



LIMITED TIME OFFER

George Koch found his Euphoria in only two days at K3 Cat Ski near Revelstoke.

BY GEORGE KOCH // PHOTOS BY BRYAN RALPH



There's a moment for me on every snowcat- or heli-skiing trip when everything pulls together, the skiing stars align, I know why I showed up—and above all, why I always, always want to keep skiing. At K3 Cat Ski last March, that moment arrived at about turn three down a run called Scoop. I'd been hanging back politely through the morning as we explored the gentler south-facing side of K3 mountain, not poaching the lines of several super-keen snowcat occupants intent on burning through their daily adrenaline ration. Now, we were suddenly peering down a mist-shrouded, north-facing and highly powder-choked couloir that disappeared into the depths. The instant guide Todd Craig gave the okay, my skis were in motion. The transition from standstill to a state akin to free flight was rapid, and Scoop went by in a blur of billowing snow, giant tree trunks lining the right side, deep breaths through my Avalung, occasional glimpses of my ski tips and lastly a wider view of a broad basin, with Todd standing on its far side.

"That was incredible," I declared with complete redundancy as I pulled up beside him. Going by the whoopin' and hollerin' drifting through the mist, everyone agreed.

"Yeah, that kind of takes it to the next level," Todd replied. "It was weird, though. I thought I heard this disembodied voice saying, 'Thank you, Lord, thank you, Jesus.'"

I laughed. "That was me. I do that on the first great run of every trip."

Going by the variations of bliss on the others' faces, they too were giving thanks to something or other. The group included a couple of guys from Kelowna with helmet cams and big reverse-camber skis; Calgarians Paul, Rock and Al; Todd's wife; a couple from California; and Stephen, a child psychiatrist from Washington state. I found out later that Stephen is semi-retired and skis for about half the winter. He turned with a smooth, methodical style that was exactly the same in all terrain and snow. I never saw him fall. I was impressed. Even more impressed when I found out he's in his mid-70s.

After Scoop, Todd led us down a succession of steep, north-facing pitches—trees, gullies, bowls—on the same flank of K3. K3 has an interesting backstory. David Moore, one of K3's three partners (along with son Kristopher and friend Rod Bailey, all from nearby Sicamous), told the tale on one of our cat rides. "We had ski toured around here for years, and in 1994 I bought a little six-man cat so that my friends and I could go cat-skiing," said David, who now alternates with Kris at tail-guiding and driving the cat. "As B.C.'s backcountry terrain was getting taken up by new cat and heli ops in the late '90s, we realized that if we wanted to preserve the terrain, we'd better apply for tenure." Seven years later, K3 began operating. "We were initially hesitant to turn our enjoyment into a business,"



David said, "but it's been very rewarding to show people our terrain and, in many cases, introduce them to powder and the backcountry." Last season, K3 expanded from one snowcat to two.

K3's terrain rises north from the Trans-Canada Highway just east of the village of Malakwa, about halfway between Revelstoke and Sicamous. The current day-skiing operation has been using less than one-third of K3's 133 square kilometres

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of tenure, but the mountain's complex shape makes you feel as if you're skiing a whole range. I had assumed K3 was a pun on the infamous peak in the Karakoram Range, implying something like "Even better than K2." But David explained that, with so many of B.C.'s mountains remaining unnamed, locals had talked about "that one above Kilometre 3 of the logging road," eventually shortened to K3. K3's northern end adjoins the superlative Mustang Powder snowcat operation.

Later in the day we headed over to the Dark Side, a set of longer runs into the Four Mile Creek drainage. Todd's selection, Euphoria, resembled a formidable peak-to-valley off-piste descent in the Alps: a low cornice drop into a steep bowl, then a long flank running beneath towering black cliffs, finally rolling over into a ramp-like pitch at the base of which stood a micro-dot representing our guide. All of it was wide-open and as lovely to look at as it was glorious to ski. Euphoria, indeed. The day ended far too soon.

K3 is the most efficiently run and hard-charging daily snowcat-skiing operation I've visited. Still, with the daily shuttle, ride up the mountain, safety and transceiver drills, and then further rides up plus the afternoon exit, one can't help losing about three hours of skiing time and the corresponding vertical versus a lodge-based system. David, Kris and Rod intend

to build a lodge (ultimately more than one), not only to offer a more complete experience, but to reach sections presently too remote for day-skiing. Meanwhile, they're steadily pushing farther into their own terrain. New for this season are cat roads above the Four Mile Creek drainage to access new runs dropping more than 800 vertical metres, and new cat roads into the middle third of K3's tenure—plus a new PB600 cat to get there faster.

Until a lodge is built, K3's guests typically stay at a Best Western either in Sicamous to the west or Revelstoke to the east. Since I was coming from Calgary, I opted for Revelstoke. K3's daily rate of \$375 low season (\$450 high season) includes the daily shuttles from Sicamous and Revelstoke (plus safety gear and powder skis). On a wider level, Revelstoke is a great place to take a mixed group on a skiing holiday, as it enables the keener skiers to go cat-skiing with K3 or heli-skiing right out of Revelstoke.

My second day at K3 again began with a couple of runs on the south side to work our

way to the more interesting north-facing terrain, then game-on in the steep trees. More snow had come overnight, so what had been knee-deep shots of blown-in powder off the crests were now a metre deep. Needless to say, it was sick—one of those days when there's simply nothing better on Earth than skiing, and nowhere better than right here, right now.

Todd had kept a few surprises in reserve, however. Our homeward route led us up a nondescript rounded slope to a low saddle where one ridge joined another in a T-shape. I got out with muted expectations only to stare down a wondrously steep pitch into a hanging bowl, which rolled and curved down a face splitting into several gullies. Todd grinned as he described the route, dubbed Slow Burnin'. It certainly felt like a fast burn after we pushed off, but as the descent went on and on through multiple gradients and exposures, I saw the sense in the name. Afterwards we glided out a tight valley beneath a row of truly steep, rock-lined pitches. As I gazed up them in lust and awe, Stephen caught up to me and said excitedly, "That one up there is Zugzwang, it's 50 degrees at the top. The one beside it is the Sewell Slide, and I was in the first group ever to ski it!" Something to aspire to, indeed. ❄️

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