



Carsten Moldenhauer, Edward McCarthy and Gerry Heacock enjoy the view from Niverville Col before skiing down to their camp on day 15 of the traverse.
PHOTO COURTESY DANIEL ROBB.

Skiers conquer 320 km Great Divide Traverse

LYNN MARTEL CANMORE

The Great Divide ski traverse, said Daniel Robb, is one of those legendary trips a mountaineer can't help hearing about.

Actually skiing the 320-kilometre route across massive icefields, weaving through icefalls of jumbled Windex-blue ice blocks, breaking trail in deep powder carrying 50-pound packs and camping in -25C temperatures however, remains the exclusive domain of about three dozen people.

And last month Canmore's Daniel Robb and three companions became only the eighth group since Rockies author and adventurer Chic Scott's team first travelled the glacier route in 1967, skiing from Jasper to Lake Louise.

The four – Gerry Heacock, 26, from Nelson, B.C., Vancouver's Edward McCarthy, 26, Carsten Moldenhauer, 26, from Erfurt, Germany, and Robb, 22 – began planning their

adventure last November.

In 2008 they skied Jasper's six-day Skyline/Six Pass route with a fifth friend and learned they worked well as a team. That teamwork included Moldenhauer's solo trips to place two food caches as the others were working. One of their three caches – each consisting of two 30-litre dry bags stuffed with food and stove fuel – was flown by helicopter to Mistaya Lodge.

Moldenhauer delivered their Alexandra River valley cache in a 15-hour solo ski. The Fortress Lake cache required towing a loaded toboggan 16 kilometres along a warden's snowmobile track, then two 12-kilometre ferries through snow too deep for the toboggan. With only a foamie, sleeping bag, bivy bag and cold food for the three-day trip, Moldenhauer scooped water from the still running Athabasca and Chaba rivers.

Then on April 3, Robb and Heacock's fathers saw them off from the Portal Creek

trailhead. Skiing over Maccarib Pass, they slept at the Alpine Club of Canada's Wates-Gibson Hut, feasting on cheese fondue and steak for dinner, and egg beaters and bacon for breakfast.

It would be nearly two weeks before they slept inside again, at Icefall Lodge's Lyell Icefield hut. It was nearly as long before they saw any people, when Heacock's dad and a friend met them at the Alexandra food cache bearing fresh fruit and Grand Marnier to help celebrate Heacock's 26th birthday – which they had celebrated with scotch and chocolate at their campsite below Mount Columbia a few days earlier.

"We'd just skied off the Columbia Icefield and saw a message they'd stamped in the snow," Robb said. "We'd been sending OK messages with a SPOT (transmitter) and they were just 10 minutes ahead of us. That was a high point of the trip!"

They wouldn't see people again until the

Wapta Icefield, a week further south.

During their 20-day adventure they experienced a full range of Rockies' weather, grateful a deep, late snowpack meant never having to carry their skis in the valley bottoms.

"We had absolutely beautiful Rockies spring weather," Moldenhauer said. "But our first night on a glacier was the Hooker. We were expecting nice spring temperatures, but the sky was clear and it went down to -25C. But you went out for a pee and it was so beautiful with so many stars and the outlines of the ridges and glaciers."

"That mentally prepared us for how miserable our glacier camps would be," Robb added.

At the Chaba Icefield, a whiteout resulted in the next day being a tent-bound day, waiting out a storm inside their camp fortified by a snow wall.

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Serving the Bow Valley with 20 Years' Experience

Mixed martial arts fighter has roots in Bow Valley

JUSTIN BRISBANE CANMORE

Seven years ago, Brad Cardinal had a regular job. The Bow Valley native was working as an animator, putting together kids shows.

Today, he's shattering noses and busting heads on the Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) circuit.

Mark 'The Bonesaw' Cardinal posted a big win on the Wreck MMA circuit on Friday, May 6, when he defeated Jesse Gross at an event in Quebec.

"It was a battle. The guy was undefeated going in – he had a lot of height and I don't think I was the favourite going in," said the 15-6 Cardinal.

However, the scrappy Bow Valley fighter was not deterred by the odds.

"I busted him open and broke his nose and he hurt my legs.

I dropped him with a knee to the head and put him in a choke hold. He was done, but the referee stopped the fight before he had a chance to tap out," Cardinal said.

The ending likely paved the way for a rematch, and Cardinal said he's game for that.

"I'll fight anyone," he said.

However, it wasn't always that way.

He got his start in Canmore, learning taekwondo and later karate with Mayor Ron Casey. While working as an animator, he got a chance to meet his hero, Bas Rutten, a former UFC champion, who encouraged Cardinal to try the sport.

"It was something I was going to do once, but I got hooked," Cardinal said.

He fought professionally early on, and has seen the sport change. He added Brazilian ju jitsu and Muay Thai to his arsenal, and also trains at a boxing gym in Calgary.

"I try to be well-rounded, mixing strikes with fighting on the ground," Cardinal said. "Every day I train, usually two or three workouts a day. It's not all getting beat up. We're getting more scientific."

He did take a break from training to return to Canmore recently. Despite nursing injured legs, he still managed a walk around the Bow River with his mom Suzette on Mother's Day. She says she doesn't watch his fights, but just asks for a text message to say he's okay afterwards.

Cardinal's fight will be broadcast on the Score network in the next few weeks, but he ultimately wants to reach a bigger stage.

"I want to fight in the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship). That's the ultimate goal. I gotta keep winning for that to happen and put more fights up like Friday night."

His next local fight will take place in Calgary on July 8.

Jasper to Lake Louise ski route a 20-day adventure for Canmorite

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"That storm made for hard trail-breaking the next day," Robb said. "But we had to leave; we would have run short of food. There was no discussion, we just left."

Overall, the avalanche hazard was mostly low, except for a few south-facing slopes late in the trip. Descending the Freshfields on a slope softened by afternoon sun, one of the skiers was caught in a slide, but unhurt.

"We had to sit out the day and wait to ski the slope in the morning," Robb said. But, a week since their Alexandra cache, the following day they had to ski 26 kilometres with empty bellies to reach Mistaya.

"That was our most challenging day," Robb said. "It was like skiing 26 kilometres really hung over on no sleep. It was a tough day, but getting through those points feels really great. It's an accomplishment."

"Opening the sauna building door just as it got dark and seeing our food containers was a great feeling," Moldenhauer added.

So was discovering that Mistaya owner Dave Birnie had set a track up their final climb to get there. Knowing their dehydrated dinners had been artfully prepared by Heacock added to their excitement.

"He's just a genius when it comes to planning food for climbing and skiing trips," Dan said. "But we were definitely skinny by the end

of the trip!"

Descending from the Wapta on April 22 in 10C sunshine marked a perfect end, as they were met at the trailhead by family and friends bearing celebratory treats.

"The beer tasted pretty good!" Robb said. "We were probably in the best mood of the whole trip."

For his part, Scott said he was thrilled they had experienced the trip, which, due to distance, challenging terrain and capricious Rockies' weather, is rarely completed.

"They have earned membership in a very select club," Scott said. "One of the things that makes the tour so special is that it has remained unchanged all these years. There still

are no roads, no clear cuts, no hotels and only a few huts. The significance of other adventures, Mount Everest, for example, has been seriously diminished over the years.

"I don't believe that modern equipment has made the traverse much easier. It's still as much of a challenge as it ever was."

"The Great Divide is one of those do once kind of trips," Robb said. "You travel over so much ground that very few people ever get to see. This was the year to do traverses, we had only one crevasses fall, and not deep."

"We'll remember this and we're better friends because of it. On trips like that it can go either way. Lucky for us, it went the right way."

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