

OFF-HOURS RECREATION AT DOWNHILL SKI AREAS

A GUIDE FOR USERS

Presented as a public service by

The Los Alamos Mountaineers

Los Alamos, New Mexico



SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

This brochure is directed at fellow outdoor enthusiasts who appreciate the opportunity to ski or snowshoe on their local ski hill when the lifts are closed. As much as we enjoy “earning our turns” on empty slopes (especially after a fresh snowfall!), we need to recognize that those slopes are maintained through the efforts of the ski area operator. In particular, visitors should not interfere with ski area maintenance, which continues all winter long and usually throughout the off-season. Whether the land is owned by the ski area itself or by the US Forest Service, the area operator usually has exclusive rights to operate on that site, and it’s our responsibility to avoid being a nuisance. This brochure provides a few basic guidelines intended to help off-hours users avoid conflicts with ski area folks and remain welcome visitors.



LEAVE SKI AREA STUFF ALONE

Unfortunately, a few visitors need to be reminded not to monkey around with ski lift machinery, buildings, snow grooming equipment, and other stuff that obviously belongs to the ski area operator.

STAY AWAY FROM GROOMERS AND OTHER MAINTENANCE FOLKS

Grooming the slopes and maintaining the lifts is cold, thankless work, so give these guys a break while they do their jobs. Steer clear of any maintenance work you come across, and give an especially wide berth to snowcats. Grooming the slopes in one of these machines is like driving a tank on a steep, icy mountainside. The driver is busy watching the instruments and operating the grooming equipment, and he doesn't have much attention to spare watching out for foot traffic. The last thing he wants to worry about is rolling over some hapless skier or snowshoer who didn't get out of the way in time. (One reason ski areas like to groom during off-hours is precisely so they *won't* have to worry about people on the slopes!)

Snowcats are very hard to stop on the slopes, and they tend to slide sideways when they stop moving forward. Starting them from a complete stop also creates big ruts in the snow, which the groomer then has to repair. A good policy is always to give snowcats the right-of-way and avoid forcing them to stop on the slopes. *Never* ski or snowshoe deliberately in front of a snowcat or use it as a slalom gate! This is interference with ski area maintenance

operations and is guaranteed to put the driver in a foul mood.

Snowcats are big and noisy, and you can spot them coming long before the driver can see you, so make an effort to stay out of their way. Don't venture onto a slope that's currently being groomed, and if a snowcat starts working on a run while you're on it try to traverse over to another run or at least get out of the way until the groomer is finished. If you're on a jeep road, step as far to the downhill side as you can and make eye contact with the driver.

DON'T SWITCHBACK UPHILL OR POSTHOLE ON GROOMED RUNS

Switchbacking up a freshly groomed run cuts tracks across the slope which then freeze into icy ruts by the next morning, a situation that neither the groomers nor other skiers appreciate. It's much more considerate to climb straight up the fall line at the far edge of the run. If the run is too steep to go straight up the fall line, pick a gentler slope (or a jeep trail) to ascend.

Snowboarders & Alpine Skiers: get small snowshoes for going uphill (little ones that'll fit in your pack for the descent). It'll be much easier, faster, and less damaging to the slopes than postholing up runs.



REMEMBER: YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN DURING OFF-HOURS!

When a ski area is closed, the mountain is pretty much like any other wilderness area (albeit with better parking). After all, that's why most of us are up there during off-hours! Consequently, proper training in safe wilderness travel is a must for off-hours users. Carry extra food, clothing, and emergency supplies, like you would on any backcountry trip. Travel with a partner, and let someone know where you're going and when you plan to return.

There's no ski patrol on duty when the ski area is closed, and most of the facilities will probably be closed and locked. If you get in trouble, you're going to have to get yourself out by your own efforts. If someone in your party is so badly injured that they require a rescue, treat the situation like you would any other backcountry emergency and call the local organization responsible for initiating Search & Rescue operations. In New Mexico that would be the NM State Police.

Keep in mind that the ski area operator is **NOT** responsible for taking care of you when the ski area is closed. Have fun, but take responsibility for your own well-being!