



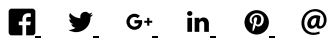
http://www.gloucestertimes.com/sports/local_sports/packed-powder-is-the-most-ideal-skiing-conditions/article_ce38d7b9-9842-5081-8034-ee6bd8def9b2.html

Packed powder is the most ideal skiing conditions

Outdoors Dave Sartwell Feb 5, 2018 Updated Feb 5, 2018



Courtesy photo You want powder, we got powder.



The powder just kept dropping from the sky. A huge weather system that swirled in from the Pacific Ocean had slammed into the Selkirk Mountains in southern British Columbia and would not moved out. We had not seen the sun in days. But the skiing, incredible.

The long and wide powder skis floated unseen beneath my feet. In fluff this deep you have to trust what is under you. I was leaving a contrail behind as a result of my boots and shins slicing through the light snow. With Iain leading the way, Larry, Dino, Tina and I slipped into the trees for some bark'n. Of the five of us, I was the least experienced in skiing deep powder and it showed. We simply do not ever get this type of skiing in the east. I let them go ahead as I struggled to find the rhythm.

My brain was aware of what was required, just relax and let the skis find their own way. Balance on top, pressure both skis, don't dig the edges as you would on ice, just float as if you were water skiing. Sure, easy enough to think, hard to put in practice. But then it started to come. The muscles in my legs began to relax as I floated through the snow. The trees came quickly, reaction was required.

The whole secret is to keep moving downward on the fall line, controlling speed by turning but never getting the skis too square to the hill. About now there was a nagging voice in the back of my head reminding me of how easy this would be if I had spent more time on the stair master in the gym. My heart started to slow down a bit and I convinced myself to breath. I stopped putting a death grip on my poles, relaxed and remembered a comment made

years ago from Dan Eagan as we about to enter some gnarly piece. "Keep your feet below your head!"

There were no tracks here, we were the first into this section of the mountain. Whoops and yelps came from my companions, letting each other know where they were as they found their own private avenues down through the laden spruce boughs. They were just flashes of ski-coat color, dancing to their own ballet being choreographed by the ever present and unforgiving tree trunks.

Down...down...down. Moving right, pressure left, ducking limbs, finding space between, action faster than the conscious mind can process. Don't focus on the trunks, just on the spaces between, trusting that there would be another avenue of escape over the knob or behind the tree ahead.

Too soon we broke out of the dark woods and onto the snow-covered trail that led us back to the lift. Iain gave me a big grin, waved his hand and we followed. No words were necessary. They would have been inadequate. We all knew we had just shared an incredible run and smiles seemed more than enough.

Sixteen members of the North American Snowsports Journalists Association had gathered to ski Schweitzer, Whitewater and Red Mountains. They are three resorts of several located in northern Idaho and southern B.C. that are affectionately known as the Powder Highway. They, like Fernie, Kicking Horse, Revelstoke and others, are the beneficiaries of weather systems that suck water out of the Pacific Ocean, freeze it and then dump it on the Rockies in amounts that are often measured in feet not inches. This area is the Holy Grail for powder hounds. We were not disappointed.

Spokane, Wa. is best the jumping off point. There are a lot of flights in by most of the major carriers. You can take a small plane into Castlegard, B.C., but the locals call it "Cancelgard" as the weather systems often make it impossible to land in this mountain valley. We rented a four-wheel drive car and drove to Sandpoint, Idaho where we spent two days skiing at the wonderful Schweitzer Resort. From there, in the middle of a driving snow storm, we headed roughly two and one-half hours north, passing over Kootenay Pass, the highest paved mountain pass in Canada. The Prestige Hotel Lakeside Resort, located in lovely small city of Nelson, B.C. was going to be our headquarters for the next few days. Whitewater, about fifteen minutes away, has no housing at the mountain and Red, about an hour away, has some, but it is very limited.

Whitewater and Red are quite similar in nature. Both are huge mountains where the average yearly snowfall is about forty feet! Red is a giant area. Composed of four mountains, it offers roughly 3,000 vertical feet of incredibly varied terrain on about 2,800 lift served acres. Whitewater is a bit smaller but has a pitch on most of its runs that will leave you breathless at the bottom. Neither has highly developed base areas. They share that "oldtimey" feel. You stuff your gear in a corner of a pleasant base lodge and can be sure it will be there when you return. After all, its Canada.

"We only groom about 20 percent of our trails," our host said. "We don't have to make snow, it just comes to us naturally."

If you want steep and deep, long glade runs, or intermediate trails from the top that run on forever, this is your place. The lines are short. Be forewarned that there is not a high-speed lift on either mountain, but because they are out of the way, the lift lines, even on their busiest days, are very short.

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