

SIERRASCENE

OUTDOORS

www.tahodailytribune.com



THROUGH **the EYES** of



Jonah M. Kessel / Tahoe Daily Tribune

The camera is turned around onto South Shore-based adventure photographer Corey Rich in his home off Pioneer Trail. Rich's photographic motivation, talents and endless drive have taken the 32-year-old around the globe, exploring places on Earth that most people only dream about.

COREY Rich

He's only 32, yet he has experienced more than most will their entire lives. He photographs some of the top athletes in the world, and they are among his best friends. He travels 250 days out of the year to some of the most untouched parts of the planet. Turn the page to take a look through the extraordinary **eyes** of this adventure photographer based on the South Shore.



{ OnlineNow }
LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF SOUTH SHORE PHOTOGRAPHER COREY RICH WHILE WATCHING A SLIDESHOW OF HIS IMAGE PORTFOLIO.
www.TahoeDailyTribune.com

OUTDOORS

Weekend edition, Feb. 22-24, 2008

www.TahoeDailyTribune.com



Corey Rich / www.coreyrich.com

Todd Snyder rappels off the West Pillar of Eichorn's Pinnacle at sunset. The West Pillar is a 5.9, 5-pitch climb in Tuolumne Meadows, Calif.

{ OnlineNow }

LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF SOUTH SHORE PHOTOGRAPHER
COREY RICH WHILE WATCHING A SLIDESHOW OF HIS
IMAGE PORTFOLIO.

www.TahoeDailyTribune.com

It was one of the flashiest buildings in the Bay Area, a part of the country that, in 1997, was oozing with flashy buildings. At the height of the dot-com boom, a 21-year-old college kid named Corey Rich walked through the glass doors of Quokka Sports, a sports-entertainment company whose primary objective was to deliver adventure videos to the World Wide Web.

The place just reeked of money, the carpet practically laid with \$100 bills. Dozens of Aeron chairs, priced at more than \$1,000, were scattered throughout the building.

Plasma flat-panel televisions were mounted on the walls. With sufficient credit, anyone can buy a plasma TV nowadays at Best Buy, but nobody had such sets in the late 1990s. Nobody except for companies that measured profits in the millions — per day at times.

Rich was impressed, but he was there for a business meeting, something about working as a photographer for an upcoming expedition to the Sahara Desert. He knew that much information after a conversation he had with a woman whose boss was overseeing the expedition.

She called him at his dorm at Fresno State University and explained that while her boss was flying back to the United States from Europe, he was flipping through an Outside magazine and stopped at one of Rich's photos. He didn't stare for very long before he was prepared to make a dirtbag climber an offer he couldn't refuse.

Just a few months earlier, Rich had ditched his Honda Civic in a Salt Lake City parking lot. He had taken out all the seats except the driver's seat to create ample sleeping room. A former competitive gymnast, the 5-foot-3 Rich said hatchbacks have their advantages.

He had been traveling around the American West, documenting climbers and climbing spots. Then the money started to run out.

His plan was to take six months off from school, photograph and climb, but he wouldn't make it at the rate he was going. In an effort to extend his climbing existence, he teamed up with another climber, Kevin Swift, and they began hopping freight trains and hitchhiking to climbing spots.

When they were through, Rich returned to Salt Lake City to retrieve his Honda Civic, used the

last of his money to fill his gas tank, and drove back to his parents' house in California's Antelope Valley, north of Los Angeles, where he grew up.

Their trip later was documented in Climbing magazine, with Swift's words and Rich's photos telling the story. Many of Rich's climbs ended in the same way, a few hundred dollars here from Rock and Ice, a few hundred dollars there from Patagonia, all for photographing places he would be visiting anyway.

"It got to be every other month that I'd have a feature story or cover story in one of those magazines," Rich said. "But there was this next major turning point, this stepping stone."

That was the meeting at Quokka Sports in San Francisco. He wasn't sure what exactly his role would be, but he knew there was money involved. Big money.

The only problem was that big money to Rich was a \$300 check from Climbing magazine. So to prep for what likely was his most lucrative assignment to date, he called his friend and mentor who was an established freelance sports photographer. While driving from Fresno to San Francisco the night before the meeting, he popped the question.

"How much should I get paid?" Rich asked his mentor. "Tell them \$1,000."

One thousand dollars is a lot of money for a college student, especially for one who was considering dropping out to climb rocks. His frequent trips to Yosemite increasingly were taking precedence over morning English classes. In fact, he had even started dropping certain classes to salvage his GPA.

If he wanted to get \$1,000 for shooting an expedition he would be willing to pay thousands of his own money to be a part of, Corey needed to look his best. He arrived outside the Quokka Sports building that night and slept in his new Ford van. With all these climbing and

a LIVING Gdream

BY JEREMY EVANS
JEVANS@TAHOEDAILYTRIBUNE.COM

Corey Rich is one of the world's most in-demand outdoor photographers, with his work seen on magazine covers and in ad campaigns. How did he turn his fantasy career into a reality?

outdoor magazine checks, he had upgraded from the Honda Civic.

He woke up at 7 a.m. the next day and bathed inside his van, using a sponge and a bucket of water. He slipped on his nicest pair of slacks and dress shoes, walked through the glass doors of Quokka Sports and was escorted to a room.

There were maybe a dozen people in the room, all seated at a long, narrow table. He sat at one end, and at the other end was the boss who had spotted his photo in Outside magazine. He waved to Rich, introduced himself and got down to business.

"First, are you interested, and second, are you available?" he asked.

Rich noticed everyone else in the room had taken their cell phones out and placed them on the table, but they were much smaller than his. Nevertheless, he took out his black brick of a cell phone and plopped it down on the table, causing a big thud.

Rich, trying to be Mr. Joe Cool, flipped through his black leather day planner, which was filled with blank white pages, and told them that, yes, he was interested and available.

"OK, how much do you cost?"

The moment of truth. Rich remained calm and said, "\$1,000."

There was a long pause, and there was an immediate counteroffer of \$800.

Shoot, Rich said to himself, I'd better just give in. His silence, though, prompted one final offer.

"Geez, you drive a hard bargain," the boss said. "All right, \$900 a day. ... You do realize this is a 30-day expedition."

And then it hit him. On that day, in a building with plasma TVs and carpets laid with \$100 bills, Rich took the next big step toward becoming one of the world's most famous photographers.

"I thought it was \$1,000 for the whole trip," Rich said. "He meant \$900 per day, and my friend meant \$1,000 per day. Literally, if I could have sent a text right there in my seat, I would've sent one to the dean at Fresno State and said, 'I'm out.'"

When Rich now gets asked, "How much do you cost?", he has a much better idea of his value, but "I don't think I

should tell the newspaper that."

One visit to his Montgomery Estates home, which he purchased in 2005, gives some idea of his income level.

It's a two-story home, the top floor being the living space, the bottom floor serving as his office. His living room is neat and tidy, with tall windows that provide views into the surrounding forest.

The kitchen floor has wood floors, and magazines are fanned stylishly on a table. A staircase with newer carpet leads into the basement, where there are several more rooms with wood floors.

Once at the bottom of the staircase, to the left is an open area with several desks where his four employees work — yeah, an outdoor photographer has employees.

Around the perimeter of the ceiling are framed copies of magazines which display his cover photos. His client list includes hallmark magazines such as National Geographic Adventure and Outside, as well as commercial clients such as The North Face, Patagonia, Apple, Nike and Anheuser-Busch. In all, there probably are 50 magazine covers in the main room of the basement.

Trevor Clark, an employee at Corey Rich Photography, was blown away the first time he saw Rich's basement. Clark's

duties are managing, editing and storing images, from the second the images enter the building, to the second they leave for clients or are uploaded to one of several servers.

"The first day I walked in here, I couldn't believe what I was looking at," said the 24-year-old Clark, who is a part-time photographer. "Most photographers, especially outdoor photographers, kind of live out of their vans and make a meager living, and that's fine with them. But Corey is on another level. And I think keeping everything in such order is unbelievable."

Pressed against one wall is a black file cabinet, which measures probably 4 feet in height, is 2 feet deep and more than 6 feet in length. It's designed to store slides. On the other wall, tucked into a corner, is the

computer station where his mother, Ruth, works part time by completing basic accounting duties.

"He was always organized," said Ruth Rich, 65, who lives with her husband in Gardnerville and drives up several times a month to assist with her son's business. "He knew where everything was. He was very neat. All the papers on his desk were organized, and he never let them get out of place."

Toward the back of the main office area is the desk of Blaine Deutsch, a former creative director for an advertising agency in St. Louis who was hired by Rich in the summer of 2005. His duties are to attract new clients that aren't outdoor-related outlets and market the Corey Rich brand through mailers and postcards.

The two became close after Deutsch contracted Rich to do a photo shoot for campaign titled "Bud Light Action Sports" in 2001, and they've bonded ever since. When Rich's business was showing signs of growing further still, he called Deutsch and asked him if he was interested in leaving his job in the Midwest and moving to Lake Tahoe.

There is a deck with a filtered view of the Sierra Nevada, but it's piled high with several feet of snow. There also is a back room with a server that stores images Clark sends over, and there's also two racks of outdoor apparel from the industry's most respected companies — jackets and pants of various colors for the athlete models Rich uses for his photo shoots.

Not that he's around often to organize local photo shoots very often. Rich traveled more than 250 days last year for work.

When he analyzes his life over the past 15 years, Rich still seems to shake his head in amazement.

"I guess I do pinch myself and say, 'Is this for real?'"

He talks about how he got his first camera from his dad, a Canon SLR, and started shooting weekend climbing trips as a teen.

Then he graduated to photographing the "Pet of the Week" for the Antelope Valley Press, his hometown newspaper, to being a silly college kid living in a dorm and getting a call from Quokka Sports, to being one of the most in-demand outdoor photographers on the planet.

"I thought it was \$1,000 for the whole trip. He meant \$900 per day. ... Literally, if I could have sent a text right there in my seat, I would've sent one to the dean at Fresno State and said, 'I'm out.'"

South Shore adventure photographer, recalling the first big payday he received as a 21-year-old student

Corey Rich

"There was no decision necessary," said the 34-year-old Deutsch, who lives in Gardnerville with his wife and two daughters. "I had a five-minute conversation with my wife and said, 'We're moving to Tahoe,' and we haven't looked back since. This isn't a guy who decided to go out with a couple rolls of film to be a photographer."

"I have complete trust and faith in what Corey is doing. He is the best thing going in this type of photography. Corey lives by the philosophy 'Work hard, play hard.'"

On the other side of the bottom floor, after passing through a hallway bisected by the staircase, is Rich's office. Nothing fancy — just a futon, a computer desk and a bookcase stacked high with outdoor books.

And, of course, he gets to live in Lake Tahoe when he's not working.

"From the very beginning, there was never a question in my mind — 'Is this a viable business? Can I make money?'" said Rich, who has lived on the South Shore for six years. "My thing is, I love what I am doing, and these are the types of pictures I love. I love being outside and being around people, and that kind of worked into being a career. I can't believe this is what I do and, apparently, I am OK at what I do. This is a career where I get to work with a great group of people here in the office and in the field. If I am working with great people in great locations, I am the happiest guy on the planet."