



Spring - Summer 2011

Issue #814

The  
Hut  
hits

75

# Glen

hits

# 99

Happy Belated 99th Birthday, Glen!

from the Ski Mountaineers and



# 2011 The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ski Mountaineer's Mount Baldy Hut

What more fitting an honor than to grace these pages with a tribute to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baldy Hut and the men and women who made it happen. The Ski Mountaineers who had the vision to pick this lofty location 2000 feet, by trail, above a road with views of the San Gabriel Mountains that have no match anywhere. The warm evening alpenglow just dims the tiniest flickering lights of a vast sea of civilization below and gives a profound sense of being deep in the wilderness.

This location next to Southern California's premier backcountry skiing destination – Baldy Bowl – offering challenging chutes that resorts do not compete with that has been used by professional ski and movie makers for years. The surrounding terrain – that is being explored on all sides just puts the Hut in the center of So. California's finest ski mountaineering. It offers skiers a warm fire to come in out of the snow and share stories and adventure in a friendly, warm, backcountry setting. There have been times when I stayed there during blizzards then got up in the morning to look out at the untracked bowl. Myself and a couple of others were the first up and first down the fresh powder, when no one else even made it to the hut.

Inside the Hut is a well-stocked library providing a great history of the area

and the roll that the Hut played. Also inside is a cast iron, wood-burning, pot-bellied stove in the main living area, a cast iron wood-burning stove in the kitchen, a fully stocked tool shed, a basement for storing wood and equipment, continuously running fresh spring water year round and an upstairs lounge with the ambience that any mountain cabin owner would enjoy.

The Hut is held in high regard by those who use it as they always max out the number of people who can come to several work parties throughout the year. The excellent lunches and dinners make for very festive occasions that not many members would want to miss.

We are very fortunate to have this relic of history still in our local mountains and would be greatly honored to believe that future generations would be able to share our precious gem 75 years from now.

May we all be thankful for what we have!

Submitted by: Alvin Walter



# **SAN ANTONIO SKI HUT: 75 YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG**

Two SMS outings to the San Antonio (Baldy) Ski Hut were scheduled this winter (Feb. 12/13 and Mar. 5/6) to "celebrate" the hut's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a milestone that will be reached during 2011. Seventy-five years is a long time to survive the harsh alpine environment on Mt. San Antonio (10,064'), subject to snow, rain, violent winds, floods, avalanches, forest fire, and vandalism. Still a popular destination year round, the Hut exists today because over the years there has been a dedicated cadre of individuals seeing to its repair and maintenance.

The idea of building a hut high on the slopes of Mt Baldy had its origin when a group of college students, led by UCLA professor and ski coach Walter Mosauer, founded the Ski Mountaineers on November 7, 1934. The group quickly commenced outings to the high peaks of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino ranges, as well as to the Sierra. It was their desire to build a ski hut on the upper slopes of Mount San Antonio that brought the group into the Sierra Club. They decided that ski life would be a lot easier and more pleasant if they had a hut on the peak's southern bowl close to reliable snow. However, the Forest Service would not grant a permit to this small and unknown club. The problem was solved on September 26, 1935, when the Ski Mountaineers' membership agreed to an invitation from Ernest Dawson, president of the Sierra Club, (his son, Glen Dawson, now 98, is a founding member of the SMS) to become affiliated with the Sierra Club as its third section, and the first to elect its own officers. With this backing, a permit for the hut was granted.

The building project began immediately. Money was raised through donations, raffles and parties, but all materials, over 10 tons, were carried on the backs of workers up the steep, 3 mile trail to the 8200' building site. With help from Club members throughout the

Chapter, and the driving force of George Bauwens, a tough old German engineer and outdoor enthusiast, the hut was ready for regular use by January 1936. They were sweeping away falling snow as the roof was applied. Alas, the hut only lasted one season. In September 1936 a fire of undetermined origin reduced it to ashes. The insurance adjuster finally arriving exhausted at the ruins, exclaimed, "If it burns again, we'll take your word for it!" The members immediately started reconstruction, this time with the help of burros to carry supplies. A new, larger hut was ready when snow arrived in December. The hut quickly became a center for SMS activities with work parties, social events, skiing and ski racing.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the hut remains a popular weekend destination for hikers and skiers, but more on an individual basis rather than for group events. It has been years since the SMS scheduled a hut weekend. Thus the idea to schedule two outings in this hut anniversary year and hopefully there would be snow on at least one of the weekends. A week before the February outing a hike up the peak found continuous snow coverage from the hut to the summit, but warm temperatures during the week brought out the rocks in the bowl and left large dry sections along the ridge to the summit. Our group of 11 consisted of this reporter and Reiner Stenzel as co-leaders, May Adachi our chef and group meal planner, Chad Stein, Don Sparks, Doug O'Neil, Sung Byun, John Digiocomo, Ken Deemer, Keith Himes, and Jim Garvey. After arriving at the hut and an early lunch, we carried our skis across the bowl and climbed on firm snow up through the trees to west ridge. We could then see only bare ground where a week before continuous snow reached to the summit. An attempt was made to ski down into Goode Canyon, but that was quickly halted by Manzanita bushes. Retreating back to the ridge, we settled for a single run on firm crusty snow down into the bowl, where some boldly continued to skis between the rocks and made their way carefully across the bowl. Back at the hut the rest of the day was spent relaxing, taking in the view, and then enjoying May's deliciously prepared dinner. By prior arrangement, also joining us at

the hut was UCSB student Ryan Haswell and friend. They hiked along the Devil's Backbone from the Baldy Ski Area to the summit, and then skied to the hut via one of the chutes, managing to find a continuous trail of snow among the rocks in the bowl. "All in a day's fun," they said. Ah to be 20 again! Following breakfast on Sunday, thank you again May for another delicious meal, a few participants checked out of the official outing for one more ski run off of west ridge, (they reported the snow being softer and more enjoyable than on Sat.) while the leaders (incorrectly thinking the snow would still be frozen) and rest of the group closed down the hut and departed for the cars.

Through the rest of February it looked like winter was over, but March came in like a lion and for the March outing we were hiking the hut trail through new snow. Although 10 had expressed interest in the outing, after a number of cancellations including the co-leader, we ended up with only 6 skiers at the hut on a non-Sierra Club outing. A disappointment, but ski conditions were outstanding. Saturday afternoon we crossed the creek, put on our skis and easily skinned across the bowl and up onto west ridge. Along the way we passed Gil Estrada, hut manager, skiing 6 laps off of west ridge into the bowl. We then continued upward with 3 reaching the summit, and 2 turning back earlier. The snow was continuous and easy turns were enjoyed by all back to the hut. May Adachi again (thank you!!) planned and prepared a delicious dinner and breakfast for us. Early Sunday morning we could feel the wind hitting the hut, but it slacked off before we started again on towards the summit. However, as we gained elevation on west ridge, the wind returned and grew stronger and colder. Apparently we were experiencing signs of another weather system that was predicted to move in late Sunday. Clouds were moving in, and we could see a cloud cap settling on Mt San Gorgonio. The snow being frozen at this point, we pulled our skins, and retreated downward enjoying the ever softening snow back into the bowl. Climbers going to the summit later in the day reported extremely high winds and whiteout conditions. Also on this hut outing were Karl

Eggers, Bahram Manahedji, and Claire Le-vaillant.

As much fun as it is to be at the hut with a group of fellow skiers, it can be nerve racking and challenging to lead a scheduled Sierra Club outing there under winter conditions. Baldy ski terrain is just plain steep, with lots of rocks and trees, and if the snow becomes even slightly firm, a slip or slide can have serious consequences. Snow and weather conditions change not only from day to day, but sometimes from hour to hour. Add in a mix of different abilities among the participants and you have ingredients for possible trouble. Most hikers attempting Baldy's summit are wearing crampons and have an ice axe. Whether they know how to use these tools is another matter. The Sierra Club restricts outings that require use of ice axe/crampons for safety purposes. Such outings are limited to carefully screened Sierra Club members only, require technical leader and participant skills, medical statements from all participants, and outing approval must be obtained well prior to the event. These are all good rules for a national organization to reduce accidents and limit liability for the club and its leaders. So, when does a group of skiers climbing uphill on snow become a mountaineering outing subject to the Club's restricted outing regulations? It's a fine line for sure, and one that can be crossed easily if conditions or terrain changes or a participant's skill level is exceeded. Leading an outing as a private, non-Sierra Club outing is one solution, but that doesn't seem to solve our current situation of too few active leaders, and quickly has the appearance of a shell game.

Submitted by: Mark Goebel



Photos by Alvin Walter

"The Mugelnoos" is a newsletter published, by and for the Ski Mountaineers Section of the Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club. Please submit articles, photos, letters and ideas for publication in future issues to:

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