

Try snowshoes this winter



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Winter in Western Colorado can be a rough time because many of us are stuck indoors. We all enjoy our summer and fall activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, fishing and ATV riding. Problem is that most of those activities cannot be done during the rough winter months.

There is of course skiing and snowmobiling, but both of those hobbies can be expensive. Why not give snowshoeing a try? It is relatively inexpensive, is good exercise and gets you out of the house. The old adage is that if you can walk, you can snowshoe.

Snowshoes have made a lot of progress since the ones I wore in my youth. My first pair was about 4 feet long, made of wood and had leather laces. They weighed slightly less than a set of snow tires for a Buick. After a couple hours on them, I had a pretty good idea what a turkey wish-bone felt like.

Modern snowshoes are made from lightweight metals or plastics. The laces consist of a waterproof synthetic fabric. Most modern snowshoes

are raised slightly at the toe for ease of maneuverability.

When choosing the right snowshoe, consider how much weight you will be placing on them. Aside from your own body weight, you must add the weight of your clothes and any items you are going to carry with you. It is easiest to walk with the lightest and shortest shoe that can accommodate the weight you wish to put on it.

A basic guide to size selection is as follows:

100 to 150 pounds uses a 20 to 22 inch shoe

150 to 200 pounds uses a 25 to 26 inch shoe

200 to 230 pounds uses a 30-inch shoe

Over 230 pounds would use a 36-inch shoe

You are going to want to dress in layers because it can be very cold in the mountains this time of year. Start with a good set of thermal underwear and warm wool socks.

Your second layer should include some type of fleece or mid-weight jacket. Outer layer should include a waterproof jacket (Gore-Tex), snow pants or gaiters, wool hat and waterproof gloves. A waterproof and well-insulated pair of hiking boots is a must.

Polarized sunglasses or goggles are essential. The sun reflecting off all that snow can cause snow blindness.

As with anything else we do outdoors, bring a survival pack with you. Carry some water, food, and fire making supplies, shelter and a basic first aid kit. I throw in an extra pair of socks as well. I carry a



Snowshoes today are much lighter, durable and more efficient than those I knew as a kid. (Mark Rackay/Submitted photo)

GPS to keep me on course and a cell phone, just in case.

It is a good idea to invest in a pair of trekking poles. These poles will help you keep your balance and navigate tricky areas. Trekking poles are a relatively inexpensive item and can be used in other outdoor activities such as hiking.

Since over half of Montrose County is made up of public lands and National Forest, finding a place to go snowshoeing is not a problem. Many

folks like to walk along the many cross-country ski trails while others hike on snowmobile routes.

Personally, I prefer the quiet and solitude of just walking through the untouched timber. It is very quiet and peaceful in the mountains during the winter months and it provides a nice solitude from the city life. The trek does not have to be strenuous, slow and steady is all that is required. You can stop and rest all you want.

It may take a couple of times for your muscles and balance to kick in so a few short trips are in order before jumping in for an all day excursion. Take it slow and easy, enjoy the mountains in winter and until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

So many ways to ski Colorado



Outdoors

By John T. Unger

What is the difference between freestyle skiing and free-skiing? Which one includes Big Mountain, and which involves slopestyle? Or do you prefer backcountry or cross-country skiing?

Beginning with the newest (and maybe least widely done), and proceeding to the oldest (and most widely done), let's understand some terms.

Freestyle skiing is a term that encompasses several subdivisions of other new terms: Park, Halfpipe and Slopestyle.

Park, as in "Hoot Brown Terrain Park" in Telluride Ski Area, has man-made jumps and features. In Hoot Brown, there are welded steel rails resembling round hand rails like those found on stairways, elevated rails like those from a railroad track, steel welded boxes, steel walls and a series of artificial ramps and jumps, from 25 to 50 feet long. Snowboarders and freestyle skiers relish sliding and grinding over these playthings.

Halfpipe is just as it says, a snow-covered winter feature like the halfpipe in which a summer skateboarder might be seen riding up the walls and doing flips and grabs and tricks.

Slopestyle, added to the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014, is more oriented to much bigger jumps, during which the boarder/riders or skier typically executes more complicated spins and

IF YOU GO: Cross-country skis/boots/poles are available as daily rentals at Great Outdoors store and at Cascade Bicycles, both in downtown Montrose, and both rent out backcountry gear as well. Skate skiing skis/boots/poles are available locally only at Great Outdoors store. For backcountry skiing, avalanche beacons/probe poles/shovels are a necessity, and can be purchased at Ouray Mountain Sports.

inversions of longer duration in very long flights in mid-air. Telluride's local boy Gus Kenworthy won the silver medal in Slopestyle at the Sochi Olympics, greatly adding to its popularity.

Freeskiing, not to be confused with Freestyle, involves what is known as Big Mountain skiing. For instance, Telluride Ski Area has a Development Squad that has a Terrain Park team as well as a separate Big Mountain team. The Big Mountain Team is composed of freeskiers who train and compete on very steep, ungroomed natural features and conditions. These "natural features" are stumps, rock ledges, narrow chutes and gullies.

Downhill skiing/alpine/lift-served area are terms that refer to skiing in a semi-controlled environment (again, like Telluride) where many of the slopes are groomed, cleared of hazards, and perhaps sprayed with "snow-making" equipment. This is where lifts do the work of getting skiers and riders to the top, and avalanche dangers have been managed and nearly eliminated each day.

Backcountry skiing typically involves unmanaged areas where adhesive climbing "skins" are attached to the bottoms of skis and splitboards so the user can walk uphill on the snow. Stripping



Pam East enjoys the moguls on the North Chute run last weekend at Telluride Ski Area. (Submitted photo)

the "skins" off at the top of a mountain slope then allows the thrill of skiing back down for users who have now "earned their turns." Such an outing necessitates each user having an avalanche search/transmit beacon, a probe pole, and a shovel, along with the knowledge and experience to use these items quickly enough to find and dig out a colleague when needed.

(Note that many downhill ski areas like Telluride now have a "beacon park" for patrons to practice single or multiple victim searches, using one's own beacon. This year, Telluride's beacon park is located near the top of Chairlift 5, just to the right/south along the route called Lower Woolley's Way. Since beacons are not needed at the lift-served areas, this

is a public service for those users who sometimes choose to backcountry ski instead.)

Cross-country or Nordic skiing includes two forms. "Classic x-c" form is still done much like it was over a thousand years ago when it developed in Europe and in northern Asia. Skis are either waxed under the center kick-zone by the user, or nowadays imprinted with a roughened "fish-scale" pattern to allow the skier to get a grip on the ski track during the kick phase, followed by a glide phase. It is typically done on a track that is groomed in a simple way with two parallel grooves.

Skate skiing is the other version of cross-country skiing, and is a much more recent invention. In it, the skier moves much faster than in the classic version, but requires a wider groomed area of track, and is known to be exhilarating in its own way as a powerful, rhythmic exercise.

Both of these forms of cross-country skiing can be done for very little cost, with inexpensive used equipment or reasonably priced rentals (see below). Nearby groomed tracks are at the Visitor's Center at our own Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, on Grand Mesa thanks to the Grand Mesa Nordic Council, at Top of the Pines outside Ridgway or at Ironton Park on Red Mountain Pass, both thanks to the Ouray Nordic Association, or at Priest Lake and Trout Lake thanks to the Telluride Nordic Association.

Enjoy the snow, use good judgment, and experience winter in your choice of these self-propelled snow travel methods.

John T. Unger is a Diplomat of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians, with over twenty-five years of practice in Montrose. He is glad for winter. Ideas for future columns are welcomed at sportsdocunger.com.



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