

## Personal Essay: Erick Crockenberg

I believe life boils down to experiences, relationships, and what we leave behind. Few things make me as happy chasing new experiences and ideas, sharing those moments and lessons with others, and working towards a goal. I was adopted by grandparents when I was very young, and moved from California to Vermont. I've been lucky enough to call Vermont my home base ever since. I went to CVU high school in Hinesburg and the University of Vermont in Burlington, and have since started my young career in the Green Mountains. Growing up I was fortunate to have parents who optimized experiences over things, sharing a spark for the outdoors and for travel from a young age. I grew up exploring the lakes, mountains, and rivers around my home state, and built an amazing friend group who shared these passions. Together we've snowboard camped on glaciers in Alaska, backpacked in Morocco, lived out of Subaru wagons for months at a time chasing storms, and endlessly searched out new swimming holes around the state. As a student I studied environmental science and design – believing we must conserve what we love, for me, the outdoor environment in which I play. In college I led research focused on sustainable farm energy systems. I went on to found a non-profit community development organization, which I ran from the time I was 22 until I was 27. I currently work as a carpenter and cook in Vermont. About a month ago I connected with Ryan Koupal the founder of 40 Tribes, a backcountry ski guiding and community development initiative in the Tien Shan Mountains of northeastern Kyrgyzstan. The concept marries entirely native resources—yurts, mountains, snow, and motivated locals—to create jobs at the local level and deliver a blended mountain and cultural experience. And for me, it is a perfect combination of three passions, 1) community development, 2) travel and 3) outdoor exploration. I will be joining the 40 Tribes team as a "jack of all trades" volunteer for the entire Winter 2020 season, supporting the team with local logistics, yurt caretaking, cooking, snowboard guiding, and photo-storytelling. I will be unpaid over the course of my nearly two months in Kyrgyzstan, however my room, board and local travel will be covered by the organization. The goal of this grant is to support this adventure and new career direction, helping cover my airfare and equipment costs.