

Do it All This Spring: Multi-sport events make decision-making easy

By
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In the dead of winter, it is hard to imagine paddling on sunny lakes, pedaling through green fields, or running along dirt roads on summer mornings. But outdoor enthusiasts, beware. Spring is creeping up, and we lovers of the outdoors will soon face an annual springtime dilemma. When daylight begins to linger longer, when daytime temperatures climb above freezing, and when summertime toys start coming out from attic storage spaces, our minds become puzzled, mixed-up, and confused.

What, you might wonder, causes this state of discord and confusion? The answer? Too many options.

With summer around the corner, but winter still holding on, there is still epic snow at ski resorts and Nordic centers. But the roads cry out to be ridden on bikes. There is great backcountry spring skiing, but the creeks and rivers rage with spring run-off. And while there's still great snowshoeing in the woods and fields, the later-setting sun makes an evening jog through the neighborhood equally attractive. What is an athlete to do?

Fear not, outdoor enthusiasts! I have the answer to your shoulder-season predicament. You can have your cake and eat it, too. No need to decide one way or the other; do both. Better yet, do three, four, or even five sports!

"People like a multi-sport challenge," says Al Risch, organizer of the Tuckerman Inferno, North Conway, New Hampshire's, springtime pentathlon. Events like the Inferno, the Wildcat Wildfire, and the Sugarbush Adventure Games are not for the faint of heart, but they are perfect for the indecisive. Need motivation to get in shape this winter? Want an excuse to hit the hot tub this spring? Again, compete in the Games, the Inferno, or the Wildfire. These events make the most of the springtime shoulder season, and they prove that you can enjoy everything spring and winter have to offer—all at once.

THE TUCKERMAN INFERNO AND THE WILDCAT WILDFIRE

Maybe you feel the need to up the ante this spring. Tuckerman Ravine on New Hampshire's Mount Washington is the biggest, baddest, backcountry ski run in the East. And fittingly, the Inferno is the biggest, baddest, challenge this side of... well, Mount Everest!

The history of the Inferno dates back to the 1930s and the days of Austrian skier Toni Matt, who schussed the Tuckerman Headwall reaching top speeds in the 80s and skied from the top of the Ravine to Pinkham Notch in under seven minutes.

"The top to bottom format," says race organizer Al Risch, "is a massive undertaking—it's too much." And besides, Mother Nature plays too big a factor in whether the Sherburne ski trail will be skiable all the way to the bottom on April 17. Still wanting a challenging event, Risch introduced the pentathlon concept in 2000. "What makes the Inferno unique," says Risch, "is that it really is an extreme challenge."

Risch is not kidding. An eight-mile run in North Conway is followed by a six-mile river-paddle through icy rapids on the Saco River. Then there's a 25-winding-mile bike up Route 16 to the foot of Mount Washington. Then Tuckermen and women—who are probably a bit tuckered themselves at this point—hike, while carrying ski equipment, up the Tuckerman Ravine Trail to the culminating ascent of Left Gully (for which, in last year's icy conditions, many participants used crampons) and descent through a giant slalom course.

If you are tough enough to consider the Inferno, sign up early: Friends of Tuckerman Ravine, who put the event on, accept only 20 Tuckermen, 20 Tuckerwomen, and 30 teams. If you don't get in (or if you're not tough enough), the Wildcat Wildfire may be for you: it's the same event, only the hike up and ski down take place across the street from Tuckerman's at the Wildcat ski area. Make no mistake: the Wildfire is

grueling; it just doesn't carry quite the mystique (or risk) of Inferno. And the Wildfire has an open registration; there is no limit to the number of participants.

"Above all," says Risch, "we do it to support our cause." Friends of Tuckerman is a nonprofit committed to preserving Mount Washington for use and enjoyment for future generations.

Participation in any of the above earns you many things. Finish any of them as an individual, and you'll feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment. Second, the training for events like these helps you maintain your fitness through the winter. Third, if you decide to compete in an event as a team with friends, you build camaraderie with teammates. And most important, the above events remove the necessity of choosing between activities. There is no need to decide; with multi-sport events this spring, just do it all!