

NICK DEVORE THE FREE HEELER

After a four-hour climb to the summit of Colorado's 14,048-foot Handies Peak, 22-year-old Nick Devore stops to pose for his standard celebratory photo—placing his head and hands on the ground and gracefully elevating his ski boots vertically into the air. “You guys have to try this,” he shouts to his friends, including Chris Davenport, from his upside-down vantage point. “There’s a great view from here.”

Back upright, Devore clips into his telemark bindings and finds a rocky, exposed line to skier’s right of the summit. He makes aggressive, polished turns down the steep face and then launches a 30-foot cliff, landing it effortlessly.

“Before Nick joined me to ski some of Colorado’s 14ers, he didn’t have much ski-mountaineering experience,” says Davenport, who skied all 54 of the state’s 14ers in a single year. “But after that, he went to Denali and pretty much ran up North America’s highest peak. He is one of the most talented skiers I have ever seen in the big mountains.”

Conquering skyscraping peaks is nothing compared to what Devore has already overcome. At the age of 17, his father, a photographer for *National Geographic*, committed suicide after a long struggle with drug and alcohol abuse. Devore dealt with the tragedy the only way he knew how.

“I left shortly after to travel around Europe and climb for three months,” he says. “That was a great time to be alone and think about it and soak it in. I often felt lonely and kind of in shock. But it was a turning point for me. That’s when I really grew up.”

With a mop of strawberry-blond hair, grayish-blue eyes, and a freckle for each day he’s spent in the sun, Aspen-born Devore has a ski resumé well beyond his years: a winter of skiing in Chamonix at age 14; several ski descents off the top of Alaska’s 20,320-foot Denali; and climbing and skiing 18 of Colorado’s 14,000-foot peaks with Davenport—including 14 in a two-week period.

He placed 18th overall in the U.S. Freeskiing Nationals at Snowbird last winter (the only telemark skier to qualify for the finals), and finished seventh at last year’s Elk Mountains Grand Traverse, a 40-mile backcountry ski race that climbs more than 6,000 vertical feet from Crested Butte to Aspen. He’s had film appearances in *PW06* and *PW07*, telemark ski flicks by Powderwhore, and *Mountaintown*, a documentary about Aspen. Next summer he’s planning to organize a big mountain tele camp in Portillo, Chile.

Devore fits the stereotype of the earthy freeheeler: He crochets his own hats, spends summers working at an organic fruit and vegetable stand, and he recently transferred from the University of Utah to Arizona’s Prescott College, where he’s pursuing a self-created degree in philosophy, photography, and sustainable building. He’s also a dedicated yogi and a 5.13 climber with “super-human fitness,” according to Davenport.

But it’s skiing that makes him go head over heels at 14,000 feet. “Skiing is not just a sport for me,” he says. “It is my way of exploring. It is my way of living.”

—MEGAN MICHELSON



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