



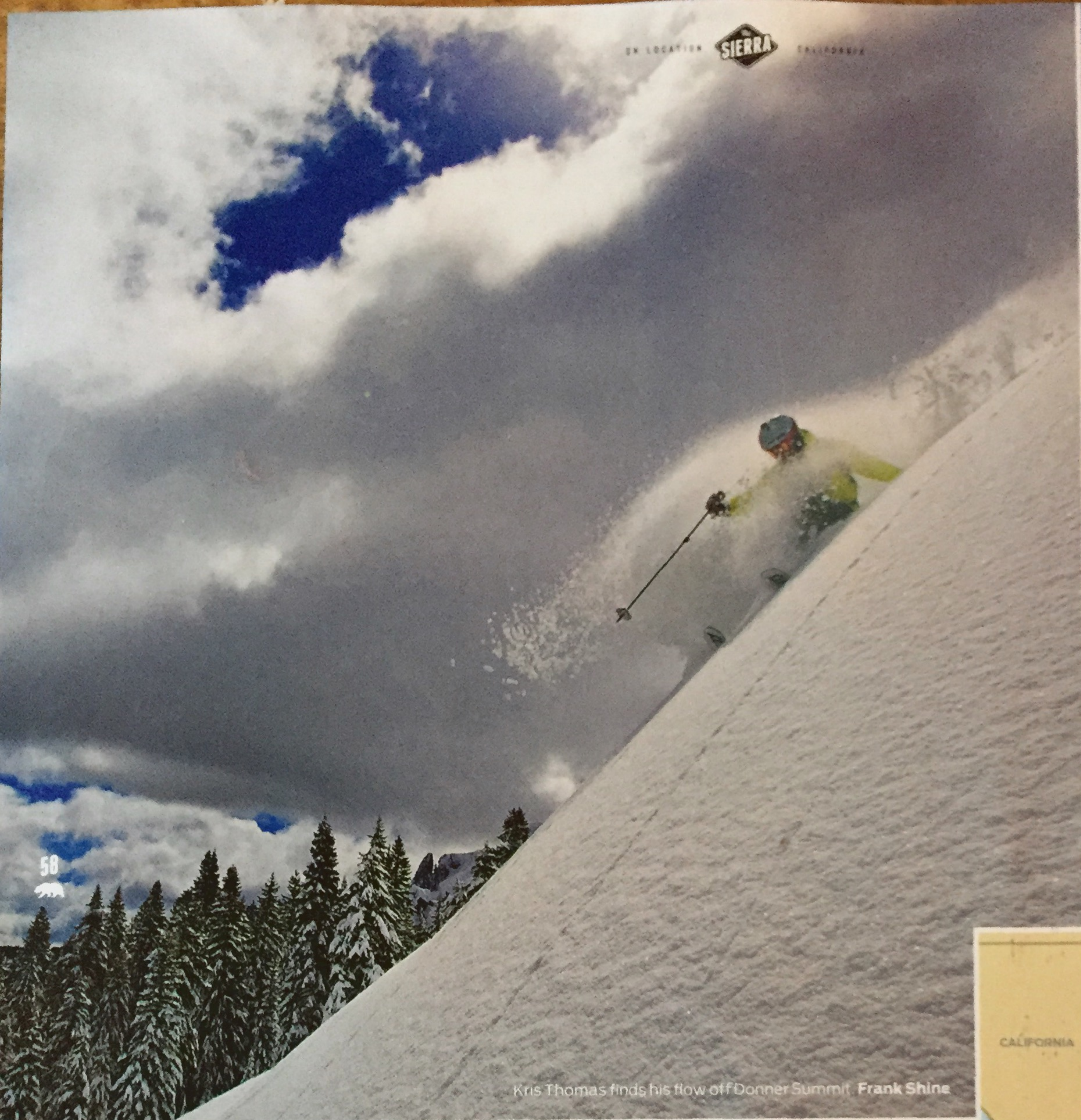
LOST & FOUND

HOW ONE FAMILY FOUND HOME
OFF THE GRID IN THE SIERRA

BY MEGAN MICHELSON

It's Sunday morning at Lost Trail Lodge and Lindsey Rodni-Nieman and her family are making blueberry pancakes. "We're out of milk," Lindsey calls from the kitchen. "Tony, can you run and grab some?"

Picking up a carton of milk isn't easy out here. Lost Trail Lodge is located four miles via rugged backcountry roads from Truckee, California. In the winter, you have to snowmobile or ski out here. In the summer, a four-wheel-drive vehicle can make it, but the road passes through a creek that swells with snowmelt. >>



Kris Thomas finds his flow off Donner Summit. **Frank Shine**



The lodge, which is solar-powered with a backup generator, lies deep in the Sierra's Coldstream Canyon, a granite divide in the shadows of Tahoe's Donner Pass. There are no neighbors back here, and the ski terrain seems endless. Steep, above-tree-line chutes and bowls drop off the Pacific Crest's bony ridge-line a few miles uphill from the lodge, and gentle, low-angle trees surround the lodge's backyard.

"Nothing out here is convenient," says Lindsey, who's 35. "But there's something about living out here that's grown on us."

Lindsey's parents, David and Kathleen Robertson, bought land here in 1998 and started building a lodge, a process David expected to take two years. Five years and many truckloads later, they had a 3,700-square-foot log home, decorated with stringed instruments, wooden skis, old snowshoes, mariachi hats, a red canoe hanging from the ceiling and more.

This is no sparse hut. Five bedrooms come equipped with down comforters and gas stoves

and several have Jacuzzi tubs crafted from river stones. The kitchen has a double oven and a Wolf range.

The lodge first opened in 2003. David and Kathleen lived in a small, nearby cabin that overlooked a beaver pond, and David would greet guests at the trailhead to shuttle them to the lodge on an '87 Tucker Sno-Cat.

News of the paradise not far from Truckee trickled out, and groups would skin out on winter evenings to score freshies in the morning.

Susie Sutphin, a Tahoe resident who was working at *Couloir* magazine at the time, was among the first regular guests. "I'd feel like I'd literally get lost on my way there, and I'd leave the world behind me," Sutphin says. "Then, right out the door of the lodge, you have phenomenal skiing off the main ridge, with both south- and north-facing aspects. You can't even put this place into the hut category. It's a super nice house in the backcountry with granite countertops and potbelly stoves." >>

LOST TRAIL LODGE:

Located four miles up an unplowed road of just outside of Truckee, Calif. Also accessible via Sugar Bowl Resort via Coldstream Canyon. Rentals from \$99 per guest or book the entire lodge for \$1,380 per night. losttrailodge.com

GUIDE:

Alpine Skills International offers guiding to around Lost Trail Lodge. alpineskills.com.

AVALANCHE SAFETY:

The Sierra Avalanche Center. sierraavalanchecenter.org or 530.587.3558

GEAR:

The BackCountry in Truckee offers a full range of rental AT, telemark and splitboard gear.

...n Kennen digs in above
Donner Lake. Ryan Salm



"This way to get lost." Frank Shine



Kris Thomas takes a recess from homeschooling at the lodge. Frank S



DURING THEIR FIRST THANKSGIVING AT THE LODGE, IN 2011, IT SNOWED SIX FEET, AND TAHOE GOT SLAMMED WITH 700 INCHES OF SNOW, A BANNER SEASON IN THE SIERRA. SKIERS ARRIVED IN DROVES, AND TONY AND LINDSEY SPENT MONTHS SHOVELING.

Eventually, the Lost Trail Lodge got some press—a story in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, for starters—which brought in weekend warriors from the Bay Area for “soft adventures,” as Lindsey calls it—backcountry skiing with three-course dinners and a comfortable bed.

Lindsey started coming out to the lodge each spring to help her dad, and in 2005 when she had a daughter, Kiely, she brought her baby out as well. In 2010, Lindsey moved to the lodge full time with Kiely and her partner, Tony Nieman, whom she married four years later. Her dad cashed in on a much-deserved break from snow removal and called to check in from the beaches of Hawaii.

During their first Thanksgiving at the

lodge, in 2011, it snowed six feet, and Tahoe got slammed with 700 inches of snow, a banner season in the Sierra. Skiers arrived in droves, and Tony and Lindsey spent months shoveling.

Since then, winters have been less plentiful, but skiers still show up. Lindsey and Tony now have a son, Shepard, age two. Kiely, now 10, is homeschooled through an independent-study program, but her best education may come from the wilderness that surrounds her. “When we talk about what Kiely likes about living out here, it’s the same things that we like: the proximity to nature, the smell of the forest, the sound of the creeks, the effort it takes to get home,” Lindsey says.

Each fall, the family preps for the coming winter, chopping five cords of wood and stocking the pantry with oatmeal and canned veggies, 200 pounds of dog food and 300 rolls of toilet paper. Some winter mornings, Tony wakes early to spin a few laps on the slopes near the lodge. A skintrack up the closest ridge leads to 2,000-vertical-foot pitches through mellow, treed runs of untracked snow. He’ll invite friends out for bigger missions, like to 8,683-foot Anderson Peak, which offers steep, sustained terrain in all directions. But much of Tony’s day is spent working, clearing the solar panels, fixing a broken snowmobile or changing the oil in a dozen different machines. >>



Lost Trail Lodge’s wall art is designed to outfit a bluegrass band and combat a zombie apocalypse. Scott Sawyer

Lindsey, who worked as a housekeeper before moving out here, spends her time caring for the children and running the guest lodge—cleaning, taking reservations and fielding questions. (“How long will it take us to get to the lodge?” is a popular question, to which Lindsey answers, “It can take between one and seven hours, depending on various factors.”)

“It’s a little ironic living out here,” Lindsey says. “We have this beautiful environment around us, but all the work that’s necessary to keep the place running takes up so much of our time.”

It feels a little like a mountain version of *Little House on the Prairie*. In their home, Kiely loves playing the musical instruments that dot the living area, while Shepard climbs the ladders into the lofted sleeping areas or rides tractors with his dad.

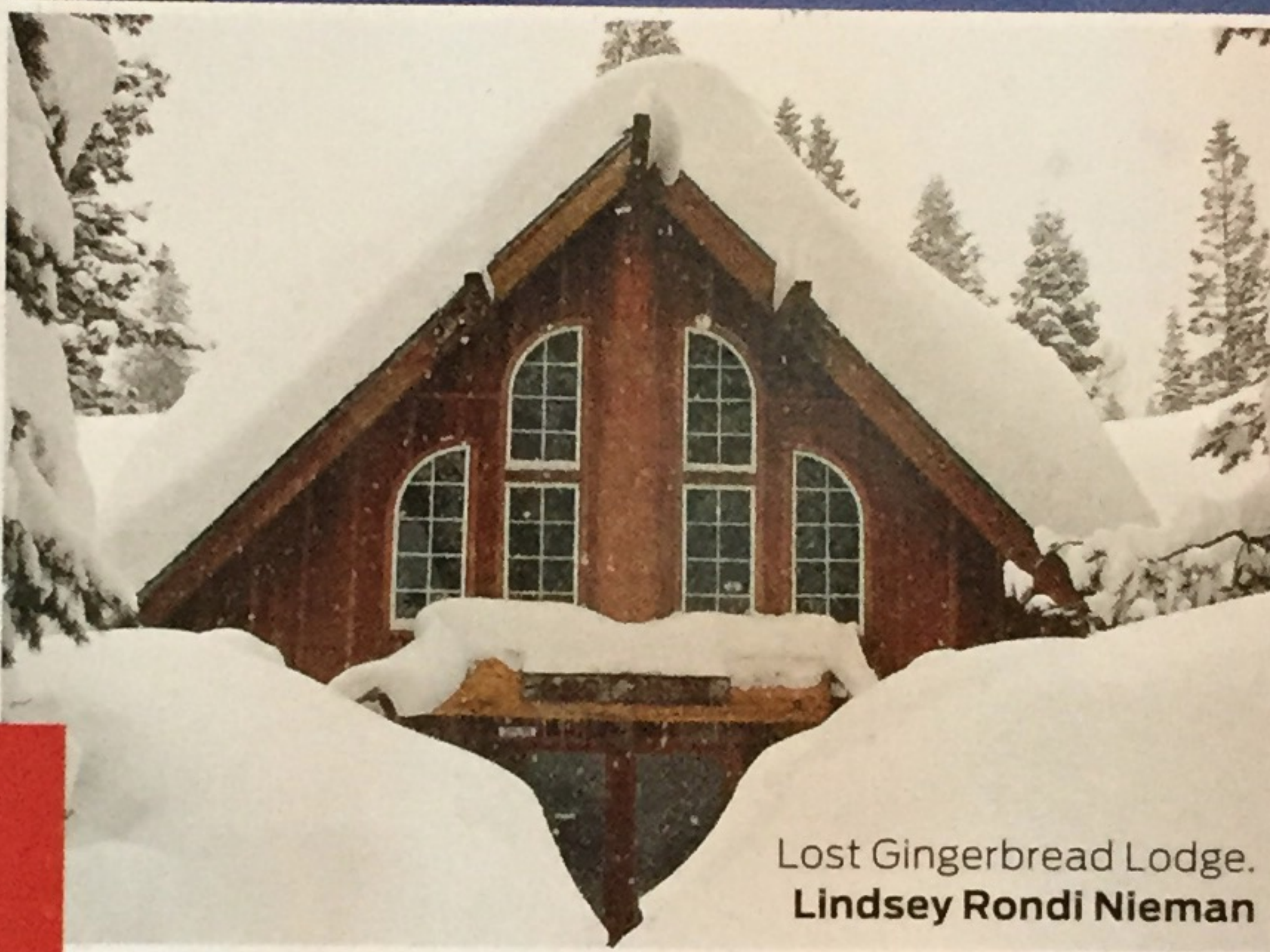
Making money isn’t their end goal—the business makes enough to cover the basics, but that’s about it. “We have enough to go to the thrift store for supplies and buy groceries,” says Lindsey.

They do have satellite internet, but it’s dial-up-era slow and their only other mode of communication with the outside world is a flip phone that picks up spotty service from just the right spot.

So does this family in the woods feel disconnected living at the base of snow-capped peaks and miles down an impassable road? The answer is a clear no. “People are always like, ‘Don’t you feel isolated out there?’” Tony says. “But the truth is, we love it out here. It would be hard to move back to town.” ■



Jeremy Jones cannonballs into Coldstream Canyon. **Seth Lightcap**



Lost Gingerbread Lodge.
Lindsey Rondi Nieman



Pickin’ with Lost Trail Lodge’s house bluegrass band. **Scott Sawyer**



MAKING MONEY ISN'T THEIR END GOAL—THE BUSINESS MAKES ENOUGH TO COVER THE BASICS...

Miles Clark unplugs off Donner Summit. **Ryan Salm**

