

Hit The Sidecountry

Unlock the gate to fresh lines.

Jackson Hole wasn't the first resort to allow access to out-of-bounds terrain, but when The Big One officially opened its gates in 1999, it signaled a major shift in tolerance. Riders were now free to ride lines in the uncontrolled and unmarked zones beyond the boundaries, which sparked a new style of hot-lapping the sidecountry. Eleven years later, more than 75 North American resorts permit entry to their adjacent zones. —Dan Kostrzewski



PHOTO: LIAM GALLAGHER

RULES OF THE GAME

1. Gear up with a pack, shovel, probe, and digital avalanche beacon.
2. Take a Level 1 avalanche course.
3. Know the daily avalanche forecast.
4. Enter through marked gates.
5. Ride lines one at a time.
6. Don't drop in on someone below.

FIVE EPIC SIDECOUNTRY RESORTS

■ JACKSON HOLE MOUNTAIN RESORT, WY

The steep, sustained lines bordering JHMR are as gnar as North America gets. And with a new tram to lift you 4,139 continuous, vertical feet back up top—in nine minutes—it's no shock that Jackson's OB bowls and couloirs were ground zero for the sidecountry explosion.

Tip: Test yourself on the Headwall before you hike into more exposed terrain.

■ REVELSTOKE MOUNTAIN RESORT, B.C.

The Selkirks and Monashees of B.C.'s interior have long been a sweet spot for split touring, sled access, and heli operations. Recent construction of the Stoke and the Ripper chairs at RMR opened up prime hikeable terrain to the masses.

Tip: It's a gray area, but access the catboarding bowls if you get tired of North Bowl.

■ BRIGHTON, UT

All of Utah's Big- and Little-Cottonwood Canyon areas are packed with hikeable terrain, but we like Brighton because of its low-key feel and low-price day tickets. It's been a local line favorite since before crews and rails dominated the Salt Lake scene.

Tip: Line up early to hit the featured terrain off the Millicent Chair.

■ ALPINE MEADOWS, CA

Unlike Squaw, Alpine has always been open to accessing its classic Sierra lines from inside the boundary. This North Lake area doesn't have the scene or the stars of other Tahoe resorts, but the vibe is chill and the terrain is sick.

Tip: Hire one of Alpine's guides for a first taste of sweet lines on the margins.

■ MT. BAKER, WA

This misty epicenter of big lines is revered for its open-access attitude, world-record snowfalls, and steep shots that get real serious, real quick.

Tip: The storms are deep, but watch the weather and freezing level to hit it when it's on.

In the Zone

Backcountry Construction Methods

When selecting a jump location, steer clear of hazards such as sagging cornices, tight gullies, or heavily wind-loaded slopes, and always heed the warning signs of cracking, whumping (loud settling of the snow), or recent avalanche activity. Check overhead exposure, and be aware that the prime start zone for a slide is 38 degrees steep at a convex rollover ... which is also prime jump-building terrain. —Dan Kostrzewski

BUILDER'S CHECK LIST

1. **Verts Snowshoes:** Superlight, fixed-heel shoes with a cult following.
2. **BCA Arsenal Shovel With Saw:** Extendable shovel with a hideaway saw.
3. **Water, Snacks, And Sunscreen:** A gallon of water a day at altitude and SPF—even under overcast.
4. **Avalanche Safety Gear:** Pack, shovel, probe, beacon, and partner—mandatory!
5. **Med, Nav, And Com:** Medical kit, SPOT Sat beacon, GPS, and Motorola radios all come in handy.

PHOTO: JEFF CURTIS

PRO TIPS

SPOT THE LANDING

Pick a site safely away from avalanche run-out paths. Eye the in-run, check the frame and make sure the landing is just steep enough. In shallow snow-packs, probe the landing zone for stumps and rocks, and then toss a few snowballs to figure out the sweet spot.

STOMP IT OUT

Sideslip the in-run and then hardpack the last 40 or so feet using snowshoes, making sure it's wide enough for setup turns. Stomp the shit out of a square section next to the jump location to use as a quarry. In coastal zones, excavate down to bulletproof layers for the good block-building snow.

BLOCK OUT THE BASE

Cut big blocks from the quarry with a snow saw or shovel, and then start building with these solid cubes to create a super-hard foundation. Use stacked boards to create a frame two board lengths wide, then stack back blocks to create the grade for the ramp.

SHAPE AND SMOOTH

Make sure everyone in the crew grabs a shovel (including the filmer) and pack in the gaps with loose snow. Take a trial run, and then shave your work to get the height and angle dialed. Be ready for a few more rounds of shaping and shoveling, so keep snowshoes on until it's time to drop in.

MEASURE AND CALCULATE

Use those math skills to calculate how much speed is required, and then watch where the first rider (if it's not you) drops in from and where they land. Visualize speed, setup turns, and rotations into an equation that will ideally result in a landing where you barely even have to bend your knees.

Getting Around

Choosing The Best Approach In The Backcountry

Scoring a prime line in the backcountry takes a lot more sweat and skill than loading a high-speed quad. Whether burning gas with an 800cc snow machine or earning every vertical foot via splitboard, just getting the line can be more than half of the experience. And while most riders pair up with others who back the same method,

the real masters in mountain travel mix and match modes to the specific mission. But no matter what mode you choose, you need the right gear. We've condensed some wisdom from the riders who know into basic advice on which method best fits your style, budget, and objectives.—Dan Kostrzewski



PHOTO: DANIEL LNER

■ SNOWSHOE

The easiest uphill upgrade is a pair of compact mountaineering snowshoes like the MSR Denalis (\$139), which allow for steady progress in the deepest snow. Snowshoes don't require a new board or bindings, but do require lugging the weight of both on your back. The Deeper crew favored Verts (a lightweight, fixed-heel snowshoe) to front-point straight-up gnarly chutes, but most "slowshoes" are infamous for a plodding pace on flat sections and a tendency to obliterate skintracks, which is a source of conflict with skiers. Aim to break a separate trail if you walk this walk.

GEARTIP: Add collapsible three-part poles for speed and balance—Black Diamond's Expedition FlickLock styles (\$89) work best in cold weather.

■ SLED

Only a heli provides faster transport than a two-stroke fun-machine, unless it keeps getting stuck—which is every rookie's fate until skills like sidehilling, tandeming, and trailbreaking are mastered. Once a rider gets a handle on the horsepower, a long-track mountain sled like a Ski-Doo XP will get its owner deep into the alpine in a hurry, but also into a lot of potential trouble, fast. Learning how to use the tool kit and a towrope is critical and might prevent having to call in an expensive long-line recovery. But the biggest drawback to sledding is that money-sucking sound that comes with ownership.

GEARTIP: Bank on at least 5,000 for the sled and two grand per year for gas plus upkeep. Taller bars and a snowboard rack are essential.

■ SPLITBOARD

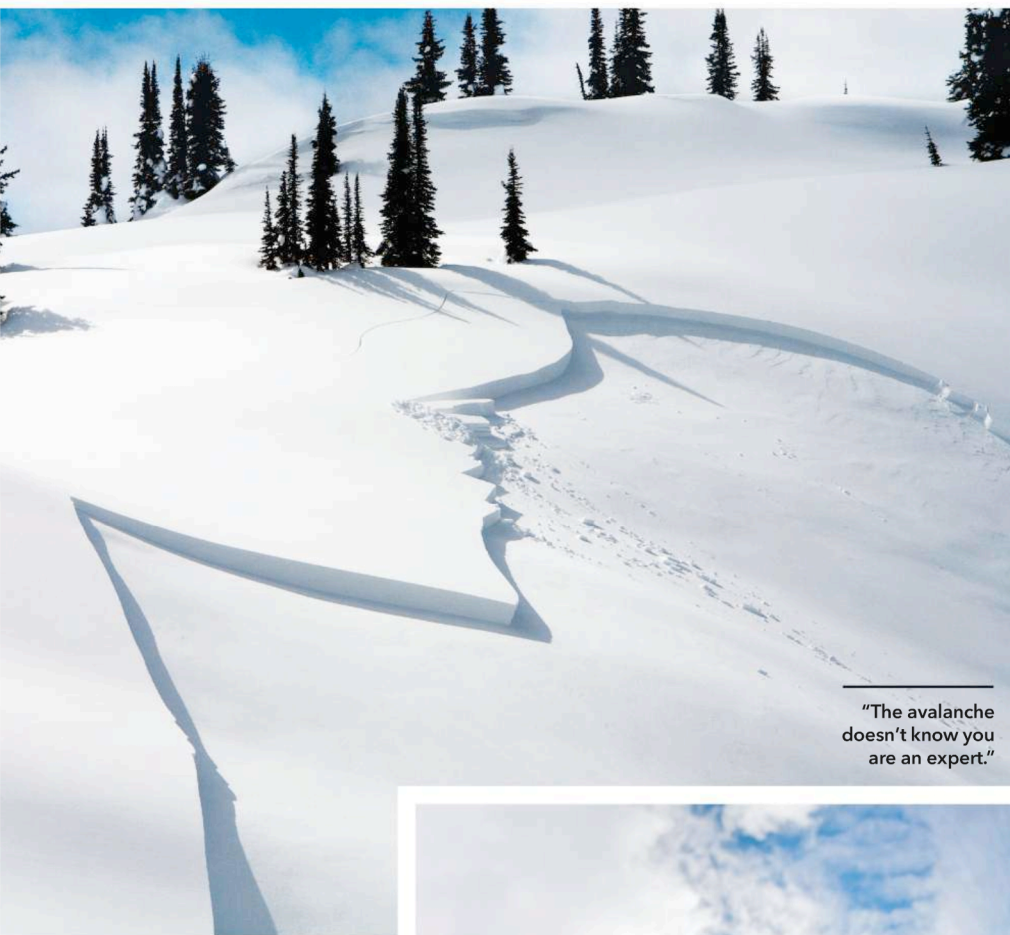
The big advantage is gaining vertical in split (ski) mode with an efficient kick-and-glide motion that slides you up pre-existing tracks on detachable skins that allow forward-only progress on the climb. The wide surface area also floats the skis on untracked shuffles, enabling splitters to break trail in remote areas and switchback up slopes to untouched zones. New shapes from Jones, Lib, Venture, and Prior have sweetened the ride from Voile's original decks, but the shortcomings remain: cumbersome weight, slow transitions, and a need for serious fitness. Start training now.

GEARTIP: Keep peeled skins warm in winter by cramming them into inside pockets and dry in spring by pre-waxing them with rub-on.

Avalanche 101

Steps Toward Heightened Awareness

Rule number one of avalanche safety is to not get caught in one. It sounds simple, but riding avalanche terrain requires making calculated judgment calls based on constantly shifting variables. A smart first step to learning the needed skills is taking a Level One course. Most riders view their own education about terrain, weather, and snowpack as a lifelong process—because, as the famous avalanche expert André Roch once said, “The avalanche doesn’t know you are an expert.”—*Dan Kostrzewski*



“The avalanche doesn’t know you are an expert.”



■ CLASS ACT

There is no global standard for avalanche education, but most intro courses conform to a three-day format commonly referenced as a Level One. The keys to picking a class are choosing a trained professional (check the American Avalanche Association member list) and selecting a reputable program, such as one listed by the American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education (AIARE). It’s also helpful to seek out a teacher who approaches backcountry in a similar style—by lifts, sleds, or skins—to avoid cultural divides.

Check directories at americanavalancheassociation.org or avtraining.org.

■ LOCAL’S FORECAST

From the Alaskan outback to the Sierra sidecountry, avalanche danger in specific ranges is forecasted daily by trained professionals at regional avalanche centers. They all use the American Avalanche Danger Scale, which increases exponentially in five steps from low to extreme. Backcountry riders should get in the habit of checking these daily reports via Web sites, phone hotlines, and automatic e-mails. It’s a valuable source for what’s happening below the surface. Find your center at avalanche.org or avalanche.ca.

■ MULTIMEDIA

Snow science takes experience to master, but the best 101 textbooks are *Snow Sense* by Jill Fredston and Doug Fesler, *The Avalanche Handbook* by David McClung, and *Staying Alive In Avalanche Terrain* by Bruce Tremper. For visual learners, check *The Fine Line*, an award-winning film by Rocky Mountain Sherpas. There is also a new version of the Canadian Avalanche Centre’s interactive tutorial that tests and teaches critical skills online.

Start the tutorial under the training tab at avalanche.ca.

■ CONTINUING ED

Soaking up knowledge from riders with more snowpack experience is a prerequisite before dropping into the next course, which is a four-day, Level Two. Educators say spending time in all three snow climates—coastal, intermountain, and continental—is essential, as is logging a few days of snow time with a professional guide. If you can’t book a week with ACMG splitboard guide Scott Newsome in B.C., a spectacular place to start is a guided, lift-assisted day at the backcountry-only area of Silverton Mountain. Go guided at silvertonmountain.com or newsomesnow.com.

A close-up portrait of a man with long dark hair, wearing a brown jacket, holding a black helmet with 'ONeill' and 'bern' logos. He is holding a small black camera with 'CONTOUR GPS' and '1080p HD • 155° WIDE' printed on it up to his eye.

CONTOUR

JEREMY JONES

HUMAN HIGHLIGHT REEL

ContourGPS The world's first hands-free video camera to shoot HD 1080p video while tracking location, speed, and elevation with an integrated GPS receiver.

View Jeremy Jones' story and others at Contour.com