

Recipe for an (almost) perfect ski trip...

In a bus, load:

47 like minded souls, add 1 most handsome and capable driver, include 2 amazing leaders, 1 comic weatherman, 1 Joan Murray songstress, enough outdoor gear for the entire Russian army, and possibly, some mind altering substances.

Travel East

Add snow, lots of it.

We cooked this all up, and were served 6 days of great skiing on the long trip to the Kootenays, Tuesday, February 27 to Sunday, March 4.

Day 1...After 3 relatively smooth pickups, and despite a traffic snarl in Langley, we headed off only 10min late, east to Osoyoos, stopping for our first ski of the trip, at China Ridge just outside of Princeton. Our driver Jag, was able to negotiate the hairpin turn on the ascent to the site, no small feat given that last year conditions made it impossible to drive to the trailhead. It turned out to be a perfect first day on the trails, a nostalgic day of skiing with the snow one remembers from childhood, calling you to build a snowman or to toboggan on that first hill. No time for that though as the trails were groomed and ready for us to explore. The snow fell on and off until late afternoon, but there were still beautiful views of the surrounding valleys to be glimpsed through the clouds and snow. By the time we left late afternoon for Osoyoos, the snow had stopped. Jag drove us back to our hotel under blue skis, in time for a lukewarm hot tub, and that legendary first night potluck dinner.

Day 2...It was a scenic and smooth drive to the Paulsen trails outside of Castlegar, with fresh snow and blue skis to start, changing to light snow in the afternoon. The groomer worked steadily to provide us with classic and skate trails, the cabins were stacked with firewood and the few locals invited us interlopers inside to crackling fires. Surprised to be invaded by us 'Coasties', one asked why we would make such a long journey just to ski at Paulson. "Were there not mountains near Vancouver?" Perhaps when you live here in the Kootenays, the winter beauty is taken for granted, the perfect dry snow, the silences, the animal tracks, clusters of white barked birch and poplar huddling together, the simple *wilderness*. There is no comparison between our coastal skiing and what Paulson had to offer us, and it was easily worth the effort to get there.

We left Paulson, to settle in for 4 nights at the Best Western in Trail, a resource based town along the banks of the Columbia River. Dr. Data (alias Richard), called ahead to guarantee a hotter hot tub, then we all went our separate ways to dine, some inside the hotel, others to explore the town, or to gather groceries and retire to their rooms. It was from our home base in Trail that we would explore new trails near Rossland and Nelson, and return to Paulson before the trip home.

Day 3.....Today, we tried to answer the question, “Just how many Vancouver skiers can you fit in a very small cabin?” We found the answer on the Blackjack Trails, a short drive past Rossland, across the road from Red Mountain. No downhillers in our group this year, we were all dropped off at the top of a short icy road down to the Blackjack cross country trailhead. The snow was falling thick and fast as we began our ski, dampening clothes, but not spirits. Too many of us headed for tiny Gibbard’s cabin at the end of the groomed trails. I never counted, but there were most of us in that cabin, couldn’t have been more than 10ft. square, with a blazing stove in the middle. It’s a good thing that we all get along so well...the skating snow looked a bit heavy today, and the groomer was having a hard time keeping up with the snow coming down, but this didn’t stop skaters and classic skiers alike from having yet another fantastic ski day.

At the end of the day, many skiers opted for some time to explore the historic ski town of Rossland. There’s a great little craft brewery, a chocolate shop, coffee shop and a handful of quite good restaurants. Rossland is quintessentially cute, restoration and preservation of the older brick buildings clearly being a priority, and the large amount of fresh snow only adding to its charm.

Day 4...Skiing at Nelson Nordic trails today, mostly flat and scenic along the river, but this is where the “almost”, of a “perfect ski trip”, comes in. Just ask Roy why it is not a good idea to try and slow oneself down on an icy slope with a forward pole plant. I’m sure he could demonstrate this move to any skiers who might be interested, and show how he managed to “almost” take out his eye with the head of his pole. It would be one of those moves in the instruction manuals with the dark X over top, or one of those “do not try this at home” moves. Nor on the ski trails. Fortunately for Roy, he came out with merely a black eye and small scar that can only add to his manly looks.

After skiing many of the Nordic trails, such as Apex, Euphrates and Clearwater, we boarded the bus for the optional trip to Ainsworth Hotsprings. Just as the Ktunaxa First Nations warriors would use these springs to heal their wounds after battle, so too did many of us, after our 4th consecutive day of skiing. Some skiers opted to stay and explore Nelson, while the rest of us basked in the hot pools and caves before dipping hastily into the icy pool. We all dined together in Nelson at different restaurants before returning to Trail.

Day 5....Our second day on the Blackjack trails and Dr. D’s weather report, “for all you skiers and snowboarders”, was spot on; just below freezing, some sun and cloud (beautifully described by my roommate Joanne, as if, ”a duvet was being pulled back in the sky”), and only a dusting of snow in the afternoon. The hidden valleys from Day 3 opened up, and the views from Torresan’s cabin were spectacular. It was as if we were skiing completely new terrain with the clear conditions and open vistas, so it never felt like a repeat of an earlier ski day. There was also the addition of some “almost” (there’s that word again) dead mouse heroics which involved Bernie, Roy and supposed resuscitation. This was relayed to me over our last night pizza dinner and after a bit of wine, so the details are unclear. What was clear, is that on hearing of the mouse resuscitation, roommate Joanne maintained it should have been killed nonetheless, which

may have more to do with mouse battles at her Savary Island cabin, than with some personality disorder. She is really a kind and compassionate person (except to mice), I have known her for almost 40 years.

Day 6... There were many other kind and wonderful people on this trip, our songstress Joan being one of the more vocal ones. She thanked our two hardworking leaders, Eda and Beverley, with a lovingly sung rendition of 'One' (well, Two actually). Dr. D's weather report and then Joan's "You are my Sunshine" sing-a-long guaranteed us sunny weather for our last ski at Paulsen, as well as the long drive home. Apparently Gordie's long underwear also played a part in our weather, but I leave it up to you to clarify this with him personally. The animal tracks we had seen at Paulsen earlier were confirmed to be a Lynx and her kittens...not something you'd likely find skiing on the coast. So, if you're 'almost' ready to come on next year's long trip, to wherever it may be...DO. It's bound to be perfect, or at the very least, "almost".