

10 important Australian backcountry safety recommendations

Ski and splitboard or snowshoe tours are a great way to get fit, experience nature and socialise. The aim of the following recommendations is to help you effectively prepare and respond to the risks in the Alpine National Park in winter.



This information is bought to you by the Mountain Sports Collective in collaboration with Alpenverein Melbourne. Both organisations are formed around sharing knowledge and information about mountain sports safety, environmental protection, advocacy and most importantly the connection of mountains and community.



The Melbourne Alpenverein (Austrian Alpine Club) is a chapter of the Section Innsbruck. We organise expeditions abroad, local events & gatherings around knowledge translation, pooling resource from the Club Arc Alpin such as this awesome foundation content. Become a member and also enjoy the 'Alpenverein Worldwide Service', providing insurance for rescue costs, repatriation and limited third party liability. If you're a backcountry skier or snowboarder, mountaineer, climber, hiker or simply an adventurer, this might be right up your alleyway.

www.alpenverein.melbourne



WE ARE A NOT FOR PROFIT USER GROUP ORGANISATION FOR HUMAN POWERED MOUNTAIN SPORTS IN AUSTRALIA.

Backcountry Travel Advisory

We issue information on various alpine hazards. Weather, avalanche, access and more, from June until October, spanning the alps from Mt Stirling to the Main Range. A crowd funded initiative. Help today, become a member and get involved

We also stage training and community events, festivals, engage with agencies and resorts on backcountry issues advancing safety standards, environmental protection, access and community.

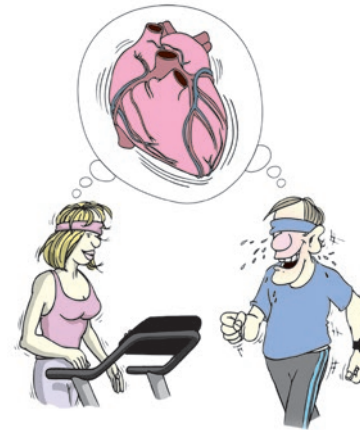
www.MountainSportsCollective.org

1 Be fit and ready for action

Ski tours are an endurance sport. They make your heart, circulation and muscles work hard, so good health, a high fitness level and an honest assessment of your capabilities are required.

On the mountain avoid having to rush and adopt a pace that avoids anybody in your group getting out of breath. Make sure you pace yourself and have enough energy for the return journey.

Regular endurance and strength training make ski touring and mountaineering more enjoyable by improving your fitness. If you have been out of training for a while, after a sickness or at an advanced age, an examination by a sports physician can help you assess your physical limits.



2 Do your homework

Maps, guidebooks, the internet and experts are good sources of information about routes, distances, differences in altitude and the current conditions. Pay particular attention to the weather forecast, as cold conditions, strong winds and poor visibility greatly increase the risk of accidents. Also plan alternative routes and find out the emergency number for the areas' ski patrol, police rescue (000) and log intentions with your ski patrol or park rangers



The decisive question when planning a tour: Do the current conditions allow for my tour destination? Bear in mind that the plan is a mental draft which must be reassessed continuously on tour. Even the most careful plan is worthless if the fixation on a destination is strong to the point of not factoring in new information gained on the spot. Planning an alternative makes it easier to react flexibly to adverse conditions.

3 Study the Backcountry Travel Advisories.

Before going on tour, find out the details regarding alpine hazards. The avalanche danger: Which level? What? Where? Pay particular attention to information about the danger level (1-5), about avalanche prone locations (Where is it dangerous today?) and the danger patterns (What is the main danger today?). New snow, wind-drifted snow, old snow (persistent weak layers), wet snow and gliding snow are the 5 typical avalanche problems. Extensive ice sheilds, rime and crusts also present considerable hazards. The Advisory will outline the predominant source of danger. Typical avalanche danger zones are gullies and bowls filled with wind drifted snow, lee slopes adjacent to the ridge line, shady slopes, sunny slopes, transitions from shallow to deep snow. Ice can prevail anywhere and in some cases everywhere.

Visit MountainSportsCollective.org for the latest backcountry travel advisory (June - October)



4 Pack right & tour light.

Make sure you have the right equipment for winter conditions and that your backpack weight is fit for purpose and tour duration. For avalanche rescue, an avalanche beacon, shovel and probe are standard equipment as well as a first-aid kit, bivouac sack and mobile phone and personal location beacon (PLB). An airbag system increases the chances of survival however it can provide a false sense of security. We recommend 3 antenna avalanche beacons and metal avalanche shovels. For ice conditions crampons and ski/split crampons, ice axes / whippets are prudent. Packing both is never a bad idea. Assuming you know how to use them.

Important point: Even though the technical avalanche emergency equipment is being improved continuously, responding efficiently and safely in the case of emergency (coordination, emergency call, probing, shovelling, first aid) must be trained and practiced.



Visit MountainSportsCollective.org for a list of training providers

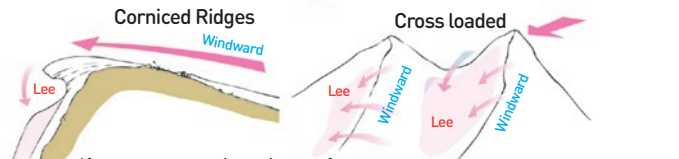
5 Self assess hazards

Applying your research to 'in the field' observations will give you a keen sense of whether the forecast picture matches your own on mountain reality. Make sure you recognise the leeward aspects, the windward aspects and the associated avalanche and ice hazards respectively. If these are consistent with your research, your hardwork has paid off. If not, you're starting from scratch and will be assessing hazards based purely off your own observations. It may be time to reassess and change your plan

< points windward
< icy terrain



prevailing wind direction
Wind ripples (steep side to leeward)



If you see warning signs of instability weigh these against your research or preconceptions with regards to your route and decisions. These signs are signals for avalanche danger. Please share your field observations with MSC via email or instagram promptly.

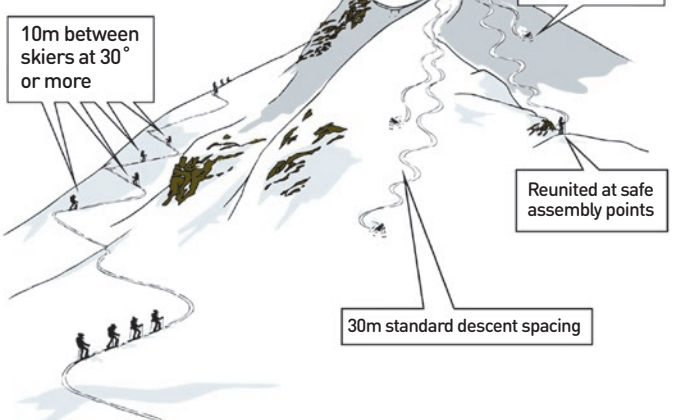


8 Group dynamics

Small groups (up to six people) are safer. Communication with other winter sports enthusiasts and mutual consideration prevent dangerous situations. Stay with your group. Inform someone you trust of your destination, route and return time (including Ski Patrol or Parks Intentions forms). Important note for solo skiers/snowboarders: minor incidents can turn into major emergencies. The ideal group size for ski touring is around 4 people, for guided tours the head count 8+1 has been established as a recommendation for the maximum group size. In far bigger groups, chaos and frustration looms large due to difficult communication, lacking control and compounding delays.

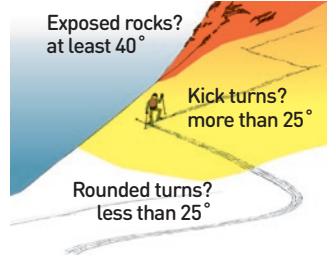
6 Space Out!

Spacing out reduces the load on the snowpack and contains damage. Spacing distances of 10m between party members when ascending a steep slope also makes kick turns more comfortable. On downhill sections, always maintain a distance of at least 30 m. Ski down very steep slopes one by one. Distances also prevent collisions while descending and limit the damage: in case of an avalanche, chances are that fewer skiers will be buried. Always avoid skiing slide paths above other parties.



Take quick breaks and tune in to your surrounds.

Liquids, energy and breaks are required to maintain performance and concentration. Hot isotonic drinks are ideal for quenching your thirst and keeping you warm. Continually get your bearings ("I know where I am") and be wary of following any existing tracks. Drink and eat (carbohydrates) about every hour in order to refuel your body. Breaks shouldn't last longer than 5 minutes to keep the body at "operating temperature". Make sure you choose locations for your breaks that are protected from alpine dangers like avalanches, rock fall or buried flowing water. Preferably sheltered from the prevailing elements.



7 Avoid falls, slides and collisions

Falls, slides and collisions with snow gums on downhill sections are the main cause of accidents on ski tours. Good skiing technique and a speed that matches your ability and the conditions reduces the risk. A ski helmet protects against head injuries. More than two thirds of all accidents on ski tours happen when skiers fall while descending. Slides on ice, leading to collisions with trees or falls from cliffs is a very serious hazard. Comparable to that of avalanches. For the snowpack a fall is an enormous "shock": 5 to 7 times the body weight impacts on the snowpack and can trigger avalanches.



10 Respect nature and our environment

The mountains provide a valuable environment for experiencing wilderness. Enjoy this freedom! Be considerate of native animals, those you can't see who live under the snow, or those who share our huts. Respect protected / prohibited areas and seasonal road closures. Tread lightly on the ground, particularly exposed flora on ridges and summits which whilst only tiny can be decades old, and working hard at consolidating otherwise erosion prone terrain. Use public transport or car-share to get to your starting point. Support the alpine clubs in their endeavours to conserve your access to the unspoilt mountain environment. Regrettably it still does not go without saying: "Keep our mountains clean, pack out all trash!". We strongly urge you carry out everything. In more remote areas where public toilets do not exist, familiarity with the use of 'Poo tubes', a personal faecal storage container, is a mandate of the backcountry community.



These recommendations have been provided by the Club Arc Alpin and have been passed by the general meeting 2015. Members of the CAA: Alpenverein Südtirol (AVS), Fédération Française des Clubs Alpins et de Montagne (FFCAM), Club Alpino Italiano (CAI), Deutscher Alpenverein (DAV), Liechtensteiner Alpenverein (LAV), Österreichischer Alpenverein (ÖAV), Planinska Zveza Slovenije (PZS), Schweizer Alpen-Club (SAC). And amended for 'Australian conditions' with approval by Alpenverein Melbourne by Mountain Sports Collective 2019