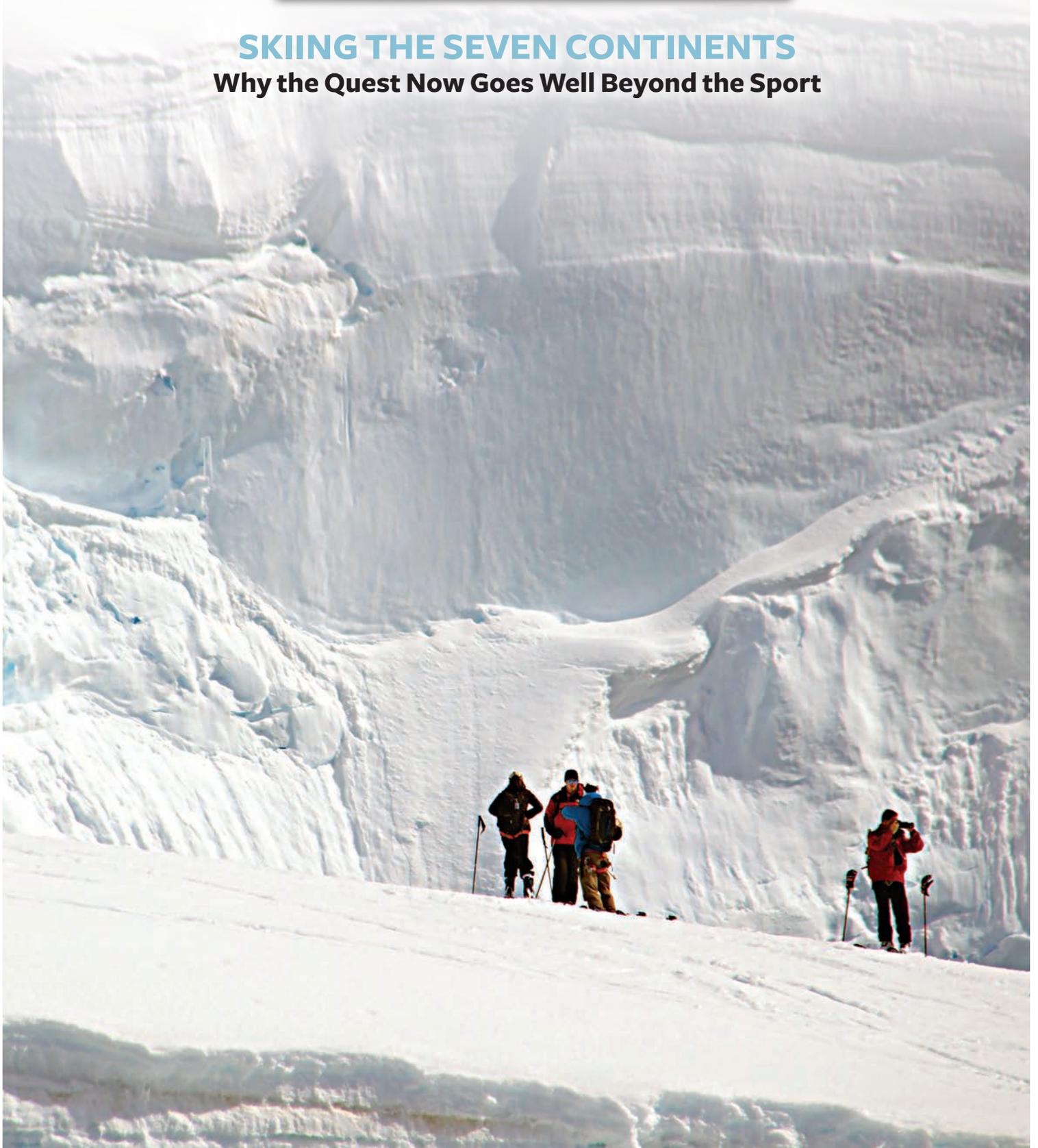


SKIING HISTORY

Journal of the International Skiing History Association

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

SKIING THE SEVEN CONTINENTS
Why the Quest Now Goes Well Beyond the Sport





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ADAM CLARK 



TOM LIPPERT

Letter from the ISHA President

Climate change is a matter of concern to all of us who live to glide on snow. Each of us can support candidates who advocate productive climate legislation, and we can support organizations working to activate young voters in snow country.

To the readers of *Skiing History*:

Charlie Sanders frames his wonderful Seven Continents report in the context of climate change. He points out that skiers worldwide face habitat loss. It's a matter of concern to all of us who live to glide on snow. As historians, we are acutely aware of the problem, because we have seen the retreat of Alpine glaciers over the past century and, especially, over the past decade.

I first saw this for myself in 1983, when, with a couple of friends, I skied the Haute Route from Chamonix to Arolla. At the time, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) reported that the country's glaciers had retreated an average of 50 feet per year for a century, and the process was accelerating. The numbers were so disturbing that I began writing about climate change in 1989, and in 2005 went back to school for a degree in environmental journalism. I entered a second career, promoting renewable energy.

Since 1999, the Swiss glacial retreat rate has doubled. Glaciologists predict that Switzerland will lose two-thirds of its ice by the end of this century — possibly all of it. Skiing is in danger off the glaciers, too. In the United States, the Fourth National Climate Assessment of 2018 reported that terrain below about 7,000 feet will soon get more winter rain than snow, and eventually only rain. Forget snowmaking: It will all wash away. This is already common in New England. Meanwhile, the ski season at higher elevations, in the Rockies and Sierra, has grown shorter by about two weeks, and that change is accelerating.

We're all frustrated that climate deniers in elected office have reversed most pro-

grams to slow carbon emissions, or even plan for a warmer future. If our sport is to have a future, those climate deniers must be exiled from power. Regardless of who sits in the White House, as long as the Senate remains in the hands of climate deniers, no progress can possibly occur. And the Senate will continue to approve judges determined to put corporate interests above the environment.

Skiing is a small community that spends very little on political action. As a mere start, a few years ago, ISHA divested its fossil-fuel stock. Going forward, each of us can support candidates who advocate productive climate legislation. And we can support organizations working to register and activate young voters in snow country. Maine, New Hampshire, Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado and Arizona stand out as snow-country states where a few thousand young snowsport addicts might make a big difference at the polls.

The ad on the facing page asks support for the nonprofit organization Protect Our Winters, founded in 2007 by a group of high-profile snowsport athletes. The group lobbied successfully for statewide climate legislation in Colorado and Nevada. For 2020 one of their goals is to reach up to two million voters with a climate action message. That would represent progress.

Sincerely,

Seth Masia
ISHA president

Skiing the Seven Continents



QUARK EXPEDITIONS

The ultimate voyage of discovery in a rapidly warming world.

BY CHARLES J. SANDERS

When international ski mountaineering icons Dan and John Egan were inducted into the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame a few years ago, it was Dan who wistfully described the global magic carpet ride that skiing had provided for him and his brother. “When I was a kid skiing for Warren Miller,” he said, referencing the late ski film icon who inspired more far-flung snow travel than any person ever has or likely will, “I remember him telling me that if I held onto my skis tightly enough, some day they would turn into an airplane to take me around the world.” He laughed and added, “And I’ll be damned. He was right.”

The notion that skiing can be a ticket, or at least a happy excuse, to visit many of the world’s most dra-

matic and sublime destinations has existed for well over a century and remains a pillar of the sport’s appeal. It’s no exaggeration that among the most dedicated skiers and boarders, the desire to slide *everywhere* is today more pervasive than ever. Inspired by the pioneers who preceded us on alpine journeys across this magnificent blue and white planet, for many the similar pull of adventure has launched decades of global ski travel, whenever time, opportunity and finances have permitted. It has also, along the way, fostered an expanding love for winter adventure, and a more profound respect for the Earth.

Sadly, that joy and wisdom are now joined with the fear that climate change may someday soon bring it all to an end, for ourselves and our children. As a result, the dream of skiing the world *now* has recently intensified into perhaps the most

urgent aspiration among the truly possessed of the global ski community, with its centerpiece the drive to achieve one of the holiest grails of modern mountain sports: ski mountaineering on all seven continents.

It was in pursuit of completing that elusive quest that I found myself, along with my wife and son, clutching the handrails lining our ship’s narrow corridor as we pitched and rocked our way through the world’s most violent body of water—the infamous Drake Passage—separating the southern tip of South America from Antarctica. We were certainly not the only ones, by far, who had made the decision that our lifelong passion to see and ski the most ecstatically beautiful, frozen place on Earth had to be accomplished sooner rather than later. It just felt that way out on the cold, heaving water, hundreds of nautical

Left and cover: Author Sanders and family silhouetted against a massive ice cliff along Wilhelmina Bay, Antarctica.

miles south of Cape Horn on the way to our seventh continental ski destination together.

The original roots of international ski travel trace back to the Victorian Age, when Swiss hoteliers and leisure-class British gentry first discovered in the 1860s that vacationing in an Alpine wonderland could serve as an appealing alternative to England's dreary winters. The idyllic fixation on genuinely global ski adventure, however, did not emerge until the beginning of the 20th century, with inspiring tales of fur-clad explorers sloshing ashore with their sled dogs and seven-foot planks to conquer the polar regions, and intrepid mountaineers lugging their ropes, crampons and skis higher and deeper into the remote, glaciated mountain ranges dotting the rest of the cold world.

From those footsteps emerged the romantic, pre-War travelogues of Ernest Hemingway and Lowell Thomas, both of whom had an abiding love for adventure skiing and an even deeper affection for describing their heroic exploits to the public. Even more influential in captivating the imaginations of early ski voyagers were the visually exquisite mountain films of German director Arnold Fanck and his more casual American counterpart, John Jay.

The releases of those first winter action features to a growing audience of adrenaline junkies in the 1920s and '30s presaged the coming of Warren Miller, Greg Stump, and all of their cinematic disciples as the proselytizers



On October 18, 2006, Kit and Rob DesLauriers and Jimmy Chin arrived at the top of the world, the 29,029-foot summit of Mount Everest. Next step: skiing down. With the descent, including a group rescue of her husband, Kit (inset) became the first person—man or woman—to climb and ski from the highest point on each continent—the fabled Seven Summits.

ers for experiencing the world on skis. And to the growing band of worldwide snow nomads of the Gen-X and Millennial generations, the arrival of adventure gurus Doug Coombs, Chris Davenport, and more recently, Candide Thovex and his *Ski the World* campaign, signaled that it was “game on” when it comes to the goal of skiing every worthwhile patch of snow on the planet.

The fact is, though, that it has only been with recent advances in ski touring equipment, safety techniques, and more efficient air travel that the world has grown small enough to genuinely accommodate the seven-continent ski dream. It is now a reality that *any* dedicated skier or boarder with enough experience, desire and sponsorship (self-funded or otherwise) can slide his or her way around the entire globe. And so, it's no longer just the explorers, the filmmakers, and the superstar free-skiers with a universal ticket to ride. It is potentially all of us.

According to Doug Stoup, the ski mountaineering ecologist responsible for pioneering ski touring in Antarctica, there are now probably several dozen people of varying ages and abilities who have skied or boarded the snows of all seven continents, with many more hoping to complete the quest before climate change renders it impossible. And Stoup, the man with more polar expeditions to his credit than anyone in history, should know. A significant percentage of those who have completed the circuit have done so with his help on one or more of the 40 trips he has organized or led to the Polar North and the Antarctic.

In admitting that skiing the seven continents has unexpectedly grown into a recognizable goal within the sport, with backcountry ski mountaineering in Antarctica as its capstone, Stoup is still careful to clarify that “the kind of people who attempt to ski on all seven continents rarely confuse that goal as being separate from the larger dream of skiing *everywhere* for as long as they can.”

“Look at it this way,” he explained. “Being able to say ‘I’ve done that’ becomes proof of commitment, even a personal rite of passage, in a sport in which accomplishment is sometimes hard to measure. That’s especially meaningful to those who choose ski mountaineering and alpine aesthetics over racing. But ultimately, it has to be viewed as just

“It’s no longer just the explorers, the filmmakers, and the superstar free-skiers with a universal ticket to ride. It is potentially all of us.”



Charlie Sanders, in a prayer garden near the climbers' cemetery below South Base Camp I on the Nepalese approach to Everest, gathering information on climate change and the effect of pollution from nearby Kathmandu and its exploding population.

one more step on the perpetual journey to experience the entire world on skis, to enjoy and celebrate life and adventure to the fullest in the short time we have on this planet."

Global adventurer Jimmy Peterson, author of the seminal book *Skiing Around The World* and perhaps the most widely travelled skier in history, agrees. Like Stoup, he asserts that the dream of skiing the seven continents is a great aspiration, but still nothing more than a handy stop on the road to the next mountain, a way to measure progress toward the endless goal of experiencing everything, everywhere, on skis. "Skiers are dreamers," he wrote. "And your own skier's odyssey only comes to a close when you cease to dream."

"Of course," he added over drinks in a tiny Austrian inn below the Kitzsteinhorn, "it doesn't stop with your seventh continent. If it does," he paraphrased an old Woody Allen joke in toasting the quest with me, "you're doing it wrong."

Within my family, that same philosophy had resonated across generations, reflecting traditions handed down since the 1940s by a wacky group of winter adventurers that included U.S. 10th Mountain Division veterans and friends. True dedica-

tion, those marvelously obsessed role models preached, required experiencing a few iconic mountain routes in pursuit of the dream of skiing if not all, at least some of the best mountains the world has to offer. Just exactly when that goal shifted for Nina, our son Jackson and me into the seven-continent quest is difficult to pinpoint, but it suffices to say that it did, along with the knowledge that all trails would lead to Antarctica.

In Oceania, we had tackled the Tasman Glacier on Mount Cook, which for 25 years I had dreamed about skiing after seeing John Jay's film of Stein Eriksen gliding down through the seracs to a waiting airplane on the snow. And that was exactly how we experienced it on summer trips dedicated to finding endless winter traipsing through the Southern Alps of New Zealand, and later the Snowies of Australia.

Equally spectacular were August trips into the Andes, where the views of Aconcagua from Portillo, Chile, high above Inca Lake and the contraption known as the Roca Jack drag lift, was one of the pinnacles of our South American adventures.

In Asia, we had floated through the trees beneath Hokkaido's Yotei, the powder-buried Japanese volcano, and received Shinto blessings from samurai-clad ski warriors at Shiga, a



WARREN MILLER ENTERTAINMENT

Warren Miller, a pioneer in action sports films, inspired generations of skiers to explore the exotic and the extreme.

bullet-train ride into the mountains west of Tokyo. A subsequent ski trip to the Himalayas of Kashmir, hard on the Pakistani border and a burgeoning war zone, was unsettling but spectacular amid the peaks above Gulmarg. Skiing Africa's remote Atlas Mountains on the behemoths that loom over the Kasbah at Mount Toubkal was part of an extraordinary cultural experience just a few hours beyond the snake charmers and palm trees of Marrakech, Morocco.

In Europe, negotiating the Aiguille du Midi Arete prior to descending the Valley Blanche at Chamonix, and skiing the runs below La Meije through snow squalls at La Grave, had both been sublime. And our dozens of North American ski odysseys were highlighted by the Chugach backcountry in Alaska, with hundreds of square miles of untracked powder and the best pure skiing we have ever experienced.

There were other highlights as well, most of them frequent stops on the "must-do" adventure list of international skiers that are too numerous to mention, but each in their own way memorable. That included skiing the old U.S. ski-troop training runs at Cooper Hill, Colorado, with my dad in celebration of his 80th birthday, surrounded by all of the old, World War II "Boys of Winter"



CHARLES J. SANDERS

In an extraordinary contrast in imagery, palm trees wave in the warm breezes just beyond the walled Kasbah on the approach to Africa's remote snow-capped Atlas Mountains, with the majestic 13,671-foot Mount Toubkal, Morocco, standing guard.

savoring some of their last runs together in the sun.

By 2016, I hoped that we had finally, respectfully, earned our shot at completing the seven-continent ski circuit. And so it was on December 15, a little before 5 am, that we found ourselves alone on the deck of the *Ocean Diamond*, staring out over an endless expanse of the Southern Ocean speckled to the horizon with icebergs. Ahead lay the chance to fulfill the dream. But in Antarctica, more so than anywhere else in the world, there are no guarantees of anything—least of all, success.

Someone, of course, had to have been first. When Oliver “Tom” Hayes III, a three-tour Vietnam combat veteran and lifelong skiing devotee returned stateside in the mid-1970s, he discovered something about international ski history that he found truly extraordinary. Hard as it was to believe, more than twenty-five years after Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay had first conquered Mount Everest, and more than five years after Japanese extreme skier Yuichiro Miura had skied a section of that same sacred mountain before nearly being killed tumbling

down the Lhotse Face (a frightening scene captured in the Oscar-winning 1975 documentary *The Man Who Skied Down Everest*), Hayes deduced that still, no one person had skied the snows of all seven continents.

The principle reason for that strange hole in the world of skiing milestones, Hayes determined, was that while Everest had rightfully earned its notoriety as the world's most dangerous place to establish sporting credentials, even *reaching* the more remote Antarctic was at that time the rarer feat. And it was Antarctica, not the Earth's highest peak on the Nepalese-Tibetan border, that was an indispensable destination in the seven-continent ski tour.

In those days, visitors who did manage to reach the frozen continent were usually not dedicated skiers or mountaineers. Rather, they were mainly scientific adventurers with special permission to be there from a sponsoring government. Most wouldn't in their wildest fantasies have contemplated risking serious injury in a downhill skiing accident with medical help usually several days away, let alone dragging along the equipment necessary to mount such an attempt. As a former U.S.

Naval officer with a background in intelligence, however, Hayes also judged himself as uniquely qualified to overcome those obstacles.

During his time in the service, Hayes' had grown adept at planning global ski travel around his access to free military transportation. In fact, he had managed to hitch enough rides to ski the other six continents. Hayes' new strategy would be to carve himself a place in skiing lore by sneaking a pair of skis with him on one of the American scientific military missions to the South Pole he hoped to finagle his way onto as a civilian advisor. Once there at the U.S. McMurdo Station, he planned on climbing and skiing the most impressive, nearby ridge. If there was trouble, he could at least count on prompt medical attention to go along with his likely arrest and expulsion.

Either way, Hayes felt that it would be worth the risk to be able to claim one of the great, unofficial prizes of the sport, regardless of the modest level of athletic accomplishment it might represent. Knowing the process of catching a lift to the most remote, strictly regulated corner of the planet could take years, Hayes set out in the late 1970s to give it his best shot.

Meanwhile, following Hillary's conquest of Everest, members of the serious mountaineering community had turned their attention toward another historic dream far more challenging than Hayes' goal: the race to become the first human to summit the highest peaks on all seven continents. This parallel effort would have a powerful influence on the seven-continent ski quest, especially as the two pursuits eventually morphed into a single, related crusade.

By the end of the 1970s, several world-class climbers had joined the Seven Summits race, including 10th Mountain vet Bill Hackett and the South Tyrolian master mountaineer Reinhold Messner, who in 1978 became the first person to summit six of the seven: Denali (North America), Elbrus (Europe), Aconcagua (South America), Kilimanjaro (Africa), Everest (Asia), and the mountains he considered to be the highest in the loosely defined region of Oceania: Mount Kosciuszko near Canberra (if one considers only mainland Australia as representing the continent) and the Carstensz Pyramid on Puncak Jaya in New Guinea (if the surrounding South Pacific region is included). While Messner now set his sights on ascending Mount Vinson, and as Tom Hayes simultaneously continued

to plot a less spectacular Antarctic descent on skis, both independently wondered whether their dreams to reach the mountains of the frozen continent would ultimately prove a ridge too far.

It was then that a new force in mountaineering arrived, the likes of which had not been seen since the ill-fated day that famed British mountaineer George Mallory set out to summit Everest in 1924. In a mountaineering world rapidly evolving toward professionalization, it was actually two amateur climbers—far more experienced as skiers than mountaineers—who now strode unself-consciously into the spotlight.

During the summer of 1981, Snowbird resort founder Dick Bass and Hollywood mogul-turned-adventurer Frank Wells had met and joined forces in pursuit of their mutually held and equally outlandish Seven Summit climbing dreams. The idea that these two, self-described “high-altitude trekkers” could beat elite climbers like Messner in the race for the seven summits would ordinarily have been laughable. But with their audacious amateur spirits, bolstered by conspicuously healthy financing, Bass and Wells were a neophyte phenomenon of nature.

Unfortunately, just as death had stalked Mallory on Everest, it came calling on Bass and Wells, too. In the latter case, however, it was their close friend and team member Marty Hoey, one of the finest female ski mountaineers in the world and the head of safety at Snowbird, who died in a fall near Camp IV on their doomed 1982 Everest expedition. Another attempt on Everest the following year ended in near-tragic disappointment for both men, with Wells coughing up blood as the team unsuccessfully strove for the summit. And so, for Bass and Wells, the elusive prize of *Chomolungma* remained unachieved for the time being.

Tom Hayes, in the meantime, was suddenly having better luck on his seven-continent ski quest. While his attempts at convincing the U.S. Navy that he would be a good addition to a scientific

mission on Antarctica had failed, he had also astutely chosen to emulate Bass and Wells by getting in contact with the American-supported Chilean armed forces about procuring guest transportation to Chile's base on the western Antarctic peninsula.

Through his apparent military connections in Santiago, Hayes was able to swing a seat on one of dictator Augusto Pinochet's cargo flights out of Punta Arenas to the Junta's tiny Antarctic Peninsula outpost. Now shamelessly flaunting rather than concealing his skis as he carried them off the plane, he walked away from the transport after it nearly crashed on arrival, jumped onto a Chilean military helicopter that ferried him up to a ridge above Paradise Harbor, and skied down. On December 1, 1984, Tom Hayes finally staked his claim as the first person ever to have skied all seven continents.

“I'm not sure how my dad celebrated,” said his son Tim, “but he was really, really proud of that accomplishment for the rest of his life.” Famed mountaineer Ned Gillette would take another four years to accomplish the same goal, a circumstance that Tom Hayes believed put into perspective the overwhelming odds he had faced and overcome through amateur perseverance—with a little help from his friends.

By the time Tom Hayes had skied his seventh continent, Dick Bass and Frank Wells were back on track, having accomplished successful climbs on every continental summit but Everest.

Frank Wells now had a decision to make. Following his two abortive tries to summit Everest, the last of which had nearly killed him, he determined that it would be irrational to risk his life to try a third time. Bass disappointedly forged ahead without him, facing alone the competitive zeal of Messner and several other aspiring Seven Summit climbers now breathing down his neck.

To Bass, however, the loss of his partner and the rising intensity of the competition were just two more, minor obstacles for him to overcome by sheer force of will. Climbing with



Vietnam veteran Tom Hayes noticed a hole in skiing's record book: No one had skied all seven continents. He accomplished exactly that in December 1984.



Bucket List Worthy: skiing off-piste in Portillo, Chile, high in the Andes and in view of Inca Lake and spectacular Aconcagua—at 22,837 feet, the highest peak outside of Asia.

famed alpinist David Breashears as his new guide, the amateur Bass departed again for Kathmandu in the spring of 1985, and improbably—almost incomprehensibly—became the first person ever to summit the highest peak on all seven continents. He reached the top of Everest on April 30, 1985, some five months after Hayes had completed his seven-continent ski journey. Bass said a prayer for the late Marty Hoey at the pinnacle, descended with Breashears and the Sherpas, and after calling his family and Frank Wells with the good news, headed home to throw himself the biggest mountaintop party the world had ever seen.

The shindig at Snowbird, as cataloged in the narrative of the Bass and Wells adventures, *Seven Summits*, remains one of the legendary après gatherings in ski-mountaineering history. It is still discussed with reverence among those who attended, including the eighty musicians of the Utah Symphony, the additional 150 members of the choir Bass insisted upon hiring, and hundreds of invited guests and Snowbird employees. “I wanted to throw a party that would make Nebuchadnezzar envious,” he admitted, with a wink to his defeated colleague, Reinhold Messner, who completed his own Seven Summits quest a few months later and established one of the greatest mountaineering careers in history.

Now that the Seven Summits had been successfully climbed by an individual mountaineer, and the seven continents skied (albeit less spectacularly) by a single ski adventurer, a new, ultimate, seven-continent ski mountaineering dream slowly but inevitably began to take shape.

Since his ski descent from Antarctica’s Mount Vinson with Bass and Wells in 1983, Yuichiro Miura had been contemplating climbing up and skiing down from all seven continental *summits*. His problems, however, were his advancing age, and the fact that his run and subsequent tumble down Everest had commenced well below the crest. Even though he would conquer *Chomolungma* another three times (the last climb at age 80), he came to the realization that he simply no longer had the necessary physical and emotional stamina to survive a ski descent from the top.

Miura himself had been preceded in his contemplation of skiing the Seven Summits by one of the most curious characters ever to streak across the ski mountaineering landscape. Friedrich “Fritz” Stammerger arrived in Aspen from Munich in the early 1960s looking every bit the part of the mythic, Alpine-god he fashioned himself to be. After climbing and skiing the sixth highest peak in the world (Cho Oyo) in 1964—and not so incidentally enduring accusa-



CHARLES J. SANDERS

Nina Ossoff Sanders learns firsthand why European skiers have been visiting Gulmarg, Kashmir, in the western Himalayas, since the Brits established a ski club there in 1927.

tions that he had abandoned two seriously ill climbing mates at high camp in Nepal to do so—Stammerger busied himself climbing and skiing the highest fourteeners in Colorado.

Stammerger’s incredibly dangerous and occasionally reckless exploits captured the attention of Aspen newspaper editor and former 10th Mountain Division ski trooper, Bil Dunaway, who had helped pioneer extreme skiing by shredding the North Face of Mont Blanc in 1953. The attention that Dunaway’s publications afforded Stammerger helped overcome the stain on his reputation caused by the Cho Oyo incident, and enable his marriage to Playboy centerfold Janice Pennington.

As Stammerger’s heart had always resided in the Himalayas, he next chose to attempt a ski descent of one of the world’s most difficult peaks, Tirich Mir, on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Was he building up to skiing Everest from its summit? No one can be sure, since he disappeared into the Hindu Kush in 1975 never to be heard from again.

Bil Dunaway led the search for Stammerger’s body, which was never recovered. Some of his personal effects, however, were discovered near the base of the mountain, leading to wild speculation led by his widow that her husband had been far more than a simple ski mountaineer. Those allegations included



CHARLES J. SANDERS



CHARLES J. SANDERS

New Zealand's Tasman Glacier on South Island presents several unique challenges to skiing, such as entering (left) and exiting ice caves on the way to the snow fields. Skier: Jackson Sanders.

that he had also been an intelligence asset of the CIA, the KGB, or both. There is no proof of any of this, other than the certainty that the career of an enormously gifted (even if injudicious) ski mountaineer had been snuffed out well short of its apex.

As a result, by 2005, two decades had passed between the time that Dick Bass stood on the roof of the world and the day that one of the world's greatest extreme skiers arrived at his Snowbird resort and won her second consecutive World Freeskiing Championship. In all that time, though ski mountaineer Davorin "Davo" Karničar of Slovenia had surpassed Miura in skiing from the peak of Everest in 2000, still no one had succeeded in skiing the Seven Summits. And once again, as it seemed with all things involving Dick Bass, strange and extraordinary things followed.

That evening, Kit DesLauriers and her husband (world-class skier and mountaineer Rob DesLauriers) were enjoying dinner in Snowbird's Aerie restaurant in celebration of her back-to-back championships, when Bass unexpectedly joined them. As was his pleasure, he waxed poetically about the philosophical mindset of the climbers he had met on his seven summits odyssey, and proceeded to note how he saw those same traits in Kit and her approach to skiing.

The next morning, a signed copy of *Seven Summits* was delivered to the couple at their hotel. There was no accompanying note to Kit saying "go

for it," but according to her, there may as well have been.

"I didn't see Dick again before we left," Kit recalled, but after that, "Seven Summits was always on my hotel bedside...By the time I finished the book, the idea was speaking to something primal in me." And so after talking it over with Rob (who agreed to participate in some of the climbs and descents with her), Kit, indeed, decided to go for it. She would attempt to climb up and ski down from the Seven Summits, and become the first person, not just the first woman, to do so.

Over the next 18 months, Kit made the impossible seem commonplace. She became the first woman to climb and ski the summits of Vinson and Aconcagua. She likewise skied from the summits of Elbrus, Kosciuszko and Kilimanjaro. Since DesLauriers had already climbed and skied Denali from its summit in 2004 (making her the first woman to do so), that left only one hill in Asia to climb and ski. It was, of course, the same dragon that Bass had also of necessity slayed last: Everest.

In late August of 2006, the DesLaurierses headed with their team to Nepal. They approached the epic challenge as confidently as possible, despite the unavoidable visions of Miura crashing down the Lhotse Face to within two hundred meters of certain death in the *bergschrumd* at its base. Their intense preparation for Everest, in fact, included studying the film of Miura's near-fatal de-

bacle (shot during an expedition that resulted in the deaths of six other climbers), trying to discern how best to handle the deadliest of the mountain's sections—especially the infamous, nearly-vertical Hillary Step just below the summit that Miura himself had not skied.

While all of this was transpiring, Davorin Karničar was quietly continuing his own Seven Summits ski mission. Having previously pioneered an "uninterrupted route" from the top of Everest (in the process nearly careening to his death circumventing the Hillary Step and completing his five-hour descent of the Lhotse face by somehow skirting the Khumbu icefall to its runoff), Karničar, too, had just one ski mountain left to conquer. Like Messner before him in the Seven Summits race, his last challenge would be the pinnacle of Antarctica.

Thus, even as Kit, Rob and teammate Jimmy Chin planned their own ski route down Everest, Karničar was desperately trying to reach Mount Vinson to become the first human to complete the Seven Summits ski circuit. This reality added even more tension to the DesLauriers expedition.

Prior to commencing their climb with the traditional Buddhist religious ceremonies at the foot of the Khumbu Glacier, the DesLauriers team arranged for an audience with one of the holiest leaders in the region, Tibet's Lama Geshe. At the place he designated as "the junction of heaven and Earth," Lama Geshe blessed Kit's efforts to complete the skiing of the seven summits. And then he sent the team off on what he prayed would be a safe and successful journey, "for the good of themselves and for others."

"I contemplated what he said," she wrote in her autobiography *Higher Love*. "For my entire life, I'd been called to seek the highest places....But now I also understood that being in those places—the junction between earth and sky—opened my heart to a heightened kind of love....I realized that maybe the greatest limitation people experience is thinking they can't achieve something they want to achieve. By challenging myself here,

perhaps I could inspire others to challenge their perceived limitations.”

The torturous climb up Everest took more than a month. On October 18, 2006, the DesLauriers team found themselves at the top of the world. That was the “easy” part.

After a brief, celebratory moment on the summit with Rob, Kit DesLauriers popped into her skis and began the series of turns that would take her down from 29,029 feet. The journey did not go as smoothly as hoped, however. She arrived on skis at the top of the Hillary Step a few hundred feet below the summit, sent Rob ahead on roped ski belay as planned, and a short time later found him dangling unconscious due to a lack of oxygen over the exposed edge of what amounted to an 8,000-foot drop.

A harrowing death-zone rescue followed, involving Kit rallying the Sherpas to assist Rob while she down-climbed to get more bottled oxygen, nearly passed out several times on the way, and then climbed back up again to help assist in the rescue. After Rob’s oxygenated recovery, the full team was finally able to reunite on foot at Camp IV, still above 26,000 feet. There they slept for several hours before Kit, Rob and Chin successfully skied a full mile down the Lohse Face without incident and proceeded briefly into the Khumbu icefall, accomplishing as Karničar had perhaps the most challenging and dangerous run on Earth.

Upon their arrival at Base Camp, a disappointed Kit announced that in her opinion she had not truly completed an *uninterrupted* ski descent. With few exceptions, the world demurred, adopting the widely accepted view of Dick Bass that judging fulfillment of spectacular but amorphous endeavors such as these is simply not an exact science. Having climbed up and descended on skis from the summit of Everest, down-climbed a belay section in order to save a life, and continued down from Camp IV through the most difficult, skiable portions of the route, Kit DesLauriers has generally been recognized as the first person—man or woman—ever to climb and descend



CHARLES J. SANDERS

The fluke of a Humpback whale confirms why sailors named this magnificent spot in Antarctica “Paradise Harbor” early in the 20th Century.

on skis from the Seven Summits.

That fact, of course, does not diminish the extraordinary accomplishments of Davo Karničar, who less than one month later on November 11, 2006, completed his climb and ski descent of Mount Vinson and his own Seven Summits ski circuit. Though apparently urged to do so by many of his fellow Slovenians, Karničar rightfully and graciously refused to dispute Kit DesLauriers title as the first person to ski the Seven Summits, despite the harrowing interruptions she had encountered.

On September 16, 2019, with the sad irony of a Shakespearean tragedy, the man who had survived dozens of confrontations with death in some of the world’s most inhospitable environments, was pruning a tree in his backyard when it fell and killed him. It goes without saying that regardless of this premature ending to his remarkable life, no discussion of the greatest ski mountaineers in history is complete without devout reference to the magnificent alpinist and extreme skier Davo Karničar.

With two days of air travel and another 48 hours of crossing the Drake Passage behind us, our ship had finally slipped into Antarctica’s Wilhelmina Bay as we slept through the brief spring night in 2016. Now up on

deck and staring at the outlines of monstrous, glaciated peaks that were becoming visible, Jackson, Nina and I for the first time wondered aloud what exactly we were doing there with our skis. It simply didn’t look possible. And peering through the gloom, it certainly didn’t appear sane, simply for the sake of joining a hypothetical global ski club.

That doubt, however, instantly evaporated as the dawn revealed what had to be one of the most spectacular sights in the universe.

Sunshine suddenly illuminated a nearly cloudless sky, and lit up the glaciated harbor as if it glowed from within. I had never seen ocean water reflect that deep a shade of blue before, or viewed mountains so caked in snow, made even more spectacular by randomly spaced veins of ancient cobalt and azure ice standing out against the brilliant white.

Leopard seals lolled on ice bergs as flocks of Chinstrap and Gentoo penguins took turns using smaller floes as fishing platforms. Humpback whale mothers and their calves spouted in the distance, thrusting a fluke into the air as they rolled and dove for krill. For skiers and naturalists both, this was a 360-degree view of heaven.

Two hours later, our Zodiac was being lowered from steel arms protruding from the ship four decks



A stratovolcano located in Shikotsu-Toya National Park, Hokkaido, Japan, Mount Yotei is famous for being located in the powder-blessed region that is home to several of Japan's most popular ski resorts. Skier: Jackson Sanders.

above, and splashing into the icy water. In full arctic winter gear, and carrying the usual inventory of avalanche probes, shovels, beacons, ropes, radios, crampons, skins and skis, we descended with our guide Andrew Eisenstark for the trip to the landing zone. The islands and mainland of Antarctica are accessible by water only at the rare points where glaciers and land slope gently into the sea. Most of the steeply cliffed shoreline sits five to ten stories above the water.

After trudging our way ashore and performing the standard gear checks, we fixed climbing skins to our skis, and roped up. The paramount danger of skiing in Antarctica is generally not avalanches, but rather falling into one of the many, endlessly deep crevasses that open and close in the flowing glaciers. Forcing an intense smile, Nina followed Andrew carefully up the ridgeline, one foot in front of the other, one glide at a time. Jackson and I headed up behind them. We buzzed with nervous energy, but the *good* kind that simultaneously makes you happy, and hopefully keeps you alive.

As it turned out, it was a thankfully uneventful 45-minute climb up to our vantage point a thousand feet above Foyen Harbor. At the ridge top, Antarctica once again revealed what had

to be one of the most astonishing views in the world, a translucent blue, black and white masterpiece of water, rock and hundreds of feet of layered snow and ice glistening in the sun. After posing with our penguin companions, we unroped, peeled off our climbing skins, and with some deep breaths swooped down through the corn. Descending through the exquisite scenery to the water on the precise route we had climbed (now reasonably certain of its stability), Jackson came to a graceful stop next to Andrew, and both joyously raised their poles above their heads.

"You did it!" Andrew shouted. "Seven continents! All before you can buy your own beer!" At 19, Jackson had joined Tom Hayes' son, Tim, as one of the two youngest males to accomplish the seven-continent ski quest, an obscure, unverifiable fact about which he seemed to care nothing at all. "It's not about that," he said, flashing the sarcastic grin he saved uniquely for his parents, before repeating the mantra. "It's about doing it right."

There were, naturally, other Antarctic ski descents under far less enticing conditions. At Waterboat Point in Paradise Harbor, in the kind of deteriorating overcast that Antarctica is really famous for, we aborted a mainland climb after unanimously



SNOWBIRD RESORT

Through grit and dogged determination, Snowbird Resort founder—and amateur mountaineer—Dick Bass improbably became the first person to summit the highest peak on all seven continents.

noting the changing sponginess of the snow beneath us. Skiing slowly back down over potentially crumbling snow bridges to the zodiac pick-up area, situated across a fifty-foot-wide sea channel from the empty Gonzales Videla Chilean research base where Tom Hayes had completed his record-setting journey, we discovered that fragmented pack ice had choked off the landing site.

One gets awfully cold, awfully fast, waiting to see if it will be necessary to make a swim through icy waters to reach a likely unheated source of shelter for the night. After two hours of nervous small-talk, the zodiac (with Andrew's radio guidance) was finally able to pick its way through the debris to give us a lift back to the ship. That night, we warmly toasted luck, family, friends, and the spirit of *gemütlichkeit*. The next morning, the Ocean Diamond turned north through the Drake Passage once again, toward home and deeper reflection.

It's never been easy to explain to those who do not partake in winter mountain sports why the experience of cold powder snow and sunshine is so deeply tied to the spiritual well-being of those who do. The addictive aesthetics of skiing, the euphoric feeling of flight, of being totally immersed in sublimely beauti-



CHARLES J. SANDERS



CHARLES J. SANDERS

Left: The famed gondola of La Grave, France—perhaps the most extreme ski resort on the globe—offers a bird’s-eye view of Le Meije, in the French Alps. Above: If anyone ever has a doubt about the spirit and toughness of the U.S. 10th Mountain Division’s members, they’ll let you know otherwise.

ful—even mystical—winter mountain landscapes, are all life-affirming gifts impossible to describe to those who have not experienced them.

Even among those who do grasp that enchantment, trying to define the motivations for wanting to engage in pursuits as quirky as attempting to ski in every exotic and sometimes dangerous locale across the world and on every continent can be daunting. “Why not just enjoy the ride without keeping count?” is a frequent rejoinder by knowledgeable skeptics, many of them purists suspicious of tainted motives.

That question is poignant for mere mortals like us, whose efforts take place far below the heights achieved by the Stoups, Miuras, DesLaurierses and Karničars of the world. Their professional achievements represent the pushing of humanity’s envelopes. We, on the other hand, need to search significantly deeper to discover the motivations for our more humble undertakings, a pursuit to which I found myself irresistibly drawn upon our return.

To complete the journey successfully, I determined I had to at least try to answer that question. Why the craving for the seven continents, rather than simply focusing on the pure joy of the skiing experience?

British mountaineering legend George Mallory’s famous quip “because it’s there,” theorizing on what

he believed to be the self-evident reason for experiencing the world’s highest peaks, was just too glib to serve as an adequate explanation for non-professionals following in footsteps rather than breaking trail. Nor did the somewhat more romantic musings of the great Dartmouth ski coach Otto Schniebs suffice, who tried in the 1930s to frame his love affair with skiing in the simplest possible terms by explaining, “this is not just a sport, it’s a way of life.”

That ethos of snowy, sunshine-on-my-shoulders enlightenment is no doubt an important aspect of the seven-continent ski quest for all who attempt it. Nevertheless, it seems an over-simplification to suggest that the expenditure of energies necessary to accomplish so eccentric a goal can be explained away as merely the by-product of a life-long passion (whether based in spirituality, hedonism or both) for a life on snow. There had to be more to it than simply amassing a collection of skiing experiences to tick-off on an imaginary “way-of-life” checklist.

And so, I turned once again to Warren Miller for clues as to just what that *more* might be. In one of his film narrations, the ancient manner of global ski travel observed that the search for extraordinary experience also lies at the heart of skiing’s draw. “Adventure,” as he put it, “is the invitation for common people

to become uncommon.” And living an uncommon life is a notion that a great many dedicated skiers hold dear. It signifies not only the drive to achieve a higher level of personal joy and endorphin-fueled satisfaction, but also the search for distinction in the eyes of peers with similar spirits.

By completing the seven-continent quest, it is certainly true I had hoped to achieve a definable accomplishment that would indelibly mark our family not as elite, but rather as simply belonging to the global tribe of skiers of the *uncommon* variety. Achieving that badge of belonging is an additional, important source of validation for all who treasure being even a small part of the unique band of international skiers and boarders perpetually moving through Schniebs’ special way of life together.

All of those revelations got me closer to the center. Still, somehow, it did not yet feel like the whole story. It took the words of one more master ski mountaineer to drive home the final, perhaps most important, point.

In his Forward to Kit DesLauriers’ book *Higher Love*, renowned alpinist Conrad Anker reflected on the fact that in a world growing perpetually smaller through technology, the question of what still qualifies as “uncommon experience” is today a far more complicated inquiry than it was in Warren Miller’s time. Addressing the reality of modern

existence within the global GPS bubble, Anker posed the question of whether, “in our overcrowded and overtaxed world, with pretty much every geographical feature mapped, named and assessed for value,” does it still remain even *possible* to find the elements of exploration and adventure necessary for a genuinely transcendent ski experience?

He concluded that the answer to that conundrum, of locating and fulfilling the kind of uncommon dreams that signify truly meaningful triumphs, is as elementary as it is long-standing. “We simply need,” he explained, “to locate the blank spots on our own maps, and explore them,” too.

Anker’s epiphany was that the search for personal meaning has always been an essential element underlying these quixotic journeys, even the ones undertaken with precision by world-class athletes and explorers. As Kit DesLauriers herself defined it, perhaps the most important lesson of her accomplishments was the realization that her skills and love of ski mountaineering had not been the sole keys to her success. Only when they were joined together with her will to give something important back to the world had she been motivated to achieve the ultimate goal of *higher love*, the kind that contributes to the well-being of others.

In taking the lead of these legends, and attending to the blank spot on my own map, I realized after long reflection the simple aspect that I had sorely overlooked: *gratitude*. Not in experiencing the thankfulness that was always present over fulfillment of our skiing milestones as they progressed, but rather in committing to better and more consistent ways of expressing that appreciation—in the words of the Tibetan Lama—for *the good of ourselves and others*.

Yes, it is true that there is great irony in the fact that the carbon footprint of global travel is more substantial than we would prefer. Though commercial aviation currently accounts for a small 2.4 percent of global emissions, the number

is rising at an alarming rate, and that remains troubling no matter how meticulously we try otherwise to limit our fossil-fuel consumption. Still, there must be those who will bear personal witness, and in order to do so effectively, visit those places where conservation efforts are most urgently needed and speak out concerning how best to protect them for future generations. That is precisely what many international skiers are now doing, through their participation and leadership in groups ranging from the Sierra Club and the Outdoor Business Climate Partnership to the Explorers Club and Protect Our Winters (POW).

It is my hope that by having witnessed first-hand the rivers of meltwater now coursing through New Zealand’s South Island glaciers, the rapidly melting ice of the Alps, the polar regions, and even the Himalayas, and the frequent droughts and freeze-thaw cycles plaguing so many regions with formerly stable and reliable snowpacks, I am now more credibly positioned to work toward protecting the disappearing winter world. Reducing the ecological horrors that human-induced climate change is already producing will not be easy, but we must take action immediately—especially in the areas of education and legislation.

None of us, as Jimmy Petterson suggests, should ever stop dreaming about our next ski adventures. But in doing so, we must also commit ourselves to the responsibility of working harder, longer and more effectively to ensure that our great grandchildren—and all the spiritual descendants of our proud tribe of global skiers and boarders—will have the same opportunities to experience the joy and wonders that we were granted, long into the future. In the end, that and that alone will be the real measure of whether or not we have truly “done it right.” ❄️

Charlie Sanders is a board member of the International Skiing History Association and the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame, and serves on the advisory board of Protect Our Winters. He also is a member of the 10th Mountain Division Descendants Association, an elected member of the Explorers Club, author of the award-winning book “Boys of Winter: Life and Death in the U.S. Ski Troops During the Second World War,” and a contributor to “Passion for Skiing,” the history of Dartmouth College snow sports.

This article is dedicated to the late John Fry, who spent the better part of 90 years skiing the world, and enriching our lives and our dreams by writing about it.



ICE AXE EXPEDITIONS

Jackson, Charlie and Nina Ossoff Sanders in Foyen Harbor, Antarctica, the ultimate destination in their successful Seven Continents ski quest.

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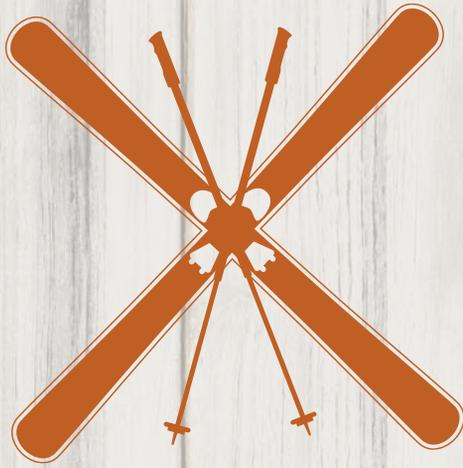
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