



High and mighty: Talus Lodge sits on a 7,400-foot plateau in the southern Rockies.

LODGE

Paradise found

Get your alpine bliss at the Rockies' newest retreat

IN JAMES HILTON'S CLASSIC BOOK *Lost Horizon*, the heroes stumble upon the hidden mountain paradise of Shangri-La only after their plane has crashed in a Himalayan blizzard. Happily for visitors to the southern Canadian Rockies, getting to Shangri-La is a whole lot less, shall we say, problematic. They just have to drive to Canmore, Alberta, hop in a helicopter and fly 15 minutes south to Talus Lodge.

Chris Espiniel and Dan Verrall, the co-owners of Talus Lodge, discovered their mountain paradise a few years ago. While studying topo maps, they spotted an interesting corner of the Rockies on the edge of Banff National Park, and then explored the area on foot. What they found was the perfect place for a high wilderness retreat.

Espiniel and Verrall's lodge, which opened last year, is nestled on the edge of a small alpine plateau, sitting at timberline at 7,400 feet. The plateau is guarded

on all sides by steep drops, glaciers and mountain barriers. If you fly in here, you're more or less trapped, but what a prison. The plateau offers guests a post-age-stamp alpine universe where everything they could want to see is within half an hour of the lodge: glacier-fed turquoise ponds, a waterfall that tumbles off the edge of the visible world, and cracks leading down into unexplored limestone caves. The best view of all is from the veranda of the lodge itself, where the horn of a mountain without a name lords it

over the southern horizon. It's one of the best balcony views you'll ever see.

The lodge has the flexibility of a place that has not become too set in its ways. You and some friends can rent out the entire 10-guest facility for the ultra-reasonable price of \$750 per night, or opt for a catered, guided experience. Food is what's called mountain gourmet—good, abundant and healthy—while the lodge has an intimacy and hominess that, to this transplanted easterner, brings back memories of the cottage, with evenings of cribbage, board games, reading and talking.

One other thing. All those steep drops, glaciers and mountains surrounding the lodge provide a bonus for the urso-phobic. Very few bears bother to pay a visit.

—Jerry Kobalenko



THE LOWDOWN: Talus Lodge is open from mid-February to mid-April and mid-June til the end of September. Rates are \$750 per night for the entire lodge (self-catered groups), plus an extra \$250 per person return for the helicopter. Guided, catered rates are \$1,050 to \$1,850 per person for 3 to 7 days, including the helo. For more information: (250) 342-9358 or (403) 678-6638, www.taluslodge.com