

San Juan Hut Systems' Ski Route: Last Dollar Hut to North Pole 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 Maps: (7.5") Sams

Last Dollar Cord. NAD 27: N38 00 22.9 W107 56 45.9

Last Dollar Hut Elevation: 10925 ft

Distance From the Last Dollar to North Pole Hut: 8.7 miles

North Pole Hut Cord. NAD 27: N38 03 14.7 W107 53 50.7

North Pole Hut Elevation: 9960 ft

Ski/Snowshoe Route Description:

- These first two steps offer an alternative route to regain the Last Dollar Pass road vs. the exposed ridgeline described in the Last Dollar Hut Route description. This alternative is well protected from wind and as it faces north, holding powdery snow well, may be used as an alternative ascent to the hut as well.
- Go north from hut, slightly uphill 150 lineal feet, to where trail drops down a short steep clearing. (Look for a huge ugly blaze on tree at the top of the slope.)
- Ski a short way to your right and then switchback to the left which should take you to a truck-width road that takes you back to the LD Pass Road.
- **Follow the next 5 Steps carefully! These steps are crucial for finding the Alder Creek Trail and avoiding needless backtracking.**
- From the pass road, head North, down the road, disregarding the new USFS Alder Creek trailhead signage (this trailhead is not well suited for winter use as it utilizes short switchbacks through tight trees).
- Continue down LD Rd for about 200 yards; look for clumps of small Aspen on your right and a small clearing with a large Spruce tree with a small sapling "hugging" it, in the middle of this clearing.
- LD road continues down to the left of this Spruce. Do Not Follow It. Look to the right of the Spruce; there is a truck width corridor going down, north, into the forest. There are blazes on trees, both to the right and left of the corridor, indicating the correct route.
- Follow this old road again for about 200-300 yards to a white "T" post (a fence stake). Here the trail goes sharply off to the right and is now only horse width. This is Alder Creek Trail and is well marked with old and new tree blazes. It is easy to miss this start of the Alder Creek Trail; the previous road continues downhill to the North and drops into a number of small clearings before dropping onto LD road.
- You should now be on the well marked Alder Creek Trail and can cruise along for the next 1 ½ half miles. You've been heading in a NE direction, but the trail will contour around to the East (near the areas indicated by the "G R E" in the word "UNCOMPAHGRE" on the topo). Several small 'slough' areas could come across the trail and should be crossed one at a time or leave the trail and go around below when dangerous snow conditions exist.
- Just past the "E" in "UNCOMPAHGRE", the trail crosses a steep North facing slope. At the top is a rock outcrop. This is a very active avalanche path! Be safe rather than sorry and switchback down and around this small but potentially deadly area.
- ¼ mile past the Rock Outcrop Slide is a huge slide path for chutes 5 and 6 (for LD Hut skiers). The trail crosses near the bottom of the deposition zone; blown out timber all around.
- Ski along a short way, you will come to a small stream crossing and available water.
- Climb out of the streambed into a large clearing with an old 4' high, log walled, and roofless trapper's cabin in the SW corner. The trail exits out of the NE corner of this clearing.
- You will come across another large slide path that the trail goes through near the bottom of the run- out zone.
- A couple of potentially dangerous 'slough' areas that could run down below the trail into classic terrain traps. Go down and around these during high hazard times.
- Another large slide path starting way high up, that the trail goes across the bottom of.
- The Alder Creek Slide!! **This is an extremely dangerous slide path with multiple starting zones** all over the place for 2,000 vertical feet. The Alder Creek Trail goes right through it at a 'choke' near the very bottom. The winds generated by an avalanche when it is rockin' and rollin' reach over 150 mph as they blow across the trail. SCARY!! Use alternative and evasive winter ski routes to get this section safely behind you. Read the following:
 - At the South edge of the Alder Creek slide area (just before you start exposing yourself); look for several sets of double blazes on the uphill and downhill sides of trees on the west side of the trail. These double blazes will lead you down a gentle, wooded ridgeline, above and beside the drain of the avalanche chute to your right, north.

- Once down a short distance (100 yards) through these trees, begin to angle over toward the chute, look for a safe descent into the bottom of the drain, cross drain, and ascend sun and wind-blasted south facing side of the gully to regain the Alder Creek Trail.
- The route into this gully is not without danger if done improperly. Use caution! Take your time in choosing your route down into this gully to cross. These directions DO NOT guarantee a safe crossing of the Alder Creek Slide. You must make your own safety/stability assessments and proceed or not proceed accordingly. If the crossing described above is unsafe, another crossing further down the gully is possible.
- Once regaining the trail after the Alder Creek Slide, you will come to an area of wind-fallen trees. Work around these on the right, east, and regain the trail.
- The Alder Creek Trail is now pretty clear all the way to a 4-way trail junction. The distance from the slide to this junction is approximately 2 ¾ miles. However, route finding must be done with care to ‘stay on’ the trail. If you lose the trail backtrack until you are sure you are on it and start over. Bushwhacking and dead-reckoning are a bad idea here.
- Under bad visibility conditions, there are two tricky Aspen clearings before the 4-way junction mentioned. The trail enters these clearings from the South at the top end and exits to the North at slightly lower elevation.
- The 4-way junction (indicated by a prominent trail coming up from the North) is where the Alder Creek Trail becomes the Dallas Trail. You want to continue heading east.
- Continue on this up/down section of trail for approximately 2 ½ half miles with easily available water at the steep, tight bottom of the Middle Fork of Leopard Creek.
- After the Middle Fork of Leopard Creek, a sustained climb (skins may be necessary) takes you onto a forested ridge crossing. This is the ascent ridge for access to Hayden Peak skiing.
- Now to get to the hut. Continue rapidly down the forested Dallas Trail to a clearing. With a hard left, north, you leave the Dallas Trail as it continues east. Pass through a stand of Spruce trees going north, and enter a large clearing that runs along the West side of some beaver ponds drained by the East Fork of Leopard Creek.
- The hut sits visible in a clearing 300 yards north of The Dallas Trail.

Layout of The North Pole Hut Site:

Propane tanks are on the south side of the hut. Please remember to turn off the propane at night. Also, please turn off ALL propane tanks when you leave the hut. Firewood is located 100” east 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. Pack out what you pack in. All trash should be hauled out. Leave NOTHING at the hut. DO NOT decorate the hut. This includes prayer flags.

Skiing around the North Pole Hut:

There are numerous beginner trails leading from the beaver pond area near hut to the south and headed uphill toward Hayden Peak. There is avalanche danger as you approach the big, obvious cliffs. It is also possible to ski along the Dallas Trail west toward the Last Dollar Hut. This is a moderate Nordic trail with fun ups and downs. To access the “turnable” terrain above, leave the hut and get on the Dallas Trail as it heads west until you are at the top of a completely treed-in, difficult to define ridge. Check your map, this distance is approximately a 1/3 of a mile from the hut. At this poorly defined area, head up hill, south, left, through the forest. The forest here is a very slight incline. As you continue upward, the ridge nature of this forested area will become more evident. Approximately, ½ mile from the Dallas Trail, the hillside steepens very quickly. There is a potential avalanche area of unstable snow here. So the safest route is to your right, west, up this, now, much steeper hillside. As you continue up you will see an area of dead standing, limbless trees on your left that makes nice gentle glade skiing on the way down. Unfortunately, there is a rock band that cuts across the bottom of this dead tree area, which is difficult to see on your morning climb. There is high slide potential at certain times as you near the top of this rock band. Continue up the right hand side of this slope with views of the sharply pointed spike of rock, known as North Pole Peak to your right, west and across a deep basin.

To get to the top of the forested area and arrive at a spot known as the “Lunch Spot”

This is at tree line. Continue up a narrowing and steeper area with small windblown trees. There is an active avalanche area to your left that is visible just before breaking tree line. Once you have broken tree line, look for a large comfortable resting area, with small rock outcrops and great views of the north face of Hayden Peak. From this Lunch Spot there is a mostly open area directly east, about a 100” that is often skied down, but know that it is an active avalanche slope. If using this route, continue back to the hut by staying to the skier’s right of the aforementioned rock band with the large treeless basin of Hayden Peak to

your right, east. Using this route, skiers must be aware of terrain trap, avalanche gullies and pick their route very carefully as they head back to the hut.

To climb Hayden Peak, throw skis on your pack and boot your way up the west face above you to gain the Northeast ridge of Hayden Peak. Lots of scree on this west face. Once on the Northeast ridge of Hayden, continue all the way to the summit in a leisurely stroll, until the final 200 vertical feet, where the slope is usually 'white marble'. It is possible to reverse your route back to tree line, it is also possible to ski the great northeast snowfield, by several descent routes.

From the summit of Hayden, looking east/northeast, there is a gentle rib that is sometimes skied down to a lower bench. From here it is possible to continue down, east into the basin; however, the terrain steepens considerably as does the avalanche potential. From the just mentioned lower bench, it is possible to traverse north, skiers left, under the northeast snowfield. At the far north end of the snowfield, skiers can drop down into some stands of trees seen below. From here it gets VERY tricky. Ski through these small stands of trees a short distance until a much defined narrowing rib appears before you with a huge drop off to your left and the deep basin to your right. This is an active avalanche area that deserves much respect. The safest way down this rib is to the skiers left a short distance, being extremely avalanche protocol minded. This rib can also hold shallow snow cover over sharp scree that has ruined many a ski bottom as the rib is often windswept. There are two exit gullies through the rocks (to your right) from this rib that give passage into the lower basin below you to the skiers. right. Only one of these rock gullies is recommended and they are parallel and side-by-side. At the point you are looking for this gully passage there will still be trees below you in more of a leftish (NE) direction. To identify the proper rock gully, make sure that you identify the improper rock gully that is much more of an obvious collecting drain for avalanching snow above you. The rock gully that is the only acceptable one to use is the one that is to the skiers left of the improper rock gully. This proper rock gully is approximately 80 vertical feet and requires at almost ALL times to take ones skis off. The rock gully does NOT have skier falling, exposure-related, hazards associated with it when you are down climbing the gully (i.e. it is very easy). Once at the bottom of the gully, it is very easy to see the huge rock band that underlies the great northeast snowfield. From the bottom of the gully, do not descend into the bottom of the creek-draining basin! Instead, traverse left (North), with open slopes that you traverse under or through or as soon as you exit the gully or ski a descending traverse right to a stand of trees. Then ski down a short rib (headed north) and then head for the last chute-less avalanche exposed area. It is very possible to give oneself adequate avalanche protection in this area.

There is one last chute to ski. This chute starts near the lowest point of rocks on the skiers left, in a classically defined avalanche starting area with trees on the skier's right. This chute drops about 400 vertical feet and has slide potential, but can be skied properly with respectful avalanche protocol procedures in place. From bottom of last chute, traverse left back toward the hut. If you do not want to ski this last chute (which at times could be scary) you can traverse to the skiers right **above the starting zone for the chute** into the trees and work your way down through fun, steep trees, enter the chute lower down and continue down to the bottom of the chute staying in the trees. Near the bottom is an old mine road that is very helpful in getting back to the Dallas Trail and then left, west, to the hut. It is very worthwhile to find this mine road otherwise it's "Rambo-time" down through the timber on your left, an unforgettable experience but not one without its' own "special charm"