

Ptarmigan Tracks



The Newsletter of Camp Denali & North Face Lodge

The 2018 season is a wrap, and, amazingly, half the winter seems already to have flown by. As we set about the introspective pause that the writing of *Ptarmigan Tracks* affords us, we are prone to reflect on the past summer- the highs, the lows, the firsts and the familiar. On balance, 2018 was a season of hard work, close friendships, engaging guests and memorable Denali experiences. However, this year in particular afforded us a poignant reason to reflect further back than we sometimes do, all the way to our beginnings.

This past August, Camp Denali cofounder Morton Wood died in his Seattle home, surrounded by loved ones, at age 94. We, and many of you, fondly know him as Woody. Woody was the last surviving of Camp Denali's three founders. While Camp Denali (and North Face Lodge) continue to thrive 68 years later, the living connection to our roots has receded a step further into history.

Thoughts turn to the vision and aspirations that inspired Woody and Ginny and Celia then, and what we endeavor to be, and to provide, today. We have witnessed many external changes since Camp Denali was homesteaded in 1951: Alaskan statehood, the first outside road to reach the Park, and the tripling of the Park's land area, to name a few. While Camp Denali has seen its own refinements along the way, we are grateful that Woody and Ginny and Celia imparted most of the keys to success in that original recipe of hard work, friendship and natural experiences that await engaged travelers. Perhaps, the more things change externally, the more we can offer simply by carrying on their pioneering vision.





Summer Roundup

Every summer season at the lodges takes on a character of its own; not defined by the year, but rather by those events or projects that take place over its course. 2018 will be etched into our minds by four things: snow, dancing, a murder, and a new cabin.

Flying into Kantishna on May 5, our first staff landed in a ski plane to find over three feet of snow covering the ground, with drifts over six feet in many places. Besides ample shoveling opportunities, we were also able to get in some wild sledding down the Camp Denali driveway!

Despite all the snow, we opened on June 2 with our second contra dance camp with the Great Bear Trio. It was a rocking good time for staff and guests alike as we danced far past our normal summer bedtimes.

July was marked by the dramatic poisoning of Juliet at an all-staff murder mystery party. The evening was set at "Quigley High" during the popular Shakespeare production and mired in adolescent turmoil. Suspects included the jealous Blueberry dog mushing team, the "Poisonberries" clique battling

Eleanor Rose Purdy



Our community celebrated a new addition! Eleanor was born to Sky and Marianne Purdy on 10/19/18.

for the "Snowcoming" Queen title, and the Alaskan Reptile Appreciation Club.

We wrapped up our summer by breaking ground for a new guest cabin at Camp Denali, for no summer feels truly complete without hand-digging an eight-foot deep outhouse hole.

Photo Credits

Cover page: Camp Ridge View (Andrew Recupero). This page: Tundra Lunch (Ralph Clevenger), Rearview Mirror (Murray Cohen), Camp Denali Bakery (Murray Cohen), Counting Cranes (Ralph Clevenger). Special Sightings page: Weasel (Sam Wilson), Fireweed (Emily Stone), Bluebells (Jenna Hamm), Caribou (Eden Andrulaitis), Sow and Cubs (Mike Morrison), Moose Rutting (Linda Sparks). Center spread: Trumpeter Swans (Murray Cohen). Back page: Frosted Tundra (Jim Hogg).

Special Sightings

5/22 *Wood frogs croaking at Nugget Pond*

6/8 *Female Smew on tundra pond!*

6/15 *Lynx strolled through picnic during the bus trip to lodges*

6/20 *Surfbird and Rock Ptarmigan chicks on Camp Ridge*

6/24 *Beaver with baby at Wonder Lake*

7/9 *Mink near Reflection Pond*

7/30 *Two lynx on road to Wonder Lake*

7/30 *Red fox feeding on blueberries*

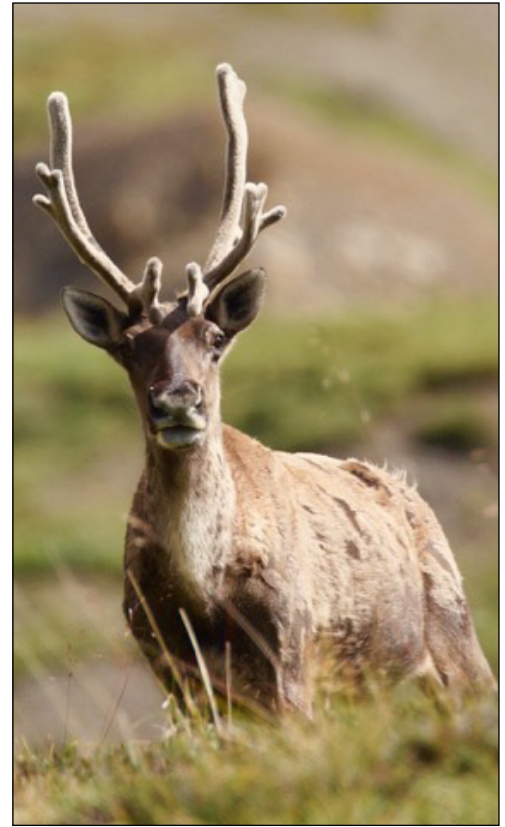
8/2 *Black wolf at base of Camp Denali driveway*

8/10 *Ten grizzly bears in view at once near Mt. Eielson*

8/10 *Three wolf pups crossing the road near the Toklat River; seen during the departure bus trip*

8/24 *Heavy overnight migration of Grey-cheeked and Swainson's Thrushes; 10-20 flight calls per minute*

8/31 *Upward of 3,000 Sandhill Cranes overhead in mid-afternoon*



The Smew by Matt Cahill

Things can get out of place in the swirling subarctic spring. The churning season brings storms and wind, then sun and stillness. Year to year, the timing of snow melt and bud burst might be off by weeks. You can't blame a bird for getting confused, even lost, from time to time.

When a smew turned up near Wonder Lake this June, staff wondered what wrong turns landed an Old World duck on the New World's back porch. Alaska sees many rare birds, but usually on the coast and the islands. Only a few dozen smew have ever been found in North America, and for this little duck – a first Park record – her nearest mate might be 1,000 miles away on a pond in Siberia.

However she got to Denali, for a brief few minutes she starred for a very lucky Naturalist Foray. She could have easily gone unnoticed: a tiny gray duck with a glossy maroon crest and a fish-catching bill like her merganser cousins, sitting still among dozens of ducks. As abruptly as she arrived, she took flight over a knoll, not to be found again.

The smew might have found her way west to Russia, or summered somewhere in Alaska. She may have even settled for a local drake, rearing some odd hybrid ducklings. And surprisingly often, wayward ducks stick to their mistakes. A slight chance remains that next spring one lone smew might be making her home in Denali.

2019 Special E



Stan Senner

*Vice President for Bird Conservation - Pacific Flyway,
National Audubon Society*

Denali Bird Life

Dates:

May 31-June 2 North Face Lodge
June 3-6 Camp Denali



Sally Jewell

Former U.S. Secretary of the Interior

Public Lands - A Priceless Treasure for Future Generations

Dates:

June 24-27 Camp Denali
June 28-30 North Face Lodge



David Sibley

Ornithologist, Author and Illustrator

Bird Identification and Observation

Dates:

June 10-13 Camp Denali
June 14-16 Camp Denali



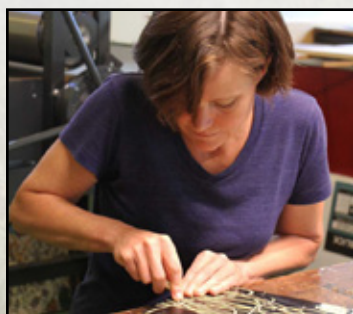
Dr. Mara Kimmel

*Deputy Director of Strategy, Scholarship and Engagement,
Anchorage Museum*

People, Politics and Promise in the Far North

Dates:

July 1-4 Camp Denali
July 5-7 North Face Lodge



Sara Tabbert

Artist

Exploring Land and Community Through Making Art

Dates:

June 17-20 Camp Denali
June 21-23 North Face Lodge



Dr. Pat Druckenmiller

Director, University of Alaska Museum of the North

Denali Dinosaurs: Revealing Alaska's Ancient Landscapes

Dates:

July 15-18 Camp Denali
July 19-21 North Face Lodge

The land is like poetry: it is inexplicably coherent, it is transcendent in its meaning, and it has the power to elevate a consideration of human life.

- Barry Lopez



emphasis Series



Gwen Holdmann
*Director, Alaska Center for
Energy and Power*

The Future of Energy

Dates:
July 22-25 Camp Denali
July 26-28 North Face Lodge



Jim Wilson
Nature Artist

Denali Through the Eyes of an Artist

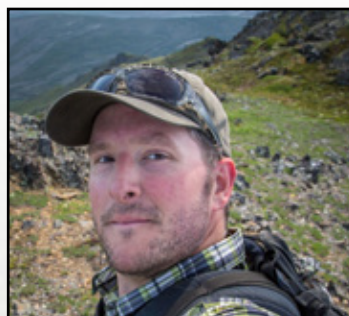
Dates:
August 19-22 Camp Denali
August 23-25 North Face Lodge



Dr. Brian Barnes
*Director, Institute of Arctic
Biology*

Wildlife Hibernation and Overwintering Strategies

Dates:
July 29-August 1 Camp Denali
August 2-4 North Face Lodge



Dave Shaw
*Conservation Photographer;
Science Writer, Photo Educator*

Autumn Nature Photography Workshop

Dates:
August 26-29 Camp Denali
August 30-September 1 Camp Denali



Ernestine Hayes
Writer, Memoirist, Professor

Our Stories and the Land

Dates:
August 5-8 North Face Lodge
August 9-11 Camp Denali

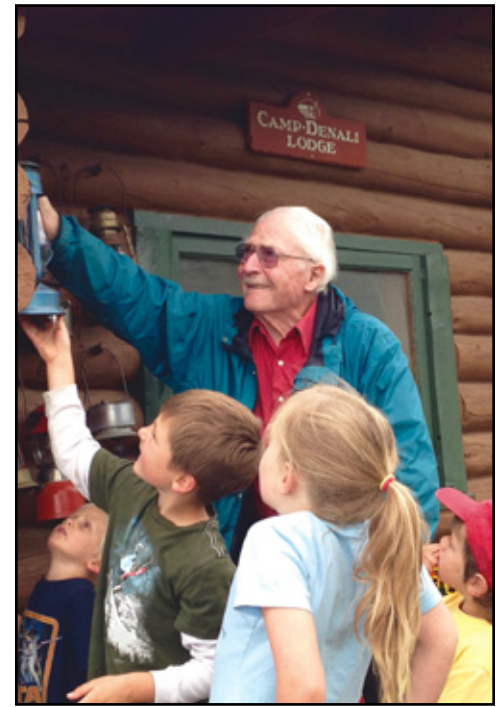
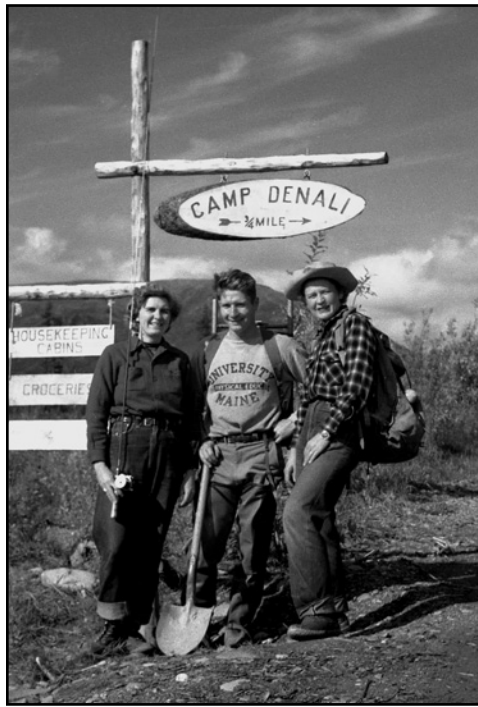


Dr. Neal Brown
*Former Director, Alaska
Space Grant Program and
Poker Flat Research Range*

The Aurora Borealis

Dates:
September 2-5 Camp Denali
September 6-8 Camp Denali





Woody in Memoriam

In keeping with a long-standing tradition, a kerosene lantern shone through the night from a cairn atop Cranberry Ridge this past August, this time to mark the passing of Camp Denali cofounder Morton Wood. Woody, as he was better known, died peacefully at his Seattle home on August 16, surrounded by family and caregivers, at age 94.

In mid-August, dark skies return to the subarctic following a three-and-a-half-month hiatus. Anyone looking out a cabin window at Camp Denali that night may have seen lantern light in the darkness. Whether they realized it or not, they would have been connected by more than lamplight with the man being honored.

Woody helped to shape Camp Denali in lasting ways through his head, his heart and his hands. Anyone who has spent any time here has likely used the signature wooden latches that he made for the doors of the lodge, a building which he also made. Inventive and resourceful, if occasionally stymieing at first try, one soon appreciates Woody's latches for their simple but elegant functionality which has served well for over 60 years.

Woody arrived in Alaska in 1946 for college, shortly following indelible experiences at war in

the Italian Alps as a member of the Tenth Mountain Division. He would later credit nature with "straightening him out again," and cite the importance of connection to the land, something that we remain grounded by today. It was this connection that caused him, as a young Mt. McKinley National Park ranger, to decline a transfer to Yosemite in 1952 and instead embark with Ginny Wood and Celia Hunter on the creation of Camp Denali.

Woody, together with his wife Martha, made his last visit to Camp Denali in 2014. Until that point he remained able to travel, allowing them to make the trip semi-regularly. We will remember from these visits his genuine interest in each individual staff member, his and Martha's recorder and dulcimer music, and his breadth of life experience, from mountaineering, to folk dance, to homesteading in pre-statehood Alaska and more.

On their last visit, Woody and Martha gifted us an Earth flag. Atop the flagpole, it reminds us of him, and the many lessons he had to share. It also sustains a cherished connection, much as a kerosene lantern, or a well-worn door latch.

Happy trails, Woody.



Camp Denali & North Face Lodge Staff

Work Hard, Play Hard

The long days of summer grace the Camp Denali & North Face Lodge staff with ample daylight for exploring. The opportunities for adventure are endless when the remote wilderness of Denali National Park is at your doorstep.

On Monday and Friday evenings between dinner and new guest arrivals, group volleyball matches and basketball games were the sports of choice. Hiking adventures and overnights were on the rise this year, stretching from the Kantishna Hills to Polychrome Pass, and many places in between. Two of our staff undertook the overnight bicycle tour back to the Park's entrance, 89 miles away.

Unseasonable warmth and abundant sunshine set the stage for water activities throughout July, resulting in several days of sunbathing interspersed with quick dips in chilly Nugget Pond, Moose Creek, or Wonder Lake. A few intrepid staff competed to see who could submerge in the most bodies of water throughout the park (it was a tie at 16).

Canoe trips through early-season candle ice and tundra lounges to observe the northern lights bookended the season, with trips to Pika Hut and berry-picking afternoons in between. No matter how long the workdays are, we manage to save some energy to appreciate this beautiful park we call home and the community with which we get to enjoy it.

Now hiring for 2019

APPLY NOW!

We are currently seeking qualified applicants for the following seasonal positions:

- **Grower and Groundskeeper**
- **Breakfast Cook**
- **Dinner Cook**
- **Assistant Facilities Manager**
- **Skilled Maintenance Crew**
- **Naturalist Guide**
- **Bus Driver**





Denali National Park Wilderness Centers, Ltd.
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to receive our newsletter electronically.*

Thank you!

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Denali Planning Proceeds Under New Paradigm

The process of planning is well rehearsed in Denali, but the ground rules for park planners and the public have changed. Two initiatives, a Winter and Shoulder Season Plan and a Wonder Lake and Kantishna Recreation Plan, are moving forward under new secretarial and executive orders claiming to streamline the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Under these orders, National Park Service (NPS) planning guidelines will sideline public process unless planners actively commit to it.

The Winter and Shoulder Season Plan's visionary document presents a spectrum of ideas around access, facilities and commercial opportunities designed to improve and broaden visitor experience. Off-season visitation to the Park has increased a whopping 350% in the last five years. Currently the quiet off-season provides a welcome respite for wildlife and our gateway communities. Improved access and opportunity must proceed cautiously in order to protect wilderness and wildlife values. Look for a draft plan out for public review this May.

In one sense, the Wonder Lake and Kantishna Recreation Plan is a long-awaited comprehensive management plan for the Kantishna, but "recreation" is only half of the NPS dual mandate. So far, the Park's vision includes trail and remote campground development, a roadside commercial use campground and possibly breaking ground for a new, consolidated NPS administrative site. We are discouraged the NPS did not undertake a thorough and transparent visioning for this plan inclusive of conservation priorities. Among the goals of Denali's 1986 General Management Plan for the Kantishna were protections for seasonally migratory wildlife and purposeful buy-back of available private land to ensure limited development and preservation of the area's remote, wilderness character, a vision further supported by the 2006 Backcountry Management Plan.

The recreation plan's burgeoning scope is not yet public, but the draft is scheduled for May 2019. In addition to sustaining the area's conservation goals, we hope the Park prioritizes long-overdue trail remediation and improvements to current visitor services, and stops short of putting the Kantishna "up for sale."