

BIGGER, BETTER, FASTER...

Outside ski racing, no one cares how fast you go or how many runs you ski, right? Wrong. Contrary to the notion of skiing-as-recreation, a handful of maniacal skiers are bent on breaking every record imaginable.

In early April, former U.S. Ski Teamer Rusty Squire skied from dawn till dusk at Big Sky, setting a new world record for vertical feet skied in a day: 322,300. Assisted by a helicopter, he tucked 220 inbound runs in 10 hours, raising \$10,000 for charity.

While Squire's vertical was on groomed terrain, other record setters racked up verts in the backcountry. On April 20, two San Francisco businesswomen broke the backcountry heli-riding mark by accumulating 305,525 vertical feet in just under 15 hours. Skier Jennifer Hughes and snowboarder Tammy McMinn made 101 off-piste runs with Klondike Heliskiing near Atlin, British Columbia.

Just eight days later, *their* record was broken. Canadian ski racers Ed Podivinski, Luke Sauder, and Chris Kent joined up with Swiss freeskiier Dominique Perret to set the mother of all endurance records by skiing a whopping 353,600 vertical feet in the B.C. backcountry.

With the help of Mike Wiegele's heli-ski operation, they made 73 runs in fourteen and a half hours, averaging 50 miles per hour on each thigh-burning descent. (Hughes and McMinn can take comfort in the fact that they still own the women's record.)

"I think 400,000 is possible," Squire says. "I just don't know if there's anyone nuts enough to try it. When you're out there that long, it's almost surrealistic."—*Brian Metzler*



Hughes (left) and McMinn used spread sheets to meticulously plan the day, right down to the pee breaks.

McMinn shreds way to heli-skiing record

Ex-Springs snowboarder covers 305,525 vertical feet in day

By **Mike Spence**
The Gazette

Take a dream. Stir in large portions of determination and analysis. Add a smidgen of whimsy.

And what do you have? In Tammy McMinn's case, a batch of world records.

The former Colorado Springs resident teamed with Jennifer Hughes, 35, of San Francisco to set three world records and break four existing world marks in heli-skiing.

McMinn, on a snowboard, and Hughes, on skis, covered 305,525 vertical feet (232.3 miles) at Paradise Peak near Atlin, British Columbia, in less than 15 hours on April 20.

The feat is equivalent to snowboarding from the summit of Mount Everest to the base more than 10 times between breakfast and dinner.

"I think it's more special than a medal, just the memories," said McMinn, 31, a 1984 Doherty High School graduate who has worked in San Francisco as a computer analyst the past four years.

"We're never going to forget something like this. For me, it was probably bigger than going to the Olympics because it's such a unique thing that we did."



Former Colorado Springs resident Tammy McMinn, center, is flanked by pilot Bill Karman, left, guide George Robbi, skier Jen Hughes and guide Bernhard Kriner. The crew helped McMinn and Hughes set four world marks in heli-skiing on April 20.

Some might say the feat was mad. That notion makes McMinn laugh.

"One of my friends said, 'My dad and I are in awe of what you've done. My mom thinks you're crazy,'" McMinn said. "I said, 'I can't believe it took a stunt like this for your mom to realize that.'"

While the adventure might seem a little tetchy to some,

it took months of preparation and the synchronization of an Indianapolis pit crew for McMinn and Hughes to complete 101 runs down a 3,025-foot slope in 14:50.

McMinn spent three months in serious training for the event, doing endurance work and weightlifting as much as 3 hours a day Monday through Thursday. She snowboarded 7

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hours a day Friday through Sunday.

McMinn also spent hours lining up sponsors, who donated snowboards and skis and helped pay for helicopter fuel.

"In the original proposal, we put down 120,000 feet," McMinn said. "We figured, maybe we can do 150,000 feet. We knew the men's record was 294,000."

Eventually, McMinn and Hughes duo increased their goal to 180,000 vertical feet. Yet, even those plans changed when McMinn decided to apply her computer expertise to a three-day trial at Lake Tahoe.

"The first day, I did 67,000 feet. The second day I did 80,000 feet over 11 hours. My last peak day, I did 75,000 feet," McMinn said. "I kept spreadsheets of every single run, tracked how long it took. I took the average times from all three days, then tried to place an estimate of what actually could happen in Canada."

The result?

McMinn figured she and Hughes could do close to 285,000 vertical feet — tantalizingly close to the existing men's world record of 294,340 set by Mark Bennett.

"I just basically said if we fall somewhere between 180,000 and 285,000, I'll be

See **SNOWBOARD**/SP5

Vertical feats

Editors note: Last issue, we published an avalanche of letters criticizing obsessed heli-skiers profiled in "Vertical Culture" (January 1998). Since then, the heli-skiing record was broken twice: first by Tammy McMinn and Jennifer Hughes (photo, right), who logged 305,525 vertical feet in a day with Klondike Heliskiing of Atlin, B.C., then again, nine days later, by Edi Podivinsky, Luke Sauder, Chris Kent, Dominique Perret and guide Robert Reindl, who pumped 353,600 verts in a day at Mike Wiegele Heli-copter Skiing in Blue River, B.C. Wiegele's defense of the quest for heli-skiing records follows:

Going for the record was just plain fun, exciting, challenging and motivating. We skied to reach for higher achievement and enjoyment. None of the vertical challengers or terminators insists anyone attempt the challenge. The following points are what motivate us:

1. The people who take part in the World Vertical Challenge are high-profile athletes. They come here to ski as much as they can in a day or a week.
2. It gives us an exciting charity fundraising event for our avalanche research and education foundation, the National Ski Team and Youth Development. To date, more than \$60,000 has been raised.
3. It is the professional duty of ski guides to lead skiers according to their ability, their



desire and within their comfort level. We pursue higher achievement and excellence.

4. We have never criticized Mark Bennett's world record. To the contrary, we admired this achievement and congratulated him.
5. The article's criticism was highly unfair and unethical. I guess people like Wayne Gretzky, Tiger Woods, Donovan Bailey, Ken Read, Steve Podborski, Pete Sampras and many more are unworthy people in society because of their high performance.

MIKE WIEGELE

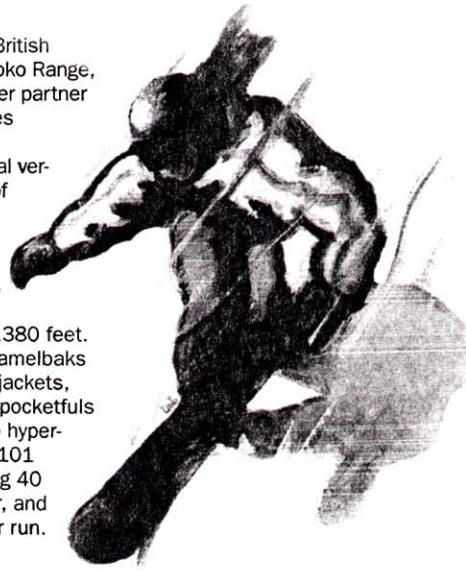
Blue River, British Columbia

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

Just after sunrise on April 20, Tammy McMinn got her wish—to find out just how long her endurance could last. After nine years of snowboarding, 31-year-old McMinn climbed aboard a Klondike Heli chopper in Atlin, B.C. en route to set the women's record for the most vertical feet ridden in a day. No previous record for women existed, only the men's record of 153,000 set at Mike Wiegele's in 1995.

Nearly fifteen hours later, exhausted in the fading light, she had not only set a formidable women's record, but much to her surprise, had also conquered the men's record—in fact, she nearly doubled it.

Deep in British Columbia's Sloko Range, McMinn and her partner Jennifer Hughes (on skis) each achieved a total vertical descent of 305,525 feet (232 miles), beating Mark Bennet's former skiing record of 294,380 feet. Hydrated by Camelbaks beneath their jackets, and fueled by pocketfuls of GU, the two hyperped through 101 runs, averaging 40 miles per hour, and 3,025 feet per run.



McMinn utilized K2 Clicker step-ins to save all the time she could.

Was it any fun to ride solely for speed and maximum vertical? Is a record worth the effort? McMinn says that testing herself was the important part, not breaking records. "It was just as much a mental challenge as it was physical," she says. To put her accomplishment in perspective, consider that a typical rider descends only about 7,500 feet in a day—McMinn rode over 40 times that. —S.L.



BY JACK GALANTE/SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Tammy McMinn (left) and Jennifer Hughes rode/skied for 15 hours in Canada

S.F. Women Blaze Past Alpine-Descent Mark

By Paul McHugh
Chronicle Outdoors Writer

Two women from the Bay Area tried last month to achieve the greatest number of vertical feet ever descended in one day by a female skier or female snowboarder.

Instead, the team shattered the world record set last year by Mark Bennet. His mark of 294,380 vertical feet was left spinning in the wake of the plucky pair, who clocked 305,525 vertical feet during almost 15 hours of high-speed schussing on Paradise Mountain in British Columbia.

"Originally, breaking the world record was not our goal," said San Francisco skier Jennifer Hughes, 32, who works as senior tour planner for a Bay Area cruise line. "But I've always felt that most women don't push themselves hard enough in sports. So, me and Tam thought we'd see

what we could do to set a good benchmark for women. It also seemed like a smart way to get in a huge day of helicopter skiing."

Her partner, snowboarder Tammy McMinn, 31, also from San Francisco, tests software for a computer-consulting firm. Both have long been devotees of winter sport. But after deciding last year to test themselves in a new way, they had to ratchet up skills, equipment and fitness to a higher level.

McMinn trained like a triathlete, with endurance programs built around cycling and running — as well as lots of snowboarding. Hughes utilized the services of Bay Club trainer Brian Ott, who emphasized plyometrics with weights, stair climbing and hill running. In addition, they created team-building adventures by ascending mounts Shasta and Whitney.

Their big push started at 6:45 a.m. on April 20. A major sponsor, Klondike Heliskiing, provided a chopper and support staff through Kluane Helicopters. Their initial run zoomed down 3,400 vertical feet of snow in the Sloko Range of British Columbia, near the town of Atlin.

Gradually, they established the most efficient line down the mountain, knocking off runs of 7-8 minutes. By the time they shattered Bennet's record, they were so hypnotized by fatigue and the sight of onrushing mountain scenery that their celebration consisted of a shrug. Only wobbly legs and fading light forced them to quit, after completing their 101st descent.

The Atlin townspeople renamed the mountain run the team had so deeply grooved with their tracks. Old name: "Echo." New name: "Unbelievable!"

Schuss v. Schuss

With the list one-upped every year for the past five, the thrill of holding the world record for vertical descent on snowboard or skis rarely lasts long, as snowboarder Tammy McMinn and skier Jennifer Hughes quickly learned. On April 20, in Atlin, British Columbia, they carved out 232.3 miles of Canadian downhill, averaging 40 mph for almost 15 hours, to jointly snatch the all-time marks for vertical heli-skiing descent, vertical descent by a woman, and vertical descent by a snowboarder. But before the Bay Area twosome had much chance to gloat, a team of four Canadian and Swiss skiers, all



male, bested their mark by more than 48,000 feet—a mere nine days later. McMinn explains that since she and Hughes still hold the women's record, they have no plans to trump the guys. "Unless my snowboard record gets broken," she says. "Then I'll have to get back out there."