

» THE STUFF YOU WANT  
OUR Sold-Gold Holiday Gift Guide

DELUXE  
YEAR-END  
ISSUE!

# Outside

2009 ALL-STAR

## The 25 Coolest People Now

Amazing Athletes,  
Great Explorers,  
and Mind-Blowing  
Heroes Who Push  
the Limits

#1  
**LAIRD**  
**Hamilton**  
The Alpha  
Surfer's Year  
of Triumph

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**FIVE-STAR  
HELI-SKIING**

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**NAKED  
ICE CLIMBING**

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**TOM BROWNE  
DROPS OUT**



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**RUSSIA: PROTECT NATURE AT YOUR OWN RISK**  
A BLOODY TALE OF CRIME & CORRUPTION BY KAMCHATKA

+10  
SEMI-  
**PRIVATE  
ISLANDS**

## ALEXANDER FYFE

### SOCCER CAPTAIN

While the Iraqi National Soccer Team was gearing up for its knockout performance at the 2004 Summer Olympics, U.S. Army captain Alexander Fyfe was helping the country's next generation of athletes sharpen their dribbling skills. Fyfe, a civil-affairs officer with the Fort Lewis, Washington-based 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, was stationed in Mosul, Iraq, last February when he noticed some local kids playing with a makeshift ball made of straw. The 26-year-old West Point grad—a standout midfielder as a teenager in Rocky Point, New York—e-mailed his high school coach, Al Ellis, and asked him to ship over a few balls. Ellis broadcast the request over the Internet, and soon Fyfe had received \$25,000 worth of jerseys, balls, and other soccer equipment from the United States and Japan, which he helped distribute to children throughout northern Iraq. Though his is a goodwill mission, Fyfe still has to watch his back: In June, while on a delivery run to schools near the town of Qara Qosh, his convoy was ambushed by anti-American insurgents. The soldiers escaped harm, but the incident rattled Fyfe, who hopes to end his tour of duty by year's end and return home to the Northwest for a winter of hiking and skiing. "This soccer project is one of hundreds of good news stories happening here every day," he insists. "I'll leave Iraq knowing that I played a small part in a very big production." Whatever the outcome in Iraq, it's hard to contest the rightness of kids playing sports outside.

—JASON DALEY

## JOE DON MORTON

### SMOKE JUMPER

The wildfire outside the Alaskan town of Arctic Village was small, maybe only five acres, when veteran firefighter Joe Don Morton hurled himself from the belly of a Casa 212 aircraft on June 22, 2004. Even 125 miles north of the Arctic Circle, in the sparsely vegetated foothills of the Brooks Range, it took eight men and two CL-215 tanker planes three days to douse the blaze. Morton, 34, is a veteran Alaska Smokejumper, one of 68 elite firefighters who serve as the Last Frontier's first line of defense against wildfires, parachuting into the backcountry as soon as flames are spotted. Smoke jumpers are a burly breed, but in Alaska—where 99 percent of the state is wild and

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roadless backcountry—the job redefines hardcore. "When I heard about guys throwing themselves into the middle of burning, untamed wilderness 500 miles from the nearest road," says Morton, a former Navy search-and-rescue swimmer who got his start fighting fires in Arizona, "I knew it was my calling." Good thing, because 2004 was Alaska's worst fire season on record, with 680 separate blazes charring nearly 6.5 million acres across the state, including the headline-grabbing Boundary Fire, which

scorched 537,000 acres of the White Mountains National Recreation Area and threatened suburban Fairbanks in June. "It looked like a war zone," says Morton, who made nine jumps between May and late September, often hauling up to 110 pounds of gear (including a Kevlar jumpsuit, hard hat, ax, and chainsaw) to clear terrain just ahead of the flames. "The large fires kept our guys out there a long time," says base manager Dalan Romero. "They were a challenge to everyone's endurance." —JASON STEVENSON



JOE DON PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE McMILLAN