

## San Juan Hut Systems Ski Route to Last Dollar Hut

*Please note: this information is intended only as a supplement to a full color topographic map. If the scale of the reprinted topo is not large enough for you to navigate accurately with, you are responsible for obtaining your own full size, full scale topographic map.*

**Topo Map:** (7.5'') Greyhead

**Trailhead Elevation:** 9702 ft

**Trail Head Cord. NAD 27:** N37 59 00.9 W107 56 57.9

**Distance to Hut from Trailhead:** 2.7 Miles

**Hut Elevation:** 10925 ft

**Hut Cord. NAD 27:** N38 00 22.9 W107 56 45.9

### Directions to the Trailhead:

- Follow Highway 145 west out of Telluride to Deep Creek Road, marked "Lime" on the topo map. Deep Creek Road is the first right after Keystone grade, 7.2 miles from Telluride or a left turn 9.4 miles from Placerville if coming from that direction. The road maintenance facilities are located at the turn and serve as a landmark to look for.
- Or also leaving from Telluride, get onto Last Dollar Road and follow it past the airport to the bridge at Deep Creek. Continue straight, passing through Aldasoro Ranch. Climbing up the road you will see a driveway and house on the left. Continue up Last Dollar road into the Greyhead Subdivision. This road will widen and you will encounter many turnoffs with names and Private signs.
- Go across Willow Creek. Just before a Y intersection you will see an Uncompahgre National Forest Sign. The road will be plowed to the intersection. This is your trailhead. Trailhead is approximately 5.5 miles from Highway 145. Please try to park as far out of the way as possible so that other vehicles can park and the snowplow can still plow and turnaround. Shovel out an area if you need to and park facing back downhill so that if it snows you are headed in the right direction. Do not block other vehicles in please. Just before the final parking destination there is a last steep slippery section of road. Try to get up this section of road before the sun softens the snow and makes it slippery!

### Ski/Snowshoe Route Description:

- From the trailhead, ski up Last Dollar Road. Shortly after starting, Last Dollar Road crosses through the run out zone of a potential avalanche slide path, which is easily recognized and avoided. Half a mile after this potential slide path, Summit Creek will cross Last Dollar road. This is where 3 switchbacks begin that lead to the top of Last Dollar Pass. At certain times of the year there may be avalanche potential at the midway point of switchback number 2. These potential pockets are hidden and not evident until you would be directly beneath them.
- If you assess that there is danger, instead of continuing up Last Dollar road, you may go up the old route to the pass. This alternate route becomes a necessity only a few times of the year, if at all. To utilize this alternate, an old abandoned road exists above Summit Creek, above the bench that you see from Last Dollar road. This old road starts just before crossing Summit Creek, directly across the Last Dollar Road from 2 old log structures and works its way up into the center of the basin, where it is possible to rejoin switchback number 2, above a potential avalanche area. In 15 years this slide has never been active, although...
- Continue skiing up switchback number 2, then switchback number 3 until you are at the top of the pass. Elevation: 10,663 ft. The hut sits on the ridge crest to the east, approximately 300 vertical feet and 1/3 mile above the pass at approximately 11,000 feet. The easiest way to the hut is to ski directly up the ridge crest with the open grassy slope to your right that offers views of the Wilson Peaks to the south. It may be necessary to pull your skis off and walk if your skins are not gripping. This is a good approach to use if the winds are less than 100 miles an hour, because the views are so amazing.
- If the winds are more than 100 miles an hour, it is recommended that you take the "back route". This "back route" is a bit more confusing, especially if it is dark, but removes you from being blown to Kansas. From the top of Last Dollar Pass, there is a road on the North side of the ridge that starts out truck width, and parallels the ridge. There are also other hunting camp roads and the new start to the Alder Creek trail in this area as well (i.e. somewhat confusing to start). This back route to the hut quickly and very steeply ascends, eventually becoming horse width as it switchbacks up the north side of the ridge that the hut sits on and deposits you directly on the ridge where the hut is located.

### Layout of Last Dollar Hut Site:

Propane tanks are on the south side of hut and hanging from tree in front of hut door. Please remember to turn off ALL propane at night and any time that you leave the hut. Firewood is located 10' in front of hut under large tree canopy. Please split wood outside, and replace split wood inside hut for next skiers. Please leave axes inside hut. Collect snow for water from the southwest of the hut. Please keep this area free of litter, urine and dishwasher. Use the stovetop of the wood stove to melt

snow for water. Put snow in the large silver metal tubs to melt snow in. Turn propane tank off at night. Pack out what you pack in. All trash should be hauled out! Leave NOTHING at the hut. This includes prayer flags.

### **Skiing around the Last Dollar Hut:**

This is the hut where we had one of our two ski fatalities. The skiing at this hut is primarily avalanche chutes. Although they're avalanche chutes, they are relatively safe avalanche chutes, as far as avalanche chutes go. This is because these are not terrain trap types of avalanche chutes, where once you get in you would be unable to get out. At any time when skiing any of these chutes, it is possible to exit any of them on the skiers' right or skiers left. Some chutes, once you are in them, you remain committed (should you be committed?!) the entire length of the chute; not so with the Last Dollar chutes.

To find access to these north and northwest facing chutes exit the hut and ski up the timbered ridge to the east. After skiing approximately ½ hour the slope will radically steepen in front of you. There is one potential avalanche zone on this timbered hillside, before you break tree line that could hurt you. If you stray too far to the left on this timbered slope while ascending, it is possible to inadvertently wander into the run out zone for chute number 1 and the catchment basin that supplies it. To safely break tree line from this steep timbered slope, there is only one relatively safe route when avalanche danger is moderate to high or worse. This route is approximately 400 feet from the ridgeline to your right (South). When utilizing this safest route it is necessary to take advantage of the small stands of isolated tree pockets that are above you upon leaving the timbered forest and breaking tree line. While choosing this route it is possible to keep potential bodies of moving snow beneath you to your right as you do an ascending traverse from tree island to tree island attempting to gain the above-tree ridgeline to your right, south. Once or twice a year it is impossible to safely complete this short traverse right to the safety of the above tree line ridge to your right. This is due to a snowfield that can hold 2 to 4 feet of very fragile wind slab that separates skiers from the safety of the trees and the safety of the ridgeline. This snowfield is only 200 feet across but can be deadly impassable. If you assess that you can safely join the above tree line ridge to your right, you will be rewarded with great views to the south of the Wilson's and the San Miguel Range. Continue up this ridgeline headed for what is locally known as the "Lunch Spot" which is at an elevation of 12,000'. While heading for the "Lunch Spot" which sits on the ridge proper, do not attempt a long ascending traverse to the left because this will take you into an extremely fragile, very large, very active, avalanche zone that is the starting zone and catchment basin for chute number 1... AVALANCHE AREA!

The "Lunch Spot" is a large flat area just below the summit of a peak locally known as Han Shan, 12,311 ft. which is just above you. Sometimes it is possible to ski from the actual summit of Han Shan down through snow-filled gullies that lead into chute number 2. There are 6 commonly skied runs that are skied from this area of which 3 start from near the vicinity of the "Lunch Spot". The other longer chutes are to the north and somewhat hidden by the trees that separate them as they descend from beneath the rock band which lies beneath the large head wall under the obvious, mostly horizontal ridge, that leads north from Han Shan to Hayden Peak, which lies directly above the North Pole Hut.