



A road trip—with no fuel surcharge!

❖ Ultimate Ski Vacations may book a lot of skiers on flights to Tremblant and Quebec City (and this season, they're flying in style aboard posh Porter Airlines), but the tour operator also arranges plenty of other holidays near and far. And if this is the year for a classic Quebec or New England road trip, they'll even top up your tank! Plug your vehicle info, group size, destination and gas price into Ultimate's litre-beater website and cost out your trip before it begins. A Chevy Tahoe from London to Tremblant, for example, means the troupe will pay about 60 cents a litre. Ultimate won't pick up the speeding tickets though. Details: www.ultimateski.ca



Marmot U

❖ The GAP year between school and university, especially for Brits, can be played out very differently around the world. Spending it at the Canadian Rockies Academy in Marmot Basin and Jasper, for instance, involves an 11-week curriculum with similarities to winter sports courses in Quebec, B.C. and abroad, but in a unique Parks Canada setting. "Our objective was to create the most comprehensive winter education program possible," said

Dave Gibson, president and CEO of Marmot Basin. Some of the courses include emergency first aid, avalanche safety training, CSIA, CASI and CSCF training and examination, equipment maintenance and tuning, and a selection of Parks Canada-approved classes ranging from GIS/GPS navigation to Human Impact & Trail Etiquette to Astronomy. Last season's trial program at Marmot Basin, which welcomed 16 students, obviously went well—more than 100 British and beyond young men and women signed up at the CRA this season. www.canadianrockiesacademy.com

He's back!

❖ Jaws dropped in the Lake Louise maintenance shed in October when former resort owner **Charlie Locke** dropped by to let the gang know he was back in the game.

"I'm retiring retirement," said Locke, who handily negotiated a five-year buy-back-in clause when he sold Resorts of the Canadian Rockies during the 1982-83 ski season. After five years of "playing around" with cattle and land, travelling and Sunday skiing at The Lake, Locke returns this season as a managing partner and joint owner along with Murray Edwards. He calls it "freedom 85."

With a great deal of eyeball rolling, local reactions are mixed. Many people fondly recall a less corporate-style mountain under the respected mountaineer but controversial leader; others can't believe the prodigal son is back.

An unknown Irish poem Locke recites from memory sums up his personal feelings: "For fame and for fortune I've travelled the Earth. But now I've returned to the land of my birth. I brought back my treasures only to find, they're less than the pleasures that I left behind. For these are my mountains and this is my glen. The slopes of my childhood will see me again."

—Monica Andreeff



◆ When a hundredth of a second or two is the difference between winning and losing, every tiny detail counts, including knowing when you're in the most efficient tuck. Alpine Canada sponsor GM has been helping position national team skiers for seven years by offering time in its wind tunnel in Warren, Michigan. Trying to have his socks blown off here is 2007 Lake Louise downhill winner Jan Hudec.



Photo: JOHN EVELY

POLE JOKES

◆ It's pretty tough to find a lift-line around Big White if you have to do some busking for your dinner so Wiegele heli-guide and visiting street entertainer Ron Betts prefers hanging out in front of restaurant exits for scraps. "So far I've been able to make two letters from the alphabet with my ski poles" said Betts proudly, "but not yet at the same time." Advice from Ron's mother on really cold days? "Balance your pole on your chin, not your tongue."

Heading off to Boise

Kelsey Wyse stands on top of her game at Knox Mountain in Kelowna, B.C., with three silver medals from last year's National Games.



❖ Canada's Special Olympics ski team will face fierce competition from all corners of the globe at the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho, this February. Twelve skiers with intellectual disabilities have worked their way through regional, provincial and national competitions to win coveted spots on Team Canada. Head Coach Randy Scott feels that several are among the world's top-10 Special Olympics skiers.

The athletes' training regimen is wide-ranging, including swimming and weight training, even cycling a 100-km race. In addition to their strong commitment to training, Scott is impressed with the team's bonding and support of one another. Kelowna skier Kelsey Wyse is a case in point. As she prepares for her first World Games, the 24-year-old hopes to bring home some medals, but the opportunity to meet skiers from around the world is also huge. Kelsey is quick in her encouragement of other team members and brings unwavering good spirit and a positive attitude to the hill every time.

Follow Kelsey's and Team Canada's results February 6-13, 2009: www.teamcanada2009.ca.

—Debbie McKeown



Doran and Matthews at Scottish country dance class.

Dan Matthews 1947-2008

❖ The North American ski industry lost a life-long friend and supporter in September. Daniel Richard Matthews was well-loved in ski country for more than 35 years.

Passionate about the sport, Matthews assisted in the founding of two Ski Area Management Courses in Ontario, and taught in both Toronto and France. From 1978-1983 he was the director of Ski Resort Development for B.C., shaping the future of resort development in that province. He managed several ski areas, including Big White and Apex. In 1986 he started DRM & Associates, a specialty consulting business, improving resorts all over North America. In 2006 Dan was honoured to receive the prestigious Judith Kilborne Award, given annually by the Canadian Ski Council to someone who is dedicated to the development of the skiing and snowboarding community.

At his Celebration of Life at Blue Mountain in Collingwood, many friends, family, and ski industry leaders and associates took the time to share stories and remember Dan. He will be greatly missed.

—James Doran

WILL WORK FOR PASS

❖ Here's a covenant made for real ski bums. In the Rockies some resorts offer a season's pass in exchange for days spent working and skiing on the hill before it even opens.

For these hills, "snow-farming" is often crucial to opening up hard-to-access areas. The labour includes setting up and moving snow fences, shovelling and compacting key areas by sidestepping down them. It can be hard work, but it's broken up with pre-season powder turns before anyone else is even allowed on the hill.

"It's not easy, but it never feels like real work," says Banff ski bum Matt Sweet. Matt's been taking advantage of the program for years, not just for the free pass and early faceshots, but also to see how the mountain is shaping up and where the best snow will be when the resort opens.

Sunshine Village, Lake Louise and Kicking Horse all have their own versions. Some call it bootpacking, others trail crew or manual grooming. On average, nine to 12 days of labour gets you a pass—and your body in decent shape—for the season.

—Kevin Hjertaas



SURVIVAL TRAINING

❖ Practice is an integral part of avalanche beacon ownership and thanks to Backcountry Access—manufacturer of the Tracker, likely the simplest-to-use avalanche transceiver—beacon training parks at many ski resorts in North America (including 16 in Canada) help keep off-piste and backcountry skiers safer...and curious onlookers wondering. Four to 10 buried transmitters wired to a central control panel can be quickly reset by users to instantly create a new avalanche scenario. BCA has plenty of basic safety tips and a more thorough training DVD, along with a list of ski areas with training parks at: www.backcountryaccess.com/education.

The Ancient Realm

❖ Imagine being a kid these days where entertainment is most often mastered in a digital style that rarely requires human interaction. Now imagine being Ewan and Mackenzie Carter, aged 6 and 8, with 70 hectares of B.C. wilderness as your own private backyard. Throw in a river you can drink from, tree houses in old-growth forest and a 300-metre rope tow to access your very own ski hill and you've got the essence of what being a kid should be about. But this wild Disneyland isn't completely lost on adults; Chris and Chantal Carter, of Revelstoke, B.C., are quite aware of their land wealth and this family of four is about to define eco-tourism in a manner that will surely test the curiosity of others—developing one of B.C.'s first, if not only, private ski retreats using hydro-power and very little else aside from the land around them. The Ancient Realm, located somewhere near Revelstoke, B.C., is due to open this month.

—Heather Lea

❖ FLASHBACK with Marty Olson

It doesn't seem that long ago that the mark of a good skier was performing on-hill with skis not only parallel but so close together they were one fluid board. Long, straight skis glued together looked cool, but all that cool could be undone if the skis crossed, a very real possibility. A nifty remedy appeared in ski shops called **Parablacks**, which could be affixed as big physical barriers on ski tips to prevent them from crossing. A base with wire hoop was glued to the ski surface and the Parablack was held on by the black wedge that snapped under the wire. The wedge was popped out to quickly remove the device. These anti-tipcrossers disappeared in a season or two, perhaps because the only thing worse than crossing your tips was crossing your tips with Parablacks attached. They worked so well, they also prevented uncrossing—at least gracefully.

Photo: MARTIN OLSON