



Assignment: Altitude

Getting the action at Kirkwood.

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By: **Julie Dugdale**

Life behind the lens with an adventure photographer.

When the pale rays of the morning sun first peek over the ridgelines of [Kirkwood](#) Mountain's wild terrain, casting a hint of the day's promise over the rugged hills and horizon, most people haven't yet stirred. In fact, they'll likely sleep through the ethereal tranquility of this scene.

That is, unless it's their job to be there—to capture the magic that the rest of us will likely never experience firsthand; to stake out the perfect spot on a silent, beautiful ridge and wait for that fleeting moment when raw nature meets a human explosion of life; and to bring a sense of awe to the world below that still sleeps, unaware.



Welcome to the professional lives of [Corey Rich](#) and [Dane Henry](#). The Lake Tahoe-based photographer and videographer, who shoot some of the most epic skiers and snowboarders at Vail Resorts' Tahoe mountains, are first and foremost storytellers, Rich says. They document the vibrant adventure industry from behind their lenses, traveling the globe to catch adrenaline-charged feats by fearless athletes and explorers in otherworldly environments. They bring to life the perspectives that remain out of reach for most of us. "That's what



Corey Rich finding the angle. Top: Rich hard at work in the powder. ©Jose Azel / auroraphotos.com

it's all about," says Rich. "Waiting for those opportunities. My favorite critique is when someone looks at a photo and says, 'That's B.S. That's not real.'"

Being an adventure photographer sounds like a dream job: Your office is the wilderness, your

commute is full of beauty and jaw-dropping scenery, and no two work days look remotely the same. But the gig comes with plenty of not-so-dreamy demands as well. Hauling pounds of bulky camera equipment up a blustery mountainside at dawn isn't exactly a perk, for instance. And Rich recalls mishaps when snowmobiles broke down en route to a location, or when models never showed up for a shoot. "You're juggling," Rich says. "Like a conductor in an orchestra, you have to make sure the instruments are tuned, make sure all the pieces come together. Which is a rare deal with Mother Nature."





Gallery: (1) Rich just hanging around on the job; ©Rex Lint. (2) A bluebird day at work; ©Jose Azel / auroraphotos.com.

But, for all the struggles behind getting the perfect shot—the bone-chilling mornings, the frozen equipment, the precarious setups in remote terrain—Rich says the results are worth it. “Some of the most meaningful and powerful moments come from when humans are really being pushed to their limits,” he says. “It’s hard. Otherwise everyone would do it. When people are at their most sleep deprived, their coldest, their hungriest—that’s when some of the coolest pictures happen. The photography often gets better when you tell a story, because usually there’s a heck of a lot of suffering that went into it.”

For Rich, who first picked up a camera 20 years ago at age 18 to shoot a rock climbing adventure, the job is about being in the moment, and inspiring someone else with the story of that moment. Although his photography has evolved from straight adventure shooting in the wildest of places to incorporate true people-centric storytelling, his mission is constant: “Energize people to live every day to the fullest.” And with this job, Rich and Henry do just that. “Some of those days are out of this world,” Rich says. “Magical. There’s not a single sliver of feeling that I’m actually working. You forget the clock is ticking because you’re having such an unforgettable day. The reality is, you work really hard to get to those days. You earn those days. When you do get there, it’s really special. Everyone talks about ‘that day.’ That’s my job: to capture ‘that day’ and share it.”



Rich doing his thing behind the lens. ©Rex Lint.

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