



Canadian alpine skier Paul Stutz takes off down the Farnham Glacier. The summer glacier training project allows Canada's top skiers and snowboarders to train on snow at home this summer.

Racing to the Olympics from the top of a glacier

Purcell range offers athletes top training

TRENT EDWARDS
CALGARY HERALD
FARNHAM GLACIER, B.C.

Deep in British Columbia's Purcell Mountains, a massive glacier lies near the top of a remote peak, hidden from the world by shadow most of the year.

Farnham Glacier's slopes are known only to heli-skiing powder hounds, but by 2010, it could well be remembered as the place where Canada's alpine skiers and snowboarders kick-started their drive to the Olympic podium.

With the Vancouver-Whistler Winter Olympics less than seven years away, a group of private Canadian Olympic sponsors led by the Calgary Olympic Development Association has sunk \$900,000 into a pilot project aimed at providing Canada's alpine skiers with a world-class summer training home near Panorama, B.C.

Canada's alpine ski and snowboard teams are rotating through 10-day to two-week camps on Farnham's slopes from mid-June to mid-August. Most of the skiers on the glacier this past Monday came from the national alpine development team.

"This is the best summer training I've ever done. It's better than in Whistler. It's steeper, we have more space — everything about Farnham is better," said 23-year-old Calgarian Aimee Newton, who raced to Canada's best-ever finish in World Cup parallel giant slalom snowboarding last season in Sapporo, Japan.

Canada's alpine sport associations have been sending their top athletes to South America, Europe or glaciers in the U.S. to improve their technique each summer. In Europe, ski teams are forced to share a similar-sized glacier with 15 to 20 other racing teams.

"The skiers have been asking us for their 'Olympic Oval' for years so they can train at home in summer. There are no more winter sports — they're all 12-month sports now. Hopefully, this will help get our skiers on the podium with the Austrians," said John Mills, president of CODA, while visiting the glacier with board members to assess the project's future.

Skyline Helicopters and R.K. Heli-skiing choppers transport the skiers to the glacier at 5:30 a.m. and return them to their residence at Panorama Mountain Village, near Invermere at noon.



Canadian freestyle development team skiers arrive at Farnham Glacier for a day of practice, as part of training project for top alpine ski racers, freestyle skiers and snowboarders.



CODA president John Mills watches skiers towed to the top of Farnham Glacier near Invermere on Tuesday.

CODA airlifted two snowcats to the glacier and a small crew of drivers to groom a section of the glacier each night and ferry the athletes up a winding track beside the course through each morning. The glacial area is three kilometres wide and one kilometre in length.

"Whenever the weather's good the conditions are ideal. We can pretty much ski when we want, where we want here," said Ryan Semple, 20, of Ottawa. He's aiming to join the World Cup team full time next season.

Overnight, temperatures on the glacier (altitude: 2,930 metres) hover near freezing and the north-facing slope allows year-round skiing potential. There are still three metres of snow at the top, and a metre at the base of the skiable area.

"The safety level is higher here and we can train more efficiently," said Stephan Kurz, head coach of the national women's alpine ski teams. "I hope we stay here, because in Europe right now it's 35 C and the glaciers are melting fast."

While Alpine Canada opted to cut off the area after 330 metres of vertical drop over varied pitches, another 100 metres of drop could be added onto the



Alpine skier Ryan Semple awaits another run.

course to approximate the length of a World Cup downhill.

Orange plastic circles held aloft by metre-high bamboo poles border the skiable area, warning athletes to stay within the crevasse-free zone.

The course is split into thirds for the three disciplines sharing the slope. Technical skiers race down the hard-packed left ski lanes through a 40-gate slalom course. Alpine snowboarders have filled the area's equally hard-packed middle lanes with their low-cut triangle gates.

The area's far right is mogul-packed and includes a few jumps for the freestyle skiers.

Farnham's wide variety of pitches is unmatched by most of the world's glaciers.

The Farnham experiment, combined with the anticipated windfall of training dollars from government and corporations due to Vancouver-Whistler's successful bid, have infused the alpine teams with enthusiasm.

"We have a lot of rookies who are really talented and excited," said Sylvia Kerfoot, a 26-year-old freestyle skier from Whistler, who is now considering stretching her career so she can compete as an Olympian in her home town.

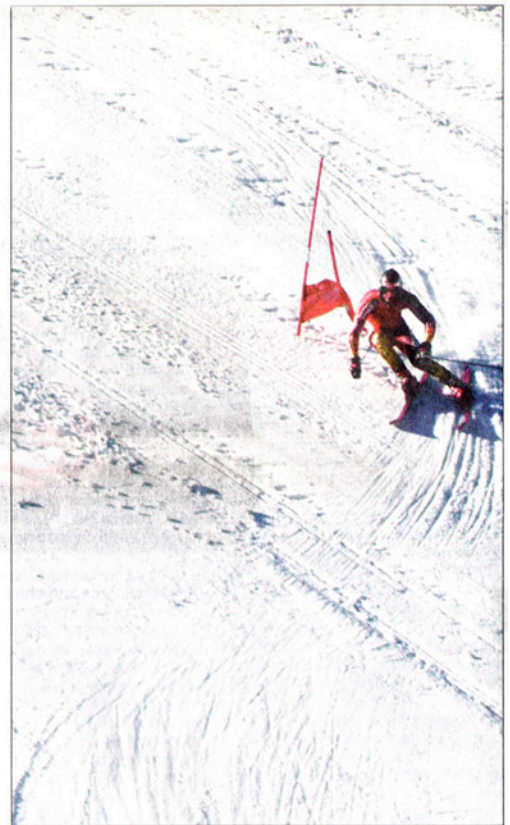
CODA and its partners, 2010 Legacies Now Society, Vancouver 2010 Bid Corporation, and the Canadian Olympic Committee, will decide this fall whether the project should be continued next summer.

Organizers don't want to continue using a helicopter to transport athletes to the glacier in future years, and are considering building a road to the Farnham hut a kilometre below the base of the current training slope.

"We've been working on the logistics of this for the past two years. We wanted to get feedback from the athletes that this is the terrain that we need and that the snow conditions are consistent," said Mills. "Now that we know they like it, it's up to us to find the most affordable way of providing them with this training."

The project is part of CODA's ambitious \$260-million plan to create the first Canadian Centre of Sport Excellence, a series of world-class training centres, for high-performance athletes in the Calgary area.

TEDWARDS@THEHERALD.CANWEST.COM



An alpine racer carves past a gate on Farnham Glacier in the Purcell Mountains during a Tuesday training session.

Summer workout on the home front

Great access to world's best training camp

TRENT EDWARDS
CALGARY HERALD
FARNHAM GLACIER, B.C.

Paul Stutz, one of Canada's rising alpine skiing stars, celebrates his 20th birthday today. In another year, he might have been in a European or South American hotel, making expensive calls to talk with family and friends back in Canada.

Instead, having just finished a second two-week summer training camp at Farnham Glacier, he was able to take an easy two-hour drive home to Banff from Panorama Mountain Village.

The advantages of training at home did not end there.

As a development team member, Stutz is obliged to pick up his own costs for food and accommodation. Staying at Panorama saved him a few thousand dollars — nothing to scoff at when expenses often outweigh income as a carded athlete drawing less than \$2,000 a month.

Stutz and his young alpine development teammates were also able to skip the joys of long flights, jet lag and currency exchange.

Stutz, the winner of the Super G at the Canadian junior championships last season at Le Massif, Que., was ecstatic about the training conditions and coaching attention he received on the glacier.

"It's the best off-season training I've ever had, and I've skied in Europe, South America and Australia," said Stutz, while awaiting another run down Farnham.

"I feel fortunate that we have access to what I think is the best glacier training in the world."

Stutz turned in eight to 10 runs daily on a World Cup-length course — a full day's skiing — by noon. After a 20-minute ride back to Panorama, the skiers and snowboarders worked on their strength training, took a University of Calgary-accredited course in German, watched video footage of their morning training to analyse technique with a coach, relaxed in the pool or played tennis.

All toward the dream of skiing Whistler in the Olympics, in 2010.