

TRACKS TO TRY

CALIFORNIA

Bear Valley Cross Country

Nestled in the super scenic High Sierra and surrounded by two wilderness areas, Bear Valley Cross Country offers some of the finest striding and skating anywhere! With impeccable grooming, expansive meadows, scenic ridgetops, snowshoeing, sledding, telemarking, backcountry, alpine skiing and lodging within walking distance, Bear Valley offers incredible adventures for everyone.

209/753-2834, www.bearvalleyxc.com.

Sorensen's and Hope Valley Resorts

Your resort for all seasons in the Sierra Nevada. Sorensen's offers cozy housekeeping cabins, many with wood burning stoves, and delicious, homemade cuisine in the Country Café, serving 7 days per week. Located on the eastern edge of beautiful Hope Valley, a perfect spot for XC skiing, snowshoeing, fishing, hiking, biking or just plain relaxing. Conveniently close to Grover Hot Springs State Park, east of Kirkwood and 20 minutes South of Lake Tahoe. For reservations or more information, 800/423-9949, www.sorensensresort.com.

COLORADO

Gunnison & Crested Butte

Gunnison & Crested Butte, Colorado is known for being one of the state's most popular year-round recreation destinations with a contagious local energy. For cross country skiers, it's a winter paradise. Start with over 300 inches of snowfall, 90 km of groomed trails and an exceptional Nordic Center. Ski where Olympic and world-class athletes live and train for the quality and diversity of terrain, and glide into 22 cross country events this winter! 877/345-8926, GunnisonCrestedButte.com.

Latigo Ranch

Looking for a skiing vacation offering 50 km of trails groomed for skate and classic, terrain of aspen glades and open vistas, gorgeous views that take your eyes to distant mountains, fabulous skiing each day without seeing more than a handful of people, comfortable cabins, fine dining cooked by and eaten with the ranch owners, all just 2 hours west of Denver? Make Latigo Ranch your next ski destination. 970/724-9008, www.LatigoTrails.com.

IDAHO

Sun Valley

Boasting diverse terrain, excellent grooming and sunny skies, the Sun Valley Region is truly Nordic Town USA. Offering over 200 km of groomed Nordic trails, the system includes historic mountain lodges, wilderness skiing and snowshoeing, and "in town" groomed paths connecting the communities. Visitors will enjoy the pristine grooming and hallmark events like the Boulder Mountain Tour, the culminating event of the annual Sun Valley Nordic Festival. Visitsunvalley.com.

MONTANA

West Yellowstone

Visit Yellowstone's Nordic skiing gateway. West Yellowstone boasts 35 km of Olympic-quality corduroy on the Rendezvous Ski Trails, home of the Yellowstone Ski Festival and Rendezvous Race. You'll find another 10 km of groomed trail along the scenic banks of the Madison River in Yellowstone Park, and a dog friendly classic track following the Yellowstone boundary, all accessible from the snow-covered streets of town. Back country skiers can explore 2.2 million acres of powder in Yellowstone's interior, accessible by snowcoach or trailheads along Hwy 191. www.rendezvouskitrails.com.

CANADA ALBERTA

Lake Louise

Known for reliable snowfall, long ski season, extensive trail network, easy highway access, and iconic world-class destination with great amenities. With unrivalled vistas and wildlife sightings, the scenic journey along the TransCanada highway, Canada's #1 thoroughfare, creates a spectacular tour to the unforgettable, and easily accessible, Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise. Miles of groomed trails await you with record snow levels and a season starting earlier than any North American region. Step into our backyard this ski season and experience it for yourself.

For more information visit www.fairmont.com/lakelouise.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Nipika Mountain Resort

In the heart of the Canadian Rockies in British Columbia, Nipika offers a spectacular setting for your XC ski holiday. 50 km of meticulously groomed classic and skate ski trails, waxing facilities, snowshoeing, skating, hot tub, sauna, and beautiful hand built, fully equipped log cabins to curl up in. Nipika is the perfect skier's get-a-way. Oh yeah, have we mentioned the drop dead beauty of the Canadian Rockies in winter. Nipika offers complete ski school, ski & snowshoe rentals. 877/647-4525, www.nipika.com.

Whistler

There's another side to Whistler. It's stunning and pristine wilderness. It's quiet and serene settings. It's unassuming and inclusive amenities. It's 129km of diverse and impeccably groomed terrain. It's Whistler's cross country skiing experiences, and it's the perfect way to enjoy this one-of-a-kind resort, as well as the venue and facilities left as a legacy by the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Come, explore Whistler's Nordic side. For information on accommodation and packages call 1.800.WHISTLER or visit whistler.com.

OFF TRACK

CONTINUED

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While golfing doesn't rely as critically on dynamic balance as skiing, you can use golf to improve your proprioception, or the awareness you have of your body in space, a critical balance skill. Balance may be the most important aspect of skiing. Proprioception allows you to balance with your eyes closed, and that is why skiing at night is such a great balance improver. In the summer the following exercise provides a similar challenge. When putting, visualize the stroke, close your eyes and make your putt. You will force yourself to "feel" where your body is without external clues. Putt, putt, putt.

This article might have you visualizing a soft, over-weight, cart-driving golfer who couldn't ski one kilometer, let alone 50, and that I am soft in the head. But, please take

some time to check out the new young lions of golf. Mainly they are fit race horses. As for flexibility, I suggest you look up Camilo Villegas, the "Spiderman" of golf. And if you think that golf has no aerobic component I submit Christopher Smith, a 45 year-old who shot six under par 65 on a regulation course in 44 minutes and six seconds. He carried six clubs with him and sprinted between shots. Some skiers I know would have trouble running the distance that fast without taking the clubs or the shots. The takehome-take-home here is that golf can be exercise and that, just as in skiing, "thinking" is the ruin of the sport. You have to feel it.

All this talk about golf and skiing makes me believe that a new biathlon sport could be born. I'll work on the concept this spring, after the snow

melts, perhaps using roller skis with a nine iron strapped to my back. If that doesn't work out, at least I've concocted my latest justification for a round of golf: cross-training. **[GCS]**

Jimmy VandenBrook resides in the Norwegian-American community of Mount Horeb, Wis., not far from Madison where he works for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture as a Natural Resources Manager. Jim is the director of instruction and past-president of the Madison Nordic Ski Club. Memorable ski events include 24 American Birkebeiners, the Norwegian Birkebeiner, skiing in Yellowstone and the 440K Rajalta-Rajalle ski tour across Finland.

A Different Birkie Perspective

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"It's not flat," he says. Admittedly not the strongest sprinter on Team Birkie (Bjerke's seven-man crew), he likes that "there's some ups and downs" throughout the course that he can work. But if anything, he just really enjoys the vibe. The crowds here are electric, exceptional to the insane degree they cheer on and acknowledge the athletes, he says, especially during podium ceremonies. "The Americans seem to be very open," he continues, speaking of last year's events. "And afterwards, there was this gathering at this one bar in Hayward. That was very nice."

As of this writing, Team Birkie had just completed training in Denmark. They look forward to February. "In Norway, you sort of learn to not brag about good results," Bjerke admits. "But in America, if you've done well you're allowed to be happy about it."

I'm about 1.5 km from finishing and am running on the fumes of a second wind. It's begun snowing. At the final uphill—a bump, even by my standards—I twice lose footing. This throws me off stride, somewhat, and into the open skater track. With dozens of Korte skiers now barreling down into the shoot, and with zero leg power by this point, I simply can't nudge back over to prevent certain collision. I lamely shuffle across the finish line, chest heaving.

Minutes later I'm nursing hot potato soup in a semi-heated tent with other 23 km and 12 km finishers. I've forgotten a dry change of clothes and can feel my sweat freezing. Somewhere around now, I'd later learn, Espen Bjerke is far off in the woods and to the front of the lead pack, and suddenly—snap—his left pole breaks in two. Tore Martin, a

teammate of Bjerke's, will go on to claim first prize. Bjerke presses on, anyway.

With that, I was off. There were huge labor demonstrations down in Madison that I had to see about. But I'd done it, dammit, even if only the shortest loop. And while I'm not skiing this year (and don't know whether I'll ever get back to the Birkie), some part of me wishes I was. To the guy whose skis wandered off—I hope they turned up, and that your tour turned for the better. And to the young lady I maybe cut off—hope you didn't take it personally or anything. **[GCS]**

Brian Anderson is a freelance writer, a native of Chicago where he thinks he's mastered the art of weekend touring. His interests include film, nebulae and travel.