

Human powered holidays

Three kinds of trips fuelled by you-- and that tread lightly on the earth

BY LISA MONFORTON, CALGARY HERALD APRIL 18, 2009

Adventurers have punished their minds and bodies on human-powered odysseys for centuries. Every week, it seems another modern-day Thor Heyerdahl embarks on a feat that most of us can't even fathom, and often for the fame that comes with success.

But Vancouverite Julie Angus's expedition wasn't an ego trip, nor was it to get into the record books, or satisfy her adventurous side.

Her goal was environmental; she wanted to see with her own eyes how the Atlantic Ocean was being affected by global warming. As she writes in her book, *Rowboat in a Hurricane: My Amazing Journey Across a Changing Atlantic Ocean*, "I wanted to experience the environment in Technicolor detail."

A graduate student in molecular biology with a keen interest in ecology, Angus and her then-fiance Colin (now her husband), also an accomplished adventurer, embarked on a 10,000-kilometre rowboat expedition across the Atlantic Ocean from mainland to mainland in September 2005. She became the first woman to do so.

The harrowing five-month journey taught Angus many things about herself and the fragility of the ecosystem but, more than that, the excursion was an astonishing environmental eye-opener.

"It opened doors to see things that you would never otherwise see," like the trash-filled waters in the Caribbean Sea or the marine wildlife that befriended the couple along the way.

In the interest of Earth Day (Wednesday, April 22), we're not suggesting you embark on a risky expedition rowing across the Atlantic, but rather consider a holiday that slows down the scenery and allows time to stop and get in tune with the environment, all while leaving a smaller carbon footprint.

Here's a sampling of a few human-powered holidays that just about anyone can do. You might even bring home a few souvenir blisters.

Carbon-free kayaking in the Queen Charlottes

Paddle alongside whales, sea otters, seals and porpoises while kayaking and camping around some of Canada's most stunningly beautiful and remote waters and islands in the Queen Charlotte Strait.

Outfitter Sea Kayak Adventures is offering two six-day kayaking trips in August into God's Pocket Provincial Park, Canada's newest marine park, founded in 1995.

Unlike many of the other kayaking adventures in the area, outfitter Terry Prichard swears that in this remote island archipelago "you won't see anybody else"--except, of course, your fellow paddlers, abundant marine life and secluded landscapes.

The trip starts in the town of Port Hardy on North Vancouver Island where guests will be taken by water-taxi into the park wilderness. Camp will be set up on secluded pebble beaches and, during the week, guests will be treated to days of paddling around the islands, steeped in aboriginal history and culture, exploring tide pools animated with sea stars and anemones as well as some trekking into the lush rainforests. All gear and the kayaks, which are made in Ladysmith, B. C., will be waiting at the drop-off point.

"We are carbon neutral," says Nancy Mertz, Prichard's wife and business partner. Though the outfitter is keen "to turn people on to non-motorized travel," says Mertz, the company realized the irony in that their guests usually have to travel quite a distance by car or air to get there. So when you log on to seakayakadventures.com, you can offset the carbon cost of getting there by donating to one of several projects, says Mertz, which includes native energy projects. Can't make it this summer? Sea Kayak Adventures also offers trips to the Baja in winter. For details, go to seakayakadventures.com Be a land steward in your own backyard

If you're an urban cowgirl who likes to occasionally get her hands dirty, look no further than Alberta's Porcupine Hills.

Dames on the Range, whose motto is "Not Your Momma's Social Club," formed an alliance in 2008 comprised of approximately 20 southern Alberta businesswomen --which includes three ranch owners and one bed and breakfast owner --whose mission it is to introduce their city sisters (and brothers) to the country way of life through programs and retreats, weekend getaways and day trips.

Late in May, the Dames kick off the summer with two mini-getaways followed by a summer long itinerary of events that can be customized to suit a variety of tastes. "We want to show (people) a fresh perspective through different eyes," says Dames on the Range founder, Ma Dame Debbie Webster, proprietor of Chimney Rock Bed and Breakfast.

"Soul Power" (Look In) and Horse Power (Look Out), are two all-gal getaways taking place May 22 to 24 that will introduce participants to the country way of life through a variety of activities. Soul Power is billed as a rejuvenating weekend of massages interspersed with interpretive nature walks and other activities that offers a close-up glimpse of Alberta's landscapes, plants and animals and learning from the experiences of country women.

"We are aware of the land we live on," says Webster, of the women who operate the events and activities.

Horse Power is for those interested in getting more comfortable around steeds and mares while learning to ride better. Both packages include two nights' accommodation, activities and meals, which are all made from regional ingredients. Webster adds that anyone planning to participate in the trips need to know just how remote the ranches and her B&Bs is. The Chimney Rock, for example, is more than 50 kilometres south of Longview and more than 50 kilometres west of Nanton.

"We're remote," she says, so people better gas up before they head out.

There are dozens of other events on the roster including a series of Edible and Medicinal Plant Hikes throughout May, a half-a-dozen hiking adventures, including a two-week-long hike from Kananaskis to Yoho National Park, Hiking Sacred Places, a Frontier Cattle Drive and too many more activities to name.

For more details and pricing on the events, e-mail contactus@damesontherange.ca or go to damesontherange.ca, or call Webster at 1-403-646-0151. a two-wheeled view of the world

Rick and Tanya McFerrin are passionate about the pleasures of seeing the world by bicycle--so much so they wanted to share that experience with young adults who might never get the chance to do it.

In 1998, the Calgary couple travelled around the world on two wheels and eventually created Two Wheel View, a charitable organization that gives underprivileged or at-risk teens the chance to travel, get immersed in new cultures and environments, all with the goal of building confidence, self-esteem and a whole new set of life skills.

TWV runs three cycling expeditions every year for students and one for adults. It's through the adult trips that the bulk of the money is raised to fund the teens' trips, in addition to other fund-raising activities.

The next adult trip will be to Argentina in March 2010. It's a 16-day trek that covers 450 kilometres of cycling over 10 days through three climate zones.

"It's a beautiful mix of culture and natural landscapes," says Rick.

Just about anyone can manage the trip, he says, because it's geared to all levels of cyclists. "You'll not only help sponsor kids, but it's also just an awesome trip."

If you're keen to get involved in the organization, Rick says he has two spots left on the cycling trip to Norway from June 11 to 25, with the goal of grooming future cycling trip leaders. If you're interested, you'll have to pay your own way and be expected to help out within the group.

For details on the how to make a donation, or sign up for a trip, go to twowheelview.org Offset that - if your travels take you in another direction and you need to fly, you can still offset the carbon cost of your trip when booking a west- Jet or air canada flight. with west- Jet, when you're booking simply

type in the word "offsetters" in the promotional code tab and a portion of your flight cost will be donated to purchasing carbon offsets. aircanada.com offers a similar setup in a partnership with non-profit Zerofootprint. when you book at aircanada.com you can use the co2 calculator to determine how much carbon your trip will use and then purchase offset credits that go toward reforestation projects across canada.

© Copyright (c) The Calgary Herald