

Wild Irishman Mine - backcountry ski tour by Dave Cooper



Heading up the slopes above the Wild Irishman Mine-small.JPG

The mountains surrounding the small town of Montezuma seem to be especially favored with good snow conditions. As a result, this area offers many excellent ski tours. One of my favorites is the Wild Irishman Mine trail. Not only does this tour provide spectacular scenery and good intermediate backcountry skiing, but as an added bonus there are opportunities for advanced skiers to extend the tour to catch some great glade skiing. For an easy tour, the ghost town of Sts. John makes a good destination.

We were fortunate to ski this trail shortly after one of our recent heavy snowfalls. While the new snow provided good powder to ski, it also raised the avalanche hazard. Most of the trail is in relatively safe terrain, though there are a couple of spots where the trail passes below obvious avalanche chutes. Also, if extending the tour to ski some of the glades above the mine (as we did), it is

Getting to the Trailhead: Montezuma can be reached either from Silverthorne or by driving over Loveland Pass on Highway 6.

If approaching via Silverthorne, take the Silverthorne exit from I-70 (Exit 205) and drive east on Highway 6 for 8.3 miles to Montezuma Road. This is 0.3 miles west of Gondola Road or 4.8 miles east of the Arapahoe Basin Ski Area. Turn south onto Montezuma Road, go straight at the stop sign and follow the road as it curves to the left. Continue on to the small town of Montezuma, a total of 5.5 miles from Highway 6.

Look for a plowed parking area on the right in the center of town, immediately before the signed road to Saints John on the right.

Statistics and Difficulty: For the easy tour to Saints John, the trail gains 530 feet in 1.3 miles. The intermediate tour to the Wild Irishman Mine climbs a little over 1400 feet in 2.8 miles. Good telemarking skills are recommended if you decide to continue on to ski the glades beyond.

USGS Quads: Keystone, CO; Montezuma, CO.

necessary to be able to evaluate snow stability and to choose a safe route. If your skills are a little rusty in this area, it may be time to take a refresher avalanche awareness class. Remember to check out current conditions on the Colorado Avalanche Information Center website (<http://avalanche.state.co.us/>) and carry your shovel and beacon.

Trail Description

From the parking area ski up the roadbed towards Saints John, initially southwest then northwest. Stay on the main road as it climbs gently through switchbacks before reaching the Saints John Creek drainage at mile 0.5. At this point another trail (headed towards the Hunkidori Mine) takes off to the right. Stay straight and continue up to the ghost town of Saints John, reached at mile 1.3. This is the terminus for the easy section of the tour.

The storm clearing on the trail to the Wild Irishman Mine-small.JPG

Continue through Saints John as the trail drops to the right across the creek and then abruptly left in front of the Berry Home (1869). Continue southwest up the drainage, passing a Forest Service information booth and gate at mile 1.8. Reach a trail junction at mile 2.1. At this junction the Wild Irishman Trail cuts left across the creek before starting a steeper climb south and then southeast to reach the old mine buildings at mile 2.8. This is the end of the intermediate tour, and a great spot for lunch.



Making tracks above the Wild Irishman Mine-small.JPG

When conditions permit, advanced skiers may want to continue up-valley to access the glades to the southwest of the mine buildings. To do this head south up a shallow gully, gaining approximately 100 feet of elevation. Stay well clear of the slopes of Glacier Mountain if there is any avalanche potential. When you reach the flats above treeline, contour west, staying just above the trees, to one of several glades that drop back down to the trail below the mine. The runs are short but sweet, dropping a little more than 200 feet before re-joining the trail. Conditions were so good the day we were there it was necessary to head back up the trail and ski one more lap.

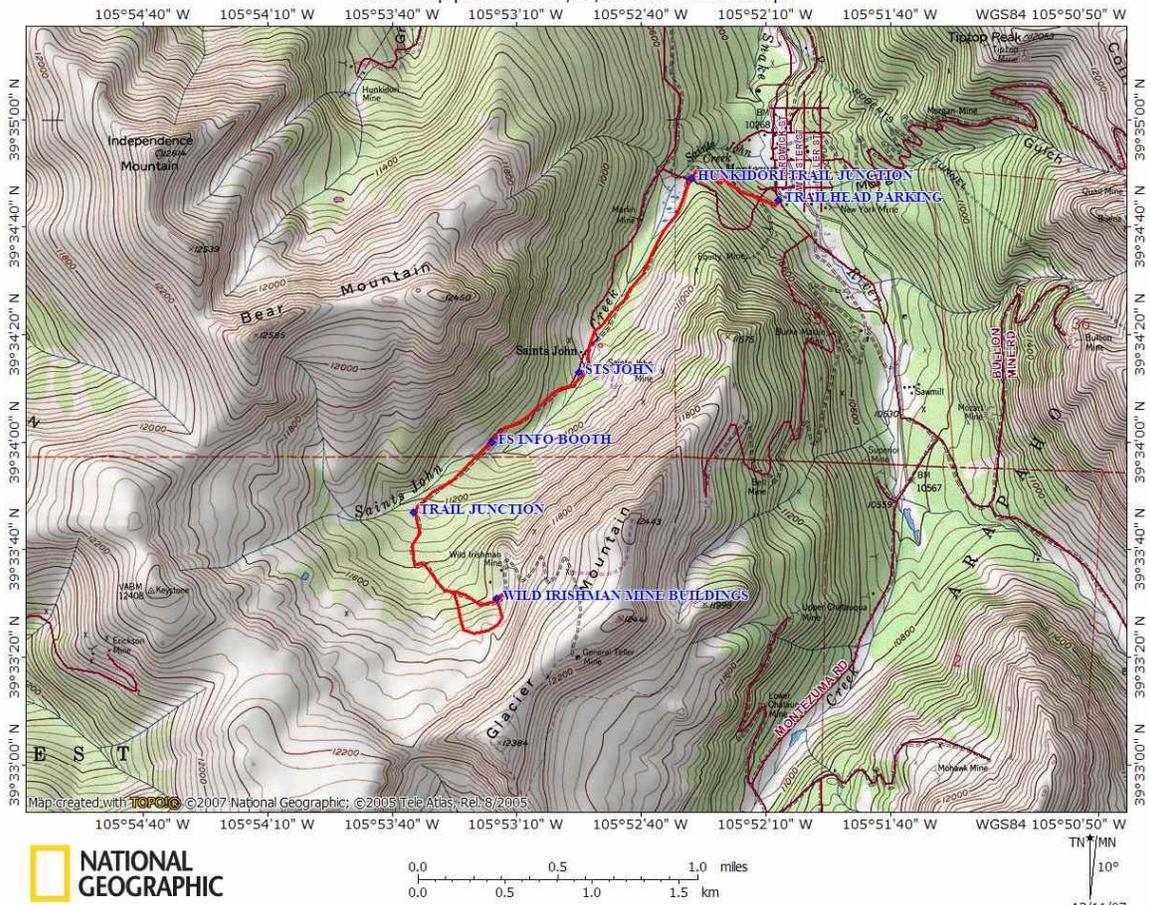


The descent back down the trail takes a fraction of the time it took to climb up. Enjoy.

Perfect Telemarking conditions in the glades above the mine-small.JPG



TOPO! map printed on 12/11/07 from "Untitled2.tpo"



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
TRAILHEAD PARKING: 39,34,45N / 105,52,7W, 10308 feet
HUNKIDORI TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,34,49N / 105,52,28W, 10545 feet
STS JOHN: 39,34,13N / 105,52,55W, 10843 feet
FS INFO BOOTH: 39,34,0N / 105,53,16W, 11083 feet
TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,33,47N / 105,53,35W, 11289 feet
WILD IRISHMAN MINE BUILDINGS: 39,33,31N / 105,53,15W, 11696 feet

