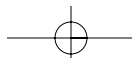


THE FIRST  
STAGE  
OF THE  
DOUBLE  
THAT  
ALMOST  
CLAIMED  
CHRIS'S  
TEETH.

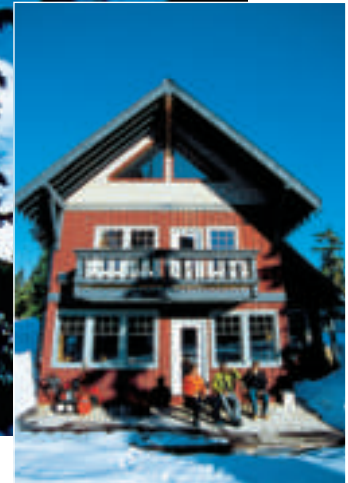
Skier: Richard Haywood



# SEEKING SANCTUARY

WHEN YOU'VE  
HAD YOUR FILL OF  
WHISTLER GLITZ  
AND GLAMOUR,  
CALLAGHAN LODGE  
IS A WELCOME  
RESPIRE.

By Chris Lennon  
Photography by Arne Gutmann



**"THAT'S EXACTLY WHERE I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO LAND,"** yelled our guide Richard as I pulled my

face away from my skis and checked to see that my sorry excuse for a smile was still intact. Not exactly the words you want to hear from the man you were relying on as your eyes while attempting to execute a blind double drop in the B.C. backcountry. Still, since I wasn't hurt I'm sure my crash provided some much-needed comedy relief to the man who had been breaking trail for us the past two days in the serene wilderness of the Upper Callaghan Valley.

This whole turn of events started in the off-season when photographer Arne Gutmann and I went looking for a short backcountry adventure to try to grab the final spoils of winter before settling into the glitz and glamour of summer in Whistler. Without the time or money to go to Alaska, we searched for options closer to home. What we found was an absolute gem that, while not intentionally kept as a secret, has

gone unnoticed by nearly all of the almost two-million winter visitors that Whistler hosts each year.

Nestled into the Coast range, just 13 km west of winter's best interpretation of Disneyland, the full-service, 465-square-metre Callaghan Backcountry Lodge is world's away from Whistler. Except for the five-star accommodations and dining, this place is everything that Whistler is not-and vice versa. For those wishing to experience the alpine wilderness of B.C. without sacrificing any comforts, this is the place to do it.

Although there's no road access to the lodge, we started our trip by taking a five-minute drive south of Whistler to the staging area just off Hwy 99. After meeting our guide Richard Haywood and Chef Michael Downy, we boarded snowmobiles for a 22-km ride through old-growth cedars and past the future Olympic nordic venue en route to the lodge. Sitting in the valley below Callaghan and Powder mountains, the lodge offers access to a 4,300-hectare playground for ski touring,

## RETREAT TO CALLAGHAN

**ACCESS** to the lodge is primarily via snowmobile or snowcoach, but arrangements can be made to ski tour or fly in by helicopter. Trips depart from the staging ground 13 km south of Whistler on Hwy 99.

**PACKAGES** include transportation, accommodation, meals and ACMG guiding, and start at \$400 for a one-night, two-day stay. Accommodation ranges from queen or twin bed with shared bath to the self-contained Solitude Suite complete with private lounge, loft, patio, fireplace and bath.

**TOURING EQUIPMENT** rentals can be arranged through The Escape Route in Whistler's Marketplace, 604/938-3228 or [www.escaperoute.net](http://www.escaperoute.net).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
[www.callaghancountry.com](http://www.callaghancountry.com) or  
604/938-0616.

Skier: Chris Lennon

snowshoeing and nordic skiing. At full capacity, the lodge only accommodates 16 people, so crowds are never an issue, but on this trip Arne and I were especially lucky as the only guests.

The plan was to quickly drop our gear in our rooms and head out to spend the day shredding lines a little farther up the valley on Solitude Glacier. Of course, things never go exactly as planned, especially when you have a photographer in tow. While Arne attempted to capture the striking vista gained from the many lodge balconies and large windows, I spent some time refuelling on fresh-baked goods and coffee that Michael had prepared earlier that morning.

After a couple of cups of coffee and a little coaxing from Richard, we got Arne out the door and began a fairly leisurely ascent of Solitude. Even with an agenda and a limited amount of time, it's amazing how quickly you can relax when you look around at the surrounding peaks and struggle to find even a half-dozen tracks. It's comforting and reassuring to know that whatever you don't manage to ski

today, will look the same again tomorrow.

As we climbed higher up Solitude, I was amazed at how great the snow was. I knew it would be fresh, but since it was mid-April and I'd spent the past couple of weeks in Whistler wearing boardshorts, I was only expecting good spring corn. Surprisingly, what we found was relatively dry late-winter snow. The reason for this is two-fold, Richard explained. First, Callaghan Lodge is significantly higher than Whistler at 1,370 metres. Second and perhaps more importantly, the lodge and surrounding terrain are trapped on three sides by glaciers. Moist air flowing from the coast cools as it moves into this micro-climate and pounds the valley with light, dry fluff before moving on towards Whistler.

After a good solid day spent pillaging the spoils on Solitude Glacier, we made our way back to the lodge with the intention of going for an evening skate-ski on the 32 km of groomed and track-set trails traversing the valley and circling Conflict Lake. Claiming that the lodge door was locked, a ploy that I now believe was an elaborate hoax, Richard went around to the patio door and then presented us with two cold beers as he opened the purportedly locked door from inside. From there we moved upstairs to the lounge area to shoot some pool and try our best to devour the full spread of appetizers that Michael had prepared while we were out on the hills.

After refreshing with a hot shower and planting myself on the sunny deck, it didn't take long to forget about our nordic ambitions. A few hours later, after watching the sun set behind the alpine playground that we had tracked out earlier in the day, Michael provided a delicious four-course meal in the elegant lamp-lit dining room. With a full belly and visions of the next day's adventure circling in my head, I retired to the Solitude Suite and gazed at the stars shining above Solitude Glacier before falling fast asleep.

The next day's plan was to play on the slopes just south of the lodge known as the Cal-Pow in the morning and then make a second attempt at nordic skiing in the afternoon. Once again, the toughest task of the morning was getting the photographic wizard, who now had sore legs, out the door. With a lot of coffee and some help from Vitamin I (ibuprofen), we eventually made our way up the Cal-Pow and came upon a picturesque double drop that sent Arne into an excited hummingbird-like frenzy. I'm convinced that part of Arne's enthusiasm came from the fact that he would need to wait below, and rest, while Richard and I continued up to the apex of the line. Regardless, I didn't need much convincing and after a quick bite of lunch, Richard and I were off.

Which brings me back to the humbling feat of only making the first half of a double drop. Dusting the snow off my goggles and preparing to redeem myself on the second drop, I took a moment to appreciate the vastness of the surrounding terrain. Up the valley to my left I can just faintly see the tracks we left the day before on Solitude. Across the valley to the north sits the Pemberton Ice Cap, and below me lie some nice trees and rolling terrain flanked with increasingly steep pillow lines falling back to the lodge. How am I going to explain this place to so many who haven't experienced it? Maybe I shouldn't say anything at all?

Hearing a chuckle from the man behind the lens snaps my focus back to the task at hand and I quickly decide that anything I do share with potential visitors must be accompanied with one warning: No matter how easy it is to get caught up in all the pampering and full-service spoiling of this place, don't neglect to scout your own landings. ❄️