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ERIC HJORLEIFSON, COAST MOUNTAINS, B.C.
BY BLAKE JORGENSEN

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GETTING INVERTED BECAUSE WHEN IT'S TOO HOT UP TOP, YOU GOTTA GO DOWN

It's high noon, Aug. 6, 2006. Sweat rolls down my face and back as I labour across a large open slope to gain a ridge 100 yards away. The peak above me is jagged, like the cathedral towers dominating the skyline of the town in the distance. The sun's rays warm an otherwise cold breeze blowing off the lake some 5,000 feet down in the valley below.

Once on the ridge, my partner and I stop to take in the vista and drink some water. The views are amazing. You can see for miles. For a time we stand, basking in the sun's warm glow, completely oblivious to the upcoming storm that's brewing off the coast.

Over the next 12 hours Mother Nature will gather all her might and unleash a monstrous can of whoop ass upon us, pummeling the area mercilessly in a seven-day assault of wind and precipitation. But, for now, we are unknowing and content in the moment. Transfixed, I shed a few thoughts to my friends back home, riding bikes, going to the beach, banging nails; then I de-skin, fix my goggles, and prepare to drop a gorgeous, shady, south-facing slope of knee-deep powder.

That's right, folks, Aug. 6—knee-deep pow and shady south faces. This ain't no dream; this is a northern inversion.

Each summer, ski bums from around the globe flock to Chile or Argentina in pursuit of their own personal ski dream. The journey provides a chance to exchange your hot-on-the-job-site, swass-drenched-stain-on-your-shorts situation with the far more pleasing, balls-deep in powder, carving wide turns that send cold smoke billowing over your head—a situation that you prefer.

Skiiing in the Andes is amazing. It is the longest mountain range in the world, and with over 50 peaks exceeding 6,000 metres, it is also one of the tallest. These giants provide a natural border between Chile and Argentina, and they extend like the spine of the conti-

nent, some 8,000 kilometres up from the tip of Cape Horn north to the Caribbean: this region is a skier's utopia. There are resorts scattered on both sides of the border, up and down the spine, from world-class über destinations like Portillo and Las Lenas to the lesser known and often less crowded resorts like Corralco and Catedral Alta Patagonia.

If backcountry adventure is more your gig, then this place is your stadium arcadium. Everywhere you look there are mountains. Unnamed peaks jet up from oceanic fjords, glaciers stretch for hundreds of miles in all directions. There are volcanoes, lots of

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volcanoes. Chile alone is home to over 100 of these cylindrical giants, 36 of which are active, lava-spewin' bad boys. To survey a topo map is to drool.

It may be the geography and the skiing that brings you to this part of the world, but it's the people and the culture that'll keep you perpetually planning your next summer-ski vacation. The locals are friendly and hospitable, with a culture rich as the soil. In Argentina, the entire female population seems to be afflicted with some type of beauty burden, but they seem to be managing it. The beer's cheap. So is the food.

When it comes to the weather, like any other region of the world, there are years of feast, and there are years of famine. The winter season of 2006 brought a feast to the people of

Barilloche, Argentina. Powder was the main course, and it came served in heapfuls.

In the second week of August, over 300 centimetres of fresh fell on the resort of Catedral Alta Patagonia. For days the resort and surrounding area was belaboured with precipitation, the skies dumping nearly a metre of snow in one 24-hour period. Locals toted the storm as being the biggest provider of Argentine powder in over a decade. Roads closed, lifts halted, and parked cars were simply buried onsite. People scrambled to their rooftops to shovel away snow loads certain to wreak havoc on the homes of those who were away.

Like most other rogue environmental events, the storm dumped challenges along with precipitation. For days, our biggest obstacle was simply getting to the resort. Road crews had trouble keeping up with the constant barrage of sleet, rain and snowfall.

Accidents, power outages and manic cabbies all made morning access difficult. Once at the resort, you'd pray that the lifts would run, transporting you deeply and cautiously into the powder abyss. At moments during the week it felt as though the entire resort would be buried beyond recognition, or wiped out by a 10-foot crown of unconsolidated storm snow. We stuck to the trees and avoided convex rollovers. Ripping lines through sublime hardwood forests, eluding towering stands of bamboo, laughing. Forget the beach and the warm nights with friends on the patio, I thought. Forget the bike and my goal to find summer employment back home as a bikini waxer. Life is too good down here, troughing neck-deep through a northern inversion.

—Peter Moynes



MARK LASSETER GETS TITS DEEP IN THE SUMMERTIME BLUES. Moynes photo