

TRAVEL

SKI

SPECIAL REPORT

In the tracks of the greats

Want to ski like a champ? **Rachael Oakes-Ash** checks out the favourite local runs of our Olympic stars.

Two gold medals and a silver at the recent Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver is impressive for a nation known more for its beaches than its powder. Our team of 40 athletes ranged in age from 15-year-old snowboarder Scott James to 37-year-old aerialist Jacqui Cooper. And while many top Australian competitors spend the northern winters training and competing on the World Cup circuit, they spend their southern winters at their favourite home resorts.

You may only make the podium in your own mind but at least you can ski where our top talent trains in NSW and Victoria – and have a go at some of the key Olympic disciplines.

Most professional skiers start their careers in the racing department. Every Australian resort has a racing club and offers race training for the seriously dedicated.

Schuss the early-morning slopes at Thredbo and expect to share the chairlift with downhill,

super combined and Super G racer Jono Brauer. Former Winter Olympian and World Cup winner Steven Lee shreds the gates at Falls Creek in Victoria each winter.

If you fancy skiing in Lee's tracks, he's launching guided back-country tours of the snowfields this season.

Channel your inner Torah Bright at Perisher, where the Olympic gold medallist trained before making the move to Salt Lake City. To celebrate Bright's success, the superpipe at Perisher will be renamed in her honour this year. Think of Bright when you try your own tricks in Australia's premier superpipe or start with the beginner terrain parks and work your way up.

If you prefer to do your best moves in the air then head to Mount Buller. Vancouver gold medallist Lydia Lassila and five-time world champion Cooper are both members of Team Buller and have honed their skills on the custom-built jump on Mount Buller's Chamois



Run – the same jump that has hosted 36 World Cup events in Australia.

You will need strong knees to follow in Vancouver silver medallist and Turin gold medallist Dale Begg-Smith's tracks. The 2006 Olympic freestyle moguls champion trains at Perisher and regularly competes in the

Falls Creek has 65 kilometres of world-class groomed tracks.

Australian freestyle moguls titles. Perisher's Toppa's Dream is in the Devil's Playground region of the resort and is renowned as the country's top moguls course, appropriately named after Australian development mogul team coach, Peter Topalovic.

Snowboard-cross mates Alex "Chumpy"

Pullin and Damon Hayler had high hopes for medal success with fast qualifying times in Vancouver but crashes prevented them from reaching a spot on the podium. If high adrenalin is your thing, then snowboard-cross racing is a must as competitors speed down the hill on a course of jumps and bumps. You can pick up tips from Hayler at his home resort, Thredbo, if you can catch him, while Pullin is a regular at Mount Buller.

Australia's most successful alpine racer, Zali Steggall, started skiing as a child in France and took up ski racing in the resort town of Morzine. When her family returned to Australia in 1988, she continued to train at Perisher and went on to win a bronze medal in slalom at the Nagano Olympics in 1998. You're likely to find Zali, now working as a barrister in Sydney, on the slopes of Perisher this winter with her five children. If you're lucky, you may bump into her at the resort on Zali's run at Blue Cow.

Alisa Camplin took to the snow later in life –

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Looks good in gold ... (from left) Torah Bright will have the superpipe at Perisher renamed in her honour this year; Lydia Lassila is at home at Mount Buller. Photos: Getty Images

TRIP NOTES

NSW

- ▶ For Perisher, Blue Cow and Guthega, phone 1300 655 811, see perisher.com.au.
- ▶ For Thredbo, phone 1300 020 589, see thredbo.com.au.

VICTORIA

- ▶ Falls Creek, phone 1800 232 557, see fallscreek.com.au.
- ▶ Mount Hotham, phone 1800 468 426, see hotham.com.au.
- ▶ Mount Buller, phone 1800 285 537, see mtbuller.com.au.
- ▶ The Kangaroo Hoppet takes place on August 28 at Falls Creek. See hoppet.com.au.

her first passions were gymnastics and sailing. She took on aerial skiing in the early 1990s and, while there were many detractors, she went on to win gold in the Salt Lake City Olympics of 2002, backing it up with bronze in Turin in 2006. The Melburnian chose Mount Buller as her Australian training ground and was a member of Team Buller.

Mount Hotham in Victoria has a ski and snowboard-cross course open to the public and built to World Cup standard. The Canadian ski-cross team and the Australian ski-cross team,

including Olympian Jenny Owens, have trained on the course, so you will be in good company.

Cross-country skiing takes endurance and strong thighs and the best place to trial both is at Falls Creek, where Australia's Olympians, Paul Murray and Ben Sim, train.

The official base of the Australian cross-country ski team, Falls Creek, has 65 kilometres of world-class groomed tracks and is home to the country's biggest cross-country marathon, the Kangaroo Hoppet, which is held on the last Saturday of August. Windy Corner Cross-

Country Ski Centre offers everything from equipment to instruction.

Paralympic champion Michael Milton calls Thredbo home. He learnt to ski there before losing his leg to cancer at the age of nine. Undeterred, Milton continued to race and has won 11 medals, including six gold, and is the fastest speed ski racer with a disability, clocking more than 213km/h. He still schusses it up on the slopes of Thredbo. But be warned: he's so fast, if you blink you'll miss him.

Malcolm Milne was one of the first

Australians to make his mark on the world winter stage, becoming the first non-European to win a World Cup downhill race, at Val d'Isere in 1969, so if you see him on the slopes this season, show some respect.

Whether it's moguls, snowboarding or cross-country, we can't all be champions on the slopes, or even indulge in every winter sport. For example, if you enjoyed the curling at the 2010 Games, you may have to cross the ditch to the Naseby Indoor Curling Rink on the South Island of New Zealand.