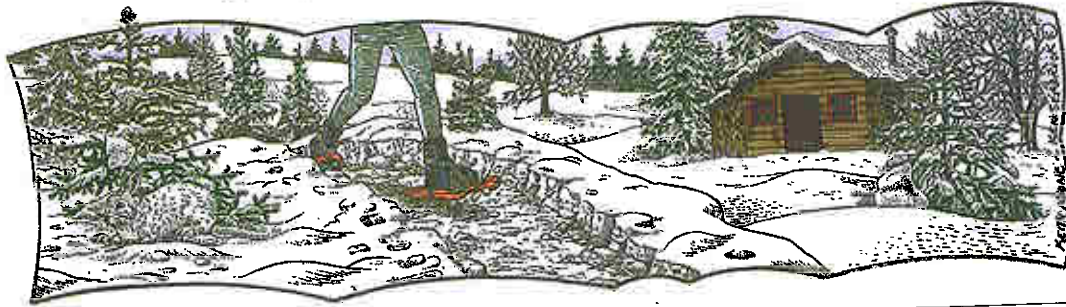


# WINTER



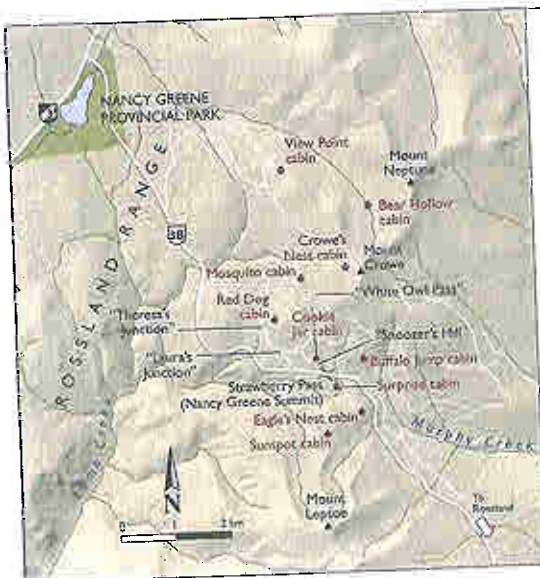
## Nancy Greene Summit trails and huts

The snowy winters of the Kootenays are the stuff of legend. What nobody mentions, though, are the dreary, grey days when heavy cloud socks in the lake valleys. That's when locals know to grab a friend, drive to 1,575-metre Nancy Greene Summit, and go for a walkabout. Bring your snowshoes, or your skis with fish-scale bases or climbing skins. Above the clouds awaits a winter wonderland sparkling in the sunshine.

The expanse of rolling, forested terrain that encompasses both sides of Highway 3B in the Nancy Greene

Summit area is crisscrossed with ski trails and dotted with 16 or more warming shelters. These huts, which don't appear on most official maps, have survived below the radar for decades. And while some are little more than wooden frames wrapped in plastic sheeting, with a sawdust floor and a wood heater, they provide a welcome place to warm up along the trail. A group of local citizens aligned with the non-profit Friends of Rosland Range hopes one day to secure official recreational tenure for the land to ensure future access for backcountry explorers.

The most intriguing cabins are the early ones built by members of the informal "Rosland Seniors Cross-Country Ski Club," a clutch of retirees from what was then the Cominco mining-and-smelting operation. Many of those original ski buddies are now schussing down Heaven's pillowy slopes, but their past antics are documented in the cabin log books and yellowing photos tacked to the walls—tales of playful pranks and freely traded insults, shared meals, whiskey, laughter, and, of course, glorious days spent on the snowy slopes.



### WHERE

Monashee Mountains, Rosland Range; an area of Crown land northwest of Rosland and southeast of Nancy Greene Provincial Park.

### TERRAIN

Old logging roads and trails across gentle rolling terrain, with some forested and some open clearcut areas.

### LENGTH

The loop described takes about two hours, but this area is crisscrossed with trails, so you can choose a shorter or longer route.

### RATING

Easy.

### HIGHLIGHTS

Scenic winter views, funky warming huts.

### GETTING THERE

From Castlegar, drive west along Hwy 3 and turn south (left) onto Hwy 3B, as if heading to Rosland. Drive just under 9 km to the sign that says "Nancy Greene Summit: elevation 1,575 metres" on the highway's north (left) side—pull into the parking area on the south (right) side. Coming from Rosland, the parking area is on the south (left) side, about 20 km from town. This area, which is also the trailhead for the Seven Summits Trail to the south (popular in summer), is sometimes called "Strawberry Pass." Check with the Rosland Chamber of Commerce for information about some of the area's huts and trails. You can gently poke about the area on your own. To explore more extensively and find the out-of-the-way shelters, you'll need to hook up with a knowledgeable local.



● left: Snowshoers arrive at the "Cookie Jar," one of 16 or more hidden warming huts in the vicinity of Nancy Greene Summit, in the Monashee Mountains northwest of Rossland.

below: Carol Postasnyk of Nelson and Albert Camille L'ecluse—a.k.a. "Cookie"—pose outside the "Cookie Jar" warming hut that L'ecluse helped to restore in the late 1990s.



*The rolling, forested terrain is crisscrossed with ski trails and dotted with warming shelters.*

With some friends, Gluns and I have planned a ski jaunt that will take us past three of the quirkiest warming huts on the north side of Highway 3B. From the Nancy Greene Summit parking lot, we walk across the highway before putting on our skis. There's no trailhead sign, but obvious tracks lead up a gentle hill and into the forest. We pole up the slope, soon passing a painted sign that reads "Snoozer's Hill." This is the first of many unofficial signs we'll see at junctions and along the trails.

The ski tracks take us away from the highway and generally north through an old clearcut. After just five minutes, the "Cookie Jar" appears ahead of us. It's hard to miss—the trim on the former prospector's shack is painted a luscious pink. "Cookie," a.k.a. Albert Camille L'ecluse, is a legendary local character responsible for all the friendly, hand-painted trail signs. He helped to restore the derelict hut in the late 1990s. At 93, he doesn't get up to the huts much in winter anymore, but he's here with his red

snowshoes today, greeting us with a big grin.

We crowd inside the warm hut. The decor is secondhand store meets joke-shop kitsch. The ceiling is panelled with old skis, signed by visitors.

"They hold the cabin up," L'ecluse insists.

The hut is crammed with rebuilt kitchen chairs L'ecluse has painted with outdoor scenes, and a light bulb with a fancy lampshade hangs over the stove—a joke, as there's no electricity. The pièce de



● left and right: Snowshoers Heather Gordier and Andrew Pantel of Nelson are happy to reach Crowe's Nest cabin, where they warm up with hot tea and sign the hut's guest log.



résistance is the metal woodstove, a marvel of functional folk art concocted from a barrel, heating ducts, and old lawnmower parts, which squats on an old pair of skis.

"It used to have boots on," notes L'ecluse.

L'ecluse has the gift of the gab, his repartee seasoned with well-practiced insults punctuated by wheezy laughter. Although we could swap stories all day, we want to tour around to some of the other cabins, so we leave L'ecluse playing his harmonica and head back out into the snow.

Our next stop will be the Red Dog cabin—the Hilton of the huts, complete with carpeting. We ski northwest along old logging roads and trails, with views of Old Glory Mountain to the southwest. The area around Nancy Greene Summit is not an undisturbed wilderness; logging activity continues around the huts each year, suddenly opening up new vistas or new ski slopes. Despite the cuts, a fresh snowfall makes any landscape look pristine.

We turn right at "Laura's Junction" and "Theresa's Junction," then climb a short hill signed "Maureen's Thrill." After admiring the decor and old photos at Red Dog cabin, we carry on

northeast to Mosquito cabin, which sports a nifty brass doorknocker. Mosquito cabin used to be hidden in thick forest but is in the open now, with a great view of the Christina Range to the west, including peaks Gladstone, Faith, Hope, and Charity.

The traditions and camaraderie of the original "seniors club" cronies seem to live on in these day-use huts. Doors are never locked. Locals know to bring along a bit of newspaper and kindling for the woodstove. Visitors sweep the floor before they leave. It's a neighbourly, good-hearted system. Some unofficial local guardians cut firewood for the huts, and have posted signs to discourage any who might abuse them.

We ski back south over "White Owl Pass" and back down to the Cookie Jar, now redolent with the aroma of cheesy-potato perogies and pork ribs. L'ecluse cajoles us into sampling some before we ski back to the parking lot, then drive down into the clouds again. ☺

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