

Outdoor Winter Activities and Sports Tips

Getting Active This Winter

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Cross Country Skiing 101

If you are looking for a way to get fit and cover a lot of ground in the winter, nothing beats cross country skiing. This activity started in Scandinavia with wood planks strapped to the feet to allow passage on deep snow. As time and technology mixed, the ski, boot, binding and poles have advanced to the point that you now have to choose the specific type of ski you need for your use.

Types of Cross Country Skis

Classic Skis

These skis are thin and torsionally flexible to follow the cut tracks of a groomed cross country ski center. Since the tracks are already compressed by the grooming machine you don't need the floatation of a wide ski. They aren't well suited for skiing in areas that aren't groomed.

Touring Skis

If you want to venture off the groomed track while still having a ski that will let you enjoy the Nordic centers, consider a touring ski. A little wider than a classic ski for more floatation while still having the properties that let you glide smoothly on groomed tracks, touring skis are a jack of all trades design.

Off Track Skis

If you want to go where no one else does then an off track ski is the answer. Wider and shorter than classic skis, they are also stiffer and have steel edges for turning without a groomed track. These are too wide

Choosing Your Base

There are three main types of bases which will affect the grip and glide of your skis. All skis have a glide zone on the tips and tails that should be waxed with a glide wax. What varies is the middle grip zone that allows you to push off and get traction.

Wax

This is the original option with a special grip wax needing to be applied to the middle of the ski base. It is based on the temperature and weight of the skier. It needs to be applied each time you ski. Waxed skis have the best glide but less grip.

Textured

If you are a recreational skier who doesn't want to do a lot of work on your skis, then a fish scale base is a great option. It is ready to go when ever you are and offers a high level of grip but at the expense of glide.

Skin

Skin skis aim to have the grip of a textured ski with the glide of a waxed ski. The mohair ski is adapted from ski mountaineering and does a good job of offering the best of both worlds. As a bonus it is replaceable unlike the base of a textured ski.

How to Size Your Skis

Your skis are based on your weight. Heavier skiers need longer skis. When you are looking at the different types of skis (Classic, Touring and Off Tracks) your ideal length will be different for each. Generally, the wider the ski the shorter length you'll need.

Check the brand websites for their sizing charts for each model based on weight and terrain.

For example, a 200 lbs person would need a 206 cm ski in a classic ski and a 196 cm in an off track ski.

Your local ski shop will be able to help you get the right size ski as there are many factors including weight, experience, how fast you want them to be and where you will be skiing.

Boots and Bindings

The current standard for boots and binding is the NNN style. This can be seen on the boots by the two grooves running the length of the heel. There is a bar across the toe to lock into the binding.

Any NNN binding will work with any compatible boots so don't feel compelled to get the same brand. Get the boots that best fit your feet.

The bindings vary in how they mount to the skis. There are direct mount that need to be drilled and screwed into the ski as well as two rail mount systems that attach to a plate on the ski. Ask your ski shop for the right combination to fit your skis.

Poles

Poles are used both for balance and to help propel you forward. When sizing poles they should be about shoulder height or .85 x your height.

Conclusion

Cross country skiing is great exercise and a lot of fun. Figure out where you want to ski and use this guide to help figure out what is the best option for your terrain.