

## Eric Pehota Interview - A Glimpse at the Life of the Big Mountain Rider Pioneer

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All photos by Eric Pehota.

**Eric Pehota**, one of the most well-known big mountain riders in the 1990s, skied first runs with his best friend **Trevor Petersen** in such places as Alaska's Chugach mountains. The men appeared together in many legendary skiing videos including *The White Room* and *Cosmic Winter*. Eric Pehota and Trevor Petersen indubitably are among the most important pioneers of the sport.



In 1996, many things changed. Trevor Petersen, the extremely talented and brilliant big mountain rider, perished in an avalanche as he was skiing the Glacier du Ronde's exit couloir on Chamonix. His body was found in a sitting position on the edge of the glacier, his spine broken, with his face toward the majestically rugged Mont Blanc. This tragic event had a clear impact on Eric Pehota's life, but he didn't forsake skiing and the mountains. Now, nearly 13 years after the tragedy, we called Eric to ask how his life is going.

## Good Evening, Eric Pehota

It is 6:00 a.m. Finnish time, but at Whistler in British Columbia, Canada, it is 8:00 p.m. The skiing legend Eric Pehota answers his phone with a masculine and rugged voice that is simultaneously friendly and polite.

*"Hello Eric, this is Marko with Homeboy Ski online ski magazine. We agreed to an interview for this evening. Is now a suitable time to talk?"* I was a bit nervous in starting the conversation since Eric Pehota along with Trevor Petersen had been my role model for many years. I remember my last years of high school when I would look at pictures and videos of Eric and Trevor skiing and dream of skiing in mountains as enchantingly beautiful and challenging as the ones they skied.

*"This is a very good time to talk. I just got back from a hunting trip, so this is perfect. What would you like to talk about?"* asked Eric.



My nervousness subsides and I feel more relaxed once I note that Eric is in a great mood and is receptive to the idea of being interviewed. Even though I'm not calling Eric for the first time, I still feel a sort of respectful nervousness toward my role model of yesteryear.

"I have loads of questions and only a few hours of time, so I'll try to be succinct", I tell Eric. I know that the interview could easily stretch on for hours, as I would have millions of questions for the skiing hero whose doings I have followed closely for many years. Unfortunately we are not sitting in armchairs before the fire with beer bottles in hand, but rather we must plow through the interview systematically.. So, it's time to talk about skiing the big mountains.

## Roots on Whistler Mountain

I am a 34-year-old and I feel like an old geezer in the company of new school skiers. I can't quite pull tricks like double flips or 720-degree spins, but I'm not alone. Eric Pehota has also aged over the years and he is no longer as active in skiing as he was in the early 1990s. As a result, there are sure to be many among us to whom Eric Pehota is an unknown great, or then there are those who haven't heard much of him since the mid-90s.

Eric Pehota is now a 44-year-old and lives in the village of *Pemberton* on the north side of Whistler. Trevor Petersen's son, **Kye Petersen**, who is a 19-year-old rising star, lives only a kilometer from Eric. Eric Pehota has a wife and two boys, who are 12 and 13 years of age. They, naturally enough, are active Alpine skiers. The boys enjoy back country skiing just like their dad does, but Eric wants the boys to train and compete regularly on race courses in order to maintain a certain rhythm and discipline in life.



Eric Pehota skis 80-120 in a year. He is a genuine mountain man who lives and breathes big mountain air. His skiing is based on true passion. Eric has several sponsors (Rossignol, Oakley, Arc'teryx, Leki poles, Whistler/Blackcomb) and he is still an active skier, although more selective on the projects he works on. Eric skies on his own terms and enjoys every moment in nature and on the mountain.

Eric Pehota grew up in the northern part of British Columbia on a high mountain. His family moved from Mackenzie (a small town in northern British Columbia) into the mountains when he was a small boy. They did not have television, a phone or video games in their home. As a matter of fact, they did not even have electricity, and the family survived for the most part on logging. The family had ample time to play cards and be with other family members, which is not necessarily very common in modern families.

Eric Pehota's childhood was quite different than children's lives today, but Eric was happy and satisfied. He had everything he needed. The daily, 140-kilometer trip to school did not even bother him because he got to ski to the highway and then back home every day.



Through cross-country skiing, Eric Pehota got interested in Alpine skiing. A nearby, 600-meter mountain in the northern Rocky Mountains in British Columbia had one ski resort called *Azu* ski village. There was one T-bar ski lift with which Eric began his downhill-skiing career. The small boy most likely did not realize what sorts of adventures skiing would soon draw him into.

## Eric Pehota meets Trevor Petersen

In 1984, Eric Pehota met Trevor Petersen at Whistler. Trevor was a young, talented skateboarder and freeskier. The men became best friends who went on to ski dozens of first runs on high mountains. Eric and Trevor spend lots of time in the mountains hiking and skiing until skiing movies made them a well-known duo.

Eric and Trevor were a fortunate pair because, as pioneers in the field, they were drawn into the big skiing movies of that era. By appearing in skiing videos, Eric and Trevor were able to travel around the world and ski in exotic places, such as the Chugach mountains in Alaska.

Eric and Trevor lived a happy time in their lives, full of adventures in places where only few had the opportunity to go. *“It was a real adventure. I enjoyed the pioneer status because I got to do what I loved the most. The time in the mountains with Trevor was very rewarding because after demanding and challenging runs I really felt alive”*, says Eric Pehota.

## **Dream days in the mountains? For sure no helicopters and frenzied activity**

Eric and Trevor skied many mountains, each more beautiful and challenging than the last. Which of those thousands of runs was the best? Or is it even possible to name any one run the best? Yes, it is. *“The best single run in my life was Pontoon Peak on a mountain named Mount Meteorite. At the time it was one of my biggest runs. Pontoon Peak is about 1000 meters high, a steep, 45 or 50-degree north mountain face. Before our run there was a snowstorm, which left a layer of powder up to my chest. It was an awesome day”*, says Eric Pehota.

Well, the past is past, and many of us remember awesome runs afterwards, but what kind of day is Eric Pehota’s dream day on the mountains? Would it be, for example, heliskiing in Haines, Alaska, with Seth Morrison and Seth McConkey? Not exactly, though that such a day on the mountain would of course interest Eric Pehota. Rather, his dream day would be something else entirely.



*“My dream day skiing? That’s an easy question”*, declares Eric Pehota. *“I would wake up my two sons at 6 in the morning, check the weather forecast, and we would head to the mountain before sunrise. The boys and I would ski soft powder in the murky light of dawn”*, he depicts. No helicopters, no hubbub, no frenzied hype. Only the silence of the mountain and powder skiing with his own children.

## **Fast jetboat ride upstream through the rapids**

Eric Pehota is a self-sufficient entrepreneur. In his own words, he has all he needs, such as a house, a garden, chickens and turkeys in the backyards, the ability to keep his own vehicles running, etc.

Eric does not want to be dependent on anyone, nor does he owe anything to anyone. For example, he has never borrowed money from the bank.



Eric is not from a wealthy family, but earthly treasures are not what he is after. He is satisfied with what he has, and if he needs something, he gets it by working toward his goal. He earns his livelihood by doing work and food comes from his own garden as well as from the bounty of the land, since Eric Pehota is an avid hunter.

Eric Pehota's family business runs a white water jetboat ride service in Whistler. Eric pilots his customers in a specially built boat. While normal most boats only go downstream, Eric pilots his boat both downstream and upstream. The boat carries 6-8 passengers at a time and can travel at speeds of up to 72 kilometers an hour. The boat can even be used in unbelievably shallow water, only 10-15 cm deep. As you might expect, Eric himself maintains his boat.

The business has a very good history and there have been no serious accidents. One of Eric's customers praised the jetboat ride to the skies, saying it was one of the best things you could do at

Whistler. So, if you ever travel to Whistler, think seriously about taking a ride in Eric Pehota's jetboat.



Since Eric has all he needs, does for work what he wishes, and has skied the world's mountains with another pioneer of the field, I asked him what the best thing to ever happen to him was. Eric's answer was exactly what I as a father of four expected. *"I have two boys and a wife, and I couldn't imagine life without them. Everything else besides them is just a bonus. Nothing else means anything"*.

## Trevor Petersen unexpected death left a gaping hole in Eric Pehota's heart

*"There comes a time when one must risk something, or sit forever with one's dreams"*  
- quote found written in one of Trevor Petersen's notebooks.

On a February morning in 1996, Trevor Petersen went by himself to ski Chamonix' classic off-piste run, *Glacier du Ronde*. Although Trevor was a very experienced and practiced mountain-goer, he met his end at the Ronde glacier's exit couloir. A massive avalanche pulled Trevor into its cold embrace. When his friends below in the village of Chamonix became concerned, a helicopter patrol went to search for Trevor. He was found dead at the end of the exit couloir. Trevor and Eric's path as a pair of friends ended in a way that all freeskiers fear. Eric was left with warm memories and a gaping hole in his heart.

*"Trevor was like a brother to me. He was a passionate adventurer and a trustworthy partner, and he always had an admirably dedicated attitude toward free skiing and the mountains. This sport has its own risks and you just have to accept them. The same tragedy could have been my fate as well",* says Eric Pehota.

Trevor Petersen was mourned by friends as well as his wife and two children, of whom one is now at 19 years of age a very well-known freeskiier, **Kye Petersen**. Following in his father's footsteps, he is a very talented skier, but also a very obstinate young man.



*"Kye goes skiing with us every now and then since after all he lives only a kilometer from us. Kye reminds me a lot of his father. He has a strong will and personality. Kye is nice, intelligent, and learns quickly, just like Trevor. On the other hand, Kye does things exactly as he wishes, and he doesn't have any patience for those who are not on the same page as him", says Eric Pehota.*

They say, "time turns memories to gold". People have a tendency to forget the bad things. I asked Eric Pehota what was his best memory of the times he and Trevor conquered the mountains together.

*"Hmm, it's hard to name one single best memory, since there were so many good times..."*

After thinking for a moment, Eric recalls one of the best memories of his time with Trevor. Surprisingly, the pioneer of freeskiing tells of a memory that has nothing to do with skis and snow.

*”As a matter of fact, one great memory often comes to mind, and it is from the time when Trevor and I were surfing on the west coast of North America years ago. I remember how when we paddled over the waves I looked Trevor in the eye and saw the feeling of joy and happiness that blazed in his soul. He was in his element. He lived life to the fullest and loved every moment, and you could see this in his eyes. I feel privileged to have been able to share all those moments with Trevor”.*

## **Life continues and the sport develops**

Eric Pehota has experienced the kinds of moments on the mountains that only very few people have the opportunity to experience. These include a wealth of fine times and success, but also misfortune and sorrow. He has not left the mountains for good, though, because nowadays he goes on skiing and hunting trips with his children.



Eric’s children represent the new school of skiers who, in addition to big mountains, are also interested in pipes, parks, and streets. I asked Eric how he feels about the changes in skiing over the past few years and what he thinks of the future of skiing.

*”I think it’s great that the sport is developing. Everyone loves to ski powder, but for example parks and pipes are also excellent entertainment, which brings a whole new dimension to the sport. On the other hand, the competition for recognition has become fiercer, as a result of which many take huge risks. It is really sad to see talented young skiers blowing their bodies out by trying too hard. It is sad to see young people hurting themselves”*, says Eric Pehota.

When a person has experienced in the mountains a great amount of joy and happiness, but also sorrow, one wonders whether they could have done something differently. I asked Eric whether there is anything in his life that he would have liked to do differently.

*"Not one thing. I wouldn't leave anything undone or change something I've done. I am happy and at peace with myself, and I don't feel that anything should have been done differently. If I die tomorrow, I will die happy".*



This is the exact answer I expected. Eric Pehota's equilibrium and ability to manage his life almost make me envious, because my own life contains at least a busload of things I could have done differently. Eric Pehota is a man who has seen and experienced many things that the common man will unfortunately never experience.

The two-hour conversation with Eric Pehota was rewarding and memorable. My role model from many years ago has returned to my life, for I genuinely value Eric Pehota's outlook on life. The man has his values in the right place.