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Foreword

By Reggae Ellis

After two disrupted and locked down winters we are all looking forward to a return to some kind of “normal” this season. For many that simply means being able to leave the city, head to the mountains and go skiing. Driving through the resort gate will be a big moment and if nature cooperates we won’t have to wait long, the opening of the ski season just a few weeks away.

Of course, a lot of people couldn’t wait until our winter and did not hesitate to reacquaint themselves with the freedom of travel and the joy of skiing overseas when international borders reopened. That includes the crew here at Chillfactor and it didn’t take long for us to work out a content-gathering itinerary from Europe to North America.

“Like the turn of spring, the world opening up has felt like a breath of fresh air,” Coen Bennie-Faull writes in a story on a road trip he did along BC’s Powder Highway with fellow Hotham skier Drew Jolowicz and photographer Dylan Robinson. I couldn’t agree more, and it was a good feeling to board an international flight for the first time in over two years.

Our senior photographer and designer Tony Harrington has really been getting his travel fix, spending six months on the road, creating stories and photos from Jackson, Grand Targhee, Chamonix and Alaska. Harro’s still not back and even designed the magazine on the fly, the majority of it being done during down days in Alaska.

But as we all know, there is something special about Australian skiing and skiers and we have plenty of content including a day mission to Bogong’s West Peak, a look at some iconic Australian runs and an interview with Olympic mogul champ Jakara Anthony.

Finally our photos feature on the 2021 winter is a good reminder that there’s nothing quite like a good day at your home resort. Now that we can, get out there and have a great winter. See you on the hill. ☘

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, work, ski & adventure. We pay respects to elders, past, present, and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded.

Deep in the trees at Mt Buller. Skier: Charlie Comben. Photo: Tony Harrington



Contents

- 26 Jakara Anthony**
The Olympic champ on her golden year
- 32 The 2021 Rollercoaster**
Reflecting on last winter
- 44 Ups and Downs with Drew**
Pro skier Drew Petersen opens up on mental health
- 52 Buller Lock-in 2.0**
When every day was like skiing mid-week
- 58 Way Out West**
Skiing Mt Bogong's western face
- 64 Local Knowledge**
The iconic runs in our resorts
- 72 Homegrown Hokkaido**
Meet Niseko's real locals
- 80 West of Wanaka**
A Road Trip Through the Southern Alps
- 88 Chamonix**
Who would ski here?
- 100 Switzerland**
The complete skiing experience
- 106 Frontiers of Freedom**
Road tripping Canada's Powder Highway
- 118 Wyoming**
Jackson Hole, Snow King & Grand Targhee
- 132 At Home with Kai Jones**
Hanging out with the 16-year-old big mountain prodigy
- 142 Alaska**
Why you do (and don't) want to go there
- 158 Winter Starts Now**
A look at the new Warren Miller film
- 172 An Eagle Eye**
A different photographic perspective

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On the cover: "Kitchen crew coming through" Points North Heli chef Buddy Blackwelder has been working in Alaska for the past 8 years, just so he can score a couple of heli rides. Photo: Tony Harrington.
This page: Falls Creek local Nick Payne taking in the lakeside views. Photo: Riley Mathews



Skier: Jess Hasiat / Photo: Harro

Who says skiing is only for weekends? Wouldn't you prefer... *...this?*

This is Buller midweek. The mountain is untouched and waiting for your line; and there's no line at the lift.

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Work from *home* here this year.



ON-THE-FLY



ADAPTABILITY

The Old Bold Skier

THERE ARE OLD SKIERS AND BOLD SKIERS BUT NO OLD BOLD SKIERS.

Respect our tobogganing brothers and sisters. Too many skiers think that tobogganing is destroying our ski resorts.

Our ski resorts will not be destroyed by those who toboggan, but by those who watch them with condemnation. The resorts have fenced them in, stripped them of their freedom to roam the mountain, robbed them of the right to experience the mountains in ways that we do.

Tobogganers are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, with the same hopes and ambitions as us—except that a twist of fate has meant that they are only seeing snow for the first time now.

To be called a tobogganer is not an insult but a badge of honour, joy and the first step to a life in the mountains. Support your local tobogganer and give them the space they deserve. ☺



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BLAZE

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10 Do's and Dont's for International Ski Travel

*Illustrations by Jared Rodden
Words by Watkin McLennan*

It's been a while for most of us since we last sampled some fine international pow. We thought people might be a bit rusty on appropriate ski resort etiquette and how to represent Australia OS. Here is our list of do's and don'ts when you are traveling beyond our sandy shores.



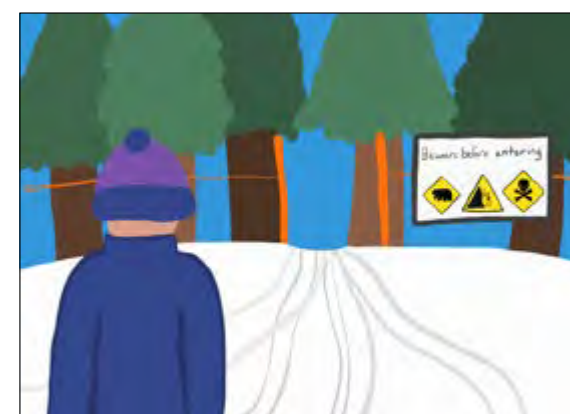
1. Don't be a dickhead.

If you're a dickhead stay at home and take up golf.



2. Do tip.

The big wide world has economic customs that differ to ours. Tipping is one of them. We know it feels strange to tip when the service has been bad. But someone's gotta support the ski bum lifestyle. If it helps, think of it as a donation.



3. Don't die.

The mountains can be a little more real in the big wide world. There are many ways they can kill you. Stay safe, know where you are going and hire a guide if you want to get adventurous.



4. Do dryland training.

Preparing your beach body for skiing takes a bit of work but it will help you make the most of your short holiday and keep you away from ski patrol.



5. Do Après Ski.

It's just so much fun. But Après is the key word. Don't be that drunk guy lost on the other side of the mountain. Refer to Don't die for more details.



6. Do speak to strangers.

You might get lucky, fall in love and earn a citizenship in a snowier part of the world. Ski holiday for life?



7. Don't pay for excess baggage.

Do wear ski boots on the plane. Jetstar might not like it but you just tell them "these boots are made for flying and that's just what they'll do."



8. Don't tell people how good your ski holiday was.

Keep it to yourself. No one needs to know about your extravagant hobby.



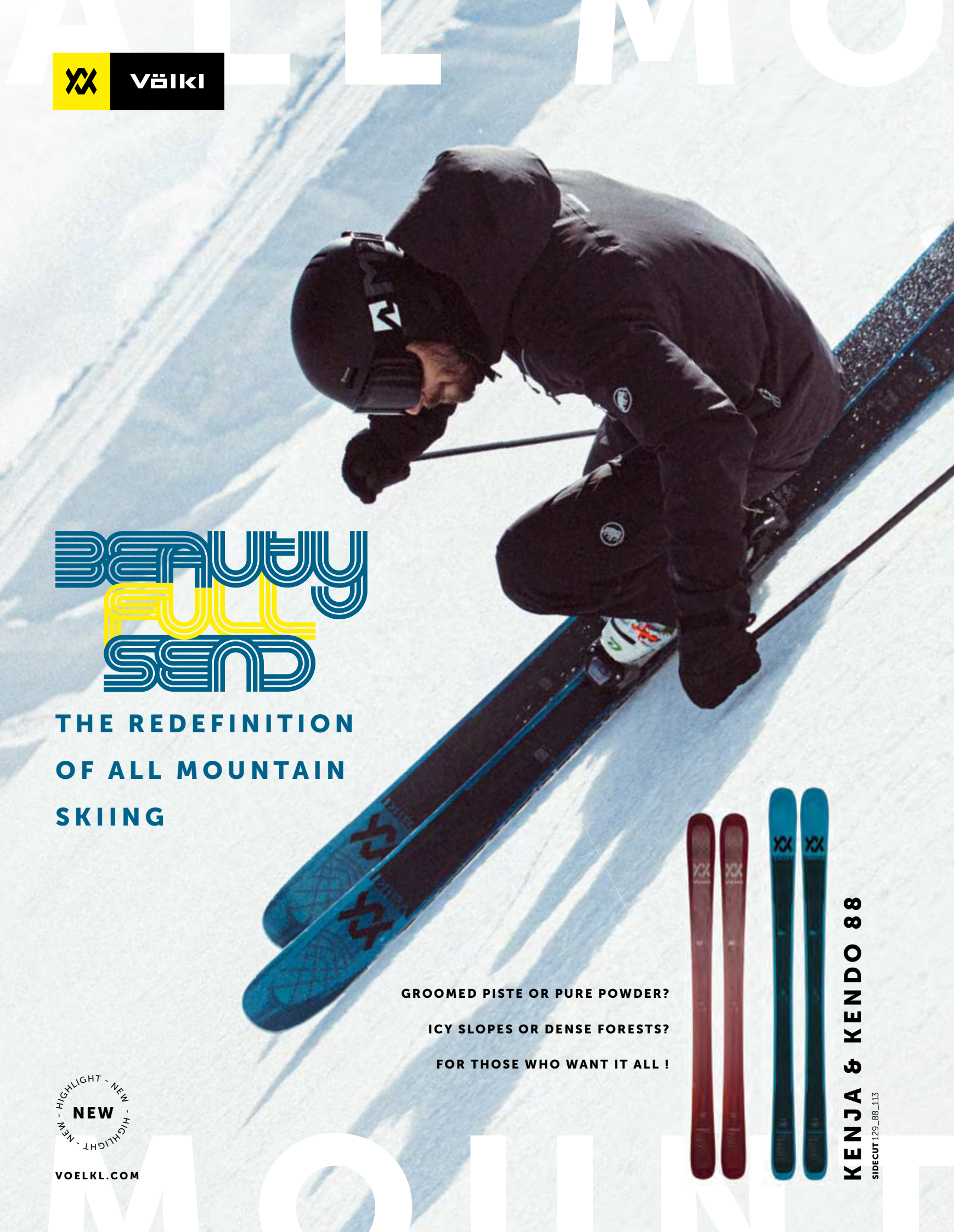
9. Do get the right travel insurance.

No one wants to support a GoFundMe for a heli rescue off the back of Annapuri.



10. Don't forget about skiing in Australia.

We know the snow can seem whiter on the other side of the fence but nothing quite compares to a week skiing in the snow gums.



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FACTION



A Golden Year

JAKARA ANTHONY TAKES IT TO ANOTHER LEVEL

By Reggae Elliss

For Jakara Anthony the past six months have been a dream come true, winning both the moguls Olympic Gold Medal at the Beijing and the Crystal Globe as overall World Cup champion. Jakara's incredible season included a record 12 World Cup podiums as she pushed the progression and performance level in women's moguls in each event.

Reggae Elliss recently caught up with a happy and relaxed Jakara who is firmly focused on the future, the next Olympics and becoming the best skier she can.

Well, firstly, congratulations on the Olympics, winning the gold medal and on your stellar World Cup year. What an epic season!

It's been absolutely insane. Starting the year, like you were saying, with an Olympic gold medal, a Crystal Globe, and then coming home and getting some pretty cool opportunities off the back of all of that. It's been incredible.

I saw you at Bells Beach for the Rip Curl Pro this Easter, you and coach Pete McNeil had the access all areas VIP Pass and you got to witness some epic surfing as well.

It was an incredible event and to get a behind the scenes view into that and how it runs and how the athletes handle themselves and everything was really interesting. Just being a fly on the wall and seeing how other athletes in elite sports function.

You were firmly in the Tyler Wright camp down there and she went on to win the event. She's a two-time world champion, did you get a chance to talk to her and compare your sports, approaches and success?

I loved chatting to Tyler. It was really cool to just see her going about her business there, how focused

Left: Jakara's progressive airs are setting the standard in women's moguls, and an integral part of her Gold Medal run. Photo: Tim Clayton/OWIA



and in the zone she was before her heats. She absolutely ripped out there and was definitely the one to beat. It was pretty cool to be a tiny little part of that journey there.

With the live broadcast the surfers have to deal with a lot of attention. I counted four cameras in Tyler's face before that final. That's something thing you usually don't have to deal with, but did you experience anything like that at the Olympics?

It's funny, during the Olympics and at our World Cup we have quite a few cameras around as it is captured for international broadcasts but when you are competing you just don't notice them. You become so focused on your own ritual and process that is all becomes part of the periphery that you just zone out.

You mentioned it being a 'COVID' Games, but your first Olympics were at PyeongChang in 2018, which was full on and pre-pandemic. What was that like compared to this year with the toned-down opening ceremony, no spectators, no family - was it a totally different atmosphere?

They were two very different games in a lot of ways, particularly the COVID aspect. No spectators or anything at these games, which did make it a little easier to just focus in on what you were doing. Pros and cons to it. I couldn't have my family and friends there to celebrate at the time and to watch in person, but maybe it made things a little easier. Very different to my experience going into PyeongChang, I was going in knowing that it was just for the experience to learn what the Olympics is like, what it's about. I didn't have any expectations on my performance and I was able to ski to my ability there and come away with a fourth, which I was over the moon with. It was personal best at the time. Contrast that with coming into Beijing, I had experienced the Olympics before and I had much higher expectations for my own performance, I was determined to perform at a level that could take out that top spot. They were very different games in a lot of ways, not just COVID.

Above: Jakara, all smiles and wrapped in the Aussie flag after her win. Photo Tim Clayton/OWIA



Those four years makes a big difference, doesn't it? Last time we interviewed you for Chillfactor was 2019 and you said your air tricks were a 360 and a back tuck. That's all changed up now.

Yep, back mute on the bottom and a cork seven mute on the top and it is a big difference from PyeongChang, where I was doing 360 and a back tuck. There has been a big step up in the women's field over the last four years and we have progressed so far so quickly. It's been really cool to be a part of pushing the competition and the sport. The majority of the women's field are now competing with either a D spin or a back flip with a grab in it or a back full. It's been really awesome. I think it's going to keep going for a little while!

You are the only one doing the cork seven mute and airs are worth 20% of the judging criteria. If the other competitors can't match you on the technical air they've got a disadvantage straight away right?

I got the highest score in the women's field for jumps at most of the events this season, which was a pretty cool achievement and something we worked really hard on over the past four years. My turns are also technically strong but nailing the most difficult tricks definitely gives me a big advantage over my competition.

In the leadup to the Olympics you had an amazing World Cup run with a podium result in every event.

I had two wins prior to the Olympics, maybe eight podiums and eleven podiums for the season. Three wins all up - a pretty phenomenal season.

That's an understatement. Watching at you in the start gate at the Olympics, in qualifying and the finals, you had this aura. You looked steely eyed and confident. I remember thinking, "She's going to win." How were you feeling?

I was just so in the moment, focusing on what I needed to do during that run. That's been a really key skill I've learned, particularly over the last year, that's allowed me to ski at the level I'm capable



of – how to be present in the moment and not get too far ahead of yourself or focus in the past. I just really hone in on what exactly can I do right now in this moment to give myself the best opportunity to ski at the level I know I'm capable of. That was the key thing for me at those Games.

Going into the Beijing Games with a podium result at each World Cup event, your confidence level must have been high. You knew you were going to those Games as one of the favorites.

Results are one way to gain confidence, but I also gain a lot of confidence through my training, knowing I've trained harder than everyone else, knowing I've given my all to absolutely everything and I've left no stone unturned. I really think my team and me, we did everything possible to put ourselves in the best position to perform. When we got there, I had so much confidence going in. Because I was like, "All right, I've done all the work and now it's just time to go and execute."

And execute you did.

Yeah, it was an incredible performance. I was really proud of my performance.

So you should be. Especially considering how disrupted the past few years have been. Your 2019-2020 tour was cut short by COVID - how did that impact your preparation?

We were really fortunate with timing to get out of Victoria and get into each state as we needed for different training opportunities. Although it worked well for our training it did mean that I couldn't go home. I've actually probably spent more time away from home over the last two years due to domestic border closures than I ever have before.

It's been a tough couple of years as it has for everyone, but we were very fortunate to be able to go and continue our training in some capacity at each point during the year and get overseas to compete. Like everyone, we had to make some changes to the way we went about things; we lived in a bubble essentially, only spending time and seeing the Australian mogul team. We went to

training, we came back, we slept, we ate and that's pretty much all our lives have consisted of over the last couple years. It's been a tough little journey, but I've learned a lot of things from it.

Lucky you're such good friends on the team.

We've got a pretty special little community and we're kind of like family. I actually do spend more time with them than my own family. It is lucky everyone gets along. We've all got each other's back and in an individual sport it is nice to have that team support around you.

For last year's World Cup tour 2021, you left Australia and were away the whole time in a bubble with the mogul team. How did you feel on the circuit that year?

That was a tough year. We had pretty disrupted training and COVID just took a toll on everyone and everything. I never really felt like I quite got up to the level that I was capable of in competition or in training until right at the end of the season, after all our competitions had finished. I was glad to finally get there eventually, but yeah, I really struggled getting up to speed that season.

And that was at a post season camp in Finland, right?

That's right, it was after the World Championships in Kazakhstan. I went back to Finland with my coach, Pete McNiel, and we had a really great little camp there that kind of started that final year of preparation into the Olympics on a positive and happy note.

And you took that with you into our domestic season. I know you were training up in Perisher again last winter. When New South Wales got locked down, you were fortunate to still be able to train on Toppa's Dream, the mogul run over in Blue Cow.

We were really lucky during the last couple years of COVID to have such good support from New South Wales Institute of Sport, Olympic Winter Institute of Australia, Snow Australia, team sponsors like XTM and Karbon. All of them working behind the scenes to make things happen for us so we could still have the best possible opportunity to train. We were still able to progress really well over the last couple years.

Again, going into World Cup '21-'22 how'd you start off?

I got the podium on the first event and only missed one podium that whole season. That one I missed was after our Christmas break, when I didn't end up skiing at all because of weather in France. We couldn't get on the hill. It was tough coming back off that break. But yeah, I started the season with the bang and had a couple of really good training blocks heading into it. I was really happy with where my skiing was at regardless of the results. I

felt like I was skiing to the level I was capable of and I was doing new things on new courses every week. It's mentally tough, but it's a pretty rewarding feeling doing that.

To get to the consistency elite level sport demands, you have to train hard physically and the mental side is just as important – how you maintain that?

It is not easy. First there's the physical component of our sport, which is pretty important. It's a high-impact sport. You have got to be fit and strong and put a lot of time into building that up. But just as important is the mental side, there's a lot of mental factors in our sport. There is a fear factor. There is genuine risk involved with our sport. Then there's all the fear of failure, performance, pressure, and learning to deal with that. Over the years I have learnt a number of mindset skills that have helped me manage where my thoughts are going. I've had a really good team around me that have been able to not only teach me those skills but help me to apply them day in, day out.

Talking about fear, when you did land your first because cork seven mute on snow and how scary was that? Was it here in Australia?

Yes, I did my first ones on snow here. Taking a new trick to snow is always a bit scary, but we're lucky enough to have water ramp facilities in Australia, which are plastic ramps into a dam if you're in Melbourne or a nice pool up in sunny Brisbane, where we have our new facility, the Geoff Henke Training Centre. We do a lot of numbers on water first, so we know when we make the shift to snow, we are going to land it.

And it's a whole other level landing those tricks on snow.

Yes, there are big deductions for landing errors in Moguls. You want to know you are not only landing it, but you are landing the trick well, and then you've got to ski out back into the moguls and make it look like you never even left the ground. It's the toughest part of the course, in my opinion so you need to be very confident going in with your jumps.

You've had your coaches with you for the journey for a lot of years now. After your gold medal you shared a heartfelt thanks to Pete McNiel and Kate Blamey – how does it feel to have them supporting you?

Yeah. Kate first coached me when I was 12-years-old in Team Buller Riders and then came to work with the Australian national team just after PyeongChang. I've worked with Pete on and off since then too and full-time since I was 16 and he's been a huge part in helping me develop into the person and the athlete that I am today.

We all met from skiing and working at Mt Buller, and we have travelled together all over the world. It



was pretty amazing to be standing at the top of the mogul course in Beijing with someone I've known since I was 12 and skiing down to someone else who has been with me since I was 12 as well. From Team Buller Riders to an Olympic gold medal, pretty amazing to think how things work out that way.

You and Pete spend a lot of time together in each other's pockets, are there times when you're staring at each other over the Corn Flakes and ready to have some time away from each other?

[Laughs] We do spend a lot of time together and Pete's been there through the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. I think the thing that's so good about our relationship is the trust that we have. I have so much trust in him as a coach and he has a lot of trust in me as an athlete. He tells me to go out and try some pretty wacky things at training and I'm just like, "All right, I'm trusting you on this." More often than not, they tend to pay off. We make progress quickly because I trust him, and I take things on board fairly quickly. I think that's been key in our relationship and success.

And you've had good support from Snow Australia, the Olympic Winter Institute – how much of a difference does it make to have that framework behind you?

The support we receive to go and do our sport, it makes a world of difference. I've been on the New South Wales Institute of Sport since I was about 13 and Olympic Winter Institute of Australia since I was about 18. Once you get to that Olympic Winter Institute of Australia level, you're receiving enough funding that you can just do your sport without worrying about the financial side. You can dedicate all your time to training, improving and getting better results. We're really fortunate to have this in Australia and superb team sponsors like XTM and Karbon that provide the gear we need to train. There are just so many people behind the scenes working to make it happen for us - we're really lucky to have that.

Now people might think you've just won the Olympic gold medal, you've won the World Cup

tour, the pinnacle and the highest achievements in your sport – what's left?

I'm definitely looking to go to the next Games, but there's a lot of things I want to achieve before that. We've got other events like World Championships and World Cups to focus on, and then I've got goals that don't even relate to results that I want to achieve in the sport. Pushing boundaries, jumps, turns, all sorts of things. I've got a lot of things that keep motivating me to train hard and keep pushing.

You have been super busy since you came home with a lot of commitments including some fun stuff, like the Grand Prix.

The Grand Prix was incredible. I was an ambassador which meant I did some media to promote the event as well as going to the event myself. I met some amazing people and had some very cool experiences. I didn't realise winning a gold medal would result in me doing a hot lap or walking the grid right before the race but it was very, very cool!

Back during the Olympic telecast Channel Seven had parties on air at athletes' family homes including yours. Your parents looked so stoked when you won, was it great to see that from over there?

Mum and dad were so proud. They've been my biggest supporters over my journey. They had to put in the hard yards, both emotionally, financially and in terms of dedicating their time to get me to training, to mountains, overseas training camps etc. They have just been so supportive in every way. They just want me to be happy and loving what I'm doing, and they just did their best to try and facilitate that.

I guess bringing home an Olympic gold medal is a nice way to say thank you.

Yeah. They do love the medal too.

Thanks Jakara, good to chat to you and congratulations again.

Thank you. It was fun to chat. ☺

Jakara nailed back to back gold in the World Cup in Alpe D'Huez, France, in mid-December. Photos: Chris Hocking



Cross the Mountain.

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Jakara Anthony - Beijing Gold medalist, World Cup and Duals Champion.



Photos: OMA

The 2021 Rollercoaster

REFLECTIONS ON LAST WINTER

By Reggae Elliss

NSW's Main Range was a refuge for Snowy Mountains locals during the five-week August/September lockdown. Photo: Boen Ferguson



As we head into what we hope is the first ‘normal season’ in three years it feels like time to reflect on the last.

The past two winters weren't much to write home about, and 2020 is one we'd rather forget with NSW under 50% capacity caps and Victoria in lockdown. As 2021 started the resorts, the snow industry, skiers and snowboarders were feeling chipper and hopeful. In hindsight, that optimism may have been premature and we embarked on a rollercoaster of highs and lows, both in terms of lockdowns and snowfalls.

Snow-wise last winter was a one-month wonder with two big storms in July the only thing to save a very much a below-average season. Using the Snowy Hydro's snow reading at Spencers Creek, the depth for 2021 peaked on July 29 at 183.6cms, and by the end of August was down to 157.3cms.

Peak snow depth is usually reached in August or September when resorts are at their fattest. This is the first time since 2014 that the peak came in July.

As far as lockdowns go, the Victorian resorts endured three lockdowns of varying length, but

managed 75 days – a lot better than 2020. It doesn't tell the whole story however; most of that time only some regional Victorians could ski. Melbournians only had access to the mountains for a month at the start of the season and then for 10 days from July 27-August 5. The city then went into yet another lockdown until October, so spare a thought for anyone from what was one of the world's most locked down cities.

In NSW the resorts were quiet with visitation down 70% when Sydney went into lockdown on June 26. When the ACT and other regional areas domino-ed

into stay-at-home orders too, the mountains were open but were ghost towns. The nail in the coffin for NSW resorts went in on August 15 when a state-wide lockdown was announced. It lasted nearly five weeks.

Even without the hell-ride of the pandemic the weather and snow conditions served up a winter of highs and lows. Pre-season, a couple of light snowfalls and good snowmaking temps saw Perisher achieve another early opening with lifts spinning on Front Valley on June 4, a week before the usual kick off. The other resorts were busy

building their base and it was looking good for the regular opening weekend start of a few lifts open on minimal terrain at most resorts. However, an East Coast low developed off the NSW south Coast in the week leading into the opening weekend, dropping 5-10cms on Tuesday June 8, before unloading across the Alps. The resorts received 30-60cms in two days and in the Snowy Mountains heavy snow fell as low as Jindabyne creating havoc on the roads.

The wet, heavy snow ensured all resorts had some lifts open on the June long weekend.



The rest of June was pretty uneventful but snowmakers took advantage of cold temps over the following weeks to progressively get more terrain open. Natural snowfalls were light on for the rest of June with an 8cm top up on June 24-25, but only after 50mm of rain.

At the start of July, the Snowy Hydro's Spencers Creek snow depth was a meagre 54.8cms and the open terrain in the resorts was limited to snowmaking areas. However, climate drivers which had been neutral were shifting and the IOD (Indian Ocean Dipole) looked like it would go negative boosting potential for a couple of decent storms.

A few days later NSW saw 15cms on July 3-4 and the first good day of the season - -4C, 11cms of fresh snow and off piste terrain coming into play. The following weeks stayed cold with quality dry packed snow and moderate WNW winds giving Thredbo refills; we enjoyed fun mornings on the corduroy and dry, packed snow off piste.

Things picked up on July 15-16 with a cold storm and after 30cms of fresh snow Saturday July 17 went down as one of those "best in years" days and powder turns.

15cms more landed across July 20-21, with more again on Friday July 23, although strong WNW winds made it hard going and sent everyone on windhold at times. The snow hit strongest on Saturday July 24 with 40-50cms measured by Sunday morning and 10cms more that night. Storm skiers embraced an awesome couple of days in the NSW resorts with constant refills. The following week kept on delivering with a 25-30cms top up on July 28 and the cherry-on-top of steady snowmaking and wind-blown adding to already superb cover.

This back half of July when the snow arrived in force cruelly aligned with when Victorian resorts were again in lockdown. A handful of on-mountain crew pulled out their backcountry set-ups for some great in-resort touring. In NSW the Sydney lockdown kept most skiers away making for one of the best month's skiing I can remember here in

Left page, clockwise from top: Arkie Elliss, loving the powder on July 17. Adam Kroenart in the Thredbo's trees during the second July storm. Bailey Johnson, training in Thredbo's Antons' park. Photos: Boen Ferguson. Right page: Boen Ferguson, back to his skiing roots on an epic Thredbo powder day last July. Photo: Adam Kroenart





Thredbo. It was cold and blustery but the rewards were there; and the lack of people meant even the powder days were totally mellow and hassle free. Those two July storms turned out to be the biggest of the year taking the gauge at Spencers Creek from 63.7 on July 14 to 183.6 on July 29. Hopes were high for August.

Mid-season started off well, with a tidy 15cms over the 3rd and 4th before it went dry and fine for two full weeks. We didn't see another storm until August 24 with a dose of 15-20cms across the Aussie Alps. The month ended with light falls on the 28th-29th

and closed with a 10cm top-up on August 30, but the cumulative August tally was only 55cms. The official snow depth at Spencers Creek was 157cms; a 30cm loss over that month.

September saw plenty of melt, a warm air mass and hairdryer northwest winds saw down temperatures as high as 8C. The mercury did drop again in mid-September and there was a dusting of 5cms on the 13th followed by a few cold days which helped hold the snow pack at higher elevations. The NSW resorts were allowed to reopen on September 16, Perisher rolling Front Valley as soon as the

restrictions lifted at 1.30pm while Thredbo took another day and resumed operations on Saturday September 18.

With just two weeks of the season and most of NSW and ACT still locked down, Charlotte Pass made the call not to reopen. The "reopening" weekend in NSW came with a rain event that deluged 50mm in the early hours on Saturday followed by gale force pre-frontal NW winds and wind-hold on the Sunday.

No lifts or terrain parks in Perisher during the lockdown, so Martin Longhitano improvised and found some different features to hit. Photos: Casey Ripper.





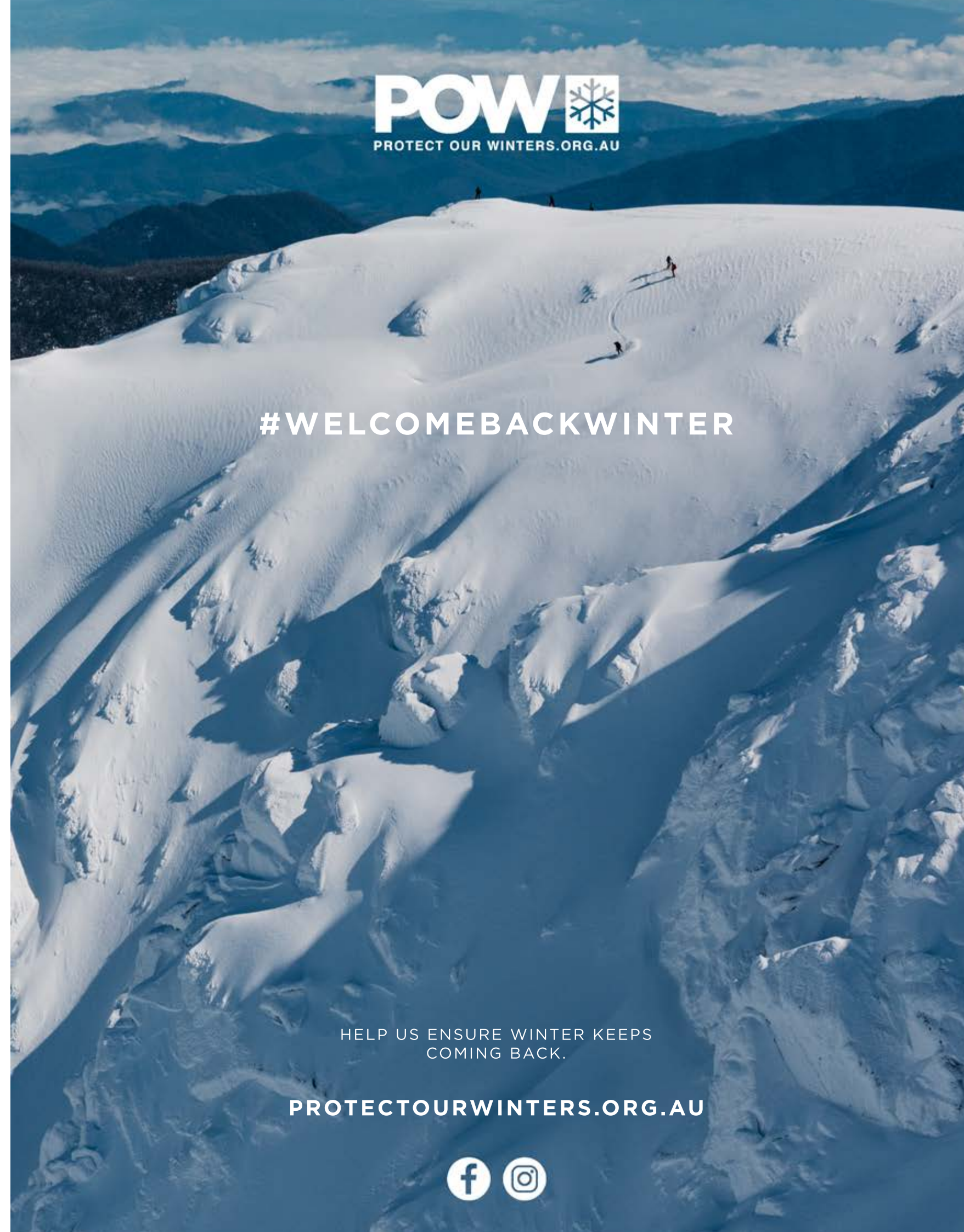


However, a late consolation prize of solid snowfalls on Monday September 20 produced an excellent late season powder afternoon with no people and fresh turns every run. After some punishing weeks that Monday was up there with one of the best days of the year. The weather cleared unveiling the 40cms of fresh from the preceding 24 hours at a dry -6.2C; it was a classic mid-winter powder day in Spring, better late than never.

The rest of September saw a mix of good spring skiing thanks to a melt/freeze cycle and some rain into the closing weekend. As you'd expect, with visitation limited to regional areas the final two weeks were very quiet in all resorts and you had the feeling the season was crawling to the finish line. Thredbo pulled the pin a week early on September 26 and Perisher had its pin pulled a few days later when the region went back into lockdown. Down in Victoria the resorts remained open for regional visitors and it was cheering to see Falls, Hotham and Buller make it to closing day.

What a year. The resorts all did an incredible job rolling with the pandemic punches and working hard to maintain operations for those lucky enough to be able to get on snow. Here's hoping 2022 cuts us a break and gives our industry a chance to get back on its feet, and we can all get back on skis. 🏂

Previous page: Drew Jolowicz chasing night time powder in Hotham during the Victorian lockdowns in July. Drew is wearing a headlamp while remote flashes create the backlight. Photo: Dylan Robinson Left: Cade Robinson, Flat 3 in the Antons park on Thredbo's closing day, September 26. Photo: Jimmy Williams



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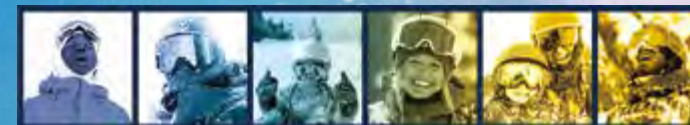
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Ups and Downs with Drew

*Words Drew Petersen and
Rhylla Morgan*

Crouching in the Truckee River late on a January afternoon the water is hovering around 2.5C. Puffy-wearing dog walkers are hurrying home as the winter sun drops to the horizon.

They do a double-take when they see a pile of clothes on the snowy river's edge and a man calmly submerged up to his neck in the icy current. Professional skier Drew Petersen relocated to Truckee at the beginning of the ski season and the river is close to his new home.

What started as a novel experience his new housemate Todd looped him into, the icy dips have now grown into a practice for Drew. "It's good to get uncomfortable. To counteract the shock of

Left: A quiet moment in the Truckee River. Above: Drew is embracing his new ski home in Tahoe. Photos: Tony Harrington

the cold water, I focus on my breathing, slowing it down in order to take calm, slow, deep breaths. It's an opportunity to re-centre myself and be fully rooted in the present moment," says Drew.

"Cold water immersion has been scientifically shown to increase the production of mood-boosting hormones and neurotransmitters, including dopamine and noradrenaline. "I always walk home after a cold dip in a better mood."

As he picks his way gingerly from the rocky riverbed back to his towel Drew's skin is smacked pink. He marvels at the white patches in the crook of his elbows, untouched by the cold water while his arms were pressed tightly in a prayer pose.

"Our bodies are incredible, when you see how we are built to respond and get blood exactly where it's needed. These two little spots didn't need the

warm blood flow," Drew observes with a detached curiosity.

As an alpine athlete Drew is no stranger to being tuned in to the finer workings of his body, training to hone his skills on skis and building resilience to carry him through his adventures on snow and running ultra-marathon trail races. It's his job. A job he loves and that demands countless hours on snow and workouts in between to maintain the physical fitness that this elite-level sport demands. He's the first to admit, it's a fortunate life to ski pow and pursue mountain adventures for work.

"I am indeed 'living the dream.' That piece and perception of my life is not untrue in any way.

There's just another side to my life—and another side to me—that I've previously always kept hidden. My struggle with mental health has been



life-long in many ways, but it really came to a head in the last five years. Things got really dark for a long time. Now the difference is that I'm talking about this side of my reality."

Drew is shining a light on that darkness through the release of a powerful short film, Ups and Downs. Within, layered on top of beautiful powder skiing, Drew opens up with raw vulnerability, discussing the depths of his depression, suicidal thoughts, and his path towards healing with a candour never before seen in a ski film.

He's breaking trail with honest conversations, 'going deep' and talking about suicide and depression and in a way that is reshaping the stereotype of what a sponsored athlete's sphere of influence can be. His sponsors Salomon and Hestra have been with him for the ride and joining Drew on a journey that adds another level of depth and inspiration to the usual brand ambassador role. Talking with an audience following one of the screenings

Drew acknowledges his film is, "Not the 'normal flavour' ...[for] a ski movie. I hope to change the culture and break down the stigma of mental health." And he is. One conversation, magazine article, podcast chat and film screening at a time.

"What I've learned more than anything is that there is infinite power in changing our entire culture surrounding mental health. The number of people who have reached out to me and opened up with their own stories continues to amaze me. All of these struggles – all the way to my struggles with suicidal episodes – are truly normal. I didn't fully believe that until now, but if I could have known that when I was at my worst, I would have felt much less alone."

He explains in Ups and Downs, "No one understood the suicidal piece of me... In reality a lot of my life has been spent in this dark, lonely and depressive place... One of the greatest truths that I've learned is asking for help is one of the strongest things you can do. Probably the most important thing I've done in my whole life."

Catching up with Drew for some playful spring sunshine laps at Alpine Meadows he seems to be in a good place. Settling into a supportive community in Truckee, surrounded by a circle of friends and close to San Francisco where his girlfriend is studying. He's striking a balance of skiing hard at Palisades Tahoe and his pro-skier stuff with chilling out with friends, their kids and dogs and keeping check on the foundations of sleep, nutrition and therapy.



"Moving to Tahoe feels like a fresh start. With my renewed mental health, the opportunity to develop community and explore new-to-me mountains is really helping me to settle in and just feel like myself. Feeling aligned with who I am and already feeling at home here gives me hope as I carry on with my new sense of purpose."

We talk about what's next and he's exploring how he can help more people and improve access to mental health services. And keep skiing - of course I can't help thinking Drew is changing what it means to be a sponsored athlete through the contribution he's making to our mountain-loving community.

A ripping skier who inspires us with his pow prowess and who equally makes it the norm to

really talk on the chairlift ride, especially about the difficult and dark stuff. To get help, to ask for help and to normalize all of it as part of the experience of being a human - that's a healthy example for anyone.

Find Ups and Downs at >>> drew-petersen.com where he shares road-tested advice and super helpful mental health resources.

Follow @drewpeterski to add more beard icicles, burritos and seriously good ski content to your IG scroll. 🍌

Previous: Bluebird shred at Alpine Meadows. Above: Taking life a day at a time. Photos: Tony Harrington



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 **HAKUBA VALLEY**
Japan's Largest Snow Resort

Photo By Hiroya Nakata



Buller Lock-in 2.0

By Watkin McLennan

“It snowed 40cm in the last 30 minutes up here!” Nick Reeves shouted down the phone at me as he battled 100km winds near the top of Mt Buller’s summit. It was Tuesday 20th July. Victoria was in lock down. It had been snowing on and off for several days and suddenly Buller was on.

The second season of COVID lockdowns kept the Melbourne weekend warriors away. For those that could stay for the season they had a two-faced ski resort. When the lifts ran the runs were empty, skiing like mid-week even on the would-be busiest days of the season. And when regional Victoria was in lock down Buller became a public park where instead of ovals and playgrounds, we had ski runs to stretch our weary ZOOM bound legs.

The two-faced resort flipped every few weeks as the virus peaked and subsided. This duality reminded me of Buller’s normal two-faced season where every weekend it’s transformed from quiet alpine retreat to Melbourne’s Mountain. Buller more than any other Australian ski resort suffers from the proximity curse. Buller’s proximity to Melbourne is why it has almost twice as much lift capacity as Thredbo, Hotham or Falls Creek with a similar amount of terrain. And why Buller offers unrivalled seasonal programs that repeatedly produce world-class skiers. The flip side of these benefits is every

weekend in July and August Buller is chockers. The key to skiing Buller is to only visit midweek or - as we discovered last season - during a pandemic.

Claire my partner, and I went for a walk that night. After hearing the chaotic reports from Nick Reeves up top we wanted to see what the village looked like. Like a true apocalypse the streets were dead quiet with only the odd streetlight illuminating the dense swaths of snowflakes as they fell. Cars were buried so deep that they no longer resembled vehicles, but monster moguls on a powder day. As we walked our excitement grew. The next day we would share the mountain with only a few dozen other ski tourists.

In lock down all the lifts were closed. Having already been in lockdown for the preceding week we had developed a powder day routine. It started pre-dawn with skinning up the snow-covered roads through the village. A few minutes took us to the bottom of Skyline where we would tour up the would-be skier cross course and transition at the top of Bull Run chair near a blue start hut that had been abandoned in a snow drift. It was the perfect place to whip the skins off in a blizzard.

Ski touring inside a ski resort is completely different to skiing it lifted. Rather than planning your day

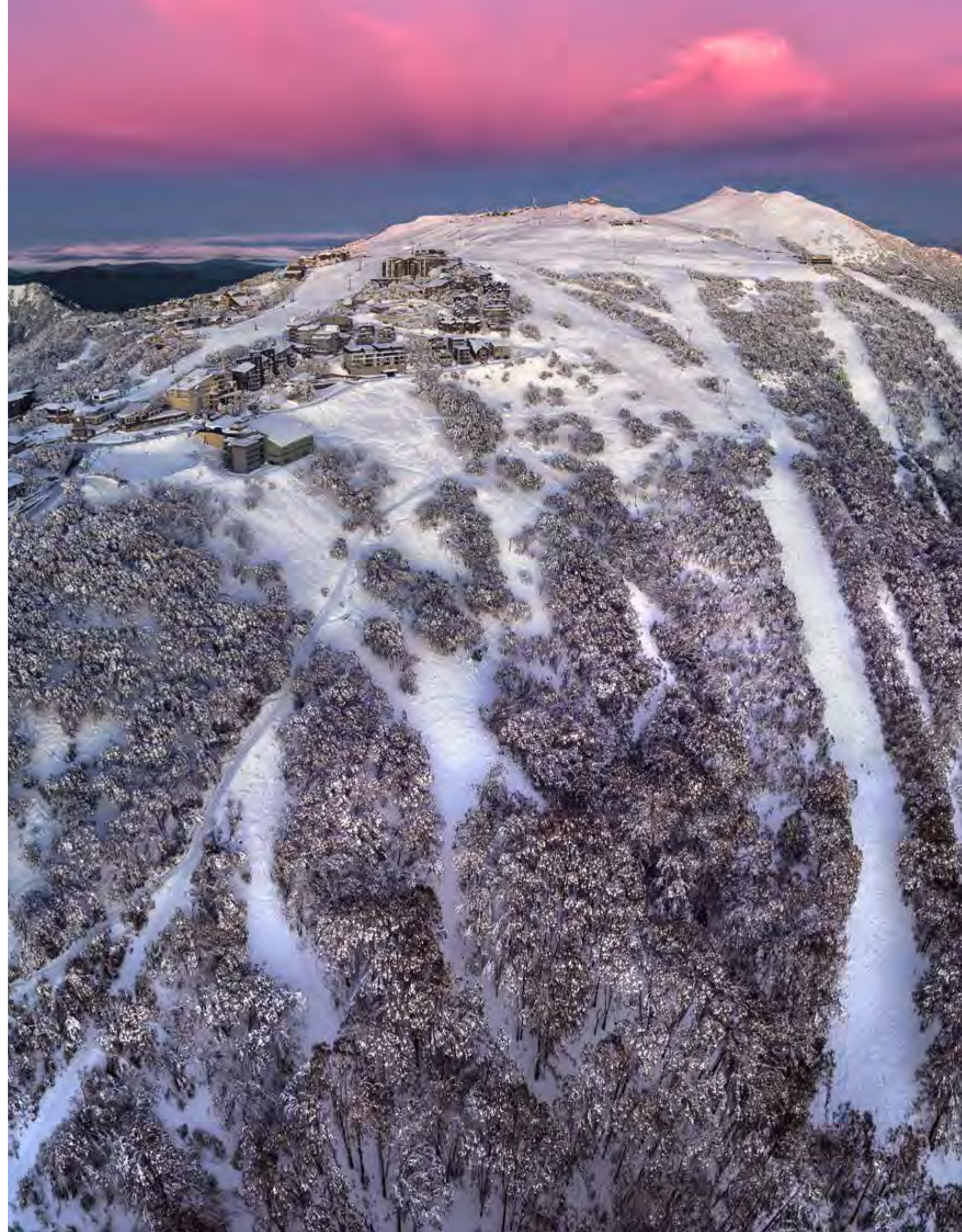
around chairlifts and restaurants you plan around up tracks and picnics.

On Buller’s south side there are two main up tracks. The first and most used is Standard. Touring up Standard can get you back to the village, onto Federation or over to the north side for a change in scenery. The other up track is Zwiier’s Zig Zag. This isn’t the most direct route up, but it is a whole lot more interesting than walking up Little Buller.

A common loop for us was to ski Federation to the bottom and then head up Whiskey Creek trail to Zwiier’s Zig Zag onto Family Run then past Kofler’s to the Summit. This was literally Buller’s bottom to top from the lowest lifted point to the highest. It would take about an hour, and it was rare to do more than one in a day.

On this epic Wednesday we found ourselves at the top of Bull Run chair in our trusty blue hut. There was a small group of us, and we decided there was time for a few Standard up tracks before moving on to Zwiier’s. The question was where to ski first? The dark grey of the blizzard at dawn was becoming a lighter as the sun rose.

A private powder playground in mid-season. Top right Charlie Comben Top left Andre Bennett. Right Mt Buller in all its glory. All photos: Tony Harrington






On the previous mornings we had done the opening run classics like Sun Valley and Wood Run. This morning seemed special. This morning required new thinking. This morning we tested a run at Buller that I have never understood.

The old guard often talk fondly about this run but I have never understood why. Why do you like icy bumps with no rhythm? Why do you like hitting rocks that never seem to be covered? What do you know that I don't? On this morning we discovered what the old guard were on about. We discovered that this run was special because after 40cm in 30 minutes it skis like a British Columbian pillow field. Those arhythmic moguls become opportunities to spontaneously change direction. Those rocks finally get covered and offer even more airtime. A consistently steep pitch means that all of these airs and transitions are met with soft steep landings.

That run was only one of many pleasant discoveries last season. Much like the time spent sitting on a chairlift, the up track is where you meet people and chat. For the locked down community at Buller they became conversation trails for catch-ups in lieu of dinners and nights at the pub. During the late August lockdown Kofler's remained open for take-aways. It became the local cafe of choice - a great excuse (the only excuse) to leave the village and get some state sanctioned exercise. One sunny Saturday there may have been 50 people spread out across the Kofler's flats all enjoying a latte taking in the alpine sunshine. The police were even there on their skidoos to enjoy the community spirit.

Buller last year skied a lot differently. We skied different runs at different times of day. We ate in different spots. We got back up the hill in different ways. All of this created a very different ski resort, a very different mountain.

It has made me realise one reason why skiing is so good. Mountains have the ability to transform. They transform in minutes as a storm rolls in. They transform over days as snow accumulates or melts. They transform throughout the week as crowds come and go.

Last season Buller transformed to the rhythm of the virus. One transformation that will continue and that every skier should make the most of is Buller's weekly transformation from Melbourne's mountain on the weekends to Buller's mountain mid-week - where skiing the quiet runs might make you feel like you're back in a Buller Lock-In. 

Andy Fallshaw in Thulkes. When there's no lifts operating, touring or tele mark set ups are a must.

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Bogong's West Side

A DAY TRIP TO VICTORIA'S HIGHEST PEAK

By Drew Jolowicz



In recent times skiing for me has been about exploring the Australian backcountry. To the untrained eye the Aussie Alps may first appear underwhelming in stature, but those in the know hold a very different perspective. Those who know this country see beauty and ruggedness, in mountains that are some of the oldest in the world. Worn and sculpted through the ravages of time, steeped in history they have a story tell.

With the ebbs and flows of another COVID season emotions were frayed. We're all human and it was another rollercoaster year. Freeskiing is about expression and freedom; feelings hard to come by in a pandemic when our freedoms were limited. Can we go? Can't we go? When can we go? These questions were looping on repeat.

By late September spring had sprung, the Victorian high ground was calling and there's none higher

Left: The view up to West Peak from the Kiewa Valley on a crisp early winter's day. Above: Clouds brew over the Victorian high ground in the late afternoon light. Photos Chris Hocking

than Mt Bogong. [I know, I know, we went there last year, so the editor nearly didn't run this.] As the crow flies the Main Range isn't that far away, why not get there? For those who reside south of the border the Sentinel or Watson's Crags may as well have been the French Alps or the Chugach. It is in NSW and the border was closed to us - and besides, in 2020 we never made it to West Peak.

As good as the skiing is up here it's not why humans first visited the area. Rich in Indigenous culture the region was home to the Yaitmathong people. In the Waywuru and Dhudhuroa languages the mountain is named Warkwoolowler. Translating to 'a place to collect Bogong moths.' Visiting tribes sought permission from the traditional land owners to spend some of the warmer summer months at the higher altitudes feasting on the protein and fat rich delicacy. Often walking for days different clans would come together, feast and hold sacred ceremonies.

On the summit of Warkwoolowler you can feel the presence of the First Nation Elders. While some

of us skiers consider our recreation ceremonial, it pales into insignificance when reflecting upon the history of the clans who roamed the earth before us. In taking the upmost care when acknowledging the Yaitmathong people, our reason for being there was different.

Perched on the outer limits of the Bogong Massif lies West Peak and some of the most stunning terrain in the Victorian Alps. As a kid I can remember being at Hotham flicking through a ski mag and coming across a photo taken by Andrew Barnes. Jumping off the page was Australian skiing legend Bill Barker ripping the very western edge of Bogong. It must have been the early nineties. Greg Stump's 'Blizzard of Aahhh's' had been released a few years prior, re-invigorating the free skiing movement.

This was a golden era. Here was a classic photo of Bill busting perfect jump turns on long skinny skis with his trademark dreadlocks flowing in the breeze. A timeless image, it could easily have been Scot Schmidt in Chamonix France. Only it wasn't, it was Bill charging West Peak Australia with Mt Beauty thousands of feet below. That image fuelled my desire to ski the West Peak. Some things change, some things stay the same. Skis have changed, the striking views and rich green pastures of the Kiewa Valley remain the same, as does the grace and style with which Bill still skis with today (and he still has dreads).

Our objectives for West Peak were ambitious. Up, out, and back in a day. Were we bonkers? Maybe. Most people ski this zone as part of an overnight trip. Leaving early, Chris Hocking, Dylan Robinson and myself would travel light, not being tempted to ski other lines along the way. It was a hard slog, but it was a stunning spring day, warm and sunny, and by late morning the snow surface was silky smooth corn. We were fortunate to be the only one's skiing 'Way out West' and had the place to ourselves and skied a few different lines with Chris capturing some stunning pics.

Photographer Chris Hocking captures the very essence of spring skiing in Australia as Drew skis Bogong's West Peak with the township of Mt. Beauty thousands of feet below. Photo: Chris Hocking



As the sun drifted across the evening sky it was time to begin the suffer-fest back down the mountain. In truth it's not that bad. A quick pit-stop at Michell Hut for some whisky and a break made the final descent that bit easier. By 6pm we were back in civilisation. Twelve hours door to door, a big day, everyone was beat. Satisfied though, we'd ticked a bucket list box.

If the turbulent state of the world over the past two years has shown me anything, it is to appreciate what we have at right at our door. Maybe it takes a once in a hundred-year event to take stock, slow down and explore our own backyard, but there is no need to wait another ten decades for the next homegrown adventure. Where will it be? Not sure, but it will be a different destination in the Aussie Alps as there is so much more to explore. **f**

A view totally unique to Warkwoolowler. Rich in Indigenous culture this is the land of traditional owners, the Yaitmathong people.
Photo: Chris Hocking



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Local Knowledge

THE GO TO RUNS
IN YOUR RESORT

By Reggae Elliss

EVERY RESORT IN THE WORLD HAS THEM, THE ICONIC “GO-TO” RUNS THAT LOCALS AND IN-THE-KNOW SKIERS HEAD FOR WHEN THE CONDITIONS ARE RIGHT.

There are a few “go to” runs in each resort, runs that are at their best when the wind is a specific direction or when visibility is poor or a semi-secret hard-to-get-to gem on a bluebird powder day. Too many to name and everyone has their favourite, but here are a few of the iconic runs you’ll find in our major resorts.

INTERCEPTOR, PERISHER

One of a few go-to runs in Perisher that are a long way from Front Valley, the top of the Interceptor offers a choice of lines either side of the top station. It’s a bit of a mission to get to and two days after a storm the hidden spots still have lines and you’re more likely to get that classic post-storm bluebird day. A little bit of wind buff will make sure you’re not hitting the bottom after that 15cm Aussie “dump”. This particular face is around the corner from the top of the chair and faces southeast so it loads with snow from the NW winds that bring the classic winter storms. Skier Lucas Wilkinson. Photo: Perisher.





THE DARK SIDE, FALLS CREEK

Darkside is located in the Sun Valley at Falls and it is often loaded by a north westerly wind, the motherlode storm in the Northern Victorian Alps. Its south-east shady aspect means it gets a little morning sunshine and afternoon shade which keeps the snow in excellent condition for days after a storm. For locals like Tom Costa, it is a favourite go-to run. Photo: Chris Hocking.



MCCOLLS, HOTHAM

McColls is one of many go to runs for the Hotham locals. Tucked away off to the side of the Blue Ribbon Chair, it offers protection from the elements on a storm day. It's a case of north-west is best and if the wind is blowing from this direction the snow collects amongst the snow gums down this end of the valley. Heaven on a powder day as Drew Jolowicz can vouch for here. Photo: Chris Hocking



THE BLUFF, THREDBO

With direct access from the top of Kosciuszko Chair, the Bluff is an obvious run that gets tracked out early on fresh snow day, but it is the go-to in a variety of conditions. Facing south/southeast, the Bluff is a snow-gathering bowl with a variety of lines and a decent vertical drop of 250 metres to the outrun at the bottom of Cannonball. When the wind is moderate to strong out of the WNW, the Bluff comes into its own with constant refills of soft wind-blown powder and fresh tracks every run. That's why many locals will tell you that a windy WNW afternoon is when Thredbo is at its best. Joey Elliss, on one of those days. Photo courtesy of Le Bent.



**THE VILLAGE BOWL,
MT BULLER**

It is hard to pick just one run at Mt Buller, but there is one place at Buller that is totally unique. The Village Bowl is Buller's own. Nowhere else can you ski such good terrain through the Woolly Butts. These trees, sometimes called Alpine Ash or Eucalyptus delegatensis, grow around all our mountains. They tend to grow no higher than the typical snowline where the trees transition to snow gums. At Buller this is around 1400m. In the Village Bowl however, the trees seem to creep up a little higher. Village Run 1, 2 and 3 are gladed runs through these giant trees and every time they are open it is a privilege to weave between their trunks. Charlie Comben threading the goods. 🏂
Photo: Tony Harrington

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Hokkaido Home Grown

MEET THE REAL LOCALS

Words & photos Chad Clark

The 2020-21 season in Hokkaido was the first of its kind in over a decade... quiet, no lift queue, 3pm powder in the resorts, and untracked snow for days in the backcountry. For those of us living and working here in the snowsports and industry, we were cautiously optimistic, even hopeful, for the return of at least partial tourism for the 2021-22 season. Once again, our hopes were dashed, this time by Omicron.

While we missed the usual influx of inbound tourists, we definitely made the most of our opportunity to feast on a season-long tabehodai (all you can eat) powder buffet. With nearly as much snowfall as last season but perhaps more consistency, it was another surreal and epic season for those lucky enough to live here in Hokkaido.

Not known for steep or challenging terrain as in other areas of the world, Hokkaido is, however, known for the deep, dry, consistent snow that seems to fall endlessly in the winter months. Indeed, it was endless, from mid-January to mid-December. Whilst the resorts were relatively empty, it's always good to get out and explore the backcountry when the conditions are prime.

A brief break in the heavy snowfall and a clear morning weather window beckoned us to try to hit a notoriously steep zone not too far from home in Niseko. I was with a group of friends from town exploring this zone for the first time. As we hiked towards the drop point, I stopped on an exposed ridge with a clear view of the slope, to see if it would be a good vantage point to shoot some photos.

I saw a skier, who wasn't part of our crew, getting ready to drop. I quickly shed my pack and hurried to pull out my camera, fumbling to dial in the settings just in time to catch Sapporo freeskiier Hide Okada on his first line. The conditions were unreal! Taisuke Kusunoki dropped next and then a bit later, Saki Hayahshi and the rest of the crew. The snow was unreal, and the boys were ripping.

These are some of the images from the session. Later I caught up with Hide, Saki and Taisuke to ask them some questions about each of them, their skiing, and that unforgettable day in the Hokkaido backcountry.

Hidemitsu (Hide) Okada

Where are you from?

I was born and raised in Hokkaido in Otaki village, now called Otaki Ward in Date City. After high school, I moved to Sapporo where I still live today.

Tell me about how, when, and where you first started skiing?

I started Skiing at 3 years old. I learned from my father who is a ski instructor.

What type of skiing do you do? I started as a slopestyle athlete and now I'm a freeskiier, active in Japan's freeride competitions. The rest of my time is spent in the backcountry getting photos and filming.

How would you describe your style?

In a word, I'm a freeskiier, searching for the best powder and pillows.

What do you love about skiing?

I love the feeling of gliding through powder as well as airs, but it's really about sessioning various zones with my group of friends. The mountains provide extraordinary scenery and I just love spending as much time out there as possible.

What is a typical season like for you?

I start my season in Hokkaido in December and in February I usually travel to Hakuba for competition and photography expeditions. I ski the Japan Freeride Open and this year I placed 3rd! In March I will usually be in Central Hokkaido chasing spring pow on photography and filming trips.

How have the past two seasons been different?

My friends and I continued to ski and take photographs, while taking the necessary precautions against infection. Hokkaido typically sees large numbers of skiers from overseas, but as this year there were less visitors there were less tracks and battling for powder.

Are you looking forward to a return to normal winter?

I'm definitely looking forward to all the Hokkaido fans returning, but it would be nice if they could leave some space for us locals too!

Describe that day we met in the backcountry

That day was one of the most memorable of my skiing life. The quality of the snow was without a doubt my favorite of all time and the zone we skied was incredibly exciting. The weather was perfect and combined with the snow, it was the best I can remember. I was excited to drop and ski the line I had been envisioning. The excited but nervous feeling before I dropped and the elated feeling after I stuck the line were amazing.

What do you do in the off-season, green season?

For the past 2 years I have been getting addicted to mountain biking, maybe because the line down the mountain is similar to skiing. It's great to envision your line and descend. I can't do everything that I want to yet, because I'm a beginner, but I want to work up to getting air like skiing. It's great for off-season training and I'm out in nature and in the mountains. I fish the rivers around Sapporo and I love to camp near Furano.

Saki Hayashi

Where are you from?

I was born in a village in Austria and after some years living here and there I ended up on the far north coast of New South Wales, Australia.

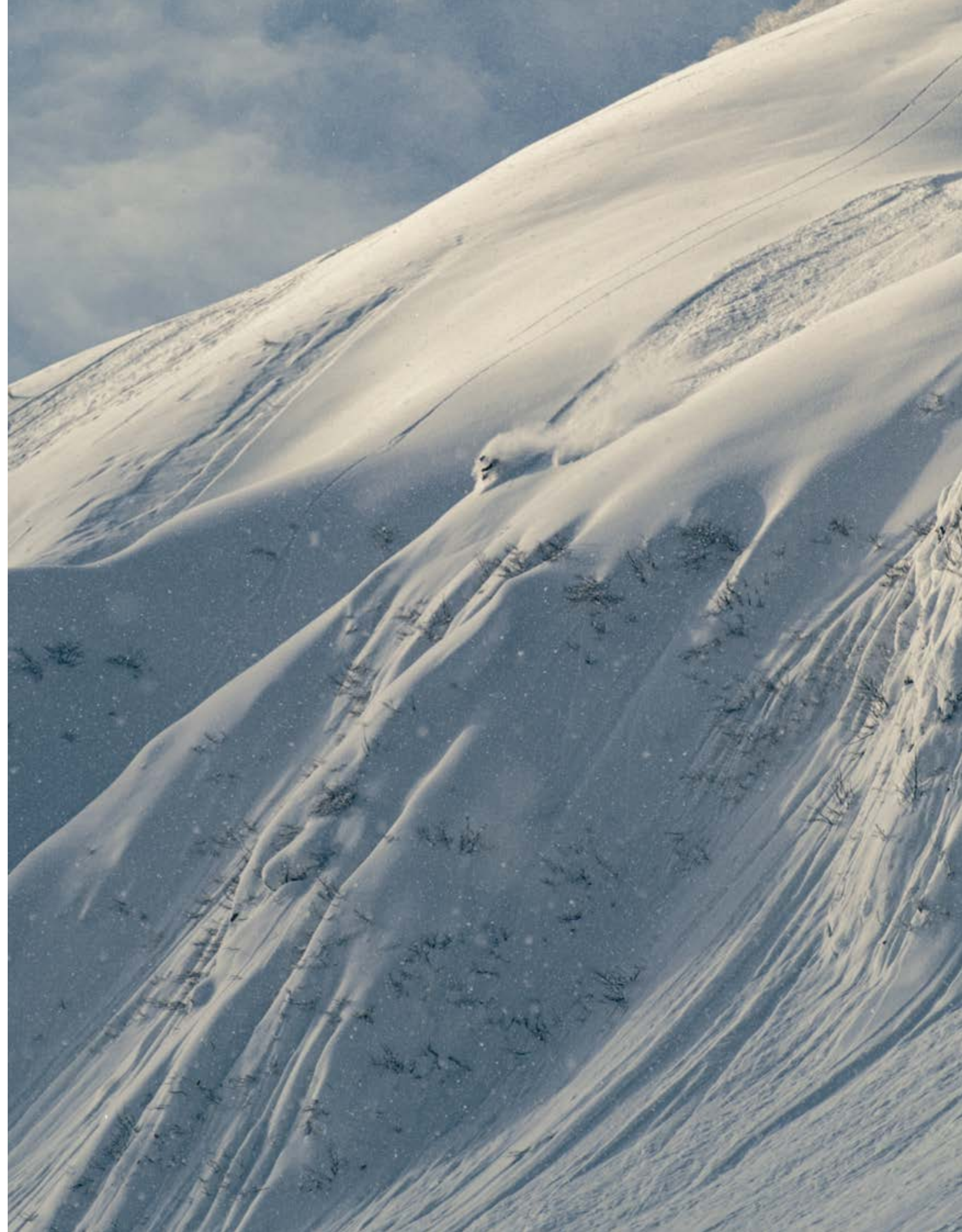
How long have you been in Hokkaido?

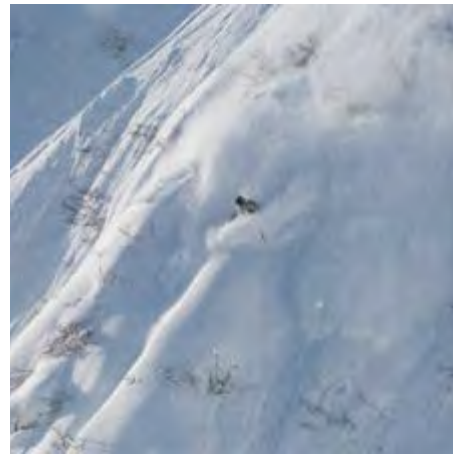
I first started coming to visit Hokkaido about 11 years ago during the Australian summer holidays. I have been living here on and off since 2014.

Why Hokkaido?

Hokkaido has the best snow in Japan (maybe the world) and some pretty underrated terrain. It also provides me with a great balance of work and play. Originally, I planned to stay here for one or two seasons, but I couldn't stop coming back. In 2019 my business partner Josh and I launched our Backcountry guiding company, Niseko Zen and Hokkaido became home.

Hidemitsu Okada dropping a line he has been thinking about for a long time.





Sequence: Taisuke Kusunoki dropping into perfect snow in a classic line in the Hokkaido backcountry. Portraits, top to bottom: Saki Hayahshi, Hidemetsu Okada, Taisuke Kusunoki



Tell me about how, when and where you first started skiing?

It was the Aussie summer holidays in 2007 and my brother mum and I were heading to Japan. I remember being so excited to try skiing. We went to Mt Naeba, a ski resort that sits between Niigata and Nagano prefectures and I instantly fell in love with it. Naturally, I was terrible at the start, but eventually I got the hang of it and took some lessons. I was hooked and skiing eventually became my life and career.

What type of skiing do you do?

I would say that my main focus is backcountry skiing. I feel the most joy when skiing bigger, scarier lines. As far as freestyle goes, I have a shallow bag of tricks, but I love to get airborne! For me it is all about feeling smooth and fast. I like trying to flow with the terrain as much as possible, but I am also always on the hunt for something to jump off of.

What do you love about skiing?

I love being in the mountains but I am not the biggest fan of walking back down them. Skiing down is so much more fun! Skis are such a great vessel for adventure in a snow-covered world. In a place like Hokkaido where the snow cover reaches from the highest peaks all the way to the sea, with the right gear you can go pretty much anywhere.

What is a typical season like for you?

In a typical winter season, I'm busy with ski lessons from mid-December. But that doesn't stop me from squeezing as much freeskiing as I can between clients. It just means that there are a lot of early starts so that I can make it back in time to ski with guests. From January through to March, the backcountry season is on and the gates are open. Everyone is hungry for powder and you have to be quick and know where to go to get the goods.

How have the past two seasons been different?

These past two seasons have been surreal, finding fresh powder has never been easier. The town has been quiet and most of the bars and restaurants have been closed. Less work means more time and it has been a great opportunity to explore new terrain, learn new things, and get ready for the next wave of tourism when travel resumes.

Saki Hayahshi dropping into some serious terrain. Don't believe everything you hear. Hokkaido has some great terrain, it is not all about low-angle in-resort powder.



Are you looking forward to a return to normal winter?

As a business owner I am most definitely looking forward to seeing the town come back to life. A lot of businesses including my own are counting on it. I have really enjoyed the quiet mountains these past two years, but I am ready to get back to it.

Describe that day we met Hide and Taisuke in the backcountry.

It was January the 10th, a crisp Monday with about 30cm of fresh powder on top of an already epic base. We had been waiting for some good weather to go hit that zone and it had finally lined up. We started our hike in the morning but by the time we got close to the drop zone we could see that another group was already ahead of us! It turned out to be some Sapporo freeskiing legends. While we finished our ascent, the weather cleared and the boys dropped, showing us exactly how good the conditions were! The snow was deep and it was absolutely blower. I aimed for the line I had been planning in my head... a spiny cliff section just below a blind roll. I was stoked to stick the line. It was one of the most memorable days I've had in the backcountry.

What do you do in the off-season, green season?

I'm waiting for normal travel to resume but for now I run some tours in the rivers and the sea. I surf, camp, hike and really enjoy everything Hokkaido has to offer. I also spend a lot of time in Jozankei, a small onsen village on the outskirts of Sapporo, where I work as a white-water rafting guide from mid-April through summer. Last year we opened a new course which is the highest-grade summer rafting course in Hokkaido. If you're in Hokkaido in summer, hit me up! but mostly I enjoy surfing, camping and other outdoor activities.

Taisuke Kusunoki

Where are you from?

I'm from Osaka

How long have you been in Hokkaido?

I've been going back and forth between Hokkaido and Osaka since high school, so I have been around for a long time.

Why Hokkaido?

Where I grew up, there are no mountains or snow and I always thought that to enjoy the ski life, Hokkaido would be the best choice. It's got the best snow in all of Japan! Also, some of my great friends from high school are here. It's a beautiful place and above all, I just LOVE Hokkaido!

Tell me about how, when and where you first started skiing?

When I was 7 years old a bus tour started operating between Osaka and Hakuba for just children. I remember the trips to the mountains with all my friends. It always felt like a special event and we all had the best times.

What type of skiing do you do?

Backcountry, freeski and big mountain. I also snowboard and yukiita (no bindings).

How would you describe your style?

Freestyle! Firstly, it's just fun! It's extremely exciting and rewarding searching for good snow and good zones, skiing the line you've envisioned and capturing a great photo or video, then ending the run with a high five! I love the camaraderie, going to the onsen after a day in the mountains, eating delicious food, drinks with your friends, looking over all the pictures and videos of the day and having a good time all the way to bed! There are still a lot of things that I want to explore and express through skiing and I look forward to the future.

What is a typical season like for you?

Every year is different. Up until recently I was doing tournaments with FWT, going to Hakuba for photography and filming and also Canada. These past couple of years I've just stayed in Hokkaido exploring and skiing around the island.

How have the past 2 seasons been here?

They were so very different! It became impossible to travel freely so I stayed in Hokkaido and skied with my friends.

Are you looking forward to a return to normal winter?

Yes, I hope that everything goes back to normal and we can travel easily and have a normal season! It will be nice when everyone is free to go where they want again without stress!

Describe that day we met in the backcountry

We had been planning to hit that zone and I had decided on my line the day before. The conditions looked to be perfect and the weather was forecasted to be sunny for a change! As it turns out, the snow was the best we rode all season. It was so light that I was literally floating. That line was also the best I skied all season. We didn't have a photographer with us, so we were really grateful that you happened to be there and shooting. Thanks for the shots and for capturing the memory. ☺

Saki Hayahshi, high speed run through the backcountry powder, the plume in his wake showing just how dry the snow is. Epic.





SHIGA KOGEN, NAGANO

JAPAN'S WINTER OFFERS A WARM WELCOME

Japan has so much to offer winter travellers. Its snowy northern regions feature some of the best winter sports resorts on the planet and are loved by ski and snowboard enthusiasts from all over the world. But they also offer plenty of attractions for those who just want to enjoy the winter scenery and experience some of Japan's famous winter festivals.

Ouchi-juku in Fukushima Prefecture is a charming and picturesque village that has been preserved more or less unchanged since the Edo Period (1603-1867). Ouchi-juku was first established around 1640 as a 'post town', or rest stop, on the busy Aizu Nishi Kaido route used by samurai and other travellers heading to Edo (the old name for Tokyo).

In winter the village, famous for the rows of traditional dwellings which line its main street, is blanketed in thick snow and the thatched roofs, made from dried straw, provide insulation and warmth. The village and surrounds have been so well-preserved that you'll feel as if you've taken a step back in time; the roads are unpaved and utility poles and power lines hidden from sight. Close your eyes and you might just be able to imagine samurai strutting down the main street.

Today the town's traditional buildings are officially protected and have become a popular local tourist destination. Their interiors provide a tantalising glimpse life at as it was in the Edo Period; many of them feature traditional irori sunken hearths used for cooking and heating, as well as household implements of the era.

One of the more famous of Japan's winter festivals, the Sapporo Snow Festival, attracts many thousands of visitors from all over the world each year. But many smaller, more intimate festivals take place in towns and villages across the country.

Ouchi-juku hosts its own Snow Festival on the second weekend in February. Candles and handmade snow lanterns are placed all around the streets of the town, bathing the old buildings in warm light.



OUCHI-JUKU SNOW FESTIVAL, FUKUSHIMA

In a nod to the town's historic past, the festival also features Edo Period costume competitions, taiko drumming performances, and, unsurprisingly for the food-loving Japanese, a soba noodle-eating competition. The town's speciality is a bowl of delicious negi-soba - buckwheat noodles with an interesting twist: the locals use leeks in place of chopsticks to eat their noodles!

Elsewhere in central Japan, other stunning winter landscapes await those prepared to explore off the beaten track. The mountains of Shiga Kogen in Nagano Prefecture rise to a height of more than 2,000 metres and are covered in ancient forests of hemlock, larch and white birch trees. These form shimmering white powdery landscapes in winter as their branches become covered in frost and laden with snow - a work of art by nature.

A guided tour allows visitors to don snowshoes and hike through natural winter forests that are normally out-of-bounds because of heavy snowfall. In addition to breathtaking views, you'll experience the beauty of winter in this remote and pristine wilderness, a natural park that is also a sanctuary for Japan's iconic snow monkeys and home to the Japanese serow and Japanese stoat.



JIGOKUDANI YAEN KOEN, NAGANO

Those who might find a mountain trek a little daunting-or perhaps families with young children-can view the landscapes from ski lifts, gondolas, or on a snowmobile. On a clear day, there are panoramic views of the Northern Alps, Mt. Fuji, and the Sea of Japan.

The area around the summit of Mt Neko, located in the Sugadaira Highlands of Shiga Kogen, is one of the coldest places in Honshu during winter. Although there are no lifts to the top of the 2,170-metre mountain, you still see many intrepid winter sports fans trekking up carrying their skis and snowboards. They are rewarded with a 3km downhill run from just below the summit. A guided tour in a snowmobile is another option.

A contrast to these serene landscapes can be found in the areas around Jigokudani (literally, "Hell Valley"), whose daunting steep cliffs spewing geysers of hot water gave the area its name. In winter, Jigokudani experiences some of the heaviest snowfall in Japan and temperatures regularly drop to minus 10 degrees Celsius.

Jigokudani's best-known residents are its Japanese macaques or snow monkeys, some of which famously soak serenely in open air onsen (natural hot springs) during the colder months. A facility was built in the early 1960's to provide a sanctuary for them and to allow their ecology to be observed, and this subsequently evolved into a natural park area.

After a day trekking through the snow or perhaps back-country skiing, visitors can find time to soak in an open air onsen themselves and watch the night sky, contemplating a view that has not changed over millions of years.

Winter - a perfect time for visitors to experience Japan, to explore the beauty of its majestic mountain ranges and to immerse themselves in the cultures and traditions of the season from years gone by!



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Are you in?



West of Wanaka

WEEKENDS AROUND
WANAKA DONE RIGHT .

*By Miguel Porteous
Photos Matt Cherubino*

Throughout the week most of us tend to dream about or plan what we want to get up to on the weekend. For some that is a couple of nights on the piss and a dusty Sunday at the beach; if that sounds like you, then this is probably not your kind of story. It is, however, exactly your kind of story if, like me, you try to pack as much skiing, surfing and adventure missions into the short two-day slice of freedom we call a weekend.

My name is Miguel Porteous and I am a professional skier from Wanaka, New Zealand. I am predominantly a halfpipe skier but have always been keen to trade the icy walls of the pipe for fresh snow or a bit of classic Treble Cone NZ wind buff. Last year, after a busy 20/21 Northern hemisphere season, I returned to New Zealand and headed straight into two weeks of hotel isolation. Fourteen days alone in a hotel can get pretty interesting and you find yourself day dreaming about being in that one spot that really feels like home or sparks that feeling of amazement as you try to mentally escape the four walls you're in.

Left: Looking out over potential lines flying through the main divide. Right: Ben Richards mid-way through a 360, above exposure.





For me that spot is Wanaka and the lone road west that connects the small town to the coast. For most this road is a scenic way to get from point A to B, but for those who look a little deeper this traverse offers access to some of the most stunning and rugged mountains in New Zealand. Just as the snow-melt from these mountains eventually makes its way to the ocean so does the road. The tar seal, after snaking through valleys eventually meets the black sand of the isolated West Coast. Here the many sand banks and river mouths are fed by southwesterly ground swells that provide waves to those who have the time and knowledge to find them.

During my quarantine, when I wasn't sleeping, eating or watching *Blindspot*, I started planning the ultimate weekend; one that would start in Wanaka and head west, stopping for a day's skiing before ending with a day's surfing on the West Coast. It wasn't hard to find mates who were keen to join and after a phone call or two we had assembled a small crew of good friends and amazing skiers Dane Kirk and Ben Richards. Things were starting to come together and all we had to do was wait for the snow and conditions to line up for a two-day window.

I've always had interests in old cars, especially tough as nails four-wheel-drives such as Land Rovers. During a lucky scroll through the local trading post in Wanaka I came across a beat-up 1964 Series 2a Landy for sale and it was a bargain. The vehicle in question was pictured covered in hay, dented and well-used through the years as a farm vehicle. However the seller claimed it would still run. From the first look I was sold on the baby blue trooper, I couldn't stop thinking about how it would be a classic vehicle to use for our mission and take west of Wanaka. So, instead of telling the seller he was dreamin' I arranged to pick the car up the following day. A few mates and I spent two days painting, cleaning and giving some well overdue TLC to the Rover until it was ready for the trip. My favourite touch was the makeshift vertical ski rack that sits on the edge of the flat deck.

New Zealand pillow lines with Craig Murray



After weeks of checking forecasts - both for snow and swell – a window appeared that was too good to pass up. The whole crew met on a Friday afternoon for a beer and to talk over the plan for the coming two days. The excitement was high as we used Google maps and other photos to plot potential ski lines and jump spots. We were lucky enough to be accessing the mountains by heli with a direct pickup from the side of the road.

Saturday morning dawned crisp and clear. The first of the crew to escape their beds shortly after the 5am alarm put the final packing touches to the Rover, making sure everything was well strapped down and secured to the flat deck. Ice was scraped from the windscreen and we piled in. The film crew in the support vehicle behind. Those of you with old cars can probably guess what happened next. We turn the key to start the poor old girl on that dark, cold winters' morning - and nothing... The tensions rose a little as we had to rendezvous with our heli pick up along the road at 9am sharp. Time was ticking.

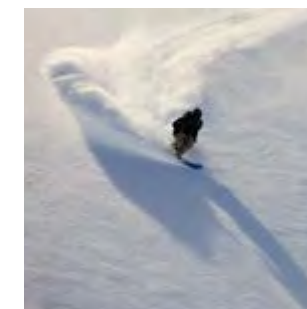
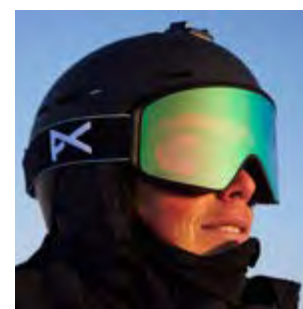
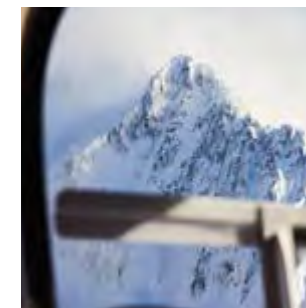
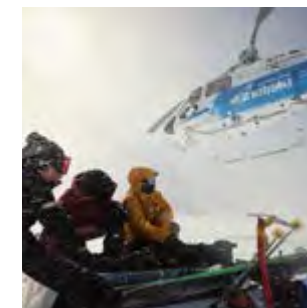
The tension started to climb as we were meant to be meeting the heli and our guides at 9am sharp at an agreed marker on our map. The whole crew

got their shoulders behind the hefty old Landy and shoved her out onto the road. A roll start with our support vehicle was the plan and thankfully after a bit of pushing and towing she sputtered to life. Ben, Dane and I piled onto the tight bench seat and we were off.

I could write forever about the next two days as they were filled with so many highlights including first ski descents, double backflips, more rolling starts, BBQ cook ups, cracking weather and really fun surf to top it all off. However, instead of rambling on I invite you to watch the short film titled 'West of Wanaka' that will be available online for free in June 2022. Hopefully our trip can inspire you to get out, enjoy, and make the most of your weekends creating memories with good mates.

This project wouldn't have been possible without the help of our sponsors Anon, Weber, and GoPro. Thank you. 🙌

From above: Art forms shaped by the wind in the Minarets. Skier: Ben Richards. Insets, clockwise: Boys waiting for the heli; Waiting for the pick-up after a run; Alaskan-looking peaks, Camp set up on the west coast; Ben Richards first run warm-up in some dry NZ pow; scoping lines. Next page: Miguel Porteous hitting a pocket of fresh





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Chamonix

QUI SKIERAIT ICI?

[WHO WOULD SKI HERE?]

Words and photos Tony Harrington

“When you arrive in Chamonix you are shocked. You are in a deep, deep valley that’s as cold as anything... And above you you’re menaced by these giant glaciers and these even more menacing peaks of the Aiguilles. It’s a hostile place, where you don’t feel welcome at first.”

“ And then next thing you ask yourself is where do people ski here? ... And then once you see the lifts you go okay, there’s the Aiguille, there’s Le Brévent, there’s Les Grands Montets... The next thing you ask yourself is who would want to ski here? It is that hard core - it’s steep, it’s consistent and there’s no relief.”

These observations about Chamonix are from an interview I recorded several years ago with Aussie pro skier Chris Booth. I think Chris does a good job of capturing the awe and overwhelm that most people feel when they arrive here and look up.

Is he over cooking it a bit? Maybe he’s sprinkling in some drama, but he speaks the truth. This place is certainly not your average alpine resort.

If you like a mellow ski holiday with terrain that sits nicely in your comfort zone and the experience of cruising from piste to patio lunches you are spoiled with endless choices all across the European Alps. For me, what I love about Chamonix is exactly what Chris talks about as he describes Cham; that awe-inspiring feeling of being surrounded by soaring, sharp mountains that leave me anticipating the potential of a mind-expanding ski experience – if the conditions and mountain allow it.

Chamonix is rich with history matching the staggering scale of its dramatic peaks. The first recorded entry of the name “Chamonix” was back in the year 1021. Monks settled on a bank of the river and established a farm. The harsh

Where are the lifts you might say? Look deep into this image and you’ll see the Aiguille du Midi cable car making its way up to an elevation of 3,842m. That’s some 2.8 km of vertical above the valley floor. In mid-winter there’s a good chance you’ll be able to ski all the way back down to town.



climate and isolated nature of the region limited expansion and kept daily life challenging. The life for the valley-dwellers was fraught with difficulties and extreme poverty, with their only income coming from harvesting cereals, beans and other vegetables. The harsh conditions instilled a toughness and a spirit of rebellion in the Chamionards where they refused to pay the dime to a tax imposed by the church that they obtained their land from. Even when threatened with the unthinkable penalty of ex-communication, they continued to steadfastly resist all authority.

In 1741 the first two alpine explorers in the Chamonix Valley were a pair of Englishmen, Windham and Pococke. Their enthusiastic tales of climbing up the Montvenres into the Vallee Blanche initiated an early flow of tourism into the valley in 1741. Come 1821, following an accident on Monte

Blanc, La Compagnie des Guides was established and extreme adventuring took a foothold.

When the train line into Chamonix was opened in 1901, the number of winter visitors into the valley flourished and it developed into a winter resort. Soon an international ski competition was held and in 1924 Chamonix staged the first ever winter Olympic Games. By 1956 the second stage of the Aiguille du-Midi, a two-stage cable car opens, giving access to some of the highest reaches of the alps and in seemingly touching distance of Europe's tallest mountain peak, the 4,810m Mont Blanc. The top of the "Aiguille" is perched on a chunk of rock at 3842m with a mind-boggling 2800m vertical drop to the town below. It is from up here skiers access routes including the incredible Vallee Blanche, offering up to a 20 km journey of moderately difficult terrain to the valley floor,

as well as some of the most extreme routes skied anywhere on earth.

Chamonix has been long regarded as part of the right of passage for any serious skier. Some come and never leave, like Australia's most successful big mountain skier and 2 x World Champion Andrea Binning who did just that.

Andrea's husband Stian Hagen is a Norwegian mountain guide and alpinist and they have created a life here in the valley and raised two kids. Their 12-year-old son Aksel is as comfortable and competent ski touring in backcountry terrain and climbing the aiguilles as he is on a race course, ski jumping or slaying powder runs with his parents. Camile, just 7-years-old also looks like she could have a skiing future not unlike her Mum. During my visit I was on course with the family to capture

some photos of Camiles's first race. She won a medal, so I might keep that shot filed away next to my collection of shots of Andrea, for when we do a feature on her in a decade's time...

Another person who arrived in the valley and never left is Wendy Stevenson. A savvy entrepreneur Wendy's Irish accent is barely discernable beneath her perfect French. Not only does she know the language, she knows everyone and how to fix problems. She provides a unique service called Wolf Inc, invaluable for ex-pats and visitors, navigating the complexities of local bureaucracy. If you are trying to sign a lease, understand a health insurance form, negotiate the paperwork after a car accident or get tangled up with the police Wendy is your one phone call. There isn't a professional skier, film crew or ski bum who's moved here that Wendy hasn't supported with her special blend of

professional expertise and motherly care – which is peace of mind in a place as extreme as this.

This visit was my first back to France in many years and I was reminded of my first time in Chamonix in the mid 90's. Back then couldn't believe I was finally in the place I'd watched endlessly in "Blizzard of Ahhhs" and I felt humbled as soon as I stepped off the train. I've been fortunate to visit many times since, but the impact is never lost. I don't think there will be a time I'll step out of Chambre Neuf or walk along the Place de l'Eglise and look up without feeling astonished.

I first came to Chamonix in 1999, following competing in the World Heli Challenge in NZ where there were a lot of riders who had either grown up or did seasons here. They talked about it so much that they just sold it to me.

The reason why I stayed is because I couldn't compare the mountains to anything else in the world. The mountains are just jaw dropping, and it's where I met my husband Stian (Hagen). It's an awesome place to bring up your kids.

Certainly, there is worry there, but at the same time I have a husband that gives our kids lots of information about safety and dangers in the mountains. We want our kids to enjoy and do similar things to what we do, and we do this by training them up in the safest way possible.

Photos above and next page, Mike Slattery, former professional skier, Warren Miller movie athlete and big wave surfer aficionado feeling right home in the alps.





There are parts of Chamonix that scare me, there are friends who have passed away, but it's an incredible place, it's a high energy place. If mountains are your thing, nothing beats it. It's very inspiring.

Chamonix is not a place for beginners, you've got to be a good skier. There are not many places to learn but if you want a true big mountain experience

and tap into a good week, then I highly recommend hiring a guide because then you are going not get to the goods straight away, and do it in the safest way possible. ☞

Top row (L-R) Aksel Hagen following in his father's footsteps as a ski jumper, racer, big mountain skier and alpinist. Middle: Andrea Binning and Stian fell in love with more than just Chamonix. (R) Camile Hagen in her first ever race. Of course she won a medal and who wouldn't be surprised if she followed her Mum's footsteps?

Above and right: Andrea Binning taking time out from Mum duties to slay pow up on the Aiguilles.

Next two pages: Stian Hagen is in his late 40's, remains fully sponsored by Volkl and Arc'teryx, gets to train team athletes in the backcountry while working on product development. And the icing on the cake? He's married to an awesome Aussie who also happens to be a former 2 x World Champion Extreme Skiing Champion.







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THE COMPLETE SKIING EXPERIENCE

By Reggae Ellis

AFTER TWO YEARS OF CLOSED BORDERS AND NO INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL, I WAS MORE THAN READY TO HEAD OVERSEAS FOR A SKI TRIP AS SOON AS TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS LIFTED. “FINALLY,” I SAID TO MY 17-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER ARKIE AS WE SAT IN A VERY QUIET SYDNEY AIRPORT WAITING TO BOARD OUR FLIGHT TO DUBAI.

It was March 13, exactly two years and one day since I’d returned from my last overseas trip, a three-month visit to Hakuba. When I returned from Japan I missed having to home-quarantine by a few days and the past two years of travel restrictions, closed borders and lockdown still seem a bit surreal.

While this trip wasn’t a season-long relocation we were headed to Europe for 16 days and Switzerland was the top of the itinerary the top of the itinerary. To say we were excited is an understatement and any second thoughts I have about international travel had long disappeared. When travel first reopened late last year, many people were a little nervous about traveling again and a bit put off about some of the hoops you had to jump through to visit Canada and the US. That was understandable with negative PCR tests before departure from Australia and on arrival plus the chance of testing positive while overseas

However, by the time we left in March many of those restrictions had eased and for Australians heading to Europe things were pretty simple, the only requirement for entry to Switzerland being proof you were fully vaccinated with a booster. Even a negative Covid test prior to departure as

not required. After showing a hard copy of our international vaccination certificate at the Emirates check-in counter in Sydney, I didn’t have to bring it out again at all while we were away until we boarded the flight home.

We flew into Zurich, picked up the rental car and were out of there, cruising on the freeway towards the mountains like it was back in 2019. Switzerland is synonymous with the European Alps and has long been a lure for skiers, the towering Alps providing a spectacular backdrop to some of the best skiing in the world. The Swiss Alps cover an area of 41,285 square kilometres and are home to over 300 ski resorts with St Moritz Andermatt, Verbier, Zermatt and Davos among the better known bigger international resorts.

However, for every internationally-renowned resort there are five you haven’t heard of and as you’d expect they offer a huge variety of terrain and experiences.

Each resort has its own unique atmosphere and the beauty is that most have maintained their authenticity and charm. Switzerland is also one of the most beautiful countries in the world, renowned for its lakes, green valleys and historic villages and



towns, all under the gaze of the towering peaks of the Alps.

As you’d expect there is a huge variety of terrain on offer and whatever your style of skiing you’ll find it, from long corduroy groomers to open powder bowls and steep couloirs and long, long vertical. Skiing and the mountains are part of the nation’s DNA and while Switzerland has a long tradition of ski racing and alpine touring, it is also a priority destination for park and pipe riders with the terrain parks in resorts like Laax and Corvatsch regarded as among the best in the world.

The Swiss Alps are also a freeriding Mecca with Engelberg and Verbier the two major freeride resorts, attracting skiers from all over the world. Both offer a huge choice of off-piste terrain and have long been a prime location for filmmakers and photographers and their pro skier subjects. In many ways,

Verbier is the epicentre of the freeriding world and is the location for the Extreme Verbier, the world’s most prestigious freeride competition held every year on the steep, intimidating slopes of the Bec de Rosses. First held in 1996, the Extreme Verbier is one of the world’s original big mountain

competitions and also final event of the Freeride World Tour and often the event where the FWT World Champion are decided.

Verbier has been long been on my wish list and the opportunity to cover this year’s FWT event was too good to miss. Verbier part of the massive 4 Vallées ski area, but on its own Verbier offers an incredible amount of terrain and 1500 metres vertical. This season was inconsistent for snow, with periods of warm weather in between snow storms, and with a limited cover down to Verbier village. However, thanks to the high altitude there was plenty of snow on the upper slopes, the groomed runs in perfect shape with soft spring snow and fun bumps off piste.

Thousands of people were in town that week for the Freeride World Tour event and for good reason – it has to be one of the world’s most spectacular sporting events and watching it live takes it to another level. The venue on the Bec des Rosses is easily visible from Col des Gentianes at the top of Verbier’s Jumbo cable car and it was packed, thousands of keen spectators taking advantage of the perfect weather and making their way up to viewing areas for the 9.15am start.

In a bonus for spectators a Freeride World Junior event was also being held on run called Le Petit Bec to the looker’s left of the main event venue, giving the crowd the opportunity to watch future FWT athletes in action.

Conditions for the main event were challenging, we’re talking “sport with consequences”, as there was plenty of exposure on the super steep cliff-laden venue. But the competitors are among the best big mountain athletes in the world and they really are on another level. From 70-foot cliff drops to massive backflips and huge 360s, it was a spectacular display of skiing and snowboarding - the best I’ve ever seen.

In the end Swiss skier Max Chablis took the double, winning the Extreme Verbier and the World Title while New Zealand’s Jess Hotter finished sixth, but after two wins and a second this year, accumulated enough points to be named FWT World Champion.

Verbier Village has a lively après scene at the best of times, but it was pumping that weekend with a big crowd on hand in the village to watch the FWT Marcus Caston ripping in Engelberg, one of the premiere freeriding destinations in Switzerland. Photo: Ross Woodall



presentation before partying into the night. For those who prefer more sedate evening activities Verbier Village has a wide range of dining options all within easy access.

There is also a big range of accommodation for all budgets, the most expensive being hotels and apartment in close proximity to the lifts. Staying at the base of the mountain in Le Chables is a good option especially with a gondola to Verbier Village running to midnight.

here is also a gondola from Le Chables to Bruson, the resort opposite Verbier, which is a good option to escape Verbier's crowds, particularly on weekends. We skied it a couple of times and while it is much smaller than Verbier, it has plenty of fun terrain including some excellent groomed runs. We also had an afternoon of good spring snow on the western facing slopes with no one around. Apparently Bruson also comes into its own on a powder day with some of the best tree skiing in the 4 Vallees. Next time.

And there will be a next time. I need to ski Verbier when it is at its best and with most Swiss resorts within a two-hour drive of each other, there is so much more to explore. Switzerland is the ultimate destination for a snow holiday, a multi-layered experience with stunning scenery, efficient and easy to use public transport, towns and cities that ooze old-world charm and, of course, world-class ski resorts with reliable snow and a huge variety of terrain for everyone from beginners to expert. Put it on your bucket list and tick it off as soon as you can. ☺

This page: Watching the Extreme Verbier event was one of the highlights of the trip. Unbelievable action. Norway's Hedvig Wessel, left, drops in from the start gate on the Bec Des Rosses. Photo: Dom Daher/FWT. Max Chablis, right, and a huge backflip during his winning run. Dom Daher/FWT Right page: Enzo Scotto was the freeride coach in Thredbo for a few years. Practising his backflip clinic 101 in Engelberg, Photos: Soren Rickards



Switzerland's Big Five.

If there is a next-level experience for skiers, it would have to be freeride skiing in **Engelberg-Titlis**. While Switzerland is full of beautiful winter sports destinations, **Engelberg-Titlis** is somewhat special: it feels off the beaten track. The resort is less than two hours from Zurich Airport and is **known as the freeride capital of Switzerland**.

But what it's famous for, is the **Big Five**. Visitors on an African safari are always keen to see the legendary "Big Five" – elephants, lions, rhinoceroses, buffalos and leopards. **Freeriders in Engelberg**, on the other hand, are mad about a different **Big Five: the Laub, Galtiberg, Steinberg, Sulz and Steintäli**. Each of these unforgettable powder slopes can be easily reached by cable car!

MORE INFORMATION:

www.myswitzerland.com/engelberg
www.myswitzerland.com/winter

STEINBERG

The glacier. The big one inside the ski area. It's wonderful, of course, but also demands respect. Like any glacier skiing, there are crevasses to potentially fall into, so you need to know the route, or better — ski with a mountain guide. But when you hit it right and feel at home on the Steinberg, it's as fun and rewarding as it is tiring on the legs. The side to far skier's right is very steep at the top, but a great run in flat light due to the huge wall you ski next to.

GALTIBERG

The King. The Queen. Maybe the entire Royal Court. Certainly the biggest of the Big 5. To have a run featuring 2,000 vertical meters of awesomeness without a single meter of hiking is skier luxury at its best! But it's not all ice cream and balloons; the Galtiberg is a serious mountain descent and we strongly recommend you only do it with a guide. First, to actually find the route (it's tricky), second because guides also find the best snow.

LAUB

It's hard not to start with the Laub, one of the world's most iconic powder runs. Some even call it "the perfect powder run," and we won't argue. Like an old wine, the Laub seems to get better with age, but perhaps its best quality is having something for everyone — from the steep and committing wall side on skier's left to the huge, lower-angled snowfields on skier's right. We love them both, almost as much as we love the Käseschnitte in Restaurant Ritz at the bottom.

SULZ

This playground on the Jochpass side of the ski area is never boring. Just when we thought we knew every rock there was to know, a young local lay down a sneaky new line between Middle Sulz (the cliff-dropping Mecca) and Big Sulz (the mellower of the Sulz siblings). The third member of this trio, Little Sulz, is still a great short run for a few warm-up laps — and no less fun for its size!

STEINTÄLI

Because of its north-west aspect, good powder snow can often be found here even days after the last snowfall. Depending on the route you choose, you can either return along the blue slope after the tall rocks or you can continue, almost as far as the Engstlensee lake. If you go for that option, you'll have a ten-minute walk back to the valley station of the Engstlen lift.

WHERE TO STAY:

The Ski Lodge Engelberg is the place to be for the ski community. The comfortable boutique hotel with international flair is located in the centre of the village. It offers 39 individually designed rooms and 4 seminar rooms. The relaxing wood stove sauna and hot tub are just the thing after a day in the mountains.

Learn more: www.skilodgeengelberg.com

AVALANCHE BULLETIN :

Staying safe off the piste: Whether you're freeriding, ski touring or snowshoeing – when you enjoy activities away from the patrolled, secured slopes you need to be well-informed. In addition to safety equipment and **avalanche awareness training**, keeping an eye on the latest **avalanche reports** is vital if you want to enjoy the powder snow.

Learn more: www.slf.ch/



Switzerland.

Frontiers of Freedom

ROAD TRIPPING CANADA'S POWDER HIGHWAY

By Coen Bennie-Faull & Drew Jolowicz
Photos: Dylan Robinson

Coen: Slowing down, rediscovering old hobbies, dabbling with new health regimes, then cancelling those health regimes and cracking a beer at 10am (because, why not?), baking sourdough, Facetiming with friends and family and the constant hunt for Rapid Antigen Tests. COVID has its many moods and shared challenges, but ultimately everyone has had to tackle it their own way. The collective experience of social distancing and the impact on our sense of self is only just now beginning to show its toll.

Stifled by lockdowns, cancelled events and fear of the unknown, many of us were forced to put aside the activities we hold dear. Uncertainty impacted our ability to maintain regular routines, yet our minds continued to seek purpose. Our hearts pursued connection and our bodies craved activity.

Last light is often the best light and this night was maybe the best of the trip. Drew Jolowicz dives into a blank canvas under a setting Revelstoke sun.





Like the shift into Spring, the world opening up has felt like a breath of fresh air. However, the return to rhythm has been met with an air of hesitancy. As we poke our heads out of hibernation, reconnect with old friends and settle back into the hum of life, the dust doesn't feel like it's quite settled. Civil unrest has spread like wild fire around the globe. Natural disasters seem to be daily news and all of a sudden the pandemic seems the least of our worries. Navigating media has become like a Bachelor's degree in forensics, as we navigate a world that feels divided and confused.

Understandably, the thought of travelling brings with it a level of anxiety. Increased hoops to jump through at airports and the fragility of global border closures kept me awake at night scrolling flights asking myself: do I or don't I?

Flicking between snippets of ski films to fuel the fire, distant memories of sharing hoots, hollers and high fives on a powder day with friends come flooding back. Hesitancy fades, replaced with an air of nervous excitement as flights are finally booked. Given the pandemic, British Columbia's quiet interior seemed like the place to be. The town of Revelstoke, nestled on the edge of the famous Rogers Pass, and Kicking Horse just down the road offer some of the best skiing on that continent.

Fortune favours the brave. Fellow Hotham locals Drew Jolowicz and master lensman Dylan Robinson joined me going all in on a late February strike mission. The risk was well and truly worth the reward and just like that... it was time to hit the road again.

Drew: Flying into Calgary, a quick stop at 'Rent-a-Wreck' was made to pick up some wheels. A trusty RAV 4 was the chariot of choice. By saving a few bucks on the ride meant an upgrade to Winter tyres. Handy for the blizzard, not so good for skids. Piling in our bags, 'Mr. Rent-a-Wreck' looked worried. "Don't worry, you've got my credit card. No skids, Dylan."

First stop Kicking Horse: Pulling into Golden late at night the snow was relentless. A last-minute change to our flights meant we would catch this storm. Within minutes of checking into the Rondo Motel, our room looked like we'd been there for a month. Gear strewn everywhere; stoke was high!

Left: return to sender. With travel opening up, Australian free skier Coen Bennie-Faull sends it express airmail straight to Revelstoke British Columbia. Next page: straight off the plane, Drew rips into some blower Kicking Horse powder. Logic suggests when it's -25 Degrees don't go skiing. Pfft whatever!



I was no stranger to Golden and Kicking Horse having visited the first season the Gondola was installed. Before the arrival of the Golden Eagle Express this part of the Purcell Range was a heliskiing zone only. In its infancy, there was no village or on mountain accommodation. The sleepy town of Golden was predominantly a highway truck stop with strong industrial roots.

Times have changed. Golden still remains no frills and wonderfully quiet. The main street has maintained its character with a couple of pubs, cafes and a cool little gallery displaying local artist's works. For lovers of a big Canadian breakfast (who isn't?) Big Bend Café is a must. A good old fashion western diner, it feels just like Mum's kitchen.

In stark contrast to town, development up on the hill has been significant. The main attraction for skiers however remains the Gondola and the terrain it accesses. A series of steep ridges, chutes and cliff bands funnel into five alpine bowls. Recently the resort has been hosting a stop on the Freeride World Tour and it's easy to see why. The competition face 'Ozone Bowl' is a short hike from the Stairway to Heaven chair. This place isn't for the faint hearted and the locals are straight up about it. Bring your 'A game' or prepare to be bucked off 'The Horse'.

Spending a few days here on our way through to Revelstoke it was hard to believe our luck. Straight off the plane and into some fine Kootenay cold smoke. Speaking of the cold, it was, with the mercury not nudging north of -25 degrees. The snow was blower, billowing up with every turn. Lapping the Gondi and ski touring off the backside we explored far and wide. A stellar start to our trip!

Next stop Revelstoke: A two hour drive further west lies Revelstoke or 'Revy' as it's affectionately known. Arriving to link up with fellow Hotham free-skier Coen Bennie-Faull, the next week was a blur of powder and pine trees.

People come here for the snow and there's no shortage, with the region receiving 10 metres plus annually. From the top of the Stoke Chair the world's your oyster. Mt Mackenzie separates numerous bowls of big mountain terrain that roll into beautifully gladed trees and natural features to galore. Revy's reputation for steep and gnarly terrain compliments some great mid-mountain corduroy with something to keep the whole family entertained.

Revelstoke's modern lift system really packs a punch, providing excellent access to some great backcountry for those with the right knowledge. Even days after a snowfall, there's plenty on offer and we rallied to check it out. Changing gears, we

were on mountain time, focused only on the world in front of us. Endless options kept us going back for more and we lapped until our legs could go no more. As the sun set behind Mt. Begbie, this was one of the best days of the journey.

The skiing is just one element here. Revelstoke the town has some great eateries, bars and shopping if you wish. Undoubtedly there's been some recent growth, however as an outsider looking in, Revy has largely avoided the usual growing pains of expansion. Residents are warm, friendly and inviting, and prices around town remain reasonable. The mountains have sculpted the culture here and a function over fashion, Gore-Tex over Gucci mentality best sums up the way of life in these parts.

Rogers Pass: Pretty much smack bang in the middle of Revelstoke and Kicking Horse lies the ski touring mecca of Rogers Pass. Dwarfed by towering peaks rising straight up from the highway, the road commands attention as trucks roar past you. Not if you're a passenger though. I became accustomed to the familiar sound of Dylan's camera blasting rapid fire as we drove through. "Bangers bro?" I'd ask, "Yep, just filled another card", was the response.

It's hard to comprehend how skiing here is possible at all, given the complexities of the terrain. In impressively proactive fashion, Parks Canada and the Canadian Military use explosives to manage susceptible avalanche paths in the Glacier National Park. The primary objective of these operations is to minimise the risk to traffic and help keep Canada's major railway and freight corridor moving. This isn't to say all risk is mitigated, far from it. Backcountry users still need to apply for a permit and check daily forecast bulletins to see which zones are open.

Trees, gigantic pillow stacks and some seriously legit alpine lie in wait. In all honesty, we barely scratched the surface. It would take months or even years to realise the full potential of this place.

The highlight though was a day touring up on the Bonney Glacier. Coen had the inside scoop on this zone and thought it was worth a second look. 'There's powder and pillows up there, we should go!' He wasn't wrong. After three hours of bush-whacking we emerged onto glaciated country and our objective was stacked and ready to go.

From the top of the Golden Eagle Express, the views of the Purcell range are something else. Drew Jolowicz hooks in on a brilliant blue-sky day.





By the afternoon, sunny skies had given way to grey-bird. Coen wasn't bothered. Finding a line he liked, it was time to send. An impressive display of skiing and hats off for cowboying some trademark Rogers Pass pillows in difficult light.

From pow turns to pillow poppers, to skiing with friends and shared experiences on the road, this was a hard adventure to accurately put into words. Dylan did it best through photos and I think Coen summed it up perfectly at the top. We've all had to navigate the past two years individually which has been tough. I know I can speak for the three of us in saying that testing the waters of travel again although daunting, has enabled us to re-connect with ourselves and others and feel a sense of mateship in the mountains again.

A lot goes into making a trip like this possible. Many thanks to our families, friends and sponsors for your support in helping keep our dreams alive! 🙌

Above: Coen, Jess and Drew put in the hard yards on the up-track in the Glacier National Park. Rogers Pass is a ski touring mecca for those with the right knowledge and permits. Below: Three, two, one...dropping. Coen Bennie-Faull threads the needle on a formidable Rogers Pass pillow stack. Impressive skiing in difficult light.



DREW JOLOWICZ P's: Dylan Robinson



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Wyoming

JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING IS A SPARKLING JEWEL IN THE ADVENTURE SKIING CROWN, BUT THERE'S EVEN MORE TO THIS BIG SHINING DIAMOND, IF YOU TAKE A LOOK AT THE SMALLER GEMS ON EITHER SIDE.



Jackson Hole

IT'S GOOD TO BE BACK

*Word and photos by
Tony Harrington & Rhylla Morgan*

Resort ambassador and backcountry guide. Lynsey in an open letter to Jackson Hole sums it up intriguingly, “If you were a breakfast, you’d be a bowl of nails with ice cream on top.”

We take in the drama of the Cirque and Headwall above us as we ride up Thunder and I’m reminded this will be one of the last times I ride this chair. There’ll still be Thunder laps next year, but a new detachable quad is going to cut the journey time in half.

Jackson lives up to the hype. It’s big, bold and is absolutely a skier’s mountain. But the resort and the town is in a battle to make sure the combination of tourism and billionaires pouring into the Hole doesn’t kill the very thing everyone loves about this wild place.

So you’ll notice a few shifts taking place. There will be days the resort simply won’t sell tickets to curb capacity. The consensus seems to be that everyone wins when caps mean more manageable lift lines, hill space for your turns and staff and venues not getting swamped. You’ll also see a footnote on your menu about minimum pay and tips for staff. Locals are under incredible rent strain and many are already doing two jobs just to live here, so paying people a living wage seems overdue.

The resort is also breaking ground to build more affordable housing – all steps in the right direction. Without these changes there’s the depressing possibility that the core locals, the people that run lifts, make coffee, nurse the injured, clean hotels and teach people to ski - the very fabric of this community – won’t be able to live here anymore.


Previous page: My first day back in the valley, she threw in something unexpectedly spicy. It’s cold and bluebird and instead of finding my ski legs in resort, I’m headed 13 miles south of town and about to spend an unforgettable day skiing untracked pow. Guide Andy Brookes leads the way. High Mountain Heli promise you’ll make six drops and hit après with a minimum of 12,000 feet of vertical under your belt by the end of the day. Right: If a heli doesn’t fit your budget, grab a guide and hit the backcountry. Lynsey Dyer and Bobby Thomson fossicking through white gold.



There's a fierce, defiant local flavour still to be found at the Stagecoach, in the belly of the Moose and riding the START bus to and fro each day that gives that kick to this place. It would suck to lose that.

Lynsey Dyer has been a professional skier for over a decade. Originally from Sun Valley, she moved across to Jackson Hole and honed her skills in the powder-filled mountains of the Teton mountains.

Knowing she charges (she was the first female to hit the infamous Fat Bastard and Cave air cliffs in the Jackson Hole backcountry) and after a good deal of powder turns warming up, I asked if she'd care to hit a cliff for some airtime.

She looked down for a moment down, and then up and smiled. "I can't... I'm pregnant" something that at the time was being kept under wraps. There was a round of congratulations and smiles and I could see from the sparkle in her eyes that another journey of adventure is right around the corner for this go-getter. 

This page: Lynsey Dyer is a skiing addict, entrepreneur and mum-to-be, wallowing here in the powder fields of the Jackson Hole backcountry.

Next page: Marni Walsh is one of those 'under the radar' locals who skis better than you and embodies the hustle it takes for so many people who live and ski in Jackson. She's just wrapped up working on the video production for the Natural Selection event and rips apart Hoback laps between lining up her next work project and taking her dog for a run along the skin track.







Hail to the King

THAT CLICHÉ ABOUT PICTURES
AND THOUSANDS OF WORDS FEELS
RELEVANT LOOKING AT THIS STRIKING
SHOT CAPTURED ABOVE JACKSON.

I can take a crack at describing how Snow King rams right into Snow King Avenue and how the walk, even in ski boots, from the famous elk arches is less than you'd do from any ski resort car park; yet this picture does a way better job than my long list of adjectives ever will.

"The King" was Wyoming's very first ski area back in 1939 with the 'Old Man Flat' Rope tow giving it a solid head start on Jackson Hole Mountain Resort,

which didn't saddle up for another 24 years. This steep, cold north-facing slope is responsible for giving many of Jackson's accomplished skiers and snowboarders their head start too. There's a reason the US and French Olympic ski teams have trained here.

Some locals are going to hate me for saying this, but it's worth remembering there are times when the shenanigans and traffic to get out and around

to Jackson Hole to chase powder on those storm days makes Snow King a smart alternative. Skip the drive and simply gorge on pow laps right in town. The sleek new gondola makes bingeing vert even easier than the old double chair, and you'll often have runs to yourself.

When you get up top it's the best view of the Tetons going. I couldn't stop thinking about my friend who's just learning to ski and how much she'd love

this beginner area – at the top of the mountain 2380 m above sea level. I can't think of many mountains where learners aren't shivering down the bottom in the cheap seats, but here they score the dress circle and the coziness of a gondola ride up. There's even a new chairlift on the backside of the hill that gets sun all day with fun blue runs in a playful bowl.

It's warm up here in the sunshine, the town is spread out below, the view is insane and I've got three year

olds making their first snow ploughs on the most perfect cord next to me. I'm giving my friend a call. The fact there is a great brew pub and sweet potato fries literally across the road when we download won't be lost on her either. 🍷

Long shadows keep these sheer runs fast and firm even on sunny Spring days. Photo: Tony Harrington



Life of Brian

*By Rhylia Morgan
Photos Tony Harrington*

Brian Maguire has the cheery demeanor of someone who really loves what he does. He’s been skiing for a job since skis were long and skinny. His office is a small, folksy cabin with a dreamcatcher dangling on the porch, and is also the Ski & Snowboard School at Grand Targhee.

We’re catching up on everything we’ve missed in the two years while Aussies were locked out of the US and Brian’s updating me on his recent ski-change from Jackson Hole through the Teton Pass here to Alta (Wyoming). He headed up the Snowsports School in Jackson for many years and more recently was managing the Visitor Experience for Snow King in Jackson. Now he’s back on the tools in what might be the raddest little ski school in the west. If it weren’t his office I’d be trying to move in. I’m already picturing myself whittling on the stoop.

We get to talking about how ski resorts are getting busy, feeling the strain of visitors and expectations. Brian reflects on the places he’s been part of over 45 years from Mt Buller to Beaver Creek, Vail and Jackson included, “The way I see it, they’re fun to be part of when the sport is in front of the business, which was the majority of the years I spent in Jackson Hole, and they quit being fun when the

Grand Targhee is nestled in west of the Tetons, stockpiles snow and is fuss-free. We joined Jeremy Jones and son Cass for a shred, a mate of Kai Jones flew by for some air and made time for giant nachos in the Trap Bar.

business eclipses the sport. Here in Targhee the sport is way in front of the business for now, and that’s the fun part for sure... And it’s exciting also to see the vision to grow this place sustainably and be a part of that.”

Targhee only has 5 lifts accessing 2600 acres, usually buried by 500 inches of powder each season. It’s a low-key set up with a couple of bars at the base, fire pits and a modest café. That’s a big part of the appeal. In 2023 a new lift is set to replace the cat-ski operation out on Peaked Mountain and there are plans afoot to update the accommodation. Last year the car parks had an expansion so don’t say you weren’t warned – it’s definitely a place you need to get to before everyone ‘discovers’ it.

I was lucky to join Brian with his adult daughters and a gaggle of friends and partners for some laps and a guided tour. He grins, “well I have to say, that was one of the more pleasurable experiences I’ve had skiing in a really long time.” Of course Brian is a beautifully technical skier but as he tells it, “one of my favourite statements about skiing is whoever’s standing at the bottom of the hill smiling the most is the one who’s doing the best. It doesn’t matter how you got there, what led up to it or any of that.”

As more ski mountains become focused on a carefully managed resort experience we are riffing about the essence of skiing and what’s kept him so passionate about the sport over a lifetime.

He’s crumbling crackers into his soup in the middle of Wild Bill’s Grill and greeting passing colleagues as we chat, “I go back to when I was around 8 years old and I was lucky to spend a lot of time with my grandfather. Going fishing with him, it was an investment. It was an investment of time, you had to pack your gear, pack the boat, you had to invest in what the experience was going to be. The fish you might catch was a minor part of the process. It was all about the jokes, the stories and time I shared with him.” And that is why Brian might just be the ideal person to lead a ski school team and share that approach to skiing with his instructors and guests.

It seems like Grand Targhee is his kind of place. He chuckles as he recalls the season opening in November; he’d been in the job just a few weeks. “I’m walking through the parking lot and it’s at least an hour until opening. There are 4 or 5 boys outside the family car. They are so revved to go, they have their boots and skis on and they are doing laps in the parking lot. Then I walk another row and there’s a Subaru with the sunroof open with two feet sticking out of it and a guy in there trying to get his ski pants on. It had a huge impression on me, like wow – okay. These people are really fired up.”

After our catch up I am looking up Fred’s Mountain smiling and picturing those kids bursting for their first ski day of the season. If you want more of that pure joy of skiing and less bells and whistles you could do a lot worse than ‘Ski the Ghee’. Stop in and say hi to Brian when you do. ☞



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“FOR ME IT’S ALL ABOUT LIVING IN THE MOMENT AND HAVING FUN. YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE MOUNTAINS SERIOUSLY, THEY ARE DEFINITELY A DANGEROUS PLACE, BUT HAVE FUN. THAT’S WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT.” KAI JONES



At Home with Kai Jones

IF YOU’VE NOT HEARD HIS NAME BEFORE, YOU SOON WILL.
THIS KID FROM IDAHO IS JUST GETTING STARTED.

*By Rhylia Morgan
Photos Tony Harrington*

Kai Jones works hard. It’s the fourth day of heading out and getting home in the dark. He’s been filming a segment for Teton Gravity Research (TGR) in a secret spot close to home in Victor, Idaho and finished up the day digging out a stuck sled with the crew for over an hour.

That’s after a day hiking and filming in a zone Kai admits was ‘pretty spicy’. He pulls up a picture on his phone. It’s spicy all right. In fact it’s hard to see where the line is and no surprise when he admits he felt pretty ‘gripped’ standing on top.

Kai lives up to every bit of the ‘pro’ part of his ‘pro skier’ title. He must be tired right now but he’s ticking off tasks. Unpacking the van, putting cameras and beacons on charge and hanging up gear

only pausing briefly to steal a quick snuggle with the family dog, Captain, and Mom, Shelly, as he comes and goes through the kitchen.

Winters are hectic in the Jones household. TGR is the family business. Kai’s Dad, Todd Jones is a co-founder of the production company. What started as a ‘dirtbag ski bum’ dream has expanded to encompass online content, merchandise lines, lifestyle stores, global film tours and savvy brand collaborations – all deeply rooted in progressive action sports and the adventure lifestyle.

Kai, his brother Cam and the posse of Jones cousins are now writing the next chapter of the family story as they carve their own path.

In Kai’s case he’s made the most of his ringside seat seeing ski movies developed around the dinner table, knowing some of the best freeride athletes on the planet and the big mountains sitting in his backyard, “ever since I was little I’ve been able to go out into the mountains and ski every weekend. From a really young age it’s really been a passion and I’ve been super fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue my skiing. Honestly, I’ve strived to ski as much as can for as long as I can remember.”

Adjectives like ‘passionate’ and ‘driven’ are often sprayed around in this industry, but in Kai’s case they capture exactly how this determined young man approaches skiing – with an intoxicating mix of loving it and an intense obsession with every aspect of perfecting his craft.

“HE’S HIGH STOKE. HE’S DRIVEN, HE’S MOTIVATED. HE’S TRYING TO PUSH HIMSELF, HE’S TRYING TO PUSH THE SPORT AND HE’S REALLY YOUNG SO THAT’S A GOOD ATHLETE TO HAVE IN YOUR QUIVER.” ~ TODD JONES

Five years ago he blazed onto screens in “Far Out” skiing an iconic Jackson Hole line called “Smart Bastard”. It was a segment that could have easily not happened, except another project was cancelled at late notice. As Todd Jones recalls, “we were brainstorming the back up plan of what we’d shoot in Jackson. Someone said ‘show them those clips of Kai’. I had a few bits I’d filmed of him on my iPhone. The Jackson Hole team got really excited; so we put camera resources on him and shot the segment. It went on to get millions of views.” Kai was 11 years old.

That was the first segment Kai filmed with his now good mate and mentor, pro-skier Tim Durtschi who remembers the day clearly, “He showed up that day and really impressed the whole crew and was hitting some big cliffs, especially for an 11 year old. It was pretty extraordinary.”

“Kai has raw talent...He’s ahead of lots of his peers. I think it all started ing around his coaches, his dad [Todd Jones], his uncles [Steve and Jeremy Jones]. They have all been there to give him high-level advice and Kai’s taken all of that on. He understands it takes a lot of hard work, knowledge and real respect for the mountains – he’s the one who has put those things together at a very young

age. I’ve watched him take all that in and combine it with the sheer fun he has skiing.”

Tim talks about his role as a mentor for Kai, “I’ve showed him how to be confident and challenge yourself, apply yourself and prove to yourself that anything is possible. Kai has big goals and he’s willing to put in the work to achieve them; whether it’s dropping a 60-foot cliff or skiing spines in Alaska. He’s a little fearless but he’s also very calculated.”

And what has Tim gained from their partnership? “Skiing can get a bit serious at times so heading out with a young guy like Kai helps me see the joy of it and be reminded ‘hey, this is mind blowing’. After skiing for films for nearly 20 years you can start to lose some of that stoke. Kai gets me back to that simple, fun energy.”

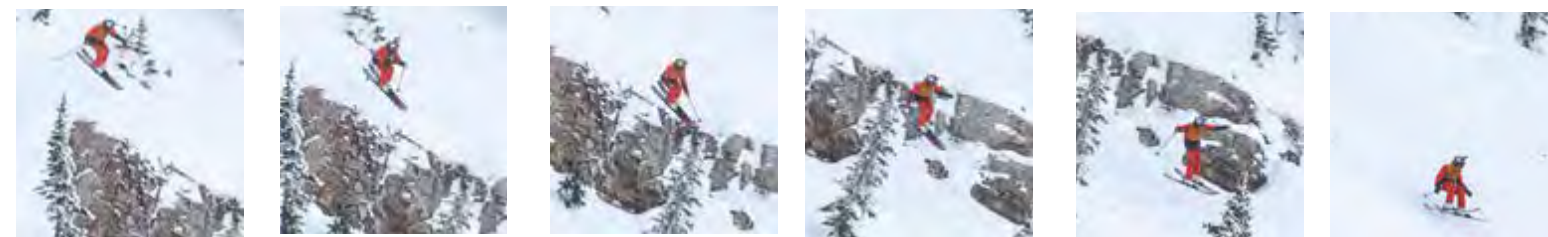
Fast forward through the next couple of years and Kai signs as a Red Bull athlete at 13, garners sponsorships from Quiksilver, Mammut, Atomic, TGR Optics and Skull Candy and recently joined the GoPro team. All the while competing in IFSA Junior Freeride competitions with the local team from Grand Targhee. He took the national title in 2018.

We catch up with the Jones clan for an IFSA event at Grand Targhee, Kai and his snowboarding cousin Cass are competing. The extended Jones clan is part of the gaggle of parents, coaches and friends in the finish zone; all are staring into the low January sun and twinkling sundogs.

Todd reflects, “to be sitting at the bottom of the course with Jer [emy Jones] it was a cool revelation in that moment realizing this was something we’ve not done together in the mountains before – watching our kids compete. I’ve shared so much in my life with my brothers, especially in the mountains. We’ve explored Alaska, made films and travelled all around the world - and now this. It’s definitely a cool, full-circle moment.”

Todd is behind the camera when Kai comes to work at TGR, “As an athlete he’s great. He knows the program. He knows what matters. He’s good with the difficult parts of all, doing the boot packs, standing in the cold on a ridgeline for an hour

Top right sequence: Cliff drops on IFSA competition runs are just a walk in the park for a kid who spins 360s off of Alaskan spines. Middle: This is a rare photo of Kai that will be published with his skis on the ground. Right: At home with his dad Todd and mum Shelly Jones.



“I’M FOCUSED ON BRINGING A FREESTYLE ASPECT TO THESE BIGGER ALASKAN LINES – THAT’S MY FAVOURITE PART ABOUT SKIING IS COMBINING ALL DIFFERENT TYPES OF SKIING AND BRINGING IT INTO ONE... I’M WATCHING AND LEARNING FROM EVERYONE. IT’S A COMBINATION OF BEING REALLY NERVOUS AND HAVING A LOT OF FUN IN A WHOLE NEW TERRITORY.” KAI

waiting for the sun to pop. He’s just chill. It seems like he belongs there in the mountains, doing what he’s doing. He loves it.”

As a father Todd is pragmatic about the future for Kai in skiing, “It’s up to him. If he wakes up tomorrow and he’s done – that’s fine. I don’t think that’s his plan though. I think he wants to keep pushing the sport and himself. There are a lot of mountains he wants to climb so we’ll support him in that.”

There’s a smart head inside that Red Bull helmet. Kai is candid about how much he has on his plate and he’s matter of fact, “It’s definitely a lot. But skiing is so fun it makes it worth balancing school and skiing and friends. I spend nights doing school and do a lot of school in the summer... it ends up working out.” 🍀

Left: Walking the talk on his Alaskan goals, Kai in Juneau this April. Photo: Nick Alegre/TGR Below: A cool partnership: Tim Durtschi and Kai Jones “To watch them progress together and cheer each other on is such a rewarding vibe to be around. They have a kind of ‘brother’ relationship and are really good friends – they make quite the team.” ~Todd Jones





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Alaska

WHY YOU DO (AND DON'T) WANT TO COME HERE



The Return to AK

Words & photos Tony Harrington

After feeling ‘shoe-boxed’ in behind closed Australian borders last summer I made myself a promise. I committed to getting back to pursuing those things that define who I am. To ski, surf and shoot in the wild and special places that have shaped me and this life I’ve created.

As each year ticks past I feel the urgency whispering at me; to not waste an opportunity, to take on those days in the mountains and the ocean while I can. It wasn’t so much the thought of running out of time, but the last few years of postponed plans has been a reminder not to let any of it slide by.

I’m not 23 anymore but I’m more than willing and able to take on calculated risks; swimming out into a broiling ocean at Pipeline and dropping into serious and technical terrain in Jackson, Chamonix and up here in Alaska. These are things I’ve done for decades but this year, getting to do it again, it feels different.

Early on in this trip I started to realise what I was connecting with after such a long pause in my travel and adventures was not so much about the extreme elements and the big lines – it was reconnecting with the people, sharing these moments and places and the journey itself with my chosen tribe.

As I realised the ‘why’ was just as important as the ‘what, where, how and when’ of the journey I noticed I started to relax and enjoy the ride a lot more. I got more comfortable with giving myself permission to savour time having fun with old friends, meeting new ones and letting the details drop into place.

It also made skiing the scarier lines more enjoyable. I’d dialled down the planning, thinking, analysing side of my usually busy brain and took some time to be where I was. There were more moments in the past month when I stopped and took in the extraordinary landscape than I think I’ve had in a long time. I’m not sure if that is about being a couple of years older or more appreciative after not travelling. Whatever the reason, it felt like a gift. I’ve never done the meditation thing. I’m not a downward dog. Maybe a silver lining from all the unpredictability of life in recent years is that my

Previous page: A good Aurora Borealis show is really an out-of-earth experience. Left: Sledging out deep to remote zones, hiking the peaks and shredding lines adds a whole new dimension to the adventure of Alaska.

‘go with the flow’ muscle is fitter? Whether it was switching up plans at the last second or picking where to make the next turn in a sheer couloir, I made choices in the moment and trusted they would work out.

There are a few things I noticed after a couple of years away. I’ve been making an annual pilgrimage to Alaska for 25 years and was last here in March 2020 just as the pandemic unfolded.

Firstly, it’s the retreating glaciers. Seriously, if you need evidence about the march of global warming it’s clearly on show up here, just like it was in Europe where I was hiking across scree in places I’d skied only a few years ago. The second is the explosion of big mountain heli-skiing and backcountry adventures in AK.

COVID has fired up so many people to get focused on their bucket lists. Me included. The adage of you “don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone” has motivated so many of us to get outside again. I felt I was running into so many friendly and familiar faces from my past at every turn in AK this spring. People I’d met back in the early days, and just like me they were hungry to get back to doing what they love and had missed in recent years.

Most heli operations in Canada during the 2020/2021 winter season were shutdown so many of their clientele headed to Alaska for their heli fix, as AK remained operational through the pandemic. For many it was the first time they’d ventured to Alaska; for many it will also not be the last...

This part of the world is usually the domain of seasoned athletes, guides, filmmakers, photographers and more adventurous heli ski clients who have pioneered these mountains and created the industry here. Now with the influx of this new wave of guests discovering the experience in AK the heliski business is mushrooming dramatically.

The days of rocking up and buying a ride in an empty heli seat are over. To secure a spot you now need to pre-book (and pre-pay) a trip 12 to 24 months in advance.

The experience of heli skiing itself has also changed. There are a lot more helicopters in the mountains here now. In Valdez there are the established operators; Valdez Heli Ski Guides

operating out of the Tsaina Lodge near Valdez, Black Ops with their Robe Lake base, Alaska Backcountry Guides and now also Pulseline who both operate out of the Valdez Airport. East Peak is a proposed ski area that currently offers the 907 Snowcat operation overlooking the township and harbour of Valdez and snow machine-accessed riding is also exploding.

The Anchorage region has the Tordrillo Mountain Lodge, Alaska's first and perhaps finest heli skiing operation, Chugach Powder Guides sit right next to Alyeska ski resort, Triple Point Expeditions out of Palmer and a little further up the road is Majestic Heli Ski. Plus there are a few stealth operators who recruit private groups of clients and simply "hit" wherever the best conditions might be. Haines and Juneau down in South East Alaska is another zone offering big mountain heli ski experiences.

So, there's a lot going on for a pop-up industry that only runs in a super tight two-month window and a lot of people want in on the action, both as operators and clients. It's not quite as "cowboy" as it used to be, but some elements of the 'wild west' still exist in this untamed place - it is Alaska after all!

There's often robust 'race and chase' for certain hero lines and descents between the heli groups, but at the end of the day what matters for most skiers is simple. It's the click of your bindings, adjusting your goggles, taking a few calming breaths and then getting the nod from your guide to drop in and make what will likely be the run of your life.

This might be something you have been inspired to do ever since you first rode a black diamond run, but be warned, the feeling and the emotions will far go beyond what you imagine - even more than those fantasies you've conjured while watching the latest Teton Gravity Research or Warren Miller Miller film. Alaska is the real deal. It gets its hooks into you and can be a hard addiction to shake once you've formed the habit.

To put this place into perspective, it's one of the snowiest spots on the planet and the storms that create such unimaginably awesome skiing also often shut down the skiing for days at a time. Long-time athlete turned heli guide Kirsten Kremer at Valdez Heli Ski Guides explains the odds; "33% of the time is 'down days' with poor weather and no flying, there will another 33 % chance of flying but skiing low-angle, mellow slopes. But what it's all about is that magical 33% chance of scoring the best, life-altering, extreme skiing you've ever experienced, and that is what makes the gamble worth it.

My two-cents when planning an AK adventure:

- Book as a group of four if you can. That is a full heli load – so you're flying with people you know, ideally at the same level and fitness. Skiing up here is hard-core. If you are not ski fit you can be in for an expensive and dangerous time. The terrain you'll ski is determined by the ability of the weakest skier in your party.

- Read the terms and conditions. It's really important to understand the policies of heli-time inclusion, refunds or rollover options if you don't fly and be comfortable with what you are signing up for. Don't be afraid to ask questions. These operators are running a huge logistical operation with incredible risk, responsibility for your safety and a slim margin. It's a premium experience that comes at a premium price. It's worth every cent when it all comes together – just ask anyone who's done it.

- Choose an insurance policy that covers cancellation of heli-time due to inclement weather. It's a good way to protect your investment if a storm sits on top of you for a week and you don't fly – at all. And remember, if you do only get out for one day – it might be the defining day of your skiing life.

- Tip your guide, the pilot and the lodge staff generously. They graft around the clock to keep you safe, fed and to make your dreams happen. More often than not they are fuelled by passion and not for a big payday, so be bighearted and kind.

Australia's Jenny Milton has called Valdez home during the spring time for the past 20 years. She has a pretty cool back yard, this one being East Peak with 907 Snowcats, towering above the Port of Valdez.





VALDEZ HELI SKI GUIDES AND THE TSAINA

“We’re going to the Roadhouse, gonna have a real... good time!”– The Doors

The first time I visited Tsaina Lodge and Valdez Heli Ski Guides was 1995 after competing in the World Extreme Skiing Competition. This simple roadhouse on the Richardson Hwy above Valdez was essentially the clubhouse for WESC at the time. It’s here I met “Sick” Rick Armstrong who would sleep in the log room adjoining the bar; he’d guide clients all day, come in straight off the ship with his harness still on, more often than not working long into the evening still wearing it. I’m pretty sure there were times where he left his boots on all night too. A lot of long-term friendships were born from that first memorable time in Tsaina.

To get back and re-connect with this special breed of people; the skiers, snowboarders and guides left me flooded with memories and incredible gratitude that I got to be there for those early days, and that nearly 30 years on I’m still doing this, and this unique crew are too. There are some who came and simply never left, or like me are pulled back every year by the lure of the mighty Chugach.

One of those people I was fortunate to spend time with was Lisa Wax, a former owner of the Tsaina and one of the maddest skiers I know. She’s still here. She’s the first person out on the mountain on most days, ski touring up, or sledding up only to “ghost ride” her sled to the bottom and trailing it down as she skis her line or scoring that occasional heli lift that comes up when a guide has a spare seat in their “ship”.

I could write about the epic day I had with Valdez Heli Ski Guides, about the prolonged powder runs down to the glaciers and the steep fluted couloirs stacked against each other on the Dimond ridgeline but the story I’d really love to share is some of the history of this place.

In Spring 1987, a small group of Valdez skiers gathered for the first airplane-assisted skiing on Thompson Pass conducted by Chuck McMahan. The Mayor of Valdez was even there. A year later Michael Cozad acquired what had been a road house for oil truckers since 1949 and Tsaina Lodge became part of extreme skiing lore.

These were pioneering days for the sport. There were no beacons, shovels, packs, probes or base

Couloirs like this are stacked side by side right behind the home of Valdez Heli Ski Guides and the Tsaina Lodge, making for very economical use of heli time

radio for safety. It was a basic air taxi service, and long before ‘guiding’ was offered. This was a drop-off only and you were responsible for getting back down.

In order to kick-start the Tsaina business, Cozad created the World Extreme Skiing Championships in 1991, in which a young skier called Doug Coombs claimed the inaugural title. When Liza Wax took on Lodge in 1993, Coombs approached her and asked “If you get the lodge, can I run a heli ski operation here?” The rest is history and Valdez Heli Ski Guides was born.

Coombs chose to only cater to expert skiers because that’s how he and his guides wanted to ski. If you weren’t going to ski the gun barrels and Dimond, if you weren’t that type of skier, you’d be respectfully directed elsewhere; “Maybe Wigleys would be a better fit for you?” Maybe you think that made him a w-nker; not at all. You wouldn’t meet a better guy, but he was matter-of-fact about the skill needed to ski this terrain. And didn’t want to be a baby-sitter.

Back then everyone who made their way to Tsaina and Valdez were predominately hard core mountaineers or hard core surfers, or both. It was the domain of soul riders and toughened mountain people.

At any given time during the season there were as many as a hundred people camped in the parking lot, staying in RVs and even snow caves. Everyone was made welcome and it was an eclectic mix that would wash in and out of the bar. There were even a couple of random millionaires rolling through, but for the most part the people who made that annual pilgrimage worked and trained all year towards that goal of Spring riding in the Chugach.

Nowadays, if you have the money you can simply pay to access this world. You don’t have to be an expert level skier or snowboarder, although you should be alpine fit and you don’t have to camp in the parking lot. I was blown away to see up to nine helicopters parked in front of the Tsaina, so there’s no space for skibums in igloos anymore.

High rollers will have their own private charter for a whole week or two at a time, others will book a couple of days, or if you are a skid like some of us you can take a chance and potentially score a 4- 5 run day and come back in on a fuel run to keep costs down. But you know what? Whatever level you are rolling at, if you like the sound of giving it a go my advice is this - just do it if you can. But be warned, once you’ve ridden a spine in Alaska you might find yourself back here every Spring. 🏆

TORDRILLO MOUNTAIN LODGE

CATERING TO A BESPOKE CLIENTELE

Tordrillo Mountain Lodge has long been on my bucket list, but is also one of those super special destinations I thought might stay as a wishlist item and never happen. In an incredible twist of fate, just hours before I was to board a plane off to somewhere else, a call came in from Hugh Barnard, the GM of the Tordrillo Heli Skiing operation. “Harro, we have a spare seat, would you like to join us?” “Hell yeah!” I answered in a heartbeat and pinched myself to make sure it wasn’t a daydream.

So, I swapped a jet plane journey for a fixed-wing light plane ride out across vast winter wilderness to a remote pocket of Alaska where there are no roads, not even in summer. This place is truly remote, only accessed by 35-minute plane or 45-min heli ride from Anchorage.

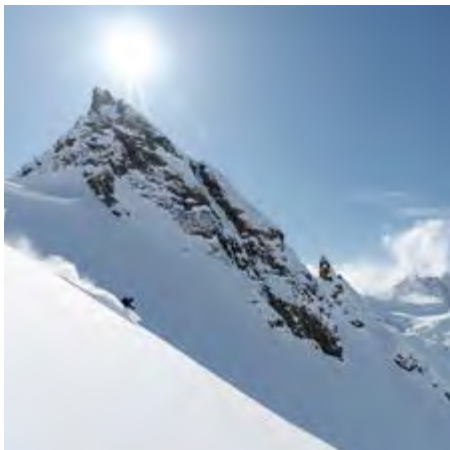
Tordrillo Mountain Lodge is perched on the banks of a huge lake, frozen solid during the winter months and apparently a stunning fishing spot in summer. It has two luxury lodges, each with their own helicopter. A total of eight people can stay in each lodge or for those wishing to have a more personal experience you can book a whole lodge for yourself as a private guest.

Now, this is heli skiing at its finest and it comes at a price, but for those who value this kind of an experience they really don’t come much better. Packages include five hours of heli time for each person and start at US\$15,000 for a week or make the whole lodge your own for US\$180k. The holistic experience out here is as exceptional as the mountains and skiing. The gourmet meals and first-class service is equalled by the superb crew looking after you. The guides are the best you’ll find anywhere; professional, experienced and frankly, really cool people to share time with, ’94 Olympic downhill champion Tommy Moe and legendary alpine guide Lel Tone being just two of this impressive line up.

Runs typically offer 3000-4000 vertical feet of skiing and being located deep in glaciated terrain, the snow stays cold and dry long into April. The type of skiing here is more suited the powder aficionado over the steep skiing enthusiasts and often (but not always) the more-challenging offerings some other Alaskan Heli Ski operators provide. Sure, there’s steeps if you want them, but the Tordrillo mountains lend themselves to vast open rolling powder fields which is exactly their appeal.

I hear that in June and it’s “Kings and Corn” season. Fishing for King salmon and skiing corn – spring snow that is. So as soon as I tick one off, it seems I have another item to put back on that bucket list... ☞

Left: One of the most accomplished heli ski managers in the industry, Hugh Barnard reaping the rewards. Below left: Matt Walsh from NZ is a regular visitor to the Tordrillo’s. Once you’ve got the bug its hard to shake it. Bottom: I don’t know what’s more beautiful, the fresh salmon bites or the helicopter behind. Right: Matt Walsh, Gene Weymouth and guide Wes Wylie in a gob smacking landscape





POINTS NORTH HELI

THE FINAL RUN

At some point during an AK trip you will be pushed outside your comfort zone. In my years coming up here it happens - every time. That feeling of being taken to the edge is honestly part of what makes skiing up here so addictive. So it happened again, on my last run here at Points North Heli; my very last run of my northern winter.

We rounded a peak ready to make our way down and looked ahead to a tall, seemingly vertical panel of snow running into a semi couloir with an ice fall on the side; about 2,500ft of 50+ degree terrain. The mandatory air to get onto the run was just the beginning.

It's one thing to ski something like this in one fell swoop, dropping in and committing all the way to the bottom. Definitely the best approach. It's a whole different story to do it how I did; in shorter stop/start sections so I could shoot, with a heavy and valuable load of camera gear riding on my back.

Once the first two turns are out of the way you tend to slip into a "flow state" and as long as you hover in the balance of being relaxed and focused, the extremity of the slope can be incredibly fun to ski. It was after stopping to take some shots halfway down that I gingerly fastened and tightened my LowPro backpack and carefully slid forward to make my first hop turn. This is when you need the "crux" of commitment to round and finish the turn. All of a sudden I felt it. The tail of my ski catching and although I only lost a micro-fraction of balance, it was enough to put me in a precarious situation.

I had a split second to intercept my brain before it tore off down a fight/flight track of "...we're so screwed" and get it focused back to the task at hand of committing to forward motion, making the next turn and surviving to share this story. It's like when you are skiing in trees, if you look at the tree you'll hit it. Where focus goes, energy flows. If you let your brain start a worry cycle about what could go wrong up on a steep AK face there's a really good chance you'll soon be a cartwheeling freefall into the glacier below.

Alaska is the pinnacle for me. Every turn I've ever done in life has been another step towards building the muscle memory, technique and mindset to take on these mountains. Points North Heli guide Jeff Easter leading the way down on my last run for the northern winter. Oh what a rush to finish on.

I had a good dose of adrenaline pumping through my veins and a stash of incredible photos on my camera as I took in the vast and imposing Alaskan spines all around me and slipped into a careful rhythm of turns. Every sense is dialled up to 11 and I'm hyper-aware of the information coming through my skis, boots and soles of my feet. I'm breathing and savouring each millisecond. The sheer elation and stoke as I clear the bergstrom at the bottom and let my skis run out to the flat is euphoric.

The awareness then sinks in. That was it. My final run for the season. My heart is beating in my ears and I'm in one piece, standing in the sunshine. I turn and look up to where I've just skied. A simple set of tracks are the only clue to what I've just accomplished and a feeling that is hard to explain to anyone else; but if you're a skier, you'll understand. ☞

It's often difficult to capture the sense of place and precarious nature of the terrain that we ski into when creating content for an adventure thirsty audience. It's not always that easy to do. This photo goes close to showing what it's actually like.



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THE SEASON

Winter Starts Now, the latest film from Warren Miller is appearing on cinema screens across Australia and New Zealand from May, a sure sign the 2022 snow season is right around the corner.

Winter Starts Now is incredibly the 72nd ski and snowboard film from the Warren Miller stable and there are over 40 screenings across Australia and New Zealand starting down in Melbourne at the Jam Factory on May 11-15. Sydneysiders get their faceshots from May 19-20 at the historic Cremorne Orpheum and May 21-22 at the classic Randwick Ritz, for those who don't cross the bridge.

The film as always takes audiences on a journey, starting with a criss-cross across North America. Winter Starts Now is an ode to winter and a call to action for skiers and snowboarders – get stoked, be prepared, because the season so many of us live for is nearly here.

From ski touring the remote peaks on Alaska's Prince William Sound to Maine's community of craftsmen and women devoted to sliding on snow, the film features a host of interesting individuals and resorts that have their unique stories to tell. From kids with huge Olympic dreams to adaptive shredders who leave even the most able athletes in the dust there are stories to inspire and entertain.

Viewers buckle up for a road trip with big mountain skiers Marcus Caston and Connery Lundin as they chase winter up to Alaska, before catching up with speed riding legend JT Holmes, and meet new friends Madison Rose and Vasu Sojitra.

The late Warren Miller was renowned for the diverse skiers and skiing he included in his films



and Winter Starts Now stays true to that credo. Featured resorts include Palisades Tahoe where locals Johnny Mosely and Amie Engerbretson are joined by a few "old timers" who arrived decades earlier and stayed for the skiing and the mountain.

In a coast to coast journey we drop in at Solitude, a multi-layered resort and one of Utah's gems, before heading to Aspen to joining the National Brotherhood of Skiers, which has the mission of supporting and representing African Americans on the ski slopes. The itinerary then hops over East to meet the core skiers and snowboarders of Maine sharing what makes their part of the world something special.

Of course, the stories are accompanied by the incredible action and beautiful cinematography you've come to expect and as you spill out onto the footpath you'll be psyched to back down to your local resort and make some turns as soon as the snow starts landing.

Winter Starts Now" takes viewers on a journey to the highest peak in America, to the best-groomed trails at beloved resorts, and to the town ski hills that have stood their ground throughout the everchanging ski world. The film is a homage to every skier who lives for the thrill and finds solace on the chairlift. **f**

SELECTED MOVIE TOUR DATES

Visit the website for more screening dates

VIC

Melbourne: 11-15 May
Albury: 5 June
Geelong: 5 June
Rosebud: 5 June
Ballarat: 5 June
Bright: 12 June

NSW & ACT

Sydney - Cremorne: 19-20 May
Sydney - Randwick: 21-22 May
Avoca Beach: 22 May
Northern Beaches - Glen St Theatre: 2 June
Albury: 5 June
Canberra: 5 June
Byron Bay: 19 June
Newcastle: 19-20 June
Wollongong: 26 June

SA

Adelaide: 3 June

WA

Perth: 3 June

TAS

Hobart: 5 June
Launceston: 5 June
Invermay: 17-19 June

QLD

Brisbane: 17 & 19 June
Gold Coast: 18 June

NEW ZEALAND

Auckland: 6-8 May
Tauranga: 20 & 22 May
Wellington: 20 May
Christchurch: 20 May
Ohakune: from 11 July
Arrowtown: 15-17 July
Wanaka: from 29 July

Get your tickets before they sell out,
warrenmiller.com.au
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PRO SKIER MARCUS CASTON ON HIS ROLE IN WINTER STARTS NOW.

By Reggae Elliss

Marcus Caston has been regular in the Warren Miller stable for almost a decade and for this pro skier from Salt Lake City, Utah the annual production is an annual highlight of his skiing year. When we caught up with Marcus he'd just got home from Alaska where he'd been filming for next year's Warren Miller offering.

Marcus, you're now a regular on our screens in Warren Miller. How'd that come about?

By luck mostly! I was shooting photos and was an athlete for Shred, which is owned by Ted Ligety. He was one of the Warren Miller athletes when an extra spot came open and he asked me to go. That was 10 years ago, and this is now, I think my ninth film.

'Winter Starts Now' is just about to be released in Australia and you shot that in the 2020/21 season, tell us about it

I did a big road trip with a good friend, Tim who filmed it. We started in Salt Lake and the idea was to go to these big ski towns and ski their small town hills. So, we started with Steamboat and we skied at Howelsen Hill. Went on to Jackson Hole and skied at Snow King... you get the idea. It was cool to experience these places different and see what the town hills mean to these places. The town hills are really the first resorts in those places, before the big resort developed. They really are the essence of the skiing for those towns where locals get started, squads train and ski racers hone their craft. So, a lot of the great ski racers that come out

of Jackson Hole, they'd ski at Snow King. The same in Howelsen in Steamboat, where they've produced, I don't know exactly, but it's something like fifty Olympians, or more.

That sounds great, and then the other segments for 'Winter Starts Now' were filmed up in Alaska.

That's right. we were on a boat in Prince William Sound for a week and then did a week heli skiing at Majestic. The heli skiing in Alaska is what every skier dreams of. That's the Mecca, that's it. And to be able to go out on the boat and access totally different terrain that way was super special. You're skiing a different quality of snow being right there on the ocean and to experience such a pure Alaskan perspective of the mountains from the water was really cool.

How'd you access the snow from the boat?

We would take the little dingy from the boat into the beach, and ski tour up. That was a super cool way to explore that terrain and so different to resort or heli skiing. We floated around for a week, checking out little islands and stuff. It's endless, just endless opportunities up there. We'd cruise pass stuff and you're like, 'oh wow...that looks like Whistler.' And then 10 minutes later, oh there's another Whistler or there's Jackson. It feels never-ending.

That sounds incredible – all that terrain and such a great way to get to it.

Yeah. It was awesome, and super beautiful skiing back down to the water. Just living on the boat was amazing and travelling to new terrain that way each day. There was tonnes of snow too. The snowbanks off the beach were 30 feet high at times.

So tell me, what's it like filming with Warren

Miller. It's been nine years now, does it feel like an annual get together?

That's exactly what it is. It's the annual gathering. Every year it's such fun to be in the film and getting to make it each winter, but it's also amazing to go to the movies and watch it at the end. I go to the screening here in my hometown. I take all of my family and I've been doing that for years now. It really is a traditional kickoff to winter for us, and everywhere around the world where the film is shown. It's cool they do it in Australia – I had no idea.

That's right, it's a big deal in Australia. There are sell-out shows in Sydney and Melbourne and it goes on the road to ski resorts and regional areas too. For many people when the Warren Miller film comes out, it's a sign that winter's just around the corner and for lots of skiers it's a traditional get together.

Totally. I go to a bunch of the shows all across the States, and I see the same people year after year. It's their tradition. I've talked to people who are bringing their kids because they went with their parents when they were little. It's a cool, special thing to see the role the films play in people's winter experience.

It's mind-boggling when you think that Warren Miller made his first film in 1950 and that there is a Warren Miller ski film every year. It's been part of so many people's entire life experience of skiing. Warren Miller's legacy and impact on skiing, not just in North America, but worldwide, through his films, is incredible isn't it?

It's really cool to be part of this amazing tradition. I used to go to the Warren Miller film here in Salt Lake when I was a kid. I remember my Dad

taking me, and we were walking through the lobby and Glen Plake was there with his mohawk up. I'm sure the other athletes were there too, but I remember staring at Glen and being like, 'man, the guy's a rockstar.' Then my first Warren Miller film premiered in the very same theater. It was cool to

go full circle and walk in there. It was moment of 'wow, this is crazy.'

You didn't dye your hair blonde and make a Mohawk?

No. No!

You have a few segments in this year's film, but some of the best in my opinion are the big mountain segments. A lot of work goes into filming those, with guides, snow safety and all of that - what's the safety protocol like up there?

Well, you kind of dip your toes in. The guides have been up there all season and they kind of know what the snow pack's like so steer us to the right zones. You ideally start small and get comfortable and work your way up. It's generally pretty safe in Alaska, I'd say. There are no trees, it's a stable maritime snowpack and there's big run outs. You can ski most things pretty safely. You can also get into some sketchy situations, so it's all about taking your time, being smart and careful up there. We appreciate the expertise of those local guides for sure.

For your career as a professional skier being in regular film segments and productions as big as Warren Miller, that has to be pretty important for you work-wise.

Yeah it is, and this project is the one that I look forward to every year, for sure. It's a big trip every year, and it's the one that means the most for me. There's still something cool about seeing it on the big screen, that doesn't get old. We work and film a lot all year and put stuff online, but it's just not the same as walking into a theater and seeing it big and sharing it with hundreds of other people all at once. It's a really cool atmosphere.

Yeah, it must feel amazing in the dark of the theatre, with a heap of people hooting and having a good time.

It's such good fun. It's also funny. The thing that Warren Miller movies have always been good at is not just showcasing hardcore hero skiing, but showing the lighter side of it as well. The jokes, making light of aspects of what we do and including those quirky elements like the town hills and beginners or whatever. It's about including all aspects of skiing. And that's the fun part, when you do something stupid and it shows up on the big screen in the final edit, and people are having a good laugh at it.



For sure! Falling off a chairlift, getting caught in the bullwheel or something is always good to see. I think that's the beauty of Warren Miller. It does show multidimensional, different aspects of skiing and will have a story on ski patrol for example, or a ski racer...

For sure the films try to showcase so many sides of skiing. Not just skiing straight and fast down a big Alaskan spine - it's a lot broader than that, and Warren Miller does an incredible job of including all those aspects which lets a wide audience connect to the film and the variety in the segments.

What was that quote of his? Go skiing today because you might not go skiing tomorrow or something like that?

If you don't do it this year, you're going to be one year older when you do! So true.

Speaking of that, how long will you keep doing this? You've done nine Warren Miller films now, will we be seeing you make it to twenty?

I'll keep going as long as they'll have me.

What is the best thing about filming with Warren Miller every year for you?

It's just doing something different every year. It's being able to experience skiing in a new light every time.

Thanks for the chat Marcus. Enjoy your summer, there are a lot of Aussie skiers down here fired up to see the film.

Yeah, thanks. Hope you guys have a great winter. ☺





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Skiing with mates is fun, but who wouldn’t rather have an untracked powder line all to themselves and not have to share? Who wouldn’t want a bit of... solitude?

I first heard of Solitude from a couple of Australian snowboarders who hid themselves up there for a winter. They kept quiet about their find so they could keep the 1200 acres of untouched powder to themselves. This was before the days of live tweeting and posting. Other skiers, boarders and

film crews would turn up, capture their gold and also keep quiet about this special location in the hope of keeping it to themselves.

It’s just too good a mountain for that to last forever and the secret has been out for a while, but there is still solitude to be found up here. It’s hard to believe it’s only around half an hour outside the hustle of Salt Lake, and a similar drive as its more well-known cousins Snowbird and Alta.

Plan to sneak up to Solitude on a weekday and there’s a good chance of scoring fresh lines all day long, especially if you are up for a little adventure into Honeycomb Canyon offering a plethora of untapped powder terrain.

<https://www.solitudemountain.com/>

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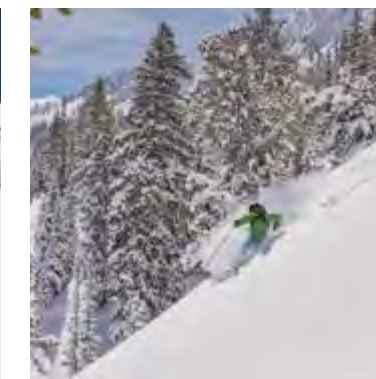
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A LOOK AT SOME OF THIS WINTER'S GEAR

GIRO CONTOUR GOGGLE

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RRP: \$439



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RRP: \$399.99



LÉ BENT PRAMECOU WOOL HYBRID JACKET

Lé Bent are levelling up their layering game again this season with a new range of cleverly designed mid-layers. We've got our eyes on the Pramecou Wool Insulated Hybrid Jacket, but there's also a more heavy-duty hooded option for storm skiing and street wearing.

What sets their mid-layer apart is the so-called 'FlowState Sleeve System' which incorporates strategically placed panels of their flexible Signature Merino Wool and Bamboo Rayon Blend around the shoulders, arms and back, to facilitate unrestricted movement where you need it most. The end result is a luxuriously soft layer that lets you forget the traditional burden of layering and focus on finding your own flow state on the mountain, or wherever else you wear it.

RRP: \$319.99

RIP CURL F-LIGHT SNOW 32L BACKPACK

After a few hikes into the Kosciuszko backcountry last winter we can say that this feature-packed backpack is light, durable and comfortable to wear with padded, breathable shoulder straps and a breathable back panel, sternum strap and removable waist strap.

Weighing only one kilo, the F-light snowpack has a volume of 32 litres, so plenty of storage and comes with a heap of features including a quick access compartment for probes and shovels, vertical and horizontal snowboard carry options, multiple ski carry positions, hydration system compatibility and a tricot-lined goggle pocket.

There's also an ice axe carry loop and loops for helmets and ski poles. The zippered back panel allows easy access to the main compartment which has plenty of storage.

RRP: \$179.99



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HARRO'S GEAR

HARRO TAKES US INSIDE HIS PACK

When you're skiing in places outside your comfort zone there are a bunch of things you want in your kit. Ability, knowledge and respect for your environment are the start but having the right tools to negotiate technical terrain is so important. Gear you can trust transforms your experience and confidence. There's a lot going on when you drop in, and you need to know your gear is working with you.

Backcountry equipment keeps advancing and there is plenty of reputable equipment out there. The main consideration when gear shopping is getting clear on whether the equipment is suited for the job you're asking it to do. Especially when you head to the backcountry, what you pay for that extra strength in a binding, those stronger elements or a special design feature of your pack can be the difference between getting home safely and not.

I travel a lot, usually spending 3-4 months at a time chasing snow across continents. I try to keep my quiver to just one set of skis and bindings due to brutal excess luggage charges. This northern winter I carried a pair of Volk Blazé 106. This was a great all-round freeride ski for in resort and backcountry skiing in the US and Europe, and even in Alaska it worked really well. Just a note, skiing in Alaska is a different beast, and warrants it's own column – I promise to do an AK ski review another time.

For me, bindings are super important. If you don't have confidence in what's keeping you on your skis then your headspace is equally unbalanced. I fell in love with the Duke PT the first time I used it. It straddles downhill and touring with equal aptitude. You can rely on the traditional toe and heel piece for spicy downhill descents without worrying the toe pin in the binding or boot might fail. I feel rock solid, even with a hefty back pack adding to the load. The transition to touring is quick and easy, you simply unlock the toe piece which flips up, pins go into the sockets on the Dalbello Lupu boots and you're off.

Top: The tool kit. Middle: The earning of turns and photos. A good touring set up is of prime importance in the backcountry. Bottom: Mandatory air into terrain requires specialist equipment that will not fail when you most need it.

Backcountry backpacks are a very personal choice and everyone has different deal breakers. As a photographer in big mountain terrain my top three criteria are; it has to fit ergonomically, fit my camera gear of course and have a place for shovel, probe and the necessary safety gear that many camera-focused bags don't have.

I'm really happy with my current rig and have certainly tried a lot over the years. The LowePro Whistler 350 AW II does what I need for a big mission and for travelling. It holds shovel, probe, climbing skins, snacks plus 2 x Nikon bodies, several lenses and a Mavic 3 drone. It will handle mounting skis on the side for hiking. It fits snugly to my lower back and although can be super heavy with everything I load in, it balances well and stays put which is critical when skiing technical terrain.

The only downside is it does fall just outside of the size limit for carry-on baggage on airlines, and its easy to pack too much weight in there and tip over the 10kg airline limit - I've been fortunate so far. The US airlines don't seem to be as harsh as some Australian ones when it comes to scoping bags in the boarding lounge and singling out travellers who look like they are on the edge of the limits. I've been burned before and now don't fly Jetstar for this reason, I pay a little more to fly with Qantas.

On smaller shoots and for faster skiing, I'll scale down to the LowePro Photo Active BP200 AW. I easily jimmy rigged a small shovel and probe on the outside while inside it holds a Nikon DSLR and up to 4 lenses. It serves perfectly as my second "carry-on personal item" when flying and will hold my 13" Macbook Pro so I can work in the air.

The final piece of LowePro gear I constantly use is a Pro Tactic TLZ 75 AW II which I call my "Kangaroo Pouch". It's a quick fit design that mounts on my chest and can hold my Nikon DSLR with a lens attached. I made a small enhancement by fitting a compartment pocket on top of the body that allows a second lens to sit in there. This pouch is used by itself or in combo with the above two packs depending on the task and terrain at hand. ☞



Lewis Foster, dropping into a clean face in the Kosciuszko Backcountry. Photo: Aedan O'Donnell

TEN PEAKS IN A DAY

By Lewis Foster

Looking for any excuse to catch my breath, I checked my watch again. It was 9:30 am and I was standing on top of Mt Townsend, already having summited six of Australia's highest peaks that morning. With Kosciuszko and the Ramsheads behind me, I took a moment to soak up the scene.

Unlike its famous neighbour Kosciuszko, comparatively few people visit the nation's 2nd highest peak. When you stand on the Townsend Summit, you get to witness the scale of Australia's Alpine landscapes. Staring out across the rolling blue hills down into Victoria, you'll wonder... how am I the only one up here?

So here I was, just me, the peace, the quiet and my mission. Bag Australia's ten highest peaks in a single day. I clipped into my trusty touring skis, pointed them downhill and let gravity do its thing. While practically straight-lining down the flanks of Townsend (veering for no one) I relished in my freedom.

I skirted around Lake Albina and stopped to snap some shots of this glacial infinity pool. I peered down into the Western Fall and Lady Northcote's Canyon and began to dream up new missions. Visions of steep descents, hidden waterfalls and Opera House Hut had me distracted once again. With my mission calling, I headed for the ridge that would take me to the final three peaks.

Two hours later I was standing atop Mt Twynam, 10 peaks in the bag. I spotted a fellow tourist in the distance. It was my friend Rohan, his sights were set on the steep terrain I had been salivating over from Townsend. He kindly offered for me to join his mission but with my return journey still ahead, I wished him well and slid on my way.

As I glided across the Snowy River, I mused that I'd been through 40km of Australia's, most iconic Alpine terrain and the only other person I saw was a mate! The best thing is this is not unusual for the Australian backcountry, while encounters tend to be rare they're always friendly.

I began to ponder the wonders of snow travel. There's no way I could have summited the ten peaks this quickly in the Summer. The key to my success was the glistening superhighway created by the winter snowfall. No sticking to hiking trails, trampling vegetation or walking downhill! In the snow season, almost the whole range is up for exploration. Most people see the mountains as less accessible in the Winter, but to those with the right knowledge and equipment, snow makes these mountains both more accessible and beautiful.



Photo: Jakob Kennedy

I believe everybody can experience the real Snowy Mountains. Working as a Guide for K7 Adventures I spend my Winters teaching others how to access this beautiful landscape safely and efficiently. From snowshoeing through the snow gums to skiing the steeps, there is an adventure out there for all fitness and ability levels. If you want to experience the backcountry first-hand but don't know where to start, K7 Adventures has the answers and the knowledge to guide you. Let us know what type of Adventure you would like and start exploring beyond the resorts this Winter.



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Dwight D. Eisenhower Hwy Utah
40°40'9.0917" N 112°22'43.9642" W



Matanuska Glacier AK
61°49'12.27" N 147°26'28.2917" W



AN EAGLE EYE

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Words & photos Tony Harrington

The freedom of being able to travel again and road trip across the USA felt like such liberation. As we journeyed across vast plains and wove our way through towering ranges it was awe-inspiring to be reminded what a tiny dot we are in the broad sweep of these wild places.

We'd occasionally spot an eagle riding thermals high above us and wonder what they could see.

Here's a few images from stops along the way. Drone photography certainly adds another vantage point, a brief window into that eagle's high domain. 🦅



Ouray Colorado
38°1'8.9995" N 107°40'6.432" W



Irish Canyon Colorado
38°1'8.9995" N 107°40'6.432" W



The mighty Chugach Mountain Range is 400km long and 100km wide. As far as the eyes can see there is untouched and unmatched beauty of a snow playground. A seemingly endless array of mountain peaks with stacks upon stacks of glaciers, couloirs, ramps and panels of skiable terrain. 🏔️

Jenny Milton Thompson Pass AK
61°9'8.335" N 145°37'50.9301" W

Ski patroller

[ski:/pə'trɔːlər] [noun]

The job of the ski patroller is to keep you safe on the mountain. But for Hannah Baybutt of Sun Valley, it's more than a job. Keeping you alive makes her feel alive. She's the first to rise. The last to leave. A first responder, an emergency medical technician, a rescuer, an explosives expert, an avid skier, a dog lover, a teammate, a friend. There's nowhere she'd rather be. She belongs in the mountains.

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