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Snow-free skiing in Hyde Park

DAVID SIKES

ANDY BARKER
for the London paper

"CROSS-COUNTRY skiing? In London?" my flatmate asks, incredulously. Well, not quite, but almost. The Scandinavians have taken their time-honoured means of transport, attached some wheels and, hey presto, invented an aerically demanding adventure sport for the off-season.

Once you perfect the technique, you can exercise a whopping 90 per cent of the body's muscles on a two-hour power trek around Hyde Park. What's more, it burns up to 1,200 calories. Not even

than worn down." There are two methods you can follow. The first is the classic where you keep the legs parallel. However, this works only on relatively flat terrain.

The second is more akin to traditional cross-country skiing, with the arms powering the legs forward as they heave their way over the ground.

It is, Ballentine says, almost the perfect simulation of cross-country skiing. "It's like going on a rowing machine if you are preparing for a rowing trip." It's not quite such a perfect match for downhill skiing but will still help with spatial awareness, balance and overall fitness.

The classes take place on Saturday mornings and both beginners and intermediates are welcome. Once you reach a certain standard you can arrange to hire the equipment and then zip about on your own.

Ballentine, from Northern Ireland, guides my beginners group through the basics on a grassy patch near the Serpentine Bridge. We lace up our leather ski boots and clip into the bindings at the toe, leaving the heels free.

Passers-by point and laugh as we hop about on one ski but Ballentine assures us it will be worth it. "At first it feels a bit wobbly but you build up ankle strength

pretty quickly," he says. He claims to be able to get anyone standing up and gliding along in one session.

We take to the pathway and begin poling ourselves forward. Gradually we pick up the technique but it's not a smooth ride.

Within minutes we're going down like dominoes. Then, after an hour or so, the number of tumbles starts to fall and we get something close to roller-skiing. I even try a turn.

Classes cost £20 per session or £60 for four. The only things not provided are gloves. And a word of warning: don't go for the fingerless variety, as I did. My bleeding knuckles were smarting all the way back to South Kensington station.

www.rollersti.co.uk

ON A ROLL | Iain Ballentine demonstrates the art of roller-skiing

“ You feel like your body has been built up rather than worn down”

ROLLER-SKI INSTRUCTOR IAIN BALLENTINE

jogging can compete with that.

And if you're contemplating a winter skiing holiday, it could be just the thing to get you back in shape after a year away from the slopes.

"One of the beauties of roller-skiing is that it's low-impact, with less stress on your joints than, say, running," says our instructor, Iain Ballentine.

"You can go out for a couple of hours and feel that your body has been built up rather

