



## ASK ANDREW

**Q:** *It seems like you always have a different ski partner. Why is that, and how do you find them?*

**When it comes** to partners, as Mae West said—a hard man (or woman) is good to find. Given the option, I'd be happy to ski with all of my partners from 20 years ago, but most of them have moved on to more profitable or responsible endeavors, or become, as they're commonly called, "grown ups." It would be a lot easier if we could all agree to be imbecilic blood brothers/sisters until the end of time.

Instead, I have a dirty-little-secret. I keep a little black book of potential partners for everything from short day trips to month-long outings. The pool of people who are willing to be mellow on a high-danger avalanche day, and those who want to get after it at all times are different, and for good reason.

Sometimes there are opportunities for short, expensive trips that favor the doctor/lawyer types, and at other times you need a supply of dirtbags for whom time is *not* money. Equipment can be a factor, such as finding partners with a quiver of kites or a pricey PackRaft. At first, you may not be able

to think of any partners for a given trip idea, but keeping a list can jog your memory. It's devious, but it works.

At the top of my list of desirable partner characteristics is "motivation." Trips seldom go as planned, but where there's a will, there's a way. Someone who's willing to sit under a rock for an hour while a storm passes and then continue on is a good partner. If they can fall asleep under the rock, wake up and punch it for 18 hours, then make dinner and do the dishes, they are an excellent partner.

Great partners go into the experience with an open mind and willingness to give it their all, whereas lousy partners are always looking to protect their own interests—my stove, my tent, my food, my money, mine, mine, mine. You really have to be willing to write it all off, both in the micro and macro sense, to be a good partner. The best trips I've ever been on are those where partners are willing to Plan, Prepare, and Pay (The Three P's), yet once the trip starts to unfold, are willing to improvise as needed. Having a plan is important, but following it is not.

Actual skiing ability is quite a way down my list of requirements, and being a gonzo skier can actually be detrimental. Gonzo skiers only want to do one thing: ski. They don't want to wait for weather, experience local culture, or enjoy the journey if there's even a remote chance that they could be center-punching avalanche-prone slopes instead.

Finding good partners is mostly dependent on being one yourself. If you can't find anyone to go on trips with you, look in the mirror. Out of the hundred or so people I've traveled with, the few with whom I wouldn't repeat it were those who insisted on forcing the trip into being something it didn't want to be. When life gives you unstable layers, make a layer cake. It may not be what you expected, but then again, it may be better. From the top of one peak you can see many more; a group of new friends and partners may yield many others. Or, I suppose, you could always take out a Craigslist ad under Alpine Encounters....

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