

# Otway trails ready for Haywood NorAm races

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It was raining lightly most of the afternoon Wednesday at Otway Nordic Centre – just the kind of weather Jim Burbee hates to see.

Last time Burbee checked, there was still a month of winter left on the calendar, but with El Nino still in effect, abundant snowfalls and cold temperatures typical for this time of year have failed to materialize.

The good news for 315 skiers entered in this weekend's Haywood NorAm/Buf Sprints Western Canadian cross-country skiing championships is there's still enough snow to race at Otway. Most of the trails in use for the races are on north-facing slopes which don't get much direct sun when it's lying low on the horizon in winter and conditions should be fine for three days of racing Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

"We're living on the edge, there's no secret recipe – every day it changes," said Jim Burbee, the chief of competition.

"The dusting of new snow Monday and Tuesday) helped a lot because we've got the frozen stuff we grind up and this fine stuff binds it together and it skis better. It really changes the nature of snow so it doesn't ice up. It's easier to manage and it slows the course down too. It makes it a lot easier to wax for classic. All it takes is one thaw or one little shower and then we're back to fast."

Ken Hannah, the chief groomer for the host Caledonia Nordic Ski Club, has experience working at Whistler and Sun Peaks and Burbee says he's done a masterful job preparing the five cross-country

base now covering the trails.

Racing starts Friday with interval start skate races. The Buff classic-technique sprints are on Saturday, followed on Sunday by a mass start classic race on Sunday. Today is a training day.

For spectators, Burbee says the sprint event packs plenty of excitement in a short course which converges on the stadium area at Otway.

"You have six people starting abreast every four minutes for about three hours, so there's lots of action," said Burbee. "They're out and they're back in within three minutes and a minute later another heat goes out. Normally, a cross-country ski race you have to wait for somebody to come back from somewhere, but these guys are hardly ever out of sight."

Saturday's heat races start at 11:45 a.m. Friday's classic races get started at 10 a.m., while the mass-start event Sunday starts at 9 a.m.

The event has attracted some of Canada's best ski racers, including some who have been racing World Cup events in Europe. This is the final qualifying event for Ski Tour Canada, an eight-race World Cup series March 1-12 at four Canadian venues – Gatineau, Que., Montreal, Quebec City and Canmore, Alta. Fourteen men and 12 women will be named to the Canadian team for the tour.

At the Canmore races, the men's and women's World Cup points champions will be awarded Crystal Globes for their season accomplishments, marking the first time the cross-country trophies will have been presented outside of Europe.



CITIZEN FILE PHOTO

**Phillip Widmer leads the group on a hill during the 1.6 km Classic Sprint race at the Haywood NorAm Western Canadian Cross Country Ski Championship on Feb. 15, 2014, at the Otway Nordic Centre.**

Cendrine Brown of Fondeurs Laurentides (Saint-Jérôme, Que.) is the current leader in the Canadian

dian NorAm standings, ranked 23 points ahead of second-place Dahnie Baerter of Whitehorse, Yukon

In the men's NorAm standings, Kevin Sandau of Calgary's Foot-hills club has a 15-point lead over Andy Shields of Lappe Nordic Ski Club (Kaministiquia, Ont.).

Other male skiers to watch on the Otway slopes this weekend include Knute Johnsgaard (Whitehorse), Bob Thompson (Thunder Bay, Ont), Patrick Stewart-Jones ((Nakkertok, Ont.) and Brian McKeever (Calgary). McKeever, a visually-impaired skier who competed in the 2010 Olympics, and the Paralympics in 2010 and 2014, is no stranger to Prince George, having won the 2005 national championships overall title at Otway.

Among the women, Andrea Dupont (Calgary), Jennifer Jackson (Thunder Bay, Ont.) and Maya Macisaac-Jones (Calgary) are well within striking range of the Brown in the NorAm rankings. Dupont, Jones and Jackson are 1-2-3 respectively in the Buff Sprint standings. Dupont is one point ahead of Jones and 10 ahead of Jackson.

Julien Locke of Rossland, who trains with former national team coach Dave Wood at the Black Jack Ski Club, holds a 40-point lead over Shields in the men's Buff Sprint standings.

The Haywood event includes racers from midget age (13 and 14) right up to senior. The fastest skiers will get to race first. Younger racers and masters competitors will compete Saturday and Sunday in the Teck Northern Cup, which is part of the B.C. Cup race series.

Recreational skiers will be able to use the Otway trails during the races. A map of the off-limits area is available on the Caledonia club website at [caledonianordic.com](http://caledonianordic.com)

