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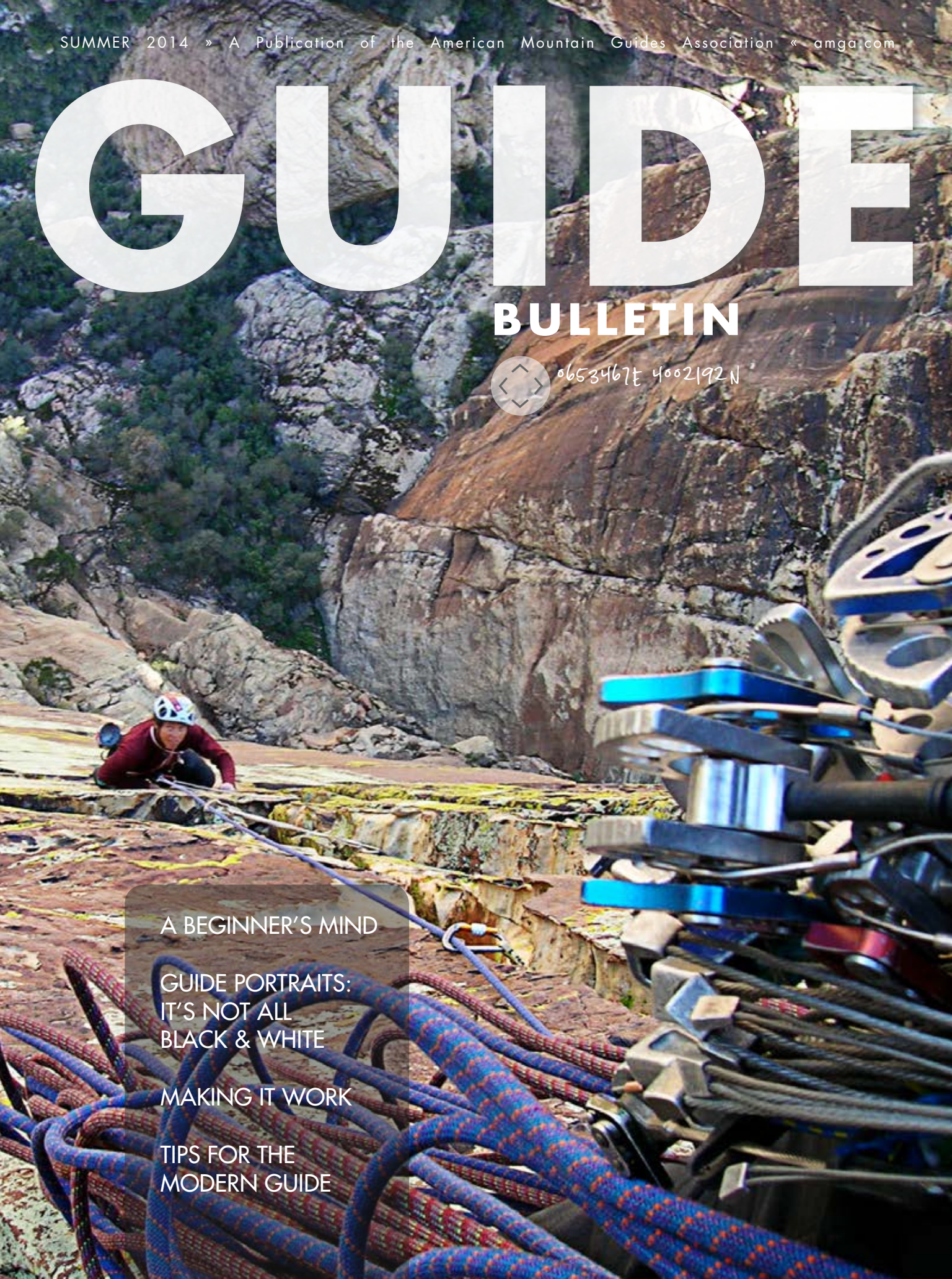
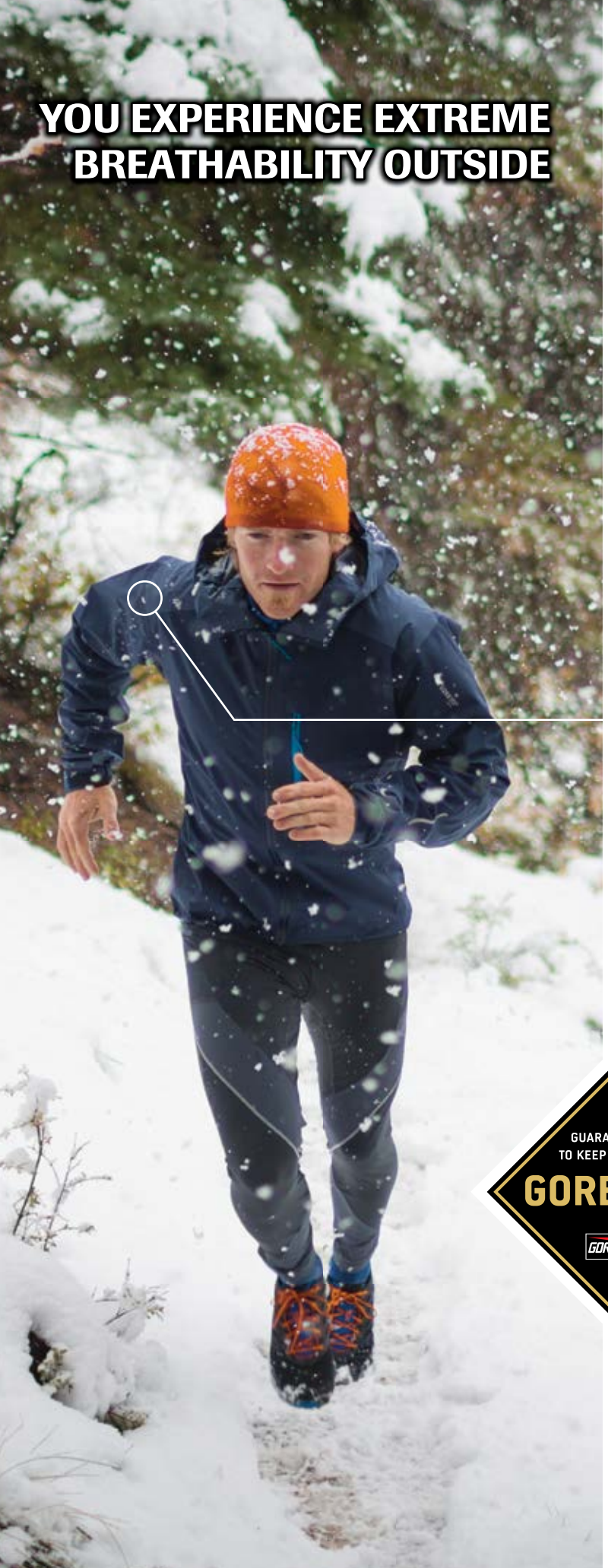
GUIDE BULLETIN





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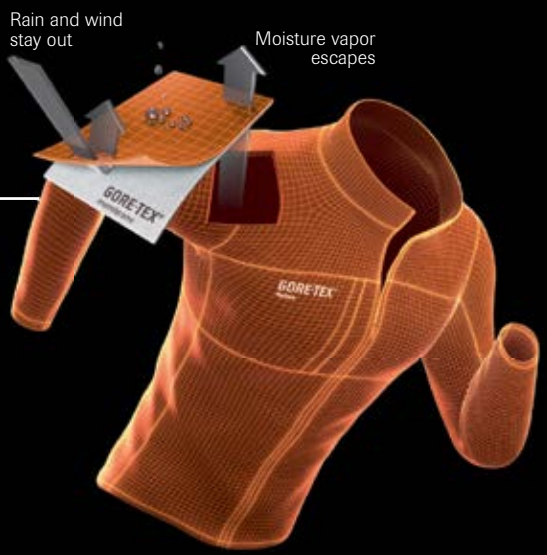

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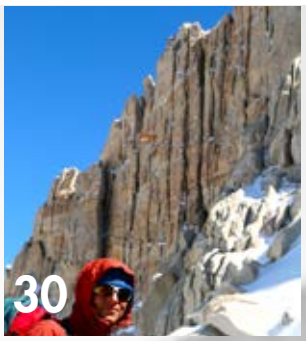
GUIDE BULLETIN

On the cover: ANGELA HAWSE ON PITCH 2 OF CLOUD TOWER, RED ROCKS, DURING A ROCK GUIDE EXAM IN 2005.
PHOTO BY THE LATE AND INCREDIBLE CRAIG LUEBBEN



GUIDE BULLETIN

Guide Bulletin

Editor: Lizzy Scully
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Contributing Photographers: Karsten Delap, Nick Manning, Cameron Lawson, David Clifford, Ashley Davis Tilly, The late and incredible Craig Luebben, Matt Lipscomb, Chris Wright

Guides share a lot of commonalities: a higher-than-average level of athleticism, a love of the outdoors, a desire to educate, an obsession with climbing and or skiing, and the list goes on. But we're also a diverse group. We've come to guiding in different ways and with diverse perspectives. In this issue, we explore both these distinctions and our shared aims.

By Betsy Winter, AMGA Executive Director

IN OUR OPENING FEATURE, *A Beginner's Mind*, 55-year-old Steve Levin describes how his mindset changed exponentially when he decided to become a guide. He had to unlearn decades of climbing habits in order to hone his guiding skills: "To become a better guide, I needed to look at this intimately familiar universe with new eyes, to carefully recognize and re-evaluate all that I'd come to take for granted," Levin writes. He came to guiding at a much later age than most guides.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, 21-year-old Nina Hance was practically born into the lifestyle, as her parents were heli-ski guides in the Chugach Mountains of Alaska. In our closing article, *Potholders,* she takes us on a journey from her childhood to her first season as an Apprentice Ski Guide. "The sum of the skills and responsibilities that an aspiring guide needs to learn has always intimidated me," she explains. "But… as the season progressed and I became more practiced, I also felt less intimidated by the extent of responsibilities and training that still lay ahead of me." Both Levin and Hance share the vulnerabilities intrinsic to the guiding career, but also the strength derived from their love of the mountains.

The guiding life is not just unique in the mixed paths guides take to professionalism; it's also diverse in guides' perspectives. Adam Fisher opens his article, *Making it Work,* by writing, "Choosing guiding as a career can be both immensely rewarding and deeply frustrating… Unlike many other occupations, there isn't a clear path laid out for aspiring professional guides." His discussions with ten guides at different stages in their AMGA training reveal innumerable perspectives on everything from making ends meet to finally finding one's place and what that looks like. And in our photo feature, *It's Not All Black & White,* Karsten Delap captures the many faces of guiding in shades of gray. *GUIDE Bulletin* Editor Lizzy Scully captions these photos with brief overviews of these individuals' lives, along with answers to significant questions such as: Why guide? Why is certification important? What are hardships you've suffered in your guiding path?

We loved this issue for its variety. We think it illustrates the wide spectrum of personalities, styles, and paths in our community. We'd love to hear your stories and get your input on this topic. Please visit our blog— AMGA.com/blog—and comment on this editorial, which we are reprinting there. And, we invite you to share your stories with us. Please write Lizzy Scully at editor@amga.com if you have a piece to submit for the blog or the *GUIDE Bulletin*. Check out our new section, *Iluminations,* Page 38, which highlights your in-the-field photos and quotes you've overheard or said yourself. Thanks, and see you at the crags this summer! «

A ROCK GUIDE, AUTHOR, AND SPEAKER, MAJKA BURHARDT EPITOMIZES THE DIVERSE LIFESTYLE LED BY MANY GUIDES.

PHOTOS BY ASHLEY DAVIS TILLY

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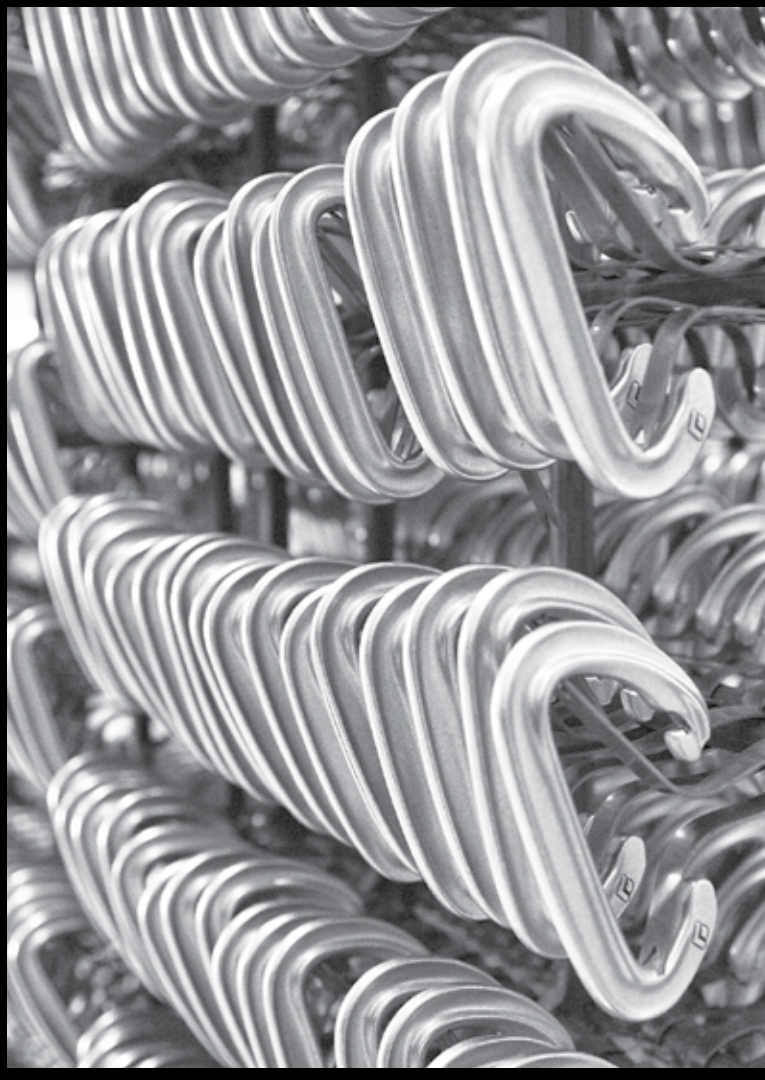
Photographers (clockwise from top left): Andrew Burr, Sandra Salvas, Andrew Burr



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THE BEGINNER'S MIND

STEVE LEVIN GUIDING THE EAST FACE OF LONGS PEAK, AKA THE "DIAMOND."
PHOTO BY STEVE LEVIN

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A SEASONED CLIMBER ADDS DEPTH TO HIS GUIDING PERSONA UNLEARNING A LIFETIME OF CLIMBING.

By Steve Levin, Assistant Rock Guide

THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE EASY! *Four pitches up Eldorado Canyon's Rewritten and my ropes are a tangled mess of red and blue butterfly coils, snarled chaotically around my legs and tie-in point. It's an early afternoon in June, the start of my first season guiding, working for the AMGA Accredited Business, Colorado Mountain School. As my two guests in turn negotiate the fourth-pitch crux 60 feet below—a rising traverse along a horizontal break—it occurs to me that perhaps I should have coached them before I led the pitch. I yell down encouragement, as much to soothe my own fears that they will be unable to follow (what then?) as to help. We've been moving much slower than I'm used to on this relatively mellow 5.7, and now the wind is picking up as grey thunderheads build over the Divide, west across the spine of the West Ridge. I scan the small, sloping ledge where I've built an awkward belay and realize we won't all comfortably fit. I want to put it into high gear, but then realize I'm only one member of this climbing party—the game has changed. After 40 years on the rock, and with an intimate knowledge of Eldo, I feel an uncharacteristic edginess.*

My mindset that day had been, "I'm taking two people out climbing." Simple enough, right? And so my preparation had been routine: Select the objective. Sort gear. Coordinate a meeting time. And though carrying a full pack and trailing two ropes wasn't my normal M.O., I felt confident my risk-assessment abilities would provide for significant safety margins. So what, then, made that day (and every guiding day since) so unlike the recreational climbing I was used to? »


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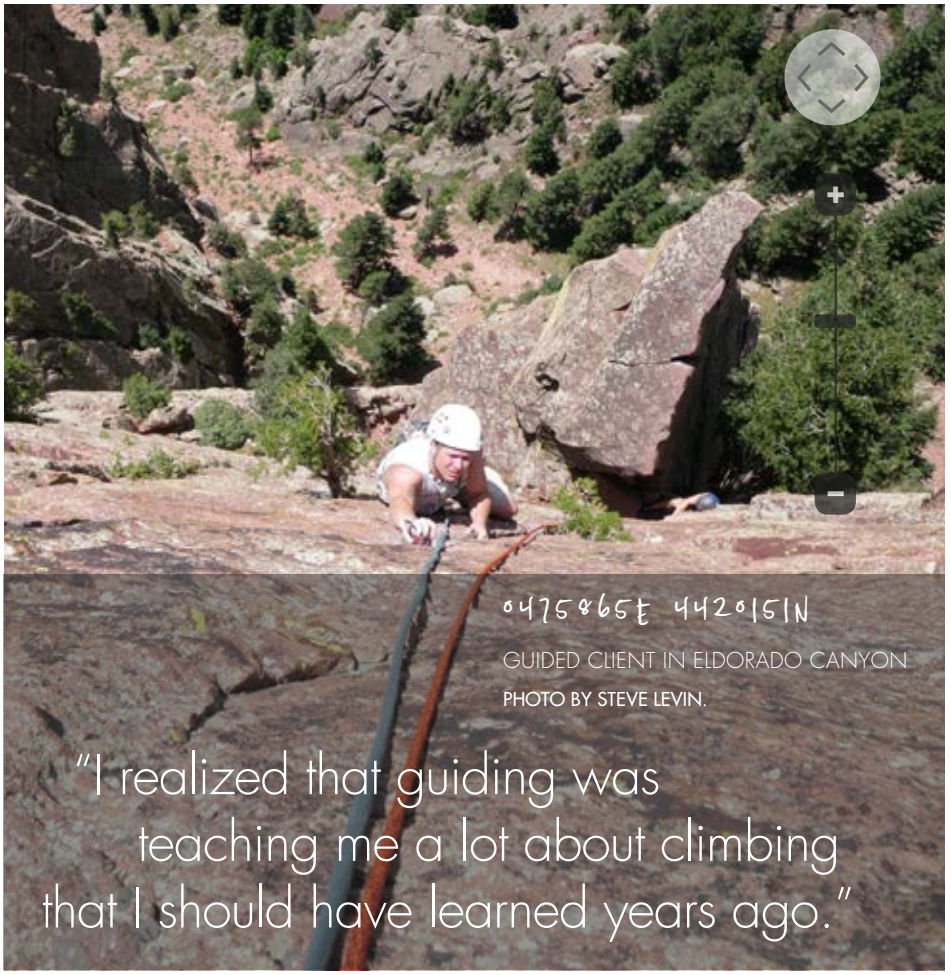
As it turns out, a lot. I didn't quite understand how much recreational climbing and guiding are two opposite sides of the climbing coin. And I didn't realize how much the recreational side had conditioned me. To become a better guide, I needed to look at this intimately familiar universe with new eyes, to carefully recognize and re-evaluate all that I'd come to take for granted: the ease of a familiar partnership, moving over exposed, third-class terrain, and my minimalist approach to gear and rigging. I would need to cultivate a Beginner's Mind—to unlearn much of the technical knowledge I'd already acquired.

First was the partnership. I'd been conditioned to climbing with peers, climbers comfortable and fluid in the vertical realm. The interplay and synergy of motion I'd experienced with them high up on a Black Canyon desperate or on some sandy Zion wall was my baseline—we would arrive at the belay with gear organized for the handoff, ropes tidy, and little need for talk as we reflexively shared tasks. But with guiding, that missing set of seasoned eyes—and hands—raised the bar considerably. Moreover, moving all the rope myself while directing each step of the day was exhausting—even simple toproping days in Boulder Canyon required constant focus and output. Now, each day as I met my guests, I was presented with an unknown quantity that I needed to wrap my head around: I would need to "fact-find" with my guests, whether from pre-climb interviews, watching their coordination as they stepped out of the car, or seeing their comfort level on an exposed, rocky trail. Every piece of information was valuable.

Next was taking for granted the relative comfort and ease with which my peers and I move over technical terrain. We would casually approach Lumpy Ridge's Twin Owls with a quick solo scramble, or solo down the East Slabs of Redgarden Wall in 15 minutes back to the car. In guiding, these simple tasks were no longer straightforward; indeed, I was finding that approaches and descents were often the crux. Here, cultivating Beginner's Mind proved a challenge, as I realized how difficult it was to recalibrate my concept of "scrambling"; exposed terrain is intimidating, an unnatural environment for most human beings, but I'd forgotten as much years ago. Even the steep, rocky trail leading to *Rewritten* had taken a chunk out of our morning as my guests huffed and puffed uphill with sea-level lungs and city legs. With time and effort, I found that re-booting my expectations on this terrain helped me to relax—and even have fun. I learned to offset my natural inclination to use speed as a tool with setting more realistic time plans, becoming more efficient with rope management, and employing sensible pacing.

FINALLY, I FOUND THAT MY PARED-DOWN TECHNICAL systems were no longer valid. I had whittled to a bare minimum my techniques, knot craft, and equipment. I never carried a cordelette, rarely belayed two followers simultaneously, and was certain I could "figure it out" should I need to rescue an injured partner. My standard anchor set-up on long free climbs like Chiefshead in the Park had been a series of clove hitches, employing a direct-harness belay, and my partners and I would casually forgo taking water (or packs) on *The Cruise* or *Yellow Spur* because we knew we could climb them quickly. But in guiding, you cannot be so relaxed. Instead, the challenge became moving two followers efficiently through a series of belay or rappel transitions, or short-roping an exposed descent. You have to be prepared, and proficient with your tools. Beginner's Mind again, but now with a slight affront to my ego as I realized that guiding was teaching me a lot about climbing that I should have learned years ago. I guess I hadn't mastered the vertical world as well as I'd thought.

But the biggest challenge was accepting that my role had changed. It was no longer as climbing partner, or even as climber, but as a facilitator for someone else's experience. We rarely do this while recreational climbing »



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GUIDED CLIENT IN ELDORADO CANYON.
PHOTO BY STEVE LEVIN.

"I realized that guiding was teaching me a lot about climbing that I should have learned years ago."

(well, maybe while on belay duty for our friend's project!), but I soon found it liberating to put my own climbing agenda aside. Now a day in Eldo was orchestrated to immerse my guests in the milieu of rock and sky; to share the pulse and flavor of the canyon; to share my climbing DNA. Pointing out the old gazebo on the Rotwand while recalling Ivy Baldwin's high-wire act; indicating poison ivy or blooming Mariposa lilies that we passed on the trail; or describing Roger Briggs' epic first free ascent of *The Diving Board* as we gazed skywards—these and other tidbits, drawn from a lifetime as a climber, became my currency as I built depth into my guiding persona, even as I worked to let go of much of that climbing past.

A year later and I'm in another environment I know well—the Diamond of Longs Peak, Colorado. The weather forecast is poor, a 70 percent chance of storms, but this is the only day my guest has. We easily negotiated the bowling-alley gully of the North Chimney, and the climb has been going well. After each pitch, I break out PB & J mini-sandwiches, and energy bars and gels. I carry extra water and clothing, pacing our climbing and coaching my guest where necessary. Climbing at altitude is relatively new for him, so I emphasize being efficient and resting at each opportunity. The infamous "5.7" traverse requires a bit of beta ("make the move and then reach back to unclip"), and the pumpy "enduro" corner a quick refresher in relaxing the hands while jamming. I'm psyched to be here and am doing my best to spread that energy. At a high belay I show him an efficient way of French-freeing using slings and clipping directly into gear with his belay loop (just in case—which turns out to be necessary) and give him detailed beta for climbing the squeeze chimney with his pack hanging from his harness. Now, as I belay him up the crux, penultimate pitch, a storm moves in and graupel rains down. We're in the thick of it. I lean out and watch my guest climbing up to me, an enormous grin lighting up his face. «

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A SPECTRUM OF GUIDES AND ASPIRING GUIDES DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES & REWARDS OF PURSUING AMGA CERTIFICATION.

IT'S NOT ALL BLACK & WHITE

Photos by Karsten Delap, Text by Lizzy Scully

1 SARAH CARPENTER

Ski Guide

For Carpenter, helping people achieve goals they didn't think were possible is a gift that she can give. "I love my office outside, and I love inspiring passion for the outdoors in others," she says. She values her AMGA certification because she finds the feedback she gets from more advanced instructors to be invaluable. "The guiding career is such that you don't often have opportunities to have your skills critiqued by others," she says. "And that is such an important piece to growing and learning as a guide and as a mountain traveler." Carpenter is one of three people who run the American Avalanche Institute, and she works for various guide services. Her biggest guiding challenge right now is dealing with a knee injury and still trying to work. "This summer will be full of surgeries," she says. "But hopefully I'll be put back together by winter!"

2 LINDSAY FIXMER

Rock Guide, Apprentice Alpine Guide

Fixmer believes in order to give her clientele the best experience possible, she needs to continually advance her skill set. "As a guide, formal training is important to me," she explains. "And certification is a crucial component to reaching my goals." Fixmer strives to learn from fellow guides and colleagues, uphold and add value to international standards, guide and learn in diverse terrain, and broaden her experience to be more well rounded. "The most rewarding aspect of my guiding career is my clients' and my own personal growth in the mountains in our character, our experience, and our skill set," says Fixmer. "This growth fosters excitement for the next climb, the next destination, and the next adventure, which in turn elevates the desire and drive to learn more. It's a climbing growth cycle!"

3 MATT FARMER

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

An American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide and AMGA Instructor Team Member, Farmer joined the AMGA Instructor Team in 2014 and guides throughout Europe and the United States. He was hooked on the AMGA after his first course. "Though I initially started the program seeking the technical training, I quickly appreciated that a tremendously powerful part of the process was the development of personal and professional camaraderie due to the cross pollination of ideas among guides from all over the country and indeed around the world," he says. His love of sharing the challenge and joy of moving through technical terrain motivates him to continue increasing and refining his skillset. "I feel privileged that I am able to design my life to pursue my bliss while at the same time sharing the satisfaction of facilitating the dreams and life experiences of others," says Farmer. Farmer also believes there is always room for improvement. "Certification is not the end goal professionally," he says. "Rather it should be considered a minimum requirement for an independent professional… the beginning of embarking on the lifelong process of gaining more and more experience and expertise to become an increasingly competent guide." He recommends oversight in the form of structured mentoring and apprenticeships, combined with rigorous training programs and standards accredited by national and international professional associations as the norm in risk management intensive professions worldwide. "Guiding is still in its infancy in this regard. All of us—clients, guides, guide service owners, land managers, and the public at large—will benefit from continuing to raise the professional bar industry wide."

4 RON FUNDERBURKE

Rock Guide, Apprentice Alpine Guide

From early on, Funderburke recognized certification was the only way to access a career-level income, upward mobility, and a client stream that could sustain him. "If I really wanted to convince my spouse and family that guiding was a [viable] profession, I needed to actually be a professional, attain a professional-level skill set, and seek professional credentials," he explains. Funderburke chose guiding because it lets him vicariously re-live his early experiences as a rock climber. "I never get tired of their elation, their gratitude, and their dedication," he says of his clients. "I could guide the same rock climb, day after day after day, just to see the spark ignite in their eyes, the fire that tells me they will pursue climbing for their entire lives, just as I have." He derives the same satisfaction from teaching and training new climbing instructors in the AMGA Single Pitch Instructor program: "As I watch the light bulbs explode in an SPI student's mind, the old paradigms crumble, and I know that a professional perspective is being wrought. It's a great joy to watch."

5 ROB HESS

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

Embracing a term his friend coined, Hess calls himself an "Adventure Genie" because he loves helping people accomplish their dreams and develop an appreciation for all things "wild." His "guests" trust him to be their risk manager and to make sure their mountain experience is positive. "To work with many types of personalities and to be able to talk their language (so to speak), and develop a program that gets them stoked is what it's all about," he says. And as the chief guide and owner of Jackson Hole Mountain Guides, he has many opportunities to do this. However, it's not just the guiding that Hess loves; he also values relationships with fellow guides, both aspiring and fully certified, and is both the AMGA ski discipline coordinator and the AMGA course and exam director for rock, »

alpine, and ski disciplines. "To work programs where I have dialogue with fellow instructors and examiners on how we approach guiding truly gets me psyched," says Hess. "Plus, it's amazing to work with and watch newer guides and aspirants, and see how they think, work, and solve problems, and how this evolves constantly over the years."

6 PETE KEANE

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

Keane wasn't sure he wanted to finish after starting on the guide track because it was difficult balancing family life and work. But, he says, both his "highly supportive" wife and various Instructor Team members urged him on. "I received a lot of positive encouragement, and this helped immensely," he explains. Furthermore, "Having two young kids actually had a focusing effect on my preparation." Now the owner of Timberline Mountain Guides, Keane is glad he stuck with it. The job is constantly evolving—as Keane puts it, "The most rewarding aspect of my career is finding and choosing new and appropriate objectives for my returning clients. This keeps me from stagnating." Though Keane does repeat many of his most requested summer alpine objectives, he says he finds his most rewarding guiding challenges in the shoulder seasons.

7 ANNA KEELING

IFMGA Guide

Keeling loves all things mountains, and has not only climbed and skied for decades, but also used to compete in adventure races. It was only natural that she'd pursue a physically challenging and mentally stimulating career such as guiding. Keeling completed her IFMGA certifications in New Zealand with training and work experience in Canada. She became a United States citizen in 2009 and joined the AMGA shortly thereafter. Keeling trains guides in New Zealand and the United States. "I bring an international element to the AMGA Instructor Team as a foreigner," she says. Keeling has enjoyed balancing her life as a mother with finding new ways to be a guide, and becoming a guide trainer as one of the AMGA Instructor Team members. "It's fun seeing all the different types of people getting into it, and I like seeing what each has to offer," she says. "I also learn tons, too, about myself and others, and about the techniques and tricks. It's good fun, great people, and a great office."


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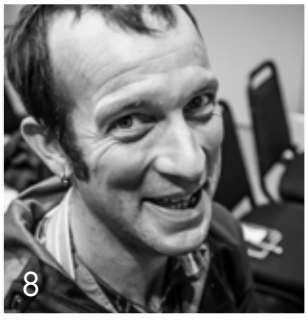
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8 FOREST MCBRIAN

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

McBrian pursued AMGA certification because he wanted a world-class education. "Research shows that mastery comes from thousands of hours of practice," he says. "But the old saying also shows that perfect practice makes perfect; early on in your career it pays to have several hundred hours of practice with a skilled coach looking over your shoulder. It improves your confidence and accelerates your learning process." Now the owner of Borealis Mountain Guides, along with his wife and colleague, Erin Smart, McBrian offers his clientele "wild adventures" in the Alps, Alaska, and the North Cascades. He loves the difficult yet rich, diverse work of guiding, citing one recent week as an example: "I skied, laughed, ate fabulous food, and got to know some wonderful people; we saw a fox near a glacier, skied through WWI ruins, and learned new phrases in new languages." However, he recalls it was sometimes difficult to balance the demands of training for courses and exams with guiding, travel, and time with friends and family, and so offers some advice for aspiring guides: Don't charge ahead too quickly!

9 ANDRES MARIN

Rock & Alpine Guide

Marin finds many reasons to love his profession: He loves challenging himself with hard onsight guiding objectives because it keeps him physically and mentally »

"Certification is not the end goal… but the beginning of embarking on the lifelong process of gaining more experience and expertise to become an increasingly competent guide." —MATT FARMER

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PHOTO / DAN HOLZ Matt gearing up for a day of climbing in Ouray, CO.

engaged; he enjoys meeting great guests and sharing experiences with them; and the places he works are "incredible." However, the career also has significant challenges. "It's hard to be really good at everything," he says. Marin doesn't want to "just" meet the minimum requirement to get certifications. But, he adds, he recently retired from international mixed and ice climbing competitions, after representing the United States in five climbing world cups. This gives him more time to focus on skiing and on finishing his full AMGA certification. All aspiring guides should take AMGA courses in the various disciplines, he says. "If a doctor, lawyer, or plumber needs to be certified or licensed, a mountain guide should be, too!"

10 JASON MARTIN

Rock Guide

An AMGA board member and Director of Operations at the American Alpine Institute (AAI), Martin develops course curricula, manages land-use permits, supervises AAI's guide staff, and oversees AAI's social network. He recently restarted his pursuit of AMGA certifications after a ten-year break. "I'm doing this to provide an example to the younger guides who work for me at the American Alpine Institute," he explains. Despite the challenges of the expense of the process due to family obligations and a full-time job, Martin enjoys the guiding profession. "I love sharing my passion with others and watching them fall in love with adventure in the outdoors."

11 RODRIGO MUJICA

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

The highlight of Mujica's guiding career was being one of the first guides in the United States to earn his full certification in 1998. "I believed in the profession from day one, when I quit school back in 1982 to pursue guiding," he says. "It was my dream to become a fully certified guide." Mujica has guided upward of 300 days per year, and calls the lifestyle "amazing." He now runs several mountain-guiding businesses (including Aventuras Patagonicas), a heli-ski operation, and avalanche-control operations for Chilean mines, all possible thanks to his certification and love for the mountains. But certification didn't come easily. When he was going through the process, the then-nascent program was expensive, time-consuming, and "nobody knew how far it would go in the United States." Ultimately, it was the best choice for Mujica: "I feel like I have done everything possible in my career for over 27 years. I owe everything to the mountains. It has been an amazing trip."


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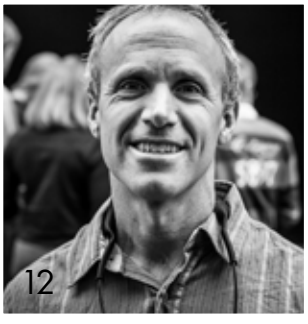
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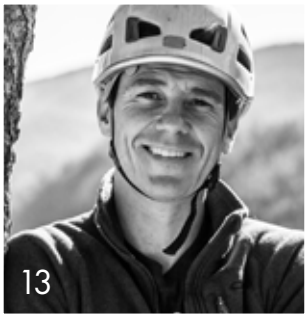
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12 ALAN ORAM

Aspirant Mountain Guide

An emergency medicine physician in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and the AMGA's medical advisor, Oram found guiding after 14 years of recreational climbing, skiing, and pursuing his medical career. After his residency, he sought a lifestyle linking his passion for the mountains with his medical training. "After some life changes and an accident in the Tetons while climbing with my good friend Gary Falk, who is now an American Mountain Guide/IFMGA guide, I realized the value of Gary's skills and training." Despite feeling like a "grandpop" on his courses and exams, Oram started the process in 2010 and hopes to finish by 2015. "Many people ask me why bother at my age [53], and I tell them that I am committed to developing the proper skills to safely and proficiently be a certified guide," he says. "Anything less, and I feel like I would shortchange myself and the people I'm taking into the mountains."

13 MICK PEARSON

Rock Guide, Assistant Alpine Guide

For Pearson, AMGA certification is the future of professional guiding in the United States. So, while the process has been long and resource consuming, he sticks with it because he enjoys working with people as they develop the confidence to pursue their dreams. Pearson owns Kaf Adventures, and considers himself first and foremost an instructor. "I'm proud of working as an educator and a »

"I love sharing my passion with others and watching them fall in love with adventure in the outdoors." —JASON MARTIN

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guide," he explains, adding that he's also proud to be part of the AMGA. "The organization is run by like-minded individuals who care about the future of our profession. Get involved with the organization, and enjoy the process of education!"

14 VIREN PERUMAL

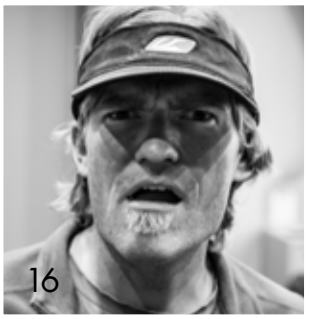
Rock Guide, Apprentice Alpine Guide

Perumal is pursuing AMGA certification to sharpen his skills as a guide and to increase his level of professionalism. Despite the challenges of being away from his family for long periods, he loves his chosen profession. "It's rewarding to teach folks who are passionate about climbing how to move more efficiently in the mountains and on long routes, and to see them use those new tools in their personal climbing," he explains. So while Perumal didn't grow up skiing, he's working hard to achieve full certification, starting with the ski discipline—"It's daunting!"

15 ERIN SMART

Ski Guide, Apprentice Alpine Guide, Single Pitch Instructor

For Smart, guiding is a complex career, and obtaining AMGA certification is the first step on a long road of continuing education. Though it has been expensive and sometimes difficult to maintain strong personal relationships because she's gone so much, Smart still digs guiding. She travels extensively most recently to Norway where she works as a ski guide. "I feel like I have a place here in Lofoten, where the mountains and people have shared some of their magic with me," she says. "Once you find these places that you connect with as a guide, exploring them personally and then sharing them with your guests and seeing their smiles is what it's all about."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16 MARK SMILEY

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

Smiley received his AMGA/IFMGA certification just before we went to press (congrats Mark!). He appreciates the AMGA and enjoyed the process, in part because it made him a better, more confident skier and climber. But he also simply loves guiding. "It's very rewarding to hear my clients say, 'That was the best adventure I've ever had,'" he explains. A largely independent guide, Smiley feels that it's important to offer as many destinations to clients as possible, so earning full AMGA certification was the clear choice for him. IFMGA certification opened doors for him to guide in Canada and Europe. But, he adds, one of the biggest issues in guiding today in the United States is lack of access. "It's a continual battle that everyone needs to fight in order to make guiding a sustainable career," he says.

17 GEOFF UNGER

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

Unger wears two hats in the guiding world: He owns his own business, offering custom climbing, mountaineering, and skiing tours; and he presides over the Certified Guides Cooperative (CGC), an organization that works to get access for Certified Guides. Guides themselves own the CGC, and its model relies on having only AMGA Certified Guides working in the field. This, Unger says, is important to further the profession. "When the CGC approaches land managers, we present AMGA Certification as a standard and as the pillar of our risk-management platform. My hope is that the CGC will be granted accreditation and land managers will see the co-op as a beneficial organization for guides, clients, and stewardship of public lands." Unger gladly adds this volunteer work to his busy schedule because he wants access to more areas. "My clientele will follow me almost anywhere, but I feel a little bit hamstrung when clients ask me about certain areas and I have to say we can't go there without running the trip through a guide service or that, even worse, it just isn't possible," he says. He appreciates the upcoming changes with Commercial Use Authorizations (CUA) for limited climbing in national parks, but still thinks the small number of CUAs being issued will mean he is competing against fellow guides.

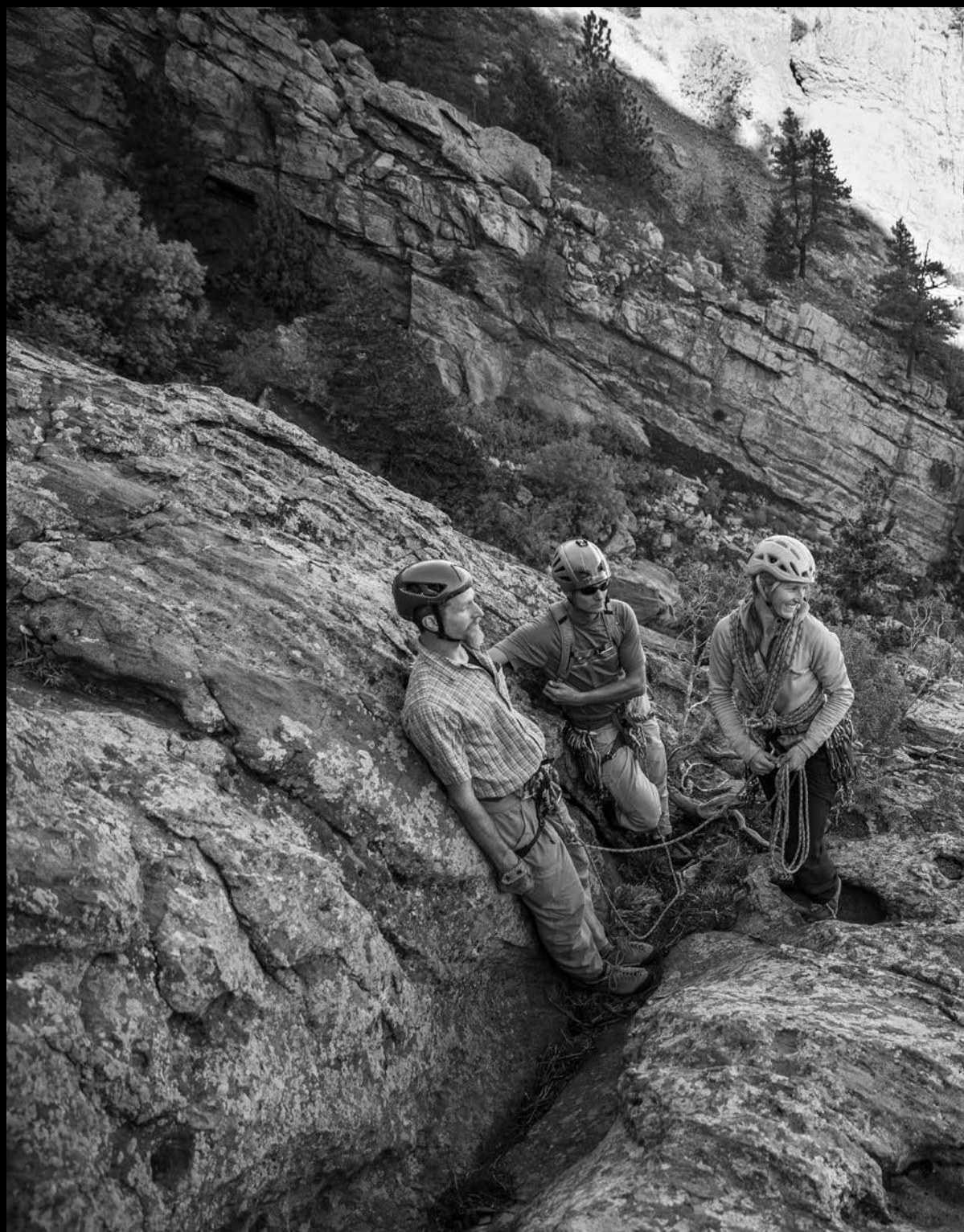
18 JEFF WARD

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

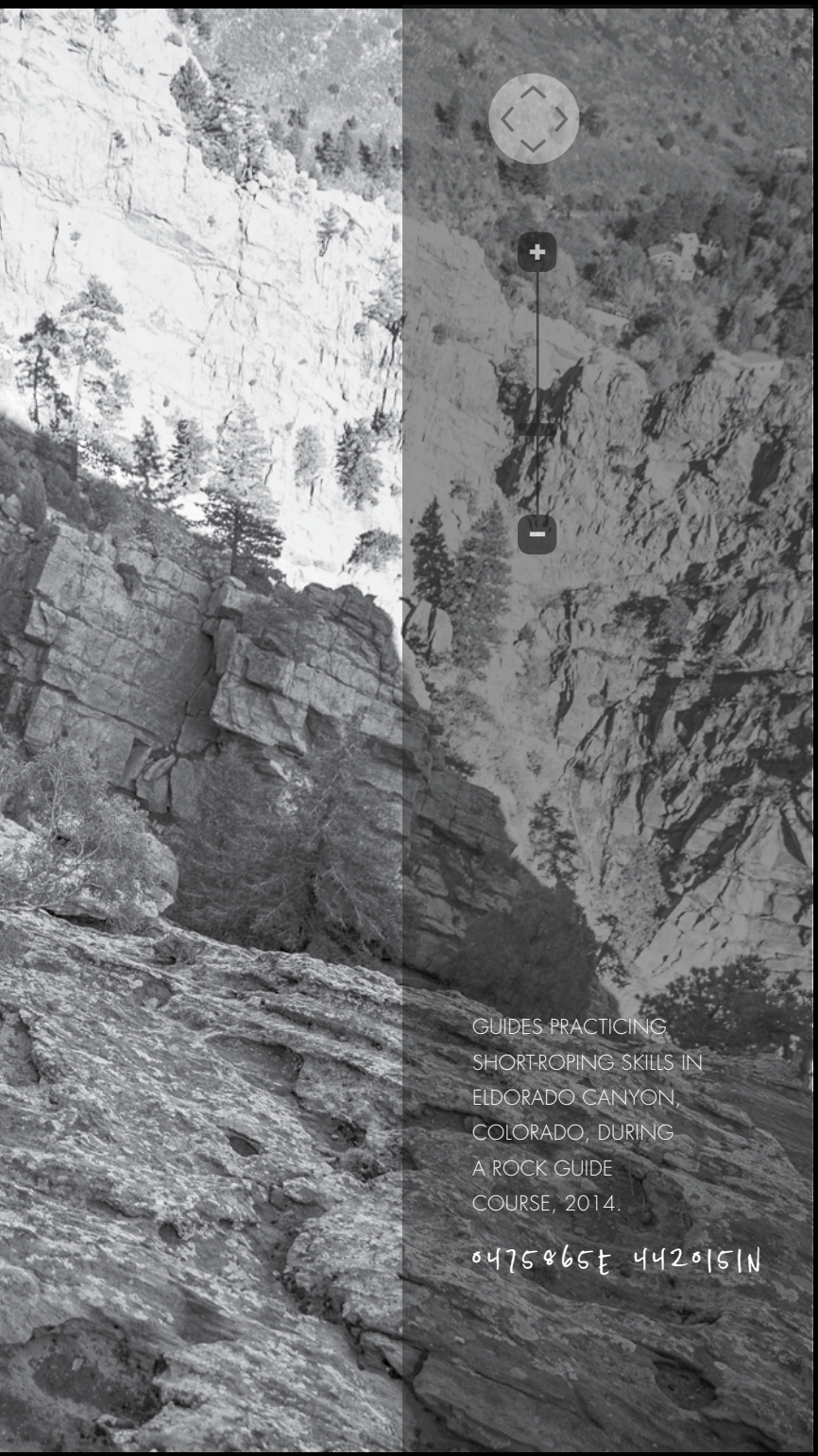
As owner of the North Cascades Mountain Guides, Ward often hears clients say, "That was the best day of skiing in my life!" Their enthusiasm and the constant challenge »

"Once you find these places that you connect with as a guide... sharing

FROM TOP GREG GERMAN, ANGELA HAWSE, ART MOONEY, JOEY THOMPSON



them with your guests and seeing their smiles is what it's all about."-ERIN SMART »



GUIDES PRACTICING SHORT-ROPING SKILLS IN ELDORADO CANYON, COLORADO, DURING A ROCK GUIDE COURSE, 2014.

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TOP LEFT OLIVIA RACE, DYLAN TAYLOR, DICK JACKSON, CHRIS BURK

TOP RIGHT BELA VADASZ, ADAM BECK, BUSTER JESIK, ANDREA CAMPANELLA

of guiding make his career worth it despite the long spells away from his family. Says Ward, "I've missed a lot of birthdays, but I'm also able to take extended periods of time off to be with the family. The flexibility of this career is pretty unique." It's hard work, but Ward wouldn't change a thing. "After my nearly 20 years of working as a full-time guide, people have finally stopped asking me what I plan to do when I grow up. I have a pretty 'normal' life, except I really like my job." Now a member of the AMGA Instructor Team, Ward pursued AMGA certification as a personal challenge. "I really didn't know what I was getting into when I showed up for my first alpine course in the Bugaboos, but I was very impressed with what I learned even after having guided for five years," he says.

19 TRAVIS WEIL

Rock Instructor, Apprentice Alpine Guide, Single Pitch Instructor

Working for Fox Mountain Guides in North Carolina, Weil is pursuing his certification in order to advance his career, to offer his clients more options and better experiences, and to gain more credibility with employers and clients. But he says, added certifications primarily benefit his clients. "The more training and exams I go through, the more tools I have to make their day better and the more terrain that I am able to comfortably and efficiently enable them to explore," he says. "The most rewarding aspect of my guiding career is seeing people progress in their skills which gives them a deeper love for climbing."

20 ERIC WHEWELL

American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide

Early in Whewell's career, he had to learn the difference between climbing for himself and climbing for others—i.e., guiding. "It sounds simple, but I needed to learn these differences, as well as ways to effectively manage risk," he explains. "I pursued certification because I felt that if I wanted to be a Mountain Guide, proper training and certification were essential. I wanted to be held to an international standard and be capable of guiding in any discipline, anywhere in the world." «


19


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CHO OYU SKI

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE EMPLOYEES PRACTICING RESCUE SKILLS DURING A CLASS CO-TAUGHT BY AMERICAN MOUNTAIN GUIDE KARSTEN DELAP. PHOTO BY KARSTEN DELAP

MAKING IT WORK

FINDING A PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY IN THE GUIDING LIFE

By Adam Fisher, Apprentice Rock Guide, Single Pitch Instructor

AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW IF YOU'RE reading this, choosing guiding as a career can be both immensely rewarding and deeply frustrating. It can be challenging to get your foot in the door, and once you have, finding a way to make the lifestyle sustainable can be even more confounding. Unlike many other occupations, there isn't a clear career path laid out for aspiring professional guides. And there hasn't always been an obvious way forward for those of us already in the industry and still developing our craft. As Jason Martin, director of operations at the American Alpine Institute and an AMGA board member, says: "It can be frustrating to find a career path, because there isn't one."

With seven years in the outdoor industry, a solid résumé, an apprenticeship with an accredited service, and a Rock Instructor Course under my belt, this is precisely the boat I find myself in now. I'm at the precipice, debating whether or not to take the plunge into professional guiding. I enjoy teaching and helping people exceed the limits they place on themselves. I love the disciplines we work in and I've got ambitions for my future in guiding. But I also have some reasonable reservations: Will I be able to earn a living wage? Can I continue to handle the lifestyle? Will guiding stay engaging as the years go by? I knew I wasn't the only aspiring guide with these questions, so I went looking for answers.

I spoke with ten fellow guides in hopes of finding some insight from their experiences. I chose guides at varying stages in their careers, and from a range of specializations. Some clear trends quickly emerged from our conversations: Without fail, guides would first recount how they got their start, their opportunity, their break. Then they told of a period of hardship, frustration, and doubt. They then revealed how this eventually gave way to a string of new opportunities and solid establishment within the guiding world. And finally, from guides farther along in their careers, I heard about how they'd found their place, as well as an accompanying sense of

stability and contentment. To me, this was heartening news, giving me a sense of faith in a process that had at times seemed elusive.

MIKE SOUCY › BE SURE THAT YOU WANT TO BE A GUIDE BECAUSE GUIDING IS WHAT YOU WANT TO DO—NOT BEING A CLIMBER OR SKIER. ‹

A FOOT IN THE DOOR

Everyone I interviewed found their way into guiding from a broad array of backgrounds, ones probably familiar to all of us within the outdoor industry. Most began in their early twenties, though some, who had dreamed of guiding since childhood, began even earlier. Others found guiding somewhat later in life. Some had been sponsored athletes, while others were recreational climbers and skiers looking to turn their recreation into a vocation.

Most of the interviewees launched their careers one of a typical few ways: working for their university outdoor program, working for an outdoor-education company like NOLS or Outward Bound, or having already gained enough personal mountain/climbing experience to land a position at one of the larger guide services.

There are, of course, other inroads… The Argentine Willie Benegas (Rock and Alpine Guide, Assistant Ski Guide) and his twin brother, Damian, went to climb Aconcagua at 18 years old. On the mountain they saw guides at work and realized that with this vocation they could spend their lives in the mountains they loved. They decided guiding was their calling, and hired on as mule drivers. Here, on the highest peak in South America, they were promoted to porters, and eventually, guides

The key to getting your foot in the door, says American Mountain Guide Mark Allen, is to "hone your craft. Before you guide you need to refine the skill set needed for the terrain you are going to work in." He adds that you should build an impressive résumé before you apply, given that the guiding industry is, much like the sport of climbing itself, based on experience and not just credentials.

MARK ALLEN › INJURY IS THE SILENT KILLER OF THE INDUSTRY: SIX MONTHS UNPAID VACATION, YOU'RE HOSED. ‹

HARD TIMES

Almost every guide spoke of rough times and the difficulty of making ends meet early on. As Mark Allen says, "a lot of guides in this country are living out of their car for the first five to eight years," but it does smack of a core truth: a perfect storm of low wages, unreliable seasonal work, and the high cost of training in our industry. The result is a lifestyle that many of us are all too familiar with, and that may even drive some away from guiding as a métier.

Out of pure financial need, many guides are forced to find other work in the early years of their career. American Mountain Guide Mike Soucy says, "Be ready to work hard just like the top tier of any other profession. Expect there to be some dark times. Expect to supplement guiding and pay for courses… It will get better."

North Cascades Mountain Guide owner and American Mountain Guide Larry Goldie offers different thoughts: "You're better off working somewhere where there's not a lot of work but where you are better paid than [you would be working] somewhere with a lot of work but less pay." »

That way, he says, you can spend more time in the mountains developing your skills and at home maintaining relationships. Goldie adds, "I have a real issue with companies paying small wages to young [aspiring] guides and taking advantage of them. It's a disservice to the industry in the long run." Goldie's concern is that these low wages will drive attrition within both individual companies and the industry as a whole—a model he feels is flawed.

I think there's truth and insight to be found in all these thoughts. On the one hand, most professions require a period of "paying your dues." Young doctors and attorneys, for example, are routinely slammed with work as interns/residents or junior partners, respectively. These intense periods of "paid apprenticeship," in guiding as much as in law, develop humility, grit, and competence. On the other hand, I think many guide services can and should do more to welcome and compensate new guides. This will not only help build loyalty and pride among guides, but will also work in concert with the AMGA's goal of increasing the public's perception of guiding as a legitimate and thriving profession in the United States.

JASON MARTIN › MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU—EXPECT THERE TO BE PHASES WHERE EVERYTHING CHANGES, AND CHANGES AGAIN. THIS WILL BE DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE. ‹

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Eventually, hard work pays off, skill is rewarded, and new opportunities will present themselves. Willie Benegas got his first big break in 1995 while climbing Trango Tower. He made a connection with a higher-up in one of the first companies to guide on Everest and next thing he knew he was sent to his home base of Aconcagua with that company. This led to assignments in the Cordillera Blanca, on Cho Oyu, and in 1999 to Everest—his first time on the mountain.

Jason Martin says, "A guide who makes himself indispensible becomes an important aspect of the company." Martin would like to see greater devotion going both ways between guides and their employers, and feels strongly that loyalty is one of the best ways for guides to get new opportunities and to succeed in the industry. "Many guides shift their work structure every five years based on the phase of their life—different needs mean you figure out a different earning regimen," he adds, though he feels this can still be done while staying loyal to one's employers.

Dawn Glanc, a Rock and Alpine Guide, was having trouble making ends meet until she landed a second job guiding ice in Ouray. This new work made all the difference, and for several years she spent summers in the Cascades and winters in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado.

For me, the message is clear: Hard work does pay off. And if I stick with it, new opportunities will come my way. But what if I don't want to wait, or can't afford to? How can I get ahead? Many guides suggested (you guessed it) pursuing AMGA certification. Others spoke of the importance of mentorship. Elaina Arenz, New River Mountain Guides owner, emphasized networking. "Attending the national meeting and making connections with people in the industry is really, really key, and will open doors," she says.

LARRY GOLDIE › FIRST AND FOREMOST I'D SAY THE UNIVERSE CONSPIRES WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE FOLLOWING THEIR DREAMS... YOU'LL NEVER REGRET FOLLOWING YOUR DREAMS ‹

FINDING YOUR PLACE

So you've made it. People know you. You've got a gaggle of return clients, some AMGA certs, or even a pin. Congrats! But is that enough? Not necessarily. Some guides who met all these benchmarks still seemed frustrated in their careers; others were much more at peace. The difference was that some guides had "found

their place," while others were still trying to do so. This is a challenge everyone faces in life, regardless of his or her occupation; it's also part of what makes the journey so interesting.

Mike Soucy says you need to know yourself and the kind of guiding work that best suits you. "There's a difference between somebody who wants to be a guide and somebody who wants to be a business owner. I'm willing to earn a smaller margin in order to have less responsibility and stress." Soucy says he's excited about working in the United States, adding, "I want to keep energy invested in improving our own situation rather than running off to live in some other country because it's an easier environment."

Anna Keeling has become well established in the industry, has many returning clients, and is on the Instructor Team for both AMGA and NZMGA. She has a son, and told me that "becoming a parent doesn't mean you need to stop guiding." It just means you need to balance your schedule and compromise with your partner at times.

Mike Lewis, Rock Guide and Assistant Alpine Guide, finds frustration, peace, and passion in his work. As guides, he says, "we have a fearlessness, charisma, and joie de vivre that make it impossible for us to do anything else." Mark Allen works and travels a lot, between his own company, Expeditions Northwest, and others. He's "hustling to set up a security net" to provide for times of injury, retirement, and big purchases.

For Dawn Glanc, the two-home lifestyle got old, and when the opportunity arose for her to live and work in Ouray year-round, she took it. Glanc still travels often for work, but having a single home base, combined with meeting her husband, Pat Ormond, also a guide, made all the difference. She keeps her passion for guiding alive by constantly exploring different niches in the guiding world, such as instructing all-female programs. She adds that, "it's easy to see people who've 'made it' and see only the end result, not all the hard work they've put into it."

And finally, Willie Benegas has been at it a long time, has a great reputation in the high-altitude world, and can choose which jobs to take. He now only works with small groups, where he can make a real change in his clients. "I help them reach their goals and also make them better climbers," he says.

MIKE LEWIS › GO WORK FOR ONE OF THE BIG GUIDE COMPANIES FOR A FEW SEASONS AND FIND OUT IF IT'S REALLY WHAT YOU WANT TO DO. ‹

MUSINGS

It seems that contentment along the path of one's guiding career can be found by accepting and enjoying the process, as well as by tailoring your work choices to fit a lifestyle that works for you. The guides I spoke with confirmed that guiding can be a fulfilling, sustainable career. As in any profession, we aren't entitled to anything, and can't expect our goals to be attained easily. The more we, as an industry, think of ourselves as a high-level profession, with certain prerequisites for entry, the better off we'll all be. For young guides, this means expecting to work hard all year and to dedicate ourselves to professional development. For established guides, this means taking pride in our work and finding the place within the industry that fits. And for guide-service owners and administrators, this means supporting young and developing guides in every way possible. We're all in this together, trying to make it work.

I believe we're in a unique and dynamic place in American guiding. We're growing quickly and making progress on our common goals. We're shaping our future and finding direction as an industry—very similar to a young guide setting out to shape his career. «

› MORE ADVICE FROM THESE GUIDES AT **AMGA.COM/BLOG**

TIPS FOR THE MODERN GUIDE

The modern American guide world has recently matured into a professionalized community. Likewise, becoming a guide now requires a lot more dedication to personal and professional development than it once did. There are, no doubt, more barriers to entry in the modern era, which begs some important questions: How does it all work? Can I make a living? Is AMGA certification worth the effort?

By Dale Remsberg, AMGA Technical Director

THE SHORT ANSWERS ARE: Becoming a guide is a long-term, complex journey. Yes, you can make a great living, with a high quality of life. And certification is without a doubt worth it!

Obviously, it's more complicated than that. My own career path in many ways has paralleled the growth of the guiding profession. I started my formal guide education in autumn 2002 after moving to Boulder, Colorado. At that time, I had already worked as a "guide," although I really was simply a climber who put up the rope. I met some great new friends and decided to enroll in the Advanced Rock Guide Course in Red Rocks. My instructors were Art Mooney, Alain Comeau, and the late, great Craig Luebben. I was also introduced to Mike Powers (then the AMGA technical director). I was fascinated with the idea of how to actually make a living as a guide. Sure, I had great clients and was putting checks in the bank, but I didn't yet understand the scope of what being a guide really meant. So I drank the punch and set a long-term goal of becoming an American Mountain Guide.

Little did I know the journey I was undertaking. It would shape my life, take me around the world, introduce me to wonderful people—fellow guides and clients alike—and produce some of the richest experiences I've had. Of course, it has come with costs, both financial and personal, but I wouldn't change a thing. I look back now with great pride at what I've accomplished and in being a part of the modern American guide culture.

I was lucky and received great mentorship from people like Rob Hess, Eli Helmuth, Marc Chauvin, and Art Mooney. These guys were my heroes, and I wanted to be just like them. In 2006, I received my pin (the shiny medallion that gets you fame and glory). I became the head guide at a large Colorado-based guide organization and started teaching rock programs for the AMGA. On my path, I have learned some important lessons that go beyond the technical skills covered on AMGA courses, and I think they're worth sharing here:

10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEING A GUIDE IN THE MODERN ERA

1. A long-term guiding career is not going to work without training and certification.
2. Once you start your apprenticeship, align yourself with a company. Just like all other professions, the likely starting point is as an employee. With time, you can become savvy enough to strike out on your own. Remember: Most surgeons are still employees of a business that provides them with stability and clientele.
3. Respect the professional guide community, and work within your training and certification scope of practice.
4. Guiding is dangerous! Stay fit and always work on your personal movement skills. It will save your life.
5. Diversify your guiding. Getting bogged down in one type of work can lead to burnout.
6. Shake hands with the guides you meet in the field, and in the bar with your glove off. We need to embrace a high level of respect and culture among all guides.
7. Don't forget that learning never ends. Complacency kills just as fast as lightning!
8. Respect the environment. It provides us our gold.
9. Remember what this career is all about. Without our clients, we have nothing.
10. A good glass of red wine never hurts to end a hard day in the mountains (and provides a perfect opportunity for your sales pitch about the next trip). «

› MORE TIPS FROM REMSBERG AT **AMGA.COM/BLOG**

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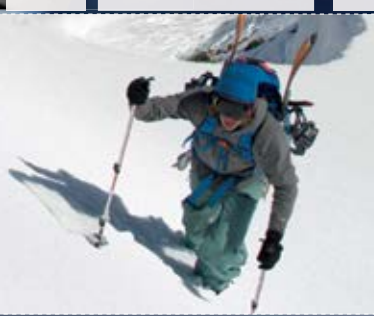

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AARON RICHARDS

MEET AARON RICHARDS 2014 BROOKS-RANGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNER *By Jackie Hueftle*

"I'm excited to be a part of a generation that follows through on what was started by the group before us: making guiding more accessible, professional, and sustainable"

AARON RICHARDS STANDING NEAR THE SUMMIT OF BEAR CREEK SPIRE.
PHOTO BY NICK MANNING

AARON RICHARDS HAS SPENT MOST of his life in the shadows of big mountains, from his childhood in the Cascades to his current home in the beautiful Sierra Eastside town of Bishop, California. Richards trained as a field botanist at Oregon State University, but he also enjoys working with people. So when he moved to Bishop in 2010, he began guiding rock, alpine, and skiing for the Sierra Mountain Center and working toward his AMGA/IFMGA certifications. In addition to winning this scholarship, Richards was recently selected to be an ambassador for Brooks-Range.

AMGA: *How did you start guiding, and what kind of trips do you usually guide?*
AR: I showed up in Bishop and two days later was shadowing the Sierra High Route on skis [with the Sierra Mountain Center]. Now I'm lucky enough to be guiding a bit of everything. We do a lot of alpine climbing in the summer (East Face/Buttress of Whitney; Temple Crag, Palisades) and have decent ice climbing (Lee Vining Canyon) and skiing during the winter.

AMGA: *Where do you want to go with guiding?*
AR: I have the short-term goal of becoming an American Mountain Guide and working solely as a guide. I'd like to see guiding become an easier profession to make a living in. More long-term, I'm excited to be a part of the generation that follows through on what was started by the group before us: making guiding more accessible, professional, and sustainable.

AMGA: *Nice! So how's the quest for your IFMGA certification going?*
AR: I've taken my Rock Guide, Advanced Rock Guide, Alpine Guide, and Ski Guide courses and am not yet certified in any. I am taking my Rock Exam in October.

AMGA: *What has the Brooks-Range Mountaineering scholarship meant to you? Has it helped with these goals?*
AR: I think that more than the financial help with the course, which I was taking anyway, Brooks-Range's inclusion of me in their circle of ambassadors has added legitimacy to my professional life. The people there have made it easier to take courses, which are my professional goals, and I'm hoping they'll help with some personal climbing goals in the future. I wouldn't say it's changed anything I'm doing, but it has made things a little bit easier.

AMGA: *Let's back it up a bit—when did you start climbing?*
AR: I started climbing in high school—1998. My first outdoor experience was in 1999 at Smith Rock.

AMGA: *Speaking of your house, what's your day-to-day like? Do you have any other jobs? What do you do for fun?*
AR: I pick up some odd construction jobs here and there, but am moving toward working as a guide full-time. The Sierras are an amazing place to live, with so much to do, and I try and do a bit of it all. It's hard to pick a favorite activity, but luckily out here it's easy to ski in the morning and go sport climbing or bouldering in the afternoon.

Life-wise, I bounce around the Eastside a lot and spend a good amount of time in Palo Alto with my wife. Straddling the mountains can be hard, but it does mean that we meet up in Yosemite and Tuolumne a lot. If only I could convince her that aid climbing isn't stupid…

AMGA: *Where do you normally climb now?*
AR: There are so many places to climb out here; it's rare that I head to the same spot repeatedly. I like to spend time in Tuolumne during the summer. It's only about 90 minutes from my house.

AMGA: *Do you have any personal climbing goals, aid or otherwise?*
AR: There are always grades, climbs, and times that I strive for that are irrelevant to anyone else. My list never seems to shorten, and I guess that's a worthy goal in itself—never letting my list of goals get too short.

AMGA: *What would that dream trip be?*
AR: As many great climbers have said, it isn't the trip itself but the people you do the trip with. There are plenty of places I want to see both culturally and geologically, and I think that a dream trip would have to include all three components—a good friend, a beautiful climb, and a new culture.

AMGA: *So…*
AR: If you're paying, I'd start with climbing ice on Mt. Kenya then move on to huge rock climbs on Baffin Island, and finish with some relaxing sport climbing in Thailand. The first two would be with my buddy Ian McEleney, and then I'd send him home and bring my wife in to drag me up steep rock. «

› READ PREVIOUS PROFILES ON THE GUIDING LIFE BLOG: **AMGA.COM**/BLOG

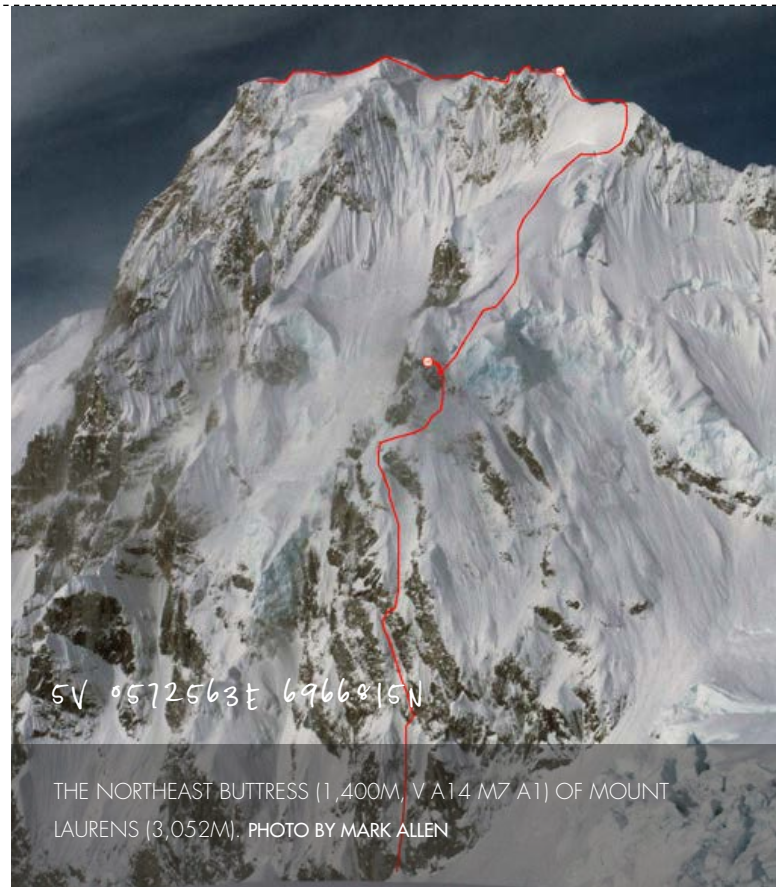
AMGA Guide Nominated for Piolets d'Or

Mark Allen and partner earn international recognition for climbing new alpine route

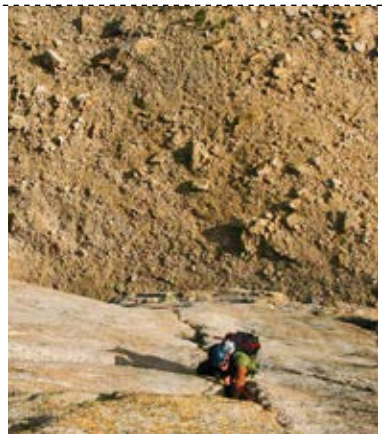
American Mountain Guide Mark Allen and his partner Graham Zimmerman were on the short list for the Piolets d'Or award for their 2013 ascent of the Northeast Buttress (1,400m, V AI4 M7 A1) of Mount Laurens (3,052m) in the Alaska Range. Though they didn't win, they were pleased just to be nominated, Allen told us via email the night of the event.

"Graham and I are not bummed at all; if we were to pick our two favorites [to win], these would be them," he said of Ueli Steck's solo of the south face of Annapurna and Raphael Slawinski and Ian Welsted's first ascent of K6 West. "We were just so pleased to be nominated and brought to France for this celebration, and to represent the United States."

› FOR A FULL ACCOUNT OF ALLEN'S TRIP, VISIT THE GUIDING LIFE BLOG AT **AMGA.COM**/BLOG



THE NORTHEAST BUTTRESS (1,400M, V A14 M7 A1) OF MOUNT LAURENS (3,052M). PHOTO BY MARK ALLEN



A Good Year for Chris Wright

Wright becomes an American Mountain Guide and receives multiple grants to climb Teng Kangpoche

Not only did Chris Wright receive his full AMGA/IFMGA certification in 2014, but the Timberline Mountain Guide and his partner Scott Adamson also received the prestigious Mugs Stump and Lyman Spitzer Awards to attempt the North Pillar of Teng Kangpoche (6,487m) in the Khumbu region of Nepal.

Wright finished his final Ski Guide Exam in February after an "arduous" seven years of effort. Being just 23 when he started the process, he remembers people talking about how long it took, and adds, "I thought I'd be different." But an injury and "life getting in the way" precluded him completing the ski program as quickly as he'd hoped.

"By the end, I had to remind myself that it was all about learning and growing as a professional, not just about finishing," Wright explains. "But I'm definitely glad to be done. The phrase my buddy [American Mountain Guide] Nick Pope used was 'swooning with relief that it's all over.' That seemed about right to me."

So far nothing has changed, as Wright's accomplishment is so recent—"But it does feel really good to look down and see the crest on my jacket. It makes me feel proud to wear the pin knowing what a rich history and culture it represents."

› READ THE FULL INTERVIEW WITH WRIGHT AS WELL AS MORE ABOUT THE MUGS STUMP AWARD AND CLIMB ON THE GUIDING LIFE BLOG AT **AMGA.COM**/BLOG

GuidePace: *A New App "Assistant" in the Field*

With the help of a programming buddy, Chris Burk (Rock Guide, Assistant Alpine Guide, Apprentice Ski Guide) recently built the GuidePace app, a Smartphone application to speed up and simplify a guide's tour planning. He conceived the idea on an AMGA Alpine Program, during which he felt like participants spent too much time doing unit conversions and calculations. "Since virtually everyone has smartphones today, an app that easily automates these things seemed like the perfect solution," Burk says. "Ultimately, I want GuidePace to be a functional tool that helps guides to be more efficient, and cuts down time spent on ski or alpine exams."

Burk developed GuidePace using Adobe PhoneGap, which allows you to write code in web-development languages (JavaScript, HTML, and CSS) and then compile it to run on any of several mobile operating systems, such as iOS and Android. "But basically," he adds, "the process involved reading a couple of books and then sitting in a coffee shop with a laptop for about a hundred hours." Burk will soon be doing an Android version of GuidePace (available in a few months). As well, he plans on developing other apps related to tour planning and guiding in general.

According to various guides, the app saves time, helps with calculations, and is overall a positive addition to their toolbox.

There are, however, a few glitches still to work out, says American Mountain Guide Jeff Ward, such as with working the Chauvin System, which wasn't straightforward. But overall he thinks the GuidePace is a great tool.

AMGA Instructor Team member Marc Chauvin has similarly positive sentiments. "While the app doesn't do anything you cannot do the 'old-school' way, it can greatly simplify the process," he says. Because it can convert miles to kilometers and feet to meters, it saves conversion time in the field. Also, clicking the info button on the units/hr or min/60m or min/pitch gives you a quick reference to the Munter rates for various travel methods: uphill walking, skiing, downhill skiing, flat on foot, or bushwhacking. As well, you can create custom "Munter paces."

"These things can be hard to remember, and sometimes take looking at notes to recall," Chauvin says. It's here where the app saves loads of time.

Instructor Team member Amos Whiting concurs: "The app saves me time in my tour planning. I still use a guide notebook, but this has streamlined the process."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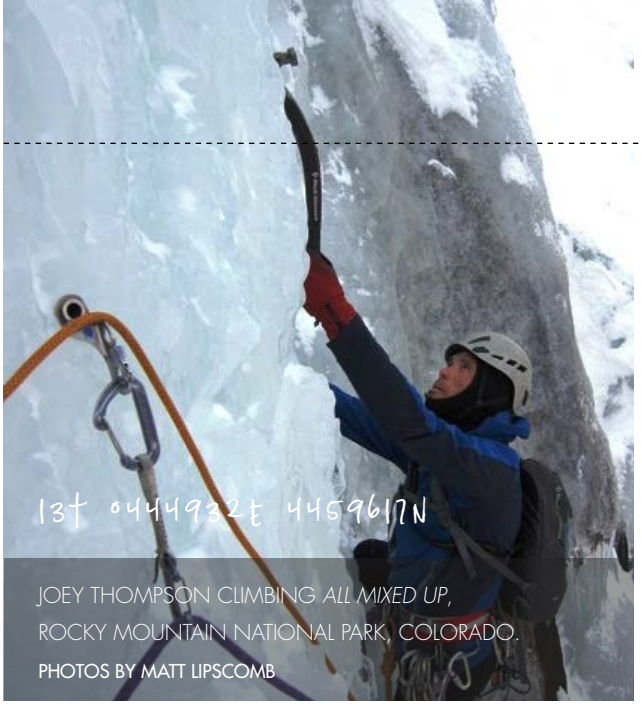
AMGA Guide Adam George in Chamonix, France
Alexandre Buisse

Joey Thompson Receives Pin

Investment in the future pays off for new American Mountain Guide

Joey Thompson received full AMGA/IFMGA certification March 2014. Thompson says finally finishing the AMGA's rigorous certification process after ten years opens doors for him. "The AMGA's certification process makes it possibly to work year-round in different disciplines, and attaining AMGA/IFMGA certification makes guiding a viable way to make a living," he says. Thompson feels that he now has different opportunities to make a living from mountain guiding—he can negotiate higher wages, get higher-end assignments, and serve as a mentor to others. Plus, it's a great way to visit other countries and to collaborate with international mountain guides.

Thompson also sees future potential for the industry in general. More guides getting AMGA/IFMGA certification propels the entire profession forward: "It increases guide security, and encourages guide services to provide pensions, 401Ks, health insurance, workman's comp, and uniforms. These are all things that professionals get in other industries, so why not guiding?" Plus, more guides with AMGA certification means American guides have a stronger voice as a whole.



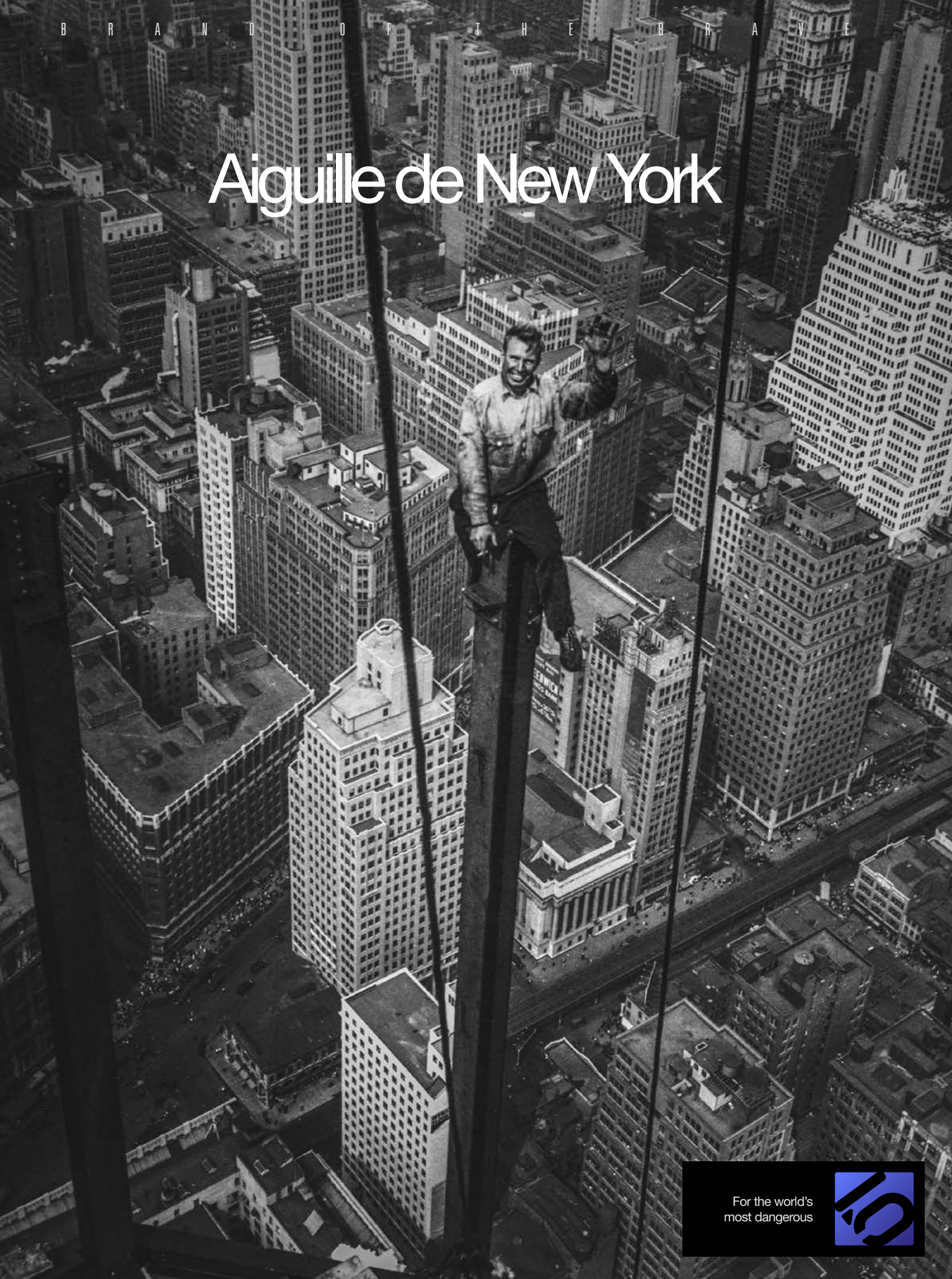
JOEY THOMPSON CLIMBING *ALL MIXED UP*, ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, COLORADO.
PHOTOS BY MATT LIPSCOMB

"If you're just some climber who lives out of your car and you're shredding every day, you don't necessarily have an investment in the future. Guiding is more about climbing for our clients and establishing relationships with guide-service owners, land managers, and insurance companies to invest in our future."

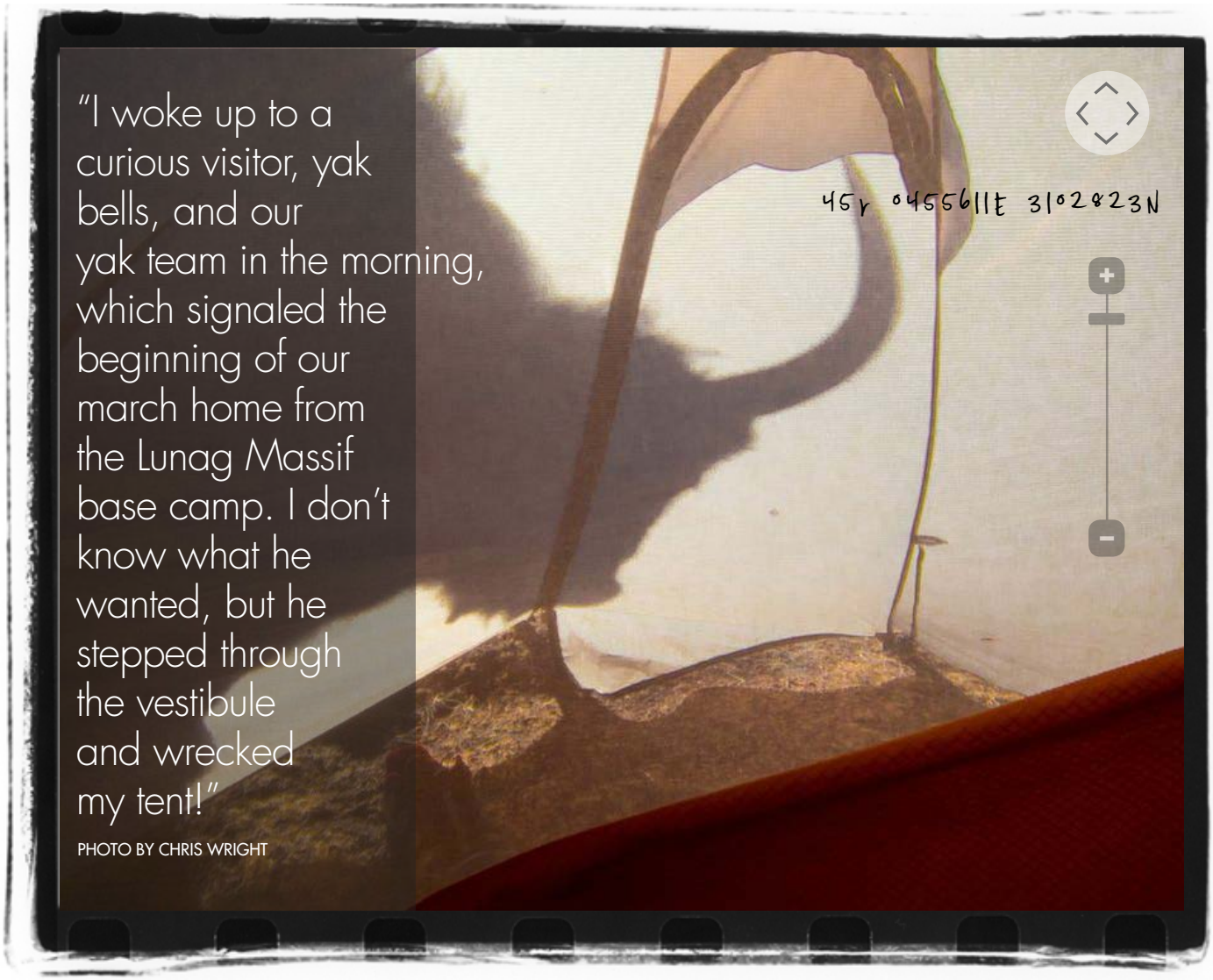
› READ MORE ABOUT THOMPSON ON THE GUIDING LIFE BLOG AT **AMGA.COM/BLOG**

B R A N D O F T H E B R A V E

Aiguille de New York



For the world's
most dangerous


"I woke up to a curious visitor, yak bells, and our yak team in the morning, which signaled the beginning of our march home from the Lunag Massif base camp. I don't know what he wanted, but he stepped through the vestibule and wrecked my tent!"
PHOTO BY CHRIS WRIGHT

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POTHOLDERS

I grew up on a heli-ski base on Thompson Pass in the Chugach Mountains of Alaska.

While my parents worked as ski guides, I stayed at the heli base doing schoolwork, playing in the parking lot, or weaving potholders. During my first season in Alaska, in 1998 when I was five, I turned my potholder crafting into a thriving little business.

By Nina Hance, Apprentice Ski Guide

WORD ABOUT THE NIFTY, COLORFUL ITEMS SPREAD, and soon many people on Thompson Pass—locals and international heli-ski guests alike—were buying potholders as fast as I could make them. Phatz Ski Rental, the shop at the heli base, even sold them. Doug and Emily Coombs, fellow-guides and friends of my parents, were my biggest customers, ordering large quantities every year. I loved making potholders. I also loved skiing.

In one snapshot in the clutter of images on my parents' refrigerator, I stand atop a ridgeline holding my skis, head tilted to the side, leaning against my poles. The leg straps on my full-body harness stick out below my puffy jacket. My goggles cover most of my face, but you can still see I'm grinning from ear to ear. My tiny figure lies against a backdrop of Alaska's spectacular, snow-covered Chugach Mountains.

Mom took this picture on the summit of Cracked Ice Mountain. A helicopter dropped us off on what was to be my first heli-ski run, ever. My dad had an extra seat available in his group that morning for mom, and since I weighed a mere 60 pounds, I was light enough to come along, too, sitting in the front seat between my dad and the pilot. The flight from the base to the top of Cracked Ice happened so quickly that I could barely comprehend what I saw out the window: blue glaciers, gaping crevasses, and the wildest, steepest peaks—new sights to my young eyes.

I still clearly remember skiing the run, powder knee-high on the adults and waist-high on me. My thighs burned so intensely that I had to take several breaks. By the time we reached the bottom, my legs were so fried that I just plopped into the snow, exhausted but very excited.

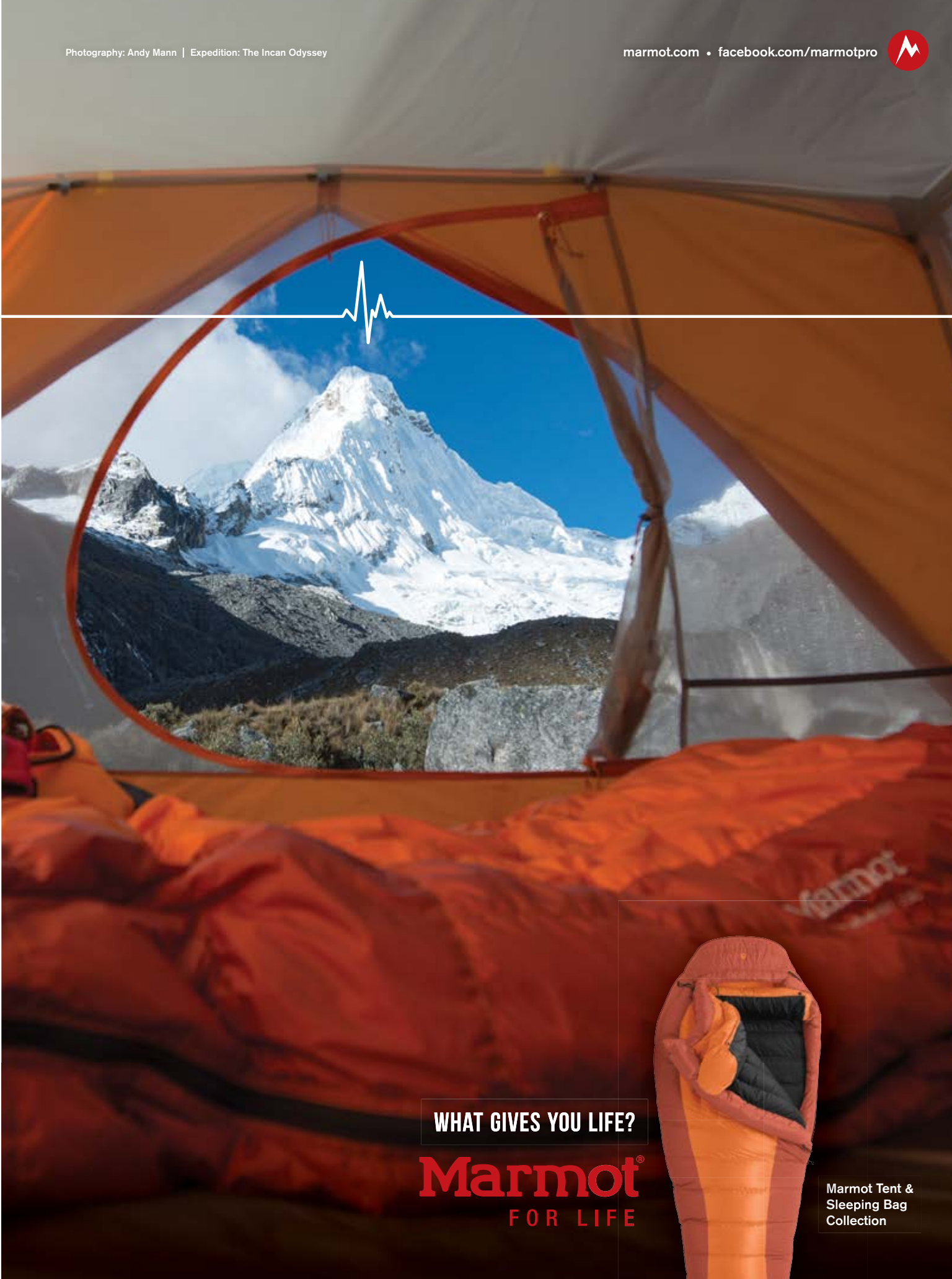
Fifteen years have passed since that first heli-ski run, and I am now 21. I continue my annual commute to Valdez, just like my parents. My income no longer comes from selling potholders, but from working as an apprentice guide for Black Ops Valdez, a heli- and cat-skiing operation based out of Valdez.

Even though I grew up in this terrain, I continue to marvel at its beauty and expanse. Everything is bigger here: the runs are longer, the snow is deeper, and the slopes are steeper. In every direction, big peaks with aesthetic lines stretch endlessly into the distance. Glacial valleys, separating one mountain range from another, look like vast white rivers, frozen mid-rapid. The skiing is incredible, with snow dense enough to carve yet light enough to smear a turn and get face shots. We're fortunate to be able to take a three-minute heli lift to a peak that would otherwise take an entire day to climb.

I was thrilled to join the Black Ops crew and begin my guide training in 2013. It was my first year working as an apprentice guide, as well as my first season working for Black Ops. I mainly worked as the dispatcher, but also attended guide meetings and cat-ski guided on stormy days. Plus, I worked in the office and gave safety briefings. Occasionally, I got a seat in the heli as a tail guide, or backup guide, for the lead guide. Tail-guiding served as a great way to get into the field, become familiar with the terrain, and learn from the lead guides.

The sum of the skills and responsibilities that an aspiring guide needs to learn has always intimidated me. But each time I tail-guided, I was assigned one specific skill to work on, whether it was loading and unloading the ski basket, landing the heli, shoveling out a landing zone, or communicating with the other guides over the radio. As the season progressed and I became more practiced, I also felt less intimidated by the extent of responsibilities and training that still lay ahead of me.

The close of our six-week season arrived before I knew it. It was the end of April and my last night in Valdez before heading home to Montana. A family friend and Valdez local, who I have know since the first time I came to Alaska, invited me to her house for a farewell salmon dinner. Walking into the kitchen of her cluttered, yet cozy cabin tucked into a thick forest, I inhaled the scents of spices and freshly chopped wood. While pouring wine, I noticed two potholders hanging on a hook above the stove. They were well used, burned, and faded, but I immediately recognized them as a set that I had made many, many years ago. «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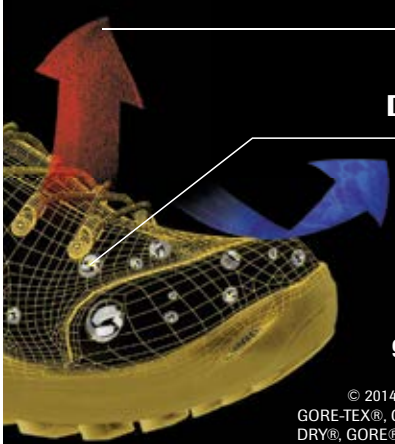

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