

RISE OF THE SHE BUM

Bow down reptilian-brained brothers.
The age of the female ripper is upon us.

By Lisa Richardson

When there's 62 centimetres of fresh snow and the She Bum leaves her kids with Grandma, she's not coming home for lunch.

"I don't know when I'll be back," she says, "but it's not going to be noon." The usual rules don't apply when the 60cm rule is in effect, even when you're a mom.

I offer the following as evidence to the credit in my karmic account: that I would pull into Rossland on assignment, January 14, 2005, to cover Kirsty Exner's Women's Freeskiing Camp in time for the biggest dump of the year; that I just got myself a pair of seriously fat skis; that, as I leave the day lodge with my lift pass a woman yells my name, and it's my old buddy, the She Bum, saving me a space in line; that a core skier, whose husband has cut secret runs through the trees, is going to pull back the Red Mountain veil and take me to see the Wonderful Wizard of Faceshots— all are proof that I am in the metaphysical black. I slide into line next to her, jittering with anticipation. (cont)

Loving the dog's life. Deb Mackillop and Stacey Spencer waiting for a ride after another epic day. Location: Whitewater Winter Resort

photo: Steve Ogle



Portraits of a She Bum.
top: Lee Anne Patterson
bottom: Lisa Korthals

Selkirk Wilderness lead guide Heidi Steckle gets in touch with her feminine side. Location: Selkirk Wilderness Skiing.

The She Bum is the female equivalent of the ski bum. (Skiing, at the turn of the century, was pronounced with a Norwegian accent and sounded more like “she-ing,” so it’s not a big linguistic stretch to offer the girls this tag as a breed of their own). It used to be that the boys had dibs on being ski bums, and the girls were relegated to Snow Bunny status. The Bunnies were eye-candy: stretch pants, furry boots and manicured nails. They didn’t really ski. They lounged. With great hair. Accessorized with earmuffs. Maybe fur from a small animal for accent.

She Bums don’t give a toss about having toque-head. They accessorize with duct tape and sleep in their cars. They sound like Lee Anne Patterson, almost 40-years-old and still living largely out of her truck. For Patterson, a heli-guide and ski pro, skiing

has been the driving force through the bulk of her years on the planet. “It’s never allowed me to make other choices,” she says. “Every year September rolls around and I think, maybe it’s time for a change. But then I get excited about skiing again and don’t get around to the change part.”

Patterson has become a Rossland regular, coaching the Women’s Freeskiing Clinics and trail building over the summer with a crew of local gals. Having spent a critical chunk of her career playing with the boys, this professional female athlete says it’s awesome to find a pocket of hardcore women like the crew she’s encountered in the Kootenays. “The thing is,” Patterson quips, “they don’t consider themselves hardcore. They’re just doing what they have to do. They’re so committed to their sports, and

they’re figuring out ways of making it work.”

These women, juggling children, partners and work with the mountain lust in their guts, are an integral part of Exner’s freeskiing clinics. While celebrity coaches like Aleisha Cline, Lisa Korthals, Edith Rosza and Patterson herself are brought in to guide alongside Rossland residents Exner and Lyne Grenier, it’s the core local women who add real flavour to the experience. By acting as tailgunners they divulge the best runs to hit, revealing the mountain’s birthmarks, gnarly scars and beauty spots with the intimate precision of a lover. And it’s this package, these estrogen-laden coaches and guides whom 50 ladies from the States and Canada come to rub shoulders with, in the hopes that some of that magic dust will rub off.

In the clinic, the coaches and tail guides

photos: Peter Moynes

Foremothers of Funk

As a style movement, funk is the new folk. The most evocative lifestyle handles have been plundered from music. Funk, folk, it’s all about roots. Every hardcore mountain woman shares her roots with these foremothers.



Skadi, Wife of Ullr

Skadi, the Norse hunter Goddess of Winter considered the “brilliant one,” has enough kick-ass in her to be worthy of a She Bum’s pile of flaming skis. She’s a cool and independent huntress, spirit of winter, deity of hunters and mountain-climbers. Skadi, meaning shadow or shade, has an edge that comes from knowing death, obliteration or an avalanche could be just around the corner. Anyone who’s spent time in the mountains knows that exhilaration comes hard on the heels of danger. A giantess, she went to Asgard, realm of the Gods, to avenge her father’s death and was made a goddess by compensation. Skadi ditched her first husband, the sea-god Njord, because he lived at the beach, and she couldn’t stand to be far away from the mountains.



Phyllis Munday

Munday not only wore the pants in her family, she made them. She sewed tents and waterproof gear on her living room floor in preparation for the expeditions she made to the Pacific Northwest with her husband Don in the 1920s and 30s. With over 30 first ascents to her name, Munday was the first woman to climb Mount Robson in 1924, the Rockies’ highest summit. She once fought off a bear in hand-to-hand combat and raised a baby while living in an alpine cabin she and her husband built themselves. After Don’s premature death in 1951, Munday became the hostess at the Alpine Club cabin in Banff. In 1964, she pioneered the Coast Range’s classic ski traverse, the Spearhead, naming many of the peaks there.



Dolores LaChapelle

The iconic author of *Deep Powder Snow*, LaChapelle began skiing in the 1940s on army surplus seven-foot-long hickory skis. No She Bum slouch, she’s recognized as a founder of the Deep Ecology movement, a philosophy that believes everything is connected. She has used powder skiing as the practice that takes her deeper into an understanding of the work of Heidegger, Arne Naess and Alan Watt. LaChapelle also made the first ski ascent of Mount Columbia, the second highest peak in the Rockies, along with several first ski descents near Alta, Utah. When she brought her two-week-old son home, she was living in a high mountain cabin accessible only by rope tow. Now based in Silverton, Colorado, she teaches Tai Chi and directs *The Way of the Mountain Learning Centre*.



Elizabeth Parker

The formation of the Alpine Club of Canada is largely attributed to this feisty journalist, who “pen-lashed” the first President of the American Alpine Club (1902) when he dared to suggest opening a Canadian chapter (see page 62). She argued it was un-Canadian to subject local mountaineers to the dictates of a foreign alpine institution. Four years later, as founding Secretary of the Alpine Club of Canada, Parker smashed old-school tradition by ensuring the club’s constitution allowed women to be members. Seventy-seven of the Club’s first 300 members were female.

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Lisa Korthals deep into her first trimester and loving every minute of it. Location: Valhalla Powdercats



photo: Peter Moynes Inset: Dave Quinn

Kimberley chills on the chill.

THESE ARE WOMEN WHO RIP THROUGH FRESH TREE LINES WHILE PREGNANT, FACE SHOTS AT EACH TURN, INSPIRING ONLOOKING GUYS TO MUTTER, "I WANT TO SKI LIKE A GIRL."

are driven by the imperative of skiing. Explains Patterson, "I think for some of the participants, skiing with this group of female coaches is life-changing. It allows them to focus. It's a catalyst for them to get back in touch with the things they're passionate about. All of the coaches share one common thing: they have all followed their passion and let that steer their life."

Just as I'm stoked to be riding that first chair, jonesing at the grizzle-bearded patroller's promise of pay dirt with a chance-encountered friend, a woman who would pee herself as a kid rather than go inside and lose ski time, the women who sign up for the clinic get juiced from the baldfaced commitment of these She Bums. Their life choices of jobs, accommodations

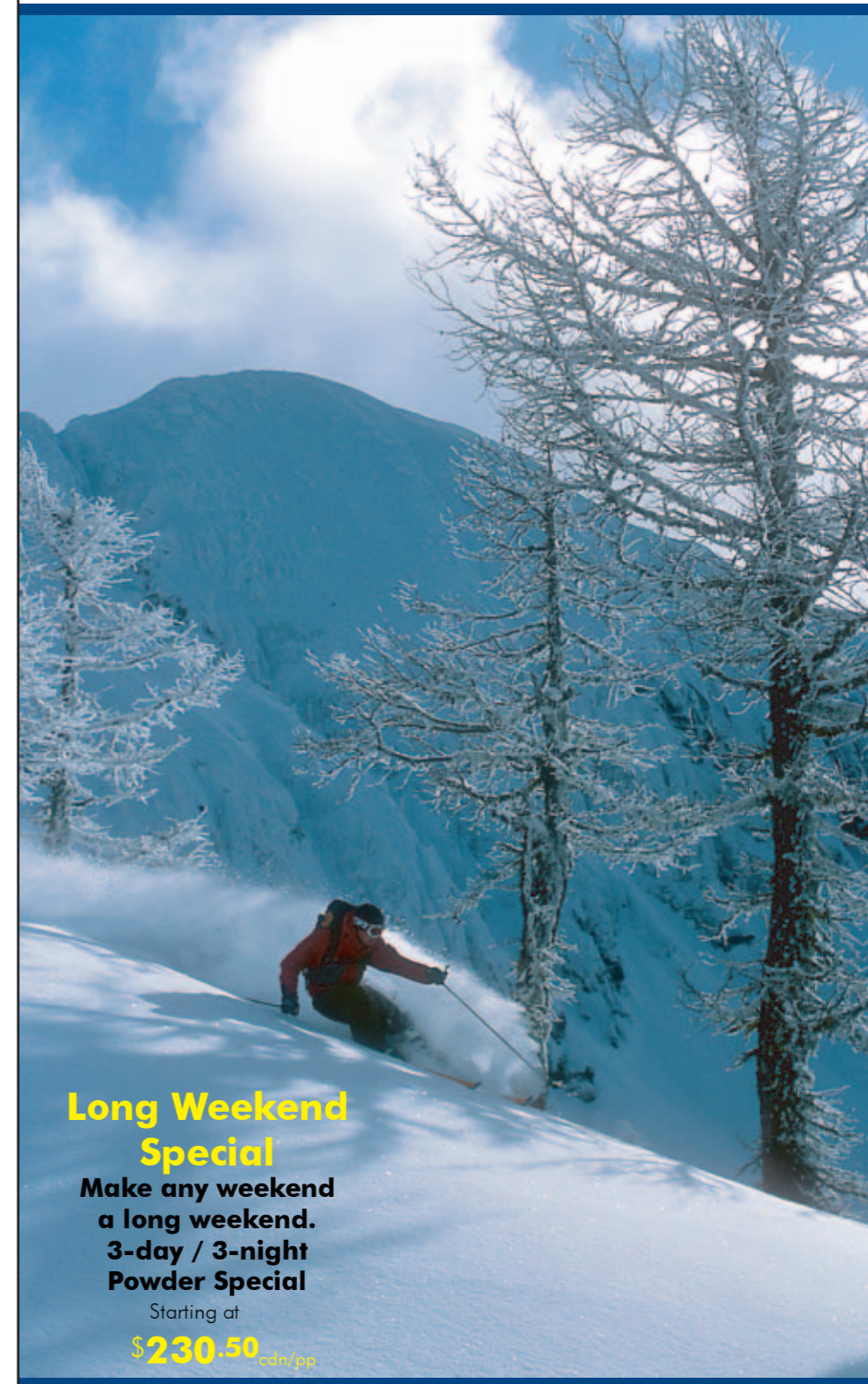
and home bases all come down to what quenches their thirst for powder. These are women who rip through fresh tree lines while pregnant, face shots at each turn, inspiring onlooking guys to mutter, "I want to ski like a girl." Without them, a bloke's ski-bumming fantasy shrivels up fast. Because no matter how much you live to shred, after awhile you get tired of holding your dick in your hands.

Rosslund in a powder frenzy is like nothing I've ever seen. The 20cm rule shuts down the local psychiatric clinic. You can save space in line for your buddies, provided they fit with you on the triple. You can leave your skis in line and grab a coffee. Everybody's amped. But it's a jungle with laws.

Whistler is not like that. My first powder frenzy out west is headlined, *Hooligans on Ice*, a Disney-meets-the-Gladiator spectacle that leaves me shaking. I never quite shuck off the shellshock from breathing in that feral cocktail of adrenaline, testosterone and blood lust. Amid the thud of bombs going off, a line of trigger-happy riders tow the length of Spanky's Ladder, waiting for the flag to drop. When the patroller standing guard over untracked lines down Ruby Bowl gives the signal, poachers tuck in from on high, snake to the front of the line, racing up the ice-etched staircase. Antlers clash. In the line ahead of us men are pushing and shoving, tossing enemy skis down the hill like football hooligans. It stops just short of being a riot. No one is waiting around for

the official announcement, but the energy has turned. The anticipation of fresh lines is laced with an in-your-face aggro. Where is the love?

Human aggression is rooted in the reptilian brain, and when that little clump of cells lights up, we're at our most primitive. This is the "Wild Life," when the dictates of the lizard brain: feeding, fighting, fleeing, or fornicating, override any other commands, sucking the heat from every cortex. At base, we are our carnal appetites: to eat, to have sex, to dominate. It's when we layer on the other more evolved parts of the brain that we get to play, use language, make love, use imagination, touch mystery. Maybe, if we take away most of the women in a society, the males are forced to jostle for the alpha position, in a constant clash for dominance via a



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Maddy Fulton laps up a little heli love at CMH Bugaboos.

photo: Topher Donahue

charged-up sex drive with nowhere to go. What's a powder frenzy in a ski town where men outnumber women three to one? It's a pack of males fighting for the right to get off.

Maybe that's trite. None of us like to be reduced to a primal instinct, debased to lizard men. But in Rossland, as the lift line grows longer and the anticipation builds to a crescendo, I have to wonder why the mojo rising is so different from the one I experienced in Whistler. I can't help think of the pheromones in the air: 50 women in Exner's clinic limbering up by the lodge, mothers dragging their kids into the daycare building, She Bums throughout the queue.

Powder skiing is primal. As primal as motherhood, as music, as that thick bass line that underscores true funk. The goal of funk music, when it emerged in the wake of soul, was to create as intense a groove as possible. And it was dirty. It was dirty music and funk was a dirty word because it was sexy. Named for the smell of love, it is music that starts out slow and mellow, amping up to an insistent rhythm that possesses you—a soundtrack for getting your love on. The call to arms, the step aside as your fellow musician was gearing up to get down is, "Now put some stank on it."

Let's face it, skiing too is all about sex. Sex. Play. Our appetites. It's that beautiful balance that comes when the person ripping up the hill in front of you is a girl: the She Bum putting stank where it belongs. ❄️

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