

HIKING RUNNING CYCLING SKI ING

# Getout

STORY AND PHOTO BY JOHN D'ONOFRIO

## Huntoon Point

THE PLEASURES OF A WINTER NIGHT



I am **drawn** to Huntoon Point.

First of all, it's a *great* name for a point: Huntoon. Second, it's the highest point on Kulshan Ridge, known to most 'hamsters as Artist Point. And third, there are the 360-degree views of snaggle-toothed peaks. Situated between the two lords of the northern high country, Baker and Shuksan, Huntoon Point occupies the proverbial catbird's seat.

The point is named for Bert Huntoon, a legendary figure in the history of our neck of the woods. In the 1920s, Huntoon served as general manager of the Mt. Baker Development Company. He was an early connoisseur of the beauty of our corner of the world; his evocative black-and-white photographs of the area can be seen at the Whatcom Museum.

In summer, of course, Kulshan Ridge is crawling with other like-minded scenery hounds, owing to its easy access by internal combustion engine. Frankly, it can be a zoo. But in midwinter, at sunset, it's a lonely and magical place.

For many years I have made an overnight excursion to Kulshan Ridge an obligatory part of my midwinter recreation. Typically, I bivouac among the last sheltering trees on the ridge, below the point itself, which is fully exposed to the capricious winter winds. But this year, we won the weather lottery. It was cold, clear and absolutely still—a perfect opportunity to pitch the tent on the very top of the point with its unobstructed views in all directions.

Staying warm was definitely not an issue on our recent climb up to Austin Pass, following the well-trod snowshoe track emanating from the parking lot adjacent to the upper lodge of the ski area. There's nothing like carrying a heavy backpack uphill through the snow to keep the blood warm. After a short break at the pass to admire the calendar view of Shuksan, we resumed the ascent, reaching the top of Kulshan Ridge in mid-afternoon.

The sky was cobalt blue and the sun bathed the snowscape in sweet, clear light. After what had seemed like a month of cloud cover, the sunshine was nothing short of blissful. Below us to the south, Baker Lake looked like a Siberian travel poster. To the north, the Border Peaks, plastered with snow, gleamed in the afternoon sun.

We dug out a flat spot for the tent, fired up the stove to melt snow for drinking water and sat back on our snow-carved easy chairs to watch the sun go down, warm in myriad layers of fleece and down. Far below, the last skiers and snowshoers headed down, navigating the spider web of trails in the snow toward the distant lights of the ski area. Our only company was a huge raven, passing overhead on its way to an appointment.

There is a unique pleasure in inhabiting the high county in the season of white. To be warm and comfortable in the teeth of winter is uniquely satisfying; one feels dialed in, connected. Evening spread its cloak of dazzling stars overhead and we lingered beneath them, savoring the big-hearted night, listening to the silence and savoring a memorable night on Huntoon Point.