

[Excerpt]

“The Powder Triangle”

In British Columbia, snow junkies find heli-skiing conditions for the cost of a lift ticket.

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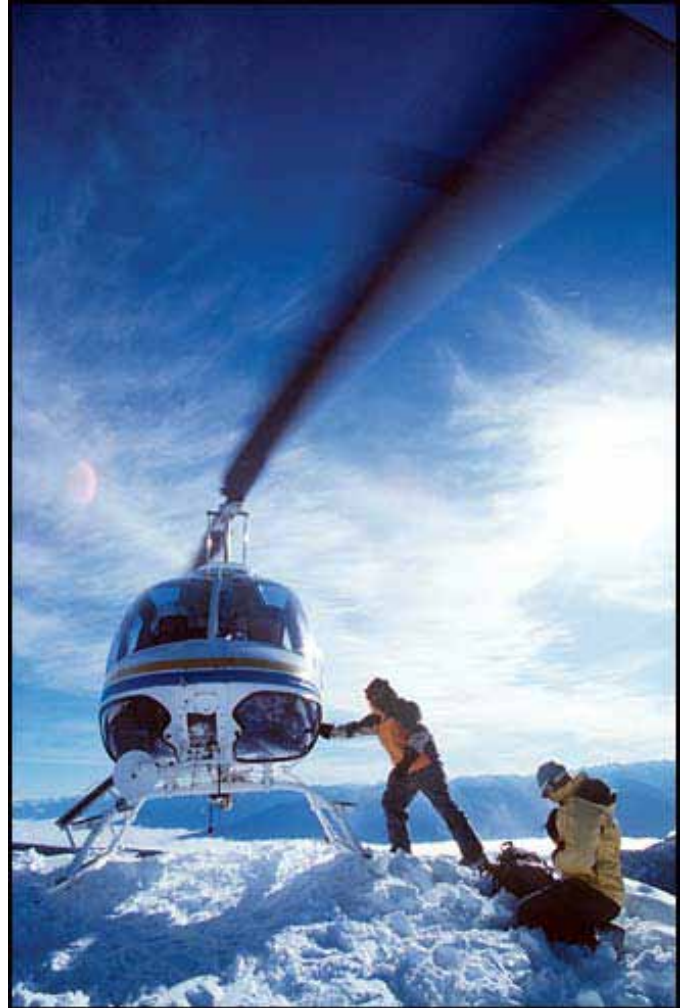
It was raining when we left Nelson, British Columbia, and it was raining when we parked in the mud on the west side of Kootenay Lake. It was raining when we unloaded the snowmobiles and it was raining when we gunned our way up the slushy, sloppy logging track. It was raining, raining like it would never stop. Then, suddenly, it wasn't raining anymore. The drops splattering my goggles had turned to flakes. Climbing higher, we'd crossed the magical temperature barrier, and the dark evergreens, which had dripped at lake level, were frozen and heavy with snow, flocked like a fantasyland. The skies had been closed for weeks, since before we arrived in Canada. But now it was snowing, snowing like it would never stop.

The track ended after ten miles in a huge, gorgeous amphitheater of cliffs and peaks and trees, and we killed the engines, stepped up to our hips in soft snow, and unloaded our skis. Then we pushed higher still, breaking trail under our own power, zigzagging upward until at last we reached a ridge and declared ourselves high enough. Below us was a perfect powder pitch—nearly 40 degrees—studded with massive Douglas firs. Their trunks were fat and dark; the corridors between them, white and inviting. I felt like saying grace.

THE BEAST WITH 40 FEET

Deep-powder skiing has a way of getting under your skin and driving you farther and farther afield in search of untracked slopes. It is an increasingly rare experience at U.S. resorts, thanks mainly to heavy traffic, but in the hidden, southeastern corner of British Columbia, where powerful Gulf of Alaska storms shed their fury, you can find helicopter-skiing conditions for the cost of a lift ticket—and a cheap lift ticket at that.

Average annual snowfall in this wedge of the province can top 40 feet (12 meters), and a ski area



Blade Runners: A helicopter ride gives Casimiro and his team a taste of B.C.'s mythic, untracked runs. *Photo by Steve Casimiro*

might see just 2,000 visitors on a busy weekend. In the subculture of deep-snow aficionados, it's known simply as the Powder Triangle, and it is hal-
lowed ground.