

Ptarmigan Tracks

Vol. XXXVIII, November 2013

The Newsletter of Camp Denali & North Face Lodge



Ginny's Legacy

By Jenna Hamm

On March 8, 2013, Camp Denali founder, Ginny Wood, passed away peacefully at her home in the hills above Fairbanks, Alaska. An outdoorswoman from childhood, horse-packing and skiing turned into flying in 1942 when she joined the Women Airforce Service Pilot training program. Lucky for Alaska, Ginny literally landed in Fairbanks on New Year's Day 1947, and never really left.

Pilot, entrepreneur, wilderness guide, community builder and conservationist, Ginny's legacy will be about sustainability and her desire to live lightly on the land. The fact that Camp Denali is not a 300-room hotel is testament to her vision.

So it was to my surprise, upon Ginny's last visit to Camp Denali in 2008, that we ended up felling trees in front of her cabin. We put her up in a staff cabin built for and named after her daughter, Romany. Ginny never wished to impose. She would always bring her own sleeping bag, even her own pillowcase from home, and sleep on top of the ready-made bed, not wanting us to incur another load of laundry and another bed to make up because of her visit.

Soon after she settled in I met her on the path searching for me, and Simon, my husband. Despite her desire to be an unobtrusive guest, clearly something was not right. Her greeting went something like this, "I can't see the mountain!"

Sure enough, over-eager spruce trees and willow bushes had not just crept into the mountain views from the cabin but pretty much occluded them. Together the three of us flagged several of the offenders, Ginny coaching us from her favored perch on the steps of the cabin. While some may have been quick to label Ginny as a tree-hugger for her environmental ethics, in this instance, the view was sacred, not the trees!

Here in Alaska, Ginny Wood was a peerless role model for sustainability, conservation, and community. "Her huge gardens with double moose fence, freezers full of peas, beans, and berries, [her] freshly baked bread, clothes hung to dry in the basement. Next to her example...I learned that each step is meaningful," reminisced Pam Miller of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.

In 1960, Ginny joined a handful of concerned Alaska residents to create the first conservation society in Alaska. Together they argued against the damming of the Yukon River and Edward Teller's grand plan to use a nuclear bomb to blast open a deep port along the arctic coast. For her lifetime of grassroots conservation work, Ginny was the humble recipient of numerous state and national awards.

Some of Ginny's most eloquent testimony was voiced in her enduring advocacy for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. About the Refuge, she wrote, "the ethical, spiritual, recreation, and educational values of such an area are those one cannot put a price tag on, any more than one can on a sunset, a piece of poetry, a symphony, or a friendship." We feel privileged to have known Ginny and to be continuing her legacy of sustainability at Camp Denali.



Ginny on the Park Road (B. Powell, 1974)



Denali from Reflection Pond (M. Lindhjem)



Ptarmigan Tracks Newsletter
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Top: A Camp Denali Outhouse (R. Clevenger)
 Middle Right: Simon and Theo leveling the 1954
 lodge (C. Dunn)



2013 Project Roundup, aka Job Security for our Staff!

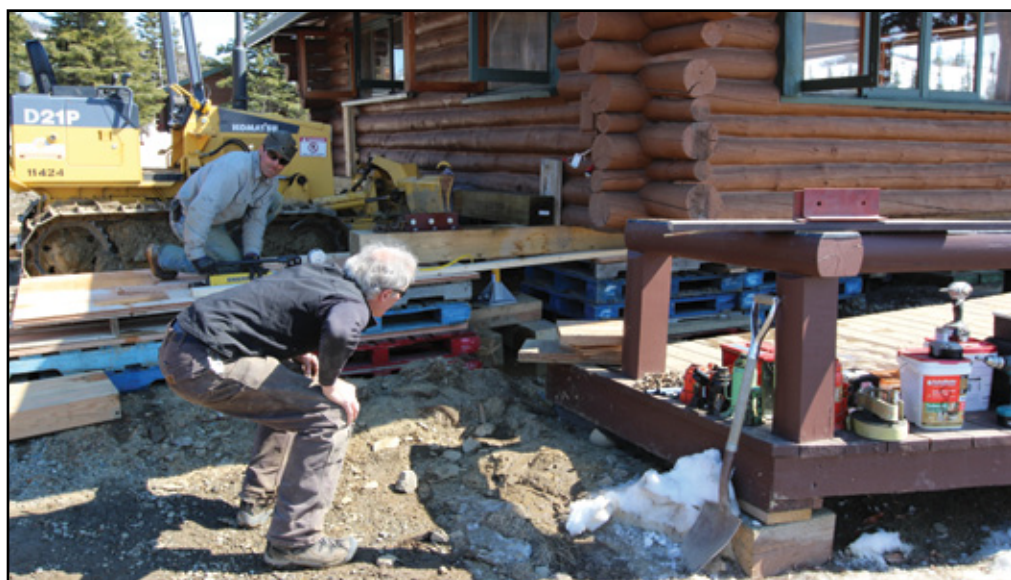
By Simon Hamm

The recap of this year's achievements reads a lot like a serial novel. Since we prefer to tackle big projects in the shoulder seasons, our general strategy is to launch into a project in the fall, accomplishing any digging before the ground freezes, and staging materials onsite for the following spring. If all goes according to plan, we fly back in early May and pick up where we left off, as the clock steadily ticks down toward opening day.



The Land Rover on Polychrome Pass (S. Hamm)

the crew, including a "deck-in-a-day", it was ready when the first guest bus of 2013 pulled into the yard.



This year's serial novel picks up (literally) with the Camp Denali lodge resting on cribbing in the upper parking lot. We'd left it that way at the end of 2012, after jacking it in the air and skidding it 15 feet north. The goal was to give it a new foundation and a new lease on life after 59 years. Thanks to the combined efforts of

Besides moving the lodge, the 2013 crew found time to replace a generator and have a well drilled at North Face Lodge, replace seat cushion foam in our buses, replace Bergschrund's outhouse, sew a mountain of curtains, sheathe Sourdough's exterior walls, install a grease trap at North Face Lodge, and complete a host of other improvements.

So what is the serial cliff-hanger for 2013? Well, based on the success of the lodge move, we decided to carry the momentum by lifting and re-leveling the Riffles building, which had started to list into the melting permafrost in the 30 years since its construction. Off came the porches. Out came the showers and the hot water tank, the flooring and the wallpaper. The clock is once again ticking down to opening day, and our amazing crew has once again assured their own job security!



Bull Moose in Nugget Pond. Painting by C. Frolking

From the Special Sightings Notebook

5/11 *The coldest April in 88 years combined with May snowfall kept ice on Nugget Pond until this date, when water flooded the ice overnight*

5/22 *First frogs heard croaking at Nugget Pond, two weeks later than usual*

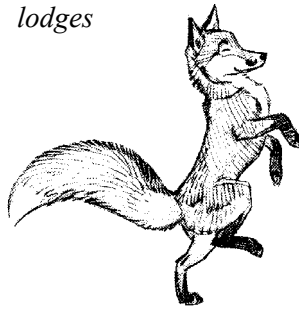
6/19 *Three year old Silas spots a "black bird". Confirmed to be a Red-winged Blackbird, accidental in Denali*

6/20 *Maggie Whitaker, daughter of guide, Maria, and friends set a record for the longest amount of time spend in Nugget Pond: 50 minutes!*

7/26 *Peregrine Falcon nest with fledglings spotted near Wonder Lake*

8/20 *A little rain allows Lake Creek to once again flow with water after being dry for about a week*

9/4 *Sandhill Cranes seen and heard flying high above the lodges*



A Spring and Summer of Extremes

The 2013 season began with a long, drawn-out winter, was followed by a heat wave, and ended with a landslide! April and May were among the coldest on record. Snow continued to accumulate and temperatures dropped to almost -30° F in early April. Our opening crew members were skiing and sledding in their free time through the third week of May. Yet for all the time spent digging pathways between cabins, summer ushered itself in right in time. June and July were two of the warmest on record, and we found ourselves musing about air conditioning! Soon enough, the thunderstorms started wildfires.

One lightning strike hit very close to home, igniting the spruce forest on top of Iron Dome, just two miles west of Camp Denali. Within an hour, an airshow commenced that had all our guests and staff out of doors and on top of roofs. Three water bombers lapped Wonder Lake scooping water (up to 12,000 pounds worth) to dump, with exquisite precision, on the flames. A second fire a few miles east of Wonder Lake kept the Fairbanks-based fire crews in the area through the night. Never before had we experienced wildfires so close to Camp.

Eventually the heat subsided, bringing cooler and more typical weather patterns. To wrap up the season, a landslide occurred in mid-October on the east side of Sable Pass, depositing frozen soil over a 200-foot section of the park road. Thankfully, as of late October, the NPS road crew had the area cleared.

If What They Say Is True...

that life
begins at forty
I was premature
My second life -
not second childhood -
no- a whole, real life
began at thirty-eight
when I came here -
here to Alaska -
alien milieu
of wilderness,
strange life-styles,
different ways.

Turned forty-five,
I formalized my adaptation
in a rite-of-passage -
acquisition of
some twenty acres,
strewn with gold.

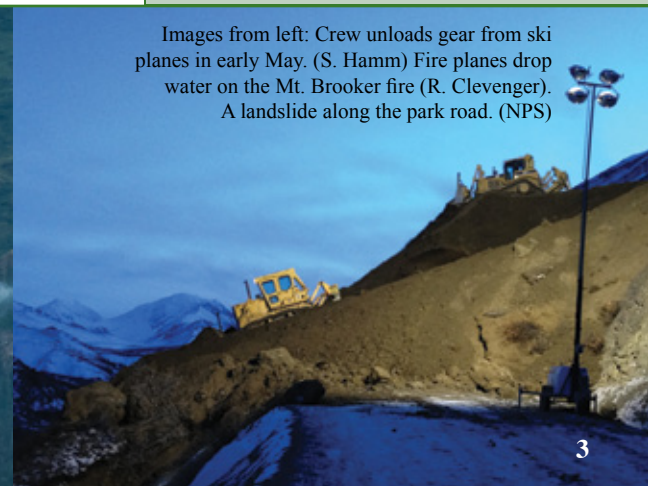
My summers there,
apprenticeship and mastery,
in part were spent
upon my knees
with chisel, dandelion pick,
trowel and spoons,
in part calf-deep
in icy water,
waders, rubber gloves.

My eyes
turned eagle-sharp to spot
one pin-point fleck
of treasure
to increase my hoard
or, more often, to assist
slow-learner tourists
to a "real" experience...
no salted dirt,
no tall, convenient trough
to stand at comfortably;
success not guaranteed,
but always found.

My forties, fifties, sixties,
early seventies
that second life flowed on.
Three decades plus
wrought changes
in the creek,
the tourists,
me...
All things must end,
(another saying, that),
and so -
I'm on my third life now,
excepting memories.

© Louise Gallop

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Images from left: Crew unloads gear from ski planes in early May. (S. Hamm) Fire planes drop water on the Mt. Brooker fire (R. Clevenger). A landslide along the park road. (NPS)

Bird Migration & Conservation



Scott Weidensaul
Acclaimed Author and Field Researcher

June 2-5 at Camp Denali
June 6-8 at North Face Lodge

Scott Weidensaul's passion is birds, especially bird migration. He is the author of more than two dozen critically acclaimed books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Living on the Wind*, about migratory birds. During his evening presentations we will explore the wonders and dynamics of bird migration and take a light-hearted look at his field research – a lifetime spent, as he says, “messing around with birds for fun and science.”



Life on a Changing Landscape

Seth Kantner

Award-Winning Alaskan Author

July 7-10 at Camp Denali July 11-13 at North Face Lodge

Seth Kantner is a writer and photographer, born and raised in northern Alaska. His work reflects his love for the land, the animals that live on it, and his belief in the importance of wilderness left wild. During his sessions, we will focus on the details of Denali's vast landscape, how to notice single details in a natural world bursting with them. Kantner will also present on the change that has and is taking place in Northwest Alaska.

Alaska's Interior & Coastal Flora

Stacy Studebaker
Botanist, Author and Environmental Educator

June 9-12 at Camp Denali
June 13-15 at North Face Lodge



Stacy Studebaker has called Alaska home for the last 40 years and is one of Kodiak's leading naturalists and environmental educators. She reaches a wide audience by integrating natural history and science

with art, music and writing. Stacy's daily field trips will emphasize the characteristics of subarctic flora and will explore how plants flourish despite the rigors of mountain weather, glacial terrain, permafrost, and the brief growing season.

Life on a Changing Landscape



Sarah Roeske
Research Geologist

June 23-26 at Camp Denali
June 27-29 at North Face Lodge

Sarah Roeske is widely recognized for her research in Alaska, and she brings 35 years of experience studying Alaska's geology and Cordilleran plate tectonics. Roeske's programs will present ideas on how mountains are formed and examine mysteries of earthquakes. We will learn what makes Mt. McKinley unique and why earthquakes are hard to predict. Daily field excursions will explore local geology, including the history of gold discoveries near Camp Denali.



'Last Frontier' to 'Last Wilderness'

Steve Haycox

Historian, Author & Professor

July 14-17 at Camp Denali July 18-20 at North Face Lodge

Steve Haycox is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He continues to teach after retiring from a 42-year career teaching environmental history. Haycox's programs will examine the definition and evolution of the “wilderness idea” as it applies to Alaska. We will connect this topic to the continuing tension between economic development and environmental protection in Alaska.



emphasis series

Bubble Trouble: Methane Release



Katey Walter Anthony

Ecologist and Assistant Professor

July 21-24 at Camp Denali

July 25-27 at North Face Lodge

Katey Walter Anthony is an aquatic ecologist and assistant professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her scientific discovery of methane bubbling hotspots in arctic lakes has led to breakthroughs in understanding the role permafrost thaw plays in methane release. Professor Anthony's evening programs will explore topics about climate change, permafrost thaw, and methane release from Alaska's lakes.



Nature Photography Workshop*

Mark Kelley

Professional Nature Photographer

August 25-28 and August 29-31 at Camp Denali

Mark Kelley has photographed the people, scenery, and wildlife of Alaska for over 35 years. In his programs, Kelley will celebrate the wild wonders of Alaska. Field trips will emphasize the compositional elements and creative perspective that shape a photograph, all the while finding that decisive moment in each image. Denali's vast landscape, vivid with autumn colors, makes for exciting opportunities around every bend.

**There is an additional fee for this program and space is limited*

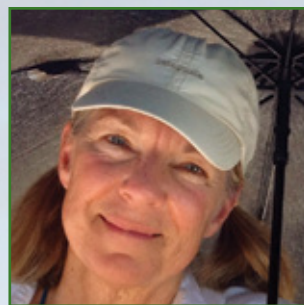
Alaska's Native Cultures

Cyd Martin

Cultural Anthropologist

August 4-7 at Camp Denali

August 8-10 at North Face Lodge



Cyd Martin is a cultural anthropologist who has worked with Native Alaskans and tribes in Alaska. We will have the opportunity to learn about the history of the Eskimo parka design and how this iconic garment

is vital to Arctic culture and identity. Martin will also discuss new theories on the migration of Paleolithic Europeans to the New World and share the artifacts and cultural evidence that supports those theories.

Painting in the North



Kesler Woodward

Artist and Professor of Art

August 15-17 at North Face

August 18-21 at Camp Denali

Kesler Woodward is one of Alaska's best known artists. In 2002 he was Denali

National Park's first Artist-in-Residence. He served as the Curator of Visual Arts at the Alaska State Museum and as Artistic Director of the Visual Arts Center of Alaska. Woodward will explore depictions of Alaska and the circumpolar north by artists of all eras. He will also be available to work with guests on their own paintings and drawings throughout this series.



Curtains of Light: Aurora Borealis

Neal Brown

Former Director of Alaska Space Grant Program

Sept 5-7 at Camp Denali Sept 8-11 at North Face Lodge

Neal Brown's interest in auroral phenomena was first sparked when working for NASA. He received his PhD from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where he held a faculty position in the Physics Department and Geophysical Institute before retiring in 2008. Brown's evening programs will explore the science behind the aurora. His enthusiasm for the mystical night skies is contagious during his series at our lodges.

Read more about our 2014 lineup on our website, www.campdenali.com



Photos clockwise from top left: Nancy, Jane, Toni, and Ann take a break from the ridge hike on the Eagles Nest Cabin porch (A. Ambros) Fireweed in full bloom (J. Sharbaugh) A Pika eats a willow leaf (M. Lindhjem) Caribou pause to examine the photographer (N. Gittleston).

Diversity in the Outdoors

By Aparna Rajagopal-Durbin, NOLS

In June Camp Denali served as a “base camp” for the National Outdoor Leadership School’s (NOLS’) Expedition Denali: Inspiring Diversity in the Outdoors. The historic expedition, which occurred on the 100th anniversary of the first ascent of Denali, aimed to be the first expedition of African Americans to summit the peak. The goal of the expedition was to inspire young people of color to get outside, get active, and fall in love with our wild places. The team is now on the road speaking to audiences across the nation.



Expedition Denali Climb Team
(H. Henry 2013)

Good News for the Arctic

By Beth Peluso, Audubon Alaska

Teshekpuk Lake, located on Alaska’s North Slope, teems with birds during the nesting season and is one of the most ecologically important wetlands in the entire Arctic. Part of the National Petroleum Reserve–Alaska, this sensitive area provides habitat for tens of thousands of molting geese, threatened species such as the Spectacled Eider, millions of nesting shorebirds and waterfowl, and the 60,000-head Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd.



On February 21, 2013 there was great news: the Bureau of Land Management announced that the first-ever comprehensive plan to manage the Reserve would close

11 million acres to oil and gas development, including 3.1 million acres surrounding Teshekpuk Lake, for the duration of the plan. This includes the globally-significant Teshekpuk Lake Important Bird Area. Although not permanent protection, the plan provides a responsible balance between conservation on about half of the nearly 23-million acre Reserve and access and development for the vast majority of the area’s oil.

Louise Gallop Passes Away

By Jenna Hamm

There are few colder sports than panning for gold. This did not deter Louise Gallop, former “Camp cook” and owner of a gold claim on Friday Creek in Kantishna. Many former guests and staff from the late 70s and 80s will recall Louise, clad in hip waders and rubber dish gloves, coaching curious visitors in the fine art of panning.

Louise passed away on August 6, 2013 in Anchorage at the age of 90. A New York City native, Louise first traveled to Alaska in 1959 and to Camp Denali in 1960. She moved to Alaska the following year where she taught school in Anchorage. Having her summers free, it wasn’t long before she returned to Camp Denali. During those summers Louise caught gold fever and eventually purchased a claim on Friday Creek. One of the nuggets retrieved from her claim is on display at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art where Louise was a docent and volunteer for 32 years.

A philanthropist, Louise gave generously to the Museum, her Unitarian fellowship and to other social and environmental causes. Without any family in Alaska, close friend, Nancy Bale, and Camp staff member, Carley Dunn, assisted Louise in her later years. Nancy helped self-publish a book of Louise’s little-known poetry, one poem of which is reprinted in this newsletter.

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Parkside Guest House Staff

CARLEY DUNN '96-'13
Anchorage, AK



S. Fisher

The enthusiasm of our staff is what makes our guest experience so memorable!

General staff positions are available for the 2014 season, as well as the following professional seasonal positions: Dinner Cooks, Skilled Maintenance Workers, and Naturalist Guides.

Registered Nurses are encouraged to apply for any of our positions.

If you know of someone who would be a good fit for our organization, encourage him or her to view the employment pages of our website.



M. Stoutenburg.



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Looking Back.... One Hundred Years Ago in Denali

On June 7, 1913, four members of the Hudson Stuck-Harry Karstens expedition became the first mountain climbers to reach the south summit of Denali. Stuck, then the Episcopal Archdeacon of the Yukon, organized the climb to promote the 20th anniversary of the church in Alaska. 21 year-old Walter Harper, of local Athabascan descent, was the first member of the party to set foot on the summit.

The 1913 party was beset by poor weather, debris left by a massive ice avalanche the previous year, and even a fire at one of their camps which destroyed valuable supplies. Nevertheless they accomplished their climb in seven and a half weeks, roughly twice the modern timeframe.

100 years later, in 2013, an expedition including direct descendants of the first ascent party retraced their forefathers' footsteps. The "Denali 2013" climbers set out to commemorate the story of the original climb, including the major contributions by Alaska Natives.

All but one member of the Denali 2013 party succeeded in reaching the summit, and all made it safely back down the mountain. Upon crossing the McKinley River, they were welcomed by friends and staff from Camp Denali and North Face Lodge, who greeted them with fresh cinnamon buns from our bakery!

Sam Alexander and Dana Wright on the Centennial climb (K. Karstens)