



Flying to and from each day's hiking destination by helicopter was one of the highlights for the writer's 89-year-old father.



A Bell 212 helicopter flies hikers to a different destination each day in the remote Purcell Mountains of British Columbia.



Canadian Mountain Holidays offers heli-hikes in British Columbia, where the distinctive granite spires of the Bugaboo range were sculpted by glaciers over eons.

# Heli-hiking for all ages

You're never too old (89!) to enjoy the beauty of British Columbia's mountains

Story and photos by SUZANNE MORPHET  
Special Contributor

The warmth of the early morning sun bouncing off the glacier takes me by surprise. I'm dressed in multiple layers for a day of hiking high above the tree line in southeastern British Columbia's Purcell Mountains. The weather can change here swiftly and dramatically, but I wasn't expecting to be swapping my toque for a sun hat in early September.

Close to where our helicopter dropped us off, a small, blue-green glacial lake resembles a slushy drink, with patches of ice bobbing on top. The glacier itself winds down the mountainside above us, a fresh coat of snow sparkling in the sun, inviting us to make tracks.

First we strap crampons to our boots and rope together in case one of us falls through the snow into a crevasse. "And it would likely be me, being first in line," quips guide Bob Sawyer, wanting to dispel any anxiety we might have.

The fit and trim Bob — he looks like a youthful Clint Eastwood — hands us each an ice ax and shows us how to plunge it into the ice should we start to slip and slide. By the time we're ready, we look like serious out-

door adventurers — and we are.

My father, 89 years old and diabetic, is on this trip. Not on the glacier, mind you. He came with me to this pristine wilderness, but he's a few miles away, enjoying a more leisurely hiking adventure.

My group will ascend Dome glacier, lunch on a rocky plateau with sweeping views across a valley that's prime grizzly bear habitat, pick our way down a steep mountain face following a wild goat trail, skid down a bank of lingering snow, scramble over waist-high boulders, and hike part way up Pyramid glacier.

We will cover about five miles; not a huge distance, but over the course



Hikers pass Cobalt Lake in Bugaboo Provincial Park. There are hikes to accommodate different skill and fitness levels: You can follow mountain trails or strap on crampons for a journey across a glacier.

See **HELI-HIKING** Page 5K