

SKI THE MOUNTAINS FROM NEW HEIGHTS

Figure 1
Image captured by Madison O'Hara

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ritish Columbia is located in Canada's westernmost province. There is a very diverse climate and beautiful scenery. My father Matthew O'Hara had the privilege of spending 10 days in Cariboos mountain range, heliskiing.

The name of the company my Dad chose to tour with is CMH. CMH is the abbreviation for Canadian Mountain Holidays. CMH heli-skiing remains to this day one of the first and largest heli-skiing operations in the world. Offering massive terrain and untouched snow. They are also among the most experienced in the world and use only the latest safety and technology.



Figure 2
Man Skiing Down Mountain.
Image captured by Matthew O'Hara



So, what is heli-skiing? It is a free range, naturally sourced winter bliss. Heli-skiing is a guided experience in personalized groups led by highly qualified mountain guides who know the area best. You'll be whisked via helicopter to the top of a descent in the backcountry where there are no chairlifts, line ups, and no resort fences.

I was truly inspired by his trip and learned even more about his experiences through my interview with him. My dad's name is Matthew O'Hara. My father was born and raised in Peekskill which is an area located in Westchester County, NY. My father works in New York City as a commercial banker specializing in commercial real estate finance.

My dad's passion for skiing began when he was about 6 or 7 years old. He said "my mother and father had a strong desire to start an activity that we all could do as a family". He and his siblings all began skiing at the same time so their skill level was very similar. He stated that "skiing was an activity that none of his friends did, let alone with their parents". Skiing for my dad was synonymous with "freedom". Once he and his siblings became "safe" skiers, his parents would let them explore the mountain on their own. The sport became "addicting", he said.

Figure 1

Helicopter lifting off of the mountain. This is the form of transportation used. Photo taken by Matthew O'Hara



Heli-skiing is for those who have experience. It is not a trip to take if you are a beginner. My father has been skiing for over 50 years. With such a busy life, juggling work, kids, wife, etc. he wishes that he could get out on the slopes more, but he skis an average of 15 days a year.

To add additional background to my father's experience with skiing, he has skied Utah (Snowbird, Alta, Brighton, Solitude, Park City), Colorado (Breckenridge, Copper, Keystone, Vail, Ajax, A-Basin, Winter Park, Telluride, Highlands, Aspen), Wyoming (Jackson Hole), Idaho (Sun Valley), Vermont (Mt Snow, Okemo, Magic, Bromley, Killington), NY (Hunter, Wyndham, Whiteface, Belleayre, Jiminy Peak, Catamount), Massachusetts (Butternut Basin) and Canada British Columbia (Cariboos, Revelstoke)

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I was curious to find out what the process of signing up for this trip was like. It is always nice to hear someone's viewpoint who actually experienced it for themselves. My dad said "the process was daunting and there were a lot of questions and steps to go through". The trip can be extremely dangerous because of the helicopter and avalanches. So, he said "I had to understand the risks associated with this trip. Because of the danger I had to purchase special insurance in case I needed to be rescued or recovered".

Heli-skiing is not something that many people are familiar with. My dad said "during one of my trips to Utah (Snowbird), the resort was marketing powder trips by helicopter into the backcountry. That was about 30 years ago, I never did it back then but I had it in the back of my mind to do it one day".

I imagined that the preparation for this trip was a lot. My dad explained that the trip was difficult but rewarding. He wanted to get the most out of the trip, so he needed to be in the best shape possible. My dad said that he trained 5-6 days per week anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes. The only thing he said he would have done differently was train harder which I think goes to show how difficult this trip was physically.

A trip like this is always fun when you are in the company of your friends or family. My father took this trip with his brother-in-law and friends that he has been skiing with for the past 32 years. The most amazing part of the trip was meeting new people. My dad said "I met some interesting people and incredible skiers. We were a group of four and were grouped up with seven other skiers. Two were from NYC and the rest were from Canada.

Trips like these are so important to go on. My dad said "For this trip I wanted to get out of my comfort zone and I did. I think it is important to challenge yourself and get out there and live. I certainly don't do enough of this. In fact this was the riskiest and most adventurous trip I have ever taken".

A trip like this is also hard to prepare for especially when you are working. My dad works in NYC. He is up at 4:45 am and comes home at 5:30 pm. My dad said "I would come home and not be up to training. Quite often I had to push myself to do it. I am glad I did...there were plenty of people who would bail at lunch time. No one in our group did". I think that says a lot about how hard my dad worked.

The company prepared my dad for the trip well in advance. They set up training videos about 16 weeks prior to the trip. They were required to watch safety videos and had to sign a release form. The release basically indemnified the company from any liability if he were to get hurt or perish.

I was curious as to what a typical day on this trip looked like. My dad said "Early morning stretch and exercise class followed by breakfast. We would have time slots every day for our helicopter pickup. The helicopter would take the group to predetermined runs all day long basically 9 am to 5 pm everyday. Lunch would be flown in and set up by our guides at the summit. We would take anywhere from 8 to 15 flights per day depending on the ski and weather conditions".

To complete my interview, I wanted to understand what my dad took away from this trip. What he said was really inspiring. Embrace adventure and be open to meeting others and you just might have an experience of a lifetime.