

# JOURNEY LINES

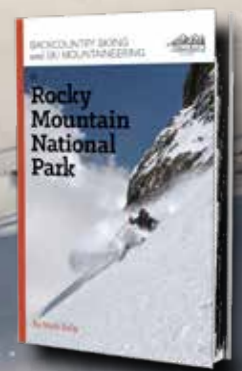
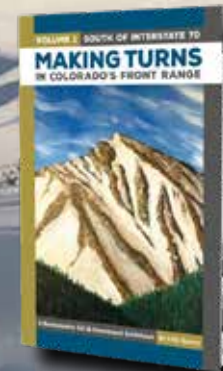
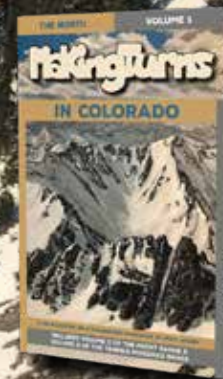
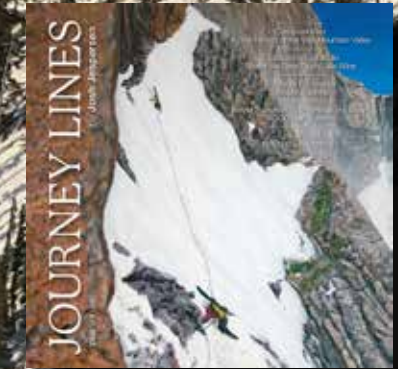


*Turret Needles*  
*Peak*  
*Fifteen*  
*Turret Peak*  
*Little Finger*  
**EVOLVING IN THE MOUNTAINS**

*Thumbs*  
**JOSH JESPERSEN**

*Sunlight Peak*





**GiterdunPublishing.com**

**For Our Other Titles  
Author Bios & Events  
Avalanche Safety  
Orders & Retailers  
Book Reviews**

**contact us at [orders@giterdunpublishing.com](mailto:orders@giterdunpublishing.com)  
Follow Us @GiterdunPublishing**





*Journey Lines is not just a guidebook* and compilation of ski adventures. It is a chronicle of progression, laden with invaluable lessons gleaned from the edge of my limits. It is a culmination of the intricacies and crossroads in my life, since I decided to fully immerse myself in Colorado, as a ski bum; a choice I made while deployed to Afghanistan as a Navy SEAL, and surrounded by the snowy peaks of the Sulaiman Mountains in the Hindu Kush.

I have worked at a ski area for minimum wage, 48 hours a week, night shift, just so I could get a ski pass and free lift tickets to all the resorts in the state. I discovered a splitboard, and found adventurers to emulate. I made mistakes in my discovery of avalanche prone snowpacks, turbulent mountain weather, and my own boundaries. I sought out mentors who would polish my understanding of the high peaks, and shift my perspective as to why I want to go further. I found a calling in the mountains as a catharsis, and a way to feel closer to my brothers who didn't make it home from war. I realized I need to bring more veterans into these wild places, and propel them to fall into nature.

I set an improbable goal for myself in climbing and shredding all 54 of Colorado's 14,000 foot peaks, and through dedication or commitment, maybe even obsession, I became the only person to accomplish this feat in a single ski season. I followed in the footsteps of Lou Dawson, Chris Davenport, and many other Colorado mountaineers to achieve my goal in only 138 days. I did this for my fallen brothers, my living ones, and myself.

In that season I had an epiphany about why I fought, and what it was I defended. It was the land, the freedom to roam, and the indomitable spirit of exploration, we as Americans have always had. I took from my experiences spent exploring every pocket of Colorado that season, and committed to sharing what came from them. I saw the different cultures, mountainscapes, and unbelievable history each different range and iconic town beholds. I was supposed to be in the San Juans for three days, but spent a week limping my junker van through the heart of the range, skiing five peaks, and fixing breakdowns in three towns. That van, and my love/hate relationship with it would ultimately be my muse for Journey Lines.

I have traveled my path to a point where I want to share it with others. I have placed myself through trial and tribulation, stoke and setbacks, and a perpetual journey in a position to bring this to you. I want you to immerse yourself on your own Journey. I want you to learn the lessons I have learned, and scribe a deep appreciation for the land and our sport onto your soul. ***I want you to chase your own Journey Lines.***



Josh Jespersen  
Author

# rates + services

## advertising

### Journey Lines Book

We are going in a different direction with Journey Lines. It's a guidebook but in a larger format, like a coffee table book. We hope to stick to a minimalist ethic throughout the book. One element of this project that differs from past publications is that the price includes inclusion in the book tour movie. There will be raffles to benefit non profits so there will need to be a gear contribution element to be negotiated.

## pricing + specs

|                                       |        |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Inside Front Cover Spread             | \$5000 |
| Inside Back Cover Spread              | 4000   |
| Back Cover                            | 3000   |
| Full Page Table of Contents Placement | 2500   |
| Full Page                             | 2000   |

### Display advertisement space available.

Two Page Spread  
22" W x 11" H = Trim Size  
22.25" W x 11.25" H = Bleed Size  
21.75" W x 10.75" H = Live Area  
Landscape Orientation only

## other services

### graphic design

GravityGirlGraphics.com will design your custom ad, at a rate of \$60 per hour and will provide an estimate prior to beginning your project. Allison Seymour has years of outdoor marketing design experience and can bring your vision to life.

Full page  
11" W x 11" H = Trim Size  
11.25" W x 11.25" H = Bleed Size  
10.75" W x 10.75" H = Live Area

**File info: Press Quality .pdf with bleeds & printer's marks.**

## custom art

Fritz Sperry Art and @fritzsperryart on instagram is available to for custom commision artwork. please contact fritz@giterdunpublishing to discuss your project and get a quote and timeline. Paintings usually take about 2 months to complete so factor this into your production timeline



Josh Jespersen on Ellingwood Point with a flag bearing the names of fallen soldiers. Photograph courtesy of Josh Jespersen

### Former Navy SEAL Summits Fourteeners in Record-Time

Josh Jespersen needed only 138 days to climb and splitboard all of Colorado's fourteeners—and he did it to honor his fellow veterans.

BY JEFF WARANIAK | SEPTEMBER 2017

When Josh Jespersen was a Navy SEAL, grueling expeditions were the rule, not the exception. So, naturally, out of the record-breaking 138 days it took him to climb and splitboard all of Colorado's fourteeners, one of his favorites was also one of the most challenging: a 15-hour push to bag Crestone Peak and Crestone Needle in a foot of freshly fallen powder. "It was mind-blowingly beautiful," the 30-year-old Leadville resident says. Beautiful? Sure. Exhausting, too—but for Jespersen, co-founder of [Mission Memorial Day](#), that's sort of the point.

Nearly three years ago, Jespersen, along with three other combat veterans, established the Mission Memorial Day initiative as a way to honor those killed in action and to inspire veterans to get active by embarking on punishing climbs and hikes over the May holiday. Jespersen, however, keeps the group's spirit alive year-round by, say, shredding every fourteener in a single ski season. In winter 2015-'16, Jespersen tracked Vail resident Jon Kedrowski as he tried to break the existing record (362 days) held by big-mountain skier Chris Davenport. After seeing Kedrowski fall short—and take some flak from the snowsports community for piecing together his runs, as opposed to descending via continuous routes—Jespersen decided to keep his own attempt quiet.

Jespersen (who *did* ride continuous lines) began his expedition solo on Mt. Elbert on January 3. Of the remaining 53 peaks, he broke trail alone on 28, while ski buddies or fellow former SEALs joined him on the others. Maintaining a near-daily routine of climb-board-sleep, Jespersen only took breaks because of bronchitis, bad weather, and dangerous avalanche reports. When he descended his final fourteener, Capitol Peak, on May 21, he celebrated with a single Instagram post, then headed directly to Denver, where he boarded a flight to the Philippines.

**260,560:** Total feet of elevation Jespersen climbed on his quest to ride all 54 fourteeners

There, the Mission Memorial Day founders spent five days walking 66 miles from south to north on the country's main island of Luzon. They retraced the route taken by hundreds of U.S. and Filipino prisoners of war in 1942's Bataan Death March, during which thousands of the POWs were tortured and killed by the Japanese army.

The trip was sobering for Jespersen but underscored part of his mission to get veterans outside: "When you're a vet, you take an oath to protect this land, so why not get out there and enjoy it?" Jespersen says. "You really get a sense that you fought to preserve it and protect it and keep it American." This month, Jespersen will lead a group of former service members on a mountaineering trip in Wyoming's Teton Range, but don't look for him to be setting any more records this ski season. "From now on, when I go out, I'm just going to go ski what I see," Jespersen says. Spoken like a regular ski bum.

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR THE FALLEN?



# THE BROTHERHOOD ESCORT

JOSH JERSPERSEN | RICK E. SCHULER | DIRECTED BY ISAIAH BRANCH-BOYLE | MUSIC BY KEITH SHACKLETT  
SUPPORT BY KILL CLIFF | WESTON | CILO GEAR | RYLO



# JOURNEY LINES

ZINE VOLUME 1

by Josh Jespersen

---

## Conquistador

A Lost Resort of the Wet Mountain Valley

---

## Chamonix, Colorado

Where the Beer Flows Like Wine

---

## Soldier's Footsteps

Trooper Traverse

---

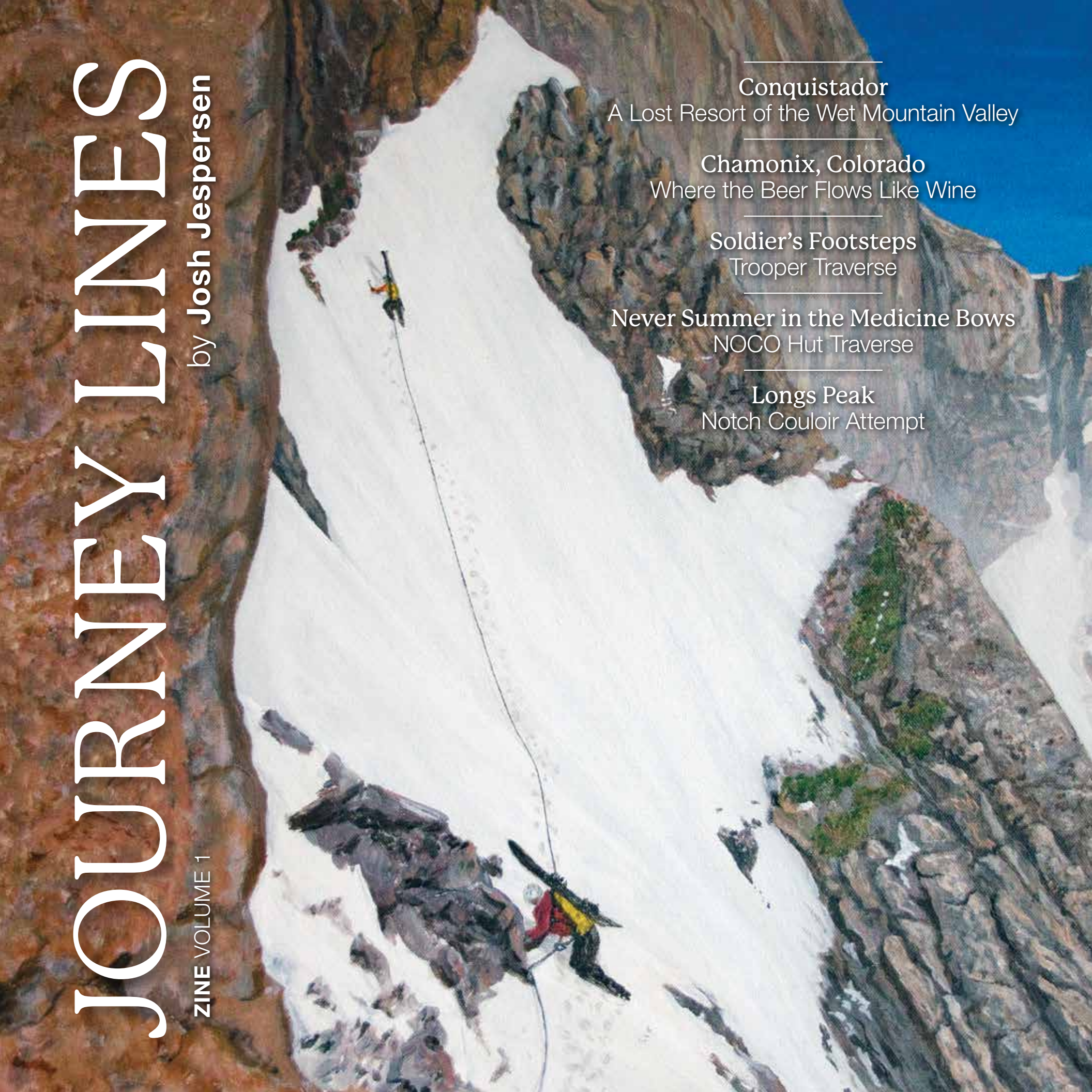
## Never Summer in the Medicine Bows

NOCO Hut Traverse

---

## Longs Peak

Notch Couloir Attempt





# JOURNEY LINES

by Josh Jespersen

## TABLE OF EVOLUTION

### 1 Beginning the Journey Out of Bounds

This is where you hone your skills; learn how to stay safe, while having fun; learn how to “embrace the suck,” while always smiling and taking it all in.

#### Chapter 1: **Bygone**

- Conquistador: A lost resort of the Wet Mountain Valley
- Cuchara: Might as well be New Mexico
- Pikes/Glen Cove: Almost a century of skiing in the alpine

#### Chapter 2: **Pass Culture**

- Cameron: A pass to the North
- Lizard Head: A pass to the South
- Independence Pass: It's a “Scene” come spring
- Flat Tops Trail: Scenic Byway to snow

#### Chapter 3: **Building Appreciation**

- Moonlight Mission: Rally the crew and howl at the moon
- Hitchin' Rides At Loveland: It's part of the culture
- Ski Train From The Big City: A Colorado tradition
- Mine Tour: Touring a mind blowing mining district
- Sitting In The Devil's Armchair: Surrounded by lines
- Wheeler Geologic: Appreciate the Earth
- Topping Out: You're the highest person in a whole range
- Into The Black: Shred into the deep
- Chamonix, Colorado: Where the beer flows like wine
- 14er Journey: This is a right of passage in Colorado

### 2 Post Grom

Descents have different categories and types. These routes are special.

#### Chapter 4: **Hallways of Descent**

- Hunting on North Apostle: A longshot
- Marcelina Maze: Welcome to the Jungle
- Lake City Crap Chutes: Roll the dice
- Bristol Head: An even longer shot
- Red Canyon: New frontiers of Colorado

#### Chapter 5: **Beautiful Faces**

- Huron: If you don't get distracted
- Torreys: Skiing off the edge of the world
- California: 3k into the “Sangre Fishhook”
- Milwaukee: Over a pass and through the woods
- Eureka: Wow

#### Chapter 6: **Watching, and waiting for the 5K**

- Sopris: How do you know someone in Carbondale has skied Sopris? They'll tell you.
- West Beckwith: 7 to 12 and 12 to 7
- Princeton: 14 to Chalk
- Ouray Amphitheater: Town is the trailhead
- Meeker: Skiing to Church

#### Chapter 7: **Desperation Turns**

- Mt. Evans: Classic Colorado
- Isabelle Glacier: This place exists
- Desperation Tour: Milking it
- Red Elephant: The long search
- Taylor Park: Up a dirt road



**TO BE WILD IN  
A LAND THAT HAS  
NEVER KNOWN  
ANYTHING ELSE.**

**Full Page T/C**      **\$2500**  
**Full Page**          **2000**

**WESTON**  
BACKCOUNTRY

[westonbackcountry.com](http://westonbackcountry.com)



## 3 Cracking the Journey Code

These Journeys are expeditionary, but still tethered to a base camp.

### Chapter 8: **San Juan Soak**

- Skiing lines out of Rainbow Hot Springs

### Chapter 9: **Elk Bath**

- Skiing lines out of Conundrum Hot Springs

### Chapter 10: **Narrow Gauge**

- A trip to the Elk Park stop, and the Arrow Vestal drainage

### Chapter 11: **Park Tour**

- A ski traverse of RMNP's high plateau looking for herds

### Chapter 12: **Never Summer in the Medicine Bows**

- Traversing a hut system in Northern Colorado

## 4 Full Value

Now you're cutting loose and getting mobile. It's time to be committed.

### Chapter 13: **Soldiers Footsteps**

- Trooper Traverse

### Chapter 14: **Pedaling around the San Miguel's**

- Three peak circuit on old dirt roads

### Chapter 15: **Bikepacking the Sangre De Cristos**

- Bike tour of the Spanish Peaks, and some Sangres

### Chapter 16: **Animas Lines**

- Raft trip down the Animas out of Silverton, with two basecamps

### Chapter 17: **Blood of Christ Vision Quest**

- Ski traverse of the Sangre De Cristos

## 5 Becoming the Goat

These lines are the complete culmination of your evolution. Reserved for only those who have experienced every chapter and are ready to attain their next level.

### Chapter 18: **Longs Peak**

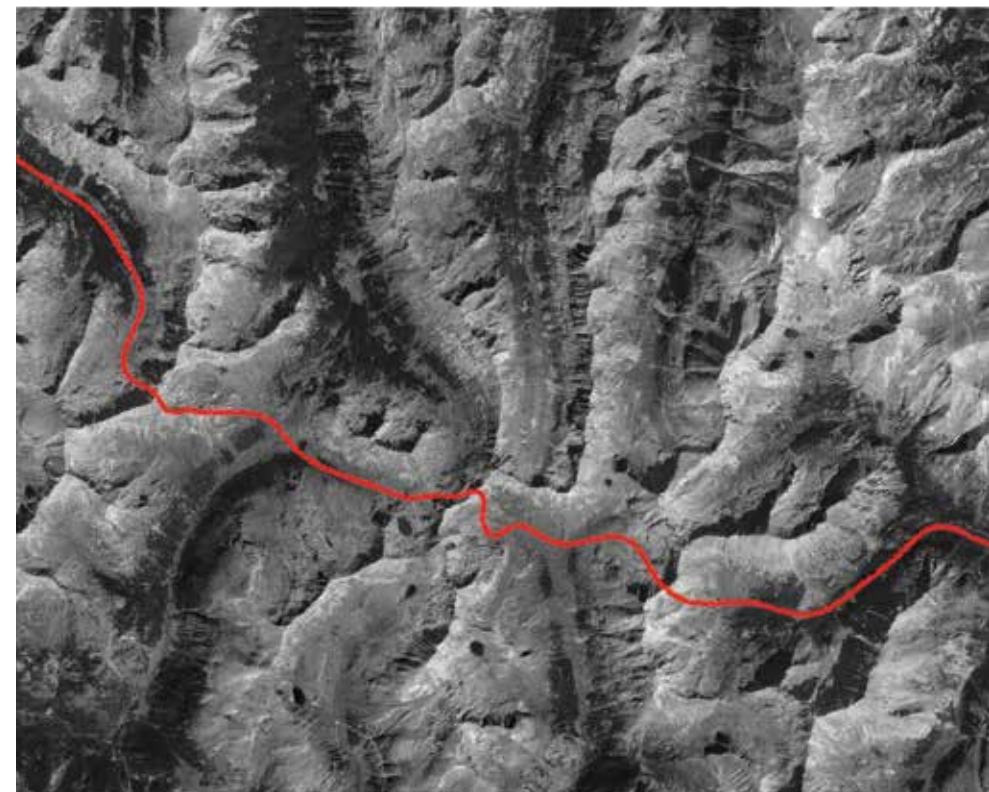
- The Notch Couloir

### Chapter 19: **Mt. Antero**

- North Face

### Chapter 20: **Imagine**

- You're ready to make your own Journey Line

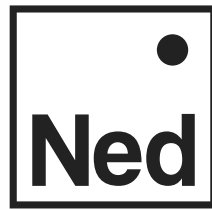






|            |        |
|------------|--------|
| IFC Spread | \$5000 |
| IBC Spread | 4000   |





## Live better & feel better.

We founded Ned to help people live better & feel better through simple means and a deep connection with the natural world. Our pursuit of creating the absolute highest quality natural remedies has become our life's journey. **We're proud to support Josh Jespersen on his Journey, and all those with their own mountains to climb.**

With gratitude,  
Ret and Adriaan

Helloned.com | @meetned





*There are more than 150 ghost ski areas in Colorado, and they range from totally overgrown, to still having lift towers. These places are eerie to ski, but amazingly fun. It is the oddest feeling to be skiing around an old ski area with the trails still cut, and be completely by yourself or with just your group. You will be walking around wondering where the locals' powder stashes were, and where the lifties had their smoke shacks built. You might see rollovers and wonder if there was a patroller standing there yelling at people to slow down. You might even spot some clean steeps that you can't help but think must have been a nice bump run in its day. Most of the signs are gone, so you won't know what the runs were called, but you can come up with new names in your head based on any characteristic that stands out. These ghost area journeys will stir your imagination, and will act as a stepping off point into the backcountry. It is time to ditch the crowds and the safety net of the resort to embark down a new path. This first step will feel bold, and it should, as you are about to change your perception and explore a new medium for wonder.*





---

## Conquistador

A Lost Resort of the Wet Mountain Valley

*In south central Colorado*, on the eastern slopes of the Sangre De Cristo Range, lies the remnants of the only ski operation in the Wet Mountain Valley. A ski area called Conquistador kept its lifts spinning for 11 years, and its 15 trails are still visible from the town of Westcliffe. This pocket of Colorado is not a valley bustling with tourists. Instead, it's dotted with working ranches and is hemmed in by mountain ranges. Its appearance is akin to the northern section of the Arkansas Valley, with a much more golden hue. Being here takes you back a couple decades, and it has a smell in the air that resembles Wyoming. This ghost area gives you an eerie feeling when touring through the overgrown network of runs, and that feeling, fueled by a need to see around the next corner, makes you want to explore every desolate nook and cranny of this place.

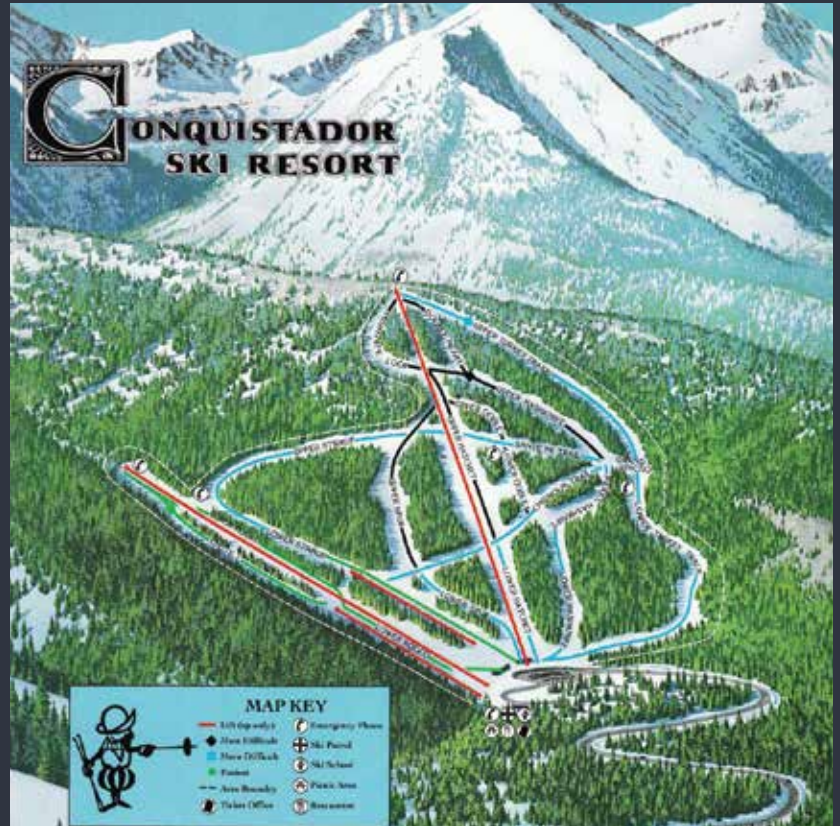
Timing the snow here can be a little tricky, and because you want to make this trip with the best possible conditions, this will be the book's first foray into storm chasing. During the winter of 2017-18 the jet stream was trending far to the north, and the southern half of the state was left high and dry, for most of the season. I had been paying close

attention to every storm that was straying slightly south, and come February, a good low pressure system crossed directly over the Sangres with a slow speed, putting down a thick coat. Most of the SnoTels in the region are further into the range, and not a ton of help for guessing how much snow is at Conquistador. So the next best indicator was webcams, and there is a good shot from the town of Westcliffe showing most of the range with the old trails visible. This still may not be enough to pull the trigger, and so I had one last trick up my sleeve. The old base area of Conquistador is now a private entity called Hermit Basin Christian Conference Center, and I thought why not get the best on the ground observation. So I called them up, and asked them to look out the window for a snow report. Funny enough, they were delighted to do so, as it is a good chance for them to remind you of the only red tape when accessing this ghost line. They simply ask you to use the Hermit Road for access and avoid trespassing on their ground. “No problem at all” I said, and they replied with, “well, you can’t see the field grass down here anymore... so we prolly got more than a foot.” With that last bit of information, I was on my way.

After skinning up Hermit Road for a mile, we came to a sweeping vista with the high peaks in the background, the powdery slopes in the foreground, and the golden valley to the east. It was an inspiring view, but it is also a good decision point. You can either skirt Hermit Basin’s property line to the bottom of the slopes, or continue up the road to access the top of the old area. Both options require a little up and down, but we chose to work in from the top so we could get better views of the high peaks. Picking our way through some dense forest after leaving the road, we popped out right at the top of the old lift and stood on the tower’s platform. It was all we could do to not keep looking around for relics, but there was powder below, and we had been anticipating this first lap. We chose the most direct line off the top, previously called Double Heart. This old black diamond run started out with a slow gradient that let you gaze at the valley below and totally take in the view before coming to a roll that leads into a steep shield of snow. Cresting the roll had that feeling of anticipating a bump line with obscure formations and no rhyme or reason, but instead I had a field free of obstacles in front of me. I blasted down this section, barely turning at all, and holding my arms out feeling the relative breeze I was creating for myself. I was going so fast, taking advantage of the champagne conditions, on this derelict slope, with its boundaries still evident, that I started to get tunnel vision. Stopping just before the property line to rally with my crew, I could tell they had experienced the same euphoria. After a round of high fives, and a quick transition, we were off to explore the rest of the mountain. The typical head down, skin track didn’t materialize though. Instead, we were buzzing with conversation about what this place was like in operation. We wondered how many people skied in jeans, and where the best rolls must have been to throw Daffys and Cossacks. We wondered how forgiving the ski patrol was, and what kind of hot doggers called this place their home mountain. We were totally engulfed in the ski area of our imagination, and repeated this process for five more laps.

Conquistador was a unique experience, and watching the weather patterns makes it truly worthy. Go chase those feelings we experienced in this piste of the past, which are reminiscent and something you won’t experience anywhere else, not this side of the apocalypse anyway.







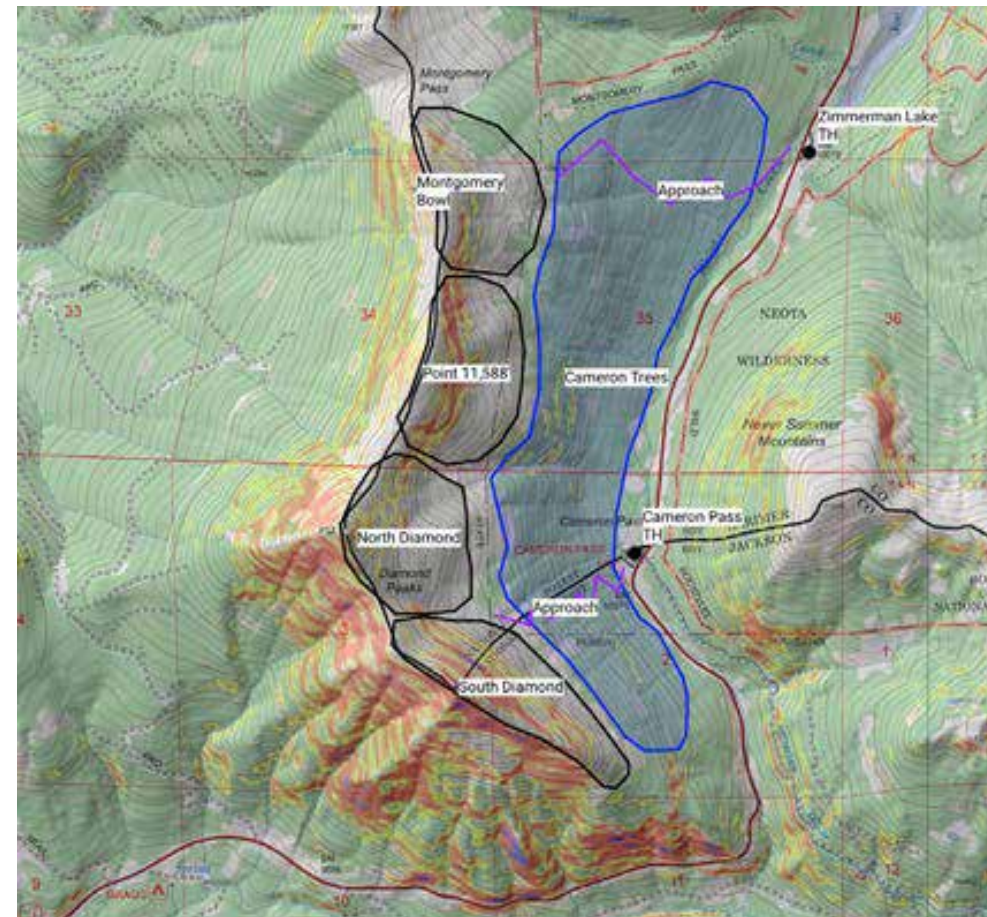
# Cameron

Colorado has countless gems, some are hidden, and some are heavily chronicled. Cameron Pass is one of a kind though, and it bridges that gap. The experience speaks to the border region of Colorado and Wyoming. The zones here are mapped out on a number of websites; it has its own ski patrol, and even its own online forum. However, when you are in the parking lot you see more cross-country skiers than backcountry skiers, and it is not uncommon to see people snowshoeing to get to their lines. Don't let the lack of skittles colored attire make you underestimate the locals though. They get after it, and they ski with an ethic as well; ski it looks right to left on the Diamond Peaks Ridge, and don't disrespect that. This custom is in place to get skier compaction on the slopes, and in a way, they all ski for each other up there. The more compaction throughout the season, the more stable the slopes may be, and that is what a ski tribe does. It's important to note that skier compaction may help but it doesn't always, assess every slope based on its stability not on if it has tracks.

The pass sits far to the north, and is accessed by either driving up Poudre Canyon from Fort Collins, or from North Park through Gould. Highway 14 weaves into the Michigan River Valley splitting the Never Summer Range to the south, and the Medicine Bow Mountains to the north. The north side is where this place has its own kind of feel. When you're on either South or North Diamond Peak, it almost feels like you're in a different state. The elevation is lower, the immediate peaks are more rolling, and you have incredible views all around. When you look to the south however, you realize you're still in the Rocky Mountains with daunting views of Nohku Crag, Mount Richtofen, Mount Mahler, and Braddock Peak. These peaks are big, steep, rocky, and mostly spring lines. Whatever season you choose, or whichever side of the pass you go for, don't sell yourself short and make it just a day trip. A weekend or multi-day commitment is worth it when you head up, and you have options ranging from tent camping to backcountry huts. If you're skiing the Diamond Peaks or Montgomery Bowl, you can park at either the Zimmerman Lake

## *A Pass to the North*

or Cameron Pass parking areas, and set up camp at least 10 minutes from the lots. When going for the bigger lines on the south side, you can pay to camp at the Crag Campground in State Forest State Park. The south side also has two backcountry huts maintained by the Never Summer Nordic system. You can stay at either the Nohku Hut or the Agnes Creek Cabin, and enjoy beds with a wood stove. Finally, if you have the means to bring a camper or RV along to shred in style, you can park along County Road 41 in State Forest State Park. You will have to pay a fee, and be sure to bring a generator with gas and propane, because there are no plug-ins during winter. The obscurity of Cameron Pass lies in the fact that most Colorado skiers and snowboarders have probably never been to the place, mostly because of the drive, and the fact that the skiing is not much better than what they have closer to home. Making this trek when the northern mountains are getting dumped on is more than worth it, and not just for the



Zimmerman Lake TH - 40°32'22.60"N 105°52'56.31"W  
Cameron Pass TH - 40°31'13.73"N 105°53'37.86"W









snow. The one thing that makes this northern playground standout from others is the locals. Not only do they ski with each other in mind, they will also welcome out-of-towners with open arms. Try to find one of them, and take turns breaking trail on a pow day. If you are cool, they won't hesitate to make sure you know the way things work around there. It's what makes Cameron Pass so special, and it's an attitude I hope people take back to their own stomping grounds. Exploring around on either side will give you a greater appreciation of what lies to the north. I've got two last tips for you powder hounds. Get groceries in your home town, and ski fall line with discretion. You want to pay close attention to your exits off of South Diamond as the south side of the mountain has large washouts, and is mostly unskiable. If you do make it down to the road however, chances are you won't get picked up. They haven't caught on in these parts, and hitching doesn't really work up in "Wyorado."









# Ski Train from the Big City

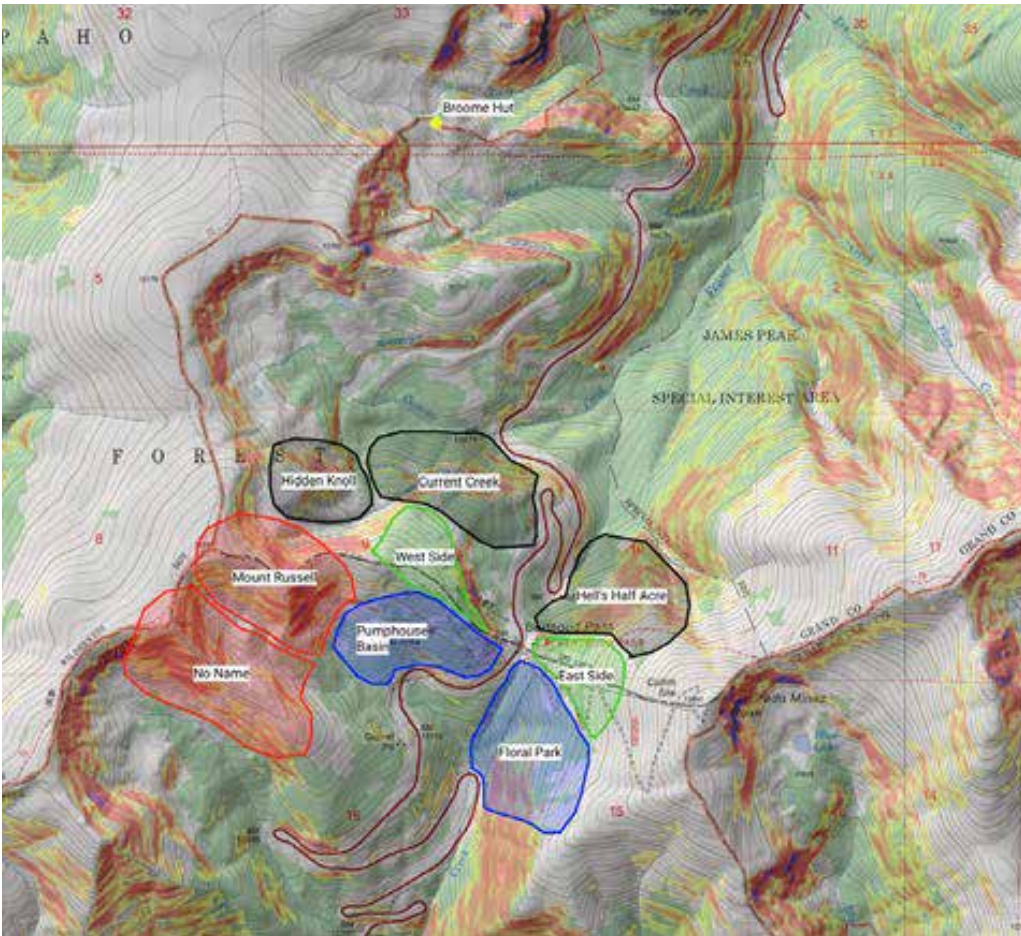
Taking its first trip in 1940 and running for 69 consecutive years after that; this classic train has emerged from a hiatus to reignite the tradition. When you get dropped off in Denver at dawn with ski gear in hand, look up at the red neon lights of Union Station, and you'll know you're in for an adventure unlike anything else in America. There are other trains that get you close to ski areas, but almost as if you were in the Alps, this train drops you off no less than 200 feet from the base of Winter Park. Getting dropped off at 9:00AM, and departing at 4:30PM, riding almost bell to bell is not a challenge. When the train departs downtown at 7:00AM, you are in for 58 miles of sweeping views. You'll pass Gross Reservoir and follow South Boulder Creek past Rollinsville. The train runs up canyons and cuts through 28 tunnels while gaining 4,000' of elevation on its way to the Moffat Tunnel. Just before you go through the 6.8 mile long underpass, you can look out the rider's right side of the train to see backcountry skiers heading for the East Portal. Once the windows go dark, you have about 15 minutes to get your boots on and your pack ready, as you pull directly up to the resort after emerging on the west side of the mountains. Feel free to leave your belongings in your seat if you're taking a day trip. The tickets for this experience range from \$29 to \$59 each way,



## *A Colorado Tradition*

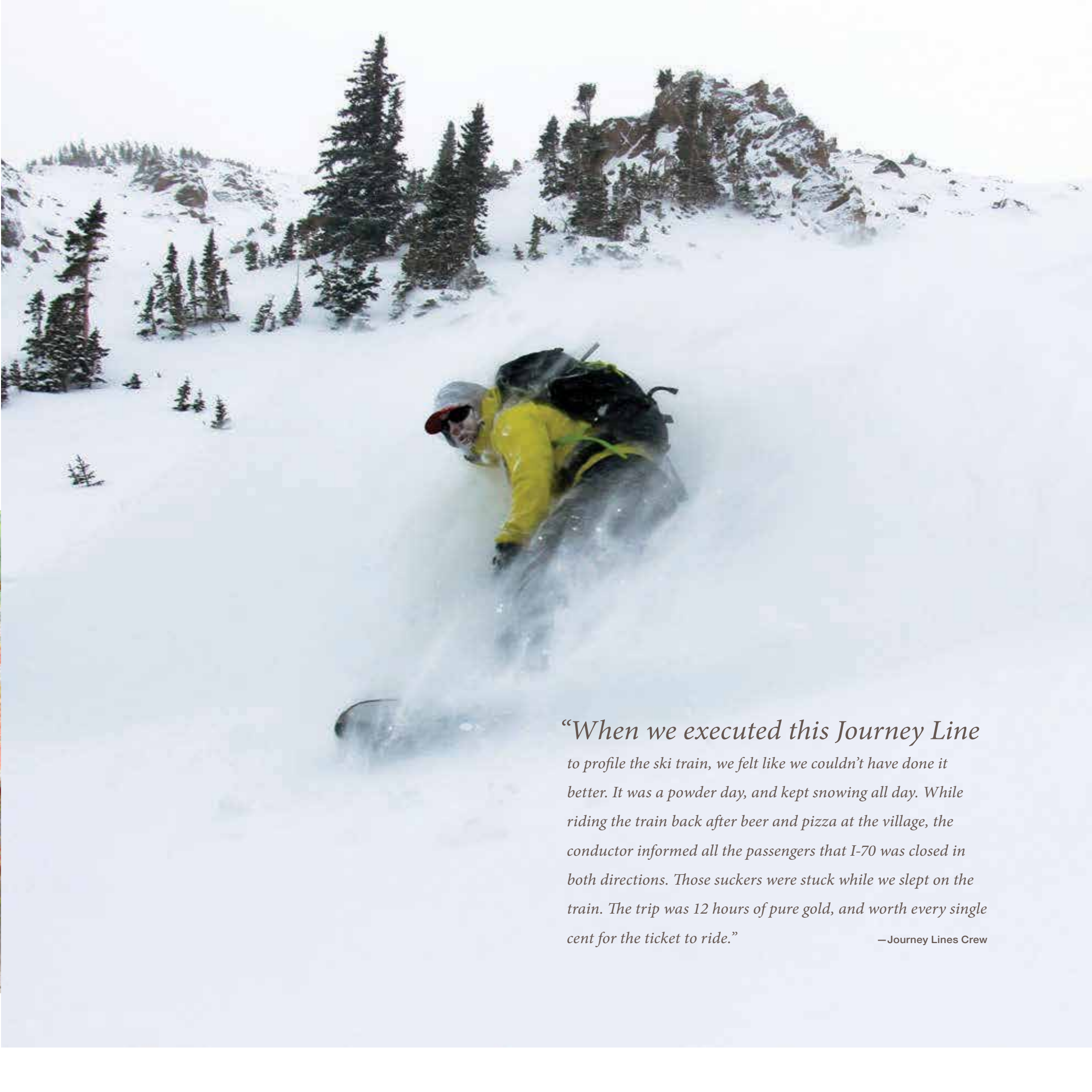
but don't let that price deter you, this journey is worth it. If you want to take a family trip to the resort, or stay in a hotel at the base, doing that is easy. However, if you're paging through this book, it is likely you don't have a ski pass, and the skills learned hitching at Loveland are necessary.

Yes, it's time to hitch up to the backcountry at Berthoud Pass. Since you might be on a timeline to get back to the train, expedite your pick up by riding the free Village Cabriolet to the Vintage Lot, and stick your thumb out on Route 40. It is slightly uncommon to hitch from so low on the pass, so getting a ride may take some time, but once you get a lift the stoke continues to rise. Getting to the top of the pass, you will see crowds of people just like on Loveland, and people have been



Berthoud Pass Summit - 39°47'53.28"N 105°46'37.52"W  
Broome Hut - 39°49'35.02"N 105°46'59.80"W





*“When we executed this Journey Line to profile the ski train, we felt like we couldn’t have done it better. It was a powder day, and kept snowing all day. While riding the train back after beer and pizza at the village, the conductor informed all the passengers that I-70 was closed in both directions. Those suckers were stuck while we slept on the train. The trip was 12 hours of pure gold, and worth every single cent for the ticket to ride.”*

— Journey Lines Crew

skiing here for decades as well. You are now at the site of Colorado's first lift-served ski area, and just like the train you rode to get there, it is part of Colorado's ski history. When Berthoud Pass opened for its first day as a ski area in 1937 two men were killed in an avalanche. So again, don't let the vibe lure you into complacency. Keep in mind, while you're skinning up either side of the pass, how much ground you covered to get where you are, and revel in the fact that you haven't driven at all. The amount of terrain here is mind boggling, and there are more than 5 drainages you can ski down to the road on the west side alone. After you spend a couple hours kicking it at this zone, start planning your exit with enough time to board the train. Hitching back down the pass to Winter Park is the best option, and doing it with ample time for an apres-ski beer is even better. Don't be late for the train, because it is punctual, even when it's snowing.

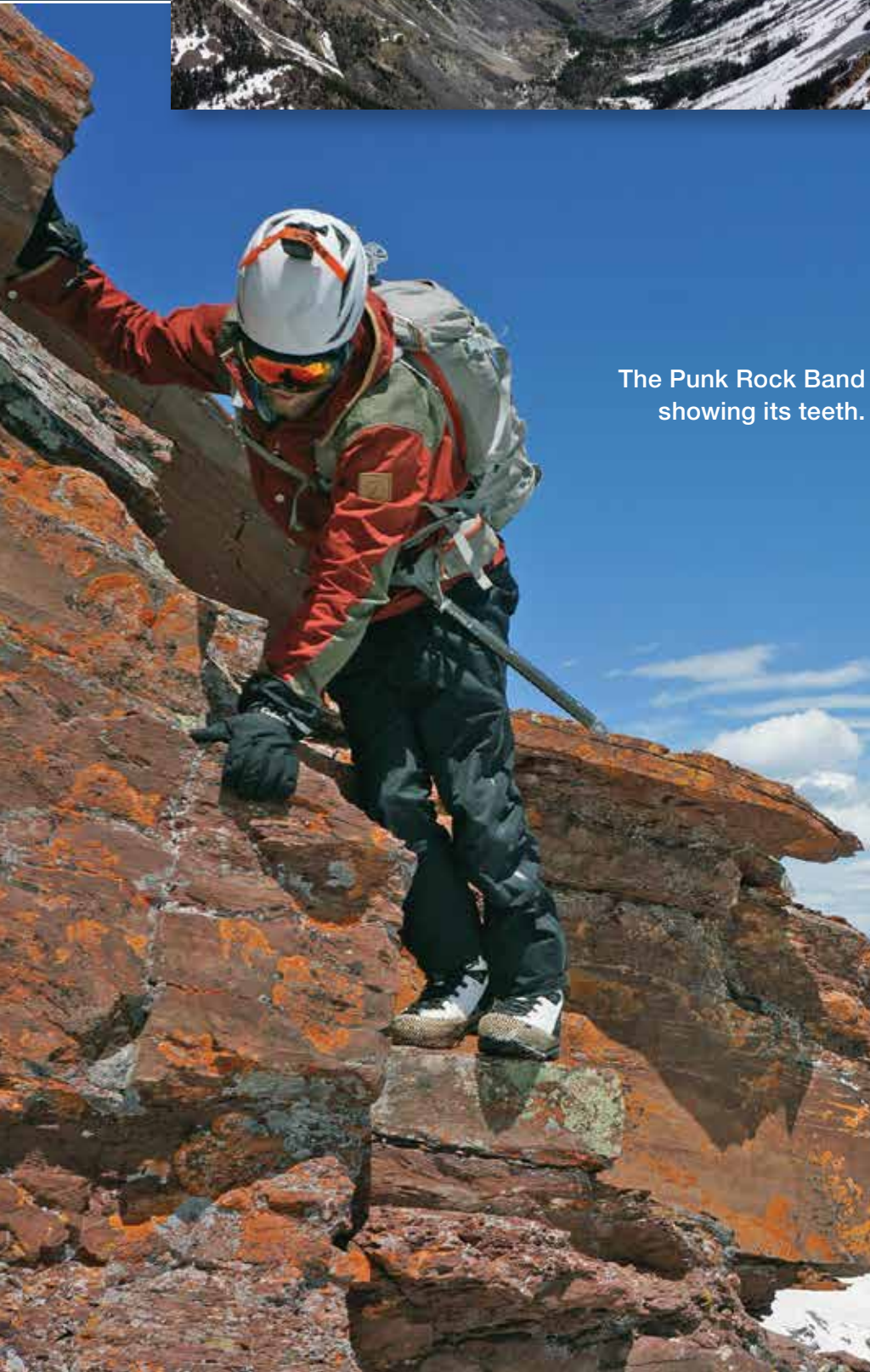
If you want to take this journey up a notch, and get full value out of it, I suggest you plan an overnight stay at one of the many huts in the Berthoud Pass area. Skiing the area or the pass is a highlight, but what will always be a cherry on top, is the memories you'll have of riding a train to go make turns.











The Punk Rock Band  
showing its teeth.





---

# Chamonix, Colorado

## Where the Beer Flows Like Wine

---

### DAY 1

*Having some local insight pays off*, but to really find the backcountry goods, you need to immerse yourself in a group of local rippers who call a place home. And, surprisingly, Aspen is one town where the locals have proven to be very helpful and affable when it comes to helping a guy out with a backcountry mission. A visitor might assume the Aspen community to be reserved and cliquish, but I find that reputation to be perpetuated by outsiders. Peeling back the layers of Aspen and seeing the town's lifeblood, its ski community, I have found that this old mining town's gold is the locals who live and breathe skiing; the locals who drop me a hint when it's time to hightail it to Aspen to make some turns.

*Aspen Local: "Hey, insider info says that the road opens tomorrow afternoon, Josh."*

*Me: "No Shit?! I called the ranger district and they said the 15th."*

*Aspen Local: "I have a friend in town who works the road—but keep that info on the DL."*

*Me: "On my way!"*

With that tip, my buddy Ricke Schuler and I drove up Maroon Creek Road just before midnight, under a perfectly starry sky and crisp air, indicating we might get a freeze. A couple hours later, after sleep and food, we started our approach. The striated snow on North Maroon had a glow to it, with a deep purple sky reflecting off the summit.

We climbed out of the green valley and above the trees, staring up at the daunting North Face, which never looks like a ski line from the bottom due to the layer cake appearance it takes on. The line weaves through cliff bands, and snow benches stacked on top of each other, and you have to navigate from one weakness in the rock to the next by making small and large traverses. Halfway up the line, we started to realize that the freeze, that initially seemed promising, was now creating an issue with the skiability of the face.

After slowing our pace to try and let corn form, we found ourselves on the summit after noon, waiting for conditions to turn in our favor, but we were losing daylight. "Can't wait all day," we agreed before committing to a steep, exposed line in teeth chattering conditions. But we also agreed that we hadn't come for the conditions, we'd come to immerse ourselves in Aspen's backcountry ski culture and explore the alpine.



After finishing our lap on North Maroon Peak, we met up with Jason Lee Beavers, a local 56 year old ripper who operates a gardening business during the summer. He moved to Aspen more than thirty years ago to work on a ranch, as he was a cowboy from Amarillo, Texas. He learned to ski, climb, then snowboard, and realized he was becoming a pretty good mountain man, better than the cowboy he ever was, so he's stayed in the mountains ever since. We met a month earlier after finishing the Trooper Traverse, which is a classic ski traverse from Leadville to Aspen originally executed in the winter of 1944 by a Recon platoon of the 10th Mountain Division. This traverse is just under 40 miles, and crosses over three passes higher than 13,000'. It has been done in a day, but we wanted to do it just like the 10th did, and spent three nights in the middle of the Sawatch Range. When we finished, we walked into Aspen Brewing looking and smelling like we had just spent four days skiing from Leadville and apparently in a town with true skiing soul, that gets you a pitcher or three of beer.

We found out then that Beavers knows his way around the Maroon Bells. Walking into his home is like walking into the "Aspen Snowboard Hall of Fame." Framed photos of all the major Elks Range peaks, signed books with personal notes from Chris Davenport and a quiver older than Travis Rice, litter his flat. Once we stepped into the "Beaver Den," we were in the grasp of Aspen's skiing soul. The beer flowed like wine as we swapped stories of epic powder days. Meeting someone decades deep in his life as a ski bum, gave us a sense of what it means to be a part of a tight knit, mountain town community. From being penniless living in old shacks, to run-ins with Hunter S. Thompson, to tragedy in the mountains, but always capping off with a description of that feeling you get falling gracefully down a mountain. The ski life is real, and Beavers is what I envision the epitome of it being. The next morning I had to call another local for turns, because Beavers had to tend his gardening business so he can "get to Japan sooner."

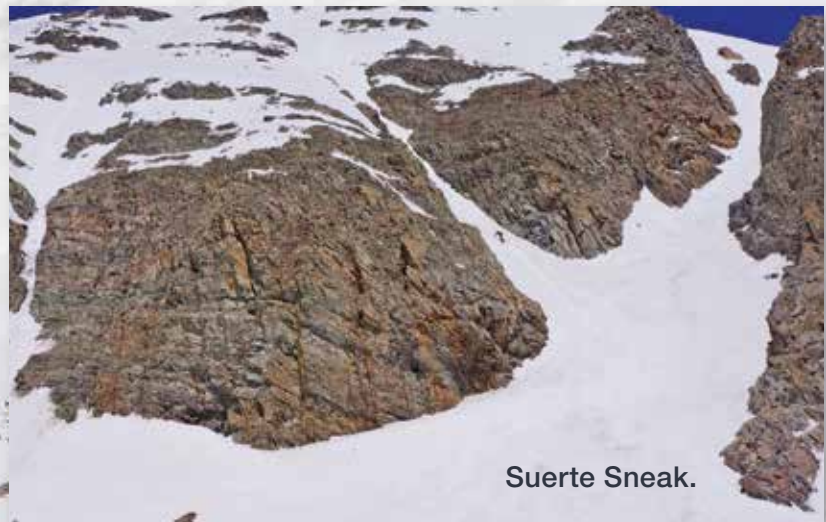
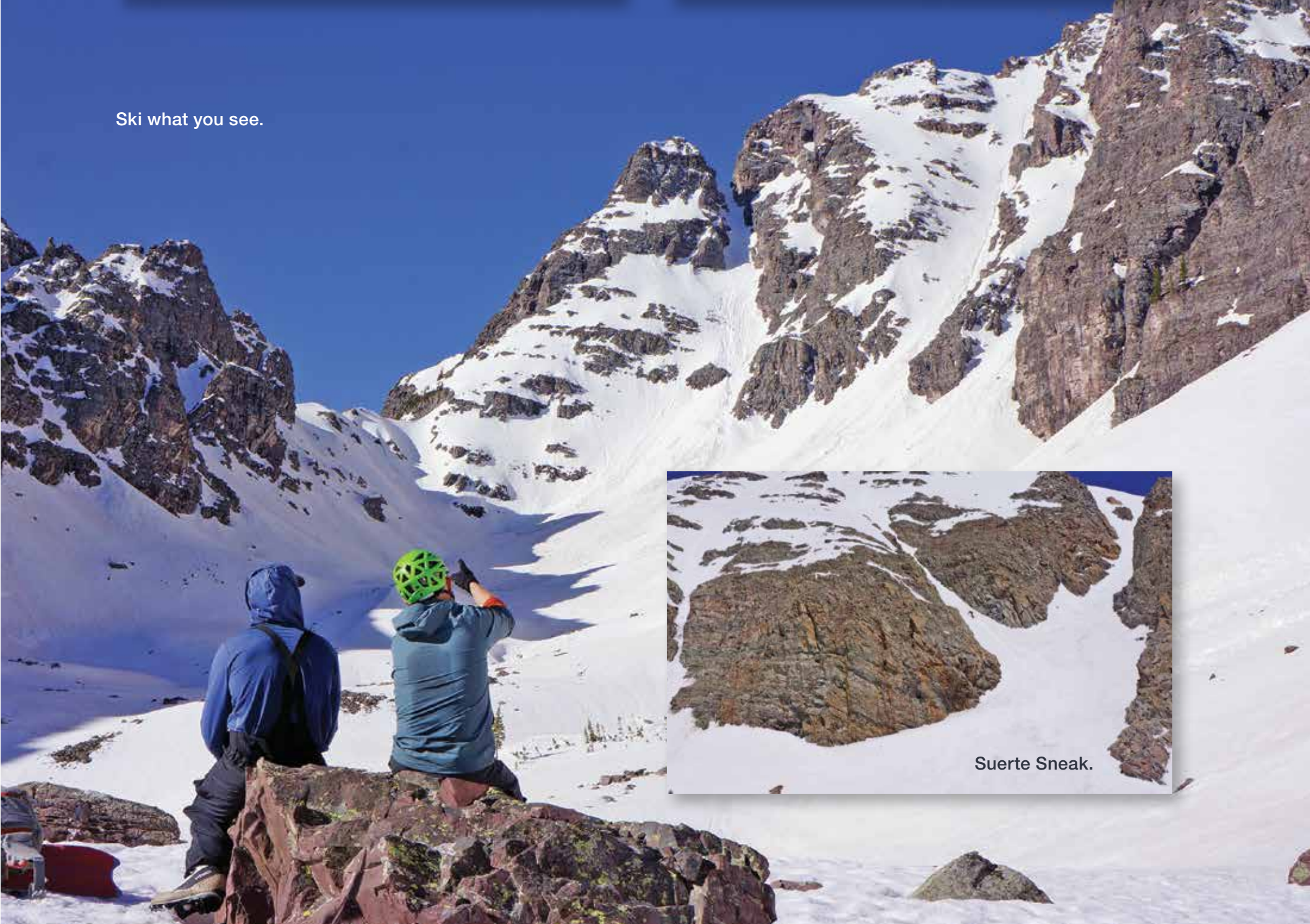
## DAY 2

My next local on tap was a skier named Matt Lanning. Matt has been chasing snow for what would seem to be a lifetime as well. Growing up in the era of Telluride chronicled in "Blizzard of Ahhhs," Matt is always on the search for perfect turns, but admittedly isn't a fan of splitboarders. "Dude, that's all good in my eyes," I tell Matt. In fact, I make it a point to ski with guys like him in an attempt to convince them we're not so bad. Matt and I met, literally, on the summit of North Maroon a year earlier, and luckily I changed his mind about splitboarders that day. Or "just one splitboarder," as Matt says, but none of that matters, as Matt sees skiing the way I do. Go out, and ski the funnest thing you can, on any given day. So when we met, we poked up into a basin, saw a line, and went for it. This was a classic case of ski what you see. Ditch the objectives, and just go out with the goal of having as much fun as you possibly can. Sometimes that's the best option for what you have, and this is the commonality between us all. Sure, maybe Matt has a penchant for forward facing snow sliding, but when people who have a spirited connection to the lifestyle get together, it doesn't matter how you face. You are going to go climb a line, and then take it to zero with a smile on your face, every time. Zero in this case was all the way down to the ubertourist attraction Maroon Lake. After some Suerte Tequila, and tourists wondering why the hell we had our shit spread all over the Maroon Bells parking lot, it was time for lunch.





Ski what you see.



Suerte Sneak.



At lunch, a friend of mine from Protect Our Winters showed up, Jake Black. Jake grew up in Keystone, and spent his youth competing in freestyle. Now, finding his way to Aspen, he met us just in time to hear Matt say, “I am headed up to a hut tonight to ski in Montezuma Basin tomorrow if you wanna join.” Ricke and myself were riding the flow, and immediately signed up. Jake though, understandably couldn’t commit to a day of skiing at the drop of a hat and said, “I gotta help build some mountain bike trails later today, I’ll let you know if I can join.” Jake hung up the plank for some wheels already, I thought, and continued to pile tacos in my mouth. Ricke and I laid in some grass stretching for a bit before heading to the trailhead. Once there, we put on boots that hadn’t dried yet, so we could skin up to a private hut that was offered to us by a local. Yes sir, I’ll slide those wet liners on for that. Hanging in the hut that night, I was buzzing from the lines we skied in the morning. Going out with no objective but fun can be a relief from the typical summit chase. That night I was hoping for the typical experience of cards and booze, but going on our third day of STFU I couldn’t even keep my eyes open. I sat by the fire with a blanket over my legs, a cup of tea in my lap, and drool dripping out of my snoring face. Call me Granny I guess, but I was unconscious for a solid eight hours until at 6 AM sharp, when I heard a voice.

---

### DAY 3

It was Jake! He showed up, and showed me. Like a true Aspen local, he bleeds skiing(snowboarding actually). We hadn’t talked since lunch the day before, but Jake knew when and where to meet us. He got to the trailhead before we stopped dreaming, and made it to the hut in time for coffee. That’s the soul right there, and now our crew of five was heading into Montezuma to see what was good. We had a loose plan to choose between Castle and Conundrum, or wherever corn was best for shucking. However, just before we rounded the corner to look at the high peaks, Matt let us in on an idea. He had been eyeing up Conundrum’s East Face, and a little sneak into the couloir. “I don’t know if it goes, or if it’s in, but let’s take a look at least.” He knew I would be game for that, and so we kept skinning with our minds open, but our eyes focused. Further into the basin, and under the Conundrum Couloir we could see the East Face had potential. So the climb began, and we finally got a close look at the sneak, off the face and back into the couloir. It was good, but was the snow good? We still didn’t know that, and with the sun heating everything up rapidly, climbing the face was too slow. We would have to keep booting up the couloir, and make an assessment from the top. Time to move fast, pocket music... engage. After the booting was done we walked across the ridge to Conundrum’s South Summit to check the snow.

---

With the first tap with a pole, the rotten snow fell away to the rock. It was that nasty snow that disintegrates when you set an edge and leaves you clinging to rock. I wondered though if it was just this spot that was bad, and walked the ridge a little more to find a thicker drop-in point. Thirty feet down the ridge I found a squeeze with a deeper base and perfect corn on top. Looking down the line it was dizzy steep and super techy, but it had some really cool contours and ledges that made it manageable. After a quick chat with the boys, I told them my thoughts, and a few of us decided to give it a go. Into the void, set the first edge, link the next turn, and the next, slide over the contour, flow into a couple more turns, check the sluff, and blast through the sneak. The line was a dream, and the snow was perfect! We all rallied at the bottom for a high five huddle, and Matt purveyed some Suerte as he always does. So that’s



Josh and Ricke with Jason Lee Beavers.

WHAT IT WOULD BE THEN, THE SUERTE SNEAK. WAS IT A FIRST? WHO THE HELL KNOWS, AND I WOULD NEVER CLAIM IT TO BE, BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT IT'S ABOUT. IT'S ABOUT HAVING AESTHETIC THOUGHTS WHEN YOU SEE A FACE, GETTING UP TO GIVE IT A LOOK WITH SOME RIPPERS, SUSSING IT OUT, AND SENDING IT IF CONDITIONS ALLOW. DID MATT HAVE THE LINE IN MIND WHEN HE INVITED US UP TO THE HUT? I DON'T KNOW THAT EITHER, BUT I AM SO GLAD TO HAVE FRIENDS WHO SEE EVERY DAY AS AN ADVENTURE, AND WANT TO BRING YOU ON THOSE ADVENTURES.



Those adventures that are their life. Their life of skiing, and in this little pocket of the vast Colorado Rockies, the soul of skiing. Ricke and I spent one more night with Beavers sitting on his deck BBQing, not wanting to leave. On the drive out, we couldn't stop reminiscing about their hospitality, their pride, and their dedication to a sport. So next time you start bagging on Aspen for the fur, remember that's just a coat. Underneath all the pomp is a skier who does absolutely everything they can for that feeling, including not giving a shit what you think about them.

---

### LEGACY

Backcountry skiing or extreme skiing is not taken lightly in the Roaring Fork Valley. There is a reverence to it all that I haven't found in other parts of Colorado, and it has to do with the nature of the Elks Range; their prominence, their propensity for massive avalanches, and their savage beauty that can lure the unbeknownst into complacency. A range like that draws in a special type of laconic seeker. Someone who can only find easement to their restless spirit in a truly wild environment. These individuals have graced the snowy slopes with their visionary descents for decades, and the present day locals show no sign of letting up. They have an outward appreciation of far off cradles of steep skiing as well, and the only place you might hear talked about more than Aspen Highlands is Chamonix, or "Cham." When a local, or an outsider does something that pushes the boundaries of the sport, it gets respect.

That becomes something you need to understand if you want the embrace of Aspen's locals, the respect of its traditions. It's a place that now has generations of ski mountaineers that have held a standard, and a clean ethic. Some people have come, and thought this code bullshit, but they have also gone. The traditions around there are steeped in progression, aesthetics, and clean descents. When you're skiing these peaks, you feel like you owe it to the people who skied them before you to do it right, and grace them in your own way. I have my own goals for progression in the Elks Range, and they involve faces or basins that remind you of paintings instead of real life. I used to think the views and vistas drove me to make a pilgrimage to Aspen. I know now its not "what" that draws me here, but "who."









---

## Never Summer in the Medicine Bows

Traversing a Hut System in Northern Colorado



*There are a few ranges in Colorado that lie relatively incognito,* with regard to skiing. For whatever reason, they haven't garnered much attention; lack of a ski area, lack of amenities, and in the case of the Medicine Bow Range, lack of human existence. People live in this pocket to the north, but the areas on either side of Rocky Mountain National Park's little brother are sparsely populated at best. To the west is North Park, with its only incorporated municipality of Walden, it was explored early on by fur trappers, and was a prized hunting ground for the Utes. To the east there are more elk than people, and the dramatic Poudre Canyon. In Section 1 you got a taste of the goods when you skied Cameron Pass, and you were likely cranking your neck to look further north, wondering what the hell was up there. This is where you find out.

On the western flanks of these mountains is a dense forest encapsulated in State Forest State Park. A number of logging roads criss-cross these well managed groves, and between them and tree line is the Never Summer Nordic yurt system. Scattered throughout the park, you can stay and shred in a number of these shelters. However, if you want to really explore the unknown, it is also possible to string together a number of the yurts from north to south. Starting at the North Fork Canadian Yurt, traversing to the Ruby Jewel Yurt, and finishing at the Upper Montgomery Yurt, we skied unbelievable terrain over the course of four days in prime conditions. Seeing the breadth of this range while skinning through a forest that changes its appearance and make-up every mile, felt pioneering. Backcountry enthusiasts have frequented this system, but it has classically been centralized to a couple spots. There is endless potential here, and endless snow. The range is positioned perfectly to gather up the energy from storms in Colorado and Wyoming with topography that looks like a line of catchers mitts stacked on top of each other just waiting to fill with powder.

---

MARCH 19, 2018

Ricke Schuler and I drove in on a high last night, as it was snowing so hard that the powder was flowing over the hood of the car. We woke up this morning, to at least a foot and a half of fresh snow, with clouds still shrouding the peaks. Just as we got to the yurt, and started shoveling off the porch, the haze started to clear, and as if Ullr was showing us the way, a bright sun streak illuminated a distinct line down the nearest ridge. We dropped everything, and started to dead reckon for the prize. This whole area was new to us, and our futile attempt for beta outside this particular yurt left us wandering through parcels of selective logging. It would be a couple miles of bushwhacking to the base of what appeared to be a 2,000 foot climb in deep snow. As we ascended, the pitch grew steeper, and the trees more sparse. Questions about stability crept into our minds, with all the new storm snow, as the skin track meandered upward. With near constant probing though, and quite a few hand-pits, we couldn't find anything to make us think twice. Every piece of our puzzle was indicating right side up, and on top of that, we were on a westerly facing slope. With our trade winds in Colorado, I would have thought that this slope, bearing the brunt of any wind, blowing across from the Park Range, might leave it devoid of a deep pack. Near tree line though, it was still an entire trekking pole to the ground. Could we have found a snowy Mecca in our fussy state? Once on top, it was time to find out, and as we gave each other the "here goes nothin," fist bump we dropped into the line with an intent to ride fast and have an exit. Once I got up to speed though, the whole slope in front of me turned into a canvas, and with a wide open vista in







front of us, the line felt never ending. The perception of time was irrelevant, and any exhaustion in the legs evanesced. It was in every sense of the word, perfect. Bottoming out, and easily following a creek back to the yurt, all we could do, till sunset, was admire our line and relish the day. There weren't any lessons learned, or any real takeaways in our approach to the line. It isn't often that you encounter a complete powder day in a zone you have never laid eyes on, and ski an aesthetic line with sustained pitch and stable snow. It really was just an incredibly fun day in which we nailed the conditions. Settling in that night by the fire, we couldn't help but wonder if the trend would continue.

---

### MARCH 20, 2018

After chillaxing in the yurt all night, we woke up feeling spry and ready to explore our next leg of the journey. Since we were carrying heavy food loads, it was nice just contouring the range for a couple miles on the wide open North Fork Yurt Trail. You then turn southeast, for about a half mile on the North Canadian Trail, and finish up by going east on the Ruby Jewel Road. The forest keeps your attention the whole way, with sparse groves of aspen, young lodge pole pines covered in old man's beard, and occasionally opening up with sweeping views. If you let yourself take it all in, it's mesmerizing. After about 3.5 miles of this joyful traverse, you arrive at the Ruby Jewel and Clark Peak yurts. Immediately dropping our extra gear, we b-lined it up the drainage to look at the goods. These yurts have incredible access to a variety of amazing skiing; couloirs, mellow glades, technical mini-golf, and even some small faces. There are so many lines to ski that it's hard to keep passing things up. Our goal though, was getting above tree line for a bird's eye view. Once there, we saw a bounty you couldn't plunder in two days. So we made a game plan to cram the most fun possible into our short time, by picking a little couloir just down the ridge, scoping a couple zones for the next day, and doing a quick movement down the drainage for another line. The aspect we chose was east, a typically spooky place to play, but with constant assessment, our lights were green. The snow in this hourglass shaped couloir made for so much float, you felt in complete control, forgoing a speed check through the choke and onto the apron. We were completely buzzing from the line, and hungry for another. With a quick recon of something I thought might go, and our daylight waning, we broke a steep skin track to another ridge. This line was special, and so varied in its features. You first dropped onto a broad spine interspersed with scrubby pines, then coasted left off a small cliff into an open shield for savory turns. Next, you cut through a tree blind that abruptly opened up into a descending slide right above a cliff, and finally made a wide arcing turn back left through it's only weakness. Flowing through this line felt natural, and we carried that high all the way to the yurt. Finding this amount of fun in a day is easy, you make any experience what you want out of it, but for it to be so unconscious... was surreal. We didn't have to put any mental effort into milking stoke out of the day, it was just there. I began to completely tune out any part of my life outside of the yurt around me, and the snowy peaks around it. It was another day of total perfection.

---

### MARCH 21, 2018

My buddy Ryan Koupal showed up last night, and conveniently was able to leave his car at the exit for a shuttle back to our car. We were really banking on this, because hitching back to the start is near impossible on the park's dirt roads. Figuring out yesterday that this yurt was probably the best stash, we decided to ski here again before traversing out, and we



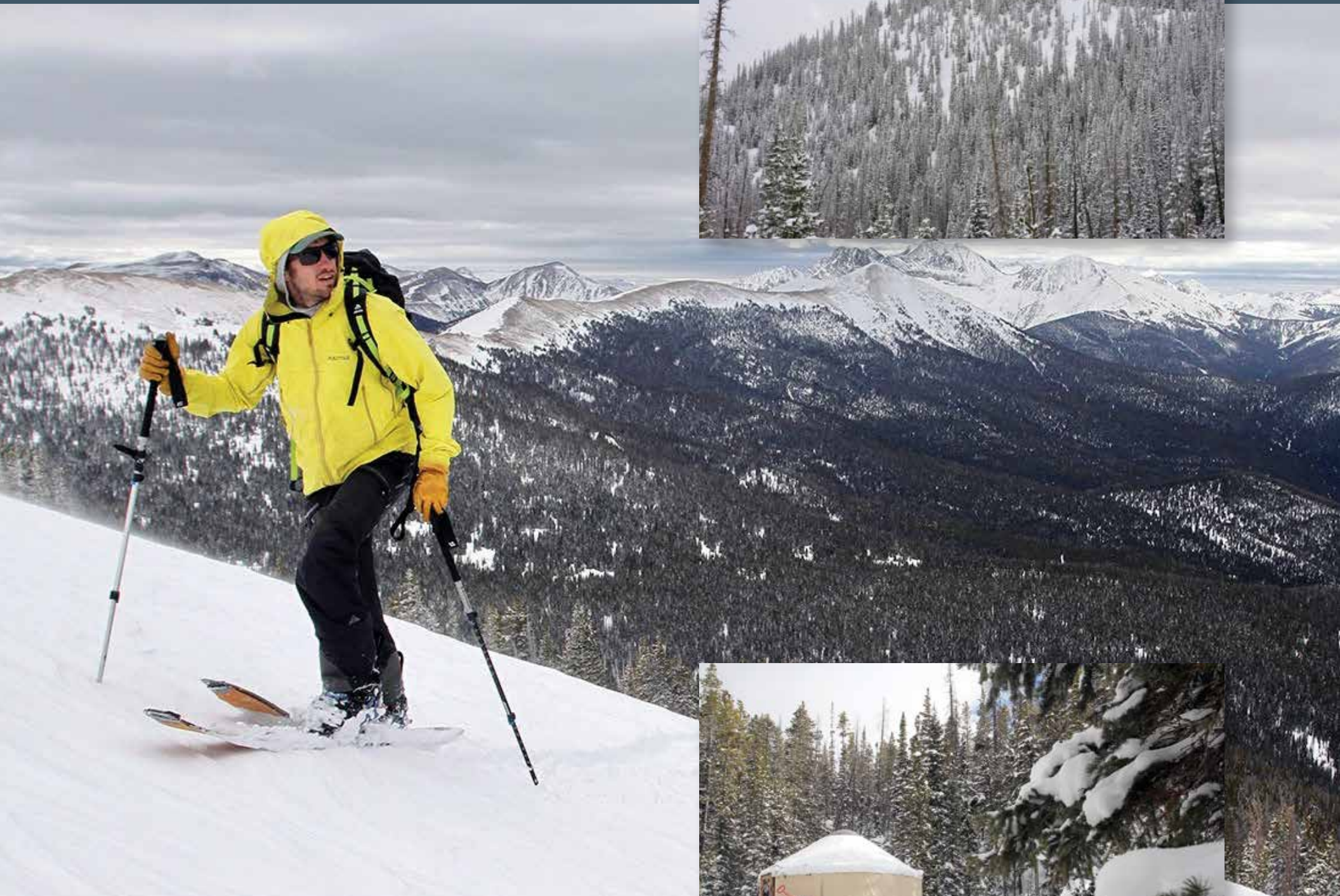


knew just where to go. All day yesterday, there was this bulging peak that we studied from every angle, and just like the Mona Lisa, it seemed to be staring back. It looked like one of those descents that absolutely any music could fill the background noise when you're gracing its slopes with sweeping turns, and it's lending you face shots in return. Even better, our second skinner from the day before deposited us right on top. We had set ourselves up at the Ruby Jewel, with a fast ascent in place, and we were ready to drop before our breakfast was even digested. Standing on top of this line galvanized the day, and looking for our next zone was exhilarating. There was stoke, there were pictures, and there was a party ride. The tone of this trip was jubilation, and it had been carrying on for three days now. We couldn't help it, and were still on cloud nine, we skinned directly to the other side of the basin to hop on another pow field. It was so easy to get to this slope, and quick to ascend as well. I was realizing that it is a veritable playground up here, and we had it all to ourselves. We busted out two quick laps in this tract, with the first being pedal down, on a wide open pitch, and the second, bouncy rhythmic turns in a long glade that spit us out near the main trail. After a downhill skin-track race back to the yurt, we packed up our kit, and started moving to our final refuge. This leg of the journey was similar to the movement the day before, with its immersion into a spellbinding forest. You take the Ruby Jewel Road for a half mile, and then hooking left onto the less discernible Cross Country Trail for just under 3 miles. There were times when following the blue blazes marking this trail could be hard, but we eventually made it to an intersection with the Montgomery Pass Road.





Mona Lisa.



Ruby Jewel Yurt.



Going right, we then skied a slight downhill to our humble abode to finish. For three days to come together in such a straightforward way was beyond our wildest dreams. Our elation was caused by surface level emotions, gleaned from fresh snow only. It was pure fun, and that's it. No deeper meaning, and trying to manifest one wasn't even a thought. You couldn't convince us we had anywhere else to be on the planet at that point.

---

MARCH 22, 2018

Our final morning of the trip was the first and only day that we had an actual objective. Two months earlier skiing Cameron Pass, when I was craning my neck wondering what this range had to offer, we saw a craggy little bowl to the north. It wasn't really clear how good the skiing might have been, or how technical the lines were, but it was worthy of a map study. This research led to the discovery of the Montgomery Pass Yurt's proximity to the potential zone, and had a hand in the planning of this whole trip. So yeah, we were going to go have a look. To get eyes on this mystery face, we simply had to skin back up the Montgomery Pass Road a little more than a mile beyond our previous intersection, and hook a left into the Southwest basin of Point 12,184. That day though, the sun decided to really come out for the first time, and with full force. Our powdery dream quickly started turning to a gloppy mess, and our travel began to slog. We continued working our way up onto the ridge of this basin as the trees opened up and lent our eyes close passage to something we had only seen from afar. It was what we had hoped, and so we kept charging to the top. Meanwhile, the conditions were deteriorating, and it was becoming apparent we might not get to send the lines that lured us here. After so much stoke, would we be able to make a justified decision, or would our powder frenzy take hold? Would we be able to end such a climactic trip by bailing on such an anticipated capstone? We finally got to the top, and saw that things had heated up so rapidly that the potential for wet slides, or cornice breaks had risen. There were so many signs that Ryan said, "I don't like it," and that was it, nobody argued. You might think that we would be really hungry for this line because of the build up, and the white room we had been living in, but it was quite the opposite. The amazing journey we took to get here had satiated any need we had to get our rocks off. We had lived the ultimate dream so far on this traverse, and doing anything to jeopardize that ride was out of the question. So we took a secondary route down, which was actually a beautiful tree run, and a righteous final descent in its own way. We gathered our belongings from the yurt, and skied out via the Montgomery Pass Road for a mile, and a right on Bockman Road for two miles to Ryan's car.

It was hard letting go of the amazing ride we had just taken, and all the way out, even while driving, we kept wondering what we missed, and what was still waiting for us next time. There weren't any 'Muirisms' to be had, and that's ok. It was fine that coming away from this trip, the only feeling was a yearning to go back for more, and not some profound connection gleaned through a transformative experience. It wasn't necessary to understand the spiritual nature of the place we explored at the end of the day, and while other times that can be paramount, this time it was just the laughs that kept our attention. The Medicine Bow Range was calling for us to come back for a number of reasons, but we only needed the fun, and the powder.







---

## Soldiers Footsteps

### Trooper Traverse

*If you have spent time in the military and the mountains,* you know that the parallels you can draw between the two worlds are endless. Even having experience in just one of these realms, you could easily comprehend the similarities; working in a team, training for success, and excelling in adversity. Often times there is a great deal of cross pollination, and maybe the best example of this was represented by the 10th Mountain Division during World War II. To really connect with these pioneers of war and alpine, I gathered a team of all veterans from my generation to recreate the famous Trooper Traverse, a 30-mile ski traverse conducted by a recon platoon of the 10th from Leadville to Aspen over the heart of Colorado's Rocky Mountains in the winter of 1944. We knew it would be a fulfilling mission to pay homage in this way, but we didn't realize the level of connectedness and understood sentiments would go so far past uncanny.

---

#### DAY 1

Leading up to this point we had done a great deal of planning; map studies, food portioning, gear prep, and all the physical/technical training we do for every ski season came into play. Much like the military when planning a mission, the logistics leading up to a big ski traverse can be the difference between success and failure. One characteristic of being deployed to a war zone that outshines civilian life though is not having to call off work for these plans, and with a three foot storm coming in two days ago, we questioned stepping into very committing terrain with such objective hazard looming. Realizing that the team would have to change if we pushed the dates, we started to evaluate things. First the route, it appeared that we could avoid avalanche terrain for most of the first day while treading lightly and keeping our senses open. Next we looked at the storm, which came in wet, warm, and windless with the potential to stabilize quickly and possibly improve conditions, as the season had been fairly dry. Weighing all of this and trusting our abilities to make good calls in the mountains, we decided to pull the trigger.





February 18, 1945

*The 10th Mountain Division was about to undertake the most audacious silent assault of their combat tour in WWII. This surprise attack took weeks of planning, and in reality, years of training at Camp Hale to prepare for. In the days leading up to the bravery that was about to commence, scouts constantly probed the German lines at the crest of Riva Ridge on skis to find routes for a Battalion of soldiers to make an approach. This ridge was key in the Germans defense of the Po Valley and holding the American advance at bay. It was now time to employ the tactics of the highly specialized mountain troops as they would "Climb to Glory." On the evening of the assault, a heavy cloud cover loomed over the area and the American rear shined searchlights in the sky providing 'artificial moonlight.' Also to the benefit of the Yanks was intermittent fog, that kept the Germans from peering over the side of Riva Ridge towards their opponents. After hours of complete discipline and technical skill moving up the slopes and cliffs in total silence, the brave "Ridge Runners" were on top of the Germans to awaken them with lead and hellfire. As the battle for Riva Ridge commenced, the fog lifted, and days of bloody battle would take place.*

As we began our Trooper Traverse, skinning up the deep valley of Half Moon Creek Road, with slopes ascending to 14,000 foot peaks on either side, a looming cloud cover from the storm remained. Although the hazards we were exposing ourselves to by entering this valley were much less conspicuous, their objective nature still remained. We would creep our way into the mountains, and keep our presence light and swift,





Ascending Darling Pass.



First look at Deer Mountain.



all the way to camp, while maintaining a keen eye on our surroundings and everything above us. After just over five miles of traveling, well below tree-line, we hooked a left towards the old Champion Mill up Halfmoon Creek. Finally our route had a more discernible incline to it, and we edged closer to the alpine. The fog of the morning was completely gone, and the sky was a cobalt blue; in contrast to the steep slopes dressed in white, from a fresh coat of storm snow, that now had us in its sights. We came to the first obvious avalanche path we would have to cross, and saw that its destruction had already run its course. A massive debris pile lay in front of us, and while we could easily skirt around it, we implemented avalanche terrain spacing to mitigate risks of hang-fire, putting only one team member at risk at one time. After crossing this section of the valley, and making it back into a grove of old growth, we could let our guard down slightly, as we made our way towards Darling Pass. Our day ended after 8 miles of skinning to make tree-line and set up camp. We dug out an eating area, and erected our shelters. Our days battle was done, and it was time to enjoy the company of those around us. This group that made their way into the Sawatch Range that day; a group of veterans, brothers in arms, skiers and snowboarders. Our attempt to honor the men who camped in this basin 74 years before us was just beginning, but we could already feel their presence as we currently shared two traits with them; men of war, and now men of mountains.

---

## DAY 2

We woke up at 12,000 feet to a crisp morning, with rays of sun just starting to creep over the crest of mountains, and warming us just in time to pour our coffees. From our camp we could see the Mosquito Range across the broad expanse of the Arkansas River Valley. This basin is true Colorado with old remnants of the silver boom on surrounding ridges, and windswept 14ers above them. If you love this state, you feel at home in these places, and you feel like protecting this land is worth any sacrifice one could make. I have to wonder if the men of the 10th had these same thoughts waking up to this Rocky Mountain majesty, and further wonder if a man named Burdell Winter shared these emotions at any point before he shipped off to WWII. “Bud” Winter would be one of almost 1,000 men of the 10th to pay the ultimate price for our freedoms in the fighting that would take place. He was the only soldier on the Trooper Traverse that would be killed in action. When we broke camp and started our ascent to Darling Pass, I had Bud on my mind as the warm sun gave my body comfort and ease. I also had an objective for the day, I had been obsessing over since I first saw a picture from Lou Dawson’s trip report of his own recreation of this route. Just over the pass looking north in the photo, you could make out a deep gash in the flanks of Deer Mountain with no evidence it could make for a descent. I had poured over trip reports, and studied contour lines and slope angle shading for hours. I hoped more than the success of our traverse for this line to go, as I had intentions for it. Reaching the top of Darling Pass, my anticipation was not put at ease, as I could still only see what the picture from 17 years prior told me. From the pass, you can either down climb some scree to get to snow, or traverse left for snow. We chose left, and found a savory rib sporting a foot of powder to make our way below the objective. Halfway down, I stopped making turns, and just straight-lined it to the base of the gash. I couldn’t wait any longer, and I just had to know if this was going to be a ski line, or just a mirage. As I lost momentum on the flat bench and peered into the gash, every shred of anticipation would turn into determination. The line went, and I now had a job to do.



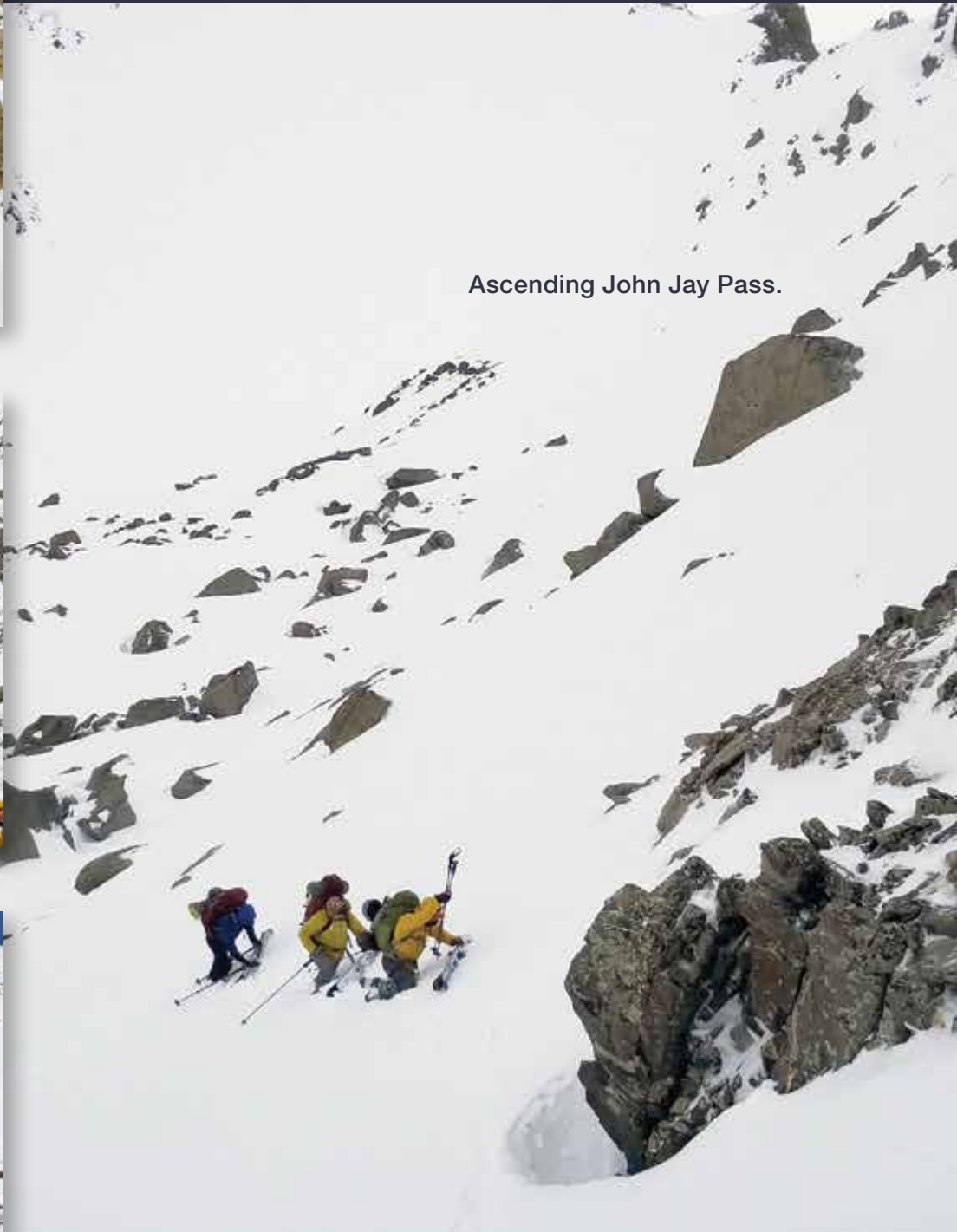
Climbing Pole Eater.



Ascending John Jay Pass.



This is for "Bud".





*Excerpt from Burdell "Bud" S. Winter's Bronze Star Citation*

*"...In the initial attack of an important offensive, Second Lieutenant Winter accompanied a leading rifle company as a forward mortar observer. During the fierce battle, the company's radio was put out of commission, and his was the only communication between the company and other units. Courageously, he followed the company commander through mine fields and through the most intense artillery and mortar barrages, relaying messages and directing the fire of his mortars until he was killed. His splendid heroism was an inspiration to all who witnessed his deeds..."*

The group I had put together for this trip and myself had all lost dear friends in combat, and we find solace in living our lives to a greater extent for them. We lessen our longing for their company by honoring them every chance we get, and if we truly want to keep the legend alive, the legend of a brotherhood that embodies our dead friends, we must honor the past, as they are the foundation we stack the memories of our lost comrades on. As we held onto these ideals, booting up this beautiful couloir, I noticed a pillar standing directly on top of the line. It was proud and straight, almost as if it was "Pole Eater" himself, which is what Bud's friends called him endearingly. Taking the time to go out of the way for this line wasn't even an afterthought, it was our duty to ski this line, and now with the pillar standing at its apex almost like a statue, it would be named "Pole Eater Couloir." Climbing and skiing this line turned into one of the most meaningful descents I have ever done as we read aloud Bud's Bronze Star citation at the base, and dedicated the descent to him. The power this tribute had over all of us was tangible, and as we skied across the North Fork Lake Creek headwaters to our camp below "John Jay Pass," our feelings were something you cannot articulate. We settled in for our second night, perched over cliffs above 12,000 feet, and the openings of our tents pointed directly at the significant descent of the day. With eyes and minds fixated, we had nothing to say and everything to be thankful for.

---

### DAY 3

Unzipping our vestibules in this surreal setting, overlooking the entire basin we had come across the day before made us feel insignificant. Now, just as we were waking up, the sun just so happened to rise directly over the top of Pole Eater Couloir. It only stoked the fire we had in our bellies to keep going on this traverse, and with a big day ahead, we would need to harness that energy as a group. The terrain we had in front of us was semi-technical, but due to the fragile snowpack we were dealing with at the time, the north facing aspect we had to cross became very technical. There were slides all around us, and on every aspect, from the storm we snuck into the mountains on the heels of. Now on the third day, we found ourselves in the middle of the range with only one way to go, forward. Making a quick climb up John Jay Pass, we finally got eyes on the face we had to cross to get to the next pass. In more ideal avalanche conditions, there is a mellow bench to move west on that has cliffs below and steep slopes above. With our conditions though, crossing that low would have been a death trap, with a high possibility to remotely trigger any unstable snow from above, and consequently being swept over the cliffs below; this was not an option. We had to work our way across the upper sections of the face, finding islands of safety and smartly bounding from one to the next.



Battle Traverse.



Williams Mountain



Trooper Couloir.



February 19, 1945

*The men of the 10th fought tirelessly all through the previous night, and into the day after gaining the element of surprise over the Germans. Through the fierce defense many casualties were suffered, but the infantrymen held their ground, and Riva Ridge would now be in the hands of American troops. Just as this success was being realized, other elements of the 10th commenced what would be a six day assault of Mount Belvedere. The maneuvers to take this second objective were reliant on Riva Ridge's capture. The different battalions executed their separate missions while facing adversity in terrain, weather, and an entrenched enemy. As a whole, from February 18th to the 25th, the 10th Mountain Division would showcase what it means to be a distinguished military combat unit. They would go on to have many more successes over their deployment, and gain control of the Po Valley. What remained instrumental in their advancements was the divisions ability to remain collected in harm's way, and function as a unit in each battle.*

Working our way across this maze as a team, with flawless communication, was almost second nature to us. We were functioning like a military unit; as a group of veterans we all understood the imperative nature of those instincts and how they translated to the mountains that day. After making it across the daunting face, we all stood at the second pass to really take in the complete beauty of our surroundings and shed the weight of our last movement. In the military, and in a time of war, you are on a constant yo-yo of extreme highs and extreme lows; or even extreme adrenaline rushes followed by moments of mind numbing monotony. This is a pertinent characteristic in the mountains as well, and after our morning, we had a huge slog across a basin and up a long ridge to the final pass over the Williams Mountains. Being in the mountains though, you can easily break up the rambling mind if you just decide to look up and away from your feet. Luckily for us, on the final uphill, we were still in the middle of Sawatch Range, and the views might have been the best of the entire traverse at this point. Once we started making our way up the long ridge, we could see mountains stacked on top of mountains to the south, and the inspiring Williams Mountain was right in front of us. We were moving in the middle of a bluebird day though, and this slog was really starting to slow us down. We knew on the other side of this last uphill was the last major descent of the traverse, The Trooper Couloir, and the eagerness for high speed turns kept us going. When the 10th skied this couloir, they were facing blizzard conditions and had no clue if the thing even went, but descending out of the alpine was imperative. Our conditions were amazing though, and I was looking forward to the last line. At the top of the line the wind was howling, but I could see that it had full coverage of what appeared to be slightly warm, silky powder. As I dropped in I couldn't quite see the exit, and could make out a debris pile at the bottom, but slightly left. Making my first turn felt remarkable, and the snow felt fast, so I aimed the nose of my board to the right of the old slide and completely let my plank open up. I made long, fall line, heel-side turns with toe-side turns that had a slight trend towards what I thought was the exit. I was riding so fast that I could feel the power of my board really being put to the test as I engaged either edge. I could now make out my exit, and so I lowered my torso even more as if I was a skateboarder bombing down a steep hill in the days of Dogtown. The descent was the perfect way to shed the weight of the alpine, and finally be in the relative safety of a lower valley and on our way out. As we all collected below the apron and admired our tracks, we



acknowledged where they had come from. We knew what led us to make them, and we felt like we had now really walked in the footsteps of the men whose legacy we wanted to preserve. Down the valley a mile or so we found a nice open meadow to set up for the night, and the mood was light. There was a more relaxed feeling in everyone, and we sat around for hours just talking about what those men must have been like, and what they would have felt like after they skied that same couloir.

---

#### DAY 4

Our last day spent in these men's footsteps wouldn't be quite the same as the previous three. We were now below tree-line, and all the steep descents were behind us. All the arduous climbs had already taken place, and a slow convoluted meander out of the Hunter Creek Valley was all that was left. The grand views of the high Sawatch were now constricted by dense groves growing on the slopes above this deep valley. Our thoughts, however, traveled well above the peaks, traveling back in time. They transcended our present circumstance, and planted firmly into the consciousness of a 10th Mountain Soldier walking out of the mountains. He would see a backwoods town called Aspen on the eve of his deployment to Italy. Not the Italy that we all know today either. They were traveling to a continent that was ravaged by war, and a specific line that was facing heavy casualties against a brutal German defense. These soldiers were walking out of what I know was a perspective shifting wilderness experience, and leaving those high peaks to fight a total and complete war to decide the fate of the world. Our minds were going to these





wild places, because we all knew that same feeling. All of us had faced the eves of our own deployments to far off battlefields. We could all remember the feelings we had before going off to fight; excitement, fear, exhilaration, trepidation. A litany of emotions, none of which you are entirely stuck on, but more than anything else, a feeling of the unknown. You don't really understand, and can't even begin to comprehend the complexities of war until your two feet are firmly planted in the midst of the chaos. The chaos and the beauty, or the beauty of chaos, are things that never leave you. Often times, after a soldier's time in war is over, he yearns to go back. Back to the simplicity, and the camaraderie that is prevalent in an environment surrounded by objective hazards and where every day is goal oriented. You go out towards the edge in hazardous conditions, taking along with you all the gear you need, your sharpened technical skill sets, and putting things on the line for a mission. It would be hard to discern at this point whether I am still talking about war or the mountains. Honestly, I am talking about both, as there is no doubt in my mind that they are so intrinsically intertwined that I feel completely at home in either environment.

### 90 POUNDS OF RUCKSACK

[Chorus]

*I was a barmaid in a mountain inn;  
There I learned the wages and miseries of sin;  
Along came a skier fresh from off the slopes;  
He's the one that ruined me and shattered all my hopes.*  
Singing:

[Chorus:]  
*Ninety pounds of rucksack  
A pound of grub or two  
He'll schuss the mountain,  
Like his daddy used to do.*

*He asked me for a candle to light his way to bed;  
He asked me for a kerchief to cover up his head;  
I like a foolish maiden, thinking it no harm;  
Jumped into the skier's bed to keep the skier warm.*  
Singing:

*Early in the morning before the break of day,  
He handed me a five note and with it he did say,  
"Take this my darling for the damage I have done.  
You may have a daughter, you may have a son.  
Now if you have a daughter, bounce her on your knee;  
And if you have a son, send the bastard out to ski."*  
Singing:

[Chorus]  
*The moral of this story, as you can plainly see,  
Is never trust a skier an inch above your knee.  
For I trusted one and now look at me;  
I've got a son in the Mountain Infantry.*  
Singing:

[Chorus]

Shared experiences tie people together, and while my group of friends and I already had much in common, we had now entered the mountains seeking a connection to the past, and were now coming out safely on the other side. We had absorbed every sight, embraced every suck, and magnified every high while keeping a lens on the perspective

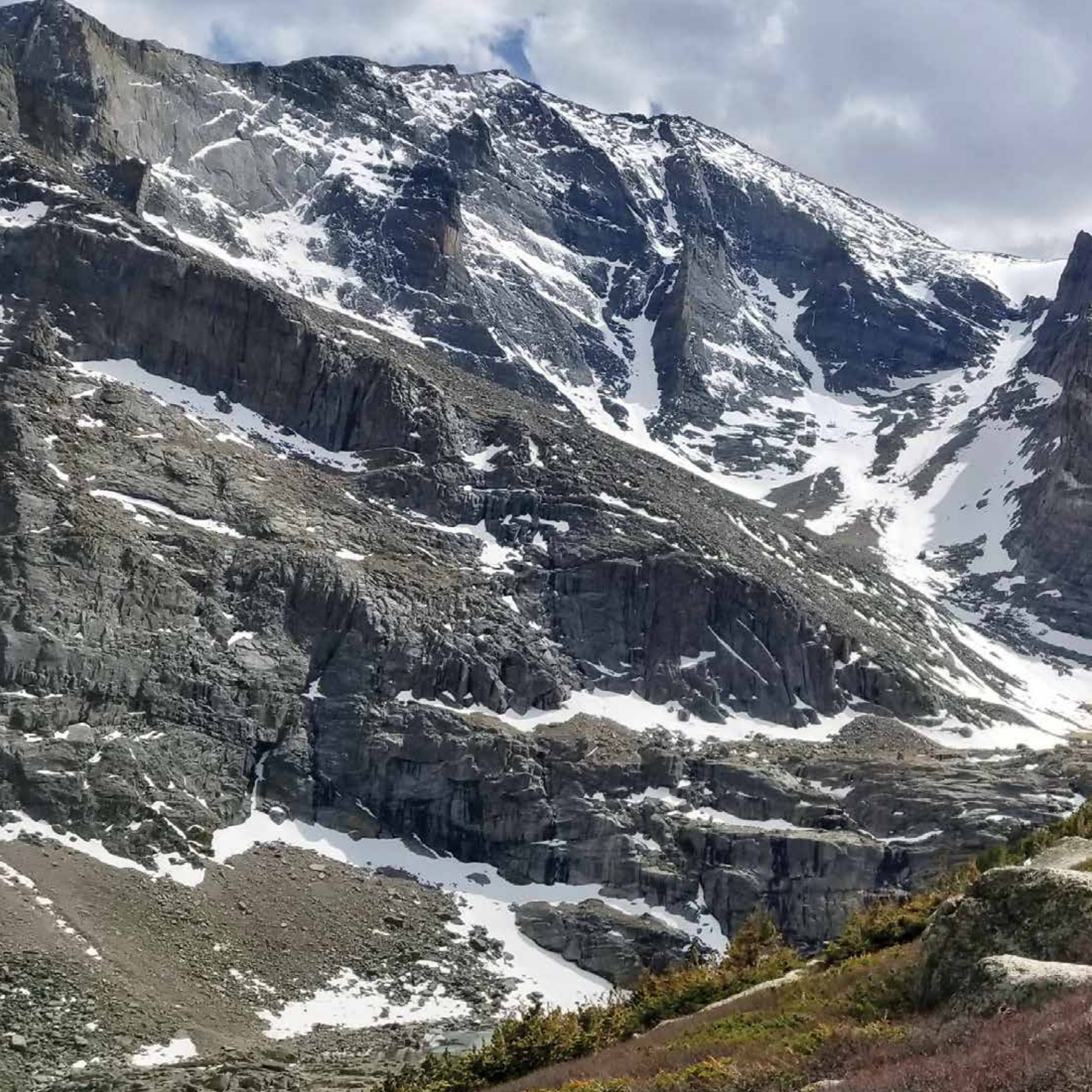


of those that came before. We now felt that our brotherhood spanned generations, and we could almost understand what these men felt as they exited the high peaks seeking a bar for libation. They must have been singing their song through the streets, as were we. Over and over, we kept our spirits going strong by rattling off each verse and belting the chorus. As loud as we could, we made the lyrics echo off the buildings of Aspen, all the way to the steps of the Hotel Jerome, where the 10th famously got an Aspen Crud as their final stop. And so we woul... "Closed for renovations." "What?!" We had skied all the way from Leadville over the course of 4 days, and 4 passes over 12,000 feet to a bar that was CLOSED. We would adapt and overcome I suppose, and go to Aspen Brewing! And so we would sing our song over pitchers in a different bar than planned, but it turned out to be a serendipitous ending to the trip, as we looked on the wall in the brewery to spot something incredible. Aspen Brewing proudly showcases a framed United States flag, but if you look closely and count the stars, you see that there is only 48. In other words, it is the same flag of our country in 1944 when the 10th executed their own traverse. This certainly felt like the stars aligned, and our new generation of veterans would complete our traverse at a bar reflecting the change of times. It was the fellas giving us a sign to imbibe, and be proud of our accomplishment. I want it to be understood that in no way do you have to be a veteran to follow in the footsteps of the 10th. These men were first climbers, skiers, and outdoorsmen of the highest caliber, as it was easier to turn a skier into a soldier preparing to fight the German Wehrmacht. If you want to understand something about the men who had a massive influence in building the outdoor industry as we know it, just put yourself in their shoes as young men. Put yourself on your own Trooper Traverse, and when you find yourself deep in the mountains with wonder and amazement, just know that a group of intrepid bastions of freedom walked that same line many years before, to forget where they were going.



A team of military veterans, and mountain men.









---

## Longs Peak

### Notch Couloir Attempt

*Colorado boasts* many venerable peaks, but not all are truly iconic. Longs Peak is one of those mountains that most mountaineers and budding adventurers tell stories with drifting gazes, about; lamenting of a storm one was caught in, or a day of complete exhaustion before vowing to go back for more.







The history of this mountain is worthy of its own book, as are the names recorded in its annals. Having its first recorded ascent by an expedition on August 23, 1868, which was led by none other than John Wesley Powell. The same Civil War veteran who lost his right arm at the Battle of Shiloh, and is credited with the first exploration of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.

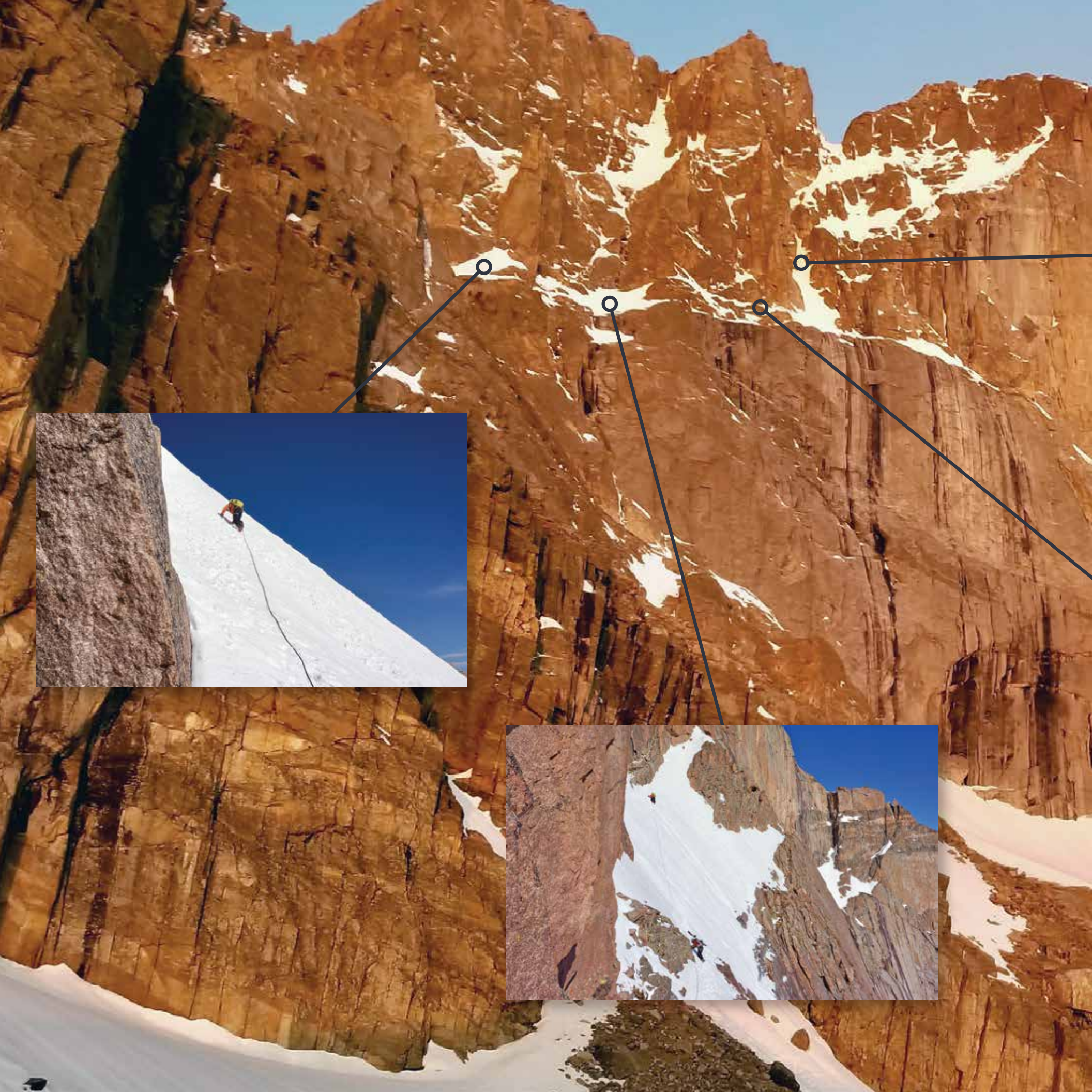
As a skier or snowboarder this 14,259 foot peak is an intimidating puzzle. It is plagued by winds that ravage any snowpack from whatever parts of the mountain that are not sheer cliffs. Only two summit descents even exist on this peak; Keplinger's Couloir, and the North Face. Committing is one way to define both of these lines, and paying attention to the storms hitting Rocky Mountain National Park is paramount in nailing conditions. When and if your aspirations allow you to forgo a clean summit descent, you start to find other aesthetic lines of snow sparsely painted on some aspects. Then you walk into the Chasm looking up at the east side of this mountain, which draws climbers and mountaineers from around the world to scale the infamous Diamond. In a state that is littered with some of the greatest sites to see in our Rocky Mountain west, this view might stir the inspiration from the deepest parts of your soul. Devoid of snow, this massive cliff makes you wonder what kind of person is capable of hanging above your current stance, with the void between. Shaking free of the amazement and looking left, your eyes catch the Notch Couloir, only to have that same amazement come tingling back up your spine. As you take in this line ending abruptly over multi-pitch climbs you may think, "Would I ski above that void?"

This perfect fall line and hallway couloir, resting over air, was first climbed in 1871, when Reverend Elkanah J. Lamb descended the route from the summit. Then for more than a hundred years was only seen as a climb on the mountain's East Face. As with the progression of so many aspects in our sport however, in 1984, vision was turned into action by John Harlin and Jimmie Katz. This mental and twisted refrigerator of alpine snow would be turned into a ski line. Harlin and Katz skied the line belayed, and any extreme skier might react to this with judgement. That would be until they have placed themselves on a 50 degree slope above ski-base jump worthy cliffs. In fact, Harlin wrote about their methods in a 1984 *Rock & Ice Magazine* article titled, "Notch Busters, or Skiing the East Face of Longs Peak,"

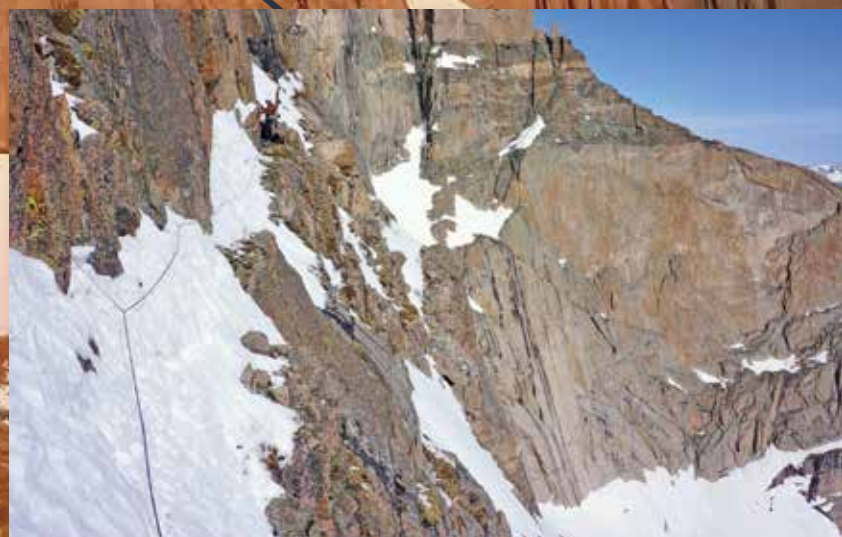
*"Belaying an 'extreme' descent raises a number of questions. Chris Landry's definition of extreme skiing easily catches the public's imagination: 'If you fall, you die.' By that philosophy, a belay would automatically remove the descent from the extreme category. But, for crying out loud, climbers can do hard and interesting things in the mountains without undue worrying about death. Why not skiers? Why must steep skiing be free-soloing? So, I rationalized to myself, belaying could and ought to be introduced to 'extreme' skiing. Someone else could have the honor of the first 'free-solo' of the descent if they so chose."*

"You want me to bring a rack," I asked my friend, when we met in Boulder, just about the time Pearl Street's bars made last call. "No, I have mine super dialed and we can use your rope," said Jon. A small part of me wondered











who exactly it was 'super dialed' for? Was it racked just the way he liked it, or ready for us to swap leads? If the latter, would that mean I would take a pitch across the Broadway Ledge? Am I ready for that?

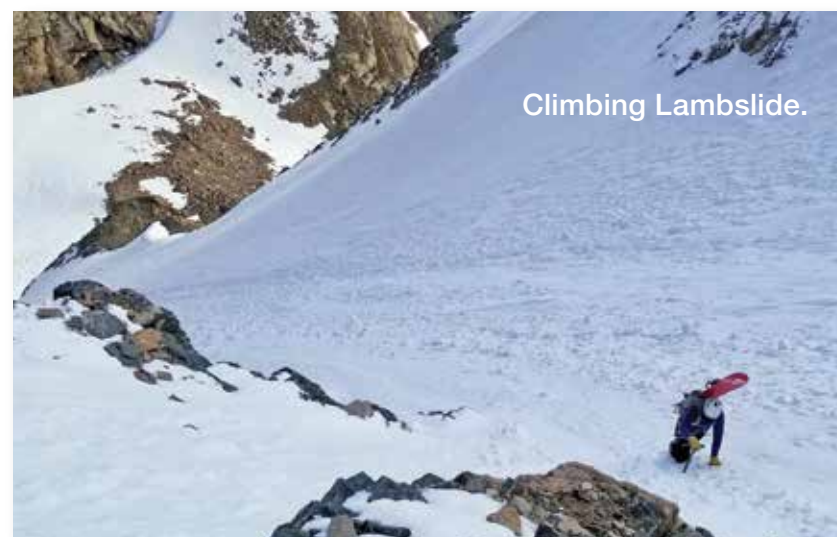
This particular partner of mine has been a mentor since I got a text from him while working at Moe's BBQ in Boulder asking me to go ride. We had a mutual friend who knew we both loved splitboarding, and knew I probably had some things to learn. Since then, we have had days in the mountains that could rival a stand-up comedy show in regard to how much we smiled and laughed. We always find a way to nail conditions, and have those unforgettable experiences. I know why too; in all the lessons I have learned from Jon, there is one that sticks out more than anything, "You'll never know till you go." It's this kind of ethos, from his generation of mountaineers that I value most. They aren't afraid to face a biting wind, go out for the epic day, or even get skunked on an objective. Just getting out the door and doing something is the important part, and obviously they pick the most likely objective for a good time, but wasting time waffling on conditions isn't an option. He has taught me to get out the door, be ready to adapt to what you face, and make the best of your surroundings. But did that make me ready for the Notch?

Hiking up the East Longs Peak Trail well before dawn is always a time warp to me. Time almost doesn't exist until you see the sun's rays breaking the horizon, and on this day, we were walking across the frozen Chasm Lake just then. Almost like a choir breathing life into a magnificent cathedral, we watched in awe as the cold face warmed into a glowing golden hue. It seemed like all the sun's energy was concentrating on this one place right before our eyes. Beating back the urge to simply stare we started moving up Lambs Slide to gain Broadway Ledge.

Our third partner for the day was Ricke, and as we moved higher, above the void, I couldn't help but notice his head on a swivel, taking it all in. He had a silence to him that morning, and it told me that he felt like he was going to push his limits that day. I guess he and I were in the same boat then, as I was still wondering if Jon was going to hand me the rack. We moved onto the beginning of the ledge, and I saw Jon gearing up to lead. I didn't say anything, just letting our flow naturally happen. In the back of my mind though, I realized I wanted the rack. As the slack tightened, and Ricke followed Jon's lead, leaving me as the third, that want to be on the sharp end took hold. It was beginning to dawn on me that I was still relying on my mentor in crux situations, but I was yearning to bear the responsibility. He had prepared me, and I was ready. Traversing this band of snow to where we could enter the couloir with no burden of gear placement let me absorb the moment though. I watched every water drip from the snowfields above. I paid attention to the growing void as it deepened below us, and thought about the place I was in. I thought about the exposure, the risks, and the awareness that this is exactly where I wanted to be. I could tell watching Ricke that he was slowly gaining the same perception, and we let Jon carry on his steadfast presence to where the temperature would change.

Entering the Notch Couloir feels like opening a cold storage. It has an essence that you're not supposed to stay long, but in this cooler place, any misgivings Ricke may have had dissolved. He started booting up the couloir, and with





every step he kicked, an echo moved up the Notch. Our rhythm was supported by very supportable snow, however too supportable unfortunately. It began taking a couple kicks for each step, and doubts of skiing the line crept in. It still seemed viable though, until we got above the choke and back to sun exposed snow. What we found there was a mix of mashy, rotten, and bordering loose, wet conditions. I was still considering the descent, feeling comfortable with the firm snow over the exposure. It took me a second though, to pull myself out of the position of absorbing Jon's knowledge, and realize that he wasn't the only mentor that day. I saw that Ricke was looking to me for direction, and searching for something to make him feel more confident about the void, and the couloir that was akin to a sheet of ice. I processed how incredible it was that through my time spent learning from Jon and how far along my path he has taken me, I am now able to kickstart someone else's journey. Even more quickly than I could come up with something to ease Ricke's worry, I knew that Jon had never placed me in a situation where I was disquieted. It was always focused on the best times with a progression, not just daunting feats. So while noticing the tension that had formed over our next course of action due to the snow, we all agreed to relax, and not ski the Notch Couloir that day.

After kicking the elephant off the face and into space, we had one more pitch to lead. This time, I didn't stay quiet. I asked Jon if I could take the lead, and bring us to the top. I don't think he could have been happier, and even though he has seen me grow in the mountains a great deal, he may have seen the most genuine maturing in those moments just before passing me the rack.

We topped out, and took it all in. It was again one of those days you remember forever, and while it was far from over, rappelling off the back side felt like I was turning another page in my book. My mentor had propelled me down a path, and now I felt like I was paying his lessons forward. I felt like Ricke was truly realizing that you don't know what the journey will be like all the time, and that simple fact, is why you go.

To be continued...



*I don't know how to get back to where I want to be.* I want to say things, to express the way my soul feels when the ebb of my pursuits has dried the flats—and put the water line at its low mark. It will flow again and I will pick up my existence, my place, where I'm at my best, my element—myself. Until then, I'm stuck.

*Watching the ember burn.*

I'm stuck sinking into the doldrums of bore. Restlessness creeps in as I wallow in stagnation.

*Fuck.*

I need help in these times, but who can understand? Nobody has lived through my book. A succession of events has carved out the spirit that I embody. Death, life, delinquency, war, love, loss, lust, and whatever else has given me definition. This story of mine has led me to be constantly yearning. It has driven me to scheme, to wonder, and wander. Between the high points is where I lie now, in that space I cannot fill.

*Where I want to fucking scream as the ember bursts into flames.*

Sitting, motionless, waves of heat coarse through my body. Beads of sweat form on my scalp, and my hairs stand up. I want to peel back, engaging every muscle, bending my spine with breaking intensity, belting a savage call. I have to. I can't let this torrid existence continue without a release.

*The flames are scalding.*

My instinct is an uncontrollable need, in its most primal form—a conditioned addiction to the fucked, to the useless, the unwanted, and the—*if not me then who*. Mediocrity has become intolerable and fighting that will only build the tension to toxic levels. Where do I want to be, not here, it can't be *here*? What do I want to say? —and why do I care to say it? — and who even wants to listen? Talking is useless. I need to move on, to move, to stir, to shudder, to boil, and to fan the flames.

*To let the fire rage.*

I'm pining for my mistress. My taming that is action. When the body of water that emulates my being is calm, before it stagnates again. Before that, is where I stand, and the swells are frothing and turbulent. Spray is in the air, and it's suffocating.

*I can't breathe until my spirit rages again.*

*I have to get back to the Journey.*

> *Written by the author on a commercial flight home from the Alaska Range.*





Calm waters.



# TURN YOUR PASSION INTO PURPOSE.

POW TURNS PASSIONATE OUTDOOR PEOPLE INTO EFFECTIVE CLIMATE ADVOCATES. WE LEAD A COMMUNITY OF ATHLETES, THOUGHT PIONEERS AND FORWARD-THINKING BUSINESS LEADERS TO AFFECT SYSTEMIC POLITICAL SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

---

## JOIN US

---

Back Cover

\$3000

**TEXT ACT4POW TO 52886**  
TO LEARN MORE

**POW**   
PROTECT OUR WINTERS