National Geographic Adventure

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No self-respecting whitewater aficionado would contest that the Futaleufú is among the greatest stretches of whitewater on the planet. For about 50 miles, this shifting thread of turquoise winds through an impossibly grand theater of scenery. Rafters take in skyscraping peaks, sheer granite cliffs, and thickets of hardwood forest as they tumble down 36 Class IV and V rapids. Despite its brawn, however, the river is gravely endangered.

A Spanish power company, Endesa, has the rights to build three dams that would destroy long-standing shepherd communities and wipe out whitewater recreation forever. Earth River Expeditions, the whitewater-rafting company that pioneered the first raft descent of the river in 1991, has and continues to put up a massive fight. They bought a large amount of land that Endesa would have to purchase in order to build the dams and fought the construction of unsustainable development. In 2012, with the profits from their raft trips, they also founded a conservation organization, the Futaleufú Riverkeeper, to work on litigation, community outreach, and other conservation efforts full time.

The first thing travelers can do to support river conservation is experience the Fu. After cruising the river each day, rafters retire to camps etched into cliffs and perched in trees. Extracurricular activities include hot-tubbing in natural springs, rock climbing, rappelling, mountain biking, and, naturally, blissing out on a private beach. All profits from the trip go toward protecting the river. Want to do more? Donate directly to the Futaleufú Riverkeeper .