

# Funplex

Contributed by Adam Howard

Locked in and standing on rocky ground, it occurs to me that my skis are the short, narrow, stiff skis I wish they weren't. The view, back across the valley to Verbier, Switzerland, is the same, regardless of which skis are on my feet: Crystal-clear, with a chandelier of contrails. And my companion, Bob, doesn't care about my skis, or even the level to which they will, or won't, take my skiing today. He's too busy eyeing the fromage-like snow pitching away from our perch at this abandoned-for-the-season ski area, Bruson.

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The sun is in and out of the clouds, and the beer is definitely out. It's the kind of warm, late-spring afternoon that's good for napping. Or shooting the shit about things like fusion-rock and indy-pop—the Dixie Dregs, and the new B-52's album were hot topics on the skin track—or, now, new ski equipment. We de-rock and embark onto a huge 30° ramp, groomed a week or so ago, and now layered with froth—not quite cream cheese, not soap suds.

Not good. Almost immediately I punch through and auger. Bob, on fat tele boards, fares better; a true master of mank. But he could make it look good skiing on his boot soles, with his 20 years of skiing in the Swiss Alps under his ceinture. And even after our top-station conversation about waist-width, shape, and rocker, it's as clear that, most of time, it really isn't about the gear at all. It's about a lot of things. Today, people and sense of place top the list. Sure, another day it may be about face shots. Rarely is it about gear, even for those who, sadly, depend on gear to make a living.

I can, of course, imagine a better ski for these conditions. And a snowboard, any snowboard, would be ideal. This winter, Backcountry tested nearly 200 pairs of capable skis at Powder Mountain, Utah, and 50 boards at Jay Peak, Vermont. Now I'm in the Alps, and the thought of gear is as exhausting as skiing this piste paste. But, winter is coming, regardless of the price of gas and heating oil. Issues of Backcountry will arrive with more stoke, and less smoke.

And as the B-52's ask in Funplex: "What the hell will I do with this stuff?" Well the short answer is: Use it. New or old, fat or skinny. Staying in the game doesn't always mean enhancing the tools. Playing the game is all that matters. Just ask Bob.

-Adam Howard, Editor