

TIP STRIP

SAFETY

Tony D'Agostino, the resident hunting pro at Bass Pro Shops in the Fingerlakes Mall, knows all about tree stands.

"I spend more time in a tree than a roasted turkey,"

he said.

Bow and gun hunters use tree stands some 15 to 25 feet off the ground for two reasons. The first is visibility. The second is that getting up high reduces the hunted animal's ability to smell you.

How to play it safe:

► Don't use a homemade stand. They deteriorate over time and they're not built to any standard. "Wood rots and nails or fasteners rip loose from the tree," he said. Manufactured stands should have a sticker from the Treestand Manufacturers Association (TMA). Check out tmastands.com.



► Wear a full body safety harness. "Don't forget to use a climbing system, a supplemental rope or climbing belt, with your harness. Most accidents occur while ascending and descending the tree," D'Agostino said.

► Unload your gun while climbing or descending. "And do not have a gun or bow on your body when you're climbing. Pull them up (or lower them) separately with a rope," he said. ♥

— David Figura is The Post-Standard's outdoors editor.

ACTIVITY

"YOU MISS 100 PERCENT OF THE SHOTS YOU NEVER TAKE." — WAYNE GRETZKY

Skiing Backcountry

FOR THE ADVENTUROUS AT HEART

BY GREG MUNNO

Ski lifts stink.

Long lines. High ticket prices. Cold, boring rides.

Of course, lifts do whisk you up the mountain, and that's great if your goal is to ski as many vertical feet as possible.

But if you want to get away from the crowds, commune with nature and get one of the most fantastic workouts of your life, ditch the lift and head into the backcountry.

"Backcountry skiing is really a totally different mindset than resort skiing," said Vinny McClelland, manager of the Mountaineer (www.mountaineer.com), a serious backcountry equipment shop in Keene Valley, one of the Northeast's backcountry-ski hotspots.

"It's not all about the down," McClelland added. "It's about enjoying the woods, the solitude and beauty of the mountains, the exertion of getting yourself up the hill. And it's about getting away from the expense, the crowds and the hoopla of a downhill ski area."

The Mountaineer is one of the few places that rents backcountry ski equipment.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF VINNY MCCLELLAND

Zander McClelland booting up a slide, which is a slope that has been cleared naturally by erosion and other forces, in the Adirondack High Peaks, a mecca for East Coast backcountry skiing. Backcountry skiing is about using your own strength to get up the hill. One method is to hike with your skis on your back. The other is to "skin" up, using a cross-country type motion and climbing skins on the bottom of your skis. If you look closely at McClelland's skis, you can see he still has his skins on from an earlier part of his journey.

It also has a popular ski festival the first weekend in March, which offers even more chances to demo equipment, as well as guided backcountry ski tours that are one of the best introductions to the sport.

Don't want to wait till March?

Contact Jesse Williams, who runs Cloudsplitter Guides (www.cloudsplitterguides.com) in Keene Valley. He can bring you into the backcountry anytime conditions permit.