

Ski season gets under way early in Canmore

■ Alberta town in the Rockies offers cross-country skiing as early as October

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TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

Every year, the National Technical committee of CANSI (the Canadian Association of Nordic Ski Instructors) meets to discuss new ski techniques and how best to teach them at an on snow location in Canada.

The idea is to find a place with early season snow so that we can renew our skiing and get rid of the summer rust. This year we headed to Canmore, Alberta and it turned out to be a very good choice since they have been skiing there since late November. Our meetings were scheduled for the first week of December and involved both telemarking (a downhill technique on medal edged backcountry skis) at Sunshine Village ski resort and cross-country skiing at the Canmore Nordic Centre.

Our first couple of days were spent at Sunshine Village which is located 16 km from Banff, high in the Canadian Rockies. There are three ski areas near Banff but we choose Sunshine Village since it usually opens first, is easy to get to and, most times, has good early season snow.

This year Lake Louise ski area was also open early but it is quite a bit further away from Canmore and Mt. Norquay was slated to open December 4 which was after our telemark sessions were scheduled.



KEITH NICOL/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

On this trip, Sunshine Village lived up to its name, offering skiing under clear, sunny skies.

The Sunshine Village day lodge is at an elevation of around 7,000 feet and is known for its spectacular scenery. When we were there, the snow was a bit thin but by sticking to some of the higher slopes, we found that the runs had good snow coverage. About half the lifts were operating and the base was 50cm of snow. The days were generally sunny and we had to remember to watch our ski tips now and again

since the temptation was to rubber neck at the fine views in almost any direction. Nearby is Goat's Eye Mountain, the Eagles and Lookout Mountain which are all in the 9,000 foot range. This part of the Rockies is made up of jagged, heavily glaciated peaks and it is no wonder it attracts skiers throughout the winter.

My favourite runs were off of the Angel Express since here you are well above treeline and we could

practise big carving turns across the wide slope. In the distance was Goat's Eye and I vowed to return later in the winter to be able to ski some of its steep black and double black runs.

Sunshine is also known for its super steep runs like Delirium Dive which requires that all skiers and riders be equipped with avalanche beacons, probes and shovels and you must ski with a partner. Again

If you go...

- Sunshine Village Ski Resort: www.skibanff.com
- Canmore Nordic Centre: www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/kananaskis/parks_canmore.asp

this wasn't open when we were there but is on my "to ski" list.

Sunshine has 2 other freeride zones (Silver City and the Wild West) so if you feel like you have mastered Delirium Dive you can still be challenged.

But Sunshine is more than just super steep runs. In fact, we spent most of our time on easy green runs since they had better snow coverage and were perfect for discussing new ideas in the teaching of telemark skiing. We especially liked the runs off of the Strawberry Triple and Mt. Standish Express chairlifts.

After two days of telemarking, we headed for the cross-country ski trails at the Canmore Nordic Centre. This location is one of the best in Canada for cross-country skiing and now with its extensive snow making can guarantee snow for November and even earlier.

When we were there in early December there were 55 km of trails open and it looked like mid-winter. Everything was perfectly groomed for classic and skating technique. Although the Canmore Nordic Centre is known for its racing (it hosted the 1988 Winter Olympics and more recently World Cup cross-country events in 2005 and 2008 and the World Youth Biathlon in 2009), we saw all ages and stages there in our three-day stay.

There were little kids trying out skiing for the first time, skiers pulling young ones in chariots, and many families out for a winter outing. And like the scenery at Sunshine Village, the scenery is jaw dropping. The peaks surrounding Canmore tower over the town making for a spectacular backdrop for cross-country skiing.

And you never know who you might see skiing on the trails. On our first day we saw Olympian Becky Scott who was working with a group of young female ski racers and we ran into Dave Wood (former coach of Canada's Olympic team) with a group of skiers.

With over 20 km of recently installed snowmaking, Canmore is now on the map for anyone from ski teams to recreational skiers who want good early season skiing. And last year they experimented with storing snow over the summer under saw dust so they could ski even earlier. The stockpiled snow was spread over the trails so that cross-country skiers could "kick and glide" even in October. So if you want to get cross country skiing early, Canmore is the spot.

Keith and Heather Nicol are avid skiers and Keith has a popular Nordic Skiing website at <http://www2.swgc.mun.ca/~knicol/nordic%20main.htm> They are based in Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

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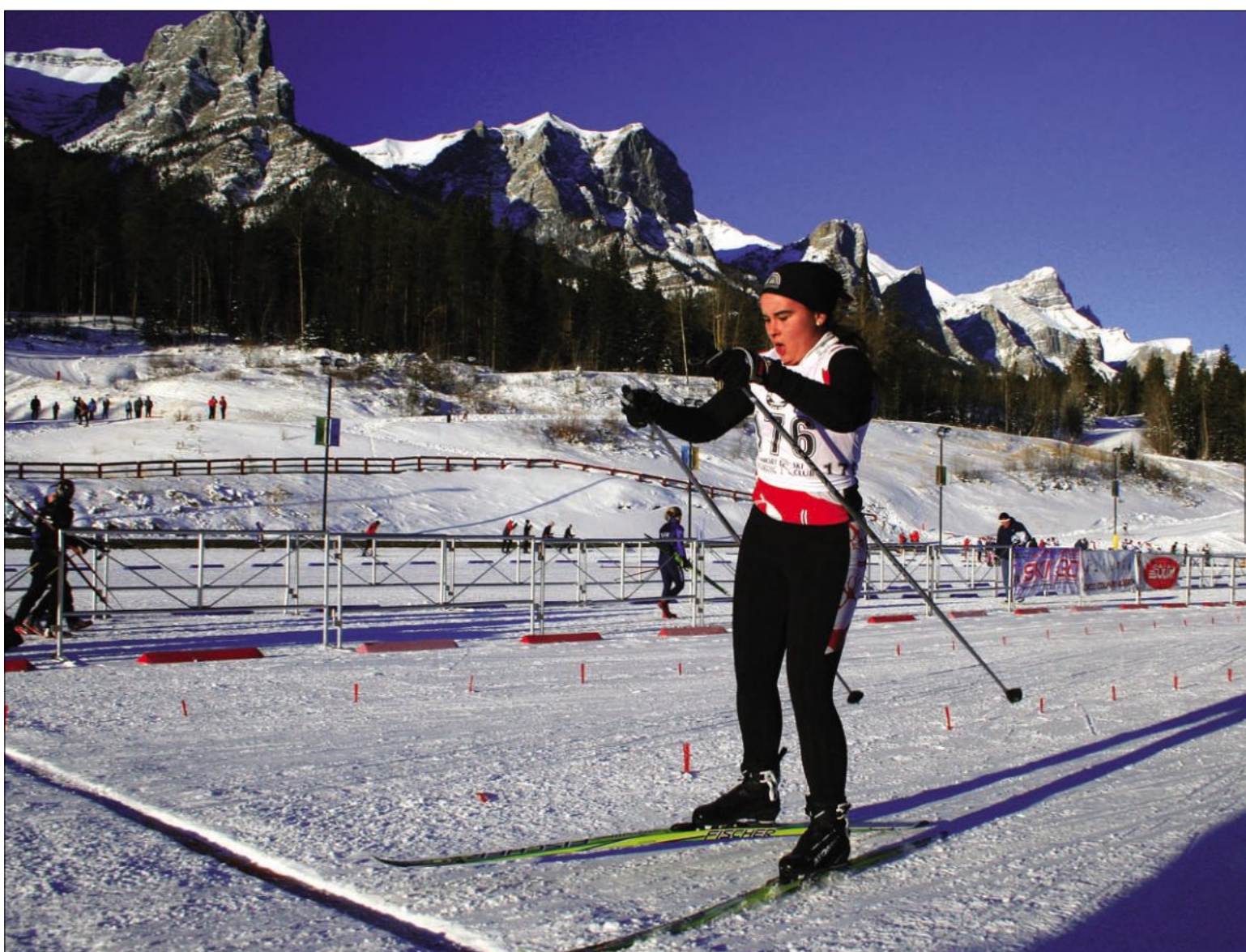
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KEITH NICOL/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Skiers play 'Follow the Leader' at Sunshine Village Resort.



KEITH NICOL/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

A cross-country skier pushes hard across the finish line.