

A photograph of two skiers on a snowy mountain slope. The skier in the foreground is wearing a dark jacket and pants, with a red backpack. The skier in the background is wearing a dark jacket and pants, with a yellow hat. The background features jagged, snow-covered mountain peaks under a clear blue sky.

Backcountry Skiing (and Snowboarding)

Spencer Gray, et al.

2-18-09

What's the difference between BC and XC skiing?

- They overlap
 - Gear, Technique, Terrain
 - Definition of BC: depends on who you ask
- Anything off piste (resort trails)
- Light touring
 - Telemark/Randonnée
 - Snowboarding outside of resorts
 - Alpine skiing outside of resorts

Light Touring

- Mix of up and down on rolling terrain
- Emphasis on being out in the wilderness; not cranking turns in deep powder
- Similar to XC skiing in equipment and technique



Little Belts, Montana, Spencer Gray

Telemark/Randonnée/Splitboard

- Downhill emphasis
- But: “earn your turns”
- Special equipment to climb slopes:
 - Wax
 - Skins
 - Crampons



Yellowstone backcountry, Spencer Gray

Alpine skiing and Snowboarding

- Ordinary alpine skiing and snowboarding equipment can be used in the backcountry, but:
 - It's heavy
 - It's tough to walk in ski boots
 - Doesn't work on flat and uphill terrain



Light Touring

- Skis similar to XC skis
 - Metal edges
 - Narrow to medium width
 - Straight or with side cut
 - Waxless: fish scales
 - Double camber or “camber and a half”

Light Touring

- Boots similar to XC boots
 - NNN-BC system
 - Reinforced plastic cuff
 - Reinforced sole
 - Insulated
- Bindings similar to XC bindings
 - NNN-BC system



Telemark

- Skis are (now) nearly the same as alpine skis
 - Single Camber
 - Carving side cut
 - Wide for flotation
 - Lighter



Telemark

- Beefy boots
 - Heavy leather or plastic: trade-offs
 - Rigid cuff
 - 75mm NN (3-pin)
 - Heel groove: cables/crampons
 - Bellows and duckbill



Telemark

- Wide variety of bindings
 - Cables
 - Strap/Plate
 - 3-pin
 - Combination of the above



Randonnée/Alpine Touring

- Skis are same as alpine skis
- Boots similar to alpine boots except better for walking:
 - Rocker built into sole
 - Rubber sole
 - Hinged cuff
- Bindings pivot at toe on the way up but lock heel for the way down



BC Alpine Skiing/Snowboarding

- Use the same equipment as you would at a ski area
- Alpine Trekkers
- Splitboard is cut in half lengthwise
 - Use like skis on the way up
 - Use like conventional snowboard on the way down



Poles

- Single shaft vs collapsible



How do I get up?

- Skins
 - Synthetic hairs or plastic grooves glide forward but grip in reverse
 - Stick to bottoms of skis with glue (good) or straps on (not so good)
 - Use with Telemark, AT, or Splitboards



How do I get up?

- Snowshoes
 - Use with snowboards or alpine skis
 - Make sure that snowshoes fit onto snowboard boots
 - Bring other boots for the way up if you're on alpine skis



What if it gets steep/icy?

- Yes, there are “ski crampons”



How do I get down?

How do I get down?



- Good question

How do I get down?



- Good question



Falling is an art



BC ski gear is expensive

(And don't forget your avy gear)...

So be resourceful!



Little Belts, Montana, Spencer Gray

Remember how they used to do it



No snow? No problem.



Rocky Mountain Front, Montana, Spencer Gray

Resources

- Instruction books:
 - The Mountaineers Books: BC Skiing
 - Free-Heel Skiing by Paul Parker
 - Allen and Mike's Really Cool BC Ski Book
- Guidebooks:
 - David Goodman's two AMC BC Ski books
 - Wild Snow by Louis Dawson; etc
- Journals: <http://www.backcountrymagazine.com/>
- Online:
 - <http://www.wildsnow.com/>
 - <http://www.tetonat.com/>
 - <http://www.skimountaineer.com/>
 - <http://www.telemarktips.com/>
 - <http://www.math.utah.edu/~eyre/rsbfaq/> (older)
- Ski festivals
 - Adirondack BC Ski Festival: March 7-8, 2009:
<http://www.mountaineer.com/skifest/index.htm>