

# The Beginners' Guide to Ski-ing

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*Outfit.*—According to all the books about winter sports no clothes that you have ever worn before will be of the slightest use to you. You must equip yourself with such things as:—

- 1 pair of horse-hide mitts.
- 2 pairs of goat-wool socks. (*Query:* Do goats have wool?)
- 3 pairs of horse-hair shirts.
- 4 pairs of snake-fur braces.

And so on to the *finale* of a rucksack which contains an ice-axe, a sextant, theodolite, illuminated compass, slide-rule (or logarithm tables), thermos flask, dog-biscuits (for rescuing St. Bernards), bandages, splints and a pair of crutches.

A special paragraph is always devoted to boots. It is generally agreed that these should be square in the toes, parabolic at the heels, and at least three sizes too large. They must be dosed with bear-fat and shark-oil to make them snow-proof (it is well known that no shark ever lets the snow in) and lined with uncured skunk to make them pinch-proof. Double reversible two-ply welts, of course; and laced with plaited iguana strippings.

Old grey flannels may be all very well, but you must put grey flannels right out of your mind. You must not even toy with the idea of Harris tweeds. In fact you must shun Harris tweeds as though they were the plague. There is no material to which snow clings more readily, thickly and persistently than it does to real rough tweeds. So if you wear them you will come in from a run looking like a snow-man and soaked to the skin in spite of all your horse-hair shirts and snake-fur braces.

Yes, the books are sound enough on the outer garments question. But not enough emphasis is laid on colour-scheme. You should be very careful about this and limit your choice to the following:—

1. Black.
2. Blacker.
3. Blacker still.

The funeral note is the only one to sound. Gaily-coloured scarves and pull-overs would be like the ribaldries of a saxophone breaking in on some majestic symphony.



Before we finally abandon the important trouser question there is one really useful tip I want to give you. No amount of bears' fat and sharks' oil will keep out the snow if you don't strap the bottoms of your trousers over the tops of your boots. Or is it tuck them inside the boots? I always forget which. Anyhow, do one or the other.

*Skis, Choice and Care of.*—Now I really am in a position to put you right about skis. It is an extraordinary thing, but all the books by experts have completely missed the point about choosing them. They fill pages with irrelevant details about light skis and heavy skis, thin skis for crusty snow, wide skis for soft snow, toe-clips and alpina bindings, until the despairing reader decides that the only thing to do is to hire a bagful as though they were golf clubs. Then the first thing he sees is a fat little boy tearing ahead of everyone, executing every turn known to skiers. And all that he has on his feet is a pair of curved barrel-staves tied on with a good stout string. Well, that makes you think a bit.

The fact is it doesn't matter how short or long or wide or thick or light or heavy your skis are. And as to the sort of bindings, you simply want some that you can undo with your teeth in any position with your mouth full of snow. For the rest, notice that the great majority of skis are a pale yellow—platinum blondes almost. Avoid these and buy a pair of brunettes instead. For whatever a gentleman's taste in other matters, experienced skiers definitely prefer brunettes. I don't know why, but there it is.

Lastly, a word on the great wax question. I know that the books are for ever comparing the



merits of this wax and that wax. Black wax ironed on for beaten tracks, white wax massaged in for deep snow, green wax for thaw, and so on and so on. But all their advice is based on a futile misunderstanding. Wax is slippery stuff, and these experts aim at going as fast as possible. You, like me, will find that the confounded things go much too fast as it is. The real problem is how to slow them down. And the answer to that is not wax but sand-paper. But use it in private. You don't want to get yourself talked about.

*Ski sticks.*—A pair of these are given away with your skis, and you must carry them wherever you go. They will trip you up at vital moments, and involve you in many extra miles retrieving them when dropped. Further, you must never use them—(1) to help you round in turning; (2) as a brake in times of crisis; (3) as anything else useful which may occur to you—it is all terribly bad style.

What are they for then? Well, my view is that they are just a trial and a temptation to which every skier is expected to rise superior. And there is no doubt that they look very well in photos at the top of the climb, just stuck carelessly in the snow.

*Kick Turn.*—When you have fourteen feet of skis attached to your feet ordinarily simple little movements like a right-about turn become quite arduous undertakings which call for the most careful thinking out. If you throw one foot out carelessly at an angle as you were wont to do in civil life you immediately pin the back of one ski down with the other and cannot move that foot until you get back to the "as you were" position. Now try more cautiously. Keep the skis well apart and turn the right through a very small angle. Now shift your weight on to it and then turn the left after it. Soon you will get into a steady rocking motion, turning each ski just a little every time you lift it. In this way you will turn round in about ten minutes. Always provided of course that you do not turn into a slope and move off down it backwards with skis diverging.

This, however, is not the way to make a standing turn. Thoughtful people have invented the kick turn for you, and this is how you do it.

Kick forwards and upwards strongly with the right ski and plant its heel in the snow near the toe of the left ski. Now keep its heel in the snow and let it fall sweepingly to the right. Its toe swings irresistibly to the rear of the left ski until they lie parallel on the snow but pointing in opposite directions. And so are your feet. You never suspected, did you, that your joints and

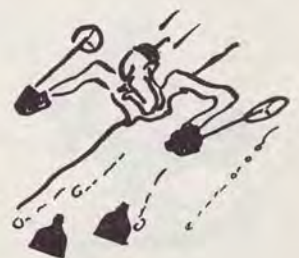
muscles could achieve so contorted a position? Very interesting, is it not? You have probably strained one or two small tendons, and if you do not hasten to relieve the strain by completing the movement more important things will start to give and you will be crippled for life. So in the midst of your great agony try to complete the turn by lifting the left ski up and round. You can't? Then try to lift the right back to its original position. You can't, damn my eyes? No, don't throw yourself down or you will twist your legs right round and have to walk backwards all your days when you come out of hospital—that is if paralysis doesn't set in. You can't move at all then? Well, you must call for help now and someone will come and unstrap your skis. Anyhow, that is the kick turn.

*Stemming.*—Your ordinary straight running will lack the easy confidence and carefree abandon it should have unless I first show you how to stem, which is the only legitimate way of applying the brake other than using complicated turns like the christiania or the telemark.

Here is a smooth easy slope. When you want to stop, which is of course as soon as you get going, thrust the heels of the skis wide apart, pressing them firmly on the inside edges. As you observe, this points the toes inwards. The skis converge, cross each other, tie your legs in a knot and throw you head first over the tips with great violence. I am sorry I could not mention this little consequence at the beginning, but I was afraid that if I did you might have felt a little diffident about trying—I was right? There, I knew I was!

Now don't start struggling wildly to get up. You are just a confused tangle of limbs, skis and sticks which will need very careful sorting out. So lie still and think it out thoroughly before trying to move.

First spit out the snow. That's right. Never mind about your teeth just now; we'll look for them later. Swallowed them? Nonsense! that was probably some snow. Well now, let me see. You had better start by tracking down your left leg. It starts from the usual place, twists round your back and reappears over your left shoulder. The ski passes under your chin and apparently down your neck. No, the one with its toe in your mouth is your right ski, and that seems to be sprouting out of your ribs in some strange way. Your right arm? Where is it? Is that it there? No? Well, I'm very sorry, but you don't seem to have a right arm. Not just at present anyhow. Are you sure you had one? Quite sure? All right, all right; there no need to get short tempered about it. After all, you still have your left arm, so you are an eye up on Nelson. Oh, yes, you are. The snow will come





out of that one eventually, and when it thaws you will probably be able to see quite well with it again. Now unwrap that left arm gradually, starting at the wrist. That's right. Can't get beyond the elbow? What's this pathetic looking lump in the small of your back? Why, I do

believe it's your right arm. I knew you were making a lot of unnecessary fuss. No, don't try to move it yet. It's wedged in between your sticks.

You know, I'm just a little bit afraid you will have to surrender and unstrap your skis. Do that with your teeth. Oh, I'm sorry, I was forgetting about your teeth. Well, there's nothing else for it. You must yodel for help. What, can't yodel? You must learn, then. Come on, and I'll teach you. Shape the lips for the letter O and then tighten the muscles of the stomach as though you were going to be sick. . . .

**Straight Running.**—All that is needed is grace, ease and confidence. And now that you know about stemming you should develop these quickly. So get that haggard hunted look out of your eyes. Live only in the present. Brooding on the immediate future is morbid and has an adverse effect on your style.

And don't shout "*Achtung!*" when you are coming. It sounds so silly when you never arrive.

**Christiania Turn.**—The christie is really a side-ways skid and, like so many other things, can be divided into three parts:—(a) starting the skid; (b) trying to stop the skid; (c) getting up again.

None of the books by experts that I have read gives a really satisfactory explanation of this most useful of turns. The trouble is that they will introduce the most confusing diagrams. Now I absolutely guarantee to make it crystal clear with letters only and no drawings.

Suppose we call the right ski  $rTrFrH$ , T being the tip, F the foot (your foot), H the heel (its heel). So the left ski is  $lTlFtH$ . The left leg is  $l$  and the left arm  $L$ , and  $r$  stands for—All right, you've got it. Now suppose you were travelling left-handed down and across a slope and Satan prompted you to christie to the right. Of course you shouldn't, it would be much easier to christie to the left. But suppose that Satan's suggestion found favour with you and you tried. Just suppose. Are you supposing? Very well.

Advance the right ski so that  $rF$  about trisects  $lTlF$ . Skis must not touch of course. They should



be apart and slightly divergent. Now  $lF$  should be about bisecting  $rFrH$ , R slightly bent—no, I mean  $r$ —and most of the weight on  $Rf$ — $rF$ , I mean. The hill is on your right. And by that I mean the slope is there—if that is what travelling left-handed means, but I'm not quite sure. Anyhow, let us say that hill is left and slope right. Now flatten the left ski. No, I said *flatten*, not *fatten*. I'm quite sure I did. At the same time put some weight on the left heel and you should begin to come round. Not that sort of come round, you egg. I mean turn, revolve. Well, that would be the start of an open christie. But you probably won't be able to manage it at all and will have to resort to a jerk christie, so we'd better try that instead.

In executing a jerk christie starting the skid is quite simple. Take your weight off the skis by making a half-hearted jump and at the same time jerk the body violently to the left (if a right-handed christie is desired). The word *body* is something of an euphemism. What you must really jerk is the—Well, let us introduce another letter and call it B. B can stand for more things than body. So never mind about jerking the torso. If only you waggle B good and strong you are bound to start a skid.

Then the difficulty is to stop it. And if you don't flatten the outside ski at first only the inside one will turn and you will spin round, cross the heels of your skis and fall over backwards down the hill. Rather like your stemming contretemps, only taking place in reverse, if you see what I mean.

Now come along and try it.



**Telemark Turn.**—This is the only practicable turn for deep snow, and it can be executed in deep snow only. So come away with me to those steepish slopes that are as yet almost untracked.

Far below us lies the hard scarred surface of the practice fields. And beyond them again the sad grey head-stones of the cemetery, where skiers, luggers and even curlers lie side by side, their little quarrels at an end. Deep solemn thoughts rise naturally to the mind, and one seems to see as in an inspired flash the why and wherefore of flattening the outside ski in a christiania, and to perceive as a perfect whole the truth and beauty of a stemming turn, the insidious vileness of a sitzmark.

But we must return to earth. Tear the mind away from the contemplation of eternal verities and bend the body into the wondrous curves of the telemark position. A left-hand telemark, please.



As you move off down the slopes slide the right ski forward until your foot is in line with the tip of the left ski. Your weight must be entirely on the front foot. It is also absolutely essential that your weight should be on the back foot. Then as you begin to gather speed press the right heel outwards, thus forcing the right ski slightly athwart the bows of the left. Very good. Now keep that position and you will begin to turn to the left. But do keep the tip of the left ski pressed firmly against the right instep. Do not let it slip behind your foot or it will cross the back of the right ski and you will find yourself running with parallel skis and crossed legs.

Well, there! You have done it. Now keep your head and don't try to lift your skis. Slide the left back again and see if you can wriggle it across the right to its normal position. Quick! before you get going too fast. Can't manage it? Wait a bit and let me think. No, don't try the sitzmark—not in this cross-legged position and at this speed. Those small bones in the ankle, you know. Go so easily, don't they?

Yes, you are going rather fast now. Sixty? Oh, no; not as fast as that. Not more than forty-five. No skier can do much more than that. You can always stop in the cemetery. Oh, no, not permanently, I hope. Quite unlikely, really, Hardly ever happens.

My! you nearly skewered that fellow. Narrow squeak, wasn't it? Yes, they're all staring after you. You are creating quite a sensation. Rather fun, isn't it? I always think—Eh? Oh, no, not sixty. Really not sixty. About fifty, I should say.

Sorry, can't hear you at this pace. The wind simply blew your words right away. You know you are getting terribly good at straight running. That distance and at this pace! If only you could master the turns—You must come up and try the telemark again tomorrow. That is if—if—

Oh, well, never mind. It's not very likely, anyhow. Here's the cemetery now. Good luck!

### F.I.S. International Ski Races at Innsbruck February 22, 1936

THE controversy which has been raging between the European ski-ing organizations and the Olympic Committee over the question of the admission of ski-instructors to the Garmisch competitions has resulted finally in a decision to hold the international F.I.S. races at Innsbruck in the Austrian Tyrol immediately after the Olympic games proper.

Eleven nations, including Great Britain, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland and Sweden will send their entire ski-ing teams to Innsbruck for the F.I.S. races on the twenty-second of February.

The Olympic competitions end on the sixteenth of February. On the following day at Seefeld in Tyrol, an ice curling competition will take place. On the nineteenth there will be figure skating and hockey at Innsbruck, which boasts the second largest rink in Austria. Many famous skaters will compete and several foreign hockey teams are expected also. The high-spots of the Innsbruck events, however, will occur from the twenty-first through the twenty-fourth. On the twenty-first the F.I.S. official championship for downhill will take place. Slalom is slated for the following day, and the jumping events from the Berg-Isel follow on Sunday. The twenty-fourth will see the downhill from the Glungezer, the longest ski run in the world, boasting a distance of fifteen kilometres (about 10 miles) and a drop in altitude of some 7,300 feet. The F.I.S. events are expected by the international ski-ing authorities to be of much greater significance than the Winter Olympic ski-ing events, since the disbarment of instructors means the virtual elimination of Europe's fastest racers and highest jumpers as practically all Swiss and Austrian and most great Scandinavian skiers are also teachers.

