

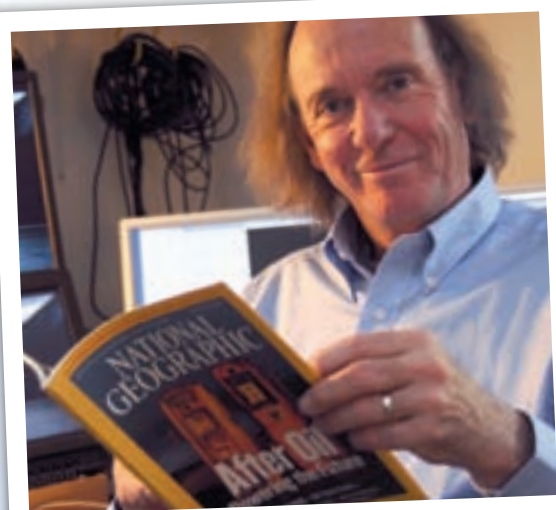
RE People

Who: Michael Parfit & Suzanne Chisholm
Where: Near Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
When: 2003 to present
What: Solar-electric system
Why: Necessity & environmental consciousness

Michael Parfit and Suzanne Chisholm are communicators. They write, edit, and produce articles, books, and documentary films about nature and other topics with their company, Mountainside Films. Suzanne was trained as a development economist, and now is a videographer and still photographer who travels the world. Michael is a journalist who in 2005 penned the cover story for *National Geographic*. The article explored the world's energy plight and considered various solutions. Michael wrote about the big picture, and also included his personal experience.

Just before starting to work on the "Future Power" article, Michael and Suzanne moved to an off-grid island near Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Needing electricity for their home and film production office, they installed a 1,500-watt solar-electric system with gasoline generator backup. So they know firsthand the problems that the *world* island faces—how to power our needs with the resources available, without fouling our nest or sacrificing convenience and functionality.

While necessity has pushed Michael and Suzanne toward renewable energy (RE), there's an underlying fascination with the technology for environmental reasons as well. Michael does not see "how civilization, in the idealistic meaning of the word, can survive on oil for much longer without a descent even further into chaos than we are in now." The promise of home-scale renewable energy is exciting to him—he expects it to be "as significant a factor in human lives as the personal computer in a matter of a few decades."



As is too often the case with new RE system owners, Michael and Suzanne expected the initial system to power more than it was capable of. The upside is that RE—and especially PV systems—are very modular, so they will soon add more solar capacity, or perhaps a wind generator.

The high point of their renewable energy experience so far, says Michael, was the day their PV system came online. "The feeling of independence, as fragile and incomplete as it was, was dramatic," Michael said. "We felt that we were cutting one of the ties to the long umbilical cord that links every one of us to ugly politics, ugly treatment of people, and unsustainable, nasty habits. You can talk about the benefits of renewable energy until the words are all used up, but there's nothing like actually seeing energy move into the system."

—Ian Woofenden