

# Cross Country VS. Downhill

By

H. P. Douglas

TO me, one of the regrettable trends of modern skiing is the craze for downhill running made possible and encouraged by the ski hoists now found in all ski centres throughout our Laurentian country. Those of us who took up the sport years ago found then and still find our chief pleasure in using skis as a medium to take us over lovely snow covered mountain country. The special technique necessary to easy, fast going across stiff terrain comes only from long practice and experience; it cannot be learned from books and is not taught by the modern ski instructor.

I well remember being invited to a week-end ski party north of Montreal. On arrival my host, a companion of many years, remarked, "We were going to have with us two young American college men, both Class A racers and experts in downhill running and the modern technique. It will be interesting to see how they get along in open country".

After supper ski maps were brought out and the trip for the following day planned; a wide circuit over typical Laurentian country was decided upon, a distance of some fifteen miles, crossing ranges and valleys, giving plenty of climbing, trail and downhill running, bush and open, all well mixed up together.

The next morning was perfect, just zero, no wind, not a cloud in the sky, fresh powder snow over the old crust, fast as lightning, and a terrific back-slip to wax against. Barney, my host, and I had covered many miles together and it did not take us long after breakfast and washing up to do our waxing and stow our packs; it was to us just routine stuff.

Our two young friends, however, when we were all ready and eager to be off, had not yet decided on their waxing. They politely scorned our advice while we knew little about their large and strange assortment. At last they appeared in the very latest equipment; steel edged, heavy skis, down pull bindings, streamlined trousers; they certainly were a picture.

I TOOK the lead at the start and we ran from the house down a tricky winding narrow woods trail coming out suddenly to a small lake, the drop down the bank onto the snow-covered ice steep and fast. Here occurred the first casualty as one of the lads, not knowing the value of the telemark knee position and coming



*No executive figure is better known to Canadians, over a long period of years than H. P. Douglas, whose close association with the sport extends back to the turn of the century. Onetime president of the Montreal Ski Club, chief executive of the Canadian Amateur Ski Association, "father" of the Canadian Ski Year Book and for many years its editor, his interest in skiing has never lagged. "H. P.", as he is so widely known, is in the "over sixty" category now, but one would hardly know it by his ski activity, nor the manner in which he goes about his tennis and golf in the summer. He is a familiar figure on the cross country jaunts, rucksack laden, swinging along on sizeable trips.*  
The Editor.

down the little dip with his ski points together and in line, stuck them under the crust and took a nasty forward dive, cutting up his nose and forehead. Our first-aid kit, always carried in our touring packs, soon fixed him up good as new and we crossed the lake and started up the first long climb of the day, a six hundred foot slope, all cleared, with the

occasional Laurentian boulder and clump of maples relieving the dead white expanse.

There is a really delightful art in working up a long steep slope like this. As you approach it you instinctively size it up and your course lays itself out as plain and simple as can be. Up we start in the first long traverse, our wide, rather short, light skis keeping us well up on the snow, easy to handle on the kick turns at the corners. Our wax is working well, no back slip, and Barney, now up ahead, breaking trail, is climbing easily and with little effort: it is a real pleasure to watch his lovely co-ordination, arms, body, skis, all doing their bit. It is grand fun and we both know intuitively the exact limit of the grade we can take without slipping back, a wrinkle learned also only through experience.

Looking back we see below us our young friends in trouble; their skis are sinking deep in the snow, wax not holding, and trying to climb too steep, continually slipping back, their bindings placing an uncomfortable strain on their ankles. We turn, run down and get them straightened out and give them their first lesson in hill climbing without a ski tow.

At last they join us at the top, both blown and rather discouraged and bewildered with it all, and not in any mood to enjoy one of the loveliest views in the entire country. Barney and I point our skis downhill into the valley on the other side and wind back and forth in long sweeping stem turns, well in control, running fairly fast and yelling to each other in sheer delight, and at the bottom swing to a stop with our favorite telemark. Our companions, but half way down, seem in sad difficulties; their unaccustomed packs are bothering them, their pet tempo turns not working in the heavy snow, so different from the hard packed downhill track they are used to. They are falling and making heavy weather of it, and when covered with snow they pull up alongside of us, are almost ready to call it a morning.

IT was the bush whacking adventure—an entirely new experience to them—after lunch in the open, that finally and completely put the young experts hors de combat. A good two miles down and around the back of our roughest mountain we took them, with no road or trail to follow. Just sliding and slipping

through the gullies, poles in one hand, the other grabbing at branches, anything to hold us back. Skirting cliffs, around and over wind-falls, fighting alders and underbrush, every foot a struggle.

The snow in the bush was four foot deep, lying white and soft, no crust and knee deep at every step. We, well up ahead, and incidentally having our own troubles, could hear a succession of crashes and curses as they struggled along in our tracks. When at last we came out into the clearing they just collapsed on a log and told us what they thought of us, asking if we thought that was skiing.

To make a long story short we cut down our trip and brought them back to the cabin, the last four miles in a sleigh, a tired pair of lads, one with a twisted knee and both rather scratched up and bruised and quite unable to understand how two old fellows like Barney and I could put it over them so badly.

**I** SELDOM of late venture to the popular centres where the crowds gather and the ski tow experts perform; up and down, down and up, all day, lovely tempo christie turns, and ultra modern technique.

No! The wide open country for me and mine where new hills afford thrills

without number; a light pack with a simple lunch and off we start in the sunshine on a grand adventure over mountain, valley, lake and stream. What a pleasure to make your own trail down those great hills in the fresh snow, your skis singing a song of joy as you whiz along. At the bottom I always love to stop and look back on my ski track and criticize it. Too wide a turn there, a bit wobbly around the big tree half way down; next time will try and do a neater job.

Best of all is the stop for lunch on the tip top of our biggest hill in the lee of a great boulder, and we sit overpowered, as we drink in the gorgeous view of range after range of snow covered hills, the North River black in the rapids far below. Out with the cooking gear, the fire burning brightly, soup, sausages, coffee.

When at the end of the day, comfortably tired, we run swiftly and quietly down our last trail into the little village, the lights are twinkling in the windows of the houses, the Western sky still coloured with the fading golden sunset. We slip off our faithful skis at the Club ready for a good dinner and the evening train back to Montreal.

I say again, the open country for mine!

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