



Photo: SAM EGAN

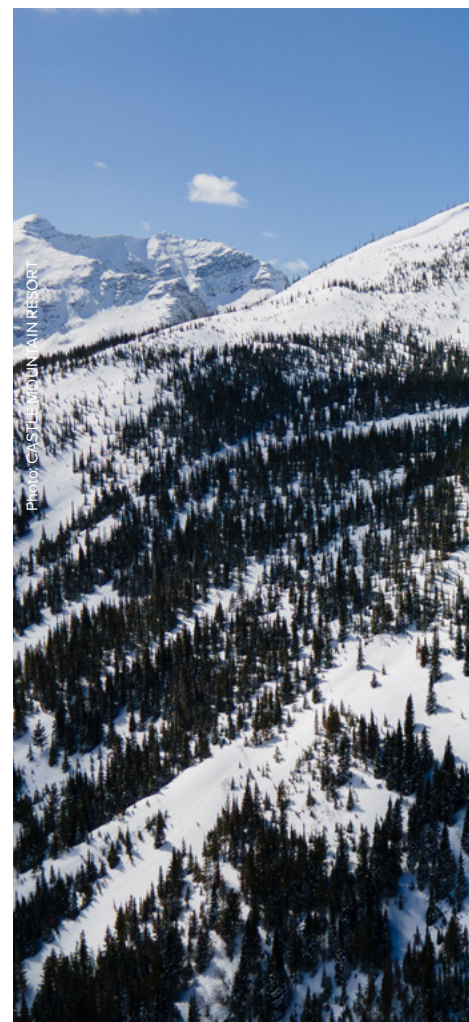


Photo: CASTLE MOUNTAIN RESORT

THE PASSING OF AN ICON AL RAINE: 1941-2024

▶ It's fitting that a recounting of Al Raine's life should appear in a *Ski Canada* issue titled *The Best of Skiing*, since he's responsible for much of what Canada has come to represent on the world stage.

From the time he was appointed as head coach and program director of Canada's alpine ski team in the spring of 1968 to his final days as the mayor of Sun Peaks, Raine was driven by a conviction that our ski racers could go head-to-head with the top European countries and that Canada could develop four-season resorts that would offer a tourism experience at the very highest echelon.

Raine's work with the national team incorporated concepts that were years ahead of their time: summer training on the Kokanee Glacier, wind-tunnel testing to design aerodynamic downhill suits, and physical and mental training and preparation in order not just to compete on the world stage, but to excel.

Raine is perhaps most widely known for his place alongside Nancy Greene, his spouse of 55 years. Skiing's dream team, commonly known as Al and Nan-

cy, married in 1969. It was during their frequent trips to the Alps that Raine began to dream of building a major ski destination in British Columbia.

In the '70s Raine worked on B.C.'s Commercial Alpine Ski Policy, indefatigably travelling throughout the province to unearth potential gems for future winter tourism potential. By the end of his contract, Raine had done site evaluations on more than 40 ski areas, including many local ski hills which are the backbone of recreational skiing in the province.

What Raine did next was truly revolutionary. He turned his attention to the development of skiing on Blackcomb Mountain as a major ski destination next to Whistler Mountain. Raine engineered the deal that saw Aspen Skiing Company and its partner, the Federal Business Development Bank, finance four chairlifts on Blackcomb. Next, as the government-appointed alderman on the newly incorporated Resort Municipality of Whistler's first council, Raine's vision for what Whistler could become began to take shape.

Ventures during those years included Nancy Greene's Olympic Lodge and proposed developments at B.C.'s Melvin Creek. But Nancy and Al eventually moved to Sun Peaks where, as Director of Skiing, Nancy skied with guests and actively marketed the new resort while they also built and managed Nancy Greene's Cahilty Lodge. Al worked tirelessly as mayor as the community of Sun Peaks grew into B.C.'s second mountain resort municipality.

In April of 2024 Al Raine was diagnosed with ALS, a rare and fatal neurodegenerative disease which, in his case, began with difficulties speaking. During interviews and public statements, Raine showed his characteristic optimism in the face of impending decline and his eventual passing. "I would rather wake up worrying about affordable housing, finding a way to fund infrastructure expansion or First Nation reconciliation solutions and not worry about what is coming next. I married the loves of my life, Nancy and skiing. We have shared so many happy moments together and a life in the mountains. We have healthy kids and grandkids. I have no regrets."

His last official act was resigning the mayor's chair one day before his passing at age 83.

—STEVEN THRENDYLE

CASTLE ABSORBS CAT TERRAIN

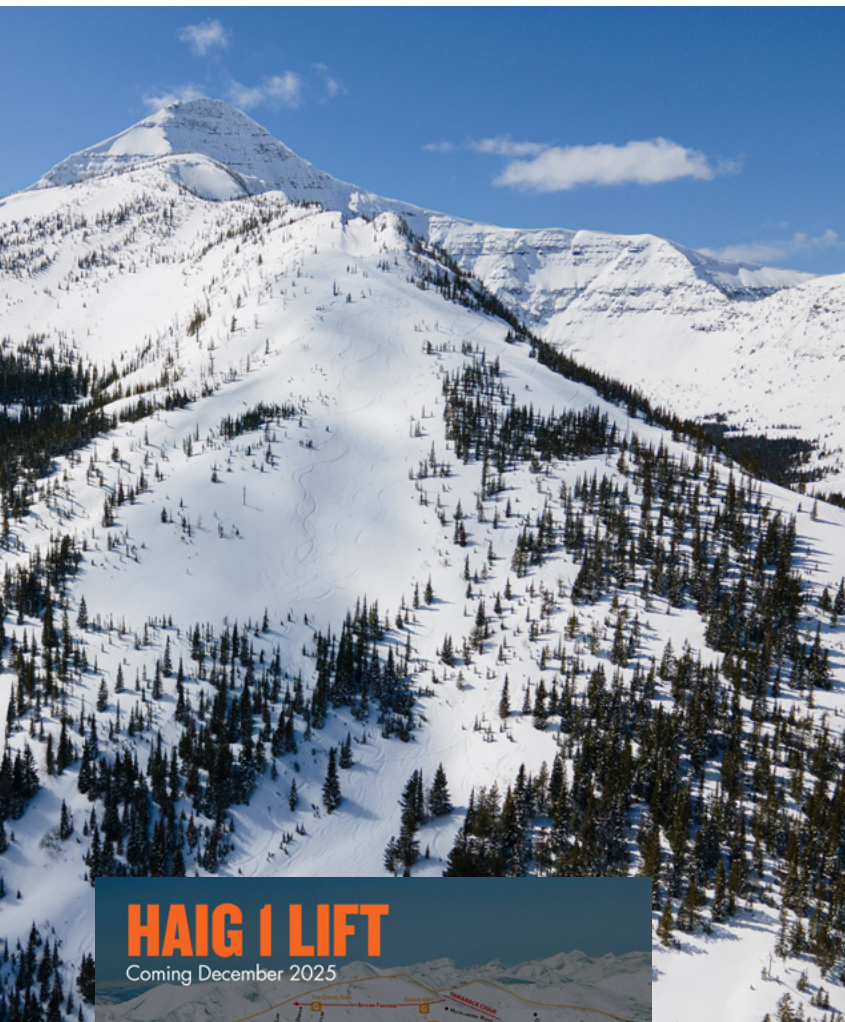
▶ Castle Mountain's domain will get 25 percent larger next season following the installation of a new chairlift into what was previously cat-skiing terrain.

The plucky redoubt in southwestern Alberta has leagues of adherents loyal to its steep, sustained fall-line pitches and constantly wind-refreshed snow (see "Catching the Drift," *Ski Canada* vol. 52, issue 2).

The expansion will add mostly inter-

LAURENTIAN REVIVAL

A century ago, Montrealers could ski from town to town in the Laurentians with no need of car shuttles by way of the *Train du Nord*. The train is gone, but the inn-to-inn idea is back, thanks to the **Routes Blanches**, a group organizing routes, maps, transportation and luggage transfers for those who want to spend two or three days sliding skinny-ski style between cozy beds and restaurant tables near Mont-Tremblant. pleinairpdh.com



chair. Much of the lift equipment has already seen long service in the Rocky Mountains as the Angel Express, recently removed from

mediate and expert terrain, extending further up the broad face of Mount Haig beyond the existing Huckleberry Chair. For the last decade the area has seen day trips from **Powder Stagecoach Cat-Skiing**.

While the high-speed quad chair will be new to Castle, it's not a new

Sunshine Village in Banff.

And while repeat clients to Powder Stagecoach Cat-Skiing might regret the coming of the commoners and the end of cat-skiing, anyone with a lift pass has reason to cheer Castle conquering new lands.

—IAN MERRINGER



RENTAL RUCKUS?

▶ The 2024 launch of Vail Resorts' **My Epic Gear**—a membership-based rental program providing slopeside pickup and delivery of ski equipment—has created a potentially sticky situation at Vail-owned Whistler Blackcomb. That's because in 2010 Whistler became the first Canadian resort to host the rival **Ski Butlers** gear delivery and fitting service. It's still in operation at Whistler Blackcomb, despite the service being bought by Vail's arch-competitor, Alterra Mountain Co., in 2022. (Whistler was Ski Butlers' *only* Canadian resort until 2024, when Alterra-owned Blue Mountain and Tremblant were added.)

Is My Epic Gear putting a damper on

Ski Butlers' Whistler prospects?

"We operate in six Vail resorts, and competition isn't new for us," says Ski Butlers president Mike Cremeno. "Our big advantage is that we've been doing this for years, and we have a system that works."

When prime locations close to the lifts at Vail resorts like Whistler aren't available, Cremeno says, Ski Butlers finds other ways to stand out. "We invest in premium real estate as close as possible to the slopes, and look for other ways to make schlepping gear easier. Anything that adds value to their experience is a win."

—ADAM BISBY

BURNS & RISKS

▶ **Wildfires** are a force of renewal, and not just ecologically speaking. For skiers they take an unskiable forest and create perfectly skiable glades. By that measure, there's a lot of new backcountry ski terrain. Last year more than million hectares of land burned in British Columbia, and almost three million hectares burned in 2023. Not all of it is skiable but still, together that's the equivalent of more than 1,000 Whistler Blackcombs or 25,000 Blue Mountains.

But before you skin off to explore one of these new playgrounds, know that temptation carries extra risk.

"Burns create some of the best ski terrain," says Ryan Buhler, forecast program manager at **Avalanche Canada**. "But you need to take additional precautions when skiing in burned areas."

They come in two categories, he says: physical hazards—like falling trees and buried logs and stumps—and, less obvi-

ous, a change in avalanche danger.

Wildfires remove the stumps and undergrowth that naturally anchor the snowpack, creating the potential for larger avalanches and entirely new avalanche paths. With reduced tree canopy, the snowpack is also more impacted by the weather. Increased wind interaction creates more wind loading and slab formation. Sun crusts and surface hoar are also more common. All create more layering in the snowpack and higher avalanche danger.

Plus, forest fire variables are too site-specific to be reflected in avalanche forecasts and take time to be incorporated in the **Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale**, a rating system used in national and provincial parks.

Buhler says skiers should adjust their behaviour accordingly, and note closures around recent burns. Large areas of tempting glades in Jasper National Park, created by last summer's wildfire, are closed to backcountry skiing as avalanche specialists assess the new avalanche risk.

—RYAN STUART