

Jimmy Petterson

# SKIING AROUND THE WORLD



Over 30 years in search of the  
ultimate ski descent

ZetterQvist Förlag



## IDEA AND PURPOSE – INTRODUCTION

Most everything begins with an idea. It develops over time, evolving from a primitive, rough thought into a more refined concept, before eventually becoming reality.

So it was with the idea for "Skiing Around the World". This idea began as a game, taught to me by my friend, Papi Tuomala. In 1985, the same year I began my career as a ski journalist, Papi told me of a competition that he had with his friends. It was quite simple. One got a plus point for each land one skied in, one got a minus point for each visited country which offered skiing and where one had not skied, and the person with the most points was the leader.

Because of my new profession in ski writing, I quickly passed Papi and other friends, and became very successful at this game. I began, in fact, to niche myself by writing most often about skiing in odd and unusual countries and destinations. Somewhere along the way, I began to realize that I had actually skied in more countries than most people had ever visited, and that this odyssey had not only provided some very interesting and sometimes unusual ski experiences, but it had been a fascinating journey through a cultural smorgasbord.

As a ski writer, I am often in need of reference material, and I became well acquainted with ski books. In searching through many such books, I noticed that a certain kind of book which interested me very much did not seem to exist. As I was so bent on visiting odd and unusual ski destinations, I sought a book that would tell me about such places, and also show me pictures so that I could visualize whether skiing in such a spot would be interesting or not.

There were zillions of books on ski technique, volumes on ski history, and many guide books to the top resorts in America, the Alps, or even the world. A thousand books told me the best runs and restaurants in Chamonix, Aspen, or St. Anton, but nowhere could I find the number of lifts in Kashka Su, Kyrgyzstan, the vertical drop in Isafjördur, Iceland, or the parameters of the ski season in Cedars, Lebanon. I could find no photos of the skiing in Bansko, Bulgaria, Nozawa Onsen, Japan, or Seli, Greece, so I did not know if the slopes were tree lined runs or open bowls, and I had no idea if they would provide good off trail skiing or not. How was I to know which areas were best suited to my needs?

There was really only one way to find out – go to the source. And so, I did. The product of this long odyssey is this book. It is my hope that it will help many other skiers decide the most suitable destination for them to ski and inspire people to venture into an ever larger arena of countries to mix a ski holiday with an interesting cultural experience.

With regard to the developed ski countries of the world, it is not my intention to describe all the ski areas nor is it my plan to even choose, necessarily, the best ski areas. Rather, I wish to describe a carefully chosen handful of ski areas that are representative of that country. The chosen spots will include some of the largest, most famous, and best ski areas, some smaller, lesser known, but worthwhile areas, and perhaps, some that are picked because of their beauty or some unusual characteristic.

Regardless whether one wants tips on the best off piste skiing in top resorts, suggestions of powder pearls which have yet to be discovered by the masses, or locations at the outer limits of the ski galaxy, one should be able to find the information here. Welcome to "Skiing Around the World".

**Jimmy Petterson**  
writer, photographer and skibum

# A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD OF SKIING ON ALL SEVEN CONTINENTS...

From the balmy Mediterranean countries of Lebanon and Greece to the lands of eternal snow in the very high latitudes, Jimmy Petterson takes you on a beautiful and interesting ski odyssey.

This is not a dry book of facts and tips. Mr. Petterson's story is full of the personal anecdotes, humor, and interesting people that one is bound to meet during many years of adventures in the ski world. His background as both a social studies teacher and a long-time ski bum combine well to make this book human, interesting, and informative.

The book, measuring 240 by 340 mm (the same size as this brochure), will contain over 300 pages and more than 500 full color photographs. It will be bound with a sturdy and luxurious hard cover.

## ...AND A USEFUL GUIDE OF QUICK AND HANDY INFORMATION ABOUT THE SKIING IN EACH DESTINATION

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### IN A NUTSHELL

#### Rating scale

- \* Poor
- \*\* Fair
- \*\*\* Good
- \*\*\*\* Excellent
- \*\*\*\*\* This is a rarely given score, indicating that the area is extraordinary in this particular category.

#### KEY

- NOVICE** quality of terrain for novice skiers.
- INTERMEDIATE** quality of terrain for intermediates.
- ADVANCED** quality of terrain for advanced skiers.
- SIZE** number of lifts. Generally speaking, ski areas with less than 10 lifts rate one star, 11-20 lifts earns two stars, 21-30 lifts gains the area three stars, and over 30 lifts wins the area four stars.
- LIFTS** effectiveness of lift system with regard to lifelines.
- VERTICAL DROP** altitude difference between highest and lowest point in the lift system. As a rule, areas with less than 400 vertical meters are rated with one star, 400-800 vertical meters of skiing are given two stars, 800-1200 vertical meters of skiing earn a resort three stars, and areas with over 1200 vertical meters get four stars. A few rare ski resorts which offer over 2000 vertical meters earn five stars.
- SNOW** general snow quality in the ski area. This is related to the altitude of the resort.
- OFF PISTE** quality of the off trail skiing in the area.
- TREE SKIING** quality and amount of off piste skiing in forested areas.
- VILLAGE** charm, appearance, and atmosphere of the village.
- VIEWS** visual beauty of the surrounding mountains.
- NIGHTLIFE** quality of the après-ski and nightlife experience.

**In each chapter,  
Mr. Petterson takes  
you to the slopes you  
always dreamed of  
skiing... or to exotic  
destinations where  
you didn't know  
skiing existed.**



**ASIA**

**VII**

into a kind of fantasy land for skiers. Later in the year, in August, an Aeroflot jet returned me to Almaty, from where I would attempt to enter that dream world.

At the airport, I was picked up by Ken Tengri Mountain Service, who transported me for the next five hours in an old Russian military transport vehicle, into ever more desolate terrain. Every now and then, a woman's yurt could be seen, alone amidst the vast hilly grasslands, like a small boat in the Pacific, with no other sign of human life from horizon to horizon. In early evening, I was deposited at Karakas Base Camp, a small enclave of about thirty tents, situated at a beautiful mountainous meadow, 2200 meters above sea level.

»Edelweiss, so rare in the Alps, blanketed the fields as daisies might do at home.«

The grassy slopes around were covered with wild flowers. Edelweiss, so rare in the Alps, blanketed the fields as daisies might do at home. The camp was surrounded by pine forests that dotted the surrounding slopes for about a half kilometer above, at which point the trees ceased to grow... but the mountains continued upwards. These were the «foothills» referred to by Macken, and to the South, a few snow covered tops were visible. My tent looked down on the green Karakas River that marks the border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and a small cluster of Kyrgyz farmhouses wove along the opposite bank of the river. I stood here, at the perimeter of one of the highest mountain ranges in the world. Tomorrow, a helicopter would transport a group of us into a region which was off limits, even to the local people, for most of this century.

Very few people on Earth have ever set eyes on this astonishing little corner of the world, and even fewer could call themselves familiar with the area. One of the only people who falls into the latter category is Karabek Valiev, Kazakh climber supreme, who has conquered Mt. Khan Tengri (7010 m.) and Psk. Pobedy (7439 m.) here in the Tien Shan, as well as Mt. Everest, and 19 other mountains of 7,000 meters or more. Valiev now operates Khan Tengri Mountain Service, a company which offers the possibility for climbers and trekkers as well as skiers to experience this region which is so dear to his heart. For skiers, Karabek has put together the most unusual and unique heliskiing program in the world. It is a summer program, which, weather permitting, climaxes with a descent from the dizzying top of Mt. Semenov at 5,816 meters.

There is no obvious ski resort playground, and the people who visit here are, understandably, not your average tourists. During our first dinner at the base camp restaurant, there were guests from as far afield as Austria, Switzerland, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, Japan, America, and Australia. Many lively stories were exchanged over a traditional Russian meal of shashlik, as we all got to know each other. I spoke with an old Italian man, who told me of having skied from the top of Mount Athos, a Chinese colonel, which, at 7546 meters, is considered the highest climbable mountain in the world. This is quite a feat in itself, but he had done it when he was 60! I turned to my left and chatted a bit with a young lady who was just returning from a trekking adventure. It was Petra Kronberger, Austrian Olympic skiing gold medalist.

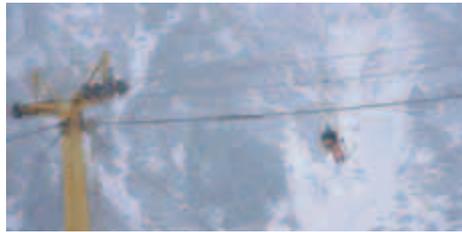
The group which I would ski with was an interesting crowd as well. More than half of them had worked as ski instructors or mountain guides in the Alps. I was also surprised to meet six

year old Hilde Braun of Germany and her husband, 69 year old Peter. This was definitely not the age group I had expected on a ski adventure in the rarified atmosphere above 5,000 meters, but in spite of their age, they were probably more qualified than I for the endeavor we would soon embark on.

Hilde had been a part of the German national ski team in the late forties and early fifties. In 1953, she had swept the gold medal in the slalom, giant slalom, and downhill in the student world championships of skiing. As for Peter, our upcoming

adventure would probably seem as tame as a Sunday walk in the park. He had partaken in history's first expedition to conquer Mt. Dhaulagiri in Nepal in 1953. Among the hardships they had encountered at that time was a 20 kilometer stretch of thick jungle that took a full 16 days to hack through. While they did not attain the summit, they did reach the lofty height of 7,700 meters.

We had a good lineup of participants for such a specialized skiing adventure: for they possessed an abundance of mountain



MOUNT ETNA: FIRE AND ICE

Skating combines the actual act of negotiating one's way down a mountain face on two boards with a nature experience. Sometimes, on a day of light deep powder snow, for example, the skiing itself is the main attraction, while on other occasions, the beauty, serenity, or dynamic power of the surroundings can be a more dominant aspect of the day's proceedings.

The quiet stillness of gliding over meadows of virgin corn snow, while songbirds chirp a spring melody takes a skier far beyond the actual mechanics of making turns. Skiing in the shadow of the steep, craggy limestone cliffs of the Dolomites, to take another example, creates an entirely different atmosphere, but one which also contributes enormously to the sense of what skiing truly is.

The nature that surrounds a skier can emit an aura of tranquility, of forbidding, or of enormous strength, and it is the sheer power of nature that most often stirs my soul when I am skiing. I often stand on a slope in awe of my environment, dwarfed by a dark wall of granite or on a blue glacial scree, and I can almost feel the unbridled energy that created those physical features. This past winter, my ski's introduced me to another compelling force of nature, similar in age to the most ancient glaciers, and yet more powerful still. Last March, my friend, Rupert Scherzer, and I skied a mountain which could meet any glacier head on and force her into a weak submission. She is more dangerous than the most nefarious glacier, whose yawning crevasses might swallow up humans being in the blink of an eye. Her potent energy is as unpredictable as the persistent movement of glacial ice is foreseeable. Her volatile temper, irrational behavior, and random actions are as difficult to chart as the movements and activities of a scorn woman on the first of April.

My Ena has towered head and shoulders over the island of Sicily for over 600,000 years. She has inflicted more heat and wreaked more havoc than the mafia. She has been the source of terror, catastrophe, mystery, inspiration, and fascination throughout her long and fiery history. Homer and Virgil have written accounts about Ena in ancient times, while Goethe and Guy De Maupassant are but a few among many writers who have been intrigued by Europe's highest volcano during the last few centuries.

There is no rhyme or reason, no pattern, and no predictability with Mt. Ena. Some eruptions have been short, like the week long outbreak of 1979, while others have seemed endless, like the ten year eruption between 1614 and 1624. The mountain is pock marked by literally hundreds of craters,

each representing a unique eruption, and each with an individual history all its own. Some of the eruptions were cataclysmic, like the devastating one that began on March 8, 1669. Before the dust and cinders had settled, 122 days later, a cliff in the mountain, fourteen kilometers long, had opened up, emitting a billion cubic meters of lava, destroying much of Catania and numerous neighboring villages, and snuffing out the lives of over 20,000 people.

The eruption of 1886 gave rise to a miracle, when Cardinal Dusmet brought the Veil of Saint Agatha to the endangered city of Nicolosi. The cardinal stood but a hundred meters outside the village hoping the veil would ward off the fast approaching flow of lava. Indeed, the cardinal and the veil succeeded in doing what no glacier could ever have done, and the lava ceased its forward movement at the feet of the devoted cardinal.

Since then, there have been eruptions that have destroyed villages, devastated woodlands, and as recently as 1971, wiped out the cable-railway system and the Volcano Observatory. The Sicilians, however, have learned to live within their unpredictable environment, and they answer Ena's insults and abuses by merely rebuilding what she breaks. It is, therefore, perhaps, not so surprising that the local people have built not only one, but two ski resorts on the slopes of this beast.

Ena has her positive sides as well, helping to fertilize the land, and attracting hundreds of thousands of tourists to her side, and the Sicilians seem to have a good relationship with the tyrannical, yet often benevolent matriarch of their island. The local people admire her beauty, are grateful for her generosity, and respect, but do not fear her great omnipotence. They overlook her excesses and transgressions as we might forgive the tempestuous outbursts of a loved one. Nobody has a stronger sense of family than a Sicilian, and Ena, after all, is family.



My Ena adventure began with a simple phone call to the ski area of Ena Sud, a group of four lifts with 600 vertical meters of skiing, situated near the village of Nicolosi. My Italian is limited, but the person on the other end of the line seemed to be saying that the lifts were closed due to a volcanic eruption. He then advised that I call, instead, to Ena Nord. This, of course, did not make sense, to a non-Sicilian. It must be a language problem.

Figured. If my understanding was correct, that Ena was undergoing some major volcanic activity, why should I call the ski resort on the other side of the mountain? Surely, people are staying far away from the eruption, if possible. I wanted to get to the bottom of this mystery, so I called, anyway, to the tourist office in Linguaglossa, a short drive from the five lifts on Ena's north-east face. This time a lady assured me that I had not been misinformed. Ena Sud was closed, as much of the snow was buried in volcanic ash, but the wind blows consistently from the north and west, and at Ena Nord, everything was business as usual.

A couple of weeks later, Rupert and I were flying past Mt. Ena, headed for Catania. The views from the plane were stupendous. We looked out over the rugged coastline of Sicily bordered by the blue-green waters of the Ionian Sea. The vegetation back from the coast was green, as is certainly always in these latitudes. Jutting out of the surrounding green was the imposing white presence of the volcano, looking over the surroundings like an albino dragon, spewing plumes of smoke from her gaping mouth.

Gazing down from the sky, one could already understand how this tower of white had, for centuries, been the origin of all kinds of myths and legends. Throughout history, Ena has alternatively been known as the home of Gods, like Vulcan and Cyclops, and the mouth of hell. One story even claims King Arthur to

have been transported here by an angel. I could lazily fantasize about these various sagas from the safe distance of our flying chariot, but very soon, Rupert and I would no longer enjoy the security of many kilometers distance between us and the smoking serpent.

That evening, we arrived in the little mountain village of Linguaglossa. It was carnival week, and the narrow streets in the center of town were cordoned off to allow the revelers to parade safely through that part of town in their multi-colored costumes. The town square was a bank of activity, as half the village danced the music of a live band. Streamers and other colorful decorations hung around the square from wires and lampposts, and I felt as if we had walked smack dab into a festival.

We awoke the next morning to crystal clear skies. The mountain looked even more imposing from below than from the plane, smoke still billowing relentlessly from the 3500 meter high chimney. As we wound up the mountain, the juxtaposition of clear and brightly glowing flowers with the winter white in the background gave a surrealistic quality to the scene.

It was early March, and the snow was spring-like. The slopes were firm in the morning, but even here on the north side of the mountain, they eventually warmed up into corn snow. The lower slopes had a few trees, which grow, in this region, up to about 2000 meters. Above that elevation, the landscape was barren. From the upper runs one could look out over the ocean, reflect

NORTHERN EUROPE | Norway

# Chapter 14. NORWAY

Norway is a small country of 4.4 million people, which boasts one of the most spectacular coastlines in the world. Her west coast is fringed with a labyrinth of fjord fjords, giving Norway an amazing 21,300 kilometers of shoreline. Many of these long arms of the sea stretch inland for well over a hundred kilometers, and every centimeter is worth seeing.

The fjords, flanked by granite walls which often reach 1000 meters above the water, are decorated by endless waterfalls that cascade down every nook and cranny of these cliffs. They are sure to keep a tourist in awe for every second of his journey. A surprise is provided by mother nature around every bend in the road, as a new arm of a fjord appears, a surge of rushing spring melt water rushes down the valley from a hanging glacier, or a picturesque village squatted into a small pastoral meadow appears at the end of a fjord.

Norway is the appropriate place to start skiing in northern Europe, for this is where it all started thousands of years ago. While skiing was primarily a form of transportation for many centuries, the Norwegians are given credit for starting and developing it as a sport as well, and immigrants from Norway spread skiing to the United States in the mid-1800s. In addition, the Alpine countries started importing Norwegian ski instructors in the beginning of the twentieth century to teach people the Telemark turn.

## STRYN

### SUMMER SKIING – FOR THOSE WHO JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH

There are many skiers and snowboarders who are also wind surfers, golfers, mountain bikers, tennis players, or sailors. In other words, there exist snow sport enthusiasts who are normal people. They are happy to live in a world with four seasons, and they enjoy to lie on the beach and relax during the summer months. Basically, there are good people who have a life beyond snow. Then, there are those amongst us who go kicking and screaming into the spring, fighting tooth and nail against nature's inevitable metamorphosis from white to green. These are the true fanatics of the slopes—the riders who have no adrenaline substitute for the thrill of sending billows of powder dust skyward or setting a crisp line of corn kernels into motion, cascading down some steep pitch. These psychological cripples cringe at the thought of riding their ski or board, gather dust and rain in some dingy cellar for eight months without seeing the light of day. These are the true snow fiends, who just can't get enough, and it is to these addicted addicts that Stryn offers salvation.

Like all addictions, snowsports are not cheap, and if your dependency is so great that the mere thought of a full summer without the white stuff has you clawing the walls, you, then, are burdened with a very expensive habit. The snow fields of South America, Australia, and New Zealand are not cheap to get to. The alternative is to head to one of the glaciers in the Alps, but

Of the countries of northern Europe, Norway is also the only nation to have hosted the winter Olympic games, and they have done so twice, with the 1952 games in Oslo and the 1994 event held in Lillehammer. The Alpine skiing events for the Oslo games took place in Norefjell, which boasts Norway's greatest vertical drop (1003 m.), while Kvitfjell and Hafjell became famous during the '94 games. These venues were used because of their easy access and infrastructure, but they do not really represent what is best, unique, and most interesting about Norwegian skiing.

Other well known and popular Norwegian resorts include Hemnesdal, Geilo, and Trysil, but they also owe much of their success to their proximity to major population centers. The skiing that best typifies Norway, however, lies a bit further afield.

The small and remote village of Norefjell and Stranda are locations where a skier can combine excellent skiing with sea views and landscapes that are uniquely Norwegian. Oppdal, one of the largest ski areas in Norway, is an excellent location for wide open, above tree line skiing. It offers a combination of many points, large back country territory, and a robust sports ski life. Finally, Stryn is where winter meets summer. This glacial area opens around the time when most other Norwegian ski resorts close, and it provides a juxtaposition of the seasons where glacial snow coexists with green summer grass in beautiful counterpoint.

Stryn is not only a lot closer and cheaper to get to than Argentina, but at less than \$10 per person to cram us into a sixteen square meter cabin at Strynsvann Camping, the accommodation was very about to break anybody's bankroll. Situated in the fjord lands of western Norway between Bergen and Trondheim, Stryn is a sleepy little village near the end of

not allowing me to use these wide bodied powder skis which were making the task so easy for the others. They were conserving energy and having more fun to boot. I was exhausted, and we had only skied a few hundred meters. I negotiated each turn on the windblown ridge with trepidation. Suddenly my tips crossed, and I went head over heels down the slope for a short distance. I was okay, but Roland, our Swiss guide, immediately warned me what I already knew. »Jimmy, don't fall!« he said succinctly. We continued to thread our way between the obstacles, holding closely to the tracks of Oleg, our Kazak guide. Soon, we arrived at a slope with a much wider area of safety, and Oleg told us that we could spread out and enjoy making first tracks in the fresh snow. The slope had been protected from the wind, and the snow was perfect, but I still did not have much stamina. Ten turns were easy...twenty turns...I started to labor...twenty five...at least I'm getting lower with each turn, I thought...thirty...lactic acid attack. I lurched to a stop accompanied by a soundtrack of heavy breathing right out of a hard core porn film.

»...we could spread out and enjoy making first tracks in the fresh snow.«

Our day continued like this, with wind crust on the upper slopes and powder lower down. We skied five more descents averaging 600 vertical meters per run, and everybody was drained by the time we headed home. It had been both exhilarating and exhausting. Back in Karkara, as I relaxed in my tent, I felt as if I had completed the first day of boot camp in the marines. The day had offered sections of skiing that were sensational and others that were mere self preservation, and I wondered with great anticipation what the morrow would bring.

FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS, OVERCAST skies covered Karkara, and snow fell in the high mountains. Our »whirlybeast« was grounded, and we had a chance to go horseback riding instead. Throughout history, the Kazak people have been renowned horsemen, and in this section of the country, the horse is without question the main means of transportation. One of the locals brought some horses to the camp, and we



knowledge and experience, and a proper understanding that this was a far cry from ordinary skiing. The rewards as well as the perils on an excursion like this are more similar to those usually found in the sport of mountain climbing, and the people comprising our group were well aware of that fact.

The following morning, we piled our skis and ourselves into an orange monster which had the faded letters »Kazakhstan Airlines« barely still legible in blue lettering on the side of the aircraft. The Mi-8 MTB was an important part of the ill-fated Soviet campaign in the mountains of Afghanistan, for it is specially suited for high altitude flying. Used for skiing, this chopper can carry ten skiers and their gear up to as high as 6,000 meters! Compared to the sleek four passenger llama whirlybirds used for heliskiing in nearby India, the Mi-8 MTB looks like a prerodactyl, but it is a very capable beast.

Half an hour after liftoff, we were set down atop a peak approximately the altitude of Mt. Blanc. I asked Kazbek the name of

this mountain, and he explained that this top was so low (4700 m.) that nobody had bothered to name it! The peak may well have been anonymous, but my lungs and head told me that it definitely was not low. My head was light, and my breathing was heavy, even before I started to exert myself skiing. Here, one needed a long rest after merely buckling one's boots.

What breath one had was taken away by the surrounding scenery. Kazakhstan has 2700 glaciers, and it seemed as if we could see all of them from here. Seracs glistened icy blue in the sun all around us, and a lattice work of crevasses yawned lazily like giant venus fly traps waiting for an unsuspecting victim to venture too close.

Nobody had to remind me that this was not Canada! It was not the visible crevasses that worried me...it was the ones I did not see which gnawed on my brain. We were all fitted not only with avalanche transceivers, but even with harnesses bearing carbines. This was a precaution necessitated by the largely unexplored glacial terrain. Should one fall into a crevasse, he could,



When it comes to skiing, Zermatt was there, at the forefront from the very beginning, having built the world famous Gornergrat railway in 1898, and opening its first ski school in 1902. It is the classic ski resort. It is difficult to describe Zermatt without using as many superlatives as a Mercedes advertisement. It is a legendary venue for skiing, and well deserving of legend status. Zermatt has the largest number of high capacity lifts in the world. It is in the top ten worldwide in vertical drop with 2200 meters of skiing top to bottom and has one of the ten longest runs in the world as well, a fifteen kilometer journey from the top of the Klein Matterhorn, back to the village. For those who prefer après ski, Zermatt also ranks among the top ten ski resorts worldwide, with eight nightclubs and well over 100 eateries. To top it all off, it has the highest lift in the Alps, which takes visitors to 3899 meters, and some of the most stunning mountain vistas anywhere in the world. One can view no less than 38 peaks that exceed 4000 meters from here, and the imposing blue ice of the glacial seracs and huge crevasses add an additional intensity to the surrounding nature that can be replicated in very few ski areas in the world.

All that, and then, there is the Matterhorn! It stands alone at the end of the valley, like a giant citadel. It is gorgeous, stunning, and staggering, stupendous, spectacular, magnificent, awesome, and inspirational, but that entire description doesn't really do it justice. It is the perfect mountain! It is more majestic than all the kings and queens that have ever walked the planet. Its beauty is ageless and timeless. It is Ingrid Bergman, Marilyn Monroe, and Naomi Campbell all rolled into one.

The mere sight of the Matterhorn towering over the end of the valley is enough to make a devout atheist drop to his knees, genuflect, and pray. God must have apprenticed and practiced mountain building with the other million odd peaks and precipices in the world, and then, once he was an accomplished master, his final work was certainly the Matterhorn. I suspect, that some hundred million years from now, when the Alps have worn down to a rough facsimile of the flat, rounded hills of Lapland, the Matterhorn will still tower over the valley like a gargantuan obelisk celebrating mother nature's perfection. By that time, perhaps, the steep, rugged slopes that now provide some of the steepest and most challenging terrain in the world for expert skiers will be a series of meandering pistes for beginners, and the experts will be freeriding the mellowed slopes of the Horn itself. But, for now, its vaunted walls are as formidable and awe-inspiring to hardened climbers and extreme skiers as they are to wide eyed first visit sightseers.

The legendary mountain, naturally, creates additional legends that bask in its aura and feed off its notoriety. Edward Whymper was the first to be touched by Matterhorn glory, after his triumph over the peak in 1865. Ulrich Inderbinen has probably shared the spotlight with the Horn most often. Ulrich was a local lad who became a mountain guide at the turn of the century, climbed the Matterhorn over 350 times, and still put his footprints on the peak after his 90th birthday.

Despite the Horn's apparent impregnability, novice climbers can climb its east face with relative ease, while the north wall has certainly conquered more climbers than the other way around. French extreme skier, Jean-Marc Boivin has even made a descent of the east side of the mountain, but I was very content to just glide around in the shadow of this Swiss monolith.

Last Easter, my friends, Keith Johnston, Martin Söderqvist, and I came to visit the village which could well be described as the grand dame of Swiss skiing, and ski the area that surrounds this

# A coffee table book which will capture every skier's imagination...

ASIA | Kazakhstan

water was a silver snake, shimmering in the sun. Soon the landscape became all white, and below us were enormous glacial cirques and hanging glaciers, while up ahead, looming ever closer, were Khan Tengri and Pik Pobedy. The altimeter showed 5230 meters as we touched down atop still another »no name« peak. »This is only a warm up!« said Kazbek, with a grin. »You can ski some named summits later!«

The skiing was similar in nature to the first day. The upper exposed slopes were windblown, and the lower sections were good powder. We were higher, the runs were longer, I had wisely borrowed a pair of »fat boys«, and I was still breathing like a dinosaur in heat. What we were doing bore little resemblance to ordinary skiing, and was actually a far cry from heliskiing elsewhere in the world. Here, one did not worry about style, but skied rather a technique of function and safety. Conserve energy and avoid falling.

There is one danger, however, that even the most careful technique cannot always avoid. Shortly after beginning our second run, Oleg, who was leading the group, broke off a large slab avalanche. As we looked on in horror, he was carried down the mountain and out of our sight. The avalanche cascaded down amidst a sea of glacial ice, and we hoped to God that he had not been buried or swept into a crevasse. In a chaotic descent, we tried to incongruously combine speed with caution. As quickly as possible, we followed in the wake of the avalanche, but still it took quite a few minutes to reach the next hump in the glacier from where we could see Oleg's fate. Everyone breathed a heavy sigh of relief to see our guide standing, shaken and without his skis, but nevertheless, in one piece. It had been a shocking reminder that this was, in fact, a skiing expedition, and not a day of »pleasure skiing«.

THE AFTERNOON ALSO DID NOT pass without event. We landed atop Pik Ignatiev, 5488 meters, the highest elevation most of us had ever been at. After skiing just a few hundred meters, one of the Austrians was close to blacking out. He was feeling sick and scared, and began to hyperventilate. Fortunately, Peter Braun was not only an experienced mountaineer, but a doctor as well. He gave our disabled companion a tablet to relax him along with some calming words, and we were soon able to negotiate Pik Ignatiev successfully.

Following yet another stormy day, came our final ski day. What with the avalanche and the additional snowfall, it was deemed that Pik Semyonov's summit of 5,816 meters would have to wait for another time.

**»...just like a giant bathtub, the lake drains out under the North Inylchek Glacier...«**

Prudence is often the better part of valor, and I believe I sensed, among the group, a slight feeling of relief, rather than disappointment, in the decision not to press on to the altitude limit. The last snowfall had brought the powder on the wind protected slopes to a depth of 30-40 cm. and our entourage satisfied itself with the best powder skiing of the trip.

My final day was climaxed by an afternoon journey with the helicopter into the climbers base camps for Khan Tengri, Pik Pobedy, and Mramornaya. First, we flew over the magic Lake Merzbacher. Each August, an ice plug melts, and just like a giant bathtub, the lake drains out under the North Inylchek Glacier, creating geyser like fountains that spew out water through holes in the ice further down the glacier, until, three days later, the lake is empty.

Then, we landed at base camp for Pik Pobedy, situated right on



the South Inylchek Glacier. This is the second largest ice flow in the CIS countries, a veritable river of ice more than one kilometer wide, that winds itself for over 50 kilometers between two immense ridges of the Tien Shan.

Soon after, we landed almost at the foot of Khan Tengri, the pyramid peak whose northern wall is made up of yellow marble, and which many climbers consider to be the most beautiful mountain in the world. In fact, when the sun's last rays shine on the marble upper slope, the crimson color that often appears has inspired legends and sagas for hundreds of years. My whistle stop tour of these base camps provided one high point after another, and provided a fitting final act to a journey that had had its share of highs and lows, adrenaline and exhaustion, risks and rewards.

After the sun had set on our final evening in Karkara, I had five hours of bumpy road to Almaty to contemplate and internalize our entire experience. It was skiing as I had never done before—high altitude skiing, where—certain risks unavoidably go with the territory. The reward was not the usual exhilaration of having the powder explode in one's face at the nadir of every turn, or the sensation of effortlessly floating down a slope of bottomless fluff. Instead, the skiing was often a struggle through difficult snow and a constant battle for oxygen. Hence, the rewards here were different. One of the pay-offs was the sense of being awed and mesmerized by the unique scenery around us. Another compensation was the sense of achievement, skiing in a region where very few people had ever ventured and at altitudes at which only a handful of humans had ever skied. Perhaps, the ultimate reward, however, is the one that goes hand in hand with the element of risk. It is a reward well known to the climber, but not so often familiar to the skier—the feeling of survival.

## KAZAKHSTAN IN A NUTSHELL

Length of season: Within the lift system – December-April  
High altitude / heli skiing – During the summer  
Name of resort – Chimbulak  
Altitude of top – 3800 m.

NOVICE	***
INTERMEDIATE	**
ADVANCED	*
SIZE	*
NUMBER OF LIFTS	**
VERTICAL DROP	*****
SNOW	**
OFF PISTE	*
TREE SKIING	*
VILLAGE	***
VIEWS	*
NIGHTLIFE	*

▲ Ski area



**In this book, the author and the Zetterqvist Publishing Company present the stories and photos that represent a lifetime of chasing the skier's dream. For over three decades, Jimmy Petterson has sought the deepest snow, the longest runs, the most dramatic descents, and the most spectacular scenery in which to practice his favorite sport. Here is the result. Enjoy!**



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