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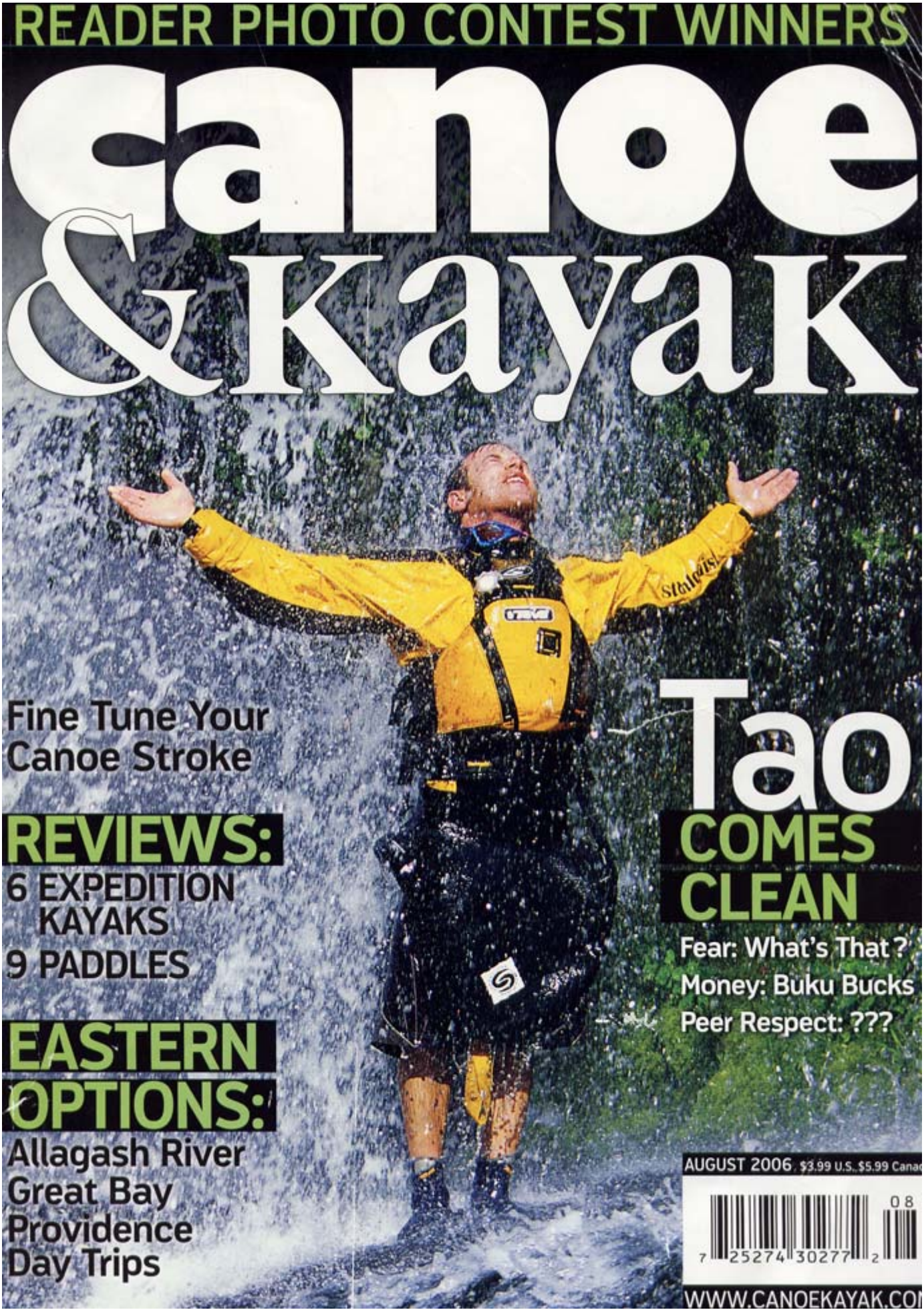

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Adriatic Crossing

An arresting development halts first-ever attempt.

> FIGHTING A FORMER COMMUNIST government bureaucracy was not on our agenda when Shane Braddock and I planned the first unsupported sea-kayak crossing of the Adriatic Sea. However, our trip started and ended with threats of arrest from the harbormaster in the Croatian city of Split.

Eventually the harbormaster relented and said we could go if we were accompanied by a support vessel. A friend offered his yacht, and two days later we were granted permission. However, it stipulated that we could not leave Croatian waters. By that time, we didn't care. We were going to Italy with or without permission—or so we thought.

On our first day, we arrived at Vis Island after 28 miles of paddling. We were greeted by a small cluster of people and reveled in our 15 minutes of Croatian fame.

We launched early the next morning for a 45-mile open-water crossing. The wind strengthened to 25 knots, producing 10-foot breaking swells. Palagruza appeared on the horizon after nine hours of difficult paddling.

We landed and walked up the long hill to the lighthouse, where its keeper said, "Welcome, I saw you on TV and knew you were coming."

We shared a meal in his home, perched at the edge of a cliff on a tiny islet in the middle of the Adriatic. We had completed the most difficult part of the expedition; now we faced the "illegal" crossing to Italy.

We left the next morning and were nearly halfway across when the harbormaster radioed for our position. When we identified our location, he threatened us with a police launch, arrest, fines, and jail. Sitting on perfect paddling seas, imagining the aroma of Italian espresso wafting on the breeze, we made the difficult decision to sail back to Split.

The local media swarmed us when we docked. I expressed my happiness about completing the journey to Palagruza, and disappointment that we were prevented from reaching Italy. Shane was less forgiving, calling the officials petty bureaucrats and automatons who would have made former Yugoslav dictator Tito very proud.

—Ray Fusco