

The dream of loneliness

# Jewelry box in the ROCKY MOUNTAINS

TEXT | PHOTOS GÜNTER KAST



Note added by Canadian Adventure Company's Mallard Mountain Lodge, November, 2023.

This article by Günter Kast from his visit with us in Winter 2023, has been published in German in several European Magazines, including "Snow", which Günter describes as "the most important skitouring magazine in the the German speaking market."

What you are reading here is a Google Translation of the article.

Some of the text is "lost in translation", but the message of his "dream" experience with us is very clear. Enjoy!

Deep in the mountains of British Columbia, the McManus family has fulfilled a dream: their Mallard Mountain Lodge, accessible only by helicopter, is the perfect base camp for ski tours in absolute solitude.

Stay overnight before the helicopter flight to the hut  
The I in Valemount. Although this is one of the main towns in the Mount Robson Valley, in the very east of the Canadian province of British Columbia, only around 1,000 people live here. Now, at the weekend, it is estimated that just as many "sleders" will arrive: snowmobile tourists with their noisy Machines that haunt the valleys and forests around Valemount, "armed" with thick suits and full-face helmets. They look at my ski touring equipment, which I carry into the hotel, with raised eyebrows. There's no doubt about it: they think the idea of climbing a mountain with climbing skins under their skis and pure muscle power is very exotic.

The next morning, at the heli-port, I meet like-minded people : five tall boys around 40 who have been together since school and who have traveled from Quebec, the French-speaking province in eastern Canada. The Rocky Mountains are at least as exciting for them as they are for me, and the mood is correspondingly excited. It's also been a long time since they've been traveling without their wives, children and family. They are looking forward to the Boyz trip like crazy. We are all warmly welcomed by Paul McManus, whose family owns the Mallard Mountain Lodge, which will be our home for a whole week should be. I ask him about the many snowmobile pilots.

"Don't worry," he says calmly, "they'll give us the terrain

Don't argue with me."

When we were in the air with the helicopter

On the way to the lodge, I understand what Paul means.

The flight takes a good half an hour - none of the four dozen or so private cabins in the province's seemingly endless mountains are as secluded as those of the McManus family. We penetrate deep into these hidden under a thick blanket of snow.

gene wonder world. Yes, it is this absolute loneliness that magically attracts us. There are plenty of huts and ski touring peaks in the Alps. But also masses of people. When we land, Valemount is the next town, the nearest road is more than a hundred kilometers away. When we get out we sink knee-deep into the white splendor. Paul had indeed a winter with below-average snow depths. But Canadians are apparently spoiled by Ms. Holle more often than we Europeans.

#### EXCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND

Mike Packham is already waiting at the hut. Our guide knows that we are excited about the crystals made of frozen water and want to go straight away. So quickly check your avalanche equipment and head to the powder! "Quiet, brownie," says Mike with a wink. "Nobody disputes the First Tracks with you." He's right. Rushing would be out of place. This playground belongs to us alone. But that also means that we have to create the ascent path ourselves. Luckily, Mike has the strength of two grizzlies that have been spotted here in the summer but are now hibernating. We climb higher and higher. Marvel at Mallard Peak, which gave the hut its name.

Our first departure is called "Dessert". A dream. At the bottom we immediately fall asleep again, wanting more of this tempting "dessert" because the snow is so wonderfully fluffy. When we put the skis down at the hut, our eyes light up. And yes, the thighs glow too...

Only now do we realize what a jewel box we live in. The hut is small but nice. You immediately notice: >





# TRAUMTOUR



1 At night the fulfills

Lodge even stronger  
Clichés of all "winter-in-  
Canada" addicts.

2 The helicopter takes off  
the guests directly in front of the  
Lodge - it couldn't be  
more convenient.

3 Such virgins  
Unfortunately, touring  
conditions in the Alps are poor  
become rare.









**T**RAUMTOUR

Blowing powder snow  
up to your ears: it's worth it  
the long journey.







Someone has made their personal dream come true. On the ground floor, the wood stove roars and exudes cozy warmth. Matao serves focaccia with olives as an appetizer. We were a bit skeptical about the 21-year-old chef: can he do that, as young as he is? After the first dinner with steelhead trout cooked in salt, we know: Yes, he can do it!

### TRUE FAMILY BUSINESS

Quality is a common thread in everything the McManus family does. At least that's the impression you get when you hear Paul tell you how his dad came to be a lodge host in this inaccessible corner of British Columbia.

Paul's parents, Derek and Barbara, grew up in Calgary, Alberta on. Derek made his living as a lawyer, but his true passion was always skiing. He knew them

Heliski pioneers Mike Wiegele and Hans Gmoser personally and were one of the first to set up a catski business. For the In retirement he bought a farm near Salmon Arm

Southern British Columbia, where he raises llamas and alpacas. At one point, Derek asked his sons Paul and Jason if they would be involved if he built a cabin in the backcountry. "We were both immediately excited," says Paul. "We set about finding the best place for our project, using Google Maps and helicopter flights."

### FIVE VALLEYS FULL OF FRESH POWDER

First they explored the mountains around Revelstoke, but some had already taken root there. "It couldn't be lonely and remote enough for my dad," Paul remembers.

And so they ended up here, very close to the Athabasca Pass on the Alberta border, which was an important crossing in the early 19th century for the Hudson Bay Company fur traders led by cartographer David Thompson.

The following day the smell of fresh coffee wakes us up. It snowed another 20 centimeters overnight. We



① Derek and Barbara have been enthusiastic tourers for decades.

② Son Paul looks after the guests of the lodge personally.

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Within a radius of over 100 kilometers

**” MATAO IS THE  
BEST COOK.**

He is also the only one.

“Boss” Matao is still there  
young in years, but  
cooks like a grown-up –  
sometimes outdoors.

Sun and virgin powder as far as  
the eye can see. This is how  
you imagine a ski touring adventure  
in den Rocky Mountains vor.





# TRAUMTOUR

So you could do the same runs again without having to miss out on virgin powder. But there is so much new to discover. Five valleys can be seen from the hut

Reach day tour. Each one has bowls and peaks of varying difficulty, so there is something for every level.

## NEVER-RIDED RUNS IN ABSOLUTE SOLENESS

Because the clouds have now cleared, we set off for the valley behind the Mallard massif. Must do again and again

Guide Mike takes the saw out of his backpack to create a way through the dense coniferous forest. He calls it "bushwhacking". We bravely fight our way through the woods, and as a reward we reach runs that have never been ridden before. We can even give them names. So we feel a bit like professional freeriders in a spectacular ski movie. Outdoor people often claim that they feel exposed and small in the midst of great nature. Most of the time it sounds trite and cliché. But this is where it actually hits the point. And that's why we are very defensively under-

away. Nobody wants to trigger an avalanche or get injured in this solitude.

If you burn a lot of calories, you should  
Eat well – nothing is easier than that  
at Mallard Mountain Lodge.

In the evening, Matao treats us to osso buco, which tastes as Italian as in Milan, where the braised dish was invented.

There is also red wine from cartons. Not entirely in keeping with the style, but glass bottles would be too heavy to transport in a helicopter. In general, the hut logistics at what feels like the end of the world are not that easy. That started with construction. "We put the lodge in the valley together in advance to see if everything fit," says Paul. "Then we disassembled it into its individual parts and flew it to its final location." The winter of 2014/15 was the first season. More than ten years had already passed

has been going on since the "go" for the lease agreement, which stipulates what is allowed in the area, the so-called "tenure", and what is not. In this case: ski and snowshoe tours in the winter

ter, but no heliski and of course no snowmobile safaris.

"More and more hikers come in the summer," says Paul happily.

"Mountain bike trips would also be possible, but we would have to create trails first." The hut also had to be open to guests. "We wouldn't have gotten a building permit just for private use."

Above all, the hostel should be functional. Solar panels on the roof provide electricity, and a diesel generator is available as back-up. The stove is powered by propane gas, the fireplace burns wood that has been cut itself. The outhouse is in a hut next door, so going out at night or in a snowstorm can be a bit of an expedition. For showering, mix cold water over the stove

heated water, carries the bucket up to the first floor and creates a "bucket shower" in the bathroom with a rope and carabiner. You sleep in bunk beds with curtains for some privacy.

## MAXIMUM OF SIX TOURERS

The real luxury is the huge playground around the hut.

On the few days it doesn't snow, you can see as far as Jasper National Park, looking at sharp peaks that look like a Canadian version of the Matterhorn. In addition, there is the privilege of being able to travel in a group of only six people. "Nobody flies so few guests to such a remote cabin," is how Paul and Derek summarize their unique selling point. We, the customers, feel this. We are becoming more and more calm. The hustle and bustle of everyday life and also the hustle and bustle of ski tours at home are gone from us. For a moment, quietly lost in thought

We'll follow wordlessly, sometimes cracking jokes, in the coming days Mike through the snow-covered landscape and marvel

fresh traces of mountain hares, martens and weasels. Quebecers can't get enough of the descents in heavy powder. We fall asleep again and again, on some days up to seven times, until just before dark we return tired and satisfied to our cozy hostel in the middle of the white solitude.

When we once again praise Matao for his skills and him

When someone attests that he is the best chef around, he just shrugs his shoulders and says: "It's not that difficult. Because I have no competition within a radius of at least a hundred kilometers.

renz." After dinner we treat ourselves to a whiskey, play cards or let the day's experiences pass us by while we look into the blazing fire. Nobody misses here

Television and computers. Paul grabs the old acoustic guitar instead and tunes almost like he's in a bad mood

Cliché country songs. Of course, "Rocky Mountain High" by John Denver should not be missing. The song just fits here too well.





Info-Box:

## THE ROAD TO MALLARD MOUNTAIN HUT

There is still a lot of ski touring in British Columbia less popular sport than in the Alps.

There are several reasons for this: long distances, non-widespread avalanches reports, but also missing huts and Bases. A "normal" tour quickly turns into a logistically demanding expedition with a tent, pulka and heavy luggage. If you want something more comfortable, book a guided tour week at the Mallard Mountain Lodge, which can only be reached by helicopter.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

[www.hellobc.com](http://www.hellobc.com)

[www.visitvalemount.ca](http://www.visitvalemount.ca)

[www.thompsonokanagan.com](http://www.thompsonokanagan.com)

**ARRIVAL:** With Air Canada ([www.aircanada.com](http://www.aircanada.com)) – Ski touring equipment travels free of charge – to Vancouver and on to Prince

George. It's best to rent a car there rent and drive to Valemount (300 kilometers). After a night in „Best Western PLUS Valemount Inn & Suites“ ([www.bestwesternvalemount.com](http://www.bestwesternvalemount.com)) drives one the following morning to the near one Heli-Port, where the participants of the Tour week meeting.

**ENTRY:** At least six months left Valid passport and ETA registration: [www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/eta.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/eta.asp)

**ORGANIZER:**

Canadian Adventure Company, Derek McManus, [www.canadianadventurecompany.com](http://www.canadianadventurecompany.com), T: +1-250-835-4516, E-Mail: [info@cacld.ca](mailto:info@cacld.ca); The season begins on December 28, 2023 and ends on April 28, 2024. A week of touring from Valemount costs approximately 3,360 euros per person including helicopter flight,

Guiding and all meals. You can bring your own alcohol.

**VANCOUVER:** For the largest city in British

You should definitely take a few days to visit Columbia ([www.destinationvan-couver.com](http://www.destinationvan-couver.com)). "The Fairmont Vancouver Airport" ([www.fairmont.com/vancouver-airport-richmond](http://www.fairmont.com/vancouver-airport-richmond)) is perfect for overnight stays before and after connecting flights. You sleep in soundproof rooms

Rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows which you can see directly onto the airfield. Authentic Vietnamese cuisine served the "Phnom Penh" (<https://phnompenhres-aurant.ca>) in the heart of China Town. The Local has been voted "Best South" several times East Asian Restaurant" (make sure you make a reservation!). The Vancouver Experience Pass offers many discounts.

