

UP TO HERE

Showdown on High Rustler

High-jinks rule during Alta's annual last-gasp ritual

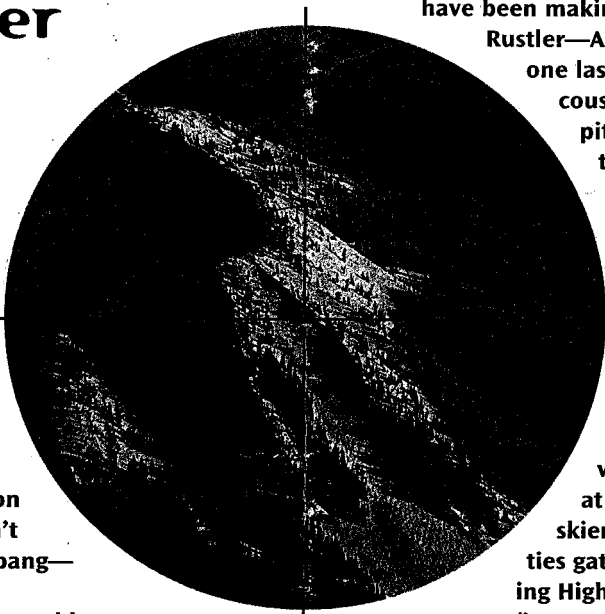
IT'S SPRING, and one by one the nation's ski areas are shutting down, some with pomp while others quietly fade to black. Alta fits somewhere in between. Mountain operators fail to publicly celebrate Alta's season end, but local Utah skiers can't let their turf close without a bang—or a bong.

Alta is a cult of first tracks and last tracks. And like any cult, there are rituals. "You think you're a *real* skier?—I'll

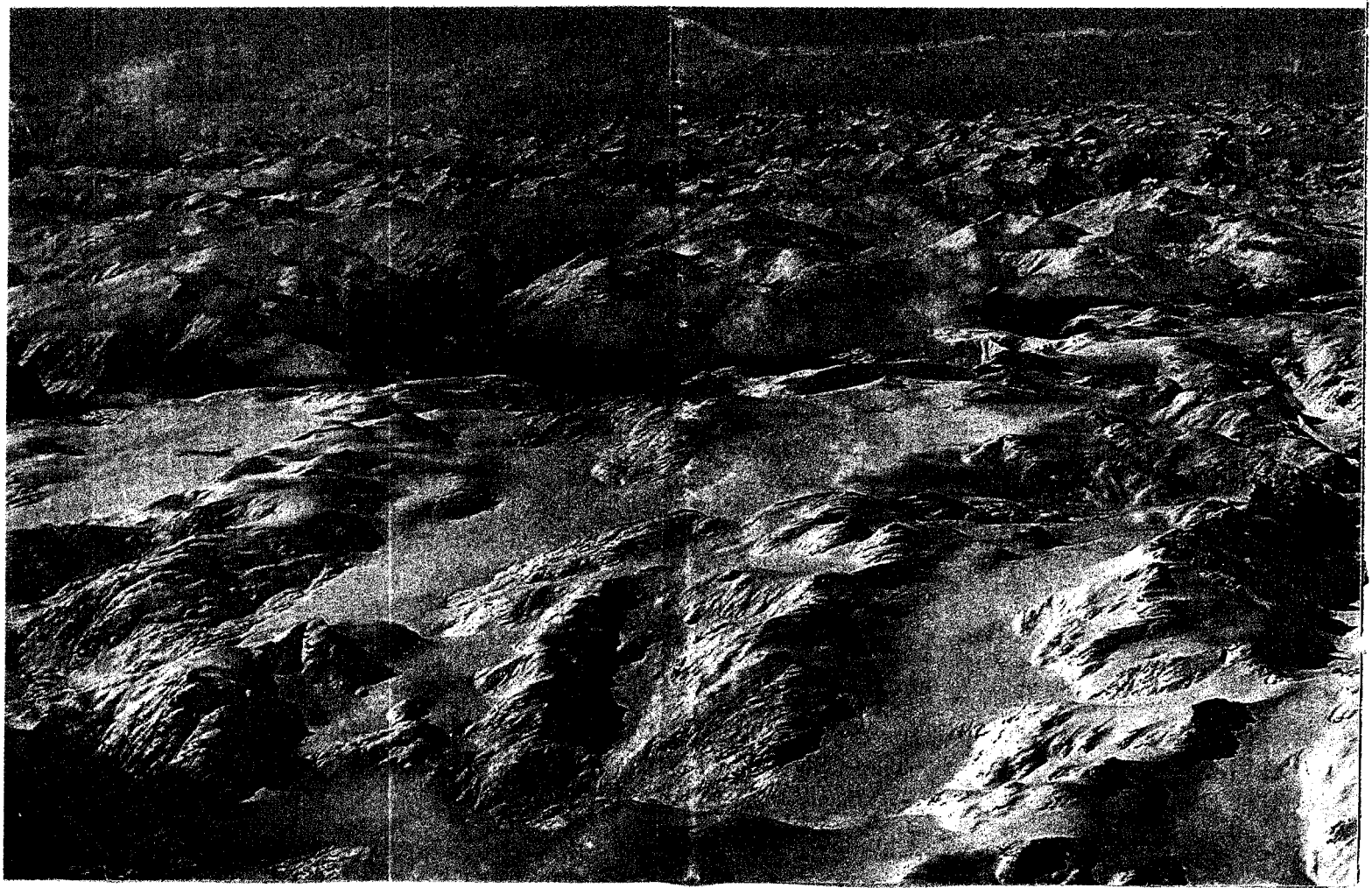
see you on High Rustler, buddy" is the chant on closing day. Since the 1960s, a solid group of loyal Alta skiers have been making the High Traverse to

Rustler—Alta's most dramatic run—for one last kiss of winter and some raucous hell-raising. The 45-degree pitch will drop you quickly down the 1,300 feet of vertical, but the point is to wait at the top, and wait, drawing it out until the last possible moment, when the final skier crosses the traverse and arrives for the last run of the season.

Though Alta technically closes at 4:30 p.m., the last chair on the Germainia lift of winter 1995 left the loading area at 5:40 p.m., April 23. Over 200 skiers of all shapes, sizes, and abilities gathered along the ridge overlooking High Rustler. Coolers, kites, import (i.e., greater-than 3.2) beer, combustibles, and a boombox were passed among the crowd. A flat spot, no larger



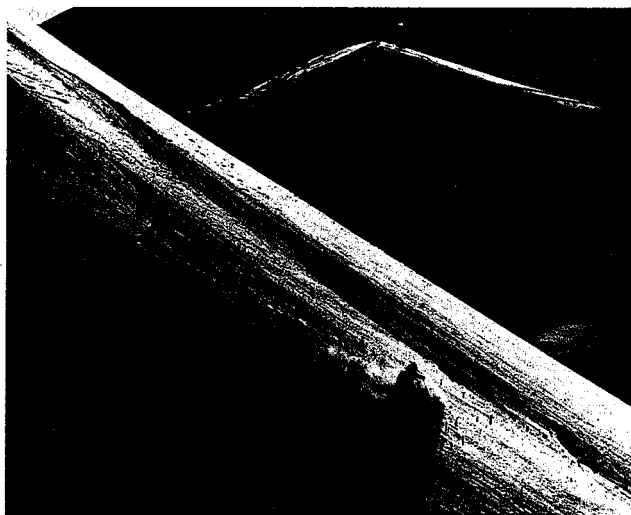
High Rustler as seen through the DEA's super-secret aerial bongscope.



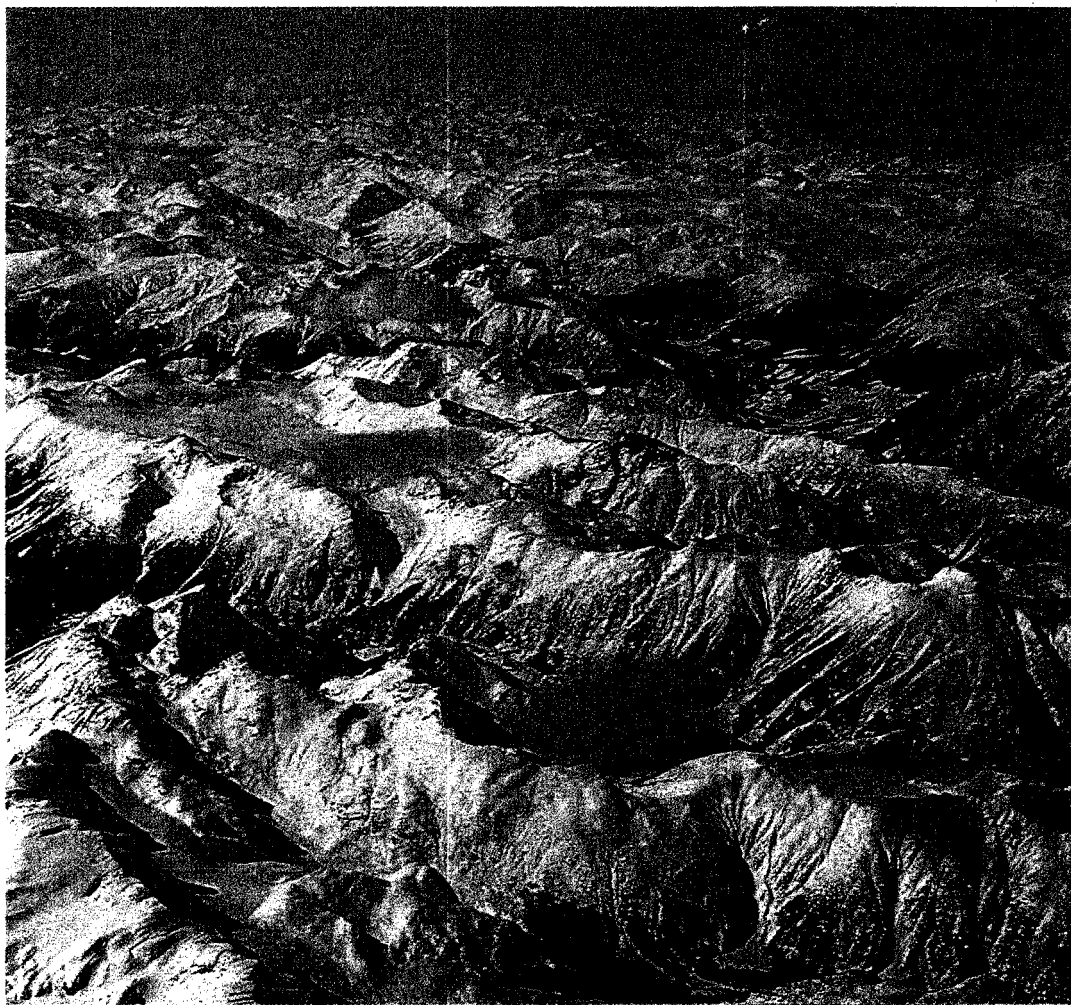
than the bed of a pickup truck, became the podium for the "judges." If you failed to wait for the last skier to arrive, jumping into Rustler too soon, the judges pounded you with harsh words and heavy snowballs. Others, intent on bagging a run ahead of the masses, snuck away from the judges to ski secret lines down through the tress. Most stopped first to pray at "The Church," home of the sacred Alta bong, where they gave thanks for the 14-foot base remaining on closing day. Hard-core Altaholics stashed the bong in the trees years ago, and it's one of the few ski items that doesn't get ripped off at the end of the season. "Some things are sacred," says Alta spokesperson Connie Marshall.

Then the time comes. A giant roar erupts from the crowd as skiers surge to the edge. It's a Chinese Downhill, Alta-style—flash turns, hoots, hollers, wipeouts, and apologies made to the wind as the skiers continue their nonstop crush to the bottom, elbowing others aside at high speed and threading through snowplowing novices who just wanted to experience the ritual. There's no time to finesse or practice turns—you spend most of the run trying to survive the onslaught of darting, out-of-control bodies. And then you're down, breathing hard and looking back at the carnage on the hill and those doddling skiers who have yet to complete their homage to the mountain. Not exactly the kind of run you'd have craved in January, but a ritual is a ritual, and after all, *some things*—no matter how inexplicable—are sacred.—Jill Adler

Oops...



Let's see. Six screw-ups a day, times 30 days per issue, times seven issues, that's uh, well...a lot of screw ups. Usually we catch them before they impact any humans involved, but every once in a while we don't. This one was a real goof. On page 56 of the Photo Annual (January 1996) Greg Griffith's evocative photo (above) was mistakenly credited to fellow-Whistlerite Paul Morrison. Given that photogs work incredibly hard at producing quality images, it's a real drag when idiots like us miscredit their work. We sincerely apologize to both photographers, who, it is rumored, were seen throwing darts at a wall-mounted Photo Annual in a Whistler pub.



*Despite
what they say
size is
important*



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