

powda sutra

the guide to
snowy pleasure



photo: Chris Pedersen/the Gauntlet

gauntlet ski and snowboard supplement 2008

EVENTS⁰⁸

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'08 Ski hill reviews

This ski season, the *Gauntlet* undertook the project of bringing you the lowdown on all the maddest powder we could find. We spent our winter break skiing every mountain we could get to and then writing about it. We based our reviews on snow conditions, type and variation of terrain and overall experience.



Katy Anderson/the Gauntlet

Scenic, snowy and a short drive away

LAKELOUISE

Lake Louise, AB
day pass: \$72

Gina Loitz and Katy Anderson

Lake Louise is world-renowned for both its beautiful scenery—including the emerald-coloured glacial lake that lies behind the massive Chateau Lake Louise—and its versatile and plentiful terrain.

The front side offers many well-kempt, groomed runs from green to black, as well as glades. It also features two chairs, a high speed gondola and the Summit Platter.

From three of these lifts you are able to access Louise's back side.

The back side offers what keeps many experienced riders coming back—its infamous bowls. The further to skier's left you traverse, the more bowls you are able to access, giving many riders a thrill with mostly double black runs and the option to drop cliffs. For less experienced riders, there are a few green and blue runs and access to the Larch chair, which serves Louise's far side.

The Larch area is much smaller than the back side, but offers many route choices. From the top of the lift, you can use ski skins or hike up to a double black run appropriately called Elevator Shaft. Whether you choose to hike up or not, you are able to choose from a number of groomed runs, try your luck at the glades or take skier's right to the

Rock Garden where you can access inbound pillow tops.

Louise's thick dry snow and variety of terrain make the resort a favourite for many, but because of its proximity to Calgary, Canmore and Banff and the plethora of riders knowing and exploiting Lake Louise's hot spots, it can mean long lines and ridden-out terrain.

Despite delighting in Resorts of the Canadian Rockies—especially Louise with its terrain and proximity to Calgary—many park riders handed in their once-cherished passes this season. The RCR Superpass entitles the holder to ride Lake Louise, Nakiska, Fernie and Kimberley as many times as desired, as well as offering a booklet full of member benefits, including discounted lift tickets for family and friends on certain slow times

in the season, and other minor guest services. However, a release issued Nov. 8 declared RCR would be removing all man-made jumps at their four Rockies resorts this season.

The decision was met by many angry park riders who conducted a small demonstration during the men's downhill at Louise in late Nov. and subsequently similar refund requests were honoured. The release stated the choice to remove jumps was made to save all guests from injury. Protesters rebutted they were angry the hills removed the option to take the risk.

Meanwhile, the choice to hit a rail—arguably more dangerous than a jump—will not only remain, but be increased with the development of new rail parks already in the works. Many riders have been

enjoying jump features at all four resorts—with the park at Nakiska being for some the only attraction, as the Nordic hill sees very little snow and has heavy grooming—for many years. As such, this decision and others were enough to hand in their Superpasses.

On top of the absence of jumps, many riders are concerned that while prices of tickets at RCR have been increasing, the features and benefits have been decreasing, including membership booklets advantages.

However, despite the change in benefits and absence of the cherished jumps, Lake Louise remains a gem of the Rockies—and just a short drive away.

Located 182 km (about 100 minutes) from Calgary.

Stoked on resort's first day ever

REVELSTOKE

revelstoke, B.C.
day pass: \$56

Gina Loitz

Picture a mountain that has never been shred before. Picture driving up to a brand new resort and seeing one or two tracks underneath the chairlifts, only from ski patrol the day before. Picture fresh lines in absolutely every direction you look. This was the opening day of Revelstoke Mountain Resort—a new mountain boasting the longest vertical descent in North America.

Prior to Sat., Dec. 22, Mount McKenzie had only seen the prosperous heli/cat skiers tearing up its alpine awesomeness. A humble \$42 student pass purchased the day before opening to beat the madness was quickly refunded and put towards a \$560 inaugural season's pass instead. What followed was an incomparable pow day of slashing untouched, light-as-a-feather powder that had boards and riders rejoicing.

Opening day saw many confused patrons and personnel working through the obvious bugs of any first day, especially of that magnitude.

Issues arose like how to get groups of impatient patrons up mountain switchback roads. Parking was as scarce as the soup selection at lunch with all the canteens reading "sorry out of stock," even at a haughty \$6.50 a bowl. The adventure seekers there for this incredible event had to bring their adventurous tastebuds as well as the menu lists mix n' match pasta dishes, bison burgers, sweet potato fries, and pulled pork sandwiches, all for reasonable prices and exceptional quality. A pair from Whistler runs the cafeteria, championed for owning the best restaurant in town called the Great White North.

The great masses got their fill of pow and pomp, departed elsewhere for the remainder of the Christmas week and left the hill opened only to 20 per cent of its projected capacity, up for grabs by local Revelstoke shredders and the people that knew them! The gondola, appropriately labelled The Revelation, the quad chair to the top called The Stoke, and the double chair from the base to the "easy" lower half of the mountain dubbed The Powder Slug, serve an immaculate 27 marked runs of inbounds, epic powder. Not far off the beaten trails are unmarked tree runs that have all-natural terrain in tack, meaning large boulders and logs of either pillow top or top-over-bottom proportions, with the actual top of



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

the mountain warning that there are no green runs at all.

Planning for a full day at Revelstoke involves bringing your already acquired riding legs as a top-to-bottom run took our crew an average of 45 minutes to an hour, hitting the pow at the top and working our way through the trees right back to the base of the gondola. After two runs we were

tapped and were looking to tap a beer at the lodge, for a reasonable resort price of \$5.25 a pint.

This hill is planning to expand on all fronts for years to come, with Whistler compared village drafts and condo lots already being eaten up faster than the powder falling daily.

If your deal is steep n' deep, you'll be stoked to revel in this majestic

new mountain that is going to take the Rockies by storm. Bring your best waterproof gear, extra goggle lenses, a map of the new mountain, whistles, avalanche beacon and shovel. The mountain is so good, it might be a good idea to bring a spare set of underpants, too.

Located 410 km (about 5 hours) from Calgary.

Surfing the white

WHITewater

nelson, B.C.
day pass: \$83

Todd Andre

Most skiers and snowboarders unfamiliar with the Kootenays tend to look at Whitewater Winter Resort as a speed bump on southern B.C.'s powder highway, but a quick stop can prove to be permanent. The little resort gets enough big snow to convince diehards tired of the Rockies' rocks to trade postal codes with nearby Nelson, B.C. With an annual average snowfall of 1,250 centimetres per year, sick terrain and the best resort food in North America, Whitewater should be included on any ski trip through interior B.C.

When we arrived at the resort Jan. 10, we were expecting six centimetres of overnight fresh waiting for us on top, but what we got was 20 centimetres of the lightest, fluffiest snow ever to stick to the side of a mountain. The snow gods had dumped an additional 15 centimetres of snow in the four hours since the snow report was published at 5 a.m. that day.

We started the day riding the fluffy stuff down greens and blues



Ryan Shelly/the Gauntlet

off of the Silver King chair, which is probably the best spot for riders who like to minimize risks when they ride. For the remainder of the day we stuck to the soft steeps and open trees surrounding the Summit Chair on the opposite side of the resort.

For advanced riders, the Summit side has everything you could want right off the lift or just a short traverse away. There are adrenaline pumping cliffs with steep and deep landings; open bowls covered in snow coated

lips and kickers; and tree runs that trap in waist-deep powder.

Anyone equipped with avalanche gear can traverse out of bounds past the Diamond Glades and ski through some sweet trees to the resort access road. The backside backcountry is skied here so often that anyone driving up the access road to the base lodge in the late morning or afternoon will be assaulted by backside skiers trying to hitch a ride to the chairlift. If you do go back there though, bring all of the necessary

gear: a transceiver, a shovel, a probe, a friend and a brain. The backside powder is so deep that lone skiers have been killed after getting buried in tree wells.

After all those powder turns we stopped for lunch in Whitewater's rustic lodge. Whitewater's organically grown gourmet menu and affordable prices put every other resort in Canada to shame. We had a choice between various curry style bowls, massive, mouthwatering burgers and a wide variety of

wraps and sandwiches. The food is so good that the author of the menu, co-owner Shelley Adams, swore her chefs to secrecy to protect the sanctity of her ingredients. The secrets have now been revealed in a cookbook that can be bought at Whitewater's downstairs gear shop, or you could ask Adams herself, as she is often working the line during lunch hours.

There is an ambience at Whitewater that can not be duplicated at any of B.C. or Alberta's mega resorts. Size does not make up for the intimate service guests receive at a quaint resort like Whitewater. Everyone who works in the lodge and on the lifts is smiling and helpful, but, more than that; there is an air of authenticity that can only be present at a loved local ski resort. Or maybe it is just a knowing pity due to the knowledge that they can stay for the next pummeling of powder while we have to drive back to Alberta's arid conditions.

If you have never heard of Whitewater, start listening. It is not the next super resort like Revelstoke, and hopefully it never will be. Go for its local charm, fantastic food, empty lift lines and sick slopes. Or don't go and leave all the fluffy stuff to us.

Located 624 km (about 7 hours) from Calgary.



Paul Baker/the Gauntlet

Too extreme for your Grandma

RED RESORT

rossland, B.C.
day pass: \$58

Paul Baker

Deep in the south of British Columbia, there resides a tiny, undiscovered jewel that is Red Mountain Ski Resort. The small resort boasts only four lifts and two small mountains, but plenty of fresh snow and stellar terrain will satisfy any discerning rider or skier. Red is an unfortunate eight-hour drive away from Calgary and is therefore not a locale for day-trippers or those adverse to long road trips.

Those who do make the trek will find a rewarding skiing experience uncluttered by the crowds of the more popular resorts.

Our Red adventure took place on New Year's Day 2008. We were staying with some friends who were living in Rossland, the small town only five minutes from the resort. As expected by anyone who has ever tried to drink on par with a group of Yellowknifers on New Year's Eve, we were all fairly hung-over the next morning. Despite our diminished state, we managed to get up before nine o'clock and cram our group of seven—plus gear—into a Volvo station wagon for the short drive to the resort.

There were hardly any lines for

the lifts and the runs were almost entirely empty of other skiers and boarders. We initially chalked this up to the fact it was a holiday, but our local friends informed us that this is usual and that both crowds and lines are very rare. We took advantage of this and explored as much of the mountain as possible in the one day we had. We managed to ride much of the resort's two mountains, Red Mountain and the larger Granite Mountain.

We spent most of the day on Granite Mountain. Serviced by three lifts, this mountain boasts some excellent and varied terrain. Granite is home to chutes, moguls, untouched powder and the few green runs found at the resort. The pres-

ence of the Paradise Triple Chair on the back of the mountain and green runs circling the mountains allow visitors to enjoy all 360 degrees of the mountain. There are a few green runs running from the summit, but the mountain is largely covered in runs only suitable for more advanced skiers and riders who can handle steep and treed terrain.

The smaller Red Mountain, which was originally the only mountain the resort covered, does not contain a single green run. There are a few groomed blue runs to get down safely, but the mountain is mostly home to double-black runs characterized by steep slopes, dense trees, and sizeable moguls. The resort is most fully enjoyed by experienced

skiers and riders, as it is estimated only 15 per cent of its terrain is suitable for beginners, with 45 per cent being classified as advanced or expert terrain.

For those looking for challenging skiing and riding, Red is certainly a resort worth considering. Because of its distance from Calgary and other major cities, Red has a lack of crowds and many areas of fresh snow as a result. If you can suffer through the long drive, you will be well rewarded with an enjoyable skiing experience. The cool mountain air is also an excellent cure for a hangover.

Located 631 km (about 8 hours) from Calgary.

A hill so big it has two weather systems

KICKINGHORSE

golden, B.C.
day pass: \$46

Ben Callaway

It was opening weekend and the hill had already been blessed with 267 centimetres of snowfall. Rolling into Golden the night before could have been the smartest decision any of us had made in a long time. The atmosphere in the local pub was ecstatic, with talk of how much untouched powder there was and how crazy the chutes on CPR ridge were going to be. I had never been to the hill, but I already knew it was going to be an amazing adventure.

The hill opened at nine o'clock, but with the buzz going around the night before, we knew that we had to show up early. Arriving an hour early, there were already lines for both tickets and the gondola. Once my crew and I had tickets, we were about the 100th people in line for what felt like the longest gondola ride I had ever taken. One perk about this gondola was that it takes you to the top of the mountain without having to traverse or take another chair to reach the top, the case at many other hills.

Standing at the top of the mountain looking down was a sight I had never seen before. The cloud line was sitting at about the halfway



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

mark on the hill with nothing but endless powder and the sun shining in our faces.

First run: CPR ridge. This run is for the more experienced riders and especially with waist-deep powder, and the untouched lines that come with opening day. It was the experience of a lifetime. There were endless chutes that would challenge the best of the best. Unfortunately, the Feuz bowl had been deemed unsafe

that day so we were unable to ride Redemption Ridge—supposedly even gnarlier than CPR.

The halfway mark on the hill is where most of Kicking Horse's intermediate to beginner runs are. If this is what you're looking for, you don't have to take the lift to the top. There are two chairs that service these runs without the thrill. With plenty of trees to duck into, there was no lack of excitement on these

runs. They were well groomed and taken care of.

For all its glories, Kicking Horse's biggest drawback is its tendency to rain. The hill is so large, it's known for its two weather systems—the lower part identified by the icy conditions rain can produce. That said, it almost never affects the top half, meaning those in search of powder will find what they're looking for.

Even though it was opening

weekend, this hill is an amazing time whenever you choose to go. With a great little sushi place at the bottom of the hill and good times to be had at the Golden pubs, you won't be disappointed. The mountain offers runs for all experience levels from beginners to the most experienced riders.

Located 265 km (about 3 hours) from Calgary.

Dry snow you can eat out of a bowl

FERNIE

f e r n i e , B . C .
d a y p a s s : \$ 7 2

Katy Anderson

Fernie's famed snow is near flawless. The only problem is it's just too far to get to as often as you'd like. Fernie is three hours from Calgary, so not likely a daytrip unless you like exhaustion and unsafe driving as much as you like skiing.

If you have a spare couple days, however, the trip is well worth it for its five powder bowls, expansive terrain and long vertical. Finding a friend to drive out with is a good idea—for gas money and company if you drive, or transportation if you don't. If you can't find a buddy, try posting an ad on Craigslist.com or at worst, a Greyhound ticket is \$100 and about five to six hours each way.

For those who prefer the small mountain atmosphere of some of the other inner B.C. resorts, you aren't going to find it here. However, the resort's popularity also means there is a lot of accommodation in the town, including two hostels—Hostel International's Raging Elk and Samesun's Powder Mountain, with dorm room rates starting at \$25 a night and shuttle service straight to the mountain.

When at the mountain, if it's excitement you're looking for, take the Timber Bowl Express Quad and head to skier's right and take a short hike for some tight glades and great powder. Double black thrills can also be had by going to White Pass Quad into Currie Bowl and traversing along the ridge to skier's left until you are on the ridge where you can head into Lizard Bowl via High Saddle or Lone Fir.

If you're looking for powder, as always, the higher you go, the more you'll find. Take a couple laps off of the White Pass Quad or



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

head to the Lizard Bowl and take Face Lift up. The more lifts it takes you to get there, the less people will make the trip, which means the more power for you to tear into.

Park Riders will be disappointed as the decision was made to take all man-made jumps out of all the parks at the RCR resorts. However, because of Fernie's bountiful snow, it doesn't take too long to find some natural kickers to soar off of.

Although Fernie is known for being steep and deep, there are still some smoother runs for beginners to gain confidence on. Little dudes and first-timers can start on the Mini Moose conveyor belt and from there, the Mighty Moose platter. If, after a couple warm up runs, things are going well, a newly-developed rabbit can head to the Deer chair which is still in the

marked learning area. The Elk chair is steeper than the Deer chair but also offers a choice of green runs and will take a rider straight to the bottom, which often keeps confidence high.

Cedar Bowl and Lizard Bowl offer many blue runs, meaning you have access to awesome snow with having to ride too far out of your comfort zone. Fernie also offers free mountain tours twice a day, at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

When the *Gauntlet* headed up Fernie to do our reviews we were rewarded with thick snow and fresh lines. However, when heading down White Pass Quad towards to the bottom of Currie Bowl—the top had been closed due to poor conditions—we were stopped by a ski patroller who confiscated one of our passes, stating that we had blatantly cut through an avalanche zone. Shocked, we stopped to see

where we had made our mistake and watch the patroller to see if he nabbed anyone else. Sure enough, within ten minutes he had cut just as many tickets.

This led us to believe the danger zone was not marked well enough. Granted, there were numerous warning signs, but they looked to be in the middle of a run and had tracks on either side. Visibility issues also arose with the spaced out signs. By the end of the day they had tied brightly coloured rope between the signs, which was a definite improvement, but the incident unfortunately cut many riders' days short. It's a good idea to pay particular attention to avalanche areas on the hill.

Located 293 km (about 3 hours 30 min) from Calgary.

Hittin' up one craaazy halfpipe

COP

c a l g a r y , A B
d a y p a s s : \$ 3 8

Chris Pedersen

If humans were never meant to fly, the halfpipe would never have been invented. Neither would the largest halfpipe in North America, located right within the city limits at Canada Olympic Park. An oasis within a desert of cement, the ski hill and the terrain park are ideal places for skiers to practice and perfect technique without a long drive.

The hill features two quad chairlifts and two wide open runs on the hill, one under each lift. There is also a bunny hill for beginners and young kids. However, the runs are over before you can blink an eye, and the hill tends to be icy. Although COP doesn't compare to a mountain experience, it's the place to practice and technique can be honed to perfection on these slopes. There are no long runs, deep powder or mountain scenery. Its benefits are that it's close, offers an outdoor setting that can provide exercise for several hours,

and an excellent hill for beginners or those looking to practice technique on ice. A lift ticket will cost you only \$38 and the drive is short. COP also offers a world class terrain park.

The terrain park is nestled between the bobsled track and the main ski hill. COP requires all users to wear a helmet to promote safety. Failure to follow this rule will result in expulsion from the park and the hill. The terrain park begins with a series of medium and small jumps. Two tabletops, several rails and a gap jump also dominate the upper park area. The middle of the terrain park is divided into three sections. To skier's right are a series of small jumps for beginner riders. To skier's left are a series of medium-sized jumps designed for the more advanced trickster. The jumps on skier's left lead into a series of larger rails, designed for advanced riders. Both the halfpipe and skier's right funnel into some smaller jumps and some large walls. There are over 20 features in the terrain park for skiers and snowboards to learn tricks and get monster air. The jewel of the park features the 22-foot wide halfpipe. The sheer size of the pipe can scare a person to the point of dyeing one's long johns a distinct

shade of brown. Riding the pipe is exhilarating and definitely can test one's skills tremendously, however it can be dangerous and should only be ridden by experienced skiers and boarders.

It is a marvel of human engineering that snow can be shaped into such a design.

"The halfpipe requires 10 days of snowmaking before it can be shaped," said COP communications director Susan Hall.

The park takes another five to seven days to shape before it can be skied.

Calgarians should be proud of this pipe as it is world class. It takes a lot of work to create the terrain park and COP has done a great job in creating a park of its magnitude for riders of all abilities. For the skier or snowboarder that does not want to travel the long distance to the mountains, COP and its terrain park offer a convenient alternative. It offers challenges to more experienced riders but also has appeal to mid-level park riders with smaller jumps. For the beginner, there is a small terrain park connected to the bunny hill. This mini-park contains small jumps and a miniature halfpipe to hone one's



Chris Pedersen/the Gauntlet

skills at a more fundamental level. You could cross the valley to Springbank for flying lessons, but COP offers them for a fraction of the price

and without the need of a mechanic.

Located on 16th Ave NW, just west of Sarcee Tr.

The sun shines on these runs

SUNSHINE

banff, A B
day pass: \$78.40

Katy Anderson

Like a run down Continental Divide that leads you into B.C. and then back again, Sunshine offers the best of both worlds. There's a lot of space for bunnies to learn and a place for experts to graduate to freeriding.

It's also close, offers a season from Nov. to May, 12 lifts and boasts some of the heaviest snowfall in the Rockies. However, with its proximity to Calgary and Banff comes its downfall: long lines, overuse and steep prices.

To get to the ski village and lifts, there is a gondola at the bottom. There is a big wait at the bottom, but there is less concern about checking your ticket at the top, which speeds up lines. It's a long ride down at the end of the day, which can make for an extra half hour of skiing after you catch your last lift. When headed down, there is one main way for beginners, although it's often icy. There are, however, more challenging ways to get down that are less skied out—and with fewer pylons.

Instead of hitting Banff Ave. from the bottom of Goat's Eye, heading down Wolverine take the exit at the bottom of the lift.

Sunshine offers a lot of terrain for beginners and a deep base, providing more snow to cushion your fall. There are two magic carpets to start on and, once you've graduated from those, the Strawberry chair has some shallow green runs. When you feel comfortable and are looking for more of a challenge, head over to Wolverine for some longer green runs or Jack Rabbit for some steeper, albeit short green runs.

For those looking for powder, you can find it off WaWa ridge or head to skier's left and keep an eye out for a gate on your left hand side leading you into some delicious powder and some natural kickers. Depending on the conditions, you can sometimes find powder off of Goat's Eye—Goatchicken Glade is always a good bet. But beware: though Goat's Eye can be a lot of double-black fun, heavy winds can lead to scarce snow on the mountain and you may have to head in for a wax job when the day's done.

Sunshine's best feature is arguably the off-piste skiing in Delirium Dive. It's a taste of the backcountry, with the security of knowing you are in a resort-controlled area. This is a great

place for those looking to learn how to navigate freeride terrain. Be prepared to have an avalanche beacon, a shovel and a partner as these are required in order to gain access. Knowledge of how to navigate steep avalanche-prone terrain is also recommended. When headed into this beast, there is a band of cliffs, but for those too terrified to take the dive, you can bypass the cliffs via a set of stairs. The Sunshine ski school offers full- and half-day trips that include a guide and the equipment you'll need—however, this area is for experts only. You should be comfortable riding down black diamond runs before you attempt it. To test your readiness, try Goat's Eye's Wildside or Farside.

Jumps in resorts have created contentious issues this season. It's said that when you give a child space to screw up, they may have some mishaps, but in the end they will come back to your loving arms. This is the approach Sunshine has taken with their beloved park riders. Unlike the Resorts of the Canadian Rockies mountains, Sunshine has made the decision to keep both their jumps and their halfpipe. To hit the many features the terrain park has to offer, take Continental Express.

Another interesting feature available is the SlopeTracker—a GPS sys-



Geoff MacIntosh/the Gauntlet

tem that tracks the runs you take, your speed and total vertical feet. It costs between \$20–30 depending if you are just visiting for the day, have a Sunshine card or a season's pass. At the end of the day you're rewarded with a map printout of the information.

Like most popular ski resorts, Sunshine is expensive. You're best off bringing your own lunch and, perhaps, beer. However, for those who prefer to kick back while

gaining some liquid courage and needed nutrients, try Trapper's after the main lunch rush has subsided and get a table near the abominable snowman. If you suspect you will need some extra gear, it's a long ride down to the car. Bring it to the top, and either stash it in a nook, a small bag or be prepared to dole out the cash for a locker.

Located 137 km (about 2 hours 15 min) from Calgary.

Day-to-night, Pano offers plenty



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

PANORAMA

invermere, B.C.
day pass: \$67

Geoff MacIntosh

Selecting the right ski hill is always a chore, especially when traveling with skiers and snowboarders of different skill levels. Picking the wrong hill can make those with experience bored to tears or fledgelings slide down runs in terror.

Panorama has done a considerable

job in appealing to all mountain-goers, regardless of skill level or preferred method of getting down the runs. With Taynton Bowl for the powder lovers, the aptly named "Extreme Dream Zone" for the feature seekers and three lifts of primarily green runs for the novices, Panorama has something for everyone.

Starting the day in Panorama is a pleasure. The staff is always friendly and out on the runs bright and early, making sure that everything is in shape for the day. Ice and worn lines are minimal in the mornings,

although it has been known to rain, which causes runs to ice up. Line congestion is focused on the Mile One quad, which unfortunately is the main lift from the lodge, and the line gets longer by early afternoon. Beyond this, lines decrease drastically on all the other lifts with minimal-to-no waiting time. Luckily, there are plenty of runs to choose from without having to return to the lodge.

Located on skier's left, Sun Bowl is reached via the Champagne Express quad, and offers a variety of terrain that feels completely isolated from

the rest of the hill. It is possible to take the intermediate path down the Sun Bowl, but the interesting features of the area are in its black diamond runs.

Panorama's real treasure lies at the top of the mountain, past the Summit quad. After a short-to-medium hike up from the chair, a dedicated expert can find terrain that, until a few years ago, was reserved for heli-skiers alone. Taynton Bowl was originally a heli-ski destination, but has since been opened up to those who venture to the top of Panorama. Hiking times vary, from just a few minutes for the

run B 1st, up to just over half an hour for a leisurely stroll to Never Never Land, the furthest run in Taynton Bowl. The terrain throughout the bowl is excellent, with deep powder all the way across ranging from steep black runs, to even steeper double blacks.

This is where those in search of the best resort terrain in Western Canada should put their attention. What does ultimately detract from the experience, unfortunately, is the seeming endless narrow cat track following Taynton Bowl. This is the Achilles heel of Panorama. The design of the hill means narrow groomed trails are necessary at the ends of the many harder and more interesting runs to reconnect with the lift. This requires dedicated Taynton Bowl skiers to take three chairs up to the top every time.

As the sky gets darker, other hills slowly close down, the tired skiers and snowboarders finish and head into the lodges to relax, or return home after a full day of snow. At Panorama, there is only enough time for a quick bite to eat before it's time to hit the hill again, for some dramatic night skiing. The lights only cover a small portion of the hill, but for those looking to experience something new and get a few last runs or jumps in before the end of the day, the option to night ski simply cannot be beat.

Located 296 km (about 4 hours) from Calgary.

Worst avy start in 30 years

Ten dead by early Jan.—nine in AB and BC

AVY SAFETY

Todd Andre

“Look, it’s not rocket science, I’ll meet you at the other side of the slope,” I said to my ski buddy before diving underneath a Lake Louise out of bounds marker and cutting across the unblemished white slope below.

“What is there to be worried about?” I thought, “I’ve been here a thousand times without ever seeing a slide, it hasn’t snowed for a week, and we’ve got all the avalanche gear just in case I’m wrong.”

Seconds later, the snowy slope below my board disintegrated with a hushed swoosh as I clung to the side of the mountain. While I sat there trying to understand the magnitude of my good fortune and the stupidity of my act, I finally began to see the value of an education in avalanche fact over avalanche mythology.

“The number one myth is that ‘it can’t happen to me,’” said the University of Calgary’s Outdoor Centre resident avalanche expert and ski guide Albert “Albi” Sole. “The people out there could represent the people at the U of C, they are students—and largely young males.”

The Canadian Avalanche Association describes the typical avalanche victim to be a male in his 20s who backcountry skis. The approaching months of Jan., Feb. and Mar. have the unholy reputation of taking 73 per cent of the year’s victims. However, this year’s avalanche season is still young, and 10 skiers have already been killed by backcountry slides, making it the deadliest start to the avalanche season in 30 years.

“Statistically, most fatalities happen in March, and the average in January is usually less than five—probably more like two or three,” said CAA communications director Mary Clayton. “It’s been the most fatalities to this point in the season, but we’re still under the average [for the year]. It’s just that it’s only mid-January and that is the reason for all of the media interest.”

According to the CAA’s website, Canada has averaged 11 avalanche fatalities per year since the 1970’s, but that has increased to 14 per year in the last 10 years. A recent surge in the popularity of extreme sports has added to the traffic into Canada’s backcountry and the average death toll has risen along with it. This year’s 10 tragedies have not yet climbed above either numerical average yet—but we’re not far off.

The body count begun to attract nationwide media attention this week after avalanche deaths at two of Canada’s biggest ski destinations: Whistler Mountain and Big White

Ski Resort. The death of 21-year-old Australian skier Leigh Barnier at Big White resort Monday, Jan. 7 occurred in-bounds, shocking experts across the country. This case illustrates the difficulty even avalanche experts have in predicting what the snow pack will do. Royal Canadian Mounted Police constable Julie Ratee confirmed that no criminal investigations will be held into the death, but she didn’t rule out the possibility of the family pursuing civil action.

The Whistler death of 29-year-old skier Curtis Green was different in that both he and his 21-year-old ski partner Ben Moses were in a permanently closed area of the hill. An avalanche carried both men over a 75 metre cliff killing Green and putting Moses in the hospital with serious, but non-life-threatening injuries. The Whistler RCMP is setting a Canadian precedent by pursuing criminal negligence charges against Moses for the death of Curtis Green.

Snow conditions are often blamed for these needless deaths, but in most cases—including Barnier—the victims themselves could have prevented their fate with a little education.

“Certainly the snow pack is poor in many areas of the province, [and it’s] not just Alberta, but the southern part of British Columbia, especially the Kootenays,” explained Clayton, referring to the weak layer of snow being blamed for most of the fatal slides across Canada. “There is a bad crust that was laid down in December, and that crust is responsible for a number of fatalities. Many of these accidents occurred to people who were unaware and ill equipped. It is a big issue of ours to get the message out to raise awareness.”

The CAA holds Avalanche Awareness days every year in 30 communities across Canada in an attempt to bring avalanche safety into the Canadian consciousness. This year the national event was held at Sunshine Village Jan. 12–13, and featured everything from demonstrations of avalanche safety gear to instructions on how to use public avalanche bulletins. Despite the efforts of the CAA, the message is still not sinking in.

Sole, a ski guide with 28 years of experience in the Canadian Rockies backcountry, said there are still many skiers and snowboarders not getting an avalanche education, yet still entering blatantly dangerous backcountry areas.

“It’s not the problem with the backcountry, it’s the people going there,” said Sole. “We like to blame the world, but it’s basically very risky behaviour. It’s people that underestimate the risk.”

The risk of being caught in an

avalanche is reduced dramatically with training and experience. If you don’t have either of these, Sole advises sticking to the safe areas.

“There are a lot of places to go that are safe from avalanches: skiing inbounds, cross country trails, snowshoeing trails. As soon as you go outside these places, you need training.” Sole warned. “The backcountry is truly wild terrain.”

The Calgary Outdoor Centre’s Introduction to Avalanche Safety runs every weekend until Apr. 4 of this year. The website promises to teach its adventurous pupils how to recognize and avoid avalanche terrain and dangerous conditions, how to minimize risk and how to perform a self-rescue. The \$145 price tag includes books, as well as the rental of a transceiver, a probe and a shovel. A transceiver helps skiers track down their buried comrades, the tent-pole-style probe is used to prod for them and the shovel is a more effective digging tool than a skier’s wet mittens. For more information on this course and others, check their website at calgaryoutdoorcentre.ca.

But it is one thing to go out with the right gear, and entirely another to know how to use it. The difference could determine the life or death of a close friend or family member.

“Most [avalanche victims] suffocate under the snow and about a quarter of the people die from injuries sustained in the avalanche, so if your party is not able to rescue itself, the rescue team will be too late,” said Sole.

Backcountry skiing is all about making the right decisions to ensure all that pricey avalanche gear never gets used.

“I encourage people to go the backcountry, but just get the training first and then make smart decisions,” Sole said. “It’s the smart risk thing. Get the right training and right equipment and there is no reason for it to be very dangerous whatsoever.”

U of C researchers have recently developed a technique that has the potential to make backcountry skiing a little less risky. The Propagation Saw Test, brainchild of leading avalanche researcher and an associate professor in the U of C’s civil



engineering department Dr.

Bruce Jamieson, will allow backcountry skiers to test for ‘propagation propensity,’ which is the likelihood the snow layers will split or crack.

“When a fracture occurs in the snow, a slab element breaks free and a split begins in the snow,” explained CAA avalanche expert Clayton. Clayton went on to explain that propagation is how far or fast the split occurs in the snow.

“Many areas have a rain crust that was buried in early December. This test can help forecasters decide if avalanches are likely to release on the crust,” says Dr. Jamieson.

Dry slab avalanches, the most common type of avalanches associated with recreational activities like skiing, occurs when a skier or snowboarder cuts into the snow and the slice propagates—or cracks—through snow less than one metre deep, causing the snow to slide and build rapidly into an avalanche. This was the type of avalanche that I triggered at Lake Louise a few weeks ago, and its regularity makes it the most deadly type of avalanche. I was lucky I left the area without the aid of a helicopter.

Dr. Jamieson’s research team has uncovered knowledge that could save dozens of trained adventurers once it is incorporated into avalanche safety courses across the country. The technique was demonstrated at last weekend’s Avalanche Awareness event at Sunshine, and the test will become widespread after avalanche forecasting and control teams verify its value.

So, if you want to safely slice up the sweet stuff in the backcountry this season, get yourself educated on avalanche safety before you go out. The avalanche fatality record is not one you want to be known for breaking.

Take Albi Sole’s advice.

“The course is \$145—which is not cheap for students—but it’s a lot cheaper than losing your life,” he said.

Check out the Parks Canada website for avalanche terrain ratings and more information. Before heading out to the backcountry you **MUST** take an avalanche course and have the proper gear.

<http://www.pc.gc.ca>

Another good resource is the Outdoor Centre here on campus—near the Olympic Oval—or, check out their website.

<http://www.calgaryoutdoorcentre.ca>

In search of powder

BACKCOUNTRY

Chris Pedersen

Have you ever skied down a run at a resort and cursed at icy slopes? Ever parked your car and then cursed at resort crowds? Ever walked up to the ticket window after waiting in the long line and cursed at resort prices? If you answered yes to any of these questions, don't worry. There is a solution. Leave the masses and Aussie accents behind, put your wallet away and head into the backcountry of the Canadian Rockies to go powder skiing.

Backcountry skiing involves hiking up a slope or a trail to reach a skiing destination. The overwhelming desire to find a slope where nobody has skied and the powder is deep is the most common goal of backcountry skiers.

The first and most popular form is alpine touring. These skis feature bindings that lift in the rear when you are walking and lock down when you ski the slope. You can use downhill boots in AT bindings, making it ideal for people who come from a downhill skiing background. These bindings do not require a person learn a new technique.

The second form of backcountry skiing is the timeless telemark. This type of skiing uses a binding that does not lock down in the heel, much like a cross-country ski. A person must learn a new technique to ski

down a slope. Telemark is one of the oldest forms of accessing the backcountry. However, telemark skis are not very popular because they require a person to adapt to a new style of skiing.

The third form of backcountry travel is on a split board. This type of travel is for those people that never learned to ski or prefer the feel of a snowboard. It allows snowboarders to access the backcountry where it would normally be impractical. A split board is a snowboard that is cut in two. You ski up the slope or across flat areas, link the two pieces of the board together, then shred the powder on the way down.

However, split boards can be hard to find and harder to afford, leading most boarders to a fourth option. The cheapest way to access backcountry terrain is to strap on a

pair of snowshoes, grab a backpack, tie your board—or skis—to it and do some good-old-fashioned hiking. Once you find a desirable line, strap on your gear and go.

No one method of travel is best, as they all have advantages and disadvantages. It is up to the rider to choose equipment that suits their preferred style of travel and skills. The easiest way to try out the equipment is to rent it from the University of Calgary Outdoor Centre. It costs \$36 to rent AT gear, \$30 to rent telemark gear, \$35 for a splitboard and \$10 for a pair of snowshoes.

After you have rented gear it is time to head out and ski. There are many places in Banff and Kananaskis where powder seekers will be rewarded. In Kananaskis, driving along Spray Lakes road and stopping at one of many marked

trails will lead to find excellent skiing. In Banff, there is plenty of skiing behind Lake Louise and up near Bow Summit. However, these destinations are only scratching the surface of places to find untouched powder. A good guidebook or somebody experienced in the area is recommended to fully explore the powder of the backcountry in safety. The search for fresh powder takes one away from the resort, away from the lines, away from the masses and into the quiet world where the powder is deep. The best part is you can rent the gear and still have money left over for a hamburger and beer after a rewarding day of searching for powder.

Before attempting backcountry skiing, it is very important to know about the avalanche risk. See page 8 for more on avalanche safety.

This ol' lift is bringing me up

KIMBERLEY

kimberley, B.C.
day pass: \$55

Chris Tait

While not plagued by rampant avalanches or blessed with a constant dump of snow like Fernie, Kimberley manages to get some decent pow and provides a healthy mix of beginner, intermediate and expert runs.

At least, that's what we hear. Because its season begins fairly late (mid-December) and most of the hill's features don't open until just before Christmas, we were left with two thirds of the hill—containing most of the more advanced terrain—outside of our experience and thus mostly out of the review.

From the front side experience, the hill offers very good skiing for the beginner to advanced intermediate, with confidence-building airy glades and wide-open groomers. To skier's right, there's some powder

in mild moguls, along with a couple of pretty intense jumps. The jumps are, of course, tucked away in trees and appear to be fairly natural, given RCR's recent war on man-made features.

Though the mountain statistics don't really show it (only 20 per cent of the hill is deemed "beginner"), there are plenty of options for newbies to explore the entire resort, not just the bunny hill. This would appeal most to adult beginners, who are given a chance to join more skilled skiers and riders in enjoying the scenery and diversity of the mountain more than at most resorts.

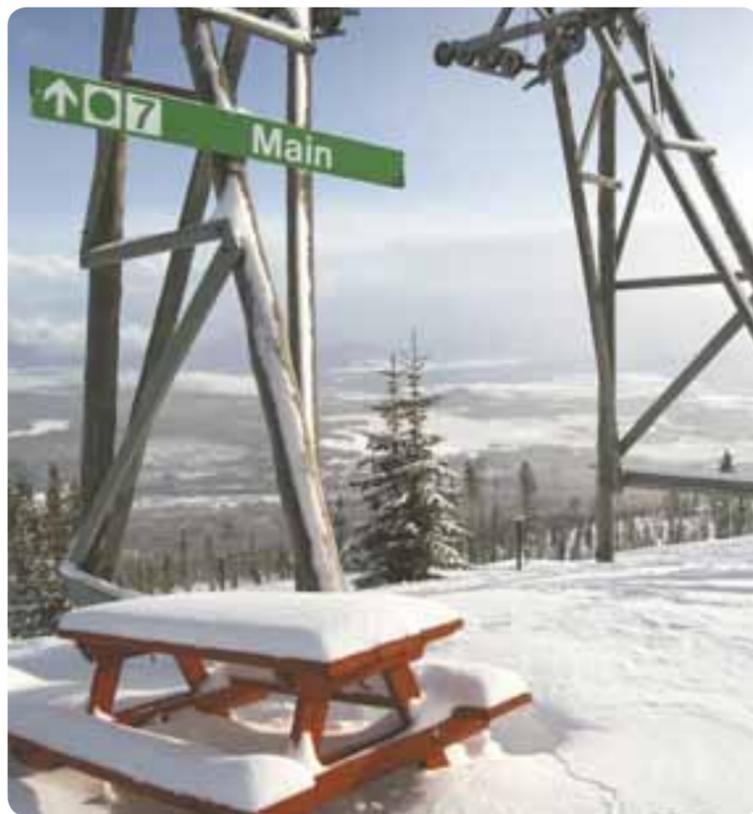
Kimberley's main selling feature is a lack of crowds. Because it's located so far away from major urban centres, the majority of skiers and boarders seem to be either local or staying for extended periods of time, something lowly ski bums travelling on a budget aren't likely to do without sleeping in frozen cars. As a result, there are fewer people on the hill than most resorts, especially early in the season. This becomes apparent when skiing towards the boundaries and not seeing a single

person for more than five minutes. Though this is a rare occurrence, even the middle of some popular runs still had uncut lines at the end of the day.

Another perk of the resort is its rich history, which usually seems to go fairly unnoticed. The Kimberley ski club began in the early 1930s, building their first run on North Star Mountain. Though the original lodge burned down, some historical structures can still be found, including a wooden lift pulley setup and a mid-hill lodge near the top of the North Star Express quad on the front side. Also left, as an ornament from days gone by, is a relatively recent chair lift, rusting and unused for several seasons, scheduled to be removed.

Kimberley resort overlooks the picturesque Columbia River Valley. The valley, far down the slope of the mountain, often has at least partial cloud cover and the sight of skiing above the clouds is pretty spectacular.

With a pretty awesome mixture of runs covering a wide range of



Katy Anderson/the Gauntlet

abilities, Kimberley is sure to be a safe bet for families, large groups and the few who can either afford the lavish on-hill accommoda-

tion or rough icy car-sleeping.

Located 393 km (about 4 hours) from Calgary.

Family friendly and icy, like Disney on ice

NAKISKA

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

Chris Tait

It's easy to overlook the youngest brother in a large family. While he may not have the credit or reputation of his older brothers and sisters, his fine accomplishments may be simply forgotten.

Nakiska—located on Mount Allen in Kananaskis—plays this role well in the Resorts of the Canadian Rockies family, following Lake Louise, Fernie and Kimberley (avoiding the distant cousins in Quebec). After its construction for the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics, where it hosted the alpine ski events, "Canada's Olympic moun-

tain" became a family favourite. Its proximity to Calgary makes it an ideal choice for day trips to resorts bigger than COP and its accessibility to a wide range of skiers lends to kids learning to ski and snowboard in mountain conditions.

Despite its new family-friendly face, Nakiska remains true to its racing roots. Wide, smooth runs with steep, speedy potential adorn the main front section of the hill. While there are a few mogul-speckled runs to skier's right, speed junkies will love rocketing down the open groomed runs in all their giant slalom glory.

However, skiers and riders looking for big air will be disappointed, as RCR has recently decided it will remove all man-made big air features from its resorts. This was reflected in concerted efforts to find photo-



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

genic kickers at Nakiska coming up fairly short (there were less than a handful). The company has said it will continue to have its current features for the rest of the season with regulated access and will run entry-based events in the future.

The resort has four chairs: two quads serving the majority of the mountain, one dedicated to a beginner section of the hill and a fourth to the summit area. Though there was

originally a T-bar to the actual summit, it is usually out of service due to the recurring weather conditions.

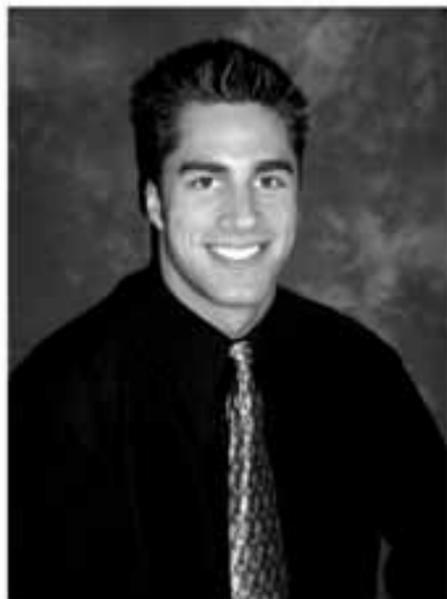
The weather, along with substantial grooming, has a huge impact on the snow quality at Nakiska. Between strong winds sweeping in from the north, to a steady stream of skiers and snowboarders, icy conditions have never been strangers to the mountain. This is usually prevalent in the more open and popular

areas of runs, leaving lines on the sides with light powder or lighter groomed snow for skiers looking to get off the hard pack.

Fortunately, there aren't many times the slough of snowmakers on the hill are left idle and giant snow whales can be found pretty regularly, waiting to be groomed out onto the runs. Most of the runs are groomed to keep any loose powder from blowing or scraping away.

All in all, Nakiska provides a nice range of experience for larger groups or those wanting to learn to ski adverse conditions. Those looking for non-groomed runs won't find them here, but speed on the hill has never been in short supply.

Located 83 km (about 49 minutes) from Calgary.



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Gold worthy?

WHISTLER

Whistler, B.C.
day pass: \$83

Gina Loitz

Two words: it's true. Everything you've heard about The Legendary is true. The largest North American resort, the velvet powder, the serene little village, the employees dedicated to delivering world class service to all guests, the kidney you have to sell to afford a day pass and the lineups as long as the Nile river. You'll discover everything you were warned about and it's all worth it just to say you rode the world-famous Whistler Blackcomb.

We were wise with our choice of day to hit this up. We picked Mon., Jan. 8, the day after the last weekend for most people on Christmas break, and the lamest first day of the week. Luckily, we were met with no lineups for passes and an easy wait for the Peak Chair to the top of the mountain. Even with a late start, we were awarded some fresh pow.

There are no student rates at Whistler, but the wicket worker—dedicated to the best in customer service—honoured our Revelstoke passes for a discount and tossed in \$10 worth of lunch vouchers, making the steep price easier to digest.

Like the slogan any realtor lives by, Whistler does well in part due to their stellar location. Its proximity

to two major city hubs, Vancouver (approximately one and a half hours away) and Seattle (about three) mean city folk travelling on vacation to the mountain, or locals ready for a day trip pour in.

Whistler's awesome snow dumps can also be attributed to the location. The Vancouver coast gets pounded with precipitation, usually in the form of rain in the city. However, the mountain is high enough that the all-season precipitation falls in the form of the fabulous white stuff. During the winter, it's guaranteed almost daily.

That's not all mother nature graced this hot spot with. Whistler Blackcomb is so vast and expansive, there is almost endless terrain with endless potential. If you're beginning, ride the bunny hills at the base of the village. If you drop cliffs, take flight off any of the appropriately titled "Air Jordan" or "Waterfalls" hits. Or, perhaps, ride the gnarly chute tucked in between two slabs of jagged rock nicknamed "The Coffin."

You can also eat your pow in a bowl if you prefer, with the Peak Chair serving four immaculate caverns.

Blackcomb is the hill to hit if you're starting to ride park, or it you're already into going big. Because there's a separate park for each skill level, it's less intimidating to try straight airs off a five footer to those soaring over and above the 35-foot wedge practicing their stylish backside nines.

If you're fed by sled fuel, there's plenty more terrain to be had on



Gina Loitz/the Gauntlet

the opposite side of the valley facing Whistler Blackcomb that keeps the sled heads of this winter world satisfied.

Although Aussies flock here in even larger numbers than other ski hills. They make good clubbing buddies in the village, as every night is a party night. Whistler is known

almost as much for its nightlife as its skiing.

After my first day here, one thing was clear: a day could never be enough. To know this beast intimately would take a long, long time—and a lot of snowmobile gas.

Whistler is the Hollywood for aspiring pros, those chasing the

dream and making theirs come true. It's only going to get bigger with the 2010 Olympics fast approaching. But, as the road gets bigger for the games, so do the crowds and the hype that has been fed for years.

Located 918 km (about 12 hours) from Calgary.

From the land of pizza and french fries

BUNNYSKIING

Amanda Hu

Skiing is a common western family pastime and has been for decades. However, when parents aren't keen on the slopes, little Johnny or Suzie can miss out on the experience. This means while many children brave the hills and take their learning spills young, some eventually encounter a situation later in life where they're faced with skiing again. They muster up the courage to embarrass themselves on the hill with their more ski-inclined friends.

When broaching this situation, there are several things beginner skiers can do and places to go to make their lives easier and escape the experience with *slightly* fewer bruises.

The Ski Nakiska and Lake Louise websites feature a handy first timer's guide outlining preparation tips for ski hill virgins. They outline clothing choices, equipment, instruction and the novice hills for each respective resort. Clothing choices should include layers of breathable, sweat-wicking fabrics, a good ski shell,

snow pants, wool socks, waterproof mittens and a pair of goggles.

When procuring equipment for a first-time ski outing, it's usually best to rent or borrow rather than buy. Equipment is available for rent on the hill, but, like everything on the hill, it's more expensive than getting it elsewhere. The University of Calgary Outdoor Centre offers downhill skiing packages for \$23 a day, \$30 for snowboarding packages—and just \$5 for a helmet—as well as special prices for longer durations and students.

Getting professional instruction is an important step towards becoming the biggest ski bunny of them all. Most hills offer private and group instruction for varying costs. Although shelling out money for lessons adds to the already bountiful expenses of a ski trip, the cost is well worth it.

"It would probably accelerate your learning 100 or 200 per cent," said Outdoor Centre programming manager Colum MacDonald. "Some people do get it, going on their own and they can figure out, but getting lessons, you prevent creating bad habits that you fall back on."

Once all of the gear is assembled and you've got to cash for lessons,

it's also a good idea to choose a hill that is beginner-friendly. While a bunny hill and some green runs are standard at every hill, the difficulty varies. Some hills also have a larger variety of beginner runs that are as steep as bunny hills but are longer. Distance from the city also plays a role in choosing your starter slopes.

"In Calgary, COP is so close," said MacDonald. "They do a pretty good job at maintaining it. It can get a bit icy because Chinooks come through, it gets warm and it gets cold, things melt. [It's] also because of the volume of skiers."

However, MacDonald added that COP can be more dangerous for learners because of the large number of other patrons riding very fast and doing jumps and tricks in a small area.

Hills geared towards families are also good to start on, because they feature some easier runs and cater to beginners. Panorama has a lot of family-friendly features but can be icy due to extensive grooming. And ice has two effects beginners don't need—speed and increased pain.

"Norquay, when they rebuilt the hill, had some great things with some greenish runs which were



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

pretty visible," MacDonald said. "This is good for when you bring kids because you can be in the main lodge and look up the hill and see them coming down. Norquay has a great set up for beginners, but it's on the edge because it doesn't get near the snow that Sunshine gets."

MacDonald also noted Sunshine and Lake Louise are great starter hills

and offer a lot of varied terrain but cautioned that beginners could get lost in such a vast area.

Overall, when learning to ski, there are many things to focus on. However, remembering three main things can make your experience more enjoyable: patience, a bottle of Advil and where to find the hot tub.

Save money, wax yourself

BOARDWAXING

Allison Cano

Any ski shop will be happy to take your money and tune your gear for you. However, as skiing is already expensive, it's easy to run short of cash, so it's nice to be able to do the job yourself and save the \$15 whenever you hit a rock.

Before you do anything, you're going to need to buy—or borrow—the tools for the job: a file and file guide to tune the edges, P-tex and a lighter or blowtorch for gouges in the base, wax and an iron. The best way to tune a board or pair of skis is to secure them with a vice. These are available at any ski shop and will support both ends and clamp on to the middle to keep the ski or board from moving around. For a cheaper option, two blocks of wood fixed in place to a bench with some type of rubberized material on top will keep the skis/board from sliding around.

After this is set up, the base needs to be cleaned. You can use a base cleaner for this, or iron on a coat

of wax and scrape it off while it's still warm. If there are any gouges in the base, now is the time to fill them. To do this, melt the P-tex into the gouge. The best thing to use is a blowtorch, but a lighter will work. Hold the tip of the flame to the P-tex candle, and wait until the end of the candle lights on fire. Hold the P-tex close to the base, and drip the flaming P-tex into the scratch. When the hole is filled, let it dry, and then scrape the excess off with a metal scraper.

To tune the edges, use your file and file guide. If you can get a hold of a diamond stone, it will get rid of burs a regular file won't be able to fix. Run the diamond stone lightly over the edges until all the burs are smoothed over. Then hold the file guide against the base, and run it in long, smooth strokes over the side edges. If you are worried about filing away too much, colour the edges with a marker, and file until the ink is scraped off the edges. Most skis and boards are set with a 2 degree bevel, so for the side edge, use an 88 degree file guide. Repeat the same process for the base edges, but with a 0.5 degree file guide. Most shops will have guides specifically for the base edge.

Lastly, you'll need to put on a coat of wax. Let the wax iron heat up, and hold the wax against the iron, letting it drip over the whole base. A regular iron set to the lowest setting will work, as long as there is no water that will release steam. Sweep the iron along the base, making sure not to leave it on one

spot for too long. Iron the wax in well; the longer you heat it up, the bigger the pores of the base open up, which will allow more wax to sink in. After the wax has cooled, take off the excess with a plastic scraper. For a really smooth finish, use a nylon brush to get the excess wax that the scraper won't and finish

off by buffing the waxed surface with a scotch bright pad.

With a bit of practice, you'll be able to tune your gear as good as any shop tech would, and save yourself up to \$50 a pop. The equipment needed to do it may be a bit expensive, but it will more than pay for itself after only a few tunes.



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

Stayin' warm on the cheap

CHEAP GEAR

Elyse Merriman

Skiing and snowboarding have never been connected to being cheap. You're more likely to focus on the powder, the mountains and the rush you get from participating in a sport that's more accessible in Alberta than many other provinces. The prosperity of this province, combined with the high cost of the sport to begin with, can somewhat put a damper on a student's hope to go skiing. At times, skiing or boarding on a student budget can seem impossible. However there are options. It takes more work to find cheap gear, but it is out there.

Not only are your the buddies ripping partners, but they also have gear. If your friend is thinking of upgrading, you might be able to buy their old stuff off them for cheap.

There are also many places around town you can get used gear, which, as always, is cheaper than buying new. Checking out thrift stores for clothing including jackets, gloves and a toque can be a great way to go. The stuff may be old, but retro is in right now. You might as well take advantage of a cheap neon ski jacket and pass it off as style. If you're willing to scour around and check stores on a regular basis, good deals are

sure to pop up. If you're looking to upgrade, try trading your old gear in at Sports Swap. They have a couple locations around town and are always a treasure trove—think of the teenager who gets new gear from well-off parents and grows out of it before hitting the hills much.

An option that you don't even have to leave campus for is the university Outdoor Centre. They have used gear listings online, as well as a used gear sale every Dec. Check it out, but make sure to be there early, as the good stuff usually goes fast. Shopping online is another good option. Ebay, Craigslist and other online classifieds offer gear at good prices. Be smart before you lay down too much cash for anything. If there's something you want to know about the gear, ask when laying down the cash for big-ticket items like skis or boots, be sure to compare prices.

If the prospect of potentially not hitting the slopes hasn't prompted you to buy used and you're still stuck on buying new, there are a few options for saving there as well. Check out end-of-season sales, when stores are trying to get rid of older makes and models. Also, join a ski or snowboard club on campus and score discounts on new gear at stores pre-season. It's not as cheap as buying used, but at least you're saving some money. After all, the more money you save on gear, the more you can put towards lift tickets.

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One Crazy Canuck

KEN READ

Katy Anderson

In 1975, a twenty-year-old from Calgary placed first in the World Cup downhill. It was the first time a non-European had taken the honour.

Ken Read's win announced that Canada was a force to be reckoned with in downhill skiing. He was the unofficial leader of the Crazy Canucks, a group of four skiers that would become a cultural phenomenon. For decades, Europeans had dominated downhill skiing, but the Canucks made a name for themselves and would go on to win a combined total of 107 top ten World Cup finishes. They were known for being reckless and very, very fast. The teammates travelled around the World Cup circuit in Europe in a Volkswagen van with shoddy equipment and a budget that was sub-par compared to the what the European teams had to work with.

A longtime Calgary native, Read is a two-time Olympian. He placed fifth in '76 and was a Canadian medal hopeful going into the '80 Olympics in Lake Placid. Just seconds after starting the course, Read's binding popped open and Canada's Olympic hopes dimmed. His teammate Steve Podboroski, earned a bronze medal at the games, and in '82 became the first non-European to win the World Cup Championship.

"You have to admit that Irwin and his teammates skied with fantastic daring," said top Swiss skier Philippe Roux in a 1977 article by Ron Scammell. "They're crazy, these Canadians. I was timed at 114 kilometres an hour in the middle of the 'S' turn and believe me, I couldn't have gone any faster unless I wanted to be carried off the course. And so, Dave Irwin reached 124 kilometres an hour while holding his line completely. There's the whole difference. Irwin picked up the hundredths of a second because he was constantly faster than we were."

Perhaps the most reckless of the four Crazy Canucks, Irwin was known for his spectacular wipeouts, one that

many journalists hailed as the "most frightening crash they'd ever seen." Dave Murray was the fourth Canuck and held three World Cup podium finishes in his career.

"It was always exciting when you're able to represent Canada and be part of a dynamic group that catches people's imagination and are part of building momentum for a sport," said Read.

The training techniques used by the infamous Canadian team were



Ken Read (l), Dave Murray 1978

courtesy Ken Read

cited as the reason for their tremendous success and were soon implemented around the world. The team was determined to break onto the scene and knew that by sacrificing individual glory for team support, they would do better as a whole.

"Ski racing is a very individual sport and the attitudes in Europe had largely been the dog-eat-dog," said Read. "You're very, very competitive [in Europe] and therefore you didn't necessarily want to help your teammate beat you, whereas we were strapped for resources, we were considered an outsider team and we didn't have much of a track record prior to finally breaking through. We worked together,

"Last year, the performance of the team was the best in the history of the sport in Canada—which surpassed my team. It's about time."

**-Ken Read,
Crazy Canuck, Alpine Canada CEO**

we shared information, we lived in close quarters. You had to learn to work with each other or else life was going to be pretty miserable. We also realized that by sharing information we would be better as a group and that by being better as a group we would raise the bar."

As soon as one of the athletes would speed into the finish area, he would radio information up to the next skier to let him better understand how to ski the course,

so the next teammate would be able to make as perfect a run as possible. The information could mean that your teammate was able to beat your time, but meant that the Canadian team would do better on a whole.

Read retired from a nine-year career at the age of 26, much to the surprise of many onlookers. In an interview radio with CBC, Read explained that the fun of touring was for the most part gone. As well as being given the Lou Marsh award, the honour reserved for Canada's top athlete of the year, Read has been awarded the Order of Canada and is on Canada's walk of fame.

Read attended the University of Calgary in spring sessions "year after year" while skiing and eventually earned his degree in economics from the University of Western Ontario. From there he went on to do a stint as a TV broadcaster with CBC Sports, wrote a book entitled *White*

Circus about his time on the World Cup ski circuit and stayed involved with the Olympic Association as a spokesperson for athletes. He is also an investor in Banff Mount Norquay, a ski hill about an hour away from the city.

These days, Read is Alpine Canada's chief executive officer and has helped to put Canada's national ski team back on the map.

"What I see in the current team

is very much the same thing [as we were]: a fairly cohesive group who are all different, they are all individuals but they all bring something to the table that helps make the group stronger. By working together as a group you are stronger as a group. Sometimes you just have to be thankful that you have the right chemistry."

The team featuring the Canucks held the Canadian record of the most World Cup podium finishes (13) until last year's 2006/07 team broke it with 14 and a World Championship finish—the very team that Read had been brought onboard to hand pick.

Read holds high hopes for this year's World Championships, which will be held at Val d'Isere, France—the site of Read's first podium, where he placed first. In thirty years skiing has changed. Ski technology has dramatically improved, which makes the sport both easier to compete in and easier to enjoy.

"To a degree, I am envious of [the improved equipment], but I'm benefiting from it as well," said Read. "As someone that has skied all their life, I make a better turn now than when I was on the Canadian ski team."

Read noted the improved equipment is bringing more people into the sport, which can only mean good things for the national team.

"We have a strong core of athletes, and working to bolster that with younger ones coming along," he said. "Last year, the performance of the team was the best in the his-

tory of the sport in Canada—which surpassed my team. It's about time. Seeing that the sport has regained substantial momentum is of interest. Ski clubs across the country are reporting record numbers, we're seeing strong interest all the way across and that just means in future years, we're going to see more talent coming up through the pipeline."

Like his racing style and trademark silver hair, Read's hopes for the Vancouver Olympics are bold. He has publicly announced Canada plans to top the alpine medal standings in 2010.

"2010 is something that's very much on our radar," said Read. "We have our first advance set on the Whistler venue at the World Cup level next month in February. [Olympics are about] much more than simply preparing athletes. There are thousands of people involved and some significant budgets and so on, but as far as the athletes are concerned, we have a world championship first next year and then we move to the Olympics in 2010. We appear to be on track, but the rest of the world is always trying to raise the bar. We're trying to make sure that we can be ahead of that with our training programs, support to our athletes, increased sponsorship and also trying to do as much in terms of research, trying to anticipate where the sport's going to be in two years. The goal is that when an athlete gets into the start gate, they resolutely believe that everything possible has been done for them and all they have to do is deliver."

Waiting for Whistler

The flight to 2010

Kyle Nissen



courtesy Mike Ridewood/freestyleski.com

FREESTYLE

Stewart Pallard

Ever since freestyle skiing made its Olympic debut at the 1988 Winter Olympics as a demonstration sport, it has undergone tremendous growth. The sport would continue to grow by leaps and bounds a few years later when moguls became a medal sport at the 1992 Olympics and aerials in 1994. The sport would expand both in Canada and internationally. Canadians have been leaders in the sport for nearly two decades. Despite its growth, it is still widely regarded as a niche sport. Athletes compete in it day in and day out, suffer gruelling travel schedules, poor funding and severe injuries—all for a chance once every four years to win an Olympic medal.

“It’s a sport where it’s individual when you go down the hill,” said former World Cup freestyle skier and former Canadian National Mogul Team head coach Murray Cluff. “Sure, the coach helps you get ready, but when you go down the hill, it’s you. You may be part of a team, but it’s definitely an individual sport. [The athletes] are driven in whatever avenue of life they choose.”

The Cochrane native is a member of the freestyle community who has seen it all. He has been involved in freestyle skiing for over thirty years and has had tremendous success both as a coach and as an athlete. At the age of 16, he became the young-

est skier ever to win the Canadian senior men’s mogul competition. He went on to become a nine-time national champion in freestyle skiing and was the 1980 world freestyle champion before retiring in 1991 at the age of 34. He then enrolled in the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Education and coached the Red Deer Freestyle Ski Club. Cluff was inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame in 2000.

Cluff enjoyed more success in his coaching career. Most recently, he was mogul skier Jennifer Heil’s personal coach when she won the gold medal at the 2006 Torino Olympics. However, having a personal coach was seen as a very controversial move and Canadian Freestyle would not give Cluff accreditation as one of their coaches because it was a trend they did not want to see become more popular. They have since changed their minds.

Fortunately for Cluff, the Austrian team would give him accreditation and the concept of having a personal coach in freestyle skiing has grown in popularity after skiers and coaches saw Cluff and Heil continue to win. Heil would win back-to-back World Cup titles, the World Championships and Olympic gold medal under Cluff’s guidance.

“The year after I did it, a fellow by the name of Jeremy Bloom from the United States, who was a top mogul skier and college football player, had a personal coach as did another American who got third in the Olympics in 2006,” said Cluff. “It showed that it could be done and I really believe if other people had the resources, they would do it. Look at figure skating. Most people

have private coaches. I pushed the bar. They thought we were a bit out to lunch and that it wasn’t needed but when people saw the results they went, ‘wow.’ We were the first and it’s kinda cool to break the ground.”

Some of Cluff’s former skiers include Olympic gold medallist Jean-Luc Brassard, Olympic bronze medallist Deidra Dionne, freerider Matt Hayward, and Olympian Kyle Nissen.

Nissen has been a member of Canada’s World Cup ski team for eight seasons and is one of the top aerialists in the world finishing second in the World Cup rankings during the 2005–06 season and fifth in the 2006–07 season.

“He’s a real solid competitor,” said Cluff about his former pupil. “I haven’t coached him in about eight years now, but when I had him, he was a kid that never seemed to get rattled.”

After suffering a knee injury at the end of last season and because the 2008–09 season does not count towards Olympic qualifying Nissen is taking time off to recover. He knows that injuries are part of the game when it comes to freestyle skiing.

“In terms of sacrifice, my knee may never completely heal,” said Nissen. “I may have done some permanent damage.”

Schooling is also something that is sacrificed when an athlete wants to represent Canada internationally.

“I wanted to go to the University of Calgary and take computer science, but that has been put on hold,” said Nissen. “In freestyle skiing, you move around a lot and it’s tough to be anywhere long enough to do

schoolwork. Sport Canada started a program [that] for every year you’re a carded athlete, you get a year of school paid for. I will take advantage of that when I retire.”

When you’re a world class athlete, there is essentially no off-season.

“Realistically, we’re on for ten months of the year,” said Nissen. “The other two we’re in the gym. I never spend more than two weeks at a time at home.”

Nissen did not make the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic team, as he lost out late in qualifying to teammate Jeff Bean. However, he was able to fulfill his dream and represent Canada at the 2006 Torino Olympics. Nissen was the number one aerialist in the world at the time and finished in fifth place.

“It was the biggest crowd I ever jumped in front of and my whole family was there,” said Nissen. “I didn’t get the result I wanted but I feel that I jumped pretty good.”

Many athletes do not always fare well in their first Olympics, but Cluff thinks Nissen will do better at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

“A lot of Olympians say—and it seems to hold true to theory—that your first Olympics is kind of like your practice one,” said Cluff. “It’s so overwhelming. Even if you are the best, you get so overwhelmed by the spectacle that you don’t do your best performance. On the second one they come back and they get it done. Jenn [Heil] came back and she won, Bruce Jenner did that, Jean-Luc [Brassard] in 1992—he was seventh and won in ’94—so even in freestyle we can see that. The people who have won were definitely contenders the previous Olympics, but they just didn’t have the experience

to handle the overwhelming aura of this whole thing. Who knows what Kyle will do? He had a good enough performance that he knows he’s on, he can make it, he can handle it.”

Aerials has either the curse and blessing of being one of the most precise sports in the world.

“Aerials is even almost more precise than moguls, because you know they’re coming into a jump 65 kilometres an hour into the triple but if they miss that timing a wee bit, they miss the jump and it’s a two and a half performances every four years,” said Cluff. “It’s just amazing. Diving has ten jumps in a competition, in trampoline they do 10 jumps, but in freestyle it’s two. Two jumps. Each one lasts about two to two and a half seconds. If they blow their take-off, it’s over.”

Nissen will be counting on his knee to hold up for the next two seasons so that he can have another chance at representing Canada at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

The Olympics are the pinnacle of the sport. While they do have a World Cup circuit every year, it is an Olympic goal medal that every freestyle skier dreams about winning, which calls for freestyle skiers to be the very best in clutch performances. One 24 second run for mogul skiers and two jumps for the aerialists every four years.

“Everyone talks about the phrase performance on demand, right?” said Cluff. “It’s not like a marathon run, it’s not like running the 1,500 metres, it’s not like a tennis match that lasts two hours and maybe you can have a bad set. You have to be on in freestyle.”

Fruit-bootin' on the slopes



Chris Tait/the Gauntlet

SNOWBLADING

Cam Cotton-O'Brien

You'll get a lot of shit for it, but if you've got a thick skin and a desperate fear of smashing your head and becoming a perma-drool machine while hurtling down a hill on two wobbly legs and a couple sticks, snowblading is your best option to get down a mountain.

The glory and the downfall of snowblading stem from the same thing: its extreme ease. Both

snowboarding and skiing are difficult things to learn and master. In order to competently shoot down a hill on a snowboard the rider must learn how to carve. No easy task, it requires enough confidence to point oneself downhill—therein gaining a lot of speed—while switching from edge to edge. Skiing also presents initial difficulties. Like snowboarding the biggest discomfort is gaining too much speed while turning from side to side. You can snowplough to avoid this unwanted acceleration, but then face the problem of trying to avoid crossing your skis. These obstacles may be

insurmountable for some, thus leading to the utility of snowblades.

It is insanely easy to snowblade. Within the course of a day or two, an individual is almost assured of being able to tackle at least blue runs, possibly blacks for the more brazen. This can allow a first-time user to keep pace with their more-experienced mountain buddies, at least on groomed runs. Anyone familiar with skating should be a competent snowblader. It requires little more than a slight shift in body-weight to swing around from side to side, enabling such ease of turning that the speed problem should not

get too far out of control. Starting out you can snowplough with comfort, safe in the knowledge that your blades can't be crossed without serious effort. Moving beyond your initial foray, it is easy to quickly hone

your skills and go faster down the hill. By keeping your blades parallel and using shallow turns, you'll be able to increase your speed to the point where you find your perfect mix of speedy pleasure and positive-you're-about-to-die horror. To gain better control of the blades and push this threshold a little further, try to keep your shoulders pointing down the hill at all times, turning from the hips.

Unfortunately, the extreme accessibility of snowblading gives rise to its biggest downfall—beyond the exorbitant rental costs. Like the teenage boy who shares a pink bike with his six-year-old sister, people will make fun of you. Even the lifties are likely to take a poke at your inadequate sticks. You can try and counteract it by doing crazy stuff like riding the mountain in your swim trunks, but really there is no way to avoid it, so just roll with the punches and remember that it's better than irreparable brain damage.

The downs of the ups

ENVIRONMENT

Stewart Pallard with files from Katy Anderson

The environmental impact of skiing has received little attention—until recently. Historically, skiing was seen as a benign use of land, allowing man to come closer to his natural surroundings. However, that is starting to change. The public is gradually becoming more environmentally conscious and ski resorts are trying to meet the challenges of being in environmentally sensitive areas and limiting their impact.

"The simple problem of ski hills and animals is alienation of habitat," said Canadian Wildlife Services spokesperson Dave Bolton. "They keep animals from using land at entrances of valleys which is important for movement."

Alpine Canada president Ken Read said he feels ski hills are doing their part to minimize their impact on Canada's wildlife.

"Interestingly enough—using Lake Louise as an example and as we see at Norquay and other places—because of the clearing of the trees that have been there for many, many years, [these areas] become prime habitat for wildlife," he said. "We've had fire suppression in Banff National Park

for a hundred years, and they're now going through the exercise of burning trees to try to open up forests. Ski resorts opened up the forests and now there's eight to ten resident grizzlies at Lake Louise, because there's a food source. So, in fact, it's a great multi-use of a venue. It's used by humans in wintertime and by the grizzlies in the summertime."

Many ski hills around Calgary face the problem of not receiving enough natural white stuff and are forced to rely on man-made snow. This causes water to be redistributed unnaturally, which may or may not have positive or negative impacts.

"Taking water from mountain sources, usually streams, means less left for the environment," said University of Calgary geoscience professor Dr. Masaki Hayashi. "Water is deposited on ski hills in the form of snow until the spring melt, meaning that it will be released to streams with a delay of several months. How that impacts the environment would vary from ski hill to ski hill."

He said a hill such as Canada Olympic Park would probably not have a big impact on the source water but a mountain such as Mount Norquay may impact its source water, which comes from Forty Mile Creek.

"A ski hill would have to conduct an environmental impact assess-

ment to get a permit to [take water from a natural source]," said Hayashi. "There would be some type of restriction as to how much water they can use and when."

It's assumed that ski resorts have been sticking to these restrictions. The results of this process have to be studied on a case-by-case basis, because each ski hill would be unique in their water requirements and their own geography. In the instance of many ski hills, Read noted snowmaking has had a positive impact on the environment.

"You have vastly improved snow management techniques," said Read. "Snowmaking is actually seen as a positive in terms of global warming, because all it is, is a redistribution of water. You're taking it out of a creek or a holding pond or whatever your source is, putting it onto the hill and at the end of the season it melts, goes back to where it came from. But the reflective qualities of having white on the hills longer, the UN—when they did their environmental report that was issued last year—was citing that as one of the positive attributes."

As the public continues to become more aware of their ecological footprint, ski hills will have to meet the challenge of minimizing their impact in their ecologically sensitive locations. Expect the debate to continue.

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Shredding is for the Cats, meow

CATSKIING

Kendra Perry

If you feel like shredding, ripping, tearing or stomping through fresh untouched champagne powder away from busy lift lines, snow plows and the shiny one-piece suits of ski resorts, then Cat skiing may be the sport for you.

Cat skiing has been around for over 25 years and it is now more popular than ever before. It involves travelling via snowcat to backcountry areas that would otherwise be inaccessible to the average Joe skier or boarder. Approximately 15 skiers or boarders can pile into a snowcat and be dragged up steep constructed trails in order to rip into unmarked uncut powder in vertical and rugged terrain.

Cat skiing began in 1965 when snowcats were shuttling passengers up to areas where the ski lifts were not yet operating or broken down. Ten years later, Ontario native Allen Drury opened a cat ski operation in British Columbia's Selkirk Mountains which is still operating today. B.C. mountains including the Monashees, Rockies, Selkirks, Purcells and Valhallas, are legendary for their epic snowfalls and crisp light powder. Their combination of plentiful snowfall and cooler temperatures make for ideal Cat skiing conditions. Many of these areas receive as much as 42 feet of annual snowfall.

The terrain of a Cat skiing trip varies depending on the snow conditions.

"Typically we will ski at or just above the treeline due to visibility issues," said Cat ski guide Martin Gregor. "On clear days we will usually drop skiers on alpine peaks or ridge line dropoffs."

Big dumps allow riders to ski more remote terrain that would otherwise be bare and too dangerous to ride. When weather conditions are less cooperative, guides may retreat to higher elevation terrain where snow is more abundant.

Cat skiing is a good alternative for those who can't fork out the cash for the notoriously expensive heli-ski trip. This is not to say that Cat skiing is cheap. A three-day vacation package may still put a \$1,000 dent in your credit card.

"The main difference [between Cat skiing and heli-skiing] is cost and terrain," said Gregor. "Choppers can access high elevation terrain and hence better assurance of sweeter, deeper powder, while snowcats rarely reach beyond 1,000 verticle feet."

Heli-skiing also tends to be more on the dangerous side due to uncertain weather conditions causing an average of one no-fly day per week.



Katy Anderson/the Gauntlet

However, this doesn't mean that Cat skiing is without its dangers. Cat skiing operates in uncontrolled terrain where risk of avalanche is always present. It is perhaps less dangerous than backcountry skiing because of the bigger groups and having a guide present.

"Skiers need to realize that Cat skiing always carries some level of risk," Gregor says, "Respecting the mountain and educating yourself on the risks can go a long way. The most dangerous thing is a skier who has

little mountain knowledge or skiing ability and puts the rest of the group in danger by skiing like an idiot."

All skiers and boarders are required to both wear and know how to operate a transceiver in the event of an avalanche burial. Guides and guests all carry backpacks containing shovels, probes and other necessary survival equipment.

In order to Cat ski, guides require that clients be of a certain skiing ability. Most operations request that skiers be at least strong, intermediate skiers who are comfortable

in deep powder. Of course, this does not mean that weak skiers will not overstate their abilities and find themselves bailing face-first into the powder or having to be dragged out of tree wells and thus holding up the rest of the group.

Regardless of the risks involved, guests swear the fresh lines are worth it.

"There's nothing like the rush you get," said snowboarder and Cat-lover Eric Nelson, "Flying through powder, jumping cliffs—seriously, everyone should

try it. It's worth every penny."

There are many Cat skiing companies that operate in the B.C. mountains for skiers and boarders who are interested. They range from high-end companies offering posh rooms and fine dining to those aimed at skiers and boarders on a budget. Poor students might want to check out Wildhorse Cat Skiing, Fernie Wilderness or Bug Red Cats. These companies offer packages starting at \$1,300 for a three-day trip as well as one-day rides starting at \$300.



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