Sun Peaks/Big White Adventure!
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By Dave Olsen

Our tale starts a week before our departure with the great pre-trip party hosted by assistant trip leader Christina Anderson and her husband Ed. There was food and drink aplenty and we probably set a club record by having present virtually everyone that was on the trip and in town for the event. The only absentees were Carmel Roche who would be joining us from Florida and Don Blasl who was airborne, returning from the club’s trip to Lake Tahoe. Everyone else — all 11 of us — were present. That’s right — this was to be a boutique trip with just 13 skiers signed up to enjoy the pleasures of two great Canadian destination resorts.

Joining the trip from the Ski Club of Washington DC, courtesy of the Blue Ridge Ski Council sanctioning process, were Caroline Janov and Tracy Long. Tracy was unfortunately sporting a recent injury — an apparent sprained ankle — that she feared might prevent her from going on the trip. During the party, Clare DeCesare dusted off her nurse’s cap, examined the offending ankle, and advised Tracy to get it looked at ... which she did, immediately following the party. By ~5:30pm Tracy called and confirmed that she had in fact broken her leg, and that there was no way she could go on the trip.

Clare came to the rescue again by suggesting that a mutual friend of theirs and of Carmel, Joanne Ward, might be interested in taking Tracy’s place. Long story short, Joanne was indeed ready, willing and able to join us, bringing great smiles from Tracy as this substantially reduced her financial loss.

Jump ahead to a week later at National Airport’s Alaska Airlines counter. Tom Griesacker and Tom Ligis were the first to arrive, and were just about done checking in when I arrived at 5:45am. With three agents working at the tiny counter it took me all of about three minutes to get checked in. Next to arrive was Pat Berry followed in rapid succession by Steve Peirce and Christina, Don, Caroline, Ginny Lester, then Clare and Roger DeCesare with Joanne. Not yet 6:15 and we had all twelve of us checked in, well ahead of the 6:30 mark by which I had asked everyone to arrive.

After some morning coffees and assorted provisions we boarded the 737 for our nonstop flight to Seattle, pushing back from the gate a few minutes ahead of our
scheduled 8:00am departure and lifting off ("wheels up" as aviators like to say) ten minutes later. Some of us nibbled on whatever we had bought in the terminal while others purchased the $5 snack boxes that Alaska was selling. No video entertainment system on these birds, but for $10 they would rent us a "digEplayer" that held a number of movies and other fare.

After an uneventful flight (the best kind) we touched down in Seattle just shy of 10:00am. A long flight – more than five hours from gate-to-gate – but more than 45 minutes ahead of our scheduled 10:49am arrival. Plenty of time to wander SEA-TAC's shops and eateries.

Our scheduled 1:20pm departure was delayed by about half an hour but the free beer and wine (a nice Yakima Valley Chardonnay) aboard the Horizon Air DH-4 turboprop made for an enjoyable 45-minute flight. We touched down in Kamloops, British Columbia, about ten minutes beyond our scheduled 2:25 arrival time.

Less than 40 minutes later we had retrieved our luggage, cleared Canadian customs, and loaded our shuttle bus for the hour-long trip to Sun Peaks Resort.

Check-in at Nancy Greene's Cahilty Lodge was a breeze, allowing ample time to procure some beverages from the local shops for the club-hosted pizza party in the tripleader's room. Everyone seemed to enjoy the Mountain High pizza including Carmel, who had arrived from Fort Lauderdale on Air Canada via Toronto and Vancouver. Christina commandeered the clipboard from the lobby that had the signup sheet for skiing Sunday morning with Nancy, and most of us signed up.

We had been planning on the availability of breakfast at the on-premises restaurant - Macker's Bistro - but were disappointed to learn that it was undergoing repairs for the duration of our visit. We found a couple of options nearby including the 5 Forty Café & Deli that made some reasonably priced breakfast wraps and the rather pricey buffet at the Delta Hotel.

We were welcomed Sunday morning with a blue-sky day with just a few wispy clouds. Lots of snow, nicely groomed - but alas, no new snow. A few of us took a quick warmup run when the lifts opened at 8:30, then we all gathered on the slope just outside the Cahilty to meet Nancy and her husband Al. We split into two groups for what would be a three-hour resort tour.

Nancy, Olympic medalist (Grenoble, 1968 - gold in GS & silver in SL) and Canadian Female Athlete of the 20th Century, took the more adventurous group on a fast-paced tour that hit virtually every lift on the mountain including Mt. Morrisey
across the valley. Nancy pointed out the series of evergreens decorated for Christmas - some by the resort staff and others by several of the families that visit the resort each winter.

Our tour included an optional run down the Headwalls trail on which the Velocity Challenge was to be run, March 5-8. This is the only speed-skiing venue on the FIS World Cup tour outside of Europe. Racers reach top speeds of ~110mph in 8 seconds.

We had planned to meet-up for lunch at the Village Day Lodge at the base of the lifts but, on Nancy & Al’s suggestion, opted instead for the on-mountain Sunburst Restaurant with its yummy fresh-baked Sticky Buns.

Sunday evening Nancy & Al hosted a welcome reception for all their guests. We had to make an abbreviated appearance as we had reservations for a 6:00 group dinner at the Sun Peaks Lodge Steakhouse.

Monday was similar to Sunday - more blue skies and another lunch for many at the Sunburst Restaurant. Tuesday - our third and final day at Sun Peaks - brought clouds and wind. Mid-afternoon we departed the slopes and changed into our street clothes for our 4pm transfer to Big White resort. We stopped after about 2-1/2 hours in the town of Kelowna where we had a good, reasonably priced dinner at Montana’s Cookhouse. During the subsequent hour’s drive to Big White we found ourselves in a modest snowstorm that made it difficult for the driver, unfamiliar with the resort, to locate our lodge, but bode well for skiing the next morning. Our late-night check-in was thankfully painless as we were all ready to hit the sheets.

The White Crystal Inn backs onto Big White’s “skidestrian” village: Shops, restaurants and lodges adjoin the snow-covered thoroughfare through which the skiers make their way between the upper and lower lifts. Most of us started our visit as we had at Sun Peaks with a first-morning resort tour. A heavy morning fog made the going tough and our Snow Host prevailed upon me to run “sweep” at the back of our group, communicating over my FRS radio with Steve Peirce who was with him at the front of the group, to keep us together. It would have been a lost cause without the radios!
Going up the Falcon Chair we caught first glimpse of the resort’s wondrous “snow ghosts,” the snow-covered evergreens. We’ve seen snow-covered trees at other resorts but these are truly distinctive. They are totally packed and covered with wind-blown snow, many to the extent that you could barely tell that there was a tree beneath.

After some great burgers at Snowshoe Sam’s, Pat, Christina, Steve, Roger and I frolicked around in the still-fresh powder in the glades off the aptly named Powder Chair, “woo-hoo’ing” to each other (ala KT Tunstall’s Black Horse and the Cherry Tree) to keep together. Après ski we were joined by Carmel and Caroline at the Happy Valley Day Lodge where we shared some libations. A memorable afternoon.

Thursday brought a reported 4+ inches of new snow. Powder? Yes. Champagne powder? No. While not a wet snow, this was a heavy, wind-blown variety that made turning difficult. Ginny found out just how difficult when she took a bad fall in the morning, seriously injuring her right arm in what would ultimately turn out to be a break. That made life most difficult for the rest of the trip, but her roommate Caroline and others pitched in to help as best they could.

Thursday après ski we were hosted by the resort to a tubing party on their Mega Snow Coaster, claimed to be the largest tubing park in North America. Carmel arrived sporting the new white ski jacket she had acquired. Clare especially enjoyed the set of tubing lanes where you were allowed to hold onto as many other tubes as you wanted, going down the chute linked together. The other set of chutes was limited to single tubes, but had the advantage that the attendant would give you a wicked spin at the top, making for a dizzying ride down. To get back up, you would lie down in your tube and hook the handle onto a rope tow, making a sort of conga line. Those in the uphill tubes had a substantial advantage in lobbing snowballs at those behind them! Afterwards there was complimentary hot chocolate available at the adjacent ice rink.

Friday’s skiing brought some high winds that seemed to sand blast a layer of skin off our faces. Friday evening we arranged a farewell dinner at Snowshoe Sam’s. Pat captured a great photo of their signature Gunbarrel Coffee in the making, with the flaming
liquor engulfing the shotgun barrel. Check out all the great trip photos at our SmugMug site.

After a too-short night, we gathered in the lobby for our 3am departure to the Kelowna Airport for our 6am flight to Seattle. All went smoothly with our check-in and on-time departure. We were treated to a somewhat light-hearted briefing by our flight attendant who explained how the seat cushions could be used as a flotation device “in case our flight turned into a cruise,” how the seat belt operation “was not rocket science,” and how we could use the grey button on the overhead panel to turn on the reading light but “the yellow button may eject your luggage.”

Our SEA-TAC transfer between gates was a bit convoluted, involving not one, not two, but three separate trains on our way to Terminal C. The final challenge was to decide whether to get on that third train, with signage advising that we do so to get to Terminals C/D, or to go up the elevator to get to Terminals C/N. We opted for the train and ended up OK.

We touched down at DCA just before 4:30pm, nearly a half hour ahead of our scheduled arrival. As is the case with most trips, as soon as our luggage came out we were all on our separate ways with barely enough time for a few quick goodbyes. Another great PSC trip in the books!

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