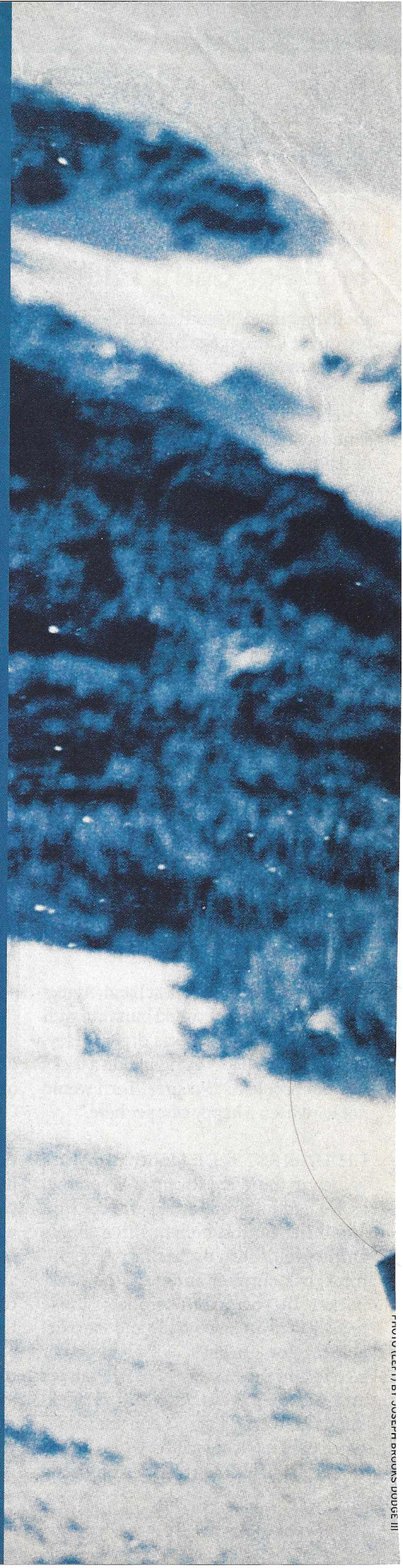


Meet **Brooks Dodge,**  
the **man** who pioneered  
**extreme** skiing.

By David Goodman

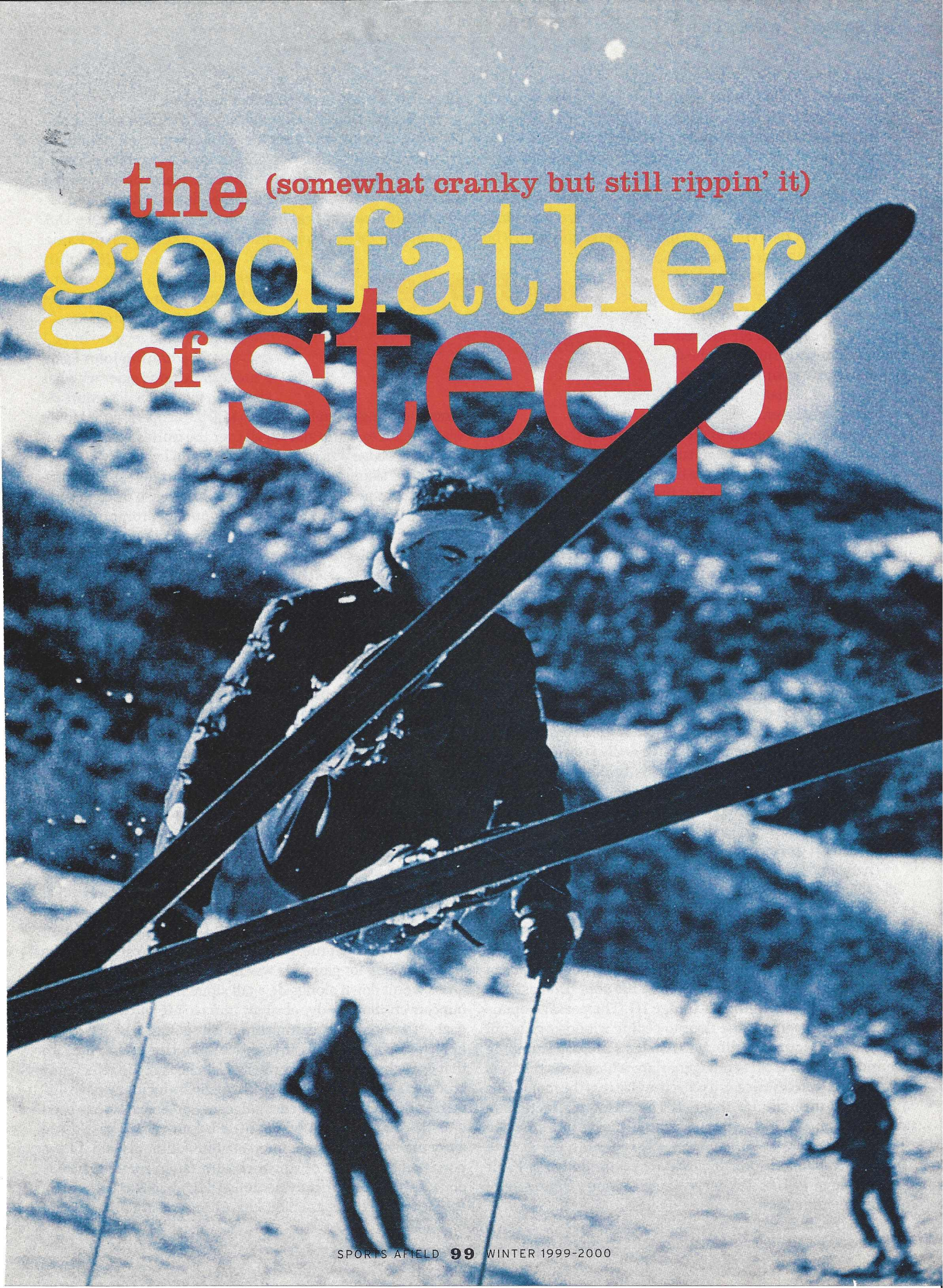
BROOKIE DODGE STOOD atop the craggy mountain ridge on a crisp spring day, his seven-foot-long wooden skis perched on his shoulder. The white summit of Mount Washington, the storm-raked capstone of New Hampshire, gleamed behind him. The 16-year-old lad had come to claim a long-awaited prize: a frighteningly steep snow-filled gully that snaked its way improbably between shark-tooth rocks and glistening patches of ice. The route lay just beyond Tuckerman Ravine, the steep skiing mecca of the East. Even the hard core of Tuck's regulars had blanched at this line, reassuring each other that it was unskiable. An unacceptable risk. A death wish.

All except for Dodge. The short, lithe, hawk-nosed young man with brown hair pressed flat against his



Brooks Dodge today (top), and making a jump turn in 1956 (right).

the (somewhat cranky but still rippin' it)  
godfather  
of steep



head would typically remain silent while his friends assessed the skiing possibilities around them. It was the mid-1940s, and already Dodge had a reputation for seeing possibilities where others saw obstacles. While friends fretted, Brookie analyzed.

A bell-clear April day was the opportunity Dodge had been waiting for. As the gold light of morning slid slowly down the mountain, young Dodge climbed steadily skyward up a long, prominent gully called Hillman's Highway. He calculated that he had a 30-minute window when the snow would soften just enough to create a one-inch layer of wet corn snow, the perfect surface on which to set his steel edges. He arrived on the summit ridge just when he'd planned to and scrambled over to the narrow slot that stabbed the sky like an icy dagger.

Dodge stepped gingerly to the edge to survey the landscape. His first challenge was to negotiate a slick 50-degree headwall, then dart sharply left to miss the first rocks. There was no margin for error here, which was just the way Brookie liked it. He looked up at the blue sky, down at the white snow, and leaped in. As onlookers watched in wonder from below, the New Hampshire teenager fired off three perfect turns, slid right to avoid the small avalanche he triggered, then took three more quick turns before lunging left to clear more tumbling snow. Again and again he bounced side to side, dodging rocks that threatened to shred him should he misstep. Where the gully narrowed to a ski length, Dodge launched effortlessly into the air over a menacing bulge of ice. Without pausing, he roared down the bottom of the run, to the amazement of the crowd.

A few friends greeted him enthusiastically where he stopped. "Well, Dodge, whaddya gonna call that one?" asked a buddy. The young man shrugged. He hadn't really considered that detail. "Well, we've got a name for it," said his friend. "We think it oughta be called Dodge's Drop."

Brookie smiled shyly. He liked the idea that this would be his signature run. It had everything he looked for in a mountain descent: It was steep. Bold. Dangerous. Virgin. Elegant.

"That sounds fine," said the flush young New Hampshire boy. "I'll call it Dodge's Drop."

I FOLLOW JOSEPH Brooks Dodge Jr.—Brookie to those who know him—into his sprawling home in Jackson, New Hampshire. The hallway is lined with striking photographs of Tuckerman Ravine that were shot by his son, professional photographer Joseph Brooks Dodge III. The passage opens into the living room, where floor-to-ceiling windows gaze out onto the real Mount Washington, Dodge's lifelong stomping ground. The tall, erect septuagenarian, whose brown hair is now fringed with silver, casts a reflective glance at the mountains as we stroll through the house. It's a quick but affectionate acknowledgment, like a man passing his lover in a crowded

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room. The passion is palpable, but unspoken.

For Brooks Dodge, skiing the steeps has been an improbable ticket to an extraordinary life. While picking off a stunning array of ultrasteep first descents around New Hampshire in the 1940s, Dodge quietly redefined the realm of the possible on skis. The country boy never dreamed that his talent would one day earn him an Ivy League scholarship, a berth on two U.S. Olympic ski teams, a place in the U.S. Skiing Hall of Fame,

and recognition, a half-century after his daring feats around Tuckerman Ravine, as the pioneer of modern extreme skiing.

"Brookie Dodge was huge," declares an admiring John Egan, a modern extreme skier who has starred in numerous adventure ski

**"Brookie Dodge was huge," declares admiring extreme skier John Egan.**

films, including several by Warren Miller. "People train at Mount Washington to climb and ski all over the world. So in his own backyard, Dodge was competing on a world level."

Extreme skiing today has grown into a booming cottage industry. Ski areas are now falling over themselves to offer steeper, wilder, riskier terrain to the paying public, promoting their hair-ball runs with apoplectic hype. Extreme skiing contests have become a regular feature at many western ski resorts. The culmination of this fad is the multimillion-dollar ESPN Winter X-Games, in which packs of skiers race head-to-head in a kind of demolition downhill—all of which makes the trailblazer of steep terrain decidedly uncomfortable.

I ask Dodge: "Are you extreme?" He ponders the question. His angular jaw juts forward, and he narrows his deep-set eyes. "I don't know what people mean by that term," he growls. "I've seen movies of guys jumping off 100-foot cliffs and landing in a heap of powder at the bottom. I don't know what they call themselves. Personally, I think that's stupid. It takes a helluva lot more skill to ski a steep slope and do it in elegant form.

"I just thought of it as developing technique that would meet the challenge that I had given myself. I would always do it with a minimum of risk. That was part of the game. I wanted to stick around," he says. "If that's what they call extreme skiing—well, I never thought of it that way."

For Dodge, skiing the steeps was a challenge that was equal parts intellectual, aesthetic and athletic. "I was interested in skiing elegantly, precisely and well from the top to the bottom," he says. That meant no mistakes and no stops. Dodge wasn't looking for glory. He was in quest of the perfect run.

As we sit down alongside a tall stone fireplace to continue our conversation, Dodge abruptly turns to me and levels a stern gaze. "I wanna make damn sure this is going to be accurate," he snaps. "If it's not, you can just pack up and leave." I assure him that everything will be rigorously fact-checked; he reluctantly accepts. The gut-check greeting explains why many have dismissed the old man as a curmudgeon. For skiers, he has been a mythic figure, about whom little is known. He has scared away many of the people interested in telling his tale. I have persisted largely out of stubborn admiration for what he has done. As a skier who has made annual pilgrimages to Tuckerman Ravine for more than a decade, I have been awestruck by Dodge's

bold routes, having skied some of them and having been scared senseless on others. It is from having followed—or attempted to—where Dodge has led that I realize that the man is nothing if not consistent. Sure, Brooks Dodge is a control freak. His obsession with precision has been a hallmark of his creative genius. That quality is what has enabled him to live a life on the edge—and return to tell about it.

JOSEPH BROOKS DODGE JR. was born in 1929 in North Conway, New Hampshire. His father was Appalachian Mountain Club hut manager Joe Dodge, a legendary raconteur, woodsman and gruff host to countless mountain travelers from the 1920s to the '60s. The Dodge family lived in Pinkham Notch, the remote base camp at the foot of the highest peaks of the White Mountains, 10 miles north of Jackson.

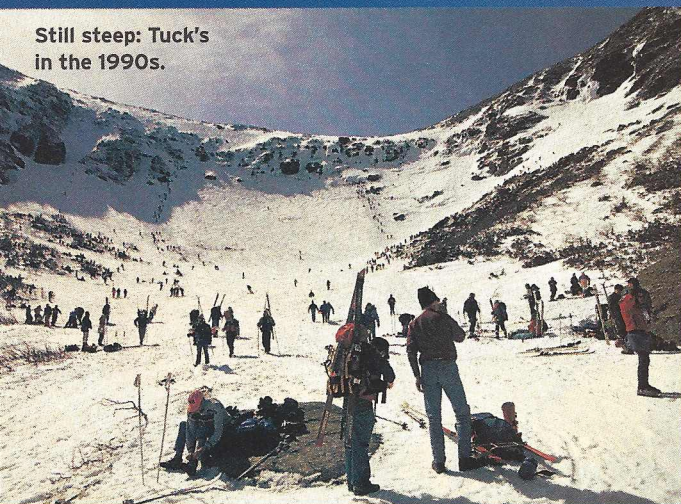
### TO TUCKERMAN AND BEYOND

Tuckerman Ravine, located on Mount Washington, New Hampshire, is a legendary pilgrimage site for skiers and snowboarders seeking to test themselves on the steeps of the backcountry. The ravine often holds snow into July; on a good spring weekend, thousands of people flock there.

**Getting There:** Tuckerman Ravine is best accessed from Pinkham Notch, which is located on NH 16, ten miles north of Jackson and three hours from Boston. It is a 3.1-mile hike from the AMC Pinkham Notch Visitors Center to the ravine.

**Staying There:** The ravine has limited camping, and there is inexpensive lodging at the AMC Joe Dodge Lodge in Pinkham Notch (call 800/262-4455 or visit outdoors.org for reservations). There are also numerous

Still steep: Tuck's in the 1990s.



hotels and inns within a 15-minute drive of the mountain (contact Mount Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce, 800/367-3364 or 4seasonresort.com).

**The Routes:** The best skiers can test themselves on the routes Brooks Dodge pioneered a half-century ago. The most popular include Duchess, Dodge's Drop and Chute Variation.

**Other Backcountry Destinations:** There are numerous other less-traveled areas for skiing around Mount Washington. For a definitive guidebook to backcountry skiing and riding in Tuckerman Ravine and elsewhere, see *Backcountry Skiing Adventures: Classic Ski and Snowboard Tours in Maine and New Hampshire*, by David Goodman (AMC Books, 1999, \$14.95; 800/262-4455).

Brooks got his first pair of skis at age 2. He and his sister would go outside and hike up the Tuckerman Ravine Trail a short distance, then try to get down any way they could. Seeing that the children needed instruction, their parents began taking them into Jackson each week for a two-hour lesson at the famous Hannes Schneider ski school. Joe Dodge eventually brought instructors to stay at Pinkham Notch, which was a dream come true for Brooks. Under the tutelage of a young racer named Johnny Reid, Brooks began to ski every free moment. "After school, Johnny would take my sister and me up the Wildcat Trail or the Sherburne Trail. We'd climb up until 15 minutes before dark, and then ski home."

When Dodge reached high school, he burst out of the backwoods and onto the ski slopes. His years of hiking up mountains to ski had made him a phenomenally strong skier, and the precocious teenager was soon dusting the top college racers from Middlebury and Dartmouth. Walter Prager, the Dartmouth ski coach, was duly impressed and promptly recruited him for the vaunted Big Green ski team. When Dodge told him he couldn't afford the Ivy League school, Prager returned the next week with an offer of a scholarship, a job as a pot washer and a second job in a ski shop in Hanover, New Hampshire. "Well, I'm yours," Dodge said. It was his unlikely turn, riding his skis out of the rugged New Hampshire mountains into the rarefied halls of Dartmouth in 1947.

Under the tutelage of world-renowned coaches, Dodge rose quickly through the ranks to become among the top racers in the world. He was on the U.S. World Championship ski team in 1950 and 1954, and he competed on the U.S. Olympic ski team in Oslo in 1952 and in Cortina, Italy, in 1956. He narrowly missed medaling in Cortina, coming in fourth in slalom, and he won a number of national races in Europe that year.

Even as Dodge crisscrossed the world, it was his boyhood stomping ground that cast the deepest spell on him. Tuckerman Ravine resembles a sliced-open teacup perched on the side of Mount Washington, the highest peak in New Hampshire. It is an internationally famous proving ground for skiers. Globetrotting extreme skier John Egan says flatly, "Tuck's is as hairy as anywhere else in the world. It's a big mountain environment with a lot of consequences at the bottom if it doesn't work out."

Brookie Dodge first skied over the Lip of Tuckerman Ravine on his wooden skis at age 12. Coming over the Lip and descending the supersteep headwall of the ravine is an unforgettable rite of passage for skiers. It is a moment when earth falls away and sky rushes up beneath your skis. To survive, or even attempt, skiing over the Lip requires a skier to overcome a primal fear of falling and to transform terror into a thrilling and precise flight on skis. From the day he skied the Lip, Dodge was smitten. He often hiked up just to watch the college skiers tackle the half-dozen steepest lines around Tuckerman Ravine. As Dodge grew older and stronger, he turned his sights to the multitude of unskied routes that laced the walls of the craggy bowl. He lusted after frighteningly steep lines, but he realized that current ski technique, with its wide carved turns, simply required too much space for the narrowest gullies. Brookie Dodge had a solution: He would just reinvent skiing.

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"I set out to devise a different approach to skiing there," he tells me, as we pore over photos of him skiing as a young man. His thinking was simple: Tight places require tight turns. So he developed a style of short, quick jump turns—"two-pole turns," as he called them—which involved keeping his ski tips on the snow while pivoting his tails back and forth across the fall line to check his speed. The innovative technique is common today, but it was unheard of in those days, he recalls.

Captivated by the possibilities of pioneering bold new routes, Dodge began to lead a split life: He would train and race at ski areas for Dartmouth, but on free weekends, he would slip away and hike to his old haunt. As he peered up at the numerous unskied gullies around Mount Washington, Dodge swore, "I have to ski them all." One by one, Dodge began descending everything that was white. Duchess, Sluice, Cathedral, Icefall and Dodge's Drop were among the now-classic routes that he claimed on his long wooden skis and leather boots. The daring, technical lines, many of which were over 50 degrees in steepness, astounded the ski world. No ski area had terrain like this, and no other skiers had the moxie or talent to attempt such jaw-dropping lines. When Dodge began skiing in Tuckerman Ravine in the '30s, there were seven established routes; when he finished in the early '50s, he had added a dozen more. In the years since he made his mark, no major routes have been established there of the

high standard and enduring quality as those that he had skied. "Even with the ski technology today, those are still tough lines to ski. There are not many people who can nail them," says Egan, who grew up skiing at Tuck's. "And back then, skiing on [wooden skis]," Egan chuckles, "he was definitely pushing the envelope."

"I remember following him down some of the steep chutes, and it was just sort of free falling, with your skis checking across the slope when you could," recalls George Macomber, a fellow Dartmouth and Olympic skier, who began skiing with Dodge as a teenager. "Nobody did that kind of stuff. He was way ahead of his time."

The consequences of skiing in these places, Macomber notes matter-of-factly, were severe. "The main thing about it was that you couldn't fall. If you fell, you were dead."

INTENSITY MARKS ALL that Brooks Dodge has done since his days of pioneering the steeps. He graduated from Dartmouth in 1951 with a degree in civil engineering. He continued racing during a two-year Army stint, but retired his racing bib after the 1956 season to get married to a young lawyer named Ann, have two children, and attend Harvard Business School. He joined the Boston-based real estate development firm of Cabot, Cabot & Forbes in 1959 and became its CEO in the early 1970s.

But skiing was still in Dodge's blood. In the 1960s, he proposed to mountaineering guide Hans Gmoser that they

use helicopters to ski in the Bugaboo Mountains of British Columbia. The trips that he, Gmoser and their friends took into the virgin powder fields throughout the '60s were the seed of Gmoser's company, Canadian Mountain Holidays, now the largest heli-skiing operator in the world. Dodge and his skiing buddies, including Macomber, also planned and developed the Wildcat Ski Area in New Hampshire in the late '50s.

In 1974, Dodge abruptly quit as CEO of Cabot, Cabot & Forbes. "I'd had enough of the damn city," he tells me. He packed up his wife and two kids and moved back to Jackson, New Hampshire, in the shadow of Mount Washington. But at age 46, Dodge wasn't about to retire. In 1976, he defeated skiers half his age to win the National Veterans Ski Championship. He hired an Italian ski coach, and the word was that Brooks Dodge was returning to the slopes with a vengeance. At the same time, he took up soaring, competing in—and winning—competitions around New England. Then, on a summer day in 1978, the fate that Brookie had eluded while skiing the steeps nearly claimed him in a glider.

Dodge was competing in the New England soaring championships and was ahead in the race, which was held on a searingly hot July day. As he approached the landing site in western Massachusetts, the temperature in his cockpit was over 120 degrees, and he had drunk all his water. In his final landing approach, Dodge suffered a heat stroke and lost consciousness. His glider clipped a tree and

slammed nose-first into the ground. Dodge was pulled from the wreckage with a fractured skull, and his lower left leg was crushed. Doctors wanted to amputate just above his ankle, but his son refused permission. Young Brookie knew that if anyone could fight his way back from the brink, it was his father. Dodge spent 95 days in Massachusetts General Hospital, where doctors had to fuse his ankle joint together. It looked as if Brooks Dodge's days in wild places were over.

"YOU WANT TO see my toys?" asks Dodge cheerily. His gait shows only the hint of a limp, the result of having his leg shortened two decades ago. We pass beneath trophy heads from his recent hunting trips in Africa, Asia and the Arctic. He then shows me into his garage, where he and his wife have an impressive rack of skis: skinny cross-country skis for their daily outings on the trails and fat powder boards for their annual heli-ski trips to British Columbia. A fleet of custom-made titanium road bikes that they have ridden all over the world is parked in the corner.

It was inevitable that Brooks Dodge would return to the mountains. It was the place where he drew his strength. The focus, calculation, obsession—everything he harnessed to survive the steeps as a boy, he had to muster to bring life back to his shattered body. Within 18 months after his accident, he was back on his skis, gingerly rebuilding his confidence and strength. Within two years, he and Ann took a bike trip through Europe with Hans Gmoser. Brooks was in excruciating pain on the trip as his ankle swelled after each day's ride. But there was no turning back.

"Now it's a total enjoyment just to get out in the winter and the outdoors and fresh air and be able to make some good turns at age 70 with a crippled old body," reflects Dodge.

He pauses momentarily and peers off out his window toward his beloved mountains. He seems to be concentrating on something, and his eyes twinkle knowingly. It's the look of that audacious young man who once stared down the throat of Dodge's Drop and saw an elegant ski route where others saw only fear. **SA**