COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN EXPEDITION

Exploring the Health of North America's Majestic Columbia River

Alison Jones carried Wings WorldQuest Flag #7 from the source of the Columbia River in the Canadian Rockies to its estuary at the edge of the Pacific Ocean near Astoria, Oregon, to document the status of the fourth largest river in North America. As part of her long-term "No Water, No Life" project, her 2007 team traveled by helicopter, ski plane, ferry, and on foot to interview, photograph, and document the people, wildlife, wetlands, forest, and industries touched by this vast river.

Alison Jones and Robin MacEwan hold WWQ Flag #7 at Athabasca Glacier. The shrinking Columbia Icefield in Canada is a major source of the Columbia Basin's fresh water. Photo: Jay Wiener

EXPEDITION TEAM

Project Director/ Lead Photographer:
Alison M. Jones

Project Coordinator:
Robin MacEwan

Photographer:
Bonnie Meunch

Videographer:
Fritha Pengelly

Attorney/Area Resident:
Jay Wiener

PROVIDING A VISION OF WATER USE AND CONTROL

Alison's "No Water, No Life" expeditions raise awareness about the vulnerability of vital freshwater resources by using photography, science, environmental data, and interviews to document watersheds. Her team assembles a rich visual record of water-related issues and life along meandering rivers so that scientists, conservationists, politicians, industrialists, and communities have a new view of their river, and the issues most important to sustaining its health.

"The shortage of fresh, clean water is the greatest danger to which mankind has ever been exposed."

—United Nations Human Rights Commission

EXPEDITION TECHNIQUE: DOCUMENTING A RIVER SYSTEM

Videotaping and photographing the river system was an ambitious task since the Columbia watershed spans the US-Canada boundary, seven Western states, eleven tribal nations, public and private land, and rural, urban, and industrial areas. The ten major tributaries of the Columbia system drain 3,000 square miles and pour more water into the Pacific than any other river in the Western Hemisphere.

After months of studying the watershed and identifying its important stakeholders, the Columbia team traveled for six weeks along the Columbia River to document significant natural features and the human footprint in its glaciers, canyons, headwater lakes, wetlands, and estuaries. The daily routine included photographing significant sites, interviewing people, writing field notes, downloading and cataloging images, and providing updates to an expedition coordinator in New York City.

UNDERSTANDING THE RIVER THROUGH ITS PEOPLE

Over 11 million people depend on the Columbia for power, crop irrigation, fisheries, industrial water, recreation, and everyday drinking water. Prior to the trip, Alison scheduled meetings with people who know the Columbia firsthand – tribal leaders, conservationists, business owners, sportsmen, and homeowners. Local hosts explained issues relating to tribal and protected lands, hydroelectric dams, climate change, and potential threats from liquefied natural gas (LNG) tankers, Superfund sites, timber, mining and nuclear industries.

WHO

Alison M. Jones

WHAT

Documentation of fresh water availability, usage, and quality

WHERE

Columbia River Basin in Western Canada, Washington, and Oregon

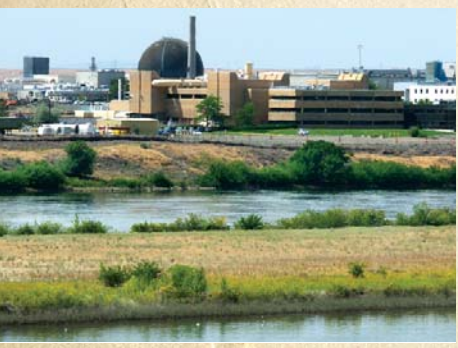
WHY

To raise awareness of the value of fresh-water resources and how North American and northeastern African water supplies are being degraded, threatened, protected, and sustained

Route of the Columbia River and the "No Water No Life" expedition

The scenic Yakima River Canyon as seen from Route 821 in Washington State

Chief Joseph Dam spans the Columbia in northwest Washington



The Columbia River runs 50 miles along the decommissioned Hanford nuclear production site in south-central Washington State

BEARING WITNESS TO CHANGE

The crew traveled 4,700 miles, conducted 72 interviews, took 70 GB of still photographs, and recorded 27 hours of video. Alison's team documented many threats representative of global watershed challenges, as well as strong restoration efforts to protect and preserve this freshwater resource.

Alison's team was shown photographs of the river before its 400 hydroelectric dams were built – images that contrasted with the graphic scenes of change and degradation that they saw on their trip. They encountered many areas where extensive logging had stripped trees from hillsides and sites so damaged that clean-up plans were measured in decades.

Interviews revealed keen stakeholder awareness of environmental issues. On reaching Cape Disappointment, the final point in their journey, the Chinook tribal leader led them to a secluded, sacred cove to share his traditional views about the river's values – a fitting conclusion to their expedition.

EXPEDITION FINDINGS

The retreating Columbia Icefield, one of the world's major storehouses of fresh water, led the team to wonder about the Columbias future. Despite the grave concerns, the team was optimistic. Canada, whose lands supply 40% of the annual water for the entire system, has a well-endowed, forward-looking model for watershed stewardship in British Columbia.

Many of the leading voices calling to protect the river basin come from First Nations in Canada and Tribal Nations from the US, who want to

Visit Alison's web site to learn about rivers:

No Water No Life
www.nowater-nolife.org

Read Alison's field notes and see her photos of river systems in Africa (Omo, Mara, and Blue Nile) and North America (Columbia, Raritan, and Mississippi)

protect their cultural heritage and the salmon, whose return to the river has been encouraged by the decommissioning and removal of some dams. Everywhere she traveled, Alison found people who wanted to talk about the issues, have their views recorded, and work toward a healthy future for the Columbia River Basin.

ABOUT ALISON M. JONES

Alison M. Jones has worked as a photographer for African conservation and development programs for over 20 years. She founded No Water No Life to help disseminate warnings about watershed degradation and to publicize successful stewardship programs. While her project also takes her to other river systems, Alison will return to the Columbia River Basin in August 2008 for more interviews, aerial photos, wetlands documentation, lectures, and an exhibit. Her expedition results are on the web.

Grounds of the Tamastslikt Cultural Institute in Pendelton, Oregon, serving the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla Tribes

Tembec Lumber Mill along the river at Canal Flats, British Columbia

ALISON'S EXPEDITION ADVICE:

Stay neutral and don't impose your own views during interviews

Interview a wide cross-section of stakeholders and scientists, historians, journalists, artists, and others

Send interviewees a project description ahead of time and give them a hard copy when you meet them

Schedule interviews, preferably in the field, during mid-day to reserve early AM and PM for photos (when the light is best for still photography)

If possible, include a videographer and professional resource manager on your team