



Welcome to HIGHER Freeride. New Zealand Edition 2026

Higher Freeride offers an international extension to existing Australian and New Zealand freeride/freestyle programs. Founded by Australian coaches Coen Bennie-Faull (Arc'teryx Athlete, APSI level 4) Jake Woods (APSI level 4 examiner/trainer) and Nicholas Higginson (APSI level 3 & qualified secondary school teacher).

Our aim is to create the pathway to help young athletes transition from local junior freeride competitions onto the international stage. Our programs focus on the physical and psychological skills to succeed in competition and aim to cultivate training environments that build leadership skills and self-reliance in young athletes.

Our 2026 Program

This August–September, HIGHER returns to New Zealand with a multi-location program designed to introduce athletes to freeride competition, build fundamental skills, and develop confidence in big mountain terrain.

Spanning Wānaka, Mt Olympus, Ōhau, and Queenstown, the program integrates training, competition opportunities, and team-based living into one cohesive experience.

Whether athletes are stepping into their first events or building toward higher-level competition, the NZ program provides the structure, coaching, and environment to support that progression.

Program Location & Dates

Wānaka: 14 August – 4 September

Mt Olympus: 31 August – 9 September

Ōhau: 9 September – 13 September

Queenstown: 13 September – 21 September



2026 Program Streams

Our three programs are designed to meet freeride athletes where they are—whether building fundamentals, competing on the junior circuit, or stepping into FWQ events. Each stream offers tailored coaching, structured support, and access to world-class terrain.

Development Program

Ages: 12–13

Dates: September 13 - 21, 2026 (Queenstown)

Duration Options: 1 Week, a longer training block may be available upon request.

This program supports stronger U14 athletes and their families to take the next step from domestic Australian competition to the Remarkables 3*. Riders are introduced to high-level terrain and competition fundamentals. **Note: This program requires a parent/guardian to travel with them. Athletes will be accepted on a case by case basis in conversation with each family**.

- 5 days/week of on-snow coaching
- Includes daily transport to training venues and off-day activities.
- Option to join evening off-snow activities (i.e. trampolining, gym & recovery)

Core Program

Ages: 14–18

Dates: August 17 or 20 - September 21, 2026

Duration: 5.5 Weeks

The Core Program is the central pathway offering for junior athletes. Athletes live and travel together under full staff supervision, following the NZFJT across the south island of NZ. With the recent change in FWTJnr World Championships qualification process via Australasian competition only, this program is designed to assist athletes in achieving their goals.

Competitions Available: Treble Cone 3*, Olympus 2*, Remarkables 3*

- 5 days/week of on-snow coaching
- Includes full-board accommodation and meals, 24/7 care
- Off-snow activities: gym, sauna, trampolines, climbing, cultural excursions

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Qualifier Program

Ages: 18–22 (limited to 6 athletes)

Dates: August 14 - September 4, 2026

Duration: 3 Weeks

The Qualifier Program is designed for our young adult athletes preparing to compete on the Freeride World Tour Qualifier. With a focus on performance, competition execution, and decision-making, our coaching aims to give these athletes the tools to travel, prepare and compete solo as they step out into the world on their own.

Competitions available: Treble Cone 2*, Remarkables 2*, Remarkables 4*

Focus areas:

- Competition execution at FWQ events
- Line strategy, snow condition understanding & terrain analysis
- Travel planning and logistical independence
- Peer learning and coach-guided progression
- Mental and physical prep for high-performance output





Program Inclusions/Exclusions

24/7 Care*

Accommodation - Full Board*

Food – Breakfast & Dinner*

5 full days on snow coaching per week

Transport

Off season athlete guidance

Coach/Athlete ratio - 1:6

Strength & Conditioning consultation with Pillar

Consultation with Sports Psychologist*

Arc'teryx AUS/NZ 55% Discount

(* Core and Qualifier program inclusions only)

Not included in program fee:

Flights

Ski Passes

Lunches daily

Competition entries

Medical expenses

Travel insurance

Off snow activities

Liability Wavier

Athletes and parents are required to sign the HIGHER Liability Waiver prior to their acceptance to the camp.

Sample On-Snow Daily Structure

6:30am Pre-hab, injury prevention and mobility session

6:50am Breakfast

7:20am Van load for training venue for the day

7:25am Wheels up for daily on-snow coaching

8:00am Morning on-snow coaching

11:30am Lunch - (Restaurant or packed at home)

12:30pm Afternoon on-snow coaching

3:00pm Van Load, return to accommodation

3:30 - 5:30pm Ski-tuning, video review, off snow session, rest for athletes

5:30 - 7:00pm Study/Down Time

7:00pm Dinner

8:30pm Brief for tomorrow, athlete preparation and reflection

9:30pm Lights Out

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Additional Resources

Hugh O'Keefe - Strength & Conditioning Coach

Hugh is a passionate and experienced strength and conditioning coach and the founder of Pillar of Strength, a performance coaching business focused on building strength, mobility, and resilience in snow sports athletes. Currently completing a Master's in Strength and Conditioning, Hugh works with elite-level skiers and snowboarders, including athletes within the NSW Institute of Sport SBX program.

Hugh supports HIGHER athletes with both group and individual programming, designed to prepare their bodies for the demands of freeride skiing. His work focuses on injury prevention, movement quality, and progressive strength development to ensure athletes can perform at their best on snow — and stay there.



pillarofstrength.com.au

Gavin Freeman - Sport Psychologist

Gavin works with HIGHER athletes to develop the mental tools required to train and compete in the high-pressure world of competitive freeride. Through group sessions and one-on-one coaching, Gavin helps athletes build awareness, resilience, and a mindset that supports consistent performance and long-term growth.

As a registered psychologist, Gavin has worked with Olympic athletes, CEOs, elite coaches, and high-performing teams in both the sporting and corporate world. His expertise spans performance psychology, goal setting, leadership, and pressure management — giving athletes the psychological edge to thrive in their sport and beyond.



gavinfreeman.com.au



Accommodation, Catering & Transport

- Athletes will be housed in an appropriately sized house accommodating for numbers. Coaches will be housed on site as well to ensure athletes are supervised and cared for.
- Breakfast and dinner will be catered through coaches and staff. Staff will support athletes with their nutritional choices and appropriate fuelling for days on snow.
- Lunch will be a combination of packed lunches prepared by the athletes and on-mountain restaurant lunches (self funded). Athletes will have choices within this structure.
- Snacks for on snow refuelling will be available in accommodation kitchen.
- Athletes will have access to local transport and coaching staff will be available to take them to supermarkets or any other shops they need during their stay.
- Athletes will be advised of suitable arrival airport and time, staff will meet athletes at their arrivals gate.

Insurance

- Athletes are required to purchase their own travel insurance which covers them for injury, illness, theft, accident and skiing in off-piste terrain throughout their trip.
- We suggest booking insurance prior to booking flights in order to have flight logistics covered under any potential claim. Insurance should cover athletes from the day they leave until the day they arrive back home.
- Insurance should cover your athlete for interruption of journey costs, as many of HIGHER's costs are likely to be unrecoverable in the event of an interruption to your athlete's camp for any reason. Insurance providers can give you a detailed description of what will be covered in your policy, and we strongly suggest that you discuss with your insurer the type of program your athlete is involved in. If the camp is interrupted, HIGHER will do everything we can to support your claim to the insurance company to recover your costs.

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Care, Injury Protocol and Medical Disclosure

- We encourage you to share with our staff all details pertaining to your child that can assist us in giving them the care they need during the program. This includes but is not limited to disclosure of learning difficulties, anxiety, depression, personal preferences, allergies and dietary conditions.
- Injury prevention and risk management is an important part of our process. Daily movement preparation, micro-strength activation movements to ensure that our athletes bodies are prepared for their on snow performance.
- If an injury is sustained, staff will ensure athletes are supervised, cared for and facilitate medical appointments and treatment.
- Concussion: In the event of a blow sustained to the head, staff will follow the SCAT5 protocol and make informed judgements on return to snow for athletes.
- All athletes are required to complete the HIGHER medical disclosure form prior to departure.

Training Modalities

- **Physical:** the physical training program is designed to push as hard as necessary (relative to the weekly – monthly – seasonal phase) without compromising the volume, or intensity of on snow training – we plan for frequent light touches on key aspects (strength, movement skills, mobility etc.) with the overall goal of increasing durability and improving performance.
- **Psychological:** these sessions will revolve around the Psychological, Emotional and Social health needs of young developing athletes.
- **Technical:** our objective is to create strong, versatile skiers that can carry the skills they learn with them for the rest of their lives. Starting with the most fundamental skiing skills and developing them into the sport specific skills necessary to excel in the discipline of competitive Big Mountain Freeride.
- **Tactical:** the ability to make “good” decisions stems from understanding and experience. By continuing to expose these athletes to a range of choices, educating them on what should inform those decisions and reflecting on the outcomes, we hope to develop athletes that can push the limits of their potential and keep themselves and those around them SAFE while doing it.

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Training Objectives

On-snow training blocks will be organized into three general themes:

- Air & Style – Utilizing terrain park features and natural features around the mountain to train all things freestyle. From the fundamentals of jumping to freestyling natural hits, it's all about airtime.
- Technique & Control – Building the technical foundations to improve speed, power and control in any terrain, racecourse or competition venue. This is the core of skier improvement.
- Line & Fluidity – Focusing on more of the tactical and practical elements of Big Mountain Skiing, these sessions will center around terrain exploration, skiing out-of-resort, line choice and visualization.

Off-snow sessions activities will be planned based on staff assessment of athlete fatigue and competence and logistical viability on any given off day. Some activities include:

- Access to gym to participate in S&C sessions programmed by Pillar.
- Indoor climbing/bouldering
- Trampoline sessions
- Recovery sessions - Sauna, cold plunge, pool

Rest days will be taken twice a week to ensure appropriate mental and physical recovery time. Our staff will monitor athletes physical and emotional state and manage training load to be productive for their growth while also ensuring we manage the level of risk athletes and staff taking on.

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Join Our Information Evening

Want to learn more?

We're hosting a virtual information evening to walk you through the NZ 2026 program, explain how the pathway works, and answer any questions. This is the best opportunity to understand whether the program is the right fit for your athlete.

Date: Wednesday 22 April

Time: 7:30 PM (AEST)

Meeting Link: <https://meet.google.com/eze-onri-vs2>

To express your interest or ask any questions, please send us an email including a brief athlete background by Sunday 31st of May.

We'll send through detailed pricing and everything you need to know.

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