

**Capt. Norm Baker's Memorial
The Explorers Club—New York
September 15, 2018**







Capt. Norm Baker was Thor Heyerdahl's first mate, radio operator and celestial navigator on the three epic reed boat voyages on *Ra*, *Ra-II* and *Tigris*, 1969-1978.



However, to us he was Capt. Hook, and one of our dearest friends and expedition partners. That's Drunken Joe in the middle. Here, Hook gifted me with one of my favorite scotches, Laphroaig-10.



The Dragon Lady and I had the pleasure of doing 12 expeditions with him, from Canada and the US to Thailand.

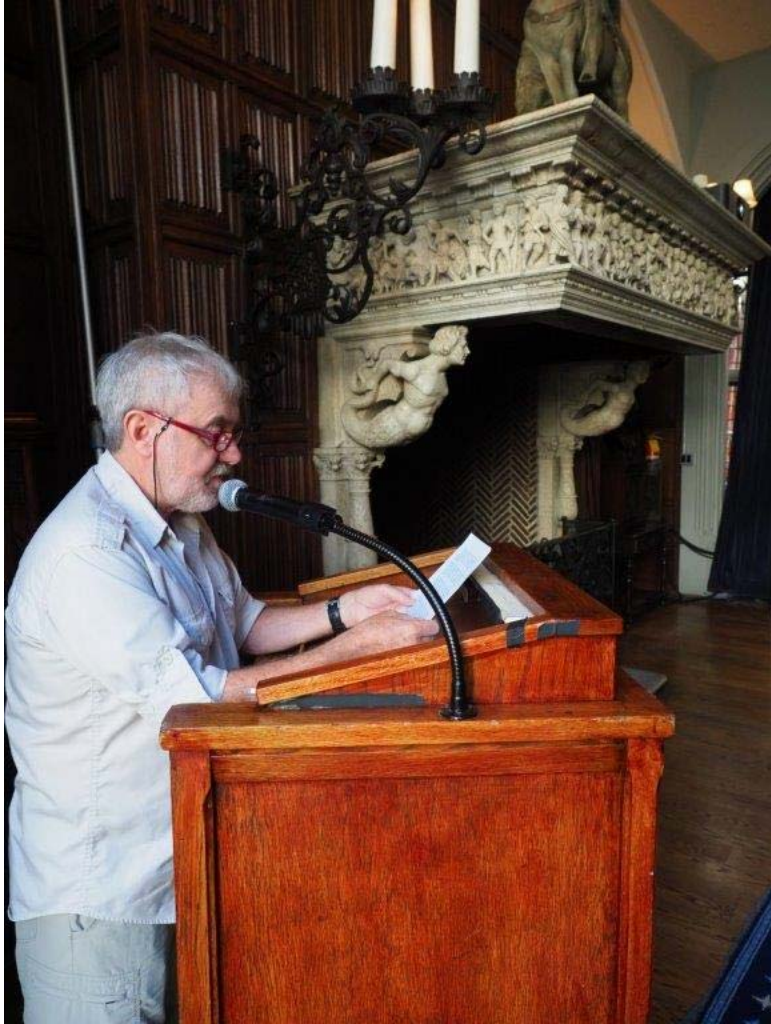


After his Cessna 172 Skyhawk sliced into a tree ridge last November in Massachusetts, the family gave me the honour of delivering the eulogy at his memorial at New York's Explorers Club.





The Club's Executive Director Will Roseman introduced Norm's daughter Elizabeth and husband Bill who made preliminary remarks. She introduced me.





Note one of Robert Peary's sleds on the wall, right. He was first to the North Pole, in 1919.



D

Son Daniel and one of his twins.



As I spoke, shots from Hook's life played on the back screen. These are at the end of this Blah Blah.



Johnny Walker is one of the Club's sponsors. They market The Explorers Club brand.



After I concluded, President Emeritus Ted Janulis and President Richard Wiese spoke eloquently. Then friends were invited to tell a story about Norm, toast him, sip, then toss the glass with much of its contents into the fire, causing a flare up. Here's Mudstang Sally, one of a loooong parade with often humorous, often poignant memories.



Then it was the family's turn. Norm's grand-daughter Olivia is an actress and playwright working the boards in an off Broadway play she co-wrote called *Dickie in the House*. It's not her first. She put on a great show. The gal has personality. And very, very long legs. Very.



Emmie. With a fellowship to travel and write a book about Capt. Hook. She wants to do it by reliving as many of his experiences as possible. Thus, she's invited on our next canoe trip. Wouldn't feel right, after 10 years, not to have a Baker along... Actually, the whole family is invited.



Jacob's a dancer with a university troupe. This family is just too damned fit—and talented. But then their last name is Atwood, related to the Canuckistanian Margaret.



Son Mitch. “You’ll notice that the Bakers all have excellent posture. This is due to Pops always ordering us to ‘Stand straight, shoulders back!’”



It was followed by wine and cheese at the Club, before family and invited guests—which included Hook’s 10 paddling buds who attended from all over North America—strolled around the corner to the French restaurant Le Charlot which had been booked, the family hosting.



With Mitch and his husband Thom. The lamb chops were the best I've had, easily. Weather? Perfect. Company? Better. The martinis and wine were pretty damned salubrious too. I hadn't had a drink for two weeks as I, successfully, fought off a nascent cold. I sure didn't want to be all stuffed up and sneezing while honoring my old friend....



New York wouldn't be New York without fellow Club member BJ. He's been part of my experience there since '84 when he set me up on a one person junket to Scandanavia for a month to write travel articles. The eulogy follows, then the photos:

Capt. Hook Eulogy 4:00pm September 15, 2018, The Explorers Club

Capt. Norm Baker was one of the Greats, a living legend of adventure and exploration. However, we called him Capt. Hook. Everyone on our canoe expeditions earns a river name. He absolutely loved his. I was surprised to learn that he didn't know anything about fresh water fishing when he joined his first brigade of ours on Saskatchewan's Churchill River in 2008. But then he'd always been connected with the ocean. He said aboard *Ra*, they'd just toss a line over the stern and pull in whatever grabbed it.

But he was keen to learn so I took him to a small bay, showed him how to use the rod and snapped on my favorite hook, a Len Thompson lady bug, which became his favorite. I told him to cast in a fan pattern in order to cover the whole bay. Finally, I said there'll be a big jackfish in here.

I hadn't walked the 100 feet to camp before he shouted. By the time I got back to him he was holding a walleye and was as excited as a kid. When I snapped his picture I said, remember

what it's like to be 10 years old again.... You can see his reaction on the screen. His next fish was that big jackfish. That picture is there too.

And he was hooked on fishing. But that's not all that he hooked in the beginning. He hooked logs and rocks and canoes and trees and shrubs and once he even hooked himself. He hooked Saskatchewan so often I anointed him Capt. Hook. But in time he became our best fisherman. He absolutely loved fishing.

Several of his paddling buddies have come in from all over North America and I'd like to introduce you. Please stand briefly when I name you:

Snorkel Master—Lynn Danaher

The Cabbage Lady—Phyllis Biegun

Flipper—Martin Stockwell got his name when he dislocated his ankle but fortunately his wife Tiny Tush is a doctor too and popped it back into place.

Tiny Tush—Lorrie Hansen

Mudstang Sally—Sally McIntosh

Tree Stomper—Nate King-Cormier

Chuckles—Don Yoshida

BJ—BJ Mikkelsen already had a good nickname in BJ which didn't need to be changed, just pronounced fully so as to speak

And The infamous Dragon Lady herself—Su Hattori

And I'm Capt. Magnus Twat, named after a fur trader with the Hudson Bay Company who died in 1801 while paddling the Carrot River, which is the namesake of the small town in Saskatchewan where I was brought up. And it's only that affiliation, no other, that caused me to adopt that river name. (Tongue in cheek.) Many a time I was to hear Hook boom, "Twat! Let's go fishing!" And we would, with me paddling and him sitting in the bow facing back. We loved those times.

Hook and I met when he contributed to my *Adventurous Dreams, Adventurous Lives* book and he listed whitewater canoeing as one of his pastimes. I invited him to join our annual brigade and he flew out to Saskatchewan in his Cessna. He also always brought a paddle the size of a grain shovel he'd had since the 1960s. He was a very strong stern paddler, but I could never convince him that the imbalance in paddle sizes between bow and stern caused problems, but he did save it just for rapids.

Over a dozen years we did 12 expeditions together. Several were 16-18-person affairs. Six were Flag expeditions. I was team leader on all but one. Because Hook was the great Tor Heyerdahl's—and that's how he said it was pronounced, Tor, not Thor—first mate, I jokingly suggested that since he had gained some experience in the position that I'd like to try him out as

my first mate. He took me seriously. And, thus, Thor Heyerdahl's first mate was my first mate for 10 years.

Hook was, of course, most famous for being Thor's first mate, celestial navigator and radioman on the reed boat voyages. The 1969 *Ra* attempt across the Atlantic didn't quite make it to Barbados before breaking up 100 miles short and sinking. But the following year, they made it in *Ra-II*. Thus proving that there could be a link between the civilizations of Egypt and meso-America. A final voyage in *Tigris* in 1978 proved there could have been contact between Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus civilization. It was in 1970 after *Ra* that he was elected as a fellow. Naturally, Thor sponsored him. Madani Ouhanni of Morocco is the lone survivor from the *Ra* expeditions, though the Kon-Tiki Museum informs me that there's at least four from *Tigris*. Madani emails about his "great friend Norm" and wishes us every success today.

Hook was born November 18, 1928, in Brooklyn. His dreams to live an adventurous life were born when he'd bike through the fields—that's how old he was, there were still fields in Brooklyn—down to Floyd Bennett Field to watch planes taking off and landing. AND to watch ships sail out the narrows and he'd yearn to know where they were going. This is while in San Francisco another of the future Greats, a youthful Don Walsh, was dreaming exactly the same thing, as Don watched ships sail out below the Golden Gate Bridge.

Both men joined the Navy, Hook after picking up a civil engineering degree at the ivy league Cornell and a masters from Cooper Union College. He served aboard a destroyer as Commander during the Korean War and saw action. But it was while enroute back to San Francisco, while cruising around Diamond Head, that he spotted wooden yachts in a race and knew that's where he really should be. Two years later he was sailing one all over the South Pacific. It was in Tahiti where he met Heyerdahl.

Future wife Mary Ann was engaged to '60s DJ Cousin Brucie, who you can still hear on the '60s channel on Sirius, when she met Hook. A real romantic, on their honeymoon in 1960 Hook left her to roam Zumatt alone while he climbed the Matterhorn. She was adventurous too and supportive of his disappearing for months. Having sold their home in the early 1980s with plans to take the family around the world, they ended up instead spending five years on Tortola rebuilding the 1868 95-foot Norwegian fishing boat the *Anne Kristine*. She was not only the sister ship to Amundsen's *Gjoa*, the first to sail the Northwest Passage, and not only the oldest ship in New York harbor during the 1986 Tall Ships Parade, but the oldest continuously sailing vessel in the world. Unfortunately she was also largely rotten when they bought her. Broke after the massive rebuilding they put her up for charter. She went down in 1991 in *The Perfect Storm*—it was mentioned in the book—and insurance had been cancelled because he wasn't aboard. Hook said he didn't know anything could hurt so much...until Mary Ann died of cancer in 2003.

As a consolation to the loss of the ship, he returned to his first dream, flying. He'd learned to fly at the age of 13 after he won a contest building a model airplane. The prize was flight lessons. His Cessna 172 Skyhawk was named the *Anne Kristine II*. It was in the Skyhawk that he made

the three day flight from Windsor, Massachusetts, to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, every summer for 10 years.

In between he and his late brother Howard ran a company specializing in tricky construction jobs often involving concrete. One of his contracts was replacing the sidewalk to conform to Trump Tower when it was being built. Many changes were requested during construction which Hook duly noted but when he presented his bill—which included charges for the extra work—he was stiffed, told he could sue for those added costs, told in the end after paying lawyers for two years he'd end up with the same amount. So they settled. But Hook got Trump back. A bid went out to enlarge the lobby. It involved concrete structure changes, Hook's specialty. No one else bid, partly because it was a tricky job, and no doubt because of Trump's reputation for ripping off contractors. Knowing he could do it, Hook doubled his usual estimate, added a fat topper for extras he expected he'd get ripped off for, and for good measure slapped on another topper. He won the contract, did the job and this time got paid. But he swore off ever doing business with the orange cockroach again.

Another adventure he had was a job on Long Island requiring the rental of concrete pumps. One didn't work so when he returned them to the rental company, he said he wasn't paying for the faulty one, and didn't. A few days later two goodfellows from Paul Castellano's Gambino family barged into his office demanding payment. Hook said, "Let's talk about this like gentleman." One of the wiseguys bellowed, "Don't call us gentlemen! We're not gentlemen!" And decked him. Hook paid. How the hell was he to know it was a mafia company?

He told these stories with a raconteur's brilliance. Indeed, he's the best raconteur I've ever heard. Once, on the Missouri, we ran into a troop of Boy Scouts. For an hour around a campfire he mesmerized them and our 18-member brigade with the story of *Ra*. Although I'd heard it several times before, I was enthralled each time he recounted it.

On one of our early expeditions he brought me a copy of Heyerdahl's *Ra Voyages* and I read it while sharing a tent with him. I was struck how every time Thor wrote about Norm, the tone would change, become softer, respectful, affectionate. Thor's high regard for Norm jumped off the pages. He wrote how Norm, when he finished his day's duties, would immediately look for something else to do. That's the way he was on our expeditions. And that's exactly the kind of person you want on an expedition. They were best friends. Hook flew to Norway to visit Thor when he was dying of a brain tumor in 2002.

Hook was one of the most congenial people I've ever known, a people person with a tremendous capacity for friendship. That's also a trait you want on a reed boat sailing for five months with 11 crew members, as was the case on *Tigris*. However, I'm sure members of the Club's Board of Directors who had to deal with him might gag. When he got a spike in his head, it was in to his tonsils. I learned to put Nat King Cole instead of Dean Martin on the radio on our many long drives. He never forgave Deano for "what he did to Jerry" way back in 1956. In other words, blaming the Dean Martin-Jerry Lewis breakup on Dean.

He was a man of his generation. On another long drive, I took a chance and punched up Howard Stern. Howard took that moment to say something particularly gross—and I mean gross even

for Howard. I punched it back to the '50s channel but Hook was aghast. "Did I hear what I thought I heard?" he sputtered. I glanced in the rear view mirror. Snow Job was in the back seat trying to stifle the giggles. So was I.

Hook was at heart a 10-year-old boy. His family called him the world's oldest Boy Scout. He had the energy and huge appetite of a boy and was frequently the subject of jokes at our camps for insisting nothing be wasted. If you said you knew Norm Baker and hadn't heard about Slopchute Mary you didn't know Norm Baker very long. Slopchute Mary was an enterprising Chinese woman in Hong Kong during the Korean War who struck a deal with Hook's destroyer to scrape and repaint rust in exchange for the crew's leftovers which her people neatly repackaged for sale. At our camps, he'd scrape pots so clean they almost didn't need to be washed. We'd joke about Hook sticking his head into a pot again.

On one of the dinosaur expeditions with *Tyrannosaurus* Phil Currie we were sitting around the bonfire. There were gophers everywhere and somebody told a story of someone they knew who dropped his pants and squatted over a gopher hole only to have a gopher pop up and bite him on the nuts. In the best upmanship I've ever heard Hook told of the time he was aboard *Ra* and was literally on the poop deck doing his business when a hammerhead shark rocketed up like a Saturn missile. Hook was able to throw himself forward in the nick of time. ...I remarked that you have to expect that to happen when you dangle a worm in front of a fish.

On the Missouri, he forgot to bring toilet paper. The joke was because he was so tough he preferred to use nettle. The following year, the running joke was he used cactus. The next year, rattlesnakes. And so on. He got a great kick out of it.

Keenly intelligent, when something caught his interest, his laser concentration could burn a hole in steel. It was that intense, and something to behold. Always curious, he was always expanding his horizons, always learning, and there were no limits to his interests. I'm an old radio music director and DJ and I can't stand rap, which is spelled with a silent c in the front to me. But a year ago he had the chance to strap on headphones and for over an hour he listened intently to that crap, wanting to understand it. He was just interested in learning about everything.

While most explorers have one consuming passion, he was interested in all theologies. Ten of our expeditions were by canoe, from three dino bone hunting down Alberta's Red Deer River with *Tyrannosaurus* Phil, to seeking lost fur trading posts and pictographs in Saskatchewan, to retracing part of Lewis and Clarke's route on the Missouri. Two others were in Thailand, one an archaeological cave dig that led to the building of the Hintok Camp museum on the River Kwai; the other ethnological amongst the hilltribes, and that collection, when completed will go to a museum.

He was fearless. This is a guy who floated on a haystack not once but twice across the Atlantic Ocean. When we were on a river with poor rapids, he'd express disappointment. At 87 he broke his neck steeple jumping. At 88 his hip skiing. I joked that next his parachute wouldn't open. Sadly, I wasn't far wrong. *Tyrannosaur* Phil's wife, Eva Koppelhus, the Danish Delight, came up to me on more than one occasion in the badlands desperately worried and begging me to ask Hook not to climb on the steeper slopes. But what could I do? I could see he was careful. He

had climbed the Matterhorn. He was a lifelong risk taker. He was an athlete. As his son Mitch emailed, “Pops needed adventure like other people need air.”

The accidents began to take their toll on our last two expeditions. After both accidents he had to recover at his daughter Elizabeth and Bill’s place and that meant immobility. That was tough for someone who had a lifetime daily workout regimen that made my jaw drop when he first described it. Well into his 80s he was portaging canoes over his head. With his neck barely healed, he joined our 2016 dinosaur bone expedition. Being a 10-year-old kid, Hook was fascinated by dinos. Our three prospecting expeditions were outstandingly successful. On one we had discovered an incredible *six hadrausaur*s, on another the best *velociraptor*, as some paleontologists call it, found in Alberta and something *Tyrannosaurus* Phil had been seeking for 34 years. On that final one in 2016, a rare *anchiceratops* skull and frill which, the summer of 2017, we dug out, jacketed and choppered out and which is destined for the paleo museum at the University of Edmonton.

It was on this last expedition that he found he didn’t have the wherewithal to climb the badlands any longer. His frustration was such that he blew his stack and unreasonably took his anger out on Tree Stomper, his canoe mate. Stomper, like all of us, could see what was happening and rolled with the punches. But the once affable Hook was starting to have dark moods when his body would no longer do what it had always done.

Our final paddle was a year ago, the summer of 2017. He had been recuperating from that hip broken only four months earlier. I designed a lazy, easy paddle on a favorite lake, Reindeer, with no portages and plans to camp several days at each site. A pleasure trip. It was evident that his hip was not healing well. He had a cane. His cranky moods were more frequent—and remember that this was the one of the most congenial people I’ve ever known.

But he was still tough. At one point a terrible northern Canadian storm blew in with freezing horizontal rain. Instinctively, several of us huddled around Hook who was sitting in his chair, because his piece of crap tent was flooded and half collapsed. He never did bother buying a decent tent in all these years, by nature preferring to rough it. His response was to mutter, “I’m not a marshmallow, you know.” He was only in shorts and t-shirt and soaked, and it was cold as hell, but he was fine—and he was. Only a true explorer can be cold, wet and miserable—and still be enjoying it.

We started with fishing and I want to end with it. Our last full day on the water together was beautiful but he was in one of his crankiest moods. He reminded me of Joe Btfsplk in *Lil’ Abner*, walking around under a dark cloud. I heard the familiar, “Twat! Let’s go fishing!” though it was more of a bark than the usual happy call to arms. So we paddled out perhaps 20 feet and I said, “Cast over there.” He growled and cast—and the moment his lady bug spoon hit the water, his rod jerked. The look of surprise on Hook’s face was something to behold and he delightfully cranked it in to my waiting net. The change was amazing. He was half way back to the old happy, affable Hook. I paddled another dozen feet and told him to cast over near some weeds. This time it took five seconds for another jackfish to strike. This time the change in Hook was complete. His dark mood had completely vanished and he was glowing again. We spent another

hour paddling around and we only caught one other fish but it didn't matter. Hook was back. Happy and having fun.

And that's the way I remember him—a great, great companion and friend, always happy, always positive, always curious, always ready for a new experience, a new adventure, a new expedition. He was a great, great inspiration. Like everyone in this incredible Club, we were just kids out playing, seeking fun and adventure together. Mitch, Elizabeth and Daniel and grand-kids Olivia, Emmie, Jacob, Maya, Isabella, Hattie and Phoebe—you are so lucky to have had the real life Capt. Hook as your patriarch.

We'll never know what went wrong in the cockpit last November 22. The next week he was scheduled for surgery again on that stubborn hip. I just know that he would have been the most miserable person in the history of care homes if that's where he would have ended up. He wasn't afraid of dying, he'd spoken about that only a year earlier, and it's on video. While I really believed he'd live into his 100s, he went out at a grand age and he went out instantly doing something adventurous he loved: flying.

An explorer could not ask for a better exit.

* * *

The photos. Here, I've added some explication that wasn't on the screen.





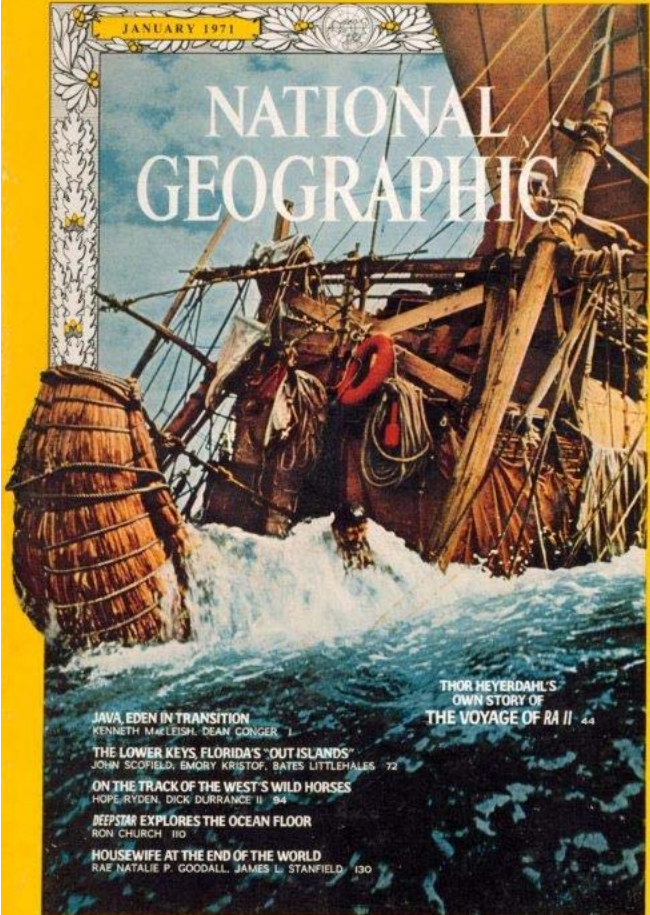
Hook hooked again!



“Your first fish! Remember what it’s like to be 10-years-old again!”

JANUARY 1971

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



THOR HEYERDAHL'S
OWN STORY OF
THE VOYAGE OF RA II 44

JAWA, EDEN IN TRANSITION
KENNETH MCKEISH, DEAN CONGER 1

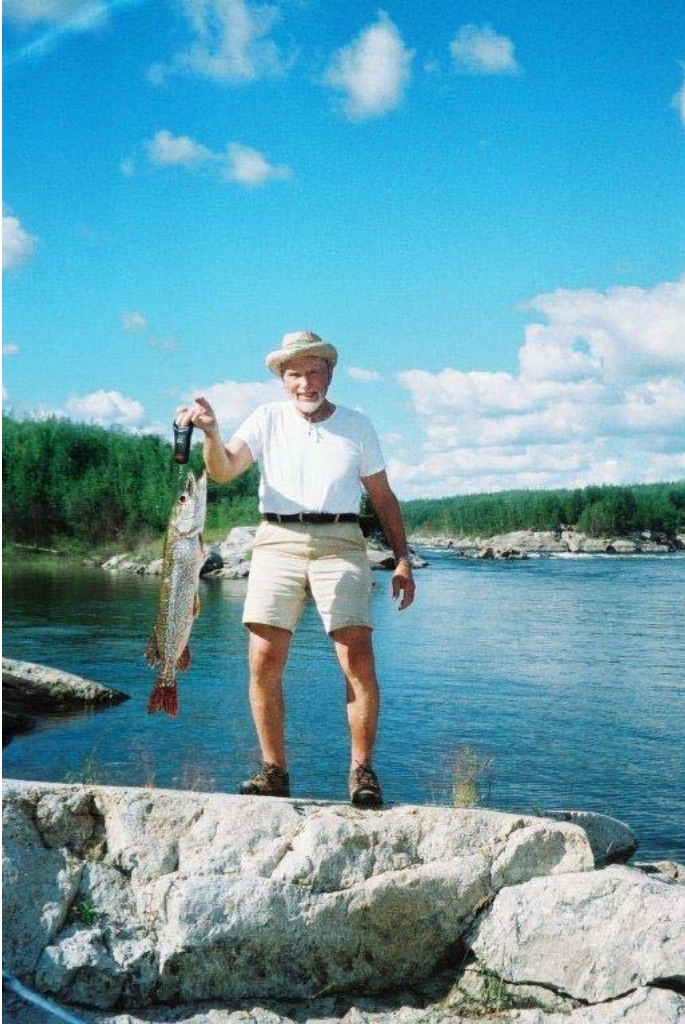
THE LOWER KEYS, FLORIDA'S "OUT ISLANDS"
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ON THE TRACK OF THE WEST'S WILD HORSES
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OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY WASHINGTON, D.C.



I said there'd be a big jack in there.



That's 87-year-old Hook far up the gully in the badlands.

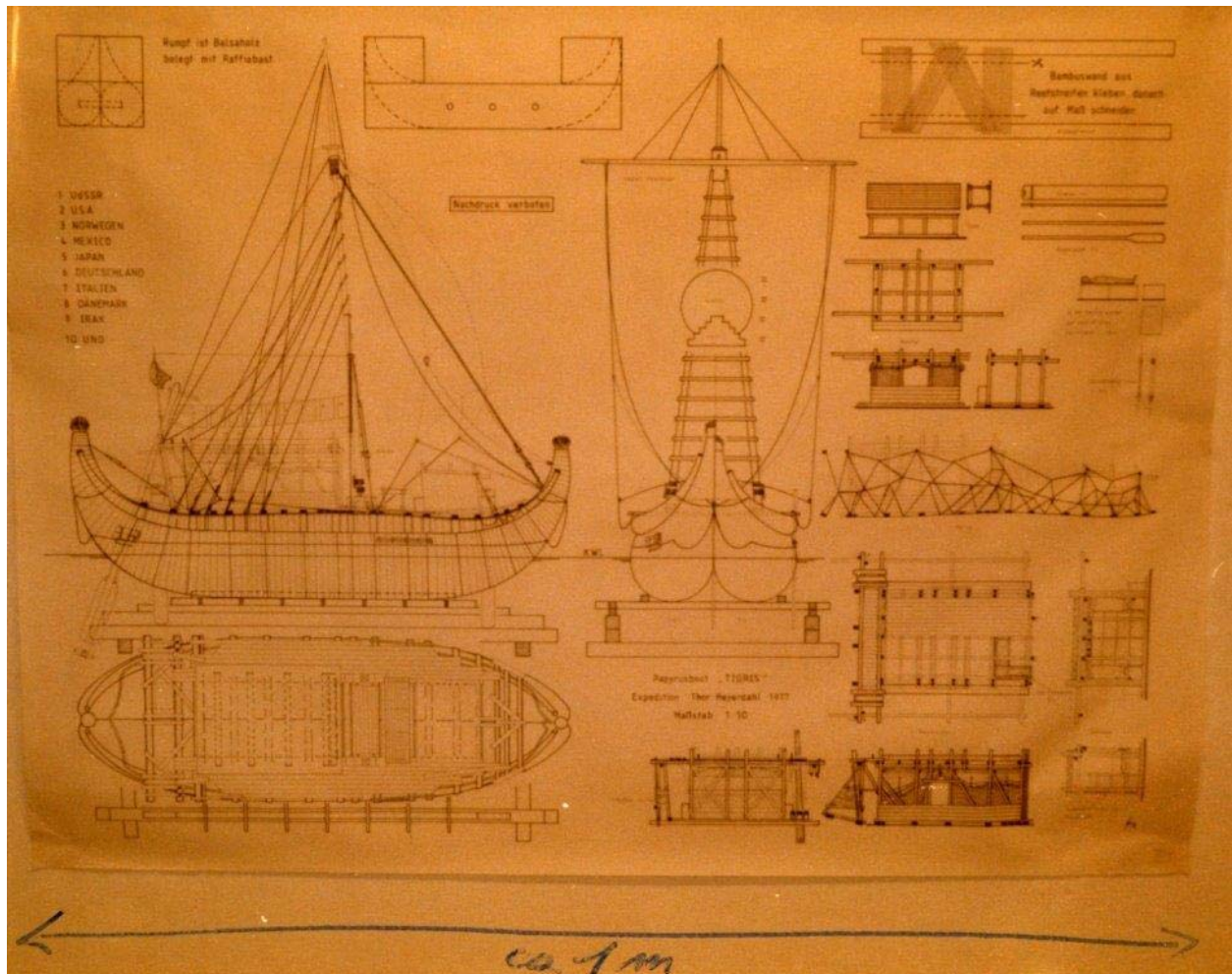


Group in the Age of Mammals. *Tyrannosaurus* Phil Currie's feet in the Cretaceous. The KT Boundary in the dug out dirt just below The Explorers Club flag. I called it the KY Boundary so often I expect Ty-Phil and the Danish Delight to accidentally let it slip that way in class.



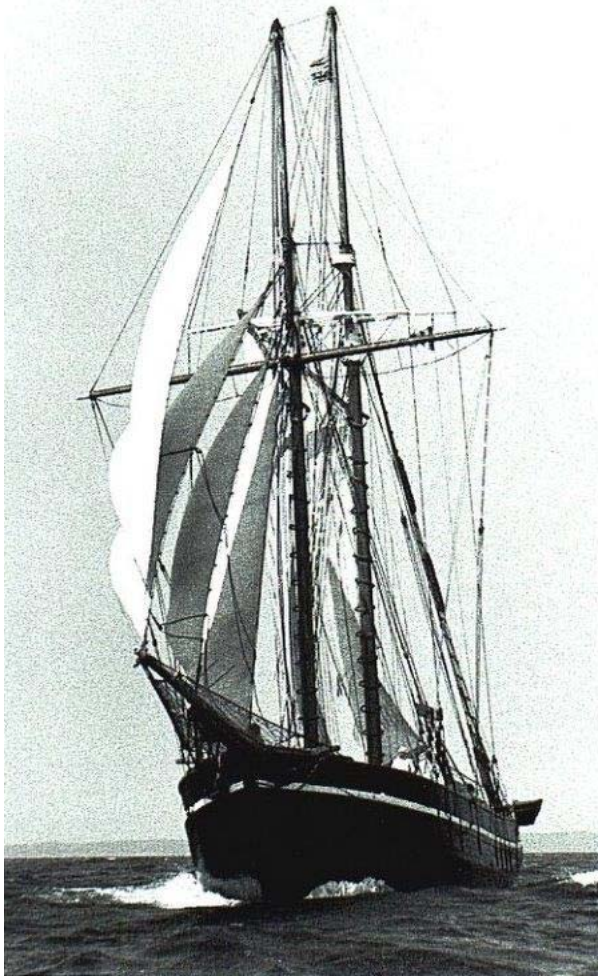
With The Explorers Club flag signifying a Club sanctioned expedition, this one to the Red Deer River in Alberta, site of the greatest concentration of dino bones in the world. The flags each

have a history of previous expeditions going back decades. We did three. *Tyrannosaurus* Phil Currie and wife Eva Koppelhus, the Danish Delight, were field leaders. I was team leader.





Chiang Mai at Club member Bucklee Bell's Kesorn Arts. Bucklee is the biggest ethnographic dealer in SE Asia. Cool guy, once a renowned Frisco psychedelic artist, and still is. Hook, Birdman (Rob Tymstra) and I were on an ethnological collecting expedition among the hilltribes.



Anne Kristine.



Our last paddle together, his broken hip not healing well. Popping champagne celebrating the launch of another grand two weeks in Nature.



We met in person in Toronto in 2007 at the launch of *Adventurous Lives, Adventurous dreams* at late member Billy Jameson's incredible loft stuffed with millions of dollars of collectables, from Egyptian mummies to shrunken heads to a guillotine. Twenty-eight contributors flew in from all over North America.

ADVENTUROUS DREAMS, ADVENTUROUS LIVES

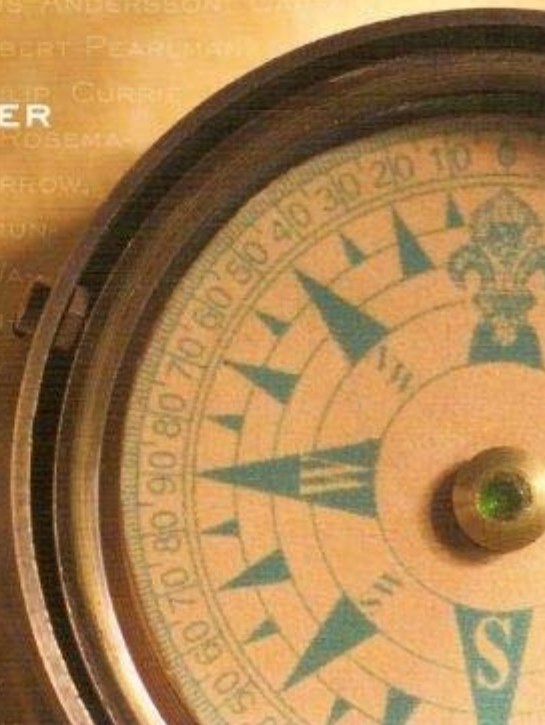
Collected and Edited by

JASON SCHOONOVER

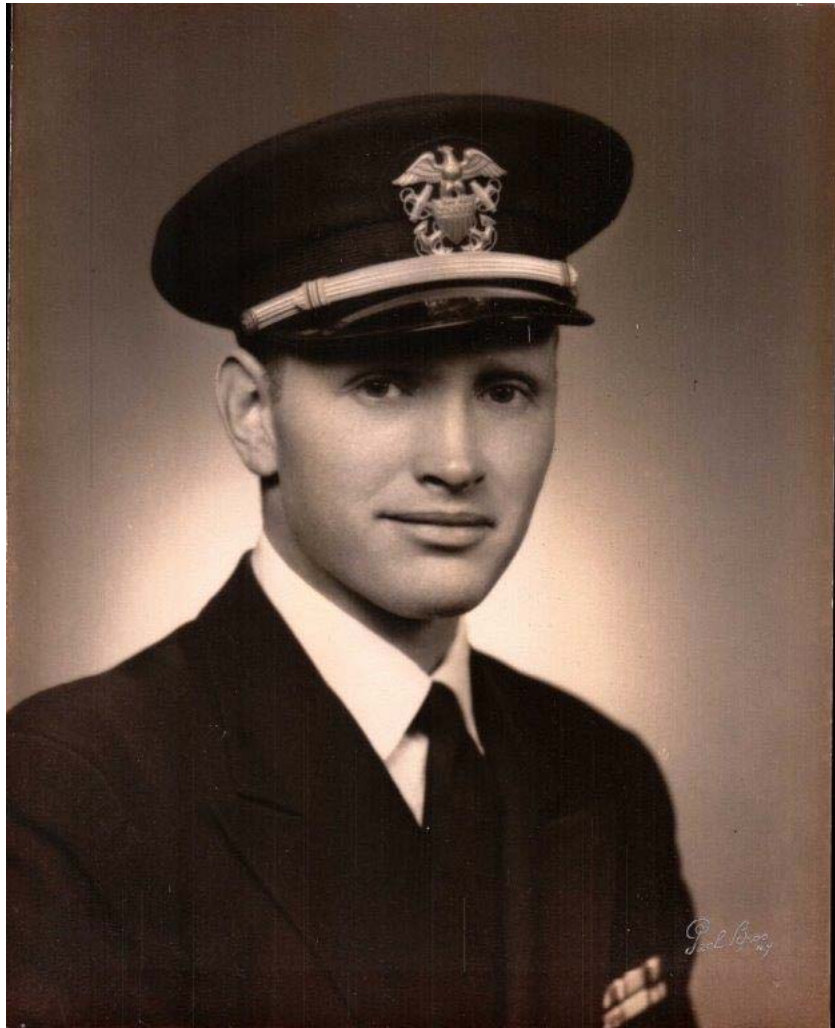
Foreword by

MEAVE LEAKEY

I had no idea when I had my first youthful dream of flight that it would take me all the way to the moon—but that's the power unleashed in following one's dreams. Jason Schoonover's book should be required reading in every school. —BUZZ ALDRIN



The book with Hook's contribution. Each of the 120 were asked to describe the youthful moment when the dream was born launching their remarkable lives. Note: I didn't include this picture in the memorial.





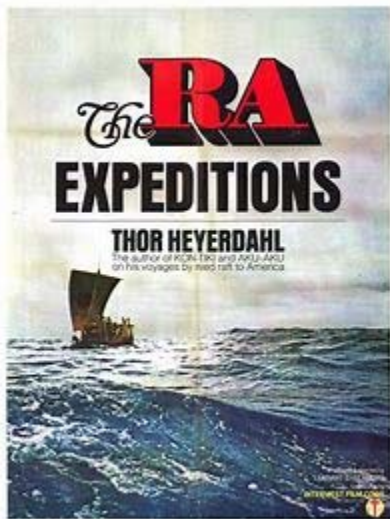
With Thor.





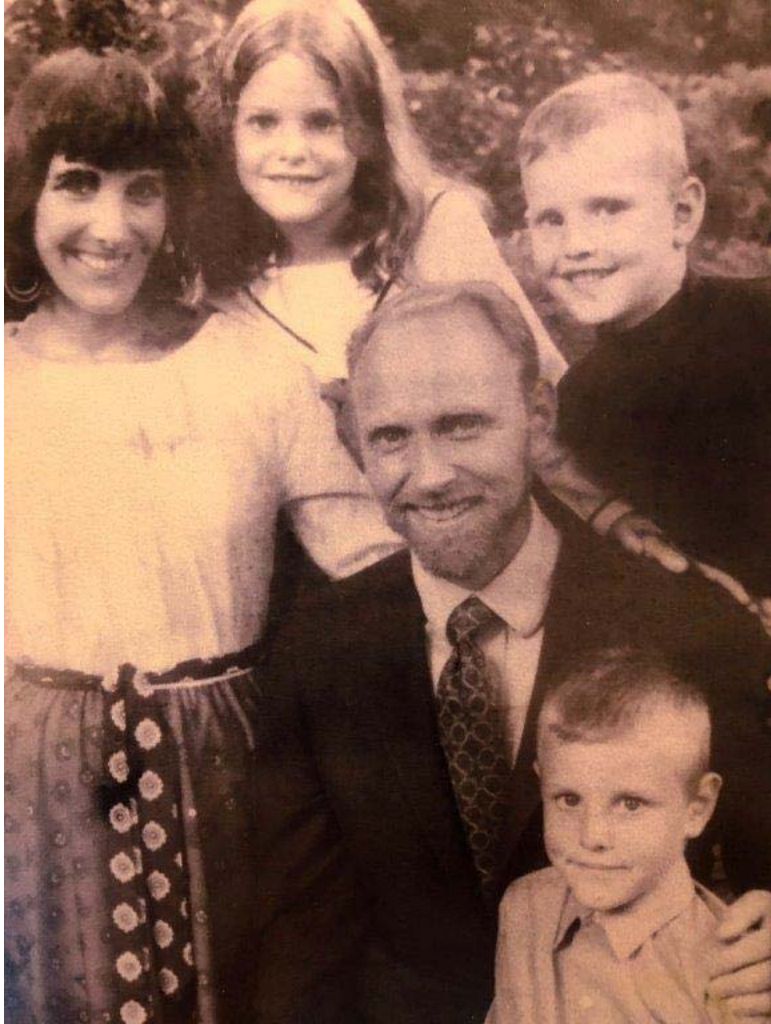


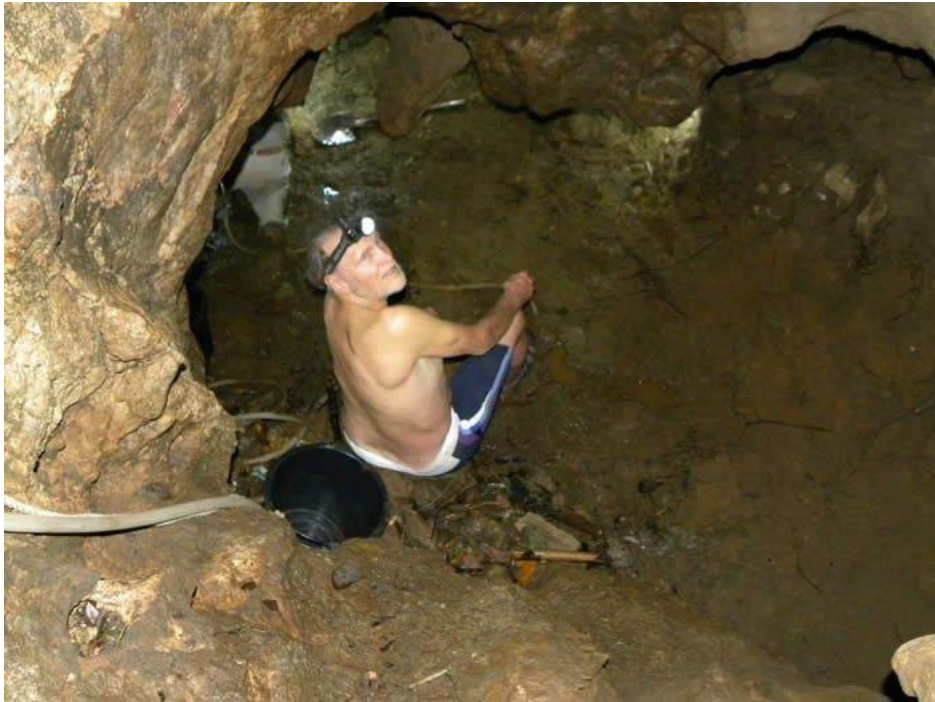
The Explorers Club Annual Dinner at the Waldorf. Familiar faces from the flat screen include George Kourounis and Jessica Phillips aka Lady Danger.





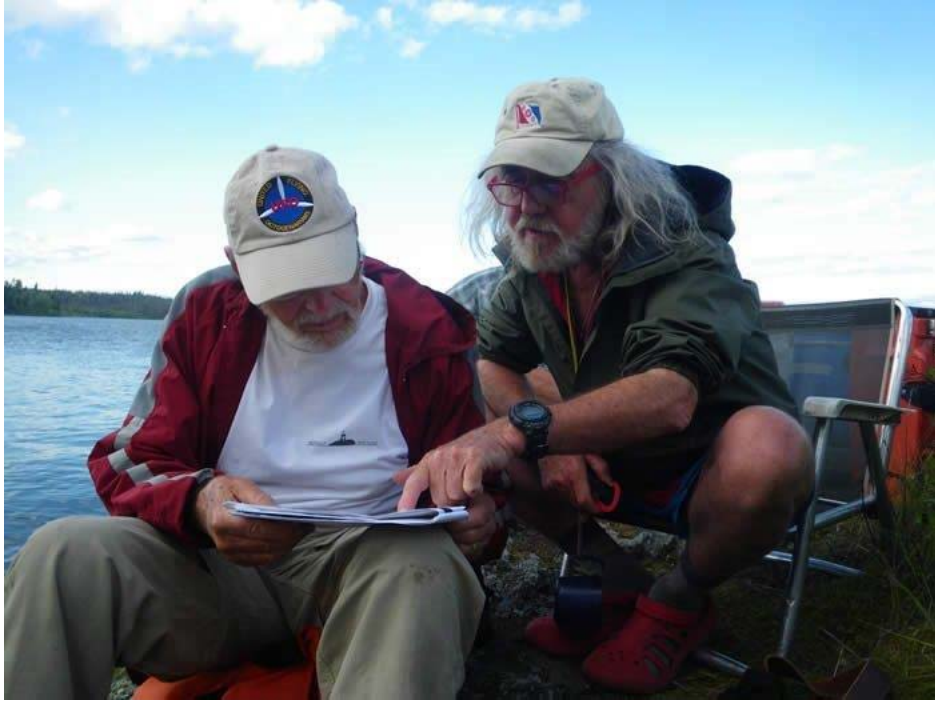
The David Thompson Expedition, seeking the last two trading posts he visited with the Hudson Bay Company before jumping ship to their bitter rival, the North West Company. We found one, here on Saskatchewan's Churchill River.





Digging for Paleo- and Neolithic tools in Hintok Cave along the River Kwai. Our finds led to the building of the museum at Hintok River Camp.







With Tree Stomper as his bow.



Hook Rapids on the Churchill, so named because on his first trip, and only a half hour into it, he

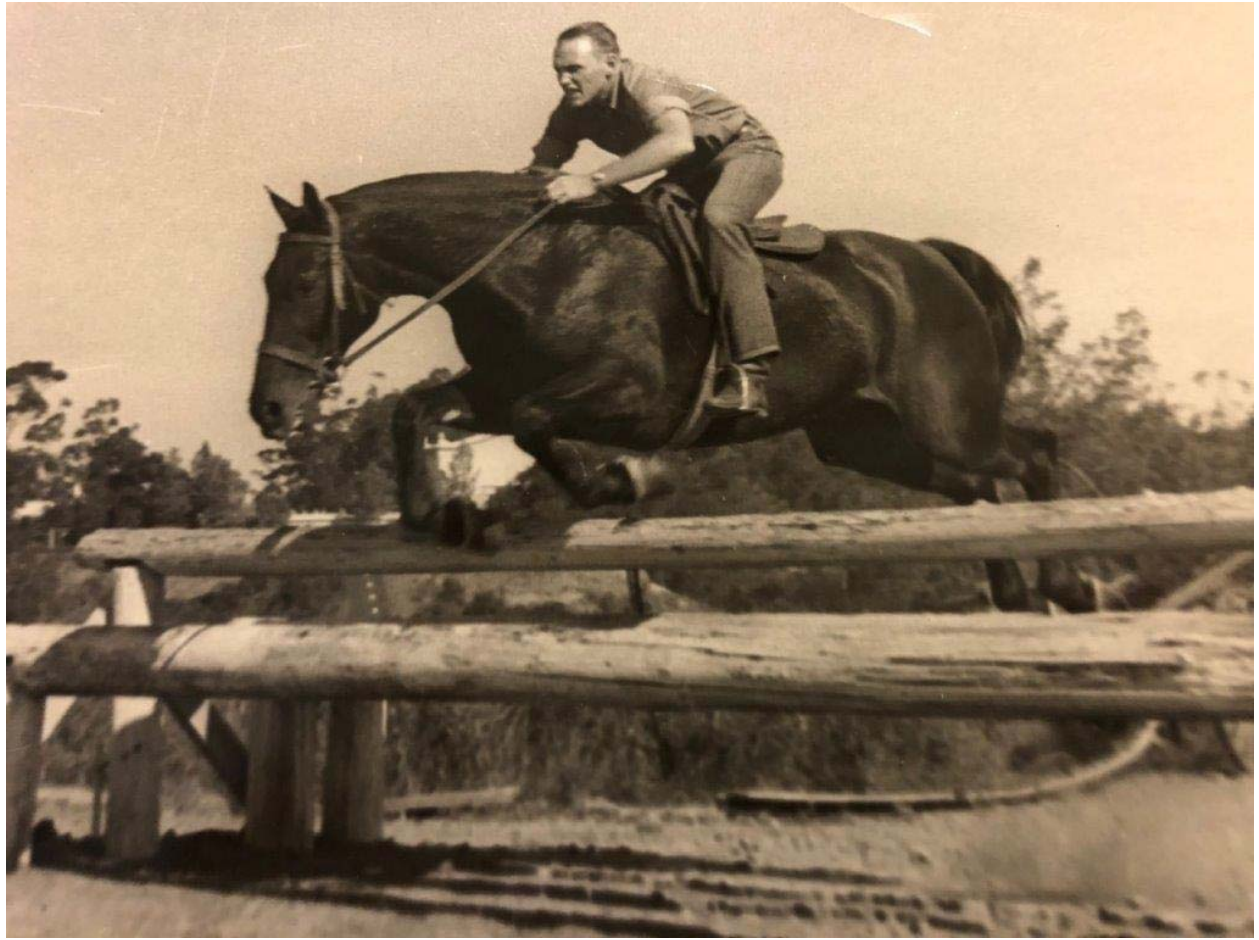
spilled in them and washed down several hundred years before calm water. Was he phased? Not a bit.





With Club Ombudsman Brian Hanson and Board of Directors member Snorkel Master, sometimes known as Lynn Danaher.







Norman Borlaug

*Juiri Senkei
Tokyo, Japan*

Abdoulaye

Thant Thant

U THANT
SECRETARY GENERAL
UNITED NATIONS

*George S. Goyens
U.S.A.*

Carlo

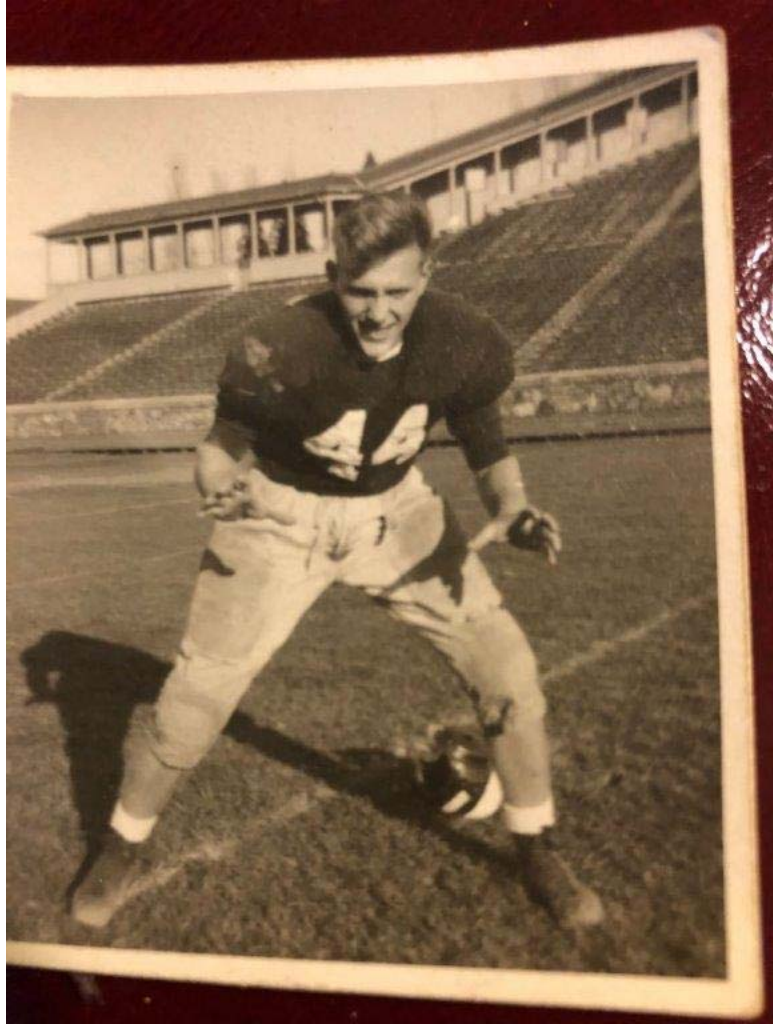
The American Henley Championship Crew - Spring of '49

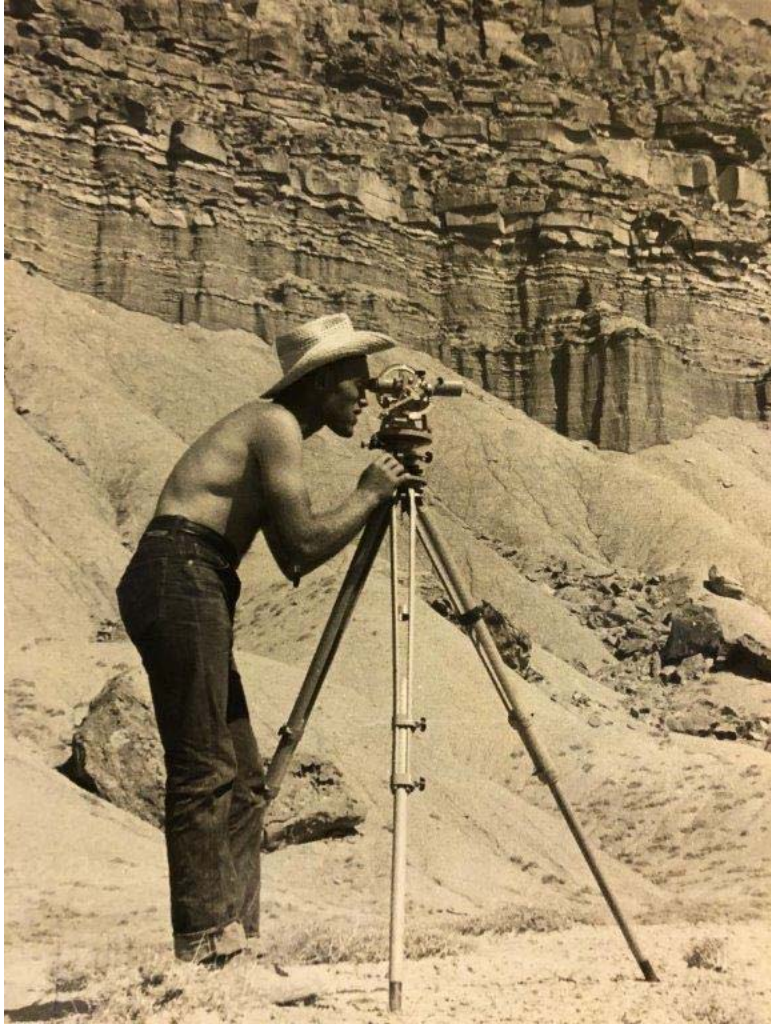


Al Bock
Coach

Stroke 7-Towner Duckley 5-Paul Zimmerman 4-Chuck Warren 2-Bob Post
-Dick Elmendorf





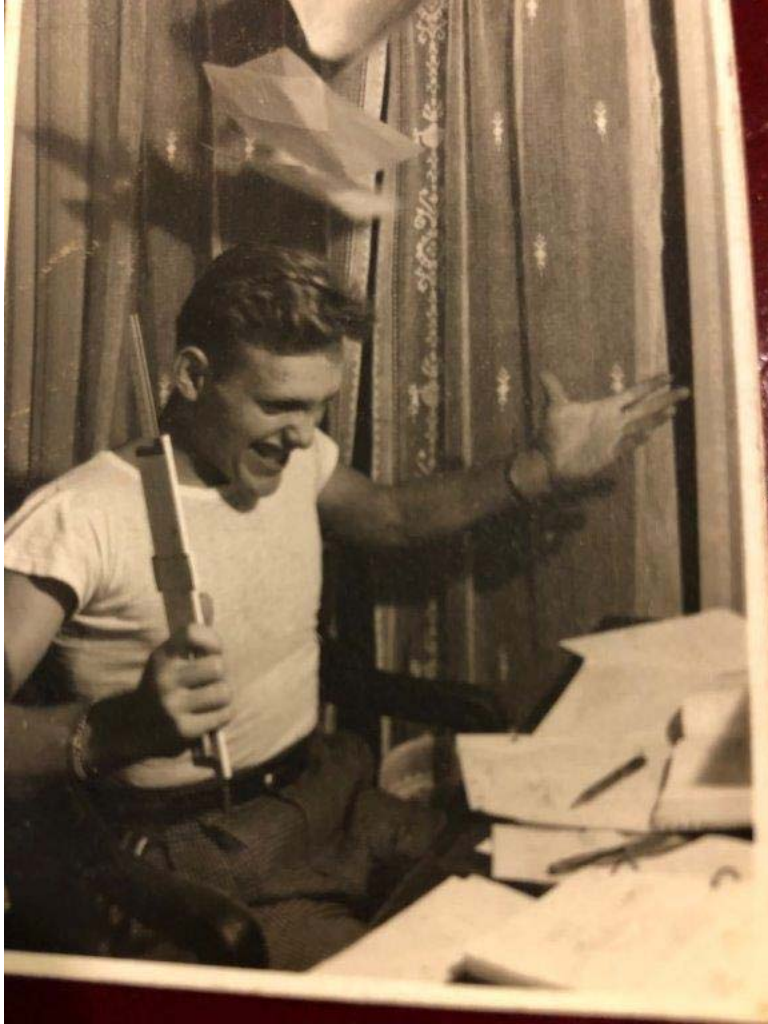








That's Hook down on his knees, as I joked, pleading, "Hang on! Just give me a minute! I can fix it!"





Bridge over the River Kwai with Sir Rod Beatty left and Martin Saunders.



Some of our happiest times together...this taken on that last paddle....



The Lost Pictograph Expedition on Saskatchewan's Reindeer Lake. The pictographs, submerged since 1942, weren't found, probably obliterated.

















Tigris was the biggest of them all.









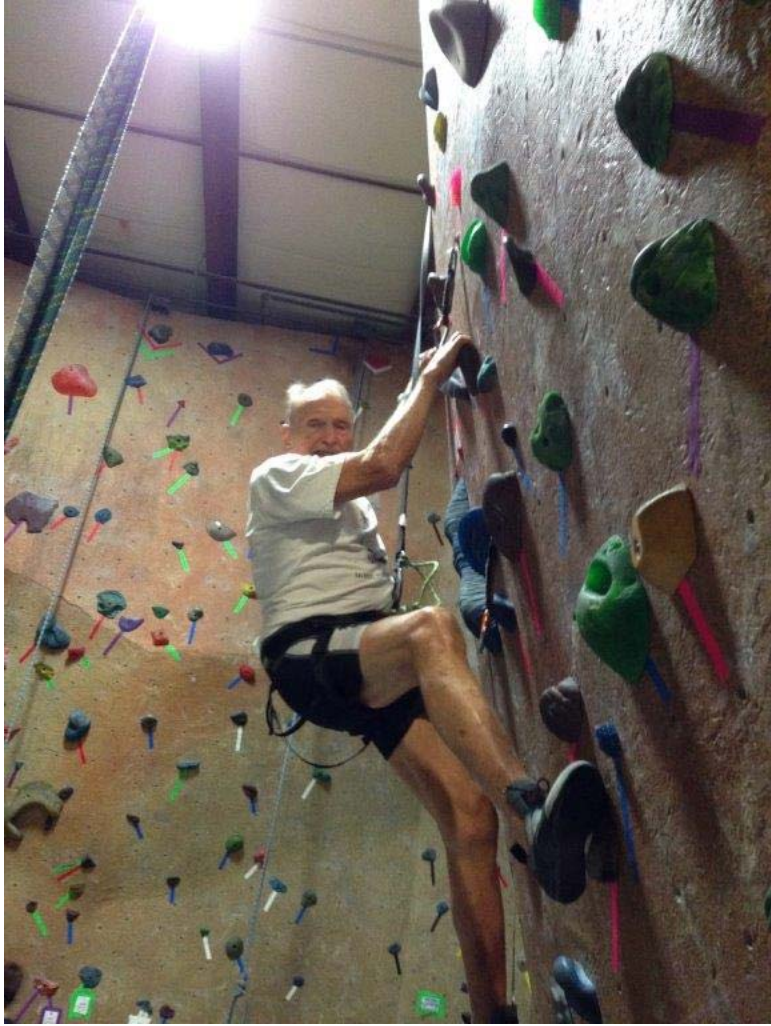


THE
TIGRIS
EXPEDITION



IN SEARCH OF OUR BEGINNINGS

**THOR
HEYERDAHL**





With the Bow Buba, Candy Wilson.



The last day of that last expedition with Chicken Legs (Garth Ramsay), Good Yoko (Kumiko Ramsay-Yokoyama), The Dragon Lady (Su Hattori) and Deep Throat (Eric Forbes). I just don't know anyone who packed so much living into 89 years. Expeditions just won't be the same without...Capt. Hook....

Farewell, my old friend. Farewell.

Fini

