

Snow Country Accommodation Guide P.20

Wild Isle

The Islands' Adventure Magazine

October - December 2001

FREE



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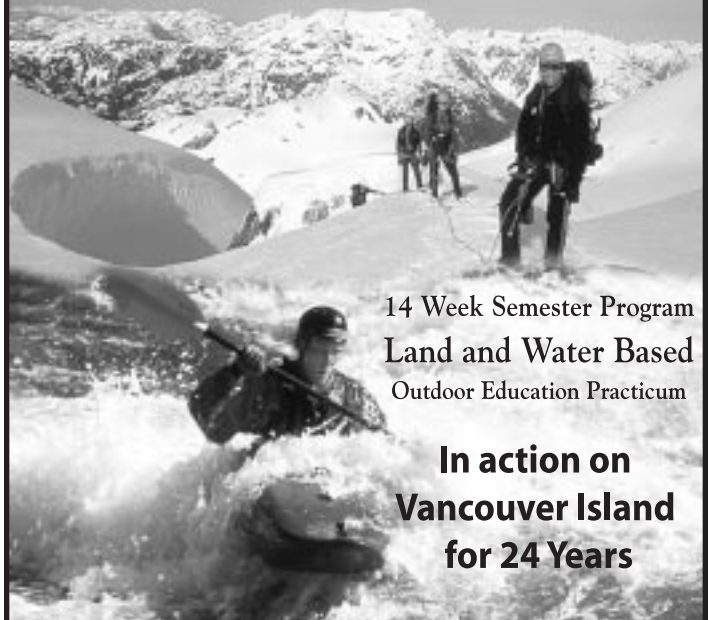
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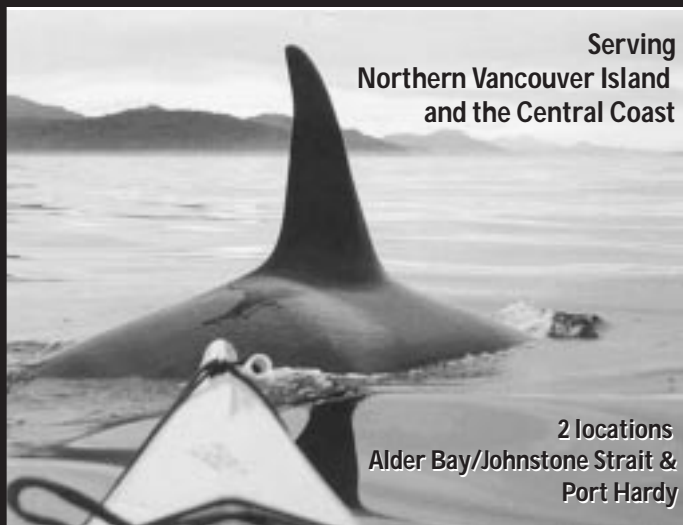


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18 Oct-Dec 2001

Publisher/Managing Editor

Philip Stone

Assitant Editor

Ryan Stuart

Associate Editors

Tanya Storr, Greg Shea

Feature Contributors

Andy Smith, Cam Scott,

Jenny Hudnall, Peter

Rothermel, Peter Janes,

Ryan Stuart,

Philip Stone

Photography

Greg Shea, Philip Stone,

Coastalbc.com,

Julie Perkins.

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Editorial & Advertising Inquiries to:

Wild Isle Magazine

P.O. Box 482, Heriot Bay, B.C.

Canada VOP 1H0

Tel: 250 285-2234

Fax: 250 285-2236

eMail: wildisle@island.net

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**Next Deadline for
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EDITORIAL



As always, the final task in completing another issue of *Wild Isle* is to pen a quick editorial. This issue little space

remains to wax poetically as *Wild Isle* 18 is packed. We've had the proverbial shoehorn out to squeeze all the material in.

We turn our sights onto the Comox Valley in a big way this issue. And with good reason, the new highway is complete making it easier than ever to reach the valley from north and south. Combine that with the Islands' major ski resort and a whole host of world class adventure opportunities on their doorstep and it isn't hard to see why the Comox Valley claims to be Canada's Recreation Capital see page 13 for the full story.

Regular readers will notice continuing changes in the look of *Wild Isle*. As a good friend put it skimming a draft version "now it looks like its here to stay". We hope you like where we're going with the magazine. Ideas and suggestions are always welcome. You can send your ideas to us, support the magazine by taking out a subscription and be entered in a draw for great prizes all in one by completing and returning the forms on pages 21 & 22.

We've been busy not only with the print edition but also with our ever expanding web site. The whole site as been overhauled, updated and redesigned. Now there is no need to go any further than **wildisle.ca** to find anything you want to know about adventure sports on the west coast.

Wild Isle will be at the coming ski shows in Victoria at the Cedar Hill Rec Centre on Oct. 13th and the Comox Valley Show Nov. 4th at the Filberg Centre, Courtenay. We'll have more prizes to give away and free trial issues to send out so be sure to stop by and say hello. See you there.

Philip Stone

FROM THE FIELD

Whistler Blackcomb Redefines 'Terrain Park'

WHISTLER- It wasn't that long ago that terrain parks were a novelty. Built primarily to cater to aggressive, young teenagers -- and keep them off the mainstream runs -- the early terrain parks were considered more a fad than a necessity.

All that has changed now. With the continued growth of snowboarding -- and the sudden boom in twin-tipped skiing -- terrain parks have quickly become an indispensable component in the modern mountain-area mix. Kids, teenagers, twentysomethings, amateurs, pros, instructors, patrollers even mums and dads jump, spin, flip or railride their way to new levels of on-mountain play.

And that's created a whole new set of challenges for terrain park designers to address. "There are now so many different ability levels that one park just won't do anymore," says Stu Osborne, Whistler/Blackcomb's terrain park supervisor.

Welcome to Whistler/Blackcomb's new Nintendo Terrain Park Zone. "It's like having three different parks in one big playground," explains Osborne.

Still accessed off Choker Run, just below the Rendezvous Lodge at Blackcomb Mountain, the new "terrain playground" includes a world-class snowcross course, a World Cup halfpipe and three distinct parks. "A lot of resorts now have various terrain parks located in different areas of their mountain," says Osborne. "I think we're one of the only resorts in North America to group all our parks in one zone."

Leading the way is the new Super Park. "This is for the real expert. It consists of double-black and black-diamond table-tops, advanced rails, spines etc." It will also have its own

entrance, adds Osborne. "Guests will need to show a special super park access pass to enter. The pass will be available through Guest Relations for a minimal fee and will be good for the season." The reason for the special pass? "We want to make sure we keep the ability levels separate."

Mere mortals will be able to hone their skills on an intermediate version, Choker Park, directly adjacent to the Super Park. "This will have similar features as the expert park in addition to rollers, mini spines, step-up jumps and various jibs. Only everything will be scaled down so the stakes aren't so high."

Last but not least, is the teaching park on nearby Big Easy. "Our ski and snowboard school offers lessons for all types of riding," says Osborne. The Big Easy Park will now be the perfect place to start learning terrain park tricks. It will have all the classic features, only on a much smaller scale. While it is designated as a dedicated learning area, the Big Easy Park will also be accessible to the general public.



Airing it out in the Whistler/Blackcomb half pipe, photo by Guillaume Tessier.

Cerro Aconcagua

Seven diabetics summit the
Western Hemisphere's highest peak



VICTORIA- On January 12, 2001, IDEA 2000 diabetic climbers Katherine Brandt-Wells - Canada, Doug Burnsnall - Wales, Vitorrio Casiraghi - Italy, Christopher Meloche - USA, Marco Peruffo - Italy, Lisa Seaman - USA, Emilio Valdés - Spain, and non-diabetic team members Jordi Admetlla - Catalunya-Spain, Bob Manwell - USA and Greg Ritchie - USA, successfully reached the 22,834 ft (6959m) summit of Argentina's Cerro Aconcagua, the highest summit in the western hemisphere and the highest summit in the world outside of the Himalayas.

The first of the group reached the summit at 12:30 hours in clear weather after battling high winds earlier in the day. All team members reached the summit via a route known as the "falso," a variation on the Polish Glacier approach to the summit. A second attempt, two days later, via the Polish Glacier on a route known as the "Polish Direct," failed approximately 400 metres from the summit when low level clouds rose higher, enveloping the climbers, reducing visibility to near zero, forcing a retreat.

This was the largest group of insulin-dependent, or Type 1, diabetics to ever reach this altitude. The climb was organized and planned as a positive example of the accomplishments possible by diabetics willing to actively manage their disease and to raise awareness of the needs of Latin American diabetic medical education and medical supplies.

The group also participated in a research effort looking at the effects of extreme altitude and diabetic physiology -- an area with very little information available. They recorded blood glucose levels, insulin requirements and other medical information as they

ascended the mountain.

"We've met our goal of a safe all-diabetic ascent of this great mountain, proving that diabetics who are able to properly manage their health are capable of anything," said IDEA 2000 co-founder and expedition leader, David Panofsky.

"This summit is truly a testament to the strength and dedication of all IDEA 2000 team members," said Todd Clare, IDEA 2000's other co-founder and base camp coordinator, "who are not just diabetics, but incredible people."

IDEA 2000, Inc. is a non-profit charitable organization with the overall mission of promoting better health for diabetics worldwide. This fall, Katherine Brandt-Wells -- the only Canadian and one of only two women on the summit team -- will be speaking at a series of public forums dubbed "Extreme Diabetes", throughout southern B.C., showing slides of the successful IDEA 2000 expedition.

Nanaimo: Saturday, November 17, at the Coast Bastion Hotel. RSVP to CDA in Nanaimo (250) 729-3824.

Campbell River: Saturday, December 1. All day event. RSVP to Pauline Melanson at the Campbell River General Hospital (250) 286-7023.

This program is free of charge but limited to people with diabetes and their friends and families. Donations will be accepted and proceeds will go to supply insulin, blood glucose monitoring supplies and education to needy diabetics in South America. Seating is limited and you must register in person or by phone.

More information can be found on the group's website, www.idea2000.org

Canadians clean up at international surf comp



TOFINO- The 2001 BCSA Quiksilver/Roxy Summer Surf Jam at Cox Bay, Tofino was the biggest, best attended surf competition in Canada to date. 104 of western Canada's best surfers competed for \$5,000+ in prize money, trophies, titles, and chances to join the Canadian National Surf Team at the World Surfing Games in Durban, South Africa next year. Filling out the competitor's line-up were surfers from Washington, Oregon, Brazil and Australia.

After a miserable week of rain and no swell leading into this year's Summer Surf Jam, organizers were faced with a grim scenerio. Fortunately, Mother Nature smiled on the BCSA once again. What a great day

on Saturday! Solid 4 foot swell, head high at times with few lulls. Lots of clean faces, calm winds with broken cloud giving way to sunshine. The crowd of 400 to 500 could not have asked for a better day!

Sunday the 19th saw a smaller, less consistent swell. Light onshore winds. Same morning fog/cloud, breaking out into sunshine in the afternoon. I was especially stoked to see most of Sunday's audience of 300 to 400 standing at the water's edge, cheering and hooting through the final heats.

Sponsor raffle prizes and giveaways totaled some \$5,000.

GOB shot their latest video for "No Regrets" at the Surf Jam Party on Saturday night at the Tofino Legion. Their production crew could be seen just south of the competition on Sunday, still shooting tape for the video. Also filming at the Jam were the New VI [chum stn], OLN, TSN, and CBC Newsworld.

Many thanks to all sponsors, judges, event staff & volunteers involved for the countless hours they contributed to make the surf jam a huge success. Roxy Quiksilver Summer Surf Jam Final Results complete results, scores & photos visit the BCSA website at www.bcsa.ca

Cam Scott

*Photos clockwise from top
Sepp Bruhwiler 3rd men's pro/am
Cox Bay party under construction
Peter Devries 2nd men's pro/am
Dave Cambell aka Florida Dave
Photos courtesy Coastalbc.com*

My 2 Cents

It was a good weekend. What a miracle swell! Saturday morning was absolute Cox bay perfection. Sometimes surf contests are blessed with waves. I think Jesse sent us some this time. The girls competition was fierce this year. Lots of competition and everyone was surfing well. The south island girls (Melanie and Leah) really pulled through and were showing everyone what they can do. Catherine is totally amazing, the fact that she played in the sand with her kids until the second her heat was in the water and then surfed so well.

Moms really are multi-talented!

I was stoked to see so much support for the girls part of the contest. Thanks to Roxy and to Doug at Gallaz for all the rad prizes.

Jenny Hudnall

MEN'S PRO FINAL

Raph Bruhwiler	1	\$2,000
Peter Devries	2	\$500
Sepp Bruhwiler	3	\$250
Gary McNeill	4	\$100

ROXY PRO FINAL

Jenny Hudnall	1	\$500
Leah Oke	2	\$250
Melanie Smith	3	\$150
Cathrine Temple	4	\$100

LONGBOARD FINAL

Eric Frang	1	\$500
Tony Redpath	2	\$250
Ollie Atkie	3	\$150
David Ball	4	\$100

JUNIOR PRO/AM

Peter Devries	1	\$500
Ollie Atkie	2	\$500
Nick Killins	3	
Kyle Dziana	4	

ROXY AM FINAL

Joanne de Pape	1	
Joey Rukavina	2	
Lisa Damien	3	
Alice Hudnall	4	

LONGBOARD FINAL

Eric Frang	1	\$500
Tony Redpath	2	\$250
Ollie Atkie	3	\$150
David Ball	4	\$100

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Raph Bruhwiler, Sepp Bruhwiler

JUNIORS

Peter Devries, Ollie Atkie

WOMEN

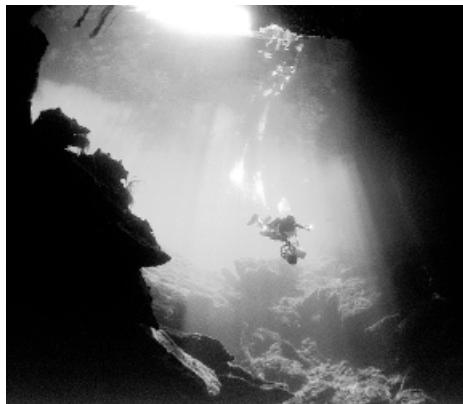
Jenny Hudnall

LONGBOARD

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Journey Into Amazing Caves at the IMAX Theatre - Victoria



Located in Victoria at the Royal BC Museum, almost 1.5 million people have enjoyed the 15 films the theatre has presented to date.

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This fall the National Geographic welcomes audiences to an all-new IMAX® theatre adventure, subterranean-style: **MacGillivray Freeman's Journey Into Amazing Caves**. The adventure is a natural to present on Vancouver Island as we are home to some of Canada's most impressive cave systems, a caver's heaven.

Journey Into Amazing Caves is a suspenseful expedition with a new breed of scientists who boldly explore places once thought off-limits to human presence, let alone IMAX cameras. For *Journey Into Amazing Caves*, these scientists have joined up with a team of intrepid filmmakers to bring back unprecedented footage from unique and forbidding ice caves, underwater caves, and terrestrial caves. Audiences will squeeze into Earth's alien, hidden realms guided by two women cavers on the quest of a lifetime: daring to enter caves so remote and so threatening, exploring them is like exploring a new planet.

During *Journey Into Amazing Caves*, audiences will wriggle through tiny, twisting passages, drop into gleaming blue labyrinths of ice, swim through flooded underground vaults, and enter a world so extreme the microscopic creatures who live there are called *extremophiles*. They will circle the globe, stopping in the hot, lush Yucatán; dropping into barren, frozen Greenland and flying above the primitive red rock Arizona desert. And they will hold their breath as

their expedition leaders, Dr. Hazel Barton and Nancy Aulenbach, rappel down steep cliffs into unmapped chambers, hoping to bring back startling new discoveries that may unlock new cures for human disease.

MacGillivray Freeman Films, the production company that made large-format film history with the groundbreaking IMAX theatre adventure *EVEREST*, now reverses its sights from the highest mountain-climb in the world to deep chasms inside the earth. "With *Journey Into Amazing Caves*, we have a chance to transport audiences into a place they've never had a chance to see up-close before and give them a sense of the heart-pounding adventure of exploring an utterly unknown world," says Producer **Greg MacGillivray**. "The experiential feeling of IMAX photography is perfect for capturing the excitement of caving, which is filled with unexpected discoveries that will thrill audiences of all ages."

At the heart of *Journey Into Amazing Caves* is the moving triumph of two tenacious young women who are part of the new movement of extreme athletes and "extreme scientists" – scientists who gather their knowledge and data in treacherous, unforgiving zones of the environment.

Dr. Hazel Barton is a microbiologist who is literally caving to save lives. Like an ancient explorer looking for new worlds, Barton travels the planet's caves seeking undiscovered organisms that might hold new medical applications, including next-generation medicines to treat drug-resistant tuberculosis. There's great promise in her research – some cave "bugs" being studied by other scientists already appear to attack cancer cells. Dr. Barton's caving partner, Nancy Aulenbach, is a passionate adventure-seeker, an expert in cave rescue and a bold pioneer who is looking to expand the limits of what we know about caves – and how to save them from the imminent dangers of pollution and human encroachment. Together Hazel and Nancy journey to worlds of unparalleled beauty and danger in *Journey Into Amazing Caves*.

National Geographic Books has released two companion books that compliment the film — *Caves: Exploring Hidden Realms*, by renowned caving journalist Michael Ray Taylor, and a children's book, *Exploring Caves*, by film stars Nancy Aulenbach and Hazel Barton. Each of these is fully illustrated with color photographs.

Journey Into Amazing Caves begins September 28 and will show at 12, 2, 4, 6 & 8pm. *Alaska* continues at 11, 3 & 5pm *Blue Planet* plays at 10am, 1 & 7 pm

COMOX VALLEY SKI SWAP



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Where are the White-tailed Ptarmigan on the Island?

by Peter Rothermel

The Vancouver Island White-tailed Ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucurus saxatilis*) is found exclusively on Vancouver Island. This small, pigeon-sized bird is one of the few that can survive in the alpine throughout the year. While they always have a distinctive white tail and wings, their body feathers change from white in the winter to a mottled brown in summer and fall. They are sometimes confused with blue grouse, which move up into the alpine in late summer. Blue grouse have a gray-blue band on their dark tails. These wily birds are likely to hide in plain sight in the alpine areas of tall mountain peaks in the heath and heather or on rocky slopes. They will generally freeze upon your approach, relying on their cryptic colors to keep them safe.

White-tailed ptarmigan on Vancouver Island is on the British Columbia "Blue List" which means that they are legally designated as vulnerable to declines from either human activities or natural events. Due to the restricted range of this species two areas on Vancouver Island have been designated as Important Bird Areas: Strathcona Park and Mt. Arrowsmith and area mountains.

Beginning in 1995 a research project was initiated to provide information on the abundance, distribution, and status of this listed subspecies. This research, combined with observations from hikers and naturalists have shown that white-tailed ptarmigans are more widely distributed on Vancouver Island than was previously believed. They have been found in alpine areas on south, central and northern Vancouver Island.

During the white-tailed ptarmigan study over 300 white-tailed ptarmigan have been color banded in alpine areas all over Vancouver Island. The banding of individual birds helps in the study of their population ecology and behavior.

What is currently needed is information on the locations of individual birds throughout the alpine areas on Vancouver Island. While you are in the alpine areas on Vancouver Island we would like you to keep an eye out for ptarmigans. If possible we would like you to read and record the different color bands, and in which order, that are located on each leg of individual birds. Bands can be read with binoculars from distances of 25 m. When in the alpine, please consider using the data cards that can be found at selected trail heads and in summit registers to record ptarmigan observations. Please send observations to: Kathy Martin, Department of Forest Sciences, UBC, Vancouver, B.C., V6T 1Z4

The Strathcona Wilderness Institute, Phone: 250-337-1871 Fax: 250-337-1821), will be distributing cards to trail heads, but help is needed in placing cards in summit registers. If your club has a trip planned to a Vancouver Island summit and you wish to help, please contact me: Peter Rothermel, Box 185, Qualicum Beach, BC, V9K-1S7, phone: 250-752-2529 or email: prother@nanaimo.ark.com





View Point

- the view is not always clear -

by
Andrew Smith

"SNOWMOBILING AROUND STRATHCONA PARK"

Vancouver Island is probably known more for its moderate winter weather, rather than a place to pursue traditional winter recreation activities. However, there are some great winter wonderlands easily accessible on Vancouver Island and when looking at a map, it's hard not to be drawn towards Strathcona Park. After all, there is a great new Inland Island Highway and a good paved access road right up into snow country. Mt. Washington Ski Resort, located immediately adjacent to the park, also attracts many people to the area for a variety of winter activities.

However, while park visitors seem to understand and respect the policies surrounding park management during summer months, the snow seems to cloud many peoples idea of what is allowed in the park in the winter. One of these misnomers, is that snowmobiling is a permitted activity - unfortunately it is not presently allowed within park boundaries.

Snowmobiling, while not enjoyed by everyone, is a great winter activity, mixing adventure with excitement while accessing many places not usually reached during the summer season. Given that the conditions for snowmobiling around Strathcona Park are usually great and the vistas are stunning, it is not hard to understand what attracts people into the park. Unfortunately, guided by a public planning process culminating in the existing Park Management Plan, Strathcona Park does not permit the use of any motorized vehicles within the current park boundaries, unless authorized under a park use permit. The park is open to hiking, snowshoeing, nordic skiing and climbing, etc. but snowmobiling is not a permitted activity.

Beyond the limited amount of park boundary signs during the winter, some

confusion may also be associated to the recent addition of the Divers and Rossiter's Lake area to the park. Prior to being annexed to the park, this land was privately owned by TimberWest, who did not appear to mind recreational use of the area, including snowmobiling. However, once the land was acquired, discussions lead to a decision to extend current park policy onto these lands and restrict motorized use.

Understandably, local snowmobile clubs feel that their recreation areas are being threatened by either land development or over protection. At the same time, other park users maintain that the serenity of the park must be protected and backcountry users should be able to enjoy the park without being subjected to the noise and use of snowmobiles. However, snowmobile use is allowed in portions of other provincial parks and in a park as large as Strathcona, couldn't an area be set aside in it as well? Flip side - there are many areas around the park, filled with trails and old logging roads, perfectly suitable for snowmobiles - is the park needed for such a use?

BC Parks continually deals with park use issues surrounding recreational use. In most cases the policies and guidelines are quite clear. At other times however, where some flexibility does exist and environmental impacts are not a factor, the decision is often guided by public will. For this reason we encourage people to participate in park planning processes, to ensure that everyone's views are identified and given fair consideration.

In the meantime, for those interested in snowmobiling in the vicinity of Strathcona Park, please be aware that the park does not allow this use at the present time. Snowmobilers are encouraged to contact local snowmobile clubs for information about where to go in this area.

If you have a point of view about snowmobile use or any other park related topic, please contact Andy Smith, BC Parks, Extension Officer at Tel: (250) 337-2405, Fax: 337- 5695. E-mail: Andy.Smith@gems6.gov.bc.ca ,or send letters to BC Parks, Strathcona District, 1812 Miracle Beach Drive, Black Creek, British Columbia, V9J 1K1.

Wolf View Point correction

Credit for the Wolf article last issue should have read:

Presented by Andy Smith and prepared by "Wolf Safety Working Group" in cooperation with Wildlife Branch, of Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

Wild Isle regrets the error.

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Less is better for everything

Peter Janes becomes enlightened while shredding cement with no way of stopping. What he found may change the way you play.

I carve pavement.

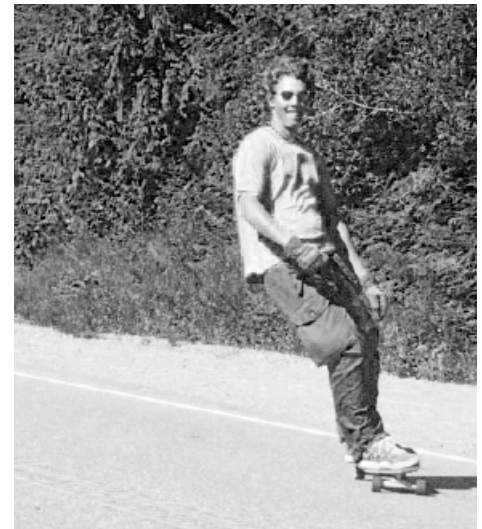
The simple beauty of railing turns down a four-lane highway by starlight. The telemarking of asphalt sports, best suited for lanky whitemen in faded clothing. Cool in a not-cool sort of way. I speak of the asphalt longboard, a skateboard best suited for downhill on steep roads. The Harley of the skate family, a five-foot wooden deck with wide trucks and fat wheels. I've never learned how to ollie and I've only tried twice.

There are no brakes. A large portion of longboarding's appeal springs from its low level of technology. Once I start rolling a slope, the only options open are a clean run to the flats, or some form of a bail. Generally, the latter option is highly unappealing at speed, despite the high-technology safety gear I use – gardening gloves. Longboarding's inherent commitment necessitates a certain presence of mind, in a similar sense to that required by climbing or backcountry travel. Pushing past personal limits becomes dangerous, but correspondingly more rewarding. Self-knowledge is needed to mediate skin and asphalt, skull and bumper.

I'm not trying to encourage playing on the highway. What I advocate is finding a similar passion, ideally self-supported, involving low amounts of technology and definitely putting fossil fuels on the periphery. In this sense, I'm beginning to see all my high-tech outdoorsy gear, like my mountain bike and lead-rack, as problematic. This technology actually interferes with both my personal experience of the natural world and it's general health.

I find it interesting that outdoorsy people are usually considered environmentally minded, despite the quantities of nylon and metal that we accumulate for our activities. These materials help us attain our goals in fun and hip ways, but have lasting environmental impacts in their production, use and disposal. I believe I could attain similar satisfaction from much simpler and low-tech activities, such as writing or meditation.

I achieve personal growth and satisfaction through totally committing to an activity, regardless of what it may be, and pushing it to the limits. I suggest that each of us look at what we're doing and think about making some sacrifices to the greater good. Humans are doing some serious damage to the world:



Peter Janes, armed with gardening gloves, lettin' 'er glide down some Island asphalt.

Photo: Julie Perkins

damage that can be avoided by altering our avenues of personal challenge. I'm trying to ditch internal combustion engines and the rest of the gear produced by big-industry. This reasoning can be extended to include my fleece and Gore-Tex jackets, which are made out of petroleum. Furthermore, do I really need that yellow Metolius camming unit? Aluminium smelting is one of the most energy intensive and polluting processes known to man. Do I want to encourage that? We're actually destroying distant parts of the world in order to equip ourselves to experience other parts of the same world.

I'm starting to value the challenge of not having any small cams when I'm climbing. This situation forces me to experience the world creatively, without using technological crutches. When I'm forced to rely on personal faculties, instead of what I've bought, my achievements are much more rewarding. The longboarder demonstrates this philosophy beautifully by using a simple machine, in combination with the force of gravity and the Island's highway infrastructure. Be creative. Go primitive. Take risks.

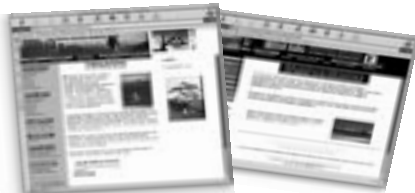
Peter Janes is an outdoor instructor and student on Vancouver Island.

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Comox Valley



Comox Glacier from the Valley of the same name.

Sitting between mountains and ocean, the Comox Valley has soil so fertile even adventure sports thrive. Mountain biking, paddling and hiking opportunities lie waiting to be explored in Courtenay, Cumberland and Comox. Residents live their lives with an air that suggests, “I live here by choice” not for a job. Understandably so.

Even the downtown streets of Courtenay, with the Comox Glacier as backdrop, scream funky character with an adventurous split personality. While the close proximity to world class diving, hiking, climbing, mountaineering, mountain biking, (breath) cross country and downhill skiing, and white water and sea kayaking makes the valley an attractive home to anyone who loves the outdoors, people have to make a living too. Many residents try to get paid to play. Much of the cash flow is devoted to the adventure sports that make the valley famous. So, what does the future hold for Canada’s recreational capital?

Businesses in Courtenay and Comox worry that the new highway steers potential clients away from them. The old highway ran right through Courtenay’s downtown core, right past the businesses that catered to the skiers, bikers, hikers, paddlers and climbers heading for adventures farther up the Island. All the businesses had to do was sit and wait for the Saturday morning ski renters to pull into town.

“People going skiing aren’t going to dog-leg into Courtenay off the new highway,” said Al Dunnett owner of Ski Tak Hut in downtown Courtenay. “It will cost them half an hour to make the detour. They are going to rent the day before in Victoria or Nanaimo or they’re going to wait until they get to Mt. Washington.”

His concerns are echoed by all the businesses catering to skiers in the valley. Owner of Ski and Surf, Kevin Lawrence, foresees his business dropping off in the short term as well. “Most people heading to Mt.

by Ryan Stuart

“Canada’s Recreational Capital” is printed across the wall on the VIA rail station in Courtenay. Who could argue when the valley has so much to offer and a new highway to boot? So what do the businesses that service those recreaters think about the Valley’s future? Read on...



Powder skiing at Mt. Washington.

Washington are day trippers. They won't detour through Courtenay." He says skiers and boarders staying longer on the mountain will benefit the Comox Valley.

"The highway is a big benefit to Mt. Washington for one day visits. For the people spending two or three days up there, they are going to get bored, and come down to Courtenay," he said.

Both businesses see the decline as a temporary cost of making the area more accessible to travelers. "We are closer to Victoria," said Dunnett. "We are not a fringe area any more."

But until the numbers of year round visitors and the time they spend in and around the valley rise substantially both businesses face tough times.

"There will be a big drop in our business and then it will improve in about two years," Dunnett said.

"In the short term it will be good for Mt. Washington and difficult for us," Lawrence said. "In the long term it will be good for them and good for us."

'The Comox Valley Cycle Club is one of the biggest in Canada.'

While things may not be rosy for the ski stores, some positives on the cross-country skiing front are appearing. "Mt. Washington has a new facility up there that is just fantastic," Dunnett said. "They even had the national crosscountry team training up there last spring." The team took advantage of the deep Island snow pack to train for a week in May.

Dunnett also looks forward to the alpine expansion planned for their local hill and to the possibility of Whistler getting the Winter Olympics. He says both those developments can only draw more people to the Comox Valley.

Tourism Comox Valley has mixed emotions about the short-term future of the valley.

"The highway has its ups and downs," said Lara Greasley, TCV Coordinator. "It's easier to get here and easier to go past here." With the worry of people driving right through the valley Greasley says lots of money has gone into promoting the Oceanside route, on the old Island highway.

"We have statistics on what happened when the highway bypassed Parksville and Qualicum, so we have an idea of what's coming," she said. In those communities tourist visits dropped and have only just started to bounce back after more than five years.

One area that helped those communities is internal signage. "If you dropped someone who had never been here before in the middle of the valley, would they be able to find their way around?" Greasley says no. "We are going to continue working and improving our infrastructure."

Mt. Washington and Crown Isle golf course are both well signed, as is Kingfisher Resort. These major tourism businesses have put the infrastructure and marketing effort to attract clients from

'We have a smokin' group of young people who compete at a world class level,'

around the world through cooperation and expansion. "When the bigger businesses market themselves they market the whole valley, and all the businesses benefit," Greasley said.

Tourism Comox Valley encourages cooperation between its smaller businesses. Smaller operators will play a key role in the future of the valley says Greasley. "Soft adventures are where many of our inquiries come from, things like whale watching, hiking and kayaking. These businesses were strong in the past but they haven't reached their potential. The product is here but they still need to organize to offer better service and to grow."

Companies like Wheelies Mountain Adventures are making a go of it. Wheelies runs guided mountain biking tours and shuttles to some of the more popular rides in the valley. "We focus on the freeride to BMX aspect of mountain biking," said Javan Wyker, part owner.

They opened their bike racks to clients last year on Mt. Washington. This year in search of more business they moved into town. And things are going well says Javan, "we've had excellent feedback."

Through all the talk of highways and economic growth the one reason all the operators maintain a positive outlook is because of the natural attraction of the valley. The skiing will only get better as the resort grows larger. And the mountain biking in the valley has literally taken off.

"The new trails being built are being built higher on the mountains to take advantage of the downhill," said Matt Powsey, part owner of Dodge City Cycles in Cumberland. "The trails have cool drops, big air and cool features." Much of the new trail designs can be linked to the rise of "freeride" bikes. The big beefy downhill units that Powsey says add control and speed on any ride.

The trail building effort has taken off around Cumberland. "There was one trail seven years ago, now there is 38 kilometres of single track," on the Beaufort side of the town, said Powsey.

John Rankin, of Mountain City Cycles in Courtenay, says, "There is lots of space

around Cumberland and the dam, especially compared to places like North Van. There is lots of potential for trails.”

Trail building continues where ever there is space. That includes some monster downhill spillage off the local ski hills. New trails drop from the salt shacks on the Mt. Washington road to the logging road near Wolf Lake. That is in addition to all the trails being built on the ski hill itself.

The now defunct ski hill at Forbidden Plateau has two long downhills, Two Sheiks and a Dog and Screamin’ Demon; they drop from the base area to the Puntledge River. This development links all of the trails from Forbidden Plateau to Comox Lake to Cumberland and beyond. And the best

‘This is one of the best places in the world for sighting the six gills.’

parts are “It’s an awesome descent,” and “it’s all single track,” says Powsey. Mountain biking has quickly become one of the biggest attractions for adrenaline enthusiasts. The riding is challenging, interesting and varied, there are tens of kilometres of it and there are long descents.

But the Comox Valley’s bike scene doesn’t stop at the mountains. BMX has come to town. On June 20th this year the first BMX race was won at the new track in Cumberland. Every Thursday night since the track has attracted larger and larger audiences and numbers of participants.

“More people are coming out to ride and to watch,” said Powsey, who is at the track most races. “The locals are out there screaming and cheering their grandkids on. It’s great to see.”

Similar things are happening with road bikes. “There’s been a huge resurrection with road bikes,” says Joan Carson, owner of Forbidden Cycles in Courtenay and one of the most positive supporters of the Comox Valley bike scene. “The Comox Valley Cycle Club is one of the biggest in Canada.”

Cross training athletes are partially responsible. “All the best mountain bikers cross train,” says Carson.

Carson’s shop sponsors some of the best mountain bikers in Canada and the world. “We have a smokin’ group of young people who compete at a world class level.”

The list is a who’s who of Canada’s mountain bike scene: Leon May, top Canadian finish at Grouse Mountain World Cup, Roland Green, national team members and former valley resident, Kiara Bisaro, one of Canada’s top female cross country riders, and the list goes on.

Strong showing from valley riders could be contributed to many things, but one to consider is popularity. “There’s what? 20,000 people in the valley and there’s five bike shops, that’s a lot,” Carson said.

With so many top mountain bikers in the valley one begins to wonder why. “It’s the water,” says Carson. “I think it’s the climate, I think it’s the terrain, I think it’s the fact that the coolest people in the world live here.”

With all those people riding bikes, and all those new trails being cut on private land, there must be conflicts.

“One day someone is going to get hurt riding on private land and sue,” said Carson. Liability issues will force land-owners to close trails. “The future of mountain biking runs on a line somewhere between now and extinction.”

The relationship so far has been a good one. Powsey says the owners of some of the logging companies have been respectful of the trails.

Turn to page 22, **Rocking Valley...**

High on the Comox Glacier.



Fifth Street, downtown Courtenay.

Floating through a decade and the growth of a sport:

Comox Valley Kayaks

With so many companies running sea kayaking trips to so many different areas and some of those areas being so crowded, one might jump to the conclusion that sea kayaking has been around forever. How else does one explain how all those manufacturers and guiding outfits make money.

For evidence of just how young the sea kayaking industry is, one need look no further than the little company that did and does, Comox Valley Kayaks.

It all began in what seems as only yesteryear – 1990. That summer Don Lockwood's step mother bought a few kayaks and started the Courtenay based company as a hobby out of her garage. Not many Comox Valley residents have ever tried the boats before, but Don became inspired.

He took over the company and with a fleet of six boats tried to crack the local market. "It was a novelty for the locals back then," says Erin Thomson, Don's partner. "He offered lessons and we had kayak polo on sit on tops, just to get people interested."

Sea kayaking began to catch on. Don moved the store from behind the Courtenay Veterinary Clinic to its prominent location on Cliffe Street in Courtenay. Traffic heading in either direction on the highway passed right by their front door. The new location helped the business grow.



When Erin joined the company in 1995 they had 40 boats. "The sport was increasing in popularity," she said. "We had lots of school groups, tours and kids camps."

Erin left her hometown of Olds, Alberta, just north of Calgary, in 1995 and headed west. As all Albertans do when they hit the Island, she couldn't leave. Coincidentally, Don's old partner wanted out: Erin bought in.

Comox Valley Kayaks began offering more to clients. Three hour lessons and day trips were popular but so were multi day tours in many different spots around the Island. The client base grew and diversified to include not only their core markets of Vancouver and Seattle but places farther a field. "We got more and more people from farther and farther away," Erin said.

In 1996 with demand growing they opened a store on Quadra Island at the Heriot Bay Inn. They also opened a Powell River store. But it was short lived. The partners wanted out, and the logistics of ferry rides and time demands from other stores was too much. The store sold to Powell River locals.

The partners next venture proved much more successful. The Campbell River bypass had just been completed for the still to come Inland Island Highway. Don and Erin

We got in on a growing sport early, before it was popular.

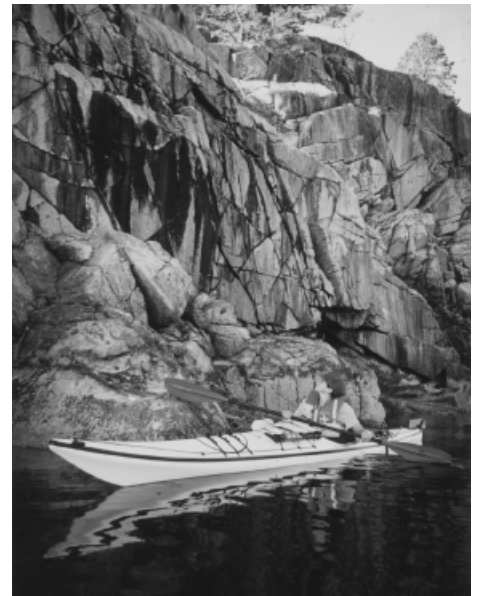
knew the new highway would bypass their location in Courtenay. "They still have to pass through Campbell River," Erin says. Instead of moving the store, they opened a new one in Campbell River in 1998. The new location is only a few blocks from the Island Highway, all they need to divert potential business are a few signs.

Foresight and smart decisions like this are indicative of their success.

Today Comox Valley Kayaks owns 98 boats and at the peak of summer employs 10 people. And those employees are not running trips.

"The baby boomers are getting older, they want cushier trips like mother ships, and water taxi support to get away from the crowds," says Erin. It became too difficult for her and Don to offer rentals, sales, lessons, advice, day tours and multi day tours. Instead they streamlined the business to only offer, rentals, sales, lessons and day trips. Through contacts and alliances they offer planning and referral services to provide customers whatever they need.

But the biggest demand from customers is trip planning help, Erin said. "People know



how to kayak and they want to go out, but they don't know where to go, and they don't own a boat or don't want to bring one from New York."

Erin says she can provide charts, tide tables and just about anything else someone might need for a sea kayak trip.

That includes flexible service. "We are very friendly and flexible. We will stay open late to accommodate people. We're push-overs."

Being "push-overs" says Erin is not the only reason Comox Valley Kayaks is so popular. "We got lucky," she says. "We got in on a growing sport early, before it was popular."

The real secret to their success probably lies in a mix of being in the right place at the right time, flexibility and friendliness. Whatever the reason, it works. Their clients come from as far away as eastern Canada and the U.S. and their rental fleet will probably top 100 next year. And that all comes despite a plateau in sea kayak growth.

But just like every other business, events like the World Trade Center attack effected business. "We had a few groups from Eastern Canada who canceled because they couldn't get a flight."

Sea kayak companies come and go, but with more smart decisions and foresight Comox Valley Kayaks will survive.

- Ryan Stuart

Snowboarding - Ride it, slide it, huck it, stick it

A huge skateboard influence is revolutionizing snowboarding these days. The guys at the top of the sport are still hucking huge air and carving massive faces, but sliding long railings with minimal amounts of snow has caught on.

The newest development helps fill time when the snow doesn't fly or the hills are closed. The snow-skate is a cross between skateboards and snowboards. The super freestyle boards can be used anywhere with almost any amount of snow. "Guys are dumping a pile of snow at the end of a rail and sliding [snow-skates] on it," Corby McCartney at Boardwalk says. "They can be used anywhere, if it snows in town they could be used."

Last year most models were just a deck with rails running down it. This year the new design has a skateboard like deck on top of a short ski. The ski can be turned, but requires good balance. The double decks provide a pop to the boards which allow for kick flips and other skateboard tricks.

The boards have become so popular specific parks are being built for them at ski hills. The parks have rails and jibs and other freestyle features. Snow-skates retail from \$40 for the Sport Check special to \$240 for boards that pivot on the skis.

Normal boards are going more freestyle as well. All mountain boards with park ridability are really popular, especially with the younger crowd, says McCartney.

"Guys are doing rails off cliffs," McCartney says. "Freestyle stuff is getting larger and larger. The young kids are eating it up, and going hard."

Going hard requires great control. Step in bindings don't offer that kind of control and aren't as popular because of it. That said they do offer more convenience for those that don't want to bend down.

For the third season DC offers a pump boot, much like the Reebok pump sport shoes of the early 90s. A pump on the tongue of the boot can be filled and released at any time with

just the push of a finger. "Heel hold down is all important with a boot," McCartney says. "These provide great hold and comfort as well." In three years, he says he has had very few problems with the pump or air chamber.

Burton boots are all hand stitched this year and have a cinch system that gives better fit all over the boot. Burton products cost more, says Macdonald, because they are that much better. "The technology they use is incredible, its totally worth the price."

Crosscountry - lots new

New developments in skate skiing have athletes flying along the snow. A new binding system and extreme side cut skis are to blame.

Salomon developed a binding system with two attachment points. One binding is beside the toes, the other at the ball of the foot. The set up is laterally stiff and provides a spring back on the foot.

Fischer's skate cut has been around a few years but this is only its second model on the market, says Bernard Zirkel at Mountain Meadows in Courtenay. The skis have two hourglass curves on each edge, providing skate skiers better directional glide and control.

Overall, says Al Dunnett at Ski Tak Hut in Courtenay, skating skis are torsionally stiffer giving better edge control. He says many technologies used in alpine skiing are being integrated into crosscountry skis.

Boots are stiffer and have more ankle support, bindings are stronger with faster response to boot action, says Zirkel.

Wider selection dominates the

cross country market changes. With all these choices Bernard Zirkel recommends one thing to all cross country skiers on the coast: "Use fish scales, its hard to maintain wax in this environment." Beginners should start with classic crosscountry style and progress to skating when they get the feel, he says. Mountain Meadows carries Karhu, Madshaus and Fischer crosscountry skis.

For those looking for the middle ground between full telemark gear and crosscountry Madshaus has a lightweight ski with metal edges. The idea is to allow some backcountry turning with crosscountry's light weight. These skis are ideal for skiers on the west coast who want to ski in and off track.

The route most light back country skiers take, says Bernard, is leather or light plastic boots, telemark bindings and skis again, with fish scales and skins.

Technology doesn't change as quickly with crosscountry as it does with downhill gear, and cross country skiers don't change their gear as often either.

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Backcountry - versatility and performance get you farther out back

The newest thing in backcountry travel is the *Meta* and *Morph* from Karhu competing with a similar Salomon *Rate* and *X-advantage* design. They are short, fat skis, with a permanent ski on the bottom and one of three choices for a binding. "They perform like a snowshoe with glide," states Bernard at Mountain Meadows. He sees them being a great way of getting around in the backcountry for snowboarders and hikers.

The genetic misfit allows for three binding choices: a mount for street shoes, a mount for crosscountry ski boots and a mount for boots designed to go with the skis.

Mountain Meadows will be stocking a few rental models this winter.

To complement the ski/snowshoes, Salomon has a new light plastic snowshoe with a binding that is compatible with cross country skis.

Mountain Meadows recommends Mountain Safety Research (MSR) snowshoes for traversing slopes. The stiff plastic snowshoes track better than the traditionally shaped aluminum frame shoes on side slopes. They recommend the latter for general flat terrain use. The shop is

considering stocking racing snowshoes for rentals, since Mt. Washington plans to hold some snowshoe races this winter.

With skis it's all about fashion. Shorter and shapelier is in, especially with the rainbow of colours on this years boards. Mountain Meadows carries only a few backcountry skis. On the alpine touring side there is Hytrax Air Carbon from Fischer and the Tua Hydrogen. The Fischers were tested extensively by the shop last season and they have returned by popular demand, says Bernard. The Tua is an ultra-light, high end ski.

For telemark Mountain Meadows has a few models of Tuas to choose from, but because 50 per cent of Tua's line is brand new, he hasn't had a chance to check them out.

Telemarking lacks popularity on the island, most tele skiers use old gear or go off Island to buy new gear, which is why Bernard doesn't carry more stuff. When he does sell tele gear it's often the bindings. "Everything has a 12 millimetre riser. Some are going up to 45 millimetres," he said. The trend toward releasable tele bindings hasn't caught on, probably because of

price, although Bernard says the National team has to have them.

He says alpine touring/ski mountaineering gear is much more popular than telemark. He carries four bindings and one pair of boots.

For the occasional backcountry venture Bernard recommends Alpine Trekkers, which quickly and easily convert downhill skis into alpine touring outfits. Of course one would require skins to go up hill. "There is a tendency towards synthetic skins, because they are easier to maintain." But Bernard says, with a little care mole hair skins are much better. "They have better glide and climb." Some good news comes from G3 who assemble and pre-cut mole hair skins, Mountain Meadows will be carrying them.

For snowboarding in the backcountry split boards are the way to go. Burton appears on the split board market this year, with a new binding set up. Split boards separate into two skis that, with the addition of a climbing skin, can be used for climbing uphill. The binding lifts right off the board with a jerk of the loop. The toe of the binding has a pin in it that clips right into a separate climbing binding on the centre of the ski just like a cross country binding. Worries about durability quickly evaporated after Rory Macdonald at Boardwalk, watched a rider on the Burton split decision push the board to the max.

Beacons go more and more digital every year, but Bernard says the signal doesn't work as well as analog beacons in long range searches. Probes and shovels continue to lose weight and gain strength. Mountain Meadows wants all backcountry enthusiasts to remember their prices are competitive with Mountain Equipment Co-op.

Downhill - New ski styles

There's no new trend in skiing, but there is an emerging trend with skis," says Al Dunnett of Ski Tak Hut in Courtenay. Skis having twin tips which are wider and with more shape are gaining popularity, especially with the younger crowd. "Skiing is cool again."

Almost every brand of ski has a model that is a short, wide twin tip. That includes brands like Volkl that traditionally catered to an older audience. They've come out with a plain black twin tip, emblazoned with a "V" on the tip.

Salomon, the leaders in twin tip technology, have a signature 1080 line this year, every length has its own graphics, and each length is named after famous free skiers.

"These new skis are more specific, they are for the park and freeride," Dunnett said. He says the popularity of extreme sports fuels the freestyle revolution. "This is a trend we are seeing again. In the 70s freestyle skis had upturned ends."

Fat and short are in across the entire ski spectrum, as is lots of side cut. "There are no straight skis," Dunnett said. "Wider skis with side cut are easier to ski, they turn better and faster, they hold ice better and they are just more fun."

Dunnett compares skis to mountain bikes. Straight skis are fully rigid, first generation shaped skis are hard tail, and this year's shaped skis are full suspension rides.

Riser plates accompany the trend. Risers lift the binding off the ski, providing clearance for the boot and leverage in the turns.

"Riser plates are mandatory" with most skis today, says Dunnett.

Most manufacturers have introduced in the last few seasons integrated binding systems which are bindings built right into the ski. With normal skis and bindings, a ski flexes in front of



Comox Valley backcountry with the Comox Glacier behind.

Fat, round and soft the rage Boots so comfortable you float

the boot and behind the boot, but along the boot length there is a flat spot. A rigid boot and binding prevent the ski from flexing. To address this lack of flex Volkl has a Marker binding that slides on rails. This allows the ski to fully flex, even under foot. The binding slides down the ski to adjust for the flex. Salomon's system is similar. The binding has two attachment pins on the ski. This allows full flex of the ski by taking the rigid boot and binding off.

"You get on one of these skis and it feels like silk or velvet," Dunnett says. "But you can push the ski and it still feels good at the top end."

The Salomon system also has a dampener at the toe of the boot designed to absorb vibrations. Lots of bindings and skis have some sort of dampener.

Racing skis keep shrinking. "Where someone would have been on a 210 centimetre pair of skis they now ski 190s," says Dunnett. Parabolic shaped skis are faster on edge. Racing skis are for a specific market.

Dunnett says if there is one kind of ski truly designed for Mt. Washington it is "all mountain, freeride skis, like the Rossignol Bandit XX or the Salomon X-Scream. They're not fat, but one size down."

Salomon's Pocket Rocket is also a Wet Coast ski. Twin tip but fatter than its sister ski the 1080, the Pocket Rocket was designed for people who want to spend time in the park but also want to ski deep powder.

Skis add fun, but boots are number one. Dunnett advises "You want comfort and fit." To help out with those needs, liners in higher end boots are now thermic. They mold to the shape of individual feet with the heat of use. Softer plastics are helping with performance of boots. By injecting different plastics into different parts, soft flex and lateral stiffness can be achieved. This combination provides more control and easier turning of skis.

"Boots used to be made with one plastic in different thickness." Now plastics are combined with other more comfortable materials, like leather. These mid range boots are more comfortable, softer but have more support than traditional boots.

Salomon has a boot coming out, says Dunnett that is a lace up ski boot modelled after snowboard boots. What next?

While new developments abound when choosing a new pair of boots one of the most important things to consider is getting a good fit.

Dunnett says Ski Tak Hut has a brand new, boot fitting system. "We have the most sophisticated boot fitting on the Island. We can basically reshape boots, within a fine tolerance." Together he and his staff have almost 100 years of boot fitting experience. They spend much of their winter testing products and their summers hand picking which models they will carry.

All this adds up to great news for Island skiers and snowboarders heading for the mountains this winter.

- Ryan Stuart



An example of the new school skiing sweeping the market. Rail slide, Blackcomb terrain park. C/O Whistler/Blackcomb.
Photo by Bruce Rowles.

Brooks introduces Eclipse spray decks for spring 2002

The Eclipse Nylon was introduced to retailers at the Outdoor Retailer Show in Salt Lake City in August 2001. It will be widely available at retailers across the continent for the Spring 2002 season. The Eclipse expedition sprayskirt is loaded with exciting features to meet the most demanding conditions in comfort with style and function. It is seam sealed, has a 500 denier cordura edge guard, overtop the 200 denier nylon. The cargo mesh deck pocket is zippered to hold your belongings securely, and the deck features an implosion bar to ensure water cannot pool. Available in two colour combinations, yellow/royal or black/smoke, and two sizes #2 and #3 to ensure the

widest range of fit on touring kayaks. Suggested retail: \$90 US. For further information contact Angela Lee, Brooks Wetsuits Ltd. toll free: 888-986-3441 email: info@brookspaddlegear.com www.brookspaddlegear.com



HAPPENINGS

Every Tuesday	BMX races	Qualicum Beach
Every Thursday	BMX races 6:00 pm	Cumberland
Every Sunday	Mountain Market - Arts and Craft Fair	Mt Washington
1st. Sun. Every Month	Guided mountain bike rides at Hartlands call SIMBS	Hartlands, Victoria
Sat. Sep. 28	Opening Night Journey Into Amazing Caves	Victoria, IMAX
Sun. Oct. 7	Shows: 12, 2, 4, 6&8 pm Single Speed Championships 250-336-2200 for info	Cumberland
Mon. Oct. 8	Last day of summer lifts	Mt Washington
Fri. Oct. 12	Premier "New World Disorder" sequel George at Neverland Bikes for info	7 pm, David Lam Aud Univesity of Victoria
Sat. Oct. 13	The Island's Ski and Snowboard Show 250-595-7121	Cedar Hill Rec. Cent
Oct 24-26	SKGABC Fall Exchange	Cooper's Landing Pender Is.
Sun. Nov. 4	Comox Valley Ski Swap 250-337-8936	Filberg Centre Courtenay
Fri. Nov. 16	Best of Banff Film Festival 604-885-7448 for tickets	Gibsons
Sat. Nov. 17	Extreme Diabetes lecture 250-729-3824	Nanaimo
Nov. 17&18	Best of Banff Film Festival 250-472-3820 for info	Victoria UVic Centre
Wed. Nov. 21	Best of Banff Film Festival 250-741-1855 for info	Nanaimo Port Theatre
Thurs. Nov. 22	Best of Banff Film Festival 250-723-3744 for info	Port Alberni Echo Centre
Fri. Nov. 23	Best of Banff Film Festival 250-285-2234 for info	Campbell River Tidemark Theatre
Sat. Nov. 24	Best of Banff Film Festival 250-338-2420 for info	Courtenay Sid Williams Theatre
Sat. Dec. 1	Extreme Diabetes Lecture 250-286-7023	Campbell River

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Rocking Valley athlete haven

...from page 15, Comox Valley Profile.

"They have been really good so far. They could have nuked many trails but they have left buffer zones, which is nice."

To try and halt further logging near trails the Community Forest Society is trying to buy up some of the private land near Cumberland. But they fight an uphill monetary battle.

Down on the water Bill Coltart doesn't face any land issues with his scuba dive operation, See and Sea Adventures. He runs clients out to dive sites near the valley throughout the year.

"During the summer we dive off Hornby Island to see the six gill sharks," he said. "In the winter the stellar and California sea lions are around."

Diving with the sea lions is almost guaranteed during the winter but the sharks are a little more elusive. But Coltart says, "This is one of the best places in the world for sighting the six gills." Closer to the valley

he takes clients to a sunken steamship 30 minutes off Comox. There are 100's of fish and invertebrates that colour the water.

While summer time may seem like the best time to be out on the water diving Coltart says that isn't so. "The diving is better during the winter. There is less plankton, so the visibility is better. The water here only changes a few degrees throughout the year."

Above the water sea kayaking has managed to grab on. Comox Valley Kayaks introduced sea kayaking to the valley in 1991. They rented six kayaks. This year their fleet has ballooned to 89 boats.

The valley is not known for its sea kayaking, although the beaches, water and coastline around Comox provide excellent kayaking. But just a 30 minute ferry ride away, Denman and Hornby Islands are a sea kayakers


paradise. The water is warm, the sea life abundant and the views of the Island and Coast mountains make any trip.

The rivers around the valley are not known for their white water either, but that doesn't mean there isn't white water to be had. Kevin Lawrence paddles the valley's rivers every spring and fall and sells paddling accessories out of Ski and Surf. The Brown's River offers difficult creek boating in a small volume river. But Lawrence prefers the Puntledge when the waters high. "A few years ago the water was up for the whole spring. It was great. The [Puntledge] river gets big, big waves. One day we had four paddlers on one wave."

On a dryer front, the rock climbing in the valley has not seen much development in recent years. The cliffs above Comox Lake house some fine friction climbs and cracks with great views. And there are a few lines up near Mt. Washington. The valley is blessed with lots of rock that waits for more climbers to start developing.

Hiking has similar potential but development is nonexistent. Unless mountaineering is more ones style. The Island Ranges backdrop the Comox Valley. All the peaks have been climbed, but routes and variations lie on almost every chunk of rock. Many lie within a day's hike of Comox Valley trailheads.

Companies, infrastructure and potential continue to grow in the valley. Compared to a few years ago development has grown exponentially and will, by all accounts, continue to do so in the near future. Considering the valley is home to Allison Forsythe, one of Canada's top downhill skiers, Leon May, one of our country's best downhill riders and Kiara Bissaro, one of the top women cross country riders, imagine what the valley will grow to become in the years to come.

Maybe Canada's Olympic medal capital or maybe it will reassert its title as recreational capital. Joan Carson doesn't care what you call the Comox Valley, she knows why it's great. "It is as cool as it can get. It rocks." 

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