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MUMMY SLEUTHS | PIT VIPERS | THE USA AT 250

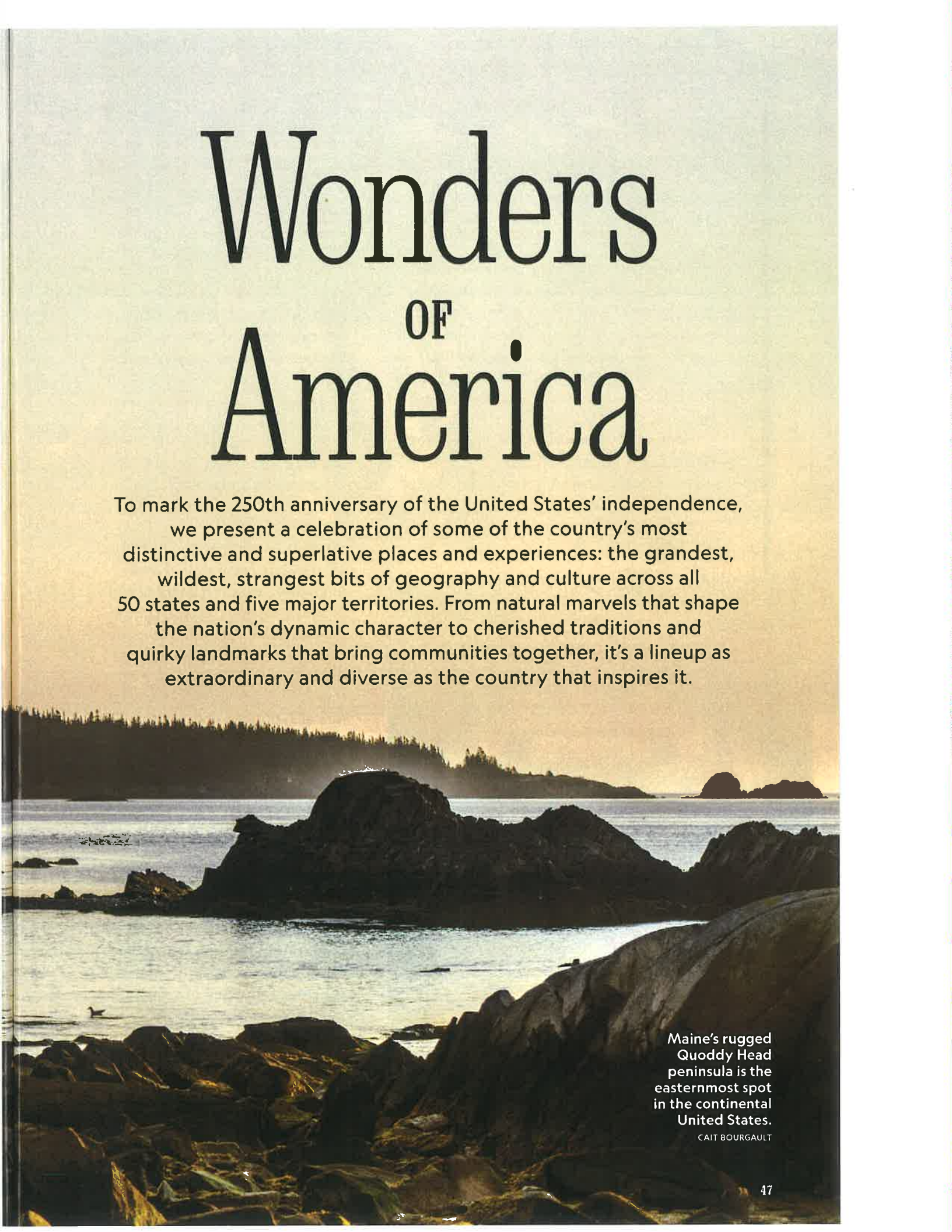
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC BEYOND EARTH



HOW WE'RE PREPARING
TO LIVE AND WORK ON THE
MOON AND MARS

Wonders OF America

To mark the 250th anniversary of the United States' independence, we present a celebration of some of the country's most distinctive and superlative places and experiences: the grandest, wildest, strangest bits of geography and culture across all 50 states and five major territories. From natural marvels that shape the nation's dynamic character to cherished traditions and quirky landmarks that bring communities together, it's a lineup as extraordinary and diverse as the country that inspires it.



Maine's rugged Quoddy Head peninsula is the easternmost spot in the continental United States.

CAIT BOURGAULT

Gnarliest Wave

CORTES BANK, CALIFORNIA

OFFICIALLY, THE BIGGEST wave ever surfed in the U.S. was a 77-foot leviathan ridden in January 2008 by then 42-year-old big-wave ace Mike Parsons. The spot was one few surfers in the world have ever laid eyes on: Cortes Bank, an open-ocean break about 100 miles southwest of San Diego, where some extraordinary underwater topography creates a volatile, legendary wave factory.

Cortes Bank is *almost* an island, a barely submerged seamount that rises abruptly from depths of thousands of feet. Since it's surrounded by deep water, the long-traveled and unobstructed swells that reach it can be remarkably powerful—and in just the right conditions, they climb the underwater ridge and surge upward to become colossal, cathedral-like waves.

And while rising seas have some surfers worried about the erosion of coastal surf breaks, deepwater ones like Cortes are little affected by a few feet of sea-level rise. In fact, climate change could make waves at Cortes even burlier, since warming waters fuel more energetic storms.

Even now, though, riding Cortes is a pros-only affair. Veteran surfer Greg Long, who survived a near drowning there in 2012, calls it “as extreme and dangerous as anything that I would ever want to do in the ocean.” But despite blacking out beneath three waves and being resuscitated by his safety team, he's kept on surfing Cortes since. Such is the magic, he says, of “the bathymetric miracle that exists there.” —CHRIS DIXON

FRANK QUIRANTE (SURFER); ED JONES, GETTY IMAGES (RUNNER)



Longest Footrace

QUEENS, NEW YORK
CITY, NEW YORK

5,649

Times that runners circle a single block to complete the annual Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence 3,100-Mile Race, the world's longest certified footrace, founded in 1996 by the late Indian spiritual guru (and Queens resident) Sri Chinmoy.

40

Days (plus nine hours, six minutes, and 21 seconds) it took Finnish newspaper deliveryman Ashprihanal Aalto to set the course record in 2015, sleeping just a few hours a night.

26

Vertical feet a Sri Chinmoy runner gains (and loses) during one loop of the block. Sounds meager, but a finisher will have ascended the equivalent of five Everests. —BK