

About Zambezi Expedition leaders Helge Bendl and Andy Leemann



The "Mother of Waters", as the Thai call her, brought them together: In 2005, German journalist Helge Bendl, 29, joined an expedition on the Mekong river to produce a documentary film and several feature articles about this venture. The expedition was led by Andy Leemann, 54, a boating expert from Switzerland, who had already explored the Amazon and the Orinoco with his company Rib Expedition & Adventure. In the footsteps of a French expedition that had searched for a river route to China 150 years ago, the expedition traveled more than 3,000 kilometers in inflatable boats from Vietnam to China. Its aim was to showcase the potential of the region for eco-tourism and the need to preserve the unique biodiversity along the riverbanks. Reports and images from this multimedia voyage were broadcasted daily on the internet and followed by a huge audience. One of Europe's leading publishing houses, Axel Springer, honoured Helge's coverage with the "Axel Springer Prize"; the news network CNN recognized his outstanding reporting with a "CNN Journalist Award".

Upon completion of the Mekong expedition, the two adventurers had become friends. A trip to the Zambezi - which Andy had visited 30 years earlier on his voyage with a Volkswagen van from Switzerland to South Africa - revealed that tropical diseases like the malaria that killed Livingstone as well as his wife Mary more than 100 years ago still prevail. Combining their experience in the fields of river navigation and media work, they created a project to support a good cause, a project that would fire the imagination of millions of people: an expedition as an advocacy vehicle to showcase the difficulties and successes in fighting malaria. Their intention is to bring medical care to remote places that are difficult to access and, through the involvement of journalists, to increase public awareness of the malaria epidemic along the river.



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Helge Bendl, journalist



- Helge Bendl was born in 1978 in Tübingen (Germany).
- After sociology, political science and journalism studies, he joined leading German Daily Süddeutsche Zeitung as a freelance journalist.
- Since 2004 he has been reporter for press agency Zeitenspiegel.
- He won the CNN award in 2006 for his coverage of the 2005 Mekong Expedition from Vietnam to China.

Andy Leemann, Boating expert



- Born in 1954, Andy Leemann is an archetype of a traveller and sportsman. Typical for a fellow from Switzerland, he started off with extended ski- and climbing tours.
- In his early 20s, he notably travelled from Switzerland all the way down to South Africa where he worked and lived for one year, and spent another year travelling in South America (Patagonia, the Andes, Amazon and Napo Rivers, just to name a few of the places visited).
- Andy Leemann also has many years of experience as a professional cruising and racing skipper on traditional as well as modern sailing vessels and accomplished more than 100.000 nautical miles.

