



Organic
Connections

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Saving an Endangered River

HELENA NORBERG-HODGE
The Economics of Happiness

TRACEABILITY
Tracking from Farm to Fork



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Factory mass-market conformity is dead

Back in 1964 (my apologies if you weren't born then) Bob Dylan sang about changing times. In one of his most famous songs the singer-poet wrote, "The order is rapidly fadin', and the first one now will later be last, for the times they are a-changin'."

No question that the sixties shook things up (yes, I was there), but it turns out that it took industrialized America until the end of the millenium to witness real status quo-altering change.

The Woodstock generation caught a glimpse of communal humanity, but by the 2000s the scale of people-to-people interconnectivity became unprecedented in human experience.

Back in the heyday of The Beatles, everybody watched three news and entertainment networks (CBS, NBC and ABC), read the local paper or listened to radio. Today, we have a billion "channels" of information at our fingertips. We are able to express ourselves and instantly connect with other like-minded people.

In our new wired and wireless world it's all about choice. Consumers today have more power because they have significantly more choice.

But some rich and powerful corporations with a factory mindset are seriously threatened by choice. They are trying to push back to make us conform again. They need standardized consumers (not inquisitive and opinionated ones) to buy their standardized products.

Big Food is a good example. Documentaries like Robert Kenner's *Food, Inc.* literally opened the barn door to show how our food is produced, and the corporate powers that be aren't all that happy. They want the door closed. If that can't happen, they'll proactively make consumers so confused they won't know *what* to believe.

You may have seen the media campaign from the Corn Refiners Association trying to sell us on high-fructose corn syrup (which they would like renamed "corn sugar") being a "sweet surprise." Now there is the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA), a new alliance of large-scale farmer- and rancher-led organizations and agricultural partners (including Dupont, Monsanto and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association), "to answer Americans' questions about how we raise our food—while being stewards of the environment, responsibly caring for our animals and maintaining strong businesses and communities." *Really?* If words could only make it so.

The times, whether big industry continues to resist or not, *are* a-changin', and all the big-bucks PR campaigns and media events won't bring back the limited-choice, mass-market "good old days."

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or•gan•ic [ôr gan'ik]

denoting a relation between elements of something such that they fit together harmoniously as necessary parts of a whole: *the organic unity of the integral work of art* • characterized by continuous or natural development: *companies expand as much by acquisition as by organic growth.*

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Helena Norberg-Hodge

The Economics of Happiness

by Bruce Boyers



Back in the early nineties, I had occasion to spend a fair amount of time in a Mexican village called Ajijic, on the shores of Mexico's largest freshwater lake, Lake Chapala. Looking back, I can see now that I was there in the midst of a very pivotal event: the encroachment of a global economy on what had once been a thriving local economy. Daily, still making their way up and down the town's cobblestoned streets were local merchants of all kinds, selling lake-caught fish, handmade furniture, ice cream, water and many other products. The weekly open-air market sold locally grown fruits and vegetables (the tastiest I've ever had to this day), meats, and handmade nonedible products as well.

The American retirees who, for the most part, lived in a housing development outside the town, were quite excited about the very first supermarket, which had just opened. Like its typical American cousins, it brought produce and food products from hundreds and thousands of miles away, totally ignoring that which was produced in the local community. Locally made clothing, which at that time could be seen adorning members of the indigenous population, was being replaced by the trendy fashion seen in movies and television—both of which were still relatively new commodities in Ajijic. You could also see on the faces of the older children and teenagers that because the mass media was telling them they lived in a sleepy, backward village, they couldn't wait to get away to places like Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city, sixty miles north. Thus was being quickly eroded what once was a lively local culture.

As it turns out, the things I had seen were not at all unusual and were not even the best example of the effects of globalization on

local economies. Helena Norberg-Hodge—analyst, author, speaker, filmmaker, and producer of a new documentary entitled *The Economics of Happiness*—had made a far more dramatic and demonstrative investigation, going back 30 years.

Norberg-Hodge spent considerable years studying a unique region called Ladakh, in northern India. Known as “Little Tibet” through its cultural and religious connections



“Even the material standard of living was high. They had large, spacious houses, plenty of leisure time. There was no unemployment—it had never existed—and no one went hungry. Of course they didn't have our luxuries, but what they did have was a way of life that was vastly more sustainable than ours. And it was also far more joyous and rich.”

In the mid-1970s, the Indian government began to see Ladakh as a considerable source of income from tourism. As a result, it was very suddenly exposed to the outside world—and thence came truck after fuel-burning truck, over newly paved roads, bearing cheap food and goods, undermining the local economy. The area became overwhelmed with the imagery of Western consumerism, which made its own culture seem pitiful. The people—much like I had observed in Ajijic—began to think of themselves as backward, primitive and poor.

Today there is air and water pollution, unemployment, a widening gap between rich and poor, and, most astonishingly for a people who had been so spiritually grounded, criminality and depression.

Expanding her view from Ladakh as a microcosm to the world at large, Helena Norberg-Hodge was able to see the same

I discovered that potatoes were being sent to Italy to be washed and put in plastic bags and then sent back again to Sweden. It was utterly outrageous.

to Tibet, it is one of the highest-altitude places on Earth to be inhabited, and until relatively recently Ladakh survived in virtual isolation through farming and regional trade.

“Over the years, Ladakh has become a second home to me—or almost like a first home,” Norberg-Hodge says in the film. “It was a huge source of inspiration. I learned about social, ecological and personal well-being—about the roots of happiness.

effects occurring all over the globe. “I had my eyes opened in Ladakh in the seventies,” she told *Organic Connections*. “Then when I went back to my native Sweden and to other countries, I suddenly saw that the same thing was going on.

“For instance, in Sweden I found that the biggest food corporation was American company Philip Morris. I discovered that potatoes were being sent to Italy to be washed and put



A film by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Steven Gorelick & John Page



the Economics *of* Happiness



in plastic bags and then sent back again to Sweden. It was utterly outrageous.”

Economic Theory

As she analyzed the problem further, Norberg-Hodge realized that the basic problem was rooted in the fundamentals of Western economics. “What economics has become as a discipline is a really disgraceful set of

myths that were essentially formulated at the time of slavery and colonialism,” she said. “One of the fundamentals that was set in stone was that it’s in everybody’s interests to specialize for export, instead of providing a range of things for their own region or their own people. These theories were put in place at the same time that very wealthy merchants and emerging industrialists were benefiting from turning entire

diversified economies into monocultures that produced just cotton, gold or copper, as the whole world was sort of coming under this one umbrella from Europe.

“We really have to question those assumptions from the outset. Economic theory often becomes nonsense when we’re talking about primary production—particularly food production. The idea that industrial specialization leads to an efficiency in nature is an utter and

total myth. Inside the efficiency of ecosystems is complexity and diversity. If we would mirror that in our primary production and allow that diversity to flourish, we would have a very different world.”

GDP Madness

Part of the economic practice is that countries use GDP (gross domestic product) as a measure of progress. The more Norberg-Hodge analyzed this, the more she saw it as a very shortsighted view. “Using GDP as a measure of societal progress is little short of madness,” she points out in the film. “If there’s an oil spill, GDP goes up. If the water is so polluted that we have to buy it in bottles, GDP goes up. War, cancer, epidemic illnesses—all of these things involve an exchange of money, and that means that they end up on the positive side of the balance sheet.”

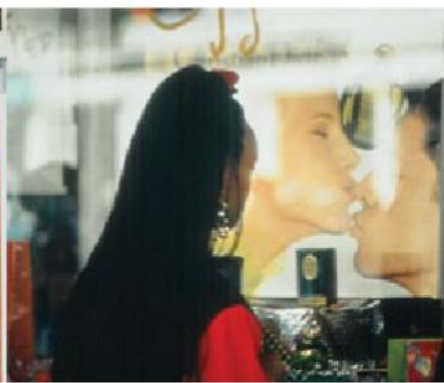
urbanization exacts a high cost in natural resources as cities continue to swell and require more energy, more food—and more water—all the while expelling mountains of trash. Subsidized food systems mean that goods are transported thousands of miles, wasting precious fuel and contributing to climate change. People and groups moving into cities come into conflict for the few jobs available. Competition from local producers is cut down as giant corporations importing food and goods continue to be subsidized by governments and are encouraged by deregulation and legislation in their favor.

From another, perhaps more important, standpoint, it is also clear that this economic path has not led to happiness. Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy*, quotes a very telling statistic in the documentary, which speaks volumes. “Every year since the end of World War II, one of the big polling firms has asked

other parts of the world: localization. Simply, localization means creating more sustainable economies by producing much of what we need closer to home. It also means preserving our customs and cultures, and interweaving these into the goods that are locally produced.

Localization of businesses is a compelling argument. In the film Michael Shuman, author of *Going Local*, explains an alarming trend. “In the United States right now, local governments are giving \$50 billion a year to attract and retain nonlocal business, and we’ve calculated that the federal government is giving another \$63 billion. That’s \$113 billion a year that is making local business less competitive.”

These subsidies are misdirected, Shuman argues, and he goes on to give a specific example. “One of the most important studies that we have on the effects of local business



The number of Americans that say, “Yes, I’m very happy with my life,” peaks in 1956 and goes slowly but steadily downhill ever since.

Part of Norberg-Hodge’s philosophy—as one might surmise from her statement on GDP—deals with an actual redefinition of economics. “A broader definition of economics would embrace how we use resources, how we use the natural world, including the animals and people, to provide for our needs and perhaps a degree of comfort,” she explained. “That’s how we should see it.”

The Economics of Happiness clearly demonstrates that, with the “old” definition of economics very much in play, globalization has been, from colonization forward, reducing our planet to trade-dependent societies and economies. Being exposed to idealized marketing imagery, local children are motivated to leave behind their farms and their families; local agriculture disappears, along with local culture. The continuing trend of

Americans, ‘Are you happy with your life?’ The number of Americans that say, ‘Yes, I’m very happy with my life,’ peaks in 1956 and goes slowly but steadily downhill ever since. That’s interesting, because in that same 50 years we’ve gotten immeasurably richer; we have three times as much stuff. Somehow it hasn’t worked, because that same affluence tends to undermine community.”

Localization

Norberg-Hodge first enumerated her observations and analyses in a 1991 book entitled *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*. It was in this book that she originally made public the events she’d seen as globalization hit Ladakh. She also proposed the antidote to what had happened there and in many

compares the impact of \$100 spent at a local bookstore versus \$100 spent at a chain: \$100 spent at the local bookstore left \$45 in the local economy; \$100 spent at the chain left \$13. So you’ve got three times the income effects, three times the jobs, three times the tax proceeds for local governments. The principal difference was that the local bookstore had a local high-level management team; it used local lawyers and accountants; it advertised on local radio and TV. None of those things were true of the chain store.”

A case is also made for the localization of finance. Local banking would preclude the liabilities of huge speculation and the vagaries of world markets and would provide greater stability. Money could go into credit unions so it is reinvested into the community.

The most obvious and impactful candidate for localization, however, is the food system. Proponents of industrial-scale monoculture farms argue that they will produce far more food than local farms and end global famine, but hard facts do not bear this out. For 15 years Dr. Vandana Shiva, author of *Monocultures of the Mind*, has helped analyze local farms in many regions of India—wetlands, high mountains and deserts. “Our research has shown, again and again and again, that biodiverse small farms, using ecological inputs, produce three to five times more food than industrial monocultures,” Dr. Shiva points out in the film.

“We’ve helped to set up local food systems—CSAs and farmers’ markets—all over the world,” Norberg-Hodge continued. “We started promoting this 25 years ago. As an example, one farmer told me that he’d been a farmer all his life and selling to big middlemen in the large distant cities. He said that when we started the farmers’ market and he began selling there, it was like entering another galaxy. He’s now growing 18 or 20 different crops, he has a direct relationship with the customers, and he’s getting the proper remuneration and respect that he deserves, doing one of the most important things that anybody could do.”

Localization doesn’t just benefit far-off rural locales. “I think there are certain myths that keep rearing their heads,” said Norberg-Hodge. “One of them is that localizing is only something that could happen in a small village or town. The fact is that, as a movement, it’s emerged out of quite big cities all around the industrialized world. People have begun reconnecting with their regions and they’re seeing multiple benefits from it.”

Localization in Action

The Economics of Happiness documents instances of successful urban food movements. In San Francisco, government policy now requires all public institutions, from schools and hospitals to prisons, to obtain their food from local sources. In Detroit, where the auto industry has been in decline for decades, a local food movement has emerged that uses vacated land to raise food. In some cases, people can obtain what they need from the garden for free; the organizers only ask that “customers” put in some work on the garden.

The film also covers a number of unique local movements that are gaining momentum.

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Beginning in the United Kingdom, transition towns were formed in response to climate change and the decline of cheap oil-based energy. In this model, the community becomes dedicated to making the entire municipality fully sustainable. There are currently 96 transition towns in progress in the US.

An outstanding example of a thriving local economy is Ogawamachi, Japan, in which a community-owned biodigester produces energy for the community and compost for a nearby farm. Produce from the farm is sold to local residents and a local food restaurant. Purchases within the community can be made with the town’s own currency and much of the money remains there.

Moving Toward Community

From these initiatives Norberg-Hodge sees hope and a growing awareness.

“I see the world moving in two different directions,” she concluded. “The one promoted by our business and government leaders is toward this outdated model of growth, pushing harder and harder to expand, to scale up and speed up that system. In the meanwhile, the earth is crying out against it, people are crying out against it, and in virtually every economic forum now there are demonstrations. The great hope is that from the bottom up people are moving in exactly the opposite direction, which is toward community.”

“What also gives me hope is that there is a growing awareness within many people from the environmental movement that we need to look at the economy, and to understand the economy in a deeper and broader way.

“The wonderful thing is that as we *decrease* the scale of economic activity, we actually *increase* our own well-being. That’s because, at the deepest level, localization is about connection. It’s about re-establishing our sense of interdependence with others and with the natural world. And this connection is a fundamental human need.

“I can still maintain my faith in basic human desire for peaceful coexistence and more sustainable ways of living, because virtually everywhere you go you will find people who are trying to work in that direction.”

For more information about the film, projects and events, visit www.theeconomicsofhappiness.org.

Traceability

Tracking from Farm to Fork



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that one in six (roughly 48 million people) get sick annually from foodborne diseases. Along with various scares and recalls, public awareness of food has increased due to popular cooking shows on The Food Channel, the prevalence of celebrity chefs, and documentary films such as *Food, Inc.* that peek behind the marketing façade of our industrial food system. This awareness is evidenced in the popularity of farmers' markets as well as a growing demand for organic produce and free-range, grass-fed, humanely treated farm animals.

At one time, respected brand names were all the assurance the buying public needed. This is no longer the case. Consumers today routinely value reviews from people like themselves over the carefully crafted advertising copy from manufacturers. Skepticism has replaced trust, and an increasing number of people want to know exactly where their food comes from and how it was grown or raised. The new term for this is *traceability*.

The interest in traceability has led to ways of assisting food shoppers in tracing the food they are buying, and is influencing cuisine through a lengthening list of chefs who are now demanding traceability in the ingredients they use.

Traceability in Supermarket Aisles

For consumers the pertinent question would be, how could grocery shoppers examine a produce or meat item and trace its source in order to ensure that the item has been produced within desirable parameters?

A system called HarvestMark, developed by YottaMark—a company specializing in tracking and authentication of products—is already making this possible for some 3 billion items in stores.

HarvestMark consists of a code printed on the label of a product. The code can be scanned by a shopper with an iPhone or Android smartphone, and data is then immediately available showing the grower, growing methods used, and other pertinent information about the product. In the case of animal products, the methods employed in raising and feeding can be checked. It is also possible to enter the code on the HarvestMark website to obtain the same information.

HarvestMark came about as a response to the expanding awareness of food sources. “I started the company originally to provide traceability and authentication for products,” Elliott Grant, founder and chief marketing officer of YottaMark, told *Organic Connections*. “In about 2006, primarily after the spinach recall issue, we focused the company more heavily on the food sector; it became apparent that there was a need for better transparency and traceability back to the farm. We already had the technology developed, so we really applied ourselves to the food industry.”

HarvestMark is designed to make it easy on everyone—in fact, the company does all the “heavy lifting” itself. “We try to make it look very simple,” Grant said. “My analogy is it’s like a duck on a pond; we’re gliding effortlessly on a surface but underneath we’re paddling like crazy. We host all the data and provide the communication channel. If you’re a farmer in Mexico, information technology is probably not your forte. We take the entire burden off the grower of handling the technology side; we made

it really simple. It’s very easy for them to upload data and get data back.

“First we work with the growers on the farm to implement technology that allows us to capture the harvest information, whether they’re packing strawberries in the field or mushrooms or lettuce on a packing line. This could be anywhere in America or Mexico, or Chile or Argentina or Peru; we’re all over the world now. We furnish the farmer with technology to upload the harvest information to our secure servers. The farmer is then



provided with a sticker that has a unique serial number on it. As that sticker on the product makes its way through the supply chain, anybody can query it along the way and access our database.

“The final part of the chain is the shopper. In addition to being able to scan items in stores, a shopper, for example, might eat strawberries and say, ‘Wow, these were just terrific strawberries,’ or ‘This banana was wonderful’; or, on the other hand, they may say, ‘These mushrooms went off too quickly.’ That feedback goes to the grower; so we can

provide a two-way communication channel. The advantage for the grower is they can see the feedback based on what they actually grew. Thus, rather than just having somebody calling up saying, 'I loved your strawberries,' or 'I hated your mushrooms,' the grower can now be linked to a particular seed variety on a particular day, picked by a particular crew; and we can even tell them how old it was and where it was eaten. So it's a much better way of getting growers information that they can actually use."

It's obvious from the number of items bearing the mark that food companies are

products; we don't produce any of what are called conventional food products at all."

Leventini sees a substantial benefit to companies implementing this type of technology. "I think whenever you can differentiate yourself from your competition and further help the consumer understand where the food is coming from—what the farm looks like, what the company's practices are, what their protocols are, how they're treating their animals, how they run their farms—it drives a lasting relationship with the consumer and continues to drive separation from the competition."

Coleman Natural Foods plans on utilizing HarvestMark on other of their products in the future.

Local and Traceable Haute Cuisine

Some of the major pioneer work in traceability has been and is being performed by top chefs. There are a number of celebrity chefs who have for some years specialized in local cuisine and knowing exactly where their ingredients come from, including California's Alice Waters, Wolfgang Puck and Suzanne Goin; New York's Dan Barber; Chicago's

We furnish the farmer with technology to upload the harvest information to our secure servers. The farmer is then provided with a sticker that has a unique serial number on it. As that sticker on the product makes its way through the supply chain, anybody can query it along the way and access our database.



already seeing the value. One company, Coleman Natural Foods, has just implemented the HarvestMark for their Petaluma Poultry line so that their consumers can be confident of the products.

"We really wanted to get the word out about our practices and our products and give consumers a connection to where their food comes from," Mike Leventini, president of Petaluma Poultry, told *Organic Connections*. "HarvestMark allows us to do that. Our company is dedicated to providing families with all-natural and organic food

Like many others, Leventini has observed the rising public interest in knowing the sources of the food they are purchasing and consuming. "I think people are becoming more and more aware of what they eat, and recently how what they eat is being raised," he remarked. "An example of this concern was seen on the West Coast with Proposition 2,* and this showed that people are paying attention. Anytime you can allow consumers a quick, easy way to peek in and see where their chicken came from, how it was raised—those kinds of things—I think it's really important."

Rick Bayless; and Atlanta's Kevin Gillespie.

TRACE restaurant in Austin—part of the W Hotel, Austin—was founded on the principle of serving local cuisine, the origin of which could be traced (hence the name). TRACE's mission statement reads: "Trace is committed to creating an enriching and thoughtful culinary experience by fusing the vibrant, local personality with our commitment to integrity and socially responsible food. Our high-quality, conscious cuisine is prepared from locally foraged and sourced, sustainable ingredients—or obtained through

My mentality comes from the need for a better relationship between the world that I'm in as a chef and the world that farmers are in. Trying to find that is what's most important to me. I jumped on the concept of TRACE, because those are things that I'm really passionate about.

national partners with well-known sustainable practices. We hope you'll enjoy your meal, which can be confidently traced back to its natural origins."

Interestingly, the first person hired for the restaurant was an experienced local food "forager" who would be responsible for providing the restaurant with high-quality locally sourced ingredients. "When I heard that the restaurant was being planned, I contacted Starwood, the parent company, and told them that if they were going to do this concept, they needed someone like me," Valerie Broussard, TRACE food and beverage buyer and forager, told *Organic Connections*. "I was already familiar with the farmers, and I had built these relationships and lived that lifestyle myself personally, anyway. I like to shop at the farmers' markets and there are a lot of things in my refrigerator that people outside of this area might not even recognize. They're not mass-produced, mass-marketed types of products, and I actually buy much of my own food from people who made it themselves. That's what I wanted to help this restaurant achieve. For this kind of concept it takes a little more time, and it's an involved process to dig deeper than most chefs have time for. I'm sort of an extension of the chef in that way."

The company then sought out and found a *chef de cuisine* who was passionate about locally sourced food and hired Chef Paul Hargrove, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, who had already made a considerable name for himself as the executive *sous-chef* at Café Boulud Palm Beach and at

the James Beard Award-winning restaurant Daniel in New York.

"My mentality comes from the need for a better relationship between the world that I'm in as a chef and the world that farmers are in," Hargrove told *Organic Connections*. "Trying to find that is what's most important to me. I jumped on the concept of TRACE, because those are things that I'm really passionate about."

Within such a concept, keeping a restaurant up and running day to day creates, to say the least, a fast-paced environment. Hence the work between Paul and Valerie must, of necessity, be hand in glove.

"The chef develops his menus based on what we know will be plentiful, Broussard said. "For example, in the last few weeks I've been e-mailing farmers and asking, 'What are you putting in the ground now?' or, 'What seeds are you starting, so we know what we can expect 60 days from now?' Then we can forecast accordingly and the chef can develop the menu based on that."

"Valerie will call around to farmers she knows," Hargrove explained. "She puts together a spreadsheet for me, showing me the availability from them for the week. When she's out visiting farmers' markets, she shoots me back messages with pictures, and I'll instruct her to buy '2 pounds of that' or '5 pounds of this.'"

To the Future

Hargrove is happy to see the growing trend among chefs to espouse locally and sustainably grown—and traceable—ingredients.

In the last few weeks I've been e-mailing farmers and asking, 'What are you putting in the ground now?' or, 'What seeds are you starting, so we know what we can expect 60 days from now?' Then we can forecast accordingly and the chef can develop the menu based on that.

"I think it's the responsibility of all of us as chefs," said Hargrove. "Especially if you are a celebrity chef and you care about quality ingredients, quality products, it's your duty and responsibility to spread that message and spread that word. I do here. And I'm glad to see that chefs have gone from being people that farmers hated to work with to people that farmers are starting to like to work with."

"I think that if we don't support what we have now, we won't continue to grow in the right direction," Broussard concluded. "There are a lot of different reasons for buying locally, and one of them is supporting the economy in which you live. I also think that will allow more variety, and it makes it possible for people to do things on a smaller scale than if they are forced to go big and industrial."

For further information on HarvestMark, or to check a HarvestMark code, visit www.harvestmark.com.

To find out more about TRACE restaurant, visit www.traceaustin.com.

* Proposition 2 was a 2008 California ballot proposition that passed with 63 percent of the votes. Officially known as the Standards for Confining Farm Animals initiative, the proposition adds a chapter to Division 20 of the California Health and Safety Code to prohibit the confinement of certain farm animals in a manner that does not allow them to turn around freely, lie down, stand up, and fully extend their limbs.

From top left: TRACE's Chef Paul Hargrove.

Tenderloin, includes beef from Branch Ranch in West Texas and locally grown onion.

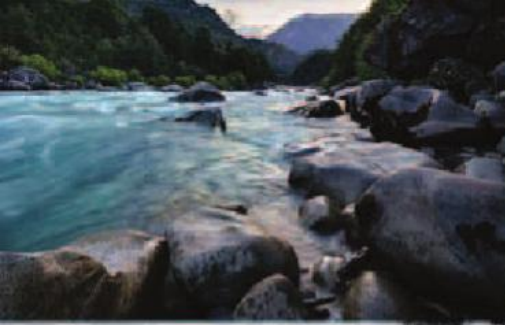
TRACE restaurant in Austin.

TRACE's forager, Valerie Broussard.

Crab Salad, made with crab caught locally in the Gulf of Mexico, and cucumbers from Johnson's Backyard Garden.

Brunch Burger, featuring beef from Branch Ranch in West Texas, eggs sustainably produced from Niman Ranch, and pickles made of cucumbers from Johnson's Backyard Garden.





Chile's Rio Futaleufú

Saving an Endangered River



Fed by lakes high in the Andes of Argentina, the Rio Futaleufú crosses the Andes—and into Patagonia, Chile—before it finally empties into Yelcho Lake. Along its journey, it creates some of the most breathtaking scenery and whitewater experience to be found in the world, and at the same time it is a potential resource for hydroelectric power that governments and power companies find completely irresistible.

For the moment—and hopefully well into the future—the river is being preserved through the efforts of whitewater experts Eric Hertz and Robert Currie, who have facilitated the private purchases of key properties along the river that provide solid political resistance to its damming. Through their company Earth River Expeditions, these purchases have also allowed Hertz and Currie to create a totally unique experience for visitors from all over the world.

In an effort to promote the river and its experience, Hertz recently hired veteran nature photographer Carr Clifton to spend two months along the river in order to photograph it. The results, like the river itself, are spectacular.

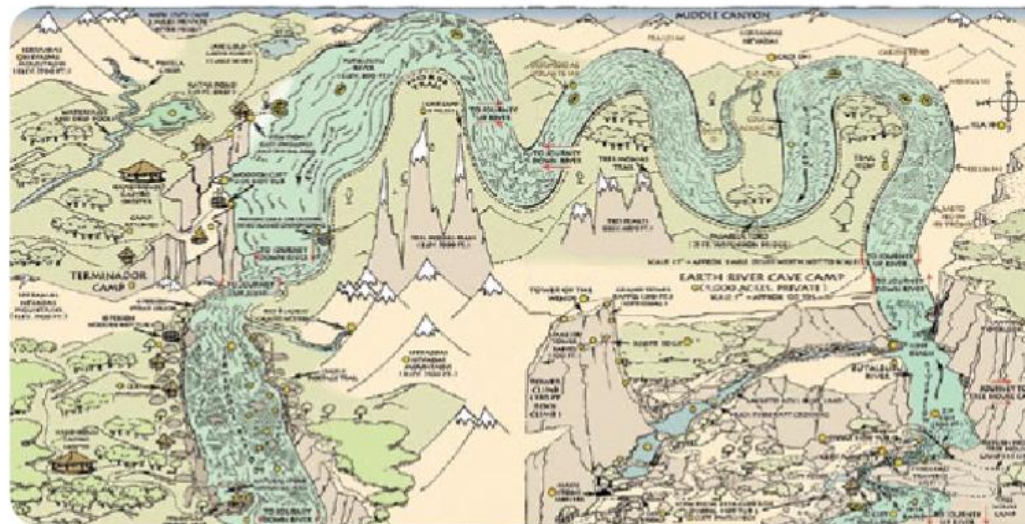
The Futaleufú

“There’s just something about this river,” Eric Hertz tells *Organic Connections*. “It’s very intimate and very dramatic in the same view. You become mesmerized by things like the moss on the rock and the amazingly smooth-carved boulders that the river has made around a particular rapid. And of course the water goes anywhere from turquoise to teal,

depending upon the depth, the cloud cover, the sun, and the amount of white in the rapids that mixes in with it; the water is a mesmerizing color and very clear, very deep. It’s a big river, like the Colorado in the Grand Canyon, but it’s crystal clear and a beautiful color.”

“The color of the water is phenomenal,” agrees Carr Clifton. “If that river were muddy water you’d be scared to death of it—it would

boat, lost it, and they abandoned the trip, which is how it got the name Terminador—it means ‘Terminator.’ Then we came back and used lighter boats. On the original trip they pretty much had full baggage boats with people holding on, so their boats were fairly unwieldy. We came back with two oar-paddle combination boats with very little gear, so they were extremely light and agile and we were able to do it.”



look so mean. But it’s so beautiful with its glacial turquoise waters that it catches you off guard. Your guard isn’t as high as it would be if it were muddy like Grand Canyon flood-type water. This river just looks so gorgeous that it disarms you.”

But it wasn’t only the color of the water that attracted Hertz: the whitewater challenge of the place is quite significant. “I was on a road trip in Patagonia in 1990 and we drove along the bottom part of this river,” Hertz recounts. “I said to my partner, ‘This thing is raftable; people could go down it. It would be an amazing river.’ The next year we planned to come back and we did. It had been attempted in 1986 but they had problems halfway down in a rapid called Terminador. They flipped the

For someone like Hertz, who has been a river guide since his teenage years, navigating this river has a particular appeal. “It’s very different from other rivers because every time you turn a bend it looks like you’re on a different river,” Hertz says. “It changes a lot that way, and I’m not used to seeing that. You’re floating down and you go around a bend and there’s a rapid and it doesn’t look like the rapid before. The rapids have quite distinct characteristics, and there are different kinds: there are technical rapids* and there are bigger water rapids with waves, and then there are rapids that involve walls, and some are technical with giant boulders. The scenery changes dramatically as you go downriver.”



Photographing the River

For Carr Clifton, who was charged with capturing the river in pictures, the stress was a bit different than it might have been for a passenger or even a guide—although Clifton was no stranger to running rivers. “I was apprehensive,” he recalls. “You’ve got \$20,000 worth of camera gear in a Pelican waterproof box, and you’ve tested it to be waterproof, but there’s always that chance it could leak. I also worried about having to swim any of those rapids—you really don’t want to do that if you can help it. But by the second trip I was a lot calmer. I knew how safe the guides were and I knew their capabilities to row these rapids, so I was far less apprehensive. No one swam. In two trips nobody went in the river—nothing. Totally smooth ride.”

Yet there were still tense moments. “Every day was just a rush going down the river,” Clifton says. “We’d go ahead of the group to photograph the whitewater action. Simply holding a \$10,000 camera above the water or climbing on boulders holding the cameras was quite nerve-racking for me.”

Clifton found the beauty of the place well worth the anxiety. “It’s got to be one of the more beautiful rivers in the world,” he continues. “Especially if you’re considering whitewater rivers, it’s probably *the* most beautiful whitewater river in the world to raft down. The color of the water and the boulders—it’s all unbelievable. There is also incredible forest, with huge trees two to three feet in diameter—kind of a cross between a jungle and a big deciduous forest.”

For Everyone

Since Hertz and his partner have figured out how to make it safely down the Futaleufú, it has become a prime whitewater destination. But due to the unique nature of the surrounding valley, it has also become a destination for just about anyone else as well.

“There are certain people who want to run very hard rapids, but that is quite a limited number,” Hertz says. “There are a tremendous number of people who want to go hiking and trekking and don’t want to be running rapids. This place lends itself to that. For most river destinations like the Rogue River, the Grand Canyon or Middle Fork of the Salmon River, they’re mainly raft trips.

“This particular river has a beautiful trail that follows it, and that opens it up to a whole host of activities, including any level of river rafting, from beginner to expert. We’ve taken people from 6 years old right up to 86 years old down the river—there are really no limits. And the canyoning, horse-back riding, inflatable kayaking, rock climbing, repelling, fly fishing, mountain biking, and trekking are all first-rate. I don’t know of a location anywhere in the world that comes close to rivaling the Futaleufú for its quality and abundance of multi-activities, and in our case these activities are actually in our private camps as you’re going down the river.”

This series of camps means that the craft used to navigate the river do not have to be loaded up with supplies, and visitors don’t need to return to the same location every night. “Normally with multi-sport locations, you come back to the same place every night after traveling by vehicle every day,” Hertz explains. “Once you put in at the top of this river with us and come down, you don’t see roads and vehicles the entire time. You just go from camp to camp.”

Like the river itself, the camps that Hertz has installed are quite varied. “The camps are so diverse and unique that you will think you’re on a different river at every camp,” he says. “If you look at Carr’s pictures, you’ll see that the Terminador Camp looks nothing like the Mapu Leufu Camp; and that looks nothing like the Cave Camp, which is all white granite, or the Tree House Camp.”

The camps also have numerous amenities, including handmade hot tubs, wood stoves where meals are cooked by staff, and even flush toilets and hot showers.

Saving the River

Providing a world-class tourist destination was but part of what prompted Hertz and Currie to purchase the land. “Earth River Expeditions is not a nonprofit,” Hertz points out. “We have volunteered our time and resources over the years by donating a percentage of our profits and, when necessary, even running commercial trips to subsidize our conservation work.”

The Chilean government, along with a Spanish power company called Endesa, has been eyeing the Futaleufú as a source of hydroelectric power for a number of years. Another river—the Biobío, further north—was dammed up for this purpose before Hertz and his team could stop them. He wasn’t going to let that happen again. “We

originally purchased a bunch of properties along the Futaleufú to stop the dam,” Hertz says. “We bought them in different areas of the river where the dams were planned. We wanted to make sure they couldn’t destroy this river like they did the Biobío, one of the great rivers of the world. The only way you can do that is by owning the land.

“We’re not out of danger; they could still try and do it, but they’re going to meet some stiff resistance. They now know this river is gaining a pretty big reputation around the world. It keeps making these lists, such as the most beautiful whitewater river; I’ve never seen a list of top whitewater rivers that this river was not included on. We’re now using those lists against constructing the dam; we’re building our case, if and when it comes to that.”

“Basically there are other rivers down there, and Chile is going full steam ahead to dam everything,” says Clifton. “With companies from other countries, including Spain, there are interests coming in from everywhere. They want to string huge power lines to, I believe, some of the mining industry there. So it’s really crazy. They dammed the Biobío without any idea of what they had, and so Eric just keeps fighting to try to make sure everybody knows what kind of a resource they have.

“If those guys weren’t down there, nobody would know about this river,” Clifton concludes. “It would probably be dammed already. The crazy part is there are other places like that right now that are disappearing, and nobody knows about them. So you’ve got to find those jewels and you have to bring people down there and show them what there is to lose; otherwise these places are going to be lost, and nobody will know what they were.”

For further information about the Futaleufú experience, visit Eric Hertz’s Earth River Expeditions website at www.earthriver.com.

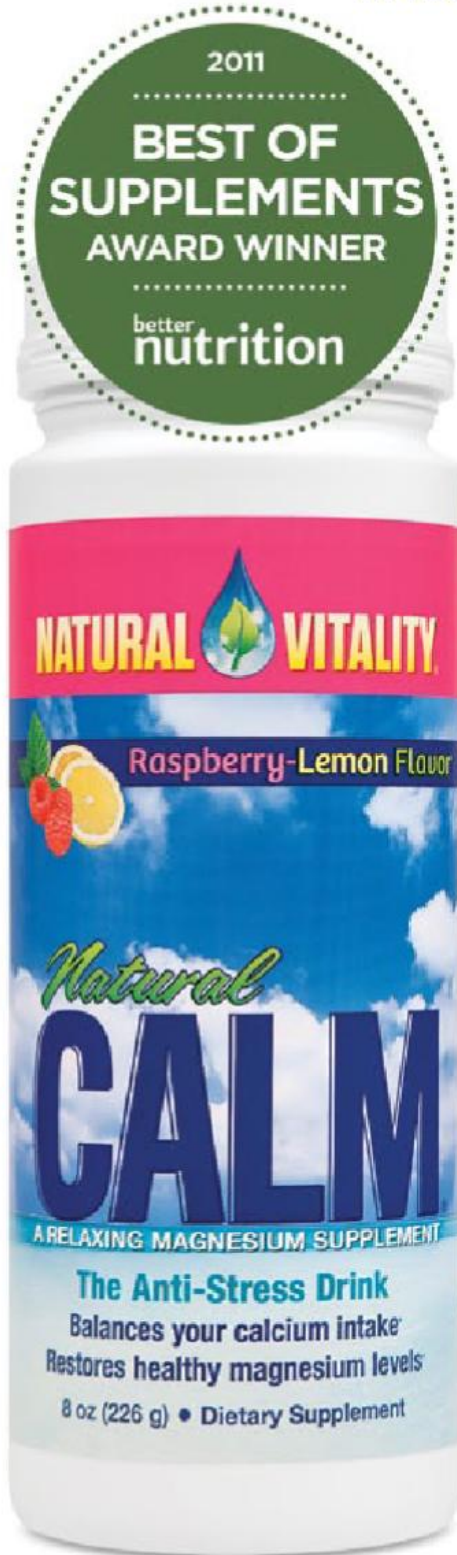
To view more of Carr Clifton’s amazing photographs of the river, visit www.carrcliftonstock.com/index/gallery/Futuleufu.

*technical rapids: The International Scale of River Difficulty classifies whitewater rapids into six categories, from class I to class VI, reflecting both the technical difficulty and the danger associated with a rapid. *Technical rapids*, typically graded class IV–VI, require higher navigational skill, as they force the paddler to read the water and often move back and forth across the rapid.



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