

Tahoe's talk of Vancouver, Jan. 27 am edition

By Susan Wood

CALLAGHAN VALLEY, British Columbia – Free-heel skiers rejoice.

For the first time in history, there's a place and time to see the best of the best compete in all four Nordic disciplines – cross



A venue was created for Vancouver's Nordic events.

country, biathlon, ski jumping and Nordic combined – during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games. The beauty and majesty of the Callaghan Valley, located 11 miles south of Whistler off the Sea to Sky Highway between the ski resort town and Vancouver, will become the backdrop for 28 medal events at Whistler Olympic Park.

The governments of Canada and British Columbia funded the \$120 million investment to develop 5,000 acres of the once-sleepy backcountry area of Callaghan Country. It is anchored by Mount Callaghan to the north and Callaghan Creek to the south. Even as the world prepares to cast its eyes on the wilderness area, the place has not lost its charm. A six-mile drive up Callaghan Valley Road leads pre-Olympic visitors to a tiny,

narrow bridge crossing with a funky cabin welcoming visitors.

With the Olympics fast approaching, construction crews are putting the finishing touches on the ski jumping venue, and the sign identifying this multi-sport complex has been erected. Athletes have gone out to test some of the grounds – 100km of groomed trails. Another 15km of snowshoeing trails are open. Two-thirds of the whole area is open to the public. All of it will be when the Games are over.

The place is a popular option for cross country skiers such as Walter and Sheila Frith who split their time between Whistler and Vancouver. The local residents have explored the area during the last decade.



Sheila and
Walter Frith
talk about
cross country
trails.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

“We love cross country skiing, so this is indeed the jewel of the Olympics,” he told *Lake Tahoe News* on the couple’s return to their vehicle from the trail. He explained how few trails existed before Vancouver’s Organizing Committee won the bid to host the Winter Games.

The Friths enjoyed taking the entry to Inside Passage□ run to the appropriately named Around the World run, a 1-1/4-mile route which encircles the Top of the World□ climb to what the

facility's brochure labels as the place for "fantastic views in all directions."

These runs lie outside the Olympic venue, so they're open to the public.

The Friths said they appreciated more trails developed than what Olympic officials intend to use. Being residents, they have seen a "hot and cold" reaction to an event of such magnitude enveloping their two towns.

"We knew enough about the Olympics that you don't like all of it, and certainly there's a reluctance to hosting it, but we expect all to come on board. And I think they've tried for a green Olympics," he said, illustrating an approval for the sustainability measures taken this year with the Games. (Read about some of these measures in upcoming Olympic coverage in *Lake Tahoe News*.)

Here at Callaghan Valley, Vanoc officials chose a site to develop where trees were previously harvested and cut their construction footprint in half from the initial design. An environmental assessment team reviewed the impact of wildlife, plants, wetlands, waterways and archaeological sites during building phases that started five years ago.

The organizing committee hopes to fill three stadiums with 12,000 spectators witnessing the spectacle of these lesser-known, yet equally thrilling sports.

Just a few notes on the subject:

Athletes competing in the 31 mile cross country race are expected in two hours to climb 2,000 vertical feet. That's more than double the vertical drop the men's downhill racers will cover at Whistler Creekside.

Ski jumpers reach a speed of more than 60mph before hurling their bodies into the air.

Chamonix, France, was the first Olympic city to host ski jumping and cross country skiing in 1924. The French city at the base of Mount Blanc touts a proud heritage of its glory days of the Winter Games.

The men's biathlon was first held as an Olympic event at the 1960 Winter Games in Squaw Valley. The Lake Tahoe-area resort hosted a slew of events marking its 50-year anniversary earlier this month, including a Nordic Legends dinner at Granlibakken Resort a little over a week ago. (Read all about it in the *Lake Tahoe News* archive.)

Squaw's neighboring ski resort, Northstar-at-Tahoe, did its part in commemorating the history of biathlon and Tahoe Olympic roots by installing the West Coast's one official course this year.