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TRAVEL

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DINA MISHEV FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Art tour of the Riviera leaves an impression

BY NANCY NATHAN

Vincent Van Gogh fell in love with the brilliance of Provence. Soon after he arrived from Paris in 1888, he told an artist friend who stayed behind about the colors that charged his creativity. “The stretches of water make patches of a beautiful emerald and a rich blue in the landscape ... Pale orange sunsets making the fields look blue, and glorious yellow suns.”

We can imagine ourselves under the crystal sun along France’s Mediterranean coast, which travelers might soon be able to visit once again. I had planned to be there last April, and still hope to get there this fall. But since we’re not yet able to make that journey, we can soak up the radiance online — on museum websites and in video presentations about the many artists, Cézanne, Picasso and Matisse among them — who traveled from Paris to the Mediterranean and shaped our vision of the seductive Riviera.

A trip to Provence and the Riviera might start at the western end of that stretch, in the Roman city of Arles, where Van Gogh first lived after leaving Paris. While none of the original paintings is still in Arles, there is a Van Gogh trail, with easels displaying his most iconic views of that city, where he lived for 15 months and where his exuberance propelled him to just keep on painting — and painting.

When I followed that trail of easels a few years ago, I started where Van Gogh himself started, in the town square where his famous “Yellow House” was painted.

SEE PAINTINGS ON E14

Small resorts, deep tracks

A dedicated skier’s life keeps winding back to the little places

BY DINA MISHEV

Most of my best ski days have been at destination ski areas. I’ve gotten bell to bell face shots of champagne powder at Steamboat Springs, ripped groomer after groomer under a cloudless sky at Beaver Creek and racked up insane amounts of vertical at Jackson Hole. But it’s small ski areas that have changed my life.

The definition of “small” in the context of ski resorts can be hard to pin down. “It can even be different depending on the skier you’re talking with,” Adrienne Saia Isaac, director of marketing and communications at the National Ski Areas Association, emailed me. The organization classifies resorts as small, medium, large or extra large. To do this, it uses a metric related to lift capacity and vertical

transportation feet per hour that’s so esoteric not one of the resorts I asked could tell me what theirs was.

But it’s more about heart than statistics — a scrappy base lodge, lifts so slow you learn to enjoy the journey as much as the destination, knowing patrolers by name, a general lack of amenities (which encourages bringing your own lunch and snacks), a parking lot, maybe even dirt, that doesn’t require a shuttle to get to the slopes. These smaller-scale, regional outfits are enjoying a surge in popularity during the pandemic because they’re often less crowded than destination ski resorts.

On Feb. 15, Bluebird Backcountry will open near Steamboat Springs, Colo., with zero lifts, 1,500 acres of terrain, a 2,200-foot vertical drop and no more than 300 skiers a day. That’s small in one way. Liberty

SEE SKI ON E15



LIBERTY MOUNTAIN RESORT

TOP: At one time, Snow King was so close to the author’s office she could ski there on her lunch break. **ABOVE:** Liberty Mountain, with its bunny slope, is where the author was introduced to skiing.

Naturalist’s escapades enliven wild memoir

BY ANDREA SACHS

The second in an occasional series about the books that spurred our love of travel.

On every trip that involves wild-life, I have a secret urge to pocket the animals and take them home. I know this is wrong on so many levels, which is why, when I first read “The Whispering Land,” I identified with Gerald Durrell: The author is my id.

“Keeping the torch beam firmly fixed on his eyes, so that he could not see what I was doing, I gently brought up my other hand and then, with a quick movement, I threw the cloth I carried over him, and grabbed,” he writes in his memoir, which was published in Great Britain in 1961 and in the United States the following year.

Durrell had a valid reason for snatching the pygmy owl from its attic perch, one of dozens of critters captured during an eight-month expedition in South America. As I learned in the prequel, “A Zoo in My Luggage,” the British naturalist was building a zoo on Jersey, in the Channel Islands, and needed residents. Since he couldn’t very well order the animals from a Sears catalogue, he traveled to their habitats and scooped them up like a fashionista shopping on Rue Saint-Honoré. In his first book, he ventures to then-British Camerouns; in the second installment, he journeys to Argentina, the land of peccaries, tapirs, seriemas and other fascinating fauna.

I am fully aware that, in most cases, removing animals from their natural environment is unethical. Yet, more than 20 years

SEE BOOKS ON E15

NAVIGATOR

One passport not enough? Here’s how you can apply for dual citizenship. **E14**

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted travel domestically and around the world. You will find the latest developments on The Post’s live blog at www.washingtonpost.com/coronavirus/

FAMILY

What parents planning to travel solo with their kids need to know first. **E16**

In 1961 memoir, British naturalist rounds up critters and captivating tales

BOOKS FROM E13

after discovering “The Whispering Land” in a Harvard Square bookstore (I liked the cover), I remain an eager passenger on Durrell’s wild ride. For one, his excursions predate the Age of Enlightenment for wildlife protection and conservation. Two, his heart is in the right place: He dedicated his life (1925-1995) to protecting endangered animals and ensuring their future through his Jersey Zoo, which he founded in 1959, and the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, which works in nearly 20 countries. And finally, he is a charming and witty fella. Imagine if “Fawty Towers” had aired on Animal Planet, or if David Attenborough were Monty Python’s seventh troupe member.

Case in (third) point: After an evening spent under a Land Rover in Patagonia — always the gentleman, he had insisted that the three female members of his party sleep inside the vehicle — he awakens to find a stranger in his midst. “He wore the supercilious expression of his race, the faint aristocratic sneer, as if he knew that I had slept in my clothes for the past three nights,” he says of the bedroom-crashing guanaco. The shaggy cousin of the llama burps. “He paused for a moment, glaring at me, to make sure that his comment on my worth had made me feel properly humble.” The animal trots off, and Durrell awaits the arrival of dawn swaddled like a baby in blan-

kets, puffing away on cigarettes — another time-stamped habit.

In “A Zoo in My Luggage,” Durrell spends most of the nearly 200 illustrated pages collecting and anthropomorphizing around Bafut, a mountain kingdom in the West African country. (Ralph Thompson contributed the inky drawings for both books.) Among his finds: Cholmondeley St. John, a chimp with a posh demeanor; Ticky, a black-footed mongoose; and Georgina, a baboon who runs amok in a British department store a la Curious George. In “The Whispering Land,” Durrell starts in Buenos Aires, swoops south to Patagonia and then boomerangs back north to Callegua, now a national park. His story opens and closes with a bureaucratic roundelay that many travelers, including those who are not transporting traps or a puma, may find relatable.

In the first half of the book, Durrell behaves like a (mostly) typical wildlife enthusiast, observing with his eyes and keeping his grab-by hands idle. (One exception: an Aesop-slow tortoise they helped cross the road by throwing him into the back of the car. They later christened him Ethelbert.) When his team locates a colony of roughly a million penguins, his excitement is palpable. “In among these craters waddled the biggest collection of penguins I had ever seen, like a sea of Pigmy headwaiters, solemnly shuffling to and fro as if suffering from fallen arches due to a lifetime of carrying overloaded trays. ... It was a breathtaking sight.”



Gerald Durrell checks on a pink pigeon from Mauritius, one of the many rare animals residing at his Jersey Zoo, in 1984.

After describing their arduous trek to sea, he turns his lens on a family he names the Joneses and a chick from next door who is always popping by their nest for free food. The scene plays like a sitcom. “The parent Jones, being harried by its gaping-mouthed brood, its mind fully occupied with the task of regurgitating a pint of shrimps, did not seem to notice the introduction of a third head into the general melee that was going on around it.”

On wildlife-viewing trips, I try to emulate Durrell in the field, especially his patience, curiosity and unbridled sense of wonder. This has paid off. On Sea Lion Island in the Falkland Islands, a Gentoo chick approached me and yanked on a Velcro strap on my

coat. Then it regurgitated all over both of us. I was honored. The penguin, according to my unscientific interpretation, was trying to share its seafood meal with me, like splitting a cookie with a friend. In the Galápagos, I was swimming off a beach on San Cristóbal Island when I noticed a pair of birds darting around underwater like battling submarines. They were Galápagos penguins. I swam with them, beneath a searing sun, and gave myself heat stroke. I dragged myself onto the beach and had to drink copious amounts of coconut water to recover. I imagine Durrell would have poured himself a glass of wine and jumped back in the water. I am clearly still a rookie.

The second half of the book

focuses on rounding up animals, or “bichos,” for his Jersey venue. (In “A Zoo in My Luggage,” he and the locals refer to the wildlife as “beef,” as in “Good morning. You bring beef?”) When I first read the book, I found these anecdotes as entertaining as Doctor Dolittle’s escapades, but I didn’t pick up on the greater importance of Durrell’s work until years later. When I cracked the book open again, I was more informed about wildlife conservation issues and eco-tourism. This knowledge helped deepen my admiration for his writings and mission. As he explains in the prologue to “A Zoo in My Luggage,” “To me extirpation of an animal species is a criminal offence, just as the destruction of something else that we cannot recreate or replace, such as a Rembrandt or the Acropolis, would be.” In his view, the tortoise is as sacred as, say, the Taj Mahal, a position I support. Ditto for some of his collecting practices.

To amass his animals, Durrell employs locals, providing them with another source of income. Once word gets out that a British man is interested in buying bichos, villagers start showing up at his doorstep like UPS drivers. He also buys wild animals kept as pets, such as a foulmouthed Tucumán Amazon parrot and a maltreated ocelot in critical condition. At his temporary digs in Callegua, he administers a shot of penicillin, dresses the ocelot’s wound and sets out food — both

reader and writer cross their fingers. “Then, while I held my breath, she leant forward and lapped experimentally at the raw egg,” he writes. “Within thirty seconds the plate was clean, and Luna [his guide] and I were dancing a complicated tango of delight round the patio.”

Durrell expresses a similar level of exuberance for humans. He is accompanied by an engaging cast of characters, including the aforementioned Luna, who is the Robin to his Batman, and Edna, who keeps his gin glass full and feeds his animals whenever he is away from the estancia. He dedicates an entire chapter to an airplane seatmate named Rosa Lillipampia, who has a “lava-flow of chins.” The pair bond over a Proustian remembrance of praying mantises. “So, for ten minutes or so, we played with the insect, making it run up and down each other’s arms, and laughing immoderately, so that all the other passengers obviously doubted our sanity.” Note to post-pandemic self: Be more open to chatting with other passengers; you might meet someone who also raced hermit crabs as a child.

Durrell closes with a quote from Darwin that is surprisingly not about animals but about the generosity of strangers. He adds that the zoo is private but open to the public. “So come and see us,” he says invitingly. I will when I can, though I can’t promise that I won’t think about swiping its residents.

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A big leap still awaits, thanks to a life on skis

SKI FROM E13

Mountain Resort, one of the closest ski areas to D.C., is only 100 acres and 620 vertical feet, but has eight lifts. Small in a different way.

But in terms of impact on skiers and their lives? They’re all big.

“Small ski areas are so important to the soul of skiing,” Isaac wrote. “[They] are where many people learn, where kids experience snow for the first time, where the culture of skiing is rich and the people there are dedicated to their home hill.”

Small ski areas and the experiences they engender — funky, funny, familial — have consistently been the backdrops in the timeline of my life.

1976

A gangly, brown-haired 6-year-old boy named Derek puts skis on for the first time at Pats Peak in Henniker, N.H., a short drive from his home near Concord. Built by the four Patenaude brothers on 200 acres of mountain they bought from their father, Merle, the ski area had opened only 13 years before. It has two chairlifts and a lodge made from lumber from trees cut to make the ski runs. (Some of the largest beams were hewed at the family’s sawmill.) The bunny slopes — the area of any ski resort specifically designed for beginners with wide, flat runs — frustrate Derek terribly and when his mother comes to pick him up, he tells her he never wants to ski again. But it turns out that Derek’s younger brother, with whom he has a robustly competitive relationship, loves skiing, so Derek sticks with it, creating the potential for us to meet on the summit of a small ski area 37 years later.

1987

My first time skiing is not auspicious. On my third run, a toddler whose skiing skills vastly outshine my own zips between my legs as I snowplow down the easiest run at Ski Liberty (now Liberty Mountain Resort) in the Alleghenies. Having recently studied mountains — the American Rockies and the Himalayas — in my seventh-grade geology class, I take issue with the Alleghenies being mountains, even though Liberty’s 1,190-foot summit is the tallest I’ve ever seen. The last run of the day I throw caution to the wind and abandon the beginner lifts in the base area in favor of the chairlift to the top. A vast and impressive view greets me, although it does little to sway me from thinking these are hills and not mountains. Still, having 360-degree views from a vantage point higher than everything else around makes my stomach queasy in a good way.

1991

On a sunny spring weekend, the whole family skis together for the first time (and, not that I know this



DINA MISHEV FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

In 1939, Snow King Mountain, which rises 1,500 feet above downtown Jackson, was the first ski resort to open in Wyoming.

at the time, for the last time). The day before, Mom and Dad sat through a three-hour presentation on timesharing available at Massanutten Resort so the family can enjoy a “free” three-day vacation at this 70-acre ski area in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. While they got the hard sell from a mulleted man in a three-piece suit, my younger brother, Rob, and I lingered around the several arcade games in the base area lodge. Finally on the slopes, as with most sports, Mom is a natural and quickly masters the beginner “green” runs, but not Dad. “My ankles aren’t meant for this,” he says every time he attempts to snowplow and, instead of coming to a stop, spins 180 degrees and is left to slide down the slope backward. If I hadn’t seen what he can do with a soccer ball, I’d think him hopeless at sports. Skiing is the first thing Rob and I are better at than Mom and Dad.

1992

Because it’s organized by the teen group at a friend’s church, my parents okay a weekend ski trip with friends to Seven Springs, outside Pittsburgh. At 300-some acres, Seven Springs is the biggest resort I’ve ever skied at by at least a factor of three. Its high point, at 2,994 feet above sea level, sets a record for me. Riding the lift to this high point, something I didn’t know was possible happens: The individual hairs inside my nose freeze. Since Seven Springs is still years away from having six terrain parks, including the only 22-foot Superpipe on the East Coast, when my friends and I are finished skiing for the day, we construct our own ramps out of snow and sled off them on lunch trays borrowed from a base-area cafeteria.

1995

For every 20-second run down the 190 vertical feet from the summit of Wisconsin’s Wilmot Mountain to its base area, I spend five minutes riding the lift. Still, on a

Friday night I’d rather make the 90-minute trip to the (self-titled) “Matterhorn of the Midwest” from my university than go to a frat party. Wilmot’s slopes are glacial sediment deposited about 18,000 to 15,000 years ago when two lobes of the massive ice sheet that covered much of Canada and the northern United States collided. In 1938, this sediment made for rich farmland, but Walter Stopa thought this particular hill had a higher purpose than agriculture. He rented it from a farmer, and Wilmot Hills opened. Wilmot has the lowest summit of any resort I’ve been to, but the longest history.

1997

Halfway through a gap year between college and starting law school, I’ve now been a Wyomingite, specifically a resident of Jackson Hole, for four months. My goal is to advance from an intermediate to an all-mountain skier. It was because of the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort that I moved here, but it is Snow King Mountain that is five blocks from the office where I work as a paralegal. The mountain rises 1,500 feet above downtown Jackson, and I can ski there on my lunch hour. (Jackson is the largest town in the valley of Jackson Hole.) While Jackson Hole Mountain Resort has far eclipsed Snow King in size and amenities, the King was actually here first. It was the first ski resort in Wyoming, opening in 1939 with a rope tow powered by a Ford tractor. I eat a PowerBar for lunch while riding up a lift named for the man who installed that rope tow, Neil Rafferty. The Rafferty Lift takes me to the resort’s main intermediate area, but the runs back to the bottom are steeper than any advanced run I’ve seen before.

2002

I have not gone to law school, nor left Jackson. I am continuing my education though — learning

how to telemark ski, a style of skiing that originated in the Telemark region of Norway more than a century ago and combines elements of Alpine and cross-country skiing. You use skis with edges, but only your toes (and not your heels) are attached to the ski via bindings. This requires a different type of turn while descending. Quad-intensive, a telemark turn is somewhere between a curtsy and a lunge. Done right, it feels like dancing down the mountain. In the two years I’ve been learning to telemark, I’ve felt like I was dancing exactly 2½ times. In addition to providing a new challenge — not that I have yet met the challenge of becoming a confident all-mountain skier on traditional Alpine skis — telemark skiing allows you to ski uphill. With mohair climbing skins attached to the bottoms of skis, telemark skiers can ski up mountains, also called “skinning,” freeing them from requiring ski lifts. Like many big ski resorts, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort does not allow uphill skiing. Snow King does, though, and I’m skinning up before its lifts have opened for the day. At the top, I’ll take my skins off, make hesitant telemark turns back to the base and be at my desk by 9 a.m.

2007

I’m lost. Recently married, but also recently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), a degenerative neurological disease, I take three hours to summon the motivation and energy to drive the four minutes between my couch and the base of Snow King. Since starting to ski uphill, it has become my meditation. The slow, rhythmic sliding of my skis on snow through trees that were here when this valley was still the domain of Native Americans clears my mind and helps my mood like few other things can. I know this, yet for two months now, I just can’t. Crying — on the couch, lying in bed, under hot water in the shower — is

easier. I have never been so confused — where’s my newly wedded bliss? — nor felt so helpless, anxious, or broken. Today I rally but do not have the energy to both skin and keep my crying in check. Tears stream down my face as I load my gear into my car, step into my skis at the base of the Rafferty lift and start, slowly, up the mountain. Leaving the base area, I do not think I will make it the full 1,500 vertical feet to the mountain’s summit, and that’s okay. I made it out of the house.

2009

I’m no longer depressed — it went away within a month of starting on Wellbutrin — but still have MS. (There is no cure for MS.) It is because of the latter that I am competing in a 24-hour uphill skiing race at Sunlight Mountain, a small resort in the White River National Forest down valley from the larger resorts of Aspen and Snowmass in Colorado. The race is meant to raise awareness of Can Do MS, founded by 1964 U.S. Olympic skier (and bronze medalist) Jimmie Heuga, who was diagnosed with MS in 1970. At the time of Heuga’s diagnosis, the medical community believed people with MS should avoid physical stress. Heuga thought differently and stayed as physically active as he could, finding that exercise, along with nutrition, improved his health. (This has since become the conventional wisdom.) Can Do MS promotes the ideas that staying active and keeping positive about the disease can ultimately improve the lives of those living with the disease. I agree with this so strongly that I’m doing the race solo, skinning up and then down Sunlight Mountain as many times as I can in 24 hours. My husband and a friend are also competing as a team of two. Speeding down the Beaujolais run under a full moon at the end of my 16th lap, I’ve got about eight hours to go and have little

doubt about making it the full 24 hours. Having MS has become a huge motivator for me — who knows how long my body will be capable of something like this? — and my support crew at the base includes my mom, sister-in-law, friends and my brother, who flew in all the way from Paris to help.

2011

While my soon-to-be ex-husband is moving out of our house, I’ve removed myself to Eagle Point, a newly reopened 600-acre ski area in the Tushar Mountains above the one-stoplight town of Beaver, Utah. It’s been a week since the last snowstorm, but with an average of fewer than 100 skiers a day, there’s still plenty of untracked powder to distract myself from what’s happening back in Wyoming. Also distracting is the strong skiing of the local farm kids in camo and Carhartts.

2013

At the summit of Snow King, which I’ve decided has the best views of any summit I’ve ever stood on even if it’s not that tall (7,808 feet above sea level), the boy who started skiing at Pats Peak in 1976 says “Hi” to me. We start talking. Despite both of us having lived in Jackson, where the year-round population isn’t that much greater than its elevation (6,237 feet), and skied on Snow King for at least 15 years, we’ve never met before. At the bottom — I let him leave the summit first so I can watch him ski — Derek suggests we get coffee sometime. “How about dinner?” I reply.

2015

My mom’s skiing days ended at Massanutten, but she’s at Snow King with Derek. I had planned to go snow tubing with them, but halfway through six chemotherapy treatments for Stage 3 breast cancer, today is not a good day.

2019

At the end of a wonderfully normal day, Derek and I head over to Snow King. The lifts are closed, but that’s fine because we’re skinning up. Just below an aged pine tree so distinguishable from all others because of the thickness and vibrancy of the hairy moss encircling its trunk that I, years ago, named it Tom Selleck, Derek surprises me: “We should get married at the top when there’s a gondola.” “Why wait for something neither of us is that excited about to be built?” I ask, thinking back on our numerous conversations about how a high-speed, comfortable, enclosed lift to the summit will fundamentally change the King’s no-frills, low-key vibe. “Can you see your Uncle Gus riding the existing lift?” “Fair point.”

2020

Snow King receives approval for the gondola and announces it will be finished for the 2021/2022 ski season.

2021

Derek and I both buy new ski boots. His are black, mine white. They’ll look great at the wedding.

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