Mickey Snarfed My Caribbean Isle | Ramping Up Your Athleticism

The Finest Snowshoes Around | PREDICTIONS '99: Iceberg Hits Jersey!

VAIL GETS BURNED
Behind an Ecoterrorist Action

Outside

JANUARY 1999

THE YEAR'S BEST TRIPS

Tackling the Futaleufu

Traversing the Karakoram

Summiting the Grand Teton

Horsepacking Rajasthan

77

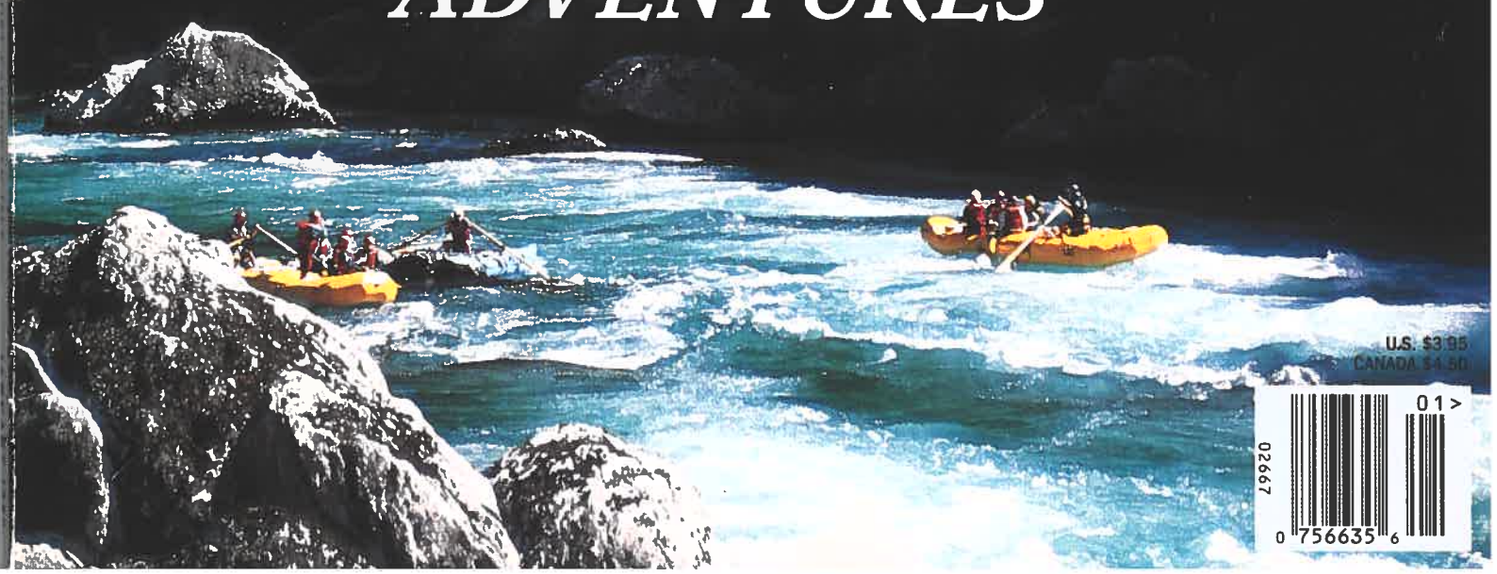
Flat-Out, All-You-Can-Eat
ADVENTURES

Kayaking from the Andes to the Amazon

Trekking the Transylvanian Alps

Sinking Into Suriname

First-Ascending Antarctica



U.S. $3.95
CANADA $4.50

01>
02667
0 756635 6

The week after after his Futaleufu trip, Earth River received the following letter from the Outside Magazine writer, David Rakoff.

Dear Eric;

Even though I'm a correspondent for outside magazine—I'm on the masthead—I am frightened of everything. That's My bailiwick at the magazine, in fact; they send me to do Things—stories that scare the hell out of me. The minute I accepted the assignment, I regretted it. I spent the week leading up to the departure, crossing Manhattan Streets a little less energetically, it hopes that a cab might hit me and break my leg and get me out of it.

Then in the hotel lobby in Puerto Varas, you enthusiastically hooked up your computer and showed me a video clip of Himalayas, which would be one of the "Fun" rapids on our trip. The waves were nearly 20 feet high. The raft would crest and then disappear from view entirely. Your enthusiasm aside, I thought I would pass out and seriously considered hitch hiking back over two continents.

So how extraordinary is it when I say what an amazing trip I had on the Futaleufu. The word I had heard over and over was "exhilarating" and it's apt, certainly, but actually not strong enough. The Futaleufu its an astonishment! The color of the water, it's crazy volume, the roar, the velocity of the ride, and through it all, the absolute mastery of our incredible guide in the back of the raft—made every element seemed heightened, perfected, colorized, almost virtual. And incredibly fun, it must be said.

There was also a great variety of activities during the week; inflatable kayaking, rafting and canyoning to name a few. Now when I watch the video of the trip, I can pick out my face grinning, against the barreling froth. I frankly still can't believe I ever managed to do it, but I'm supremely glad I did.

I'd go back for a view of the stars alone.

Sincerely,

David

GETMORENTHUSIASTIC®

Sign In | Join Free

Outside

Sports | Featured | Adventure | Gear | Travel | Health | Run | Cycle | Long Reads | Podcasts | Videos | Sean Kemp

Do Not Sell My Personal Information
Read Our Terms of Use

Enjoy 50% a YEAR!, plus exclusive member guide

Enjoy 50% a YEAR!, plus exclusive member guide

Sign In | Join Free Trial

Sports | Featured | Adventure | Gear | Travel | Health | Run | Cycle | Long Reads | Podcasts | Videos | Sean Kemp

Do Not Sell My Personal Information
Read Our Terms of Use

Sign In

Fu Fighters

Radical Climb #8 Lesson #17: Fu a bunch of FOFs in a cold, hard them down the Fairbanks. Stop a slam, bounds free—and it!

Published: Oct 1, 2010

Cassie Mehrer | Follow

Sign Up | Log In

Save Stories, Follow Topics, Get RSS

Newsports: Easily find more routes and boulder gems, upcoming running events, and more near you. Three weeks free! Learn more.

Newsletter Hacks and Pro gear reviews to your inbox. Sign up for free today.

GLEN CLOSE AND I ARE MEAD DOWN HERE. Her over bedeville we tumble. Now run all the fun gym cycle of the Rio Tuolumne, it is a perfect day. The sun is shining and the river is beautiful, a shimmering, sparkling, ever-changing mosaic of light and shadow. Glen and I are head. Suddenly I'm hit with a pterodactyl-sized, my own remote Elephant Man nameit. I am not a man, I am an animal. Follow the bubbles to the surface!

The forth is disembarking, chuckling in every direction, with no rope on. Relation being what it is, the combination of our life jackets and the powerful arms of Robert blow the trick.

Glenn and I are isolated, dripping, back into the boat, our ordeal all of five seconds from death to finish.

Cutting through the green, snowcapped Andes in southern Chile like a saber through flesh, the Futaleufú River is a Class V whitewater adventure of the highest order. Its name means "the great river" in the Mapuche language. On its 125-mile, 2,000-foot descent to the Pacific, the Futa is relatively slope in several lakes, which simultaneously work in an IV aqueous, it is considerably more temperate than most glacially fed rivers—and Glen Lee and Glen all the all. This accounts for the Fu's supreme beauty, but it also makes it a formidable challenge for an adventuring kayaker, crazy Canadian Glen Fleisinger.

This is our last day on—and brutally to—the river. Glenn, 59, grins wildly as we rapsode our positions in the raft, his steady complete bone structure somehow enhanced by the brush with mortality. I wish I could say the same for myself. I'm hunched halfway around the world to write about unstrikes harrowing rafts on an expedition meant to bring attention to an endangered river. But most of the time I'm thinking about my wife and kids back home in Bellingham, who I'm always up. And the ones who do—Glenn and Mark from Nebraska Nebraska—all thought that kids.

So I'm heading back with very friends and a story of a tent development scheme seems more sweeping grant than sleep and present danger. But not before having the crew scared out of me.

Our group of two dozen travelers will be part adventure tourism, part consciousness raising. The Futaleufú is facing a proposed dam project by multinational corporation Endesa, Chile's largest electric company.

We are being led by Earth Flow's Guide Experiences, which started running outfitted trips down the river in 1992. Based in upstate New York, the organization has been touring as property along the Fu to keep it out of Endesa's hands. Earth Flow's Chile operation is run by Kevin Koch, 32, who has been living in Chile for three years and who knows the Futaleufú like the back of his hand. Koch will return home and, through word of mouth, sand others down the Fu, enhancing its value as a well-traveled ecotourist destination and keeping it a viable economic alternative to a hydroelectric dam. Or there's the best case scenario, at least, Koch's plan is to make the Futaleufú so valuable as a group will buy a piece of land and put conservation easements on it so that it can never be sold to a power company. Endesa is a corporation, not the government. It would have to seek eminent domain to take it.

Earth Flow's founder is Eric Hertz, 44, an Arkansas with the youthful, Kool-aged Nostalgia of Greg Brown. Our guide, Robert M. a Santiago native of Scottish and Chilean parentage, with the physique and demeanor of a large cat. Robert's mother is a professor of Spanish literature, his father is a lawyer, rapids, and Robert is a lawyer. Red Fox on the Fu is an days in three rafts, starting at Valentina Canyon—roughly 25 miles from the river's headwaters and ending at Lake Lacar, in Argentina's Nahuel Huapi National Park—and Robert pre-rafts for the last 20 miles down to the mouth of Tornavacas. Glen and I are in one of the group's boats.

Robert marks the oars in the back and provides each car with a few minutes of note reading. On our first day, as we leave Villarrica Region ("Mapu Cousin") on Five Class IV challenge—he points to the geography of chaos rolling below.

"We'll ride down that ridge of water and then we'll turnaround across and back to the left, and we'll be in the middle of the lake." Then we'll paddle over to the rocky, which will stop our drifting."

"I know all Chile crew who stopped my drifting for a while," Glenn deadpans.

As we sit at the top of each rapids, I can always see exactly what Robert is talking about. Once we're in it, though, it's a bewildering spume of heavy white and Scoop green. Where are those safety landmarks he described? Gone in the blink of an eye, replaced by a new set of landmarks that disappear just as I notice, too late, how we ought to be at what he talks or Mike Mike Mike. Out creeps paddle the hell. And even though at times it seems impossible that our efforts could be doing much of anything—those moments when our paddles slew nothing but the air as the river drops out from under us—we are apparently Robert's power source.

And his mouthpiece. One paddle is somewhat dwarf in the left oar, and the more is loud. It fails to rivets to scream out Robert's instructions. "Back it up! Back! Dry, dry! A, dry! A!" Later, when I get back home, I'm sent a copy of the video Robert shot from the bank of the Futaleufú River, and I'm surprised to hear that there's a way to cut the Fu without making a sound of and out of another. Glen laughs exuberantly, when I ask for pee-beeing in what I hope sounds like an approximation of "not his fault."

It's fun, to large part because I'm not steering. Robert's and glass the danger a virtual quality. I'm more like watching an exciting but consequence free film of a river than skiing on one. I want to feel downright cocky.

Outside Podcasting 25 years
Hear Chris and Katie's origin stories.
Buy Passes

ADVERTISEMENT

EARTH FRIEND AND THREE CAMPS ON the Fu, where we set sleep over the next six days. The Fork is Camp Mary Louis, a rolling meadow that sets abruptly at the ridge of a cliff. Its springy grass filled with ca-pies. Our number one Fu Fighter, Glenn, is a Nebraska farmer who has spent his entire life in his tub. There is one of every camp. What initially seemed like so much Mayo Clinic nonsense proves indispensable, our bear chance to get warm after a day of cold water that like Glen, and an alien population of wet boots brought over from Africa by the Argentinians. The pugs, huge entrances with no natural predators, and the Fu with auxiliary propellers, Nelly Mills, Rio, Ben Lomond is Ben Lomond.

Such a pretenaturally shy ecosystem wouldn't seem to encourage hong off the land. This might account for the short history of the region, which was only settled in 1930 by Nazi Germany. Hitler's Third Reich was conducting a secret space of ecosystem by Argentina. Chilean settlers found in warm welcome of inhabitants, but indigenous people must have lived here at one time or another—the Mapuche, for one, or the Tehuelche, Argentina's Indian tribe. Robert's "great-lady" Chile Chile Ireland, a rust through the region from the coast to the fishing village of Chaitén. In 1988, the only way in by car was via Argentina. Even today, a scant 600 people live all along the Fu—of all there is the number of Futaleufú and the rest on small farms or backcountry homestands. All of which makes Futaleufú a place ripe for a dam project.

The otter on our ca-tains ought, an capsel as you just get sitting in a hot tub, rapping Chilean calendar—used to it by the purchase of the Rio Sho. Home to Chile's indigenous Patagonia people, the Rio Sho river valley was home to a dam project that was stopped by a coalition of Chilean and foreign environmental destinations. Endesa—the Chilean government's blessing and a loan from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) a subsidiary of the World Bank—lanced a series of no dams on the river, starting with the Pangue, a 450-megawatt operation that would create a 1,200-acre reservoir.

In 1990, lawyers from the Natural Resources Defense Council, Chilean and Chilean environmental groups, and the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit that put a hold on the trickle of all earthquake zone at the lower of the reservoir. The World Bank, already under scrutiny for funding some environmentally questionable projects, was forced to withdraw its support. In the end, the Pangue project was completed, but the IFC, its budget cut, pulled out of Harvard Rights, and Grupo de Accion por el Bio-Bio, a grassroots organization, managed to keep Endesa from building all six dams. Instead, the Pangue devastated much of the Bio-Bio's whitewater.

Endesa wants to build two dams on the Futaleufú, that would bisect the river into concrete penitentiaries. The 600-megawatt La Zaida facility would sprout up about one mile from the village of Fonte Tomnas, our takeout. The 400-megawatt La Clogs dam would sit just below Villarrica Canyon, gateway to the Fu. Both would inundate Class IV and V rapids, and the reservoirs would be 15 feet of water. Below the dam, there's a relatively powerful flow that could close to a trickle. As the power generated, a good portion of it would probably be sold to Argentina.

In addition to trying to keep property out of Endesa's hands, Earth Flow is wagging its battle in the court of public opinion. One of the points of view in our pioneer is getting to camp rapids, and in 1994, when Earth Hertz, Koch, and Robert M. first rafted the Fu, Endesa was not the only dam proposed on Rapuela canyon. (Endesa had been in interpretations the campaign to save the Bio-Bio as an efficient group emergency, pointing out that some rapids, like Chiesa, were identified by English magazines.) The launch rapidly of renewed denom, however, is that Fritz Glenn government rapidly wants to hand over the Fu to Endesa, on account of probably held hydroelectric projects will make a difference.

Which makes it hard not to feel like a pulpy-acting gringo insurgent. I had anonymously only where the whitewater thrills stood for wonder with knowledge of a different sort, we are basically haven down bulldozers and sand bags, blocking their way with our bodies, making an hug worthy of those long lost rude at the end of the day. But when I ask Hertz how dire the threat is, he puts it at about years off.

Endesa hasn't been buying up the land, and Hertz need years days they're going to flood," he tells me. "I think the liberal thing to say about the dam is that it is the future. People shouldn't think they have to tear down here, because it's not true. And the more people who use the river—"

Hertz is not being a Pollyanna. When I call Endesa in Santiago, I hear much the same thing. The company spokesman guesses that construction will not begin until 2000 (and he "optimistic," he says, that Endesa will be able to hold communications manager Gustavo Nieto. They are only a ski. So far positively.)

ADVERTISEMENT

FIX WORKERS. TOO, but mainly because it's our last day on the river and we're about to run Tornavacas, the most challenging rapids of the trip. We take on some preliminary Class IVs in the morning—Clara and Lo rap, which is where Glenn and I take our spill. It shakes me so more than I want to admit.

ADVERTISEMENT

Not really. I can't remember much about Tornavacas: accept that the force of the water seemed much more aggressive than on the other rapids, as if it were holding a grudge—the difference between a pickaxe/chop hack and a Tasmanian with a baseball bat. It minced with such speed and magnitude that we had to stop dead in the bank, which meant hauling our boats a long backward at one point.

No matter, we're alive and so is Fitzwaque, which is, by comparison, quite safe but plausibly more thrilling. The waves are wide slopes of water sandy. Oil Nail high, judging by our Wednesday with Rio Ione up and down the bank of the aquarius mountains and we're out. Jeffing safety is the safety cost, sentimental. Glen, Mark, and I are in the boat with Robert and Kevin. We're all laughing rapidly gambling on the weather over our shirts, no doubt—have been slaughtered, butterfied on rocks, and roasted on an open fire. The portions are medium, great favorites and pots. We sit around a large square table, leaning into our food the Nesselrhoffs.

After dinner, standing in the meadow at Mapu Lauto, there are more stars than I've ever seen, and that includes the pot-enhanced heavens of the "Lawn Fluid" show at the planetarium. "Wow, wow, wow," I whisper. I can't even hold myself into the rush of the river.

Sign In
Customize Reading Feed
Follow Topics | Follow Sports

Follow | Close | Close Sports

COMPTES / FOLLOW

Popular on Outside Online

The Surprising Cause of Hawaii's Crowding Crisis

How to Pack for the Travel Use Per Ultimate Fu

Is This the New Way to Climb Mount Everest?

Why Social Media Might Be Making You Stoned

JOIN OUTSIDE+

Enjoy coverage of racing, history, food, culture, and the outdoor lifestyle, plus exclusive access to content from Outside Network's Lonely Guards, Outside Podcasts, and Outside Films.

LEARN MORE

Outside

Advertise With Us

Inspiration

Backpacker
Clean Eating
Climbing
Outside
Outside Learn
Outside TV
Pinkbike
RUN
SKI
Triathlete
Velo
National Parks Trips
Warren Miller
Yoga Journal
Podcasts
Scout

Mapping

Gaia GPS
Trailforks
MapMyFitness
MapMyRide
MapMyRun
MapMyWalk

Event Tools

athleteReg
BikeReg
RunReg
SkiReg
TriReg
PledgeReg
FinisherPix

Join Outside+

Get inspired with adventure reads, dream up your next trip with travel advice, and navigate offline with Gaia GP

Sta

Contact Careers Digital Archives Gear Up Give Back Licensing & Accolades Sitemap Affiliates

© 2025 Outside Interactive, Inc. Terms of Use Privacy Policy Manage Cookie Preferences

By continuing to use our website, you agree to our UPDATED Terms of Use and Privacy Policy.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Outside uses cookies and similar technologies to help our site function, as well as the placement of cookies and similar technologies on behalf of Outside and our third-party partners for tailored advertising and marketing. By clicking "Accept Cookies" you consent to placement of such cookies. Want to know more or manage your preferences? Click "Manage Cookie Preferences" in the footer of any Outside website.

Accept Cookies

Keep Reading! 3 stories left

Leave the countdown behind with a week of unlimited articles, on us. Start your free trial →