

CROSS COUNTRY/

over the pristine snow



Photo courtesy of Mt. Hood Meadows

Imagine a quiet cross-country trail over a pristine snow landscape. At the higher elevations, the sky appears a deep blue -- an exciting contrast to the green pines and bright sun.

With the popularity of skiing booming over the past few years, both cross-country and alpine skiers are starting to look for secluded places to enjoy their sport. The slopes and well-run ski trails are just getting too crowded.

A good place to start looking in Oregon is the north slopes of majestic Mt. Hood. One small ski area lays claim to the sunny north side of Oregon's tallest peak -- Cooper Spur.

Cooper Spur ski area is located 20 miles north of the small town of Hood River in the quaint Hood River Valley (Hood River is just 62 miles east of Portland on Interstate 80N).

The ski area itself began with two rope tows just after World War II. It has recently been expanded to include a 1,100-foot T-bar and 40 acres of ski trails.

From the top of the T-bar there is a

breath-taking view of Mt. Hood and Pollalie Creek canyon. To the north are the rolling orchards of the Hood River Valley spilling to the Columbia River and guarded by Mt. Adams in Washington.

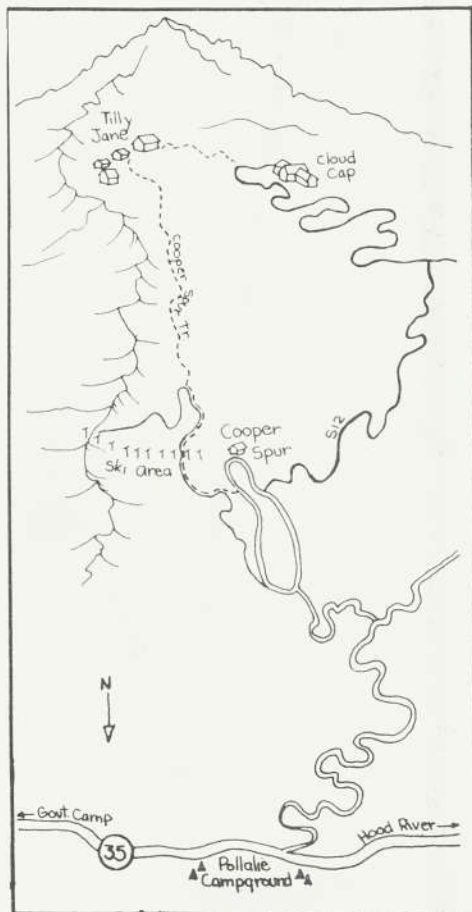
Cooper Spur isn't just for alpine skiers. The opportunities for cross-country buffs are many.

The Cooper Spur Trail leaves the ski area and travels three or four miles up the mountain to Tilly Jane Camp and then on to the famous Cloud Cap Inn at the timberline.

Tilly Jane has a shelter for overnight camping. Here is one of the most beautiful views of Mt. Hood -- the sheer north face. If you're willing to climb a bit, there's excellent downhill skiing here, too.

Cloud Cap Inn was built in 1889 and was a popular recreation center on Mt. Hood for many years. People used to travel in buckboard wagons up the steep trails for a week of relaxation in the alpine setting. The inn has been closed to the public since the 1930's, but is still maintained by the Forest Service and Hood River area mountaineering clubs.

The view from Cloud Cap is awe-in-



spiring -- the broad sweep of the Cooper Spur, the ice cliffs of Eliot and Coe glaciers and the craggy face of the north side of Mt. Hood.

Another route up to Cloud Cap Inn for the cross-country skier is the road which travels from Cooper Spur Ski Area. It's flat and long (about 8.5 miles), but it's beautiful. The road zigzags back and forth in switchbacks that are sometimes more than a mile in length.

On Ghost Ridge, at the northern corner of one of these switchbacks, is a great view of the mountain, Eliot Glacier and the canyon of the Eliot branch (west fork) of the Hood River.

You can reach Cooper Spur Ski area and the beginning of some good cross-country skiing by taking Highway 35 out of Hood River and travelling south. You'll find signs on the highway that will direct you to another cut-off and on up the mountain to Cooper Spur junction. Continue on up the access road from the junction. It's paved and maintained by Hood River County up to the ski area.

Ski preparation

There you sit, patiently waiting for the snow to fall. But are your skis ready for a trip up to the mountains?

"Every pair of skis should be thoroughly checked and tuned up for the first use every season," said Cliff Phillips, ski technician at the Mountain Shop in Portland, "because the porous wax dries out over the summer."

This involves checking and lubricating bindings, tuning and hot waxing.

Bindings should be checked to make sure release settings function properly. Silicone may be applied to release settings to insure safety. Bindings should also be well lubricated.

The bottoms of skis should be cleaned with lacquer thinner or white gas to remove old wax. Gouges and scratches are filled in with a P-tex candle. The candle should be held about a half-inch from the ski base. The first couple of drops usually contain carbon particles, so let these drip onto a piece of scrap; then start on the ski.

It's best to fill in the gouges until they are higher than the rest of the blade, said Phillips, and then shave them down flush. Sometimes, after smoothing them you'll see that in some spots, small craters remain. These will have to be filled in again -- until they are flush.

Excess P-tex can be scraped smooth with a Surform blade or a steel scraper. When using either tool, exert pressure over the edges, not in the middle, so as not to make the base concave.

Tuning is making base material flush with edge and edges square. Ski bottoms may become either concave or convex with wear. And frequently brand new skis are not flat. A 12-inch mill bastard file can be used to file edges and bottoms. Skis should be placed in vice before filing.

To file edges, make mark with a black felt pen. Hold file at a 45-degree angle from the ski. File just until markings are gone and edge is sharp.

When filing bottoms stop from time to time to check the base for flatness using a straight edge, steel scraper, or true bar. If concave, the edges will have to be brought down until they are flush with the base; if convex, the base material will have to be shaved off to bring it down flush with the edges.

Waxing is important both for getting maximum performance out of the ski and in helping to prolong the life of the base. Wax must be melted to penetrate the polyethylene base.

Brushing is the most common of home applications. Use only a natural bristle brush of about three inches wide. Melt wax in saucepan; do not let it get too hot. Starting from the tail, run the brush down the ski quickly and smoothly with long strokes. Try to get as thin and smooth a layer as possible. Remove the excess wax from the running surface with a flat scraper, plastic or metal.

If you don't feel qualified to prepare your skis yourself there are many competent ski shops that are.

