

# SHREDDIN' GNAR

gauntlet 2007 ski and snowboard supplement



Katy Anderson/the Gauntlet

When the idea came up to uncover the gnarliest pow in the Rockies, to drop the steepest cliffs, launch the sickest air—and document the whole thing—only one individual was up for the challenge. Former *Gauntlet* sports editor Sean “Rookie” Nyilassy travelled over 650 kilometres to shred seven of the best local mountains.

He survived to tell the tale, but only by following his tested mantra: “If in doubt, ski it out.” So the next time you find yourself at the top of a run with your heart pounding because you left your comfort level back on the chair lift, ask yourself: “What would Rookie do?”

## RED RESORT

r o s s l a n d , B . C .  
d a y p a s s : \$ 5 2

Sean “Rookie” Nyilassy

If you're hungry for powder, strap on your bib because Red Mountain has an all you can eat buffet open December through April. We made the trip to our furthest destination from Calgary to shred Dec. 8–9. Red's season had started the previous week, but Dec. 8 was opening day for the Motherlode and Paradise chairlifts on Granite Mountain—the bigger of Red Resort's two peaks.

We arrived a good half-hour before the lift opened and found a sizable crowd of locals eagerly awaiting the chairs to start swinging. Once we reached the top, it was easy to see why. Red was pounded with snow in November and coverage was great for early season all over the mountain. Nothing was

closed, and despite the locals beating us to the chairlift, we got fresh tracks down two of the gnarly-steep chutes Granite has to offer.

The fun certainly didn't end there. A couple of hours into the Friday morning the locals slowly trickled back to the parking lot to take care of their real responsibilities—their jobs, suckers—practically handing over the mountain to us. We didn't wait in another lift line and found fresh snow almost everywhere we went. While the lifts did close at 3 p.m., we were plenty tired by that point and ready for a massive heap of nachos in Red's bar, Rafters.

With their base now over two metres, Red has continued to see great snow this season. Their powder isn't quite as light and fluffy as the Rockies', but there are loads of it that don't get skied out very quickly. Since Red is relatively far from Calgary, Vancouver and Spokane, it sees little traffic from those major centres. The nearest airport is a small one in Castlegar 45 minutes away. These two factors contribute to the lack of crowds at Red and keep the powder fresh for those willing to make the trek.

Although there are still some fresh turns in the tighter treed areas many days after a storm, the locals are usually seen strapping on their snowshoes or skins by that point. There are a handful of peaks that are an easy hike from Red's in-bound

terrain for those with the proper gear and knowledge. This easily-accessed backcountry opens up thousands of acres of powder to be shredded once the in-bound trails have been beaten up a bit.

For those not up for the backcountry adventures, the terrain at Red is challenging to say the least. The Silverlode chair accesses the few short green runs available at Red. The Paradise chair has a good variety of trees, groomers and bumps for intermediate skiers. The remaining areas are not for the faint of heart. Red Mountain is steep all the way around with no top-to-bottom green run to save beginners who make the trek up. There are some excellent runs on Red Mountain, and the lack of vertical climbs makes for fast laps for those in a hurry. But the real treasures lie on Granite Mountain. A solitary green run wraps right around the mountain, meaning you can ski all 360 degrees of it. There are some mellower trees in the Powder Fields area, but most of the mountain is very steep. There are a few chutes, like the slides and coolers, and lots of trees.

So if you like driving, steeps and trees, why not give Red a try. If you are a beginner who whines about the 15-minute drive to COP, Red is probably not for you. In any case, plenty of snow and a quiet mountain await deep in the Kootenays.

# There's no pow to be had at Fortress

## One of Calgary's closest mountains remains closed

### F O R T R E S S

Todd Andre

Snowboarder Lindsay Aiken has done more surfing than snowboarding this year, despite her season's pass at Fortress Mountain, a snow haven only 45 minutes away from her Calgary home. But surfing? In the ocean starved, cow-patty-paradise of what is known as rural Calgary? She surfs the net, of course, along with every other Fortress pass holder who is eagerly awaiting an opening date to be released from mountain management.

A pristine panoramic photo from Fortress' peak adorns the home page of the resort's website, taunting would-be skiers and boarders like Aiken with their slogan, "We got the snow," juxtaposed with the gloomy caption, "Opening soon." The website hasn't changed in months. Neither has the resort. Every other resort in the Rockies has enjoyed a surge in business because of the best snow conditions in years, while Fortress sits empty.

"They seem like they're really irresponsible because they couldn't open last year," grumbled Aiken, one of several disgruntled University of Calgary Snowboard Club members.

A native of snow-scarce Ontario, Aiken's primary reason for moving out west was to take advantage of the world-renowned Rocky Mountain champagne powder. But despite having bought her Fortress season's pass through the Snowboard Club back in September, she has yet to lay eyes on the mountain's snow capped peaks—excluding her online visits.

"I don't have any faith it will be open at all this season," said Aiken with a sigh. "Maybe for a month in February. It seems really unorganized. I'm optimistic about its potential, but they don't seem to want to put in the effort."

There is plenty of blame to go around, however. The resort was forced to close the bridge on Fortress Road Nov. 24, 2006, after government inspectors deemed it unsafe. Zrinko Amerl, president of Fortress Mountain Resort, claims the Alberta government intervened without warning, and at the worst possible time.

"We were ready to open for Dec. 1, but the government said, 'We want you to certify everything,'" said Amerl, in one of the dozens of telephone interviews he has been forced to conduct since being shut down in November. "They looked at the bridge and felt it wasn't safe, based on an engineering report that wasn't complete. This is strictly because of the government, the processes and the government approvals. All of these delays are directly because of them."

Dave Nielsen, the regional director of Alberta's conservation agency for Kananaskis Country, says that Fortress' closure is not just based on the bridge, but several problems that have plagued the resort.

"These are things that were brought to [Fortress Mountain's] attention last year: public health and safety, lift certification, food services, *et cetera*," said Nielsen. "The stuff from Fortress is longstanding, but the bridge was recent. Part of the problem was that the facility was closed for a year. The year's closure has created issues that need to be rectified."



Laura Sydenham/the Gauntlet

This did not take place at Fortress. There will be none of this taking place at Fortress in the foreseeable future.

The U of C Snowboard Club executives have supported Fortress for the last few years by selling \$199 Fortress passes to members and offering to build a terrain park on the mountain. On the surface it looks like a good deal for the club and its hundreds of members, never mind the free marketing garnered by the resort. Unfortunately, the deal has put the club and its loyal members in the middle of a battle between big government and big business. Snowboard Club executive Amanda Brown isn't happy with the way things have been handled by Fortress thus far.

"They just weren't ready," said Brown, referring to passes that drop in value with each missed powder day. "They promised us it would open in the middle of December. [Snowboard Club members] were patient enough to wait for the second opening date, but now people are getting impatient. Their date keeps getting pushed back. [The \$199 passes] will not even be worth it if you can only go twice."

Fortress posted on their website that they would be ready to open "in the middle of January" but their gates remain locked as this story goes to print. The unexpected delays have led to a predictable response from savvy student consumers, who rarely have \$200 to spend on groceries, never mind a dormant ski pass. Geoff Burrel, the executive member of the Snowboard Club dealing with the Fortress fiasco, said that members have abandoned the struggling ski resort.

"I'm not sure if I'm at liberty to say how many passes were sold, but I will say that an overwhelming majority of the passes sold were requested to be refunded," said Burrel, adding he was sympathetic to the resort's plight at first, but after dealing with the mountains of refund forms instead of a mountain satiated with snow, his patience has thinned. "The

main reason they weren't allowed to open is that their lodge isn't up to standard."

Indeed, Fortress opened its gates last year in late January, but without the availability of its main lodge. Everything ran smoothly: pass holders were happy that it opened at all and the Alberta government seemed happy that they had another tourist attraction to boast about in their Travel Alberta ad campaigns. Kananaskis Country has changed their stance in dramatic fashion this year, presumably in the best interest of the public.

Amerl thinks that these new approvals are unnecessary.

"Normal procedure would be to certify the lifts and open," said Amerl, referring to last year's arrangement with K-country. "They want us to approve the washrooms and other stuff that we have a safe record [in providing]."

K-country insists that it's in everybody's best interest, including their own, to have Fortress open for business.

"We certainly hope that Fortress can be back in operation," said Nielsen. "That's our profound wish, but public health and safety is our primary concern."

In the meantime, some have lost faith in the cultish resort. Frustration has built up in customers because they feel like they weren't given enough information. Fortress sent out a question and answer email in November, but failed to contact their customers since then, despite a declaration at the bottom of the email promising to, "keep [pass holders] in the loop by sending more e-mails the moment we have new developments."

Die hard student snowboarders like Aiken, who loathe missing a week of riding, let alone over two months, are unhappy with Fortress' scant communication.

"They haven't done anything to contact

anyone, or to let us know if we can get our money back, or if they are going to do something next year [for pass holders]," said Aiken, who has given up on Fortress. She said that she could have used the money to purchase a pass elsewhere if she knew the mountain was going to be closed for this long.

Amerl asserts that additional communication was impossible given his circumstances.

"When you don't have any info to give out, simply saying, 'We don't have anything to say,' doesn't cut it," said Amerl.

As winter drags on, skiers, snowboarders and Fortress pass holders alike are all getting their powder fix elsewhere. The Snowboard Club has threatened to remove Fortress from their website in an attempt to shake off a stigma of broken promises and late starts, while snowboarders like Aiken are soaking up the snow at other resorts in the neighborhood. No matter how you look at it, that can't be good for business.

"Of course we'll survive," asserted Amerl. "Most of our pass holders are quite patient, and as far as snow conditions are concerned, it's awesome."

There is hope for dejected Fortress members though.

"For anybody who shovels a couple hours of snow, they can ski or ride [the mountain] for free," said Amerl. "But they have to make sure they're in contact with us at the gate beforehand."

So, if Fortress is still under state shutdown this week, eager skiers and boarders can get in some turns in exchange for a little grunt work. It's a great deal for those who haven't already bought a pass, but not much good for those who have.

# '07 Ski hill reviews

## Enchanted forests

by Sean "Rookie" Nyilassy

### FERNIE

fernie, B.C.  
day pass: \$69

Looking up at Fernie's five bowls, it's easy to understand why someone decided to turn it into a ski resort. Each bowl offers riders plenty of space to explore and the ability to traverse from one bowl to the next makes it easy to lose yourself in the winter playground. We explored Fernie on Dec. 10, the day after opening.

With just one day to play at Fernie, we were lucky to have a guide for the morning. Shawn Clarke runs two-day "steep and deep" camps at Fernie, but made some time to show us around during our visit. He took us to some areas we may not have discovered and gave us a great feel for the mountain. In the afternoon we ventured off on our own and put in some great turns.

Fernie has an impressive annual snowfall and plenty of terrain. The lower mountain is covered in cruisers

for beginners to learn on and tune their skills for what is offered above. The five bowls within Fernie's boundaries are treed to the max, allowing for what Fernie is known for: tree-skiing. Unfortunately for boarders, these bowls make for plenty of traversing, but the rewards are plentiful. There are enough gentle tree runs to keep the intermediates entertained for days and tonnes of steeper ones and a few chutes to challenge the experts.

With accommodations to fit any budget right at the bottom of the hill, a weekend at Fernie isn't out of the question on a university student's savings. However, this means the hill is accessible to any stooge with the means to get there and the slopes can be busy. Luckily, traversing far enough around one of the bowls will usually yield some fresh snow.

If tree-skiing is your thing, Fernie is your place. Keep an eye on their snow report and when they get a nice dump, make your way down there for some B.C. hospitality and great riding. Just remember to go back to Calgary at some point. Or not.

## Better than a hoof-induced concussion

### KICKINGHORSE

golden, B.C.  
day pass: \$60

We sat in our hostel watching the snow fall the night before riding at Kicking Horse, and it was *goood*. The hill had been open the two weekends preceding our visit, but Dec. 15 marked the commencement of full-time operations. With 48 centimetres falling in the 48 hours before they opened, we were in for a treat.

We arrived at the hill half an hour before the gondola opened, but a sizable crowd was already gathering in anticipation of a sweet powder day. As avalanche bombs echoed through the valley, the crowd cheered and excitement climbed higher and higher. We were finally neatly crammed into gondola cars and whisked to the top as the first lucky riders let out cries of joy getting face shots on the groomer below.

We had run after run of the most endless powder I have ever experienced. As the day flew by, the patrollers opened more of the mountain as they deemed it safe, delighting every rider. It's hard to pick a favourite run when we got face shots below the gondola, on CPR ridge and in the trees off the Stairway to Heaven chair, but the

open chutes on CPR ridge must have been unbelievable for the first few riders down them.

Although not everyone can expect a 50-centimetre day like we had, it's not unheard of at Kicking Horse. They get more frequent big dumps than the Banff-area resorts to the east and certainly have some crazier terrain. Kicking Horse has some big open bowls

but the steepest runs are accessed by traversing along one of the ridges serviced by the lifts and dropping into one of the chutes or treed areas along the way.

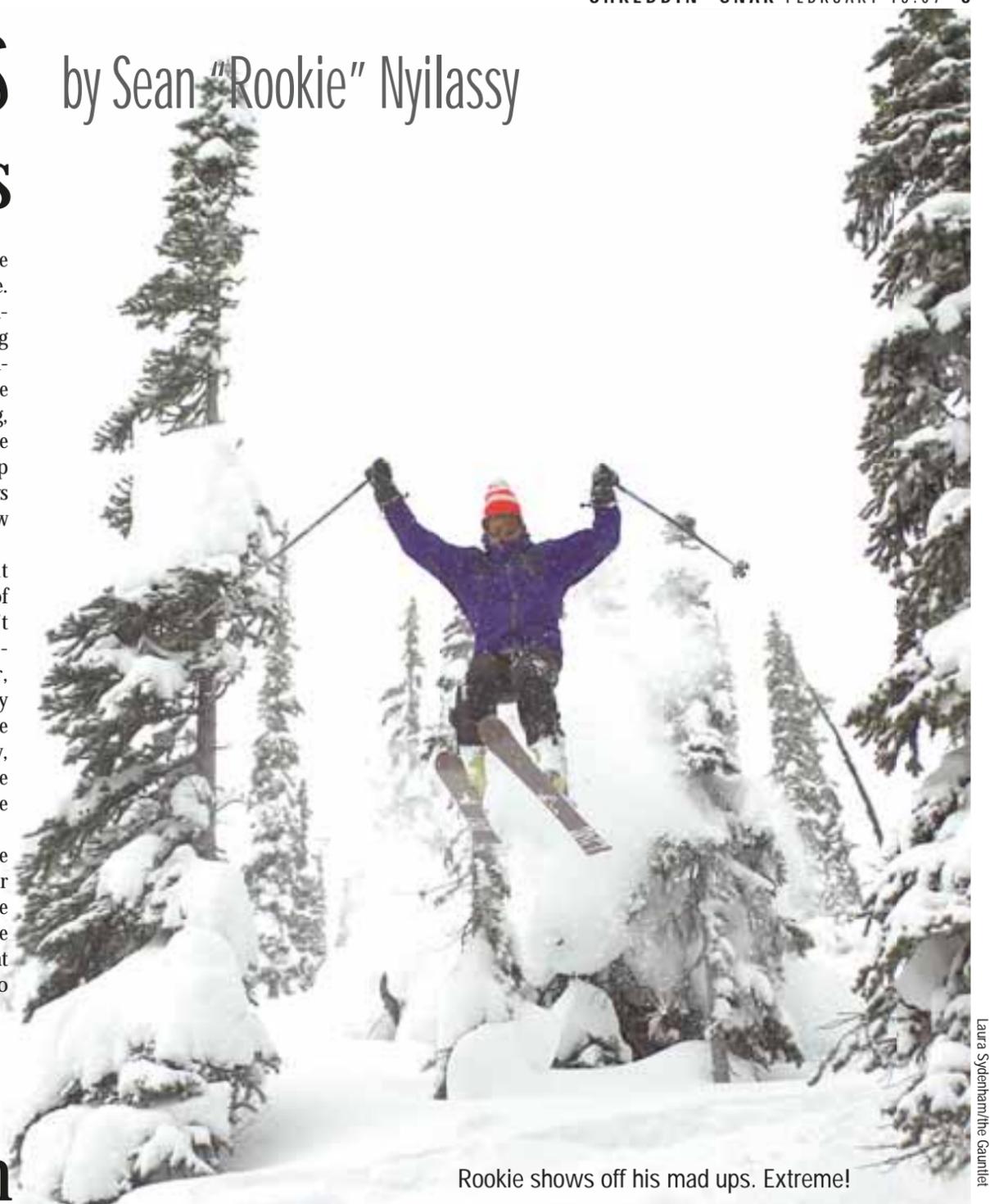
The patrollers were unable to open the Feuz Bowl on our day there, but it apparently has some of the best riding at Kicking Horse. Unfortunately it is often the last area to open following a snowstorm and

is often not ready until the day after the snow stops falling.

Kicking Horse's high-capacity gondola also spits patrons out at the top quickly enough for the mountain to get skied-out rapidly after a storm. Fortunately, there are some of the best backcountry hikes those with the appropriate gear and awareness.

While our day of incredible powder at Kicking Horse was probably better than the average day there, the terrain it has to offer would be a pleasure to ride any day.

Despite the extra driving time, Kicking Horse is worth a visit for a few days. If you can't find something stupid to try there, you definitely have your eyes closed.



Rookie shows off his mad ups. Extreme!

Laura Sydenham/the Gauntlet

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| • Alpine Touring Skis   | Introductory Ice Climbing Feb 25 \$125     |
| • Avalanche Safety Gear | Weekend Bike Repair Clinic Feb 17 \$149    |
| • Snowboards            | Kananaskis Lake Snowshoe Hike Feb 18 \$52  |
| • Snowshoes             | Beginner XC Ski Lesson Feb 24 \$50         |
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Laura Sydenham/the Gauntlet

He's faster than time!

## Record breaking snow season

### LAKE LOUISE

Lake Louise, A.B.  
day pass: \$69

Like most of the Rockies, Lake Louise did very well for snow in November and early December, making conditions for our Dec. 14 visit ideal. There was enough snow to cover the sharks often lurking beneath the surface at Louise and fresh snow in the days before our trip ensured we had a fresh canvas to paint on. The sun was even shining brightly when we arrived—a rare occurrence at Louise.

We headed straight for the backside, where snow is typically best, and were able to get some great runs in before needing warmth and nourishment. Luckily, we got the craziest lines out of the way in the morning

because the clouds moved in for the afternoon, and the flat light forced us into the trees.

The tree-skiing at Louise lived up to our standards and we managed to continue enjoying ourselves without the morning sunlight. We even ventured over to the unpatrolled West Bowl for our last run, where fresh tracks can be found long after the rest of the mountain has been pounded by the crowds. After our satisfying day of shredding the gnar, we headed to the comfortable but crowded bar for an expensive pint.

Louise's selling feature would have to be the backside terrain. Three lifts, the Top of the World, Summit Platter and Paradise, access one of North America's largest open bowls and provide guests with almost endless possibilities when weather permits. The backside offers enough green runs for beginners to get a taste of the open bowl atmosphere while keeping advanced riders busy for

ages with steep chutes and cliffs, as well as open areas to cruise in.

However, cloud cover and fog often make riding the backside a guessing game. Flat light makes it near impossible to tell whether you are going up, down or upside-down. When this is the case, the Ptarmigan area has some excellent tree-skiing where visibility will be infinitely improved. There are also some treed areas on the frontside, although snow quality and quantity isn't as good as on the back.

If chutes, trees and bowls are more than you can chew, the Larch Chair offers some nice cruising groomers and the always-amusing Rock Garden. There are also plenty of cruisers near the base on the frontside as well as an impressive terrain park. Rails and jumps range from introductory to 'don't-look-down,' and the park is well-maintained right through spring for those days when search-

ing for powder isn't worthwhile.

Despite receiving light, fluffy powder for most of the season, Louise can get tracked out quickly on busy days. But if you're willing to work for your turns by riding way over in Brown Shirts or the West Bowl, you'll find some snow to call your own. And although steadily increasing lift ticket prices put a day-pass out of many students' reach, those smart enough to buy the Louise card enjoy discounts at Fernie, Nakiska and Kimberly as well.

Louise is a well-rounded mountain, with something for everyone and enough something to keep anyone amused for years. Although its popularity can make it busy at times, the staff keep it running like the world-class resort people expect. So if you get the chance, go there, but bring someone who knows their way around because it's too much to explore in a day.

## Better than staying at home, barely

### CO P

Calgary, A.B.  
day pass: \$34

Are you *board* of Calgary? Do you wonder what the hell there is to do in this stupid city? Perhaps you're overlooking Canada Olympic Park. We made it out there for an evening of skiing on Dec. 11, and by evening of skiing, I mean an evening of abusing our bodies in their terrain park.

Having exited Calgary on Highway 1 on numerous occasions, staring from the road as the gigantic half-pipe swallows riders like a Venus fly trap swallows flies, we were eager to give it a try. We reached the 'peak' of COP to find that, along

with the mandatory helmet rule introduced a couple of years ago, riders must now sign a waiver to enter the park. While some whiney underage high school kids won't like the idea because their guardian is long gone, one ride through the park's large features explains the waiver's rationale.

After jotting down our John Hancocks, we got the blood flowing in our legs on the small features at the top of the park on our way to the excessively large pipe. It looked larger in person than from the highway, but it was too late to turn back now. Riding up the 22-foot wall makes you question your sanity, but getting above the deck is accomplishment enough to instill a sense of victory.

After a few feeble attempts we

decided to focus our energy on one-hits and hiked the bottom of the pipe for the remainder of the evening. We would have liked to try the large kickers beside the pipe, but a couple of hours of bones connecting with ice as we increased the vert and spins on our hits was enough punishment.

COP managed an impressive Nov. 11 opening day this season and was the only hill I can think of with their park pretty much finalized by early December. The set-up is great, with small kickers and rails on the flatter top section to play or learn on, followed by three choices for the steeper section. There are more challenging rails and medium jumps on one side, the Goliath half-pipe in the middle and large

kickers on the other side.

While the park offers features for riders ready for jumps and rails, the rest of COP can be a great place for the first-time rider to learn. There isn't much point in driving for two hours to the mountains just to ride the magic carpet when COP has one right in Calgary at a fraction of the price.

Another unique feature of COP is that it is a training facility for many other Olympic sports like bobsledding and luge. This allows them to offer programs at the discovery level for every sport that is offered to the high performance athlete. So if you aren't up for riding there, you can always take a quick skeleton lesson and terrify yourself down an icy chute.

## Groomin' it up on the groomers

### NAKISKA

Kananaskis, A.B.  
day pass: \$53

The lack of snow at Nakiska's base when we arrived Dec. 12 was not exactly reassuring. Their snowmaking had been working overtime during the cold snap in November, but coverage was still minimal at the base. However, higher up we were happy to find a few runs on the Gold chair open and well-covered.

We began ripping laps on the groomed trails as the sky opened up to release some of the largest snowflakes in one of the densest snowstorms I have ever seen. Being the middle of the week at Nakiska, there were a few race teams training on one run and about three other people on the lifts. Meaning that with each ride up the chairlift, the snow fell fast enough to cover up our tracks. Within a couple of hours, a good seven or eight centimetres were on the ground and we had a powder day.

This is not often the case, as the average annual snowfall is far lower at Nakiska than most other mountain resorts, and the groomers seem to have perfected a technique that turns the slopes into sheets of ice—which remained evident under our fresh pow. However, Nakiska was built for the alpine ski racing events at the 1988 Olympics and still serves as an excellent training facility for athletes from across Canada and around the world.

There are other things Nakiska is good for as well. Beginners looking to get out of Calgary and enjoy the mountains will find plenty of gentle terrain half the distance to Banff but still in a mountain setting. The terrain park, although not ready for our visit, presents some delightfully massive features to scare the pants off even advanced riders, as well as plenty of smaller ones to learn on.

While Nakiska offers none of the alpine bowls and tree-skiing enjoyed further west, it's great to wake up hung-over, check the snow report and go back to bed. Then, a couple of hours later, you can crawl out to your car knowing there's no fresh pow to shred in the mountains and hit Nakiska for a half-day in the park or beginner area. That shorter drive helps increase the amount of sleep you can get after a night of partying.

# Where bunny meets XXXXTREME

## SUNSHINE

b a n f f , A . B .  
d a y p a s s : \$ 7 0

We made our way to Sunshine Village for their opening day, Fri., Nov. 10. That early in the ski season and before most resorts' seasons have even started, it's hard to expect too much. However, above-average snowfall throughout the Rockies in October and November meant Sunshine was able to have most of the terrain on two of their main lifts open.

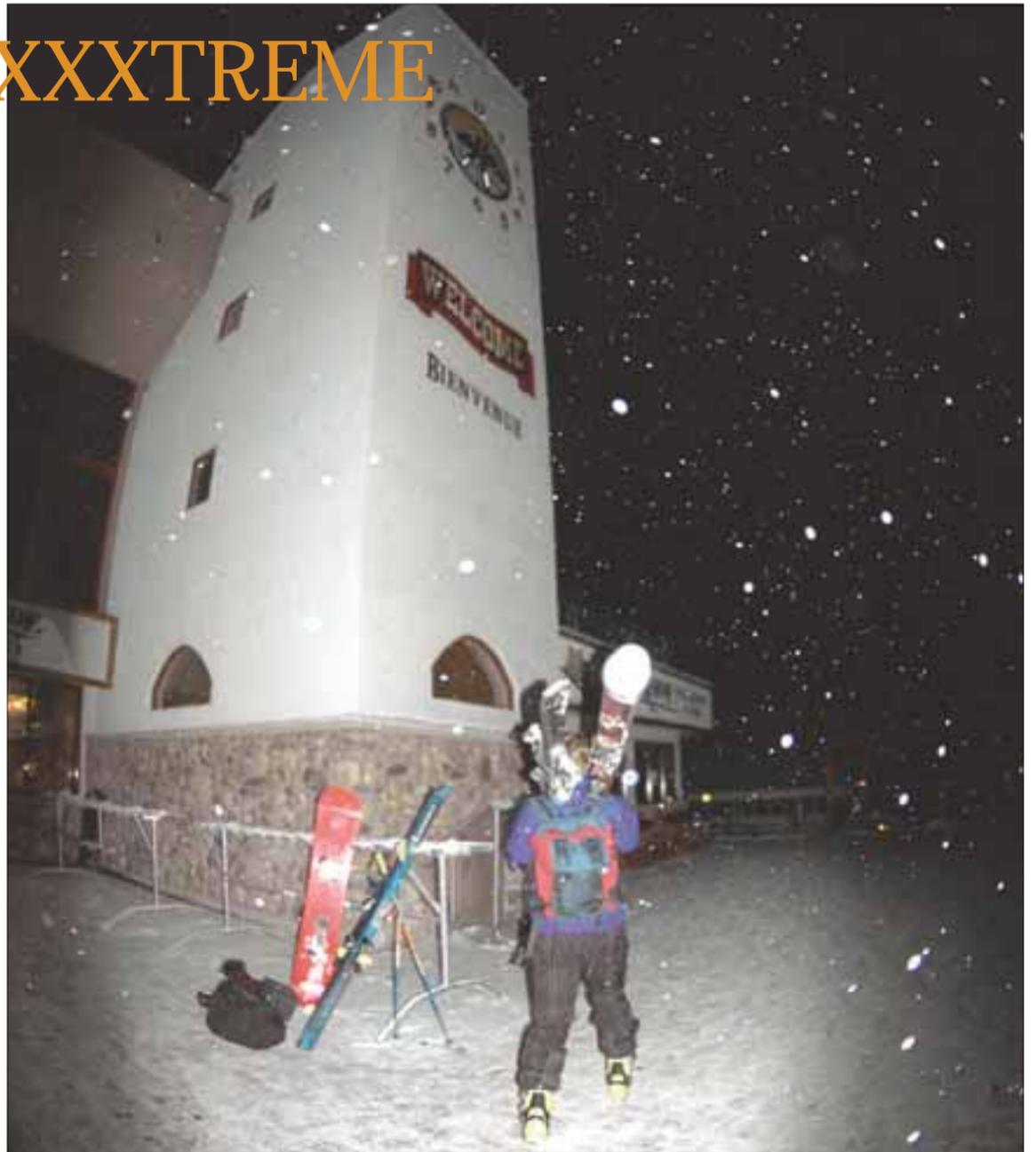
We were able to enjoy some powder turns on Wawa and even found some soft landings below a cliff band on Standish. To our surprise, the ample snow did a pretty good job covering up the jagged rocks you expect at Sunshine in the early season, keeping the damage to our bases at a minimum. After a solid day we ventured over to Trapper's where a pitcher of beer helped us to relax the muscles we hadn't used since last season.

Now that Sunshine's operations are in full swing, you can expect to find terrain for any ability. There are a few easy groomers on Wolverine, Standish and Wawa, as well as

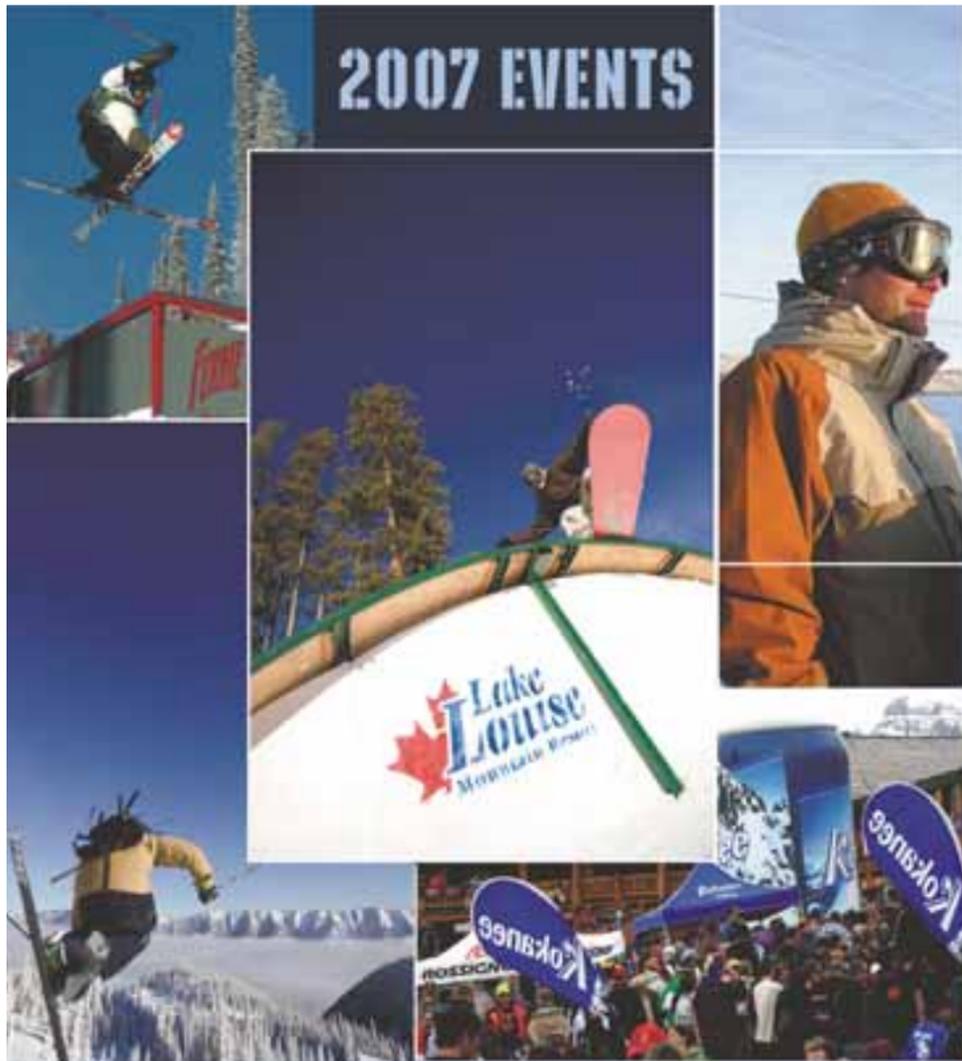
screamers on Goat's Eye, Angel and Continental Divide. There are some treed areas accessible from Goat's Eye, Wawa, Tee Pee and Angel, but most of Sunshine's best terrain is open bowls and steep chutes. And it's hard to forget the extreme terrain like Delirium Dive and Wild West. A lap may take about an hour, but for the steep lines available, it's worth every minute.

Covering all of Sunshine's terrain is the Rockies' champagne powder most people crave. Although the slopes are packed most weekends and the obvious playgrounds get tracked out very quickly, a little bit of exploration on Wawa can usually provide some fresh turns. In the past, searching for fresh turns was the only option long after a snowfall, but a major terrain park overhaul should provide some entertainment on those non-powder days. A sponsorship from Rogers has allowed Sunshine to turn the lullaby they used to call a park into an 11-acre challenge for all abilities.

With the changes in the park and great variety of terrain all over the mountain, Sunshine shouldn't be missed by any avid skier or boarder. Keep your eye on their snow report and jump in whatever beater you can get your hands on the next time they're dumped on.



Dale Miller/the Gauntlet



### 2007 EVENTS

### FOR SKIERS AND SNOWBOARDERS

Lake Louise Big Mountain Challenge  
Junior - February 17 & 18, 2007  
Senior - February 21 - 25, 2007



Lake Louise Slopestyle  
March 3, 2007

lake louise  
**Slopestyle**

Fernie Freeski Competition  
Junior - March 10 & 11, 2007  
Senior - March 14 - 18, 2007



Fernie Big Air  
April 7, 2007

fernie  
**BIG AIR**

Lake Louise Spring Episode  
April 28 & 29, 2007



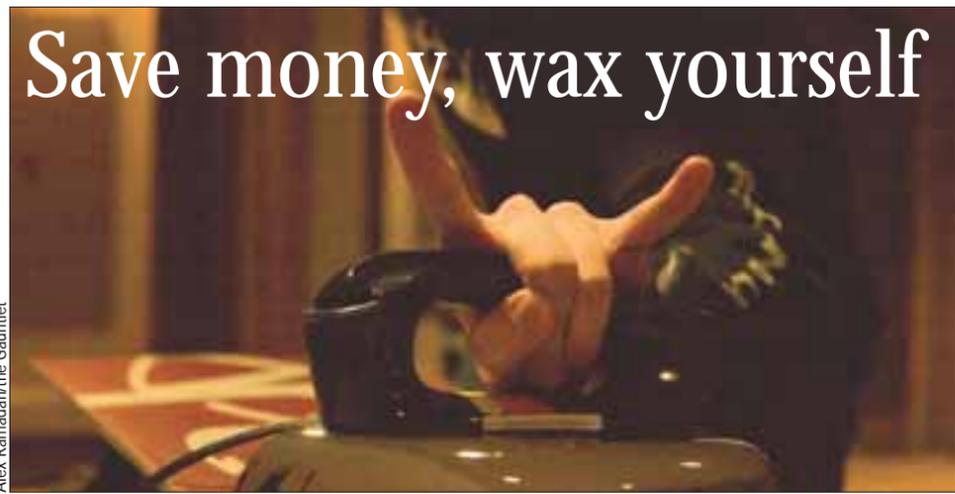
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Alex Ramadan/the Gauntlet

## BOARDWAXING

Andrew Rininsland

The first step is to clear all the crud that's accumulated on your board or skis, as well as any old wax that's still there. This is done by liberally spraying the base with the aptly-named base cleaner (\$8-\$12), waiting 20 or so minutes, then going tip-to-tail with a wax scraper. (See Fig. 1) Do this in a ventilated area (like outside) because toxic fumes are totally weak-sauce. If the base looks like the moon and needs some P-tex lovin', now's the time to do this. Melt a P-tex candle, dripping it into any large gashes. Smaller ones are fine and will probably smooth out during waxing. (See Fig. 2)

Next, pour the wax onto the base by heating up the iron and melting the wax on it. Note that any iron used for waxing will never touch clothes again, so either buy a dedicated

waxing iron or forgo having pressed garments ever again. Get enough to coat the base, but don't go overboard because more wax equals more scraping, which equals a huge mess. (See Fig. 3) Did I mention to do this in a ventilated area like outside?

Once the base looks like a Jackson Pollock painting, take the iron and run it up and down until the wax is evenly distributed. Make sure to use moderate heat so the wax doesn't go up in smoke. Now, wait half an hour.

Rockin'! Okay, now, remember all those warnings earlier about doing this outside? Yeah, this is why. Take the scraper and scrape tip to tail until there's very little wax left. (See Fig. 4) There should be no big flakes coming off. This seems rather pointless, but the idea behind waxing is to fill micropores in the board's surface. Leftover wax will only slow you down.

If you're a perfectionist, take a buffing pad and rub it tip to tail until it's smooth. Killer! You're done!

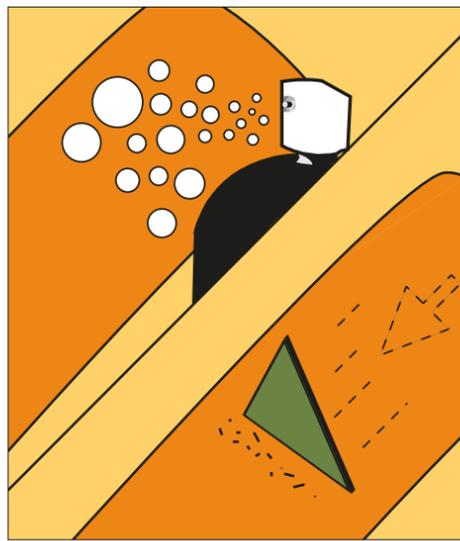


Fig 1. Clean your board.

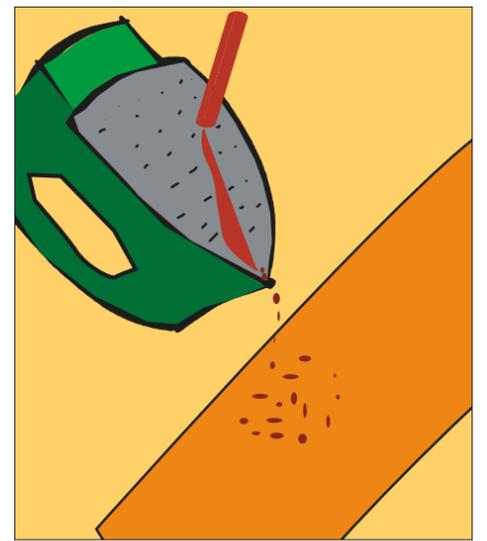


Fig 2. P-tex lovin'.

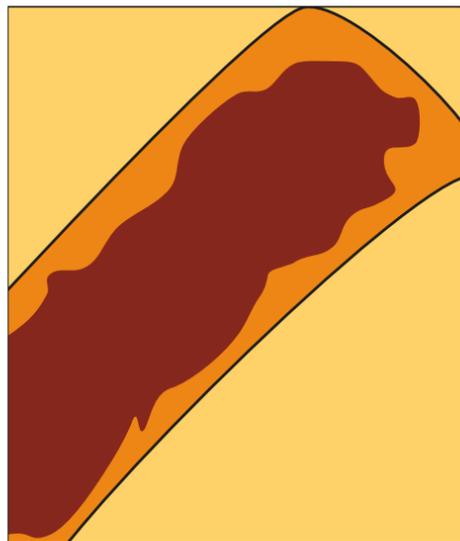


Fig 3. Wax on.

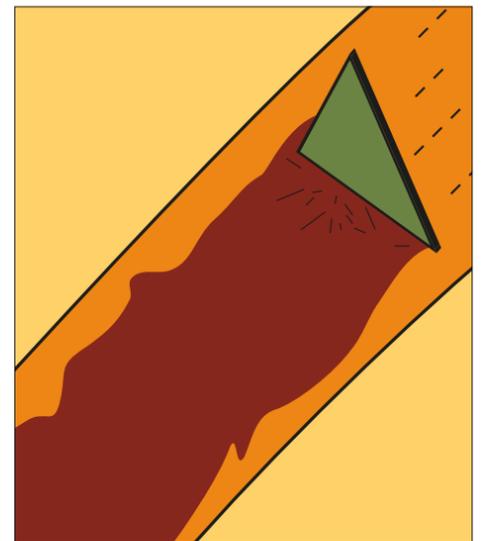


Fig 4. Scrape that mofo down!

Diagrams by Andrew Rininsland

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# Thrifty shredding



Katy Anderson/the Gauntlet

Rookie knows where to find cheap gear. That toque? \$2.

## CHEAP GEAR

Trace Gillespie

Cheap gear sounds like a contradiction—hitting the slopes by nature is expensive. When heading to the hill, most riders are prepared to shell out for gas, wildly expensive food and drink, an overpriced lift ticket, a possible ambulance ride and, of course, something to get you down the hill. It's nice to think of buying skis or a board as a once-in-a-lifetime activity, but with the speed of gear evolution, the top-of-the-line only lasts a season.

In the past there was a thrifty solution; then resort owners banned crazy carpets. But being a city near the hills gives Calgary a wicked gear scene. Those who enjoy loans and creditors taking away their couch—or those who've found that elusive pot of gold—can head right down to one of the city's top retailers, where a brandspankin' new set of good downhill skis, bindings, boots and poles will go for upwards of \$1,000.

For the less financially endowed, there are many used gear options, which allow room for this month's rent.

Generally, a good used score can be found for as low as \$100 for skis and bindings, \$5-10 for poles and \$50 or less for boots. Avoiding the ambulance ride is up to you. Boards are similarly priced, minus the poles of course.

Calgary has a plethora of stores to satisfy the need for speed, but some are easier to access. Used shops can be a goldmine or a bomb as the gear

changes from hour to hour, so thrifty skiers should be prepared for a long hunt for those slick snow sticks.

One big option when looking to get rid of some gear, or to pick up something used, is talking to Dino and his posse at **Outdoor Approach**. They'll let you in on a not so well-hidden secret: consignment. Following exactly the same principle as the books sold in Bound & Copied, sellers negotiate a price and a percentage and when it sells they cash in.

As far as on-campus options go, the University of Calgary's snazzy **Outdoor Centre** has some good used rental sales to keep an eye out for. They're also the only place to rent. Rentals are often less than half what they'd cost on the hill. But get there early, they're busy during the 8 a.m. rush.

Another sweet spot is **Sports Swap**, where flashy associates can bling you out with some used gear starting at about the price of those new sneakers you can't wait to get all salted up.

Heading over to **Abominable Sports** to compare prices is a good idea.

Although expensive, ski towns always have an abundance of rental shops. They also present a chance to preview some gear worth buying and check out end-of-season deals.

A less movement-oriented approach is to hit up some sick deals on **ebay**, though the danger there is not seeing the gear in person before it is purchased. A solution to this can be found on **Craigslist** (calgary.craigslist.org), a classified website where buyers can contact sellers and check out the gear before buying it. The site is local.

Need somewhere to find cheap gear? Check out these awesome websites.

[www.calgaryoutdoorcentre.ca](http://www.calgaryoutdoorcentre.ca)

Click 'used gear' and you'll find, to your surprise, used gear. Local, easy pick-up, and it supports a U of C business.

[calgary.craigslist.org](http://calgary.craigslist.org)

A classified site where you can find a plethora of used things. If you're lucky, you can even find skiing equipment!

[www.ebay.ca](http://www.ebay.ca)

Though no longer home to human femurs—I was just about to complete my collection too—the world's largest garage sale is home to skiing equipment.

[www.abominablesports.com](http://www.abominablesports.com)

The shop is local and right across from COP. You can buy your gear and get right on skiing down the slopes of what's left of Calgary's Olympic pride.

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# 'Ain't nothin' sweeter than untouched snow

Trace Gillespie

Imagine carving in silence. No lifts, no crowds, no resorts, no ski patrol. Nothing but you, a mountain and hopefully a buddy.

Backcountry is the name of the game—for those who can handle it. The backcountry houses unlimited runs filled with endless powder and some extremely dangerous carving potential. But no one is born with enough backcountry knowledge to live out a day avalanche free. Experience and keen judgement are essential.

It's not as far away as it sounds, and the reasons for avoiding the hills are obvious.

"[There are] too many people and the slopes aren't big enough," says Outdoor Club executive and ski junkie Jeremie Bourqui. "Learn, experiment and experience."

Getting to the backcountry isn't impossible either, but there are a few key lessons everyone should know.

The number one rule for backcountry wannabes is to go with someone who knows what they're doing.

"Know what to do in an emergency situation before setting



Laura Sydenham/the Gauntlet

An xtreme bunny hopping in a treed area.

out, [in case] anything happens," said Bourqui. "Always check equipment before leaving."

Before heading to the backcountry you need to know what to do if you're caught in an avalanche, but also avoidance and how to find your buddy.

"The chances of survival drop significantly after [being buried for] 15 minutes, with the critical

phase between 15 and 45 minutes," said Bourqui. "Rescue teams can take hours, or even days to arrive. Time is life."

With a minimal amount of rescue time, it is essential to take action quickly and effectively. All backcountry skiers should have a shovel, probe and beacon, said Bourqui.

"Never leave the parking lot with-

out [them]," said Bourqui.

According to the American Avalanche Association there are over 30 avalanche deaths each year in North America. The risks can be daunting, but don't let numbers stop the search for the perfect run.

"With a 30 cm base and snow, without coercion I'll go anywhere," said Bourqui. "The Lake Louise region is the best in the area, and

Kananaskis is good too. Rogers Pass has some good options, even if the warning is high."

The best way to get more information is to take an avalanche course either with the Outdoor Centre or another credible organization.

For weather readings check out [www.weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca](http://www.weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca) or [www.avalanche.ca](http://www.avalanche.ca).

## Heli-skiing is expensive, but hella-cool

Kendra Perry

Being 100 miles from civilization, with 9,000 vertical feet of terrain and three and a half feet of feathery powder doesn't have to be a dream. If you have mad skills and a wad of cash in your wallet, you could turn this fantasy into a reality.

Heli-skiing is downhill skiing or snowboarding in areas reached by helicopter rather than chair lifts. Riders pile into a helicopter and are dropped on top of a mountain. The helicopter returns to pick the riders up at the bottom. Heli-skiing allows riders to access extreme terrain otherwise unavailable for riding. But before diving in head first, there are a few things you need to know.

Trips often take place in open snowfields, glaciers and trees. There are a wide range of areas that a skier can choose to go but first-timers are limited in their choices. Everyone dreams of powder, but unfortunately the weather does not always co-operate.

"Seventy per cent of the time, conditions are going to be unbelievable," said former heli-ski guide Ted Foley. "The other 30 per cent of the time, they are going to be a lot less than sweet."

In marginal conditions, skiers may be limited to trees only. It really comes down to luck.

Heli-skiing is not for everyone. Riders need to be confident and consistent before deciding to head into the unknown. If you just graduated from the rope tow and think you're going to go shred the gnar on some crazy mountain peak, think again. Foley insists that you be at

least an intermediate skier to participate on an expedition.

"You need to have skied actively for many years and be comfortable and in control on all types of terrain," says Foley.

There is no advantage in exaggerating your experience. If you get into the backcountry and try to pull out your best snow-plow or can't keep up with the group, you're out of luck. Heli-ski organizations reserve the right to pull you off the trip and send you home. To avoid an embarrassing—or worse, dangerous—experience, don't lie about your skills.

On top of not being for the average Joe, heli-skiing is also expensive. A two-day trip can put a \$2,500 dent in your wallet. A seven-day excursion can cost as much as nine grand. Unless you have this kind of cash just sitting around, it's probably time to start saving your pennies.

There are also many dangers associated with heli-skiing. The most obvious is avalanches, but helicopter accidents can also be an issue. Heli-ski organizations make safety their top priority, but anything can happen when you stick it to mother nature. Skiers are required to carry transceivers, probes and a shovel on them at all times in case of an emergency situation. Knowing how to use these fancy devices is also an asset.

Some might say the risks and high costs aren't worth the fresh lines, but Foley thinks there's nothing better.

"There is no greater high than ripping turns through deep untracked powder," says Foley.



Katy Anderson/the Gauntlet

Pillow tops like this don't come for free.

"If you can scrape some cash together, then go for it. It's definitely worth it."

If heli-skiing sounds like the sport for you, there are many different companies that operate trips throughout Alberta and B.C. Foley

recommends Canadian Mountain Holidays and Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing. Both companies offer two- to seven-day expeditions boasting some of the most experienced guides in the country.