

Run Deep



By John Baldwin and Linda Bily

Run Deep

A Celebration of Backcountry Skiing in Deep Snow



By John Baldwin and Linda Bily



📷 Rachel Baldwin 📷 JB

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Alison Sydor JB

The wind pressed my jacket firmly against our chests. It was the kind of wind you could lean your full body weight into. We stood on the middle summit of Mount Seymour as powerful gusts behind a clearing storm blasted the alpine areas. Over on the main summit, the wind swept up the steep southwest side of the mountain, creating strong updraft. More than forty ravens had gathered here to soar on it. They would fold their wings and chase each other, diving and rolling in hot pursuit while making noises that sounded like pebbles being dropped into a pool of water. At the end of each plunge the ravens would catch the updraft and instantly rise several hundred metres to repeat the diving and tucking all over again.



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📷 JB



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Maybe Hans Gmoser had also been watching ravens when he said, “A man should have wings to carry him where his dreams go but sometimes a pair of skis make a good substitute.” For us, backcountry skiing is the closest we will ever get to being ravens. Using touring bindings that allow us to walk on our skis and “skins” for grip, we roam the high ridges and peaks like the ravens, free to wander and ski where our hearts lead us and to roll with the spirit of the earth.

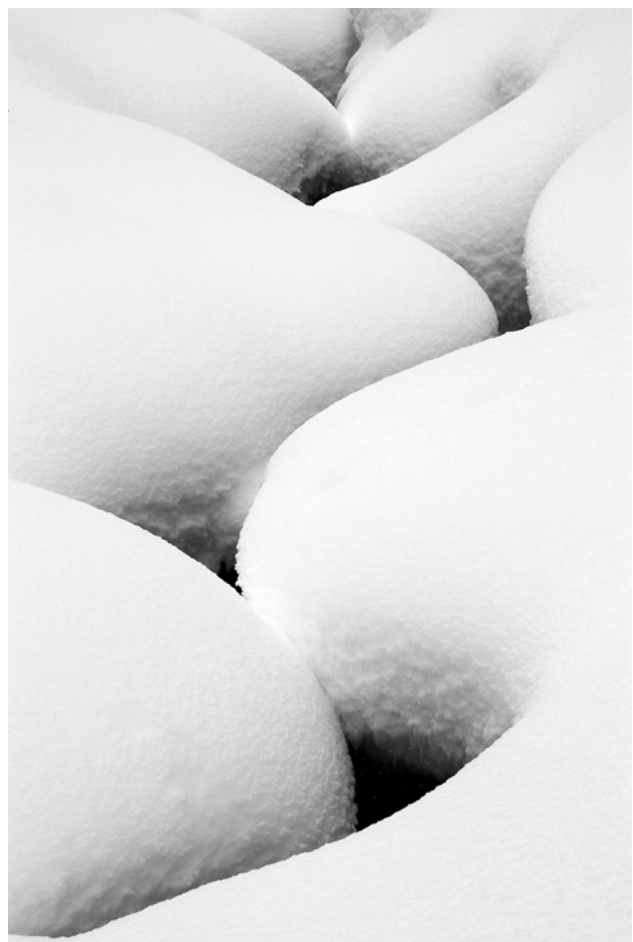
In winter, storms roll in off the North Pacific Ocean and wash the western edge of British Columbia with waves of moisture like the barnacles endure in the surf below. This constant lashing plasters whipped cream dollops of snow on the peaks and smears it across the ridges and bowls.



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What is it about snow? What is it that draws kids to make snow angels, or run their hands and feet through the snow? And what is it about making ski tracks through fresh powder draws out the child in all of us?

In winter, skiing is our life. It is part of our seasonal migration from green to white, from sweeping hillsides of alpine flowers to snow-plastered trees and snowflakes dancing in the air. We start our trips with a slow steady climb up through a wintry forest, with snow settled in deep under the trees. All sounds are muffled by the blanket of snow, and the old-growth forest stands in total silence as it has for hundreds of years. The cool air on our cheeks is invigorating. The steady rhythm of climbing uphill is meditative and produces an inner quiet. We are suspended above the ground by the snow. The landscape takes over and imparts a sense of flow as we move slowly up the hill, curving around the side of the mountain and wrapping it with our winding ski track. Up we climb, eager for the descent, but also basking in the peace and solitude of the ascent. Winter is a time to look inward—a time to enrich the soul.

As we wind our way to the top of our run, the air is often thick with snowflakes. We remove our skins and the anticipation builds as we switch our bindings to downhill mode. With a push over the edge we are off, curving and swooping our way down the mountainside with snow spraying in the air. Feeling the soft snow under our skis we play with it, carving and sculpting as we steer through this mouldable medium. When the snow is deep, it sprays onto our chests and flies in our faces and only our speed enables us to float on top, suspended on the frozen crystals.

It is exhilarating to lay down the first set of ski tracks in a vast wilderness, as if painting on an empty white canvas. Our tracks are an expression of joy written on a temporary canvas that will soon be washed



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 Anne-Marie Baribeau  LB

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Linda Bily JB

clean with the next snowfall. But backcountry skiing is not just about the exciting downhill—it is also about the tranquility of moving gracefully through the mountain wilderness. Our skis become the tools we use to interact with the winter landscape. They allow us to revel in the spirit of winter, to swoop down from the summit of a high mountain peak or seek out the snowy winter glades of an old-growth forest, and to connect with the wilderness in a totally different manner than we are used to. In 1921 Sir Arnold Lunn described this well in his book *Alpine Skiing At All Heights And Seasons*, with the words: “There are many who find in the combination of skiing and mountaineering the finest of all sports, for whom no ski tour is perfect unless it includes the ascent of some big peak, or traverse of some great glacier pass, and also yields the ski-runner the unfettered joy of a perfect unhampered run down some great glacier. It is not merely skiing, it is not

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merely scenery that draws us to the glaciers on skis. It is rather the knowledge that the skiing motion seems to lend a new significance to mountain beauty, so that the impressions gained in some run down a glacier highway are deeper, more vivid and more enduring than those which reward the man on foot.”

Days blend together and there is a flow to the winter season. In the dead of winter the high peaks and icefields are shrouded in bad weather and our ski journeys stay closer to the treeline. Here we search for deep powder in glades and meadows. As the days grow longer and the weather improves we will venture higher and higher into big alpine bowls and ski across vast glaciers. The tranquility of the glades will be replaced by the shimmering white of the alpine. But for now our souls get to play in the deep snow like the ravens soaring and rolling on the updraft.

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🏂 Linda Bily and Mike Miller 📷 JB

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