

The History of SOUTHERN SKIING



By Randy Johnson

Todd Bush photo

Skiing in the south

sounds counterin-

tuitive, and for many years that's exactly what it was. Although snow fell in the mountains in winter, and early photographs show intrepid natural-snow skiers enjoying it, the snow wasn't deep enough and wasn't predictable enough to sustain a ski industry. Two major challenges faced the early ski operators: ensuring snow and attracting skiers. For skiing in the High Country to be feasible, people in the warmest part in the United States had to be convinced to drive hours to ski on mountains covered with machine-made snow. Obstacle after obstacle—from warm winters to bankruptcies—almost derailed the attempts to establish a viable ski industry in the area. But while some early visionaries' hopes were dashed, others picked up the tow rope and continued up the mountain. Eventually—in a region known more for sun than snow—they created the winter sports success story we now take for granted. This winter is the 40th anniversary of skiing in North Carolina.

The Early Days

The effort to ski in the south started long before snow-making. A remarkable photo from the 1930s shows Tom Alexander—who almost 30 years later would open the Cataloochee ski area in Maggie Valley—and his wife on primitive skis on a snowy slope, using golf clubs as ski poles.

Also in the 1930s, a skiing Lees-McRae College instructor inspired his students to try the sport. The students formed a ski club, and the shop at the college made their skis. The Depression-era Works Progress Administration's North Carolina guide shows them skiing Beech Mountain 30 years before the mountain became a ski area.

By 1954, a primitive natural snow area was open in West Virginia, but Asheville friends Bob Carr, who'd gone to Yale, and Robert G. Beard, who'd gone to Princeton, decided to form the Mount Mitchell Ski Club instead of driving to West Virginia. When Governor Luther Hodges okayed skiing on Mount Mitchell, Carr and Beard cleared a slope in 1957. But Blue Ridge Parkway officials refused to keep the road open, and Hodges decided against operating a state ski area to avoid competing with soon-to-open Cataloochee. So much for skiing on the East's highest mountain.



The Sugar Mountain skyline

Randy Johnson photos



Remember cowboy... er... cowgirl hats?
The early-'80s at Ski Hawksnest.

Photo archives



Jack Lester, Jean-Claude Killy and Jim Cottrell. Lester became the national director of skiing for the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and he and Cottrell were program developers (note Cottrell's jacket patch). French-Swiss awarded more of the program's alpine skiing patches than any resort in the country.

Randy Johnson photo



Hawksnest had its share of interesting 1980s events. The Cherokee Indians arrived to do a snow dance one light snow year. Later, a *Playboy* magazine Playmate of the Year paid a visit.

A couple of years later and a few miles to the north, in 1959, Virginia's historic spa hotel The Homestead became the "South's first ski resort"—the first to combine exceptional ski facilities, total snowmaking and top-notch accommodations. Austrian Sepp Kober launched The Homestead's slopes and helped create the southern ski market. The resort's "Come South to Ski" campaign created mass public awareness, and Kober's accent and ski skills inspired skiers. He became the "Father of Southern Skiing." The efforts at The Homestead were the turning point that set the stage for High Country skiing.

The High Country's First Resort

In March 1960, the National Guard was returning home after ferrying food to snowed-in High Country residents, and Cataloochee was readying to open the next year. The combination of significant snow in the High Country and a nearby ski resort started tourism leaders like M. E. Thalheimer thinking about the potential for winter recreation in the High Country. Thalheimer purchased land from Grover Robbins, the Boone Chamber appointed a committee to help, and the development of the Blowing Rock Ski Lodge was underway.

When the lodge opened in 1962, "the rich and famous came in droves," recalled Grady Moretz, who'd become a shareholder, like many others, by providing goods or services to the resort in exchange for shares. Moretz supplied materials via his V. L. Moretz & Son Lumber Company. But a wealth of problems (see JD Dooley's story in this issue) led the bank to call the note. Moretz, Jon Reynolds (affiliated with a Winston-Salem company that graded the slopes) and others bought the Blowing Rock Ski Lodge by paying the bank.

Mortez gave the resort a new name—Appalachian Ski Mountain—and began to rebuild the business.

Then came one of the South's most fascinating ski stories. In 1968, long-haired Boone native Jim Cottrell proposed an independent ski school at Appalachian to Grady Moretz. The Charlotte college instructor wanted to teach a course in downhill skiing. Moretz agreed, and Cottrell and his brother Jones taught 114 students that winter.

That same winter at Beech Mountain, an intense, charismatic man with a shaved head and a bizarre past also taught skiing. Atlanta native Jack Lester claimed to be the first American to graduate from Australia's West Point, the first American commissioned in the Australian Army, the youngest stage director at Hollywood's Grauman-Chinese Theater and former manager for Marilyn Monroe and the singing group The Ink Spots.

Lester had caught the ski bug when he met Clif Taylor, originator of the graduated length method (GLM) of ski instruction. That approach, in which beginners start on short skis and then move up, hit the industry like shaped skis did in the mid-1990s. Lester was sold on the idea. The same winter Cottrell's students were learning at Appalachian, Lester was teaching former North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford to ski on Beech Mountain. When the Austrian ski school director ordered



Photo archives

Nice beanies, guys. Ahhh, the '70s. The early French-Swiss Ski College team with Jack Lester and Jim Cottrell in the center.

The uniforms brought a certain cachet to those who donned the famous French-Swiss jacket.

the unsanctioned instructor off the slopes over the PA system, Lester was mortified. That slight would help make southern ski history.

The following summer, when Jim Cottrell found himself living next door to Lester in Charlotte, the French-Swiss Ski College was born. They'd show the arrogant Europeans that Americans could teach skiing.

During the winter of 1969-70, French-Swiss was a card table in the Appalachian Ski Mountain lodge, but Cottrell and Lester's group-booking concept brought in hundreds of students—and thousands of Green Berets who were diverted from Europe ... to North Carolina!

The army's 65 percent injury rate for servicemen learning to ski in Europe ended at French-Swiss. Navy Seals, cadets from the Naval Academy and West Point, and the Harvard racing team followed.

Then Lester brought Jean-Claude Killy to Boone for the premiere of Killy's first feature film, *Snow Job*, a week before the 1972 Winter Olympics. Resplendent in silk ski pants, fur boots and American eagle-embroidered sweater, Lester created a major media event. Depending on which newspaper you read, Lester was either a

huckster or a promotional genius, but the fact is that Lester put High Country skiing on the map. The Chamber praised him as the "magic promoter."

The juggernaut rolled on. Lester wanted to franchise French-Swiss, starting with Snowshoe. But open-heart surgery led to his death the following summer.

Cottrell carried on with Mike Lamb, a Colorado instructor who later became the ski school director at Sugar Mountain. In 1976, Cottrell hosted the Winter Special Olympics, and every year since, he has championed the Southeastern Winter Special Olympics and propelled participants to international games. Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver attended the games in 1982.

The rest is history. The Moretz family became sole owners of the resort, and their mountain, Cottrell's methods and Lester's promotions helped create the southern ski industry.

After Appalachian

Neither Beech nor Sugar was responsible for the first lift-served skiing in Banner Elk, now proclaimed the "Ski Capital of the South." In the early 1960s, Auburn and Nelta Andrews owned a shaded bowl just

outside of Banner Elk that was becoming popular with sledders. Auburn had been a Lees-McRae College student during the first surge of North Carolina ski interest in the 1930s. In 1965, local physician Dr. Charles Wiley had the idea to build a tow. He sold stock to physicians and used his Jeep to power the lift.

The Andrews installed lights, and skiing took off. Local families and students "had a big time," Nelta Andrews recalled in the 1980s. One night, Dr. Wiley crashed on the way down the mountain and told Auburn he'd have to take that big rock out of the meadow. But there were no rocks. Wiley had slammed into a "meadow muffin," a frozen pile of cow manure from the previous grazing season.

When the big ski areas opened later, "the squirrels ate the tow rope; we just sorta faded out," Nelta said. The old engine and pulleys still sit in the field.

Local developers Grover and Harry Robbins, who started Tweetsie Railroad, opened the four-star Hound Ears Lodge and Club, the Boone area's second ski slope with North Carolina's first chairlift, in 1964. But the big slopes had more mass appeal, and the resort joined the roster of ghost ski areas in the late 1980s.



Thousands of Green Berets initially trained with the French-Swiss Ski College during the winter of 1969-70. The French-Swiss method drastically reduced the accident rate troops were experiencing during their training in Europe.



Snowmaking made all the difference in the eventual success of skiing in the High Country and the South. The small "snow guns" of old have given way to massive "snow cannons" and even boom-mounted guns that inundate a single area.



Celebrities helped make High Country skiing visible. Besides Jean-Claude Killy, "Spider" Sabich and 1964 Olympic gold medalist Billy Kidd raced in the early 1970s Snow Carnival of the South—said to be the first professional races ever held in the region.

The High Country's third ski resort opened in the winter of 1966-67, North Carolina's fifth. Herb Reynolds, of the construction company involved in the Blowing Rock Ski Lodge, developed Seven Devils with help from Gardner Gidley, a Winston-Salem designer affiliated with the Tanglewood development. Reynold's son Jon bought the ski area in the mid-1980s and Gardner Gidley's son Tom was marketing director during the early years when the slope's name was changed to Ski Hawksnest.

After mid-1990s controversy with the Town of Seven Devils over a sewage treatment plant, Reynolds sold the resort to Leonard Cottom, who with son Lenny runs the resort today.

The Mega-Slopes

In July 1960, Alabamans Tom "Doc" Brigham (a dentist) and Serena "Chessie" MacRae, of Linville took a hike in Banner Elk to look for likely spots for ski areas on Beech and Sugar mountains. After climbing Sugar, Brigham decided he didn't like the peak's irregular boulders, so in March 1960, he and others purchased an option on the "rockless" upper slopes of Beech Mountain from Bill Elder.

Problems arose financing the land in 1963, and Brigham convinced Grover Robbins to hire him and get involved. The Robbins' Beech Mountain development group, Carolina Caribbean Corporation, wanted to pair the Beech resort with a condominium project on St. Croix, the part of the Virgin Islands administered by the United States.

The slopes were ready in December 1967. Beech was poised for leadership in the southern ski industry.

Sugar came next. In 1968, MacRae, her husband and Brigham left Beech to create a resort on Sugar. Brigham, whose skiing wanderlust would later lead to the development of Snowshoe, West Virginia, had "learned to be content with rocks."

Bob Ash became Sugar's mountain manager in 1971. Ash had been one of only a few local ski instructors among The Homestead's mostly European staff. "We amazed the Austrians at The Homestead," Ash remembered. "We were the West Virginia rednecks from Beckley." Ash was a snowmaking genius. He earned Sugar a feature describing his snowmaking innovations in *Ski Area Management* magazine.

Along with Jean-Claude Killy, "Spider" Sabich and 1964 Olympic gold medalist Billy Kidd skied the High Country in the 1970s.

However, the local winters in the early 1970s were among the warmest in more than 20 years. Carolina Caribbean, Beech, Sugar and other ski areas focusing on real estate sales were reeling from the oil crisis, recession and high interest rates. Skiing continued to make money, but couldn't offset plummeting real estate sales. Doc Brigham said, "you couldn't borrow money with a borrowing machine." Sugar's financial straits were Doc Brigham's cue. "That carpet-bagging dentist" left for his next project—Snowshoe.

During those years, Beech Mountain's preeminent position began to erode due to the superior snowmaking and easier access at Sugar. In fall 1974, Beech operations manager Fred Pfohl, now owner of Fred's General Mercantile, hired Bob Ash away from Sugar. The word went out that Beech would again focus on skiing. A two-foot Thanksgiving snowstorm launched the season.

But Carolina Caribbean went bankrupt in February 1975. Its president, Roger A. Hard, who had just overseen Beech's first acceptable ski season, became president of Sugar Mountain Company. Bob Quinlan, former vice president of finance at Beech, also made the move to Sugar.

Apres-ski history was being made at the base of Sugar. The "notorious" nightspot called the Hub Pub Club was a happening spot. Dan Seme, Jr., later mountain manager at Snowshoe, was one of the operators. His daytime job as Sugar's first professional ski patroller allowed

him “to invite all the girls down to the club,” where he was the bartender. “All the guys followed,” he said. Entertainment included a pre-fame Jimmy Buffett, poker-faced comedian Jackie Vernon and the Kingston Trio. Avery County at the time was very dry. Seme said, “We spent one Halloween on the roof just guarding the place.”

The club closed, but the building became Alpine Ski Center, the now landmark ski shop at the entrance to Sugar Mountain. Sugar employee Bob Quinlan launched Alpine with friend Hiram Lewis, Sugar’s director of marketing. Alpine—at Beech and five urban locations in three states—rode the post-bankruptcy rise of southern skiing. Alpine has earned repeated Ski Industries America (SIA) awards for fueling the retail success of southern skiing.

In 1976, Sugar Mountain changed hands and the following winter was leased to new operators, Blue Knob Recreation, Inc.

At both Beech and Sugar, resurgent ski operations, although profitable, could not offset the drain created by the still slumping real estate market. Bankruptcy followed and unfairly tainted the South’s ski reputation.

Up at Beech, the property owners’ association operated the ski area through the winter of 1975-76, with participation from area accommodations entrepreneur Alan Holcombe.

Record cold and snow returned from 1976 to 1978. Under Blue Knob, attendance was up, but Sugar declared bankruptcy. In 1978, partners Dale Stancil and Ray Costin bought the resort for \$2.6 million. (Ray Costin bought Ski Beech Resort in 1986 and owns it to this day.)

Gunther Jochl became general manager and still is today—one of the South’s benchmark ski careers. Aggressive snowmaking, careful grooming and long ski seasons have spelled success. Mike Lamb arrived from French-Swiss to head the marketing effort and ski school and became an oft-heard spokesman for Professional Ski Instructors of America.

The final High Country’s ski area debuted in 1970. Mill Ridge was the sixth local resort, the state’s ninth. But the multi-faceted little resort couldn’t draw weekday crowds and closed in the early 1990s. The Mill Ridge property owners’ association scored a first—the members bought the slopes and built nature trails on yet another ghost ski area.

But for the remaining resorts, conditions and reputation began to improve. Snow droughts in the north and west helped the High Country earn credit for the nation’s best ski conditions in 1980-81. The new High Country Host launched its toll-free ski report. Sugar Mountain’s Sherry Perry became the nation’s first woman Outstanding National Ski Patrol Professional of the Year.

Another boost came when Switzerland native Sepp Gmuender and Paul Bousquet of Killington hit Beech in 1982. Helping things along even more, the High Country’s only detachable quad chairlift was installed. And then liquor by the drink passed in 1985.

Nordic Nirvana

By then, cross-country skiing had arrived in the High Country. In 1978, John Elder created the South’s first cross-country ski center at Beech Mountain Campground. When that center closed, Fred Pfohl—then mayor of Beech Mountain—rented skis at his store, Fred’s General Mercantile.

Hanes Boren and Sam Houston rented Nordic skis at Footsloggers in Boone, but the shop’s guided ski trips by High South Nordic Guides sparked the southernmost cross-country ski resort in 1980. High South Nordic Guides, led by Steve Owen and Jeep Barrett, became the official ski concession at Roan Mountain State Park. High South boasted Professional Ski Instructor of America-trained teachers. Their guides



Randy Johnson photo

The rusting bull wheel of the old chair lift may be all that’s left of the ski area infrastructure at Mill Ridge, but the slopes are mowed and new trails explore the now POA-owned natural area. Hikers and the occasional cross-country skier enjoy the ghost ski area.



Randy Johnson photo

The High Country’s downhill skiers enjoy great scenery, but it’s the cross-country enthusiasts who marvel at the best of the area’s snow-blasted beauty. For Nordic skiers on Roan Mountain, nearly 1,000 feet higher than Beech, the skiing is straight out of New England.



Snowboarders surf a frozen wave near the peak of Sugar Mountain where Sugar Top's manmade ridge competes with Grandfather's sumptuous summits. Sugar Ski & Country Club lies directly below.



Before his death in 2004, Bob Ash dreamed of bringing a new ski area to the High Country. Here, he sits below Hanging Rock in the early 1990s, imagining the resort. One of the beautifully sculpted early runs rises behind him.



Dude! Extreme skier extraordinaire Glen Plake came to Beech in the early 1990s and got an enthusiastic reception. He taught NASCAR drivers to ski race and then made some above-the-clouds runs on a picture-perfect High Country morning. But even the toughest slope wasn't enough; he started jumping off retaining walls onto the snowy Banner Elk side of the mountain.

included Hart Hodges, grandson of North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges, and James Randolph, son of Alabaman Ted Randolph, who had been involved in the development of Sugar Mountain.

The center lasted into the 1990s, and made news by teaching Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander and wife Honey to ski.

It wasn't just "outlanders" on the Nordic scene. Pineola's Troy Clark won the first and last Mount Mitchell Cross-Country Ski Race by defeating 75 competitors over the 8-mile course. The win led the National Guard to ask the North Carolinian to join their biathlon team. Who would imagine that a member of the Avery County Board of Commissioners (from 1984 to 1990) would be comfortable sporting cross-country ski stretch suits on Roan Mountain? Clark's High Country Ski Shop in Pineola is still the area's premier Nordic ski rental shop.

Snowboarding Surges

In December 1987, Greg Barrow of Banner Elk's Edge of the World Outfitters made one of those life-changing decisions—he began stocking snowboards. "We have six Burton snowboards for rent," he said, "but we'll get more if the demand is there." Barrow was on the cutting edge.

Sixteen-year-old Banner Elk resident J.J. Collier and his brother Dave embodied the trend. As winter 1988 ended, J.J. and Dave Collier's dad John piled his two snowboarding sons into the station wagon for Stratton Mountain, Vermont and the U.S. Open Snowboarding Championships.

Incredibly—J.J. took first place in the Junior Moguls. "Jake" Burton Carpenter, owner of Burton Snowboards, was shocked that Collier had won on a 1989 model board unavailable at the time. "Where did you get the board, J.J.?" the company owner asked. Collier said he'd won it in Banner Elk days before in the south's first snowboard race—sponsored by Edge of the World. Burton had shipped the board south a week earlier. Now it was back. J.J. and Dave both netted Burton sponsorships. Today, J.J. lives in France where he designs skiwear for Salomon.

The Resort That Wasn't

Since the mid-1980s, a construction crew had been cutting new slopes in Banner Elk on Hanging Rock and capturing skiers' attention. General Alexander Andrews, who had helped create Sugar Mountain, had been acquiring land for years, and Bob Ash was designing the slopes. With close to 200 acres of skiing and a 1,700-foot vertical drop planned, the resort would be the largest in the region.

Snow Country Magazine tweaked Ash in a 1991 article, suggesting that his vision verged on the grandiose. Ash's plans made full use of the high-tech snowmaking advances that had earned him four patents, not to mention the jealousy of competitors and a reputation for being a difficult dreamer at times.

Despite years of work, Ash's effort faded. The slopes are now a golf course community.

Ash moved on and surfaced on the 50th anniversary of snowmaking in 2000. His innovative snowmaking devices were chosen for the 1988 Winter Olympic in Alberta and for use at Sunday River, Maine, one of the world's largest, most successful snowmaking systems.

The only skiers who ever skied Ash's wide, manicured slopes were a handful of telemark skiers. "It's big, with a Western feel," one said. "If it had opened, it'd been the best resort in the South." Bob Ash died in 2004.

Big Hair Day

In 1993, Mohawk-coiffed skier Glen Plake, the original extreme skier, caused a sensation when he toured 50 smaller ski areas in the country. Plake arrived at Beech with some of NASCAR's "young gun"

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That same year, Boone studio photographer George “Snowman” Flowers retired. His snowy scenes ran in newspapers from Florida to New York for almost 40 years as United Press International High Country bureau chief. He played a major role in convincing the South that skiing in the region was viable. He won UPI photo contests for his winter scenes. Flowers also accepted photos from freelancers. One of these photos—showing a cross-country skier striding across the snow-covered Linn Cove Viaduct—ran on the front page of Hawaii’s *Honolulu Advertiser*. Flowers closed his Boone photography studio and donated all his negatives to the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce in 2003.

The Next Run

Where does High Country skiing stand on the eve of its 40th anniversary?

Some may say that Snowshoe, Wintergreen, Canaan Valley and others seem to be reinvigorating their base facilities more rapidly. But High Country resorts have achieved what southern slopes have been working toward for years.

"Skiers are finally realizing that ski conditions can be great up here when it's balmy down there," said Brad Moretz.

To appreciate that, you have to look past the lift ticket sales statistics, into the lives of the people who've struggled to live in the southern mountains while bringing snowsports to the masses. Year after year, they tune the skis, teach the lessons, run the resorts, patrol the slopes or melt the frozen snowguns at 2:00 a.m. in 10 below zero windchills. Not all of their names can appear in this or any article, but you know who they are—or who you are. Skiing came South on the dreams of true believers—and we're still here.



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Randy Johnson

WRITER, PHOTOGRAPHER
AND TIRELESS PROMOTER
OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

By John DeMers

Randy Johnson has always had a passion for winter, snow and the mountain way of life.

Born in Indiana to a military family, Johnson grew up living in many locales across the United States and Europe. During his college days in Richmond, Va., Johnson made winter pilgrimages to climb Mt. Washington in New Hampshire with friends, enjoying the cold and snow. But the drive was long and their thoughts turned to finding the same type of environment closer to home. Their search for the snowiest spot in the south brought them to the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area in West Virginia, a place they would go snowshoeing. In the early 1970s, hearing that a resort close by named Snowshoe Ski Resort was about to open, Johnson said, "My friends and I had to go and check it out."

In a story that even Snowshoe supports, he and his brother "helped" open the resort in a funny kind of way.

"We arrived at the resort the day before it was to open. We checked out the lodge and gasped at the price, then slunk off to camp in the woods by the parking lot. The next morning, my brother Ken and I met a bunch of skiers at a roped off area at the top of the slope. We were cupping hot chocolate, looking like the Michelin men in our down suits, and I guess we kinda looked official because some skier came up and asked us, 'Can we ski down the hill?' My brother said, 'Sure, we don't care.' Under the rope they went." They were the first skiers down Snowshoe. Randy and his brother accidentally christened a ski area, while at

the same time discovering snow skiing.

"I wasn't a skier," Johnson said. "My passion was rock climbing, backpacking and winter mountaineering. I was researching wilderness management in graduate school and began to realize that skiing, especially cross-country skiing, was a cool way to enjoy the back country."

In the early 1970s, his quest for the snowiest spot in the south led him to Grandfather Mountain. "I fell in love with Grandfather. My soul always feels at home there," he said. For a week every January "we'd climb Grandfather Mountain and camp. We had a ritual when we came down—stomping into Daniel Boone Inn, covered in wet wool, and eating far more than we deserved for the price."

On a 1977 visit to Grandfather, he thought he was losing his favorite place. "I encountered No Trespassing signs—hikers had died on the mountain—and the trails were being closed. So I met with Hugh Morton, owner of Grandfather Mountain, and told him that I'd studied trail management and thought a plan could be developed to manage the wilderness area of Grandfather that would let the public in as well as defray management expenses with trail fees. 'How are we going to do that?' he asked me. I said, 'Hire me.'"

Johnson left Virginia and devoted his attention to turning Grandfather Mountain's trails around. He was also able to entice researchers to Grandfather. The results were projects like protecting endangered bats and reintroducing peregrine falcons. He also worked to mesh the mountain's

trails with new paths being built on the Blue Ridge Parkway as the last link was opened in the 1980s.

At the same time, writing was an ever-growing passion. He'd been writing poetry since high school ("I won a college poetry contest in 11th grade") and worked on student newspapers.

Locally, his early writing promoted the new concept of paid hiking permits on Grandfather Mountain. But he wanted to expand his range. "I bought my first manual typewriter at WJ Office Supply in Boone and taught myself to two-finger type," he recalled.

Becoming a "real" writer happened over years of deadlines and hundreds of articles, photos and restaurant reviews for *The Mountain Times*—"I first contributed to their third issue," Johnson said.

Those stories led him to start writing about the High Country for regional newspapers (the *Charlotte Observer*, *Atlanta Journal*). He became known for his outdoors expertise on the local area, and soon was contributing to national publications. One full-page article that Johnson wrote and photographed for *USA Today* featured a map that included Boone. That map appeared in a Doonesbury comic strip parody of the then new national newspaper.

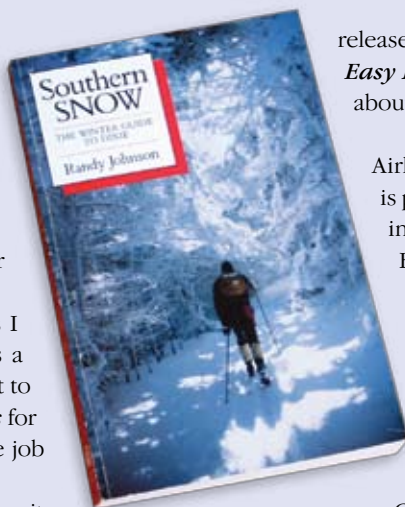
In 1986 Johnson published his first book, *Southern Snow: The Winter Guide to Dixie*. It covered the history of skiing in the south and the weather of the southern mountains, and it became a cult classic regional ski book. The book resulted from a quest—to get southern skiing recognized

in the national magazines. "Nobody was covering us," he said, "so I started hammering away at it." Eventually, his High Country articles appeared in *SKI*, *Snow Country*, *Skiing*, *Backpacker*, *Cross Country Skier* and many others.

Johnson left Grandfather in 1991 to pursue photojournalism. But then another opportunity came along.

"One day while I was in the Bahamas I was checking my messages and there was a job offer from a Greensboro publisher about to launch a new magazine called *Hemispheres* for United Airlines," Johnson said. He took the job in 1992.

Books have become his focus. The University of North Carolina Press will republish an updated *Southern Snow* next winter, and this summer a revised edition of Johnson's *Hiking North Carolina*—the bestselling statewide trail guide—will hit the bookstores. A few years ago, Falcon Press



released his *Hiking the Blue Ridge Parkway* and *Best Easy Day Hikes Blue Ridge Parkway*. Find information about his books at www.randyjohnsonbooks.com.

Now the editor-in-chief of *Hemispheres*, United Airlines' in-flight magazine, Johnson has piloted what is perhaps the most award-winning airline publication in the country (www.hemispheresmagazine.com). He was just named editor of a new online magazine for The North Face that will debut in April.

"It took me awhile, but I've identified some of what motivates me," he said. "On Grandfather, I got great satisfaction keeping the mountain open for hikers and building new trails—those years define my life. I loved teaching people to ski on Roan Mountain with High South Nordic Guides in the '80s. And I've been accused of being a one-man chamber of commerce for the High Country with the articles I write. Bottom line—sharing the mountains, the snow and cold, with others truly inspires me."

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