

WE ARE SO FREE

Visiting the Dalai Lama with a water cannon?
Paddling around Canada on a raft? For sure!
Mario Goldstein keeps rediscovering life and
the world. It is contagious.

Interview
Stephan Glocker

Photos
Mario Goldstein
Ramona Goldstein
Patrick Schilbach



Bering Sea, here we come:
63 days on the Yukon.



“We did not really know what wilderness means. I was also apprehensive of animals, the vastness and nature.”

**MARIO GOLDSTEIN
LIVE AT
GLOBETROTTER**

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Mario, you sailed around the world for seven years, visited the Dalai Lama on a peace trip with a water cannon, and lately you crossed America from Newfoundland to the Bering Sea. Is your wanderlust the result of your time in jail in the GDR?

Mario Goldstein: It is the other way around, I went to jail because of my desire for freedom. We lived close to the German-German border, watched West German TV – “Dallas” was the best – and I was constantly aware of what was not allowed. When you live under such absolutism and there is no end in sight, you need to take freedom in your own hands. I talked about that when I was 15, the Stasi must have got to hear about it – and put me in jail for ten weeks, probably to knock the nonsense out of me.

Did the deterrent work?

At the beginning, yes, it scared me. My fear, however, turned into the realisation that I still wanted to get out and needed to think about how. When I was 18, I applied to leave the GDR. They kept me waiting, and then they announced: “Mr. Goldstein, you will never leave this place!” And I thought: Well, we will see.

Fleeing from the GDR?

The attempt. I was aware of part of the Czech-Austrian border with no minefields or spring guns. Instead, I touched a signal wire and the soldiers caught me just before the Austrian border. You do not keep running with a Kalashnikov in your back. They flew me from Prague to Berlin. That was my first flight: in handcuffs, but in a window seat.

And then back to jail?

Stasi custody, two and a half months of interrogation, the whole rigmarole. It ended with two years imprisonment. After six months, the FRG ransomed me and I went to West Germany. Only shortly afterwards, the wall came down. I initially swore – if I had waited one and a half years, I could have saved all that trouble. Of course, it was great though. I had left everything behind, family and friends. >>

Across North America with a converted water cannon vehicle to Dawson (bottom left), and then by raft to the Bering Sea.



"Little money but lots of love - I liked that."

Did you start travelling once you were free?

First, I wanted to earn a lot of money and become a millionaire – I might have watched too much "Dallas". After three weeks in West Germany, I had a job – as a driver. It was an old dream of mine to become a truck driver, I only drove around Stuttgart though. I quickly realised that my boss earned much more than his drivers. So I returned to East Germany and became self-employed specialising in insurance policies.

You learned to be a bricklayer in the GDR. How did everything work out as an entrepreneur?

It did not work out at all initially. After three years, I was broke. Looking back, it was not too bad, the insurance business was an interesting experience and I learned a lot at the training courses. After the low point, I started again – more carefully and cautiously – and then I was successful. First I won over an advertising agent, later a printer and a building business. Selling window cleaning devices was the most profitable however. The building business shut down after a while, the printer still exists.

I now see that period as an entrepreneur in a different light, but it was a good base for my next life.

You mean you saved up enough money?

At least some basic starting capital. Much more important was the realisation that such great business connections only function as long as you are successful. When the building business started struggling, nothing counted any more. That was the crucial experience – I started thinking. I noticed that I could not change anything by shutting down my company. I wanted to make completely new experiences. I dreamed about sailing, a new yearning. First, it was the west, and then it was freedom on the wide open sea. I did not have money for a boat but I found an American woman who was willing to put some money into an old catamaran. I went travelling with that boat for the next seven years.

It sounds so easy for you to let old things go and start new ones...

I grew up under ordinary circumstances, but always with lots of love from my mother and from my grandfather, who basically took on a fatherly role after my parents got divorced. We did not have much money but a lot of love – I always liked that. So when I notice that my emotions are drifting away from what I am doing, I can easily let go of everything. Material things – the house, the job – are often just an excuse, you need to realise that. My time as an entrepreneur was – when you think of it – the wrong track for me to take, but it was necessary. Another important experience is letting go of a re- >>



Always amongst the people: a Native American prepares salmon to dry.

EIN MOMENT, KEINE GRENZEN

18-400 mm F/3.5-6.3 Di II VC HLD

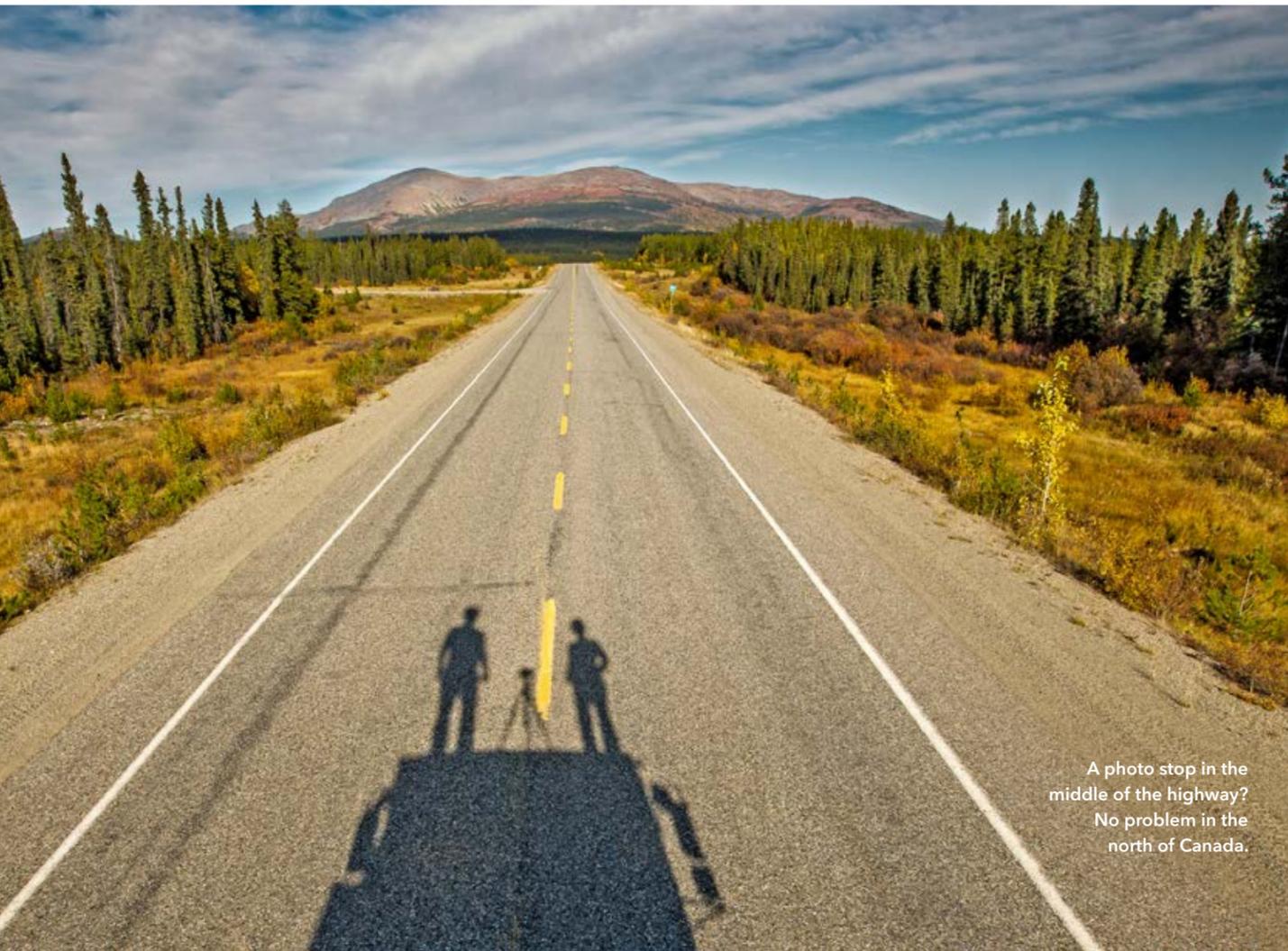
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„Gemacht für echte Kameras - Sorry Smartphone“

Das neue Megazoom-Objektiv von Tamron bietet unbegrenzt Fotografie-Vergnügen auf allen Reisen durch Wildnis und Großstadtdschungel. Mit einer Brennweite von 18-400 mm – das entspricht einem 22,2x Zoom – kann kein Smartphone mithalten. Reise grenzenlos mit Tamron.

Für digitale Spiegelreflexkameras mit APS-C-Sensor von Canon und Nikon. Bilder zeigen reale Brennweite, schematische Objektivlänge ist nur beispielhaft dargestellt.



A photo stop in the middle of the highway? No problem in the north of Canada.

“The Stasi put me in jail for ten weeks when I was 15. Probably to knock the nonsense out of me.”

lationship. My first wife did not warm to the idea of sailing. In the end, we broke up.

You spent seven years on all oceans. What's paradise?

A “Good Life” – that is also the name of our boat. Over a long time I was very happy with my new girlfriend Yvonne and later on, with our daughter. At one point though, even a catamaran becomes a bit small and we wanted a change. We tried the country life in Brasil, in the Caribbean and Mallorca. There, I wanted to offer sailing tours but that was not so easy as the market was already rigorously carved out. Yvonne started thinking about returning to Germany.



Time for a big cut again?

Exactly. Our idea was to enjoy the remaining months where we were, sell the boat, return to Germany and earn money with presentations. Another business I had no idea of. But we came up with the presentation “5 years – 5 seas” which is still running.

Was it not a difficult move from the sea to the mainland?

We're back to the subject of letting go. It just felt right and when you have new plans in your head, old stuff is just in your way. That's how I came up with the water cannon.

Water cannon - like at Stuttgart 21?

I need to explain. I read a lot about Buddhism and the Dalai Lama. I wanted to visit him – it was just another of those ideas. While looking for the right vehicle – four wheel drive, a lot of room and affordable – I found a water cannon vehicle online. It was love at first sight: We wanted to go on a peace mission with what was once a battle vehicle.

What did Dalai Lama have to say about that?

(laughs) He had no idea what was headed his way. I made a proper project out of it all and collected around 1,000 messages of peace – pupils, adults – who all wrote down their wishes and ideas for the Dalai Lama. Everything went into the Book of Peace, a four-volume book which I gave to the Dalai Lama personally in his Indian residence at the end of the 12,000 kilometre long journey. The Dalai Lama also had a message for us.



Great freedom after prison and work: Mario lived on the catamaran for seven years.

I have told this story in a film, a presentation and a book – with a personal introduction by Dalai Lama. It all worked well and I had a whole lot of fun.

Soon, you will be touring through the Globetrotter stores with an even bigger journey: across North America, from Newfoundland to the Bering Sea. Did you travel in a water cannon vehicle again?

Of course – we shipped it to Newfoundland and travelled for six months from Dawson City in Yukon over a dis-

tance of 12,000 kilometres. We built a raft for the second stage: 3,000 kilometres along the Yukon River to the Bering Sea. The presentation is called “Sehnsucht Wildnis” – yearning for the wilderness. The name fits well, because my current wife Ramona and I started out as greenhorns. Although I have sailed around the world and driven all the way to India, I had no experience of the far north. That is part of the adventure. So we just set off at Cape Spear, the most easterly point in North America. I thought thousands of icebergs would be floating around the Atlantic, but we had to travel far out with our boat to see some. At the same time, we had an encounter with a humpback whale – my first whale, even though I had been at sea for seven years.

Newfoundland, Labrador, Manitoba are not on the list of many travellers going to Canada. What did you expect in no-man's-land?

We did not really know what wilderness really meant. I was also a little apprehensive of wild animals, the vastness, the loneliness and the incredible power of nature. It worried us. We met hermits and visited people like Mike McIntosh who has 18 brown bears.

You learn and experience the most when you come into contact with people on your travels. After 1,500 kilometres, I complained that – in the country of elks – I had not yet seen a single elk. A local was so amused that he travelled with us for a bit and in no time at all he pointed out eight elks. Not directly on the roadside but only a little way into the bush. So we moved into the wilderness step by step. Later on, elks and one or two bears were a common sight every day. We talked to experts on wolves, went off with American Natives stalking buffalo and visited a bear station. And so things just happened, all across Canada. >>



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MAKE LIFE A RIDE.



Not only the animals are wild in the Yukon region. Behaviour might be a bit rough in the bush, but always sincere.



Training with the locals: Mario travelled with Native Americans, visited bear experts and adventurers.



Were you ready for the big Yukon River adventure when you arrived in Dawson City?

The old gold mining town of Dawson City was where we wanted to meet the German dropout Holger Haustein. He used to do ski jumping with Jens Weißflog, is now know as Driftwood Holly and lives in the bush. Lots of dropouts and hedonists live in the Yukon territory, it's worth a visit for that reason alone. We didn't come up with the idea of paddling down the Yukon until we were in Dawson. We saw people sailing down the river. So it clicked again. Winter was approaching though. So we decided to return the following year and do the complete Yukon. Not just the usual stretch of water from Whitehorse to Dawson but the whole route through Alaska to the Bering Sea - where you can almost see all the way to Russia.

3,000 kilometres on a raft through Canada and Alaska is a bit more challenging than a road trip with a water cannon vehicle...

Exactly. Independent and always in the middle of it all - the wilderness, storms, bears. Looking back, the trip with the water cannon vehicle basically served as a training trip. That's just how things often come together on such journeys.

Did you have experience in designing a raft?

No. But after a long time doing online research, I found Chris who knows the Yukon very well, and who has built a raft before. He gave me lots of tips and important >>

"There are heaps of hedonists in the Yukon region, that fact alone makes the journey worthwhile."

I TAKE WITH ME

EQUIPMENT FOR THE NEXT WILDERNESS TOUR



(1) A must when on the river: a handy axe for fire wood, to chop through obstacles or make repairs to the raft - like the Hultafors Classic Trekkingbeil.

(2) Always at my side: the Leatherman Wave, the miniature tool box. The missing corkscrew is no problem in America - they only have screw tops ;-)

(3) Wardrobe on board (also in the plane): The Ortlieb Rack-Pack can hold lots of luggage, it is sturdy and waterproof.

(4) The Rack Pack's handy relative. Waterproof bags like the Ortlieb Packsack PD350 also keep the smell inside: At night, you can put food and cosmetics inside, hang it up on a rope between two trees - and the bears will not notice.

(5) No trip into the wilderness without a tarp. With the FRILUFTS CALLAN TARP, you have a dry shelter for breaks or bivouacs in no time at all. It can also be used to provide sun protection or as a sail - don't forget the guy lines.

(6) Morakniv Bushcraft is not only a superb all-round knife but is also safe with wet hands.

(7) With three different blades, the Outdoor Edge Pack Saw cuts through metal, wood and bones.

(8) Never without my compass! The Swedish Silva Expedition is state of the art.



As a round-the-world yachtsman, water cannon vehicle mechanic and wildness raft builder, Mario Goldstein knows the value of a good tool.

>> More equipment for your next wilderness tour on www.globetrotter.de

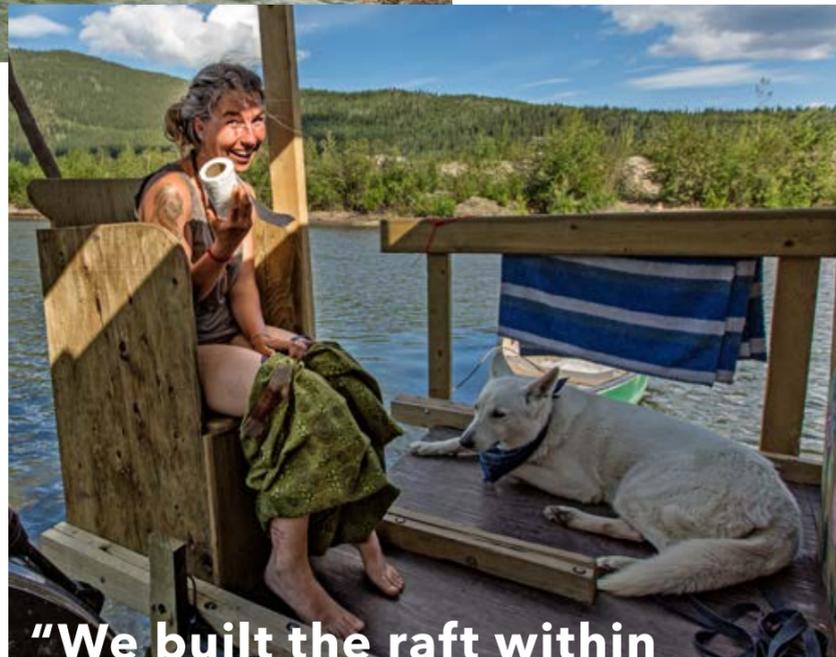


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The Five Finger Rapids are one of the key sections of the 3,000 kilometre long Yukon river trip.



"We built the raft within three weeks. Then we set off."

The dream of the vast expanse. You only need to set off and live your dream.



<< INTERVIEW >>

materials. At Lake Laberge in Whitehorse, we built the raft within three weeks. Then we set off. On the first stretch to Dawson City there are many little towns along the Yukon where you can buy more supplies or drink a beer. That was perfect to get used to the swing of things.

How was life on board?

Mostly very relaxed. There was just the three of us: Ramona, Patrick – a friend from Germany – and me. And the dog. Once we also took somebody else on board: a dropout who was stranded on an island and had been waiting for help for two days. We had a 15 horsepower outboard motor on board but often we just drifted and enjoyed the monumental nature. At night, we tethered the raft to the river bank. Mike, the bear expert, had told us that bears would not go near moving objects and that they would probably not climb onto a raft. I will never know if that is true but I felt reasonably safe – and we did not get any unexpected visitors.

Was the raft comfortable?

Yes, indeed. We had a canopy which protected us from sun and rain. It got bent a bit but it worked. We also had a canoe to use for photographing and filming, and we could store a lot of equipment in it. Only a heater was missing. We tried to heat the raft with gas once, but it did not work. We only had three cartridges for cooking. When they were empty, American Natives gave us two full ones. I really love such gestures when travelling.

There were no problems on the river?

Not really with the wilderness, and my river navigation profited from my time as a sailor. The GPS track from Chris was very handy, especially in the Yukon Flats – the river branches out into a system 400 kilometres long and 30 kilometres wide. There is no official main waterway. Sometimes, we stood on the roof only to see which way we could go next. Of course, we also had a little crisis. Ramona wanted to continue drifting slowly through nature, but I wanted to speed up a bit so we could complete the trip before winter came. If you do not arrive, you might have a story but not a happy end. And when you start something like this, you also want to finish it. So we sat together and came to a compromise.

Are you going to tell us the end?

(laughs) Sure. The closer we got to the Bering Sea, the more difficult it became. Sometimes we had to wait for storms to pass. There were problems with the en- >>



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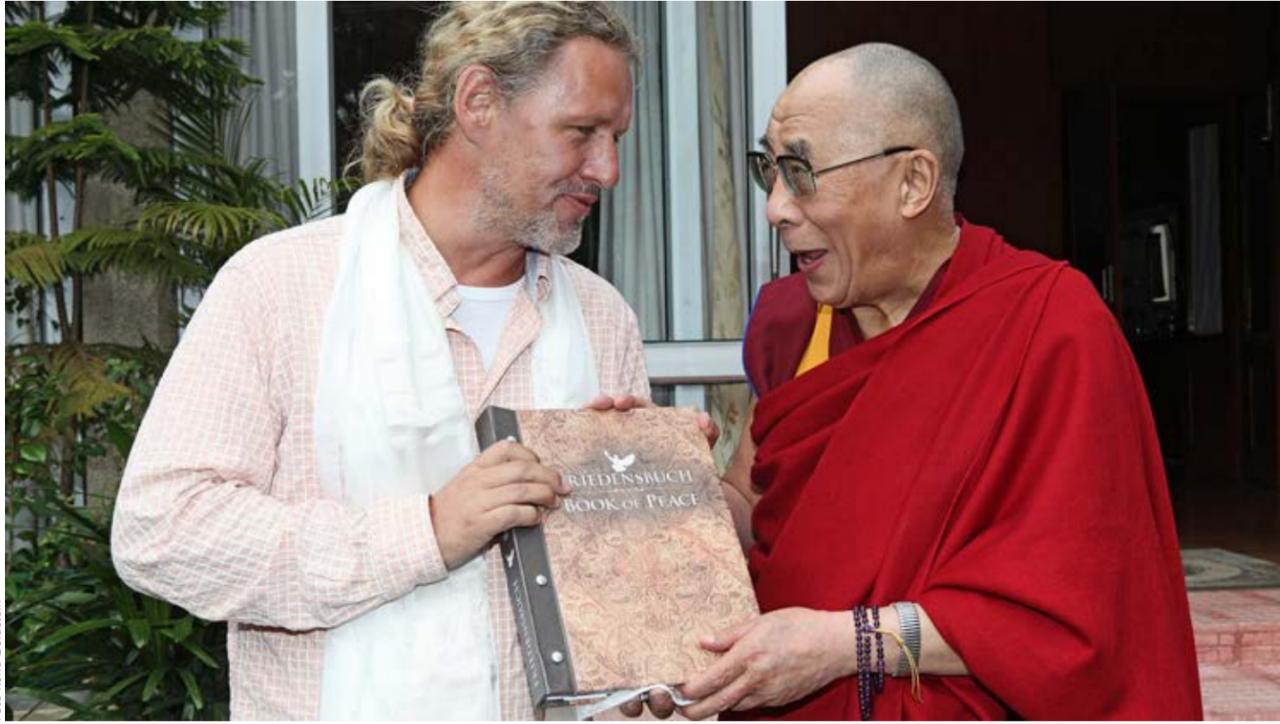


Foto: Rene Goldstein

Mario went to India before his North America crossing – to visit the Dalai Lama.

gine. We stranded on sandbanks. But on the 3rd of September, we arrived at the Bering Sea. I will never forget the last night, protected from the wind in a small arm of the river: we shared the last beer and watched the glimmering northern lights in the sky. It was like a goodbye ceremony.

What happened with the raft?

We put it on stilts in a little town near the source and gave it away. It is now probably some kind of children's playground.

What's your conclusion on "Sehnsucht Wildnis"?

You can fulfil your dreams. We did. And others can do it too. That is the message.

Mario, we are doing this interview in your office in Plauen. With your company Freiträumer, you organise festivals, events and presentations, also for other people like Willi Wetzel and Markus Lanz. Have you now arrived home after your years of travelling?

The prison they put me in when I was 15 is just around the corner, only one hundred metres away. It has been converted into a vocational college. So you could say that we've come full circle – in a good way. And my next project will also be about my homeland and my personal story: About the old inner-German border strip – and about freedom. <<

MORE ABOUT MARIO GOLDSTEIN

Presentations at Globetrotter

In the following months, Mario Goldstein is touring through the Globetrotter stores with "Sehnsucht Wildnis". Find further presentations and all the dates on www.mario-goldstein.de

Freiträumer events

Mario organises presentation days and festivals in his home city of Plauen. Next dates: 19.11., 26.11., 11.3.18 (Chemnitz), 23.-25.3.18. Info: www.freitraeumer-festival.de

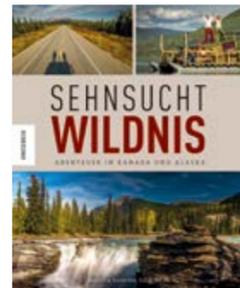
Films & books

On www.mario-goldstein.de, you can get the DVDs on his projects and the

book "Der Freiträumer" in which Mario tells his life story.

Book about the tour in April 2018

In April 2018, Knesebeck Verlag will publish "Sehnsucht Wildnis", the book all about the North America crossing.



Jack
Wolfskin

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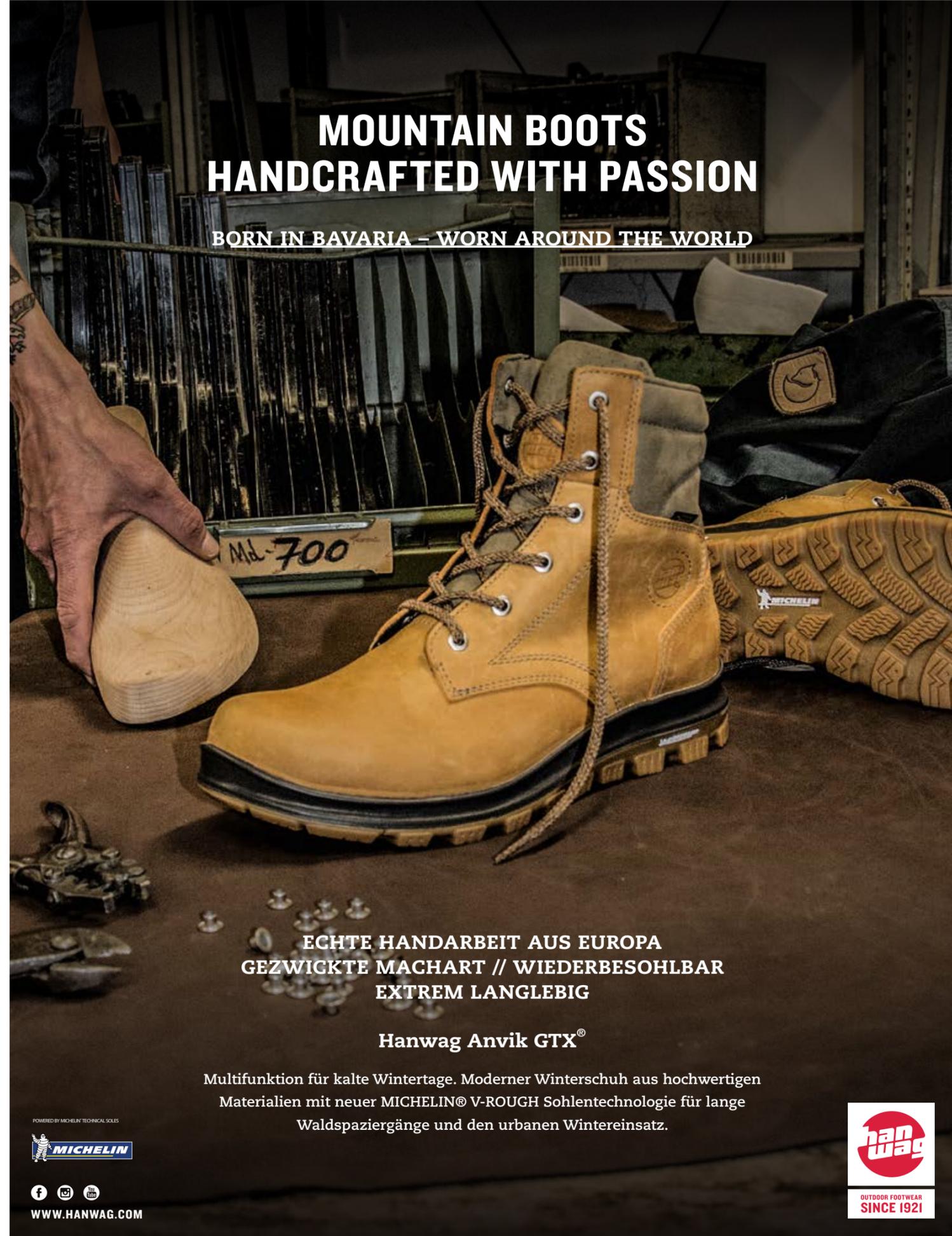


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