



patagonia  
winter 2003



## LOST AND FOUND

FIELD REPORT

by molly loomis

A custom exists among adventurers in Russia called *sidyet na dorogv*, "to sit for the road." Prior to departing on a journey, travelers sit in a circle and observe a moment of silence. It is a moment to reflect upon what could have been forgotten, and it allows for the opportunity to travel into the adventure at hand, free of worry and fully present.

Sitting for the road in the dimly lit hall of our expedition liaison's house, encircled by my teammates, Melis, Keri and Aubrey, I realize that the tool for adjusting my crampons is a continent away, forgotten in my truck. Without the tool, they are useless.

Four days later, we're holed up in our tent like a family of moles in the Nalychevo range of Kamchatka, Russia. We traveled to this unique range for the solid snowpack, endless runs and erupting volcanoes. But instead we are in the midst of a storm with 80-mph winds. Outside, the snow blows sideways; our whole world has turned white.

"Ohhhh, do you know what Teton Pass is like this time of year?" I groan from my sleeping bag.

That night, the wind subsides. At first light, fueled by enthusiasm, we stuff our daypacks, slap on skins, and begin the long incline toward Pinachevo Pass. The snow is rock hard, and our skis flex and bend over large waves of *sastrugi*.

Through the clouds, I can decipher a pattern I understand: a steep ridgeline of snow and rock leading to Volcano Aag.

Close to the summit, the hard-packed snow turns to ice. My teammates step into their crampons and continue on. I curse that I didn't have the discipline to observe my own moment of reflection before leaving home. The route is not steep, but the slope to my right drops quickly to the valley floor. I concentrate on each step, conscious that my mind is playing games with me. Focusing on regrets of forgotten gear won't do me any good now. I chop hasty steps with my adze for a better purchase on the smooth ice.

Finally, we reach the summit. Three volcanoes reign over the land; perfectly triangular, covered in snow, plumes of smoke billowing up into the sky. No roads crisscrossing the ranges. No patchwork patterns of fields. The landscape seems ancient, as if we have passed through a time warp, back to an age when the Earth was younger and the continental plates were ornery.

We switch our crampons for skis and choose a long line descending to the west from the summit. The snow has softened under the afternoon sun. It is like velvet, fast and smooth. A small tail sprays up as I switch and drop the other knee, edges carving into the snow, my previous timidity gone.

I realize that of the "tools" my body intuitively uses, none were forgotten or left behind. I flirt my way down, playing as I pick up speed, linking turns tighter and tighter, then soaring into long, fast arcs across the white slate.

This is what I remember. This is what I do.

When Molly is not out on her skis exploring and climbing in the Rockies (or farther-flung places when she's lucky), she parks her home, a 1978 RV, at the base of the Tetons, in Driggs, Idaho.

Photo: ALEXANDER KLUN