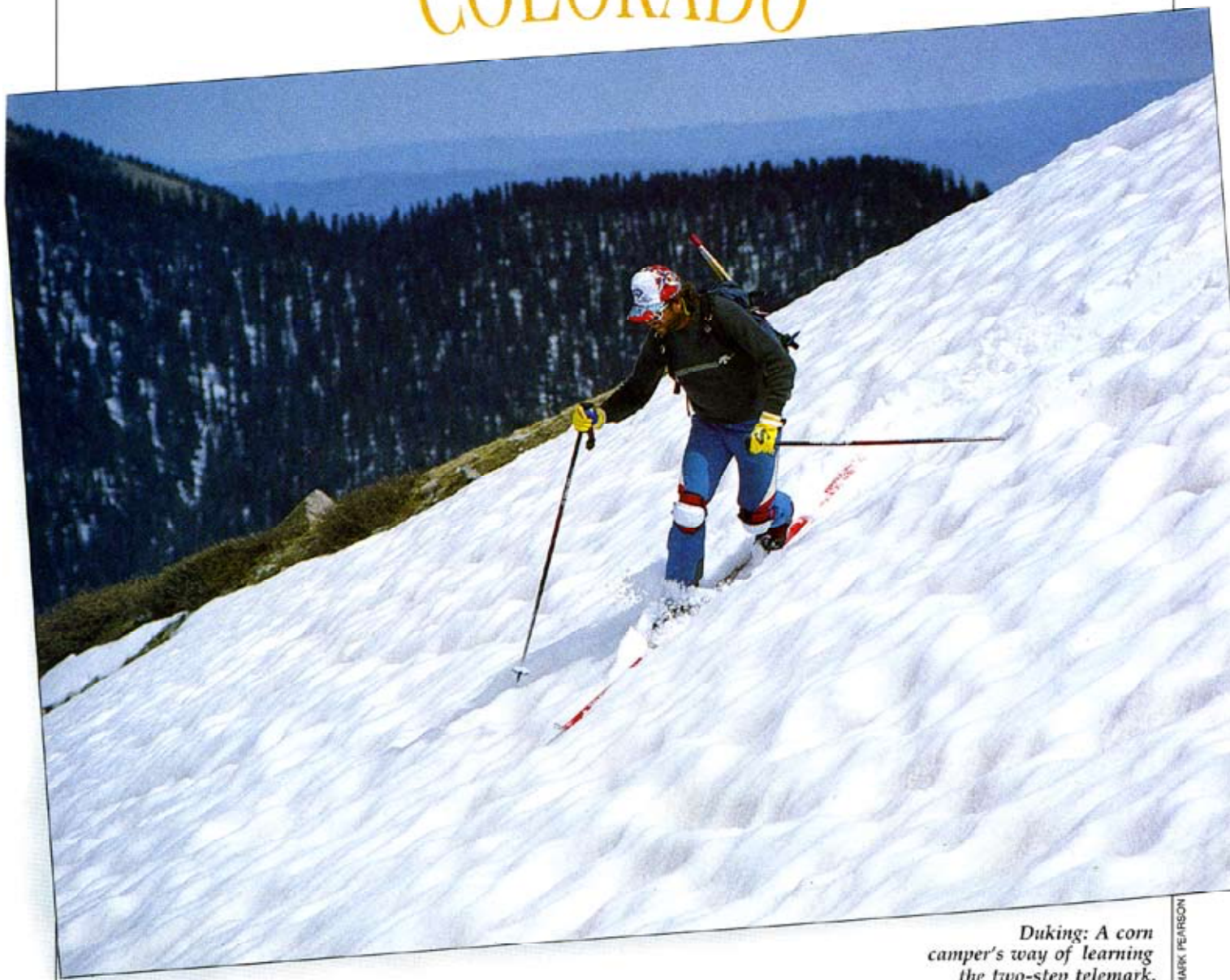


# COLORADO



*Duking: A corn camper's way of learning the two-step telemark.*

MARK PEARSON

**O**N THIS PARTICULAR MORNING, CAMPED AT 13,000 feet, I awoke early to the strains of the campfire song: "Someone's duking, Lord, kumbaya, someone's duking, Lord, kumbaya...."

The words weren't quite right, so I roused myself and went in search of the singer. I found Craig kneeling, naked from the waist up, peering down a precipitous couloir. It dipped down for 100 feet to a slot between sheer granite walls. He grinned when he saw me. "I found it!" And so he had: the snowy passage that would take us back to our base camp.

Every 10 minutes Craig would spin a small rock down the chute to determine whether the corn snow had softened enough for his jump telemark and parallel turns. Between rock tosses he'd resume his version of the time-tested tune to calm his anxious nerves.

## *Corn camp and skiing with marmots*

by MARK PEARSON

"Someone's duking, Lord, kumbaya, oh Lord, kumbaya...."

What's duking? It originates from a teaching sequence for the two-step telemark turn. Taking a cue from the 1960s hit "Duke of Earl," skiers rhythmize their movements to "Duke, Duke, Duke, Duke of Earl, Earl, Earl," stepping the front, then the back ski down in unison after every "Duke" or "Earl" as they descend a slope. It's strange to see and hear, but it works and it's fun. It





*High above Marmot Basin, a skier pauses to soak up spring's finest.  
Right: A cross-country ski trip without a picnic is like winter without snow.*

MARK PEARSON

also seems to be an addiction among my more uncontrollable friends: After humming a few more bars, Craig hollered to tell me what I already knew: The snow was perfect. After we skied through the narrow slot, the slope opened into a gentle bowl that provided perfect, wide-open skiing past abandoned mining equipment partially exposed through the melting snow. One hour and 2,000 vertical feet later, we arrived back at basecamp for our evening game of "Mountain Golf" (mountain-bike polo played with golf clubs and balls), a little fishing, and plenty of lounging around the campfire.

This is Corn Camp: looking for steep, impossible ski runs to conquer and waiting for just the right moment to attack them, filling the time in between with a mix of crazy, impromptu games and relaxation. Corn Camp is

our last chance for spring skiing. This year it fell the week before Memorial Day. Corn Camp enters my dreams in February. I envision the consistent snow, the warm weather, the camping, the camaraderie. This spring a group of instructors, friends, and racers from Durango trod up Colorado's La Plata Canyon to Corn Camp.

A typical Corn Camp day begins at 8:30 A.M. Ten skiers hike from basecamp into Marmot Basin, the canyon's largest drainage, named after the short-legged burrowing rodents that inhabit the area. These particular marmots have a penchant for rubber hoses, as a group of corn campers unfortunately discovered several years ago when they returned to their truck after a day of hiking and skiing, only to find the gas gauge mysteriously on empty. Forced to push the truck down a rocky road, the skiers finally got gas from a local miner, but the truck still wouldn't start. Closer inspection revealed small holes in the gas and antifreeze lines, holes made



# PIQUE-NIQUE SUR LA NEIGE

(*"A picnic in the snow"*)

I HAVE NO PATIENCE WITH PEOPLE WHO take to the trails without a picnic meal. Or worse, those who think that gorp, dried prunes, shriveled dates, and two whole-grain crackers comprise a worthy trail repast. Treat your palate with care and it, in turn, will keep you satisfied while you ski.

Here are the basics of the Woodward picnic rucksack: bread, wine, cheese, pasta salad, fruit, chicken, truffles, coffee, assorted yo-yos, party favors, balloons, a book of poetry, and a blanket.

Here are the particulars:

**BREAD:** A baguette or a loaf of sourdough French or Russian rye. Substitute crackers only in an emergency.

**WINE:** Red only, except when champagne is called for in celebration. I suggest a hearty Italian Chianti Classico, California Zinfandel, or moderately priced French Bordeaux.

**CHEESE:** Camembert, Brie, Fontina, and Bel Paese are recommended.

**PASTA SALAD:** Any type will do. If you're in a festive mood, try a lamb, eggplant, and orzo salad.

**FRUIT:** Apple and orange slices. Use grapes for big occasions.

**CHICKEN:** Chicken breasts, fried, if you're in a rush. Otherwise try something exotic like chicken breasts seared with cranberry pecan butter.

**TRUFFLES:** The more outrageous, the better.

**COFFEE:** Espresso, what else?

**YO-YOS:** Duncans, of course. I suggest the "Satellite" model that glows with the help of two AA batteries or the Mel-Yo-Dee that plays a tune on each yo.

**PARTY FAVORS:** Go for the Party Pop-pers, those small canisters that make a nice "pop" and unload stringy confetti. They're always a big hit. Also try the 75-cent, banana-shaped harmonicas that come complete with around-the-neck carrying cord.

**BALLOONS:** Twisty animal balloons are a mega-hit on any tour.

**POETRY:** Something old and preferably Shelley. Forget Robert Frost—too woodsy.

**BLANKET:** Irish or Scottish wool. Please, no ground cloths, tarp tents, or other monstrosities that detract from the presentation of the food. Can you imagine *coq au vin* eaten while sitting on coated nylon?

**EXTRAS:** Plates and utensils. No plastic or paper.

## Packing It Up

Start with the wine (never decant it into a plastic or metal container). Lay the bottle(s) on your extra clothing at the bottom of the pack. Next put in the bread. On top of the bread, lay the chicken (in foil), the pasta salad (in a plastic container), the cheeses, truffles, etc. Snuggle the coffee thermos down along one side of the load.

The fruit, in containers, goes near the top. The picnic is then covered with the blanket. This way you remove the blanket first and lay it on the snow. Then one by one, with a mandatory flourish, remove the picnic goodies starting with the prosaic (fruit), then unveil that nice bottle of red wine or delicious strawberry truffles. Make sure your picnic pack has a front pocket where you can hide the party favors and balloons until the appropriate moment.

Estimated picnic pack weight: 12 pounds.

—Bob Woodward

Bob Woodward usually picnics in the Bend, Oregon area.



by little marmot teeth.

A marmot whistles a warning upon our approach. "Must be a scout," Craig yells. "Yeah, telling the others there are fuel lines in the valley," someone adds. The jokes continue for three-and-a-half hours as we tour toward a large snow-covered bowl, where we stop to examine a dozen potential routes. The summit ridge is dotted with rock pinnacles, and between the pinnacles lie the descent routes—some wide, some narrow, all with varying degrees of steepness. Within an hour, every route is cut with wavy lines.

By 3:00 P.M. we finish skiing and start down the dry,

rust-colored boulder fields back to camp. When we arrive, we see two marmots running from underneath our truck. Sure enough, teethmarks are all over the brake lines and undercoating of the wheel-well. Lucky for us they had barely eaten enough for an appetizer. Thank goodness they don't eat corn.

Mark Pearson is a PSIA-certified ski instructor and freelance writer in Aspen, Colorado.