MOUNTAIN LIFE

RESORT GUIDE

OVER 100 TOP NORTH AMERICAN RESORTS PROFILED

A LOCAL'S GUIDE TO THE POWDER HIGHWAY

HELI-BIKING B.C.'S COAST MOUNTAINS

NEWFOUNDLAND'S BURIED TREASURE

PLAN YOUR BEST CAT OR HELI TRIP

0 74470 58057 7 55

2015-16
ANNUAL

$7.99

"A former mining town, with its Old West facades and welcoming charm, Fernie is encircled by majestic mountain bowls. It's the type of place that instills anticipation the moment you arrive."

THE GATEWAY TO THE ROCKIES

LEFT FERNIE, PHOTO MIKE MCPHEE. **ABOVE** FERNIE. ABBY DELL PHOTO COURTESY OF RESORTS OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES.

Embarking from Calgary, Alta down the Crowsnest Highway, we pass the site of a devastating 1903 rockslide where a 1 km wide slab of towering Turtle Mountain broke off and met its fate with gravity, killing between 70 and 90 people, the most deadly rockslide in Canadian history.

An ominous kickoff, but an early reminder of the sheer power of these mountains. Soon we cross the continental divide at the Alberta/B.C. border. Our timing is perfect, sunset, and we're treated to some of the most incredible mountainscapes I've ever seen.

Finally we reach Fernie, B.C., one of the best ski bum roosts in the world. A former mining town, with its Old West facades and welcoming charm, Fernie is encircled by majestic mountain bowls. It's the type of place that instills anticipation the moment you arrive.

Geremie Boiteau is about as local as it gets in Fernie. On his wedding day, Boiteau, his wife and 520 of their friends gathered at the base of the resort's Timber Chair to break the world record for the longest shot ski ever taken—over 213 m of skis bolted together and 522 people downing *Jäger* at one time. Fernie is our kind of town.

On a snow day, Boiteau says those experienced enough should hit the ridges for some steep semi-gladed runs.

"Start in Cedar Bowl, which is your best chance for the best snow," he says. "If there's a secret here, that would be it. You could also take the high traverse all the way to Snake Ridge—it's a bit of a walk but totally worth it. You'll have 1,000 feet of vertical, uninterrupted.

"There's some really nice steep hits to be had in Gorby Bowl," he continues. "Otherwise, Steep and Deep and Red Trees are a sure bet. You're going to have some really good powder in there."

To really up the ante in Fernie, a trip to nearby Island Lake Catskiing is a must. Recently celebrating its 25th anniversary, Island Lake has been instrumental in early big mountain backcountry ski and snowboard culture (Images of legendary snowboarder Craig Kelly basically put this place on the must-hit map of every snowboarder in the world in the '90s.) Today, Island Lake offers a true high-end cat experience with all the first-class amenities.

No visit to Fernie is complete without a trip to the Griz bar, where the motto is "Keeping Rippers Ripped Since 1962." But it's time to show restraint; this is only our first stop and it's back on the road in the morning. ▶

"Panorama really does live up to its name. The peaks here are a perfect blend of Coastal Range bulbousness and Rocky Mountain drama—big and aggressive, with killer views everywhere."

KARI MEDIG PHOTO COURTESY OF PANORAMA MOUNTAIN RESORT.

FRIENDLY LOCALS, PHENOMENAL TERRAIN

With Fernie behind us, it's on to Kimberley Alpine Resort, an incredibly quaint spot with the friendliest locals. This family-focused gem boasts light Purcell powder, an abundance of sunny days, a variety of ski in/ski out accommodations and a ton of family activities. It's a genuine B.C. ski experience with seemingly no lift lines.

Brennan Shaw has been a local at Kimberly for over 20 years. When it's snowing, he suggests taking the Easter Chair to the backside of the mountain.

"On the whole backside North Bowl there are some great runs with good fall lines," he says. "And lots of stuff to leap off of. When you hit it on the right snow day, it's phenomenal. There's quite a bit of traversing, but it's well worth it."

"Halfway through the day or if there's no new snow, I'm going to Ridgeway," he adds. "It's actually the easiest run on the hill, but it's my favourite. It's like one side of a half pipe, all the way down. And it's really, really long. It's good bang for your buck."

After Kimberley, we turn west off the highway at Invermere, and wind up the road to Panorama, a modern ski village à la Whistler or Tremblant but with its own distinct personality. Panorama really does live up to its name. The peaks here are a perfect blend of Coastal Range bulbousness and Rocky Mountain drama—big and aggressive, with killer views everywhere.

To get the local scoop, I meet up with Jason Simpson, Panorama's Director of Mountain Sports. After a snowfall, Simpson says your best bet is to head straight up Champagne Chair and take your first left down Skyline.

"Then, head for the summit and anything on the front side, from the Zone across to Roy's Run," he suggests. "If you're comfortable in the glades, you can jump into Tree Time or Tight Spots, but if you're not, then Roy's will be fantastic. Or head right down View of a Thousand Peaks onto Stumbock's."

The View is a long, steep black diamond pitch and Stumbocks is a black bumpy ride that ends up on the Taynton Trail and then to the base of the mountain for more than a kilometer of leg burn.

If there's no new snow, Simpson says the Taynton Bowl will always give up something great. Up until recently it was the reserved domain of a local heliski operation. Now within bounds, the slopes are patrolled and avalanche controlled.

It's true: the inbound backcountry experience of the Taynton Bowl is hands down the best thing about Panorama. Well, apart from the high alpine Swiss raclette at the Elkhorn Cabin near the top of Rollercoaster, with all the meat and cheese you can cook yourself.

For desert, a post-meal rip down a perfectly groomed run in the dark, with only our headlamps and those of our dinner guests to light the way. It's really an imperative experience, and definitely a highlight of our trip. ▶

BLACK DIAMOND CHUTES

The next day we roll into Kicking Horse Mountain Resort just outside of Golden, a two-h drive from Panorama. Known as the "Champagne Powder Capital of Canada", KHMR h every kind of terrain, but if it's steep chute and big lines you're after, this is the place. full 60 per cent of the runs are advanced a expert and all of it lift-accessible.

We didn't waste any time and went straight senior instructor and BMC guide, Steve Fisk

"Off the bat, I'd drop into the Dumpster Chutes," he says. "It has a varying pitch, s as it goes out into the middle of Crystal Bo it lessens by a few degrees every 50 feet. the terrain is too much for you, move 50 fe to the left and it's a little bit easier and ea until you're into the wonderfully groomed Crystal Bowl."

If there's no new snow, Fisk recommends taking part in a guided program to learn h to use the challenging local terrain.

"In a 30 cm snowfall, how do I avoid sloug Where should I be skiing so I don't get pushed over by the snow that's following r down?" he says, adding that Kicking Horse holds some of the most diverse and compl alpine terrain he's ever found in Canada. " discuss a lot of terrain spotting and using features to understand your location within chute so you don't end up in a cliffed-out sition or an area where you're not comforta being."

After our day on the steeps, we take the gondola back up to the Eagle's Eye restaur for fine dining at 2,345 m, capping off our Powder Highway mission. The dinner conv inevitably turns to the rest of the highway, what its locals would have to say, and wha would be in store for us if we didn't have retreat back to the real world.

ABOVE THE GOLDEN BACKCOUNTRY LIVES UP TO ITS HYPE. MIKE MCPHEE PHOTO. **RIGHT** TRENT BONA PHOTO COURTESY OF RESORTS OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES.

"Known as the 'Champagne Powder Capital of Canada', KHMR has every kind of terrain, but if it's steep chutes and big lines you're after, this is the place."

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY

DAVE HEATH PHOTO COURTESY OF RED MOUNTAIN RESORT

Al Clark was one of the biggest names in Canadian snowboarding in the '90s. Along with his friend Greg Todds, he invented the Superpipe as we know it. Today he calls Revelstoke home and wouldn't have it any other way.

"Looking out at Kill the Banker, it's plainly obvious to see a few amazing natural features," he says. "These are some steeper inbounds lines that can challenge any rider at around mid-mountain elevation, with trees and nice open pockets, cliffs, pillows, chutes and some moguls if you're into that stuff."

And if you're willing to put in the work, the touring at Revelstoke is phenomenal, says Clark.

"Weeks after a storm, there's still pow to be found," he says. "And if you have touring gear, there are amazing bowls from the top of the Stoke, but make sure you're equipped with a guide, or experienced friend and all the necessary backcountry gear and know how to use it."

After Revy, the next stop on the highway is way south to Red Mountain. Located in Rossland, the resort consists of three mountains that can all be skied 360 degrees around. As long as you don't go past the cat track, you'll always end up at a lift.

Deanne Steven may know more about Red than almost anyone. Born and raised in the area (her mother was a host at the resort), she's been a local for more than 30 years.

"If it's really dumping, I head to Powder Fields, which isn't the steepest or meanest, but it's definitely one of the most fun. It's also the one that will get tracked out first, so you want to get in there before making your way to some of the steeper stuff. And there are some really nice lines on Red that not everyone knows about. Skier's left of War Eagle. You can do five great laps in there in about an hour.

"You have to have a beer at Rafters," she adds. "It's not even worth going to Red if you don't. It's the pub that's been here since the beginning of time, where all the kids used to sleep before the ski races."

The final stop on the Powder Highway loop is Whitewater, near Nelson.

Shane Johnsen is an area local of 21 years, former guide and owner of Tribute Board Shop.

"First of all, make sure you haven't had breakfast, because Whitewater has the best food you'll ever eat at a lodge, just as primo as in Nelson.

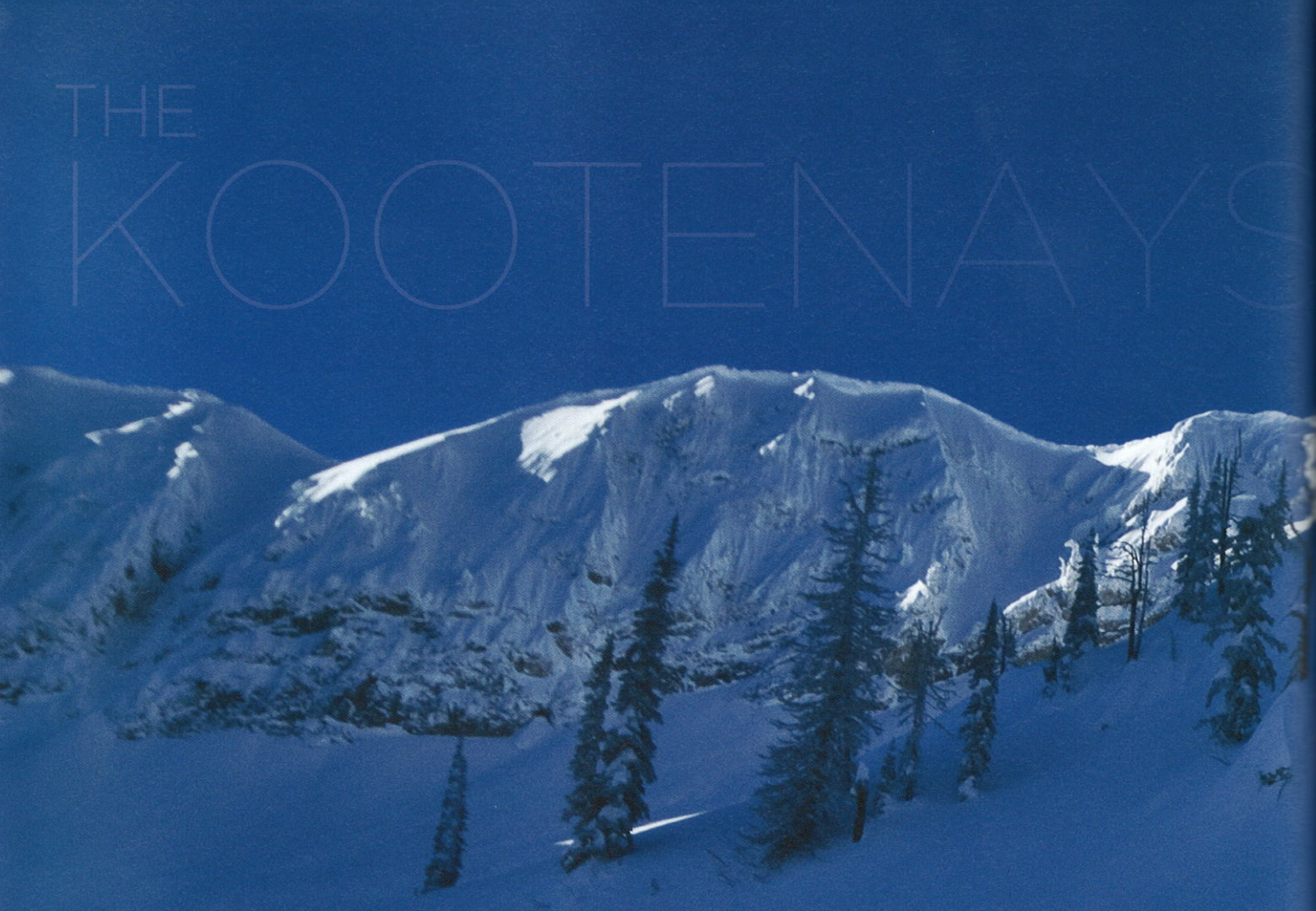
"If it really dumps, you're heading for Summit, where it's all about tree runs," he continues. "Whitewater has some of the best, so just pick a line and go."

If it's more of a groomer day, Johnsen suggests taking the Silver King chair to Yankee Girl ("It's kinda our jib run fave."). That's not to say Silver King doesn't have its share of fresh snow ops.

"There's an area called Five Mile Basin," he says. "Head up Silver King and tour over, or you can head up from Hummingbird Pass. I make my way over to Five Mile to catch the goods."

We set out on the Powder Highway to find its secret stashes. The single greatest thing we did to maximize our fun was talking to the locals right out of the gate. After all, these are their resorts, their runs, bars and restaurants. Judging by the huge smiles on our faces throughout the whole trip, we really did find the best spots at every stop. And I can't think of any better highway in the world from which to have had this experience.

THE KOOTENAYS



by Mike McPhee

There is something about the Kootenays that stirs up emotion and inspiration in a way that makes people question existence elsewhere. This southeast corner of British Columbia feels bigger than the space it holds on a map. The "Powder Highway" as it is called, snakes through spectacular mountain ranges, linking a number of truly unique mountain towns. Bountiful snowfalls, terrain of all types and several world-class resorts make this a place that begs for exploration. The fact that heliskiing and catskiing were invented in the Kootenays pretty much sums it all up.

tourismfernie.com / #ferniestoke, tourismgolden.com / #goldenrules, tourismrossland.com #rossland, seerevelstoke.com / #therealstoke, nelsonkootenaylake.com / #nelsonbc tourismkimberley.com / #kimberleybc

HENRY GEORGI PHOTO COURTESY OF RESORTS OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES.

FERNIE ALPINE RESORT

Located in the southeast corner of B.C., Fernie's roots lay in coal mining, but it has bloomed into a gem of a ski town. The resort, located a short 10-minute drive from town, has been operating for over 50 years and is legendary for deep powder and big mountain terrain. The Lizard Range of the Rocky Mountains creates a unique microclimate that produces a hefty 11 metres of snowfall per season. Terrain and infrastructure includes 2,500 acres, five alpine bowls, 10 lifts, 142 runs and some hefty tree skiing.

Do yourself a favour and hit Snake Ridge. It may take a bit of a skate (or hike for snowboarders), but there's almost always some soft pow turns to be had. The natural half pipe gullies at the bottom are fun as well.

The town itself has a historic downtown with turn-of-the-century brick buildings. There are plenty of watering holes and a good mix of restaurants to sustain you through the powder days. Island Lake Catskiing is located just down the ridge from the resort and Fernie Wilderness Adventures offers catskiing by the day.

During the warm season, the resort offers a diverse mix of mountain biking, hiking, scenic chairlift rides, a zipline and aerial park, accommodations, wedding venue and tennis courts.

Fernie, B.C.

Calgary, Alta

(866) 633-7643
skifernie.com

142 runs

$83.95 (2015)

10 lifts

1,082 m

2,500 acres

1,100 cm

No night skiing

Park

Lift-access downhill & cross-country