



THE ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO BLUE RIVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA. ALMOST IN THE CENTRE OF THE PROVINCE. ALMOST IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE. BUT YEAR AFTER YEAR, WE MAKE THE TREK FOR SOME MORE



WIEGELE LINES

ROB AVATOGLOU

Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing is a special experience. The snow is phenomenal. Mike says it is because of the lack of wind. Snow flakes fall straight down. Because of this they are bigger than your average snow flake. I am certainly not going to argue with Mike because I have experienced this amazing snow first hand many times. And I love it!

Excitement builds from the time we arrive in the departure lounge in Vancouver airport. Familiar old friends begin to reappear. From all over the world. Snow buddies, ski mates. Folks we only see once a year, but share the passion for deep powder, fine foods and a unique experience.

It's approximately a 40 minute flight to Kamloops, where we overnight before a 2.5 hour shuttle trip to Blue River. It's a beautiful drive heading north via (ironically) the Southern Yellowhead Highway. We are in the north Thompson Valley. Past the Sun Peaks Resort turnoff, up through Clearwater, and on to Blue River.

My best endorsement of Blue River is it's quaint. There is a general store. A motel. And of course a fuel station. And The Legion .. oh The Legion (Canadian version of the RSL). Most Aussie visitors to Wiegeles pass through The Legion on the Friday night at about 1130pm. I'm sure there is more to the town, but we are here for the snow, so we don't experience it. Apologies to Blue River residents. I love



AIR CANADA 



AND WE HAD STABILITY, WHICH MEANS ONE THING - STEEPS ARE ON THE AGENDA!



your town. But I've always been busy chasing snow when I have visited. Upon arrival, we settle into our cabins – traditional log cabins, just like the brochure. We organise our skis or boards. Fat boys of course. 120mm underfoot. The Wiegeles' ski shop has half a dozen options across a number of brands. For my first trip back in 2007 I carried my skis. Never since. It's a waste of time. The fat boys we want when skiing these mountains would have very little use back home. I just use Mikes! Plus he

provides mandatory transceivers and shovel packs for all guests. Safety in the mountains is priority #1. Info sessions, instructional DVDs, talking to the guides about current conditions, we immediately start soaking it all up. Safety around the helicopter is also crucial. We learn about the machines, safe environments and emergency procedures. Talking about a bunch of "what ifs" may seem negative but these guys take it all extremely seriously. They don't want accidents, and neither do we.

WIEGELE'S INDUSTRY LEADING UNLIMITED VERTICAL POLICY MEANS YOU CAN HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO © JOHN SCHWIRTLICH CERTAINIMAGES.COM



Mike Wiegele
Helicopter Skiing

AUSTRALIA WEEK

JANUARY 30TH - FEBRUARY 6TH

BLUE RIVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

+1 - 250 - 673 - 8381

wiegele.com

reservations@wiegele.com



A highlight each year for me is again seeing all the Wiegeles crew. Pulling into the village and being greeted by all their smiling faces. Michelle Wiegele, Mike's daughter and President of the company. Daniela Aufschnaiter has been the lead on Guest Relations for longer than she cares to remember. And her #1 alibi Rose Anne van der Heiden. Always smiling, and always having a solution to whatever problem a guest may produce. And of course all the guides. The mountain men and women who take care of us up in the hills...you spend so much time with them in the snow and in the resort. They are the conduits that allow us to experience something so special. Tim McLean was my first guide, some 10 years ago. Lives in Kamloops. Been a big part of Mike's family for 20+ years. Knows the mountains like the back of his hand. Every year his bear hug takes my breathe away. Then we share a laugh, and probably a beer! Senior lead guides such as Erich Schadinger, Barry Widas, Bob Rankin, Bob Sayer and Elias Ortner have all become dear friends over the journey. And not to forget the pilots, who are all amazing and do a fabulous job. Our man is always Heath Coleman, super pilot extraordinaire. We have a saying, if Heater's not happy neither are we.

This year we were blessed – we copped a Blue River flurry night one - 45cm, then another night two, another 40cm. Oh no – it stayed cold but then the sun came out for the next few days. And we had stability, which means one thing - steeps are on the agenda! Whoop whoop. Here we go. Yeeew.

For four days it was amazing. Probably a little deeper than the average. That can happen up here. 1.2M acres of terrain in the Caibos and Monashees. We averaged 14 lifts per day, and when you have unlimited verticle, the more lifts the better. By the time we got down, bundled up our skis and boards, and took a quick swig of water, the chopper was ready to fly again. Eight lifts prior to lunch – well we did set off at 815am – a quick sandwich, soup and hot tea sitting on our shovel packs, and then back into it! Glaciers, trees and log cuts, we got to explore them all. Our lead guide Erich was determined to make the most of the excellent conditions, and by the end had most of us hanging for that apre beer and hot tub.

What a week! What a crew – ten of us in total. And the snow experience of a lifetime! Can't wait to see what 2016 brings us.



EYES WIDE SHUT DEPARTMENT: AUTHOR ROB AMATOGLLOU BEGGED US NOT TO RUN THIS SEQUENCE, BUT HEY, WHAT ARE MATES FOR BUT TO SHARE YOUR BEST SKI MOMENTS? IF YOU WANT TO SKI WITH SOME MATES GET ON THE AUSSIE WEEK NEXT YEAR.
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Access to Wiegeles is easy - fly one stop to Kamloops, they transfer you from there www.aircanada.com

more at www.wiegele.com



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