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Ski Speak: Going skiing? Do the mashed potatoes

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SNOWMASS, COLO. — Did last winter's ski instructor - "ski pros" they're called - drive you crazy, going on and on about carving, corn and mashed potatoes? That wasn't Thanksgiving dinner he was talking about. That was Ski Speak, the lingo you need to learn if you want to fit in with the "rippers" on the slopes. Shout a few phrases to your ski buddies and you'll snow the "gapers" in the lift line.

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

BOILER PLATE: Hard icy snow, a surface so dense your skis can't make an edge.

BOWL: A wide-open snowy basin, usually above timberline, often below a cornice atop a ridge.

BRAIN BUCKET: A helmet, the kind of protection smart skiers swear by.

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

CABLE CAR: A room-size metal cabin suspended on a cable and big enough to carry 25 to 100 skiers uphill at once.

CARVE: To press the uphill edges of your skis into the snow - "edging" - in order to make a controlled descent.

CAT TRACK: Narrow ski trails, sometimes snow-covered maintenance roads that connect ski runs otherwise separated by cliffs, ravines or woods. Often added next to a black diamond run so beginners have an easy way to get back to the base area.

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CHOCOLATE CHIPS: Rocks sticking up out of the snow, more dangerous than death cookies.

CORDOROY: Freshly groomed snow marked with thin, parallel grooves. See snow cat.

CORN: Crumbly, cornlike spring snow that has melted and refrozen.

CORNICE: Overhanging rim of snow or ice, often on a ridgetop, usually windblown.

C-TURNS: Wide, semicircular turns beginners do when practicing carving techniques.

DEATH COOKIES: Crunchy, crusty bits of snow that form when snow melts during the day and refreezes at night. Hitting a patch of it at high speed acts like a brake.

EAT WOOD: What you'll do if you lose control and hit a tree.

EDGES: The second-most used term in the instructor's vocabulary. The right and left edges of each ski. Press one or the other into the snow to make a controlled downhill turn.

FALL LINE: The most-used term in the instructor's "Skiing in Ten Lessons" manual. This is the downhill direction a rock would roll if it fell, and where the skis will go if they slide downhill by themselves. If you fall, keep your skis at right angles to the fall line.

FIRST TRACKS: The first joyous run of the day on fresh snow, the reward for early risers who are first up on the chairlift, and first back down.

GAPERS: Novice skiers and onlookers who spend more time standing around than actually skiing.

GLADE: A grove of thinly spaced trees, fun to ski between. Sometimes a shortcut between two downhill slopes.

GONDOLA: An enclosed "cabin" chairlift that seats four to six skiers and has external ski racks mounted on the sides. Most gondolas are semi-detached, slowing down while you climb in, then reattaching to the cable before climbing uphill.

GROOMING: What snow cats do at night, mashing, crumbling and re-smoothing snow in preparation for the next day's skiers.

HALF PIPE: A 200-foot (or more) mound of snow piled up then reshaped to form a trough. Freestyle skiers and snowboarders perform acrobatic tricks in, over and around the trough. Super Pipes are longer.

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

HUCK: To ski off a cliff or mound, getting airborne in the process.

LUNCH TRAY: As in "launch," a snowboard.

MASHED POTATOES: Mushy spring snow often found at busy trail crossings or near the base area at the end of a warm day.

MOGUL: What a "bump" used to be called.

NOODLE: A ski so old or so poorly built that it won't stay rigid enough for fast skiing.

OFF-PISTE: Ungroomed snow, usually beyond or between marked trails.

OUT-OF-BOUNDS: Terrain outside the resort's legal boundaries, ungroomed, generally unpatrolled and unsafe. Skiing out of bounds will cost you your lift ticket.

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PLANT: Not a weed or a flower, but the act of planting, as in "to plant your poles," i.e. sticking the point of your pole in the snow to initiate a turn.

POWDER HOUND: A skier whose day isn't complete until he finds a powder stash.

POWDER STASH: 1. a slope where the snow is deep, light and undisturbed; 2. a virgin patch the obsessed "hound" doesn't reveal.

RIPPER: An expert skier, the kind of skilled athlete you hope to become.

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

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

TERRAIN: Various measurable acreage with physical features 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. A "no tucking" sign means no racing down a crowded slope.

YARD SALE: The pile of junk at the bottom of a black-diamond run when you crash and burn, scattering your skis, poles, goggles, hat, gloves, day pack, cellphone, water bottle, trail map, sunscreen, keys, driver's license and Grateful Dead ticket stubs over the snow.

WHOOOP-DE-DO: An undulating, dragon's-back trail on a beginner's slope designed for kids.

WIDOW-MAKER: The steepest, narrowest, toughest run on the mountain, usually attempted by the very gifted or the very foolish.

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