

SKIER Magazine Resort Guide

Region Info: Kootenays

(with a selection of four resorts)

Steve Ogle

Location:

Resorts within the Kootenay region are spread out between four major mountain ranges of southeastern BC: the Monashees, Selkirks, Purcells, and Rockies. Since most ski and snowboard bums already have a geography degree, we don't need to delve too deep into this topic. For the rest of you, it's in the bottom right corner of the map.

Terrain:

This is not the place to work on your tan. Known as the world's only inland temperate rainforest, the Kootenay region gets hit with big, cold snowfalls that blanket fog-enshrouded valleys and steep, shady mountainsides. Cover these slopes with optimally-spaced conifers and you have the best tree skiing anywhere.

Vibe:

Some would say that folks in these parts are flaky and overly-laid back, mainly because—let's face it—they smoke way too much weed. But it is soooo, totally, not like true, dude.

Getting There:

This region is bounded by the TransCanada to the north and the Crowsnest Highway 3 to the south near the US border. Both are sketchy routes with multiple mountain passes, but do-able in a Honda Civic. To avoid this, fly into Calgary, Spokane, Washington, or the upgraded Canadian Rockies International Airport in Cranbrook.

TIP:

This is one area you don't need to chase down the snow. The best advice is to chill out, slow down and go with the flow. You'll get plenty of powder.

WHITEWATER Winter Resort

Mutter the word *expansion* even under your home-knit scarf in the Whitewater lodge and you could get a plate of organic yam fries tossed into your face. This is where locals embrace a slow, rickety pace—just watch them happily plod up one of the two rustic chairs or hike to the majestic Ymir Peak above the resort. On big snow days, for which the area is famous, this mellow gets harshed—usually at the top of the *Blast*, a 400m fall-line epic right under the Summit chair. A couple of these to warm up, and many riders take to the legendary slackcountry beyond the ropes where they reap the deeps of *The Backside*, dropping into perfect glades and secret stashes, finally hitching a ride up in the back of their brother's old Tacoma. Some would say it's an addiction—a physiological dependence to which a lot of time is devoted. You'd be hard-pressed to disagree, after reviewing the snow-covered faces of those chronic skiers and boarders.

But what happens when the basis of an addiction becomes legalized? This year, sociologists and skiers alike will be there to witness this human experiment if Whitewater's backside expansion plan comes together. With the addition of 175ha of patrolled terrain, up to nine cut runs will lead skiers down to the access road as far as the 7km sign. A shuttle bus will provide them with free access back to the resort, and therapists will be on hand to monitor their condition.

LATEST:

The big news at press time is up to five kilometres of boundary extension with the opening of the fabled *Backside* to patrolling, with shuttle access back to the resort.

MUST HIT:

One of many avalanche awareness clinics offered by the resort, so you can check out the legendary backcountry and live to tell about it.

EATS:

Breakfast: Skip the solid foods and fuel up at Oso Negro coffee shop

Lunch: How many resort cafeterias have produced a best-selling cookbook? Hit the Fresh Tracks Café for a taster.

Dinner: Anywhere within a snowball's throw of Baker Street and you can't go wrong.

APRES

Mike's Place Pub in the remodeled Hume Hotel heritage building is where to drink an NBC Faceplant or five—available only in the heart of winter.

Marvel at dreadlocked hippies sampling cheese plates at *Bibo*.

Finley's is a great place for a piss-up and karaoke.

SLEEP:

-Low end/ hostel: yes

-slopeside: no

-luxury: yes

EVENTS:

Whitewater Winter Carnival, Jan 30/31

Kootenay Coldsmoke Powder Festival, Mar 5-8

Tribute Throwdown Rail Jam, Mar 21

PARTY FACTOR

2/4

ROMANCE METER

2/4

OVERALL COST

\$\$

Red Mountain Resort

The horizon line on that next drop looks like the edge of the earth, so naturally you hesitate before going over. So far it's been smooth sailing through tight trees and a couple of small cliffs but the next rollover has no tracks on it. Just before your doubts send you perpendicular, a voice echoes out from the nearby Motherlode lift like a prophetic Galileo—albeit with a hoser accent:

“Give ‘er dude! It’s good!”

This is the vibe at Red. Locals would rather see you send that cliff than keep secrets about landings, pow stashes or even their childhood. Red Mountain provides the ultimate winter vibe with an open, Kootenay attitude of hard-charging and honest shredding. Many people have turned a Rossland ski season into a lifetime intertwined with the iconic ski hill, an unassuming gem shining with history and culture, including a colourful mining background (hence the resort's name) and a ski racing legacy that lives on today with the Red Mountain Racers, North America's most successful ski club.

So if you feel like you're pioneering new ground above some unknown cliff beside *Links Line*, know that it's probably been done before by a 12-year old girl who's ski-coach grandmother probably dropped in right after her.

LATEST:

New rules for US border crossing took effect last summer so your Red season's pass will no longer be valid for international travel.

MUST HIT:

Powder Fields on the front face of Granite is insane for wide-open gladed terrain.

EATS:

Breakfast: *Clancy's* is the local's choice for injecting caffeine into your veins or a muffin into your pocket for the chair.

Lunch: Enjoy a meal or a latte on the deck of *Paradise Lodge*, located mid-mountain at Red.

Dinner: *Gypsy*, located right at the base area, offers a unique blend of creative gourmet dishes and meals.

APRES:

Rafters Lounge above RED's Base Lodge is a must for unwinding from all those 360's.

The Flying Steamshovel in Rossland has just been expanded and now hosts live entertainment and DJs on a regular basis.

Catch a Trail Smokeater's Junior A hockey game down the hill. Follow the

smokestacks to the arena.

SLEEP:

- Low end/ hostel: yes
- Slopeside: yes
- Luxury: yes

EVENTS:

- Canadian Open Freeski Championship, Jan 20-23
- The Gathering at Red, Mar31-Apr 5
- Kokanee Springfest, Mar 6-14

PARTY FACTOR

3/4

ROMANCE METER

2/4

OVERALL COST

\$\$\$

Revelstoke Mountain Resort

So you're a kid in a candy store, and every day for your whole life you've been going in and feasting on bonbons galore. The supplies are limitless but the only problem is that everything is sugar-free, fat-free, gluten-free—whatever. Sure, it's great but you're sick of being healthy and want to get one of those sugar highs every kid lives for.

Then one day, Coke, Pepsi, Nestle, and Kellogg's all roll into town and fill the shelves with the sickest, baddest, high-octane treats on the planet. And it's just you, your scooter, and an empty stomach. This is what skiers and snowboarders experienced three years ago when Revelstoke Mountain Resort came to town and injected glucose right into the veins of all those die-hard Revy backcountry riders. Suddenly they had North America's highest snowcone (1713m of vert!)

parked in their own backyard.

According to Revy stepmaster Greg Hill, the best part about a new resort is not having to punish visiting friends with a 1700m skin-up before breakfast. "In the past there would be a few of us up on the mountain enjoying ourselves but now on a powder day you can hear the excited *yeehawws* of hundreds of people."

Must be the sugar talking.

LATEST:

The Freeskiing World Tour has added Revy to its list of venues for the next three years.

MUST HIT:

When it's groomed, Greg Hill likes to charge down *Snow Rodeo* top to bottom. This run used to be for cat skiers only.

EATS:

Cheap: *The Nomad* is a great burger option

Mid-range: *The Village Idiot* makes a stupidly good panzerotti

High-rollin': *The Woolsey* is one place the snowmobilers don't track up

APRES:

The River City Pub at the *Regent Inn* is right downtown and serves up local Mt. Begbie brews.

Talk snow with heli- and cat-skiing guides in the base area lounge of the *Nelsen Lodge*, now with it's own restaurant, mojito menu and BC-made *sake*.

The Cabin is a refurbished bowling alley, now a bar and snowboard/skate shop.

SLEEP:

-Low end/ hostel: YES

-slopeside: YES

-luxury: yes/no YES

EVENTS:

Freeskiing World Tour, Jan 8-10

Other dates not finalized: contact Ashley: ATait@revelstokemountainresort.com

PARTY FACTOR

2/4

ROMANCE METER

1/4

OVERALL COST

\$\$\$\$

Panorama Mountain Village

Panorama Mountain Village bills itself as a “complete winter destination”, using carefully planned nomenclature that highlights slopeside accommodation as the main draw. It makes sense, especially for visiting families and groups of friends who are looking for a place to put up their feet during a week of skiing or boarding. Superlatives abound: The Panorama Springs *Hot Pools* inspire a warm, fuzzy sensation, not to mention the *Gold Premium* Slopeside Condos where everyone wants to stay. The SBC editorial staff—specializing in acronyms—feels that Pano’s marketing team should take on a “*More Than Words*” theme. This is not only the title of the greatest skiing/riding ballad ever written, but the slogan does a much better job at describing the mountain’s terrain.

First off, grab your calculator: 1220m of vert; 9 lifts, 120 runs over 1150ha; 20% beginner / 55% intermediate / 25% expert terrain; 2 terrain parks; 40% snowmaking coverage. It all adds up to good times, but if that still doesn’t compute just gaze out at the indescribable Purcell landscape beyond Taynton Bowl and you’ll forget all about the tourism lexicon, zenning-out in the moment instead. Be on your toes though, or at least your edges, because below you are Canada’s longest fall-line groomers.

If numbers or dollar signs aren’t really your issue, lift off with RK Heliski based out of the village for the ultimate powder experience.

LATEST: - waiting on this

MUST-HIT:

Head along Outback Ridge until you reach the sign for Ktunaxa. Drop through a tricky rock band at the top, before you reach a section of beauty trees.

EATS:

Cheap: *The Jackpine Pub*, in the village, offers eleven types of burger.

Mid-range: Head down to Invermere and hit *Strand's Old House Restaurant*.

High-rollin': Award-winning Greys Restaurant features different set menus each evening.

APRES

The *T-Bar* features live music, a 40' bar and a casual menu.

Fairmont or Radium Hotsprings are about 20 minutes each from Invermere.

Drag your wasted carcass around the village to patrol for other wasted carcasses.

SLEEP:

Low end/ hostel: yes

Slopeside: yes

Luxury: yes

PARTY FACTOR

2/4

ROMANCE METER

3/4

OVERALL COST

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