



JANUARY IN MARIN

A pub in the woods

■ Pine needles crunching underfoot, you trudge along a trail up yet another steep hill in Muir Woods. You stop to wipe the sweat collecting on your forehead, when suddenly your overheated brain registers that there's a Swiss chalet ahead, tucked amid the towering redwoods. Sprinting up some steps to the deck of the lodge—brightly painted in traditional floral patterns—you look out toward Mount Tamalpais and order a cold beer.

It's no mirage. The Tourist Club on the edge of Muir Woods is run by the Nature Friends (Naturfreunde), a 600,000-member international confederation of outdoors enthusiasts based

in Vienna, Austria. The club is also a popular pit stop for hikers, who can kick off their boots and enjoy a selection of international beers and soft drinks on a deck with a spectacular view of Marin County's wilderness.

The Muir Woods branch of Nature Friends was founded in 1912 by a group of German and Austrian immigrants who found themselves spending more time en route from San Francisco (pre-Golden Gate Bridge) than hiking around Mount Tam. To solve the commute problem, they bought a parcel of land for \$200 and built a lodge for overnight stays.

"In the heyday, in the 1920s, Nature

Hikers take a break at the Tourist Club on the edge of Muir Woods.

Friends would hike all over the mountain, sometimes playing accordion, mandolin, and guitar and singing the old German and Austrian songs," says Erich Fink, the chapter's historian. That tradition may have faded, but the group keeps the *gemütlichkeit* alive at its annual alpine festivals, held throughout the summer, featuring traditional music and schuhplattler dancing. Lederhosen optional.

•*Where:* 30 Ridge Ave., Mill Valley. Call for directions.

•*When:* Open year-round.

•*FYI:* Traditional alpine festivals take place in May, July, and September on the third Sunday of the month. Admission costs \$6.

•*Contact:* (415) 388-9987.

— Mickey Butts