

## **SKI THE HOLLY BLEFGEN WAY!**

During the '70s and '80s, my wife and I spent many winter weekends cross-country skiing the magnificent terrain of southern Ontario with its hills, valleys, open meadows and beckoning navigable forests, along with making occasional cross-country treks into northern Ontario as well. We used hearty, Karhu steel-edged XCD fiberglass cross-country skis which were made for trail blazing, where none existed, and bush-whacking when the going got rough.

Sometimes, however, the downhill sections of our many jaunts were the most terrifying. One particularly memorable and challenging trip took us into the uplands just east of Lake Superior Provincial Park north of Sault Ste. Marie. There, after summiting a peak with spectacular views looking out into Agawa Bay of Lake Superior and over Montreal Island, came the harrowing descent through scattered trees and dark woods back to the Agawa Canyon with its Algoma Central Railway and our route home. We thought there had to be a better way to safely and effectively turn our skis to avoid trees rather than to just “crash-and-burn”, or make wide, gentle looping descents.

Back at the Mansfield Ski Club in 1985, Holly Blefgen first advertised telemark lessons on the groomed downhill terrain frequented only by alpine skiers of that era. What a godsend – a novel way to turn, under control and using our own Karhu equipment with its Rottafella 3-pin, Nordic-norm “Telemark” toe bindings combined with sturdy leather, laced Merrell “Telemark” cross-country ski boots! Now, we were in control when back out bush-whacking across the Ontario landscape.

Several years later, Holly added remarkably improved telemark gear to her instructional sessions with shaped Rossignol skis (just like modern alpine equipment), much beefier Rottafella toe bindings with cable security, and 3-buckle Crispi plastic boots (just like current alpine equipment) with flexible ‘bellows’ toe construction. This modern gear gave rise to the descriptive term of “free-heeling” and a new technique for fun on the ski slopes. In fact, now we could “genuflect” in our new telemark gear any day of the week, not just on Sundays!

Telemarking allowed us to ski using the new-for-us technique at alpine ski areas across Canada from the typical shorter southern Ontario hills to the expansive,

big vertical terrain in the mountains of western Canada such as Silver Star, Sun Peaks and Whistler/Blackcomb. A highlight of our many telemarking adventures was a week's ski-touring journey on the Durrand Glacier in the Selkirk Mountains north of Revelstoke in the early '90s. What a rush - after a couple of hours of climbing in telemark gear with skins, pushing off in knee-deep powder, down a steep mountain pitch into the forested valleys below! There, telemark turns were both essential and exhilarating!

After more than 30 years of enjoyment utilizing the telemark technique, added to our first-love of alpine skiing learned in our youth, old knees forced us to focus on one pursuit alone for down-hilling. But, free-heeling had given us a whole new thrill for our favourite winter sport and added many days of enjoyment with a new proficiency in mountainous terrain that we would never have experienced had we not learned how to ski... **the Holly Blefgen Way!**

Thank you Holly...

Ann & Blair Ferguson

Mansfield, ON

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