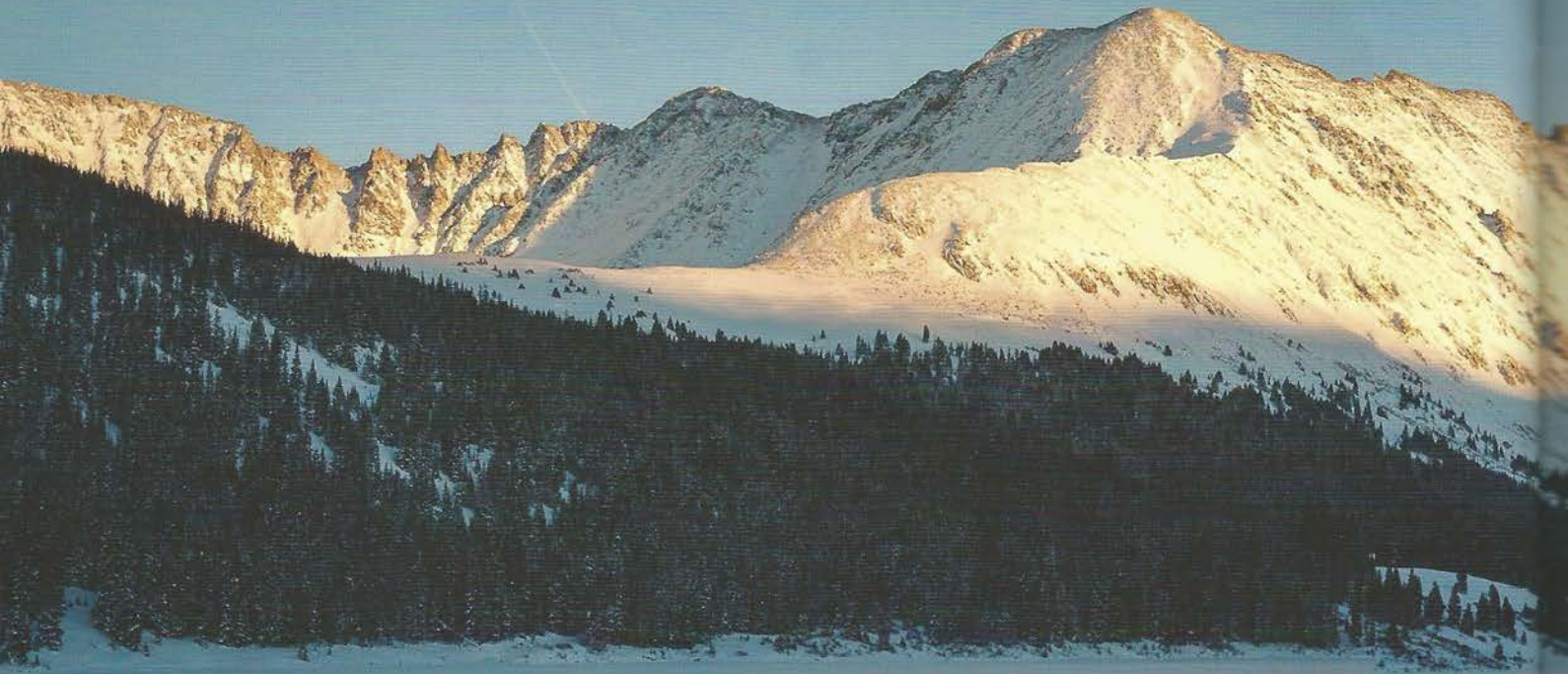


SNOW USE!

Filming in Winter Conditions



Clinton Reservoir

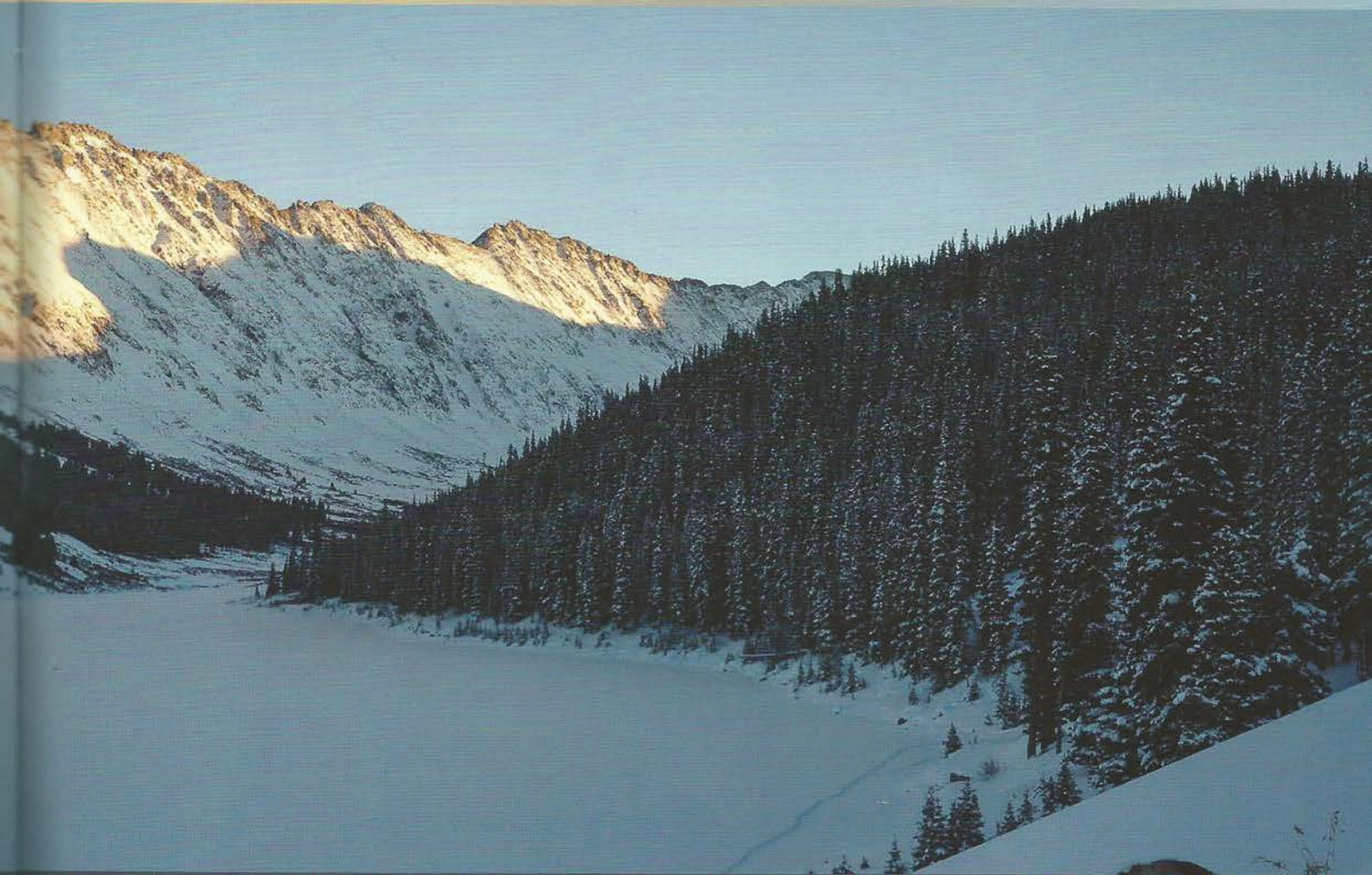


Ann Lukacs. Photo courtesy of Ann Lukacs/LMGA

by Ann Lukacs

As a location scout/manager based in Breckenridge, Colorado, I receive a lot of requests for snow locations. Whether the request is for a Mount Everest location that you can drive to or snow-covered roads for car commercials, there are some basic snow logistics.

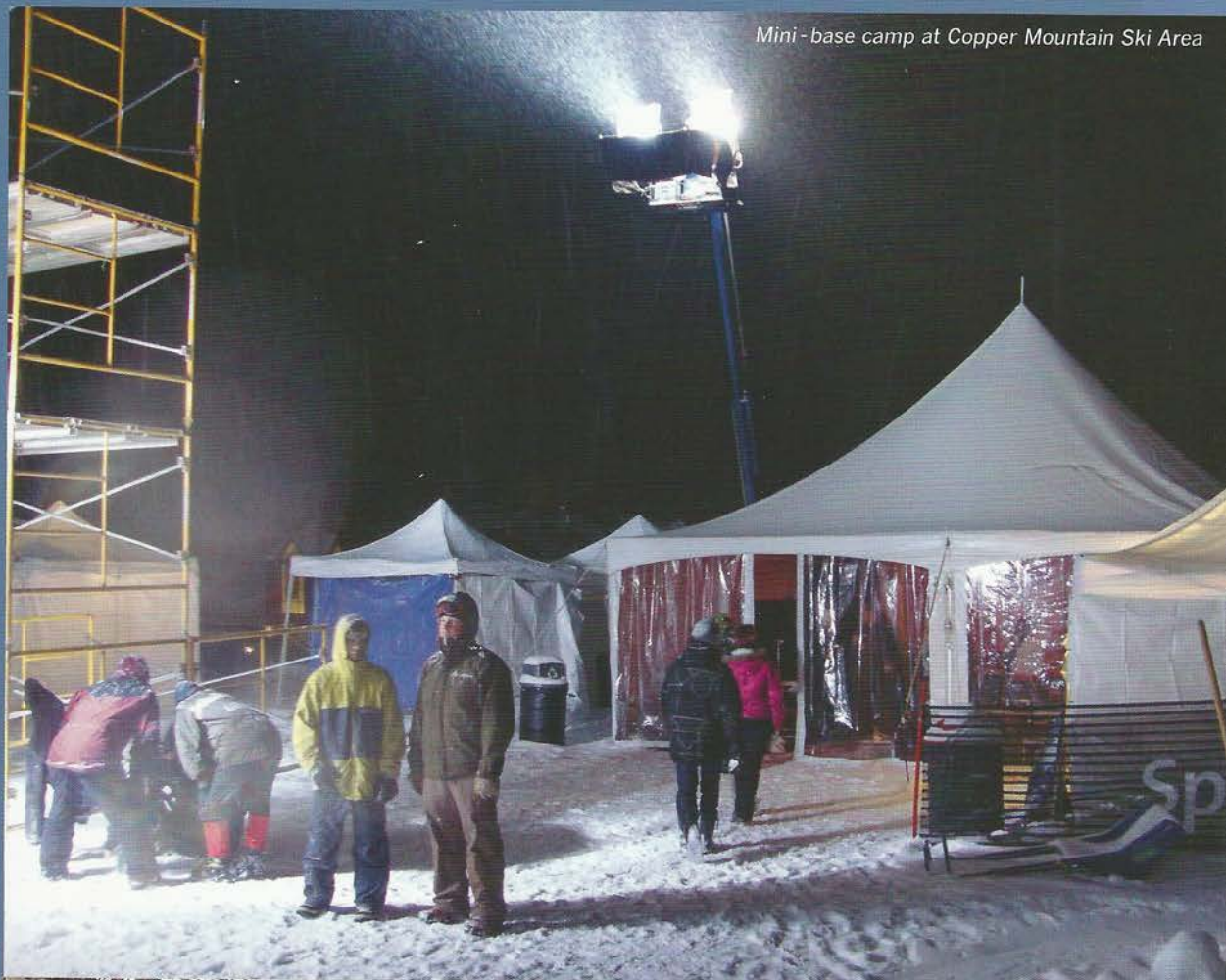
All photos by Ann Lukacs/LMGA, except as noted.



You need an appropriate vehicle for scouting. My mountain vehicle is a Honda Ridgeline with snow tires and 4WD capability. Chances are good that snow tires and 4WD will be all you need. If you aren't familiar with chains, they may prove too difficult to use. The key to driving in the snow is "slow and steady." Don't spin your tires and don't assume that 4WD means you are invincible. 4WD vehicles can get stuck as well as anything. For the most part, the roads you drive on will be maintained. Even if you are driving on unplowed roads, there is usually a road underneath. If you have never driven on snow, just drive sensibly. Take your time. It is not uncommon to get storms that provide 8" to 18"+ of snow at one time. However, once the storm passes, it will usually be sunny, blue skies and gorgeous!

Before heading out to scout, make sure you have plenty of water, snacks and fuel. I have a winter emergency kit in my vehicle (blankets, matches, tarp, flashlight, etc.). I also keep a duffle bag of cold weather gear in my truck. Coats, gloves, goggles, hats, socks, vests and a variety of "layers." Layering is the key to comfort when you are exerting in winter conditions. Don't forget a good pair of boots and you're ready to go! I carry a pair of snowshoes and ski poles in my truck all winter which are helpful for scouting preparedness. I moved from Detroit to Colorado in 1980 and learned to ski around the same time. However, you don't need to ski to scout for snow locations. Usually, the ski areas will give you a site tour by snowmobile or you can hire someone if you are in a remote area. In terms of scouting equipment, I have not had any issues with my Nikon D7000 or iPhone or any apps in the cold and snow to date.

Mini-base camp at Copper Mountain Ski Area



Shopping in Breckenridge



Arapahoe Basin Ski Area



Basic snowmobile

There are basically two options for shooting snow: at a resort ski area or in the backcountry, including county roads or private property. Shooting at a ski area has the advantage of a built-in infrastructure. They have access to snow cats, snowmobiles, lodges, chair lifts, ski patrol (safety and medical) and snow support personnel. They can make your production go very smoothly but they also come with their own set of challenges. Due to litigation concerns, many ski areas now restrict travel on the mountain during operating hours. However, in most cases, we would want to move the company before the area opens and we would still be shooting after they closed. It is simply a matter of working with their operations. If it works for your creative team, I think the benefits of filming at a resort ski area outweigh the disadvantages. Each resort area is different and some are definitely more film-friendly than others. The time of year also plays a big role. Obviously, running a ski area is their main priority so they probably aren't going to be receptive during Christmas week. If your shoot looks like something the ski area can accommodate, they will usually take you on a site visit via snowmobile or you can scout via skis/snowboard.

When we filmed the Mount Everest location for *The Bucket List*, starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, we based at the top of Arapahoe Basin Ski Area in Colorado. We were able to set up in one of the "warming huts." Just like camping



Basic snowcat

at the real Mount Everest, we did a lot of waiting on weather. We were very fortunate to have a warm interior mini-base camp. The main base camp was at the base of the ski area which was 10–15 minutes by snowmobile or chair lift.

Since we usually scout alone, if I am heading into the backcountry, I try to formulate a game plan on where I am going and, if possible, I let someone know or I leave a note in my office. You don't have to go far to run out of cell service. If you are scouting in the backcountry, venturing into areas that aren't accessible by road, you might want to talk to or hire a local guide who is knowledgeable about current snow and avalanche conditions. Unless you are experienced in the snow, don't assume you can just rent a snowmobile and go anywhere. This is especially true if you are scouting in unknown steep areas. Depending on the time of year and the stability of the snow, there is the potential of an avalanche that could be triggered by a snowmobile, especially if there was just a heavy snowfall. Most avalanches happen during or right after a snowstorm. The best way to manage avalanches is to have a current weather forecast, recognize when there is enough new snow to produce storm avalanches and select terrain that minimizes your exposure to the risk. Colorado Avalanche Information Center (<http://avalanche.state.co.us>) provides this information. There are similar organizations in every state. You certainly don't want to pick a location in a slide zone. Obviously, the ski areas monitor conditions inbound. The highway department maintains the highways and various roads. The weather can change quickly. A good source for weather forecasts and avalanche conditions nationwide is www.opensnow.com

I remember a shoot in the backcountry where we transported crew and equipment to the location via snow cats and snowmobiles. It was probably a 30-minute commute. Since there was no shelter at the location, I brought along a huge tent that we anchored to one of the snow cats. The commercial involved a "guru on a mountain top" and a young "student" seeking his knowledge. They had the guru dressed in a gauze costume. It was January! I remember the actor showing signs of hyperthermia and altitude sickness. The medic quickly got him in the tent with space blankets and sleeping bags to warm his body temperature before we transported him down as we heard the director say, "but I only need one more shot."

Once you find your location, there are some basics to moving the company around in the snow. Snowmobiles and snow cats are vital. A snowmobile is designed to operate on snow and does not require a road or trail. It is an open-air vehicle and can usually accommodate two people. If you are filming at a ski area, they may require that their personnel operate the machine. Often you can attach a toboggan or equipment sled to the rear for hauling gear. The number of snowmobiles needed will depend on the size of your crew and the logistics of getting to your location. A snow cat is a much larger enclosed-cab, truck-sized fully tracked vehicle. They are primarily used at ski areas for grooming snow. The ski areas usually have a large basket that can attach to either the front or rear of the "cat" to load and transport equipment. There are also "passenger cats" available that are similar to a passenger van on snow treads.



Arapahoe Basin Ski Area

In addition to snowmobiles and snow cats, other snow support that can be useful include snowplows, industrial snowblowers, front-end loaders or shovels. I will make the initial contacts for the various snow-moving options since it is support for the location. The resources are shared with the art department and/or transpo, as needed. The equipment operators can prep the location, roads or sculpt the snow for picture. They are very familiar with moving snow!

If possible, it's smart to get your snow shots in or near resort towns. You have access to lodging and various production needs, and you can usually find a location that will easily accommodate your base camp and mini-base camp needs. Of course, unless you are on private property, most of the ski areas and backcountry are on USFS (U.S. Forest Service) land and will require a permit.

What happens if there is no snow? Get creative! It is not unusual to haul in snow by dump truck. We filmed *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* in Breckenridge. I wish I had a dollar for every local (including myself) who said "March is our heaviest snow month." Well, not that year. We were hauling snow down from the top of the mountain. Then it started to snow. We received 87 inches of snow in five days!!! We eventually had so much snow, it forced us into a cover set.

With snow work comes high altitude. Be sure to acclimate and pace yourself for the first few days. Since that isn't always possible, the next best thing is essential. Water! Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. It will keep you from getting nasty altitude headaches. Also, wear sunscreen and proper



An outdoor clothing shoot utilizing a chair lift

UV sunglasses! If you experience symptoms such as nausea, abnormal fatigue or slurred speech, see your medic for possible altitude sickness. There should be oxygen on set. Remember that work usually goes slower in the snow and/or at altitude.

I have been working on snow shoots for many years. Like any shoot, it is all about prep. Don't let snow intimidate you but respect it. There are a lot of local resources to help. Most of your shoots will be in contained areas and all you have to do is enjoy the view.

CONTRIBUTORS



Rob Christoffersen

Rob Christoffersen spent a significant part of his childhood at Disneyland where his grandfather was fire chief. He thought taking theatre production in high school was a good way to avoid boring classes and meet girls. Rob went to college at the University of Nebraska where they still shot film for journalism. He got to work at a great PBS station in Lincoln, Nebraska, and then did rock & roll and other jobs to avoid the office. Many indie features, commercials and reality TV shows later, Rob still enjoys the thrill of opening day on set. He is a member of the Nebraska Film Association that is currently lobbying for some basic state film incentives. Rob resides in Lincoln, still avoiding office jobs and helping to raise his wonderful son, Lucas.



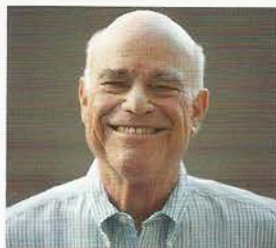
Ann Lukacs

Ann Lukacs fell in love with photography at an early age. She worked in the camera department, Local 600, for many years. Her industry experience coupled with her knowledge of the mountains unwittingly realigned her direction to locations. Ann's credits as a location manager include *Gravity*, *The Bucket List*, *John Carter* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*. She produced *Behind the Chutes*, an award-winning documentary telling the story of rodeo bareback riders. She is currently in production on *Thunder Over Europe*, a documentary about the crew of a WWII B-17, based on her uncle. She sits on the Board of Arts for Colorado, a state advocacy organization supporting Colorado Creative Industries. Lukacs owns a small photography art gallery selling her photography as well as other local artists. In addition, she works to promote the South Park National Heritage Area. Of course, there is always skiing and hiking to round out her time.



Nancy Mills

Nancy Mills is a freelance entertainment writer whose work has appeared in dozens of magazines and newspapers around the world, including *USA Today*, *USA Weekend* magazine, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Us Weekly*, *People*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *The Costco Connection*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Daily News*, *The Guardian*, *International Herald Tribune* and *The New York Times Syndicate*. Over the years, she has visited hundreds of TV and film locations in such far-flung spots as China, India, Italy, France, Germany, England, Mexico, Australia and Fiji. She is a graduate of Cornell University.



Ned Shapiro

Ned Shapiro, a native Angeleno, was a location manager for feature films and TV for more than 30 years. After two years as a US Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, East Africa, Ned went from USC Graduate School in journalism directly to KNX-News Radio, then on to KNXT-TV (now KCBS) as a field producer for six years before he was lured into scouting for commercials. He moved over to television where he worked on *Hart to Hart*, *Knight Rider* and *Murder, She Wrote*, among others. Ned's feature film credits include *Dead Again*, *Indecent Proposal*, *Apollo 13*, *Intolerable Cruelty* and his "swan song," *The Kids Are All Right*. Ned, now happily retired since 2010, lives in West Los Angeles.



Rebecca "Puck" Stair

A former English teacher, Rebecca "Puck" Stair is on the LMGA Board and co-chairs the Regional/International Committee. A frequent contributor to the *LMGA Compass*, Stair is proof that distant members can play an active role in the Guild. A location scout & manager for film and television for about a decade, her notable projects include *No Country for Old Men*, *3:10 to Yuma*, *John Carter*, *Terminator: Salvation* and *We're the Millers*. A current member of Women In Film, she enjoys the challenges of filming in rural and urban locations alike, and is currently honored to serve on the Executive Board of IATSE Local 480. When not filming, she, for some insane reason, runs triathlons.



Mark London Williams

Mark London Williams has reported on moviemaking, both analog and digital, for publications like *Variety* and the *Los Angeles Times*, and is currently a senior correspondent for *Below the Line*, and a contributor to *British Cinematographer*, covering post-production and Hollywood's awards season and its discontents. He's also the author of the time travel book series *Danger Boy*, but hasn't been able to personally go backward, chronologically, yet.