



Unplugged in Canada

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*Excerpts from an article arising from a visit to  
Canadian Adventure Company's Mallard Mountain Lodge  
in the Summer of 2014.*

*For the full article, visit*

[http://www.premiertravelerusa.com/Unplugged\\_in\\_Canada/76/2353.aspx](http://www.premiertravelerusa.com/Unplugged_in_Canada/76/2353.aspx)

With an eye to going truly off the grid, Matt Bell went in search of adventure and found himself in British Columbia's backcountry.

The land was soft and giving, like a waterbed made out of moss, so I pressed into it with my entire body. It was the quietest I could ever remember. No planes, cars or other people—just a languid breeze and the periodic whistle of a marmot. In the primordial, pine-scented air, my brain found the kind of stress relief no pill could possibly provide and, finally, on that ridge in Mallard Mountain Valley, I found an intermission from my month-long battle with insomnia.

We were about 1,000 feet—a hike of about an hour and a half—above our home base. The Mallard Mountain Lodge is set deep in British Columbia's Rocky Mountain backcountry, adjacent to Jasper National Park, at about 6,700 feet above sea level. This is Canadian government land, and few have been here since Canada's most revered explorer, David Thompson, first "discovered" this wilderness while searching for new fur trading routes in the 19th century.

In 1998, five valleys were granted on concession to Derek McManus, known as one of the founding fathers of snowcat skiing. He created the Canadian Adventure Company (CAC) in order to share the year-round wonders of this wilderness with only a few travelers at a time.

The closest road is a logging capillary, about 11 miles away. In fact, everything and everyone at the cabin—including me—arrived via a dazzling, 30-minute helicopter ride over jagged peaks, a ride originating in the small town of Valemount, itself a four-hour road trip from the closest airport (in Kamloops).

### HOME SWEET CABIN

The pine cabin (and everything in it) was put together in six weeks, much like a puzzle. There's no cell or Wi-Fi service, just a satellite phone in case of emergency. As soon as we touched down, the world I had left behind was obscured to near nothingness beyond the misty clouds that had settled over the mountains.

We were five guests, plus three members of CAC—Derek, an affable, yet stoic man; his soft-spoken wife Barbara; and their 34-year-old son and guide, Paul.

### OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF AWESOME

True, cabin life was not luxurious, but the real return came with the exhilarating opportunity to be the only people (and among the first) to experience this landscape. The outdoors is the real star of this show.

A colossal reverie of snowy peaks, remote waterfalls and crystal-clear streams, the area is dotted with a menagerie of sapphire-colored alpine lakes and marshy fens that seem like they could have been plucked right out of a fairy tale. Couches of easygoing ridges perch over rivers of lichen-covered boulders and sweeping, evergreen forests that might never have known the bottom of a hiking boot or felt the glide of a pair of skis.

### NATURAL WANDERS

One afternoon, we ambled past a minefield of quartz, “which means that there might be gold around here,” Paul said, brandishing the knowledge he'd gained from the book on DIY gold-mining that he'd been reading. We lunched before the majesty of the Continental Divide, which is on full display from Mallard Valley's East Ridge. I'll never forget the morning we passed an emerald-green lake and two of us dove in. “You're the first people to swim here,” Paul said with a proud smile. He clearly enjoys his role as guide.