



Backcountry Ski Basics

One great thing about backcountry downhill skiing is that it's free—you can skip the pricey lift tickets at overbuilt resorts. And while skiing unmarked, unpatrolled slopes does require some up-front investment, outdoor retailers are increasingly offering affordable used gear. Once you've slapped climbing skins onto your skis and slid up ungroomed powder to earn that first summit view, you might consider the initial outlay a bargain. —*Dina Mishev*



Do not underestimate the importance of finding the perfect backcountry boot. **SCARPA's Gea and Maestrale boots** (women's and men's, respectively) are medium in width and volume, affording beginners stability and flexibility. With their streamlined three-buckle design, plant-based shells, and cozy liners, the boots balance uphill comfort with downhill performance. [\\$700, *scarpa.com*](#)

D. SCOTT CLARK/ANDREW STILLIS + MOTION



There are backcountry skiers who have a quiver of skis, and there are backcountry skiers who stick to the **VÖLKL VTA 98 skis**. At approximately three pounds each, they're just heavy enough to handle the variety of conditions you'll encounter on the

downhill, but they won't make the uphill more work than it needs to be. Mount the skis with **DYNAFIT ST Rotation 10 bindings**, which are neither the burliest nor the lightest but are solid and easy to use. [Skis \\$700, *voelkl.com*; bindings \\$600, *dynafit.com*](#)



You'd never ski at a resort in anything as thin and breathable as **OUTDOOR RESEARCH's Overdrive Convertible Gloves**, but they're perfect for skinning. If the base knit gloves aren't quite warm enough, deploy the hidden water-resistant and windproof soft shell overmitts, which also protect your thumbs. [\\$45, *outdoorresearch.com*](#)

GREGORY's Targhee 32 backpack is just the right size for a daylong ski tour. A zippered front pocket has sleeves for your probe, shovel blade, and shovel handle; the main compartment is accessed via a "U-zip" back panel. Both have oversized zipper pulls, so you can keep your gloves on. And an insulated hydration sleeve prevents your water from freezing on most days. [\\$142, *gregorypacks.com*](#)



You don't want to sweat all the way up, and you don't want to get hypothermic on the way down. Enter **STIO's Basis Power Wool Crew and Tights** and **OUTDOOR RESEARCH's Refuge Air Hooded Jacket**. The former are stretchy, breathable, and quick-drying base layers. The latter, a mid layer, isn't as hot as some other jackets in the newish "active insulation" category. [Crew and tights \\$109 each, *stio.com*; jacket \\$172, *outdoorresearch.com*](#)

Buying gear that you hope to never use is painful. Still, an avalanche transceiver (which helps rescuers find you if you get buried), a collapsible shovel, and a probe pole are the most essential pieces of backcountry safety gear. **BLACK DIAMOND** bundles its user-friendly [Guide BT Avalanche Beacon, Evac 7 Shovel, and Quickdraw Tour Probe 320](#) in a package that costs \$50 less than if you bought the items separately. [\\$550, *blackdiamondequipment.com*](#)

