



My relationship with Whistler has always been an

development and glitzy, SUV crowds have never really been my scene, which is why I always arrive hopeful but leave hungry for a fresher taste of the

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

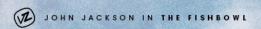
north have gone deeper by both sled and split to tap sectors that exist in a more natural state. The

access is more epic and there is no Roundhouse Lodge or Peak Chair, but the experience is a

the second-growth framing village and valley development below.

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

Mar 5, 2010



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Secret stashes: Deep Ecology in the Coast Range

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





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throwback to what Whistler was long before the number-one ranking was bestowed or the Olympics 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 hectarage, the entire Coast range is known for its timber. Due to the luck of elevation, the ski areas were mostly spared the saw before chairlifts arrived, resulting in old-growth sub-maritime forests that drop from peak to creek through three ecological zones, and contrast

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. At the sweet spot below treeline, a two-decade pruning policy has created gladed clusters that bring intermediate traffic into the trees. But even these manicured glades are only a reflection of those beyond the boundary that remain a strong local draw on storm days.

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. The coastal catch basin of the Callaghan creates towering canopies and sick pillow stacks, but rolling over the Duffey toward the dry side, the forests transition to Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir and lodgepole pine, with both beetlekill stands and frequent fires creating eerily rippable glades. On one side and the other, the range is home to sweet trees.

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's focus is now trained on running his Mount Currie Coffee Company and raising his new son Kai with his fiancée Lisa. But with an open weekday in two hectic schedules, we decided to sneak in a morning session surfing his hometown trees.

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 Skull Skates x Endeavor Snowboards the lakeside plateau at 5.500 feet. We skinned up for the climb and gained vertical on a slick track through tall timber. In relative silence we emerged from the understory to a fresh coat where, with panoramic visibut not one soul in sight, we picked an alpine line with a few short exchanges. Village clatter was just a few peaks away but, surrounded only by the muffled sound of treeline, Jake Blauvelt's Naturally... the mad rush of high-speed access was far removed and the valley scene was of wild forests frozen in time.

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. At the entrance I found myself staring blind down a steep tree chute that Chris confirmed would go and, as I looked left, he simply motioned for me to drop in. Riding with the ebb and flow of mutual trust, my mind was freed of conscious effort. On a 68 Prior, I slide-checked the line and cut off only surface sluff, which we followed in alternating tandem, framing one run in time with the tall, straight trees watching in silence from either side of the slide path.



Pow POV. Chris Ankenny photo

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