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Whitewater Adventure Classic Finds New Life as an E-Book

'Best Travel Book of 1989' rekindled as an e-book with planned community, digital enhancement

A quarter century ago, a race was on in China that rivaled, in some circles, the earlier "Ping-Pong diplomacy" that brought China and the United States into head-to-head competition. Instead of a table tennis court, however, it was the full course of the Yangtze River in China – all 3,960 miles of it – that served as the stage for the struggle.

Riding the Dragon's Back became the unofficial history of those expeditions attempting to be the first to descend the celebrated river, the "dragon" of the title. Written by Richard Bangs, an adventure travel pioneer with some 35 first descents on his resume, and his colleague Christian Kallen, the book was first published in both hardcover and paperback just a couple years after the events it describes. It was one of the early recipients of the Lowell Thomas Award for best travel book, awarded by the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW).

Now the whitewater adventure classic has found new life in the Cloud , with the October publication of the e-book, ***Riding the Dragon's Back: The Great Race to Raft the Wild Yangtze***. Until the end of the year, the book is available exclusively at Amazon.com through Kindle Select (link: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00FV8ZTQ6>)

The e-book revises somewhat the order of chapters in the original book, moving the natural history digressions at the back of the book in a separate section, and placing the action of the events on center stage.

"It became clear in editing the book for a new generation that the history just got in the way," said co-author Kallen. "The momentum of the expeditions themselves, plus the heated competition between U.S. teams and the Chinese sports squads still makes for great reading. So we decided to focus on those stories."

The rival expeditions included one led by Portland, Oregon's Ken Warren, who scooped front-runner Sobek Expeditions for the permits to be the first to raft the world's third-longest river from its source, in 1986. Sobek – Bangs' adventure travel company– had to settle for second place, securing their permit the following year for an expedition through the deadliest section of the river, known as the Great Bend, in Yunnan Province.

But when the Chinese learned that an American was poised to be first down the river, they launched several teams of young people eager to claim the prize for their homeland. As the teams raced down the

river in the summer months, the race gained international press, which was magnified when several of the rafters died in the attempts, including photographer David Shippee of St. Paul, Minn., on the Warren team. He died from altitude sickness at the very outset of the ten-week expedition, which ended in mutiny and chaos.

The day-by-day chronicle of the Warren-Chinese competition, plus the Sobek expedition the following year, forms the heart of ***Riding the Dragon's Back***.

“In some ways, I think books like this inspired TV shows like “Survivor” and “The Great Race,” said Richard Bangs from his current base in Venice, Calif. “A disparate cast of young people in competition against the wilderness and themselves – that’s become the template of many Reality TV programs. Only nobody was cast in these expeditions, and nothing was scripted.”

Bangs himself has produced and hosted many TV shows, guiding audiences to unknown corners of the globe through his Emmy-winning “Adventures with Purpose” series on public television, and his more recent award-winning “Richard Bangs’ Quests.”

The republishing of the book in the age of the Internet, blogging, online video and Facebook has presented new opportunities, say the publishers. Home video shot by one of the Sobek trip participants, can be edited and posted online, a Facebook community is being developed (www.facebook.com/RidingTheDragonsBack), and other electronic means of sharing the book and its stories can be explored.

“Since the book has been out of print since for over 20 years,” said Kallen, “reading it on an iPad or Kindle becomes the preferred way to experience these adventures. That’s appropriate – you can pack an e-reader to the summit of Everest or the depths of the Grand Canyon if you want.”

Until the end of the year, ***Riding the Dragon's Back*** is available exclusively for Kindle at Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00FV8ZTQ6>. Publication for Apple’s iBook and other e-book formats is scheduled for January. Desktop Adventure of Healdsburg, Calif., is the publisher of the electronic edition.

Resources:

For more information or interviews, contact Richard Bangs at richardbangs@msn.com or Christian Kallen at ckallen@msn.com.

Sample chapter and images are available for press use with credit from the Publisher, www.desktopadventure.com

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