

Letter from Phil Knight, Conservationist, Recreationist

I have made repeated trips to the Porcupine Cabin in the Crazy Mountains - probably 8 trips over the years with friends and my wife. We always go in winter to enjoy skiing, sledding and solitude, as well as the amazing views and the great cabin. In the 1980s and 1990s we went there at least 5 times and always skied the Porcupine Low Line Trail #267 over to Elk Creek to tour up Elk Creek into the high basin where there was plenty of snow. One season we even climbed up to the ridge at the head of Elk Creek and skied off that - it was spectacular.

Another season - probably early 90s, I made a trip with Wild Things Unlimited, doing wildlife surveys. 2 of us skied up Elk Creek and over the ridge into the head of the South Fork Shields River, then all the way down the South Fork and back around to our snowmobile and loaded up and drove to the Bennett Guard Station where we stayed. We were looking for sign of wolverine and found plenty on the divide and in the South Fork Shields. We observed lots of wolverine tracks and it was hard to say for sure but it was probably more than one animal.

We stayed at Porcupine Cabin again in the winter of 2014, 2015 and 2016, for New Years trips to relax and celebrate the holiday with friends. We started out in 2014 to ski over to Elk Creek and were stunned to come across a huge fence and locked gate and No Access signs on the Porcupine Low Line trail. We tried to find a way around the fence, but no luck. It really limited our ski touring since the only other skiing out of Porcupine Cabin is up to Bald Ridge, which is steep and the snow is often thin in the woods. We tried the 267 trail again in 2015 thinking maybe we missed something last year, but had the same issue with no access. Last time we went to Porcupine Cabin we did not even try to travel over to Elk Creek.

The proposed trail re-route would definitely be a much more difficult and dangerous route in winter, when travelers would face avalanche danger and steep terrain. Safe and enjoyable winter travel from Porcupine Cabin to Elk Creek required restoring the traditional trail access.

Phil Knight