

## SKIFULNESS - ACCIDENT PREVENTION BY FINDING HAPPINESS IN LESS DANGEROUS TERRAIN

Kjetil Brattlien\*

*Norwegian Geotechnical Institute (NGI), Oslo, Norway*

**ABSTRACT:** Skiers are killed by avalanches mostly because they choose to ski too dangerous terrain. A big part of a perfect day in the mountains is the mental and physical satisfaction we feel after a trip, and the total experience is about a lot more than the terrain we selected during the trip.

A key question in avalanche accident prevention is why people choose terrain that is too steep and dangerous when they could have a great day also skiing in safer terrain. The Why2Go-method (Brattlien, 2016) is a method in three steps, focusing on risk acceptance and factors that bring happiness. Step 1-WHY is defining the goals of the trip and your risk acceptance. Is the goal extreme skiing and high risk, or is it returning home safely to enjoy a cold beer after a long day outdoors? Step 2-WHERE is the planning of where to go to achieve the goals defined in step 1. Step 3-HOW is how you proceed by selecting safe travel rituals and in practice choosing terrain after skills, conditions and risk acceptance.

**KEYWORDS:** Risk acceptance, terrain, skifulness.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Skiers are killed by avalanches mostly because they choose to ski too dangerous terrain. Avalanche accidents happens despite tremendous resources on education, equipment and forecasting helping people to be on the right side of the fine line. The fine line has two options; "coming home with a smile or coming home in a bag". Despite all the effort to prevent accidents the statistics show that in average about 100 people are killed by avalanches in the European Alps every year (Techel 2016).

One crucial question is if accidents are best prevented by giving people more hard facts about avalanches and conditions, or if increased awareness on accepting less risk is a better medicine.

### 2. MIND OVER MAN

A key question in avalanche prevention is why people choose to ski too steep and dangerous terrain when they could have a great day also in safer terrain. A young and brave extreme skier might need extreme terrain to have a great day, but does an average family father need to ski steep and dangerous terrain to feel happiness?

The family father probably has a nicer and more expensive car than the young skier, but who is most satisfied with their car is not a rational question. It is about what they feel. Life is 10 % what happens to you and 90 % how you react to it.

---

\* *Corresponding author address:*

Kjetil Brattlien, NGI, PB 3930 Ullevål Stadion, 0806 OSLO, Norway. email: kb@ngi.no

Do you need a 50.000 EUR car to be satisfied? Do you need to ski in steep and dangerous terrain to be satisfied?



Figure 1: Life can be great also without a Volvo XC90 because happiness is about what you feel and not what you have. Photo from volvocars.com.

### 3. SKIFULNESS

Mindfulness is a popular concept in our modern society where distractions and abundance can mislead people. Mindfulness is the ability of the mind to observe without criticism (Gunaratana 2011). You can observe your bumpy old car and see beauty even though other eyes might see it different.

You can see 25 degrees terrain for skiing and be filled with joy since you know you can ski with control and elegance using every turn to create speed. Skifulness might be a proper word for the mindful observation without criticism of your great dance down the gentle terrain. Skifulness allow you to dance and enjoy nature at the same time. It is about being alive, enjoying life and returning home safely. Skifulness is also about seeing the beauty of gentle terrain and thereby making it attractive to avoid dangerous terrain.

The human factor is believed to be a major cause of avalanche accident because people have preferences and filter facts to get the answer they want. Numerous accident investigations show surprisingly odd terrain selection. One way to reduce the human factor is to always have attractive alternatives! Skiffulness might be a way of get a wider preference by also making gentle terrain attractive.

#### 4. WHY-2-GO

A key question in avalanche accident prevention is why people choose too steep and dangerous terrain when they could have a great day also in safer terrain.

The Why2Go-method (Brattlien, 2016) is a method in three steps focusing also on risk acceptance and factors that bring happiness.

- Step 1-WHY: Is to answer "Why to Go" by defining the goals of the trip and your risk acceptance. Is the goal extreme skiing and high risk, or is it returning home safely to enjoy a cold beer after a long day outdoors?
- Step 2-WHERE: Is to plan where to go to achieve the goals defined in step 1.
- Step 3-HOW: Is how you proceed by selecting safe travel rituals and in practice choosing terrain after skills, conditions and risk acceptance.

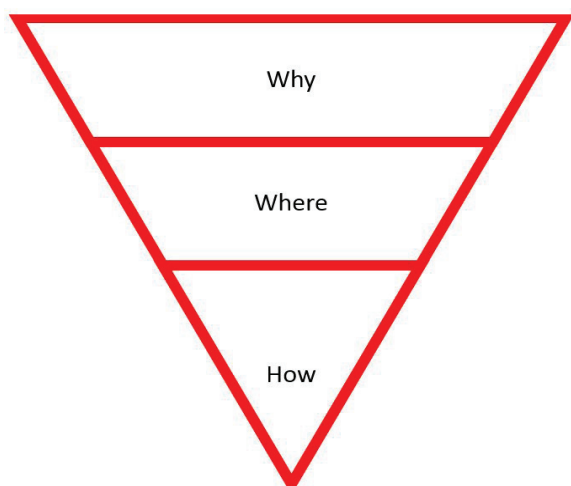


Figure 2: The Why2Go-method is a method in three steps focusing on risk acceptance and where and how to go to choose terrain after skills, conditions and risk acceptance.

The Why2Go-method is different from other approaches mainly by the first step where motivation and risk acceptance is addressed. As a father of four kids, I have more responsibility and other preferences today than before. Today my list of step 1-WHY I go skiing is something like this:

- the main goal of a ski trip is to be outdoors and enjoy the weather mother nature has to offer,
- to be fit and stay in shape,

- to get some good skiing,
- to get home safely to my family, get off the wet clothes and heavy boots,
- to have a beer and feel the great feeling in the body and mind after a long day outdoors.

Steep terrain is not a must on my list anymore. My list today reminds me of why I want to go, who I am and my risk acceptance.

Step 2-WHERE is to plan where to go according to conditions, skills and the goals and limitations from step 1. People have different preferences on methods and tools to plan trips. I always use rule based methods like the Graphical Reduction Method (SLF-GRM) or the Afterski-method (Brattlien, 2008).

NGI has made a digital map for Norway that show the steepness of terrain steeper than 20 degrees (NGI-2012). The map is available on computer and as an app to bring in the field. People often plan where to go by using the avalanche bulletin, the steepness map and rule based methods.

Step 3-HOW is in practice how you travel by safe travel rituals and choosing terrain after skills, conditions and risk acceptance.

Step 2-WHERE and step 3-HOW has many similarities to Munters 3x3 method (Munter, 2003). Step 1-WHY is the key as it defines your risk acceptance, your goals and limitations.

The Why2Go-method is a tool designed to help people to choose terrain after skills, motivation, conditions and risk acceptance.

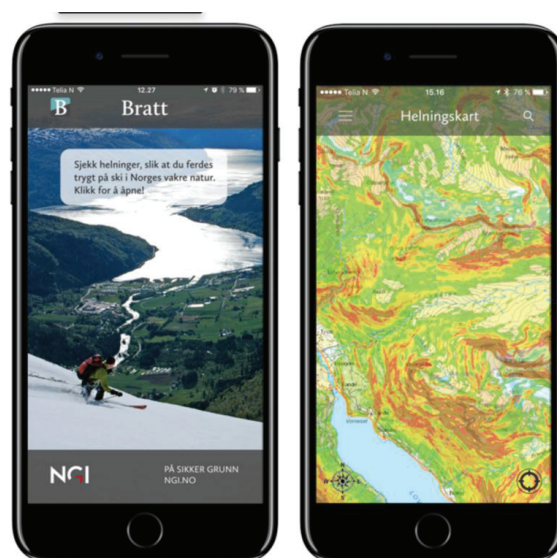


Figure 3: NGI's steepness app where green is 20-30 degrees, yellow 31-35, orange 36-40, red 41-45, brown 46-60, dark brown 61-90.

## 5. CONCLUTIONS

Skiers are killed by avalanches mostly because they choose to ski too dangerous terrain. We know that most avalanche accidents could be avoided if people accepted less risk and preferred to travel in less dangerous terrain.

Skifulness is about seeing the beauty of gentle terrain and thereby making it an attractive option to avoid dangerous terrain.

The Why2Go-method is a tool designed to help people to choose terrain after skills, motivation, conditions and risk acceptance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank avalanche professionals around the globe for great discussions on how to prevent avalanche accidents and how to enjoy life.

## REFERENCES

- Brattlien, 2008: Den lille snøskredboka (first edition). Fri Flyt.
- Brattlien, 2016: Snøskred - livsviktig kunnskap. Kagge forlag.
- Gunaratana, 2011: Mindfulness in plain English. Wisdom Pub.
- Munter (2003): 3x3 Lawinen.
- NGI (2012): <http://skredkart.ngi.no>
- SLF GRM: [https://www.slf.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/WSL/Publikationen/Sonderformate/pdf/2016-Caution-Avalanches.pdf](https://www.slf.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/WSL/Publikationen/Sonderformate/pdf/2016-Caution-Avalanches.pdf)
- Techel 2016: Avalanche fatalities in the European Alps: long-term trends and statistics. <https://www.geogr-helv.net/71/147/2016/gh-71-147-2016.pdf>