



What goes up

Canadian Mountain Holidays

A helicopter ferries a group of Powder 101 skiers to a run in British Columbia's Cariboo Mountains. The region is legendary among serious powder hounds.

Heli-skiing course makes downhill dreams come true for wilderness skiers

By MARK SISSONS
Special Contributor

Crouching in the thigh-deep blowing snow on a windswept mountain top, I brace for the icy blast of the Bell 212's rotor wash as the helicopter lifts off and banks away into a cloudless azure sky.

An intermediate-level skier who seldom strays from resorts' blue runs, I'm about to tackle the glaciers, glades and steep slopes of British Columbia's rugged and remote Cariboo Range. Half the size of Switzerland, it will be my deep-powder classroom for the next seven days.

"If you're comfortable on intermediate runs at most resorts, willing to tackle the occasional black diamond run, and have a sense of adventure, you're ready for Powder 101," the Canadian Mountain Holidays representative explained when I inquired about their introductory heli-skiing course.

Adjusting my goggles, I point my big-mountain fat skis downhill. And then I set off to learn how to "write my name on the face of the gods" — a term seasoned heli-skiers use for tracing graceful S-turn signatures down untracked powder.

Heli-skiing in Western Canadian mountain ranges like the Cariboo, Selkirk and Bugaboos is unsurpassed. Exclusive access to spectacular terrain, unmatched snow conditions and the best operators in the business, led by heli-skiing pioneer CMH, have made this region legendary among serious powder hounds.

"Just don't look at the trees and you'll be OK," I remind myself as I occasionally tumble into soft pillows of feather-light powder on my first backcountry glades run. Soon, the whoosh of my boards and the shouts of joy from my companions are the only sounds disturbing the silence.

By the time the chopper scoops us up after the longest, most exhilarating run of my life, I understand why they call your first day of heli-skiing "the point of no return." There's just no going back from this ultimate downhill dream come true.

Mark Sissons is a freelance writer in Canada.



The Cariboo Lodge accommodates 44 guests, in 12 single and 16 double rooms, all with private bath.

When you go

Cariboo Lodge is located in British Columbia's Cariboo Range, which offers a range of alpine runs and tree skiing. For more information, visit canadianmountainholidays.com or call 1-800-661-0252.

Powder 101: The course is designed for those ready to make the transition to powder skiing. Each new group consists of up to 10 skiers. Those taking Powder 101 should be newcomers to deep-snow skiing and at least strong intermediate skiers.

When to go

Heli-skiing season in Western Canada normally runs from December until the end of April, and occasionally into May.

Getting there

CMH trips start and end in Calgary. Guests are transported by bus and helicopter to the company's remote wilderness lodges.



Skiers and boarders from around the world flock to British Columbia's Cariboo Mountains.

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