

{ DEEP RUNS THE MEADOW }

A JOURNEY THROUGH POWDER
SKIING'S BLUE-COLLAR BIRTHPLACE
UNCOVERS MORE THAN JUST BIG
MOUNTAINS AND DEEP SNOW



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SMILEY SWALLOWS... MORE POW.

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BUSTING OFF A MILLION HITS
ON THE WAY BACK TO THE CAT,
IT'S HARD NOT TO THINK THAT
BRAD IS ONE OF THE SMARTEST
GUYS ON THE PLANET.

A 20-minute snow-mobile ride down the road

from all this action hides Meadow Creek. Less a town than a gas station and lumber mill plus their few associated home-steads, Meadow Creek is B.C.'s cat-skiing ground zero. Which, for just another one of the hundreds of tiny villages that populate the Interior, happens to be quite a claim. But it's true. Two hours north of Nelson, three hours southeast of Revelstoke, a million miles from the nearest airport or urban centre, on the border between pavement and gravel—literally—the 200-resident settlement hidden at the north end of Kootenay Lake, deep in the heart of the Selkirk Mountains, is the actual birthplace of powder skiing's blue-collar experience.

With three cat operations and a heli-ski outfit in the works, it's possible that Meadow Creek has more per-capita residents working in the powder-ski industry than any other town in North America. What were grand visions 30 years ago have turned into a culture that not only deeply affects those who come here to ski but the fabric of the town itself. Highland Powder Skiing, White Grizzly Adventures and Selkirk Wilderness Skiing all operate base lodges within walking distance of each other, yet each offers a distinctly unique product, one that when experienced in conjunction, as we did early last March, is the quintessential backwoods powder-skiing experience.

2,400 metres up in the sky above lies the summit of 2,648-metre White Grizzly Peak. Fifteen centimetres of fresh glistens under the glare of a late-afternoon sun. Peter Lauber, a non-typical Swiss-born guide and diehard skier, pushes in a boot-pack past a gallery of incredible chutes and pillow lines. We're forging to the high point of White Grizzly Adventures' snowcat tenure, one of the more distinctive operations in the cat-skiing milieu, and another critical piece of the Meadow Creek powder experience.

Owned and operated by Brad and Carole Karafil, White Grizzly, which enters its eighth season this winter, inhabits a beautiful spot of burl a quick crow flight from Selkirk Wilderness to the south, across the Lardeau River valley from Highland to the northeast. The Karafils' intimate operation sees only 12 skiers per week on a mountainside that's largely northeast-facing, where snow falls deep and dark on steep rock gardens and 35- to 45-degree tree shots that drop over 1,000 metres without a bench. Guests stay in a cozy log cabin, eat gourmet French-Canadian cuisine cooked by Carole herself, satisfactorily blown and hungry from trying to keep up to Peter, White Grizzly's lead guide. It is one of few cat operations catering directly to experienced skiers, and it does so very well.

From just below the summit of White Grizzly Peak, I stare out at a landscape that looks as if it was designed by a god who loved to ski.

"This place is perfect," says Lauber, a hand-rolled cigarette hanging out the side of his mouth, wool toque pulled low over his ears, his beaten and battered, duct-taped Langes resting on an old lichen-covered rock.

"This is why I do what I do," adds Brad, who built the franchise. "I'm in this for the skiing, plain and simple. If I can't ski every day, that's the day I'll move on to something else."

And as we drop another steep, beautiful chute, down into glades, off one of a million hits on the way back down to the cat, which will take us to frosty beers and wonderful food and big comfortable beds, it's hard not to think Brad and Peter might be two of the smartest guys on the planet.



SMILEY SWALLOWS... HIS COURAGE.