

If there's one word that describes how Tim Kemple has managed to carve a living as an outdoor adventure photographer in less than a decade, it's passion. "I love the outdoors and I actively do all the sports that I shoot. As an athlete myself there's an authentic nature that I try to capture in my photos," explains the 29-year-old American when I speak to him on the eve of the gruelling North Face Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc, the marathon event he has photographed for the past three years. "Also, I love photographing people who are really passionate about what they do," he adds. His daring and breathtaking photographs of runners and climbers taken in spectacular landscapes throughout the world for clients capture not only the subject, but also the atmosphere and mood of the events.

Growing up in the state of New Hampshire, in the north-eastern US, Tim initially focused his attention on climbing. With some of the east coast's best destinations for the pursuit on his doorstep he quickly became an accomplished climber, teaming up with locals Dave Graham and Joe Kinder, who remain well-known names in the climbing world. His transition from climber to photographer began in the summer of 1999 when he set out on a road trip to Utah with Dave, Joe and other friends after graduating from high school. "I used the \$200 I was given from my relatives for graduating to buy a Nikon N90 so that I could document the road trip," he recalls. "I knew through reading some photography books that I should probably shoot with slide film if I wanted to take the best photos, to show people when I got back. So with little money left after buying the N90 I borrowed a 35-70mm f/2.8 lens from one of the guys at a local outdoor shop and was given a bunch of expired slide film."

Returning from the trip with some decent shots, he contacted Tyler Stableford, photo editor at *Climbing* magazine, who had photographed him climbing a few years earlier. "He gave me good, honest feedback – 'these photos suck, but I really like this' or 'these ones are pretty terrible, don't ever do this again' or 'it would've been better if you'd taken it at a different angle'. He didn't run any of them in the magazine but he gave me great critique, which I'm super-thankful for to this day." Although Tim hadn't immediately broken into the climbing photography scene, he knew it was something he was keen to pursue. "For me it was important that I was shooting something I was



Iker Pou climbing in the Picos de Europa, Spain.

Do you want to shoot ADVENTURE?

When there are so many areas of professional photography to specialise in it is often difficult to decide which is best for you. This month Tor McIntosh speaks to adventure photographer Tim Kemple to find out what it takes to make a photographic career out of a passion for the outdoors.

passionate about," he says. "I knew what photos inspired me when I read *Climbing* magazine so I would go out and try to duplicate them or create the same kind of angles, which is really how I learnt. These were the days when climbing magazines would run a 10-page photo story with full-page photos – those articles motivated me."

After the road trip he started college at University of New Hampshire (UNH) to study

microbiology. "It might seem a completely disconnected subject, but it made sense to me," he laughs. "I consider myself to be a problem solver and someone who likes to understand how and why things work, so to start with that's how I approached my photography. I knew what look I wanted to create so I worked out how to go about achieving it." Even today his problem-solving attitude means he adapts his equipment to cope

TIM KEMPLE

with the tough shooting situations he encounters. "I custom-build the battery packs I put in my lighting system so I can easily carry multiple packs up the side of a mountain. My lighting kit should weigh 20lb, but it weighs almost half that."

During his four years at UNH he continued to shoot photos of his friends climbing, sending batches of slides to photo editors on various magazines to get feedback. However, it wasn't

long before his work started to get published.

"By the time I graduated from college I was making enough money from editorial work to pay the bills... just. Then I came up with this plan to buy an RV [recreational vehicle] with a long-term loan and drive around the country to shoot photos, so that's what I did. I paid \$100 a month for the RV plus gas and insurance, which was a much cheaper option than paying rent." For a year

Tim lived in his RV, shooting and climbing all over the USA. However, this nomadic, cheap way of living meant he found himself in situations that weren't always ideal. "One pretty stressful time was when I broke down in the middle of nowhere in Mexico with all my camera equipment and all my slides inside the RV," he recalls. "After that happened, I moved to Boulder, Colorado, and stayed with friends before heading to Nepal ▶



with some mates to make a movie about the child porters in the Mount Everest region – it was part climbing movie, part documentary to bring awareness to the issues surrounding the child porters.” The movie was cut in Boulder, where he remained for eight months before moving to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he now lives.

By this time Tim was an established climbing photographer, but in order to widen his market he approached commercial clients. After identifying the companies that he wanted to work for he went about contacting each one to arrange meetings so he could show them his work. “One Saturday I called the creative director of [outdoor gear store] Eastern Mountain Sports expecting to leave a message and he answered the phone, which completely caught me off-guard. Anyway, he gave me a small job, which was a half-day shoot that went really well. The next thing I know he calls me when I’m in Texas and asks me to be at Mount Washington in New Hampshire for a shoot in two days’ time. I didn’t tell him where I was as I knew he’d say it wasn’t worth me coming out for the shoot. So I jumped on a plane to New Hampshire and thankfully it all worked out; I still shoot for the company today.”

Tim believes his meteoric rise to commercial success is partly due to having the ‘get up and go’ attitude of a New Hampshire native. “There’s a type of mentality linked to growing up in the north-east – it’s not aggressive, but it’s pretty blunt and forthright,” he explains. “It rains a lot

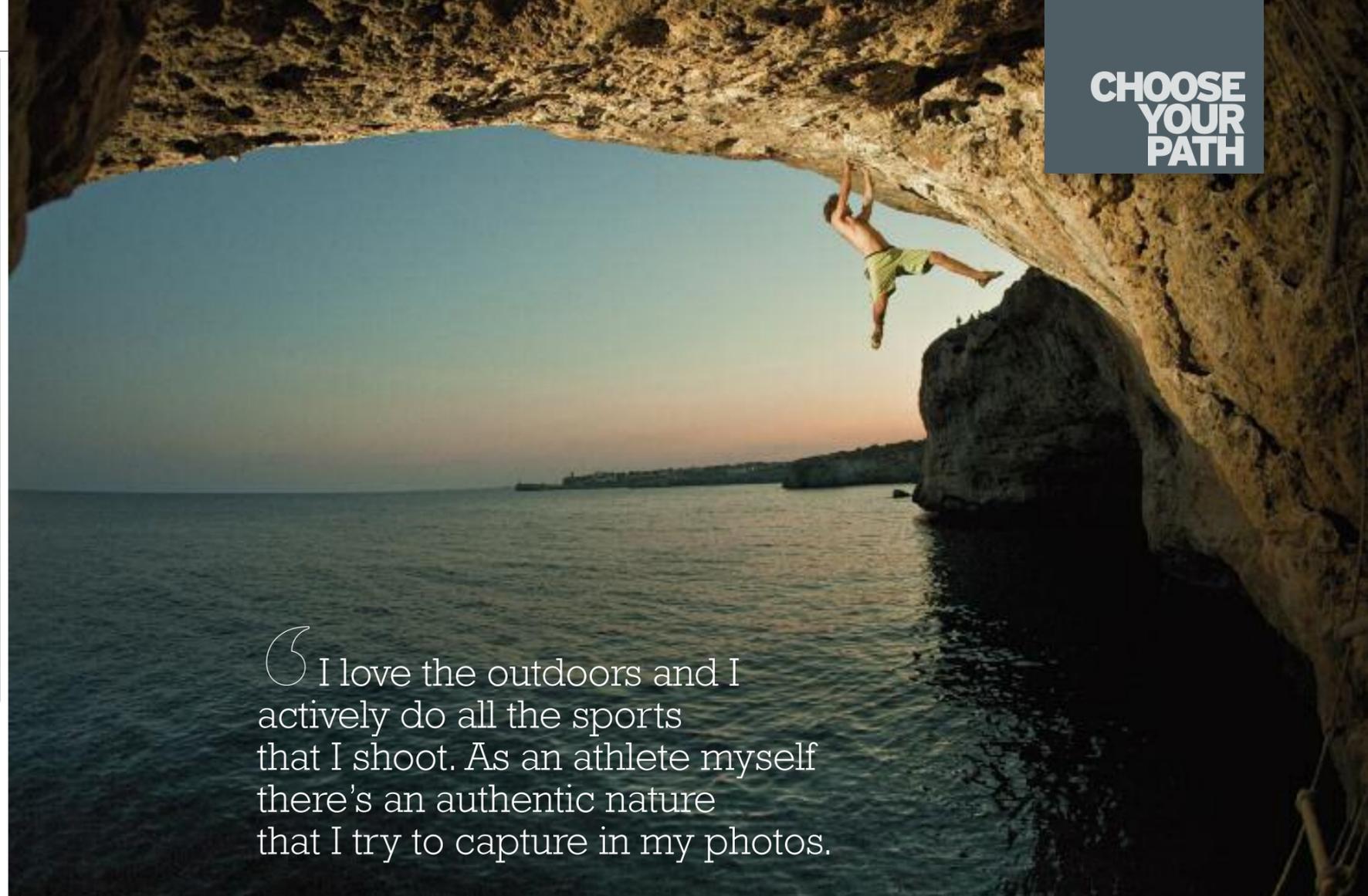
[in New Hampshire] so when you have a sunny day you make the most of it, unlike other parts of the US where it’s sunny every day – there’s a reason Californians are so laid-back,” he laughs. But he admits that having such a character trait can be a curse as well as a blessing. “Often you’re working with people with a more laid-back attitude than you and the two personalities don’t always match. For example, you want to spend an extra hour shooting in the rain and they’re over it.”

As someone who is always looking for new creative opportunities and ways to expand his work, Tim formed a video production company with two North Face athletes, Renan Ozturk and Jimmy Chin, called Camp4 Collective. “We do mostly web videos for outdoor and action sports clients; we do 90% of all the video work for The North Face [the exploration and equipment company],” he says. Branching into multimedia production is Tim’s way of ensuring his career has longevity. “Every single one of my clients is asking for video footage, with some of my bigger clients expecting video to take up half of the shoot,” he reveals. “I do think all photographers who hope to be around in 10 years’ time should have a solid working knowledge of video, if nothing else so they can be part of the entire creative process around a shoot instead of just a little piece. In fact this year I switched from Nikon to Canon for the video capabilities – I shoot the EOS 1D for the auto focus and the frame rate and the EOS 5D for a lighter body.”

Above
Renan Ozturk, Rio de Janeiro.
Right
Matt Segal, Mallorca.
Below right
Tracy Garneau, Scotland.

With a schedule that sees him travelling all over the world (“this year I’ve worked in Scotland, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, the US, France, Ireland, and it’s only August!”), working half the time for his commercial clients and the other half with Camp4 Collective, I ask him about the editorial clients who helped to kick-start his career a decade ago. “These days I don’t budget any income from editorial when I’m looking at my budget for the year, I just look at it as a bonus,” he replies. “Editorial is a really good place for photographers to get their work out there, hone their skills and not be confined by any creative boundaries – you just go out there and shoot what you want to shoot.”

The crux of his advice to anyone who wants to take a similar path is simply to follow your passion, not the money. “You need to be able to step back and take an objective look at what you’re good at and why you want to do a certain type of photography. If you’re shooting running just because you think it’s going to make you



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money, that’s not the best idea as you may not have the same passion as if you were shooting another subject that’s close to your heart. It should never be about doing something because you want to make money, as it will be totally apparent.”

Tim’s action-packed, globetrotting lifestyle is a dream job for many, but to achieve it he did have to make one sacrifice – his own climbing career. “These days photography is my job and climbing is what I do to escape,” he says bluntly. “As a sponsored climber I used to climb six days a week, now I’m working six days a week and climbing one day a week. But being in the mountains, being outdoors and being around really passionate people is when I’m having the most fun. I say that I work six days a week, but I get to go on some great adventures and get to share some special occasions with some really cool people.”

www.kemplemedia.com
www.camp4collective.com



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