

Guide Book Excerpts

From *Colorado Hut to Hut, Volume 1 Northern & Central Regions*, by Brian Litz

Shrine Mountain Inn (Jay's, Chuck's, and Walter's Cabins)

JAY'S CABIN	
HUT ELEVATION	11,209'
DATE BUILT	1987
SEASONS	Year-round
CAPACITY	12
HUT LAYOUT	1 room with double bed, 1 room with 2 singles, 1 single in hall upstairs; 1 room with queen bed on main floor; 5 single beds in communal area downstairs
HUT ESSENTIALS	woodstove for heat, propane cookstove and oven, all kitchenware, indoor flush toilets, tub and shower, generator-powered electric lights
OTHER GOODIES	communal sauna, hot and cold running water

CHUCK'S CABIN	
HUT ELEVATION	11,209'
DATE BUILT	1988
SEASONS	Year-round
CAPACITY	12 (6 upstairs and 6 down)
HUT LAYOUT	1 room with queen bed, 1 room with 2 singles, 2 couch-beds in main room upstairs; 1 room with double bed, 1 room with 2 singles, 2 couch-beds in main room downstairs
HUT ESSENTIALS	Woodstove for heat, propane cookstove and oven, all kitchenware, indoor flush toilets, tub and shower, generator-powered electric lights
OTHER GOODIES	communal sauna, hot and cold running water

WALTER'S CABIN	
HUT ELEVATION	11,209'
DATE BUILT	1997
SEASONS	Year-round
CAPACITY	12 (6 upstairs and 6 down)
HUT LAYOUT	1 room with double bed, 1 room with 2 singles, 2 couch-beds in main room upstairs; 1 room with queen bed, 1 room with 2 singles, 2 couch-beds in main room downstairs
HUT ESSENTIALS	Woodstove for heat, propane cookstove and oven, all kitchenware, indoor flush toilets, tub and shower, generator-powered electric lights
OTHER GOODIES	Communal sauna, hot and cold running water

The Shrine Mountain Inn, above Shrine Pass and a few miles west of Vail Pass, is a perfect overnight weekend getaway or base camp for day tours in the area. There are plenty of powdery glades, airy ridges, and backcountry roads to explore nearby. The rolling landscape features open meadows with thick stands of trees. The area is a great choice for skiers of all abilities, especially those new to the sport. The short, easy approach (though still not trivial) is accessible to all skiers, hikers, and bikers. Skiing to the inn is ideally suited to traditional cross-country touring gear.

The Shrine Mountain Inn is actually three distinctive structures. The main structure, Jay's Cabin, was built in memory of Jay Utter. It is a magnificent lodge that sleeps 12. Guests share two indoor bathrooms and a kitchen, a beautiful potbellied stove, and a large, south-facing porch with great views of the Gore and Tenmile Ranges.

The second structure, Chuck's Cabin, built in memory of Chuck Anderson, features two separate units; each sleeps six and is equipped with a bath. This cabin's separate upstairs and downstairs quarters can be reserved individually. The upstairs must be reserved entirely by one group, and the lower quarters can (and will) be filled by multiple groups by the 10th Mountain reservationists.

The third and newest structure is Walter's Cabin, built in memory of Walter Kirsch. Walter's Cabin sits a short walk away from the others, on the edge of a sprawling meadow.

It is similar to Chuck's Cabin and has the same reservation requirements. All three cabins are open year-round. For reservations, call the 10th Mountain Division Hut Association (see Appendix A).

RECOMMENDED DAY TRIPS:

Black Lakes Ridge is the treeless ridge directly northeast of the Shrine Pass Road. Leave the inn and return to the road. Turning toward Vail Pass, ski southeast along the road for 0.7 mile, then onto the ridge. This gentle ridge is a great spot to cruise around. Experienced skiers can also drop off the east face into the Black Lakes drainage for some superb telemark skiing. From the ridge, ski south along a road back to the Vail Pass parking area, then return to the inn. The basic ridge tour is suitable for novices; the descent of the east face is recommended for strong intermediate to advanced skiers.

Head south/southwest from Chuck's and Jay's Cabins, bypass Walter's Cabin, and head up toward the trail to Shrine Mountain--the route to the Fowler/Hilliard Hut (see Tour 18c). A short tour provides great views to the southeast, which "only get better as you ascend.

Between Shrine Pass and the Vail ski area is the notorious Commando Run, one of the most difficult tours in the state. This tour drops northwest, down along the Shrine Pass Road, into Turkey Creek for 1.5 miles. Turn north onto the Timber Creek Road (marked) and ski up along this road to the northwest until the road splits on a wooded saddle. Contour west and southwest on the main (left) fork toward Lime Creek. After several hundred feet, begin a steep climb through the woods to the top of Elevation Point 11,611'. Once on top of the ridge, follow it west and then north, rolling along the crest until a long descent deposits you onto Two Elk Pass near the eastern boundary of Vail's famous Back Bowls.

Ascend north across the windswept south face of Red ("Siberia") Peak, then ski down its northeast ridge. Descend west into Mill Creek through unrivaled backcountry terrain and gain the Mill Creek Road. Follow the road to the Vail ski area and, finally, ski to the bottom of the downhill area via the trail of your choice.

This tour is 18.7 miles from Vail Pass to the bottom of the ski area. Gaining over 2,000 feet of elevation and losing over 5,000 feet, it is an advanced run that requires a shuttle car in Vail (fee parking). Note: Skiers taking this tour need an additional map, USGS 7.5-minute Vail East, as well as maps necessary for the Redcliff to Shrine Mountain Inn route (Tour 18b).

TOUR 18a: Vail Pass Trailhead to Shrine Mountain Inn

SEE MAP PAGES 124-125 AND 142-143

TIME	2 to 4 hours
DISTANCE	2.7 miles
ELEVATIONS	TRAILHEAD: 10,580'
	SM INN: 11,209'
	GAIN/LOSS: +629'/-20'
AVALANCHE	Minimal danger
MAPS	10th Mountain Division: Resolution Mountain
	USGS 7.5': Vail Pass, 1987
	National Forest: Arapaho, White River
	Trails Illustrated: Map #108 (Vail/Frisco/Dillon)

TOUR OVERVIEW

The Shrine Pass Road, which travels between Vail Pass and the town of Red Cliff, has been a popular recreation area for decades. The name comes from views of the Mount of the Holy Cross as seen from several points along the way. At one time, there was interest in building a place of worship near the summit of the pass, but this never came to fruition. In summer the road is pleasant but often crowded.

In winter the route is one of the most popular ski tours in the state. Unfortunately, during the 1990s, Shrine Pass Road also became very popular with snowmobiles. Consequently, as part of a greater Vail Pass area recreation usage plan created by the Vail Pass Task Force, the actual Shrine Road between the Vail Pass parking area and the top of Shrine Pass is now designated as a snowmobile route. A dedicated route for skiers now runs parallel to the road along the south/southwest side and several hundred feet below the road.

In addition, there is now a \$5 per-person, per-day fee payable at the parking area to Forest Rangers or at a self-serve kiosk. Money raised through the fee is used to produce usage maps, create signage, groom trails, and pay attendants.

DIRECTIONS TO TRAILHEAD

Drive on 1-70 to the Vail Pass exit (Exit 190), 15 miles southeast of Vail, or 5 miles west of Copper Mountain. The Colorado Division of Transportation has now designated an overnight parking area for hut users on the west side of the pass, north of the road that wraps around to the solar-powered rest hut and toilets. After you exit and are on the west side of the pass, the parking area is immediately on the right (north) just past the Forest Service shack.

THE ROUTE

Leave the parking area, walk west, and gain the well-signed (Forest Service-style) beginning of Shrine Pass Road. Begin skiing and proceed past the first switchback until you reach the apex of the second major switchback. The skier's trail exits the road here and strikes off to the west/northwest and begins a gradual ascent up through the meadows that lie along the northern slopes of West Tenmile Creek. The route snakes its way for 2.4 miles along the border between the meadow and the trees up to the crest of the pass. The trail is well-marked. If you stray too high to the north, you will hit the road; too low and you will reach the creek.

One thing to remember about Shrine Pass itself is that it is rather indistinct. When you reach it, you will generally be in an area with lots of snowmobile tracks in a flat, open meadow. The pass and a summer Forest Service outhouse will be off to the right (north/northeast). The trail to the inn lies off to the left (southwest) in the thick stand of trees.

Turn to the southwest and locate the trail to the hut. If the area is covered with new snow or the weather is stormy, it may take a minute or two to find the snow-covered road that wraps upward 0.3 mile to the inn.

TOUR 18b: Red Cliff Trailhead to Shrine Mountain Inn

SEE MAP PAGES 124-125 AND 142-143

TIME	5 to 8 hours
DISTANCE	9.3 miles
ELEVATIONS	TRAILHEAD: 8,680'
	SM INN: 11,209'
	GAIN: +2529'
AVALANCHE	Some avalanche terrain encountered; easily avoided
MAPS	10th Mountain Division: Resolution Mountain
	USGS 7.5': Red Cliff, 1978; Vail Pass 1987
	National Forest: Arapaho, White River
	Trails Illustrated: Map #108 (Vail/Frisco/Dillon)

TOUR OVERVIEW

This route follows the western portion of the classic Shrine Pass route. From Shrine Pass the road drops steadily to the town of Red Cliff. If you are descending into Red Cliff, be prepared for the ride of your life, especially if the road has recently been packed by snowmobilers. If you are skiing up to the inn from Red Cliff, expect a long, taxing ascent. As a direct route to the inn, this alternative is not nearly as popular as the Vail Pass route. However, this route works well as a starting point for a round-trip excursion going from the Shrine Mountain Inn to the Fowler/Hilliard Hut and back to Red Cliff.

DIRECTIONS TO TRAILHEAD

From the north, take I-70 and exit at Minturn (Exit 171), 5.4 miles west of Vail. Proceed south on US 24, driving 10.3 miles to the bridge at Turkey Creek. From Leadville, drive north on US 24 from the intersection with CO 91 (just north of Leadville) for 22.6 miles to the Turkey Creek bridge. From the north end of this spectacular bridge, turn east and drive into Red Cliff. Look for the Shrine Pass Road (County Road 16). Park along this road or in a parking lot near the marshal's office.

THE ROUTE

The Shrine Pass Road up Turkey Creek begins in a deep valley; the actual starting point varies depending on how far the road has been plowed. Initially, the road is on the south side of the creek. Soon the road crosses over the creek and continues climbing below south-facing slopes for 2.5 miles. Pass the turnoff and bridge to Wearyman Creek (the beginning of the Hornsilver Mountain route from Red Cliff to the Fowler/Hilliard Hut, Tour 19a) and follow the road up and across Turkey Creek.

Ascend through thick forest for 1.9 miles, then cross back to the north side of the creek near some old cabin ruins. Continue up the valley for 2.8 miles until you pass the turnoff to the north for the Timber Creek Road. Climb through a steep, tight turn and eventually pass an outhouse on the right before entering a flat, treeless basin 7.3 miles from Red Cliff. Follow the road up the north side of the basin through a steep gully. Then contour to the south, following the less distinct creek up to 11,720-foot Shrine Pass.

You are near the pass when you can look to the southwest to the Tenmile Range. (An altimeter may help if the weather is inclement.) A Forest Service sign also marks the spot. From here, cross the southwest side of the clearing, enter the forest, and follow the well-traveled trail to the inn.

TOUR 18c: Shrine Mountain Inn to Fowler/Hilliard Hut

SEE MAP PAGES 124-125 AND 142-143

TIME	5 to 8 hours
DISTANCE	6.8 miles
ELEVATIONS	SM INN: 11,209'
	FIH HUT: 11,500'
	GAIN/LOSS: +1,211/-920'
AVALANCHE	Some avalanche terrain encountered; easily avoided
MAPS	10th Mountain Division: Resolution Mountain
	USGS 7.5': Pando, 1987; Red Cliff 1978, Vail Pass 1987
	National Forest: Arapaho, White River
	Trails Illustrated: Map #108 (Vail/Frisco/Dillon) ; Map #109 (Breckenridge/Tennessee Pass)

TOUR OVERVIEW

The standard trail linking the Shrine Mountain Inn and the Fowler/Hilliard Hut is a scenic route that will test your fitness level and route-finding abilities. Overall, this challenging trail follows the most direct and commonsense route between the huts, but it always seems to take longer than expected--so get an early start. The first half of the trail travels high across the west side of the south ridge of Shrine Mountain near tree line. Consequently, it is exposed to foul weather and wind from the west. If the weather is severe, consider bypassing the high traverse of Shrine Mountain by skiing through Wilder Gulch by way of the Shrine Pass Road (County Road 16).

THE ROUTE

The trail leaves the Shrine Mountain Inn (from near the new Walter's Cabin) and begins a 1.3-mile southwesterly climb onto Shrine Pass. A compass reading may be helpful here; the rock near the summit of the mountain is a handy orientation point. A scattering of blue diamond trail markers helps show the route up through the sparsely timbered slopes and tree stumps. Break out of the trees and ascend west onto the 11,720-foot pass, just south of the summit of Shrine Mountain.

From the pass, turn south and begin a long, gently descending traverse of the west face of the south ridge of Shrine Mountain, just above tree line. Ski through small islands of trees, following the occasional trail marker. As you near the south end of the ridge, contour slightly to the southeast and begin descending steeper slopes into the forest. Continue south down toward the creek through ever-steepening, forested slopes. Eventually, this descent ends in a small meadow near the head of Wearyman Creek.

The trail into the woods on the south side of the creek is probably the hardest section of this route to locate, so take a little time to find the proper point of entry. Ski west through the meadow until the creek leaves the meadow and begins to drop steeply. On the south side of the creek, you will find trail markers for the route to the Fowler/Hilliard Hut. (Avoid the summer road, which continues down the valley to Red Cliff, it heads west above the creek at this same spot.)

Enter the woods and begin a 200-foot descent to a tiny clearing (shown on the USGS topo map). Ski to the southwest until you gain a wide, gentle road. Follow the road for 2 miles on a seemingly interminable low-angled climb until you reach a series of switchbacks heading directly uphill to the southeast. Ascend through these to the 11,460-foot saddle east of the hut. Turn west (near a summer gate) and ski 0.3 mile over a small hill to the Fowler/Hilliard Hut.

If you ski from the Fowler/Hilliard Hut north to Shrine Mountain Inn, remember to climb through the small meadow at the head of Wearyman Creek. , Exit the clearing to the northeast to begin the ascent across the west side of the south ridge of Shrine Mountain.