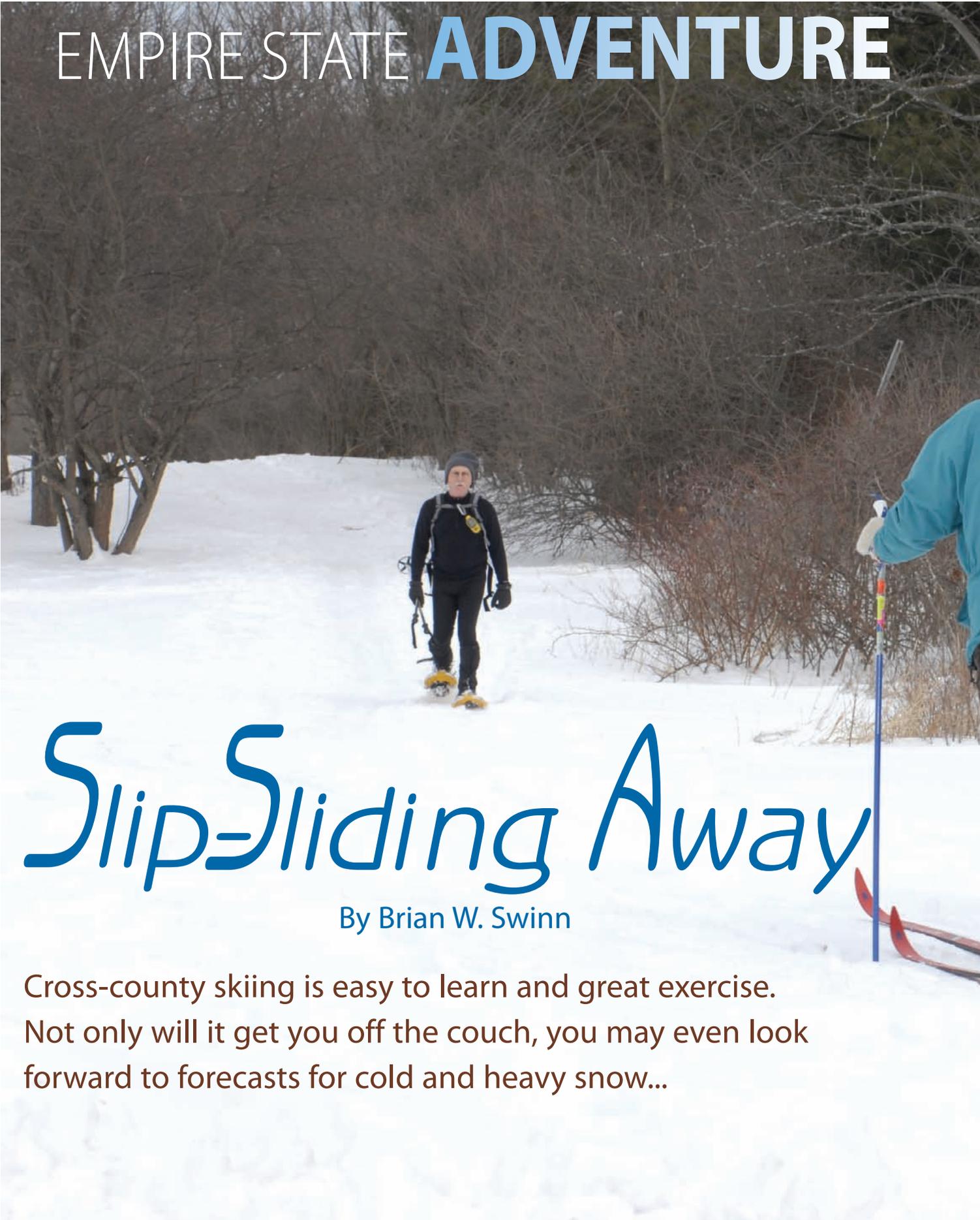


EMPIRE STATE **ADVENTURE**



Slip-Sliding Away

By Brian W. Swinn

Cross-county skiing is easy to learn and great exercise. Not only will it get you off the couch, you may even look forward to forecasts for cold and heavy snow...



WILD TURKEY TRAIL

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

Practice Good Stewardship

- Stay on the trail to help reduce erosion and to avoid poison ivy.
- Do not disturb or collect animals, plants or cultural material.
- No pets or bikes.



Come see for yourself if the "road less traveled" makes all the difference. A lively jaunt through brushland and field leads to an enchanting northern hardwood forest with many rewards.



Highlights

- Don't miss the peculiar "flight song" of the bobolink over the fields in spring.
- In summer, listen for veery and other thrush species in the deep woods.
- In fall, be alert for turkeys feasting on acorns.
- In winter, deer find protection in the wooded Philipinkill valley.



Accessibility

- A 1.5-mile loop over grass and wood chip surfaces.
- Moderate ups and downs.
- Shortcut options provide a range of alternative routes.



www.fiverrivers.org



Bill Barnaszewski

Kick...glide. Kick...glide.

Hear the rhythmic swishing sounds your skis make in their snowy tracks. Listen to their staccato hum as they overrun patches of fallen pine needles. Drink in the cool, crisp air.

Cross-country skiing likely originated centuries ago in Scandinavia, where it remains popular as sport—and often as everyday transportation. Today, cross-country skiing offers a delightful mix of exercise, fun and a bit of winter exploration. Because of the many cross-country centers scattered across New York State, you should be able to find a course where you can set your own pace.

Most cross-country areas are far too large for manmade snow, so the sport essentially depends on Mother Nature's winter blessing. You'll find that most established centers groom their trails for skiing ease, and will

be happy to apprise you of current trail conditions.

In contrast to downhill skiing, which turns gravity into motion, cross-country requires muscle power.

Enjoy the stillness of the woods broken only by the sound of your own breathing and an occasional bird call. This is the allure of cross-country skiing, a sport that cuts across age and experience.

There are different skiing styles, but the beginner will probably prefer the diagonal stride method, where pole-equipped arm and opposite leg are moved forward together,

and sides are alternated. It's much easier to do than to describe, and most people find the learning curve to be short.

Advanced skiers often perform the much more dynamic skating stride, which features a powerful kick. Overall, the movement resembles ice skating or rollerblading.

Your initial investment in cross-country gear can be very small. With daily equipment rentals and trail fees running just several dollars per person at established ski centers, all you need to get started is appropriate clothing. Naturally, if you have access to large tracts of snow-covered land and you long to break trail, buying equipment might make sense.

Cross-country skis exhibit an entirely different personality than the downhill variety. Equipment for downhill is designed for turning capability and control at speed. Slightly springy, gently arched, wax-less cross-country skis are longer, more slender and have textured patches on the undersides that grip when you step down. Let up, and the skis spring back a bit, helping you speed across the snow. The characteristics of cross-country skis, combined with some easily learned techniques, help you climb, glide and maintain control. Also available are classic skis, which require application of different waxes according to snow and temperature conditions. To complete your outfit, you will need boots that match the bindings and poles made expressly for the sport—all fitted for your size and weight.

Newcomers are always astonished at how warm they get on the trail, even on the coldest winter days. By all means, keep yourself covered, but do so in layers, so that you can remove and add clothing at will. Stay away from cotton and lean toward fabrics that retain your body heat and wick moisture from

Connect to Nature



Ski DEC

DEC's four environmental education centers are the perfect places to try out your newly acquired cross-country skills and equipment.

- **Five Rivers** Environmental Education Center (Albany County)
- **Reinstein Woods** (Erie County)
- **Rogers Environmental Education Center** (Chenango County)
- **Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center** (Dutchess County)



Each education center offers its own blend of ski experiences. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/education/74.html for more information about DEC environmental education centers and cross-country programs they may offer in your area. Although many state forests have trails suitable for skiing, some have become cross-country skiing destinations. On the Tug Hill Plateau, where the snow gets deep and stays all winter, there are state forests with extensive and well maintained cross-country ski trail networks that offer many miles of scenic trails for skiers to explore. For more information, see the Region 6 Natural Resource Highlight on Winona, Barnes Corners and Carpenter Road State Forests at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/353.html. In the Catskills, Belleayre offers downhill and cross country. See www.belleayre.com.

the body. Cross-country skiing can provide a good aerobic workout, so wear non-restrictive clothes that would be appropriate for jogging or power-walking in winter weather. You'll also be surprised at how many muscle groups you use, so take it easy at first. After a few times out, your muscles will start getting used to the routine. Remember to bring plenty of water to keep hydrated.

Start with short jaunts, especially if the kids come along. Don't be disappointed if you don't complete your entire trip. After all the exercise and unfamiliar arm and leg motions, snow angels and snowball fights might start to look like a good fallback plan.

Even though it's a relatively low-risk sport, caution to avoid injuries is always advisable, and cross-country skiing proves no exception. If you pick a cross-country trail well-matched to your abilities, the chance of injury is minimal.

Beginners often tend to ski somewhat slowly and cautiously, and most hills pale in comparison with their downhill brethren. Because cross-country skiing requires sev-

eral inches of snow cover which can cushion falls, many people find the most outrageous thing that happens is a quick, comical bout with lost balance, followed by a less-than-graceful sit in the snow. Embarrassing perhaps, but usually harmless.

Cross-country skiing is a great way to build low-impact, aerobic activity into winter. And don't forget—nothing quite wraps up a day of cross-country skiing better than a cup of hot chocolate shared among friends at your favorite ski area.

Editor's note: In August, *Conservationist* suffered the loss of contributing editor **Brian Swinn** to cancer at age 54. Before going on medical leave, Brian toiled tirelessly to finish several projects, including this article. We are fortunate to be able to continue to share his fine work with our readers, even after his untimely passing.

One of his favorite pastimes was going on "adventures" (as he called them) with his son. It was fitting, then, that Brian became the feature editor for the day trips we refer to as "Empire State Adventures" in this publication.

We will miss Brian's thoughtful input and his quick wit. Above all, Brian was a tremendous writer, sharing his talent with *Conservationist* readers for the past 18 years.

Kick...glide. Kick...glide. Au revoir, mon ami.

Places to Go, Courses to Ski

With winter nearing full stride, now is the time to check out places for your cross-country ski adventure. Local favorites abound, but there are many places known far and wide for skiing in New York State.

Although beginners might be best off with established centers that offer equipment, lessons and well-groomed trails, other options exist. Memorable surprises await the fully equipped skier in areas such as the **Finger Lakes Trail** in Letchworth State Park in western New York, the 50-kilometer **Jackrabbit Trail** in the **Adirondack High Peaks**, the **John Boyd Thacher State Park** near Albany and the **Eagle Hill Trail Loop** in Tarrytown. Many of the more remote areas may require advanced, trail-breaking skills, but repay you with solitude and splendid natural beauty.

Check the internet or local chambers of commerce for more information, and for other places to ski.