

SKIING

Red rocks big time



Barb Martowski

ROSSLAND, B.C. — Tucked deep in the southwest corner of the Kootenay Rockies is one of British Columbia's best skiing treasures — Red Mountain.

It's not like it's a new hill, having been the sight of the first Canadian National ski race back in 1898, it's just that Red has been a low-keyed kind of place

— in other words, a skier's hill.

Content to stay under the radar for many years, Red has always been about terrain rather than "resort," but that's about to change.

In June, new owners from south of the border inked a deal, and the wheels have been put in motion to not only expand the terrain, but add more on-hill accommodations and improve and enlarge customer services and amenities. Just don't go looking for glitz and glamour.

"No, that's not what we're about," says Howard Katkov, president and CEO of Red Mountain Ventures. "Red will never be a place where you see small, coiffed dogs peaking out from an overpriced, fur-trimmed ski suit."

You could almost hear "And if I do, I'm moving" as a tail end to that sentence.

Katkov, a real estate developer from California, first came to Rossland four years ago and fell in love with both the town and the lifestyle. He purchased some property

and started building his retirement home. Only then did this avid skier actually make it up the hill, though friends had been touting Red's great terrain for years.

"This place is amazing; incredible chutes and steeps. In fact, we've just been ranked 13th out of the top 25 ski resorts in North America by *Skiing* magazine, and that's huge. We've just had the best holiday season ever, and so has the town."

Katkov couldn't say enough about Red. While we were having lunch up at the Paradise Lodge, which was gutted and rebuilt this summer, he said, "Look at this, just look at this," flicking a pile of snow off the railing. "It's bone dry and there's plenty of it."

Backyard adventure

Talk quickly turned to the variety of in-bounds terrain and the popularity of backcountry skiing.

"Backcountry, hell it's the backyard here at Red," said Katkov, telling me that he and Jim Greene, VP of operations had gone out the previous day and all they had to do was take the Motherlode chair and do a short hike over to Gray Mountain.

Currently there's just under 1,600 acres of terrain, and from what I could see, plenty of runs to really challenge even the most hardcore of skier and riders.

Red is actually two mountains — Red and Granite, and four distinct areas. Red itself, rises 5,208 feet and features blues and blacks, and a new terrain park. Though the map does indicate a green which wraps around the mountain, a big sign at the chair tells you it's not accessible.

A sign that my bus mate Sarah Pelton missed. As it was her second day as a bonifide skier, she went for what looked on the map like a small, easy-to-handle hill. Wrong.

"Somehow I ended up on a run called the Cliff, which is a double black. I haven't even skied a blue yet! I came down most of it on my bum," she laughed, "but I want to come up with you to Paradise."

Her enthusiasm is exactly the type of skier and rider that Katkov and Greene are looking for. "It's always going to be about the skiing experience here," said Katkov. "At the end of our 15-year plan, we'll have a total of 4,200 acres with plenty of terrain for all levels. The difference though is our accommodations and amenities. We're limiting the amount of beds we put on the hill (all ski-in, ski-out with the first condos scheduled for availability by 2006) and we're being very careful about the amenities. Rossland is a very important component to this resort, in fact we're actually within the town boundaries, so that's where people will be shopping, not up here."

The other face

Granite Mountain (6,800 feet) is where I found my paradise — literally. Off the Paradise chair is this wonderful area of mostly blues (read easy blacks here in Alberta) with a few greens that you can play in all day. The Motherlode chair, which is also on Granite, is where you want to play if you're into blacks and double blacks — especially if you want to make your legs burn.

"To the right of the Motherlode chair, you ride along Buffalo Ridge, where you can either drop into the right — an area that has several blues to give you a break from the blacks. Or you can go further along and drop off to the left, into some pretty technical



— BARB MARTOWSKI, Sun photo

Even though there hadn't been any fresh snow in three days, Heather Hamilton, Red's customer service director still managed to find some untracked powder.

stuff like Roots and Short Squaw," said Downhill Rider tourguide, Ryan Saulou. "But I warn you, you're going to feel your quads blow if you don't stop at least three or four times."

If this all sounds a little intimidating, not to worry. Red has a terrific snow school with classes that range from beginners of all ages to specialty classes on how to ski powder, steeps and glades.

Red, along with Whitewater may be a bit out of the way for many of us here in the Edmonton area, but both are well worth putting on your destination list. If you hate the idea of driving for 12 hours, consider hoping a bus. Alternately, fly into Cranbrook, rent a vehicle and make a point of spending a few days at both. Guaranteed, after your first trip, you'll be planning the next one. For more on Red, visit www.redresort.com.

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Transportation, accommodation and equipment supplied by Downhill Riders and Sundance Ski Shop.



— Photo courtesy RED RESORT

With the backcountry literally in Red's backyard, many skiers and riders take advantage of the quick access off the Motherlode chair.