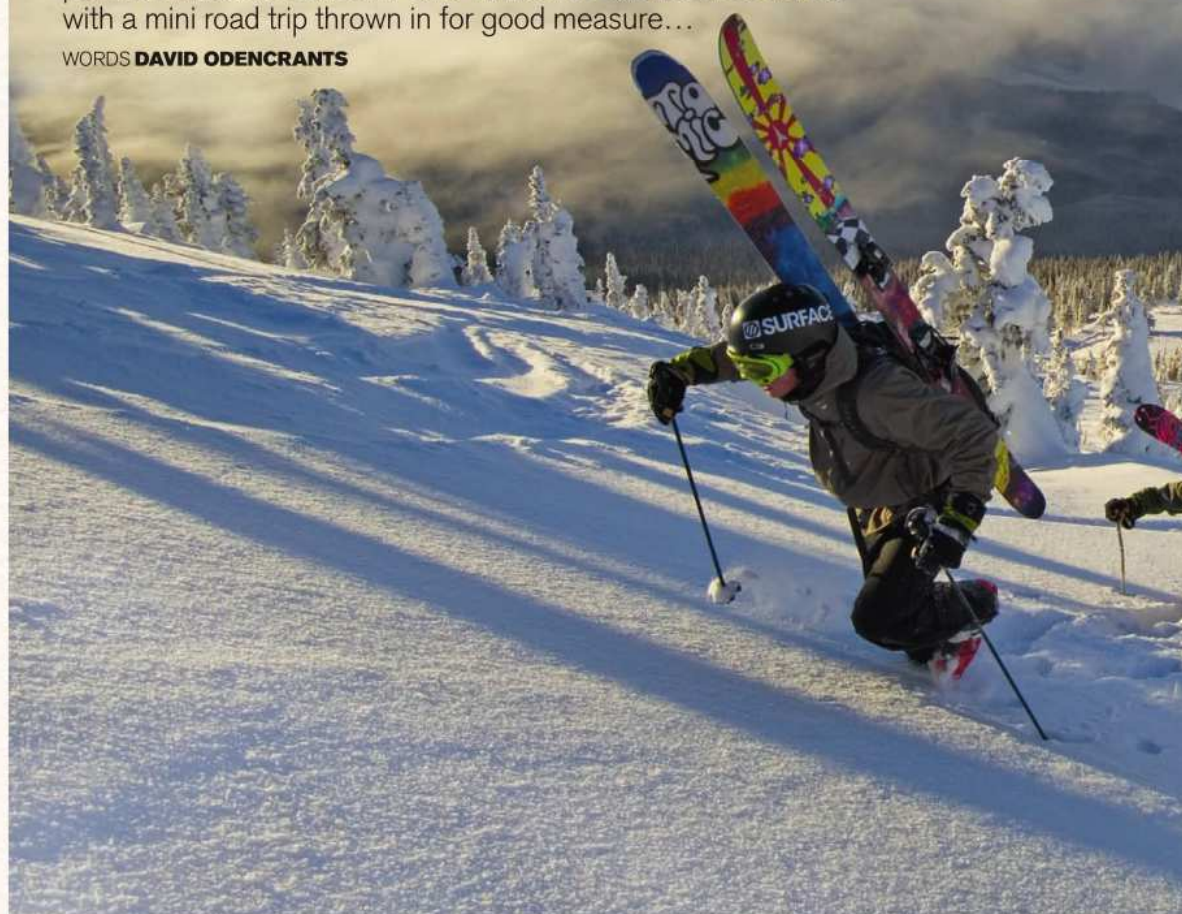




# Canada Calling

Some of the best ski trips are the spontaneous ones. Which is why Fall-Line's dashed off to British Columbia for a quick powder hit before season's end. **Whistler** and **Revelstoke**, with a mini road trip thrown in for good measure...

WORDS **DAVID ODENCRANTS**







**M**Y DREAMS were about to come true. My flight to Canada was booked. My boots, skis and camera were packed. I was heading to the land of bottomless powder, doughnuts, chicken wings, pick-ups and NHL hockey. I had a long trip ahead of me, but these are the things you do in the search for untracked powder.

Would Whistler live up to my expectations? What about Revelstoke? Would the snow be as light as the rumours? These were the questions that ran through my head as I waited to board the plane from Sweden over the big ocean to Canada. ➤

PHOTO: WWW.FREEDOMHUSKATER.COM



## IN SEARCH OF POWDER

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Nine-and-a-half-hours later I was stood in Vancouver, ready for (what I hoped to be) an awesome week in Whistler with fellow riders and friends Pete Simill and Jacob Schenström (who's there for the season and leant his spare bed to me for the week).

With an average snowfall of 10.42 metres (410 inches), my expectations for Whistler – the riding in Whistler – were high. And it didn't disappoint. From our first day we had knee-deep powder wherever we went... but just as much fog and wind. We spent most of the time skiing in the woods, not even getting a chance to see the mountains around us.

It's amazing how many people ski off-piste over here; everyone has a pair of fat skis under their feet, tracking the off-piste quicker than it takes to go up a chairlift. It didn't help that we were skiing during peak season. But coming from the Alps, where most people

stay on-piste, it took a while to get used to.

They weren't all bad though, those locals. In fact, I'd go as far as saying that Canadians are some of the friendliest people I've come across. Chairlift chats are a given. "How's your day going?", "What do you think of the snow?", "Where have you been skiing?"

The rule 'No friends on a powder day' doesn't exist here. People actually went out of their way to tell us where the good powder stashes were.

More than once we heard the words 'Christmas trees' and 'really sick place' mentioned in the same sentence. We had to search it out. "Go up the Peak chair, at the top traverse, as high as possible to your skier's left," one local told us. "You know you've found it when you reach a ridge. Drop down over the back and you'll have steep terrain with pines no bigger than Christmas trees." ➤

“The rule 'No friends on a powder day' doesn't exist here. People went out of their way to tell us where the good powder stashes were.”



“I played up the sides, jumping off the cliffs, with waterfalls of snow falling after me”

*continued*

The poor visibility meant it was hard to find it, but we did. We dropped in and charged through the pines, barely breathing because of all the snow in our mouths. An easy hike out made this run one of our early morning favourites – before the crowds rushed in.

It was a week of early mornings, trying to get as much untracked snow as possible. During our trip we got more than a metre of snow; it was constant snowfall. So even though everyone was after the precious white gold, the Whistler/Blackcomb area is big and there was plenty of snow for everyone.

It was one morning in Blackcomb when I skied the deepest turns of my trip. It had been snowing all night; Jacob had some time off work and promised me a day of deep, deep powder. We lined up in the queue (really!) to Spankys Ladder, a short hike that takes you to the back of the area, which is often hailed as the heart and soul of Blackcomb's steep skiing scene.

At the top there were a few choices; we went for the line to the left. In front of us stretched a big open powder field that dropped into a gully with a couple of cliffs.

As the guest I had the privilege of going first, and OMG what a run. I set off with a couple of big, high-speed turns, feeling the snow pass over my shoulders and hit my face. I paused to wait for Jacob, gasping for air, before setting off for the gully.

It was nice little gully, almost like a halfpipe, filled with deep powder. I played up the sides, jumping off the cliffs, with waterfalls of snow falling after me. Big high fives were thrown as we came down to the cat track that took us back to the resort.

There was just one more thing to do before I moved onto Revelstoke: bag some first tracks. We paid \$20 for the privilege to ride the gondola up at 7.30am, an hour before it opened. The rain was pissing down when we entered the lift – but we knew that meant heavy snow at the top. Once up, we had a record-quick breakfast at the Roundhouse Lodge (well, as quick as you can eat a full English with some Canadian waffles and maple syrup), before letting rip on the hill, fresh with snow – and empty.

It was time to move on: Revelstoke was waiting for me. My buddies Rasmus Ekman and Primus Bergström picked me up in their

Dodging the crowds in Revelstoke





## IN SEARCH OF POWDER

continued

Suburban pick-up and we set off on the 500km drive east.

We chose scenery over speed, and opted for the back roads over the pass instead of the highway: big mountains, endless woods, small streams and deep valleys.

Seven hours later, with the clock approaching midnight, we arrived at our friends Kim and JJ's place, who were not only putting us up for the week but also showing us around the mountain.

The first time I read about Revelstoke was in a magazine about ten years ago - this redneck little village famous for its catskiing, heli trips and touring opportunities. Oh, and its awesome snow and awesome amount of snow, averaging 12-15 metres every winter. Ever since then I've wanted to ski here.

In 2007 the Revelstoke ski area opened, but even before then the hype about the area was incredible, and it didn't slow down after its opening. Don't be fooled by the fact that Revelstoke has just one gondola and two chair lifts - its ski area is bigger than first appears. Whereas, in Europe, one lift might feed three

or four runs, Revelstoke's three lifts manage to service 27 runs.

We clocked up some good mileage, exploring the area. Most of the skiing is done (if not on the piste) in the three bowls: South, North and Greely. The five of us spent most of the time skiing the latter two, with their mix of narrow, steep chutes and cliffs of all sizes, which had us pushing each other to go bigger and bigger on each run.

But our biggest lines were yet to come. We met up with local pro skier Chris Rubens, our guide for the day. This man doesn't mess around: first run of the morning was a short but steep and heavy hike to the Sub Peak, which rises 200m above the top of the highest lift in Revelstoke. I could lie and pretend we all kept up with Chris like pros... but we didn't. This guy is a machine (we were all star struck). At the top we paused to catch our breath and take in the view before dropping into the trees, weaving around them, jumping over them; a big playground, just for us.

Further down, before we hit the narrow trees in the South bowl, we made another short hike to an area with several rocks and pillows, all

eager to hit some decent-sized cliffs. At the top, and after a quick bite (chicken wings and doughnuts), Mr Rubens showed us how it was done, jumping bigger and with more style than any of us.

As the end of my trip grew closer, so did the 2012 Freeride World Tour stop. The lift queues started getting longer, and the off-piste tracked out quicker. It was time for me to return to Europe. To say goodbye to the doughnuts, chicken wings, pick-ups, NHL hockey and bottomless powder. Had the trip lived up to my expectations? More like exceeded them. **FL**

“At the top we paused to catch our breath and take in the view before dropping into the trees, weaving around them, jumping over them; a big playground, just for us”

## ESSENTIALS

Snow conditions in Whistler and Revelstoke are generally best between January and late-February, but March/April can have their fair share of powder days.

### WHERE TO STAY

Listel Hotel in Whistler is located smack bang in the centre of the village, just a few minutes' walk from the main lifts. Doubles from \$99 per night. In the centre of Revelstoke, the Sandman Hotel (complete with two indoor swimming pools AND whirlpools, bliss), has doubles from \$119.

➔ [www.listelhotel.com](http://www.listelhotel.com)  
➔ [www.sandmanhotels.ca](http://www.sandmanhotels.ca)

### GETTING THERE

✈ The nearest airport to Whistler is Vancouver (two hours). For Revelstoke, it's Calgary (five-and-a-half hours). Greyhound offers bus transfers to both resorts.

➔ [www.greyhound.ca](http://www.greyhound.ca)

### PASSES

Whistler: \$96 per day; Revelstoke \$74 per day

➔ [www.whistlerblackcomb.com](http://www.whistlerblackcomb.com)  
➔ [www.revelstokemountainresort.com](http://www.revelstokemountainresort.com)



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