## Ptarmigan Tracks Vol. XXXVI, November 2011



## The Newsletter of Camp Denali & North Face Lodge

#### Crafting a New Vehicle Management Plan

In August, the National Park Service released a longawaited Draft Vehicle Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Current management is based on a 1986 General Management Plan that established a seasonal cap of 10,512 vehicles. Leading up to the plan's release was

a multi-year Road Capacity Study that assessed the impacts of traffic volume on wildlife and visitor experience and began modeling traffic patterns. The final plan will guide vehicle use on the park road for the next 15-20 years.

The 318-page draft plan offers three alternatives. Alternative A-No Action would maintain the seasonal cap on vehicles and continue to offer the same transit and tour options for the majority of park visitors. Alternative B–Optimizing Access would maximize ridership on all tour and transit buses and combine a new economy tour onto the current transit buses. Alternative C–Maximizing Visitor Opportunities would promote a range of visitor activities.

It would keep tour and transit functions distinct and offer a self-guided economy tour option on separate buses. The road between Eielson and Wonder Lake would be managed for the lowest traffic volume to promote its wilderness values. Both action alternatives would offer Teklanika River and Eielson Visitor's Center as new premium tour destinations. Notably, commercial authorizations would be issued to retain the day tours operated by Kantishna lodges.

Under Alternatives B and C, the park would dispense with the seasonal 10,512 cap and put in place a system of adaptive management to help park managers determine the car-

> rying capacity of the road. This experimental approach would entail collecting data from indicators-things such as night-time traffic levels and the number of vehicles in a viewshed-to inform the Superintendent's decision about road capacity for the following year. Additionally, traffic modeling would be used to schedule bus departures and to manipulate the movement of vehicles to avoid crowding at rest stops and wildlife sightings.

Our written comments about the plan echo many of those of the conservation community. For example, adaptive man-A Camp Denali and North Face Lodge bus drives the agement is complex and costly (each of the action alternatives come with an one

> million dollar annual price tag); will it adequately protect park resources? Read more at www.denalicitizens.org. As park visitors and our guests you have your own experience to bring to the discussion. Although the comment deadline for the draft plan has passed, we encourage you to follow the outcome.



Park Road near Eielson. (R. Clevenger)



As we approach Camp Denali's 60th season, we are both humbled and inspired by its success and longevity. What started as Celia's, Ginny's, and Woody's toil to homestead 67 acres in Kantishna has evolved into a 50-person seasonal enterprise encompassing Camp Denali, North Face Lodge, and Parkside Guest House.

We enter 2012 excited to commemorate six decades of operation, marked by stewardship, sense of place, and active learning experiences. Please join us in person, or drop a line to share your own recollections and impressions.

Warmly,
The Cole and Hamm Families



**Ptarmigan Tracks Newsletter** Edited by Jan Tomsen and Simon Hamm

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Front cover image:
Dall Sheep at Polychrome.
(M. Ambros, 2011)
Illustration by William D. Berry
Above photo:
Camp Denali Guest Cabins. (R. Clevenger)

### 2011 Highlights

#### **Staff Transitions**

After more than 5 years as our Reservations Coordinator, **MJ Aft** left this fall to pursue worldwide travel. We are sad to lose her, but glad to welcome **Sarah Bierschwale** (2011 staff) as the new friendly voice to greet you on the phone. Her love of the northland after working and studying in Montana and Minnesota makes her a great addition to our year round office staff.

#### **Project Roundup**

The 2011 project season got underway earlier than hoped for, when Carley Dunn called from Parkside Guest House to report that broken plumbing had flooded the house, and that the downstairs ceiling was resting, in pieces, on top of waterlogged beds and carpeting. Ensuing renovations sidelined most of Wally's other winter ambitions, but with help from Carley and others, Parkside was ready for opening day, with some nice improvements in the bargain.

The pace didn't slow down much inseason. We lured Bill Perhach back into the fold with a big, shiny Peterbilt dump truck. Bill made nightly gravel hauls from the park entrance, trucking about 400 yards of material, which we applied to Camp's driveway and upper yard. Dump truck rides up and down the hill proved quite popular with the four-and under crowd.

Other highlights included extensive landscaping at both lodges, a double-wall fuel tank upgrade at North Face Lodge, an outhouse for Eldorado cabin, completion of 2010 water plant improvements at Camp Denali, a 20-inch lift for the Carpenter Shop, paving at the winter office, and enhanced storage in the Upper Back 40. Fair weather



Eldorado cabin and new outhouse. (S. Hamm, 2011)

allowed for shingling of the Carpenter Shop and Grubstake cabin, as well as plenty of painting. In addition, all-new guest bikes were selected and procured with help from Drew McCarthy.

#### **Staff Nuptials**

New staff members, **Shawn Pummill** and **Kelly Thornton**, tied the knot on August 14th in a small ceremony officiated by Simon at Pika Hut, our beloved octagonal cabin at the top of Camp Ridge. Several staff contributed by carrying firewood, hors d'oeuvres, and floral arrangements inspired by the approaching autumn season.

Long time staff **John Kahle** and **Ellen Horbett** met at Camp Denali when John worked on our operations crew and Ellen as our Office Coordinator and host. They were married on October 8th in East Aurora, New York.

Best to all the newlyweds!



#### From the 2011 Special Sightings Notebook

	1 0
5/14	Wood frogs first heard at
	Nugget Pond (one week later
	than recent years.)
7/4	Pink Diapensia blooming on
	Camp Ridge!
7/15	Several sightings of a young
	pine marten around Camp
	Denali.

7/22 Wolf kill on Sable Pass.
Wolves seen rolling detached
caribou head around like a
ball.

7/30 Black bear on hillside below Camp Denali.

8/5 Grizzly observed on a fresh caribou kill at the East Fork River. Wolverine seen on Thorofare: covered the dis-

tance to Gravel Mountain in about two minutes!

8/7 Snow fell and stuck around long enough for Camp kids to make angels on the front lawn.

8/19 Young lynx heard calling to parents across the road on Polychrome Pass.

8/24 First Sandhill Cranes heard over Cranberry Ridge.

8/30 Flock of Rusty Blackbirds at Wonder Lake.

9/11 Literally thousands of Sandhill Cranes in migration up Moose Creek valley all afternoon.



#### **August Lodge Guests Witness Life and Death Drama**

The wolf was in hot pursuit as it charged after the cow caribou, both animals throwing dust as they bounded up the dry bar of the Teklanika River. We were quickly drawn to the edge of the observation area, hoping for a glimpse of one of nature's most necessary but seldom-seen acts: the ending of one hard fought life to enable the continuation of another. What ensued was only a couple of minutes long, but created vivid memories for those who were there to witness the kill. Both animals were exhausted, but the gaining wolf left the caribou no room for error. After a few final efforts to ward off the wolf, the caribou was taken down, and, in an instant, the battle was over. The wolf stood over it's prey, panting, and we stared, awestruck, teary-eyed, and humbled—a few of the many emotions that welled to the surface. The morning of August 26th, 2011 was spectacular, and reminds us of the tremendous opportunity we have to observe the truly wild in Denali National Park.

—Anne Beaulaurier

Image credits:

The weather vane at Camp Denali. (M. DeYoung, 2009)

Black wolf in autumn. (R. Clevenger, 2005)

A snapshot of Erin's and Hig's 4,000 mile journey. (Ground Truth Trekking, 2007)



From the prologue of *A Long Trek Home* by Erin McKittrick\*

The plan was to walk, to paddle, and to ski. To leave Seattle and reach the Aleutian Islands under our own power. To travel not just in summer, but also through an entire Alaskan winter. To travel more than 4,000 miles.

We were about to do something audacious. We were about to do something no one had ever done before. I couldn't grasp the full extent of it any more than could our most skeptical questioners.

We planned it, we breathed it, we believed it, but it seemed as though we spent all our time proclaiming a plan that didn't feel real.

\*2012 Special Emphasis Speaker Learn how Erin's and her partner, Hig's, adventure turned out this summer at Camp Denali July 23-26 and 27-29

# 2012 Special Emphasis

#### **Camp Denali Celebrates 60 Years!** Former Staff and Special Speakers June 4-7

**J**oin us in celebrating the rich history of Camp Denali and the people who have shaped it into the unique destination it is today. We'll have numerous former staff on site to share stories and images through programs and informal conversations. It will be part reunion, part historical



perspective, and a lot of fun to revisit stories from the early days through the present.

#### **Bird Migration and Conservation** Scott Weidensaul, Acclaimed Author, Field Researcher and **Bird Enthusiast**

June 8-10 & 11-14



Field trips with Mr. Weidensaul will focus on Denali's remarkable breeding birds, which will have just returned from wintering areas as far-flung as Asia, Africa and South America. Bird watchers of all skill levels should find these outings rewarding. Mr. Weidensaul's evening presentations will explore the wonders and dynamics of bird migration, and a light-hearted look at his field research – a lifetime spent, as he says, "messing around with birds for fun and science "

#### Wildflowers of Denali **Staff Naturalists and Guest Lecturers** June 15-17 & July 18-21

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 strategically 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 witness plants flourishing despite the rigors of mountain weather, glacial terrain, permafrost, and the brief growing season.

#### Stewardship and the National Park Idea Tony Knowles, Former Alaska Governor and Chair of the **National Park System Advisory**

Board

June 22-24 & 25-28

Mr. Knowles will convey the compelling story of three significant pieces of Federal legislation that "made Alaska" and have had a profound affect upon America. The first is the Statehood Act. creating the 49th state in 1959 and. upon these newly designated state lands, developing the largest oil discovery in



American history. The second, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, is one of the great acts of social justice in America for the rights of indigenous peoples. And, finally, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act is the most significant land conservation act in American history. Combined, these three pieces of legislation create an amazing story of politics, personalities, power, idealism, and economics.

#### **Painting in the North** Kesler Woodward, Professor of Art Emeritus, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

July 2-5 & 6-8

Evening programs will explore artists' depictions of Alaska and the North, with a special emphasis on historical and contemporary artists' images of Denali and environs. Professor Woodward will discuss the way individual and societal views of



the relationship of people to the land subtly, but inexorably shape the way land and animals are depicted by artists of all eras. He will also be available to work with any guests interested in working on their own paintings and drawings of the Denali region.



#### Wild Salmon and the Tongass National Forest Ron Medel, Fisheries Program Manager, **Tongass National Forest** July 16-19 & 20-22

Through evening presentations, Mr. Mendel will share his knowledge of wild salmon natural history and production, with an emphasis on the rich fishery of the

Tongass National Forest and its contribution to the annual commercial harvest of Alaskan salmon. He will also discuss issues surrounding the health of wild salmon, and the challenges of their continued survival.

# Series at Camp Denali

**Burning Alaska: Coal and Climate Change in the Great North** 

Erin McKittrick and Bretwood Higman, Directors of Ground Truth Trekking

July 23-26 & 27-29

**D**rawing from the stories and experiences of their wilderness journeys, Ms. McKittrick and Mr. Higman will explore Alaska's



coal country, and the potential for development, in their presentations. Little known to most, Alaska has a huge proportion of the world's coal deposits, hidden beneath remote wilderness from Cook Inlet to the Arctic. As Asian demand for fossil fuels grows, new mine proposals are

springing up, threatening wildlife, rivers, and human neighbors. They have also witnessed dramatic impacts of climate change on the landscape and people of the state, and will share these observations.

Writing Alaska in a Time of Change Nancy Lord, Environmental Writer,

former Alaska Writer Laureate

August 10-12 & 13-16

**M**s. Lord will present images and background research she did for her book *Early Warming*, related to how

communities in rural Alaska and the Canadian Northwest are coping with and adapting to climate change. In another program, she'll share her experience and short excerpts of writing from her ten

days in Denali as a writer in the park's Artists-in-Residence Program.

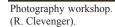
Autumn Nature Photography Workshop\*

Ralph A. Clevenger, Professional Nature Photographer

August 27-30 & August 31-September 2

Fieldwork and two evening presentations will explore ways to improve one's photography by learning to see beyond preconceptions and translating visual impressions into

Clevenger w size the important pushing bour create an opp for new ways ance for under plex equipments.



visual impressions into creative images. Mr. Clevenger will emphasize the importance of pushing boundaries to create an opportunity

for new ways of seeing. He will provide guidance for understanding and maximizing complex equipment to allow technology to work for, not against, participants in their efforts to capture great images.

\*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.



**D**r. Brown's evening lectures will explore the aurora, its myths and science, sun dogs, noctilucent clouds, and other atmospheric phenomena.

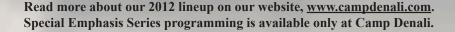
Hands-on instructional aids and displays will illustrate many of the discussed

scientific concepts.

By early September,
clear nights are

finally dark enough to view the aurora. Join Dr. Brown in his enthusiasm for the north country's mystical night skies!











A bear family walks down the park road. (J. Huddleston, 2011). Drew McCarthy and Jan Tomsen ski across *stastrugi* snow on Wonder Lake (C. Bieberich, 2011). *Elegiac* (Kesler Woodward, 2007).

#### Proposed Gas Exploration Near Denali National Park

In 2010 the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issued a license to Usibelli Corporation (the owner of one of the state's largest coal mines in nearby Healy, AK) to begin exploration for coalbed methane on more than 200,000 acres north and east of Denali National Park. If significant quantities are found the exploration license could be converted to a development lease. Extraction would entail numerous roads and well sites and the use of hydraulic fracturing (known as "fracking") near residential areas along the Stampede Road and on currently undeveloped land designated by the state for its wildlife habitat and recreational value. Although exploration has not yet begun, we are concerned because DNR has been unresponsive to the concerns of local residents and has not given any assurance that the impacts to human residences and critical wildlife habitat would be mitigated. In August, the Denali Citizens Council formally appealed DNR's Best Interest Finding for the Healy Basin Gas Exploration License. We continue to support this effort and encourage you to help them sustain their appeal.

#### Learn more at www.denalicitizens.org.

#### **Local Kantishna Business Sold**

The recent sale of nearby Denali Backcountry Lodge could be a significant portent for Kantishna, and Denali National Park. The new owner, VIAD, is an international corporation whose diverse operations include marketing, tourism, transportation, and related visitor services in the Canadian Rockies, and in Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park where they are both an independent operator and also a park concessioner. This acquisition puts them in an obvious position to compete with Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture for the next Transportation Services concession

for Denali. However, that contract has just been extended for three years to allow for the implementation of the Vehicle Management Plan (see P. 1). In the meantime, it will be interesting to watch what VIAD does with its new holding in Kantishna. Given the extraordinary privilege of operating inside a national park, we have always advocated for letting one's scale of operations be governed by the carrying capacity of park resources, and not by that of the market.

## New Book to be Published on Camp Denali Founder

Boots, Bikes, and Bombers: Adventures of Alaska Conservationist Ginny Hill Wood edited by Karen Brewster is due to be released by the University of Alaska Press in early 2012. It is an innova-



Ginny and dog, Toklat, in 1961.

tive and collaborative life history of Virginia "Ginny" Hill Wood, co-founder of Camp Denali and a pioneering Alaska conservationist and outdoorswoman. Born in 1917, Wood served as a Women's Airforce Service Pilot during World War II. Eventually settling in Fairbanks, she co-owned and operated Camp Denali for 25 years and helped start the Alaska Conservation Society, the state's first environmental organization. *Boots, Bikes, and Bombers* is a valuable contribution to the history of Alaska and is a testament to the joys of living a life full of passion and adventure.

### 2011 Camp Denali and North Face Lodge Staff

MJ AFT '06-'11 Denali National Park, AK ALEX AMBROS '06-'08, '11 Hartland, VT

MARSHALL AMBROS '01, '02,

'05-'08, '11 Hartland, VT

**BOB AUSTIN** '10, '11

Northampton, MA

ANNE BEAULAURIER '02-'11 Denali National Park, AK

MARIA BERGER & MAGGIE **WHITAKER** '97-'11

Fairbanks, AK

HANNAH BERRY '10, '11

Gustavus, AK

SARAH BIERSCHWALE '11

Gardiner, MT

PIERRE-LUC BOUCHER '11

Québec City, Québec SARAH BUSH '11

Knoxville, TN

TATE BUSHELL '11

Allendale, NJ

MATT CAHILL '09-'11

Amherst, NH

ANDREW CARHUFF '11

Tucson, AZ

WALLACE & JERRYNE COLE

Denali National Park, AK

LEE DRURY '10-'11 Milwaukee, WI

JACK FITCH '11

Ester, AK

TIM GIBBINS '11

Portland, OR

CHRIS GOCHENOUR '06, '09-'11

Overland Park, KS

JOSEPH GOSS '09 -'11

Athens, GA

SIMON, JENNA, DANIKA, & SILAS

HAMM Denali National Park, AK

JANET HUDDLESTON '11

Takaka, New Zealand

AMY JACOBS '11

Louisville, KY

JEFF KLAKOVICH '11

Santa Cruz, CA

KATIE MAHONEY '11

Jackson, WY

TOM McCARRAN '11

Amherst, MA

DREW McCARTHY '07-'11

Anchorage, AK

BRIAN McCORMICK '95-'11

MARTHA McPHEETERS '06-'11

Denali National Park, AK

DANIEL, OLIVER, & LILLY McMAHON & ANNABELLE

SWEETMAN '11

Tasmania, Australia

EVAN MEMOLI '11

Montgomery, VT

MAX MILLER '11 Indian River, MI

EMILY MILLER '11

Utica, NY

**SARA MOLINARO** '06-'07, '11

Evanston, IL

**MEGAN MULCAHY** '11

Grafton, WI

JOHN NORDSTROM & EVAMARIA

SCHARNOW '10-'11

Rockport, MA

CHERYL PAPIN '11

Wildwood, MO

SHAWN & KELLY PUMMILL '11

Vashon Island, WA

JULIANN SCHAMEL '05, '07, '09-'11

Fairbanks, AK

KATHERINE SCHAKE '05-'09, '11

Portland, OR

ANYA SCHWARTZ '08-'11

Huntington, VT

DANIEL SENNER '10-'11

Bellingham, WA

LAUREN SIMAS '08 -'11

Berkeley, CA

JULIA SMITH '04-'11

Sarasota, FL

JONATHAN STARKES '10-'11

New Haven, CT

JAN TOMSEN '03, '04, '06-'11

Denali National Park, AK

KRISTEN VAWTER '10-'11

San Francisco, CA

HANNAH WAGENAAR '10-'11

Maxwell, IA

FRITZ WITTWER '96 -'11

Denali National Park, AK

**Short Term** 

Staff & Volunteers

THEO AND ANDREA AMBROS

Hartland, VT

SUSAN DENNIS

LaGrande, OR

RACHEL KRESINA

Claremont, NH

ADRIENNE LEE

LaHabra, CA CHARLENE WRIGHT LOCKE

Bozeman, MT

Anchorage, AK

Parkside Guest House Staff CARLEY DUNN '96-'11

#### 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. General staff positions are available for the 2012 season, as well as the following professional seasonal positions:

Skilled Maintenance Workers Naturalist Guides **Dinner Chefs** 

\*\*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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www.campdenali.com

## Looking Back... sixty Years Ago at Camp Denali

"It all started in the fall of 1951 when Celia Hunter came down from Fairbanks to visit Woody and me at McKinley Park. That weekend we flew our Cessna 170 out to the airstrip at Kantishna.

A mile and a half from Kantishna we left the road and began climbing up a ridge above Moose Creek. As we ascended, we gained a full panorama of the Alaska range. While we drank in the beauty of the subarctic scenery stretching before us, The Idea began to take form.

We mused on the current trend in Alaska. Awake to the tremendous tourist potential, promoters were keen to develop tourist attractions. But all plans called for making living in Alaska just as comfortable and convenient as in the States. We believed, though, that there are those who seek experiences genuinely Alaskan, who want to feel that they become "sourdoughs" and catch the spirit of the bush country—even if it means living without running water and electric lights, and taking the mosquitoes with the scenery. And here was the ideal spot to try our ideas."

-Ginny Hill Wood. Excerpts from "The Building of Camp Denali", *Sierra Club Bulletin*, June 1954

We will be celebrating Camp Denali's 60th anniversary next summer. Join us June 4-7 to learn about our history and favorite stories from former staff. Stay tuned to our website or Facebook to learn about other celebratory activities throughout the summer.