

# Get Off the Bike and Go White

Winter's here, and is a perfect time to seek the snow and cross-train in snowshoes.

By Kari Redfield

Photographs by Sharon Yee

## Snowshoeing

is one of the most popular winter cross-training activities for snow-country bikers, triathletes and runners. Triathlete Ray Browning and mountain biker Tinker Juarez are just two of many pro athletes who champion it as an integral part of their winter training programs.

Greg Krause, top 15 American finisher at the 2005 Ironman World Championships, puts it bluntly: "My training on snowshoes is what got me my top triathlon results."

That's because it's one killer workout. "Even if you snowshoe slowly about two miles per hour your caloric expenditure will be about eight calories per minute, or 480 calories per hour," says Declan Connolly, Ph.D., director of the human performance laboratory at the University of Vermont. Kick it up to three miles an hour and burn up to 1,000 calories an hour.

It will also do wonders for your V02 max (the maximum volume of oxygen your muscles can use). Studies by Connolly and colleagues found that after a snowshoe training program, athletes showed greater boosts in V02 max than athletes who completed a similar running program.

Snowshoeing has several additional benefits: You can make it as hard or as easy as you'd like. It requires limited equipment and investment, and can be done in groups with friends or family. The learning curve is minimal and rewards are quick to follow. It gives your hard-used muscles and joints a break. And it's a refreshing mental break literally a stroll in a winter wonderland.

## What You Need

**Snowshoes.** Though snowshoes are inexpensive, it's a good idea to rent first. You'll get a better feel for the types recreational, mountaineering, aerobic/fitness and race. (See sidebar for more information on fitting and buying.) Outdoor shops and Nordic centers often rent them for \$15 to \$20 per day.

**Poles.** Ski or trekking (with a snowbasket) work fine.

**Boots/Shoes.** Insulated, waterproof, supportive hiking boots work best for deep powder and long outings. For groomed trails or running, try lighter hiking boots or running shoes. Add a pair of gaiters, which go



descending; it's done by moving diagonally back and forth across the hill, creating a zigzag track. You'll want to lean back a little as you go, which not only helps with balance, but also engages the cleats on the back bottom of the snowshoe.

To turn, shuffle around gradually or lift the turn-side foot. Rotate it 180 degrees and plant it back down. Weight that foot and bring the other foot around. Repeat.

As you get better, you can incorporate more technique. Take a class or workshop or pick up a book such as *Snowshoeing: From Novice to the Master* by Gene Prater (Mountaineers Books, 2002, 0898868912).

Like any workout, be sure to start your workout with a warm-up and take time to stretch.

As a beginner, start in shorter increments. Go out for less than an hour and build up to longer jaunts.

## Where to Go

Look for groomed trails at Nordic centers and at ski resorts. As you improve both your technique and your overall winter outdoors skills, you can advance to frozen lakes, snow-covered single-path bike routes through white forests, and jaunts in national and state forests and parks.

You can also pick up some good techniques and have fun events, such as the Snow Snake Stomp Snowshoe Races in Red River, New Mexico, (5K and 10K) scheduled for January 15 (info@enchantedforestxc.com), or the Screamin Snowman Race in Nederland, Colorado (5K and 10K) scheduled for February 12 (darrin@racingunderground.com). Both welcome and encourage beginners.

*Fitness writer and editor Kari Redfield fled cold Minnesota to take advantage of the warm Arizona winters, but snowshoeing remains a sport she enjoys.*

over your boots and pants and keep snow and moisture out.

You'll also want to bear in mind the general precautions for working out in the winter outdoors. Proper clothing, hydration and safety precautions can ensure that your snowshoeing experiences end happily. (For more on safe winter recreation see story on page 8.)

## Getting Started

Strap on the snowshoes and go. "Snowshoeing takes a minute to learn, yet a lifetime to truly master," says Steve Ilg of Flagstaff, 2005 Course Record Holder of the Mt. Taylor Winter Quadrathlon, Mens Team Mens 4x4 Open and author of the book, *The Winter Athlete* (Johnson Books, 1999). "I still learn subtle techniques each time I strap on my 'webs.'"

Start your learning on a groomed trail. Concentrate on keeping your stride compact, shorter than your running stride.

To climb a hill, you'll either want to edge, go straight up or switchback up it. In edging, kick the uphill edge of your lower snowshoe into the hillside to create a horizontal step, then step down with the higher snowshoe and engage the cleat. Repeat. Go straight up by kicking the front of the snowshoe into the snow. Use long steps, spaced wide apart vertically.

Traversing is a good technique for

## Choosing Snowshoe Gear

Today's snowshoes are as technical as the rest of your workout gear and garb. Before you buy, you'll need to consider how you'll use them.

Recreational snowshoes are, as the name suggests, for the occasional snowshoer and work on most terrain.

Mountaineering snowshoes are larger and made for more challenging snow conditions, the kind you see off the beaten path. They cost the most.

Aerobic/fitness snowshoes are lightweight and fast to run in, but not meant for carrying more than a daypack, and work best on groomed trails.

Racing snowshoes are for serious-minded snowshoeing competitors on well-packed race trails.

The next consideration is size. Choose the smallest one you can get away with because you get superior maneuverability and movement. But if they are too small you'll sink into the snow, so err on the side of too big. Remember not only to take into consideration your weight, but what you'll be carrying. When you're testing them, they should sink no more than six to eight inches.

Go to a specialty store to buy your snowshoes. Try them outside, if only for a walk in a snow-covered parking lot. Look for whether they support you and if they are easy to get around in. Pay attention to the bindings. You should be able to take them off and put them back on outside fairly quickly because you may need to adjust them while snowshoeing. When your snowshoes are on, you should be able to shake your feet without causing the bindings to loosen or move around side-to-side.

