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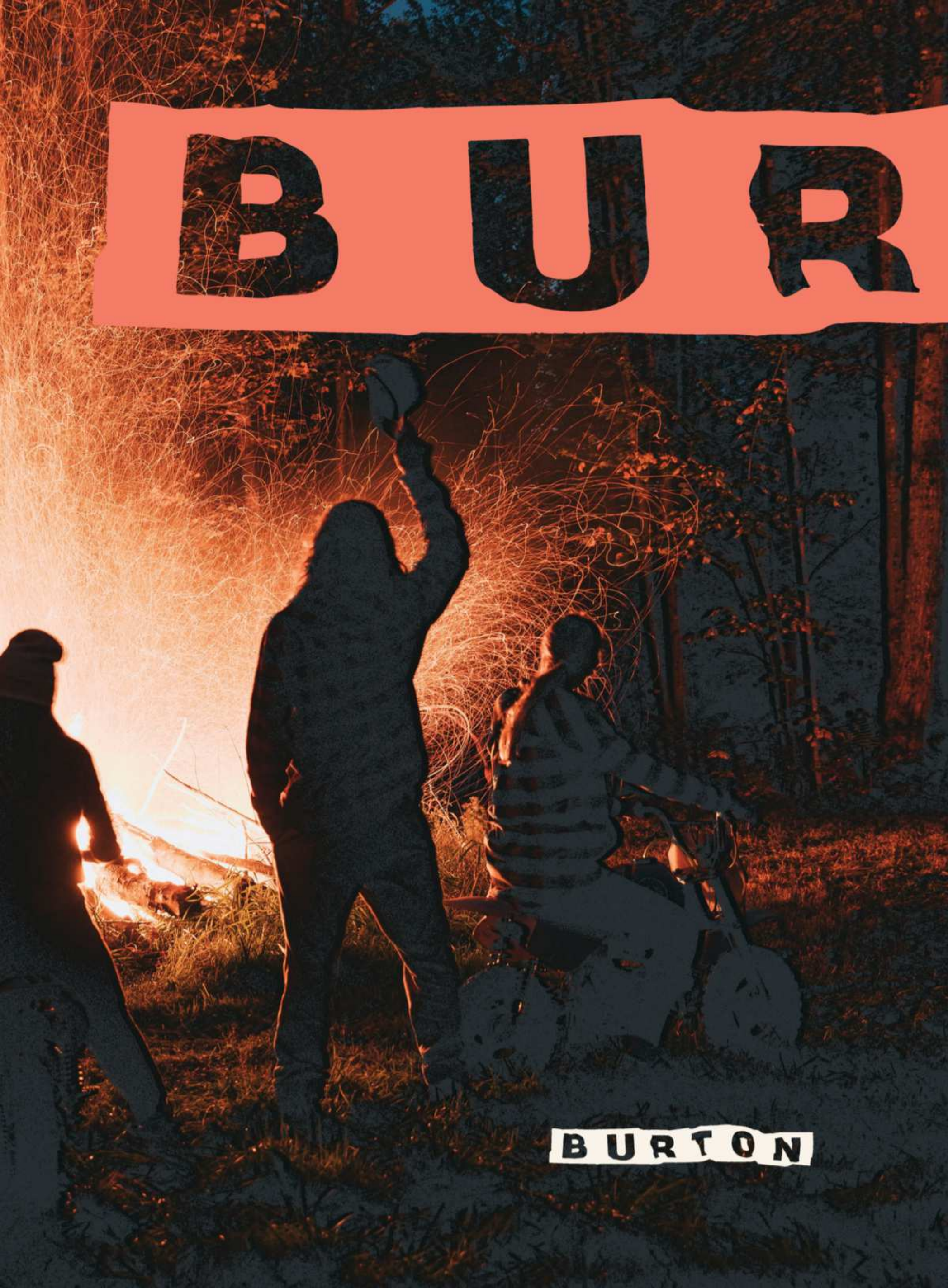
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Features

52 The Inner Lives of the Obsessed

Director Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi is shaking up the world of climbing films with stories that reveal the fellowship among elite alpinists—including her husband and collaborator, Jimmy Chin. With their latest project—*Free Solo,* about Alex Honnold's ascent of El Capitan—the power couple may be on their way to the Oscars. **BY LISA CHASE**

58 Who Do That Voodoo

Many of the world's greatest athletes follow bizarre pre-competition routines that they insist are critical to their success. Are they tapping into the ancient power of rituals, or are they just nuts? **STEVEN KOTLER** gets scientific. PLUS: Deconstructing the winning habits of Olympians and adventure icons.

64 Dan in Real Life

Before he died by suicide, Iraq War veteran Dan Sidles seemed to be thriving, thanks to outdoor programs designed to help manage PTSD. His life and death spurred his friend **BRIAN MOCKENHAUPT** to ask tough questions about the limits of nature-based remedies for our suffering soldiers.

76 The Soul of a New Pole

More than five decades after a phenomenal totem pole was removed from his First Nations outpost in British Columbia, Native artist Roy Vickers decided it was his destiny to carve a replica. What followed was the creative journey of a lifetime. **BY CHUCK THOMPSON**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NEW STUDIO; CELESTE SLOMAN; KILIII YÜYAN; JEFFERY SALTER/REDUX

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STYLING BY SHARON WILLIAMS/ART DEPARTMENT; GROOMING BY SUSSY CAMPOS/ART DEPARTMENT; PROP DESIGN BY WOODEN LADDER

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Battling Uphill

In 2009, on his first assignment for *Outside*, contributing editor Brian Mockenhaupt traveled to Afghanistan's remote Kunar province, where he embedded with an Army platoon at a site called Observation Post Hatchet. The collection of spare plywood huts was home to 24 soldiers tasked with rooting out elusive Taliban soldiers in some of the country's most rugged terrain. Mockenhaupt was the ideal reporter to capture the scene: he'd served two tours as an infantryman in Iraq before returning to a career in journalism, and as a result, the soldiers were quick to accept his presence.

Not long after we published that story ("Fire on the Mountain," November 2009), we sent Mockenhaupt back to the mountains to cover an expedition in Nepal comprised of experienced guides and military veterans. At the time, the idea of using adventure as a form of therapy for soldiers struggling to reintegrate into civilian life was gaining momentum. The expedition, sponsored by an organization called World TEAM Sports, used group therapy and the shared teamwork of climbing in hopes of providing a healing experience for 11 veterans, whose war trauma ranged from lost limbs to PTSD. By many measures, it was a success. Twenty-nine-year-old veteran Dan Sidles, Mockenhaupt wrote, "had found much of what he'd been missing: camaraderie, shared history, and the thrill of the unknown." Sidles went on to take a semester-long guide-training course with the National Outdoor Leadership School and climb peaks in Alaska and South America. Still, Mockenhaupt was hesitant to label wilderness therapy as a cure-all, recognizing the limitation of one-time experiences. "Many of the veterans, like Sidles," he wrote as the trip came to a close, "were still trying to break through barriers the war had created. Again they would find themselves alone, without their comrades, and frustrated by a world that doesn't understand them."

This month, Mockenhaupt writes the heartbreaking coda to that story, reporting on the final years and tragic death of Dan Sidles. The grim statistics of veteran suicide—20 former service members take their own lives each day—have been covered widely in the media. Mockenhaupt's reporting ("Dan in Real Life," page 64) goes beyond the data, producing the most complete picture of the complications veterans face as you'll ever encounter. It's a devastating read, but also an incredibly important one. —CHRISTOPHER KEYES (@KEYESER)

Built to Scale

Photographer Kiliii Yüyan had heard of Roy Henry Vickers, a famous indigenous artist based in northern British Columbia, before he traveled from his Seattle home to document Vickers's attempt to re-create a famous totem pole that had been shipped off to a museum decades earlier ("The Soul of a New Pole," page 76). Yüyan has roots in Siberia's Nanai culture and sometimes carves ivory, which gave him perspective on Vickers's masterwork. "I might use a chisel; he's using a chainsaw," Yüyan says. "The scale of the Northwest Coast culture is just like that. It's amazing, powerful, and huge."

Feedback

Fountain of Ire

In our July issue, writer McKenzie Funk explored the controversial views of Liz Parrish, who served as the guinea pig for a potentially dangerous gene-therapy experiment with the goal of warding off the aging process ("I Am Patient Zero"). Readers were skeptical, finding her actions to be unrealistic, ill-informed, and selfish.

Your readership deserves better than the pseudoscientific hype served up in this story. An "ordinary mom" could never eliminate aging by searching the internet, going to a few meetings, and then flying to Bogotá for "secret" injections. Death is as much a part of life as birth. Someday we may develop new treatments that will make growing old easier, but the changes will come from the National Institutes of Health, not some foolish huckster.
Mike Maffett, M.D.
Lake Burton, Georgia

I've been reading *Outside* cover to cover since the late seventies. McKenzie Funk's article is the first one I've actually wanted to put down. We are not meant to live forever, and modern medicine has already extended life expectancy. We need to clean up the planet and create a healthier environment for future generations before we try to lengthen our stay on earth.
Nancy Shefte
Golden, Colorado

Failing Forward?

After reading the package "A First Time for Everything" (July), I want you to make this a monthly column. My favorite story was Nick Paumgarten's account of his attempt at doing a daffy on skis. I tried it a few times myself when I was young and fearless, usually resulting in head and neck pain, broken sunglasses, and complete embarrassment. Pro tip: don't practice this trick in view of a chairlift.
John Meaney
Sisters, Oregon

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GRAYSON SCHAFFER; ANNIE MARIE MUSSELMAN; KILIII YÜYAN

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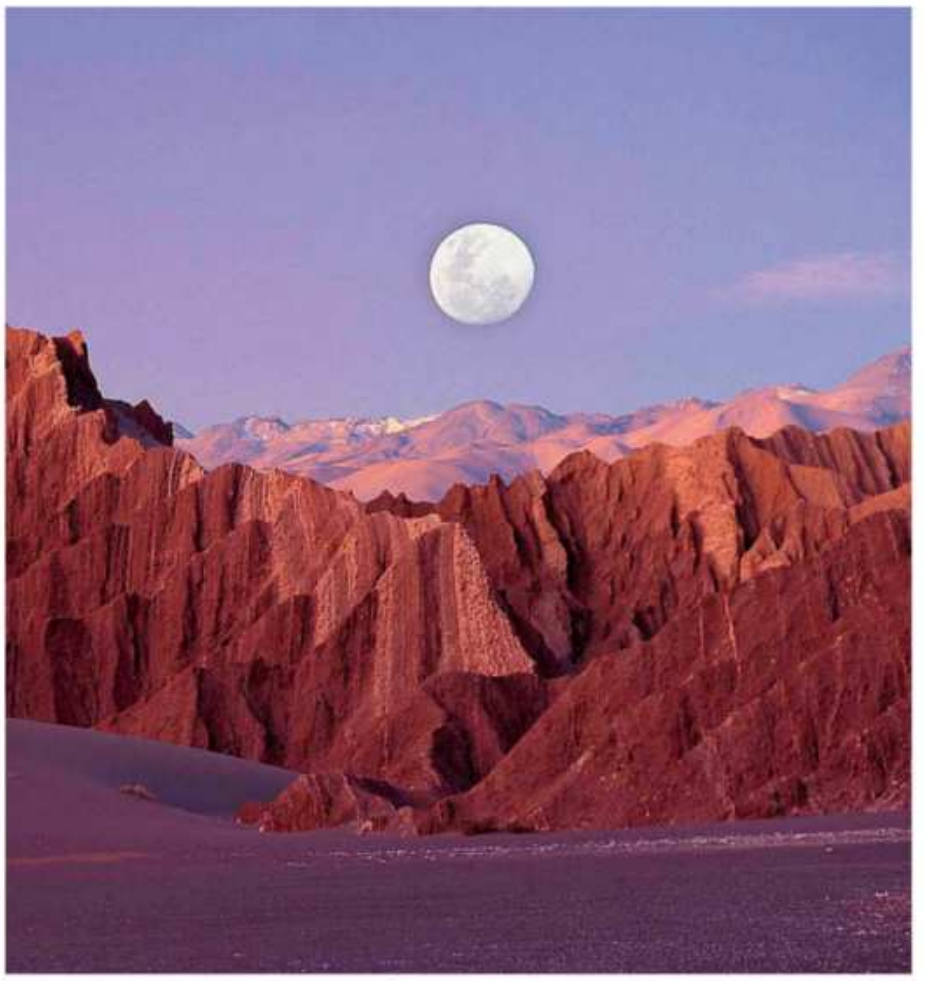

"Gilderhus figured she might get a call one day that Sidles had been in a terrible accident in the mountains. An avalanche. A fall. But not that he'd killed himself."

—BRIAN MOCKENHAUPT, PAGE 64

Go With Us

Join **Outside GO** and expert astronomy guide Xavier Jubier in Chile's scenic Elqui Valley for the 2019 solar eclipse. Sandboard and hike in the mountains surrounding San Pedro de Atacama in the days before witnessing this once-in-a-lifetime event. $10,250; outsidego.com

Habit Forming

As research director of the Flow Genome Project, author Steven Kotler has spent much of his adult life studying how athletes get in the mental state to perform their best. This month he explains why odd pregame rituals—like Shaun White's practice of eating steak before every competition—may ease nerves ("Who Do That Voodoo," page 58). As it turns out, Kotler has a few rituals and superstitions of his own.

→ **Dance It Out**
"Thirty seconds before I do something gnarly, I put in my headphones, stop talking, and wiggle my hips back and forth. It pulls me right into my body, but admittedly, there's nothing worse than a 50-year-old dude twerking next to you on the chairlift."

→ **Hang Some Air**
"When I ski off the lift, I try to jump into the run. That sensation of weightlessness gets me into the zone."

→ **Avoid Burritos**
"There's a gas station near my house that has the best burritos, but I can't eat them. I stopped there once before mountain biking and had a nasty fall."

Working in the Wings

Fans rejoiced when the 2015 documentary *Meru* succeeded where so many climbing movies have failed. As Lisa Chase explains in this month's "The Inner Lives of the Obsessed" (page 52), the film's secret weapon was director Chai Vasarhelyi, who put the spotlight on the emotional stakes of the journey. Chase, a New York writer and former *Outside* senior editor, spent time with Vasarhelyi in the run-up to the director's next project, *Free Solo*, about Alex Honnold's 2017 ascent of El Capitan. She was impressed by Vasarhelyi's fresh perspective on the why of climbing. "For decades everyone subscribed to George Mallory's line 'Because it's there,'" Chase says. "Chai didn't take that for an answer. She wanted to know why climbers do it and how the people around them cope with it. She's able to take what these guys are doing and turn it into something relatable."

So You Think You're a Weekend Warrior

In September, we're launching our Modern Guide to Adventure on Outside Online, featuring everything from the best backpacking trips to pro tips on staying active in the city. Think you don't need that advice? You may be right—if you score 12 or higher on this quiz.

My car is filled with:
a. Old receipts (-2)
b. Gear (+4)

2. A "project" is:
a. Painting my bathroom (-5)
b. A bouldering problem (+2)

3. Losing cell service means:
a. Disaster (-4)
b. Fun! (+3)

4. "Hero dirt" is:
a. A member of the Avengers (-3)
b. Exactly what you want on trails (+2)

5. Lunchtime is when I:
a. Eat (-2)
b. Run (+3)

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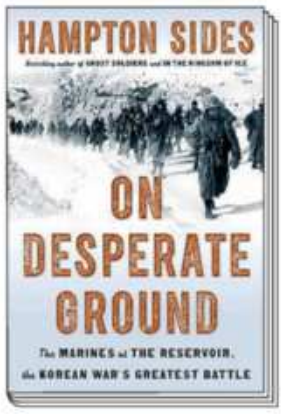

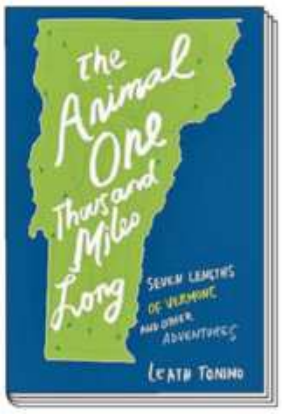

By Our Contributors

Two new titles we're reading this month.

***On Desperate Ground*, by Hampton Sides ($30, Doubleday)**
Sides recounts the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, a massive Korean War assault by 300,000 Chinese soldiers on freezing and outnumbered U.S. troops.

***The Animal One Thousand Miles Long*, by Leath Tonino ($18, Trinity University Press)**
Tonino writes about why he can't get his home state of Vermont off his mind, exploring it via a 260-mile canoe trip and other adventures.

Can't Take It Any S'more

This summer, the *Outside* staff was hard at work when *Backpacker* tweeted a dubious claim that cheesy s'mores—with cheddar instead of marshmallow—are the next campfire staple. Horrified, we decided to wage war.

9:55 A.M.
Backpacker publishes its ill-advised tweet. "You owe it to yourself to try this," its staff lies.

10:35 A.M.
Outside responds: "Delete this."

11 A.M.
Debate ensues. *Outside* posts a picture of grilled cheese with the sick burn #CheeseWhereIt-ShouldBe.

1:18 P.M.
Backpacker begins a taste test, falsely declaring the cheesy s'mores "not bad."

4 P.M.
Our test results: "That's gross," editorial fellow Kaelyn Lynch exclaims accurately after one bite.

LOGAN ROBERTSON

What We're Watching

It's tough to find mountain biking, kayaking, and dog jumping in one competition. Tune in to the GoPro Mountain Games, featuring more than 3,100 athletes and thousands of dollars in prizes, on **Outside TV**.

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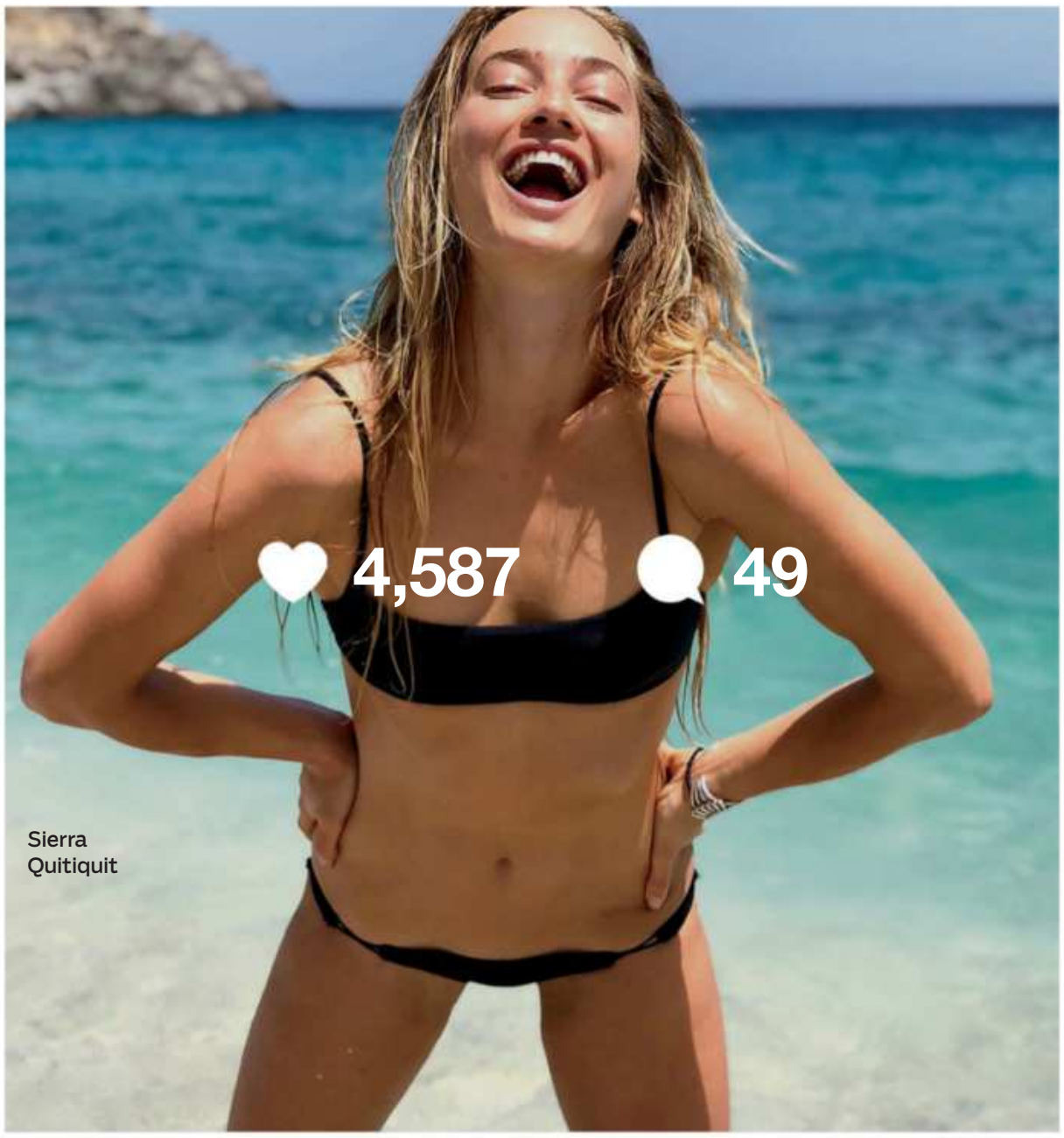

Sierra Quitiquit

Selfie Control

FEMALE ADVENTURE ATHLETES HAVE TAKEN CHARGE OF THEIR NARRATIVES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA. THAT'S SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE—EVEN IF YOU THINK THOSE SEXY BIKINI PICS SEND THE WRONG MESSAGE.

BY MEGAN MICHELSON

I DON'T REMEMBER exactly when I started following Sierra Quitiquit on Instagram, but it was several years ago. Since then, I've occasionally found myself scrolling her feed in a trance, getting pulled dozens of photos deep by her seemingly charmed life. Quitiquit, a 29-year-old professional skier from Utah, appears to be a laid-back woman who's up for anything. One moment she's lounging in her Dodge Ram van on a road trip through the Rockies, the next she's playing a ukulele on a beach in Mexico or taking a cold plunge in a mountain stream.

Not surprisingly, in the age of #influencers, these impressions are meticulously crafted. Quitiquit has more than 91,000 followers on Instagram, and like many other social-media personalities, she's paid to tag brands in some of her posts. As such, the more followers she attracts and likes she receives, the better her business does. This, one assumes, is a big part of the reason she frequently uploads shots of herself doing yoga in her underwear or running into the ocean for a skinny-dip. Quitiquit is gorgeous and has earned money as a model for nearly a decade. She's clearly comfortable showing her body, and she takes modeling gigs for bikini brands. Were she purely a model, the sexy shots wouldn't raise many eyebrows. But because she made a name for herself as a hard-charging freeskier in the early 2010s and has featured in ski films as recently as 2015, her skin-baring photos make her a target for scorn, especially among top athletes.

"She's better at modeling than skiing," one female professional skier told me. "Can she even ski?" asked another. This despite the fact that Quitiquit has competed on the Freeskiing World Tour and carved jaw-dropping lines down backcountry peaks in films from the likes of Warren Miller and Sweetgrass Productions. In her Instagram feed, some disapproving commenters have said, basically, that she should put her clothes back on.

I understand the resentment. For athletes who dedicate themselves to grueling training programs and skills development, the success of attractive self-promoters like Quitiquit—and there are plenty out there these days—can feel like cheating. A few years ago, climbing writer Andrew Bisharat published an essay on his website, Evening Sends, bemoaning the rise of the athlete-model in climbing, surfing, and skiing. "If the goal is lucrative sponsorship, then it appears that there are now two ways to achieve this," he wrote in the piece, which was widely shared. "You can work hard to become one of the best athletes in the world at your sport, or you can generate a large social-media following by looking good at doing whatever it is you like to do."

Professional skier Lynsey Dyer, a noted advocate for women in sports, told *Outside* last year that sponsors have come to value personality over talent. "There are a million pretty girls on Instagram being paid to hashtag a new brand every week in front of a pretty background," she said. "But there are very few who actually rip." (Dyer, like most of the athletes I reached out to, declined to be interviewed for this story.)

I'm not here to cheer Quitiquit's *Maxim*-ready images of herself. As a woman, mom, and dedicated mountain-sports athlete, I personally believe that those images can be detrimental. (More on that later.) But I'm also done with anyone—regardless of gender—telling women that there's a right way and a

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Clockwise from top left: Instagram posts by Quitiquit, Laird Hamilton, and Tommy Puzey

wrong way to present ourselves. For far too long, female athletes have been forced to follow norms established by male-dominated sports federations and adhere to standards of beauty dictated by male-dominated media industries. In our current digital era, women still face enormous pressure from those industries, but they also have the ability to craft independent careers that enable them to enjoy a lifestyle of their choosing. Instead of shaming them for showing too much skin, we need to give them the freedom to be whoever they want to be.

We seem to be getting there when it comes to the very best female athletes. Olympic ski hero Lindsey Vonn's Instagram feed is loaded with revealing pics—couture, bikinis—but that doesn't appear to upset many people. Similarly, male stars like surf god Laird Hamilton and soccer icon Cristiano Ronaldo pepper their social accounts with gratuitous beefcake shots but seem to get a pass. I've also noticed that male athlete-models like Tommy Puzey—the former elite ultramarathoner who models for H&M and appears to have dedicated his Instagram to the glory of his glazed abs—rarely get tsk-tsked for going shirtless.

So why all the hate for women like Quitiquit? It's fair to say that they're using their sex appeal to gain attention they wouldn't get through athletic talent alone. But for female adventure athletes, the challenge of getting noticed has always involved a lot more than success in their sports. However, thanks to social media, it's now possible to monetize that attention. Women can interact directly with fans, style their own photo shoots, and act as CEOs of their personal brands. You don't have to like every photo they post to appreciate the significance of that change.

When I asked Quitiquit about the sexier shots in her feed, she told me that while she posts some specifically to highlight her bikini sponsors, others are to promote a strong feminine image. "I went through a huge personal challenge within the modeling industry, feeling unacceptable as a strong, muscular woman," she said. "I've worked through a lot of bullshit to come to a place where I'm really proud of the things that my body can do."

According to Mary Jo Kane, director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota, we are undergoing a generational shift in attitude about sexualized images. While Kane's research has shown that such images alienate an athlete's core audience and don't boost interest in sports, a growing number of women view them differently. "Female athletes—especially today's younger generation who are comfortable with social media—unapologetically say being beautiful is powerful," Kane says. "Older people tend to be more offended by images that sexualize female athletes, because of what it's meant historically for women to be marginalized in sports."

Quitiquit is the first to admit that she isn't the best skier out there. Her success hasn't derived from winning competitions or taking the riskiest lines. Instead, she says, it's come from being herself. "My approach has always been to work really hard, learn different skill sets, and use those to create something that's all my own," she told me.

That, ultimately, is what I find appealing about Quitiquit. When I'm thumbing through her feed, I usually skip right past the bikini photos. They're not the reason I follow her, but they don't stop me from falling for her larger story, one she's happily scripting for herself. Recently, I paused on an image she took of her friend while they were ski-touring across Norway with surfboards and wetsuits strapped to their packs. In the caption, she writes about eating cheese sandwiches and her fears of surfing in icy temperatures. Photos like that make me want to plan an adventure to a place I've never been.

Male athlete-models rarely get tsk-tsked for going shirtless. So why all the hate for women like Quitiquit?

And guess what? That shot got twice as many likes—and more than three times as many comments—as the one of her doing yoga in her underwear.

Correspondent Megan Michelson (@skiingmegan) is based in Tahoe City, California.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BLAKE PETERSON; KENNA COLBURN; SIERRA QUITIQUIT; STEPHANIE CATUDAL. PREVIOUS PAGE: LYNSEY DYER.

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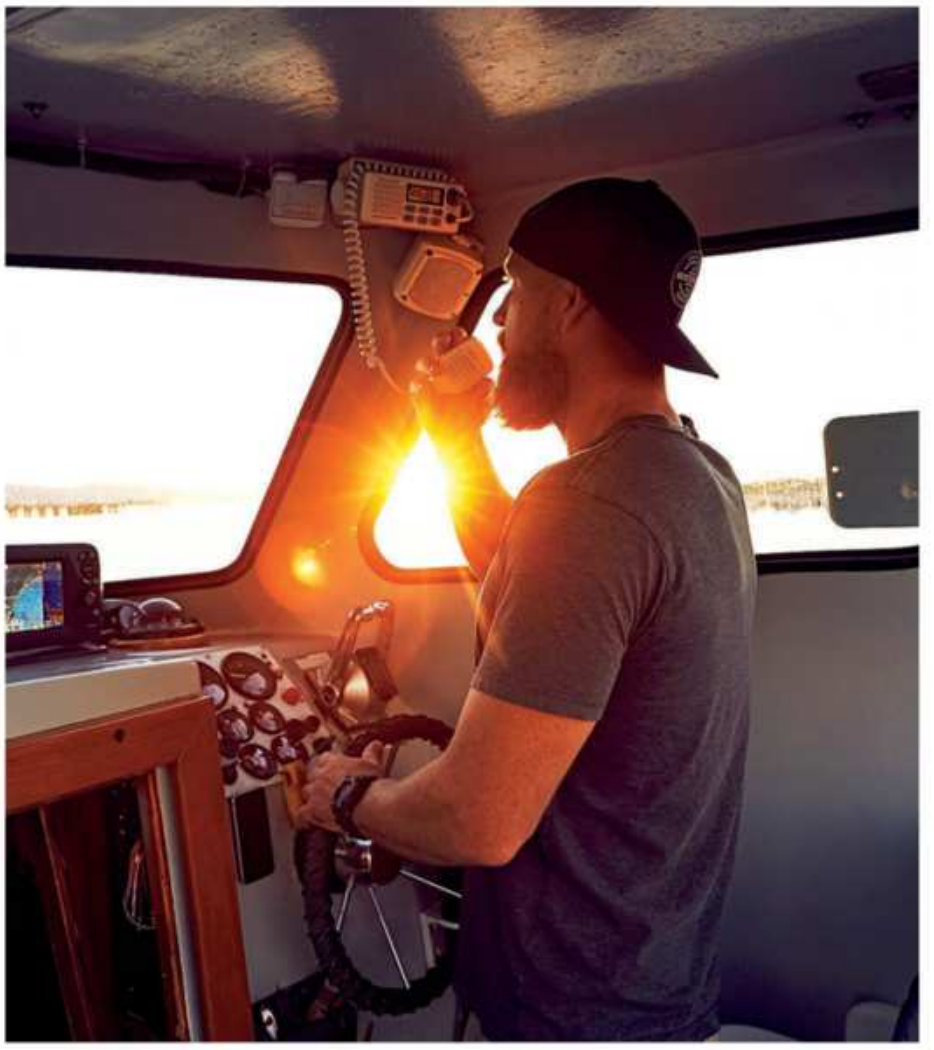
Deep Cuts

EXPLORING THE OCEAN FLOOR WITH AN URCHIN HUNTER

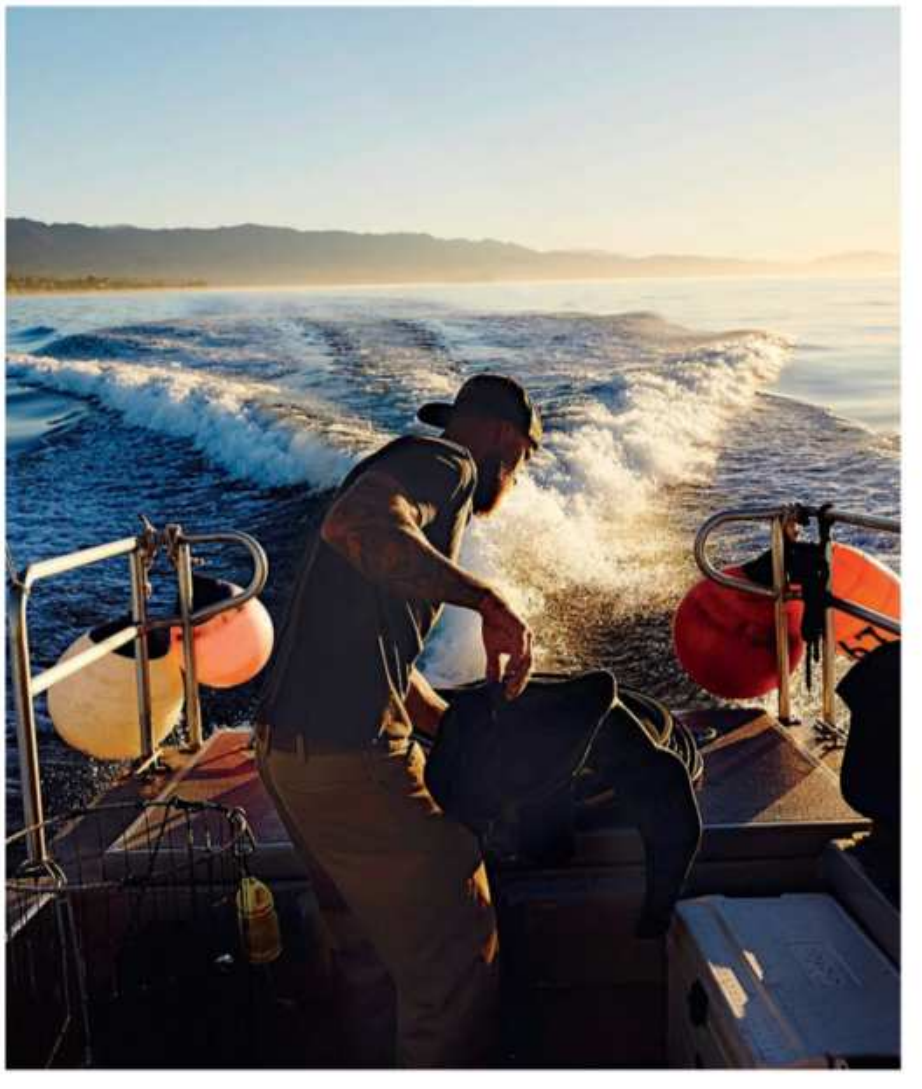
River Jordan was 12 years old when his family moved onto a sailboat in 2000 and spent three years traveling through South America and the Caribbean. In the 18 years since, he's made a career out of exploring the world, photographing the people and landscapes he encounters. "I have this real connection with the ocean," he says.

Jordan still travels widely from his home in Austin, Texas, though he doesn't always go abroad to find good stories. In 2017, in Santa Barbara, California, he met John Hoadley, a sea urchin diver who invited Jordan to dive with him and document his wild, often dangerous undersea workplace. "Here's a guy who jumps off his boat, way off the coast of California, into water that may not even have 15 feet of visibility, regardless of weather," says Jordan. "Who would do something like this every single day and love it? That's what drew me to this project." —EMILY REED

Portfolio by River Jordan



Urchin divers often work alone, miles from shore, for days at a time. "He's way, way out there with no one else around," Jordan says. "He drives the boat, he catches the urchins, everything."



When Hoadley dives to depths of up to 120 feet, he's equipped with oxygen tanks, a basket, and a purpose-built catch hook that attaches to his arm and allows him to grab an urchin and place it in the basket. "You see him in his whole getup, and you think, Wow, you really wear your profession," Jordan says.

A vulturine guinea fowl; above, Jane Kim

Endless Forms Most Beautiful

MEET THE METICULOUS SCIENTIFIC ILLUSTRATOR WHO PAINTS PUBLIC WALLS TO GET PEOPLE THINKING ABOUT MIGRATORY SPECIES

BY ERIN BERGER

"I'M NOT AN EXPERT on birds," says artist Jane Kim. "I'm an expert on the 243 birds I painted, in the position that I painted them."

Kim is referring to the work that went into *From So Simple a Beginning,* one of the world's most ambitious natural-history murals. Covering a 2,500-square-foot wall in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology visitor center, it depicts avian species from every modern bird family, plus 26 extinct ancestors. Starting in 2013, Kim, a scientific illustrator, spent two and a half years researching and painting the feathered specimens in precise detail. "We saw the project as reaching a broad audience—people who care about art, birds, or just nature," she says. "I didn't realize the insanity of it until it was done, and then I was like, Holy shit!"

People who haven't seen the mural up close might react similarly to *The Wall of Birds* ($40, HarperCollins), a visual diary of Kim's Sistine Chapel–like endeavor, paired with essays about ornithology and her artistic process by Thayer Walker, a longtime *Outside* correspondent and Kim's husband. The book presents fascinating extras like the bird-specific Pantone chart she created for the mural, including shades like finch feet and hornbill yellow.

Kim, 37, is one of a small number of women in the top ranks of scientific illustration, and she approaches the discipline with a modern twist. The art studio she and Walker created, Ink Dwell, has taken her technically rigorous work from dusty museum dioramas to everyday public spaces. In her *Migrating Mural* series, for example, she painted whimsical (and startlingly realistic) migrating animals onto man-made structures located in the species' natural habitats. From 2012 to 2014, she painted Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep on the sides of a motel, a sporting-goods store, a national-forest visitor center, and other buildings along a 125-mile stretch of California's U.S. Highway 395. Last year, she began adorning structures like an air-traffic-control tower with monarch butterflies and caterpillars to celebrate the insects' migration path. She has already completed murals in Florida and Arkansas, and will create three in Utah this fall.

Conservation themes run through all Kim's art, but she also touches on social issues. For the bird wall, she placed the species over a map of the world to represent the birds' diversity and migration patterns. "There are so many connections that can be made between these animals and societal issues like equal rights and immigration," Kim says. "All of my work has the same spirit, which is to first capture people with compelling imagery, and then give them the opportunity to walk away with a deeper understanding."

Weddell Sea by Zaria Forman

Pollution Pods in Norway

Art for the Anthropocene

THREE ARTISTS FIND SURPRISING NEW WAYS TO EXPLORE MANKIND'S ROLE IN OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT —E.B.

ZARIA FORMAN

Forman's pastel drawings are often mistaken for photographs—which is impressive, given that her subjects are complex natural formations like vast glaciers and crashing waves. In 2016 and 2017, NASA invited her on two flights with Operation IceBridge, a multiyear campaign to monitor the poles and the effects of their changing climates. Forman produced drawings of rarely seen icy formations that she photographed while over Antarctica and the Arctic. An exhibit featuring these works opens at New York City's Winston Wächter Fine Art on October 25.

JENNY KENDLER

Kendler's *Birds Watching* is a breathtaking outdoor sculpture that consists of 100 oversize bird eyes arranged side by side. According to the artist-activist, the 40-foot-wide flock of peepers, made of colorful reflective film mounted on aluminum, represents species threatened by climate change. The piece is on display through November 11 at upstate New York's Storm King Art Center.

MICHAEL PINSKY

Maybe don't linger too long inside Pinsky's *Pollution Pods.* The British artist linked five geodesic domes into a ring in front of London's Somerset House and filled them with varying mixtures of nontoxic chemicals, emulating the air quality of places from pristine Norway to noxious New Delhi. Pinsky plans to tour the domes around Europe this fall, including a stop at Geneva's Place des Nations in October.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: INK DWELL; VIRGINIA CHADWICK; COURTESY OF ZARIA FORMAN STUDIO; MICHAEL PINSKY

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Burton Athlete KIMMY FASANI

As one of the most influential female riders of her generation, Fasani has appeared on magazine covers and in top snowboard videos, pushing progression in freestyle and backcountry snowboarding at every step of the way. But perhaps her greatest accomplishment happened last year, with the arrival of her son, Koa.

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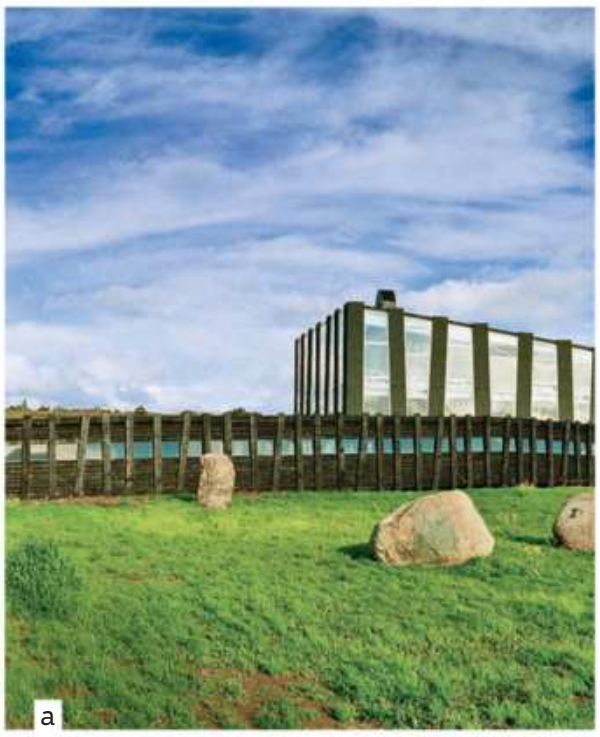
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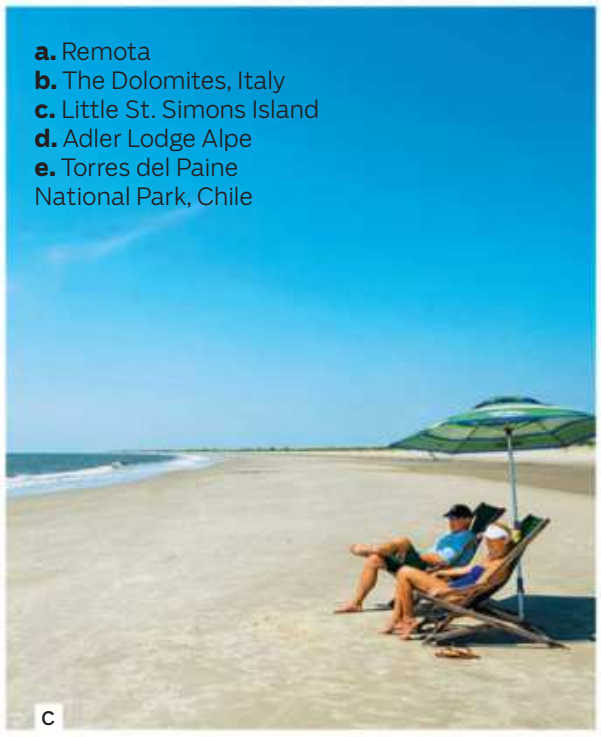
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a. Remota
b. The Dolomites, Italy
c. Little St. Simons Island
d. Adler Lodge Alpe
e. Torres del Paine National Park, Chile

BEST FOR: FJORDS AND FLY-FISHING

REMOTA

Puerto Natales, Chile

The design of this 72-room lodge in Chilean Patagonia is almost as dramatic as the landscape that surrounds it. Slanted steel-and-glass walls mimic the iconic wind-bullied sheep-shearing sheds endemic to the country's Magallanes region. But getting outside is why you travel all the way to Puerto Natales, the gateway to 700-square-mile Torres del Paine National Park. Spend one day hiking 12 miles round-trip to the base of the park's famous 8,500-foot granite spires and another stalking fat brown trout along the Río Prat. Or paddle the waters of Last Hope Fjord in a kayak, then send the 30 private sport-climbing routes the lodge put up on its own secluded cliffs. Before a king crab dinner, hit the indoor pool or Finnish-style sauna, housed in a building purposefully set a three-minute walk away. Why? So you can feel the wind and rain first. From $280 —TIM NEVILLE

BEST FOR: MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE AND SOLITUDE

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South Tyrol, Italy

Surrounded by the toothy spires of Italy's Dolomites, the Adler offers some of the best adventure access in Europe. It's located on the Alpe di Siusi plateau, a carless Unesco World Heritage site that's accessible only by foot, skis, or cable car unless you're staying at the lodge. In summer, head out on guided hikes, like the eight-mile Witch's Path, which winds through green foothills and alpine meadows. Other options: grab a loaner hardtail and hit the nearby singletrack or paraglide over the iconic 8,400-foot Schlern massif with Tandem Fly. In winter, explore Sciliar-Catinaccio Nature Park on skis, or ice-climb Vallunga Valley's 18 routes. That is, if you can drag yourself away from the lodge and its floor-to-ceiling window views, sauna, saltwater pool, and gourmet meals eaten under the stars with a glass of Montalcino in hand. From $235, all-inclusive —NICK DAVIDSON

BEST FOR: SEAFOOD AND SECLUDED STRETCHES OF SAND

THE LODGE ON LITTLE ST. SIMONS ISLAND

Little St. Simons Island, Georgia

Rent your own slice of southern charm at Little St. Simons, a private 11,000-acre barrier island with an unpretentious collection of five cottages and one lodge. More Southern Gothic than tropical, the landscape is dominated by live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, rugged dunes, and seven miles of private beach. You can book a room or cottage or blow it out by reserving the whole resort. With a limit of only 32 guests at a time, you're almost guaranteed solitude as you walk the trails, comb the beach, or fish for flounder and red drum. Naturalists are on hand to take you birding and kayaking along the tidal waters and teach you about the local population of nesting loggerhead turtles. Better yet, everything is included, from the bicycles to the Low Country shrimp boils. From $425 —GRAHAM AVERILL

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: REMOTA PATAGONIA LODGE; BLUE COLLECTORS/STOCKSY; LAURA SAUSINA; CASSIE WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY; ADLER MOUNTAIN LODGE; JOVANA MILANKO/STOCKSY. PREVIOUS PAGES: WICKANINNISH INN.

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a. Collective Retreats in Wolcott, Colorado
b. The Swag
c–d. Surfers Lodge Peniche

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BEST FOR: BACKCOUNTRY SOUTHERN COMFORT

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BEST FOR: WORLD-CLASS POINT BREAKS

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Peniche, Portugal

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF COLLECTIVE RETREATS; THE SWAG; TOBIAS ILSANKER; EMELIE LINDGREN; JOHN NORTHRUP/LECONTE LODGE

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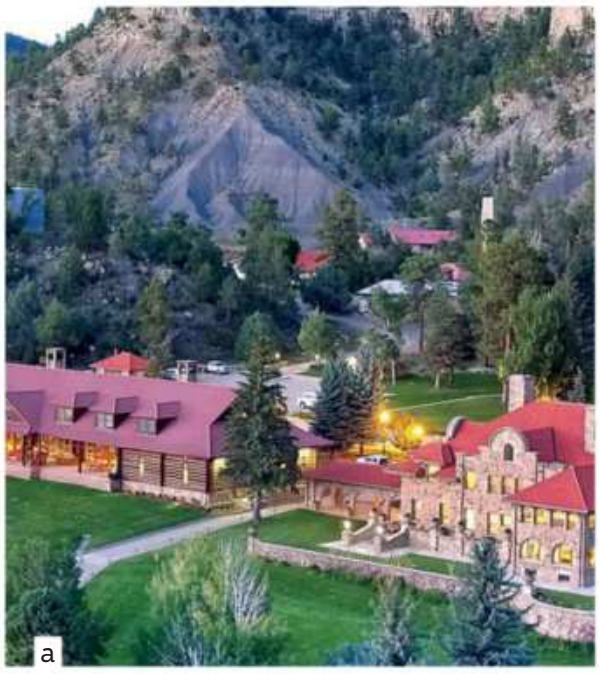
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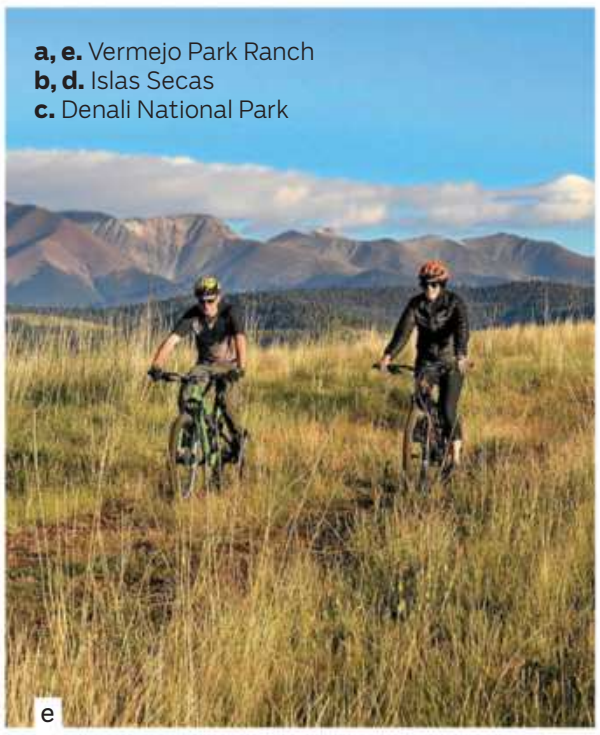
a, e. Vermejo Park Ranch
b, d. Islas Secas
c. Denali National Park
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BEST FOR: A SOUTHWESTERN SAFARI

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Raton, New Mexico

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BEST FOR: TURQUOISE SEAS AND BIG FISH

ISLAS SECAS RESERVE AND LODGE

Isla Cavada, Panama

With parts of Costa Rica overrun with tourists and Nicaragua working to recover from recent unrest, Panama is poised to be the next great Central American hot spot. This new sustainable adventure outpost on Cavada, a 400-acre island in the Pacific's Gulf of Chiriquí, is one of its crown jewels. Hike a couple of miles through the dense jungle, SUP or kayak the calm leeward bays of the resort's private 14-island archipelago, float in a secluded plunge pool, or lounge on empty beaches—the lodge has nine casitas and only hosts up to 18 people at once. It also has its own dive center with on-site instructors, so even novice guests can explore the gulf, which is filled with manta rays, dolphins, hammerhead sharks, leatherback turtles, and teeming coral reefs. Finally, boat into the big blue to catch-and-release monster tuna and marlin in the world-renowned Hannibal Bank and off Isla Montuosa. From $1,000, all-inclusive –STEPHANIE PEARSON

BEST FOR: MOUNTAIN VIEWS AND DIGITAL DETOXING

DENALI BACKCOUNTRY LODGE

Denali National Park, Alaska

The journey to Denali Backcountry Lodge is an adventure in itself. It's accessed by either a six-hour bus ride deep into five-million-acre Denali National Park, or via a 35-minute air-taxi flight from the park entrance over the snowcapped Alaska Range. Once you've checked in to one of its 42 log cabins—nestled alongside Moose Creek by an old gold-mining camp—let the rugged wilderness engulf you. There's no TV or cell service. Naturalists lead botanical walks and day hikes through the nearby trailless tundra, while you keep an eye out for caribou, moose, Dall sheep, and blond grizzlies. Or explore the endless backcountry on your own. Just be sure to pack a can of bear spray in your day bag. Our favorite excursion? Cycling five miles to Wonder Lake, where you'll score the park's best view of 20,310-foot Denali gleaming pearly white in the midnight sun. From $545, meals included –N.D.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TED TURNER EXPEDITIONS; ISLAS SECAS RESERVE AND LODGE; XANTERRA TRAVEL COLLECTION; MAXIMILIAN GUYMCNAIR MACEWAN/STOCKSY; ISLAS SECAS RESERVE AND LODGE; TED TURNER EXPEDITIONS

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Born from our limitless imagination, the RDX offers powerful acceleration with a 272-hp turbocharged engine, rail-like cornering through available Super Handling All-Wheel Drive™, and inspiring versatility via 79.8 cubic feet of cargo space*. Imagination built the all-new 2019 RDX and evolved not just what's possible in an SUV, but also what's possible at Acura. The future starts now. The future is the 2019 RDX.

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BEST FOR: LOCAL INTEL

OUTSIDE GO

Our travel partner, Outside GO, not only has some serious boots-on-the-ground knowledge of four of the lodges that made our list, but it'll also get you some exclusive booking perks. Visit Lone Mountain Ranch in May and you'll be hooked up with some of Yellowstone's best guides for a chance to see wolf pups. You'll also score a free night at the Lark, a hip boutique hotel in nearby Bozeman, Montana. Reserve Islas Secas and you'll receive a free 30-minute outdoor massage. A sojourn at Vermejo Park Ranch includes a full-day guided adventure, such as fly-fishing the property's 30 miles of private streams. And at Chem Chem (shown here), Outside GO works in a surprise or two for every guest, such as keepsake *kikois* (traditional East African sarongs) or private lakeside dinners for honeymooners. To learn more, visit outsidego.com.

CHEM CHEM PHILANTHROPY AND SAFARIS

REEL IN SOME ADVENTURE

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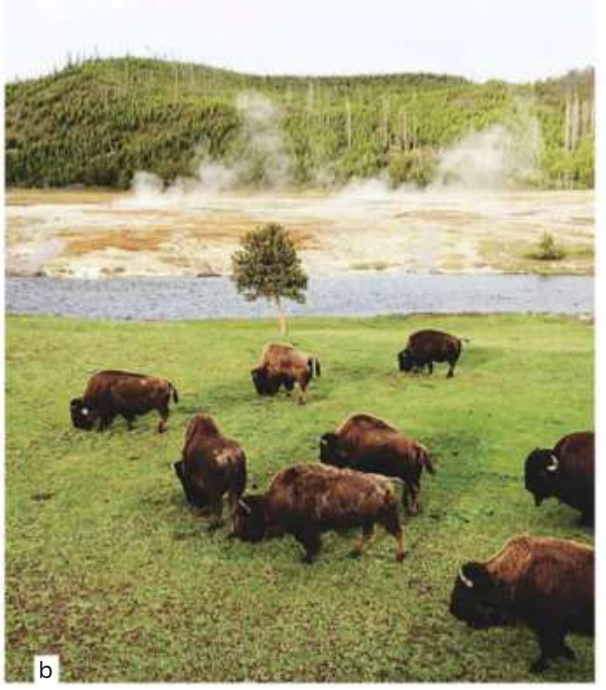
PARK CLASSIC
THE MAJESTIC YOSEMITE HOTEL, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK
Designed to complement the granite cliffs and towering sequoias that surround it, this National Historic Landmark is the perfect place to land after climbing Half Dome or hiking to one of the park's waterfalls.

a

d

c



b

a. Ucluelet, B.C.
b. Yellowstone National Park
c. Tofino
d. Little Chem Chem, Tanzania

BEST FOR: GAME VIEWING AND GIVING BACK

CHEM CHEM LODGE

Manyara, Tanzania

Sandwiched between two national parks, this safari camp provides unparalleled access to Africa's big game. It's located along an ancient migration corridor, where herds of giraffes, elephants, zebras, and gazelles pass by to forage the plains of Tarangire. The lodge is a collection of breezy tent villas, and all visitor profits are funneled into community-based projects, like anti-poaching efforts and skills training for locals to help reduce human-animal conflict. You can participate, too, by bringing children's clothes and classroom supplies in your luggage and stopping by a Chem Chem–sponsored school during your stay. The owners also have two properties nearby: Little Chem Chem, on a 40,000-acre private preserve, and the smaller Forest Chem Chem, which offers three vintage tents beneath fever trees on the Tarangire River. From $920, including meals, activities, and conservations fees —G.A.

BEST FOR: SURFING AND STORM WATCHING

WICKANINNISH INN

Tofino, British Columbia

Just 25 minutes north of the 198-square-mile Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, this 75-room lodge on Vancouver Island embraces B.C.'s turbulent weather. In addition to ocean views, each room comes with hurricane-rated glass to better withstand the stunning tempests that roll in from across the Pacific. Don the inn's complimentary rain slickers and boots, and step outside for a free "West Coast facial," or head to the Ancient Cedars Spa for treatments based on indigenous cleansing ceremonies. On clearer days, walk the 13 beaches that line the seal-and-eagle-flecked coast, or make your way 25 miles south to the village of Ucluelet for a short hike to the Amphitrite Point Lighthouse, a linebacker of concrete and steel that defies the storm-whipped swells that assail it each winter. The island has plenty of good surf breaks, including Cox Bay Beach, just minutes from the inn. Afterward, refuel with a meal of drippingly fresh steelhead salmon. From $260 —T.N.

BEST FOR: NORDIC SKIING, YOGA, AND YELLOWSTONE ACCESS

LONE MOUNTAIN RANCH

Big Sky, Montana

Sitting on 150 acres in Custer Gallatin National Forest, this former cattle farm, founded in 1915, keeps 52 miles of trails meticulously groomed for cross-country skiing. Routes meander from your door up 2,000 feet through pine forests and alpine meadows and offer stunning views of 11,145-foot Lone Mountain, home to the Big Sky Resort. Many of the lodge's 27 log cabins have wood stoves or 1920s-era stone fireplaces. Meanwhile, chef Eric Gruber, of the Horn and Cantle restaurant, knows how to feed starving skiers, whipping up three nourishing daily meals, like homemade pappardelle with elk meatballs. Take a break from nordic skiing and head into the backcountry of nearby Yellowstone or ride the lifts at Big Sky, 12 minutes away. Not into snow? Visit in the warmer months to hike, horseback ride, fly-fish, whitewater raft, or enjoy a weeklong meditation and yoga retreat. From $375 —S.P.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GALLERY STOCK; COURTESY OF YOSEMITE HOSPITALITY; KEVIN RUSS/STOCKSY; KEENAN BUSH; CHEM CHEM PHILANTHROPY AND SAFARIS

a. The Jefferson Memorial
b, g. The U.S. Capitol
c–d. The Willard InterContinental
e. El Chucho
f. The Gibson
h. Bad Saint

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CAMERON DAVIDSON/GALLERY STOCK; MIRKO SCHERRER; MICHAEL KLEINBERG; SANDOR SUBERT; REY LOPEZ; MONG LINH; CAMERON WHITMAN/STOCKSY; FARRAH SKEIKY/DIM SUM MEDIA

Down in the District

WASHINGTON, D.C., HAS SURPRISINGLY ACCESSIBLE ADVENTURES—IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK

BY J. WESTON PHIPPEN

6 A.M.
Wake up early at the historic **Willard InterContinental** hotel. It's only two blocks from the White House, and it's the place where Martin Luther King Jr. finished penning his "I Have a Dream" speech. Head out for a run and you'll have **the National Mall** nearly to yourself for a two-mile stretch between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial. Extend the route five miles with a loop around Hains Point and the Jefferson Memorial.

8 A.M.
Stop by **Florida Avenue Grill**, a local-fave no-frills diner near Howard University that claims to be the world's oldest soul-food restaurant. The order: hotcakes, corn muffins, eggs, and grits.

10 A.M.
Rent a hybrid bicycle at Georgetown's **Big Wheel Bikes** and pedal the C&O Canal trail 14 miles upstream to Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center in Maryland, then hike two miles on the Billy Goat Trail for views of the Potomac River.

2 P.M.
You'll be hungry after riding back to D.C. Good thing that Georgetown is one of the city's culinary epicenters. Grab a lobster roll at **Luke's Lobster**, a Neapolitan-style pizza at **Pizzeria Paradiso**, or mussels at **Clyde's**, the city's most beloved watering hole.

3 P.M.
Pay homage to the 26th president and his role in establishing our public lands with a hike around the serene 90-acre Theodore Roosevelt Island in the middle of the Potomac. Rent a kayak from the **Key Bridge Boathouse** and paddle the half-mile crossing, or take the footbridge from Rosslyn, Virginia.

7 P.M.
Scoring a table and some pork belly in blood sauce at **Bad Saint** in D.C.'s Columbia Heights neighborhood is life changing, but the line wraps around the corner by 5 P.M. If you can't stand the wait, **El Chucho**, an easy-going Mexican joint just up the street, is a great backup plan.

9 P.M.
To avoid the college kids in Adams Morgan and the congressional staffers on U Street, drop by the **Gibson bar**, a prohibition-style speakeasy on 14th Street. The drink menu changes seasonally, but expect expertly crafted concoctions like the Crystal Caverns, made with Irish whiskey, cheese orgeat syrup, honey, and house-made berry bitters.

11 P.M.
Head off a hangover at **Copycat Co.** on H Street with an order of steamed *bao,* grilled meat skewers, and pot stickers. Your body will thank you in the morning.

Take nothing on the Eye of Sauron.

For cold belays and limited space, desert camping and unexpected monsoons, open bivies and long approaches. For never again having to choose between weight, space and warmth. **We made it easy. The Micro Puff is the only jacket you need to pack.**

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Nico Favresse and Alix Morris on the first ascent of Eye of Sauron in Yosemite, California.
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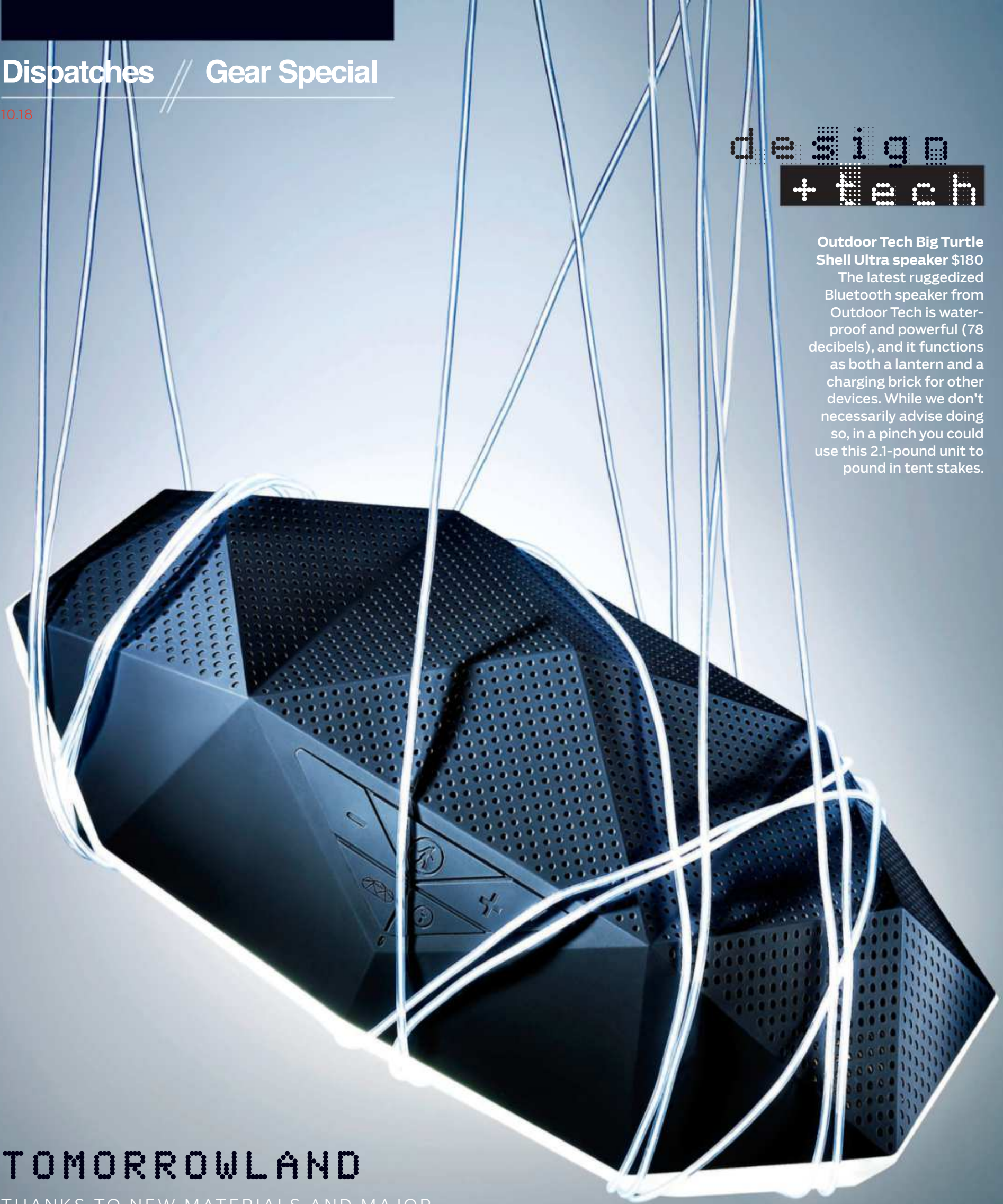
The Micro Puff® Hoody

Our lightest, most packable insulated jacket ever.



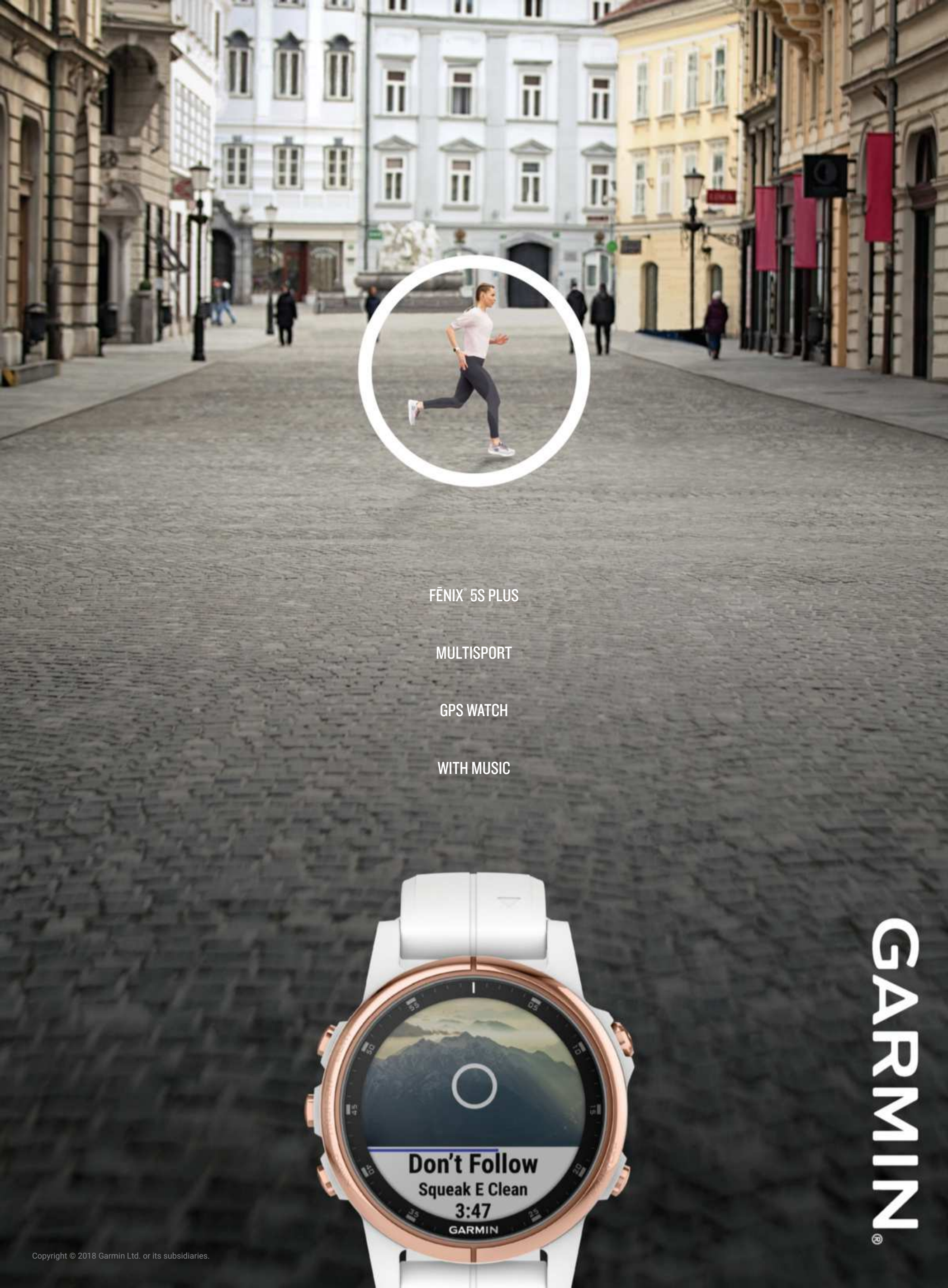
design + tech

Outdoor Tech Big Turtle Shell Ultra speaker $180
The latest ruggedized Bluetooth speaker from Outdoor Tech is waterproof and powerful (78 decibels), and it functions as both a lantern and a charging brick for other devices. While we don't necessarily advise doing so, in a pinch you could use this 2.1-pound unit to pound in tent stakes.

TOMORROWLAND

THANKS TO NEW MATERIALS AND MAJOR LEAPS IN ENGINEERING, THE GEAR OF THE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Inga Hendrickson**



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design + tech

Small Wonders

PERSONAL ELECTRONICS GET TINIER AND MORE CAPABLE

BY BRENT ROSE

A. DJI Mavic Air drone $800
So nice of DJI, a celebrated maker of professional-quality drones, to offer a reasonably priced model for the rest of us. The Mavic Air shoots beautiful 4K video and comes with newbie-friendly capabilities like obstacle avoidance, target tracking, and a range of preprogrammed shooting sequences. The whole thing folds up small enough to fit in your jacket pocket.

B. Panasonic Lumix LX10 camera $550
This is one of the best point-and-shoot cameras ever made. The Lumix's one-inch, 20-megapixel sensor captures images that are so sharp and vibrant that people might assume you used a top-end SLR. Add 4K video and live cropping and you have a portable powerhouse.

C. Fitbit Charge 3 smartwatch $150
Fitbit's most popular band is back—and this time it's waterproof, 20 percent lighter, and equipped with an extra-bright screen and a battery that lasts up to seven days. The device, which can track your efforts on land and in the pool, also offers menstrual-cycle monitoring plus phone-free mobile payments (in the special-edition version).

D. Garmin InReach Mini satellite communicator $350
The scaled-down version of Garmin's popular unit is about the size of a deck of cards but contains the same backcountry safety goodies as the original, including two-way messaging and an SOS beacon. Don't mind the mini screen: you can sync with your smart device via Bluetooth and operate all functions from there.

E. GoPro Hero camera $200
The entry-level GoPro Hero squeezes a lot into an affordable package: the 2.4-by-1.7-inch Wi-Fi-enabled camera is waterproof down to 33 feet without a case, has a bright two-inch touchscreen, responds to voice commands, and offers five shooting modes, from burst to time lapse.

Happier Meals

CHOP WITH PRECISION, HYDRATE LIKE A MASTER, AND WIN AT DINNER (EVEN IN THE BACKCOUNTRY)

BY A. C. SHILTON

A. L.L.Bean Quick-Pack Folding picnic table $149
A camp cook's dream, this 25-pound aluminum table is workhorse sturdy and offers 8.8 square feet of prep space and four seats. The whole thing folds up in under two minutes.

B. Camelbak ChuteMag Vacuum Insulated Stainless 32-ounce bottle $36
Magnets hold the ChuteMag's lid to the side when it's open, so it doesn't hit you in the face while you're drinking. It's the kind of invention you never knew you needed, then you wonder why you didn't have it sooner.

C. Hydro Flask Coffee mug $30
There's plenty of great travel drinkware out there, but at home we like holding a handle. This stainless-steel 12-ouncer features double-wall vacuum construction that keeps your joe hot twice as long (with the no-drip lid on) as the ceramic options in your cupboard.

D. Whiskey Peaks rocks glasses set of four $65
Seeing an iconic mountain come into view at the bottom of a tumbler tempers the sadness of reaching your final sip of whiskey. Buying this set isn't the same as actually setting your eyes on Denali, Rainier, Whitney, or Half Dome, but it's a start.

E. Yeti Silo 6G cooler $300
The Fat Wall design and pressure-injected foam insulation in this cooler kept six gallons of water at brain-freeze temperature for two days. The removable spigot is easy to clean (though it doesn't lock open for hands-free filling) and no-slide feet add stability.

F. BioLite FirePit stove $200
We love campfires, but we don't like smelling of smoke. The rechargeable-battery-powered fan in the FirePit creates more efficient combustion and reduces fuel intake. A removable grate converts it to a small grill.

design + tech

Fancy Free

INNOVATIVE TOOLS THAT OFFER PERFORMANCE BOOSTS WITHOUT UNNECESSARY EXTRAS

BY MARC PERUZZI

A. Cannondale F-Si bike $2,999 and up
Lefty mountain-bike forks, which have only a single stanchion and shock connecting the front wheel to the rest of the frame, perform just as well as standard two-sided forks on cross-country terrain, but their strange look can make riders doubtful. The new Lefty Ocho Carbon fork is sure to win converts—its sleek design is crazy light and efficient.

B. Salomon/Atomic Shift MNC ski bindings $650
Seven years of R&D went into this new touring binding, and the results are terrific. The Shift, made by both Salomon and Atomic, offers unparalleled performance. Full toe and heel pieces provide a secure fit, while flyweight construction makes it a nimble backcountry setup.

C. Spy Ace EC One goggles $275
Push a button on the Ace EC One and an electric pulse changes the tint of the filament sandwiched in the lens. It's fast, so when you're ripping on a sunny day and enter dark woods, you won't struggle to see the trees.

D. Burton Step On snowboard bindings $250
If skiers had to sit down in the snow to click into bindings, the whining would never stop. When paired with the Step On boots, the binding invites snowboarders to the stand-up crowd.

E. Sweet Protection Outrider MIPS helmet $170
How does Sweet sell a light, aerodynamic road helmet with MIPS—which reduces rotational forces during a crash—for less dough than similar-quality lids? By cutting nonessential features and superfluous materials.

F. The North Face Prophet 85 pack $379
Normally, we'd shy away from an 85-liter pack, not wanting the aches that come with lugging such a load. But the Prophet's suspension brings the weight closer to your body with a simple tug of the left shoulder strap, reducing stress on your back.

Discover the world's coolest luxury adventure experiences

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX MELESI | BORANA LODGE, KENYA

Outside GO®

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design + tech

Meridian Line Momentum jeans $99
Stretchy outdoor denim is usually too flimsy or not pliable enough. Meridian uses a just-right blend of organic cotton, polyester, and spandex, cut to maximize mobility.

A

B

C

D

E

Dress to Impress

SUIT UP IN THIS YEAR'S MOST ADVANCED PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS

BY JAKOB SCHILLER

A. 686 GLCR Hydrastash Reservoir jacket $350
Many of us get dehydrated while skiing because we don't want to carry a bottle or pack. The crafty designers at 686 came up with a remedy: a water reservoir that zips into the powder skirt, with a drinking tube running inside along the front zipper. Its clever placement means that the water never throws you off balance or makes a chairlift ride uncomfortable.

B. The North Face Women's Contoured Tech High-Rise tights $110
Researchers at the University of California at Irvine designed groovy patterning and shading for these tights to make the wearer appear taller and slimmer. The polyester-spandex fabric dries quickly, and the high waist is extremely comfortable, offering perfect support for almost any sport, from yoga to running to CrossFit.

C. Adidas Ultraboost Parley shoes $180
To make these all-purpose runners, Adidas and conservation organization Parley for the Oceans collect discarded water bottles and other plastic trash from coastal communities around the world and recycle it into yarn for the foot-hugging uppers. Use your smartphone to scan the chip embedded in the heel and you'll get details about the waste that was used in your shoe.

D. Columbia Titanium Omni-Heat 3D Knit Crew top $90
Columbia has advanced its Omni-Heat lining technology—foil dots that reflect heat—by placing synthetic fiber clusters between the dots. This base layer is probably too hot for backcountry charging, but it's perfect for riding lifts.

E. Mi Pulse smart bra $79
Chest-strap heart-rate monitors are more accurate than wrist models, but they chafe when paired with a bra. The Mi Pulse has an advanced monitor (with Bluetooth and ANT+) seamlessly built in, so everything moves together instead of fighting.

CREATURE SEEKERS
A CAMO-CLAD ADVENTURE
CONQUER THE OUTDOORS ON YOUR NEXT HUNTING TRIP AND SAVE
WITH A BUNDLED POLICY FOR YOUR AUTO AND OUTDOOR VEHICLES
PROGRESSIVE
PROGRESSIVE CASUALTY INS. CO. & AFFILIATES

The New Rules of Healthy Living

From virtual-reality meditation to infrared saunas, these are the latest innovations and insights for improving your well-being BY GORDY MEGROZ

1. UPGRADE YOUR HOME

You spend roughly half of your time at home, so your surroundings should be as healthy as possible. Rachel Gutter, president of the International WELL Building Institute, suggests some simple ideas that can improve your indoor environment.

Add circadian lighting
Lighting is an important factor in how well we sleep. To help address that, companies like Lighting Science sell fixtures and bulbs that are specialized for different rooms and times of day. "They adjust the spectrum of light to provide the right levels and temperatures to wake you up naturally in the morning—through rich white light that promotes alertness—and encourage relaxation and sleep at night, through warmer color schemes," Gutter says.

Breathe cleaner air
"Poor indoor air quality can contribute to conditions such as asthma, allergies, and other upper-respiratory challenges," Gutter says. One fix—in addition to ventilation, cleaning, and removing pollutants—is an air purifier. But don't settle for the first one you find. Some filters produce ozone, which can cause the same health problems as bad air. The California Air Resources Board has studied purifiers extensively and lists the safest options on its website.

Use nontoxic cleaning products
"Regular cleaning is important because it helps remove potentially harmful debris and maintain a healthy indoor environment," says Gutter. "However, harmful ingredients in cleaning products can lead to eye, nose, throat, and skin irritation, and emit noxious gasses, which can lead to other health issues." There are plenty of highly effective green products from brands including Lemi Shine, Mrs. Meyers, and Simple Green.

Filter your water
Tap water may contain toxic metals like lead and mercury. Studies have shown that prolonged exposure to these substances has been linked to high blood pressure and kidney problems in adults, as well as developmental delays and deficits in children. Reverse-osmosis systems, like the ones made by Pelican and Aquasana, attach to your sink's tap and help remove harmful metals.

Test for mold
Mold, which can grow anywhere with excess moisture, can trigger many maladies, including asthma, headaches, and allergies. Trying DIY removal of serious problems, like black mold, can make you even sicker. Find a local contractor with the tools and know-how to do it for you.

Grow your own veggies inside
The benefits here are twofold: A 1989 NASA study found that indoor plants effectively removed formaldehyde, benzene, and other indoor pollutants. Other research suggests that gardening can lead to better eating habits—and has even been associated with lower BMI. Plus, companies like Glowpear make us want to grow inside: they offer self-watering planters with a built-in reservoir.

Ditch the foam mattress
In 2005, an Atlanta lab tested a memory-foam mattress and found that it emitted 61 chemicals, including the carcinogens benzene and naphthalene. Some other foam mattresses may release gasses that have been associated with upper-respiratory problems and headaches. If you're sensitive to allergens, you're probably better off with a mattress that has wool or cotton components. When shopping, look for a mattress that meets the minimum requirements for organic material content as recommended by the Global Organic Latex Standard and the Global Organic Textile Standard.

2. EAT REAL FOOD

The science is clear: dietary supplements are usually ineffective—and sometimes harmful—so you're better off sticking to a balanced diet that consists of good whole foods.

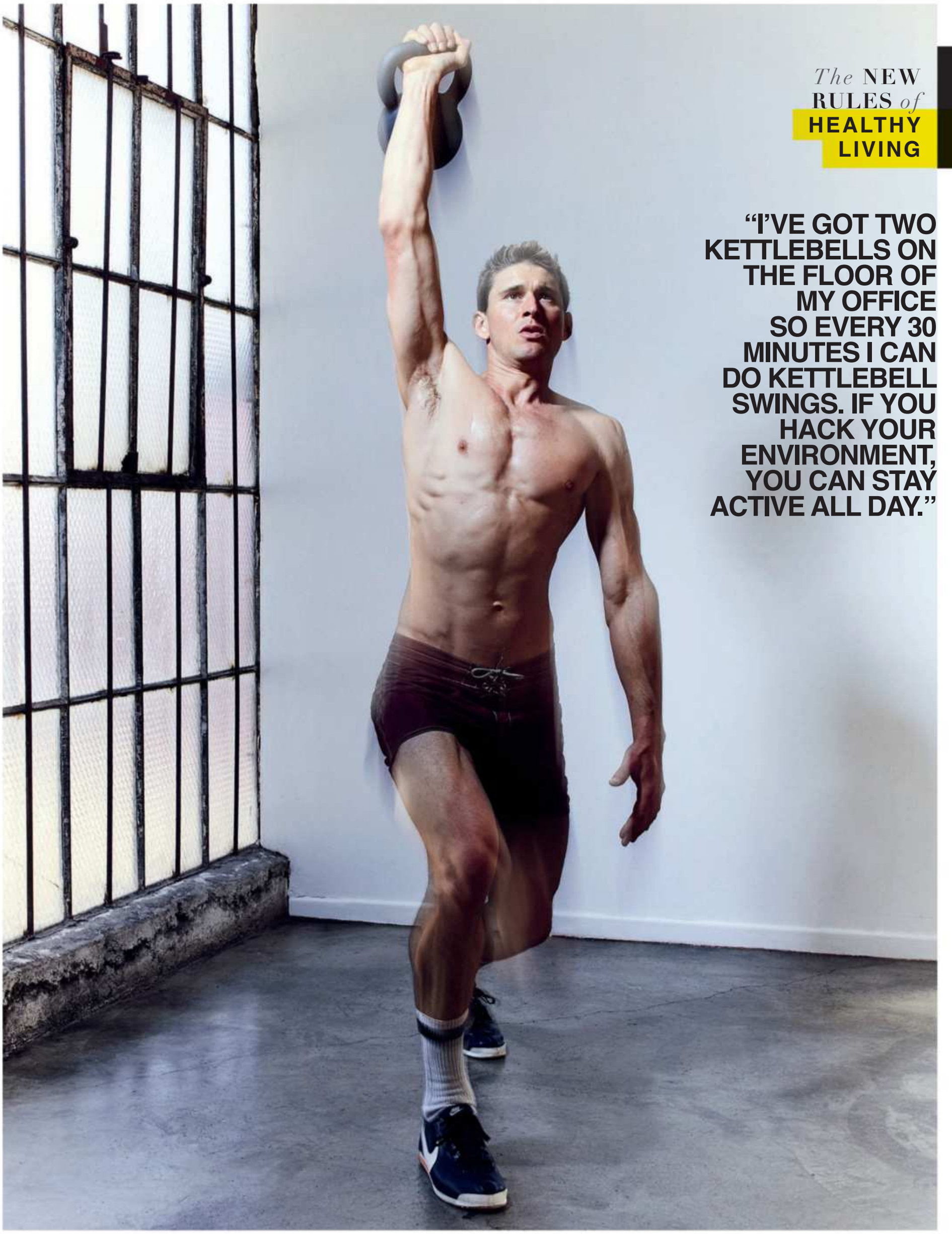
In 2016, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* examined supplement studies conducted over the past 20 years and found "disappointing results about potential health benefits," along with mounting evidence of potential harm. (According to 2015 findings, supplements account for 23,000 emergency-room visits per year.) In the May *Journal of the American College of Cardiology,* a review of 179 published studies showed that many supplements that supposedly prevent heart disease and stroke, such as calcium and vitamins C and D, didn't do much of anything.

So it's no surprise that some professional athletes are leaving tinctures and gelcaps behind. "Athletes are finding they can get all the nutrients they need from a whole-foods diet," says Greg Wells, a Toronto-based sports physiologist. To get a feel for what a smart modern menu

"Athletes are finding they can get all the nutrients they need from a whole-foods diet," says Greg Wells, a sports physiologist.

STARRING **BEN GREENFIELD** →

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JOE PUGLIESE**



The NEW RULES *of* HEALTHY LIVING

"I'VE GOT TWO KETTLEBELLS ON THE FLOOR OF MY OFFICE SO EVERY 30 MINUTES I CAN DO KETTLEBELL SWINGS. IF YOU HACK YOUR ENVIRONMENT, YOU CAN STAY ACTIVE ALL DAY."

STYLING BY SHARON WILLIAMS/ART DEPARTMENT; GROOMING BY SUSSY CAMPOS/ART DEPARTMENT; PROP DESIGN BY WOODEN LADDER

looks like, Noah Elliott—a Paralympic snowboarder who won two medals in Pyeongchang—shares how he fuels himself, and Wells offers advice on how Elliott could do it even better.

Breakfast
Omelet with peppers, onions, broccoli, and ham; mango Greek yogurt; apple or banana; coffee and orange juice.
Greg Wells: "I'd make a few changes here. The orange juice is simple sugar that gets absorbed quickly by the body for immediate fuel—but if not used right away, it turns to fat. I'd rather see athletes eat more whole fruit instead. Fiber helps the body use fuel in a more time-released way, so you avoid the energy crash from a sudden drop in blood sugar."

Snack
Clif bar; dark chocolate; cheese and crackers; salami; homemade trail mix.
Wells: "Replace the salami, because there's good evidence that processed meats are associated with increased cancer risk. Swap it out for fresh meat or fish."

Lunch
Grilled chicken; mashed potatoes; green beans; banana bread.
Wells: "This looks great—he has protein and carbohydrates covered. Add a healthy fat source like avocados, which can have an anti-inflammatory effect, to make the next training session easier."

Dinner
Beef or chicken tacos with tomatoes, onions, peppers, and pineapple-mango salsa.
Wells: "This also looks great. There's protein, vegetables, and fruit. Athletes can never eat enough veggies. They contain antioxidants, polyphenols, and flavonoids—all great for recovery, physiological functions, and overall health."

3. TO GO FARTHER, LIFT HEAVY

Exos, a human-performance company that works with some of the world's top pros, has taken an atypical approach to the way it trains endurance athletes: instead of high-rep, low-weight exercises in the gym, Exos embraces a higher-weight, lower-rep routine.

"Runners and cyclists often prepare just by doing more of their sport, and many of these athletes are lacking strength and power," says Stefan Underwood, a performance specialist at Exos. "But if you increase those measures, you can push more watts on the bike, or run at a faster pace. And added strength helps cut down on injuries."

The plan has worked: According to the company, the triathletes, runners, and cyclists in their stable are performing better than ever under the anomalous program. And Underwood is quick to point out that contrary to popular belief, this type of regimen won't bulk you up. "Your strength gains will largely come from neuromuscular increases," he says. "Lifting weights is not all about getting bigger—this is about becoming better at generating force in a coordinated effort."

Underwood prescribes the following strength program to endurance clients. Twice a week, complete the full cycle four times, using a weight that's heavy enough to make the last few reps difficult but not so heavy that you sacrifice form.

Stability Lift
Attach a resistance band to a post or doorknob. With your back to the post, kneel on one knee and hold the band in both hands at the side of your hip. Press the band forward in front of your chest, making sure to maintain a solid, upright position. To increase difficulty, put more tension on the band. Do ten to twelve reps. Repeat on the other side.

Romanian Deadlift
Holding dumbbells in each hand at your waist, lower the weights to your knee while keeping your chest up, allowing one leg to extend behind you. Do six to eight reps. Repeat on the other side.

Lateral Lunge
Holding a barbell across your upper back, take a large step to the side, allowing your weight-bearing leg to bend to 90 degrees while keeping your chest up. Do six to eight reps. Repeat on the other side.

Leg Curls
Start by kneeling, with a partner holding down your calves. Then slowly lower your torso to the ground. To increase difficulty, hold a weight in your hands. Do eight to ten reps.

Split Squat
With one foot resting on a bench behind you, and holding a dumbbell in each hand, lower your body until your back knee touches the ground. Then lift back up again. Do six to eight reps. Repeat on the other side.

Bench Press
While lying on a bench, hold a dumbbell in each hand, one by your head and the other straight up. Lift the weight up to meet your other hand. Do six to eight reps. Repeat on the other side.

4. LEARN TO BE HAPPY

Laurie Santos, a professor at Yale, created a new course last semester called Psychology and the Good Life, which focuses on how students can make themselves happier. "I had moved into a new role, living on campus with students and seeing them up close," she recalls. "I realized that they were stressed, anxious, and unhappy. And it isn't just here—this is a national problem."

The class obviously filled a need—it has quickly become one of the most popular offerings at the university. Here, Santos shares a few tips for boosting joy.

Give your body some love. Never underestimate the power of a workout and the benefit of a good night's rest. Research shows that for some people, a half hour of exercise can be as effective as taking an antidepressant. A week of sleep deprivation—defined as sleeping only four or five hours a night—can negatively affect your mood.

Do nice things for other people. When we need a pick-me-up, we often feel the urge to treat ourselves, but studies show that redirecting this impulse toward someone else has a stronger positive effect on your mindset. Researchers at the University of British Columbia found that spending $5 to $20 on another person improves your mood more than spending it on yourself.

Guard your time. People who sacrifice their free time to make money are not as happy as people who do the opposite. Leave room in your life for unscheduled hours.

Guard your time, advises Laurie Santos, a professor at Yale. People who sacrifice their free time to make money are not as happy as people who do the opposite. Leave room in your life for unscheduled hours.

Be thankful. Every night, write down five things you're grateful for and spend some time thinking about why.

Work on your social connections. Researchers have found that happy people spend more time with friends and family and less time alone. A survey conducted by the University of Chicago's business school found that simply talking to a stranger on a train can make you happier.

Savor the present. Studies suggest that we let our minds wander too often, dwelling on the future or the past. Surveys done by Harvard psychologists show that our mood improves when we pay attention to the moment we're in. Meditation is a great way to accomplish this.

Put in the effort. Becoming a happier person takes work—it's like practicing to become a better athlete. It won't come easily, but the payoff is worth it.

5. INVEST IN BETTER SLEEP

Until recently, hiring a sleep coach may have seemed absurd. But many athletes—including soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo and some players for the Chicago Bulls—are already employing their services, and new research makes the practice seem like a smart idea for the rest of us.

In May, a 12-week study conducted by the Exercise Physiology Research Laboratory at UCLA found that amateur athletes who used a sleep coach experienced remarkable benefits. The test's 38 subjects each received a ten-minute education session from a personalized trainer once a week. For 19 of the participants, these sessions focused on specific ways they could improve their sleep. The other participants were presented with more general information about personal wellness that covered a wide swath of topics, like recommending routine check-ups and how to relieve stress. All of the participants were subjected to the same physical training three times a week.

At the end of the 12 weeks, average sleep quality improved across both groups (possibly because of the well-established sleep benefits of exercise). But more notable was that compared with the people who received general wellness training, the sleep-coaching group tested far better in every category related to fitness, including improved VO_2 max, body power, blood sugar, and heart-rate variability. "We think that we were able to biologically correct their circadian rhythms," says Brett Dolezal, one of the researchers. "That's hard to measure, but that's our hypothesis—that their bodies were realigned, and that's what allowed for better performance."

This is just one study, and the exact process behind the results is likely more complicated. But according to Ingrid Prueher, a sleep coach based in Connecticut, the reasons the practice works are simple: it holds clients accountable, and it allows experienced coaches to pick up on root causes of sleep issues that people might miss on their own.

Prueher, who's certified through the Family Sleep Institute, says these underlying problems can include things like bedroom clutter. "It's not just about sheets, pillows, and mattresses," she says. "It could be the laundry detergent you're using. It's my job to figure that out."

"It's not just about sheets, pillows, and mattresses," says sleep coach Ingrid Prueher. "It could be the laundry detergent you're using."

BE YOUR OWN COACH

Sleep coaching isn't cheap. Ingrid Prueher charges $997 for the first month of virtual sessions, and $2,429 for a month of in-home appointments. Typically, she says, a month of coaching is all it takes to get people on track, but it can sometimes take up to three months. If you're not ready to drop that kind of money, here are a few sleep-promoting habits you can try on your own.

Remove visible stressors. Don't underestimate the impact of the last thing you see before you close your eyes. For example, if you have your briefcase in your room, the thought of looming deadlines may keep you awake. Even a basket of clothes that needs to be folded can make your mind wander.

Breathe right. It's no surprise that a dry bedroom can keep you awake. Among other things, it could cause skin and throat irritation. A humidifier is a simple fix if there isn't too much moisture in the air already.

Wash your sheets often. Ideally every three days. That may seem like overkill, but germs in your bedding can cause respiratory distress, and frequent washing is the best remedy.

6. HEAT THINGS UP (AND COOL THEM DOWN)

Extreme-temperature therapies—both hot and cold—have boomed in recent years. But between infrared saunas and cryotherapy tanks, it's hard to separate the snake oil from the science.

Nora Gilman, a board-certified athletic trainer at RX Sports Recovery, a Denver-area clinic that uses state-of-the-art technology to help athletes compete at their best, explains which treatments are worth your time and which ones you're better off skipping.

HOT

Infrared Sauna

What it is: A normal sauna uses wood and heats up to about 175 degrees. This one uses infrared light, a form of radiant heat, and warms your skin to a max of 130 degrees.

How it works: Our bodies absorb infrared light, leading to increased blood flow and improved tissue oxygenation. This boosts levels of ATP, which is what we use as energy. Research on athletes and infrared saunas is still limited, but a small 2015 study suggested that infrared saunas can reduce recovery time after intense exercise. The performance benefits of regular saunas are well established, though: for example, a 2007 study of distance runners published in the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* found that after three weeks, the participants who did 30-minute post-exercise sessions in the sauna lasted 32 percent longer in a time-to-exhaustion test.

When to use it: There's not enough evidence yet to suggest ideal timing, but the athletes in the 2015 study did evening sessions lasting 40 minutes, which seems to be the preferred duration among infrared practitioners.

Spot Heat Therapy

What it is: The direct application of heat to one specific part of the body, typically to treat injury. A standard

"IF YOUR ROOM IS NOT AT AN IDEAL TEMPERATURE, YOU'RE NOT ENGAGING IN PROPER REPAIR AND RECOVERY WHILE YOU SLEEP."

The NEW RULES *of* HEALTHY LIVING

"PEOPLE USE BIOHACKS AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR HARD WORK. BUT YOU STILL HAVE TO BREAK A SWEAT AND MEDITATE AND ENGAGE IN ALL THE THINGS THAT WE KNOW ARE GOOD FOR US."

heating pad works well for this. However, low-level laser therapy, a technology for targeting problem areas that doesn't involve heat, will provide similar results more quickly.
How it works: Localized heat drives blood flow to an injured area, which promotes healing. Multiple studies have found that heat application significantly reduced discomfort for patients with lower back pain, and other research suggests that this method can improve mobility and alleviate other forms of acute pain.
When to use it: If you're able to exercise, apply heat right before your workout, which will have the added benefit of loosening the affected area. Low-level laser therapy should only be performed by a trained technician, who can determine an appropriate session length and frequency based on your injury.

Hot Tub
What it is: An après-ski ritual that needs no introduction.
How it works: A 2017 study found that hot-water therapy helped athletes recover markedly better from vigorous exercise compared with those who were treated with cold-water therapy. Other research also suggests that heat stimulates growth hormone, which helps build muscle.
When to do it: Post workout, but for no longer than 15 minutes, according to research published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine.*

COLD
Icing
What it is: A bag of ice on a sore part of your body.
How it works: For decades, traditional thinking was that icing an injured body part promoted healing. Recent research has found that's not the case. It is now believed that icing delays healing because of reduced blood flow to the injured area.
When to do it: Don't. For injuries like a twisted ankle, Gilman suggests compression and elevation, which have been shown to reduce swelling. For persistent injuries, she recommends cross-training. "If you're a runner and have shin splints, get on the bike instead," she says. "Doing a different activity stretches separate tissues and promotes healing."

Cryo Chamber
What it is: A fancier, updated version of a full-immersion ice bath. You walk inside a cylindrical chamber and get blasted with extremely cold, dry air (around minus 159 degrees) for up to three and a half minutes.
What it does: Studies have shown that this method decreases inflammation in athletes. It also increases the production of norepinephrine, a hormone that's partially responsible for alertness and attention.
When to do it: Once a day, three to four times a week. According to US Cryotherapy, which has locations throughout the country, you shouldn't spend any longer than three and a half minutes inside the chamber—longer than that can cause frostbite.

Cold-Therapy Compression Sleeves
What it is: These sleeves are filled with cooling gels and apply compression. There are designs that fit various parts of the body, including your torso, legs, and even head.
What it does: "The compression promotes circulation," Gilman says. "But the cold isn't really achieving much other than maybe numbing your sore muscles."
When to do it: Not recommended, because according to Gilman, the cooling effect doesn't speed recovery—it just acts as an analgesic. She suggests compression on its own, for 30 to 60 minute periods.

7. MODERNIZE YOUR QUIET TIME

There's plenty of evidence suggesting that meditation is healthy for both body and brain. For example, in a 2018 Harvard study, when 24 people with clinical hypertension meditated regularly for eight weeks, 13 emerged with markedly lower blood pressure. Research has consistently shown that meditation can help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. So, yes, you should slow down and turn inward on a regular basis. And there's no reason it can't be fun, thanks to an innovative wave of technology with a new-school feel.

Headspace app $13 per month
With a million paid subscribers, Headspace is one of the most popular meditation apps in the world. Choose a quiet place to sit with your phone, press Begin, and a male voice will deliver soothing instructions like this: "Take a couple of big deep breaths, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth." The sessions start at three minutes and progress to 20. At first even the shortest amount of time might feel like a chore, but after two weeks you might find yourself doing the full 20 and feeling sad to stop. Morning sessions are best for improving your focus for the rest of the day.

Muse headband $200
Muse uses a "brain-sensing" headband, paired with an app, to optimize your meditation practice. The company claims that the band detects brain waves and gauges the intensity of your concentration by measuring electrical activity along your scalp. If it decides your mind is properly on point, you'll hear birds chirping. If you're drifting, the sound of gentle rain in the background will gradually become a downpour.

Smith Lowdown Focus sunglasses $350
These sunglasses also run on Muse technology, so the experience is somewhat similar to using the headband. But there are differences. For one thing, the sensors are placed in the nose pads and earpieces of the frames, which makes for a more stylish setup. And the meditation prompts are targeted specifically to athletes. "We choke when we're uncomfortable and overwhelmed," the app's tutorial says. "The key to peak performance is shifting into the present moment." The background sound is ocean waves, but if the app detects that you're losing focus, you'll hear them crashing loudly against the shore.

Cubicle Ninjas Guided Meditation VR software Free
Chicago-based Cubicle Ninjas, a creative design agency, has developed an interesting meditation app, the first in a series of health and wellness programs. Once you've loaded the technology onto a pair of VR goggles (such as the new Oculus Go), you're treated to a number of imaginary locales: a redwood forest, a waterfall-filled bay, and a realistic winter scene with a light wind, fat snowflakes, and brilliant northern lights. Don't splurge on a VR unit for this purpose alone, but if you already own one, it's worth downloading the program.

Research suggests that gardening can lead to better eating habits, and has been associated with lower BMI.

The Human Experiment

BEN GREENFIELD HAS RADICAL IDEAS FOR LIVING HEALTHY. THE THING IS, MOST OF THEM WORK.

BY CHRISTOPHER KEYES

IF THERE'S A NEW technology or diet out there promising to improve your life, chances are Ben Greenfield has tried it. Over the past few years, the 36-year-old Spokane-based author, blogger, personal trainer, and father of twin boys has grabbed the life-hacking baton from Tim Ferriss, the godfather of self-quantification, and run with it, occasionally sprinting down some questionable trails. Greenfield made headlines last year after having his penis injected with stems cells, part of a quest to explore the outer edges of sexual-performance enhancement. ("My wife was pretty concerned about it," he says, "but then I was like a 16-year-old boy for the next few months.") Most of his work, however, is grounded in more traditional areas of health and fitness, and his commitment to combining the latest research-backed findings with human-guinea-pig experimentation means he's often adopting effective wellness strategies—cold plunges, blood testing, intermittent fasting—long before they hit the mainstream. We phoned Greenfield, who was on his daily afternoon walk, to glean some of his hard-earned wisdom.

"**I wasn't a jock when I was growing up.** I really didn't rip my nose out of the books until my parents built a tennis court behind our house. That got me interested in sports. I kind of had a crush on my tennis instructor."

"I wanted to be a sports-medicine doc or an orthopedic surgeon. But after getting a master's in exercise physiology and biomechanics, I got a job in surgical sales. **There wasn't a single doctor who encouraged me to go to medical school.** It just seemed like reams of paperwork. I'd worked as a personal trainer all through college, so eventually I quit sales and dove back into that."

"I can tell you exactly why I was a good trainer: **I was a geek**. I wasn't into biceps curls and pressing. I was into blood-lactate testing and metabolic-rate testing."

"Do some stool analysis. Some blood tests. What's your blood vitamin D level? What are your electrolyte levels? Once all that data is on hand, **you can customize your diet according to what your body needs** rather than accepting some dogmatic diet that's selling well on airport bookshelves."

"There's a ton of data linking fluctuations in blood glucose with a host of chronic diseases. When you chew your food 25 to 40 times per bite, **it lowers your blood-glucose response to a meal**."

"I've got two kettlebells on the floor of my office so every 30 minutes I can do kettlebell swings. I've got a pull-up bar on the door. I've got a treadmill. I'm walking while I'm talking to you right now. **If you hack your environment, you can stay active all day.**"

"If you can keep inflammation and blood glucose low, you're nailing the two variables that cause a lot of athletes to be healthy on the outside but unhealthy on the inside. **I wear a continuous blood-glucose monitor.** I have a needle that goes into my arm. I think that's going to be the next big thing in the self-quantification movement."

"We live off-grid. We grow all our own food and I hunt most of our meat. **We're basically like hippies.** But then you walk inside my house and there's nearly half a million dollars' worth of different biohacking equipment, from pulsed electromagnetic field machines to hypoxic training devices."

"I spend the first hour of each day just looking at science publications. **I keep my ear to the ground to understand if there's actual research behind these devices** or they're just gimmicks."

"I've engaged in some pretty extreme acts. To a certain extent, it's my shtick. There are risks, but **I love figuring out ways that you can make your body feel young**, especially when they're within the bounds of relative safety and legality."

"If your room is not at an ideal temperature—typically 64 to 66 degrees—you're not engaging in proper repair and recovery while you sleep. I sleep on a ChiliPad, which circulates cold water underneath my body.

"I keep the room at 66 degrees. I've got blackout curtains. **I listen to binaural beats played through headphones to lull me into a deep-sleep state.** I even diffuse lavender oil next to my bedside. But my wife is the complete opposite. She just lays her head on the pillow and goes to bed."

"**People use biohacks as a substitute for hard work.** They think, Well, I have this special infrared light in my office that's going to enhance my testosterone production, so I don't have to go to the pain cave for this afternoon's workout. But you still have to break a sweat and meditate and engage in all the things that we know are good for us. Once you've got all that down, then you can throw technology into the mix."

> **"If you can keep inflammation and blood glucose low," says Greenfield, "you're nailing the two variables that cause a lot of athletes to be healthy on the outside but unhealthy on the inside."**

"Heart-rate variability is a good way of determining that your nervous system has recovered. **I use NatureBeat to track HRV**, but you can use any of these new apps."

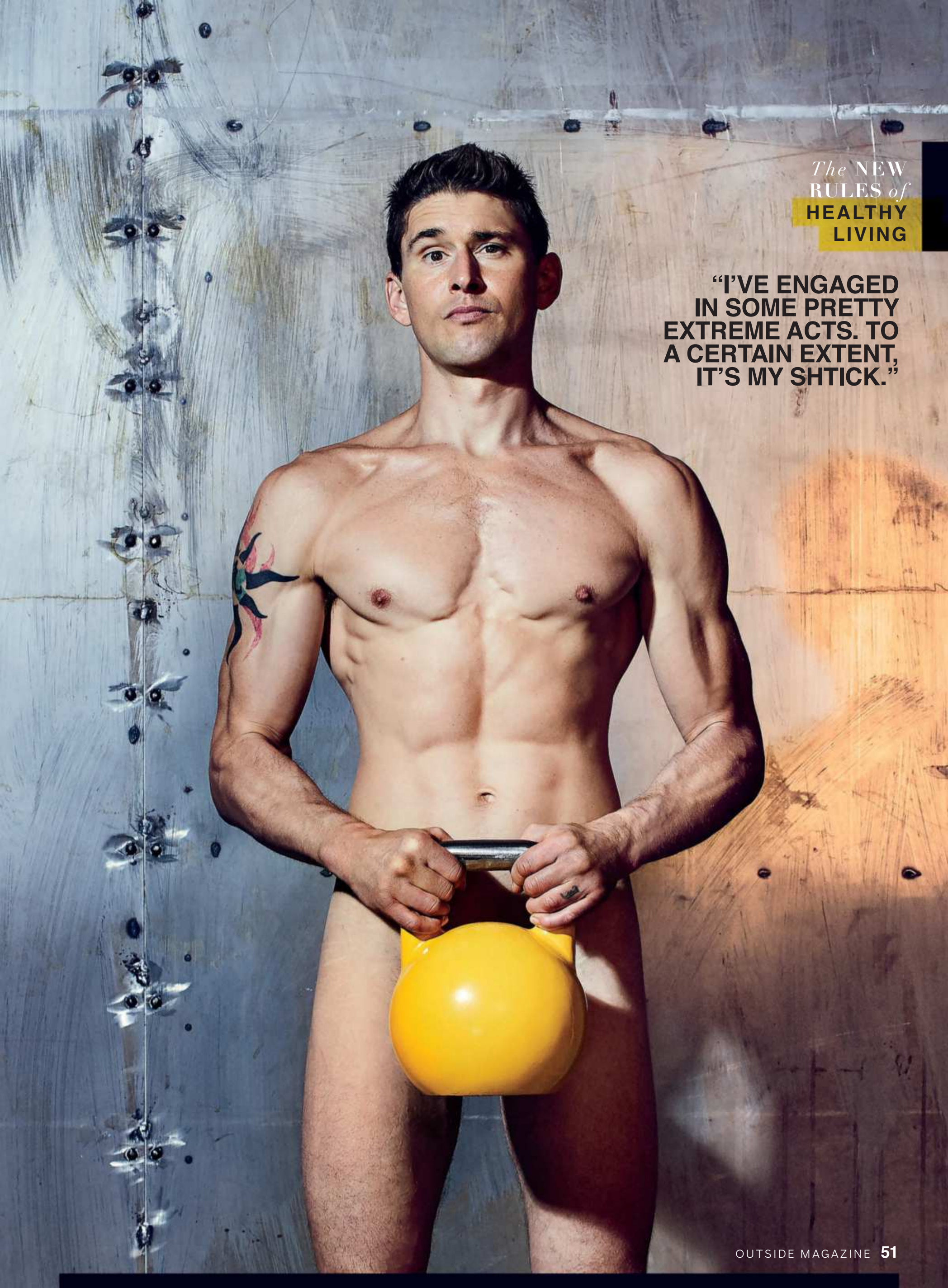
"There's a host of benefits from intermittent fasting. Decreased inflammation. Better sleep. I adopt that as a dietary principal. So if I finish dinner at 8 P.M., the very soonest I eat is 8 A.M. Many athletes confuse intermittent fasting with caloric restriction. **I eat about 3,500 to 4,000 calories per day**, just compressed into a smaller window."

"I've taken a deep dive into anti-aging. A couple of months ago, I became one of the first people in the world to get a full-body stem-cell makeover. **My entire musculoskeletal system was injected with stem cells combined with platelet-rich plasma**, which is basically like a growth factor. I woke up after five hours, covered in needle marks and knife wounds. But now my joints feel like they did when I was a teenager."

"I'm big into the use of cold therapy—the whole Wim Hof method. I used to do long, cold swim sessions in the Spokane River when I trained for Ironmans. I remember I finished up those sessions sitting in my car trying to figure out how to drive home. But **that was more just being stupid** about my cold-water swimming than any sort of crazy biohack."

"If you can control your breathing, **you can control your sympathetic nervous system**. And the cool thing is that the locus of control is inside you. You're not relying on a supplement or pharmaceutical or biohack."

"Accepting who you are, with all your inherent flaws and imperfections, can be dangerous. **Sometimes you set expectations for yourself that are too low.**"



"I'VE ENGAGED IN SOME PRETTY EXTREME ACTS. TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, IT'S MY SHTICK."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CELESTE SLOMAN

THE INNER LIVES OF THE Obsessed

Filmmaker ELIZABETH CHAI VASARHELYI doesn't climb, but her determination to shine a light on what drives extreme mountaineers produced two of the best adventure documentaries of the past decade *Meru* and the new *Free Solo*, both of which were shot by her husband, climber-photographer Jimmy Chin. LISA CHASE finds out how she cracked the bro code and transformed what could have been humble climbing porn into Oscar bait.

"TODAY I WAS REPLACING SWEAR WORDS. I HAD TO DO IT MYSELF. NO ONE ELSE CAN DO IT,"

documentary filmmaker Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi says over a nouvelle Indian lunch at bohemian-cool Pondicheri in Manhattan. She appears every bit the sophisticated New Yorker: elegant and slender, with an expensive-looking black leather jacket slung over her shoulder. It's 98 degrees in the shade outside, yet she orders a spicy *aviyal* (a robust coconut vegetable stew) and a bowl of hot turmeric soup. And she enthusiastically accepts my offer to share my paneer dish and naan. She may look delicate, but I suspect she knows something about voraciousness.

Vasarhelyi and her husband, climber and filmmaker Jimmy Chin, codirected 2015's narratively rich and visually jaw-dropping *Meru,* which chronicles the first ascent of the Shark's Fin, a treacherous spire atop 20,702-foot Mount Meru in the Indian Himalayas. But the f-bombs to be replaced today occur in a not-quite-final cut of her latest collaboration with Chin, *Free Solo*. The film, in theaters in late September, is about climber Alex Honnold's pioneering 2017 ropes-free ascent of Yosemite's El Capitan, a feat he accomplished in three hours and 56 minutes.

In the cut I saw in June, Honnold clocks four fucks in the first eight minutes. But *Free Solo* was funded by National Geographic—not especially fuck friendly. So before Vasarhelyi can fly out of New York City (where she primarily works and lives, along with the couple's young son and daughter) to join Chin in Jackson Hole, Wyoming (where he primarily works and lives), she needs to scrub the cursing. "These guys," she says, meaning climbers, "all swear."

"It helped that she didn't give a fuck about climbing," says Jon Krakauer, a big fan of Vasarhelyi and the key talking head in *Meru*. That film is studded with moments of Krakauer explaining the culture of climbing and the danger involved in attempting such a peak, as well as the motivation for doing so—all facets Vasarhelyi strongly advocated for, to help make the film's core alpinism accessible to a wider audience.

Still, her marriage to and collaboration with Chin has struck some in climbing as a collision of worlds, and their living arrangement is just one of the outcomes that raises eyebrows. "Everyone is like, 'How do they do it with Chai in New York and Jimmy in Jackson?' " says Conrad Anker, one of the protagonists of *Meru,* along with Chin and Renan Ozturk. Then he adds, exasperated with the prying, "I don't know how they do it, but they do it! They make it work." (Vasarhelyi, too, is fed up with the topic. "Why does Jimmy say he lives in Jackson Hole? Because he doesn't like New York and he often says he lives 'just in Wyoming.' Let him live 'just in Wyoming.' He's in New York a lot.")

During the three years between Anker, Chin, and Ozturk's ill-fated attempt on the Shark's Fin in 2008 and their successful redo in 2011, Ozturk was nearly killed in a terrible skiing accident and Chin miraculously survived a major avalanche. That's all included in *Meru,* as are interviews with the climbers' wives, girlfriends, and sisters—elements that existed in early iterations of the film but were reshot to bring up the emotional quotient when Vasarhelyi got involved. She helped break the mold of the typically bro-heavy genre of climber cinema and extreme-sports flicks in general. (See: the entire oeuvre of Warren Miller.) *Meru* delves into the fear and support that coexist in the families of these men. This, too, is largely thanks to Vasarhelyi's influence. "It's because I have skin in the game," she says. In other words, because she's in love with a guy who climbs peaks that might kill him, she needed to try to explain to herself the why of it.

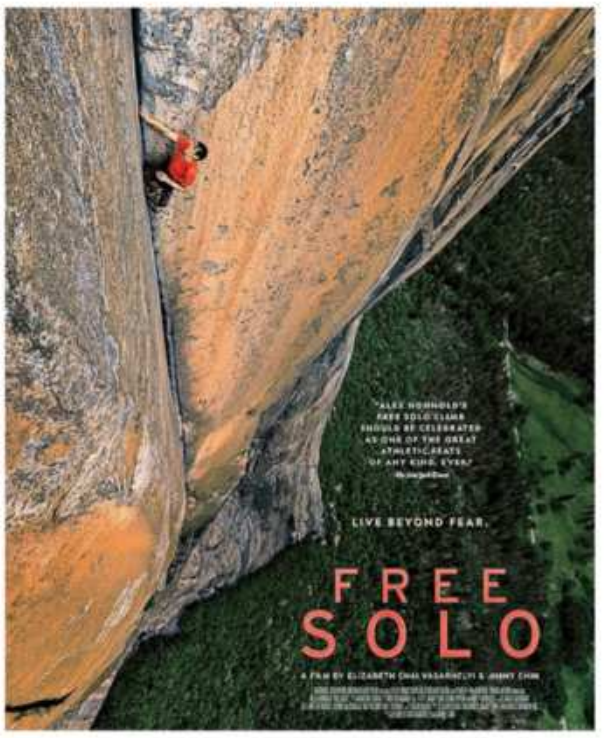
"At Sundance for *Meru,* it was a completely different world for me," says Anker. "I went from doing videos for Ernie's Telemark Shop to being in a film that was a contender for the Oscars. On my end, it makes things easier—now we don't have to do a film about my life. Chai and Jimmy did it already, we're good." It's true: Anker shows up emotionally in *Meru* ("It was an eight-hour interview," Vasarhelyi marvels), talking about his friendship with his climbing partner Alex Lowe, who died in a 1999 Himalayan avalanche, and how he fell in love with and married Lowe's wife, Jenny, and adopted their three sons.

Honnold was in the market for a similarly definitive film when he began to contemplate free-soloing El Capitan. Nothing he was going to do as a climber would surmount that; El Cap is his godhead. "Chai brought a totally different approach to filmmaking than I'd experienced before," he says on the phone from his home in Las Vegas. "Most of the time, in my other climbing films, you're shooting for a brand—you go out and get the shot. You do it 17 times. Working with Chai was the first time I worked with someone who cared about getting the honest moment."

By the time Honnold had begun to think seriously about El Capitan, he'd met Vasarhelyi only once. "It was at a North Face athletes summit," he says. "A Giants game was on TV. An unnamed member of the team had edibles. I'd heard about this really smart woman from New York who was with Jimmy, this filmmaker—you know, Upper East Side, it's pretty classy. And the first thing I said to her was, 'Good to meet you. I'm completely incapacitated.' I spent the whole Giants game with her." After what Honnold describes as six months of courtship, he chose Chin and Vasarhelyi to film his climb. He knew they'd care for the story and be able to document the attempt in a way that wouldn't compromise his safety.

"In a strange way, Chai and Alex are alike," Chin says, calling from a surf vacation somewhere on the Pacific coast of Mexico, atop a bluff he climbed to get cell reception. "Her films are meticulously assembled. She doesn't turn back until she's tried ev-

"I always wonder about the word intense," Vasarhelyi says in a tone that indicates she doesn't wonder at all. "INTENSE IS USED TO DESCRIBE WOMEN. Guys are intense, but they don't get described that way."



Clockwise from top left: *Free Solo* poster; Vasarhelyi at work on the film; Vasarhelyi and Chin; stills from Vasarhelyi's *Touba* and *A Normal Life*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/JIMMY CHIN PRODUCTIONS (2); BRYAN BEDDER/GETTY IMAGES FOR NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC; SCOTT DUNCAN; HUGO BERKELEY AND ELIZABETH CHAI VASARHELYI

erything. There's a certain mentality of a climber in there—she won't give up.

"It's also about accuracy," Chin continues. "It's vérité. She has a certain level of restraint. You're always tempted in filmmaking to play up or overstate something. Chai is intense and understated. She's not tempted. She's just like, nope."

"I ALWAYS WONDER about the word intense," Vasarhelyi says in a tone that indicates she doesn't wonder at all. "Intense is used to describe women. Guys are intense, but they don't get described that way."

OK, but: she's pretty intense. She's only 39, and for her entire life she's been living a high-octane, continent-spanning life in a family of intellectuals. The Vasarhelyis are old-school Upper East Siders, the kind of cultured meritocrats who defined that part of Manhattan before the hedge-fund managers took over. Chai's parents, Marina and Miklos, were immigrants from Hong Kong and Hungary, respectively, who came to the States in the seventies to study and teach after meeting in California. ("I think the story was, he was the professor and she was his TA," Vasarhelyi says.)

Growing up in Manhattan, she attended the Brearley School, which describes itself as a place for "girls of adventurous intellect." She was good at science, a Westinghouse scholar. Her family's apartment was steps from the Whitney Museum, and she says she spent many afternoons hanging out at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where her mother worked before she became the CFO of the New School. (She also worked at the Fashion Institute of Technology and Columbia University.)

When Vasarhelyi was 12, she cohosted a TV show on Nickelodeon called *Totally Kids Sports*. "You will never be able to find any footage of it. And that's good," she says emphatically. "It was Connie Chung's heyday, right? They were looking for a nice Asian girl."

Her dad, now a professor of business at Rutgers University, taught Vasarhelyi and her younger brother to ski—took them to Jackson Hole, in fact. He apparently taught them well. "Chai can drop Corbet's Couloir," says Chin, full of admiration. "She can show up in Jackson and rip the tram."

Vasarhelyi started her film career while a student at Princeton, working in Hong Kong for the late ABC News anchor Peter Jennings. Her first documentary, *A Normal Life,* which was completed in 2003 when she was 24, followed seven college-age friends in Kosovo aching not just to live but to thrive in spite of the Bosnian conflict. "The only thing that separated us was circumstance, right?" says Vasarhelyi. "I had all these privileges. They never had those opportunities in a war that was supposed to be over." *A Normal Life* won best documentary at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2003 and caught the attention of the late Hollywood director Mike Nichols, who hired Vasarhelyi as his assistant on *Closer*.

She spent much of the next decade working on films about Senegal. If you're in Vasarhelyi's personal orbit, you kind of have to love Senegal: "My brother has been three times, my parents have been three times," she says. "I lived there for five years. Jimmy's been to Senegal. Our daughter, Marina, went when she was a baby. We had a mosquito net around her Baby Bjorn." Vasarhelyi's documentary *Youssou N'Dour: I Bring What I Love,* about the great Senegalese musician, premiered at the Telluride and Toronto Film Festivals in 2008. Next came *Touba,* a "visual poem" of a film, in the words of one critic, that follows the annual pilgrimage of more than a million Senegalese Sufi Muslims to that city. In 2012, Vasarhelyi met Chin at a Summit Series conference (think Aspen Ideas Festival meets Coachella), where he was giving a talk on Meru and failure.

Long story short, part one: "We were standing alone right outside of where I was giving my talk, and I started chatting," Chin says. "I said, 'Oh, you're a filmmaker. I'm

about to give a talk. Want to come?' And she blew me off and said, 'No, I'm not interested.' Which is totally Chai."

But Vasarhelyi did put Chin in touch with a friend from childhood, Harvard professor and author Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, who was writing a book about creativity and failure and happened to be attending the conference, too. A connection among the trio was forged—"although," Lewis says, "I immediately felt like the third wheel."

Long story short, part two: "I was like, 'Hey, do you mind taking a look at my assembly?'" Chin says, referring to his footage for *Meru*. At that point, the film had been knocking around for a couple of years, failing to get into Sundance and other festivals. "I sent it to Chai, and I didn't hear from her for three months. I thought: (A) she doesn't like me, and (B) she doesn't like my film."

Neither was true. Vasarhelyi was in Senegal during those three months, filming *Incorruptible,* a visceral look at violent clashes between students and the government of Abdoulaye Wade in 2012. When she returned to New York, she and Chin reconnected, began working on *Meru*, and fell in love. At the time, the project had a scant 35 hours of footage, including the climb and the interviews. It was Vasarhelyi's idea to rewrite and reshoot, to "see whether Conrad, Renan, and Jimmy could access the emotions that were real."

Krakauer calls the earlier version "a fine climbing film, just more kinda climbing porn. Chai turned it into a really good *film,* not just a good climbing film. It's probably the best of the genre. Jimmy would agree with this."

"That's what she has, the sensibility of narrative and seeing ahead," says Chin. "Sometimes she can see the film before it's made. Also, understanding how the industry works. I have that capacity with expeditions. I don't have that in the filmmaking world."

Meru won the audience award for documentary at Sundance and received much critical acclaim. It also earned more than $2.4 million at the box office, making it one of the top-earning docs of 2015. Vasarhelyi talked Krakauer into being part of the publicity campaign; she was hoping for an Oscar nomination and playing the schmoozing game. She made the rounds with Krakauer, Chin, and Anker. But *Meru* didn't land on the list for best documentary film. It was probably one of the few times in Vasarhelyi's life that she came up short.

MERU AT ITS CORE is about friendship, about its bonds and boundaries, and it's clear that friendships were altered and came to an end through Chin's collaboration with Vasarhelyi. At the time, Chin was still with Camp4 Collective, the production company he founded with Ozturk and photographer Tim Kempel. The three later recruited director Anson Fogel as a partner. Shortly after Vasarhelyi and Chin connected, Camp4 broke up for reasons that are still unclear but that seem to involve creative friction between Chin and the other partners and Chin's desire to keep working on *Meru*.

The climber-filmmaker world is an insular place, with its own customs and ways. Vasarhelyi was considered an interloper. When I ask her about the whisper campaign that surrounded *Meru*—that she's autocratic, that she was responsible for Chin's Camp4 departure, she replies, "Hmmm. They say that? I really don't have anything to say about it." In 2015, Chin told *National Geographic,* "I'd prefer not to go into it, but I am happy to say that I founded Camp4 with Tim Kemple and Renan Ozturk in 2010. We brought in Anson Fogel a couple years later, and I left the company in 2013." Fogel declined to comment.

Whatever resentments may remain in the climbing world, if *Meru* and *Free Solo* are any indication, her partnership with Chin will continue to produce great films. "We're in a rhythm. We both know what the other person brings to the table," Chin says. They each mention the connections they felt upon meeting: commitments to authenticity and storytelling and pushing the envelope, their shared Chinese heritage, even Jackson Hole. And professionally, they complement each other. Together their talents produce gorgeously shot films with an emotional core. As Chin says, "Worlds colliding works."

> Vasarhelyi and her husband complement each other professionally. Together their talents produce gorgeously shot films with an emotional core. As Chin says, "WORLDS COLLIDING WORKS."

Nowhere is that more evident than in *Free Solo*. Maybe the greatest paradox of the film is that it required a monumental operation that remained invisible. Five cameramen had to be ready to be in position on the wall on just a few hours' notice, and there was a crew of three more on the ground. There was a helicopter for big sweeping shots of the wall and aerial shots of Honnold, a speck in a red T-shirt, shimmying up the white granite. He needed to be able to decide the time of the climb based on his intuition and readiness, not on some production schedule. He needed to feel free to bail. He wanted to be filmed, but he didn't want to *feel* filmed.

"Alex told Jimmy at about five the evening before that he was probably going to go the next morning," Vasarhelyi says. "Jimmy's team was in position, but Alex had no idea they were in position."

How was that even possible? How did they accomplish that? "By disappearing," she says. "By making Alex feel that it was all good, whether he went or not." It's Vasarhelyi's turn to be full of admiration for what her husband achieved. "They really played down the investment, the operation that was there. There were a lot of cameras—nine." Some of them were mounted remotely near the most harrowing parts of the route. The crew couldn't bear the thought of possibly filming Honnold falling to his death. Honnold couldn't bear laying that responsibility on them. The stakes were high in every way. These people were intimately involved with one another.

"It's why this film has captured the elegance of climbing. And of my process," Honnold says. "I mean, they could have made some crazy, adrenaline-fueled, 'He's going to his death....'"

Nope. Vasarhelyi may not be a climber, but she cares deeply about the sport and had no interest in portraying Honnold as a risk junkie with a death wish—the way he's sometimes treated by the mainstream media. The idea at the core of *Free Solo,* she says, "is this kid who is so scared of talking to other people that it was easier for him to climb alone, with no ropes, than to ask for a partner. I feel like we all have something in our lives like that. It was really important to see Alex's eyes before he did it. What did his eyes look like the morning he set off?"

And what did the camera see? Vasarhelyi's eyes light up. "He was excited." Long pause. "And very well prepared."

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HAIR AND MAKEUP BY DANI LEVI. HAIR CARE: R+CO. MAKEUP: CLE DE PEAU.

who do that

Athletes and adventurers

use rituals to get ready for big

moments—whether

it's wearing a new pair of socks

on summit day or bouncing the

tennis ball exactly seven

times before bashing

a serve. Does it work?

STEVEN KOTLER

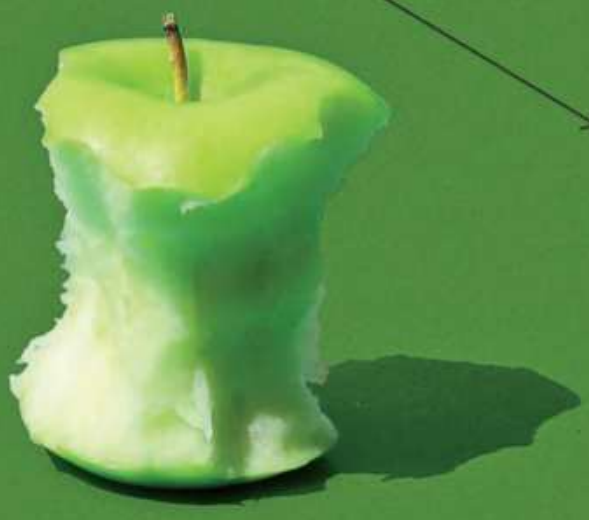
art by NEW STUDIO

explores the cutting edge of

neuroscience, plus a little bit

of black magic, to

find out.



voodoo

Three, two, one,

dropping—but wait, there's something he's got to do first.

Before extreme skier Julian Carr launches off any of the monster cliffs that have made him famous, he does three things. Always three. Never four. Two is out of the question. He exhales deeply, looks up at the sky, and clicks his poles together, just once.

Professional skier and wingsuit BASE jumper JT Holmes also clicks his poles together before launching off cliffs, but not once. "Twice," he says.

What Holmes does not do is look toward the sky. Instead, a little while before pole-clicking, he eats a green apple. "In the beginning," he says, "it was for energy and hydration. The tartness was like a shot of caffeine. But this has changed over time. The apple is one piece of the equation as I build my courage to do something gnarly."

Former professional kayaker Jamie Simon has a different approach. "Before I run any big waterfall," she explains, "I take a few deep breaths and visualize all the bones in my body. It gets me out of my soft tissue and into my core, and it grounds me."

Sports rituals—those quirky behaviors carried out by athletes in the hope of influencing performance—are a mainstay of our A-game. Most athletes have a few, but not many will talk about them. This raises a variety of questions. Where do our preperformance routines come from? Are they superstitious nonsense, or do they help our cause? More specifically: If Carr pole-clicks twice instead of once, or if Holmes substitutes a red apple for a green one, will the gods of cliff-hucking take notice?

Scientists have been trying to answer these questions for over half a century, and they haven't had an easy time of it. Part of the problem lies in defining what they're studying. Consider the multiple game-day habits of tennis player Rafael Nadal. These include: always taking a pre-court cold shower, toweling down after every point, picking at his underwear and shirt and slicking the sweat from his nose before every serve, crossing the lines on the court with his right foot first, and, in front of his chair between games, meticulously arranging his two beverages of choice—one a sports drink, the other plain water—in a line so straight that global positioning systems might be involved. Which of these are rituals and which routines? And what's the difference, anyway?

Hard to say, isn't it?

Researchers have firmer definitions. Preperformance routines, to use the preferred term, should have performance benefits. They calm anxiety and tighten focus. Traditionally, superstitious rituals are repetitive symbolic actions that lack a direct instrumental purpose—like how skier Matt Reardon used to always wear the same merino long johns before trying anything of consequence. (If things were going well, he eschewed washing them, which he admits led to an abundance of funky smells by season's end.) But if wearing those long johns actually lowered Reardon's anxiety (because he hadn't violated his superstition), or if the pole-clicking displays of Carr and Holmes tighten their focus, then isn't that a direct instrumental purpose?

Consider former Red Sox third baseman Wade Boggs's famed fetishes: waking up at the same time every day, eating chicken and fielding 117 ground balls (no more, no less) before every game, always taking batting

FROM LEFT: NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/GETTY; RICHARD HEATHCOTE/R&A/GETTY; OLI SCARFF/GETTY; WILLIAM CAMPBELL/GETTY; LAURA BARISONZI/RED BULL CONTENT POOL; TONY TOMSIC/GETTY

THE LINE

Professional Athlete Rituals

CRAZY LIKE A FOX

Golden State Warriors forward **Kevin Durant** does a notorious "shimmy shake"—jiggling his shoulders side to side—before each free throw.

Tiger Woods always wears a red shirt on the final day of a tournament.

Serena Williams is said to wear the same pair of socks throughout a tournament—without washing them...

...Whereas alpinist **Conrad Anker** must don a fresh pair on summit day.

Sasha DiGiulian paints her nails pink for good luck before climbing competitions and always puts her right shoe on before her left.

Former Detroit Tigers pitcher **Mark Fidrych** talked loudly to the ball before he threw a pitch.

THE LINE

practice at 5:17 P.M., always running sprints at 7:17 P.M., then—and it's worth pointing out that Boggs isn't Jewish—scratching the Hebrew word *chai* (meaning "life") into the dirt before each at bat. On the surface, much of Boggs's behavior appears, to use the technical term, batshit crazy. But a regular sleep schedule is fantastic high-performance kung fu, and eating the same meal every day standardized Boggs's energy levels and guaranteed he wouldn't bonk in the eighth. And while the number 117 seems arbitrary, doing anything that many times will definitely warm up both the body and the mind.

To understand ritualized behavior, start with the fact that the brain is a meaning-making machine continually trying to link cause and effect. This is evolution at work. On a hunt, it helps to remember that the last time you went out, when the bushes started shaking, there was a rabbit inside. And if you happened to pound your spear on the ground twice, perhaps to improve your grip, before you discovered that rabbit, your brain may try to connect those dots.

That's how superstitions are born.

And it may not just be humans who are wired this way. Famed psychologist B.F. Skinner discovered that pigeons also have this tendency. When Skinner placed extremely hungry birds in a cage with an automated feeding arm set to arrive at regular intervals, whatever a bird happened to be doing right before the food came—spinning in circles, pecking the air in the upper right corner of the cage—would later be repeated in an attempt to produce the same result. Skinner called this "superstitious behavior," writing: "The bird behaves as if there was a causal relationship between its behavior and the presentation of food."

It's also worth noting that the birds' state of hunger and stress may have created a feeling of uncertainty in them. This matters. Back in the early 1900s, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski was living among South Sea islanders and noticed that when they fished the dangerous waters beyond the reef, the men performed a series of rituals to ensure a safe and productive voyage. By contrast, when they fished the predictable waters of the local lagoon, they treated it like any other part of their day—no rituals required. From this, Malinowski concluded that when outcomes are important and situations uncertain, ritual behavior increases. It's how we try to gain a little control over the uncontrollable.

The same is true in sports. In the 1970s, University of San Francisco anthropologist George Gmelch decided to investigate Malinowski's theory in baseball. A former minor leaguer, he reasoned that while hitting and pitching are subject to random influences, fielding is a much steadier craft. Great players get a hit 30 percent of the time. Fielders snag balls at a much higher rate and with far less fanfare. Gmelch figured that if Malinowski was right, he'd find a greater number of idiosyncratic behaviors among pitchers and batters than among fielders. And that's exactly what happened.

The majority of batters and pitchers had a ritual of some sort, maybe not as extreme as Boggs's winner-winner-chicken-dinner, but definitely distinctive. Among fielders only one did, and he was in the middle of a fielding slump and couldn't catch the flu. "Rituals are about confidence," Gmelch explains. "It's about gaining a feeling of control in the face of uncertainty. And the greater our sense of uncertainty—the more we want to feel in control—the more likely superstitious rituals are to develop."

The most important discovery researchers have made about rituals is that they tend to work. Part of this, as Gmelch pointed out, is that we perform better when we feel a sense of control. But we also increase our focus and optimism about our chances for

FROM LEFT: FILIPPO MONTEFORTE/GETTY; JOE ROBBINS/GETTY; JEFF BOTTARI/GETTY; SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/GETTY; TPN/GETTY; CHRIS TROTMAN/GETTY

JUST CRAZY

Juventus striker **Cristiano Ronaldo** must always step onto the field right foot first, and he yanks his shorts up super—we're talking *super*—high before each penalty kick.

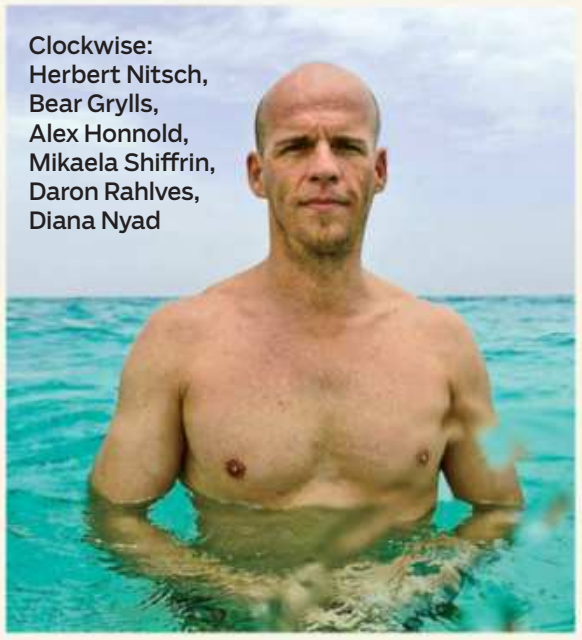
Former Jacksonville Jaguars defensive tackle **John Henderson** had a trainer slap him hard in the face before every game. Ouch.

Washington Capitals goalie **Braden Holtby** squirts water into the air and intently follows one drop until it falls to the ice. At the end of every period, he hits the net posts with his stick and flips his water bottle backward into his glove.

College football coach **Les Miles** ate grass from the field during games.

Rafael Nadal has an elaborate series of match rituals, including picking at his underwear before every serve and arranging his water bottles so the labels face the side of the court he's playing on.

Former Yankees first baseman **Jason Giambi** wore a gold lamé thong with a flame-lined waistband to break out of hitting slumps. And it worked.



Clockwise: Herbert Nitsch, Bear Grylls, Alex Honnold, Mikaela Shiffrin, Daron Rahlves, Diana Nyad

INHABITED

Andy Walshe, the former head of human performance at Red Bull, knows many adventure athletes who have rituals. "As much as they do a physical warm-up, they also do a psychological warm-up," says Walshe, who now consults for professional sports teams and is working with the computer and gaming accessories company Logitech on a program to better understand how humans perform. We asked for his insight on the following athlete rituals. What are they doing right and wrong? —MEGAN MICHELSON

SNOWBOARDER

SHAUN WHITE

"The night before a competition, I always eat a steak dinner. The one time I didn't was when I lost the Olympics in Sochi. When I have three guys in front of me in competition, I do this: The first guy to drop, I put my left binding in. The second guy to drop, I put the right binding in. The third guy to drop, I push myself out into the gate area and watch him ride. I don't watch any of the runs in full except the one just before me. I do this sequence because it happened once at a competition and I won. If the guy before me falls, I'm going to go nuts and give the judges a show. If he makes his run, I have even more motivation to nail mine."

ANDY WALSHE: "A pre-event routine is something an athlete can exercise a sense of control over. The structure of White's is so rehearsed that it likely allows his brain to focus on his more tactical approach to the event. As for the steak dinner, it can be risky to have a dependency on a certain food. If you have to eat a particular food and it isn't available, what will you do then?"

SURVIVAL EXPERT

BEAR GRYLLS

"I cross myself before every skydive. My grandfather used to do it before taking off in a plane, and I always liked it."

WALSHE: "Turn on any television and you'll see athletes crossing themselves, praying, kissing crosses around their necks. You see religion everywhere in sports. Spiritual routines like Grylls's are very personal. A moment of reflection can clear away distractions and be very grounding."

SKI RACER

DARON RAHLVES

"My ritual started with my first win on the World Cup. Black clothes meant it was on. Black socks, black base layer. Then right before the start, I'd do an eight-second sprint to get the heart pounding and then mental imagery locking in the smooth and fast feeling. Last words: Crush it!"

WALSHE: "I've seen it all—athletes with lucky socks, precise ways of putting on shoes. When someone has identified a lucky charm—in Daron's case, a color of clothing—there's some research that says people who connect to a physical thing experience a small performance benefit from that placebo effect. Some of these events, like ski racing, are won by very small margins, so that can make a difference."

SWIMMER

DIANA NYAD

"I was compulsive, to an OCD degree, with my gear bag before a big swim. I would pack, unpack, pack all the individualized pairs of goggles, caps, extra suits, chafing gels. Each item had to rest in a particular space in the bag, to the point that I could reach in with my eyes closed and pull out the night-time goggles in one deft move. I would do 100 arm windmills, then touch down to ground left, then right, with breath mantras for each move: 25 count English, 25 German, 25 Spanish, 25 French. Each one perfectly executed, each breath in sync. Then I'd put my robe on over my suit, goggles always in left pocket, cap in right."

WALSHE: "There's no downside to an athlete's routine—unless they become dependent on it. Say you have a rigorous

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BEN SIMMS/NBC/NBCU PHOTO BANK VIA GETTY; PETER BOHLER/REDUX; TIM CLAYTON/CORBIS VIA GETTY; MARTIN BUREAU/AFP/GETTY; JEFFERY SALTER/REDUX; PHILIPPE PETIT/PARIS MATCH VIA GETTY

success. And don't sleep on the placebo effect: superstitious rituals win games just as sure as sugar pills cure disease.

Also, context matters. Perform a random series of behaviors before a hard task under serious pressure and, likely as not, nothing happens. But give those behaviors a name, call them a ritual, and performance improves. The same works in the other direction, which helps explain taboos. No baseball player with any common sense dares mention a no-hitter before the final pitch is thrown, just as no action-sports athlete in his right mind says, "This is my last run."

"You can't even *think* it," explains skate legend Danny Way. "The last time I made that mistake, I launched 20 feet out of the quarterpipe, drifted backward midair, smashed into the ramp, and shattered my ankle into pieces."

Not everyone thinks preperformance rituals are the way to go. "I'm not bullish on them," says sport psychologist Michael Gervais, who coached Red Bull athlete Felix Baumgartner through his jump from a helium balloon 128,100 feet above the earth and now works with the Seattle Seahawks. "Routines, be they preperformance or superstition, put form and structure around what's formless and structureless. True masters of craft don't need them. They know that sport is about adjusting to a spontaneous unfolding—their mastery comes from embracing uncertainty."

But if you include flow states in this discussion, ritual and routine start to make even more sense. Defined as an optimal state of consciousness during which we feel and perform our best, flow refers to those in-the-zone moments of rapt attention when we get so focused on the task at hand that everything else melts away. Scientists have known about flow's relationship to peak performance for a century, but recent research into the phenomenon can help us decode rituals, too.

Flow states have triggers, preconditions that drive us into the experience. While there are more than 20 known triggers, they all share one commonality—they significantly amp up attention. That is, flow shows up only when our focus is all in, right here, right now. That's what these triggers do: they drive attention into the present moment.

One good example is "clear goals," a trigger identified by the godfather of flow psychology, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Clear goals keep us in the now, focused on what we're doing and what we're about to do. When goals are clear, attention can stay locked and loaded. This explains Boggs and his 117 grounders. Keeping the number in mind lowers cognitive load and keeps attention on the task at hand. Both drive flow—which helps win ballgames.

Another trigger is "deep embodiment," first identified by the Flow Genome Project, a peak-performance research and training organization I cofounded in 2011. In our work with action-sport and adventure athletes, we've found that attention is heightened when multiple sensory streams are engaged—when we're paying attention not just to sight and sound, but also to touch. The skin is the body's largest organ, with the greatest number of sensory inputs. That's why so many rituals have a tactile component—Boggs scratching *chai* into the dirt, Nadal plucking at his clothes—and it also explains the ski-pole click. The number of clicks doesn't matter, but the engagement of multiple sensory streams sure does.

In other words, thanks to our biology, the voodoo works.

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one-hour routine, and for some reason, you're not able to do it. Then you're putting yourself at risk of having that impact your performance. Like Nyad, many top athletes slow their breath before big events. The simplest way is this: breathe four seconds in, four seconds out, for four minutes. It can lower your heart rate."

SKI RACER
MIKAELA SHIFFRIN
"I make a playlist of 15 songs that I listen to on repeat. Each song gets me focused or pumped up. I also make a more meditative playlist with piano or classical music to keep me calm. In between runs, I'm surrounded by noise. In order to stay calm and focused, my noise-canceling headphones have become a hugely important tool in my routine."
WALSHE: "Go to any high-performance locker room and music is being used. It's an ancient tool—the drumbeats marching into battle. Music can signal to your brain that it's time to focus. In individual sports, like Shiffrin's, it gives the athlete a chance have their own space in a busy environment."

FREEDIVER
HERBERT NITSCH
"Between my last warm-up dive and the final dive, I zone out totally until I have a bird's-eye view of the whole event below me. I observe the diving platform, judges, spectators, cameramen, and myself from above. I remain in this mode up until my last breath, after which I dive back into the confines of my skin, and venture below the surface. It calms me down tremendously, which is important in this sport where adrenaline is my foe."
WALSHE: "There are a lot of arguments in terms of the efficacy of visualization. When you do it, the visual cortex activates and lights up the same way as when you actually see something. It's like the brain version of virtual reality—you get to experience a place without actually being there. But don't get bogged down by the details, in case the experience doesn't turn out how you visualized it."

CLIMBER
ALEX HONNOLD
"My routine is about limiting the number of decisions I have to make and avoiding variables. So I'll pack my bag the night before and make my breakfast, which is generally the same muesli and fruit when I'm in my van. I'll do whatever I can to prepare ahead of time. I'll often wear the same clothes, but again that's more about knowing exactly how they'll perform and avoiding surprises. I want to execute a big climb exactly the same way that I've prepared for it."
WALSHE: "Getting everything squared away up front is a huge advantage. For Honnold, a checklist could give him a precise way to make sure everything he can control is taken care of. People in high-risk pursuits—parachute jumpers, deep-sea divers, big-wave surfers, or military operators—they all typically have very strong routines. It's a significant part of what makes them feel safe."

BASE JUMPER AND CLIMBER
STEPH DAVIS
"There are a lot of intense emotions when you're about to jump off the edge of a cliff. When I know I'm just about ready to go, I shake my shoulders, take a deep breath, and smile. It makes me feel positive and confident, which is what I need to perform through the first few crucial seconds of a wingsuit jump."
WALSHE: "Davis's smile is important. Humor is an unsung hero in intense moments. You see the tension rising, then a smile or laugh can bring someone back to earth and relax them."

DAN IN REAL LIFE

As America wrestles with high rates of suicide among military personnel and veterans, outdoor programs have been offered up as a promising treatment. Dan Sidles seemed like the ideal candidate: an Iraq War vet who suffered from PTSD, he tried to find a renewed sense of purpose through climbing and mountaineering. Ultimately, it wasn't enough. BRIAN MOCKENHAUPT explores the final years of a tortured friend.

DAN SIDLES grew up in northern Iowa, where the cornfields stretch to the horizon without a blip of elevation and the roads run bullet straight for miles through towns like Pocahontas ("the Princess City") and Mallard ("We're friendly ducks").

He detasseled corn in those fields in the summers and hauled beer kegs out there with friends. He wakeboarded on Five Island Lake and played football for the Emmetsburg E-Hawks, where he was a standout on offense and defense. After a directionless year in community college, he left Iowa for the Marine Corps in 2001.

His older sister still lives in the area, and I stopped by her house to pick him up. "I have Daniel ready for you," Amy Gilderhus said and handed me a small Folgers coffee container with strips of duct tape securing the plastic lid. The weight surprised me, heavier than I had imagined. An urn decorated with an American flag held the rest of his ashes; it sat on a living room shelf next to a picture of Sidles and a large frame that displayed a folded flag and his medals from the Marines.

Gilderhus wanted some of her brother's ashes spread on the mountains he had climbed, the places where he seemed happiest. I had offered to help get them there, together with some of Sidles's other friends and climbing partners.

We started a few weeks later, on a July day in 2016 in the Flatirons, the giant slabs of tilted sandstone that rise up along the western edge of Boulder, Colorado. They were a favorite climbing destination for Sidles. He'd scrambled up them scores of times, usually alone, wearing his earbuds and a red bandana, and often shirtless, revealing a thickly muscled tapestry of tattoos.

I had climbed the Second Flatiron with Sidles a few years earlier. That was my first time on something so high without a rope. I begged off the last short stretch, which required a move back onto the face near the top—heady for a new climber. Sidles continued, breath quick and heart drumming. Afterward he wore a giddy smile, still riding the adrenaline spike. "I haven't felt like this since the last time I was in a firefight," he said.

Now I started up the slab again, with a half-dozen others who had shared climbs with Sidles. Just ahead of me, Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind person to summit Mount Everest, danced his hands across the rock and settled on a hold. In 2010, he and several friends from that Everest expedition had guided 11 wounded Iraq and Afghanistan veterans up Lobuche East, a 20,075-foot peak in Nepal. I wrote about the expedition for *Outside,* which is how I met Sidles. We spent hours talking on the trail. He was curious, self-aware, and determined to find some peace in his life. A natural storyteller, he punctuated the serious with humor and a laugh that a high school friend described as "a little girl getting licked to death by puppies." Of the veterans—a mix of men and women with amputations, traumatic brain injuries, and post-traumatic stress—he seemed to be the person who gained the most from the trip. Sidles reveled in the physical challenge and believed that the outdoors might offer him a way forward.

In Nepal and afterward, Sidles spoke with remarkable clarity and insight about himself, his motivations and shortcomings. He knew that he'd been self-destructive and mired in self-pity after two tours in Iraq, and that many who cared for him had suffered because of it. He spoke not as someone lost in the darkness but as one emerging into the light. "I'm not going to give up, even on the roughest days. I don't want to be a statistic, someone who resorts to doing drugs and drinking my face off to deal with my problems," he told me. Perhaps other veterans would find some hope in his story. "Maybe they're thinking about hurting themselves," he said. "Before they run for the razors, maybe they'll run to someone who can get them into something like this."

He went on to climb in Ecuador, Alaska, and across the West. He summited Mount Elbrus in Russia and Aconcagua in Argentina. Gilderhus figured she might get a call one day that Sidles had been in a terrible accident in the mountains. An avalanche. A fall. But not that he'd killed himself.

I didn't ask why. Few of us did. We knew Sidles had been struggling. But plenty of questions remained. He had participated in so many outdoor programs, most of them

COURTESY OF AMY GILDERHUS (2)

geared toward veterans and meant to help them reintegrate, find fellowship and purpose, and overcome some of war's damages. For years he'd used the health care services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Why hadn't he seen more progress?

Many of those who knew him thought they'd failed him. Had they? Had the VA failed him? Had the country failed him, with its inability to understand what people like Sidles lived through?

Was this conclusion inevitable—dead at 34, a decade after he'd taken off the uniform? Or might things have turned out differently? And might his story tell us something about how to heal other combat veterans? To know that, I needed to understand what had happened to him.

But first we would return some of Sidles to one of his favorite places. After 1,000 feet of mellow climbing, we gathered near the top. Matt Murray opened a sleeve of Clif energy chews and passed them around, a toast of sorts. "Dan ate these like candy," he said. Bald-headed, with a booming baritone voice, Murray flew A-10 attack jets in the first Gulf War. He had climbed with Sidles occasionally for the past several years, but mostly he had been his friend's unwavering supporter. Sidles had twice lived with Murray and his wife for several months.

I pulled a small glass jar from my pack, containing a portion of Sidles's remains that his sister had given me, and handed it to Murray. He tipped the jar and pale ash poured out. Some lifted on the breeze. Pebble-size pieces of bone and teeth tinkled down the rock face.

"There he is," Murray said. He dragged his fingertips across the fine gray pile, then rubbed them together.

I HAVE KNOWN several veterans who killed themselves, and many more who tried, some of whom I served with in Iraq in the Army infantry, and others I've met since. It sometimes seems I know more combat veterans who have considered suicide than haven't.

Twenty veterans kill themselves every day. While that tally presents the problem in scale, it obscures the fantastic complexity of each story. Cure a disease and millions might benefit from the same protocol. Not so for suicide, its causes and preventions so highly personalized. There can be myriad factors unrelated to war or military service: crumbling relationships, lost jobs, terminal illness, depression. And what pulls one veteran back from the edge might not help the veteran sitting next to them.

Despite the common portrayal of service members and veterans who die by suicide as young and battle scarred, most recent victims did not serve in Iraq or Afghanistan. According to a VA report, 65 percent were aged 50 or older when they died—though they could still have been dealing with combat trauma, which sometimes doesn't manifest for decades. Among the younger veterans, who die by suicide at a higher rate than older veterans, more than half didn't go to war. And of those who deployed, many didn't see heavy combat.

But Sidles did.

Assigned to weapons company, Second Battalion, First Marines Regiment, he rolled into Iraq on March 20, 2003, in the turret of a Humvee. The .50-caliber heavy machine gun he manned fired half-inch-thick bullets that could tear a man in half and shear off limbs. Twenty-one years old and a couple of hours into his war, he shot up a car full of fighters, sending it off a bridge and into the water. He'd fire more than 1,000 rounds on that first day of the invasion. He and his friends fought north toward Baghdad, the invasion wound down, and they went home, where they drank themselves senseless and acted the part of victorious Marines, cocky and belligerent.

Sidles and two buddies all got the same tattoo: UNSCARRED. After surviving the war, they imagined themselves untouchable. Sidles got another postwar tattoo, inked across his chest: LAUGH NOW, CRY LATER. "Looking back," he told me, "it's almost like I had the feeling that what we were doing over there was going to haunt me. The first time was so easy compared to what happened the second time. We used to laugh and be filled with pride when we killed. Then you get out and no one understands how you could do that. People you would die for think you're a psycho, and that makes you cry."

"Looking back," Sidles told me, "it's almost like I had the feeling that what we were doing in Iraq was going to haunt me. We used to laugh and be filled with pride when we killed. Then you get out and no one understands how you could do that. People you would die for think you're a psycho, and that makes you cry."

The following spring, Sidles was back in Iraq, this time outside Fallujah, a city boiling with tension. Days after he arrived, insurgents ambushed four private-security contractors, killing them, dragging their charred bodies through the streets, then stringing them from a bridge over the Euphrates river. Sidles's unit went out that night and cut down the corpses.

In response to the killings, the Marines encircled and then pushed into Fallujah to clear it of insurgents, engaging in house-to-house fighting. On the city's outskirts one afternoon in April, Sidles and two other Marines climbed atop a tower with an M240G machine gun and several belts of ammunition to observe enemy movements. But on the flat roof, in the full light of day, they were observable, too, with barely a concrete lip for cover. As they settled in, gunfire erupted from buildings and streets to their front and on both sides. Bullets snapped overhead, inches away, and several rocket-propelled grenades whooshed past, just missing them. If they stayed on the roof, they would die. The only way down was a ladder exposed to all that gunfire. Sidles ordered the other Marines off the roof while he covered them. He'd soon shot through nearly all 400 rounds, and he didn't see how he'd get down alive.

"I just accepted the fact that I was about to die. And when you do that, when you believe that, your life goes *poof!*—right in front of your face," he told me one morning in Nepal as we sat on a stone wall outside a mountaintop monastery. "Every choice I had made in life led me to that rooftop, and it was all over. I don't think you're ever the same after that. A piece of you is taken."

As bullets pinged around him, Sidles scurried down the ladder and made it to safety. He still had six months to go.

Most U.S. combat deaths and injuries in Iraq were a result of improvised explosive devices. Insurgents hung them from highway overpasses and stuffed them into dead dogs along the road. They hid them in trash piles and car trunks, and most often, they buried them in the dirt. One of these exploded under Sidles's truck on a scorching-hot July day. The blast burned and bloodied his face, mangled the medic's arm, and took off the gunner's hand. What Sidles would remember most, for years, was the terrible screaming.

As he walked into the chow hall hours later, with his own blood and that of his friends still on his uniform, a senior Marine told him he'd need to change before entering. The pettiness and lack of understanding enraged Sidles.

On his next patrol, four days after the blast, another Marine in Sidles's Humvee no-

ticed a battery half-buried near where they'd parked. He dug in the dirt. "Dan, we've got to go," he said. "We're on top of an IED."

The bomb had malfunctioned. The truck's weight had engaged the pressure plate, which should have ignited the massive artillery shells buried beneath it. The disposal team later told them that had the IED exploded, they'd all be dead. "What do you do? You just shake it off," Sidles told me. "You can't dwell on that stuff. Until years later, when it starts to really set in, what you've been through. That's when it starts to screw with you."

He spent his last year in uniform instructing new recruits in rifle marksmanship, then returned to Iowa. In the Marines, he and his buddies had relished their image as fighters and killers. Back home, in a world where people didn't understand where he had been or what he had been doing on their behalf, the ground seemed to shift. Sidles, who had grown up with a lazy right eye, was already sensitive to people's stares. Now it was all he could see. Judgment. He compared himself to a tiger on a chain, gawked at by strangers: " 'Hey, he's been to combat. Want to go talk to him, want to go touch him?' You just feel like this wild animal, and it's like, oh man, I'm a human being."

He'd sit in a bar in Emmetsburg, wearing a brooding mask of meanness, and wait for someone to start eyeing him. Drunken fights became a pastime. He spent a few nights in jail and missed out on more because the cops knew him and knew he'd been to war.

He still hung out with a few close friends from high school, but those trusted relationships had changed, too. James Davis, for one, felt a yawning distance. "He was talking to me, telling me a story, but he was just looking right through me," Davis said. Sidles told him that people didn't understand how crazy the war had been or how hard it was to readjust to life afterward. "It felt like a script he gave people," Davis said. "Like he was trying to placate me."

"He'll always be my best friend," Sidles told me. "He'll bring up things that, no matter how many times he said it, always made me piss my pants. And now when I'm back, he'll bring it up: Remember that time? And it's not even funny to me. For him I'll try to fake it. But he can tell."

Sidles knew he was alienating people but felt helpless to stop the spiral. A drunk-driving charge earned him two weeks in jail. "I was throwing my life away, but I didn't know why," he said. "I didn't know what was causing it."

He moved from Iowa to Phoenix, but the change didn't help. He couldn't escape the aimlessness and boredom. Nothing matched the terrible excitement of the war. His social worker at the VA had an idea. She connected Sidles with Weihenmayer, who invited him to join the team that would climb Lobuche.

Sidles (front) and the author (behind) nearing the summit of Lobuche East in Nepal in 2010

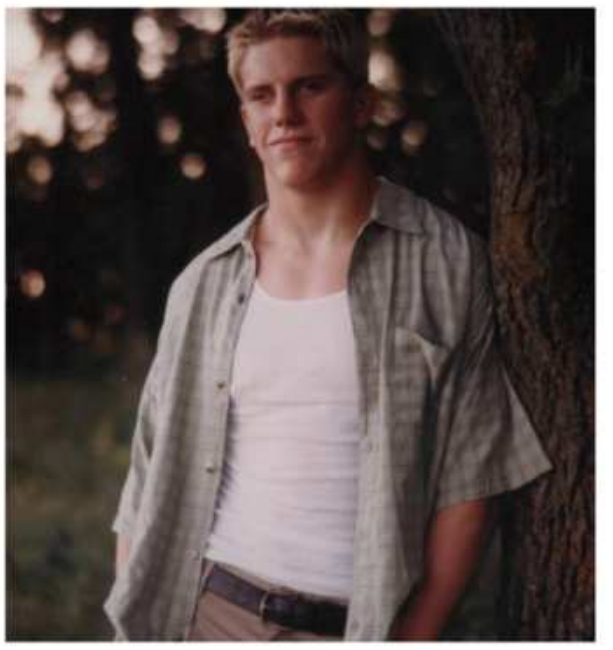
DIDRIK JOHNCK

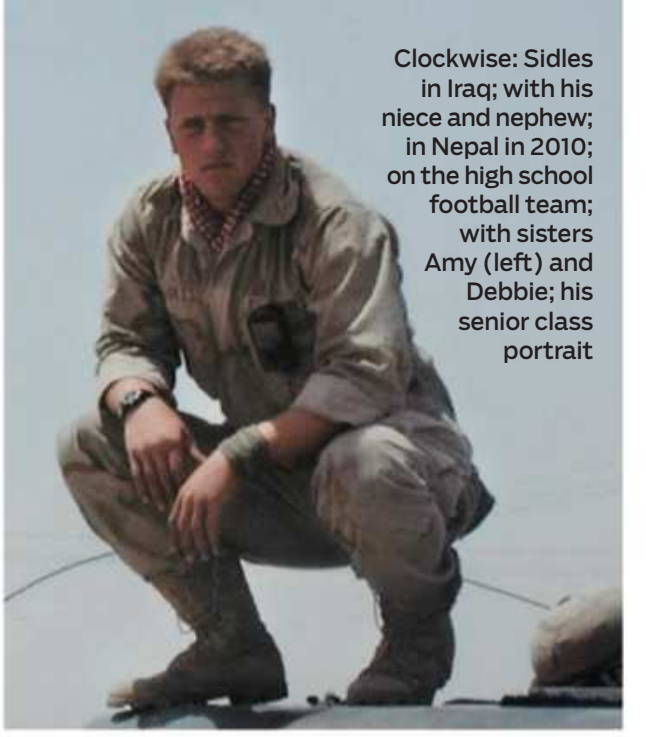
WAR VETERANS have long found relief in the solitude, perspective, and physical challenge of the outdoors. Earl Shaffer, who fought in the Pacific in World War II, told a friend he was going to "walk the Army out of my system, both mentally and physically" and became the first person to through-hike the Appalachian Trail, in 1948. Paul Petzoldt, who started the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), fought in Italy during World War II with the Army's storied Tenth Mountain Division, as did David Brower, the first executive director of the Sierra Club, and the founders of several American ski resorts.

Colonel Robert Rheault first brought veterans into the wilderness with a formalized program meant to calm the mind and salve the wounds of combat. Rheault fought in Korea and Vietnam with the Special Forces and retired in 1969 in a haze of scandal after his men killed a South Vietnamese double agent. He retreated to the outdoors and worked at the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School in Maine for 32 years. In 1983, he started a program for Vietnam veterans that promoted the physical challenge and camaraderie of the military in the mountains of New Hampshire. "We need each other to share the heavy loads, to help a vet who is hurting, to lend a hand across a dangerous or difficult spot in the trail, to make camp in the wild," he wrote in *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders: A Handbook for Clinicians*. "The experiences duplicate everything except the shooting, the wounding, and killing."

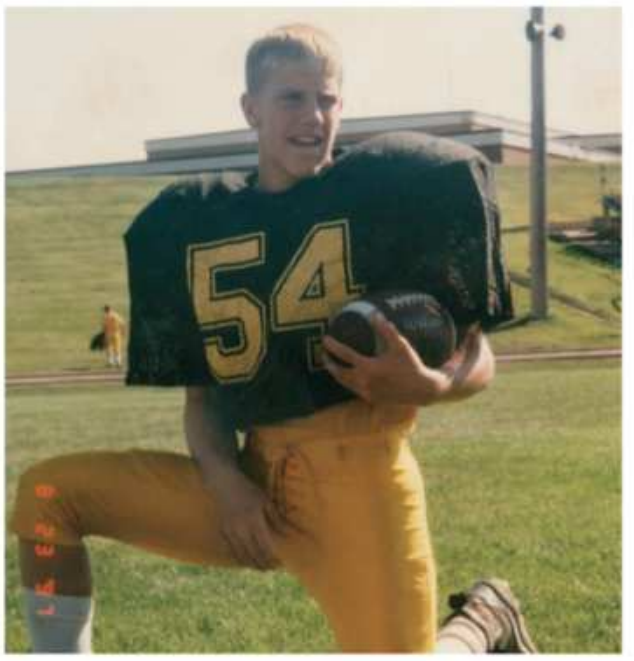
Despite promising results, nature-based programs for veterans didn't gain wide interest until the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan gave us a new generation of struggling veterans. Today that landscape is crowded with groups offering everything from sailing and surfing to horseback riding and ice climbing. Many of these programs are event based, not built around continued engagement. Some are meant just to be fun outings, a "Thank you for your service." Others, like Weihenmayer's group, have more elaborate ambitions to ease PTSD symptoms and help the injured overcome limitations.

For the Nepal expedition in 2010, Weihenmayer and his climbing buddies reasoned that mountaineering could mimic the best parts of military service: teamwork, a sense of mission, and a shot of adrenaline. That's what Sidles found when he strapped on a pair of crampons and slogged toward the Lobuche summit. He liked the rush he felt in the mountains, outside his comfort zone, a little bit scared and not wanting to let down those around him. "It takes courage to face your fears," he told the filmmaker





Clockwise: Sidles in Iraq; with his niece and nephew; in Nepal in 2010; on the high school football team; with sisters Amy (left) and Debbie; his senior class portrait



Michael Brown, "and if there's no fear, there is no courage, you know what I'm saying?"

Brown, who has summited Everest five times, ran what was then called the Outside Adventure Film School. Students usually made their own short movies during multi-day backcountry trips, but on the Nepal expedition they all worked together to film the veterans. The resulting documentary, *High Ground,* prominently featured Sidles. After the expedition, Brown interviewed Sidles in Phoenix and filmed him in a boxing gym. Murray, a longtime friend of Brown's, had climbed with us in Nepal and helped Brown with the follow-up interviews for the film.

"I feel like now that I know what I'm capable of, I just want more," Sidles told them. "That feeling of just being alive."

Brown and Murray both lived in Boulder and encouraged Sidles to relocate to Colorado. A few months later he moved into Murray's basement, with mountains now in his backyard. He started climbing with a friend of Murray's who had taught bouldering and mountaineering at NOLS. Sidles wanted to work as a guide and figured that attending NOLS could be a good route. He enrolled in the outdoor-educators course—three months of skiing, canyoneering, climbing, and wilderness first aid meant to prepare students for outdoor careers. That program now draws two dozen vets a year; Sidles, who used his GI Bill benefit to pay for the course, was one of just two who took part in early 2012.

Kyle Drake, a field instructor that semester, was Sidles's adviser. Sidles told him about the Marines, his time in Fallujah, and the years that followed. Most of the other students were just out of college, and at times Sidles grew frustrated with their immaturity. He argued with a fellow student during a skiing exercise, so Drake positioned himself near Sidles, should he need to intervene. "I wasn't sure what his life experiences had done to him," Drake told me. "Is he a ticking time bomb, or is he just going to be angry?" But Sidles knew he needed to remove himself from the situation and find release through exertion. Duckwalking in his telemark skis, he charged ahead, dragging his sled—upside down—through the snow.

"Hey Dan," Drake called. "Do you need help?"

"No," Sidles said. "I'm good."

During the canyoneering section, with two weeks left in the semester, Sidles again argued with a fellow student. In the Marines, that sort of confrontation—stern voices and threats—wouldn't have raised an eyebrow. But this one, while not physical, concerned the instructors enough that they sent Sidles out of the mountains early. NOLS awarded him a certificate for completing the course, which was necessary for the VA to reimburse the cost under the GI Bill.

The chance to use his new outdoor skills came soon after. Weihenmayer organized another expedition for wounded vets, this time to Ecuador's 19,347-foot Cotopaxi. Several veterans from the Nepal trip, including Sidles, would serve as mentors. Matt Burgess, a military policeman who fought in Iraq, credits Sidles with keeping him on the expedition. Disillusioned by the physical demands, Burgess had wanted to quit. Sidles told him of his own doubts in Nepal. "He'd pull me aside on a daily basis. 'You doing OK? You still glad to be here?' " Burgess told me. "At one point I fell and slipped. It was Dan who stopped me. Knowing he was there and had my back was extremely comforting."

Weihenmayer and the other guides from the Nepal trip had all summited dozens of other challenging mountains. They knew the stresses of expeditions. For the veterans, they surmised, success in the mountains could be taken back to their daily lives. "We were overconfident. We tried it again, and the whole thing almost fell apart," Wei-

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY OF AMY GILDERHUS (5); MICHAEL BROWN

henmayer said of the Ecuador trip. "There's a fine line between an adventure and the chaos of retriggering some of the wounds they were there to fix."

In a lodge halfway up Cotopaxi, Sidles and another veteran mentor nearly came to blows over Sidles's contention that the other man wasn't pulling his weight. Sidles also had strong words for the guides, who he felt were underprepared. That day a guide had misjudged a route, turning a four-hour acclimatization hike into an all-day grind. The rancor soured the overall mood, which worsened a few days later when only half the group summited. "We should have been more prepared," Weihenmayer told me.

His group, now called No Barriers Warriors, has since run dozens of veteran trips. They're done on a smaller scale, with an emphasis on the overall experience rather than reaching the summit. The staff receives three days of suicide-prevention and crisis-management training, and a staff social worker checks in with the veterans before the trip and for several months afterward to see how they're integrating the experience into their daily lives.

THE PROBLEMS on Cotopaxi highlight the shortcomings of some programs, which can be heavy on good intentions and skills acquisition, but light on mental-health expertise and a deep understanding of the physical and psychological issues veterans often face. And many of the programs might not be reaching those who could most benefit.

"It's much easier to work with a veteran who has his shit together, who shows up, has a good time—you can take some pictures, and you don't have to deal with them again," Joshua Brandon told me. Brandon used to run the Sierra Club's Military Outdoors program, which takes veterans mountaineering, rafting, climbing, and fishing. Most of the vets who came on his trips didn't have what Brandon calls "hardcore" issues. "It's the guys and gals who are the most self-destructive, and destructive to the people around them, who are the most work," he said, "but they also need the most help. And they're the ones we should be helping."

Brandon met Sidles on a climbing trip and thought he could be a good leader for the Sierra Club's program. He understood Sidles's struggles—the alienation, despondency, and wrecked relationships. He had dealt with the same challenges after three combat tours in Iraq, which earned him a Silver Star and two Bronze Stars with Valor. He and some fellow soldiers taught themselves to climb on Washington's Mount Rainier and found that the adversity, risk, and teamwork eased their minds in ways therapy and medication alone couldn't.

But while therapies like yoga, meditation, and virtual reality have been validated by studies and utilized by the Pentagon and the VA, there has been little research about the benefits of nature for veterans. In a University of Michigan study for the Sierra Club, in which veterans participated in canoeing, rock-climbing, backpacking, and skiing trips, the 98 subjects reported improvements in psychological well-being, more social connectedness, and a more positive life outlook, though a month after the trips the benefits had largely dissipated. "Nature is a momentary fix," Brandon said. "Much like medication, you have to keep dosing."

During the canyoneering section of the NOLS outdoor-educators course, with two weeks left in the semester, Sidles again argued with a fellow student. In the Marines, that sort of confrontation wouldn't have raised an eyebrow. But this one, while not physical, concerned instructors enough that they sent Sidles out of the mountains early.

Brandon left the Sierra Club but still puzzled over how best to reach veterans like Sidles. He believes that ongoing outdoor experiences built around tight community and self-examination, rather than just escape and thrill, can help. Working with a team of researchers at the University of Washington—and backed with a $100,000 grant from REI and additional support from Outdoor Research—Brandon designed a pilot study that started earlier this year. Veterans recruited from the Seattle area met regularly for small-group excursions and casual social gatherings to augment traditional treatments and medication.

If the results are positive, Brandon hopes to see programs like this incorporated as a core element of treatment protocols. But he recognizes the difficulty of shifting institutional mindsets and working with volatile veterans. "You really have to care about someone to put up with some of that, to fight through and not take offense at some of their bullshit," Brandon said. "It's the same issues we're trying to help them with that are causing them to lash out at friends and family."

For Sidles and many vets like him, it's not just the combat that wrecked them. While his battlefield experiences alone would have been enough to twist his sense of self and derail his relationships, Sidles's war started long before he set foot in Iraq.

"I TAUGHT MYSELF to tie my shoes, for fuck's sake," Sidles told Brown in a documentary interview. No one bothered to show him, and he feared asking for help, so he figured out his own system of loops and knots, which carried through to adulthood. He was the youngest of four siblings by eight years, with 16 years between him and his eldest sister. "My dad pretty much told Daniel that he was a mistake," said Gilderhus, who is 48. "He didn't have parents. They were old and sick."

Their father had a heart transplant in 1998, and their mother was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis around that time. To be closer to medical care, the family moved from Graettinger to nearby Emmetsburg, a town five times bigger, with 4,000 people. In high school, Sidles excelled in sports, but academics came harder. "You got this douche dad who says, 'You're a no-good punk who's not going to amount to nothing,' " he said. "A test or something comes up in school, and you say, 'I'm not going to study, what's the point? I'm just going to fail. My dad tells me that all the time.' And then what happens? You take the test and you fail. And he gets the report card and says, 'Yeah, that figures.' "

Neglect and emotional abuse, shaping a kid's sense of identity and self-worth, can damage them as much as physical or sexual trauma. To gauge exposure to these negative events, mental-health providers use a ten-question survey about family instability and incidences of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Divorced parents? One point. Parent in prison? Another point. Two questions stood out to me as particularly relevant to Sidles: "Did a parent often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?" and "Did you often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?" Based on what I know of Sidles's childhood, I figured his score at a four.

Male veterans of today's all-volunteer military are twice as likely as their civilian counterparts to have endured difficult childhoods, which wasn't the case during the Vietnam War, when the draft selected more broadly from the population. (Female veterans and civilians have similar numbers of negative childhood events, and while female

veterans are half as likely to kill themselves as male veterans, they're more than twice as likely as female civilians to do so.) Many people, like Sidles, join the military to escape a crappy home life and for the camaraderie and opportunities they didn't have growing up. But unresolved childhood trauma can stack the deck and cause bad experiences later in life to do far more damage. "The guys who come in with a lot of emotional baggage, it just gets compounded, especially with combat tours like we had," Ryan Thompson, Sidles's section leader during his Iraq deployments, told me.

Compounding trauma increases the likelihood of suicide. In a 2017 study of male veterans in an inpatient program for combat-related PTSD, more than 40 percent reported four or more adverse childhood experiences. Those with a greater number of ACEs were significantly more likely to have thought about suicide or tried it. But if the military screened out those with bad childhoods, it would lose an enormous chunk of the recruitment pool. The services have a hard enough time filling their ranks. Most young Americans—more than 70 percent—are too fat, too sick, or perform too poorly on aptitude tests for military service, or they have disqualifying histories of crime, drug use, or mental illness.

In many ways, Sidles was an ideal recruit: strong, driven, devoted, and searching for belonging. The Marines offered him respect, adventure, and a sense of purpose and worth far from small-town Iowa and far from his family. If he had had a different job in the military—say, helicopter mechanic—things might have turned out much differently. He'd be a couple of years from retirement today. But he chose the infantry.

"I adapted to war really well," Sidles said. "A lot of people who join the military come from broken homes like me. I'm no exception. So you've got some anger. You can't deny that. It's there. And then the Marine Corps just adds to that."

Sidles felt bullied by his father and elder brother, and he considered terrorists the biggest bullies of all, so he channeled that anger. Friends who were injured or killed stoked the flames. "The fire just keeps burning and burning and burning," he said. "And then you come back here and try to put it out, and it's, like, impossible."

During my two Iraq tours with an Army infantry company, I had some close calls, but I didn't see anything like the combat Sidles did. Even if I had, my upbringing better prepared me to deal with the ramifications. I left for war knowing that my family loved and supported me, and I returned to the same. Within several months my violent dreams, startled responses, and irritability eased as my mind readjusted to life outside a war zone.

Sidles didn't come home to that kind of safe harbor. "The love I didn't get at home I got from my friends. I felt that a lot in the Marine Corps," he said. "There's no situation that's too tough as long as you have people who care about you, and you care about them, to go through it with you. Once I got out of the military, I realized I was really, really on my own."

His own choices may have led him to that rooftop in Fallujah— most prominently, enlisting in the Marines—but other factors beyond Sidles's control played a part, too. He understood this, and it fueled his resentment toward his father. "He told me I would never make it in the Marine Corps, I wouldn't even make it through boot camp," Sidles said. "I did two combat tours, Purple Heart, awards that say things like courage under fire, and he tells me I did nothing in Iraq."

"Daniel wanted one thing from my dad: a sincere apology," Gilderhus recalled. "For everything."

"You don't have to forget," she told her brother, "but you might have to forgive a little to go on."

Sidles tried to repair the relationships, but it was short-lived. Family wounds aren't easily mended, and the hurt ran deep. His mother, for whom he cared greatly, died while he was living in Phoenix. His family didn't call. A friend told him several days later. He wanted to confront his father at the funeral home, but Gilderhus stopped him. She invited him to her home for Christmas. Trying to navigate the bitter family emotions, she decided to have a gift exchange with her father at her mother's graveside, then celebrate with her brother later. But Sidles learned of this. He drove to the cemetery, saw his father, and kept driving. After an argument with Gilderhus that night, Sidles left. The last of the frayed family threads had snapped.

I LAST SAW Sidles in July of 2013 while in Boulder for Michael Brown's wedding. The morning of the ceremony, I climbed the First Flatiron with Murray. We were just starting the initial pitch when Sidles passed by on the trail, hiking down from the top. I called to him, but he didn't hear. Or maybe he did. He just kept charging down the path.

Later I sent him a text asking if he'd like to get a beer and catch up.

"Fuck no," he wrote back. "I'll go ahead and skip story telling time."

The message stung. Storytelling time. I read this as an indictment: he saw me not as a friend but as a journalist, someone else who had taken advantage.

"He thought we used him," Brown said. "And we did."

Like Brown, my relationship with Sidles began as a lopsided exchange. Journalists and filmmakers are gatekeepers of our subjects' most personal experiences, and the transaction is tilted decidedly against them: Tell me your story, with all its intimate, painful, and embarrassing details, and I'll share it with the world. The interview itself can retraumatize, a possibility I wrestle with routinely when writing about people who've been emotionally and physically scarred. For this they receive no compensation, only the possibility that someone somewhere might be exposed to their story and moved by it.

When he first saw my *Outside* piece about the Lobuche climb, Sidles worried about how others would view him. "Then I had gotten a couple hits on Facebook from a couple guys who had been to combat," he told Brown, "and they basically told me that they felt exactly how I felt, and it was almost like a thank-you for speaking up." This prompted Sidles to open up more for the documentary. "Instead of worrying about how I was going to look," he said, "I threw that aside and said, You know what? I'm going to be honest. I'll let people see how I live and how I think."

I helped with some of the editing, and as we reviewed the footage, Brown mentioned several times that he wished he could make a whole film about Sidles, so eloquent, honest, and funny were his reflections and insights. We both loved spending time with him. "If he smiled or laughed, and you were at the

In 2014, Sidles spoke before 50 people at an ice-climbing event in Ouray, Colorado, and though he was racked with nerves, the talk went well. But the rhythms and demands of everyday life confounded him. "Dan seemed like he was still a gunner in Iraq," Nick Watson told me. "He was just stuck there."

other end of that, it was the best feeling in the world," Brown said.

He showed Sidles the documentary before almost anyone else had seen it. "Yeah," Sidles told Brown. "It's all true." But he came to regret his involvement. He felt like some of the guides on the trip had used him as a prop—*look how we're helping these wounded veterans*. He also nursed resentment toward some veterans in the film who hadn't been wounded in combat or, he felt, had embellished their experiences.

Though the infighting on the Cotopaxi expedition had exacerbated these frustrations, Sidles continued to take part in veterans outdoor programs. He wanted the opportunities but seemed to resent it at the same time, as though his participation confirmed that he couldn't help himself. Yet he believed that the outdoors had been truly good for him, and he wanted to use his experiences to help other vets. Climber Timmy O'Neill, who cofounded the adaptive program Paradox Sports, worked with Sidles to market himself to the professional climbing and outdoor-recreation communities. In 2014, Sidles spoke before 50 people at a Paradox ice-climbing event in Ouray, Colorado, and though he was racked with nerves beforehand, the talk went well, and he enjoyed the experience.

But the rhythms and demands of everyday life confounded him. He felt he had been at his best in Iraq, fighting alongside his brothers. Back home, where people's reactions to him ranged from curiosity to wariness and concern, he seemed to long for the war's simplicity and the sense of worth and purpose it brought him.

"Dan seemed like he was still a gunner in Iraq," Nick Watson told me. "He was just stuck there. He never made that leap to having an identity in the civilian world, having something to get up and look forward to." Watson, a former Army Ranger, runs Veterans Expeditions (Vet Ex), which has taken thousands of former military men and women climbing, rafting, mountain biking, and mountaineering. He linked up Sidles with a former special-operations Marine who runs rafting trips and offered to train Sidles as a guide. "I thought it was perfect," Watson said. But Sidles didn't last the day. Watson's friend told him Sidles bristled at interacting with the younger guides.

Another friend of Sidles in Colorado had connected him with an assistant guiding job on Denali. I figured this could be a good step, moving him away from his primary outward identity as a war vet. As a guide he'd be expected to check his emotions, work with a team, mitigate conflict, and meet the needs of paying clients. But this turned out to be another false start. He enjoyed the work and got along well with clients, but he argued with the lead guide. He didn't work another Denali expedition.

Watson climbed with Sidles several times over the years, both on Vet Ex trips and just the two of them. Sidles eventually cut off contact with Watson, but even before that, in the months leading up to Sidles's decision to distance himself, Watson had sensed a shift. "The outdoors wasn't fun to him anymore," he said. "The thing that was keeping him going, he lost that."

After texting me that afternoon in Colorado, Sidles sent Murray a note berating him for giving me his new phone number. "Every time I hear about you and everyone living their happy lives," he texted, "it reminds me of what a piece of shit I am."

Sidles stopped talking to Murray, apparent punishment for the breach of trust. He apologized months later, and their friendship resumed. Over the next two years, I often asked Murray about him, but I didn't reach out myself. Before Sidles died, and many times afterward, I wished that I'd set ego aside and written to him or called, to let him know that I valued him as a friend and hoped to share a trail or rope with him again soon.

AFTER THE NOLS course, Sidles moved into an apartment in Gunbarrel, just outside Boulder. As he had while living in Phoenix and in Murray's basement, he spent much of his time alone, playing guitar, watching history documentaries, and reading. When he was still talking to Gilderhus, he would sometimes call her late at night and tell her about episodes of *Dr. Phil* he had seen, how the analysis might apply to his own life.

He had worked for a few years as a personal trainer after the Marines and enjoyed the autonomy and the one-on-one interaction with clients. He couldn't imagine himself in a regular job, beholden to a company's norms, rules, and schedules and forced to deal with coworkers and customers. The VA agreed, deeming him unemployable, which qualified him for monthly compensation in addition to his disability benefits. Still, he wanted to work, and the verdict of his inability to support himself weighed heavily, Gilderhus said.

The gym offered refuge. For hours he lifted weights and exhausted himself with boxing drills, a Sisyphean attempt to quiet his mind. While living in Boulder, he scrambled up the Flatirons alone several times a week, sometimes every day. He often climbed the First Flatiron, where a fall, though unlikely for a decent climber, could be catastrophic. Climbing without a rope freed him from the need for a belay partner. He could climb when he wanted, without coordinating schedules, without judgments or expectations. But soloing also offered risk and thrill, the ever present what-if?

Sidles told his Marine buddy Adamn Scott that he liked the high stakes. "You screw up and you die," he said. Scott sensed that this also bothered Sidles—being so drawn to the danger, the same craving they felt for the rush of combat.

"Don't you ever get nervous being by yourself?" Scott had asked him. "What if something happens?"

"Who cares?" Sidles said.

Scott had been with Sidles through boot camp, infantry school, and both tours in Iraq. They shared the same UNSCARRED tattoo.

"When we first got out, I couldn't function in society without being drunk," Scott said. Every day a sight, smell, or sound reminded him of Iraq. He tried the VA, but like Sidles and so many others, he felt that the therapists couldn't understand his time in combat and were more interested in medicating him. "What helped us the most was getting together and talking about it," Scott said. Each summer he'd invite a half-dozen Marines to his house in Bloomfield, Iowa, for a few days of beers, grilling, and catching up. Sidles always attended.

Sitting around the fire, they talked about how they were getting by since they left the Marines. They talked about the war, and they talked about suicide. "We'd all thought about it," Scott said. Sidles told him he'd never do it. "He called it the pussy way out," Scott said. They had talked about it in Iraq, too, in a broader conversation about heaven and hell, and where they, as killers of men, might be headed. "Dan was of the understanding that you didn't go to heaven if you commit suicide," Scott said.

During a visit a few summers ago, they spent the day out on a boat, skiing, wakeboarding, and drinking beer. Back at the house, they drank into the night. In Scott, Sidles saw everything he didn't have: a good job, a loving wife, kids, a house.

"Dude, your life is the shit," Sidles told him.

"You could have this, too," Scott said. He hoped Sidles would return to Iowa one day and buy a house near him.

"Nobody's going to want me," Sidles said. "I'm a broken old piece of shit."

Scott wasn't buying it. "I just chose not to be miserable anymore," he told Sidles, and chided him for not being more grateful for what he had, traveling the world to climb mountains, often with other people funding the trips.

Then Sidles punched Scott, and Scott punched back, the two men bloodying each other's faces.

Other Marines tried to reach him as well.

After Sidles guided on Denali, he stayed for a few weeks with Ryan Thompson, his old section leader, who lives in Anchorage. They would spend hours talking. "He still had a lot of deep-seated anger," Thompson said. Anger at himself for leaving the Marines and for getting arrested, which closed off job opportunities. Anger at civilians for not understanding him. Anger at his family.

"I had some pretty frank discussions with him about how self-destructive he was and how he needed to find a more positive path in his life," Thompson said. "One time I even asked him: Are you going to hurt yourself? Are you thinking about suicide?"

"No," Sidles said. "I've got too much fight left in me for that."

SENDING SOLDIERS to war is far easier than bringing them home. More than 15 years of continuous warfare has flooded the VA with men and women struggling with physical and mental wounds. Of the 2.7 million who have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, about 20 percent have been diagnosed with PTSD. They are often prescribed medication and offered one of two widely used treatments. In prolonged-exposure therapy, the veteran writes a detailed account of a traumatic incident, like a bomb explosion that might be causing nightmares, irritability, and substance abuse. The story is recorded and then played back, over and over, until recalling the incident doesn't cause distress. In cognitive-processing therapy, a veteran describes a traumatic incident, then discusses it with a therapist to identify irrational beliefs associated with the trauma, such as guilt that a bomb wasn't spotted before it exploded.

The success rates aren't encouraging. More than half of the veterans who start prolonged-exposure or cognitive-processing therapy don't complete the 12-session regimen. And for veterans like Sidles weighed down by multiple traumas, focusing on one incident often isn't enough. Plenty of veterans have received excellent medical and mental-health care. But with an institution so big, the demand so great, and individual needs so complex, not all veterans get the specific help they need.

Sidles also complained about therapists who don't know war—"like me giving mothering advice to a mother," he said. Group therapy was hard for him as well. He wasn't interested if it meant sitting in a circle with people who hadn't been in combat pulling triggers. Each negative therapy experience compounded the problem: open up a few times, see poor results, and lose incentive to dig in and tell the story again.

But Sidles still relied on the VA for medical care. He needed knee surgery and had been prescribed medications for depression, sleep, and pain in his shoulder, knee, and hips from military and sports injuries. A VA doctor advised him to quit climbing or he risked needing hip replacements. Sidles figured he'd be better off with his own therapy regimen—smoking weed and climbing.

On a fall day in 2014, he called the VA's outpatient clinic in Golden and was soon yelling at a nurse about an upcoming appointment. Patricia Alexander, the clinic's supervisor of mental-health services, took the phone. "We couldn't sort through the obscenities," she told me. "I got tired of it and hung up." An hour later, Sidles was sitting in the clinic. Alexander, five feet tall and 100 pounds, stood in front of him. "Hi, I'm Dr. Alexander. How can I help you?"

"I want to talk to the motherfucker who hung up on me," Sidles said.

"I would be that motherfucker," Alexander said. "How can I help you?"

The response threw him off, and calmed him. They went to her office to talk, the first of what would be six visits in all. They established something of a pattern in their relationship, with Sidles testing and Alexander pushing back but not rejecting. "I could just pick you up and snap your neck, and there's nothing you could do about it," he told her in a session a few weeks later.

"Yeah, but could you wait?" Alexander said. "I just got custom ski boots and I'd like to use them."

Sidles laughed at this and relaxed.

"I never felt I was in danger from him," Alexander said. "Never once, even when he was raging." The clinic director, Kris Johnson, who served eight years as an Army doctor, told me he interpreted Sidles's comment more as a statement of frustration than a threat. "I've seen so many people like that. They're pissed at the world, not you specifically," Johnson said. "At some point they give up. This is just some other fucking VA doc who doesn't know what he's talking about."

The VA had previously diagnosed Sidles with borderline personality disorder, characterized by impulsive behaviors, extreme emotional responses, and unstable relationships. The military considers this a preexisting condition, not service related—war didn't break them, they were screwed up already—and has used the diagnosis to discharge service members and deny disability benefits to thousands of combat veterans. "Someone who didn't know what they were doing gave him that diagnosis," Alexander said. "I got that overturned. Dan had untreated PTSD." She also got Sidles's PTSD disability rating bumped up to 100 percent.

In Alexander, a former Air Force and Army psychologist, Sidles had a passionate advocate. Her youngest son had served a violent tour in Afghanistan as an Army paratrooper, and afterward he boozed and fought. Alexander told me that a therapist at the Denver VA identified his PTSD symptoms but did little to alleviate them. Alexander could sense her son's mounting hopelessness and devised her own treatment regimen, outside VA channels, including neurofeedback, yoga, EMDR, and hyperbaric oxygen therapy. "Without it," she said, "I think he would be dead."

He didn't have the equipment, or money for a ski pass, so his VA doctor, Patricia Alexander, worked on getting him both. Others at the VA told her to stop, because it wasn't an appropriate treatment. She refused. "It was a totally appropriate treatment," she told me. "He needed to be outside." Sidles got the skis, but their next meeting was their last.

She thought Sidles was headed down the same path and figured he could be helped by a similarly tailored intervention. Alexander recognized the importance of addressing Sidles's childhood, which she said is too often overlooked within the VA. Many providers don't understand or appreciate how early trauma compounds war trauma, or they're hamstrung by the handful of treatments they can offer.

The first few sessions with Sidles were triage. Alexander sketched a human brain and explained to him how traumatic memories are stored and the neurological effects of too much stress. She wanted to get Sidles a brain scan, to show him how PTSD and his injuries had altered his neurological function, influencing behaviors.

Adrenaline, a critical component of our fight-or-flight response, heightens our senses, dulls pain, and curbs our need for food and sleep. It's designed for short bursts. But if the brain is chronically stressed—by childhood abuse, combat, or a toxic mix of the two—adrenaline stays high, masking the commensurate drop-off in other brain

chemicals that regulate emotions and sleep. Boxing and climbing the Flatirons without a rope offered a little shot of adrenaline, a fix to calm the mind and body. "He was raised on fight-or-flight, so he was going to be drawn to things that would push that adrenaline up. Fighting. Screaming. Thrill seeking," Alexander said. "He was trying to manage that incredible imbalance in his system. Then you add traumatic memories and losses, and no one explains it to you, you're going to get hopeless real fast."

To help Sidles, she needed to regulate that roller coaster of hormones. "What could we do to calm your brain down?" she asked him.

Skiing, he said.

He didn't have the equipment, or money for a ski pass, so Alexander worked on getting him both. Others at the VA told her to stop because it wasn't an appropriate treatment, Alexander said. She refused, and Sidles eventually obtained equipment through Semper Fi, a nonprofit supporting veterans. "It was a totally appropriate treatment," she told me. "He needed to be outside." Sidles got the skis, but their next meeting was their last.

"How's it going?" Alexander asked as they sat down in her office, and that set him off. He yelled and pounded on a metal bookshelf. Other staff heard the commotion and stepped into the hallway. Someone called the police, and Sidles left. Johnson and Alexander wanted to continue seeing him, but others at the clinic felt unsafe. The VA's disruptive-behavior committee in Denver, which reviews the cases of veterans who may be a threat to staff or other patients, banned Sidles from the Golden clinic and said he would need a police escort at the Denver VA. Sidles thought it was Alexander who had banned him. Another person he trusted had let him down.

"If we could have kept him here, I think we could have made a difference in his life," Alexander said.

In 35 years as a psychologist, and many years working with combat veterans, Alexander has had many clients kill themselves. But she thinks most often about Sidles. "I feel like we failed him," she said. "We're losing a generation, and I can't stand it anymore. We're not doing our job." Alexander retired from the VA last December and has joined a Denver-based nonprofit, the Brain Health Initiative, which will offer veterans the kind of treatments that helped her son—treatments she feels could have helped Sidles.

The VA has made suicide prevention its top priority, this year allotting $500 million to pay for additional mental-health providers and resources. But even if the VA filled every job vacancy, the fix assumes that doctors and therapists are providing the right care at the right time to the right people. As Sidles's case shows, that isn't always so.

"We give it our best guess, and then we start throwing medication at people," Alexander said. "People lose hope and become suicidal when they can't fix it and they don't know why."

Over the course of several months of talking with people about Sidles for this story, I had become increasingly discouraged; so many told me that they had been aware of his struggles but had felt helpless to stop the slide. If nothing could have been done, digging into his life felt grotesquely voyeuristic. But Alexander and Johnson helped me understand two critical pieces of Sidles's story: his path was not inevitable, and he was not an exception. His actions may have seemed extreme to those with a frame of reference based on a better childhood and more conventional adult experiences. But Alexander and Johnson found his story far too familiar.

Several combat veterans expressed the same thing to me. "A lot of people look at Dan like he was some fucked-up outlier," Brandon said. "No. He could be any one of us." Good treatment was critical for Brandon, but so was community, and Sidles's increasing isolation left him without that.

"The community piece is huge," Brandon said. "Loneliness is a fucking killer."

KREMMLING, Colorado, sits on a high plain 100 miles northwest of Denver. The old mining and ranching town of 1,500 doesn't have much charm, but it's cheap and well situated for climbing and skiing in the surrounding mountains. Another try at a fresh start.

In December of 2015, after briefly moving back into Murray's place in Boulder, Sidles relocated to the Kremmling Apartments, a two-story building in the center of town with a couple dozen units. He was glad to be away from the Front Range congestion and from Boulder, where he felt out of place. But this put him far from what remained of his support network. His physical remove mirrored his growing emotional isolation.

If he wasn't out climbing or skiing, Sidles was often at Mountain Beast, a mixed-martial-arts gym in Granby. He worked out alone, pounding the bags, sweat pooling on the floor. At home he'd drink beer, maybe smoke some weed, play guitar.

Kremmling isn't very welcoming to strangers, and neither was Sidles. A confrontation, whether just likely or inevitable, occurred on the evening of February 4 outside his apartment. Sidles said it wasn't his fault; the police disagreed. He had yelled at a woman as she smoked a cigarette outside her apartment, accusing her of messing with his car. The woman's brother heard the commotion and approached Sidles, who knocked him down with a punch that broke a tooth.

The police charged him with third-degree assault and disorderly conduct. A Breathalyzer test said he was plenty drunk. Deputy Jesse Stradley, the sheriff's department's veteran-liaison officer, served in the Navy and worked at the jail. He first met Sidles the night of his arrest. "I told him not to come toward me," Sidles told Stradley, referring to the fight. "Why would a guy pet a barking dog?"

A barking dog. A tiger on a chain. A disposable razor. Sidles saw himself in many ways, few of them good.

Sidles was released the next night on $1,500 bail and assigned a court date the following month. He and Stradley met again by chance a few days later. After that they got together at least once a week for lunch or a workout. Sidles called or texted him most days, often to vent his frustrations about his landlady, how old he felt, or how people didn't understand him.

He also reached out to Duane Dailey. As a medic and surgery tech in Vietnam, Dailey had repaired soldiers' bodies; as the veterans service officer for Grand County, he helped them repair their lives, connecting them with VA programs, medical benefits, and employment. In March, Sidles asked Dailey for a ride to pick up his car at the mechanic. "Why are you living in Kremmling?" Dailey asked as they drove. "It's a sucky town unless you're a cowboy or you love to fight."

Close to the mountains, Sidles said.

As he did after all his veteran interactions, Dailey jotted down brief notes about his phone calls and meetings with Sidles.

March 7—He wanted to be in a small town to get away from the bullshit.... No one understands. He's very lonely and has no friends. Needs meds for depression. He informed me he understands why so many vets kill themselves.

March 18—Dan is very depressed, despondent, paranoid.

Sidles appeared in court on March 21, and the case was continued to May 2. Dailey found Sidles a cheap apartment in the nearby town of Parshall and helped him move some belongings into a storage unit, preparations for Sidles's new plan: an eventual move to Thailand, where a Marine buddy owned a mixed-martial-arts gym.

"I'd like to go out with a girl and just talk to her, be like a normal person," he told Dailey as they drove. "That doesn't work. I can't do it."

At the storage unit, Sidles beat his fists against the door and wept.

"Dan," Dailey said, "we need to get you some help."

Dailey reached out to a friend, Kris Johnson, who told Dailey he already knew Sidles from the Golden clinic. Johnson planned to be in Kremmling later that month for a

town-hall meeting on veterans' benefits. If Sidles wouldn't attend, he and Dailey would stop by his apartment to see him.

But that was three weeks off, and the pressure was building. With a court date looming, Sidles oscillated between pragmatism and despair.

"Totally serious, can you work out in jail?" he texted to Stradley. "Do you get to bring books, etc?"

Stradley told Sidles that jail time in Grand County would be easy. The food was good, the atmosphere relaxed. He could read books and do body-weight workouts.

The assault charge carried a maximum sentence of two years in jail and a $5,000 fine. Someone with no criminal record might not get any jail time, but Sidles was looking at 30 days and a bill for the man's broken tooth. Brett Barkey, the district attorney for Grand County, felt jail might be good for Sidles. "Sometimes that's enough to encourage them to take a different path," he said.

A confrontation occurred on the evening of February 4. Sidles said it wasn't his fault; the police disagreed. He had yelled at a woman as she smoked a cigarette outside her apartment, accusing her of messing with his car. The woman's brother heard the commotion and approached Sidles, who knocked him down with a

Dailey disagreed. "He's like a caged animal now," he said. "If you put him in a real cage, it will make it worse."

Barkey, a retired Marine colonel, served three tours in Iraq. That he had worn the same uniform and still wanted him locked up felt like another betrayal to Sidles.

"For him to expect to get a pass because I'm a Marine is misplaced," Barkey told me. "Folks who aren't held to account end up exhibiting these behaviors that are counterproductive and dangerous. I'm not going to be an enabler."

Many of those who pushed back against Sidles found themselves cut out of his life. But the arrest thrust Sidles into a realm he couldn't simply turn his back on.

April 11—Vet has no friends. No one cares about him. He will kill himself if he has to go to jail. He'll break the neck of man who he assaulted. He understands why so many vets kill themselves.

While awaiting his court date, Sidles stewed in Parshall, a has-been town with a couple of bars and a few dozen people. The apartment building wasn't much: a long, single-story cinder-block building next to the post office, divided into five units. Sidles had two small rooms and a walk-through bathroom, furnished with a bed, a small table, and a couch, for $500 a month.

He told Dailey he was happy with the new apartment, away from gawking neighbors in Kremmling, but within days he complained to Stradley about the isolation, neighbors slamming doors, and spotty cell-phone service.

AS SIDLES SPIRALED, Chad Jukes, another veteran from our 2010 Nepal climb, was back in the Khumbu Valley, headed toward Mount Everest. In Iraq, a roadside bomb had damaged his right leg, which was later amputated below the knee. Like Sidles, Jukes had climbed all over the world. He'd gained a few gear sponsorships, often spoke to groups about his experiences, and taught ice climbing—a life Sidles had imagined for himself. The Nepal trip had seemed like a launching pad for Sidles as well, but almost six years on, the two men couldn't have been in more different places or states of mind.

On April 3, Sidles posted a Facebook link to a story about a bid by Jukes and another veteran to become the first combat amputees to summit Everest—which Jukes would do on May 24, part of an expedition to raise awareness about PTSD, veteran reintegration, and suicide. Above the link Sidles wrote: "All you I fought with in Fallujah, this is a real hero." He didn't mean it as a compliment; Jukes was wounded running convoys in Iraq, not kicking down doors and hunting insurgents. Sidles found the distinction extreme. "If you want to be inspired by this 'look at me fuck' I've seen guts this girl doesn't have," he wrote in the comments.

In one of his last Facebook posts, dated April 22, Sidles shared a link about an Army veteran who had killed herself. "I'm sorry life didn't work out the way you deserved," Sidles wrote. "If there's an afterlife, protect us. We'll see you soon."

He left Dailey a voice mail on April 26, telling him that he was depressed. Dailey called him the next day, but Sidles didn't answer.

The following day, Dailey brought a local Marine veteran to visit him. Sidles's gray Toyota FJ Cruiser was parked outside. They knocked; no answer. Dailey could guess where this was headed. He had had one other suicide, a few years earlier. Police found the veteran in his car along a remote road, dead from a shotgun blast, with Dailey's card in his pocket. On the back, the Marine had written "My only friend."

Stradley was worried as well. He hadn't heard from Sidles since a text on April 25. "He said to me once that he's not going to make it," Stradley told me. "It was sickening to me, because I didn't know how to help." Sidles told him that just having someone to talk to, someone to listen, had been a great help. "I considered him a friend, and I told him that," he said. "You don't push a person if they don't want to be pushed. I didn't want him to delete me as a friend. Being up here, you need somebody."

The day after Dailey's visit, Stradley called his boss, who dispatched deputies for a welfare check.

They found him in the bedroom.

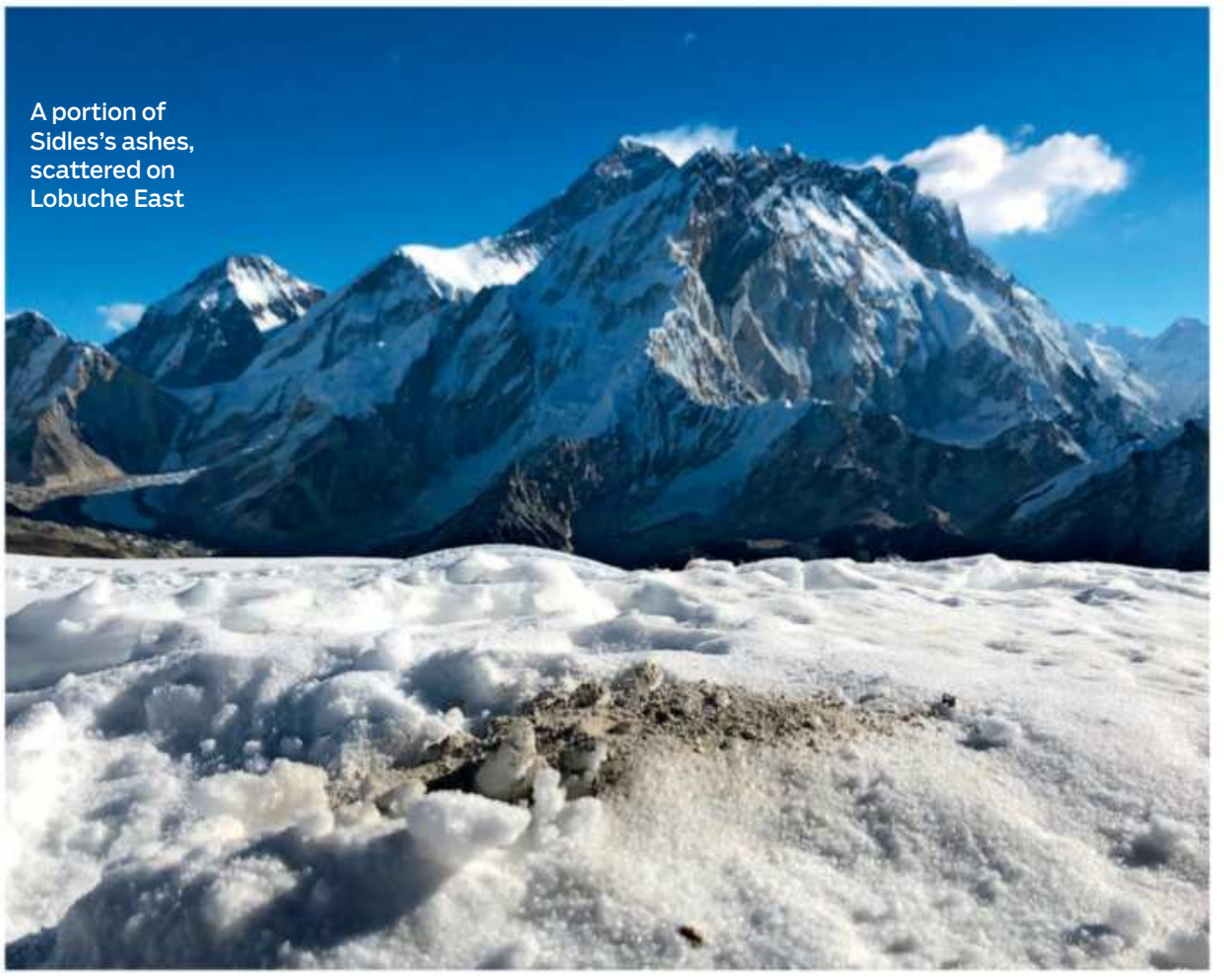
Sidles, who so often climbed without a rope, without that umbilical to keep himself anchored to the earth, to save himself should he fall, had ended his life with a tether. He unlaced his boxing gloves and looped a noose around his neck, and in his small closet he tied the other end to a bar on the back wall, about four feet off the ground. This was not a quick or inevitable death, with agency withdrawn and the course set after an initial action: a trigger pull, a step off a bridge, a leap from a rock face.

Instead, Sidles fought. He fought against himself, against the world, until his very last moment. With his feet propped against the wall, Sidles pushed. He pushed so hard that the bar bent nearly into a U.

THEY FOUND HIM on a Friday, and by Monday, news of his death had migrated to Facebook. Messages flooded his page. Grief and shock, but anger, too.

> "Dude we talked two weeks ago about all this shit going on in your life and when I asked you if you were good you said yes. So you lied to me which is why I'm disappointed. I'm angry with myself for not flying up there and making your ass come home with me."

> "I'm pissed that you bitched out on the rest of us and now there's one more brother I have to let go of. We're all hurting inside from the past that haunts us and the memories that can never be forgotten But I'm going to walk this one out until my days are ended but not by my own hand."



A portion of Sidles's ashes, scattered on Lobuche East

KEVIN NOE

"One of the baddest motherfuckers that ever set foot on Gods green Earth… I'm fucking heartbroken."

Tami McVay, who served in the Marines and dated Sidles briefly after our Nepal trip, had been doing a push-up challenge popular on Facebook—22 push-ups a day for 22 days, to raise awareness about veteran suicide. "About midway through, I shared a little bit about Dan in a post. I said, 'My friend has gotten into mountaineering, he's doing really well,' " McVay recalled. "And then three days later this happened."

Sidles left a note. Gilderhus hasn't let anyone read it, but she told me some of it: "I tried to get help, and this is what happened. I'm sorry for hurting everybody, especially the ones I love." He also figured not many people would care about his passing. "There will only be a few people at my funeral, maybe 20," he wrote.

He was wrong about that. Dailey and Stradley spent a few days organizing a memorial, and on May 5, the crowd neared 150 at the cemetery in Hot Sulphur Springs. Climbers crowded next to local veterans and law-enforcement officers. More than 30 Marines who served with Sidles gathered from across the country. Several had been in touch over the years; others hadn't seen Sidles, or each other, in a decade.

A bagpiper played the "Marines' Hymn" and the American Legion honor guard fired a three-volley salute. Led by the Marines, everyone filed past the table and laid a hand on the box that held Sidles's remains. In the minds of many people at the memorial, his was a combat death, the same as if he had fallen in Fallujah.

His Marine buddies gathered that afternoon in a pub down the road. They drank and laughed and traded stories about Sidles, about the war, and about everything afterward. Some military units have been stalked by suicides, but Sidles's was the first for his company. The Marines implored each other: Reach out. Don't let this happen again.

FOR THE NEXT two years, Sidles's friends would carry him around the world, to the places most meaningful to him. A cousin who is also a Marine spread some of his ashes this spring on a memorial hill at Camp Pendleton, in California, where Sidles had been stationed, and Gilderhus is coordinating with Arlington National Cemetery to have some of his remains interred there, which she expects to happen this fall.

Last fall, Kevin Noe, who climbed with Sidles in Colorado and on Aconcagua, spread some ashes on Lobuche, where Sidles's life in the mountains had begun. A few months before that, Noe and I tucked a bottle with ashes into a backpack and headed for Mount Elbrus in southeastern Russia for our own unfinished business.

On our first Elbrus attempt, in 2012, Noe and I climbed with Sidles, Murray, and Steve Baskis, who had been blinded by a roadside bomb and had been with us in Nepal. Halfway to the summit, still two hours before dawn, Murray fell ill. He tried to continue but didn't have the energy. He said he could turn back alone, but we quashed that. In the dark, with one blind and one sick climber, we figured it was safer to move as a group. Sidles felt strong, and we encouraged him to continue with the other climbers—a Russian woman and two Chinese with a Russian guide. We wished him luck, and the beam of his headlamp faded as he trudged higher up the mountain.

As we headed down, a spitting snow rose into a swirling, howling whiteout. We lost our way and veered far off the route. After dawn, during a brief break in the snow and clouds, we could see base camp a half-mile away. We started for it and walked into a vast crevasse field obscured by a layer of fresh snow. With a thunderstorm parked overhead and charging the air, we roped up and picked our way through the field. Noe walked point, poking a trekking pole into the snow to search out solid ground. Hours later, exhausted, we staggered back into camp.

Sidles fared better. The Chinese climbers turned back with their guide an hour after we had turned back, but the Russian woman climbing with Sidles said she'd been to the summit before and that they should continue. They climbed on, with daylight bringing only slightly better visibility. In the clouds and the snow, they could just make out the sporadic wands along the route. A summit marker and small shrine told them they had reached the top of Europe.

Now we walked the path Sidles had taken five years earlier, across the broad saddle between the two summits and onto the slopes of the higher peak. The wind dropped to a mild breeze, and the rising sun warmed us.

We stepped onto the summit under a clear sky, mountains stretching to the horizon. I thought of Sidles standing here in the clouds and the snow, never seeing the world spread out before us now. And I thought of the chaplain's blessing on the grassy, windy hilltop in Colorado. "It seems fitting that we should leave our comrade to rest under the arching sky, as he did when he pitched his tent, or laid down in days gone by, weary and footsore," he'd said. "May each of us, when our voyages and battles of life are over, find a welcome in that region of the blessed, where there is no more storm-tossed sea or scorching battlefield."

Every moment, every choice, for the living and the dead alike, had led us here.

Noe tipped the small bottle, and the ashes poured out, pale gray on a field of white.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR BRIAN MOCKENHAUPT WROTE ABOUT NATURE THERAPY FOR PRISON INMATES

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide or self-harm, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline toll-free from anywhere in the U.S. at 1-800-273-8255. (To reach the Veterans Crisis Line, press 1.)

Vickers in full regalia. The design on the opposite page is taken from his sketch for the new Hosumdas Totem.

THE SOUL OF A NEW POLE

BY CHUCK THOMPSON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KILIII YÜYAN

FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, TRIBAL CHIEF AND ARTIST ROY VICKERS WAS OBSESSED WITH A TOTEM POLE THAT WAS TAKEN FROM A REMOTE NATIVE VILLAGE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA. HE DECIDED TO MAKE A REPLICA, AND ALL HE NEEDED WAS WILL, SKILL, AND A 17,500-POUND TREE.

CHIEF ROY HENRY VICKERS WANTS MY SHIRT.

I can't blame him. Faded green checkered Wrangler Retro. Mother-of-pearl snaps. Worn, not dingy. Everybody loves this shirt. Me most of all. I wear it whenever I think cameras might be around.

"You know what you're supposed to do when you're in a chief's house and he says he likes something you have?" Vickers asks.

Some distant raven song bends a note in my mind. I take off the shirt and hand it over.

"All yours," I say, dying a little inside.

Vickers grabs it without hesitation. "You've just done something very traditional in this part of the world," he says, running a thumb over those flashy buttons I'll never unsnap again.

"I feel totally authentic," I say.

This gets a big laugh out of Vickers—pretty much any joke gets a big laugh out of Vickers—because he's just finished telling me that there's no such thing as authentic. Also, he really digs the shirt. As Roy has said, "I'm an Indian cowboy."

If it seems unlikely that a 72-year-old First Nations chief and one of Canada's most celebrated artists—who happens to be in the midst of carving a replica of a famous totem pole, which he calls the biggest and most intimidating challenge of his career—would take time to pilfer a piece of shitkicker plaid off a visiting whitey, you don't know much about Roy Vickers.

Or about this part of the world, a First Nations outpost in northern British Columbia called the Skeena Valley. Here, the difference between a gift and a theft isn't always so easy to discern, and the payoff can take generations to play out.

FOR A WORK OF ART considered to be one of the most aesthetically advanced of its type, a surprising amount of mystery surrounds the totem pole that has consumed Roy Vickers for decades.

People can't even agree what to call it. In Vancouver, at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (MOA)—where the pole commands pride of place amid one of the world's most important collections of Northwest Coast Native art—curators refer to it as the Raven Pole, because there's a discernible image of a raven (along with two eagles) on its face.

Originally it was 21 feet tall, but because of damage to the bottom section it's now less than 18. Vickers insists that the totem, which has a distinctive 11-foot-long beak, depicts not a raven but a mythical bird known as a hok hok, a fearsome creature that crushes human skulls. Lately he's taken to calling it the Hosumdas Totem—*hosumdas* being a term used to denote the head chieftain of B.C.'s Oweekeno people.

No one knows who carved the pole or when it was raised. The MOA says circa 1890. Vickers guesses it could date back to the mid-1800s. But at this point it's impossible to be sure.

There's also disagreement about how the pole got from its location near the village of Oweekeno to the MOA. The museum's website says it acquired the pole from the British Columbia Totem Pole Preservation Committee in 1956. (The committee, now defunct, was a partnership of business and academic interests, formed to purchase and preserve totem poles around the province.) It wasn't put on display until many years later. Vickers and the eldest person in Oweekeno—his ninety-something Auntie Evelyn, who happens to be one of 50 people who speak the critically endangered Oweekeno language—believe that someone, possibly loggers, may have taken the pole from the village in the 1960s.

When I first heard about the pole, it supposedly had been stolen around the turn of the century. This is not implausible. Canada's Indian Act of 1876, and subsequent amendments, became the tacitly genocidal legal instrument through which the Canadian government suppressed First Nations cultures across the country until reforms began in the 1950s. In addition to tearing families apart and forcing children to attend residential schools, the Indian Act outlawed the custom of potlatch, a gift-giving feast that included the raising of totem poles, crucial to Northwest Coast indigenous identity.

The decades that followed, roughly 1875 until the 1930s, are referred to as the Great Scramble—a period when the landmark museums of America and Europe, and a handful of private collectors, ransacked the Pacific coast, plundering almost all known First Nations art. With their exotic representations of ravens, eagles, bears, killer whales, beavers, frogs, and other fauna, totem poles have long transfixed outsiders. In his book *Captured Heritage: the Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts,* Douglas Cole grimly describes the white world's locust determination to "salvage in the last hour a residue of a dying culture."

One thing everyone does agree on is that the Hosumdas Totem originally served as a house-entry pole for Oweekeno chief Simon Walkus, who died in 1913. Like the unknowable designs carved into the pole itself, the rest remains an intricate puzzle.

VICKERS INSISTS THAT THE TOTEM, WHICH HAS A DISTINCTIVE 11-FOOT-LONG BEAK, DEPICTS A MYTHICAL BIRD KNOWN AS A HOK HOK, A FEARSOME CREATURE THAT CRUSHES HUMAN SKULLS.

IN THE 1970S, Vickers visited the MOA regularly to study the art of his ancestors. Each time, he felt an inexplicable pull from the pole. Something about the abnormal artwork—except for the raven and eagle faces, the pole is mostly free-flowing, abstract designs—and the remnant spirit inside the wood wouldn't let him go.

"In those days, you could walk right up and touch it," Vickers remembers. "Growing up in Kitkatla, we used to climb on the old

Clockwise: the woods of northern British Columbia; attaching the beak; Vickers drumming and singing; timber framer Matt Lewis's toolbox

totem poles. No one told us not to. No one said they were sacred."

In 1994, an unexpected development sent Vickers on what he now sees as his destined journey. After a long association with an Oweekeno family, Vickers—whose ancestry is Tsimshian, Haida, Heiltsuk, and English—was adopted into the House of Walkus, hereditary chieftains in Oweekeno. He had suddenly become the adoptive grandson of an important figure: Simon Walkus, the chief who owned the pole, which stood in front of Walkus's house for decades.

By this time, Vickers had become a wildly successful artist. His Eagle Aerie gallery in the Vancouver Island town of Tofino was a tourist destination. A mini cathedral of cedar, it now draws 500,000 visitors a year from around the world. He'd created major works of art for the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria and was an adviser for the opening ceremonies at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. In 2006, he received the Order of Canada, the nation's second-highest civilian honor. His painting *A Meeting of Chiefs* had once been presented as an official state gift to Queen Elizabeth II. (Vickers now howls at the memory of that. "My painting, a gift to the queen of the colonizers!") In 2018, he designed the bentwood box and all the artwork for the Grateful Dead's 19-disc box set *Pacific Northwest '73–'74: the Complete Recordings*.

In 2014, Vickers decided he needed to do something about the pole, whose presence in the university's museum he'd come to resent as a literal representation of cultural theft. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was then in full swing, promoting explicit acts of healing between the government and the First Nations. Petitioning the museum to repatriate the pole back to Oweekeno made sense as a symbolic gesture. But transporting the fragile wood to the region could have damaged it further.

Gradually, the idea of carving a full-size replica began taking shape. A new pole would embody a reborn spirit. It also fit the modern fashion for reconciliation. You hear that word a lot in Canada these days, though when I mention the theme to Vickers during my visit last June, his usually cheerful expression clouds over.

"Reconciliation is a political word some people have put together to mean something," he says, standing in his open-air workshop, sounding a lot like Morgan Freeman sitting in front of the parole board in *The Shawshank Redemption*: "Rehabilitated? ... I know what you think it means, sonny. To me it's just a made-up word. A politician's word."

"It's not even possible in this world to reconcile the cultural genocide that's happened to our people," Vickers says. "You can't fix it. You can't make cultural genocide better. What is possible, what I want, is to regenerate a new culture, a new strength for people who seem to have lost their power. It's not lost. I'm proof."

VICKERS HAD the will, but even for a man of limitless vision the way forward seemed unclear. The original pole was carved from a red cedar so massive that, Vickers estimates, it was probably 1,000 years old. In addition to permission and cost, the logistics of finding, felling, and hauling a centuries-old tree out of the dense B.C. backwoods seemed beyond his considerable abilities.

Then the spirits of the ancestors intervened—at least, that's how Vickers sees it. On a sunny summer evening in August 2015, at a fishing lodge not far from Oweekeno, Vickers was introduced to a couple of middle-aged logging men who were in from Vancouver. Because he's a storyteller, he began telling the strangers about the Hosumdas Totem.

"If I wanted to find a really big cedar for a totem pole, who would I need to talk to?" Vickers eventually asked.

"How big?" one of the men replied.

"About two meters in diameter," Vickers said.

"Well, after jumping through a lot of hoops, eventually you'd have to talk to me," the man said. "I'm Ric Slaco, vice president and chief forester at Interfor." The Canadian company is one of the world's largest lumber producers.

Later, when I repeat this piece of remembered dialogue to Slaco in downtown Vancouver, he says that's exactly how it went down.

"You could just see it was something special. I bought into Roy's dream right away," Slaco says. "I said, 'We'll get a log for you.' "

On February 1, 2016, Interfor flew Vickers and Ted Walkus—his adoptive brother and the hereditary Oweekeno chief—into the Great Bear Rainforest to look at seven monumental cedar trees identified by field crews as totem candidates. None of the first trees were quite right—too wide, not straight enough, not... sincere enough, to borrow from Linus Van Pelt.

"You look for a spiritual connection to the living," Vickers says. "Each tree is like a human being, with its own personality. Same with people. Usually, something will jump out at you."

As the men continued their search in the Sandell River Valley, the last tree they hoped to see was the most difficult to reach, requiring a tough hike. Vickers was walking on a four-times-broken, 69-year-old ankle and a couple of cracked neck vertebrae, the result of being thrown from a horse. Both eyes would soon require surgery. But when he saw the tree, which probably weighed 17,500 pounds with all its limbs, he had no doubts.

"As soon as we saw it, Ted and I put a hand on the tree and started crying," Vickers says. "We knew it was the one."

After the men delivered a traditional blessing, a crew moved in and dropped the ancient tree in less than an hour. To accommodate its massive girth—its widest diameter was roughly 16 feet—they doubled up on the number of thick steel cables typically used for such operations. A Sikorsky Skycrane helicopter lifted the great log out of the forest.

BY HIS OWN accounting, Vickers has carved some 30 totem poles. But when he began to examine the Hosumdas Totem—during multiple trips to the MOA, which let him in before opening hours to take measurements and photos—he noticed something he'd never before appreciated. From top to bottom, the pole has a unique sense of flow that's different from typical pole designs, which tend to feature a stack of distinct sections.

"I BOUGHT INTO ROY'S DREAM RIGHT AWAY," SAYS RIC SLACO, CHIEF FORESTER AT INTERFOR, ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST LUMBER PRODUCERS. "I SAID, 'WE'LL GET A LOG FOR YOU.'"

"The artist who carved this pole was way ahead of his time," says Vickers. "When I began trying to copy his work, it twisted my mind. This brilliant artist also had the courage to do something totally out of the ordinary. There was no carver alive who could help me understand what he did."

Without the aid of a computer, much less tracing paper or a ruler—Vickers guesses that the carver probably did his designing with a pencil, string, and some pieces of bark—the artist had rendered a 2-D design onto a 3-D pole with supernatural accuracy.

In his workshop, with the new Hosumdas Totem about two-thirds complete,

Vickers walks me around it, explaining the innovative design in musical terms. In the same way a visionary composer might juxtapose major and minor keys and sharps and flats in ways that break convention, the pole's sections and shapes—ovoids, nested ovoids, U's, split U's, elongated S's—flow together like nothing Vickers has ever seen.

"He took the totally rigid forms of Northwest Coast art and bent them to his own way of design," Vickers says. "I am certain this pole is one of the most powerful statements a chief on this coast has ever made."

Music has long been a big part of Vickers's identity. In conversation, he'll spontaneously burst into one of the elegiac songs of his ancestors. One afternoon, he picks up a custom-made guitar—featuring cool raven-shaped sound holes—and sings me a haunting version of "Drums," Johnny Cash's virulently anti-colonial lament, delivered from the view of "just another empty Indian." It's an inspiring and unsettling interlude in his work on the pole.

"A carver who doesn't sing and dance doesn't get it," Vickers says.

VICKERS KNEW he couldn't carve the new Hosumdas pole alone. Using hook knives, chisels, and adzes to "move wood" on a giant log demands Sasquatchean strength and endurance. After a lifetime of abusing his body, Vickers has no business carrying a load of laundry down to the basement.

In the 1970s, he fractured three vertebrae after being thrown off a rodeo bronc. He broke a bone in his face, lost four teeth, and fractured vertebrae in his neck in a motocross wipeout. His oft-broken ankle finally had to be fused in 2016. In 2017, he had surgery in both eyes to repair corneal growths likely caused by excessive exposure to sun, wind, and dust.

To complete the pole, Vickers assembled a dream team of carvers. One was Latham Mack, a gifted Nuxalk sculptor originally from Bella Coola who makes masks that sell for well into five figures. He was brought in to help finish the pole's raven face and beak, and to texturize the overall piece. Another recruit was Dean Heron, an artist and instructor known throughout B.C. A Tlingit-Kaska from the Yukon, he says he had to adjust to what he refers to as the pole's "southern style."

"There's only one V cut on this entire pole," he says, pinpointing a typical difference between Tlingits and carvers down the coast. "All I did was work on the model pole the first two weeks I was here. The hardest part was figuring out the face."

The linchpin of the operation—the first person Vickers asked for help—is a local timber framer named Matt Lewis. Vickers calls him Magic Matt, and anyone who's ever employed the hit-or-mostly-miss services of an independent contractor quickly learns to stand in amazement at Lewis's brute strength, feather-touch artistry, and beers-can-wait work ethic. It was Lewis who muscled out the raw form of the pole's 11-foot beak, cutting with a Husqvarna chainsaw.

"It's a mind-fuck to get it right," Lewis says, marveling at the complexity of the totem's design. "We measured it and broke it down into sections, but this isn't the same piece of wood as the original pole. You can spend a lot of time chasing a knot around."

LEWIS IS WHITE—his father was a conscientious objector who moved to Canada from California to escape being drafted during the Vietnam War—and his centrality to the project raises another knotty point: the question of authenticity. Vickers has heard grumblings within the community.

"No one has the nerve to say something like that to my face, but someone will tell me so-and-so said this and that about my methods," he says. In fact, Vickers has been defending the use of chainsaws, computer-aided design, and nonindigenous carvers as far back as the 1990s, when he started using Aldus FreeHand to draw totem templates.

"To me it's almost like one of the ancestors created that program, it's so suited to this type of design," he says. "I admit there was a time I felt guilty about it, but these are the tools of our time, and we utilize them for our traditional art, just as past generations used the technology available to them."

"Our ancestors weren't dumb," adds Mack. "When they got steel introduced, the first thing they did was make knives and blades."

Vicissitudes of history aside, paternalistic worries about the ethnological integrity of Native art are almost as old as the market for that art. By the 1870s, white collectors were already expressing concerns about philistine influence on aboriginal art, as though Native cultures should remain preserved in amber for the cognoscenti's aesthetic pleasure.

"One can only shake his head sadly to see art so corrupted and debased," wrote an 1880s travel writer named Miss E. Ruhamah Scidmore about the evolving state of the silverwork she found among Stikine carvers in Wrangell, Alaska.

A commercial artist himself, Vickers knows that the prejudices of the marketplace have scarcely changed. When I offer an example, he finishes the scenario before I can.

"If a novice indigenous carver makes a halfway decent Haida mask, he might sell it for $1,000 in a Vancouver gallery," I say. "But let's say a Jewish woman from New York studies Northwest Coast art for decades and masters the form—"

The old Raven Pole, before its removal in the 1950s

"She can't even give her work away!" Vickers shouts. "There are millions of people who think this way—including many First Nations people—but there's no substance to it. Stopping a white man from carving a totem pole isn't protecting the culture. It's dividing people."

"I notice it's never anyone with a tool in their hand complaining about authenticity," Lewis says, noting that this is the fifth pole he's worked on with Vickers. "This pole was logged with a helicopter, eh? So where are we going with this?"

OWEEKENO IS A one-dirt-road village sited in a remote fjord on the hard-charging Wannock River, year-round population roughly 80. To get there last July for the potlatch and pole unveiling, I join 40 or so people in Port Hardy for a ten-hour trip on the Buttle Shuttle, a converted 1950s ferry that chugs up Rivers Inlet. July rains obscure some of the most epic scenery on the coast, but when we dock the skies lift, revealing a landscape of

FROM TOP: MICHAEL KEW/UBC MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY, VANCOUVER, CANADA; C. MACKAY/UBC MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY, VANCOUVER, CANADA

vertical valleys and mountain peaks shaped like cedar hats.

Standing beneath a roaring 200-foot waterfall—anywhere else, they'd dedicate calendars and heli-seeing flights to such a natural wonder; here it's just called Piss-Piss Falls—Vickers waves us in.

"It's always like this before a potlatch, thunder and lighting," he tells me. "That's the Thunderbird welcoming visitors."

Family and friends from up and down the coast hug, then load boxes of potlatch booty into a phalanx of muddy trucks. Vickers's eyes go red and puffy.

"I've been like this all week," he says, his voice abruptly becoming hesitant and thick. "It's really happening."

The legendary giveaways for which potlatches were partly banned (authorities believed they were bankrupting villages) were always only a small part of the tradition. The Walkus family potlatch is typical. Over the course of two nonstop days—endurance is a big part of the potlatch program, and newbies are rightfully terrified by the endless speechifying of old-timers—ceremonies are dedicated to honoring ancestors, noting recent deaths and births, settling disputes, commuting history and culture through song and dance, fostering business relationships, conducting coming-of-age initiations, gossiping, meeting potential mates from other villages, and lots of eating, which in Oweekeno means successive meals of salmon, elk, halibut, and crab.

WHEN A SHROUD IS CUT AWAY AND THE GOLDEN CEDAR POLE SHINES IN FRONT OF THE VILLAGE'S BIG HOUSE, PEOPLE GASP, THEN BREAK INTO A SUSTAINED CHEER AND TRILLING WHOOPS.

The unveiling of the Hosumdas pole kicks off the festivities. When a shroud is cut away and the golden cedar pole shines in front of the village's big house, the 250 or so guests gasp, then break into a sustained cheer and trilling whoops.

"We want to gift this to the community," says tribal chief Ted Walkus. "This isn't us, the Walkus family, putting our pole up there. This is us bringing something home that will enrich every one of us."

Back when it was on its side, sitting on sawhorses back in Vickers's carving shed, the pole was impressive. Now, standing up, it seems three times larger and more powerful. All weekend people gather at its base to talk. As if drawn by instinct, children keep returning to play in its imposing shadow.

During the potlatch, Ric Slaco is honored before the tribal chiefs, presented with a six-foot-tall replica pole and invited to join a dance. Everything at the potlatch moves counterclockwise around a great fire that's positioned in the center of the dirt-floored big house, giving an increasingly hypnotic aura to the proceedings.

Vickers's emotions overflow on the second day, when he formally adopts each of the three carvers—Lewis, Heron, and Mack—into his family. Lewis is given the Oweekeno name Saeis, meaning "cedar mat," acknowledgment of his prolific facility as a woodsman and a humorous play on his given name, Matt.

After the adoption ceremony, I chase down Paul, the soft-spoken, middle-aged Oweekeno man in charge of bestowing honorific names to adoptees. I want to pin down the English spelling of Lewis's tribal name. Paul doesn't seem to appreciate my zeal for fact-checking.

You could start the name with an *S* or an *O* or an *X*, he advises unhelpfully. I turn my notebook around and show him my transliteration: Saeis.

Paul shakes his head, then scans the horizon for some imaginary spirit. There's no way to accurately convey what a dork I feel like at this moment.

"Maybe. The last sound is too difficult to translate," he finally says.

The meaning in his grimace is clear. Write it down however you want, it says. You're gonna get it wrong no matter what.

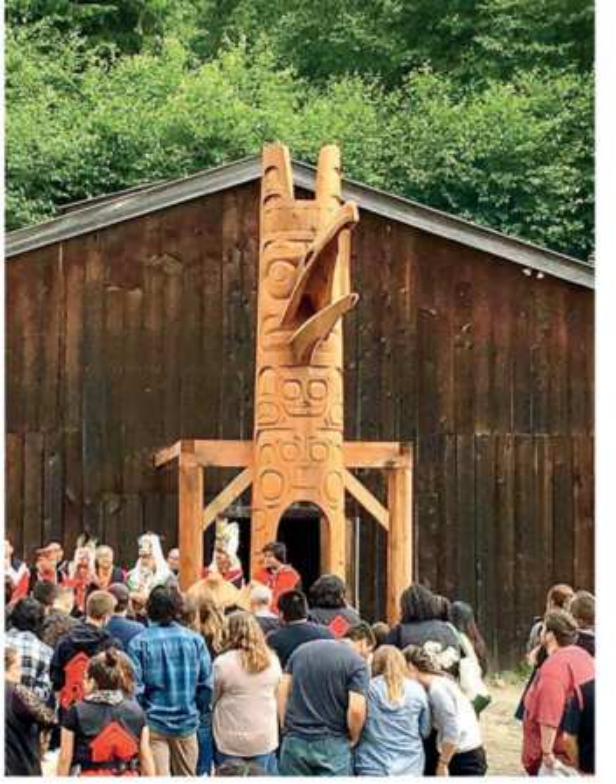
"We've always underestimated the power of the written word," one elder says during the potlatch. "Our culture can only be understood through visions and dances."

That's undeniable—no business is finished at a potlatch until it's been sealed with a performance—but for Vickers, nothing conveys the culture like a blade moving through cedar, transforming a historic theft into an improbable gift.

"It doesn't matter how or why the pole was taken from the village," he told me before the festivities got underway. "I'm glad it happened. The museum acquired it and valued it. If not for that, we wouldn't have created this monument today.

"Think about this," he adds. "Not so long ago it was illegal to do what I'm doing, just carving a pole for a potlatch! It feels like I was meant to do this. It feels like everything I have done in my life is all about getting this pole done."

Through the rain, you could see what a relief it was to finally move on.



Scenes from the potlatch and pole-raising

FROM TOP: CHUCK THOMPSON; JOYCE LEONG

CHUCK THOMPSON (@THOMPSON_CHUCK) WROTE ABOUT WHITEWATER PADDLING ON BRITISH COLUMBIA'S KLINAKLINI RIVER IN JULY 2016.

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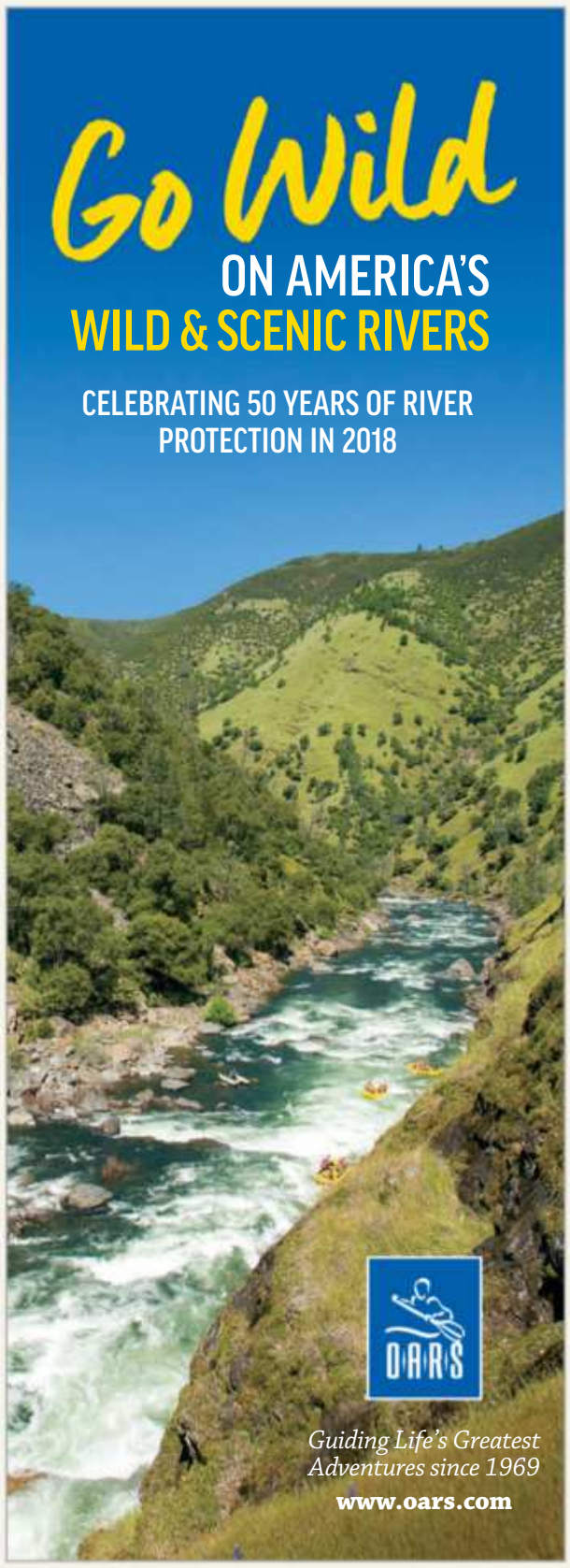

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