

# Portneuf Range Yurt System Manual

## Introduction

This booklet has been prepared to provide you with important information concerning the Portneuf Range Yurt System. It is essential that you and all members of your party read through this information before embarking on a tour to any of the yurts.

After reading this material, make a careful and honest evaluation of your—and your party's—abilities. If you have any doubts of your abilities to undertake a yurt tour, we recommend that you go on organized tours provided by ISU Outdoor Adventure Center.

You must understand that backcountry travel by ski, snowshoe or foot is dangerous. Idaho State University can not provide any assurances of your safety. *Travel to and from the yurts and use of the yurts is done at your own risk.*

**Yurt Reservations require a 100% down deposit and the reservation fee is non refundable.**

**Please understand that it is the responsibility of the yurt user to locate the yurt. Yurt rental fees will not be refunded if the yurt is not located.**

**All yurts are locked. You need to obtain the combination to the lock the week prior to your trip.**

## Background On The Yurt System

The Portneuf Range Yurt System started in 1983 with three donated canvas wall tents placed at the McNabb, Inman and Jackson Creek locations. From its inception, the yurt system was intended to be a nonprofit public program to provide a means for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy the beauty of Idaho's mountains in the winter. In order to accomplish this, the Pocatello Recreation Department, Idaho State University Outdoor Program, Pocatello Nordic Ski Association, the Caribou National Forest and dedicated volunteers all worked cooperatively together, providing material, labor and expertise to make the system a reality.

In 1984, the original wall tents, in bad repair after a heavy winter, were replaced with more durable backcountry yurts designed and built by Kirk Bachman. Bachman, who built his first yurt in the ISU Craft Shop while a senior at the University, had tested yurts in the Big Holes and Sawtooths and found that the 16 foot diameter dome shape structure made a perfect portable shelter for winter use in the mountains. With its roomy, efficient interior, a plastic skylight allowing natural light to illuminate the interior, and a hardwood lattice side wall, the backcountry yurt is an aesthetically and environmentally appealing structure.

In 1985, a large 24 foot diameter yurt purchased by the City of Pocatello was placed at the Moonlight and then later transferred to Mink Creek. A new yurt site was established at Syringa Creek. That brought the total number of yurts to five. All the locations were carefully chosen to allow for different abilities levels—and to allow travel between the yurts.

The yurt system received a boost in 1991 when the Bill Francis Memorial Endowment provided a \$700 grant to build bunk beds for all the yurts. Bill Francis, an outdoor writer for the *Idaho State Journal*, was an enthusiastic supporter of the system and spent many of his fall weekends cutting wood and getting the yurts ready for the winter.

In 2000, the Outdoor Program inherited the Yurt System. With the help of the Wilderness Equipment Rental Center, a new 20 foot yurt was bought and located in the Rapid Creek area.

In 2002 the Rapid Creek Yurt was relocated to BLM land on the North Fork of Jackson Creek and renamed the Skyline Yurt. The Rapid Creek Ski area land was sold to the Shoshone Bannock tribes.

Syringa Yurt was relocated in the Fall of 2003 to its new location near Hagler Creek. It was renamed the Catamount Yurt.

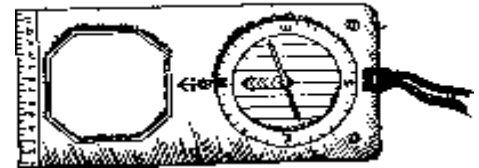
Volunteers are still the key to the success of the program. If you would like to help, give us a call in early October when plans are being made for work weekends.

## Before You Start

Carefully read this material and evaluate yourself and your party. If you feel confident that you have the skills and knowledge to safely undertake a yurt tour, follow these steps:

1. Make reservations for yurt use at the ISU Outdoor Adventure Rental Office located downstairs in the Student Union Building (phone 208-282-2945). The rental center can provide copies of the reservation policy and current yurt fees. Full payment of fees are required to reserve a yurt. **Please understand that it is the responsibility of the yurt user to locate the yurt. Yurt rental fees will not be refunded if the yurt is not located.**
2. Yurts are reserved from 2:30 PM the day of the reservation to 2:30 PM the next day. The yurts are locked and you will need to get the combination to the lock one week before your trip.
3. A short video tape has been prepared to help assure proper use of the yurts. Yurt trip initiators are asked to have all members of the party view the tape prior to undertaking a tour.
4. Check equipment lists (suggested lists are included within) prior to departing. Make sure everyone in your party is properly prepared, including the eventuality of having to spend the night out.
5. Before leaving, always leave word with a friend or relative about where you are going, your route to the yurt, and when you plan to return. If, for some reason, they are concerned about your return, the following are numbers for reporting any problems or emergencies concerning the huts:

282-3912	ISU Outdoor Adventure Center
317-3918	Ask for Dana Olson-evenings
235-1560	Ask for Peter Joyce-evenings
251-2691	Ask for Justin Dayley-evenings
705-5875	Ask for Bob Ellis-evenings
282-2945	Outdoor Adventure Rental Center



6. Check the weather forecast. Yurt tours are not recommended during winter storm warnings.
7. Before departing, make sure you have the combination to the lock and that your vehicle has plenty of antifreeze and the battery is in good condition. Chains and a shovel are recommended.

## Please No Dogs or Snowmobiles

Because the snow surrounding the yurts is melted for drinking water, dogs are discouraged. The yurt system was developed for ski tourers and snowshoers, and we asked that users not attempt to drive snowmobiles directly to the yurts. **The local landowner has specifically asked that no snowmachines are used to access the Skyline Yurt.**

## Suggested Routes to Yurts

Routes to the yurts are described in separate handouts which are available when you make reservations. We recommend that you first learn the locations of the yurts by going on organized tours or by taking a day trip prior to your reserved time. Even then, it may be difficult to locate a yurt on your own. There have been cases where an individual has been to a yurt on several occasions, yet has not been able to locate it on a later date. Poor visibility because of fog and falling snow can make it nearly impossible to find the yurts. It is for this reason that we strongly advise against undertaking yurt tours in poor weather or poor visibility.

Routes to the yurts are not marked because of the extreme difficulty of marking backcountry winter trails. Some parts of the tours go through large, open areas where no features exist on which to attach markers. In other areas, where the routes go through trees, markers are quickly engulfed under a thick layer of rime caused by a combination of blowing snow and misty clouds. Heavy rime is a common occurrence at the high elevation yurts.

The yurts themselves are located on ground level, and snow packs easily exceed 6 feet. That means the yurts, when dug out, are hidden behind piles of snow which make it hard to see them from any distance. The yurts are also located in trees which help provide necessary wind protection but also increase the difficulty in locating them.

This all adds up to some important prerequisites of yurt use:

- Go on organized tours first to familiarize yourself with surrounding landmarks and learn about route finding tricks which will help you locate a yurt on your own. If you have any doubt of your route finding skills, continue to go on organized tours.
- Before attempting any yurt tour on your own (particularly Jackson Creek and McNabb yurts), you should be experienced in the use of a map and compass and carry both with you on the tour. GPS coordinates are given for each yurt on the specific yurt information sheet. Knowledge of how to use a GPS unit is needed. There are different datum systems used by GPS system and the Portneuf Range maps coordinates are in the WSG84 datum.
- Use good sense and err on the safe side. Keep your party together. Turn back if the weather closes in or visibility becomes difficult. The yurt will always be there for you to visit another day.
- Always be prepared. Carry the equipment and clothing (see equipment lists) necessary to spend the night out if for some reason you don't find the yurt.

**Please understand that it is the responsibility of the yurt user to locate the yurt. Yurt rental fees will not be refunded if the yurt is not located.**

## When to start

Travel to yurts involves a significant rise in elevation from where you leave your vehicle. The elevation rise combined with the distance into the yurts and possible slow snow conditions (deep snow, breakable crust, heavy wet snow, etc.) can make your trip an all day affair.

It is highly recommended that you are on the trail no later than 9:00 or 10:00 AM. Daylight is short in the winter, and you'll need to allow plenty of time. Once you arrive at the yurt, you'll also need time to dig out the yurt, woodpile and toilet.



## On the Trail

While skiing or snowshoeing to the yurts, don't allow your party to become separated. This is extremely important in bad weather or poor visibility. Stay together and stay safe. Travel at a pace which is comfortable for the slowest member of the party. If one member becomes exhausted, your entire party is weakened as a result. A slow but steady pace is a time tested and safe way of traveling in the winter.

## Condition of Yurt Upon Arrival

It is possible that yurts can be damaged due to extreme weather conditions common in Idaho's mountains. High winds, heavy snow storms, falling branches from trees, accumulation of snow on the yurt's walls can cause rips and tears and/or partial or total collapse. It is also possible that the yurt can be vandalized or items such as the Coleman stove stolen. These possibilities point out the need to be well prepared. In particular, be prepared to spend the night out if it becomes necessary. Please report any problems to the ISU Outdoor Adventure Center (282-3912) or the Outdoor Adventure Rental desk (282-2945).

## Items in the Yurt

In each of the yurts, you should find a wood stove, Coleman cooking stove, lantern, pots, shovel and axe. You'll also find wooden bunk beds. The beds are made from plywood and you'll want to bring a sleeping pad for comfort and warmth. Please note that the wing nuts which hold the bunks together may need periodic tightening. Near the yurt will be a wood pile and potty, both of which you will probably have to dig out. **Items which are not in the yurt include: Coleman fuel, food, sleeping pads, and extra mantles for the lantern.**

## Digging Out Yurts

It is important to keep the yurts dug out on a regular basis. If snow is allowed to build up two things happen: (1) weight on the sides of the yurt push inward and bend the lattice side wall; and (2) snow build up on top of the yurt will eventually cause it to collapse.

We ask that everyone who uses the yurts pitch in and help by keeping them dug out.

To remove snow, start by shovelling it away from the sides. Be extremely careful when using the shovel. The metal shovel can easily tear the canvas covering of the yurt. We have found that each yurt will have one side toward the prevailing winds which will have the largest accumulation of snow. It is particularly important to remove the snow from this side. Continued side pressure and natural creep within the snow pack can exert enough pressure to deform and fracture the side walls.

Once snow has been removed from the sides, someone inside the yurt can push the canvas ceiling up and down. The snow should slide off. What ever you do, please do not use a shovel to move snow off the roof. Torn canvas has almost always resulted from improper shoveling. *Please keep the shovel inside the yurt.*

## How Much Coleman Fuel to Bring

Bring at least one liter of Coleman fuel per night. The Coleman fuel is used for the cooking stove and the lantern. The wood stove is used for melting water and heating the yurt.

## A Note About Using Coleman Stoves And Lanterns

Read carefully the Coleman Stove Operating Instruction located in the yurt. They can be found in either the log book or posted by the Coleman Stove. Always make sure valves for the stove and lantern have been turned off. If not, escaping gas can be ignited by the wood burning stove. **EXTREME CARE SHOULD ALWAYS BE EXERCISED.** If you have doubts, light the stove and lantern outside.

### Word to the wise.

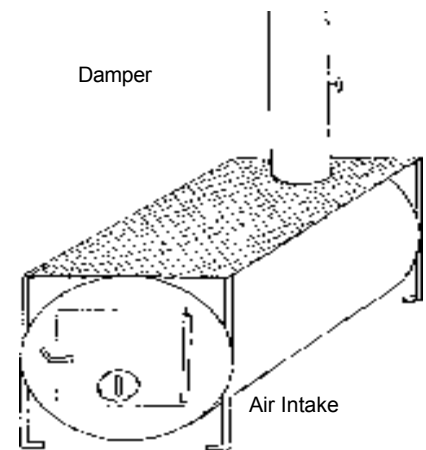
**Do not over pump the stoves.** They become cranky when they have to much pressure.

**To relight the stove;** first let the stove cool and then release the pressure from the tank and then start the process over.

**Relighting without cooling and releasing the pressure** will cause fuel to flood the system and will cause a persistent high yellow flame. If this occurs turn off the gas, turn stove over to get rid of pooled gas. Let stove cool before relighting.

## Follow These Procedures When You Arrive

1. Check to make sure the top of stove pipe chimney is clear and snow has not drifted over the top.
2. Start a fire in the wood stove by the following procedure:
  - a. Open damper. The damper is open when oval handle is in a vertical position (see illustration).
  - b. Open air intake fully by turning handle counterclockwise.
  - c. Open stove. Insert paper, **fire starter** and pieces of kindling and light. Note: Because of residue moisture in the yurt, we have found that starting a fire in the stove takes some effort. The fire starter



will burn for several minutes, helping dry out the kindling before it flames. Start out with very thin pieces of kindling and gradually increase size. **Don't be tempted to use Coleman fuel. Starting fires in an enclosed space with Coleman fuel can result in an explosion!**

- d. Leave air intake full open until fire is going, then turn it down to a comfortable level. **Don't leave stove unattended when air intake is full open.** The stove can get dangerously hot. When leaving the yurt even for a short period of time, close the air intake completely.
  - e. When the fire is burning well, turn down the air intake to a comfortable level. Temperature of the stove can also be regulated by adjusting damper. Keep wood and other flammable items from touching the stove surfaces.
  - f. Always use extreme caution. The yurt, lattice frame work and other material in the yurt are flammable and can burn to the ground in minutes if the wood stove or Coleman stove and lantern are not properly used.
2. Shovel snow away from the sides of the yurt. It's particularly important to relieve pressure on the windward side of the yurt where most of the snow has built up. Don't use the shovel on the roof; remove snow from the roof by pushing the canvas up and down from the inside.
  3. Break a path to the wood pile and outdoor potty. Shovel away snow from wood pile and dig out potty.
  4. For sanitary reasons always use the potty for urinating or defecating. The snow surrounding the yurt must be kept clean since it is used for drinking water. It is for this reason that dogs are discouraged.
  5. If you need to refill gas in the Coleman lantern or stove **please do so outside.** The fumes and spilled gas are extremely flammable and can be ignited by the wood stove.

## Follow These Procedures When You Leave

1. Thoroughly clean out the yurt. Sweep out dirt, wood chips, and snow with broom.
2. Pack it in, Pack it Out. Carry out everything you carried in including garbage and food. Anything left in the yurts has to be carried out by volunteers in the spring.
3. If you have spare fuel remaining, pour it in the stove, lantern or the extra gas container.
4. Close air intake on stove before leaving yurt, even for short trips.
5. Move any flammables (paper, kindling) away from wood stove. Leave firewood and kindling inside yurt so the next visitors will have dry wood to start a fire.
6. Make sure the latrine seat is closed. Place axe, shovel and broom inside yurt.
7. Lock and securely fasten yurt door so snow doesn't drift inside.

## Safety

Everything you do on a backcountry tour should be done carefully. Conducting yourself safely while using yurts is equally important. Use common sense and care when using the wood stove, Coleman stove and lantern or while filling gas containers, starting the fire, chopping wood, etc. There is no ski patrol in the backcountry. You and your party must come prepared. Backcountry travel in the winter involves a great personal responsibility upon all members of the party to do everything they can to be safe. There are many dangers, and the name of the game is to stay alert, constantly evaluate and minimize potential hazards.

## Further Information

A good reference book with information on backcountry skiing and overnight winter camping skills applicable to our area is *Ski Camping* by Ron Watters of the ISU Outdoor Adventure Center. It is available at local bookstores.

The ISU Outdoor Adventure Center, located on the first floor of the Student Union Building, maintains an extensive collection of outdoor recreation reference materials with books and magazines on winter backcountry travel. The public is invited to use the resources.

## Suggested Equipment List For Yurt Tours

The following equipment list is included to serve as a guide to help you prepare for a yurt tour. More items are listed than you may take or some may have been omitted, but we hope this list will give you an idea of some of the equipment possibilities. Remember, come prepared to spend the night out if for some reason you don't make it to the yurt.

Dressing in layers is the best choice for outdoor activities. As you get warm you can take off layers, and as you cool down during breaks, you can put them back on. The term *synthetics* on the clothing lists, below, refers to materials such as pile, lycra or polypropylene. Feel free to photo copy this list and pass on to all members of the party.

### Clothing—Inner Layer

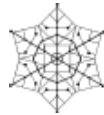
- Long Underwear Top and Bottoms  
(wool or synthetics such as polypropylene, etc.)
- Inner Socks (wool or synthetics)
- Liner Gloves

### Clothing—Insulating Layer

- Pile Jacket or Down Jacket
- Wool, Synthetic or Pile Top
- Wool, Synthetic or Pile Pants
- Wool or Synthetic Socks
- Wool or Synthetic Hat
- Mittens

### Clothing—Protective Layer

- Shell Parka with hood
- Shell Pants
- Insulated Gloves
- Gaiters



### Feet

- Ski Boots
- Extra Socks
- Down or Fiberfill Booties  
(Not necessary but comfortable in the hut)

### Repair Kit

- Sewing Needle & Thread (or Dental Floss)
- Duct Tape
- Epoxy
- Multi tool (Leatherman)
- Extra Screws to Fit Ski Binding
- Extra Bail for Binding (if bales are removable)
- Bailing Wire for General Repairs
- Extra Basket for Ski Poles
- (Also handy in the repair kit is a set of *lantern mantles* in case those in the hut lantern are broken. A small can of *sewing machine oil* is also useful for oiling the pump gasket in the Coleman stove and lantern.)



### Other Items

- Pack
- Skis & Ski Poles (Snowshoes)
- Sleeping Bag
- Sleeping Pad
- Waterproof Ground Cloth & Nylon Cord (Bivy Sac)
- Topographic Map(s) of the area
- Compass and or GPS
- Sunglasses and/or Goggles
- Headlight or Flashlight
- Spare Batteries
- First Aid Kit
- Watch
- Personals (Toiletries, Glasses/contacts, etc.)
- Cord and Clothes pin to hang clothes to dry
- Toilet Paper
- Candle
- Water Bottle
- Notebook, Pencil, Reading Material
- Shovel



### Kitchen

- Fuel Bottle with Coleman Fuel (1 liter for each night's stay)
- Matches (Waterproof Container)
- Cup & Plate
- Silverware
- Soap and sponge for dishes
- Food for the trip
- Camp Chair (Crazy Creek)

### Items for everyone--place in your pocket in the event you become separated from your pack

- Matches (in waterproof container)
- Knife
- Fire starter

### Skins / Avalanche Safety

- Climbing Skins : recommended for McNabb and Jackson Creek Yurts.
- Avalanche Transceivers (Pieps), probes and shovels for each party member : recommended for the McNabb & Jackson Creek Yurts.