
Love (and 'copters) lift sweethearts up where they belong

Happy hearts — and hiking boots

Chairlifts convey couples to summit

ROBERTA AVERY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

May your love be as pure as the snow on the mountain peaks and as enduring as these mountains amongst which you have chosen to wed.

— Part of ceremony by wedding commissioner **Rick Kunelius**.

BANFF, ALBERTA—Tracy Ross and Brent Walden wanted a Rocky Mountain high when they tied the knot.

So they pulled on their hiking boots and boarded a helicopter bound for a high peak to exchange their vows in thin air.

"We wanted something spectacular and, as we love the mountains, it was ideal for us," said Walden, 35, a Calgary lawyer.

The couple considered a traditional "big wedding" in Calgary, but bringing together his family from Ontario and hers from

Just the facts

■ Rick Kunelius charges between \$200 and \$375 for a marriage ceremony. Helicopter weddings for the couple and three guests start at around \$1,395. For information, visit www.kunelius.com

■ A private cabin for two at Shadow Lake Lodge starts at around \$140 per person per night including three meals a day. For information, visit www.shadowlakelodge.com

■ For information on wedding licences, visit www.banffbureau.com

New Brunswick proved to be a logistical nightmare, so they opted for a small private ceremony instead.

They did an Internet search for mountain-top weddings and up popped "Ranger Rick," said Ross, 35, who works in marketing.

Banff-based marriage com-

► Please see **Wedding, K15**

Travel

These weddings have altitude

► **Wedding** From K14

missioner Rick Kunelius, who earned the moniker Ranger Rick during his 22 years as a Parks Canada warden, specializes in adventure weddings, tailoring ceremonies for skiers, mountain-bikers, horseback riders, hikers and even mountaineers.

Flying in a helicopter over mountain ridges is not for the faint-hearted and Kunelius insists everyone who boards the aircraft wear good solid hiking boots.

The helicopter dropped them off close to the top of Grotto Mountain near Canmore, Alta., where they exchanged their vows one June morning against a stunningly beautiful backdrop of snow-capped mountains.

"The clouds came in and formed a dreamy white background; everything was perfect," said Ross.

Walden, a captain in the Canadian Forces Reserves, wore his red dress uniform of the 33 Field Engineer Squadron and Ross wore a white bridal gown and veil, carried a bouquet of roses colour co-ordinated to match the bright yellow helicopter — and hiking boots, of course.

There were no wedding crashers. The bighorn sheep that sometimes try to nibble bridal bouquets kept away and there were no signs of grizzly bears.

"When you are out in the backcountry with a seasoned veteran like Ranger Rick you feel completely safe," said Ross.

Downhill ski enthusiasts Denis Tancrede, 58, and Isabelle Perrault, 34, braved minus 25C temperatures for a winter wedding with altitude at the top of the Lake Louise ski area. Kunelius rode up in the gondola with

the couple and then found them a quiet spot away from the ski runs for the ceremony.

Isabelle, who dressed in a white snowsuit she had picked up in Europe and a white fox headband, purchased from the Hudson Bay Company, attached her bouquet of red silk roses to her skis.

Although they live in Montreal, Tancrede and Perrault had no problem picking up a marriage licence at the Banff Bureau in the Wolf and Bear Mall.

"It was a wonderful day, we were in a very relaxed mood and spent the rest of the day skiing," said Tancrede.

I met Kunelius at Shadow Lake Lodge near Banff in September when he invited me to join him scouting out possible wedding locations.

He had set his sights on Little Copper, which at 2,560 metres is about 730 metres above the lodge.

It was a steep climb up loose scree and then, near the top, ankle-deep snow.

The moisture in the air formed icicles in Kunelius' handlebar moustache.

It was worth the effort. Although it was hard to find a level area, the views in all directions were breathtaking.

That night, as we sat around the roaring fire in the lodge, Kunelius related tales about his 12 years as one of a handful of marriage commissioners licensed by Alberta to perform weddings in the Banff area.

"It's been a delightful appointment," he said.

His ceremonies have run the gamut from formal and grand affairs at the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise to performing a ceremony roped to a rock face on Banff's Mount Hector with a 600-metre vertical drop below

the wedding party.

"The bridesmaid was clinging tightly to the rock but the bride and groom were quite comfortable leaning over the edge," said Kunelius.

Leona Reimer and Brent Brodoway of Calgary are outdoor enthusiasts who cross-country skied 14 kilometres up to Shadow Lake for their wedding and stayed on at the lodge for an idyllic honeymoon.

"We'd hiked up the previous summer and had fallen in love with Shadow Lake," said Reimer, 44. "Getting married on skis and the setting with Ball Mountain in the background had so much meaning to us.

"It was the best thing we could have done."

The couple opted to wear cross-country ski clothes for the ceremony and their wedding breakfast consisted of the steaming cinnamon buns that the lodge prepares fresh daily for arriving guests.

The original Shadow Lake rest house, built in 1928 by the Canadian Pacific Railway, was acquired by the Brewster family who added 11 cabins in the 1990s and two hot water showers, a positive luxury in the backcountry.

Although the lodge can accommodate up to 48 people, Reimer and Brodoway opted for a small private ceremony — Kunelius brought along his sister Karen and her friend to act as witnesses.

"Our families are not into the outdoors so it would never have worked to invite them, but to us, it is a piece of heaven and we intend to go back every year for our anniversary," said Reimer.

Roberta Avery is a Meaford, Ont.-based freelance writer. Her trip was subsidized by Shadow Lake Lodge.