

Doing Aspen the hard way: Climbing up before skiing down on a calorie-burning break in Colorado's ski haven

- Keith Perry heads to Aspen and tries one of the latest (and most tiring) ski trends
- 'Uphilling' involves climbing up a piste - before skiing all the way back down
- 'Uphillers' use adapted boots to climb, before clipping in for the descent

By [KEITH PERRY FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

PUBLISHED: 05:22 EST, 17 January 2018 | **UPDATED:** 20:28 EST, 19 January 2018



Zooming up Colorado's Buttermilk Mountain by heated chairlift, surrounded by Aspen's spectacular scenery, takes just minutes.

Unfortunately, I am not on the lift.

Red-faced, puffing and drenched in sweat, I am attempting to reach the summit on foot. This, I am told, is the joy of the latest mountain craze — known variously as uphill, ski touring or skinning. Call it what you will, it's hard work.



Don't worry, there's an alternative: For the less energetic skier, there are also chairlifts

Perhaps I miscalculated Aspen's 7,900ft altitude, but my lungs are gasping as I shuffle along, the skins on my skis stopping me sliding back down the mountain.

The aim is to hike from the base at Aspen to the top of Tiehack lift — a 1,600m ascent.

It is no mean feat, and my instructor for the hike is one of Aspen's top endurance athletes, Ted Mahon, who is about to take part in Aspen's Power Of Four ski mountaineering races: a 24-mile yomp, including a 10,000ft vertical climb. He is competing with his wife, Christy, who in 2010 became the first woman to ski all of Colorado's 14,000ft peaks.

Uphilling requires a special boot and ski binding that allows your heel to lift in the back, so you can 'walk' up a mountain. Once at the top of the hill, you lock your heel back in and head down the slope.



Keep going, almost there: Keith (centre) and his colleague take on the Aspen gradient

It's an invigorating way to access back-country areas you can't reach via lifts and, believe me, it's the ultimate workout. Mahon estimates that, during our 90-minute hike, we burn around 750 calories. But, unlike running, there is minimal impact on the knees and hips.

Reaching the top, I'm sweaty, but proud. We peel off our skins, clip our heels back into our bindings and shoot down for a beer in the Woody Creek Tavern, where the late journalist Hunter S. Thompson hung out.

I'm exhausted, but exhilarated, in equal measure.