



MWSC Big Mtn. Team

2013

Intro to

Alpine Touring (AT) Gear

What, who, where?

As many of you know, accumulating the perfect gear for any sport is a lengthy - and often addicting - process. **For the purposes of this program, you do not need to be fully outfitted in the best the market has to offer. You need functional essentials for light to medium backcountry skiing.** You may just be testing out this field and would be mistaken in spending a good deal of money on a sport you ultimately decide is not for you. Or, you may have some previous experience and are sure you want to invest in an optimal experience for years to come.

Most of the gear available is made by reputable companies and what is “best” or “worst” is really a matter of preference, or only applicable at very high levels of the sport. However, a lot of the gear is nuanced and made for different body types and ski styles. I suggest you **go into a reputable dealer (e.g., McU’s, Greenwoods, Eco Lounge, Idaho Mtn. Touring, Go Lite, etc.) and talk to a qualified sales person about what you’re looking for.** Try stuff on and get a feel for what is best for you, fit wise and financially.

Once you’ve found what you’re looking for, **supporting local businesses is great,** but there are a lot of options out there, most of which are as good as the next. I have acquired some great used gear from **Craigslist and Ebay, consignment stores (Backcountry Pursuit and Outdoor Exchange), and discount online sites (Department of Goods, Steep and Cheap, The Clymb, and Evo).**

The following is a very basic overview of the essentials needed for this program. You may be familiar with a lot of the content. This is just to give a better baseline to go from before you actively begin acquiring gear.

Alpine Trekkers

The first piece of equipment everyone should be introduced to is the Alpine Trekker from BCA (backcountryaccess.com). These may be a good choice for many of our athletes who do not currently own AT boots or bindings. The Trekkers are an adjustable insert that is compatible with most standard alpine boots and bindings.

Pros: Relatively cheap. You won't have to purchase new boots and bindings initially, or every year if you are growing (Trekks are size adjustable). Compatible with the current boot/binding set up.

Cons: Extra weight to pack, take up space in the pack. Takes more time at transitions to get in and out. Not optimal for very long hikes.

For this level, I would definitely look into these. Check out the website, watch the videos and read the reviews. I've used these in the past and they work great.



Tech binding



Bindings

Fritschi binding



AT bindings differ from standard alpine bindings in that they are lighter and that the heel piece can be unlatched to allow for hiking, and locked back down for alpine skiing.

If you decide to purchase AT bindings, there are (basically) two different types on the market. There are many nuances and pro's and con's to each. Talk with a qualified sales person to get an idea of which binding is appropriate for the level/type of skiing you'll be doing (Either would be fine for this program, this is more dependent on what you'll be doing outside the program).

One is often referred to as a "tech" binding (Dynafit and Plum). These are very minimalist and extremely lightweight. However, some people believe tech bindings are not as durable and that the boot is not as secure making it more likely to eject, but there is no definitive research - to my knowledge - to back this. (See top left).

The other is often called Fritschi binding (Marker Dukes, Black Diamond Fritschi). These look more like a standard alpine binding, are a little heavier than techs, but may provide a more secure lock in for more aggressive skiing. (See top right).



Boots

AT boots differ from standard alpine boots in that they are lighter, often have a treaded sole, and have more flex - especially in the walk mode. Most AT boots are not compatible with standard alpine bindings.

If you decide to purchase AT boots, there are two (basically) different types, differentiated by their compatibility with the two different types of bindings. Both serve basically the same purpose equally well. There are nuances, but ultimately the boot needs to match whichever binding you have gone with.

The first are boots with “tech fittings”. These are compatible with the tech bindings (Dynafit and Plum). These are identifiable by the toe pin fittings on the side of the toe piece. See above.

The other type are usually just sold as AT boots and are compatible with Fritschi bindings (Marker Dukes). These will not have the toe pin holes in the toe piece. See below.





Climbing Skins



Skins are a marvel of modern technology. Light and compactable, skins have adhesive on one side and directional “carpet” of nylon or mohair on the other. When applied to the base of the ski this allows the skier to walk up hill on snow. Amazing.

There are many different companies making skins, but they all serve the same purpose to the same effect. (The one exception is K2, which is now making skins that have clips specific to their skis - don't buy these skins if you don't own these skis). Otherwise, the only thing to look for when purchasing skins is that the skin is as wide if not wider than the fattest part of the ski, and that it is as long if not longer than the ski. Most new skins will come larger than the ski and you have them cut to fit the base.

As you may be growing and getting longer skis over the next few years, you might consider cutting the skins longer than your ski and folding them up over the tail. Or look for cheap, used climbing skin deals on Craigslist or Ebay.



Transceiver (Beacon)



Beacons are one of the three most essential tools of a backcountry skier's pack, along with a probe and a shovel. In the most basic of terms, beacons have two settings; transmit and search. A beacon in search mode will hone in on a beacon in transmit and give the searcher an approximate location of the transmitter. We will talk a lot more about beacons during the program.

There are not that many beacons on the market, though more and more have been popping up in the last few years. Different beacons may work a little different from one another, but they are all compatible with each other, meaning, a Pieps beacon in search mode will find a BCA Tracker in transmit. Likewise, a Tracker 1 - which is older and more rudimentary - will find a Tracker 2, -which is new and has some interesting though non-essential functions. I have had great luck finding good, used beacons at a decent price on Craigslist, but it's up to you which direction you want to go. The important thing is that we all have functional beacons with good batteries *every day* we go out.



Probes



A probe is an extendable/collapsible “stick” essential to avalanche rescue. After a buried transceiver’s signal is found, rescuers probe the snow in a grid or spiral pattern to determine exactly where and how deep the transceiver is in the snow pack.

A lot of different companies make probes to essentially the same effect. As long as a probe is functional it will serve its purpose adequately, meaning, feel free to buy used or older probes as long as they don’t have major dents, bends, or other defects that could lead to them breaking in the field.



Shovels

Shovels are obviously another essential piece of the avalanche rescuers toolbox.

Companies have been fairly progressive with the technology in the shovel field in the last few years, outfitting them with different function, size, and break down options.

For our purposes, the main things to consider are: **One - this is an avalanche shovel, not just a snow shovel.** Snow shovels are not only heavy, large and cumbersome, but their scoop is also too large to effectively dig out a buried individual. **Two - do not get a shovel with a plastic blade. Get metal.** Plastic blades have a higher potential to break in the field, which is about as bad a scenario as one could imagine.

Other than that, just look for something that will fit in or on your pack nicely.



Packs



There are a few different companies making some pretty awesome packs specific to backcountry skiing and snowboarding (BCA, DaKine, Go Lite). These often have exterior straps for holding skis while boot-packing, holsters or pouches specifically for shovels, probes, and helmets, and a myriad of other non-essential, but handy, features.

That being said, for the purposes of our program you don't necessarily need one of these packs. What **you need is a pack that can hold, or strap on, your shovel, probe, lunch, skins, water, and extra layers. Also, you want those to remain dry if it's precipitating.** Therefore, if you have a backpacking pack that is not massive, or a larger school backpack that is water proof, that will work. However, you most often don't outgrow a backpack before it deteriorates, so investing in a quality pack is a consideration. Try to stay away from the JanSport Cosco special, you'll be thankful for the dry layers and sandwiches.

Helmets

I'm sure you all have them. If not, get one, because we'll be wearing them. Any *ski* helmet will do. This cat would not be cleared to ski with us.





Layers

Most of you probably have a lot of good layers for skiing. Backcountry skiing requires a good layering system. Consider how hot you will get hiking uphill, with a pack on your back and 10 pounds on your feet. If you don't layer down while hiking, your sweat will soak you through your layers, dehydrate and exhaust you. However, once you victoriously reach the top of a ridge, there may be snow and high winds and you'll cool down rapidly.

The general rule - for the upper body - is to have a wicking layer on skin (Under Armor, wool, synthetic), one to two warming layers (fleece, micro-puff), and a waterproof layer (jacket shell - the team jacket I presume). You'll want some lighter gloves for hiking and your regular gloves for skiing. Most people only wear 1 pair of thermal underwear on the lower body, unless it is extremely cold. Likewise, some prefer not to hike in a helmet if the terrain is mellow, so a lighter cap or headband could also be appropriate.

Everyone's body thermo regulates a little different, so it's really all about finding out what is most comfortable for you. However, it wouldn't hurt to make sure you have your bases covered.

Conclusion

There are no **reputable** brands that I wouldn't recommend. For most of this gear - except maybe the layers - there are no knock off brands out there to my knowledge. It's all about discovering what is comfortable for you and suits your ski ability and style. Talk to a sales person, try stuff on, and be deliberate in your decision. Everyone should be comfortable and confident when we're out crushing incredible terrain. Email me if you have a question about a piece of gear and I'll try to help the best I can. Good luck, I'm jealous of you all, new gear is awesome.

