

THE JOURNAL OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SKIING

❁ WINTER 2012/13

C M H



RUNNING WITH A FAST CROWD | PURE PRIVACY | GENERATIONS | CLASSROOM OF THE GODS

A CONNECTION TO PERFECTION

IT'S THE GREATEST SKIING EXPERIENCE ON THE PLANET. No doubt. That's what brings people to CMH the first time and for years to come. But with each visit they discover that it's more than that. It's about connecting with and being part of something very special and making it an integral part of our lives.

It's about connecting with the experience; the indescribable rush that comes from gliding through the trees of a perfectly spaced glade or soaring effortlessly down the slope of an alpine peak. Mastering what was once a dream.

It's about connecting with these enchanting places; taking a moment on the summit to gaze across fjord-like valleys filled with morning cloud towards distant peaks, only to discover the tracks you laid down yesterday. Finding yourself dwarfed beneath a giant cedar that's older than your great-grandfather, or traversing under the shear walls of a granite spire that's older than time.

It's about connecting with the finest team of professional mountain and ski guides anywhere who have been on this journey all their lives. Their passion is to introduce expectant newcomers to their world, safely guide them to places they've only dreamed of and watch the magic unfold.

And it's about an equally committed team back at the lodge who are dedicated to ensuring that every facet of your experience with us is as it should be for you. Our unique style of mountain hospitality is informal yet highly personalized, professional and authentic. There are no white gloves at CMH! You'll arrive as our guest but we hope you'll return as our friend.

It's about connecting with a world of fellow Heli-Skiers who share a common passion and zest for life. There's a unique camaraderie that develops after a great day in the mountains as the adventures and misadventures are relived in the warm comfort of the lodge, with your new best friends, as you linger at the end of a truly sumptuous meal. When was the last time you felt this relaxed?

And ultimately it's about connecting with a special part of you. We spend our lives busy with all sorts of stuff. But how much of it is really, truly meaningful? For all of us there are those all too rare and singular moments with family and friends, doing the things that we're really passionate about that define the real us. So many of our guests are devoted professionals or business people, but at heart they're also Heli-Skiers. It's who they are.

And it's who we are. Welcome to our world of CMH Heli-Skiing. We look forward to sharing it with you.



Rob Rohn
General Manager and Director of Mountain Operations

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PO Box 1660, 217 Bear Street
Banff, Alberta
T1L 1J6 Canada
(403) 762.7100
(800) 661.0252
www.cmhski.com
info@cmhinc.com

Project Management: Mark Piquette, Marty von Neudegg

Editor: Kevin Brooker (kevinbrooker@mac.com)

Production Manager: Patty Zinck

Correspondents: Shelley Arnusch, Topher Donahue, Aaron Teasdale

Photographers: Dick Barrymore, Kevin Boekholt, Topher Donahue, John Entwistle, Dan Griffith, Roger Laurilla, Thomas Leufen, Craig McGee, Russ Peardon, Michael Welch

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Welcome to the brand-new CMH K2 Rotor Lodge. Don't mind the Sasquatch.



WAVELENGTHS

Not even these gnarly mountains can hold back the march of high technology.



IT'S TOUGH OUT THERE FOR AN ELECTRON

The next time you're suffering Internet download frustration in a CMH lodge, think about how that miracle occurs in the first place. "It's definitely a complex task to deliver good Internet service to all of our locations," says Russ Peardon, CMH's Director of Information Systems, who recently returned after a six-year hiatus. "My job used to focus on the radio systems used by staff, but the expectations of today's guest means it's all about building better Internet connections." To that end, Russ's crew recently upgraded the microwave service to the notoriously difficult Bugaboos and Bobbie Burns, and tested a promising new satellite service at the Monashees. Meanwhile, those ridgetop repeaters sure take a beating up there. Says Peardon, "Sometimes we literally have to fly out to them and knock the ice off."





CHECKING THE PULSE OF AVALANCHE BEACONS

With a fleet of 652 devices, CMH is the world's largest single user of avalanche beacons. As such, feedback regarding real-world usage is invaluable to the manufacturer of our beacon of choice, the Barryvox Pulse. Rob Whelan, Assistant Manager of CMH K2, is the guide responsible for working with the Barryvox development team. "These beacons are actually mini-computers," Whelan points out, "and because we keep such rigorous safety protocols, we're able to use software that collects the performance data that Barryvox needs to monitor and constantly improve the product. For example, we asked to move away from toxic alkaline batteries to more environmentally friendly lithium—and last season we became the first fleet to use them."





GREEN ENERGY FOR A WHITE WORLD
CMH has been “off the grid” far longer than that term has been fashionable in environmental circles, so we’re always seeking clever new energy solutions. This season, the good news is that operational savings from Galena Lodge’s micro-hydro electricity generator have recouped the \$450,000 it cost to install in 2005. As Galena’s maintenance expert, Luke Crawford explains, “It provides more than 80 per cent of our electrical requirements. We’d love to do better, but unfortunately in mid-February the stream-flow slows to a trickle. Still, we’re saving 50,000 litres of diesel fuel per season.” Hmm... if only we could tap the unlimited power of skiers at the bar bragging about how awesome they were today.





I AM YOPELLING—DO YOU COPY?

It's official: Two-way radios are here to stay for all CMH guests. Last season marked the first time the policy was in effect universally. Previously, guides had been concerned about too much chatter overwhelming the single frequency by which they constantly trade mission-critical information. They also worried that a false sense of technological security might lead skiers to overlook time-tested partnering skills like constant vocalizing and maintaining visual contact. "But when we had our post-season guides' meeting," says CMH Mountain Safety Manager Todd Guyn, "the feedback on radios was 100 per cent positive." While the new system performed flawlessly for lost skis, separated partners and tree-well encounters, there were no reports of unintended consequences. ❄️





How big-mountain snowboarding was invented at CMH, practically before the invention of the snowboard itself.

flashback

IN 1981, BLAKE BARRYMORE WAS SURFING WITH HIS FATHER near the family vacation home on the Baja peninsula of Mexico. That's Dick Barrymore, of course, the late American ski filmmaker whose annual releases rivalled those of Warren Miller. Blake, meanwhile, was a young ripper who frequently skied for Dad's camera.

Between waves they were brainstorming ideas for the upcoming season in which Dick had booked an extended stay at CMH Monashees. Such a dramatic setting would require one of the equally dramatic gimmicks for which Barrymore was famous. In 1979, for example, he shot footage of surfer Mike Doyle's pioneering monoski, and captured for the first time a rider straightlining a powder field. But surfing turquoise walls in the Pacific gave Blake Barrymore another idea. "What if we get a surfboard up on one of those glaciers and ride it like a big wave at Waimea?" he asked. "Son," Dick replied, "that is a fantastic idea."

Blake, now in his fifties and still tearing it up in Sun Valley, vividly remembers fleshing out the segment. "I came up with the name Ted Shred," he recalls. "In those days we called dumb people Teds, and shred was surf slang that was just becoming popular.

"At first, I figured that powder could be ridden on a big old surfboard, with a fin," says Blake. "Then we learned that people were already experimenting with snow surfing, but on completely different boards." Indeed, what grew into snowboarding began with a sort of parallel evolution, featuring independent tinkerers like Winterstick in Salt Lake City, Sims in California and Vermont's Jake Burton. With exactly zero experience on any of them, Blake gathered a handful of prototypes and headed for CMH.

"Well, they all sucked," says Blake of his initial attempts to surf on snow near Invermere, near the Bugaboos. "They had these crazy rubber straps, and crappy edges. They were super hard to control." And just as Ted Shred was about to give up, Dick pointed to the last

board in the collection and asked, "What about that little one? Have you tried it?" It was the prototype of what would later be dubbed the Burton Backhill, barely 100 cm long, with two steel fins and a rope coming up from the tip for control.

Though far from the gun he envisioned, Blake grudgingly gave it a try. "I stepped in wearing a pair of old Sorel snowboots, and I just took off. It was actually controllable." So began the world's first big-mountain snowboard shoot. As Barrymore senior later reminisced, "Blake never had a bad turn on that thing."

You can judge for yourself, since the four-minute sequence that made the final cut of 1983's *Canadian Mountain Odyssey*—and still gets tons of views on YouTube—contained virtually every run that Ted Shred made on his \$40 Burton. Not that turning was the order of the day. Ted quickly graduated to straightlining on the wide-open Monashee glaciers, and there are several shots of him rocketing through groups of skiers, causing them to be "streaked by the Shred Baron," as the cheesy voiceover puts it. (Thus, not only was CMH Monashees the cradle of big-mountain snowboarding, it also represented the first instance of a skier-snowboarder rivalry that continues to this day.)

In one terrifying run, Blake recalls, "I hit a rollover and started picking up massive speed. We later did some calculations and we figured I was going 86 miles per hour (nearly 150 kph). You can see in the film—it's not a rooster tail, it's a goddamn vapour trail."

Ironically, Blake Barrymore never snowboarded again. Skiing is simply too deep in the family's genes; his son, Wing Tai, is one of America's top Olympic prospects in skiing halfpipe. "But if somebody got me a replica of that board and another heli ride into the Monashees, I'd do it again in a heartbeat. It would be a dream come true." ❄️



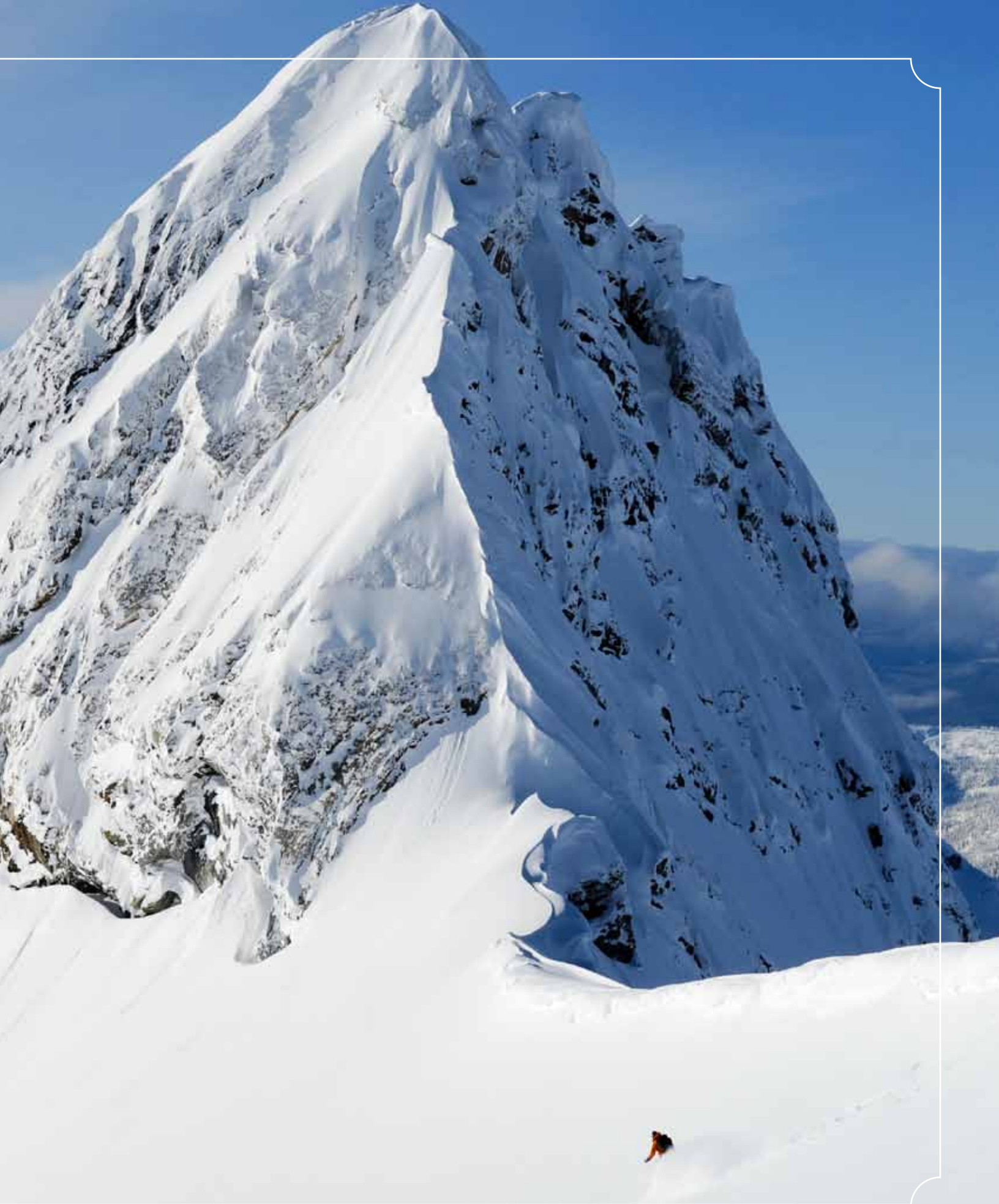
Left: Blake Barrymore scares himself as he approaches 150 kph on a primitive Burton snowboard.

This page: Skiers about to be “streaked by the Shred Baron.” The ski/snowboard rivalry began right there.



PURE. *privacy*

Everybody knows that CMH skiers are sociable folks. But as **TOPHER DONAHUE** discovers, there's much to be said about sharing the experience with just a few close, personal friends. ▶





TO SKI AS A CMH NOMAD, I AM LEARNING WITH NO SMALL DELIGHT, IS TO TRAVEL BACK IN TIME.

If I can just ignore the presence of modern safety systems, internet weather reports, fat skis, and, of course, deluxe accommodation, then it's easy to imagine myself having this same adventure a half-century ago, when Heli-Skiing was invented. We too are striking out with an intimate band of skiers, our own chopper and pilot, a pair of guides and a simple mission: wander freely, and widely, then ski whatever lines look the most tempting.

The Nomads private skiing program was born—rediscovered, if you will—about 20 years ago when guides Dave Cochrane and George Field, while spring skiing with an adventurous group in McBride after the other CMH lodges had closed, decided on a whim to detour southward. They flitted from one CMH lodge to another, all while discovering—and then ripping—choice lines amid the vast 375 linear kilometres of ski paradise between McBride and the Bugaboos.

Modern privateers now have two choices: Nomads North, which roams the Monashees, Gothics and Adamants tenures, and Nomads South, whose terrain includes Revelstoke, CMH K2, Galena and Bugaboos. In both cases the drill is the same: guides discuss their tentative itinerary with the other CMH areas, compare notes on weather and snow conditions, and then, within the limitations of safety, allow the guests to choose what kind of skiing they'd like today. Where that will take them is always a delightful work in progress.

The magic of Nomads Heli-Skiing is that it provides, by definition, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. No two trips are ever the same, nor is there pressure to keep up with anyone or be anywhere other than the lodge-du-jour in time for happy hour. For us that means skiing seemingly endless tree runs like Glade Runner in CMH K2, then popping over to charge massive alpine shots near the spectacular but seldom-seen spires of the Pinnacles in the Southern Monashees. As Nomads manager Jeff Bodnarchuck explains it, "We ski in three mountain ranges and four tenures, sometimes in the same day. We emerge at each landing to a new vista in every direction and no tracks in sight. To me that's the essence of Heli-Skiing."

Even the sightseeing seems better when flying is more like a journey than a commute. It's not unusual for Heli-Skiers to see a pair of moose, as we do one afternoon, but spotting the rare northern flying squirrel gliding from a treetop as we carve past a giant haystack-shaped mountain at the remote southern border of CMH Revelstoke—that feels like a gift for us, and us alone.

Epic snowfalls only sweeten the deal. One morning we hear the engineer's voice crackle over the radio, "I still haven't found the helicopter!" My journal for that day reads: "I've just found an even higher level of respect for British Columbian snow. Decompressing in Halcyon Hot Springs in a four centimetre per hour snowfall, each flake is big enough that, as it hits the water, it holds its form before melting into the liquid. And it wasn't even supposed to snow today."

Perhaps there's something to the spring's storied lithium content, because on the last day I swear that's where I spot three snowflakes that are exactly the same. Our final dinner is, without a doubt, the most divine meal I've ever eaten in my life. Halcyon Chef Tyler Leeson happens to be sharpening his game in preparation for a Canada-wide chef competition, and the menu he prepares for us—an appetizer of honey and chipotle-glazed ribs with watercress salad, followed by a pastry-wrapped veal tenderloin in a red wine and cherry reduction, then capped off with a dessert of almond coconut pavlova featuring pineapple custard and raspberry coulis—is the perfect coda to a long day of steep tree skiing through Galena's legendary forests.

The only way to describe this is a state of transcendent bliss. Author and passionate skier Ernest Hemingway may have written *A Moveable Feast*, but as far as I can tell, only CMH Nomads has perfected it. 🍁





“The magic of Nomads Heli-Skiing is that it provides, by definition, a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”





SMOKE & MAGIC



AS A GROUP, THE CMH CHEFS RANK AMONG THE FINEST IN CANADA.

They could easily find work in any top city hotel or restaurant of their choice. So why, other than for the skiing, would any of them decide to work in the remote B.C. backcountry?

“That’s easy,” says Rick Carswell, CMH Food and Beverage Manager. “It’s because they have complete independence. Unlike most kitchens, our chefs order the foods they want and create the dishes in exactly the way they want. They even go on personal shopping trips to the city each autumn to make sure they have all of the exotic spices and other ingredients they’ll need for the season.”

The policy extends to specialized kitchen equipment too, which is how, last October, to launch his second season at the Adamants, Richard “Smokie” Benson asked Carswell to procure for him what the aptly nicknamed chef views as an essential tool for conjuring his culinary magic: a Bradley electric food smoker.

“I’m one of those chefs who likes to push himself every day to do something adventurous,” explains Smokie. “The way I look at it is that the guests are out there getting the best skiing in the world, so I’d better be back here turning out food that can match that standard.” Which is why, as you come and go at Adamant Lodge, you’ll catch the occasional whiff of smoldering apple or hickory wood as it subtly perfumes anything from nuts to fish to beef tenderloin.

“Over the past five or six years I’ve really gotten into creating amazing foods with smoke, and charcuterie in general,” says Benson, 33, a graduate of the Culinary Arts program at Camosun College in Victoria, B.C. “There are so many variables to play with, like whether to brine first or not, and the choice between cold or hot smoke.” Benson’s undeniably low-tech little box is seldom without one delicacy or another: “Let’s see, I’ve smoked almonds, garlic, tomatoes, turkey, tuna and, of course, candied salmon.”

Not surprisingly, skiers love it. But it comes at a cost, says Smokie. “Ever since I started hickory-smoking the pork ribs for Tuesday’s rib and wing night—where I actually start the process three days in advance—I’ve had to just about double my order of meat. People go crazy for those ribs.” 🍁





BEEF TENDERLOIN A LA SMOKIE

Cold-smoking a premium cut of beef yields a subtle but delightfully aromatic flavour. Smokie tells you how to do it at home: "Clean the tenderloin, tie with string, and cold-smoke for two hours. The ideal temperature is 3°C, so obviously it's something you need to do outside in the winter. For wood chips, I like mesquite for beef. Once it's out of the smoker, rub with cracked black pepper, rosemary, thyme and a touch of olive oil, then refrigerate up to six hours. Finally, sear the loin in your hottest pan, apply a good dose of salt, then roast at 200°C until the internal temperature is 50°. Then let it rest 30 minutes before serving." Smokie likes to serve it with potato gnocchi, puree of sweet Walla Walla onions and batonnets of heirloom rainbow carrots. As for the wine pairing, Smokie recommends Mission Hill Oculus, a robust cabernet sauvignon. "It's Canada's version of a Bordeaux, with lots of fruit happening. In my opinion it's one of the best wines coming out of the Okanagan."



Famed World Cup champion Luc Alphand attacks the powder much the same way he did the toughest downhill in skiing: with total commitment and a smile that never goes away.

RUNNING WITH A CROWD

Multi-sport speedster Luc Alphand set the pace, but as **KEVIN BROOKER** reports, his merry band of French *sportifs* had little problem keeping up.



Mais oui, we ski over there, too.

“DOES ANYBODY KNOW THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO CANADA?” In two decades at the Gothics, lodge manager Claude Duchesne has seized on some odd themes for a post-dinner speech, but never quite as weird as this Tuesday. “There’s been a hold-up at the border,” Duchesne continues. “Some of our gang here”—he motions to a table of burly, hooting Frenchmen, whose dinner attire, for some reason, consists of nothing but their white bathrobes—“they shipped a few boxes of some special food from back home in Toulouse—the finest *cassoulet*, I’m told—and it’s supposed to be here by now. But the customs people apparently think that packages which come from the south of France are suspicious. We may need intervention from a higher power.”

Higher power? Well, how about that dude sitting over there eating sushi and wearing a smile wider than his head. That’s right, it’s Luc Alphand, one of the greatest ski racers of all time who then became one of the greatest rally racers of all time. He’s the special guest who’s teaching us how to tear apart big mountains, when to dance shirtless on a tabletop, and, in short, how to have more fun than any man in his 40s has probably ever had. Does Luc have to sort out those customs knuckleheads too? ▶



It's a lot like the Hahnenkamm, except it's way more fun.

MEMO TO ANYONE TRYING TO TALK THEIR BUDDIES INTO ROUNDING OUT A POSSE FOR A CMH TRIP: Merely invite a living legend who has reached the pinnacle in at least two of the world's sexiest sports, and preferably one whose athletic career is still on the rise as he embarks upon a third.

That's pretty much all it took for Thomas Leufen of Destination Poudreuse, CMH's Paris-based agent that has been re-educating French skiers about where the world's greatest skiing is for over 20 years. "As soon as we announced that Luc was coming," says Leufen, "the trip filled up." Which is how 32 of Luc's new best friends (a 33rd was forced to bow out; please don't let him read this article) now find themselves smack in the middle of the last, and maybe even the best week of the 2011-12 season.

You could see that right from day one when Duchesne tells the group, "I think this is the fastest Saturday we ever got a group in, fed lunch, and ready to go skiing." And why not? Duchesne points out that this is the first bluebird day after a month of steady snowfall. "It's April, it's -5 degrees, there's powder everywhere. It just doesn't get much better."

A half-hour later, the marquee group is about to catch his drift. They're clicked in and poised to drop in on a perfect, sparsely treed Monashee slope when the man himself makes a shocking confession. "Actually, it's my first time Heli-Skiing," Luc offers casually, the last thing you'd expect from a guy covered in sponsor logos and rocking a super-fat pair of next year's Dynastars. But any thought that he'll be less than a mind-blowing skier is instantly dispelled as Luc blazes down on Duchesne's tail, railing monster turns in knee-deep cream before launching an impromptu jump and jibbing artfully off a huge snow mushroom.

It's like someone shot off a starter's gun. The rest of the group charges forth, thoroughly giddy as they too braid their way like rock stars through this jaw-dropping terrain. It sets an upbeat tone that will last the entire week: Never have fewer skiers fallen, or flailed awkwardly, or complained about sore legs. "I'm skiing with a World Cup champion" is well on its way to turning into, "I'm skiing *like* a World Cup champion."

A few hours later the spring sun is still high in the sky, and on the warm terrace, skiers are getting to know one another over frosty



I skied with Luc Alphand, and I have the helmet cam footage to prove it.





Could everyone please load the helicopter faster?



All... systems... go!

beers. More than a few are already saying, “Best runs of my life.” Luc, meanwhile, is holding court in the hot tub. At one point, though, he steps out of the pool for a roll in the snow. Except the slushy surface is too firm underneath for that, so Luc merely lays down in a fetal position, rubbing his paws softly over his face like a kitten. He then strolls back into the hot tub. “If there is a heaven,” he announces matter-of-factly, “this is it.”

WHEN IT COMES TO A GLITTERING ALPINE TRADITION, it’s hard to outdo the nation that produced the dashing Jean-Claude Killy plus the “*ski extrême*” of Patrick Vallençant and a host of daredevils that followed. Indeed, the French Alps can boast every feature you’d wish for in a mountain range with one notable exception: they don’t have Heli-Skiing.

No wonder those members of the group who have Heli-Skied before—about a third—possess such diverse travel resumes. Take Didier Caillol and Lucile Brugede, who live near Marseille. They’ve Heli-Skied over a dozen times, as far afield as Kazakhstan, Utah and Greenland, plus several visits to CMH. “It’s nice, for a change, to be

in an all-French-speaking group, especially one this *sympathique*,” says Caillol, who admits that France hasn’t been as diligent as other European countries in teaching kids English.

As for the mainly anglophone lodge staff, they’re trying to do their part as citizens of a bilingual nation. At the first dinner they all introduce themselves in varying facsimiles of French, though not quite as good as, say, guide Pierre Hungr, who happens to be fluent, thanks to growing up in French immersion school in Vancouver and his time spent guiding in Chamonix. Even chef Yoshi Chubachi emerges from the kitchen to bid the guests *bienvenue* in elegant, if slightly Japanese-accented French.

There is another great advantage to hosting an all-Gallic crew. Like many CMH guests, they tend to bring various delicacies from home for sharing. In this regard, the inventors of the word *gourmet* are—*quelle surprise*—in a class of their own. This week nobody is more popular than Rodolphe Peters and Stephane Billiot, principals in rival Champagne houses. They are spectacularly equipped with numerous magnums of their vintage sparkling wines. At one point, Peters narrows his eyes at Billiot as he refills glass after glass for his ▶







Talk about your *joie de vivre*: Whether on the snow, flying jauntily above it, or relaxing nearby, these Frenchmen proved themselves *formidable* in every aspect of a Heli-Ski vacation.





grateful countrymen. “They make theirs with Pinot Noir grapes,” he growls, “while we use only Chardonnay. We should be mortal enemies.” But then his face lights up and the pair slap hands in an exuberant high-five. “Instead, we’re best ski buddies!”

And what is wine without cheese—eight large wheels of premium Saint-Nectaire, a classic semi-soft from the volcanic region of Auvergne in central France that everyone agrees is the perfect meal-ender. The benefactor is Francis Charbonnel, who owns several sporting goods shops through which he’s come to know Luc socially. For a guy like him, who’s already skied 60 days this season, making this trip along with some chums was a no-brainer. France, he confirms, is a sports-mad nation, and he’s not surprised that, in addition to being strong skiers, this group contains a host of experts in tennis, cycling, motorcycling, climbing and sailing—in short, people a lot like Luc Alphan. For his part, Charbonnel’s status as a former competitive speed-skier is on full display up in the mountains. And as a part-owner of a helicopter touring company, he just came up with a new goal: “I think I’m going after my helicopter pilot’s license when I get home.”

Then there are the manly hunks of Team Cassoulet, as they are being called, despite the fact that their highly prized tins of *haricots*, pork and sausages are still a no-show. These dozen-odd *copains* are veteran but still very fit rugby players from Toulouse—or more precisely, Saint-Girons, a nearby town about which they sing with lusty reverence. In fact, the Cassoulets will burst into full-throated song at a moment’s notice, ably led by their smallest member, a booming tenor named Hubert de Thoisy who blushes when asked if he’s a professional opera singer. “No,” he laughs, “I actually run a shoe factory.” He also once lived in New Zealand, which is how he came to teach the Cassoulets a French version of the haka, the Maori war chant made famous by the All Blacks rugby team. That, too, they’ll break out at the drop of a beret, and fortunately, de Thoisy has one.

AS THE WEEK TUMBLES ALONG, it becomes increasingly clear that there is only one problem with hanging around Luc Alphan: It is

difficult for mere mortals to keep up. This is a very strong group, both at the bar and on the snow, but when the last guy on the makeshift dancefloor is also the first guy in the stretching room next morning (though after, *bien sur*, his dawn run), your work is definitely cut out for you. Jagermeister shots? Luc’s in. When the video geeks cluster around the GoPro footage after each day’s skiing, guess who’s in the front row. Billiards? Table tennis? Victory is surely his. And don’t even think about beating him to that super-steep couloir over there.

On the other hand, with his twinkling eyes, permanent smile and volcanic enthusiasm, he’s everything you’d want in a ski buddy. So when a warm front passes through late in the week that makes the skiing less than appetizing, Luc takes it cheerfully in stride. And so, of course, does everyone else. It helps that Claude Duchesne has the brilliant idea of airlifting the entire circus up to a nearby mountain for a festive barbecue lunch. “It’s not exactly standard operating procedure,” he tells the gang, “but we can’t be sitting around the lodge. We need to get out and have some fun.”

Even the helicopter pilot, Roger Hoogendoorn, gets in on it. While everyone else is downing burgers and beer, he grabs a shovel and builds a big jump up on a steep slope. Turns out he’s brought along those plastic sliding carpets that kids use, and the next thing you know he’s rocketing down the pitch on his belly and demonstrating that his superb flying skills do not require heavy machinery. Four or five human missiles follow before Luc, broken back and all, sets the distance standard. The ensuing barrage of flying Frenchmen lasts over an hour, but it will take the aerodynamics of a hulking rugby forward stripped down to his underwear to eclipse Luc’s mark.

Just then Duchesne takes a call from the lodge over the radio. “Hey guys,” he calls out, “the cassoulet just arrived!” Cue Hubert; this call for three or four celebratory songs from the *Toulousains*.

Sure enough, on the final night of the season, the entire lodge finally gets to eat what several Canadians describe as “the best thing I ever ate from a can.” There are even a few magnums of champagne left to toast a week that won’t be forgotten for a long time. Someone asks Luc, “Do you think you’d like to come back again next year?”

Silly question. “*Absolument*,” he replies. Without hesitation. 🍷

COOL HAND LUC

One of the world's greatest sportsmen, Luc Alphand is a hero in his native France. Born the son of a mountain guide in Briançon, Luc's powerful skiing earned him a place on the French World Cup squad in 1984. By the mid-90s he dominated the speed disciplines, earning 12 victories and 23 podiums. In 1997 he became the first skier to win the overall World Cup title racing exclusively in downhill and super giant slalom.

Luc next transferred his skills to auto racing, making 10 appearances at Le Mans and 11 in the world's most punishing rally, Paris-Dakar. Naturally, he found victory there too, in 2006. Alas, his motor sports career came to a near-tragic end in 2009 when he severely damaged his spine in a motorcycle accident. Yet he defied the odds and fought his way back to robust health. These days he lives with his family in Hautes-Alpes, where he operates a craft brewery with his brother, Lionel. Estelle, Luc's 17-year-old daughter, carries on the family ski tradition, winning four medals last season at the first Youth Olympic Winter Games.

Meanwhile, even at age 47, Luc's professional sporting career is far from over. "I just signed a three year contract to pilot the world's fastest yacht, *l'Hydroptère DCNS*," he told fellow skiers over dinner in the Gothics Lodge. "It's a trimaran that officially reached nearly 53 knots, but has gone faster. The big risk, though, is that it can blow apart at that kind of speed." Luc is currently training to take the helm in record-seeking ocean crossings. "It's very challenging to be at the wheel, at night, in three metre-seas, going as fast as you can."

But expect Alphand to go from apprentice to expert pretty fast, like he does everything. "These sports are very different in technique," he notes, "but they have one thing in common: You rely on your vision, plus your ability to analyze what's coming at you. Well, nothing prepares you for that better than skiing." 🍁





Even ageless mountaineers eventually must call it a day. As AARON TEASDALE reports, at CMH the task of passing the torch crosses all disciplines.

generations

WHEN YOU MEET HIM, IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT CMH GUIDE DAN GRIFFITH IS 61 YEARS OLD. A tall, silver-haired bear of a man, his boyish smile and sun-kissed vigour belie his maturity. Little wonder; it was only six years ago, in between ski seasons, that he set the Guinness world record for the fastest ascent (189 days) of the Seven Summits, the highest mountains on each continent. Griffith is the indefatigable archetype of what a guide should be.

Fuelled by an undiminished love for taking people into the mountains, Griffith has been guiding for 33 years (14 years with CMH). On the evening he was interviewed for this story, he is more interested in talking about a Spanish couple he'd just spent the day with than guiding. It was their first time in the wild mountains of Canada. "You should have seen that woman beaming," he says, something he never gets tired of seeing.

Asked about his future, Griffith doesn't hesitate: "I'm not ready to stop yet." Though he knows he won't be able to go forever, he points out that the oldest-ever CMH guide worked until age 75. Yet while Griffith's eventual departure will be an undeniable loss for CMH, he's already prepared the company by leaving them the next best thing—his son.

Looking back, it seems inevitable that Luke Griffith would become a ski guide. At a tender 18 months, he was schussing backyard snow ramps. At age four, he went Heli-Skiing for the first time, which has to qualify as a record in itself. "We like to say he's 31, but has been heli-skiing for 27 years," Dan says with his characteristic full-face smile.

While spending his winters as a ski racer, the junior Griffith began tagging along with dad on increasingly far-flung mountain adventures. His thirteenth summer was spent in Mount Cook village in New Zealand while his father guided, and by 19 he was assisting on 17-day treks through the Indian Himalayas. "There are so many places my dad has dragged me I sometimes don't remember them all," Luke says. "Then it comes up in conversation, and I'm like, 'Oh yeah, I was there.'"

By his 19th summer, Luke, who's a younger, more jocular version of his dad, started work as a CMH hiking guide. It was 1999 and he was just in time to catch the twilight years of Heli-Skiing's golden era. "I was super lucky to get to spend some time with Hans and Leo and meet the people who are the guiding legends of our time," Luke says of Messrs. Gmoser and Grillmair, the founders of CMH and the original authors of the *joie de vivre* that infuses the company to this day.

"The Griffiths are the first—and still only—father and son mountain guides in Canadian history."



How many can say they started Heli-Skiing at age 4? Just Luke.



Like father, like son: the Griffiths in their natural habitat.



Summer vacation, Griffith-style: the boys pose on top of Aconcagua, 6969m.





Just another day at the office for Todd Guyn.

After 37 years of duty, Colani Bezzola steps away with confidence.



More complicated than just handing over the keys: pilots Jim Barker and Doug Dykeman.



Several years later, in 2005, Luke began as a Heli-Ski guide for CMH. When he got his ACMG mountain guide certification in 2009, he was only 29, the same age at which his father earned the distinction. It is the highest level of certification a guide can attain, a rigorous process that takes a minimum of five years to complete. Thus did the Griffiths become the first—and still only—father and son mountain guides in Canadian history.

“I’ve never met someone who is as amped to be in the mountains as my dad,” Luke says with obvious admiration. “I love the mountains, but there’s no way I love the mountains as much as he does. That passion—to love something that much—it’s not just a mountain thing, it’s a life thing.”

It’s clear, however, that no shortage of his father’s passion has genetically transferred to Luke, who admits to being a “skiing addict since I was a little kid.” Dan likes to tell the story of a seven-year-old Luke skiing with his school at Lake Louise. An instructor took the kids into the advanced backside area and stopped to ask them, “What do we always want to do when we ski powder?” Young Luke immediately raised his hand and blurted, “Be first!” before turning and charging down the mountain.

Though he showed this uncommon wisdom as a child—and, as Dan points out, “When you do something since you’re a kid, you just have a kind of innate, instinctual knowledge about being out there

that you might not even realize you have”—both father and son are humble enough to realize they’ll never know it all. “Every moment of every day you keep learning out there—the more you learn the better you are,” Luke says. “Many guides have been here at the Monashees well over 10, 15 years. It’s great. There are so many people to learn from here.”

CMH is well-known for retaining its guides, pilots and other employees for decades. It’s a culture in which good people find it easy to stay. But when you’ve been around for nearly five decades as CMH has, even the longest-serving must some day retire, allowing a new generation to take their place. This generational torch-passing occurred in a couple vital areas of CMH’s operations this past season.

For almost three decades, Jim Barker has been Chief Pilot of CMH’s partner company, Alpine Helicopters, overseeing every facet of the helicopter work that lifts skiers into the mountains. When he stepped down for the winter of 2011/2012, Doug Dykeman was an obvious choice to replace him. A veteran pilot and aircraft maintenance engineer, Dykeman has been flying for Alpine and CMH since 1988.

In his new role, he says, “Now I’ve got 45 pilots to look after.” That means bringing them all together in the fall, after summers usually spent in forestry or wildland firefighting, for refresher training and, as Dykeman puts it, “To get their heads wrapped around winter.”



The one thing Todd Guyn cares about more than skiing hard is skiing safely.

He doesn't say that lightly. Piloting a helicopter in a mountain environment in winter is some of the most challenging flying in the world. It takes a refined skill set and a steely mind, and only the best get hired to fly for CMH. Even then, pilots can spend up to five years as a support pilot before they're allowed to take over flying a group of guests in a Bell 212, the dependable, dual-engine birds that are the mainstay of the CMH fleet.

"We have pilots that we're comfortable sending out into almost any situation," Dykeman says. He adds that whether he's assessing a pilot's skills or doling out the season's assignments, he has a singular focus. "It's all about safety around here," he says, before adding, with no pun intended, "it's what we revolve around."

The second major transition at CMH last season was another key behind-the-scenes figure. Jon "Colani" Bezzola served for 21 years as the first and only dedicated Mountain Safety Manager. A Swiss guide who first came to work for CMH in 1975, Bezzola spent the last two decades traveling from lodge to lodge and geeking out on the snowpack. He studied its crystals and layers, standardizing the techniques guides used for assessing stability, and helped create an innovative, high-tech system of snow and weather data collection

that helps guides make the best decisions for where to take skiers each day. In recognition of his pioneering efforts, Bezzola was given a Service Award from the Canadian Avalanche Association in 2010.

Mountain guide Todd Guyn had the opportunity to work with Bezzola often over his 17 years as a CMH guide and then Assistant Manager of the Revelstoke Lodge. But in the last few winters their relationship changed. With an eye towards his retirement, Bezzola took Guyn—then chair of CMH's Mountain Safety Advisory Group as well the Technical Director for the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides—under his wing and began teaching him the nuances of his job. In the winter of 2011/12 Guyn became the new Mountain Safety Manager.

"He was very good at what he did—he brought 25 years of experience. I admire him for sure," Guyn says of the challenge of following Bezzola. "He stayed on until the end of December to help me. He was a good mentor."

Now that he's in charge, Guyn is focused on taking CMH's safety systems to the next level, whether it's giving guests their own radios or incorporating the latest technologies in avalanche forecasting. "We're constantly being challenged to find new ways to make Heli-

Skiing safer. What I like is there's never a question of finance. Every year we spend whatever it takes to make it as safe as we can. It's the core of our company, and I'm pretty passionate about making sure it stays there."

That said, Guyn is the first to acknowledge that there's no way to remove all danger from wilderness skiing. Skiing with CMH is not knitting. "We have to have an appetite for risk," he says, "or we wouldn't want to Heli-Ski."

In business, people often talk about institutional memory, but at CMH it's more than just an abstract concept. It says something about the depth of their commitment that each of these torch-passers has not actually retired. Barker is, for the time being, the Assistant Chief Pilot, working daily with Dykeman to make sure flying operations continue running as smoothly as ever. Bezzola may no longer be Mountain Safety Manager, but he's still a regular presence in CMH's Banff office in his new role as an advisor, ensuring that his 33 years of knowledge can still be called upon when needed. Then there's Dan Griffith, who'll be passing no torches anytime soon, thank you very much.

"It's simple. We're all here because we love skiing."

Inevitably, though, these icons will step away. When they do, CMH will do what it does best—replace people with years of hard-earned expertise by hiring other people with years of hard-earned expertise. For CMH, a company built on a bedrock of experienced guides, pilots, and safety experts, that typically means promoting from within. It's always been a guide-driven company, as evidenced by the several long-term guides now occupying key managerial positions.

Not everyone has aspirations to move into management, however. "I'm quite happy to be a guide and create good times and bring everyone home safe," Luke says when asked about his future plans. "People ask 'What are you going to do when you grow up?' and I say, 'This.' This is what my dad and I do. We guide."

He might as well have been talking about CMH itself. From its audacious inception, it's been driven by a passion for bringing people to the mountains and giving them the adventure of their lives.

"We're all here because we love skiing," Luke says as he once again unintentionally sums up the zeitgeist of CMH. "To be able to bring people places they never imagined they'd be, with blower powder going over their head, and to hear the laughter, and everyone clanking poles. That's what it's all about."

It might even be enough to keep you Heli-Skiing to 75, or who knows, older still. History is a long, long time. ❄️



A GANG OF FAMOUS SURFING AUSSIES SHOWS THAT THEY TOO ARE FAIR DINKUM WHEN IT COMES TO RAGING ON SNOW

GREEN WITH HENNY

Many a close-knit group has staked out a permanent fixture in the CMH calendar, but few are as regular or as zealous as the Australian crew of lifelong surfers who, since 1994, have ruled CMH Galena for a two-week span known as Week 0. The Green Group, as staffers call it, is a bunch of mates with more than a few luminaries from the global surf industry, including Quiksilver co-founders Alan Green and John Law, plus Brian Singer and Doug Warbrick, who built Rip Curl. "Galena is the punctuation mark around which the rest of the year revolves," says Singer of the rotating cast—friends and family alike—who fill the 33 spots year after year. "The original core group are mostly skiers now in our 60s, while the younger ones tend to snowboard."

"They're all rippers, though, and super fun," confirms CMH's Mike Welch, who guides them every year. "They have loads of costume nights, Aussie barbecues, pig roasts—whatever they do, they just get into it full-on." He notes that last December, for no evident reason, "A bunch of them suddenly decided they needed Mohawk haircuts." As for the risk inherent in super-early season booking, no worries. "One year we were told, 'Don't bother, it's marginal,'" recalls Singer. "But we said screw it, we're coming. And we had a blast anyway." ❄️



CLASSROOM OF THE GODS

CMH's Powder U offers a variety of advanced courses. But as **SHELLEY ARNUSCH** learns, Powder 101: Girl's School is the perfect starting point.



WHEN I THINK BACK ON EVERYTHING I LEARNED AT POWDER U—and it was a lot—the thing I remember the most is “the bounce.” The bounce, you see, defines powder success. Seasoned resort skiers need techniques for gripping and grinding and carving down packed, groomed runs. But that translates poorly to slopes of knee- or thigh- or waist-deep fluff. There you need to forget most everything you learned at the resort, keep your skis evenly weighted, and bounce from turn to turn like a carefree rabbit. Once you get the bounce, good things start to happen.

What audacity: to even think about throwing my skis in a helicopter basket without knowing about the bounce. But that’s the point of Powder U, CMH’s series of trips designed with a focus on coaching and skills development rather than vertical-foot count. Just like an academic university curriculum, Powder U’s trips start at the introductory level with Powder 101 and Powder 101: Girl’s School, then progress upward (er, downward) from there. More advanced programs cover all manner of subjects, from backcountry safety to filming, to specific terrain features such as trees, steeps and pillow drops. There’s even a “grad-school” trip, Powder 707: The Masters, for veterans who need to get back to the bounce, as it were.

Last March this wide-eyed coed (and Heli-Ski novice) enrolled in Powder 101: Girl’s School, staged from CMH Revelstoke. I definitely had freshman jitters. For many women, even resort-skiing superstars, which I was emphatically not, there’s an undeniable intimidation factor to Heli-Skiing. Like many rookies I feared being chucked into the fire, assigned to a group of hard-charging, vertical-clocking hotshots, and expected to keep pace or suffer the shame of holding up the group. Happily, however, my experience couldn’t have been more different.



Our crew was one of four concurrent CMH trips at Revelstoke that week. Though we kept to ourselves for the skiing, everything else—meals, après sessions, status meetings and the like—involved mingling with guests from the other trips. Our 11-person gang was a combination of gals flying solo, like me, and those who were travelling with significant others. There was Lucie, an elegant Québécoise pharmaceutical executive (and soon-to-be grandmother), who came with her partner, Louis. Though Lucie skied with the grace you'd expect of a former model, she was no match for Louis, a ski instructor with an impressive list of CMH trips under his belt. Up to this point, he had become resigned to the idea that Heli-Skiing would be a stag affair. But with the option of having Lucie participate in the Girl's School trip, Louis was stoked to have the best of both worlds—his Heli-Skiing *and* his chérie amour.

Similarly, Barbara, a psychology professor from New Jersey, was on a western *tour-de-poudre* with husband Mike, who was skiing with another group. In their case, Barbara's experience matched that of Mike's—both possess not one but two badge-of-honour Arc'teryx ski suits that CMH awards to those who log a staggering million vertical feet. Yet now in her seventies, and sporting double knee braces, Barbara was naturally slowing down. Despite the experience, her skiing was more in line with a group where the majority were like me, logging foot number one.

Rounding out our posse were sisters Nara and Larissa, sassy California moms getting their first taste of Heli-Skiing courtesy of their dad, Norm, a spry septuagenarian and seasoned powder harvester. Among the solo flyers were Colorado mom and mountain-bike enthusiast Carrie, Kate, a garrulous executive coach from Pennsylvania, and Kim, a high-powered lawyer from Eastern Canada, who got the added bonus of getting to visit with her Revelstoke-based, ski-coach son during her stay. Also on the roster: CMH staffers Sarah and Ellen, plus two Calgarians, including myself.

Although Girl's School guide-teachers aren't always female, the stars aligned on this particular trip, landing us in the care of two no-nonsense alpine amazons, Alison Andrews and Lili Lambert. Accustomed to hanging with the big boys, busting chauvinistic

chops with strong, silky style, this would obviously be a softer touch. However, that's not to say they were about to let this class off easy.

While the skiing is, was, and will forever be the *raison d'être* of any CMH trip, learning the ropes is a major component of the Powder 101 experience. Day 1 brought the requisite avalanche awareness and snow safety field training, followed by a briefing on the hows, whats and whys of getting in and out of helicopters, such as the "heli-huddle," a group hug of sorts that keeps everyone outside the bird in the pilot's eye during lift-off and landing. While instinct directs you to cover up ostrich-style when the aircraft is bearing down, Alison reminded us that the smart thing to do is to keep your eye on the sky and remain ready to get out of the way should a gust of wind suddenly arise.

There's more to learn once you're dropped at the top of the first snowy slope, starting with how to gear up. Ever tried to click in when you're standing in knee-deep fluff? Much easier when you jam your ski tails into the snow to stabilize them before you step into the bindings. Then there's the whole matter of skiing with a guide and a group in an unfamiliar and unforgiving mountain wilderness. You learn to keep the lead guide in sight and make a joyful noise in order to alert the group to your whereabouts, whether it's a whoop, a yodel, or a sing-in-the-shower-style version of your favourite girl-power anthem (in my case it was the chorus of 4 Non Blondes' "What's Up?").

Once geared up and guide-savvy, that's when the field-study part of Powder U commences. For the virgin-powder virgin, those first few turns will make you feel more than a bit like a baby fawn taking its first steps. It's a new sensation, strange and thrilling, leaving you keenly alert, a bit breathless, somewhat puzzled and, in my case at least, entirely exhilarated. From then on it's all downhill, and gloriously so.

Led by the intrepid twosome of Lili and Alison, the Girl's School classmates made the most of our time at this the alpine campus, weaving in and out of trees and down open meadows of knee- and thigh-deep snow. Feather-light precipitation dutifully fell from the sky each day, dusting away the previous ski tracks like the shake of an






Can you laugh? Eat heartily? Make gravity your little friend? If so, maybe you're Powder U material.





“For many women, even resort-skiing superstars—which I’m not—there’s an undeniable intimidation factor to Heli-Skiing.”

A vertical photograph of a snowy mountain range under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The snow is bright white, and the mountain peaks are jagged and rocky.

Etch-a-Sketch. With each run our collective improvement was tangible. We learned to keep our hands out front and our hips centered, a position that was memorably, if crudely, described as skiing like you are (*cough*) “making love” rather than (*cough cough*) “going to the toilet.” With each run we became stronger, our turns getting ever rounder and more natural. We grew more confident, less inclined to indulge the urge to slow down, and more apt to go with the flow.

There’s a beautiful abandon to powder skiing that is not to be confused with recklessness. Deep snow provides a natural speed check, and once you accept this, and realize that you can point your sticks downhill without suffering the same hazards you would encounter on a mountain covered with hard snow and moguls, the mountain at last becomes your soft, welcoming playground. And if you’re anything like our gang, each time you skid to a stop you’ll find yourself laughing out loud.

There were more laughs at Girl’s School than just those brought on by the sheer rush of mastering the bounce turn. The all-for-one mentality of the group fostered a refreshingly supportive atmosphere. By the end of the first day everyone had been given a nickname: Lucie in the Sky with Diamonds, Two-Million Foot Barbara, Killer Kim, Gnarly Narla. Larissa we dubbed The Torso on account of her choice of dark jacket and white pants, which rendered her legs invisible against the snow. We fed off our collective energy, cheered each other’s successes and improvements, and helped each other up when we fell—something that became rarer as the week progressed.

Off the mountain, the good vibes continued. We convened for boisterous post-ski video replay sessions, fuelled by wine and shots of elderflower liqueur. Girl’s School claimed its own table at dinner each night, with an open invitation to partners and family associates to join. It was here we found out about Kate the Great’s previous life as a cruise ship director and Killer’s alter-ego as a judge. We heard about kids and husbands and boyfriends, got and gave advice, and became increasingly giddy as we reminisced about the day’s highlights over the second (and, OK, third) bottle of wine.

On the last night, Girl’s School held a graduation ceremony of sorts in Sarah’s room, all while getting decked out in disco accessories from Ellen’s extensive costume supplies. Following our own private dance party we made our flamboyant entrance into the banquet hall over a soundtrack of Donna Summer’s greatest hits blasting from a boom-box, setting a raucous tone for the rest of the evening’s festivities.

The concluding half-day of the trip saw Lili and Alison skiing in their shocking pink feather boas and bedazzled dollar-store Elton John glasses (surprisingly good in flat light, Lili noted). Pros by now at getting in and out of the heli, and fully confident at carving our own personal lines through blankets of powder, we clocked a couple of memorable runs before shuttling back to the lodge, eventually parting as Girl’s School grads and friends.

Now I wistfully think back to my time in that classroom in the clouds, where I learned to bounce and ski with abandon. Most importantly, I also learned that Heli-Skiing isn’t just for the hardcore, as I had feared. Sure, you can’t be a bunny-hill beginner and, yes, it helps to be on your game, fitness-wise. But Girl’s School is the kind of supportive, accessible environment that every powder newbie would be lucky to call their first time.

Personally, it marks the beginning of a quest that I hope will result in my own million-vertical-foot suit one day (kudos to you, Barbara, for even making me consider the possibility). And in addition to all that, Girl’s School proved that disco isn’t dead after all.

To be honest, all that’s missing are mortarboard caps to hurl upwards in unison, and a lusty salute to our fair alma mater, good ol’ Powder U! ❄️



CMHYEA





ARBOOK





Bruce Howatt Area Manager, Bobbie Burns

Skiing and mountain climbing have always come first for Bruce, despite being a prairie boy from Edmonton, Alberta. As part of the early wave of accredited Canadian-born guides, he took his first test at age 18, and has been with CMH winter and summer for over a quarter-century. Bruce was one of Canada's top technical climbers in the 1980s, but now lends his expertise to developing features like via ferratas and ziplines to challenge the adrenaline-hungry new generation of Heli-Hikers. As for skiing, the break-dancing father of two says, "I've had more injuries than I care to count, but I think I still rip."

Maria Hawkins Reservations Agent, Banff

You're in capable hands if your booking is handled by CMH head office's resident super-athlete. England-born and Banff-raised, Maria was something of a late bloomer, however, having started road bike racing at age 25. But only five years later she rode for Canada at the Barcelona Olympics. Since then she has added mountain biking and cross-country skiing to her repertoire, and still manages to travel the world competing at a high age-class level. "I love long races like Sweden's Vasaloppet," she says. "Sure, 90k is a long ski, but I'm lucky to live in the perfect place to train for it."



Guy Clarkson Guide, McBride

Though he claims his days are only 24 hours long, Guy's CV would indicate otherwise. His many professional sidelines have included pilot (fixed-wing and helicopter), sailor, rancher, filmmaker, military trainer and television producer. Skiing, however, trumps them all. "Especially as I get older I feel incredibly privileged," says the father of four who's about to start his 33rd season of guiding. "And I love it more every winter." Guy's off-season (as if he has one) involved travelling to Norway to prepare for an upcoming reality TV series set in Canada's Arctic. In classic understatement, he admits his partner, Judy, is "the world's most understanding wife."







Solve Sundsbo

Guest, London, UK

How many top fashion photographers can say that their original inspiration came from a ski magazine? Just this one. “I always loved skiing,” says the Norwegian-born Sundsbo. “I remember being 13 at a work experience in a sports shop, reading all the magazines and watching the videos. I told myself, ‘One day I’ll ski the Cariboos.’” That he did, but only after storming his profession with a simple, artful style that’s appeared in everything from top advertising to *Vogue* magazine to a Coldplay album—and even an Emmy-award-winning 2011 film documentary. His next dream? “Bringing my four kids to CMH.”



Gary Tarna

Guest, Tokyo, Japan

New York-born Gary’s family moved to Tokyo when he was 14, where, except for studying at the University of Southern California, he eventually settled into the family business of pearl trading. A one-time ski patroller in the Japanese Alps—he’s fully bilingual—Tarna was 32 when he made his first trip to CMH. Forty visits and some six million vertical feet later, his twice-annual Monashees adventures are a cherished ritual. And though his trading business has expanded to general luxury goods, he can still spot a perfect gem: “There’s absolutely nothing better in skiing than the tree lines at the Monashees.”



A SKI

finds a home

Not content with just a short stay, the folks at K2 Sports are going all in. Behold, the CMH K2 Rotor Lodge is about to be born.

FOR THE PAST FOUR SEASONS, ski designers and professional freeriders from K2 Sports have kept a regular date on the CMH calendar. They even get to call it work, given the fact they toil dawn to dusk testing new ski designs and charging big lines for the likes of Warren Miller Films.

Well, it turns out that a giant corporation like K2 has a mindset much like an ordinary Heli-Skiing warrior in that, sometime around Day 5, the question invariably bubbles up: “Why am I not doing this all season long?” Thus, last spring, when CMH happened to ask if K2 might fancy a more permanent residency, the company also answered exactly as any skier would if he could: “Hell, yeah! When do we start?”

This season will therefore witness the birth of CMH K2 in the quaint lakeside town of Nakusp, formerly CMH Kootenay. “It was an easy sell,” says Mike Gutt, K2’s Global Marketing Manager. “We’ve had such a positive experience, first at the Monashees, and especially for the past two seasons at Kootenay. It’s a cool place where everything resonates with the K2 vibe—the town, the mentality, the terrain. The staff were very receptive, but so were the other guests whose visits coincided with ours. Last year over half of them asked when we were coming next season, so they could book the same week.”

That’s going to be a lot easier now, according to CMH’s Director of Brand Strategy, Marty von Neudegg. “We’re just sorting out the details,” he said in July, “but we expect to run all 14 weeks of three-, four- and five-day sessions in which ordinary CMH skiers get to rub shoulders with K2 pros like Seth Morrison, Sean Pettit and Andy Mahre. There will be a variety of themes to choose from, including film shoots, women’s programs and equipment testing.” It’s a new idea for everyone, he says, and sure to be a work in progress. “But imagine, a ski company with its own Heli-Ski lodge. It’s going to make a lot of people in the ski industry very jealous.”

Von Neudegg points out that the two companies share a lot of DNA. “We’re both around the same age. K2 will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2013, and CMH will do the same in 2015. And both of us were heavily into freeriding decades before that term was even invented.”

Obviously, freeriding is the core of K2’s ski and snowboard business. The company doesn’t even make race skis, says Gutt. “The whole world is moving toward the freeriding ethic, even in Europe, where racing has traditionally driven the industry. But last season, for the first time, our unit volume over there actually exceeded North America’s.”

One of the principal benefits for CMH will be even more concentrated research and development of future powder tools. “Our fleet of K2 skis is already popular with our clients,” says von Neudegg. “That’s partly because they’ve had a great place to test all sorts of flex patterns, rocker shapes and sidecuts, plus the energy to really get after it, design-wise. With that process now going on all season long, it can only make for better skis.”

The other renovation task relates to the lodge itself, which Gutt promises will have a full makeover in the madcap K2 style that readers of ski magazines know very well. “We’re not talking about a few posters here and there,” he says. “Every room will have its own decor. It’s going to be super funky.” Expect the K2 Sasquatch to make an appearance, too, leading pub crawls and impromptu plunges into crystal-clear Upper Arrow Lake.

Not that this deal needs sweetening, but Gutt reveals one tangible bonus for every single rider who books a session at CMH K2. “You’ll get a free pair of next year’s K2 skis of your choice the following autumn.”

As they say in the co-branding business, how’s that for a value proposition? 🍁



This could be you. And to top it off, every visitor to CMH K2 gets a free pair of next year's K2 skis.



Ordinarily, giant, hairy hominids don't give orders. But at K2, they like to do things a little differently.



CMH Heli-Skiing
PO Box 1660, 217 Bear Street
Banff, Alberta
T1L 1J6 Canada

(403) 762.7100
info@cmhinc.com



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