

Ultimate expeditions

They can take years to plan, and be over in a matter of hours, but the rush can last a lifetime. Here are five of the best ski adventures, chosen by five of the best British Mountain Guides

1 BEAR HUNT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Skiing down from the summit of Kalanag in the Garhwal Himalaya of India, fellow mountain guide Rob Collister and I decided we needed another expedition. This time it would be a small team, and we needed a suitable objective. We considered Trisul in northern India, but failed to get a permit; we thought about Tibet, and the dizzy heights of an 8000m peak. But it was the wild and untouched Homathko Icefield on Bute Inlet, British Columbia, that we settled on.

Finding a veritable 'blank on the map' in this day and age is no mean feat; but a trawl of the web, and a few local contacts revealed that more people have stood on the moon than these obscure summits.

The coastal range of BC is a perfect destination for a team of busy mountain guides; the access is quick, the altitudes are low, and May (a month between seasons in the western Alps) is the perfect time to go. Three days after leaving Manchester and Rob Collister, Eric Pirie, Nick Parks and I were being whisked up to our new home for three weeks, by helicopter.

Our efforts to camp lasted until the first storm, which saw us scuttling for shelter in a snow hole, which would become a palatial haven before the snow stopped falling. When we finally emerged, the true potential of our setting became apparent, as we savoured day after day, peak after peak of exploration and fresh tracks.

Ten days later, we started to move. With packs on backs, and

more on improvised sleds (made from a sheet of waxy plastic, slipperier than a Teflon tray) we set sail across the expanse of this great icefield. The formula was simple, yet rewarding: a morning of dragging our loads to a new campsite, a new summit, and a new descent to round off each day. There were snowy peaks as far as the eye could see, and most had been satisfyingly scribbled with our tracks. Once the summit of Mount Grenville was under our belts, our long descent to the ocean began.

Winter turned to spring, as we followed the bear tracks into the forest. Gruelling kilometres of bush whacking through avalanche debris and fallen trees led to the snowline. Only the alarming view of our brightly blundering throng, and the sound of our incessant don't-

dare-surprise-them singing, kept the bears at bay. Thankfully, these were wilderness bears – and we were feared, not food! Emerging out of the forest at last, we got back to the planes, trains and automobiles (and boats) that would take us home happy.



Martin Chester is the British Mountain Guide behind the Off Piste Essentials DVD and has guided on skis all over the world. To ski with him, visit www.pyb.co.uk/ski

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That big mountain at 11 o'clock is Mount Grenville...



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