



Chapter 3: Snowshoeing Tips

Snowshoeing does not require complicated, technical know-how. The best tip, in the words of snowshoe champion Bernie Boettcher, is to “Run (or walk) without falling down.”

At first, snowshoeing may seem a bit awkward, but it takes no time at all before traipsing along with ease becomes second nature. Riding on top of the snow beats post-holing up to your thighs at each step. When the trail is hard-packed, the crampons on your snowshoes give you purchase where you could otherwise slip.

Pro Tip: Jog First

“I try to race/run on snowshoes just like I do off of snowshoes. I'd recommend that a newbie should at least do an easy jog in snowshoes to get used to the extra weight and size of the shoes. Sometimes I will add a little padding to my ankles (like an ace bandage) to soften the blow from kicking myself with the snowshoe tail. It doesn't happen a lot but can be quite painful if you hit the ankle right on the bone.” —David Dunham, former Snowshoe National Champion of Bradford Massachusetts

Technique

Snowshoeing requires endurance, strength, balance, and coordination. Some simple techniques will make a wide range of terrain accessible to you.

Climbing: Using your crampons will help you climb effectively. When faced with a steep hill, put pressure on the toe of your foot so the metal teeth of the crampon can grab hold of the snow.

This will give you the traction you need to climb. If you have retractable poles, shorten them for the climb. And don't forget that if the slope is simply too steep you can blaze a trail that switchbacks across the mountain and makes its way up more slowly.

Descending: To make a controlled descent, bend your knees slightly and lean back, keeping your weight over your heels. Open up your stride, and you can pick up speed without tripping over yourself. Keep your arms out to the side and enjoy the run down—the fast, light, powder descents are the big fun. Lengthen adjustable poles when descending.

Edging: Though many people opt not to use poles, for traverses they are key tools. As you head across a slope, kick the side of the snowshoe into the hillside, engage the crampon, and stomp down hard. The poles come in handy to maintain balance and support. Shorten the pole on the uphill side so that your hands are at the same height (each pole will be a different length).

Breaking Trail: If fresh snow graces your trail and no prints mark the way, you will be breaking trail. When in a group, walk in single file, letting the first in line break trail and switching off as needed. When it's your turn to lead, take consistent, even steps that others can follow.

Pro Tip: Get There First

"First tracks are fabulous! Own 'em."

"The only serious tricks to discover are on the downhill. Keep your arms out to the side and open up your stride. The magic of snowshoeing happens on the downhill when you start to "float" on the powder! It's a kick. And loads of fun, that is until your foot gets trapped under some submerged log and you fall flat on your face in the powder. But that's kind of fun too. It's hard to get hurt snowshoeing because the surface is so forgiving." —Bernie Boettcher, USSSA Masters National Snowshoe Champion 2003 and 2004, Silt, Colorado

Conservation

There is nothing like the quiet solitude of wild places in wintertime. For many of us who love snowshoeing and other winter activities, the opportunity to enjoy this peaceful setting is nothing short of a way of life. While everyone has a right to enjoy national forests, no one has the right to abuse them. We all share a responsibility in protecting nature, keeping our water clean, and preserving key wildlife habitat.

Sanitation and the Wasatch Front Watershed

Since the earliest days of settlement, the majority of Utah's population has chosen to settle along the range's western front. Here, numerous river drainages exit the mountains, and in a desert with a giant salt-saturated lake, these fresh water sources are the hub of life.

Guarding these resources is a watershed plan that encompasses the seven major canyons of the Wasatch Mountain Range (the Wasatch Canyons) and their drainages. From north to south, these drainages are: City Creek, Red Butte Creek, Emigration Creek, Parleys Creek, Millcreek, Big Cottonwood Creek, and Little Cottonwood Creek. The Salt Lake City watershed is comprised of the waters of these creeks, the surrounding lands that support these water sources, and the groundwater recharge areas for the Salt Lake Valley. Watershed restrictions are enforced in the following canyons: Little Cottonwood; Big Cottonwood; Parleys, north and east of Mountain Dell Reservoir; Little Dell (toward East Canyon); Lamb's; and City Creek.

In other words, drinking water for the residents of the Wasatch Front comes directly from the canyons in which we play. For this reason, domestic animals such as dogs and horses are not allowed in the watershed canyons. Camping is allowed in developed campgrounds only, and backcountry camping must be a half mile from any road and 200 feet from any water source.

When getting rid of human waste in these watershed canyons, follow a few simple rules:

- * Use restrooms when available.

- * If restrooms are not available, don't leave yellow holes next to the trail. Have consideration for the visual aspects of the trail and those who come after you. Never urinate next to or above a stream or water source.

- * Defecate before you leave home or bring a zippered bag to carry out your waste and the toilet paper used. If you are unable to do either of the above, choose a south-facing slope well away from any direct water source and unseen by others. The sun on the south slope will start the freeze-thaw cycle that will help dilute the waste during spring thaw and runoff.

Snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and other forms of human-powered winter recreation are activities that get people out in nature to enjoy solitude, to exercise, and to recharge. Fortunately, these activities have minimal impact to the natural world. Unfortunately, unregulated and unmanaged snowmobiling in national forests impacts wildlife and other users. While the Forest Service tries to manage these conflicting uses of public land, it is important to understand that the public plays an important role in managing national forests. Not only is it important to check our own behaviors, but becoming actively involved in protecting the areas we love is crucial to keeping what we have and preserving for the future..

Grass-roots and national organizations are at the forefront of this endeavor. One group, the Winter Wildlands Alliance, is a national nonprofit organization composed of winter sports enthusiasts and conservationists working to promote and protect wild lands and opportunities for human-powered winter recreation. To learn more about how you can get involved, visit www.winterwildlands.org. In the Logan Ranger District of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest, the nonprofit group Nordic United is dedicated to providing non-motorized winter recreation. Nordic United participates in land-management decisions, partners with other organizations to improve groomed cross-country and snowshoe trails, and sponsors events, clinics, and races. Learn more about them at www.nordicunited.org.

Trail Etiquette

Everyone has a different view of how public lands should be used. With the variety of objectives and opinions, our recreational areas require that we call up that skill we learned in kindergarten—sharing. Common sense and courtesy go a long way when you meet another sport enthusiast. Here are some simple things you can do to help “share” the snow with others:

- * When you park, make sure others can maneuver around you.
- * Treat the environment with respect. Pack out what you pack in. Tread lightly.
- * Respect closed areas and private property.
- * Share the trails with others. Be a good ambassador for your sport.
- * Avoid snowshoeing on cross-country ski tracks. Skiers use these tracks on their way in and out. When snowshoeing on or near Nordic center trails, make sure you don't use the ski trails.
- * Obey all watershed regulations.