

A Winter's Kick & Glide

Seven inches of squeaky snow is a winter gift. A Canadian cold front dropped the fresh powder overnight. It is more than enough for some skinny skiing. Lately winters in north central Pennsylvania have not been kind to cross country skiing. Too often a promising



snowstorm ends with freezing rain, comes in the middle of the week or melts too quickly. So when snow covers the ground, is plenty deep enough, is on a weekend and is fresh powder to boot, it's time to dust off the skis and head out.

An easy drive takes me to a parking lot at the trail head. **The air is still cold as I lace up my ski boots** but a warm sun promises moderating temperatures. I click into the bindings and the skis disappear into the powder snow, only the curved tips visible above the white blanket.

The basic idea of cross country skiing is to kick back and glide forward. It is an easy rhythm to slip into. However, after a year's hiatus from skiing, my first few attempts at a kick and glide are awkward. I'm off balance, almost stumbling with these long pointy "boards" strapped to my feet. I'm glad to have poles to lean on. My balance returns quickly and I get the feel again. I quickly settle into a push-kick-glide routine.

The snow sings with a soft hiss as the skis slide along. I'm breaking trail this morning but my tracks disappear as loose powder fills in behind me leaving only two faint parallel lines in the snow. I zip along through a field to a long, gentle descent. A few extra kicks keep my momentum going and then gravity takes over and I enjoy the free ride. Toward the bottom of the slope I start to slow, so reach out with one pole and kick with the opposite ski to keep moving.

Short hopping kicks push me up a steep climb. The combination of sun and exercise turn up my thermostat. Time to shed a layer. I stop at the top of the ridge to do so and

sip some water. The view is spectacular. The fresh snow creates a fairyland look to the landscape. Snow is piled softly on tree limbs sparkling in the sun, each flake a tiny gem. The sky overhead is painted a brilliant blue. Around me are the sounds of a forest waking up. A few tentative birds call and wings flutter. Snow loosened by a passing squirrel cascades down a tree as though in slow motion. The trail, a smooth, white ribbon, shows the disturbance where deer passed earlier in the morning. The trail beckons me, but I am reluctant to ski on. I am just enjoying the moment. Prompted by a slight chill, I kick into action again, looking forward to what the next bend in the trail might bring as I enjoy this winter's cross country ski outing.

Key Places to Cross County Ski in Columbia & Montour Counties

- PPL Montour Preserve
- PPL Susquehanna Riverlands
- Ricketts Glen State Park
- Weiser State Forest
- Any of our 6 State Games Lands

More information can be found in the "Nature at its Best" section of this guide.

By Jon Beam