

GASHES IN GRANITE

MOUNT WASHINGTON'S HUNTINGTON
RAVINE OFFERS THE EAST'S MOST
ACCESSIBLE SKI MOUNTAINEERING.
BY BRIAN IRWIN

» Hugo Harrison sends
Diagonal Gully while
filming for Warren Miller
Entertainment in 2011.

Brian Post



1. Escape Hatch
2. The Bottom of South Gully
3. O'dell's Gully
4. Central Gully
5. Diagonal Gully
6. Yale Gully
7. Damnation Gully

The plod up Diagonal Gully

requires focus. It's a 15-foot-wide slot that obliquely slices the face of Huntington Ravine on the east aspect of Mount Washington, New Hampshire's crown jewel and the Northeast's highest peak. Diagonal is no-fall terrain, with a technical ice-climbing pitch at its outlet and slopes up to 55 degrees at its entrance. Not a bad line on which to have a guide.

The sun is starting to cook the corn when guide Kevin Mahoney and I top out, having eased up 1,000 feet of water, ice, and crunchy Styrofoam in the predawn hours. We strip skins, holster axes, and stuff away our crampons. Mahoney, 44, is vetted; he's one of the country's few UIAGM-certified ski-mountaineering guides. His family grew up just a few miles down the road, where they run a small ski area named King Pine. Mahoney has guided Washington countless times. He's also guided the Haute Route. And attempted the first descent of Denali's south face. And climbed new alpine routes in Nepal, Alaska, and other far-flung spots, including a new route on Alaska's Mooses

Tooth, an ascent that earned him a Piolet d'Or nomination, the Oscar of climbing awards. So when Mahoney tensions the rope between us as I slip into the couloir, I feel confident.

Huntington is striped with steep, classic lines: lower-angled gullies like Central or South Gully. Moderates like Escape Hatch. And narrower, steeper ones like Damnation Gully, with its ice flow midway down. Skiers approach the ravine by a three-mile, 2,100-vertical-foot skin up established fire roads from the parking lot. It's a ski-mountaineering toy box that lacks the crowds of neighboring Tuckerman Ravine. The environment is uniquely alpine, more Teton than New England. Weather can be harsh, avalanche

IF YOU GO...

Guide » Kevin Mahoney guides skiers of all ability levels from his Richmond, Vermont, home base. [from \$300; mahoneyalpineadventures.com]

Equipment » Avy gear and basic mountaineering equipment, including ice ax, harness, and crampons, are needed for most lines in Huntington. Either AT or telemark gear is appropriate.

Season » You can ski Huntington most of the winter and all through spring, but avalanche conditions often prohibit midwinter trips. March and April are the most popular months.

Drink » The Moat Smokehouse and Brewery in North Conway, New Hampshire, is the post-Washington tradition among locals.



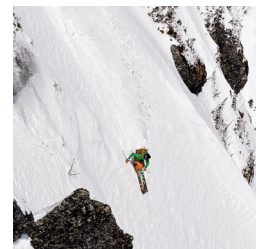
Left » Lines of Huntington Ravine. Above » Guide Kevin Mahoney climbs Diagonal Gully.

conditions touchy. But choose the right day and partner and your face will ache from smiling.

I slide into Diagonal's portal, tips and tails inches from the flanking granite. The snow softens as I hop-turn down the pitch, managing my slough as I feel the gentle, reassuring tug of Mahoney's belay. The slope angle eases and we arc carefully down the line. Our hoots reverberate from the gully walls as Mahoney dances down.

At Diagonal's terminus, we glide to the top of the ice pitch we'd climbed to access the line. An anchor Mahoney left from our ascent waits in the iridescent ice. We thread the rope, gingerly weight it, and rappel onto the slope below. I stash my technical gear, push in some earbuds, and turn up the volume for the run-out back to the car. As I thread the trees in the ravine's bottom, shins slicing through slabby drifts, the voice of Trey Anastasio echoes in my ears: "Nothing I see can be taken from me..."

Brian Irwin writes about uphill access policies at U.S. ski resorts on page 16.



Ben Leoni's Right Coast Backcountry Haunts

THE MEATHEAD FILMS
STAR DISHES ON HIS
FAVORITE LOCALES.

Gulf of Slides

PINKHAM NOTCH,
NEW HAMPSHIRE

From the visitor center, follow the Gulf of Slides trail. Lines in the cirque are exposed but offer long descents. This is serious avalanche terrain, so have your safety gear and your brain. Stay away after big storms or high winds.

Hillman's Highway

PINKHAM NOTCH,
NEW HAMPSHIRE

Follow the Tuckerman Ravine trail to the Hermit Lake Shelter. Hang a left onto the Sherburne Trail to the bottom of Hillman's Highway. Start on east-facing Hillman's in the morning and work toward north-facing Dodge's Drop in the afternoon.

Chic-Chocs

SAINTE-ANNE-
DES-MONTS, QUEBEC

Champs de Mars and Mount Hog's Back offer accessible Chic-Choc terrain right off Route 299 south of the entrance to Parc Nationale de la Gaspésie. Champs de Mars offers quality glades. Hog's Back has long, steep runs reminiscent of lines in Colorado.

Big Jay

JAY, VERMONT

Deep snow and prime hardwood glades can be found just down the road from Jay Peak Resort. It's easy to get lost in these woods, so go with someone who knows the area.

Northeastern Avy Resources

» mountwashingtonavalanchecenter.org
» centreavalanche.qc.ca