

February 12, 2012

Backcountry Babes looks to get women off the beaten path



Special to the Daily/Babes in the Backcountry Former Babes in the Backcountry owner Leslie Ross (right) works with Babes in the Backcountry Avalanche Level 1 participants to learn about avalanche beacon transmission signals.

- [⏪](#)
- 1 of images
- [⏩](#)

When Jenna Boisvert shook hands with Leslie Ross last fall to formalize her purchase of Ross's Babes in the Backcountry, she had grand ideas.

Among them: Change the name to Backcountry Babes.

As it's now known, Backcountry Babes meets the same objective as it did in its former ownership, but now with bigger and broader ideas. Founded in 1996 by three-time telemark free-skiing champion Leslie Ross, the company recognizes the lack of women in the backcountry and strives to provide opportunities for women to get outside and enjoy the outdoors.

Boisvert didn't initially plan to buy the company. She didn't even plan to attend one of the camps - at least, not until one of her friends convinced her to go.

"I'd never thought about participating in a women's-specific class or instruction," Boisvert said. She

ended up going by herself and was stunned at her experience during Sisters in the Steeps - a one-day clinic that improves steep-skiing abilities.

"It felt like such a comfortable environment to work on skills," Boisvert said. "It's kind of hard to ask men, and you never know how helpful they'll be and how quickly they're going to write you off."

Two years later, Boisvert went on a hut trip to Canada, where she was not only pushed to do things she'd never done - like travel along glaciers - but she also met "some really amazing women from all over the country."

The camps provide the missing link between women who ski at the resort and those who want to trek into the backcountry. They cover the basics: How to put skins on skis, what skis and boots to buy, how to pack a daypack, how to use a beacon, and so on. They also cover basic avalanche safety and other critical parts of backcountry travel - without having to rely on men to show the way.

When Ross was contemplating the sale, Boisvert was also thinking about a career change. The two connected to discuss how Boisvert could duplicate a version of Ross' program in Alaska, her home base. But Ross suggested purchasing the company - though it took a few years for both parties to prepare for the transaction, which was finalized last October.

"I'm a huge proponent of what she's done and the atmosphere she's created with it and the opportunities it provides," Boisvert said. "My ideas are very similar to how she's been operating the business. I didn't want to disrupt it, just maintain what was going on as well as expand it in other ways."

So far, Boisvert hasn't changed much, except to have to cancel some of the winter trips due to lack of snow. She put some of the Lake Tahoe experiences back on the schedule (though they've been postponed) and much of the activity remains in Colorado, with Kirstin Nelson heading up those camps as the events vixen. Nelson also worked with Ross.

Ultimately, Boisvert wants to add an Alaska component as well as more summer experiences, such as mountain biking, introduction to backpacking and sea kayaking.

Currently, there's a two-week Grand Canyon rafting trip on the docket. Boisvert is excited that this year's trip, which will be an all-female voyage, coincides with the 35th anniversary of the first women's trip that ever went down the Grand Canyon in August 1978.

"Nobody thought they could run the whole river by themselves," Boisvert said. The Backcountry Babes trip will be all-inclusive and led by female guides at a cost of \$3,775.

"I'm really excited about this company and the opportunity. I was turned on to it by participating in it," Boisvert said. "It's inspiring and energizing opportunity for me to be around the women I work with as well as the women who come and take the courses."