

What are XC, BC, & AT skiing?

Cross-country skiing (XC) is a form of ski touring in which skiers propel themselves across snow-covered terrain using skis and poles. Cross-country skiing is a type of Nordic ski sport in which the boot heel is not attached to the ski binding. Cross-country skiing can be done on groomed tracks, ungroomed trails in the forest, or in the trail-less back-country on untracked snow.

Nordic skiing is a group of winter sports that includes all types of skiing where the heel of the boot cannot be fixed to the ski (as opposed to alpine skiing). Olympic Nordic skiing events are cross-country skiing, ski jumping, Nordic combined (xc and ski jumping) and biathlon (skiing and rifle marksmanship). Another Nordic discipline is telemark skiing.

Ski touring is an activity where distances are covered on skis. Touring is generally done on trails which are not groomed, and without mechanical lifts to get up hills. Tours can extend over a period of more than one day. Typically, skis, bindings, and boots allow for free movement of the heel to enable a walking pace, as in Nordic skiing, and unlike alpine skiing.

Back-country Skiing (BC) means different things to different skiers. In Europe it is called off-piste, which simply means off-trail. Regardless, back-country skiing does mean skiing in more remote locations where there is no ski patrol, where snow is deeper, ungroomed, with variable conditions. Skiing the back-country in New Mexico and Colorado requires navigational skills, avalanche awareness, and self-reliance. For some skiers, back-country terrain may be moderate, but for others it means skiing using skins to the top of a mountain and down. Accordingly, people use various types of equipment for different types of skiing. In some locations, back-country skiing uses helicopter, snow-mobile, snow-cat or other types of access. Some day trips and overnight trips to huts are considered back-country trips by the NMCCSC.

Alpine skiing is commonly known as downhill skiing. Alpine skiing includes different skiing styles. Alpine skis have bindings that lock the toe and heel of the boot to the ski. This is in contrast to free-heel bindings used in Nordic skiing—such as cross-country, ski-jumping, telemark skiing, or ski mountaineering.

Alpine touring (AT), recently popular, involves touring the back-country with equipment that enables the boot heel to be free while skiing uphill, then locked down for alpine-style descents.

Telemark skiing is a technique of turning and skiing downhill in which the heel is free and the turn is made in a lunging position. While the telemark technique can be done in any free-heel equipment, skis, boots and bindings made for telemark skiing are sturdier than cross-country touring equipment to withstand the more aggressive turning and downhill uses.