

Karol Życzkowski
Józef Wala

**Narciarstwo wysokogórskie
w Polskich Tatrach Wysokich**

pamięci Henryka Wenerskiego (1938 - 2002)

Wydanie przedpierwsze - już poprawiane - Warszawa 2003

Ski touring in the Polish High Tatras (English abstract)

Foreword

The beginning of ski-touring in the Tatra mountains dates back to the first decades of the 20th century. The first skier's guide-book giving a description of the Polish part of the Tatras [45] was written in 1913 by one of the pioneers of tourism in the region, Mariusz Zaruski; a more detailed one [22], by Józef Oppenheim, was published in 1935. Since then, and particularly during the last two decades, many new ski descents have been made in the Tatras, still there is no reliable and up-to-date source of information for ski-tourists available.

The aim of the present publication is to provide an updated list of ski descents in the Polish High Tatras. Tatra Wysokie (in Polish) range between two passes in the main ridge of the mountains: Pod Kopą (in Slovakia) at the East and Liliowe at the West – see the map, second page of the cover. The mountains West from Liliowe, including Kasprowy Wierch with the ski lift, do not belong to the High Tatras and are not covered in the present guide-book. We restrict our attention to the area within the borders of Poland, but we include information on possible descents from the border peaks and saddles to valley in Slovakia (we mark them with the letter *S* added to the route

number). For more information on ski touring in the Slovak Tatras consult the booklet by Stoffan [63].

The Polish Tatra mountains form part of The Tatras National Park (Polish: Tatrzański Park Narodowy or TPN). All tourists and skiers are obliged to obey the Park regulations which aim at preservation of the region's unique nature. It is not allowed to ski off the marked routes in the forest area, or enter nature reservations which are habitats of marmot and wild goat (*e.g.* the regions of Koszysta, Wołoszyn, Miedziane, and Żabie Czuby). Needless to add, the tourists must not leave any waste or litter behind in The Park.

The list of possible skiing tours in the main Polish High Tatras valleys is ordered geographically from East to West and clockwise within each valley: 1) Rybiego Potoku, 2) Pięciu Stawów Polskich (Five Polish Lakes), 3) Pańszczyca and 4) Gąsienicowa. Each descent is numbered (*e.g.* the symbol 4.11 stands for the descent 11 in the Gąsienicowa valley) and marked with a line on an enclosed photograph or sketch.

Description of every descent contains :

WHP111	the route number according to the classical Tatra mountains climbing guide-book by W.H. Paryski [25]
TR 2	difficulty of the descent (see below)
MAX46°	maximal inclination in degrees (as measured

	by the authors)
MIN2m	minimal width of the couluars (dependent on the snow cover)
380m	total altitude difference
1600m	length of the descent (in the terrain)
SR14°	average inclination
NW, W	orientation of the slope

To help an intelligent reader to extract some relevant information from the text in Polish we provide here the translation of the description of an exemplary descent: (see page XXX on the reverse side of the book)

Saddle by Żabia Czuba 2031 m

Descent 1.1 Along Żabi Żleb to Morskie Oko (1395 m),

Route number 1190 in the guide of W.H. Paryski [25], Difficulty 4, maximum inclination 46°, minimal width 2m (depending on the snow cover), denivelation 640m, total length 1150m, mean inclination 34°, Western orientation of the slope.

From the saddle down the couluar, at first (?230m, 350m, mean 41°) later (?300m, 540m, mean 34,°), and the last part to Morskie Oko (?110m, 260m, mean 24°). The difficulty depends mainly on snow conditions; the descent is possible if the rock barrier are covered. Ascent along the route, rock barriers with short difficult passages (difficulty IV, if not covered by snow). Easier ascent is possible along the route WHP 1191 (dotted line

in Fig. 1, p. 30). First descent: K. Lizak, D. Szyłko and D. Zadecki, skies carried down the barrier, May 2, 1997; skiing along the entire descent- the same team – April 2002.

Ski-routes difficulty level:

The difficulty of a descent depends strongly on the snow conditions and it is not easy to specify it as precisely as in the case of climbing routes. The scale used in this guide is analogous to the classical UIAA scale for climbers and varies from 0 (difficulties comparable to a guarded black piste in a ski resort) to 6 (most difficult ski descents ever made in the Polish Tatras). All objective factors influencing the descent are taken into consideration: inclination of the slope, configuration of terrain, length of the dangerous stretches, necessity of the alpine climbers equipment, danger of avalanches and falling stones, problems with orientation and selection of the optimal route, difficulties in reaching the starting point of the descent. If the maximal inclination of the slope is the only factor which determines the difficulty of the descent (easily accessible, wide, straight couluars), the scale reads:

0 for less than 33° inclination,

1 for 34° - 38°

2 for 39° - 42°

3 for 43° - 46°

4 for 47° - 50°

5 for inclinations larger than 51°

The scale suits well the character of the descents in the Polish High Tatras, where most of interesting descents ranges from is 30° to 50° inclination. Where the inclination exceeds the value of about 55°, the snow tends not to form a stable cover. For descents in a less favourable terrain, the difficulty increases, depending on the exposition and other objective factors.

To gauge the scale we provide some typical examples of descent of different difficulty:

0 - Liliowe (route number 4.29);

1 – Gładka Przełęcz to Dolina Pięciu Stawów Polskich (2.20);

2 – Zawrat to Czarny Staw Gąsienicowy (route 4.12, 40°);

3 – Kozia Przełęcz (Goat Pass) to Pusta Dolinka (Empty Valley), route (2.27, 45°),

4 – Niebieska Przełęcz (Blue Pass) to Dolina Gąsienicowa (route 4.22);

5 – Wyżnia Zmarzła Przełęcz to Zmarzły Staw (route 4.11);

6 – Miękuszowiecki Czarny to Kocioł Czarnostawiański (route 1.8).

In some cases the additional + or – signs are added to signal the upper or lower limit of a certain difficulty scale, but one has

to be aware that the data provide only rough information on the actual level of difficulty, which may vary depending on the snow conditions.

Geographical co-ordinates of some of the important topographical points in the Polish High Tatras are given for the GPS (Global Positioning System) users, p. 1000 as well as a list of useful phone numbers and internet addresses. (p. 10001).

Avalanches

The Tatras are mountains of the Alpine character. Although the peaks do not exceed the height 2650m (2500m on the Polish side), the skiers face dangers typical for Alpine area, the lack of glaciers and crevasses being the only difference. The skiers who set out for more difficult descents (level 3 and higher) should be equipped with crampons and ice axes, while helmets, rope and alpine hardware should be used for the extreme tours.

Avalanches form the greatest danger: almost every year there are casualties caused by the avalanches in the Tatras. The Tatrzańskie Ochotnicze Pogotowie Ratunkowe (TOPR - the Tatras Voluntary Rescue Unit) uses the following international scale of avalanche danger:

1 – small – stable snow cover, favourable conditions for ski-touring;

- 2 – moderate – a slight possibility of triggering the avalanche by a large external load (i.e., a group of skiers), rather save conditions for tourism,
- 3 – significant - avalanches may be triggered out even by a small load (e.g., by a single skier), or may start spontaneously at particularly steep slopes, any activity in the mountains requires great expertise;
- 4 – large - unstable snow cover, considerable probability of spontaneously triggered avalanches, region accessible for ski touring severely restricted, recommended company of local experts;
- 5 – extremely large – highly unstable snow cover, huge probability of spontaneous avalanches in the entire Tatras mountains, hardly any part of the mountains can be accessed safely.

Even a favourable avalanche information from the TOPR does not equal a 100% security for a skier visiting the Tatras in winter. A certain level of caution is always necessary, in particular after a recent snow-fall. The presence of ski traces on the snow should not be interpreted as a sign of safety guarantee – one has to choose the itinerary of each ascent or descent carefully; it is recommended to avoid concave couloirs and keep the safe distance between group members. Generally speaking, the Alpine guidelines to avoid the danger of

avalanches [54,57] should be also obeyed in the Tatras. During the last decade the use of avalanche beacons got more popular in the Tatra mountains: they operate on the international 457 KHz frequency and are compatible with the Alpine standards. The use of such electronic devices by each member of a skiers' group is strongly advised.

The data collected in the Alpine countries show that 90% of people caught by an avalanche and covered by snow survive the first 15 minutes after the accident, but the survival probability decreases to 30% already after the following 20 minutes. After three hours only 3% of victims can survive below the snow [54]. The role of skiers who witness an avalanche is crucial in saving life of their victims, so apart from the beacon (turned on!) the skiers should carry also a snow shovel and a snow probe. Solo ascents are strongly discouraged.

During the mid-winter frosts it is often practicable to cross the frozen Tatras lakes on skis. In spring the conditions change because of the thaw: even if there are ski traces on the surface of the frozen lakes there is no guarantee of the possibility of safe crossing over the ice layer and it is recommended to encircle the lakes.

Anybody who decides to practice ski touring in the Tatra mountains must be aware that the risk can never be entirely eliminated, and they have to take responsibility for themselves.