

EXPLORER® 500

ONLINE IN THE DEEP OF THE JUNGLE

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The EXPLORER 500 was the guarantee for safety and ability to communicate from the world's most inhospitable places

Mark Kalch and Nathan Welch, two fearless Australian adventurers, have joined the elite few in history who have survived the treacherous journey from the source of the Amazon high in the Andes in Peru to the mouth of the river where it meets the Atlantic Ocean off Brazil.

“I'm always passionate about pitting myself against nature's harshest environments, to see if I have what it takes to come out the other side,” enthuses Nathan. We also wanted to bring some exposure to the Amazon region. To give some insight into the Amazon people, the deforestation that is happening and its complex challenges. Challenges that are the responsibility of the entire planet!”

The most inhospitable terrain on the planet

Setting off in September 2007, the team faced a grueling 6.800km, six month trek and paddle over some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet. The team would face everything from snow-capped

mountains and the burning heat of the desert to the raging white waters of the Apurimac River and the wide open expanses of the Amazon herself.

A constant flow of information

The expedition, from the very beginning took a huge logistical effort to organise. Spending such a length of time in the middle of nowhere is a dangerous business, so the team had to ensure that it was well prepared. Both Nathan and Mark were keen to ensure that the outside world was fed with a constant flow of information from the expedition, so updating the Expedition Amazonias website was a high priority for them. This of course presents rather a challenge when phone lines and broadband connections are few and far between in the mountains, jungles, deserts and rivers that the team would tackle.

“Our aim was to be able to update our website from any point or location along the river. For this we needed to be able to transfer large amounts of data quickly. We also needed emergency communication capabilities,” explains Mark.

“Obviously, safety was our number one priority,” agrees Nathan. “We had to ensure the satcom system was reliable and would allow us to contact the outside world in an emergency situation. Also, we had always planned to update our website ‘on the job’. This included both general posting of reports as well as the up-loading of photos.”

EXPLORER 500 to ensure safety and communications ability

The team opted to pack the aptly named EXPLORER 500 to ensure both their safety and ability to communicate with the outside world. Its high bandwidth enabled the fast transfer of text and pictures to the website and its reliable voice helped them out of a number of tight spots and enabled them to speak to loved ones.

“After several particularly harrowing incidents, to be able to contact loved ones and family was a massive thing psychologically. High in the Andes, with the river far below us, staying with families who have no running water, no sanitation, no electricity, yet still being able to make contact with the outside world was truly amazing,” remembers Mark.

“The EXPLORER played an important role in maintaining morale,” says Nathan. “It was our lifeline to the outside world and on occasions it provided us with a means to contact emergency support and notify family of our predicaments. Contact with family and the outside world, generally speaking was pretty easy.”

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Life-saving equipment

It goes without saying that during the expedition, there were several incidents that could be described as close calls. And although the team expected a tough challenge, there were times when outside assistance was a welcome relief if not a life-saving necessity.

Mark recalls hitting some real trouble during the perilous whitewater section of the paddle: “First, our raft became wrapped in a very dangerous position on the river. It was stuck in this precarious position for two days before we could free it. We lost a lot of equipment, including our eating and cooking utensils. Then a series of sharp rocks in the Apurimac Canyon tore an enormous hole in the bottom of our

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raft. After an emergency repair on the run, we struggled forward in the whitewater. We eventually reached a point where we suspected there could be road access. Again the EXPLORER came into play and we made an emergency call to our logistics contact. With no food supplies left, no cooking equipment and a badly damaged raft, the EXPLORER definitely saved us on that occasion.

EXPLORER was not just a tool for fetching help and updating the website though. In fact it played an integral part at the end of the journey, at the moment the team achieved the success they had been struggling for: “It was after midnight, in pouring rain, mosquitoes were swarming & we were stuck in the mud waiting for the tide to turn. It was a magic moment to be able to call our loved ones and the EXPLORER was the medium that allowed us to share our special experience!”



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