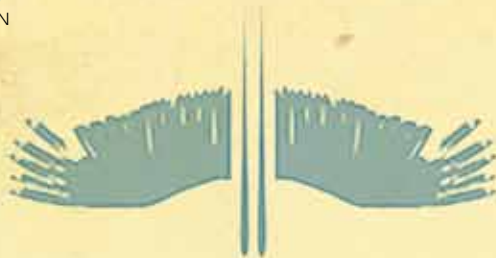


WORLD CUP PATROL

BEAVER CREEK PATROL/CREW, RENOWNED ON WORLD CUP CIRCUIT
STORY AND PHOTOS BY CANDACE HORGAN









Miller. Ligety. Cuhe. Feuz. Kostelić. Svindal. Weibrecht. Zurbriggen. While many Americans don't necessarily know all their names, in Europe, these World Cup racers are renowned. Ski racing isn't as popular in the U.S., but each year in December, these racers and more descend on Beaver Creek, Colo., for the Birds of Prey downhill race, as well as super-G and giant slalom events. It is the only men's World Cup stop in the U.S., and one of only two stops in North America.

The 2011 Birds of Prey, held December 2-4, turned into an extended event, with many American racers having excellent performances. Bode Miller won the downhill, edging Beat Feuz by four-hundredths of a second. Feuz captured third in the super-G the following day, which was won by Sandro Viletta. Ted Ligety captured second in the giant slalom on Sunday, finishing 16-hundredths of a second behind Marcel Hirscher.

Due to lack of snow in Europe, a men's slalom and giant slalom and a women's super-G scheduled for Val d'Isere, France, the following weekend was moved to the Birds of Prey course and held December 6-8; it marked the first time the women raced the course. The move gave Lindsey Vonn the opportunity to capture her 46th World Cup win before her hometown fans, as she won the super-G on December 7 by 37-hundredths of a second over Fabienne Suter. Ligety also won the rescheduled giant slalom, turning the tables on Hirscher and besting him by 69-hundredths of a second.

The final race of the week was a slalom held on December 8, won by Ivica Kostelić. Hirscher continued his strong week by placing third.

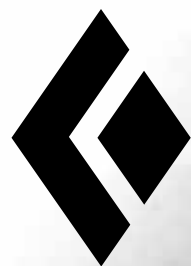
Putting on a World Cup downhill race is a huge production involving hundreds of volunteers on the Talon Crew. Coordinating the Talon Crew this year was Asa (Ace) McKee. The Talon Crew helps to prepare the course by watering it, shoveling any new snow off the course, putting the gates and nets back up when they get knocked down by the racers, and more. Skiers will sideslip the course to help push any accumulated snow to the sides, where it is shoveled outside the course boundaries by volunteers. Some of the Talon Crew wear crampons to help with their tasks, especially at steeper parts of the course.

"This is my sixth year working the race, and this is actually my first year coordinating the volunteers," says McKee. "A good friend of mine used to do it, and I had the opportunity to take it over this year because he had another gig that he's doing. There are 17 different section chiefs for the course, and we have over 500 volunteers. It's quite a handful."

Course preparation actually starts long before the snow falls, with volunteers helping to put up the main A-Nets. Course preparation begins in earnest in mid-November, first with snowmaking (if needed; the course requires at least an 18-inch base), and then with the watering and maintenance of the course.

"We start in the summer prepping nets," says McKee. "We put up new A-Net towers this year; we got all new nets and towers from Vancouver, so there was a crew here all summer prepping the course. We started with a heavier crew





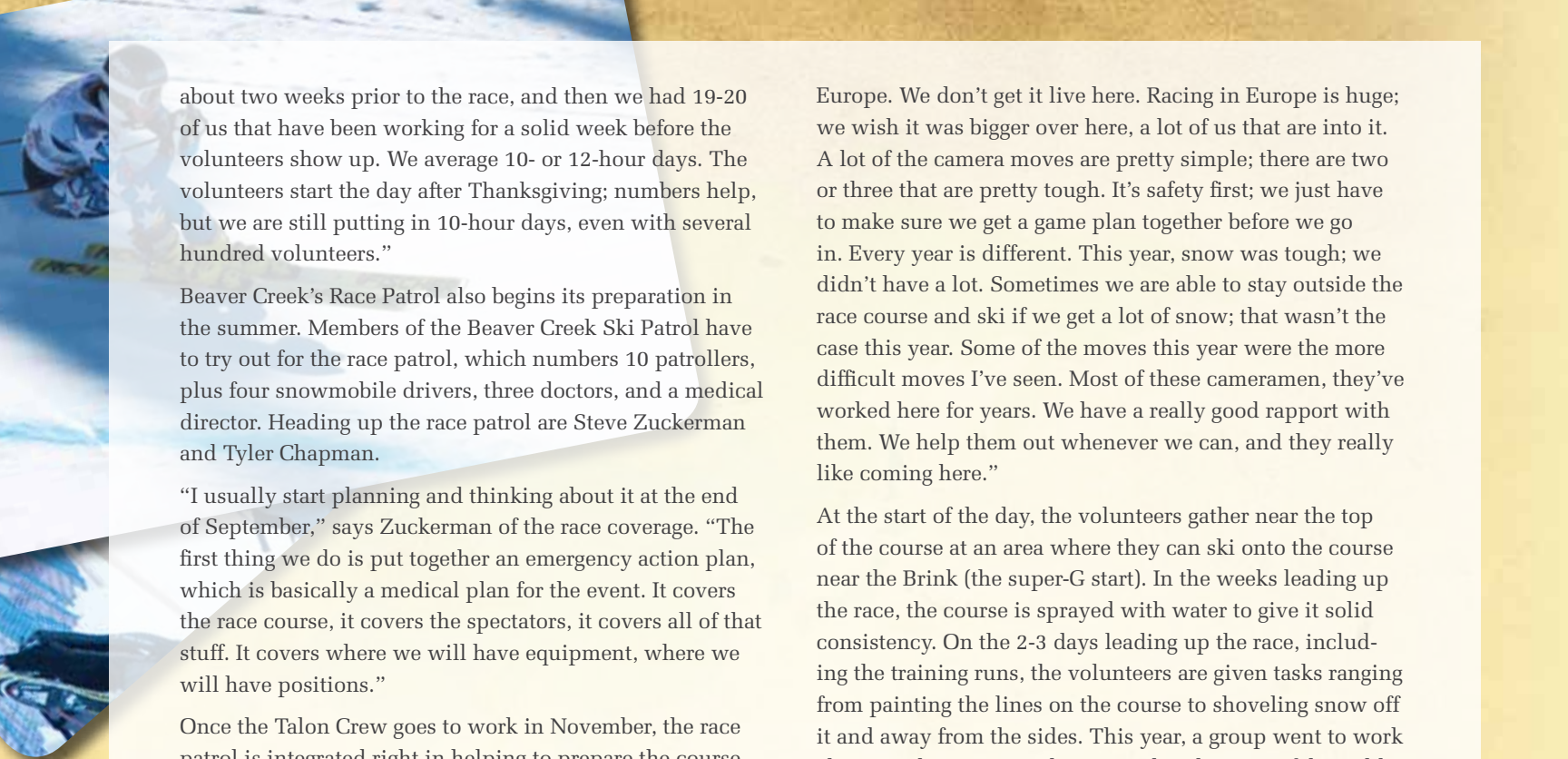
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about two weeks prior to the race, and then we had 19-20 of us that have been working for a solid week before the volunteers show up. We average 10- or 12-hour days. The volunteers start the day after Thanksgiving; numbers help, but we are still putting in 10-hour days, even with several hundred volunteers.”

Beaver Creek’s Race Patrol also begins its preparation in the summer. Members of the Beaver Creek Ski Patrol have to try out for the race patrol, which numbers 10 patrollers, plus four snowmobile drivers, three doctors, and a medical director. Heading up the race patrol are Steve Zuckerman and Tyler Chapman.

“I usually start planning and thinking about it at the end of September,” says Zuckerman of the race coverage. “The first thing we do is put together an emergency action plan, which is basically a medical plan for the event. It covers the race course, it covers the spectators, it covers all of that stuff. It covers where we will have equipment, where we will have positions.”

Once the Talon Crew goes to work in November, the race patrol is integrated right in helping to prepare the course.

“Our race patrol here is a special group,” explains McKee. “They work right alongside with the crew chiefs here, and they are out shoveling and doing everything everybody else is doing, but they have added tasks. They run snowmobiles for us, look over security, and look over the safety of the racers. They are a huge part; if we didn’t have them, we wouldn’t have a race.”

“The main thing with our race patrol, and some of us have worked on race patrols at other events, is that we are completely integrated into the event,” adds Zuckerman. “We start several weeks prior to the race. We assist the crew in putting up the protection, we help hang A-Nets, we help do the slipping, we help with some of the other safety systems, so we are very integrated into the event, and what that does is it gives us complete familiarity with the course and how it works, with all the safety systems, and also good familiarity with people on the crew. We feel it gives us a really big advantage in working the course.”

“We’re transportation too for heavier things on the course,” explains Chapman. “As much as we might think it’s just people being put in the toboggans, we put in a lot of other things in those toboggans to get them to where they need to go on that race course. Stuff you just can’t ski with, we put it in the toboggan and rope it down to wherever it goes. We do all the television equipment to places on the course where it can’t get by Snowcat.

“It’s funny, because we don’t get televised races here in America like they do in Europe. They show the Beaver Creek race on NBC on Saturday morning (*ed. note: the downhill was broadcast on Friday*), but it’s live over in

Europe. We don’t get it live here. Racing in Europe is huge; we wish it was bigger over here, a lot of us that are into it. A lot of the camera moves are pretty simple; there are two or three that are pretty tough. It’s safety first; we just have to make sure we get a game plan together before we go in. Every year is different. This year, snow was tough; we didn’t have a lot. Sometimes we are able to stay outside the race course and ski if we get a lot of snow; that wasn’t the case this year. Some of the moves this year were the more difficult moves I’ve seen. Most of these cameramen, they’ve worked here for years. We have a really good rapport with them. We help them out whenever we can, and they really like coming here.”

At the start of the day, the volunteers gather near the top of the course at an area where they can ski onto the course near the Brink (the super-G start). In the weeks leading up to the race, the course is sprayed with water to give it solid consistency. On the 2-3 days leading up to the race, including the training runs, the volunteers are given tasks ranging from painting the lines on the course to shoveling snow off it and away from the sides. This year, a group went to work chipping down an area by a turn that the racers felt could be hazardous. Ultimately, the athletes are looking to race on a smooth, almost glass-like surface (until their edges start chewing it up).

Race Coverage

With the speeds the athletes attain in the races, the smallest mistake can have major consequences. Almost every recreational skier has seen footage of dramatic race crashes at the Olympics or other World Cup events. For the Beaver Creek Race Patrol, a lot of work goes into making sure they are ready to respond to any incident that might happen.

In addition to the patrollers, Zuckerman has two or three doctors stationed at various parts of the course. There is a clinic at the base of Beaver Creek that can handle some orthopedic trauma and take X-rays. However, the standard of care is still OEC.

“We wouldn’t have to have three doctors for a giant slalom or slalom,” explains Chapman. “We like to have three for the speed events.”

Adds Zuckerman, “We have a few (doctors) that are anesthesiologists. We have a few that are ED physicians, and we have a few doctors that are orthopedics. They carry the equipment that is appropriate for their specialty.”

A helicopter is parked halfway down the mountain just off the Golden Eagle Jump section of the course. Patrol can ski an injured racer to the helicopter in a toboggan. If a racer goes down below where the helicopter is stationed, there is another landing zone right by the gate at Red Tail Camp at the bottom of the course.

Patrol stations sleds at the race start, at the super-G start, at

the Pumphouse (near the Pete's Arena section of the course), at the Harrier Jump, and at the finish area.

"We just have a regular rig at the start with a burrito, and a burrito is a blanket, a sleeping bag, a quick splint for legs, three cravats, zonas, and a tarp and oxygen tank," explains Chapman. "At the super-G start, we have two backboard rigs, a vacuum mattress with a pelvic binder, a scoop with airway management pack, a traction splint, and an AED. The Pumphouse has two backboard rigs, airway management, an AED, and oxygen. We'll have an extra burrito at the Pumphouse also. We keep a backboard rig with oxygen at the Harrier Jump. As far as the race course is concerned, that's it. If you had a midshaft femur fracture, you would call for the KTD separate from the airway management pack. We do have a regular rig in the finish area on race day that's dedicated more to spectators; if someone were to slip and fall on the bleachers or something, the patrol will help us out with spectators. We are just dedicated to being on the course; we can't pull ourselves off the race course to respond to a spectator.

"The airway management pack has O2, basically all the bleeder stuff, a bag valve mask, and a pedi and adult mask. We don't do anything to it; it comes from the patrol. We have tube material in there, oral airways, nasal airways, some big dressings for big lacerations, King airways, and all of our oxygen delivery systems, so non-rebreather masks and nasal cannulas. We also have glucose and EpiPens."

Patrollers are the first to respond to an incident on the course, and doctors are kept in reserve. According to Chapman, a lot of the injuries are less severe, things like ACL and MCL tears, though that doesn't slow the racers down, as they will finish the race even with a ligament injury ("It happened four times during the last (2010) race."). Other injuries that they see include spinal injuries, shoulder separations, clavicles, and lacerations from the sharp edges of the skis. Responding to an incident also involves the entire race team.

"We get the track shut down first, so that we don't have an athlete on the track," explains Zuckerman. "Our first patroller responds and gives a quick patient report. While they are responding,

we usually are getting more information from other people and preparing the equipment that needs to go down. We'll send that down, and if we need a doctor to go down, they will. We can move the ambulance crew from the finish area to the ambulance if we need to, and we can move the helicopter if we need to."

As far as running rigs on a surface that bears a strong resemblance to a skating rink, it's about keeping the sled from sliding out and using the fall line. Rigs are run with someone on tail.

"Rig running on the course is pretty simple, if you know the course," says Zuckerman. "There's friendly places to be on the course, and unfriendly places to be on the course, and you just have to be cognizant of those. Running in the upper arena takes a little bit of attention, but anywhere down the lower course is pretty easy. We do use a tail roper, just to make it safer, and we always have an extra person on scene with us to do that. Any of these guys on the course can take you down anywhere."

Come race day, another function of the Beaver Creek Race Patrol is crowd control for the people who flock to the course. Depending on the course conditions, it can involve getting people down on sweep as well, or keeping them out of areas around the course.

"If neighboring trails in and around the race course are open because we have natural snow, we end up doing a lot more crowd control," explains Chapman. "This year, I would say we are on the lower end of the amount of crowd control we had to put out there. Once again, most of the crowd control we do probably comes from the bottom up. We do have a snowmobile lane that we have to establish, and that's more for the Talon Crew and keeping them out of the snow lanes.

"We'll ski people into the Pumphouse on Friday, letting them know that if they are going to go in to view the race at that location, they need to be an expert skier, because we'll then ski those people out on the race course and sweep them from the Pumphouse down the race course. We'll end up getting a couple of taxis because people will say, 'Yeah, I'm an expert skier,' and they think they are an expert skier, but when they are on the race course where it's really icy, they find out 'Wow, I can't do this.' A lot of





the crowd control we do is definitely from the finish up, because we will have people hiking up trying to get as close as they can. We try to keep an eye on making sure people aren't standing behind some of these bigger A-Nets. In some of the spill zones, it looks like it's pretty taut, but when a racer comes into it at 50 or 60 miles an hour, that net is meant to give, and if someone was right behind it, that would be bad. We are trying to make sure that kind of stuff doesn't happen, where they get into places they shouldn't be."

The athletes on the tour recognize the Birds of Prey course as one of the best, and value all the time the volunteers put in. Vonn herself, racing Birds of Prey for the first time, stated in a video posted by Beaver Creek, "It's perfect Colorado snow, which I absolutely love. As far as the snow condition and the work that the crew has done here in Beaver Creek, it couldn't be better."

In an article written by John Meyer in the Denver Post, Ligety stated, "This downhill is really fun, especially after Lake Louise, which is so soft and kind of lame. This hill is in awesome condition. It's good to be here, where they actually prepped it right."

In the same article, Didier Cuche described the race course as very rewarding. "If you make the perfect run here, even if you are not on top, but you had the perfect run like you wanted to, that's an indescribable feeling."

For the Beaver Creek Race Patrol, these feelings the racers have about the course and all the work the volunteers put in ends up translating into some relationships with both the coaches and the racers.

"The American racers love racing here," says Chapman. "It's the only race we have in America, so if I saw a racer and recognized him I would say hello and tell him I'm with Beaver Creek Ski Patrol, and they would say thank you for all our hard work, and they appreciate what we do. They are very appreciative of the work we do to make this race happen. It's North America's downhill; we don't have anything else in the States. When our team does well, we get invited to the celebrations after and get a little bit of social time with those guys, which is fun." +