

JON TURK

AUTHOR-EXPLORER-ADVENTURER

SHORT BIO:

Jon Turk received his Ph.D. in chemistry in 1971 and wrote the first environmental science textbook in North America. Shortly thereafter, he left academia to engage in extreme expeditions in remote parts of the world—a life’s passion that has continued for 40 years. Jon’s two-year kayak passage across the North Pacific Rim was named by *Paddler Magazine* as one of the “ten greatest sea kayaking expeditions of all times.” His 1,485-mile, 104-day circumnavigation of Ellesmere Island with extreme kayaker Erik Boomer was nominated by *National Geographic* as one of the Top Ten Adventures of 2011. It was also awarded “Expedition of the Year” by *Canoe and Kayak Magazine*, was reported on the front page of the *New York Times*, and received First Prize in Print Journalism in the Northern Lights Awards in 2013.

Among his many adventures on four continents, he has kayaked across the North Pacific and around Cape Horn, mountain biked through the Gobi desert, made first climbing ascents of big walls on Baffin Island, and made first ski descents in the Tien Shan Mountains in Kyrgyzia.

But the greatest journey Jon has followed is a passage from science into the realm of events that science cannot explain. Jon chronicles his world-class journeys and his mental and spiritual passages in a trilogy of books: *Cold Oceans*, *In The Wake of the Jomon*, and *The Raven’s Gift*. His next book, *Crocodiles and Ice*, will be published in 2015. He speaks frequently on spiritual, environmental, adventure, and motivational themes, and he has been featured as a performance artist and storyteller with Weber Dance, in *Synchronicity and the Sacred Space*, based on his journey in *The Raven’s Gift*. More at: www.jonturk.net

BOOKS IN BRIEF:

Cold Oceans is an exploration of the mind-set of expedition success.

In The Wake of the Jomon takes a close look at the spirit of human migration, framed in a personal kayak journey across the Pacific Ocean.

The Raven’s Gift chronicles the teachings of one of the last Siberian Shamans who was born into a Stone-Age existence.

Crocodiles and Ice (pub. 2015) will be a spiritual journey into environmentalism.

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LONG BIO:

For forty years, Jon Turk has wandered through exotic and remote landscapes and returned to write and speak about his adventures, the people, and the environments encountered. He was trained as a scientist and worked for decades in environmental education. Now, he is focused on storytelling as a way of raising awareness of cultural and environmental tipping points — and thereby seeking some level of sanity and sustainability in this oil soaked, internet crazed world.

Jon grew up on the shores of a wooded lake in Connecticut, attended Phillips Academy, Andover and then Brown University. He earned a Ph.D. in organic chemistry at the University of Colorado in 1971. The same year, in honor of Earth Day 1, he co-authored the first environmental science textbook in the United States. It sold 100,000 copies and spearheaded the development of environmental science curricula in North America.

At the same time, hounded by restless spirits, he began wandering the globe, visiting people and places that were far from his childhood upbringing. Over the decades, he has kayaked across the North Pacific and around Cape Horn, mountain biked through the Gobi desert, made first climbing ascents of big walls on Baffin Island, and made first ski descents in the Tien Shan Mountains in Kyrgyzia.

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Jon chronicles his world-class journeys and personal mental and spiritual passages in a trilogy of three books: *Cold Oceans*, *In the Wake of the Jomon*, and *The Raven's Gift*. His next book, *Crocodiles and Ice*, will be published in 2015. He has been a contributor to numerous magazines, including *OUTSIDE*, *Canoe and Kayak*, *Sea Kayaker*, *Paddler*, *Sailing*, *American Alpine Journal*, *Rock and Ice*, and *Walrus*. He writes and speaks frequently on the vital importance of our relationship with natural environments in this oil-soaked, internet-crazed civilization, as well as about his outer adventures, inner spiritual explorations, and other motivational topics. He has also been featured as a performance artist and storyteller with Weber Dance, a modern dance troupe which portrays his Siberian journey in *Synchronicity and Sacred Space*. And, he offers longer workshops and corporate talks and training upon request.

In 1980 he married Chris Seashore, and together they lived in a small house in the Montana forest and shared many journeys. Together they have three children and six grandchildren. Chris died in an avalanche in March, 2005. In September 2006, he met Nina Maclean whom he subsequently married in 2011. They spend winters in Fernie, B.C., near great skiing, and they enjoy summers in the woods in Darby, feasting on fresh vegetables from Nina's garden.

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BOOKS:

A novelist creates fictional characters and moves them through an imaginary landscape. Over the past fifty years, Jon Turk has wandered through real landscapes, full of joy and wonder and often fraught with physical hardship and danger. His books recount this physical and spiritual journey from the chemistry laboratory, to his career as a textbook writer, to the present — where he explores the beauty and functional utility of alternative ways of perceiving and living in this world.

Cold Oceans: Adventures in Kayak, Rowboat, and Dogsled (1998)

Cold Oceans is a story of love, self-discovery, and an exuberant passion for wild places. Guided by his restless spirit and fueled by tales of Elizabethan explorers, Jon Turk first heads off to kayak alone around Cape Horn. But while he is paddling through the rain and mists a raging storm scuttles his plans.

On his next expedition, he and his partner, Chris Seashore, attempt to row the Northwest Passage in a single season, but find themselves more often dragging than rowing their skiff through the half-frozen, gelatinous sea. As they are bogged down by heavy sea ice, Jon became frustrated and asked, “Maybe we could reach Pond Inlet if we could just get going; if the trip would finally get underway.” Chris answered, “Jon, the trip isn’t going to start; it has started. This is the trip. Can’t you see that even now?”

Two years later, he attempts to run a dog team up the east coast of Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic, making his final camp beneath a wind varnished iceberg locked into a frozen sea. On his fourth expedition, he’s again joined by Chris as they paddle sea kayaks along an ancient Inuit migration route from Ellesmere Island to Greenland. Following the footsteps of old ways, and listening to the land, its people, and its ghosts, they make the treacherous crossing but also find the goal within the journey.

Seventeen years after his first expedition and shipwreck, Jon returned to Cape Horn with a partner, Mike Latendresse. Working together and dodging storms, the pair rounded The Horn a day after Jon’s 51st birthday.

In the Wake of the Jomon: Stone Age Mariners and a Voyage Across the Pacific (2005)

In the Wake of the Jomon is a tapestry of a grand adventure story and an anthropological quest into what makes us human. It was a finalist in the 2005 Banff Book Competition. In 1999 and 2000, adventurer Jon Turk and partners sailed a small trimaran and paddled a sea kayak from Japan to Alaska. *Paddler Magazine* called this voyage “One of the Ten All-Time Greatest Sea Kayak Expeditions.”

In the Wake of the Jomon tells the story of the modern expedition and looks backward at Stone Age mariners who paddled these waters over 10,000 years ago. The book asks, “Why did people

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with primitive stone tools leave their homes in the lush temperate bamboo forests, with salmon in the rivers and deer in the forests, to paddle into the frozen Arctic during the Ice Age?”

Jon argues that to understand our ancestors, we must appreciate their spirituality as well as their pragmatism. **In the Wake of the Jomon** combines a modern adventure with an anthropological quest into Stone Age migration, skeletal remains, archaeological mysteries, and the eternal urge to explore.

The Raven's Gift: A Scientist, A Shaman, and Their Remarkable Journey Through the Siberian Wilderness (2010)

Framed by high adventure across the vast and forbidding Siberian landscape, **The Raven's Gift** is a life-altering vision of the ties between the natural and spiritual realms, informed by one man's awakening and guided by the ancient Spirit Bird who soars above us on wide black wings.

In the remote Siberian village of Vyvenka, the harshest of lands, Jon Turk met Moolynaut, a shaman of the Koryak people. A year later, Moolynaut entreated the spirit of a great black raven to help mend Jon's injured pelvis. As a scientist, he could find no rational explanation for the healing so he traversed the frozen tundra where Moolynaut was born, camping with bands of reindeer herders, and recording stories of their lives and spirituality.

Moolynaut was born in a skin tent on the Siberian tundra during the reign of Czar Nicholas II. She not only survived, but maintained her spirituality through the Bolshevik revolution, the entire rise and fall of the Soviet Empire, and the bandito capitalism of Perestroika. She asked Jon to tell her story, which is the story of all indigenous people, from the jungles of the Amazon and Melanesia to the high Arctic.

“I wanted to cut my deer free and lead it into the autumn tundra. I saw myself alone, with the young bull, huddled behind an outcrop of rock as the first snows swept across the land. I would lead the bull to rich pasture and it would protect me. We would grow old and strong together. But this was just a dream. I was a little girl and my father was on the beach, counting rifles.” ~ Moolynaut

Through her teachings, his own adventures, and the patient conversations of many men and women, Jon has begun to see the world as our ancestors saw it, sustainable and full of wonder. Slowly, he is realizing that the lessons and experiences we learn from the people who live in wilderness — and ultimately from Wilderness itself — can guide us through our passages in this oil-soaked, internet-crazed, madcap world.

ANTHOLOGIES

“Kayaking the Solomon Islands Chain” for [*The Modern Explorers*](#), edited by Robin Hanbury-Tenison and Robert Twigger; published by Thames and Hudson, 2013.

“A World of Ice” about the Ellesmere circumnavigation for the Banff Press anthology, [*Rock, Paper, Fire*](#), edited by Marni Jackson and Tony Whittome, 2013. This book is reviewed in the [National Geographic Adventure Blog](#).

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