

What It Takes To Test: Gear Test Q&A

Contributed by The Editors

Next week will be Keese Lane's freshman year at the Backcountry Magazine Gear Test. He's got a few questions before heading out to Powder Mountain, Utah....

Tweet

Keese Lane is in for a trip next week. Each winter, the online editor at Alpinist.com sits in his office, plucking away at his keyboard, while most of the staff at Height of Land Publications heads to Powder Mountain for the annual Backcountry Magazine Gear Test Week. But this year, Keese got the call and he's headed to Utah. He had a few questions for BCM Associate Editor Tyler Cohen before his freshman year at the ski test.

Keese Lane: Anything special I should bring?

Tyler Cohen: Bring your AT boots—all our testers are in either AT or tele boots, 'cause it totally wouldn't be fair to test backcountry sticks in World Cup race boots. Bring your sidecountry kit—a smallish pack, beacon, shovel, probe. Pow Mow has a ton of sidecountry terrain, and we usually do a lap down to the access road at the end of each day. Bring your A-game. And some ibuprofen.

KL: So we're not actually backcountry skiing 100% of the time? Why do we test backcountry gear at a resort then?

TC: It's really a volume issue. We'll have more than 500 products there, and there's no way we could get through it all if we were touring on absolutely everything. For the most part, a ski is a ski on the up but we do ask the testers to consider how much weight they're willing to haul uphill. The down is where skis really differentiate themselves and a good backcountry ski is versatile, stable, reliable and fun on the way down.

KL: Didn't the test used to be at Jay Peak? Why do the test at Powder Mountain?

TC: The test moved to Pow Mow five years ago. It's totally off the radar. When we go up there, it feels like the whole place is ours and we always hear locals grumbling about how it feels crowded when our crew of 50 rolls in. It's super easy to bust hot laps off the main quad, but there's a lot of good steeper, more technical terrain a little ways from the main zone. And for the last two years, it's dumped during the test week.

KL: How do I record my feedback?

TC: We have test forms for each category—skis, boots and bindings. For skis, you record numerical scores for things like responsiveness, dampness, turn initiation and how it performs at different speeds. The numbers are important, but the comments are the more important. Be witty and creative, but also detailed. Most testers cover the backside of the form in comments.

KL: I heard something about you getting a Mohawk two years ago....

TC: Yeah. That was a rough night. I didn't hit my test quota the next day.

KL: Quotas? You actually have testing quotas? I thought you just partied like skiers for a week?

TC: Test by day, party by night. Everyone is expected to evaluate six to eight pairs of boards every day, and that's at least three runs per setup. I think we did the math one year, and our whole group takes something like 4,000 runs during the five days. Most people roll back to the lodge each evening and finish off their test forms from that day. Then the beermingo comes out.

Stay tuned to backcountrymagazine.com all next week for updates from the Gear Test Week.

Tweet