

Burned out landmark will reopen this winter

STOWE'S STONE HUT



This fall, rafters arrived via helicopter to the flank of Vermont's highest peak, and crews got cranking on the project. Morristown contractor Donald P. Blake Jr. Inc., was awarded the construction contract. Work is expected to cost \$276,000.

After the state pays a \$100,000 deductible, Spaulding said, insurance on the building will pay for all construction, other than some non-code improvements in the plans. Those include extra safety features that the insurance company deemed above and beyond what was strictly necessary, but which state officials wanted to help prevent another accident.

In a way, the collaborative spirit of the Vermont unit of the Civilian Conservation Corps that erected the original Stone Hut is alive in the re-build.

A woodworking school in Cambridge is taking care of the interior furnishing. Walker Construction is laying down a concrete floor with a modern drainage system; it will be covered by a wood floor very similar to the original, so skiers and riders won't even know what's underneath.

A granite-industry stalwart out of Barre, John Pelkey, carefully sandblasted all the soot that had covered the stone walls during the fire, to the point you can barely tell there was fire damage. Stowe's Matt Parisi is handling the masonry work, although the exterior looks remarkably unchanged. Spaulding said state officials were happy to see, a few days after the fire, that the walls could be stabilized for the winter.

Ironwood Precision from Johnson is handling the windows, one of those "I know a guy" discoveries after the initial estimate for window replacement came in at more than \$50,000. Another local man prepared the roof beams, using spruce logs that he hand-stripped of their bark for that rustic look.

Overseeing the architectural design is Northern Architects of Burlington.

Fans of the Stone Hut should have no problem recognizing the new building, which will be as rustic and rugged as the original. That means no electricity and no heat, save the woodstove.

The choice of woodstove was a sensitive point, since it was the source of the fire that gutted the original hut last December. The new one will be steel, not cast-iron, and it will have a glass door. There are also plans to improve the woodshed, to keep the fuel drier.

When the rebuilt hut opens for the coming ski season, one thing will be different, at least for the first year. The state has put a moratorium on the lottery system used to determine who gets to spend the night at one of Vermont's most exclusive overnight spots. ■



STORY / Tommy Gardner
PHOTOGRAPH / Gordon Miller

Work began this fall to replace the historic Stone Hut near the top of Mount Mansfield, with a few modern-era touches. Purists need not worry; they'll be all but invisible.

"Listen to that," Frank Spaulding said to one of the men using a whirring power drill to secure a frame corner. "They didn't have that 80 years ago."

The Stone Hut, built in 1935, burned down last Christmas Eve, after some friends left wet logs leaning against the woodstove. The original structure would have turned 80 this year, and state forestry officials are excited that it'll be ready to rent again this coming ski season.

MOUNTAINTOP RESTORATION In bright summer sun, a crew from Donald P. Blake Jr. Inc., of Morristown, install roof beams at the Stone Hut. The beams are spruce logs, hand-stripped of their bark for a rustic look. An old Richardson postcard of the original Stone Hut.