

It takes less than a minute to shoot down the 1,600-foot slope at Cerro Negro.



ALPHA

DO BEFORE YOU DIE

# EAT MY DUST HURTLE DOWN AN ACTIVE VOLCANO

A CHARCOAL-BLACK pyramid rising from the Nicaraguan jungle, Cerro Negro has experienced an explosion of activity recently. Since the volcano last erupted in 1999, its molten core has triggered earthquakes, its gas-stained craters still spew sulfurous plumes, and people from all over the planet have been flinging themselves down its slopes on sheets of plywood. After bouncing to the Pilas-El Hoyo Natural Reserve in the

back of a truck with 20 fellow boarders, I tucked a crude wooden sled under my arm and followed our guide up the soot-colored scree. Our goggles and orange jumpsuits made us look like a band of prison escapees, and we got a primer on volcano boarding technique: Sit down, lean back, and hold the rope. You can brake with your feet, our guide said, before reminding us that our driver was at the base of the slope tracking our speed with a radar gun. "The record is 59 mph." I wanted that record. Then he gave me a stiff push, and I plunged down the 41-degree slope, chased by a jet trail of ash. I submitted entirely to gravity, even as it hurled jagged shards at my face. My board soon began careening to the side, and I launched forward and somersaulted down the scorched slope as basalt and volcanic dust flew into my mouth. By the time the cloud cleared, I was already back on my board, coasting toward the cheering group and a triumphant eighth-place finish—with a top speed of 34 mph. —ELIOT STEIN

