
Man on the River sets sails on May 1st... And he won't be alone

Dossier de la rédaction de H2o
May 2011

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From "Me" to "Us": A new dawn for the endeavour of Giacomo De Stefano, the sailing prophet of the "Gift Economy"

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A new beginning - Last year, the challenge begun: From London to Istanbul, thousand of miles aboard a rowing boat. A potentially deadly virus forced him to stop, but now Man on the River makes his comeback, ready to set sails from where he left off. With a renovated philosophy: "It won't be the adventure of a river-loving man, it will be the journey of many people caring for our planet"...

Giacomo De Stefano, documentarist and sailor, undertook the project to row and sail along the waterways linking London to Istanbul. His main goal: Bringing attention over the poor conditions of many rivers, that could become vital resources by developing sustainable local economies and responsible tourism.

Many friends helped him in his effort, from boat building to the official departure on April 2010. After about a month of sailing on the Thames and the North Sea, Giacomo was struck by a sudden illness: After receiving first aid in the UK, he was transferred to Venice hospital, where he slowly recovered from a nasty pneumonia virus.

Won this battle, Giacomo has spent the last months in training to get fit again.

The journey - He'll face the same challenge: 5,200 kilometres, 6 months on a rowing boat, day and night, 1 million oar strokes on the Rhine and Danube from the English Channel to the Black Sea. And to help him across 15 countries from London to Istanbul, passing through England, France, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia and Turkey, there will only be the wind and a sail. All of this not for a sporting achievement but to build a new relationship with nature, water and rivers. It is the feat of 44 year old Giacomo De Stefano, born in Asti but Venetian by adoption.

The new philosophy - "This journey is different from my previous ones: It's an experience that I've shared with many others and that maybe someone else could get done. I can't say I wouldn't be over the moon to row all the way to Istanbul: I'll spend all my energy, love and passion to make it. However, as I've learned last year, things could have changed. We are moving to a world where the absolute ego does not dominate anymore: The new driving force is the word "Us", that brought me such a long way both in my life and in this Man on the River adventure. So, I now have to consider the opportunity to share the journey, should I have to stop again.

I've spent a lot of thinking about that. I'm not interested, not anymore, to be remembered as "the Man on the River", the single individual that has rowed so many rivers and miles, meeting lots of people along the way. I wish that many Men on the River could share the commitment about this journey and future ones: to dream and make dreams real. To care about others, about life and lives."

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A new team - Giacomo will be joined by two travel companions, making even more intriguing the journey. Bruno Porto will be the co-protagonist of the project and the "green power" aboard Clodia: The Brazilian skipper has plenty of strength, experience and will, and he fluently speaks five languages.

He's the perfect team mate for Giacomo that is still recovering from the illness that forced him to stop his navigation. Bruno's help dramatically increases the odds to get to Istanbul. "Luckily - says Bruno - this year I could join Man on the River. Helping a good purpose is always satisfying, even more so, when you have the pleasure to share it with Giacomo and to learn through new experiences."

Josephine Schaumburg is a cultural researcher and will assist Giacomo and Bruno in two ways. She will be organizing meetings with local press and environmentalists; and, she will document with photos and small films, the progress of their voyage on her blog River Side Stories

"My last eight years of travelling - says Fine - have all been beautiful and valuable. But I started to feel that something was missing: an utility that goes beyond my personal enrichment. I wanted to do something that also others could benefit from. Documenting, even in a humble way, our journey is a good opportunity to share the experience of exploring our world with friends and any other interested persons... Well, and even more important than that, I admire Giacomo and his dedication to environmental protection. It is a big honor for me to assist him in his mission."

Fine will travel aboard a small electric boat following the same itinerary of Man on the River. If possible, she will try to get in contact with local people through the online-platform CouchSurfing. Couchsurfers are a community of around 2.5 million members worldwide that offer hospitality in their own country and ask for it when they are travelling in others. Therefore, the word refers to the practice of moving (or "surfing") from one sleeping place (most of the times a simple "couch" in the living room) to another. But offering a couch is not obligatory. Also just spending time with that foreign traveler and showing him or her around in the city is common practice. The philosophy behind all this, is, to create an alternative way of travelling where a true exchange between the traveler and the local person can take place.

When - Man on the River is scheduled to restart on Sunday, May the 1st, from Faversham, Kent, UK. Within mid-may the boat should cross the English Channel.

And then all the way to Istanbul.

Man on the River