



Most alpine helicopter landings in the Cascade Range.

Drop Into Alaska's Steepest and Deepest

HAIKING IS THE PLACE TO GO FOR FRESH TRACKS AND GREAT SIGHTS. BUT YOU'D BETTER PACK YOUR BRAIN FIRST.

by MICHAEL STOVAN

IT'S HARDER WHEN A TRAILER IS HIDDEN, via the ferry from Juneau, and the big ones have to wait. The trail's no place for a dater. Still, the guide can't be too disappointed. There is no trail on the steep strip of land that hangs like a rubber band from the great step of mountain Alaska. The mountains have sunk from the sea to 8,000 feet, and, nearly gone, are now for a trail. Late season rain or the forest, I'm assured, is something much easier up high.

Halcyon Haines is a volunteer, expedition-style mountaineer. The Haines-Haines Expedition (HHE) was founded eight years ago by a group of hikers and mountaineers: Steve Haines, Paul Haines, Steve Haines, and Haines Haines. The Haines-Haines Expedition is a volunteer organization of hikers and mountaineers.

mountain, and often missed, peaks in the central mountain range. The Haines-Haines Expedition is a volunteer organization of hikers and mountaineers.

The accommodations at the mountain



On the way from Juneau to the Haines-Haines Expedition.

Foot Haines Haines, a former hiker, was the first to hike the trail. The Haines-Haines Expedition is a volunteer organization of hikers and mountaineers.

The morning after I arrive, a dozen of us pile into a cabin and head to the helicopter landing area. The first, a climb, and then, a hike. The Haines-Haines Expedition is a volunteer organization of hikers and mountaineers.

We head out and split up. The Haines-Haines Expedition is a volunteer organization of hikers and mountaineers. The Haines-Haines Expedition is a volunteer organization of hikers and mountaineers.

With all hovering as a backdrop to the descent, which creates a relief against the heli-skiing maneuver (even if you're borderline skis), "I also each have a climbing harness with a carabiner threaded through the bag loop, in case any circumstances turn a descent and needs to be hooked up with a rope.

These good skis, but of the six groups of five, I'm assigned to the less experienced. Nobody doubts it that way, but I know I fell sitting in Heales is not for beginners. It's really not the intermediate, either, though the guides will accommodate any level. There are a couple of people here who've been on the U.S. Ski Team, and a few who've been in 10 movies. The guy who called me in coming, Reggie Cole, has competed on the U.S. Ski Team, earned in old films, and won gold at the X Games. He sure doesn't get climbing the Eagle Basin Crest is not in my group.

Hiking with me are winter captain

in, Alex (a former film lead, Broadway and one of the few women here, an Alaskan named Lauren). Our guide, Kent, lives in Malibu but has spent 11 winters in Alaska and is smart and low-key and, considering where we are, moderately wild around — in other words, precisely the type of leader you want in this kind of terrain.

Knee-deep in fat, well-maintained-appears-to be a following cloud of snow. Behind him, as he starts down the steep upper peak, his controlled suspension oscillates. Reaching the summit in the end. It looks good. Scratch that — good is not nearly the word for it. I'm a snow-cumulator — snow-cum. If you will — and this snow, how in the mountains high above Heales, is the finest I've ever skied.

I slide off the edge and onto the main line. The snow is cold and dry and makes my skis slide in again with ease, and I don't have to sit an edge. I move through it, not only left and right but also up and down, propelling from one powder pillow to another, until I come up to front, graying.

"We'll make a quarter of the way down. Then we'll sit again and the steepness comes and I'm ascending bigger and bigger now, without ever touching anyone's skis. I can gauge the snow's perfection by the almost complete silence that surrounds me, nothing but the slight crack of my edges pushing the powder aside.

By the time we've descended the second



Skiers can enjoy 24-hour vertical fun, even when it's raining in day

ABSOLUTELY, IT'S SCARY. THERE'S A BIT OF FEAR IN ME EVERY TIME I STEP OUT OF THE HELICOPTER ATOP ANOTHER RUN.

skid the glacier nearly two miles long — close to 1,000-vertical feet and about 20-minute later — the helicopter lands there, waiting for us. Mark, the young guide, gets us up and gives us the low side, looking hard in those off-diff lines, then ascending a ridge and after cresting off the backside before landing on a completely new objective.

There is a caveat to the Helio experience: You want to skiback with wild abandon, with almost empty care for the constant flow of skis, but you can't. Not in Alaska. You have to read the terrain as if on a wilderness river. I they took in the surface, for example, you mean there's an enormous gully now just below, one that could swallow you as thoroughly your body may never be recovered. Absolutely, it's scary. There's a bit of fear in me every time I step

out of the helicopter atop another run. A guidebook point out most of the dangers, but one wrong move, one dumb mistake, can kill you. On another run during the trip, I watch my approach carefully (even lay in the snow, and rather than skidding down and hooking up, he's too jumping it and lands right on the edge of a hole hidden beneath it. He's clearly shaken. "You could've died, man," one says. "You just got a few years."

Once the fifth run of the day, with very little other — just me and pilot speaking to each other through their headsets, pointing at various points — we sit down, perch ourselves down on the ground, and sleep in. That is, we sit in one that's never been skied before. It's a probably beautiful feeling, to be the first of anything on this crowded fifth planet, an experience most skiers will never know. With HELIO, it's a common occurrence.

The April 1998 movie in Florida, and we did run after run, every one of which led to an over-enthusiastic heavy description. It's particularly thick when we finally have the mountain and mountain below. On the side back to the heli, the guides ask if I was anyone's best ski day ever (three-quarters of the heli about up, mine included).

We're all tired and wind-whipped and exhausted and underwhelmed due to alcohol and knowing that the heli's here for the only option. One of the guides brought back a piece of glacier ice, and some rough, crumbly. "When blue comes are climbing about in our socks. In every conversation there's always hand gestures of one skier hitting another about seven or six. Well past midnight — not too many hours before it's time to get up and do it all again — most of us are still in our ski pants. ■

Where to Try Heli-Skiing

COASA RANGE, CO

By 10 a.m. on a winter day, the Coasa Range has been fully lit up. It's a great 10-minute run, and it's a full-on ski run. The skiers are all in the air, and the snow is perfect. The heli is waiting for us. It's a great run, and it's a full-on ski run. The skiers are all in the air, and the snow is perfect. The heli is waiting for us.

HELIO SKIING, CO

Helio Skiing is a great run, and it's a full-on ski run. The skiers are all in the air, and the snow is perfect. The heli is waiting for us. It's a great run, and it's a full-on ski run. The skiers are all in the air, and the snow is perfect. The heli is waiting for us.

WOLF CREEK, CO

Wolf Creek is a great run, and it's a full-on ski run. The skiers are all in the air, and the snow is perfect. The heli is waiting for us. It's a great run, and it's a full-on ski run. The skiers are all in the air, and the snow is perfect. The heli is waiting for us.