

9 top gear picks for winter sports

By Kari Bodnarchuk

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Get out and embrace open spaces across New England this winter, whether that's on snowshoes, Nordic or backcountry skis, lunch trays, or foot. More people than ever will be heading into the wilderness this year, but make sure you have good solid equipment. Here are some of the top picks of this season's gear, from kids' backcountry skis to the latest avalanche beacon and snowshoes.

A BOOT BACKPACK FOR TRAVEL

You may not be traveling much right now, but you still need a good bag for toting boots and sundry items from your home to car, hotel, and (soon) plane. Westwood-based Kulkea has created a new all-in-one boot bag and travel backpack called **Käydä** (meaning "visit" in Finnish) that redefines "feature-rich." The expandable pack has a cavernous water-resistant main compartment for holding ski

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Gear up for fun on trails, slopes

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boots or other mucky footwear, a zip-out liner for easy cleaning, and zippered sleeves for storing toiletry items and hand warmers. A second lined compartment holds your jacket, magazine, and travel snacks. The pack also features a stow-away helmet sling on the front, a fleecy top pocket for sunglasses, easy-access pockets for your boarding pass and laptop, and a mesh vent for the boot compartment. Add to that thin but comfortable waist straps, padded ergonomic shoulder straps, an easily adjustable sternum strap, and plenty of sturdy grab handles. The crowning glory, literally: A sling bag that snaps onto the top of the main pack for easy transport and for keeping your book and travel documents handy. \$279.95. www.kulkea.com.

TOURING GEAR FOR BACKCOUNTRY KIDS

The quickest way to kill your kid's interest in backcountry skiing is to put him or her on a heavy old pair of converted alpine skis. Thankfully, kids' backcountry gear has come a long way in recent years, with new youth-specific options at more reasonable prices. This season, Dynafit launches the **Seven Summits Youngstar Ski Set**, which includes skis ranging from 120 centimeters to 160 centimeters in length (for roughly ages 8 and older), pre-mounted pin-style tech bindings with easy-to-use heel lifts, and nylon POMOCA skins. This lightweight setup (the 120s weigh just 3.6 pounds per ski with binding) offers great power transfer to help your child stay in control in various conditions and toe rocker for remaining afloat. The ST Rotation 7 bindings have a rotating toe piece to help prevent early release, adjust by 50 millimeters in length so they can grow with your child, and have an impressive DIN range of 2.5 to 7. \$699.95. www.dynafit.com. For kid's boot options, look to Lange, which has a new children's boot out this year (size 22 and up), or Dynafit, which offers soft-flex boots down to size 22.5.

AN ALL-MOUNTAIN TOURING SKI

Keep up with your kids or fellow backcountry skiers with **Fischer's new Hannibal 96 skis**, which perfectly suit New England's varied conditions. The touring ski has a paulownia wood core and strips of carbon from tip to tail, making it lightweight for the ascent but stiff enough to maintain control, reduce chatter, and respond well in a variety of terrain on descents. It floats on powder but holds on tight in icy conditions thanks to the rockered tip and 94 mm sidecut underfoot. The long turning radius (19 meters for 162-length skis) help you control the all-mountain touring ski at speed. The Hannibal's sloping topsheet also sheds snow to prevent buildup and slowing you down. The skis come in 162 centimeter to 183 centimeter lengths and work with Fischer's Z-hook waterproof skins. Add Fischer's lightweight pin-style Tour Classic bindings, which have a rotating toe piece to prevent early release, easy-to-access heel lifts, and a DIN setting of 4 to 10. \$799.99 skis; \$549.99 bindings; \$179.99 skins. www.fischersports.com.

BOOTS MADE FOR WALKING

Dalbelo ventures into the world of alpine touring boots this year with its Quantum series. These supremely lightweight ski boots range from 2.5



Clockwise (from above left): BCA's new Tracker4 avalanche beacon, Dynafit kids' skis, Dalbelo's Quantum series alpine touring boots, the Freerider Pro SL 32L+ women's backpack, Dakine's Heli Pro 24-liter women's-specific pack, Tubbs's Wilderness snowshoes, Westwood-based Kulkea's new all-in-one boot bag and travel backpack called Käydä, and Salomon's Escape 60 Outpath cross-country skis.

pounds per boot for the base model (**Quantum**) to 2.1 pounds for the top-end carbon version (Quantum Asolo Factory). These unique boots have a shell that's constructed in two pieces and bonded together, enabling them to retain stiffness while making them thinner and lighter than a traditional single-mold boot. The Quick Lacing System lets you fine-tune the fit in your forefoot: Twist the dial to make micro-adjustments as you tighten or loosen the tension of the thin braided cord. Then pull on another cord to cinch the ankle cuff tight and secure it in place with a cam lock. The dual-link cuff allows for huge range of motion (65 degrees), meaning you can walk uphill naturally. The boot has a moldable liner that conforms to your foot, a thermal-insulated footbed, and a full internal gaiter to keep out snow. It comes in a 99

millimeter last for narrow feet. Sizes: 22.5-30.5. Currently \$699.95-\$899.95. www.dalbelo.it/en-us/boots.

EASY-TO-USE AVALANCHE BEACON

Whether you're snowmobiling, skiing, or snowshoeing in potential avalanche terrain, make sure you have a workable avalanche beacon with you and the smarts to use it. **BCA's new Tracker4** has all the features you need in a no-nonsense, easy-to-use layout. Switch from Transmit to Search easily with gloves on and push a button on the front to select Multiple Burial Mode — the device offers Signal Suppression and Big Picture modes for multi-victim rescues, and lets you search up to 180 feet. What sets the Tracker4 apart from its predecessors: This device has rubber reinforced edges and a slightly recessed screen for ex-



tra protection and durability, a larger and brighter LED display, and a louder speaker to aid while searching. You can also upgrade the software in the future. The transceiver weighs 7.6 ounces with three AAA alkaline batteries included and comes with a harness for strapping it to your body. \$389.95. backcountryaccess.com.

BACKCOUNTRY PACKS FOR WOMEN

At last, numerous companies offer backcountry ski packs designed to fit women's bodies — with shorter backs, narrower shoulder straps, and contoured hip designs — including Deuter, Dakine, Gregory, Ortovox, and Mammut (don't worry, guys, each company offers men's versions, too).

The **Freerider Pro SL 32L+ women's backpack** joins Deuter's Slim Line collection. This lightweight (2.7-

pound) spacious pack works well for a long day out or even a multi-day tour if you expand the tucked-away roll-top lid to gain an extra 10 liters of space. Access the main compartment and your hydration sleeve through full-length zippers on the back — no need to remove skis that are stowed for hiking. A second large compartment holds your probe, shovel, and other safety gear, while your wet skins stash in a front outer zippered pocket. Strap skis on the sides of the pack or diagonally, slip your helmet into a detachable sling on the front, and toss your sunglasses or goggles in a protective pouch on the lid. Or use the included straps to secure snowshoes or a snowboard up front. Plenty of other straps and pockets let you tote all the gear you need. It also comes in 18-liter and 28-liter options. \$180. www.deuter.com.

Dakine's smaller **Heli Pro 24-liter women's-specific pack** works great for shorter outings or quick trips out of bounds off the chairlift. The pack comes with a built-in helmet sling, an insulated sleeve for your hydration hose, separate pockets for goggles and skins up front, a safety gear pocket, and a main compartment for a jacket and snacks that's accessible from the back. Carry your skis diagonally or A-frame style, or your snowshoes or snowboard vertically up front, securing them with built-in straps. The rugged weatherproof bag, made from 100 percent recycled polyester, can take a beating and keeps your gear dry. Dakine also make packs that can fit an airbag system — check out the Poacher R.A.S., which comes in 18 liters to 42 liters. \$120 Heli Pro 24L; \$170-\$265, Poacher R.A.S. www.dakine.com.

GET OUT FOR A WALK ANYWHERE

Tubbs's Wilderness snowshoes handle well whether you're exploring established trails or blazing your own route through untouched snow. The shoes have a lightweight aluminum frame and soft decking that provide good float, and rugged toe and heel crampons that bite into even the hardest snowpack. Raise the easy-to-use heel lift for uphill climbs to give your calves a break. The 180 Pro Binding comes with wide padded support that distributes pressure across your foot and flexes for comfort. Fasten the buckle over your forefoot, adjust the webbing for the right amount of support, and lock the heel strap into place — then release the buckle over your foot for a quick and easy exit. The Wilderness shoes come in sizes 21, 25, and 30 inches for women, and men's sizes come in 25, 30, and 36 inches. Get them soon — snowshoeing is expected to be one of this year's most popular outdoor activities. \$199.95. tubbs-snowshoes.com.

TAKE THIS NORDIC SKI ANYWHERE

Maybe you want to explore groomed tracks at a Nordic ski area (New England has about 50 of them) or just head out your back door and see where your skis take you (endless possibilities). **Salomon's Escape 60 Outpath cross-country skis** can take you on either adventure. These classic skis have metal edges that help you stay in control when you blaze your own route, a width of 60mm for added stability, and fish-scale bases so you don't have to fuss with waxing. Thanks to the skis' lightweight wood core, you won't feel like you're steering snowplows either. The skis, good for novice to intermediates, come with integrated NNN-compatible bindings (with the metal post on the toe). Salomon's Escape Outpath boots have a padded tongue, Thinsulate liner, ankle gaiter, and zippered cover for keeping out snow — and offer a generous enough fit for your cozy winter socks. The rigid heel-cup and cuff also add support on more rugged terrain. The skis come in 165-205 centimeters, while the unisex boots come in 5-11. \$319.95 skis with bindings; \$230 boots. www.salomon.com/en-us.

Kari Bodnarchuk can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.

