

Callaghan Backcountry Lodge, Whistler, B.C.

Full-service remote access at the centre of the universe.

by *Leslie Anthony*

The first thing you notice about Callaghan Backcountry Lodge—other than the fact that it's a magnificent 22 km snowmobile, snowcat or ski-in from the highway through, at times, towering and all-too-rare coastal old-growth forest—is the backdrop enormity of Powder Mountain.

That might explain why the lodge, located at the head of the spectacular Callaghan Valley in a 3,500-acre outdoor adventure playground, was first named Powder Mountain Lodge when it opened in 1998. Indeed Powder Mountain and its attendant ice-cap have long been the focus here—no less than five feasibility studies for alpine ski areas on it have gone by the wayside; the woman who thought she had the original rights has exhausted all her legal appeals to the claim, and so the area has been tenured for multi-use backcountry adventure. Which is exactly what you get.

At Callaghan you can snowshoe across meadows and through open forest, cross-country ski on track-set or skating trails amidst magnificent scenery, or tour into the high alpine to bag killer, 1,000-metre ski or board descents in some of the region's lightest and most reliable powder. In fact, the Callaghan Valley annually receives almost two metres more snow than nearby Whistler. Part of the reason is the southwest-oriented valley (the direction of prevailing storm tracks) and part is the elevation—the lodge sits at 1,370 metres, almost twice as high as the town of Whistler.

Once you've finished your day of shralping the undulating steps of Powder Mountain's bowls, or dropping the myriad of hairy pillow lines on the west side of the valley, you can check out the best part of the Callaghan experience—the bright cozy, red cedar lodge with cubby-hole bedrooms built on a traditional Scandinavian design. The place is a rare treat of brightly lit rooms, comfortable digs and customized four-star cooking by a live-in chef. It's hard to beat this kind of comfort at the end of a long winter day—especially if you've chosen to ski into the lodge from the Highway 99 staging area.

If you do decide to ski all the way in, you can break up the journey with a stop at Alexander Falls warming hut—near the benchlands on which the Nordic events would be held if the Vancouver/Whistler 2010 Olympic bid goes through. But don't hang there too long, there's another 13 to go after that.

The last time I was there I went to bed after midnight, under a sky constellated by billions of stars. When I awoke, I was greeted by silver-dollar snowflakes and before I departed there was a fresh 30 cm of new to slide through—and it wasn't even snowing in Whistler.

DNA: Callaghan Country Winter Adventures; (604) 938-0616; callaghancountry.com

[MAIN photo 2193-11] **Paul Morrison**

[caption] **Sheets and pillows provided. Skier: Shane Szocs.**

[MEDIUM photo 2193-43] **Paul Morrison**

[caption] **A new Nordic event: Slogging.**

[MEDIUM photo 2193-41] **Leslie Anthony**

[caption] **Powder Mountain is so big, it's even in the kitchen.**

[DETAIL photo 2193-40] **Paul Morrison**

[caption] **Scandinavian, yes. IKEA, no.**