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GOLDEN SKIING

on Golden Trails

by Laura Robinson

Each year, my partner and I try to hit the ski trails in Banff National Park by the end of November. Venture a little farther west of the Town of Banff and you'll find a different weather system, one that can drop extraordinary levels of snow early in the season, but also drop temperatures rather dramatically. When we faced a week of -30°C as an average, our attention turned a little farther west, where on lower-elevation levels and therefore slightly warmer temps, we found exhilarating perfectly laid-out trails. We were off to Golden, B.C. and the Dawn Mountain Nordic Centre, tucked conveniently on the edge of Kicking Horse Mountain Resort.





Photos: Golden Nordic

uck was with us, as our friends Reg and Barb, who together have logged more decades as National Park wardens than they care to acknowledge, loaded our gear into their vehicle. We all sped off from Banff on the TransCanada Highway, and 140 kilometres later, we were in for a Golden adventure.

The good folks at Tourism Golden arranged a two-bedroom unit at the Resort, we picked up nutritious, delicious food at local stores, easy places to find organic chow, and by early afternoon were gliding through majestic forests, assured by our Western friends that the bears, by now, were sleeping soundly.

Nordic ski clubs are labours of love. There is something so very authentic about people who belong to ski clubs. I use the word “belong” because local ski clubs give all of us a deep connection to one another and to the natural world. People work and play tirelessly for years to provide club members and the public with profound experiences in the woods. After more than 40 years of meeting stalwart volunteers (ski clubs are all still virtually run on relatively shoestring budgets, considering what they provide to their community), I’d like a medal to be cast in their honour. Golden Nordic should be sent one of the first.

We were treated to excellently groomed trails, and if we skied steadily, we were fine in the -25°C dry crispness and stunning sun. We realized it was a good idea to get onto its trails fairly early, as the coniferous giants cast long chilly shadows by 3:00 p.m. in lower temperatures. But fear not, a check one year later in December 2014 showed perfect snow conditions and temps at -1°C. And in 2015, why not try the Huckleberry Loppet weekend Jan. 24-25. It’s a great two-day event, with Classic skiing on Day One, any distance from one to 30 kilometres and skating on Day Two from one to 20 km – something for the littlest of Bunnies to grizzled Masters.

The trails are also designed to form seven concentric rings from three to 20 kilometres, with increasing technical challenges. With signage that lets you know the skill level necessary on each trail and arrows at strategic points directing you back to the chalet, you’ll be fine, but do put a map in your pocket. The good news is that Golden is at the very western edge of Mountain Standard Time, so you actually squeeze in an extra hour of daylight at the end of the day compared to say Revelstoke, which is in Pacific Standard Time.

If you arrive midday in midwinter and want to squeeze in a quick ski, Golden Nordic has also built six kilometres of Classic trails from another club chalet at the Golden Golf Course. It’s on the way to Dawn Mountain up Kicking Horse Trail, which is actually a road, but only six kilometres out of town. Watch for signs. Normally Dawn Mountain trails are ready in November, while the golf course needs more consistent winter weather at its lower elevation.

For our warm-up on Dawn Mountain, out of the 33 kilometres of skating and Classic trails, members advised skiing out Beaver (gentle), hooking up to Hawk Owl (3.1 kilometres of rollercoaster challenges), switching to Moose via Pegasus (plenty of fun challenges), and then following more signage on Hawk Owl to either Raven for another 5.1 kilometres of climbs and descents or Caribou if we wanted to simply kick and glide and enjoy the wonderland that surrounds. We had a run with Moose and then migrated to Caribou. In such cold temperatures, we didn’t even contemplate skate skiing. A couple of hours of Classic skiing was truly enough to stay warm and added up to needing a couple of bottles of wine and pasta in great abundance in our cozy unit at the resort, a combination that breeds early shut-eye and deep mountain sleep.

Dawn Mountain is within walking distance of Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, but on cold days, prepare for a quick jog. The chalet is heated geothermally and has a kitchenette where hot drinks can be had.

(above) The Dawn Mountain Chalet is the club’s main lodge.

(opposite far left) There are trails for all skill levels.

(opposite left) Black designs on the trees aren’t painted on – they’re bear claw marks.

(left) The Huckleberry Loppet is Golden Nordic Club’s premier ski event each season.



Golden Nordic

Our next morning included visiting with Golden Nordic president Jeff Dolinsky, who gave me a fun tour of the day lodge and the lovely apartment upstairs available for rent to those who want to stay a few days. We skied some of his favourite trails. As we kicked and glided, Dolinsky suddenly stopped. "See those trees," he said, pointing to a group of trees that looked like they had a series of black designs painted on them, "those are claw marks."

Oh, I see, these trees must be pre-contact, and First Nations marked them so they looked like they had long, deep scratches. This must have told them where they were in the woods or something. Jeff looks at me like I am daft. "No. These are marks were not put there by humans. Those are claw marks from bears."

A chill greater than anything Mother Nature could throw at me runs from my toque to my toes. "Are you sure those bears have hibernated?" I ask as I look at how the neat deep piercings ascend the trees. I am assured by Barb and Reg, who can identify an animal track covered by two centimetres of snow, that they have yet to see bear tracks and couldn't imagine any staying awake for such cold temperatures. Think of it from the bear's point of view. Yes, skiers will be as cold as popsicles in this weather!

Dolinsky also mentions that Golden brought in legendary trailbuilder Don Gardner (he designed the Canmore 1988 Olympic trails and plenty more), who arrived in 1996. You can tell an expert had a hand on these trails because there are special treats, such as the dips and doodles that make you pay attention to balance and turning, really fun stuff just when you may get a little lackadaisical.

For a witty, galloping, humorous history of Nordic

Legendary trailbuilder Don Gardner, who designed the Canmore 1988 Olympic trails, produced the conceptual plan for the ski trails at Golden.

skiing and trailbuilding in the Golden area, <http://www.goldennordic-club.ca/golden-club-history> is a smile-inducing good read. More recently, though, the club had to defend the rights of people to travel quietly and with their own heart, soul and skis through the woods, as snowmobilers and developers eyed the land they had worked so hard to clear for trails while respecting as much as possible its natural integrity. With diplomacy and reason on its side, Golden Nordic has been able to maintain the trail

network and hosted the 2012 Canadian Master's Championships to rave reviews. It has rentals, a ski school, a healthy Jackrabbit program and a wonderful Grade 7 program for local schoolchildren. For \$10.00 for adults, \$5.00 for children and \$25.00 a family per day, you can't go wrong. Golden Nordic now has two snowshoe trails too. It's truly a club with a community heart.

Kicking Horse Mountain Resort and Dawn Mountain Nordic Centre are 15 kilometres from Golden on the Dog Tooth Range of the Purcell Mountains. Look for the signage for Kicking Horse Mountain Trail once you enter Golden, but also don't miss some of the funky cafes, galleries and shops in town. There's nothing like mixing books and meals, and I had a great time talking with the mountain-bike folks over lunch at Bacchus Books & Café. They've got an equally cool system of trails for summer, while the Art Gallery of Golden boasts local talented artists. Check out the Golden Museum and Archives. I got a really super-vintage print of early cyclists and postcards with 1930s skiers in their high-tech wool threads – Canadian cross-country at its best.

JUST THE FACTS

- **Golden Nordic** (includes trail updates, events, directions, etc.): www.goldennordicclub.ca/home
- **Kicking Horse Mountain Resorts:** kickinghorseresort.com/winter-main/the-resort/accommodations-packages/
- **Golden and area lodging:** kickinghorseresort.com/winter-main/the-resort/accommodations-packages/in-golden-lodging/
- **Golden Tourism:** www.tourismgold-en.com/
- **Shuttles from Calgary Airport:** (Dec. 20-March 22): kickinghorseresort.com/winter-main/the-resort/accommodations-packages/specials-packages/