



## Matt Houghton's Column



### Bio

Matt Houghton's the founder of Push.ca. Prior to this, he was the editorial director of SBC Media and the editor of Snowboard Canada Magazine for 10 years. Matt was also a founding editor for SBC Skateboard Magazine and the editor of Vehicle Magazine. He's been published in a grip of other magazines, announces events, and spent two years as a team manager for a late, great Canadian snowboard company. Based in Toronto, Matt likes skating park trannies in the summer, jibbing boxes and riding trees in the winter, and hopes to continue defying the aging process.

## Kicking Horse: Choose To Be Challenged

Posted On Aug 06 2009, 02:37 PM



4,133 feet: That's a lot of vertical, my friends. Especially when you consider the majority of it is bad-ass black diamond terrain; the kind definitely not recommended for casual cruising. (Over 60% of the runs are deemed Advanced or Expert.) You want to ride cushy, mile-wide groomers that you can link up Warren Miller-approved turns on? Go to Colorado. You want to ride the kind of in-bounds terrain that's just like the backcountry lines you see in videos? Go to Kicking Horse Mountain Resort.

I first rode Kicking Horse when it had a different name: White Tooth. I was living dirt-style in Lake Louise at the time, which is about an hour's drive down the Trans Canada Highway. There was only one chairlift at White Tooth back then, going a small fraction of the way up the mountain. You could either lap runs off the chair, or if you had strong lungs and were willing to hike, you could tour off the lift to the top of the mountain. Either way, since the lift only ran from Thursday to Sunday, you were pretty much guaranteed powder since the runs would sit untouched all week. And that's precisely what my friends and I would take advantage of: we'd consistently hit White Tooth on Thursday mornings for fresh snow and a change of terrain.



One December 8th, 2000, everything changed. White Tooth was re-born as Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, most notably with the Golden Eagle Express gondola, which

took passengers all the way to the top of the mountain. A massive amount of terrain was opened up, and Kicking Horse generated an instant buzz in the snowboard scene as the new spot to get gnarly. And trust me, "gnarly" is an apt description. Short hikes and ridge traverses opened up zones like CPR Ridge, Terminator Ridge and Crystal Bowl, which offered lift-access to the kind of riding you'd normally have to use a snowmobile, helicopter or snowcat to reach. (Or, of course, hike all the way to the top like a determined few did back in the White Tooth days.)

I hit the "new" Kicking Horse a season after it re-opened, back in 2001. I rode there with a crew that included Andrew Hardingham and Jon Cartwright; two guys who know how to ride big lines and big drops. We were toured around by legendary local Justin Baun, who'd grown up in the town of Golden (just 20 minutes from the base of Kicking Horse), and was beyond hyped to have such a massive playground in his backyard. It snowed when we arrived and then instantly got sunny for the rest of the week; I was stunned at how long we got fresh tracks for throughout our visit. I was equally stunned by the quality of riding and how challenging much of the terrain was, should you choose to be challenged. At the time I described it as, "the easiest access I've ever seen to runs that will make you shit your pants." And keep in mind that's a compliment.



Eight years later, I finally returned to Kicking Horse. Since then, an entire base village had been built, with slope-side condos and hotels, restaurants, shops and pubs. And more importantly, new chairs had been added to provide even better access to the top of the mountain. It was no longer necessary to traverse or hike as much as I did during my first visit, making the overall mountain much more shred-able and easier to explore. Of course the leg-burning vertical remained, and a small, kid-friendly terrain park had been added to the bottom of the mountain. And I have to give credit to Kicking Horse for cleverly scattering natural-style park features around the mountain; 50-50'ing a couple of burly log jibs on your way to the bottom beats hitting boxes at a place like this.

Speaking of locals, the early-morning crowd you'll find at the base of the Golden Eagle Express says much about Kicking Horse and the town of Golden. People are here to ride first and foremost, and the duct-taped gear, backpacks and taper-tail boards prove it. No one moves to Kicking Horse to get sponsored or take part in the kind of lame, on-snow fashion show you'll find at resorts back east. It's all about getting up the gondola to score fresh tracks, and how many runs you get before it shuts down for the day. So if you're ever wondering where the real riders are -- the kind who could give a shit about the consumer trappings around our sport and which pro landed which trick -- this is a good place to look.



I've spent a lot of words in this article hyping up the intensity of riding at Kicking Horse, but I assure you that cat-tracks and groomed runs can also take you from top to bottom... I just wouldn't recommend going there if that's the type of riding you like. No, this place is truly for those who love to freeride and have a deep desire to get to the so-called goods on a daily basis. Of course if you paid any attention to the media this winter, you'll also be aware of the fact that it's highly unwise to leave the resort boundaries here. (Click [here](#) to read more about the couple from Quebec who got lost in the Kicking Horse backcountry last February, and the subsequent fall-out.) But why would you? Aside from a never-ending desire for more and more pow, there's no lack of amazing riding and good snow at a place like this. So really, why duck a rope and take the risk? Unless you have the kind of experience and skill and local knowledge to justify it, it's simply not worth it.

With 2,750 acres of riding, there's more at Kicking Horse than you can likely cover in one visit. So by all means, plan a trip there to ride it for yourself, but make a contingency plan to return. And since Golden is a pretty chill town to spend time in, there's no excuse to not be well rested each morning when you wake up for the first gondola.



Check out the [Push.ca Ski Resort Directory](#) for more information on Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, plus every other ski resort in Canada.

Click [here](#) to visit the Kicking Horse Mountain Resort site.

Make sure you also check out our [gallery](#) for more shots from Kicking Horse and Golden.

Push Gallery: Kicking Horse Kicking Hors

[Back to gallery list](#)

 Kicking Horse by... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009	 Andrew Hardingham by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009	 Scott Shaw by Jeff... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009	 Kicking Horse by... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009
 Paul Gonzales by... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009	 Andrew Burns by... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009	 Brendan Keenan by... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009	 Golden Pillows by... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009
 Kicking Horse by... by encorniator Thu, Aug 6 2009			

-----  
Related:  
**Revelstoke is My Kind of Town**  
**Rome At Revelstoke** (video)  
**Who's Responsible?**