

RUNNING with the

Yeti

BY DAVID WEBB

HEAD TO THE SNOW FOR
BC'S HOTTEST RACE.



Elsa gives the "Yeti" five while running her race in Sun Peaks Resort

Sun peeks over North Vancouver's Cypress Mountain, shining first in thin rays that cut through the trees like arrows, then finally with full force, warming the brisk March alpine air. Around me, competitors gather, tromping on the crisp snow pack with their snowshoes, some casually making conversation, others running 100-metre windsprints in an attempt to fend off the cold and get their heart rate up for the impending race.

As the sun gets warmer, the racers get ready. They gather at the starting line, about 100 in all, and wait in anticipation for the call to arms. Onlookers and photographers gather beside the track, some regular spectators, some seeing this for the first time — I count myself in the latter. The countdown — then go! The snow explodes under the crush of 200 snowshoes as the racers pour through the gates like thoroughbreds at the Kentucky Derby.

This is snowshoe racing, the fastest growing outdoor winter sport in North America, and in the Lower Mainland, The Yeti Mountain Snowshoe Series rules the snowshoeing scene.

Snowshoe Racing?

While skiing, sledding and skating are commonplace in the world of winter sports, many people have never tried on a pair of snowshoes, let alone raced competitively in them. But that has started to change in the past few years. According to event organizer Marc Cooney, snowshoe racing has enjoyed a 100 per cent participation growth rate in the past year. It's great exercise, burning over 1,000 calories per hour, and offers people a chance to get out and see the outdoors during the cooler months. Although Cooney is too busy organizing and supervising The Yeti Snowshoe races to compete in them, he still attributes snowshoeing to

his quitting smoking and now-active lifestyle.

The Yeti is a multi-race series that travels around to various ski mountains in BC. In the 2003-04 season, The Yeti toured Vancouver Island's Mount Washington, Vernon's Silver Star Resort, North Vancouver's Mount Seymour and Cypress Mountain, Sun Peaks Resort in the Interior and Whistler Mountain. It offers five and 10 km races through forested trails, and is open to everyone, of any skill level and experience — that's where The Yeti shines. This is not just for the hard-cores, or the ultra-competitive racers — although they are there too. Six different classes in each race ensure everyone has fun. Cooney has done a great job promoting a supportive environment. There is no preselection or cutthroat competition. In fact, race rules demand that if a racer ahead of you becomes injured, you must assist. And every