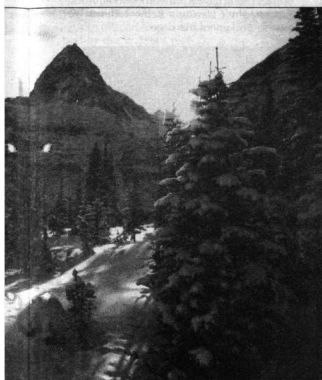


es in and around Alberta



Majestic Alberta peaks

are possible, but the more adventurous skier uses his durable equipment and goes for several days at a time, camping in snow tents, carrying heavy framed backpacks and braving the cold. On these trips he can encounter icy weather, crevasses, seracs, icefalls, avalanches, and formidable descents and ascents. A good knowledge of the possible dangers and their remedies is necessary, including wilderness first aid. Houle describes it as a "struggle of man against the wilderness."

Telemarking is the nordic form of downhill skiing, seen more frequently on the major ski hills every year. Today, telemarkers are competing with downhillers," says Wollen, but telemarkers always have the option of leaving the carefully groomed resorts for the naturally wild back-country, where no mogul-munchers exist. Telemarking is a "more graceful, balanced type of downhill skiing," explains Bezovic, because of the free heel and more strenuous skiing technique.

The growing popularity of nordic skiing is exemplified by the U of A Nordic Ski Club, whose membership has grown to an unprecedented 60 members. The club now offers courses in beginner cross-country skiing, telemarking, skating techniques, wilderness first aid, winter camping, and cross-country day touring. The courses are open to the public as well as its members. Information on nordic skiing is available through the various specialty ski shops found in Edmonton, as well as through the Alberta Nordic Ski, a newspaper published by the Canadian Ski Association.

Besides being good, healthy exercise, nordic skiing is also a social experience, with lots of fun to be had by all. "It's a great way to meet people," Bezovic assures us.

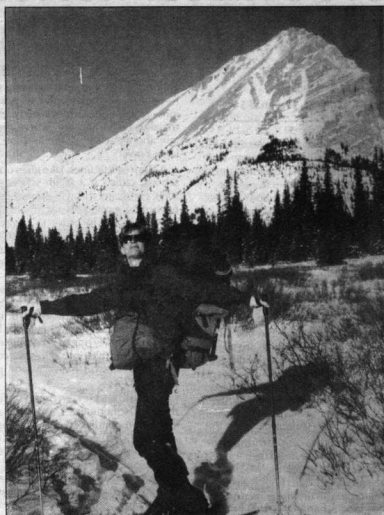
by Renata Osterwoldt

Ski touring has become an exhilarating alternative to one day ski tours. Ski touring consists of the exploration of the back-country with the use of cross-country skis. Backpacks are used to carry food, clothing and often tents for the trips which may last anywhere from two days to several weeks. It sounds very strenuous, but ski touring may be one of the most relaxing, yet challenging experiences available to the outdoor enthusiast.

The Rocky Mountains provide Albertans with an excellent location for ski touring. There are two basic levels available to the cross-country skier. They include using marked trails, alpine hut accommodations, or planning unique routes with tent or snow cave locations.

The easiest tour involves skiing along defined trails which are often five roads or hiking trails, ranging from beginner to intermediate levels. It is often good to consult hiking books for distance and trail information. The day's skiing will be rewarded by arriving at a shelter located 15-25 km from the starting point. The shelter consists of log cabins built and maintained by National Parks, Provincial Parks or the Alpine Club of Canada. They provide a rustic atmosphere containing wood stoves for heat and cooking, bunk beds, and sometimes a table. Evenings will be spent in the candle-lit cabin playing cards, sipping well earned liqueurs, and talking about the day's adventure.

If you are more experienced and better equipped, you can break your own trail and explore your own area of the "winter wonderland." Routes are often into areas where no trails exist or areas not commonly used during the winter season. The speed of skiing is greatly reduced due to the need to break trail and keep track of your orientation. Shelters vary depending on the preference of the skiers and the terrain travelled. Tents may be used if the time and energy for building a snow shelter are not available. Snow caves and quinzies are the warmest and safest shelters for winter camping. Caves can be dug out of existing snow drifts, providing for a sleeping/cooking platform. Quinzies are made by piling snow into a large pile, allowing it to consolidate, and then digging out the inner part. Candles and body heat provide the heat to raise the inside temperature to approximately 0°C. Winter sleeping bags and insulate pads, in combination with a snow shelter, provide a warm and comfortable sleep.



Breathing free in fresh outdoors

The preferred equipment for ski touring includes: metal edged skis, consisting of hybrid metal/fiberglass/foam combinations; alpine boots which are higher and stiffer than conventional cross-country ski boots; bindings which provide a better attachment to the ski; and metal ski poles.

Due to the avalanche danger in the mountains, it is always important to be aware of the type of snow and terrain you are travelling on. It is recommended that an avalanche transceiver transmitter, avalanche probe, and a shovel are carried at all times.

The days spent in the back-country during winter are never forgotten. The experiences include the feeling of exhilaration upon reaching a mountain pass after an exhausting uphill ski, examining the unbroken layers of snow, falling into five feet of powder snow, enjoying the sight of the majestic mountains towering silently above, and skiing under the light of a full moon. Friendships strengthen as you experience the little known world of winter in the back-country.

Photos courtesy of University of Alberta Nordic Ski Club

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