

Australian National Akja Examination

As a prerequisite all candidates for the examination will have made a solo descent with an unloaded akja, to the satisfaction of a resident examiner or chief patroller, governed by the same technical guidelines outlined below.

The test will be held on a suitably steep slope with challenging terrain in regard to moguls and snow conditions. Terrain used will be that which is able to reflect the skill of the candidate in using an akja.

Each candidate will complete a full run in the lead and assist position over the course (to be set by the examiners).

The course will consist of two sections:

1. Section one requiring three changes of direction, an emergency stop and some traversing. The course itself may dictate where the direction changes take place and include a high traverse and sharp turns.
2. Section two which is intended to run continuously from the first will allow the lead position to show his/her discretion on path selection.

****Major losses of marks will be incurred by a candidate who initiates events leading to fall or tipping or loss of control of the akja.**

AKJA PREAMBLE

The run consists of two sections; the top section to be completed as directed, the lower section allowing the candidate full discretion in terms of path selection.

There are four acceptable changes of direction:

1. Stop kick turn
2. Snow plough turn
3. Assist hold turn
4. Side slipping forwards and backwards

A controlled continuous speed is recommended throughout the decent.

An emergency stop will be called by an examiner during the run. A stop kick turn will be demonstrated by the candidates on request. A minimum of three changes of direction are required to be demonstrated followed by terrain dependent turns on the bottom section.

CATEGORIES TO BE ASSESSED

There are four main categories in the akja test for which analysis will be made.

AKJA LEAD

1. Path selection
2. Change of direction
3. Overall competence

AKJA ASSIST

1. Change of direction
2. Akja stability
3. Overall competence

SPEED OF RUN

As per demonstration but also not too fast or too slow. A controlled decent with continuity of speed allowing candidate to demonstrate skills.

PATH SELECTION

This category involves choosing the best available travel of the akja to avoid unnecessary moguls, ruts and traverse ledges. It is desired to keep the akja in the fall line of the slope, proportional to the steepness i.e the steeper the slope the more desirable it is to keep the akja travel close to the fall line depending upon terrain and snow conditions. The lead role by anticipation, observation and experience choosing the best snow and terrain for the safe descent of the akja and ultimate arrival at the designated destination.

DIRECTION CHANGES

A variety of techniques are permissible; however, the foremost consideration is the safety and comfort of the patient in relation to the degree of difficulty of the slope.

Permissible for examination purposes are the stop kick turn, the basic snow plough turn, the assist-hold change of direction and the forwards or backwards side slip.

- A. THE STOP KICK TURN:** whilst the akja weight is held by the assist role the lead undertakes a basic kick turn. Throughout the manoeuvre both lead and assist maintain contact with the akja handles. When the lead resumes his weight holding role the assist then performs a pivot turn so that both lead and assist have identical ski direction, before further descent is undertaken. It is recommended that such a direction change be undertaken only if the candidates come across an obstruction e.g. a rock, trees, crevice etc. In a National Patroller exam it would probably mean he/she has chosen the

wrong route unless instructed to do so. Marks would be lost for failing to show fluid continuity.

- B. BASIC SNOW PLOUGH TURN:** Initiated by the lead, sufficient time, radius and space must be allowed for the assist to safely change direction. In this manoeuvre the akja also changes direction in the fall line and considerable care must be undertaken. It is advised that this technique of direction change should only be used on less steep slopes.
- C. ASSIST HOLD CHANGE OF DIRECTION:** For this manoeuvre instantaneous communication between lead and assist is vital. As the lead initiates a 180 degree pivot turn, the assist holds the majority of the akja weight with skis across the slope in a blocking position. Once the lead has changed direction then he resumes the major weight holding role and the assist changes by pivot turn to the new identical direction of the lead. The akja remains close to the fall line throughout the manoeuvre, whilst continuous slow velocity can be maintained, if the manoeuvre is completed with ideal continuity.
- D. SIDE SLIP - FORWARD OR BACKWARD:** The side slip can be effectively used to alter the downhill direction of the akja. Care should be taken not to accumulate loose snow. Even terrain or the side walls of moguls are most advisable places to undertake such directional changes. A comfortable distance between skis is recommended to aid stability and sharing of the load over both skis. Needless to say backwards side slipping should not be applied for prolonged periods nor should the lead patroller initiate dramatic direction change here as the assist patroller will find it difficult to maintain the akja in the direction sought. This method of directional change is recommended on steep or mogul terrain, in that at no stage do the skis enter the fall line whilst numerous directional changes can be undertaken in one descent without a turn being risked. It is an accommodation of the change in fall line caused by each mogul.

AKJA STABILITY

The akja is designed to run on the snow and should at all times be transported with all four runners edging, unless short shafted off the snow.

In negotiating mogul terrain it is essential for proportional vertical rise and fall of the akja handles to take place. Firstly this maintains the akja runners and running surface on the snow as much as possible and secondly offers the best possible patient comfort and a smooth ride.

In mogul terrain the akja should travel over the shoulders and ridges and not the ruts or grooves of the moguls thereby maintaining maximum ski/ snow contact.

Under most circumstances the fall line should be used as the most direct and suitable access in descent. Only in extreme circumstances should an akja traverse the fall line on a steep slope. In such cases, uphill handle pressure is most advisable to hold and grip the upper akja runners to the snow surface. This also provides the best possible patient comfort by close to level travelling. Variations in hand/akja handle position are permissible.

Short shafting must be a well communicated dual manoeuvre with smooth transition from snow to air to snow. It is often advisable to test the patients weight, akja and assist/lead's strength before this manoeuvre is undertaken. Smooth terrain is most advisable for short shafting.

OVERALL COMPETENCE

This includes the broad area of arm, leg and body position and visual and verbal communication between lead and assist. For the lead role it is essential to demonstrate changes and initiations clearly with sufficient time and radius for the assist to follow. For the assist he must react calmly and confidently to initiations to which he must follow.

Regarding body position, arms should be slightly flexed in an athletic position and available to extend or retract as necessary. Full extension is not recommended in normal running.

The upper body should be erect and basically rotated from the hip and shoulder to the fall line. Care should be taken to ensure both legs share the overall weight and edging. Emphasis should be made that the upper leg and ski work together in unison with the lower leg, otherwise it will tend to rise too far uphill and buckle under the body. Knees should be marginally bent and not over extended, so as to avoid stiff legged edge vibration and uneven edge pressure.

The category also includes fluid continuity in speed control, and the elimination of all but essential stoppages.

In an exam situation, a controlled continuous speed is recommended for better examiner observation and for the candidate to demonstrate his/her skills. Stamina will also be assessed over the duration of the descent. This is vital in a safe and controlled descent and a functional body position and good teamwork will make a significant difference in the condition of the candidates at the completion of the run. Conversely, bad edge control, body position and poor co-ordination will prove exhaustive and unsafe in a long akja descent.