

Cheat Sheet for Backcountry Tours

Nordic Ski Association of Anchorage
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Winter is a great time to peg the fun-o-meter. To enjoy our ski tours we need to take care of ourselves in the mountains. This means staying dry and warm, eating enough food to replenish our energy and keep our fires burning, having appropriate ski gear and traveling safely.

Staying dry and warm is essential to enjoy ski tours. Check weather conditions, and forecasts ahead of time, bring adequate and comfortable gear to handle the elements. Keep in mind we'll take a lunch break, water and food breaks. Its not uncommon we encounter sun, wind, wet snow and cold. Layering is good, cotton is bad.

All of our tours are all day outings. Ski touring is a demanding activity so bring adequate water and food to replenish your energy and warmth. Most people require only 1,500 to 2,500 calories in a day however while ski touring the energy expenditure can go as high as 4,000 to 6,000 calories per day. Bring tasty foods which are easy to consume in the cold and are readily digestible.

Your day pack should be comfortable, fit your body and be capable of carrying what you need during the tour (water, food, and extra clothing). Touring skis are adequate for most of our tours. Skate skis are inadequate or inappropriate for all our tours but the Hatcher to Willow tour. If there is any one item which you must be particular about a good fit, that would be ski boots. Climbing skins will aid on the ascent of some of our tours particularly where we climb steeper terrain. We will advise you which tours skins are recommended. Some of our touring occurs in avalanche terrain. We'll advise you when we think its a good idea to bring avalanche gear (beacons, probes, and shovels) and we'll let you know when avalanche gear is essential.

All ski outings are attended by members of the Anchorage Nordic Ski Patrol. These capable volunteers provide the tour with safety and first aid expertise. They are essential to help us minimize the risks we take on our ski outings.

For many of us dogs are family members and enhance our outdoors experiences. Keep in mind, not everybody likes dogs. We'll try to strike a happy balance by allowing well behaved dogs, who can handle the weather and snow conditions, and don't chase wildlife. Please stay in control of your dog during the tour.

Backcountry ski touring is a demanding activity. We'll list the length of tour, the level of tour (beginner, intermediate, or advanced) and the terrain you'll ski on. Whatever your skill level, inspirations, and physical condition, you can judge for yourself if you want to partake in the days adventure.

Backcountry ski touring is many things. It is skiing, a wilderness experience, panoramic views and most of all fun. We hope you'll join us. If you have any questions, email or call us at anchoragenordicskitours@gmail.com or 336-1717.

The Appendix

Weather, Avalanche Information, and References

Weather:

Southcentral Alaska National Weather Service homepage:

<http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov/>

Anchorage Zone Forecast:

<http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov/pubfcst.php?fcst=FPAK51PAFC#AKZ101>

Current Weather Conditions around Anchorage:

<http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov/mesonet.php>

Upper Kenai Zone Forecast:

<http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov/pubfcst.php?fcst=FPAK51PAFC#AKZ125>

Turnagain Pass (Center Ridge) conditions:

http://ambcs.org/cgi-bin/siteCurrent.cgi?site=TURNAGAIN_ABD

Summit Lake (near Manitoba Mountain) conditions:

“Hatcher Pass” Zone Forecast:

<http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov/pubfcst.php?fcst=FPAK51PAFC#AKZ111>

Independence Mine current conditions:

http://ambcs.org/cgi-bin/siteCurrent.cgi?site=INDEPENDENCE_M

Alaska Statewide Zone Forecasts:

<http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov/pubfcst.php>

Specific Alaskan location conditions:

<http://ambcs.org/SiteViewer.shtml>

Alaskan Road Weather and Conditions:

<http://www.dot.state.ak.us/iways/roadweather/forms/AreaSelectForm.html>

Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center (Turnagain Pass):

<http://www.cnfaic.org/>

Avalanche Advisory on the Web:

<http://www.cnfaic.org/advisories.php>

Forecast Hotline:

754-2369

References:

Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills, 7th edition, 2003, editor Steven M. Cox and Kris Fulsaa. The first section is of importance to beginning back country skiers.

Backcountry Skiing: Skills for Ski Touring and Ski Mountaineering, 2007, Martin Volken, Scott Schell, and Margaret Wheeler. A book written for those who want to carve turns in the back country. Nonetheless the avalanche advice is spot on, and for intermediate or advanced skiers the book could be invaluable. The book provides a good guide for those who want to advance their ski touring from our tours.

Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain, 2002, Bruce Tremper. There are a number of books on avalanche safety and this is one of the best. This book is a complete guide beginning with basic avalanche concepts and building to an advanced level. Tremper writes in a clear, often humorous writing style, and makes even complex scientific concepts easy to understand.



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