

Wrangell St. Elias News

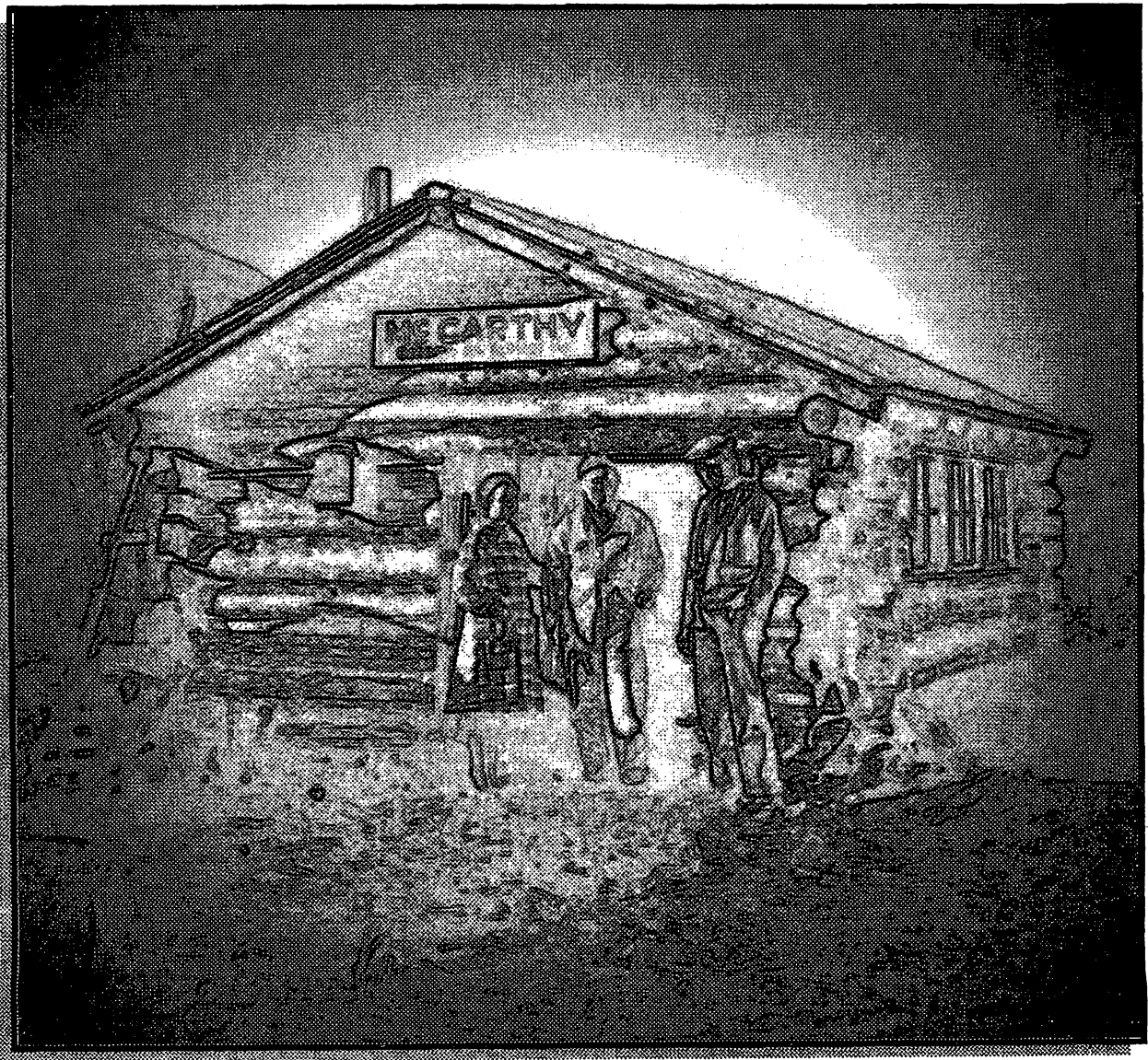
"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty"

Vol. Seven Issue Three

May & June 1998

Two Dollars

A look at one of McCarthy's flying legends...



Merle "Mudhole" Smith—my dad

BY KENNY SMITH — PAGE 6

A note from the publisher

BY BONNIE KENYON

“When does spring arrive in McCarthy?” one inquires.

“When the robins show up, of course,” is a response you might very well here from a McCarthyite.

I realize snow patches persist and the temperatures still drop into the teens at night, but when the robins arrive somehow they promise us spring is on the scene whether it looks like it or not.

My neighbor Lynn Welty called me April 20 and excitedly announced she was looking at her first robin of the season. As we talked Rick pointed at one in our driveway! And, so, that's enough proof to me—spring is here and I am delighted!

Rick and I had the opportunity to do a little ice fishing at Long Lake on the 14th and we were amazed to see 3 Trumpeter Swans swimming in a small stretch of open water. Although we didn't get much in the fish department, the trip was worth it just to watch the swans trumpet to the gas-

powered ice auger and race our snowmachine down the lake!

Another sign of spring was the flock of geese that Rick spotted on the 17th.

Rick and I want to welcome a new columnist for Wrangell St. Elias News – Dee Frady. As most of you know, (if you read *Items of Interest*), Dee and her husband Terry are year round residents of McCarthy. Their log cabin home and local gift shop are located on the westside of the Kennicott River at Mile 55¼ of the McCarthy Road. Since the Fradys opened up the Willow Herb Mountain Depot, Dee has been increasing her knowledge of McCarthy area wildflowers. We are very honored to have Dee join our publication. You won't want to miss her first article on page 19. Welcome aboard, Dee!

As you can see by this issue's cover, Kenny Smith, a McCarthy summer resident, is sharing a profile of his dad, Merle “Mudhole” Smith that we can hardly wait to share with you. His story begins on page 6.

When George Cebula

returned from his most recent trip to Anchorage, he brought a new addition to the offices of WSEN. It is called a MBM Sprint Bookletmaker which, according to the documentation, is a “one-person bindery system that doesn't require special operating skills.” (That's good, I say!) This issue of WSEN is going to be it's first official trial run. Not only will the Sprint fold each WSEN, but will staple—all at the same time! Prior to the Sprint's arrival, we had to fold each page of the paper with a folder that, at times, gave Rick quite a challenge. Our old folder was very noisy. The new machine is quiet! Each WSEN, once collated, had to be individually stapled. Now we can feed a complete, collated issue through the Sprint and it will exit onto a conveyor belt already folded and stapled!

This is the time of year we are trying to work on two projects at the same time. The May/June WSEN and our yearly Visitor's Guide to Kennicott & McCarthy. Another excellent feature of the Bookletmaker is that it will also process our guide. This year we plan on printing 9,000 so our new addition is going to certainly prove worthwhile. George, who is our foremost Viz Guide stapler, was concerned he was being replaced by a machine but we soon put his fears to rest. He could now *upgrade* to performing 2 jobs – both stapler *and* folder!

Wrangell St. Elias News welcomes aboard the following subscribers: Birte Becker, Ak; Joan Plank, AK; Brendan Kelly, AK; Keith and Laurie Rowland, AK.

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Items of Interest

BY BONNIE KENYON

Chris Richards: Chris is back home in Kennicott after spending 2 months with his mom in California. He is taking full advantage of the "spring lull" before our summer tourist season begins. He estimates this year is his 7th year in the guiding business. Most of his last year's guides are returning and they are looking forward to another good season.

Although his greenhouse isn't quite thawed out yet, he is busy taking in Jeannie Miller's extra vegetable and flower transplants.

Before we hang up, Chris reminds me he'll gladly give a good home to my excess tomato plants. Needless to say...I am relieved to know I don't have to throw away those "extras."

Kris Rueter: Our neighbor, Kris, on the hill above us is presently basking in sunny, warm Florida as I write. She is attending a family reunion. I hope those 80 degree temperatures don't spoil her too much!

George Cebula: George is back at home after a 3 month stay in Anchorage serving on Grand Jury. He survived and even enjoyed carrying out his citizen's duty but, one thing is sure...there's no place like home! And George is obviously glad to be back at his westside cabin. Last September George, his brother Ted and Ted's Milwaukee neighbor, Bob

Habermehl, made excellent headway on George's garage project. As you can see, it is a handy addition to George's homestead. He's waiting for brother Ted to return this year and help him put those special finishing touches on it.



"GEORGE'S PLACE" WITH NEW GARAGE

Jim, Jeannie, Matt and Aaron Miller: Before I had the chance to call Jeannie for an item from her neck of the woods, the phone rang. Surprisingly it was Jeannie wanting to know if I had planted the new Swiss Chard we both had ordered from Park Seed. I told her we were trying to get the seed to sprout first. She informed me I didn't need to do so as her seed came up within a couple of days! Now, she is wondering what she is going to

do with the transplants. We still have at least another month before we can put our seedlings in the garden. She explained her house was already full of plants and she may be forced to plant her garden earlier this year. It seems Jeannie's plants are thriving and growing much faster than usual. What a problem to have, I tell her!!!

It's April 21 and I ask her how much snow she has left at her place in Kennicott. She says, "It depends on where you are standing!" The hillside behind her is bare but her garden area is still covered. She may have to get her shovel back out and do some serious snow removal!

Jim and Audrey Edwards: Speaking of our local "inside gardeners"...Audrey is well ahead of us all, I think. Her living room is overflowing with a variety of green growing things.

Like Jeannie she is outgrowing her inside quarters. Birte gave her a helping hand the other day and they managed to do some repair work on the greenhouse.



WSEN staff photo

AUDREY EDWARDS GETS A JUMP ON SUMMER WITH HER GREENHOUSE!

Rick and I took a walk to the Edwards' homestead yesterday. We peaked inside to see how the project was going. I could tell it wouldn't be long before the

inside gardener moved her plants to their permanent quarters.

Jim's shop was bustling with activity as well. Birte and Harm were putting the finishing touches on a fancy weed eater they are building for Audrey. Jim was busy on his airplane project and studying how best to install the engine. Spring is a great time for finishing up those inside projects.

Ken and Carly Kritchen: Along with spring breakup comes a thing called "mud." Frankly, I'm not very fond of it, but some creatures actually revel in it! Creatures like Ginger and Firecracker, Ken and Carly's horses. They love rolling in it, says Carly – especially right after she grooms them!!! Braving the mud and slushy snow, Ken and Carly are managing to get in some horseback riding these days.

Carly reports that their farm has increased by six chicks. They hatched out on April 15, Sarah Welty's 13th birthday.

Don, Lynn, Sarah and Rene Welty: Speaking of birthdays...Rene and Sarah both celebrated one since our last issue of WSEN. Rene, who turned 10 on March 30, and Garrett Hoare, who turned 9 on March 13, had a joint birthday party on March 14. Sled riding was on the agenda. Sarah and I shared a sled on one particular ride, actually "flight." I'm not sure if we hit a bump or careened around a corner, but I know at some point she and I and the sled

parted ways. We were traveling so fast that I didn't even realize we had flown off the sled—until I saw it traveling alongside us!!

Sarah received a trip to Cordova as one of her birthday presents. She ended up staying 2 weeks and says she had a great time! She tells me her Girl Scout troupe plans on going to Hawaii next summer and she would really like to go. Each girl must pay their own way. Sarah is hoping to earn \$450 this summer.

Rene reports that Daisy, their pet rabbit, had 9 baby bunnies on March 29. She is quite proud of them and assures us that all are healthy and growing in leaps and bounds!

Don is joining the crew of Wrangell Mountain Air this summer as one of their pilots and Lynn is going to work for the McCarthy Lodge as waitress during their breakfast hours. Sounds like the entire Welty family are in for a adventure-packed summer!



WSEN staff photo

ONE OF DAISY'S BABIES.

Mike and Cynthia McCann: The McCanns are not unknown to most of McCarthy's residents, but I just recently got

the opportunity to meet Cynthia and get reacquainted with Mike. They are temporarily staying at the Kennicott River Lodge and Hostel and giving owner Brad Grossweiler a hand. Cynthia says she and Mike are unboarding the place and doing some inside finish work on the main building.

Kelly, Natalie and Tessa Bay: The Bays are moved back into their McCarthy quarters for the summer tourist season. Natalie informed me today that they have recently acquired a new Danby washing machine. From her description, I feel certain this machine is the same model as Audrey got this last year. It sounds like the ideal machine for our remote living conditions in McCarthy.

Another item of interest, says Natalie, is that Brandon Hamilton of Wrangell Mountain Air got his private pilot's certificate this winter. Congratulations, Brandon, on a job well done!

We can expect to see Dave Hollis and George Cebula once again back in the driver's seats for Wrangell Mountain Bus.

Doug and Mary Schrage: It's always good to see the Schrages. Doug, Mary and boys were able to fit in a visit to their McCarthy cabin during the middle of March and they really enjoyed our beautiful weather. Mary says she hopes they can make a March trip an annual event. I hope so, too, Mary!

Meg Hunt and Ed LaChapelle: Meg, Ed and their electric car have arrived in McCarthy. It didn't take Meg long to get settled in and begin

her share of inside gardening. She says things seem to be slow growing but she chalks that up to "gardener's impatience."

Ed left on April 15 for a week-long trip to France where he plans on attending an avalanche control seminar. He hopes to eventually get us a story on his new car. In the meantime, I hope this picture will give you a peek preview.

Fred and Ann Dure: There has been a lot of excitement out in the Nizina area this last month. Just what are Fred and Ann up to? Trucks hauling bales and bales of hay were coming in and over the river and through the woods to the Dure's property. According to Fred, he and Ann are enlarging and improving their log home by adding a straw bale/passive solar addition. The post and beam construction will include 3-sided log exterior paneling in order to maintain visual consistency. Also on the summer's agenda, is the construction of a solar power system and a septic and water supply system. Now, that is some kind of agenda!

Keith and Laurie Rowland and family: March proved to be a great month for visitors to the McCarthy area. Keith, son of Ken and Nancy Rowland, and



Photo courtesy Loy Green

MCCARTHY'S TRANSPORTATION GOES "HI-TECH!"

his wife, Laurie, were in for about a week during the latter part of the month. Although Rick and I had met Keith, we had never had the opportunity to meet Laurie. Laurie's brother and a friend of the family also accompanied the Rowlands. We hope to see much more of Keith and Laurie in the days to come.

Al and Fran Gagnon: I decided to see if I could raise Al or Fran at May Creek on our CB radio. I was successful. Al gave me a "bird report" from over his way. He said when I called he and Fran were busy watching a flock of 20-30 juncos scratching away at the sunflower seeds outside their cabin window. He also reported that Fred and Irene Denner of Dan Creek and he and Fran had spotted their first robins of the season 2 days ago. It is always good to hear that all is well with our neighbors at the "creeks!"

Tim Mischel: Tim is up at his Angle Station property above Kennicott these days and reports that on about April 17 at least one bear in his vicinity

is awake! Interestingly enough, Tim says there is a cave about 500 yards from his place. He noticed tracks leaving the den and heading down the mountain towards National Creek. There is another den close by but it is still closed up. Thanks for the warning, Tim; we'll keep our eye open for those furry critters.

Tim has seen a Northern Shrike, lots of ptarmigan and this morning he called to let us know he was watching 2 nanny goats on the ridge above his cabin. Our April weather is treating him just fine, he says.

Tony Zak: On March 27 WSEN received an Email from subscriber Daniel Talcott who is a personal friend of Tony's. He informed us Tony suffered a heart attack early that morning and was admitted to Fairbanks Memorial. Tests revealed a 95% blockage.

On the 28th Tony was airlifted to Providence Hospital in Anchorage. In an April 23 Email, Daniel reports that Tony had successful angioplasty done on Wednesday April 15 in Anchorage. Two stents in his heart artery solved the blockage problem.

According to Daniel, Tony is back in Fairbanks at the Pioneers Home and is his old self again. Tony also recently celebrated his 83 birthday!

All of us here at WSEN send our belated birthday wishes to you, Tony, and thank God for your speedy recovery.

We also want to express our appreciation to Daniel for taking the time to Email us and keep us informed. ☺

Merle "Mudhole" Smith—my dad

BY KENNY SMITH

In the spring of 1937 my father, Merle K. Smith, was flying small airplanes in Kansas for the "Inman Brothers Flying Circus." He had previously owned his own small barnstorming business in Kansas, but had sold to the much larger Inman Brothers operation. One day a telegram came with an offer too good to refuse—a job flying for the Cordova Air Service in Alaska with a salary of \$175 per month! Dad wasted no time accepting the offer, which included a ticket on the Alaska Steamship Company's S.S. Yukon.

Just hours after stepping off the steamship in Cordova, his new boss, M.D. Kirkpatrick, told him that he was scheduled for a flight to McCarthy in the company's Stearman C3B biplane, N5415. (Today, the same aircraft is restored and displayed at the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum in Anchorage). The flight to McCarthy was uneventful, but the return trip to Cordova gave Dad a hint of what Alaska weather had to offer. Thick fog forced him to land at a railroad section house at mile 78.

In 1937 the majority of Cordova Air Service's business was flying to McCarthy, Chisana and the Bremner River mines. As a result of a bad landing at the Bremner, Dad soon acquired the nickname "Mudhole."

In the spring of 1938 Dad's fiancé, Bertha Oglesby, came to Cordova where they were married only hours after she got off the ship. A few weeks later my folks moved to McCarthy. At McCarthy Dad did the flying for Cordova Air Service using a Bellanca Pacemaker and Mom

operated the radio and relayed the weather reports.

For \$10.00 a month they were able to rent a house from the legendary Kate Kennedy. Kate made her fame in the Klondike and had moved to McCarthy in 1914. The home they rented is still standing and is owned by the Hegland children. Mom loved the winter in McCarthy, where she learned to ski. Only five other women spent the 1938/39 winter there. When all the local women got together, Anna Iverson from the west side of the Kennicott River made the sixth.

Unfortunately, Kennecott closed down that fall. Mom was in the McCarthy depot when the last train pulled out in November 1938.

After the Kennecott mines closed there was very little flying business at McCarthy. M.D. Kirkpatrick died in an aircraft accident in late April 1939. He was en route to Cordova from McCarthy. Soon after, Dad and Mom transferred to Cordova when Dad was selected to replace Kirkpatrick as head of the company.

Around mid 1942 Dad quit Cordova Air Service and went to work for his friend Harold Gillam, who was then chief pilot for the war contractor Morrison-Knudson company (M.K.). During the next few years Dad flew all over the territory for M.K. and Gillam. Mom and their first son, Kenny, (that's me!) moved to Anchorage.

As the second world war slowed and Morrison-Knudson completed its contracts in Alaska, Dad (called Smitty by his friends at that time) moved back to Cordova and purchased

Cordova Air Service.

In 1952 Dad was attempting to finance large transport size aircraft in order to expand the air service into a full-sized airline. He purchased a Douglas DC-3 which was to be used in scheduled service between Cordova, Valdez and Anchorage. In addition, the company anticipated using the aircraft to transport summer tourists into McCarthy via the May Creek airport. Dad had always dreamed of the day when McCarthy, Chisana and Chitina would boom again and he intended to help them do so.

In 1952 Dad found out that the Kennecott Copper Corporation was about to lay off their watch persons. Those folks lived in McCarthy and were friends of ours. This meant the Kennecott facility was available to anybody who wanted to look around. That same year, Dad and Mom purchased the building which is now the McCarthy Lodge from two other old McCarthy friends, Steve and Mary Pytel. In addition, Cordova Airlines purchased the old Golden Hotel and Bar and the structure that is now the "Ma Johnson Hotel."

Beginning in 1953 Cordova Air flew tourists into May Creek. From there they took them to McCarthy in an assortment of old vehicles like Model A Fords, an almost new 1937 Chevrolet sedan and a number of jeeps which had been flown in on Cordova's DC-3. After spending the night in one of the airline's McCarthy facilities, they were taken up to Kennecott on a "speeder" train operating on the old Copper River & Northwestern Railroad tracks. The tour was tremendously popular since a visit to Kennecott was

like stepping back in time. The stores were still stocked, beds made, the hospital looked and smelled like it was still in operation.

Again, circumstances intervened and in 1957 the tours had to cease as Kennecott Copper Corporation unexpectedly sold all their surface rights to a little known entrepreneur from the Seattle area. For some reason the company didn't shop around for other buyers. It is sad that the Territory of Alaska couldn't have acquired the property and used it exclusively as a tourist attraction.

Rumor had it that the Kennecott Corporation was worried about liability and had made a deal with the buyer to destroy all structures. Over the next 6 years the new owner stripped the property of almost everything that could be flown out, began hand picking and transporting some of the high grade copper ore that remained at the site and removed the rails between McCarthy and Kennecott. Fortunately, the buyer didn't have the heart to destroy the buildings so many still stand today.

During the period that Cordova Air Service flew tourists into McCarthy, Dad was a principal on the territory's

tourist advisory board. After the Kennecott disappointment, the company began flying its tourists to Dawson City in the Yukon Territory. The company continued to operate the McCarthy Lodge and some of the other buildings as well as provide seasonal service with its DC-3's. However, after the sale of Kennecott, its McCarthy area business was very slow.

When O.A. Nelson (legendary Chitina personality) died in 1961, Dad and two other

essentially gave the Chitina property away as well.

From a monetary standpoint Dad never made anything from any of these investments. One might question why Merle Smith didn't make a fortune after holding ownership to property that had quite a bit of value. In order to make money off of his Chitina or McCarthy townsite holdings he would have had to sell them piecemeal. Instead, he looked for buyers that would take it all

in one package with a promise that they would operate it. This was impractical since the Chitina and McCarthy economies weren't that substantial. So, the answer is simple—he never cared about personal wealth. His dream was to see the Copper/Chitina River country come alive again.

Mom was much the same way. My wife Donna and I

have a collection of artist Gail Niebrugge's Kennecott/McCarthy prints. Mom never seemed to care for them but it wasn't until just a few years before she died that I figured out why. The pictures of the weathered mining buildings made her sad. She liked to remember the area as it was when she lived there, an active industrial community with lots of hustle and bustle. →

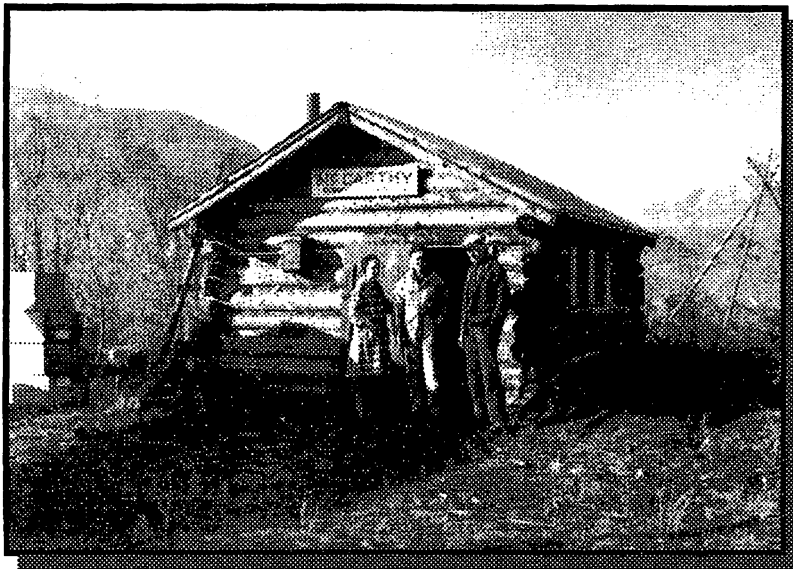


Photo courtesy Kenny Smith

LEFT TO RIGHT—BERTHA C. SMITH, MERLE K. SMITH, M.D. KIRKPATRICK AT MCCARTHY AIRSTRIP 1938

partners owned the Chitina Hotel and a little enterprise called Copper Valley Trading Company. Soon after O.A.'s death Copper Valley Trading purchased all of his property from the estate. O.A. had owned most of the Chitina townsite.

In 1968 Cordova Air merged with Alaska Airlines. At the time of the merger Dad gave the McCarthy interests to an old timer who once worked up at Kennecott. In the years following the merger Dad

McCarthy traffic trivia

BY JOHN ADAMS

If you are walking around McCarthy or Kennicott and get dusted by a passing vehicle and you start thinking that there is more traffic than you could remember from the past, you may be right.

My count of vehicles on the east side of the Kennicott River four years ago was 92—this year the count is 115. Of course some of these are no longer in operating condition, but the majority are. This number does not include motorcycles, 4-wheelers or snowmachines. (Is

it time to pave the road to Kennicott? It *would* keep the dust down!)

After a few phone calls I came up with the following statistics:

Anchorage has a population of approximately 254,859 permanent residents, has 1,937 miles of roads and 206,264 vehicles. In other words, .8 vehicles and .008 mile of road for each resident.

McCarthy/Kennicott has a population of about 20 permanent residents, 5 miles of

roads and 115 vehicles. That makes 5.75 vehicles for each person with .25 mile/person to drive it on.

The bottom line? I think it is better to live in McCarthy than Anchorage. We may have 6 times the number of vehicles per person, but since you can only drive one at a time that helps even the odds. Add the fact that we have a short summer season, after which we mainly use snowmachines—but that is another story.

12th Annual Alaska Mountain Classic ski race

BY RICK KENYON

On April third the first of the contestants in the 12th annual Alaska Mountain Classic Ski Race arrived in McCarthy. They had left Devils Mtn. Lodge in Nabesna on March 29. The winners this year were Gabe Lydic and Eric Lindscoog, who also won in 1997. There were 14 starters in the race, and 10

people finished.

Racers had a choice of three routes. The main route was through Cooper Pass to Chisana, from there to Skolai Pass, down Skolai Creek to the Nizina Glacier and on to McCarthy. More experienced racers could shave miles by going down the Rohn Glacier or

up the Nabesna Glacier to the Rohn or Regal Glacier, then south down the Nizina Glacier.

This race has been held in different locations every 3 years. The first race was held between Black Rapids and McKinley Park and was won in 2 ½ days by Art Ward and Sue Forbes.

Liquor license in Limbo

BY RICK KENYON

Notice was posted at the mail shack of a limited liquor (beer and wine) license application by the Glacier View Campground this past winter. The Campground is located on the west side of the Kennicott River about a half mile from the footbridge. The notice was also run in the Copper River

Country Journal during February. In March, area residents received letters asking for input on the application.

Since several of our readers had asked about the status of this application, we phoned the Alcohol Control Board (ABC) as we were going to press on April 23. We were told that

although many letters were received by the ABC, no application has ever been submitted by Glacier View Campground. The board will retain the letters, but since the application must be filed within 90 days of posting notification, it is unlikely that the license will be further pursued.

"No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent."—Abraham Lincoln

Copper River caribou history, life, and management

BY LEE R. ADLER

Lake Louise Airstrip,
Alaska, June 16, 1956.

The U.S. Airforce C-47 with a red tail circled the small gravel airstrip several times before the pilot finally felt that it was safe to land. After a bumpy landing followed by strong braking by the pilot, the passengers and their gear were dumped off. The four airmen, which I was one of, had 5 days to spend at the Lake Louise R & R camp, with visions of catching boat loads of lake trout; we did quite well and did catch many lake trout.

That was 42 years ago and was the first time that I set foot in the Copper River Valley. Little did I know that I would return 13 years later as a wildlife biologist for the BLM, stationed at Glennallen. About the same time in 1956, another biologist named Ronald O. Skoog was starting an 8 year doctorate study of the Nelchina caribou herd. I have never had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Skoog, but I greatly admire the man and have drawn heavily from his thesis in writing this report.

History

The first written record of caribou in the Copper River Valley is from the Russian explorer, Sereberinikoff, whose party killed 4 caribou near Tazlina Lake in 1848. Caribou were apparently abundant at that time.

The next explorers to make mention of caribou were U.S. Army Lieutenants Glenn and Allen, in 1898 - 99. By this time caribou were very scarce in the Copper River country.

They did take note of caribou drift fences that had been built by native hunters in the Copper and Chitina River valleys. These fences were used to cause migrating caribou to funnel through narrow gaps where they were ambushed and killed by native hunters for food. Although no caribou have lived in the Chitina valley in modern times, the drift fences, game trails and old caribou antlers show that they were abundant there during the second half of the 1800's.

Before the advent of firearms the native hunters used spears and bows to kill caribou. In addition to the use of drift fences, they also used canoes which they built to spear caribou while they crossed lakes. (Skoog 1962), interviewed the late Jimmy Secondchief of Mendeltna. As a young man he accompanied his elders as far as Clarence Lake and helped them spear caribou from canoes. These Ahtna Indians had a trail system that encompassed the whole Copper River Basin, and these hunters had to carry the meat 40 miles back to their villages. Part of this trail system still exists and can be seen by a trained observer from an aircraft. The trail that Secondchief used was possibly the trail from Mendeltna to Old Man Lake, and thence to Clarence Lake.

A friend who knew Jimmy Secondchief since 1953 related to me a story: Another native had shot and wounded a moose and lost the trail. He talked to Jimmy, who stated, "I find moose and pack 'em out." Jimmy did just that; and all by himself.

During the winter of 1924, large numbers of caribou from the 40 mile herd which lives north of the Alaska range, migrated south into the Copper River country through Isabel and Mentasta passes. These animals mingled with the local Nelchina animals. It is not known how many of these caribou stayed in the Copper River area.

Harry Johns, a long time Copper Center native, recalls in the fall-winter of 1927, thousands of caribou migrating south through Isabel Pass into the Copper River. He recalls that until then he had not seen many caribou in his hunting territory.

These mass migrations have proved typical for caribou statewide in Alaska. When local herds buildup to high populations, they tend to make fall-winter migrations into new winter range. This is known as overflow, and is sometimes very distant from their home range.

Dr. Skoog feels that his studies show that all Alaskan caribou are of the same species—*Rangifer Tarandus Granti*, the Tundra Caribou. It is also his opinion that all six regional subpopulations have intercourse with neighboring herds at some time during their cycles.

The Nelchina caribou herd has tended to cycle from high to low about every 50 years. Low populations occurred during the 1890's, 1940's, and 1970's. High caribou populations occurred during the 1860's, 1920's, and 1960's. Low population numbers are not well established, but under natural conditions on the

Nelchina range would be about 20,000 caribou. Skoog estimated a high population of 86,000 Nelchina caribou in 1964.

The all time low in Nelchina caribou occurred in the spring of 1972, when only 9,000 caribou were counted on the calving grounds on the east slopes of the Talkeetna mountains. I was a biologist at that time and participated in that count. This was not part of the natural cycle, but was a very unfortunate management error. From 1967 to 1972 no counts were made of the Nelchina herd. During these years the number of hunters had increased along with the introduction of the snow machine to hunters. The results were disastrous.

The fall population of about 25,000 caribou was reduced to about 9,000. The hunter caribou harvest for the 1971-72 season was about 13,000. Predation and other natural deaths accounted for the other losses. Through cautious management the Nelchina herd had increased back to about 45,000 animals by 1994.

Food Supply

Caribou tend to be on the move except when they are bedded down. Caribou have little tendency to overgraze. Unlike other grazing animals, caribou tend to graze lightly.

In the spring the caribou favor willow buds and catkins, green leaves of dwarf birch, and some sedges and grasses. They particularly like the new spring growth as it comes forth.

The summer vegetation provides a smorgasbord for caribou. They feed heavily on dwarf birch leaves and buds, willow leaves, all new growth of grass, sedge and forbs. Also, low lying browse such as bearberry, lingonberry, crowberry, ledum, and mushrooms. This is the period of the year when the caribou replaces body fat lost during the winter and have their most



photo courtesy Lee Adler

AUTHOR WITH NELCHINA BULL CARIBOU 1990.

rapid growth rate. Lichens are not an important food in the summer.

During the summer they tend to work their way up the mountains and live almost entirely above the timberline. Now their worst enemy is the clouds of flies and mosquitoes which hound them constantly. They seek refuge on windy ridges, snowfields, and sometimes by running at full speed to escape the bugs. At the end of their runs they assume a heads down-still posture, somehow hoping the insects will not rediscover them. They do though.

During the fall there is a transition to a more Spartan

diet. Early in the fall willow, dwarf birch leaves and mushrooms are still favored, but soon sedges and lichens tend to increase in importance. A 1954 sampling of 91 rumens from Nelchina caribou during September showed: 31% lichens, 23% sedge-grass, and 41% browse mostly willow leaves.

Winter for the caribou lasts from about October 15 - April 15. The mature bulls enter this period following the rut and are depleted of body fat, and are generally in poor condition. The rut or breeding season is centered around the first two weeks of October.

During this time their food supply is predominantly sedge-grass and lichens; a maintenance diet only. Skoog examined 600 rumens of Lake Louise flat caribou from October to

January and found the food to be 50% sedge-grass, and 30% lichen. The remainder is low browse and horsetail.

Migrations and Movements

About the only area that is consistently used by the Nelchina caribou herd is its calving grounds. This includes the east slopes of the Talkeetna mountains above timberline, on the upper reaches of the Nelchina River, Oshetna River, Black River, Kosina Creek, and the other creeks in the area. Most caribou calves are dropped during the last 10 days of May. Caribou drop only single calves and they tend to double their size in the first two weeks

of life. They are also very active and well developed at birth.

As already mentioned, caribou tend to move upwards in elevation during the summer. For most of the Nelchina herd, this means the upper reaches of the Talkeetna mountains. By September, the herd begins its move to winter range. During my 29 years of observation, this has often meant the Lake Louise flats, the area around Eureka, or the wooded lands along the Gulkana, Gakona, and Chistochina rivers. During the 1971-72 winter, a majority of the Nelchina herd wintered along the Nabesna Road where they were harvested very heavily by hunters. During the 1982-83 winter most of the Nelchina caribou crossed the Copper River between Gakona and Slana, and wintered on the west slopes of the Wrangell mountains.

Since about 1979 the Nelchina herd has been forsaking its normal winter range in the Copper River Basin and migrating into the Yukon Territory east of Tok, Alaska. Happily for Alaskans, they migrate back to their traditional calving grounds in the Talkeetna mountains.

Another oddity was the erratic movement of the herd following the volcanic eruption of Mt. Spurr in September 1992. This eruption dumped about 2 inches of volcanic ash over parts of the Copper River Valley, centered around

Glennallen. The caribou were seen as far south as Tonsina Lake and around the Kenny Lake area—areas where caribou are not normally found.

Overflow and Subpopulations

Although the Nelchina herd is fairly well established as a definite herd, there are at least three subpopulations of caribou that were derived from the overflow from the parent herd. These are the Mentasta herd, Chisana herd, and the Delta herd. These populations have developed their own calving grounds and are autonomous in that regard. Dr. Skoog arrives at this conclusion in his theses; he even believes that the once extinct Kenai herd came from the Nelchina herd. This herd was last seen about 1912.

The Mentasta subpopulation was an important part of local hunters' food supply until 1990. In 1964, Skoog estimated the Mentasta herd population at 5,000 animals. By 1997 the population had been reduced to 614 caribou. (Park Service count). A five year study, 1992-1997, of caribou calves on this population showed that wolf and bear predation eliminated almost 100% of the calves by September.

This same area has also experienced dramatic decreases in moose and Dall sheep populations. My own estimate of the total decrease in caribou, sheep, and moose populations in the Wrangell Mountains

would be 80 to 90%—due mainly to an increase in wolf and grizzly predation, following the creation of the Park in 1980. In the case of moose, the decrease may be due in part to the change in vegetation from browse to a more climax spruce type.

The Future

Factors working against Alaska caribou are: blocking of ancestral migration routes, harassment by snowmobiles, excess predation and excess harvest by hunters. In other words, a management blunder by authorities.

Dr. Skoog does not feel that food supply is a problem with caribou, and until proven otherwise, I tend to agree with him. Modern game biologists tend to set the desired population goals at a predetermined number and manage toward that end. This may prevent the caribou populations from reaching high enough numbers to overflow into surrounding habitat and replenishing depleted herds, such as the Mentasta subpopulation. Another management tool to restore depleted caribou herds is the temporary reduction of wolves and bears in calving areas.

In conclusion, I would like to say that with wise management, our tundra caribou will continue to prosper and always be with us. If we fail, we will have only ourselves to blame.

CLASSIFIED

FOR SALE: IBM PS-1 computer with color monitor, Windows 3.1 and Star color printer. Good working condition. \$275 or best offer.

Contact Audrey Edwards @ 554-4414

Fuel cells for rural power generation

BY RICK KENYON

One of the challenges we "bush dwellers" in Alaska face is electricity—either doing without, or producing our own. If you are a long-time WSEN reader, you might remember that we have talked about several of the methods of generating power in past issues—solar and diesel-powered gensets. To put it real simply, solar enthusiasts toot their horn about *quiet*, safe power production, while genset boosters trumpet the fact that they get power when they *want* it, not when nature decides to grant it. If only there were a way to have both...

Enter the fuel cell. Imagine. An efficient, non-polluting power source that produces no noise and has no moving parts. While it sounds like science-fiction, just such equipment has been in use in spacecraft since the 1960's. The problem? High cost. That may soon change.

I first became aware of fuel cells last November, when the major news media announced a breakthrough in technology that would allow vehicles powered by fuel cells to use gasoline as a fuel. One of the drawbacks to using them in non-stationary situations has been the fuel requirement—fuel cells run on hydrogen, which brings to mind images of exploding dirigibles and other unpleasant sights. Factor in that few existing gas stations have hydrogen at their pumps, and the motivation to develop fuel cells quickly cooled. The possibility of using existing

infrastructure and a fuel most people feel comfortable with (as well as huge government perks for development of "enviro-friendly" technologies) got at least one major automobile manufacturer, Chrysler, to announce plans for a proof-of-concept car to be

I spoke with Dan Rastler, Target Manager, Distributed Generation at EPRI, and asked him how much it would cost for WSEN to obtain one of the test units. "About \$90,000," was his frank reply. Sensing my dismay, he quickly told me they "project that the unit will cost

"Imagine. An efficient, non-polluting power source that produces no noise and has no moving parts."

unveiled in 1999.

So, what do cars have to do with generating electricity in McCarthy? Hopefully, if Chrysler is successful (Ford and G.M. are also working on fuel cell powered vehicles, burning straight hydrogen or methanol rather than gasoline) the price of the technology will plummet. But whether this new technology gains widespread acceptance for transportation or not, development of fuel cells for power generation is underway.

The Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) and American Power Corporation of Boston, Mass., have announced a collaborative alliance to field test and evaluate small, 3 kW fuel cell systems for the residential and commercial markets. The tests will evaluate up to 25 "alpha series" 3 kW prototype fuel cell systems to assess their technical and economic potential for serving residential and commercial markets with power requirements in the 1 - 50 kW range. A typical residence uses 1-2 kW over a 24 hour period.

approximately \$5,000 when it moves from prototype to moderate volume production." Dubbed the Residential Power Generator, (RPG) each unit produces 3 kW net power from two fuel cell stacks and utilizes an "environmentally friendly" battery technology to meet 10 kW peak loads. During off-peak periods, the batteries are recharged by the fuel cells.

A fuel cell converts energy directly, without combustion, by combining hydrogen and oxygen electrochemically to produce water, electricity, and heat—all useful products for us bush-dwellers. When fueled with pure hydrogen, they produce no pollutant emissions. They offer significant improvements in energy efficiency as they remove the intermediate step of combustion and mechanical devices such as turbines and pistons. Unlike conventional systems their high efficiency is not compromised by small sizes. Also, unlike conventional plants, they operate at high efficiency at part load.

Fuel cell cogeneration plants (plants that produce

both electricity and hot water) have demonstrated unprecedented reliability and durability that is significantly better than conventional competitive equipment. The absence of combustion and moving parts means that fuel cells can run continuously for long periods of time before servicing and that they are far less prone to breakdown or forced outages. They can use hydrogen derived from a variety of sources—two of the more

popular being natural gas and propane.

Our own Eric Yould, who, when not at his homestead cabin near the Nizina River spends time in Anchorage as the Executive Director of the Alaska Rural Electric Cooperative Association, gave us his comments on fuel cells: "Frankly, I think that fuel cells may well be the energy production medium of the future. Certainly they will find their place in central station

generation, but perhaps their greater value will be to the individual home owner. A 5 kw fuel cell in your home will be able to replace your need for central station generation, but it will also replace your hot water heater as well. By providing energy for both of these household demands, it is estimated that we will be able to increase the thermal efficiency of the feedstock to about 80%." ☺

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Good News from the Wrangells

BY BONNIE KENYON

My greatest desire in writing *Good News from the Wrangells* is to let you know that no matter where you are on earth, no matter what your circumstances are in life, there is Someone who loves you and yearns to enrich your life. Recently, friend and WSEN subscriber Tonia Alexander of Wasilla forwarded an Email that enriched me. A few days later my friend Wendy Cobbett of North Pole sent a copy of the same story, and I want to pass it on to you.

The Collection

Years ago, there was a very wealthy man who, with his devoted young son, shared a passion for art collecting. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection.

Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others adorned the walls of the family estate. The widowed elder man looked on with satisfaction as his only child became an experienced art collector. The son's trained eye and sharp business mind caused his father to beam with pride as they dealt with art collectors round the world.

As winter approached, war engulfed the nation and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram. His beloved son was missing in action. The art collector anxiously awaited more news, fearing he would never see his son again. Within

days, his fears were confirmed. The young man had died while rushing a fellow soldier to a medic.

Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness. The joy of the season—a season that he and his son had so looked forward to—would visit his house no longer.

On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he walked to the door, the masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. As he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hand. He introduced himself to the man by saying, "I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few moments? I have something to show you."

As the two began to talk, the soldier told of how the man's son had told everyone of his—not to mention his father's—love of fine art.

"I'm an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give you this." As the old man unwrapped the package, the paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man's son.

Though the world would never consider it the work of a genius, the painting featured the young man's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man thanked the soldier, promising to hang the picture above the fireplace.

A few hours later, after the

soldier had departed, the old man set about his task. True to his word, the painting went above the fireplace, pushing aside thousands of dollars of paintings. And then the man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given.

During the days and weeks that followed, the man realized that even though his son was no longer with him, the boy's life would live on because of those he had touched. He would soon learn that his son had rescued dozens of wounded soldiers before a bullet stilled his caring heart.

As the stories of his son's gallantry continued to reach him, fatherly pride and satisfaction began to ease the grief. The painting of his son soon became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest in the pieces for which museums around the world clamored. He told his neighbors it was the greatest gift he had ever received.

The following spring, the old man became ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation. With the collector's passing, and his only son dead, those paintings would be sold at an auction. According to the will of the old man, all of the art works would be auctioned on Christmas day, the day he had received his greatest gift. The day soon arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. Dreams would be fulfilled this day; greatness would be achieved as many

would claim "I have the greatest collection."

The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid.

The room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked.

Minutes passed. No one spoke. From the back of the room came, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. Let's forget it and go on to the good stuff." More voices echoed in agreement. "No, we have to sell this one first," replied the auctioneer.

"Now, who will take the son?" Finally, a friend of the old man spoke.

"Will you take ten dollars for the painting? That's all I have. I knew the boy, so I'd like to have it."

"I have ten dollars. Will anyone go higher?" called the

auctioneer. After more silence, the auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice. Gone." The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room and someone exclaimed, "Now we can get on with it and we can bid on these treasures!"

The auctioneer looked at the audience and announced the auction was over. Stunned disbelief quieted the room. Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? We didn't come here for a picture of some old guy's son. What about all of these paintings? There are millions of dollars of art here! I demand that you explain what's going on here!"

The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son...gets it all."

Puts things into perspective, doesn't it? Just as those art collectors discovered on that Christmas day, the message is still the same—the love of a

Father—a Father whose greatest joy came from his son who went away and gave his life rescuing others. And because of that Father's love... whoever takes the Son, gets it all.

At church this last Sunday, George Cebula shared an inspirational note which he received from the Alaska Radio Mission Station KNOM out of Nome which says: *God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.* Just in case no one has told you lately... you are "greatly" loved. I leave you with a scripture that says it all.

"For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He (even) gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life." John 3:16 Amplified Version

Friends of Kennicott plan their future

BY BONNIE KENYON

Anticipating acquisition of Kennicott's major industrial buildings and approximately 2,825 acres of surrounding land, Friends of Kennicott, (a non-profit organization) and the National Park Service are thinking about how this public resource might be managed.

Since 1994, Friends has recommended non-governmental, non-profit operation and management. To quote from their Second Annual Report dated March 25, 1998, "The National Park Service is conceptually supportive of this approach to minimize a bureaucratic presence, reduce

expenditure of public funds and take advantage of local expertise. If willing and able, one or more non-profit organizations such as Friends could, for example, manage an adaptive reuse program, provide guide services, manage compatible commercial enterprises, and conduct ongoing stabilization."

A Planning Process Committee, chaired by Ben Shaine, was set up to "work with the Park Service to design a process for determining a long term vision for management of Kennicott." A Kennicott-based meeting is being planned for sometime in

June between the NPS, local residents, Friends of Kennicott and other interested parties.

Rich Kirkwood, president of Friends, and chairman for the Legal Structures committee, has begun looking into the benefits and detriments of Friends assuming full management of Kennicott. According to a committee report at the Board of Directors meeting in March, "Under a full management regime, Friends apparently would not be able to serve as a local advocacy group while simultaneously operating the site in the national interest on behalf of the NPS."

OUR TOWN

May 1923 June

LOCALS

Jack Schultz departed on the Wednesday local to take a position with the C.R. & N.W. He is employed on the Chitina River bridge, which is expected to go out any hour.

Mr. Huddleston was a passenger to Chitina on Wednesday's train. He wishes to announce the fact that the Nizina bridge is open for foot traffic if the pedestrians can walk over on a plank over running water. He also states that anyone using the foot bridge will have to hunt the way to it, as no road has been cut yet.

The contract for getting out a large number of mining timbers to be used at Kennecott was completed this week. Mr. Trimm who held the contract reports that he made out very well. Prior to completing the work, Mr. Trimm suffered a very painful accident while loading a car of logs the scaffold gave away, and Mr. Trimm sustained a badly bruised arm and a strained back. It was a first thought that one of the bones in the forearm was broken but examination showed nothing more than a bad bruise.

Malloy, who has been associated with Mr. Trimm in his logging contract left town Wednesday to go on a few weeks' hunting trip.

Bill Berry and Andy Taylor have been employed by the Dan Creek Mining

Company to put their telephone line in good working order. They began on the job early Monday morning. Bill states that the line is badly grounded in different places.

Thursday Mrs. Brenewick and Leonard moved to the ranch for the summer. Olav Holtet hauled the furniture, as Pete is out on the creeks.

Olav states that he is going to go to work for Pete Johnson getting out logs. Pete is reported to be getting out a good lot of long lumber. The mill is said to be working every day.

LET'S CLEAN UP!

Several people have cleaned up in front of the houses and the rest of the town looks all the worse. We suggest that all those who haven't cleaned up (this includes us) would do well to take a little outdoor exercise.

Even though we don't expect the President or any speech makers from over Washington way to drop in on us for a talkfest, we never can tell about when a committee from the city of gestures might drop in, to investigate something or another.

Anyway what's the use of having a rake if you don't use it?

May 5

LOCALS

Word was received on the last mail that C. F. M. Cole, former publisher of

the News, has been issued final certificate of mineral entry for the Cole Bench placer claim. Frank states that he spent two weeks in Juneau straightening up some important matters pertaining to his patent. This property adjoins the Andrus holdings on Chittitu Creek and is considered rich by many prospectors who have been over the ground.

The stage drivers put in a few strenuous hours of work at Blackburn Tuesday evening saving the Kennecott road from washing away when a flood came in the gully which crosses the road by the extinct community. Sig had the misfortune to fall in the drink and get thoroughly soused.

May 12

KENNECOTT ROAD TO BE PUT IN GOOD SHAPE IMMEDIATELY

Tuesday evening the McCarthy Commercial Club met to inaugurate ways and means to get the Kennecott road in shape for summer and winter traffic.

After some discussion, a committee composed of Capt. Hubrick and Judge Coppennoll was appointed to wait on Mr. Neiding and ascertain what the Copper corporation was willing to do about the upper end of the road. Mr. Neiding stated that the Corporation would put on a crew to fix the road as far as the graveyard, on the lower end of the

Company's property, if the citizens of McCarthy would put the rest of the trail in shape.

The committee agreed to act upon the matter, so accordingly a subscription list was started and three hundred dollars was collected the first evening.

Actual work will begin during the course of a few days.

A good road is a long felt need both to the employees at Kennecott and the citizens at McCarthy and will undoubtedly increase traffic between the towns.

LOCALS

The strawberry plants are in bloom at the Iverson ranch.

George Marhoffer tried to ford Young Creek a couple of days ago and nearly succeeded in getting rolled. Young is running bank full.

Capt. Hubrick has begun the construction of a plank walk from Riverside Drive to First Avenue. He is also constructing a new street crossing at First and McCarthy.

NEW PAPER IN MCCARTHY

The Kid's Gazette, the latest publication to enter the newspaper field in Alaska will make its initial appearance on the McCarthy streets Sunday. The paper will be managed by Deanie O'Neill and Marion Wills. The

publishers of the new sheet have made arrangements with the News to obtain a small press and body type. The new paper will publish facts without fear or favor. It is entirely non partisan and will not be affiliated with any particular brand of politics.

The sheet will be about 7 x 9 inches.

May 19

KENNECOTT MAN HAS NARROW ESCAPE

Metallurgical Engineer Lawrence, employed in the capacity of leaching plant superintendent by the Kennecott Corporation, is going around shaking hands with himself over his recent escape from a rather dangerous accident. In some way Mr. Lawrence became entangled in a shaft and took several trips around before he was released. As he was hardly bruised his many friends are coming around to see who buys the cigars.

WEATHER

Four inches of snow fell at the Green Butte on Monday night May 21. Another such misdemeanor on the part of the weather man, and Alaska won't be any better than the great Outside, where they are always having something out of season.

May 26

LOCAL MAN SUSTAINS PAINFUL INJURY

Thursday evening Wm. Reid suffered a rather severe accident that resulted in his being confined in the hospital.

Reid, accompanied by Bill Hair started for

Kennecott in a Ford roadster, the property of the McCarthy Garage, and as they were passing the local roundhouse of the Copper River & Northwestern something went wrong with the steering gear, and the car attempted to crawl up the side of the building.

Hair managed to jump out in time to prevent himself from being in the smashup, but as Reid was driving he had to sit and take it.

As soon as he could be extricated from the wreck, it was discovered that one of his legs was useless; so he was immediately taken to the hospital. An examination proved that the hip bone was cracked. Dr. Gillespie states that the patient should be on his feet in a short time.

All of his friends are extremely sorry for Bill's misfortune but they are also glad that the accident was not more serious.

June 2

WORK ON RR TUNNEL IS DIFFICULT

The work of changing the RR tunnel at Chitina to an open cut is progressing rather more slowly than was at first expected, owing to the fact that the contractor, O. A. Nelson, is striking frozen gravel. He has piped water thru the town from two gulches, and has flumed the intake four hundred feet. This gives him sufficient water for a six inch head.

The water, carrying off the muck, falls into an excavation at the north end of the tunnel and from that point finds egress to the river by another tunnel.

LOCALS

Frank Iverson received notice today that his homestead patent had been issued.

Mrs. Eckstrom and her two little children were visitors in McCarthy Friday.

Mr. And Mrs. Pete Johnson were in town Sunday. While here they moved their equipment out of the old McCarthy Café.

John Barrett finished a three hundred gallon storage tank for water, to be used in case of a fire. The tank is full.

June 9

CHITINA GOSSIP

A telegraph construction crew came in over the trail this week from the summit. They were the first party over this year and report a hard trip.

They were ten days making Copper Center. There is a large quantity of snow in Thompson's Pass.

NEW RIFLE RANGE AT KENNECOTT

The Kennecott Rifle Club has just finished clearing a new plot of ground that is to be used this summer for the new six hundred yard range. The members have also constructed new firing points, and erected new butts with a safety pit twenty by four feet, and nine feet deep.

Practice on the new range is to begin in a short time, and a bunch of good scores are in the offing.

The Rifle Club is also contemplating taking over the equipment of the defunct shotgun club. This equipment consists of shells, guns, pigeon traps and clay pigeons. All

members of the Rifle Club who wish to practice with the scatter guns will pay an extra assessment to defray the cost of ammunition.

Later on, members of the dual club expect to do some active work with pistols.

CHITINA LOCALS

The railway station at Chitina has been slightly remodeled to accommodate the family of the new agent, W. B. Masecar.

June 16

FIRE AT PETE JOHNSON'S RANCH

A fire at the Johnson ranch last Friday completely destroyed the tool house, burning all the tools. Fortunately, the fire did not spread to the sawmill or other buildings.

June 23

WATER WASHES AWAY BRIDGE ABUTMENTS

During the high water on the Nizina River, four of the abutments of the falsework done on the Nizina River bridge last winter by the A. R. C. were washed out.

FOREST FIRES AT MILE 114

Mr. Slimpert, who returned on Thursday to Chitina from his mining claims at Mile 109 reports that big forest fires are raging just north of mile 114. The region is well timbered and a good year for fur bearing animals.

On days that the wind was from the south the smoke was thick in Chitina.

June 30

Alaska Chickadees Stick to What They Know

BY NED ROZELL

Abby Hawkins wants to know if you've seen her birds.

Abby is a fifth-grader at Pearl Creek Elementary School in Fairbanks. In a science project, she asked: "How far does a chickadee roam?" I'm sure many feeder watchers have asked the same question while watching the birds appear as puff balls on cold days. Abby decided to try and find out.

Using a permit owned by the Alaska Bird Observatory and a few of the observatory's bird traps, Abby captured birds near her home in Fairbanks.

Anna-Marie Barber of the bird observatory helped Abby place tiny, colored bands on the legs of 29 chickadees (18 boreal and 11 black-capped). With the bands, the birds appear to wear colored socks on their right legs.

Abby uses binoculars to check chickadees she sees for the color bands, and that's where she needs some help. More on that later.

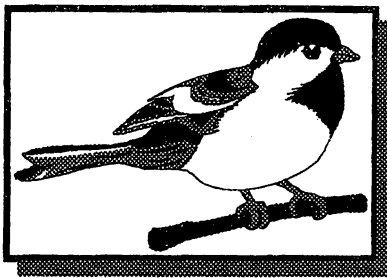
In a few months of chickadee-watching, Abby has seen or recaptured 16 of the 29 banded chickadees near her home in Fairbanks. She has also seen another chickadee that was banded by a biologist at his home more than three miles away.

Her preliminary evidence suggests that chickadees stay pretty close to home. She gets no argument from the experts. Pierre Deviche and Susan Sharbaugh both study chickadees at the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Institute of Arctic Biology.

"They are probably the most

sedentary little guys up here," Deviche said of chickadees. During winter, the birds might not stray more than a few acres. Researchers in Minnesota found chickadee flocks ranged over about 40 acres there, but Deviche said Alaska chickadees probably travel less because of the energy costs of living in extremely cold weather.

Chickadees may roam a bit farther later in the summer. Birds that hatch in the spring sometimes cover a few miles before they find a new home.



Sharbaugh mentioned studies done in the Lower 48 where mated pairs of chickadees bred in territories ranging from four to 20 acres. That's still a pretty small world in which to spend your entire life.

Before I get back to Abby, a few chickadee questions have perched on my desk. Edward Smith of Payson, Arizona, sent a letter in which he asked for "some clarification as to the origin, meaning and derivation of the name chickadee." The lexicographers of the Oxford English Dictionary wrote that the name stems from the birds' song.

"Chickadee" is a North American invention of someone who spoke the word some time between the days of Columbus and Henry David Thoreau, who

used it in 1838. "Chickadee" is not used in Europe, where this bird is known as don't giggle-the tit.

Eric Troyer of Fairbanks wanted to know where chickadees and redpolls get their water in the winter. He assumed they eat snow, but wondered if eating snow might cool down tiny bodies already engaged in a battle against heat loss. Sharbaugh said the birds do get their water from snow. She pointed out that anything they eat in the winter—insects wedged in bark, sunflower seeds—is frozen. Snow may be the warmest thing they ingest in an Alaska winter.

Back to Abby Hawkins. She would like a message from you if you see any of her color-banded birds. If you see one, write down the band colors starting with the top band ("red over blue"), and get in touch with me at (907) 474-7468 or send me an e-mail at nrozell@gi.alaska.edu. I'll pass the message to Abby so she can stick a pin in her map to represent the spot where the chickadee was seen.

Of course, according to Abby's early results, she doesn't expect any sightings from New York, Anchorage or too far outside Fairbanks. If you live near Abby, in the area between Ester Dome and the University of Alaska, keep an eye on the feeder for chickadees with colorful leggings. Abby thanks you.

This column is provided as a public service by the Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska Fairbanks, in cooperation with the UAF research community. Ned Rozell is a science writer at the institute. He can be reached on e-mail at nrozell@gi.alaska.edu.

the Languid Lady

Wildflowers of the Wrangells—Part 1: "Early Bloomers"

BY DEE FRADY

One of my earliest childhood memories occurs in a stroller, being pushed by my mother, as she points out and names all the wildflowers. In later years, there were countless trips and hikes to identify and transplant flowers to our rock garden. Also, my father enjoyed taking us to visit various botanical gardens. From that start I've had a lifelong love affair with plants.

This article is designed primarily to cover plants native to the McCarthy area and possibly other related topics. I use the word cover loosely as I cannot begin to mention the hundreds of varieties that occur! I can profile and share observations of a few.

Every late April and May I look for certain harbingers of the summer. Here are some of the earliest to bloom and my favorites to spot.

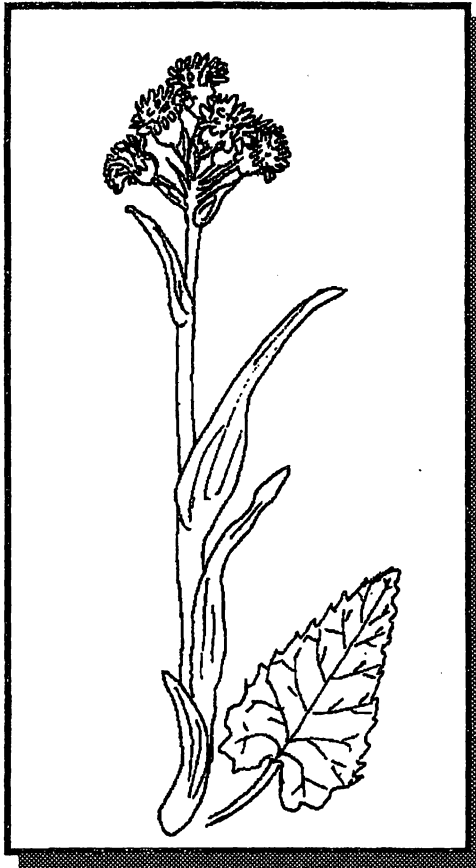
ARROWLEAF COLTSFOOT

(*Petasites sagittatus*)

Aster/Composite Family

This interesting plant blooms before the leaves fully develop (Son Before Father). The thick, hairy stalk, 12-16" tall, has a cluster of white, daisy-like (disk) flowers on top. These often have a yellow or purplish tinge which later develop into white dandelion-like puffs as they go to seed. The leaves are large and

triangular shaped. They often hybridize with *P. frigidus* and like wet places. Historically, Coltsfoot has been used for medicinal purposes in a variety of ways such as a cough remedy (Coughwort) or astringent.



ARROWLEAF COLTSFOOT
(BLOOMS BEFORE LEAVES DEVELOP)

Other uses have been as a popular smoking herb (British Tobacco), yellow-green dye for wool and processing the leaves for a salt substitute. Coltsfoot was the symbol of French

pharmacies.

In late April, I always find many Coltsfoot shoots pushing up through the bare ground around our chicken coop and under the large spruce nearby. Actually, the chicken coop is really a storage shed as a grizzly ate all our chickens long ago!

WILD CROCUS/PASQUE FLOWER (*Pulsatilla patens*) Crowfoot/Buttercup Family

This is one of the first flowers to appear in spring and resembles the domestic garden crocus. Related to the anemones, the large, cup-shaped, light to dark violet flower has 5 to 8 pointed sepals on top of a stout, hairy stem, about 8" tall. They like steep slopes or south-facing bluffs. Can be transplanted, seeds less easily.

In late April or early May we always spot Wild Crocus on our first spring pilgrimage to Anchorage. They grow on the rock face of the infamous McCarthy Road, "Hug-A-Boulder-Bend" (thankfully, now posted with signs). Nearby, along the south-facing slopes of the Chitina River they grow in profusion.

WINDFLOWER (*Anemone parviflora*) Crowfoot Family (Named for birdfoot pattern of leaves.)

A lovely plant that blossoms as soon as the snow melts. A single, white flower with a yellow center rises above the leaves 6-8" and sways in each breeze, hence the common name. The five rounded, white sepals (outer, floral "leaves") may have a bluish tinge on the underside. Leaves are whorled in 3's on upper stem and have dark veins, unlike the yellow anemone. Likes meadows, stony slopes, snow flushes. Can transplant or seed. ALL anemones are poisonous!

Behind our cabin on Smokey Mountain, in late April, we find Windflowers growing in large beds on the south-facing slopes where the snow melts first. By the way, Smokey Mountain is our name for a flank of Fireweed because of all those black bears we have watched on the hillside over the years.

FAIRY SLIPPER/CALYPSO ORCHID (*Calypso bulbosa*)
Orchid Family

This fragrant flower may well be the most beautiful of our native orchids. It produces a rose-pink 'slipper' (sac-like lower flower) on a slender stem, 3-8" tall. The single, rounded, deeply veined leaf which grows close to the ground is evergreen and stays so through the winter. However, the soon wilting leaf dies when the flower appears and new leaves appear in August. This orchid is found in woody, mossy terrain, often on rotting wood. Probably semi-parasitic. Transplants.

One of the most pleasant surprises was to discover large patches of Fairy Slippers all over our property. I have a favorite patch on our path to the outhouse. Every May 1st I start watching for the first buds to appear. Needless to say, it

makes those daily trips more interesting.

BEAUTIFUL JACOB'S LADDER
(*Polemonium pulcherrimum*)
Polemonium/Phlox Family

A very showy, "early bloomer" which is also an outstanding wildflower for cultivation. Flowers are sky blue or rarely, white with a yellow 'eye' in the center. Leaves are many and opposing (ladder-like, hence name) on short, 8-14" tall, well branched stems. Likes dry, rocky, sunny habitats. Transplants and grows from seed easily. Will bloom all season if not allowed to form seed. Not to be confused with the taller variety, which does not have a yellow "eye" and blooms much later. Beautiful Jacob's Ladder generally is in full bloom the last week of May and an early source of nectar for bees. At one time was used to combat rabies, in what manner, I do not know.

These beauties grow everywhere on the roadsides in McCarthy as well as gravel areas on the west side of the Kennicott River. I have often seen them in full bloom the first week of May on south-facing rocks in the Kuskulana area.

ARCTIC LUPINE (*Lupinus arcticus*) Pea Family

A striking plant which is on everyone's list of favorites. The pale blue to purple, often bi-colored flowers are shaped like pea blossoms. They grow in an erect spike on a large, hollow stalk which bears palmate, or lobed, many-fingered leaves. There is often hybridizing with *L. nootkatensis*. Depending on species they grow 10 to 36" tall. Seed pods develop as the plant matures. These as well as the

leaves are considered poisonous. Actually are closely related to the locoweeds. Lupine like an open habitat of fields, roadsides or alpine meadows in dry, well-drained soil. Older plants are more difficult to transplant but seedlings can be easily moved. Can also start from seed. One attribute includes the ability to add nitrogen to the soil, making it richer for other plant life. These are also plant pioneers being one of the first to appear past glacial recessions.

A visual treat, Lupine grow everywhere in our area and can be enjoyed from the roadsides to meadows filled with these showy spikes. By mid-May I always watch for the 'early bloomers' at Swift Creek. Occasionally, some have been seen to grow almost pure white.

This list is by no means complete or meant to be, as there are countless varieties of plants in full bloom by the end of May. Most of the Anemone, Pyrola and Violets as well as (later berry-producing) ground covers like Dwarf Dogwood or Nagoonberry. The list is endless. Keep in mind that there are many variances in blooming times due to winter conditions, locale, etc. I have seen Fairy Slippers in full bloom the first week of May or the last week of May in the same patch. Other patches may have only a few plants, or as in the case of last year, huge patches everywhere. It was a phenomenal orchid season!

Can you guess what (uncommonly used) common plant name the title refers to? Hint: The name refers to a characteristic of this flower. I will cover this favorite in the next issue.

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For more information contact Fire Dept. members or call (or fax) 822-3927, Sam Lightwood, chmn. Publicity Committee. Mail: Fair c/o Sam Lightwood, HC 60 Box 229, Copper Center AK 99573.

EPA proposes certification of operators for small drinking water systems

JUNEAU, APRIL 8, 1998—

As many as 600 small water suppliers in Alaska will face a new federal requirement that could be difficult or costly for them to meet, Department of Environmental Conservation officials warned today.

The proposed federal rules would require all public water systems operators to be "certified" by the government after receiving proper training. If adopted by EPA, the State will have to enforce the same requirement or face losing \$1 million in federal construction funds for drinking water systems. The proposed regulations were proposed by EPA in March and published in the March 27 Federal Register. The public comment period is open until June 25.

A public water system is any system serving at least 25 people. Currently only those systems serving 500 people or more are required to have

trained and certified operators.

DEC Environmental Health Director Janice Adair said, "The goal of the proposed rule is to produce safe drinking water. We of course support that goal, but we're concerned that these small operators are not aware of this pending new requirement. They should take advantage of the public comment period and let the federal government know how the proposal will affect them. They should also let EPA know any alternative ideas they might have on meeting the goal of this proposal." Adair's division operates the state's drinking water program.

Keith Kelton, DEC Director of Facilities Construction and Operation, said, "The objective is a good one, which is to make water supplies safer. But this is a big change, and it's likely that many of the small public water system owners may not have heard of this. It's important that they let EPA know if they have

concerns with the proposal." Kelton's division provides training and certification to drinking water system operators in the state.

The proposed regulations were published in the March 27 Federal Register, and were entitled "Draft Guidelines for the Certification of Water Operators." Public comments will be accepted until June 25, and should be addressed to: OPERATOR CERTIFICATION COMMENT CLERK WATER DOCKET MC-4101 (docket #W-98-07) ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY 401 M STREET, S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

To obtain a copy of the draft guidelines, owners and operators of small water systems are encouraged to contact Kerry Lindley, DEC Juneau, 907-465-5143; or Art Ronimus, DEC Anchorage, 907-269-7623.

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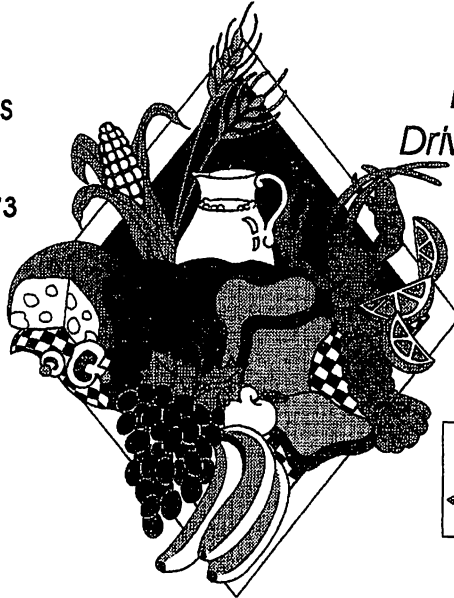
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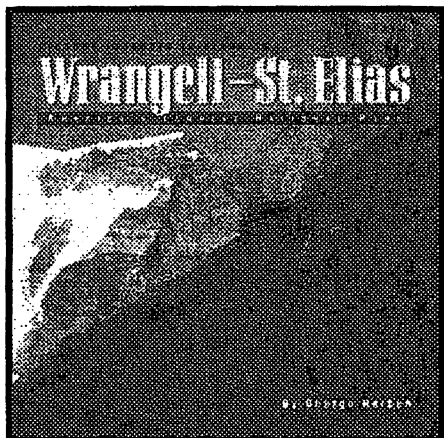
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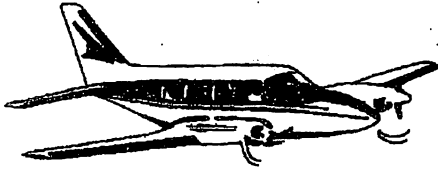
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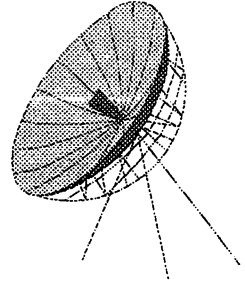
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Cooking with Carly

BY CARLY KRITCHEN

When I moved to Alaska about 25 years ago, most eggs were shipped up from the lower 48 by boat, and were not exactly fresh by the time they were sold in stores! The solution to the problem of stale eggs was to have your own flock of chickens. During the years that my husband and I have had chickens, we've carried them by boat, by truck, and by airplane to wherever we were going. I'm always surprised at what good travelers they are, and how little time it takes for them to make a new location into home and start laying eggs! We used to pack up our flock and take them out to fish camp with us. As soon as we let the little ladies out of the crate, they would start pecking and scratching all the debris at high tide line, and would lay eggs with bright orange yolks that were delicious, but took some getting used to!

Our current flock of about 14 chickens provide us with lots of fresh eggs. They live in an insulated house with a light during the winter, and lay pretty well all winter. Their egg production jumps up with the additional daylight in the spring, so I'm always looking for recipes that use LOTS of eggs. I've discovered that if a recipe says "use 4 eggs" it's usually OK to use at least 6 eggs!

I've used this recipe for a long time; it's good when you have a crowd for breakfast or brunch, and also is good as a main dish served with salad and french bread.

Egg Casserole

2 cups toasted bread, cut into 1" cubes
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
6 eggs, lightly beaten
2 cups milk
1/4 cup onion, finely minced
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon mustard
2 tablespoons dried parsley
dash pepper
4 slices bacon, cooked, drained, and crumbled

Combine cubed bread and cheese and put in the bottom of a greased 10 x 6 pan. Combine eggs, milk, onion, salt, mustard, parsley, and pepper. Mix until blended. Pour over cheese mix in casserole. Sprinkle with crumbled bacon and bake at 325 degrees for 50-60 minutes.

I love quiche, and this recipe is the one that I use most of the time. You can also add about 1/2 cup of just about any left-over veggies (I especially like broccoli).

Vegetable Quiche

1/2 cup shredded Swiss cheese
1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1/2 cup shredded carrot
1/3 cup diced onion
1 tablespoon flour
4 slightly beaten large eggs
1 1/2 cups milk
1/4 teaspoon salt
dash pepper
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

1 single crust pie pastry, baked
Combine Swiss cheese, cheddar cheese, carrot, onions, and flour. Evenly spread mixture over the bottom of the pie crust. Mix together eggs, milk, salt, pepper, and garlic in a separate mixing bowl. Pour egg mixture over the cheese mixture in pastry shell. Bake in

a 325 degree oven for 35-40 minutes, or until a knife blade inserted toward the center comes out clean. Let stand for about 10 minutes before cutting into serving size pieces.

This recipe is fun, looks impressive, and is actually really easy to make. It makes it easy to serve breakfast eggs to a group of people by doubling or tripling the recipe. I have no idea what "maridadi" means as I don't remember who I got the recipe from! Serve with salsa.

Maridadi Eggs

6 slices bread, toasted each side
6 eggs, separated, keep yolks whole
softened butter
1/4 teaspoon salt

Spread one side of each slice of toast with softened butter. Beat the egg whites with salt until stiff. Mound the egg whites on top of the 6 toast slices. With a spoon, carefully lift one egg yolk and press into the center of the mounded egg whites on each piece of toast. Place on a baking sheet, and bake in a 475 degree oven for about 4-6 minutes, or until meringues are lightly browned. Serve immediately.

I've had good luck with this souffle recipe, the cornmeal seems to make it less likely to collapse when you take it out of the oven! Serve with your favorite cheese sauce.

Ham and Cornmeal Souffle

1 1/2 cups milk
1 tablespoon butter
1/3 cup cornmeal
1 teaspoon salt
4 egg yolks, beaten

1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
 1 teaspoon dry mustard
 1 teaspoon Worcestershire
 1 teaspoon grated onion
 1 cup cooked diced ham
 4 egg whites, beaten until stiff
 Combine milk, butter,

cornmeal, and salt; cook and stir over low heat until thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and cool slightly. Stir in the beaten egg yolks. Add cheese, mustard, Worcestershire, onion, and

ham. Fold in the stiffly beaten egg whites. Turn into a buttered 2 quart souffle casserole and bake uncovered at 300 degrees for 1 hour. Serve hot.

A LOOK AT THE WEATHER

BY GEORGE CEBULA

After a rather cool January, the effects of El Nino continued to be felt here in both February and March. McCarthy experienced a rather average February, weather wise. March seemed a bit on the warm side.

The high temperature for February was 41 on the 26th (39 on Feb. 21, '97 and 45 on Feb. 11, '96). The lowest temperature recorded at McCarthy in February was -20 on the 7th (-4 on Feb. 1, '97 and -45 on Feb. 21, '96). The high was 30 or above on 5 days and the low was zero or lower on 19 days. The average February temperature was 9.8, the same as '96 and within 0.2 of '95. Last years 19.5 was almost 10 degrees warmer. None of these average temperatures are even close to the -3.9 in February '94. By comparison Silver Lake had a high 40 on February 1st (41 on Feb. 5, '97 and Feb. 21, '96) and a low of -20 on February 7th (-5 on Feb. 15, '97 and -43 on Feb. 21, '96). The average February temperature at Silver Lake was 6.6 (19.6 in '97 and 8.6 in '96).

The February precipitation was about half of normal with 0.47 inches of liquid (0.63 in '97 and 3.34 in Feb. '96). Total snowfall was 7.9 inches (1.6 in '97 and 37.0 in Feb. '96). Silver Lake had 0.42 inches of liquid (0.38 in '97 and 2.41 in Feb. '96) with snowfall of 11.0 inches (a trace in '97 and 30.5 in Feb. '96). McCarthy began February

with 23 inches of snow on the ground, increased to 28 on the 15th and ended with 26 inches. Silver Lake has 20 inches on the 1st, increased to 29 on the 16th and ended with 26 inches.

March saw the return of below zero temperatures and plenty of sunshine. The high temperature for March was 54 on the 20th (43 on Mar. 31, '97 and 47 on Mar. 24, '96). The low temperature recorded in March was -23 on the 3rd and 4th (-23 on Mar. 3, '97 and Mar. 8, '96). The average March temperature at McCarthy was 20.3 compared to 11.7 in Mar. '97 and 18.0 in Mar. '96. The high reached 40 or higher on 17 days and the low was zero or below on 12 days. Silver Lake had a high of 54 on March 21st (40 on Mar. 22, '97 and 44 on Mar. 26, '96), a low of -25 on March 4th (-17 on Mar. 3, '97 and -22 on Mar. 8, '96) and a March average temperature of 17.7 (11.6 in Mar. '97 and 14.8 in Mar. '96).

March precipitation was light and all in the form of snow. Liquid precipitation was 0.16 inches (0.23 in Mar. '97 and 0.80 in Mar. '96) and snowfall was 1.2 inches (3.5 in Mar. '97 and 13.7 in Mar. '96). Silver Lake had only a trace of liquid (0.04 in Mar. '97 and 0.86 in Mar. '96) and a trace of snow (1.0 in Mar. '97 and 11.0 in Mar. '96). By the end of March the snow cover was still 22 inches at McCarthy and only 10 inches at Silver Lake.

The total snowfall for '97-'98

was 68.0 inches (44.6 in '96-'97 and 66.8 in '95-'96), with 36.7 inches in October. The greatest snow depth was 28 inches. This compares with an average ('80-'98) of 64.2 inches and a snow depth of 27 inches. The greatest snowfall was 99.9 inches in '90-'91 and the lowest was 27.3 inches in '86-'87. The greatest snow depth was 39 inches in '90-'91 and the lowest was 16 inches in '86-'87. Silver Lake had a total snowfall of 46.6 inches and the greatest snow depth was 29 inches.

The melting continues into the first half of April with the snow depth down to 11 inches by the 15th. The skies have been generally cloudy with temperatures ranging from the low 20's to mid 40's and only a trace of precipitation. The lows the past 3 nights have stayed above freezing and the snow is very soft with standing water everywhere. Breakup has finally arrived.

May should see a rapid increase in temperatures with highs in the 60's by mid month. Precipitation is usually on the light side with an average amount of less than an inch. Breakup will be a bit early this year with the light snow cover and warmer than average winter temperatures. June is usually the warmest month at McCarthy with an average temperature in the mid 50's, highs in the 70's and about 2 inches of rain. *

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

In our last issue, we covered the story of the Sourdough Telephone Repeater Site and the ongoing problems associated with the local phone system. It seems that both companies involved in the equipment dispute took exception to our story, so here, for your consideration, are *their* stories.

Rick Kenyon
WSEN

Dear Rick:

As we discussed recently, the following is my understanding of the status of Copper Valley Cellular's ("CVC") cellular system and Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative's (CVTC) ability to provide service to fixed customers at McCarthy through that system.

There are areas in Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative's service area where the cost of providing telephone service through cables is prohibitively expensive. McCarthy is one of these locations. However, CVTC has found that it is possible to serve some customers in such areas through the use of fixed cellular service. CVTC has contracted with CVC to purchase minutes of cellular telephone use at wholesale rates for these areas; CVTC in turn uses those minutes to provide flat-rate local exchange service to CVTC customers. Thus, while fixed cellular customers are customers of CVTC, CVTC's only duty is to provide that service through its contract with CVC.

CVC's initial cellular system included sites located in Valdez, Cordova, Glennallen, and McCarthy. Equipment

manufactured by Plexsys International ("Plexsys") was installed at all of these sites. Later, in an effort to enhance coverage, CVC hired New Horizons Telecommunications, Inc. to design and build a cellular system expansion. The three new cellular sites at Paxson, Slana, and Naked Island in Prince William Sound were also equipped with Plexsys equipment. CVC has had some problems with the satellite link connecting Valdez to the Naked Island site, but the Plexsys equipment is working as expected.

At the three remaining new sites in Cordova on Heney Ridge, Lake Louise Road west of Glennallen, and on Sourdough Ridge in McCarthy, the cellular equipment is clearly not working as the cellular company had expected. These sites have repeater cellular equipment that is manufactured by a company called Repeater Technology Inc. ("RTI"). CVC has insisted on correction/replacement of the equipment.

Currently, CVC is involved in a lawsuit with its contractor, New Horizons. I believe that CVC is making every effort to resolve the problems with these sites and to ensure that the existing RTI equipment will

perform as engineered and designed and, if not, to work with the contractor to replace the RTI equipment with equipment that will work. CVTC has asked CVC to keep it apprized of the progress in working out these issues. As soon as we are assured that the system is working as specified we will let your readers and our customers know.

We at Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative are certainly aware of the frustration that those awaiting service from the Sourdough Ridge site must feel towards us. Let me assure you that we share in their frustration. Our desire is to see CVC and its contractor get this site up and running as soon as possible and to get the sites at Lake Louise and Cordova functioning reliably.

I would ask all of our customers and potential customers alike to please continue to be patient with us. We do care, and will continue to work very closely with Copper Valley Cellular to assist it in resolving the issues with its contractor.

Sincerely,
Tim Rennie
General Manager
CVTC

April 3, 1998
 Wrangell St. Elias News (WSEN)
 Dear Editor,

We read Mr. Rick Kenyon's article (page 6, Wrangell, St Elias news, March and April) concerning Copper Valley Cellular service at McCarthy and Sourdough Ridge with intense interest. We have not seen Mr. Monfils letter of February 13, 1998, referenced in the article. If this was a letter that he sent to the press, and he is quoted accurately, a characterization of business libel is appropriate. It would be nice if he were more careful about that sort of thing.

McCarthy, Dan Creek, May Creek and surrounds could easily enjoy modern and suitable cellular service if there was an honest-to-goodness collective interest in achieving that technically simple goal. The news article paraphrasing of Mr. Monfils letter seems to indicate that the net deficiency rests with New Horizons Telecom and the RTI equipment. From our perspective, the real reason that the new Sourdough Ridge site is just sitting there, doing nothing beneficial for the community is the result of indecision, vacillation, and ever-changing management priorities of Copper Valley Telephone (CVTC), acted out by Copper Valley Cellular.

New Horizons Telecom (NHTI) is a respected 20-year Alaskan company, based in Palmer that never before had to resort to litigation to solve a problem. The 6 individual site project that we performed for CVC has been fraught with name-calling, finger pointing, and seemingly willful failure to understand simple test processes. After months of effort and contemplation, and with deep regret and sympathy for the residents of McCarthy,

NHTI filed suit against CVC for breach of contract and for non-payment of invoices. NHTI also filed suit against CVTC for contract interference. The CVC/CVTC lawyers have desperately and unwisely counterclaimed NHTI, charging incompetence, misrepresentation, fraud, and deceit. This counterclaim may be intended to frighten NHTI into some undefined submission, but it isn't going to work. These four words—incompetence, misrepresentation, fraud, and deceit are extremely serious, and have no applicability in fact or supposition and have no foundation in NHTI reputation and past practice. The counterclaim serves only to the discredit of CVC and CVTC.

This is a long and involved story, but the short version is that CVTC has never permitted NHTI to turn up Sourdough Ridge long enough to effectively test the site. Further, contract modifications are requisite to configure antennas, and eliminate subscriber conflicts. We believe that CVTC understands this process, but is no longer enthusiastic for the success of this particular service expansion. CVTC, has been ordered by the Alaska Public Utilities Commission (APUC) to change the manner in which the costs of cellular sites are allocated. I have not sorted it all out yet, but it looks like this means that Sourdough Ridge would lose all or part of telephone ratepayer subsidy. Based on the limited surrounding population, that probably renders the site fiscally unfeasible.

I can say with absolute certainty that Sourdough Ridge would be on the air if all responsibilities fell under the umbrella of any one qualified

company that actually wanted to get it done. The fact that we have litigation going over a technically simple situation is terrible and ridiculous. NHTI certainly doesn't like it, but we have little choice. NHTI would have never placed itself at legal risk if not convinced that NHTI would prevail. However, like most other people we recognize that there are only two classes of parties to a lawsuit: Lawyers and Losers. NHTI may never receive adequate monetary compensation and CVC and CVTC could end up in bankruptcy. The whole situation is pretty dumb, but common sense seems to have been misplaced. We have asked the CVC and CVTC managers to get their boards directly involved in the problem. We think that there is a good chance that the board could collectively solve the problem.

The bottom-line? WE NEED HELP! The active participation of the CVTC and CVC Boards of Directors, the ratepayers and local residents is urgently needed to restore business logic and common sense, and to break this legal deadlock. CVC and CVTC management can't do it. Naturally, money is an issue and, predictably, more money will be needed. CVC and CVTC have put us through an unplanned, unnecessary, unproductive and incredibly costly flail for the past year and a half. They have disorganized and demoralized our hard working field people. NHTI and its employees did not deserve any of that. We worked hard and in good faith and we deserve recovery of all costs.

Further, NHTI has long identified several items, especially antenna configuration, that were never in the NHTI contract. CVC and CVTC admit that, but have unwaveringly ignored the requirement. The Sourdough

Ridge site will never perform satisfactorily without a detailed field strength study, and optimization of antennas at Sourdough, McCarthy, and at subscriber locations. Measurement, reconfiguration and optimization after initial turn-up is standard industry practice. I cannot believe that CVC does not understand that. It was not included in our contract because it is a total unknown until post turn-up field strength measurements are taken. Our job was to get the sites built on a tight schedule, where they wanted them, within a budget, and we did that as we promised.

NHTI has operating proof of the RTI concept at Heney Ridge, but CVC / CVTC will not acknowledge that. They have decided that they want the RTI equipment off all sites. They have the right to make any equipment changes they want, but they have no basis for trying to force us to do it for them without compensation.

Our project for CVC

included 6 sites:

Full Cell Sites: (Plexsys Cell Site Equipment)

Slana

Paxson

Naked Island (Helicopter Access)

Cell Extender Sites: (RTI Cell Extender Equipment)

Sourdough Ridge (Helicopter Access)

Lake Louise

Heney Ridge (Helicopter Access).

The cell extender sites all use the RTI equipment. The RTI package links a full cell site (host site) to a remote antenna location (extender site) through a microwave radio link. The signals are retransmitted and received at the extender site on cellular frequencies identical to the host site. Subscriber

conflicts typically occur between cell and extender sites or between adjacent cell sites, and those have to be resolved empirically based on measurements of actual radiated conditions.

There are mathematical relationships for predicting these conflicts, but in practice the mathematical models are not sufficiently precise and antenna adjustments and changes must be made to eliminate conflicts. This process of conflict resolution is normal. It is relatively simple with mobile customers, and more difficult with fixed customers. (CVC never bothered to initially identify its fixed customers.) However, that lack of knowledge doesn't reflect adversely on the viability of the Sourdough Ridge site. Nothing would have changed. It simply adds steps and cost to the conflict resolution process. CVC and CVTC have been unwilling to deal with that. They admit in their own counterclaim that it was not part of the NHTI requirement. At the same time, they say that it is an NHTI problem (It is not.) and they won't deal with the issue. It doesn't make any sense.

As a percentage of total project costs, antenna optimization is probably not that significant, but it doesn't seem very hopeful that CVC and CVTC management will ever consider that obligation. If they overlooked the requirement in their project budgeting, the money should be well within the range of normally planned project oversight contingencies. Ironically, the money that NHTI has spent getting jerked around, and the money that both sides of this dispute have paid to lawyers and consultants would have gone a long way toward perfecting the technical performance and

finishing the job. If everyone really wanted this project finished, this whole circumstance would be just plain dumb. In any case, the situation is clearly out of control.

CVC hasn't fully paid us for any site. There seem to be no significant complaints about the cell sites, or about the extender site at Heney Ridge. CVC is enjoying reliable revenue from them. It could be a coincidence but the Lake Louise and Sourdough Ridge extender sites have the lowest probable revenue potential, yet seem to be where all of the alleged problems are concentrated. It causes us to wonder whether or not CVC / CVTC consider those sites a fiscal mistake and ever want those sites available for service. These two sites have no commercial power (they use engine-generators and photovoltaic panels) and will both likely cost more to operate than they will ever recover from wireless customers.

CVC has no apparent engine-generator maintenance personnel and no maintenance plan. This is taking its toll on the hardware, and every time a problem occurs, CVC sends us a "nasty-gram" demanding remedy. Although not contractually obligated to do so, we have responded to each and every complaint, and have confirmed those problems are the result of deficient maintenance. NHTI was never contracted for maintenance, and we have urged CVC to do something positive toward adopting a maintenance program. Their response to that is to accuse us of trying to get a "lucrative" maintenance contract from them. (Believe me, CVC / CVTC and "lucrative" don't fit in the same sentence.) Still, we continue in good faith to provide

emergency response to keep their sites operational, receiving no compensation.

My ethics wouldn't ordinarily permit me to write to the news media about a legal adversary. However, John Monfils apparently did just that, in order to cause a news article that clearly fixes the blame on NHTI. NHTI is innocent, but this is a small state, and our good reputation is critical to us. John has made us out to be schmucks. We have no choice but to respond. I hope that you will print this long letter. I tried to shorten it, but there is a lot to

say. The residents of McCarthy and the Cooperative members deserve to know both sides of this story.

Thank you for reading our story. I extend my sincere sympathy for the frustration and inconvenience of the CVC cellular customers. I am sorry that our company has to be a part of it. NHTI will continue to offer good faith, but the only hope that I see for final resolution is through direct involvement by the respective Boards of Directors and more pressure by the local residents applied to CVC and CVTC to

solve the root management problem. This is a problem that can be solved.

Anyone wishing further information may contact, call, fax, or e-mail me at the address or numbers below.

Sincerely,
John S. Lee, P.E.
Chief Executive Officer
New Horizons Telecom, Inc.
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Direct Fax: 907-761-6011
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kildonan School
RR 1, Box 294
Amenia, NY 12501

Dear Residents of McCarthy,

My name is Tim Dirth and I am a high school student in Amenia, New York. I attend a small private school for dyslexics (100 students in grades 7-12) in this rural town. Amenia has at least twice as many cows and deer living here as people. My school has about 500 acres of rolling hills, open fields, and woodlands. It used to be a dairy farm. All of this land is abundant with wild life, including bobcat, white tail deer, coyotes, fox, turkey, pheasant, partridge, grouse, etc. There has even been a black bear spotted on campus. I'm sure this list does not compare with the wild animals you have living there.

I enjoy spending time outdoors whenever possible including camping and hiking. I once went backpacking in the mountains in Wyoming for 30 days. My home is in Massachusetts right next to the Vermont-New Hampshire border. I don't travel much, but one of the few places I would like to go to is Alaska. I have a special interest in your town because it is so small and in the wilderness. I heard that you have about 35 year round residents. Perhaps at some point I'll be one of your visitors passing through. One of my teachers receives your newsletter. Mrs. Borden and her husband (also one of my teachers) were in McCarthy last summer (97). They told me about your town and showed me a few pictures. Perhaps someone in your town could send me a response to this letter. I would really like to have someone out there to correspond with.

Thank you very much,

Sincerely,
Tim Dirth

PS—After June 5th I will be on summer break so after that time please send correspondence to: 80 Highland Ave. Northfield MA 01360

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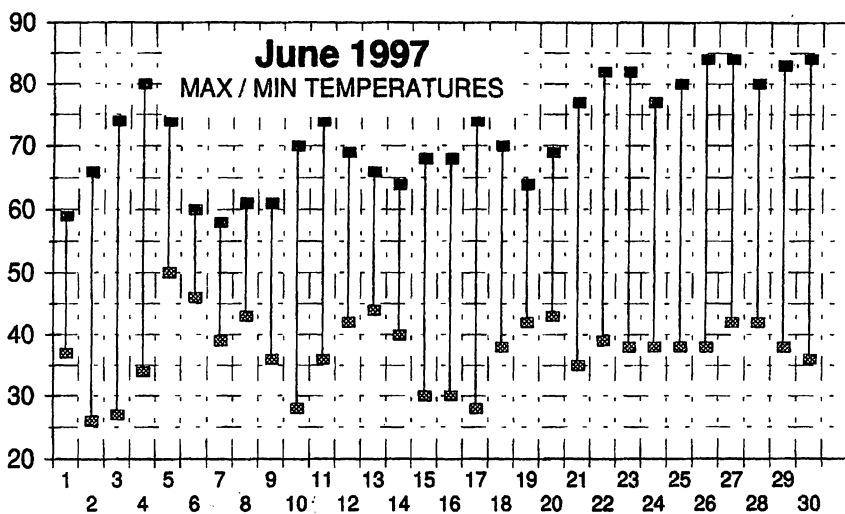
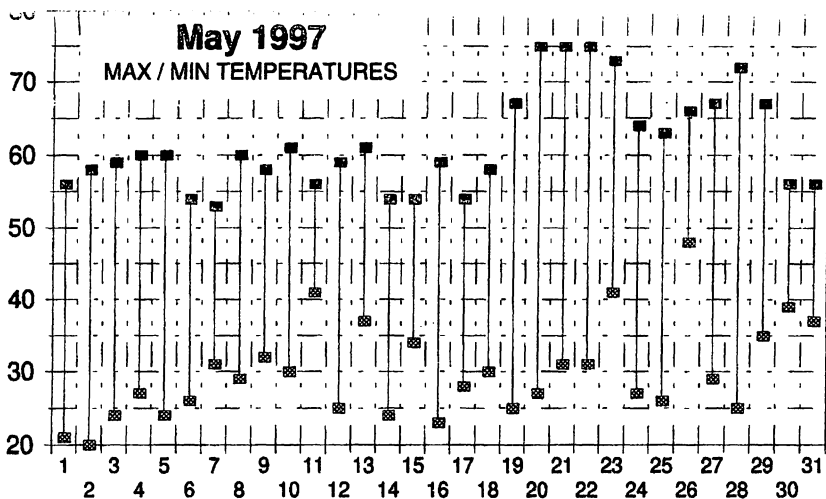
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**Wrangell Mountain Air
McCarthy, PO Box MXY
Glennallen, AK 99588**

Weather - What can we expect?



Wiangell St. Elias News
 McCarthy
 PO Box MXY
 Glennallen, AK 99588

The Barber Shop

Convenient location & open year around!

You can drive and park near our comfortable, private cabins located on the McCarthy Road 1/2 mile from the Kennicott River—no need to carry your luggage over the river.

We serve a hot breakfast and offer custom tours and plenty of information on the local area.

Our rates run from \$50 (room for one person), to \$125 (cabin for two with private bath). Other rooms and cabins also available.

McCarthy Trail Rides B&B

(907) 554-4433

John Adams
 PO Box MXY
 Glennallen, AK 99588

