

2006 - 2007  
SKIING'S INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE

# FREESKIER

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THE BEST OF 2006

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**PLUS:**

RAILS ABOUND IN NEWFOUNDLAND  
JF CUSSON'S ARGENTINA COMEBACK  
JEREMY NOBIS EXCLUSIVE: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

Antoine Gagnier has amazing style. Here, the French plumber and electrician 180s over a pile of rocks. On landing, he missed a second pile by less than six inches. Gnarly.



Although the economy has recovered significantly since then – due mostly to surging exports and corresponding employment to supply those exports – the still-struggling entry remains awash in cheap food, cheap alcohol, cheap accommodations and cheap travel. An American bill can get you pretty much anything; a hundred can buy you downright everything. Everything.

After a couple days, the rest of the Sunice team arrived in Mendoza. JF Cusson – back from a three-year golf and pokabattical – and Antoine Gagnier – the creative genius and new grinds and grabs – arrived just in time for the Party of the Year.

I wouldn't dare fathom a guess as to where this dude spent his money in a country where poverty abounds, but he found ourselves invited to a young Argentine's birthday party. The occasion was celebrated with a massive rave tent, DJs from the future, and projector TVs playing clips of monkeys (as well as a screening of *Skimatec*). But the cherry on the cake: open bar, dude!

Hundreds of bottles of vodka lined the bar, and the staff bartender was eager to take your order. Hold the tip, party lasted until the sun began to shine (which it did every day in Mendoza), and was truly of epic proportions. One person in the group, who shall remain nameless, got into one of the many drunk-traps scattered across Men-

doza. They must not have liability lawsuits; random holes leading to running water and sewer systems abound on the sidewalks. If you aren't looking down while you walk, you can end up under the street faster than you can say "AHH!!"

Badly needing to get some real work done, we headed off to Las Leñas, the legendary South American ski resort. It was pretty late in the season, but rumors of fresh snowfall encouraged us as we made the cross-country trek through fields of wild horses and cows. One cow we came across lay dead by the road, its head mished by the Subaru parked sideways on the wrong side of the road. More accurately, the cow mished the car. We didn't see what happened, but the driver's side of the car was almost completely missing. RIP.

We rolled up to our condo in Leñas with the rhythmic booming of the quintessential Argentina dance beat (think Shakira) billowing out from a nearby, end-of-year staff party. We emptied the van of our equipment and waited for someone to let us into our locked room as our guide, Mark, from *SouthAmericaSki.com*, looked for an outlet to charge his phone to call for help. And then: silence. No sound. No light. Nothing but a bunch of dudes standing in the freezing cold, looking at each other, wondering if Las Leñas suddenly ceased to exist. When the power goes out here, it's not a small, isolated event. "This happens whenever

there are parties," our guide casually commented. "The power could be out until tomorrow. Guess we can't call."

We eventually got into our condo, which had no TV for the naked mattresses and no hot running water under a roof, and almost a week after leaving North America we were at our destination.

The first couple days in Leñas, the mountain was closed to high winds and some snow. So instead of venturing up the mountain, we hung out in the resort parking lot and watched the rail: a legit cheese grater on one side and pointy rail on the other. Only Colby's skis fell victim to the hazard. Frank sessioned the rail for hours and we got a good workout. It was much rejoicing and celebration in order. So we drove thousands of miles to hit a rail in a parking lot. It was something, and it was fun. The blanket of quiet snow headed into town to eat a massive steak dinner (\$100 for an entire seven-person crew), played poker all night long, and had a cheap (but delicious) beer.

The mountain of Las Leñas is set up much differently than anything in the States or Canada. It's mostly of intermediate and beginner slopes, as well as a spaghetti incident of lifts and surface tows. The most expensive money lift: Marte. Sketchy at best, this lift rises above gnarly chutes and spires and eventually drops off at the top of it all. More terrain is accessible v



**"YEAH, IN ARGENTINA, IT'S OKAY TO RIDE AROUND THE BUSY CITIES ON A MOPED WITH YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY ON-BOARD, IT'S LEGAL TO HAVE UNMARKED GAPING HOLES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SIDEWALK... BUT IT'S ILLEGAL TO JUMP OVER PILES OF ROCK ON THE SKI HILL."**

Words and Photos: **Matt Harvey**

## OUT OF THE ROUGH AND INTO ARGENTINA

**THREE SKIERS AND A GOLFER  
GET THEIR SHINE ON IN  
MENDOZA AND LAS LENAS.**

"Man am I happy to see you," Colby West said as I bumped him at the Buenos Aires International Airport.

Colby had been off the plane for less than 10 minutes and was already nervous about being in the "big city." We collected our bags and headed to the lobby, scanning the unfamiliar faces of our driver; a man allegedly holding a sign reading:

**COLBY WEST  
FRANK RAYMOND  
MATT HARVEY**

Our sign was somewhere among the sea of white paper held above suited heads. After a minute of searching, we gave up to find a more familiar, North American, face: Frank. There he lay, sleeping on his mounds of ski gear in a coffee shop.

"I couldn't find the sign, or you guys, so I thought it was easier to just go to sleep," Frank explained, as he wiped the sweat from his eyes.

Then out of nowhere came our driver. Running up with a big grin and the proper sign, he found us. I guess we stood on sore thumbs: three stupid Gringos looking for a way out. He let us take a couple lines in Spanish, quickly realizing we couldn't speak the word of the language, and continued by using hand signals to direct us to his white minivan.

Five hours later, we were in Mendoza at the Damajuana Hotel—our home away from home, and the best part of the trip. Las Lenas was still another six hours away by sketchy van ride. I sat by the pool, drank \$1 beers, beat the locals at poker to pay for said \$1 beers and got our shine on, waiting for the remainder of the Sunice team to arrive.

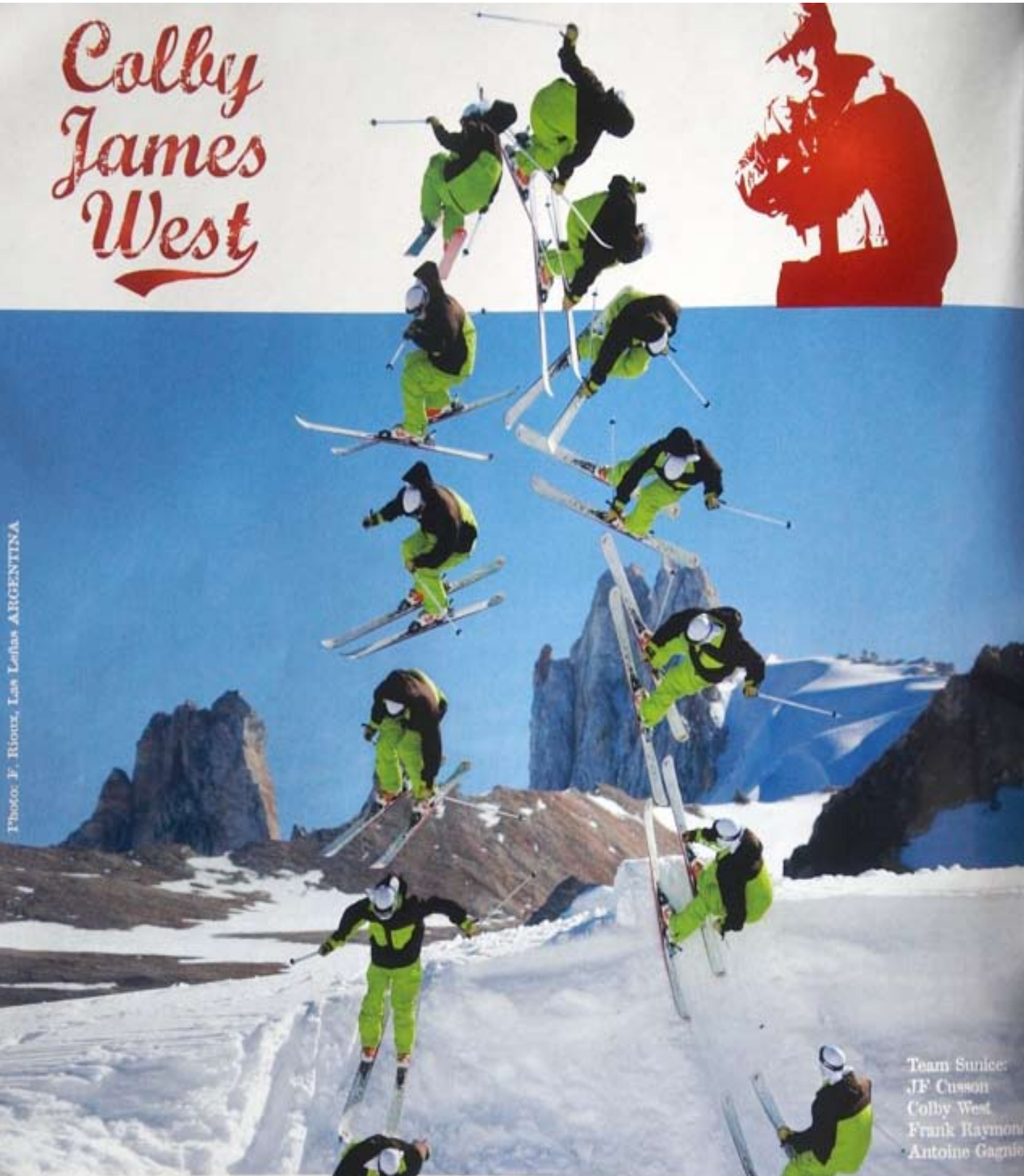
Argentina is a beautiful country that enjoyed a strong, middle-class economy through the 90s. It pegged its peso to the American dollar and embarked on a prosperous path of economic liberalization, deregulation and privatization. Unfortunately, its dependence on other countries for debt financing, as well as failures of the political and economic systems, contributed to the slow crumble of the nation's economy from 1995 until its outright collapse in 2001. »

Frank records the first shot of the trip: Nose press over cheese on a steep and rocky mountain.

# Colby James West



Photo: F. Rioux, Las Leñas ARGENTINA



Team Sunice:  
JF Cusson  
Colby West  
Frank Raymond  
Antoine Gagnier

[sunice.com](http://sunice.com)

Check out the Prime Collection at SIA Booth D145

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J&Cusson



He's back!

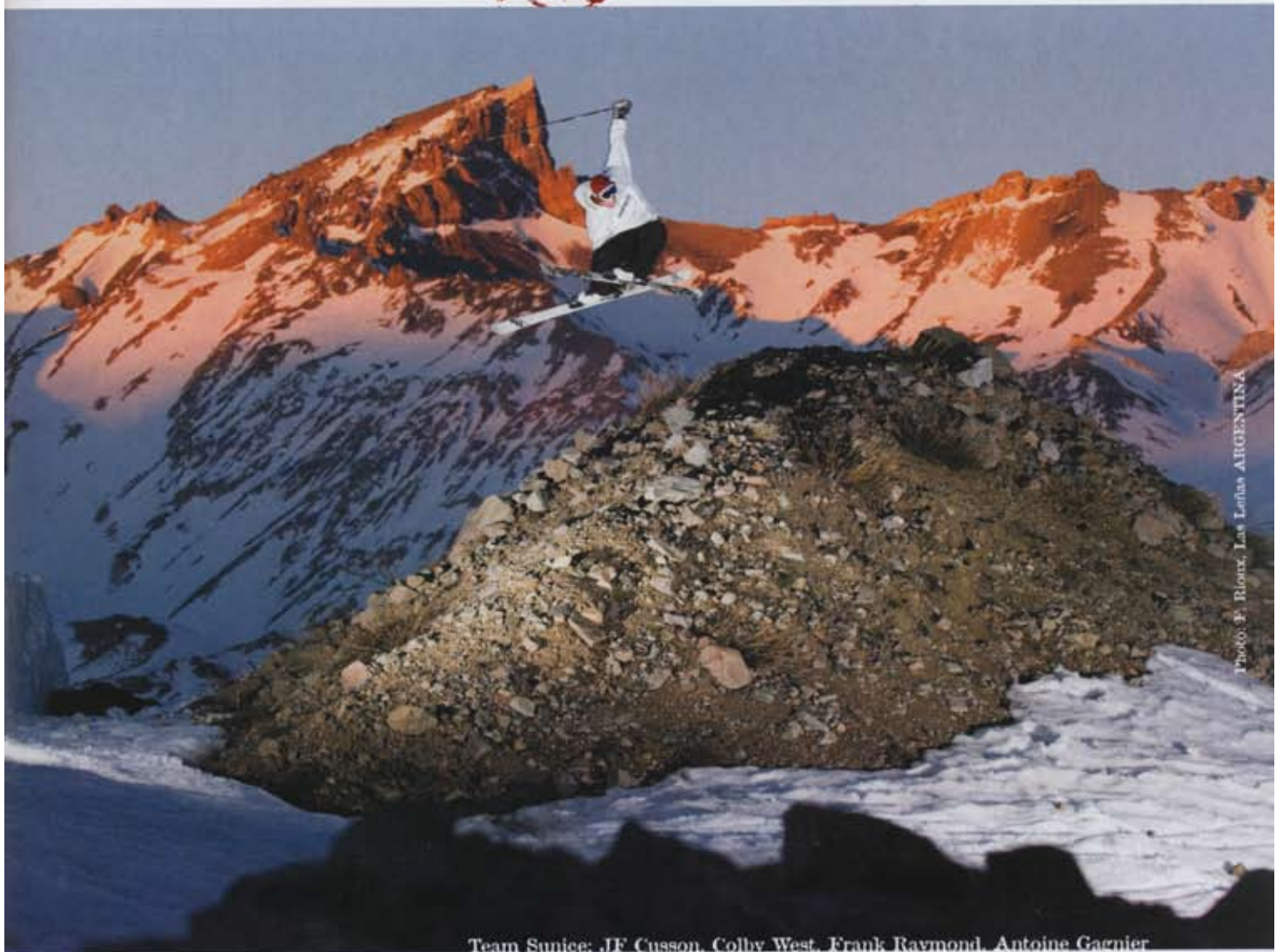


Photo: F. Rioux, Las Lenas ARGENTINA

Team Sunice: JF Cusson, Colby West, Frank Raymond, Antoine Garnier

or is he... [sunice.com](http://sunice.com)

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