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Hiking is the easy part of getting this trip going:  
Molly Milligan, Pilar Peterson, Helen Schettini, Sara  
Wickham, Kalina Hornsby and Natalie Langmann.



# BRALORNE

## Six girls cut loose in the Bralorne Backcountry

WORDS BY NATALIE LANGMANN | PHOTOS BY JEFF CORBETT

up to the peak. It's cloudy and we're  
lighter on our feet. The snow is  
loose and we're moving fast. The  
wind is in our faces and we're  
gliding down the mountain. The  
trees are covered in snow and  
the ground is a mix of snow and  
rock. We're having a great time  
and we're not even sweating.  
The snow is soft and we're  
gliding down the mountain. The  
trees are covered in snow and  
the ground is a mix of snow and  
rock. We're having a great time  
and we're not even sweating.



I'm getting nervous as my phone starts ring-  
ing off the hook just before the trip's about  
to start. Vanessa Stark won't be able to make  
it. Our photographer, Jeff Corbett, is call-  
ing to say that Nelly, his old F-150, is having  
mechanical problems and he won't be able to  
transport his sled.

"Of course Nelly isn't working," I say,  
shaking my head. "She has a timer set to fall  
apart the moment a road trip comes up. It's  
safer if I just come down to Vancouver and  
drive you and your sled to the drop zone."

Next up, Molly Milligan calls the story  
off—her sled has died. Kalina Hornsby calls  
and offers to double Molly. I switch lines back  
to Molly, who has spent enough time in Bra-  
lorne, BC, to know that doubling sucks, but  
she agrees, saying, "If anything, it will be fun."

Then there's Pilar Peterson and Sara Wick-  
ham with one sled between the two of them.

"If you get yourselves to Bralorne," I say,  
"I'll tandem Pilar."

A plan is in sight as our tangled mess be-  
gins to smooth out. After working till late,  
Pilar will drive Sara's sled around via Lil-  
looet. Then Sara will come over the next day,  
doubled by Andrea Helleman. Note: she was  
blessed with the last name Helleman for a  
reason—there's no way in hell that you could  
put me on the back of her sled going Mach  
speed over the Hurley.



Milligan, literally waist-deep in a pillow.

**SOME WANT THE PLACE TO BE KEPT A SECRET, WHILE SLEDNECK RUFFIANS HAVE BEEN HEARD TO CLAIM,**

*It's called Bro-lorne. Leave your bras at home; this isn't no place for a lady.*

This takes us to the moment where we are off-loading our sleds at the snow line of the Hurley logging road. Spring has left only a thin patch of snow to sled upon till we reach the road that takes us through the mountains. We cruise into Bralorne, and besides holes in our sled's skis, no problems. That is until we open the door to a big surprise—no hydro. I had just paid my bill, a little late, I confess. The house is frozen, we won't be able to cook, and within an hour we won't be able to see. I fire the wood stove up, and Kalina and Helen start making nachos on the top, swearing that we will not starve in Bralorne. I call hydro and beg them to come. They aren't crazy about driving around from Lillooet, saying the roads are in bad shape. Surrounded by candlelight, we wonder if Pilar will wake up at 4 a.m. and drive five hours of winding, rough roads to meet us.

The morning rolls in with a bit of sun just as Pilar pulls up with her window open and Nickelback cranked.

"Shut that music off. I hate Nickelback," I scream out the window.

"What are you talking about? They are so good, so blue-collar workingman," enthuses Pilar.


At least she's here with Sara's sled; the day is starting to get better. And with those words in mind, the hydro guys drive in. They

take a look around at a bunch of girls with sleds and then realize that it was Pilar who passed them a mile back. They promise never to turn the power off again.

During its prosperous gold-mining days of the 1930s, Bralorne had a town hall, swimming pool, hockey teams, a ski hill and Canada's first ski club. That past is long forgotten, the few remaining houses are in shambles, and a whole new crew of people are coming by sled and packing skis and snowboards. Just north of Pemberton Meadows, cellphones stop working, time stands still, and people ride snowmobiles to the doorstep of their homes. Once there, the Bridge River Valley is surrounded by massive peaks and endless shred zones.

Some want the place to be kept a secret, while sledneck ruffians have been heard to claim, "It's called Bro-lorne. Leave your bras at home; this isn't no place for a lady." So imagine the heads that turn when we sled into town to shoot for a week. We wonder if Corbett is out of his mind. Doesn't he know that between all the girls we're bound to get stuck more times than he can wish he left the bras at home?

With Molly and Kalina doubling, Pilar, Helen, Corbett and I head for the Noel, the valley's easiest sled-accessed area. If the Noel's been shralped, we can always head



Peterson tail-wheelies at dusk.

to the Not Noel or into Playland. Rooping up to the peak, it's cloudy and we're unable to see past the engines of our sleds. Passing over an avalanche field of debris, we're thinking this day might be a bust. But within seconds, the sun starts peaking through the heavy overcast skies. It's time to start riding pow and scoping out which lines will be worth shooting. Molly spots a decent-sized cornice and quickly busts a smooth Method off it as the clouds completely disappear. We find some drops, jib any feature, and ollie anything worth hitting. Heading out of the Noel, Molly and Kalina make doubling look easy. Parking up next to the house, we're exhausted, but Kalina heads to the basement to chop wood. She's a ninja when it comes to severing logs.

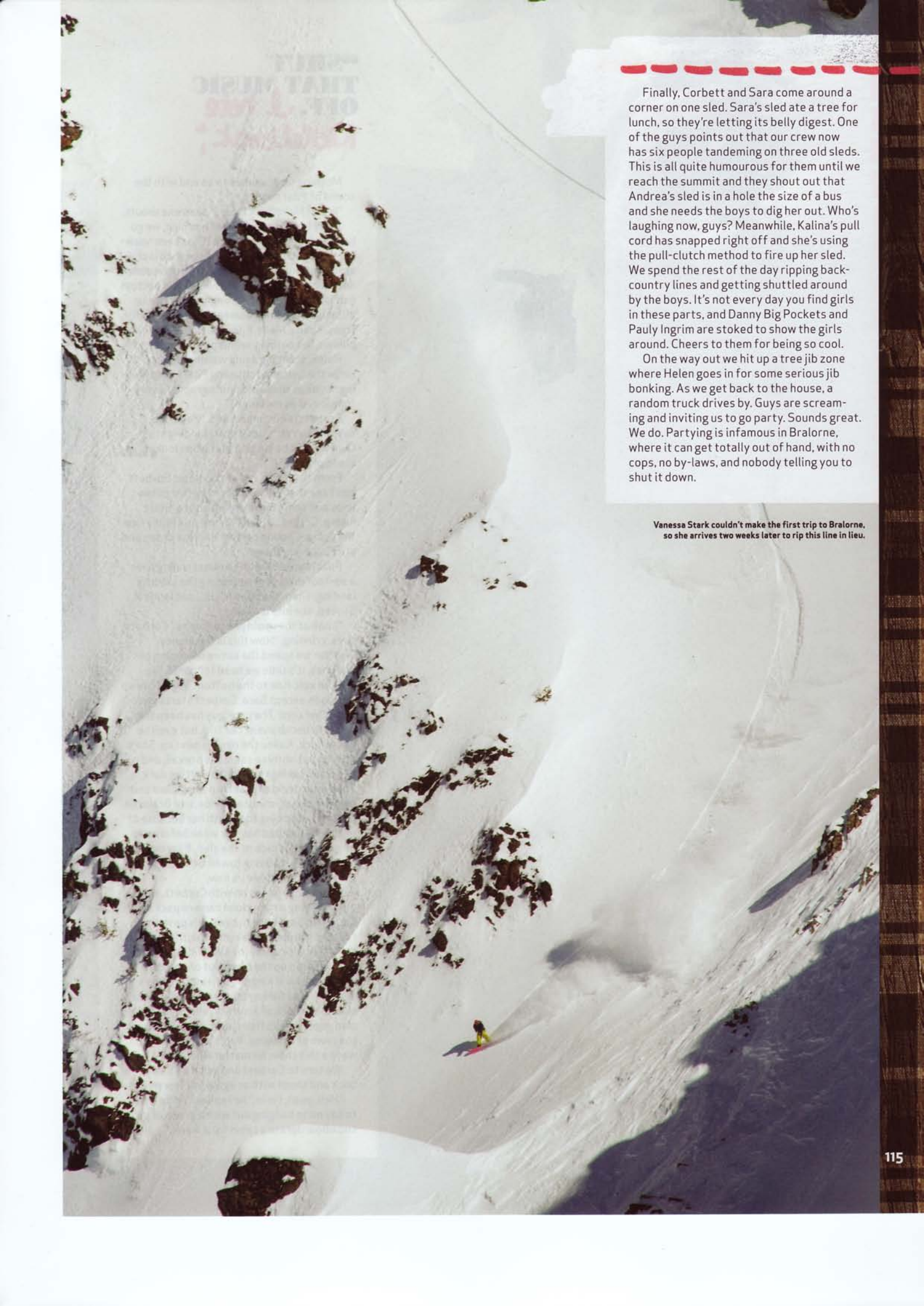
The next day we awake to Sara racing in on the back of Andrea's sled.

"I will never tandem over the Hurley again," Sara swears.

A revved-up Andrea burns off to hook up and sled with some local guys. We head up Kingdom Lake Road and into the Lord of the Rings area. Pilar and I are hammering along when she squeezes the brakes. Flying over the sled in an abrupt stop, I see a pillow field that would make anyone freeze in their tracks. The crew catches up and scopes out the zone, but knowing we'll come back, we ride on. Pilar and I tandem up through the trees, Helen right on our ass. The trees are so tight that just when we think we've lost her, there she is a moment later.

"We've got Helen," I say, and keep going. After running into Andrea's crew, we start wonder what has happened to Corbett and the other girls.

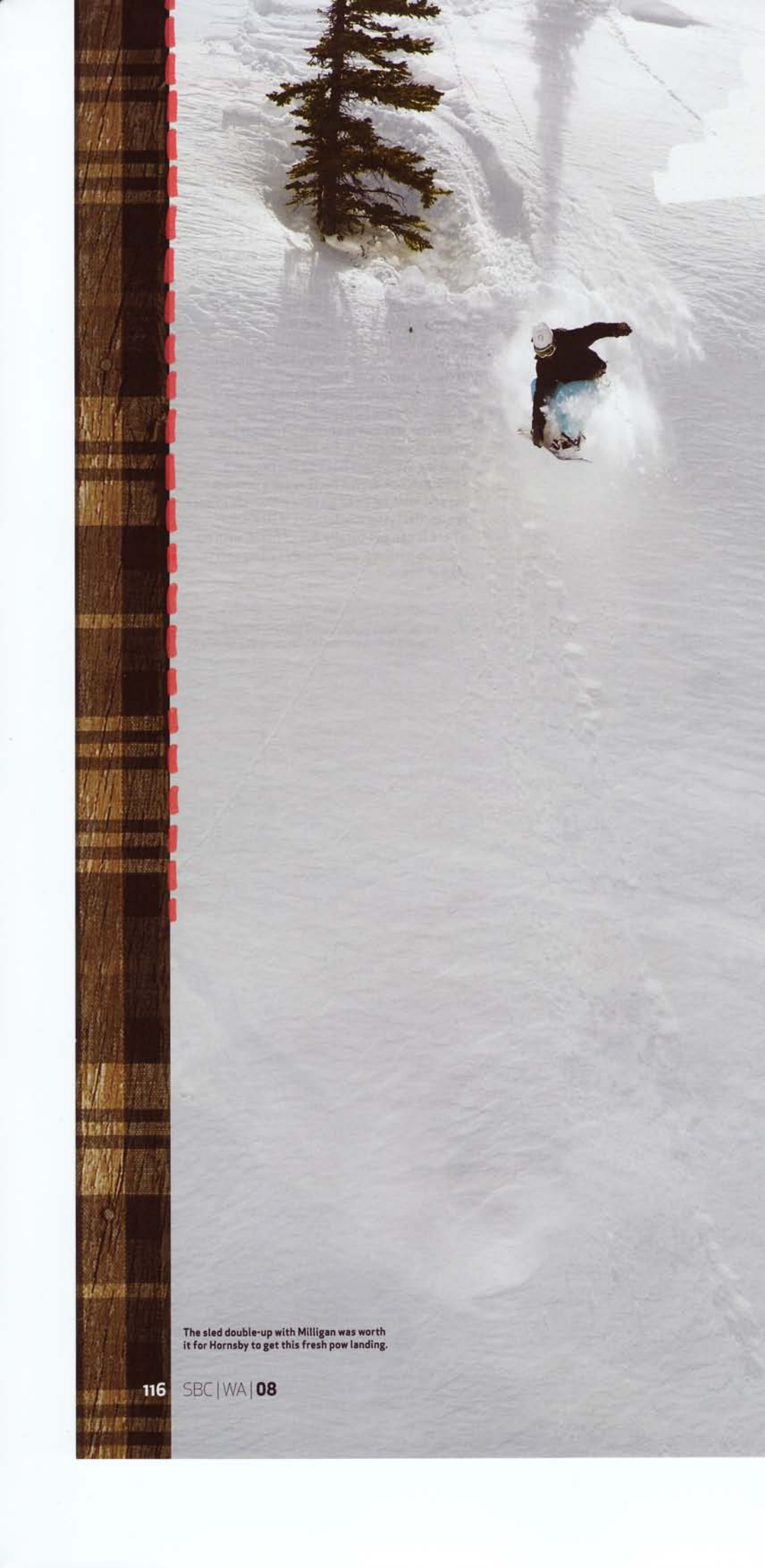
Pilar turns to me and jokes, "Well, we've got Helen."

An aerial photograph of a vast, snow-covered mountain slope. The terrain is rugged, with numerous dark, rocky outcrops scattered across the white snow. In the lower right quadrant, a small figure of a skier is visible, wearing a bright yellow jacket and dark pants, carving a path down the slope. The lighting suggests a bright day, with soft shadows cast by the rocks and the skier. The overall scene is one of a high-altitude, winter sports environment.

Finally, Corbett and Sara come around a corner on one sled. Sara's sled ate a tree for lunch, so they're letting its belly digest. One of the guys points out that our crew now has six people tandeming on three old sleds. This is all quite humorous for them until we reach the summit and they shout out that Andrea's sled is in a hole the size of a bus and she needs the boys to dig her out. Who's laughing now, guys? Meanwhile, Kalina's pull cord has snapped right off and she's using the pull-clutch method to fire up her sled. We spend the rest of the day ripping back-country lines and getting shuttled around by the boys. It's not every day you find girls in these parts, and Danny Big Pockets and Pauly Ingrim are stoked to show the girls around. Cheers to them for being so cool.

On the way out we hit up a tree jib zone where Helen goes in for some serious jib bonking. As we get back to the house, a random truck drives by. Guys are screaming and inviting us to go party. Sounds great. We do. Partying is infamous in Bralorne, where it can get totally out of hand, with no cops, no by-laws, and nobody telling you to shut it down.

Vanessa Stark couldn't make the first trip to Bralorne, so she arrives two weeks later to rip this line in lieu.



## “SHUT THAT MUSIC OFF, I hate Nickelback”

Morning sleep comes to an end with the sound of Pilar singing.

“Is that Nickelback I hear?” someone shouts.

After being serenaded all morning, we go back and hit the pillow field. It has been snowing throughout the night, and the road is covered from our tracks. We make it to the zone and start picking lines and hiking. The bottom half isn't working out strongly in our favour, although Sara finds a sweet drop through the trees. Kalina, Molly, Pilar and Helen drop the pillows, but nothing seems photoworthy.

Helen, standing aside waiting, shouts, “I know the lyrics to that song Pilar keeps singing: ‘Look at these old photographs/ Every time it makes me laugh.’”

Corbett is not impressed. “Yeah,” he says, “if you girls don't start landing stuff, then we'll all be singing that when looking at these photos.”

From the lower end of the slope, Corbett can't see that we've spotted better pillow lines and some big drops up above. Start hiking, Corbett. Helen, Kalina, and Molly ride the pillows, bouncing over endless drops and sticking everything.

Pilar is uneasy. She's been standing over a 20-foot drop contemplating the sketchy landing. Then, she goes for it... and lands it. Stoked, she hits it again.

“Look at these old photographs,” Corbett says, grinning. “Now this is the money.”

After we spend the entire day riding pillow lines, it's time we head for home. We take an epic ride to the bottom. We all fire up our sleds except Sara. Corbett starts yanking on her cord. The poor guy has been the de facto backbone of our trip, but even he has no luck. Kalina the ninja is next up. She's strong, but nothing seems to prevail, and we all end up taking rounds. It's getting dark. The group decides that I'm pulling Sara and her sled the 45-minute ride back to Bralorne. Molly has climbing rope with her because of problems her sled had the week before. I'm now on the gas side of the sled, Pilar on the brake, and Sara being towed behind. If only those boys could see us now.

Pilar finally jumps on with Corbett, who's also carrying a 150-pound camera pack on his back. I rip Sara back to town. It's past nightfall, and I've just hit pavement with Sara's sled. There is no way my sled will be able to tow Sara's up the road. Out of nowhere comes the local kingpin, P.J. Hunton, who's also the local fix-anything guy. He ties Sara's sled to the back of his truck, and there the sled goes, sparks flying everywhere through the town of Bralorne. Yep, sled trips are always a shit show, no matter what.

We turn to Corbett and ask if he'll come back and shoot with us again in a few weeks.

“Hell, yeah, I'm in,” he replies. “I'd be crazy to say no to hanging out with a group of girl snowboarders in a cabin for a week.”

The sled double-up with Milligan was worth it for Hornsby to get this fresh pow landing.