

# HUMAN NATURE

ELIZA KERR  
(LEFT) AND DENI  
HODGES IN  
YOSEMITE'S EL  
CAP MEADOW

## Diversity Takes A Hike

You could talk yourself blue speculating why few African-Americans and other people of color trek backcountry trails. But rather than bemoan the lily-white landscape, two California women—Eliza Kerr and Deni Hodges—are doing something about it.

Kerr, a former Outward Bound instructor whose resume includes scaling Yosemite's El Capitan and a 44-day traverse of Alaska's Wrangell Mountains, cofounded Wild Women Workshops in 2000. Since then, the Yosemite-based nonprofit has guided rigorous all-women adventures from the Sierra to Tibet. But it wasn't until last year, when Kerr met Hodges at a Wild Women Workshops event, that she realized they weren't reaching far enough. "We always thought one of the best things about our trips was diversity," Kerr says, "but it was chiefly a difference in ages."

Enter Hodges. The Oakland yoga instructor, herself a veteran backpacker, understood the power of the wilderness and was eager to connect Wild Women with a more diverse community. Together, she and Kerr created the country's first women-of-color commercial trek, recruited game beginners from the Bay Area, and with the help of an REI grant were able to provide scholarships for all participants. The 5-day hike was scheduled for mid-September in Yosemite's granite-rimmed Lyell Canyon.

By the time this issue is in your hands, the ranks of wilderness enthusiasts will have grown by a dozen. And if those 12 keep hiking, and take their friends, who introduce *their* friends to the outdoors...now that's affirmative action.

*Dennis Lewon*

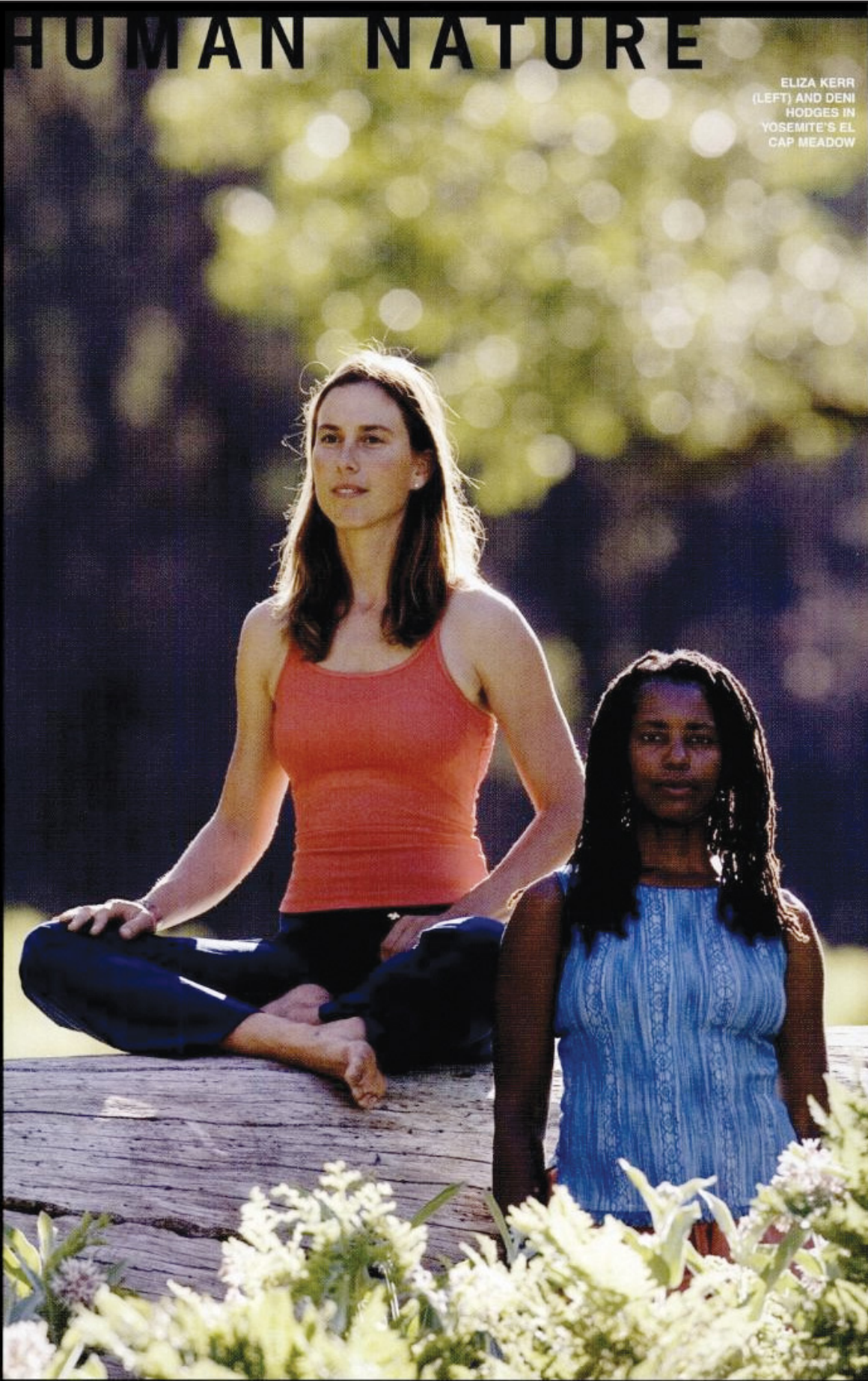


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