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Outside Traveler

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WHISTLER BLACKCOMB

By Seth Masia

DOUBLY HEINOUS STEEPS mean twice the fun at Whistler Blackcomb, home to the biggest vertical in North America and an astounding variety of snow conditions. Sister peaks, these British Columbia bad girls practically flaunt their grand vert, true glacier skiing, and leg-burner runs up to seven miles long.

WHY WE LOVE IT: By virtue of the vast and varied terrain (larger than Vail and Aspen combined), this resort has always drawn a cosmopolitan crowd. The number of rowdy young immigrants will surely redouble as opening day of the 2010 Winter Olympics approaches. And the village is at only 2,140 feet, so sea-level folk can let loose without fearing hypoxia-empowered hangovers.

NUMBER-ONE RUN: These peaks have long been a favorite stop on the World Cup circuit, thanks in part to the exhilarating 1.5-mile highway known as the Dave Murray Downhill, which rolls off the south shoulder to Whistler's base.

HOT LODGE: The Fairmont Chateau Whistler is a wonderland of sprawling penthouses and romantic turrets at the foot of Blackcomb Mountain. Luckily, there are more than two dozen bistros and nightclubs nearby to tempt you out of your mountain-view room on the stormier nights. (Doubles, \$256-\$446; 800-606-8244, www.fairmont.com/whistler)

SOUL PATCH: From the top of Horstman Glacier, traverse under the summit cliffs and cross the ridgeline via Spanky's Ladder. This brings you to a trove of hidden chutes plunging through a cliff band down to Blackcomb Glacier.

MOUNTAIN STATS: SUMMIT, 7,494 FEET (BLACKCOMB) ◆ VERTICAL, 10,300 FEET (COM-
360 INCHES ◆

8-9690.



TWO PEAKS ON THE HORIZON

Moonlight Basin, in Montana, and Idaho's Tamarack Resort are the first full-service U.S. ski resorts to open since the debuts of Colorado's Beaver Creek and Utah's Deer Valley, in 1980. Wondering if these untapped frontiers merit exploration when you could be on your favorite hill? Check out the promising reconnaissance report. —CHRISTOPHER SOLOMON

Moonlight Basin

EVERY GOOD SKI AREA has a split personality—part nurturer, part dominatrix. But no resort behaves more like Jekyll and Hyde than Moonlight Basin, the one-year-old resort 45 miles south of Bozeman that shares a boundary with Big Sky. First it lulls you, then it tries to kill you.

The lull part: Moonlight is a real estate venture, and the kindly blue and black pistes that meander down the north face of 11,194-foot Lone Mountain are tailored to those looking for vacation homes. The new Lone Tree lift will fill out those offerings this winter, adding more than 500 acres of open glades and unintimidating expert runs.

Moonlight's sadistic side? Just look up: The Headwaters is a forbidding wall striped with nine chutes pinched by bands of sharp shale and scree. Three Forks is the boast-in-the-bar run, a 1,200-foot plummet into Stillwater Bowl that nudges 50 degrees in spots. (Until a lift is built, reaching such lines requires a 25-to-45-minute hike.)

Moonlight Basin can't yet keep you occupied for a week—the base area's swanky lodge doesn't even have a gear shop or ski school—but it's one more reason to book that trip to Big Sky.

MOUNTAIN STATS: SUMMIT, 10,250 FEET ◆ VERTICAL, 3,850 FEET (2,070 LIFT-SERVED) ◆ SKIABLE ACRES, 2,000 ◆ ANNUAL SNOWFALL, 400 INCHES ◆ LIFT TICKET, \$40 ◆ 406-993-6000, WWW.MOONLIGHTBASIN.COM

Tamarack Resort

THE VIEWS RECALL TAHOE. And the terrain? Call it Steamboat West. That's the early line on Tamarack Resort, 90 miles north of Boise, which opens in December. The Tahoe analogy is plain from a 7,700-foot spot on West Mountain's ridge: Far below, 22-mile-long Lake Cascade glistens in Long Valley. What's more, the resort sits far enough west to rack up 300 annual inches of snow (100 more than Sun Valley), yet it's east of Oregon's high desert, ensuring that the bounty arrives talcum-dry.

Don't expect Tamarack to max out your Pocket Rockets. The tree skiing in glades of aspen and subalpine fir, and the languorous blue runs that unspool down the mountain's 2,800 vertical feet, summon Steamboat—diverting, if not exactly heart-stopping. Snowcat skiing will be offered this year on 500 acres to be made lift-accessible in the next few years. It's all part of a \$1.5 billion plan to make Tamarack a year-round resort with some 2,000 chalets, condos, and hotel rooms. (At press time, just 60 chalets and cottages were available.) For the best après-ski, head to the old logging town of McCall, 17 miles north.

MOUNTAIN STATS: SUMMIT, 7,700 FEET ◆ VERTICAL, 2,800 FEET ◆ SKIABLE ACRES, 1,100 ◆ ANNUAL SNOWFALL, 300 INCHES ◆ LIFT TICKET, \$53 ◆ 208-325-1000, WWW.TAMARACKIDAHO.COM