

The Explorers Club Northern California Chapter

October 2003

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Thierry Thys
and his Mi2

Private Flights
Across the Vast Unknown
(to outsiders)



A glimpse at
the Sea of Okhotsk

San Francisco
October 3, 2003
Thierry Thys

Through Russia,
with Patience

Thierry Thys is not an average guy; he claims, however, to be an average pilot. An average pilot with a lot of time in the air and a hankering to do something unusual. He will talk about

a five-year period (1995-2000) and his experience in crossing Russia in private aircraft. His own rules: I own and fly the aircraft; there are no sponsors, corporate or government help. This is the story of what an individual with no connections might face; did face.

In 1995, the first attempt involved buying a YAK18T aircraft in the Ukraine and trying to understand and deal with the permits, licenses, fees, etc, that would allow the plane to cross the Russian - Ukraine border. The effort was unsuccessful

The second attempt, in 1996, involved buying another YAK18T in Smolensk. They crossed Russia in the late summer but were stopped in Magadan in September. The aircraft was disassembled and shipped to Seattle.

In 2000, on his third try, he crossed eastern Russia, from Kazakhstan to

Alaska in a 1979 helicopter he bought in 1998. The trip took persistence, entrepreneurial skills, the tenacity of an explorer and not a little good fortune and good humor. He prefaced this travel by knowing, "Our first problem will be to get out of Kazakhstan. Our second, to cross Russia. Our third, to leave Russia." The initial estimated time to cross Siberia in the Mi-2 aircraft (it flies at about 100 mph) was two months. To give you a flavor of the reality: he spent 78 days in the former capital of Kazakhstan before they could leave; bureaucrats could not make a decision about exporting the former military craft. He spent a month at the border before being allowed to proceed with surreal restrictions. By the time he reached the Sea of Okhotsk, the heart of the Gulags, they finally crossed the path taken in 1996.

They managed to continue on,

LOCATION

Date Friday, 3 October 2003
Place: St. Francis Yacht Club
San Francisco
Time: 6:30 pm, no-host cocktails
7:15 pm, dinner
Cost: \$55 (by Sep 29)
\$60 (if posted afterwards)

Reach Steve at
nauticos@oceaneearth.org
or 925 934-1051.

Reservation Form on page 5
Please reserve promptly!
NO MEAL WITHOUT RESERVATION

Continued on page 2



The 'Veil of Grief' in the land of Gulags.



The route of Thierry Thys' successful trans-Russia flight in 2000. He continued on, from Nome to Oakland in North America.

Continued from page 1

despite the approaching Arctic winter. By the end of November they exited Russia across the Bering Straits and landed in Nome. Customs was expecting them with a warm welcome. They had traveled 5000 miles in almost five months; five days later they would be in Oakland, 2700 miles further.

Thierry N. Thys attended Stanford

and UC Berkeley and graduated from MIT in 1953; he started a manufacturing business in 1956 with his brother Edouard Thys; they sold the business in 1993. He served four years as president of the Investment Casting Institute, a trade association. Thierry held the world's third longest soaring flight, from Truckee, CA to Winslow,

AZ, in 1970. He sailed a *Gulfstar 50* from Mystic, Connecticut to Oakland, California, through the Panama Canal in 1993. In 2002-2003 he flew a *Stemme 10-VT* motor-glider from Point Barrow, Alaska to Cape Horn, Chile! An average pilot?

Come hear the stories and see Thierry's pictures.

May Raffle

Bill and Dana Isherwood have focused upon China recently. They have been in Beijing, travelling to western Sechuan, learning the language all along the way, and have been immersed in the contributions each can make bringing their skills to this old land.

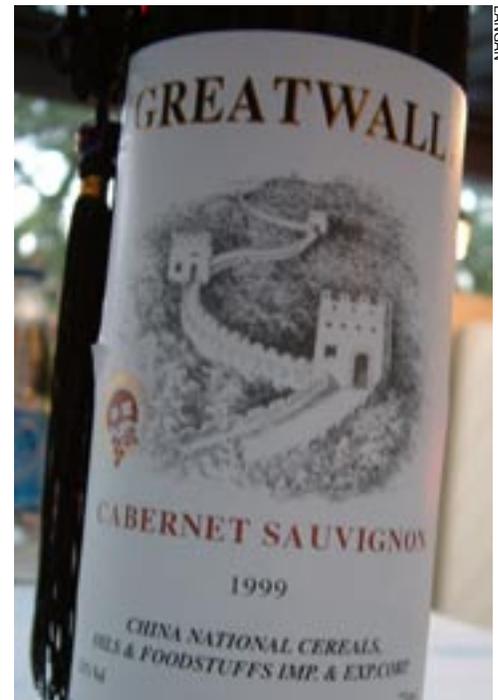
Bill works with the environmental authorities in the Capital, using his experience to bear on issues and plans that need ample attention. Speak with him about the details; we have had too little time to discuss them.

Dana is embroiled in the Kham Aid Foundation, a private effort to help improve the quality of life in the west, near Tibet. She deals with specifics: delivering donated wheelchairs, arranging scholarships— and payments.

Specific to our Chapter, the newsletter has reported the progress of one student, Jiangyang Quxi, whose education Dana has arranged for us to sponsor. In May, in Palo Alto, Bill circulated among the group selling tickets for a raffle of objects from their China travels. He was successful in raising about \$300, enough to assure that Jiangyang Quxi can continue for another year. Thank you!

Bill and Dana left Beijing at the height of the SARS scare but have now returned. In January, when they plan to return to the Bay Area, we have scheduled a talk to hear first hand about their experiences.

If you are interested in helping or volunteering, contact the Kham Aid Foundation in Pasadena: at (626) 449-7505, khamaid@khamaid.org, or the web www.khamaid.org.



Coals to Newcastle? Naw, a great chance to test the competition. Lesley Ewing was the lucky raffle winner for this bottle.

San Francisco Bay — Angel Island Picnic

July 13 – Better Late That Never

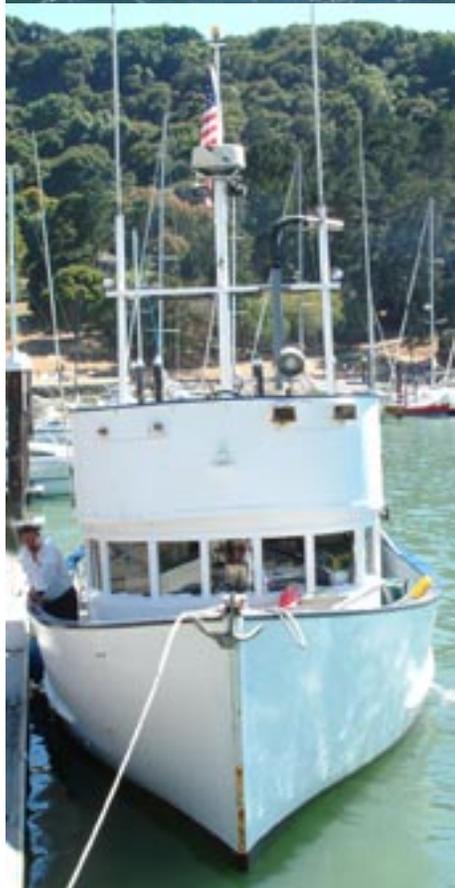


Blame it on the Vice Chair for the delay, if you must, but we did manage to schedule and enjoy a Sunday in the Bay in mid-July. The weather could not have been more perfect; a small but enthusiastic group assembled in Berkeley and, with the good services of former Chair Bob Schmieder, enjoyed a cruise to Angel Island, as well.

Relaxation, hikes, good grub and lots of conversation. A great day.

In 2004, plans are already afoot. Anders and Kathy Jepsen, shown on the Island, have volunteered to organize the day: get in touch and help!

ajviking@aol.com



Capt. Schmieder, aboard the *Cordell Explorer* at Angel Island. Bob has conducted Cordell Expeditions for twenty-five years!

On October 25, he has scheduled a reunion for anyone who has been involved in any way with the Cordell Expeditions' projects and their guests. There is no charge, and no reservations are required

He does ask, "It would be very much appreciated if you would let us know in advance that you plan to attend. Just email us" at

info@cordell.org

To make this a success, he also seeks your help to locate past participants to encourage them to attend this event. Contact him to volunteer. To check details click on 'Reunion' at

www.cordell.org



Cordell Expeditions' Reunion Saturday, 25 Oct. 2003

PRESENTATIONS

1:00-5:00 PM

Shorebird Nature Center
Foot of University Avenue, Berkeley

SOCIALIZING

5:30-9:00 PM

Cordell Explorer
Dock L, Berkeley Marina

San Diego Explorers Club Meeting September 23 at Oceans 2003

Town and Country Hotel
& Convention Center, Mission Valley
September 23, 2003

Reception at Oceans 2003 Exhibit Hall
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

7:00 pm Dinner in the Pacific 4 Room

8:00 pm Presentation by Dr. Paul Dayton
with introduction by Dr. Don Walsh

The OCEANS 2003 MTS/IEEE Exhibitors invite you to the hosted reception in the exhibit hall. You can come earlier in the day to view the exhibits. Pick up your badge at the conference registration (any problems call Bonita on her cell at (619) 445-3777.)

On display are two floors of 275 exhibits:

- human-powered submarines
- AUVs (autonomous underwater vehicles)
- ROVs (in the hall and pool)
 - Atmospheric dive suit
 - Ocean instruments
- 10' x 8' ocean core sampler
- schools with marine science programs
- non-profit and educational organizations, and professional societies
 - NASA, NOAA, NAVY

Please contact Bonita Chamberlin at:

(619) 445-0735 or sdexplorersclub@earthlink.net

Dinner Cost: \$45. Reservations required.

Field Trip Offer

Chapter Members Have Organized Trip to South America



Tablet, about 8 by 10 inches, found recently by Alex Hirtz.

You are invited to be first to view the First Writings in the Americas (3500-1500 BC)

Explorers Edward & Sandy Ross have **completed** plans and invite you to join a unique expedition to the Amazon rainforest to see recently discovered Valdivian artifacts—including the first writing system in the Americas! You will be in the first group to visit the unexcavated site with its discoverer, Alex Hirtz of Quito (geologist, naturalist, and well known orchid specialist.)

You can marvel at stone ‘plates’ depicting pre-Columbian beliefs concerning relationships between Earth and celestial bodies. Unearthed on pyramid-shaped ‘Astronomer’s Hill’, symbols on these ‘cosmograms’ are similar to those found existing a few centuries later in Mesoamerica and Peru, thus suggesting a common ancestry with this center that thrived from 3500 BC to 1500 BC, in what is now Coastal Ecuador. You can walk the area once inhabited by these pre-Columbian astronomers and gaze into the mesmerizing eyes of their Owl Shamans. Together, we will imagine what it was like when inhabited by these forward-thinking people.

We will fly to Quito on February 19, 2004, cross the Andes by van through paramo and cloud forest to Butterfly Lodge for four days of close encounters in the Amazonian rainforest, guided by intrepid entomologist Ed Ross. Then we will re-cross the Andes, visit Monkey Canyon (a little

known simian paradise), and thence to the secret site of the first communicators—the Valdivian astronomer/priests. You will be fascinated by Alex’s theories and well-researched explanations and maybe have some interpretations of your own—or come back another time to participate in the dig.

Back in Quito, have a special tour of cultural and archeological treasures and dine with the president of University of San Francisco of Quito. Fly home the 29th, or choose from the following options: primitive white-water rafting, cruising the Galapagos on a chartered boat, mountaineering on one of Ecuador’s magnificent (presumably quiescent) volcanoes, and/or make an extension to Peru’s fabled Machu Picchu.

Fellow Explorers, do not miss this unparalleled chance to be ‘in’ on the discovery of the “New World’s First Writing”! Help interpret artifacts and discern the yet-to-be published site. Sign up today with Sandy & Ed (415) 383-6130 or fax 381-9214 or email healthhab@igc.org. The final cost depends on the number of participants— so encourage your friends Seasoned expedition leaders and explorers Phil Rasori and Don Heynemann plan to be there, and we encourage you to join this archeological and jungle bonanza.

– Sandy & Ed Ross, FN’79



January 9–11, 2004
Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center
San Francisco

The San Francisco Ocean Film Festival celebrates the sea with inspirational films that increase our appreciation of the oceans that surround us. View the beauty and mysteries of the ocean’s depths, experience the thrill of ocean sports, explore the coastal cultures that are shaped by the sea, and pause to reflect on the importance of this vital ecosystem.

The Festival will showcase some of the many documentaries and fictional narratives that depict our oceans – endangered, partially explored but unconquered – as well as the lives and lore of the people who have come to know the earth’s last frontier.

Mark your calendars; more details will follow!

–Krist Jake, MN’78

The Chapter Chair

Dear Northern California Explorers:

I think it was only last week that I wrote that it was hard to believe that another lecture season had come to an end. At least I think it was last week. All of a sudden we're back! Where did the summer go? And how come I still have all those 'to-dos' left on my list? Nonetheless, your officers have been busy during the interregnum and have lined up a great selection of speakers for the coming months.

Our meetings this year will cover the globe. Without giving too much away, we will be traveling through Russia (Sept) to Timbuktu (Nov), then cycling along the Silk Route (Dec) to Tibet (Jan), a stop-off to investigate remote sensing and archaeology (Feb), then into the Kalahari (Apr) and perhaps back to Everest (Jun). I expect that this season will be intriguing, adventuresome, and educational.

One issue yet to be decided is whether we will schedule a March meeting. As you are undoubtedly aware, this March marks the Explorers Club 100th Anniversary. The Explorers Club Annual Dinner in New York can be expected to be especially significant and memorable. I know that a number of chapter officers and members are planning to be in New York for this event, and I would both encourage and solicit your attendance as well. If we have sufficient interest, we would like to secure enough tables to seat our chapter attendees together. I have no doubt that the dinner will be a sell-out, and that an early commitment will be required get adequate reservations. (Last year was a sell-out, and it was only as a result of wheedling and consummate whining that I was able to secure seats for my guests!) If you are interested in attending with us, please let us know by making a note on your September meeting reservation form

and returning it to me (whether you attend the meeting or not.) We will proceed with our planning according to the level of interest indicated. In any case, I'm sure the Northern California Chapter will be well represented in March.

In another event of note, the San Diego Chapter has invited our members to join them in a gathering of all West Coast Explorers. Jim Hoffman, Chair of the San Diego Chapter, has extended an invitation to Northern and Central California members to join his chapter for a pre-ECAD celebration in January. Current planning is to host the dinner at the Town and Country Club at Miramar. This event would be a great way to get to know some of our Southland members. We should have more details on dates and speakers by the time of our next newsletter.

Please observe that our schedule this year is somewhat different. Instead of our typical last-Friday of the month, we have had to shift dates around a bit to deal with the fall of holidays and other events. So please take careful note of the exceptions and mark your calendar in advance. Remember that the October 3rd meeting will be your chance to bring us up to date on your summer adventures, so please send in your reservation early!

Lastly, I want to extend the Chapter's thanks to Sue Estey for her hard work compiling our new membership roster. Sue has been slaving away over the summer being both a detective and a data specialist. We will all benefit and we certainly appreciate it.

I look forward to seeing you all on October 3rd.

—Stephen E. Smith, FN'96

Evolution

@ The Explorers Club

Mort Beebe and I met with Richard Wiese this Summer, he is at the helm at a very special time. He is bringing the headquarters into modern communications and computerized operations, has been successful in stabilizing our finances and continues the maintenance of that beautiful building on E. 70th St.

We reflected on what we can do to help. The consensus: build membership! An active club needs active members.

Why do you belong to The Explorers Club? We each have our reasons, and I cannot pretend to elucidate others'. I know that TEC was a draw for me for decades before I made the effort. As a result I delayed the enjoyment and friendships I might have had years before!

My awe with the club was brought on by a family member, now gone, who was an explorer in classical terms. He climbed the peaks, lived in forbidden lands, encircled the globe, and was delighted to share these experiences. As he and I spoke, I realized that the contributions we all make, by being involved in field work, can be significant. It is only the degree of recognition between the first to achieve and the student learning the wilds.

This awareness pushed me to join the Northern California Chapter (I was ignorant that regional groups even existed.) I found that most members of the club are toiling individualists, pursuing their interests in the wide world— and willing to share these.

What a deal! Now I look for others, to encourage them not to wait. The annual fee is well worth the benefit!

Why do you belong? The answer might help you encourage someone new.

—Lee Langan, FN'99

Please make your checks out to The Explorers Club, Northern California Chapter, and mail with this form to:

Please reserve _____ spaces for October 3, 2003, at the St. Francis Yacht Club. Cost: \$55 each by Sep 29; \$60 if postmarked thereafter (contact Steve at nauticos@oceanearth.org or 925 934-1051 to assure a reservation).

Name: _____

Address (if changed): _____

Guests: _____

Δ I am interesting in attending ECAD, in March 2004, with Chapter members.

Dr. Stephen E. Smith
402 Via Royal
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

meal choice (please circle):

meat

fish

vegetarian

Northern California 2003-2004 Event Calendar

(Mark the dates! Venues will be identified at time of event.)

October 3, 2003 St. Francis Yacht Club	Thierry Thys	"Private Piloting Across Russia"
November 7, 2003	Issa Mohammed	"Ancient Manuscripts of Timbuktu"
December 5, 2003	Alan Nichols	"Biking Along the Silk Route"
January 16, 2004	Dana Isherwood	"Helping Out in Western China"
February 27, 2004	Sheldon Briener	"Remote Sensing in Archaeology"
March 28, 2004 Waldorf Astoria, NYC	ECAD	100 Years of The Explorers Club
April 30, 2004	Rupert Isaacson	"The Bushmen of the Kalahari"
June 4, 2004	Open	Final details not complete.
June 19, 2004	Chapter Picnic	Contact Anders Jepsen

Please note venues and dates with care.

The October 3 meeting is at
St. Francis Yacht Club, San Francisco.

In full and lively color!

To experience this newsletter in color,
see the 'pdf' version at our web site.

(When copying the URL addresses be sure to keep them all on one line; most are also available as links on our Chapter web site.)

October 2003

Dr. Stephen E. Smith
The Explorers Club
Northern California Chapter
402 Via Royal
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

