

# Nikki LaRochelle

Breckenridge local Nikki LaRochelle took up the sport of ski mountaineering (SkiMo) four years ago. Since then, the local artist has gone from SkiMo neophyte to rising star on the women's circuit. BY KATE LAPIDES



**How did you get into the sport of Ski Mountaineering?**

My now husband, Brad, coaxed me into doing a team race called The Power of Four with him. However, he failed to mention that it was actually 28 miles long and had approximately 12,000 feet of climbing. But we did it. At the finish, I was so exhausted, but felt so accomplished.

**What has been your most memorable moment during racing?**

These races take you to beautiful places and the views from up high are unparalleled. But my best memory was finishing that first race with Brad. After working through such an enormous challenge, everything thereafter seemed so sweet. My feet ached, my back ached, my legs ached, my stomach hurt, I couldn't walk, but I was so, so happy.

**It's hard, skinning up the peaks, and the downhill on those tiny skis are scary. Why do you do it?**

The sport isn't a road marathon through Disneyland, that's for sure! You could be the strongest person out there and lose a skin or take a big fall on a descent or have a really bad transition and fall way back. It's not just a drag race to see who has the strongest engine. What keeps motivating me in this sport is to really uncover my potential as an athlete. There is an allure to see how strong I can get, how fast I can get.

**Describe an incredibly great winter SkiMo day in Breck.**

I'm a woman of ritual, and our small ski tour gang has established a Saturday ritual when we aren't off racing. It looks something like this: Get up at 6 a.m., eat a big breakfast and drink a bunch of coffee. At 7:15 a.m., meet the gang at

the designated parking lot, put the skis on and go—usually for three or four hours. But easily the best part would happen at 11:00 a.m., when we go get a second breakfast and more coffee, usually at Amazing Grace. There is something so wonderful about getting a big effort in and then relaxing with your friends and feeling that levity of the weekend.

**What do you love most about winter in Breck?**

Winter creates this sort of forced simplicity of my life. In the winter, moving about isn't as compelling, even with a Subaru Outback. I find myself staying in town more often, settling into the routine of doing just a handful of activities. Everything slows down. My time feels more deliberate. I sleep more and eat more and I drink a lot of hot chocolate. I get to wear scarves and on occasion—this being Breckenridge—multiple down jackets. ❄️