

Callaghan Gold

During the summer of 2013, as part of our ongoing commitment and support to cross country skiing, Whistler Sport Legacies set aside a certain amount of capital funding to create a snow storage facility that would allow us to offer guaranteed snow to our provincial teams, our local clubs and eventually the general public from the beginning of November each year.

A suitable site was chosen to the west of the Biathlon stadium, which faces due north/south. This particular site had been used as a dumping area for organics (e.g. tree stumps, overburden, soils, and rocks) during the construction of what was then the Nordic venue for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. We knew that everything that had been buried there should have composted to a certain state, and that would help keep the digging reasonably inexpensive.

The site was surveyed and it was decided that we would construct a horizontal “half-pipe”. Construction started late in 2013 with the snow already falling. The dimensions of the half-pipe were to be 20m wide by 100m long by 5+m high (approx. 10,000 sq. m), with a 2% slope heading north for drainage into an already established drainage system.

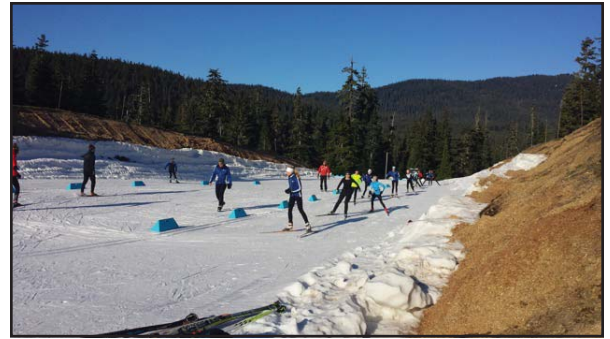
The construction of the half-pipe took approximately seven days using two large excavators that worked in tandem with one another, moving their full buckets to left and right and placing the excavated fill to make the walls of the pipe. This was achieved in reasonably quick time and turned out just as we had planned.

During the winter of 2013 -14 the floor of the half-pipe was used as part of our recreational trail system, Neverland. The plan was to fill it towards the end of the winter, but the 2013 -14 winter was not one of our best for snow depth or retention so we started filling at the end of March and through into April, pulling snow off the parking lots, Biathlon trails and stadium. This was achieved by pushing the snow with our snow cats. We did manage to partially fill it but not to capacity.

The plan then was to cover the snow with sawdust. First we had to look at different types and then we did some testing to ensure that the sawdust would not stain the snow. Once this was established we imported the sawdust from the lower mainland and covered the snow to a depth of approximately 35cm. In reality, with the unusually hot summer that followed, it would have been better to use a 50cm coverage. That summer as it got hotter and hotter we watched our snow slowly settle and settle.

The last week in October 2013, in heavy rain, we commenced uncovering the snow pile - or what had now become known as “Callaghan Gold”. Our snow had shrunk over the summer to approximately 3m in depth. We began by removing the sawdust, while being careful not to contaminate it. This was a two day exercise using one excavator, a front-end loader and two snow cats. The sawdust was moved by the front-end loader to an out-of-the-way storage area to be used again next year. We experienced very little sawdust loss and minimal snow contamination.

Once this step was complete it took five days for a large front-end loader and



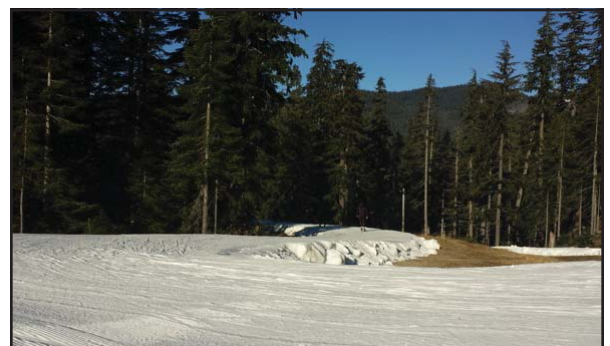
two snow cats to lay out a trail. Careful consideration was given to the trail layout to get the most out of our snow - location, weather, the sun at that time of year, shade and what would be best for both the skier and grooming. Once this had been decided we finished up with a 0.9km trail (this was GPS’ed) by 0.75m deep by 7m wide. The trail took shape as a figure eight - using one of our bridges and utilizing the floor of the half-pipe as a stadium. We also had three uphill and downhill built into the trail system.

During the construction of the trail system it rained hard every day. Work commenced October 27th and we were ready to ski on 0.9km on the morning of November 5th 2014. Our first group of athletes (approximately 75) arrived for training on Saturday, November 8th to find a trail system of white, white snow (free of sawdust and rocks), and they gave the Whistler Olympic Park staff rave reviews.

The winter of 2014 -2015 on the Pacific west coast was not very kind to us as far as snow precipitation went. We were grateful for the Callaghan Gold trail as it saw us through to the Christmas period. As we moved into 2015 most of the precipitation was rain with unseasonal warm temperatures. By the end of February we were back to Callaghan Gold for our Ski S’Kool and Jackrabbit programming, and by the middle of March, with so much rain, we closed. Needless to say we were not able to harvest any snow at that time for the 2015 -2016 season, as all of it was washed away.

It should be noted that on one of our north facing trails we still had a 10m section of 2013 “Callaghan Gold” snow in June 2015.

By Lindsay Durno, Managing Director Whistler Olympic Park



Photos: Whistler Olympic Park