

Red Mountain Pass - backcountry skiing by Dave Cooper



Red Mountain Pass provides spectacular views in addition to many acres of outstanding backcountry skiing-small.jpg

Ever since first experiencing the tremendous backcountry skiing available in the vicinity of Red Mountain Pass, back in the early 1980's, I've tried to make an annual pilgrimage to this area. So far I haven't been disappointed. On each occasion my friends and I have found amazing powder snow conditions. Whether skiing the gentle slopes high on the flanks of McMillan Peak or the challenging tree runs in US Basin we have enjoyed memorable descents that demand that we skin up again and repeat. On those occasions when the snow above treeline is windpacked, there are plenty of glades lower down that tend to hold good snow.

During that first visit more than a quarter of a century ago we stayed at the St. Paul Ski Lodge, a full service lodge run by Chris George. The rustic building was a

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive on Highway 550 to the summit of Red Mountain Pass, 13 miles south of Ouray and 10 miles north of Silverton. There are several parking areas at the Pass, the northernmost being the best if starting on County Road 14A, while the parking area just to the south is at the start of County Road 14.

Statistics and Difficulty: For the intermediate tour to the Mountain Belle Hut, the trail gains 500 feet in 1.2 miles. The slopes of McMillan Peak offer moderate slopes for those wanting to practice their telemarking skills. More advanced skills (including routefinding and avalanche awareness) are recommended if you decide to continue on to ski the glades of US Basin. Climbing skins are recommended for this tour.

Resources: For more information on the St. Paul Lodge, go to <http://69.6.227.193/>
For information on the Mountain Belle Cabin, visit <http://www.skihuts.com/index.htm>

USGS Quads: Ironton, CO.

great location to enjoy the family-style meals and pleasant conversation, while the tremendous skiing right out of the door was a definite bonus.

Another place to stay on the Pass is at the Mountain Belle Cabin, located not far from the St. Paul Lodge. This cabin was built in 1999 and is owned and operated by Red Mountain Enterprises.

On our recent visit we were staying in nearby Ouray to get in some end-of-year ice climbing at the Ice Park, but the new snow tempted us to take a day off and head for the pass. I'm glad we did!

Trail Description

Starting up County Road 14A-small.JPG

Depending on which of the parking areas you start at, either ski up County Road 14 or 14A. They come together as County Road 14 after a few hundred feet. Head south on the roadbed, probably tracked by skis and snowmobiles (watch for snowmobiles on the road). After one half mile the road turns east up an unnamed drainage and climbs quite steeply (skins recommended) to



another road junction at mile 0.9. Here County Road 14 turns right (south) and is well-signed to the St. Paul Lodge and Mountain Belle Cabin. Throughout this area you'll see some of the many old mine buildings still standing.



Skiers stop near one of the many old mine buildings-small.JPG

Stay on County Road 14 as it climbs up and past St. Paul Lodge and then the Mountain Belle Cabin. The ski to this point is a very nice outing for intermediate skiers, but for those who want to practice their telemark skills or for the advanced skier, this is just the start. To continue on above treeline, head east in the vicinity of the Mountain Belle Hut onto the west flank of McMillan Peak. From here, choose your descent line, taking care to stay off the steeper terrain when avalanche

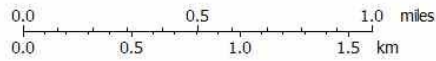
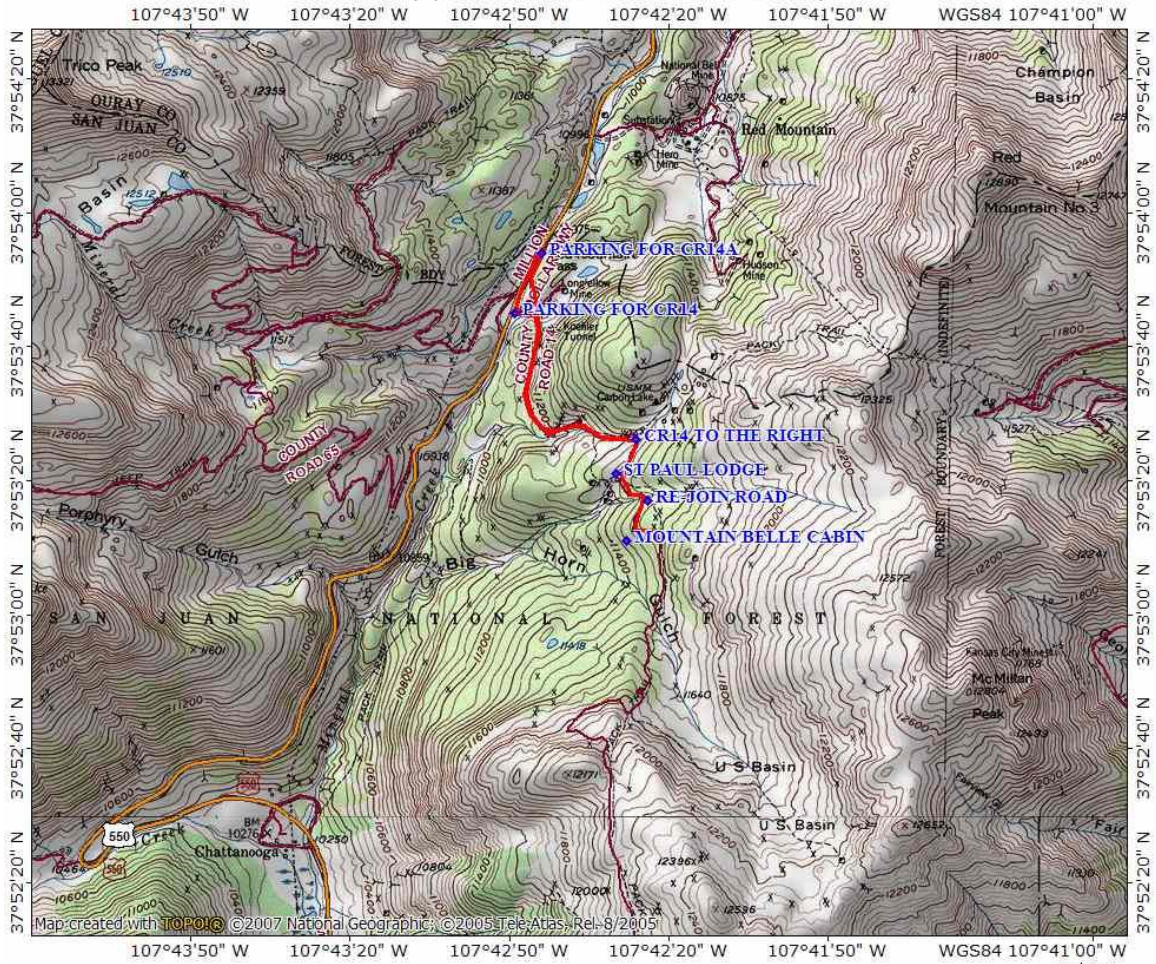
conditions are suspect.

When your legs can't take any more, County Road 14 provides the way back to the car.



Time to shed the climbing skins and head down-small.JPG

TOPO! map printed on 01/02/08 from "Untitled.tpo"



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 PARKING FOR CR14A: 37,53,54N / 107,42,44W, 11083 feet
 PARKING FOR CR14: 37,53,45N / 107,42,49W, 11069 feet
 CR 14 TO THE RIGHT: 37,53,26N / 107,42,26W, 11440 feet
 ST PAUL LODGE: 37,53,20N / 107,42,30W, 11444 feet
 MOUNTAIN BELL CABIN: 37,53,12N / 107,42,29W, 11455 feet
 RE-JOIN ROAD: 37,53,17N / 107,42,24W, 11547 feet

