

Hut System To Circle Wilderness

By Mike Jacobs

When we featured the Tenth Mountain Trail Association's hut system a year ago it had four huts of its own plus the Polar Star Inn and the Diamond J Ranch to accommodate cross-country skiers for overnight shelter.

At that time the system extended north to south (from the Polar Star Inn to Peter Estlin Hut, Harry Gates Hut, Diamond J Ranch, Margy's Hut, and the McNamara Hut) along the western edge of the Holy Cross Wilderness.

Now there are four more huts extending from north to south along the eastern side of the wilderness: Shrine Mountain Inn, Fowler/Hilliard Hut, Schuss/Zesiger Hut, and Vance's Cabin.

In addition, five huts and an east-west route have been approved by the US Forest Service to connect the Polar Star Inn to the Shrine Mountain Inn, closing the north end of a wide circle, hopefully next season.

The Association also is proposing another five huts and a route connecting the Diamond J Ranch with Vance's Cabin to complete the circle at the south end. One of these proposed huts is the existing Rocky Mountain Health Ranch.

See the map on page 43 for the current routes near the Holy Cross Wilderness. Refer to the February 1988 issue for details on the original six huts on the western side of the circle. Details of the eastern side, new this year, are as follows.

Shrine Mountain Inn

At 11,209', this privately owned and operated inn provides the most deluxe accommodations of the TMTA system, which takes the reservations. The Inn has two handcrafted log buildings with one sleeping 12, and the other, eight.

Each building has kitchen facilities, indoor plumbing, cold and hot running water, electric lights, sauna, and catered meals. Skiers also can arrange for meals, sleeping bags, and towels by calling the Inn at (303) 926-3854.

Fowler/Hilliard Hut

At 11,500' and 6.8 miles southwest of the Shrine Mountain Inn, this TMTA-owned hut is a memorial to Ann Fowler and Ed Hilliard of Denver, who were killed in a mountaineering accident. The hut sleeps 16 people on the second level; the main level is reserved for communal space. Hut is equipped with a wood stove for heating and cooking, kitchen utensils, propane cook stoves, paper products, and beds and pillows.

Schuss/Zesiger Hut

About 8 miles south of the Fowler/Hilliard Hut and close to the Colorado Trail is the Schuss/Zesiger Hut at 11,660'. Jack Schuss and Al Zesiger donated the funds for construction of this hut, which has accommodations similar to the Fowler/Hilliard Hut.

Vance's Cabin

South of the Schuss/Zesiger 8.5 miles, Vance's Cabin is like the Polar Star Inn, Diamond J Ranch and Shrine Mountain Inn in that it is privately owned. Just 3 miles north-east of Tennessee Pass, Vance's Cabin features a sleeping loft, deck, sauna, gas oven and stove and a woodburning stove for heat. It sleeps 16; reservations are made through the TMTA.

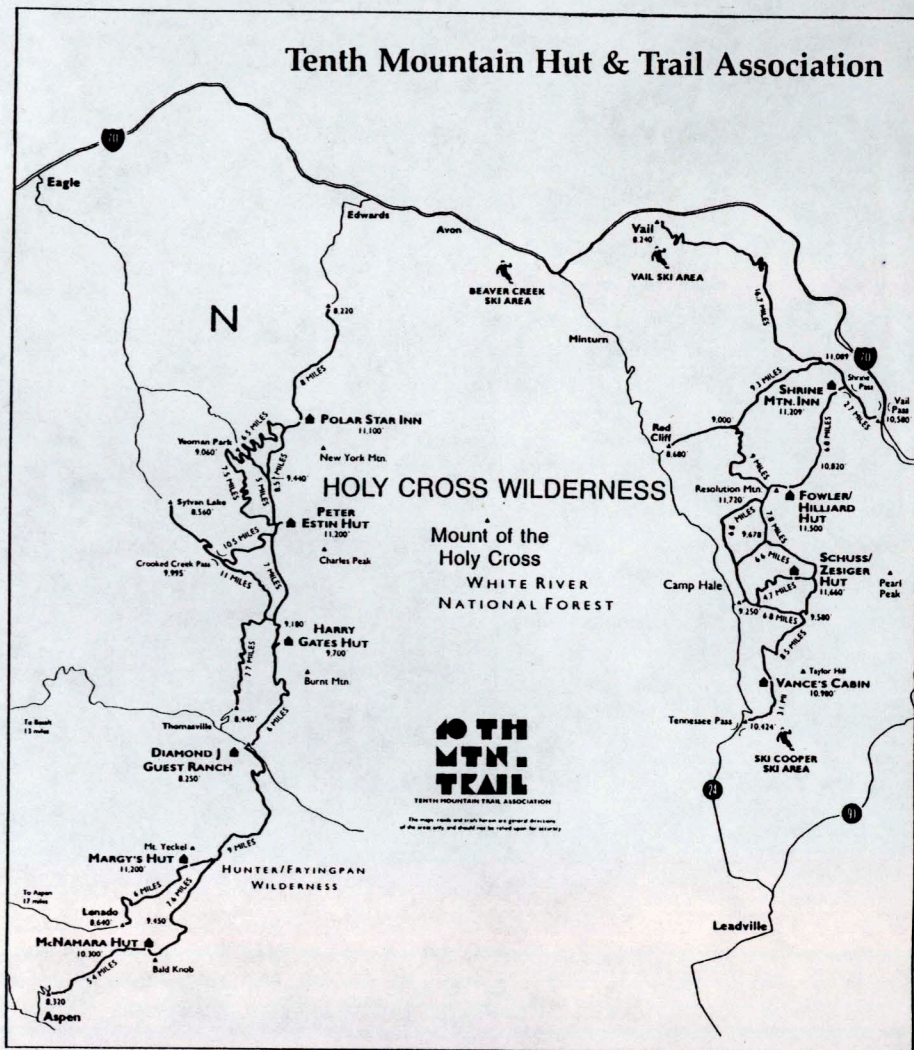
Skiing Routes

Of the two routes to the Shrine Mountain Inn, one is the easiest and the other is among the most difficult in the TMTA system. The easy route is 3 miles and 620 vertical feet on a road from Vail Pass; the difficult route is 16 miles and 4,970' from Vail.

The 7-mile trail from Shrine Mountain Inn to the Fowler/Hilliard Hut loses 1,000 vertical feet and climbs 720 vertical feet with some sections above timberline. Beautiful panoramic views make for nice skiing.

Fowler-Hilliard also can be reached from Camp Hale by following Resolution Creek Trail 7½ miles with an elevation gain of 2,250'. This hut also can be reached from Red Cliff by skiing 8 miles and 2,820 vertical feet.

There are two route options from



This TMTA map shows the approximate location of the ten operating huts. Routes are proposed for closing the north and south ends in the near future, with three more huts on the north and five on the south end.

Fowler/Hilliard Hut to the Schuss/Zesiger Hut. For the expert skier, an unmarked and spectacular 7 miles and 1,900 vertical feet connects the huts. A lower route for intermediate skiers also gains 1,900 vertical feet, but it follows Pearl Creek to a jeep road along Resolution Creek before ascending Resolution Mountain.

Between Schuss/Zesiger and Vance's Cabin it is 8.5 miles of 1,480' downhill and 2,080' uphill. There are alternate routes from Camp

Hale to both Schuss/Zesiger and Vance's Cabin.

Each hut stocks bindings, bales, and screws for emergency repairs. Shuttle service to trailheads is available from Warren's Shuttle Service, (303) 927-4493, Paul Martin.

Reservations

Because 2,000 skier nights were cancelled last season, TMTA has adopted a new reservation policy, requiring full payment: \$18.00 per person per night on weekends and holi-