

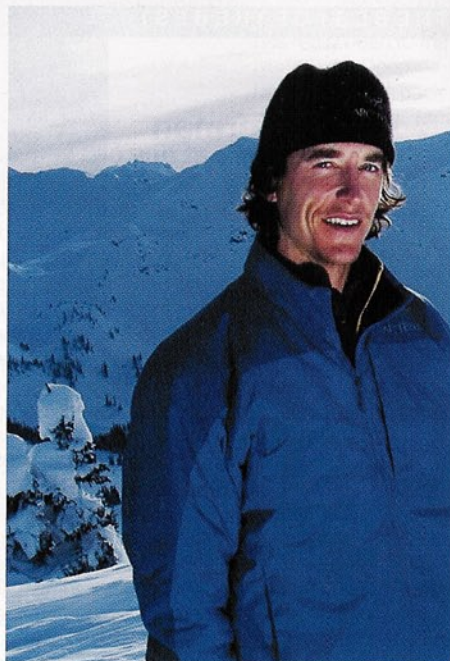
“Bimbaluna,” says professional climber Josune Bereziartu, “is the highest point of my career.” And to female climbers, it is one more step toward closing the sport’s shrinking gender gap.”

Josune Bereziartu

Climbing where no woman has gone before • On May 9

professional climber Josune Bereziartu, 33, started up Bimbaluna, a 65-foot limestone well in Saint Loup, Switzerland, to do what no woman had ever done: climb one of the world’s few 5.15s. The rating is so difficult it didn’t even exist until four years ago, and since then, only 12 people had managed it, all of them men.

For Bereziartu, a 15-year rock veteran from the Basque region of northern Spain, finishing Bimbaluna was a real coup. What had taken the route’s first ascensionist three years took her just five weeks of dogged determination. “Bimbaluna,” says Bereziartu, “is the highest point of my career.” And to female climbers, it is one more step toward closing the sport’s shrinking gender gap. —Kasey Cordell



Greg Hill

A million vertical feet in a year

Greg Hill skis mountains the sovereign way: no lifts, no helicopters; only the power from within. Using skins on his skis for traction, the forester and ski guide climbs a peak only to ski back down it. In 1999, his first year of serious backcountry skiing, 4,000 or 6,000 feet of vertical gain and loss would have been a big day.

But that was just a start. “Ruedi Beglinger [a famous guide in the Canadian Rockies] claimed to have skied nearly a million verts in a year, and that made it one of those benchmark deals,” says Hill. “Nobody had done it, and nobody was expecting anybody to do it. So I started trying for it.”

Last year, Hill, 30, a native of British Columbia, did 40,000 feet under his own power in a single day. (It would take a slower, shuttle-dependent heli-skier two days to match that number.) Over his year, Hill summited 40 separate peaks in central B.C. and put in 37 days of 10,000 or more feet. He got “pushed around a couple of times by avalanches,” but reciting the mantra “Breathe and believe,” he kept going. On May 19, in the MacKenzie Mountains, after 145 days of skiing, he got the millionth foot. He was tired, but, he says, “I was sorry it was over.”

“Nobody had skied a million verts in a year, and nobody was expecting anybody to do it,” says skier Greg Hill. “So I started trying for it.”

