



OXYGEN FED SPORT

by XCZONE with
Justin Wadsworth and Beckie Scott
Bend, Oregon
Cascade Mountain Range
10,000ft
Oxygen 60% of Sea Level

Cross Country Skiing is *unlimited* in performance and diversity. Whether that is laying fresh tracks at sunrise, spending an afternoon training in the woods, elite international racing or carving free heel turns in powder with friends. "Unlimited" is the next movie by xczone currently in production and scheduled for release by Xmas 2003, on a double DVD set packed with motivational and technical content. It will be our most ambitious project to date; trekking where no one has gone before. It is shot on Location in Bend Oregon, Vancouver Island, Gatineau Park, Lake Placid, and Austria. The film will cover XC Skiing, Biathlon, Norpine, Telemark, Roller-skiing, In-line, Trail Running, Mountain Biking, Triathlon, Rowing, Paddling, and Cycling. Featuring World Class athletes in all disciplines with one common thread - the love of xc skiing.

The recipe for any good xc ski film requires bringing together great skiers, an enchanting location, good weather conditions and applying unparalleled cinematography with sophistication and panache.

Such a ski film would not be genuine without talent. So who better to engage than the fastest skiers on the continent.

Although we had approached Beckie Scott and Justin Wadsworth the previous year with the idea of skiing in a film, the Olympics were somewhat of a distraction. Now post-Olympics, Beckie's and Justin's life showed no signs of slowing down. But they are extraordinary people and were more than generous with their time. So it was that I was pleasantly surprised to receive an e-mail from Beckie inviting us down in June. Justin called just before I flew down, reassuring me that ski conditions were superb - he sounded a bit too eager on the phone.

They are super people [and I am not just saying that because they served me the first cappuccino every morning] while being dedicated 24 hours-a-day athletes who practice skiing as a religion.

Going to visit Justin Wadsworth and Beckie Scott at their home in Bend, Oregon, USA, is somewhat like taking a eco-tourism trip to Jurassic park - the local wildlife has home advantage.

Beckie is known for her prowess in the pursuit, and Justin is no less a predator. Notwithstanding, Justin had promised me plenty of sun, snow and scenery for filming.

I was excited, and in retrospect I do not recall any mention of supplemental oxygen, otherwise I would have packed some for the expedition.

Six hours and three connections later [with a more diverse, and no doubt, scenic route for my ski bag], I had traveled from Chelsea, Quebec, Canada and was now on approach into Redmond/Bend, Oregon, USA. Given airline cutbacks, I had had only a bag of pretzels and five in-flight coffees since my first flight took off. The lady next to me was terrified of flying, we were experiencing turbulence and her meds were wearing off. To aggravate the situation, a wild-bearded middle eastern gentleman was pacing the aisle anxiously - a look of inevitability in his eye [it turns out he was waiting for the washroom]. I turned my attention out the window off the starboard wing.

The Cascades are often referred to as the American Alps with a chain of spectacular volcanic peaks; rugged summits, snow fields, alpine meadows, immense fir, cedar and hemlock trees. If you pay attention you may see wild mustangs, cougar, deer or elk along ancient trails used by the Shoshini Indians.

From the aircraft window, the glacier covered, 14,000ft summit of Mt. Rainer appears to be shrouded in clouds blowing in off the Pacific. I would later learn that two climbers died in that snow storm on the mountain. As the plane banked South-East, the rock of Mount. St. Helens came into view, scarred from the 1980 eruption that blew 1,300ft off of its top, and stood in contrast to the lush greens of Mt. Rainer,.

There stood Mount Hood, clearly above the horizon at 11,000ft. A desperate rescue attempt was unfolding below, as a National Guard helicopter crashed trying to pull nine climbers from a crevice. The details of which I got to read the next morning at breakfast before heading over to Beckie's and Justin's place - I am still motivated.

Now, it is not uncommon for Justin to summit three 10,000ft mountain peaks by crust cruising on xc race skis and descend in a morning,. So, I am not sure, at the time, what he had in mind. However, he appeared to be bursting with energy and anticipation to show me his "hood" [a.k.a. the sites.] Beckie was conspicuously quiet... maybe it was just too early... or did she know something... After a quick introduction to "Oscar" [their espresso machine, that incidentally they never leave home without], we were on our way.

Bend is the outdoor recreational capital of the US Pacific North West, with 300 days of sunshine a year. Located on the Eastern leeward side of the Cascade mountain range and along the Deschutes River. The town sits on the desert dry valley floor below a line of impressive volcanic peaks - one of which was the location of the shoot.

The mountains above Bend, Oregon, collect one of the deepest snow packs in the World. It is where the cool Pacific Northwest spring weather keeps the snow on the ground well into summer.

It is a twenty minute drive (15 for Justin) up the highway past Mt. Bachelor with its 20km of groomed xc trails at 5000ft with access to higher snow fields in the Three Sister's Wilderness.

Racing is in Justin's blood. So when the radar warning detector went off it came as no surprise - at least not to Beckie. Apparently, having fast reflexes is also an asset. Beckie looked unimpressed but somewhat accustomed.

Once at the trail head. I loaded up with a backpack, extra clothing, food, water, and 70lbs of camera gear with tripod. Beckie and Justin each carried an extra pair of skis in addition to supplies.

"It should take 40 minutes to climb to the site," explained Justin. Crust cruising on race skis

no less. We left the car at 5000ft, and the site was one of the peaks shy of 10000ft. I did the math; 100ft per minute rate of climb. "Sure, I am game. After all, I was a national biathlon champion," and I chased after Justin, while Beckie began at a more prudent pace.

"What was I thinking!" I just came from sea level, after three hours sleep having been off skis for a month, and here I am chasing one of the fastest men in the world up a 10,000ft mountain with 70lbs of stuff on my back that I can neither shed nor consume, whilst trying to stay ahead the Olympic pursuit champion. Before long I was sucking wind. To make matters worse, the extra weight had completely collapsed my ski camber to the point where I was a wee bit unstable - or was it climbing through the rarified air without the benefit of bottled oxygen.

So I did what anyone would have done in my predicament - I faked equipment malfunction, stopped for water and discretely coughed up a lung.

For most people "this would have been a challenging drive," as Justin would later put it. But it was worth it. The scenery was also breathtaking. The sun was intense. My sun-block was at home.

Through the camera lens, Justin and Beckie were skiing in their element; across huge snow bowls amongst the rugged volcanic peaks of Broken Top, and The Three Sisters that rose out through the snow pack - both inviting and warning. It was as though I was on top of the World. We were able to spend a total of eight hours skiing and filming [real cross-country] at one of the most spectacular sites imaginable, in perfect conditions.

The late afternoon descent was almost an afterthought, but no less exciting even though the snow had softened. The next twenty minutes unfolded in high speed glade and bowl skiing through colossal natural half pipes and over jumps, in summer conditions. Justin took to the slopes aggressively; scooting between trees, carving turns down double-black-diamond pitches and taking air where ever he could. Normally a pretty confident downhiller myself, but not knowing where I was going, nor which cliff Justin was about to lead me off, and given that I was still carrying \$10,000 worth of camera gear on my back, I decided that caution was the better part of valor, and followed Beckie's line. [My partner Lise Meloche thinks I just wimped out.]

Overall the experience can best be described as epic. It takes an extraordinarily talented skier to demonstrate the "unlimited" attributes of cross-country skiing, and a super person to candidly share their passion and love of the sport.

Although I have captured it on film, I have been asked to keep the exact location secret - not that I could find my way up there again, nor do I expect crowds there any time soon. That is the way it ought to be. Skiers should have to "earn their turns" to appreciate the fullness of the sport.

For those of you who cannot wait...

We are producing a commemorative CD-ROM for Beckie Scott featuring stories, articles, video interviews, and ski footage of our Olympic "Gold" medalist. The CD-ROM is scheduled for release XMAS 2002. All of the proceeds will be going to Beckie to bolster her ski career. This is our opportunity to show our support. Check out the www.xczone.com web site for details later this fall.

P.S. The airline lost my bags on the return trip.

Footnote:

XCZONE is considered by many in the industry as being the “Warren Miller of Cross-Country Skiing,” with such films as “High Velocity” and “On Snow,” or for the technically inclined “Tao of Skiing” and “Fundamentals of XC Skiing Technique.” [on DVD/VHS/CDROM]