

Nordic Skiing Activity Standard

Activity Description

Nordic Skiing may be held on in-bound terrain on maintained tracks or in backcountry terrain, using Nordic equipment (generally lighter with free-heel bindings). These trips involve traveling through varied terrain that may include gentle rolling hills, moderate slopes, forested areas, forest service roads, repurposed railroad beds, hiking trails, groomed trails and snowmobile trails. May also include open meadows where participants must be proficient in both kick-and-glide techniques for travel and turning techniques for controlled descent. Trips will generally avoid steep terrain (over 25 degrees) where avalanche hazard assessment in the field would be required. Technical challenges may include: variable snow conditions, navigation in unmarked terrain, steep but short descents requiring controlled turning, stream or gully crossings, or travel in remote areas.

Definitions

In-bound terrain	Avalanche controlled terrain with commercially maintained tracks
Backcountry Terrain	Ungroomed terrain outside of developed ski areas
Nordic Ski Trip	Trips that are primarily focused on using kick and glide techniques for skiing and only require the use of snowplowing or traversing to descend slopes.

Difficulty Ratings

Rating	Distance	Elevation Gain	Technical Requirements
Easy	1-5 miles round trip	Up to 500 ft	Basic diagonal stride and snowplow techniques on gentle terrain
Moderate	5 to 10 miles round trip	500-1200 ft	Confident diagonal stride, herringbone climbing, and snowplow/step turns on varied terrain
Challenging	10 to 15 miles round trip	1200 to 1800 ft or more	Strong kick and glide technique, efficient climbing skills, and confident turning on moderate descents
Difficult	15+ miles round trip	1800+ ft	Advanced Nordic techniques including telemark turns, confident descending on ungroomed slopes, and stamina for long distances (break trail for 3 miles)

When rating a trip use the greater value of distance or elevation gain.

For multi-day trips, the overall difficulty rating should be based on the most challenging day. Trip postings must include information about daily distances, elevation gains, and terrain challenges.

Pace Ratings

Rating	Description
Casual	Average pace under 1.5 mph; ample time for rest, photography, nature study
Moderate	Average pace 1.5-2 mph; regular breaks; suitable for most intermediate Nordic skiers
Brisk	Average pace 2-2.5 mph; minimal breaks; requires good cardiovascular fitness
Fast	Average pace >2.5 mph OR includes significant technical challenges requiring advanced Nordic skills

Terrain Ratings

Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES)

Rating	Description
Non-Avalanche	Non-avalanche prone terrain means terrain with stable snowpack; slope angles not in the 25-45 degree range; that does not include terrain traps (e.g., stream beds, gullies, steep road cuts) or snow pillows, roll-overs, cornices and subtle micro-terrain features; and that does not have avalanche prone terrain above the selected route.
Simple	Exposure to low angle or primarily forested terrain. Some forest openings may involve the runout zones of infrequent avalanches. Isolated steep sections have many options to reduce or eliminate exposure. No glacier travel. Does not enter avalanche terrain.
Nordic Trips do not go beyond “Simple” on the ATES ratings	

Equipment Recommendations

For All Participants:

1. Nordic backcountry skis and bindings (wider than track skis with metal edges recommended), poles
2. Full or part-length (kicker) skins
3. Helmet and eye protection
2. Boots appropriate for backcountry terrain
3. Adjustable poles
4. Ten Essentials
5. Extra clothing layers appropriate for winter conditions
6. Food and water adequate for trip duration plus extra
7. Personal first aid kit

For Leaders:

1. First aid supplies appropriate for winter conditions
 - a. Consider a group emergency shelter

- b. Extra layers (can be distributed among group for weight distribution)
- 2. Other speciality winter gear as required by trip classification and duration
 - a. Shovel, beacon, probe
 - b. Stove and fire starter
 - c. Insulated pad
- 3. Navigation tools and Communication devices (radios and/or satellite messenger)
- 4. Repair kit appropriate for equipment
- 5. Snow assessment tools

Recommended Skills

For Participants:

- Diagonal stride technique (classic Nordic skiing)
- Herringbone and side-step climbing techniques
- Snowplow and step turns for descending
- Basic telemark or parallel turns for moderate slopes (for Challenging/Difficult trips)
- Winter clothing layering and moisture management
- Equipment familiarity and adjustment
- Basic winter safety and self-care

Additional Skills for Leaders:

- Proficient Nordic skiing techniques on varied terrain
- Snow assessment for travel efficiency and safety
- Recognition of terrain that might pose avalanche risk

Roles and Requirements

Role	Responsibilities	Skills / Course Badge Required
Participant	No experience required (unless communicated by the trip leader based on difficulty level)	None

Leader	See below	Trip Leader Badge ATA or higher Ski Leader Badge (for difficult and challenging trips) WFA Badge or higher
Mentor	Group determination if not defined through this process	Trip Leader Badge, Mentor badge from Group
Instructor	<i>Not updated as of 10/30/2025</i>	<i>Not updated as of 10/30/2025</i>

Leadership Requirements:

Requirements need to be appropriate for the difficulty of the trip. A trip leader badge and ATA should be sufficient for easy and moderate trips.

Basic Requirements:

1. CMC member in good standing, at least 18 years old
2. Current Wilderness First Aid certification
 - Current CMC Trip Leader
 - Avalanche Terrain Avoidance (ATA) training (minimum)
 - Successfully mentored on at least one Backcountry Nordic ski trip (for difficult and challenging trips)
 - Demonstrated competency in Nordic skiing techniques on varied terrain
 - Approval by appropriate CMC group committee

For Leaders in Potential Avalanche Terrain:

1. Avalanche Level 1 (or higher) required
2. Experience assessing snow conditions and terrain features

Assessment Standards

Methods of demonstrating competency in Nordic skiing techniques to include any of the following:

- CMC Basic Nordic Skiing and Backcountry Nordic Skiing course badges,
- Documentation of leading Backcountry Nordic Ski Trips on CMC.org
- Documentation of leading Backcountry Nordic Ski trips for other groups be provided to a group level committee.

Notes and Special Considerations

Group Parameters

- **Recommended leader ratio:** 1 leader per 8 participants for standard trips; consider additional experienced skiers or co-leaders for larger groups or more challenging trips

Risk Management Considerations

Avalanche Awareness:

- Even on gentle terrain, be aware of what's above your route
- Recognize basic signs of unstable snow
- Understand how terrain features can create localized hazards
- Know when to modify routes based on conditions

Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Changes
1.0	6/9/2025	Graham Ottley	Initial document

2.0	9/23/2025	Volunteer Committee	Added suggestions and reviewed the initial document. Added comments to Feedback R1: Nordic Skiing as well
3.0	10/21/2025 and 10/30/2025	Volunteer Committee and editing by Ashley Kramer	Revised based on volunteer committee comments. Took away redundant information that is included in Trip Leader School
3.0	1/5/2026	State Council	Document approved by State Council