



SKI
TIPS



By
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MIND YOUR MANNERS

Miss Mountain Manners:

Illuminating your pressing etiquette questions

Dear Miss Mountain Manners,

On a powder morning, how long do I have to wait for my friend if she's late? At what point can I ski away, in good faith that I waited long enough?

Signed, Hungry for Pow

Dear Hungry,

It depends. What is the relationship between you two? Why do you ski together? Does she make every day more fun, take flattering photos of you, and show you cool lines on the Ridge? If so, she's worth the wait and honestly you are lucky to have a friend like that, so don't push it. On the other hand, if she is chronically late, forgets her beacon, eats half your French fries, and brings along uninvited partners, then you two might be better suited for other activities, like, say, sharing funny cat videos on Facebook. But that doesn't mean you can ski away at 9:01. Wait 5 minutes (which will feel like an eternity while you watch powder getting gobbled up; I feel your pain) then send a text with a backup plan to meet later in the day. Next, head to the singles line and keep your eyes open for more compatible partners.

The bigger lesson here is to put careful thought into your partner selection, especially on a powder day. Sharing big days with friends almost always makes them better. Ideally, both partners contribute to the fun in their own ways. You share your French fries, and I'll show you cool stashes.

**Dear Miss Mountain Manners,
Is it OK to pee near the bootpack, if others have already done so?**

**Thanks,
Coffee Enthusiast**

Dear CE,

Good God, no. This isn't the dog park. I mean, you hiked all the way up the Ridge, or wherever, and you can't muster the energy to walk 6 more steps to take care of your business? Please. Part of why we all like hiking for some turns is that we get to experience a taste of the raw Alpine environment. Don't subject the rest of us to your hygiene deficiency. Rule of thumb: your pee should be invisible from the bootpack and the transition areas. Go behind a tree, behind a rock, or otherwise far away. As a last resort, cover up your mark with some fresh snow, like your well-mannered cat does. But really, your best bet is just to move out of range of where traffic flows. Just don't fall off the backside of the Ridge however, as doing so with your pants down would be super awkward.

**Dear Miss Mountain Manners,
Can you settle a debate for us? I would like to improve my skiing and my husband feels that he is the best person to teach me to ski better. He says it will be fun and it's free. I, however, am not psyched for that prospect. Who's right?**

**Thank you,
Carving Couple**

Dear Couple,

Thank you for asking that question. Now get ready for a rant, because this is a grave infraction of mountain manners. The answer is no, no, a thousand times no, your husband should not even consider teaching you to ski. I sincerely hope he's a great cook or is ridiculously handsome, or has other amazing qualities because that is a terrible idea and he shouldn't even suggest it, much less try to talk you into it. Here's why: teaching skiing is a profession. Lots of people are great skiers, but don't ask them to explain how to make a parallel turn or which foot to stand on or why hockey stops don't work in powder. And even if they do know a few things about technique, it's not likely that they can apply them in the right context or in a logical order.

I've watched many a confident, well-meaning husband teaching the absolute wrong stuff to his poor wife. Wife is struggling. Why? Because she's being taught the wrong stuff AND she's skiing like crap and feeling awful about the whole thing. Husband tosses out helpful tidbits like "I TOLD you to keep your hands facing down the fall line." Meanwhile what the wife would really like to be doing with her hands is placing them tightly around his throat.

Bottom line: family members don't teach other family members. Ski lessons are relatively cheap compared to the heavy toll of sucky relationships. So take a ski lesson, then celebrate your successes with a few victory laps together so you can show off your new moves. At which point your husband

says, "Nice job sweetie, you're crushing it. I'm proud of you." Period. No coaching, just cheerleading.

**Dear Miss Mountain Manners,
My friends call me a gaper. How can I be a "cooler" skier? Does it have to do with how I ski, or my clothes, or what? Please help.**

**Signed,
Desperate Gaper**

Dear not-at-all-a-Gaper,

Your first step is easy. Stop skiing with these so-called friends. Name calling is lame, period. If they are putting you down, it is only because they need to feel better about themselves at your expense. That is probably the least desirable quality you want in a ski partner. We all ski best when we feel confident and psyched.

Second, in the Mountain Manners Handbook, the way to be a cool skier is to understand the flow of the ski area and the people in it. If you think about it, what a ski area really does is to move people around — up, down, and across. If you focus only on your own needs, you'll stick out, you'll be an annoyance to others, and you may put yourself in danger. Here are a few examples:

◆ Don't stop on traverses. Keep moving so you don't hold up traffic behind you. If you want to stop, ski either above or below the traverse, then park in a place that doesn't make everyone else wait while you adjust your boot buckle.

◆ I'm sure you want to get huge air, but can you see the landing? Are there people there? Landing on someone else is not cool. Landing in the backseat and flailing your way into someone else's line is also not cool. Keep yourself together.

◆ I know you are excited to ride the lift with your friends ahead of you, but remember there are other people in the lifeline too.

◆ In Montana we do tend to drive big vehicles. But is your rig so big that it needs 2 parking places? Keep it tight; the parking lot is one of our most limiting resources. Be cool and make room for others.

Are you seeing the theme? Skiing is a shared experience. Have you ever felt a happier vibe than the collective stoke of a powder day? That's what we want to cultivate. We play best when we play well with others! ◆

Karin Kirk talks with her mouth full and never returns phone calls. But on the hill, her manners are impeccable. She's also a ski instructor and Ridge Guide at Bridger Bowl. She can be reached at karin@kirkframeworks.com.

