Veggie Tour - When the Smoke Settles

Contributed by Conor Hurley
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The cold air blasted me in the face as the door swung open, welcoming me into the frigid, pre-dawn darkness. It was to be a big day, the biggest yet; so far my longest journey has consisted of hobbling 20 to 30 city blocks spread out over a few hours and a couple cups of coffee. Today will be the day to strike out into the world and break free of my injuries.

The Veggie Road

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When the Smoke Settles

Dispatch 9

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When you don't have anything better to do, grow a mustache.

Vernon has been socked in with what seems to be an endless low-pressure system, yielding few sunny days. The room that became my den over the past three weeks is starting to grow old, making my mind scream for a change. Frustrated with my inability to carry out menial tasks and take care of myself, I am starting to become bitter. However, today will change all that, for I am heading up to Sol Mountain.

Cresting the shoulder of Mt. Baldur, we broke out of the cloud layer, leaving nothing but blue skies between outer and the snowy slopes of the mountains. Quickly, we crossed over Bill Fraser Lake and landed in the alpine meadow where the lodge is situated. As we disembarked from the helicopter my spirits were lifted immediately.

Nothing had changed too much over the past month. The snowpack had certainly increased. Mt. Fosthal and Sol Mountain loomed in the distance, displaying their magnificence in the royal blue sky. Although I won’t be able to ski, I could not think of a better place in the world to be.

The group who will be at the lodge over the next few days is destined to be quite an interesting one. Everybody is a friend of, or related to Aaron. For four days, there are going to be 14 of us and then for the last five days our numbers will dwindle to six. My father and I will be taking on the lodge caretaking duties over the course of our stay.

As people trickle in from skiing, I listen to stories of the day’s adventures. Vicariously, I live through their w “Was it deep?” I ask. “How was the rain crust? Where’d you go?” The questions never stop. The binoculars have become my best friend, as I use them constantly to spy on people getting some turns.

By my second day at the lodge, the crutches were traded in for ski poles and my slippers were left aside in lieu of boots. The time had come to strap on a pair of snowshoes and start my rehab. With over three meters of snow on the ground, the dangers of Vernon’s icy sidewalks seemed as far away as the rest of the world.

There was a massive high-pressure system sitting over us, leaving nothing but blue skies and cold temperatures. rain crust was making for some less than savory turns, and left its mark on a number of our group members. With snow on the horizon, Peter, Al, Rob and I decided to dig a snow pit and enjoy the afternoon sun. While we basked in the sun’s rays and laughed about one thing after another it became clear to me: I was in for a good time.

Above the snow pit, my father was in the midst of his first ski tour. Although he had never telemarked before, he w using my gear. Sipping tea out of my Thermos, I watched him make his way up the skin track with Ealu close behind. The two of them climbed and climbed, finally reaching the summit of their run just before the sun began to set. As he took off his skins and stashed them in the pack, I realized he had dropped into the world of the hut keeper?: shovel, work and ski. The grin on his face was the giveaway when he arrived at the snow pit after his run.

The dynamics of the group were fantastic; most everyone there had helped build the lodge in some way or anothe After the tours came home, we gathered in the living room or in the kitchen, sharing food and stories. By the end of the four days, everyone had gotten an interesting perspective on each other. We said our goodbyes and then there were six

of us left at the lodge.

Signs of snow were starting to appear. The temperature was getting warmer day-by-day and the mercury was fall Like little boys, we peered out into the dark night to see if the flakes were falling yet. After days of waiting, the snow finally arrived, dumping copious amounts of the fluffy stuff on the Monashees. Four weeks lie between any sort of turn and myself; but I would not be excluded from the fun to take place.

Dave Flear, co-owner of Sol Mountain Touring, Al, Rob, Peter, my father and I made our way down to Bill Fraser I and across to the slopes of the Banana Belt—a series of treed chutes and gullies which drop 600 meters off the shoulder of Mt. Baldur. It was one of those cold smoke days; you know, the ones when the snow is so light it just turns to smoke and blows up over your shoulders.

While the others made their way to the top, I trudged through the thigh deep snow in search of lines they could sk Looking up the gullies and down through the treed alleys, visions of skiing those lines flooded my mind. After reaching a chute we had talked about, I set myself up in a good vantage point to watch them come down one by one.

Although, I never once made a single turn while I was at the lodge, the energy and fun I was able to absorb from watching my friends ski was more than enough to make up for it. Now I am back in Vernon where I will be hanging out with Pinky, Whale and the rest of the Silver Star ski patrol for another week before my last appointment with the orthopedic surgeon. Hopefully, he will spout out the words he uttered a few weeks ago—“You can start skiing February 1.”

Mt Fosthall for Sol Mountain's living room..

Sol Mountain and the Twin peaks.

A good day's skiing.

Mt. Fosthall.

Sol Mountain.

With my rehab complete, we took some time to enjoy the sun and -15 Celsius temps.

The kitchen was a busy place, people cooking, cleaning and constructing.

Scott coming back from cutting wood.

Rob Paul and Peter closing down another great day.

Mark Hurley getting Deep.

Dave Flear grinning his way down the mountain.

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