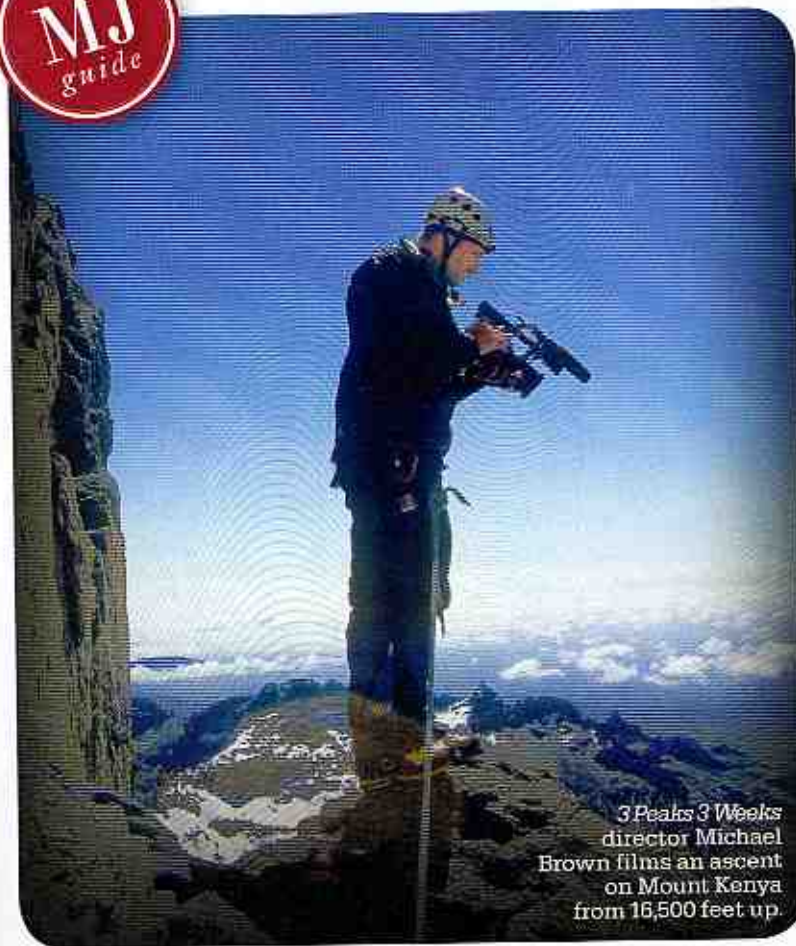
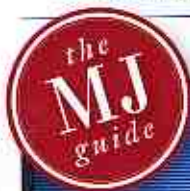


HOW TO MAKE AN ADVENTURE VIDEO

Whether you're summiting Denali or paddling down your local river, you've got the makings of a movie. We asked three of the world's best documentary filmmakers for tips on how you can earn a standing ovation — even if it's only in your living room.



3 Peaks 3 Weeks director Michael Brown films an ascent on Mount Kenya from 16,500 feet up.

➤ STEP 1: PLAN

Just because you don't have a script doesn't mean you shouldn't be prepared. Know what you want to shoot and what to expect on location.

✕ THINK IT THROUGH

"Write an outline beforehand. Come up with different concepts for the film, including action, location, and scenes. Buy a corkboard, index cards, and pushpins. Write your various scene ideas on the cards and move them around on the board. Think through transitions and picture how you want the final product to look." —CURT MORGAN

✕ BRING PROTECTION

"Keep a couple of garbage bags in your camera case. When it rains, make a hole in the bottom that's just big enough for the lens. Then you can operate the controls by reaching through the bag's opening. Also, a cold camera attracts condensation, so wrap it in plastic when you move from a cold to a warm environment." —MICHAEL BROWN

✕ KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT

"We had 5,000 pounds of camera gear and only one and a half rafts to carry it. We put together a plan for what would fit where — that way we weren't surprised. Keep stuff you need most on top, though you'll inevitably have to dig to find gear that's on the bottom." —SHAUN MACGILLIVRAY

✕ SCOUT YOUR LOCATION

"We got as much information about the area as we could beforehand. There are two things you need to be cognizant of when scouting a shoot: the weather and where the sun will be. Don't shoot into the sun or you won't see people's faces. Look for the best places to film, but also the logistics behind the shot — things like how to get there and if cell phones work." —S.M.

OUR EXPERTS



MICHAEL BROWN
The Serac Adventure Films president has spent hours clinging to mountainsides while shooting award winners such as *Light of the Himalaya*.



SHAUN MACGILLIVRAY
He produced 2008's *Grand Canyon Adventure: River at Risk* using a 350-pound camera, a crew of paddlers, and Robert F. Kennedy Jr.



CURT MORGAN
He directed last year's snowboard doc *That's It, That's All*, starring X Games gold medalist Travis Rice. It won Best Film at the X-Dance Film Festival.

STEP 2: SHOOT

Being behind the camera means finding the best way to capture the action from the viewer's perspective.



SHOOT THE ACTION FROM MULTIPLE SIDES
 “Even if you only have one camera, you can make it look like you’ve got seven. Film your friend, say, hitting a jump, then have him do the same jump a few more times, shooting from different angles.” —C.M.

VARY YOUR SHOTS

“Variety is the key for a good editable sequence. The biggest beginner mistake is to shoot all the same distance and focal length to the subject. Get wide shots to establish the location and key characters, move in for medium shots, and, finally, get close-up detail shots to really convey what’s happening. Hold each shot for a minimum of 10 seconds. And don’t continually pan with your subject. Editing will be a lot easier if your subject moves through the frame and then off the edge.” —M.B.

FILM DURING DUSK OR DAWN

“Try to shoot in the early morning or late afternoon. The low sun casts longer, more dramatic shadows than during the day, and the light is softer. The best light often comes after a storm passes, especially in the evening. If the light isn’t working, a reflector or even a headlamp can work in a pinch.” —M.B.

MOVE YOUR CAMERA

“When you zoom, you’re compressing the frame. Instead,

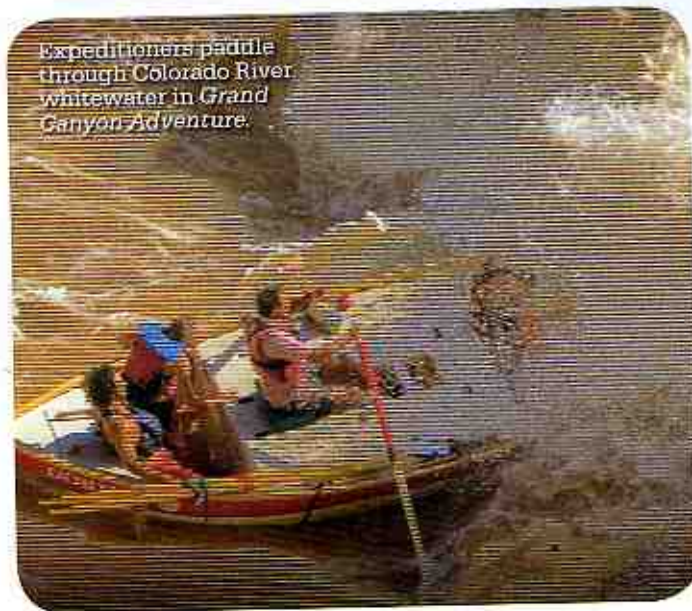
move your camera, which will change the depth of field. It might not be that perceptible to the audience, but it’s a great effect. You can put a slider plate on a tripod and move the camera forward, backward, or side to side smoothly.” —S.M.

KEEP YOUR INTERVIEWS CASUAL

“Make your characters feel comfortable. Get candid moments. Ask questions off the cuff. Squeeze emotion out of spontaneous moments.” —S.M.

WORK FOR THE BEST SHOT

“On the Colorado the perfect angle was always the most difficult place to reach. We’d spend hours getting to a rock cliff, but it was always worth it. At Nankoweap we took four hours carrying our camera 1,000 feet up a hill. Everyone said we couldn’t do it, but it was one of our best shots. We even kept it there for a time-lapse shot throughout the night.” —S.M.



KILLER SHOTS



SNOWBOARDING
 “Instead of standing on the lip of a jump and shooting your buddy at takeoff, try standing far away and looking at it from an angle. Climb a tree and shoot the rider from above, or follow your buddy down the hill with a helmet-mounted camera.” —C.M.



RIVER RUNNING

“River trips are great for time-lapse shots, even when the river’s not the main subject. You can shoot things like storms, setting up camp, and floating downstream. Use a tripod, compose the shot, and hit RECORD. You can get good stuff in 30 minutes. Figure out in the edit room how much to speed it up.” —S.M.



CLIMBING

“There are plenty of famous summit shots that could have been filmed somewhere else. To make sure yours isn’t one of them, shoot surrounding features that leave no doubt about your location. On Everest, I make a point to shoot Lhotse and Cho Oyu.” —M.B.

STEP 3: EDIT

Use programs such as iMovie (Mac; free) or, for more control, Adobe Premiere Pro (Mac and PC; \$800).

✂️ PACE IT PROPERLY

"We put strong scenes at the beginning, middle, and end, and everything else is filler. If the movie is powerful throughout, you wouldn't appreciate those scenes as much as if it led up to those points." —C.M.

✂️ DON'T OVERNARRATE

"Narration is good for transitions and giving facts, but don't let it be too heavy. Let characters provide emotion, background, and inspiration." —S.M.

✂️ USE MUSIC SPARINGLY

"Sometimes it actually works best to kill the music and just run the rumbling of the river. It allows the audience to feel moved." —S.M.

STRETCH THE GOOD SCENES



"Find your best sequences and play them longer rather than sticking in as much stuff as possible." —S.M.

STEP 4: SHARE

Eventually you'll have to break your movie free from the computer and show it to actual people.

✂️ SKIP YOUTUBE

"YouTube might get more eyeballs, but Vimeo HD (vimeo.com) looks better. Use the website's instructions to compress and export the video from your editing software to match their format." —C.M.

of copies, bring the disc to your local copy center, and they'll make as many as you want." —C.M.

✂️ EDIT AGAIN

"We have focus groups watch and rate up to 30 segments, then fill out a survey to gauge what works. Invite a group of friends over to watch and discuss the rough cut. Ask them what they like best and play on that. Don't forget the beer." —S.M.

✂️ BURN A DVD

"If you want a quick one-off, use iDVD software on a Mac, or DVD Studio Pro for more professional options. If you want to make a lot

CONTRIBUTORS: Eugene Buchanan, Josh Fulmer, Megan Michelson, Chuck Tannert



THE DOCUMENTARIAN'S KIT

Serac Adventure Films (seracfilms.com) partner and cinematographer DAVID D'ANGELO lists the gear you'll need to film your own adventure.



▲ MANFROTTO TRIPOD SYSTEM

The carbon-fiber 190C.3 tripod is lightweight yet strong, and the 501HDV head smoothly pans and tilts, but the key piece is the 556B leveling center column, which takes the annoyance out of leveling a shot. [tripod, \$280; 501HDV, \$207; 556B, \$123; bogenimaging.us]

◀ V.I.O. POV.I HELMET CAMERA

It's pricey, but no other helmet cam can handle barreling down Class III rapids or getting beaten against a craggy wall as well as the waterproof and shock-resistant POV.I. "We used it with amazing results on *Deadliest Catch*," says D'Angelo. [\$700; vjo-pov.com]



▲ SONY HDR-XR520V HANDYCAM

D'Angelo likes this model because it can record video to its built-in 250GB hard drive or a Memory Stick Pro Duo flash card. "A Memory Stick is more stable than hard drives," says D'Angelo, "so you don't have to worry about losing your film if you drop your camera." [\$1,500; sencytyle.com]

▶ SCHNEIDER .55X WIDE ANGLE LENS ADAPTER 37MM

The field of view on a camcorder is so narrow, "it's like shooting through a toilet paper tube," says D'Angelo. The Schneider allows for panoramic vistas. [\$150; schneideroptics.com]



▶ RODE VIDEOMIC

Upgrade your audio with the VideoMic, which mounts to the top of the camcorder. "It's great for dialogue or background sound effects," D'Angelo says. [\$149; rodeinc.com]

▶ PELICAN 1510 CARRY-ON CASE

Disaster can befall your precious gear only if you let it. The thick plastic 1510 is watertight and crush-proof and has plenty of compartments. Just as important, says D'Angelo, "It easily fits in the overhead compartment on a plane." [\$244; pelican.com]

