

Ni hao (Chinese for “hello”)! My name is Sue Elder. I am a proud member of the Canadian Ski Patrol, and this is my 30th year of patrolling. I live in Kamloops, BC, Canada, and patrol at Sun Peaks Resort. I work as a paramedic. This is my report on the 2 months I spent in Yanqing, China, as a paid ski patroller at the 2022 Olympics and Paralympics.



Beijing 2022 was not my first Olympics/Paralympics. I also volunteered at the 2010 Olympics/Paralympics at Whistler. After getting hurt early on, I was given a desk job as a team leader. It was a wonderful, fulfilling experience and I have very fond memories of my time at Whistler, even though I did not get to be a patroller out on the mountain.

Before and since 2010, I have volunteer patrolled the yearly Winterstart World Cup speed events in Lake Louise, Alberta. I have loved every second of it and have learned so much from this high functioning, professional, funny, and friendly team.

Fast forward to January 2020. A team of us from the Lake Louise Winterstart patrol were set to fly to Beijing in order to work the pre-Olympic “test events.” I went early in order to tour around China. While I was in the air, the pandemic exploded. All tourism in China was shut down and the races got canceled. I got one of the last flights out.

The Lake Louise team was asked to patrol Beijing 2022, but political relations between China and Canada had become strained. The Lake Louise team declined the invitation, a decision which I totally respect. I was left with a very difficult decision. Do I stay home in protest, or do I go and try to build some bridges and spread some good will? Was it even safe to go? Tensions eventually eased and I decided to attend.



In mid-January 2022, I flew Kamloops/Vancouver/LA/San Francisco/Tokyo/Beijing. There were a whole slew of Covid tests involved and let’s just say I was very glad when I arrived at the hotel in Yanqing! It was a very clean and modern hotel. The food was good. We got a buffet breakfast and dinner every day at the hotel and an adequate hot lunch at the venue. It was mostly Chinese food with some Western dishes.

The Chinese were totally committed to preventing a Covid outbreak. We were tested daily and asked to wear N95 masks at all times – even when outdoors. We were kept in our own little bubble and not allowed to visit any other area. However the strategies work, as no patrollers contracted Covid while working in China.

It was a 50-minute daily bus ride to the venue. There were many 12-to-14-hour days, so we learned to sleep on the bus as much as possible. The bus ride took us through a 10 km long tunnel, along the elevated highways and past the Sliding Centre and the Athletes' Village. Both looked very nice, but we were never allowed to visit them. Then the road snaked its way up the hillside where no self-respecting road had a right to be! The engineering was marvelous. We travelled in a hydrogen-powered bus, and our driver was smooth and assertive. We often passed other busses, but it rarely felt scary. Just don't look over the edge!



The alpine race venue is called the "National Alpine Skiing Centre" and it is perched on Haituo Mountain. It's important to note that this venue was created for racing and training only. It is far too steep to be opened as a public ski area. The Chinese carved the runs out of rocky hillsides and ridges. The runs were watered and frozen into steep, icy pitches with unusual fall lines. Rumour had it that one of the pitches was 65 degrees! The race and training runs formed white ribbons of human-made snow, corralled by miles of safety

netting, with brown, barren slopes falling away on all sides. The surrounding countryside was starkly beautiful, with a large lake at the bottom of the valley and eroded and ancient mountains rising on all sides. On a clear day, you could just barely make out a section of the Great Wall in the distance. Air pollution was only a problem on two days.

The weather during the Olympics was windy, sunny, and cold (-20C). In the two months that we were there, it only snowed once. That was the day of the men's GS. Mayhem broke loose as the racers and course workers tried to negotiate the fog and 15 cm of loose snow over sheet ice. Skis were missing under the powder snow and almost half the racers did not finish. Luckily, there were no serious injuries.

We "international" patrollers were a team of 21. There were supposed to be more, but some were denied Chinese visas at the last moment. About 2/3rds were American, with the remainder coming from Argentina, Sweden, France, and England. I was the only Canadian.



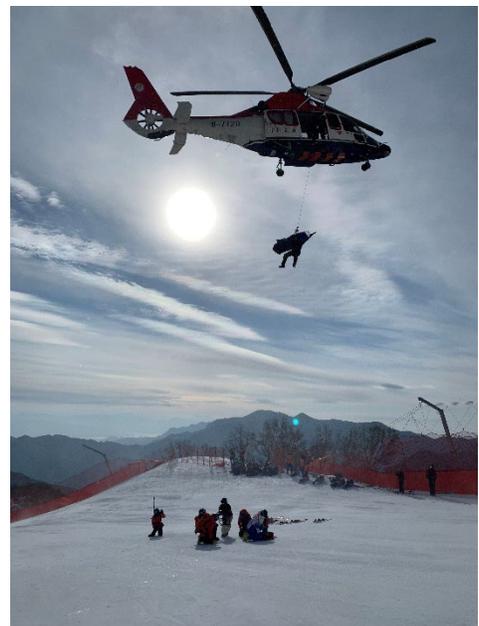
The team was highly skilled at first aid and toboggan handling. The only person on the team with international speed event patrolling experience was me, but the group picked it up quickly.

The local patrollers were funny, friendly, and willing to learn. Conversations involved saying each other's names a lot, fist bumps and pantomiming. Important conversations went through translators, both human and electronic. Many friendships were made, and I shall miss their enthusiasm and good will.

Each Olympic first aid station was staffed with at least one international patroller, one local patroller, one international doctor and one local doctor. Sometimes there were more but never less. The Chinese doctors were volunteers and were enthusiastic and fun, but they had very little first aid experience. The paid international doctors had more experience. Everyone wanted to be "first in," and who could blame them? It led to some interesting scenes! Eventually the group agreed that the patrollers should be first in, and the doctors should only be called in, as necessary.

Communication was our number one challenge. Our radios were tricky to use and not dependable. It was often difficult to understand people due to strong accents. When responding during a race, we had to wait for a "Stop Start" and permission to respond, but no one on our patrol team had been supplied with a jury radio. It was inefficient and dangerous while messages were relayed between 3 different teams. This was finally remedied during the Paralympics.

We were required to bring our own first aid kits from home. We were loaned a patrol vest. We had a fleet of about 22 Cascade toboggans. Every toboggan had a tarp, vacuum mattress, blanket and wrap leg splint. The vac mats were fast, comfortable, and effective but prone to getting punctured. They had to be stored overnight in a warm location, which required a lot of movement each day. We shared this equipment with the local patrollers (who often had different duties than us). As a result, we never knew exactly where our equipment would end up. Trauma packs were carried by the international and local doctors. We also had equipment for technical rope rescues, but never had to use it. Anyone who fell always slid down the steep pitches and stopped on the relative flats below. But we were glad we had the technical gear just in case someone got hung up on the nets.

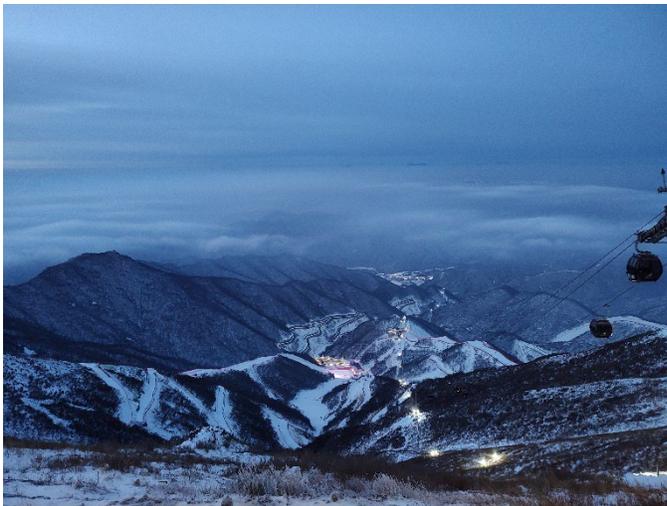


The Chinese had planned to evacuate injured racers using a helicopter. They used a winch system (as opposed to a long line). During training it became apparent that this type of rescue was not optimal. Winching was slow. There were strong and

unpredictable cross winds. Due to this, and possible lack of experience by the heli crew, there was an incident with injuries during a training scenario. It was pointed out that patrollers could treat and transport patients very quickly and safely by toboggan, and that the helicopter could just stand by at the bottom. That was what eventually happened. Patients were assessed and treated by local doctors at the ski area base. If further treatment was required, patients were usually transported by ambulance to the local hospital at Yanqing. Only a few were evacuated by helicopter from the base.

As for the types of incidents out on the course, there were lots of falls that resulted in broken race gear and some impressively long uncontrolled slides. There were no life-threatening accidents. There were several extremity fractures, mostly caused by racers hitting nets at high speed. Incidents were handled quickly and well, earning the approval of the organizers.

In the early days, several side slippers and course workers were injured when they fell and went for a long sliding ride. Once the weather warmed up in March, several slippers and one international patroller wrecked their knees in the wet, thick, and deep corn snow. At any given time, there were several workers on crutches.



During the Olympics, we worked very long days with few days off. There simply weren't enough of us. We were so fatigued that many of us felt impaired. It was a dangerous situation. In the period between the Olympics and Paralympics, we got a bunch of days off, and then the long days started again during the Paralympics. In the end, it worked out that we were on duty 6 out of 7 days.

The races were set up and run by a team of Russians. Between the Olympics and Paralympics, war broke out in Ukraine. The IPC made the difficult decision to send the Russian Paralympians home. However they did not send the Russian course workers home. The Paralympics could not have been run without them. The political situation did not seem to increase tension out on the mountain.



In the gap between the Olympics and the Paralympics, we were moved to a lesser hotel. The rooms were smaller and less clean, the common area was smaller, and the variety and quality of food was diminished. It was adequate, but disappointing after our positive experience at the original hotel.

Attempts at translation provided much amusement. One morning we received a message that the gondola would be closed because there were “insufficient

personnel to kill.” A sign at the bottom of the lift stated that people “without self-control” would not be allowed to ride the lift. That applied to most of us!

At times it seemed like it we had been there forever, and yet by the end of it, it seemed like we had just arrived. It was nice to be heading home, but it was hard to say goodbye. There were tears, hugs, and promises to visit. I am a better person for having been there. I am content in the knowledge that while in China I had spread some good will and finally realized my dream of patrolling on-snow at the Olympics/Paralympics. I was inspired by all the athletes, but especially the Paralympians. I met some kick ass patrollers and learned lots. Thanks to all of the team for an epic journey, and thanks to China for putting on an amazing show and hosting us at a difficult time.

Well done, everyone!

