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Below and continued on page 13 are descriptions of lodging that SKIER NEWS staff has experienced and recommend.

## Mountain Club on Loon

Since it is slopeside, The Mountain Club on Loon is the closest you can stay to the main slopes without pitching a tent next to the gondola. The property recently completed a \$9 million

renovation and now guests can enjoy all new club rooms, studios and suites. Whether delighting in the awe-inspiring views of Loon Mountain or countless other White Mountain peaks, your everyday world is a distant memory within minutes of arriving at The Mountain Club on Loon.

The Mountain Club on Loon is located slopeside on a bluff overlooking the Pemigewasset River in Lincoln. The Mountain Club provides year-round experiences and a carefree ambiance ideal for families, couples and groups alike. Enjoy the thrills of navigating 55 mountain trails right outside your door on Loon Mountain and enjoy many other local activities as well.

The Mountain Club on Loon Resort and Spa is New Hampshire's only ski-out lodging. Also, for your convenience, guests receive complimentary covered garage parking. Their Health Club features an indoor lap and heated pool, complete cardio and workout rooms. Also find fitness classes, racquetball/squash, indoor basketball, steam and sauna, lockers and

towels.

Room amenities include fully equipped kitchens, complimentary WiFi, coffee makers, hair dryers, and some rooms feature balconies and whirlpool tubs.

Indulge in pampering treatments at the on-premise Viaggio Spa and Health Club. Enjoy delicious cuisine at the Black Diamond Pub. Or experience the simple delights of pool time with your family or a tranquil soak in a hot tub under a starlit sky.

Easily accessible, The Mountain Club is located just over two miles off Interstate 93, which makes it a convenient two-hour drive from Boston. Escape to the breathtaking White Mountains area to a fun-filled place that is a destination all its own, with a relaxing setting, attentive service.

Log on to [www.mtnclub.com](http://www.mtnclub.com) or call 1-800-229-7829.

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## THE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

# FACING FEAR on the MOUNTAIN

By TONY CRESPI, SKIER NEWS' TECHNICAL EDITOR

Sometimes fear makes a skier into a frozen sculpture. On a grey morning last February, on the front face at Mount Snow in Vermont, a young adolescent looked nervously toward their family perched on an intersecting ridge a few hundred yards below. Between grey ice and groomed "ice cubes" the trail was marked by ribbons of hard groomed snow. Another skier came nearby and created the kind of edge sounds that are heard when hard edges slash into the frozen, ice-like conditions.

The family looked stiff and cold. As I momentarily stopped nearby, the father made complimented me on my turns. And he asked if that is the key to better edging. I gently noted it is partly the tune as much as the turn. His wife nodded in agreement.

The group looked frozen and some looked frozen with fear. Fear is not a helpful aid to carving smooth turns on a steep pitch. It's also not helpful if an instructor or family member throws up their hands in frustration at the sight of a skier nervously struggling with fear. A better conversation starter is to note that skiers from Vermont to Colorado can feel fearful. While there are adventurers who feel a positive rush of adrenaline jumping off a cornice into a steep chute or slicing the ice on a black diamond trail others may feel uneasy, even queasy, simply sitting in the center seat on a six-pack chairlift.

In New England, hard snow – ice – can serve up a good portion of anxiety. Narrow chutes in the West can add angst. Sometimes, the sounds of edges sliding, skidding and slipping add torment to the outing. We all need reassurance at these moments.

Some folks stagger, some may almost stammer, if asked to acknowledge fear. It is better to cultivate a conversation on fear by acknowledging that we see fear in all walks of life. Watch a window washer on a high-rise building and we may fear they might fall. Talk to a Ph.D. student at graduation and a few might acknowledge past fears of failing.

There are different kinds of fear. For skiers, from the Jaws of Death at Mount Snow to Cody Bowl at Jackson Hole, extremely steep or icy trails can create feelings of fear. Sometimes trail names alone add apprehension. Who choose "Jaws of Death" for a trail name?

Have you ever felt a knot in your stomach when looking down a difficult pitch? Can you recall some moment when you felt a sense of dread?

Fear is complex. Fear can be debilitating. For psychologists the complex nature of fear can include understanding anxiety, stress, as well as crisis and coping strategies. Truly, much here lies well beyond this article. Understandably, sometimes the array of symptoms associated with fear can incapacitate even a talented skier. For the purposes of this article we shall group these overall feelings under the rubric of fear. In fact, we can include a general sense of uneasiness, a feeling of anxiety about a particular skiing situation or an overall feeling of apprehension about skiing as part of this sensation.

Here's good news: with skillful efforts many skiers can learn to reduce their fear. One strategy involves finding a helpful instructor or guide who can impart specific skills from which to ski better. After all, skillful movement patterns grant skiers a solid platform from which to better face varied snow conditions and changes in terrain. In addition, knowledgeable ski instructors can also work with equipment issues. Well-tuned skis, properly fit boots, and properly adjusted equipment are important tools for more effectively handling the mountain. Just as mountain climbers and alpinists know the importance of mountaineering skills and equipment, so do the best instructors know fearful skiers can benefit from both skill

development and well maintained equipment. Still, what can help?

Have you ever suffered from the inability to do something you might like to do or felt some experience was outside of your control? If so, you too may find these strategies helpful.

### Inside The Circle of Fear

1) The Displacement Factor  
One technique involves "displacements."  
Can you move your anxiety from your stomach to your feet? As you ski can you picture anxiety as a piece of fruit? Does it change from watermelon to plum as you ski? Will it change with steepness? Will it change with snow? Will it change as you move toward a less frightening trail?

For a fearful skier, this game might be helpful as a visualization model can help develop coping skills. Try picturing your anxiety as fruit as you drive up the access road. Some skiers feel excitement as they first glimpse a steep trail from the car, others maybe not so much. If this were a piece of fruit, does it grow larger or smaller as you walk into the lodge? Does it change as you load the chairlift?

Some skiers may prefer numbers over fruits. That is, a numerical hierarchy with 10 symbolizing intolerable anxiety and 1 being minimal anxiety might be preferable. Others have likened fear to a knot of rope. Sometimes the knot is very large, as if fastened from the large ropes on a huge ship to a small knot fastened from sewing thread. Begin by visualizing your anxiety. Then, see if it can change on the mountain. Does a modest warm-up run help reduce anxiety rather than a warm-up run on a black diamond pitch?

Is this a game to finesse your skiing? Could it help?

2) The Worst Case Scenario  
So, what is the worst case scenario?  
Imagine the most disastrous, most unlikely consequence that could occur? Hopefully it is not hospitalization. Hopefully it is not embarrassment. In some cases this conversation can make it more comfortable to confront reality. Through imagining a worst case scenario the conscious effort of producing a fearful reaction that typically occurs spontaneously can either inhibit the reaction or modify the reaction.

Remember, though, some skiers may visualize a disastrous possibility. People with a fear of flying may only imagine a crash landing; some may never wish to leave home. Some skiers may believe they can never ski a particular trail. Many, though, imagine the embarrassment of falling.

When I learned to ski deep (two and three feet of deep) powder as a young skier I imagined thrashing around and looking somewhat clumsy amidst the group of elite powder skiers that I had agreed to join on my first powder day in the Rocky Mountains. My scenario fortunately lacked injury. Others imagine far worse scenarios. Often, though, beginning on moderate terrain and building skiing skills can begin to effectively change the scenario. Perhaps skiing alone or with a friend on modest terrain can build skills or skiing hard snow before exploring a black diamond. Powder skiers sometimes use a similar strategy that is helpful to master new techniques.

Ideally skiers may need several options. With the worst case scenario, it can be helpful to consider your strategy and the expected outcome. After all, why feel an excessive fear of learning.

Consider more modest terrain to build confidence and competence. Replace that dreaded scenario with a more positive experience. Skiing should be fun. While it is more challenging then a day at a theme park it should not frighten. Plan a day to build confidence.

3) Rebuild That Wall of Fear  
Anxious, fearful, situations in skiing can be countered in numerous ways. The skier who fears skiing a steep or icy slope can be instructed to stop five feet short of the critical point of high anxiety. Where is that point? Are you one or two feet short of that place which elevates your fear? When we find that point it allows us to reframe the situation. It also offers a visualization cue that may be helpful. It allows the skier to gradually create wider cracks in one's personal fear barrier. Now, ski two feet to the right of that most fearful point. Where is that point? We must begin to displace our fear with determining where that point lies. It is a roundabout way to begin to reduce anxiety.

Have you or a friend felt fearful to ski some slope? Do you or others tend to ski that trail in the same pattern run after run? If so, stop before that lip or bend which is most intimidating. Then, stop after that spot which escalates fear. By helping to negotiate a trail in new ways you can help tear down a wall of fear which limits enjoyment. Ultimately, build a barrier against fear. Now that is success.

4) Master Relaxation  
One key to handling fear involves relaxation. One approach is deep breathing. Without qualification, learning how to relax can be a very useful strategy for modifying fear.

Stop for a moment and practice deep breathing. Tense and relax different muscle groups. Begin with the fingers, add hands, add arms, add toes, add feet and add legs. Gradually try tensing and relaxing the entire body.

Add systematic deep breathing.  
Typically fear incapacitates skiers, creates tension, and reduces muscle flexibility. A series of deep breathing drills, in combination with muscle relaxation exercises can help skiers begin to modify bodily reactions to fear.

How well do you breathe if tense and afraid? Are your muscles relaxed and flexible when you are frightened? By practicing relaxation we can learn skills from which to tackle fear. It can be quite powerful.

Summary and Conclusions  
Fear is a complex factor in skiing. What is extraordinary is the many ways fear emerges in skiing and the infinite range of possibilities available for coping. What has been provided here is but a glimpse into four approaches. Clearly there are many approaches. Some are psychological in nature and some not. Whatever your repertoire, as skiers we all have something in common. Telling ourselves or someone else to relax is not typical. It tends to make us more conscious of the very behavior we wish to reduce. As a rule of thumb, trying something else which is mutually exclusive of the fear factor may be helpful. Try taking a breath. Try the worst case scenario. Try relaxation strategies. Try visualizing fear as a fruit and see if you can change its size. Hopefully make it smaller.

Clearly fear can devastate even a competent skier. Left alone it reduces muscular flexibility and takes the pleasure out of skiing. Fortunately there are many approaches for handling the feeling but like any skill, it takes practice. Consider the techniques outlined here. Consider finding a skillful coach. Examine if your skis and boots are helpful and tuned correctly.

Do not be afraid to expand your skills. Do not be afraid to examine your fears. Use situations as learning opportunities.

*Technical Editor Tony Crespi has served as both a Ski School Supervisor and Development Team Coach. A frequent writer in publications across snow country, his column is published throughout the season.*

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