From the Top

By Witold Kosmala
PSIA-E Alpine, Level III
K2 Ambassador

I hope your snowsports journey is going well for you this season. It’s all about the journey, isn’t it? We never reach its end. Yes, we can get a medal, pass a certification exam, or reach some temporary destination, but ultimately it is all part of a life’s journey which does not stop. When our point of view is like that, we do not let obstacles get us off track. We know that no journey has smooth road, but we hope that it is smooth enough. I hope you enjoy your journey, and I hope that your journey does not make others around you to stumble.

This month Peak Performance is beginning its 5th year. Wow, where has the time gone? Graciously, Gordon Carr has created an Index of all published issues from years 2009 – 2012, which is included in this publication. As you will realize, there are lots of topics covered, with lots of different ideas. I strongly encourage you to look up these publications and reread those great articles. Journey on to my web page that can be found at

www.mathsci.appstate.edu/~wak/

and look up all the previous issues of Peak Performance that are posted on the bottom of the page. They can easily be downloaded. Also, please, don’t hesitate to write me at

Kosmalaw@bellsouth.net.

Remember that our intentions for Peak Performance are to promote the snow sports to the best of our abilities, so your ideas are most welcome!

Don’t forget the Valentine’s Day on Thursday, February 14. A perfect gift for your sweetheart is a trip to the slopes. You can even pull out a small box of chocolates on the lift to make the day that much more special. (Don’t let them melt in your pocket!)
Main Course

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By Gordon Carr
PSIA-E Alpine, Level II

All editions available at www.mathsci.appstate.edu/~wak.

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Warren Miller Shoot 2009 – Northern China

By Chris Anthony

5:47 PM “BACK IN BEIJING” 5 Star Hotel Room  Feb 16, 2009

Aahhh….this feels so good!

Have I really become this high maintenance? So completely spoiled with modern conveniences that I can’t even go 10 days without a hot shower or a western style toilet to sit down on? Perhaps I’m thinking too much? No, I’m not. I really did miss both these items this past week and I’m stoked to be standing in a warm shower with water running over my head and down my back instead of shivering in the woods squatting next to a tree trying to do my business while holding off the frostbite.

From the glass-walled shower of the bathroom in this five star hotel room I finally realize I can relax. Everything from the shiny toilet to the marble sink and the Jacuzzi tub is a luxury. Even the 52” flat screen TV hanging on the wall pumping surround-sound into the shower with me is much appreciated. All of this is so easy to take for granted until it is taken away for a while.

I’m back in Beijing, back to civilization, but still a long way from home and with a novel of a story spinning around in my head. I’m also a world away from where I was a few hours ago.

It’s really hard to believe what we just accomplished or that I was blessed enough to be part of it. In a very short period of time we had just shot one of the most exotic and difficult Warren Miller segments to date. Had I realized how tough this trip was going to be, I might have lost more sleep before I was on the first flight out of Denver.

Over the last twenty years I have battled difficult snow conditions, altitude sickness, injury, harsh environments and crazy travel conditions as well as made life-changing choices, all to be part of the annual Warren Miller film. But this latest expedition was the most difficult test I have been part of yet, mainly due to the remoteness, the difficulty of quick rescue and the extremely cold temperatures.

On previous film shoots I always felt secure. If something should go wrong, we had an “out” or at minimum, a base location in which to find comfort. Not this particular shoot. We were far removed from any quick “out” – raising the stakes a bit for every aggressive turn, jump or exposed line I might be skiing for the camera.

The assignment: to locate an almost mythical place where archeologists feel skiing might actually have begun. The place: Northwestern China in the Altay Mountains where rock drawings dating back 3000 plus years have been found of men skiing.

The idea of documenting this journey for the Warren Miller film “Dynasty” started when director / cinematographer Chris Patterson heard about rock drawings in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region near the Altay Mountains of China and Mongolia. The total region covers over 1,600,000 square kilometers (617,763 square miles) and is one-sixth of China’s total territory, making it China’s largest province. Xinjiang borders Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. With a population of over 19 million, Xinjiang is home to 47 ethnic groups including the Uygur, the major ethnic group in Xinjiang. Urumqi is the capital of this region and one of the cities we would be passing through to get to our final destination in the northern part of the Xinjiang Region boarding Kazakhstan. This was our target destination. En-route we would experience numerous dialects of Mongol, Kazak, Uygur and Chinese.

The rock drawings indicated that people were on skis in this region dating back 3000 plus years. They used skis as a necessity to everyday winter life for hunting, gathering and recreation through the snow. This rivals records found in Norway that indicate skiing originated there. The jury is still out over who can take claim.

Cinematographer Chris Patterson, known for his intensity to tackle difficult film projects, jumped all over this.
While doing his research he came across evidence of a small group of Mongolian families still living off the land in the region, much as westerners did some 200 years ago in North America. More intriguing, they build their own skis from wood and utilize leather for bindings and horsehair as skins permanently bound to the base. This allows them to use the skis like snowshoes, walking uphill before sliding back down.

5:55 PM “BACK IN BEIJING”  5 Star Hotel Room Feb 16, 2009

… I stepped out of the shower, wrapped myself in a thick oversized towel, brushed my teeth, shaved and then laid down on the bed in my luxury Beijing hotel room and stared at the ceiling. I closed my eyes and reflected back over the last couple of weeks…

THREE WEEKS PRIOR – COLORADO

…When it comes to getting the phone call from Warren Miller Entertainment, I light up like a little kid in a candy store. My heart rate goes up, I can’t focus and I pretty much drop everything else. The timing of the phone calls is pretty amazing as well. They are usually only a few days before a project is supposed to start. Oh sure, I might have heard rumors, but no way can you take it seriously until you are actually on your way to the airport or, better yet, on the flight. Anything can happen between now and then…as was the case in this trip.

I left Vail three days after the original itinerary had me leaving. Actually I was a little surprised to be headed to the airport at all. I was half believing that the project had been killed. Reason: the Chinese did not approve our visas. Holding our breath we submitted again for a second opportunity at approval.

Considering I was in China a year prior as a guest of a small ski area outside Beijing, I was fairly certain that I would eventually be approved but what about the rest of the crew? I held on, hoping for the last minute scramble to the airport.

A few days later piles of gear were scattered throughout my apartment. As I was laying it all out, I tried to remember what I had done right or, more importantly, wrong during past expedition type film trips. I reflected on two particularly cold trips. One was Mt. Cotopaxi in Ecuador where not only did I underestimate the cold and bring the wrong sleeping bag but I also became very sick. I can still remember the pain I was in when I made it to the summit. Hiking that volcano in a pair of brand new race stock ski boots was not a brilliant idea either. The other, Mt. Donovan in Iran, was almost as difficult. There extreme cold, altitude, fatigue and illness almost destroyed the entire film shoot. Adrenaline and pure guts saved it. But I can remember as clear as day the cold, the fatigue and the suffering that took place on that mountain.

I was about to give up hope of this film shoot happening and was starting to make other plans when the phone rang and an e-mail came in. Our visas were approved and in minutes I was stuffing all the gear I had laid throughout the apartment into a waterproof duffel bag and a ski bag. I jumped in the car and headed to Denver for a 3:00am wake up call and a 6:00am flight. The time was 6pm, February 4th, 2009.

Our team consisted of up-and-coming producer Colin Withrell, new school park and pipe specialist Canadian Austin Ross, the master Chris Patterson and still photographer Canadian Ilia Herb. Ilia and Austin were flying from Canada, Patterson Montana, and Colin and I out of Denver.

Colin was going to meet me at 4:00am with my passport complete with visa in hand at the airport. But for a moment at 4:00am, Colin forgot where he had put our passports. He tried to hide this incident from me but it was obvious that he was in a panic and looking for something. I just sat back and watched the newbie literally start to have a heart attack while dissecting his bags looking for our documents. At this point I figured it was either meant to be or not. Interjecting would just further freak him and not really fix anything. At 4:05am he found them and the color came back to his face and my concern disappeared.

Denver to San Francisco was the first leg of the flight at two and half hours. In San Fran I spent the 3-hour layover making some last minute phone calls and sending a few more emails before dropping off the grid. The San Fran / Beijing flight is eleven hours. I lucked out with an upgrade. Since I do not sleep, I watched five movies. We landed in Beijing and were picked up by a friend that helped us move to the Crown Plaza Hotel. This
was a very nice introduction to China with its fancy vogue rooms, flat screen TVs and modern bathrooms. Here we would meet up with Austin and Ilia who I would be meeting for the first time. Patterson would arrive in the middle of the night. It was 6:00pm and we put in for a 5:00am wake up call in a totally different time zone. I was already exhausted and all I had done so far was sit on airplanes. I fell asleep two hours before the wake up call and then scrambled to take what would be my last shower. We all met outside the hotel in the brisk air at 6:30am.

I did not know much about where we were going. I was just happy to be part of the team. I do this with a lot of trips when I’m not the pilot. This way I have no built in expectations. It is going to be what it’s going to be and I just go with the flow. But I have to admit that when I learned our next flight was four hours, I was a little surprised. The scale of travel started to set in. I thought we were basically there. Apparently not.

We flew over the Gobi Desert to Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region in northwestern China. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xinjiang) When we landed a guide named Ali greeted us and took us to lunch where he explained the region a bit. The appearance and culture of people was different than in Beijing. It felt like we were closer to Mongolia and Kazakhstan, which in fact, we were. It was brutally cold outside. When I asked Ali if he was going to join us for the rest of the trip he said, “No way! It’s too cold where you’re going.” All of us looked at one another, already shivering, thinking, “Oh shit.”

Our next flight would take us an hour further north to the city of Altay. Despite the fact this would be our shortest leg of the trip, it would also be one of the most difficult. First security was incredibly strict at this airport and they went through all our gear with a fine-tooth comb. Second, only two flights a week leave to our next destination and of those flights, none were large enough planes to fit our ski bags.

The flight was leaving in a matter of minutes and we could not get on because we had too much gear. The language barrier made matters worse. This plane was going to leave and the next one going where we needed to go wasn’t until the next week. Massive decisions had to be made in a split second of time. Miraculously, Ali was able to recruit a van large enough to carry our skis north. So despite the fact he did not want to go further north into the cold, he volunteered to drive our gear 12 hours overnight and meet us the next morning in the small town of Burgin. The film shoot was saved again. We scrambled to the plane.

Landing at night in Altay was like landing on a polar icecap. It was brutally cold, desolate and dark. The thermometer in the airport showed –20C and dropping. We quickly met our next guide who would be with us for the remainder of our journey. His name was Akbar but Patterson quickly nicknamed him “Snackbar”.

Akbar spoke enough languages and dialects to get us through the rest of the puzzle. He spoke Chinese, Kazak, a little Mongol, English, Mandarin and his native tongue of Uyghur. He was a character you definitely needed in your corner for this type of adventure. He did not take crap from anyone and made things happen by arguing a lot. Or at least it sounded like he was arguing with almost everyone.

With Akbar came Abdushkur the cook and one of the kindest people I have ever met but could not speak with. He would ultimately make the most amazing meals from two pots, a pan and any small stone fire oven we came across.

Another night went by quickly in the bitterly cold city of Altay. As we rolled in from the airport the locals were celebrating their winter festival. The team just wanted to lay their heads down for a moment but curiosity had us wandering the city streets among the lights and ice sculptures in the –25C temperatures. The setting was beautiful and the locals handled the cold as if they were at the beach.

Between sleep deprivation and a lack of understanding what time or day it was, the entire period in the city of Altay is a blur to me. I just remember being woken up before daybreak and being stuff back into a cold, cramped bus for the three hour ride to the village of Chung-Kar where we would be introduced to our next mode of transportation. Along the way I barely remember stopping in the smaller town of Burgin at 5:30am and intercepting Ali who had driven our equipment through horrible weather to meet up with us. After dropping it off with us, he quickly got the hell out of there. I think we picked up something to eat as well but with my Ambien-induced coma in full swing...it’s hard to say.

A couple of hours of driving across vacant, open plains later, the bus pulled into the village of Chung-Kar and up
to the doorstep of the small adobe home of Dunai Aga, the Kazak elder with facial lines of a life well lived. He greeted us with a smile and bear hugs that could warm even the coldest of environments, including this one. It was instantly apparent that Dunai must be the toughest and happiest man on the planet. His wife, daughter and a son accompanied him. The women came out bearing food and a hot goat milk tea. The air outside the bus was bitterly cold and the hot mug I was handed by the wife burned my palms. I sucked up the pain and wondered if the wife was fazed at all by the cold air or the scalding mug she handed me.

The lines in their faces and toughness of their hands made me feel frail by comparison. Looking around it was clear to me once again how spoiled I was being born in a country with every amenity at my fingertips. One of them being a bathroom, which I motioned to Dunai I could use. He was happy to oblige and walked me past the house, through the livestock and past a gate where the pigs hung out to a hole in the ground. After this experience I quickly scrambled back to the house where a spread of food was laid out for us like none I had seen before. Nuts, berries, bread, meats, greens, noodles, soups... . How the women of the house had put this spread together this early in the morning and in this cold environment impressed the hell out of me.

The family used hand gestures to gap the language barrier and ushered us to take a seat around the decorated table in the middle of a room. It was clear the room obviously doubles as a living room and bedroom during non-meal times. Colorful carpets insulated the surrounding walls and hand woven bright colored blankets lined the bed we sat upon. Large pillows trimmed the bed with more folded blankets accompanying them. A wood-burning stove acted as the only source of heat besides what came from the oven. Everything was immaculate. Even the car battery that worked as the power source for the lights fit in the make up of this room comfortably.

Our Kazak hosts were more than gracious. They wanted us to feel at home and to load our bellies with fuel. Looking back, had I known what was to come, I definitely would have eaten more of the wonderful items at the table that morning...

6:50 PM “BACK IN BEIJING”  5 Star Hotel Room  Feb 16, 2009

RING!

… The ringing of the hotel phone startled me. My reflection time had turned into a nap. For a moment I was confused about where I was. The TV was blasting CNN, all the lights were on and the phone was ringing off the hook.

It took me a moment to orient myself. I had not heard a phone ring in days nor was I used to lying down without shivering. I moved, more to knock the phone off the cradle than to actually answer it. But I did. My greeting might have indicated my displeasure with the interruption of my nap. On the other end was a smooth talking Chinese woman. In broken English she told me she was waiting in the lobby with a driver. She was wondering how much longer it would be until we would be ready. Ooops... .

Honestly, I just wanted to crawl into the warm bed and watch HBO for the rest of the night. I had to kick myself for such a thought and remember I was in China. How often in my life would I be in China, post film shoot, with a beautiful Chinese girl willing to guide me around Beijing? Live every moment, right?

Her name was Yoyo and I was actually supposed to meet her a year prior when I had visited China as a guest of a small ski hill outside the city. For some reason she did not show but I did remember her fun name.

Yoyo was one of those unique Chinese stories we hear as Westerners. Brilliant in mind, the communist system schooled her to be an engineer and then placed her in the system to work as what she referred to as a “tool of the government”. Now she builds short-range missiles in a factory outside Beijing. Her only way out of this routine is to learn English, qualifying her for the opportunity to take an exam that would allow her to study abroad. Choosing this path would mean returning to China with a Western education and then working under a communist system. But this is not her personal agenda as she is fully aware of the imbalance of freedom and human rights when she compares Western capitalism with Eastern communism. She wants out; or at least a means to move up in status in her culture. This brings out the juxtaposition China has put itself into recently. Though communist, their economy is quickly gaining wealth from competition thus setting the stage for them to
crush us in manufacturing since they can produce with cheap labor from lack of human rights. However, some of the young Chinese are getting a little antsy and want more rewards out of life. People like Yoyo.

After a nice lunch in the warm clean setting of the hotel we loaded into a van ready to take us into the city of Beijing. The drive from the outset hotel into the heart of the city was nuts. Sixty million people create a tremendous amount of activity. Everywhere I looked human impact was evident and alive. More bizarre was the range of incredible wealth and poverty. This is a culture torn between an ancient world and a modern civilization. Still fresh in the middle of it was some of the most amazing architecture of our times thanks to the recent Olympic Games. This was a total contrast from where I had been days earlier traveling across frozen lands by a horse and sleigh, surrounded by a world that has not changed for thousands of years…

“Northwestern China” – Chun–Kur  Feb 6, 2009

… Jaining Uye (pronounced chana) is the name for the horse drawn sleighs we would be married to for the next several days. The chana were a fine piece of handcrafted engineering made primarily of wood and leather with some tempered metal under the skids.

At first, riding behind the horse on the chana was a novelty. Then I realized, looking around the streets of Chun-Kur, that the use of horse and chana was not a ride at Disneyland. This was actually a necessity of life for these villagers. This is how they live. It was like stepping back in time 110 years in the US.

We loaded our bags onto the chana which were already anchored to six of the toughest looking horses I have ever seen. Dunai’s son Kannat (Smiley) would be the lead horseman taking us into the Altay Mountains toward the village of Kanas. He would be assisted by two other Kazak horsemen, Hastir and Norbik. Over the next several days these three men would become our guardians. I would come to realize in the cold that they were also some of the most durable men I had ever met. If I wore the clothing they were wearing rather than the high tech Obermeyer gear I had, I would most likely have perished on day one.

We rolled out of Chun-Kur like a wagon train of the old west. Jubilant and fresh, we were! The horses matched our enthusiasm, trotting proudly down the main street of Chun-Kur, past the store fronts and street vendors like prima donnas. I stood on my sled and held the reins like Ben Hur, giggling with confidence and the sense of adventure, totally clueless to the monument of a journey which lay ahead. Chris Patterson sat on the chana behind me capturing every moment with his 16mm Bolex. It was cold…very cold….–30C.

It was not long before we came upon our first issue. At the time, it did not really occur to me to worry since I had no concept of what laid before us. Had I known, I think I would have been extremely concerned about our well-being.

Two of the horses pulling the heavy sleighs up what would be the first of many hills, stepped off the trail and sank to their necks in snow. The cold temperatures and dry climate had left the existing snow pack unconsolidated and bottomless. The snow which was not packed down responded like quicksand. The two horses struggled to free themselves but soon gave in to
Heading back out into the cold was not pleasant but should be for living and surviving the day cold. Tradition calls for them to invite us in, offer warmth and let us drink something before h

skinned and fluorescent clothes.

An infant and a man, (I'm not sure if he was the father) was a little surprised by the invasion of their home by white foreigners in the dead of winter. Unfortunately, it was not warm enough to melt the ice off my boots.

Surprisingly, it was warm enough for me to remove a couple of my six layers of clothes. Not the most ideal situation in these sub-zero temperatures with no indoor retreat to dry off in. Another element which could be detrimental to my immediate health: sweating then freezing.

When we reached the first summit I looked around in an attempt to get my bearings. It looked like the plains of Idaho 150 years ago; which frankly, did not look anything like any of the mountains I had seen in the images I received prior to the trip. In fact, this environment did not remotely look like it would facilitate a Mongolian mountain community needing skis to skin up and ski down at all. Granted it was overcast and visibility was only about 20 miles but this worried me. Where the heck were we going? And how far away was it?

The cold overcast day dragged on and the horses and humans already seemed to be in a trance. Time had stopped. Every once in a while a horse would dip its head into the cold snow bordering the trail to snag a mouthful of snow while walking. While the horses were walking rhythmically in sync, I would alternate between walking along side and riding on the chana to keep myself warm but not too hot. I did not want to sweat and then freeze. The goal was to maintain a perfect body temperature and keep my toes warm. I tried to ignore the fact that my socks were already wet. Every time I stepped on the sleigh from the uncut powder I was walking through, my horse would look back at me with an expression of disgust. I could tell this was going to be the beginning of a very long and wonderful relationship.

As we walked through the frozen plains on what appeared to be a buried road, I felt like I had been inserted into a science fiction movie. Looking around I was imagining that a nuclear winter had destroyed civilization as we knew it and only a few hardy nomads had survived the disruption and loss of modern conveniences. In the early hours of the trek we came upon what appeared to be a modern civilization half buried in snow. It was like a scene from Planet of the Apes. Half buried billboards appeared from the snow, miles from anywhere. On them were famous images like basketball player Yao Ming selling life insurance in Chinese. In the distance I recognized a modern but half-built control tower of an airport rising from the snow covered earth yet no people, cars, or planes of any sort were anywhere near it. It was as if life had ceased to exist and all that remained was a frozen planet. We traversed the remains of the frozen landscape on hand built horse drawn sleighs in negative temperatures at a snail's pace looking for our next place to bed down and have a meal. It was bizarre. Am I looking into the future or the past?

The reality of it is this: the region we were traveling through in Northwestern China is in an interesting conundrum. During the summer months the Chinese move in and start to develop the area but then disappear during the long cold winter months.

After a few hours of traveling under grey skies through the cold air we stopped at the adobe home of a Kazak family. Their one room villa had a single small stone oven that acted as the heat as well as a place to cook meals. Surprisingly, it was warm enough for me to remove a couple of my six layers of clothing and relax for a moment. Unfortunately, it was not warm enough to melt the ice off my boots. The family, made up of a young woman, an infant and a man, (I'm not sure if he was the father) was a little surprised by the invasion of their home by white skinned and fluorescent clothed foreigners in the dead of winter.

Tradition calls for them to invite us in, offer warmth and let us drink something before heading back out into the cold. This is how their culture has survived for centuries. Their tiny home was simple but functional just as it should be for living and surviving the day-to-day life in this part of the world. It had only the very basics minus running water and electricity. Outside the livestock surrounded the home.

Heading back out into the cold was not pleasant but already my mind was better prepared to handle it and what was to come. I knew that I would need to keep myself warm with the right combination of walking and riding on
the back of the chana. The short break allowed me to somewhat dry out one of my layers. As for my socks, they were still wet and I could feel that my feet were on the border of getting cold. Allowing them to get too cold would mean frostbite, a mistake that could be very costly in this environment.

Chris Patterson who shared the chana with me was keeping himself busy by catching the surroundings on film. If only the film could really capture the sensation of just how cold it was….

Because of the cold and lack of power Patterson chose to bring a Bolex camera. This is a spring-loaded, hand-wound 16 mm film camera; old technology that still captures the world better than today’s digital technology. The Bolex was taken to the moon and Mount Everest back in the ‘60’s. He winds it to load the spring which spins the film and powers the shutter. This lasts for about 30 seconds. He can change the film rate and his exposures and lenses.

The technology of capturing light on film has not changed all that much in the history of photography. What has changed is the quality of medium on which it is captured. The Warren Miller movie is still shot on the tender medium of super 16 mm film. This is movie making in its true form; capturing moments of light on pictures frames to tell a story about a place and period in time.

Together Patterson and Colin brought 90 rolls of 16mm film. At regular 24 frames per second each roll represented 9 minutes of film but Patterson often shoots at a variety of frame rates thus changing the 9-minute window of each roll. When his film reel runs out, he or Colin would have to pull out a portable darkroom, put the camera in it, open the camera up and change the exposed roll out for an unexposed one. They did this all by touch. As the shooting hours moved on, more and more exposed rolls were created. These rolls went into a designated backpack – a backpack we would protect with our lives if necessary. Just looking at it made me nervous due to how vulnerable it was to the elements.

* Note: At the end of the trip Patterson would be stopped by the authorities while shooting outside the Forbidden City. They exposed his film and confiscated a few items. Luckily most of the movie was on a flight home with Colin.

At one point Patterson told me that film starts to become brittle at around –35C, Bolex cameras start to have some issues at around –38C and his fingers –40C at which point he would say, “Screw it, I’ll shoot later.”

Uphill most of the way, we walked and rode with our heads down into the night. It had been at least twelve hours since we had started off with the horses and we’d stopped only once the entire time for any length of rest. My mind wandered and I was thinking about how I was going to go to the bathroom in this environment. I could feel the time for me to do so was close. I started to calculate the distance we had traveled. This occupied my mind for what felt like hours but most likely was only a few minutes…

My horse was exhausted and began stopping every 50 feet or so. I would walk up next to him to urge him on a few more steps through the darkness. I felt bad for him pulling all our gear and yet was amazed by his endurance and ability to handle the cold. I just hoped he would not give out because then I would have to cut him open and crawl inside to stay alive. I remember Luke Skywalker doing this on a distant ice covered planet during a storm in one of the Star Wars movies. Wow, was my mind wandering!

Just as I thought we couldn’t go any further we came to the crest of a hill where we could see several wooden buildings. Homes to more Kazaks I presumed. Our horsemen immediately unloaded the chanas and sent us into this warm home where several men and women sat around a wooden table next to a stove. Just off the main room was another room with a raised platform that acted as a sleeping area with tons of thick colorful blankets lining it. In another corner was a larger wood-burning stove. This place was to become our home for the night.

Before I could even get my boots off Austin was already in his sleeping bag and asleep. I sat stunned and exhausted. I could not relax because I feared that if I took off my clothes I would only have to put them back on to go outside in search of a place to go to the bathroom. I was jealous of Austin; he could poop on command and do it in a few seconds. I am the type of guy that needs a toilet and a magazine….
Our cook has fixed us a meal while the rest of the group got oriented and organized in the small quarters of this confined home where we sat shoulder to shoulder. The entire evening was like a dream. I could not believe where we were, how long it had taken us to get here and how far we still had to go.

I had dinner then wandered outside. I needed to empty my bowels but it was snowing so hard that I had to cut a trail in the darkness to find a place to relieve myself. I ran into the horses tied to a fence and covered in snow like frozen ice statues. They appeared to be sleeping. The snow was coming down in torrents and, for the first time in my life, I was actually hoping it would stop. I worried it would snow too much thus making the remainder of our three day walk into the Altay that much more difficult. But forget that, right now I just had to worry about trying to go the bathroom without dying of exposure.

Chris Anthony, a Big Mountain skier is a Colorado native and longtime Vail resident. For a good portion of his life, Chris competed at an international level, including World Cup, as well as traveled as an athlete and on-screen personality with the Warren Miller Film Team. Chris has filmed with the legendary action sports production company for 23 years and continues to do so currently. His feats are displayed in the annual Warren Miller feature film as well as numerous television programs and documentaries such as “Warren Miller Global Adventures.” Chris is a former Alaskan Extreme Skiing Champion, a veteran of 9 World Extreme Skiing Championships, and US Heli Ski Association Level 3 Mechanized Ski Guide.

Can you find Chris skiing on these great mountains of Alaska? This is a heli-skiing zone known as Crispy Critter in the Chugach Mountains in Alaska.

Between film shoots and sponsor appearances Chris manages specialized ski programs under his company “Chris Anthony Adventures” in Alaska, Italy and Colorado. Additionally, Chris co-hosts the “Camp of the Superstars” every August in Portillo, Chile. Also, Chris is available for speaking engagements. His website is www.chrisanthony.com.

There’s Always Room for Improvement

By John B. Gaida
Labrador Mountain
Senior Development Coordinator

I am thankful to the Education Foundation for giving me the opportunity to attend the Master Teacher Certification event “Sports Psychology” that was held at Windham Mountain on February 29, 2000 to March 1, 2000. Having been a professional ski instructor for 239 years I wondered if there was something new to learn
about the way I perceived my students. Thanks to Bill Beerman, Ruth Innes and Bill Koerber who conducted an excellent course I came away with a new sense of professionalism.

When I arrived at Windham Mountain I thought “Is this going to be taught mostly in the classroom, and possibly some on snow?” Well, after some indoor work we were outside applying what had been taught. This course actually shows the ski instructor how our students feel when doing something new, like taking a ski lesson for the first time. Learning is a voluntary process, therefore, a person cannot be disciplined into learning. A person pays money to take a lesson in good faith, and expects they are taking it from a professional. We, as a Skiing Professional, must overcome our students fears and anxieties about their possible failure to succeed. In this first lesson we must convey a trust to our students by having them feel comfortable in trying something new, and we must be enthusiastic. We should not make them feel that “my way”, “the instructor’s way” is the only way. If we accomplish this, we have helped gain a person who will enjoy the sport of skiing for many years.

During this course we also worked on our own personal fears, anxieties, and stressful times that we, as instructors, face in our own skiing everyday. We talked about these situations in the classroom and then we went out to face some of these concerns on the snow. We overcame them by doing a specific task, for example, skiing extreme conditions, icy moguls, and speed control on steep terrain. By actually doing these tasks we overcame our own individual problems and concerns. We now can better relate to that child or adult taking their first ski lesson.

I learned a great deal from this course, and I know I can relate much of it to my personal life as well as my professional life. I highly recommend that “Sports Psychology” be taken by all ski instructors.

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**Cross-Training**

**Ice Racing**

*By Witold Kosmala*

*PSIA-E Alpine, Level III*

I cannot claim that I know all about ice racing. In fact, I know very little about it and I have never done it. So, this short article about ice racing is just to tease you with the idea. I know that a number of our readers get into the sport of motorcycling, so riding on ice may be just the thing for you in the winter time.

Ice racing is commonly performed on bikes that resemble normal race bikes, but have a more rigid construction, longer wheelbase, have studded tires and no breaks. Studded tires have spikes up to 3 cm in length. Bikes normally have 90 spikes on the front tire and 200-500 on the rear. You definitely do not want to get run over by one of these creatures. So, NEVER let go of the handlebars and watch out for other competitors’ bikes.

Here is a real action photo. Racers’ speeds are approximately 80 mph on the straights and 60 mph on the bends. The safety barrier usually consists of straw bales or banked-up snow and ice around the outer edge of the track. These pictured guys have no fear, probably because they are wearing helmets, right?
There is actually no such turn, only a portion of a turn. In the January issue of Peak Performance, I discussed comma turns. Comma turns are also only a portion of a turn. When the commas are connected with stivots the partially carved turns are formed. This type of a turn is mostly used by racers or skiers of all walks of life with the desire of improving their skiing. Practicing partially carved turns provides skiers with better balance, better turn initiation with improved body movements and more versatility. Racers use stivots to do most redirecting of their skis when they are going the slowest, that is, before the new turn begins. Basically, after one turn is over, a skier permits skis to glide mostly in a straight line, while pivoting the skis. This is done until the skier gets to the line which skier will be able to carve and get successfully to the exit point of the next turn.

Training

Stivot Turns

By Witold Kosmala
PSIA-E Alpine, Level III

Ice racing (like every other activity one can ever do), has connections to skiing. With my very limited knowledge of the sport, I would guess that balancing, angulation, fore/aft pressure distribution, proper attire, proper equipment and fear management would be the main connections. Tactics would involve smoothness of all moves, scrubbing speed before entering a new turn and going for a late apex. Throttle is one of your friends. Let me know how your ice racing goes for you.

Here is a close-up of a studded tire.

Peak Performance
In the first illustration given on the previous page, when the desired turns, (gates) line up just right, a skier can make carved turns between them. That line would be the quickest way down. Keep in mind that the illustrated circular arcs are not circular in real life.

Most often the gates do not line up so perfectly, so carved turns between them are not possible. This is a result of gates being too close to each other, off set too much, skis’ sidecut radius too big, not enough speed and/or pressure. In these cases racers perform partially carved turns. These turns are made up of comma turns connected by stivots. This is shown in the second illustration. Of course, skier’s line will vary depending on speed, type of skis used and so on. Also edge lock can occur before the fall line is reached. Observe that the stivots are performed on top of a turn and commas on the second half of a turn. Furthermore, the best comma turns should follow a line of an inverted cycloid, not a circle.

As I mentioned earlier, partially carved turns make an outstanding exercise for more advanced skiers. They practically bland all skills together. Therefore, don’t leave them just for racers, go and try them yourself. For stivots demonstrated in slow motion, go to Ted Ligety’s web page www.tedligety.com and look at October 22, 2012 posting.

Illustrations performed by Konrad Kosmala.
From Cars to Skis

A Few More Connections

By Witold Kosmala
PSIA-E Alpine, Level III

For now, this will be the last episode where I discuss how skiing is connected to driving a car. In the last several issues of *Peak Performance*, I discussed at length a number of topics where the connection of cars to skis was obvious. In this short article I will just mention a few more things (not in any particular order) that driving a car has in common with skiing.

1. Making phone calls and/or texting is not a good idea when operating a car. In fact, in some States talking on the phone without the use of earphones is illegal. Texting can also be illegal depending on age and on an individual State laws. As far as I know, there are no laws against talking on a phone while holding the unit, or texting, when navigating down the hill on skis or snowboards. My recommendation would be not to do it until you stop moving.

2. It seems like no one teaches drivers as to where they should look when driving a car. That skill almost comes automatically. Every so often drivers are corrected by words: “Look at the road. Don’t look at the views. Don’t look at others in the car. Don’t turn around. Don’t look at the railing or the wall next to you.” Hardly anyone says; don’t look at the hood while driving. But, in skiing it is not unusual to see skiers look down at their skis. This creates a poor stance and jeopardizes safety. In skiing, just like in driving, you should look where you are going. If you are moving pretty fast, then you need to look further down your path to see what is coming up.

3. Holding the steering wheel in the car would translate to holding ski poles. You don’t need to squeeze them extremely hard, but don’t let them go.

4. It is very hard, and damaging, to turn the steering wheel of a car that is not moving. The same is with skiing. And, if you are successful turning without movement, then all you get is a pivot. See the photo. Can you see the circle on the snow resulting in a 360-degree pivot by my skis?

5. Often in the wintertime ruts form on the road. They can be made of snow, gravel, sand, and so on. While driving in a rut, often we are careless with our steering lock. It seems like the car just steers itself by remaining in a rut. But, if at some point a wheel catches the edge of the rut, it might jump out and take the car in an unwanted direction.
by a surprise to the driver. Snow skiing in a rut is very similar, but often skiers scrape their tips and tails against the sides of ruts on purpose, usually to manage their speed. Ruts get quicker and quicker as the number of skiers using them grows. So, ruts that drop you in to a steep slope may be actually too fast eventually. The same goes for ruts on rock ledges. With those especially, be extremely careful how much pressure you put on ski tips when scraping the edges of the ruts. If your ski jumps out at an uncomfortable angle, you life might be at stake.

6. Cars have their steering wheels in the front. Depending on the throttle and break, drivers put more or less pressure on the front wheels as they apply the steering lock. The same goes for skiers. Most of the time you will want to steer the ski so tails follow the tips, that is, steering is performed by ski tips and not ski tails. (Note, I said, most of the time.) But, instead of using a pedal and a steering wheel lock like car drivers do, skiers need to perform many actions to steer skis correctly. These moves involve: progressive pressuring of ski boots throughout their boot cuffs, progressive pressure of their toes and feet inside their ski boots, proper edge angles, proper platform angles, proper muscular tension, proper body moves which cover the balance and everything else that is involved in making a steered turn. Wow, there is just so much going on. You wonder how you ever learned all that, and how you will ever teach all that to your guests. Good luck!

**Turn to Wisdom**

- He who wants milk should not sit on a stool in the middle of the pasture expecting the cow to back up to him.
- Sorrow looks back. Worry looks around. Faith looks up.
- Failure in people is caused more by lack of determination than by lack in talent.
- A man is rich according to what he is, not according to what he has.

**Thoughts for the Month**

- One coach said that “on modern skis if you lay them way over you can arc just about anything;” do you agree or disagree?
- When your intermediate student overtips, overrotates, or has abrupt movements, or is not centered over the skis, or has too narrow stance, what would be some tasks (drills) you could ask them to do to start correcting their problems?
- How can you tell if your boots have a proper forward lean?

Elaborations on last month’s Thoughts for the Month.

**Question:** How should the proper ski pole length be determined?

**Answer:** Traditionally, the pole is of proper length if when standing in your boots on the ground you invert the pole, place the handle on the ground, grab the shaft below the basket and the forearm is parallel to the ground.

Modern skiers use poles about one inch shorter than the traditional length. Bump skiers and big carvers might want to use poles up to two inches shorter then the traditional length. On the other hand, lifters and high-rise bindings will add about one to one and a half inches to your height above the skis.

According to PSIA-E Examiner Brian Whatley, the ski pole has proper length if the pole reaches from the ski to your sternum when you are in a home position on your skis. This will nicely accommodate your arm length from the shoulder to the elbow, height of the binding and other irregularities.
Question: What is meant by NASTAR in recreational skiing and snowboarding?


“NASTAR (an acronym for NAStiOnal STAndard Race) is the world’s largest known recreational ski and snowboard race program. It allows ski or snowboard racers of all ages and abilities, through a handicap system, a way to compare themselves with one another and with the national champion, regardless of when and where they race. Since the program’s development by [Ski](http://www.ski.com) magazine in 1968, more than 6 million NASTAR racer days have been recorded. It has been available at more than 100 ski resorts in North America. Many U.S. Ski Team stars got their start ski racing in NASTAR programs.

NASTAR courses are simple, open-gated giant slaloms on mostly intermediate terrain, allowing skiers of all abilities and ages to experience racing. Just as in golf’s handicap system, skiers can compare their times and compete with one another regardless of where and when they compete. It takes into account varying terrain and snow conditions. The program went through several national sponsors, the latest being Nature Valley.

The National Standard is the Par Time or the “0” handicap which every racer competes against when they race NASTAR. The “0” handicap is typically set by a U.S. Ski Team racer or former champion. Runners-up establish handicaps against the winner by their lag time percentage. These “traveling pacesetters” compete against pacesetters from each NASTAR resort at sanctioned Regional Pacesetting Trials prior to the start of the following season. These events enable pacesetters from each individual resort to establish their own certified handicap against the national champion’s Par Time or “0” handicap. The resort pacesetters use their certified handicap to set the Par Time at their local NASTAR course each racing day, and in turn give each participant who races at their resort a handicap that is referenced to the national champion. The Par Time is approximately the time the national NASTAR champion would have raced the course had he been there that day. Various allowances are then made for age group, gender, disability if any, snowboarders, etc. Every skier, regardless of ability or disability, can ski with a time referenced against the national champion, corrected for the specific resort and course conditions and his/her level. Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze designations are based on performance in several races, relative to each racer’s age, gender and ability group. Championships are held near the end of the skiing season each year.”

The non-Alpine Divisions of NASTAR are Telemark, Physically Challenged, and Snowboarders. What interested me was the Physically Challenged classifications that are given in the middle of page [http://skiracing.nastar.com/rankings](http://skiracing.nastar.com/rankings). None of them specify reconstructed body. In my case, I was fortunate to avoid amputation, but on many fronts my permanently damaged body physically challenges me when competing against the healthy counterparts. Enough said.

Question: What are the “stivet” turns?

Answer: See the article on page 16 in the publication.

This and That

ICE TOWER

Ice Tower, Big White, B.C. was featured on [www.skinet.com](http://www.skinet.com). Read what they said. I bet some of you are already getting your gear out.

“Off day? » During a ski vacation, sometimes you want to get off the slopes for an afternoon to kick back. Scaling the 60-foot Ice Tower at Big White in Kelowna, B.C., isn’t exactly chilling out. It’s constructed with
three telephone poles braced together, which are then flooded with water. The result: a monolith of beautiful, three-foot-thick British Columbia blue ice. There are 19 routes to the summit, and guides to help you get there. Boots, crampons, and tools are provided. And, yes, there is a beginner side.”

STONE GRINDING

Stone grinding flattens the ski base, removes burnt and damaged base material and provides important micro-structure. Bottom line, it makes your skis faster and easier to wax. The stone grinder is a precision machine that puts a pattern in the flat and smooth finish of the base. The minute texture on the bases of the boards keeps suction from developing as the heat generated by the motion of the ski tends to bind to a completely flat base.
There are easier ways to add texture to bases of your skis and boards. Warren Miller boys are stone-grinding skis their way. (See the photo on the previous page.) I suppose these three musketeers don’t know any better. They misunderstood what rock-grinding means. Or, are they trying to tell us what Nordica skis are good for?

Update for Members of PSIA-AASI Eastern Division
Region 4

What we know about our membership (demographics and trends). . .

- Year-end membership has gone from 11,172 in 2002 to 10,688 in 2012 (down 9.5% in 10 years).
- Region 4 is our largest of 7 regions with 2,150 members (21% of total).
- Membership retention has slipped slightly from 89.4% in 2002 to 88.5% in 2012.
- # of new members has averaged 1,225 over the past ten years.
- In 2002-2004 average annual event registrations were 7,567; in 2010-12 it was just under 6,000.
- 69% of our members are male; 31% are female.
- 56% of our members are age 50 or older.
- 53% of our new members in 2011-12 are less than 30 years old.
- We lose 5 out of 4 new members from the active ranks within 10 years of joining.

What you have told us you value & need (spring 2012 member survey with 2,500 responses). . .

- 56% want mid-week events.
- 56% want events within 2 hour drive of home area.
- 43% say greatest value in your membership is improvement in your teaching; 36% say improvement in your skiing or riding; 13% discounts on products, gear, etc.
  - 20% of 16 – 35 age group say discounts important; only 10% for members of 20- plus years.
- 92% say service from division office is good or excellent.
- 93% say quality of educational experience from field staff is good or excellent.
- 40% say dues are too expensive for what is offered to members.
  - 47.5% of 16 – 35 group says too expensive; 36% of 20- plus year members.
- 51% say prefer paying dues by June 30; 49% would prefer dues paid by October 1.
  - 62% of 16 – 35 group prefer October 1; 63% of 20- plus year members prefer June 30.
- 53% of members say the cost of dues & attending events is the biggest deterrent to remaining a member.
  - 77% of members 16 – 35 agree, 43% of 20- plus year members agree
  - Only 9.8% of 16 – 35 state lack of recognition by guests and management; rises to 36.7% of 20- plus year members stating that as a primary issue.

What we are doing “locally” to address issues & concerns. . .

- Keeping our expenses in check. We spent $100,000 LESS in 2011-12 than we did in 2008-09.
- Keeping your costs in check.
  - Did not raise Eastern Division dues in 2012-13; no dues increase planned for 2013-14.
  - Did not raise event registration fees in 2011-12 or 2012-13.

Peak Performance
PROFESSIONAL SKI INSTRUCTORS OF AMERICA
EASTERN DIVISION

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SNOWBOARD INSTRUCTORS

LEADER CENTER FOR SNOWSPORTS EDUCATION

➤ Making it easier and less costly to become a member.
  ○ A “JOINING EVENT” no longer required. Initial training at home area.
  ○ $30 student discount upon joining (for 16 - 23 year old members; policy changed
    in 2011 vs. the previous policy of students paying full dues upon joining
    and getting the discount in their second year).
  ○ “January White Sale” for new members joining and signing up for their Level 1
    exam by January 23, 2013 and passing their Level 1 exam by February 15, 2013.
    They will receive a $50 credit toward a future education event registration
    through the 2013-14 season.
  ○ New members joining on or after February 15 may enjoy the rest of the current
    season and all of the next season for one dues payment.

➤ Making it easier and less costly to stay a member.
  ○ Available member scholarship monies have grown from $1,600 in 2003 to more
    than $10,000 in 2012. Total scholarship monies from all funds is now more than
    $15,000.
  ○ Monies from scholarships now open to all members in good standing (vs.
    members in 3rd or more year).
  ○ “Professional Development Scholarship for Level 1 Members”
    This is a newly designated “Professional Development Scholarship for Level 1
    Members” that earmarks 20% of the existing available Member Scholarship funds
    (approximately $2,000) for Level 1 members to use specifically for L2
    prerequisite courses and practice exams in preparation for taking their L2
    skiing and teaching exams.

➤ Building stronger recognition of your efforts & value
  ○ A Thanksgiving outreach campaign to more than 75 resort general managers
    thanking them for their support of snowsports education and urging their
    support of snowsports school directors and staff.
  ○ Created a Membership Promotional Task Force to develop initiatives and ideas to
    better promote our members to the general public and resort managers.

What we are doing “federally” (with National PSIA) to address issues &
cconcerns...

➤ Building stronger recognition of your efforts & value
  ○ A call to the National Association via our Joint Resolution of October 2012 with
    the Rocky Mountain, Northwest and Intermountain Divisions to reinstate and re-
    energize a National Snowsports School Management Council.
  ○ A call to the National Association via our Joint Resolution to create a new and
    more effective consumer awareness program.
  ○ A call to the National Association via our Joint Resolution to designate a key
    staff person to serve as a Director of Membership.
  ○ A call to the National Association via our Joint Resolution to agree to an
    exploration and discussion of more equitable and effective governance model
    for PSIA & AASI that provides members and divisions with more direct input and
    influence on National Association policy and budget decisions.

A DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN SNOWSPORTS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
1-A Lincoln Avenue  Albany, New York  12205-4907
Phone: (518) 452-6095  Fax: (518) 452-6099  E-mail: psia-e@psia-e.org  www.psia-e.org

Peak Performance
Announcements

- On January 29, Witold Kosmala has been granted accreditation in Coaching Advanced Skiing and Racing by PSIA-E.

Pet of the Month

Warren Miller’s film crews capture skier named Pat who skis with his cat, Hat, on his shoulder.