

Steve Barnett is recognised as one of the true instigators of the telemark boom, but ironically his skiing began on downhill boards. It wasn't until 1968 that Barnett started touring as a means to expand his world of skiable terrain.

Steve Barnett è uno di quegli illuminati che molti anni fa riscoprirono il telemark in America. Veramente uno dei primi. Leggete questo articolo e se non sapete l'inglese fatevelo tradurre, aiuterà molti a capire quanto in Italia siamo ancora indietro nell'intendere il Telemark

metal-edged Bonnas, Silvretta bindings and heavy boots. The Silvrettas were inadequate as they broke easily and you had to assume they wouldn't release during a fall. Also, everything was heavy. There was an aesthetic appeal to lighter equipment.

E: So when did you make the switch?

B: It took a long time because I was wary of country equipment. In 1972, I took a tour of Mount Rainier National Park with a friend who had bought a lightweight package from REI.

On the way down from Summerland he broke a pole, ruined a binding, ripped a boot, and finally snapped a ski. That caused me to dismiss lighter gear for years to come.

Finally, in 1976, I migrated towards a pair of Europa 77s (Fischer's predecessor to the Europa 99). It seemed like the right ski - not too heavy yet strong. Around the same time I decided to dump the Silvrettas. I had relied on downhill turns up to that time. Though I knew about the telemark, I thought of it as a stunt. Suddenly, I was putting there-pin bindings on my skis, buying used nordic boots, and telling myself I would master the techniques to ski on this equipment. I just decided I would learn to telemark.

EXPLORE: How did it go that first season?

BARNETT: I tumbled down my first few mountains. I hadn't fallen so much since my first days on skis. Then I ran into a guy who telemarked reasonably well and he advised me to get good boots. I did, and it improved my skiing about 600%. In fact, it was a revelation. I kept think-ing, "I can go anywhere now." I finally felt like I had a system that was reliable, safe, light enough for the distances I intended to ski, and capable of turning in all snow conditions. I always thought the breakthrough for providing the perfect backcountry system would be something like titanium skis and carbon bindings.

Instead, it was a technique - an old, discarded technique.

EXPLORE: When did you decide to write the book?

BARNETT: I thought about writing a brochure after the 1976 season to let people know what was possible. By the end of the 1977 season, I had become evangelical. I experienced amazing skiing that year despite the drought all the downhillers moaned about. I was consumed with the desire to tell what I had learned, so I wrote the book during the summer of 1977. It hit the shelves in January 1978.

E: Why were so many people interested in it?

B: Because they were searching for the same thing that attracted me - light, reliable equipment for exploring the backcountry. Coincidentally, there was also interest among downhill skiers looking for new ways to push their limits. All of sudden they could strap on telemark skis and experience the fun of learning to ski again.

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E: What are your thoughts about that facet of skiing, that is lift skiing and telemark racing?

B: I think it's rather silly. That doesn't keep me from doing it, mind you, but I admit it's a stunt. If you want to ski fast on groomed slopes there's much better system available. You might as well use the right tools for the job. I don't think telemark racing will ever attract the world's attention because it doesn't reflect the real reason why most people telemark - which is to ski the backcountry. The ability to make high-speed telemark turns on a groomed slope doesn't translate into the ability to ski bad snow in the wilderness.

E: Switching gears to equipment, what are main improvements you've noticed in recent years?

B: For backcountry skiing there haven't been that many. Certainly there are more good boots available, and the variable, and the variable length poles are an improvement. But the skis designed by Karhu and Epoke in 1978 were just as good as modern skis. Today's skis are not evolving towards better touring but towards skiing fast on hardpack.

E: Is there a trend towards lighter backcountry touring equipment?

B: Actually, the trend here is towards moderation. When skinny skis made their debut in the backcountry, part of the excitement was proving a point. We saw light skis, like Epoke 900s, used on major expeditions like the circumnavigation of Mt. McKinley. You don't see that now. Rightfully so - wider metal-edged skis are the appropriate tool.

It follows on tomorrow issue / Segue domani



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