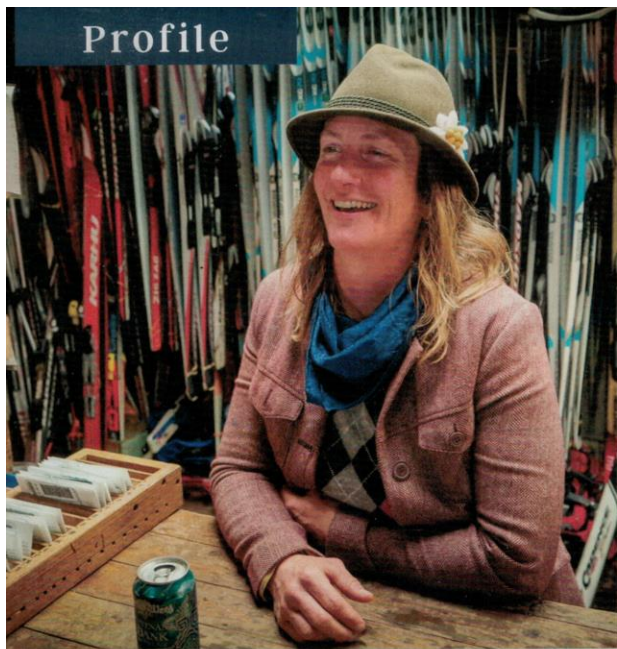


Profile



SUE HAYWOOD

By Nikki Forrester

Sue Haywood is one helluva mountain biker, but did you know she also makes great salsa? Oh, you knew that, too. Well, did you know she's a staple of West Virginia's snowsports scene? Sue moved to Davis in 1994 after graduating from West Virginia University. Although her mountain biking career began in Morgantown, she didn't start her love affair with snow until moving to Canaan Valley. Upon her arrival, she launched into the snowboarding scene, teaching lessons and competing in boardercross races at Timberline Resort. At the same, she picked up a gig at White Grass Ski Touring Center and learned how to telemark ski.

Tele-skiing, which

originated in Telemark, Norway in the 1860s, refers to a specific technique skiers use descend a slope. The result is a graceful dance of sorts that looks as if the skier is running downhill. Boots are bound to skis only at the toes, freeing the heel—and the soul.

Although many claim the ancient sport of telemark skiing is dead, it's alive and well in Canaan Valley. Sue is an integral part of a thriving community of tele-ladies in West Virginia, including a few women who established tele-skiing in the region and still shred the mountains today. Pop into White Grass this winter to take a lesson with Sue, get the scoop on the best gear, and ask about her passion for powder days.

You were part of the OG snowboarding scene in Canaan Valley. What was that like?

I was on courtesy patrol at Timberline, and I also taught snowboarding there. There was a great group of youngsters shredding. Everyone was just so excited about the winter. It was all about paltry paychecks, big snows, and good parties.

Do you remember your first cross-country ski?

The friends I came down here with knew Chip Chase, so we would go over to White Grass. I remember that first ski because it was definitely like, "Wow, this is really far." We went all the way up Three Mile into Dolly Sods. It was torture, it was trudging, and I kept thinking 'When is this going to be over?' But since I was a mountain biker, I had the mindset that it was supposed to hurt a little bit.

Snowboarding or skiing?

Snowboarding feels very free because you don't have poles. I love snowboarding in deep powder where you're surfing on top. That is such a good feeling—really free but cool as shit. If you want to go somewhere, though, you've gotta have skis that can go uphill. They're way more versatile and you don't need a lift. The downhill is so exciting when you're skiing ungroomed trails and trees, especially on skinny skis. It's not a deal breaker at all to have to go uphill, I like earning my turns.

When did you start working at White Grass?

I started soon after I moved down here. I rented out skis,

gave lessons, and worked in the café a bit. Chip was one of the first people I met down here. And to this day, I haven't met anyone like Chip. He was definitely a huge draw to working at White Grass. Now, I can do my mountain biking thing most of the year and work at White Grass for the winter. It's like my winter identity.

How did you learn to telemark ski?

Trying to figure out the telemark turn was an early obsession. I can't remember a lightbulb moment, but I watched Adam Chase and Athey Lutz and would get little bits of instruction from them. They each have a definite style, which you can really see in their feet. Starting to think about my feet as weights and springs was probably the biggest thing for me. But in most conditions, I'm still wondering whether my turn is going to work.

You were the first person to ski every White Grass trail in a day. How was that?

I did that two years ago and couldn't believe nobody had ever done it before. There are 50 km of marked trails on the map, which took about 12 to 13 hours to ski. I moved left to right across the mountain and came up with a route where I wouldn't have to double back. I did miss some small sections between trails though, so I'd like to see more people do it with their own sequence.

You also competed in the American Birkebeiner, the largest cross-country ski race in North America. What was that like?



Cross-country skiing is really thriving in the Midwest. It's very much a part of their culture and I felt a real kinship with everyone there. There were 10,000 people at the race last year, which was pretty mind-blowing because I've never seen that many Nordic skiers. I started in the last wave, so I was back with the masses. Once we got going though, you're just cruising. It took me four hours and seven minutes to ski 32 miles. I had never skated for that long. I don't think I've ever skied for that long without stopping either.

How has skiing influenced your biking?

The kind of skiing we do is very skill-based, which is the kind of mountain biking that I do. Skiing requires core strength and balance. You also get speed when going downhill that's not controlled. The balance, line choice, and commitment elements of skiing definitely transfer over to biking.

What keeps you in West Virginia for the winter?

I've often wondered, 'If I'm this into skiing, why don't I move to Colorado?' I really do love skiing, but I like the skiing we do here. It's very fun and rugged. White Grass is our playground. People rejoice and celebrate when we have a

powder day. I've just come to accept that sometimes we ski on very low snow. And this is my home. I can see sunrises at my house and in the winter they're just awesome. Like that bluebird day in winter when you just feel like, 'Wow, this place is so pretty.' 🍷

Any last thoughts?

SKI UPHILL EVERY DAY

Sue Haywood is a professional mountain bike instructor, professional White Grasser, and professional maker of Hay Sue's Spicy Salsa. Do a flip, dip a chip, and go hang with Sue & Chip at White Grass this winter.