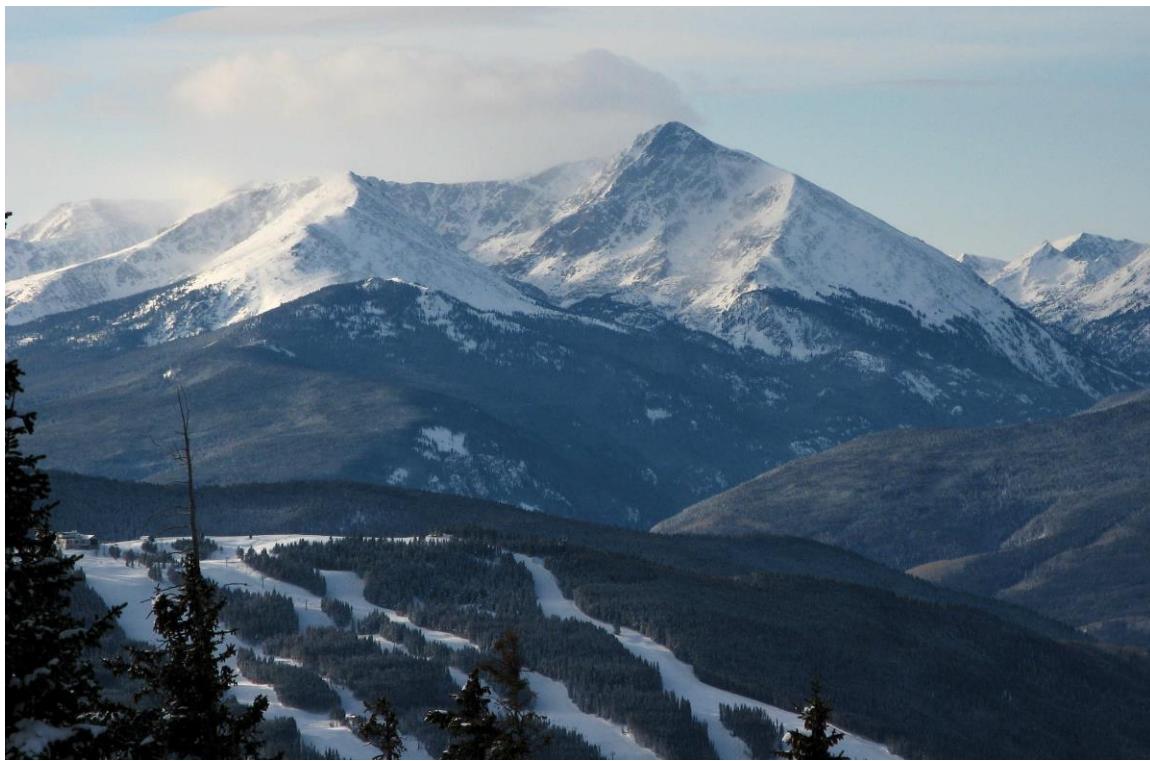


The Eiseman Hut
– Backcountry Ski Tour / Snowshoe to a 10th. Mountain Division Hut
by Dave Cooper



Excellent views of Mount of the Holy Cross from the Eiseman Hut.



Another view of the Holy Cross Wilderness from the Eiseman Hut.

This year's Christmas outing to one of Colorado's backcountry huts was a return visit to the Eiseman Hut, one of the newer huts in the 10th. Mountain Division Hut system. Located in the rugged Gore Range north of the Vail Valley, there is no easy way to reach the hut in winter. The outstanding scenery and normally reliable snow conditions make the effort well worthwhile.

The hut offers sleeping accommodations for 16, wood-burning stoves and propane stove-tops for heat and cooking respectively, so all you need to take is a sleeping bag and your food.

On all of the hut trips we've been on I have to say that whether we've been with a group of friends or sharing the hut with other groups there has always been a delightful atmosphere and sense of camaraderie. This Christmas our friends had to cancel at the last minute but we still enjoyed good conversation and companionship with other groups sharing the hut.

The two routes to the hut offer a choice of a steep, sometimes narrow trail or a longer but gentler road. A popular choice is to ascend the steeper but shorter ski trail from the Spraddle Creek Trailhead, then descend the Red Sandstone Creek road on the way out. That is the route described here.

A car shuttle is required to complete the loop described; otherwise catch the free Vail Valley bus (970-479-2178) plus hike a bit to get back to your car at the end of the trip.

Ascent Trail Description (via the Spraddle Creek Trail)

A note: the trail follows blue plastic diamonds or blue plastic arrows on trees. However, in some areas (especially when crossing from Spraddle Creek into Middle Creek, these may be challenging to follow. It is recommended that you have map and compass, or better still a GPS unit with route pre-entered. Note also that the Spraddle Creek Trail does not appear on the USGS topographic map, so it is a good idea to get a map from the hut folks when you make your reservation.

Climbing the steep switchbacks out of the Middle Creek drainage

Getting to the Trailhead

Spraddle Creek Trailhead: Drive to the Main Vail exit (Exit 176) off I-70. At the roundabout at the bottom of the exit ramp, turn right on the signed Spraddle Creek Road. The lower parking lot is 0.1 miles up the road on your left, but should not be used unless the upper lot is full or you do not have four-wheel drive. Since the Spraddle Creek jeep road starts at the upper lot, continue past the lower lot and drive to the entrance to the Spraddle Creek Estates, 0.7 miles from I-70. Do not park here but turn right and drive a short distance up a steep hill on the dirt road to the upper parking area by ranch buildings. The Forest Service outhouse helps identify the parking area.

Red Sandstone Creek Trailhead: From the Main Vail exit (Exit 176) off I-70, drive west on the Frontage Road one mile to Red Sandstone Road. Turn right (north) and follow the road for 1.4 miles to the parking area just before the closed gate. Note that the Red Sandstone Road actually leaves the paved road and becomes gravel at a major switchback 0.7 miles up the road.

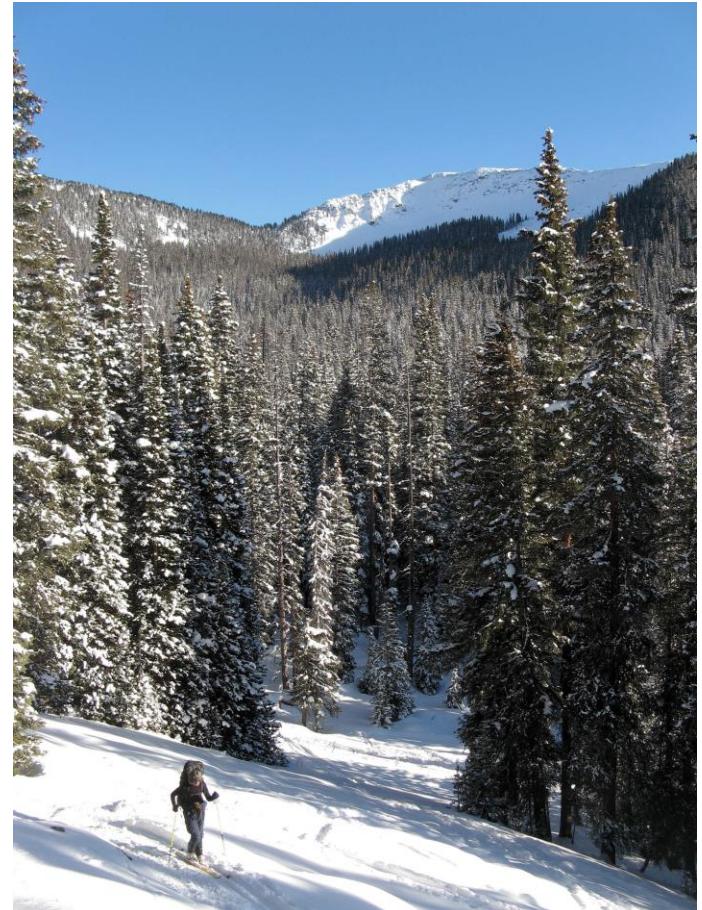
Statistics:

Eiseman Hut via the Spraddle Creek / Middle Creek Trail:

Intermediate/Advanced Ski. Gain 2950 feet and lose 250 feet in 5.9 miles. With a backpack this is quite strenuous. Allow 5-7 hours for the ascent. Climbing skins are necessary to ascend this trail.

Eiseman Hut to Red Sandstone Creek Trailhead: Intermediate Ski. Lose 2700 feet of elevation in 7.8 miles.

USGS Quad: Vail West, CO; Vail East, CO. Since the Spraddle Creek Trail is only a winter trail and does not appear on the USGS maps, it is important to also obtain the Official 10th Mountain, Winter: Gore Range Map



The Spraddle Creek Jeep Road starts just beyond the buildings and climbs initially east then switchbacks northwest towards Spraddle Creek. Follow the road as it contours around into the drainage, staying on the right (southeast) side of the creek.

After 1.7 miles, at 9,600 feet, look for blue diamonds indicating the trail diverging from the road on the left (north). The trail drops down to and crosses Spraddle Creek, then cuts sharply back to the west as it climbs steeply up the ridge separating Spraddle Creek from Middle Creek. This hillside is exposed to lots of sun and can have marginal snow cover.

Follow the blue diamonds as they take you over the ridge (2.2 miles) at an elevation of 9,720 feet, then back to the north on a gradual descending traverse into Middle Creek, dropping to 9,530 feet before starting to climb again after 3.0 miles. This descending traverse can be quite challenging with many downed trees across the trail, requiring innovative techniques to negotiate. Hopefully in time the snow will cover these.

The trail follows the drainage as it curves to the east on moderate terrain. After 5.2 miles, at an elevation of 10,500 feet the trail has reached the end of the valley and starts to switchback steeply to the north, leaving the drainage. Your climbing skins will be challenged on this section as you gain 700 feet in the last 0.7 miles. Since the hut is nestled on the opposite side of the ridge, the first indication that you're getting close might be the smell of smoke from the wood burning stove. When you finally reach the hut you'll be ready to relax on the deck or inside the hut and watch the sun set over the Holy Cross Wilderness, perhaps the most spectacular view from any of the huts.

The Eiseman Hut





Sunset over the Holy Cross Wilderness - Mount of the Holy Cross is at the left of photo

Around the hut

Make sure you have time to explore some of the fine skiing around the hut. On the slopes below the huts skiers will find glades and tight tree skiing to satisfy intermediate to advanced ability levels on moderate to steep terrain. You will cross the road several times as you lose up to 1000 feet of elevation on each run. To climb back up either follow the road as it switchbacks up, or skin up and climb directly back up the hill to the hut.

Another favorite for skiers is to climb up the ridge northeast of the hut, towards Point 11,474. The skiing off this ridge is through more open forest, but on steeper terrain. Check snow stability before getting on the steeper chutes.

Resources:

It costs \$28 per person per night to stay at the Eiseman Hut.

For more information on the 10th Mountain Hut System, including booking and availability information, go to www.huts.org

For detailed information on routes to all of the huts in the system, see the excellent guidebook: **Colorado Tenth Mountain Huts and Trails: The Official Guide to America's Largest Backcountry Ski Hut System** by Louis W. Dawson II



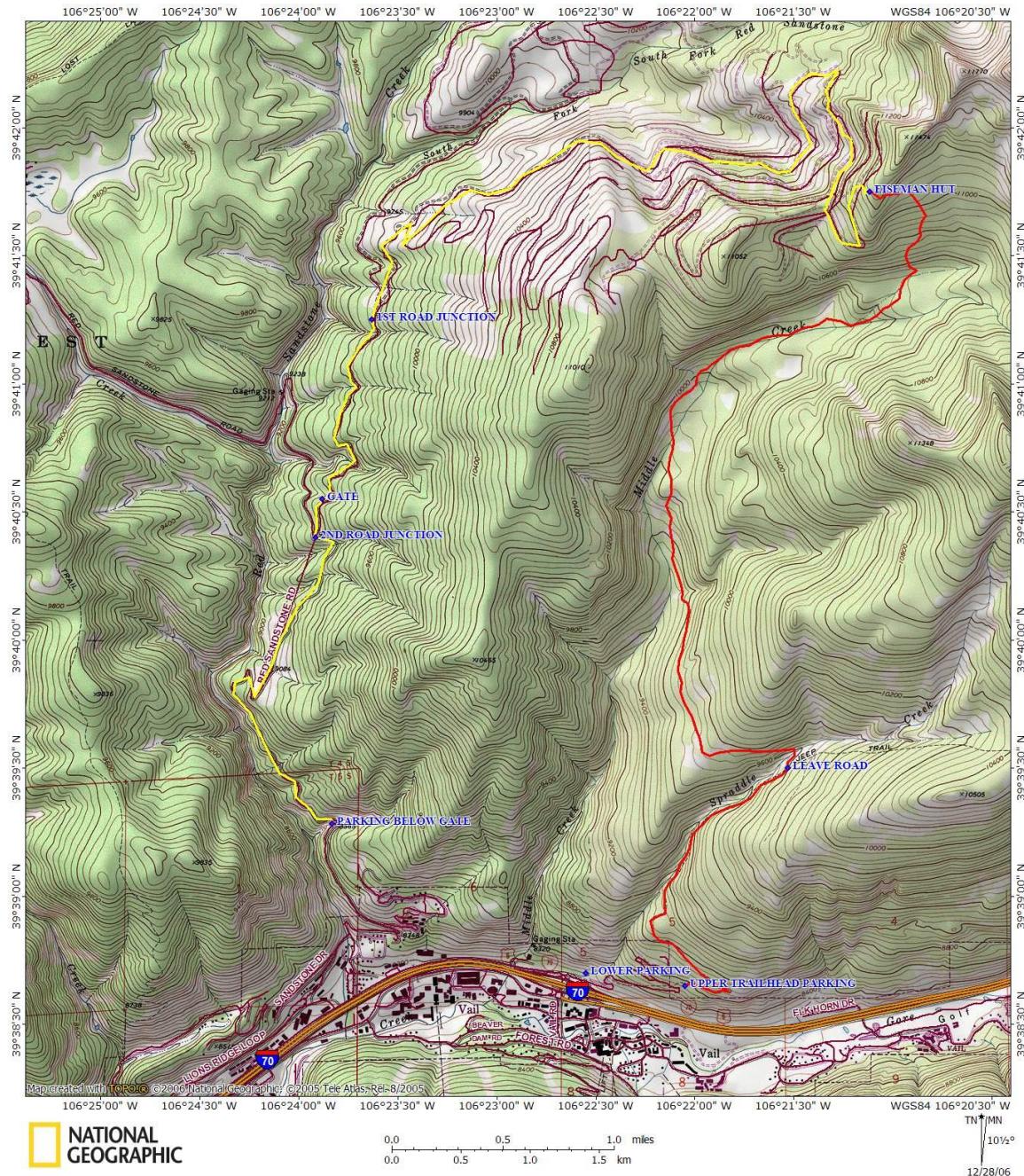
The Descent via Red Sandstone Creek

The road switchbacks down the slope to the north of the hut. I would suggest catching the road on the first switchback below the hut, a drop of perhaps 100 feet. There are a number of spur roads in the area, so be sure to follow the blue diamonds on the main road. It is also possible to cut across several more of the switchbacks to get in one last, long powder run. But make sure to catch the road before you get too low.

Descending the road

Assuming that you take the road down, kick and glide on the often packed (by snowmobiles) roadbed for 4.7 miles to the first road junction at 9,700 feet, immediately beyond a gate. Turn left here (south) and continue the fast descent down the Red Sandstone Creek drainage to a second

road junction at 9,300 feet, after 5.9 miles. Again, turn left at this junction and head down along the well-packed Red Sandstone Road, reaching a closed gate after 7.8 miles. There is parking a short distance below the gate.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)

TOPO! GPS Data Format DegMinSec NAD83 ElevFeet Local-Time

LOWER PARKING: 39,38,42N / 106,22,33W, 8271 feet

UPPER TRAILHEAD PARKING: 39,38,39N / 106,22,3W, 8602 feet

LEAVE ROAD: 39,39,30N / 106,21,32W, 9613 feet

EISEMAN HUT: 39,41,45N / 106,21,7W, 11250 feet

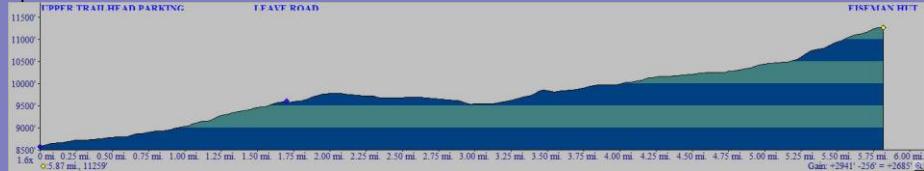
1ST ROAD JUNCTION: 39,41,15N / 106,23,38W, 9738 feet

GATE: 39,40,33N / 106,23,53W, 9383 feet

2ND ROAD JUNCTION: 39,40,24N / 106,23,55W, 9363 feet

PARKING BELOW GATE: 39,39,17N / 106,23,50W, 8609 feet

Spraddle Creek Trail Ascent Profile



Red Sandstone Creek Road Descent Profile

