NEW YORK ROCK EXCHANGE: THE EAST'S NEWEST BC LINES I WILL LA NIÑA RETURN?

# Backcountry

THE U[illegible]D EXPERIENCE

## KA POW!

8,000M BADASS BENE BÖHM AND 4 OTHER BC SUPERHEROES


**NOVEMBER 2011**
$5.95 - DISPLAY UNTIL DECEMBER 6, 2011
BACKCOUNTRYMAGAZINE.COM

HAYDEN PRICE // BRIGHTON BACKCOUNTRY, UT
PHOTO: JASON EICHHORST


0 74470 02160 5 11



BCM_NOV11_1_FIN.indd 1 10/5/11 1:56 PM

**One inspired turn deserves another.** // Photo: Nick Souza

# THE GIFT

BY JEREMY MCGHEE

**"Being paralyzed is a gift."** The words leave my lips and the person I'm speaking with invariably stares back blankly, as if I'm crazy. Yeah, I'm crazy all right. I can't feel my legs, and I'll still huck bigger than most. But that has nothing to do with my statement or that blank look. I ski and it inspires people—that's my gift. *Let me rewind....*

In September 2001, while riding my motorcycle, a white car swept in front of me. I remember my face smashing into the car's side. Inertia buckled my bones and sent me skidding against the pavement. My limp, broken body grated to a halt, and as I lay powerless in the street, cold crept up my arms as crimson, life-giving blood flowed onto the warm summer asphalt. I knew I was dying, but in that moment, my fight began. I was not ready to die, but splintered ribs knifed through my lungs. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't move. A desire to sleep consumed me. My arms, face and lips grew cold, and all I could muster was a simple, repetitive thought: "Keep your eyes open! Whatever you do, DO NOT close your eyes!"

Everything changed in an instant. A team of paramedics on its lunch break saw the whole accident and was there in seconds. They were eating tacos across the street. Go figure. They saved me.

In those moments on the street, something woke inside me. I tasted death, and it made me sick. Now I am going to make damn sure that I enjoy this playground. There is so much to see and do in this world. Why would I ever sleep in or drink so much that I waste the next day? Why approach life with anything less than vigilance, to make every day count?

When faced with a challenge, many of us simply choose to lie down, rest, give up. It's completely natural. When the alarm goes off in the morning, my first impulse is to hit snooze. But lying in the warmth of my bed reminds me of lying on that sticky-hot summer asphalt...the powerful urge to sleep...if I close my eyes just a little longer...NO! I will open my eyes. There's a playground out there waiting, and I am going to explore it. I'm alive. My coffee tastes better; the air smells sweeter; the mountain looks more awesome; and every arching turn channels such a force of gravity through my skeleton that my soul vibrates.

And now, just doing what I love to do has meaning to other people. I can ski, surf, bike—all of the things I loved before the accident—and people are inspired. They tell me so. Mine is a rare gift—not an easy gift, nor one that I wish on anyone—but it's a gift nonetheless.

When I'm out skiing, going fast with my friends, enjoying the mountains, I'm healed. There is no chair. All the worries of the world fade with every turn, and in these moments—so far from the moments I spent lying in the street—I'm free.

We all face the same choice when the alarm clock goes off. I choose to open my eyes and live.

*Learn more about Jeremy's journey back to the mountains on p. 50.*

# Under His Own Power

## Sitskier Jeremy McGhee sets new tracks in the backcountry

BY MEGAN MICHELSON

**Left to right: McGhee racing to the backcountry; A rare moment of stillness at Mammoth Mountain.** // Photos: Nick Souza

*Jeremy McGhee wants to be the first sitskier* to ascend and descend a major backcountry peak under his own power. Sure, some sitskiers access the backcounty via cat, heli and snowmobile, but McGhee wants to get there on his own.

"I've always said, I need to be doing what I would be doing if I wasn't paralyzed," says McGhee, who is 34 years old and splits his time between Mammoth, California and Hawaii. "Backcountry skiing has become a passion. If I wasn't paralyzed, I'd be skinning up and skiing. So that's what I need to do. I just need to figure out a way to do it."

In 2001, McGhee was in a motorcycle accident that broke his back and left him paralyzed from the waist down (see p. 24). "There's so much unknown regarding spinal-cord injuries," McGhee says. "At the moment, I knew I was paralyzed. The ensuing months of recovery were difficult, but there was always an underlying feeling that I was going to be OK."

When he got out of the hospital, he bought a set of driver's hand controls, installed them in his Toyota 4Runner and drove to Colorado. He was a competitive boardercross rider before the accident, and he was determined to get back on the mountain. "We all have that moment where we can choose to live life and be an inspiration, or be a bummer to everyone," he explains. "I choose to live life."

But his first day in a sitski wasn't exactly easy. "I got in a sitski for the first time and went skiing with all my ribs broken still," he says. "I dropped a few f-bombs. It was frustrating. But eventually, I was able to ride anything on the mountain."

Back home in Mammoth, he got himself a powder rig—a sitski with a megafat Völkl Kuro attached—and started exploring Mammoth's sidecountry terrain. But he lived in a house surrounded by the Sierra's spiky peaks, and when friends would visit, they'd skin up the mountains out his backdoor. "I was literally left behind," McGhee says. "I don't know if there is anybody who has studied each little chute as much as I have."

> "He's fixated on pushing his personal limits. Getting out in the backcountry was the next logical step."

McGhee is now working with a company called Hands on Concepts to help develop a lightweight sitski rig with a boot-and-binding system that can walk uphill—essentially an alpine touring sitski. The product is still in the design stages and is a few years out from a final version. "I have been asked now by several mono skiers for this type of product," says HOC's Steve Holub. "Jeremy is a good test subject. He is willing and able to test/punish equipment, and, most importantly, he provides good solid feedback."

Last winter, McGhee made plans to climb and ski the Bloody Couloir, an iconic 2,000-foot line in California's *(continued on p. 87)*

# Under His Own Power

(continued from p. 51)

Eastern Sierra. A feature-length documentary called *Drop In* was planned to showcase McGhee's mission. "A heli can't land up there, you can't take a snowmobile up there. It's too extreme," McGhee says. "So we were going to climb the face. I was going to have climbers ahead of me setting anchors."

His friends weren't surprised by his determination: McGhee, after all, has already heli-skied, surfed and ridden a motorcycle while paralyzed. "Jeremy has never been content with average, and being paralyzed is more of a challenge to him than a disability," says Alan Jacoby, McGhee's friend and a co-teacher at Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra. "He's fixated on pushing his personal limits. Getting out in the backcountry was the next logical step."

So McGhee trained hard—hand cycling, weight lifting, cross-country skiing—but as the spring backcountry season was ramping up, complications in Jeremy's personal life stymied his plans to climb and ski the Bloody Couloir. The film project was postponed, but McGhee hardly seems disappointed. "We weren't able to do the Bloody Couloir, but I definitely hit some backcountry spots around Mammoth—trips involving off-road vehicles, snowmobiles and my friends pulling me like a dogsled team," he said. "There will be another attempt to climb Bloody. It's just going to take a while." ▮

# The Lucky One

(continued from p. 52)

animal. But she's also an open book, which I love about her. She's a really genuine, caring person."

The same ambition that drives Monego's athletic pursuits also inspired her and two friends—fellow pro skiers Laura Bohleber and Persson—to form a charity in 2009 called Summits4Kids (summits4kids.org). The organization funds everything from medical care to education for struggling kids in mountainous nations where the women travel to ski. Before their trips, they raise money via used-gear sales, slideshows and by soliciting their sponsors. Then they donate the funds to small, indigenous child-advocacy organizations they've researched in advance, and those organizations allocate the money. In all, the women say, they've given more than $30,000 to humanitarian centers in Peru (where they skied in 2009) and Ecuador (where they skied in 2010).

In Peru, they donated to a safe house in Cajamarca that provides shelter, food and education to runaways. "There's a lot of kids who are 'street kids'—just unlucky kids with difficult realities," Monego says. "They run away from home because there are problems with their families. They don't really have a future." When Monego and her friends visited the safe house, after notching summit descents of Ishinca (5,530 m), Yanapaccha (5,460 m) and Pisco (5,752 m) in the Cordillera Blanca, the kids danced and laughed as Monego regaled them in Spanish, one of four languages she speaks. In Ecuador, some of their money paid for a little girl's eye surgery; the rest went to a haven for teenage mothers in Quito.

Monego's S4K involvement reminds her that no matter how much danger she faces in the mountains, hers is a life of privilege. "These kids are suffering," she says. "We're lucky." ▮