

Sun reporter discovers women's camps are best way for green skiers to learn

## Girls just wanna have fun

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'Are you insane?' That's what people kept asking me after I accepted an offer to write an article about a four-day women's-only ski camp in Banff.

Skiing for four days? No problem! So I hadn't skied in a little more than 10 years. So my experience of hurtling down a ski hill in Saskatchewan with no training whatsoever on a school trip wasn't exactly fun. So I was a little nervous.

Luckily, the people at Salomon's Women Will ... Adventure Camp are seasoned pros. They're the best instructors Sunshine Village has to offer and they're at the disposal of camp participants for four days of lessons, tips, tricks and encouragement.

The women in our group ranged from a black diamond skier looking to add some finesse to her moves on the slopes, to a self-taught blue runner who needed some lessons to keep up with her strong-skiing family, to a slightly nervous green runner who needed a push to take on a blue run.

I was the lone beginner. Although I can snowboard with some ease, skis, ski boots and poles scare me and all I was hoping for was the ability to make it down a run without breaking my neck.

The first day is spent on the slopes, getting a feel for the instructors and the runs. My instructor, Emma Vasey, who is from London and has been skiing since she was three, gives me a quick refresher course. We spend most of our time improving my rudimentary skills before heading back for lunch, a laid-back, buffet affair at the Sunshine Inn.

Some of the women stayed at the Inn, but I opted to stay at the locally owned Ptarmigan Inn in Banff, which caters to skiers by offering shuttle service to downtown and ski rentals.

After lunch, it's back out on the hill. Emma takes me through a few more runs, pausing throughout to let me catch my breath. It's not just a rest for my legs as she tells me what to expect at the next turn or demonstrates a new technique.

We head back to the Inn at around 4 p.m. for our first apres-ski event, a fixture at the camp. Over wine and cheese, the instructors share ski tales and take the time to talk to each participant.

It's the first time Dan Barideau has taught the women's camp. He explains that while technique is important in any sport, he focuses more on the psychological aspect.

"I like to build people up and take them way beyond where they are and into what they can be," he says. "I want them to be able to look back at what they've accomplished by the end of these four days and say, 'I can do this. I'm better than I thought I was.'"



**WOMEN WILL ... From left, Ani, instructors Dan and Emma, Suzanne, Di, and Dahli kicked up the powder at Sunshine Village during the Salomon Women Will... Adventure Camp.**

— Sean Hannah

Why women only? Board sports are often dominated by men, but women are making inroads in all of them and camps like Salomon's are helping break down the snow fences put up by gender. Besides, men and women learn differently. It is staggering how fast you can improve at a camp. It's like a private lesson in a group setting.

There's also a day of video analysis and the opportunity to try out new Salomon equipment designed specifically for women.

Irene Heenan's husband got her the package for Christmas. He's a ski fanatic and she's always been slightly nervous on the slopes. When he came to Sunshine for a visit on the third day, Irene suggested they go for a run. She did a jump and shocked him.

"I thought he was going to pee his ski pants! It was great," she says, adding though she was upset with her Christmas gift at first, she's already making her list for next year.

"After this weekend, I feel like a completely different skier. I'd love to do this again and that's a surprise. I didn't think I could do this. Now, I'm not really afraid to try anything."

As for your friendly neighbourhood snowboarding reporter? It will take a few more ski trips before I'm comfortable enough to take on a black diamond run but I did make it down several mountains without breaking my neck, which is a good goal to have.

The four-day camp costs \$479, not including lift tickets, rentals, accommodation or meals. All abilities are welcome, and I would recommend this camp to any woman interested in really learning how to ski.

The next Salomon Women Will ... Adventure Camp begins March 9 and runs through the weekend. Spaces are still open. Check skibanff.com or call Toll-free 1-87-SKI-BANFF (1-877-542-2633).

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