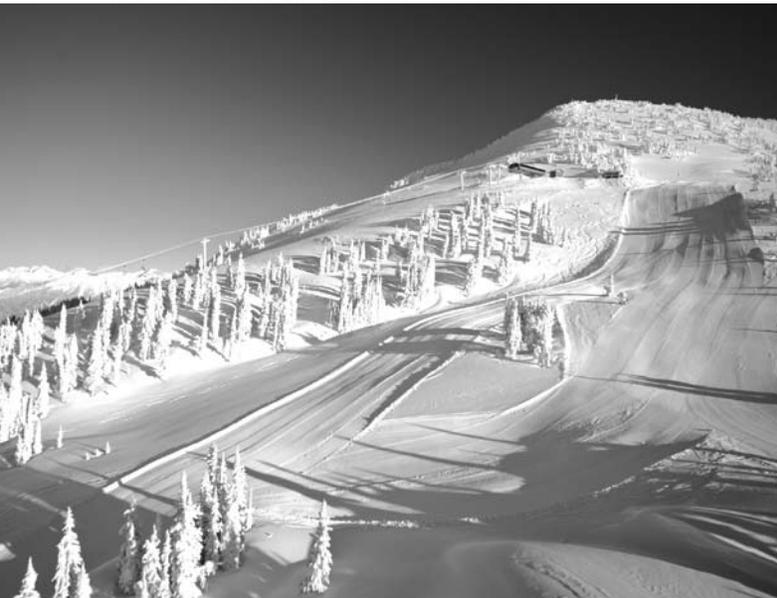


# British Columbia Comeback

Since the opening of a new alpine resort in 2007, Revelstoke has returned to the attention of the international skiing community. **BY JENNY CLAYTON**

PHOTOS THIS PAGE COURTESY REVELSTOKE MOUNTAIN RESORT



Revelstoke Mountain Resort opened in December 2007, with 3,121 acres of skiable terrain, a high-speed gondola, and base-village lodging at the Sutton Place Hotel.

Almost a century after the Revelstoke Ski Club organized its first winter carnival in 1915, skiing is still going strong in this British Columbia mountain town. Last January, five-year-old Revelstoke Mountain Resort hosted the Canadian Freeskiing Championships on Mount Mackenzie. One of the competitors was 20-year-old ski jumper Zoya Lynch of Canada. Before she moved to Revelstoke, Lynch was a plaintiff in the lawsuit against the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC), attempting to have women's ski jumping included in the 2010 Winter Olympics. The lawsuit failed, but women's ski jumping will be an event in 2014 in Sochi, Russia. Although women's jumping was controversial in 2010, it was recognized in 1923 in Revelstoke, when local jumper Isabel Coursier set a women's world record of 84 feet.

Two peaks near Revelstoke, located in the Selkirk mountain range, have played an important role in the history of skiing in the region. On the northern edge of the city, Mount Revelstoke (6,004 feet) was designated as a national park in 1914. The shape of this hill made it particularly suitable to setting ski-jumping records in the 1920s and 1930s. Since the 1960s, Mount Mackenzie, south of Revelstoke (8,068 feet) has become popular for downhill, snowcat skiing and heli-skiing.

Revelstoke has returned to the attention of the international skiing community with the opening of Revelstoke Mountain Resort (RMR) on Mount Mackenzie in December 2007. Developed by Denver-based Don Simpson of Grand Peaks Property, and Toronto-based Hunter Milborne and Robert Powadiuk, the resort boasts some of the deepest accessible powder in British Columbia. Still expanding, RMR offers 5,620 feet of vertical drop and an average annual snowfall of 30 to 45 feet. Visitors can ascend the mountain by a high-speed gondola, two high-speed chairlifts, or two conveyor lifts. In addition, RMR offers snowcat and helicopter services. The base of the mountain currently features a beginner slope and a tube park, a restaurant and wine bar, and rental and retail shops. Accommodation is available at the Sutton Place Hotel, completed in 2009.

Revelstoke came into being as a railway service center in the Selkirks shortly after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885. To take advantage of spectacular scenery and promote mountain tourism, the CPR and the federal government established Canada's first national

parks, Banff (1885) and Glacier (1886) along the railway's route through the Rocky and Selkirk Mountains. In the new settlement of Revelstoke, residents were using skis, introduced by Scandinavian immigrants, to travel in winter, check mining claims, and deliver the mail. Members of the Revelstoke Snowshoe and Toboggan Club, formed in November 1891, went on backcountry treks and built a toboggan slide in town. Hoping to attract alpine tourists, residents of Revelstoke promoted the mountain north of town as a potential park. In April 1914, the federal government designated this area as Mount Revelstoke National Park. Thirteen years later, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales officially opened a 29-kilometer (18-mile) automobile road to the summit.

Thanks to the energy of recently arrived Scandinavian immigrants, winter sports took off in Revelstoke after the creation of the national park. A new ski club was organized in December 1914, which grew to a membership of 300 in its first couple years. The ski club's first tournament, in February 1915, included skiing, skating, snowshoeing, curling and a costume competition at the ice rink. The yearly tournament became so popular that the CPR offered special rates and extra sleeper cars to accommodate the overflow of spectators who could not find rooms in Revelstoke.

By the 1920s, jumpers from Revelstoke and further afield were setting world records for distance on "Suicide Hill," in Mount Revelstoke National Park. Henry Hall of Detroit established the first professional world record on the Revelstoke hill in 1921 by jumping 229 feet. The same year, local jumper Nels Nelsen, an immigrant from Norway, set a world amateur record of 201 feet. Jumping became the new craze, with skiers building their own private jumps for practicing. In February 1924, the *Revelstoke Review* boasted that the town could "produce over fifty native jumpers of all ages from twelve years up, who will jump over 100 feet. To be an 'expert' in Revelstoke a jumper has to make somewhere around 200 feet." A year later, Nelsen established a men's world record of 239.5 feet. In 1933, local resident Bob Lymburne set another world record in Revelstoke with a jump of 287 feet.

Revelstoke ski jumpers were not only breaking world records, they were breaking gender barriers. In 1922, 16-year-old Isabel Coursier was jumping in the boys' contests in Revelstoke, when there was no category for girls. Organizers created a category for women in 1923, and as the sole jumper, Coursier set a women's world record with a jump of 84 feet.

After World War II, the national park rebuilt the hill to meet international standards. Revelstoke held its first "Tournament of Champions" in 1950, and eight years later, ski jumping competitors hailed from Germany, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Japan. Despite this effort to revive jumping, tastes and technology were changing. With the advent of lifts and tows, skiers were less willing to walk up the hills, and the ski jumps were only accessible by foot. To serve the interests of downhill and slalom skiers, the park installed a lift and a rope tow in

PHOTOS COURTESY REVELSTOKE MOUNTAIN RESORT



Top: The resort offers 500,000 acres of heli-skiing terrain in the Selkirk and Monashee Mountains through Selkirk Tangiers Heli-Skiing. Above: Snowcat skiing is accessible from the base village.

the early 1960s. When the Trans-Canada Highway was completed through Revelstoke in 1962, it boosted the town's economy and tourism potential. Yet the highway also cut across the lower ski slopes of Mount Revelstoke, and the lift had to be moved up the hill.

Since the growth of lift-powered skiing at the national park was limited, entrepreneurs Donald Sinclair and Paul Mair tapped into the potential of Mount Mackenzie, three miles south of town. In December 1963, they opened an 800-foot rope tow for family skiing. Mair, a skiing instructor from Austria, ran the ski school; Sinclair built the rope tows and a T-bar. In 1969, their operation bought and removed the ski lift equipment from Mount Revelstoke, ending downhill skiing on that mountain. Mount Mackenzie had the potential for much higher runs. By the mid-1970s, Blake Franklin had logged a road to the summit and cleared a downhill run of five miles. He transported skiers to the summit by snowcat.

Two of the last ski-jumping tournaments were held on Mount Revelstoke in 1971 and 1972, but they were not successful financially. Too much effort was needed to prepare the jumps for competition, and hike up to them. While the focus for downhill skiing shifted to



Nels Nelsen of Revelstoke soars off a local ski jump in 1918. He was among the world's best ski jumpers in the 1920s and held the world record of 73 meters (239.5 feet) from 1925 to 1930.



The Revelstoke Ski Club, circa 1914. The club hosted its first tournament in February 1915. Today the club offers recreational and racing programs for skiers ages 5 to adult.

Mount Mackenzie, Mount Revelstoke has maintained its appeal to cross-country skiers. This year, the park held its 28th annual moonlight ski, an activity that was already taking place in the 1920s.

In 1965, Austrian immigrant Hans Gmoser and business partner Leo Grillmair pioneered the sport of helicopter skiing in the Bugaboo Mountains of southeastern British Columbia. In the winter of 1978–79, their company, Canadian Mountain Holidays, faced a lack of snow. Since the Revelstoke area had deep and reliable snow cover, CMH started offering runs on Mount Mackenzie, which it described as “an excellent mountain...with tremendous potential.” Around the same time, Peter Schlunegger, a mountain guide from Switzerland who was a former employee of Gmoser’s, started Selkirk Tangiers. This heli-ski company was based in Albert Canyon, northeast of Revelstoke. Schlunegger was carrying on a family tradition, as his great-grandfather had worked for a time as a guide at Glacier

## DETAILS

### Revelstoke Mountain Resort

Camozzi Road  
Revelstoke, B.C.  
Canada VoE 2S1

**Phone:** 866.373.4754

**Web:** [www.revelstokemountainresort.com](http://www.revelstokemountainresort.com)

**Vertical drop:** 5,620 feet

**Top elevation:** 7,300 feet

**Base elevation:** 1,680 feet

**Season:** Early December to early April

**Lift tickets:** \$76 adult day pass (approximately \$74 U.S.)

**Skiable acres:** 3,121, including high-alpine bowls and 13 acres of glades

Lift-served skiing, cat skiing, heli-skiing and backcountry skiing all accessible from base village. Selkirk Tangiers Heli-Skiing (now owned by RMR) offers 500,000 acres of terrain in the Selkirk and Monashee Mountains.

Sutton Place Hotel offers ski-in, ski-out accommodations at the base area. The nearby Sandman Hotel Revelstoke offers 173 guest rooms and two indoor swimming pools. Other local lodging options are listed on the resort Website.

House lodge in Rogers’ Pass. As heli-skiing became more popular and more companies were formed, heli-ski operators successfully lobbied the provincial government in the early 1980s for distinct tenures to the large areas where they operated.

In 2000, the Mount Mackenzie ski area was a modest affair, jointly owned by the city and Clyde Newsome, who also operated Cat Powder Skiing. The ski area consisted of a double chair, a beginner’s T-bar, and 10 runs. In December 2004, the B.C. government approved a master plan to turn Mount Mackenzie into an all-season resort that would cost \$800 million and would eventually include 25 ski lifts, 100 trails, a golf course and hotels. To finance the resort, developers sold real estate to skiing enthusiasts—some of the single-home lots come with their own heli-pads. Property at Revelstoke appeals to investors who are interested in “climate change real estate,” according to journalist David Ebner, writing for the *Globe and Mail*. The area’s consistently deep snow levels suggest it will still have snow when other winter resorts are suffering. By 2007, Revelstoke Mountain Resort had purchased the ski hill, Cat Powder Skiing, and Selkirk Tangiers heli-skiing. The resort opened on December 22, 2007. Local residents in this town of about 8,500 had already bought 85 percent of advance season passes.

Blessed with deep snowfall, Revelstoke residents have found ways to make the most of this winter resource for the last 125 years. With its combination of generous snowfall and vertical downhill, Revelstoke Mountain Resort continues to push the limits of the skiing experience. ❄️