



# The Arctic Turn



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## First Tracks



December sun above Picnic Rock at Alyeska

Photograph courtesy of Scott Jordan

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*The Arctic Turn* is a publication of the Alaska Division of PSIA/AASI. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit submissions for content, clarity and space. Please submit articles and photos, along with a short bio as attachments to Warren Souther--telewarren@msn.com

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# No Nordic Rain-Checks in Juneau

by Tom Brayton

PSIA-AK Nordic clinics at Eaglecrest with Deb Willits was a good time in spite of the Juneau weather. We all got something from Deb's insight on biomechanics as well as having a good time skiing together and focusing on skiing with other nordis. Deb learned that skiing in the rain is not as bad as one thinks it will be when you look outside first thing in the morning. In fact she had a lot of fun..

On Friday we were on skate gear and started out skiing to warm up. While warming up Deb sneaked a camera out of her jacket to get some "before" video. Then we got down to business by discussing the concept of the upper body being a panel that moves from ski to ski in a stable manner ie. Without tipping or excessive twisting. And the importance of the ball and socket joints in our hips to make it happen. She had us play around with a low and tall stance. We discovered that with a taller stance we have a greater range of motion with our legs. She had us ski without poles with our hands clasped behind our backs she had us focus on maintaining a stable upper body with a tall posture. All the drills we did through out the morning were without poles. Deb kept us skiing and gave lots of individual feedback and adjusting the drills to mach our needs. She also explained to us about core engagement and that when our leg extends it is pushing against both the ground and a solid core to get maximum power. Once again we skied with our hand behind our backs focusing on a solid core and full extension through the hip. After awhile we were all starting to get a little wet and headed back toward the lodge. On the way back we took some time to do the "after" video.

During lunch time the video showed everyone's skiing had improved from the morning's activities. We all showed much better alignment over our skis throughout the skating cycle. I know that my skiing felt more efficient even though I was carrying about 4 pounds of water in my clothes.

After fueling up with lunch, changing into dry clothes and feeling good about my skating I was stoked to get out and get some new ideas on improving my poling.

We started the afternoon with Deb demonstrating that we should use the entire core [not just the upper core] to start our poling motion. She wanted us to think about pushing into the earth, not back behind us. As I watched her demonstrate the movement I could see her hips not just staying forward but actually moving forward slightly. There was the hip joints again and, I could see not only how these joints helped in keeping the upper body moving as a stable panel over one ski to the other but, they also can help keep this panel [and COM] aligned over the push off ski for maximum power in the direction of travel.



Out side we played with this movement to get the feel of it and then added it to our improved lower body skating from the morning's session. Pushing into the earth with the entire core engaged keeps the center of mass forward as opposed to using the upper core only with a big long push back behind which has tendency a push your...[well lets just say it rhymes with center of mass] way back behind your feet.

It all came together for me and my skiing felt much more efficient and effective.

What a great day of skiing. And on top of all that my clothes were so wet they were halfway to being clean again. Pretty cool, huh?

The next day we were on classic skis Deb applied the same principles to classic skiing. A stable upper body that moves as a panel from being aligned over one ski to the other. Once

again we put the poles aside and she used the "Quick Foot" drill with feedback to straighten out our individual misalignment issues.

After lunch we worked on polling using the same ideas of, engaging the entire core to hold the COM over the feet and, polling down into the earth to keep it there. We worked on getting the movement and the feel of this in diagonal poling, double poling and, kick double pole techniques.

As we watched ourselves ski on video that day Deb made sure that we each pointed out what we saw in our own skiing first. If need be she would steer someone into seeing what she thought they should see. Then Deb would give her views of what she saw and relate it to what we had

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worked on over the course of both days. Deb conducted the video viewing to maximize the learning experience of each skier in a relaxed truly professional manner

Saturday night we had a potluck at Ken's house I would like to thank Sue for allowing all those skiers into her house. By the way the place was spotless! Thanks Sue! We stuffed Deb with salmon, smoked and other wise. We all had a great time hang'n out with other skiers. We should get together like that much more often.

In an e-Mail exchange with Deb she said that she was not yet sick of salmon. Hard to believe after we all unloaded our freezers in her honor. She also learned to ski in the rain and liked it. Yes you do have to buck up here in Alaska but the rewards [like good snow to ski on when you thought it would be miserable] are worth it. She said the there was no highlight and that the total experience was great! And she would love to come back. Hopefully sometime when there is more daylight and not so many clouds so she can see what it looks like here.

If you ever get a chance to attend one of Debs clinics don't pass it up. Treat yourself to a coach with a solid technical knowledge blended with an understanding of biomechanics she has excellent communication skills with a relaxed friendly manner. She is real nice person too.

I would like to thank the Division's Board of Directors, Warren Souther, Nordic Chair and especially Jeffra Clough Eaglecrest's Snowsports School Director for her financial help which made it easy to attend multiple sessions. And of course Deb, for taking the time out of busy her schedule to help us out. Thank you all.

# The Upside-Down of Things

by Simon Marsh

Have you ever looked at photos in any of the Ski Racing editions, or even some of the shots promoting equipment in the many ski magazines? Looking at the skiers, one of the more exciting aspects to see is how far away their skis are from the path their bodies take. At almost any part of the turn where the photo is taken, the edges are at a relatively high angle that you would be able to read the brand name of the skis on their bases.

The ability to initiate these turns comes from the commitment of literally moving your body down the hill and ahead of the path of your skis. At this point of

the turn, your skis are just finishing the arc of your previous turn or are just beginning to release into the next turn. The resulting image that you can see in many photos is that of being "hung" by your legs upside down as one is starting to move down the hill. This type of turn has been called the "Upside-Down Turn."



The Upside-Down Turn demonstrates early edge engagement and obviously demands athletic ability and skill. But does that mean that it is out of range for any advanced skier to do? Not at all. The timing of movement down the hill determines how far ahead of your skis you can get. Sometimes we do it when we have timed our pole plant correctly, even in the bumps or when there is some undulating

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terrain on an easier slope that encourages us to move forward. The photo of Ted Ligety clearly shows how much he has committed his body down the hill. He's racing, but it almost looks as if he's free skiing down the hill. Because his body is ahead of his skis, he can keep forward pressure over the tips of his ski. The one exercise that helps to make the Upside-Down Turn most successful is moving the body down the hill while the skis are still engaged in the old turn. When the skis are just completing the previous arc, they are carrying lots of energy. If the skis were to be tipped over to the new downhill side before the arc was finished, the energy transferred down the hill would be very quick and powerful. In what we would call a normal turn, (or less dynamic one); as the skis flatten our body is more or less directly over our skis. As we move down the hill, gradually our edges begin to engage and we show more edge angle at the bottom of the turn. As a result, we have created all the proper angles in our body and we can finish the turn with confidence. It is at this point of the turn that we want to begin moving down the hill for the Upside-Down turn. We make the same similar moves, (roll the ankles and knees down the hill, pole plant, etc.), as we do in a less dynamic turn. The difference is that by starting the new turn earlier, we can maintain the energy created from the old turn and carry that energy down the hill with us, creating smooth and powerful arcs.

So how do we do it? One can actually gain the sensation in a stationary position. Have someone stand below you on

the hill and have him/her catch you as you fall into his or her arms. This will help to gain the sensation of rolling your ankles and knees into the turn resulting in your body being further downhill than your skis. You can even lean down the hill with your poles. Various exercises help up us to move forward and down the hill at the beginning of the turn. These include:



- Lifting your new outside ski at turn initiation
  - Double pole swing, or double pole plant to move the body down the hill
- Practice these on smooth, flatter, ego-boosting terrain. Maintaining a forward position is important. Trying these turns when out of balance make for a lot of extra work!

The result of making these turns is you will find that your overall balance will improve. When moving ahead of your skis, your body maintains a strong athletic position, you will have a strong balance over your outside ski, and you will create early tip pressure, thereby bending the ski naturally through the turn.

In the picture of Lindsey Vonn, look at how far inside her body is, yet how committed she is to her outside ski. This creates the thrill of really feeling the skis slicing through the snow, knowing that you have the confidence to commit yourself down the hill.

After a couple of times, you're going to feel the same sense of enjoyment of the turns as it seems Ted Ligety is having in the photo.

## About Simon



Simon continues as the Gravity Corps Head Coach for the 2009-2010 season. He has been working for SSCV since 1998 as well as coaching the Battle Mt. High School Ski Team.

Before working for SSCV, Simon began working at the Beaver Creek Ski School in 1993 and still continues when not working at SSCV. From 1996-2005, he has worked for various places in the summer months. Working at the Perisher Blue Ski School in Australia as an instructor/coach, he moved on to be an instructor/ski guide for the ski school in Las Lenas, located in Argentina, and finished up with four years as a coach for Team Gilboa in the summer ski season at Mt. Hood, Oregon.

Simon graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a BA in Political Science and International Affairs. He had a brief stint ski racing while in school and was a member of the CU Track and Cross Country Team.

Simon holds a PSIA Examiners Position as well as a Level III from the APSI in Australia and Regional Coaches Certification for the USSCA.

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# Alaska Alpine Mini Academies

We are happy to announce that Nick Herrin will be at Eagle Crest on February 19, 20 and 21. To sign up to attend these clinics please see Jeffra Clough! Nick is excited to be here in Alaska and we hope to see you there!



## About Nicholas

A ski instructor since 1994, Nick began in Washington State at Ski Acres Ski Area (now known as Summit East), working for John Mohan's Ski School. He then spent nine years teaching at Big Sky Resort in Montana, where he ran the training program at the Big Sky Ski School. After that, he moved south to Colorado to work as the assistant director to teammate Bobby Murphy in running the Telluride Ski and Snowboard School. Still in Colorado, Nick is now the director of the Ski and Ride School at Crested Butte Mountain Resort. He has won several 1st and 3rd place finishes in National and World Powder 8 Championships. Nick spends his free time on his cross or mountain bike and when he can sneak away to the coast he enjoys kite surfing. He is also a competitive unicyclist and is currently working on juggling while cycling! This is his second term on the team.

At Alyeska Resort we are happy to announce that Robin Barnes will be our visiting trainer from Heavenly Ski Resort. Robin visited Juneau last year and we are happy to see her back in state again.



## About Robin

Robin has been a ski instructor and trainer at California's Heavenly Ski Resort since 1989. She is a PSIA-certified Level III alpine instructor, PSIA-Western Regional Demo Team member and PSIA Western Division Tech Team member. Robin is certified as a personal trainer by the American Council on Exercise and owns Tahoe Outdoor Fitness in South Lake Tahoe, California. A migrant snow-seeker, Robin spent 16 seasons instructing in Portillo, Chile. She speaks both Spanish and Portuguese, and has twice earned a spot on SKI Magazine's Top 100 Instructors list. This is her first term on the PSIA Alpine Team.

Space is limited to ten spots for Robin at Alyeska so sign up early!  
Visit [www.psia-a.org](http://www.psia-a.org) and click on her picture to sign up.

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## Are you ready for feedback?

by Warren Souther

Recently I was conducting some cross country training with Nordic Team member Dave Lawrence and the subject of feedback came up. (The three hour drive to Soldotna brought up some odd subjects.) I was discussing how a friend had said to me that as ski instructors what we do is criticize people's skiing. How can we change this while still acknowledging that indeed we are doing just that! I thought to myself, what needs to change is how feedback is delivered!

Well, how do we do that?

First thing we can do is ask if someone is ready for feedback. How many times have you made a run, gone skiing, and thought "Wow, I am glad no one saw that!" We are aware of our shortcomings and we work to overcome them.

In fact the challenge of working something out in our skiing on our own is what so many evening conversations consist of. If we enjoy talking about challenges we are working then, then we also need to accept that people want to work on these items sometimes without our assistance. The joy of figuring something out and experimenting is so often ignored by well meaning instructors. Encourage your client or friend (loved one) to explore by sharing stories of challenges you conquered in the past. Invigorate them! Make them passionate about the challenge and the rewards and wish them luck is lesson number one.

So now someone comes to you and says "I am ready for someone to watch me and see if they can help me", or "I would like to take a lesson". How can you provide help

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without criticizing? First thing is

1. Describe what you see

Now, is what you are describing accurate? Does it match what they are feeling? Are you able to identify what muscles are being activated to cause this, can you demonstrate to them the movement? These are all ways to make sure that the issue really is the issue. Perhaps an injury or improper fitting equipment could be aggravating or masking the issue? Make sure you and the client BOTH agree what the issue really is first!

2. Why? The Five Why's

Why do you do this, well WHY? Asking why five times will help focus the answer to a specific point. One or two whys does not always get to the real issue. Allow the client to validate why a certain movement takes place and where it started. Without validation from the client you have forgotten to keep this student centered teaching. Before you decide on which direction to take with your client ask yourself this same question "WHY am I choosing this?" Is it because you are working on this and you feel they will benefit from this focus? Is this getting to the root cause and correction of the client or is this keeping yourself the focus?

For instance, at a clinic I was asked to provide feedback on some ones skiing. Before I could say anything she said

"I know I am bending at the waist!" My question was why and her reply, to move her Center of Mass (CM) forward. But why I continued. So I don't fall backwards obviously, came hers. "Why don't we drive our knee forward as we bend our ankle" I asked. Her reply "I broke my ankle badly and don't trust to put my full weight on it" was hers. Why don't you trust your ankle, does it still hurt? Her reply was no, her ankle has healed. So why don't you want to balance over this ankle? Her reply was, "I just don't trust it."

So now instead of working on high end difficult balance maneuvers or pushing her to place her body in what she would consider a "high risk maneuver" my task moved into restoring her confidence in her ankle. Without the five why's I was destined to fail, but with the five why's we both walked away knowing we had worked on something she could utilize and work on.

3. The four rules of one.

- Pick one thing
- Explain one thing

- Show one thing
- Ski one thing

We all have been subjected to having two tasks to ski or think about in the past. Are we passing this along to the client? Ask yourself, what one item can I show that will make the MOST difference in this person's skiing? Secondly, remind yourself continuously to only teach that one item. You can show them many different approaches to that one thing and this is where you can flourish as an instructor; grow by thinking up as many different approaches to work on that one thing. Explain through showing, discussing and having your client move their body through the movement even when standing still. Feel what muscles and movements happen, how outside influences help or hinder movements. Allow time for your client to fully understand what change you are asking them to make so that they have ownership of this new movement.

4. The four P's of feedback

- Preference
- Public vs. Private
- Permission
- Paraphrase

Here is where we can improve how we might have done things before! First, ask and find out the preference in receiving feedback. Do you prefer a visual image such as follow me. Do you prefer a description of the movement, or do you prefer to feel the movement through touches, pulls or bamboo practices?

Now, do you mind if I say this in front of the group or would you prefer this in private. I might have the best observation and correction for someone's skiing but if I blurt it out in the wrong manner it is going to land on deaf ears. Or worse, resentment and

being bullheaded towards trying a new movement pattern because of my presentation.

When is the best time for feedback to be given? Our training manuals state that feedback can be given during, immediately after a movement or delayed at the end of the session. What about this idea, when the client is ready for feedback! Just because you are ready does not mean they are ready. Ask first, are you ready for feedback? They might not be, and as a friend you must honor their wishes or possibly lose out on repeat business with this client.

The final part of this is to make it easy for them to remem-

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ber the feedback that was given. I have seen and experienced feedback that went on for some length that totally confused me only to then have someone else paraphrase the feedback into a few words. Those words I remember and it only takes a phrase to recall the lesson now. I paraphrase my lessons now to great success; it only takes a phrase to get instant changes in my students as they ski by me.

It is my hope that all instructors will utilize these ideas when delivering lessons. A misplaced comment or criticism of some one's skiing can hurt and drive people away from instruction and/or the sport of skiing. People view their self worth through there skiing, as odd that may sound. Be kind, thoughtful and respectful of your friends and clients always. Demonstrate this through the way you deliver your feedback so that it is seen as a constructive critique, when asked for. Keep it fun and I will see you outside.

## Alaska Division Member Schools



## Annual Meeting of Members

The Board of Directors is happy to announce that the annual meeting of members is scheduled for February 27, at 6:30 PM, in the Portage Room at the Alyeska Prince Hotel. Your elected board will be present and we welcome your input on the direction you think your organization should move towards.

We will also be conducting a review of the Bylaws and the Policy and Procedures and making updates as needed. We look forward to seeing you there. This meeting will take place next door to the silent auction for the Alyeska Ski Club as well so come along and say hello!

## Nordic News

By Warren Souther

I am planning on scheduling Dan Clausen to come into the state for cross country clinics for the end of February to start of March. Please email me at telewarren@msn.com to request training to be held at an area close to you.



I will need confirmation that you have at least six (6)

people who can attend and we would be very happy to set something up for you.

A warm and dry thank you to Deb Willits for her recent clinic in Juneau, we look forward to seeing her again when the weather is nicer!

Are you interested in telemark clinics, let me hear from you and I hope to have some online at [www.psia-a.org](http://www.psia-a.org) so keep checking there as well!

## Eaglecrest, What's Not to Love

by Caroline Aherns

My only experience traveling to Juneau had been a short ferry stop and getting off to stretch my legs. WOW have I been missing the boat. I traveled to Juneau and the wonders of Eaglecrest for the Children's Specialist Exam in January. Weather, two days of cold but beautiful sun and a day of POWDER! What more could you ask for. Well how about the down home hospitality of the wonderful staff, Jeffra Clough and crew were welcoming and made me feel right at home. The day lodge reminded me of the lodge at Hoodoo Ski Bowl in Oregon (1970's) where I grew up skiing, a great place for families to get out and enjoy the mountain lifestyle. A no worries kind of place.

Did I mention that the man in charge of food service is a gourmet chef for a fishing lodge in the summer? Or that the Pittman's Ridge hike revealed a breathless view of never ending white topped mountains growing out of the ocean surrounding us? The drop into the West Bowl provided for some of the best tree skiing I'd done in years. The new Black Bear chair opening next season will open up even more great bowl skiing and black diamond terrain. Go to Juneau, see the seat of Alaska government, and then GO SKIING! It is worth the trip.

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