



NEWS STORY WE AREN'T COVERING THIS MONTH:

Planet Ski reports that St. Anton—in response to too many foul-smelling locals upsetting vacationers—is requiring après patrons to change out of their ski gear by 8 p.m. The Jaded Local seeks to intervene. PHOTO: SCOTT MARKEWITZ

# ADIRONDACK ASCENSION

RISING OUT OF TROPICAL STORM IRENE'S DISASTER, NEW SLIDE PATHS OPEN IN UPSATE NEW YORK

**F**orty-degree lines scar the faces of many of the Adirondack High Peaks in Upstate New York. The descents mostly consist of landslide paths that ran deep to the anthracite bedrock after rain events. Slides like Bennie's Root Canal on Lower Wolfjaw or Grand Central on Mount Marcy, New York's highest peak at 5,344 feet, have been popular ski routes for decades.

The faces of the 'Dacks changed, however, in September 2011, after Tropical Storm Irene dropped a foot of rain and heavy winds in the region. The aftermath created scores of major slides, which became big couloir-like runs, causing a rush for first descents.

Many of Irene's formations—specifically, unnamed ones on Basin Mountain—are quite remote. Others, like the spectacular slide that runs down the side of Cascade Mountain, are a short approach from the road and can be skinned and skied in half a day. And although no low-hanging fruit of first descents remain in the region, these new slides have been the focus of the local ski community.

According to Drew Haas, author of *The Slide Guide* and founder of Adkbcski.com, a website dedicated to Adirondack backcountry skiing, discovery of the range's new offerings will be widespread this winter due to the diminutive 2011-12 snowpack. During the 10th annual Adirondack Backcountry Ski Festival, Haas and the venerable Glen Plake were some of the first to descend the longest new slide, a 1,000-vertical-foot slash down the face of Saddleback Mountain that, with the runout, is a two-mile-long ski.

"[The slide] existed in a small sense

prior to Irene, but was gouged out to be wider and longer," says the 32-year-old Haas. "When I skied it with [Plake], we found excellent conditions—powder snow and terrain up to 40 degrees with steeper bulges."

Haas, originally from Ithaca, New York, has lived in the tiny town of Jay, New York, in the heart of the Adirondacks, since 2007. He's scouted new slides by fixed-wing aircraft and says that while the new potential is vast, most of the unskied lines that remain exist deep in the backcountry.

Skiing Adirondack slides, both new and old, is a serious endeavor. The snowpack is often shallow and avalanche prone; the terminuses of the slides are logjam terrain traps; and beta is scarce. For these reasons, backcountry skiing in the Adirondacks is a low-traffic activity where self-sufficiency is imperative.

"The new slide on Basin [Mountain] is remote," adds Haas. "It requires a seven-mile skin and then it drops off the backside of the Great Range. The slab is quite steep. I know of no one having gone after it last season."

Haas, like many skiers and climbers alike, says his favorite new line is the Trap Dike, a narrow slot of snow and ice that looms over Avalanche Lake. Accessed by a fresh slide that runs to the summit of Mount Colden, this apron drops 1,000 vertical feet from the apex to the top of the Dike's narrow chasm. It's more protected from the wind and is less scoured, says Haas. "It's been skied for years but [after Irene], the Dike is now flushed clean, allowing for more linkable turns between ice bulges and rappels."

The local skiers' approach to the new slides embodies a unique Adirondack ski ethos. Although for some there's a battle for first descents, Haas claims that isn't the Adirondack way.

"It's not about *the* first descent," he says. "It's about *my* first descent. If you're the first to drop a new line, who cares?"

—BRIAN IRWIN



Ian Forgays rips Angel Slides off 5,115-foot Algonquin Peak. Mount Colden and the Trap Dike can be seen in the mid-ground (the deep-cut slide angling left to right on Mount Colden's lower half). New York's tallest mountain, Mount Marcy (left), and Skylight Peak (right) are in the background.

PHOTO: BRIAN MOHR