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Talking Ski Talk

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Ready for winter? If your ski instructor mentions carving and mashed potatoes, you can be sure it's not Thanksgiving dinner he means. So don't feel snowed when you head for the slopes. Keep your edge with the following ski-speak:

BLACK DIAMOND: Steepest, most difficult run on the mountain. A double-black diamond is even more so.

BOWL: A wide-open snowy basin, usually above timberline, often below a ridge on two conjoined peaks.

BUMP: A hulking mogul of snow that starts as an insignificant pimple and grows into a mound as skiers steer around it.

CABLE CAR: A room-size metal cabin, one of two suspended at equidistant points on a cable, big enough to carry 25 to 100 skiers uphill at once.

CARVE: Leaning and pressing the uphill edges of your skis into the snow to make non-skid downhill turns.

CAT TRACK: Narrow ski trails, often snowed-over maintenance roads, connecting ski runs otherwise separated by cliffs, ravines or woods. Often added to create easy ways down steep inclines.

C-TURNS: Wide semicircular turns, generally done to practice carving techniques.

CORDOROY: Freshly groomed slope marked with grooves left by a snowcat. See snowcat.

CORN SNOW: Crumbly, clumps of refrozen spring snow.

DEATH COOKIES: Crunchy crusty bits of snow that form when snow melts during the day and refreezes at night into bits of ice. Avoid at all costs.

EDGES: The right and left edges of each ski, shaped to be slightly narrow under the boot and wider at the tips. Because they are hour-glass shaped, they turn by themselves when you put your weight down on the center.

FALL LINE: The most-used term in the instructor's "Skiing in Ten Easy Lessons," manual. It's the downhill path of least resistance, where the skis would go if they slid downhill by themselves. It's the path NOT to take if you fall and have trouble standing up.

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GLADE: A stand of thinly spaced trees. Bold skiers, go on through; old skiers wear helmets.

GONDOLA: Enclosed "cabin" chairlifts that seat four to six skiers and have external racks to hold your skis. Most gondolas are semi-detached while you're climbing in, then reattach to move uphill.

GROOMING: What snowcats do at night, mashing, crumbling and smoothing the slopes into a flat surface for the next day's skiing.

HALF PIPE: A 200-300-foot snow mound built up then reshaped into a trough in and over which snowboarders and freestyle skiers can do aerial and acrobatic tricks. Super Pipes are longer.

HIGH SPEED QUAD: An open chairlift for four to six skiers that moves uphill at high speed, and slows down to load and unload skiers. .

MASHED POTATOES: Mushy, semi-frozen spring snow often at busy trail crossings, waiting to trip up the unwary.

MOGUL: A hulking bump of snow that starts as an insignificant pimple and grows bigger and bigger as skiers steer around it.

OFF-PISTE: Literally, off the path, meaning ungroomed snow beyond marked trails.

OUT-OF-BOUNDS: Terrain beyond the resort's legal boundaries, generally unpatrolled. The black hole where rule-breakers get into trouble.

PLANT: Not a weed, or a flower, or a thing. As in, "to plant your poles," meaning to stick the sharp end of your downhill ski pole in the snow ahead of your downhill ski when starting a turn.

POWDER STASH: 1. A special spot where the snow is always deep, light and undisturbed, a virgin patch so hidden that you'll have it to yourself.

SKI PRO: A puffed-up name for a ski instructor. The likely precursor to "ski professor."

SNOW CAT: Big rumbling, tank-like machines on treads that drive back and forth over the slopes at night, smoothing them down for the next day's skiers. Identifiable by their headlights.

TERRAIN: Physical features, measurable acreage including slopes, steeps, valleys, woods, ridges and some man-made features.

TUCK: To crouch down in a racing position, knees bent and poles against your sides. If the sign says "no tucking," it means no racing on this overcrowded trail.

YARD SALE: "What you get at the bottom of a black-diamond run when you and crash and burn and your possessions are scattered over the snow. Skis, poles, goggles, hat, gloves, day pack, cell phone, water bottle, trail map, sunscreen, keys, driver's license and Grateful Dead concert ticket stubs, all scattered over the snow.

WHOOOP-DE-DO: An undulating, dragon's back trail in a practice part designed for kids.

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