

In late 2008, (at the suggestion of section member, Matt Gunn) we (ACC Vancouver) became involved in informal discussions with two memorial groups (Brett Carlson Memorial Foundation and the Kees and Claire Memorial Hut Society) and two other local mountaineering clubs (ACC Whistler and BCMC) along with a few interested individuals (& Whistler area ACMG rep), on the feasibility of together building a “chain of huts” in the Spearhead range. The consistency of views and enthusiasm for the project was palpable to all from our very first meeting. The sense that the timing for such a project might never be better encouraged us to meet on a more regular basis and form a coalition calling ourselves the Spearhead Huts Committee (SHC). Our efforts were dedicated to defining and reaching agreement on a common vision for “a system of huts in the Spearhead and Fitzsimmons ranges” and transforming that vision into a reality.

Many members in each of our participating clubs have a long and intimate association with the Spearhead - Fitzsimmons area. In 1968 the BCMC erected the Himmelsbach Hut in Singing Pass. Mt Trorey is named after one of the founding members of the BCMC, JJ Trorey. Until 1986 the Vancouver Section had a club cabin at Whistler. Our club members have long recognized the unique and remarkable nature of this mountain range with its complex glaciers, ragged peaks, vast alpine bowls and meadows. We and countless other backcountry enthusiasts have been drawn to and often enjoyed traversing its terrain, routes and trails for their recreational, educational, scientific and spiritual offerings. Because of its proximity to services as well as its ease of access, the Spearhead Traverse has become known as a classic destination for spring ski-touring akin to the Wapta Traverse in the Rockies or the Haute Route in Europe. The area also features numerous outstanding hiking, scrambling and climbing opportunities in summer and has the potential for many more interesting and useful trails.

The roughly 40 kilometre horseshoe shape of the Spearhead – Fitzsimmons range, its string of high elevation, easily traversed glaciers and snow fields connected by relatively simple ridges and shallow cols, without the need to gain and/or lose significant amounts of elevation on a given day’s travel, makes the Spearhead an obvious and ideal destination for summer and winter multi-day traverses by parties of moderately experienced backcountry enthusiasts. Most of our members are in that category. The hut system will allow winter and summer backcountry travellers to experience this remarkable environment relatively unencumbered by overnight camping equipment and heavy packs. Inclement weather is a reality of travel in the Coast Ranges especially in winter. A hut system here will provide enthusiasts shelter in a safe and relatively comfortable environment in the event of adverse conditions; it will extend the conditions and season in which activities can occur. The hut system will reduce the impact of human visitation on area flora and fauna by substituting hut accommodation sustainable high quality waste management practices for the environmental damage caused by unrestricted and unmonitored construction of tent sites and uncontrolled human waste. Finally, the hut system will broaden the visitor base to include both younger and older enthusiasts, as well as those with less experience.

As presently conceived the system will consist of a 3 huts, (the larger of) which will provide summer and winter accommodation with heat and water, toilets and self-serve cooking facilities. The committee and BC Parks (Garibaldi) planners have agreed upon general site locations, being at about the 2,350m level in the Pattison/Tremor Col, the 2,200m level on shallowing of the south ridge of Macbeth & finally at about 2,000m on a ridge east of Fissile about 200 m above Russet Lake and 500 m south of the present Himmelsbach shelter. Hut capacity will vary between 10-30 people depending upon location. They will be accessed exclusively by self propelled means either by hiking or skiing using existing routes and trails or newly developed trail systems. It is anticipated that helicopters will be used to ferry in supplies and maintenance materials as well as to evacuate wastes. The SHC formed a sub-committee to investigate and report back on possible sites, developed a detailed set of site criteria and used a standardized evaluation frame work to come to decisions on the best possible sites. Further Site visits by committee members, interested stake holders, including First Nations’ members & Elders are scheduled for September of 2011.

In March of 2010, after nearly a year of regular meetings, representatives of the five founding organizations signed an agreement describing their “goals and shared vision”. Under the terms of the agreement we will work together as a committee of the Whistler Section of the Alpine Club of Canada. The primary goal is to build a sustainable system of huts. While it is intended that all major decisions be made on the basis of consensus, each organization will have a vote on the committee. The committee will be chaired by Jayson Faulkner of the Whistler Section. Fundraising efforts will be coordinated by the SHC and members will make their best efforts on behalf of the group’s goals. The huts will be operated by the SHC a committee of the Whistler Section of the Alpine Club of Canada. Park Use Permits and leases will be in the name of the Alpine Club of Canada and be the responsibility of the Whistler Section. The SHC will be responsible for booking arrangements, collecting user fees and all ongoing maintenance costs.

Because the proposed huts lie within Garibaldi Provincial Park, the SHC has, from an early stage, involved and consulted with BC Parks in the development of the Spearhead Hut System Concept Plan (SHSCP). At our regular June (2010) meeting we were informed by Garibaldi Park administrators that BC Parks’ regional supervisor found the “SHSCP” consistent with the existing Garibaldi Park Master Plan. As a result, the concept plan and group entered into Level 1 screening under the BC Parks Impact Assessment Process, SHC will continue to work closely with BC Parks (Garibaldi) as the approved concept evolves through the various into a practical plan for a series of specific huts situated at particular locations. Because the huts also lie within the traditional territory of the Squamish and Lillooet First Nations, representatives of the SHC will consult with the elders of this significant community of stakeholders. And finally, because the proposal may affect the interests of Whistler/Blackcomb, an important and powerful area stakeholder, the SHC maintains open channels of communication and where possible cooperation. An indication of WB’s present posture towards the project can be inferred through their recent support of SHC site investigation sorties by providing free access to the alpine (via lifts and ground transport).

Advancing the SHSCP from concept through the various stages of; development of practical plans for specific huts at particular sites, fundraising, volunteer recruitment, acquiring materials and preliminary construction, through to transport and hut placement will be a multi-year process.

The Vancouver Section executive has approved our participation in this project and has buttressed that strong support with Grants from our Endowment Fund (matching amounts contributed by the other participating group) for start up costs. In 2010 the Section provided \$1,000 from the Endowment fund and in 2011 another \$2,000 was awarded in response to specific applications for financial assistance being \$1,000 to support Site Analysis work and another \$1,000 to provide seed money for a Fundraising Soiree to be held at the VanDusen Gardens.

Besides the benefits available to all hut users as outlined above, it is the intention of the committee that section members (and members of the other 4 participating groups) will additionally benefit from preferred rates (50% off) when buying backcountry passes as well as preferred rates (about 50%) when staying at the huts. The Committee has agreed to advocate strongly for these preferred rates with WB as consideration for the advantages that the hut system may bring to WB.

This is not a done deal. There is still much work to be done and a number of not insignificant challenges to be met. We intend to share with you and other interested parties our progress as we move towards our goal. Much of this information and reporting (as well as fundraising and volunteer coordination) will be accomplished through a website: www.spearheadhuts.org.

We ask for your assistance and support and hope that some of you will volunteer your time and expertise to help us move this project from vision to reality. If you have observations, concerns or questions regarding this project we want to hear them, please forward to rbrusse1@telus.net.

Rob Brusse Chair – Vancouver Section Alpine Club of Canada