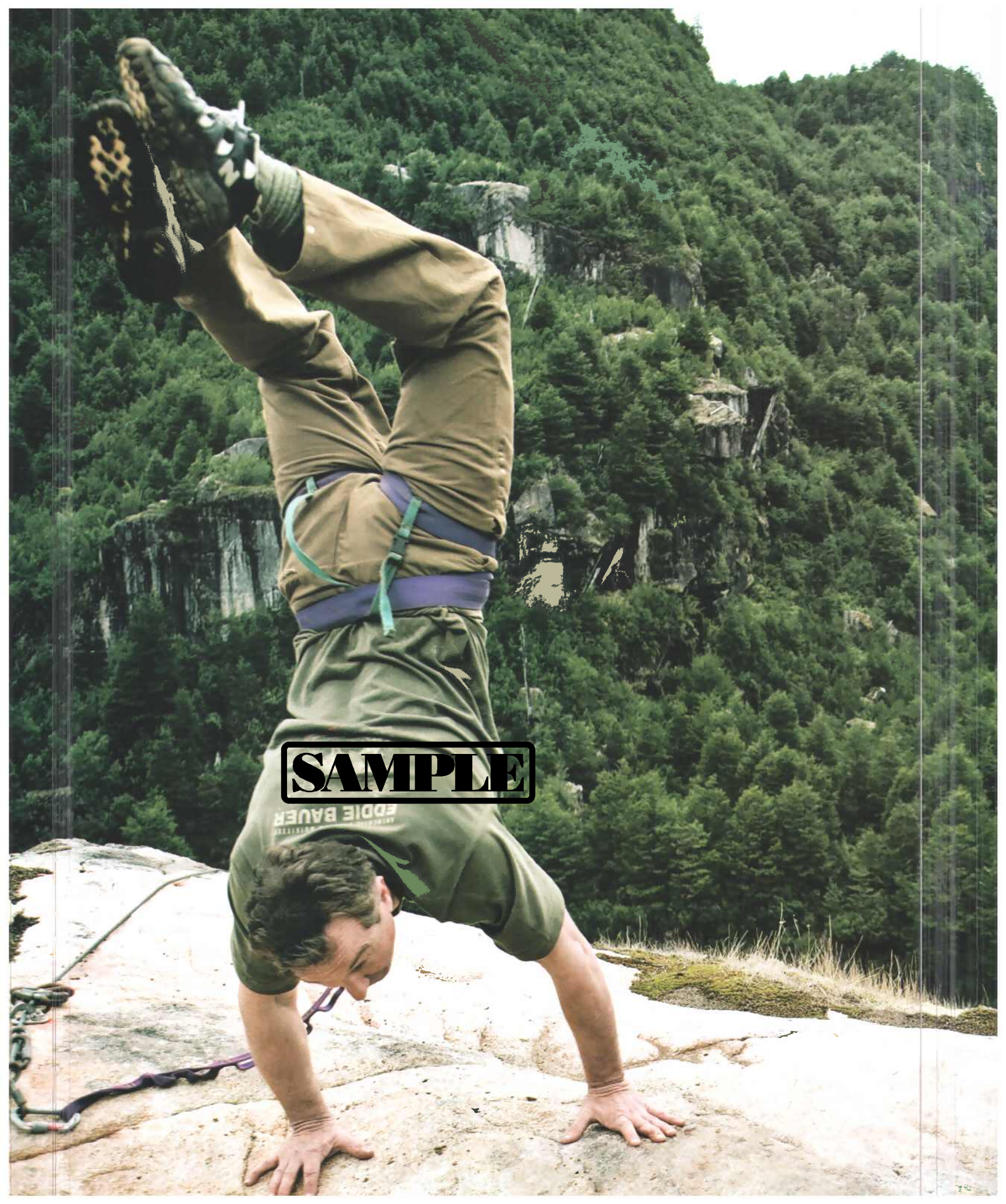


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EDDIE BAUER  
SPORTSWEAR





# Bobby's Big Adventure

**ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.** and a spirited group of celebrities raft down  
**CHILE'S FUTALEUFÚ RIVER** not just for fun but also  
to help save this magnificent waterway.

*photographs by*  
**William Abranowicz**

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Balancing act:  
Conservationist Robert  
Kennedy kicks back  
on the Knife's Edge,  
above the Futaleufú.



**MARCH 20, 2005**

Last spring my wife, Mary, our nine-year-old daughter, Kyra, and I assembled with thirty-three friends who had arrived at Chile's Santiago Airport following overnight flights from various places. Our group included tennis star John McEnroe and his wife, rock singer Patty Smyth; comedian-writer Dan Aykroyd and his wife, actress Donna Dixon; and *Seinfeld* star Julia Louis-Dreyfus and her husband, *Saturday Night Live* comic Brad Hall, all with children in tow. All together, there were sixteen kids and twenty adults determined to tackle the Futaleufú—one of the world's finest and yet least known white-water rivers—with American outfitter Earth River Expeditions. But our ten-day trip involved more than just adventure. Earlier in the year, Chile's largest hydropower company, Endesa, had announced its intent to dam the Fu in 2013. Part of our group's mission was to bring the public's attention to this wilderness gem so that Chilean people would be less inclined to tolerate its destruction.

From Santiago, we flew 1,000 miles south to Puerto Montt, a maritime city that serves as the gateway to Chilean Patagonia. The next day, penguins surfed our bow wave as we rode a ferry south to the tiny port of Chaitén. A three-hour bus trip over a dirt road introduced us to the region's beautiful landscape.

We stopped at our put-in, El Chiquito, just before the Fu's confluence with the Azul River. There we donned wet suits, helmets and life jackets, grabbed our paddles and listened to a safety briefing by Earth River's founder, Eric Hertz, and his partner, Roberto Currie. Our trip would include easy Class III

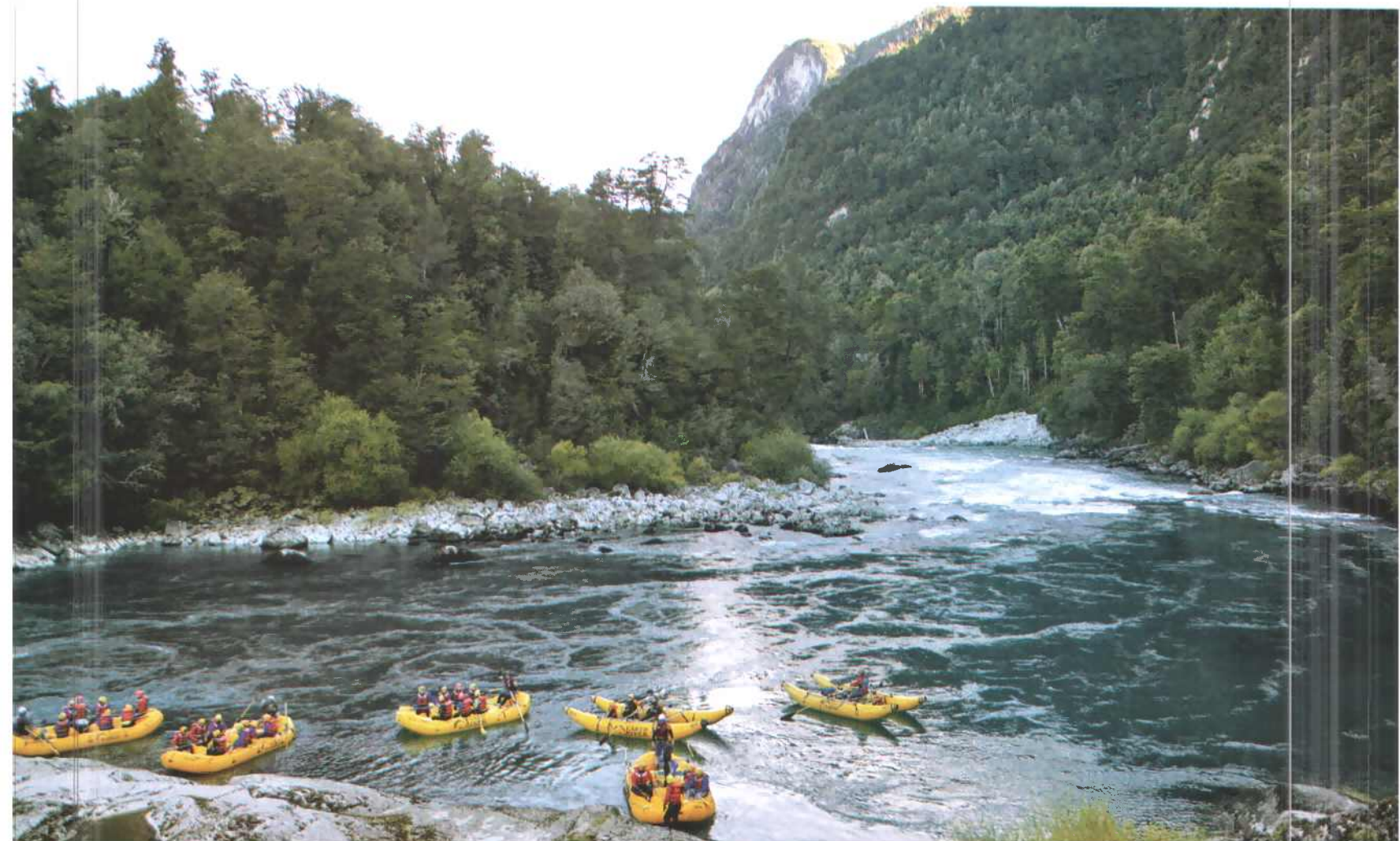
rapids, invigorating Class IVs and extremely challenging Class Vs. White-water rafting is, of course, an inherently risky activity, but Earth River is famous for its commitment to safety. Its guides have studied the best routes down the river, and kayaks and catarafts accompany all its trips on the Fu, taking strategic positions at each rapid. (A cataraft is a sturdy rowing platform mounted on two pontoons that glide easily atop the water, making the craft stable and maneuverable even in the most ferocious rapids.) After the briefing, Eric coached the mostly neophyte crew in paddling techniques.

There was a loud gasp when we emerged from the jungle onto the riverbank and people took in the brilliant teal blue of the sun-struck Futaleufú. "Oh, this is b.s.!" said Julia. "It's like the Disney World ride with the blue dye. It's gotta be fake!"

We split into six paddlers to a raft, each with a guide wielding a long oar. A wooden perch on a raised platform. Mary and I boarded Roberto's boat with Julia and Brad; their thirteen-year-old, Henry; Anne Hearst (whose family owns the company that publishes this magazine); and Senator Antonio Horvath, a powerful Chilean politician. The Aykroyds and McEnroes went with Sam Payne and Sandra Feusi, two former Cirque du Soleil acrobats, and Abner, the most *guapo* of the handsome guides. On a previous trip, Kyra had dubbed Abner "Cutie-Pie" and tortured him by braiding his hair into porcupine spikes tied fast with colorful bits of cloth. The name stuck.

In the pool below the put-in, each crew practiced flipping its boat and scrambling back in. Mary asked Julia how she still

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looked so gorgeous after two dunkings in the river. “I have someone to do my makeup and hair. They’re following in a van,” she said earnestly. “Keep it under wraps. I’d rather not share.” Brad observed that her makeup squad might have problems getting access to the remote campsites. “They’d better figure it out,” she said sharply, “if they want to keep their jobs.”

Brad worried that Cutie-Pie would need a winch to lift Dan Aykroyd back into the raft. But despite his size, Dan is strong, athletic and shockingly agile, as he demonstrates with acrobatic dancing in his *Blues Brothers* stage act. He sprang back into the boat with grace.

We ran a series of Class IIIs and IVs and finished the day at Mandaca, a Class V with an eight-foot drop that dumped us on Denis Watson and twelve-year-old Belle Aykroyd. Into the rapids Belle floated by with a big smile on her face. She placed her helmet, signifying “I’m okay,” as one of the guides pushed her from the water. Brad asked Roberto, “What’s the hand signal for ‘Don’t tell your parents’?”

Dan had been somewhat reluctant to make the long trip to Chile, but he was suddenly at home on the river. “This is the best,” he told me. Donna nodded and gave me a gleeful grin.

Our first camp, Mapu Leufu, was situated on a cliff nestled between glaciers and rugged mountains reminiscent of the Tetons. We arrived at nightfall, and the McEnroe clan was somewhat disconcerted. Patty—already nicknamed Patty Packin’-Roe by Julia for the hours she had spent packing for her children—got lost briefly in the woods, and nine-year-old Anna

couldn’t find her shoes. Sean, a teenager, missed his girlfriend and tile showers and frankly seemed pretty miserable.

Arturo Carvallo, the mayor of the town of Futaleufú, hiked up to our campsite for dinner and to ask for our help in stopping the dams, which the local community strongly opposes. In 1990, Eric Hertz and I, working with the Natural Resources Defense Council, local environmental groups and Pehuenche Indians, fought Endesa’s plans to dam the Bío-Bío, Chile’s other great white-water treasure. We ultimately lost that battle.

The first of the Bío-Bío dams was already under construction, and Chile’s burgeoning white-water community thoroughly demoralized, when Eric discovered the Futaleufú, in 1991. His first descent by raft that year opened up the possibility of run-trips on the Fu, and this reinvigorated Chile’s white-water paddlers. Now the Fu is also threatened. In the meantime, however, Endesa has been privatized, so it no longer enjoys the local popularity it once claimed as Chile’s national power company. Its constitutional right to condemn land is also less clear. With construction not scheduled to commence for several years, river lovers have more time to organize and inform the public.

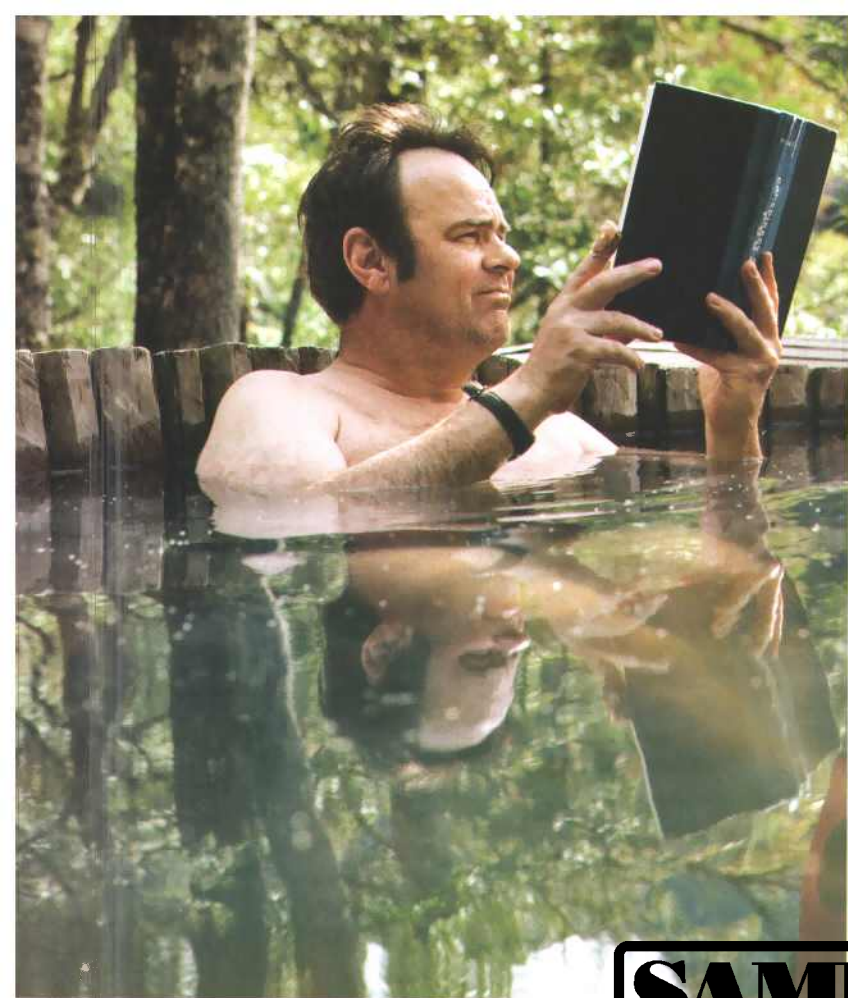
The biggest hurdle to overcome is that the Fu’s beauties are largely unknown to the Chilean people, who rarely venture south of Puerto Montt except to visit Torres del Paine, the country’s famous national park. But the Fu’s rich beauty dwarfs the

**Julia Louis-Dreyfus shares her wilderness fashion savvy with Kennedy. OPPOSITE: The rafters relax on a peaceful stretch of the river.**

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FROM LEFT:

**Dan Aykroyd enjoys a leisurely soak at Cave Camp; Tree House Camp; a thrilling ride through the rapids.**

stark majesty of Torres. Its unusual color, spectacular scenery, endless series of formidable Class IV and V rapids and extraordinary fishing combine to offer adventurers one of the world's finest white-water experiences.

My father took my nine siblings and me on most of the great rivers in the western United States, including the Salmon and the Snake. After he died, my brothers and I ran a Maine-based rafting company and paddled first descents in Peru, Colombia and Venezuela. As a river advocate, I've continued to kayak and raft white-water rivers at every opportunity. Since 1988, I've worked alongside Earth River, fighting to protect some of the best remaining white-water rivers on the planet. The Fu is on the short list.

We could see the river from our cliff-side campsite that night. A full moon lit the landscape, illuminating a blanket of low-lying clouds spilling down the Fu, below us. In the morning we would watch the blanket withdraw. Annie Costner, a battle-scarred river activist and the daughter of actor Kevin Costner, marveled at the way the clouds, like a divine force, tucked the river in.

## **MARCH 22, 2005**

John McEnroe said he slept nine hours—and it was his first night in a tent ever. Dan had a rough night. “I finally relaxed when the motorcycle drove into my tent,” he said, “because I knew I must be dreaming.”

As we took to the water, Eric told us that the previous day had been practice for today's run of Inferno Canyon, a series of four Class V rapids in a narrow gorge that compresses the vast energy of the Fu. The first rapid is a string of standing waves (known as a wave train) with a granite wall on one side. Cutie-Pie and his crew aced it, making the ride look effortless. Another boat, piloted mainly by hormone-craving teenagers, took a less conservative approach and hit the wall, but it spun off safely.

We ran the other rapids smoothly while the smaller kids rode horses around the canyon (young children skip all the roughest rapids). We spotted them above the river on a narrow trail cut into the ravine wall just as we were entering one of the Class Vs. Time seemed to slow in the tumult of these giant rapids, and I noticed little things of beauty. Cormorants and geese basked on sunlit rocks; a kingfisher undulated by with a trout still flapping in its beak.

Between the rapids, I fished from the bow, quickly hooking six one- to six-pound trout. I've fished in Canada, Latin America and most of the States, but I've never seen a waterway with such an abundance of consistently large trout. The small bays and pockets of still water along the Fu's banks almost always yield trout. It was pure joy to entice them from their hiding places under the willow branches and watch them follow the lure from great distances in the gin-clear water.

Trout are not native to Chile. In 1903, a botanist brought 400,000 trout eggs from Germany and founded fish farms to stock Chile's rivers and streams with browns and Rocky

