



5 GOOD MINUTES

WITH SINGLE-BLADE CRUSADER JIM COFFEY

IF EVER THERE WAS AN ALL-AROUND WATERMAN, IT'S CANADA'S JIM COFFEY. A former C-1 and C-2 World Cup competitor, the 43-year-old is also the four-time captain of the Canadian World Rafting Championship Team, an Instructor Trainer for Rescue 3 International, founder of the Whitewater Intensive Leadership Development School (WILD), and owner of Quebec's Esprit Rafting, which runs trips throughout Canada and Mexico. But it's his penchant for the single blade, and protecting the right to use it on Canada's waterways, that separates him from the paddlesports crowd. Exhibit A: his work spearheading navigation legislation for his beloved Kipawa River, which made it to the Canadian Supreme Court in 2007. Exhibit B: his ability to huck an open hull with serious style. This winter, he made first open canoe descents of 40-foot La Gloria Falls and 30-foot El Cielo on Mexico's Rio Oro, and took his Esquif Taureau through Class V Cabron rapid on the Rio Tamata.

— Eugene Buchanan

LIKE ALL CANADIAN KIDS. I played hockey in the winter and went to canoe camp in the summer. It's canoeing that led me away from the life as a doctor, lawyer or accountant that my parents thought I'd have. The turning point came when I was 15 and we did a 30-day trip on the Coppermine River in the Canadian Arctic. That was a huge eye-opener that taught me there was a lot more to life than what's offered in cities.

I LOVE PIONEERING NEW RUNS. I was just born 150 years too late to become one of those great explorers who opened up Canada's rivers.

WE NEED TO MAKE CANOEING LOOK COOL and exciting as opposed to something to do in retirement. That's what needs to happen to grow the sport among today's youth. The whitewater world is flooded with visuals of kayaking. We need to get that same image across in canoeing.

THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN A PERCEIVED BAR where kayaks could do something, but canoes couldn't. Now there's a group of us that wants to change that. With the right skill, a lot of the harder runs can be paddled in open boats. I think people will start seeing open boats in places where you typically find kayaks.

MY COMPANY REFLECTS MY ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY. Our guides don't just take tourists down the river, they're advocates for Canada's wild and scenic places. Selling paddling trips doesn't make a big difference

in the whole scheme of things. But using our trade to pass on vital environmental and social messages does. Our business has become a good vehicle to stand up for our wild and scenic places.

LAST YEAR WE ORGANIZED A 500-KM PADDLE to the Parliament to raise awareness of the right to paddle Canadian rivers. If a river is navigable, it triggers environmental assessments before development can take place. We paddled the Kipawa to the Ottawa straight to Parliament Hill, and raised a lot of publicity about the issue.

THIS SPRING'S LOSS OF NAVIGATION RIGHTS was a devastating blow to Canada's environmental movement. The government's economic stimulus package included legislation to gut the hundred-year-old Navigable Waters Protection Act. The law basically said that if you could float a river under human power, it was navigable and hence in the public domain and protected by the government. Now, instead of needing an environmental assessment for a development, it falls under the Minister of Transport's sole discretion.

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY HAS TRUMPED THE ENVIRONMENT. The government is so concerned about the economy that it's discarded the environment. As an environmentally based rafting company, we're stakeholders in our wild and scenic places. If anyone should speak up, it's us.