



A Trivial Outing

**Want to pretend to be a ski-traversing badass?
Vermont's Trivial Traverse is for you.**

traverse | *trav•erse* | : To cross a hill or mountain by means of a series of sideways movements from one practicable line of ascent or descent to another.

Tfirst time I heard the phrase “ski traverse” in a backcountry context was about 15 years ago, when an email popped into my inbox from my friend Andrew who had recently moved to British Columbia. He’d just completed the Bugaboos to Rogers Pass traverse, and was sending a note to his buddies about it, with pictures. The skiing and the vistas looked beautiful and impressive: big white slopes of pristine pow, tumbling glaciers, jagged summits. Then I noticed something odd. It was like the scale of the photo was messed up. Their backpacks were about the size of adolescents. I remember thinking to myself: yeah, good for you Andrew, but I ski to feel free, not to be burdened with 80 pounds of gear.

A few years later, I learned about the Grand Traverse, a 40-mile backcountry race from Crested Butte to Aspen. At first, it was tempting: A classic route through the high country, managed for safety but raced for speed. Then I checked out the racer manual and could feel the excitement draining from my body. The checklist of mandatory gear was two pages, and it included a shelter, cooking equipment, and various implements that would constitute a “warmth strategy.” Um, no thanks. Maybe in a few years, when I’m not in charge of the warmth strategy for my three kids.

by Kirk Kardashian | photographs courtesy CTA



Then, last year, I noticed a listing in the Catamount Trail Association newsletter for a one-day, unguided marathon ski tour in my home state of Vermont, from Bolton Valley to Smugglers' Notch. It's known by some as the Trivial Traverse. Billed as having more vertical in less mileage than the Grand Traverse, the organizer, Kevin "Dr. Skimo" Duniho, said entrants should "expect 8 to 10 hours of tempo skiing with very few short breaks," and that skimo race gear was recommended. As a recreational mountain bike racer, the word "tempo" doesn't scare me, but I'm not into superlight and crazy expensive ski mountaineering racing. Instead of pricey carbon, I'd have to run my typical AT gear. With multiple bail out points along the way, it seemed worth the risk. And I liked the idea of traveling

with four steep descents greater than 1,500 vertical feet each: the Bolton to Trapp Family Lodge descent, the Steeple Trail, and runs down the front of Stowe and Smugglers' Notch. In between, there's some gradual skinning along the Catamount Trail and on the Trapp Family Lodge property, but there are also burly ascents up the Bruce Trail (2,000 feet of climbing) to the Stone Hut on Mount Mansfield, and the final 1,700-foot climb up Spruce Peak, which connects to the top of Smuggs via the Long Trail.

The entire day, we were never more than two miles from the nearest road (or a full-featured ski resort, for that matter), but the length of the route made it a bonafide adventure that tested our

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with a minimal pack.

I roped-in two friends, and we showed up at Bolton Valley at 6:30 am on a Sunday in early April. Some of the other participants pitied us for our heavy equipment. My notoriously frugal friend, Steven, said to the naysayers, “I’ll buy you a beer at the end with the pile of cash I saved from not buying a skimo kit.” He never had to make good on that promise, because the skimo guys didn’t wait for us. More money saved!

Dr. Skimo didn’t wait for us, either. But that was all right, because the route is pretty simple, and we pieced it together with the “Mount Mansfield Region Nordic Ski and Snowshoe” map I picked up at Umiak Outfitters in Stowe. It uses a combination of frontside trails at resorts, and sidecountry trails that connect the resorts. It’s kind of like a greatest-hits album for the Stowe region,

endurance—and our feet.

We were all hollow-eyed after the Bruce ascent—18 miles in—and took comfort in chips and soda at the Octagon Cafe at the top of the FourRunner lift at Stowe. We all stopped along the way to tape blisters. For three dads of youngsters at home, it wasn’t a trivial outing. To piece together an epic day close to home, without draining the bank account on ultra-specialized carbon-fiber boots and skinny skis just takes some imagination, and a kook like Dr. Skimo to provide the stoke.

Riding a deep snowpack with a creamy surface, we made it to Smuggs by 4:00 PM, where my old Vermont father-in-law picked us up. The journey was 25 miles and 9,000 vertical feet. No teenager sized packs on our backs. No warmth strategies required.

