



10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION
HUT SYSTEM NEWSLETTER
WINTER HUT SEASON
2016

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

S I M P L I C I T Y

There is great strength in the simplicity of this mission. In fact, this simplicity and clarity of mission are key reasons for 10th Mountain's success.

10TH MOUNTAIN's formal mission statement: "The purpose of 10th Mountain is to plan, finance, build and manage, for public use, a mountain hut system that promotes understanding and appreciation of the natural mountain environment while developing individual self-reliance."

Put another way, 10th Mountain's mission is to provide warm, comfortable shelter that allows people to explore and enjoy Colorado's high country. There is great strength in the simplicity of this mission. In fact, this simplicity and clarity of mission are key reasons for 10th Mountain's success. This mission is easily understood and supported by all involved including 10th Mountain staff, 10th Mountain Board of Directors, donors, communities, business partners, and hut visitors. This clarity minimizes "mission drift" which occurs when an organization gradually drifts away from its founding purpose. Thankfully, 10th Mountain, has, with careful and diligent attention, "stuck to the knitting" and maintained clear focus on its original, succinct, and increasingly relevant mission.

The very simplicity of the huts allows an uncluttered and—paradoxically—full experience. The huts are sturdily constructed, well-equipped, and devoid of much of the technology and wrappings that demand attention. This minimalism allows people to unwind, relax, and revel in the company of friends and family.

What opportunities do the huts provide? In addition to all the shenanigans that occur (many of which we don't really want to know about), the huts simply provide connections: huts connect people; huts connect people with the forest; and, huts connect our valleys, our communities, and our regions. These connections are valuable in today's busy and sometimes complicated world.

Finally, skiing, snowshoeing, and snowboarding are amazingly simple ways to travel in the backcountry—dependable, fun, and entirely reliant on individual ability. Self-reliance is a marvelous trait and anyone who travels up to the huts under their own power can take great pride and satisfaction in their accomplishment.

As you might expect, a lot of hard work is required to provide this simple hut experience. 10th Mountain remains grateful for the many volunteers, contractors and staff who continue to do great work. Because of their efforts, and your careful use, the huts are in great condition. We hope you visit the huts soon. If you do, please keep these three simple things in mind: prepare wisely, get an early start, and enjoy! 



— BEN DODGE | Executive Director
10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION HUT ASSOCIATION

Backcountry Snowsports Initiative

Snowmobile (OSV) Use on Forest Service Land

- **Open** to Snowmobiles (OSV): **9,769,939 acres**
- **Closed to OSV** on Wilderness Land: 3,224,322 acres
- **Closed to OSV** on Non-wilderness Land: 2,132,453 acres
- **Total Closed to OSV: 5,356,775 acres**



These numbers were extracted from Winter Wildlands Alliance's 2015 Winter Recreation on National Forests report. The Colorado Mountain Club's **Backcountry Snowsports Initiative** has distilled

that information down for an in-depth look at current OSV regulations in place throughout the state.

As it stands, more than 65% of forest lands in Colorado are open to OSVs. While some areas, with sufficient snowpack, may be appropriate for cross country OSV use, other areas are experiencing conflict between user groups, wildlife and other natural resources.

The new OSV rule will eventually prompt land managers to designate winter travel plans but Forest Service staff are still awaiting further directives from the Washington D.C. office on how to interpret and implement the new rule. We anticipate more information this winter including parameters and formatting for the motor vehicle use maps which will be released with new winter travel plans.

In the meantime, BSI is collecting information on current designations which may or may not meet the requirements of the new rule. Check out the overview of existing winter restrictions on your local forest and let us know if we are missing any information! 

Peter Oatman

PETER ADAMS OATMAN passed away on August 30th, 2015, after a quick and courageous battle with pancreatic cancer. Peter was a frequent 10th Mountain Huts winter visitor, having skied to huts every year and often twice a winter, since the early 1980's, when he first skied up to McNamara and Margy's Huts with his parents, Janet and David Oatman, and his wife, Dottie. More recently he was joined on hut excursions with his daughters Maddie and Avery Oatman, who, having grown up in Boulder, Colorado with a skiing enthusiast like Peter as their father, began skiing at very early ages.



When not skiing, Peter spent his adult life pioneering alternative energy in a career that spanned 35 years. Following a master's degree in Building Energy Engineering from the University of Colorado, Boulder, he worked in solar energy, building energy monitoring systems, energy auditing of commercial buildings, wind power and biofuels.

Peter delighted in gathering friends for a hut excursion, and loved to plan elaborate gourmet meals during his turn at making dinner, then sitting back with drink in hand, and singing with the guitars until wee hours in the morning. Then he was up early to skin up and ski some tele turns in fresh powder around the hut—this was his idea of heaven. One of his favorite spots was the slope just above the Peter Estin Hut. We know he's up there tele-turning to his heart's content and will miss his smiling face and contagious enthusiasm for life and especially for skiing. We will think of him at every 10th Mountain hut we go to in the coming winters. 

10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION HUT ASSOCIATION | JANUARY 2016

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The 10th Mountain Division Hut Association is a privately funded not-for-profit organization located in Aspen, Colorado. The purpose of 10th Mountain is to plan, finance, build and manage, for public use, a mountain hut system that promotes understanding and appreciation of the natural mountain environment while developing individual self reliance. We welcome any comments or suggestions you may have.

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Avalanche!

FOR THE PAST 18 YEARS I have been managing the Alfred Braun Hut System, living and working in the Elk Mountains, day in and day out in avalanche terrain. I have learned a few things, some of them the hard way. I'd like to share them with you in the hopes that the lessons you learn in Avalanche terrain don't come the hard way.

First, my disclaimers: I am not an avalanche expert. I do have great admiration for those who have dedicated their lives to studying and understanding the fascinating complexity of this particular aspect of our natural world. Their work has helped keep me alive, for which I am very grateful.

I am not a ski mountaineer. People may think that being a hutmaster means you get to ski all these great lines all the time. The truth of it is, since I mostly break the cardinal rule of backcountry travel and am out there alone, I am usually too chicken to ski the steeper slopes. That said, I have skied a few mountains, and have found myself out there when the snowpack was "whoomphing". I don't think I can really claim anything more than having been lucky over the last two decades in avalanche terrain.

This last winter brought us the usual unstable and suspect Colorado snow pack. We had one big storm come through which laid down a good bit of snow, brought in with a fair amount of Northerly winds, which built the usual cross-laid wind slab around the higher elevations. I was so spooked by the conditions I was really making a point of staying out of the backcountry (I mean it when I say I've mostly been chicken). I was running a non-hut related errand, and found myself driving down the Castle Creek Road in the afternoon. Glancing over at the Conundrum Creek drainage, I was completely flabbergasted to see a huge and growing powder cloud, a suddenly blooming cauliflower, a rapidly expanding huge thunderstorm-like explosion of snow. I realized that, despite living and working in avalanche terrain for the last eighteen years, this was the first avalanche I'd seen.

I was thrilled. I felt like a charge of electricity flowed through me, I noted the time, pulled off the road, and snapped pictures (which really didn't turn out or capture the moment). And then I laughed at myself. I've seen tons of avalanches, or to be precise, tons of avalanche debris, lots of different slide paths I've come across AFTER they have run. It surprises me how much they surprise me, after all, in avalanche terrain with avalanche paths, it is what they do, they run. Avalanches don't run every year, not all the time, not

even in the same places. But if you are in avalanche terrain, don't be surprised to see places where avalanches have run, and sometimes they run HUGE. If you are below timberline and standing in a meadow, look around, it is probably an avalanche path and you could be right in the bullseye.

The surprise was how I've managed to never actually see an avalanche. I realized it was a direct result of how chicken I've become about avalanches. I don't see avalanches in action by design. I have kids and responsibilities, no devil may care attitude here. So, I simply don't go into avalanche terrain when conditions are ripe for avalanches. One of my boys cautions me as I head out the door "Don't get caught under an avalanche, Dad". I think it's pretty good advice. First, avoid them.

I base that idea of avoidance being the first line of defense on the statistics of avalanche deaths. No one goes out there thinking "today would be a good day to get caught in an avalanche." But lots of guys go out there "to see how it looks." I know myself well enough to know I'd ski down something if I've hiked up it, no matter how sketchy the conditions. For me, better to avoid the temptation.

The statistics are changing over the years, but the general trend holds: Most avalanche deaths are caused by trauma, getting bashed on rocks or strained through trees. Not good. The next biggest cause of death is suffocation from burial, also not good. I travel alone most times, so avoidance is even more important, as there is no one there to dig me out, if I were to survive the trauma. Better just to not go on those bad days. I wear a beacon, which just reminds me of the seriousness of even the small slides. I want to make it easier for the body recovery team anyway. Mostly, I don't want them to need it, ever!

My list of realizations gained while trudging along in avalanche terrain:

- 1 **Fresh snow** is so attractive it hides its danger well. It is clean, white, quiet, soft, and a delight to ski. There are no obvious danger signs, no brilliant red poisonous berries, no rattlesnake warning with buzzing tail, no large huffing mama bear to get your attention. Just quiet, clean tranquil beauty. Until it "whoomphs", which definitely should get your attention.



Hawk Greenway

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2 **Danger** can reach you in places you think are safe. I've seen where big avalanches have come down steep slopes, crossed over level ground, crossed the creek and willows, and climbed up a hundred and fifty feet to snap good sized trees down across the ski trail, pointing uphill. Never underestimate the power of the big slides.

3 I have learned that the **alluvial fans** below the peaks are not necessarily made by flowing water or summer rockslides. They are made by the transport of rocks, trees and debris from avalanches. You can see these alluvial fans, looking like an upside down, half funnel snuggled up to every slide path chokepoint, opening out, spreading skirts out to the middle of the valley. Some are heavily timbered in all but one open and active avalanche path. Don't be fooled, even the large timber on such slopes is vulnerable to an avalanche. Avalanches can start from different trigger zones up the drainage, and ricochet down the slide path, emerging in a different fashion from the chokepoint depending upon how they are bouncing wall to wall. The entire alluvial fan is a potential slide path, regardless of how big the trees have grown. I've seen trees of a hundred and fifty years or more laid down like toothpicks, places I had paused to catch my breath thinking I was safely out of the active avalanche path.

4 I have learned that there are **no guarantees** in avalanche terrain. You can manage the risk, you can minimize your exposure, sometimes by a lot, but you cannot necessarily eliminate it. Pay attention ALL the time you are out.

5 I ponder the **huge number of variables** required to come together just so to make an avalanche occur. I think of the wind, the storm history, the snowpack history, the length of the slope, its solar exposure, all the factors. It's become second nature to me, gauging the immediate terrain, avoiding exposure when and where I can. To me, no ski run would be worth getting caught. There are too many great ski days ahead!

Sometimes, the conditions just seem so weird. This spring, I was surprised to actually see my second avalanche. It was a warm day, I was enroute to the Lindley Hut, walking on dirt, amazed at how early the snow was melting out. Across the valley I heard the telltale clatter of rockfall. I searched for it and then was astounded to see a wave of melting snow, like an ocean wave crashing upon a beach, a surge of rocks, snow and water, going so much faster than anyone could run. It was splashing down the avalanche slide. I'd always sort of pooh-poohed the wet slab spring avalanches in their slow speeds and predictable, warm afternoon behavior. This one caught my attention as I'd never

seen anything like it.

I'm no expert, and the old saw holds that "there ARE NO living experts". I don't go quite that far, but I'm willing to say that there is a lot to learn out there!

Just as avalanche paths eventually will run, so too must I. After 18 years, it is time to pass the "hutmaster" baton on to another. The Alfred Braun Hut System has hired Morgan Boyles, young man extraordinaire, native of Aspen, hut aficionado and Elk Mountain Grande Traverse Survivor, to take the reins. I wish him the best of all times, and safe travels in the backcountry to all. Say "Hi" to him when you find him on the trails! 🏔️

— HAWK GREENWAY

Hut Master Hawk

ON A RAINY AFTERNOON in the end of July I picked up a large truck and an equally large chainsaw from Hawk Greenway. All of the sudden I was responsible for readying the seven Braun huts for winter. My task was to "do Hawk's job," intimidating to say the least because Hawk has an unbelievable set of backcountry and management skills.

In a community that attracts remarkable characters, Hawk stands out. At 16 he rode a horse alone up the Pacific Crest Trail and wrote a book about the adventures, he is an experienced bush pilot, an avid hunter, and managed a 32,000-acre ranch.

Hawk's experience is not just that of a woodsman or a cowboy. He also holds a Masters in Natural Resource Management, has sat on numerous conservation boards, is a proud father, and was even a Lear jet pilot.

Many of us know him through his role as "Hut Master Hawk." He started the job soon after he finished building a beautiful cabin on the backside of Aspen. For two decades he skillfully and prudently managed the Braun Huts as they came to be the beautiful system that we enjoy today. The tireless passion that Hawk poured into the huts and the many volunteers that helped this summer were essential for this year's transition. I am tremendously thankful for Hawk and the many friends of the Braun Huts in our community.

Though a serious mountain bike accident prompted Hawk to move on from this job, he shows no signs of slowing down and he will not be far from the joys and challenges of managing a hut system. Currently building a new cabin on the backside of Aspen Mountain, Hawk is mastering new skills as the proud owner of a sawmill! 🏔️

— MORGAN BOYLES | Alfred A. Braun Hut Manager



New Owners Pledge 'Cadillac' Legacy

JOHN SEIPEL built the Polar Star Inn in 1987 on New York Mountain near the outpost town of Fulford. Along with the adjacent Carl's Cabin, the Polar Star (11,040 feet) provides a linkage from the Aspen side to the Eagle/Vail area.

Seipel announced in December that both huts have sold to Shawn Gallus and Nick Cherney. "It was time for the next generation of thinking," acknowledged Seipel, who said he is turning 66 and needs respite from "a lot of effort and organization."

Seipel, for whom the new owners are renaming Carl's Cabin as the "Seipel Hut," knows about effort and organization. He built the Polar Star in a blistering nine weeks, cramming a complete mountain cabin into one, short building season. His other significant contributions to the 10th Mountain Huts include design, construction, permits, logistics and sweat equity on the Jackal and Fowler-Hilliard in 1988, 10th Mountain and Uncle Bud's in 1989, and Skinner in 1990.

Seipel had hoped to hand off his cherished Polar Star to a family member, but other interests prevailed, so he opted for Gallus and Cherney. "These two have been asking me for more than a year," he said. "I've been putting them off, but decided on Shawn, a dear friend, and much younger, who has been helping me for 20 years. I had promised that he would be cut in when the time came. His good friend, Nick, can help shoulder the cost, so the combination is unbeatable."

Also unbeatable are the motives of the new owners, both impassioned backcountry skiers. They met 20 years ago while working at Cordiera Lodge and share a contagious enthusiasm for mountain huts.

"It has to be a labor of love," enthused Gallus, a Minnesota native. "Nick and I love going up to the hut, and I hate coming down. For me, it's about unplugging everything and getting back to simple things, like keeping warm. I have always loved the backcountry and it's great to be in the backcountry and get paid for it."

Gallus, 46, pledges to continue what Seipel created, maintaining the Polar Star as the "Cadillac" of the hut system - with running water (summer-only) from a nearby spring. "Our main goal is to main-



John Seipel at Polar Star Inn

PAUL ANDERSEN

tain that legacy. The Polar Star had a sauna, and it would be fun to revisit that, but with the sauna serving both huts."

Cherney, 34, has a special attachment to the Polar Star as the first hut trip he made with a special young woman. "I met a girl on a trip in Mexico and wanted to teach her to ski. One of the first things she did was to skin to the Polar Star. That same lady is my wife, and we've got four kids. Being out there in the mountains is a huge part of my life, and to have my family connected to the huts is really huge."

Other than renaming Carl's Cabin in honor of Seipel, the new owners plan to fine-tune the huts for the best experience possible. "These huts under-promise and over-deliver," said Cherney. "Everyone is so amazed by the experience. We have a long list of ideas, but we will slowly make changes and pay attention to where things can be improved."

Gallus and Cherney praise John Seipel for his vision, foresight and incredible ambition. They also recognize his humility. "John has such a long history with the 10th, but no one knows who he is," reflected Cherney. "He's been such a key part of it, and he's never going to name a hut for himself, so now we'll have the Seipel Hut."

"We hope to make it longer than John did," said Gallus, "and he was at the hut for thirty years!" 

-PAUL ANDERSEN

Vail Mountain School's Hut Trips

LIANA SIDELI is the director of outdoor education for the Vail Mountain School (VMS). Liana plans the logistics for all of the outdoor education experiences including hut trips, rafting, hiking, kayaking, and stand up paddling. 10th Mountain caught up with Liana to ask her about her role in the outdoor education program at VMS—a K through 12 independent school with 438 studious students.

How long has Vail Mountain School been using the huts?

Hut trips have been a treasured part of a VMS experience for over 25 years.

At VMS 4th through 8th grade each have a class hut trip. We begin with a fall trip for the 4th grade and then 5th through 8th grade strap on skins and make the trek in the winter!

We begin in the earlier grades with the huts that are the “easiest” to reach. In each successive year, we build on this initial experience, and book huts that cover a bit more terrain or are a little more challenging to reach.

Does Vail Mountain School have any unusual or noteworthy hut trip traditions?

Vail Mountain School has created its own “recipe” for a successful hut trip. We believe in the 5 p’s (proper planning prevents poor performance).

Every evening at a hut there is a de-brief in which each student has an opportunity to share their highlight of the day.

We also have a tradition of holding a faculty hut trip in early December every year. Veteran hut trip leaders take turns “leading” the trip, teaching about proper hut use etiquette and setting the itinerary.

What do the kids like the most about the trips?

These experiences are often mentioned as one of their favorite opportunities at VMS. Students love the time with their teachers and peers, the experience of a “real challenge” and time together at the hut.

What aspect of hut trips do the kids struggle with or like the least?

Touring uphill. When we solicit feedback from the students many will cite that the hardest part was “getting to the hut” but that the best part was “being at the hut with my friends.”

What do you feel are the most important lessons that the kids learn?

Overcoming challenges. Every student struggles with something on the trip. If the weight of their backpack isn’t the challenge, maybe it’s buckling their boots, clipping their leashes, cutting an onion, or cooking dinner

on a stove for the first time.

Kids are notorious for bringing items they shouldn't on trips—any memorable items that were carried to a hut?

On a 6th grade hut trip we had made it to Vance’s Cabin and were talking about the plan for the rest of the afternoon. I noticed a group of girls whispering in the corner but they wouldn’t tell me what they were talking about. They were very concerned that they would have a bit of “free time” before dinner to do “something.” Sure enough right before dinner they came upstairs with a bag of nail polish that had to weigh at least five pounds!

What is your favorite hut and why?

Tough question! We love them all! 10th and Jackal are probably my favorites due to the surrounding views but each hut has so much to offer. We believe it’s important to choose huts based on the goals we have determined for different age groups in the backcountry.

As a leader/educator, do you have any tips for taking kids on hut trips?

Use hut trips as an opportunity to encourage leadership. Teach the students what it looks like to be a leader on the trail, in the hut, and taking care of each other. Then ask students to step into roles in which they have to use and build their leadership skills. 

10th Mountain’s Backcountry Exploration Program offers discounts to qualifying school groups and other non-profits.



VAIL MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

Extraordinary **Hut Volunteers** | Summer 2015

We just can't say it enough...**Thank You 10th Mountain Volunteers!**

—PHOTOS BY DAVE LEE





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Huts For Vets hosts Team RWB

COMBAT VETERANS handle their war trauma in many ways. Some mire into depression, despair, even suicide. Others medicate themselves into zombies with prescriptions from the VA. Only a few choose the challenging but ultimately rewarding path of physical fitness.

In September 2015, **Huts For Vets** brought half a dozen members of Team Red, White and Blue to the Margy's Hut for a weekend of hiking, philosophical discussions, and camaraderie. Fitness is what Team RWB is all about, and they proved it on every trail.

One of their members, a young man who described his triumph in a life-and-death battle with drug and alcohol abuse, said that mountain running saved his life. Thanks to a demanding fitness regimen for which he received support from his veteran peers at Team RWB, his life was turned around. Today, this combat veteran is a long-distance runner. And whenever he runs, he carries the American flag.

During the **Huts For Vets** trip with him and his teammates in September, the stars and stripes were with us on every trail—even through the thick tangle of brush that describes the lower portion of the Woody Creek Trail, which is one of the most biologically diverse riparian ecosystems in the Roaring Fork Valley.

The Team RWB website describes a well thought out organization with over 100 chapters across the US, every chapter featuring running as a foundational discipline. And there's more.

"Our chapters and communities deliver consistent, local opportunities for veterans and the community to connect through physical and social activity," states the RWB website. "And it is so much more than running. They host regular fitness activities, social gatherings, and participate in local races and events together. Veterans can also develop their leadership skills by serving as a volunteer leader in their local chapter."

Watching the stars and stripes flash through the woods and stand tall at the summit of Mt. Yeckel was also a reminder that these veterans are true patriots who have given everything they have to the service of our country. It was a pleasure and an honor to have Team Red, White and Blue become part of our **Huts For Vets** program. We look forward to having many more of these strong and promising veterans join us at **Huts For Vets**. 

—PAUL ANDERSEN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | HUTS FOR VETS



Posting the Colors | Mt. Yeckel

PAUL ANDERSEN