

WORLD RAFTING Championships 2007

First Descent

The Impossible River

Inje Fact File

***Inje
Team Coaching Clinic***

RAW

Rafting Around the World

June 2007



UNsinkABLE
INFLATABLES
THE NILE SERIES
CHOICE OF CHAMPIONS



**Nile 4.3 Hi Lo
asymmetric**



**Nile 4.0 Med
Symmetrical**



**Nile 3.5 Low
Symmetrical**

ARK's most popular range of rafts the Niles are used across a broad range of river types . The 4.3 m Niles are capable big water Class V although they are specifically designed for smaller volume technical rivers where steep tight drops are more frequent the that big hits.

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SO GO STANDARD OR PIMP YOUR RIDE

Design your own raft
Our versatile digital design and cut technology allows us to fully customize. Choose shape, size, colour and branding in infinite choices
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www.arkinflatables.com

Phone +27 21 7831672 Fax +27 21 7831427
email ark@ark.co.za



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Black River,
Mauritius

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RAW—Rafting Around the World

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Send letters, news and event results to
irfmagazine@intraftfed.com



IRF *presidents report*

PRESIDENTS REPORT

CONGRESS 2007

28 June

Inje, South Korea

It would be unjust to begin this report without acknowledging the fact that the IRF is not run by only its President. The IRF is run by a group of very committed and very passionate members of a board of directors. I will not mention any names (for now) as there is not a single board member who doesn't pull their own into voluntarily accomplishing the mission that they themselves have traced for the future of IRF and agreed by the board.

We are getting ready to celebrate a ten year anniversary 1997-2007, that goes to show that the world of rafting was ready to pull together with the people they believed in; with a mission they believed in, fair and fun racing, international training and education standards, and the commitment to preserve our playgrounds, the rivers.

Since 2006 the IRF has continued to grow as steadily as always, adapting to the growth in membership and interest to race on all continents of the world. Our friends from Asia continue to surprise us with the participation of Indonesia in the 2001 Worlds in the USA, the Japanese team's continuous efforts to become number one, and our new allies in South Korea, who proved to

have all the ingredients and aficionados to handle a World Championship. Europe has bounded ahead with the creation of a Euro Cup Series with a diversity of venues and rivers. Latin American and Africa continue to provide members for IRF even with economic adversity.

The IRF Forum has proved to be a good mechanism to communicate to all rafters, from the board members to the general public interested in our issues, making the IRF network more participative, available and important.

Bids for different races are becoming more difficult to analyze thanks to the growing interest of sponsors, more available treats to teams, technological advances, and new participating countries. Reforms about this issue have been adopted by the board so that we can provide the best venue for racers and sponsors. During this World Championship we are proud to be able to announce the host for the next WRC and to work with organizers and judges to produce a better championship again and again.

Our Web page has been revitalized, our magazine is having its 4th edition published and our public relations committee continues to produce positive images about our activities. Guide Training and Education Com. has gone through the effort of gathering assessors and instructors from around the world to update a system that will work best internationally. The Conservation Committee hopes to fly the Ecoflag at Korea and show our support for the protection of rivers from any

human intervention of distress in their habitat.

Our Rules of competition continue to be fine tuned after our experiences in World Championships and adapting to the competitive advantages, media needs and equipment and technological advances. We continue on the road to the Olympics, gathering more international support and members, always strategizing amongst board, committee members and interested collaborators.

I would like to close my report by thanking the member of the board that keeps all board members focused, whether by Forum, Skype, emails, or phone calls, Sue Liell-Cock has continued to be the player in the team we can not do without. Her energy, knowledge and impetus into the success of the IRF must be commended by every guide, member, colleague and friend.

Rafael Gallo (President)



Ecoflag flies at the XV Villa De Madrid Kayak Polo Competition, as an additional measure to those taken for environmental sustainability during this competition. More on IRF and the Ecoflag in the next issue!



IRF congress 2007

28 June, Inje, South Korea

agenda

1. Opening; Apologies, roll call/ establish delegates (Appendix 2), establish a quorum
2. New Memberships for acceptance: Argentina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Philippines, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Ukraine.
3. Report by the President;
4. Report by the Secretary General;
5. Financial report for approval;
6. Budget for the coming 2 years (2008/2009);
7. Reports from Head of Committees –
 - a. S&C Committee – Robert Kazik
 - b. Guide Training & Education – Steve Nomchong
 - c. International Relations – Jakob Faerch;
 - d. Marketing & Media & Commercial Rafting & Conservation - within Secretary General's Report
8. Election of office bearers:
 - a. Board of Directors (List of nominations will be sent two weeks before the Congress)
9. Committees (generally maximum of 10 members on each list of nominations will be sent two weeks before Congress):
 - a. Sport & Competition Committee –this Committee will be made up of the members of the BOD.
 - b. Guide Training & Education Committee – voted for by Assessors and Instructors
 - c. International Relations Committee – nominations and then voted for
 - d. Commercial Rafting & Conservation Committee – nominations and then voted for
 - e. Media & Marketing Committee – nominations and then voted for
 - f. Continental Committees (no African Committee as only 1 member at this time) – nominations and then voted for:
 - i. Euro Committee
 - ii. Australasian Committee
 - iii. Pan-American Committee
10. Discussions and resolutions on the proposals submitted by National Federations and BOD.
 - a. Statutes - semantic changes to achieve Non Profit Organisation status
 - b. Membership fees and funding – proposal to restructure - from the BOD
 - c. Olympic Class events on artificial courses – proposal - Steve Nomchong
 - d. R4 vs R6 – Discussion – from the BOD
 - e. Including Time Trial for points - proposal - Peter Micheler
 - f. Race Rules – discussion on suggested changes to the rules. (See Appendix 3)
11. Closing of Congress



GUIDE TRAINING & *education*

AWARD SCHEME

Steve Nomchong (Head of Guide Training & Education Committee)

As the IRF celebrates its tenth year of existence the GT&E committee has reassessed its activities and developed a strategic plan for the coming years. Interest from guides, operators and federations in the IRF Award Scheme continues to grow strongly. In the past year alone, assessment and certification of rafting professionals has taken place in Australia, Korea, France, Hungary, Philippines, Wales, Scotland, Iceland, South Africa, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Spain, Switzerland, Slovenia, Portugal, Costa Rica and Greece.

Interest in adopting the IRF Award Scheme as a national standard, or to complement an existing national certification, has come from the national organisations of many countries including the Netherlands, Korea, New Zealand, Italy, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Croatia, Canada, Thailand, China, Portugal, Uganda and Japan.

One of the difficulties that has been experienced during recent years is managing this growing interest in the IRF Award Scheme. Currently it is being managed by volunteers who already have busy professional lives, with the support of Sue Liell-Cock, IRF Secretary General. The first step in the GT&E strategic plan was to increase the number of people enthusiastically taking part in the activities of the GT&E committee.

The second step was to update the Award Scheme, which has been in existence since 1999. Since that time it has reached a diverse range of people all over the world. In keeping with the philosophy of adapting the AS to be as useful as possible to as many users as possible, it has been updated based on feedback and comment received over the past few years, and the discussions held during a recent conference, "Choosing the best line - the IRF Award Scheme in 2007 and beyond", held in the Dranses river valley in France in May 2007.

The next steps in the strategic plan include:

- streamlining the certification process,
- actively promoting the Award Scheme,
- securing alternative revenue streams,
- providing additional information and services to guides,
- providing more information and services to instructors.

All member federations are encouraged to help us make the IRF Award Scheme the officially recognised guiding scheme in their country.





WORLD RAFTING *Championships*

NEWS

TEAM COACHING CLINIC IN KOREA

The IRF, together with the KOC (Korean Organising Committee), are offering a training clinic in Korea for teams that are there before the WRC starts. A certain number of coaches will be provided for free for teams that request this clinic. Coaches will be shared by teams so schedules will need to be worked out. This clinic is aimed at the teams in the lower ranks who can learn a lot from experienced coaches which will help them raise the level of their competition.

This is of no cost to your team!

**GET THE COMPETITIVE EDGE
REGISTER NOW !
info@intraftfed.com**



JUDGES WORKSHOP AND ASSESSMENTS

Competitors

5pm until late - 26 June:

There will be a Judges Assessment for all competitors who would like to get or upgrade their IRF Judge certification.

New Judges

27 and 28 June, day time:

There will be a Judges workshop and assessment for all persons who wish to get the IRF Judge certification.

Send an email to register:
info@intraftfed.com

GUIDE TRAINING AND EDUCATION WORKSHOP

4th June:

Guide Assessment

4th-5th June:

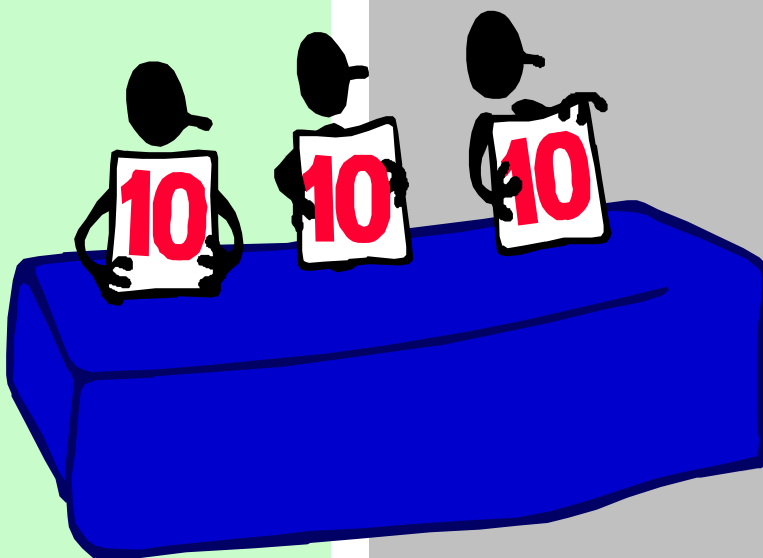
Trip Leader Assessment

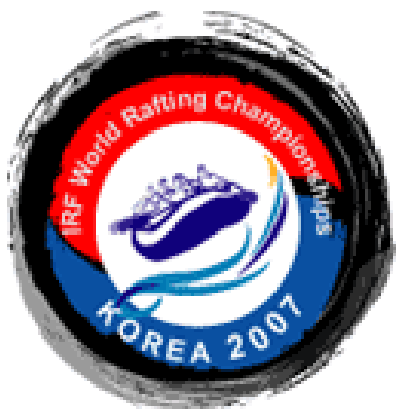
4th - 6th June:

Instructor Assessment

These workshops are not guiding courses but assessments for guides or trip leaders or instructors who would like to get themselves IRF certified.

Register: info@intraftfed.com





WORLD RAFTING *Championships*

SOUTH KOREA

Languages

Korean (official)

Religion

25% Christianity, 25% Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, 50% none.

Currency

Republic of Korean Won (W)

Electricity

220V 60HzHz

Electric Plug Details

European plug with two circular metal pins

Country Dialing Code

82

INJE

The Gross Area

Its total area is 1,620.92□, (9.9% of the Gangwon-do(16897□). 1.7% of whole country)

- forest land 89.7% (1454.81□)
- farmland 5.0% (81.01□)
- rivers 1.7% (27.53 □)
- others 3.6% (57.57□)

Population persons

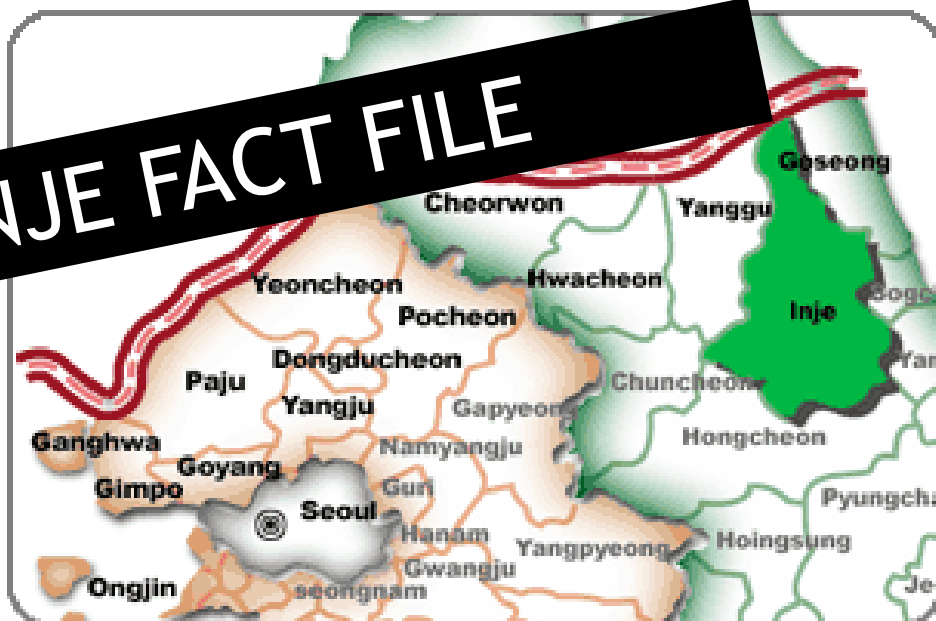
- 32,459 persons
- number of household :12,131

ATTRACTIONS

Daeam Mountain Dragon Marsh.

It was the first swamp entered into the International Swamp Conservation Agreement as a natural museum on 1,280m above sea level in which the world-famous rare plants are scattered all over the area.

INJE FACT FILE



Temple Baekdam is located in Inner Mt. Seorak. The stream flows in front of it, and it is surrounded by a grove of nut pines. It was built in 647 A.D. under the regime of 28th Queen Jinduk of Silla Dynasty. The name of the temple was called Temple Hangeye ; however, historically it went through many ups and downs. It was burned down in 690 AD restored on 719, but burned down again in 785.

Hapgang Pavilion is the point of confluence of Naerincheon stream, the upper stream of Soyang river from Girin, of Seohwa river from Hangecheon and Wontong and of Yangjirew. In wet seasons, the water from Naerincheon arrives at this point, changes direction to Wontong for 100m and again flow s backward the to its starting point.

Daechong Peak is the highest peak on Mt. Seorak, is located at the boundary of Inje county and Yangyang county, and it stands on 1,708m above sea level.



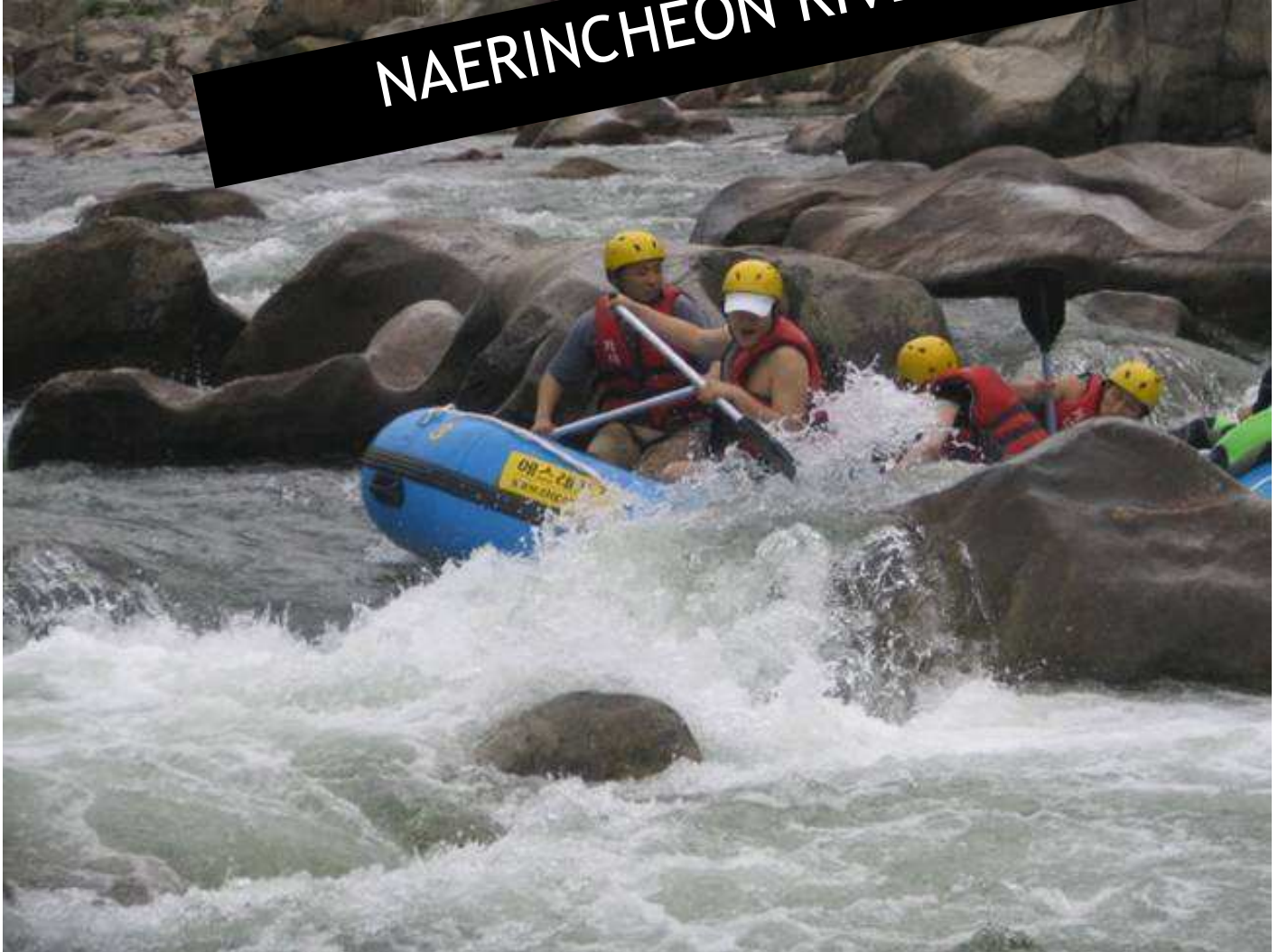
WorldGuide Index Prices

Item	Price
small bottle of water	Won 500.00
litre of petrol	Won 1,500.00
souvenir t-shirt	Won 5,000.00
movie ticket	Won 7,000.00
movie ticket	Won 7,000.00
local newspaper	Won 700.00
half litre of beer	Won 1,000.00
litre of bottled water	Won 1,100.00
loaf of bread	Won 1,600.00
food court lunch	Won 6,000.00



WORLD RAFTING *Championships*

NAERINCHEON RIVER



Naerinceon River,

the only river that flows north in Korea, crosses Hongcheon and Inje. The name "Naerin" ('cheon' means small river in Korean) is a compound word: 'Nae' is from Hongcheon-gun's "Nae"-myeon area and 'Rin' from Inje-gun's "rin"-myeon area. Above the river are many fantastic rocks and stones, and the water that runs along the valley is so pure that you can clearly see the sand and pebbles at the bottom. Naerinceon Gyegok Valley

starts near Mt. Odaesan Valley and Hapganggyo Bridge and continues on for about 57 km. Since the range is so long, it is hard to pinpoint Naerinceon. Usually, when people say Naerinceon, they mean the downstream of Naerinceon. The upper stream of Naerinceon is again divided into Misan Valley or Moraeso Valley. Few people go there because it is hard to reach. On the upper stream of Bangtaecheon, which joins together with Naerinceon, is Jindong Valley, and to the north of Naerinceon is Mt. Jumbongsan, Mt. Bangtaesan, Bang-

dong Springs, and Mt. Bangtaesan Recreational Forest. Also, there are Hwangso and Seori Resorts in the mid-section of Naerinceon, and Piasi Valley downstream. Piasi is the area around Gosa-ri, Inje-eup. Piasigang River is the water stream between Hyeon-ri and Soy-angho Lake. These are the most popular places. Around the water stream of Naerinceon, there are many mountains and branch streams. Wide woods and rocks are here, and are very attractive to families that visit here.



Anyone who has done a river trip with Billy Edwards will know that every detail of equipment fascinates him, leading to long colourful stories around the camp fire.

Billy is the designer, driving force, chief visionary, test pilot and raconteur for ARK Inflatables Cape Town. Now established for 17 years.

African River Kraft, as it was originally known, started out by inventing the enormously successful two person Croc inflatable canoe developed in the 80's.

The Croc became synonymous with rafting in South Africa. Soon an entire range of inflatables were in their livery from the one person Kayaks through to the 18ft self-bailing rafts. ARK sprung onto the international rafting arena with the Camel world rafting series to which they were the official suppliers of their formidable 14 ft rafts for 8 years.

From this exposure and Billy's further R & D trips around the world a variety of ARK designs began to leave Cape Town for destinations worldwide, becoming the raft of choice for many commercial operators.

After quickly dominating the African commercial rafting scene, they soon conquered many other regions; Australia first, followed by Europe, South and North America and Canada.

ARK is also increasingly the choice of major expeditions and first descents; the Blue and the White Nile, countless Orange River, Zambezi, Amazon expeditions and forthcoming Primacy, Futu and the Bio Bio amongst some of the expeditions.

All ARK sponsored expeditions are chosen carefully to support



environmental awareness groups in particular those directly involved with rivers.

ARK's technology is continuously upgraded and now use state of the art, Rotary Hot Air and high frequency welding combined with accurate CAD design and digital cutting system.

This technology, combined with top quality European grade inflatable boat fabric has resulted in the success of ARK products and the ability to manufacture small runs of custom built inflatables.

Not just a "cookie cutter" Raft manufacturer, ARK's versatile operation now has over 300 raft designs on file for clients in addition to the standard range of 22 sizes.

Whatever the River or the client, ARK will produce your Dream Kraft.

Contact Billy at ark@ark.co.za
www.arkinflatables.co.za

RACEcalendar

Japan Cup Rafting Race 4th August

Japan Rafters Federation holds the JAPAN CUP RAFTING RACE which consists of 5 races a year, according to the IRF race rules.

The aim for this event is to encourage the development of rafting competition.

Each race has a point system and the best team of the year becomes the national representative of next year's world championship.

All international teams are welcome to this event.

Each race is well spread around all over Japan so competitors can enjoy the traveling in Japan.

3rd round: 4th August

Mae River

Azumino

Slalom

4th round: 8th September

Tnryu River

Nagano

Downriver

final round 6th-8th October

Nagano River

Gifu

Sprint/Slalom/Downriver

Race Classification

R4 open / R6 open / R6 Man / R6 Woman

*Open = man and woman mixed team is welcome.

Contact Details: Shigeto Asano, JAPAN RAFTERS FEDARATION

2-12-45 Higashi-shindo

Hiratsuka-City Kanagawa 254-0018 Japan

Phone & Fax: 0463-53-8259, Email: rafting@zero.ad.jp, <http://club.race-rafting.jp>



China Rafting Competition 4th-8th July

China Water Sports Administration Center will organize an international rafting competition in Qingyuan City of Liaoning Province, China from July 4th to 8th. The city of Qingyuan is in northeastern part of China. It is located at 123 east longitude and 42 north latitude. The nearest airport is Shenyang city. We will invite 5 foreign teams and 8 to 12 domestic teams for this competition. The competition is 4 persons long distance (12 km) down river rafting competitions with the current difficulty of 2 to 3 degrees.

We would like to invite your team of 4 athletes plus 1 team leader to participate in the above rafting competition. We plan this competition in the above date as we wish the teams could fly to Shenyang city right after the World Rafting Championships in Seoul, Korea. We will offer your team members the return air tickets from Seoul to Shenyang and if you buy your own tickets, we will offer each member of your team 400 US Dollars for compensation of this extra section of international air tickets and we will pay for your domestic transport. Accommodation and food during your stay in China.

Contact Xia Xuezhen xiaxuezhen@hotmail.com

The schedule of competition is as following:

July 4th---arrival in Shenyang and travel by bus to Qingyuan

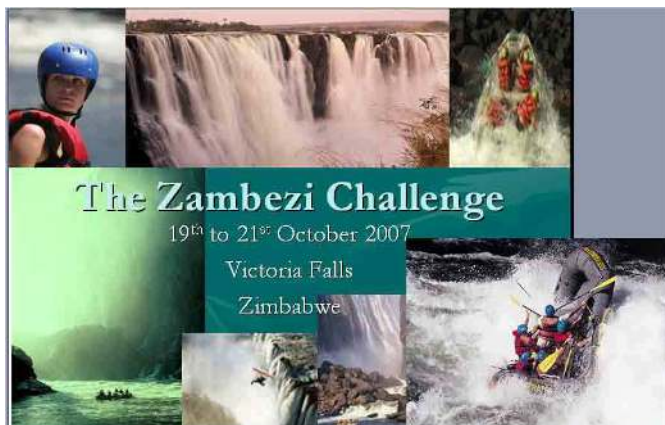
July 5th --- preparations and training

July 6th---competition and dinner party

July 7th ---Sightseeing in Shenyang

July 8th --- depart Shenyang to return home

Zambezi Challenge 19-21 Oct



Schedule of Events

Friday 19th October

Beginning of Adrenalin Junk out Day for Amateur Teams.

Recce morning for Professional Teams. (also available for Amateur Teams)

Rafting Porters Race and Town Carnival.

Zambezi Challenge Opening Ceremony.

Saturday 20th October

Raft Sprint Event. Venue Rapids 1 to 5 split.

Down River Kayak Event.

Raft Team Drum Out Event and Boma Dinner

Sunday 21st October

Raft Down River Race Rapids 1 to 11

Kayak Rodeo Event.

Formal Zambezi Challenge Closing Dinner and Prize Giving.

RACEcalendar

NORWAY 29th JUNE

Extremesportveko is celebrating its 10th anniversary in Voss, Norway from June 24th to July 1st. Ekstremesportveko is built upon the four elements; water, air, earth and fire. Kayaking, rafting, big air and freeride represent water.

Norway is famous for its rivers and Voss hosts some of the best. This alone is reason enough to find your way here this summer. On top of this, you get to experience a week loaded with disco, emotions and surprises. Young people from all over the world gather to do what they love the most; perform their activity in epic surrounding, intense nature and pumping rivers.

In a few years we will apply for the World Championships. Come and practice!

Head of Rafting: Christian Larsen: christian@skigutane.no Phone 47 95 99 46 04
Registration: Voss Rafting Senter: post@vossrafting.no Phone 47 56 51 05 25



Mistral Air Slovakia Race 9-10 June

Place: White water course in Cunovo

Course: 2-1, ww 3-4

Director of the comp.: Milica Zererová

Chief judge: Libor Fingerland

Course designer: Štefan Lukačovič

Measurment: Q-Control

Categories: R6 - sprint, H2H, slalom / W and M

R4 – sprint, slalom / W and M

R6 – sprint, slalom / juniors

R6 – sprint / debutants and VIP Race

Rafts: Event R6 - Gumotex type Pulzar 380 – provided by us

Information: Júlia Pavelková +421 903 790 192

Andrea Zererová + 421 903 235 201 www.raftmistral.sk

MISTRAL AIR SLOVAKIA PICS



Sunnysoft Czech Cup 16-17 June

Categories: International competition R4 men and women

Competition of celebrities and TV crews

Rules: Slalom rules by I.R.F and sprint (Time trial – two rounds) rules by the Union of Water

Sportsmen. R4 races are open for all water sportsmen. Type of boats aren't limited.

Track: man-made slalom channel on the river Trnavka, campus of the Sokol Zizkov in Zeliv 600 m WW 4 ,

Organiser of the races: director of the races: Stanislav Hájek

main judge:

course designer: Zdenek Proks and Martin Hajek

Applications: Complete the attached entry form and send it to the address below no later than 11 Juni 2007. Stanislav Hajek, e - mail hajeks@chello.cz

Entry fee: 300 Kč (cca 10 EU) per Team and race; small lunch the Evening beer includet (1 600 pints) for you.



BACK *paddle*

Croatia—Euro Cup 2007 *results*

After years of absence competitive rafting returned to Croatia. It was a return in a big way - Euro Cup race with 29 teams from 10 countries. Organizer KŠV Vidra helped by RK River Riders and RKK Karlovac organized a race almost 10 years after the last race in Croatia. Response was beyond our wildest dreams. We would like to thank everyone who was here for their participation in our race and patience when things did not go as smooth as they should.

	Team	Nation	Slalom	Sprint	D/river	TOT
	MENS					
1	Hazard	SVK	300	264	352	916
2	Kanjon Raft	HUN	264	300	316	880
3	Gim-pex	SLO	207	237	400	844

The event was held on two rivers – Korana and Dobra. The organizer had some problems because of unusually low water level on Korana, lack of rafts and sponsors but it did not stop us from showing everyone in Croatia that rafting belongs here. Before we got the organization of this event we were the only club in Croatia. Now there are 7-8 active clubs and we have our national championship. So even though this event could have been better organized we believe that it started things here. Like always it is very hard to start something, things should go much easier from now on. This event was also our way of saying good-bye to the most beautiful river for rafting in Croatia. Because of construction of hydroelectric power plant river Dobra will be lost for rafting. As everyone in Vidra started rafting on Dobra we are connected with this beauty and wanted to show her to our rafting friends before it was too late. And what a good-bye it was... Audience could see everything that makes rafting so attractive - people falling out of the raft, flips, amazing action. No one was injured. We hope everyone enjoyed here, smiles on most faces make us believe they did...



Italian Rafting Championships 2007

	MEN	Sprint	Slalom	Maratona	Totale
1	Italia 1 Vipiteno 1	300	264	400	964
2	Germany Kanu Schwaben –RT Augsburg	261	300	352	916
3	Italia 2 Indomita Valtellina	237	237	316	790
4	Czech Raft Klub Haplicik C.B.	216	216	276	708
5	Serbia Rafting Club Liman	207	207	288	702
6	No Work Merano	198	198	264	660
	WOMEN				
1	Germany Women	300	300	400	1000
2	Indomita Valtellina Women	264	264	352	880
3	Vodafone Donne	216	237	316	769
4	GCRPINK Brasilas	237		280	517
	TOURIST				
1	Toni Junior	300		400	700
2	Antonello Pontecorvo	300	300	352	952

BACK *paddle* results

Brazilian Rafting Championship 2007 *23-25 Feb*

The Brazilian Championship of Rafting 2007 took place in the city of BROTAS, in State of São Paulo, between 23rd and 25th of February. After three days of fierce racing the results were as follows:

MENS:

1st Alaya Bozo d'água team with 1000 points.

2nd Central Sul team with 644 points.

3rd Alaya D'Água team with 612 points.

WOMENS:

1st Hydra team with 920 points.

2nd Garras de Brotas team with 820 points

3rd Bozetes team with 660 points.

The Alaya Bozo d'agua" team have won the Brazilian Championship for the fourth time (2003,2004,2006,2007)! As winners, Alaya Bozo D`agua is guaranteed the right to participate in the World Rafting Championships in South Korea from 27 of June - 2 of July. The team is training hard; three hours every day!

The Brazilian championship was sponsored by the city Brotas, with the support of " Porto Seguro " insurance company.

Results and photos at: www.panaguas.com.br



2007 China

National Rafting Championships *May 30*

China's National Rafting Championship 2007 kicked off on (May 30) morning in Qingxin, a county in North Guangdong.

Some twenty teams competed in the 5,200-meter international standard courses in the waters of Gulong Canyon in Qingxin, which spans about 300,000 square meters and features a drop of 152 meters.

The competition is co-sponsored by State General Administration of Sport, Guangdong Provincial Administration of Sport, Qingyuan Municipal Administration of Sport and Qingxin Government.

2007 Japan Cup March/April

Japan Rafter's Federation holds JAPAN CUP RAFTING RACE which consist 5 races a year, according to the IRF race rules.

The aim for this event is to encourage the development of rafting competition.

Each race has point system and the best team of the year becomes national representative of next year's world championship.

RESULTS

Slalom / Tama River / Tokyo / 24th March

1st Rafting Team TEIKEI **2nd** Gulf Stream **3rd** R.C.Noah

Downriver / Hozu River / Kyoto/ 21st April

1st Rafting Team TEIKEI **2nd** TADA LOVE **3rd** Okayama University Exploration Team



The Impossible River

First exploration of Kachin State rivers in Burma

By David Allardice



In February and March of 2003 a team of kayakers and rafters including members from the Tsangpo 2002 expedition were invited into Northern Myanmar (Burma) to be the first to explore the rivers of Kachin State.

These rivers are fed by the eastern-most Himalayan peaks high up near the isolated border between Myanmar, India and Tibet. The team was searching for potential commercial river trips and hoped to complete the first descent of the Mayhka River and tributaries, the Headwaters of the Ayeyarwady, literally the lifeblood of Myanmar itself.



The Mayhka means Mother river, but the local Rawang people call it the Impossible River because the terrain is so steep and convoluted that it is difficult to farm and damn hard to get anywhere. After several days in the extremely remote Gorges hemmed in by 12-14,000' sheer granite peaks, running unrelenting class 5 rapids we are beginning to think it may be impossible for other reasons. We are totally committed to going downstream. Climbing out of the canyon would be an absolute bitch and it would take weeks to hike to the nearest road head assuming that we went in the right direction. Despite long days we have been unable to average more than 10 miles a day. The raft has been dragged across, around and under huge boulders, pulled past terminal drops, lined through slots on it's side, unloaded and portaged. The kayakers have been walking back up to help run the raft through as additional paddling strength. Everyone is exhausted. We sit around the campfire in the evening, glazed eyes staring vacantly into the flames, eating the last of our food supplies and thinking silently about what the next day might bring.

Snow capped mountains tower above the runway as our Myanmar Airways F28 touches down at Putao, the northern most airstrip in Kachin State. After months of planning we are about to attempt one of the great unexplored rivers of Asia.

The Mayhka team has been hand picked for their skills and attitude, all veterans of previous epic wild descents around the world and students of the undeviating downward spiral that leads to the dark underbelly of professional whitewater trash. New Zealander David Allardice (team leader), 45, has decades of leading edge river exploration in remote areas. Englishman Allan Ellard, 28,

and his paddling partner New Zealander Mike Abbott, 30, have notched up more first descents in the Himalayas than anyone and are renowned for their wild descents. American Dustin Knapp, 25, has run so many extreme waterfalls and drops that he has stopped counting. South African Steve Fischer, 27, grew up paddling on the Zambezi and is famed worldwide for his considerable ability in big violent water. Australian Pat O'Keefe, 40, has been pioneering rivers in Japan and Nepal. Perhaps the only potential weak link in the team is Ah Yin, our interpreter and his safety is an obvious concern but we figure that with the gradient that our limited maps indicate the whitewater should be classic big volume, not too continuous and hopefully no surprise walled in waterfalls.

On the ground we find that our planned military helicopter through to Dazungdam village will cost \$52,000 more than we had budgeted. After a very short meeting it is agreed that a more honest approach is required; it will involve a day on a truck, 2 bone-jolting days on tractors, and 6 days hard trekking with 30 porters. It is also the only option we have left. With a small tight group it is possible to be adaptive in changing situations and two hours later after a rushed food shop in the local market we find ourselves in the back of a truck bouncing down a dirt road with a wad of cash in a backpack and little ideal of how we are actually going to get to the river.



Very early in the morning on the third day 30 porters filter into the headman's house at Ratbo. The smarter porters have already been outside in the dark trying to ferret the lighter loads for themselves. No one shows any inclination to take the raft or kayaks; they're a lot smarter than that. The trail from the road end at Ratbo to Dazungdam is about 75 miles, normally trekked in nine days with loads, but we need to push hard to get to the river and plan to get there in six. An hour out of town all the porters drop their loads and rush off into the jungle. This is not a good start. It turns out they aren't deserting us though; just off chasing a small deer they've seen on the other side of the river. With determination and some dumb directional decisions by the deer they run it to the ground and are pretty happy with the prospect of fresh meat in the pot. This is agreed to be an auspicious start to the trek even though it has wasted time.

For the most part the trail winds through dense sub-tropical forest with lush vines and creepers entwined in a forest of huge, sculptured trees. Legendary British explorer Frank Kingdon Ward passed through this area in the 1920's and described the area as one of the most beautiful places he had ever been, walking through a living paradise we have to agree with him. Leaving Gawle village behind we climb steeply all day to the pass that separates us from the Mayhka river valley. It's a long day made even longer by constant rain. The last of the porters cross the pass at 4 pm with five hours of trek left and only three hours of light; we descend a steep mud-slide into the darkness. The last two hours are negotiated with candles and we arrive exhausted, wet and muddy at Bang Nam Dhim village.

The next morning dawns clear and we get our first views of the Mayhka river running at about 4,000 cfs (cubic feet per second), blue-green through verdant forest. For the next four days we climb along the river further into isolated mountains. Trekking in this remote part of Myanmar is not for the faint hearted and the trails and terrain are challenging. Crossing dodgy looking bridges made entirely of bamboo and rattan takes some nerve and it helps to let someone heavier than you go first. If the bridge holds then you are OK.

15 bamboo huts in a clearing mark Gawai village, the entry point to the National Park that surrounds Mt Kakhabarazi. The Park extends another three days walk to the border of India and eight days to Tibet. It is pristine wilderness rich in flora and fauna unlike any other area and probably the most intact and diverse forest ecosystem of its kind on Earth. Around a campfire that night the local Rawang and Limbu people all talk about what the new National Park means to them. They are concerned about the limiting of their traditional hunting and slash and burn agriculture. We try to ex-

plain that there will be greater opportunities with developing tourism but they have little idea of what this really could bring them. It is hard when you have lived your whole life surrounded by seemingly unlimited jungle to imagine that it could disappear, but it can.

The trail contours the river valley so we can see most of the rapids on the way up. From a few hundred feet above the river is pool drop with some steeper Grade 4 sections; it all looks like it will be clean and run-able. On arrival in Dazungdam, the whole village is waiting to meet us in a handshaking line snaking around the corner. Obviously the bush telegraph has been working well and news of strange white men carrying an even more un-

usual cargo of kayaks and raft has traveled fast and far. Sitting on animal skins around a smoky fire we share a huge meal of deer meat in the village chief's house then lay down below the smoke level to sleep; tomorrow is going to be a big day.

Two tributaries meet at Dazungdam village and join forces to become the Nam Tamai, the main Myanmar artery of the Mayhka. The Nam Tamai is flowing at 1500 cfs of champagne blue. Curious villagers perch on smooth boulders in anticipation of seeing our team in action and there is a carnival atmosphere. It is obvious to them that this will all end in tears as no one in their right mind would go near the cascading waves and chutes of foam.

The kayakers run a short warm up section of the northern tributary into the Nam Tamai dancing their way down intricate drops while

Pat and myself prepare the raft at the confluence, paying special attention to the rigging of a flip line which will be used if the raft turns over. The first rapids are a maze of boulders ending in steep chutes, not too powerful just real quality whitewater and extremely fun. The villagers are amazed at the kayaker's skills and run down the river trying to see every move, cheering and clapping every time they surface from a drop. It is surprising just how far and fast village boys can run over slippery and jagged boulders while trying to figure out just what you're doing, and why. Their enthusiasm lasts about three hours down the river then they go back to whatever they were doing before we arrived. In the shallows above each rapid we can see phenomenal numbers of huge fish as we drift through a living green corridor. The rest of the day is liquid bliss; cataracts mile after mile with lush jungle clinging precariously to canyon walls and surreal mountains suspended high above the forested ridges.



It rains heavily all night and is raining more as we put onto the river in the morning. In an easy descent down to Bang Nam Dhim we cover in seven hours what had taken four days to trek. It rains all day and the main tributaries coming in are running really high, huge boulders tumbling along the river bottom sound like giant billiard balls colliding and rain is bouncing off the river in globes of water. Every valley brings in a powerful stream and there are countless valleys. By afternoon the river is flowing brown with about 12,000 cfs; roughly the volume of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. There is now a punch to the river and an innocuous looking rapid almost flips the raft spilling everyone. It is time to concentrate more as the river character has changed dramatically.

This is Ah Yin's first swim and he is noticeably quieter back in the raft. Overnight to everyone's relief the river drops five feet once the rain stops.

There is no feeling quite like being in the middle of wilderness where every new rapid is a new game. Running an unknown river focuses your concentration;



from the moment you put on wet gear in the morning until you drag yourself onto a beach at night the rest of your life ceases to exist. Teamwork and communication are crucial as we work our way downstream and the realization that we are really out there in terms of isolation is intense. The kayakers are paddling hard and doing some big routes. It is only when you see them in the middle of the river that you get a feel for the size of the rapids. Our small Hyside raft is heavily loaded with weight low, it makes a big difference to being able to stay upright. We have the ability to slice into holes scooping water and the momentum just carries us through if we are lucky. Few other sports require the skills that expedition kayaking and rafting demand; it is a liquid environment that allows little margin for error and you are always mentally and intuitively making adjustments accordingly. There is no turning back once you cross the lip of commitment, going off the line you have chosen and you could end up in a powerful recirculating hydraulic and in

may places swimming is not an option. This is the hardest water any of us have run in a raft and the idea of commercial trips on the Mayhka has gone right out the window.

Drums and dancers in brightly colored ceremonial clothing greet us as we drift into Ridam village. Men wearing hats decorated with wild boar tusks swirl swords in a traditional welcome dance while the women sing. It was the last thing we expected in the middle of nowhere and we are all touched by the hospitality. Ah Yin explains that all the villagers around heard we were coming and have been waiting for two days for our arrival, many bringing their children to see their first white foreigner. They are surprised that we are planning to continue our descent of the Mayhka and warn us of dangerous rapids below. The men try their hand at paddling on the raft then we head off downstream with a gift of a dozen eggs.

The canyon is breathtaking. Steep vertical walls of black bedrock are covered with vines and creepers; waterfalls cascade down into the river from dozens of side streams. It's the type of place that you keep expecting to see a

leopard eating something unlucky. The easier rapids hold Zambezi style whitewater with some premiere play waves and holes. The harder rapids are not unlike the Yarlung Tsangpo, Biblical in size and closely resembling a toilet flushing into an industrial rototiller. The only consolation being that everything finishes in a pool, so you can actually get out there amongst it all and run meaty lines. Sheer granite walls are polished 60 feet above the river indicating the height of monsoon flows and it is intimidating to even consider being here when the river is running high. Contrary to human nature, don't try to convince yourself that the rapids would wash out. When planning this trip we decided to run the river in late winter so we would have the lowest water flows possible. While this meant that it would be colder the option of having less water was a fair bargain that in retrospect a wise decision.

When researching the river from maps it had been estimated that we had about 85 miles with an average gradient of 12 ft/mile, and 60 miles at 25 ft/mile. With these gradients we had been concerned that there wouldn't be enough rapids, now we are thinking that the map must have missed a couple of contour lines somewhere. The river has consistently managed to store gradient for one to two miles then let it all go at once with impressive results. Frequent scouting is mandatory, and portaging very difficult due to the constricted river channel and conglomeration of house sized boulders. Amazingly enough for a river of this character, the kayakers have been able to run the whole river with only two portages, though a fair amount of that had to do with the difficulty of portaging, sick talent and a general lack of common sense.

Day 18, 11th March my diary reads the following: 18 rapids including 4 raft portages, traveled 13.3 miles. Started 8 am. camped 5.30 pm. Personally took 3 swims including a flip off a huge wave. Ah Yin had a nasty swim off a ledge hole and re-circulating many times in the green room. Big down time and for the rest of the day walked everything. Not a happy camper. Pat disappeared in some god-awful hole. Kayakers ran everything and where a huge help with the raft. River relentless. It can't go on like this forever otherwise it will wear us out. 23.3 miles left. Big day - knackered. Food pretty well finished except 6 tins of mystery meat that no one will eat. Might be a hungry day tomorrow, still good to be here.

The next day to our relief the river eases and spreads, and it is with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that we paddle without so much scouting. It's a novelty to be able to see the bottom of a rapid from the top. There are still huge hydraulics but also space to move around. As if the river appreciates our efforts a strong wind blows downstream. We rig a tarp as a sail and make 5 knots downstream on flat water. Looking back on the last week we have been lucky. It did not rain the whole time we were in the gorges, in fact the river has dropped almost eight feet

since we had storms earlier. It could have been a lot harder and rain would have made everything intrinsically more difficult. A lot more water and it would have been impossible.

As we drift downstream we come across Chinese loggers blasting a road and trucking all the timber out, it is a shocking reintroduction to civilization. This area is on the cusp of change as roads are pushed upstream. The Mayhka valley has gold, gems and pristine forests and there are Chinese businessmen filtering across the border for these very reasons. Environmentally the clock is ticking for one of the last true wilderness areas left in S.E Asia.

On the 19th day since leaving Putao we arrive tired and happy at Laugkhaung having successfully completed the first descent of the Mayhka River. It has been 19 days since Pat's last beer - a record since he was about 13 years old. Loading all the gear onto a couple of Toyota 4WDs we head up to the village for celebrations. From Laugkhang it takes 12 hours and 70 miles to get to a real road and in two days we are back in Yangon propping up the bar in the Strand Hotel on Friday night happy hour.

It was a huge privilege to be the first paddlers allowed into Myanmar and special thanks are due to the Myanmar Govt. Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Brett Metzler of Ballons Over Bagan, Mont Bell for equipment as well as Thai Airways for help with freight. We are all looking forward to future missions. The expedition surpassed all our expectations - absolutely pristine jungle, great people and surprisingly difficult whitewater. I doubt if anyone who can visit this area will fail to be impressed with it's incredible fragile beauty.

There is another expedition on the Mayhka river planned for Dec 2009 anyone interested get in touch with David Allardice info@ultimatedescents.com to experience the most challenging river anyone has ever run commercially and the adventure of a lifetime.
www.ultimatedescents.com



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