



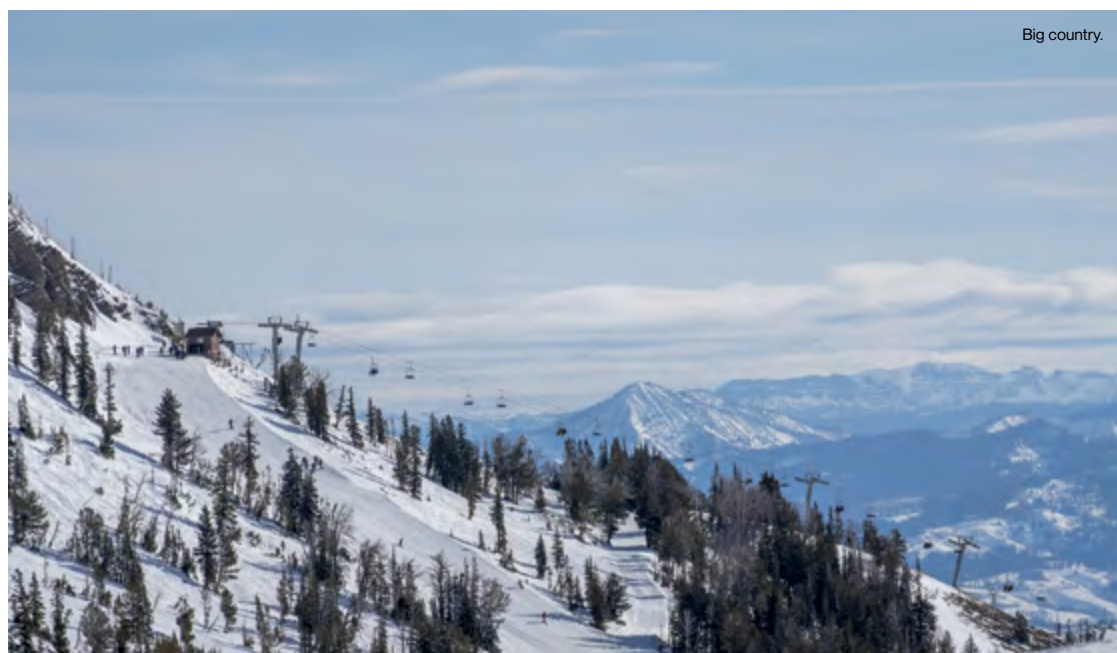
♠ AGES ♠

HIGH

WORDS BY JEFF SCHMUCK | PHOTOS BY JOHN BOWERS

Anteing up on a return journey to America in pursuit of spring-skiing escapades at Jackson Hole, Wyoming.





IT WOULD BE FAIR to say that, at times, the winter of 2022 left a tad bit to be desired in Western Canada. After receiving a full-frontal assault of neck-deep snow during the first week of January, the tap all but turned off in many parts of B.C. and Alberta until March. So with Ullr in hiding, a bare-bones snow forecast, and borders reopening, our group goes all in on a change of scenery: Why not visit the Lower 48 for the first time since Covid reared its ugly head, and take advantage of a legendary resort with towering fall lines, flowing rollers and side hits a plenty for a spring-skiing strike mission?

Given the lore that surrounds it in the world of skiing, Jackson Hole hardly needs an introduction. It boasts a 3,185-metre-high summit, from which 2,500 acres of craggy terrain fans out from like a peacock's feathers, highlighted by the premiere showboat run in the U.S., Corbet's Couloir. As a result, the hallowed grounds of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort (JHMR) have served as a powerful homing beacon for skiers since the resort's fabled aerial tram first set sail on its maiden voyage in 1966. Since then, JHMR has been featured on the cover of countless ski magazines, and prominently showcased in all 27 annual and revered films from

Teton Gravity Research, which calls the area home and has proudly played a significant role in putting its local stomping grounds on the map. With the majestic Teton Range looming above plains peppered with roaming buffalo, and the nearby town of Jackson's authentic western vibe—complete with creaky boardwalks, retail shops selling shit kickers and Stetsons and the infamous Million Dollar Cowboy Bar—it's no wonder why The Hole is hailed as a bucket-list ski destination by everyone from weekend warriors to the most seasoned professional snow-sports athletes.

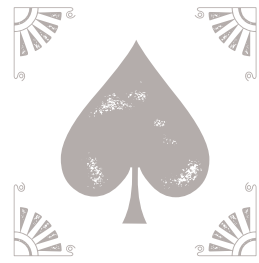
Along for the ride to Wyoming is one of the latter, Rob Heule, a jack-of-all-trades type of skier who is equally at home in both the backcountry and terrain park, and resides near Canada's cowboy epicentre of Calgary, Alberta. Also on board is Graeme Meiklejohn, an acclaimed filmmaker who, like Heule, has yet to grace JHMR's storied slopes. With the good-natured Heule possessing a dynamic skill set that includes an uncanny ability to make a proverbial dollar out of a nickel on his planks, who better to bring on a spring break ski trip during a low-tide season?

The only problem? It's pow.



THE HALLOWED GROUNDS OF JACKSON HOLE MOUNTAIN RESORT HAVE SERVED AS A POWERFUL HOMING BEACON FOR SKIERS SINCE THE RESORT'S FABLED AERIAL TRAM FIRST SET SAIL ON ITS MAIDEN VOYAGE IN 1966.





UPON ARRIVAL at the Jackson Hole Airport, which offers non-stop service to and from 15 major cities across the United States, we're whisked away to the charming, cozy and mountain-chic confines of the Mountain Modern Motel, which sits just steps away from Jackson's antler-arched town square. Following an obligatory Mexican dinner (we are back in America after all) and some restful but anticipatory winks, we awake early and bee-line for the resort to meet up with JHMR's John Bowers, who's offered to pull double duty as the photographer and host with the most for the trip. Also awaiting us, fresh off the plane from Beijing, where he competed in halfpipe in his third Olympic Games, is Aaron Blunck, and 16-year-old Luke Miele, a Massachusetts-based freeskiing and baseball prodigy who spends part of his winters in Jackson. Alongside them is the prolific and renowned filmmaker Jeff Thomas, who's stopped off in Jackson halfway through a road trip with Blunck from Colorado to Whistler on a video shoot with Head Skis. Like our crew, the two are opting to play the cards they're dealt along the way, and if all else fails, we could always have a rootin' tootin' good time together at the cowboy bar.

As catch-ups for some and introductions for others are exchanged, Bowers acquaints us with Carol Viau, an infectiously positive and knowledgeable member of JHMR's guides program, who's on-hand to grant us early access to the slopes, show us the goods, and most importantly, have our backs on the safety front.

We board the tram, aka Big Red, and as Heule and Meiklejohn look on with boyish grins when it ascends within eyeshot of Corbet's, we see that the snow conditions look ripe for our original intention. Firm and fast hardpack up high, and skied-out slushy goodness down low. But while mapping out a plan of attack over Nutella-covered waffles in Corbet's Cabin at the summit, Thomas and Blunck, who spent the previous day location scouting on the resort, attempt to convince us that conditions in the backcountry are surprisingly good.

With Viau and Bowers leading the way, we skeptically make our way across the bulletproof traverse along the top of Rendezvous Bowl toward the backcountry gate. Once Viau performs a beacon check and dolls out directions for the first-timers, we ski through it, and three turns later find ourselves miraculously submerged in lightweight, knee-deep snow.



Room with a view.



Three's company.



Golden arches.



Peep show.

WE BOARD THE TRAM, AKA BIG RED, AND AS HEULE AND MEIKLEJOHN LOOK ON WITH BOYISH GRINS WHEN IT ASCENDS WITHIN EYESHOT OF CORBET'S, WE SEE THAT THE SNOW CONDITIONS LOOK RIPE FOR OUR ORIGINAL INTENTION.



Waffle house.



ONE CAN EASILY SPEND A FULL DAY MILKING THE MULTITUDE OF AVAILABLE FEATURES OVER THE COURSE OF ONE RUN IF THEY TAKE THEIR TIME. WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT WE DO.



Field of Dreams with Like Miele.

THE JACKSON HOLE backcountry off the shoulder of the resort is an easily accessed playground for freeride-loving skiers, with a series of drainages that disperse from the base of Cody Peak and funnel their way back to the resort. And within each of them—Rock Springs, Green River and Four Pines—is an all-you-can-ski smorgasbord of every type of terrain imaginable. From high-alpine chutes, faces and bowls brimming with cliffs, to gladed meadows with pillows galore, one can easily spend a full day milking the multitude of available features over the course of one run if they take their time. Which is exactly what we do.

Upon completing the steep bootpack between Rock Springs and Green River, Blunck and Miele spot a shelf beneath the subsequent hike to Four Pines, and begin teeing off on a wall of cliffs, while Heule arcs elegant turns down an adjacent chute and makes short but sweet work of a pencil-thin couloir by straight-lining it. From there, the trio descends to frolic in the forests below, where they spend the afternoon unleashing a litany of pow turns, tree taps and backflips. We then collectively decide to call it a successful first day and ski back to the base area to enjoy some Italian food at Il Villaggio Osteria, before returning to the Mountain Modern and a pile of pulled pork and beef brisket for dinner at the nearby Big Hole BBQ.



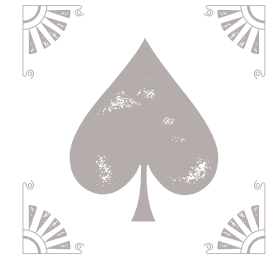
Aaron Blunck rides the pine.



Heule rallies the troops...



... while Blunck captains the air force.

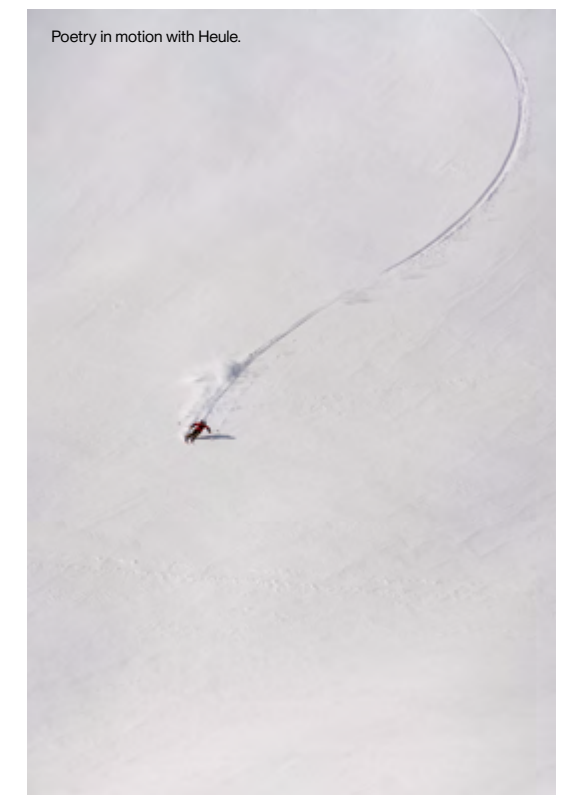


The next day, Heule, Blunck and Miele decide to tackle a more ambitious objective by taking to the imposing slopes of the crown jewel of the JHMR backcountry: Cody Peak. As the lens wielders arrange themselves in safe positions to shoot from, the three put on a show to the delight of other onlookers, with Heule slashing his way down a wind lip on the open expanse, Miele 180ing a drop, and Blunck—who's competed in X Games every year for the past decade—showcasing his experience and comfort in the air by pointing it off a massive diving board.

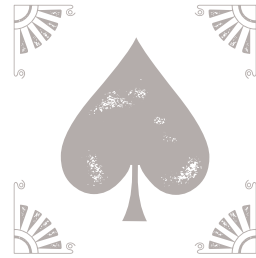
Following another late lunch, this time at the ski-in-ski-out Four Seasons Resort—where the portions, like nearly everything in Wyoming, are vast—Blunck and Thomas are set to hit the open road to continue their journey north, so we congregate around Blunck's kitted-out sprinter van in the parking lot for brewskis. Later that night, we pay our respects to the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar, where we celebrate our good luck off the flop. The next morning, we bid the travellers a fond farewell, but sense their hesitation in departing.

It's starting to snow.

Poetry in motion with Heule.







WITH STORM CLOUDS thickening above us, we meet up with Bowers at the tram station, where he introduces us to our latest merry cohort: Max Martin. A born-and-raised Jackson local, the moustached and glinty eyed Martin is a former ski racer turned freeskiier and personal trainer who runs Train The Tetons in town, and is eager to show us around for the remainder of our trip.

Viau informs us that the backcountry gate is currently on standby due to the weather, so Martin leads us to a bootpack up the Headwall, where he showcases his racing background with some aggressive and high-speed trenched turns. From there, we scarf another oversized lunch in the Piste Mountain Bistro at the top of the Bridger Gondola, before making our way to one of two Stash Parks on the mountain, which consist of natural features made out of logs and wood that the jib-loving Heule takes full advantage of.

The storm gives way to bluebird skies the next day, so we return to the backcountry for another crack at the flanks off of Cody Peak. But with the resort having a similar season as B.C., and untouched pow to be had, a stampede of snow-starved Jackson locals have the same pot of gold in mind, which leads to a foot race up the hike to the top of the ridge. Fortunately, the energetic Heule and Martin beat the herd, and are able to bag some of the biggest and best lines of the week.



Fever pitch with Heule



Max Martin plumbs the depths



Wild blue yonder.



Last chance saloon.



Top shelf with Martin.

With our fourth and final day on the hill complete, we wrap up our trip by joining Martin and Bowers for some fine dining at The Bistro (where, in a brush with the growing list of celebrities who have migrated to the area, we bump into Motley Crue's Nikki Sixx), and cap things off with a second shift at the cowboy bar. With Heule and Meiklejohn feeling fulfilled by their first experience at Jackson Hole, and pledging to come back the next chance they get, it's evident that our gamble has paid off with a much richer than expected pot.

For more on our time at Jackson Hole, visit forecastski.com for an action-packed edit that documents the trip.

HIGH FIVES

- Jackson Hole Mountain Resort** – jacksonhole.com
- Bridger-Teton National Forest** – fs.usda.gov/btnf
- Mountain Modern Motel** – mountainmodernmotel.com
- Four Seasons Resort** – fourseasons.com/jacksonhole
- Il Villaggio Osteria** – jhosteria.com
- The Bistro** – thebistrojacksonhole.com
- Train The Tetons** – trainthetetons.com
- Million Dollar Cowboy Bar** – milliondollarcowboybar.com