

From Claire Hillier

DEATH BE NOT PROUD

The Beginner's Guide to Cross-Country Skiing

CHAPTER 1 - Choosing and Caring for Your Skis

When selecting a pair of skis, be sure to ask your salesman for the fastest skis he has. Skiing slowly is no fun. Resist the urge to listen to advice on how to slow down or stop, since this information may be stored by your subconscious and surface when you least need it, like during a major downhill ski. Whenever possible, immerse your skis in water so that they will freeze. Ice helps to make your skis fast. If this is not sufficient, repeated applications of silicone may improve your speed. Be sure to hold your skis in front of your face while one of your ski partners sprays them.

CHAPTER 2 - Choosing Your Ski Partners

Close your eyes and try to imagine the strangest people you possibly can. Do you know someone who would ski in the rain? At night? Down a 90-degree slope? These are the people in your target group. Will they let you ski with them? These people are looking for novice skiers like mosquitoes are looking for blood. Watch the gleam in their eyes as you innocently lock your boots onto your skis for the first time. It is important to choose your ski partners wisely, since these folks will be guiding you through your first cross-country ski experiences. Your ski partners will know just where to find all of the comfortable,

relaxing trails suitable for a beginner; however, they will undoubtedly avoid these trails with a vengeance.

Make sure that at least one of your ski partners has a large dog who will accompany you on your ski. A good ski dog will be able to circle you repeatedly at an impressive rate of speed while you are attempting to remain in an upright position. If at all possible, find a dog who is not afraid to jump up and down on your skis.

CHAPTER 3 - Proper Weather Conditions

As soon as you have bought your skis and found suitable ski partners, begin to pray for bad weather. Insult people who mention that Spring is their favorite time of year. Laugh at old people who are afraid of ice and snow. Sneer when your friends speak longingly of warm summer days and sunshine.

With their impressive experience, your ski partners will be able to help you choose the proper weather for your ski. Since fairly warm, sunny days tend to make cross-country skiing too easy, you will want to utilize those days for less important tasks, such as housecleaning and grocery shopping. Wait until it rains. Rainfall during extremely cold weather will help to ice up the trail and your skis, which helps you to ski fast. With luck, your ski partners will choose a trail with an elevation sufficient to allow the rain to turn into a blizzard. Skiing when you can't see is more fun.

Some days will be so cold that no one in his right mind would cross-country ski. This is a real plus, since you won't have to worry about other people crowding the trails. Call your

ski partners immediately to schedule your outing. Choose long trails so that you will be able to get really cold. Ask each other why no one else seems to be out skiing. Laugh at how stupid everybody else is to be at home while you're having so much fun. Observe in passing that your chapstick is freezing on your lips.

CHAPTER 4 - The Downhill

An impressive 1.35% of all cross-country skiers surveyed reported that hills provided them with more amusement than rocks, dead trees, or even briars. While going downhill is fun, going downhill with fast skis is really fun. Make sure that you are behind all of the people with slow skis before you begin to coast downhill. Stay as close as you can to the skier directly in front of you, and attempt to gain as much speed as possible as you continue your descent. Wait until you are almost on top of your target before thrashing your arms and screaming obscenities. At the last minute, throw yourself headfirst into the nearest snowbank. Technique is crucial to this maneuver; with practice, it is possible for the true professional to wrap both skis around his neck and lock them together there.

CHAPTER 5 - Making the Grade

Although the major advantage of the downhill run, i.e., life-threatening, uncontrollable speed, is missing from the uphill ski, any truly dedicated skier will agree that there is more than ample recompense to be found. You must rely heavily on the expertise of your ski partners when choosing the proper slope for your uphill ski. While a steep grade, severely cold weather

and long distance are desirable elements of a relaxing uphill ski, the only way to truly enjoy this variation is to find a trail with ruts. Experienced practitioners such as your ski partners will be able to locate trails with ruts as deep as certain portions of the Grand Canyon. At the foot of the hill, listen with wide-eyed innocence as your ski partners assure you that the ruts are certain to disappear after the first hour or so, or at least after you have reached an elevation of about 5,000 feet. After 5,000 feet, maintain a demeanor of puzzled amusement when it becomes clear that the site of your secluded early morning ski has been used as a major thoroughfare by a startling number of tractor trailers and army tanks.

Although it is generally overlooked by ski enthusiasts, the short uphill ski can be equally relaxing. Start up the grade in the usual manner. Make sure that several of your ski partners are right behind you before you fall over sideways. Crawl to your knees and fall over again. The "crawl and fall" sequence can be repeated several times; no one ever seems to get tired of it. Flap your arms and roll around a lot. If you are lucky enough to start rolling backwards, try to take everyone down the hill with you.

CHAPTER 6 - Streams

The key to a successful confrontation with a stream is acceptance of the fact that Washington and several battalions of colonial troops crossed the stormy Delaware River in significantly less time than it will take you to traverse one babbling little mountain stream. Remember that under no circumstances

should you remove your skis in order to make this maneuver any easier.

On occasion, it is possible to "ski across" the stream, a method which requires you to ignore the existence of the stream altogether. Continue skiing as though the trail continued across the gaping black hole which marks the presence of the stream, and remember that there is a reassuring 5% chance that your skis are longer than the stream is wide and that the bank on the opposite side is no higher than the bank on the launch side. The novice skier with a tendency to miscalculate may take comfort in the fact that a mere 2 out of every 100 cross-country skiing deaths are directly caused by drowning, and further, that one should never miss a chance to soak his skis.

Your ski partners will doubtless take ample time to instruct you in the more widely used method of crossing streams, which is loosely based on the premise that anyone who can stand on skis can maintain his balance while his legs are being stretched in opposite directions perpendicular to the body. Begin by turning your body so that it is parallel to the stream, and balance yourself with your ski poles. Inch down as slowly as possible, since taking your time will allow your arms to get more tired as you attempt to keep from falling over sideways into the water. (If by chance the stream is at the end of a downhill, it may help to stop before initiating this maneuver). Throw one leg across the stream and plant it firmly, on ice if possible. Crossing the stream is no fun if you know your skis won't start sliding away

while you're straddling the water. Remain in this position until one of your ski partners comes to haul you up over the other side. Try not to slide back into the stream when you fall down.

CHAPTER 7 - Taking Pictures

One of your more experienced and responsible ski partners should be designated as the photographer for your expedition. While strong arguments can be made for several conflicting theories, most experts agree that it is helpful for the photographer to carry not only a camera, but also film to put in it. It is believed by some that taking pictures without film causes significant problems with depth and contrast, although this has yet to be proven beyond all doubt. It might also be noted that it may make a difference whether you are taking pictures without color film or without black and white film.

One of the simplest and most rewarding things which you, as the photographer for the expedition, can do is to take a group picture. Select an area where the light is shining directly into the camera, and then carefully anchor the camera on an object which exhibits some degree of stability, such as a tree branch. After setting the timer, attempt to take your place with the group. Wrap your arms around the tree branch and lose your balance. Pitch forward several times, using the camera to break your fall. Regain your composure and ski toward the group in time to have the camera catch the best picture of the back of your head that anyone has ever seen. Run out of film so you can't take any more pictures.

CHAPTER 8 - The Ten Big Lies

1. The trail will be even nicer than the one we were on today.
2. Nobody would take a three-wheeler very far up this hill.
3. Stopping is easy--just snowplow a little.
4. It's bound to get warmer later on.
5. Just start down, you'll be fine.
6. That was the last stream on this trail.
7. The end of the trail is just around that bend.
8. You might be a little stiff in the morning.
9. After this, the dog will be too tired to play.
10. Nobody has ever died from cross-country skiing.