

Thrills and Spills in the Kootenay Rockies

JANE MUNDY Updated: March 22, 2017



Kayaking at Kicking Horse will get your adreneline pumping. Jane Mundy



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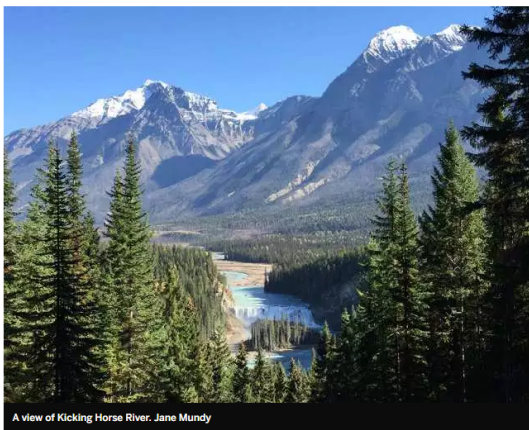
When I told my mother that I was heading to the Kootenay Rockies to paraglide, heli-hike and white-water kayak, she replied, “You’re too old to be doing that.” Good thing I never listen to my mother. Seems like yesterday she was telling me to grow up. If, however, *someone told me* that I’d be running off a 7,000 ft mountain, stepping out of a helicopter onto the top of the world, paddling an inflatable kayak and portaging –uphill in a wetsuit–I might agree with Mum. But I can’t wait to do it again.



Heli-hiking with Selkirk-Tanglers in Revelstoke, in the Columbia Mountains. Jane Mundy

Besides thrills and spills, there was downtime to appreciate the spectacular Kootenay Rockies landscape and wind down evenings with stellar cuisine. And if you aren’t fond of crowds, Yoho National Park and Glacier Park are much less populated than neighbouring Banff and Jasper. Surrounded by the Purcell and Rocky Mountains, it’s a no-brainer to unplug and connect with nature, starting at Cathedral Mountain Lodge in Yoho National Park.

If you’re driving along Highway 1 and blink, you might miss Field, population 200. This picturesque town resembles a film set, but on closer inspection it’s studded with B&Bs. Locals know to arrive at Truffle Pigs early. Rumour has it, one tourist was so upset to find there were no tables she was prepared to eat from the floor. We found seats and sipped lattes before heading to the mountain town of Golden and the Alpine Rafting Company. Here is where the Kicking Horse –famous for whitewater rafting –and Columbia Rivers flow together.



A view of Kicking Horse River. Jane Mundy

Jim Pleym, Alpine Rafting’s owner and guide, drove us down a logging road toward Beaverfoot River, which joins the Kicking Horse and snakes along the west side of the Great Divide. We stopped for a view of Wapta Falls, 98 feet tall and 500 feet wide–incredibly, we were about to paddle to its base. Voicing our concerns, Pleym guaranteed we’d get wet but there’d be no white water to navigate. Our relief was audible, but it was still a challenge...

After wriggling into wetsuits, four of us nestled into inflatable kayaks and two more had chosen to

stand-up paddle board. "Paddle boarding is way more popular and easier to learn than kayaking," said Pleym. "You feel less constricted and you can do it anywhere." Now he tells me. My fears were unfounded—for now. Although the current was fast midstream, the Beaverfoot was shallow along its banks and it was easy to stop. Pleym gave us a running commentary of the area's colourful history and geography. "The Kicking Horse is the first to be designated a BC Heritage River and an old portage trail that winds around the Wapta Falls may have been an old trading route," he said. We soon felt like pioneers, and not a soul in sight.

Would I have gone river rafting if I knew I had to lug my kayak up a steep hill (Pleym calls it a mound) in a wetsuit, slipping and sliding in rubber booties, sweating bullets and whining that I can't go any farther? Nope. I have to confess, Pleym lent some muscle on this "little hike" uphill to the top of the waterfall. Nature in the Kootenay Rockies never disappoints: Once we reached a clearing that led us to the upper reaches of the Kicking Horse River, my answer to doing it again was an emphatic yes!

Now down the other side of the hill, we paddled the hazy turquoise Kicking Horse, wider than the sinuous Beaverfoot. And with its class 2 rapids, faster and even more fun. Three hours from beginning our journey we joined Alpine Rafting's van at a clearing, peeled off our wetsuits, devoured lunch and high-fived all around.

A short drive from the mountain town of Golden is the Mount 7 paragliding launch pad. A slight gust of wind puffed into the inflatable wing was the signal: I ran off the mountain with pilot Scott Watwood of Altitude Adventures and we soared over the Columbia Valley, a breathtaking 6,372 ft (1942 metres) below, for about 20 minutes. Touching down, my face hurt from grinning ear to ear. Over a splendid dinner that evening at Cedar House Restaurant in Golden, we agreed that the PNE's roller coaster has nothing on paragliding.



Emerald Bay Lodge in Yoho National Park. Jane Mundy

Next up, we headed to Kicking Horse Mountain Resort and met Boo, a resident at the Grizzly Bear Refuge, and lunched at the spectacular Eagle's Eye Restaurant (elevation 7,700 feet). One more adrenaline thrill was in store.

From the Revelstoke Mountain Resort we boarded a Selkirk Tangiers helicopter and 15 minutes later, pilot Jacques Auger deposited our group and guide Jeff Honig on a ridge that looked like we couldn't get any higher. Honig navigated us over boulders and clumps of heather and some vistas seemed like we'd landed on another planet.

Our last night was truly memorable. Snug in my cabin at Emerald Lake Lodge, I lit a match to the wood-burning fireplace and soaked in the tub before joining everyone for cocktails and a splendid dinner in the Mount Burgess dining room. To top it off, early next morning I canoed the tranquil lake, with only the sound of a distant loon and my oars lapping the brilliant emerald green water.

Our group high-fives at the end of each day—during wondrous dinners—came with a sense of accomplishment. This trip's thrills and spills almost turned me into an adrenaline junkie, much to my mother's dismay.

Where to Stay

Just as memorable as our adrenaline moments were our accommodations: Cathedral Mountain Lodge and the jaw-dropping Emerald Lake Lodge are like luxurious adult summer camps.

Cathedral Mountain Lodge: cathedralmountainlodge.com

Emerald Lake Lodge: crmr.com/emerald

Palliser Lodge, Golden: kickinghorselodging.com/palliser-lodge

Sutton Place Hotel at Revelstoke Mountain Resort: suttonplace.com/Revelstoke

What to Do

Wapta Falls Wild & Scenic Tour, Alpine Rafting Company. Phone 1-888-599-5299

altitudeadventures.ca Phone 250-344-3214

Heli-hiking with Selkirk-Tangiers.com Phone 1-800-663-7080

For more information, visit HelloBC.com

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The writer was a guest of Destination BC and Kootenays Rockies Tourism, neither of which read or approved of this article before publication.