



SKI TRACKS

Newsletter of the Bitterroot Cross Country Ski Club

Box 431 • Corvallis, Montana 59828

September, 2003



ANOTHER SEARING FIRE SEASON

By Gordon Reese

About the 8th or 9th of July a lightning storm moved through the Lost Trail / Chief Joseph Pass area and ignited two fires that quickly became major conflagrations that had the potential to do major damage to our ski trails.

The Blackwall fire started in Idaho and moved very fast over the Continental Divide south of Chief Joseph Pass into Montana. The Ruby Creek, Butler Creek, Stevenson Creek and part of the May Creek drainages all got badly burned. The May Creek Cabin was wrapped and well defended, but it was fortunate that the fire - while coming close - did not burn around the cabin. The Frog Pond fire was observed a few days later on the Montana / Idaho border, about four miles south-west of Lost Trail Powder Mountain ski area. This fire literally blew up and in one afternoon made a large run. Fortunately, it did not travel towards Lost Trail - but burned down into the North Fork of the Salmon drainage - actually right down to the highway.

Both of these were big and aggressive fires. Thousands of acres burned. Lots of hard work, lots of equipment, some good fortune, but mainly lots of dedicated, talented firefighters, kept these fires from getting a lot worse.

As a precaution, when no one knew which way the fires would go, the Hut was wrapped, sprayed with gel foam and a sprinkler system was put in place.

Approximately three weeks later, on August 4th, I joined Patty Johnson of the Wisdom Ranger District at the Hut as we observed two "engine crews" from the Missoula Rural Fire District unwrap the Hut and remove the foam gel. The foam gel comes off, but it took lots (over 2000 gallons) of high pressure water. The MRFD engine crews - five fellows - were very experienced, diligent and careful in performing the work. We couldn't have had better folks to do the job. They cleaned screens, windows, decks, walls, roof overhangs - everything. They even scooped up the gooey gel when it finally got into the gravel and sacked it up and took it to the dump!

The Hut was re-opened a few days later to the people who had reserved it through the USFS cabin rental program.

THIS MAY BE YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER

No, your membership has not expired, but the term of service of the newsletter editor has. Just as with magazine subscriptions, inevitably the day comes when one must **ACT**. In the case of the magazine, it means paying up for the subscription, and in the present instance, it means volunteering to fill the vacant billet. The job is actually fun; it's not taxable and it's not fattening. Step two paces forward.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Saturday, September 13, 2003

At the Hut, 9:30 a.m. through the afternoon

The gate will be open 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Pot luck at noon - bring a dish of something. H2O and soft drinks will be provided. Bring gloves and nippers if you have them. Main projects: cabin cleaning, fire wood stacking (will a new world's record be set?) and trail brushing. Many hands make light work, and wonderful pot lucks!! Enjoy.



THE HUT - DRESSED UP FOR THE FIREMAN'S BALL

This photo of the East side of the Hut shows how the Hut was wrapped by the USFS as a fire defensive measure. It doesn't show in the photo, but the portions of the structure not covered by foil are covered by a mostly transparent fire protective gel. For more on the unwrapping and restoration process, see "Another Searing Fire Season" elsewhere in this issue.



JUNE WORK WEEK RECAP, ETC.

By Gordon Reese

Thanks to everyone who cleaned the Hut (especially the kitchen cleaners) built benches, moved and raked gravel, installed weather stripping, cut and piled brush, cut, hauled and cut-to-length 3 cords of firewood, and stacked and covered it, picked up trash along the highway and brushed trails. So much was accomplished !! - Thanks to all.

Newsletter Editor Retiring - New Opportunity for YOU!! A special note of thanks to Art Seifert for doing such a superb job with our newsletter. The system is in place, thanks to Art, Peg Hampton at IBID, the printers, and the envelope stuffers and mailers. Art will be difficult to replace, but for some lucky, talented, generous person this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity...and if you do a good job we will consider an increase in your pay! Maybe even double it! Thanks, Art.



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CONTINENTAL DIVIDE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

By Gordon Reese

The Bitterroot National Forest trail people have let a contract for the construction of about 4.5 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNSC) from Gibbons Pass to Chief Joseph Pass. This will be accomplished in September and October of this year, I believe.

Because the true Continental Divide passes right through our ski trail area, skiers will notice some changes in trail names and in the corresponding trail signs. What we have been calling the Continental Divide Trail will be re-named Broadway. Our present EZ Trail and the top of Picnic Meadow, together with our present Spur Trail, will be re-named and re-signed as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. Just north of the Hut, Broadway and Continental Divide National Scenic Trail will co-exist, and this will also be the case on the present Gold Medal Trail up to just below Hunter's Hill - at that point the CDNST will proceed north, cross Vista View Trail and then cross the Gibbons Pass Road (USFS Road No. 1260) and follow the true divide north.

The completion of this portion of the 3,200 mile long CDNST is long-awaited, much needed, and will be a great place to hike and ski - offering outstanding vistas. Thanks are due to our USFS folks to worked on this project. (Note: Some of you will remember that during the summer of 1998 about 55 volunteers, along with USFS personnel, built a one-half mile piece of the trail utilizing part of our existing Gold Medal Trail. Our ski club was very well represented, and those member volunteers can justly share in the thanks and satisfaction for a job well done.)

Membership Renewals / DUES

Annual Memberships EXPIRE November 1!

Renew your membership now!

INDIVIDUAL - \$10 • FAMILY - \$20

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL - \$25

SUPPORTING FAMILY - \$35

LIFE MEMBER - \$100

Membership Dues

Nov. 1, 2003 - Oct. 31, 2004

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