

SKI MOUNTAINEER WEBSITES

The internet is a great source of information for ski mountaineers: equipment, trips, techniques, avalanche information, snow levels, snow pack info. Here is Mark Goebel's updated list of ski mountaineer related websites

Gear Suppliers:

www.mammothgear.com

Mammoth Mountaineering Supply is located on Main St., Mammoth Lakes, Ca. Nearest complete line of backcountry gear, and tele & AT rentals to SoCal.

www.rei.com - bc ski gear is available online.

www.sierratradingpost.com - discounted clothing and gear. Many bargains.

www.norpine.com - has a store in San Diego. Mostly xc & tele, but some AT.

www.mountaingear.com - carries a complete line of bc gear & clothing.

www.BlackDiamondEquipment.com - full line of bc ski and climbing gear.

www.marmotmountain.com - Marmot Mtn. Works - complete line of bc gear & clothing.

www.telemarkski.com - both tele and AT gear. Sells demo skis and boots.

www.backcountry.com - full line of gear. Frequent sales.

www.bentgate.net - Bent Gate Mountaineering. Online catalog. Full line of bc gear.

www.thebackcountry.net - Lake Tahoe store. Full line of bc gear. Tahoe conditions and routes.

www.campmor.com - bargains on outdoor clothing and camping gear.

www.bndskigear.com - ski crampons for AT and tele skis.

www.climbingskinsdirect.com - online source for climbing skins at lower cost.

www.gearx.com - full line of gear, many sale items.

www.randogear.com - AT ski gear and accessories.

www.yoursole.com - low cost, semi-custom footbeds.

www.tognar.com - tools for ski tuning, wax, and much more.

www.usoutdoor.com - complete line of outdoor gear.

www.telemark-pyrenees.com - located in Spain, carries everything for the bc skier or mountaineer.

Information Sources:

www.wildsnow.com - Lou Dawson, guidebook author and 1st to ski the CO 14teeners. Loads of bc info, news, and everything you need to know about the Dynafit AT binding.

www.telemarktips.com - bc news, videos, forums for bc related discussions, trip reports, gear sales & reviews. <http://www.backcountrymagazine.com/> Couloir Forums- bc info, and discussions on gear, trip reports, gear sales, etc.

<http://pweb.jps.net/~prichins/>

backcountry_resource_center.htm -

Paul Richins, Jr., bc guidebook author & skier. Great source for info about the bc & many trip reports.

www.calskilibrary.com - Ingrid P. Wickins, author of "Pray for Snow, The History of Skiing in Southern California."

APRIL 15th MEETING NEWS...

Be sure to attend the April SMS Meeting. Valerie Mendenhall will be reading and commenting on her book **Woman on the Rocks: the mountaineering letters of Ruth Mendenhall**. This is a chance to get a unique personal glimpse into the history of the SMS and Southern California skiing.

www.sierradescents.com - reports on bc ski descents, and gear reviews.

www.mammothsnowman.com - video reports on Mammoth Mtn ski conditions.

<http://patrol.mammothmountain.com/> - Mammoth Mtn weather, snowpack, & avalanche info.

www.sgwa.org - San Gorgonio Wilderness Assoc. Check Bulletin Board for reports on conditions.

www.mtsanjacinto.info/ - conditions on Mt. San Jacinto.

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NEXT ISSUE

The April issue deadline is April 10, 2008. All letters, photos, slides, or articles should be sent to Mugelnoos editor, John Anderson, 21717 Evalyn Avenue, Torrance, CA 90503. Materials can be sent by IBM disc or e-mailed to jay-deeay@yahoo.com. Electronic photos and articles are preferred and appreciated.

MEETINGS

3rd Tuesday each month – November through May (except December) 7:30 PM, Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium 4730 Crystal Springs Drive, Los Angeles, CA. Newcomers welcome!

SMS WEB PAGE

The link is: <http://angeles.sierraclub.org/skimt/>
Check out the web page for the latest SMS news

SMS Member Gear For Sale

Mens lightweight three buckle Dynafit TLT 700 AT boots with thermofoam liners (molded twice). 291mm shell, mondo point 25, fits size 7 to 8.5 +/- . Good condition for \$100 obo, jim_garvey@sbcglobal.net or call 310-809-0792.

Mens Lowa Structura GTX AT boots, fits 10.5 wide high volume foot. \$50. Volkl 178cm Vertigo GT1 skis w/Silveretta bindings, \$50. Great \$100 package for someone who wants to get into Randonee. John Anderson, jaydeeay@yahoo.com or 310-503-2542.

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The Mugelnoos is a newsletter published by and for the Ski Mountaineers Section of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter since 1938. Send subscriptions and address changes to: Pat Holleman, 1638 6th Street, Manhattan Beach, CA. 90266 \$15 per year payable to "SMS." Due in October. Subscription payments are not tax deductible as charitable contributions.

Calendar of Events

All trips sponsored Ski Mountaineers unless otherwise indicated.

Mar 14-16 Fri-Sun Natural Science

O: Winter Ecology Workshop at June Lake: Join us for two days of xc skiing, tracking, and naturalizing in the spectacular Mammoth-June Lake area. Intermediate ski touring ability required. This trip satisfies the Natural Science requirement for the I-rating. Fee of \$60 includes naturalist instruction, breakfasts and trail lunches, and accommodation at local Sierra Club members' homes on Fri and Sat night. Reserve a place by Mar 1st, by sending sase and \$60 check payable to Sierra Club Natural Science Section to leaders Ginny and Jim Heringer.

Mar 14-17 Fri-Mon Private

Mt. Lyell Base Camp. Moderate tour to Mt. Lyell base camp with option to peak bag or enjoy close by terrain. Leader: Alvin Walter. Co-leader needed.

Mar 18 Tues Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

March 22 Sat Private

Mt. Galena. Climb and ski north facing slopes off Galena's west ridge. Long, steep and challenging. Leader: Alvin Walter. Co-leader needed.

Apr 4-5 Ski Mountaineers

TI: Onion Valley Ski Tour. Meet Saturday Morning for weekend ski at Onion Valley on Sierra Eastside. Camp at Upper Gray and ski Kearsarge and Sardine Canyon. Intermediate and above, climbing skins, metal edge skis, beacon, shovel, etc. Ldr:Tom Marsh, Co-ldr: Randy Lamm

April 5-6 Sat-Sun Private

Mt. Kidd. Climb and ski the chutes of Mt. Kidd with a spectacular view of the Palisades just up from Big Pine and Glacier Lodge. Leader: Alvin Walter. Co-leader needed.

April 12-13 Sat-Sun Private

Mt. Goode and Mt. Johnston. Ski and climb Mt. Goode and Mt. Johnston out of South Lake as day trips. Leader: Alvin Walter. Co-leader needed.

Apr 15 Tues Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

April 26-26 Sat-Sun Private

Mt. Gibbs and the Negatives. Ski and climb Mt. Gibbs and the Negatives as day trips. Leader: Alvin Walter. Co-leader needed.

Apr 25-27 Fri-Sun Ski Mountaineers

TI: Rock Creek Introductory Ski Tour: Car camp, ski slopes of beautiful Little Lakes Valley and surrounding area. Intro

SMS day tours aimed at intermediate or better skiers with some backcountry experience. Metal-edged skis & skins required. Send experience, contact, rid share info to Ldr: Mike Seiffert. Co-Ldr: Lorene Samoska

Apr 26-30 Sat-Wed Ski Mountaineers

TI: North Lake Loop Tour: Classic ski touring starting at North Lake, Paiute Pass, Alpine Col., Lamarck Col. Layover in Evolution Basin. Experience skiing with pack, climbing skins, metal edge skis, beacon, shovel, etc. Ldr: Tom Marsh, Co-Ldrs Randy Lamm, Reiner Stenzel

May 3-4 Sat-Sun Ski Mountaineers

TI: San Joaquin Mtn (11,600'): A reliable springtime favorite with great ski terrain and Sierra views. Sat climb and ski peak, just west of June Lk., via Fern Lk., 7 mi rt, 4320' gain. Sat night car camp. Sun we will ski (Esha Cyn, Tioga Pass, or Blue Couloir) wherever the snow is best. Requires strong intermediate or better bc skiing ability. Email experience, phone, & ride share info to Ldr: Mark Goebel. Asst: Randy Lamm

May 20 Tues Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

**LEADERSHIP TRAINING CLASS COMING UP
SMS NEEDS MORE LEADERS...SIGN UP NOW
APRIL 12, 2008**

Interested in becoming an outings leader for the Club?

Angeles Chapter is home to one of the largest outings programs on the planet – thousands of trips ranging from beach barbecues to mountaineering expeditions.

You can take the first step toward becoming a leader by attending a class offered by the chapter Leadership Training Committee on Saturday, April 12.

The class covers all the basics of leadership. Experienced leaders will tell you how to plan a trip, prevent problems on the trail and make sure that everyone – including you – has a great time. They'll also explain good conservation and safety practices. And they'll give you tips for getting your "O" rating quickly and then, if you choose, pursuing more advanced ratings.

The all-day class at the Griffith Park Ranger Station costs \$25. The application is on page 73 of the Angeles Chapter Schedule #306 and page 77 of Schedule #307. It's also online at angeles.sierraclub.org/ltc.

Mail the application and check, payable to Sierra Club, to Steve Botan, LTC Registrar, 18816 Thornwood Circle, Huntington Beach 92646. You also can reach Botan by phone (714-963-0151) or e-mail (sbotan@pacbell.net).

Applications and checks are due March 31.

Scholarships are available for those in financial need. Apply to LTC Chair Tina Bowman (tina@bowmandesigngroup.com).

THE DRAGON'S HEAD

Editor's note: Alvin Walter's ski adventures are the current best example of traditional ski mountaineering: new routes on difficult peaks and skiing down. The Dragon's Head is right here in our back yard, part of the San Gorgonio Massif. In this story Alvin and Scott run into all the conditions that make our sport such a challenge and such a dreamy experience: steep routes, variable snow conditions, rock fall, encountering waterfalls on descents, wild

In an ongoing quest to ski some of the less well known destinations in Southern California via some of the less well-traveled routes, I asked Scott Bornheimer to join me in this attempt to bag the Dragon's Head, located approximately one air mile south of Old Gray Back in the San Gorgonio Wilderness that is part of the San Bernardino Mountains.

We carpoled up to the Vivian Creek trailhead at 5,900 feet and were impressed by the deep snow base that was showing along side the road. The parking area was surrounded by at least 2 feet of snow. Despite that, we started out by securing our skis on our packs in anticipation of the 1000' vertical hike up the dry, south-facing Vivian Creek trail. Within less than a quarter mile at the point where the trail crosses the Mill Creek drainage, we were impressed by the relatively smooth and gently sloping terrain that is normally a minefield of large boulders 2' to 4' in diameter.

Under these special new circumstances and knowing that there was a point upstream called Mill Creek Jump-off which suggested there was a headwall, we decided to risk taking this more direct exploratory route figuring that we would find a way over or around it. Skinning up to the headwall offered an excellent perspective of a number of north-facing ski lines to be used in the future that were coming off the East/West ridge leading up to Galena Peak.

On the way, there were a few minor river crossings with only weak snow bridges that were a little threat compared to the bowling alley of constantly falling rocks

that we had to go through to get on the steeper pitches of the jump-off. In early to mid-morning when the sun starts to warm up the high upper edges of the valley snow pack, the frozen bonds that were holding the eroding earthen cobblestone walls in place begin to weaken and release a steady rock fall that had created many

sharp divots in the hard pack and a colorful gem mosaic that accumulated in the central drainage. Moving quickly and keeping a sharp eye out for any fast-flying rocks coming our way was the highest safety priority in this section of the valley.



Alvin Walter on Dragon's Head. Mt. San Jacinto in the background

Once on the icy steeper pitches of the headwall, the rock fall diminished and areas of slab ice became an issue as I was unable to kick any toe holds. Stopping to put on

crampons at a lower angle was not an option due to the rock fall and now, at this steeper angle while on thin ice, the crampons still stored in my pack remained a non-option. Scott had taken a line up a slightly more sun-exposed aspect and was able to kick in toe holds that gave me another option -- down climb about 30 feet and traverse to his line where I could penetrate the wind pack with my self arrest poles and continue up then over the highest edge of the jump-off where we were able to stop for a break.

At this point, we started skinning across some shrubs that barely protruded out of the snow. We continued traversing using switchbacks up some open drainages in a mature pinyon tree forest that allowed us to establish a

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rhythm that set my mind free to thoroughly enjoy the wilderness setting we had immersed ourselves in. After the two drainages, I was thinking that it was pretty much straight up, until we wrapped around to a more north-facing aspect and saw a much steeper and deeper drainage that we would have to drop down into. At this time of year -- mid winter -- the snow does not uniformly soften up and we had to proceed cautiously across an



Scott looking good on "The Dragon's Tail."

Photo Alvin Walters

east-facing, exposed, icy section before we could reach the bottom southwest-facing flanks of the Dragon's Head. The route was clear from here and after many switchbacks through variable snow conditions, wind-sculpted trees and rock outcrops -- we reached the top at 10,866 feet!

The effort up was very worth it. There were spectacular views to the west, where we could see San Clemente and Santa Catalina Islands through remarkably clear air over Riverside and Los Angeles -- a rare atmospheric treat. To the southwest was Mt. San Jacinto with its prominent clean snowlines down into Snow Creek that I have climbed and skied in previous adventures. And to the east were Bighorn, Josh's Tarn, and one of the steepest and most complex couloirs right at my feet that would challenge the most extreme of extreme skiers. Old Greyback and Jepson Peaks were immediately north of us.

After savoring our location and the perfect weather for

this magnificent day, at 4:00 p.m., it was time to start heading down. The south-facing slope had spent the day ripening in the sun and it was time for us to harvest it. I started linking some turns in and around some sturdy, wind-weathered pinyon and cedar trees near the top on a solid snow base on the Dragon's south-facing tail in perfectly ripened spring-like corn snow that put me in a very euphoric state. Scott followed then proceeded ahead in his faster parallel beat that switched to fast arcing turns that fluidly carved around the lengthening late afternoon shadows cast by the sparingly placed individual conifers of this mature and healthy forest.

We traded this sequence of initiating first tracks between us for at least the first 2,000 vertical feet into narrowing couloirs that bent around blind corners to a point where I heard Scott saying something in an unusually excited voice when he was just out of sight below me. I continued down to where I could see Scott pointing in the direction of what looked like post-holes across a steep, open pitch of the snow and shouting "Bear!" It didn't quite register on me just what had happened, but Scott clarified it when he said he almost ran into about a 200 pound black bear that he looked square in the eye before it ambled off into another parallel Couloir before I could get a look at it. What a rare treat it was to inadvertently come so close to our big Southern California wildlife while skiing in mid-winter in our local mountains.

We continued down our narrowing chute to a point where it suddenly dropped off at a waterfall. Fortunately, there was a way to down-climb around the side of it and continue lower. There was a point at least another 100 feet below in the narrowing canyon that looked like the top of another waterfall. We decided to take a slightly uphill traverse across an icy pitch to avoid skiing below the east side of the headwall. The snow was getting hard and icy on the north and east aspects we were traversing around and now that the sun was about to set we were thinking about the snow conditions in that headwall.

The traverse down the rest of the way to the top of the headwall through some brushy terrain went slow and now the sun had just set. Fortunately the headwall was like a big parabolic solar collector oriented to catch the day's last rays of the sun and when I skied up on the hard, east-facing edge and reached over the face to test the snow condition -- I was delighted. The weather had been perfect all day and now with no chilling wind the snow was still excellent corn.

We entered through a horizontal break between the rocks at the top of the headwall and reaped a bounty of fun spring-like corn condition turns until we got to that rock-fall section where we stayed high and straight-lined

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<http://sangabrielmnts.myfreeforum.org/index.php> - discussion board for San Gabriel Mtns.

www.mt-whitney.info/ - discussion board for Mt. Whitney, Sierra, SoCal mtns. & beyond.

<http://www.shopbaldy.com/> - Mt. Baldy Ski Area site includes current temperature and wind conditions.

www.weatherunderground.com - great source for weather reports.

<http://www.accuweather.com/news-blogs.asp?partner=netweather&blog=yaeager> - west coast weather forecasting.

www.tahoebackcountry.net/index.htm - Lake Tahoe bc information and trip reports.

<http://angeles.sierraclub.org/skimt/> - website for the Ski Mountaineers Section

www.395.com - many links to info on Eastern Sierra campgrounds, lodging, wilderness permits, plus much more.

www.dot.ca.gov/hq/roadinfo/ - California highway information

www.mammothnordic.com - crosscountry ski trail info. for Mammoth Lakes.

<http://cdec.water.ca.gov/snow/current/snow/> - temperature, rain, and snowfall data for many California bc locations.

<http://sierrafire.cr.usgs.gov/swfrs/Pages/WebCam.html> - webcams in the Sierra, great for viewing weather and snowpack.

Backcountry Ski Huts:

<http://angeles.sierraclub.org/lodges/sanantonioskihut.htm> - San Antonio Ski Hut.

<http://www.sequoiahhistory.org/pearlake/pearlake.htm> - Pear Lake Ski Hut

www.ostranderhut.com - Ostrander Ski Hut

Avalanche Information:

www.esavalanche.org/ - Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center: Condition reports for Eastern Sierra.

www.avalanche.org/~uac/encyclopedia/index.htm - avalanche terminology & definitions.

<http://beaconreviews.com/transceivers/index.htm> - independent reviews of avalanche beacons.

<http://access.jibc.bc.ca/avalancheFirstResponse/index.htm> - online avalanche avoidance training.

<http://www.avalanche-center.org/> - more avalanche safety info., & links to reports on other areas.

www.bcaccess.com - supplier of safety gear & instruction on use of beacons, probes, & shoveling.

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through to minimize our exposure. About a quarter mile down the drainage we heard a helicopter and looked up to see that it was for searches and rescues. The pilot or copilot must have caught our movement and made one big circular flight around us as I'm sure they were wondering who or why anyone would be up this creek at this time of day. The only way Scott or I knew how to tell them we were OK was to continue skiing, which we did and they apparently got the message and flew off.

The snow began to firm at this point and skiing down the gently rolling moguls was a total pleasure until the light totally faded. We stopped momentarily to break out our headlamps and with our limited but regained visibility enjoyed a pleasurable ski all the way back to my truck.

The climbing and skiing day ended much as it started with high spirits and broad smiles except that we now had a new story of a great wilderness experience to share with our friends.

ALVIN WALTER

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was the victims' high level of familiarity with the area in which they were skiing. They had skied Sawmill Canyon on numerous occasions for years and had never experienced conditions in the area exactly like this before. This is worth repeating, as it is perhaps the single most deadly scenario which experts can face: they were on their home turf facing a set of conditions *that lay outside their knowledge base*.

In addition to familiarity with the area, topography itself must also be considered a factor. Viewing Jeff's photos above, it's easy to see how this relatively benign, treed-hillside might not appear threatening (it certainly would not have automatically made *my* hair stand up). The skiers may have believed they were traveling avalanche-safe terrain.

Still, it remains difficult to accept that experienced skiers would knowingly proceed in the face of such considerable signs of danger. This is a recurring theme in avalanche incidents that demands our attention. I must admit, my own thinking on this subject is evolving. It would be easy to dismiss these events as the natural result of human folly, but if that is so, it is the sort of folly we are all uniquely vulnerable to, however impressive our level of experience or judgment.

In confronting avalanche hazard, it is clearly not enough to look inside the snowpack. We must also look inside

MOUNTAIN HIGH SKI AREA AVALANCHES

Andrew Lewicky's blog www.sierradescents.com had this post from Andrew on March 12, 2008. Thanks to Mark Goebel for bringing it to Mugelnoos' attention. Please visit 'Andrews website for links to the crown profile and photos of the avalanche areas.

This morning, I got the opportunity to speak with Jeff Pierce, who was the Site Commander for two of the three avalanches that took place in the vicinity of Mountain High ski area on 25 January 2008 in the San Gabriel Mountains. Jeff was also kind enough to share photos of the scene.

Jeff is Southern California's Avalanche Adviser for local resorts and government agencies, and has over 20 years of experience in the field. In addition to participating in the rescue and recovery operation, Jeff also recorded observations of two of the slides, including crown profiles.

Jeff's observations answer a number of questions I had regarding these avalanches—and they also raise a disturbing echo with a theme I discussed with Amber Seyler a few weeks ago.

Let's start by looking at the snowpack prior to the arrival of the big storm. Thanks to a period of warm weather, a hard melt-freeze crust formed above approximately one to two feet of unconsolidated winter snow, of which Jeff observed 8-12" was heavily faceted, with crystals in the one to two millimeter diameter range. Jeff was concerned that heavy snowfall on top of this snowpack could potentially collapse the faceted layer or not bond well to the existing crust layer, leading to failures, and he expressed his concern to local ski area personnel prior to the storm's arrival. Given the forecasts of imminent heavy snow, he expected an avalanche cycle in the San Gabriel Mountains—though principally in the Mount Baldy-Mount Waterman region.

When the storm did arrive, it arrived cold, which is somewhat atypical for Southern California storms, and which raises bonding concerns, as cold snow would be less likely to bond securely with the snowpack's icy melt-freeze surface crust.

The storm also featured considerable Orographic Lifting, which meant that the initial snow fell as 2-3cm of graupe. On top of this fell 50cm of more typical, dense Southern California snow.

Following the avalanches, which occurred on Friday, Jeff arrived with a control team on Saturday to examine the scene. The team intended to ski cut Sawmill Canyon's walls to trigger any remaining instability, however, they observed such severe remaining avalanche

hazard that they determined it was unsafe to proceed without clearing the area first with explosives (which were not available). Fortunately, the east ridge, which the control team had chosen as a safe route, descended directly to the third accident site, allowing them to perform the final recovery.

Jeff observed numerous naturally-triggered slides. In his words, they were "everywhere" on north, northeast, and northwest aspects. Jeff attempted to isolate a representative column for compression analysis, and recorded a value of "CTV Q1 x 3 @ 50cm", meaning the column failed during isolation—the weakest possible result—and failed with the cleanest possible shear interface. In other words, avalanche danger was High on all N, NE, and NW facing slopes. This was a hair-trigger snowpack: a heavy layer of dense snow sitting atop ball bearings sitting atop a hard, icy crust. Jeff observed abundant evidence of this instability, including seeing shooting cracks on upper ridges and hearing whoomphs as the snowpack collapsed. Based on his conversations with survivors of the slides, it is evident that the victims saw similar evidence of instability at the time they were skiing.

Jeff describes one of the slides as featuring perhaps the worst terrain trap he'd ever seen: a relatively broad, loaded area that fed into an extremely narrow gully. In fact, one of the fatal slides dropped perhaps only 60 vertical feet, yet buried the victim some 9-11 feet deep. At this depth of burial, Jeff notes that the skier's partners had no possibility of digging him out in time to prevent asphyxiation.

The slope angle at the crown was 36 to 37°—within a point of the magic number for slab avalanches: 38°. The slide in Government Canyon was larger, with a 3-4 foot crown, and a run of some 200 yards that dropped 1000 vertical feet—big enough to snap mature trees. In speaking to Jeff, it was evident that he was greatly disturbed that a number of highly experienced backcountry skiers chose to ski the backcountry at a time when evidence of hazardous instability was so overwhelming. Jeff indicated he spoke to other avalanche professionals about this, noting we have all fallen victim to the lure of powder and sometimes that clouds our judgment.

In Jeff's opinion, the most salient contributing factor

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PRIVATE TRIP REPORTS: SEND 'EM IN

"Back in the day" SMS group trips were the norm and massively well attended. Today, with inexpensive and extensive transportation and probably tighter time schedules, a lot of our backcountry skiing is done on private trips. If you take an interesting private trip, let Mugelnoos know about it. It's not much of an effort these days to type it up on the computer and email it and some digital pictures to me. We all need the beta.

FUTURE MUGELNOOS ISSUES

- *More Day Trippers (day tours)*
- *Book reviews*
- *General Mountain Stuff*
- *Backcountry Skiing Website update*

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