

# SkiFever!

## LOCAL POWDER

BY DAVID GOODMAN

**T**he snowstorm raging outside spat a tornado of snow in behind me. "Welcome home," said my wife, Sue, as I came through the door. "Hope you still have a few turns left. Over a foot by tomorrow morning—maybe two," she said, beaming. I managed to muster a weak smile.

It wasn't that I was unenthused about the promise of a powder day. It's just that I was fresh off a week of helicopter skiing in British Columbia. And, as my heli-ski partners were prone to repeat in a glassy-eyed daze, it doesn't get any better than that. I was exhausted when I got home. Would I ever experience snow and skiing like that again?

But even with an ecstasy hangover, I was instinctively excited by the forecast at home. Local powder is different from powder anywhere else. A big dump on your home turf is a community event. Daily routines stop and everyone you know is focused on one thing: snow. For some, it's just the hassle of digging out, but for others it's inspiration to plunge into the white stuff in any kind of vehicle, from sleds and inner tubes to skis and snowboards. What makes a powder day at home better than anywhere else isn't just the snow, it's the people. You're joined in your passions by neighbors, friends, and family. And later, at home, powder days will be just as enjoyable in the retelling.

The following morning, Sue and I struggled through gusting winds, drifted roads, and eighteen inches of new snow to get to the base of our local hill. We've gotten to know this craggy, majestic mountain intimately over the years, thrilling to every nuance we stumble upon, mining each new powder trove for turns. There are many rewards for skiers involved in these explorations. You learn where to look for untapped treasures. Knowing how the wind blows across a ridge offers clues to where you might find an overlooked powder shot. And a feeling for how the sun moves around the mountain allows you to move with it. So while the neophytes are skiing sunbaked muck, you're still ripping powder in the shadows.

In the chairlift, we studied how the storm had worked the mountain. The wind had played its usual tricks, burying some trails in powder, leaving only wisps of white on others. Our eyes wandered over to the historic double-diamond test pieces of the mountain. The top of one, a steep headwall that is usually a minefield of moguls, was submerged in white.

We quickly made our way to the trail, where we were met by an old friend, a carpenter who had been teaching and skiing here for over twenty years. "Hope B.C. didn't ruin your taste for local powder," said Dudley with a grin as he pushed off then disappeared over the lip. Sue and I dropped in on his heels.

My skis and lower legs vanished in the fluff. With gravity's help, I burst up out of the snow and dropped into my next turn. Suddenly, a sharp cold smack hit me in the jaw; a face shot on the first turn was a warning that this was no ordinary run. I shot out of the snowdrift and flew about five feet through the air. A rooster tail of cold smoke trailed me as I landed in an even deeper trough. White foam erupted around my waist then exploded in chaos around my head. My mouth, wide open as I gasped with pleasure and surprise on each landing, suddenly filled with snow. I couldn't breathe, but I was still moving faster and faster, unable to see beyond the white haze. One turn later, I managed to spit out the powdery plug, suck in a huge gulp of air, and ski out of my private blizzard. I let out an involuntary, raspy yelp before torpedoing through another four-foot-deep powder pile. Within seconds, my mouth filled with snow again as yet another cold wave boiled up and submerged me. I coughed and spat while my skis surfaced and dove down the fall line like playful porpoises, rhythmically launching into the air out of each turn and landing in deeper furrows of sugar. Snow poured down my collar, billowed over my head, washed under my arms. Again I gasped for air; again my mouth filled with snow. Going too fast...can't stop...too much snow...too much air...flying.

I came to a halt near Dudley. Both of us were doubled over, chests heaving like land-locked fish and smiling numbly. I looked up to see Sue still skiing, alternately launching through the air and exploding through powder in a perfect fall line waltz. Her dance was punctuated by rhythmic hoots of delight as snow swirled around her in exuberant accompaniment.

I stood on the slope, dumbstruck. It wasn't as if I hadn't seen snow all year—after all, I had just come from a powder paradise. But turn after turn of choking face shots? Never in my life. Not in Jackson, Alta, Vail, or even in B.C. This was an epic run, unmatched by anything I'd ever skied in my travels.

I shouldn't have been surprised. There's great skiing and deep powder in far-flung mountain ranges. But to find buried treasure, you have to come home. ❄️