

# Ptarmigan Tracks

Vol. XXXV, November 2010



*The Newsletter of Camp Denali & North Face Lodge*

## **Wolves: Public Mandates at Odds**

Alaska has long been known as a state with contentious issues surrounding wildlife management. A 1994 state law, commonly called the Intensive Management Law, dictates that wildlife on state lands must be managed for the highest sustainable yield for human consumption. In contrast, the

National Park Service is mandated to preserve natural and healthy wildlife populations and to "...leave them in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

A conflict in management philosophy thus appears in areas of the state where federal park land abuts state land. Denali National Park and Preserve is surrounded by three state-managed Game Management Units. There are active predator control programs for bears and wolves in some of these units.

In 2000, buffer zones were established on state lands adjacent to Denali for the protection of wolves in areas of critical wolf and caribou winter habitat. The buffers made trapping and hunting of wolves illegal in these areas

through 2010. The Alaska Board of Game planned to let these buffers lapse this year unless a new buffer proposal was approved. In an unusual political move, the National Park Service requested in early spring that the Board of Game keep and enlarge those buffers. Despite these suggestions and similar requests by the Denali Citizens Council and many Alaska residents, the Board indeed voted

to eliminate the buffer zones. The decision was staggering, especially in light of the fact that Denali's annual wolf survey north of the Alaska Range counted only 59 wolves in April of 2010, the lowest number since detailed counts began around 1980.

Lack of legal protection in Alaska is not unique to Denali's wolves.

This spring four wolves were killed by Alaska Fish and Game agents outside of Yukon Charley Rivers National

Preserve, including two that were collared and being studied by the National Park Service. The kills were a legal implementation of the Intensive Management Law.

Many park visitors in Denali this year were fortunate to see wolves from the Grant Creek Pack.

*(continued on page 6)*



An adult wolf and pup rest near the Toklat River. (K. Woodward, 2010)



**F**or over 50 years, our family-owned and operated lodges have existed to share the beauty, adventure and wonderment of Denali National Park, which we are privileged to call home.

Camp Denali and North Face Lodge specialize in naturalist-led outings, fine dining and tasteful, authentic accommodations in direct view of the Alaska Range. Our extended stays contribute to your enjoyment, understanding and memories of this magnificent land: its wildlife, rhythms, sights and sensations.

Experience Denali from our point of view.



### **Ptarmigan Tracks Newsletter**

Edited by Jan Tomsen and Simon Hamm

Illustrations by William D. Berry

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Front cover image:

Denali's autumn tundra. (R. Clevenger)

Above photo:

Camp Denali Lodge. (M. DeYoung)

## **2010 Season Highlights**

### **Road Rehabilitation Project**

Last year we reported on the Denali National Park road widening project between miles 73 and 86. The project began in earnest this year, widening the road in certain sections. The creation of additional intervisible passing pullouts will provide more safe places for buses to pass one another. Park visitors this summer noticed large culverts staged on the sides of the road awaiting installation, as well as heavy equipment, flagging and road cuts where expansion was taking place.

Denali's new Vehicle Management Plan, which determines the system used to provide visitor transportation into the Park, is set to be released in 2012 when the current plan expires. An Environmental Impact Statement and the Road Capacity Study will be considered. Find out more about road issues in Denali at the Denali National Park website: [www.nps.gov/dena](http://www.nps.gov/dena).

### **Roundup of Projects at the Lodges**

The 2010 project season started early after the discovery during a winter visit that the North Face Lodge spring had frozen solid. This caused no small alarm, as it has always flowed freely all winter long, often producing frost crystals a foot long on the

inside of the springhouse. All signs pointed to deeply frozen ground as the culprit, including huge ice formations on nearby Lake Creek and Moose Creek, where our ground water appeared to be diverting to. So in early April, amid returning sunlight and warmth, Simon and friend Peter Harrison flew in and spent the day plowing snow to help speed the thawing of the ground around the springhouse. Did it have the desired effect? Hard to tell, but with only days to go before the arrival of the full staff cohort, we were greatly relieved to see the spring once again flowing freely at full capacity, where it remained all season.

In addition, the following accomplishments marked the 2010 Operations season:

- Completion of guest room remodeling at North Face Lodge
- Remodel of the NFL staff room
- Water treatment upgrades at Camp Denali
- Installation of skirting and gutters at Potlatch
- Acquisition of a Ford F-800 truck for heavy hauling and towing
- A new satellite earth station for dramatically enhanced office communications and guest and staff phone service
- Fuel storage upgrades at Upper Camp



K. Willes, 2010.

## From the 2010 Special Sightings Notebook

- |      |   |      |   |
|------|---|------|---|
| 5/22 | <i>Green-up starting on Camp Hill!</i>  | 7/13 | <i>Golf ball-sized fluffs of Least Sandpiper chicks at Ranger Pond.</i> |
| 6/7  | <i>Two adult Northern Shrikes and nest with five nestlings visible from the road on the east side of Thorofare Pass.</i>  | 7/20 | <i>Lynx observed above treeline on Ridge Walk-about Trail.</i>          |
| 6/10 | <i>Two inches of marble-sized hail strip new leaves from the tundra plants in a half mile swath near Reflection Pond.</i> | 7/28 | <i>Fourteen wolves cavorting in the Grant Creek pack.</i>               |
| 7/6  | <i>Three-year-old Danika Hamm finds the first <b>blue</b> blueberries of the season.</i>                                  | 8/12 | <i>Coyote seen on Mt. Galen, headed west.</i>                           |
|      |   | 8/19 | <i>Three wolverines observed on Mt. Galen.</i>                          |
|      |   | 8/20 | <i>Sixty-five cow and calf caribou on the Plains of Murie.</i>          |



## Early Wildfires Squelched by June Rains

Although 2010 may be remembered for many a damp, cool hike on Denali's tundra, other areas of the state were again faced with wildfires. On May 19th our sky was hazy with the first smoke of the season, the earliest in memory. May was a particularly dry month during which many fires sparked up, including some that overwintered beneath the snow in combustible peat moss. Many early season hikers observed distant wildfires on the Toklat River from the top of Camp Ridge. The severity of the fire season is an unwritten book, however, until the June rains come (or don't), and come they did to Fairbanks, Denali, and southerly regions of Alaska. The volume of precipitation in Denali caused lake levels to rise, proving fatal for a loon chick on Wonder Lake as its nest was submerged. By contrast, northern areas remained relatively dry. Fires burned approximately 1.25 million acres statewide (an area the size of Delaware), causing staff members Ellen Horbett and John Kahle to cut short their multi-week canoe trip in Gates of the Arctic National Park.

Image credits:  
 Dall sheep ram at Polychrome Pass. (D. Mizokami, 2010)  
 Trumpeter swan on Wonder Lake. (R. Clevenger, 2006)  
 Amy Matthews and arctic poppies. (S. Anderson, 2010)

*from Living on the Wind by Scott Weidensaul\**

Bird migration is the one truly unifying natural phenomenon in the world, stitching the continents together in a way the great weather systems, which roar out of the poles but fizzle at the equator, fail to do. It is an enormously complex subject, perhaps the most compelling drama in all of natural history.

That such delicate creatures undertake these epic journeys defies belief. Only recently have scientists discovered that some shorebirds apparently fly nonstop from the

southern tip of South America to the coast of New Jersey, a journey of ten days—240 hours of uninterrupted flight. Even more remarkable are the four-ounce Arctic terns that leave the northern fringe of the continent each autumn, flying east across the Atlantic to Europe. They push south along the bulge of Africa, recross the Atlantic to the edge of South America, and spend the winter months moving east off Antarctica. In spring they reverse course, moving up southern Africa and lancing back to Canada—a figure eight inscribed on half the globe, a track that returns them, as often as not, to precisely the same sheltered nook where they nested the summer before.

*\*2008 and 2010 Special Emphasis Speaker*

# 2011 Special Emphasis



## Bird Migration and Conservation

June 6-9 & 10-12 Stan Senner, Director of Conservation Science, Ocean Conservancy

Stan Senner brings more than 35 years of experience with birds, science, conservation, and public policy to his job as director of conservation science for Ocean Conservancy, which he has held since 2009. He worked for The Wilderness Society and the U.S. House of Representatives during passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Mr. Senner also served as Executive Director of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania, as Alaska's Science Coordinator following the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and as Executive Director of Audubon Alaska for 10 years.

## Wildflowers of Denali

June 13-16 & 17-19 Staff Naturalists and Guest Lecturers

Naturalist staff and guest specialists will lead field trips for botanizing and wildflower photography. We will explore marshy lowlands, boreal forest, rolling tundra hillsides, and windswept heights, discovering plants that are adapted to these unique biological niches of the Far North. We will discuss the characteristics of taiga and tundra, river bar colonizers, cushion plants, and sedge tussocks, and will talk about how plants flourish despite the rigors of mountain weather, glacial terrain, permafrost, and the brief growing season.



## Stewardship and the National Park Idea

June 27-30 & July 1-3 Shelton Johnson, Acclaimed Writer and Interpreter, Yosemite National Park

Shelton Johnson, a native of Detroit, Michigan, currently serves as an interpretive ranger in Yosemite National Park. Mr. Johnson served with the Peace Corps in Liberia and attended graduate school at the University of Michigan, where he won several writing awards, including a Hopwood Award in poetry. While working in Yosemite, Mr. Johnson stumbled upon archived photos of Buffalo Soldiers who had patrolled the park around the turn of the 20th century. Since 1998, he has been bringing the history of the Buffalo Soldiers to life at venues around the country. His recent book, *Gloryland*, is a novel based on the life of a Buffalo Soldier stationed in Yosemite National Park. Mr. Johnson is prominently featured in the Ken Burns documentary film *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*.

## An Introduction to the North Country

July 15-17 & 18-21 Steve Young, Former Director of the Center for Northern Studies, Sterling College

Steve Young did his Ph.D. work at Harvard, specializing in the flora of the Bering Strait Region. He founded The Center for Northern Studies in Vermont and returned to Alaska for extended field work and consulting work for the National Park Service. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, he did field research in several areas in Siberia and, more recently, in northern Mongolia. Dr. Young has developed a broad array of college courses on various polar subjects and published *To the Arctic, An Introduction to the Northern Environment*. He has led field courses to many parts of the North, including several taught in Denali.



## Conserving Biodiversity in the Russian Far North

July 25-28 & 29-31 Margaret Williams, Director of Bering Sea Ecoregion Program, World Wildlife Fund

Margaret Williams graduated from Smith College and received a master's degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. As Director of World Wildlife Fund's Bering Sea Ecoregion Program and Russia Projects, Ms. Williams leads a team of experts in climate change, wildlife biology, fisheries, oil, development, shipping, and communications to implement an international conservation strategy for the Bering Sea. Ms. Williams has focused much of her efforts on Russian conservation issues for the last sixteen years, and founded and edits *Russian Conservation News*, a quarterly journal on biodiversity conservation in Eurasia.

# Series at Camp Denali

Offered at Camp Denali only



## The “Conservation Bill of the Century”

August 5-7 & 8-11 Jim Stratton, Alaska Regional Director, National Parks Conservation Association

Jim Stratton holds a degree in Recreation and Parks Management from the University of Oregon and an MBA from Alaska Pacific University. His long standing interest in the outdoors, particularly the National Park System, has led him to his current role with the National Parks Conservation Association, a position he has held since December 2002. Prior to joining NPCA, Mr. Stratton spent eight years as the director of the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and 11 years as the Program and Finance Director for Alaska Conservation Foundation. He started his Alaska conservation career over 25 years ago as the Executive Director of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council.

## Yellow-billed Loons of the Arctic and Brown Bears of McNeil River

August 15-18 & 19-21 Jeff Fair, Acclaimed Alaskan Author & Wildlife Biologist

Jeff Fair has studied loons and other wild spirits across the North from Maine to Alaska for 33 years. A wildlife biologist by formal training, he wrote the original status report on the rare Yellow-billed Loon in Alaska, and began field research on the species in Alaska’s vast western arctic in 2002. He has also made three recent trips to the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary in southwest Alaska, site of the world’s largest concentration of brown bears, in pursuit of his interest in the interspecific trust established there between humans and bears. Mr. Fair has published four books and is a regular contributor to *Audubon* and *Alaska Magazine*.



## Autumn Nature Photography Workshop\*

August 26-28 & August 29-September 1 Ralph Lee Hopkins, Professional Nature Photographer

Ralph Lee Hopkins is Director of Photo Expeditions for Lindblad Expeditions and travels the world’s wild places aboard the *National Geographic Explorer*. An inspiring teacher, he is lecturer on tour with National Geographic Traveler digital seminars and teaches with National Geographic Expeditions, Arizona Highways Photographic Workshops, and Santa Fe Photographic Workshops. Ralph’s work regularly appears in National Geographic publications and in major magazines including *Arizona Highways*, *Outdoor Photographer*, *Outside*, and *Nature’s Best*.

\*Please note that an additional program fee of \$75/night is charged to each Autumn Nature Photography Workshop participant. The workshop is limited to 10 participants.

## Curtains of Light: The Aurora Borealis

September 5-8 & 9-11 Neal Brown, Ph.D., Former Director of Alaska Space Grant Program and Poker Flat Research Range, and Science Enthusiast

After receiving a B.A. in physics from Washington State University in 1961, Neal Brown worked for NASA, where his interest in auroral phenomena was first sparked. At the time, the aurora was linked to understanding the earth’s atmospheric makeup, a key factor in spacecraft travel. Dr. Brown went on to receive an M.S. and a Ph.D. from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He also directed its Poker Flat Research Range from 1971 through 1989. In 2008, he retired from his faculty position in the Physics Department and Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.



Read more about our 2011 lineup on our website, [www.campdenali.com](http://www.campdenali.com).  
Go to “Activities,” then “Special Emphasis Series.”

Background photo credit: Brad Wagner.



Déjà vu on the tundra! A young Jenna Cole (at right) picks blueberries near Camp Denali circa 1976. Danika Hamm (at left) follows in her mother's footsteps a generation later.

### Wolves cont'd from page 1

They denned near the Toklat area once again and had rendezvous sites near the Plains of Murie and Highway Pass along the Park Road. The Mount Margaret Pack, closer to the Park entrance, was six wolves strong in 2009. The pack was decimated over the 2009-2010 winter, begging the question about what the impacts will be of removing the trapping buffer. Denali is one of the best places to view wolves in North America, and the value of its watchable wildlife shouldn't be discounted.

For more information, or to find out how you can respond to the Board of Game's decision, please visit the Denali Citizens Council website at [www.denalicitizens.org](http://www.denalicitizens.org).



### Supervisory Openings

This summer, two of our long time supervisors worked their final seasons at the lodges. Executive Chef Ken

Hockert will be remembered for cultivating our connections with local, organic farms as well as his deep commitment to Camp Denali and North Face Lodge. Ian McEwen, Operations Coordinator, spearheaded extensive remodels at both lodges and helped to fix everything from quirks with the buses to phones and barbecue spits.

The mission of Camp Denali and North Face Lodge is to provide active learning experiences and foster stewardship of the natural world through a tradition of excellence, community, and place. We are presently seeking strong applicants for Executive Chef, Operations Coordinator, and Naturalist Guide positions. If you know of someone who would ap-

preciate and support our mission, with a strong background in these areas, please refer them to the employment pages of our website: [www.campdenali.com](http://www.campdenali.com).

### Passings

This year the Denali Park community was saddened by the untimely deaths of two well-loved individuals. **Missy Woodward** was a Fairbanks pediatrician and friend of Camp Denali who visited regularly with her husband, painter Kesler Woodward. Missy was the first female graduate of Davidson College in 1973, who constantly amazed friends with her tenacity and kindness. Kes said of Camp Denali that "Missy relaxes here more than any place on earth." Friends were stunned and saddened by her death on July 25th.

**Phil Brease**, Denali National Park and Preserve's geologist since 1986, passed away on May 12th. Phil was an affable man who loved sharing his passion for geology. He was at the forefront of dinosaur track discoveries in the Park beginning in 2005 and came to Camp Denali and North Face Lodge many times to share his knowledge. His wit, occasionally odious puns, big mustache, and even bigger heart will live in our minds as hallmarks of the incredible resources this park has in its staff and ambassadors.



Polychrome Passages by Kesler Woodward.

# 2010 Camp Denali and North Face Lodge Staff

**MJ AFT** '06-'10

Denali National Park, AK

**STACIE ANDERSON** '09, '10  
Prescott, AZ

**BOB AUSTIN** '10

Northampton, MA

**ANNE BEAULAUER** '02-'10

Denali National Park, AK

**MARIA BERGER** '97-'10

Fairbanks, AK

**HANNAH BERRY** '10

Gustavus, AK

**KC BOEHLI** '09-'10

Salt Lake City, UT

**RYAN BROSSETTE** '08, '10

Tallahassee, FL

**MATT CAHILL** '09, '10

Amherst, NH

**LINDSAY CHRONISTER** '08-'10

Seattle, WA

**WALLACE & JERRYNE COLE**

Denali National Park, AK

**FRANK DeSALVO** '09, '10

Conway, NH

**LEE DRURY** '10

Milwaukee, WI

**FIONA GALBRAITH** '07-'10

Nelson, BC

**CHRIS GOCHENOUR** '06, '09, '10

Overland Park, KS

**JOSEPH GOSS** '09, '10

Thomson, GA

**RUSSELL GRIGGS** '07-'10

Middlebury, VT

**SIMON, JENNA, DANIKA, & SILAS**

HAMM Denali National Park, AK

**KEN HOCKERT** '04, '05, '07-'10

San Francisco, CA

**ALEX HUGHES** '09-'10

College Station, TX

**ALISON LOOMIS** '10

Sausalito, CA

**MATTHEW & MEGAN**

MARTZ '05-'10 Port Townsend, WA

**AMY MATTHEWS** '09, '10

Indianapolis, IN

**DREW McCARTHY** '07-'10

Anchorage, AK

**BRIAN McCORMICK** '95-'10

Seattle, WA

**IAN & TAYLER McEWEN**

'07-'10 Anchorage, AK

**BRIAN McKinNEY** '08-'10

Bellingham, WA

**MARTHA McPHEETERS** '06-'10

Denali National Park, AK

**MATT MILLS** '03-'07, '10

Newport Beach, CA

**DERIC MIZOKAMI** '09, '10

Fontana, CA

**JOHN NORDSTROM** '10

Weisbaden, Germany

**ASHLEY PHILLIPS** '08, '10

Seattle, WA

**ANDREW RECUPERO** '07-'10

Ferrisburg, VT

**FARAH RENNO** '10

Eagle River, AK

**JULIANN SCHAMEL** '05, '07, '09, '10

Fairbanks, AK

**ANYA SCHWARTZ** '08-'10

Huntington, VT

**DANIEL SENNER** '10

Anchorage, AK

**LAUREN SIMAS** '08-'10

Berkeley, CA

**JULIA SMITH** '04-'10

Bradenton, FL

**TYLER SOFIE** '09, '10

Bellingham, WA

**AMANDA SOLONIKA** '09, '10

Portland, OR

**JOHNATHAN STARKES** '10

West Haven, CT

**HERTHEL STEPHENS** '06, '09, '10

Girdwood, AK

**JAN TOMSEN** '03, '04, '06-'10

Denali National Park, AK

**KRISTEN VAWTER** '10

San Francisco, CA

**HANNAH WAGENAAR** '10

Maxwell, IA

**TYZOK WHARTON** '10

San Francisco, CA

**FRITZ WITWTER** '96-'10

Denali National Park, AK

## Short Term

### Staff & Volunteers

**SEANNA BERRY**

Hamilton, OH

**JILL CARTER**

Gloucester, MA

**GINNY DEAL**

Balmain, Australia

**ELIZABETH FONG**

Somerville, MA

**DANIEL HAGAMAN &**

**ESTHER ALSUM**

Hotchkiss, CO

**RORIE HAMMEL**

Girdwood, AK

**ELLEN HORBETT & JOHN KAHLE**

Denver, CO

**RANA JACKSON**

Mebane, NC

**CHARLENE LOCKE**

Bozeman, MT

**DAVID MORING**

Sonoma Co., CA

**MARCIA MUNSON**

Monte Rio, CA

**DANIEL RODRIGUEZ**

Sylmar, CA

**GLENDON SAIN**

Keller, TX

## Parkside Guest House Staff

**CARLEY DUNN**

Anchorage, AK

## Interested in Working with Us?

The enthusiasm of our staff is often what makes the guest experience so memorable. 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, [www.campdenali.com](http://www.campdenali.com). General staff positions are available for the 2011 season, as well as the following professional seasonal positions:

### Dinner Chefs

### Operations and Facilities Manager

### Executive Chef

### Naturalist Guides

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





Denali National Park Wilderness Centers Ltd.  
Camp Denali, North Face Lodge, & Parkside Guest House  
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## ***Looking Back....Fifty Years Ago at Camp Denali***

**U**nder the advice of Berle Mercer, a few Camp staff decided to try the feasibility of using pack horses to explore the park. Berle, Ginny, Woody, and Loy Mercer (along with five horses and two mules) pioneered a route from north of the Park Railroad Depot along the base of the Alaska Range to Camp Denali. The roughly one hundred mile route led them through June migrations of thousands of caribou and many river crossings. “Woody, who has waded so many glacier streams, chuckled with glee as our horses carried us dry footed...” wrote Ginny.

....And in a similar chord to current economic times, the number of visitors to Alaska overall was down that year, however, Camp Denali still saw many intrepid guests. The number of station wagon trips bringing visitors in and out of Camp was reduced from three to two per week, despite many travel agencies cautioning against it. Ginny wrote in defense of the decision, “We weren’t seeking ‘Tourists’ anyway. We wanted vacationists looking for an experience in-depth. And that, in the main, are the kind who found their way to Camp.”

Read more from the archives at [www.campdenali.com](http://www.campdenali.com).  
Click on the “About Us” tab and then “Newsletter.”