Caroline Coughlin

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Cross Country skiing for newbies

It was a sunshine filled blue sky day at Tahoe XC, the perfect conditions to cross country ski for the first time, ever. After two hours my dad and I are heading back to the lodge, I’m a few feet behind my dad who’s cruising down the slight decline with enviable ease. I, however, am flying down the baby hill way too fast, the skis attached to my boots are uncontrollable. They decide my direction and my speed, I have no say. I’m stuck in the tracks that the resort sets up for newcomers like myself when I spot the snow plow. The plow meant for grooming the tracks takes over the entire trail and the driver must’ve been able to tell I was a complete novice because he shut down his vehicle quit abruptly. It is 50 feet ahead and I’m approaching its massive size, swiftly. “Cara, you should stop now,” my dad says unhurriedly. I yell back, “obviously, dad, I’m trying!” I realize my only choice to stop without crashing into the plow. I attempt to pick up my right leg from the track to begin the “pizza” position to slow but immediately catch an edge and wipeout hard, skis and poles flying.

While skiing and snowboarding reign supreme for most people, cross country skiing is an exciting alternative. According to the Olympics website, “cross country skiing is the oldest type of skiing. It emerged from a need to travel over snow-covered terrain and developed as a sport at the end of the 19th century.” Also known as Nordic skiing, there are numerous health benefits to this sport. “In an hour a cross-country skier can potentially burn over double the calories of a downhill skier.” Also, “training in this slower, more stable way builds strength in the supporting muscles you use in everyday life, as well as those crucial to downhill skiing” (ski-buzz). Cross country skiing is beneficial for people with knee problems, since your heel is free from your ski there are no shocks to this joint. Other cardio workouts such as running cause tremendous strain on the knee joint, cross country skiing doesn’t and it still activates all the bodies muscles and cardiovascular system. The amazing workout is not only good for your physical health but it can benefit your mental health. Being outdoors is therapeutic, the time you spend cross country skiing alone is great for peace and quiet. However, the speed of cross country skiing makes the sport more sociable allowing ideal time to spend with friends and family, too.

Earlier, when we arrived at the lodge, it was packed with people on the small deck outside. I felt intimidated by the laid back people who were clearly seasoned regulars here. But I had my dad with me and he can make friends with a bear so I relaxed. Inside the lodge, we filled out a rental form and were set up with skis and boots quickly by a friendly employee. With my skis and poles in hand and boots on my feet we were shuttled out the door. No advice or helpful tips about how to cross country ski. I suppose I didn’t ask but I was still shocked we were just sent out to the trails to fend for ourselves.

Clipping into the skis, I felt unsure about being back on two boards instead of my usual, one, since I stopped skiing around age 11 to start snowboarding. Despite the ten-year gap, the skiing feeling graciously came back to me after a few paces. When you set out at Tahoe XC you first have to ascend a hill; I slipped, slamming onto my knees in the first 5 minutes. Laughing it off I popped right back up more determined than ever to get better at this sport, especially as a group of five-year-old girls glided past me.

The crunch of the freshly groomed snow was the only sound I heard. My dad and I were deep into the resorts green trail, the easiest one, of course. We would go 20 minutes or more not seeing another soul, just trekking mostly uphill, my shoulder muscles starting to burn from the overuse of the poles. My gaze so fixated on the snow ahead of me, I would’ve missed the peaceful scenery around me if we had not taken a break. Unlike snowboarding, where you’re mostly surrounded by people if you are staying on the trails, here it is just you and the forest. The narrow trails were enveloped by hundreds of pine trees spaced comfortably amongst themselves, allowing us to feel a part of the landscape.

I won’t lie and say it was easy because it wasn’t, I crashed at least three times but it was truly fun. It is always good to try something new and in between the times I felt out of control, I was smiling ear to ear reveling in the freedom I felt speeding down the trails. I am itching to get back to Tahoe XC and try it again. If you’re looking for a new way to challenge yourself in the snow, give cross-country skiing a try.

The Tahoe XC resort offers 24 groomed trails, 3 warming huts, lessons and rentals. An all-day adult trail pass is $29, after 12:30 it’s $25 and twilight 3-5pm passes are $20. The rentals for the skis or snowshoes package cost $26 for all day and are $22 after 12:30. One hour long lessons are offered for $60 including your rentals and trail pass. Group lessons to cross country ski occur at 10:30am and 1:30pm daily and 12:15pm daily for skate ski lessons. They also provide private lessons for all levels costing $50/ hour. Specials deals include $15 Tuesdays, where tickets all day long are only $15. They also conveniently allow dogs on three of their trails! Tahoe XC has events every month including fundraisers, clinics and coming up on March 5th, the 40th Annual Great Ski Race. It is the largest Nordic ski race west of the Mississippi, starting at Tahoe XC in Tahoe City ending in Truckee.