

LIFE & LEGACY

DOUG TOMPKINS SPENT HIS LIFE EXPLORING AND PROTECTING WILD PLACES, OVERCOMING DEEP SUSPICION TO WIN THE HEART OF HIS BELOVED PATAGONIA AND BECOME THE WORLD'S FOREMOST PRIVATE CONSERVATIONIST. WHEN A SUDDEN WIND OVERTURNED HIS KAYAK ON A COLD CHILEAN LAKE, A YOUNG MAN HE'D GROOMED TO HELP CARRY ON HIS LEGACY WAS THE ONLY ONE CLOSE ENOUGH TO HELP.

B Y T Y L E R W I L L I A M S



VIVA LOS FUNHOGS: Tompkins, left, with Rick Ridgeway (center) and Yvon Chouinard on the summit of Cerro Kristine, named in honor Tompkins' wife Kris McDivitt Tompkins. Photo by Jimmy Chin



General Carrera Lake sits inexplicably astride the Andes Mountains. From space, it looks a bit like a salamander with its rear feet splayed north and south within verdant mountain valleys and its bulbous snout probing east, into the barren plains of Argentina. The lake is dammed by ancient glacial moraines, forcing its waters to drain west, back through the Andes. It does so via the Baker River, Chile's largest waterway. As one might imagine, this quirky and grand geography creates a dramatic scene.

Clouds curl over granite spires poking above the northern Patagonia ice field in the west, while an endless sky reflects the lake's cerulean waters to the

east. Along the northern shoreline, cliffs are eroded into fantastic formations of polished limestone, known locally as the marble caves. These smooth rock chambers were formed due to wave action generated by the legendary Patagonian wind, a product of the atmosphere's struggle to equalize itself between a soggy, ice covered mountain range and a sunny expanse of brown steppe.

On the morning of December 8th, 2015, the atmosphere was just starting to stretch its legs. From a protected cove on the lake's north shore, the winds hardly raised much concern for six paddlers poised to re-embark after a layover day on their 5-day tour. Among the half-dozen paddlers were some of the most accomplished adventurers of our time. Rick Ridgeway, 66, a member of the first American team to summit

K2; Jib Ellison, 54, a pioneering whitewater rafter and founder of Project Raft; Laurence "Lorenzo" Alvarez-Roos, 49, co-owner of Bio Bio Expeditions; Weston Boyles, 29, a Class V kayaker and filmmaker; Yvon Chouinard, 77, a living legend in climbing, but also an experienced paddler who was on the first descent of the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone; and Doug Tompkins, 72, a contemporary of Chouinard whose story we should all know but don't, mainly due to his reticence toward media. Skier, climber, paddler, pilot, gear designer, business magnate, conservationist; Tompkins can't be labeled with any single tag, except as a man with an unquenchable fire.

Lately that fire burned at his desk, organizing Herculean conservation efforts. His adventure craving had gone largely unsatisfied, so a paddling trip on

South America's second largest lake was the perfect fix. "He was really thriving," says Boyles, who has known Tompkins since he was 4 years old.

In his single sea kayak, Boyles surfed downwind on rolling two-foot waves, turning occasionally to capture photos of the others. Chouinard and Jib Ellison paddled one of the doubles; Ridgeway and Tompkins the other, which was plagued by what Ridgeway would later describe as "a finicky rudder." Alvarez paddled a single kayak. Every 15 minutes or so, after the party separated in their surfing bliss, the men would pause to regroup. They drifted and chatted, making good time with the waves and a steady tailwind pushing them east.

Minutes after the group dispersed from their second regrouping, the wind began to rise. The waves grew bigger, and a second, more erratic wind began spilling down the Avellanos River Valley to their left. Feeling the conditions build, they all aimed for the shelter of a peninsula about half a mile ahead. Jutting into the lake like a hammerhead, the far side of the point would offer protection from the increasing wind and the lake current sweeping them headlong toward the plains of Argentina.

As he approached the shore, Boyles made a final glance over his shoulder to check on his companions, which in those conditions is more difficult than it sounds. A glance must be timed with the rise of the swell in order to see over the waves, and each turn of the torso compromises one's control in the surf. Nonetheless, Boyles stole a view of the bay behind him, catching a fleeting glimpse of Tompkins and Ridgeway's orange kayak. Something seemed amiss, though in the moment he was unsure whether they had capsized.

Scanning again, he couldn't spot Tompkins or Ridgeway, or even their kayak. The sheltered beach was less than 100 yards away, so Boyles and the others hustled ashore and scrambled up a low bluff for a better look. From there they could see Ridgeway and Tompkins,

separated from their kayak and swimming somewhat ineffectively toward shore. Despite their sluggish progress, they seemed destined for a landing at the point. The waves they rode were crashing straight into it.

"I thought, oh boy, this will be a shit show but we'll be okay," Boyles recalls. A plan was already forming in his head: Rescue the swimmers, make a fire, dry out, re-group. With little discussion, the group swung into action. Boyles jumped back into his boat, and Alvarez took the bow seat in Ellison's double. Chouinard remained on the beach as the sole shore-based resource. The rescuers paddled about 150 yards to the victims, who had strangely drifted farther from the point, not into it as expected. They had been in the water for roughly 7 minutes when Boyles reached Tompkins. Seconds later, the double kayak reached Ridgeway, who as Ellison recalls, "was clearly in worse shape than Doug." Ridgeway grabbed hold of the double kayak's stern loop. Ellison made eye contact with Boyles, now with Tompkins about 20 yards away, and everyone started for the giant eddy behind the hammerhead point, paddling parallel to steep waves with the Avellanos wind crossing their bows in unpredictable bursts.

A PLAN WAS ALREADY FORMING IN BOYLES'S HEAD: RESCUE THE SWIMMERS, MAKE A FIRE, DRY OUT, RE-GROUP. WITH LITTLE DISCUSSION, THE GROUP SWUNG INTO ACTION.

Within moments, the seemingly routine rescue took on a more threatening feel. Both Ridgeway and Tompkins had dressed in paddling jackets and thermal underwear for a sunny summer day. They were rapidly losing strength in the frigid water, which the Chilean Navy would later report was 39.2 degrees. With the drag of the swimmers on their sterns, a powerful headwind and steep waves, the paddlers struggled to make progress. "Even with two of us paddling it was still hard to make it in," Ellison says. It took Ellison and Alvarez as much as 15 minutes to reach a small rock island at the edge of the bay, where they helped the hypothermic and semi-conscious Ridgeway out of the water. They settled him out of the wind, and immediately dug into the stern hatch for the satellite phone.

Boyles, meanwhile, was losing ground. Recognizing the futility of dragging a swimmer on the stern loop, the two men tried repeatedly to get Tompkins onto the kayak's back deck. Boyles stopped paddling momentarily to place his wool cap on Tompkins' head, but the freezing water had already sapped Tompkins' strength. He was unable to make the dynamic dolphin thrust onto the boat. Boyles's sprayskirt came off the cockpit three times as he twisted to assist, and with every attempt, he was forced to make a capsize-saving brace. If he swam, both men knew, neither would survive. Tompkins finally grabbed Boyles around the waist with his right arm and hooked a heel over the top of the boat. He clung there doggedly as Weston continued stroking. They'd drifted well past the point and the shoreline was growing more distant, but Boyles turned to his partner and offered hope. "We're making it," he said.

The two had known each other since Boyles was a toddler stumbling around Tompkins' San Francisco apartment. Boyles's father, Edgar Boyles, was collaborating with Tompkins on a large format book illustrating the carnage of logging called *Clearcut*. It was the first of several publications Tompkins would produce as part of an environmental series including *Fatal Harvest—The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture and Welfare Ranching*, and *Plundering Appalachia—The tragedy of mountain-top Removal Coal Mining*. But *Clearcut*, published in 1994, was the real catalyst for Doug Tompkins' most fruitful era of activism, a period of work that made him the principal environmental philanthropist in the world.

When Tompkins and Edgar Boyles started *Clearcut*, they had known each other for more than 20 years, since they were young ski racers. Edgar was younger, and naturally



In Patagonia, Doug Tompkins flies over the landscape he fought to protect. Photo by John Q. Martin.

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Weston Boyles. Photo by Elizabeth Boyles

looked up to Tompkins, who was on the cusp of the national team, hanging out with famous schusser Billy Kidd. Elite company gravitated to Tompkins. He met Chouinard as a teenager while climbing in the Shawagunks of upstate New York. Later in life, he shared company with television news anchor Tom Brokaw, and author Thomas McGuane.

These associations naturally grew from Tompkins' undaunted confidence. At 15, he dropped out of a New York boarding school to chase the U.S. ski team at their summer training site in Portillo, Chile. His ski dreams ended with a broken leg several years later, but by then he'd already moved onto the next phase of life, starting The North Face at age twenty-one. The business began as a mail order catalog before opening a storefront in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood in 1966. The Grateful Dead played at the grand opening.

At 24, when most of us are finishing college or simply looking for our place in the world, Tompkins sold The North Face for \$50,000. He'd created the dome tent and developed an enduring brand, so why not cash out and go on a road trip to South America? "Doug always said 'You've got to keep at least four months a year open for adventure,'" relates Ellison. So, with Chouinard, ski champion Dick Dorworth, and filmmaker Lito Tejada-Flores, Tompkins drove from California to Patagonia, surfing and skiing along the way. At the end of the road they would attempt to forge a new route up the improbable granite spire of Fitzroy. British climber Chris Jones joined the team in Argentina, and the foursome spent weeks bound within a snow cave before gaining the summit, where they unfurled a flag proclaiming

"Viva los Funhogs." Tejada-Flores's film about the adventure won the Grand Prize at the Trento Film Festival in Italy, and inspired him to co-found the Telluride Mountain Film Festival. The now legendary road trip, re-visited forty years later in the documentary *180 Degrees South*, also was essential to Chouinard's creation of the Patagonia brand.

Upon Tompkins' return from Fitzroy, he and his first wife, Susie Buell, started a new business, the Esprit clothing company. Their first showroom ran out of the back of a station wagon. Within a decade, annual sales exceeded \$100 million.

"He called it the rag business," says Reg Lake, who met Tompkins after both of them returned from separate trips to Chile's Bio Bio in 1980. Tompkins was there on one of his Esprit charters. He arranged the company trips for Esprit employees, traveling to the world's finest rivers including the Pacuare in Costa Rica, and China's Yangtze, because his latest adventure passion was no longer big wall climbing. It was whitewater kayaking.

Plastic boats were replacing fragile fiberglass, and Tompkins saw how the new material might open a plethora of Sierra Nevada rivers to exploration. For paddling partners, he recruited Lake and Royal Robbins, who like Tompkins was a titan of the clothing world and a pioneering climber. Among other celebrated achievements, Robbins had made the first ascent of El Capitan's North American Wall with Chouinard and two others 16 years earlier. When arthritis slowed his climbing prowess, Robbins took up kayaking and started running with Tompkins and Reg. The trio made a game of flying Tompkins' plane over un-run rivers to scout, and then returning days later with their kayaks. Through this process, they made first descents on the South Fork of the San Joaquin, the South Fork of the Kern, and Southern California's Sespe Creek. Their second descent of the South Merced served as a training mission for their Triple Crown project, in which they made traverses of the Sierra via three now-classic river routes—the Headwaters of the Kern, the Devil's Postpile run on the San Joaquin, and the Middle Fork of the Kings.

It's difficult to fathom that a millionaire climber could notch such important descents in whitewater, but it also makes perfect sense. "He was such a good athlete," says Chouinard, "and he was always pushing." Besides his adventure sports, Tompkins fenced and had a wicked squash game. With a private plane in the mix, he was made to pull off something like the Sierra Triple Crown. "I wasn't sure he was human," says Edgar Boyles, "because humans don't

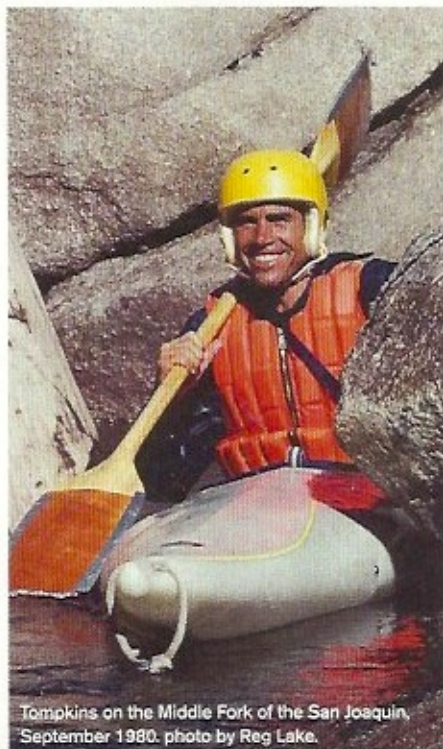
get to do so much, so well."

The Triple Crown days of the early '80s were nearly a decade past when Boyles and Tompkins each flew small planes north from San Francisco through the timber belt doing research for *Clearcut*, with Edgar's wife Elizabeth driving ground support. When they reached Vancouver Island in coastal British Columbia, they came across an old growth valley that was inevitably slated for the saw, and there was nothing that Tompkins or anyone else could do about it. Despite the publication of *Clearcut*, this forest would be lost. It was a sad realization, but it awakened a revelation in Doug Tompkins: While North America's last primeval haunts were mostly gone, a comparable wilderness existed at the other end of the planet, and much of it was still intact. Some of it was even for sale.

Puerto Montt, Chile, feels a bit like Seattle must have 100 years ago. Shake roof houses crowd steep hillsides above a bustling waterfront, where boats shuttle across a large sea harbor. Vertical blue mountains ring the water, and glistening snowfields furtively tuck beyond their flanks. In the early 1990s, logging of these seaside mountains was gaining momentum, but the cut barely extended past the view-scape of town. Beyond that view, past the end of the road, lay a green river valley surrounded by granite plateaus dotted with lakes. Within a few years, the march of the timber industry would reach this place, called Pumalin. Before that could happen, Tompkins bought it.

Chilean law had no restriction on foreign nationals buying privately held land, and land was cheap. For \$600,000, Tompkins got a 25,000-acre chunk of rich country, comparable geographically to British Columbia's Squamish Valley. One can only imagine the excitement Tompkins must have felt as he scanned a map of Patagonia, a multitude of unsettled valleys and mountainous redoubts at his fingertips. But of course Tompkins wasn't looking at this vast countryside with the avarice of extraction wealth on his mind, he wanted to save it from that fate; to preserve just one corner of the planet from the techno-industrial complex, perhaps even create a local economy that values wild nature in harmony with a stunning natural landscape. In time, this might be Doug Tompkins' Utopia.

That first purchase was just the start. Eventually the Pumalin preserve grew to more than 700,000 acres, and many Chileans looked at his acquisitions with suspicion. Distrust of a wealthy American buying massive land tracts sparked absurd rumors. Tompkins was a spy, some said, or creating a Zionist state. Some help in dispelling these claims came through the gentler voice of Tompkins' new wife,



Tompkins on the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin, September 1980. photo by Reg Lake.

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Kristine McDivitt Tompkins. She had been CEO of Chouinard's Patagonia when they fell in love, and was as committed to the conservation cause as Tompkins. Together, they developed various organizational arms to direct different aspects of their work—The Foundation for Deep Ecology, The Conservation Land

Trust, and Conservacion Patagonica.

Over the next 20 years, Doug and Kris Tompkins took on a host of environmental causes big and small. There was a forum on globalization, and advertisements in the *New York Times* with headlines like "Extinction Crisis," and "Clearcutting Your National Forest." There were the issue-specific books like *Clearcut*, and significant donations to Earth Island Institute, Friends of the Earth, the Organic Consumers Organization, Sierra Club, even the TV turnoff network. And there were more land acquisitions; Corcovado Valley, the Iberá wetlands in Argentina, Yendegaia Peninsula near Tierra del Fuego, and the Chacabuco Valley, not far from General Carrera Lake. At latest count, it's a total of 2.2 million acres, making Doug and Kris Tompkins the most prolific land preservationists in the world.

To manage the growing list of projects, Tompkins hired a cadre of passionate souls who often had little or no experience with the task they were to perform. But Tompkins' eye for talent was keen, and his confidence was contagious. His employees usually found success, and there were also fringe benefits. Amazing trips came your way. Since his days at Esprit, Tompkins made a point to facilitate experiences for his employees and co-workers, to provide them with a view into his own motivations borne of inspirational, wild places. After the publication of *Clearcut*, he arranged a road trip for Edgar and Elizabeth Boyles and family into the heart of coastal Patagonia. They were to drive Chile's developing Southern Highway, the Carretera Austral.

Weston Boyles was 7 years old. He remembers, "My brother, mom, dad, and I got into this Russian jeep and just started bouncing down the dirt road. There were waterfalls and glaciers at almost every turn. It made a huge impression." By high school, Boyles was back in the region as an exchange student in Bariloche, Argentina. "Doug wanted me to skip college and come work for him," Boyles says, "but I didn't do it." Instead, Boyles studied architecture and pursued his interest in film. His father, Edgar Boyles, had been one of the first Westerners to shoot in Tibet, and later captured the first footage of wild pandas. When Weston Boyles got his own video camera at 14, he made a movie of a school trip down the Colorado River's Cataract Canyon. The whitewater footage was so dramatic and dangerous-looking that school administrators cancelled the outing the next year.

After college, Boyles took Tompkins up on his job offer, and traveled to Chile to make a film for Conservacion Patagonica. There was a new threat in Patagonia—dams. Backed by multi-national corporations, two dams on the Baker and three more on the remote Pascua River were due to feed massive power lines stretching nearly the length of Chile,

Rob Lesser, Doug Tompkins, John Wasson, and Reg Lake, first descent of the Clarke Fork of the Yellowstone, 1984. Photo Rob Lesser collection.



TOMPKINS AND HIS FRIENDS EMBRACED WILD NATURE AS THEIR PULSE, ACCEPTING ALL THE UNCERTAINTY THAT COMES WITH IT. "WE WERE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO FIGHT OUR WAY OUT OF," CHOUINARD SAYS.

Chouinard and Tompkins, 2008. Photo by Jimmy Chin



from the remote south to the cities and sprawling copper mines of the north. With three others, Boyles paddled the lower Baker River, capturing footage of both the dramatic scenery and the genuine campesinos who live on the river's banks. The trip was supposed to take 6 days. It took 12. "Every time we passed a ranch, they invited us in for mate," says Boyles, "and we usually ended up staying for dinner."

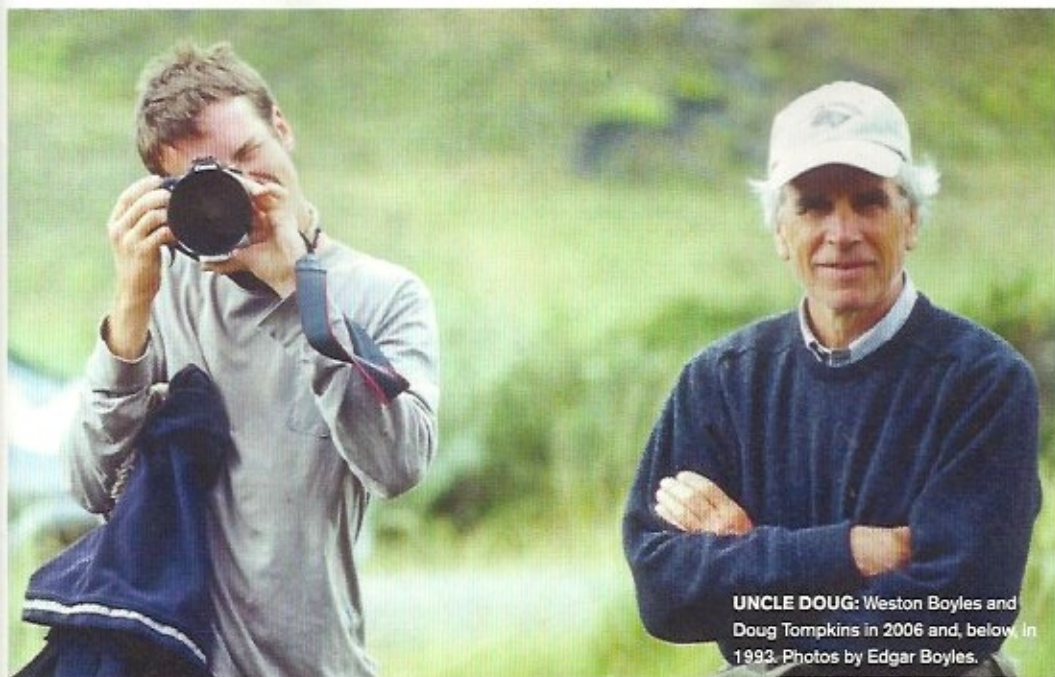
One of these social delays spawned Boyles's very own British Columbia moment, an activist's epiphany. At a grandmother's riverside birthday party, a 14-year-old named Sebastián informed Boyles that he was planning to kayak the river the following week, with a youth paddling group called Club Nautico Escualos, the River Sharks. In this part of Patagonia, gauchos in berets were a

common site. Teenagers in plastic kayaks were not. Boyles was stunned. "A youth paddling club in dam-threatened Patagonia? I thought, 'this is a story that has to be told.'"

Days later, Boyles was back on the river with the Escualos. The club was the brainchild of local teachers Roberto Haro Contreras and Claudia Altamirano, who were first introduced to kayaking when

Argentine adventurer Marcos Olviday paddled past their frontier town of Cochran during a transcontinental journey. Realizing the idyllic setting of their home—the translucent Cochran River runs through town, and the Baker is just minutes away—the Contreras' cobbled together some used kayaks and started getting their students on the water. The club was in its 12th year when Boyles joined the Escualos, and the movie naturally started falling together. During the late stages of filming, a most poignant insight came to Boyles—these kids had never seen a dam.

Boyles immediately hatched the idea of an exchange program between the Escualos and students from the Colorado Rocky Mountain School. He called the program Rios to Rivers. A massive fundraising effort and an even more daunting pile of visa clearances got the Colorado kids to Patagonia, where they paddled the lower Baker. Students met with the CEO of HidroAysén, the engineering firm that would build the dams, and then ran the river with Chilean senator Antonio Horvath, a leading political opponent to the project. When summer arrived in the northern hemisphere, the Chilean kids came to the United States to meet with various stakeholders and visit Glen Canyon Dam. As the Escualos gaped at the massive concrete plug impounding the Colorado River above Grand Canyon, a young man named Danilo Cruces told a



teacher, “This makes me afraid. This same thing will happen in Patagonia.” It was the kind of light bulb moment that makes an activist beam, and it would not have come to pass without Boyles’s indefatigable effort. He was starting to exhibit the kind of motivation that steered Doug Tompkins’ zealous life, plowing through the dirty work to eventually produce real value, and real change.

In the Grand Canyon, Boyles and the Escualos spent extra time at the abandoned Marble Canyon Dam site. They talked about David Brower and Martin Litton, sediment loads and energy demands. But the outstanding theme of that trip was the bonds formed between the Chilean and American students, and their thoughtfulness about rivers, energy, and solutions. These were sharp kids, the decision makers of tomorrow, shaping their values. Boyles’s Rios to Rivers program had taken Tompkins’ activism and channeled it straight on to the next generation.

The principal movement against the Baker and Pascua dams was called *Patagonia Sin Represas*—Patagonia Without Dams. Tompkins didn’t start the group, but he became its biggest financial supporter. The movement reached its peak in 2011 when 60,000 protesters gathered at the capital in Santiago. In the end, the dam’s defeat came at the hands of the unsightly and energy-wasting power lines that were to be strung for more than 1,200 miles. Tompkins was behind a series of billboards that depicted a woman’s beautiful face scarred by a gash of power lines. “What savage would do this?” read the roadside signs. The billboards stood beside the Carretera Austral, backdropped against the deep blue of General Carrera Lake.

“**WHO BETTER TO PUBLICIZE CHILE’S SOUTHERN HIGHWAY THAN BOYLES, WHOSE CHILDHOOD TRIP THERE AT THE HANDS OF HIS ‘UNCLE DOUG’ HAD LEFT AN INDELIBLE MARK?**”



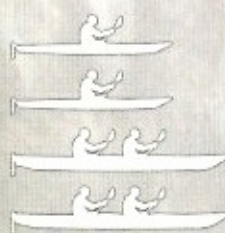
On December 5th, 2015, Tompkins, Chouinard, Ridgeway, Ellison, Alvarez, and Boyles launched near the village of Puerto Sanchez, paddling east on a glassy General Carrera Lake. Their mellow first day embodied the excitement of a journey’s beginning, and a reunion of old friends. Chouinard didn’t talk to Tompkins about business anymore, “He had these emphatic stances, and I didn’t want to argue with him,” Chouinard says. But they may have chatted about the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, a project Ellison spearheaded with such unlikely partners as Patagonia and Wal-Mart. Maybe they listened to Doug’s rants on the failings of the techno-industrial complex. “He was always pretty far out there on the philosophical spectrum,” says Ellison, “but there is no doubt that he was a mentor of mine.”

Tompkins was a mentor to many, and chief among them was Weston Boyles. The youngest of the group, he was well aware of his esteemed company. “It was like going on a trip with Paul Bunyan or something. I mean, these are mythical characters,” he says. Yet Boyles knew Tompkins well enough to challenge him, as he had recently over private drones. Boyles owned one. Tompkins thought they should be banned. He sent Boyles an op-ed piece denouncing the technology, and used the email exchange to further his philosophical ideas, urging Boyles to “understand the deep systemic root causes of the eco-social crisis, its epistemological roots and the unquestioned assumptions that drive techno-industrial society into the trap that it finds itself...the mega-tech development model is bankrupt and fruitless, a failed experiment flowing out of the Enlightenment.” Boyles had heard much of this before, even agreed with most of it. He respectfully responded to Tompkins, the pilot, with math supporting a drone’s efficiency over aircraft for aerial photography. That surely made Tompkins chuckle. “You’ve got to do the homework,” he liked to say, and Boyles had done his.

The team made it to a comfortable cove camp on day two, and then took a layover day to hike up the striking Avellanos valley. Tompkins and Boyles hiked together, going at Tompkins’ swift pace, rarely stopping except to talk about Boyles’s new work—promoting the Carretera Austral as a national scenic highway, so that its environs might gain added protections. Who better to publicize Chile’s southern highway than Boyles, whose childhood trip there at the hands of his “Uncle Doug” had left an indelible mark? Boyles went to work on a website and image campaign promoting the Carretera Austral, often working side-by-side with a team Tompkins had sent to make hardscrabble

A TRAGIC TURN

Doug Tompkins founded The North Face in 1966, and later made his fortune with Esprit clothing. A preeminent conservationist, climber, and paddler, he was well versed in expedition life. In early December of 2015, with a group of five other experienced adventurers, he began a 5-day kayak tour along the northern shore of General Carrera Lake, in southern Chile.



Weston Boyles, 29
Lorenzo Alvarez Roos, 49
Yvon Chouinard, 77
Jib Ellison (stern), 54
Rick Ridgeway, 66
Doug Tompkins (stern), 72

DAY 1

Saturday, December 5, 2015

The six friends start near Puerto Sanchez in four sea kayaks. They plan a 5-day, 50-mile paddle along the lake's remote northern coast.

Puerto Sanchez

Water temperature*
39.2°F

Completed leg of the trip

DAY 2

Sunday, December 6

The party spends the second day kayaking to the mouth of the Rio Avellanos, about halfway to their planned takeout.

Camp 1

SOUTH AMERICA
CHILE
ARGENTINA
Area Enlarged

NORTH

0 miles 2

*Source: Chilean Navy
**Time intervals and locations in the water are approximations based on the recollections of individuals under extreme stress.

DAY 3

Monday, December 7

The group spends a layover day hiking in the Avallanos Valley before continuing on the second half of the trip.

Mid-morning on Dec. 8, high winds whip down the Avallanos Valley and onto the lake, surprising the paddlers.

Planned route

ACCIDENT SITE

Layover camp

The prevailing westerly wind increases throughout the morning of Dec. 8

DAY 4: THE ACCIDENT

Tuesday, December 8

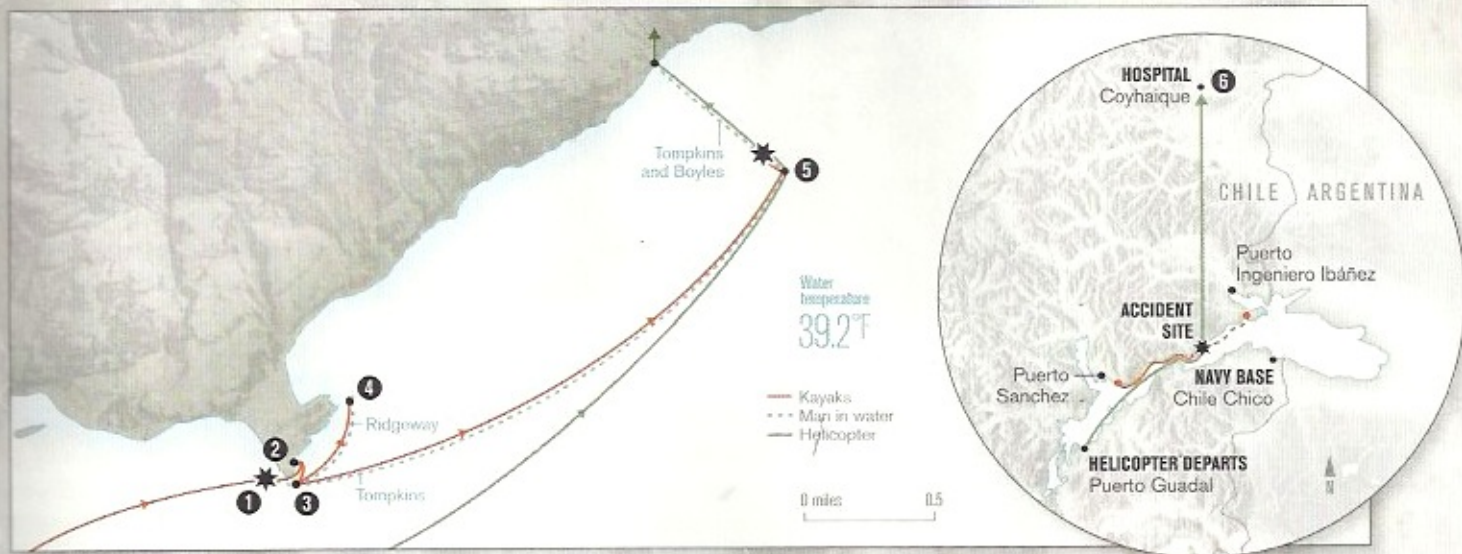
Westerly winds build through the morning. Shortly before 10 a.m., a strong quartering wind spills out of the Avallanos Valley creating chaotic paddling conditions. Seeking shelter, the kayakers aim for a hammerhead-shaped point.

1 Capsize

Tompkins and Ridgeway capsize, and are unable to roll or re-enter the double kayak. They begin swimming toward shore, but waves push them parallel to the coastline, into open water.

2 Rescue plan

Landing at the point, the others spot the swimmers and launch a rescue effort with Alvarez and Ellison in a double kayak, and Boyles in his single kayak.



3 Pick up

About 7 minutes after the capsizing, the double reaches Ridgeway and begins towing him slowly toward shore. Boyles tries to tow Tompkins but can't make progress against the wind and waves.

4 Call for help

The double kayak rescuing Ridgeway reaches a rocky island about 22 minutes after the capsizing. Alvarez calls for help on the satellite phone. Boyles and Tompkins are swept farther into the lake.

5 Helicopter rescue

Tompkins has been in the water for an hour or more when the helicopter arrives and begins towing the men to shore. Five minutes into the 30-minute operation, Boyles capsizes but keeps hold of Tompkins.

6 Hospital

The helicopter flies Tompkins to the regional hospital in Coyhaique, where doctors measure his internal body temperature at 66 degrees. He is pronounced dead later that afternoon.

roadside villages a bit more tourist friendly. It was a finishing touch on Tompkins' vision of a Patagonian economy driven by the region's natural beauty rather than the exploitation of its resources.

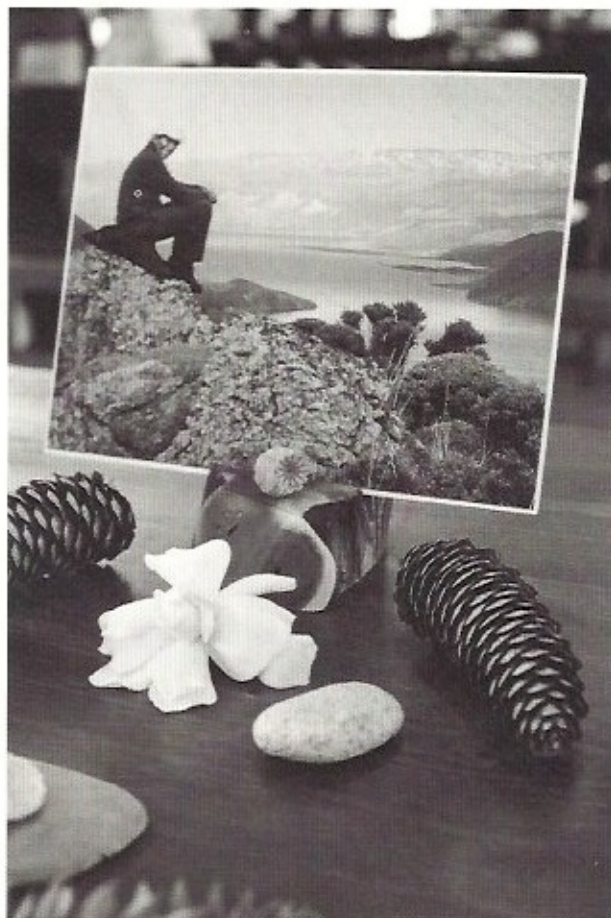
In the evening the guys got Tompkins to tell the story of his pioneering run through rapid Zero on the Zambezi. Later, they all noticed stormy lenticular clouds forming over the mountains, and habitually noted the changing weather, as they had countless times during their lives of adventure. Perhaps those strange and beautiful clouds brought Tompkins and Chouinard back to their weeks on Fitzroy so many years ago, or reminded them of the 72-hour tent stay they once endured together in Antarctica. Certainly the worldly Ridgeway was aware of the changing skies, as were Ellison, Alvarez and Boyles. These were men who have dedicated their lives to wilderness, who've chosen to embrace wild nature as their pulse, accepting all the uncertainty that comes with it. "We were always looking for something to fight our way out of," Chouinard says of the many adventures he shared with Tompkins.

Nobody on the trip wore a drysuit. In hindsight, it's easy to finger this decision as a fatal mistake, but every decision in the backcountry is a calculation of practicality and a drysuit would be one more piece of gear burdening what was supposed to be an escape from that controlled, protected, suffocating industrial world. If Doug Tompkins wanted total safety on General Carrera Lake, he'd have taken a ferry. Survival was not the goal of the trip. Living was.

A moderate breeze rustled through the cove camp during pack-up, and skies were clear. Two hours later things had changed. When Jib Ellison and Lorenzo Alvarez finally reached the rocky haul-out with Ridgeway, he was nearly unconscious from cold. Launching again to aid Boyles and Ridgeway was out of the question. The paddlers were exhausted, conditions were continuing to deteriorate, and Ridgeway still needed their help. The swimmers had been about 100 yards from shore when they capsized; Boyles and Tompkins were now half a mile from land. As difficult as it was to acknowledge Tompkins and Boyles's surreal isolation, the fact was that they were beyond the group's ability to help. Alvarez, the best Spanish speaker, made a satellite phone call.

He reached Tompkins' operations manager,

Carolina Morgado. She called Rodrigo Noriega, a bush pilot who often flies in support of foundation projects and would know where the nearest helicopter was based. Noriega relayed word to Terra Luna Lodge on the lake's south shore, and within minutes lodge owner Philippe Reuter and pilot Alejandro Maino were airborne in a Eurocopter B3 sightseeing helicopter. Morgado's next call was to the Chilean Navy, which dispatched a rigid inflatable patrol boat from its Chile Chico outpost nearly 30 miles to the east. Battling wind and waves, it would be some time before they could offer help.



Boyles knew nothing of the dispatched helicopter, but he suspected help might be on the way. He also knew that even severe hypothermia victims can recover, but drowning is fatal. So when Tompkins began to slur his words, Boyles focused on keeping his failing partner's head above the waves. He threaded his PFD tow line under Tompkins' shoulder and through his lifejacket just before Tompkins lost consciousness. Finally, using both arms, Boyles managed to lift Tompkins partially onto his lap.

Balancing precariously in the waves and the wind, Boyles saw his paddle drifting away.

They were now at the mercy of nature, puny humans floating helplessly toward the middle of an inland sea. They might have drifted there for days, Boyles refusing to part with his role model and friend, had Reuter not spotted the red kayak against the rippling white and blue water. Maino swooped in, and because the helicopter was not equipped with a rescue winch they dropped a life ring tethered to a climbing rope. Boyles used a carabiner to clip the life ring to an elastic accessory cord on his front deck, and the chopper began towing them slowly toward shore.

Boyles managed to stay upright for about 5 minutes before flipping. Somehow, he wet-exited his kayak and, without losing hold of Tompkins, pulled his own torso through the life ring. Over the next 25 minutes, Maino pulled the pair more than half a mile, before the swirling winds and steep shore cliffs forced him to stop. Boyles, himself now shivering uncontrollably, swam Tompkins the final 20 yards to a rocky beach. The chopper then flew Tompkins another 30 minutes to the hospital in Coyhaique, Chile, where his body temperature was measured at 66 degrees. He was pronounced dead later that afternoon.

Before the finality of this news reached her, Kris Tompkins and a friend began the 5-hour drive to Coyhaique. Road construction halted them after about two hours. The Carretera was due to remain closed for several hours, but when the driver explained the situation workers opened a lane. Slowly crunching over fresh gravel, the car rolled through a corridor of Patagonian road workers, each solemnly standing with hat over heart, offering their respect and prayers. Once thought to be a spy, Doug Tompkins had won the hearts of Patagonia.

Within weeks, Kris Tompkins was meeting with the presidents of Chile and Argentina, working to finalize protections for several new preserves. Boyles was back at work on the Carretera Austral, fundraising for solar panels on a new kayak and community center for the Escualos, and organizing opposition to a proposed dam on the Rio Puelo. On General Carrera Lake, the waters were again calm, gathering at the outlet in an inexorable push to become the Rio Baker, flowing free through a still unspoiled Patagonia. ■