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SMS Leadership Training - Dec 3-4, 1988

Eager to get a jump on the ski season, Kathy Crandall, Dick Smith, Scot Jamison, and Nancy Gordon began the weekend a day early by leaving for Mammoth Thursday evening. Owen, being the marvelous host that he is, welcomed these enthusiastic skiers and joined them for a fine day of skiing Friday. Kathy disappeared into the track scene with skating skis, but the others three-pinned it using the lifts all day.

Owen had supplied each of us with the article "Ski Heil!" by Joel Hildebrand from a 1935 Sierra Club Bulletin. Standards for determining skiing proficiency were of particular interest: a first-class skier is one who wins first-class international races. A second-class skier can drop 1000 feet in altitude over a standard course (not all straight) in not over four minutes. A third-class skier must demonstrate climbing ability and stamina, telemarks, christianias, and continuous stem-turns on a gradient of 15 degrees, and run down a standard 1000-foot course in about seven minutes. A fourth-class skier must ascend and descend 500 feet within specified time limits, demonstrate kick-turns, four successive stem-turns, a snow-plow to a stand-still and a short, straight run. "It should be the ambition of everyone to pass at least the third-class test."

Saturday arrivals included Tom Duryea, Debra Lerner, Dave Dykeman, and Reiner Stenzel. Although lofty ambitions were set regarding SMS leadership skills in navigation and snowcraft, skiing dominated the weekend. In fact, beside love of skiing, the major interest seemed to be gourmet dining which was provided by Susan Beck and Mary Pipersky of Anything Goes. Kathy provided all of us with delicious coffee from Trader Joe's before we hit the slopes. The snow conditions were quite good despite the complaints of rock exposure on some of the runs. Crowds were at a minimum probably because it was the weekend following Thanksgiving and the LA crowd was still recovering.

Sunday, we diversified. Owen led a group touring and others skied the tracks out of Tamarack (trail fee \$10). Whether people chose to lift ski, tour, use the tracks for light waxless cross-country skis or skating skis, the comment I appreciated most was, "It's all skiing!" Thanks, Owen, it was a wonderful weekend!

NG

TWICE THE ICE

The SCMA is sponsoring an additional ice climbing/ski trip to June Lake - Lee Vining. Reservations have been established for the duplex for the Presidents day week-end, February 18-20. Anyone interested should contact Claude Lane (818-957-3210).

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Next Mugelnoos Meeting

Tuesday, February 21, 1989
 Griffith Park Ranger Station Aud.

Program: "Skiing in the Wind
 Rivers" by Rich
 Henke.

Tracks Of A Junkie

My name is Marcus Libkind and I am a junkie. My addiction: cross-country skiing. At first, I thought the occasional outing was nothing more than a pleasant diversion from the daily grind of my job as an engineer. Unknowingly, I became consumed by the delirious joy and drunken happiness which I experienced from frolicking in the snowy, white powder. I indulged at every opportunity, carving tracks in hillsides, in sheltered bowls, and on windswept summits, until my habit grew to 50-days a year. In love with snow, I became its slave and it, my lord and master.

No longer able to hide behind the mask of respectability as an engineer, I quit my job, left the comfort of my home, and devoted myself to the full-time pursuit of fresh, untracked, snow. I moved to Lee Vining and lived in an unheated room of a trailer. My hair grew long—my beard even longer—as I skied doggedly, 100 days with nary a day's rest.

One day I looked at myself in the mirror, shocked and bewildered by the tan, bearded, muscular stranger I'd become and wondered, "what have I learned? How could others benefit from my story? I passed the evenings huddled near the glowing stove pondering these questions. As I recalled my talks with local officials who had a glimpse of the future it became clear. I must let my brothers and sisters know that there is an eminent threat to our supply of quality snow—it is not enough to have the skills and time—one must have the white powder that is essential to the highs of backcountry skiing.

My addiction took a turn—paranoia—as I saw commercial development and the resurgence of snowmobiling encroaching upon the backcountry ski sites which I had, until recently, taken for granted. It seemed evident that backcountry skiers had to organize if we were to compete with the well-funded lobbyists that were demanding a share of limited wilderness resources. Fortunately, I found others who shared my fears and hopes for the future of the environment. Together we founded an organization and a newsletter, the *Nordic Voice*.

Ever vigilant, I now at least have hope for the future. Unfortunately, my addiction to skiing remains strong, as I continue to seek out new sources for my habit.

From NORDIC VOICE, December 1988

**RJ SECOR TO BE HONORED
 AT ANGELES CHAPTER BANQUET**

The annual Angles Capter awards banquet on February 25, 1989, will be honoring R. J. Secor with a Special Services award in part for his support of the Ski Mountaineering Section.

The banquet will be held at the Friendship auditorium in Griffith Park. The social evening begins with a no-host bar and is followed by dinner. Pete Ackerman will present his slide show of climbing Europe's highest peak, Mt. Elbrus

A ticket is \$22 and includes dinner and security guarded parking. Reserve early as last years event was a sell out. Tickets are available by advance sale only; none sold at door. Mail your check (payable to Sierra Club Angeles Chapter) to Eivor Nilsson, Angeles Chapter Banquet, 1933 Glenoaks Bl, #126, San Fernando 91340. Ticket deadline is february 20.

To receive your free subscription to the *Nordic Voice* fill out and return this coupon. You are already a subscriber if the mailing label says "subscriber" under your name. There is space on this coupon for the name of a friend interested in our cause. Check this box if you would like to be notified prior to the next meeting of the Ski Touring Section Conservation Committee.

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Mail to: *Nordic Voice*, 3383 Burgundy Drive, San Jose, CA 95132-3003

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by Mike Scherer.

SNOW—AN ABUSER'S GUIDE

In a backward kind of theoretical way, backcountry snow is remarkably consistent from the Cascades to the Rockies to the Appalachians—everyone agrees that backcountry snow could be anything on any given day. While regional differences are profound, backcountry ski preferences are fairly easily understood as solutions to a region's most memorable snow problems. In other words, trauma is memorable and consumers will buy skis to avoid repeating the experience.

Emotional Scars—By Region

In the Cascades and the Sierra, most skiers come to the marketplace with the twin traumas of becoming unturnably mired in "wet cement" and having their round-edged touring skis slide out from under them on an icy slope. As a result, they tend toward softer skis, which turn very well in glop and still hold well on ice (at the lower speeds of survival skiing).

Rocky Mountain states are blessed with backcountry snow problems of deep powder (Oh you brute!) and windblown snow. But basically, the snow in the Rockies is usually good enough that few are being whipped by the backcountry snow badly enough to worry about their skis. In the ski resorts, however, problems can mount quickly in large mogul fields. Add to that the influence of a rad-and-bad telemark racing scene and an occasional brush with man-made snow and you've got a distinctly hardpack taste in skis predominating. Fair enough up to a point.

Easterners are often confronted with a icier version of West Coast snow problems. Predictably, their preferences tend toward skis which will handle ice in a routine manner and will turn with some dignity in tree-watered slop.

Deep Powder

If the world was covered with a nice, thick layer of powder we'd probably all be dead. But what a way to go! In deep powder it can be hard to keep your skis weighted evenly. At the first sign of uneven weighting, an alarm goes off inside the more heavily weighted ski. Red lights flash. There is a frenzy of activity as the crew hears the command blared throughout the cramped confines of the ski: "All dive! All dive!" Like most submarines, the ski can't come back up until it dumps its ballast—you.

Selecting a specialized deep-powder ski is simple: get one wide and soft. I find it interesting to note that this is exactly what one would need to make the powder seem less deep and soft.

Not-so-deep Powder

Try this ski fantasy on for size: You arrive at the crack of dawn; 1½ feet of new snow has fallen on a smooth, firm base; the only road leading to the resort is closed behind you due to avalanche. Do your skis matter even a little? Nope.

Any ski works great in this general kind of snow. Murderously unforgiving race skis work great. Meadow-waddling skis without steel edges work great. This is the kind of snow that a slimy sales rep means when he says that his ski "works great in powder." It's fine to put your best foot forward. In this case the rep's foot is remarkably close to his mouth.

Packed Powder

Packed powder is actually a problematic snow condition for many beginner to intermediate telemarkers. This is because the telemark turn can be initiated so strongly that it leads to overspin. Victims can solve their prob-

lem with a stiffer ski, but would be better advised to take a lesson and quiet their movements. I strongly advise learning the unmatched subtlety of the parallel turn on this snow surface.

Ice

This is the big backcountry baddy. It can bruise your hip. It can bruise your ego. It can spoil your whole day. Skis that are secure on ice have low camber, high torsional stiffness and a smooth, even flex. Of less recognized importance is the ski's width. A narrow ski (underfoot) can be edged much more positively and is quicker going from edge to edge, and one turn to the next. However, since a narrow ski gives up much of its ability to slide sideways over obstructions, a wider ski is advised for lumpy ice like suncups (Oh, gross!) That's the problem with a material world—if it's not one thing, it's another.

On ice, technique, tune and ski must be right before it can be enjoyed. Angulation must be high; hands must be low and in front. Arches should be supported, boots tight. Skis must be sharp and flat (heaven help you with a center-high ski). Speed must be kept to a level which the skis can handle. Once you have made friends with icy snow your softer snow abilities will increase dramatically.

One more thing: A parallel turn is far better suited to handling ice than a telemark because it has excellent sideways stability and comfortably allows more rapid-fire turn execution to blow off speed.

Rotting Corn Snow

Like some wines, this snow's gutsy entry onto the palate brings a keenly focused rush of cool, slightly impudent, raw earth flavors including Bordeauxish notes of sap, ripe pollen, and weedy dirt. Mid-palate, offputting herbal aromas and a firmly structured granular mouth-feel usher in the long and lingeringly inelegant finish—bringing flushness to the face and body. Often served over rocks, caution is always advised. So much caution, in fact, that a lawn chair and micro-brewery beer are at least as important as forgetting to bring your skis in the first place.

Seriously though, I find that skiing rotting corn snow is a matter of attitude. Try to imagine yourself as a speedboat. Now, making putt-putt noises with your lips, point your skis into a downward traverse and, (Are you still with me?) weighting them evenly, slowly stem your uphill ski outwards and sink into a telemark position. With practice, you can happily motor around in snow which reduces normal skiers to sputtering idiots.

Glop

Wet cement or mashed potato snow is nature's winter equivalent of an IRS audit. It could start innocently enough: a bright warm day after a storm, perhaps. But by midday, thawing snow dropping and dripping off trees could turn your once pleasant tour into a mired, "I once knew how to ski," parody from *The Wet Cement Zone*. Hesitate, over-react, let your hand drift back or allow your tele to stretch out too far, and you'll enjoy the marvelous, crowd-pleasing reenactment of the last flight of the Hindenberg. Don't get mad, get even—with a

soft- to medium-flexing ski that's widish.

Glop is best skied with a telemark turn since it offers excellent front-to-back stability and extremely strong turn initiation as the skier drops from high to low. One common problem is that skiers think of the turn as happening at some point in front of them. This leads them to step far forward into their turn, resulting in too-spread-out teles. Think of the turn as under you. Drop from high to low and split your tele only a little by moving one ski back and the other ski forward.

Death Cookies

Take a large helping of glop, perhaps an avalanche worth. Shred. Allow to stand and freeze overnight. The next morning you will have many servings of the infamous Death Cookies. Serving suggestion: wearing kneepads, beat well with heavy skis, add one part width and two parts medium flex to ski, sprinkle technique with lots of up/down motion. Or find another hill to ski.

Breakable Crust

The grandfather of all nasty snow. It varies widely and is unpredictable. One moment you're skittering atop an icy surface; the next, your center has broken through and your skis are stuck in icy grooves pointing straight down the hill. As your speed builds, you are launched back on top of the crust. At mach 2, a little-studied perturbation in the Earth's gravitational field (only found near breakable crust) causes the ground to weave drunkenly, occasionally even so far as to make the horizon spin and cause rashes on exposed parts of the victim's body. I sure hope someone reading this mentions it to the National Science Foundation or the Geological Survey.

I have a friend, Randy Osterhuber, who skis breakable crust leaving a perfect zig-zag track—on ultralight touring skis! Big help he is. I've heard told that randonnee gear ups the chances of survival. But tele skiers can't really expect any ski to be particularly helpful. I've had some success with very wide, medium-flexing skis with massive sidecut; skiing aggressively as if I didn't mind an impromptu zesty snack. But clearly my zig-zagging friend is on to something; being a better skier counts for a lot.

Moguls

Are moguls stupid, or what? Never mind. They are certainly challenging and that's enough to make a lot of skiers want to ski them. And most moguls can be skied well. (Except those horrible, steep, small, icy ones. And maybe a few other ones too. Hey, this is supposed to be a challenge, not a massacre. Backcountry skills learned from moguls include a better feel for terrain (handy in a white-out), more disciplined hand placement (a must for steep slopes) and a healthy dose of a sense of achievement (good on its own). Good for moguls is any quick-turning, secure-edging backcountry ski (preferably not narrow), which is normally skied in a length 5 to 10cm shorter than nordic and which does not have a metal layer in its construction. Take a "metal" ski into the bumps and you will bend it. "Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life." (Humphrey Bogart, *Casablanca*. Note that *Casablanca* means "white house"—clearly a ski-metaphor movie.)

Karhu XCD Supreme size 203 6 lbs. 12 oz.

Center width: 55mm. Frontcut: 13mm. Rearcut: 5mm.

A 207 was unavailable for testing (sold out). The Supreme is a very soft ski with cracked steel edges and high torsional rigidity. It closely resembles the old Phoenix Wilderness, though it is stiffer. Being such a soft ski, it's not ideal for steep terrain, because it doesn't form much of a platform to check and rebound off of. Likewise, in rotting snow its center sinks and becomes caught a bit earlier in the day than other skis. Except on wildly irregular ice (like suncups) the Supreme is very forgiving, quick to initiate and follows through well. Because of its high torsional stiffness, it skis smooth ice surprisingly well. It would make an excellent ski to learn on and will find the particular favor of those trying to master glop. (Northwesterners take note.)

All boot categories work OK; groups B & C recommended. Sizes available: 193, 198, 203, 207, 212

Merrell Kevlar Extra size 210 5 lbs. 14.5 oz.

Center width: 56mm. Frontcut: 8mm. Rearcut: 4.5mm.

The Austrians would say this ski has *zuck* (pronounce zuke). The closest English work is zip (as in zippy, not as in zero). Light, quick, responsive and with a good bite on ice, this ski is a perfect remake of the venerable Karhu XCD Comp. Response is this ski's middle name, so it's not surprising that it often feels nervous. Nevertheless, from fanny wiggling *wedelns* to relax-o-mark cruiser turns, the Ultra follows your lead in any kind of snow. Easterners especially will appreciate its quickness during obstacle-avoidance maneuvers.

Note: this ski is very heat sensitive. It should be waxed with minimal heat so the bases won't go high in the center. All boot categories work OK; groups B & C recommended. Cost: \$232. Sizes available: 190, 200, 205, 210

cont. from p. 3

Fischer GTS size 205 6 lbs. 12 oz.

Center width: 61.5mm. Frontcut: 16mm. Rearcut: 7.5mm.

The GTS is a trapezoidal cross-sectioned, metal-topped, stiffish-flexing ski. It is damp and fairly light for its flotation. The tip design has been changed from the prototypes tested in this review, making the size 200 a much more normal choice for an average adult male.

With my test boots and bindings, the GTS 205 was a lot like the old Karhu Extremes—stable with a natural tendency toward long, swooping arcs. As usual, on nice, powdery snow, the GTS could be remarkably quick, but in resistive snow (Colorado was lucky enough to get some glop last spring.) the GTS was easily mired. Packed spring runs revealed the GTS to be somewhat slow to disengage from turns, making it catchy. All told, I don't think that the 205 GTS with my boot-and-binding combination offers the versatility that I want in a backcountry ski. Again, a pair of 200's might have done the trick, especially with their new tip.

Metal topsheet—telebumping not a good idea. Boot Group D recommended. Trapezoidal cross-section. Cost: \$249. Sizes available: 190, 200, 205, 210

Kazama Outback TM size 205 6 lbs. 7 oz.

Center width: 59mm. Frontcut: 14mm. Rearcut: 6mm.

Finally Kazama has created a backcountry ski I can get behind (or rather, on top of—wait a minute, that didn't sound right). Despite its dull graphics, the Outback TM (trademark?) consistently performs beautifully in all snow conditions. It is stable yet flies around turns, even in wet cement. It handles well at any turning tempo—from tight *wedeln* to figure-11's. On icy snow, the Outback TM skis with excellent bite and stability. Mogul fans will appreciate that it holds well, maneuvers quickly and is exceptionally durable (based on Kazama's long record of bomb-proof skis). All this, and the sweet spot seems fairly long.

Boot group B OK; C recommended. Cost: \$255. Sizes available: 185, 195, 205

Chouinard/Tua Toute Neige (aka Trout Negligees)

size 205 6 lbs. 14 oz.

Center width: 60.5mm. Frontcut: 13mm. Rearcut: 4mm.

Wide and of medium stiffness, the "Trout" is a very enjoyable, capable and forgiving fish. It is damp and loves to swim in glop. Choppy surf is no problem; it jumps for joy in the piles of slush which make most other skis gasp for air. On ice, it's a bit slippery but can be controlled without a net. Only available without scales (Thank Poseidon!) so you have to slime them yourself (with wax, silly). "Trout Negligees"—the fins of winter.

No no no moguls. Dis fish be metal, mon. Trapezoidal cross-section helps edge-filing and makes it hard to hold in a ski vise. Boot group B OK; C recommended. Cost: \$278. Sizes available: 185, 195, 200, 205, 210

Kneissl Phantom size 210 6 lbs. 8 oz.

Center width: 55mm. Frontcut: 11mm. Rearcut: 5.5mm.

I think Ricardo Montalban should do a commercial for this ski: "The luxurious Nice-all Faant-tom has a re-markably smooth and quiet ride..." It is one of the longer skis for its stated size, measuring about an inch (2.5cm) longer than a Karhu (What would Freud say?) The Phantom has an even, stiffish flex and a calm personality. It prefers medium- and long-radius turns since it is easily snagged by imperfect snow in small, quick turns. Nevertheless, it willingly initiates and elastically holds turns, giving it enviable all-snow performance.

Sintered base. All boot categories work OK; groups B & C recommended. Cost: NA. Sizes available: 190, 200, 205, 210, 215

Recommendations for boots are categorized based on sole stiffness and ankle support as follows:

Group A—"traditional" touring/telemark boots

Asolo Snowfield II, Merrell XCD Lace and Telemark II

Group B—One notch up

Asolo Snowpine and Summit, Merrell Legend and Double

Group C—Performance down-skiing with reasonable touring

Asolo Extreme, Merrell Ultra

Group D—The fringe. All downhill priorities. Not recommended for backcountry (though some do use them once they're quite broken in).

Asolo Extreme Pro, Merrell Super Comp

The Skier's Ten Commandments

Carry thy own skis and thy knapsack that thy friends shall not avoid thee, and that thy days shall be long on the ski trips that thou makest.

Thou shalt not dither.

Thou shalt not commit sitzmarks. ("Sitzmarks are made by fools like me, but only fritsch can miss a tree.")

Thou shalt not swipe thy neighbor's ski wax.

Thou shalt not bear false witness of thy downhill runs, nor thy jump turns, nor thy telemarks.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's sealskins, nor thy neighbor's agility, nor his stem-christiania, nor his closed-christiania, nor his open-christiania, nor any other christiania which is thy neighbor's.

Thou shalt have no other sports before skiing.

Thou shalt not take with thee any toboggans, nor any other means of transportation from the heavens above to the earth beneath.

Remember the winter time and keep it wholly; in the summer thou shalt labor and do all thy work, but the winter is the season of the ski.

In winter evenings, thou shalt not fritter away thy time with backgammon, nor tiddley winks, nor jigsaw puzzles, but in the sweat of thy brow thou shalt polish and wax thy skis, for in ten hours thou shalt labor and climb up the hill and in ten minutes shalt be down again. (Oh yeah!)

-the Yosemite Winter Club

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