





PHOTO BY ANDREW HANCOCK '02

COOL JOBS

It's an arguable point but one that *Texas Aggie* believes it can win: Graduates of Texas A&M University have some of the coolest jobs on the planet. Read and dream, for the Aggies featured in this year's annual dream-job roundup have stories that take you with them.

By Stephanie Jeter '06

At 20,000 feet, a Mexican sunrise dazzles.

At the crossroads between known and unknown, staying on your bike to pedal through Bolivian mountains exhilarates. Following century-old mule tracks through Mexican canyons to recreate a lost 140-mile trail is nothing less than incredible.

To have it all as your livelihood—that's a terrific job.

David Appleton '77 is the founder and director emeritus of Outpost Wilderness Adventure, a Colorado-based adventure camp. His job, essentially, is to live adventurously and take everybody with him. After graduating *cum laude* in agricultural economics, Appleton was hired as a program director for a summer camp in the Hill Country. "After a couple years, I started getting interested creating a program for teens that would focus on adventure sports," he said.

OWA soon went full-time. Appleton moved the company to Colorado and started leading people of all ages canoeing, backpacking, mountain biking, rock climbing, fly fishing and mountaineering across the world. Wyoming, California, Texas, Utah, South America, the Alps, Alaska, Bolivia, trips were organized with the purpose to live, learn and play in the wild outdoors.

He's since passed company leadership to a senior guide, but continues to guide and go on trips. The places he's seen, "It's just hard to describe them," Appleton said.

Appleton spoke by phone from his organic farm in Colorado. That's another of his enterprises — growing lettuce, potatoes, carrots, cilantro, turnips and more at 8,800 feet.

"One of the more profound things would have to be mountain biking in the fog in Bolivia," he said. He was the lead biker out of four forging a small path at a very high elevation. "We were coming around the corner and there was this man and woman," he said. Appleton and the other bikers were dressed in full gear—helmet, camelback water packs, gloves. "Our eyes caught for just a second before we disappeared back into the fog," he said. "That village hadn't



seen an outsider for 10 years. It was two worlds coming together just for an instant," he said.

From soaking in the Northern Lights from atop the highest peak in Idaho, leading a team of teenagers to climb a previously undocumented peak in Bolivia, to watching a sunrise transform a rock and sediment landscape, Appleton is a journeyer in every sense of the word.

Back in the states, he designs hike and bike trails mostly by hand—"we use picks, rock bars, shovels," he said. And, as a great compliment to his work, he was recognized by the Campaign for America's Wilderness as a Wilderness Hero in 2004.

"I've been captivated by trails all my life," he said. Both literally and figuratively, he follows his own.

David Appleton '77

COLORADO AND TEXAS
OWNER OF BISON PEAK LODGE/APPLETON TRAILS & TARRYALL MOUNTAIN FARMS; DIRECTOR EMERITUS OF OUTPOST WILDERNESS ADVENTURE

"That village hadn't seen an outsider for 10 years. It was two worlds coming together just for an instant."



Mike Goodwin '85
 AUSTIN, TEXAS
 MANAGER OF MASTER TOOLING
 AND ENGINEERING AT BALFOUR

“I’ve told several people over the years that when I received my Ring—as far as I was concerned—I was graduated.”

He answered an ad in the newspaper.

Fate could not have made a happier choice in the happenings that led Mike Goodwin '85 to be a manager of master tooling and engineering at Balfour. Not only does his job mean he works among some of the most highly skilled ring designers, engineers and creators in the country, this Ag scored a designation as the keeper of the Aggie Ring masters.

If the Aggie Ring on your hand was made after the 1960s, the hand-engraved original by which it was made is under his protection. Two sets of originals—one men’s size 10 and one women’s size six—are housed in his office. “No one messes with them but me,” he said.

The integrity of the Ring’s reputation is contingent on Aggies’ character, and the integrity of the Ring’s form is trusted to Goodwin.

“I know. It’s really cool,” Goodwin said.

The relationship between Ring and Goodwin is not made of muscle. Being the keeper doesn’t just mean guarding the Ring physically. Goodwin is an engineer. He earned his bachelor’s engineering technology. The verbs he finds himself using are made of much more finesse.

It’s a detail-oriented process, he said,

but in short, this is how the Aggie Ring is made. The method is called a “lost-wax investment casting process.” Using the protected master brass Rings, a metal mold is made. “That’s the way tooling works,” said the manager of master tooling. “You have a master, and from that master, production tools are made.”

From there, the original Aggie Ring masters go back to Goodwin’s office and the metal mold takes over. Every Ring is first made in wax; these molds provide the form. From there, each wax ring is sized. “In men’s, we go from a six-and-a-half up to 13 in half-sizes,” he said. “In ladies, we go from a four to a nine-and-a-half in half-sizes.” If a graduate orders a Ring that is larger or smaller than those, Goodwin said they make the appropriate changes on a wax pattern.

Once each wax ring is made, they are clustered onto a “ring tree,” which is essentially a rod with rings attached along its side like branches. The wax “ring tree” is then covered by a very precise mixture of investment powder and water and baked overnight at 1,300 degrees until the wax melts and the mixture turns hard.

What’s left is a hollow, negative copy of a tree full of Rings.

Molten gold is poured into the mold. The mold is removed, the gold is cooled, the hardened investment powder is stripped off, and each Aggie Ring is clipped off the tree using powered bolt cutters.

From there, every Ring is hand-finished. You know the final product.

“After a season of use, the molds wear out,” Goodwin said. When someone spots an imperfection on a wax mold, he’s there to bring the Aggie Ring back to perfect.

“A&M is by far the school where the Ring is the biggest thing,” he said. With about 10,000 Aggie Rings leaving the line every year, Aggie Rings outsell other Balfour clients, like Notre Dame, Texas or West Point, 10-to-1, he said. “I’ve told several people over the years that when I received my Ring—as far as I was concerned—I was graduated.

“You just want to ensure that it’s done right, and perpetuated.”

Being the keeper of the Aggie Ring is not a title. It’s a trusted responsibility.



The Aggie Ring masters (right) from which molds (left) are made.



The first *Sports Illustrated* cover photo by an Aggie (right) was shot by Andrew Hancock '02. His second SI cover can be seen on Page 7.



PHOTO BY ANDREW HANCOCK '02



Andrew Hancock '02

WEST LAFAYETTE, INDIANA
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER,
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

“Getting to shoot for the magazine and have my credential for an event read ‘Andrew Hancock/Sports Illustrated’ is pretty incredible.”

For years he stood behind the camera. “I had my first photo published when I was in seventh grade,” said Andrew Hancock '02. It was an action shot of a golfer mid-swing, sand forever held airborne. All the adults were impressed, he said. Hancock always had an eye for artistry. Hand him a camera, and he could photograph almost anything and do it brilliantly.

But you couldn't make him take a portrait. No, Hancock hated taking pictures of people. A portrait photographer must take control, he said—move here, stand this way, get in a person's face, give direction. To be in charge made Hancock feel odd and uneasy, he said. So, he didn't do it.

He has since changed his approach. In a satirical twist, Hancock, the Ag who chose to take zeros on portrait assignments rather than complete them, became the first Aggie to have his work celebrated on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*.

His coup de maître—a portrait, a portrait so fantastic that there was no other place for it but the front of one of America's paramount publications.

And for the last year, that's what he's been attempting to do again, bending, twisting and reshaping his craft in all sorts of new directions. The results have been his strongest work yet. His second *SI* cover appeared in September.

It's a good thing he takes pictures for a living. He needs proof to remind him that he's really there—rigging cameras

to photograph Larry Fitzgerald (wide receiver, Arizona Cardinals) on a Jet Ski for a *Sports Illustrated* feature, shooting Peyton Manning's record-breaking season for the most touchdowns thrown in a season, getting in-your-face shots of NCAA March Madness basketball tournament play, standing on the sidelines at NFL playoff games with a press pass draped about his neck, on the dirt as the finest horses blaze the track for the Kentucky Derby. He's photographed George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, Barak Obama and the Queen of England.

He's seen and captured history. “But nothing compares to Kyle Field,” he said. “Kyle Field is home.”

Hancock's work has been published in most every major market newspaper in the country, along with publications around the world. His first assignment for the *New York Times* ended up on the front page of the Sunday edition. Honors come so often, he can't remember how many awards he's gotten. He thinks the tally is upwards of 40.

“It's truly a blessing to be able to do this for a living,” he said, but it comes with a lot of pressure. For a big shoot, Hancock travels with 15-20 cases of equipment and at least one assistant. “When shooting for *Sports Illustrated*, there is little to no margin for error.” Long days are common. Tension is expected. Despite it all, “getting to shoot for the magazine and have my credential for an event read ‘Andrew Hancock/Sports Illustrated’ is pretty incredible.”



Justin Rackley '08

FLOWER MOUND, TEXAS

PAA PRO ANGLER, LAKE FORK FISHING GUIDE

"I'll tell you what's special. When it's 6:30 in the morning and there are 150 guys out on the water and, since it's dark, they all have their red and green navigational lights on."



The water is his office, a tackle box his briefcase, watching fish patterns his market research.

And as a professional fisherman, a big catch is his promotion.

Justin Rackley '08 may be a minnow in age compared to his peers, but he is hitting professional milestones fast.

The recent grad is a competitor in the Professional Angler Association, putting him among the top 150 anglers in the world. Rackley earned the PAA league spot after winning the 2007 Boat U.S. National Collegiate Bass Fishing Championship with his partner, Trevor Knight '08. Since then, and even before, this young Ag has made a habit of jumping in with both feet. Less than a month after his December graduation with a degree in wildlife and fisheries science, he was on Lake Fork working as



a bass fishing guide.

The lake is where he breathes the best. With the sun and the breeze and the quiet, there's deeper meaning in the rhythm of cast and reel-in. "I love what I do," he said. "I get to fish." He gets to fish a lot. A professional angler is one that fishes tournaments for money. As such, "I spent a lot of time studying lakes off the water," he said. "I spend a lot of time studying lakes on the water."

Fish are habitual creatures, he said. If you watch and study, you can track their modes, and then catch them. "I love getting on the water and figuring out the puzzle, the pattern," he said. "Bass fishing is a mental game. Where should I be? When should I be there?"

In answering those questions, he's pulled in some true prizes. He's traveled to new areas and new lakes. No matter the scenery, there's one thing that

doesn't change. "I'm always one of the first at the boat ramp," he said.

He gets to teach as a guide. He gets to entertain. "I get to do what I want to do." It's not just his job. With a constant sunburn and streaming jargon, fishing is part of his identity.

"I'll tell you what's special," Rackley said. "When it's 6:30 in the morning and there are 150 guys out on the water and, since it's dark, they all have their red and green navigational lights on." It's the start of a tournament, and all the competitors are idling near the bank where the national anthem is playing. "Everyone has their hat over their heart and it's just quiet, just for three minutes. We all sit together until someone at the microphone calls your name and you take off one at a time."

Hearing his name, he puts the boat in gear and heads to work.



Megan Knight Force '06 with country singer Trace Adkins.



A photo taken at the Brayton Fire Training Field by Bud Force '03.

Bud '03 and Megan Force '06

FORT WORTH, TEXAS

BUD: CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER AT BUD FORCE PHOTOGRAPHY

MEGAN: PUBLIC RELATIONS COORDINATOR FOR JUSTIN BRANDS

Bud Force '03, freelance photographer and videographer, and his wife Megan Knight Force '06, a public relations coordinator for Justin Brands, are in lines of work where there is no shortage of stories.

"I joke with my wife that it seems almost monthly I have to call her from the top of a mountain somewhere because that's the only place I can get cell phone reception," Bud said. And when Megan answers, she most likely just got off a call with a New York magazine or Hollywood movie set or assisting a celebrity in getting just the right pair of Justin Boots.

Between the two of them, life stays interesting. For better or worse, for richer or poorer, for bad cell phone coverage or extra air travel, the Forces are in interesting occupations.

They could be a comparison study

in fascinating jobs: She is the point of contact between Justin Brands and bands and celebrities that wear products as endorsement—"I have my hand in everything, from working with the media about new product launches, to announcing new endorsee relationships," Megan said. He travels the globe and was named a Top 10 finalist in the BBC International Photographer of the Year and is working to expand his outdoor-adventure editorial market.

She attends award shows and special concerts. "At an awards show, you can look across the aisle and see Taylor Swift and Jamie Foxx. It's pretty cool," she said.

"I have the opportunity to watch an idea go from a simple sketch or leather swatch ... to an entire collection of boots sold throughout the nation," she said. In addition to Bud Force Photography, he's also the photographer, videographer and public information officer for Texas Task

Force 1, the state's primary urban search and rescue team. The job takes him to the wake of the storm, where cities are held captive by floods and damage. He's been trained in swift water rescue and structural collapse awareness so he can document events as they happen on the front lines of disaster theaters.

"Probably one of the most surprising things I've seen was last year in the wake of Hurricane Ike. I came across an African lion in the sanctuary of a church on Bolivar Peninsula," he said. "That's pretty intense video footage."

He edits his work in his downtown studio, across the street from Megan's office. When they carpool home, maybe he'll have word of a new portrait job lined up—he's shot high profiles like Jerry Jones and T. Boone Pickens. Maybe she'll share excitement over a new endorsee. Some compelling Force-family tales have started with, "How was your day?"

"Probably one of the most surprising things I've seen was last year in the wake of Hurricane Ike. I came across an African lion in the sanctuary of a church on Bolivar Peninsula. That's pretty intense video footage."