

Off the Resort Trail

Cross-Country Skiing in Whistler

By Gigi Ragland



Callaghan Backcountry Lodge at night with the Taboggan Trail lit for evening playtime.

Callaghan Backcountry Lodge photo

Downhill skiing dominates the slopes at Whistler Resort in British Columbia. But that's not a secret. Most outdoor enthusiasts know that Whistler is rated as one of the finest ski resorts in the world. Proof of that fact is Vancouver's winning bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games.

What most folks don't know, however, is the area also boasts a variety of venues for amazing cross-country skiing. Both the novice and advanced Nordic skier will be pleased to know that there are three great choices located within the Whistler area.

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Lost Lake X-C Trail System

This public park transforms into a Nordic skier's wonderland during the winter season. Just a short walk from Whistler Village, the park offers over 32 kilometers of groomed and track-set trails that wind near and around frozen Lost Lake with some vantage points overlooking Blackcomb Mountain. Trails cover Lost Lake Park and meander through Chateau Whistler and Nicklaus North golf courses.

Dog owners will be pleased to know that a portion of the multi-use Valley Trail from Meadow Park to Rainbow Park is track-set for cross-country skiers with dogs. So taking Fido out for a little walk could turn into more of an adventurous outing.

A warming hut is open from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, however, no food services or snack bars are offered on the trail system. Skiers will need to pack their own munchies or plan to have a meal at one of the nearby restaurants located in the upper village.

Favorite Feature

Lost Lake is close enough to walk to and from Whistler Village; or take a local bus.

Author's Recommendation

Lost Lake Loop offers 4 kilometers of lighted trails for night skiing from 3-9 p.m. Pack some cocoa and cookies and go for a moonlight ski.

Hours: 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Skiing is free every Monday evening after 3 p.m.

Tickets: Buy tickets at Lost Lake and Nicklaus North ticket booths and Meadow Park Sports Center.

2008-2009 Season Prices: \$17 Adults/\$10 Youth/\$8.50 Kids/\$34 Family.

Rentals: Use your own gear or rent from The Cross Country Connection at The Lost Lake Trailhead. Nordic skis, lessons and tours are offered.

If you go: Lost Lake Cross Country Ski Trails, www.crosscountryconnection.ca.



A backcountry skier takes time for a view break while touring Callaghan Country. Callaghan Backcountry Lodge photo

Callaghan Backcountry Lodge

Remote and pristine, Callaghan Country is one of the best-kept secrets of the British Columbia backcountry experience, until now. Drive 15 minutes along the Sea to Sky Highway (8 miles) from Whistler Village and avid cross-country skiers can kick and glide along 42 kilometers of groomed tracks through sub-alpine old growth forests with stunning mountain views in the Coastal Range.

As the only commercial backcountry lodge to operate in the Coast Range of British Columbia, Callaghan is quite unique. The finely-crafted lodge is only accessible by snowmobile, snowcoach, ski-in, dogsled or helicopter. Guests booking multi-day, overnight ski packages with the lodge are in for a treat.

Delicious home-cooked meals are prepared with great skill from the in-house chef and the cozy alcove guestrooms and nooks around the lodge offer wonderful snug areas for

rest and relaxation. In addition to the skiing, tobogganing and snowshoeing, just about any snow activity is available for guests to enjoy.

Callaghan Valley is surrounded on three sides by glaciated terrain in the heart of the Coastal snowbell, guaranteeing abundant snowfall and substantial snow pack. It's possible to enjoy the trails and lodge environment for a day-ski but for the full effect, book one of their multi-day ski packages.

In addition to the Nordic and cross-country ski trails and touring, there are alpine ski touring packages available as well. Upon request, instruction from the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG) can be arranged by the day or trip.

Favorite Feature

The pristine wilderness setting is a great refuge to escape from it all — at least for a few days. The variety of terrain and endless views combined with the warm hospitality of the lodge staff makes it hard to leave this

paradise in the backcountry.

Author's Recommendation

Try tobogganing on the curvy and fun hill that the staff artfully creates each year. Sometimes they light the path at night for a twilight evening full of thrills and spills.

If you go: Callaghan Backcountry Lodge, www.callaghancountry.com.

Whistler Olympic Park

Cross-country skiing is the sport with the largest number of events and provides one of the largest sources of medals at the Olympic Winter Games. Whistler Olympic Park is located just 20 kilometers south of Whistler and will be the home site of the cross-country, biathlon, Nordic combined and ski jumping events for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Imagine yourself skiing the same cross-country trails as the 2010 Olympians. The public ski trail system opened for visitors last winter season with beginner, intermediate and advanced trails. This winter, the Park offers 50 kilometers for Nordic skiing.

The trails are expertly groomed for both classic and skate skiing. For the advanced Nordic skier there are 15 kilometers of Olympic-caliber competition trails in the center, 10 kilometers of scenic training trails in the south and over 25 kilometers of recreational (easier) trails in the Madeley

www.OutdoorsNW.com

Creek valley to the north.

The trails, which can be accessed from the brand new 11,000 square foot day lodge adjacent to the cross-country stadium, is open to the public and sits between the ski jump and cross-country skiing stadium. The lodge is the place to start and end your day. You can buy trail passes, rent equipment, sign up for lessons, buy gear and purchase food as well as take advantage of the changing facilities and showers. After all this, relax in its lounge after an action-packed day of Olympic-caliber cross-country skiing.

Located in Callaghan Valley and neighboring the Callaghan Backcountry Lodge staging area, skiers will truly enjoy the valley's epic snow.

Favorite Feature

The trails are so well groomed it is a true pleasure to reward yourself with a day of cross-country skiing at this professional facility. The views of the ski jump hill are fantastic as you gaze through the trees on various trails throughout the system.



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www.SkitheMethow.com



Skiers cruise by the Whistler Olympic Ski Park that will be used for Nordic skiing, ski jumping and the biathlon at the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Photo by Gigi Ragland

Author's Recommendation

Combine a weekend of cross-country skiing at Callaghan Backcountry Lodge with a day at Whistler Olympic Park. The two are a perfect combination and offer a huge variety of terrain and combination of cross-country skiing.

If you go: Whistler Olympic Park, www.whistlerolympicpark.com

Gigi Ragland is a freelance travel and food journalist from

Longmont, Colo. She considers her Whistler excursion one of the best cross-country ski experiences ever.



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