Tarzan was an Eco-Tourist ... 
and Other Tales in the Anthropology of Adventure
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Edited by
Luis A. Vivanco and Robert J. Gordon
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Acknowledgements

This book has been an Adventure, in the Simmelian sense. That we deliberately set out on a trip of discovery is not what we, or Simmel, refer to here. For Simmel, the experience of adventure emerges in the unexpected and unplanned, the moments of dislocation where one can grasp the basic categories of existence. It is in this sense that putting together this volume has been adventuresome, because it has introduced us to new places and people that have encouraged us to rethink certain basic assumptions about the contemporary ubiquity of adventure, not to mention having altered some of the plans we laid out for this project.

The project was born of conversations, in the hallways between classes and in the hallways of conferences, about such things as television reality shows, the Ernest Shackleton craze on public television, the “extreme” content books and magazines one finds at the supermarket checkout counter, and our amazement that people actually buy such cars (and now cologne) as the HUMMER. All of it speaks to adventure’s omnipresence, or at least a desire for adventure and its stories. As we expanded our conversations, inviting more friends and interlocutors, we found a lot of our colleagues had been thinking about these things as well, perhaps quite naturally, because as anthropologists some of our professional mana comes from the appearance that we lead adventuresome lives.

The time seemed ripe to convene more formal conversations about the complex relationships between culture and adventure, and so we organized two panel sessions, one at the American Anthropological Association annual meetings and another at the Northeastern Anthropological Associa-
tion annual meetings. With the help of Rob Welsch, we also arranged a mini-conference in the Maori Room at the Field Museum in Chicago. Judging by attendance numbers and the animated conversations that continued as the rooms emptied, the topic struck a chord with a lot of people. We have seen a mixture of enthusiasm and disquietude, a sense that we have some things to work out as individuals and as a discipline about what this ubiquity of adventure tells us about the worlds in which we live and work.

Unfortunately, for reasons that can perhaps be explained only by Simmel’s emphasis on the unexpected nature of adventure, a number of the friends who joined in these conversations could not join us in this volume. But we would like to express our deep gratitude to them, not only because of what they added to these conversations, but also because of the contributions they have made or are likely to make on this theme once they are able to publish the fascinating insights they shared with us. They include Ed Bruner, Quetzil Castañeda, Frederick Errington, Deborah Gewertz, Harald Prins, Mark Mosko, M. Estellie Smith, and Geoff White. Ute Luig, Lynn Meisch and John Middleton were also intellectually close to this project, although they did not in the end contribute to this volume. We also owe a gracious debt to the folks at Berghahn Books. Marion Berghahn has been supportive of the project from the very first moment we broached the topic with her. Catherine Kirby and Michael Dempsey have assisted expertly in the production phase.

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We are especially grateful to our families, who consistently keep us in line but allow us to veer off on adventures of our own, often enough to keep us productively decentered.
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We live in a post-explorer era in which it is widely considered that the feats of the great adventurers are remnants of history and that the Earth’s mysterious places and peoples have long “been discovered.” Yet adventure enjoys ubiquitous status in public culture and late capitalism. Adventure television, from the Discovery Channel to the “reality shows,” is a major growth area. Best-selling books and magazines increasingly feature “extreme content” and narratives of audaciously successful and famously disastrous expeditions. The best selling SUV (Sport Utility Vehicle) speaks volumes about the current fascination with adventure and the goods deemed necessary for it. Such purchases clearly have major environmental consequences, yet people persist in purchasing them even though they—like most SUVs—will never be used for what they are supposed to be capable of doing. These totems of the desirable bespeak a nostalgia for more heroic days.

Or consider “adventure travel.” Once the province of elites, it has become accessible and fashionable among the middle classes, and is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. It draws on, and serves as a conduit for, an increasingly transnational concern with the disappearance of distinctive places, cultures, and ecosystems (Johnston 1990; Zurick 1995). More than half of tourists (98 out of 197.7 million) defined themselves as adventure travelers (Travel Industry Association 1998).

Adventure should not of course be restricted to consumers: its therapeutic value is well-accepted. Over the last three decades, for-profit and not-for-profit agencies have developed adventure experiences defined as life-enhancing and identity-transforming. The best known of these organ-