

Burnie Glacier Chalet Ski Touring Week



Howson Range ~ Northern British Columbia

Pre-Trip Information

Getting There

Burnie Glacier Chalet is the hand built realization of the dream of our visionary Bavarian guide friend, Christoph Dietzfelbinger. Christoph built this beautiful hut, complete with a sauna, in the early 2000's and refurbished it in 2022. We first skied at BGC in 2005 and have always wanted to spend more time there. To that end John returned to guide there in 2025 and for 2026, Tom Wolfe, the new owner of BGC, has set aside a week for NMS to fill with our own group.

This mountain refuge sits at about 3450 ft, in a valley with both gladed below-tree line slopes and glaciated alpine terrain, where the surrounding peaks reach above 8500 ft. The lone ski hut in the Howson Range, located outside of



Smithers BC, this hut is far to the north and west of all other BC ski lodges. Protected by the Burnie-Shea Provincial Park we will be earning our turns, in a quiet wilderness (with the exception of the heli ride into and out of the hut).

The town of Smithers is an easy 1.5 hour flight from Vancouver BC and has plenty to do in its own right if you have time before or after your touring week. There is a nordic ski center (Bukley Valley Nordic Center), a small ski hill (Hudson Bay Mountain Resort) and a unique designated backcountry ski area (Hankin-Evelyn Backcountry Skiing Recreation Area).

It is possible to drive to Smithers in the winter, John did this last winter in 3 days from Leavenworth in our electric car! Do keep in mind that while it is a well maintained road (by northern BC standards) it is a 2 lane, undivided highway and certainly has the potential for slow/stormy driving conditions so be sure to allow time for this if you opt to drive.

Flights

Smithers (Airport code = YYD) is the closest airport and provides the easiest access for this tour. If you are flying into/out of Smithers you will be able to do this trip without a rental car. The Silver King Heli Base is also located at the Smithers airport and this is where we will be catching our ride into/out of the mountains.

Flying in and out of Terrace, BC (YXT) is another option (about 2.5 hours from Smithers by rental car). Tickets can be less expensive into Terrace but you would have the additional cost of a rental car, time spent driving to/from Smithers, and likely an additional hotel night at the end of the trip.

As with all airline travels, by minimizing your number of connections, and making sure you don't have any tight connections, you greatly reduce your chance of lost or delayed luggage. When you check in for your flight make sure that your bags are checked through all the way to your final destination.

We always recommend arriving at least the day before the start of your trip. It is super risky to arrive the day of in case of lost/delayed luggage &/or flights. Even if your travels go smoothly it is nice to have a bit of a margin and there is plenty to keep you busy if you do schedule extra time (i.e. checking out the nordic center &/or the Hankin-Evelyn backcountry ski area).

We will ski on the last day of the tour but plan to be back at the Heli base in Smithers by 1 or 2 PM at the latest. This schedule is set up to allow you to catch the evening flight out of Smithers to return to Vancouver, barring any unforeseen weather delays. We generally recommend against tight travel plans but if you decide to go this route please be sure you check in with us, before booking your flights, to make sure the timing will work & be sure you have insurance to cover any travel wrinkles that might occur (i.e. if we cannot get out of the mountains in time due to weather).

Alternatively you could spend another night or two in Smithers for a more relaxed end to your trip.

Smithers Hotel

All Burnie Glacier Chalet guests are recommend to stay at the [Stork Nest Inn](#) in Smithers on the Thursday evening before their tour begins. Breakfast is included with your hotel booking and this a convenient central meeting point for our group. The hotel provides free storage for your extra gear (i.e. ski bags) during the week. If you are flying home on the last day of the trip it is also possible to store gear at the Silver King Heli Base so you do not have to go back into town before your flight home.

We will be available to look over gear to make sure everyone has the appropriate gear packed for the tour & extra gear organized to allow for a timely departure on day 1. We will depart the hotel for the Heli base at approximately 10 AM on Friday morning.

Please plan on making your own lodging arrangements for Smithers for the nights before/after the tour.



Shuttle

There is a free shuttle service between the airport (YYD) and the Stork Nest Inn before & after your tour. This shuttle will transport you from the airport to the hotel after your arrival into Smithers on Thursday. It will transport you back to the airport for your Heli flight into the hut the following morning (Friday).

If you are staying on at the end of the trip you will be able to take the shuttle back into town. If you are catching the evening flight out of Smithers you will be in position for this as the Heli base is located at the airport.

Personal Gear, Group Gear & Mountain Meals

Equipment

Please review the gear list thoroughly. If you have any questions feel free to contact us via phone or email. There are some gear shops, grocery stores, etc. in Smithers but it is generally best to arrive with all of your gear so you aren't hunting down any critical items at the last minute.

It is important to use all of your touring gear prior to this trip. Despite many years of personal and professional ski touring we always find we need a shake down day at the start of each season to remind ourselves what we need for a day of touring and to make sure everything is functioning well. It is also important to do a little touring in advance of your trip in order to break you feet into your boots and get the legs/lungs in shape for a week of skinning.

As this is a heli accessed, hut based tour, we will be able to bring a few more luxury items than we would on a traverse but we are still somewhat limited by our weight allowances for the helicopter. Items that will be useful here that you might not have brought on previous European hut trips include a small non-wheeled duffle for storing extra hut items & shoes or sandals.

A swim suit and 1-2 towels can be useful for the sauna/shower which is definitely not to be missed.

The composting toilets are located outside of the hut so a pair of snow boots can be useful for making the trek down the shoveled path (or for helping to shovel out said path if you are so inclined). There are several pairs of boots available to use at the hut if you would prefer to leave yours behind.

There is beer, wine and liquor available for purchase at the lodge. It is possible to bring a little of your own in if you have the space/weight available in your luggage. If you do this be sure to bring cans rather than bottles and make sure it is packed well, ideally in a small box or bag, and not in your duffle.

Unlike Europe, this trip is best done with luggage without wheels. Smithers is serviced by small commercial aircraft and larger/bulkier bags are more likely to get left behind in case of space constraints. A simple ski bag and non-wheeled duffle bags are the ticket if you have a quiver of ski luggage. We will leave ski bags and any extra gear in Smithers while we are at the hut for the week.

Food

One of the highlights of this trip is the fact that after a big day of skiing we are tucked into a cozy hut at night and fed like kings/queens by the incredible hut cook. This means we get to ski with relatively light, day touring packs. Dinners, breakfasts and lunches are provided as part of your trip package. If you really like to use specific items like Gu, Shot blocs, etc. you can bring these along but otherwise we have you covered.

Alcoholic beverages are available but are not included in the trip fee.



If you have a food allergy or other dietary requirements please let us know. Please distinguish between food preferences and requirements. Often we find that preferences change in the mountains. The hut chef is happy to accommodate allergies and requirements, but it becomes difficult to plan if this changes once the food has been purchased and flown into the hut for the week. It is worth remembering that this is a remote hut and it takes a great amount of energy to stock and to operate. That being said the food is certainly one of the highlights and there is always plenty, both in terms of quantity and variety, so rest assured you will have plenty of calories to fuel you for uphill skinning (and downhill skiing) each day.

First Aid Kit & Medications

You should plan to bring a simple first-aid kit. Your guide will have a kit for major emergencies. Your kit should include blister repair materials (Compeed is AMAZING and worth having in your kit for sure - it is light years better than moleskin!), ibuprofen or aspirin, Imodium, something like Comtrex or Dayquil/Nyquil & throat lozenges for colds and Pepto-Bismol tablets.

If you are on any medications, be sure your guide knows and understands what it is for. If anything has changed since you filled out your medical forms, be sure to let us know this as well. You need to talk with your guide before taking any medications as they must know what is going on with you physically if an accident or illness occurs.

Flotation Packs

You are likely aware of the discussion surrounding flotation packs. These are backpacks that contain an airbag system that can be deployed in the event that you are in an avalanche. The airbags that are deployed essentially help you to float to the surface as debris is sorted by particle size, theoretically keeping the largest particles on top of the debris.

Do they work? In open alpine terrain, when used properly, the packs do increase your chance of ending up on the surface. While they can provide some protection from trauma, it is still possible to be buried with one or to be seriously injured or killed, simply from trauma, even while wearing one.

Historically, we have skied without flotation packs but many of the guides wear them now. These are not a piece of required gear and there are pros and cons to be sure. On the pro side they are another layer of protection. As parents of young children who spend a lot of time in the mountains we like to stack the deck in our favor as much as possible. The drawbacks are primarily increased pack weight and more limited pack space. Cost is also a factor - compared to other backpacks these are quite expensive, but if thought of as an extra bit of life insurance they are relatively cheap.

If you are interested in purchasing one of these packs look for one that uses a fan, rather than a canister, as they are light years easier to travel with.

As guides, we make very conservative decisions starting with the basic idea that any avalanche incident is unacceptable in a guided situation, but still possible. Humans do err from time to time and there are also events that occur in the mountains that simply cannot be forecasted. We do not recommend any piece of gear in order to change the level of acceptable risk.

Glacier/Touring Gear

Despite this being a mid-winter trip ski crampons can be quite useful. Please be sure to have these for your specific ski binding setup.

Harnesses w/ 2-3 locking carabiners are required for glacier travel. Be sure your harness will fit over your ski clothes (including when you are layered up) and is comfortable to wear under a backpack hip belt. Ski specific harnesses are



usually much more comfortable than a rock climbing harness which often have bulky/rigid gear loops that can rub when worn under a hip belt.

A light weight ice axes may be useful for some lines (if you are into that sort of thing) but are not mandatory gear and there are some available to borrow at the lodge.

Travel & Rescue Insurance

There are two primary types of insurance to consider for a backcountry ski tour:

- 1) Trip Cancellation/Travel Insurance
- 2) Rescue Insurance

While there can be overlap between these types of policies it is important to read the fine print to be sure you are comfortable that the coverage matches your needs.

Travel insurance can protect all of your non-refundable trip expenses (i.e. guide fees, airline reservations, etc) and in some cases might also provide some rescue insurance.

Once on the trip you are responsible for the cost of your evacuation if injured while skiing. NMS carries commercial liability insurance but DOES NOT carry rescue insurance for its guests.

There is huge variability between insurance policies and providers, and even within policies depending on your residence and citizenship. The information provided in this document is only meant to help you start to educate yourself about insurance. It is your responsibility to select the products that provide the amount of coverage/protection that you are comfortable with.

Travel Insurance

In addition to providing you with protection should you have to cancel your trip unexpectedly, some travel insurance policies can cover many other aspects of your trip itself. Examples of possible additional coverage include search & rescue for accidents (restrictions often apply), medical expenses while traveling, and allowances for lost or delayed luggage. There is a huge spectrum of possible benefits/restrictions so make sure you read the fine print. This sort of insurance has eased the process for both our customers and ourselves as it is reasonably priced, and takes much of the financial risk out of the equation for you and for us.

This insurance often needs to be purchased within ~14 days of the day we receive your deposit in order for maximum coverage to be available (i.e. coverage for pre-existing medical conditions). If you miss this deadline for any reason it is still worth talking to the insurance company as you will likely be able to find a policy that will cover most, if not all, of your needs.

Some of the policies have exclusions for backcountry skiing or mountaineering so you need to make sure these activities are covered (if you would like any associated search and rescue coverage to be valid).

There is a broad spectrum of reasons that might force people to withdraw from a trip. These include injury/illness for yourself or a close family member, work conflicts/obligations, or anything else that comes up to derail your participation. Generally speaking the more flexible insurance policies carry a higher premium. It is up to you to ensure you select the coverage that matches your needs. We would recommend speaking with a representative of the insurance company to help sort through the coverage options.

As of the spring 2022 season COVID illness/exposure, or any other COVID related travel difficulties, will be treated as any other illness that might cause an individual to miss their trip. As such please be sure your trip cancellation insurance matches your acceptable level of exposure in this regard.



We recommend [Red Point Travel Service's "Ripcord" policies](#) as a starting point for trip cancellation & rescue insurance.



****Action Item:** Confirm Trip Cancellation/Rescue insurance (usually within 2 weeks of making your initial downpayment). **

Other details

Final Payment

For international programs final payment is due 120 days prior to the first day of the trip. Please note that all deposits, and final payments after their due date, are non-refundable. This is what secures the trip for the remainder of the group. We **STRONGLY** encourage all participants to consider purchasing travel insurance to protect this investment.

We request an ACH/e-check payment or a bank wire for final payments. There is a 3.5% fee for final payments made by credit/debit cards.



****Action Item:** Submit final payment (by ACH transfer/e-check/ or bank wire) at least 120 days prior to your trip's start date. **

Passports

On all international trips we usually carry a photocopy of our passport separate from our passports in the event that it is lost. ****Please confirm that your passport is current and will remain so until at least 90 days after your scheduled return to the US.****

Money Exchange

We have found the easiest, and cheapest, way to handle money is to use your ATM card to withdraw money once you are in Canada. Smithers is a modern town where the shops usually accept debit or credit cards and it is easy to find an ATM machine.

Make sure to let your bank know that you will be traveling so they do not suspend your card.

It is good to have some Canadian dollars to use in the lodge for beverage purchases (if you plan on partaking in this).

Gratuities

People often ask us about gratuities for the guides. While these are totally optional it is a common practice in the ski guiding industry. If you feel like your guide(s) did an exceptional job for you, the guides certainly always appreciate tips. There is a huge range of what people choose to give but somewhere in the ballpark of 10% of the trip cost seems to be an overall average.

Cell Phones

For most Americans, with one of the common cell providers (i.e. Verizon or AT&T), using your cell phone in Canada is relatively seamless. Discount carriers can range from less reliable to non-functional.

ESIMs have also made it easy to have lower cost cell access throughout most of the world. These are slightly less convenient as people will not be able to call your US number directly (unless they have WhatsApp) but the cost



savings can be worth the relatively minimal hassle. I have found this travel blog to have helpful information on ESIMs if you have not worked with these before: <https://www.traveltomtom.net/travel-tips/best-esim-cards-for-europe>.

There is no cell coverage at BGC and there is very limited wifi (i.e. better to plan not to have it).

Charging Electronics at the Lodge

There is standard AC power at the lodge so you can plan to bring your own wall plugs and cords.

Training

The best training is always the activity that most closely simulates the activity you are training for.

As we are basing out of 1 hut for the week we will have the option for a short bus and a long bus on most days. This means folks who always want more can get it while others can have a pleasant day of ski touring before heading back to the lodge to enjoy the sauna, reading, etc. There is also the option to take a rest day if this is ever needed, though it is usually hard to pass up a good day of ski touring in a range where no other skiers are competing for fresh tracks.

We typically skin and ski between 3,000'-6,000' per day (~ 4 - 6 hours) depending on snow conditions and individual enthusiasm.

For most people a continuation of your normal aerobic training regimen, combined with as many days of ski touring as you can squeeze in, will be sufficient training for this trip. As we will be skiing from after breakfast to early-mid afternoon each day, for many days in a row, it is good to do as much distance/endurance training as you can. You want to be sure to do some uphill skinning prior to the trip in order to get your feet used to your boots and avoid getting blisters while on the tour.

Final Pre-trip Checklist

- Send Flight Itinerary to NMS office.
- Make sure you have all of the required equipment, call office if you need any assistance.
- Forward travel/rescue insurance information to NMS office.
- If you have a phone that you plan to bring with you please make sure the office has this number on file in case your guide needs to contact you.
- Submit your final payment at least 120 days prior to the trip start.

Contact Us

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions as you are making your travel plans. We are available at info@mountainschool.com.

We look forward to skiing and spending time with you at the legendary Bernie Glacier Chalet!

Olivia & John

