

## Interview with Greg Hill

Greg Hill is likely as famous for climbing up as he is for skiing down. In 2008, he did the unthinkable and skied a million vertical feet in a single year. Then, in 2010, he did the unimaginable and skied two million vertical feet, averaging 5,500 feet of climbing a day. With his feats of endurance, Hill bolstered the reputation of his sponsors, including Dynafit, a company known for its touring gear.

Recently, Hill left Dynafit and signed on with Salomon, a company known for its traditional alpine gear, in a move that fundamentally represents a shift in the ski industry. Mainstream brands are getting into the backcountry, and Hill is helping Salomon get there.

We caught up with Greg Hill, last month, to talk lightweight gear, extreme lines and his move to Salomon.  
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Backcountry: What led you to make the move from Dynafit to Salomon?

Greg Hill: "There were certain disconnects with Dynafit that had arisen over the years and I felt, not that I had outgrown my shoes but that I had given a lot to the company and I wanted to move on to a company that perhaps I could get a lot more from in terms of marketing and all the potentials that come with a bigger brand.

A friend of mine skied with Salomon for years and I'd skied on their skis a little bit just to try them and I had blast and once I heard they were looking to transition more into the backcountry, it just seemed like the perfect time to move over."

Backcountry: Can you describe your current Dynafit setup?

GH: Huascarans - 114 mm, Vulcan boots, Radical ST's bindings.

Backcountry: How does that compare with what you'll be using with Salomon?

GH: "Their gear will be a little bit heavier, more downhill related; better skiing performance. Salomon's much more into the newer technologies which I'm really agreeing with which was sort of one of the things: they're not afraid to really break from convention. Dynafit appeals to a particular skier that isn't looking for reverse camber, early rise, and all the new progressions. The new Salomon setup has all that and the new Rocker 2 sort of ski will be what I'll be skiing on for them. They'll be progressing all sorts of things in the future, but for now the Rocker 2 is what I'll be using -- 180 -- and then the biggest thing that I've moved over for is to help them out with all new technologies. They're not looking to redefine the whole backcountry, but they're recognizing that they're a big force and can really help the backcountry movement."

Backcountry: What other specific technologies and innovations does Salomon hope to develop for the backcountry market?

GH: "Can't say anything specific cause it's all hush hush. Easiest way to imagine it is I'm the type of backcountry skier who likes to shred a lot on the way down but also likes the high-performance stuff on the lighter end of the spectrum just to make the ups easier and with Salomon's R & D team there's a lot of potential to see where we take it."

Backcountry: You've moved from a very backcountry specific brand to a company known more for their alpine equipment than for their touring gear. It seems like your move might point to a larger trend within the ski industry that's propelling backcountry skiing into the mainstream. Can you comment on this?

GH: "In the 18 years I've been in the backcountry I've definitely watched it go an activity that appeals more to the person who's just out there to go randonneE and hike around and get a little summit here and a little ski there, to an activity for the more fast-paced shredder that really recognizes that with the right gear they can get out there and summit amazing mountains and charge down radical faces. That's really what the progression is. I mean, years ago, I would go out and ski these peaks and everyone would think I was crazy and now I go out there and I look around-- everyone's doing it! And it's amazing there's this whole progression of people, who, well, we're all out there for the hike and everything, but we're also out there to really just tear it up, to just be free in the mountains and ski as hard and as fast as we can."

And obviously there's also a lot more people into it. It's not just a niche sport anymore where just a few people do it. People are recognizing that with just a little bit of knowledge about avalanches and mountain sense you can get out there and have an amazing time without the pressure of ski hills and people all around you."

Backcountry: What about the increased dangers and reckless behavior associated with more people out there wanting to ski "extreme" lines?

GH: "With more people, obviously there are hazards, like in Jackson Hole last year, some guy triggers an avalanche and it went down and across an access trail. There's just that many more people out there, so things you used to be able to ski before that didn't affect anybody you now have to think about a little differently. But I personally think it's a great trend because playing out in the mountains is one of the best things you can possibly do and for me the fact that so many more people are getting into it and to be working with Salomon and helping more people get into it is really exciting."

Backcountry: You're an aggressive, descent-driven skier, but having logged two million vertical feet in one year, uphill performance is obviously important to you. How will switching to Salomon's Quest boot (the lightest model of which still weighs twice as much as the Dynafit TLT) influence your skiing?

GH: "My friends will really like it! That's what we have now but they brought me on for things that we're going to create in the future. So initially, I'll be on prototypes for things that are different and more progressive-- things that I enjoy doing."

Backcountry: What role will you have with the company? Will you be directly involved in R&D or more on the publicity and brand promotion side of things?

GH: "I'd like to do both. I mean that's what's so exciting for me is that I could see the potential for both. When I walked into their R&D a few weeks ago and saw the size and the scope of what they can do right there on site-- that was really exciting for me. But then as an athlete, promotion is huge and you're only as big as your wheel, and Salomon's a huge wheel, and I think they can really help increase my exposure. So I'm really hoping for all sides."

Backcountry: In the past you've focused on both ambitious ski mountaineering projects like climbing and skiing two million vertical feet in one year as well as competing in randonnee races. By signing with Salomon, will your career plans and goals as a skier change at all? Are there any new opportunities and projects now available to you?

GH: "Not too much. The opportunities they present are amazing with their Freeski TV, their marketing, and there will definitely be more trips open to me, more exploratory trips. They're going to 'coolify' me in a way-- that's not really a word, but their marketing appeal is amazing to me. They'll be able to get these stories out there to a much broader array of people and that's the most exciting thing for me. My goals aren't going to change. I still have endless summits I want to ski off of and places I want to go and by signing with Salomon, I'll be able to achieve more of those goals."

Backcountry: What ideas do you have for the upcoming season?

GH: "As of yet I don't have much planned. I'm not going to go ski three million feet or anything. Definitely not something I can do. For me, I've got a list, say when Chris Davenport went and skied all those 14ers in a year, there's the dream of, say, trying to do that in two or three months if the weather and conditions ever come in."

"There's lots of goals and at this stage I haven't yet zoomed in on anything yet, I'm just basically going to keep exploring and hopefully just doing slideshows and keep inspiring people to get into the backcountry-- that's my main goal really."

--Ed Note: Hill is currently in the Himalaya filming for Dynafit.

Backcountry: Anything else you'd like to add?

GH: "I have to be a bit vague on what we're doing exactly, but I guess it's quite obvious that we're going to take my experience and love for the mountains and help trend Salomon in that direction with all their R&D and potential. Ultimately, it's just really fun to see more and more people out in the backcountry, and we're excited to help grow and develop that trend even further."

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