



Secret stashes: Deep Ecology in the Coast Range

Mar 5, 2010 Author: Dan Kostrezewski: photo of Kevin Sansalone and Mare-France Roy by Brian Hockenstein

My relationship with Whistler has always been an affair of love and hate. Since my first Camp of Champions session, I've been drawn to both the towering vertical and expansive scale of the Coast Mountains that have made Canada's mega resort both an international superstar and the epicentre of Canadian shred culture.



So the last few years my trips north on the 99 have focused on a broader geographic range, captioned generically as Whistler Backcountry. From the Callaghan to the Duffey Lake Road, these trips north have gone deeper by both sled and split to tap sectors that exist in a more natural state.

Whistler front country and Whistler backcountry are two different worlds, but one thing they share is their reputation for world-class trees. Even though most shreds get their first taste of the green inside Whistler/Blackcomb's hectareage, the entire Coast range is known for its timber.

At stunted treeline, subalpine fir and rare whitebark pine provide shelter from windy alpine and transition into middle-elevation forests of mountain hemlock, yellow cedar, amabilis fir and spruce. In the lowest zone, western hemlock becomes the dominant tree in the tightly packed forests.

Even farther out, in the less-crowded backcountry, the natural order and natural isolation thrives in old-growth provincial parks such as the Callaghan and the expansive terrain on the Duffey Lake Road.

On my last trip up this forested corridor, I made a stopover between a packed groomer day at Whistler and a high-pressure heli trip to Tyax Lodge. In Pemberton I reconnected with Chris Ankeny, a resident-alien photographer with an artistic resume documenting sled and split trips in exposed terrain from Alaska and Montana to the Tetons, the Sawtooths and the Callaghan.

Ankeny and I parked on the downside of the Duffey and doubled up the logging road to a memorial cabin tucked in the trees on the lakeside plateau at 5,500 feet. We skinned up for the climb and gained vertical on a slick track through tall timber.

The climb from the col was efficient and the first run down all glory, but the bonus came after we decided to push back our return time and let a few responsibilities slide. We skinned back up for a 2,400-vertical-foot exit from the Dome to the sled.



Pow POV. Chris Ankeny photo

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