



Issue: # 5

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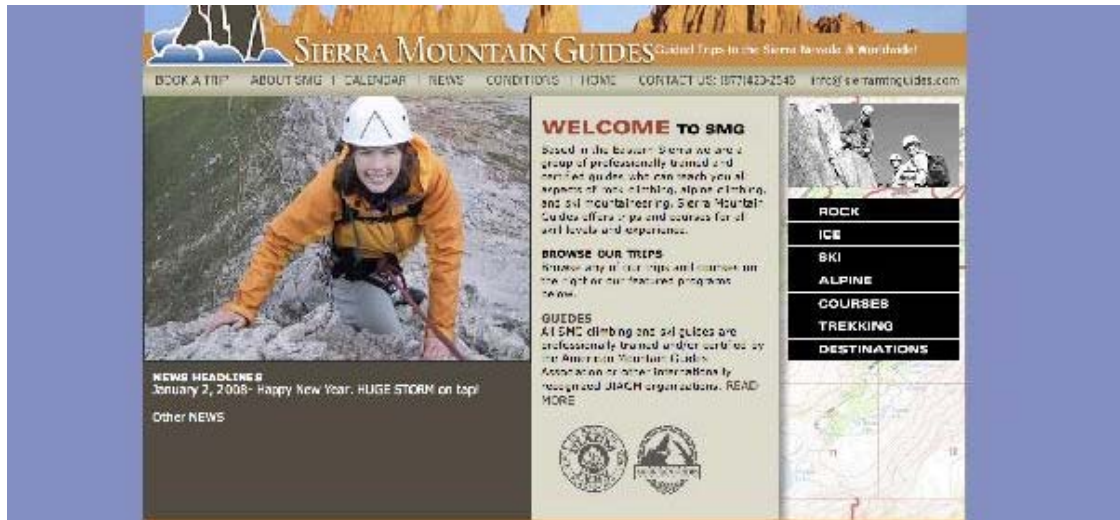
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Happy New Year!**Dear Howie,**

Well winter has finally shown her sexy face here on the east side. She has covered our lovely mountains with up to 10 feet in some areas. This is a great time of year to take avalanche courses, go backcountry skiing, and of course the ice is just right. Check out our new calendar, its chocked full of good stuff.



our AIARE Level 1 course with your delicious treats: People were seriously lovin' them!



Our Web site is up and running!!!

www.sierramtnguides.com

It has been months of hard work around here: staying up and working until the wee hours of the morning on this new web site. Sierramtnguides.com contains hundreds of pages describing who we are, what we do, where we go, and how we do it once we get there. Now Sierra Mountain Guides is there for you 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. During the next, well, forever we will be constantly updating the site and making sure it has all the info you need and is always up to date. Here are a few of our personal favorite features to check out:

- [Our Cool Color-Organized Calander!](#)
- [The World Famous Ice Report!](#)
- [The Equally as Famous Snow Report!](#)
- [The Soon-To-Be Famous SMG News Page!](#)

Why Backcountry?

I think when you say "backcountry skiing" to a lot of people they think cross country skiing. Do we all know the difference? Do we know what's involved with backcountry skiing and why we think it's so much cooler than resort skiing and that snowboarders can enjoy the backcountry too? Let's ask one of our up and coming bad-ass ski guides, Jed Porter:

SMG: Ok, so what is Backcountry skiing? How is it different from cross country skiing?

Jed: Let's see--First of all our mothers are more apt to approve of cross-country skiing. While the lines between the two activities can blur, generally we practice two distinct activities. Back country skiers can go almost anywhere snow is found. We've got tools and techniques to climb all sorts of mountains, and then we transform for the downhill, using resort-tuned technique to ski, or even snowboard, anything from forested slopes to chutes steeper than the back of your head. Cross country skiers tend to roam about in controlled environments with their skis covered in mysterious sticky waxes.

SMG: You said snowboard? Is there really a way for me to snowboard in the backcountry?

Jed: Definitely! A snowboard can be a very versatile tool for travelling "off-piste" (that's pseudo-french for off the groomed snow). The challenge that immediately comes to mind is getting up the hill, right? You've got a few options. Most simply, you can just hike up, like the half pipe addicts do. When the snow gets deeper, you can hike with the board on your back and snowshoes on your feet. Boarders get truly mobile though, when we split the



board down the middle, making two "skis" for the up and clicking back to board mode for the down.

SMG: Is it more fun than resort skiing and snowboarding?

Jed: If you think untracked snow, incredible scenery, no lift lines and summiting peaks is fun, then yes you'll think the backcountry is more fun. Look at it this way: Here in the Eastern Sierra we have two mountains with lifts and thousands without. You do the math.

SMG: How do you get up there?

Jed: Like I started to mention after the snowboard question, you could hike or snowshoe, but that's really clumsy and just doesn't work most of the time. What we do is use telemark gear, modified alpine gear (called AT, Alpine Touring, or Randonnee) or a split board. Regardless of your tool, we add "climbing skins" to the bottom for the climbing portion of the day. Skins are nothing short of miraculous. They glue to our skis for the up yet pull cleanly away for the down. The part touching the snow is a fabric that slides forward but not back. All you gotta do is slide each foot forward up the hill.

SMG: Sounds equipment intensive. Summarize what I'll need in order to try it out.

Jed: I haven't even mentioned safety equipment and practices yet. Let me assume that you're going with someone who can provide the safety equipment and knowledge you'll need. And you'll need plenty. Backcountry safety is a newsletter topic all its own. That being said, you'll need a few things. Your existing ski clothing can be adapted to be appropriate. Add a lightweight wind breaking jacket. Spiffy soft shells are nice. Backcountry specific pants are really worth the investment. Skinning up gets warm and resort-style pants are usually too hot. For your first time, rent good ski gear: AT boots, bindings and skins for most folks. Very proficient Telemark skiers should consider bindings with an optional free-pivot. Snowboarders should consider nothing less than a split board for their first time out. Rent one.

SMG: I boot pack out of bounds at the ski area all the time, why do I suddenly need lessons to go backcountry?

Jed: Avalanche danger, foul weather, getting lost, skinning up, finding the best powder, all are infinitely easier to deal with after a thorough education.

SMG: What is the progression? What classes do I take first, then where do I go?

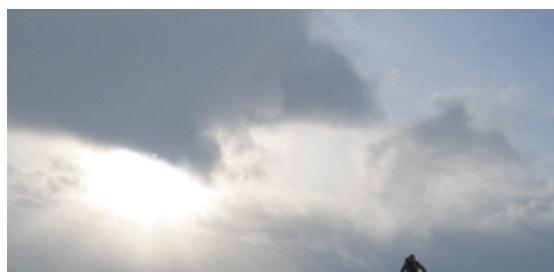
Jed: Sierra Mountain Guides offers a great progression program for people interested in heading into the backcountry. The only requisite is that you are a good resort skier to begin with. Though it is possible to learn to ski in the backcountry (ask our office manager), you will really have more fun in the variable conditions of the backcountry if you come into it with experience. For those people who want to gain a little free vertical mileage, we offer the 'June Mountain Off-Piste' program where you take the lift to the top of June and then ski the backcountry behind June for the day. You can also come out with us on a 'Ski the Backcountry' course or 'Splitboard the Backcountry'. Many people will take these and then invest their time and money in a few avalanche courses. Finally, you can come out with us on 'Sierra Peak Descents' or on a full on 'Sierra Ski Tour'. Or for the exotic type we offer ski trips all over the Alps and Alaska (oh baby!) We've got something for everyone interested in backcountry skiing.

SMG: My friend is a really good skier, why do I need to pay a little more for an AMGA trained guide to take me out?

Jed: Really good skier? Like does sick corked out 720's in the park and sprays powder 40 feet behind him in Cornice Bowl? Your trained guide, by the very nature of the training and pre-requisites has been backcountry skiing for at least 4 years extensively in multiple mountain ranges (we're talking like at least 20 steep ski tours), taken 2-3 upper level avalanche safety courses and has committed her or his money and time for up to 30 days of training and testing. A good professional guide of any training level will get regular hands on experience out in the snow, especially in the areas they guide: Getting waist deep, so to speak, in as they say in our line of work. See ya' out there!

Valdez Adventure Ski Week:

When I first thought of skiing in Alaska it brought on a long lost sense of childhood excitement and wonder. Alaska has always held a "last frontier" ideal for me. When I finally got there it was way more than I could have hoped for. I remember being absolutely blown away by how white everything was. The absolute white translated to great skiing, amazing views, and fall lines from heaven. The time I



spent in Valdez left a lifelong impression. I knew when I boarded the plane in Anchorage that I would come back with the goal of showing other people how truly amazing Alaska still is. If you are into ski mountaineering, adventure, and the last frontier, our Valdez Adventure Ski week will leave your inner child beaming, and your tick list one page shorter. Can you imagine a better way to experience Alaska's Chugach range? Neither can we. Through a combination of ski touring and helicopter assisted ski touring we'll cover a lot of ground in seven days. From the first day this low impact, cost effective ski week that will leave you with a lifetime of memories. We will be staying in a lodge for the first several nights and we'll finish the trip off with a three day two night tour in the wilds of the Chugach. Don't miss this opportunity to experience the North country. -Neil



A review of an [AIARE Level 1](#) course:

I took an AIARE Level 1 course this past weekend with the owners of Sierra Mountain Guides, Neil Satterfield and Howie Schwartz. You can take an AIARE course anywhere but it is important to note the qualifications of our instructors. Howie Schwartz helped create the AIARE curriculum since its inception. He is also an IFMGA guide has been skiing the backcountry for 15 years. Neil Satterfield is an AMGA Certified alpine guide and has been skiing since he was practically in the womb, not all AIARE instructors are as qualified as this team. This is my 4th season as a backcountry skier and I have done a lot of reading on avalanches, so much so that I thought that an Avy 1 course would be such a bore. Instead I found that there was a lot to learn even about the subjects I thought I knew. We learned how to recognize avalanche terrain, understand how weather can

affect a snow pack, and how to conduct tests in the snow to identify weak layers and identify "red flags". I was surprised at how much I learned about route finding and travel techniques in avalanche terrain (that was supposed to be my strong subject!). Finally, we also learned about the worst case scenario: companion rescue. The biggest lesson I took out of that was not how to use a beacon but how to organize a group of people while trying to conduct a search. There wasn't even anyone actually buried and our first search was chaotic! The bottom line is, I would recommend this class to anyone who has ever stepped out of a door and saw snow. Whether you ski front country (3 people were already caught in an avalanche THIS YEAR IN BOUNDS at Mammoth Mountain!) or backcountry, this course would benefit you hugely! ~Annie

We are excited to see so many of you signing up for trips this winter. Nothing bums us out more than people thinking winter is for packing on the winter weight and watching movies. Winter is a great time for cardio and fresh air! (Ok, you can watch movies and eat chocolate when its dark out). Have a great winter ya'll!

Sincerely,
All of us at
Sierra Mountain Guides





Don't let the winter pass you by!
Get out!!

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