

Upper Callaghan Valley – Skier’s Resource Manual

Part 2 – Backcountry Skiing

DISCLAIMER

The activities described in this resource manual are hazardous and should only be undertaken with a full understanding of all the inherent risks. Routefinding through mountainous terrain is involved and knowledge of avalanche hazards, glacier travel, basic mountaineering and map reading is assumed.

The information presented here is simply a record of past trips and is NOT an indication that any of the routes are safe or are in condition to ski on at any given time. Many of the routes and suggested descents are only possible in safe avalanche conditions.

It is assumed that persons attempting any of these routes have the necessary skills to properly assess the difficulties and dangers involved. You assume all responsibility for your own safety in the backcountry. While every effort has been made to ensure that the route descriptions are up-to-date and accurate, no liability whatsoever is assumed for the use of the information contained in this resource manual or for the consequences of any mistakes or errors or omissions in content or representation.

Most of the routes described are not for novices. For those new to the sport of backcountry travel and skiing, it is recommended that you accompany an experienced group or hire an accredited mountain guide.

Backcountry Skiing

In addition to the groomed X-country ski product that Callaghan Country provides, the company has also earned a reputation as an accommodation base for some of the best “off piste” skiing in North America. This type of skiing, also referred to as backcountry skiing includes a variety of sub types designated principally on type of equipment and technique used. The common thread associating them is that in all cases the heel is free to travel up and down thus creating the forward motion for kick and glide.

Callaghan Country provides commercial services including: parking, groomed access, shuttle service, luggage transfers, overnight accommodations, ACMG guiding and food and beverage services for each of the following activities:

- Alpine ski touring
- Telemarking
- Snowboard touring
- Snowshoeing / Yupping
- Light ski touring
- Yo-yo skiing
- Randonee skiing

Parking

Callaghan Country's base facilities are located 8.5 km up the Callaghan Valley Road just before entering the Whistler Olympic Park, turn left and proceed across bridge to our parking lot. Please note that parking here requires purchase of a trail pass.

Access

Ski tourers wishing to have either luggage or themselves transported into the Upper Callaghan Valley need to have made prior reservations. Skiers are advised to make early reservations as shuttle service is limited.

Ski tourers wishing to use groomed trails to either access or exit from the Upper Callaghan Valley are required to purchase a trail pass and register with the ticket office. Alpine style ski tourers are reminded that their equipment severely degrades the prepared surfaces for both classic and skate skiers. Therefore, it is preferred that they utilize the Wild Spirit trail to access the alpine areas and that they make every effort to minimize deterioration of the trails. This is particularly true on their descent, especially if the surfaces have just been groomed. Tracks will freeze overnight rendering the trail unsuitable and hazardous for its intended use. Ski Tourers must stay to the extreme side of the trail and avoid degrading the skate ski surface in the trail centre.

Accommodation

Callaghan Country offers a wide range of accommodations to fit most ski tourer's budgets and expectations. Please see www.callaghancountry.com or call 604 938-0616.

Guide Service

Callaghan Country recommends the use of a certified mountain guide to fully appreciate the magnificence and vast terrain that constitutes the Upper Callaghan Valley. Not only do they provide a safe and efficient travel route but they are also the resident experts on the best lines and powder accumulation spots. Growing numbers of visitors are utilizing this service to maximize a carefree day devoid of group conflict and to increase their personal array of alpine skill sets. Let us arrange a guide for you. It is well worth the money!

Maximizing Your Ski-Touring Adventure (Pre-Plan)

Many visitors to the Upper Callaghan Valley are simply not prepared for the sheer size of the terrain available for ski touring. As stated previously, a guide will greatly enhance your comfort, knowledge, safety and ability to enjoy the pleasures of the day.

For those not partaking in these services, a few words of advice. Use the information presented here and from other sources to carefully plan your day(s) outing. Your plan should include your intended route, destination and expected time of return. You should always have in mind a “Plan B” that allows for changes in weather, gear malfunctions, injury and /or emergency. Ensure that you leave a copy of this plan with someone who actually cares about you.

Strive to increase your knowledge and awareness of avalanche phenomena. Practice training in self rescue techniques before you leave on your trip. Take inventory of your fellow ski tourer’s abilities and their level of respect for mountain hazards. Openly discuss your level of risk tolerance at the outset and be prepared to turn around if you or anyone else in the party has concerns about the route or conditions. Remember, good gear is great but it is no substitute for well-practiced same party rescue techniques.

Check weather forecasts (www.whistlerweather.ca) and avalanche conditions (www.avalanche.ca) prior to leaving. Update background information on routes (www.bivouac.com)

The Upper Callaghan Valley is a long way from your vehicle. Are you prepared for delays and nightfall? Aside from the mandatory avalanche safety gear required to travel in these environs, are you also equipped and knowledgeable with the 10 Backcountry Essentials:

- Map (www.clarkegeomatics.ca) and compass / gps
- First Aid kit
- Whistle
- Extra clothing /hat /gloves
- Lighter
- Pocket knife
- Extra Food & Water
- Space blanket
- Flashlight /batteries
- Sunglasses/sunscreen

New Regulations Prohibiting Public Snowmobiling

The Upper Callaghan Valley has been placed under a Section 58 (1) (b) Winter Recreation Closure under the Forest and Range Practices Act. Public snowmobiling is now prohibited in the Upper Callaghan Valley by law. All of the slopes leading into the Upper Callaghan Valley are now designated for non-motorized activities. This land use decision is great news to all ski tourers, both from a safety and pleasure perspective.

Callaghan Country retains its commercial licence to continue meeting its servicing and historical lodge guest transportation needs through the provision of (guided) snowmachine trips restricted to its primary access trail. Ski tourers accessing the Upper Valley may be momentarily inconvenienced by the passing of these sleds and snowcats. While the company seeks to create an experience which will meaningfully reconnect people with the natural world, it has discovered over many lean years, that operating a lodge with a capacity to do this requires a level of mechanization. We apologize to the purists among us but at the end of the day we have to pay our bills. Recommendations for those wishing to minimize contact with snowmobiling would be to use Mainline / Parkway and Upper Wild Spirit as their access route.

Where to Go?

Of course, the decision to ski which slope involves a complex set of variables including snowpack stability, hazard level, terrain evaluation, uptrack condition, wind direction and speed, aspect and weather conditions to name a few.

To understand the vastness and complexity of the area, this user's guide has divided the area into zones that can be skied from a common route or uptrack. In some instances this might include different sides of a common ridge having different zones.

In total there are 14 different zones with 8 separate alpine uptracks accessing some sixty five individual ski descents. There are innumerable incantations of each run.

Fourteen Zones of Pure Love

Starting at Conflict Lake and moving in a clockwise direction the various ski touring areas are identified as zones and are labeled for reference in this resource manual as:

1. T – 33
2. Journeyman
3. North Shoulder / Shade Glade
4. Les Gendarmes
5. Stadium
6. Nasty Lady
7. CalPow
8. Solitude
9. Bark Face
10. Ring
11. Callaghan – West Side
12. Morning Glory (Callaghan Lake Provincial Park)
13. Mt. Callaghan Icefields
14. Telemagique Lake Traverse (Callaghan Lake Provincial Park)

Zone # 1 – T-33
Steep Chute & Summer Skiing

Total Distance: 2.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 400 m.

Difficulty: Difficult
Terrain: Challenging

An elegant collection of steep sided couloirs exhibiting diverse traits in terms of steepness , width and entry difficulty. Access during summer is typically by bootpack and during winter by traversing up East ridge. A great place to spend an early morning corn snow experiencein July.

Ski Descent# 1 - 6

Zone # 2 – Journeyman
Ski Touring / Long Runs

Total Distance: 3 kms
Elevation Gain: 760 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Challenging

Closet summit to the Lodge, Journeyman Peak lies on the end of the ridge which starts 6 kms. to the East just above Callaghan Creek. It is accessed via meadows on Solitude Loop and ascends along the Heywood Girdle and around a steeper knob into a smaller basin which leads to a ridge and the final open slopes. There is excellent skiing here, with dozens of long runs ranging from conservative lines back down the ascent route to long committing lines NE towards the Lodge.

Ski Descents# 7 – 12

Zone # 3 – North Shoulder including Shade Glade
Foul Weather & YoYo Skiing

Total Distance: 1 km
Elevation Gain: 300 m.

Difficulty: Intermediate
Terrain: Simple

Due to its close proximity to the Lodge this area is popular for persons with restricted time frames or on poor visibility days. Excellent glade skiing using the Heywood Girdle as the uptrack access. Be cautious of avalanche terrain in steep area (Shouldnotski) immediately above traverse route. Be sure to use prudent travel techniques in this area.

Ski Descents# 13 – 19

Zone # 4 - Les Gendarmes
Ski Touring / Long Runs

Total Distance: 4 kms
Elevation Gain: 760 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Complex

Variety of excellent North facing runs commencing under set of gnarly rock outcroppings. There is also a well defined gully system stretching from the bottom of the Stadium area up to Tradesman Peak. Many different variations and lines can be scoped on the traverse up. Side trips abound. Access is straight up Curly traverse to col between Tradesman and Sub-trades peaks and then West over to rock spires. This is complex avalanche terrain so good routefinding skills are essential. Ski Descents # 20 - 24

Zone # 5 - Stadium

Foul Weather Skiing / Playing

Total Distance: 2.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 100 m.

Difficulty: Intermediate
Terrain: Simple

Small amphitheatre tucked in at the end of the valley. Termination point of many longer ski descents. Perfect area to play in during times of poor visibility / excessive snow. Couple of classic small chutes and creekbeds. Access is same as for Solitude (Zone 8)
Ski Descents # 19, 34 - 37

Zone # 6 - Nasty Lady

Ski Touring / Steep Skiing

Total Distance: 4 kms
Elevation Gain: 975 m.

Difficulty: Difficult
Terrain: Complex

Relatively benign start off down permanent snowfield terminating into a series of chutes, cliff faces and pillow drops. Due to an awkward approach it does not enjoy a lot of visitation. Can be thoroughly enjoyable. Access is typically up Curly traverse and across Les Gendarmes. Complex terrain. Excellent routefinding and avalanche skills required. Voted best place for a bad date.
Ski Descents # 25 – 27

Zone # 7 - CalPow

Ski Touring / Long Runs

Total Distance: 4.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 975 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Complex

Large non descript alpine bowl area transitioning into intermediate terrain on lateral moraine or into a series of steeper pitches if kept to skier's right. Many variations on some really good lines. Access is same as for Solitude Glacier (Zone 6) or by Curly Traverse (Zone 4). More recently some parties have skinned up Nocturnal Emissions.
Ski Descents # 28 – 30

Zone # 8 - Solitude

Ski Touring / Celebrating Life

Start of Powder Mountain Traverse

Total Distance: 5 kms
Elevation Gain: 980 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Challenging

Without a doubt one of the best ski touring ramps in the South Coast. A moderately sloped glacial moraine provides the big mountain ambience, access to huge terrain and spectacular views. Good learning area for skiers proficient enough to advance into ski touring. Large selection of ski options including diversity in difficulty, aspect and snow conditions. Also offers the added bonus of witnessing unrepentant sledheads at Banner Pass. Be prepared for culture shock.

Access is by Solitude Nordic trail to termination of valley floor. Climbing creekbed to breakover and ascending on left side of lateral moraine to Col. leading south to Powder Mountain Icefields (Banner Pass). Map Descents # 31 – 33

Zone # 9 – Bark Face Foul Weather Skiing

Total Distance: 2.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 350 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Simple

Well treed ,south facing slope with a couple of epic creekbed and gladed runs. Access is from Solitude Creek traverse climbing up to VanDieselKlackin and then back north into alpine. Alternatively a zig zag traverse up through the trees acquaints you with a good ski line down. Steep & narrow . Hazards to watch for:

- 1.) Creekbeds may have holes with open water.
- 2.) Trees have been known to bite aggressive skiers

Always ski with a buddy system.

Map Descent # 38 - 43

Zone # 10 - Ring Ski Touring – X-Country Skiing

Total Distance: 4.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 340 m.

Difficulty: Intermediate
Terrain: Simple

Typically accessed by Ring Lake Trail, a moderate but constant grade uphill traverse leaving from the second large meadow area on the Ring Valley Nordic trail. Egress is often down skier's right of steep Headwall and creekbed flowing out of Ring Lake. This trip is often done on metal edged cross country skis although it is not for beginners. The steep North West facing ridge running up to Ring Lake has little recorded ski touring history. Map Descent # Blank (To be Explored)

Zone # 11 - West Side – Callaghan Mountain Ski Touring / Long Runs

Total Distance: 3.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 900 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Challenging

Six kilometer long ridge containing numerous large bowls. Predominantly west facing aspect. Best after fresh snow and with enduring good cloud cover. Access can be by options 1 or 2 as described in Morning Glory zone (above) or by zig zag traverse up through the steep wooded slopes off the north shore of Conflict Lake.

Map Descent # 57-59 three prominent landslide areas , south facing, Chutes on this aspect are prone to avalanche.

Map # Descent between # 50-56. A variety of good tree lines at lower elevations. Tag along with a local on a snowy day

Map Descent # 48 – 50 Big Mountain lines, open bowls off of False Summit

Map Descent # 46 & 47. More Big lines , open bowls , Intermediate terrain

Zone # 12 - Morning Glory – (Callaghan Lake Provincial Park / West)
Ski Touring / Steep Skiing

Total Distance: 2.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 925 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Challenging

A very large alpine area containing slopes of all aspects and gradients.

Commonly accessed by one of four separate routes:

1. From Lodge cross Conflict Lake to climber's left of three landslides and zig zag way Up through trees to bottom of alpine area and then right to gain access to False Summit Ridge.
2. Contouring up south ridge commencing at intersection of Parkway and Wild Spirit Nordic trails. A series of small bowls are encountered first and then grow in size the higher you climb. Due to its north facing aspect and intermediate gradient, this is a perfect setting for a day of multiple descents (yo-yo skiing) Map Descent #
3. Follow pronounced large creekbed from Callaghan Lake up west slope of Mt. Callaghan. Leads into the base of the larger bowls. Good choice of intermediate gradient terrain. Map Descent #
4. Cross Callaghan Lake past prominent peninsula and head into bay on northeast shore to old snowmobile trail (182nd St) and contour up creekbed to subalpine ridge leading up to set of small alpine lakes and then west up ridge gaining false summit immediately above Cirque Lake. This is an area best suited for experienced mountaineers and randonee skiers. Very steep with many additional hazards including rock /icefall, crevasses and possibility of whiteout conditions on glacier. Map Descent #

Zone # 13 – Mt. Callaghan Icefields

Ski Mountaineering

Total Distance: 6.5 kms
Elevation Gain: 990 m.

Difficulty: Extremely Difficult
Terrain: Complex

Very large (12sq.kms.) sprawling snowfields and glaciated terrain north of Mt. Callaghan. Open crevasses, white-outs and complex avalanche terrain combine to make this an area for the more experienced ski tourer or those in the care of a mountain guide. This is a strenuous day trip from the Lodge that yields a number of superbly long glacier ski runs. As this area does not fall under protection of the Section 58 Non-Motorized designation, snowmobiles may be encountered. Egress can be made out through the Morning Glory area or down through a series of small tarns Northwest of Cirque Lake and out to Callaghan Lake.

Depending on lodge staff commitments, transport back to the Lodge may be available on a fee basis.

**Zone # 14 - Telemagique Lake Traverse – (Callaghan Lake Provincial Park)
Wilderness Tour / Telemark Skiing**

Total Distance: 19 kms
Elevation Gain: 500 m.

Difficulty: Advanced
Terrain: Simple

Usually approached from the Provincial Park Campsite at the southern outflow of Callaghan Lake traverse in an easterly fashion, straight across the lake and into the bay adjacent to the very prominent peninsula. From here climb up through the forest to gain a large meadow area and then contouring up north slope to gain small col. Telemagique Lake is a small alpine area well suited to day tours and perfect for intermediate level telemarking. Exit options include creekbed to east flowing down to Madeley Lake and out on Whistler Olympic Park Nordic ski trails. Some bark eating may be incurred. Not for the novice. Navigation skills required.