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A look at skins:

One of the unsung heroes in the ski equipment world is the climbing skin. Skins allow us entry into the backcountry and all that goes with it. When skiing we love the powder or the speed and the feel of a great turn, but skins give us the views, the quiet, and the opportunity to absorb the feel of being "away".

There are higher tech ways to travel to pristine snow, but a plane, helicopter or snowmobile won't give you half of what your skins will.

Climbing skins used to be made from real animal fur, hence the name. Nowadays, however, they are made from nylon plush fibers that are aligned like the hair on a dog's back. This alignment glides easily along the snow on the uphill push, and grips the snow when the skins are weighted, so that you don't slip back down the hill. This is how you can climb hills with climbing skins. The skins are backed with special glue that allows them to be repeatedly put on and stripped off of the skis without leaving any residue on the bottoms of the skis. Always store your skins glue surface to glue surface in a bag to protect the glue from dirt, peanut butter, or dog hair, and keep them in a cool place. We carry two weights of climbing skins. The heavier Ascension skin probably climbs a little steeper slope and is more durable for those that use their skis and skins in icy or rocky conditions. The Glidelite skins are lighter and more supple, making for a better long distance package. Their grip is almost as good and their glide is somewhat better than the Ascension skins. Because they are thinner they are not as durable as the Ascension skins, but when used appropriately, will give you years of use.

Trimming your skins to the dimension of your skis is about a half hour process and gives the exact shape of your skis to the skins. Climbing skins are sold in different widths, so buy a skin from anywhere around the width of your ski tip to 10 millimeters less than your ski tip width to get the best coverage of your ski. If you like to skin up a steep track then go with full width; just remember you will need to cut away enough skin to expose your edges for those gnarly side-hill traverses!

There are a few hardware options for keeping your skins tight to your skis. This is especially necessary after several runs in wet snow. We suggest the STS tail kit, which is adjustable enough to adapt to a second (and perhaps longer) pair of skis.

You should keep in mind that the reason you have a second pair of skis is to ski different conditions than with your #1 pair, so they are probably dimensioned differently. You'll need to trim your skis with this in mind. It will create a compromise in performance but it is usually not a problem unless one pair of skis is a lot wider. Since you will trim them to fit the narrower ski, your fat skis may not climb as well and have more of their base showing.

Anyway, back to hardware. There are other attachment options but we think the STS is versatile enough for all uses. Some people prefer to have no attachment hardware for weight or friction (drag) purposes. In this case, the hardware can be simply cut off.

Because we are located at the finish line of the Grand Traverse (a high altitude, forty mile winter traverse from Crested Butte to Aspen), we do carry narrow skins as well. They accommodate the smaller skis that the racers use for this event. For narrow skis or super fats, ask for the appropriate tip loops to attach to your ski. We even sell a skin in the narrow sizes that is 70% mohair (goat hair) and 30% nylon for the ultimate in glide.

A few important accessories for your climbing skins:

Glop Stopper: When the snow is wet and going back and forth across the freezing line, snow can stick to your skins in a big way. Glop Stopper is a wax that can be applied to your skins to prevent this freeze-up. Always have it in your repair kit.

Cheat Sheets: A synthetic mesh panel placed between the glued surfaces of your skins to preserve their stickiness. They come with all of the Black Diamond skins.

Gold Label Adhesive: After a lot of use or abuse and they don't want to stick to your skis anymore, your skins will need some new adhesive.

Bob's special attitude adjustment: In the backcountry, you'll be skinning a lot more than actual skiing, so relax and enjoy what it offers!

Call us for personal assistance! (970) 925-2849

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