

Rapid Magazine Fall '08

Article about "Christmas For Africa"



GEAR FOR GOOD

Karl Moser Plays Santa in Uganda

WHEN HARD-CORE HUCKER and Team Riot freestyler Karl Moser graduated from the University of Oregon in 2005 he wanted to get as far away from the influences and demands his degree would bring. He was looking for greater inspiration than starting a career, but little did he know a short stint as a river bum would lead to so much work and reward.

"I was young and completely addicted to kayaking from watching *Wicked Liquid* [Steve Fisher's 1999 playboat movie on the Zambezi River in Africa] and I would watch it over and over again until the tape finally gave out," says Moser, now an award-winning filmmaker with Epicocity Project and a head coach with the World Class Kayak Academy. "I had this dream to go to Africa and huck my meat on the Zambezi. When I finally graduated from college—much to my mother's lament—I flew to Africa for a two-month kayaking adventure."

Knowing little about the Ugandan kayaking scene when he left, Moser says he was completely blown away by how good the local boaters are, despite poor-quality gear or sometimes no gear at all.

"It's not uncommon to see local kayakers bombing down class III in a broken kayak, a makeshift paddle and no helmet. They just don't have access to very good gear, but they have an amazing learning curve," Moser says. "We literally had guys start rolling on Monday, and then trying donkey flips at Nile Special on Saturday."

He and paddling partner Aaron Rettig would meet up with local paddlers each day. They developed friendships and started to teach them skills like rolling. As the days passed, more locals collected to watch and learn and eventually an informal club began to take shape. Seeing the lack

of and the poor quality of equipment they had, Moser began to think their skills deserved better.

So slowly from there the seed got planted for a Christmas for Africa gear drive. Moser returned home with his idea and spent a year or so hammering out how they could gather equipment and ship it overseas. After a few phone calls to potential supporters Moser realized his idea of donating gear would take off.

"The response was incredible," he said. "NRS literally gave us a shopping cart and told us to ransack their warehouse." Soon after Wave Sport, AT Paddles, Shred Ready Helmets and Astral Buoyancy jumped on board.

The gear was collected over the summer and shipped on a two-month sea voyage for delivery just before the end of December. In all, 14 kayaks, 21 paddles and lifejackets, 15 skirts, 18 sets of booties and 22 helmets made it into the hands of Ugandan kayakers living and working on the rivers.

"The big thing to understand is that kayaking for the Ugandans represents a way to better their lives. The average Ugandan makes \$600 at par annually or about \$2.50 a day for back-breaking labour," Moser explains. "A safety kayaker on a commercial rafting trip can make between \$2.50 to \$5 per day, and gets fed. If they have medical training and speak good English, they can become a guide bringing home \$20 per day. So kayaking isn't just a sport to them; it's a way to have a vastly better life."

Christmas for Africa is also the title of Moser's upcoming documentary showcasing last year's effort, a film Moser hopes will raise awareness and further his charity work. www.ChristmasForAfrica.com. —Neil Etienne