

STORY OF THE OLD HUT WHITE BUTTE TRAILS By Ron Blechinger October 2022

Since 1991, White Butte Recreation Site has been the home to a brown hut, the typical unique style frequently seen in various provincial parks, likely built in the 1980's. For many years (1991-2019), it was located near the trail head. A larger, attractive new shelter was constructed by Parks, with assistance from RSC (electricity) & RM (doors & windows), in the last few years (2018-2019). Parks & RSC trail crews then moved the old hut to junction 9 (Fall 2019), serving as a ski or hike destination for families, friends and school groups, a warm up venue for biathlon race volunteers, and other uses.

Prior to 1991, there was no shelter at White Butte. Our large, 70 child Jackrabbit program under the leadership of Brian Wagner met weekly at the Butte and parent volunteers were serving hot chocolate to the children in the wind swept parking lot. In addition, races were staged from the trail head and there was no indoor space for race officials, volunteers, and the racers themselves. As a result, Regina Ski Club members met with provincial park officials to request a hut. Parks offered a little used building from Valeport, provided the club would pay to move it, and outfit it for use.

The club accepted the challenge and Straza Movers was contacted to do the move. One problem: the hut would have to come out under a railroad and it was about a foot taller than the space under the trestle. Various solutions were considered including skidding the hut in winter over the ice of Last Mountain Lake to the south west side where it could then be loaded. Eventually, a decision was made to hire a back hoe operator to excavate a small section of the Valeport access road under the railroad, to allow the hut to be skidded up to highway 20.

On the moving day in late fall 1991, the road was lowered and Straza hitched their truck on to the skids on the hut to drag it up the road. All was going well until the railroad. The hut went down where the road had been excavated, but while

passing under the railroad, the highest point of the roof briefly ticked off the trestle as those present held their breath. It then thankfully slid under and continued to the highway. Once there, the Straza team jacked it up, put it on a trailer and hauled it to White Butte, while the back hoe restored the road.

The hut was placed (1991) in a small clearing in the poplar bluff just west of the trail head sign, in the hopes it would be out of the wind and somewhat safe from potential vandalism. Club volunteers installed a small stove and chimney, and the first window. It cost between six and seven hundred dollars to move and about the same to equip it; club members generously donated money to cover the cost. The hut was a big improvement although small for large events. But it did support school groups and informal gatherings of family and friends. It was moved a couple of times in and out of its clearing. Club volunteers maintained it. Peter Whitehead comes to mind, but I expect others were involved. Annually, he would board over the window and the door in the off season to reduce vandalism. And I am sure, along with others, he painted it; I do not know how often.

The hut needed a facelift by 2017. RSC trail crew members installed the upgraded stove in 2019, donated by trail crew member Jim Noll. Thankfully, three extra windows were installed in 2021 by RSC trail crew members. Prior to that, it's dark interior had a "grain bin" feel, but the new windows give it a bright, open, and spacious ambience. But the exterior was looking shabby, in need of a fresh a paint job. Parks supplied the paint and club volunteers set about doing the job. Thankfully, our long dry fall made for excellent painting conditions.

In early September 2022 a call went out for volunteers. Don Henry got the project started but was tied up until Thanksgiving weekend, and some of us knew we couldn't help then, so we offered to start sooner. On Thursday, September 22, Guy Hughes and myself spent a few hours prepping by scraping and brushing the hut to get rid of the loose paint, and general dirt. Then on the 24th, we were joined by keen volunteers Glen Blechinger, Ara Steininger, Nick Dalrymple (and their dog, who supervised, did PR and kept us aware of external threats; every paint job needs one!) The group brushed and rolled on the first coat of brown paint. Everyone worked diligently; the task goes so much better with a crew of folks! While Nick was rolling the walls, and I brushed the under eaves on the sides, Guy and Glen initially tackled the unexpectedly difficult job of removing stubborn excess blue skin from around the windows. Once completed they

started rolling and brushing paint. Ara painted the difficult area above the small roof, spending a long time on her back to access the spaces under the eave. Over the entire building, the aging, weathered exterior drank up the paint and it was clear it needed a second coat.

A decision was made to add a second contrasting colour on the trims around the door and the windows. So, I purchased something called "Extreme Yellow", which Guy later informed me was really mustard! On the 25th, I went out to mask the windows and door and paint a primer coat. Then, the next day, Guy and I met to finish the job. In the time it took me to paint two coats of yellow on the trims, Guy, with great efficiency, rolled a second coat of brown on the entire building. Since we had extra paint we also painted the picnic table out front.

There is a plan for Saskatchewan Parks to replace the aging shingles with metal when they are able. This will improve the appearance of the hut and help to preserve it.

While the hut now had its much needed face lift, Jill Henry, Sandy Stepan & Denise Pringle used some of the extra paint to spruce up picnic tables at the trail head and resting benches on the trails. However the bench seats were too rough to paint so Don Henry is looking into upgrading them.

White Butte is clearly a much loved, special locale in the Regina region. Thanks to all who helped on these tasks, and all the other jobs that go into preserving and protecting its amenities.