

SNOWSPORT ENGLAND

A Guide to Telemark Skiing

Great Britain has one of the best Telemarkers in the world with more World Cup podiums than any other British skier. Watch Jasmin Taylor explaining why Telemarking is so liberating.



Jasmin Taylor

The first thing that you notice about Telemark skiing is that the heel is not fixed to the ski but is allowed to lift.



But why would you want to ski like that? The answer is that it opens up a whole new world of skiing that allows for natural body movements similar to walking and running. Telemarking unlocks a wider range of turns rather than being confined to just one kind of turn as you would if your heels were locked down.

History

Before there was Alpine skiing and you wanted to turn your skis going downhill, you would Telemark. It is the oldest turn there is. It has a great history.

Skiing's a thousand years old and until fairly recently it was all about getting around in winter. The standard way of fixing your boots to the ski was the use of birch tree roots.



The Telemark turn was invented in the 19th century by a Norwegian called Sondre Norheim who lived in the Telemark region of Norway, hence the name of the turn. Sondre discovered that the Telemark turn was the best way to turn these old wooden skis when going downhill.

Not surprisingly, when ski equipment evolved, it was found that fixing the heels down was a much faster way of turning and so the Telemark turn fell out of favour and into disuse.

Perhaps it's just coincidence that Sondre Norheim died and is buried in the USA but we have the Americans to thank for rediscovering him and for re-inventing the Telemark turn in the 1980's. Not only has modern technology been applied to Telemark by the big manufacturers but also more importantly fanatical Telemarkers beaver away in their garages have come up with new inventive ways of solving old problems. The result over the last 40 years, has been technological leapfrog between skis, boots and bindings. As each element in turn got better it demanded ever-greater improvements from the other two elements and of course from more skilful, adventurous, demanding and increasingly discerning Telemarkers. The latest gear now puts the fabulous Telemark turn within the reach of every skier.



Equipment

Skis - There was a time when special Telemark skis were made but due to modern boots and bindings, skis are the same as you would use for Alpine.

Boots - Again these are essentially the same as Alpine boots except that there is a bellows over the toes to allow the foot to bend just as you do when you walk. The boot sole too is modified to allow the binding to attach boot to ski.



Bindings - There is a wide range of Telemark ski bindings. One of the most common bindings in use is this one



Rottefella
Freeride

This binding locks on to the sole of the boot.

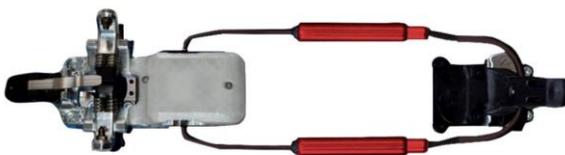
Taking advantage of the ski mountaineering's pins and sockets at the front of Telemark boots, several manufacturers use these fixings in their bindings

Meidjo



Others maintain the ancient link with birch tree roots and use high tech cable mechanisms combined with pin and socket toe fixings.

Moonlight Pure Tele

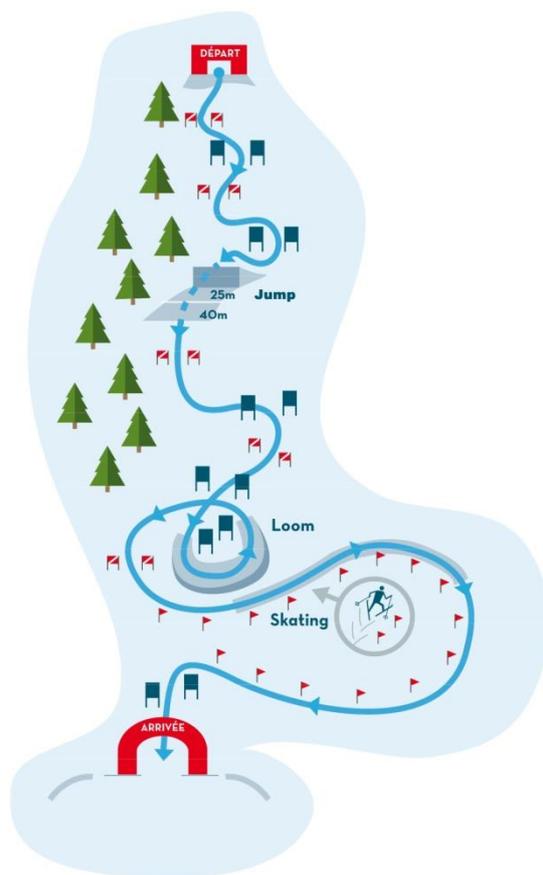


Telemark Myths

- Just because you have a free heel doesn't mean that you *have* to Telemark everywhere. There will be many occasions that demand quick fast turns where it will be easier to use Alpine turns. You *can* ski Alpine on Telemark gear. The Telemark turn comes into its own in Champagne powder where you can soar and glide through it as if you were walking downstairs on air. Only Telemarking can give you this feeling. This is the beauty of Telemark; you can mix up your skiing with different turns and it will make for much more interesting runs and make you a more versatile skier.

- You can do almost everything on Telemark gear that you can do on Alpine gear but more. Those free heels allow you to get around much more easily when it comes to the up slopes and it may even tempt you to explore the great outdoors out of bounds with your new found freedom.
- Some claim that Telemark skiing is hard on the knees. Whilst all skiing is hard on the knees, don't forget that when you Telemark, one knee gets a rest in every turn! Some people even take up Telemark to save their knees as it helps to give them a greater range of movement instead of being locked in one position.
- You'll see kids in the terrain park too, skiing switch and doing everything that their chums can do on Alpine gear.

Telemark Racing



It's not yet an Olympic sport but there is a FIS World Cup Telemark circuit.

Telemark races are a true test of a skier's all round ability. As well as Telemarking through slalom gates there are some unusual features not found in other disciplines.

A jump



If you land short of a pre-determined line, 3 seconds will be added to your time. A further second will also be added if you don't land in a Telemark stance.

There is also a banked semi-circle, the Norwegian name is the reipelykkje (pronounced *rape-alusha*) or in English the loom or rap)



Racers catapulted from the loom cross their entry tracks and the race usually goes into a skating section. It's rather like doing a 200M sprint after you've just done a GS.

There are 4 types of Telemark races.

- Giant Slalom - this is similar to an Alpine GS except that it has a jump to negotiate. A one second penalty will be added to your time if you do not execute a full Telemark turn at each gate.
- The blue ribbon event is the Classic. This is the longest of all the races which includes up to 40 GS gates, a jump, the loom and testing skating sections. (The same penalty system is applied as above)
- The Sprint - this is a shorter Classic race but with the same elements as the Classic. (The same penalty system is applied as above)
- Duel Slalom - These use the same kind of start as Alpine and Snowboard duel slaloms with hand grips and holding boards that release the skiers simultaneously. The race is similar to a Telemark Sprint except that skiing faults add longer skating sections as a penalty. These races can be some of the most exciting Telemark races with skiers fighting it out on the wall of the loom.

All these races can only be run in Alpine type resorts but in the UK where this is rarely possible, scaled down Telemark races are run at indoor snow centres with all the essential Telemark elements. For the last few years, the British Indoor Telemark Championships have been run annually in Manchester. These photos are from the British Indoor Telemark Championships.



Ben Silva



Sion Bingham

The snow centre at Manchester is one of the few where Telemark equipment can be hired so why not give it a try?