

Glossary of Ski Terms

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12/18/2012

Skiing and snowboarding are two of the greatest winter sports on the planet, and like anything else in this world the two sports have certain terms and jargon that can be confusing without a bit of definition.

Below you will find a number of terms/phrases used in skiing and snowboarding to refer to products, clothing, and the sports of skiing and snowboarding in general. We have provided a brief definition to help clear up any confusion or questions you may have on these terms/phrases.

A

ABS Sidewall: Industry term for a type of edge construction on skis and snowboards using high quality ABS (Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene) plastic.

All-Mountain Ski: A large percentage of Alpine skis fall into this category. All-Mountain skis are designed to perform in all types of snow conditions and at most speeds. Other names for this style of ski include Mid-Fat skis, All-Purpose skis, and the One-ski Quiver.

Alpine Skiing: Downhill skiing, as opposed to [Nordic Skiing](#).

Après-Ski: The day's over – time for drinks and swapping war stories from the slopes.

Audio Helmet: A helmet wired with speakers that allows you to listen to music while skiing.

Avalanche Beacon: A safety device worn by skiers, snowboarders, and others in case an avalanche traps them. The beacon transmits a signal (typically at the international standard frequency of 457khz) that rescuers can use to locate a buried person. An essential item for anyone venturing into the [backcountry](#).

Avalanche Control: The triggering of avalanches through artificial means, including controlled explosions, to make slopes safe for skiers. The most dangerous task faced by [Ski Patrol](#).

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B

Backcountry: Any area outside of resort boundaries or elsewhere that is not patrolled or cleared of avalanche dangers. This is skiing and snowboarding at your own risk, thus the backcountry is a place for knowledgeable experts only.

Balaclava: A facemask worn to cover exposed skin. A key extra whenever you are caught riding a lift in fierce, driving wind or snow.

Base: Definition of this term is dependent on the context it is being used for. Base may be used to describe the under side of a ski or snowboard, the main area at the bottom of a ski resort, or the overall depth of snow.

Baseplate: The bottom portion of a ski or snowboard binding. Of vital importance as this is the portion of binding in direct contact with ski/snowboard and therefore transfers all movement. Typically made with high-end plastics for both flexibility and strength.

Basket: Typically round or star-shaped plastic piece located at the bottom end of a ski pole. Their primary purpose is to keep your poles from pushing too deep into the snow.

Berm: A term for a snowbank, often used to provide stability on the outside of a turn.

Binding Plate: See [Baseplate](#).

Binding: What connects a ski/snowboard boot to the actual ski/snowboard itself. Ski bindings are designed to release from the ski during a fall, while snowboard bindings do not.

Black Diamond: Expert trail denoted on trail maps and signs by a black diamond. The trail may or may not be groomed, and can vary from the merely tricky to insanely difficult. A double black diamond indicates the steepest, most difficult runs at a resort.

Blue Square: Intermediate trail denoted on trail maps and signs by a blue square. Usually groomed and often the most popular runs. Note: At European resorts, a blue run is actually a beginner trail and that red is used to indicate an intermediate skill level.

Bomber: Slang term for a skier or snowboarder flying down a slope in an out of control fashion.

Bootboard: The platform inside a boot shell that the liner sits atop.

Bowl: A large mountain basin, characteristically free of trees and tailor-made for great swooping turns or steep, speedy dives.

Brain Bucket: Slang term for a helmet.

Bumps: See [Moguls](#).

Bunny Slope: An easy and flat area for beginner's. This area is almost always found near the base area as this is the first lesson stop for a [never-ever](#).

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C

Cable Car: See [Tram](#).

Camber: The upward curvature in the base of a ski or snowboard. Used to distribute weight of a rider across skis or a snowboard, as well as to provide proper tension for improved response. Determined by the amount of space beneath the center of a ski when it lays on a flat surface with its weight resting on the tip and tail.

Cant: The lateral angle of the boot in relation to the ski or snowboard. Starting from a vertical axis, your feet can be canted inwards or outwards to improve edge control.

Cap Construction: A manufacturing technique where the top sheet comes all the way down to the metal edges on the sides of a ski or snowboard; making it part of the overall structure.

Carving: A series of clean turns using the edges of skis or a snowboard. Carving turns can vary from tight turns to giant "S" shaped swoops.

Carving Ski: Narrower skis designed for tight, clean turns.

Cat Skiing: Using a [Snowcat](#) to reach and then ski areas that are not accessible by chairlifts. This is similar to [Heliskiing](#), but less expensive.

Cat Tracks: Relatively flat paths used by [Snowcats](#) to move around a mountain. These are often used by skiers and snowboarders as well to reach different areas within a resort.

Chatter: The vibration of skis or snowboards caused by traveling at high speeds. Excessive chatter reduces contact between the ski and the snow and the ability to stay in total control.

Chute: A steep and narrow gully, surrounded by rocks most often. Almost certainly an expert-only run, whether it's marked or not.

Cirque: A deep, steep-walled mountain basin or amphitheater carved out of the mountain by an alpine glacier. Similar to a [bowl](#) but generally steeper.

Corduroy: A common slang term for the grooves found on a recently groomed trail created by a [Snowcat](#) or [grooming](#) machine. Called as such for the obvious resemblance to the fabric.

Corn Snow: Springtime snow; the repeated melting and refreezing of the snow results in corn-sized icy snow crumbs.

Cornice: An overhang of snow caused by constant wind; fun to launch from, but also dangerous as they can snap off at any time.

Couloirs: French for "corridor," a couloir is similar to a [chute](#), but typically steeper and more narrow; suitable for experts only.

Crevasse: A deep and often times hidden crack in a glacier or permafrost.

Cross-country Skiing: A superb workout and part of the [Nordic Skiing](#) family, cross-country-skiing uses narrow skis and bindings where the heel releases. Typically cross-country skiing is done on flat ground as opposed to riding a lift to access downhill skiing.

Crust: Refers to a frozen layer either covering softer snow or buried under a fresh dusting of snow.

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D

Dampening: Term used to describe a tool or technique that reduces the vibrations, also known as [chatter](#), of skis or snowboard that occur at high speeds.

Death Cookies: Slang term for the cookie-sized chunks of ice formed by [grooming](#) and snowmaking; a plague at resorts in New England and the Midwest and not often seen in big-mountain Western resorts.

Delamination: The separation of a laminate along the plane of its layers. An typical case of delamination occurs with the molded layers on a ski and snowboard separating. This can ruin equipment if not attended to quickly.

DIN Settings: The tension release setting that determines the amount of pressure required for a ski binding to release during a crash; stands for the German "Deutsche Industrie Normen."

Dump: Slang term for an epic snowfall of [fresh powder](#); A t-shirt with the staple slogan, "I love big dumps" can be found in many ski tourist towns.

Durometer: The measurement used to determine the hardness of a plastic ski boot shell; the lower the durometer, the softer the shell.

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E

Edge: The sharpened metal strip on the sides of skis and snowboards, used for gaining control by biting into the snow for smoother carving and cutting. Holding an edge is a key to a good turn.

Effective Edge: The length of metal edges on the ski that is in actual contact with the snow. Today's shaped skis have a longer effective edge, resulting in a more stable, easier turning ski.

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F

Fall Line: The most direct line down a trail or slope; known as such as if you fall, that's the direction you'll slide.

First Tracks: Cutting through fresh snow before anyone else does, leaving behind your trail for all else to see.

FIS: French acronym (Fédération Internationale de Ski) for the International Ski Federation, the main international organization of ski sports.

Flea Market: See [Yard Sale](#).

Flex: Term used for ski boots to describe stiffness of the outer [shell](#). This term can also be used to describe how much a ski or snowboard bends when pressure is applied; typically, the more expert a skier, the stiffer the ski.

Footbed: The removable sole inside a ski boot's [liner](#). Factory footbeds are typically designed to be replaced, as no two feet are alike. Custom footbeds can (and should) be made to fit the sole of the foot as closely as possible.

Free heel skiing: See [Telemark Skiing](#).

Freestyle: A style of skiing or snowboarding primarily focused on tricks.

French Fries: Slang term for skiing with skis parallel to one another; the opposite of [pizza](#).

Frozen Granular: Older snow that has frozen together, typically a result of being [groomed](#) repeatedly.

Fun Box: A box found in [Terrain Parks](#) built to slide (see [Jib](#)) across on skis or snowboard.

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G

Giant Slalom: Similar to [Slalom](#) racing, but with the racing gates placed further apart to allow for faster speeds and wider turns. This discipline uses two pole gates rather than single pole gates.

Glade: A stand of trees.

Goggles: Protective eyewear used not only to shade the sun and glare, but also to protect from wind, snow, and other potentially blinding objects.

Gondola: An enclosed lift that fits, on average, between four to eight passengers; like a mini-cabin, and generally faster than an open chairlift.

Grab: Holding onto any part of your skis or snowboard while in the air; used to add both style to a trick and to maintain balance. See [Indy](#) or [Mute](#) for grab examples.

Granular Surface: A term for snow that has been packed down and possibly [groomed](#); definitely not [fresh powder](#), but instead countless tiny pellets of ice and worn out snow.

Green Circle: The easiest trails on a mountain, denoted on trail maps and signs by a green circle. Usually [groomed](#), wide and flat, and not a place for experienced skiers as traffic must remain slow. Note: European resorts will use blue as the color to indicate an easy trail.

Grooming: The most common form of trail maintenance, done to spread new snow and to smooth over bumps, icy patches and other obstacles. To groom, tractors known as [Snowcats](#) drag giant rakes over the snow; on steeper slopes, winches are used to drag rakes up the incline.

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H

Halfpipe: A U-shaped channel with smooth walls used by freestyle skiers and snowboarders for aerial tricks. Typically a halfpipe is created by carving a channel out of massive piles of snow, but they can also be dug out of the ground in areas with minimal snowfall.

Hardgoods: A catch-all term used to classify ski and snowboard equipment, including the skis, snowboards, boots and bindings.

Hardpack: A term for snow that has been densely packed due to repeated [grooming](#) or skiing and the lack of fresh snowfall.

Headwall: A steep to vertical cliff found at the end of a valley; often the uppermost part of a [Cirque](#).

Heliskiing: The holy grail for experienced, expert skiers. Skiers are transferred by helicopter into the backcountry to ski off-trail through fresh tracks on virgin [powder](#). While it is expensive and potentially dangerous, it is also exhilarating and not something everyone can say they have done.

Herringbone: To climb uphill on skis, spreading them apart to keep from sliding backwards; called as such due to the geometric pattern left behind in the snow.

Huck: Slang term for launching off a jump.

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I

In-bounds: Term used to describe ski terrain inside the boundaries of a ski resort; the opposite of [out-of-bounds](#).

Indy Grab: Grabbing the toe [edge](#) of your snowboard between the bindings with your rear hand; the most basic [grab](#). Similarly executed on skis by grabbing a ski's outside edge.

Integrated Binding: A [binding](#) system provided with skis that are designed to work specifically with that ski. Quickly becoming the industry standard as they provide better [flex](#) by bending with the ski to increase control and the transfer of power.

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J

Jib: Riding a snowboard or skis across on a non-snow surface, be it a [rail](#), [fun box](#), or even fallen log.

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K

Kicker: A cheese-wedge shaped jump, often built in the [backcountry](#) for trick sessions.

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L

Last: A boot maker's term for the interior shape of a ski boot.

Lasted Liner: A ski boot term used to describe the best type of [liner](#) constructed around a mold of the actual foot size for an improved fit.

Lateral Upper-cuff Adjustment: An adjustment on some ski boots that allows the user to shift the upper boot. Useful for bowlegged or knock-kneed people who need to adjust their upper boot to the angle of their lower legs.

Liftie: A slang term for a ski lift operator.

Liner: The removable, soft inner boot designed to provide both support and padding against the hard outer [shell](#) of a ski boot.

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M

Magic Carpet: A conveyor-belt like surface lift. Typically found only on smaller, [bunny slopes](#) where younger kids learn to ski and snowboard.

Mashed Potatoes: A slang term for wet and heavy snow.

Memory Foam: A layer of foam within a ski boot designed to mold to a skier's foot over time.

Micro-fleece: An improved form of fleece, with a tighter, less dense knit that cuts down on size. A great material to use for a middle layer.

Mid-fat Ski: Another term for an [All-Mountain Ski](#).

Milk Run: The first run early in the day.

Moguls: Bumps carved into the snow; typically they are created by the turns of skiers, but they can also be carved out for perfectly shaped mogul field.

Mondopoint: The standard European measurement for shoe sizes, commonly used for ski boots. It's based on the mean foot length for which the shoe is suitable, measured in centimeters. To determine U.S. sizing from Mondopoint, simply add the first and second digits together, and then add the decimal point (you will need add 1 to you calculated result to convert a U.S. men's size to a women's). For Mondopoint sizes greater than 30.0, add 9.0 to get the correct conversion (e.g., Mondo 30.0: 3 + 0 + .0 + 9 = 12.0).

Monoski: A type of ski with both boots attached to a single board. Monoskis became relatively popular in Europe, but never quite caught on in the United States. This term is also used to refer to the "sit-ski" used by handicapped skiers.

Mute Grab: Grabbing the toe [edge](#) of your snowboard between the bindings with your front hand. Similarly executed on skis by grabbing a ski's outside edge.

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N

NASTAR: A worldwide program that allows ski or snowboard racers of all ages and abilities to compare themselves with one another through an intricate handicapping system. NASTAR is an acronym for **NA**tional **ST**andard **R**ace.

Never-ever: A first time skier or snowboarder.

No-fall Zone: An area where falling will likely lead to serious injury; the initial entry into a steep [chute](#) is often described as a no-fall zone.

Nordic Skiing: Most commonly used to refer to cross-country skiing, but in fact can be any form of skiing where the heel of the boot releases from the binding. Along with cross-country, common forms of Nordic skiing include [Telemark Skiing](#) and ski jumping.

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O

Off-piste: Out-of-bounds. Off a trail and other areas not marked on trail map; sometimes used in place of [backcountry](#).

Out-of-bounds: Off-piste. Ski terrain located outside the boundaries of a ski resort. See [backcountry](#).

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P

Packed Powder: Term used to describe relatively new snow that has been [groomed](#) or ridden over repeatedly and thus is harder than [powder](#). Less scrupulous resorts will define virtually all snow, regardless of actual conditions, as packed powder.

Parabolic Skis: See [Shaped Skis](#).

Park: See [Terrain Park](#).

Pipe: See [Halfpipe](#).

Piste: The French word for "trail."

Pit Zips: Jacket zippers located under the armpits allowing the user to circulate air through jacket on warmer days.

Pizza: Slang term for a elementary skiing technique where skis are tilted together like a slice of pizza to [snowplow](#) down a slope.

Pole Grip: The handle on a ski pole.

Powder: Fresh, dry and lightweight snow that for many is the Holy Grail of skiing and snowboarding. Large amounts of fresh powder make for epic skiing conditions.

Powder Skis: Designed to float atop [powder](#), these skis are particularly popular in areas that receive frequent major storms. The mega-wide [waist widths](#) – ranging from 105mm to 130mm – keep the skis from sinking deep into fresh snow, but they can be challenging and sluggish to control on [groomed](#) runs.

Power Strap: The Velcro strap at the top end of a ski boot used to make sure that the top of the boot gives a snug fit connecting to the calf and shin.

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Q

Quad: Slang term for a chair lift carrying four people.

Quarterpipe: A [halfpipe](#) divided in half lengthways and used for a single, often massive, aerial trick.

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R

Racing Ski: Typically stiffer, longer, and narrower than the average ski. Sometimes known as [Slalom](#) or [Giant Slalom](#) skis.

Racing Boot: Designed for racing, these boots are stiffer and often more narrow than the average boot.

Rail: A bar, typically metal, built to be slid up by skiers and snowboarders. Almost exclusively found in a [Terrain Park](#).

Reverse Camber: The downward arc formed in a ski or snowboard by applying pressure from above. The more pressure applied, the greater amount of reverse camber created, thus loading the skis or snowboard with more energy for turning. Some skis are designed with reverse camber, which is built-in to keep the tips floating above the snow.

Rope Tow: A common surface lift, typically found running up beginner [bunny slopes](#); a constantly moving rope that yanks skiers up the slope as they stand on their skis or snowboard.

Runout: A flat expansive area at the end of run that allows racers to slow down, as well as a fairly flat run used to link tougher trails back to a ski lift.

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S

Schussing: Skiing straight downhill without turning.

Shaped Skis: Term used to describe the hourglass shape utilized by the majority of skis today. Wider in the tips and tails and narrower at the [waist](#), shaped skis require less effort to turn as the shape itself initiates a curve. The degree of actual shape depends on how much [sidecut](#) has been built in. Also known as parabolic skis.

Shell: The hard plastic outer portion of a ski boot.

Shovel: (ski): The front end of a ski, which often bows out to a larger shovel shape to avoid sinking into snow.

Sidecut: The inner curvature of a ski or snowboard, measured by the difference between the narrowest point in [waist](#) of a ski or snowboard to the widest points at the tip and tail. The curvature of a [sidecut](#) is the key component in creating a [turning radius](#); the more drastic the sidecut, the sharper the turn.

Six-pack: Slang term for a chair lift carrying six people.

Ski Boards: Extremely short skis that are like a cross between skiing and inline skating. Also known as snowblades.

Ski Brake: A required attachment for ski bindings designed to stop a ski from shooting downhill after being detached.

Ski Patrol: Trained skiers and snowboarders responsible for slope safety, including clearing areas of possible avalanche danger after a storm, marking dangerous obstacles on/near a trail, and assisting or even carting injured riders down a mountain.

Skier's Left: Used to describe the area to the left of someone heading downhill.

Skier's Right: Used to describe the area to the right of someone heading downhill.

Ski-in: Accommodation that can be reached from the ski area via skis or snowboard.

Skijoring: A version of skiing in which the skier is attached to a set of dogs or a horse by a waistband and then pulled across flat ground.

Skis: Synthetic or mohair strips of material that can be temporarily affixed to the bottom of skis for climbing up hills. Used to access higher elevations in the [backcountry](#) without constantly slipping backwards.

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Ski-out: Accommodation from which it's possible to ride from the door to the lifts.

Ski-walk Adjustment: An adjustment on some ski boots that allows the upper cuff to hinge backward, giving room for a more natural walking motion when skis are off.

Slalom: A form of downhill skiing where racers head downhill on a course line with tightly spaced gates that must be passed between with short, quick turns; see also [Giant Slalom](#).

Snowcat: A tracked vehicle used for moving around snowy, mountainous areas; often seen dragging giant rakes as they [groom](#) runs, but also used to transport riders into the [backcountry](#) for [cat skiing](#).

Snowplow: A beginner's technique for slowing down on skis. Done by bringing the front tips of a pair of skis together, pushing the tails apart, and applying pressure on the skis' inside edges. Also called [pizza](#).

Snowskate: Similar to a skateboard deck without wheels, designed to be ridden on snow for freestyle tricks.

Softgoods: Catch-all term used to classify ski and snowboard clothing, including jackets, gloves, long underwear, and hats.

Straight-lining: See [Schussing](#).

Super G: The fastest discipline in Alpine racing. Similar to [Giant Slalom](#) but with even fewer turns to negotiate allowing higher speeds.

Superpipe: A larger version of a regular [halfpipe](#); walls in a superpipe can measure up to 20ft.

Surface Lifts: Lifts that drag, yank, or pull skiers up a slope along the ground as opposed to in the air; see [Rope Tow](#), [T-bar](#), and [Magic Carpet](#).

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I

Tail: The back end of a ski.

T-bar: A [surface lift](#) that pulls you up hill by grabbing onto and then sitting on a plastic T-shaped arm suspended from a moving line. Often found on small and flat beginner slopes, but they can also be found high up a mountain in steep areas where a chairlift can't or hasn't yet been built.

Telemark Skiing: Part of the [Nordic Skiing](#) family and a hybrid of downhill and [cross-country skiing](#). Skiing with detached heels allows for traversing across flat ground but telemark skis are also wide enough to handle high speeds and sharp turns. Known for its distinctive forward bent knee "telemark" turn. Sometimes called "free heel skiing."

Terrain Park: A freestyle zone roped off from other downhill runs and filled with jumps, [rails](#), [fun boxes](#), and other assorted obstacles. Parks can also include a [halfpipe](#) and boardercross run.

Tracked Out: Slang term for a slope of once fresh snow that has been ridden over repeatedly.

Tram: The largest aerial lift; the bus-size cabins can hold upwards of 100 passengers, and are most often used to cover long vertical distances.

Transition: The section of a [halfpipe](#) linking the vertical walls to the flat floor; also know as trannies.

Traverse: Skiing across a slope, often in a zigzag pattern, as opposed to straight down; typically done to keep speeds down on steep surface or to cut across a mountain.

Tree Line: The altitude at which trees stop growing on a mountain. In the U.S., the tree line floats between 8,000 and 10,000 ft, while in Europe it tends to be lower; closer to 7,000 ft.

Tree Well: A dangerous hollow space formed around the base of trees after heavy snowfalls; fatal accidents can occur by falling into one.

Turning Radius: A function of [sidecut](#), the turning radius equals the natural circle that a pair of skis or a snowboard can make on [edge](#). The more dramatic the sidecut, the tighter the turning radius.

Twin Tip: Skis where both the tail and tip are turned up at the end, enabling a skier to ski backwards with ease. Originally popular only with freestyle skiers, as the twin tip shape allows for reverse (known as fakie or switch) take-offs and landings off jumps. Modern advancements, however, have seen twin tip shapes appear more often in big mountain skis, as they shape handles smoothly in [powder](#) conditions.

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U

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V

Vertical Drop: The distance between the [base](#) of a mountain and its tallest point.

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W

Waist Width: Measurement taken of the narrowest portion across a ski or snowboard, usually the middle of the [sidecut](#).

Wax: Used on the [base](#) of skis and snowboards to keep them gliding smoothly over variable snow conditions. New skis and snowboards will typically come waxed, but should be tuned after several uses.

Waxless Skis: A type of cross-country ski designed with a crosshatch or fish-scale pattern on the [base](#) that reduces or eliminate the need for [wax](#).

Wedge Turn: See [Snowplow](#).

White Out: When visibility drops to almost nothing; caused by heavy snowfall, fog, or a combination of the two.

Wind Packed: A term used to describe snow that has been compressed by the movement of the wind.

Wind Hold: When lifts stop running due to dangerously high winds.

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Y

Yard Sale: A crash in which a skier's or snowboarder's gear – skis, poles, hats, gloves, etc – end up scattered around the slope.

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Z

