

Roaming "The Best Place on Earth"

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From the beginning of September to the end of November, a cross country skier's wits and patience are put to the ultimate test with waiting until they get the chance to ski on snow. When the snow unfortunately does not fly early and skiers alike can't wait anymore, athletes from across North America head to Silver Star to get their snow fix. For the few privileged to get the chance to ski and race out west in early December, it is like no other skiing experience.



This year the NDC Thunder Bay ski was held on a two week road trip of racing and on snow training. The adventure started in Silver Star with classic races, then to Rossland for some skate races.

From its humble beginnings as a local ski hill back in the 60's Silver Star Mountain has evolved into a world class winter destination for elite cross country skiers. On cold, rainy fall roller ski days, athletes imagine Silver Star's snow crested trees and Sovereign's plush snow coverage. The team arrived ten days before the first NORAM's of the year to get in some good quality on snow training. As usual the skiing was spectacular with perfect weather providing great ski conditions for both classic and skate. The first races of the year are always exciting and a little nerve racking. The butterflies are fluttering and the adrenaline is pumping. Everyone is wondering how they're going to perform early season. The team had some excellent first races in both the sprint and the distance days. Andy Shields and Michael Somppi both had some solid starts to the season with 15th and 21st placings in the sprints. On the female side, Andrea Lee and Erin Tribe had strong close finishes of 17th and 18th. Alannah MacLean also had a solid showing with a 16th place of her own.

After a day of speed and finesse, the distance race gave an opportunity for other racers to shine in the spot light in the 10 and 15 km classic races. Michael Somppi was the top athlete on the team with an impressive 12th, followed closely by Chris Hamilton in 19th place. Jordan Cascagnette had a solid day finishing in 25th, while Andrea Lee was the top female in a fantastic 23rd.

As amazing as Silver Star is, and as much as the team would have liked to stay longer, it was time to hit the road and head to Rossland. Now that the first race jitters were out of the way, everyone had caught the racing bug and was very excited for the upcoming skate races. Even though that the focus of the week was primarily on skate, both athletes and coaches skied at Paulson, to mix things up a bit, which provided some amazing classic skiing. Paulson had some extremely unique and interesting trails. From fast and furious downhills to narrow single track through thick forest, it had a little bit of everything. When we weren't training - hot tubbing, watching world cup racing and playing Words With Friends were the hot activities to wind down and relax after a days' workout.

After another week of training and race prep, the team was ready for the next set of races to get under way. The first race was a long and technical course skate sprint. On the men's side both Michael Somppi and Harry Seaton had stellar results placing 4th and 5th in the A Final. Shields had another outstanding day coming second in the B final slotting him into 8th place. Monette also had a great day placing 10th in Junior Men. On the women's

side, Erin Tribe had a good showing placing 11th. In the 15 km skate mass start, Somppi and Harry Seaton were the top athletes again for the men coming in strong at 7th and 13th. Erin Tribe was again the top senior female in 11th place in the 10 km, while MacLean was 10th Junior Women.



Seaton leading the semi final, followed by Somppi and Shields. (Courtesy of David Greer)



Somppi (in red, far right) avoiding a big crash, Hamilton (top right hand corner)...not so much.

It's official; the first races of the season are in the books, but this is just the start to an exciting season. With fantastic early season results from the entire team, it's exciting to think just how much more fast and fitter everyone is going to be this season! From the road to home, the athletes headed back to their hometowns to spend quality time with their friends and family for Christmas. After a week of recuperating and relaxation, the team will regroup again in Thunder Bay to prepare for Junior and U-23 World Championships in Callaghan B.C.

Thanks for reading!