



## Revised Hut Operating Model Provides Options

The Alaska Huts board of directors completed a long, difficult process of revising and refining the hut operating model in 2006. The result? A good understanding of who is expected to use the huts, and different offerings to accommodate all users.

- **Freedom Walkers.** Local Alaskans and world-traveling backpackers are expected to enjoy using huts freely, on their own terms—as “Freedom Walkers” (a term borrowed from New Zealand huts). These self-serve hut users would carry their own food and sleeping bag and cooking on their own, but would enjoy the use of a warm, dry hut; use of the hut’s propane stove, oven, and pots-n-pans; and use of bunks with mattresses for about \$15-35 per night per person (depending on season and membership status).
- **Youth & Low-Income Education Treks.** Education groups, especially youth groups from schools to scouts, are expected to take advantage of partially-subsidized education stays at the huts, paying approximately \$12-\$14 per person per night for not only space at the huts to sleep and meet, but for food. With food and space provided, these folks who might be unfamiliar with multiple-day trips in the backcountry can focus on learning and taking it all in. These treks would be the perfect opportunity for environmental education supporters to make grants to subsidize experiences for low-income urban families who may never get out of town, for school groups, and for others who could not otherwise afford the experience.
- **Freedom Walkers with Food.** Alaskans with visiting friends or relatives, or those who are unable to carry a heavy pack, or simply those who want to treat themselves are expected to be thrilled to take a hut-to-hut trek over several days carrying only the essentials, because in popular summer and spring skiing seasons the huts would offer hearty, simple, family-style meals, beverages, and blankets as well as a friendly host, books, and on-site activities. This level of service would cost \$60-\$75 per night per person.
- **Guided Groups.** Visitors to Alaska and some Alaskans are expected to want the fully guided experience. Let’s face it, some people don’t venture into the backcountry because they don’t know the way or are worried about wildlife. Guided groups solve that, with all logistics worked out; a ride to the trailhead; experienced people to show the way and explain the human history and natural history; food provided at the huts (with some fresh items carried in by guides); and bunks with blankets. These hut-to-hut hikers would carry their own clothes and a sleeping sheet sack only. They would pay a single fee for the whole excursion at rates similar to other guided trips in Southcentral Alaska (hiking/climbing, kayaking, rafting, fishing), working out to about \$200 per person per day.
- **Discounts:** For any of the options listed above, the cost would be discounted for Alaska Huts members, for off-season use, for children, and for groups. A family of four using the huts as self-serve Freedom Walkers at spring skiing season (call them Freedom skiers?) might pay a total of \$70 per night for the family. That’s less than the cost of a single ticket for a day on the Ski Train and cheaper than taking the family skiing for a day at a resort.
- **Volunteers.** Alaska Huts expects always to work with its members as volunteers for routine trail maintenance, hut cleaning, seasonal set-up and take-down, possibly packing in supplies, and sometimes staying at the huts as caretakers to supplement a paid hut keeper. Volunteers will receive free lodging and/or food at the huts in exchange for their efforts. This would make a truly affordable way to experience the backcountry over and over again.