

RURAL ROUTE

FAMOUS INTERNETSKIERS

Looking for some backcountry ski inspiration? Will a trip report, deep powder photos, and a weather forecast that promises six to twelve get your juices flowing? Then fire up your computer and go to Famous Internet Skiers, dot com. You'll find powder shots, trip tales, snow-only forecasts, and a good dose of witty, subtle humor.

Famous Internet Skiers is the result of three uber-educated guys wanting to get their ski photos published in a magazine somewhere—anywhere. They were clueless about how to do it, so instead of wading through the quagmire of submitting freelance work to slick publications, they simply created their own online backcountry ski magazine. They've achieved a modest level of success, as proved by the traffic to the site and the click-throughs resulting in online purchases of sponsor products. They get a commission on those sales and generate enough income to pay for some of their travel research.

It all began four years ago when Sam Lozier, a UVM grad, longtime Green Mountain skier, and now resident of Bellingham, Wash., posted some ski photos on an internet forum. So did his friend, Allen Taylor, also a UVM grad, Vermont skier, and current Bellingham resident. Greg Petrics, who was attending Middlebury College at the time, saw the photos and wanted to ski with Sam and Allen. The three met, took some runs, took some more runs, took a lot of photos, and decided to create a web site that would serve as a creative outlet as well as a backcountry ski information resource. During the summer of 2009, Sam and Greg launched Famous Internet Skiers, a labor-of-love project that has far exceeded their initial expectations.

Soon, more joined the team. Now there are a total of nine contributors.

Six are profiled on the site, including the original three. The most notorious is A.J. "Lionel Hutz" LaRosa. He is obsessed with the weather and is the site's unofficial weatherman. His forecasting has earned him the title "Oracle of Powder" by ESPN Action Sports. Using professional-level tools, "Lionel Hutz" digests, analyzes, and makes stormy predictions. His accurate forecasts have garnered him a loyal following. When he's not skiing, watching the weather, and posting about it on the site, he's an attorney in Boston.

Pete Wadsworth is an engineer in Burlington who contributes dynamic photos and skiing content, mostly about the Adirondacks. Jake Evans also lives in Burlington, works at Outdoor Gear Exchange,

and contributes gear reviews. Ben Peters, formerly of Stowe and now living in Salt Lake City, contributes trip reports and photos, as does Porter Haney, who also lives in Utah.

Greg Petrics, one of the original three, graduated from Middlebury and received his doctorate in mathematics at Dartmouth. He lives with his wife in Stowe and is a math professor at Johnson State College. He contributes trip reports and photos, and also plays with Google analytics to study the site's traffic. "Trip reports with good photos drive the site for months, while the weather forecast will drive the site for about four hours," Greg explains. "They are two very different types of traffic sources and without one we would have half the traffic."



The about us page from the FIS website. Some of the players from famousinternetskiers.com at Greg Petrics' wedding this summer. From top: Greg Petrics, Porter Haney, Alexander LaRosa (aka Lionel Hutz on FIS), Christian Theberge, and Dwyer Haney. Inset: Many of the FISers shoot photos and video. Here's one from Greg Petrics.

Outdoor Gear Exchange in Burlington and backcountry.com sponsor the site and provide product for gear reviews. When a sale results from a click originating on famousinternetskiers.com, the famous skiers get a percentage. The team also does a calendar of its best photos, using a print-on-demand service. "We collaborate by email to decide on the photos we want to include, and have never lacked for legal content," says Greg.

As for the site's intriguing name, there is, of course, a story. "Before the site was a public forum, several of us contributed to Teton Gravity Research's forum," Greg explains. "People would recognize us from that. One day we were skiing at Tuckerman Ravine in New Hampshire and someone recognized us. He said, 'Hey, it's the famous internet skiers.' We kept it."

Fame, however, is not their objective. Creativity, inspiration, and fun, are. Contributor Ben Peters sums it up best: "I always hope our readers leave our site feeling inspired to chase down their own form of adventure. That's really what we're after. Inspiring readers through pictures, words, and humor to pursue their own adventures outside."

—Kate Carter

