

# WOMEN IN WHITEWATER

## LACEY ANDERSON: WHITEWATER MAVEN

BY NEIL NIKIRK

**L**ACEY ANDERSON IS a rarity in the whitewater world—a mature woman who thrives on adventure and the unexpected while pursuing her passion for running rivers outside of the mainstream destinations. Mature at “50-something” she is still actively guiding on some of the West’s most famous rivers, and when not guiding, exploring rivers outside the US. In the past couple of years, she has completed over two dozen multi-day river journeys in remote areas of Mexico, almost all of them first descents in an inflatable (cataraft), and some being the first known descents, period. Not your average boater; not your average female; definitely not your average female boater. Her independent nature, high tolerance for danger, thrill of the unknown, and ability to handle whatever comes her way makes her an exceptional individual in the relatively small circle of female hardcore whitewater boaters.

Since her first rafting trip in 1983, on the South Fork of the American River



*Lacey on the Barranca Grande section of the Rio Antigua, Veracruz, Mexico.*  
Photo by Neil Nikirk

in California, Lacey dreamed of being a river guide. Even while juggling family obligations to her daughters and furthering her education to become a credentialed

teacher, Lacey worked as a summer guide on all the forks of the American River. Since then, Lacey has logged over 6,500 miles on numerous rivers and countless days in the wild, both on and off the river. A chance encounter while leading a backpacking trip in 2000 with an adventure outfitter from Mexico led to Lacey organizing and leading the first commercial descent of the Rio Urique in the famed Copper Canyon region of Chihuahua, Mexico in 2002. This successful trip ignited a passion for exploration of remote river canyons. Since then she has notched first descents of the Rio Atoyac, Rio Atotonilco/Santa Catarina, Rio Xochiotlahuaca, Rio Tehuantepec, Rio Tlapeneco and others stretching from northern to southern Mexico.

On a recent trip into the Guatemalan highlands to run the Rio Copon, a river reputed to be the finest in all of Central America and with only three previous

*Surfing fun on the Rio Copalita, Oaxaca, Mexico.*

Photo by Neil Nikirk





*Put-in for the Middle Rio Atoyac, Oaxaca, Mexico.*  
**Photo by Neil Nikirk**

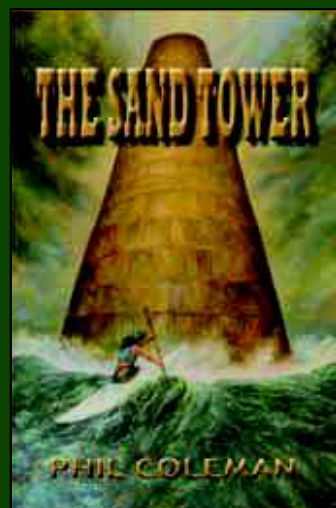
descents, Lacey and a group of river enthusiasts/conservationists were held hostage by villagers who thought they were associated with mining and hydroelectric interests, and nearly lost their lives. Thanks to the selfless act of a newfound Guatemalan friend, Lacey survived to tell the tale. Along with the sobering reality of her own mortality came a heightened awareness of the value of living in the moment and enjoying everything in life that makes you happy to the fullest.

Since that time, Lacey has downsized into her "second home," a trusty Toyota pickup/camper combo and lived the life of a river guide and explorer. This last summer was spent guiding on the Colorado River and the Middle Fork and Main Salmon Rivers in Idaho. Returning briefly to her cabin in Joshua Tree, Lacey then embarked on another journey to Mexico. Luring her were the travertine waterfalls of the Rio Lacanja

and the big water of the Rio Usumacinta, the Sacred Monkey River of the Mayan world. Plans for 2013 include guiding on the Salmon, a return visit to the seldom run canyon of the Rio Mulatos/Aros/Yaqui in northern Mexico, an exploratory trip on the Rio Guerachi in the heart of Las Barrancas del Cobre (Copper Canyon), more exploratory cataraft runs in Mexico, a return to Guatemala, and maybe an expedition to Peru.

More than just the thrill of the unknown drives Lacey to boat these rivers that are well off the beaten track. She is an avid supporter of river conservation activities and an opponent of mining, hydroelectric, and other interests that threaten clean, free-flowing rivers. By publicizing her exploits through her blog, she hopes to raise public awareness about these and other threatened rivers to aid in the fight against interests that would irrevocably harm the

river and surrounding ecosystem. Lacey is also a successful author of two books on camp cooking without coolers and an e-book on camp cooking without coolers or stoves. These publications provide boaters and other outdoor enthusiasts with meal plans and lots of recipes for gourmet camp cuisine using non-perishable ingredients that do not require refrigeration. Proceeds from the sales of her books are used to fund river preservation efforts through donations to various river protection organizations.



***An action, adventure, thriller  
 for whitewater enthusiasts!***

*"Phil Coleman is a long time kayaker and whitewater guide from Western Pennsylvania who knows the rivers of this region intimately. His first novel is an engaging sci-fi fantasy thriller which combines kayaking with gods, devils, and time travel. The book, solidly and at times beautifully written, is hard to put down."*  
 — Charles Wallbridge

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