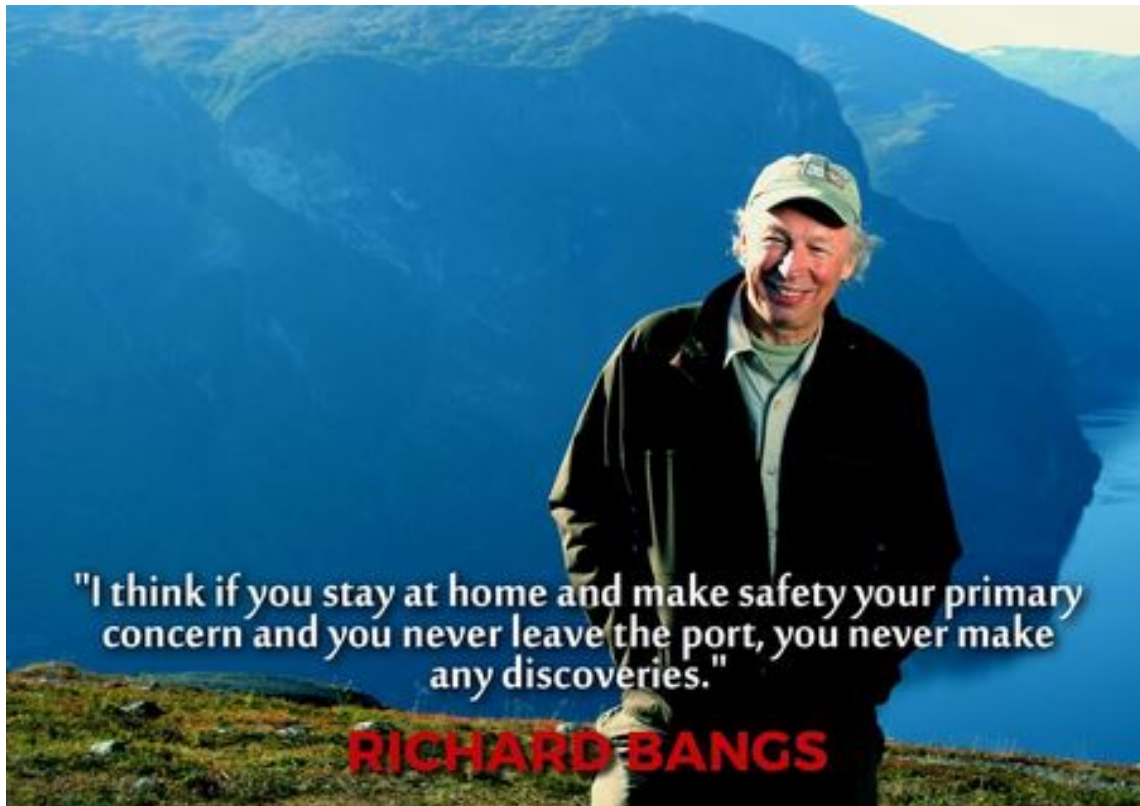
Questions? Reach out to us:

richardbangs@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

or

rebelholiday@extraordinarytravelersclub.com

We're happy to discuss!



Featured Travel 2025 - Invites for You

The Splendours of Scotland



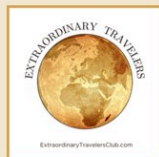
The Splendours of Scotland:
Edinburgh, the Highlands, and the Western Isles
Designed and Led by Eddy Downpatrick
Sunday, October 5th to Tuesday, October 14th 2025



Click for Details
Splendours of Scotland

October 5-14, 2025

PORTUGAL Exploration



Designed and Co-Led by
Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday
May 2-11, 2025



Click for Details
Portugal Exploration
May 2-11, 2025

[Click for Details](#)

Portugal Exploration October 3-12, 2025



PORTUGAL Exploration



Designed & Led by Jack Wheeler & Rebel Holiday

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

Friday, October 3 to Sunday, Oct 12, 2025



Take a Walk on the Wild Side in Kenya

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 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.

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.

September 2025—pricing and dates to follow!



Extraordinary Traveler - Piotr P. Chmielinski



Piotr P. Chmielinski is a kayaker and an explorer, often referred by others as 'The Godfather of the Amazon' due to his exploration and research activities on the largest river in the world.

Within the Canoandes '79 expedition, he paddled the rivers of the Central and South Americas, including the first descent of the Colca Canyon, considered one of the earth's deepest canyon, in 1981. **He is the first to kayak the entire Amazon River, from source to mouth in 1985-86, and the hero of the book by Joe Kane Running the Amazon reporting this expedition.** He has been involved in Amazon sources research especially as the co-organizer of the expedition to the permanent source in Ticlla Cocha/Nevado Mismi in the Apurimac River in 2000 for the National Geographic Society and The Explorers Club and National Geographic Society observer in expeditions to the seasonal source (most distant source) in Cordillera Rumi Cruz in the Mantaro River in 2012 and 2013.

Piotr P. Chmielinski was born in Rzeszow, Poland and was educated in Poland receiving his Master of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from University of Mining and Metallurgy, Krakow, Poland. Piotr left Poland in 1979, and after many years of adventure and residence in South America Piotr settled in Casper, Wyoming in 1983.

Following the successful navigation of the Amazon River, from source-to-sea, Piotr moved to Washington, DC in 1986 where he worked as a scientist and environmental engineer, ultimately founding the firm HP Environmental, Inc. In 1983, Piotr established Canoandes, Inc., a not-for-profit organization. He remains the President of that organization through which he coordinates expeditions and facilitates endeavors related to geographical explorations.

He lives in Herndon, VA with his wife Dr. Joanna Chmielinska the researcher at the George Washington University Medical School. They have two sons, Maximilian, Ph.D. graduate from the University of Washington, WA and Alexander, graduate from the University of Pennsylvania (Dental School).



Extraordinary Traveler Interview: Piotr Chmielinski

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

PC: Honestly, I didn't dream of any extraordinary expeditions, explorations or adventures. They were brought about by a series of happy, sometimes unexpected, sometimes difficult circumstances. In fact, from an early age I dreamed of traveling, getting to know the world, seeing all the wonderful places I read about in books or saw on TV travel programs. Kayaks, which I became interested in during my university studies, became a means, an excuse, a motive and a ticket for traveling, especially abroad. **Because in Poland in the 1970s, behind the so-called Iron Curtain, there were times when you had to have a really good explanation to obtain a passport and be able to leave the country.** And a student kayaking trip as part of an academic club was a pretty good explanation. As I gained experience and kayaking skills, my and my colleagues' aspirations to explore more and more difficult rivers grew. First in Poland, then in Europe, and then it was time for American rivers. And so, step by step, I reached with my friends from the Canoandes'79 expedition (a three-year long expedition), first to the Colca Canyon in 1981, which we were the first to paddle, and then to the Amazon River, which I was also the first in history to paddle from source to mouth in 1985-86.

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

PC: If I have to name one such experience, it is definitely Amazon. And it contains a whole range of extraordinary experiences. Let's start with kayaking - I started by paddling down an icy slope near Nevado Mismi in Peru (over 5,000 meters above sea level), where the Amazon River begins, then a rushing mountain river with its deep never run before canyons, and then a lowland river growing larger with each kilometer, to finally become a huge floodplain that is hard to see the end of it, flowing through a 200-kilometer-long delta into the Atlantic Ocean. **I paddled almost 7,000 km of the entire length of the river and I spent six months on the Amazon. It was a time of constant learning about this extremely changeable river, its mountain traps, intricate meanders and network of channels.** Time to get to know local communities and the specifics of communicating with them and looking for a safe way out of difficult situations. But it was also a time of admiration for the spectacles nature offered us, the sky dotted with millions of stars, the invigorating rain, the play of light on the waves, I could go on and on...

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

PC: When we decided to go on a trip to the Colca Canyon and the Amazon River, we were aware that many dangers awaited us there. These dangers are why no one before us has paddled the deepest canyon in the world or the largest river in the world. The dangers were related to natural conditions - such as a mountain canyon enclosed between high rock walls (in the Colca Canyon reaching up to 3 and 4 km) with raging water boiling over large boulders, from which it was impossible to escape and in which, at every turn, the great unknown occurs – a gentle flow or a waterfall. However, the encounters with people, such as Sendero Luminoso in Peru, were also a threat, for whom a few guys in kayaks were the easy prey. **Each of these experiences taught us humility and respect for the river and the forces of nature, but on the other hand, we needed a certain dose of bravado to get out of those situations alive.**



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?

PC: When I started my traveling adventure - at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s - I admired Polish climbers who blazed trails to the highest peaks in the Himalayas. It was the golden age of Polish Himalayan mountaineering. Decades later, I had the honor of meeting and making friends with many of them, and to this day I still see them and the young adepts of this discipline at the KOLOSZY (Colossus) which is the annual festival of travelers and explorers held in Gdynia, Poland. I was also lucky to meet, cooperate with and promote several interesting travelers whose goals and ideas for expeditions seemed extremely interesting to me.

Among them, I can mention: Brothers Dawid Andres and Hubert Kisiński, who explored the entire Amazon on bicycles; Aleksander Doba, who crossed the Atlantic in a kayak three times; Michał Woroch and Maciej Kamiński, friends in wheelchairs who rode a renovated Land Rover Defender adapted to their needs along both Americas; Pete Casey, a British explorer who, without using any means of transport, crossed the entire Amazon, from the mouth to the source.

Why do I admire them? For perseverance, determination, ingenuity, for overcoming difficulties with a smile and for being able to be a part of their expeditions with them in some way.

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

PC: In every area of life, not only in traveling, I believe in the principle that in small steps you reach your destination. You have to give it all and work diligently

to achieve your goals, without that nothing will happen. And you must not give up, despite the difficulties that sometimes are around.

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

PC: Perseverance, determination, discipline and ... keeping things in order would be good, not pedantic, but allowing you to limit the constant searching for them scattered (laughter).

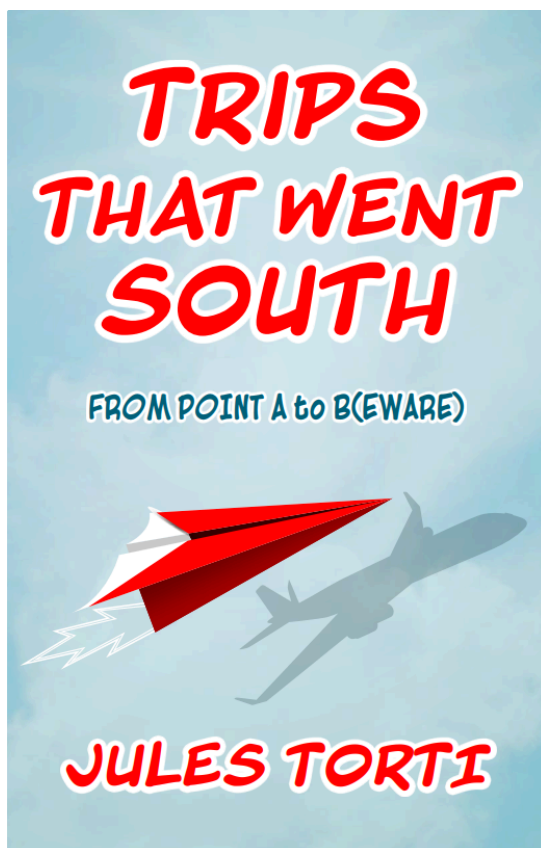
Q: What is something you dream of doing – or a place that you dream of exploring?

PC: I'm lucky to do what I like and I don't think I would want to change it. I once wanted to be a historian. It turned out differently and I took up environmental protection professionally. This does not mean that I have abandoned my passion for history, I pursue it by reading books. As for exploration, I would like to see a few more places in the world - but first - even a short return to the Amazon to see what has changed after 40+ years.

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

PC: I have one message for young travelers - it is worth dreaming and making your dreams come true.

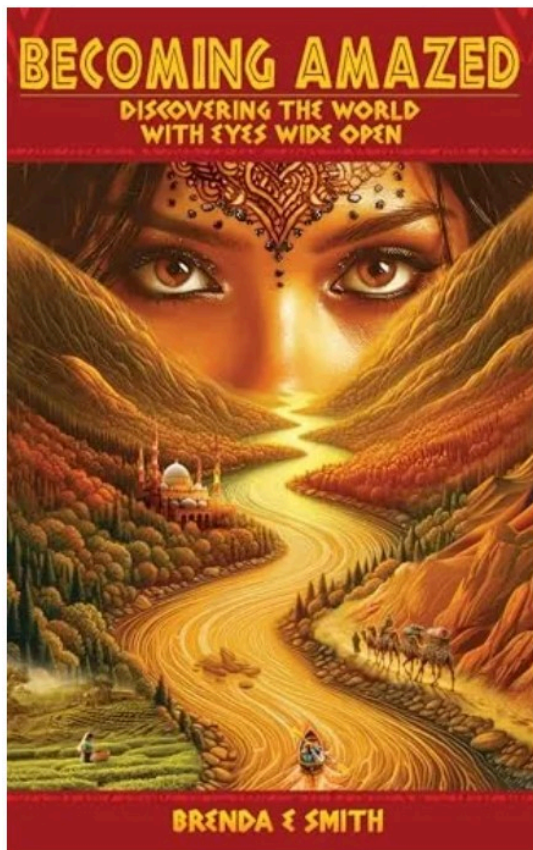
Extraordinary Travelers' Bookshelf



TRIPS THAT WENT SOUTH: FROM POINT A to B(EWARE)

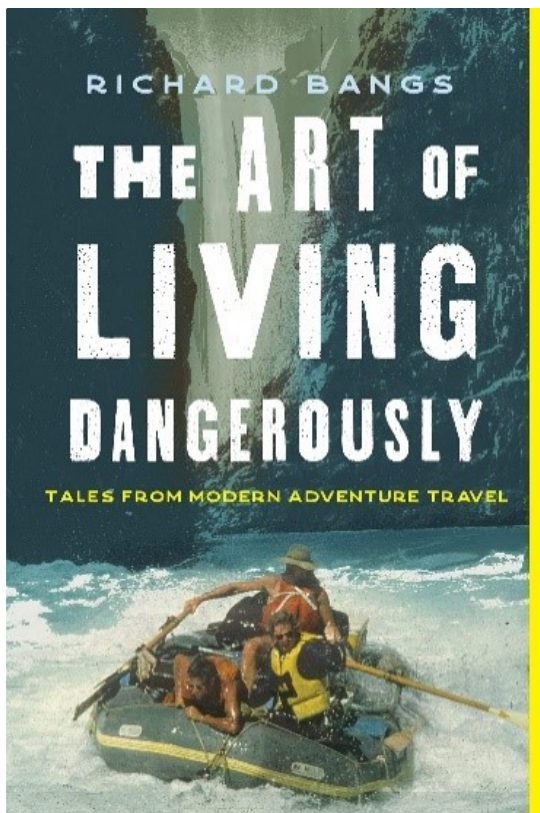
By Jules Torti

What reviewers say: "The adventures in this book show a strong curiosity and risk appetite -- leading to twists and turns one would not expect! If you've wondered how trips can go sideways, Jules Torti vulnerably shares her misadventures from Ecuador, Colombia, Thailand, Newfoundland, Belize, Iceland and China. Luckily, her playfulness and sense of humor make this an engaging and entertaining book."



Becoming Amazed: Discovering the World With Eyes wide Open by Brenda E. Smith

What reviewers say: "Brenda's stories transported me to places I've never been. She has the ability to make me feel as if I am with her on her adventures. Even her more serious stories are uplifting because Brenda finds a way to make the best of difficult and - at times- heartbreaking situations. The places she has been to and the people she has met (and loved!) are amazing. I was amazed. You will be too!"



The Art of Living Dangerously by Richard Bangs

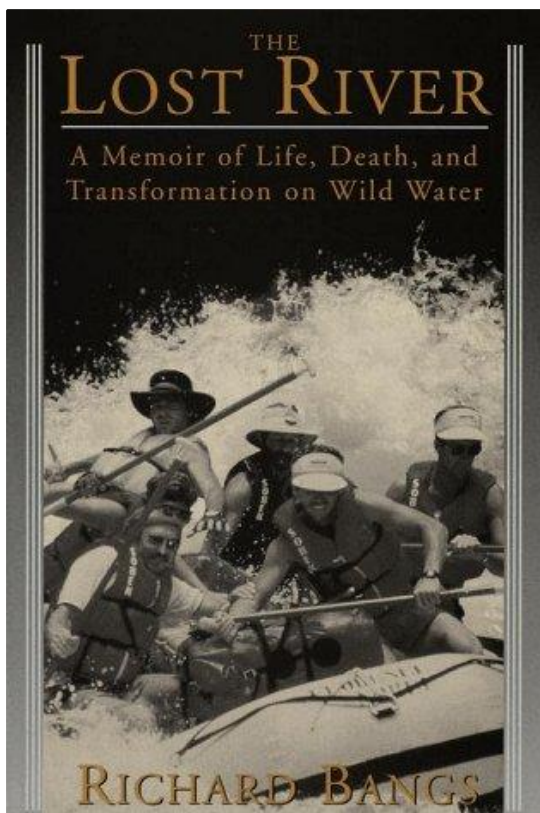
Be swept away by these awesome and implausible tales from Richard's 50 years of insanely great explorations.

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](#).

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

2598 E Sunrise Blvd Suite 2104, 33304, Fort Lauderdale, FL

This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

You've received it because you've subscribed to our newsletter.

[View in browser](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)