

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Rip down Red Mountain's
freshly groomed trails;
more fresh afternoon
snow; the scenic
Paradise Chairlift.

B.C.'s next big thing

Uncrowded, affordable, and irresistibly old-school, Red Mountain has long been the anti-resort. Now it's poised to get bigger—and even better

BY KIMBERLY BROWN SEELY PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE HEATH

DRIFTING THROUGH whisper-light powder at Red Mountain Resort in B.C.'s Kootenay Rockies, you might wonder where all the skiers are. Just as you might be wondering now: Where in the world is Red? And why would I go there instead of the grande dame of B.C. ski resorts, Whistler?

Here's why. Red is not Whistler. In fact, it's the anti-Whistler. It's not popular or plush, nor is it crowded or over-the-top expensive. The frozen-in-time ski mecca

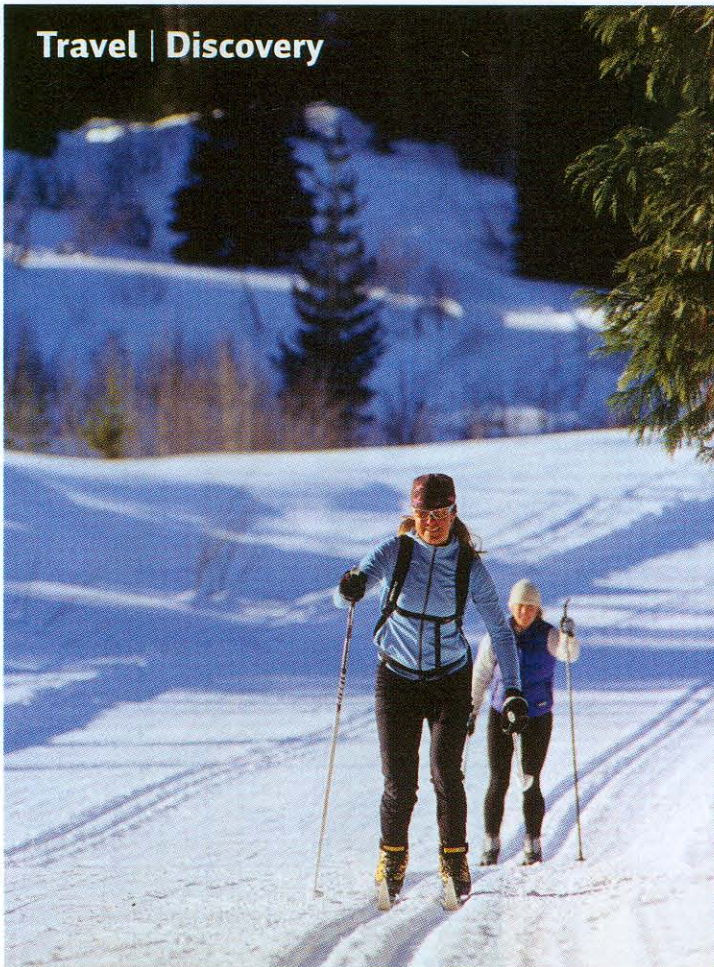
feels a little like stepping into an old Warren Miller flick: There are fewer lines, and a lift ticket still hovers around \$50. The scene seekers don't come here yet, but able skiers flock to Red for its tough terrain, and families fall for the nearby town of Rossland, with its terrific alpine community.

And although the Kootenays may sound exotic enough to be halfway across the world, they're a cinch to get to. From the Spokane International Airport, Red

Mountain is a straightforward 2½- to 3-hour drive or shuttle ride.

On the brink

But why now? Because after existing under the radar for years, Red is poised for big changes. In 2004, San Diego real-estate investor and part-time Rossland resident Howard Katkov bought the place. Over the next 15 years, he and his partners plan to spend up to \$873 million U.S. in



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Across from Red Mountain Resort, nordic-skiing lovers can access miles of trails at the Black Jack Cross Country Ski Club. Rossland, a former mining town, displays its old-school spirit with quiet snowy streets and picturesque red roofs. In other seasons, this part of British Columbia is a prime growing area for apples and pears.



improvements, from expanding ski terrain to building high-end, on-mountain condos (the first phases are already available).

Katkov, a lifelong skier, insists that what's great about Red will remain. Though he recognizes the irony in praising Red's isolation while rolling out marketing and development plans, he hopes to limit the number of beds on the ski hill in order to encourage people to spend time in town. "We're anti-village. We don't use the V-word at Red," he says.

Instead, Katkov hopes to maintain Red's eclectic personality. That starts with Red's bunkerlike lodge, which was converted from an old mine compressor house in 1947. It's got the same hip, back-to-basics vibe as Red's ski terrain, which contains only 25 groomed runs.

The rest of Red Mountain consists of trees, glades, chutes, and unmarked, ungroomed faces, all of which appeal especially to playful, adventurous skiers. (The mountain currently has about 1,700 skiable acres, mostly intermediate and advanced, but Katkov plans to almost triple that,

adding terrain for all levels of skiers.)

The old-school mood extends to Rossland, a former mining town just north of the Washington border, at the base of Red Mountain. On the snowy night when my husband and I drove into town, parents were pulling kids on sleds down steep streets toward the 109th annual Rossland Winter Carnival. Locals pointed us toward Idgie's Fine Food, housed in a 1902 former bakery, for dinner. We didn't have reservations but were soon enjoying house pasta so satisfying we decided to return again the next night. Granted, there weren't dozens of other dinner options in town, but far from seeming like a disadvantage, the familiarity struck us as nice.

And that's exactly what Red's developers hope to maintain. Banking on a backlash against the mega-resorts, they don't think it's a problem that you can't count 25 restaurants and day spas between Rossland and Red Mountain combined. If Red's owners put their money where their mouths are, you'll be able to count Red among the few ski resorts that still feel real. ■

How to get there

Red Mountain Resort (www.redresort.com or 800/663-0105) is 10 minutes north of the Canada/U.S. border within the community of Rossland. From Spokane, drive 80 miles north on U.S. 395, then head northwest on State 25 for 50 more miles, or catch the Red Express shuttle from Spokane International Airport.

Where to play

Deane Cabin The 1940s log cabin on the slopes can be rented by the day as an on-mountain warming hut and gathering place. Day rental from \$131 U.S.; additional fee for catered lunch, dinner, or coffee and hot chocolate; 250/362-7384.

Where to eat

Gypsy at Red Feast on grilled salmon with sweet pea-tarragon sauce in a relaxed setting. \$\$\$ U.S.; 4430 Red Mountain Rd.; 250/362-3347.
Idgie's Fine Food Almond-crust halibut and soul-satisfying desserts. \$\$\$ U.S.; 1999 Second Ave.; 250/362-0078.

Where to stay

Ram's Head Inn The premier inn at the base of the ski mountain has 14 guest suites. From \$127 U.S., including a hearty breakfast; www.ramshead.bc.ca or 877/267-4323.
Red Mountain Central Reservations Book condos, motels, hotels, and B&Bs on the mountain and in Rossland. From \$64 U.S.; 877/969-7669.