Skis and Ski Bindings Encyclopedia Article

Skis and Ski Bindings

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Skis and Ski Bindings

Like many winter sports, skiing is Nordic in origin. For centuries, it was viewed solely as a means of transportation. With heavy snowfall common in everyday life, it was developed simply to survive.

Originally, skis were made from the sharpened bones of large animals. In Stockholm, Sweden, a 5,000-year-old pair of "bone" skis are on display. Besides everyday use, skis were often used for military purposes. Ski troops took part in the Battle of Oslo in 1200, and Sweden used them in 1521 during conflicts with Denmark. United States ski troops fought in the Alps during World War II.

Skiing as a sport is believed to have begun in the early 1800s. In 1877, the first ski-jumping contests were held in Norway. In 1860, Norwegian Sondre Nordheim invented a swifter ski by bending up the front end. An Austrian inventor named Mathias Zdarsky shortened the skis and equipped them with metal bindings. These bindings, called *ski bindings*, were a crucial addition to skis.

The purpose of ski bindings is to keep the skier's boot firmly in place so that the ski can be controlled. The earliest bindings were found on prehistoric skis preserved in Scandinavian peat bogs and were simply leather straps. By the early 1900s, standard bindings consisted of two upright toe irons linked by a leather strap and a loop of spring cable clipped to the ski in front of the toe.

However, these bindings were not too efficient, as they jammed easily in the snow. Modern bindings are of the "step-in" type. The toe of the boot is inserted under the flange of the toe-piece and the heel lowered on the bottom flange of the heel-piece. The binding clicks firmly shut, and the snugness helps many skiers.