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Frances Cabin in the Summer

SUMMIT HUTS ASSOCIATION HUTMASTERS' JOURNAL

A NEWSLETTER AND UPDATE FOR FRIENDS OF SUMMIT HUTS

HUT TRIPPING...YURT STYLE

by Mike Zobbe, Hut Aficionado

Although I must admit I am prejudiced regarding Summit Huts, I do enjoy visiting other huts. I have been to almost all the Tenth Mountain huts and several of the Braun huts, but there is much more than that in Colorado. Check out Brian Litz's two volume *Colorado Hut to Hut* to get an idea of the many options out there.

One option that is a very different experience from a Summit or Tenth Mountain hut is a yurt. There are at least a couple dozen yurts available for rent in Colorado. I find yurts to be comfortable and just the right size for a small group. Certainly a yurt is not as spacious as a larger style hut, but in a yurt you get down to the basics and discover just how little you really need.

My favorite is Pass Creek Yurt, located about 2.5 miles south of Wolf Creek Ski Area. It is owned by Wolf Creek CAIC avalanche forecaster Mark Mueller and his wife, Sandy Koubruk. Mark and Sandy are great folks who love to ski powder, as evidenced by the location of the yurt.

I managed to pull off two three-day trips to Pass Creek Yurt this year. The first was over my birthday in the middle of the huge January snowstorm that blanketed the San Juan Mountains with more than six feet of snow. Originally, I had a full yurt with six people, but sickness and sudden job commitments whittled that down to just myself, and my good friend Greg "Super G" Walther. Greg is now living in Salida, but was one of the first hutmasters for Summit Huts; it was because of him that I became involved in SHA, so I was glad to spend my birthday with him.

First, we had to get to Wolf Creek Ski Area. The storm had closed the highway over the pass off and on over the course of the week.

Could we even get there? As luck had it, the storm let up enough so that the road was open to the ski area from the east, but closed beyond that. As we drove up out of the town of South Fork, the snow banks lining the road grew steadily as we gained altitude. We could see large avalanches off the surrounding peaks, running full track down to the bottom of the valley. Wow, I'm thinking, this could be epic.



Pass Creek Yurt sitting in 94" of snow. It sits atop a 6' high platform
Photo: Mike Zobbe

I've been to the yurt a couple times before, and I know that the route is free of any significant avalanche danger and I also know there is plenty of 25-30 degree terrain. So I'm not too concerned about being able to avoid avalanche terrain, but I am concerned that there will be so much snow that we will not be able to get up enough speed to make any turns. And there is always the issue of breaking trail in. Even though the route is mostly flat and only about 2.5 miles long it could be ambitious in this much snow.

The weather had cleared a little on the drive in, but the snow began to pick up again as we pulled into the parking lot at Wolf Creek Ski Area. As we geared up, we looked at each other and grinned, Greg and I have been on many an adventure over the years and we knew this had the potential to be another.

Getting to Pass Creek Yurt from the ski area is pretty straight forward; you follow what is normally a groomed XC trail to Alberta Reservoir and then head over a low ridge and hook up to a logging road that traverses the last ¾ of a mile to the yurt. It is actually a net loss of elevation to the yurt. The amount of snow and poor visibility, though, increased the challenge somewhat.

Once off the groomed trail, the route is marked with survey tape,
(continued on p. 6)



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NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings Friends of Summit Huts Association,

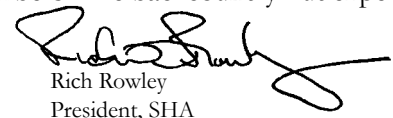
Summit Huts Spring Newsletter brings to a close a superb 2004-2005 winter hut season. We are fortunate to have Mike Zobbe as our Director of Operations and Hannah Taylor our Office Manager. Their energy has made your hut visits and our daily operations run smoothly. We close this year with our bank account in the black for a couple of reasons. The creative input from Mike and Hannah has helped us trim a lot of overhead and run a more efficient operation, and the annual October Backcountry Ball has helped us recover from our deficit of two years ago.

Just now, some of the avalanche prone chutes above Francie's and Janet's are stabilizing enough to allow some incredible spring skiing. Some fortunate hut users are taking advantage of this small window to ski terrain unstable for most of the winter.

A few reminders for everyone:

- Francie's Cabin will reopen for the summer season on July 1, 2005
- Hut reservations for the 2005-2006 winter season open to the general public on June 1
- Non-profit and educational groups receive a 50% discount on hut rental Monday-Thursday
- Summit Huts Association volunteers receive one free hut night stay for every day they work
- We welcome anyone interested in becoming a new board member

Thank you to our volunteers, members, staff and board members. The backcountry hut experience would not exist without you.



Rich Rowley
President, SHA

OPERATIONS UPDATE

By Mike Zobbe, Operations Manager

All buildings need love if they are going to be kept in good shape and huts are no exception. While they might get plenty of love from our many guests, sometimes they can almost get loved to death. Actually, it is amazing to me that given the number of people who use our huts (close to 6000 a year) they are still standing. With that many people coming and going over the course of a year, some wear and tear is inevitable.

As Janet's Cabin enters its 15th year of operation and Francie's its 10th, it is time to start thinking about some major upgrades. Due to the wisdom of SHA's founding board, a large "maintenance reserve fund" has been established and is supported through user fees to allow for large capital expenditures. With the money in this fund, we can be assured that our huts will remain in good repair for many years to come.

My most immediate desire is to start replacing some of the windows at both Janet's and Francie's. The high altitude environment is hard on windows. With the constant large swing in temperatures causing expansion and contraction, the seals on the double pane windows are beginning to break. Additionally, the cranks that open and close the windows take a lot of abuse. We will replace the windows with a simpler, more durable mechanism for opening and closing.

Replacing windows will be a big project. Transporting materials, especially fragile windows, to huts is a major

task unto itself. While we can drive up Spruce Creek Road to Francie's, the road is rough and arriving at the hut with intact glass is always a relief. Transporting windows into Janet's, as I'm sure most of you know, requires a helicopter, although ironically, as long as the pilot sets them down gently at the hut, they'll get a gentler ride under the helicopter than they will bouncing in the back of a truck up to Francie's.

After the windows, we have numerous smaller projects. I am planning on chinking the logs at Francie's (it was not chinked when it was built) and we will be treating the logs to prevent rot. Once I begin to get my "to do" list finalized, I can usually be assured of a very busy summer/fall season, and I expect this season to be no different.

Say Goodbye to Big Red, Say Hello to Frank:

After seven years of faithful service, Big Red, SHA's 1984 F250 has been put to pasture and is now serving City Wild, a Front Range based non-profit, as a work truck. In February, SHA purchased a 1999 F350 that has been named "Frank". Frank is big and gleaming white and although much more civilized than Big Red (he has a cup holder built into the dash!) he is still burly and will have no problem hauling heavy loads of firewood up to the huts.

We can only hope Frank will serve with as much distinction and personality as Big Red did.

SUMMIT HUTS CALENDAR

UPCOMING EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Workshops & Courses

Alpine Wildflower Workshop
Francie's Cabin
July 30-31, 2005

Hike in 2.5 miles to the backcountry and to beautiful Francie's Cabin. This is an overnight hut experience, where you can relax and meet new friends. Come and explore the unique alpine environment surrounding Francie's Cabin. Beautiful fields of wildflowers beckon as we wander through the Crystal Creek Drainage. \$100 course fee includes instruction from local botanist Nancy Redner, hut night, dinner and breakfast. Please contact Summit Huts for more information or to sign up, 970-453-8583 or summithuts@colorado.net.



Local Wildflowers Chiming Bells and Cinqufoil

Avalanche Level 1/Backcountry Travel Course
Francie's Cabin
December 17-19, 2005
January 14-16, 2006



Beacon Drills at 2004 Workshop

These workshops are designed for backcountry enthusiasts with little or no previous avalanche education who want to learn more about safe backcountry travel and become more confident with their backcountry rescue skills. The workshop focuses on providing information and skills to help you increase your understanding of avalanches and the winter snow pack, as well as the skills necessary to react appropriately if an avalanche were to occur. Cost of course (to be announced) includes two nights at Francie's Cabin, breakfasts and dinners while there and instruction by Colorado Avalanche Information Center staff.

Volunteer Opportunities

Francie's Cabin Work Days - August 4-6, 2005

Janet's Cabin Helicopter and Work Days - September, 2005

Section House and Ken's Cabin Work Day - October, 2005

4th Annual Backcountry Ball - October 15, 2005

Francie's Cabin Midwinter Clean and Restock - February 16, 2006

Janet's Cabin Midwinter Clean and Restock - February 24, 2006

Volunteer Appreciation Hut Trip to Janet's Cabin- March 22, 2006

Please check the website for final dates



Painting Tables at Francie's Cabin



Stacking Wood at Section House

Interested in volunteering and wondering what to expect?

Most volunteer days at the huts include hard physical labor, including wood stacking, maintenance projects and cleaning. Some projects are overnight and you are welcome to stay the night at the hut. You will be responsible for your own food and personal items. Please contact Summit Huts for more information regarding specific volunteer dates and opportunities. For each day you volunteer at one of the huts, you will earn a free night in the hutmaster's quarters. Space is limited on all volunteer days and appreciation overnights. You must reserve your space by calling Summit Huts at 970-453-8583 or e-mailing us at summithuts@colorado.net. Or maybe you've been longing to see your name in print? Send us your hut or outdoor articles and photographs to be put in future newsletter, and if your piece is selected for publication, earn a free night stay in the hutmaster's quarters at the cabin of your choice.

Summit Huts is a volunteer based organization, and thanks to you, this year has been one of our most successful ever. Volunteering creates bonds and new friendships while supporting our unique venues for the backcountry community. We couldn't do it without you!

Dates of Operation Summer 2005

Francie's Cabin Only: Friday, July 1 - Friday, September 30, 2005

Dates of Operation Winter 2005 - 2006

Francie's and Janet's Cabins: Wednesday, November 23, 2005 - Saturday, May 20, 2006

Ken's Cabin and Section House: Wednesday, November 23, 2005 - Saturday, May 6, 2006

HUT TRIPPING...EURO STYLE

by Scott Toepfer

Like with any well thought out hut trip, getting to the trailhead is a key ingredient. The trailhead for the hut trip I was about to head for was the Department of Commerce/NIST Labs at 27th and Broadway in Boulder. It's an odd place to start a hut trip, but it wasn't exactly an ordinary hut trip. We were off to do the Hoch Tirol, starting in Kasern, Italy, and ending with a summit day on Austria's highest peak, the Grossglockner. I work at the Boulder labs two days a week in the winter, so long term parking is free, and I can take an RTD express bus right to DIA.

Unfortunately (or fortunately depending on your view point) the Hoch Tirol was a no go. A strong warm front out of Africa was bringing a deluge of rain to the Sudtiroil in this part of Europe, and avalanche conditions had deteriorated dramatically in just 12 hours. In the next week two Hungarian climbers on the Grossglockner would die in an avalanche. Our guide Armin Fisher, an ex-patriot American now living in northern Italy, spent the first 4 hours of our tour with the telephone stuck to his ear, arranging an alternate tour. So, fortunately for us, the rain drove us to one of the highest tours in Europe, the Bernesse Oberland. This tour travels the largest glacier system in Europe. The trailhead for this tour sits under the shadow of the north face of The Eiger.

A long taxi ride brought us to Grindelwald, Switzerland well after dark, and just before the neighboring restaurant *Grund* closed for the night. We had an early start planned the next day. Two cog-rail trains would take us to Kliene Scheidegg and then physically through the huge Eiger massif before dumping us out onto the Jungfrau Glacier. Our first objective of the five- night hut trip was the Monch at 4,107 meters. The Monch (Monk) separates the young virile male (Eiger) from the lovely and virginal Jungfrau. The sight of these three peaks on a clear day is alone worth the price of admission.

It quickly became apparent that this trip was more a peak bagging expedition, rather than a free skiing event. After our first night at the Monchsjuhhutte we would climb 2 more 4,000 meter plus peaks and one peak at just over 3,900 meters in 5 days. It was a good thing for all of us that our crew of hut trippers all lived

above 9,500 feet and had been on a fitness regime that kept us going for the usual 6 to 8 hour days.

Of course, it really didn't hurt that the hut caretakers had giant meals of local specialties prepared for us every night. Or that the beer was available in large quantities if the need for cold, liquid refreshment arose.



Looking up at the Hollandiahutte
Photo: Scott Toepfer

The weather proved to be just about perfect. Good weather is becoming a big problem for this tour and others like it spread throughout Europe. At the Konkordiahut, a long staircase is bolted to a cliff wall. After climbing peaks and skiing glaciers all day, sore legs are forced to endure the humility of something like 400 stairs straight up from the glacier to the hut deck. At each landing a plaque tells you that "In 1966, the Grosse Aletschgletscher was at this level" or 100 steps further along "In 1944 the Grosse Aletschgletscher was at this level." It really sinks in how much the earth is warming when you are forced to lug your pack up a vertical cliff wall, where at one time you could literally ski right onto the hut deck.

Only one of our peaks was shrouded in cloud. That peak gave us one of the most heinous up-skins I have ever done. If it wasn't for ski-crampons each kick-turn might have been our

last. Literally hundreds of Swiss army guys had gone up the steep approach glacier to the 4,237 meter Finsteraarhorn the day before in hot sunshine. The glacier surface had turned from soup on their descent to frozen chicken heads as we raced the approaching storm on our ascent the next morning.

Our last big day to the Hollandiahutte quickly became enveloped in cloud. 20 centimeters of new snow almost kept us in our bunks the next morning, but some hint of a drying sky provoked three of us outside to a rapidly drying air mass. Our initial plan was to climb the Abeni Fluh, a peak we had been repulsed from the day before due to rock hard glacial ice, but Colorado Blue skies and the lure of the 20 cm of new Swiss powder were just too much. We opted for several runs off the shoulder of the 3,892 meter Mittaghorn. The last powder run of the day left the Hollandiahutte at 3,173 meters and spilled down to the small alpine village of Blaten at 1,540 meters. Fresh Swiss cheeses, salami, bread and cold beer awaited the end of one of the best hut trips I have ever been on.

BECOME A SUMMIT HUTS ASSOCIATION MEMBER!

TO ADD YOUR SUPPORT TO SUMMIT HUTS ASSOCIATION'S MISSION AND ONGOING PROGRAMS, SIMPLY RETURN YOUR DONATION IN THE MEMBERSHIP ENVELOPE ENCLOSED AND BECOME A MEMBER TODAY.

As a member you will:

- *receive all 10th Mountain early reservation & lottery benefits
- *have no cost use of the day use Al Chaffee Room at Francie's Cabin
- *support year-round educational programs for youth at the huts
- *enable SHA to continue to provide backcountry education and awareness
- *receive e-mails in addition to SHA's newsletter to learn about volunteer opportunities, special events and workshops



SUMMIT HUTS THANKS YOU!

CONTRIBUTION LIST FOR THE LAST 12 MONTHS

May 1, 2004- May 1, 2005

The generosity of all our contributors is key to the success of our organization. We apologize if we missed anyone. Please notify us of any errors or omissions.

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Hut Reservation Information

Availability: www.huts.org Hut Reservations: 970-925-5775

Check out the web page for hut availability, What's New at the huts, hut user bulletin board, and other good information. Hut rates for the 2005/2006 season will not change. Rates are: \$28/person/night at Janet's & Francie's cabins, \$26/person/night at the Section House, and \$69/night (up to 3 people) for Ken's Cabin. Rates at the 10th Mountain Division Huts are \$26/person/night. Rates at other hut systems range from \$26-\$36/person/night.

(Hut Tripping...Yurt Style, continued from p. 1)

but there was so much snow that much of the tape that normally would be at eye level was either at snow level, or completely buried. We had to pull out our map and compass several times to keep us on track. Breaking trail was not as bad as we had worried; the snow was dense and full of moisture so rather than being the knee deep slog we were dreading, it turned into a manageable shin deep trudge.

We arrived at the yurt after about 2 hours as the tempest began to pound the area with high winds and snowfall of up to 2" per hour. The yurt was buried to the roof in places. We had to dig out two feet of snow to open the door, but once in the yurt, we were dry and secure.

After getting the stove fired up and some water on for tea we steeled in to listen to the wind and snow batter the walls of the yurt. I had never been out in a storm like this! We had to shovel out the path to the outhouse every couple of hours just to keep it from getting buried.

As we sat and snacked and talked, we began to

debate whether we wanted to try a lap before it got dark or not, after all, we came to ski. Powder fever overcame desire for warmth and comfort and we put on our gear and headed out. The weather was wild. The trees were loaded fully with snow and ground blizzards would occasionally bring visibility down to almost zero, but we made our way to the top of one of the many gladed slopes that surround the yurt.

The snow was maybe a bit heavy, but still, there are few sensations like skiing down in several feet of untracked powder. If we had been above tree line, we would have had no depth perception, but all the acreage around the yurt is wooded glades, so we were able to see just well enough to ski with confidence.

That night after dinner and conversation, we listened to the "yurt-a-lanches" sliding off the insulated vinyl roof and the snow continued to come down and the wind continued to shake the structure. Getting up to use the outhouse in the middle of the night proved to be an adventure, as every time I went outside, there

were six new inches of snow.

So the rest of the trip went. We skied the whole next day till exhaustion, having to break a new trail every lap because the snow and wind would fill our skin track in by the time we would complete a lap. It was truly, epic conditions, and I'm glad we were there to experience it.

When we got back to the ski area, we almost couldn't find my truck because it was buried under five feet of snow. It took us 45 minutes to dig it out! As we headed down the highway to Salida to drop off Greg, the sun came out and illuminated the Sangre de Cristo Mountains as we drove through the San Luis Valley. We agreed that we had never seen the Sangres so white.

Driving across the expansive valley with the brilliant white Sangres was the perfect ending to an epic birthday adventure.

For more information on Pass Creek Yurt, go to www.wolfcreekbackcountry.com.