

Digging into the Roots

TREES HAVE FASCINATING ANATOMIES. From the smallest bonsai to the tallest redwood, trees, in all their myriad vestiges and forms, rely on one certain commonality. Before they can send branches skyward, before they can grow towards the food of the sun, and before they can reproduce and spread along mountainsides and into deep valleys, they must first grow roots.

Roots are substantial. Because of the horizontal growth pattern of the tree's root system, nearly 99 per cent of a tree's root mass is usually located in the top three feet of soil. They're close to the surface, and while they don't grow necessarily deep, they do grow wide. Imagine tree roots branching into a round pie plate a metre deep and two to three times the tree's height in width.

Most people know that roots stabilize a tree. They are the anchor in a big wind, the stabilizing force as the tree grows upwards and outwards; however, that's only one element of their task. Roots absorb air, water and nutrients, such as nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus, from the soil then convey these elements to the rest of the tree, all of which are essential for the trees growth and overall prosperity.

Trees serve as an interesting metaphor for culture. While it's easy for us to enjoy the grandeur and design of one of nature's most hearty, perfectly engineered organisms above ground, rarely are we able to view a tree's intricacy below. Their roots remain, in large part, a mystery.

When considering mountain culture, it's fairly easy to remark on its visible "above ground" elements. The art and the music, the funky people in the streets, the cool kids throwing 360s in the park, the old timers hitching a ride back up to the lodge, the perfect coffee at the perfect café, the architecture and the infrastructure, the people and their wares, the overall aesthetic and feel.

What about the part we can't so easily see? What about the roots which anchor and enable the visible to flourish? They feed it and

support it, in essence, directing its growth and associating it with a specific location and place.

And what about Kootenay mountain culture? What lies under the surface in this neck of the woods? What grounds the visible present?

In this issue, we dedicate our feature well to a subterranean examination of the Kootenay culture tree. We look at the people and the stories that have shaped this place. From near and far, from relatively recent to long ago, investigating cultural anomalies as far-reaching as the *SkiFreak Radical* magazine to the Sinixt First Nation's Coyote myth, the astounding tale of mountaineer Rich Marshall to the sensibilities of mountain culture abroad.

Of course, we don't forget to stop and take a look at the leafy limbs of today. Steve Ogle recounts Tim Rippel's successful summit of Everest, Lisa Richardson looks at the snowsports industry's odd ignorance of Generation Y, and Tom Chalmers gives us the carbon science behind our infatuation with fresh tracks.

Enjoy this little branch we like to call Issue #14.

— Mitchell Scott

