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## **IMAX crew captures beauty and terror**

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Moments after dangling by one hand in the world's most remote whitewater rapid, Pasquale Scaturro learned the deflating difference between heroism and filmmaking.

The Lakewood-based adventurer had single-handedly snagged a runaway expedition raft carrying precious IMAX film and cameras, in the most chaotic stretch of the unexplored Blue Nile. Scaturro had clambered from the churning water onto the upside-down back of the raft and ridden it like a crazed bronco around a canyon corner, there to rescue one of his Ethiopian guards, who couldn't swim. They had tied up the wayward boat - one of only two rafts for 3,300 miles of river descent - and preserved the record-breaking mission. Scaturro trudged upstream to where his partner, Gordon Brown, had been trying to capture the first-ever canyon run for IMAX. "And the first thing Gordon said was, 'That was a terrible shot!'" Scaturro said, laughing.

As the harrowing footage from the resulting movie, "Mystery of the Nile," makes clear, the six-month journey was not the kind of back-lot shoot where "Scene 1, Take 11" is possible. In gorge runs called "The Gauntlet" when anyone has bothered to name them at all, "there's no going back to say, let's do it again," Scaturro said.

"Mystery of the Nile," a mix of dizzying river footage on the little-known Blue Nile and haunting explorations of ghostly Nubian kingdoms, opens today at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Scaturro led the first descent and narrates the footage, adding to a long list of outdoor accomplishments that include putting celebrated blind climber Erik Weihenmayer on the Everest summit in 2001.

IMAX producers sought out Scaturro after pinpointing the Blue Nile for their next project. They saw the river as one of the world's few remaining untold nature stories, a gusher of precious water through Africa's desert that rises in Ethiopia and cradled modern civilization in three countries.

Scaturro is one of the few Americans who can speak of owning a second home in Namibia. His travels as a geophysicist for oil and gas exploration gave him the excuse to explore hinterlands from Argentina to Alaska, and he jumped at the chance to map the storied Nile.

No one had navigated the entire river from a start in the Blue branch, where most of the water originates. "Suicidal" rapids, disease, aggressive crocodiles and roving bandits sent earlier parties home.

"Most rivers, you don't have to worry about people walking up and shooting at you for no reason," said Scaturro, sitting high and dry in his raft in the atrium of the museum. "To this day, we may be the only group that's ever crossed the Egyptian border on rafts." Armed guards from the Ethiopian army accompanied them across that nation, but couldn't prevent hostile tribes with their own stores of AK-47s threatening the rafts and shooting at Brown's kayak.

A full IMAX team of up to 40, including helicopter pilots and porters, filmed for two months. They ran some rapids near the Blue Nile source in Ethiopia, then flew to Luxor and Khartoum for "easy" footage. Then they left, chased by 120-degree heat and a parasite worm lurking throughout the river.

"How do you avoid the worms? They say, 'Stay out of the water.' Well good luck doing that on a raft trip!" Scaturro said. Like most Nile floaters, Scaturro ended up with the deadly worms and took a course of "horse pills" to kill the bug.

When the support crews fled, Scaturro and Brown and a few hardy followers went back to the Blue's trickling source and started the full descent on their own. They were trained how to use the 100-pound IMAX cameras left behind, and the heavy rolls of film that last only three minutes each.

Craft services, best boys and transportation captains were nowhere to be found. For 800 kilometers in Ethiopia, Scaturro said, the group saw no roads and no light bulbs. After more than 100 days under the burning sun, each moment of filmmaking was excruciating. Brown would spend three to four hours cleaning the cameras and setting up a shot that might use 20 seconds of the carefully hoarded film.

Still, Scaturro slips into explorer's daydreaming when he mentions the float into Sudan, rarely traveled by Westerners. Spectacular sunrises heralded days of dune-gazing and mixing with friendly shore tribes and their camels, then sunsets over ancient cities.

"The best feeling in the world is when all the boats are ready in the morning, and you push into the stream, and you first feel the current grab the boat. It doesn't get boring," Scaturro said. "It just gets more and more and more fun."

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