

# They call him...

## THE SNOWHUNTER

Jean MacRae meets the man with a mission: to boldly locate every ski area on this - and any other planet

Who is he, and where did he come from - this man who spends night and day scouring the globe for hitherto unknown ski areas (or even isolated, undiscovered T-bars)? What strange forces drive him in his quest to put thousands of ski areas - from Algeria to the Antarctic... from Kazakhstan to Kitzbuhel - on the map?



The Snow Hunter - alias Patrick Thorne - appears to have his finger on the pulse of every known ski resort on the planet. Indeed, not content with finding nearly 6000 ski resorts in 80 countries, he's recently been spotted studying star charts - looking for snow in space. (You can see the results of this search overleaf.) But why? It makes you wonder what Thorne does when he feels the need to chill out and re-energise. Or does his devotion to his job do that for him?

Thorne first put on a pair of skis some 20 years ago, on a school trip to the quaintly named Italian resort of Prato Nevoso - a suitably obscure first resort for this tortured soul, who now gets a bigger thrill climbing

hills above Cyprus to find 'resting' drag lifts when supposedly on a summer beach holiday than he does schussing down the slopes of Aspen or Verbier? A few years after that first school trip, he was calling himself Damien Black, and running the little-known 'Mentalskiclub', organising college ski trips. Never one to conform, he took the 'hairy moon-boot' era of the time to a new extreme by completing his outfit with one of those circa 1970s Afghan coats, turned hairy-side out, completed with a spiky punk hairdo. It was on one such college trip, his first north to Aviemore on a British Rail student '£10 anywhere' offer, that he and his future wife Sally first got to know each other and the Scottish Highlands. All three feel in love.

Thorne's personal favourite ski area of the 200 or so he's set ski boot in are too many to mention, although his face does light up at the mention of Italy's Sella Ronda circuit. With three youngsters to think of, he tends to go for resorts like Canada's Tremblant for their family friendliness - though he does rate Wengen for the views, and Heavenly for the surreal nature of its casino-dominated Nevada base.

His first skiing book, *Low Down on The Slopes* - a perceptive and amusing look at life in a ski resort - included practical information on ski holidays, including some interesting perceptions of ski-resort personnel.

The Snow Hunter turned vegetarian, became a ski bum in the Alps every other weekend, and started writing guide books to Austria and Scotland which seemed to have an unusually heavy weighting of winter sports coverage. 'Breaking Away - the teenage guide to parent-free holidays' was penned with Sally. This gave practical hints on every aspect of holidays for the under-18s, from where to go for 'Wombling' (shooting rapids without a canoe) to advice on how not to get arrested as a spy whilst sightseeing abroad.

When Berlitz Guides approached the Ski Club of Great Britain to find a ski writer, Thorne's name was put forward. He wrote Berlitz's Italian ski guide book and co-authored the French one with the Ski Club's Tessa Coker.

