

The Peaks Of Despair

Canada's number-two ski resort races ahead, with a little help from its most famous ski-champion resident.

/// BY NEAL McLENNAN

SUN PEAKS,
KAMLOOPS, B.C.

SKIABLE ACREAGE 3,678

FAMOUS RESIDENT Nancy Greene

ICONIC RUN Kookamungas

MUST-HAVE ACCESSORY Kids

I still recall my first steep bump run in Heavenly Valley. The howling wind off Jasper's Knob Chair. The once-scary lift lines to get to the backside at Lake Louise. For many Western Canadians, including me, skiing is the bedrock upon which childhood memories are based. But I'll never forget the time a 66-year-old woman—a sitting Senator no less—whipped my butt down the mountain, while briefly holding a cup of coffee in her right hand. That was my welcome to the glory of Sun Peaks, courtesy of Nancy Greene.

Like many recreational skiers, I had a familiarity with the Kamloops-area resort without knowing much about it. I knew it was bigger than Big White, closer than Red Mountain and had more accommodation than Kicking Horse. Above all, I knew that Greene had made the resort her home mountain, both as a skier and as a businesswoman, for the past 15 years. But as my family and I drove up the 50 kilometres from Kamloops I was about as prepared for what I was about to see—Sun Peaks in all its glory—as I was for my showdown with Canada's female Athlete of the Century.

"This looks just like Whistler," said my younger daughter, and from a six-year-old's perspective, she was exactly right. The village is crafted in much the same faux-European timber-and-stone style, albeit on about an 1:8 scale. It took all of about 10 minutes to acquaint ourselves with the village's two main pedestrian streets, quickly finding a great ski store (Jardines) and a morning coffee stop (Tod Mountain Coffee House). And there was a nicely conspicuous lack of Uggs and other overtly stylish accoutrements of the mountain lifestyle. But I'm old-fashioned, in that I measure a ski resort by how good the actual skiing is, so we wasted little time in slapping on our boards and heading up the Sunburst Express chair.

Sun Peaks Resort is technically three mountains. Sundance Mountain, straight north of the Village, gets the most traffic down its long, winding blue and green runs. Directly across sits Mount Morrisey, with its great tree skiing and perfect exposure for afternoon sun. And then there's Tod Mountain, the original mountain, pre-Sun Peaks Resort and one synonymous throughout the Interior with the

BEST GEAR IN THE WEST

"I tried a pair of Swiss-made Movement skis last year and couldn't believe how fun they were on the bumps. They were called Yaka Jams and not only did they look cool, I never saw anyone with THE same skis as me for the entire season. Try saying that with a pair of Volkls." —Neal McLennan

FAVOURITE RUNS

"The Headwalls speed track at Sun Peaks Resort—I often go up alone just before my 1 p.m. ski with Sun Peaks guests. It's easy to get to the Headwalls and you can choose between bumps, power or glades. My favorite line is down through the 'Hole in the Wall.'" —Nancy Greene

Nancy Greene (right), the famous face of Sun Peaks. If you like crisp powder, steep pitches and letting loose in the trees, then Sun Peaks' Headwalls speed track (opposite page) is for you.



LEFT: ADAM STEIN, RIGHT: PAUL MORRISON

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TRAVEL Sun Peaks



No matter where you are on the slopes, the Village is never more than a few turns away.

word “steep.” We stuck to Sundance and Morrissey and abused the mountains’ unparalleled ski-in/ski-out access, repeatedly.

Halfway through the second day, a friendly chair mate from Nanaimo asked us if we were going to ski with Nancy that afternoon.

“Nancy Greene?” I asked, concerned that I might get stuck skiing with, I don’t know, Nancy Pelosi.

“Uh, yes”, he replied, explaining to me what evidently everyone else on the mountain knew. On the days when the Senate isn’t sitting, Greene high-tails it back to Sun Peaks and meets up with anyone who is interested in taking a few turns with her on a quick tour of the mountain. At the time, I assumed he meant quick as in brief, so we readily agreed to participate.

There Greene was, at the appointed spot at the appointed time, looking only marginally older than she did in the pictures from 1968 in Grenoble, where her gold medal run was so fast the clock wasn’t properly calibrated to measure it. No sooner had I introduced myself and my wife than Greene declared, “We’re heading up Tod.”

Tod lived up to its billing. Sunny and windswept, the steep slopes sported enough stiff crust to make things interesting. The rest of the afternoon was a blur, literally. It was quick, all right. As an ambassador, Greene has

PAUL MORRISON

no equal—one afternoon with her and I’m confident I saw every skiable inch of the mountain, and a few that are skiable only by her calibre of athlete.

“That was a fun afternoon,” she said, as we exchanged goodbyes and she implored us to come back soon. An off-season of rigorous dry-land training coupled with the indignities of long stretches of time in Ottawa should help ensure that our next meeting will have a far different outcome. Next time, she’ll need both hands to whip me. *w!*

STAY

SUN PEAKS has plenty of family-friendly options, like renting one of the multitudes of houses that sit just east of the village. You can still ski-in/ski-out and the village is just a short walk away, but you’ll have some serious lebensraum. The resort (sunpeaksresort.com) has numerous listings.

Our favourite hotel is the DELTA SUN PEAKS (3240 Village Way, 250-578-6000, deltahotels.com), which has the most enviable location in the middle of the village and great views of the runs of the Sundance Chair. If you want to go all out, reserve one of the new multi-room residences attached to the hotel.

EAT & DRINK

If Sun Peaks has an Achilles heel it’s the food scene—which is also like Whistler’s was 20 years ago. The best of the bunch is MANTLES in the Delta (3240 Village Way, 250-578-6000, deltahotels.com) with solid lunch specials and ski-in access. A few doors down (everything is a few doors down), SUBCULTURE BISTRO (3250 Village Way, 250-578-7827) is doing decent sushi (rolls only) in the slickest set up in the village.

GETTING THERE

Both Air Canada and WestJet fly into KAMLOOPS AIRPORT, which is 45 minutes by car from the village. Sun Peaks Resort is about a 4.5-hour drive from Vancouver, and an approximately 7.5-hour drive from Calgary and Edmonton.

For more information, visit westernliving.ca, sunpeaksresort.com, tourismkamloops.com and hellobc.com.

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