



The Ninety-Pound Rucksack Challenge

7 p.m., February 18, 2024

Whiteface Mountain, NY; Ski Cooper, CO; Mt. Glory, Jackson Hole

Overview: The Ninety-Pound Rucksack Challenge (“Challenge”) will create a ski mountaineering event that leans into the legacy of the 10th Mountain Division while celebrating its historic contributions to both the Allied victory in World War II and the development of the post-war outdoor recreation industry.

The Event: On February 18, 2024, a tribute to the 10th Mountain Division’s signature action will take place at 7 p.m. (in each respective time zone) in three locations around the county: Lake Placid, NY, where early incarnations of the 10th Mountain Division learned to ski; Ski Cooper, Colorado, where the 10th Mountain Division trained; and on Mt. Glory in Jackson Hole. The 10th Mountain Division’s motto was, and is, “Climb to Glory.”

Background: The 10th Mountain Division was the US Army’s World War II specialized unit of skiers and climbers whose January 1945 insertion into the Italian Theater helped end the war in Europe. After training for more than three years in the Adirondacks, Cascades, and Rockies, often carrying ninety-pound “rucksacks,” or backpacks, they were inserted into Italy’s Apennine Mountains to break Hitler’s Gothic Line, a fortified series of summits and ridges the Nazis had used to stymie Allied advances for more than 500 days.

At 7 p.m., February 18, 1945, some 800 10th Mountain Division soldiers began a night-time ascent of Riva Ridge, the Gothic Line’s lynchpin. Carrying packs that weighed up to 60 pounds, they ascended four different routes that ranged from 1,500 to 2,500 feet of vertical gain to take the Germans on top without a casualty. Their successful ascent not only helped break the Gothic Line; it catalyzed the German surrender of Italy and hastened the end of the war as well.

Ski towns from around America, including Lake Placid, Sun Valley and Jackson Hole, contributed soldiers to the 10th. Post-war, 10th Mountain Division veterans founded or developed more than 60 ski areas around America, including Steamboat, Vail, Arapahoe Basin and Jackson’s Snow King Mountain.

The 10th Mountain Division is currently rebuilding its military skiing and mountaineering capacities. Like all Army units, the 10th is struggling with recruitment.

How It Works: The climbs will be put together by two entities related to the 10th. The 10th Mountain Alpine Club (“10th MAC”) is a mountaineering community comprised of Active Duty, Veterans and Civilians of the 10th Mountain Division that promotes mountaineering while honoring the Division’s

heritage and the soldiers who follow in their footsteps. Ninety-Pound Rucksack is a podcast about the 10th Mountain Division and its impact on American outdoor recreation.

Members of the 10th MAC, comprised of Active Duty, Veterans, and Civilians of 10th Mountain Division, will participate in the climbs at Whiteface and Ski Cooper. Members of the public who sign waivers releasing participating entities from liability will be welcome to join.

Key Benefits: The story of the 10th Mountain Division is famous for good reason. Problematically, in the three generations since the Division's inception, public understanding of and appreciation for its contributions to American society has waned. The Challenge will elevate the 10th's legacy while paying tribute to the fitness that made the Division formidable, doing so with an event that will assist with recruitment while deepening awareness of the 10th's past and current contributions to American society.

