



McLEANINGS

SNOW SLEEPER

"Trip planning is a reiterative process that usually ends when you run out of time, or, if you're Eastern European, after you have your jeans and track jacket packed for your Everest trip —because that's all you really need."

I stole the idea of traveling to exotic places to do esoteric things from some of the wealthy people I've met on mountaintops. During one such encounter, at a time when I was wondering what I'd do with my life, I remember thinking, "Hmmm. If I were rich, I'd do this. But then again, I'm not rich, and I'm doing it anyway...." Where there's a will, there's a way. So began—accidentally—my life of travel.

Trips and travel can be roughly divided into five steps: dream, commit, plan, go and return. The dreaming part often overwhelms the optimizers among us. There are so many places to go and so many things to ski that the world seems too big. A good way to break through Dreamer's Block is to look at British mountaineering books and magazines.

The Brits like to explore, appreciate pretty peaks, and their idea of a moderate alpine climb is most people's idea of a fun ski run. Personally, I prefer trips to places with lots of mid-sized objectives rather than one all-or-nothing mission. A big single goal is like playing roulette and placing everything on a single number—if you win, you win big, but the chances are slim.

I prefer putting the commitment part ahead of the planning. Once you've jumped off the cliff of commitment and bought a plane ticket, you have much more incentive to stick the landing. My first trip to Baffin Island began with a pile of personal debt and a shotgun, but ended up with a grant from Polartec and some of the best skiing of my life. American alpinist Jack Tackle summed it up: "Just buy the f*cking plane ticket."

With dates set and a significant monetary investment made, a trip goes from theory to reality. From there, having a plan is important, but sticking to it is not. It's common for trips to go from Plan A to Plan B (or, C, D, E...) and flexibility is essential, but

if you don't have a plan, *nothing* happens. During an early trip to Antarctica, our plan went from an eighty-mile traverse, to a forty-mile traverse, to a twenty-mile one-way outing, yet still ended up being the trip of a lifetime.

Outline where you're going to be, what you want to accomplish, what kind of gear and food you'll need, and how long it might take. Start broad, and work backward to figure out what to bring, which will inevitably lead to the realization that you have way too much stuff, which necessitates rethinking The Plan altogether. Trip planning is a reiterative process that usually ends when you run out of time, or, if you're Eastern European, after you have your jeans and track jacket packed for your Everest trip—because that's all you really need.

The "go" part of travel is like tipping the first block in a chain of dominos—after the planning, organizing and scheming, it's time to sit back and watch how it all unfolds. Sometimes it's perfect, but often there are a few rough spots that are usually related to weather or conditions—like the seemingly mandatory four-day storm in the middle of every expedition. It's part of the game.

Returning is perhaps the most important element of a ski-mountaineering trip. Not returning means that you've either run off with the natives or, likely, perished. No mountain or ski run is worth dying for, although many might seem like it at the time.

Living a life of travel (even an accidental one) is as simple as making it a priority. Material objects fade and break, but memories of trips and friendships grow brighter with time. The Porsche, iPad and Gulfstream may have to wait, but it all seems worthwhile when you are standing on top of a new peak. Of course, there's always the next one to look forward to. You've already bought the ticket....



Andrew McLean lives in Park City, Utah with his trophy wife, two red-headed daughters, one good dog and one bad dog. He's racked up first descents all over the world and laid arcs on all seven continents. In a past life he was an outdoor gear designer, and his current favorite color is chartreuse. Photo: Gabe Rogel