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## SKI TOURING IN POLAND: WHO TAKES PART IN THIS FORM OF SPECIALISED TOURISM? HOW DO THEY TAKE PART AND WHY?

**Abstract:** The article presents a description of ski touring by Polish tourists. The author is looking for answers to the following questions: Who goes on this form of tourism? How and why? How experienced are the tourists? Are they aware of the risks involved? Are they theoretically and practically prepared for the danger of avalanches? The author compares their social features and tourist-recreational behaviour to research conducted by the Central Statistical Office in 2012.

**Keywords:** ski touring, tourist behaviour, tourist motivations, safety, Poland.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Academic discussion on ski touring focuses on a variety of aspects. R. PHILIPP (2010), in his work entitled *Is skiing returning to its roots?: some thoughts on the philosophy of skiing*, approaches this problem as a humanist. He notes that “ever since antiquity, people have been striving for physical and spiritual perfection” (PHILIPP 2010, p. 80). Based on a historical-philosophical analysis, he compares the attitudes of ski-lift tourists to those of skiers who do not use them. The latter are closer to the idea of skiing propagated in the 1930s by Oppenheim, the precursor of skiing in Poland, who wrote in his guidebook: “By listing the skiing routes in the Polish Tatra Mountains, we hope to encourage many skiers to go on winter excursions in the high mountains. The essence of skiing is fully developed cross-country representing the most culturally valuable advantages of this sport: strength, self-reliance, sense of direction and resourcefulness in dangerous and difficult situations” (OPPENHEIM 1936, p. 41).

Over the last century, ski tourism has changed unrecognizably. Skiing infrastructure is easily accessible, even at mountain tops, the quality of equipment has increased (it can be bought or rented) and it has become available to Poles with an average income. Old skiing routes that used to take days to cover, are currently ‘run’ by ski mountaineers in 2-3 hours, and an average tourist has access to detailed weather data

in real time. Can it be said, then, that there is still traditional ski tourism? A term which seems to be more appropriate is ‘ski touring’; foreign-sounding and unfamiliar to many tourists and mountain lovers though it is. It refers to a new, revolutionary form of tourism which offers an extreme experience. However P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011) questions whether the differences in equipment and alternative methods are enough to make it a different discipline.

In the 1980, changes in skiing led to the reintroduction of skins (<http://www.national-geographic.pl>) and new touring bindings. Skins were already known in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and currently they are back in fashion. The new generation of skiers found out that skis are useful not only for descending, but equipped with skins, they make it easier to ascend. Individual skiers started to take advantage of new technological ideas as regards equipment. They noticed that not using the ski lift for the benefit of their own muscles was rewarded with a new experience and a long descent in an untouched high mountain area simply cannot be compared to anything else. With time, ski touring started to gain in popularity. Information about this unusual sport began to appear in the specialist press and Polish enthusiasts brought equipment from abroad. R. Weiss, the author of a ski touring course book written in German in the early 1980s (after PHILIPP 2010),

wrote that ski-touring affects the entirety of a person ("*erfaßt den Menschen in seiner Ganzheit*"; WEISS 1983, p. 7).

The aim of this work is to present ski touring in Poland, describe the profile of Polish ski tourers, their demographic features, as well as their tourist activity, motivations, use of professional tourism guidance, and their awareness of safety and the danger of avalanches. Knowing skiers' behaviour and views will allow an understanding of what ski touring actually is and how much it differs from Oppenheim's times.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ski touring often takes place in protected mountain areas free from tourist pistes. An important research issue, presented in the academic literature, was the opening of mountain regions to recreation and ski touring in the protected areas of British Columbia (HARSHAW & SHEPPARD 2004), Switzerland (FREULER & HUNZIKER 2007), and in the Tatra National Park in Poland (ADAMCZYK 2009).

However, the issues most frequently discussed concern the problems of skiers and the risk of avalanches threatening ski tourers. This was pointed out by S. HARVEY & B. ZWEIFEL (2008) who studied accidents which had happened in Switzerland in 1977-2006 as a result of avalanches, as well as by VALAT & RAVANEL (2013) who remind us that every winter avalanches cause ski tourists' deaths (in the 2011-12 season, there were 32 avalanche accidents and 14 deaths reported in France alone). Swedes have also conducted such research (MAARTENSSON *et al.* 2013) which shows that in the 2012-13 season, seven Swedes died in avalanches, six of them outside Sweden. An interesting study on this issue, supplemented with an analysis of data obtained from two social media alpinism websites ([www.bergportal.ch](http://www.bergportal.ch) and [www.camptocamp.org](http://www.camptocamp.org)), was presented by F. TECHEL *et al.* (2014).

Direct research on tourists is only a small part of this research and they rarely present their profiles, views, etc. Such research can be found in work devoted to issues such as conflicts arising among ski tourers and other forms e.g. downhill skiing (THAPA & GRAEFE 2004, VASKE 2004) or snowmobiling (KNOPP & TYGER 1973). These also spend time on the slope and compete for space at the same time. Social research is found in works concerning the behaviour and views of tourists staying in protected areas (FREULER & HUNZIKER 2007, BIELAŃSKI 2010, WITKOWSKI *et al.* 2010).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS AND SOURCES

Methods used in tourism research are based on various secondary sources, e.g. those provided by statistical offices, tourism institutes, etc., as well as other sources of direct information such as the measurements of tourist numbers on a piste, and indirect information, e.g. the number of cars parked near attractive tourism sites. In-depth knowledge about tourists can be gained from social studies. In this paper, the research subject was active ski tourers in Poland<sup>1</sup>. The following methods and sources were used:

- observing skiers off-piste, also indirectly on the basis of the skin tracks on the snow;
- social research on tourists;
- Central Statistical Office data concerning sports activity among Poles and their educational level;
- the results of research conducted by Sedlak & Sedlak who publish reports on remuneration on the [wynagrodzenia.pl](http://wynagrodzenia.pl) website, based on their own methodology;
- other authors' results.

Direct observations were conducted on those pistes which are considered the most popular by skiers: Chochołowska Valley, Kościeliska Valley, Kondratowa Valley, Hala Gąsiennicowa, Pięciu Stawów Valley and Rybi Potok Valley. Moreover, the research included observation of the skin tracks in these valleys, including their upper sections and branches. The exception was Kościeliska Valley, where only a few tracks were observed, mainly in the Ornak massif. For nature protection reasons, Waksmundzka and Pańszczyca Valleys were not visited. Skin tracks left by tourists make it easier to indicate the most frequented places as well as provide information concerning the level of the skiers, their skiing skills and their techniques. They were observed at an early stage of the research. Having established that active ski tourers do appear in the Polish Tatra Mountains, it was possible to move onto the next stage.

Four basic methods of collecting data in social research were distinguished: observation techniques, surveys, secondary data analysis and qualitative studies. The first three were applied in this research. Participatory observation, where the researcher becomes a member of the group which he/she wants to study can be overt or covert. In this case overt observation was used – neither the object of observation, nor the identity of the researcher or the research centre was kept secret. A pilot study was carried out on-line on the [www.skistory.fora.pl](http://www.skistory.fora.pl) forum followed by a questionnaire survey. It is not easy to reach people who take part in this type of tourism and the survey was difficult because of the surroundings and the season.

Tourists look for excitement far from the hassle of the city, and they should not be disturbed. They are often in motion and should not be stopped by a researcher and for this reason, it was impossible to sample. Knowing the population enabled the researcher to select individuals for the sample group from several sources. The respondents included people met accidentally on the piste or at a shelter and organized groups led by a guide or a skiing instructor. A survey among 59 active skiers and tourists was conducted in the Tatra National Park, and a ski touring internet forum was used which made it possible to reach a larger group of 92 skiers. It is a forum which has existed since 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006 and has 1853 subscribers and 39750 posts (as of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011) and has been described as an 'informal ski touring club' (BARTOCHOWSKI 2011). This survey was conducted in April 2011, i.e. at the peak of the ski touring season and included a total of 151 people (18 women and 133 men), which may make up around 5-10% of those actively involved in ski touring in Poland in 2011. It was assumed that the collected results were sufficient to draw conclusions and also give a picture of the whole population.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

What is ski touring? Is it a new form of active tourism or a return to the roots? Who does it? What are their motivations and are they aware of the dangers on the mountain pistes? Do they disturb other tourists? These are just a few of the questions to be answered.

The analysis of the ski tourer profile initially included:

- demographic features,
- place of origin,
- health self-assessment,
- tourist and recreational activity.

Ski touring in the respondents' lives was studied through an analysis of their answers to questions such as how long they have been doing it, who with, how they learnt about this form of tourism, what are their motivations and whether they took part in competitions. Awareness of safety and danger of avalanches, and an evaluation of their knowledge and skills as regards safety rules were the remaining issues.

##### 4.1. THE DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

The answer to the question "Who takes part in this type of tourism?" is provided by an analysis of questionnaires (N - 151) and participatory field observation. The majority of respondents were men (88%), compared women (12%) as confirmed by field observation. As regards age, 90% were under 45 and over 18.

The largest group were aged 26-35 (40%), followed by 36-45 (26%) and 19-25 (25%). The sample contained less than 10% older than 45, and only one was at retirement age. It is puzzling that there was no one under 18, even though the author set no age restriction. The results show that ski touring is a form of recreation preferred by the young and middle-aged, most probably due to the demanding physical requirements (impossible to be met by elderly people), as well as the necessity to have sufficient mountain experience. The educational level was above average for Poland - 74% had completed university or higher education (55% - masters and 19% - *licencjat*), and the remaining - secondary or further education (26%). According to the National Census 2011, 16.8% of Poles had higher and 34.1% - secondary and further education showing a divergence from the average.

Occupation varied greatly: one in four was an IT specialist or engineer, and every tenth a student. The group consisted of traders, financiers, office clerks, teachers, medical doctors as well as representatives of other professions. It can be assumed that the majority were white-collar workers; only 2% indicated that they were manual workers.

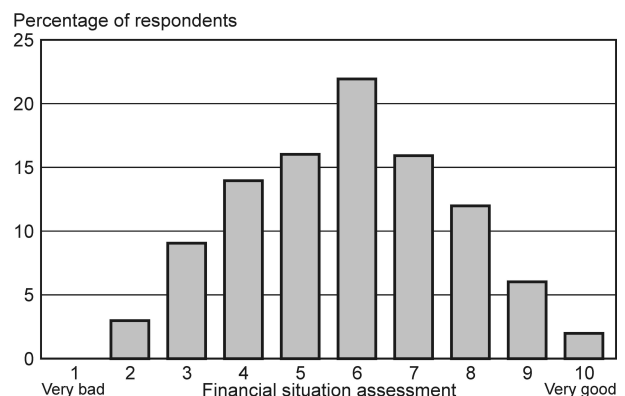


Fig. 1. Respondents by financial situation: assessed on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 10 (very good)

Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

Occupation is related to the earnings necessary to afford tourism and to allocate a certain amount of money to buying specialist equipment which may be a barrier. The answers to the question: "How do you rate, on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 10 (very good), your financial situation?" varied (Fig. 1). The respondents described their financial situation as slightly better than average (the median and the mode equalled 6 out of 10). This may result from their occupation. The comparison of the mean earnings of IT specialists, doctors, managers and engineers in Poland, published on [www.wynagrodzenia.pl](http://www.wynagrodzenia.pl) (09.2011) with those of other professional groups confirms that the earnings of the former exceed the national mean. It is visible that the majority of ski tourers belong to this

particular group. However, those with lower earnings are also quite numerous (teachers, those working in retailing and administration). Respondents included no one with extremely low earnings. The cost of ski touring is high enough to become a barrier for the least affluent social groups, but it is not an exclusive discipline accessible only to the richest (BARTOCHOWSKI 2011).

Where did the respondents come from? All of them were Polish. The majority (81%) lived in urban areas of various sizes (Table 1), and the remaining outside these areas. Nearly half (54%) came from large cities of over 100 000 inhabitants (mainly Krakow, followed by Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław and Poznań). Every fifth tourist arrived from a small or medium-sized town, but such a high number is due to Zakopane, inhabited by many active skiers. Of those declaring a rural origin 19% were not in agriculture; most of them indicated suburban localities near large urban agglomerations, as well as places in Podhale, such as Poronin or Mała Ciche.

Table 1. The size of settlements inhabited by respondents

Size of place of residence	%	% accumulated
City with over 500 000 inhabitants	40	40
City with 201-500 000 inhabitants	6	46
City with 101-200 000 inhabitants	8	54
Town with 51-100 000 inhabitants	6	60
Town with under 50 000 inhabitants	21	81
Rural areas	19	100

Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified.

The respondents' place of residence was related to its distance from the Tatra National Park. Most were the inhabitants of Małopolska Province (41%), which encompasses the park, as well as the Silesian Province (26%) which is the largest concentration of urban population in Poland. Other provinces included Masovian (8%), as well as Łódź, Lower Silesian (5% each), Wielkopolskie and Podkarpackie (neighbouring Małopolska). Others were indicated only by individual respondents. There was no one from West Pomeranian, Warmińsko-Mazurskie or Podlaskie Provinces.

#### 4.2. RESPONDENTS' TOURIST AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY

The respondents' tourist activity may be related to their health and questions were asked because of the high physical demands of ski touring. Therefore, it was important to know how aware the tourers were of their health condition (Fig. 2). The majority indicated

very good health, with 76% rating it 8 or higher. Both, the median and the mode of the answers were 8 out of a possible 10.

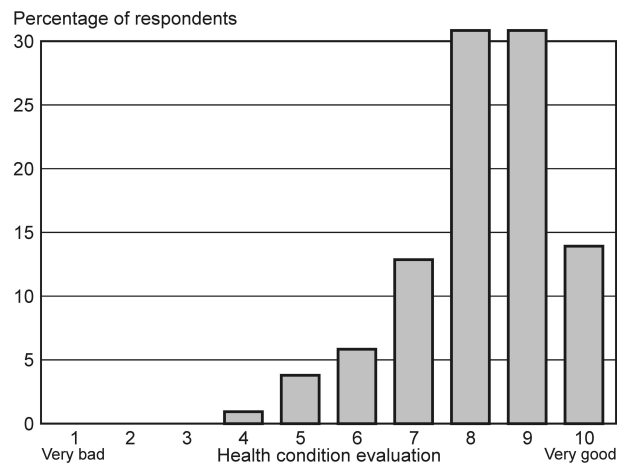


Fig. 2. Respondents by health: assessed on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 10 (very good)

Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

Such good health may result from physical activity throughout the year, It is significant because tourists mostly declared professions involving very little physical activity, e.g. computer programmers or doctors. Physical recreation turned out to be very popular among the respondents and nearly all of them indicated at least some sport. Such a high level is not surprising, considering the physical requirements that must be met in this discipline.

Most respondents regularly took physical recreation. The frequency varied: nearly one in ten exercised every day (9%), 15% exercised 4-6 times a week, over 50% - 2-3 times a week. One in four only once a week or less often.

Compared to the whole of Polish society, the respondents were very active physically. Not only did each respondent admit that they regularly took part in physical recreation, but most of them did so very often. In comparison, according to the Central Statistical Office report from 2012, over the period of 1 October 2011 to 30 September 2012, about 50% took part in sport, but only 20.3% of household members (<http://stat.gov.pl>) exercised regularly, i.e. at least once a week. It can be concluded then that sport and recreation are an important element of the studied group's life to which they devote a considerable part of their free time.

As regards the different sports listed above, several tendencies (Fig. 3) can be observed such as the significance of activities related to mountains (mountain tourism - 31%, downhill skiing - 70%, mountain climbing - 49%). Disciplines requiring physical strength were very popular (cycling - 70%, running - 36%, swimming - 31%). The percentage of gym and fitness

exercises was very low which suggests that the respondents preferred outdoor physical activity. As regards winter sports, percentages of cross-country skiing and snowboarding were relatively low compared to downhill skiing. It can be assumed that the latter is the key element of ski touring for the majority of respondents.

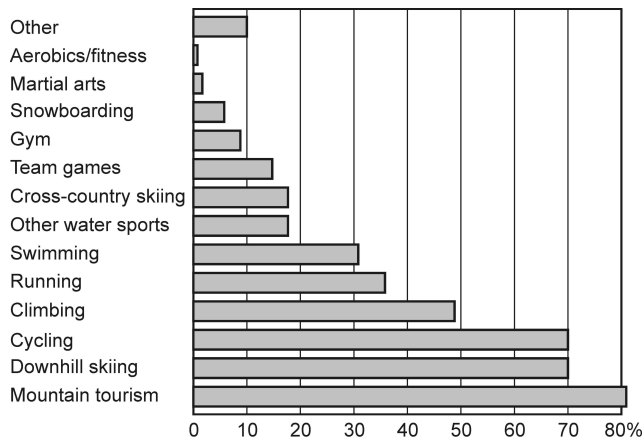


Fig. 3. Respondents by sport  
(they could indicate more than one answer)  
Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

The studied group differed from those analysed by the Central Statistical Office in 2011/12. "The most popular sports-recreational activities among Poles were cycling and swimming. The first was undertaken by 66.0% of respondents, the other by 39.9%. In addition, men preferred football (36.7%), volleyball (14.3%) and basketball (10.3%), as well as fishing (13.3%). Women usually chose aerobics, fitness, yoga and gymnastics (19.5%), dancing (16.5%), jogging, Nordic walking (15.8%) and volleyball (13.3%)". Winter sports were not among the favourite activities at that time, as they proved among those studied.

#### 4.3. SKI TOURING IN THE RESPONDENTS' LIVES

The answer to the question "What experience do you have in this form of tourism?" will give not only a better understanding of its community, but can also be used to evaluate how long it has been undertaken. Half of the respondents (54%) pointed to small (less than three years) ski touring experience, and the group of beginners was quite large (11%) – Table 2. Nearly every fifth respondent claimed 4-5 years of experience, and every tenth indicated 6-8 years or over 13, 8% had been active for 9-12 years. These results may be a proof of the dynamically growing popularity of ski touring, as well as of an accelerated development of this discipline since 2008-9.

Table 2. Respondents' ski touring experience

Experience	%	% accumulated
First season	11	11
2-3 years	43	54
4-5 years	18	72
6-8 years	10	82
9-12 years	8	90
13 years and longer	10	100

Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified.

How did they learn about this form of tourism? Over a half of the respondents (52%) heard about it from friends, almost one third (31%) had seen ski tourers on the piste. Another source was the internet (17%) while sources, especially traditional media, had an insignificant influence. These results show that it is attractive and growing though still a niche discipline. Most ski tourers inform and encourage their friends to take part as well. The basic information is often passed to tourists met accidentally on the piste and interested in a discipline which they are not familiar with.

Ski touring is a niche form of specialised tourism; it does not involve organized group tours. The only commercial form are the one- or several day trips under the care of a mountain guide, or ski touring courses for beginners, but they were not popular among the respondents (Fig. 4). A large majority (75%) of tourists skied with friends. Many of them admitted that they had also skied alone, which seems to be quite controversial with respect to safety in the mountains in winter. A small percentage took their family members with them, which involves considerable physical and technical skills. Combined with a relatively high risk, it is not an ideal form of activity for families with children.

What were the motivations of those taking part this sport, which requires a good physical condition? The respondents' main motivation was active recreation and relaxation (71%). They spent their holidays and weekends going on ski tours and it was their way of relaxing after work. Slightly less important, but also significant was the need to care for their health and fitness (49%). At this point, it is worth remembering (Fig. 2) that the studied group evaluated their health condition as excellent, but despite that they did not object to taking care of their physical condition all the time. Other motivations encouraging the respondents included the opportunity to test their own skills (31%) and gain new experience (19%). As ski touring is not a popular discipline, included among so-called 'extreme sports', these responses are not surprising. There were two other particularly distinctive motivations. The first one, typical of downhill skiers, was the conviction that ski touring enables tourists to descend away from designated pistes, in deep snow and in a difficult

terrain. The other motivation, mentioned mainly by walking tourists, was presenting ski touring as a convenient way of travelling in the mountains in the winter season.

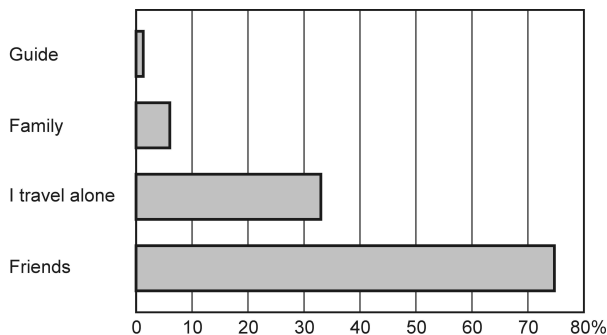


Fig. 4. Those accompanying respondents on the piste (they could indicate more than one answer)  
Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

The respondents' answers show that their motivations to ski tour are different than the motivations of the majority of Poles who take part in sport, as according to the Central Statistical Office's study from 2012, the main motivations were pleasure and fun, indicated by two thirds of the respondents. The need to stay fit and keep a good figure was indicated by 15.5% of men and 20% of women. Every tenth Pole took part in sport and recreation for health reasons.

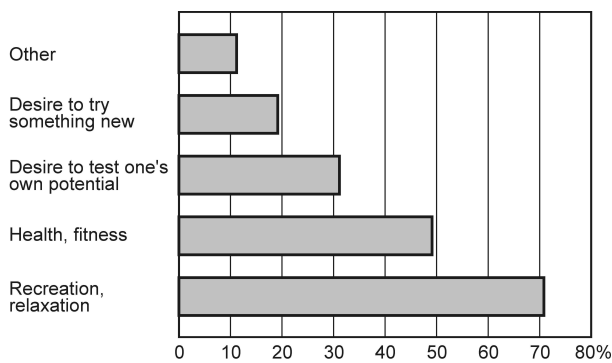


Fig. 5. Respondents' motivations for ski touring (they could indicate more than one answer)  
Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

Some respondents with longer experience in ski touring, had taken part in Alpine skiing competitions. In the group who regularly participate in competitions (4%), the majority have 4-8 years of experience; most of them being professional sportsmen, training almost every day and having equipment prepared specially for the race (possibly light skis, boots and accessories complying with the norms set by the Alpine Skiing Committee). People who compete only occasionally come from all groups, but most of them have over 6 years of experience; they are experienced skiers who

naturally have better skills. Most of them are amateurs who may test themselves, e.g. at the Polish Amateur Cup in Ski Alpinism competition, where the pistes are technically easier and the competitors do not have to meet the strict norms concerning equipment or possess a professional licence. Alpine skiing competitions require perfect physical condition, as well as experience in using the equipment, and especially a fast rate of changing the ascent/descent configuration. At the same time, it is worth noting the fact of the percentage of new competitors, no matter how small, who must face many difficulties.

In order to take part in ski touring, it is necessary to carry professional equipment, different from that used in downhill skiing, as well as wear appropriate clothing, goggles or sunglasses, a helmet, backpack and skis (different from those used for downhill skiing as regards their strength and weight - they are lighter, with skin adhesive and sometimes a hole on the ski tip) with proper bindings (special bindings with a movable heel, which enable the skier to ascend a slope. Skins are made of fur arranged in one direction, hence, while moving forward, hair-wise, they prevent it from moving back, even on a steep slope. In the past they were made from seals' fur, which gave them the name). Other accessories include an avalanche detector, a probe and a spade. For this reason, the cost of an expedition may be higher than in the case of people skiing recreationally. Fig. 6 shows how high the costs are and whether there is a relation between the costs and the respondents' financial situation.

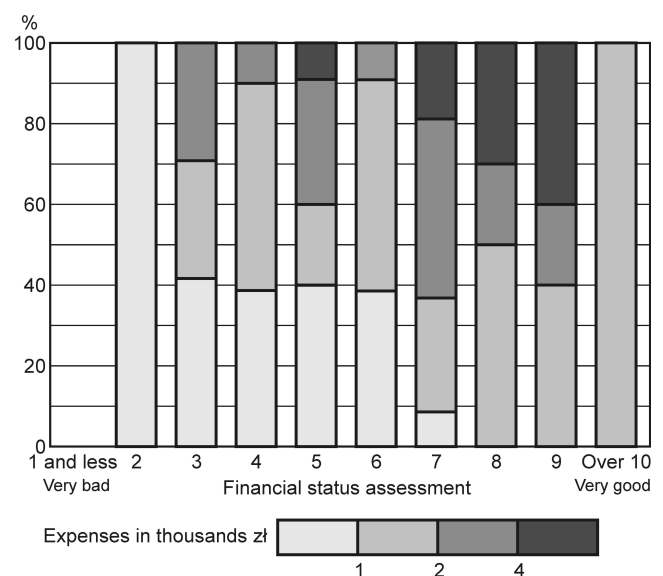


Fig. 6. Ski touring expenses compared to respondents' financial situations  
Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

It can be concluded that the more affluent spent more on ski touring - respondents who rated their financial situation at 7-9. The worse the financial

situation, the less the money that was spent. The least affluent spent up to 1000 zlotys per season and among those who were moderately rich the expenses varied. Three people at the highest financial level (10 points) spent under 2000 zlotys.

What other costs are paid by people involved in this form of tourism? They also pay for the services of an experienced guide. Some respondents regularly participated in several-day long skiing trips in the Polish and Slovakian Tatra Mountains, as well as the Alps. The latter are an important source of income for guides. The particulars of skiing in glacial mountains are different and the organizational difficulties of such a trip are greater. As a result, the best guides have a group of regular clients who visit Alpine summits and passes with them every year. Only the most experienced respondents did not use the services of a guide (Fig. 7).

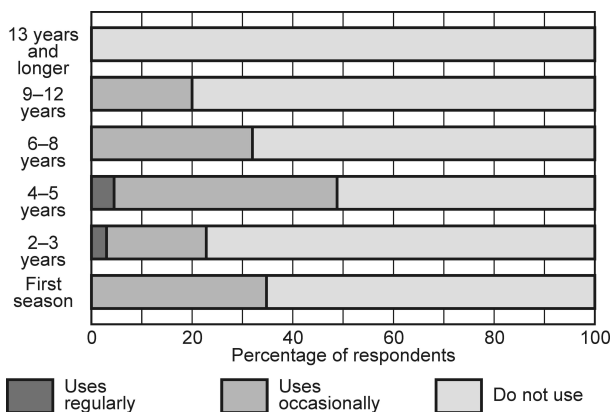


Fig. 7. The ski touring period and use of guide services  
Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

Among mountain guides' clients were people with varied experience. A sizeable group consisted of beginners, learning ski touring on courses. However, the percentage of those with several years of experience, who used the services of a guide, was greater. They sometimes even regularly participated in several-day long skiing tours in the Polish and Slovakian Tatras, as well as the Alps.

Moreover, nearly every respondent had completed one or more courses related to mountain activities. The most popular were avalanche courses (42%), which is a positive trend as regards the growing awareness of the dangers caused by masses of snow. Slightly less popular (35%) were courses teaching the basics of rock climbing, organized in the summer. These technical skills are not very useful during traditional ski touring trips. However, they may turn out very important in ski alpinism, climbing glaciers or walking rock ridges. About one third of the respondents had completed a specialist ski touring or

winter tourism course. A small group of respondents had completed a Tatra winter climbing course. They were usually highly skilled and well-informed.

#### 4.4. TOURISTS' SAFETY

Ski touring is found in the mountains, away from regular pistes, in hazardous conditions, e.g. during an avalanche alert and is not a safe form of specialised tourism. The safety theme can be found in the academic literature and that is why it was an object of the author's interest. Accidents and injuries suffered during ski touring had happened to 13% of the respondents, 3% of which had been serious accidents and the remaining 10% had suffered minor injuries. Three per cent is a substantial percentage compared to other disciplines, even those which are regarded as dangerous. Considering the fact that the study did not include those who do no longer go ski touring due to accidents, or have died during skiing trips, the statistics are dramatic.

It is important to know the respondents' knowledge and skills as regards safety on the slope. Tourers' knowledge about mountain dangers is most probably much greater than average in the Tatra Mountains. Numerous courses (e.g. avalanche courses had been completed by 42% of respondents) prove that the respondents are aware of the need to raise mountain qualifications. It is worth noting, however, that ski touring is an extremely demanding discipline. Just having the knowledge is not sufficient if it is not applied in practice; even very experienced people ignore the basic safety rules for no reason which can end in an accident. Many ski down the couloirs/crevasses with an unstable snow cover, despite mountain rescuers' warnings. Even mountain guides sometimes walk on frozen ponds in late spring with a serious danger of the ice breaking. Apart from abiding by some regulations, it is necessary to continue practicing, e.g. searching for people buried under snow with the help of an avalanche detector, or slowing down a fall on a steep slope. In a dangerous situation, only instinctive, learnt reactions may be effective. In the skiers' and generally mountain tourists' milieu, however, there is a tendency to expand knowledge and skills, so it can be hoped that the number of accidents will decrease.

The evaluation of knowledge and skills regarding safety and first aid, on a scale 1 to 5, fluctuated between 2 and nearly 4. Beginners occasionally declared high level skills, and a mountain guide with many years of experience described his knowledge as average. These facts resulted not only from the desire to present oneself in a better light, but above all from

the lack of awareness of certain dangers looming in the mountains.



Fig. 8. Knowledge and skills assessment  
Source: P. BARTOCHOWSKI (2011), modified

Personal skiing skills were evaluated the highest (Fig. 8). Good skiing skills were confirmed on the basis of the traces left by skis on the slopes during field work. Most respondents were skilful in the mountainous area.

Unfortunately, the problem of avalanches is still greatly ignored by the respondents. Nearly 40% did not carry an avalanche detector – a necessary tool for finding people under snow. Such low popularity is caused by their high price and tourists being unaware that they should have them and must not ignore the problem. Fortunately, the popularity of detectors is steadily growing and their producers are introducing models which are also simpler to use. A detector may be rented as well. Several years ago, few people owned avalanche detectors, while at present over 50% have admitted using one. Several respondents did not have detectors but used the services of avalanche equipment rental. Poles are still far behind French tourists, 95% of whom are equipped with a trio (a detector, a spade and a probe) and at the same time 95% have their mobile phones as a tool for alerting rescue services – overrated as it gives an impression of being (too) important for safety (VALAT & RAVANEL 2013). Also Swedish research confirms that 11% of skiers do not use safety devices but 87% use them regularly.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

How much contemporary ski touring has diverged from the skiing tours of Oppenheim's times (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) is hard to say. It can be assumed that qualities such as strength, independence, resourcefulness in the face of danger and difficulties, still remain tourism qualities because to be in the mountains in winter, off-

piste, requires the modern tourist to have them. Oppenheim pointed to active recreation and relaxation (71%), care for health and fitness (49%), as well as the desire to check one's potential (31%) as the main motivations for ski touring, which this thesis has confirmed.

It can be concluded that ski touring in Poland is a niche type of tourism, taking place mainly in the Tatra Mountains, as well as in others (Beskidy and Sudety Mountains). It is the choice of a particular group of tourists who cannot be called typical Polish tourists. First of all, they represent a high education level (74% – university, 26 – secondary and further education), they are young – ranging from 19 to 45 years of age (ca. 90%), and do mostly intensive white-collar work (IT specialist, engineer, physician, financier, manager, student, representative of free professions, business person). The group is dominated by men (88%), people caring for their fitness and health, regularly engaging in physical recreation throughout the year, mostly outdoors, in touch with nature. A large group earn sums exceeding the median for Poland and invest in skiing equipment.

The majority (75%) are people coming from the provinces of southern Poland in the area of which there are the mountain ranges of the Sudety and Carpathians, but are dominated by inhabitants of the Małopolskie (41%) and Silesian (26%) Provinces. As many as 81% arrive from cities; the predominating group (54%) from large cities with over 100,000 inhabitants (mostly from Krakow, as well as from Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław and Poznań). Tourism requiring intensive, physical, exhausting effort is good for people (mainly males) who after stationary white-collar work relax through contact with nature and fulfil their need to check their own capabilities and gain new experience. Not only is fitness important for them, but also developing their knowledge and skills as regards ski touring, climbing and skiing. Most of them show considerable skiing skills. They take advantage of courses and tours led by experienced guides in Poland and abroad. Some try taking part in Alpine skiing competitions, which may point to their ambitions.

Almost one hundred years after Oppenheim, we may certainly say that the contemporary tourist is better equipped with modern gear (boots, skis, skins etc.), can use avalanche detectors (devices used for looking for people buried under snow), as well as other appliances, such as a mobile phone. Moreover, a tourist who has access to the internet may receive detailed weather information in real time and other ski-tourers opinions about snow conditions. It gives them a certain comfort, increasing their sense of safety in case of emergency, which unfortunately does not mean that there are fewer accidents.



## FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this work, the author used the results of research conducted by Piotr BARTOCHOWSKI MA (2011), a graduate of Tourism and Recreation, University of Łódź.

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Article received:  
12 February 2016  
Accepted:  
14 Juni 2016