



BACKGROUNDER FOR PRESS RELEASE (March 20, 2006)

About the Worldwide Nature Artists Group (WNAG)

The Worldwide Nature Artists Group (WNAG) is the world's foremost international organization of nature artists, dedicated to the celebration and preservation of our natural heritage. The WNAG is internationally recognized for its prestige, elite pool of talent and the uniqueness of its innovative programs and activities. Membership is by invitation-only, through a juried process and is limited to 500 artists worldwide. It reads like a "Who's Who" of nature art, and includes the top names in the field, including Robert Bateman, John Banovich, Guy Coheleach, Glen Loates, Pollyanna Pickering, Gamini Ratnavira, Rosetta, and David Shepherd.

Using leading-edge communications technology, the WNAG furthers its mission of promoting nature art and supporting conservation, biodiversity, and sustainability globally, through artistic expression, education and innovative cross-disciplinary initiatives. Founded in 1997, the Group operates in a non-profit capacity and is committed to working cooperatively and creatively with other organizations that share the same concerns for our planet. For more information, visit www.natureartists.com.

About the WNAG Flag Expeditions Program

The WNAG Flag Expeditions Program was created to make possible the field study and artistic rendering of endangered species or habitats deserving of greater public attention. There will be a strong emphasis on the study of unique, threatened habitats, and rare or endangered species in remote parts of the world. WNAG Signature Members can apply to obtain financial support and the privilege of carrying the WNAG flag on their journey.

Upon return from the expedition, participating artists will be required to submit to the Foundation, a written journal and sketchbook of their journey, photos with the WNAG flag in situ, a signed flag and video footage when possible. The Foundation will provide funding, as well as prominent exposure in a growing number of venues including on the WNAG Web site, for each artist and each expedition.

Based on Foundation funding to-date, at least two Fellowships - each worth up to \$5,000 US - will be made available each year.

The first WNAG Flag Expedition was completed in January 2006, with artist David Kitler. Full coverage of this trip, including photographs and a complete exhibit of the David's Flag Journal, can be seen on the WNAG Web site.

WNAG Flag Expedition #2: "The Sacred Source – A Portrait of the Ganges"

David Rankin will sketch & paint his way throughout the headwaters region of the Ganges River system in the Indian Himalayas, from the high altitude glacial origins of the Ganges to the Elephant Forests along the southern slopes. This Garhwal region of the Himalayas is about the same size as America's Yellowstone National Park, and is home to a large variety of wildlife that Rankin will also be focusing on, such as elephants, tigers, snow leopards and spotted leopards and an enormous diversity of beautiful and exotic bird species.

With the contact assistance of his friend, David Ferguson, former Director of US Fish & Wildlife International Division, Rankin plans on working with many of the top conservation professionals in the Himalayas, such as the Wildlife Institute of India.

While David is focused on his intensive artistic efforts to sketch & paint the region's unique features, videographer, Dr. Mark Chambers, will be part of the expedition. He will record the adventure and create an interesting digital movie of their day-to-day travels and efforts. As local communications technology permits, video clips, photos and sketches of the journey will be posted to the WNAG Flag Expedition's official website.

David's Expedition will have the following key objectives:

- Creating a watercolor portrait of the Upper Ganges River system in the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalayas through sketches and paintings, focusing on the astounding beauty and complex nature of this fabled

region. He hopes to provide an artistic representation of the region that will help foster a greater respect for, and desire to, maintain and care for the area on into the future. This artistic focus has been very successful in helping to protect and care for America's Yellowstone National Park.

- Document the region-specific ecological and conservation challenges facing the Ganges River system including: A. The visible and tangible effects of tourism, including pilgrims and trekkers, industry, agribusiness, and increased infrastructure development. B. Observable evidence of glacial recession in this region and tangible effects on the Ganges headwaters C. Fragmentation of Himalayan elephant forests and its effect on the migratory patterns and genetic diversity in regional elephant, tiger, leopard, and bird populations. D. Shrinking botanical biodiversity throughout the region particularly in alpine meadows and especially the "Valley of the Flowers".
- Utilize the resulting body of artwork, research material, to further the mission of the WNAG, support conservation initiatives and educate the public to the challenges facing the ecology and species of the Ganges River region.

About David Rankin: Transparent & Plein Air Watercolors

David Rankin is a professional watercolor painter. He is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art and a successful author and lecturer. His watercolors have been featured in numerous watercolor books & magazines and in many one-man exhibitions, as well as in over 60 museum exhibitions across North America, Japan and Sweden.

David's painting style is based on what he calls "natural abstraction," in which he likes to develop realistic subjects using abstract design principles that he finds in nature.

"I perceive the world around me through a type of mental watercolor filter. I see a wet reflection on a street, the fractured glint of sunlight on water, sunlight off the surface of a peacock's neck, or grasses in a field and I instantly try to visualize how I would recreate that effect on paper... with the fewest possible strokes. If you study my paintings closely you will see that what may appear as complex detail from a distance, is in fact created from very simple brushstrokes using the natural impressionistic roughness of the painting surface to create the illusion of detail and form," David says.

His book "Fast Sketching Techniques," published by North Light Books, is one of the top books of its kind. He is presently working on a series of 3 new unique instructional books detailing his approach to transparent watercolor.

David is considered to be one of the most celebrated American Watercolor Painters to ever focus such a major professional effort on India. David has traveled all over India and spent his summers in Kashmir until the political trouble between India & Pakistan worsened. He has been travelling in India regularly since 1970, speaks a little Hindi, is a life-long practitioner of Yoga (was co-founder of the American Yoga Association and author of books on the subject), and has been a strict vegetarian since 1967.

In 1985 he began a major ongoing artistic project to paint India's remarkable diversity of wildlife beginning with her birds, (the world's 2nd largest variety of species), especially her magnificent storks & cranes. And this soon led to another major effort to paint all of India's big cats, (the world's largest diversity). His unique theme is to try and paint these species in their most natural habitats. To achieve this, he and his wife Deanna have traveled extensively throughout India on a regular basis studying all of India's wildlife. It is really David's love of nature that keeps him painting, whether it is landscapes or animals. He now has numerous landscape themes that he pursues, not only in India, but in America as well.

WNAG Flag Expedition #3: "The George River Boreal Forest Expedition"

WNAG Flag Expedition #3: "The George River Boreal Forest Expedition" will involve a group expedition to explore Arctic Quebec's George River and boreal forest region – migratory grounds for the George River woodland caribou herd – the world's largest at nearly one million animals. The Expedition's primary goal is to combine art, science and adventure to promote boreal forest conservation.

The expedition down the George River will comprise Signature Members of the WNAG including Robert Bateman and Lindsey Foggett. Also accompanying Mullen on this ambitious trek will be wilderness canoeists and photographers Gary & Joanie McGuffin, Dr. Stephen Loring of the Smithsonian Institution, and Dr. Jim Evans, an MD and Search and Rescue expert. It is scheduled for September 2006.

The George flows for 300 miles northward to Kangiqsualujjuaq on Ungava Bay, just west of the Torngat Mountains and the Labrador/Quebec border. To ensure a safe and effective art expedition Rob ran a reconnaissance trip in late 2005 to identify hazards, work out logistics for a large crew and establish a route and pace that will allow for painting, painting research and exploration. The preliminary trip involved a crew of 7, which included Foggett, the McGuffins, Dr. Evans plus WNAG President Jeff Whiting and World Champion kayaker Ken Whiting. Highlights of the reconnaissance trip included several brilliant displays of Northern Lights, stunningly rugged terrain and a good showing of wildlife including bears, caribou, wolverine, a wide range of bird species and a healthy supply of Black flies. As with the first trip, the 2006 expedition will occur close to peak fall foliage, offering a stunning display of color in the forest and interspersed tundra.

About Rob Mullen:

While earning his biology degree from the University of Vermont Robert's lab drawings landed extensive biological illustration work for his professors, and the suggestion that he go professional. After sixteen years in Manhattan as a freelance commercial artist (which included the 1990 Super Bowl logo for CBS), Robert returned to Vermont to focus full time on wildlife art in 1994. In 1995 he won the Vermont State Duck Stamp Competition. Since then he has won over 25 awards at more than 60 shows.

In New York City, his childhood love of canoes developed into a particular passion for wilderness trips. After returning to Vermont, Robert combined these annual expeditions with art by packing his field painting gear. In August 2001 he embarked on a 300-mile canoe trip to the Arctic Ocean on the Missinaibi River in northern Ontario. That initial journey has led, over the last few years, to the incorporation of the Wilderness River Expedition Art Foundation (WREAF) and annual canoe/painting expeditions in the wilderness of North America.

"My paddling expeditions and other forays into the wilderness of North America and Africa are critical for the reference, inspiration and stories behind my work," says Robert.

For More Information

Worldwide Nature Artists Group: www.natureartists.com
WNAG Flag Expeditions Program: www.natureartists.com/flagprogram
David Rankin: www.natureartists.com/david_rankin.asp
Rob Mullen: www.natureartists.com/robert_mullen.asp

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