

■ **SUPER DAVE FACT:** Check out the Life-Link Randonne Rally Ski-Tour Race at Whistler Jan. 7th, 2006 www.life-link.com.

SOURCE: Metro Vancouver

■ **HOT SITES:** Check out the following great sites: www.adventuresmart.ca, www.avalanche.ca, www.biglines.com.

SOURCE: Metro Vancouver



Backcountry playground

Before you head out make sure to be prepared

By DAVE NORONA
for Metro Vancouver

You have seen the photos, listened to your friends talk about it, and maybe even ventured off-piste for yourself. It's true British Columbia's backcountry is the biggest and best in the world. The vastness of our terrain and the amount of snowfall make every nook and cranny your own personal playground.

I think every skier and snowboarder imagines themselves skiing the perfect 35-degree slope with light fluffy powder engulfing their face. The backcountry is the place you will find that, days after the ski resorts have been tracked out.

However, this beauty also has many hidden and not-so-hidden hazards that you or your group must be prepared for before heading out. Trip planning, avalanche knowledge and map and terrain reading are just a few of the important aspects of heading out into the backcountry by ski or snowboard. This knowledge will help you make informed decisions of where to go and what slopes to ski or board on and ensure that everyone arrives home at the end of the day.

If you are looking to tackle the incredible B.C. landscape and deal with Mother Nature's fury then here are a few hints to make your next trip go smoothly.

Choose those in your group carefully and make sure everyone is at or near the same level in both ski/snowboard ability and avalanche awareness. This way your



Patrick McQuillan enjoys B.C.'s vast backcountry on Phalanx Glacier behind Blackcomb Mountain. Trip planning, avalanche knowledge as well as the ability to read maps and terrain are essential to backcountry skiing and snowboarding.

DYLAN LABELLE/METRO VANCOUVER

focus will all be the same and decisions in the field will be easier to make. Plan the area and route that you will take to get there and keep everyone up to speed if there are any changes. By going over the route with the group, some things might be noticed that may have been overlooked.

Every member of your group should have some avalanche training and know how to use a probe, shovel and avalanche beacon. All too often groups travel with just one knowledgeable leader. Unfortunately if the

leader becomes buried in an avalanche the rescue operation can be a disaster. I personally only travel with a small group of friends who I know have the skills and the calmness to help me if I get into a situation.

On your trip be aware of the different signs of what the snow pack is doing on the different slopes you pass. If you see mini snow slides on smaller, insignificant slopes then chances are bigger slopes facing the same direction are not that safe. This is a much better approach

then touring to the top of a slope you plan to ski and then digging a snow pit in one area to make a judgment call on the entire slope. Every little thing will help you make the proper decision, so look for all the signs that are present.

The message from the AdventureSmart Program and the Avalanche Association is to Get Informed And Go Outdoors. After all that is what it's all about!

For more Super Dave info, check out the website www.davenorona.com.

Gear Guide

SCARPA MATRIX ALPINE TOURING BOOT



Description: This super light-weight ski-touring boot provides the performance of an alpine ski boot yet is comfortable for all-day touring. Three alloy buckles with micro-adjustments and a dual-density thermo-moldable liner ensure the boot fits comfortable and skis with precision.

Price Range: \$599

Where to find it: www.scarpa-us.com.

G3 CLIMBING SKINS



Description: You will be able to climb the steepest slopes once your G3 climbing skins are attached to your bases. They are durable, waterproof, fast gliding and temperature-tolerant to handle anything Mother Nature throws your way.

Price range: \$130-\$160

Where to find it: www.genuineguidegear.com.

DYNAFIT TLT CONFORT BINDING



Description: Dynafit has created the lightest alpine touring bindings on the market that are easy to use and bomb-proof. Three-height heel piece, fully locked toe

mode for touring, and simple transition from touring to downhill are just a few of the options.

Price range: \$415

Where to find it: www.life-link.com.

BLACK DIAMOND RIPPER SNOW SAW



Description: Along with your probe, shovel and avalanche beacon a snow saw should be one of your essential items. The beveled teeth on the Ripper saw allows you to cut through fragile snow with less displacement. Perfect for isolating columns in a snow pit or cutting blocks for a shelter.

Price range: \$15.50

Where to find it: www.bdel.com.

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