

THE WHISTLER SLIDING CENTRE - THE STORY



Welcome, wild spirits

It is, in many ways, the purest of winter sports. Sliding down a hill on a sled. But when that same sport comes to the mountains, it is transformed into something much more vivid and intense. It is the sheer joy of speed, taken to the extreme.

Sliders are perhaps the wildest spirits in the world of winter sport. It takes a rare kind of courage and strength to rocket down a canyon of ice at speeds as fast as virtually any living thing. It is a passion we pursue the same way we do everything in life---with great respect for the challenge, but equally matched by the confidence in our ability to overcome it.

How fitting that the home of sliding sports for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games should be one that has been specially designated by the First Nations people who claim this area. To the Squamish, it is known as a Wild Spirit Place, or *Kwekwayex Kwelh7aynexw*, while the Lil'oet call it *A7x7ulmecw*, or Spirited Ground.

Where History Lives

The Whistler Sliding Centre is located on the southeast flanks of Blackcomb Mountain, in the region known locally as Fitzsimmons Creek. Built on the shared traditional territories of the Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations, it is an area designated as a Spirited Place: special, sacred places that have a long and rich history among the indigenous people of this land.

Since time immemorial, this has been a place where countless generations have come to learn about the land, and themselves. Youths would climb the hills and mountains to search for spiritual enlightenment. It was through these trips of transformation that they would gain their adulthood. Such is the mighty power of this place.

First Nations stories speak of mighty thunder beings that live high in these mountains. For the Squamish, the beating of the Thunderbird's huge wings filled the air with thunder, and their people with awe. The Squamish gave a word to represent the power and nobility of this mythic creature: *sna7em*. The Lil'wat speak of a Thunder being named *Silus*; a storied beast with wind blowing through a mane of wild hair, signifying strength, wisdom and spirituality.

Listen To The Ice

You hear it long before you see it. A loud, low rumble tumbles down the mountainside, filling the clear, cold alpine air with the sound of thunder, as another sled courses down the track. A thick forest of cedar, hemlock and fir towers rise overhead, constant reminders of the timeless beauty of this place.

The track winds its way down the mountainside like a coiled serpent, hugging the natural topography of the land. And although the track is frozen solid, it is very much alive; bursting with the awesome force of the mountain. When a sled rushes down its perfect surface, the sound of rolling thunder comes from deep within. It is the sound of Thunderbird flapping its huge wings; and of the wind whipping through *Silus*' hair---the sound of the spirits of the land. It is the ice talking.

The Journey & The Test

Every athlete who competes at the Whistler Sliding Centre is on a journey. For some, it will be about transforming from an unheralded competitor into a celebrated champion. For others, the experience will be as much about the road as it is the destination.

To those who compete on it, the WSC track isn't just 1,450 meters of ice. It is a rite of passage that will help shape their character and their future life path. The track is a symbol of the life journey we are all on.

Life is not a straight line, nor is it a road that one passes down easily or without fear. Like the First Nations traditions that preceded it, this is a place to learn, where one must build on the lessons of those who came before, in order to succeed.

Faster, steeper and more intense than any track in history, the WSC will be the ultimate test of body, mind and spirit for the world's top sliders.

The Run: Riding The Thunderbird

Vivid, violent and rough---the Whistler Sliding Centre track is not for the faint of heart. Its intensity is matched only by its dimensions. This track is steeper and louder than any in the world.

From the moment you first move down the track, you feel its awesome power through all of your senses. It starts fast and gets faster, and harder. One curve leads straight into the next. There are no simple lines or places to catch your breath here. The track throws one challenge after another at you, pummeling your body relentlessly through every corner. The track never gives up trying to make you go faster.

The track has a rhythm that every slider must try to capture. Sliders must find it early in their run. If they lose it, it will be hard to get back on the beat. Those who find the elusive perfect line will feel the full power of the mountain in every part of their body, thundering down the track and firing them like a slingshot through the sweet spot of every turn.

Those men and women who experience the WSC track are given the opportunity to feel the raw force of the land bearing down on them, pushing their body faster and testing their strength, endurance, and will. The intense forces one encounters on the track mirrors the tremendous power contained in the land around it. The speed you move through it reminds us of how fast our life journey is, and how to appreciate and savour every moment along the way, with humility and grace.

One must learn to let the force of nature guide your actions, working in harmony with it to find the balance between yourself and the track. Only then can you unlock the power held in the ice and fully realize your potential as an athlete.

The Legacy: Transformation

The Whistler Sliding Centre track parallels the journey we take through life. We gain experience and insight along the way. We make mistakes, we learn, and we grow. It leaves its mark on us. We are transformed.

No one will ever leave this track unchanged. Some will find courage, others will become stronger. It is impossible to know what form of change you will undergo. The ice decides what your transformation will be.

The journey up the mountain is as enlightening as the one down.

It is a lesson in humility: in facing challenge with grace and confidence. Winning is a reward of this journey, but not the only goal. The true test is to find your personal best. While athletes may come here to compete, success is not defined only by how you measure up against other competitors, but more importantly, against yourself.

Athletes will experience the power of the WSC track in a profound and direct way. But the track will touch the lives of countless non-athletes as well. All will find inspiration from the stories that will be told here, and from the achievements of those who compete.

Welcome, wild spirits.