



### Where's Mikey Williams?

**Late in 2008, scientists announced the discovery of snow falling in Mars' outer atmosphere. Good news, what with all the global warming doom and gloom on Earth. With this in mind, our 2009 trip destination was set - Japan to ensure the powder. There was no way I was springing for an interstellar ticket, plus Japanese food rules and there's always amazing snow there... right?**

Wrong. Well, there was amazing, waist-deep, fresh snow in Niseko, where Jake McCarthy and myself were leaving to meet the rest of the crew in Hakuba. Waiting for us down there were Mikey Williams, Kieran McLaughlin and The "Alex Kutaysov" Russian. Kieran had organised for us to be put up at The Lab, and to sample a group of resorts surrounding Hakuba. Everyone was keen to get amongst some serious Japanese pow action in Hakuba's massive, gnarly mountains. Most of the really gnarly, good-looking stuff was out of bounds, and Kieran assured us we'd be able to safely access some amazing spots after the next snowfall. For now though, the

snow on the ground was ageing, so we resolved to check out some resorts until the magic happened. On the first day checking out Happo One Happo One resort, Mikey and Kieran speed-lined a tree run managing to bury one another with spray, having no idea that this would be as good as it got for the next two weeks.

### Change Of Plan

After a couple of days of warm weather and a distinct lack of anything frozen falling from the sky, we were told that we were in the middle of their driest snow season for 30-odd years. Hmmm. Heavy freeriding lines and massive powder booters were put on hold, the boys set up their jib sticks and we were off in search of alternative hammers. Unfortunately this temporary jib mission became the whole trip, and as for the ensuing ten days we faced rain, temperatures up to 10 degrees Celsius (in late January) and not a sign of any fresh snow. Luckily the boys kept their shit together instead of wiggling out completely -although late one night Jake attempted to throw himself out of our window in his sleep. Mikey helped keep everyone busy by dishing out his list of personal chores to the crew and schooled us all at Wii Sports nightly in The Lab's entertainment room.

## Making The Most Of It

Kieran led us to a nice rail off an overpass, and during the setup we realised that we were in the middle of a cross-country skiing circuit when a class of school kids and their teacher came upon us. They were pretty keen for us to disappear, but after lots of pleading we were given the all-clear to leave the setup and come back before training the next day. Getting permission to hit a rail is always a warm and fuzzy moment, so we were back there first thing the next morning and Kieran and The Russian got to work. There was a forest in the landing, and a hefty fall (over a tractor) off the outside of the rail, but the boys got it together and bagged a shot each.

A not so warm and fuzzy afternoon followed when an overzealous lift attendant didn't want Mikey to tackle the longest, most deserted, kink rail in history. He made it clear we were a scourge on society and pursued us down the street long after we'd packed up and left, all the while on his phone yapping to the local fuzz. The Russian wanted to fit him with a double-breasted concrete suit, but luckily the guy gave up the chase and lived to be a pain in someone else's arse.

## Tsugaike Kogen Resort

We encountered another dedicated employee the following day at Tsugaike Kogen resort, when a ski patroller liked the look of Mikey and stuck on us top to bottom. Somewhere along the way he got a proper dusting off, either a strong gust of wind or Kieran mistimed a turn. He left us alone after a while and we got to sample one of the most fun tree runs any of us had had in Japan. Perfect tree spacing and pitch to play around, it was just a shame the snow was so heavy.

We covered a lot of road in search of legit spots, but more often than not there were rivers, trees, avalanches, psychotic people or any combo of the above in the landings. Thankfully the boys were committed and despite our bad luck with conditions, managed to come away with a collection of shots that belie how hard they all worked.

*When in Hakuba Transfer Snowboard Magazine stayed at The Lab with travel and arrangements organised by Liquid Snow Tours*

