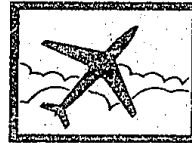


Travel



(No-4C, BC, R, W, G-CD) **7D

Ski paradise has attractions for others, too

Second of a two-part series.
Last week I introduced you to Blackcomb and Whistler mountains, which boast the highest and the second highest vertical rises of any ski mountains in North America. They are 70 miles up a scenic coastal road from Vancouver, British Columbia, on the Pacific coast of Canada, in what is popularly known as the Whistler Ski Resort area.

This week I would like to introduce you to some of the people who have been here all or most of the years since Whistler Village was built at the base of the two mountains. Ski enthusiasts have skied Whistler since the early 1960s, but Blackcomb and Whistler Village were developed only seven years ago. My diary continues:



1-of-a-kind traveler Iris Jones contributing travel editor.

FRIDAY: I know that I would never get off the beginner's slope, so I have spent the day interviewing people who could give real skiers the information they need to travel here.

I started the day at Nasty Jack's, where I could sip hot chocolate and look out the window at the two mountains. What makes this resort so different from other ski resorts is that you don't need to be bused from your accommodations to the ski slopes; you just walk a few hundred feet through Whistler Village to the two chair lifts that access the mountains.

From my breakfast chair, I could see the little ski scamps taking lessons and the skiers boarding the Blackcomb chair, which takes you up to the 48 runs on Blackcomb, and the Village chair, which starts you up to the 85 runs on Whistler.

My breakfast companion was Kent, an instructor with Ski Spirit, an organization of professional ski instructors, all of them members of the Canadian Ski Instructors Alliance. Ski Spirit guides may be part of your ski package to the area. They will take you to the best terrain for your level of skiing and provide a lot of camaraderie to a group during a ski week. (See box.)

I asked Kent to describe the Whistler area to people who are familiar with other ski areas in North America.

"Whistler is the best ski area in Canada," he said. "The only com-



Skiing near the top of Blackcomb Mountain in the Whistler Ski Resort area of British Columbia.

MICKY JONES

parable area is Lake Louise, which is one of the best in North America. Whistler and Blackcomb have the longest and second longest verticals on the continent, closely rivaled only by Jackson Hole, Wyo.

"Blackcomb is known for its long continuous runs, Whistler for its incredible variety and excellent bowl skiing. The new peak chair allows access to steep untracked snow bowls.

"Between the two mountains there is incredible variety. Long groomed trails for cruising. Steep mogul pitches for bump fanatics. Wide open bowl skiing for powder hounds. Gentle, well groomed slopes for slower and intermediate skiers."

I didn't tell him that none of them were slow enough for me.

"The snow is not as dry as the Rockies," Kent said. "Here it can be very dry down to a certain level and quite humid at the bottom. What skiers consider good conditions, we consider icy."

"Because of the number of lifts, and the 133 ski runs on the two mountains, skiers are not elbowing their way through crowds to the lifts all the time. Even on a very busy day, you won't have more than 10 or 15 people in line."

"Most people ski the top half of the mountain, which is dryer and has the deepest snow. Even the top halves of the mountains have as much vertical as any other ski area."

KENT SKIED Whistler long before they built the new village,

which was modeled after a European village but built with an eye to western Canada architecture. When Kent took his ski group off to the snowy heights, I toured the various facilities in the Village with Lix Brown, who represents the Whistler Resort Association.

Lix has also been here a long time. She saw the first buildings go up around Village Square and the Carlton Lodge go up on Mountain Square. Blackcomb and Whistler are separately owned, and the condos at Carlton Lodge represent a joint venture between them. Carlton is where you buy your lift tickets, and it is one of the places where you can rent skis.

During the second year of building the Delta Mountain Inn came on

line, and slowly the various hotels, restaurants and shops were added, season by season. Last year, Nancy's Greene's Olympic Lodge opened.

If you are a winter sports fan, you may remember championship skier Nancy Greene, who is very well-known in Canada. She was World Cup champion in 1968 and 1976. In 1968 she was a sensation at the winter Olympics, winning the gold medal for the giant slalom and the silver medal for the slalom and a gold medal for FIS Combined.

Nancy and her husband, Al Raine, have been involved in Whistler for years. Her lodge is very popular because she skis with her guests.

SATURDAY: It is snowing. White gold, they call it here. The snow makes a white moving curtain over the skiers climbing aboard the chair lifts to Blackcomb and Whistler and over the skiers carrying their skis down the pedestrian-only streets of Whistler Village and the rooftops of lodges, restaurants and shops along the small complex of village streets.

The weekend ski crowd started to arrive last night, but most of them are driving through the snow from Vancouver to the resort today. The province of British Columbia is larger than Washington state, Oregon and California combined, and it has 34 downhill ski areas, but this is certainly the most popular.

Most people come to ski, but there are other winter sports, too. You can do helicopter skiing on Powder Mountain, south of Whistler Valley in the Spearhead Range. You can also do a four-hour guided snowmobile tour into the surrounding areas.

I am told that summer is also great at Whistler. You can ride the lifts to see the mountains, hike or bike the trails, do all the usual water sports on the lakes. Winter or summer you can take the train on into the interior of the province.

For information on how to choose packages, etc., see box.

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Here's how to get information

The Canadian Consulate General, Detroit, will host a Canadian Travel Show from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, March 1, at the Fairlane Manor in Dearborn. It is free and a good way to get further information about Canadian destinations like Whistler.

Stop at the Air Canada booth and pick up the Touram brochure for information about tour packages to Whistler. One week ski packages, which include air fare, transportation to Whistler, hotel accommodations and lift tickets, range from \$500 to \$750 in U.S. money (\$700 to \$1,000 Canadian) depending on the time of year and the accommodations chosen.

I toured some of the 35 properties, which range from a nice hotel room at Nancy Green's Olympic Lodge, (restaurant but no room service) and the larger rooms (with kitchens) at Delta Mountain Inn, the only real full-service hotel in the Village, to a variety of condominium and studio accommodations with kitchens.

Whistler Creek Lodge and Fitzsimmons Creek Lodge are a shuttle bus ride away from the Village. The nice condos at Tantalus are a five-minute walk from the Village. The rest of the places listed, and many not listed, are in the village and therefore a few hundred yards from the lifts.

Blackcomb Lodge and Hearststone Lodge, as well as the three smaller, less expensive, hotels in the Clocktower building (Fireplace Inns, Clocktower Hotel and Whistlerview) were all built during the late 1970s and offer studio, loft, or one (sometimes two) bedroom condo-style arrangements with dining tables and kitchens. Comfortable, well-stocked, as are Crystal Lodge and Mountaineer Lodge.

The Carlton and the brand new International Lodge offer a more contemporary version of the same kind of accommodations.

Whistler Village Inn has small, older hotel-style rooms; it also owns Powder Lodge, which has large rooms, no kitchens, across the street.

Cars must be parked outside of, or under Whistler Village, so it is convenient to stay within the village streets, but you can also rent a condo or stay in a bed-and-breakfast in the surrounding area. All these places are booked into the central reservations system of Whistler Resort Assn., call (604) 932-4222.

Your best bet, however, is to ask your travel agent about a Touram or other tour, and to call the tourism office of the Canadian consulate in Detroit at 963-0144.

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