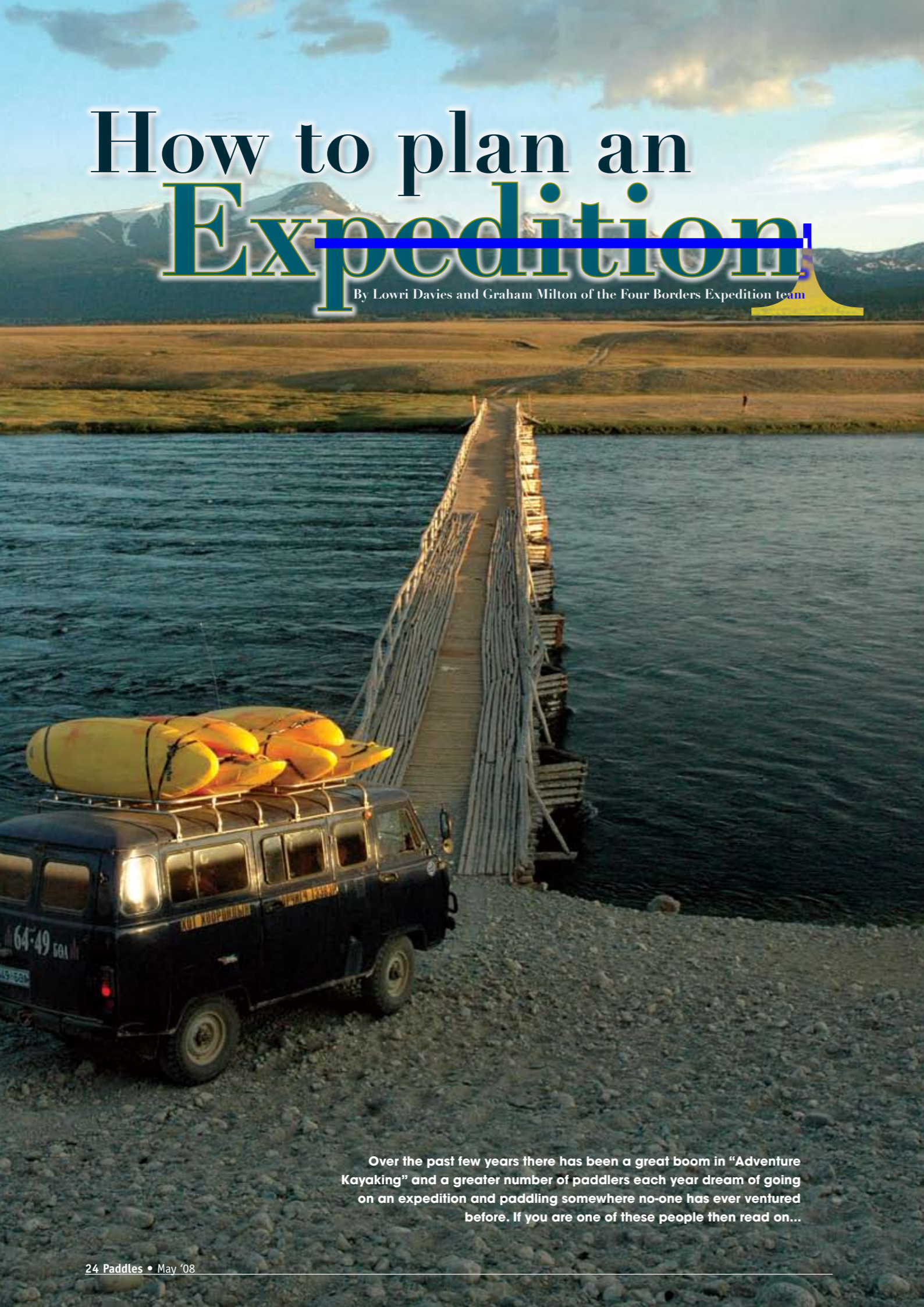


How to plan an Expedition

By Lowri Davies and Graham Milton of the Four Borders Expedition team



Over the past few years there has been a great boom in "Adventure Kayaking" and a greater number of paddlers each year dream of going on an expedition and paddling somewhere no-one has ever ventured before. If you are one of these people then read on...

An expedition involves a high degree of exploration or originality. There is a subtle difference between a kayaking trip and an expedition, so deciding what you want from a particular kayaking excursion is important. Expeditions tend to result in less actual paddling, cost more and involve a lot of time for planning beforehand. But often for those with the expedition bug, it is the unknown factors both on and off the water that creates the adventures they'll remember forever.

WHERE TO START

A great place to start would be reading 'Canoeing Down Everest' by Mike Jones - you don't get much better than him.

Next step - set yourself a goal. "I want to kayak The Congo source to sea" or "let's explore Outer Mongolia"! When you have established what you want to do, you need to work backwards to see how you can achieve it. If you have all the gear, money and your team selected then I would recommend you just book your flights and go rather than read this. Perhaps consider firing off some articles, photos etc afterwards for the rest of us to enjoy. For most of us though we need some sponsorship, grants and media attention to help us achieve our goal - and hell, they're quite fun to try and get as well! For the latest British Universities Kayak Expedition we decided to really go for it. Any paddlers selected for the BUKE Expeditions are in a fantastic position to be able to pull off a high profile expedition. A large team means more contacts and resources to exploit, plus the success of previous BUKE trips and the selection process itself adds to the credibility of the potential trip.

GETTING ORGANISED

For the Four Borders Expedition, we nominated someone to oversee all aspects of the planning and then split tasks among the team according to their skills, experience and geographic location when relevant. The main categories were Russian logistics, Mongolian logistics, sponsorship, website and media.



Set up a forum for your team where you can update and collaborate. This saves your inbox getting chocker and makes tracking separate issues much easier. Make it private so you

can discuss things such as potential sponsors honestly with no backfire!

The most fundamental aspect to establish for any expedition is what,



where and when. What you're planning on doing is the key, which helps you define your unique selling point. For our Russian leg we had a proposed itinerary of rivers to do which we sourced from the net and other contacts, which is fine for an area that has been paddled before. For Mongolia, which was largely unexplored, we needed a different approach. We searched our maps of the Mongolian Altai and listed the rivers in terms of their potential. From this we planned a town to buy supplies from and then an area by area approach to search for rivers. Make sure you get the season right – we nearly made the mistake of going to China in Monsoon!

The more exploratory and original the plan is the more marketable your trip will be. However I would strongly advise against planning your trip to try and impress media/sponsors as I suspect this would detract from your enjoyment. The trip should be for you and if other people are interested enough to give you some support, cash back!

Once you have the date of the trip planned work backwards putting in deadlines and dates: e.g. when you want your kit to be delivered by, when you need your visas, when to book flights and exhibitions where you can promote the trip etc. Some things may change but it's important to put things into perspective and for the team to see what the plan is.

You need to establish what kit you need, not what would be cool to have. The kit you take will depend partly on the size of the team, the climate of your destination and the type of rivers you envisage paddling. There are many items that you'll only need one or two of between the group. Below is a sample kit list:

CAMPING

- Tarp / Bivi / Tents (will depend on group / climate / environment)
- Sleeping bag
- Mosi-net
- Thermarest / mat
- Torch

COOKING

- Stove (multifuel, msr) with fuel bottles
- Pans
- Matches / lighters
- Mess tins (light, cheap, can cook at and eat from)

WATER

- Filter bag
- Loline / chlorine
- Good Bottle

GROUP PADDLE KIT

- Splits
- Repair kit (Flashband, gaffa, elec, neckseal / rubber, superglue, aquasure, cable ties, leatherman etc)
- First aid kit
- Spare paddle
- Group shelter?
- Spare kit (eg. deck, cag, helmet)
- Compass
- Needles and thread

PERSONAL PADDLING KIT (ABOVE THE OBVIOUS)

- Kayak Carrying system
- Air Bags
- Rescue kit: Line, Krabs, Sling(s), Prussics, Pulley etc
- Knife
- Whistle
- Lots of good drybags

ELECTRICAL

- Video camera, tapes, batteries and charger
- Cameras + chargers (not everyone need take a camera but having a mix of SLRs and waterproof digicams between the group seemed to work well)

- Laptop, charger + card reader
- USB Stick (to upload pics in a 'net cafe)
- Radios (can be useful for communication between team on the river / across the river when scouting)
- Sat Phone
- GPS
- Mobile
- Inverter (to charge your electrical equipment in your support vehicle)
- iPod / Music

HYGENE AND TOILETRIES

- Waterless handwash
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Toothbrush + paste
- Glasses / Contact lenses

PERSONAL CLOTHING

Obviously depends on climate!

- Longsleeve top (insects)
- Waterproofs
- Underwear!
- Sandals
- Good shoes and socks
- Sunglasses
- Mosi-hat?
- Hat + gloves

PAPERS

- Passport
- Visa (if applicable)
- Money
- Credit / Debit cards
- Insurance
- Driving Licence (if necessary)
- All tickets!
- Emergency phone numbers
- Leave copies of all above with someone at home
- Waterproof body wallet (keep essentials like passport on your person, even on the river)

That's a lot of stuff! It is worth considering what you can buy when you are in your chosen destination and whether you can get some equipment shipped out there for you, otherwise you may have a hefty excess baggage charge on your flights!

FOOD

You should plan where and when you will buy food. If you don't know where this might be possible, there are companies that will ship dry packed food out for you – but it can be pretty expensive.

FUNDING & SPONSORSHIP

There are plenty of grants out there available for expeditions. Admittedly they mostly favour trips that have environmental or charitable elements – perhaps worth considering but only if that's what you and your team want. A lot of grants applications need to be submitted at least 6 months before you leave so get these in as quick as possible. Take the carpet bomb approach to grants but make sure they're all good quality and not just copy and paste jobs.

For students, getting money out of a University is generally easy! Every Uni will have some sort of funding available; search the portal, your department and ask your Student and Athletic Union. I would strongly recommend contacting your Uni's Alumni association and the Vice Chancellor – go straight to the top, no messing. Nottingham University's alumni were incredibly generous and this was funding that was not advertised – it had to be hunted out. Imperial College even has an Expedition Board who are a very useful resource.

Before you approach sponsors you need to prepare your unique selling points that may be different for each potential sponsor so you should put together a proposal of what you can offer them. A useful perspective to take when trying to get sponsorship is to put yourself in their shoes and think – why should they help us? You will also need a name for your expedition and a logo can help to put on letter heads, but there is always scope for dedicating your expedition name to a sole sponsor if the price is right... 'The Run and Jump Kayak Expedition'?!

The chances are that some of you will need boats and kayaking kit so it would make sense to approach these firms first. It's much easier to go

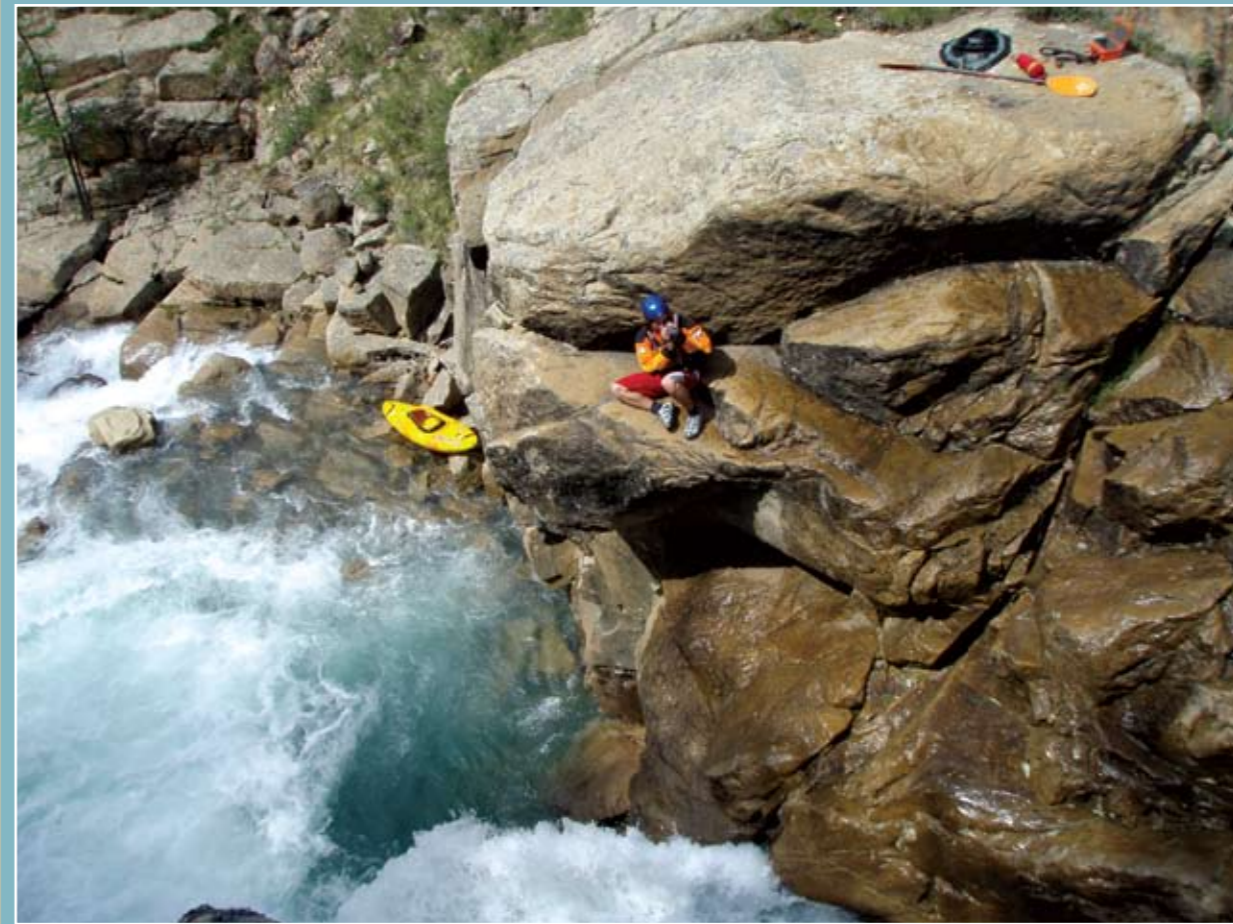


for suppliers who stock as much of the kit you need as possible. Palm and Pyranha suited us down to the ground.

The big challenge that any kayaking expedition faces before leaving home, is getting support from general outdoor companies as it's much harder to convince these companies that your trip will promote their products. Getting trade prices tends not to be hard but if you want anything better than this you will need to offer a lot more in return – perhaps more than is worth it. Lyon Equipment were fantastic because they gave us a grant and trade price kit on whatever we bought thereafter on a wide variety of outdoor gear. With the kayaking sponsors and Lyon we had 90% of the kit we needed and didn't have already. For the rest I would say wait

for good prices in shops or E-Bay! The Outdoors Show is a fantastic opportunity. People are busy but it gave us a chance to chat to the head honchos of both kayaking companies and outdoor companies of all sizes. We prepared a fancy looking synopsis of what the trip was all about and what we could offer firms. We also made business cards to hand out to people with contact details and the website address which were very useful – and great to have while we on the trip to give to people we met along the way. We approached loads of outdoor firms and this is how we got a contact at Blacks and got a free Wilderness First Aid course for the whole team.

Corporate Sponsors are even harder to attain, but if you get it you're laughing! We gave it a good crack



and approached 12 of the top graduate recruiters from the angle that we had 8 intelligent undergrads from top Universities across the country demonstrating all the skills you look for by organising a big expedition and using teamwork in adverse circumstances... look at these eye catching, vibrant, energetic photos we have that you could use for a marketing campaign... It really helps to ensure you are contacting the right people within these companies, information we got through Nottingham Business School. We got a lot of responses but they all turned us down on the grounds that we were too late, so plan your trips and get organised as early as possible to get the mega bucks. It is important

to consider the implications of such corporate sponsors.

PUBLICITY

Sponsors will want publicity. Contact magazines to see if they are interested in an article and get on to the adventure travel lecture tour before you leave to show that your trip will get coverage. A website is a great resource to impress the sponsors with up-to-date news and information of all publicity you get. Local newspapers, news programs and sports programs will probably be very keen to cover your trip.

A good resource available to students is the media relation department at the University that can organise press releases. Through this

we got coverage on ITV central, BBC East Midland and Radio Nottingham. ITV even lent us a camera to take away which meant we could tell sponsors we were going to be on ITV Central again.

LOGISTICS

You can have all the sponsorship you like but it's crucial to sort your logistics out! The web and guidebooks such as Lonely Planet are a good source of logistical contacts but our Mongolian logistics came through a contact given to us by the Young Explorer's Trust. Many of the rivers we scouted were too dry, which meant our agreement beforehand to have driver flexibility turned out to be essential. After sacking one for being drunk, we

pretty much had free reign on where we wanted to go. This enabled us to head west out of the Altai where we had more luck on small glacier fed rivers. Given the nature of our expedition we felt it necessary to organise our transport before we left the UK - something I have never been a fan of. We did all we could to get the best deal possible and we still ended up paying through the nose.

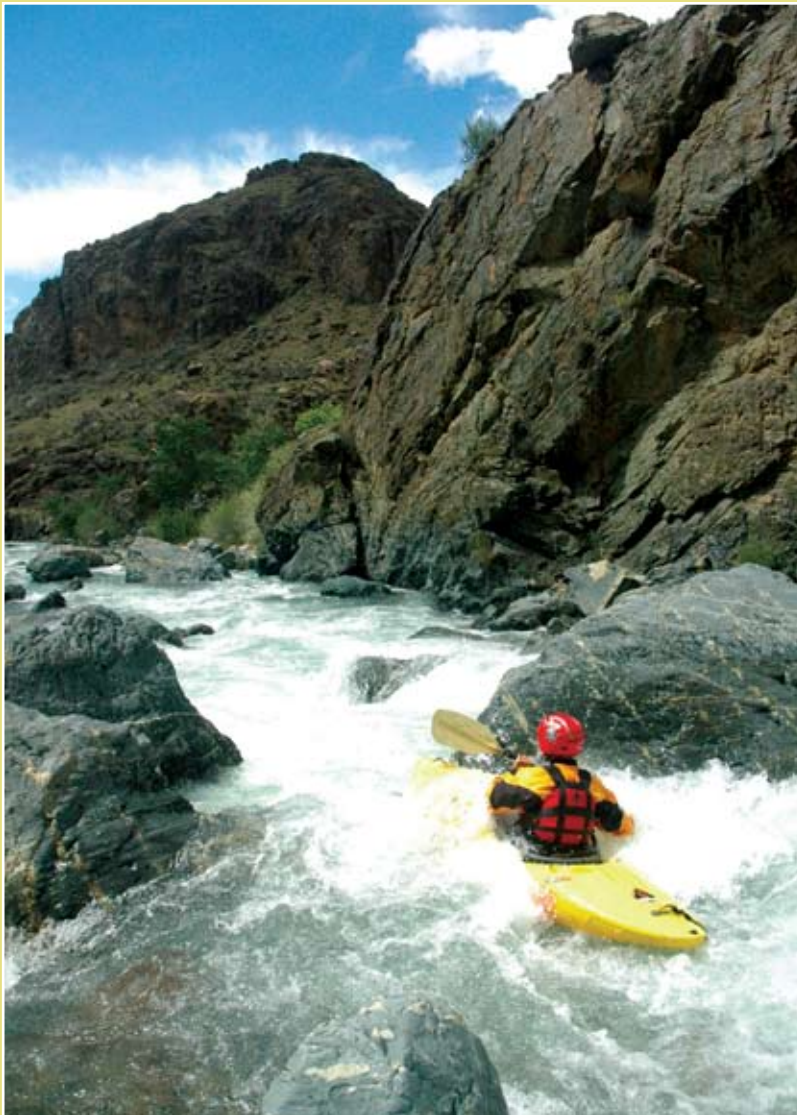
We found it was useful to plug in the co-ordinates of confluences, bridges and towns into the GPS from Google Earth. The altitude tends to be inaccurate but knowing how far to bridges and confluences is gold dust - you can reposition the waypoint once you're there.

WHILE YOU'RE AWAY

A blog is an excellent way to keep sponsors, family, friends and fans up to date on how the trip is going. Short regular updates are best, but this can be difficult as internet connections are still not available everywhere in the world, particularly down multiday canyons! If you've hit the big time, you may be able to convince a sponsor to pay for a sat phone to do short internet updates with, but it's highly unlikely.

It is definitely worth backing up photos regularly and organising the photos as you go. Filming your expedition needs serious thought. If you set out to create a commercially available film then you need experience in kayak film making.





You must appreciate that it takes hours of time on and off the river and then weeks or months editing once you're back.

POST-TRIP OPERATIONS

It's not all over when you're plane lands back in the UK! The post trip operations are very important in pulling off a successful expedition and easily overlooked. You should be proactive in providing all your sponsors with the appropriate photos, articles and reports they might want. Organise all your photos early and organise with magazine editors when the articles should be in for. Prepare for your talks, book yourself into the shows and the usual lecture tour (e.g. Wet West Paddlefest, APWE etc) and be aware that clubs and organisations such as PGL often book speakers to inspire the masses. Do all this ASAP, as it won't be long before you're off again!

TOP TWELVE TIPS

(in no particular order):

1. List what gear you need and find out who supplies it.
2. Plug in as many co-ordinates into your GPS as possible before you leave.
3. Get the season right.
4. Set the date in all cameras and back up photos in an organised fashion
5. Be nice to anyone that sponsors you.
(and those who don't because there will be other kayakers on the case after you)
6. Try to get an airline to sponsor you in return for articles for onboard mags and video footage.
7. Why not just buy kit early from ebay/factory stores/shop discounts!?
8. Don't leave your passport 5 days upstream.
9. Chase up EVERY sponsorship/grant email and get on the phone whenever possible – just think of an excuse to update them or a bit of info they might want.
10. Don't mention the word expedition to insurance firms (but don't lie either).
We used BMC who were very helpful and didn't try to charge us crazy money.
11. Set up a forum
12. Booking your flight early, it can save you hundreds of pounds