

North Canoe glacier



## Peter Stanley-Jones tries heli-hiking in Canada's beautiful Columbia mountains.

**H**uddling together on hard-packed snow, my group of eight fellow walkers watched the red and white helicopter gracefully soar away, leaving us in a wonderful silence that seemed to intensify by the second. "This is only the second time anyone has been up here this season", explained Paul, our guide, as we looked around in awe at an amphitheatre of towering peaks that seemed to encircle us. Over the next four hours we picked our way down the stunning mountainside and along the valley, passing iridescent glacial lakes, ancient prospecting equipment long-abandoned by miners, ptarmigans, marmots and delicate wild flowers. All the while Paul patiently and engagingly interpreted the flora, fauna and the grand geological features before us. Eventually, after a hard earned lunch with a view to die for, we were collected by Ted, the helicopter pilot, for an exhilarating ride past jagged ridges and precipitous peaks to a lush green Alpine meadow where the adventure began all over again in entirely different surroundings. Late afternoon saw us, exhausted but thrilled, heading back to Bugaboo Lodge for tomato-basil bruschetta and a glass of sauvignon blanc.

Thunderwater Lake



Paul at the morning drop-off

Wild flowers in the mountains



Bugaboo Lodge, with its panoramic views of the towering Bugaboo Spires and three separate glaciers, would be a worthy destination in its own right even without heli-hiking. It is set in beautiful, inaccessible back country that would take days to trek to and has an emphasis on informality that naturally suits its surroundings. Dining is of an exceptionally high standard where guests are joined by the charming guides, and for those who have the energy after a hard day's walking and a fine dinner, the lounge beckons, with its library and selection of board games as well as the roaring open log fire that dominates the room.

# MOUNTAIN HIGH

Austrian-born Hans Gmoser pioneered this heli-hiking experience in 1978 in the Columbia Mountains of British Columbia. These mountains run closely parallel to the Canadian Rockies which form the provincial boundary with Alberta. Environmental stewardship is close to the heart of the whole operation and Parks Canada, Travel Alberta, Tourism British Columbia and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) have all awarded them for environmentally sustainable practices.

During my visit the youngest guest was Abbey, aged 12 months, and the oldest was Margaret, aged 80, demonstrating that it really is an activity open to everyone.

Guests are sorted into groups by fitness and their own aspirations. The guides are highly trained, enthusiastic and experienced mountaineers, all with a tale to tell. After all, everyone wants to know what it was like when you climbed Mount Everest! Guides move to a different group each day so the first may be an expert on the geological landscape while another might

stand in a pit dug by grizzly bears and focus on the region's wildlife that includes moose, caribou, wolves and mountain goats.

After three fabulous days, I tried to work out just what was the magic ingredient that made this trip so special. Impossible: there are too many vital factors that all come together to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. However, for those who have limited time and want to enjoy walking in a variety of pristine wilderness terrains – peaks, ridges, meadows and glaciers – while enjoying the serenity and comfort of a magnificently placed mountain lodge, there can be no better way of doing it.

## Peter Stanley-Jones

Regional Manager – Canada, Alaska and the Arctic

### WEB PLUS

[www.audley.co.uk/traveller/spring08](http://www.audley.co.uk/traveller/spring08)

For further details of the different lodges, a detailed map of their locations, and answers to frequently asked questions about heli-hiking



View of Bugaboo Spires from Bugaboo Lodge



Bugaboo Lodge



Peter on Black Forest ridge

## Win a heli-hiking trip in the Columbia mountains

Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH), Travel Alberta and Tourism British Columbia have kindly donated a week-long trip to the mountains of British Columbia and Alberta, including three days heli-hiking and three nights in Banff, two days car hire, return flights and transfers. To enter the competition, simply send your answers to the following questions before 23rd May 2008 to Heli-hiking Competition, Audley Travel, New Mill, New Mill Lane, Witney, Oxfordshire OX29 9SX or [heli-hiking@audleytravel.com](mailto:heli-hiking@audleytravel.com). The winner will be drawn at random from the correct entrants.

*Which was Canada's first ever National Park?*

*Where is the site of the remarkable UNESCO-recognised fossil beds in British Columbia?*

*Which mountain in the Rockies is named after a WWI nurse?*

*What is the name of the highest peak in the Canadian Rocky Mountains?*

*Name the four mountain ranges that make up the Columbia Mountains.*

### A FEW SMALL DETAILS

Only one entry per person is permitted. Employees, plus family and friends of Audley, Canadian Mountain Holidays, Travel Alberta and Tourism British Columbia are excluded. There can be no cash substitute for the prize. The flights and accommodation must be used in conjunction with each other and must be used before 1st December 2009 subject to availability. The competition is only open to over 18s. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.

## FACT FILE

A two-week tailor-made trip to include three days' heli-hiking in the Columbia Mountains and a self-drive trip from Calgary to Vancouver would cost from £3,300 per person between late June and early September, including all transfers, accommodation, car hire and return flights. For details please contact our Canada specialists on 01993 838 700.



Descending to the flower meadows of Silver Basin