



## Mallard Mountain Lodge, B.C.

**There's a new kid** on the B.C. touring block. Nestled within the Mallard Valley of the remote Punch Bowl area of the western Rocky Mountains, and a 30-minute helicopter flight from the town of Valemount, Mallard Mountain Lodge offers multi-day ski-touring trips on terrain that tends toward the intermediate, universally enjoyed type.



Guide Ross Berg sheds some light (pow) on Mallard's appeal. Darryl Leniuk photo

That night, everyone got lit....  
Darryl Leniuk photo



If you're thinking that all they serve is duck, you're wrong. Darryl Leniuk photo



Yup, looks like a line of ducklings.  
Darryl Leniuk photo



**Our group of five lands at noon.** After munching through packed lunches under bluebird skies, we head out to tour the nearby terrain. Our first run is down Desert. The snow—a typical serving of the area's light, dry snowpack—is appropriately delicious. We hurry back up the slopes for several more servings before a final descent through the fun, gladed trails surrounding the lodge that are collectively known as Last Call. Our guide, Ross Berg, owner of Altus Mountain Guides, is a keener who fidgets whenever the pace slows. We later discover he was the youngest person ever to be accredited by the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides.

Back at the lodge, chef Dorrie has been cooking up a storm. Dorrie proves to be the yoga- and snowshoe-loving creator of delicious barbecue salmon, hearty chilis, and big, round, sticky-toffee pudding with buttermilk sauce. Breakfasts comprise homemade granolas, bacon, eggs and berry-filled fruit salads. In addition, the packed lunch we're handed each morning is a new, wonderful surprise—even my plethora of food allergies are catered to with finesse. With food fabulous enough to stuff yourself to bursting each meal, it's a good thing we get a workout on the slopes each day.

The cozy, solar-powered lodge covers basic needs plus a little more: a seating area downstairs around the stove, a dinner

table, nine individual bunks with curtains, power to charge cameras and computers, an outhouse that incinerates waste, and a bathroom featuring a bucket shower you fill with warm water from the stove.

Mallard Mountain Lodge is run by the McManus family, with paterfamilias Derek and son Paul running things on-site, and another son working from town. The whole enterprise is a labour of love and the realization of a dream. They preassembled the log lodge themselves, labeling each section before dismantling it again to fly it out to the mountains. Dedicated skiers one and all, Derek joins us many days despite nearing retirement age. In summer, the lodge offers hiking with provision-carrying llamas. "We just want to take people into the mountains," offers Derek in his gentle, sincere voice.

Much of the ski terrain conveniently curves around the lodge, which sits at 1,921 metres elevation. Each evening, while sipping wine, the lodge deck offers a panoramic view of the lines we've skied. The northeast-facing side of the valley offers a series of deep-turn bowls that descend into incredible tree skiing. Some of the higher ground offers views to the terrain explored by adventurer David Thompson during the Hudson Bay Company era. Being accustomed to more downhill than uphill, I'd arrived nervous about spending a trip exclusively touring. But over the days, my

confidence grows, encouraged by great conditions and a cheerful group dynamic. By the end of the trip, I'm sold.

Because the lodge is new, the McManus's have only had time to skim the tenure, meaning most of the area hasn't been skied. By the end of the five days, we've added 10 new names to the terrain map: Editors' Choice (damn good trees the perfect distance apart), Ribbons (a steeper section, where archaic neon ski ribbons attached to bindings are recommended to avoid losing a ski in the deep powder), and Braap (fall-line skiing so drool-worthy we break into spontaneous dirt-bike noises). Oh, and there's also Bad Penny, a line off 2,480-metre Whaleback Ridge named after me. A wide, powder-clogged bowl lit by late-morning sun, the line is so distractingly fun that I tumbled down part of it, ripping the foam out of my goggles before finding my feet again to enjoy the final turns.

Nept tumbles notwithstanding, there aren't many places in North America where you can spend each day making first descents without leaving your comfort zone. And like the proverbial bad penny, I'm hoping to keep turning up again and again.

—Penelope Buswell

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