Photo: Jason Hummel

GENERATION SPLIT SPLITBOARDER KYLE MILLER ASCENDS THE CHICKAMIN GLACIER AS PART OF THE SUCCESSFUL AMERICAN ALPS TRAVERSE. THE ROUTE WAS PLANNED BUT NEVER COMPLETED BY THE SKOOG BROTHERS. CARL SKOOG DIED IN A SKI ACCIDENT IN 2005. HIS BROTHER LOWELL LIVES IN SEATTLE.

FOLLOWING CARL

CROSSING THE CASCADES IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LEGENDARY SKOOG BROTHERS

KYLE MILLER AND JASON HUMMEL are no strangers to epic slogs, but their mission to complete the first-ever traverse of the American Alps once again confirms their standing as the undisputed champs of Cascadian sufferfests. Linking together the Isolation Traverse, The Ptarmigan Traverse, The Extended Ptarmigan and the Suiattle High Route during the first 16 days this past June, Miller and Hummel completed a dream first conceived but never completed by Washington's legendary ski-mountaineering Skoog Brothers—Carl and Lowell. In total, their stroll took them a total of 193 kilometres (120 miles) and over 18,000 metres (60,000 vertical feet) through some of the most remote terrain in the North Cascades, with resupplies at their food caches on Cascade Pass and the remote mountain village of Holden, as well as the summit of Glacier Peak. They picked the perfect weather window in the fickle Cascades and became the first pair to tick off this massive ski-and-splitboard traverse, a fitting sequel to the tandem's 2012 conquest of all Washington State's 9,000-foot peaks.

"Over the years, Jason Hummel and I had loosely spoken of doing the traverse, but I held little interest in the idea," says Miller. "The route, while beautiful and remote, involved day after day of side-hilling, the thought of which made me nauseous."

"This adventure was far bigger than I had ever expected, and we were so fortunate that it went as smoothly as it did. Physically it was quite demanding, but it was the mental game that really had me stressed out," concludes Miller. "Being natives of Washington, it gave us pride to be the first two people to pull off what some are now calling a benchmark traverse." The Skoog brothers would be proud.

—Dan Kostrzewski

TRUE ORIGINALS TRADITIONAL ALTAI SKIERS IN THE FAR NORTH CORNER OF XINJIANG PROVINCE, CHINA.

Photo: Nils Larsen

ANCIENT MODERNITY

A WASHINGTON-BASED SKI DESIGNER FINDS INSPIRATION IN THE OLDEST SKI CULTURE ON EARTH

"THEY'RE REALLY STRONG SKIERS. In the deeper snow I just couldn't keep up," explains Nils Larsen, a Curlew, Washington-based ski designer. The athletes he's raving about are the inspiration behind his company Altai Skis, but they aren't sponsored riders, and you won't find them in the latest batch of ski flicks.

They're *Tuwa*, indigenous residents of northwestern China's isolated Altai Mountains. For thousands of years, the Tuwa have used heavily rockered wooden skis fixed with animal skins—horse, usually—to navigate their region's deep continental snowpack. By some estimates, they are the most ancient, still-intact ski culture on Earth.

Larsen's long-standing efforts to design a versatile, minimalist backcountry ski had virtually ground to a halt after two decades of impatient bosses and uncommitted engineers. Finally, in 2005, a friend's travel photos inspired his design process to take an ethnographic turn.

After five visits to the Altai Mountains, Larsen has not only designed the Tuwa-inspired "Hok," which is Tuwa for "ski," he has even produced a feature-length documentary on Tuwa ski heritage titled *Skiing in the Shadow of Genghis Khan*.

Back stateside, a growing cadre of backcountry minimalists, and even some search-and-rescue groups, are joining Larsen on Hoks, favouring their light weight and maneuverability. Still, it's doubtful any of them could keep pace with the ancient masters, whose unlikely partnership with Larsen has taken the concept of "athlete-driven design" to whole new depths.

—Jeff Slack

SHE DON'T USE JELLY FLAMING LIPS LEAD SINGER WAYNE COYNE AT RIFFLANDIA 2012.

Photo: Jen Trail

TUNING IN VICTORIA

THE RIFFLANDIA FESTIVAL UNITES A CITY'S FASCINATION WITH FREAKY REFRAIN

FOR DECADES, Victoria, British Columbia, has been a land of musical weirdos, sub-sub-genres and some of the most eclectic music festivals around. Get to know the Garden City music scene intimately, and the city's reputation as a sleepy retirement village couldn't be further from the truth.

Soundwave, an electronic party that was halted in 2010 when over-attendance staggered organizers, has become legend amongst the city's music fans. The forgotten genre of ska lives on here, with Ska Fest having celebrated its 14th year in 2013. Genre-busting musical oddities, such as Daddy's Hands, Infamous Scientists, Hank and Lily, and Pigment Vehicle, got their start here. The only thing missing? No large annual festival was able to tie this eclectic mix of music scenes together. That is, until six years ago.

Enter Rifflandia. The upstart festival has managed to iron out most early-year kinks and has expanded to include outdoor park shows and more intimate venue performances: this year's venues included a church, small dive bars and even a brewery parking lot. Each year, bigger names headline the electronic, hip-hop and indie rock tips, while hundreds of smaller regional bands fill in the cracks of the musical universe. It's a welcome arrival for a city that has always placed its tastes for tunes a little left of the mainstream center.

—Jason Schreurs

GRADING THE CURVE

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FREERIDE CLUB GETS EXTRACURRICULAR

BY PETER WOJNAR

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, most students' lives are dedicated to class, studying and homework; however, one group of winter-addicted students is devoting as much time to the mountains as they do to academia. UBC Freeride has the same scholastic commitments as other students, but they set aside school to focus on skiing and filmmaking whenever conditions allow—and it has been paying off.

Last April, the 16-member club won both People's Choice and the overall title in Whistler's World Ski and Snowboard Festival's Intersection film competition where teams had seven days to shoot and edit a snowsports short. Under the direction of filmmaker and film production student Leo Zuckerman, the club took both titles against stiff competition from respected local film companies like Nuulife and Voleurz. And they did it all while writing end-of-term exams.

"Halfway through Intersection," remembers UBC Freeride member Jeremy Accland, "Garrett [Knochenmus] had to rip back to campus between two 14-hour film days to write an exam."

"One of the hardest things about balancing school with skiing and filming is co-ordinating everyone's time," says member Essex Prescott. "It's easy for one person to have five days a week off school, but to get a whole film crew together for a week is borderline impossible."

The most coveted winter schedule has the student/skier/filmmaker in class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with four-day weekends to ski and an extra day off in between. The luckiest of the crew are able to fill their graduation requirements with summer and fall courses, leaving the winter open for feeding their ski addictions. "Sometimes, conditions are all-time and you can't make that class, can't make that exam," says Prescott. "That's when you do what you've gotta do."

Building on their success with Intersection, UBC Freeride has been busy planning for this winter, including a five-episode series entitled *Freeride Raw,* and a year-long film project directed by Zuckerman. "I want to create a short that satisfies my film school requirements while letting me work with my friends in the mountains," explains Zuckerman. "I just want to be doing the things we love."

COLLAGE OF CALAMITY FROM EPIC FEATS OF ENDURANCE, LIKE SHACKLETON'S 1914 EXPEDITION, TO EVER-PRESENT EVEREST EMERGENCIES, SETTING GOALS HAS LONG DEFINED—AND MALIGNED—ADVENTURE.

Photo: Ian Coble

GOAL KEEPER

A SENIOR THESIS FROM A BRITISH COLUMBIA COLLEGE STUDENT MIGHT HELP YOU MAKE SMARTER DECISIONS ON YOUR NEXT OUTDOOR MISSION

BY MEGAN MICHELSON

A FEW WINTERS AGO, while a freshman at Quest University Canada, in Squamish, British Columbia, Ben Kelley was backcountry skiing with friends when one of his buddies disappeared. They searched for him for hours and eventually found him safe back at their condo. The experience hit Kelley hard. "The mood went from stoked to panicked so quickly," Kelley says now. "That's what sparked my interested in wilderness decision-making." Kelley then came up with a question that would guide his college curriculum: What are the consequences of decision-making and leadership in a wilderness environment?

He took a month-long course on winter backcountry travel and studied geology, psychology and neurology. Kelley, 23, recently graduated and completed his thesis, which he hopes to get published this winter. His work centers on a concept called "destructive goal setting," which is choosing a goal that's so narrow, it eliminates options, even when warning signs exist.

The solution, according to Kelley's research, is to set more broad goals and develop a protocol so you can come to a decision, evaluate it and then decide to follow through or not. "If I tell people I'm going to climb Atwell Peak, for example, it takes hold of my identity," Kelley says. "That narrow goal lets me pursue it even if, say, as I'm approaching the peak, I see a storm coming."

In his research, Kelley studied the goals in the 1996 Mount Everest disaster, Ernest Shackleton's 1914 expedition to Antarctica, and the 2010 death of pro freeskier Arne Backstrom in Peru. "Goal setting may not be the sole cause for these fatalities," he writes, "but it plays a significant role,."

For his thesis, he settled on the 2012 avalanche at Stevens Pass, Washington, that killed three experienced skiers, two of whom Kelley knew personally. "I thought that the best way to honour their lives was to create a positive learning outcome from the event that took their lives," he says. He looked at the factors at play in the group and found their goal to ski fresh powder may have impaired their ability to back out. "If the individual is able to figure out that they have fallen into the process that leads to bad decision-making," Kelley writes, "then perhaps they can remove themselves from it."

Photo: Reijo Oravа

THE ATWELL PROJECT

SQUAMISH SKI MOUNTAINEER TREVOR HUNT AND THE BACKYARD PEAK FEW DARE TO SKI

BY MIKEY NIKON

MOUNT ATWELL CASTS AN alluring, if menacing, eye down on Squamish, British Columbia. The peak dwarfs the town with a volcanic grandeur. On the west face, a series of couloirs spill from the summit ridge and snake their way through a vertically stacked puzzle of spines and seracs. Ski lines explode into the imagination, but very few people have skied with success from the ridgetop. On a mountain so visible to the throng of big-mountain ass-kickers below it, that's a telling fact.

"There's a bunch of different lines off it and it's such rotten rock that it's a real condition sport," says Eric Pehota, one of the coast's local big-mountain ambassadors. "You see it in the summertime and it doesn't look too pleasing at all, but mid-winter when it's all caked in snow, it's quite a magical little spot."

A few people have managed to etch their names on its face, including Pehota and Petersen. But there's one lesser-known figure whose love affair with Mount Atwell has produced a growing list of first descents. Trevor Hunt, an outdoor gear designer, put his first mark on the peak in 2002 with a solo ascent/descent of The Siberian Express. And then, after a season of high Himalayan ski mountaineering, he came back to Mount Atwell in 2012 with a new set of eyes and a new set of goals.

The following route descriptions are by no means intended as a guidebook. That would take the fun—and some of the suffering—out of the process. But they will give you a glimpse into a big-mountain arena that very few of us will every truly understand.

Disclaimer: historical accounts were recalled under duress by those involved. We apologize in advance for the hazy memories of our beloved ski pioneers.

Photo: Trevor Hunt

GEORGIAN
(Trevor Hunt, 2012)

Deceived by the complexity of the face, Hunt actually climbed this one by accident. He stayed the course and tunnelled through to the summit ridge before dropping back into what he calls "The Georgian Spine," an otherworldly pyramid of snow, rock and rime. After that, he banked skiers' right into the couloir and made a pant-shittingly slow exit through a section of 60-degree ice.

SQUAMPTONIAN
(Trevor Hunt, 2012)

The line Hunt was originally going for the day he skied the Georgian. He got a few hours sleep down in Squamish and then bagged his original objective the very next day.

SIBERIAN
(Peter Chrzanowski, Pete "The Swede" Mattson and Beat Steiner, 1989-91)

This was the first line to see tracks on the face and is also the most well known. The Siberian usually hosts a couple of attempts a year but is notorious for defeating even the most experienced parties. Hunt took this route in a 24-hour push in 2002, punching through a cornice at the top, resting for an hour and then airing the same cornice back onto the 55-degree slope.

ARMENIAN
(Eric Pehota, Trevor Petersen and Steve Smaridge, 1992)

This merry band of big-mountain forefathers (RIP to the latter two) ticked off the Armenian after skiing from the summit of Garibaldi and Dalton Dome on the same trip, thus completing the trifecta of peaks that make up the Garibaldi group. They then bushwhacked out what Pehota calls "creek beds to hell" before getting back to the highway a day later than anticipated.

CANADIAN
(Trevor Hunt, 2012)

Hunt's twisted take on the Armenian. He skied from the south summit and exposed himself to the terminal abyss of the southwest face before he wrapped back onto the west face and committed to the 60-degree fall line in bulletproof conditions. Hunt calls this process "one of the most humbling experiences I've had on skis."

EVERYONE WELCOME

MOUNT BACHELOR'S DIRKSEN DERBY HOSTS PROS AND JOES AT ITS ANNUAL CHARITABLE SHREDFEST

BY COLIN WISEMAN

Photo: Abe Blair

IT'S NOT ABOUT WINNING RETIRED PROFESSIONAL SNOWBOARDER JASON MCALISTER RAILS A BERM ON HIS WAY TO A DISAPPOINTING 13TH PLACE FINISH IN THE MEN'S ELITE CATEGORY. HE WON BEST PHOTO OF THE DAY, THOUGH.

IF SNOWBOARD CONTESTS EXIST on a bell curve, the Dirksen Derby is an outlier—somewhere beyond the mass of made-for-TV specials and Saturday night rail jams, all the way out the X-axis. Three standard deviations to the right. Or left, depending which of the two, roughly 30-second banked slalom courses you decide to run.

That's because Oregon's Dirksen Derby is about the furthest one can get from holding a race while still including a finish line. Sure, there are winners—whoever records the fastest time down the ultra-tight banks through the trees near Mount Bachelor's low-key Sunrise Lodge walks away with a handcrafted trophy and maybe a little bit of free sponsor swag. But there's no prize money and still, some of the world's best riders regularly attend the early December event. Heroes and anti-heroes from Jake Blauvelt to Scotty Wittlake to surf legend Gerry Lopez can be seen riding shorter-than-average boards through the snake-line setup. They do it because the Dirksen Derby has a deeper purpose: they do it for Tyler Eklund.

In spring 2007, Eklund was a 14-year-old up-and-coming rider from Bend, Oregon, who fell while preparing for the US Nationals and was paralyzed. That same year Bend local and snowboard legend Josh Dirksen pulled together a loose competition to help raise money for Eklund. Every year since, the event has grown, based upon an inclusive vibe that speaks to something that is often lost in the competitive world: a sense of community.

In December 2012, the sixth derby drew almost 500 competitors and raised close to $30,000. Ranging from casual snowboarder to groms, super-pros and beyond, the participants shared in a communal vibe to session the bountiful hit runs found throughout Mount Bachelor's evergreen-laden lower mountain, and ride out an early-season storm with like-minded folks. And the biggest cheers weren't for Temple Cummins or Terje Haakonsen—they were for Tyler Eklund, dropping in upon his sit-ski.

"For me, the derby is worth doing because it makes so many people happy," Dirksen says. "Tyler Eklund is always the main reason I do it, and everyone benefits from the event, myself included. It is such a nice way for everyone to see friends, ride together, and to get inspired." Inclusive indeed. And, one might say, just the kind of outlier that snowboarding needs.

ACROSS THE STRAIT IN A TINFOIL HAT

STAND UP PADDLEBOARDING FROM VANCOUVER TO VICTORIA FOR CHARITY

BY DAVE QUINN

DIRE STRAITS BRUCE KIRKBY BATTLES HEADWINDS AND SHIPPING VESSELS ALONG THE MAIN CHANNEL OF THE FRASER, ONE OF THE BUSIEST SHIPPING ROUTES ON THE BRITISH COLUMBIAN COAST.

Photo: Dave Quinn

BRUCE KIRKBY RARELY HAS TIME TO SIT. Maybe this is why a stand up paddleboard is his weapon of choice for wilderness missions in British Columbia. This past spring, on that standup board, Kirkby paddled 100 kilometres in 18 hours on Vernon's Kalamalka Lake to raise funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Barely a week later, Kirkby was back on his SUP on Vancouver's English Bay, kicking off the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Committee Society's (CPAWS) Big Wild Challenge with a Vancouver-to-Victoria voyage. "I was enthralled with the idea of using a SUP to explore the area between BC's two largest centres," explains Kirkby, an author and veteran of countless remote wilderness expeditions. "Raising awareness and money for CPAWS Southern Strait of Georgia campaign seemed like a perfect fit."

"SUPing across Georgia Strait has been done before," he notes. "But the idea of hopping a plane, hauling a duffel to the beach, and inflating your SUP for a four-day, 150-kilometre adventure through some spectacular waters with good buddies was what I wanted to experience."

The team included two kayakers, a long-time sea kayak guide and filmmaker Kalum Ko, who skipped his grade 12 final exams to take part in his first kayak experience ever. "The open, exposed crossing from the mainland to the islands was the biggest challenge," explains Kirkby, whose home base is Kimberley, British Columbia. "The shortest point is the 22 kilometres from Tsawwassen to Galiano Island, but this 22 kilometres happens to cross several major shipping and ferry lanes." To avoid becoming freighter propeller fodder, the team notified marine traffic controllers of their position via VHF, and Kirkby covered his hat in tinfoil, a trick that increased their radar signal. Cooperative winds allowed for a smooth, four-hour crossing of this section. "We could not have had better conditions, although my head felt a bit like a baked potato after a few hours in the sun," jokes Kirkby. "Arriving at Galiano during sunset was one of the most memorable paddles of my life."

After three days and over 130 kilometres of perfect conditions, headwinds finally kicked in at Gordon Head off Victoria's coast. "Winds were pushing 25 knots against the ebb tide by the time we bounced around Clover Point," says Kirkby, who, by that time, was SUPing from his knees. "The gang of kiteboarders charging the waves off Findlayson Point let us know it was time to get off the water." The team camped with partying Victoria grads on that point and made it around into Victoria Harbour the next morning in time for coffee.

Photo: Ian Coble

EMERALD INFLUENCE

TAKING A FEW TURNS WITH INGRID BACKSTROM, AS CASCADIAN AS THEY COME

BY KIM KIRCHNER AND DARREN DAVIDSON

FOR INGRID BACKSTROM, home is not the Seattle suburb of Normandy Park where she grew up. She's bagged first descents in China, Baffin Island and Greenland and was named one of 2013's 50 most influential action-sports athletes by *ESPN*, but she calls the larger nation of Cascadia home, from Crystal to Whistler to the Coast Range and its innumerable lines. Despite her global adventuring and stardom, the 35-year-old's essence is most clearly defined by her memories as a kid, when she spent many winter nights in the Crystal Resort parking lot curled up in the family's RV with her ski-patrol mom and dad and her brothers Ralph and Arne. Backstrom has been one of Matchstick Productions' go-to gals since the mid-2000s, and she has 13 *Powder Magazine* awards to her name. With the help of Pacific Northwest shredder and scribe Kim Kirchner, we reveal a wee bit about what's made Backstrom the bomb.

You told TheNorthFace.com that your most embarrassing moment on skis was?
The first trip I went on with backcountry ski boots, when I put them on the wrong feet. I even hiked partway up the slope before someone noticed. I guess I got them too big.

Would you rather PNW skiers and snowboarders kept all the Cascadian goods to themselves?
Hmmm. I kind of like it the way it is. But, I'd welcome more transit options for people to get to the mountains—more buses and carpooling—less cars driving up and down.

You don't mind the PNW's wet winter weather?
You get accustomed to skiing in it. The snow sticks to everything and allows you to ski steeper stuff and makes for the best tree, pillow and spine skiing anywhere. But you've got to work for it.

Starbucks, Microsoft or legalized dope: What's worse for society?
I think there are pros with all of them.

How is Washington's legalization of marijuana going anyway?
I saw a guy hitting a vaporizer inside the Sea-Tac airport the other day. It was so weird to see! Maybe he was flying to Colorado? It hasn't really affected me . . . I'm mainly concerned about the drug wars in other countries and how our illegal drug trade perpetuates death and destruction in other places.

Sled skiing: good or bad?
Bit of both.

In high school were you a Grunger? Jock? Hipster?
(Laughing) It was Seattle in the 90s so everyone was into grunge, lots of flannels and corduroy pants. My style was sort of grunge/tomboy/fleece. Sounds hot, eh?

Who were your favourite bands?
Nirvana, Mudhoney, Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins, all that. I went to see Nine Inch Nails when I was 16. Marilyn Manson opened up; it was pretty crazy. We loved Sir Mix-A-Lot. Seattle has some good music happening right now: Shabazz Palaces are amazing. Fleet Foxes too.

What were your other sports?
Swimming, basketball, track. I was a ski racer too.

Sonics, Seahawks or Sounders?
I've always been a Mariners fan, and I loved the Sonics. I got to see them play the Bulls in the finals when it was Scottie Pippen and Michael Jordan versus Gary Payton and Shawn Kemp. Pretty incredible! We had fourth-row seats.

What part did your family play in your evolution in the sport?
It's a part of my heritage. My parents and family definitely made it possible and set an example of loving the mountains and getting the reward from the challenge that comes from skiing and hiking and being outside.

In light of your brother Arne's tragic ski accident in 2010, do your parents still fully support your skiing career and Ralph's?
Yes, that's the way they are and how they have always been.

Do you view risk-taking differently than before?
Yeah, of course. Skiing is inherently risky, like life in general. Now I try to absolutely illuminate all unnecessary risk. I used to be the kind of person who'd say "Oh, it'll be okay just this once." I don't do that anymore.

How many years do you have left skiing the big stuff for the camera?
I just take it year to year and try to do the best I can every year with whatever I have going on. Shane McConkey was skiing his best at 39.

Are you a) intimidated by b) in awe of c) indifferent to the increasingly bold accomplishments of youth in adventure sport?
Definitely b. It seems like humans in general are getting to the point where we are maximizing our physical capacities while at the same time we've engineered the best toys and tools for sport. It's gotten to a crazy level. I'm so curious what will come next.

BOARD ARTISAN

PORT ANGELES GYPSY KELLY FOOTE TAILORS HIS ARTISTIC SHAPES TO WASHINGTON'S UNIQUE SURF

BY COLIN WISEMAN

GLASSED IN FOOTE'S IDEA TO TAKE LOCAL ART PIECES AND GLASS THEM ON HIS BOARDS HAS PROMPTED CONSECUTIVE GALLERY SHOWINGS. THIS YEAR, HE TEAMED UP WITH ARTISTS STEFAN HOFMANN, W3 COLLECTIVE, JEN TOFE, RYAN DAVIS AND DUFFY.

Photo: Cameron Karsten

WASHINGTON STATE SURF is notoriously fickle: from blown-out beach breaks to omnipresent drizzle to the occasional northwest swell in the Strait of Juan de Fuca; it takes commitment to be there when clean waves peel off the evergreen-drenched Pacific coastline. As a native of Whidbey Island—the kind of place that takes an extra-special northwest swell to light up—Kelly Foote, owner of Foote Surfboards, understands the plight of the Washington State surfer. And he's taken matters into his own hands by shaping surfboards that work, even when the ocean isn't.

"Most of my boards are high-volume shapes that are still fun, even when the waves aren't perfect—things like fishes and speed eggs, with some short boards as well," says the 29-year-old Foote, who began shaping surfboards in 2009, mostly for pragmatic reasons. "I was broke and I wanted to progress my surfing. My surfing and my shaping continue to grow alongside one another. Even though I sell my surfboards, surfing's still the main goal. Shaping first improved my surfing, but now surfing's improved my shaping."

With a background in composites engineering from Bellingham's Western Washington University, Foote works out of a trailer on a friend's property in Port Angeles where he lives a migratory lifestyle driven by the ocean. Currently shaping around 80 boards per year, he's added a unique element to his handcrafted pieces. In 2011, Foote gathered artistically inclined members of the northwest outdoor community and glassed their art onto his shapes, prompting a gallery show and a follow-up edition of the boards in 2013. It's a symbiotic relationship that connects the growing Washington State surf community to a broader outdoor culture, a move that will continue to strengthen the state's surf scene and, maybe, inspire future wandering souls to seek those rare peaks of Washington's coast.

FAR FROM TROPICAL WHERE THERE'S OCEAN, THERE'S FISH. GRAYM GREIG HUNTS LINGCOD OFF BLUNDEN ISLAND, BC, NEAR TOFINO.

THE BREATH HUNTERS

IF YOU THOUGHT SPEARFISHING WAS JUST FOR TROPICAL CLIMES, THINK AGAIN

BY MALCOLM JOHNSON

"I USED TO FEED MYSELF this way in the Bahamas," my friend Will Hazen says as we start out along the rocks. "But here is so much better. There's just so many fish."

It's a clear afternoon, the tide dropping to slack, and we're making our way out to the point of a small cove in Saanich, British Columbia, where we'll pull on our winter suits, swim fins, weight belts and slip beneath the surface to hunt for rockfish and ling cod. There's a black Mares speargun in my hand and I run through the steps a few times in my mind: breathe in, drop down, equalize the ears, find a fish, flip the safety off, fire. And if all goes well we'll kick back to the surface and head home with dinner.

From a historical perspective, fishing with spears is about as old as humanity and it played an important part in traditional harvesting in our part of the world: salmon from the rapids and river pools, crab from the inshore shallows, whales harpooned from cedar canoes. In recent decades, there's been a small but committed group in the Northwest mostly linked to the dive and SCUBA community. In its purest form, it's a freedive fishery—no supplemental air, just your own breath and your own strength.

Properly performed, it's also a more humane method of gathering fish; you only fire at fish you want, so you're not hooking and hurting fish that are off limits or too small to keep. And because of the physical difficulty you become another link in the saltwater food chain rather than roaring above it in a powerboat with downriggers and electronics—it's skill-dependent, not tech-dependent.

Mick Sheinberg, the owner of HtO Surf Shop in Victoria, is one of a growing number of spearfishers on Vancouver Island and he stocks some basic gear in his store. "It's a potentially dangerous activity so lots of research is needed," he says. "By far the most important thing is a deep base of knowledge. There are many things working against you when you enter the underwater world."

Spearing in the Northwest isn't an act of comfort—it's cold, dark and a bit savage, with hazards that range from currents and blackouts to close encounters with angry sea life. But it also immerses you into a lush, three-dimensional world. As Will and I kick away from shore, we take our first big breath and follow the graceful lines of bull kelp down to the bottom. There's a sharp flicker of silver baitfish, bright beams of sun angling down from the surface, and the faint form of Will disappearing, spear forward as he drifts off into the green. I look around for a moment, thinking this space of life and light is finer than any stained-glass church made by men's hands. Taken by the moment, it hardly matters if we find fish. It's a beautiful world down here. I just want to stay a while.

Photo: Jeremy Koreski

SATURNA ISLAND WAS THE MOST REMOTE PLACE WE VISITED ON THE TRIP AND OUR LAST LOCATION BEFORE FINISHING THE JOURNEY IN VANCOUVER.

THE ESCAPE ARTISTS

TWO SEA-TO-SKY-BASED FILMMAKING BRITS FIND THE ROMANCE OF RIDING IN THE WINTER RAIN

BY LISA RICHARDSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAN BARHAM

IT'S THE MIDDLE OF WINTER, pouring rain, and you haven't ridden your bike in months. You're jonesing to escape the wet cat smell of your car and a mood as Eeyore-grey as the sky. Naturally, you book a trip to Moab. Nothing a little desert-storming can't cure?

Not if you're Seb Kemp and Dan Barham, two British Columbia-based Englishmen mad-dog enough to dream up a 14-day, 850-kilometre self-propelled bike tour of British Columbia's coastal communities. In February. Evidently, it's not a decent bike adventure unless there's a solid dose of suffering attached. That, at least, is how Kemp framed *The Escape*, the 16-minute video released this past May that documents his ride with Oregonian Dave Roth, which spanned from Whistler to the Sunshine Coast and back.

Anyone who has been hailed on atop a summit, or run out of Shot Bloks at the start of a hike-a-bike climb, or has been treed by a grizzly on swooshy Chilcotins singletrack can attest that adventure intensifies to epic status only when the conditions stop being soft. "*The Escape* came about because I wanted to do that trip, and coming up with a noose-like no-escape-plan was the only way it would happen," Kemp tells me from Tahltan, British Columbia, where he is scoping out his next mission.

Heading into weather forecasted with 90 to 100 per cent chance of rain might have turned a different crew back, but starting out with videographer-photographer Dan Barham and Andy Rogers, who

DAY 1 MISSING A HUGE DUMP OF SNOW BY JUST A SINGLE DAY, WE WERE LUCKY TO GET OUT OF WHISTLER BEFORE THE ROADS BECAME TOO DANGEROUS.

DAY 2 THE SEA-TO-SKY HIGHWAY BECOMES ALL THE MORE AMAZING WHEN YOU LEAVE THE CAR BEHIND AND EXPERIENCE MORE THAN JUST THE VIEW.

DAY 4 AMAZING LOCATIONS AND TRAILS ARE ONE THING, BUT PEOPLE LEAVE THE LONGEST IMPRESSION. FRANK CHRINKO RUNS POWELL RIVER'S SUNCOAST CYCLES.

would be driving ahead to shoot and hauling all their gear with them, was the high point of the trip. "It was actually happening," says Kemp. "The freedom of the road was strongest at that point."

It rained. Not much for February, but still. "It rained leaving Whistler, then from Roberts Creek to Powell River, then Parksville to Nanaimo, and Tsawwassen to North Van," explains Kemp. "But the rain only fell on the big road-ride days, so it was easy to put our heads down and just turn pedals."

And in the end, *The Escape* wasn't about epic adventure or bikes or weather or coffee or tweeting, but about community and the solidarity of connecting with those also jonesing to hit the trails and suck back some clean, clear air, even if they have to push through snow to do it. We'll always have Moab. But nothing says "alive" quite like riding in the rain.

DAY 5 THE FRESH TRAIL AND ALL-ENVELOPING MOSS MARKED POWELL RIVER AS ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE PLACES WE RODE.

DAY 9 THE PUNISHING SCHEDULE TOOK ITS TOLL ON BODY AND BICYCLE ALIKE, BUT TRAILSIDE REPAIRS AND POST-RIDE BEERS KEPT US MOVING ALONG SMOOTHLY.

DAY 10 BY MEETING WITH THE LOCALS IN EACH SPOT WE VISITED, WE GOT THE INSIDE LINE ON THE BEST TRAILS. RILEY MCINTOSH SHOWED US HIS SPOTS IN DUNCAN, BC.

POWDER & PLYWOOD

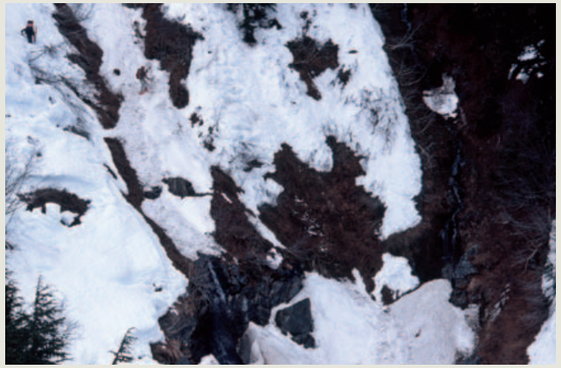
WHETHER HUMAN- OR HELI-POWERED, NORTHERN BC'S SKI SCENE HAS BEEN FLYING UNDER THE RADAR FOR FAR TOO LONG. MEET THE NEW KOOTENAYS

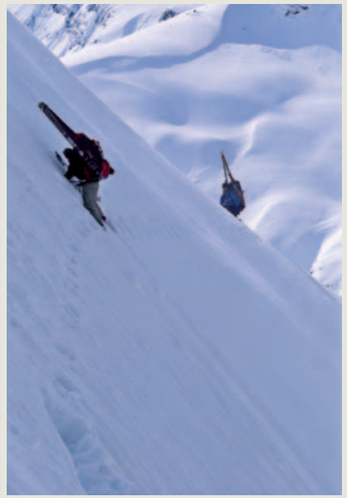
BY MIKE BERARD PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE OGLE

IN THE SOUTHERN HALF of British Columbia, Mr. Mike's doesn't rank high on food writers' "best of" lists for either cuisine or nightlife. In the northern British Columbia town of Terrace, however, the "steakhouse casual" restaurant chain is a Friday-night staple. As soon as we enter the franchise, tucked away in a strip mall next to a drycleaners and a Warehouse One, I can't help but say, "This place is bumping." Groups of young women flirt with camo-happy men. Loud music and laughter punctuate the air. This is the way the north parties, at least while indoors. Finding a seat seems unlikely. Luckily, we are with a man who has serious pull.

Prince Rupert born-and-raised ski mountaineer Dean Wagner is well known around here for both his exploits in the peaks that stand above town and for his long-time career as a commercial fisherman. Everyone in the place knows him. The impossibly modest Wagner

TERRACED DREAMS SKIER AND COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN DEAN WAGNER ALSO BUILDS CUSTOM SKIS AND SNOWBOARDS AT HIS COMPANY DIVIDE RIDES. HERE HE PRODUCT-TESTS AT NORTHERN ESCAPE HELISKIING.





SUFFERING RETROSPECTIVE TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM: KHUTZEYMATEEN ESTUARY AFTER THREE DAYS OF PADDLING; LOST IN THE JUNGLE, PRE-GPS, WITH DISH GLOVES AS A DEVIL'S CLUB DETERRENT; RIVER CROSSING; "THE FINAL TURNS OF THE TRIP FOR DEAN, WHO WOULDN'T GIVE UP. NELSON AND I WERE BOOT-PACKING LONG BEFORE THIS!" SAYS OGLE; BIG TERRAIN; "SHORTLY AFTER THIS PHOTO, NELSON TOOK AN UNCONTROLLED HEADER DOWN THE SLOPE," RECALLS OGLE; WAGNER JUMPING OFF A CORNICE WITH SHAMES MOUNTAIN AREA IN BACKGROUND; CELEBRATING THE FINISH.

IS THAT WHERE WE CAME OVER?

Just to set the record straight, we got our hands on their maps and figured out where they went.

THE TEAM Steve Ogle, Nelson Rocha, Dean Wagner
Departure Date: 10 a.m., March 31, 2004
Completion Date: 7 p.m., April 16, 2004
Total days: 17 (2 rest days)
Kayaking: 2.5 days, 96 kms
Hiking: 2.5 days, 10 kms
Skiing: 10 days, 110 kms
Total trip distance: 216 kms
Total elevation gain: 6,523m/21,400ft

LOW POINT Ogle inadvertently tosses a critical tent pole to Wagner, not realizing the snow surface had turned to ice. The pole bounces past him and down a 600-metre couloir.

HIGH POINT Finding that pole jammed into the snow at the top of the couloir with only a few inches protruding.

Day 1: Paddle out of Prince Rupert's harbour past the now-sunk *Queen of the North*.
Day 3: Paddle into the Khutzeymateen estuary, arguably BC's best bear-viewing locale. Hiking segment begins.
Day 4: It is easier to hike through the river than to hunt down a straightforward path through the undergrowth. They cross the river six times thinking it would be easier going on the other side.
Day 5: Spend an hour pulling Devil's Club thorns out of their hands.
Day 6: The tent pole incident. Finally reach snow.
Day 7: Successfully navigate a 10-metre-wide ridge with sheer drops on both sides in a complete whiteout for several hundred metres; then they find out it leads to nowhere so they have to backtrack.
Day 8: Ogle's avalanche beacon stops working due to wet conditions.
Day 9: Rocha takes a header while trying to glissade down a firm snow slope that they are traversing with skis on their backs.
Day 10: Launch a mandatory big cornice over a valley-to-ridgeline mini cliff that in Rocha's words, "Pretty much assured us this wouldn't be a classic traverse."
Day 11: : Ogle begs for a rest day. Wagner and Rocha have none of it.
Day 14: The backside of Shames Mountain ski area is spotted way to the south.
Day 16: Navigate Erlandsen Glacier and Creek in a whiteout. Have lunch in the exact same spot as heliskiing trip. Ogle remembers, "Huge seracs, when looking at them from our sunny NEH lunch spot, were actually just bumps in the snow that Dean was launching off."

entertains visits from multiple people. Some want to know about his latest ascent of Mount Fairweather. Others need a halibut hookup. Some want to discuss his basement-based ski company, Divide Rides. Some just want to BS. Few, if any, know of the epic 216-kilomtere traverse from Rupert to Terrace he, photographer Steve Ogle and former Ruperite Nelson Rocha completed almost 10 years ago, but it's the very reason we are here. Over an order of MiniMikes® sliders and Big Horn Lager® beer, Wagner and Ogle talk about what could make northern British Columbia the next serious ski destination—that is, if anyone ever makes it up here.

THE PERCUSSIVE DRUM of the helicopter blades do combat with the alpine atmosphere, as the bird pulls away from our group. As the wind and noise die down, Ogle turns to Wagner and says, "Is that where we came over?" He's pointing at a looming massif of glacial ice in the distance. It's crisscrossed with crevasses and far from any civilization.

"Yeah, I think so," replies Wagner. "Does that access Erlandsen Creek?"

The guide looks at both of them doubtfully. "You guys skied over *there*?"

"Not sure."

"Wouldn't you know something like that?"

"You would think so," says Ogle, "but we skied it by brail…in the fog."

"Wow."

We're somewhere deep in Northern Escape Heliskiing's (NEH) 1.8-million-acre tenure, located in the Skeena Mountain Range immediately north of Terrace. The past two days a thick February storm has confined us to the operation's two snow cats, a rare luxury afforded by NEH's equal parts of foresight and the ability to admit the northern Coast Range has fickle weather patterns; when the birds don't fly, the cats come out to play. Today, however, we awake to sunshine, allowing us to explore some of the deeper corners of the range in bluebird conditions. And while it's the first time I've seen the terrain from helicopter or otherwise, Wagner and Ogle are revisiting old stomping grounds.

In April 2004, the three of them crested the eastern section of the Skeena Range during their 25-day traverse from Prince Rupert. The traverse has not been repeated since. Back then, Northern Escape didn't even exist; the operation launched the next year. Obviously, NEH founders John Forrest, Benny Abruzzo and Teddy Allsop saw as much promise in the massive, snow-choked mountains of the Skeena Range as they did. The fact that the pair can't identify where they walked during those days is probably a result of being unfamiliar with the bird's eye viewpoint. Or maybe because the mountains here are so damn big.

TRUE NORTH STRONG AND DEEP DEAN WAGNER EXPLORES THE DEEPER RECESSES OF SKEENA CATSKIING'S 148,000-ACRE TENURE.

Their expedition began with a three-day kayak trip off the same dock in Prince Rupert that Wagner launches his commercial-fishing vessel. The adventure started almost immediately. "A grey whale literally almost breached on me," says Ogle. "That was a week before we actually started skiing." Once the trio reached land, they still took three days travelling through Khutzeymateen Provincial Park until they reached the alpine. "We were in this grizzly bear sanctuary," says Wagner. "We didn't see any, but we saw some very big footprints… big as garden rakes."

"A GREY WHALE LITERALLY ALMOST BREACHED ON ME," SAYS OGLE. "THAT WAS A WEEK BEFORE WE ACTUALLY STARTED SKIING."

At Northern Escape, the wildlife is more mellow, restricted to smiley-faced heliskiers downing après beers in revelry of a big day. Life here is a world away from the blister-cursed life of a ski mountaineer. Then again, the life of a dirtbag skier has its own charms, ones that Ogle can attest to. "Traversing for three weeks across rivers and unknown glaciers with two buddies is something I'll never forget," he says, recalling the adventure with a smile. "An hour-long logging road ride in the bed of a guy's truck, who warned us he was probably too drunk to be driving, capped off a real, true adventure." Probably too drunk to hot tub, we toast to both the adventurous soul and to the comfort of the present. Tomorrow, we will return to a more rustic existence.

THE MOST-NORTHERN CATSKIING operation in northern British Columbia is a modest affair; you won't find fine wines or delicate pastries in their plywood lodge. You will find lots of cold beer and hot meals. Down a country road on the outskirts of the blink-and-you-miss-it northern outpost of New Hazelton is the rustic ranch that acts as base camp for Skeena Catskiing. Less than two hours northeast of NEH, it's here on the skirt of the Babine Mountains in the Skeena Range where Jevon Zyp and his mother Lynn Schwartz launched their multi-generational family business two years ago. "My grandma didn't leave me much money," says Zyp. "But I put all of it into this operation. I hope to hell it's enough."

If anyone has the experience and mindset to open a new cat operation in the notoriously rough-around-the-edges north, Zyp might be it. He got his start road building for respected Kootenay cat outfits Chatter Creek and Mustang Powder. Eventually, Zyp missed the north he grew up in and returned in 2004 with the idea to start his own business. In 2010, it finally happened. Together with Schwartz and a skeleton staff, the family serves up what matters most—deep powder skiing and riding that stands alone in this rarely visited British Columbia enclave.

We arrive on the same night as a small group of hunters from Norway. They are here in North America to hunt big game, like cougar, moose and bear—a feature of the north that has long attracted back-to-the-woods types. Tomorrow, we will hunt snow together. It won't prove difficult.

We awake and there is no snow at the ranch, but a 45-minute drive delivers us to the goods. Transferring from truck to cat, we climb until it's steep and deep enough to dive in. The rest of the day is like a Kootenay wet dream 15 years ago. Fast, loose and deep, we chase our guide down mellow meadows and rowdier tree runs. At the top of an untouched bowl, we stop to watch one of the Norwegians cut a small slough loose and fall with joy down slope. After five days of skiing legitimately grade-A snow, hundreds—if not thousands—of kilometres from anyone else, I have a thought. "Why isn't anyone else here?" I have to ask Wagner. "It's hard to get to," he replies, smiling. Perfect.