

Huts Update

Alaska Mountain
and Wilderness
Huts
Association



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Center Creek Pass Makes a Lasting Impression

By Michael Henrich

As the helicopter lightly set me and John Wolfe down at the hut site on Center Creek Pass, I realized how special a place this is, even by Alaska standards. The sun was shining brightly on this crisp fall day. Looking to the east, the Placer River was flowing to the Seward Highway. Just to the southeast was the Spencer Glacier in all its glory. I could also see the Alaska Railroad, and I envisioned the proposed whistlestop and trail from the railroad to the hut. Looking back to the west, I followed Center Creek down the valley to the confluence of Divide Creek (about 5 miles) where Tim Jennings and Ray Burger were to be dropped off. We planned on meeting about half way from our starting points. Our goal was to check out a portion of the trail recently flagged by the Forest Service and get GPS readings along the way.

As I stood there at the proposed hut site, I couldn't imagine a more breath-taking spot for a hut. I also took note of some outstanding backcountry telemark skiing terrain in the peaks surrounding Center Creek Valley—Bench Pk., the back side of Tincan Pk., and others. I think our hut system and trail will lead to some prime backcountry skiing and winter recreation opportunities.

After a short time admiring the view, John and I started to look for the Forest Service flags. Two sets of eyes proved to be very useful in locating the flags. John followed the exact route of the flags and took GPS coordinates while I looked for the next flags in the distance. *(continued on page 2)*



Above – Author Michael Henrich ducks through low hemlock, with Center Creek Pass in the background. The proposed trail proceeds up the center of the photo and over the prominent forested hill, reaching the skyline above the high point of the hill. The route descends the far side of the pass to Spencer Glacier. The hut site is to the left along the skyline.

Below – A view from the proposed trail looking back toward Center Creek Pass. Note that the route and proposed hut site are well to the left of this view.

Photos by John Wolfe



Alaska Huts reviews costs, revenues of hut & trail alternatives

An environmental impact statement (EIS) is required to examine alternative ways of meeting a project's purpose. In June, Chugach National Forest informed Alaska Huts of the alternatives it intends to analyze, and Alaska Huts completed a financial analysis of the alternatives through the fall. Following are descriptions of the preliminary alternatives and conclusions:

- **Proposed Action.** Up to four huts (at Mills Cr., Ohio Cr., Center Cr. Valley, and Center Cr. Pass—see map) on 32 miles of trail connecting to a Manitoba Mountain (Summit Lake area) trailhead, a Johnson Pass Trail north trailhead, and a railroad whistlestop/Spencer Glacier trailhead. Each hut could hold an education group of up to 20. This was the basis for the financial model and works best financially.
- **Alternative 1.** Alaska Huts informed the Forest Service this alternative, with three huts, fewer overall beds, and a truncated trail experience, would not attract people in the same way as the Proposed Action and did not appear to be financially viable. The alternative eliminates a hut and the trail at Center Creek Pass, which is considered the prime viewpoint in the system.
- **Alternative 2.** Alaska Huts informed the Forest Service that this alternative, with three of the four huts at half the sleeping capacity of the Proposed Action, was weaker financially than the Proposed Action and not as much in keeping with the education mission of the organization because of reduced ability accommodate groups.
- **Alternative 3.** Alaska Huts informed the Forest Service that Alternative 3, which includes a trail over Center Creek Pass but no hut there, appeared weaker than the Proposed Action and Alternative 2 but somewhat stronger than Alternative 1.

The Alaska Huts board of directors spent a great deal of time discussing the particulars of hut operations and the effects of the different alternatives on projected use of the system. The huts are not like Forest Service cabins nor like full-service road-side or fly-in lodges, and nothing directly comparable exists in Alaska. That, of course, is the point of establishing a hut to hut system, but it makes financial assessment more difficult. When the first attempt to update unit costs and account for new costs from the Forest Service resulted in too many negative numbers, the board was faced with serious soul-searching. The revised financial assessment accounts for those who would be willing to carry their own food and use huts at a lower cost, as well as high-end fully guided excursions. The board feels the resulting financial model is much stronger than the original.

It's that time of year. Membership for 2007

Soon we will send out our first membership solicitation for the new year. Membership is the most important sustaining element of our modest organization, and we encourage you to renew now for the new year, or to join for the first time. As always, your membership donation is tax deductible as allowed by law for donation to this 501(c)3 charitable organization. But just as importantly, we encourage our members to stay in touch, to give us their ideas on issues of the moment, to hike or ski the proposed route, and to talk up the concept of huts among others inside and outside Alaska. Your help is critical to building the organization, and the huts. We appreciate the steadfast support of our long-standing members throughout this very long approval process and encourage you to keep at by re-joining today. Your membership definitely encourages us! Thank you.

- Michael Henrich, President - John Wolfe, Executive Director/Project Director

Alaska Mountain & Wilderness Huts Association

3039 A lder Circle, A nchorage, A laska 99508

Please join us! Your membership is critical for building the A ssociation... *and the huts!*

\$30* **\$55** **\$75** **\$150** **you name it! \$_____**

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Phone (hm): _____	(wk): _____	e-mail: _____	
Profession: _____	Hut Interests: _____	huts & trails/outdoor work	board member
education	hut operations/planning	social functions or mailings	fundraising or finance

Please make check payable to A laska Huts

Thank you! We couldn't do it without you.

**We will gladly accept less than \$30 from members for whom another amount is more appropriate.*

Our Mission:

Include Alaska's back country in a world-wide tradition of places in which hikers and skiers can travel hut to hut,

and

provide warm comfortable huts in inspiring settings to foster camaraderie and promote wilderness education and stewardship.

Alaska Mountain & Wilderness

Huts Association

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Inside:

- First Impressions of Center Creek, with photos.
- Financial Analysis of Hut Alternatives.

Volunteers needed

Newsletter layout. If you have better layout software than Word and the skills to use it, would you consider volunteering to complete the newsletter package approximately once a quarter? Please call John at 279-4663.

Board seat. The Alaska Huts board of directors has vacant seats. Interested in "getting in on the ground floor" of huts? Please contact Tim Jennings at 278-4841.

Thank you for your on-going support.

'Fly Denali' at Hut Gathering, March 6

Lowell Thomas Jr.—raconteur glacier pilot – filmmaker – Alaska lieutenant governor—will head the program March 6, 2007 at Alaska Huts' annual gathering for members and the public. Thomas will present "Flying Denali," a slide show of his personal experiences flying Mt. McKinley expedition climbers to and from Denali over a decade's time as Alaska Range climbing blossomed in popularity about 25 years ago. Mountain flying is rarely routine, and the show promises to include accounts of "forced landings and very close calls," along with exploits of the climbers.

Thomas was Alaska's lieutenant governor under Jay Hammond. After leaving public life, he flew to the mountains. He is respected as one of the few original mountain flyers. The son of legendary broadcaster Lowell Thomas Sr, Thomas Jr. is known for his engaging speaking style. Last year, he kindly showed his early Tibet film footage for Alaska Huts as a fundraiser, and we had to turn away nearly a hundred people because he packed the house. We invite you to see him speak on this topic for free (memberships and general donations always gratefully accepted). Thomas is retired now but active in the community, with special interests in nordic skiing and Alaska conservation.

'Flying Denali,' with Lowell Thomas Jr.

- Tues., Mar. 6, 2007. Kincaid Park Outdoor Center (aka Kincaid Chalet), Anchorage.
- 6-7 p.m.: Finger food & beverages, hut maps & info, hut-area slides running continuously, people to talk to.
- 7 p.m.: Main Program—brief Huts update and 'Flying Denali' slide show.

Machete Man, we miss you

The best backcountry trip we ever went on was a three-day bushwhack with several board members and volunteers, led by **Kevin Lynch**. Kevin recently stepped down from the board after nearly six years, two of them as president. His time on the board was characterized by the same qualities that made him an excellent backcountry companion—he is a people person who watches out for others and wields a mean machete to make way for his people, and he's strong as all-get-out with fortitude to see him through adversity. On that trip, he was dubbed 'Machete Man,' and even cutting his hand on a rock didn't slow him down. Perhaps Kevin's best quality is his easy-going and abundant optimism. We will miss that on the board. Many thanks, Kevin, for all your years of service. Please join us on another trek.

-John Wolfe, executive director (& Huts founder), on behalf of the board