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**A Great Day of Cat Skiing**

**By Lachlan Brown**

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Snowcat skiing offers strong-intermediate and expert skiers the ultimate powder snow experience.

Operators provide full-service guided tours into remote high-mountain regions. Powder snow and "fresh tracks" are the norm. Uphill transportation is provided by a tracked snowcat having warm, comfortable cabs. They usually accommodate 12 guests, two guides and a driver.

Some snowcat operators are based in towns or near highways and offer guests continued access to "civilization". In some cases, guests use local hotels and restaurants for accommodation and meals. Such operators may offer single-day trips.

Other snowcat operators use remote lodges high in the mountains, far from cars and telephones. These lodges provide a multi-day backcountry experience in the midst of pristine alpine wilderness. They also place guests very close to their skiing.

Many backcountry "cat skiing" lodges offer double-occupancy bedrooms complete with private ensuite baths. They have cozy and comfortable sitting areas, dining halls with cathedral ceilings, drying rooms for boots and outside clothing, games rooms, well-stocked bars and "commercial" kitchens. They offer exercise areas, video players, satellite telephones, perhaps a computer with Internet access and, of course, a well-stocked bar. Guests can enjoy a social drink and spectacular views while luxuriating in an outdoor hot tub, and then step right to their bedrooms for a shower or a nap.

No special equipment is required for cat skiing, just boots and clothing. Powder skis can be rented at the lodge. However, snowboarders should bring their own boards. Guests will make the most of their snowcat skiing tour by being in good physical condition.

Lodge life is informal and relaxed. Juice and fruit and coffee are served at 7:00 AM and a buffet breakfast is available at about 7:30. Snowcats depart between 8:30 and 9:00, when guests are ready.

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The first day of a tour is special. Guides take the first hour or so to make sure guests understand safety procedures. Everyone has practice using the radio beacons that the operator supplies. No one goes out without one.

The first run of the day is rarely more than 20 minutes from the lodge and the last run of the day can end at the lodge door. During the day, the group moves around, sampling different areas and never staying long in any one spot. Each run is in fresh, untracked snow.

On "bluebird" days, the guide will head for the high alpine. Perhaps for two or three runs on a glacier before trying the big open slopes, taking a run or two in each before heading to the next. The highest skiing elevation can be close to 10,000 ft and the views are spectacular. There is always time to pause for pictures.

If visibility is poor or if the alpine snow is unstable, it's off to one of the many ridges to "ski the trees". Tree skiing is amazing! The tree-protected snow is usually deeper and softer than in the alpine. It is consistent, light, and there are no moguls. The short, fat "powder skis" are easy to control. Forget the trees. Just ski the openings! Intermediate skiers who may never before have skied in trees find that they can not only do it, but that it's fun.

In the old burns, the trees are gnarly, but very widely spaced. The living forest has closer-spaced trees, but offers beautiful glades and tree stands that may have been thinned. Some of the glades are as open as some ski-area runs. The old cut-blocks are great fun. Snow-buried stumps create "pillows", small mounds to ski around or "pop" off. Landings are nearly always the same, soft and forgiving. It's amazing!

Guests team up in pairs in the trees and the guide keeps a watchful eye. No one gets separated. When a guest "augers in", his partner or the tail guide or someone else is close at hand to assist.

The speed of the group depends on it's ability. A group of good skiers may ski non-stop to the bottom; perhaps 1800 or 2000 ft. of pure joy, with lots of "whoops" and hollers". Slower groups will stop more often to rest, share experiences, take pictures and "smell the roses".

Guides are very responsive to the needs of the group. The guests set the pace. There is no pressure to maximize equipment usage. Each group has a dedicated snowcat that moves at the pleasure of the group. Guides are expert at providing for different skiers in their group. Stronger skiers may enjoy some "steeps", "drop-offs" or other challenges, while others are guided down more "mellow" lines.

By the end of the day, everyone is tired out. Guests who tire early can "sit out" a run and keep the driver company on the way back down the hill. If a guest wants to quit for the day, a staff member will shuttle them back to the lodge on a snowmobile. It's all very relaxed and very friendly.

Packed lunches are eaten in the snowcats, as guests feel hungry. It's possible to browse all day on a selection of sandwiches, wraps, cakes, cookies, buns and drinks. "Hip flasks" are definitely NOT welcome. Guides are extremely safety conscious and they want guests to be alert and functioning well at all times.

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At 4:00pm, guests are welcomed back at the lodge with special snacks or hot soup. Guests then have over two hours to relax, shower, read, play pool, soak in the hot tub or hold up the bar. Other diversions are possible. Guests might have the opportunity to try out a snowmobile for the first time, to learn how these machines are driven, and to do some exploring.

Dinner is served at about 7:00pm and is of very high quality. Most operators provide gourmet cuisine with extensive wine lists and will carefully cater to guests with allergies and special needs. No one "dresses" for dinner. It's a relaxed, laid-back and friendly affair. Staff mingles with guests and share tales of the day's conquests. Amusing speeches and special "award" ceremonies are common. Everyone gets to know one another. There are no "loners".

After dinner, guests disperse to read, watch a video or to congregate in the bar or games room for some friendly darts or pool. At about 9:30 PM guests start to depart for their beds. The bar usually shuts down by 10:30 PM. Everyone is tired and looking forward to the next day!

Some photos of cat skiers at play can be found by following the links located at the bottom of the

Chatter Creek Cat Skiing photos Web page at:

Lockie Brown lives in Vancouver, Canada and skis on Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains. He also organizes cat skiing trips for groups of friends to Chatter Creek Mountain Lodges, located about 120 km north of Golden, BC, in a snow belt in the Canadian Rockies. Chatter Creek has an informative Web site at

### **Go For A Cat Instead**

**By Analeese Burnabaker**

I know many people that are considering getting a pet for themselves or for family members or friends. When I ask most of them what kinds of pets they are considering they sort of laugh and say that "they are only considering dogs, of course." I'm not sure what causes this particular response in people, but I have done my best in the past few months and begun speaking up for getting a cat instead of a dog.

It's true that I am a little biased about the benefits of owning a cat over a dog. After all, I have been a cat owner since I was three years old and I am now a cat breeder by profession. I will attempt to keep all of my bias away as I share with you a few great reasons why you should at least consider choosing a cat rather than a dog for your next pet.

First, a cat is the perfect pet for many people because they require much less work than dogs. Think about it. Getting a dog requires someone to be home nearly all the time at least for the first few months of owning the dog. With a cat there is no need to potty train them, take them outside, walk them or spend endless hours playing with them. A cat is definitely a more independent animal and the perfect pet for more independent people. Who really wants to be tied down with an animal that takes so much time and attention?

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Another great reason for getting a cat rather than a dog is to have a quiet and constant companion. One of my least favorite things about dogs is how loud and noisy they can be. Of course, a cat will occasionally meow, but nowhere near as much noise as a dog. Cats pretty much keep quiet and are the perfect companion for most people. They are also great because they usually love to be around people, so if you are looking for a pet that will be quiet but will be near you, then the cat is the perfect choice for you.

Cats in general take a lot less work than dogs. Talk to most cat owners and you will hear great stories of people who love owning a cat. So if you are thinking of getting a pet, take the time to check out the benefits of getting a cat. See how great having a cat can be with your stressful and busy lifestyle.

Analeese Burnabaker is a professional cat breeder and a long time cat owner. See for more about getting a cat, the perfect pet.

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