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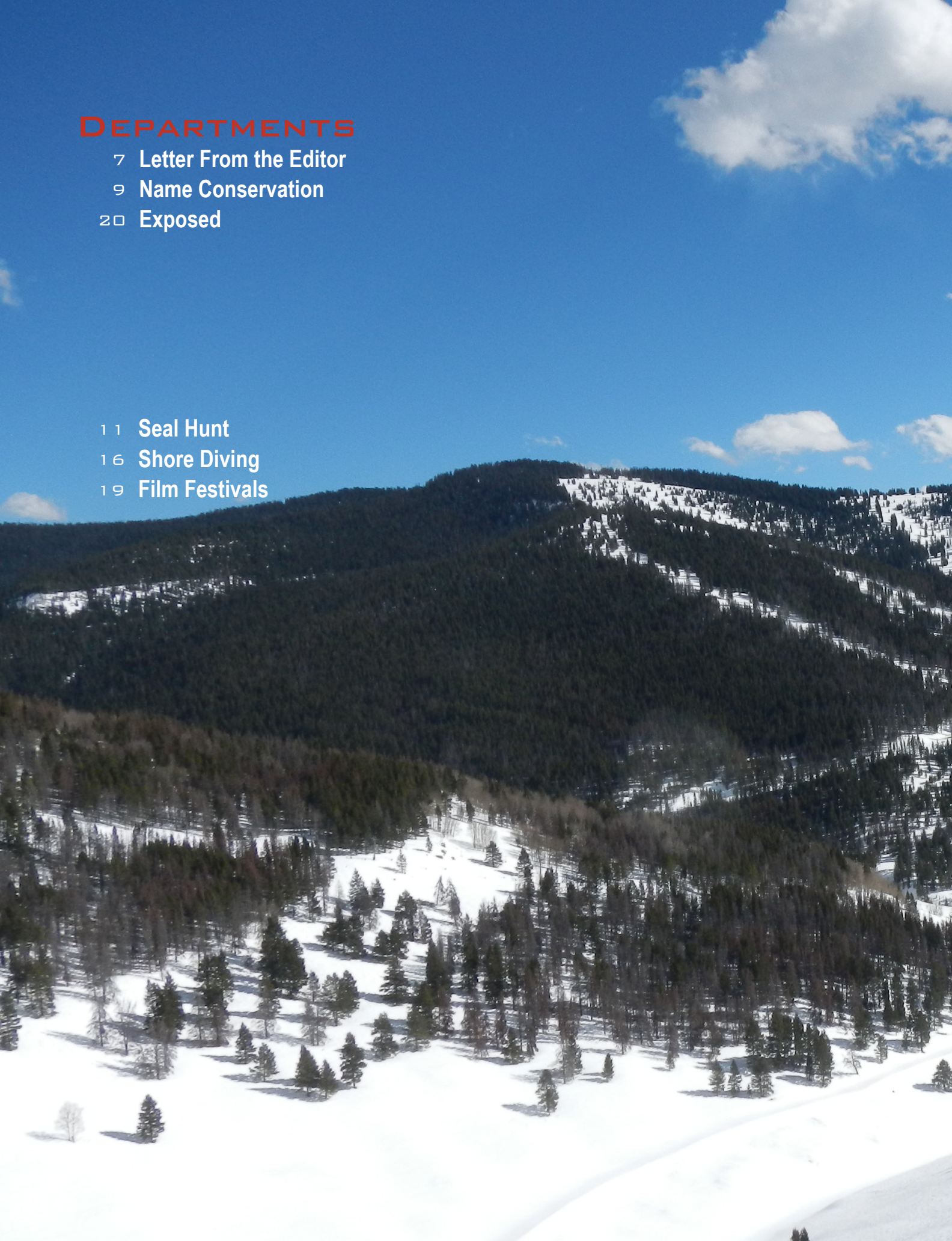


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DEPARTMENTS

- 7 Letter From the Editor
- 9 Name Conservation
- 20 Exposed

- 11 Seal Hunt
- 16 Shore Diving
- 19 Film Festivals



Front cover:

Jackson Hole, Wyoming
Photo: Erick Pound

This Page:

Blue Sky Basin, Vail, CO
Photo: Shane Williams



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Letter From the Editor



It's been one hell of a winter. A slow start to the snow gave way to some crazy storms that dumped 80 inches on northwest Wyoming in just eight days, 27 inches in northern Colorado in a single day, the greatest amount in memorable history and a record eighteen feet of snow in Cordova, Alaska. Not a place where a lot of snow makes the headlines. This of course also let to a very dangerous year with regard to avalanches. This winter has claimed 29 people including three highly trained, experienced, prominent members of the skiing community on Stevens Pass in Washington and three have while skiing inbounds. And that's in the United States alone. Of course, many of these tragedies occurred during days of

elevated avalanche danger. As with anything, education is critical to safe skiing, particularly in the backcountry. Head over the American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education (<http://avtraining.org>) and check your options for classes and sign up for one. Carrying an avalanche beacon anytime you are skiing, even in bounds, can seem silly but it may just save your life. But all is not gloom and doom. Spring is here, and that generally means stable snow for some warm weather last turns.

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Development in the Name of Conservation

A couple years ago I spent a few days backpacking in Shenandoah National Park. I came away with rather mixed emotions on the park and the national park system in general. First let's talk about the good. I was fortunate enough to visit Shenandoah in the fall and the colors of the foliage were simply amazing. Shenandoah has a nice feature on their website that lists backpacking trips by experience level and nights spent on trail (found here: http://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/campbc_trip_plans.htm). However, make sure you find a trip and print out the PDF to take along with you. The ranger I dealt with at the visitors center wasn't as much help as I would have preferred but none the less I managed to find a trip that seemed interesting and walked out of the ranger station with a back-country permit. I also applaud Shenandoah for allowing dogs on most of their trails. Other parks should take notice.

So what's not to like? There are over 500 miles of trails in a park that, although is about 70 miles north to south only measures about 7.5 miles wide. That leads to a network of trails where the word back-country becomes a bit of a misnomer. If you are looking for true solitude Shenandoah may not be the best place. In fact looking outside of the National Park system altogether may be the best bet. I prefer to use my miles to put distance between myself and others. In Shenandoah, however doing loops just for the sake of making miles seems to be the name of the game.

Now comes the real kicker. Apparently Shenandoah has received a sizable chunk of money through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (stimulus bill passed during the recession) and is putting that money into Skyline Drive (the road that runs the 70 miles from end to end) and refurbishing their overlooks. While that sounds all well and good it of course comes at a price, in addition to the money. Traffic, delays, and the noise can be heard even after being on trail for days. But those are just inconveniences. The real question is that of the sustainability of what I have taken to calling the 'development in the name of conservation' policy. Does it make sense to find a place you want to protect and build a road right down the middle of it sprinkled with tourist shops where you can buy silly t-shirts, hamburgers and refuel your RV? If we really care about conserving the wilderness areas for future generations than we should put effort into saving them from development, not going out of our way to develop them. There are plenty of beautiful miles you can drive your RV and stop for a hot dog on your whirlwind tour of postcard worthy photos, the National Parks shouldn't be one of them.

If you are planning on heading to Shenandoah check out The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (<http://www.patc.net>) publishes great topographical maps of the area that you may find very useful planning and during your trip.





Seal Hunt

In Yupik country the seal hunt is the lifeline of the community. Sled dogs and their human caretakers both rely on the bounty from the hunt.

by Eric Cedric

I am sitting in the little Bering Air offices in a back corner of the already tiny Nome airport. It's dank, dark, grey, and cold outside. 8:30 am and the sun won't poke its head above the horizon for another hour or so. I am waiting to catch my flight from Nome to St. Michael via Unalakleet. I am flying through some daylight hours so I will be able to see part of this corner of Alaska from the air. The flight to Nome from Anchorage was dark with nothing to see. It took what seemed forever just to get through security in Anchorage. The highlight of the airport was flirting with a tall, sexy Russian girl who was working at the Starbucks. However, now that I am here, in Nome, I am in full swing adventure mode, preparing to live in the Yupik Eskimo village of St. Michael for the next several months of my life, training sled dogs and running dog-sledding

trips into the Northwestern Arctic of Alaska and into the Russian Kamchadal region.

Sitting here in the Nome airport, surrounded by the goings-on, I realize that I am minority out here, and that this will be the first time I have ever lived as such. There are not many Viking looking white-boys out here. This is Yupik country, and I am the outsider. At 6-feet 1-inches, and blonde, I "stand out" in the crowd, double entendre intended.

Flying out of Nome and into St. Michael is a white-knuckle affair, and one that leaves a lasting impression of the isolation and austere vastness of the arctic. White, wind-whipped seas, and low rolling volcanic cones covered in arctic tundra are the only things you see as the plane makes its way across the lonely part of the

world.

After landing, my new boss takes me directly to a fuel tank farm where he immediately gets me to work, pumping out mud and water from around the tank perimeters. The first look at the village brings one word to mind, squalor. There is no doubt that while this is technically part of the United States, the village and area is essentially a third world country.

Village life is filled with mud, garbage, human waste and more mud. It is generous to call the village ugly, yet the region surrounding it is somehow mystical. There is an intangible quality that hangs over the land, making it seem almost prehistoric. The only other place in the world I have experienced anything similar is in the remote regions of Iceland, another tundra covered northern land.

There is no doubt that this is frontier living. Even in the 21st century, being here strikes a feeling of being on the edge. One Yupik elder describes this land by saying “it is not the end of the world, but you can see it from here.” Regarding the human interactions, this is the frontier as well, as disagreements are more often solved with fists or bullets than mediation.

Beyond the thought that a mere disagreement may be met with fists, the biggest obstacle here as best I can figure is mud. Nasty, gross, filthy, dog-shit filled mud. It is everywhere and it is a part of life here before the snow and ice arrives. No outdoor gear purchased from fancy gear stores survives this stuff. This is the land where Carhartt, and industrial work clothes are essential. Wear a

fancy-boy piece of Patagonia and it gets shredded in days.

This is especially noticed when working the dog lot. This is my second day in, and I have started working the dogs and dog yard. The dogs get fed a mix of seal fat, high protein kibble and water twice a day. To get the seal fat, raw flippers and blubber get placed into a large outdoor double-boiler where it gets rendered down into a liquid tallow that gets poured over the kibble. Consider this high-octane fuel for the dogs as the calorie return on it is incredible. In addition to the seal fat, Tom Cod also get boiled down, into a soupy fish-broth given to the dogs.

Don't think that the seal and cod magically appear either; Glen, a Yupik, routinely goes out on seal hunts, and the cod is retrieved from nets dropped into the frigid Norton Sound. About every third day, I make a run out to the nets to pull up the fish, place them into large plastic tubs, then bring them back for boiling and rendering.

If this all sounds grimy and gross, I can tell you, it is. However, I am fortunate because my house is one of the only houses in the village that has its own shower. I am very lucky that after a day spent scooping dog waste, boiling seal fat and handling dogs I get to come home and take a hot shower. Most of the Yupik are not so lucky, as indoor plumbing is a rarity in these parts. For toilet needs, this is the land of the “honeypot”. Outhouses have holding pots called “honeypots” that are used for waste. As they fill up, you carry them out to the side of the muddy streets where they are collected by a weekly “poop-patrol” and they are then brought out to be dumped into a huge lagoon of human waste. Hepatitis runs



rampant out here. Before you begin thinking it is all bad, let me tell you that the rewards out here truly help erase the bad. I was invited to go on seal hunts with the Yupik which is an honor and spectacle. As a “Gusiq” – white guy – I am not allowed to hunt the seals, and I don’t want to; but being invited to go out in the boats and observe the hunt, as well as be there on the beach when they return is an experience that is worth the hardship.

I was taken out on my first seal hunt with Glen. He told me to “go dress like you’ve never dressed before” and to prepare for the nastiest conditions I could imagine. I put on two layers of long-underwear, an expedition weight top, primaloft pants, Gore-Tex bibs, arctic boots, a down jacket, glacier glasses, a parka mushing-overcoat, fur trapper hat, gloves, hat and seal furred mittens. Barely able to move, I waddled down to the beach where we all loaded into the boat and made our way out into the minus 10 degree weather. Even with all this, I was astonished at how fast my feet and fingers cooled down, and I am a seasoned high-altitude mountaineer. I can honestly say this was one of the most uncomfortable excursions I have participated in.

Once out in the boat and floating through the pack ice, I was amazed at how astute, observant and aware the Yupik men are when hunting seal. Glen could spot a spotted seal head from at least a mile away. I have no idea how he pulls this off, but it is truly an amazing thing to see. Glen’s brother in law, Paul, came along and he shot two spotted seals. As we pulled up to the beach of St. Michael, many of the locals turned out for the butchering. The Y’upiq once hunted spotted seals using harpoons and hand-thrown “atlatls” – a combination slingshot and spear. Today, they use .22 caliber rifles to take the seals. Even so, the fact they can spot the seal out in the ice and land a shot is testimony to their skill and heritage of living with what the surroundings give them. When they hit a seal, it naturally floats due to the blubber and fat, making retrieval a matter of keeping an eye on the dead animal and navigating through the pack ice.

The retrieval proved to be physical, and rough. Glen directed the boat through pack ice, and “bergie-bits” – loose chunks of ice



that can be the size of Volkswagens. This is particularly dangerous, as the saying “the tip of the iceberg” is a reality. What you see on top is about 1/8 of what is below. Disturb it too much and it could roll, and take you with the boat out.

As Glen brought the boat up to the floating seals, Paul grabbed the gaff – a long metal hook – and handed it to me while he crouched low into the boat and held onto the sides. Paul directed me to thrust the tip of the hook as deep into the seal’s blubber and flesh as possible and then pull it in toward the side of the boat. If this sounds easy, it isn’t. While the seal’s body is covered in a blubber-layer, it is not soft. I had to truly swing the shit out of the gaff to bring it onto the dead seal’s back. Once the hook was set Paul told me to begin pulling it in toward the boat where he and Glen would pull it up and into the bottom.

Pulling the seal across the water, and through ice is difficult as the seal weighs close to 300 or 400 lbs. Imagine trying to pull a black bear across an obstacle laden room and you get an idea of what it is to pull a seal through ice-filled water. I could only imagine how this was done when the Yupi’q would hunt the seals out of kayaks and skin boats.

Paul and Glen yanked the seal up and into the boat, along with gallons of the briny and ice-cold water. It splashed everywhere

and soaked us through our various layers of clothing, adding to the discomfort. Soaked gloves and mittens made the situation seem more dangerous as my fingers began to numb out with a rapidness I have never seen or experienced before.

Once the seals were on the boat, Glen brought the boat back to the beaches of the village. I jumped out from the bow, and gripped the ice-covered line and began to pull the boat up with full force, taking advantage of the inertia and making sure to get the boat as far out of the water as possible.

The three of us coordinated a lift and toss of the seals onto the beach. Again, our gloves were soaked, and every fiber of me was screaming to get the hell out of the cold and into the warmth of the house. There was still work to be done, and I had to stay with the men to prove my mettle as a measly Gusiq.

This was where things really got interesting. Paul and Glen cut the seals up and handed out choice cuts and the ribs to the elders of the village. Everyone got some of the seal, but according to a “pecking order”. The elders got the best cuts while the village n’er do wells got the fat and entrails. It was something, watching this take place, knowing that it has been done this way for hundreds of years prior. This is not like going into a Safeway and buying a steak.

Spending time in the village, you fall into a pattern of work, sleep, and waiting for the weather to cooperate. Finally, snow hit us, and the dogs can get run. The dogs themselves know when the time is prime for sledding. They bark and howl and twitch with giddy an-

mushing is that the dogs are working dogs, born and bred to break trail and pull weight. When they know the time has come to run, they come alive.

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Shore Diving Whytecliff Park and Vancouver Area

Shore diving the Vancouver area of British Columbia can yield rewarding, if not cold, results.

by Jordan Kessler

The extended north shore of the Vancouver area offers a healthy number of dive sites each with their unique attractions and nuances. Shy of accidentally trespassing onto industrial property or lack of access to the water, there is nothing stopping you from diving along all of the Vancouver shoreline. Make sure to check the tides though as the narrowing around the Lions Gate can create deceptively strong currents during the tidal interchange. There is a large amount of marine construction and industrial facilities which will limit your ability to just drop in on the north shore. However, both West and North

Vancouver maintain community parks along the inlet with parking lots close to the water. More often than not, you probably won't see much along the shore line but exploring somewhere new is always an adventure.

The most popular dive site in the Vancouver area is Whytecliff Park on the far west end of the North Shore. This is located in the municipality of West Vancouver with Horseshoe Bay Ferry Terminal just around the point. Whytecliff Park offers dives for all skills and abilities based on the approach you take. Starting with the easiest, you enter via the beach which

slides into the bay crossing over a short patch of medium sized rocks. If you try to enter while ferry or boat wake is hitting shore it can be tricky. With proper timing this generally isn't much of a concern. Once you're in deep enough to float you can descend and follow the natural slope down out into the bay. Aim to swim at least 30 ft (10 m) to avoid wasting air. Once you're at your desired depth simply follow the contours left or right and stay within the rock walls that border on either side. You're likely to find a couple of open water courses in this area and can easily mistake another diver for your buddy if you swim near them. It is best to avoid the courses because the students have a tendency to stir up the bottom and kill the visibility. The bottom composition is very silty and made up of dirt and mud. If you're not careful and kick wildly you'll find yourself in an underwater dust storm. Massive sun stars, nudibranchs, sea cucumbers, crabs (large, hermit and decorator) and occasionally a seal or two frequent the area. Other than that, there isn't much to look at, but is a good location to refresh your skills and work on buoyancy control. Navigation is very simple thanks to the contour

of the bay, and as I mentioned above, if you get lost you'll be corralled by the walls on both sides. Just follow the slope of the bay upward and it will bring you right back to the beach.

For those looking for something a little more advanced swim out into the bay and to the left, next to the 'islet' which is a large rock formation making up the south wall of the bay. You can swim out as far as you'd like along the rock until you determine you would like to descend. I would recommend going at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way out to the point of the islet before starting your dive but there is no wrong spot to begin. The 'islet' wall drops to about 800 feet, exposed to the open waters of Howe Sound providing a sense of exposure that can play games with your mind. If you find yourself experience a bit of vertigo just remember your training and find a spot on the wall to focus on until you reestablish your bearings. Follow the wall around to the point and make sure to inspect all the nooks and crannies you come across, you never know what you'll find. I would probably avoid 'monsters from the deep' style movies the night before to keep that extra stress out of your mind, but if you consider yourself a bit of

a thrill seeker or that kind of thing doesn't bother you then go for it! All giant squid aside, it is an interesting dive with plenty to see along the wall. Most of the inhabitants are smaller in size but quite plentiful.

The north side of the bay has the most diverse marine life of all dives at Whytecliff Park. Getting there is as simple as swimming to the right as you leave the shore. Depending on where you start this dive will determine how much wildlife you will see. In the shallower waters there are rocks blanketed in kelp that is home to hundreds of decorator crabs and smaller, fascinating life. Nudibranchs are very common in these areas but are not always easy to find. This area overlaps the beach dive so you're better off starting farther out along the rock and using this as a safety stop and end location to your dive. The right side of the bay is also composed of a rock wall leading out to a small point. At the end of the point is a day marker (mini lighthouse) which is where the better part of the dive lies. This is also a very common location for the resident seals to sun bathe or rest. So if you're lucky they'll be on the rocks as you enter your dive. Seals commonly investigate visiting divers and are quite playful. There are videos of divers at Whytecliff Park with a seal chewing on their fins and playfully bumping them. Just be sure to recognize when playtime is over, the seals will blow bubbles at you when it is. If they do, don't be alarmed; calmly enjoy the rest of your dive in a different direction. Getting to the day marker requires about a five minute relaxed surface swim. The swim is easy and is no problem even with a small current, although shooting for slack tide will be best. The goal of this dive is to make it to the Plumose Anemone Gardens. If you're unfamiliar with Plumose Anemone, they are a beautiful grandiose anemone that can range from a few inches to almost two feet (or .6 of a meter for us Canadians). They resemble cauliflower in shape, with a tall slender column and hundreds of tentacles waving freely at the top. These vibrant anemones inhabit the exposed outcropping of rock feeding off the food supply provided by the passing currents. The surrounding water is visibly brighter around the garden given the amount of light they reflect, creating a soothing environment to dive in. There is also a resident Octopus who frequently makes appearances. The giant pacific oc-



topus is a beautiful creature, with a salmon like skin tone. It is the largest species of octopus in the world and can grow to greater than 23 ft and 100lbs. The garden's little guy isn't that large, but he is a beauty! This area is teeming with life and is a joy to dive, especially for a dive that is so accessible.

The last Dive location at Whytecliff is called "The Cut." Its entrance location is in the far end of the parking lot at the roundabout. Enter via a small path and steep but easy set of stairs descending into a narrow opening in the rock. The Cut is named for the obvious reason that it appears a Titan from lifetimes past took a large battle axe and split the rock with tremendous power. Once you drop in life begins immediately and surrounds you on all fronts. It is a difficult dive for those lacking in experience and is not recommended, but to those comfortable in their abilities, it is the ideal place to go as it requires more concentration and experience dealing with currents. The beauty of this spot is that once you are in the water it immediately drops off and the dive starts. It requires very little effort to get into the heart of the surrounding marine life. The Plumose Anemone garden is also just around the corner from this entrance. This provides the opportunity to approach the gardens from both directions and see what each has to offer. Each diver has their own preference in what they find enjoyable, most of which should be covered between the last two dives mentioned. It faces open

water and is exposed to the tidal currents of Howe Sound which is not a problem, just be sure to watch the tide chart and aim for slack tide.

Diving in and around Vancouver is best during the winter months and is the best time of year for visibility. It's obviously much colder outside making diving in a wetsuit uncomfortable for anyone. The temperature of the water itself doesn't vary by much, no more than a few degrees Celsius. Thanks to currents, there are times where the temperature can get as low as four degrees Celsius but usually hovers somewhere between six and nine degrees. If you get lucky, you'll see a couple of local baboons diving in wet suits and coming out with blue lips shivering like jonesing crack addicts. Seeing that reminds me that hypothermia is a shitty experience and I am thankful to dive in a dry suit. Just make sure to bring enough layers and you should be fine.

British Columbian waters are home to some of the most pristine diving sites and conditions in the world. In fact, the farther north you go the more amazing the diving gets but the deeper your wallet needs to be. Diving around Vancouver is beautiful and very affordable. There are many dive shops in the Vancouver area all of which rent gear. If you are going to be renting a dry suit, make sure to bring your own layers as not all the dive shops provide liners. Check out International Diving Center on Arbutus and

10th Avenue in Vancouver. The staff are all very knowledgeable, professional and friendly.

Driving to Whytecliff and other local Vancouver sites is relatively simple. Assuming you are leaving from the downtown core of Vancouver you will cross the Lions Gate bridge (the big green one). Be sure to crank up the music and take in the breathtaking beauty that is Vancouver! Whether it's before the dive or after and regardless of the quality of the dive itself, this spectacular Pacific vista is worth the drive alone. A beautiful sunset or sunrise is the real prize, but there is something to be said for each of the conditions Vancouver has to throw at you. If you happen to miss the sunrise on the way to your dive and come back too early for the sunset, there are ample locations to

enjoy some cold pints and good eats while taking it all in. Denman street at English Bay in Vancouver has a good selection of pubs and restaurants. Each pub has varying

drinks specials and tasty post dive treats all complimented by beachside location.





North American Mountain Film Festivals

There is no shortage of Film Festivals these days. There are few, however that are dedicated to the mountains and the culture they foster. The Banff Mountain Film Festival was started as a way to pass the time of the 'shoulder season' until skiing days had arrived. Now, most of these festivals take place during a similar time frame respective to their local weather patterns. As a result a unique brand of film festival has arisen and come to be a source of inspiration for those of us seeking adventure. Each festival is unique in its own right but will surely host something akin to each attendees interests.

Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival

Arguably the mother of all mountain film festivals, the Banff Mountain Film Festival has been going strong since 1976. In addition to the film festival Banff also sponsors a book and photography competition. The festival takes place over nine days at the end of October in Banff, Canada. However, for most it's not what happens at the festival itself but what happens the following spring and fall, the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour. The tour is sponsored by local organizations and in many cases raises money for local outdoor programs. Screenings exceed 600 on any given year including one on Antarctica. The Radical Reels tour is also a product of the Banff Mountain Film Festival. One night during the festival is billed as the Radical Reel Night. The Radical Reel Night features short, adrenaline filled movies from some of the foremost experts in action sports.

<http://www.banffcentre.ca/mountainfestival>

Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival

The Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival takes place over nine days in early February. The size and accessibility of this festival make it a great start to the circuit. It combines epic tales, personal projects, couples expeditions and notable presentations during its run in Vancouver. Footage is brought in from all walks of the globe and is home to amazing footage and countless stories. The Festival is not entirely comprised of films based in the mountains and offers a variety of eye candy for those who fall under the 'Adventurer' label. Something notable is the relaxed, professional attitude this festival holds. It is very common for viewers to speak one on one with the presenters before or after their presentations. All in all the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival boasts some of the world's premier outdoor enthusiasts and is a must see event.

<http://www.vimff.org>

Squamish Mountain Festival

Held in mid-June in picturesque Squamish, British Columbia over three days. Squamish lies between Vancouver and Whistler and has the

"Outdoor Capital of Canada" reputation among outdoor enthusiasts. Name a sport involving mountains, fjords, rivers, oceans and whatever else you can think of and you will find it here. It is only fitting Squamish should host a festival. Among the films and presentations this year is a Robot Disco Party which is sure to involve a few wobbly pops and some good times with live DJ's. There is also a chance to peruse and demo new gear on the market. You definitely won't have to venture very far to try out the newest Gucci gear. There are a lot of side events and activities going on making this a very interactive events and a great experience all around.

<http://squamishmountainfest.com>

Mountain Film Festival

The Mountain Film Festival takes place during Memorial Day Weekend in Telluride, Colorado. Like Banff, Telluride also does a tour of their films, although with a decidedly less aggressive schedule. Mountain Film is the premier mountain film event in the United States and has been an ongoing tradition since 1979, one of the longest running film festivals. This festival is referred to as "inspiring" by its attendees and is definitely a must attend event. A plethora of side activity provides the reputation earned by this festival and presentations range from academics to adventurers, artists and activists. Each year is comprised of roughly 75 films from around the world, parties, musical events and much more. This is surely a must visit festival with proof in the extended existence and reputation.

<http://www.mountainfilm.org>

5 Points film festival

The 5 Points film festival takes place each year in late April and early May in Carbondale, Colorado. Originally named for the technical climbing grade, the 5 points have taken on a bigger meaning; respect, commitment, humility, purpose, and balance. Five principals that any outdoorsman is intimately familiar with. As a relatively young festival going into its fourth showing, it has the right ideals and promise to make its mark as a top film festival to attend. With unique events like campfire stories and an inspiring photo exhibit titled 'The more I see...' you will surely be captured. With a promising line up of films and presenters, everything will be captured. As an added bonus to lure and support the younger audience, the Five Points festival has started the Dream Project which is a bursary to support and enable high school students to venture into the unknown and feature the bursary winners on an introspective film. If you find yourself with the time, Carbondale is definitely worth the trip to view this amazing event.

<http://www.5pointfilm.org>

Chalet on Lake Tekapo, NZ
Photo: Angie Williams

