

Don Mankin

Profile: Don Mankin

Age: 71

Education: BS in Electrical Engineering from Drexel University; MS and PhD in Psychology from Johns Hopkins University

Occupation(s): Travel Writer and Speaker, Organization Development Consultant

Family: Wife Katherine

Residences: Venice, CA



Searching for Orcas in the Johnstone Strait off Vancouver Island

How did you become a travel writer?

In the Fall of 2004, I was having dinner with my long time friend Ken Dychtwald, a highly acclaimed expert on the impact of the aging baby boomers. At that point, I had been an academic and business consultant for over 30 years.

After dinner I gave him a copy of my latest book. His response? "Stop writing this crap (not his word – he wasn't that polite). You should be writing about your travels." He explained that boomers were nearing retirement and becoming increasingly interested in travel, especially the kind of travel I had been telling him about for over 30 years – off the beaten track adventures that can change people's lives. I could make a decent living, he continued, and have a lot more fun telling people about these adventures

It didn't take much effort to convince me. To make a long story short, three years later National Geographic Books published my first

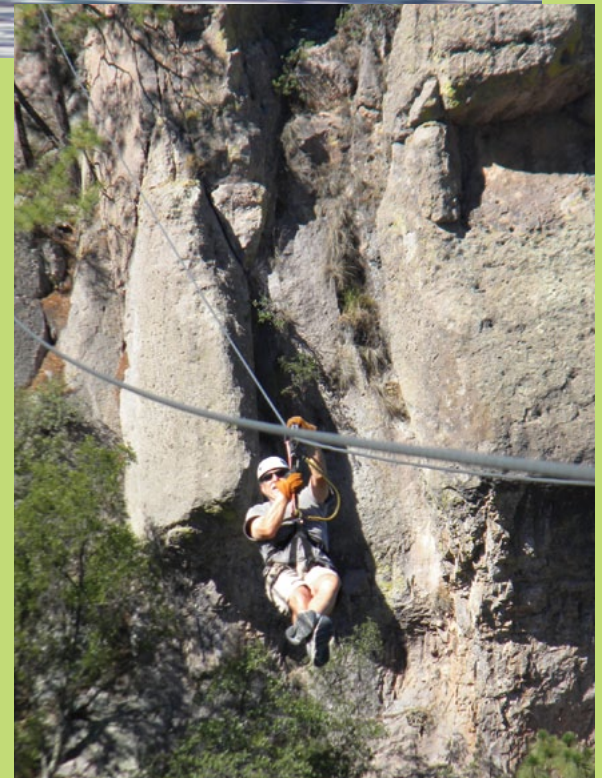
piece of travel writing, "Riding the Hulahula to the Arctic Ocean: Fifty Extraordinary Adventures for the Seasoned Traveler."

Since then I have been working almost full time as a travel writer with occasional returns to the academic and business worlds to teach a course or consult.

What are your top three trips?

I can't narrow it down to three. My favorite trips in my book are the rafting trip on the Hulahula River in northern Alaska from the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean (hence the title of the book), kayaking Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic, tracking mountain gorillas in Uganda, and camping in the interior of Antarctica.

More recent favorites include Australia, an expedition cruise to the Antarctic Peninsula, the Mountain Lodges of Peru trek in the Andes



Zippering over Cooper Canyon, Mexico

and climbing Ayun Tepui (a table top mountain) in Venezuela.

Most dangerous?

The Venezuela trip. It was very demanding, a hot and humid climb on rocky trails through the snake



Riding elephants with wife Katherine in northern Thailand

infested jungle. When we reached the top, after almost three days, it started pouring. At one point, we had to climb up the slanted face of a boulder which was now very slick from the rain. As I neared the top of the boulder, my feet slipped out from under me and I slid down the boulder and off the edge.

I had no idea how far down I would fall or what I would hit when I reached bottom. Fortunately, I fell only a dozen or so feet and landed in a pool of water lined with moss. I was soaking wet but uninjured. We finally made it over the boulders to our campsite. I was shaken and bruised but essentially OK.

I was very lucky. If I had fallen further and landed on rocks, someone else might now be writing travel articles for *ActiveOver50*.

Most remote?

That's easy. Antarctica, especially my first trip in 2002 to Patriot Hills camp in the interior. After a few days in the camp, a dozen of us decided that to escape the hustle and bustle of Patriot Hills we would head off on Skidoos and sleds and go camping about 15 miles away. We set up our tents at the base of a hill, ate dinner, stomped around a bit to keep warm, then climbed into our sleeping bags for the night.

I woke up before everyone else and climbed out of my tent. It was snowing. I couldn't see much of anything but I could make out the line defined by the edge between the gravel "beach" where we were camped and the sea of ice that extended into the distance. I realized that if I followed the line for a mile or so, it would take me around the hill to the other side, out of sight of our camp.

I shuffled off and in half an hour I was behind the hill. For 15 minutes, I just stood and watched the snow fall and listened to the rustle of the flakes and the pounding of my heart. I figure that for those 15 minutes I was probably the most remote person on earth.

Tips on traveling for boomers and seniors?

Don't depend on ratings of trip difficulty – e.g., easy, moderate, challenging, etc. You need more detailed information about the specific conditions and challenges of the trip. How rough is the trail, what is the elevation gain, are there lots of up and downs, what will you be sleeping in, are there private baths, etc.? You should ask specific questions about these and other

conditions. When possible, speak to people who have actually taken the trip like guides and former guests.

If it still sounds like the kind of trip you want to take, train for it, especially if it presents special physical challenges such as hiking long distances or paddling for several hours a day in a kayak. Hire a personal trainer and commit to going to the gym at least three times a week or pursue some other exercise



Taking a dip in the Mekong river in southern Laos

program that is appropriate for the trip. The better prepared you are for the trip, the more you'll enjoy it.

Besides writing and traveling to exotic locations, what are your favorite activities?

Eating exotic ethnic food, watching professional football on TV and listening to weird jazz. Kenny G. never reaches these ears if I can help it.

How do you stay fit and active?

I go to the gym 5 to 6 times a week and work out for close to three hours, divided almost evenly between cardio and low weight/high rep weight training. It's a major commitment and a pain in the butt but I figure I would be either dead or close to it if I didn't do it.

Does your wife accompany you?

She does unless the trips involve cold or rainy weather, sleeping in a tent or using rustic, outdoor toilets. If the trip offers great opportunities for shopping, she's definitely in.