

Heli vs. Cat

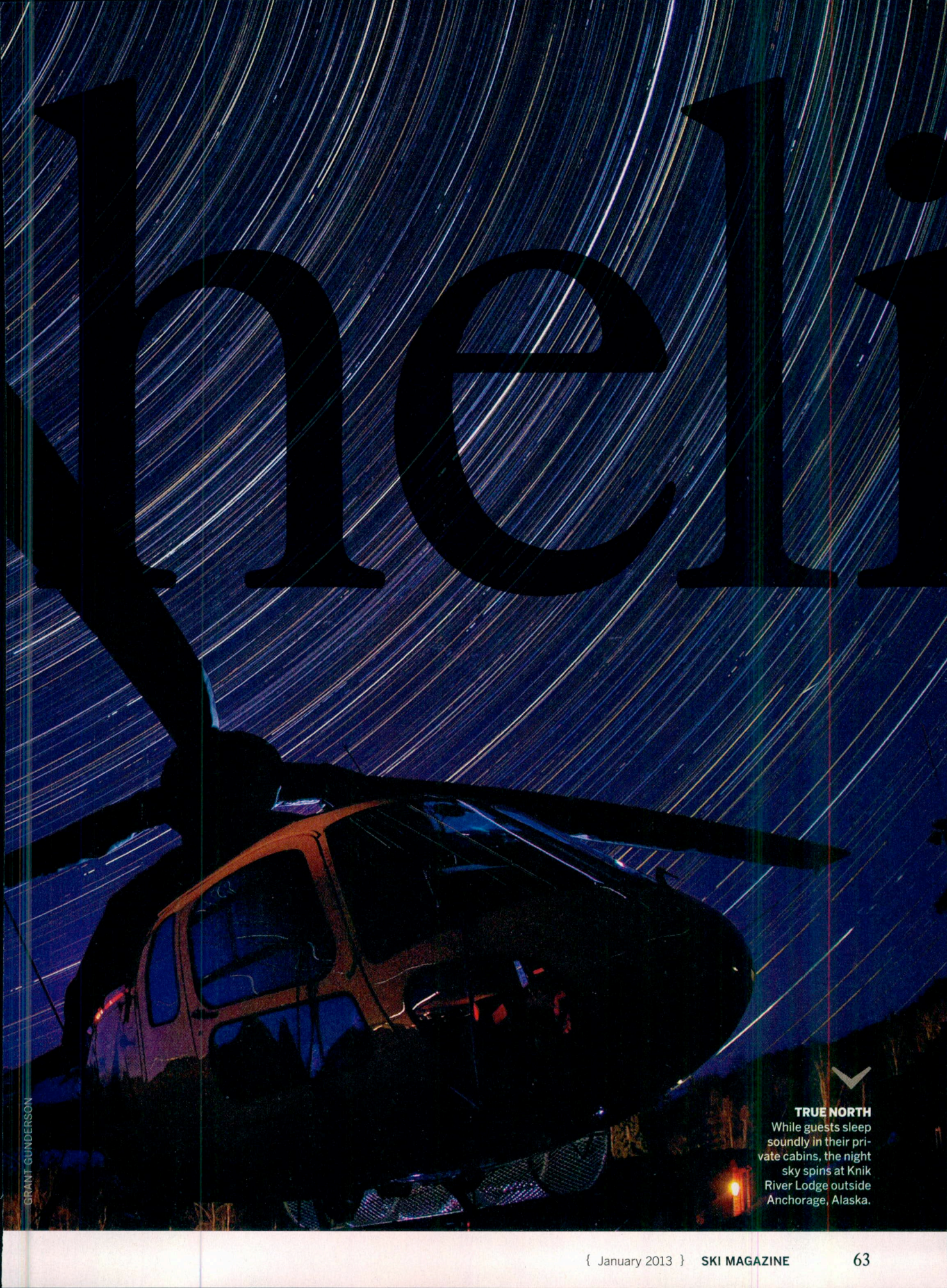
SKI Magazine editors Joe Cutts and Kimberly Beekman stand off over their preferred methods of pow seeking.

HELI-YEAH! » Heli skiing is the ultimate ski experience. Sure, there are "heli-quality" mornings at big-vert resorts when the canyon's closed. But if you've got a real powder problem, the only true fix comes with a whiff of aviation fuel. Our advice: Alaska has the rad terrain; B.C. is more reliable. Pray for gray skies if you like tree skiing; sun if you like the mellow high-alpine, where pilots can fly only with good visibility. Put together a strong group: The guides will show you only what your weakest link can handle. Ignore the blowhards in the lodge; there'll be plenty of cool people to hang with. And be ready to ski—150,000 vert in a week is easy with a Bell 212 waiting at the bottom of every untracked run. You can't do that in a cat. —J.C.

MEOW » Oooo, you heli skiers are so hardcore. But for those of us who don't wear short-sleeve baselayers so we can admire our own forearms, cat skiing suits just fine. I'll still think about you, though... when you're grounded—reading a bad mystery novel all day in a tiny, double-occupancy room next to some dude whose snoring makes the water ripple in your glass—because it's, you know, *snowing*. And when our song comes up on my new BFF's iPod as we churn back up the track for our 12th lap of steep, over-the-head blower. Oh yeah, after your four days of heli are over, two of which you actually flew on, can you pick me up at the airport? Because I can afford to ski here all week. If not, oh well. Our tail guide is *suuuuper* cute. —K.B.

BEST BIRDS

1. **CANADIAN MOUNTAIN HOLIDAYS, B.C.**
3,895,616. That's the total acreage of CMH's tenure—bigger than all of North America's resorts combined. Choose from 11 lodges and tailor your trip according to ability level, group size, price, and length of stay. canadianmountainholidays.com
2. **MIKE WIEGELE HELISKIING, B.C.**
With a big campus in Blue River, heli skiing at Wiegele's is like being in college...if you had no classes, 12 helicopters, and 1.2 million acres of unlimited powder to slay. The terrain variety and number of groups let Wiegele's accommodate all abilities. wiegele.com
3. **RUBY MOUNTAINS HELI EXPERIENCE, NEV.**
A 10-bedroom retreat designed with the rustic elegance of a Rockies hunting lodge, family-owned Ruby Mountains Heli offers luxury in the remote peaks of northeastern Nevada. Ruby serves up 200,000 skiable acres of light, dry powder. helicopterskiing.com
4. **MICA HELISKIING, B.C.**
Small groups make Mica nimble (read: pick your line). A backup snowcat makes it reliable. And an outstanding wine collection makes it, well, delicious. micaheliski.com
5. **SELKIRK TANGIERS HELI SKIING, B.C.**
Flexibility is STHS's calling card. Operating out of Revelstoke Mountain Resort, it offers everything from a heli bump to a week of private heli service at slopeside mansion Bighorn Lodge. selkirk-tangiers.com
6. **TORDRILLO MOUNTAIN LODGE, ALASKA**
What's better than heli skiing in Alaska? Heli skiing in Alaska with Tommy Moe. His irrepressible personality is a draw, but the charming lodge, gourmet chef, and unreal terrain would be cool enough on their own. tordrillomountainlodge.com
7. **THIRD EDGE, CHILE**
With locations in Portillo, Santiago, and La Parva, Third Edge is Chile's newest heli op. Skiers should be prepared for high Andes elevations and waist-deep powder in the middle of August. thirdedgeheli.com



GRANT GUNDERSON

TRUE NORTH

While guests sleep soundly in their private cabins, the night sky spins at Knik River Lodge outside Anchorage, Alaska.

COOL CATS

1. ISLAND LAKE LODGE, B.C.

Island Lake, in the Lizard Range near Fernie, is the quintessential cat experience, with a cluster of luxurious lodges, a top-notch chef (the lodge's cookbook is a Canadian best seller), and terrain that drops from high alpine bowls to gorgeous glades. Skiers average 15,000 vert per day. islandlakecatskiing.com

2. MONASHEE POWDER SNOWCATS, B.C.

The Monashees are known for their killer tree skiing—and their reputed 60 feet of annual snow. Family owned and operated MPS is smack-dab in the middle, so your first run is only a 10-minute ride away. monasheepowder.com

3. MUSTANG POWDER, B.C.

Just northwest of Revelstoke, Mustang serves up 30,000 acres of terrain using extra-fast snowcats to access as much of it as possible. (Their record: 23,800 feet in a day.) Mustang also runs a Small Groups, Steep Chutes program for high experts. mustangpowder.com

4. CHATTER CREEK, B.C.

With glacier access, low temperatures, and 44,000 acres of killer terrain that rivals anything this side of Alaska, Chatter Creek stays open later and often boasts lighter powder than other B.C. outfits. It's best for expert skiers. Cat and heli trips are available. chattercreek.ca

5. RETALLACK, B.C.

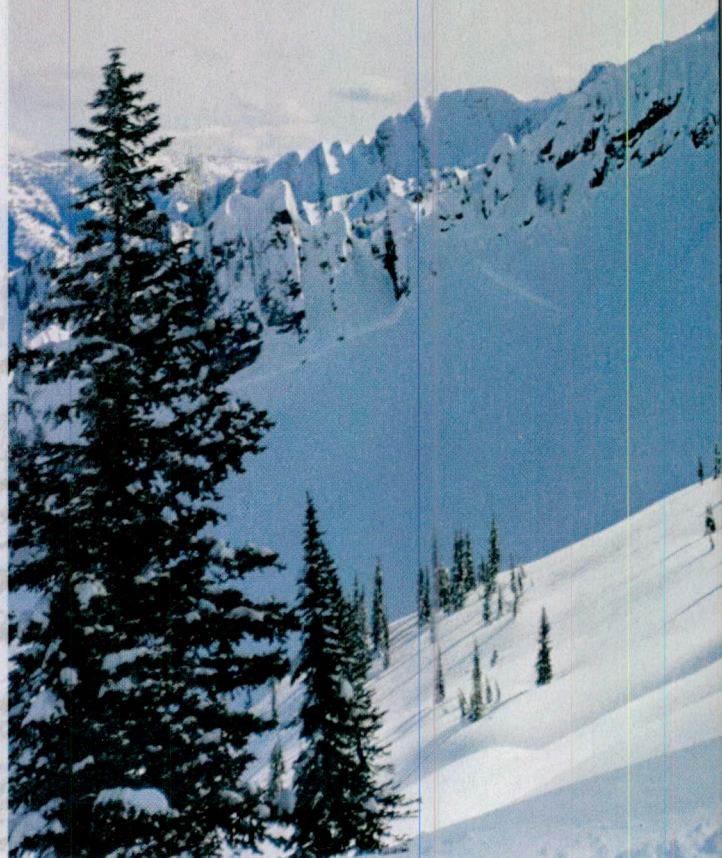
Owned in part by Seth Morrison and Tanner Hall, Retallack operates in Selkirk terrain that meets their demanding needs. Steep trees, deep snow, pillow lines...it's an expert skier's playground. retallack.com

6. BALDFACE, B.C.

Baldface, high in the Selkirks just north of Nelson, offers 32,000 acres of skiable terrain and 500-plus annual inches of snow. If you're traveling with family or a cozy group, you can rent one of seven four-person cabins. The main lodge sleeps 12. baldface.net

7. IRWIN, COLO.

Just 12 miles outside Crested Butte but boasting twice as much snow (600 annual inches), Irwin is a luxury cat-skiing op that makes up in powder quality and charm what it may lack in acres (only 1,000). Guests stay in downtown Crested Butte. irwincolorado.com





FRIENDS ON POWDER DAYS

Your buddies won't commit? No matter. Book a spot at Island Lake Lodge, and you'll leave with 11 new ones.

WEIGHING THE OPTIONS

	Heli	Cat
PRICE PER VERTICAL FOOT	\$0.12	\$0.05
PRICE PER DAY	\$1,804	\$883
FAVORITE MOOD ALTERER	Shot ski of Don Julio back at the lodge.	Lefte Blonde Belgian ale in the sun at the bottom of the last run.
IPOD PLAYLIST	Doesn't matter. You can't hear anything except <i>thwap-thwap-thwap</i> .	Guns N' Roses, "Appetite for Destruction."
MARITAL STRIFE INDEX (IF YOUR SPOUSE IS NOT WITH YOU)	Red alert. Set aside funds for a makeup trip to Aruba.	Meh, nothing a nice sushi dinner won't fix.
WHOM YOU SHOULD BRING	Fellow rippers.	Friends who make you laugh.
WHOM YOU SHOULD NOT BRING	The slow and the weak.	Anyone with a contagious stomach bug.
BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION	You have to jump out of the heli.	No extreme terrain.

* Prices are rough estimates based on published rates