

Efficient Transitions: Tips & Tricks

Contributed by Drew Pogge, Photos by Simon Peterson

Want to move safely, efficiently and quickly through the mountains? Want to waste less time and energy on the up so you can maximize the down? Effective transitioning technique—from skinning to skiing, skiing to skinning, and skinning to booting—is an essential skill for any backcountry skier or rider.

[Tweet](#)

This story was originally published in the September 2010 edition of Eights and Elevens. To sign up for the newsletter, [click here](#). To read more on efficient transitions, pick up the October 2010 issue of Backcountry.

Want to move safely, efficiently and quickly through the mountains? Want to waste less time and energy on the up so you can maximize the down? Effective transitioning technique—from skinning to skiing, skiing to skinning, and skinning to booting—is an essential skill for any backcountry skier or rider.

Before You Go

If you pack right, transition efficiency can begin before you even hit the skintrack. Place snacks and water where they're easy to reach. Stuff clothing layers on top for easy access during breaks. Dedicate a pocket or part of your pack for each piece of your kit before you leave the house.

Many ski-specific packs have separate avy tool compartments, probe sleeves, goggle pockets and helmet carriers that keep gear organized. Use them consistently by packing and unpacking the same way every day, and you'll know exactly where your gear is and how to access it quickly.

Skinning to Skiing

Learn to peel skins without taking off your skis. This saves enormous amounts of time over the course of a day, especially if you're skiing laps. Kick the tail of one ski up to where you can reach it, grab your skin tail, and peel up and sideways while balancing on one foot and using your poles for support in the other hand. Repeat on the other side. If you don't require anything else in your pack, simply fold your skins through the waistbelt and you're ready to ski. Experienced backcountry skiers can strip both skins in seconds.

Skiing to Skinning

Take one ski off at a time to keep from wallowing in what is surely waist-deep powder (aren't all days in the bc waist-deep powder?), and to reduce your risk of falling into a crevasse on glaciated terrain. After you've skinned up, put your bindings and boots into tour mode at the same time, and then strip a layer off to ensure that you won't have to stop in a few minutes when you start overheating. Put the layer at the top of your pack--it's the first thing you'll want at the top.

Skinning to Booting

Typically booting is required when the slope is too steep or rocky to skin, so evaluate the route carefully. Is there another, easier way to the top? Especially in deep snow, booting can be tiring and slow, so often a longer, out-of-the-way skin approach is faster and more energy efficient than booting. If you do need to boot, and the distance is less than a couple hundred vertical feet, it's usually more efficient to carry your skis over your shoulder. But if the distance is farther, or the terrain is more complex or dangerous, it's worth taking the time to strap your skis to your pack.

Less time transitioning means more time skiing--and who doesn't want that? Watch a video of IFMGA-certified guide Martin Volken at backcountrymagazine.com/transitions.

Tweet