

How to go from the snowplow to parallel

By José “Pepo” Hanff

There are many paths to get out of the snowplow and go into parallel skiing.

Personally, although I have used dozens of different approaches to the subject, I have never found a more efficient and quicker way than an exercise which occurred to me in 1965 which I have perfected to a set of exercises that I use nowadays.

I must stress the fact that when I use this set of exercises I teach them using the Guided Discovery methodology. Because I am not on the snow with you, I will not be able to see your performance and therefore will not be able to guide you through your discovery. I know this will make my job more difficult but I will try to describe the exercises to you the same way I do with my students.

Here we go:

As you must have noticed, when you make snowplow turns, you motor them mainly with one leg and one ski; those located to the outside of the turn.

Now I will ask you to make a turn and try to discover what the inside ski is doing meanwhile. You will probably perceive that the other ski doesn't help in the turning effort itself. What's more, because it is on the opposite edge it wants to go in the opposite direction.

With the objective of proving to yourself that the inside ski is not really helping you turn, what we will do now is as follows: While maintaining your snowplow position, apply the turning actions to your outside leg that you would normally make to get that ski to turn and **simultaneously** try to lightly lift the inside ski and then put it down on the snow again.

You will repeat this action with your inside ski consecutively several times slightly tapping the snow **while you continue turning with the other one.**

I must emphasize the fact that the main job is the one you are doing with your outside leg to make your ski turn. The light tap-tap you are performing with your inside ski is **secondary and simultaneous.**

If you have difficulty lifting the inside foot and tapping it on the snow, it is probably caused by the fact that you are putting too much “weight” on it. It is impossible to step on a foot and at the same time lift it.

Once you manage to tap your ski at least 3 times on the snow during one turn, try reversing the action from one foot to the other starting a new turn in the opposite

sense while tapping the new inside ski. At this level you must maintain your snowplow position at all times to have an ample base of support.

Once my students manage to link several turns tap-tapping one inside ski and then the other I ask them the million dollar question: How soon can you start tapping the inside ski? Once you pass the Fall Line? At the Fall Line or before you reach it? The great majority of them will answer that it is after you pass the Fall Line.

Well, they are wrong. If I am finishing a turn with the ACTIVE leg while I tap the snow with the PASIVE one, as soon as I reverse the actions, the passive leg that I was tapping becomes the active one and starts to make the new turn while at that same time the other one becomes the passive one and therefore it should be available to tap immediately, that is, before one reaches the fall line.

Let's try to find out if it is true. This time, instead of starting your tapping when you can, try to start it as soon as you begin the new turn with the new ski. Very soon you will discover that the actions you perform with one leg to make a ski turn are totally independent of the other leg. As a result you will be able to lift and tap the inside ski as soon as you take the weight off it. All this exercises will be much easier to do if you maintain a low athletic stance.

After a little bit of practice you will also discover that neither the size nor the shape of the turn will need to change because of your tapping.

By this time you will probably have noticed that the inside tapping foot tends to naturally approach the other one, therefore your answer to my next question will probably be correct: *And if you can lift and tap the ski that is located to the inside of the turn, What else can you do with it?* Of course!!! close it in parallel to the other one.

Because of the body position you now carry during the snowplow turn, the ski your are lifting to tap will by it's own weight tend to close towards the other one and that is probably what it's already doing.

Let's find out. This time, when you start a new turn, without stopping the turning actions you are applying to the main working leg, start tapping the inside leg and at the same time bring it tapping close to the active turning foot.

At this point you must become conscious of the edge position of your skis on the snow. In the snowplow position both skis were pressing on the snow on opposing edges. Now, as you bring them parallel you must become aware that the tapping ski changes to the other edge and now continues turning in the same direction as the active ski, now both on the same side edges.

At the end of the turn open a small wedge and simultaneously press on the ski that you opened and now, as it becomes the active turning ski apply all the turning actions to it and lighten the inside one so that you can start tapping it close to the new active one.

I must at this point emphasize that at no point should you press one boot against the other one. It is essential to maintain a reasonable distance between them at all times. Both legs must always function independently.

Once you manage doing the last exercise linking several turns with ease, you should try to place the inside ski lightly on the snow and now, because it is on the same side edge as the other one, without lifting it you can use both legs so that they complement each other in their actions to change direction.

Now that you can link a series of turns in this manner you must be asking yourself why you need to open the small wedge if you can turn with your skis parallel.

The answer is very simple. If you observe your skis while they are making a right turn you will notice that they are both doing it on their right side edges and when they are making a left turn they are doing it on their left edges. It is impossible to link turns without first changing edges. The little wedge you are opening serves as the means to change edges between each turn. When you open the wedge, the ski that you opened changes to the other edge and as soon as you bring the other one in, it also changes edge. The only difference between a skier that opens a wedge to start a new turn and one who doesn't is the fact that the former one changes edges in 2 steps; one first and then the other one. The parallel skier on the other hand is capable of changing both edges simultaneously. To learn to change your edges simultaneously click on "Let's Understand Skiing", go to the last chapter and practice exercises number 3, 4 and 5. At this point you should also study my lesson called "Z skier or S skier?"