

FLIGHT OF THE DODO

A FATHER'S LAST HUCK

BY BRIAN SCHOTT // PHOTO BY KEVIN CASS



It's time to fly.

I place my ski in the vice on the workbench, twist the clamps closed and run my fingers slowly over the rough metal edge, shovel to tail. From the black metal toolbox, I select a file, and place its diagonal teeth flat on the ski with both hands, pressing down with just enough pressure to create an imperceptible bend. I work slowly from tip to tail, carefully shaving away worn, dull metal, to expose a shiny, sharp edge that frames the black ski base. I brush away tiny filings as I work, and then I begin to renew the side edge. I test the sharpness of the cut with the flat of a fingernail. A diamond stone removes the burrs; a gummy stone buffs the edge to a sword finish. I am content with this art.

I watch the snow falling straight from the sky, piling up under darkness, reflecting in the streetlights outside the shed window. I press green wax against a hot iron and drip stringy beads down both skis. I massage it in, feeling the pores of the base open under my hands.

My wife and young child are sleeping when I sneak off to the mountain. I drive the hairpin mountain road slowly, sharp studs biting into whitened pavement. From the parking lot to the summit, I climb. There's a foot of new snow, and the base has hit 90 inches. The 40-foot cliff—my 40-foot cliff—is finally ready. Dropping cliffs for me has always been about controlled risk, about stamping down fear. The fear is present today.

The first turns from the summit hold the most magic. I do not think. My body knows exactly what to do. The pressure of my skis melts a thin film of snow, and they glide like a knife over soft butter. My arms direct my poles. I drive my body down the fall line.

This is love. Snow pushes and parts against my thighs. I breathe hard, snow exploding over my head and surging into my open mouth, sliding off my sweating goggles and sticking to my hat. The familiar cliff approaches, and I stamp the fear once more and do not hesitate. It's the perfect storm, and the rocks below are buried deep.

At the medical clinic, I lie in a soft bed, dizzy. My chest hurts. "You did what?" the doctor asks. "How old are you?"

"The concussion appears mild," he tells me. "Your ribs have been stretched from the backlash of the impact. It will hurt for some time, Peter Pan."

I lie there watching the snow fall outside the window as the lost boys make their laps. I think about my little boy just waking up and decide that my skis will never again carry me through space quite the same way. This cliff was my last. There's love, and then there's love.

Jack Pilot takes flight in the Idaho bc.