



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

# Van Vleck Bunkhouse

## Eldorado National Forest

### Pacific Ranger District



Built in 1957, Van Vleck Bunkhouse sits nestled in a red fir forest on the edge of a meadow near the Tells Creek Trailhead into the Desolation Wilderness and offers a spectacular view of Tells Peak. The bunkhouse is the last remnant of the Van Vleck Ranch site, which was operated as a cattle ranch from the 1860's to the 1960's. Popular activities include hiking, backpacking, bird watching, fishing, mountain biking, horseback riding, backcountry skiing and snowshoeing.

#### Important

Although available for rent year-round, only hardy, self-sufficient adventurers looking for a remote backcountry experience should rent in the winter. Winter conditions can occur from September thru June and may provide visitors with challenging weather in addition to affecting access and amenities. There is no vehicle access to the cabin in the winter.

**Renters must contact the Pacific Ranger District at (530) 647-5415 to arrange for the permit, access, check-in, and to find out current conditions.**

**Amenities: The Rustic Bunkhouse has one bedroom, one bathroom and a living room/kitchen combination with a small deck outside. Do not expect hotel luxuries.**

**Parking:** 6 car maximum. RVs and trailers are not recommended due to limited space for parking and turn around. No vehicle access in the winter.

**Sleeping:** Queen bed and bunk bed in bedroom. Bunk bed and sleeper sofa in living room.

**Heat & Lights:** Propane fireplace with thermostat. Propane lights. **No electricity.**

**Cooking:** Propane oven and cook top. Basic utensils, pots, and pans. Refrigerator in the summer.

**Water:** Well water. Tested in the summer season only. Hot and cold running water in summer at the kitchen and bathroom sinks, and the shower. Due to freezing temperatures in the winter, water is provided to the flush toilet and bathroom sink only and there is no hot water. Please conserve water as the supply is limited and can run out during dry periods.

#### Location and Access

The Bunkhouse, situated at 6,549 feet above sea level, offers extremely different recreational experiences between summer and winter use.

**Summer Season directions (July through September)**—Summer access is generally by paved road except for the last 0.5 mile which is a dirt road. To reach the bunkhouse:

- Highway 50 east 21 miles from Placerville (8.5 miles east of Pollock Pines).
- Left on Ice House Road north 23 miles.
- Right on Cheese Camp Road (13N22) 4 miles to fork in the road. Stay right for 1.5 miles to left turn at locked gate.
- The Bunkhouse is a half-mile past the gate on the left side.

**Winter Season directions (January thru March).**

When snow covers the Sierra, the Van Vleck Bunkhouse can only be accessed by a challenging 6 mile long ski/snowshoe trail through the backcountry marked by blue diamonds. To reach the trailhead at Loon Lake:

- Highway 50 east 21 miles from Placerville (8.5 miles east of Pollock Pines).
- Left on Ice House Road north 28 miles taking the right fork to Loon Lake.
- Continue 5 miles on Ice House Road to the plowed trailhead parking area on the right at the turnoff to the Loon Lake Campground. Do not obstruct traffic or snowplows on Ice House road.

Because of the unpredictable weather and road conditions, there is no guaranteed access to Van Vleck Bunkhouse.

Forest Service  
Pacific Southwest  
Region



## National Recreation Reservation Service

**Toll-Free: 877-444-6777**

**TDD: 877-833-6777**

**INTL: 518-885-3639**

**Internet: [www.Recreation.gov](http://www.Recreation.gov)**



- ◆ Reservations can be made from 4 days to 180 days in advance of your first night's stay by anyone 18 years or older.
- ◆ Maximum stay length is 6 days.
- ◆ Fee: \$75.00 per night for up to 6 people. Fees may change at any time.
- ◆ Expect to pay a reservation and cancellation fee when appropriate.
- ◆ No pets or smoking are allowed in the building.
- ◆ Check-out time is 1:pm, and check-in time is 2:00 pm.
- ◆ No refunds for bad weather, unless ICE HOUSE ROAD is not passable. Availability is July—mid October and January—March.
- ◆ Availability is July - Mid October, and January-March.

### *Important!*

- ❖ Winter use is recommended for intermediate ability level or better skiers/snowshoers in excellent physical condition who are skilled in winter backcountry survival including navigation by map and compass or GPS.
- ❖ **Depending on terrain conditions, the trip can take between 3 to 7 hours from trailhead to Bunkhouse. Depart from the trailhead no later than 10:00a.m.**
- ❖ **In Winter, be prepared to bivouac overnight in the snow in the event of an emergency. Skiers will need climbing skins.**
- ❖ One emergency shelter is available along the trail, approximately two miles from the trailhead, if needed, to take refuge from bad weather or as a rest stop.
- ❖ The summer route is not recommended for winter access as the road and turnoffs are not marked with diamonds.
- ❖ Vehicles are not allowed beyond the **gravel parking surface at the Bunkhouse.**

## Check-In

Renters must contact Pacific Ranger Station at 530-647-5415 **as far in advance as possible** to arrange for the permit, check-in, access, and to receive a current condition report. **Failure to do so will result in the cancellation of your reservation.**

Check-in is done in person at Pacific Ranger Station, 7887 Highway 50, Pollock Pines CA 95726. The Ranger Station is located 4 miles east of Pollock Pines on the north side of Highway 50 at the Mill Run turnoff. Pacific Ranger Station is open from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm 7 days a week during the summer. Call for off season business hours. Arrangements can be made for after hours check-in.

## Road and Trail Conditions

Due to the remoteness of this area, you should be alert to changing weather, road and trail conditions. Call the Pacific Ranger Station **before leaving home** for a current report.

Winter drastically changes the complexion of the Sierra Nevada and the Crystal Basin is no exception. Snow depths from a single storm can exceed two feet. Breaking trail on skis or snowshoes in deep snow conditions can be exhausting and roads can become impassable to all vehicles including 4WD. Be prepared to postpone your trip in the event of a storm rather than subject your group to unnecessary risk.

Roads are often icy and snow plowing is done on an intermittent basis by the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD). Ice House Road may not be plowed on weekends or holidays.

All vehicles including 4WD should carry chains and be serviced for cold temperatures. In the event that a storm could snow you in, be prepared to stay until the road is plowed. Carry a snow shovel to dig your vehicle out. Cell phone reception is unreliable in this area.

## Route Finding



Even though the roads and the trail to Van Vleck Bunkhouse may be marked these should not be relied upon by travelers in this remote backcountry area. Natural events and storms can remove or obliterate signs and trail markers. You are responsible for finding your way by reading topographic maps and using a compass or GPS unit. The Van Vleck Ski Trail maps attached have GPS information in either UTM or latitude and longitude in degrees, minutes and seconds. Confirm that your GPS unit is using WGS 1984 datum.

## Rental Specifics

- ◆ Be sure to take all remaining **food** with you when you leave, even unopened items. Boxes and packages of food attract mice. Cans of food will freeze, causing the seams to unseal and the contents to spoil.
- ◆ **Garbage will need to be packed out and taken with you.**
- ◆ The propane **fireplace** is operated entirely from a wall thermostat above the dining table.
- ◆ In backcountry facilities, renters are expected to clean up after themselves and prepare the Bunkhouse for the next group. **Cleaning** supplies are available. Snow shovels are provided to clear the deck and entryways of snow.
- ◆ Renters will be expected to turn on the **water system** upon arrival and turn off the water system upon departure with directions provided at check-in.
- ◆ Because water testing is not possible in the winter **drinking water will need to be boiled for a minimum of 5 minutes.**
- ◆ No **open flames**, candles, backpacking stoves or Coleman stoves, etc., are permitted inside the building.
- ◆ **Pets** are not allowed, **at any time** in the building and are best left at home.
- ◆ **Smoking** is not allowed in the building.

## Things to Take With You

- ✓ Food
- ✓ Sleeping bag/bedding
- ✓ Garbage bags
- ✓ Water
- ✓ Cooking utensils (most are provided)
- ✓ Toilet paper and paper towels
- ✓ Map, compass, or GPS unit
- ✓ Sunscreen/sunglasses/hat
- ✓ Matches
- ✓ Flashlight
- ✓ First-aid supplies
- ✓ Climbing Skins (Winter)
- ✓ Backpacking stove with pot (Winter)
- ✓ Tent or Bivouac sack (Winter)
- ✓ Fire starting materials (Winter)
- ✓ Avalanche equipment: beacon, shovel, and probes. (Winter)

## Other Items

- ◆ It is a good idea to notify a responsible person of your planned stay at Van Vleck Bunkhouse and to check back with this person when you return. If you are overdue it is considered a search and rescue and the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department should be notified at (530) 626-4911.
- ◆ Cell phone communication from the Bunkhouse is marginal.
- ◆ El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol members patrol the area and may check on the facility or perform light maintenance during your stay.

Your cooperation with the rules of occupancy is essential to the continuation of the rental program. Failure to comply with the rules of occupancy can result in termination of your stay, forfeiture of rental fees and/or a citation. Unauthorized use of these facilities is a violation of both state and federal law. Violations are subject to a fine of \$5000 and/or up to 6 months imprisonment.

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