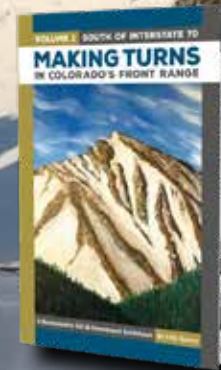
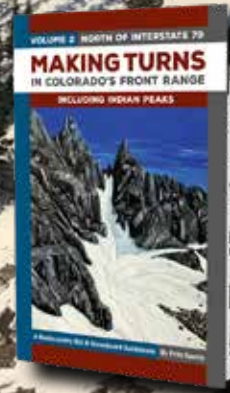
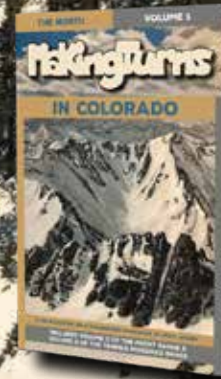
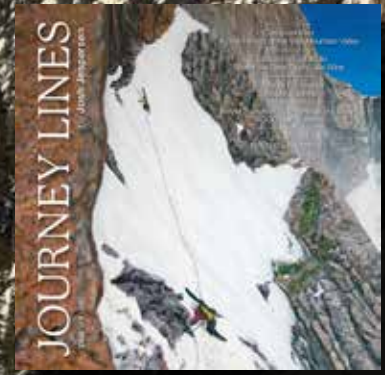




# **SKIING** in the **LOST RIVER RANGE**

**An Idaho Backcountry Guidebook By Mark Ortiz**



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## new giterdun author Mark Ortiz

Mark hails from Boise, Idaho--colloquially known as the City of Trees. In 2011 he transplanted himself to the fertile skiing soil of the Teton Valley, establishing new roots in Pierre's Hole. Since his replanting, he has branched out in his skiing as his dreams, like leafy limbs, have reached ever skyward. And while some limbs have broken, a fibula here, a clavicle there, the perseverance of his skiing tree has finally reached the lofty heights of the forest canopy. Now, each leaf can enjoy the sunlight, photosynthesizing each day of skiing to add strength and maturity to each branch of his skiing repertoire. With an advanced degree in Superfluous Extended Metaphors, Mark's passion, ingenuity and dedication to absurdity compensate for the utter lack of talent in metaphorically every other department.





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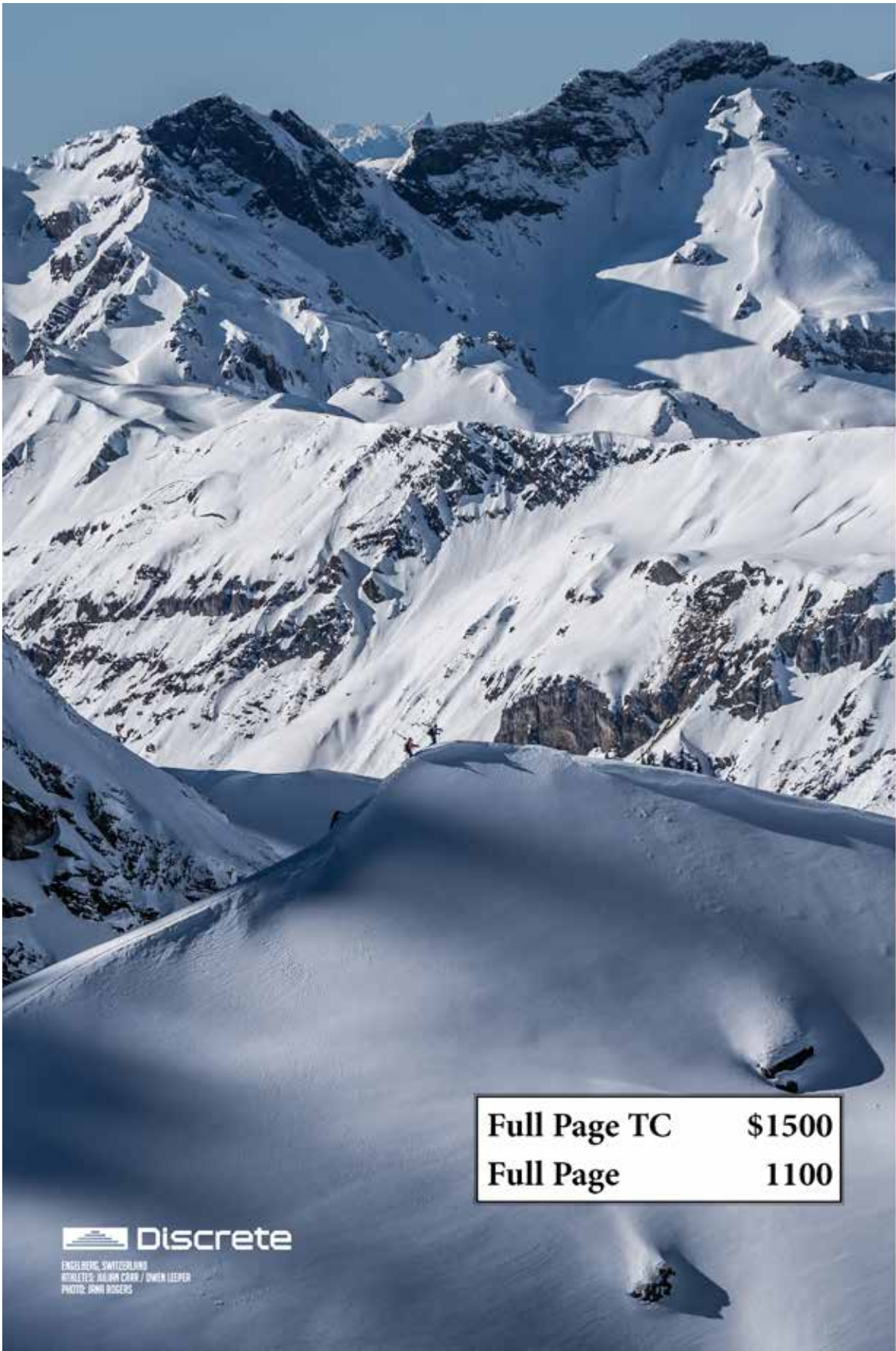


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## SKIING IN THE LOST RIVER RANGE BY MARK ORTIZ

## 31 Peaks and Zones - 50 Routes

## PASIMEROI MOUNTAINS

## NORTH OF DOUBLESPPRINGS PASS

## 1. Goose Creek Mountain - 11,085'

1a. Sheep Pen Basin

## 2. Dickey North - 11,141'

2a. North Chute

2b. South Chute

## 3. Petros Peak - 11,060'

3a. West Face

## 4. Pavlos Peak - 11,109'

4a. Southeast Face

## 5. Trinity Peak

5a. Southeast Face

## DOUBLESPPRINGS PASS AREA

## 6. Al West Peak - 11,310'

6a. East Gully

## 7. Freightier Spring - 11,213'

7a. East Face

## WEST PASIMEROI

## 8. Mountaineers Peak 11,828'

8a. East Face

## 8. Borah Peak - 12,662'

9a. West Face

9b. Snow Bridge

9c. North Face

## 10. Morrison - 11,308'

10a. North Face

## 11. Idaho - 12,065'

11a. South

11b. North

## 12. Whitecap Peak - 11,899'

## 13. Leatherman - 12,228'

13a. North

13b. West Ridge

13c. Tomshawk Couloir

## EAST PASIMEROI

## 14. Bad Rock - 11,953'

14a. North Face

## 15. Mount Church - 12,200'+

North Face

## 16. Mount Breitenbach - 12,139'

16a. South Face

16a. North Face

## 17. Mount Corruption - 11,857'

17a. North

17b. Huey and Dewey

## 18. Hawley Mountain - 9,752'

18a. North Gully

## MACKAY AREA

## 19. Donaldson - 12,023'

19a. East Face

## 20. Lost River Mountain 12,078'

20a. Birthday Chute

20b. Super Gully

20c. Hyper Gully

## 21. USGS Peak 11,982'

21a. West Face

## 22. Mount McCaleb 11,682'

22a. West

22b. South

22c. Hydra

22d. Swauger Gulch

## PASS CREEK PASS

## 23. Methodist Gulch 9,800'

23a. Snake Hunt

23b. Bear Hunt

23c. Nautilus

## 24. Invisible Gulch 11,330'

24a. South

## 25. Loristica 10,800'+

## 26. Warren Mountain 9,489'

## 27. Hidden Mouth Cave

## SOUTH OF PASS CREEK PASS

## 28. King Mountain 10,002'

28a. East

28b. Ramshorn Canyon





PHOTO: Phil Heck

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## INTRODUCTION

My first foray into the Lost River Range parallels the path of many Idahoans—I was allured by the ‘tallest’ status of Borah Peak. My brother Sam and I made the drive from Boise one August, climbing to the summit. The view was inspiring, and I predictably suffered due to the 10,000 foot change in elevation. A decade later, when we were both in our twenties, he suggested we return and try to ski the darn thing. Long story short, we did not succeed. That attempt in 2014 really stuck with me, not due to the quality of our ski descent but due to the unbelievable number of other faces that looked skiable. Every tour I took in the range after that exposed me to at least a couple of lines or peaks that ended up on the ‘to do’ list. This book is the culmination of that list. It is not an end-all, be-all guide and should not be treated as such—I am a ski bum, not a guide. Rather, treat this text as a book of ideas to provide inspiration to get out and into the tallest mountain range in Idaho.

Geologically, the Lost River Range has two important features worth discussing here. A great sea covered this area hundreds of millions of years ago, depositing sediment in distinct layers that are readily evident today throughout the range. As the stresses of seismic activity have affected the region, these layers have been tortuously twisted, folded and uplifted in a variety of fascinating ways. Many unassuming ridgelines have short, vertical rock walls that outline steep chutes. Other faces have fragmented layers providing a ‘stadium seating’ aesthetic, still others possess distinct shelves of skiable snow separated by sheer cliffs. And while the quality of the rock for climbing is generally poor—and many of the peaks are nothing more than giant piles of fragmented gravel—snow can be the great equalizer for ascents.

In the more recent geologic timeline, the mountains that we know today are the result of an active fault. In 1983, the Borah Peak Earthquake increased the height of the mountain range about 6 feet relative to the valley floor below. What this means to us as skiers is that the relief of the southwest faces of the range is direct from the Thousand Springs valley floor—a fault-block escarpment with no foothills, no glacial valleys, few basins to catch water. The lack of terrain features means that the wind scours all ridgelines and the afternoon sun melts snow rapidly, leading to a much more continental snowpack than the rest of the state. The opposing side of the range, however, is much more complex. As a result, many of the premiere lines exist in the remote reaches of the range, far away from cell service and the paved road surface of Highway 93.

The remote nature of the range presents many challenges as well as many rewards. First and foremost, there is no avalanche forecasting and reliable snowpack data is sparse. The lone resource for watershed data, the Hilt Creek Snotel Site, sits at 8000 feet and provides daily information on snow water equivalent, snow depth and temperature. While this information is extremely useful, the Lost River Range runs over 70 miles and there are myriad factors that influence snowpack differently along that length. There are several webcams that are useful, notably the Idaho Transportation Department camera of Highway 93 at Willow Creek Summit.

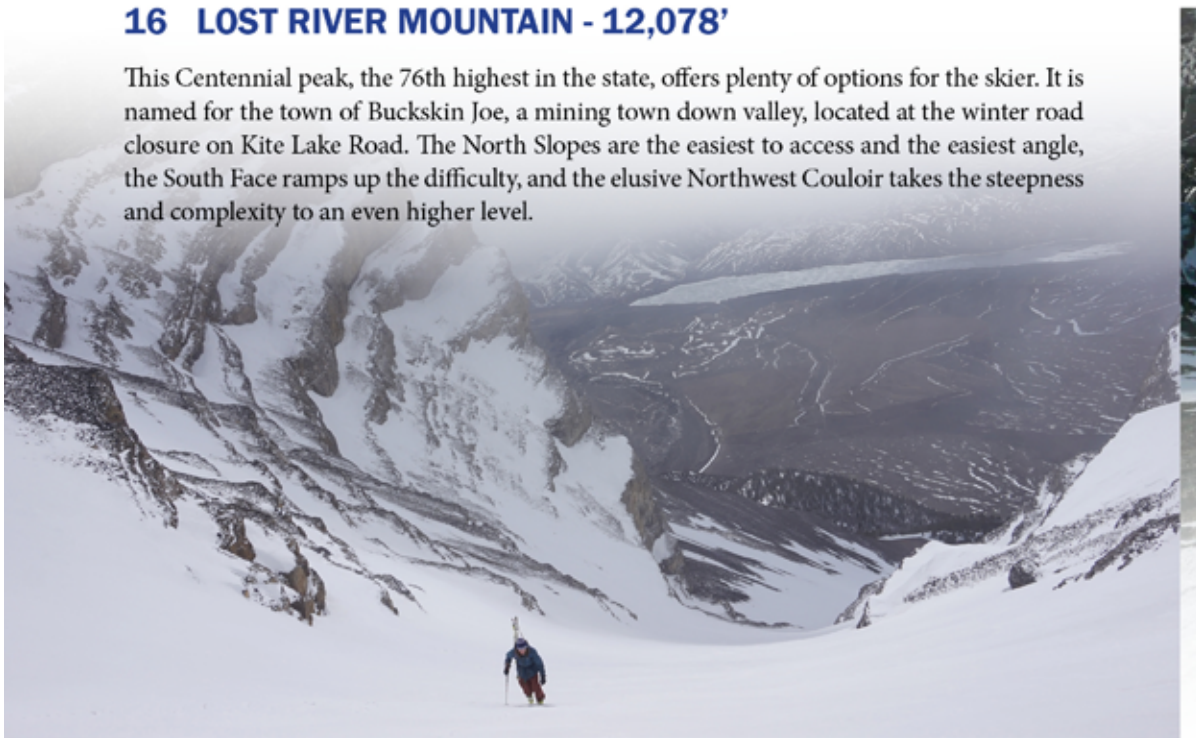
Secondly, there are no paved roads to any trailhead in the range. The most popular summer trail, Borah Peak, is gravel and unplowed through the winter months. The two passes through the range,

Doublesprings and Pass Creek, likewise are gravel but remain unplowed. Approaches often follow dirt roads that abruptly end in drifts. As a result, the mileage denoted along

## SKIING IN THE LOST RIVER RANGE

### 16 LOST RIVER MOUNTAIN - 12,078'

This Centennial peak, the 76th highest in the state, offers plenty of options for the skier. It is named for the town of Buckskin Joe, a mining town down valley, located at the winter road closure on Kite Lake Road. The North Slopes are the easiest to access and the easiest angle, the South Face ramps up the difficulty, and the elusive Northwest Couloir takes the steepness and complexity to an even higher level.



16b - Lost River Mountain	Super Gully	
DIFFICULTY: Expert	DISTANCE: 7.8 Miles Roundtrip	VERTICAL: 3,100'
SUNHIT: Sunrise + 3	ASPECT: Northwest	SEASON: Spring
TRAILHEAD: Cilmax	MAP: Page 310	PHOTO: Page 216-217

Super Gully is perhaps the best test piece of the Lost River summits and a classic descent. It's the most straightforward, no BS line in the range. There is no approach if the road is melted out and the route finding is relatively minimal. Drive up, park the car, start bootpacking. Stop when you get to the top 4400 feet later. I recommend tackling this line first to get a taste of the vertical relief and geography of the range. If this line taxes you heavily, keep in mind that this is the easiest of the big lines in the book due to the utter lack of an approach and relatively good road conditions. Additionally, the aspect of the line is southwest, meaning that it softens up relatively late in the day. Consequently, the start time is more conducive to, say, libations the night before.

Details, details:

The ascent trail begins on the hillside about .1 miles before the end of the road. It's the obvious track on the sagebrush covered hillside that goes uphill. As it veers climbers' left into the gully, choose a side. If the snow is melted on the climbers left side, I opt to keep tennis shoes on and boot that side. If both sides are snow covered, I tend to put skins on and ascend climbers' right side. Keep the snow coverage in mind for the descent. In either case, head up the gully. Ascend the sub ridge to climbers' left of the gully as the trees start to thin. Once the trees break, choose the path of least resistance into the gully on climbers' left. The tree line is about 2000 feet above the car. Good work so far!



Provided good visibility, the summit should be obvious. Stay in this behemoth of a gully and walk uphill for another 2500 feet. As I said, it's a pretty straight forward route. Don't forget to turn around and enjoy the spectacular vista from time to time. As you get close to the summit, the run widens up into a funnel shape. Ascend the ridge on climbers' left and follow it to the top of the line. Lost River Peak's true summit (12,078 ft) and corresponding register is .25 miles north along the summit ridge. The southern high point is above 12,000 feet, however.

As for the descent, the run holds a consistent pitch in the low 40s for almost 2000 feet. Somewhere around treeline, parallel the ascent route hop over the subridge on skier's left. Continue downhill. The north facing trees on the left often hold snow and can aid in descent.





## 19 METHODIST GULCH - 9,800'+

This Centennial peak, the 76th highest in the state, offers plenty of options for the skier. It is named for the town of Buckskin Joe, a mining town down valley, located at the winter road closure on Kite Lake Road. The North Slopes are the easiest to access and the easiest angle, the South Face ramps up the difficulty, and the elusive Northwest Couloir takes the steepness and complexity to an even higher level.

19a - Methodist Gulch	Snake Hunt	
DIFFICULTY: Expert	DISTANCE: 7.8 Miles Roundtrip	VERTICAL: 3,100'
SUNHIT: Sunrise + 3	ASPECT: Northwest	SEASON: Spring
TRAILHEAD: Climax	MAP: Page 310	PHOTO: Page 216-217

This is the line that made me sell my soul. Some late night topo map searching led me to identify Methodist Gulch as a promising zone; I first wandered up on a solo scouting mission in the spring of 2018 to investigate the rock formation that composes the Nautilus. Having confirmed that at least that run was feasible, I continued up the drainage to search for potential ascent options when lo and behold! I rounded a corner and saw this magnificent line. Needless to say, I did not ski Snake Hunt that day. I took a picture and logged the line for future descent. The following year, Eric Doyle and I returned to give it a go.

The geology of the Lost River Range is in beautiful display throughout this tour. The Pass Creek Gorge is one of the finest in the state and Big Mouth Cave is a short jaunt from Pass Creek Pass Road. The limestone walls of Bear Creek compose some of the cleanest rock in the range and the sedimentary layering and subsequent uplift create startlingly vertical (and sometimes overhanging!) couloir walls.

This run is one of the most difficult in the book. At its widest, the line is about 30 feet wide most years. The shallowest pitch is about 40 degrees. The pitch of the crux is in the upper 50s and is only about 200 centimeters wide (just over one ski length). There is no guarantee that the snow conditions will be good. Plan accordingly and be willing to change plans as conditions warrant.



Follow the summer trail on the south side of the creek. At .5 miles, the trail crosses Bear Creek to the north side. As the canyon forks, leave the summer trail and turn left into Methodist Gulch. Choose the skin track appropriately, staying near the bottom of the creek. After about .5 miles, the creek carves a deep gully. If conditions warrant, bypass the terrain trap by climbing up and to the left (south) through the trees around this isolated feature. Continue to follow the creek up canyon. As the trees thin out, Snake Hunt should appear on your left. Get excited! Also, note the condition of snow in the apron. I opt to make a definitive loop in the skin track here, both to confuse the people behind me and to give me a visual point of reference from the top.

Having now seen the line, it's time to get to the top. Head west another .5 miles around two pine groves before turning south and departing the creek bottom. The rock wall to the south tapers slowly into a passable scree field. Ascend the obvious ramp--this is Elk Hunt. As you near the top of the ridge, keep the skin track to the climber's left to avoid any possible rockfall from above. At the top of the Elk Hunt, follow the ridge down and to the east about .1 miles. Bypass the first couloir entrance (Bear Hunt) and identify the giant, isolated fin of rock below. That fin divides Bear Hunt and Snake Hunt. Continue down the ridge. The entrance to Snake Hunt will be the next viable patch of snow. It's game time!

From the top of Snake Hunt, the crux is not visible. The route turns curves just enough to prevent a clean look down the length of the couloir. Two convexities divide the run into roughly three parts. There are isolated pockets on either side of the run that are protected from slough though they can't quite be called safe zones. It is possible to stop just above the pinch on the skier's right and eyeball it before dropping in.

Having wiggled down the Snake, the return to the vehicles simply follows the skin track down canyon. Alternately, make it a full day by skiing Bear Hunt and Elk Hunt to complete the hunter's trifecta.