

HOW TO SKI THE BLUES AND BLACKS (WITHOUT GETTING BLACK AND BLUE)

TLH HELISKIING, April 18, 2000

“HELISKIING”

By Craig McNeil

Last winter I had the opportunity to fulfill the dream of a lifetime – helicopter skiing with TLH Heliskiing at Tyax Mountain Lake Resort in British Columbia. After reading and hearing about such an experience, I at last had the chance to find out what it was all about.

TLH Heliskiing

TLH Heliskiing is located in the Chilcotin Mountains of Western Canada, about 125 miles north of Vancouver. With copious amounts of Pacific moisture, the quality and consistency of the snow was similar to the light dry powder we find here in Colorado. The average yearly snowfall is between forty and sixty feet in a season that lasts from December to April.

TLH is considered on of the top five Heliskiing operations in Canada. The difference with TLH Heliskiing is the number of groups assigned to each helicopter. A group usually consists of 11 people plus a guide. Unlike other operations that assign four groups per helicopter, TLH only assigns two. So while one group is being dropped off at the top of the mountain the other group is skiing and arriving at the bottom. Both groups depart from and return to the lodge via



helicopter on skiing days. Therefore there are no bus rides and no extended waiting times from one run to the next. You start and finish each day via helicopter.

What this translates into is more skiing, more vertical runs and more powder with less waiting around. The average vertical per group is around 25,000 feet per day. Packages range in length from two to seven days, with the amount of skiing determined by several factors: the skiing ability of your group, the amount you want to ski, the weather and the snow conditions.

Safety Considerations

I approached the trip to British Columbia with both excitement and apprehension. Excitement over the thought of endless runs with bottomless, untracked powder, apprehension about my safety with helicopters and avalanches in the backcountry. Any fears that I had were put to rest shortly after my arrival.

The pilots that fly the helicopters are carefully selected based on qualifications and their experience flying in the mountains and the helicopter maintenance is provided by an on site team of seasoned engineers.

The ski guides are all international - and Canadian – certified mountain guides, a stringent process that takes between three and six years. They are chosen not only for their guiding skills and qualifications, but for their experience and outgoing

personalities as well. They balance exciting and challenging skiing with the safety and enjoyment of the group. These guys are seasoned pros who know their jobs and do them well.

Bottomless Snow

Heliskiing offers the true essence of skiing. The beauty and serenity of the backcountry combined with abundance of snow in off-piste conditions. This truly was an experience that you can only imagine in your dreams until you experience it firsthand.

Skiing bottomless snow is unique in that there is no base under your feet supporting you. Push your ski pole down and it keeps going. This type of skiing requires a confidence in your ability to turn and control your speed while skiing the fall line.

Although the terrain ranges from easy to extreme, and the groups are divided according to ability, you should be a strong blue-level skier who has had some experience in powder snow. The stronger you are and the better shape you are in, the better you'll do in getting around and managing the terrain and conditions.

Ironically, it's not the skiing that takes work but the energy it takes to get up after a fall. Because the snow

is so deep, once you fall there is nothing to give any leverage, so you end up wallowing around because the snow is so deep. As a result it takes a tremendous amount of effort and energy to stand up and get back on your feet. But there are ways to make life easier.

The ski of choice at TLH Heliskiing was the Volant Chubb, a ski made right here in our own backyard. Although there were other fat skis available, the “Chubb” was the ski of choice for the guides as well as the guests. A fat ski such as the Chubb is the only way to go in deep bottomless conditions. A fat ski is specifically designed for powder and off-piste conditions and will reduce the amount of energy it takes to make your skis turn. Because of their width (they are twice as wide as a normal slalom ski), fat skis will allow you to float from one turn to the next. The less you work physically, the more you have to enjoy your skiing.

For more information on TLH Heliskiing call 1 800 667 4854.
