

Wrangell St. Elias News

"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty"

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The Wrangell Mountain Skyboys, Part II

BY KATHERINE RINGSMUTH
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

During the 1930s, pilots such as Harold Gillam, Bob Reeve, "Kirk" Kirkpatrick and Merle "Mudhole" Smith soared over glaciers and mountains, followed winding rivers, and served the



Photo courtesy of Alaska Airlines, Seattle, WA.

"The Morris-Knudsen's Electra," circa 1943.

isolated communities of the Wrangell Mountain region in eastern Alaska. The increasing demand for faster transportation, and the ability to haul equipment, labor, mail, and ore to and from the remote mining districts of McCarthy-Nizina, Nabesna, Chisana, and Bremner, eventually formed the primary stops along a regularly scheduled flight route, the Copper Belt Line. Bush pilots had replaced the sourdough as the face of the Last Frontier,

and to a nation plagued by economic despair; Alaska and its aviators were thrust into a potent role—a symbol of opportunity, freedom, and hope.

The strikingly handsome Harold Gillam probably most represented the Skyboy's image of the "unsung hero." Charles "Harold"

Gillam is credited as the first aviator to establish a significant commercial operation that catered primarily to mining companies. Gillam's association with the Copper Belt region, however, predates the start of his flying business, Gillam Airways, in 1930. After four years of serving in the Navy as a deep-sea diver, Gillam

joined several friends traveling to Alaska to work for the Alaska Road

Commission (ARC) in 1923. The federal agency hired Harold Gillam as a heavy equipment operator, assigning him to the Nizina River bridge project, located ten miles southeast of McCarthy, Alaska. When the ARC shut down summer operations and the rivers froze in 1924, Gil-

lam went to work. His job was to move needed bridge construction materials from the C.R. & N.W. Railway terminus in McCarthy to the bridge site using the ARC's Holt crawling tractor. During these early years at McCarthy, Gillam befriended ten-year-old Bud Seltenreich, whose family came to Alaska during the Chisana gold rush and ended up homesteading near the site of the Nizina Bridge. Gillam took the interested first grader under his wing, giving Bud his first lessons in mechanics at the McCarthy Garage. In later years, Gillam taught Bud and his two brothers to fly. He later trained, and then hired Bud as his aviation mechanic.

In 1925, Gillam moved to Fairbanks to start a freight business. While working on a job near

(Continued on page 6)



Photo courtesy of Alaska Airlines, Seattle, WA.

"Sheep hunters," circa 1960s.

A note from the publisher

BY RICK KENYON

It is good to be home after spending a little over a month in Florida and Georgia visiting family.

That's not to say we didn't enjoy the respite from the dark and cold winter, and this year the snow. We did.

One of the penalties of being gone during that 5-week period was that we had to move a lot of snow when we got home! While McCarthy was spared the record snowfalls that other places in Alaska experienced, it got enough. It took us several weeks to catch up!

One of the things we were able to do on our trip this year was to help my 92-year old father move into a larger, more comfortable home. The move went very smoothly, with the exception of getting the phone service moved—and in the end even *that* turned out to be a blessing.

The people Dad bought from used the same telephone provider that Dad did, so we thought it should be a simple matter for them (AT&T) to change over from the old owner to the new. Not so.

To make a long story shorter, apparently AT&T is having a number of internal problems. After several broken promises, they said it was going to be over *two weeks* before they could switch the service over to the new household!

We did some research and found we could get wireless Internet service very similar to what we now enjoy here in McCarthy at a reasonable rate.



WSEN staff photo

It is always a pleasure to meet with summer McCarthy residents in the winter. We spent a pleasant afternoon with Tom and Mary Kaye Golden at their winter home in Titusville, Florida.

Prepaid cellphones were easy to obtain at Walmart. Forget the "landline," don't need it.

We downloaded Google's *Voice and Chat* (very similar to Skype) which provides for free long-distance plus free voice and video "chats."

Between Dad's new Internet service and our new G3 microwave-linked service here in McCarthy, we have been enjoying toll-free video chats nearly every day since we returned home.

For the record, our data service here at WSEN has been working very well ever since Copper Valley Telecom turned on the service last winter. Some other users have reported problems, but we are very happy to have shut down our Starband satellite service and are enjoying much higher bandwidth using the new system, at a much lower cost.

Wrangell St. Elias News welcomes aboard the following subscribers: Michael Larson, AK; Kimberly Alderman, WI; Kirk Stanley, AK; Dora Gropp, AK; Greg Hough, AK.

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Items of Interest

BY BONNIE KENYON

Long Lake Fishing Derby: The Long Lake Fishing Derby is just around the corner! It's that time of year when local (and not so local) fisherfolk meet at the lake—mile 45, McCarthy Road—for this early-spring festivity. This year's event is happening on a Thursday instead of the usual Saturday, so be sure to mark your calendar. March 15th is the date.

If your fishing tackle is buried under the snow, you might want to start shoveling. With 30 inches on the ground this year, it may take you longer than usual. **Jim Kreblin**, originator and host, is doing more-than-his-share of shoveling so the eager participants can drill their ice-fishing holes and do a bit of ice bowling on the side.

Mark Vail is going to be on hand with his special homemade chili. A bon fire is always a plus for those who enjoy roasting hot dogs and marshmallows. If you are into baking cookies, Jim is into eating them; I mean serving them to his guests! For more information, you may call Jim at 554-4434.

Jim Kreblin: When I talked to Jim on the phone recently, the subject matter included more than the upcoming derby. He was eager to share a terrific item of great interest. Daughter Lindsay and

hubby, Kurt Jensen, are expecting their third child September 29th. He says the family is coming in from Palmer for the derby. In the meantime, he is busily working on next year's wood supply and beating his neighbors, David Conner and Mark Vail at rousing games of Scrabble.

Mark Vail and David Conner: This seems a great lead-in to a few items from Mark and David. When I called Mark the other night, he answered but sounded slightly out of breath. He and David had just arrived at his place after a day-long cross country skiing trip. According to Mark, an avid skier, McCarthy is about a month ahead for that "good top crust" that enables skiers to get on top of it all.

David and Mark had just finished a 5-mile long ski trail from Long Lake, where David is wintering at Johnny McGrath's cabin, to Mark's cabin at Fireweed subdivision. Sounds like a job well done and a day full of fun and adventure.

It was during this phone conversation with Mark, that I learned about this winter's Scrabble games between Jim, Mark and David. Jim won the last game, says Mark, by "one" point; that was due to the one tile left on Mark's tray when Jim used all his letters to create the word *lutenist* (one who plays a

lute!). That's a new word for me. I suspect I don't want to play with these experienced Scrabble experts.

Mark says he dug out (under 30" of snow) his gardening supplies. He reminded me it was time to plant celery and parsley. I was glad for his reminder.

David is training in the sport of ski-jouring with Johnny's two dogs, Molly and Shiloh. He's learning all the ups and downs and the ins and outs of this mode of winter travel. Mark says he is going to join David and since he no longer has his own dog team, he hopes to borrow Jim's dog, Max.

Mark and David are finding plenty to do this winter and enjoying every bit of it, too! Happy ski-jouring, guys!

Neil Darish: Speaking of winter traveling, I couldn't help but think of Neil. Although he isn't into the ski-jouring scene, he has done a good amount of traveling this winter. It all began in October with a trip to Texas where he visited friends who own and operate an exotic wildlife ranch. Neil's Facebook postings and pictures during that time were awesome and quite entertaining. I think he made several new friends—animals, that is.

He spent November and December in Manhattan, once again

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working as a Shift Leader at the Whole Foods Market. Neil says he believes it is the largest grocery store in the nation, if not in the world.

Neil's next stop was New Smyrna Beach, Florida. He had a great visit with a couple who helped manage the McCarthy Lodge in 2003. Unfortunately, our paths did not cross while he was in Florida. My mom lives in New Smyrna. Rick and I had been visiting her before and after Neil's visit with his friends but we had taken a side trip to Texas and Georgia. Our paths didn't cross in Texas, either. Neil, next year let's compare our itineraries.

After Florida Neil returned to Texas then stopped off in Phoenix, AZ where he touched bases with Linda and Art Phillips. He beat us home by a few days, just after McCarthy's long cold spell. He said he was sorry to have missed it. I wasn't!

What he didn't miss on his return was a bit of excitement. He and his dog Dynamite were on a walk. Neil was listening to some of his favorite music while his traveling companion romped through the very deep snow nearby. They were about a mile from home, between the airport and the mudslide, when he heard yelping over the music in his ear. "I went over the berm expecting a bear or moose attack when I saw a large coyote? or was it a mountain lion? or a lynx? I quickly realized the snow was too deep to catch up to the attack happening about 30' away. Fortunately, my screaming startled the attacker and allowed Dynamite to escape. It was a lynx! Larger than my dog. It looked bigger when hunched over Dynamite." The lynx didn't leave the scene immediately in spite of the interruption. Neil said the cat hid behind a tree and kept an eye on them. Dynamite might prefer walking in a

different direction next time. Welcome home, Neil!

McCarthy Center: What's on the horizon for our local grocery store, I asked Neil. He was eager to share the upcoming upgrades—upgrades he had hoped to finish last summer. The plans include creating a real produce selection for the store at good prices. A new produce/freezer case and a walk-in refrigerator is expected to contain a variety and a bigger selection of fresh veggies.

Art Phillips recently finished training, said Neil, that will assist him in the completion of the project.

Also new this year is the freighting of supplies for the store and lodge. According to Neil, freight is coming in to McCarthy instead of him sending a driver in to Anchorage. Instead of once a week, Neil is hoping for a twice-a-week delivery.

Another item of interest for the store (and new for 2012) is the grab-and-go prepared foods. I'm sure our many summer visitors and employees are going to find this addition a plus for their daily adventures.

Thanks for giving us a heads-up, Neil. We look forward to the new and improved upgrades for summer season 2012!

Candyce Rodrick and John "Monte" Montepare: This special "item" of news came to me via Facebook from Candyce who, along with Monte, are eager to share the news of their recent engagement. Candyce writes: "On January 2nd Monte and I got engaged to be married. We thought that we should let all of our neighbors back home know about our great news. We both couldn't be happier." The wedding is planned to take place in the Kennicott/McCarthy area sometime in September 2013.

They recently completed a raft trip down the Grand Canyon. They look forward to returning to Kennicott the beginning of March.

Congratulations, Candyce and Monte!

Jim and Audrey Edwards: The Edwards' are enjoying the quiet of winter. Jim just recently came out from under a pile of paperwork for his income tax preparation. He's glad to get back to several inside projects and a breath of fresh air with collecting firewood. Now that his snowblower is repaired, he has managed to do some snow removal. As I type this "item," I cannot help but notice the falling snow outside the office, and I wonder if Jim is prepared to handle another round of blowing away that fluffy new accumulation.

Audrey, on the other hand, is thinking spring. Her garden seeds are out of storage and she is contemplating this year's growing options. She discovered a cucumber variety several years ago that has proved quite a success for us. Surprisingly, the name of the cuke is Sweet Success—and that it is! She and I each had more than enough to eat and plenty extras to share with neighbors. One of those neighbors was Stacie Miller. Stacie is determined to grow a few of her own plants this year. She called me the other day looking for seeds. I normally keep plenty on hand, but this year I only had enough for my own use. Thankfully, Audrey came through and Stacie is set to try her hand at this special cucumber.

We may have 30 inches of snow on the ground at the moment, but we ladies are convinced spring is not far away and summer is sure to arrive (eventually!).

Kelly and Natalie Bay: Life at the end of the Nizina Road is really quiet, says Natalie, and she isn't complaining either. The Bays' summers are just the opposite. As owners of Wrangell Mountain Air and

Kennicott Shuttle, Kelly and Natalie are more-than-busy providing tourists with transportation by air and by ground.

This winter, however, they left their downtown McCarthy quarters for their remote homestead on the Nizina. A few neighbors come and go, but for the most part, it is the daily visits of lynx (Natalie is quite sure there is more than one roaming the neighborhood). Then there are the moose who do damage to the groomed trails.

When I called today, I could hear the noise of a hammer in the background. Kelly was on an inside job—doing trim work. Natalie was at her desk, updating her paperwork for the upcoming summer season.

The bustle of their seasonal work is ahead in the not-so-distant future, but, in the meantime, winter on the Nizina is still in progress and Kelly and Natalie are making the most of it.

McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum: According to the museum's March 2012 newsletter, bits and pieces of historical memorabilia, are making their way back home. For example, Dave Adams donated two oak Captain's Chairs from the Erie Bunkhouse. When Gene and Edith Coppedge sold their Silver Lake campground property, they donated four rail wheel chuck (brakes). The museum recently received a series of personal letters sent to a friend in 1929-30 by Nell, a young secretary employed by the Kennecott Corporation. Bob and Paul Leitzell donated a high grade ore sample and other artifacts while they were in McCarthy this past summer for the Centennial celebration of the completion of the Copper River & Northwestern Railway. A most recent donation is a notebook chock full of news articles, a diary and personal photographs—keepsakes of Bertha and Pete Ramer. They

were sent to the museum by their nephew Marshall Rice. Bertha was a teacher in Kennecott from 1931-33. Pete and his brother, Lee, established the Bremner Mine.

The new board of directors/officers are: Sunny Cook, president; Scott Clendaniel, vice-president; Ann Dure, secretary; John Rice, treasurer; Patt Garrett, Docent; Meg Jensen, Kenny Smith and Colin Warren.

The museum is reminding folks it is time to renew their 2012 memberships.

McCarthy Area Council: MAC's first meeting of 2012 is scheduled for March 29th at 11:30 a.m. at the Tony Zak building.

Included on the agenda are the following topics: Proposal for revenue sharing funds for Nizina Road improvement—Fred Dure; NPS fire management changes/update—NPS fire management representative; KMFVD request to use grant money (already allocated) for a different purpose, Chris Chester or Leath Kramer.

The elected officers consist of: Mark Vail, president; Elizabeth Schafer, vice-president; Tamara Harper, treasurer and recording secretary.

The board members are: Natalie Bay, Gaia Marrs, John Rice, Trig Trigiano, Bill Morris, Christine Johnson, Jared Steyaert and John Montepare.

Silver Lake Kids' Ice Fishing Derby: There will be a Kids' Ice Fishing day on Wednesday, April 14th at 10 a.m. at the Silver Lake public access. Limited fishing gear and transportation is available with advanced reservation. Please contact Bruce James at 822-3575.

Enjoy Spring break in Chitina
Saturday, April 7, 2012

Come down to Chitina, go ice fishing, try your luck at ice bowling and spend time with friends. Cour-

tesy of Ray Electric, Inc. and Tom Wesner, there will be a pig roast at 6:00 PM at Uncle Tom's. Please bring a dish to share.

Thanks to Arctic Bowl in Fairbanks for donating the supplies we need to hold the first ever "Chitina Ice Bowling Tournament." Bring the kids; prizes will be awarded. Bowling will be set up from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm on Town Lake with Hot Dogs, Chili and Hot Chocolate provided at the wayside. The Chitina Volunteer Fire Department has been kind enough to help with lane set up. Should be a good time.

If you prefer ice fishing to bowling, most local lakes have public access. Uncle Tom's will not be providing the holes this year but there will be a prize for biggest fish caught that day, so bring the big ones to Uncle Tom's to get weighed.

For more info call Tom @ 823-2253 or Beth @ 823-4040.

High Tunnel program:

On Monday, March 12th, Arlene Rosenkrans from Natural Resources Conservation Service, will be at Tony Zak's from 11:00 am to 1:00 with information and application packets for the USDA Seasonal High Tunnel program.

This has been extended into 2013 and could be the last opportunity for program funding. Arlene can also meet you at another time or location if you call ahead and schedule. She has a set of pictures that she can mail or email to you (2MB) if you want to see examples from around the State.

It is a great way to extend your growing season!

CORRECTION: On page 5 of the January/February 2012 WSEN, we mistakenly captioned a picture. The picture was not Tom Bundtzen but the author, Katie Ringsmuth. Our apologies to both Tom and Katie!

Wrangell Mountain Skyboys

(Continued from the cover)

Weeks Field, he fraternized with several Alaska pilots who introduced him to flying in 1927. By far, the most influential was pilot Joe Crosson. At Joe's encouragement, Gillam left Alaska in January 1928 to stay with Crosson's family in San Diego, the "Air Capital of the West," where Gillam took flight lessons. There, T. Claude Ryan, best known for building the plane that Charles Lindbergh flew in his famous 1927 transatlantic flight, had just started a flying school. Gillam returned to Fairbanks in May with a Curtiss JN-4D "Jenny" to start his own flight school. After only two weeks, Gillam's "Jenny" stalled after takeoff at Weeks Field and crashed. Instructor and former Navy pilot Marcel L. "Danny" Danforth was fatally wounded in the accident. Gillam, however, survived the first fatal aviation crash in Alaska.

The great love of his life was reportedly Marvel Crosson—Alaska's first female pilot and Joe Crosson's sister—whom he met while in Fairbanks. Supposedly, Marvel and Gillam were engaged and decided to start an air service company together in McCarthy. In 1929, Marvel set an altitude record for female pilots over San Diego, and that fall entered the National Women's Air Derby. The couple intended to use the prize money to stake their McCarthy flying business. The race featured some of the best female pilots of the day, including Amelia Earhart. On August 19, however, on the third leg of the derby, Marvel Crosson's plane crashed, killing the aviatrix.

Despite his loss of Marvel, Gillam had apparently decided to move forward on his business enterprise. That November the *Fairbanks News-Miner* claimed "Gillam Will Fly For His New Company." The paper announced that McCarthy and Chitina residents planned to back him. Yet those plans never materialized. That same November, world-famous pilot Carl Ben Eielson and his mechanic, Earl Borland went missing in Siberia. The fledgling Gillam participated in the highly publicized search, and while flying with Joe Crosson, it was Gillam who spotted the crashed plane. The combined deaths of Eielson and Marvel Crosson likely postponed Gillam's plan to return to the Wrangell Mountains.

Gillam returned to the Wrangell region in 1930 with a Swallow biplane and a newly acquired Zenith, which he based at the Copper Center airfield. His first significant contract was to fly supplies, labor and ore to and from Cal Whitham's gold mine at Nabesna. Not only did Gillam pioneer reliable air service into the region, but he was famous for his pet polar bears, his "cat-like" vision, and his uncanny ability to fly in weather that kept most sane flyers grounded. Mostly, Gillam was known for using his remarkable flying skills to save people's lives, including Carl Whitham, who had fallen down a mine shaft. In December 1934, despite Gillam's emergency flight out of the mine in a 35-mile wind, the *Valdez Miner* reported Whitham had died from his injuries. A week later, the paper reported that Whitman had actually lived, and the report of death was "very much exaggerated." No wonder these pilots were considered "Angles in Fur"—ap-

parently they could resurrect people from the dead!

Besides Harold Gillam, another sky cowboy who flew the Copper Belt Country was "Glacier Pilot" Bob Reeve. Reeve "drifted" into Valdez in 1932 with no money, no plane, and no job. Reeve was a sort of "scout of the sky," who made a name for himself flying miners to hard-to-reach claims located in the remote peaks surrounding Valdez. Reeve used Meal Owen's wrecked Eagle-rock, and later his Fairchild aircrafts, to prospect for undeveloped mineral deposits, aptly naming his own claim, the Ruff & Tough Mine. Reeve quickly realized that although he was paid by the mine owners, in reality, he was working for the miners, whose consistent supply of mail, fresh food, and tobacco kept them connected and happy. "A bush pilot was expected to serve as mailman, message-carrier, and purchasing agent for the men who stayed the year round at the mine sites," recalled Reeve. "It was much more than a packet of needles or a can of snuff. It was their assurance that they were still a part of the outside world, and it was a tradition of Alaskan fellowship."

Reeve specialized in the transport of freight, unlike his main competitor, Gillam, who began to concentrate on passengers and mail. Gillam preferred to fly people because passengers could, as he put it, "use their two legs" to walk off his plane. The cantankerous Reeve had a different view. He once told Gillam that he preferred freight because "it didn't ask questions." Gillam's supposed reply: "Reeve can have it!" By 1932, the bold pilot started competing with Gillam

for Nabesna business, making his own arrangements with Whitman to fly gold out and supplies in to the mine. Reeve made use of local papers to conger up business in the Wrangells. When the local paper reported a daring feat by a rival—"Gillam came in the other night in the dark, and made a landing...but the field needs a floodlight to guard against accidents"—Reeve capitalized upon the readers' apprehension about flying in the dark with "Thrill'em, spill'em no kill'em Gillam" by strategically placing his ad—"Always Use Reeve Airways"—near the report, just where the reader would see it.

In 1933, Reeve realized that he couldn't just outsmart competition. As a result, Reeve famously pushed the aviation envelope in Wrangells by landing on glaciers in order to better serve the local mines. It turned out that Reeve started his air freight business at the perfect time. Even though the mining giant Kennecott Copper Corporation had temporarily closed its mines, prosperity in the gold mining industry came in the form of the Gold Reserves Act of 1934, which practically doubled the price of gold. The pilot, taking advantage of the newly opened lode mines, perfected a method of mudflat takes-offs and glacier landings that allowed service to the mines year-round. Tourists arriving on the steamship often gawked curiously at his mudflat "airport" that fronted Valdez.

Writers, too, were intrigued by Reeve. The *Valdez Miner* captivated readers with the 1935 serial, "Caught in the Wild," in which fictional Skyboy Alan Grarth (who just happened to

resemble exactly the Valdez pilot) saved the lives of three pampered easterners while "they plotted to take his!" Reeve became the focus of other writers as well. Rex Beach patterned his lead character, the "Flying Ptarmigan," on Reeve in his 1939 novel, *Valley of Thunder*. For his flying skills (and apparently his



Photo courtesy Alaska Airlines, Seattle, WA.
"Merle Smith and Kirk Kirkpatrick at the McCarthy Station," circa 1937.

good looks), the soon-to-be-famous war correspondent Ernie Pyle called Reeve the "Adonis of Alaskan Aviation." In 1937, Bradford Washburn sought a pilot to fly his climbing party and gear to the Walsh Glacier at the base of Mount Lucania in the St. Elias range, and at the time, the highest unclimbed peak in North America. Reeve replied to Washburn's request in typical Reeve fashion: "Anywhere you'll ride, I'll fly." In doing so, Reeve broke the world's record for the highest landing at 8,500 feet on skis. Each of these national figures touted Reeve as one of Alaska's great bush pilots, and contributed to his famed moniker, the "Glacier Pilot."

Federal regulation of the aviation industry in 1938 ended the so-called Wild West of Aviation, and made maverick Bob Reeve a

local hero. Due to very bad luck, Reeve was without an airplane during the period of time that covered the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA), "Grandfather Clause." At the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) meetings held in Anchorage in 1939, Reeve famously testified against federal regulation, warning that in Alaska, it was only "the rustler who survived." Nevertheless, the defiant Bob Reeve was out of the Wrangells.

Merle Smith was probably the most "grounded" of eastern Alaska's early pilots. Born in Kansas, Smith, like Buffalo Bill Cody, mastered his profession as an entertainer, barnstorming throughout the Midwest with a group called the Flying Circus. In the 1920s,

barnstorming was a popular form of entertainment, in which pilots like Smith performed stunts and tricks with airplanes. Barnstorming was a tough way to make a living, so Smith came to Alaska in 1937 to work for M.D. "Kirk" Kirkpatrick, who had recently started an air transport business called Cordova Air Service (CAS).

Although he spent several years flying supplies on scheduled flights to mines around the Copper Belt Line (during which time he also received from Bob Reeve his very unglamorous nickname "Mudhole" after crashing his Stearman biplane on the muddy airstrip at Bremner Mine), Smith fatefully became full-owner of Cordova Air Service. On April 10, 1939, Kirkpatrick left McCarthy with Con Miller and went missing in a spring snow storm. Five days

later, their bodies were recovered from the Bellanca aircraft from Orca Bay. The CAS board elected Merle K. "Mudhole" Smith President & General Manager.

As head of the company, Smith was clearly aware of Alaska's booming tourist industry, and like Cody himself, recognized that Alaska, at first look, appeared exotic foreign to most tourists. By selling Alaska in terms of the Last Frontier Smith was able to link tourists' universal perception of Alaska as a "last frontier," eventually marketing fly-in tours to destinations such as Chisana and Kennicott by promoting the experience as an opportunity to travel back to the old frontier—an idea he got after a visit to Knotts Berry Farm.

In 1941, Reeve returned to the Wrangells, making the transition from cowboy to war hero. Government contractor Morrison-Knudsen (M-K) hired Reeve to fly supplies for the construction of the Northway Airfield, the vital midway point between Whitehorse and Fairbanks in the military's cross-continental Lend-Lease Program. Reeve flew his Fairchild 71, and then M-K's newly purchased Boeing 80A, around the clock, from the Nabesna Landing Field, at the end of the Richardson Highway road system, to the Northway site, sixty miles away. By summer 1941, Nabesna Landing Field had become one of the biggest in Alaska, shorter only than Elmendorf and Ladd fields. In spring 1942, Reeve left to assist the military in the Aleutians, so M-K hired Harold Gillam to take over the construction

project. Gillam hired several well-known bush pilots to fly heavy loads to Northway, including Cordova's Merle Smith.

Northway Airfield was the last link in the internationally important Lend-Lease program. With its completion, the military christened the old Nabesna field,



Photo courtesy of Charles "Buck" Wilson, Fairbanks, AK. "On Top of Wrangell at 14,000 ft," circa 1954.

"Reeve Field." Smith, too, was treated as a hero after he borrowed M-K's 80A to ferry supplies into Chisana to save starving miners, elderly men forgotten by war and time. At age 40, Harold Gillam died tragically—albeit heroically—in January 1943. On a flight from Washington State, Gillam crashed M-K's Electra in the isolated coastal mountains near Sitka. With one passenger dead, Gillam decided to hike out to seek help. After several months his body was found wrapped in a parachute while his red long underwear hung in a tree in hopes of an SOS.

Five years later, another aviation tragedy struck the Wrangells. On March 12, 1948, Northwest Flight 4422, en route

from Shanghai to La Guardia, stopped in Anchorage to refuel. After taking off from Anchorage the DC4 reported its position over Gulkana at 9:03 pm. Then it disappeared. The aurora was intense that night, and perhaps because of this, the pilot flew the plane directly into Mount Sanford. All thirty on board were

killed. Although this was the worse crash in Alaska history, overshadowing the tragedy were rumors that the twenty-four U.S. merchant seamen killed were alleged to be carrying gold bullion as payment for delivering a tanker ship to Taiwan. Rumors sparked numerous Sierra Madre-esque expeditions for buried treasure. In 1999 commercial pilots Kevin McGregor and Marc Millican located the crash site. Though they found no gold, their discovery

did bring a modicum of closure for the families of the crash victims.

The postwar years changed aviation in Alaska in significant ways. Romantics say that it brought an end to the "Age of Frontier Flight," while realists point out that it brought safe, efficient, and reliable air transportation to the Territory, including the Wrangell Mountain region. Besides regulatory oversight in 1938, World War II produced modern airfields, and thanks to wartime industrial productivity, more powerful aircraft. With the exception of Bob Reeve, independent flying businesses began to merge their planes, pilots and prescribed routes after the war to make their services more efficient and, most impor-

tantly, more profitable. But even with the arrival of the “Age of the Airline” and President Kennedy’s ensuing New Frontier, the ‘Sky-boys of the Last Frontier’ did not fly into the sunset and simply fade away. The postwar generation of flyers pushed the envelope of aviation in eastern Alaska even further by adapting their businesses to niches unique to the Wrangells.

Even though a mountain top became his destination, Dr. Teris Moore, the University of Alaska’s “Flying President,” was more of a scientific explorer than mountain man. In the 1950s, Moore broke aviation barriers while establishing a research laboratory on the summit of Mount Wrangell, which studied everything from cosmic rays to the interactions of glaciers and active volcanoes. The science, supported entirely by aviation, was the impetus for UAF’s Geophysical Institute, which established UAF as a world-class research facility. Adding to the scientific effort was the Copper River Survey in 1950. The survey was an effort by Alaska Road Commission to convert the CR & NW Railway to a highway. It also represented another scientific endeavor supported by pilots such as Cordova Airlines’ Herb Haley, who landed and took off from the area’s only usable airstrips—the Copper River’s sandbars.

Other Wrangell Mountain flyers, like Jack Wilson, personified the independent drifter image. After the war, he refused the tamer career path to airline pilot. Instead, he blazed his own trail as a fly-in hunting guide in wild country of the Wrangell Mountains, and by his own admission, adversely impacted the record-

size Dall-sheep population there. “In the Old West men had exploited the riches of the new country...,” Wilson lamented, “...and we were no different.”

At a time when planes were getting bigger and sleeker, they were also getting smaller and more agile. Moreover, by the 1960s, a revolution in outdoor equipment had made it easier for people to access wilderness; especially the mountaineers, who, just two decades prior, slept in heavy canvas tents and ate bulky canned foods. Technological breakthroughs, initially intended for the U.S. fighting soldier, improved climbing logistics exponentially, providing the wilderness traveler lightweight equipment, such as insulated clothing, durable tents, and freeze-dried foods. Bush pilots like Wilson began to fly bigger and more numerous expeditions even deeper into the wilderness of the Wrangell Mountains.

While increasing modernization in America during the postwar years started to drive more and more wilderness seekers to eastern Alaska’s Copper Belt region, a postwar generation’s desire for modern electrical gadgets made copper one of the world’s most essential metals. This attracted scores of geologists northward, hired by big development firms to prospect for the valuable ore. The revival of mineral exploration in the Wrangells created the need to continue bush service in the Copper Belt region, subsequently attracting a new generation of flyers. It also introduced a new aviation tool to the mining industry—the helicopter. By the 1970s, helicopters had replaced the prospector’s

horse and opened a new frontier in mineral exploration.

But just as aviation had made settlement and natural resource development increasingly easier in the Wrangell Mountains, an unprecedented surge in wilderness conservation had ignited an increasingly vocal sector of the nation. Wilderness advocates in Alaska began to worry that aviation made wild places like the Wrangell’s Copper Belt vulnerable to overuse and exploitation. In his landmark study, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash explained environmentalists’ growing fear: “For a time in the history of the West, lack of technology held in check human desire to modify the land...When Alaska took its turn as the final American frontier...,” reasoned Nash, “...technological progress [particularly aviation] had largely removed these restraints.” When the U.S. Congress passed the historic Alaska National Interests Land Conservation Act, (ANILCA) in 1980, it created Wrangell Saint Elias National Park and Preserve. Because helicopters were not considered traditional and customary aircraft, their use was prohibited in what became, by far, the nation’s largest national park.

Today’s Skyboys

Although, in many ways, aviation began in Alaska as a modern, 20th century industry, the aviators became meaningful to Alaskans precisely because they reflected values and ideals of the Last Frontier. Bob Reeve’s methodical preparation of his plane in temperatures reaching 40 and 50 below zero and Harold Gilam’s acute understanding of weather patterns, not to mention the Wrangell Mountain pilots’

ability to commit to memory the natural landscape (as Mudhole Smith put it, every “lone, tough tree”) represented a vast knowledge of the environment in which these pilots flew. Smitty’s lone tree “was one of a thousand details of the [Copper] river he had observed during his flights,” explained his biographer, Lone Jan-son. Like the western cowboy, the Wrangell Mountain Skyboys came to know their environment through work.

Today’s bush pilots continue to work in a wilderness landscape where technology still requires superb human know-how and skill. Instead of miners, it is now park rangers, biologists, archeologists, and historians who depend on these pilots to provide access to the park’s hard-to-reach places

in order to study, manage, and preserve the park’s natural and cultural resources. Rather than demanding access to new roads, many of the Copper Belt communities are content to remain connected by planes and their expert pilots. Just as Gillam, Reeve, and Smith had done in the 1930s, today’s bush pilots continue to provide those communities access to economic systems, commodities, and medical care, while at the same time, they allow residents to hold on to their “frontier” identity and wilderness lifestyle.

Currently, the National Park Service is attempting to document the history of aviation and its role in shaping the history of the Wrangell Mountain area. What the study endeavors to re-

veal is how five decades of flying the Copper Belt route incorporated eastern Alaska into the New Frontier, while at the same time, exemplified Alaska’s Last Frontier resourcefulness, innovation, and even defiance, as expressed by two generations of aviators and the remarkable story they inspired. Final products produced from this historic research may include aviation properties placed in the National Register of Historic Places and an exhibit at the Anchorage Museum. If you would like to assist the furthering of this story by providing information, personal recollections, or artifacts that are representative of aviation in the Wrangells, please contact Katie Ringsmuth at 907-644-3467 or via email at Katherine_Ringsmuth@nps.gov.

State Intervenes in Navigable Waters Case

February 14, 2012, United States Federal District Court Judge Russell Holland has issued an order recognizing the State of Alaska’s interest in challenging federal authority over state-owned navigable rivers and submerged lands. The state is now a party to a lawsuit by plaintiff, John Sturgeon, an Anchorage resident challenging the authority of the National Park Service to regulate activities on state-owned waters within national parks and preserves in Alaska.

Last December, the State of Alaska joined Mr. John Sturgeon in his lawsuit against the National Park Service over federal regulations that bar hovercraft in the

waters of the Yukon-Charlie Rivers National Preserve. Mr. Sturgeon filed his lawsuit against the National Park Service in September, 2011 for a 2007 incident where National Park Service Rangers ordered him out of the preserve for using a hovercraft. The Yukon and Nation Rivers are navigable, state-owned waterways, and hovercrafts are legal under state law. Under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Park Service regulations cannot be applied to state land or water that lies within national parks and preserves.

“My administration will continue to aggressively push back on federal overreach, and efforts

to control Alaskans’ ability to travel on rivers and waterways,” Governor Parnell said. “I am pleased the court recognized Alaska’s strong interest in this issue over the objections of the federal government to our participation in the case.”

The federal government will now be required to file a formal response to the state’s complaint.

For more information go to: <http://gov.alaska.gov/parnell/pressroom/fullpressrelease.html?pr=6033>.

The above article appeared in the March 2012 CACFA (Citizens’ Advisory Commission on Federal Areas) newsletter.

“Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle.”—Thomas Jefferson

“The problems in the world today are so enormous they cannot be solved with the level of thinking that created them.” —theoretical physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

Alaska Grown — part 7, Long Lake

BY RICK KENYON JR.

Our first winter in the Alaska “bush” was quite different than the last one in Valdez. For one thing, the climate was drier and colder. The second thing was how much less snow accumulated on the ground. Instead of 30 feet of total snowfall during a given winter, we dropped to around 6 feet. On the same token, instead of -10 degrees on the coast, it might drop to -50 degrees inland! The winter of 1977-78 was no exception.

Neighbors advised us to have firewood stacked near the cabin for those cold days when driving the snow-machine was impossible. Our front porch had a nice overhang to accommodate enough wood to keep the stove going for several days. Since we didn’t have time to build a big wood shed and stock up on a big supply, we relied on finding trees nearby that were suitable for our needs. Mom, dad and I all joined in the efforts to do “wood detail,” as we called it. Stacks of cut and split firewood lined the driveway and woods around our new home.

After the road became impassable to passenger vehicles, our snow-machines became the major mode of transportation. Dad acquired another Scorpion snow-machine that was newer and more reliable. The Bonnie II was red and had a large single-cylinder engine that was tough for either mom or I to crank. The newer blue snow-machine was quieter and faster. Dad welded a simple sled in his shop and made several modifications to



WSEN staff photo

Rick Jr. with “guitar” made from Mom’s discarded “Tide” detergent box.

make it usable for our family needs.

When Long Lake froze over and the ice got thick enough for safe travel, we ventured out to explore with the snow-machine. I recall riding on the back of the blue machine with dad driving on the lake one such occasion. I happened to notice water spraying out from under the snow-machine track while we sped over the ice. Our speed decreased until we came to a halt. A lump in my throat grew as I realized we could sink down but dad assured me that there was adequate ice underneath the water that was underneath the fresh snow. It was our first experience with “gas holes” that allowed water to come up as the weight of snow on top of the ice pushed down. The track of the snow-machine filled up with slush and lost traction. Dad and

I pushed and pulled and tried to scoop out some of the goop. I don’t recall how we got it back to dry land but eventually we did! It was a lesson learned the hard way.

Ralph Lohse showed us how to ice fish. We went back on the lake and drove our snow-machines to a fresh-water spring about half-way down the lake. A few remaining salmon splashed around the open water as eagles perched nearby, watching. Ralph had an ice auger with a large bit that made a 6-8 inch hole in the ice. Short pieces of wood with string tied on one end were used as poles or “sets.” One end of the string had a large hook with bait. The goal was to leave the hook on the floor of the lake in hopes that “ling cod” would take the bait. The sets were large enough to cover the entire hole when laid across it.

The ends of the wood were packed with slush and left to freeze. The next day we would go and check the sets and many times, there were fish! Of course, we would have to chip the new-formed ice off of the holes to check the set.

Sometimes we jigged for lake trout and grayling. I remember taking my jacket off and laying down next to the icy hole. You would cover the hole with your jacket (to see down into the water) while jigging and watching the baited hook. When the fish were biting, it was a lot of fun seeing the fish come up into the hole and bite the bait.

On one such fishing expedition, we realized that Sam (our dog) disappeared and soon there was a strangled yelp for help. Dad and Ralph ran around the spring to a trap that Sam unwittingly got in while we were distracted. The wolverine trap caught Sam by the neck and would have done its job if not for a quick response on our part. It took both men to free the dog and release the trap. Sam survived by some miracle and even ran several miles home behind the snow-machine when we left. He never suffered any effects and never got in another trap!

Sometime later that winter, Sam did get deathly sick for another reason. Dad got a rabbit and laid it on a pile of firewood,

intending to clean it. He went in the cabin to get a bowl of water and knife. When he got back to the rabbit, it was gone! (Sam must have stolen it and buried it in a snow bank.) We figured he

skiing stopped by. Mike Monroe and a friend were skiing and camping when a snow storm came through and dumped about a foot of snow. A short-term camping trip turned out to

be longer than planned for and soon they ran out of supplies. Hungry, tired, and exhausted they stayed with us for several days, resting before heading home. (Mike owned a cabin in Kennecott, just north of McCarthy and about 20 miles from Long Lake.) I do remember the small crock of "sour dough" that Mike had with him and that he shared some of it with us. Mom got enough to "start" her own batch and soon we enjoyed tasty pancakes and biscuits. Sourdough was common among "bush" families and an old tradition that dated

back over 100 years.

Northern lights were something new to us and that winter was a good year for them. One evening, the lights were so bright and appeared to be just over the tree-tops. We all ran outside to view the spectacular sight. The lights were so vivid and the colors so bright that we just knew the Lord's return had come! We watched from our driveway and eventually went back inside. Never in all the years since did I see such a wonderful display of Artistry in the sky.



WSEN staff photo

Christmas at Long Lake—1977

ate that rabbit at a later date and got food poisoning. Sam got so weak that Dad had to pick him up to get him into the cabin. We had no way to get him to a vet and there was nothing to do but pray. We made him as comfortable as possible and waited it out. Mom even slept next to him one night, praying, and Sam was still alive the next morning. He got better and lived many more years after that. That dog had several close encounters with death yet lived to be 15 or 16 years old.

One day during the winter, a couple who were cross-country

Route for 2012 summer Wilderness Classic is set

BY TIM MOWRY

It may be too early — and cold — for most people to think about hiking and pack rafting this summer, but if you're thinking about doing the 2012 Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic, it's never too early to start doing your homework, especially considering it will follow a new route.

The route for the 2012 Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic was recently revealed and it will be a new course, taking racers through the Chugach Mountains from Thompson Pass, east of Valdez, to the town of McCarthy in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

"It promises beautiful terrain but is likely to be very challenging due to thick brush, steep drainages, and unrunnable rivers," race organizer Luc Mehl

said in describing the route on his web site (<http://thingstolucat.com>).

This year's race is scheduled for July 8-15.

The Wilderness Classic — there are summer and winter versions — is Alaska's longest, unsupported wilderness race. Racers must carry all their own food and gear, all travel must be human powered, racers must adhere to leave no trace principles and are responsible for their own rescue, if needed.

The summer race was started in 1982 — the winter race began in 1987 — and typically features a route that is approximately 150 miles long. The route traditionally changes every three years.

The route from Thompson Pass to McCarthy will be at least 140 miles, depending which way

racers go, and only about 30 miles of the course is floatable, Mehl said.

According to the route description that Mehl posted on his web site, racers will start at Thompson Pass, about 30 miles northeast of Valdez, and go east to Marshall Pass before heading down the Tasnuna River to the Copper River at Bremner Dunes. After crossing the Copper River at Bremner Dunes, racers will bushwhack through the Chugach Mountains to McCarthy. Some racers may float parts of the Chakina or parallel drainages to the McCarthy Road but "extreme caution is warranted for the packrafting options in this region," Mehl wrote.

(Reprinted with permission from the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner Jan 9, 2012)

CVTC announces personnel changes

VALDEZ—

Copper Valley Telecom announced today that key management positions have been filled. "As some of our senior managers prepare for retirement, we have instituted a succession plan to ensure long term company viability and continuity," said Dave Dengel, CVT's Chief Executive Officer.

Mitch Vieu has been promoted to Senior Manager for Telecom Operations and Shilah Butler has been promoted to Senior Manager for Affiliate Operations. Vieu will be responsible for all of the company's wireline operations, telecommu-

nications network, and engineering. Butler will have responsibility for CVT's affiliate wireless and Internet companies, quality control, and plant records. Mark Shorten has been promoted to the Glennallen Plant Superintendent. Chris Mishmash has assumed the day to day management of Copper Valley Wireless facilities and operations in addition to his current responsibilities for the company's maintenance and purchasing activities. Vieu, Butler, and Shorten are based in the Glennallen office. Mishmash is based in Valdez.

Tabitha Gregory has been promoted to Chief Customer Relations Officer. Gregory will be responsible for customer care, marketing and sales. Sheila Reiswig has been promoted to Customer Service Supervisor. Sue Moeller has transferred from Copper Valley's Customer Service Department to the Engineering Department. Gregory, Reiswig, and Moeller are all based in the Valdez office.

"These appointments will help Copper Valley continue to provide state of the art telecommunications services to our members and customers well into the future," Dengel stated.

Hooping it up in Homer

High tunnels changing agricultural landscape

BY MICHAEL ARMSTRONG

Donna Rae and Don McNamara stand in front of one of their Oceanside Farms high hoop tunnels on Ocean Drive Loop.

Two years ago when the Homer office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service joined a federal pilot program for high tunnels, District Conservationist Mark Kinney had no idea how successful the program would be. High tunnels are steel-framed, clear polyethylene-covered structures that extend the growing season by four to six weeks. Through NRCS, the U.S. Department of Agriculture partially funds building the tunnels.

In 2009 Kinney attended the annual meeting of the Homer Farmers' Market growers and talked about the program.

"I didn't even have to promote this thing," Kinney said. "On Monday morning, I had nine people lined up outside my office when I walked in to go to work. It never stopped."

Other conservation districts haven't embraced the program as much as Homer. Some states haven't shown enthusiasm. That's Homer's gain, with funding not used elsewhere flowing to the lower peninsula. Kinney credits the Alaska State Conservationist, Bob Jones, with backing the program.

"My attitude is, I'm going to do everything to shift the paradigm for agriculture in this area, which is what's happening with high tunnels," Kinney said.

At a meeting last month organized by Kyra Wagner of Sustainable Homer, the Homer High-Tunnel Growers got together to share ideas on manufacturers, learn tips from high tunnel growers and dream about crops people hadn't imagined outside of hard-walled greenhouses. The group pulled people from all backgrounds, including longtime homesteading families, Russian Old Believers and organic farmers. Growers raved about the success they had.

"I have 20-foot trees inside," one man said. "They're scaring me."

"I have a family of four," he went on. "We could have raised vegetables to feed five or six times that. ... You get four or five times the yield in there as you would outside."

Corn 8-feet tall? Winter squash? Tomatoes in October?

Urban farmers Don and Donna Rae McNamara put in three high tunnels on their quarter-acre lot on Ocean Drive Loop with a killer view of Kachemak Bay — and the breeze that comes with it.

Protected from the wind, the McNamara's Oceanside Farms had cherry tomatoes growing in mid October. Fennell, blueberries, grapes, asparagus, pumpkins, eggplants, lettuce, zucchini, peas, hops ... the list goes on.

"He's really excited about the hops," Donna Rae said of her husband's beer making. Already he has a batch brewing.

"This is our first season growing and it's been fantastic," Don McNamara said.

Started in late 2009, Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan announced the program as part of the "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative.

"There is great potential for high tunnels to expand the availability of healthy, locally grown crops— a win for producers and consumers," Merrigan said in 2009. "We know that these fixtures can help producers extend their growing season and hopefully add to their bottom line."

Under the program, growers who own or control land for at least five years can apply for funding for up to a 30-foot-by-72-foot high tunnel, 2,160-square feet or about 5 percent of an acre. With shipping, that size tunnel can cost up to \$15,000. The program paid \$4.86 a square foot in 2011, to a maximum of \$10,585.

High tunnel growers also get an annual subsidy for three years to do nutrient and pest incentive programs. For a full-size tunnel, growers got subsidies of up to \$4,800 a year.

"We're helping them to do it correctly," Kinney said of the incentive programs. A range management specialist, he admitted he's learned from some growers. "Some of them know more about this than I do. Some of them are teaching me."

Manufacturers have to use steel frames and 6-mil thick polyethylene plastic and warranty the building for 5 years. With no Alaska manufacturers yet ap-

proved, high tunnel growers order from Lower 48 manufacturers. High tunnel owners get reimbursed once the tunnels are installed.

“What’s amazing is how many people signed the contracts and immediately moved forward to order the kits,” Kinney said.

In some government programs, people sometimes don’t follow through or understand the rules of the program. Kinney hasn’t seen that with high tunnel growers.

“Every single one I’ve certified has been beautiful,” he said of high tunnels that have been built. “Everyone who has signed up has taken this program seriously.”

During the 5-year contract, growers can’t grow crops on tables or baskets in the high tunnel so as to not compete with commercial greenhouses. The high tunnel sits on top of tillable, mostly flat ground. Most growers put in rigid ends with doors big enough to drive small tractors into. The McNamaras split up their tunnels into three to fit on their city lot. Kinney said some neighbors have gone into together on tunnels, although the contract has to be assigned to one owner, with other growers leasing a section.

Although a lot of the Farmers’ Market producers were early adopters of high tunnels, growers don’t have to be farming for money. All it takes to qualify is to show that in two out of the past five years a grower produced at least \$1,000 of product.

“Even if all you’re doing is growing for your family, you meet the definition of an agricultural producer,” Kinney said. “That’s what allowed so many people to be eligible.”

That’s what got Neil and Kyra Wagner into high tunnels. Neil Wagner first thought the high tunnels were for commercial growers. He heard Kinney speak at the Homer Garden Club and realized they could qualify.

“That’s what caught my eye,” he said of the \$1,000 qualification. “We easily do that.”

The Wagners have two “his and her” tunnels on their 2.5-acre city lot. Neil is into production while Kyra is into experimentation. Cooperating with some Nikolaevsk families he met at Kinney’s office, the Wagners ordered a group of high tunnels from FarmTech in the Midwest, getting a 10-percent discount and sharing shipping costs on a 40-foot container. That’s the sort of cooperation Kyra Wagner has been encouraging with the Homer High-Tunnel Growers group.

Normally working in range management, Kinney said much of his job the past few years has been helping high tunnel growers. He loves it, he said.

“It’s been an interesting thing to do for the last couple of years,” he said. “Every once in a while, someone brings me a cucumber. I get a lot of people talking to me ... I can’t get through a line (at the grocery store) without people talking to me.”

Kyra Wagner said she doesn’t know why high tunnels have been such a success.

“That is a really good question. We have a really good word of mouth thing going on. People hear about it from friends and neighbors,” she said. “It’s kind of like a movement. You can’t pinpoint it to one thing.”

Whatever the reason, Kinney thinks it has revolutionized lower peninsula agriculture. With Farmers’ Market high tunnel producers just this summer growing crops, the early effects are just being seen. Kyra Wagner said some growers brought in crops two weeks earlier, and reported better production. As more high tunnel growers build and grow crops next season, Homer could see better production sooner, with more growers and foods never before seen here.

“It’s kind of exciting how big it is. It’s really the biggest boon in small-scale agriculture that as far as I can tell Alaska has seen,” she said.

“This could be a permanent part of our program, and it could be fantastic,” Kinney said. “It will change agriculture in Alaska.”

Michael Armstrong can be reached at michael.armstrong@homernews.com.

(Editor’s Note: This story originally appeared in the November 2, 2011 edition of the Homer News. Edited for dated material. It is used by permission.)

“We contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle.”—British prime minister Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

A mystery solved—the rest of the story

BY BONNIE KENYON

It all started with an ad that Dave Syren, long-time subscriber and land owner in the McCarthy/Kennicott area, ran for several issues in the *Wrangell St. Elias News*. The ad first appeared in the November/December 2010 issue. It read: Can you solve a Mystery? Does anyone know anything about a Rail Road Speeder removed (by permission) from the Long Lake area a number of years ago? Any information will be appreciated. Thanks.

Dave, persistently followed up on the leads he received. Finally, his patience and inquiry paid off. “Usually somebody knows something about any mystery out there,” says Dave.

He was right. On July 23rd, he received a phone call from Judy Fulton, former curator at the Cordova Historical Museum. She shared very

interesting information with Dave about the railroad speeder.

The railroad speeder was donated to the Cordova Historical Society (apparently by the Collins’ family of Long Lake/Cordova). It was removed by John Wilson who operated Wilson Construction in Cordova. It appears that Mr. Wilson stored it for a long time at his Cordova property. Then a Mr. Drew Lindow, who seems to have been very active in the museum arranged for an Eagle Scout troop to restore it as a scout project. It was restored and now is on display at the Cordova Museum.

Judy provided Dave with the name and number of another contact, Cathy Sherman, Information Services Director for the Cordova Historical Museum/Cordova Public Library. On October 27th, Cathy wrote Dave, verifying Judy’s information as well as adding the final touch by including a copy of the sign being prepared for the speeder. The sign reads:

Speeder Multi-Gauge Motor Car—In 1941 an Army Air Base was

built at Mile 13 as an emergency airfield and refueling stop for military and commercial aircraft. This speeder built by the US Army Transportation Corps was likely used to transport soldiers and equipment from Cordova to the Army Air Base at Mile 13 during World War 11. It traveled along the tracks of the former Copper River & Northwestern Railway which quit running in 1938. As an Eagle Scout project, Drew Lindow totally rebuilt the car to its present condition. The Cordova Historical Museum is thankful to have part of Cordova’s railroad history back in our front yard! Run by a gas engine, it featured four wheel drive and was made to adapt to many different rail gauges, with pre-drilled holes for adjustment. After the war ended it was used by the Cliff Collin’s family at Long Lake. Years later John Wilson brought it back to Cordova via the ferry.

The mystery is now solved! “I am satisfied that this is the ‘rest of the story’ on the railroad speeder from Long Lake,” comments Dave.

Subsistence collection and use of shed or discarded animal parts considered

NPS ALASKA—

The National Park Service (NPS) has released for public review an environmental assessment addressing the subsistence collection and use of shed or discarded animal parts and plants from NPS areas in Alaska.

The NPS is considering promulgating regulations to allow subsistence collection and use of shed or discarded animal parts (for instance, antlers, horns, bones, hooves) and plants to

make handicrafts for personal or family uses, for barter, or to sell. Collection activities would only be allowed in NPS areas where subsistence is authorized in accordance with Titles II and VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

The environmental assessment evaluates the effects of alternatives for managing the collection of plants and inedible animal parts from naturally shed (including natural mortality) or discarded (from hunters) for

subsistence uses by qualified local rural residents. The NPS goal is to authorize these uses in a manner to prevent or minimize adverse impacts to other park resources, values, and uses.

Alaska rural residents asked the NPS to consider allowing these activities in units with subsistence provisions because national regulations at 36 CFR 2.1 presently prohibit the “Possessing, destroying, injuring, defacing, removing, digging, or disturbing from its natural state

any living or dead wildlife or fish, or parts or products thereof, such as antlers or nests." The EA was completed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the regulations of the Council on Envi-

ronmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9).

The comment period for the EA will extend 60 days, beginning February 7, 2012 and ending April 7, 2012. Please send written comments to the attention of Bud Rice, NPS Alaska,

240 W. 5th Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501. Comments may also be posted at the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) program located on the NPS public comment website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>

Nabesna ORV Management Plan approved

COPPER CENTER, ALASKA—

Alaska Regional Director Sue Masica has signed a Record of Decision (ROD) that approves a management plan for Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs) and trails in the Nabesna District of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The National Park Service (NPS) agreed to endeavor to complete the Environmental Impact Statement, Management Plan and ROD by December 31, 2011, pursuant to a settlement agreement from a 2006 lawsuit. The lawsuit challenged NPS issuance of permits for recreational Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) use on nine trails in the Nabesna District of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The trails have provided access for sport hunting and subsistence activities since before the park was established. Summer use of ORVs on the trails has resulted in degraded trail conditions and impacts to wetlands, soils, and vegetation.

The ROD provides for the following:

- Improvement of nine trails in order to maintain one alignment and prevent resource impacts associated with degraded trails. Improvements will consist of constructed re-routes and hardening of existing trails utilizing gravel

- or porous pavement panels such as Geoblock.

- Recreational ORV use will be permitted on trails in the National Preserve that are in a maintainable condition. At this time, that includes the Trail Creek and Lost Creek trails. After improvement, recreational ORV use will also be permitted on Reeve Field trail, Soda Lake trail, Caribou Creek trail, and Suslota trail.

- ORV use by federally qualified subsistence users will continue to be allowed on trails in the national park and national preserve. The use will be subject to monitoring and management actions to ensure that resource impacts associated with unimproved trails in the area do not expand.

- The use of ORVs for accessing private inholdings within the Nabesna District will be managed consistent with ANILCA Section 1110(b), implementing regulations at Title 43 CFR 36.10(e)(1), and the NPS Alaska Region's Interim User's Guide to Accessing Inholdings in National Park System Units in Alaska.

- Construction of 20 miles of new non-motorized trails.

The Record of Decision was signed after careful consideration of management alternatives and environmental effects displayed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). The decisions identified in the ROD represent a combination of alternatives 4 and 5 analyzed in the Draft EIS and best meet the objectives

identified in the EIS. The ROD is responsive to public comment received on the EIS and presents a balanced approach. According to analysis presented in the EIS, trail improvement that eliminates trail braiding and associated impacts will result in the following resource benefits:

- Recovery of 374 acres of impacted soils, 375 acres of impacted wetlands, and 656 acres of impacted vegetation.

- Proposed trail improvements would bridge, harden, or eliminate all of 22 ORV stream crossings identified in the EIS as non-functional.

The EIS estimates the cost of all trail improvements at \$4.3 million. In order to stretch trail improvement dollars, NPS will be looking for trail improvement partners and will be considering the use of volunteers for trail repair and maintenance. Tentative funding for 2012 is positive and should enable NPS to make needed repairs on the Soda Lake and Caribou Creek trails and get started on the Copper Lake trail.

The Record of Decision can be viewed or downloaded from the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve website at <http://www.nps.gov/wrst> or at the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>.

Questions regarding the Record of Decision may be directed to Bruce Rogers at 907-822-7276.

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1921 March & April editions

K.K.K. Minstrels

From the rise of the curtain promptly at 8:15 disclosing a monster slice of watermelon with a bevy of black faces for seeds, to the Grand Finale at 11:30, the K.K.K. Minstrels' performance was a winner.

With Mr. Sadlier as interlocutor Messrs Brunelle and Saari as endmen, the first part was devoted to song and comedy and it is very apparent that many of the boys have missed their vocations, instead of being in the employ of the Guggenheims they should be on the stage. The singing was of a high order, and all of the soloists scored great successes. As for the comedy patter, the endmen played no favorites, but included everyone in camp as targets for their jokes.

The second half was a musical treat chiefly instrumental. Mr. Seineberger's violin solo was faultless. The saxophone and trombone duets were well received, and for his masterly violin playing, Mr. Rudolph was many times recalled...George Wilson's rope act was a "whirl." The orchestra with Mr. Healy at the piano, added greatly to the success of the show.

The whole affair owed its success to Miss Catherine E. Schultz who had worked untiringly for several months—this young lady characteristically remained in the background, but everyone knew and appreciated her work.

The hall was filled to overflowing including a large number from McCarthy.

The only people who are not tickled by the near approach of spring, are the mail men and freighters who have had a considerable amount of inconvenience through overflows this week. Jim Murie took a compulsory bath last Sunday which will last him till the Fourth of July.

ATHLETIC CLUB

The Grand Opening of the McCarthy Athletic Club was a big success,

and augurs well for future successes. A large number were present who thoroughly enjoyed the many stunts done by the performers, who are greatly to be complimented, especially as most of them were impromptu; one calamity did occur when a trapeze performer lost some of his apparel, but he was rescued. After the show the rest of the evening was devoted to dancing. The club now boasts 45 members.

Nels Tjosevig has been hauling machinery, etc. from the old bridge this week with Fred's assistance.

Andy Taylor and Joe McLellan returned this week from a tough trip to Chisana bringing mail. They spent some time going in staking the trail over Rohn Glacier.

Word has been received of the marriage of Martin Harris of Dan Creek, to Miss Margaret Keenan, formerly of Fairbanks, Alaska. The wedding took place at LaMesa, California

March 5th

AMUSEMENTS

A Dance will be held on Tuesday the 15th, under the auspices of the McCarthy Athletic Club.

Commencing March 26th a series of Basketball games will be played between Kennecott & the first game will be played at McCarthy.

Basketball is being keenly enjoyed by the ladies & swift games were played several evenings this week. On Wednesday (ladies night) lady spectators are very welcome.

The skating down the Kennecott has been extra good this week & many skating parties have been enjoyed.

Many McCarthy people had the pleasure of meeting Miss Austin, Kennecott's new nurse, when she visited our city yesterday with Mrs. Gillespie.

PERSONAL

Just now a number of Chisana visitors are in town. Carl Whitham who is one of the Chisana operators, arrived

on Monday evening by dog team, to procure his seasons outfit.

Tony Grisko, fur trader of the Shite River is also in town, looking into conditions in the fur market. He has a large stock of fur on hand, but is not well pleased with prices offered by fur buyers in the States.

Pete Eklund, another prospector from Chisana, is here on his yearly visit. They will all return in a few days to the interior camp.

Andy Taylor, who sustained injuries to his hand some days ago and had to stay over for medical treatment, is doing very well and expects to be able to start out very soon.

Seattle, March 5th. Representatives of the Kennecott Copper Corporation say that the advance of 70 cents a barrel on fuel oil March 1, adds \$450,000 annually to the cost of operation of the Kennecott mines, its railroad and steamship lines and adds that the raise imposes the big necessity of the immediate development of the Alaska oil fields.

Stephen Birch, head of the Kennecott Corporation, is expected to visit Seattle this month.

A.L. Powell, came down this week from Kennecott, and at present is preparing to leave for his property at the head of Rex Creek, where he intends to operate this season. His wife will accompany him: they are staying at their home on Front Street. His partner Sam Tilden, will arrive shortly.

March 12

AMUSEMENTS

The members of the McCarthy Basketball team are working hard every night at the hall to be in shape to meet their opponents from Kennecott on the evening of the 26th. In fact when Olsen and Doze land on one in a practice game it is hard to realize that they are not wild moose—and the rest of the bunch are not far behind them.

It is to be hoped the Doctor will accompany the Kennecott team down here for the first game.

LOCAL INTEREST

Shorty Gwinn left last Sunday for the glacier with a big load of freight consigned to Chisana. Operators Slimpert and Lubbe also have taken their teams to the glacier with freight.

Archie Pauline is celebrating the coming of spring by serving ice cream & cream sodas.

Ole Farsvedt, connected with the Mother Lode Coalition Mines Co., was a visitor to McCarthy this week. He will be associated with Art Powell at the head of Rex Creek this summer, helping Art to take out the course stuff.

On Tuesday night last, Dwyer's warehouse at Strelna was destroyed by fire. The cause of it is not known, but it was discovered and halted before other buildings were affected. Details are not forthcoming, but we understand two automobiles were destroyed.

March 19

BASKET BALL

Does McCarthy play basket ball? Ask the Kennecott boys. It was at least a form of modified indoor football but every one was satisfied and are anxiously awaiting for the next game...

The final score 21 to 8 in favor of Kennecott does not tell the full story, as both the Umpire and Referee will testify, as the teams were very evenly matched, although Kennecott deserved to win. As all losing teams have an alibi, McC.A.C. claims they went in with Jack O'Neill on one leg and H. Olsen was severely used in the first half and Gercken had two cracked ribs, but otherwise no kicks as they claim Kennecott was lucky and from now on they will need all that same luck.

Carl Stattel refereed the first half and Hellerick umpired, changing in the second half. While it is hard to pick out individuals, Scubbi and Meyers for Kennecott and Anderson and Snyder for McCarthy did particularly good work. Saari and O'Neill took the hardest tumbles. Special mention would be made of Snyder's wall dive, and Saari's neck tackle of Wickman, both of Kennecott.

The teams lined up as follows:

Kennecott, Saari, (Capt.); Meyers, Guard; Scubbi, Center; Wickman, Fd; Erickson, Fd;

McCarthy, Snyder (Capt.); Williams, Guard; Olson, Guard; O'Neill, Center; Anderson, Fd; and Gercken and Lubbe as substitutes for Snyder and Olsen, the latter being substitute for J. O'Neill.

Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Erickson announce that they have taken over the McCarthy Laundry and Baths, which are now re-opened, thoroughly renovated and in first class shape to handle a large volume of business. Hot water for baths always ready. Orders taken for cleaning and pressing and plain sewing. Nicely furnished rooms are also for rent upstairs.

George Andersen has sold the Heney Building which he recently purchased and remodeled to Miss Lillian Allen, who moved in this week.

Mrs. McClellan's residence is much improved by the addition of a bay window and porch.

Al Doze and Olaf Holtet are hauling lumber with their teams for the Andrus workings at Nizina.

April 2

FOR SALE

Fresh Milk at 40c a quart, New-laid Eggs at 75c a dozen. at the McCarthy Meat Market.

STEPHEN BIRCH COMING WEST

Seattle. April 14th. It is expected that Stephen Birch will arrive in Seattle very shortly from New York. The reason of his visit is said to be to make certain changes in the personnel of the officials at Kennecott, Alaska.

April 16

MCCARTHY COMMERCIAL CLUB

A well attended meeting of the citizens took place last Thursday at the A.B. Hall when the reorganization of the Commercial club became an accomplished fact. Mr. John Barrett called the meeting to order and stated the object of same, upon which J. Nickell moved that Nominations be in order for new officers. On motion by J.B. O'Neill, seconded by S. Seltenreich. J.P. Hubrick was elected President. For

secy. Dick Woodman & treasurer, Roy Snyder, their election was unanimous also the following, to serve on the executive committee, Messrs Olsen, Nickell, O'Neill, Mitchell and Barrett—the last two to act as Publicity men. Roy Snyder was appointed fire chief and health officer to work in conjunction with the school board concerning the sanitary condition of the town.

Both the retiring and newly elected president gave interesting talks on community spirit, and hoped that everyone would put his shoulder to the wheel & work in harmony for the betterment of the town. A meeting will be held at 7 next Thursday evening in the Laurie building.

Tonight

McCarthy Athletic Club

Responding to a number of requests, the basketball teams will play a friendly game at the Hall tonight. This will be preceded by a short game between the women's teams. This will be their first exhibition. After the games, ice cream and cake will be served. Everybody is invited.

LOCAL NEWS

The spring travel to the Mining Camps has begun in earnest this week. On Wednesday's train a large number arrived from the Outside and traveled to Nizina next day.

George Madden, who spent the winter in San Francisco & who will be in charge of the Chititu camp for this season, greeted his friends on Wednesday.

Stephen Palmer, who had traveled through from New York also arrived. He and Mrs. Palmer had spent the winter in Florida where they were interested in an orange plantation. Mrs. Palmer will remain in Troy, N.Y. this summer.

Paul Latham, who was employed at the Rex camp last season will return to that camp.

During his visit to Seattle last winter Mr. Latham joined the ranks of the married.

C. Ottinger, of New York, will be a new addition to the camp this summer.

F.P. Miller left for Nizina on Thursday.

Abe Morris, son of Mrs. J.R. Underwood, arrived on Wednesday's train, after having spent several months outside.

The Northwestern, which sails from Seattle today will also bring a large number of mining men North, among whom are Mr. G. Howard Birch of Dan Creek who will be accompanied by Mrs. Birch. Mr. L.H. Carvey, general manager and trustee of the Andrus holdings in the Nizina, is also an expected arrival.

April 23

Dick Woodman has just finished building a fine workshop. It is 18 by 24 and very well lighted.

Now that the snow is about gone, it is very likely that a Clean up Day will be designated by the Board of Health.

LOCAL NEWS

The summer mail contract for Nizina and Dan Creek will commence in May.

A carload of horses is due to arrive here on May 23rd, from Seattle, to the order of local buyers.

Pete S. Erickson was in town this week on business connected with the estate of the late Oscar Hansen.

Miles Atkinson, layman of Calamity Gulch, has been a visitor to town this week.

Mrs. Kay and her son Roy will spend the summer at Dan Creek where Mr. Kay is interested in mining.

The McCarthy School term will end on May 20th, and the children are already planning what they will do in vacation.

Another proposed tax which is going to hit the small community hard is that of twenty dollars yearly for dance and assembly halls (rented for any purpose). That is all very fine for halls in such places as Juneau, Cordova and Ketchikan.

Here in McCarthy we have as fine a hall as in many towns ten times its size. It is owned by the local camp of the Arctic Brotherhood, who built it in 1917 at an expense of five thousand dollars.

Now the membership of the brotherhood has dwindled down to very few. The total indebtedness on the hall, etc. amounts to a thousand dollars, eight hundred dollars of which is secured by a mortgage and the Brotherhood is having all it can do to keep the interest paid up and the insurance, thereby protecting its creditors. If they had to pay twenty five dollars a year they would be about crippled. The hall is a great acquisition to our town, especially so in the past three months when the Athletic Club has been such a strong "get-together" influence.

April 30

A Bear's Eye View—Bear Collar Cameras in Alaska

BY RILEY WOODFORD

A sunny, pond-ice melting day in late May and Boar 6041 was not long out of hibernation. This mature, 700-pound brown bear smelled a sow, her breeding scent mixed with meat. Caribou, already dead. He found her, bred and ate caribou. Over the next few weeks, he bred many times with at least three other receptive sows, and likely more, in the Copper River Basin of Southcentral Alaska. He also killed and ate another bear, a number of newborn moose calves, a few caribou calves, a hare and a beaver – and he scavenged a dead moose and a pile of winter-killed fish.

An innovative device documented the action — a collar mounted video camera and GPS unit. Every 15 minutes for a month, the unit recorded a 20-second video clip and a waypoint. In mid-May last year, Alaska Fish

and Game biologists equipped four brown (grizzly) bears – a lone sow, two sows with one cub each, and 10-year-old Boar 6041– with collar cameras. When the cameras were retrieved in mid-June, biologists downloaded almost 12,000 video clips.

Biologists want to understand the effects of high hunter harvest rates on this bear population as well as the bears' impacts on the moose population in this area. This pilot study using these new devices is part of the Nelchina Brown Bear Project, and it promises unprecedented insights into their behavior.

State biologist Bruce Dale said viewing the videos is highly addictive. "The clips are quite short, so you only get a glimpse of what they are up to. If they are not sleeping, you really want to see the next clip to find out what happens next."

As Dale viewed the clips, a couple details jumped out. "It's surprising just how active they are when they are active, they are doing something with purpose," he said. "It was also surprising the lack of time spent foraging on vegetation, they are not spending a lot of time digging tubers and that sort of thing. Instead these bears are eating lots of meat this time of year."

Who are these bears and why study them?

That predatory and scavenging behavior is a key aspect of the study, especially when it comes to newborn moose and caribou calves. Calf mortality research documents that up to 85 percent of the moose calves born in the study area die before autumn and most are killed by brown bears. Bears show different dietary preferences and abilities to catch prey, and how these traits are acquired is of keen interest to biolo-

gists. Parenting plays a role, but watching bears shows that enterprise and opportunity play a part as well.

"We have sows that kill, boars that kill, young ones and old ones that kill," said state biologist Becky Schwanke. "We have two- and three-year-olds observed on kills the very first year away from mom."

Schwanke has watched a lot of bears. She grew up hunting and fishing in Alaska, and lives in Glennallen, where she's the area wildlife biologist for Game Management Unit 13 and for this study. The project area is bordered by the Little Nelchina River on the south and extends 40 miles north to the Susitna River. Over the past five years, Schwanke has monitored 137 study bears in this area, most via aerial surveillance using VHF radio collars, which allow biologists to find the bears. Researchers have located Boar 6041 66 times since the spring of 2007, providing a wealth of information.

"This boar has been observed on nine fresh kills over that time, four adult ungulates (moose or caribou) and five moose calves," she said.

Predatory behavior varies from bear to bear, and some bears have never been seen on a dead moose or caribou.

"One, Sow 6007, we have 69 locations and 10 observations of fresh kills for her since 2006," she said. "For other bears, like Sow 6013, an older bear — she was 18 when we captured her in '06 — we have 53 locations and not one time was she seen on a kill. Another sow, 6017, 52 locations and not a single kill."

For the past few decades, VHF radio collars have enabled researchers to locate bears and oth-

er animals. In the Copper River Basin, an airplane helps, but the observations are fleeting.

"We tend to make assumptions about what happened," Schwanke said. "We'll fly over with a Super Cub, they'll be eating an ungulate, sometimes it's pretty obvious, there's a calf and a cow moose standing nearby, other times it's a bury pile. Sometimes you find a two- or three-year-old on a kill and he's pretty antsy — he's come across it maybe knows he shouldn't be there, he didn't kill it but found it."

Flying over an animal once or twice a day provides a three-minute snapshot of life, Schwanke said. "It's such a conundrum. What are they doing the rest of the time? And specifically, what are realistic kill rates for bears taking moose calves?"

The new GPS collar cameras may help answer those questions. Three were programmed to take a 10-second clip every 15 minutes, one took a 20-second clip. Each camera shut down for a few hours every day to extend battery life. The clips show the bears' chin at the side of the frame and what the bear sees in front of it.

One thing the researchers are testing is the relationships between the bears observed on kills and those not observed on kills.

"We're very curious if we can link known siblings, sons, and mother daughter pairs," Schwanke said. "We have quite a few collared bears that have never been observed on kills. If we have a sow we've never observed on a kill, is it likely that her offspring are going to be 'ground squirrel killers' — eating ground squirrels and eating sedges, berries and roots, as opposed to bears that are consistently killing and eating ungulates?"

Bear 6007 is providing some insights. She's a prolific mother, and four of her offspring have been collared as 2-year-olds. Bear 6007 is good at killing ungulates, and the same seems to be true now of three of her four offspring.

"Bears must learn life skills from their mother. We suspect predatory characteristics are among these skills," Schwanke said.

To test the new technology, the four camera bears were chosen specifically because they are known predators and the cameras were deployed at a time of high predation. While these bears provide insights into predatory behavior, they do not represent the behavior of all bears.

What do Bears do?

State biologist Chris Brockman reviewed and sorted many of the clips and summarized the behaviors as sleeping, eating, moving and breeding. Two of the study bears, the lone sow and the boar, were sexually active and engaged in a tryst with each other.

"Bears do a lot of sleeping and a lot of staring at trees," he said. "There's a good portion of each day where there's not a lot going on. The activity didn't seem to have real specific times, some bears were active through the night and others slept through the night. Some would eat a calf and nap four or five hours, then get up and move. They sleep eight or maybe ten hours a day, at any time during the day."

Like a flyover, the clips represent a moment in time. Many clips show bears eating, a few show them hunting, and even fewer show them actually killing.

The cameras have shown that killing a calf can happen quickly. "There are at least two clips of the boar grabbing calves," Brockman

said. "It's hard to say if he sees a cow with calves and bluffs them to get mom to run away – in many cases one minute he's walking through the woods, in the next clip he's eating a moose calf. Then in the next clip he's walking again."

Brockman suspects the bear smells the moose and hones in, speeding up as he approaches his prey. "We couldn't see it in the camera footage, but he knew it was there. It was lying down, hiding, and he knew it was there and just ran over and grabbed it. Once he knew where it was and that it was close, I'd say it didn't have a chance. We didn't see cows, which leads me to believe the cows don't seem to be challenging him, or perhaps we were seeing calves that were not immediately accompanied by the cow."

Brockman said one of the sows and her cub spent a week basically parked on a moose carcass, and the clips show a steady progression of their feast. The GPS data will corroborate exactly how much they did or didn't move, and this winter biologists will process the footage.

The clips also show that the sows tolerated a lot of play fighting and wrestling with their yearling cubs, but the abuse took a toll on the cameras. "The two (collars) with the sows with cubs failed at some point," Brockman said. "You've got the cubs wrestling with mom and that collar is right in the middle of it. We probably need more armor on those."

The cameras recorded sound, including some rather brutal reminders of life and death in the wild. But Brockman was surprised by some of the audio.

"I was really surprised at how little noise the bears make, mainly

you just hear brush whacking on the camera. I'd think with the placement by their mouths if they were making noise we'd hear it."

What next?

"Part of the goal of the pilot study is to determine what the best video schedule would be," said Brockman. "I would love to set a camera to go into a sleep mode when the bear is inactive."

"The one thing we've all talked about is to have a camera turn on when the animal's heart rate goes up," Schwanke said.

The devices are manufactured by Lotek, and while these units were prototypes, Lotek released a commercial model this spring. Mario Henriques and Oana Bantus of Lotek said that some improvements are in the works, including stronger housing, better electronics, and doubling the memory from 16G to 32G. Shutting the camera down during periods of inactivity is a priority. They said running the camera nonstop would only provide about 32 hours of footage — a 30-second on, 30-second off mode would be more practical.

State wildlife biologist Sean Farley worked on an early prototype of a collar camera and tested a unit on a black bear in the Anchorage area a few years ago — with the Unit 13 bears in mind. That camera took still images at timed intervals and showed promise. Farley's not involved with the Nelchina Brown Bear Project anymore, but he's watching the developments closely.

"We know that bears eat ungulates, but we have an incomplete understanding of predator success rates, degree of intake, and even the searching and attacking strategies used by bears to take calves and adults," he said. "The camera

collars, when paired with data on diet, genetics, and productivity will be a real boon to improving our understanding of predator-prey dynamics."

Researchers collected hair and blood samples from the study bears before and after moose calving season. They've also been collecting DNA samples to evaluate genetic variation between bears in the Copper River Basin and to better understand how bear migration into and out of the area affects bear population dynamics.

It won't be hard to find the study bears next spring. Schwanke and her colleagues have 22 bears equipped with radio collars. This pilot study shows the technology has potential to provide insights into little-known reproductive behaviors as well as predator-prey dynamics between bears, moose and caribou.

"It's got amazing promise for learning about all aspects of bear behavior," Brockman said. "Especially predation, since they eat the evidence."

An assortment of nine short bear video clips are available for viewing. Two feature sows playing with a cub, several feature scavenging and feeding, and several feature encounters with other bears.

Brockman has assembled a set of clips, all recorded on May 26, 2011 by Boar 6041, into a 24-hour vignette, "A Day in the Life of a Bear." That 13-minute video can also be viewed there. Give it time to load before starting.

Riley Woodford is the editor of Alaska Fish and Wildlife News and produces the Sounds Wild radio program. The story first appeared in the January issue of Alaska Fish & Wildlife News.

Rasmuson Foundation accepting Distinguished Artist Award nominations

ANCHORAGE—

Do you know a distinguished Alaska artist who deserves to be recognized? Are you one? Rasmuson Foundation is now accepting nominations for its 2012 Distinguished Artist Award.

Rasmuson Foundation offers one \$25,000 Distinguished Artist Award annually in recognition of creative excellence and superior accomplishments in the arts. The award is intended as a validation of the artist's creative output and contributions to the state of Alaska.

Anyone can nominate someone to receive the Distinguished Artist Award and an application package from the artist is not

necessary to receive the award. Eligible artists have created an extensive independent body of work representing a life-long investigation and maturation of their personal creativity. They demonstrate a high aesthetic level of artistic ability with a strong consistency of expression over at least a 15-year professional arts career. Artists working in any artistic discipline are eligible for the award.

Past winners of the Distinguished Artist Award include Alaskan artists Ray Troll, Nathan Jackson and Delores Elizabeth Churchill of Ketchikan, Rie Munoz of Juneau, John Luther Adams and John Haines of Fairbanks, and Ron Senungetuk of Homer.

"The Distinguished Artist

and supporting their future works."

Rasmuson Foundation welcomes public nominations of artists who meet the Distinguished Artist Award criteria. Artists can also nominate themselves. Nominations can be submitted online or by mail, and forms are available at www.rasmuson.org.

The Distinguished Artist Award is part of the Rasmuson Foundation's Individual Artist Awards program. Since 2004, the program has awarded 232 grants to Alaska artists totaling nearly \$1.7 million.

The Individual Artist Awards program also awards project grants of up to \$5,000 meant for artists with short-term project needs, and artist fellowship awards of up to \$12,000 for mid-career and mature artists to advance their career.

Additional information is also available by calling 907-297-2700 or 877-366-2700 (toll free in Alaska), or by writing to Rasmuson Foundation, 301 W Northern Lights Boulevard, Suite 300, Anchorage, Alaska 99503.

Rasmuson Foundation was created in May 1955 by Jenny Rasmuson to honor her late husband, "E.A." Rasmuson. The Foundation is a catalyst to promote a better life for all Alaskans.

GOLDEN'S



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"I'll say what I'll do, I'll do what I say"

Awards are designed for artists who have made an impact in Alaska with their creative output," said Jayson Smart, program officer for Rasmuson Foundation. "The award is our way of recognizing their contributions

"I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them."

— Thomas Jefferson

18-Year Study Provides Insights on Wolves

NPS PRESS RELEASE

The latest data from a two-decade-long wildlife study in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve reports a healthy and rebounding wolf population.

Wolf abundance and distribution has been monitored in the 2.5 million acre national preserve since 1993 using radio collars on animals within most of the packs using the area. No wolf study in Alaska, other than one at Denali National Park, has been in place for more years.

“Wolves depend on healthy populations of large ungulates, like caribou, which in turn respond to vegetation, weather and other habitat patterns across the landscape,” said Tom Liebscher, chief of resources for Yukon-Charley Rivers. “These data give us insight into what’s happening across a large range of resources, as well as help other agencies make informed management choices.”

A separate Alaska Department of Fish and Game study of the Forty Mile Caribou Herd, a primary food source for the Yukon-Charley wolves, shows a population of 51,000 – a 50-year high. When the wolf study began in 1993, the herd numbered about 21,000 animals. Liebscher

said that across 18 years of collar data, there appears to be little correlation between the size of the caribou herd and the number of wolves in the preserve, adding that factors such as winter weather, range condition and predators outside the preserve have a significant effect on the caribou population.

The 2011 annual report notes that wolf density was above the 18-year average (5.09 wolves/1000 square kilometers versus an average of 4.23) and that the mean pack size was 7.4 wolves. Pack sizes have fluctuated over the 18-year study, from a low of 4.3 to a high of 9.1, and average 7.1 over the length of the study. Currently, nine packs are tracked by the National Park Service; pack sizes range from one to 18 wolves. In 2010, the total population ranged between 58 animals in the spring and 74 animals in the fall.

Since 1993, National Park Service scientists have been able to determine the fate of 139 wolves collared in the preserve, creating a snapshot indicative of wolves throughout Interior Alaska. Fully 30 percent of the collared wolves (42) dispersed from the preserve where they were no longer tracked. A quarter of the collared wolves (33) were

trapped or shot in or near the preserve, either by hunters, trappers or in State of Alaska sponsored predator control programs. Some wolves (23 animals/17%) were killed by other wolves, and a few (6 animals/4%) were killed by prey. Only six wolves (4%) died of starvation, and 7% died from unknown natural causes.

Researchers lost contact with 20 wolves, either from failed collars or dispersal.

State-sponsored predator control outside the preserve but within the area used by the Forty Mile Caribou Herd has varied considerably over the years, and is expected to resume later this month. “Over time, the State has generally avoided wolves collared by the National Park Service,” said Yukon-Charley Rivers Superintendent Greg Dudgeon. “The American taxpayer’s investment in research – more than \$100,000 a year – has benefitted from this practice not only financially but by providing land managers with important information that in turn helps hunters and other preserve users.”

The full report is available on-line at <http://www.nps.gov/yuch/nature/science/wolves.htm>

Kenai Fjords authorizes snowcoach access to Exit Glacier area

KENAI FJORDS—

A new way for winter travelers to access the Exit Glacier area in Kenai Fjords National Park was authorized this week by the National Park Service.

With the advent of operations in Kenai Fjords National Park, Adventure Sixty North, a commercial snowcoach operation, became the first such activity authorized in a unit of the National Park System in Alaska. The company will pro-

vide scenic tours and guided snowshoe walks, and passengers can be dropped off to enjoy winter activities on their own. The park has authorized four round-trips per day and no commercial services Tuesday through Thursday after 1

p.m. Costs and additional information regarding the service can be found on Adventure Sixty North's website at: <http://bit.ly/z4ai89>.

Since Kenai Fjords was established in 1980, winter access to the Exit Glacier area has been limited only to those able to dogsled, ski, snowshoe, or snowmachine the six-mile section of snow and ice covered road, which is closed to vehicle traffic during the winter. Visitors in the winter are often rewarded with a quiet, solitary experience and have the opportunity to stay overnight at a park maintained public use cabin. For more information on the Willow public use cabin, visit the park website at: <http://1.usa.gov/y6IL1X>.

Beginning last fall, Kenai Fjords National Park and the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (part of the U.S. Department of Transportation) held several meetings in the Seward

area to consider the feasibility of providing an over-the-snow transportation service to the Exit Glacier area. This service had been identified by the park as a possibility in the 2004 Exit Glacier Area Plan. The park recently posted the final draft of the Feasibility Study at: <http://1.usa.gov/xH1fDp>.

In addition to fulfilling part of the Exit Glacier plan, the new winter access service aligns with Connecting People to Park, one of four themes in the National Park Service's Call to Action, a plan which is leading the agency towards its second century of stewardship beginning in 2016. Information on the Call to Action



Photo courtesy NPS

Adventure Sixty North's Rick Brown stands with the 12-passenger snowcoach that is authorized to be used for winter transportation to the Exit Glacier area.

can be found at:

<http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction>.

Any questions about the snowcoach operation or commercial services in Kenai Fjords National Park can be directed to Superintendent Jeff Mow at jeff_mow@nps.gov.

Don't forget the Long Lake Fish Derby March 15

BY BONNIE KENYON

Last year's Long Lake Fishing Derby had an international touch. Asma Gabsi, (middle) 17, a foreign exchange student from Tunisia is trying her hand at ice fishing for the first time. Her Alaska hosts are Neil O'Donnell and Margaret Stock of Anchorage. Neil, Margaret and daughter Catherine (Cat) love sharing their McCarthy area cabin with a variety of friends. Several other of their foreign exchange students have experienced the McCarthy lifestyle and its seasonal changes and activities. Cat won a prize for building the one and only igloo at last year's derby. Rick Kenyon (left) and Neil O'Donnell (right) are giving Asma tips on "jigging" for Rainbow Trout or Dolly Varden. She picked up the sport quickly and even won a prize—her first tackle box—a memento from her Long Lake excursion.

Participants for the 2012 derby are hoping last year's -30 degrees do not repeat itself this year. McCarthy's 30 inches of snow this winter is a great base for snowmachining to the lake for this year's festivities.



WSEN staff photo



Wrangell-St. Elias National Park

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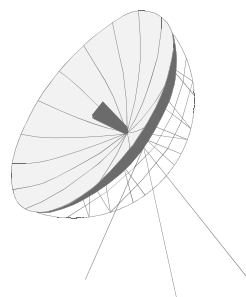
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Book review— *Graveyard of Dreams* by Craig Medred

BY BONNIE KENYON

It's that time of year when dog-mushing fans turn out to follow the trail of Alaska's most famous annual dogsled race—the Iditarod. This year's event begins on March 3rd. Media of all types get involved from start to finish. Most of the time we hear or read of those at the front of the trail but what about those who enter the race, full of dreams, passion for the sport of mushing, willing to give all to just finish, but don't?

Craig Medred, former outdoors editor for the *Anchorage Daily News*, now writes for the online publication, *Alaska Dispatch*. In *Graveyard of Dreams*, Medred pulls back the curtain on the behind-the-scenes stories of those who fell short of reaching Nome in the 2010

Iditarod. His vivid descriptions of the infamous trail that leads to the finish line gives us pictures of what these courageous mushers and their special dogs endure along the route.

For those who didn't make it, "scratched" is the official word, for those whose dreams for Iditarod 2010 died, this book was written—to tell their stories and to see they are not forgotten. These are faces with names such as Kirk Barnum, Lynwood Fielder, Karen Ramstead, Karin Hendrickson, Michael Suprenant and Pat Moon. Courageous, competitive and passionate are a few adjectives that come to mind when I think of these racers. They are also victims of the pitfalls along the trail: dogs who just couldn't or wouldn't perform, accidents to dog and men alike, destruction of necessary equipment and even the rules of the race itself.

Medred is open with his opinions on the sport of mushing and the toll it can take on people and their private lives. It can be an addiction—"more expensive than a drug habit,"—a sport that consumes people, their souls, money, time, families and careers.

Medred also tells the happy, but more-than-challenging, endings for at least three mushers who successfully finished the race. If you are an Iditarod fan or perhaps you are dreaming of becoming one of those numbered mushers, you will want to read "Graveyard of Dreams." Let its author, Craig Medred, give you the inside story—the ups and down of a dog musher's dreams.

This book is in paperback, has 192 pages and costs \$19.95. Look for it at your favorite bookstore.

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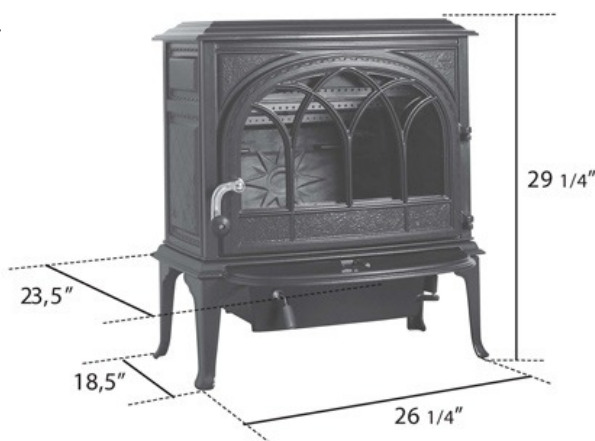
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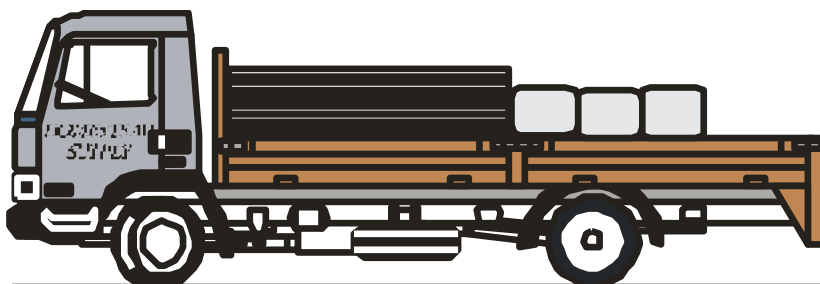
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Cooking with Peggy

BY PEGGY GUNTIS

Hello everyone! I'm working from a new computer so I hope that after I write this article to you I can figure out how to pass it along to Rick and Bonnie. It's due in a few days so I don't have much time to figure things out.

This month I was going to include recipes for Fireweed cookies and Fireweed syrup that I LOVE and that were sent to me by Allison Sayer but I think I'll hold off for the May-June issue when the ingredients of Fireweed blossoms are more readily available. I can hardly wait!

When you went into downtown McCarthy this past summer no matter where you went you were sure to see Marcheta Long working just about everywhere. Marcheta, a good friend of Barb and John Rice, spent the summer with them so we all got to know her so much better than when she would just come for a short visit. In the fall, when she got home and after she had jumped in and substituted as both a teacher and principal for several weeks, she was able to take a break and send me some recipes. I'd like to share them with you—one or two at a time. This month let's start with

ANGEL DINNER ROLLS

1 package yeast dissolved in 1/4 cup warm water
1/2 cup sugar
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup warm water
1/2 cup oil
1 teaspoon salt
4 cups flour

drop of yellow food coloring

Mix ingredients together in a large bowl; cover. Let stand overnight or 8 hours UNREFRIGERATED. Divide into 3 equal parts. Roll each part into about a 12 inch circle. Cut the circle into 8 equal wedges as if cutting pie. Roll from wide edge to point, forming crescent shape. Place on greased cookie sheet. Cover and let rise 5-6 hours. Bake 10-12 minutes at 375 degrees.

Now, this one is just for those who DID NOT eat too much over the holidays, who HAVE NOT joined a diet group, and who HAVE NOT given up chocolate! Are there any of you out there?

IOWA BROWNIES

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, softened
1 cup sugar
1 can (16 oz.) chocolate syrup
4 eggs
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup chopped nuts
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/4 teaspoon almond flavoring

Cream together butter and sugar until fluffy. Beat in syrup, then eggs one at a time. Beat in flour gradually. Fold in nuts. Pour into greased 15" x 10" jelly roll pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes. Frost with Iowa Frosting.

IOWA FROSTING

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
1 1/2 cup sugar
1/3 cup evaporated milk
1/2 cup chocolate chips.

In a saucepan combine the first three ingredients and bring to a boil and boil one minute. Stir in the chocolate chips until

melted. Frost the brownies. Cut into squares when cool.

Before I left McCarthy in the fall, I had a chance to sit down with Audrey Edwards and get a few of her favorite recipes. I know you read about Audrey and Jim often in the WSEN so I feel like you probably already know her.

Audrey loves the Taste of Home cookbooks and when I asked her for some of her favorite recipes, the ones she gave me were all from the T.O.H. annuals. By the way, you can get them on line (I just ordered another myself the other day!). This next recipe is from the 2007 Annual and it's great. It's quick to put together, doesn't take long to cook and tastes great.

PRETTY PENNE HAM SKILLET

1 pound uncooked penne or medium tube pasta
3 cups cubed, fully-cooked ham
1 large sweet red pepper, diced
1 medium onion, chopped
1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh basil or 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
1/4 cup olive oil
3 tablespoons butter
1 can (14 1/2 oz.) chicken broth
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1/2 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

Cook pasta according to package directions. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, saute the ham, red pepper, onion, parsley, garlic, basil and oregano in oil and butter for 4-6 minutes or until

ham is browned and vegetables are tender.

Stir in broth and lemon juice. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 10-15 minutes or until liquid is reduced by half. Drain pasta; stir into ham mixture. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Makes 6 servings.

Serve this with rolls (or if you are serving my husband, with the darkest Rye bread and tons of butter), a nice salad and you have a great dinner!

Now, let me remind you of a recipe I gave you a good while

ago that Bonnie Kenyon gave me and that we both cook all summer. First, I'll give you her original recipe and then I'll share an altered version that I came up with one time when my head of cauliflower left a little to be desired.

The Original — Steam 1 head of cauliflower until tender. Spread a mixture of ½ cup mayonnaise and 1 - 2 teaspoons of mustard all over the head and then cover that with shredded cheddar. Bake it in the oven at 350 degrees about 10-15 minutes.

The Altered Version — Break apart 1 head of cauliflower into bite size pieces. Steam them until they are tender and then spread in a lightly greased 13" x 9" or 9" x 11" pan. Spread with the mixture of the ½ cup mayonnaise and 1 - 2 teaspoons of mustard. Sprinkle with shredded cheddar to cover. Bake in the oven at 350 degrees about 10-15 minutes. We're having the altered version tonight with corn on the cob and chicken. Can hardly wait.

Happy eating!

Kenai Fjords—RBCA receive Coastal America Spirit Award

KENAI FJORDS—

Kenai Fjords National Park and the Resurrection Bay Conservation Alliance (RBCA) were recently honored with a Coastal America Spirit Award for their cooperative work to remove marine debris from beaches around the park. Over the last six years, this partnership has cataloged and removed thousands of pounds of debris from local beaches, reducing hazards to marine life, and improving the visitor experience on these beaches. The project has also gathered valuable data on the composition of marine debris and its rate of accumulation. Much of the work, spearheaded by RBCA Marine Debris Coordi-

nator Tim Johnson, has been accomplished with hundreds of hours of volunteer labor. Over the years, the effort has grown to include not just nearby, easily-accessible beaches, but also more remote locations such as Thunder Bay and Taroka Arm on the park's outer coast.

The Award was presented at this year's Alaska Forum on the Environment in Anchorage. An estimated crowd of 300 were on hand for the ceremony, where an eight minute video about the cleanup effort was also screened. The video can be viewed here: <http://www.vimeo.com/24321624>

Coastal America is public-private partnership effort that brings together people and re-

sources from federal agencies, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to collaboratively address our nation's coastal environmental challenges. Their Spirit Awards recognize exceptional projects that demonstrate the 'spirit' of teamwork for group efforts that are poised to address challenging coastal issues. Kenai Fjords National Park plans to continue working with RBCA in the coming years to address ongoing marine debris issues in and around the park.

For more information visit: <http://www.rbca-alaska.org/>
<http://www.coastalamerica.gov/>

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Your hosts Rick & Bonnie Kenyon

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

January 2012

Dear Bonnie,

We still enjoy each issue of WSEN and look forward to each new copy. We are particularly enjoying Rick Jr's articles.

Best wishes for 2012.

Benita & Wayne Lathbrook
Ohio

January 7, 2012

Bonnie,

I know I may be getting to be a pain but I need to say again how much I enjoy the paper. Several years ago my Daughter and her future husband visited McCarthy and raved about it. Two years ago I did my bucket list and visited Alaska and came to McCarthy via Jennifer and her van (with her son). My wife and I really enjoyed the trip and I have it on a list to come back for a longer period of time....Thanks for the paper, love it.

Bill Ramsey

Inside a McCarthy winter

(Editor's note: A winter scene through the eyes of McCarthy year 'round resident, Mark Vail, is depicted so vividly in a letter he wrote to Sunny Cook earlier this month. Sunny and her husband, Bob, spend winters in Spokane, WA, and the rest of the year in McCarthy. With Mark and Sunny's permission, I invite you to take a peek into Mark's winter wonderland.)

4 Feb 2012

0 degrees 3-1/2 feet of snow

Dear Sunny,

I haven't been to mail since early January. Lots of snow just after solstice kept the mail plane's schedule late and erratic, so I opted to infrequent journeys in. January slowed down...down...down to a low of -43 degrees by the third week (-50 in Glennallen) and close to that on the Kennicott. More staying close to home and walking loops around the neighborhood to keep cabin fever at bay.

Groundhogs day saw the back of winter broken along with a two week cold spell. Alaskan's morph, a mere marmot, may have moved a molar and twitched a whisker, but slumbered on. No need for a disturbance of his hibernation to seek shadows. He was deep down in his den knowing as hibernators do the winter will not yet end. Another foot of snow fell that night. The mail plane was yet to come. So procrastinate as I might, I've still got time to catch up on a few missing missives.

It's been a quiet winter with equal shares of cold and snow. Gary Green is the only person I've seen from that end of the road and that was over a month ago. I've been to Long Lake twice or thrice to socialize with Jim Kreblin and David Conner. Dinners and scrabble. At home I installed a new wood stove and hearth. I've read 30-40 books so far with more on the stack. The new microwave system is up and

running well but will cost \$50-60 a month dependent on # of services you buy from CVT or your smart phone provider. We'll see what spring demands bring to the phone company. They'll also have a hot spot in Downtown that will cost per use.

I've gone thru #150 of sunflower seeds feeding my various flocks of grosbeaks, redpolls and chickadees and a pair of hairy woodpeckers. One male Hairy Woodpecker has trained me to put out peanut butter when he knocks on the window. I do it to keep him from destroying the frames. The female Woodpecker is kinder and gentler and will soon be tamed to hand. I had a boreal owl visit this week too.

Mostly, quiet reigns supreme, except when the weather moves thru. A blast of wind scoured the mountains a day or two ago and caused a few avalanches to come down from the weight of windblown slabs.

Even though February will be longer than its been in years (4), it's still the shortest month and will slip by quickly, especially with the sun back over the tree tops this week. I was able to sieve electrons thru my silicon solar cells and copper conduit and charge my computer without tapping into the battery bank. I was even inspired to sprinkle the garden edge with dried coffee grounds in hopes of hurrying the first signs of spring.

Sending warm thoughts to you and Bob. See you in May.
Love, Mark

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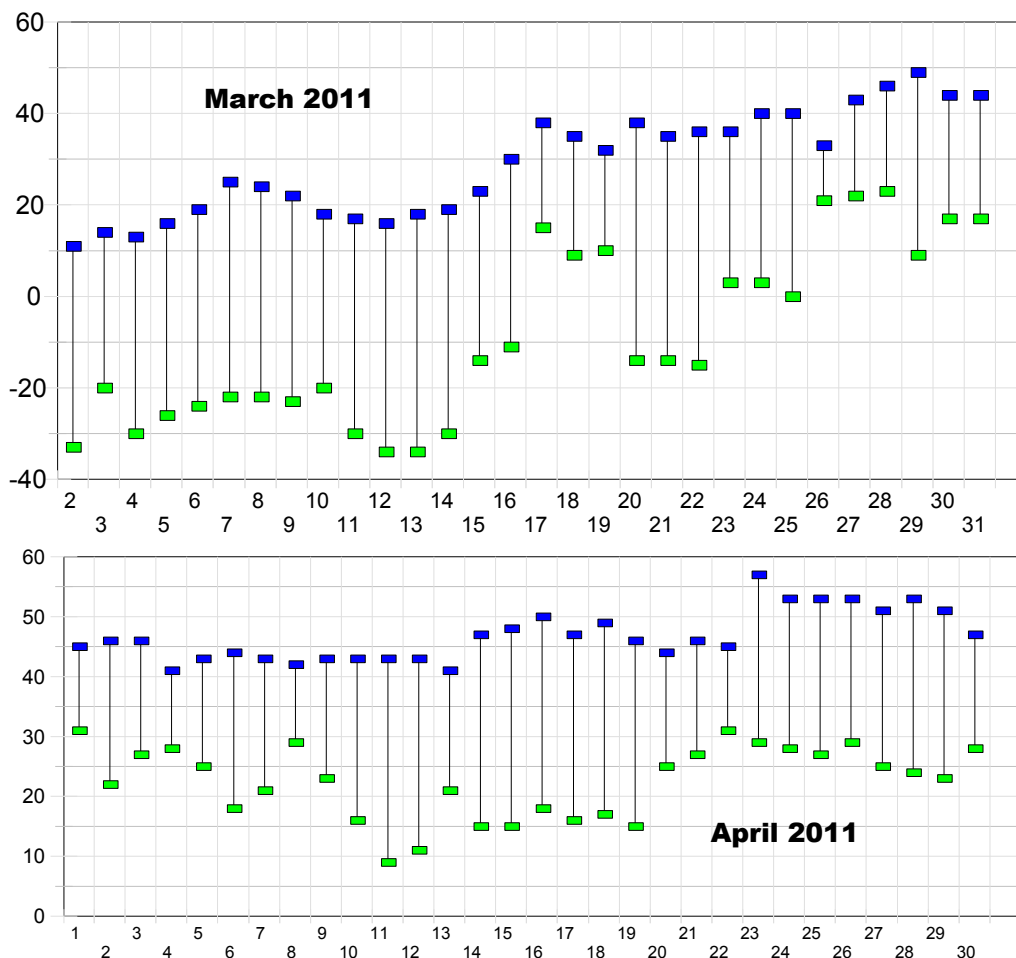
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