

If the snowshoe fits

New winter-fitness activity starts atop Seymour Mountain.



Rob Newell photo

IT'S A REAL HOWL — North Vancouver adventure racer Dave Howells has already competed in 15 snowshoe races since taking up the fast-growing winter sport.

By JUSTIN BEDDALL
Staff Reporter

Triathlete magazine calls it the ultimate cross-train for any athlete," but chances are you've never heard about the sport — that is, until now.

About seven years ago, a snowshoe rep friend of North Vancouver adventure-sport junkie Dave Howells told him about the developing sport of snowshoe running.

Howells' response: "Why would I want to do that?"

Since making his first set of fresh tracks, Howells has competed in 15 snowshoe races, coordinated numerous group runs and helped to start up local snowshoe clinics.

"Snowshoe running feels a lot like trail running, you're in the mountain environment," he explained.

Four years ago Howells' friend Marc Campbell saw a local niche for snow running and started a race series in 2001 called the Yeti Mountain Snowshoe Series that currently has stops at Mount Washington, Silver Star, Mount Seymour, Sun Peaks, Cypress Mountain and Whistler/Blackcomb, offering 5 km and 10 km courses.

Last year, Howells and Campbell decided to take the growing sport to the next level by offering the Yeti Snowshoe Academy at Mount Seymour, offering programs for individuals of all abilities and fitness levels to train for the race series, or just to simply get in shape during the winter.

"Snowshoe running is the ultimate in winter cross-training, providing a workout in

"I really believe this is the next big fitness activity."

— Dave Howells

the off-season that builds power, endurance and complements the dynamics associated with correct running technique, and, most importantly, it is a lot of fun," Howells said, noting that the Academy has attracted a wide-range of snowshoers — from housewives and mid-40s professionals to a 24-year-old trail-runner interested in cross-training.

And because most of the training takes place in the evening, participants have the

added thrill of running on snow in the darkness with a headlamp.

Howells said one of the biggest misconceptions about the sport is the antiquated notion of snowshoeing.

Snowshoers these days aren't wearing over-sized tennis rackets on their feet. Instead, they are wearing light-weight titanium or aluminum snowshoes with spring-loaded suspension that gives the athlete uncompromised balance and traction.

"These materials and design features have revolutionized the sport and created something that has become the fastest-growing winter activity in North America," Howells said. "The binding is designed to accommodate a trail-running shoe or runner."

Howells is also a member

of Team Yeti, a group of competitive snowshoers who compete in events in the United States.

The team recently competed at a qualifying event for the American Championship in Alaska this March at Bend, Oregon.

"All nine members who went to Bend qualified for Anchorage," he said, adding, "Team Yeti Canada is the first Canadian team that has gone to a snowshoe qualifier and first team at an American championship."

According to Howells, snowshoe running isn't just "Tae-Bo on snow" — that is, just a fitness fad.

"I really believe that this is the next big fitness-related activity," Howells explained last week. "It's already exploded in the United States." ●