

# Whitewater Life

**F**or Ingrid Harder, a day that begins hard at work and ends with her whitewater kayaking is a day of balance and bliss.

Harder, who has worked as a communications strategist and in conflict-management issues during her seven years at DFAIT, is currently in Canada leading a team in the Summits Management Office (SMO) that manages the websites for the G-8 and G-20 summits. But until March she was doing that job from Wellington, New Zealand—some 14,000 km away—where she has lived for the last 15 months with her partner, Mark Malan, who works for the New Zealand government.

Teleworking from that distance was challenging, but the arrangement worked beautifully. From New Zealand, she oversaw five people at Headquarters helping to implement an e-communications strategy for the summits. With daylight savings time, she sometimes had only three hours of overlap with her team in Ottawa.

## Social Media Summitry

Looking for the latest news from the G-8 and G-20 summits? As the events in Muskoka and Toronto unfold, you can follow them on Facebook and YouTube, as well as view high-resolution images on Flickr. News releases and other important materials will come via Twitter. The summit websites ([www.G8.gc.ca](http://www.G8.gc.ca) and [www.G20.gc.ca](http://www.G20.gc.ca)) will have links to these social media services, as well as “eDiscussions” where people can take part in informal public dialogue.

Social media will “allow a whole segment of the Canadian population not in academia or the NGO world to have a voice,” says Tyler Knowlton, the new-media specialist in the Summits Management Office, who laid out the social media strategy for the G-8 and G-20. Newspapers, magazines and news broadcasts still have their roles, Knowlton adds, but the freshest information will come from the Internet.

“We had to be focused; the team would come well-prepared with questions, and our discussions were probably better sometimes than what we would have had face-to-face.” It helps that video-conferencing technology has become so sophisticated that she was able to get a sense of physical immediacy as she spoke to her team each day via the computer screen. “You feel a personal connection that the telephone, say, would never give you.”

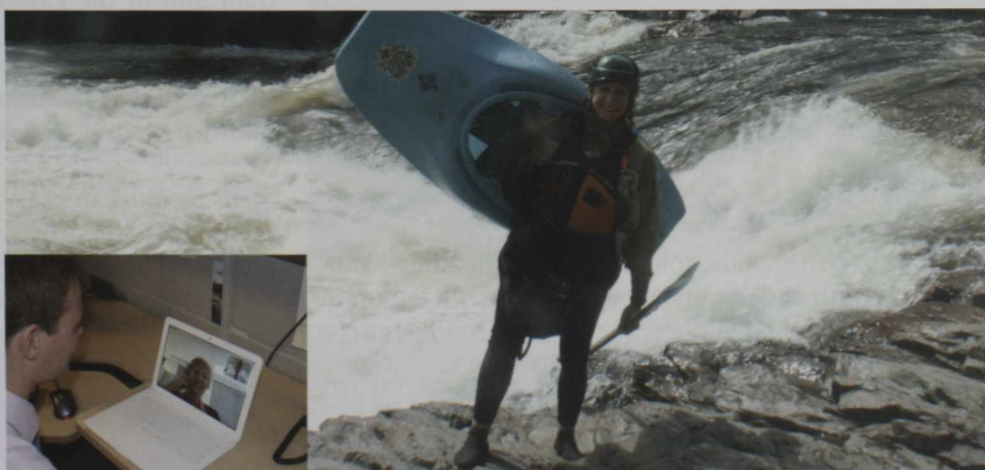
Sanjeev Chowdhury, Director General of Programs at the SMO, says that having Harder telework has been perfect. “While we were sleeping, Ingrid was working, and we were able to give 24-hour attention to this part of the e-comms effort.”

For Harder, one particular upside of teleworking was that, once the three hours of linkage with her team were over, she had the rest of the day to work in productive solitude. At the end of the day, Harder had the luxury of two rivers to kayak on, the Hutt and the Akas, 15 minutes from her front door. They are fine kayaking rivers and are both Grade II-III, which means they are relatively easy.

“You have a couple of hours to squeeze a run in before it gets dark. It’s a fun after-work thing to do,” she says, adding that the pressures of work quickly fade in a kayak. “There’s no better feeling: when you’re on a rapids, you’re totally focused, totally in the moment. You can’t possibly worry about anything else.”

When the summits are over, she’ll return to New Zealand to finish the final months of her contract, after which she would like to continue teleworking in some capacity for the department. Harder enjoys working remotely and likes how it has demonstrated that managing a team from a great distance can be done without compromising the quality of work, which is what the department’s telework policy is all about.

“Our team showed that you can think creatively, beyond the idea of Headquarters always being the base,” she says. “That’s all part of the Transformation Agenda. And if people in e-communications can’t use teleworking successfully, who can?”



Work-life balance: Ingrid Harder likes to kayak in her spare time. On the job (inset), she teleworks, here communicating with Mark McLaughlin, a deputy director in the Summits Management Office, via computer. *main photo: Yvon Martin, inset photo: Tarik Abouziane/DFAIT*