

# Why are ski towns seeing more suicides?

By Kelley McMillan, National Geographic

On a sunny morning in late February, Tom Slocum, a 57-year-old ski bum in Telluride, Colo., walked up Tomboy Road, a popular hiking route that winds above the north side of town. An avid athlete and skier, Slocum moved to Telluride in 1984, a couple of years after graduating college. Like many ski town residents, he'd worked several jobs over the years, in hotels, mostly. Over the last five or so years, he'd grown frustrated with his life—presumably by the fact the he was a middle-aged man living in a shack behind a multimillion dollar home, struggling to get by in one of the country's most idyllic ski towns.

About a mile up Tomboy, Slocum pulled over and sat down next to a small creek. From his perch above Telluride, he looked out at the majestic San Juan Mountains, which towered above the 2,000-person town and its pastel Victorians. Across the valley, the Bear Creek basin etched up the east side of the resort and disappeared into a playground of snow-capped peaks. Then, just after dawn cast its first rays, Slocum pulled out a handgun and shot himself.

Slocum's death was the first of three suicides that occurred in San Miguel County over two weeks in late February and early March. Then in May, a 46-year-old skier widely regarded as one of the best riders in the San Juans, took his life. The rash of self-inflicted deaths boosted the county's rate of suicide by firearms over the past 12 months to more than six times higher than the national average. But Telluride isn't alone. The number of suicides in Aspen, Colo., is three times the country's mean rate. Utah's Salt Lake County, home to Alta and Snowbird, has almost twice as many suicides as the national

average. And six suicides over two and a half years in Truckee prompted the community to launch a suicide task force in 2014. Though tourists from around the world flock to these locales to ski their slopes and ride their single track, paradise harbors a darker reality: resort town residents are taking their lives at alarming rates.

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