

THE MAGICAL ART OF TOURING

di Bob Woodward

Bob Woodward
*non lo conosciamo
ma sicuramente
dopo la lettura di
questo brano lo
invidiamo.
L'articolo ci è
stato gentilmente
fornito da Jordy
Margid, di Black
Diamond*

*We personally
don't know **Bob
Woodward**, but
now having read
his article, we all
envy him. Jordy
Margid, of Black
Diamond has
passed to us the
article*

I confess, I'm a ski touree. One of those people who often travels the backcountry on unedged skis. One of those people who, mea culpa, takes his dogs along for the trips. How anachronistic Here we are locked in the no-fear "I ski 50-degree couloird for warmups" era, and I'm talking about dinking around in the backcountry. Sliding around, making a few turns when the bills are steep and the snow is right, cruising around covering a lot of terrain in a day. Touring isn't hair-raising stuff but it has its rewards. Rewards like being in the mountains and makong some nice turns, and kicking and gliding not plodding over the snow. Ski touring gear simply allows one to travel light and fast to rely on talent rather than tecnology to get around. Twenty years ago touring gear and ski touring were about the only way to get into the backcountry. The alternative was strapping on outrageously heavy, hard-to-control ski-mountaineering gear and bracing yourself for sloggng up hills and excruciatingly unpleasant downhill. When I consider the peaks climbed on klister-waed bases rather than on skins, the long trips on touring gear down the John Muir Trail, the powder days on Mt. Shasta and Lassen, I have to laugt. Were we nuts? The boots were pretty flimsy, the skis had no edges and were either too boardy or too squirrely. The poles? Well our idea of adjustability was wrapping duct tape at different heights on the pole shaft and shifting our grip as the terrain and skiing demands warranted. Back then I decided to spend every on snow hour on or close by Mn Lassen I rented a cabin in the nearby town of Mineral. The cabin's water pipes froze every time the temperature dipped below 20 degrees. Thus ski time too often gave way to pipe-thawing forays. One weekend the pipes froze beyond quick-fix thawing as the temperature dove to 10 below. My ski partner John Dostal and I arose early and went touring. We skied off into a steady snowfall. Afte half an hour, we came to a steep, treeless hill maybe 400 yards long. Dostal glanced at the slope and said, "What the hell, lets try a few turns". We swooped down whooping with delight. The conditions were the ultimate fluff over hardpack. Our plans suddenly changed. We checked our position on the map and made tracks for the closest road. Tthere we essentially commandeered the first car that passed and demanded a ride to the Lassen Peak ski area. Once at the area, we begged forgiveness for our questionable hitchhiking manners citing a uncontrollable lust for deep powder. We skied from the area ino the backcountry. There we climbed and made turns on Lassen's flank's until well past sunset. I remember that time not only because of the complete ezhaustion and joy I felt at the end of the day but also because the big toe on my right foot was so badly sprained that day that it barely flexes even today. Fastforward to 1979 and another favorite volcano ski touring day. This on Oregon's 10,358-foot South Sister. My ski partern was Dan Simoneau who at the time was on the U.S. Ski Team. Simoneau had a Saab full of racing skis but no touring gear. We scrounged some up and headed off one morning at 5 a.m. Riding a thin coat of purple Klister, we kicked and glided across the high meadows to the base of tackier red klister, we climbed toward the summit plateau. After lunch on the summit, we pur on wind pants and wind shirts for the ski down. Thn we skied to the edge of the Clark Glacier dropping off several thousand feet at a steady 30 degreee angle. Just as we got ready to ski off, we heard a voice. To our left appeared a figure clad in wool knickers, wool balaclava and wool shirt, axe in one hand, rope in the other. Behind him some distance were his raper partner and three other pairs of climbers. His gaze fixed upon us, Mr Allwool untied his end of the rope, removed his crampons and walked to us. "Pd advise against your skiing that glacier," he intoned upon seeing our gear. Simoneau replied politely, "How about I try a few turns and if you still think it's dangerous, let me Know" Simoneau slid over the lip of the glacier and made two dozen tight parallel turns. Mr. Alwool cleared his throat and murrered, "Yes, well I guess it will be all right. He does seem to have the Knack of it". The problem is with the headlong rush to heavy metal and bondage boots, the knack or art of ski touring is being lost. It's becoming an endangered species. Our direct link to skiing in its original form is relegated to the arcane as people rush to create a new ski sport alpine free-heel. Ski touring's beauty has always been that it combined, in well measured amounts, the best of classic diasogonal striding and downhillng. Striding was never as fast or precise as it might havebeen on prepared tracks, but there's nothing like skimming over rolling hills in two inches of new powder over a hard base. Absolutely nothing. Just like nothing compares to swooping down a hill on light gear in the same conditions or in an inch of spring corn. The turns come not from a power base but from subtlety, feel Guiding unedged skis with flexible boots takes skill, a certain deftness not required in full-metal combat gear.

Ski touring at its best is like waltzing it's fluid, gracefull and requires skill. you have to have a complate bag of tricks and skills. Besides striding well and coaxing the skis into downhill magic, there's the art of waxing to make the ups pass without slips; the striding to have the best of both grip and glide. Backcountry ski touring is s real tradition. "A real tradition", said the gread composer Igor Stravinski, "Is not the relic of the past irretrievably gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present.



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