

AFFECT AT ALTITUDE:
EMBODIED PRACTICES AND DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGY IN BACKCOUNTRY SKIING
AND SNOWBOARDING

Jonathan Curtis
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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Signed:

Jonathan Curtis

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CONTENTS

Abstract	v
Tables and Figures	vi
1. Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Setting the Scene Part I: The History Of Backcountry Skiing and Snowboarding	5
Setting the Scene Part II: A Definition of Touring and the Backcountry	15
Conclusion.....	22
2. Literature Review	24
Introduction	24
Convergent Media and Technology in Lifestyle Sports	25
Lifestyle Sports: Commercialisation and Digital Media	31
Emergent Practices and Their Impacts in Lifestyle Sports.....	44
Voluntary Risk Taking.....	49
Conventional Theory and Methodologies of Lifestyle Sports Research.....	55
Conclusion.....	56
3. Theoretical Perspective	59
Introduction	59
The Need to Unfold Bourdieu	59
Theories of Affect.....	61
Excavating the Affect in Bourdieu	69
Affective Atmospheres in the Backcountry Field.....	76
Conclusion.....	78
4. Methodology	80
Introduction	80
Defining a More-Than-Representational Epistemology.....	81
Research Design	86
Insighter Research	91
Connective Ethnography.....	95
More-Than-Representational Research Techniques.....	99
Interview Process, Interview Participants and Data Analysis.....	102
Conclusion.....	110

5. ‘Mind, Body, Soul and Spirit’: Embodied Touring Practice and Experience.....	111
Introduction	111
‘In the Zone, Riding the High’: The Edgework of Touring.....	112
The Backcountry Parish: Touring Relationships.....	122
‘I Don’t Want it to Interfere with My Beacon’: Digital Technology in the Backcountry.....	126
Power, Pressure And Pros: Working In The Backcountry	136
Conclusion.....	143
6. ‘I’m More About Trying to Share the Experience, I Don’t Want to Brag’: The Impacts of Digital Media on Touring Practice and Experience.....	145
Introduction	145
‘I Want People to Know I’ve Been Out There’: Emergent, Disruptive, Digital Touring Practice	147
An Avalanche of Technology: Fears and Concerns Over the Influence of Digital Media	161
‘Gather as Much Information as Possible’: ‘Authentic’ Adaptations of Digital Media	172
Text, Images and Big Data: The Affects of Platform Functionality.....	182
Conclusion.....	189
7. ‘Sex Sells, But Safety Does Too’: The Commercialisation of the Backcountry Field.....	191
Introduction	191
Professional Touring Athletes’ Experience of Commercialisation.	197
Industry Professional’s Experience of Commercialisation.....	207
Recreational Tourers’ Experience of Commercialisation.....	215
Conclusion.....	227
8. Conclusion.....	230
Introduction	230
Theoretical Implications	230
A Field in Flux.....	231
Entangled Practice, Experiences and Identities	232
Limitations of the Study.....	235
Implications for Future Research	236
9: Reference List.....	239

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the lifestyle sport subculture of backcountry skiing and snowboarding, or backcountry touring. The sport sees participants use specialised equipment to venture into mountain areas that are unsupported by human infrastructure in pursuit of secluded or challenging slopes to climb and then ride down. Over the course of the last 10 to 15 years backcountry touring has experienced rapid growth in attention and participation. As a result a number of new influences have altered the way that participants engage with their practice and understand their experiences. The use of digital technologies have become significant elements of the embodied experiences of tourers in the backcountry. Similarly, the proliferation of digital media practices has offered new ways of representing and understanding the backcountry and its corporality. With these depictions of touring reaching wider audiences than ever before, commercial interest in the backcountry market has risen with ramifications for the tourers who participate in different aspects of the industry. These additions to the affective atmosphere of the field constitute a raft of challenges to sanctity of established backcountry principles that concern ‘authentic’ and safe practice. Tourers experience and respond to these struggles in nuanced ways: from expressing concerns about how depictions of the backcountry can influence the practice of others, to adopting and adapting technology that augments their observance of the conventional perspectives of touring. This thesis uses a synthesis of affect theory and the concepts of Bourdieu in order to explore and animate these intersections of human bodies, objects and the non-material. This theoretical position has informed the project design and data collection process that included fieldwork, digital ethnography and 22 semi-structured with a broad range of the relatively homogenous touring community.

TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

4.1: Interview Participants.....	105
7.1: Forms of touring commercialisation.....	196

FIGURES

1.1: Instagram video posted by Nick McNutt of the skiing the line leading up to his Accident	2
1.2: One of Christina Lustenberger’s Instagram posts about the incident.....	2
1.3: Pieps Instagram post concerning the function of their beacons	4
1.4: Pieps Instagram post concerning the beacon upgrade program	4
1.5: Urdahl, Amundsen and Holst posing with their equipment in a studio before Amundsen’s first tour, 1893-4	8
1.6: Mike Hattrup (left), Glen Plake (centre) and Scot Schmidt (right) as they arrive in Chamonix, as depicted in <i>The Blizzard of Aahhhs</i> , directed by Greg Stump.....	12
1.7: Graph of US avalanche fatalities by winter seasons 1950-51 to 2019-20	15
1.8: A tourer in the Rogers Pass backcountry near Revelstoke, BC, Canada.....	16
1.9: Snow campsite in the backcountry of the Kosciuszko National Park, NSW, Australia.....	17
1.10: A splitboard in its alternate configurations.....	18
1.11: A splitboard configured for uphill travel with climbing skins attached	18
1.12: A group of tourers taking strides uphill with touring bindings and climbing skins.....	19
1.13: Different types of touring ski binding	20
1.14: A collection of some of the gear that a tourer might carry on a routine day in the backcountry.....	20
1.15: Tourers using climbing techniques and equipment to ascend in the Kosciuszko National Park, NSW, Australia.....	21
4.1: Looking South-East down 1 st Street, Revelstoke, BC	96
4.2: Revelstoke town from the top of Revelstoke Mountain Resort	96
4.3: Instagram recruitment post for the project	103
4.4: Recruitment flyer used in Revelstoke	103

5.1: Looking out the door of my accommodation in Revelstoke, BC, Canada.....	115
5.2: A tourer testing the snowpack and making observations in a snowpit	119
5.3: Snowpack observation tools including a thermometer, slope meter, loupe and snow crystal measuring card.....	119
5.4: The researcher touring in a whiteout near Charlotte Pass, NSW, Australia.....	129
5.5: Diagram of a Propagation Labs Probe.....	134
6.1: The researcher’s Instagram video post used for recruitment during fieldwork.....	148
6.2: Instagram post from Caroline Gleich about women in the mountains and femininity.....	150
6.3: ‘How epic is that?’ Screenshots of a YouTube video posted on the official GoPro channel, depicting a skier falling into, and being rescued from a crevasse.....	151
6.4: Instagram post by professional skier Kaj Zackrisson exemplifying relatable and ‘authentic’ content.....	153
6.5: ‘The Slide Zone’ – TGR forum threads on avalanche conditions and incidents.....	154
6.6: Instagram post sharing ‘beta’ about avalanche conditions with multiple photos and discussion of avalanche activity.....	155
6.7: Instagram post highlighting the extremity of edgework and a playfully attitude towards it.....	157
6.8: A tourer addressing risk in an Instagram post by showing and discussing Avalanche safety.....	158
6.9: Reddit user <i>neatopat</i> ’s comments on Robby Emmons’ video	162
6.10: Facebook post by pondering the impact of exposing backcountry areas on social media.....	168
6.11: Professional snowboarder, Xavier de la Rue’s Instagram post raising climate change discussions.....	173
6.12: Facebook post raising environmental issues within a local touring group.....	174
6.13: Facebook post seeking advice about equipment in a local touring group.....	175
6.14: CRP App landing page and website reporting form.....	177
6.15: An example CRP report	179
6.16: Narrative driven Instagram ‘stories’ post conveying snapshots of the different aspects of the embodied touring experience.....	185
6.17: A series of Instagram posts with tips for repairing broken equipment in the backcountry.....	185
7.1: Screenshots from <i>Bet365</i> T.V advertisement with depictions of touring	192
7.2: Armada Skis Instagram post depicting touring lifestyle imagery.....	211

7.3: ‘Avalanches are serious business’ Screenshots of a YouTube video from Matchstick Productions, depicting and discussing a dangerous avalanche triggered, but survived by tourer, Flo Goeller.....	213
7.4: Greg Hill’s Instagram post promoting the ‘values’ of his sponsor, Arc’teryx	223
7.5: ‘An overwhelming sense of oneness with my natural environment’. Portraying a relatable and authentic touring identity on the Dynafit Instagram page.....	227
8.1: An open letter to the touring community from Halsted ‘Hacksaw’ Morris the President of the American Avalanche Association, to address the impacts of COVID-19 on touring.....	238