

The Road Less Traveled

Throughout the summer of 2025, guests arrived to Camp Denali bearing up-to-the minute reports of progress at the Pretty Rocks bridge. Our air taxi partner, Denali Air, frequently routed incoming flights past the construction, affording front-row views of ever-expanding steel trusses, cantilevering slowly but steadily out over empty space. By late August, we received the long-anticipated update that the massive, erector set-like structure had spanned the gap, reconnecting eastern and western halves of the park road for the first time in four years. Although the road won't re-open to traffic until 2027, what had felt distant and abstract, suddenly feels like an imminent reality.

But with through-traffic still more than a year away, Camp Denali remains, for now, accessible solely by air. And so I found myself last May, flying out from spring opening in Kantishna to attend the local high school graduation. It so happens that our past four years as a fly-in lodge have coincided exactly with those of our daughter's and her classmates' high school careers. Soaring over the Alaska Range, thoughts drifted to how fleeting, and precious, both timelines feel.

The return of the road, when it happens, will bring many benefits, not least of which is fully-restored access to public lands. But the nearer it approaches, the more sharply we feel the impulse to savor every present moment. There is a heightened sense that, despite their challenges, we will always look back on these years as a truly special chapter in Camp's history. We are apparently not alone in that instinct. Camp's fly-in era has seen unprecedented numbers of returnees, extended stays (up to two weeks!), and guests who come into the office during this year's visit, seeking to reserve next year's return.

As with any high school commencement, the next chapter when the road reopens is certain to be exciting, challenging, rewarding in unforeseen ways, and filled with promise and potential. And, it won't be without a few pangs of nostalgia. But in the meantime, sign us up for a fifth year of "extra credit." We hope to see you in the class of 2026!

~ Simon

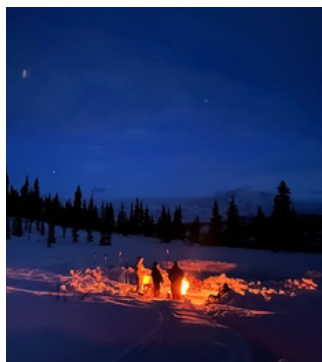


Wintertime in Denali!

The 2025 season at Camp Denali got off to an earlier-than-usual start this year- in February, to be exact! With several new faces in supervisory and year-round roles, it seemed like a good winter to head out to Camp for a combined orientation, adventure, inspiration-taking and team-building retreat.

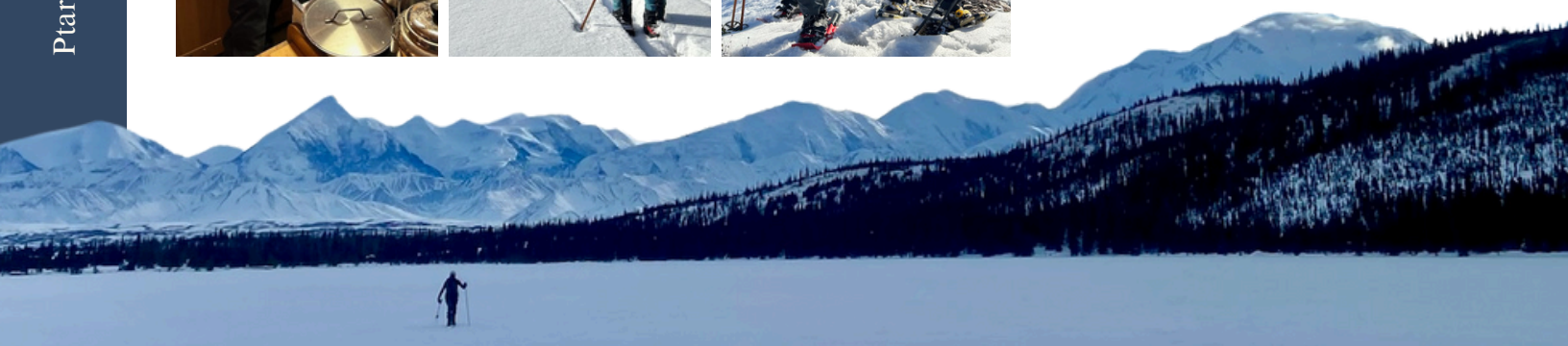
At the end of February, ten of us loaded into ski planes and flew to Kantishna for an unforgettable week. Simon and Ryan flew themselves directly from the park entrance to get a start on opening and warming buildings, hauling water, and to provide weather updates. Meanwhile everyone else wrangled food and gear down to Talkeetna and the waiting turbine Otters at Talkeetna Air Taxi. These impressive planes are more accustomed to flying climbers on and off of glaciers, but they are equally well suited to our Kantishna airstrip in snowcover.

Days found a rhythm once we were settled in. Mornings were dedicated to topics such as summer planning and leadership discussions. Afternoons were reserved for playing (after giving the sun a chance to warm things up a bit!). It's hard to know for sure when the weather and circumstances will all align to make another trip like this possible, but we left the hockey nets and the fire pit behind just in case!



Trip Highlights

- The flight up the Ruth Amphitheater, past Denali, and through Traleika Col, to Kantishna
- Excellent menu planning and supervision by E-Chef Zoe!
- Cross-country skiing up Moose Creek, following wolf, lynx, and otter tracks!
- Ice hockey on Nugget Pond (Shoutout to Rob who hand-shoveled the whole rink!)
- Firing up the solar panels and having copious electricity
- Snowshoeing up Camp Ridge and skiing the length of Wonder Lake
- Northern lights over the Alaska Range
- Ryan skiing and winter-camping the 90-mile route back to the park entrance!



Special Sightings

May 11 First wood frog heard in the evening

May 14 Lincoln's Sparrow singing; Young grizzly sitting atop Cranberry Ridge eyeing camp; wood frogs chorusing at Nugget Pond

June 1 Nursery herd of 16 caribou near Grassy Pass

June 11 First ducklings of the season - Northern Pintail hen with 6 tiny chicks swimming

June 18 Collared female wolf on road and howling near Gov. Draw and Grassy Pass

June 18 Small nursery band of caribou - 7 females with 6 calves

July 9 Wolverine near Toklat River using the road to travel

July 10 Lynx running across the road - they have been scarce since snowshoe hare populations declined a few years ago

August 14 Hawk Owl being harassed by Canada Jays in Big Timber

August 17 Caribou bull with bare antlers seen from air between Myrtle Pass and Spruce Peak

August 18 First cranes of the year

August 27 Bull caribou with shed velvet observed up close; antlers bloody with hanging tissue



Curiosity on the Park Road

Written by Ted Fuell, Photos by Nakul Nagaraj



On a cloudy day in mid July, after admiring patches of moss campion and arctic poppies, while spotting caribou skating on lingering snow patches of distant peaks, our hiking group made our way back westbound when we spotted a young grizzly bear only twenty feet off the road near Stony Overlook. We pulled over, turned off the vehicle, and watched. The furry friend waddled onto the road, roughly fifty feet in front of the van, and decided to investigate the National Park Service's markers that had been set in place to mark road hazards. In the vehicle, we quietly laughed and giggled as the bear gnawed and pawed at its new orange toy, ultimately losing it into the depths of a sinkhole above a road culvert.

It was a reminder for us, and the many thousands who have since seen the video online, of the innate curiosity, playfulness, and joy that the animals of Denali possess, and the privilege we have of being able to spend time as guests in their home. After our furry friend wandered off, leaving its traffic cone behind, we spent the time driving back discussing how our own different curiosities brought each of us to Denali—from wildflowers to wildlife, from a spiritual connection to the Alaska Range, to the clarity brought by being surrounded by nature—and that we hope to leave with the same sense of joy and playfulness as the bear we got to see.

Camp Denali Receives Stewardship Award

Honored as the 2025 Stan Stephens Stewardship Award Winner by Alaska Travel Industry Association

Every fall, Alaska’s travel community gathers for the annual Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) conference, a time to reflect on the summer season, connect with others in the industry, and explore the evolving opportunities and challenges facing tourism in our state.



Simon Hamm with Jodi Rodwell of Denali Education Center, Photo by ATIA

The conference concludes with a closing reception and awards banquet, one of the week’s highlights. This year’s banquet is one we won’t soon forget: Camp Denali was honored with the Stan Stephens Stewardship Award, recognizing our long-standing commitment to sustainability and responsible operations in Alaska.

While this award acknowledges the way we’ve chosen to do business for more than 70 years, it is not the reason sustainability guides our work. Our commitment stems from daily, deliberate choices to maintain a light touch on the land, to honor those who cared for it before us, and to preserve it for those who will follow.

What Sustainability Looks Like at Camp Denali

You might be surprised by how deeply these choices shape our day-to-day operations. Take our main power source: the sun. Since completing our solar array in 2020, we’ve been able to rely primarily on solar energy. With the closure of the Park Road the very next year, the shift to renewable energy couldn’t have come at a better time. This season, our diesel generator ran just 128 hours, a striking testament to what thoughtful infrastructure can make possible.

Our sustainability efforts extend well beyond power. This summer alone, we converted a portion of our food and paper waste into more than 860 gallons of compost. That compost returns to our gardens, enriching the soil that helps feed up to 65 guests and staff three meals a day. It’s a humble but essential cycle that underscores the interconnected nature of our operation.



The Purpose Behind the Numbers

Utilizing the natural resources around us is woven into everything we do. It’s in the meals crafted from our greenhouse, the sheets drying on the clothesline, and the environmentally mindful products we carefully source and wisely use to keep things clean. We hope it’s also felt by the guests and staff who spend time here, with an unspoken ease that comes from knowing you’re doing your best to do something right.

Most importantly, these practices are a nod to those who came before us and stewarded these lands for thousands of years. Their legacy of living lightly on the land continues to inspire us. Our efforts are just one way of honoring that heritage by caring for this place with intention, humility, and gratitude.



Zoe Denenberg and Hannah Teagle
sampling varieties of arugula

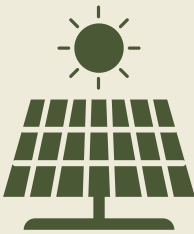


From the Greenhouse to the Kitchen,
guest plates being prepared

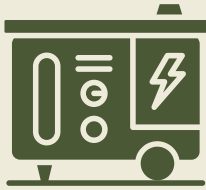


Camaraderie and community
enjoyed over a meal

A Season of Sustainability, by the Numbers



97 % Powered by
Solar Energy



128 Generator
Hours Logged



860 Gallons of
Compost Produced



Over 700 lbs of
Produce Grown

Qizhjah Vena: A Promising Update

Dena’ina Center Celebrates Early Milestones and Growing Momentum

In their first year stewarding the newly named Dena’ina Center at Qizhjah Vena (Lake Clark), Qizhjah Vena Alaska (QVA) reached a remarkable milestone: paying off the loan that made the lodge purchase possible. With generous support from partners and donors, their team has continued to advance a vision rooted in cultural revitalization, community well-being, and connection to the land. From hosting leadership camps and retreats, to expanding their board, and welcoming new leadership, QVA’s work reflects a deepening commitment to Dena’ina values and to creating a space where healing and learning can flourish for generations to come. Join two of QVA’s founders, Karen and Danielle, this August at Camp Denali!



2026 Special Emphasis Series

A Continued Commitment to Active Learning



Camp Denali's 2026 Special Emphasis Series brings a new season of writers, experts, and naturalists who will share their expertise with our guests and staff. Our ongoing partnership with Denali Education Center means that each of these speakers will present at the Sheldon Center at DEC the evening before visiting Camp Denali. Our speaker lineup may evolve as summer approaches, so follow along on our website for updates, additions, and details on our speakers.



Scott Weidensaul
Naturalist & Author

On the Wind: Following the Lives of Migratory Birds



Dr. Phil Wight
Professor, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Arctic Currents: Alaska's Energy History and Future



Eowyn Ivey
Author

Stories of Alaska: Life, Landscape, and Imagination



Ben Goldfarb
Environmental Journalist

Dam It! Beavers, Climate Change, & the Future of Alaska's Ecosystems



Alison York
Expert in Alaska Fire Ecology

Burning Questions: Fire Ecology and Climate Change in the North



Danielle Stickman & Karen Evanoff
Founders of Qizhjah Vena Alaska

Qizhjah Vena: Honoring Dena'ina Heritage and Place



David W. Shaw
Conservation Photographer

Autumn Photo Workshop

A Moment for a Movement

“People act, and vote, out of pride—in clean water, in breathable air, in the sense that they are part of something competent and forward-moving,” writes Dr. Len Necefer in his Substack blogpost, “Environmentalism is out of Ideas.” In this moment, when the usual methods of protecting the environment have lost traction, Alaska has become the object of our government's focus on energy independence and mineral mining. In the absence of coordinated effort and public will, the integrity of our Nation's public lands in Alaska and the livelihoods of people who depend on these lands, waters, and wildlife are tenuous.

Of the many conservation organizations dedicated to protecting Alaska, one of these was co-founded in 1980 by one of Camp Denali's pioneers, Celia Hunter. For 45 years the Alaska Conservation Foundation (ACF) has been the only public foundation in the state dedicated to protecting Alaska's public lands and waters and helping Alaskans build resilience to the impacts of climate change in their communities.

ACF operates on a vital principle: trust the people closest to the land. In doing so, the Foundation uses its capacity to quickly shift essential resources and power directly to Alaska's grassroots organizations and Tribes, enabling impactful, on-the-ground effort. Camp Denali is proud to support ACF— in-kind, through direct monetary donation, and through board service— because it feels like being part of something “competent and forward-moving,” and because of who it's helping to grow and what it's helping to build.



Alaska
CONSERVATION
FOUNDATION

From '75 to '25

Celebrating 50 Years of Cole & Hamm Family Ownership

Written By Jerryne Cole



Wally left his Maine roots for Alaska in 1959, returning to then Mt. McKinley National Park in 1966 to manage the park's visitor services. A year later, ready for a career change to public health, I left Seattle for a temporary summer job in Alaska with no clue that the man who hired me would become my life partner. As we got to know each other that summer, Wally introduced me to Camp Denali and to its storied owners.

By 1975 we had chased new ambitions together that included garnering our bush country Alaska bona fides. For four years we lived a homesteader's life just outside the national park when winter access was only by a twice weekly train. (Think a 16x16 cabin, hauling water, using an outhouse at 30 below, butchering moose, scratch cooking with bulk grocery deliveries by train every six months, trading our downhill skis for Bonas and a trail-less backcountry). Government work had kept us afloat with kids and bigger digs when Camp Denali's founders came to call - their retirement top of mind.



Staff Photo, 1976

With fewer financial resources than we possessed energy, self-reliance, and the desire for a purpose-driven, family-centered lifestyle, we took a huge leap to assume ownership of Camp Denali. By December, two of Wally's hand crafted, snowshoe-design rocking chairs became the down payment for Camp's timeworn structures scattered over 57 extraordinary acres of tundra. The unwritten part of our commitment was to honor Camp Denali's founders' 24-year legacy— that the carrying capacity of the land can, and should, eclipse maximal growth and greatest financial gain.

Camp Denali was (and still is) a do-it-yourself proposition, always attracting a creative, committed staff who helped us shift it from its rough-hewn beginnings to its present rustic aesthetic. Wally's relentless attention to detail, craftsmanship, and ingenuity rubbed off on the rest of us and transformed both our operational and business models all the while preserving a light touch on the land.

Meeting challenges to the wilderness character of the area honed our founders' conservation ethic. They successfully opposed a hotel at Wonder Lake and their direct engagement with policy makers ensured that the 1980 park expansion included this remote area for winter habitat of the park's caribou and wolves. During our watch, the National Park Service was politically unable to acquire several private land parcels vulnerable to development within the expanded park. Our involvement in the protection of several parcels culminated in the acquisition, renovation, and operation of North Face Lodge until it was financially feasible for our family to rededicate the site to tundra in 2021.

Camp Denali has provided all three generations of its stewards entrée to state and national nonprofit work on behalf of public lands. To Wally and me, though, the distinction of our past 50 years rests in the continuity of an involved and committed extended family who have now assumed responsibility for Camp Denali's legacy.



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Cover photo: Senneh Patterson O'Reilly **Wintertime in Denali!:** Camp Denali Staff

Special Sightings: Caribou (Murray Cohen), Grizzly bear (Dieter Fox), Ptarmigan (Sam Wilson) **Camp Denali Receives Stewardship Award:** Solar Panel photo (Ralph Clevenger), Hannah & Zoe (Linwood Butler), Salad Plating (Ralph Clevenger), Guest Dining (Ralph Clevenger)

From 75' to 25': New Owners (Camp Denali Archives), Staff of 1976 (Camp Denali Archives), **2025 Staff Photo:** (Linwood Butler)

Our hiring season is underway. We are looking for a few hard-working, community-minded individuals to join our team. Visit us at www.campdenalijobs.com to learn more and apply.

