



Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing

POWDER TECHNIQUES AND TIPS

NOV 2011 - STAYING STEADY IN THE STEEPS

Snowdrifts are starting to grow, the ski season is just around the corner and rumors of the first powder turns are starting to filter in. Around this time of year I start getting a lot of phone calls, texts and emails. "How's the snowpack?" is a common one. "What skis are you on this year?" is another.

There are also questions about what the ski season will bring. "Hope we can get back to White River Trees... it was so deep there last year" "I can't wait to get back to Coyote and Albrede Glacier". You get the idea.

Hints and aspirations are also starting to fly. A lot of them. Most are centered on getting into some steep terrain. "Do you think we can get into some steeps this year?" "I'm hoping to get my steepest powder run ever!"

Getting into significantly steep terrain requires good stability (a must), quality snow and sound ski technique.

It's common for skiers who do get the chance to ski steeper terrain to lose control of their speed by not finishing their turns through steering. They sit back and lean into the slope and generally are tentative when they really need to reach down the fall line and be aggressive.

When the stars do align and we get into our steepest lines, a few helpful techniques will keep you upright.

Steering

Greater steering is required to control momentum in steep terrain. Ultimately, you should be able to move 180 degrees from the farthest point of one turn to the other. To make this effective however, you need to limit your rotation by keeping your shoulders and hips facing down the hill. To learn to increase your steering, practice steering your legs across the hill. Progressively build the range. Eventually you will be able to steer the legs in repeated 180 degree motions without having to use your hips. Practice this in an environment that you are comfortable with, progressing into steep terrain and deeper powder as you become more proficient.

Attacking down the fall line

You have to be dynamic and aggressive in steep terrain. To become more dynamic as you initiate your turn, you need to develop a positive extension up and forwards down the hill. You may find the skis even leaving the ground slightly. For this, a strong pole plant

is required to help the initiation. If you make the turn, reach down the fall line and allow the pole plant to connect in the snow. At this point, propel your hips and shoulders forward, down the hill towards your pole plant. You can move your hips and shoulders by pushing up from the balls of your feet. The skis will become light and easy to maneuver as you build energy and unweight your skis in each turn

Your feet

It is important to adjust your platform as terrain steepens. This will improve fore and aft balance, allow you to be aggressive and dynamic in the fall line and keep in a good athletic stance. Think of shifting your feet to counter slope steepness until you have a good mix of forward pressure on your boots, well flexed ankles and dynamic foot movement.

Try these techniques as preparation for some great steep powder skiing this season. I think those stars are starting to line up perfectly.

See you in the mountains.

Tim McLean - Senior Lead Guide
CSIA Level 3, CSGA