Woodsmoke

2011-2012
It's that time of year again, when I step out of Robinson Hall, and the air no longer smells of dry leaves and autumn. It has been replaced by an even colder wind blowing in from across the green—the kind that makes your eyes water just a little bit. Hot cider season has gone, and hot chocolate season has arrived. As 2011 draws to a close, I am enjoying the opportunity to look back over everything the DOC has accomplished this year, and I wanted to share some of the highlights with you:

Last winter blessed the northeast region with a healthy dose of snow, and there was no shortage of trips going out to take advantage of it. Some highlights included: a Winter Grant Weekend that saw 70 participants, both seasoned DOC veterans and beginners alike, for a weekend of ski touring, snowshoeing, and camaraderie; Winter Weekend Fun, with introductory skiing and snowboarding trips, as well as the now-annual hockey tournament on Occom Pond, and an evening ski movie; and Winter Carnival, with the Carni Classic, CnT’s Carne-val, and a great showing by our ski teams at their home races.

Spring break saw a number of great trips around the country, including Ledyard’s annual trip to Asheville, NC and the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club’s annual trip to Red Rocks, NV, as well as many trips that were unique this year: a backcountry skiing trip to BC, a rafting trip through the Grand Canyon, and a CnT trip to Texas. Upon returning to Hanover, activity resumed as normal, with innumerable trips around Vermont and New Hampshire alike, ranging from mountain biking to rock climbing to trailwork, and everything in between. Ledyard put on its third annual River Festival, drawing paddlers from around the Northeast to Hanover for paddlesport competitions and good times. Spring Weekend was a huge success, drawing students from around campus for all sorts of beginner trips.
Summer saw campus handed over to the '13s, who did a fantastic job of continuing the DOC traditions, including a successful 50-mile hike to Moosilauke, the DOC challenge (whitewater canoeing on the White River, a trail run on the AT back to Hanover, and a flatwater paddle around Gilman Island), and a constant stream of trips. Summer Crew had a great time working on many different projects, including work on the Hurricane and Ridge trails on Moosilauke, repair and upkeep of the DOC cabins, reconstruction of the "Town Office" in the Grant, and work on trails both on Smarts and Cube. A busy summer, to be sure!

With the arrival of fall, we got ready to welcome the Class of 2015! This year, approximately 97 percent of the incoming class participated in the First-Year Trips program, which spanned two weeks, ten sections, and 142 Trips, led by 284 leaders. There was a strong focus this year on sustainability, from using biodiesel-fueled buses to bring Trippees to campus, to focusing on local and organic foods at the Lodge, and on reducing the waste produced by the program, including minimizing food packaging material and composting biodegradable waste.

The Trips program transitioned smoothly into Fall term, which has been a whirlwind of activity. We started off with an All-DOC dinner on the BEMA, which attracted over 200 freshmen and experienced DOCers alike and kept the excitement of Trips alive for the '15 class. We had fantastic participation in Fall Weekend, with 71 trippees, plus leaders, for beginner trips and dinner and live music at the Lodge. Twenty-three students completed the 50, despite rain, sleet and even snow on top of Moosilauke! Late October saw the Lodge bursting at the seams for Lodge-o-ween and a Local Foods Dinner, featuring locally grown and sourced food, and a fireside dinnertalk with the farmers and distributors, on the importance of sustainability and local farms.

It has been an exciting year to be sure, and as planning is already underway for the current winter and the rest of 2012, the spirit of the DOC is alive and well! If you are ever in the Hanover area, we hope you’ll be able to drop by and pay us a visit in Robinson Hall, which is constantly buzzing with activity as students meet to go on trips, reserve vehicles or cabins with OPO, or just study in the conference room with others who are finishing up their classwork to get outdoors before the sun goes down. We would love to hear from you!

Yours in the Out-of-Doors,
Brian Seitz ’12
DOC President

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Cover: Jessie Griffen ’10 on the shore of the Allagash River in northern Maine during a trip funded by the Davis G. Kirby ’32 Adventure Fund. Photo by Charlie Governali ’12.
For my Northern Studies internship, I have been doing snowcourses. There seems to be some confusion about what a snowcourse is, so let me explain.

**Snowcourse, scientific definition:**
a) A clearing in a forest where snow falls undisturbed for a winter, with places marked where snow has been measured and disturbed previously.

**Snowcourse, unscientific description:**
First, I have to get there. This may involve an hour’s drive north on a highway that I hope has been plowed since last night’s snowfall. Then, at best, I pull right up to the snowcourse site. More likely, I have to squeeze through a rusty gate (the lock is frozen shut). Then cross an old drawbridge, but slowly, because too much bouncing might cause it to find its resonant frequency. Or, I strap on snowshoes and walk for a mile uphill pulling my snow tube behind me in a sled. Then I arrive at the site. My track from last week peeks out from under the fresh layer of snow. As I trudge forward, the forest opens itself up into clearing and draws me into a different world with an embrace of trees. Five meticulously placed wooden posts with tall, still postures encircle the rain gauge, worshipping it. Each post has a hook protruding from its stern front, and each marks a track of previous snow cores. The track of holes also reaches forward towards the centerpiece. Fluffy silent flakes sprinkle down onto the stern occasion. The gauge itself is an open bucket glorified by its metal stand and protected by a small skirt of metal strips.

**Snowcourse, scientific definition:**
b) The action of measuring snowfall in the same place weekly for an entire winter.

**Snowcourse, unscientific description:**
I join in the ceremony by quantifying the snow. I approach the first wooden post. I toe out to where the last core was taken. I push my snow tube in the ground. But the snow must be convinced before it is to come out as a whole, measurable core. I spin the tube, push it further down past layers of ice. I plant my hands on the top and put all of my weight onto the tube until it hits the ground with a harmonic chink. Then I must twirl the tube in a large circle until the sides of the hole are compacted. I wave my arms and twist my wrists. Once my snow core dance is completed, I slowly pull the tube out of the ground, carefully walk it to the post, and kneel under the post to weigh the tube. The dance is repeated five times. Then I am granted the right to check on the rain gage. I ease the metal skirt open and squeeze into the altar. I add more antifreeze to the bucket.
Keep the snow gods happy. Then with a final glance around the temple, I exit the clearing. Science has been completed.

Snowcourse, scientific definition:
c) A collection of data about snow for a certain site. Includes depth, weight, and snow water equivalent. The information can be used to monitor the effects of development on snowpack.

Snowcourse, unscientific description:
I have filled my Rite in the Rain with numbers that will turn into graphs and papers that will help preserve the temple. I have learned that science is not a cut and dry definition, it seems like a lucky ritual sometimes. In the case of snow coring, the ritual has been practiced for over fifty years. I feel the weight of the unbroken record as I scribble numbers down. I am being welcomed into the circle of science. It is easy to walk a mile, wave my arms, and spin in circles to collect charts and charts of information, even if snow cores only come out half of the time. But it is much more difficult to make sense of all the information and come out with a certain yes or no. Fifty years later, we are still monitoring the same sites with the hopes of learning more and more. There is no definitive answer to the questions we pose. Scientists have hunches and feelings and graphs to support them, but every graph has an error bar. But with some good luck and hard work, science can reach an end. I take only information, but I leave the sacred forest ground scarred with snowshoe tracks. I hope the tracks will soon be covered. I hope that my graphs will ensure that they are the only tracks that will ever be left. I hope that for winters to come I will be able to return to the forest and find my posts and rain gauge still standing proud in the clearing, and the snow still sacred and undisturbed.
Mountain Biking: the Newest DOC Subclub

Words and Photos by Rob Collier '13
It’s been a big year for the Mountain Biking Club. As the newest club to join the DOC, we are still in our infancy but are growing fast. With weekly feeds and frequent club rides, we’ve harnessed a lot of energy, new members, and up-and-coming leaders. The new Co-Chairs, Erik Skarin and Paul Hogan, both ’14s, have been working to keep expanding the membership and activity of the club. While the trails are just starting to dry out as I write this in April, the most recent riding, from last fall, is still fresh in my mind. It was quite a biking season, and in addition to introducing some new riders to the sport, we got to explore some cool new riding around New England.

Another big effort for the club from the fall was led by Tom Collier ’11. Together with other leaders from the MBC, such as Anson Moxness ’11, he started to map and sign the trails at Oak Hill in an effort to create a sustainable, legal trail network. The Mountain Biking Club also combined efforts with the Upper Valley Mountain Biking Association and the New England Trails Alliance on several trail days at Oak Hill, clearing, draining and maintaining the existing trails.

All in all, it was quite the formative year for the club! In the coming year we hope to continue on our trend: introducing new riders to the sport, getting people outside, and working with the community to help promote legal sustainable trails around New England.

2011
The pile of debris was five feet tall, a tangled mass of charred wood, unidentifiable small metal chunks, and three-quarters of a quaint brick chimney. Finally, stacked on top of everything lay a three-foot diameter tree trunk. The next night, Gilman Island witnessed its second large fire in just over a year, but this time the fire was intentional. From those ashes arose the recently rebuilt Titcomb Cabin.

That is how I came to stand on Gilman Island one week after graduating. Greg served as our crew chief; Lucas Schulz ’08, Kate Bowman ’10, Max Friedman ’10, Jordan Nesmith ’11, and Kodiak Burke ’11 were his underlings. Our charge for the summer: build a new, full-scribe log cabin on the footprint of the original 1952 Titcomb Cabin.

The summer was a learning experience peppered with a parade of surprisingly effective plans, kluges, and chainsaws. No one on the crew had ever worked on
a log home before, so we began with a six-foot by eight-foot practice structure built at the organic farm during a couple of outrageously muggy days during the early summer. I looked at the practice cabin at one point, shook my head, and thought to myself, “What the hell are we doing?”

We pushed on. Our first task was to re-pour the damaged foundation and maneuver 3,000 pounds of concrete, an electric cement mixer, and a generator out to Gilman Island. Three weeks after the summer started, to great fanfare (I think seven people showed up in addition to ourselves), we launched our first raft of logs into the river. Safety and Security Special Investigator Lauren “Duffy” Cummings agreed to pilot our raft, towed behind his personal powerboat, and Brian Kunz, Deputy Director of Outdoor Programs, drove S&S’s safety boat alongside. Forty seconds later, three logs escaped the raft and had to be reattached. But after that we never lost a log on our way to the island from the Organic Farm.

After that first log drive, the summer raced ahead with us. We began laying logs and quickly fell into a comfortable rhythm, laying about one course (four logs) per day. Each morning we would hoist two logs and place them atop the rest of the structure then use scribes to trace the contour of one log onto the bottom of the next. The logs were then lowered to a set of sawhorses where they were speedily carved. Once each log had been cut exactly to fit, we raised it back up onto the cabin and used rubber gasket to create a watertight seal between successive logs. We paused for small milestones: the day we laid the floor, the day the walls became too high to climb and we had to cut a door, and the day we reached the overhanging logs of the porch.

Once the main structure was complete, the roof supports went up in a single, frenzied week. A war canoe full of volunteers arrived at the end of the summer to help place the final log, a 24-inch thick, 26-foot long ridgepole along the peak of the roof.

When our crew parted at the end of the summer, all of the logwork on the cabin was complete. Greg, Kodiak, and Lucas stayed on campus through the interim period between summer and fall and completed the roofing. Greg spearheaded a handful of work trips during the fall in order to finish up the roofing trim and a loft, and then they freshly stained the logs in preparation for the coming winter. This past spring, Greg and two new workers, Malia Reeves ’12 and Chelsea Liddell ’11 worked regularly to put in windows, a door, porch handrails, flooring, and a handful of other punch list items that will make the cabin habitable in the not-too-distant future.

You can see a time lapse of a single day of work at Titcomb, as well as other videos made during the cabin’s construction, at:

http://vimeo.com/14078616

The group’s blog can be found at:

http://rebuildingtitcomb.blogspot.com

Additional photos may be found at:

picasaweb.google.com/lucas.schulz/

and

mfriedm.smugmug.com/Outside/

Rebuilding-Titcomb/
I’m floating. It hits me like the first time you see yourself in the mirror and really begin to contemplate what it is behind your eyes that makes you able to process the very thoughts you’re having at that instant. The realization that kayaking is built on the fundamental phenomenon of buoyancy helped me to understand a bit of the intangible aspect of kayaking that keeps a smile on my face when the water is 33 degrees and there’s snow falling. This epiphany was slow in coming, despite the fact that what I’m saying seems painfully obvious. For the longest time, I ascribed the joy and satisfaction that I got from boating to the scenery, the people, and the rush that it gave me. These aspects, however, fail to explain why I would be happy to be just sitting in a boat by myself on a lake in the middle of nowhere.

Every minute I spend on the water, I’m joining a parade of water molecules on their eternally cycling march, and they don’t seem to mind having me along. When I’m on the water, I’m relishing in the same magical fluid that enabled the first circumnavigation of the globe and life on earth. Maybe it’s because I’ve spent too much time thinking about John Le-dyard, but I have trouble classifying anything as an adventure unless there’s water involved. To those of you who already spend time on the water, I encourage you to take a moment next time you are out paddling, whether it’s as you’re pausing to get your boof stroke just right before launching into orbit or just out for a picnic in a canoe on the Connecticut, and appreciate how cool it is to float. I promise it will add to your experience.

Words and Photo by Kevin McGregor '11
Buoyancy
The Ethics of
Being Outside

Words and Photos by Malia Reeves '12

Dynafit Ski Bindings: $450
Trad Climbing Rack: $700
Mountain Bike: $1700;

The experiences this gear provides: Priceless…?

In the last six months, I’ve bought a used pair of skis with bindings, a Mammut softshell jacket, a new pair of climbing shoes, and two different ski passes all totaling to almost $1000. And that doesn’t even count what I’ve spent on gas using all this gear.

But compared to many of my peers, I’m a small spender when it comes to outdoor gear. Especially as a multi-sport enthusiast, the expenses add up very quickly. We all justify it to ourselves explaining that without this gear we wouldn’t be able to go out and have these amazing experiences. We wouldn’t be able to do what makes us happy. And so it’s actually quite different than the rest of America’s consumer driven craze.

But is it?

As a social justice advocate with an environmentally aware mind, how can I possibly justify this type of spending—of not just money but of time and gas as well? I drove 5,370 miles this spring break to Red Rock, Nevada to go rock climbing. 5,370 miles eats up a whole lot of gas. But my trip’s carbon footprint is still slightly smaller than everyone else who flew that distance on an airplane.

While I was (rather self-centeredly) enjoying myself and my expensive gear on beautiful desert rock, I had friends who were in the Dominican Republic working on small projects in an idealistic attempt to bring more international understanding into the world. I was surrounded by a bunch of well-off white kids and only concerned with what the weather might be tomorrow. How can I, comparatively, justify how I spent that time?

These questions on the ethics of my outdoors passion come into my mind very frequently. And yet, I’ve slowly come to terms with the doubt and guilt I began to feel before. After many high school years of Amnesty International, interfaith workshops, and weeks working in
Palestinian refugee camps and at climate change conferences, I found myself worn out. I had given 100 percent to making a change in the world... and I couldn't see a difference. My idealism fell flat on its face.

So I gave up. When I got to Dartmouth I focused time on myself rather than the world. I spent hours happily nurturing my outdoors skills on rock, snow, and trails. I felt a little guilty as my social justice and environmental consciences got shut in a closet, but I was happy.

And then suddenly I found myself taking on a new role. I began to teach. I taught beginner climbing and skiing classes and took freshmen hiking on the AT. I watched kids who had grown up in a city suddenly notice the natural beauty of the world and students deathly afraid of heights conquer that fear.

Two weeks ago, a boy looked at me after his first time rock climbing ever and said with a huge grin, “That was the craziest thing I’ve ever done.” The look in his eyes told me everything; pride and satisfaction with his accomplishments shared a newfound respect for the beauty of nature’s rocky crags.

After all my time raising money for that cause or protesting this environmentally unfriendly company, I never saw that I made a change. But in the eyes of the beginner who finally makes it to the top of his first climb... there I see that I’ve made a difference. It’s a small difference, but it’s something.

Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” By doing what makes me happy I learn more skills everyday that I can then teach to others. And by passing on my passion for the beauty and challenges in the natural world I finally feel that my efforts are both justified and right. Small steps toward a global consciousness shift; appreciate nature, appreciate humanity.

And so, the next time you buy those new climbing shoes you don’t really need, think about a balance. Take a friend climbing, point out the new spring buds on the trees to your parents, or work with kids in outdoor education. Spend the time and money to improve your outdoor adventure skills but then stop and take a minute to change someone else’s life a little bit too.

Believe me, that look in their eyes when a pristine mountain trail becomes more than just dirt? … that is priceless.
This past spring break, Winter Sports Club helped to fund an expedition backcountry skiing in the Wasatch range, Utah. After a few days camping and skiing in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, the trip moved into the Lone Peak Wilderness and set up basecamp for 5 days. The snow was incredible, with an additional 2’ of Utah powder coming down during the trip. While skinning at altitude was something of an endeavor, the skiing accessed was well worth it. The pictures speak for themselves."
Commend it or condemn it, climbing long routes without a rope reflects and amplifies a most basic notion of climbing; get to the top with no means but the integrity of your strength and focus, or take the express descent back to the bottom. Being an extreme case makes soloing an interesting way to talk about why we ever leave the safety of our front door to climb anyway. Something about climbing without a rope or crash-pad – referred to as “soloing” from here on – lends itself to some unexpected characters and stories. Alex Honnold has put up many of the most impressive big wall climbs in Yosemite with only a granola bar and an iPod for an emergency anchor, and Swiss welterweight Ueli Steck recently speed soloed the Matterhorn in under two hours. Both are humble stalwarts of modern climbing, except that they often have cameras in their faces that could catch their last expressions as they huck off this mortal coil. Honnold says he started soloing only for lack of climbing partners, and Steck claims that his solo blitzes are a stylistic choice.

In the 2008 K2 tragedy that cost eleven climbers their lives, the arguably “safest” climber on the mountain may have been the Basque soloist Alberto Zerain, who moved quickly and skillfully without reliance on the fixed lines that were later wiped out by an avalanche. While the American Alpine Club estimates an average of 25 deaths annually from climbing (surgical anesthesia and hang gliding are both about twice as deadly) our visceral reaction is usually that soloing is even more self serving and exorbitantly dangerous than run-of-the-mill high altitude mountaineering. John Bachar, one of the most revered soloists of our time, died alone two years ago and is survived by a fifteen-year-old son. In a climbing league of his own, John Joline ’72 makes some sense of it all by identifying the cultural context in which we put soloing on a pedestal. Imagine a reasonable, developed society with an alternative mode of transportation to automobiles, perhaps walking...
or horses. Now imagine one day an inventor in said society pitches the idea of traveling at hundreds of feet per second in steel cages weighing thousands of pounds, passing within inches of each other in densely packed corridors. The reasonable society would say heck no, the tolerances are too tight, a mere few degree turn of the steering device at the wrong moment would cause disaster, it’s too unsafe. Here the paradigm is completely different, the living example being Stolby, Russia, where kids and families solo climb from birth and accidents are a part of the culture. But in Jersey you’re not living the dream unless you’re on an iPhone 4 doing Mach 9, passing school buses in the breakdown lane. If a paradigm shift sounds trite to you, it’s completely justified. No one is advocating that you solo 5.12+ to Schenectady for Thanksgiving, so what gives?

Consider this. Risk assessment is said to be the product of probability of failure and cost of failure, and when the benefits outweigh the risk affirmative action is taken. Driving in an early season nor’easter to “Tennessee Wall” for some southern sandstone, a friend and I decided that driving straight through the blizzard was statistically far riskier than anything we intended to do on the sharp end of a rope, but because our perceived risk was much lower than the considerable benefit (more laps on Finger Lockin’ Good) we slowed down and plowed onward. For families in Stolby and Garden State Humvee drivers, every day is a series of risk assessments that are particular to one’s capabilities and desires. Climbing without a rope, though inherently riskier than the alternatives, might just be another one of the risks we take every day of our lives but with an understandable stigma attached. The difference is that the benefits are more often opaque and personal and the perceived risk quite high. Having the education of soloing without ditching the rope would be ideal, but in the mean time we should realize that every risk we take is a solo of sorts and hope we can channel Honnold’s focus in the dire moments we might need it.

Solo
By Mike Wood ’10
Photos by Mariah Coley ’11
A Month in the
This past summer Jay Dumanian ’14 and I traveled to the Cordillera Blanca of Peru, a high-altitude subrange of the Andes that is well-known for great climbing and better weather. Like all great ideas, the trip was spawned out of desperate boredom after I sat around all winter with a bum shoulder. Jay was suckered into the trip by promises of discotecas (nightclubs) and beautiful Peruvian women. Despite the fact that neither of us had ever traveled internationally alone or climbed at high altitude, we decided to head south and figure it out for ourselves. After convincing our parents that high-altitude mountaineering is safer and healthier than Green Key Weekend, we departed for Lima, Peru at the beginning of July.

The trip from Lima to our destination at the base of the mountains, the city of Huaraz, lasted eight hours. Fortunately we only had to stop for two herds of livestock to cross the road and were duly entertained by strange Chinese films dubbed in Spanish. While getting settled in Huaraz, located at 10,000 ft, we ventured out for our first acclimatization day hike. After dishing out obscene sums of cash for high-altitude climbing gear we were eager to cut costs, which frequently meant taking public transportation. Thus, after wandering the streets of Huaraz for a half-hour practicing shaky Spanish, we located the correct colectivo (minibus) to take us into the mountains. The hour-long ride to the base of the mountains proved to be one of the most surreal and unique moments of the entire trip. The sprinter van was stuffed full. Jay and I, the only gringos, were surrounded by perhaps fifteen native women bantering in the ancient Peruvian language, Quechua, and outfitted in traditional hand-woven clothing replete with colorful top hats. During the ride and on our subsequent hike to Laguna Churup at 14,600 ft, we passed countless native families whose lifestyles have likely changed little in hundreds of years. To top it all off, after the dizzying hike, we hitched a ride back to Huaraz in the cabin of a dumptruck, jammed in a tight space with a tall Frenchman.

Finally, after corralling the necessary food and supplies, we hitched a ride with some other gringos to the basecamp for Vallunaraju, a popular acclimatization peak near Huaraz standing at almost 19,000 ft. Like all good adventures, our first attempt to climb a big mountain began terribly. While erecting our brand-new (and very expensive) tent for the first time in a base camp meadow, I snapped one of the four poles (I maintain that this was not my fault). After cursing the pole,
the tent, Eric the idiot, Peru, camping, Earl and Valerie, etc., and briefly considering giving up and returning home, we calmed down. Shortly thereafter the previously blue skies darkened and began dumping hail on us for the next four hours as we huddled in our ramshackle shelter. By dinnertime, it was pouring rain and we decided to cook in a refugio (climber’s hut) that was under construction. Of course, when the ranger there began inquiring after our park passes (which we had neglected to purchase in Huaraz), we very quickly forgot how to speak or understand any Spanish. Relieved to have made it to day two of the climb, we set out from base camp with overstuffed 40-liter climbing packs and made our way up the initial sections of the brutally steep hike from a guided expedition sped by us. It should be mentioned that this porter, certainly pushing 70 years of age, was hauling a giant double load on an external frame pack, leaning on a circa 1970’s ice ax for support, and hiking in a pair of blown-out trail running shoes that had deteriorated into open-toed slippers. Enough said.

As we climbed higher and higher, however, Jay began lagging behind sig-
nificantly; this was unsettling given that he generally crushes me in the mountains. When we rested at a flat spot at 15,500 ft, he was on the verge of passing out. With bad weather closing in, we made the difficult but logical decision to retreat and continue acclimatizing lower down for a day, before heading back to town to recover. Needless to say, our confidence took a big hit from our master class in how not to succeed in the mountains. Fortunately, rejuvenated by roast chicken, Pisco sours (traditional Peruvian cocktail) and large helpings of gelato back in Huaraz, we were once again ready to crush.

Arriving at the mouth of the Ishinca Valley after a bumpy hour-long taxi ride, we loaded our gear onto burros for the nine-mile stroll to the Ishinca Valley base camp. Since this was to be our longest trip into the mountains (seven days) we jammed nearly 200 pounds of gear and supplies into our duffle bags and climbing packs (most of which was actually our Nutella stash). After several hours of hiking, we unloaded our gear and set up base camp at over 14,500 ft, with incredible views of Urus Este and Tocllaraju. Despite the gradual nature of the hike, Jay was still feeling very ill from the altitude and our prospects for success again looked dim. With our psyches tempered, we went to bed planning for an alpine start and an ascent of Urus Este, a relatively easy climb located close to basecamp. After a cold 3 a.m. wakeup, I got a head start and began struggling up a thousand feet of punishing dirt switchbacks. Believing that Jay had turned back due to his illness, I pushed on knowing the upper section of the climb was free of crevasses and thus safely climbable solo. At the base of the upper snow slopes I stopped to refuel, put on crampons, and wait for the sun to rise. To my surprise, Jay appeared suddenly around a boulder, seemingly a new man after his predawn struggles. I forged ahead to avoid getting too cold, and covered an interesting 45-degree powder traverse off the beaten track before merging with the trail forged by a strong Austrian team ahead of us. After a couple hours of unremarkable plod-
ding on moderate snow slopes, I arrived at the summit just below 18,000 ft. Relieved to have succeeded on something, I waited for Jay near the summit while taking in the surreal panoramic view. After some photos and candy bars, we cruised the knee-crushing descent, arriving at base camp before lunchtime.

Inspired by our success on Urus, we geared up for the main objective of our trip: a climb of Tocclaraju, a striking peak standing at over 19,500 feet that required a glacial high camp and some technical ridge climbing. With half our gear hanging off our undersized climbing packs, we set off up the incredibly steep approach trail to high camp. With overloaded packs, weary legs and the absurd steepness of the approach trail, the hike to high camp at over 16,000 ft was one of the most punishing days either of us had ever spent in the mountains. Setting up camp was nearly as brutal, as the winds began gusting to 50 mph or higher. This forced us to set up camp 300 feet below the glacier on a rock ledge in the moraine. Our rented tent was too large for the rocky platform and nearly blew away several times despite being securely tied down to heavy rocks. After devouring our dehydrated meals and melting many a pot of snow for water, we finally took shelter in our tent and prepared for an early wake up.

Despite high winds still thrashing the tent, we crawled out of our warm sleeping bags, ate some frozen rolls smeared with Nutella and prepared our glacier rigs. When we reached the glacier proper an hour after leaving the tent, it was quite clear that an ascent of Tocclaraju was not to be. The winds were likely blowing in excess of 60 mph, certainly the highest winds I’ve ever experienced. In addition Jay, despite valiant efforts to push forward, was literally coughing up his left lung and was exhibiting symptoms similar to those of pulmonary edema, making a turn-around the only safe option. Despite the disappointment of turning around, the surroundings were incredible. I will always remember the wild moonscape setting as we wandered through numerous giant, gaping maws
partially illuminated by the moon, with millions of stars visible overhead and the wind whipping wildly. Jay maintains that the view of his mountaineering boots was equally stunning. Our first experience on a big mountain glacier was certainly a memorable one.

After returning to camp later that day, we decided to climb Ishinca, another popular peak, the next day. We woke up early and approached the climb on probably the nicest trail in the range, reaching the glacier by daybreak. The climb was varied and enjoyable with moderately steep snow leading to a plateau followed by some interesting crevasse negotiation. A final steep pitch of snow led to the 18,000+ ft summit. To add a little spice, we decided to descend the other side of the peak. This required rappelling off a snow and ice bollard using a münter hitch on our single super-skinny rope over a bottomless bergshrund. Good old-fashioned fun for sure. After this little bit of excitement, we trudged down the easy but tedious descent back to camp, tired and ready to head back to town.

The next day, our burros arrived and we hiked out to our waiting taxi. Now fully acclimatized, we decided to make a quick return to Vallunaraju and get redemption by completing the climb. During our quick two-day assault, we drove up in a taxi to the trailhead and cruised to the high camp in a couple of hours, easily passing our previous turn around point. We awoke early the next morning to the coldest conditions of the trip and moved as quickly as possible up the glacier in the
pre-dawn hours. Despite frozen hands for much of the ascent, the triumphant emergence of the sun when we reached the summit was very welcome. The view from the nearly 19,000-ft summit was one of the best of the trip; the climb was punctuated by several steep sections and an entertaining crevasse hop. Best of all, we descended all the way to the road the same day, caught our taxi to town, and were feasting on chicken and french fries later that evening.

For our final trip into the mountains, we decided to check out the southern part of the range and the Llanganuco Valley, which has the highest concentration of big peaks in the range and thus many incredible views. We shared a long taxi ride and the hike to Pisco base camp with some fellow Americans from Seattle. Pisco is another very popular peak characterized by moderate glacier travel and great views. We decided to bypass the typical moraine camp and climb from base camp to the summit in the same day, which proved to be one of the longer and harder days of the trip. Navigating through the complex moraine below the glacier in the dark early-morning hours with the rock-fall echoing off the surrounding peaks was disconcerting and required careful route-finding. The climb involved several steeper sections along a broad glacial ridge leading to the summit. Despite great views and weather for the entire climb, obscuring clouds engulfed the summit as we arrived. Tired after a long climb, both in terms of distance and elevation gain, we took our time on the descent and arrived back at the tents at 3 p.m. This was good timing, as shortly after our arrival, it began to snow and rain nonstop until midday the next day. Of course, we had decided to use our broken tent to save money and weight, so we got quite wet during the storm, which was bad for morale.

Luckily the weather stayed perfect while we moved our camp down to the bottom of the valley for an enjoyable rest day. By the time our final climb rolled around, we were incredibly tired and undeniably lazy. Thankfully, most of the approach to Yanapaqcha, our final peak, was achieved by motor vehicle. With a taxi ride to a trailhead off the road, the approach required two hours of mostly level walking and we set up camp near a lake with an epic view. After a relaxing day at high camp, we settled in for the night and prepared for our last climb. I learned a quick bit of advice that night: spilling one’s pee bottle in a sleeping bag (especially when it’s very cold) is a catastrophic error and will put you in the worst of all possible moods for an extended period of time. Despite my sleepless night, we made quick time on the glacier, catching up to a guided group who had left several hours before. Once the sun rose we headed up the most technical climbing of the trip, which involved two full pitches of 70-degree variable snow and ice leading to the summit ridge. After navigating the winding and corniced summit ridge, we reached our final summit of the trip at just below 18,000 ft. The guided group ended up aiding and abetting our laziness by letting us rappel off their anchors, saving us time, trouble, and cash. Very eager to sleep in a real bed, we expended every last ounce of energy virtually running to the road to catch a ride down. By a random stroke of luck we waved down a large truck with a wooden cargo trailer which was already carrying a half-dozen people, climbed inside and headed down towards Huaraz amongst rabbit food, lumber, and other hitchhikers. ☐
Ben Peters ’10 rides at sunset at Burke Mountain, VT. Photo: Tom Collier ’11