



ACCORDING to estimates by the Outdoor Industry Association (outdoorindustry.org), more than 140 million Americans make outdoor recreation a priority in their lives, pumping roughly \$646 billion into the economy. Facilitating this passion are thousands of established outdoor and adventure sport operators across the United States that offer adventures ranging from mild to wild. Each year, locals and tourists experience this country's majestic rivers, mountains, beaches, parks and trails, or head out beyond our borders.

When *The Connection* asked to hear from members who are outdoor entrepreneurs, we were contacted by mountaineers and expedition leaders who take clients to far-flung places across the globe, while others focus on local adventures, such as kayak and canoe trips, paddleboarding, hiking and off-road driving in the wide-open places here in the U.S.

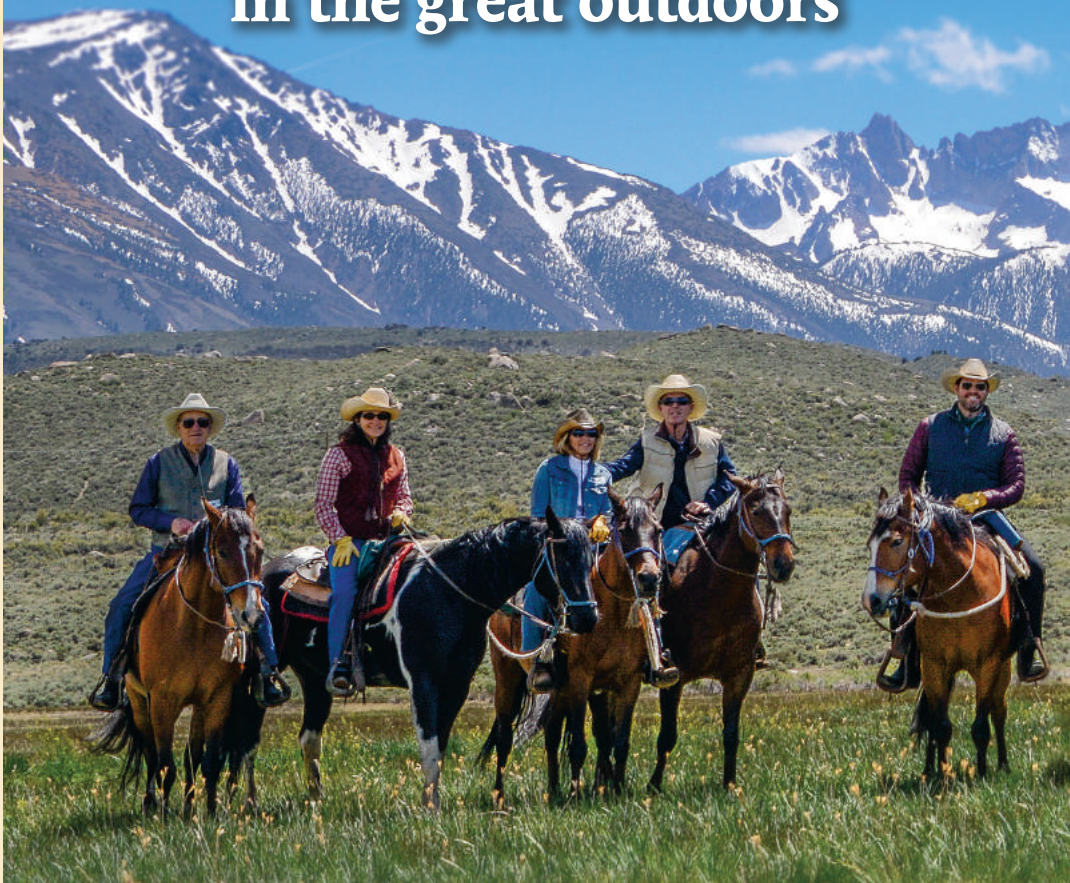
Nearly all of the entrepreneurs we interviewed spoke of a transformation that takes place in clients of all ages who spend time away from the comforts and confines of city life and venture into natural, wild environments or challenging activities. For some the payoff is a tremendous sense of accomplishment; for others it's a much-needed change of perspective.

Seeing clients' lives improved, and in some cases completely transformed, is among the rewarding professional perks in this business.

But it's the perks of the job—glorious sunsets, the stillness of a trail at dawn or the excitement of an approaching storm—that keep outdoor business owners in the game. Here's a look at five members who responded to our call. — *T. Foster Jones*

When work is

The joys of making a living in the great outdoors



Home on the range

WHETHER YOU'RE A tenderfoot or an old hand, Hunewill Ranch has something for all sorts of cowpokes.

"There are people who come who maybe have never been on a horse before, so we have real beginners. Yet, there are also people who own their own horses and ride all the time. If they want to bring their own horses, they can," says Betsy Hunewill Elliott, co-owner and human resources director for Hunewill Ranch.

Hunewill Ranch (hunewillranch.com) is a 4,600-acre, family-owned and -run dude ranch located in the Bridgeport Valley, in California. In 1931, Stanley Hunewill's wife, LeNore, started taking in guests at the family cattle ranch to offset the financial devastation of the Great Depression. Today, the fourth, fifth and sixth generations of Hunewills continue the tradition of Western hospitality. With

more than 150 horses and approximately 870 head of cattle, there's plenty to be done on the working cattle ranch, which employs up to 34 employees, including 16 family members.

The ranch is able to accommodate up to 50 guests in the cabins during the peak season, which runs from the end of May through the middle of October, with a five-day cattle drive in November. Beginning, intermediate and advanced horseback rides are offered twice a day; possibilities include high-country trail rides, loping in the meadows, a morning ride with breakfast on the creek and splash rides in the summer. Based on their height, weight



OUR DIGITAL EDITIONS

Click here for a video about the activities at Hunewill Ranch. (See page 9 for details.)

play



Guests of the Hunewill Ranch enjoy a ride in the meadows.

© DWAYNE LEONARD / HUNEWILL RANCH

and riding experience, guests are assigned to horses and then evaluated to make sure they are a good match.

"It's interesting: Horses and people all have their own personalities, and sometimes they don't fit together," Elliott says.

The guests, who visit as singles, couples and families, enjoy additional activities such as colt gentling, barbecues, roping practice, bingo, square dancing, a campfire with a sing-along and s'mores, talent night, and a hay ride to complete the experience.

"You don't have to cook, you don't have to clean, you get to be active and enjoy the outdoors, but you don't have to get dirty if you don't want to, so I think it's kind of an ideal vacation," Elliott says.

—Christina Guerrero



Hiking the Grinnell Glacier Trail above Grinnell Lake in Glacier National Park.

IMAGES COURTESY OF TRAILBOUND TRIPS



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Click here for a short video from Trailbound Trips. (See page 9 for details.)



Carol Ruhter

Happy trails

CAROL RUHTER, A Costco member from Barrington, Illinois, was a professional nature guide before she even knew it. As a little girl, she led her imaginary friends on "nature tours" of her family's farm. In 1996, she started leading local day hikes for women out of her local YMCA, stemming from her personal desire to meet other outdoors-inclined women. When the hikes became a hit, she decided to strike out on her own and founded Trailbound Trips (trailboundtrips.com).

Today her business offers day hikes, three- to four-day getaways and weeklong outdoor adventure trips across the nation. Travelers not only hike, but also participate in a variety of outdoor activities specific to a particular region, such as dog sledding, zip lining and kayaking, among many others. And Ruhter has stayed true to her original audience: All adventures are still for women only. She's led a few thousand of them in her 21-year career so far.

"I wanted to connect women with nature because it's so phenomenally good for our mind and our body," Ruhter tells *The Connection*. "I wanted to connect them with each other. I wanted to connect them with

their own personal strength, and, lastly, I wanted to connect them with God."

Faith is not a requirement, however. Hikers can choose whether or not they'd like to join a spiritually focused day hike in northern Illinois, and getaways and week-long trips include open discussions that welcome diverse beliefs.

Participants have ranged in age from 18 to 81. There's no age cap—the only requirement is an able body.

For eight years, Ruhter has also operated the Wild Woman's Triathlon in Barrington, a unique combination of kayaking, hiking and walking or running.

Whether she's leading a group on a trail in northern Illinois, roasting marshmallows under a starry canopy on Lake Superior, kayaking in the San Juan Islands or trekking through the Appalachian Mountains, there's no limit to where Ruhter will explore. Throughout the year she scouts new places for her travelers, many of whom are repeat customers. She says, "When women are with other women there is a spirit of encouragement and strength that is phenomenal." —Hana Medina

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Male polar bears spar on the coast of Hudson Bay, near Seal River Heritage Lodge.

DENNIS FAST / CHURCHILL WILD

Polar-izing experiences



MIKE REIMER

OWNER-OPERATORS of Churchill Wild's four eco-lodges, Mike and Jeanne Reimer have been leading 16-person polar bear viewing adventures for 23 years. Three of their

four lodges are on the shoreline of the vast western Hudson Bay in subarctic Manitoba. Jeanne grew up in the town of Churchill, about 40 miles from the couple's Seal River Heritage Lodge.

The couple met and married when Mike worked as a guide for her parents' fishing and hunting lodge, and together they founded the Churchill Wild adventure company (churchillwild.com). "Being able to meet guests from around the world, and to share this uniquely beautiful area with them and see them experience something that is so special, inspired us," says Jeanne.

One of few tours in the world that

OUR DIGITAL EDITIONS



Click here for a video about Churchill Wild's polar bear photo safari. (See page 9 for details.)

approaches the Arctic tundra on foot rather than in all-terrain tundra vehicles, Churchill Wild greatly lessens the carbon footprint and impact on the bears and other wildlife, explains Mike. The lodges are in a wildlife corridor with stunning vistas, he notes: "Location, location, location! We are living in the polar bears' front yard."

Churchill is the polar bear capital of the world, with about 1,000 bears arriving there from late June to autumn. In semi-hibernation, they've fasted for months, waiting for Hudson Bay to freeze so they can hunt for young seals and beluga whales on the ice. Nearly 15,000 tourists from all over the world converge on Churchill during polar bear season. Most tour in tundra vehicles, while about 600 view the bears on foot, venturing out from the cozy, well-appointed Churchill Wild lodges. During the summer, visitors can view thousands of beluga whales, as well as spectacular hot pink fireweed blossoms.

Every day in summer and autumn, the lodges offer two guided wildlife treks through the Arctic landscape and tidal flats, and over the bay's rocky coastline, under a sky filled with shimmering light blues, grays and golds. The aurora borealis often appears at night.

In 2015, Seal River Heritage Lodge and Nanuk Polar Bear Lodge became part of the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World collection, a highly sought-after and respected distinction. Mike notes that the National Geographic affiliation is a "validation that everything we do is right."

—Irene Middleman Thomas

The right angle

"THERE ARE SOME who can live without wild things," conservationist Aldo Leopold once observed in *A Sand County Almanac*, "and some who cannot." Talk to Costco members Ryan Pitcher and his father, Ed, who run Clearwater River Company (clearwaterrivercompany.com), a professional fishing guide outfit based in Lewiston, Idaho, and their passion to share the wonder of nature with clients makes it evident that they're among the latter.

"It's hard for me to explain, but I get more enjoyment watching someone else catch a fish than I do from catching my own fish," explains Ryan, the company's general manager and a registered fishing guide with more than 15 years of experience. "We like to help people do what I call 'shaking hands with the planet,'" Ed adds.

Through the Clearwater River Company's website, you can book a trip through the company or one of the Pitchers' other two companies, West Coast Anglers and

Snake River Guides. The father-son team employs 25 people—eight staff members, 10 full-time guides and seven part-time guides—all dedicated to giving clients amazing and productive fishing adventures. They also work with another 10 to 15 guides throughout Idaho, Washington state, Oregon, Montana and Utah.



Ryan Pitcher guided Isaiah Leonard into a beautiful Clearwater steelhead.

ERIN BROWNLEY





Up close with a whale shark at Kwatisore Bay, Indonesia.

The call of the sea

"BESIDES EACH OTHER, our greatest passions in life are discovering the wonders of the marine world, seeking out indigenous people and their art, and photographing and writing about our adventures." So begins the website of the Sequim, Washington-based company Secret Sea Visions (secretseavisions.com), the brainchild of worldwide explorers, and Costco members, Maurine Shimlock and Burt Jones.

The couple started Secret Sea Visions in 1990, after returning to the United

States from working on a boat in the Solomon Islands and developing their photography skills.

"We started out primarily as marine life photographers, and that came out of a long love of scuba diving and living in isolated places on the coast in Mexico, running dive shops," explains Shimlock on a Skype call from her U.S. home while Jones is away on a dive trip. "But as time went on, especially with the advent of digital photography, underwater photography was not enough to sustain us [as a business], so we started leading groups of people on scuba-diving safaris, which we love to do."

The trips range from \$3,100 to around \$10,000. Shimlock says, "You're not paying that kind of money for a rustic escape. This is high-end, luxurious accommodations with meals, massages, dive equipment and more. It's really eat, sleep, dive, repeat ... with lovely sunsets, pristine beaches, stargazing and more. Our dive trips are for people who like to dive, enjoy exotic places where few

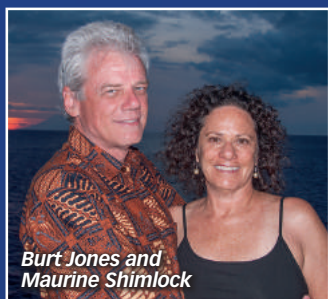
people have dived before and don't mind a bit of a hassle getting to the location."

These are not simply romantic getaways, but full-scale adventures with unusual species and interactions with indigenous people, the likes of whom might not be encountered on more mainstream vacations. This year, Shimlock and Jones are conducting six dive trips, most to Indonesia. Another trip will take them to Cocos Island in Costa Rica for the month of August.

Shimlock says most of the dive trips are full through 2019, and about 95 percent of the people who travel with them are repeat customers.

When they're not conducting tours, the couple indulge another passion by working with Conservation International as sustainable marine tourism consultants.

—Steve Fisher

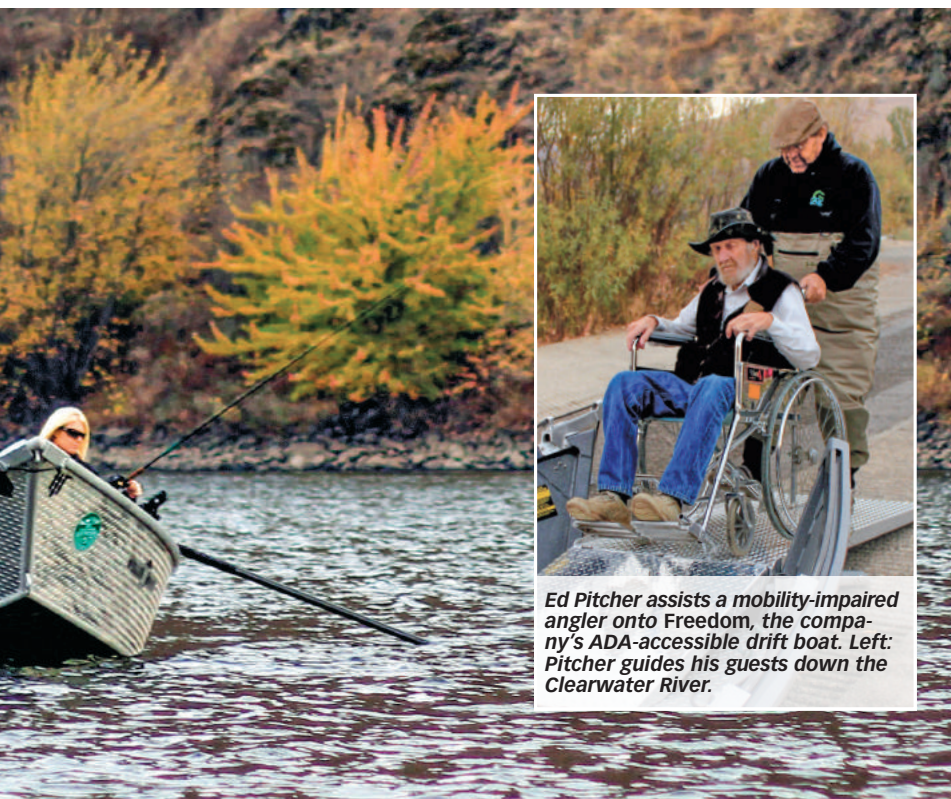


Burt Jones and Maurine Shimlock



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Click here for a short video about Secret Sea Visions. (See page 9 for details.)



Ed Pitcher assists a mobility-impaired angler onto Freedom, the company's ADA-accessible drift boat. Left: Pitcher guides his guests down the Clearwater River.

ASH BUCKLEY

While anglers of various skill levels report having stellar trips through Clearwater River Company, the Pitchers especially enjoy helping would-be fishermen and women with disabilities. "For years, it was just hard for me to see these anglers, whether they were elderly or mobility-impaired, give up on fishing, whether by choice or by life circumstance," Ryan explains. "That has always torn me up."

To help disabled anglers, the duo had a special drift boat made. The vessel, named *Freedom*, is a custom-built drift boat, 20 feet long and 17 inches wide, with an Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant wheelchair access ramp. The unique boat allows anglers with mobility issues to get back on the water.

"We have had this lifelong thing about sharing our experiences in the outdoors with friends and family," Ed says.

What they accomplish with their boat enables them to share the joy of wild places with those who have extreme difficulty making the connection. —Will Fifield