



Irene Schroeder makes her way through the rock garden on a canoe-supported ski tour of the Mad River Valley, Vermont. **BRIAN MOHR**



## Backyard Gems

BY BRIAN MOHR

Old Man Winter had been especially generous. Thanks to record snowfall, we had been skiing out the backdoor more than ever – lapping the hardwoods behind the house, skiing to visit our neighbor's pigs and laying fresh tracks under the rising moon.

Craving something different, we turned to our local river, where an unusually potent January thaw had broken up its icy shell. Now, in March, with a deep snowpack in the valley, the main channel was still wide open. It was a rare combination. We knew that the terrain along the river featured only a few sloping pastures and obscure tree lines, but the urge to float downstream, in our ski boots, was irresistible.

At the put-in below our sleepy village, our friends were already in their boat doing their best to avoid being crushed by a huge, floating river berg. A circular pancake of ice, nearly as wide as the river itself, spun slowly in the large eddy below our hometown gorge. Unable to take our eyes off this icy form, we secured our skis and hopped into our canoe.

Captivated, we circled the berg, as if our floating passage around it could be the key to a hidden treasure of skiing adventure. Chickadees chattered in the afternoon sun. The river's roar filled the air. Twice we circled the berg and then paddled off.

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The January thaw had stripped the river of its icy armor, but it also piled it ten feet high along its banks. From our boats, it felt as though we were paddling along the terminus of an ancient glacier. Our crew kept its distance in case the glacier calved.

We eyed a few tempting pastures before spotting a beautiful, north-facing ridgeline that stretched from high on an open hillside to the deep and forested steeps of a small canyon downstream. It was too good to be true – a long, clean line that had eluded us for years. At a rare break in the ice, we hauled our canoes ashore.

We climbed through an aging maple glade, the snow silky smooth under our skis. We slid past a buried fence line, and crested into the open pasture above. Struck by an unfamiliar perspective on our valley, we were reminded of how much there is to explore, even here, close to home.

High in the pasture, the lure of gravity gave us little time to linger. An entire hillside stretched open and untracked before us. We pushed off and carved sweeping turns to the river far below.

Back in the canoes, our spirits glowing, we drifted in search of another snow-covered gem. A river otter surfaced and then dove out of sight. Whitewater loomed downstream. It was hard to believe that just this morning we were loading our woodstove, and that we'd soon be home for dinner.

**BRIAN MOHR** Brian Mohr and his wife Emily Johnson make a living in the Green Mountains of Vermont by sharing stories and images of their adventures in some of the planet's wildest reaches – including their own backyard. Their latest and greatest tales are featured in their annual Wild People, Wild Places program – a series of multi-media slideshows and fine art exhibits dedicated to the long-term protection of the places featured. For more info, visit [emberphoto.com](http://emberphoto.com).

### ABOUT THIS CATALOG

Adventure is where you find it. And most often, you find it in your own backyard: whether a lunch-time mountain bike ride, a before-work ski, or a day-off downwind paddle. These days, when long-distance travel has a high impact on both wallet and environment, your backyard deserves another look. In this catalog, you'll find images and stories of just such low-impact missions. Enjoy and start planning your own. Write about your adventure on our blog, [thecleanestline.com](http://thecleanestline.com).